

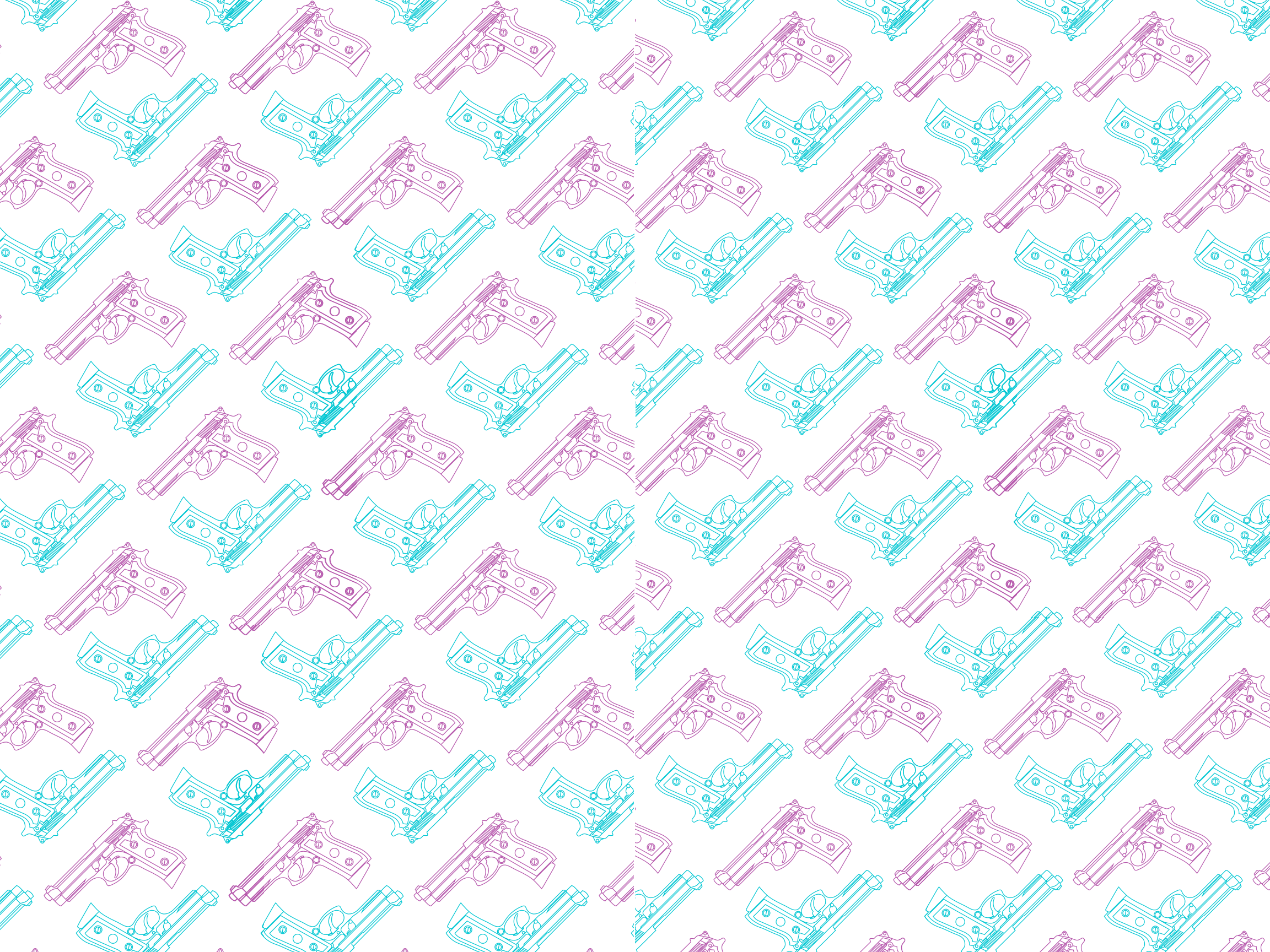
# ***KOLOB CANYON REVIEW***

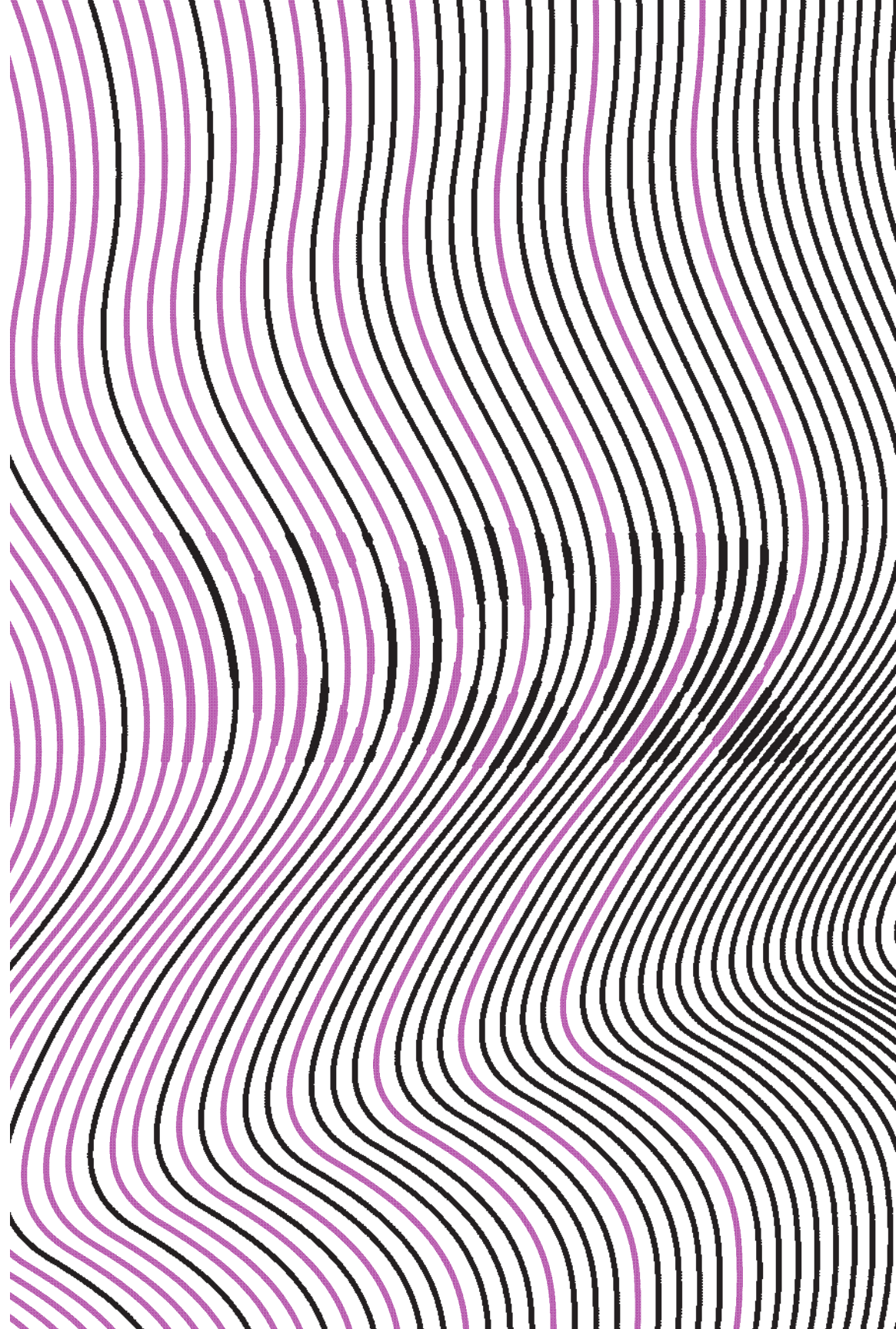
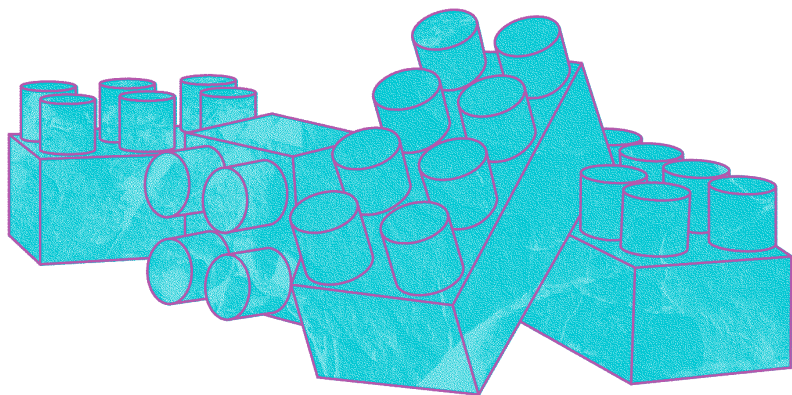



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KOLOB CANYON REVIEW IS A LITERARY MAGAZINE OF AND FOR SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY'S STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF, AND ALUMNI. AS A STUDENT-MANAGED PROJECT, KCR PROVIDES REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE IN PUBLISHING AND EDITORIAL PRACTICES. WE PROMOTE AND PRESENT SUU'S BEST WRITTEN AND VISUAL CREATIVE WORKS, SERVING AS AN ENTRY POINT FOR CREATIVE WRITERS AND VISUAL ARTISTS.

**Kolob Canyon Review**

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Spring 2020

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Southern Utah University

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SHADES OF  
MEMORY  
By Sydney Bear  
PG 214

OUR BOOBS  
By Sherisse Albel  
Pendleton  
PG 228

THE MEMORY  
OF A MAN  
NAMED HANK  
By Andrew Leavitt  
PG 90

THE BEST PART  
By Jamie Jo Karbie  
PG 239

A GUIDE TO  
THE UNTA  
NATIONAL FOREST  
By Grace Sullivan  
PG 202

YOU, my dear.  
(MRS. BANDI'S  
CLASS 2004)  
By Connor Sanders  
PG 244

SUMMER  
EVENING, 2006  
By Connor Sanders  
PG 243

EDITOR'S  
SELECTED  
ARTWORK  
PG 156

HAIR DYE  
IS NOT  
PERMANENT  
By Lindsey Kay Nelson  
PG 142

ROTTEN  
FILLING  
By Beau Barton  
PG 201

DESIGNER'S  
CHAPTER 18:  
AMELIA  
By Max Blomham  
PG 260

CHANGED  
By E.B. Raven  
PG 122

HELENE  
(OF SPARTA)  
By Madeleine Walters  
PG 220

THIRTEEN WAYS  
OF LOOKING AT  
AT FIREARM  
By Derrick Lindsey  
Shepherd  
PG 246

MOTIVATION  
By Makayla Halling  
PG 114

EXCERPTS  
FROM THE DAILY  
PG 250

REALIZATION  
By Elizabeth Armstrong  
PG 198

THE BACK-  
WOODS KING  
By Megan Wilson  
PG 260

THE FLIGHT  
By Jonzen Jorgensen  
PG 252

PICNIC  
PARENTING  
By Megan Warner  
PG 252

revise  
By Sherisse Albel  
Pendleton  
PG 234

IN FATHER'S  
HALL  
By Megan Wilson  
PG 260

THE REAL  
REASON WHY  
MERMAIDS  
DON'T HAVE LEGS  
By Hannah M. Dore  
PG 152

A THIN LINE  
By Andrew Leavitt  
PG 68

PROJECT  
OSMOSIS  
By Madeleine Walters  
PG 80

ICE  
By KileyAnne  
Larson  
PG 48

BEHIND THE  
VELVET  
CURTAIN  
By Hannah M. Dore  
PG 74

BACKPACKERS  
By Jessica Hammen  
PG 205

butterfly  
By Anthony J. Braun  
PG 206

MY PLACE  
By Jaidyn Crockett  
PG 226

ORACLE OF  
DELPHI  
By Madeleine Walters  
PG 226

BREAKING UP:  
AN INDEX  
By Lindsey Kay Nelson  
PG 206

WARM  
COLD  
CEREAL  
By Beau Barton  
PG 195

FOR ONCE  
By Madeleine Walters  
PG 226

A BOY'S  
BEST FRIEND  
By Beau Barton  
PG 195

MT. HALEKALA  
By Iuliana Noel  
PG 225

KINGFISHER  
By Jessica Hammen  
PG 222

HENRIETTA MIRA  
AND THE SOCKS HER  
FATHER BOUGHT HER  
By Madeleine Peck  
PG 222

PLAYING GUNS  
By Beau Barton  
PG 204

ATALANTA  
By Madeleine Walters  
PG 221

PLANET  
BRAIN  
By Andrea Call  
PG 216

WHAT IT  
TOOK  
By Andrea Call  
PG 18

THE TRAIL OF  
MENTAL  
ILLNESS  
By Amber Celestia  
Tavon Rossi  
PG 104

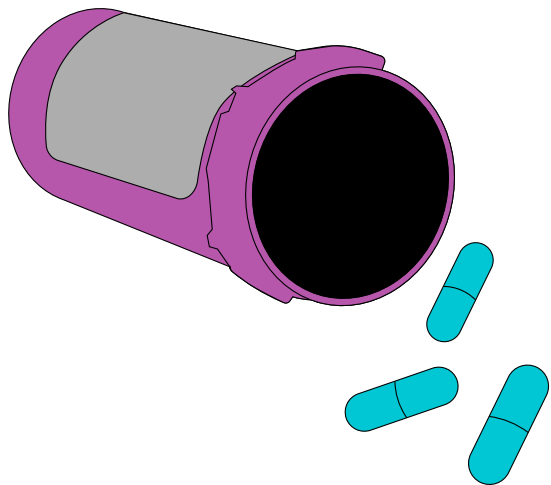
greedy  
By Anthony J. Braun  
PG 217

NOW  
By Elizabeth Armstrong  
PG 196

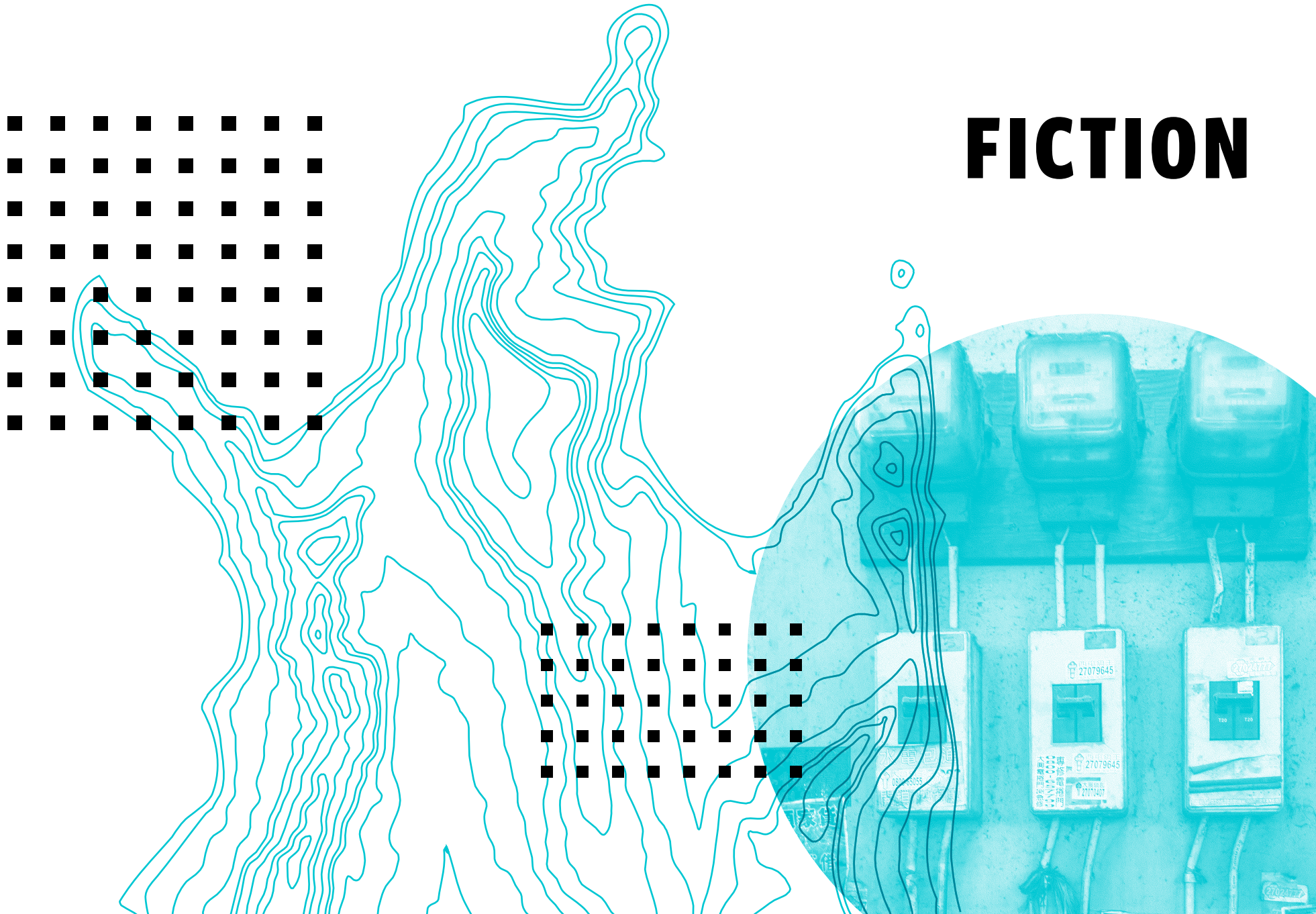
GUM  
By Rian Vasher  
PG 194

DEAR FRIEND  
By Brittany Dunn  
PG 213





# FICTION



EDITOR'S CHOICE

# WARM COLD CEREAL

Beau Barton

Sherry Stills sat alone at her table, poking the ice in her glass, ignoring the vibration of her phone, and scanning the bar for someone she could follow to a hotel bedroom. It was a Tuesday night at the Rusted Nail and the last call was soon approaching. The usual handful of patrons wandered the place like moths around a lampshade. They ordered their final rounds, stumbled over the knotted floors, and balanced themselves with the help of flimsy billiard tables. A middle-aged man stood on a crooked karaoke stage, belting the off-key lyrics to "Feliz Navidad," even though Christmas was still two months away. Sherry waited for her turn on the stage, her tanned cheek cupped within her palm, her elbow resting on the table. She waited as the same old people did the same old things.

The streets outside were getting darker and the cold, Colorado air was fogging up the windows. The clock would soon shut the place down and send her home. Sherry looked at the phone next to her drink. A pile of messages and missed calls were stacking up all over the screen. She turned the phone over, sat back in her chair, and breathed. The smell of alcohol and damp wood filled her nose. Sherry exhaled, making her blonde bangs twitch. The bar doors opened for a few seconds, allowing a cool breeze to flirt with the room. Footsteps moved past her table.

"How you doing, sir?" Carl, the bartender, said. "Cold night out there."

"Yeah," the stranger replied. "Heater's gone out in my car, just need to warm up a bit."

Sherry turned her head in the direction of the voices. She saw a thin man wearing a black canvas jacket and a grey t-shirt that was tucked halfway into his jeans. The stranger carried a guitar case in his shivering right hand. He placed the case on a barstool and took a seat next to it.

"Can I smoke in here?" the stranger asked.

The bartender nodded.

Sherry returned a hand to her glass and pretended to be interested in it. She gazed at the stranger's back, observing how his sharp shoulder blades stretched the fabric of his coat.

"It's weird," the stranger said, taking a pack of Marlboros and a lighter from his pocket. "Not a lot of places have smoking sections anymore. Not even bars let you smoke." He placed a cigarette between his lips and lit it.

The stranger's voice was calm and deep. Even with the awful music on the



stage, Sherry could hear every word he said. She twisted in her chair to get a better view of him. A long mirror with a rustic, copper frame ran the length of the wall behind the bar. Sherry could see the face of the stranger reflected in the glass. His cheekbones were strong and defined, his chin was pointed. Stubble outlined his mouth and jaw, and his hair was dark and curling over the tips of his ears.

Sherry slid her hand away from her drink, over the edge of the table and onto her crossed thighs. She watched him, tracing her fingers along the edge of her skirt, feeling the gritty surface of her leggings. She pinched the gold band around her finger and slid the diamond off. She put the ring in her pocket and did her best to forget about it.

"I'm closing up in about an hour," Carl said.

"No problem," the stranger replied.

The bartender put a glass down in front of the man.

"Don't want to just loiter around, right?" he said in a flat tone.

The stranger paused for a moment. He nodded his head.

"I get it," he said. "I'll have whatever."

"Daniel's okay?"

"That's fine."

Carl pulled a bottle from the collection of liquor that lined the bottom of the mirror. He tipped it up and filled the glass with an inch of bronze-colored liquid. The middle-aged man screamed from the stage. The stranger turned his head toward the noise and scowled in confusion.

"What's with jolly old Saint Nick over there?" he asked.

The bartender sighed.

"Open mic night," he said. "Gives the regulars something to do besides tell me the same stories."

"Those must be some shitty stories."

Carl shrugged his shoulders. He put a finger on the dented surface of the counter.

"Cash or card?" he said.

The stranger tapped out his ash, pinched the cigarette in his mouth, and reached into his pocket. At that same moment, the music came to an end.

"Hold up a second," Carl said.

He moved from behind the bar, stepped onto the stage, and stopped the singer before he could start another song. The barman grabbed the microphone and asked for a round of applause. No one clapped.

"Alright, next up we've got 'The Rusted Nail's' favorite voice, and she'll be performing the song," he squinted at a card in his hand. "'I Need Some Sleep,' by The Eels. Let's give it up for Sherry."

There was silence as he leapt off the stage and walked back to his position behind the counter.

Sherry's heels clicked against the hardwood floor, navigating through the puddles of spilled beer and crushed peanut shells. She brushed the wrinkles out of her button-up blouse and red flannel skirt. Her dark leggings rubbed against each other, making a whispering sound she hoped the stranger would hear. She stepped confidently to the stage, hit play on an old stereo, and waited in front of the microphone. The left section of her curly bangs fell across her eye. The grooves in her lipstick parted in a smile.

"Alright guys, bear with me," she said, looking at the disinterested faces.

Melancholy chimes drifted from the stereo, playing a slow and simple tune. Sherry closed her eyes for a moment. She imagined the bar's cheap wood panels dissolving one plank at a time, revealing the clean marble walls of a concert hall. She imagined the ragged clothes of the inebriated patrons burning to ash and freshly pressed suits forming in their place. Everything that was old became new, different, and exciting. She opened her eyes, the lipstick on her lips parted, and she sang.

Sherry's voice was clean and smooth, weightlessly flowing into the microphone and around the room. The lyrics flicked off her tongue and over her teeth, covering the place in a message of desire, insomnia, and discontent. Her eyebrows tilted up above her blue eyes. Her irises seemed to beg at the handful of people too drunk to listen.

Ash fell from the stranger's cigarette. Carl pointed to the same dented spot on the counter. From the stage, Sherry could see as the stranger reached

inside his pocket, retrieved his wallet, and placed a debit card on the bar. A photograph fell from his wallet before he could close it back up. It tumbled to the countertop like an autumn leaf. A young woman, motionless and pretty, smiled from the wrinkled picture. He stared at her, his hands reaching to touch her image of fair skin and black, pixie cut hair. His fingers stopped before they met her.

Sherry held the microphone and sang slowly. The stranger looked away from the photo, allowing the singer to catch his eyes. They were the same sad eyes as hers. A faint gleam of light flickered in the stranger's deep pupils, like a firefly quivering in an empty hallway. It was the look of someone lost in their mid-thirties, still waiting for life to start at some distant point in the future. Sherry sang and he listened, if only for a short time.

Her voice was like a wet blanket falling over a crowd of freezing men. There was a desire to provide warmth, to somehow make life better. But whatever comfort existed in the song only concealed secret layers of heartache. Deep down, even Sherry knew her voice was a beautiful dream that would never come true.

The stranger turned away from Sherry. He grabbed the photograph, buried it in his wallet, and slapped the thing shut. He spent the rest of the song staring in the mirror, finishing his cigarette, and analyzing his reflection between brown, green, and clear bottles.

Sherry sang the last lyric. She pinched her lips, gave a short bow, and smiled. The bartender clapped while everyone else remained silent. Sherry blew a kiss to the audience and stepped off the stage. The stranger waited for Carl to charge his card.

The singer's heels clicked their way over to the bar. Sherry hopped onto a stool one seat away from the stranger. She brushed her hair out of her face before drumming on the counter to get the bartender's attention.

"Can I have my usual, Carl?" Sherry asked.

"Alright, but you're going to have to eat it fast," the barman said.

She gazed at the stranger in short glances, waiting for him to make some kind of move. Sherry rested an elbow on the bar and crossed her legs. She turned in her stool and pointed her skirt in the man's direction. He sat still.

"So how was it?" Sherry quickly asked.

The stranger stamped out what was left of his cigarette and reached for his pack.

Carl yelled in his flat tone from the other end of the bar, "Phenomenal as always, Sherry. Really great."

She ignored the voice and leaned close to the stranger.

"What'd you think?" she asked.

The man looked at her.

"It was good," the stranger replied, pinching out a fresh cigarette and lighting it.

Sherry sighed. "Just good, huh. That's all you thought."

The man killed the flame of his lighter and put it away. "Yeah, it was good. But I'm no critic, so you probably shouldn't care about my opinion."

"That's funny, cause yours is the only one I do care about."

"Why's that?" said the man before blowing smoke at the ceiling.

"I don't know you," Sherry said. "Never seen you in here before. This isn't really the kind of place people come to."

"Then why do you come here?"

Sherry gestured back at the stage. "You just saw why," she said.

"You could go somewhere else," the stranger said.

Sherry felt a tinge of excitement from his words. "Really?" she playfully said. "You have any suggestions?"

The stranger paused. He sucked on his cigarette, exhaled a morphing, white mist, and shook his head.

"No," he said.

Sherry felt stonewalled by the man's response. She folded her arms and tried to keep the conversation going.

"Every time I sing," she said. "I get the same reaction from the same people, which is pretty much no reaction. I need to get a fresh perspective, a new

opinion. So, really, what'd you think?"

The man pulled the cigarette away from his lips. "You want to know what I think?" he said.

The woman nodded.

"I think you stood up there trying to be all sad and serious," the stranger said. "But the truth is, the first time you heard that song it was on *Shrek 2*."

Sherry laughed. She put her hands up as if she were surrendering. "Guilty as charged," she said. "Please don't tell anybody. It ruins my brooding stage persona."

The stranger smiled. "Secret's safe with me. I've got no one to tell anyway."

Sherry lifted a hand toward him. Her fingernails were shiny and painted red to match her lips. A pale line of untanned skin marked the finger where the ring was missing. She hoped he wouldn't notice, and if he did, that he wouldn't care.

"I'm Sherry," she said.

The man took her hand and shook it. "I know," he said.

"And you are?"

He paused for a second. "I'm Ian."

"Pleasure, Ian," Sherry said. "So, what brings you to a crappy place like this?"

A ceramic bowl dropped down on the counter before the man could answer. The bartender placed a small carton of 1% milk, a spoon, and a box of cereal next to the woman.

Ian squinted at the box. "Fruity Pebbles, at twelve-thirty?" he asked.

The colorful flakes fell like a landslide into the bowl. Sherry grinned as the white milk flooded over the jagged edges of tie-dye grain. "Carl keeps it here just for me. Call me crazy," she said, grabbing the spoon. "But for some reason cereal tastes better at night." She dabbed her spoon into the bowl, creating sinkholes in the pebbles. "It's like you're doing something you're not supposed to. Like you're breaking the rules." She lifted the spoon to her lips and took a bite.

"I was never a Fruity Pebbles fan," Ian said.

"Really?" Sherry replied between crunches. "You're depriving yourself."

Ian shook his head. He looked back at the mirror. "Maybe," he said. "They always reminded me of my mom."

"Ahh, that's precious," Sherry said. "She always make you cereal in the mornings?"

Ian stared. "Not exactly," he said, as if in some kind of trance. He shook his head and looked down at the glass of whiskey he hadn't touched.

Sherry leaned forward and scooped up another spoonful of flakes. She turned to him and chewed slower. Her lips puckered and smacked at the man.

"You're having too much fun," Ian said.

She laughed and dropped the spoon in the bowl. "They're just so good."

"They better be," the stranger responded.

The bartender passed by, dropping Ian's debit card and a receipt next to his glass. Ian crumpled up the piece of paper, retrieved his wallet, and opened it to return his card. The picture of the woman peeked out at Sherry.

"She's pretty," Sherry said, pointing her spoon at the wallet.

Ian shut the billfold.

"She someone special?" Sherry asked.

The man's shoulders rose high behind his neck, and he leaned forward against the bar. He looked in the mirror and shook his head.

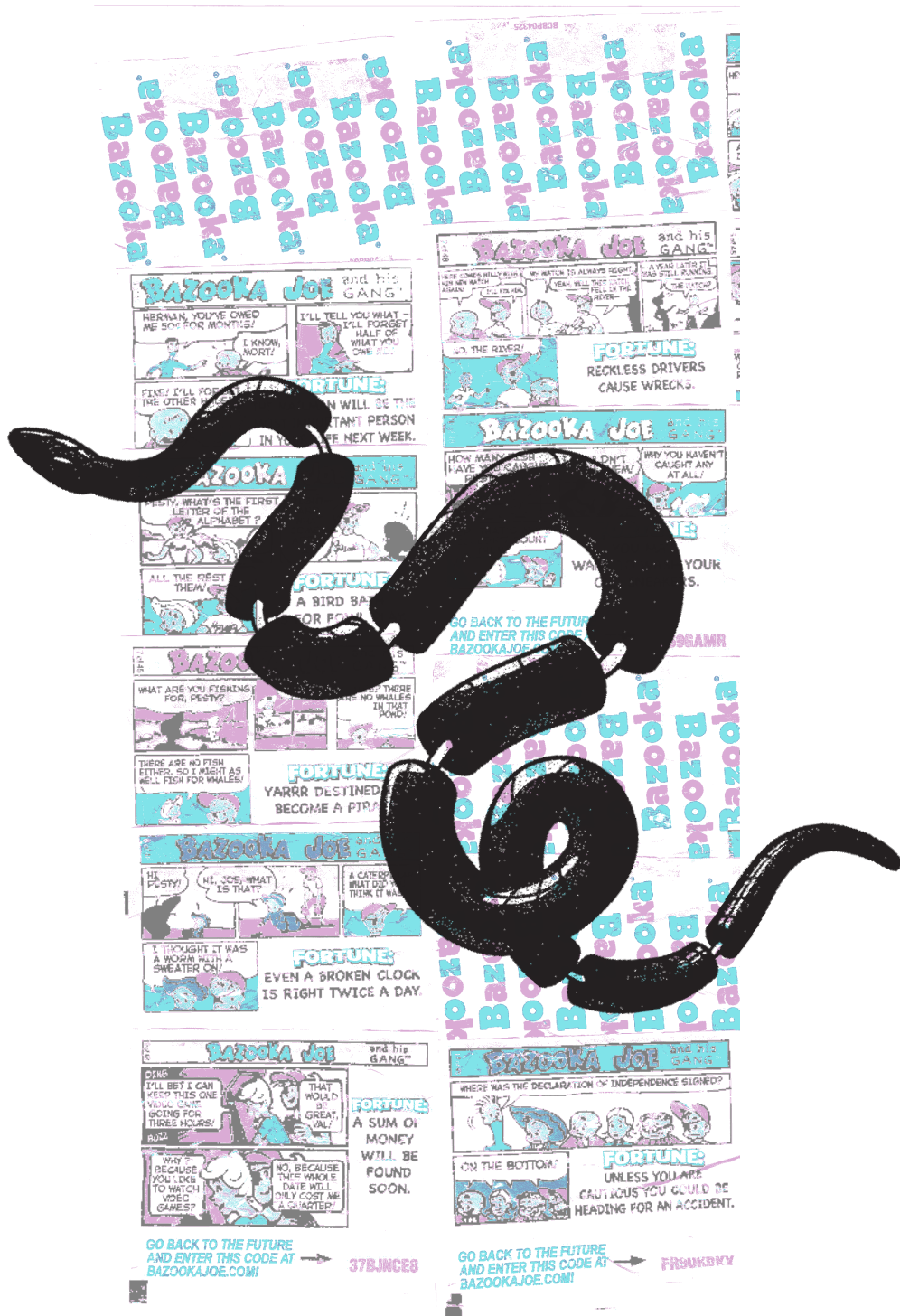
"I don't think so," he said. "It's complicated."

Sherry glanced at the untanned circle on her finger. "Yeah," she said. "Relationships are never simple, are they?"

Ian took a deep breath and rubbed the back of his neck. He looked tired all of a sudden, worn down by the direction the conversation was headed.

Sherry looked into her bowl and stirred the rainbow of colors. "Sorry," she said. "Didn't mean to stick my nose in. None of my business."

"No, it's okay," the man said. "It's just, you ever get the feeling all you are is what someone wants you to be? Like they've got a treasure map drawn out





for your life, and they expect you to follow it all the way to the X at the end.”

“What did she want you to be?” Sherry asked.

Ian killed another cigarette in an ashtray. Thin lines of smoke curled between his fingers.

“Just,” he said, “something I wasn’t ready for.”

Sherry smiled at Ian. “I think I know what you mean,” she said.

She opened her mouth to say more, but a loud buzz interrupted her. Ian turned his head away from the mirror. Sherry sat back, pulled her phone from her pocket, and looked at it. The brow beneath her blonde hair became wrinkled. She covered the screen with one hand as if she were concealing a flame from the harsh wind. Sherry could feel Ian watching her as she typed. The confidence that was once on her face melted against the florescent light of the phone. She sent her message, returned the device to her pocket, and tried to look as if nothing had happened.

“Everything okay?” Ian asked.

“Yeah, it’s fine,” Sherry said, returning to her cereal.

“Should you be somewhere?”

She chewed on her pebbles.

Ian waited. “Should you be with someone?”

The woman stopped eating. She looked at him with one eyebrow pointed high.

She laughed, loud and hard. “No,” she quickly said. “It’s nothing, just some stuff for work.”

“You usually get work calls this late?”

“Yeah, I do,” she said. “All the damn time actually. It’s annoying.”

Sherry took another bite. Her teeth quickly crushed flakes into a sweet powder that stained her tongue. She scrambled for something to say: a way to avoid the messages on her phone.

Ian watched the spoon move through the sea of colors. “That was my problem with Pebbles. They always turned soggy too fast,” he said. “When

I was a kid, I used to get up early on Saturdays before Mom. I’d set out two bowls and dump cereal into them. I’d wait for Mom to come into the kitchen, wouldn’t take a bite until I saw her.”

The man looked at his whiskey. His fingers moved the glass, causing the bronze liquid to tremble.

“But she’d never come,” he said. “She would be in her room all day. I thought she was sleeping but,” he frowned at the alcohol like it was some kind of enemy. “It wasn’t that. And the cereal just sat there. Sat there turning soggy. Waiting.”

He looked at her. Sherry didn’t know what the meaning of the story was, why he decided to share it. Something about it troubled her, but she was done with all these complicated thoughts. She just wanted to have a good time.

“Hey, what’s with the guitar case?” Sherry said.

Ian kept staring at her, the same way he stared at the mirror. “What about it?” he asked.

“Well, you brought it in, it’s open mic night, so, do you play?”

Ian sat back and exhaled. “I didn’t want someone on the street breaking my window to jack my guitar. That’s it.”

“So, was it your dream to be a rockstar?” Sherry asked.

“Don’t know what you mean.”

Sherry raised her hands and tilted her head to one side. “Come on,” she said. “Look around you. We’re all grown men and women hanging around an empty bar past midnight. This place is full of dying dreams.”

Ian opened his pack and saw there was one cigarette left. He closed it. “Alright, so what’s yours?” Ian said. “Let me guess, was it Ariel or Jasmine? Or do girls even want to be princesses anymore?”

“Ha, no,” she responded. “I think they want to be superheroes now. I wanted to be a singer. Stand in front of people, help them forget their troubles.” Sherry pointed around the room. “But this is the closest I got. I guess that’s what growing up is. Learning what you’ll never be.”

Ian returned his gaze to the mirror. His fingers toyed with the Marlboro pack.

"So, what'd you want to be?" Sherry asked.

"Nothing," Ian said.

"Yeah, right. The guy with the guitar wanted to be a nobody."

"Always wanted to be nothing. But the older I get, I find it's hard to be even that." He looked away from the mirror and over at his case. "Music helps, I guess. Makes me disappear. Makes everything melt. Makes me a nobody. Nobody."

"So, play something," Sherry said.

Ian looked at her and frowned.

The bartender walked by. He pointed at Sherry's bowl, but she quickly poured another round of Pebbles. Carl sighed. "Okay, but you've got fifteen minutes," the barman said. He turned to the stranger, "You good?"

Ian nodded.

The barman turned to leave but Sherry's voice stopped him. "We've got one more act, Carl," she said. "He wants to do the last song."

Carl looked at the stranger. "Really?" he said.

Sherry was smiling, twirling her spoon. Ian's eyes went to her, then to the barman, then to his case. "You got an amp?" he asked.

Ian's thin body looked taller than it actually was on the stage. He took a clear pick from his pocket and pinched it between his teeth. He opened the black case on the floor and pulled out a shiny, mint-green Telecaster. The brown strap pressed against his chest as he plugged the amp in and grabbed the fretboard. His voice echoed as he spoke into the microphone.

"So," he said, hitting a few cords and twisting the tuning knobs. "This is probably the very definition of cliché, but whatever, I can't help it. This is 'Closing Time' by Semisonic."

The pick slapped against the strings and a heavy, coarse sound blasted through the bar. The drunkards lifted their heads and looked at the stage. Ian's fingers flexed and pushed notes through the air. He swayed with the sounds.

Sherry sat at her barstool looking up at the stranger. He moved different from behind the guitar, as if a heavy weight had been freed from his body.

She watched him. All of the problems and complications that had been brought up seemed to evaporate in the music. Sherry's hand patted the cloth of her skirt, her heels tapped along with the rhythm, and her lips mimed the lyrics.

Carl walked through the room, grabbing chairs and stacking them upside down on the tabletops. The doors opened up to the cold night air, and patrons stumbled into the streets. The clock chirped the seconds of everyone's life away.

The phone in Sherry's pocket buzzed. She took the device out, hit the power button, and killed the screen before she could see the message. She dropped the phone on the counter and stared up at the stranger. His head was bent down, hair hanging over his eyes. His pick moved quickly and smoothly. Sherry sang with the music, her eager voice harmonizing with the notes.

Ian slowed his strum. He picked the last few chords calmly and slowly, as if he were savoring each reverberation from the strings. Sherry mouthed the final lyrics. She closed her eyes, and the walls of the place fell. The crowd cheered. Him and her, they could be the stars of this broken-down stage. It didn't matter where they came from, what pasts they hid from each other. Sherry opened her eyes. All that mattered was tonight.

"Take me home," she sang.

It was 1:00 am and Sherry still had a bowl of Fruity Pebbles to finish. Carl said she could stay if she wanted to. She told him she would walk Ian to his car then come right back. In her heart, she hoped that wouldn't be the case. There was no coming back. She took the stranger through the side exit and out into an alley. The walkway was dark and cold with only a single street lamp lighting the path.

Ian walked with one hand holding his guitar, the other in his jacket pocket. Sherry was next to him in her burgundy coat. She moved so that her hip would playfully brush against his side.

"You going to find a place to stay tonight?" she asked.

"Don't know. Haven't decided yet," Ian said.

"You doing anything tomorrow?"

"Don't know."

"Maybe we could meet up and do a song together?"

"Maybe," the stranger said.

Sherry slowed her steps. Her heels kicked through the trash blowing in the breeze.

"Or, we could go someplace now," she said, smiling. "Practice a few songs? There's a hotel I know a few blocks from here."

Ian stopped walking. He scowled at the dirty pavement and exhaled.

Sherry bit her lips. She considered her words while at the same time trying to decipher his body language. He stood still, no hint of how he really felt.

"You want to?" she asked.

Ian looked at her. Wind kicked leaves past their frozen feet. An early fall snow drifted lazily from the sky, like stars broken free from their perch.

"I'm not sure that's a good idea," Ian said.

"Is it because of that picture in your wallet?" Sherry said, fearing she might be pushing her luck. "You can just tell me. Is it because of her?"

He looked back at the ground, his brow creasing over the tops of his intense eyes.

"Her name was Neon," he said. "Weird damn name, I know. But it fit her."

Ian exhaled air into the cold. It looked like steam.

"A couple of weeks ago she told me she was pregnant. I didn't know what to say. She said she wanted to keep it. I wanted to tell her something different. I was so damn scared."

Sherry noticed his body was slightly shaking. It could have been from the cold, but she didn't think so.

"I mean, I'm not even sure it's mine," Ian said. "Yeah, we were together, but it wasn't a sure thing. She'd been with other guys, she knew it. So, I took off. I just left and that's it. Kept driving to avoid the whole damn thing. I just, I can't be a dad. I can't. I don't know."

There was a vulnerability in the way he spoke, the way he stood alone between the brick walls and the dark. Sherry stepped close to him, moving

into the steam of his breath. He was an open wound she hoped to bandage with her skin.

Her fingers rubbed across the pointed tips of his stubble. She explored the edge of his jaw and chin. Ian frowned at her.

"I just left her," he said. "Doesn't that bother you?"

Sherry smiled, moving even closer.

"No," she said. "Should it?"

She kissed him. Her body pushed against his motionless form, her hands moved down his neck and into the warm confines of his coat. Breath swayed back and forth over the curves of their lips. Sherry closed her eyes and moved against him. The walls of the alley fell apart one brick at a time, the city vanished within the night. Everything was gone. She was gone, lost in someone else, another life. Finally.

His firm hand gripped her around the chin. His thumb and fingers pinched into the soft flesh upon her face. It wasn't a harsh or violent grasp, but a concentrated hold. He pulled her away from his mouth, held her at a distance.

"You want me to take you someplace and fuck you?" Ian said.

Sherry gazed into the hallways of his eyes. Small bumps tickled over her skin. She nodded within his hand.

"So, you can forget about your life for a night?" he said. "Forget about whoever's waiting for you on that phone? Be someone else?"

Sherry pinched her lips and swallowed. The meaning of his words caused the sensation in her body to retreat. She reached down at the buckle of his belt in an attempt to keep things going.

"So what?" she said. "We're all trying to forget who we are a little."

Ian stopped her hand. He stepped back, allowing the wind to build the cold between their bodies. He let go of her, dug into his pockets, and pulled out his pack of cigarettes.

"Yeah, I guess so," he said. "But not tonight. Not with me."

Ian thumbed his lighter and burned the tip of his last cigarette. He sucked in and exhaled white smoke into the cold. He stood alone against the brick wall.

Sherry wiped the corners of her lips with her fingers. She straightened her blouse and skirt and tried to compose her thoughts. The feeling was gone now, falling away like a glow stick down a never-ending well.

"Look, I'm sorry, that was stupid. Let's just go then," Sherry said. "Forget all that, let's go find a place. You can play some songs for me and we can talk more."

"It's a bad idea," he said through the smoke.

"No, it's not. Come on. Let's just go. Go anywhere."

He took the cigarette from his lips and gave a short laugh, but it wasn't an expression of amusement. It was more like a realization.

"You might as well have a frame around you and be made of glass," Ian said. "That's the thing, I stopped fucking myself a long time ago."

He took his last puff, dropped the cigarette on the hard floor, and crushed the embers beneath his sole. Ian turned from her and proceeded to walk down the alley.

"Wait, wait," she yelled, catching his arm. "We could be something. You could play and I could sing. We could go places together, perform, maybe make a little money. Please."

Ian delicately removed her hand from his coat.

"I'm sorry," he said, before continuing to walk.

"But why?" she said. "What is it? What do you want?"

He stopped at the end of the alley, his silhouette balanced between the dark walls and the yellow streetlight. The specs of snow were twirling around him, melting as they touched the ground.

"I already told you," Ian said. "I want nothing. No plans. Nobody."

His steps faded away from her, back to his car where the engine would rumble, and he would disappear back into the shadows of the road he came from.

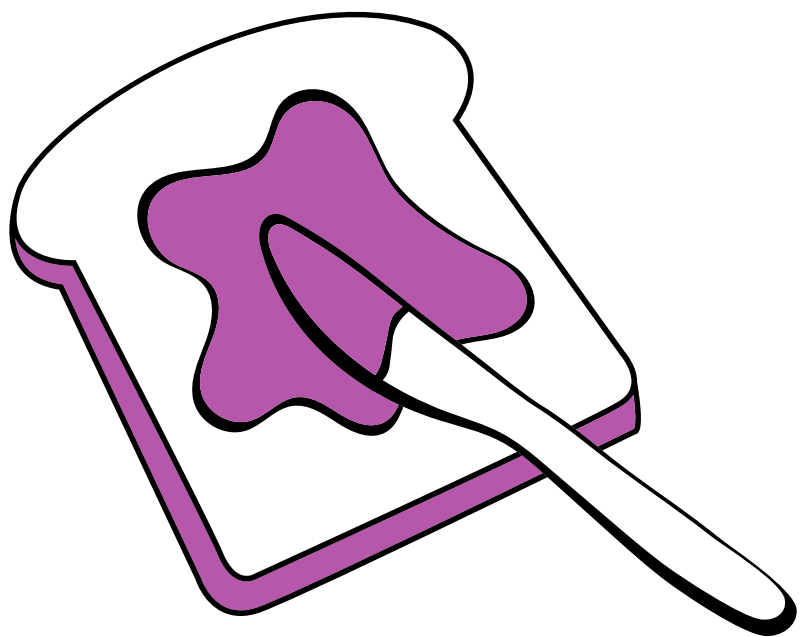
Sherry listened to his engine fade. She pressed her back against the rough bricks and slid down into a ball. She waited within the discarded magazine pages and the fast food wrappers, expecting her phone to remind her who

she really was. But she had turned it off. She had buried her diamond ring with the hope she could avoid it one more night. Her elbows rested on her knees, and her hands dug hopelessly through her hair. Tears froze across her face.

Sherry sat alone in the cold alleyway. She waited there, hoping some kind hand might come along, pick her up, and escort her to a different life. Someone, in some distant future ahead, to take her to the dreams she knew she deserved. But the walls of the alley were not fading away, and no crowds were standing to cheer. The bowl of cereal was still waiting for her at the bar, getting warmer with each passing second: a little less edible, a little less wanted.







# FOR ONCE

Madison Thomas

The room was uncomfortably hot today, or maybe it was the thick cotton of Mildred's stuffy old dress. Either way, she was tempted to cut her hair into one of the stylish bobs rather than creating a faux bob every morning. It would certainly save her time and cool her off considerably. Mildred wished the office would turn the AC up or move to a building that had windows, but she knew the higher-ups didn't care that much about the gals in the basement. A blinking yellow light at the bottom of her row alerted Mildred that her attention was needed elsewhere.

"Hello, who may I connect you with this afternoon," she asked in the sweetest tone she could muster.

"Send me over to the Rochester line please," a gruff voice replied.

Mildred did just that, plugging the connector in the corresponding slot and flicking the switch. She watched as the little light indicating if the receiver had been picked up flickered as the phone call was answered. Normally she would have listened in for a few minutes to see if anything interesting was being said, but she knew nothing interesting ever happens in Rochester.

Mildred's gaze roamed around her little telephone switchboard room. Several of her coworkers were busy connecting other calls, some of them looked half-asleep as they plugged one end of the connector into the correct slot. Wires of varying shades of black and brown were strewn everywhere, some not even connected to anything. The five other girls in her section were all grouped around Dorothy's station, near the end of the row. Excited whispers drifted over to Mildred, who was doing her best to pick up the slack from the other girls.

*They're lucky it's a Monday afternoon,* she thought as she connected another client to someone too far away to walk across the street and have a chat. Unfortunately, the person Mildred wanted to talk to was out of reach even by telephone. The wooden door to their small workspace opened with a crack. Immediately the other girls jumped back to their stations, trying to look busy as one of the suited supervisors inspected all rows and stations. He adjusted his glasses, nodded his approval and left the room, leaving his heavy cologne behind. The whispers once again took up residency in the room. Mildred was about to ask them all what they were gabbing about when her little yellow light lit up again.

"Hello, thank you for calling the American Bell Telephone Company. How may I help you today?"

"You sound like you're quite a dame. Say, you got any plans tonight," a

familiar voice cooed.

“Tony Rizzo you know better than to be calling me when I’m at work. The bosses monitor this kind of thing! And did you forget you promised to go to that reading for the new mystery novel with me tonight?”

There was a pause and Mildred imagined her plans for the evening going up in smoke. Antony Rizzo, for all his charming smile and boyish curls promised, was the worst for sticking to plans. If he wasn’t one of the only links to Charles she had left, she would’ve told him to get lost long ago.

“You have to cancel again don’t you,” it wasn’t a question, just a disappointed statement.

“Millie, you know there’s nothing that would’ve stopped me from falling asleep at that reading only for you to knock the back of my head until I woke up, but I got called into work. You know how hard I’m trying to impress the bosses,” there was a sincere plea in his words.

“It’s all Jake. See you around Tony,” Mildred replied before disconnecting herself.

The girls were still giggling around Dorothy’s desk but Dorothy wasn’t paying them any attention, she was too busy looking at the deflated Mildred. Dorothy stood up, her red hair bouncing in its stylish bob. Her heels clicked against the tile as she made her way over to Mildred.

“Millie, guess what I just overheard,” her voice was too perky for such a dull day. “Oh, you’ll never guess. There’s a gin joint close to my apartment that’s having a rub tonight!”

Dorothy loved living on the trendy side of life, and Mildred thought it agreed with her. Dorothy was always heading out to whatever new gin joint popped up in the city. She would come into work and regale the other girls with tales of splendor and mischievousness, usually with some poor fella mixed up in all of it. Mildred had always wanted to join her friend for a night of glorious debauchery, just to forget for one night the reality she’s stuck in.

“You just *have* to join me tonight,” Dorothy whined, sticking her bottom lip out.

“I don’t have anything to wear Dottie! I’ll stick out like an old jalopy at a car show - not to mention if the police raid it -”

“Don’t be such a wet blanket! I’ve been to a million of these parties. The rods who run these joints wouldn’t let their booze get confiscated by the coppers! Please, none of the other gals will join me. And it sounds like your fella just canceled on your plans so I know you don’t have a good excuse.”

*He’s not my fella*, Mildred thought as she bit her lower lip and looked around the room. Boring beige walls stared back as if daring her to add a little color to her life. Her brother Charles would have told her to go for it—if he had returned from the Great War alive. She had to go—she had to live for Charles and take all the chances he would never get to.

“Alright, I’ll go. But you need to doll me up.”

Dorothy’s eyes lit up and she squealed before giving Mildred a quick hug and returning to her work station.



After their shift ended, Mildred and Dorothy took a cramped and bouncy streetcar to Mildred’s apartment that was a few blocks from their office. Mildred lived on the ground floor of a female-only building. The gray mortar between the red bricks looked especially dull that afternoon. She said hello to Mrs. Jones—her landlady—before unlocking her apartment door.

It wasn’t much—a small living room with a velvet rose couch and a little oak bookshelf with a floor lamp looming over the couch. An even smaller bedroom with just enough room for her bed, a closet, and an oak dresser that matched her bookshelf. Her bathroom contained only a small bathtub, toilet, and utility sink. The kitchen would never play host to grand holiday dinners, but it was enough for Mildred on her own.

She’d chosen to decorate her walls with family photographs—her history neatly displayed for any guest who walked in and cared enough to glance at her wall. Her parents’ faces gazed down from the family porch back in Roxbury, New York. They still visited her—though her mother hated that her daughter lived alone in the big city. It didn’t matter how many times Mildred reminded her that she could handle herself—after all, Charles and Antony had taught her a thing or two when she went out on her first date—her mother still worried.

Dorothy pointed at a photograph of Charles in his military uniform. “Who is this handsome man and please tell me he’s looking for someone to spend the rest of his life with!”

Mildred didn't glance at the portrait as she replied, "That's my brother Charlie. He died in the trenches."

Dorothy slowly curled her finger away from the photograph. She looked anywhere but Mildred's face. Mildred shook her head and walked over to her bookshelf. Pulling a random book that was just thick enough from its place on her packed bookshelf, Mildred pried the window that sat just above the shelf open and slipped the book under it. A trick Charles had taught her before he left and the world caught fire.

"Mrs. Jones gives us a curfew," she laughed while Dorothy smiled at her friend's daring.



The pair took another packed streetcar to Dorothy's apartment, the journey a little less bumpy than the first. Dorothy lived in a lavish twenty-story skyscraper on 54th street. Her apartment was located on the sixth floor and it overlooked the beautiful cityscape, the skyscrapers reaching like Earth's fingers towards the universe above. Mildred's entire apartment could have fit comfortably in Dorothy's living room.

"How do you afford this Dottie?"

She waved a dismissive hand at her home and said, "Daddy takes care of it. Honestly, I think he just found the first thing that was available. Little did he know it would put me right next to some of the best gin joints in all of New York!"

Though Dorothy could have hosted half of New York in her home, Mildred doubted that she'd ever even touched her kitchen—it was immaculate! The granite counters gleamed under the warm glow of the lighting fixtures and there wasn't even a breakfast dish in the sink. Mildred followed Dorothy to her room, all the while feeling out of place in her frumpy old frock. Dorothy instructed Mildred to wait on her bed while she returned with some options for their evening out.

Mildred took in the room while she waited. Dorothy's home was the complete opposite of her own. No photos adorned the walls—except for a larger-than-life portrait of Dorothy. Her bed could have fit at least five people—maybe even seven if she pulled all her decorative pillows off. Mildred pictured all the things she could do with that much space. Bookshelves as tall as the ceiling, overflowing with mystery novels and spilling poets out onto the lush carpet floors. She could host dinner parties every weekend,

her mother wouldn't worry about her living alone if this was where she lived. Dorothy returned with several dresses on her arms. She laid all of them out on her bed.

"Which one are you going to wear?"

"Oh, I've worn all of these ones before, my brand new one is in the closet. The dark green will ab-so-lute-ly be striking against my hair! Now, which of these old rags do you fancy Millie?"

All of the options were so far away from the dress she currently had on that Mildred felt overwhelmed. The beadings, fringe, and overall low cut of the dresses before her seemed to say that if she made the wrong choice, she would end up on a quest she was unprepared for. Finally, she settled on a beautiful black and gold dress with a mixture of beading and fringe at the bottom; the cut was a little lower than she would have liked, but it was much higher than the other dresses. Dorothy nodded her approval, Mildred had passed the test.

Dorothy dolled herself up first, starting with a full face of makeup and then moving on to adding a little extra curl to her bob. She set to work on Mildred. She wiped the small amount of makeup Mildred had put on for work off in a single sweeping motion before coating her friend's face in the best powder money could buy and put so many pins in her head that Mildred was sure she would still be finding them weeks after this adventure. Soon Dorothy declared she was done and Mildred stared at her reflection, unsure of who was staring back. Her mother would just die if she saw the bright red lipstick Mildred wore now. She felt like a real flapper. Dorothy grinned and threw her arms around Mildred, saying it was her best work!

The young women spent the next hour or so going over the dos and don'ts of speakeasy etiquette. It was mostly a list of dos. Do say yes when someone asks you to dance, even if you don't want to. Do try at least one specialty cocktail. Do live a little. Mildred gave herself a small list of don'ts. Don't mention your dead brother or the war. Don't hold yourself back. Don't be a wet blanket.

Smiling, Dorothy stood up and dragged Mildred out of the apartment. They didn't bother with another streetcar as the 300 Club was only a few blocks west of Dorothy's apartment and they'd certainly draw attention with their attire. Mildred's stomach was churning as they got closer to their destination. This was the most daring thing she'd done since she had snuck out with Charles to see the new film *A Christmas Carol*. That was before



he'd shipped off to war. Before she was all her parents had, forcing her to be careful about everything. *No*, she thought, *no sad thoughts tonight. Tonight, I get to live and be someone different.*

The 300 Club didn't strike Mildred as somewhere a speakeasy would be – though that was probably the point. Its red-brick exterior didn't hint that anything mischievous was happening inside. It looked like any other building on the block. Beautiful ornate doors with the fire-like glow of electric lights inside. Though the 300 Club had two rather large men guarding the entrance. Suddenly Mildred didn't want to be daring anymore. Ignoring her friend's change in demeanor, Dorothy charged right up to the two men.

"Hello, boys! Tonight is berries for getting blotto," she sang, adding a wink for good measure.

The guards didn't even crack a smile as they opened the door for the girls.

"What was that nonsense, Dottie?"

"The password isn't exactly going to make sense, Millie. Then the coppers would be all over the gin joints!"

Mildred had almost forgotten about Antony and his cancelation for work, but Dorothy's casual use of copper brought unwelcome images of Antony in his NYPD blues. A small bubble of guilt bounced around her stomach. Was she betraying everything Antony stood for by sneaking out to an illegal gin joint? *Forget it. He skipped out on me, I don't need to be loyal Mildred for tonight*, she thought as a wonderful string of notes came blaring from the open door. Excitement sparkled in Dorothy's green eyes. She latched onto Mildred's hand and ran through the door. Everywhere Mildred looked there were women in gorgeous dresses that swayed with each movement and dapper men with their hats slightly askew and cigars hanging from the corners of their mouths. Even the band was mesmerizing as they played their music with vigor and excitement. The deep soulful voice of the lead singer drew Mildred in as if it were hypnotizing her, even if she wasn't quite sure why a song about cake walking babies was so enticing.

Dorothy pulled Mildred over to the bar, her dress making her look like a glowing emerald in the dim lights of the speakeasy. Dorothy grinned at Mildred before turning her attention to the man pouring drinks.

"Two of your tingliest giggle waters, Barkeep!"

Mildred took her glass from the slender man, wondering what exactly was

in giggle water. Dorothy downed her glass in one gulp, knocking her head back like she'd been doing this her whole life. Deciding to follow suit, Mildred tipped her head back, some of her light brown curls escaping her faux bob. Her eyes widened as the bitter taste hit her tongue and burned her throat. Dorothy laughed as Mildred coughed.

"You might want to start small – or not! Time to let loose! Maybe even catch yourself another fella."

Mildred grinned and asked the bald bartender for a slightly less alcohol heavy cocktail. Her eyes lit up at the first sip, it was ab-so-lute-ly delicious! When she asked the bartender what he called it, he said it was called a mimosa. Mildred decided she would like to continue ordering this delightful drink.

The music picked up, the horns and saxophones racing to the beat of the drums. The people on the dance floor were dancing in ways Mildred's mother would say were indecent. It could have been because there wasn't much room, the stage where the band performed took up most of the open space with plush maroon booths and tables tucked onto the sides of the room. She had a sneaking suspicion the close dancing was more for thrills than convenience. Mildred smiled and grabbed Dorothy's hand. The two women partnered for a fast-paced foxtrot – Mildred taking the lead. More couples were throwing each other into the air and sliding all over the place. It was like watching fish leaping from a lake.

"What is that," Mildred asked, her eyes following the frantic yet smooth motions of the closest couple.

"They're calling it swing – probably because of all the throwing," Dorothy replied.

They were acrobats, twisting over each other every which way! The fringe of the dresses creating a mesmerizing swaying motion. Big red smiles decorated every woman's face. A gentleman in green suspenders asked Mildred to dance. She said yes and soon she was learning the basics of swing dance.

His hands were warm as he held Mildred's, showing her how to cross her right arm across his chest while his right arm straightened across her chest. They were offbeat for several minutes until Mildred understood how to do the movements to the upbeat music. They danced to one or two jazzy songs before Mildred excused herself to rest her feet.

Somehow another mimosa ended up in front of Mildred – not that she

minded. She settled in the plush bar stool, watching everyone in the gin joint while sipping her cocktail. It was now three hours into her adventure, and the crowd was beginning to wilt. There were high pitched giggles from women who were half-over-seas, and more than a few couples were necking in the not-so-dark corners. A haze of cigar smoke blurred the other patrons' faces, but Mildred gasped when she made eye contact with a certain blue-eyed gentleman. *Applesauce*, she thought as Antony began fighting his way through the crowd towards her. Mildred had lost track of Dorothy after she was pulled away by Green Suspenders, but she couldn't face Antony on her own or run away leaving Dorothy wondering where she was. Unfortunately, Green Suspenders chose that moment to block Mildred's line of sight with his blockish figure. He smelled like moonshine and sweat, his green eyes glazed like a donut.

"Hey baby! Want to get out of here for some nookie?"

Mildred may have been new to the party scene but she knew Green Suspenders was being lude and she did not have time for this.

"No thanks."

Green Suspenders' uncomfortably hot hands latched onto Mildred's upper arm. His heavy breath fanned her face causing her to scrunch her nose in disgust.

"Come on baby, I know you're a pushover."

Mildred's heart was pounding faster than the jazz beat in the background. She could vaguely make out Antony's muscular frame breaking free of the gaggle of flappers begging for a dance. Green Suspenders tightened his grip on her arm. She stood up, pretending to be the quiff he thought she was. Then she ripped her arm from his grasp and connected her knee to his groin.

"Sorry Rummy, but this is one skirt you don't get to chase," she said while thanking Charles for teaching her self defense all those years ago.

She turned to start looking for Dorothy when another unwelcome male stopped her. At least Green Suspenders had been drunk and easy to handle. The irate look on Antony's face told her he would not be so easily kneed in the jewels.

"I thought you had to work," she grumbled, tucking a loose hair behind her ear.

"I am working. It's – or it was – an undercover job," Antony paused to take a deep breath. "What are you doing here Millie? This isn't exactly a place for a gal like you."

That was the last straw. Mildred was tempted to repeat the move she'd pulled earlier but that wouldn't make her feel better for longer than a few minutes. Instead, she squared her bare shoulders and glared at her friend.

"Why? Because I'm a wet blanket who enjoys book readings? Welcome to the twentieth century, Tony! A woman can enjoy multiple walks of life!"

"I promised Charlie that I'd look out for you. You being here breaks all kinds of rules."

Mildred wasn't sure if it was the mimosas kicking in or if Dorothy was rubbing off on her but she was tired of living by everyone else's rules. When she was younger, she'd lived by her parents and Charles' rules because she didn't know anything else. Now she lived by Mrs. Jones' and Antony's rules. She wanted to be like the characters in her novels, breaking rules and living for herself, not for others.

"I have lived by other people's rules and expectations for too long. Doesn't anyone care what I want? I wanted to see the world and experience things outside of Roxbury. I was going to see where all the great authors of our time lived. When Charlie died in the damned trenches, I lost my chance. How could I do that to my parents? What if something happened to me and they were left with nothing but two gravestones and pain?"

Antony opened his mouth to reply but Mildred held up a hand to silence him. She had been silent for eight long years. She could no longer hold her tongue and bow her head.

"So I moved to New York City instead. My parents could handle that and I got a little room to breathe. But did I? Everywhere I turned, my dead brother was stalking me in the shadows. I miss him so much, but how long can I let him haunt me? I did everything I could to keep him alive in my memory, I even put up with you canceling plans over and over again because you were his best friend and just the act of us being in the same room had some traces of Charlie. Sometimes it felt like it could be more than just that but now I know it was all out of obligation on your part," she took a shaky breath, a traitorous tear escaping from the prison it had been held in for eight years. "I release you from whatever blood oath you swore. You are no longer bound to me or I to you."

Mildred turned to leave, but for the second time that night a hand latched onto her upper arm. Antony drew her towards his chest until she was enveloped in a warm embrace. She was tucked against his rapidly beating heart. The music and laughter faded until nothing existed outside of Antony's embrace.

"It was never about obligation Millie. I needed you as much as you needed me. I'm sorry I left you feeling like you had to pretend to be something else. I know you're not just one thing," Antony said while loosening his hold on her. "Though you do smell an awful lot like the man you dropped to the floor. How much have you had to drink tonight?"

"Oh turn off Officer Rizzo for once –"

Unfortunately, the world had not stopped while the two shared a tender moment. Green Suspenders had recovered and his green eyes were wide as he heard the words coming from Mildred's mouth.

"There's a copper in here!"

The trumpeter squelched, the singer swore into the mic. The once satiated crowd turned into a herd of stampeding monsters. Everyone's eyes were bloodshot, the women's faces seemed to be melting. The entire speakeasy descended into chaos as couples ripped apart and dashed towards every exit. Antony began pulling Mildred towards the back exit but she pulled him back.

"I can't leave without Dottie! She's my friend –" at the moment Mildred caught sight of Dorothy by the front door.

They made eye contact and Dorothy mouthed for Mildred to go and that she'd see her at work before she disappeared with the bartender. Mildred held back a smile, her friend would have another captivating tale for the gals at work. She let herself be led out the back door into the brisk night air. The soft light of the back alley cast a romantic glow on the fleeing party-goers, almost as if they were escaping a gruesome battle.

"Well, the bosses won't be impressed with that graceful ending. Though I suppose I did break up an illegal party," Antony laughed, running a hand through his sandy curls.

Mildred shook her head and walked towards the end of the small alley. Once they emerged onto the street, she paused to look up at the city skyline. Every day a new skyscraper was being built, promising it would be the

tallest one yet, so the city was dotted with buildings in progress and others blazing like lit candles waiting to be dwarfed by a brand new dream. Each one reaching for the stars while the people walked beneath their light.

"I really am sorry about missing the reading you know."

"Walk me home and I'll call it square. This time."

Antony took his suit jacket off, offering it to Mildred. She draped the soft material around her bare shoulders, curling her fingers into the lapel to keep it secure. There were a few automobiles rushing around on the dark streets as the pair walked the several blocks back to Mildred's apartment building, but no other signs of life in the growing city. At some point Mildred opted to pull her borrowed heels off, walking the last two blocks barefoot. They paused just out of sight of her building, hoping to not disturb a sleeping Mrs. Jones. Mildred handed Antony his jacket back, their fingers brushing for just a moment.

"You know, Charlie would be proud of you."

"For sneaking out, getting drunk, and then breaking up a party? Yeah sounds like something Charlie would do," she laughed.

"No, for standing your ground and speaking your mind for once. But I think he would definitely have loved the rest of evening as well, particularly you nailing that man where it counts."

Mildred stood on her tiptoes and pressed a kiss to Antony's smooth cheek. "Goodnight Tony. Thanks for not throwing me in jail."

Antony smiled and told her anytime. Mildred snuck over to her window, careful to avoid being in the light too much. She gave one last wave to Antony before hoisting herself up and through the window. As she pulled her book-stopper from the window ledge, she noticed the title. It was T.S. Elliot's *The Wasteland*. Tucking the black book under her arm, she recalled a line from one of his sections.

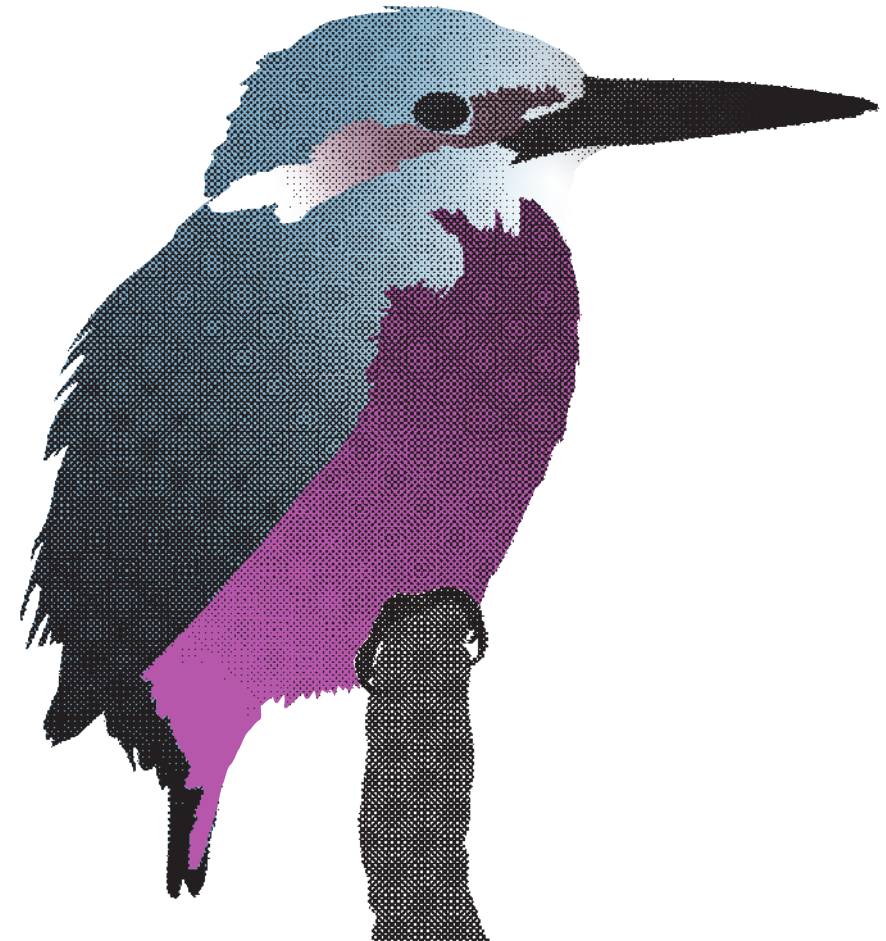
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

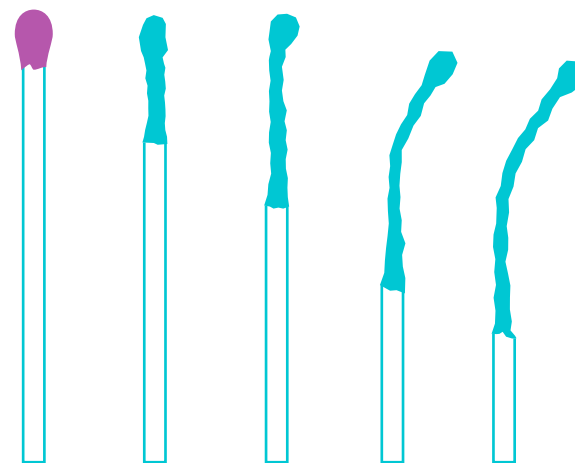
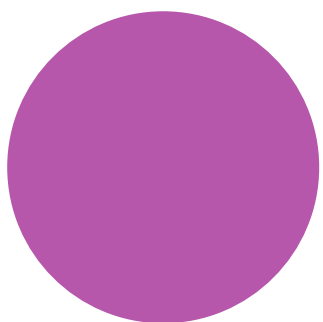
Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with the spring rain.

And for once, she understood what Elliot was getting at. She changed out of her borrowed costume and into her familiar cotton nightgown before

snuggling into bed. For once, she wasn't worried about what the next day had in store for her. Maybe, just maybe, for once she would wake up and be Mildred Brown the woman who loved books and dancing in the rain, instead of the girl with the dead brother.







# ICE

KileyAnne Larson

The flash storm last night prepared an unexpected winter wonderland that turned boulders into frosted cookies, trees into hunched-over men bundled in cotton coats, and the lake into a perfect mirror. It left as quickly as it came, barricading the roads, and extending the stay of Marla and her parents at the mountain cabin of her aunt and uncle. Everything is just as it had been almost seven years ago, as she had feared it would be when she begged her parents to hold this reunion at their own house.

The lake before her reflects the sheer brightness from all around, despite the hour, and glows with a tempting shine. She looks back toward her aunt and uncle's house, half expecting to hear the cry of a newborn baby, as she had so many years ago. The chimney puffs like a cloud factory. Of course, Marla would hear no babe's cry; Ash is older now. Nothing leaves the house in her moments of staring but the cumulus pour from the chimney. Everyone's asleep. The windows are fogging at the corners, washing away any chance of glancing inside, despite the darkness within the house already.

*My God. They turned up the heat again.*

The house sits in a shallow puddle it made all on its own from the sheer heat of the bricks, like a floating little island drifting further and further from her. She doesn't have to move to feel the distance growing between herself and a certain locked bedroom door.

Inside, all her coats and sweaters lay like rose petals. *They're roasting me alive... They roast me not... They're roasting me alive... They roast me not...* she had thought as she peeled off each layer. Her aunt and uncle seem to think that in order to compensate for the weather descending from the heavens that they have to heat their house with the fires of hell.

Moments ago, inside the house with her little cousin, she had been sweating enough to save every whale ever beached, and the red glow of her cheeks could have led Santa through the very storm that's keeping her here. Although, that was also after she'd been wrestling the little boy, laughing all the way from their game.

*What's that one from?* Ash had demanded, jabbing a chubby little finger at the patchy pale scar over her shoulder.

*Valentine's Day*, she had said, telling him about the time she and a friend tied a sled to a truck and rode it, most unsuccessfully, down a street of patchy ice.

*K, now this one!* A magnifying glass had materialized in his hand at that

point, and he had collapsed onto her lap, her wrist in his other hand as he examined three jagged scratches that stretch from her bicep to her forearm.

*That's from you, you little rascal,* Marla said, and that's when the tickling fight began. She told him though ragged breaths about the surprising strength he had when he was a baby, and his unspoken will to be a monkey, expecting Marla to be the tree.

Now, alone on the edge of the lake, the sweat around her hair transforms into an icy diadem, collecting lost snowflakes in miniature spires along her brow and at the corners of her eyes, glossy in the cold. She picks up one of the less-frosted stones along the icy brim and tosses it out across the lake. It doesn't skip or bounce, but skids in a jittery motion to the center of the mirror, lost in the glimmer. Her reflection shivers below her in a blur, accentuating her most ghostly aspects, and takes a step as she does.

*Woah, what's that nasty one on your elbow?* Ash had asked after their laughing fit.

Marla, now three steps onto the lake, touches the knotted web of scar tissue tangled up at the back of her elbow. It's a horrible, shattered mess of skin. She hates to feel it, hates even more to see it, and appreciates the contrasting smoothness of the surface below her feet.

*I don't know,* she had lied to him. *I can't remember.*

Ash had then found a storybook—as his room was swelling with them—about a tiger, and asked if one had bitten her. She told him no. She remembered being bit, yes, definitely not by a tiger, but by the cold. There is a sharpness that hides in snow, as silky soft as it seems.

Ash then found another book and asked if she was attacked by pirates. She said no, but it had triggered the deep moaning sound of wet boards in her memory, like the bellow of a ship in a storm before its beams split under the weight of the waves.

Now ten steps onto the lake, Marla hears that very groan spread across the ice. It sounds exactly the same as it did seven years ago. Her reflection grows less stable, tinted by that tempting hue of the water below the frozen surface. It's not a sing-you-to-sleep type of blue or the kind that kisses your shoulders in the summertime, it is a gluttonous blue that craves all which it cannot have.

A book about lightning was the next Ash had tried. Again, it was useless.

*I can't remember,* Marla said, but she did. She remembered that shattering crack from the day of the injury, like lightning but so much more ethereal, that had split the seams of her skin along with the foundation below her, seven years ago.

Ash's next assumption was that she had been abducted by a spaceship with aliens who conducted wild experiments on her arm, for reasons beyond humanity, and wiped her memory.

In the center of the lake, Marla stands now as a skeletal figure, blood vacant in her extremities, thin arms exposed and pale, teeth bared and chattering between cracked lips. The snow holds a coronation, but she doesn't feel she deserves it. The lightest of snowflakes pile heavy on her head, weighted as if they want to just keep falling. She is crowned in the most delicate sapphire gems that would match her eyes if they weren't so sunken. Snowflake flowers bloom in the knotted tresses of her hair, white confetti all around.

She closes her eyes and remembers a bright light, but no spaceship. She remembers the rotting sting of iron on her tongue, and the burning teeth of tigers gnawing at her elbow, and the groan of the support under her feet losing strength, and a face before her. A face so familiar. The face of a girl the same age as Ash, a girl who *should* be twice as old.

Before Marla had tucked Ash into bed, he tried one more book.

*Rusalka,* Ash had told her. *She's like a princess, but an evil one.*

On the cover of the book was a woman waist-deep in a river with a promising grin and an outstretched hand. Snow covered the shore and speckled the flowers in her hair and the crown of sharpened icicles on her head, and below the surface of the water, her own body was a skeleton. It dropped the temperature in the oceans of Marla's heart, despite the heat of the house, to hear of this princess—this *monster*—who lures men to their untimely demise. Who begs them to come further and further, despite all previous warnings. Marla's stomach reacted in roars of waves that threatened to upheave its contents.

That was when Marla left. Yes, she lied to Ash. *Rusalka got me, you figured it out. You win. Goodnight.* She had closed Ash's door behind her, walked past the ever-open door of his parent's room, the ever-locked door of his sister's room, the door-less room where her parents were sleeping, out the

front door of the house, and to the lake's center.

She's on her knees now. Her hair falls, half frozen, in a black canopy around her head, breaking off the tiny icicles at her temples. The snow, with its hidden sharpness, stings her bare neck like an axe blade measuring the swing for execution. She tears up. Before her, almost above her, is a large stretch of boulders overhanging the lake. The lake, ever hungry, had lapped its tongue at that stone for decades, eating away everything below it. From the shore at its base, one wouldn't even be able to tell the lake was below, let alone that the fall was jaw-dropping, jaw-shattering.

One could stand on that shore with a promising grin and an outstretched hand to her cousin, wanting to explore the wonders winter brought about them. One could tempt her cousin further from the house of the crying baby, despite all the warnings not to stray from the flat, familiar property line. And they could run across the diving-board-rock ignorantly, and both could slip off, shattering ice and bone on impact, and one—just one—could fall in, beneath, and never be brought up again.

Marla's hands and the hands of her bony reflection press into each other, melting *just slightly* the distance between them. Her tears are shaken from her by the shudder of a failing foundation. They drip to the ice between her hands, splattering and freezing. The dark eyes of her reflection are not her own, but Amy's. Marla's cousin, Ash's sister, half the age she should be. Her body, a skeleton below the surface.

Marla's reflection raises a fist, and so does Marla, slamming it back into the ice. The lake sighs, as if proud of sealing them away from each other. She does it again, causing a moan from the water. Bubbles shiver beneath the ice in anticipation, eager to break free, eager to welcome her. She does it again, and again, until the lake is roaring in pain and so is she.

"My fault," she whispers, cracking knuckles on cracking ice, splitting her reflection in two. "My fault." Again. A dozen pairs of eyes stare back from a dozen fragments. Again.

With a sudden tremor, that guttural snap like low thunder echoes between huddled trees and frosted rocks, and the starved lake takes a greedy gulp with one giant, lapping tongue. Ice wrestles bone. Chill fights blood. Water battles breath, and wins. The trees shiver off a few layers before shushing each other, and the ice chatters like teeth until it settles back down. After a moment, the noises stop bouncing back.

By morning, the lake will freeze over. The water oozing up between the shattered seams will stitch it back together, cooling in twisted nets. Sharp edges will soften in the wind, and all traces of fracture will fade like a scar.



# JACK THE RIPPER- UNMASKED

Larissa Jackson

Thursday, 8 November 1888

7:30 PM

Mary Jane Kelly lounged alone in her single designated room in 13 Miller's Court, feeling rather lonely for the first time in a while. From her perch on her bed, she followed a small light as it bounced around the rather bland room, casting strange shadows on the walls as the flame danced atop the wick of the candle. The struggling candle didn't provide nearly enough warmth for the humid November season that had just started to creep into lower temperatures. Though the evening remained young, according to the clock, the sun had long ago gone to sleep, replaced only by the silver luminescence of a sister moon peeking through patchy dark storm clouds. A sense of foreboding and loss swept over her in a sudden, crippling wave.

She growled to herself, something between a snarl and a cry, and leapt from her bed, which lay parallel to an identical model on the far end of a narrow space. She caught herself staring at the empty mattress more often than she cared to admit and even now, ten days later, she found herself missing the owner more than she thought possible.

A sharp flicker from the candle seized her attention and she pushed those thoughts away. A drink, she definitely needed a drink.

Cautious not to make any noise, she dug her fingers between the loose floorboards under her bed. The aged wood emanated a strangled shriek at her effort to remove it. Mary froze, listening for the sounds of her landlord. It's not that John McCarthy was a prude, but he somehow possessed the ears and nose of a bloodhound. And he disliked it when she drank—something about how girls like her couldn't hold her liquor emotionally or some Freudian nonsense like that.

She waited another painfully long second. Nothing. She released a long breath—one she hadn't realized she'd been holding—and reached within the small opening, her hand knowing immediately where to go. The glass of the bottle was cold enough to make the bones in her hand ache, but she held on tight, restoring floorboards ever so carefully.

Banging erupted on the door, made even noisier by the last minutes of silence. Mary failed to stifle a small squeak at having been caught red-handed, but when a second knock, this one much quieter than the last, sounded throughout the room, she breathed a sigh of relief. John and...and, well, John and *him* successfully replaced the locks weeks ago. No one could walk in without a key.

A third knock, this one somehow sounding more annoyed than the first two, prompted Mary to her feet. She stashed the bottle of absinthe beneath her pillow and smoothed out the wrinkles in her skirt. Relax. She willed her nerves to relax.

With a trembling hand, she slowly unlatched the lock and dragged the door open on rusted hinges.

"You weren't asleep, were you?" Lizzie Albrook, the girl living just a few doors down, strode into the room without invitation. She couldn't be more than a handful of years Mary's junior, but she still retained a spark of child-like curiosity, and excitement, that few low-class women possessed.

"Well, I was certainly trying to be," Mary lied, moving past the girl to sit down near the head of her bed. By the pillow. "I have a very late appointment and I was hoping to catch a few hours of rest before going out. What are you doing here?"

Lizzie shook her head. "I don't know how you do it." She plopped down beside Mary, taking her hands in her own. "How are you still so respected, being a woman of the streets? I mean, even grouchy old McCarthy likes you, most of the time, anyway, and he's not even one of your customers." She paused, glancing up with a hint of suspicion sparkling in her eyes. "Unless he is! Goodness, is that the big secret you've been hinting at for days now?"

Mary wrenched her hands away. "Of course not! John McCarthy is a respectable man! And I have no secrets, Lizzie."

"Don't lie to me, Mary, dear. You're quite terrible at it, really. We both know there's something you're keeping from me, but I'll let the matter drop for now because we're friends. We are friends, I hope. We've been neighbors for months and I assumed—"

"Yes, dear, we are certainly friends. Now, are you going to tell me why you're here or did you just stop by to say hello?"

For the first time since Mary had met her, Lizzie squirmed uncomfortably, averting her gaze sheepishly. She wrung her gloved hands, seeming to contemplate her words. Finally, she released a big breath of air. "I was just hoping I could accompany you on your rounds tonight," She bit her lip and looked up with big, brown eyes. "Oh, please, Mary! There's so much you could teach me and I could really use the money. McCarthy is going to give me the boot any day now unless I pay the rent!"

Mary recoiled. "Absolutely not." She felt sick to her stomach. Under no circumstances was this sweet girl going to end up anything like her, not if she had a say in it. She stood rather unsteadily and after a few moments to ward off the initial onslaught of dizziness, she maneuvered her way to an apron she'd discarded in the corner earlier that day. It didn't take long to dig through the pockets for a few loose coins. It wasn't much, but, with luck, she'd get paid well tonight. That payment alone should be enough to cover--

"Here." She pressed the coins into Lizzie's hand. "Use that to pay rent. If you can stomach it, I hear Dr. Druitt is looking for an assistant. The pay would be next to nothing, but it's good, honest work."

"I won't take your money, Mary." The tight fist around the coins said otherwise. "It's not like you can afford to be generous right now, with Joseph gone and all."

Mary knew the words were not meant to be harsh, but she cringed anyway.

Lizzie was covering her mouth with both hands, a horrified look on her face. "Oh Mary, I'm so sorry! I shouldn't've said that!"

"It's alright." She waved the girl off. "You're right, anyhow. But I get paid again tonight so I can spare it. Just as long as you stay as far away from the streets, and those customers, as possible."

"But why not? It's not like I have anything to lose. And they say there are ways to prevent pregnancy and disease so I really don't see what the fuss is all about."

"You have everything to lose, Lizzie." Mary felt close to tears, and she couldn't force them back or keep them out of her voice. "You have no idea what can happen out there, who you could come across! Look at those women in the newspaper lately! Surely you've heard about them! They were much older than both of us and you can bet they were a lot more experienced in this line of work, and look what happened to them! Some lunatic is going around slicing their throats for sport, and you don't see what all the fuss is about? This is dangerous work, Lizzie. Besides, the Whitechapel Murderer aside, there are other cautions as well. Not all customers have protections against pregnancy and, even if they do, they're lousy ones at that. You could end up pregnant with any stranger's bastard. Your life—" She choked on the sob in her throat and averted her eyes. "Your life could change just in the blink of an eye."

Whether it was the suddenly intense hormones or the way Mary avoided Lizzie's gaze, the other girl gasped audibly, eyes no doubt going as round as the full moon as she put two and two together.

"Oh, darling—" Lizzie was cut off abruptly by a gentle, but firm rap on the door, followed by the rattle of the key in the lock. Mary cursed quietly, wiping away tears that had fallen from her eyes. There was no way *he* was going to see her like this.

Seconds later, he stepped through the door, shutting it softly behind him and removing his hat. His clothes were speckled with raindrops, the tips of his hair damp. Only after seeing his rain stained clothing did Mary begin to hear the storm outside. How long ago had the rain started?

"Is this a bad time?" *His* voice alone was enough to snap her out of her wonderings.

"Mr. Barnett!" Lizzie exclaimed, jumping to her feet. Out of the corner of her eye, Mary noticed Lizzie quickly stash the coins in one of the pockets of her skirt.

"Good evening, Miss Albrook," Joseph Barnett replied with a warm smile. He inclined his head to her before his gaze flickered to Mary, dark and familiar and beautiful.

No, she couldn't think like that.

"Was there something you were in need of, Mr. Barnett?" She tried only weakly to hide the weariness in her voice.

Joseph raised a questioning eyebrow. He no doubt thought they were past this, but one side of his mouth quirked up into a half grin. "Yes, truth be told. I was hoping you'd allow me to light the fire for you."

Mary could practically sense Lizzie swoon at the statement. Fine. It was cold anyway.

"I don't have wood or matches," she said, folding her arms tightly across her chest.

He nodded. "I will check with Mr. McCarthy. Perhaps he can spare a few logs. If you would excuse me." He bowed his head to both of them and left, his boots squeaking on the wood floors.

"It's not every day a man like Joseph Barnett comes along," the girl

sighed dreamily.

"Lizzie," Mary admonished, half plea, half scold.

"Is he..." She paused, closing the door just enough to leave a sliver open. "Is he the one who got you *pregnant*? Is that why you left him?"

"Lizzie, please," Mary said again, her eyes darting to the door, "No, he doesn't know. *I* don't even know for sure. And *he* left *me*, I told you that. It doesn't matter anyway. I'm going to get it taken care of. Catherine Pickett told me about a midwife that specializes in these cases and I've already set an appointment for later tonight."

"You're getting rid of it?" Lizzie looked horrified.

"Oh, come now. Don't give me that look. I've thought long and hard about this and I truly believe it's the best course of action. I'm in no position to have a child, much less raise one."

The girl was silent for a long period and before she could speak any further on the subject, Joseph pushed his way through the door backwards, his arms loaded with firewood.

"I don't know how you do it, Marie, but you've really weaseled your way into that guy's heart. Both he and his wife were willing to give me anything I wanted, as long as it was for you. Speaking of which, Mrs. Carthy wanted me to inform you that she has a plate of fish and potatoes waiting for you, whenever you'd like it."

"That's very kind," Mary muttered, lost in thought about a hidden bottle of absinthe and a sudden guilt.

"Well," Lizzie interjected, "I think I'll be off. Maybe I'll try to charm some potatoes from Mrs. Carthy, myself." She winked at Joseph but when she turned back to Mary, her expression turned to that of concern. "If you need to talk, my door is always open."

"Thank you, dear." Mary seized one of the girl's hands and gave it a gentle squeeze before letting her go.

The room was quiet for a long, awkward minute as Joseph slowly piled the wood next to the fireplace. He cleared his throat uncomfortably. "What was that about?" he inquired, his tone hinting more at the need for small talk than actual curiosity.



Mary released a long sigh as she gazed longingly at the empty doorway. She shut the door softly before replying, "Oh, I was just warning her away from a life on the streets and the horrors that come with it."

"Maybe you should heed your own advice, then." She couldn't mistake the bitter edge in his voice and how the words practically cut her.

"Joseph, please. Not this again."

"Fine." Joseph raised his hands in surrender. "I didn't come here to fight with you, Marie. I have good news, at least, what I hope you'll think is good news."

Mary furrowed her brow, curious now, and sat down on the bed.

He talked as he worked, placing logs the same way he'd done a million times before. "I wanted you to be the first to know. I found a job working the docks and grounds for some rich folks over in Dublin. I met them about a week ago, down at the docks when I was begging for my old job back. When Billingsgate was shamelessly turning me down, these foreigners approached me and offered me a position. The pay is decent, and they provide room and board for their groundskeepers and their groundskeepers' families."

"Joseph, it sounds like it's almost too good to be true. Are you sure you want to chance going to Dublin on the word of some strangers you just happened to encounter?"

"They check out," he replied almost instantly, "I even went to that blasted Investigator Abberline to verify."

"Abberline?" Mary stood up, needing to walk for a moment. "But isn't he the head of the Jack the Ripper murders? Shouldn't he be investigating rather than working other cases?"

She may have been mistaken, but she could swear she heard Joseph chuckle. When she turned to him, the only thing left was the hint of a smile. "He has other work to do, Marie. And the lack of an investigation is just another reason why you should leave. With me. To Dublin."



Friday, 9 November 1888

4:09 AM

It had been a long night, and by the time Mary was alone in her room again,

she was beyond tired. But still, she couldn't sleep. Not with her rapidly approaching appointment and all the new information Joseph had dumped in her lap.

After starting the fire, he had asked her properly to move with him to Dublin and, still getting over the shock, she had asked him to let her think on it.

"Of course. Just don't think too long." He'd replied with a wicked smile. He'd kissed her hand once, then her cheek once, and finally had placed a short kiss full on the mouth before leaving. He'd seemed happy, boyish even.

She could still feel that kiss tingling on her lips. Truth be told, she *wanted* to leave with him. Perhaps, if she went, she could tell him about the supposed pregnancy and they could maybe, *possibly*, be a family. Maybe this was just the step they both needed in order to be ready for something as big as marriage. Joseph, she knew, would make a wonderful father, even if she wasn't absolutely positive the child was his. He would love any child of hers.

She let out a harsh chuckle at herself. She must still be drunk if she was having serious thoughts about family and marriage.

The customer tonight had only left an hour ago and he'd left her pillow smelling of strong booze. Shorter than she and finely dressed, he was a favorite amongst the girls for paying extraordinarily well and he hadn't disappointed. A large wad of pounds rested on the nightstand, congratulating her on a job well done.

And she hated it, *loathed* it, really. But she was not above taking it, not when she so desperately needed it.

Did she really need it, though? Maybe she should speak with Joseph about his thoughts on the baby. Maybe she could save the money and use it towards helping Joseph out for a change, rather than him always trying to support her.

Picking up a long, skinny piece of wood, Mary let out a groan of frustration as she mindlessly poked at the fire that long ago went out. Her gaze wandered to a stack of old newspapers sitting next to the pile of wood Joseph had brought in for her. The paper dated back to the beginning of October. The headline screamed something about a double attack from the Ripper. Two bodies had been found. Both prostitutes. Both in their mid-forties. Both found with their throats slashed and their organs lying beside, instead of inside, their bodies. Somehow, they'd acquired pictures and even

Mary couldn't bring herself to look directly at the scenes of utter carnage.

How was it possible for someone to be so cruel? Her Catholic upbringing persuaded her to believe a demon was behind it. Whether a person possessed or an Angel of Hell itself, the man behind this couldn't possibly be human.

This time, when a knock disrupted the silence of the night, Mary didn't jump. She replaced her stick with the rest of the wood and climbed heavily to her feet. Fighting a wave of nausea, she braced herself for a long second before managing to brush the ashes from her skirt and clean white apron and turn to the omnipresent door.

The rain, which now came in heavy sheets, combined with the unusually dark night, hid the solicitor's face from view. Mary could see the hunched figure: short but strong, her face hidden behind the deep cowl of her hood. Slung across her arm, a fine leather satchel clinked with unknown instruments.

Only upon seeing the bag did Mary Jane Kelly make up her mind. There was no way on God's green earth that she was going to go through with this. But at the same time, she knew she couldn't leave this poor woman out in the cold to freeze.

"Please, ma'am, come in," she ushered the woman in and rushed to grab a chair from the corner of the room. She situated it before the fire and motioned for the visitor to be seated, "Please, sit and I'll start a fire to warm you."

The woman was eerily silent as Mary shakily started up a crackling fire. Whether by some instinct, or morbid fascination, she set aside the article about the Jack the Ripper victims and threw the remaining paper into the now hot flames.

"I apologize, I should have had a fire ready before you arrived. I'm afraid I've been rather busy tonight and my head has been muddled as of late."

"Perfectly normal. Perfectly normal." The woman responded, removing her hood to reveal an angular face and a pronounced overbite. Mary suppressed a shiver that ran down her spine at a face that would most assuredly haunt her in her nightmares. Even her voice was sharp and strict, and it reminded Mary of the portrayal of witches on the stage. She couldn't stop the chill this time and she prayed the woman wouldn't notice.

"I hope you have been well since our last meeting," she quickly said to fill the awkward silence they had fallen into.

"My dear," the endearment dropped strangely from the woman's tongue, "to be frank, the less time I spend here, the better. Inspector Abberline and his lackies don't particularly approve of the service I provide. Undress quickly, and we'll begin."

Mary bit her lip at the sound of the Inspector's name. Was he doing everything besides hunting for Jack the Ripper? How many more women would he allow to be harmed before he finally started to take this case seriously?

"Miss?" the woman was already standing, her hand reaching within her satchel.

Mary shook her head to realign her focus, "Right, about that, ma'am, I'm afraid I've...well..., had second thoughts. I've decided to confer with the father and see if we can't make it work. I'm so sorry to have taken up your precious time."

The woman eyed her up and down, pausing only a second longer on her stomach, before running a nearly black tongue over her rotten teeth, "Allow me to offer a piece of advice, my dear. It's always best to tell the man of a baby only *after* the wedding night. Otherwise, a fine girl like yourself can find herself even worse off than before."

"But couldn't I just make another appointment, if things don't work out with the father?" she could feel a knot forming in the pit of her stomach and some quiet voice in the back of her head warned her it had nothing to do with the pregnancy. She could see a crazy light illuminated by the glow of the fire in the woman's icy blue eyes. Those eyes, in stark contrast against her dark hair and ghostly pale skin, seemed to freeze everything they looked upon, including Mary's muscles.

"No, my dear. By then, it will be far too late. Once you feel the baby, it's nearly impossible to terminate. I can see that, even now, you've started to form a connection. If you don't allow me to help you now, I'm afraid you will forever be beyond help."

Then that was a chance Mary knew she had to take. For Joseph.

"I thank you for the word of warning, ma'am, but I think I will take that risk."

The woman clicked her tongue like a mother scolding her child, "But what about *your* choice, my dear?"

Mary pushed herself up to her full height and smiled, "I've already made it, ma'am."

There was a long silence as the woman contemplated this. Her eyes shifted from Mary's stomach, to the satchel she still had slung over her shoulder, held tightly in one white fist while the other remained buried inside.

Finally, she nodded, "So be it. Since I'm here, allow me to check the child and make sure it's growing well. I specialize in keeping children alive as well, you know." She gave something that resembled a wink.

Mary wanted the woman gone, but she already knew from her tone that she wouldn't leave without a check-up. Mary let out a heavy sigh and bobbed her head once.

"Undress and lay down flat on the bed," the woman instructed. Mary obeyed, disrobing down to her chemise and folding her clothes neatly on the abandoned chair. Even with the warmth of the fire, she shivered.

She swallowed hard as the woman began probing her stomach at random. A heaviness hung in the air around her shoulders and she sat up, pushing away, "Isn't it a little early to feel anything? I haven't even started showing yet."

"Evidently, so." The comment was made low under the woman's breath, "I suppose there's no use in keeping up the ploy." From within the satchel, she produced a long, thick surgical knife. She twirled it around in her hand and every time the edge caught the light of the fire, it blinded Mary.

She pushed herself as far from the woman as possible, "What in blazes name are you doing?"

The woman clucked her tongue again, an ugly smile spreading across her face, "Whatever do you mean, my dear? I came to do a job, and I intend go through with it, one way or another."

Fear began boiling in Mary's stomach and she felt sick, "If I scream, my landlord will come, I assure you."

"The other girls said the same thing," the woman paced from one end of the bed to the other, keeping the knife just so the light occasionally shown in Mary's eyes.

Mary was speechless for a long second as she processed those words, "Other girls?"

The woman flicked her knife in the direction of the newspaper still lying on the floor, "All it took was two lousy letters claiming the name of 'Jack' and all of London went crazy looking for a nonexistent man."

Mary tried in vain to control her breathing. Her heart was exploding with a thousand different anxieties and her muscles plead with her to do *something, anything*. But she was frozen under that icy stare.

Jack the Ripper. Jack the Ripper was here. "Why?" she managed, around a suddenly thick tongue. A cold chill danced across every nerve in her body, and she knew the hot blood had drained completely from her face.

The woman laughed, a free, utterly amused laugh that echoed around the small room, "You certainly are just like all the rest," she chortled, "So concerned with the 'why'. Don't you understand that this is your fault? You brought this upon yourself when you chose to bend to the will of a man," she spat, "Women must learn that a man will never save them in the end. Even that pathetic Investigator Abberline doesn't care about anything but his next cheque.

"Women have done nothing but slave to a misogynistic world. You women that feed man's lust and power must be the first. As long as you remain serving the streets, a woman's position will never change."

"You're mad," Mary whispered, hardly loud enough to be heard over the crackling of the fire. As a final act of desperation, she sent a silent plea to God for guidance or, if nothing else, to redeem her from her transgressions. It marked the first she'd prayed in more years than she could count. Taking the deepest breath she could muster, trying to think of words to articulate, she screamed. "Oh, murder!"

Merely a glint in the light of the fire, the knife sliced the soft skin under her chin. The dull edge tearing at her throat, blood flooding, like the rain, down her neck. Shock prevented her from screaming again, the pain hitting in a sudden burst of white hot agony. Choking only made the pain worse but she couldn't breathe. She couldn't breathe!

Through the murky haze that had clouded her sight, she could see the witch's ice blue eyes as she sneered down at her, "Don't worry, my dear," she crooned, "This should only hurt a little."



Friday, 9 November 1888

8:30 AM

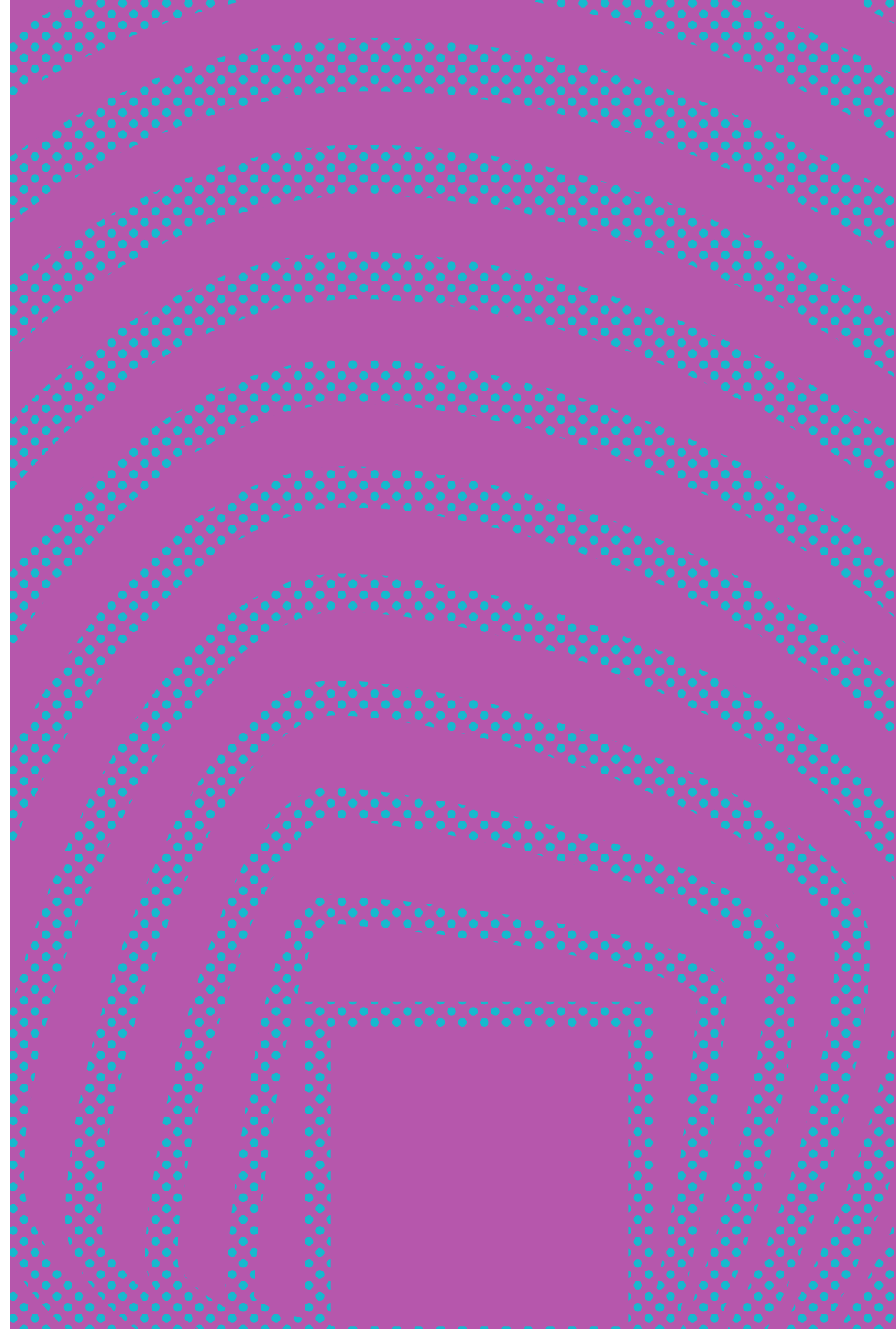
Caroline Maxwell stepped out of the little bakery, the sweet smell of caramelized sugar and yeast following her out. It was rare that she graced herself with such a treat as fresh bread and butter, but today, she had woken up happy. She wanted nothing more than to allow the happiness spread throughout her day.

Even as the breakfast was gone all too soon, Caroline walked with a skip in her step back to Miller's Court, smiling at everyone she passed.

As she turned the corner, she nearly ran straight into a small, hunched figure coming around the bend.

"Miss Kelly?" Caroline asked, recognizing the shawl as that of the young woman. Mary didn't acknowledge her, just continued walking with her head bent low, face hidden behind a bonnet she wore often. Joseph gave it to her, Caroline was certain. That man would give her his soul if he knew how. They were good for each other, she thought, and she hoped they would reconcile soon. Maybe then Mary wouldn't stay up drinking and singing Irish songs half the night and they could finally rest in peace.

Caroline watched the girl's retreating figure for a long moment before turning away. No matter. She was probably still hungover and hadn't heard the greeting. Caroline continued her short journey back to Miller's Court, immediately forgetting the encounter. Nothing, she vowed, would ruin this wonderful day.



# A THIN LINE

Andrew Leavitt

“Maybe you’re pregnant,” he said. She paused at the doorway, one hand on her stomach, gripping the soft, cotton tank top she wore to bed and the other tugging the chain of her cross into the back of her neck. Her eyes remained unfocused while she processed what he said, then she leaped the usual ten steps to the bathroom in three and vomited into the sink. She couldn’t make the extra step to the toilet.

She slumped to the floor, letting the tile cool the sweat beading up on the back of her arms. It was several moments before he poked his head in the doorway, unaware of anything wrong. “Are you alright?” he said. She didn’t answer. He knelt down beside her, helping her move into a sitting position. “Hey, hey, hey, are you okay?” he asked again, his voice smoothing out, taking on the gentle tone when one finally realizes there might be something actually wrong. “This stomach bug is kicking your butt a little bit, want me to call the doctor?”

“Do you really think I could be pregnant?” she asked.

“No,” he said, “Of course you’re not pregnant. I’m sorry, no, I’m not trying to laugh at you, it’s just a little bit ridiculous, that’s all.”

But she wasn’t convinced. She had been nauseous for several days now, only able to stomach small foods, and it was particularly rough in the mornings. She chalked it up to the flu, but now the worm of doubt was squirming its way through her brain.

She had lived with her boyfriend for about six months, and while she retained her religious affiliations (and took them quite seriously), she had abandoned some of the stricter practices of her family. She didn’t feel ashamed of living with her boyfriend, and the relationships that followed, but she also didn’t particularly want the lecture and shame accompanied by admitting that to her parents.

Her mother, she thought, would be the most likely to take the news in stride, and she needed the support and advice of someone, anyone, to help her deal with her conflicting emotions. She called in sick to work, sent her boyfriend out the door, then sat down to call her mom.

“Hello, honey, what’s going on? I’m a little busy right now but I have a second,” the voice crackled through the line.

“Oh,” she said. She paused. “I was just calling to...let you know, that...I might use the insurance card to visit the doctor. Just, if you see that.”

"Sick?"

"Yeah." She paused, unsure of the consequences of what she was about to say. "Mom? One more thing? I moved in with my boyfriend. A couple of months ago, actually. I didn't know how to tell you." Silence, then an explosion of disappointment and anger. She couldn't get a word in edgewise, but tried between outbursts to explain herself. "Mom, Mom, listen to me for a second. He's really sweet, and he's nice, and sure, we are working on things but it's fun to live here and rent is cheaper." Her mother screamed back, telling her she was setting up an appointment with their hometown preacher. Her mother made her wait on the line while she conferenced in her father, who had more to say than even her mother. Meanwhile, she paced the hallway of their small apartment, back and forth from the little bedroom to the living room and back. When the lecture subsided, her parents left her with an, "I'm disappointed in you, but there is nothing else we can do so we will talk about it later." She didn't argue, and there was no way in Hell she would voluntarily continue the conversation or divulge any more information.

She thought the next best move was to just purchase a pregnancy test and see for herself. She perused the shelves of her local Wal-Mart, hovering near the pharmacy section as she inched her way closer to the "family planning" section. Others filtered in and out of the section, but she kept her eyes forward, bouncing from make-up and toothpaste until there was a moment devoid of another person, when she darted. Slipping in and out of the aisles, she snatched the closest pregnancy test to her — she had been eyeing the tests out of the corner of her eye, when her heart stopped.

"Hi, we have a class together right?" a voice from behind said, a young man from her entry-level math class. He was tall, and she knew he was coming back to school to try and get a degree. The pregnancy test fumbled out of her grasp, until she reigned it back in and hid it behind her back, slowly and silently sidestepping out of the aisle.

"Yep. Yes, I think we do," she said.

"Oh. Well, nice to see you," the voice turned on its heels and walked away. She turned and darted into a self-checkout, double-bagged the test and strolled out to her car. The panic in her eyes betrayed her casual walk out the front door.



She stepped out of the bathroom door 30 minutes later. "What's in your

hand?" Her boyfriend was sitting on the edge of their cheap couch. She looked up, then back to the pregnancy test in her hand, then back up.

"You're home early," she said.

"Yeah, didn't need me for the rest of the day," he said and set down a box of pizza on the counter. "So I got pizza. What's in your hand?"

She didn't respond, just handed him the test. "I couldn't shake what you said this morning," she said. The rest hung in the air.

He sat down, his eyes never leaving the test. He tried to suppress a little laugh but couldn't, and a smile cracked his face. "When will we know?" he said.

"Not for a bit," she said. "It's a cheap test. You're pleased about this?"

"Pleased? Pleased doesn't begin to describe this," he said. He set the test on the kitchen table behind him, rose and took her hands. "We might have a kid. I need to call my mom."

She pulled her hands from his and stepped past him. "Yeah, we might have a kid. How are you not freaking out about this?"

"I'm confused, why would I be freaking out about this?" She didn't respond, just waved her hands and made little noises, reminding her of the little fish her dad would pull out of the lake near their home.

He stepped toward her again. "We both have good jobs, we live together, we love each other," he held up a finger on each of his points, gesturing in the general direction of his job, gesturing around the apartment, gesturing to the two of them. "You'll get maternity leave. I don't get what the issue is. It'll be easy." Easy? Good jobs in his head were being a cashier at a clothing store and lifeguard at the local indoor pool. She would not be getting maternity leave. Didn't he get that?

Her hair was beginning to frazzle; each time she ran her hands through the hair it frazzled a bit more. "Issue is? You don't get what the issue is? The issue is that you don't get what the issue is. My life is over. Our life is over."

His hands dropped to his sides. He didn't respond. This time, it was his turn to be the fish, but he reminded her more of the fish after several minutes, when the air had become too thick for them to breathe and they had begun to give up, relying only on muscle memory to weakly try to push oxygen through their gills where before there was water.



She stepped towards him, her hands reaching out, but he pulled back. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to—"

"Your life is over? The thought of having a kid with me means your life is over?"

"Not a kid with you, just a kid in general."

"You've always wanted kids, true?"

"True, but—"

"So what's the difference here? The difference is we're too young? Because we definitely aren't too young."

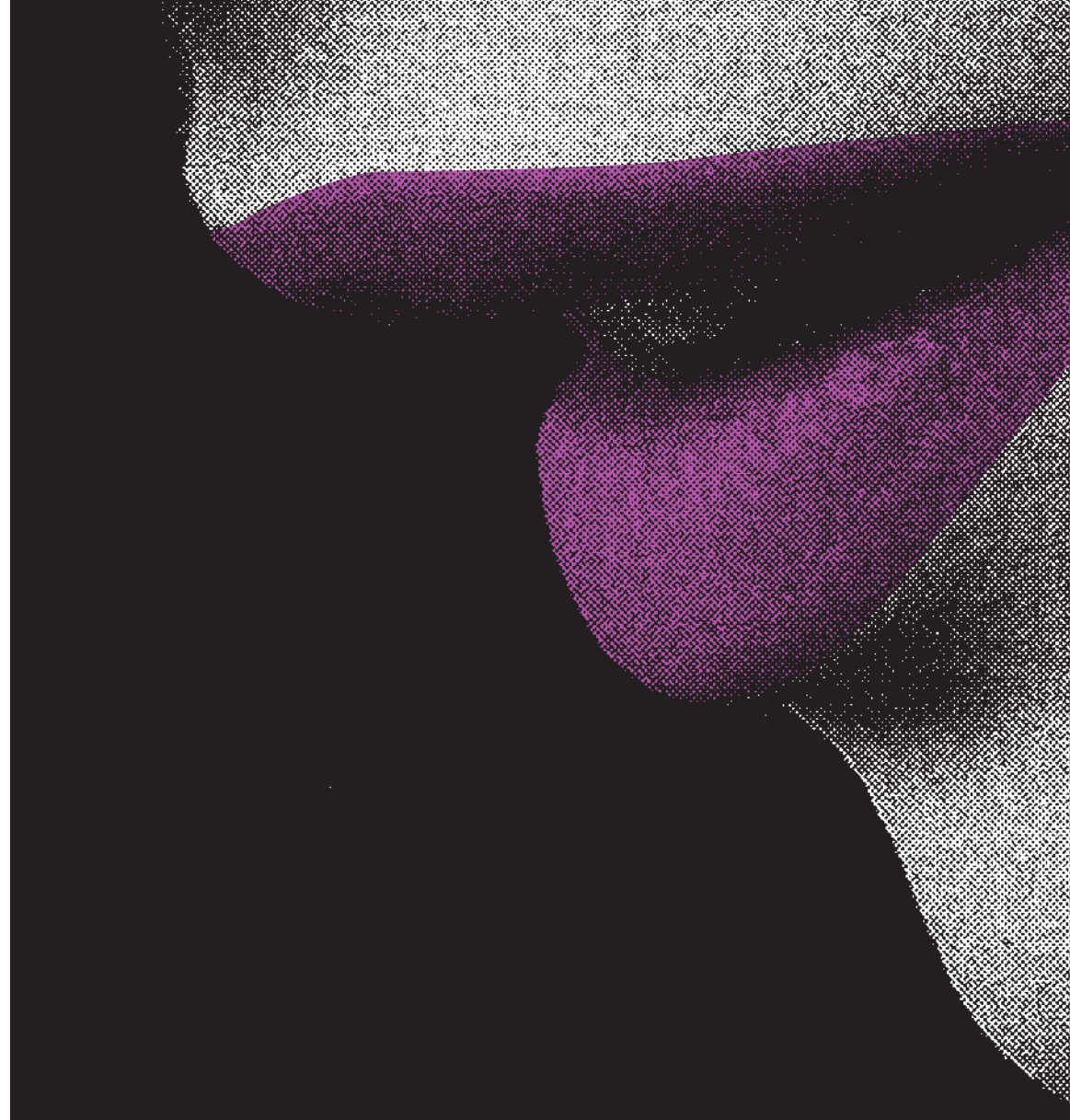
"It's not ideal, but—"

"The problem is me, then isn't it?" He said.

She tried to respond, but a second too late, and she gave up. The next day, she would have been able to explain that, yes, it was their age, and they didn't have any savings, and she wanted to get married before they had kids, and she did want to marry him but the timing just wasn't right. The next day, she had a thousand different reasons, but right then, she said nothing.

"You just don't want to have a kid with me." He glanced around, found the test on the table and picked it up. "Negative," he said. "You don't have to worry about having a kid with me." He dropped it into her outstretched hands and walked past her, out the front door.

She looked at the one single line running down the little oval on the test. First came the relief, a weight lifting off her shoulders. She didn't realize how warm she had been, and now a sweat broke out over her brow like a fever. Then came the guilt, settling in the pit of her stomach. She sat down at the same kitchen table, the thin line tapping into the palm of her hand.



# BEHIND THE VELVET CURTAIN

Hannah M Duncan

The tent ballooned before Tommy and Violetta like a beacon into the night, white and red stripes glowing in a twisted smile. People milled about the entrance in twos and threes; pipes and parasols clutched in gloved fingers with frilly lace at the cuffs. Violetta craned her neck to glimpse at the fruitful hats the women wore tilted to one side, and the caterpillar mustaches inching across men's upper lips. The chattering encompassed Tommy and Violetta in a bubble of murmurs, yet the conversations dimmed compared to the bouncing carnival music blaring through the canvas.

Tommy's hand, slick with a worried sweat, slipped through his sister's fingers. "But we don't have tickets."

"We're little," Violetta called back to her younger brother. "They won't notice us if we squeeze through the crowd."

Tommy's lips tilted into a toothless grin. "And Mama and Papa?"

"Too busy at the party to notice we're gone. We'll only be away ten minutes!"

Violetta ushered her brother around the squirming bodies. They mimicked the flies buzzing about, twisting this way and turning that way for a chance to squeeze inside. This would be her third time this week inside the striped tent. Violetta had dreamed of the flipping acrobats the night after she first came—then dreamed of the lion tamer the next night. She fantasized about ten or twelve years into the future when she could leap into the air, flipping head over heels like a coin.



Her heart swelled once the two of them shoved their way between petticoats and suit tails and into a world filled with candy floss and peanut oil. The dark evening sky had spun itself a web with strips of red and white. Tommy gawked at the man painted green who strutted around the tent at a stunning ten feet tall, then spun around to admire the woman who had grown a lion's mane beneath her chin. The world was full of anomalies, and Violetta's younger brother couldn't quite wrap his head around them all.

The two children squealed with delight as they wove around the crowd shuffling into the bleachers. A stage filled with fascinating characters and musicians loomed before them—all in front of a vast velvet curtain that stretched from canvas wall to canvas wall. Clowns. Contortionists. Psychics. They had entered into a different world while their parents droned on with the matters of Mr. Suchandsuch and his opinions on boring-adult-things at home. No one would know that the Wickerman children had gone out to play.

Two of the most beautiful women Violetta had ever seen waved from the platform raised well above the crowd. They'd pinned coiled curls to their scalps in the shape of a flower, petals hanging down around their glistening eyes. Their lips were painted like bows on a Christmas present; their waists cinched like a hand-purse. Violetta had never wanted to be someone so badly.

The acrobats jumped into action, flipping and fluttering as their costumes glimmered with every movement. Their fingers clung to the swing like talons as their bodies pulled like taffy. Violetta's eyes beamed as the acrobats joined hands and spun around each other like a Maypole. They danced in the air, painted different lines across the striped canvas. Polka dots. Swirls. Zigzag loop-de-loops.

The acrobats hypnotized the Wickerman children by twisting around each other like spun sugar. Once liquid and bending to the other's will, now tangled within one another to form a fluffy, delicious treat.

"Violetta." Tommy tugged on his sister's skirt. "Take me to get candy floss."

Violetta shushed her brother, eyes following every loop-de-loop.

"Violetta." The *uh* stuck in his throat with a whine.

She fished for a coin in her pocket. "Here," she said before dumping something silver into Tommy's grubby hand. *How are they already sticky?* she thought.

Tommy stood and bobbed away into the crowd. Violetta thought she could see her brother's blond locks ducking around families as he trekked up the stairs. She thought he stood in front of the candied cart, swaying onto his toes and back down again—but this was all from the corner of her eye. Violetta's true attention still belonged to the acrobats and their aerial somersaults. It wasn't until the performers lowered into a bow and Violetta jumped to her feet in applause when she noticed Tommy had entirely disappeared.

The candy floss cart was nowhere to be found.

As well as her brother.

Violetta shuffled across the bleachers and bounded up the stairs, all while searching for a head of frumpy, blond locks. She wondered how long she'd been entranced by the acrobats. Had he gone off to the lion tamer? To

watch the clowns and their juggling companions? Panic settled deep in Violetta's stomach and tied it into knots—double, triple, quadruple knots. The nausea of fear crawled up the back of her throat as she thought of what she would tell their parents. She'd have to scurry home and tug on Mama's dress, forcing her to shy away from Mr. Suchandsuch's very important analysis on whatever-nonsense. Violetta began to panic and call out her brother's name, but her voice disappeared within the bustle of the circus.



However, Tommy had stumbled upon The Man with Magic. He stood, transfixed by a man who considered himself a *demon-turned-flesh* as he tilted his head back and swallowed a sword whole. The man could spit fire. *Eat* fire. Conjure it from his own, unscathed palms. Tommy blinked back the heat that threatened to singe his eyebrows. He had completely forgotten about his candy floss.



Violetta knew her parents' temper well; she knew exactly the words they'd shout if she didn't find Tommy. The girl weaved between walking-canes and hands clutching fried pastries. Beneath the bleachers. Behind the goodie carts. Violetta found herself near the stage now, billowing curtain fluttering behind the circus performers. She hadn't checked there, and quite frankly, Violetta felt as if she had nowhere else to look. The girl held her chin high as she reached for the velvet drape.

Lovely, lively performers strutted and danced in front of the curtain, but there was only darkness behind. Violetta swallowed before wedging herself behind the stage, not quite sure if Tommy would have wandered back there. A breeze shoved itself between the curtain and far concrete wall. Cracks shimmied up the concrete and feathered out like branches of a tree. The cool air licked Violetta's neck without permission; she shivered in response.

"Tommy," she called out into the silence.

Although no one responded, she heard voices lulling further back. Violetta shuffled toward the voices, all the while gaping at the contorted silhouettes on the opposite side of the velvet curtain. The circus had placed a wall between Violetta and the rest of the world. She wondered if she'd ever find a way back to her brother.

The voices turned into words as Violetta approached a room flickering with

candlelight. No door—just a threshold made of blocks and blocks of cinder. When Violetta peered into the doorway, her breath caught in her throat.

Two women stood before her. One leaned against the far wall and stared at her reflection in the mirror, puffing mouthfuls of smoke into her doppelganger's face. The other stood with her back toward Violetta, unraveling her corset with chipped nailbeds. Violetta couldn't stop her jaw from dropping at the winding scars etched into the acrobat's skin. The two looked the same—twins—with faint lines tracing their necks and foreheads, scabs of makeup clinging to the wrinkled riverbeds along their skin.

Finally, the one hypnotized by her reflection noticed Violetta in the doorway. Her brow crinkled in a way that reminded Violetta of her Great Aunt Wickerman when she was cross. The residue of a woman shouted something at Violetta in a language she couldn't comprehend. And then the other spun around, eyeing the girl with smudges of black staining her eyelids.

"Niet, iz." The second one mimicked the first. She took a step toward the girl.

And Violetta ran.

She pumped her arms, legs, heart—anything, she pumped them as hard and as fast as she could. Violetta's steps ricocheted around the stone-slab floors and concrete wall. She followed the red curtain to its end where she found more than she'd wanted to. Men squatted around a table, bellies out and shirts off as they thumbed through a deck of cards. The once ten-foot man slouched against the wall, sipping on a bottle of something that smelled vaguely of soap and chemicals—head no higher than Violetta's waist. Cages lined the far wall, bears and elephants and tigers pacing back and forth with hunger stuck in their teeth.

And the smells. Violetta couldn't quite place what it was that reeked, but her nose would never forget the stench of body odor mingled with rotten tobacco.

Violetta shrieked, ready to be rid of the circus and back in her stuffy home with Mama, Papa, Tommy, and their neighbor Mr. Suchandsuch. Her dreams of the circus were slowly soiling themselves. Violetta fumbled with the giant curtain until she stuffed herself beneath it. Bright lights from above caressed her skin in hues of gold and pink and green. The girl blinked away the initial shock before inching down the curtain and back into the bleachers, eyes finally focusing on the stage where a gaggle of clowns mocked one another.

At last, Violetta discovered Tommy where she had last seen him—in their seats. She marched up the stairs and settled into her seat, mouth dry and mind hazy. Tommy looked at her as if there were a fly on her nose. Violetta swatted away the imaginary bug, not quite sure if she'd imagined what lay behind the curtain as well. Her heart raced as she thought of her love of the circus. Of the spectacular acrobats and their daunting beauty. The impeccable ten-foot-tall man. The sweet spun-sugar and tang of peanut oil. Violetta's mind became a whirlwind of thoughts. Meanwhile, Tommy's had settled like dust in a storm—happy to giggle along with the self-destructive clowns.

"Where were you?" Violetta hissed at her brother.

"What do you mean? I went to get candy floss. *You* were the one who left."

Violetta swallowed the acid still roiling in her stomach. She thought of the concrete floors. The velvet curtain and the lies that lay behind. Yet when the performance came to the end, when the actors and players emerged from the velvet curtain and folded for the applause, Violetta had already grown numb from her journey behind the curtain. She'd known of their lies. Their games. People erupted from their seats and roared with applause. Violetta glanced this way and that, watching as people praised nothing more than a scam.

# PROJECT OSMOSIS

**Madeleine Walters**

As the doors to our local Osmosis lab automatically open, Lenna whispers in my ear.

“Answer all of their questions directly, politely, and neutrally.”

I clench my fist.

The welcome video plays on monitors throughout the large room. Across the room from the front entrance are a row of check in desks. Behind each is some drab worker in a pressed white shirt and gray tie. I don’t see any way to get behind the desks. It’s just one large line of conformity against the rows of girls and their guardians.

Lenna looks at the white slip with an appointment time. We walk past them and straight to booth twelve. She’s had this appointment set up for three months. She hands the worker the slip.

“State your name.”

Lenna’s hand goes straight to my wrist. “Mena.”

The room is stuffy, the dust in the air making my throat itch. The room is sparse for this time of the year. I could have sworn I saw a girl as young as twelve, maybe eleven, with a man in his thirties. The wall behind the man is a light gray.

It’s dreary and cold in here, unlike the summer landscape outside of the doors. Outside the sky is blue and the grass a wilting yellow-green. I can hear the cars drive down the busy city road. I can hear everything in this quiet den of science. I wish that there were clocks so I could count the seconds until I leave.

The grip on my wrist tightens. I look at my sister. There is a wrinkle in between her eyebrows, a permanent fixture since she had the baby two months ago. Her bloodshot eyes are tight and her mouth is puckered.

“Philomena Harlow.” Her grip loosens.

“Age?” The man leans on the counter, eyes droopy and unfocused. He has a widow’s peak that distracts from his uneven buzz cut and pockmarked face.

“Fifteen.” A noise escapes from the back of Lenna’s throat and her shoulders begin to hunch together. I pat the hand that clings to my right wrist. It hasn’t even been three years since she went through this. I know she’s nervous for me. Only one of our futures is uncertain right now.

"One year of regularity?" His gaze sharpens, studying me from head to toe. The corner of his mouth lifts, and Lenna moves forward trying to obscure me from his leering view. He shifts his eyes to her and his mouth goes into a straight line.

Her voice is squeaky, vocal cords tight, everything about her is tense. "Yes."

"I wasn't talking to you. Another remark and you will be escorted to the waiting area with a mark on your record, while your charge remains here."

She doesn't say anything, but her body moves to shield me even more.

"Height and weight?"

I want to say that it's in poor taste to ask girls about their weight. They should just weigh us, but heaven knows they're bred dumb. So I answer the way Lenna and I practiced. With detached ease.

"Five feet five inches. One hundred seven pounds."

The guard frowns, "That's underweight for your age group." I know that he means height group, but I bite my tongue to stop myself from correcting him. He probably doesn't know the risks associated with being underweight.

"I know. I have a plan to make sure I gain the weight needed for carrying a child to term."

His smirk returns, but this time all I notice is his chapped lips. It's not until he starts writing on a form that I can feel goosebumps on my arms. I pray Lenna doesn't notice.

"Room 26. Your guardian must remain here. It is required that you change into a hospital gown before taking the Genesis exam before health and genetic testing. Additional testing may be required after the Genesis. We get your test results immediately. You will receive them in a week. Assignment will come in two weeks. Assignments are based on both genetic and intelligence compatibility."

Only two weeks? And how many until the mandatory insemination period?

I look at the man in his dark eyes and smile, "It will be my greatest pleasure to uphold the ideals and traditions of this great project."

Before anyone can lead me away to the Genesis, Lenna grabs me in what

must look like a hug. She holds me in place to make sure I can hear her low words.

"You'll have to get pregnant right away. The lab technicians get angry when you don't. They'll report you to management. It doesn't matter who you are assigned to. Before you try anything with your assigned partner, be honest. It will be easier that way. Neither of you can truly know how hard it will be in a couple years. No one really does."

My ribs hurt as she lets go and I'm led to room 26. My legs have never felt so weak.



Lenna stands up as soon as I get back to the waiting area. Her arms are covered in red scratches. Her hair is greasy and her clothes are covered in stains and baby vomit. I didn't even notice them before we left the house.

The bags under her eyes are the same as mine. But our reasons for insomnia are vastly different. In my head I can see the math and science problems floating, angry with my answers. As long as I got the vitamins and minerals right, there is hope for me.

"What did you do for three hours?"

Lenna smiles for the first time today. "I talked to Johannes. He said that Bria and Johnny missed us. Johnny said he loves you."

I look at my sister harder. Is this what I'll look like at twenty? Stretch marks on my stomach from three kids, tense muscles from worry. Young mothers never rest easy. How much will I be like Lenna? Like my mother?

I think of the cuts on Lenna's legs. She doesn't know that I've seen them. I know Johannes chooses to ignore them, especially when he tries to have sex with Lenna. I look away from my sister. I guess I'll know in two weeks.



"Since some of you have forgotten, the school has made it mandatory to go over life cycle nutrition."

Ms. Norby starts her powerpoint that I've seen at least five times in the last two years. "Low birth weight infants are infants less than 5.5 pounds. This is the most influential predictor of future health. The causes of low birth weight infants come from the mothers. There are multiple causes



from the mother: underweight mothers, inadequate weight gain during pregnancy, smoking, alcohol, drugs, heredity, disease, and in some cases the reason is unknown. During pregnancy the body maximizes absorption and minimizes—”

Ms. Norby is cut off by a uniformed Osmosis officer. He wears one of the gray bodysuits and he's carrying a gun on his hip. The Osmosis symbol sits in the middle of his chest, a solid circle with black on the edges that fades into a rainbow in the middle.

“Philomena Harlow? I'm here to escort you to Sector Six's project Osmosis lab.”

It's only been two days since the Genesis exam. I stand and meet the man at the door. He escorts me out of the school building. We make our way to the parking lot and into a gray van with the Osmosis symbol on the side.

When we get into the van he hands me a letter that says NOTICE.

“Do not open the letter. You are to give it to your guardian when you return home.” The gentle smile he has on his face as he says this makes my stomach clench. A classical song plays on his radio, the AC muffling the sounds of the whiny violins.

“I'm Enrique. I'm the head Public Relations Manager at Osmosis Labs. I'm taking you for some additional information about your test results. These are very rare, but occasionally there are some test results that confuse our systems, and we have to sort through them in person with the subject. Do you understand?”

I pick at my nails. “I understand.”

Enrique hums to the song during our short ride. He never takes his eyes off the road, his back perfectly straight. His white knuckle grip on the wheel is the only thing that gives him away.

I'm escorted to a small white room. A table and two chairs are the only furniture. I sit on the hard wood. The blank wall across from the door starts playing the welcome video for every Osmosis lab.

“I'm Liza Ballard, Head Research Scientist of Os National Corporation. Here at Os we work on breakthroughs in the field of genetics and biochemistry. Our biggest project in the US is Project Osmosis. Working with the government, we strive to help create better and more effective humans and

therefore society. We do this through knowledge transfer from mother to child. Through careful schooling, we create ideal parents, to ensure an ideal future. We thank you for fifteen wonderful years of creating a better future.”

The door opens behind me. Liza is taller than she appears on screen. Her skin is not flawless. She has moles and freckles all over her face. Instead of a perfectly styled blowout, Liza's hair is frizzy and pulled into a severe ponytail. She holds herself up with an air of dignity.

She doesn't look at me until she finishes looking at a fat folder. She looks at me with vacant eyes. “I've never met anyone quite like you. Your tests are all over the place. Perfect scores in simulation and short answers, but zeroes on true or false and multiple choice. Coming to a very even 50%. Remarkable. We could explain away the multiple choice, but the only way to get a zero on true or false is to know all the right answers. Isn't that strange?”

I scowl. This is the first time I've ever let anyone outside of my family see this negative part of me. But there isn't really any reason to hide it anymore. They know. “I have a feeling you have all the answers to your questions already. Why did you bring me here?”

“In all the reports at school, you seem average, but are a model student. I'm sure you have heard rumors of what happens to smart women.”

All I can picture is needles. Poking into my skin. Draining the potential of life, poisoning the only thing I can contribute to society. For all the technology and advancement, Osmosis labs decided to use shots that cause the body's sperm or eggs to die. No more snipping or tying. This is how great science is. It finds new ways to hurt people.

It's what they did to my mom. One shot and an hour later the convulsions racked her body and made her fall. I'd never seen a shattered skull before.

“Sterilization.”

“Yes. Normally we don't have a choice. This wasn't my first option, but it looks like you do. Have options I mean. Very limited ones, but you've won the lottery.”

My brows furrow. Completely unprecedented. Or perhaps unreported. I lean forward and talk in a low tone. “What kind of options could be offered to someone like me? You said yourself that I am only average.”

She smirks. "We both know that you aren't average. Which is why we want your baby to be the next leader of the country"

I stand up, knocking over my chair. It hits the floor with a thud and splinters on some of the weaker joints.

"What the hell are you talking about? I am destined to be an average citizen doing civil work and raising two or three kids with a mediocre partner. I am not to be noticed. Being noticed means that I will be taken away from my family, sterilized, and forced to work for this damn system. Making dumb children through my research to make compliant citizens for a corrupt government to take advantage of. I am average. That's all I ever want to be. That's all I am."

She looks bored at my outburst. "You know that only 1 out of 100,000 get offered to have their children bred to be future leaders? And only five percent of those people actually take us up on that offer? You however are the first person to be asked for this specific task. The President has been waiting for quite a while to have someone good enough to match with her son. We can't waste your God given intelligence. That would be irresponsible as a scientist dedicated to creating a better human for a better society."

I mutter, "Damn it," into my hands.

"You have two options, That's one more than thousands have. You can either voluntarily create the most brilliant leader this country has ever seen or you can be sterilized and live out that life you were dreading you would get. Also, that's not the only repercussion. Your sister and her children would also be sterilized. Do you need a moment to think about it?"

"Yes!" Sterilization killed mom, it would kill Lenna too. It's all about our genes. Bria and Johnny are not in any position to be violated like that. But I don't want to create a monster to rule this country.

But maybe I don't have to. This child will have my knowledge. The decision is difficult, but some burdens are meant for one person. Mothers are the molders of children.

I look Liza square in her emotionless eyes. "I have some conditions."

She smiles, "It will be a pleasure to work with you."

I return the empty gesture, "No, it won't."

I see her facade fracture. It's all I need.





# THE MEMORY OF A MAN NAMED HANK

Andrew Leavitt

It was a clear autumn's evening when the old man first crept into the bedroom where Hank and his wife Debby slept. The old man pulled himself in through the open window, opened to welcome in the breeze into their stuffy, second floor bedroom. That's what confused Hank the most. No man, young or old, should have been able to pull themselves through that window. Coupled with the fact that he was unable to move his body, Hank slowly relaxed his breath. It was a bad dream, a night terror, and all he could do was ride it out.

The man straightened up as best he could and dusted off his gray suit. His hair was a wispy white, his eyes clouded over with cataracts. Dark hoods ringed his light eyes. His smile was a crack in his face, lipless and ever present, his teeth like the jagged gravestones of a nearly forgotten cemetery.

He shuffled over to Hank. He didn't move fast and he didn't need to. Hank couldn't move, couldn't speak, couldn't cry out to Debby to leave the room. The old man hunched over Hank, a grip like a vice squeezed his cheeks, and he moved his head back and forth, examining the minute details of Hank's face. His hands were thin and long, his nails yellowed and dirty. His breath was hot and wretched, the stench of old meat on Hank's face, and he struggled to catch his breath. He would often stop his ragged gasps to swallow his spittle and then continue his poking and prodding of Hank's face.

Finally, he lifted one index finger, and pressed it to Hank's forehead. The finger burned Hank like a cattle prod made of liquid nitrogen, a chill so cold it was hot, and the old man's face broke into an even bigger smile, the crooked, yellowed teeth seeming to stretch back into the man's skull for an eternity. Then the old man turned and crept out the window the way he came in.

Hank woke the next morning at 7 a.m., rose promptly from bed and began his day. He did remark to his wife while combing his thinning brown hair about his nightmare. "Creepy," Debbie said, and continued watching Facebook videos on her phone. Debbie was once very beautiful, but had stopped working when Hank and her married. She didn't need to — Hank made a modest living and Debbie tended to the house, though she rarely did. Hank still found her gorgeous, on the odd occasion she did her hair and put on makeup.

Hank finished dressing in his too-tight suit (it was tight but only until he lost some weight, at least that's what he told himself) and drove to work in his Toyota Camry. It was tan and had a spoiler, which made it a sports car in his mind. He drove down the street lined with identical houses, NPR on

the radio. He walked into the office and sat down. The old man didn't cross his mind for the rest of the day.

That evening the man crept in through the same window. Once again, he walked across the room and poked his gnarled finger to Hank's forehead. Hank's internal struggle to keep his breathing even and his fear down was more difficult than the night before. The old man's face broke into a smile and once again, he crept out the bedroom window.

Hank once again woke up, went to work, and came home to bed. The old man never left his mind. That evening, he came home and asked his wife if they could close the window for the evening. "Why?" she asked. "You love having the window open when we sleep." No reason, he replied. She didn't respond. So Hank closed the window, and tried to push the old man out of his mind. With the window closed, maybe his nightmares would stop.

However, the old man returned. He walked in through the bedroom door, laughing as he opened the door, the usual silent and oiled hinges creaking. He seemed to mock Hank for thinking a closed door and a shut window would be enough to keep him out. Hank laid on his back, the old man crossed the room with his too-wide smile, pressed his long finger to his forehead. He chuckled again and shuffled out of the room.

Hank strived to keep his eyes open this time instead of letting himself drift off to sleep. When he was finally able to move, he threw back his blankets and dashed out of the room. He looked down the long hall and thumped down the stairs. He threw open his front door and looked outside. A dog barked in the distance. The streetlamps gave a soft orange glow to his lawn. There was nobody there. Hank looked around once more, this time to make sure no neighbors saw his strange manic search, then turned and slowly crept up the stairs.

"What were you doing?" Debbie said, her voice full of sleep.

"Nothing," Hank said. "I thought I heard something." Debbie replied with a grunt. She likely wouldn't remember the conversation by the morning.

Each night for a week, the old man crept into Hank and Debbie's bedroom. Hank slept little and was stressed from work. His usual punctuality at work had seemed to be replaced with forgotten meetings and deadlines.

One night, Hank left his work softball game early, citing illness. Actually, he wasn't sure he told anyone, he just left the game. No one would miss him. He spent the rest of the evening combing the home for entrances, locking

and re-locking every door and window. He told Debbie he needed to wake up early, and as such he was going to sleep in the guest bedroom, so he didn't wake her in the morning. Once he was in the guest room, Hank barricaded himself inside. He locked the door and window, moved the dresser over the window and the bed against the door. He stayed awake as long as he could but as with every night, he didn't remember when he had fallen asleep, only that he had. He woke in the dead of night. Hank could hear the old man, first at the window, rattling the pane. Only seconds later, Hank heard the door rattle against the bed frame. Then it stopped. Hank slept soundly for the first time that week.

The next night he decided to do the same. He first heard the sound of the window, then the door, then once again it stopped. Just before he relaxed, however, and settled in for a deep sleep, he heard a chuckle and a creak, as the old man stepped out of the closet. Hank didn't see him at first, but felt the now familiar tightening of his muscles, and heard the gasps of breath slip between the old man's thin, cracked lips.

And like every night, the old man crossed the room, smiled, held one long finger to Hank's forehead, then turned and walked back into the closet.

Hank didn't sleep for the rest of the night. In the morning, he slouched out of bed and got ready for work. It was a hard Monday — he had spent the weekend with very little sleep, and spent his days worrying about the old man. Even Debbie, perpetually stuck in her own little world, looked up from her B-grade vampire show and commented on Hank's deteriorating appearance, though he had not told her anything for fear of frightening her.

Hank got in the car, reversed out of his driveway and pulled into the street. Then he stopped. He couldn't remember how to get to work. He thought it was likely a momentary lapse in judgement brought on by the lack of sleep, and decided to continue driving down the road anyways, but the path never came to him. He could remember the building, the familiar brick and mortar walls and gray cubicles, but for some reason, try as he might, he could not remember the route to his building. He pulled the car over and pulled out his phone, hoping maybe he could simply search the name of his office, but he couldn't remember that either. He racked his brain, trying to figure out just exactly where he worked.

Finally, he realized he likely had some business cards in his wallet, and after a moment of digging, pulled out a dingy, crumpled business card with his name big and bold on the front from behind an Applebee's gift card, the address printed below. He drove to work, stayed for 3 hours, then told his



boss he was feeling a little under the weather.

"Well, you certainly look it, Hank," his boss, a thin man with a long nose, replied, and let Hank go for the rest of the day, brandishing his long, skinny arms to shoo Hank away. Hank flinched a little when he pointed to the door with a skinny, crooked finger.

"I'll call if I'm out tomorrow as well," Hank said. His boss didn't reply, just looked back at his computer. Hank drove home. Once again, he couldn't quite remember the route back. He looked up his own home on a map and drove home. The moment he reached his neighborhood and the perfectly manicured lawns and bushes, Hank remembered the rest of the way home and turned off the GPS.

Hank surprised Debbie when he walked in the door. Hank explained he was simply feeling unwell and his boss let him take a couple of days off.

"Oh honey," Debbie said. She patted his face from the couch where she was watching TV. "Should we take you to the doctor?"

Hank gripped Debbie's wrist and pulled her hand away from his face. "No, definitely not," he said. "Can't go to the doctor," he said. Debbie turned back to the TV.

"If you say so," she said. That evening, Hank told Debbie he was going to sleep downstairs, on the couch. He told her he thought he might throw up, and the couch was closest to the bathroom.

The moment Debbie headed upstairs and Hank could hear a vampire fighting another vampire for the love of a third vampire, Hank headed outside and drove to the nearest gas station. He gathered up supplies: energy drinks, soda, candy, cold brew coffee. Anything he could find with caffeine. He cracked open one of the energy drinks, then another, the cold fizzle aching his front teeth and burning his throat. He had almost fallen asleep during the 2 mile drive on the way to the little gas station.

He got home and drank another energy drink, then brewed a pot of coffee. Once he drank that, he brewed another. His skin tingled with the caffeine and his eyes burned from the lack of sleep. The hours ticked by. Hank spent the time pacing around his home and trying to watch television. Debbie had fallen asleep long ago. At around 3 a.m., Hank was sitting at his kitchen table. His head was in his hands and he sighed deeply. He thought he likely looked insane. He certainly felt it. He stood up from the table to see if maybe he could get a wink of sleep that night. He had only taken two steps

when his legs seized up, and he stumbled to the floor. Hank's face laid on the cool floor, his brown hair laid across his eyes. He could only see the legs of the chair near him. Behind him he could hear the door creak open. He knew, he was positive, he had locked the door just hours ago, but the door slowly opened like there was no lock on the door at all.

He heard the shuffling feet of the old man, heard his little laugh escape between his wretched teeth. He felt a cold hand grab the nape of his neck, a steel grip in his hair. He was lifted from the ground, a tiny groan emanated from his throat. A line of saliva trailed from his mouth to the floor. He was flipped over, onto his back, his arm twisted underneath him. The old man laughed hard and loud, and Hank was surprised Debbie couldn't hear anything at all. The old man's rotten teeth and wide smile was framed by loose skin that sagged down towards Hank.

Almost familiar to Hank, the old man reached out his long finger and pressed it to Hank's forehead. He kept it there much longer than he had the previous nights, the deep cold of his finger burning it's way into Hank's skin.

The old man straightened up, dusted off his jacket, and walked back out the door. The moment Hank could move, he rushed into the yard, and ran around the house three times, searching for some sign of a footprint, or a maybe a thread snagged on a rosebush, but his yard was immaculate like always.

He knelt to the ground and wept. He headed inside, knees wet from the grass, when the very first gray of the morning began to lighten the sky.

He sat on the couch and hung his head back, worried that if he fell asleep, the old man might make an appearance during the day. He opened his eyes with a jolt when he heard footsteps down the stairs, then relaxed when he realized they were too light and too quick to be the old man's.

"You look like shit, what happened down here?" He turned to reply to his wife, his mouth hung open when he forgot her name. He furrowed his brow in concentration, his memory hearkening back to their first date, their wedding, their 10th anniversary, but he couldn't remember her name.

"Hello? Are you okay?" she said. He replied that he was just fine. "Hank? I really think you should go to the doctor." He replied that he needed to call his boss, let him know that he might not come into work today.

He tapped the screen of his phone, and tried to use his fingerprint to unlock the phone. *Passcode needed to unlock phone* it said, but he couldn't

remember his passcode. He brought the phone over to his wife, and held it out.

“Will you put my passcode in?”

“Seriously? Go to the hospital.” She handed the phone back to him. He opened up the phone app and scrolled his contacts, but he couldn’t remember his boss’s name either. He didn’t remember what he did for a living, or what day his birthday was.

Panic started to rise in his throat, fear clouding his mind. He called out to his wife that he was going to the doctor and left the house. “Alright, I’ll be at my sister’s the rest of the day,” she called back.

He drove down the road and pulled onto the freeway. His brain was on the fritz, a lack of sleep meant his only thoughts were like static from a radio. But one clear thought managed to continually burst through the fog: Hank desperately needed to get away from the old man.

He drove most of the day, only stopping to buy snacks and water. He forgot the PIN code to his debit card and so he tossed it out. He drove until it got dark and found a hotel in a small town a mile off the freeway.

He rented a room for the night, all expenses going on his credit card. No PIN needed. The pimply young college student earning minimum wage didn’t blink an eye at Hank’s disheveled appearance and didn’t seem to notice the panic in Hank’s voice.

Hank locked the door and checked the windows of the little brown room. He moved the dresser in front of the door and flipped one of the two beds in front of the window. He pulled the small desk away from the wall and pushed it up against the closet door. He shut the bathroom door after checking the tiny window above the shower and jammed a chair under the door handle.

The other queen bed on the right side of a little nightstand seemed to teem with bedbugs, but Hank didn’t mind. He laid down and tried to get a wink of sleep, confident he ran away from the old man enough for one night. He didn’t have a plan for the morning, just wanted to escape the old man for a single night. Maybe he could find out his wife’s name again, or find a coworker to re-explain his job to him. Maybe a doctor could fix whatever was going on in his head. But for now, he wanted rest and a night free from the old man.

He never did fall asleep that night, and when the old man appeared, it wasn’t from a door or window, but directly out of the shadows. Hank heard him long before he saw him, the ragged breaths and slow shuffling of the feet. He smelled the rancid breath as the old man drew near. He saw the sagging white skin of his jowl. He felt the usual paralytic of fear.

As the old man walked around the small beige couch of the hotel room, Hank felt something snap inside of himself, a guttural scream loosed from his lips. He swung himself out of bed and charged the old man, who threw back his head and laughed, his yellow teeth cracked back into his skull.

He reached for the old man’s throat and choked him. The cold of the old man’s skin burned his hands, and even while Hank was choking the air from the old man, the ragged gasps of breath never stopped.

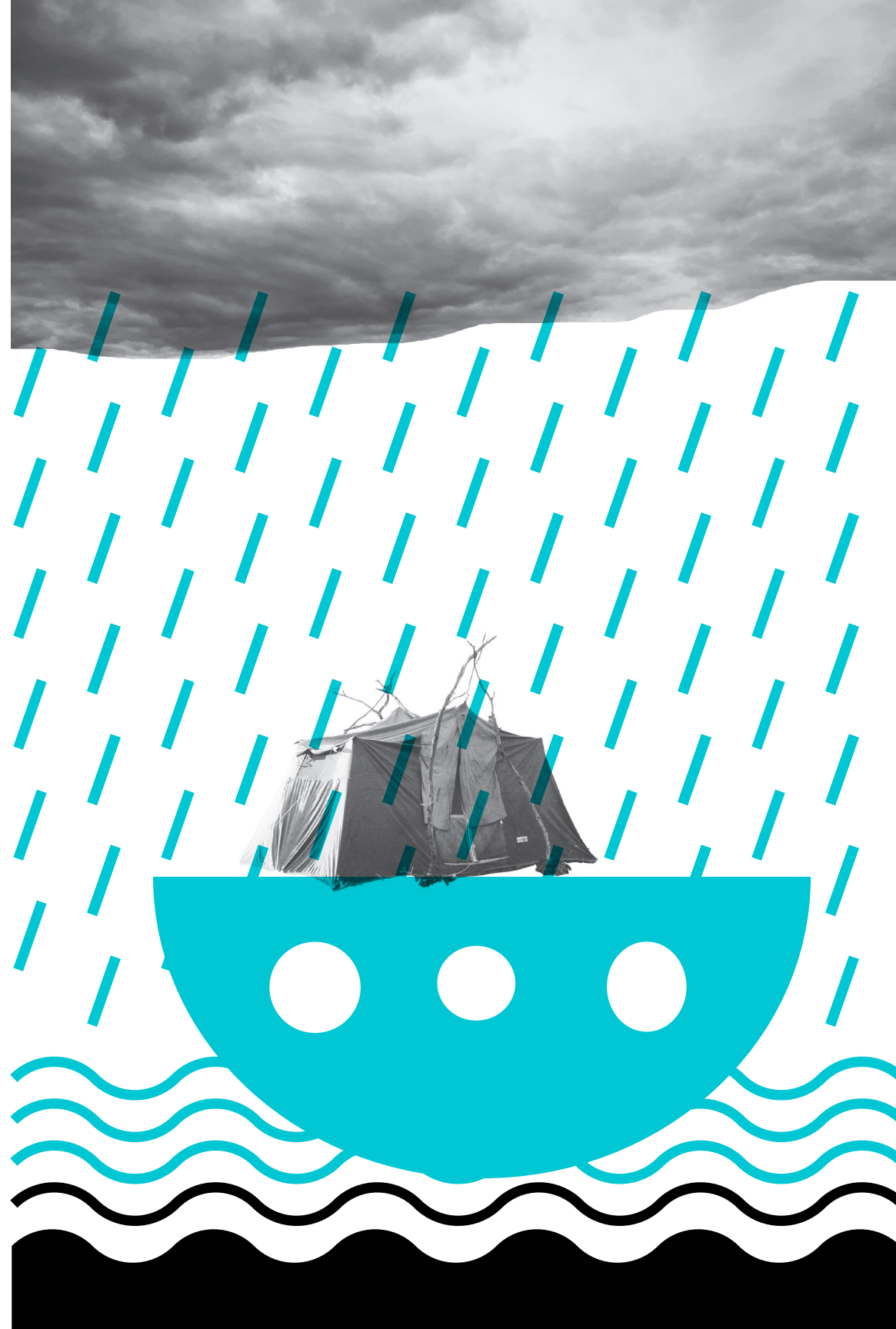
The old man gripped his cold hands around Hank’s wrists and pried them away from his neck. His white eyes were wide with excitement and his laugh grew higher and higher in pitch, louder and louder. The old man released his grip on Hank’s wrists and snapped forward, his long fingers snaking their way around Hank’s throat, his other hand reaching out with that long white finger, burning its way to Hank’s brain.

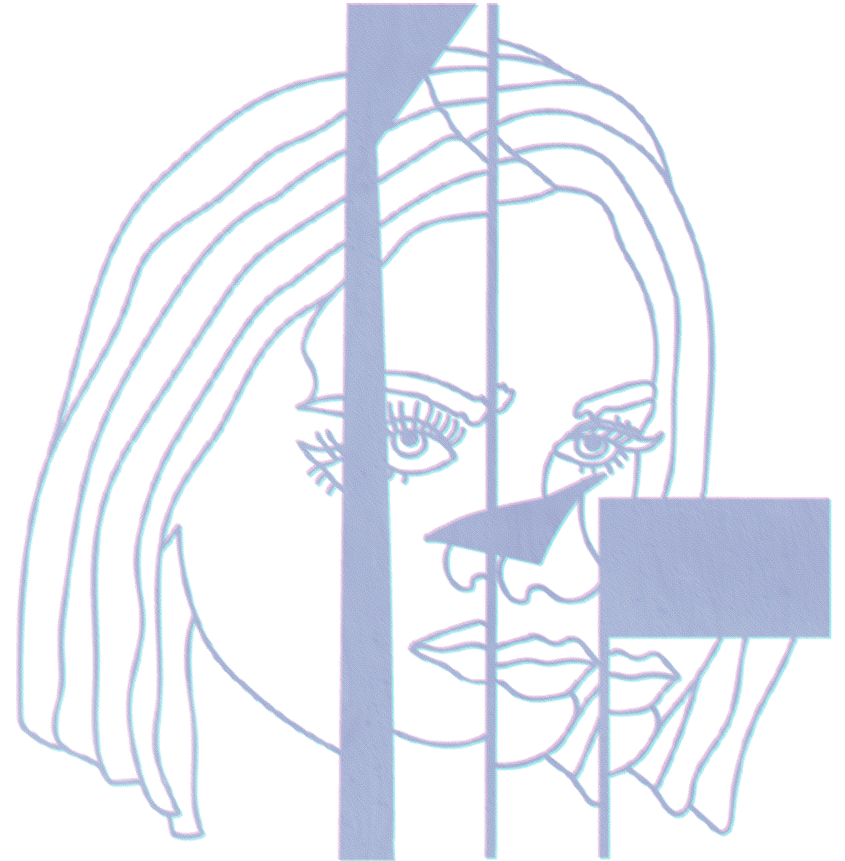
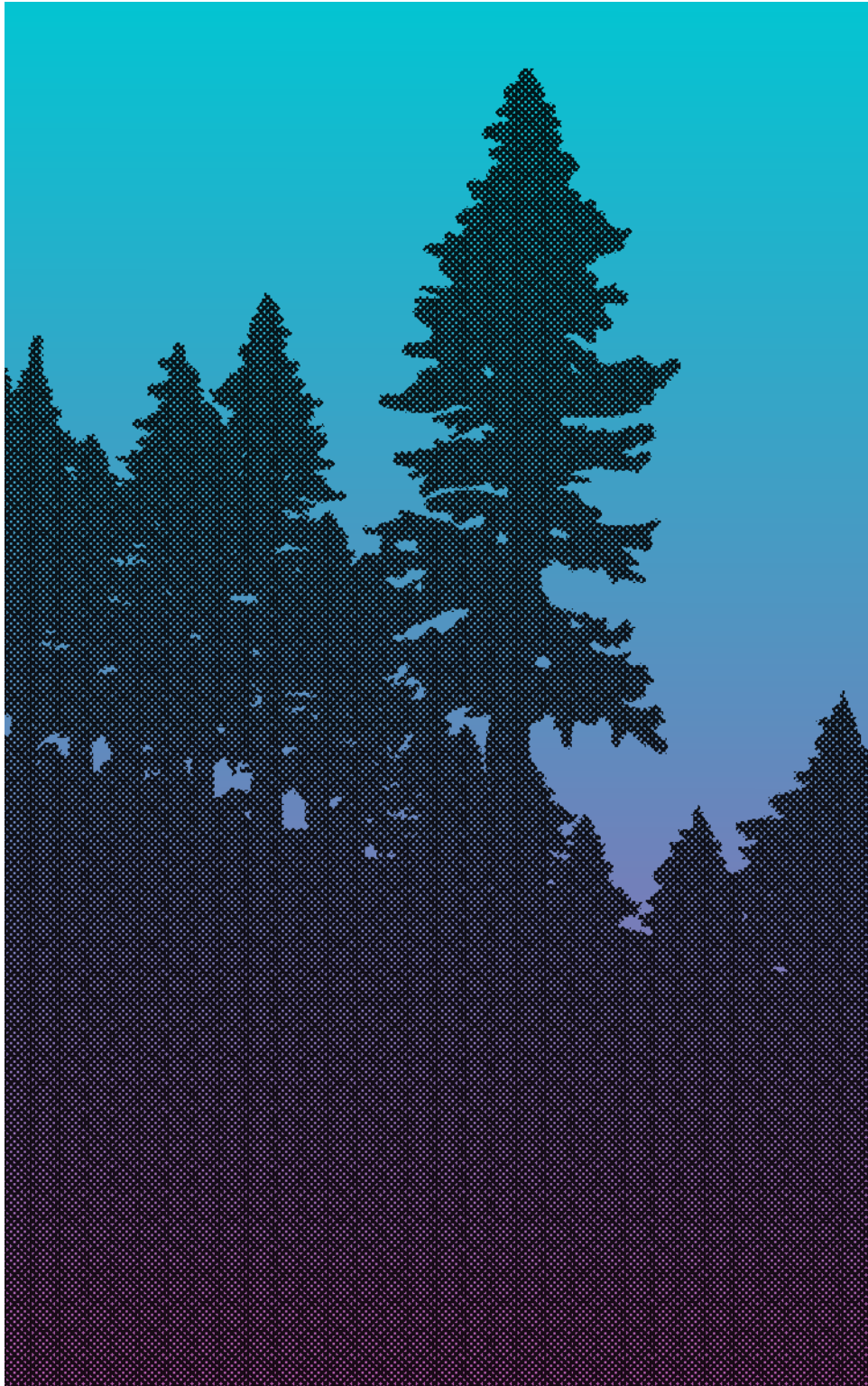
When the old man let go, Hank dropped to the floor. He started crying, which only seemed to amuse the old man even further. Hank began to crawl away, rising to his feet and running to the door. He pulled down the dresser in front of the door. It crashed to the floor and he swung open the door, hard enough the door knob broke through the drywall behind it.

He pulled the keys from his pocket, and... and he couldn’t recall how to drive the car. He knew he had to get away from the old man, but he couldn’t remember where he could go, or how to start the car, or what his own name is. He started to run down the street. His eyes filled with tears. He tripped and landed on the side of the road, the grayish sand and gravel dug into his elbows, a passing car’s headlights shone through the tears. The sound of the engine and the tires on the road masked the first chuckles from the old man behind him.

“No, please, please,” cried Hank, who couldn’t recall when and why the old man began terrorizing him. The old man reached out, one last time with his long, white finger, that wand of death and despair, and burned into Hank’s forehead. He heard the heavy breathing of the old man, his long gray tie tickling Hank’s nose, and he forgot how to breathe. The old man laughed as Hank struggled for air, drowning in his own mind.

Moments later the old man stood over the quickly cooling body, laughing into the autumn air, then turned and shuffled back to the hotel. The door to Hank's car and hotel room still stood open. The old man turned and walked down the rows of windows and doors of the crusty motel. He spotted an open window, just a couple down from Hank's. He crept to the open window and crawled through. He stood and dusted off his gray suit. A young woman lay in the bed next to her sleeping husband, soft hazel eyes and rosy cheeks staring back into the cloudy white eyes of the old man, who laughed and laughed and laughed.

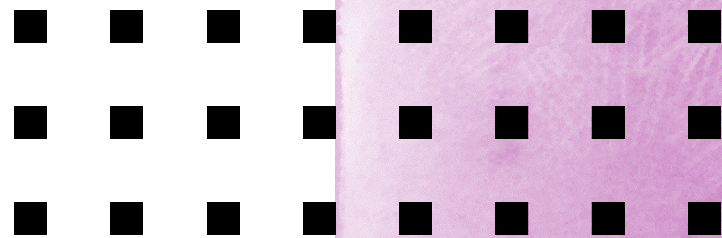






The image features a topographic map with black contour lines. A vertical line divides the map: the left side is white, and the right side is a solid purple color. In the lower right, there is a darker, textured purple area that looks like a satellite image of a coastline. At the bottom, a grid of 24 black squares is arranged in three rows and eight columns, with the vertical color split passing through the middle of the grid.

# NONFICTION



EDITOR'S CHOICE

# THE TRAIL OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Amber Celelaith Tawen Rossi

It's a cool July morning and I was supposed to be at work three hours ago, but I called out. I can't go in. I'm sick today, though if I told my boss what with he'd probably tell me to suck it up and come in anyway. That's what they told me last time, but they don't get it. I really can't come in.

So, instead, I'm a hundred miles away at the edge of a residential area on the southern edge of Kanab. Through the muddy sludge of a parking lot lies the base of the Bunting Trail. It's about a mile and a half of steep, rocky inclines that gouge their way up the mountain-side. Common sagebrush lizards dart between bushes of their namesake, birds chirp and flutter over thin, twisted trees and squirrels watch at a wary distance, waiting for hikers to drop bits of food they can devour. The air is clear and fresh from yesterday's rain, and it will be a while before the heat becomes unbearable. This is what I need right now. The peace, the quiet, far away from other people and their problems complicating my own. Supposedly, the view at the end is a breath-taking panorama of Kanab, the Vermillion Cliffs, and the fields into Arizona, but most importantly, it's very high up and a very long drop back down. I start climbing the trail. I do not know if I'll be coming back.

I've heard a lot of people spout that mental illness is an issue made up by our generation; that for thousands of years, we have not suffered from it, and now it's coming up because we're just whiny brats who want everything on a jewel-studded pedestal of pure gold. I know better. It's run in my family for generations. My great aunt suffered. So did my great grandma. And it goes even farther back than that. Many summers ago, my cousin and I visited Hebron Cemetery, an abandoned graveyard from the 1800s. It sits, forgotten by most, at the end of an old dirt road west of Enterprise. We know it though, because we have a family history in Hebron. Back then, people didn't know what mental illness was. They blamed demonic possession and fits of insanity, but even back then, our family had it.

While our family history only goes back to the eighteen-hundreds, mental illnesses goes back even farther. The ancient Greeks documented them, but like many ancient discoveries, their work was forgotten until recently. Around 150 AD Aretaeus of Cappadocia, a well-known physician, wrote about Melancholia: a disease characterized by bouts of depression and mania. He is credited with the first clinical descriptions of depression and bipolar disorder. Despite having such a limited understanding of the brain, he looked at the symptoms of these illnesses and concluded they were biological in origin and not, as many people today insist, a personality issue or a figment of the imagination.



We lost my cousin Bruce to it this past June. He was the first of my generation to go, and while I hope it kills no one else, I wouldn't be surprised if it does. Whenever I bring the fact up to others, they spout their ignorance at me. "Why would he do that?" "That's so selfish." "That seems like a silly thing to do." No one in our family said that. From them I heard, "He fought so hard." "I wish I could have done more." And, "Is it sad that I really can't blame him?" We all knew, to some extent, what he'd gone through, and no one was foolish enough to believe themselves immune. We came together to honor his life, but in our hearts we were afraid. Bruce was very strong. His fate could have very easily been any one of ours.

My first encounter with mental illness happened when I was about six years old. We were living on a military base in Germany when my brother was first diagnosed with depression. He was nine, and I had no clue what was going on. My child-brain couldn't comprehend complex matters. I was just excited because we got to move to an apartment closer to the school because the Psychiatrist said he needed his own room. The army housing department was very stingy and would set families up in the minimal required housing (one room for parents, one room for sons, one room for daughters, and no carpeting) but on doctor's orders we moved to a bigger apartment. I liked having more space, but I did not like my brother. He was irritable and overly sensitive. We fought a lot, and one day I woke up to discover a note pinned to his door. I couldn't read it, but my oldest brother did, sighed, and told me not to worry about it until Mom came out and started crying. She sent us out to look for Aron.

He wasn't hard to find. While the military base we lived in wasn't surrounded by sandbag barricades and patrolled by armed guards all the time, the entrances were guarded and everywhere else was surrounded by a chain-link fence that separated us from the dairy farms outside. We could smell the dairy farms whenever they were upwind. There was no way he would be going there.

So we trudged over the mossy ground surrounding the school's playground and searched up and down the stepped hills until we found him, wrapped in his blanket, sitting in the crook of a warped tree in a forested area that ran along the fence. The children on base spent a lot of time wandering the woods, poking sticks at the temporary streams and ponds that formed after a rainstorm and catching the tiny black lizards that shot from leaf cover to rock cover while your closed fist landed just short of its tail, so we were not the first to find him. There were others there, asking him why he'd run away from home.

I don't remember how our conversation went, exactly, but I suspect it was something along the lines of, "What the heck, you made Mom cry, come home right now." None of us wanted to see mom cry, so he came home. I didn't know it at the time, but she had depression too. I just knew that I thought they were dumb, and I didn't understand why they were this way. I couldn't understand, not until years later when I faced those problems myself.

I chose the Bunting Trail because it was less popular than the neighboring Cottonwood trail, and I can see why. The landscape is as beautiful as red rock and sagebrush ever is, but between the unstable dirt of the riverbed that drags me back with each step and the steep sandstone rocks that require me to use my hands to climb over them it is not a hike to bring the kids on. All the shifting footing and scrambling makes my joints ache and I know I shouldn't be going on a hike like this in my condition, but somehow when I get to the top things will be better. I know it will.



My issues were first diagnosed when I was seventeen, but my battle began long before that. I think I began to suspect I had trouble when I was in eighth grade. Where I'd previously prided myself in doing well academically, I started to hate school. I still behaved myself, as I was too shy not to, but the beige hallways lined with maroon lockers and hordes of people whining about class and practicing cannibalism on each other's faces in discrete and not-so-discrete corners became the bane of my existence. I stopped drawing much, everyone knew you couldn't make a living doing that and it was pointless anyway and took up the much more productive hobby of sitting alone in my room, surrounded by weeks of dirty clothes and garbage, staring at my homework and pointedly not doing it. One good thing did come of the changes though. I started writing. My language arts teacher complimented me on a piece I did, and I soon discovered I could express myself much more fully in written words instead of struggling to string together a tangible sentence in front of anyone, including my parents.

It didn't take long for me to realize that something was wrong, but I was stubborn. I knew I most likely had the same issue my mom and brother had, but they had to take medication to manage that and I knew I was better. I could manage these horrid emotions all on my own (spoiler alert: I couldn't) and show them they didn't need to rely on measly pills to be happy.

There are some forms of depression that can be treated just by therapy

and lifestyle changes. Typically, they are cases of physical depression (depression caused by an outside event rather than an inborn unbalance in the brain) that are mild to moderate. The problem that runs in our family is a genetic issue in serotonin production. We know this because migraines, also caused by a lack of serotonin, are rampant in the family and the most effective treatment for them is antidepressants. Needless to say, my attempt did not go so well. No amount of exercising and doing hobbies and forcing a smile was going to help if my brain simply did not produce the serotonin it needed. To this day, I hate trying to force a smile. People always tell me that it will improve my mood, but the only reaction I get is anger. Rage from years and years of trying something that everyone said would help, only to feel worse with each passing day. It made my life in customer service a living hell because smiles are required and they always made me furious.

While my depression slowly spun out of my control, I was very good at hiding it. Years passed, and I learned that melancholy came in cycles. At first it was two weeks of depression to two weeks of happiness. Then it became four to two, then six to two, then eight to one. In the spring of my seventeenth year, it became everything to nothing.

Finally, people started to notice, but at that point, I had conditioned myself not to say anything. Besides, we had no insurance, and doctor's visits were expensive. It wasn't until one day in early June that I cracked. I took my blue Chevy Sonic, a manual transmission car I had bought just earlier that year and went for parts unknown. I had no plan, no reasoning, I just knew I didn't want to go back to the life I hated.

I drove around the Salt Lake area for hours and cried, barely aware of the cars and world around me. I love exploring, but I didn't take much note of the winding roads through parks I'd never seen and cul-de-sacs with houses ranging from trailer-sized manufactured homes in dull shades of blue and yellow to multi-million dollar mansions with landscaped front gardens in full bloom, fountains, and ornate fences. The world around me did not matter. I did not matter.

At one point, I found myself at a light at the top of a steep hill. I stalled the car through three light cycles before I finally managed to eek my way around the corner and decided I'd had enough driving. I tediously worked my way back to the freeway and found my way home.

That night, my mom confronted me in my room.

"You've been really depressed, haven't you?"

I nodded.

"Have you been thinking of hurting yourself?"

I nodded.

"Do you think you need medicine?"

I nodded.

"Okay. I'll call the doctor tomorrow."

I'm extremely thankful for my family's experience with mental illness, because that was all there was to it. No judgment, no shame, just a matter of fact, "Okay. We can get you help." Unfortunately, I proved a difficult case to treat. My first diagnosis was Major Depressive Disorder and I was given a medication. Then another. Then another. They helped, but in spite of that, suicidal thoughts became my daily life. It became such an issue that my mom and I came up with a code phrase for it, "bugs everywhere," and it meant we had to change medications again. My life became a desperate struggle to stay afloat. I couldn't seem to hold a job. I couldn't manage school. All I could do was flit around my parents' house and pretend to be useful. A horrible emptiness filled me, one that sent me to the hospital for a week after I took another drive with no intention of returning, one that didn't leave even after the psychiatrists added panic disorder and GAD to my list of diagnoses and gave me new medication, and one that drove me up the Bunting Trail out of sheer desperation.

It really is a gorgeous view at the top of the Bunting Trail. The description couldn't have done it justice. The sharp cliffs behind me cast a shadow that keeps me cool while I admire the valley below me. The cliffs to the east, the small town sprawled at the foot of the mountain, and the greenest fields that the Utah desert can get sprawling out so far that I can see the blue tinge of the atmosphere clouding them before they fade from sight. I wipe away my tears and sit down on a rocky outcropping to think, with nothing but the gentle breeze and coldness of the rock beneath me to keep me company. Even the sounds of wildlife have stopped. I've had a bit of time to sort through my emotions on the way up and I know I have a choice to make. At the time, I did not know that it would be another year before I get the genetic testing that helps me find relief, all I know is the lost cause I call my life is looming over me, but somewhere, deep down, I want to find hope. I sit. I listen. I pray. And, very slowly, I stand up and make my way back down the mountain.

# WHAT IT TOOK

Andrea Call

She sits there and feels her face getting warmer. She feels the blood rushing to the capillaries in her cheeks and realizes it's shame. She is ashamed of herself.

At the peak of the sting of her blush, the shame is joined by a feeling of loss. It doesn't stab suddenly and hot like the shame, but it wells by unnoticeable increments until it becomes a wave. It washes her head clear.

You took it from me, she thinks. Her first clear thought in weeks. The others around her in the classroom are gathering their things to leave, and she starts to do the same. The professor who had just congratulated them on finishing the semester is speaking pleasantly to a few students and she thinks about how she should have been one of them. She should have had something to say.

You took it from me, she repeats. It was all I had. And you took it from me. This was all I had.

Her mind is still clear when she goes to the bathroom to collect herself, the quiet bathroom that almost no one uses. She looks in the mirror and watches as her expression starts to crack, and she concentrates on breathing.

You took it from me, she thinks. It was all I had. It was the only thing I had. You took it from me.

She thinks back to the four years she lived in Montana, when she was just a stupid kid with a hunger for books and stories, when she read and read and never tired of it, and never had difficulty paying attention, when she read for the relish of it and not for the obligation. When she wrote every day just for herself and didn't care if it was terrible, because it gave her energy and made her happy.

She focuses until the sting in her cheeks goes cold and the sting in her eyes goes cold and she walks herself out of the bathroom.

In a way, she feels cleaner. She recognizes what she has given up, that she has given something up. She felt something clear.

You took it from me, she thinks again, accusing. It was all I had. Why did I let you. Pernicious companion. It was the only thing I had. You took it from me.

She feels centered for a while, walking to the library to work on her next task. She feels sadness instead of rot and fog. The sky had been cloudy ear-

lier and now there is an appropriate level of watery sunlight falling mildly out of the sky. It won't last, neither the sunlight nor the sadness. But it's a cleaner feeling. She turns it over and over in her hands. It's prettier than the rot and the fog. Hurts more. Perhaps that's a good thing.

Later after work her mother calls her for a chat and they wind up discussing her brothers, the one wallowing over a breakup with a girl he had been sure was "the one," and the other struggling under the dual responsibilities of optometry school and supporting a wife and baby; the one brother who is lost in life and the other who is juggling too much at once. Mother is always worried about them. They cause her no end of anxiety, and she wishes she could just move out there and help them.

"You're the only one I don't worry about," Mother says. "I mean, of course I worry about you, but not as much. I am so grateful that you are so strong."



# MOTIVATION

Makayla Halling

My eyes ache as I put down my last few words for the night, reaching my daily goal of 500. I pull a link of my rainbow-shaded paper chain and toss the torn bit into a drawer, where dozens of other broken links are beginning to pile up and spill over the top. Finally, I can curl up in my favorite soft blanket, tuck my cold toes underneath my overheating laptop, turn on an episode of *Friends*, and zone out until sleep finally claims me for the night, leading me into the next day of busy and homework and errands. 500 words a day isn't *that* much, unless it's paired with hours of school, work, socializing, activities, and friends every single day. I haven't worked on my own project in weeks, the words are slow to come and sluggish across the page. Clunky, nonfunctional. My characters feel like wheat, dry and flat and unable to hold up under a stiff breeze. The plot chugs along, predictable. Old Faithful has more exciting twists than this.

When something is used over and over and over every day, it's sure to get worn down. Stairs develop dips and warps in the wood on every step, carpet gets matted down where foot traffic is heaviest, the individual fibers bending as they're crushed time and time again. Technology gets slower and slower, data piling down its hard drive until it takes minutes to open up something as simple as a Word document. Buttons become loose and fall off, as do baby teeth less than an eighth of the way through our lives, making room for another set that takes its sweet time in breaking itself down into a series of fillings and crowns and root canals. Brake pads in cars squeal in protest at every touch of the pedal after a few years, tire treads become smooth and slippery.

My mother has written and published the same book seventeen times. Seventeen different variations of the same love story, none of them bringing her the joy she has been hunting for over 40 years. Christian Romance was never the end goal of her writing career; she dreams of crafting something so immaculate, so heart-wrenching and beautiful and terrible that it keeps her readers awake for days, eyes bruised and hearts bleeding as an epic fantasy comes rolling to a close. She dreams of stepping out in glory, lauded by her characters and bathed in the warm glow of satisfaction as hundreds of fan letters reach her every day, praising her work and detailing the way their lives were changed by her hand. She aches to bring the story inside of her to life, to send it cascading across the page and into the lives of others, like tie-dye on a white shirt. Christian Romance was never the end goal, but rather the launchpad she hasn't managed to take off from quite yet. This is my worst fear, as we share the same goal, the same dreams. My launchpad needs to *launch* me, not chain me down.

The moon is moving away from the Earth at 1.6 inches every year. Since

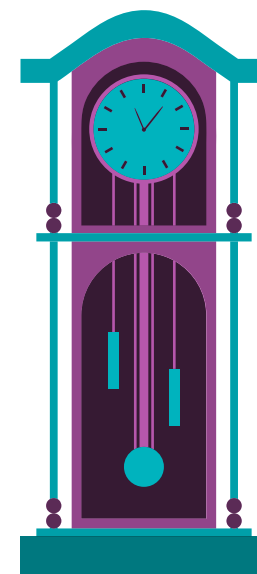
Homo sapiens are about 200,000 years old, this means that the moon is now over five miles farther away than it was at the dawn of man. This pull, this invisible friction between moon and Earth, is causing our planet to slow, our days to lengthen. The tides are slowly losing their love of the land. Even planets get tired of turning. Even moons try to escape their dizzying spin through empty space. Even the sea wishes to retreat into itself and end its seemingly endless rise and fall against the edges of the continents. Even authors tire of words.

There's a pit in my chest, worn away from years and years of scraping the stories out of myself. It feels deeper than doubt, like a lightbulb gone out after burning for a millennium. "Writer's Block" doesn't even begin to cover it, "Writer's Existential Crisis" is closer. What if this exhaustion never fades? Have I dedicated myself to a decade of practice and over \$15,000 of student loans to learn a trade that drains instead of fulfills me? What if I never take off, never break this cycle and end up working a cash register well into my adult years, as so many failed authors do? What if, what if, what if?

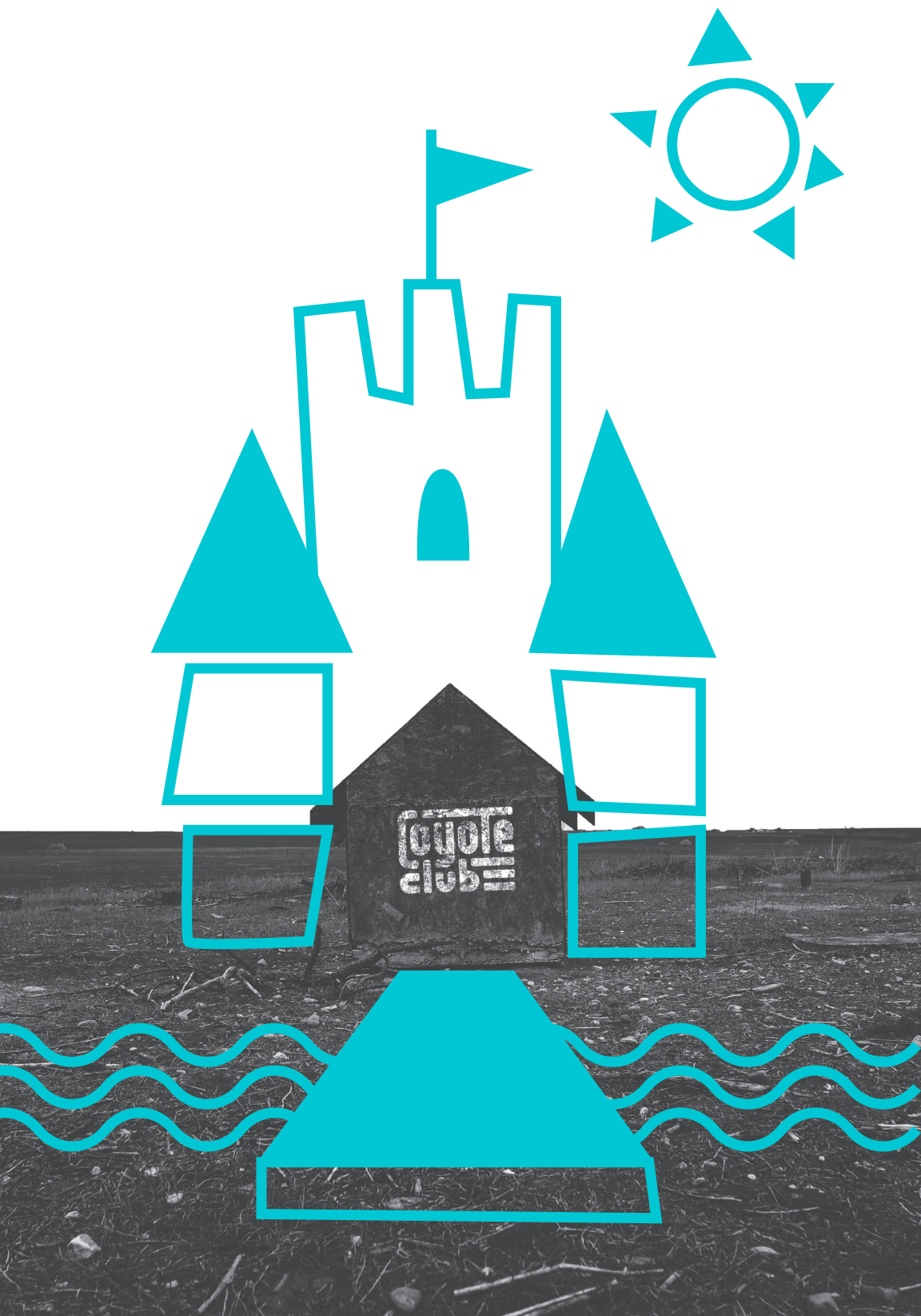
Every December first my mother helped my younger sister and I put together links of red and green paper, creating colorful chains that counted down to Christmas day. They hung from the banister, tantalizing us until bedtime when we could take a chain off and get one day closer to our goal, the Big Payoff, the Best Day of the Year. Each link ripped unceremoniously in two was like a shot of dopamine straight to the brain, and seeing the chain grow shorter and shorter was akin to watching a firework's wick burn down in slow, *slow* motion. There's something to be said for instant gratification. Too much makes a person lazy, impatient, unmotivated. Just enough keeps one encouraged, goal-oriented (even if their goal is simply making it through the day, as it was for me and my sister). It wasn't the worst idea to keep my writing going smoothly if I'm being completely honest. Now a multi-colored paper chain hangs on the wall just outside my bedroom, each link labeled with a number in increments of 500, going all the way up to 50,000 words. The chain is half as long as it was when I started it last August. It was supposed to be completely gone by November if I had kept up with my daily writing goal, but it's still good to look at it and see visible progress. I've written 26,000 words on one project, more than I've ever done in my life. It's better than Christmas; it's more fulfilling than a mountain of presents.

I am not a water wheel, nor stairs or carpet to be smashed underfoot. I'm not a machine, churning out an arbitrary number of units until a part of me breaks down and I collapse in on myself. I am not a moon trying to escape

its mindless orbit. I'm a comet shooting through thousands of lightyears of space in search of something new, something rewarding. These words will not stack up into papers of mindless drabble. I am stacking words into a world, fully-formed creations that live and breathe as if they were reality. I am creating something that people will grow to love, and finding myself whole in the process.







# A LOVE LETTER TO FLORENCE WELCH

Grace Sullivan

Dear Florence,

You came to me in a grey period. I heard “Dog Days” on the radio, as everyone had, and I could tell there was some secret power you held that I was enamored by even then. You sang about washing things away down your kitchen sink and being shot down by happiness. These images came to mind as I wrote and nurtured my emotional maturity often. This was the first anthem to escapism I connected to. Your big drums and heaviness hit the hardest in 2013 when my mother, lost and heartbroken, played “Shake It Out” on repeat. You nurtured her with your magic as she burned down her life. The Tower card befell her in a tarot reading. She left my dad and moved us away and started all over. She got wrapped up in a toxic relationship with an abusive and alcoholic man. I watched my mother as she turned toward the bleakness and grandeur of *Ceremonials* in those moments.

I remember lying on the floor of our living room, no one at home, blaring this album at my lowest moments, too. I let the powerful vibration in your voice crackle through the floor and into my skull. The words you crafted, the poetry you crooned into my heart, gave me an image for what was happening inside of me. I remember playing “Breaking Down” in the car with my mom on the way to school, in the kitchen doing dishes, loud on the CD player in my room—this was what the hurt felt like.

Storm broke in 2015 for both my mother and me when you released *How Big, How Blue, How Beautiful*. Both of us were tangled in messes with unforgivable men and hearing you yell defiance in “What Kind of Man” still makes me cry every time I hear it. There’s something in this album that came down in a rain and washed all the pain and emptiness we felt down the dirty streets. You were there when we needed to miss him. You were there when we needed to hate him. And you were there when we needed everything all at once. You pieced us together and tore us apart. You touched what was raw and burned with us.

Things settled for mom and me as it did for you. You released *High As Hope* the summer before I left home. My mom and I recognized your influence in our lives as our “Spirit Mother” and I was given your book, *Useless Magic*, as a going away present. Clinging to your words have brought me peace and clarity in moments that I needed to be reminded of power and rage and passion juxtaposed with two people sitting doing nothing. For all of this and heaven too, I thank you.

With Love,

A Fellow Feral Woman

# CHANGED

E. B. Raven

It's my second semester of college and I live in a dorm room that I don't share with anyone. It's nice, but this also means I am less motivated to keep it clean. In order to keep it from being a disaster, I make sure that I clean it every Saturday. This Saturday, in particular, the room is messier than usual.

*After it happened, I went straight to bed. It was only eight-thirty that night, so it was two hours earlier than I normally would've gone to bed. I lay there, frantically thinking about how they would react.*

I must've missed cleaning the Saturday before, as I sometimes do, because between campus events, homework, classes, and hanging out with friends, my life as a college freshman can get pretty busy. I survey the room, trying to decide where to begin. I start by picking up all of my clothes and putting them on my bed.

*This isn't what I wanted. This isn't how I wanted them to find out. This isn't fair. It isn't fair. This should have been on my terms, not anyone else's. I looked in the mirror on the door and saw that I was crying.*

I look over and catch my reflection in the mirror hanging on the dorm room wall. As I sort the clothes into piles according to where they would be put away, I think about how much different I look and how much I've changed since high school. I cut my hair off and started dressing more casually and androgynously. I look more like myself than ever before. I begin hanging the clothes in the closet. My button-ups go in one closet and the t-shirts in the other. Next, I put the pants in the drawer, checking all the pockets first.

*My mom entered my room, clearly trying to not be upset. She told me we would talk the next day after school. She went back upstairs, my phone in her pocket.*

As I sort through my pockets, I pull out flyers that have been handed to me on campus. There are flyers advertising many different events, like a pool party, a new club's first meeting, and many other things, mostly after my classes are over for the day. I don't know which ones I will be going to, but I hang them all up on my corkboard, just in case I decide to go to them. Sometimes, one of my roommates will be in my room with me and will ask me to go to an event with them, prompted by one of these posters.

*She had taken my phone because I used more data than normal and she wanted to see what I had been doing. That turned into reading my texts. I had been texting my girlfriend.*

Another thing that has changed since high school is the fact that I am, for the most part, out of the closet. Most people in my-day-to-day life know that I'm genderqueer, and even more know, or guess, that I'm gay. In high school, only a handful of people knew these things about me. I had come out to a few close friends, a few of my siblings, and a couple of adults. It was something that I had kept hidden for a few reasons. One of the main reasons that I struggled to keep this part of me hidden in my inner darkness was that I didn't want my parents to find out.

*She read my texts. She read my texts and found out I was gay. She read my texts, found out I was a lesbian, and told my father. That's how they found out.*

As I fold my pants, I think about how much my relationship with my parents has changed since I started college. I see them fairly often still, as they live about a ten-minute drive from the school. I go to their house for dinner about once a month, and I also go to things like my sibling's band concerts or theatre events.

*The next day after school, my mom texted me and told me to go to my parent's room. I had been expecting this all day. I felt nauseated. I had been dreading this all day.*

I put the folded pants into the drawer and go back to sorting my shirts. I put my button-up shirts away in the right closet and my t-shirts up in the left one. I look around the rest of the room, deciding what to work on next.

*I climbed the stairs and with every step thought about all of the horrible ways that this could go. They could kick me out. I walked down the hallway that had never seemed longer in my life. They could send me to conversion therapy.*

I decide that the next step is making my bed. I pull all of the blankets, pillows, and stuffed animals off of the bed and separate them out. I straighten the fitted sheet and put my yellow blanket on the bed. This yellow blanket is the one my mother made for me when I was a toddler. She purposefully made it twin-sized so I could take it to college with me.

*I entered their room and my dad told me to sit down on their bed. I did as I was told because what else was I supposed to do?*

Next, I put the music-themed quilt that my mom made me for graduation on my bed. Finally, I put all five of my stuffed animals on my bed.

*I didn't say anything as they told me what the church I had been raised in believed about same-gender attraction as if I didn't already know or hadn't believed it too at one point.*

I take care to set them down nicely because they all have sentimental value. The big bear is the oldest, the big moose is from a friend, the dog is the one I used to take everywhere, the black bear is the one I crocheted and stuffed, and the small moose is the one I got in my senior year.

*They told me that it was a trial that I had to overcome as if I hadn't prayed for a year for God to help me or as if I didn't hear when the leaders of the church would say what they were telling me.*

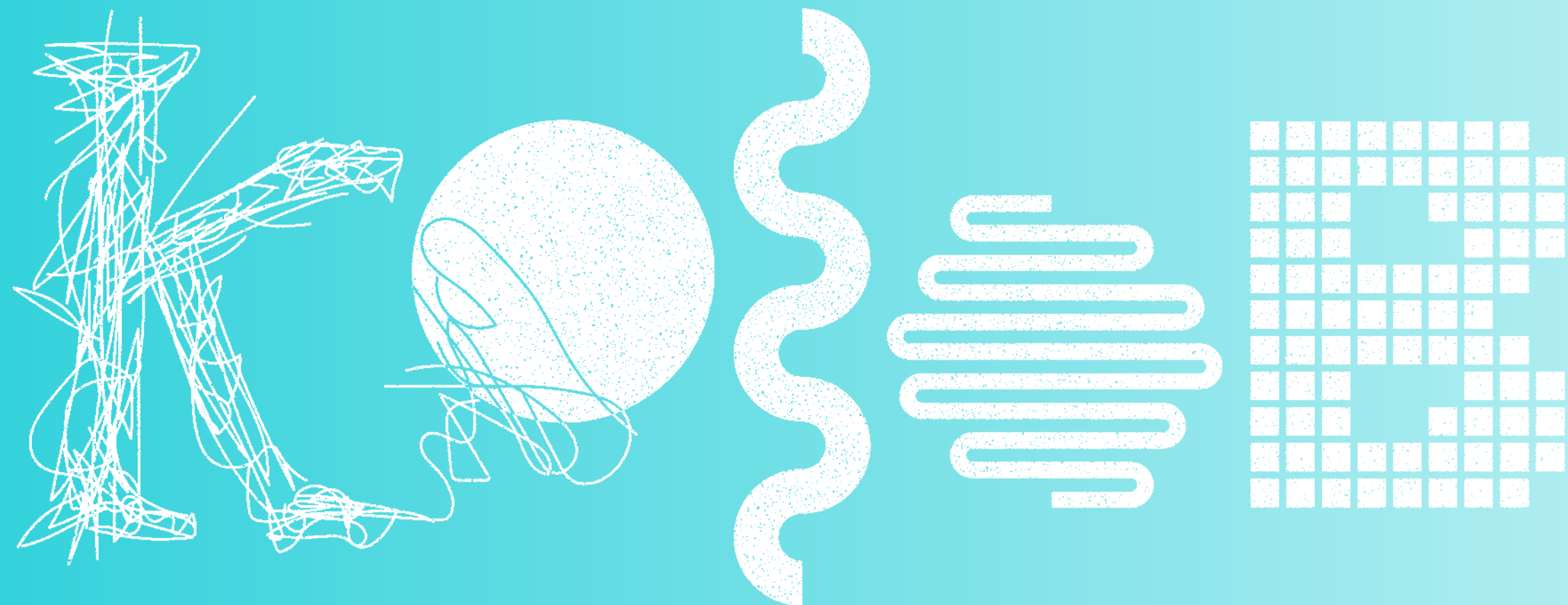
The next thing to do is pick up the pieces of trash that are too large to be vacuumed up off of the floor and put them in the trash. As I do this, I see a flyer from the LDS Student Association. One of the biggest changes in my life since high school is that I no longer go to church.

*They asked me questions and wanted me to answer, but I couldn't say anything. I just would sit and cry. Eventually, they got tired of talking at me, and they told me I could go to bed. I walked out, feeling drained, as someone inside of my brain had been vacuuming up my emotions and energy for the past hour.*

As I vacuum my room, I think about how I got my name removed from the church records. I couldn't stand to be associated with it any longer. I haven't told my mother about this yet. I don't know if I ever will. It would make our relationship even more complicated.

*I slept surprisingly well that night but didn't want to get up in the morning. I felt like never getting out of bed. But I did. I went about my day because the only other option was to not. And that's no option at all.*

I finish vacuuming and start winding the cord around the vacuum to put it away. I look at the cord, twisting its way around the hooks used to keep it in place. I imagine my mother being like these hooks, trying to contain and direct me in life. But I'm not a vacuum cord. I have a brain and decision-making skills. I will use these to get out of bed every day and continue to live my life because the alternative isn't even an option. I thought it might be years ago, but not anymore. Not ever again.



# CHAPTER 18: AMELIA

Max Bloxham

I remember her. I don't think I could ever forget the times we spent together. I didn't think I could ever forget the times we spent together. But time erases all. Even memory. I still remember the big things, don't get me wrong. I remember most of the nights we spent together. I remember Prom. I remember the rain. I remember the feel of her body on mine. But sometimes things sneak up on you at times when you would least suspect it. Sitting in a local coffee shop, someone will call out a name, say Peter, or some shit like that. But that same name was called out months ago when I was in a coffee shop with her and, for some reason, I remember that. Or I used to. It just faded to the back of my memory. Then this train of thought would unearth even more that I had forgotten. Like a fight when I was starting to get distant and then how we made up, and I reassured her with visions of the future. But it was all a lie, and she would find that out only days later. I had forgotten that. And I don't know how.

Or how I was driving the other day and I remembered something I had forgotten. Something so simple, something I shouldn't have forgotten. I was driving through town when a song came on the radio, "Say It Ain't So" by Weezer. With this song came a memory that bubbled to the surface of my brain like a thick bubble in a bowl of tomato soup that takes a couple of seconds to pop. A memory of the same song playing, me in the same seat, and her in the passenger seat. We were driving through a different town, and she was singing along to the song. That song. She was singing her heart out and when she raised her head to the ceiling to shout the lyrics to the sky, her neck stood out, lifting her head and just so carefully, a birthmark was revealed that sat just under the collar of her t-shirt. I shake the memory from my head and make a careful left turn into the college parking lot.

I remember that birthmark. Or at least I do now. How could I forget it? It was shaped like a leaf that had just fallen from a tree. Not a maple leaf, or anything fancy like that, just a normal leaf. If it had color, it would be a mix of yellow and orange, falling and gliding through the air in the heart of Autumn with the passing of the new season. I imagine it would have crunched under our feet. Another memory comes to the surface. This one rises fast and strikes me out of nowhere. We're walking through a park. She has her tiny poodle/lab mix dog with her. I think its name was Minnie if I remember correctly. I can feel her hand in mine, gripping tightly as if I was the last thing she had to hold on to. Our legs are in rhythm even though mine are significantly longer. I unconsciously keep pace. The trees are lush and full of life, birds are chirping, and there isn't a hint of the previous winter anywhere. It's incredibly hot and we're both sweating, yet our



hands are in a tight grip.

I think about our best moment together. That's an easy answer. It's prom night. She's beautiful. I didn't think it was possible for her to be even more beautiful than she already was. She's a goddess, I think. We spent the entire afternoon and night together, and yet I still think I could spend longer with her. I know for a fact that I'm going to be spending more time with her. Her room is dark. It's lit by bare bulbs on wire that span the ceiling. She tugs on my hand, pulling me toward her. Soon her dress is in a bundle on the floor; it has lost all meaning. Soon my clothes join hers, but not in the same way they've been joined throughout the course of the day. Very quietly, ever so silently, as if we were hiding, she says my name. I say her name, but not like I had ever said it before. That night her name grew until it encompassed my entire view; it grew larger than the room itself, straining on the walls, straining on the doors, as if it wanted to break free and let the entire world know her name. Amelia.

I'm saying her name again, this time it's used differently but in almost the same way. We're sitting alone on the roof of my car. It's a perfect temperature outside, and yet we're still pressed in close together as if it were 20 degrees colder. We're watching the stars, neither of us can name any of the stars except the easy ones: Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Polaris, and such. I say her name very silently, except louder than I had ever used it before. It's full of emotion. It's a loaded word that feels as if it weighs so much it could break the density of the world around it and create a black hole pulling us all in with it.

"I love you."

I say that phrase maybe a million times a day. I've never meant a phrase more in my life. I say it quietly, I say it loudly, I scream it to the heavens, and yet every time it still has as much passion as when I first said it. She says it too, maybe a million times a day, maybe a million and one times a day. She says it with as much passion as when I had first said it, as when she had first said it.

We're in my car. It's raining outside and although the rain is pounding and louder than hell, we're alone and it's quiet. The car is hot. But the heater isn't turned on. We say our names, we say the phrases. Her hand is pressed up against the fogged windowpane, leaving an imprint that will stay on my car window for weeks to come. You can't see outside. It feels as if the entire world has left us alone, to be alone, just us forever.



There was a blanket. I had gotten it from Peru about 6 months earlier. But that's another story. I look behind me in the car at the blanket. It's strictly cold washed, yet it has become paler over the year. The blanket is predominantly white and light sky blue. The blue crisscrosses the white in patterns of diamonds and diagonal stripes. I look at the window in my car. It's no longer there, but I can remember quite distinctly what her handprint looked like etched out on the window, even if I didn't remember it just a few moments ago. I open the door, grab my backpack, and walk over to the entrance of the University. I fall into a rhythm and soon enough I've fallen into memory.

We're holding hands as we stroll out of high school. Together we get in my car, passionately kiss, and stare deeply into each other's eyes. Soon we're in the drive-thru at Starbucks, picking up our orders. Mine always an iced americano, hers always an iced chai latte. Now we're on my couch in my house. A rare occasion we had the house to ourselves for a few hours. We must've said each other's names a thousand times in that hour.

We're outside on a hike. It's late summer and maybe 110 degrees. We picked a secluded hike on a hot Sunday morning, so it's us and only us. We don't need to do anything out here. We just stroll hand in hand through the canyon, its walls towering over us on either side allowing only some light to get in. Our hands are sweaty and although we trip and fall a few times throughout the hike, we never let go of our grip.



I remember when we were last alone. No. I haven't forgotten that. I push that out of my mind and try to focus on class.



We're in a movie theater holding hands. Her head is on my shoulder and try as I might, I can't focus on the movie that's playing. Her hands are quite smaller than mine, despite us being the same age. They are petite and they paint the image of a graceful ballet dancer. Her head is heavy on my shoulder and although I know that my neck will be sore tomorrow morning, I don't move it. Her small breaths are slow and deliberate as the rhythm of her body matches the rhythm of mine.

Her breaths are shallow and quick, increasing in quantity, over and over and over again she breaths in and out. I don't get distracted. I know what

I'm doing and judging on the response from her, I keep doing it. Soon her small hand that is gripping mine tightens from a crescendo, and her breaths start to recede. I look up, I see her smiling.



There was no smile the last time I saw her. Again, I push that out of my mind.



We're cuddled on the couch. The blanket is there. We're simply snuggled together watching something on Netflix probably. Maybe *Master of None*, maybe *New Girl*, whatever it is, this is probably our 5th time watching the same episode because of how many times we've gotten carried away in the middle of an episode. She was sick for a day with the cold and pretty quickly I was sick too. We're holding two bowls of chicken noodle soup, that I helped prepare for her while she lay on the couch. I've made enough meals at her house to know where all the dishes, utensils, and cups are. It's just us snuggled close together under that blanket. Just enjoying each other's presence. I love her. We say the phrase together, almost unanimously. Shocked, we look at each other and laugh. The soup in front of us splashes a little onto the blanket. We laugh some more. Those days are what average days felt like with her. Each day was a new experience and each day brought with it something different. Even on the days that seemed relatively normal. Just laughing, that's what I remember from our average days. That and cuddling.



There was cuddling the last time I saw her but there was no laughing the last time we saw each other. This time I give in to the natural flow of my thoughts and remember that time. The time I broke up with her. The time I broke up with Amelia.

The night was clear and yet no stars were visible. I was in the bathroom at her house pacing back and forth, staring at myself in the mirror and psyching myself up. Finally, I whip open the door and walk out to the living room, where she sat on the couch watching an episode of *Master of None*. I hadn't purposely turned it to the saddest episode in season 2 when the main character Dev had spent an entire month with a girl he loved but didn't tell her. It must have just been a coincidence that we were at this episode. I walk back into the living room at the end of the episode where they kiss but leave heartbroken, no future relationship left for either of them. A mournful Italian song called "Se Piangi, Se Ridi" plays, which roughly

translates to "If you cry, If you laugh." I pause the tv show, sit down opposite her, and look her dead in the eyes. She can tell something is up and it scares her. Her eyes fret back and forth from where I'm sitting, to the remote in my hands, and to my deadly focused eyes. I say it.

"Amelia. I think we should break up."



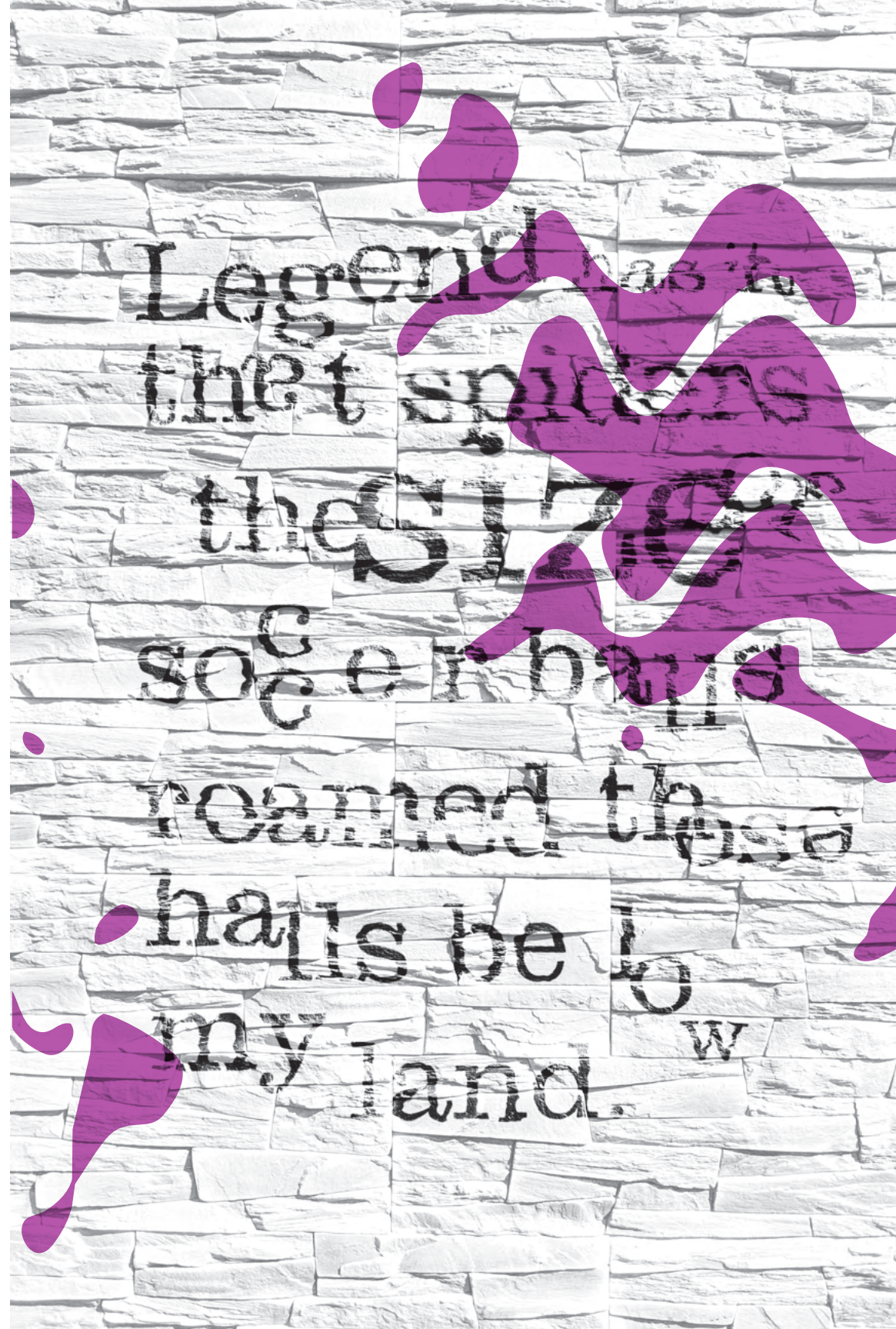
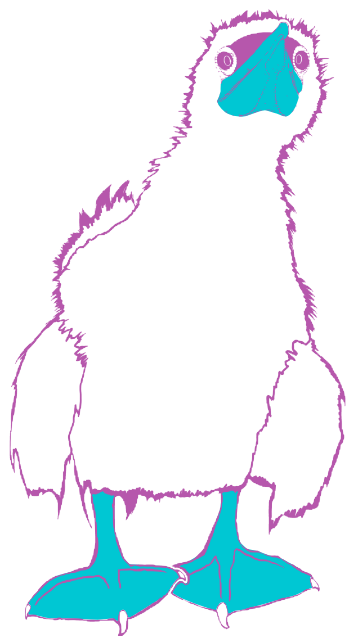
The rest of the memory is a blur and yet I remember it all perfectly. I spent nearly two hours at her house after that phrase. She was defensive at first, arguing why we didn't need to, but I was dead set on what I had to do. I couldn't be swayed. She then broke down to tears and begged me to not leave her. This was harder to fight. She broke down even further and seeing that I couldn't be budged, she begged for one last kiss to remember me by. I stood my ground that day, knowing that it would've only made it harder to leave. At least I like to imagine it like that. In truth, I broke down too. I stressed about why I was doing this and I very nearly edged off my earlier proposal. I even gave in to the kiss. I will forever remember that our final kiss was full of tears.

There are some things that I could never forget about our time together and there are some things that I forget so easily, but remember so quickly. I think that I don't go a day without thinking about the times we spent together, and remember something I had previously forgotten. Me and Amelia were together for nearly 8 months, not long in the space of things, but it felt so much longer. It's only been about 4 months since I last saw her, but once again it feels so much longer.

I wonder what she's up to today. We both went our separate ways and that's the primary reason I broke up with Amelia. I was going to Southern Utah University to study Creative Writing, while she was going to the University of Nevada Las Vegas to study Law. Near the end of our relationship, she started suggesting going with me to SUU, or changing her life's goals to follow mine. I couldn't allow that. I wouldn't allow that. I can't have someone changing their life to follow mine. She had her whole life set out in front of her, and I was not going to interfere. A long-distance relationship wouldn't work either. I wouldn't do that to her either. Visiting only once a month and consequently holding her back from her life and possible future dates. I wasn't going to do that to her, I wasn't going to do that to me.

I listed out these thoughts the night of the breakup, and I listed them out as I walked through campus now. I was content with where I was, and I

didn't want to change that. I wondered where she was now. Maybe she was in a class somewhere writing about a boy she used to know. Perhaps she was hanging out with friends and enjoying the warm day. Or maybe she had gone on a date, and now the day after she can't stop thinking about that person. That's when I got a buzz in my pocket. Pulling out my phone I assumed it was one of my current friends or a possible Tinder match. It wasn't either of those. It was a text from her. It was a text from Amelia.







# DEAR SOMEBODY

Elizabeth Curtis

Dear Somebody,

I have never been one for confrontation and consider myself to be a rather passive person. Congratulations! You managed to make me angry.

But to call what I feel angry is to call a hurricane a light rainstorm. Angry doesn't quite express the jumbled mess of emotions in my throat, a constant presence that is gradually choking me. It's like I swallowed a tiny seed that got caught in my lungs and decided that my body would be the perfect place to bloom. And at first it was nothing— a slight pressure at odd times of the day, an itch that never fully faded, a tightness that dug into my skin. Then the roots began to grow, tangling amongst skin and bone, building homes in the space between. My lungs are overrun with weeds and thorns line my throat. Crack open my ribs and belladonna covers the memories we made, leeching them of beauty and leaving behind a monochrome wasteland. Your name is lead coated, hard to utter and even harder to swallow, akin to the bittersweet tone of truth. My heart has become a breeding ground for rage and despair, a negative spiral that extends with no end in sight. And, as it is in your nature to assume you are never wrong, it is in my nature to assume I am the problem.

Just like that a cycle was born, as I gave and gave and gave while you took and took and took. And that garden of overgrowth bloomed slowly but surely, my blood laced with more poison than life force, negativity crawling through my veins, my mind sinking back to its default setting of it's okay and don't worry about it each time you acted as though those weeks of suffocating silence hadn't sown new seeds in the expanding garden that now lingered at the base of my neck, vines wound tightly around tense shoulders. Again and again and again. My heart was consumed by foxglove, a field of morning glory clogging up my veins, yarrow tinting my sight red. It built up, pressing against paper thin skin, words swimming in my mouth begging to be released. Thoughts swirled in my head— do you think of me as much as I think of you? Do you wonder where it all went wrong? But at some point I realized that you were never the solution, rather the largest weed lodged in my lungs.

It takes a lot to get me to quit and congratulations! you were the Somebody that pushed me over the edge.

Perspective is an interesting thing and sometimes all it takes is a shove for it to change, but once it does, it's like a sheet of rain that had been blurring my vision finally cleared and everything snaps into focus. For I refuse to be your second choice, your back-up plan, your dead-last-might-

as-well-as since no one else is around. I am many things but I am not your journal nor your therapist nor a listening ear to listen to your woes and your woes alone. I am not someone to be walked over or written off as an after-thought. I am done being the problem and the solution. I am done giving everything and receiving nothing. I am done letting you dictate my worth and consuming my waking thoughts. And yes, I understand that writing this is proof of how deeply rooted you are within me, but this is my final ode to Somebody.

Crack open my ribs and rip out the root and stem of you, scooping the rotten botanical pieces away, for my mind has grown weary and my fingers ache from holding on so tight. Just as stories get lost in the library of time, our memories will fade from melancholic indifference. Our paths have always been twisted, but they've diverged for the final time, and I must admit as the weeds are uprooted and bundles of wildflowers fill the empty spaces, nestling next to their venomous cousins, all I feel is relief. A burden meant for two carried on the crumbling spine of one washes away between this breath and the next as I finally let go.

I have never been one for goodbyes but I think this will do, for I spilled my guts to anybody but Somebody and now that the mess in my throat has withered away, I only have one thing left to say:

Dear Somebody,

Congratulations! You've been demoted to nobody.





# HAIR DYE IS NOT PERMANENT

Lyndsey Kay Nelson

The first thing to remember when dyeing your own hair is that dyeing your hair isn't permanent. Now, this may seem obvious, but when that little plastic bowl gets filled with dye and you're trapped in a chair by a towel and social convention, or as you sit in your basement with a cardboard box and a tiny page of folded instructions, you will want to remember, before you remember anything else, that hair dye is. Not. Permanent.



Standing as the best friend of a woman I admired, Nate was someone I could never truly understand from a distance and that perplexed me.

I'd say he was the only person to ever outsmart me in a relationship, but that's not nearly true. What is true is that he was the only person I ever dated who made me hate a name.



Next, please remember, if you at all value your skin tone and have any upcoming meetings where you want to have natural looking hands, wear a pair of gloves.

Now, you may argue, "Of course I'm going to wear gloves!"

"Well," I will respond, "you've never felt the texture of hair dye in your hair. You've never had the fun of feeling the strange gel of dye between the dry strands of your own, old, boring hair as it oversaturated every single follicle."

See, you may think it's an easy feeling to resist, but it's just as tempting a texture as lava.



*I met you in first grade and the first thing I remembered about you was the red hair. Like a fire. Like passion. Like love. Red as a volcano and curly as a poodle and lovely. Really truly lovely.*



Another one that may seem obvious, but when you're dyeing your hair, bring a towel. Between all the parting and the tossing and the combing, you're going to make a mess of your room. Bring a towel.



*When I was in the third grade, I drew a picture of you standing under the metal slide on the playground. The picture wasn't very good, it was a child's drawing of a child, but something in the picture drew me in. I knew in that moment that I liked remembering you. I liked how it felt to think about you.*



When I met Nate, I was a freshman. He was a year older than me, at least half a foot taller, and somehow he managed to be friends with everyone without ever sharing a single personal detail about himself. It was a kind of magic to watch him interact with a cheesy smile and too round a face. Not once did he mention anything deep about himself and yet everyone thought they knew him. He put on a front like no one I'd ever seen before.

We'd been texting for a few days when he convinced me to ask him to a dance by suggesting that we were both available for the event and we had a mutual friend running a group. It's a trick I'd seen done before, but I was a sophomore at that point, which didn't mean I was any smarter than the freshmen so much as it meant I was cockier.



On the subject of making a mess, don't wear a shirt you like to dye your hair in. No amount of towels, no amount of cleaning, no amount of keeping things neat, will ever stop you from making a mess of your favorite shirt or destroying the only pair of jeans that actually fit your waist, butt, thighs, and legs. So, don't wear anything you like. And don't dye your hair in a room you like. And don't dye your hair near a person you care about.

For the best results, dye your hair in the basement of an old house you don't live in anymore, when your family is all out at work and school, and you're the only sign of life in the house except for a dog that's never been nice to you and a couple of fake plants that could almost convince the world your mother has a green thumb.

That is the best environment to dye your hair in.



*We stayed friends through my big move. That shocked both of us. We used to write each other letters. Every week, I'd have a letter waiting from my best friend back home in West Jordan, back when Sandy wasn't a home yet and you were my best friend. Back when anxiety was a myth and depression was a lie and all that mattered was how much I loved talking to you.*

*I told you that every week. I wrote in my letters about how much I loved being able to talk to you.*

*Oh, how easily polluted childhood can become.*



After a few minutes of rubbing hair dye into your scalp, you will begin to notice two things. One, the mixture will begin to warm. Two, the mixture will take on a strange smell. Both of these are good things. It may hurt, but these two factors mean the dye is working. Just keep spreading dye throughout your head and ignore the burning and the smell. You'll get used to it after a while. One day, you may eventually miss it. In hair dyeing, we call this normalization. In relationships, this same effect is called gaslighting.



I didn't like the way he touched me at that dance. I liked even less the way he looked at the girls around him. And, even worse than that, was the claustrophobic feeling of relying on him for a ride wherever we went. I was his. People said that like it was an achievement, so I started to believe them.



*Every summer and every winter break and every birthday, we would find a way to have a sleepover. As we grew up, the sleepovers grew longer, and I grew more and more in...*

*More and more...*

*More and more excited to be your friend. That's all it was. I didn't fixate on when we shared a bed because I liked you, I fixated because I liked being your friend. I didn't want to shower you with gifts because I had feelings for you, I wanted to shower you with gifts because I liked how I felt around you. That was all. That was secure.*

*So, why did we have to ruin it?*

*No, not you, I know you didn't ruin it, you couldn't have, you didn't know, I didn't even know yet. I didn't realize when I thought about your smile I was thinking about your lips, I didn't consider the possibility that I saved your Instagram pictures because I simply enjoyed looking at you.*

*And if we'd never gone to Walmart, if we'd never decided to spend Hallow-*

*een together, I never would have ventured from that frame of mind.*

*If we'd never made jokes about how much it looked like we were dating and talked about going to the Halloween party together as a couple and pretended to be girlfriends, I never would have had a second thought. I never would have realized that I had fallen head over heels in love with you.*

God, I love you—loved you. Love you.



We didn't talk all summer. Or, we texted, but we only met up in person once for a double date with my best friend and a rare crush that wasn't named Nate and the whole event felt fake, a figment of someone's imagination.

We took a picture that day. His eyes looked like the ocean at the equator and my hair had recently been cut too short and dyed too dark to be in any way attractive.

I looked back at that picture every day that fall, wondering what had happened to the smile on my face. I blamed the haircut for a while. Then I blamed myself, for a while. I still would rather blame myself that think about what happened that October, what really took the smile away and left me with a brain torn to shreds.



*The truth hit like a pound of feathers: soft, but unexpectedly painful. A pound of feathers and a pound of bricks weigh the same, after all. It's just a difference of texture. It didn't scratch to realize I loved you. It didn't break my bones, it didn't bruise my skin, it didn't change a thing about me. It just hit hard, and it took its time to settle.*

*Every now and then a new feather drifts to the ground and I find a new piece of the puzzle I hadn't seen before. My fixation on your hair, my excitement when I heard your voice, the way we sang love songs together and you sang to the universe and I sang directly to you.*



Once the dye has been evenly applied, you will realize that you've gotten hair dye on your skin. Your forehead, your neck, your ears, your arms, they will all have been treated with a few spots of hair dye. This is where my magic trick comes in. When you're in the shower rinsing out the dye, take an acne cleanser (I use Neutrogena), and let that wash away the spots. Hair

dye will come out of skin with a cleanser. A lot of things will come out of skin with a cleanser. Bruises, freckles, scars, and rashes will not come out of skin with a cleanser. They come out of skin with time.



The first sign should have been the date he took to Homecoming.

She was a friend from choir, and I trusted him around her. I assumed he'd asked her because I was going out of town for a trip. I didn't have a reason not to trust him. I was a kid, sixteen years old, what reason would I have to assume my boyfriend was cheating on me?

I was naïve to trust him. I know that now.



*We walked out the door after I sat by and watched a pair of boys flirt with you for three hours and you joked that the only man you would ever date was a male version of me.*

*And I wanted to scream and punch and fight and kiss and do everything else the lovable best friend with a crush on the main character wants to do. I wanted to hit you over the head with a sign that said, "Then just date me!"*

*Which you never did. Because I didn't tell you. Because I couldn't. Because you're straight and happy and a girl and I'm Mormon and I'm supposed to be straight and I'm not supposed to feel like this about one of my young women's classmates.*



It may become tempting to reach for a box of hair dye every time something strange or eventful happens to you. Red for denial, blonde for purification, black for fear, purple for insecurity, blue for novelty, gold for excitement, grey for growing up, brown to feel young, every color of the rainbow to push aside any and all of the new, interesting, terrifying feelings that come with being human. It's the most tempting form of denial; painting over the pain and returning to school with a new look for friends and others to fawn over.

It's a hard itch to fight, but you must remember, hair dye is not therapy. Though, it certainly is cheaper.



We kissed three days after that conversation.

He kissed me three days after that conversation.

He took me to the backseat of his car and kissed me three days after that conversation.

He touched my skin, my side, my waist, my back, and kissed me three days after that conversation.

Our mutual friend told me he was cheating on me one week after that conversation.

He stopped talking to me two weeks after that conversation.

That is, unless he wanted someone to smuggle into the backseat of his car and see what it felt like to kiss a girl who didn't know how to say no yet. A girl with so much tension in her body every time that her foot stuck out into the front seat.

A girl who washed her mouth out after every date and dyed her hair purple a few weeks later in the vain hope that a change of color would make him look at her outside of his car.

A girl who drove home from school one day, her birthday, not that he'd remember, and spilled everything to her best friend, a best friend she'd realized she was in love back in October.



*You and your red hair. Your beautiful red hair, a color I tried and failed to dye my hair more times than you can count.*



In the end, I told her everything. Almost everything. The details of the car, those were for me, but the rest of it. His ignorance, his cruel silence, his relationship with another girl. I let it all out, and my darling best friend was the only person with the strength to tell me what was happening. This wasn't how a relationship was supposed to go, she said. He wasn't being a good boyfriend. I wasn't in a healthy situation. What was going on between us, it wasn't a healthy relationship.

I drove around the entirety of Sandy in my own car, singing and sobbing in the front seat as everything set in.

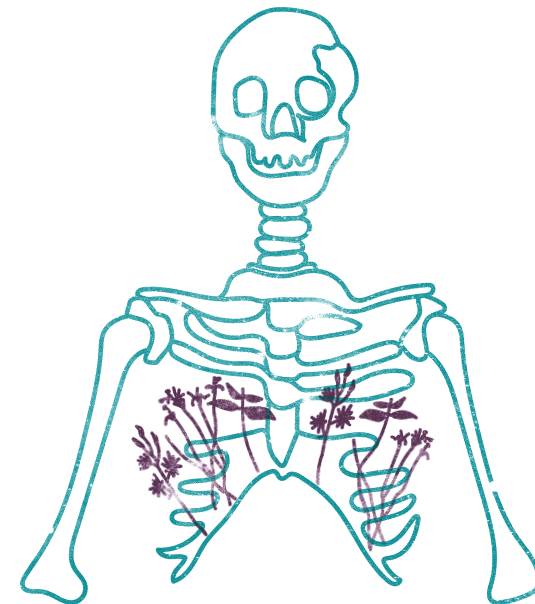
On the way home, I decided it was time to bleach my hair.

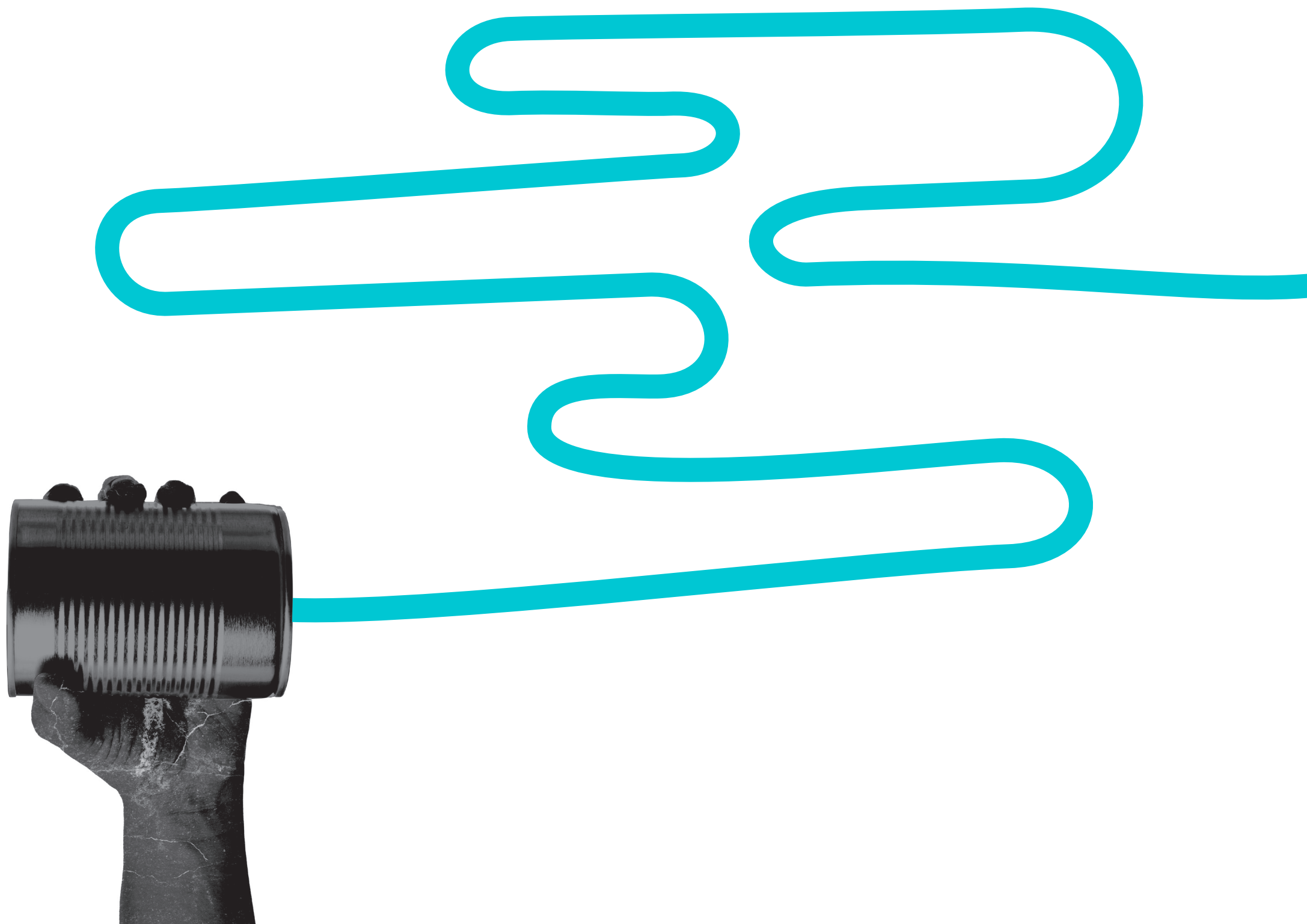


Hair dye is not permanent. Like everything, like friendships, like love, like rose-colored innocence, it fades.

It all fades.

It's just hair dye, running down the shower drain.





# THE REAL REASON WHY MERMAIDS DON'T HAVE LEGS

Hannah M Duncan

There is freedom in the tide that pushes and pulls against damp sand. The briny breeze dances with the foam lapping at the shore. The beach turns to clay as I walk out into the gradient blue. I threaten not to turn back, but the flicker of fins root me in the sinking sand.

I sit cross-legged on the carpet with a present in my lap. It's soft. That's never a good sign. Every kid dreads clothing as a birthday present, but I rip at the shimmery paper anyway. They're jeans. The denim is a course, Atlantic blue. I stand and let them unfold to the ground, measuring them against my hips like Mom always does. She's smiling now, asking if I like them. I don't, but I tell her I do.

I've never been able to drown my love for mermaids. They take grace from the creatures that flop around on the floor of a fishing boat gasping for freedom. The scales of a piano cannot compare to their lullabies, let alone the shimmer in their tails. They are strength. They are naïve. A single splash in the lapping waves and they're gone.

There's a ring of dirt around my ankles. Manacles. My legs chafe in the soaking bellbottoms as I run home from the park. Jeans have never fit me well. Mom always insisted the length mattered more than the fit, that I could always wear a belt, but they always managed to hug just above the protruding ankle bone. They scrunch at my knees, and I can't help but feel trapped in the scratchy collection of stiff fabric.

Sirens. Peter Pan. Hans Christian Anderson. H2O. Splash. Sirenia. Sirenemia. The Thirteenth Year. Aquamarine. Venus. Barbie: Mermaidia.

Skinny Jeans. The new trend. The denim wraps around my legs in a mummy's embrace. I swallow my pride and shimmy them over my newfound hips. Jump twice, kick kick, one final jump and a squat. I suck in last night's casserole and pray I can fasten the button, but Mom taught me the rubber band method if I can't. And even while I'm out at the movies, browsing the mall, or on a date at the bowling alley, all I can think about are the oversized sweatpants waiting for me in the bottom drawer of my dresser.

I summersault into the weightless deep, head over heels, diving far enough into the ocean that it is no longer blue. There is a reason why the sky reflects the ocean. There is a reason why Levi jeans stain my hands navy. This is the only place unknown to the rest of the world. The mermaids hoard the world's freedom with their collection of seashells and ship masts at the bottom of Earth's treasure chest.

There's nothing worse than shopping for jeans. I can't remember the last



time I looked at myself in the American Eagle dressing room mirror and didn't feel a lump in my throat. They don't make jeans for girls like me. Elongated trees with a thick trunk. But now they're taller than they've ever been before. High-rise. Skyscraper. Meant for an Amazon like me. I like them because I can tuck in the gut Mom gave me and feel more confident. The fabric is "stretchy," but the spandex abandons me after the third wash.

Fins do not know the taste of denim. They glimmer beneath glinting rays, barnacles crusting on Spartan scales. They course through currents like the sand sifting through my palm. They cannot feel the bite of a fastened button. They are not tattooed with the stitching along both thighs. They are free from the zipper's teeth—sucking in a breath and never letting go.

Jeans aren't meant for me. They're for the courtesy of my mother. The courtesy of the dress code. The courtesy of the boys around me that whine that they can't concentrate because a girl is wearing yoga pants. Leggings are for me. They're made for girls with legs, curves, skin, bones. They do not have a say in what we choose for ourselves.

In the final scene of *The Little Mermaid*, when the day is saved and the shackles of the curse fall around her newly-formed ankles—there is a reason why she's wearing a dress.

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# SELECTED ARTWORK

POWERWALL

Geoffrey C. Lewis



ENSNARED

Brent Kasen Palmer

NORMALITY

Rian Kasner





**WOMB 03**

Kelly Chuning



**WOMB 04**



**WOMB 08**





**INKTOBER DAY 11: SNOW**

KileyAnne Larson

164



**THE KELPIE IS DEAD**  
(LEFT)

**DRIP**  
(RIGHT)





**ERODED VASE**

Lacey Prsbrey

**GUIDING ANGEL,  
INCOMPLETE**

Rachel Stuart





### DESERT TREASURE

Symony Call Kite

### PEONIES



### USED





THE INNOCENT ONE

Julie Malia Crowell



MICRACION

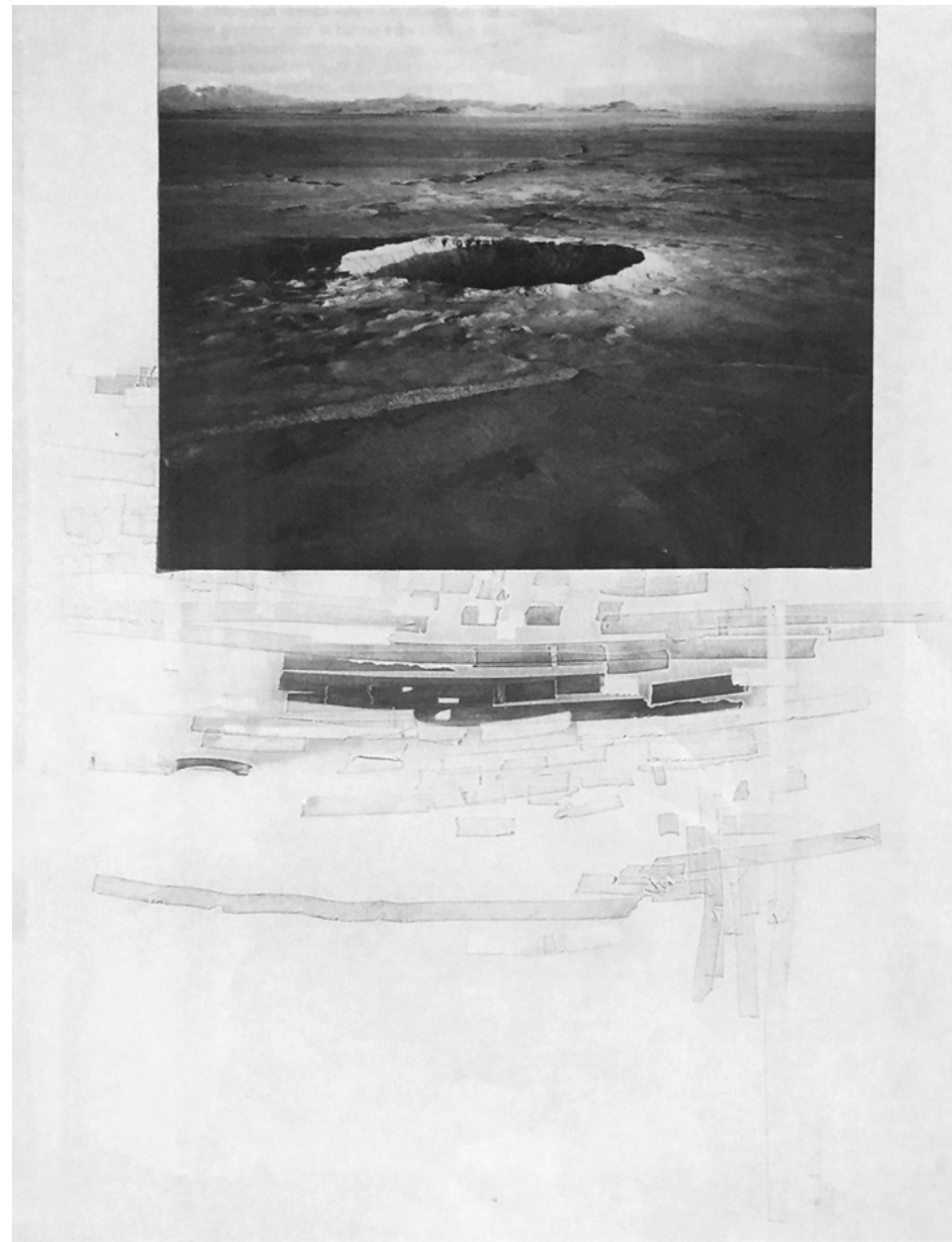




## ICE CORES

Stephanie Barlow

## REMEMBERING THE VOLCANO



## PORTRAIT OF A LANDSCAPE

PASSION IDENTITY  
DESIGN STICKER

Jimmy Allen

THE DESIGN  
CONFERENCE POSTERS  
(RIGHT)





## BADWATER AT DEATH VALLEY

Liv Braiker

176



## AT THE SPIRAL JETTY



## THE FIRST FITTING

177

## EAT YOUR HEART OUT





## GOOSEFLESH

Liv Braiker

178



179

## BREATHE

Aaron Linkogle



WELCOME TO  
YOUR DOOM

Sierra Jade Newbold



ROAD KILL

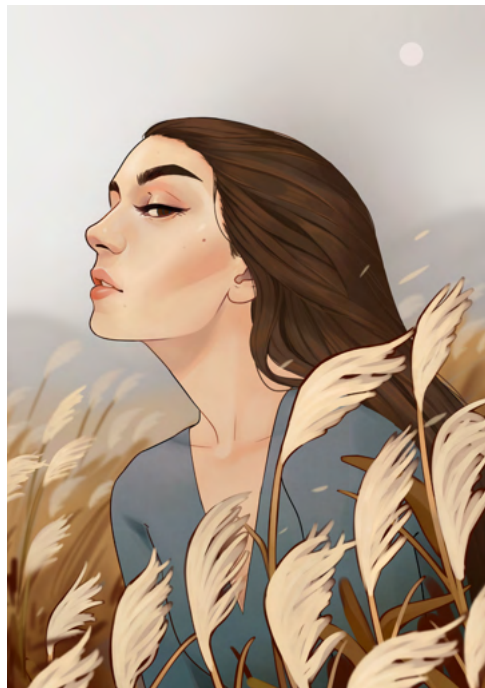


THE TEMPLE



**MAGPIE**

Mary Ellen Draper

**THE KEY TO  
THINKING****LADY LA  
TROMPERIE****FAUX ALBUM  
COVER**



## COTTON CANDY SKIES

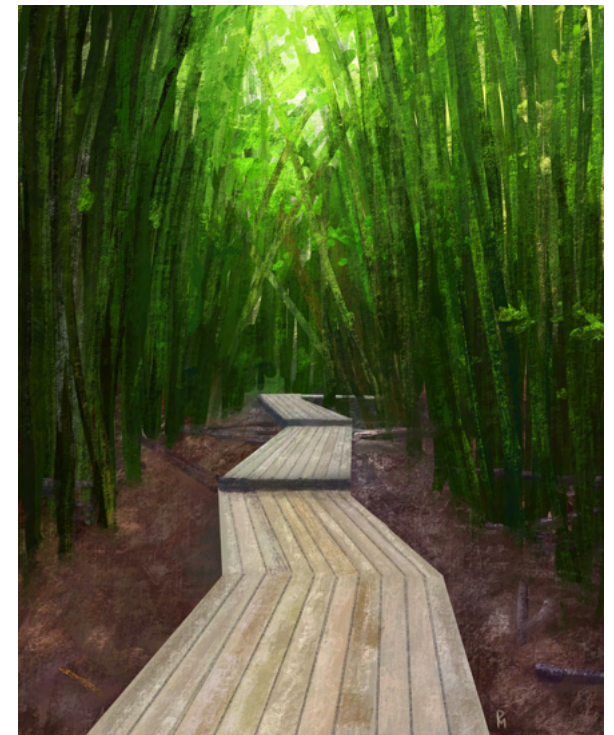
Morgan Jennifer Jensen



## RAINY REFLECTIONS



## HIDDEN PATHS







## NIGHTTIME DUNKER

Nick Sahagun

## WHEN CATS ATTACK



## THE CREW

James Culbertson



## BONNEVILLE





## FINALS WEEK

Andrew Lee



188

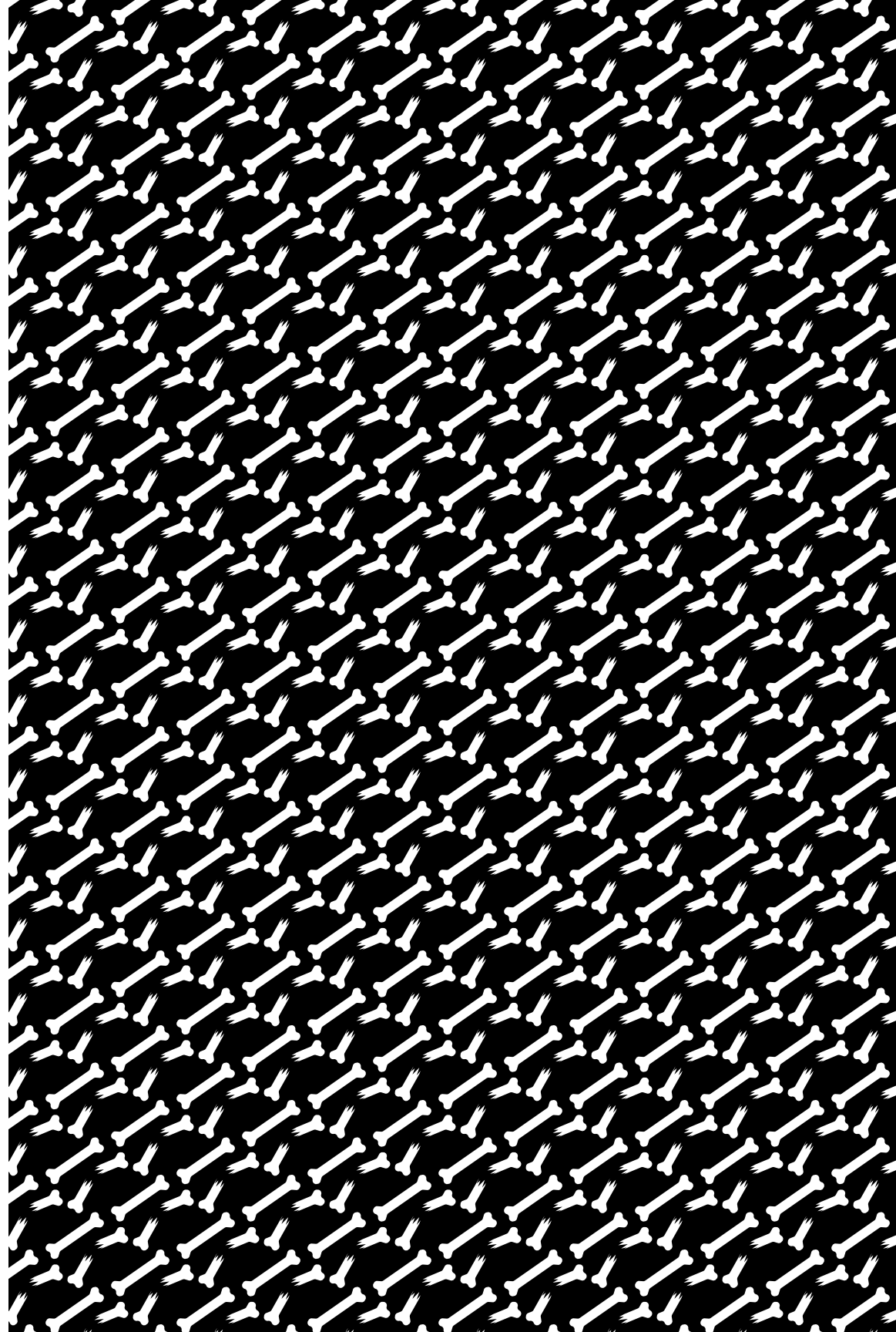
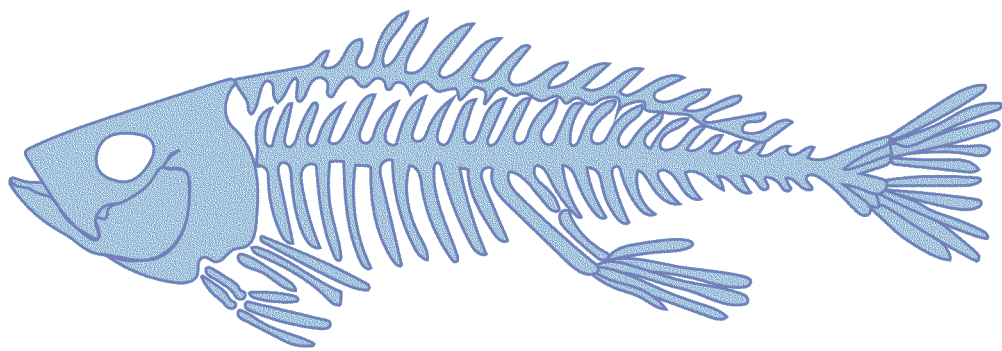
## OCEANSIDE TOWN



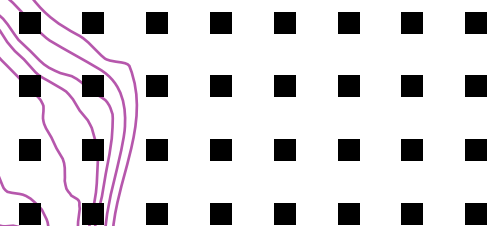
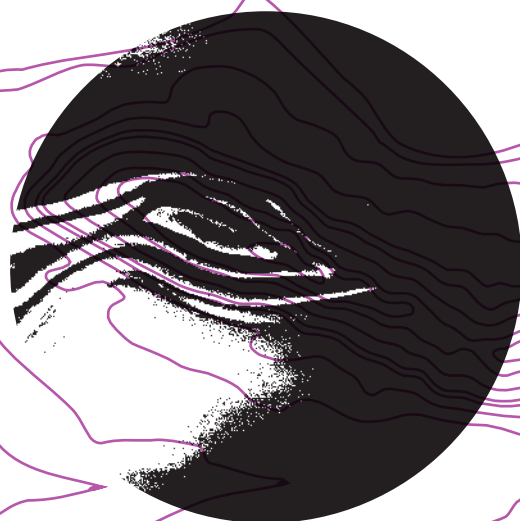
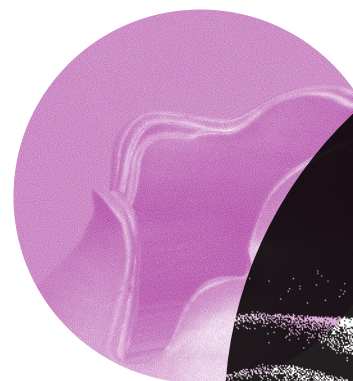
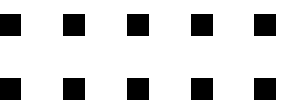
189



## ARRIVAL







## EDITOR'S CHOICE

# Let Us

Let us shed our skins and dance  
with our jittery bones and pumping organs  
beneath the light of God's false eye.

Let us braid each other's hair  
and kiss our thin lips together in prayer,  
for I pray only to you, to you  
and the water in your eyes.

Our skin is too thin; let us be  
snakes. Let us wrap our bodies  
like tide pools 'round each other and  
twist until there's nothing left of us  
but seashells and wet sand. Let us  
be snakes and uncoil. Let us  
be snakes and tempt each other  
from heaven with the promise of  
apple-flavored lips.

Your hands are no bigger than mine.  
Our lips are the same painted red.  
And I can see your heart caged behind your white  
cracked bones holding out its hands for me.  
Dance with me through this languid air. Let us  
dance as the wind carries away our skin like  
two ethereal projections searching for a  
single fine word. Let us kiss and fold and  
tumble. Let us unstitch and re-sew, let us  
write each other with poetry. And let us  
become, my love, let us become.

Taste my apple lips and I'll kiss your snake-like skin.  
Braid your long brown hair with mine.  
Let us kiss like lovers and let us combine like lovers  
beneath the light of God's false eye.

# Gum

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

Rian  
Kasner

How I love is like the flavor of gum  
Intense and wonderful at first,  
But slowly fading until there is none  
There are things that I know  
And so, I can't start chewing your gum  
Because eventually the flavor will fade  
And my mouth will go numb  
I'll have to throw it away  
With only the memory to last on my tongue  
So please,  
Don't try to part my lips for your gum  
Because as much as I want to taste the flavor,  
I don't want to throw out this one

# A Boy's Best Friend

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

Beau  
Barton

I too watched as Janet Leigh unbuttoned her blouse,  
my eyes staring through the curved glass screen.  
The black lace was snug, creasing her white back,  
teaching my innocent mind what I couldn't grasp.

I sat cross-legged on the soft living room rug,  
and ignored the fresh lunch mother had fixed.  
PB&J, apple slices, 2% milk in a Dixie cup,  
all falling away below the figure in the frame.

I was there in the shower as Janet washed her hair,  
pearl nails gliding through the steam and strands.  
Water drummed the tub like a lullaby of fingers,  
veiling the killer's steps behind calm, wet slaps.

Curtain rings screamed with my own young heart,  
a kitchen knife gleamed into the once serene bath.  
I couldn't comprehend it, the betrayal and the lies,  
the killer soaked in envy with a mother as a mask.

Streams of blood spiraled over cold, pale porcelain,  
like childhood's lollipop melting down the drain.  
I am alone, changed, fearing when adulthood crept  
through my door—a single eye that can't close.

Elizabeth  
Armstrong

Now

*Now*  
There is color  
*Cradling clouds and shining blue*  
And green blurring across the space  
*She moves across*

*Then*  
There was a sky  
*An abyss of heavy dark*  
The pavement rough under her feet  
And *she stood* still

It's quiet  
A heart beats steady  
Calm  
Easy  
*Now*

It screamed  
The tears down a cheek  
Warm  
Confused  
*Then*

For the sake of brevity  
To save the space on paper  
To give words room  
That are more powerful  
And relevant to a world with  
So much noise

Just cling to this idea that  
Your eyes will dry  
And decide to look up  
To see blue

Your heart will slow  
A rhythm that won't match  
Weighted black

For the sake of him and her  
To preserve our precious time  
To hold minutes  
That are used much better  
Than a woman too young to know  
Anything wise

Just take away from these words

*Then*  
Fog was thick  
Constant  
Grey  
*An abyss of heavy dark*

*She stood*

*Now*  
Light shines down  
Hopeful  
Gold  
*Cradling clouds and shining blue*

*She moves*

# Realization

The capacity to love is not a weakness.

Once, a boy called her immature because she cried when she listened to “Falling Like the Stars,” by James Arthur. Happy tears, but sad ones too, because we all want to not be afraid To say those words.

Another said he didn’t have time for the affection she showed him because he needed space. They lived eight hours away from each other.

She begged a boy with green eyes who beat his mom to please

Please

Please

Don’t leave. The car was filled with smoke and he left anyway.

But it’s a gift.

Because

That same love she showed those men

Found her sister, naked, an empty pill bottle next to her on the floor  
 and held the sad body as they rushed to the emergency room.

That same love she showed those men

Built a friendship with a short blond girl with hair that dropped to her waist.

One that’s lasted 9 years

Without a fight,

Even when that friend dated her brother

and she broke his heart.

That same love she showed those men

Sealed letters she mailed to her grandmother trapped in her wheelchair

12 hours away, but still best friends

“It’s what keeps me going,”

and she died, but the letters lived in a box.

That same love she showed those men

Still lives in the girl who begged a boy with green eyes who beat his mom to please

Please

Please

Don’t leave.

Because it’s a gift that doesn’t reflect the girl and her success,

If it’s not returned by a man.



# Playing Guns

---

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

---

**Beau  
Barton**

We played guns in the backyard,  
taking cover in the suburban rubble  
of rusted water heaters, broken  
bicycles, and empty cattle trailers.

Our orange-tipped barrels targeting  
each other with naive fingers pulling  
crescent moon triggers until caps  
snapped, the smell of burnt matches.

And then the screams of who won:  
who was alive and who was dead?  
Time pushed its palms against us,  
dividing friends as it likes to do.

He would play guns in Afghanistan,  
clearing houses in the heat and dust  
until one tripwire would turn the air  
into fire, the wind into razor blades.

And when he finally came home  
under the nation's striped sheet,  
I wouldn't attend his funeral  
or stand within the silent masses.

I would drive the desert highway,  
thinking about the crack of caps:  
who was alive and who was dead?  
My guilt fueling me like gasoline.

# Rotten Filling

---

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

---

**Beau  
Barton**

her skin sparkles  
below her 1920s pearls  
her long tassel skirt

snags on the branches  
she bakes her lovely pies  
with rotten apples

toasts her crystal glass  
sipping her cider champagne  
to avoid smearing red lips

she picks her teeth  
with cockroach feet and lights  
candelabras in tortured trees

begging for a guest  
to greet the empty hallways  
of her art deco cottage

a flaky golden crust  
with life's worms crawling  
within sweet filling

like a princess she is  
a witch in the forest wishing  
some love might find her

# A Guide to the Uinta National Forest

Announce your arrival gently. Do not drive the beaten paths. You will not like what attaches itself beneath the wheels.

Any sustenance you bring with you will be absorbed whether it is by you or not. Keep a close eye.

Bring no more than four people with you.

The trees have eyes and limbs and veins and they will look and grab and pulse and you must breathe them in. Breathe.

Do not touch the streams after dark. The rocks you have thrown in will have grown to resent you. They will pull you in to rest in the mud just as you have done to them.

Bridges are safe as long as you do not look at their bellies. Walk as if you are safe and do not know what you are stepping on. They will know if you do.

Fire is welcome, but do not look away. If the smoke gets in your eyes, do not look away. The wood is trying to taunt you, do not let it dominate you or you will join the pyres.

When putting out a fire, do not leave a single ember. That single ember will grow lonely. It will reach out with its dying breath for love and it will take the mountain with it.

Do not shoot the deer. They remember.

When hiking in the daylight, thank the bugs. Whisper to the bees, step around the worms, and offer some bark to the beetles. If you neglect this and invade their homes impolitely, do not be surprised to find them in yours.

Sign the visitors log to become immortal.

If you must camp, remember what lies beneath you. Carbon moves and gathers and tics. Wear earplugs.

Climb the hills and trees if you must. If the branches do not get smaller and the hill does not crest, turn around and leave immediately.

Littering will never be tolerated.

Do not carve the trees. They will swell and bulge, bark cracking around the wound. Their eyes will widen and their roots will twist to follow you. Tread carefully and do not trip.

If you encounter what you believe to be a bear, do not think otherwise. It is a bear. Do not look too closely at its feet or eyes. Its movement may seem too fast and its spine may stretch too far. Stop looking. It is a bear.

Timpanogos Cave is a beautiful stop in your stay here. If you touch the stalagmites, wash your hands in the water before leaving. The chemicals you will carry will never leave you. No matter how hard you scrub or how deep you burn.

Fishing in the mountain lakes can relax you. Stay relaxed.

If you emotionally discard something in the lake, your secrets are safe with Her.

At your campsite, you will know when you have overstayed your welcome. The rocks are old. They will bleed. Do not touch the blood. Pack your things and leave immediately.

The earth is not yours. It belongs to Them. They allow you to stay as long as they see fit. Do not overstep your bounds.

# Atalanta

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Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

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**Madeleine  
Walters**

Last night a faceless goddess  
Visited me in a dream  
Another appeared beside her  
Beautiful and awful  
The blank face  
Issued a warning  
“Never stop for a golden apple.”  
The other one laughed

I started running  
But I felt strings on my back  
Keeping me in place  
The luminous one  
Moved me like a marionette  
When the apples appeared  
My body picked them up  
Until my arms were full  
Of rotting fruit

# Backpackers

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Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

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**Jessica  
Hanneman**

They talked on the trail  
About the trees  
The trees that grew tall  
And sturdy without the help of anyone else.  
They talked about the view  
The view that went on and on  
Valleys full of autumn colors  
Mountains in the distance and beyond the demanding desert.  
They breathed in harmony with each other  
In and out with each other  
With the breeze.  
They jumped in the lake  
Cold touch, water dripping off their skin  
They drank from the stream,  
The water pure and sweet  
That kept them alive.  
Touched their lips.  
They slept, in hammocks,  
On the ground,  
Beneath the stars.  
They left hiking home,  
No trace  
Like they had never existed here at all.

# Breaking Up: An Index

## A

**Auditorium-** We fell in love in the auditorium of a high school and the auditorium flooded in response.

## B

**Breakfast-** Do you want to do nothing with me?

**Brooklyn Nine-Nine-** You were the Jake to my Amy, but like Jake and Amy, we jumped into each other's hearts without consulting our minds first. So when you wanted kids and I wanted a career, you decided to stick it through and 'change my mind'. I struggled to find a satisfying end to our episode. You thought we were still in the cold open.

### Batman

1. **Adam West-** Falling in love in the sixties was easier. Every woman wanted you no matter how similar you were to their father and every man had a drawn on eight pack and a sixties sense of 'chivalry'.
2. **Lego-** The modern games tend to get it more right, they play out the reality of the pining and the comedic desperation, the preferable option of befriending rather than dating.
3. **Christian Bale-** I have settled into the prison of my guilt, and the climb to freedom is more than I am capable of.

### Blankets

My aunt made that blanket. She sewed it herself, fabric pieced together with blood, sweat, tears, and thread. I have cried on that blanket, used the corners to wipe up bloody noses, wrapped myself in that blanket and prayed the darkness away. We went on a picnic, we both brought our blankets, and ended up switching partway through. My aunt's blanket is no longer mine. Your blanket isn't mine either.

## C

### Children

1. **Duncan-** In complete honesty, Duncan was only a dog, and an imaginary one at that, but that never made me love him any less.
2. **Gwyn-** You would shudder to believe that it was Gwyn, the perfect combination

of our two spirits, that talked me into giving our love life a few months or weeks or days or hours or minutes to breathe. Blame her, if you want, but don't count her responsible. She breathed an idea into the corporeal world, I am the one who gave it a home.

3. **Lucas-** Falling in love must have been the easiest thing you had ever done. No with me, I tried your patience, but with Lucas, and with Alta, and with the plastic Barbie house of a world that we lived in before our inevitable graduation.
4. **Sara-** I called her 'baby' and she called me 'mama' and it felt lovely to be valued separately from you and as a caregiver. I may never have children, but I will always have Sara.

**The Crucible-** You will use this play, these months of pain to torture and guilt me into taking your heart back into my chest, but the truth of the matter is you were not hurting the most. In The Crucible, you were a man with a claim to harm, and I was called a witch until I became one.

## D

### Disney

1. **Hercules (rel. 1997)-** There is a theory that LGBT+ people tend to flock to movies like Hercules because we relate to the feeling of being different from the world around us. The truth of the matter is: I always flocked to Hercules not because I needed a place to belong, but because I found the music magical.
2. **Pirates of the Caribbean (rel. 2003)-** The first kiss. The end of a fight. The first day of the rest of your life. The end of a year feeling lost and torn and broken, like an old flyer handed to a distraught commuter. The first of a thousand promises. The end of a hundred lies.
3. **The Princess and the Frog (rel. 2009)-** You can fall in love with a song and use it to carry you through a movie. I can fall in love with a theme and let it influence the rest of my life. I can't tell which of us is in the wrong.

## G

**Guys and Dolls-** Technically, the first time I met your brother was in his performance of Guys and Dolls. Now, he hates plays and I hate referring to women

as Dolls and you try desperately to push everyone back in time before reality broke our perception of each other.

## H

### Halloween

Three years in a row, the worst day of my life, and yet I wouldn't take back a single costume or heartbreak. It all led me right to your side and then back to my own side.

Sometimes, the most convincing costume is confidence.

**The Haunting of Hill House (rel. 2018)**- "No live organism can continue to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality." Our love is an organism and we are not sane.

**High School**- The funny thing about high school is that, while you may find who you are in the moment, it never lasts beyond your graduation ceremony.

**The Hogle Zoo**- The best date we've ever gone on. You decided I was a red panda, small and distracted, and I took the metaphor because I agreed. I was a red panda, trapped in a gorgeous cage and begging the universe for an exit. Not from you, though. You were too lovely to ever want to leave.

## I

**Initiative**- Something you never took.

## J

**Jazz**- The music of improvisation, of trusting your gut, of pushing your luck until it runs out, of two years spent guessing at the next step until we ran out of steps to guess at.

**Jacket**- Your jacket is still in my bed. Your name still scrawled on my heart with a knife. I bleed at the mention, the idea of you. You are every inch of every wall, each single molecule floating in the air. You are in every history book, a crusade on my very being. You are in every political speech, a charge to return to old comforts. You are the world and everyone in it, and I know I should just get rid of it, but your jacket is still in my bed.

John Mulaney

"We're here with seven-year-old John Mulaney who fended off a kidnapper earlier today. How did you do it, John?" / "Well, thank ya for askin'. I used the Bittenbinder method"

"... Now I've thrown him off his rhythm..."

"Cause as any Chicago cop will tell ya, a phone book doesn't leave bruises."

"Well, that was seven-year-old John Mulaney, currently being sued for po-lice brutality."

## L

**Laughter**- You made me laugh. Even before I liked you, you made me laugh.

**Libertarianism**- Like the bulk of politics, like everything that came from your mouth, like the color of the sky and the sun shining above us and why everyone around me loves skiing, I never could have understood libertarianism, no matter how much I tried. And trust me, I tried.

## M

**Macaroni and Cheese**- You don't have a favorite food, so I had to make you mac n' cheese for our anniversary, and nothing about that day felt the way I wanted it to.

**March**- The third month of the year, the sixth month of our relationship, and the first month we dove in headfirst and couldn't look back.

### Marvel

1. **Captain America (rel. 2011)**- The First avenger.
2. **Captain Marvel (rel. 2019)**- Your brothers never understood just how powerful this movie could be, but you let me squeal about it until your ear fell off.
3. **Endgame (rel. 2019)**- It was spoiled before we even got a chance to touch it.
4. **Infinity War (rel. 2018)**- The problem with going to Infinity War on a date is that you will feel miserable afterward.
5. **Spiderman: Far From Home (rel. 2019)**- The day I knew we were going to end before you were ready. The day you thought everything was just as it should be. The day I tried and failed to get you to make a decision. Again.
6. **Spiderman: Into the Spideverse (rel. 2018)**- Stylistically, nothing has ever left me in stunned silence like the art of the Spideverse and the snow that came later, that trapped me at your house and broke off the top of my car



while putting small cracks in the reality of our relationship.

7. **Thor: The Dark World (rel. 2013)**- I'd seen Dark World twice before we watched it together. I'm sorry I lied to you. To be fair, that isn't the worst lie I'd ever told you.

## N

**Nat King Cole**- And it's all because of you, I have a list of songs I can't listen to.

**New York City**- I was sick, my nose stuffed, my throat chafed, and not a single person on that trip gave me a chance to do the things I wanted to do, but you, like the city of New York, opened yourself up to me and helped me discover some truer form of joy.

## P

**Pet Names**- Darling, queen-king, your highness, J, hot stuff, lessblue, dork.

**Politics**- The first rule of Fight Club is: you do not talk about Fight Club.

**Prom**

You don't like making plans and I know that, but it's the effort that counts. It's not about the outcome, it's about the time you spend making a day for me. You never understood that.

You like touching me, you like to wrap your arm around my waist, or put a hand on my thigh as I drive, and I can't stand it half the time. I'll never understand that.

## R

**Resurrection**- You ended mine and Lydia's fight with a kiss and credited yourself with our continued friendship. Lydia and I would have made up anyway. I didn't know if your confidence in our relationship's resurrection was a 'bit' or reality. Your personality was prone to pride and I didn't know how to read your tone back then.

## S

**Safety**- I shouldn't be so scared. I shouldn't be so anxious. I should know that safety lives and dies in your arms. I should know you are the one place where I can be me.

**Shane Madej**- We laughed, but I think a part of us admired the way he shouted to the sky, daring an old god to return to earth, to fight him on their turf, to prove him wrong, to finally let him lose.

### Southern Utah University

Southern Utah was our plan, our next step.

Southern Utah was the place where we fell apart, where our goals and our plans went to war, and we were no longer a team so much as we were two opposing armies. The break was a Trojan horse I sent into your city. There is no way to deconstruct the horse now that you've taken it in.

**South Towne Mall**- There are a hundred photos of us minutes after I finished crying, or you finished yelling, or the pigeons on the glass at the mall staged a coup against their religious leader and pushed him off of the top of the skylight.

**Spotify**- I know I should change my password, but I'm afraid to kick you out of my life. I'm not ready for that. Not yet.

## T

**Temple Square**- A part of me still wonders if we'll make our way down to Temple Square this year.

**Timing**- Ours was never perfect. You waited for me, holding onto a rope for years and years and when I finally grabbed the other end, you only held on tighter.

## U

**Unforgettable**- That's why, darling, it's incredible that someone so unforgettable thinks that I am unforgettable too.

## W

**Waterloo**- We may have been a Waterloo. We may have been a thousand different wars. You always knew more about history than I did.

**The Wizard of Oz**- You always looked good in a suit. I always looked good in skin-tight leather pants. We always looked good on Instagram.

**White Christmas (rel. 1954)**- Christmas is the only time I play my guitar anymore, but I will learn every song from your favorite musical just to see if it makes you smile.

# butterfly

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Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

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**Anthony  
J.  
Braun**

*he* named you butterfly –  
 “mariposa,” *he* called you  
 so much so that even the innocence  
 of you stopping to admire a monarch  
 or a swarm of them  
 is tainted with *him* – conjures up *him*  
*i* blank *you* for that

# Dear Friend

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Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

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**Brittany  
Dunn**

Your eyes  
 Must have collected sea mist  
 And your body  
 Was made of marble  
 With your hair  
 The color of soil  
 And your mind and soul  
 Shaped delicately from stardust  
 How, dear, can you not  
 Love yourself  
 When you were  
 Crafted from the Earth  
 - I wrote this poem for you, but I’m taking it back for myself

# Shades of Memory

Rose:

The color of chubby blushing cheeks.  
The face I picture  
To accompany the newly discovered  
Infant held within.

Navy Blue:

The color of the sky.  
Stars twinkle overhead  
As the news wells inside me,  
Spilling over as my husband returns home.

Buttercream Yellow:

The color of the walls.  
Paint still wet,  
My husband's arm  
gently cradling my enlarged belly.

Black:

The color of the road.  
Tires screeching,  
Metal biting metal,  
The anguished howling as loud  
As my internal screams.

White:

The color of the beeping machine,  
Proclaiming my heartbeat as an anthem.  
The first thing  
My weary eyes meet.

Brown:

The color of the nurse's scrubs,  
Whose face fell when I ask  
Why my belly felt empty  
And the chair beside me vacant.

Gray:

The color of the oppressive clouds  
That languish overhead.  
Do they know  
Their color matches the graves?

# Gas Planet Brain

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

Andrea  
Call

My breath is blood.  
My blood is air.  
There's a busy frantic dying thing shackled to the inside surface of my skull,  
Trying to grow webs of connections to replace the brain  
That it just realized was nothing but a giant gas planet,  
Not a rock,  
Not a stable thing,  
Not an anchor.  
Jupiter's breath is blood too,  
A bloody sea three times the size of this whole planet and I think  
Jupiter is a terrible brain to have.  
To not have.

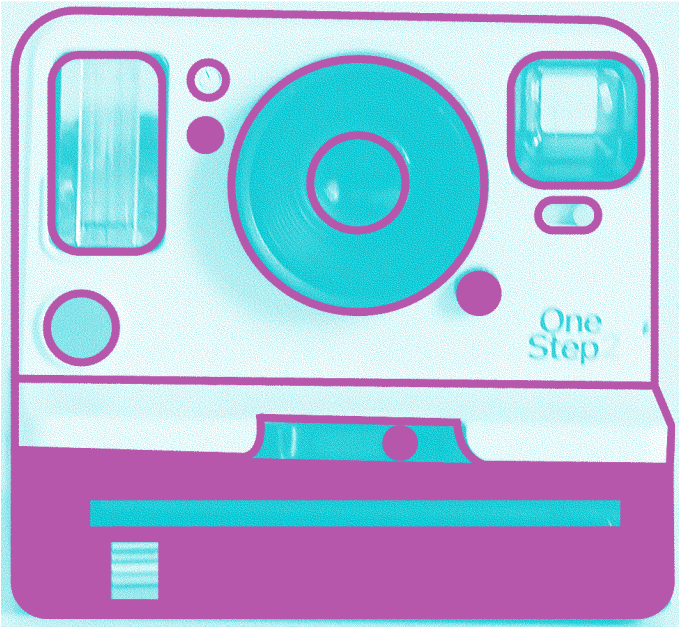
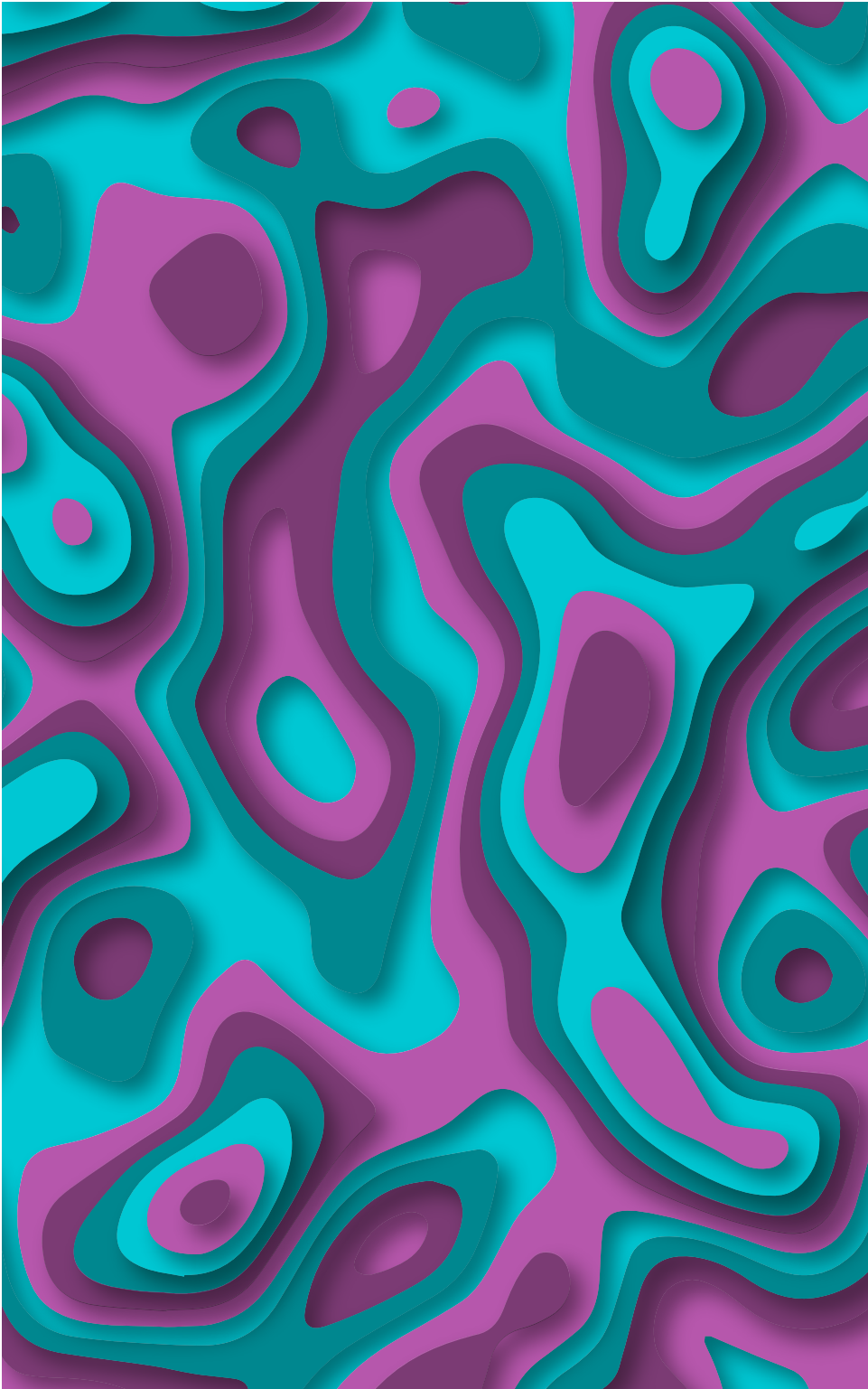
# greedy

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

Anthony  
J.  
Braun

poetry isn't painless  
it's poignant, frail, fruitless  
like my heart – helpless, hapless, hopeless  
drying like a flower,  
bruising like a fruit  
i bask in your divine,  
masking sorrows for the marrow  
line by line, i want you mine,  
but i'm so drunk on you,  
i forget there was ever a *him* or *others*  
and love never overlooks – it lingers  
and loiters in the dark recesses of the heart  
remembering this, i am anchored,  
sober to the reality that love like this  
has a half-life,  
no matter how radioactive  
sober to the fact that *he* and *they* will  
always have a warm little place in *your* heart  
and even though there's room for all of us,  
*i* hate sharing





# Helene (of Sparta)

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Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

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**Madeleine  
Walters**

I wake to a clammy palm covering my mouth  
Paris' eyes are feverish,  
Possessive and possessed  
Coarse fabric chafes against my cheeks  
And bloodied wrists  
My husband sleeps while I'm carried away

The ship reeks of rotting wood and fish  
They treat me like a whore,  
Leering at me  
I feel fingers on my skin  
Even as I sleep with the door locked,  
One person with keys

Paris visits me every night,  
But I am not clay to be molded  
Into a royal Trojan concubine  
I am not a trinket to be stolen  
And added to a collection  
Of beautiful things

Know that when I'm let off this ship  
That I can't be tamed  
I am not an animal or wild thing  
For you to shape in your image  
I will burn Troy with nothing  
But a candlestick

# I Breathe you in

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Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

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**Jessica  
Hanneman**

I breathe you in,  
Killing me softly  
I breathe you in,  
Knowing the warning  
Labels by heart  
Caution you say,  
But I heed none  
Small in my hands begging  
Kiss me, kiss me  
This addiction to the dangerous  
Stop me, Stop me  
But I know I won't stop,  
Not until the tar  
Fills my empty lungs.

# Henrietta Mara and the Socks Her Father Bought Her

Henrietta Mara walked to the edge of the lake.

Henrietta unlaced her shoes and tossed them onto the moon-drunk sand.

She peeled away her long wool socks and let her toes sink into the coarse sand, her skin a murky grey underneath the ceiling of stars.

Her father had bought her these socks.

He had bought them, he'd told her, for hiking in the summertime. He'd take her, he'd said, to the same spot his father used to take him. Where he and his father had lain out in the open air next to a fire they had gathered the wood for, built, and struck a match to set it all aflame. Where her grandfather had told her father about Galaway and the shades of green and grey in Ireland that they didn't have here. And the way the wind used to move through the grass on the hills, muttering in Gaelic too old to understand. Where her grandfather had told her father Irish tales, some old, some new, some her grandfather had merely seen on television and absorbed into his mythology. This was where her father became a man. Where he learned what fish to eat and which to set free. Where he learned the stories of his family, of his people, of a culture he wasn't a part of, but his blood still yearned for. Where her grandfather had taught him how to swear, how to love a woman, and how to hate that same woman after taking her to bed and muttering into her red curls of forever.

Henrietta's father never took her. He never told her about Ireland, or the women he had loved and hated. He only bought her socks.

Henrietta Mara scrunched up the socks and threw them in the lake. She wouldn't need them anymore. She hoped some fish would get tangled in the bundle and pull the socks down to the bottom of the lake, never to resurface.

She touched the water with the tip of her big toe. It was much colder than the cool spring night. There must be some winter snow that fed into this lake. A shiver ran through her body. She peeled away her jacket, hesitating before dropping it behind her.

She peeled away her dress.

She peeled away her underwear and stood naked on the beach.

And then she peeled away her skin.

She folded it down like taking off gloves. She let the skin dangle from the bones of her fingers before falling to the ground. She peeled off the skin of her stomach, the skin of her legs, and the skin of her face. She peeled it all away until she stood, blood and bone, under the moonlight.

And then Henrietta Mara walked into the lake.

She let the water curl around her, seeping away her blood and chilling her bones. She waded deep below the surface, letting the water swallow her with a mighty gulp. She let the water press against her body with a painful pressure. She closed her eyes to the darkness of the water and let out the last bits of air her lungs had stored. Henrietta Mara submerged herself in the cold water of the lake and wondered to herself which would be found first, her body or the socks her father had bought her.

# KingFisher

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

Jessica  
Hanneman

Cheeky chirps of the kingfisher  
Tease us, lead us on  
Along the trees and autumn leaves.  
Proud puffed up,  
Standing out,  
Barefoot on his porch  
He hikes or bikes and flies,  
Burrowed down on the banks  
Of Navajo Lake.  
Dives quickly and confidently  
For fish to kiss.  
Laughter and sunlight ,  
Beautiful blue gray feathers  
Against the orange afternoon sky.  
Shaggy crested bird,  
Hair all a mess of blonde curls  
And a butterfly wing earring.

# Mt. Haleakalā

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

Ivelynn  
Noel

I caught a taste of heaven  
And it was colder than I expected  
Fresh and full on my tongue  
The sharp air bit my cheeks  
And woke me from a slumber I wasn't aware of  
The sunlight in my mouth  
Trickled slowly down my throat  
Filling my stomach  
And warming my core  
I stretched my fingers to the open sky  
And I begged for her secrets  
But she just smiled warmly  
And told me to wait  
And find them out on my own



# My Place

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Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

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**Jaidyn  
Crookston**

Those white waves of Rockaway Beach in early morning  
when I ran wild with sand pelting my legs, creating  
dark streaks up the back and flying into my wind-whipped hair  
that trailed behind me, imitating the wings of hungry seagulls  
that gathered around hoping for a snack. The salt air tickled  
my nose and the taste of coming rain coated my tongue,  
matching the gray clouds that gathered above. I imagined  
playful ghosts appearing in the fog that  
enveloped me as I raced over the squeaky sand,  
and I saw pirate ships out near the twin rocks, slicing  
through the white waves and landing ashore in front of me  
—the little girl running wildly through the broken shells—  
then my grandma’s call, looking for the adventurer  
who had disappeared far ahead into the spreading mist.

# Oracle of Delphi

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Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

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**Madeleine  
Walters**

To be a prophetess of old  
Marble shrines,  
Gilded with whispers of praise  
Bangles on arms  
And ankles and throat  
Empty eyes staring at walls  
Lips murmuring nonsense  
“It’s a gift from the gods.”  
Tell that to Cassandra  
Cursed by Apollo  
Endowment turned liability  
Tell that to every woman  
Taken from her home, never to return  
Sanity fractured  
It is no mosaic of broken pieces  
Tell that to us  
Who see too much and  
Understand too little  
Every person blessed by the divine  
Faces a life of struggles  
It is no blessing, it is a downfall  
This gift shows the end  
Of the gods  
And the reign of man  
Destined, *designed*  
By the Fates themselves

**Sherisse  
 Alheli  
 Pendleton**

# ouroboros

there was never anything until  
 suddenly there was, and  
 it turns out it had all  
 been here all along  
 matter creates matter destroys  
 matter, but tell me,  
 what's the matter, darling?  
 don't you know that i can see the moon  
 in your eyes, all craters and imperfection  
 and life and strength and love?  
 did you know that i can see the beginnings  
 of myself all the way up until it ends with  
 you, you, you, you with your  
 vulcan love of everything  
 they say that love is all sunny  
 days and green fields and sweet honey  
 but don't they realize that honey  
 comes from bitter, harsh stings,  
 don't they realize that the ocean is  
 so much more than lazy, sweet tides?  
 if you have taken a coastal nap and  
 woken up to the soft, stern warning of  
 saltwater licking at your ankles,  
 telling you that while life originated in those  
 saline waves, life is just as sure to fade there,  
 then they would know  
 if you have ever had your mother yell at you  
 for staying out too late without texting back  
 all anxious anger and restless worry  
 if you have ever yelled back at your mother  
 only to immediately remember every single  
 hand-crafted piece of her heart

that she ever gifted you  
 then you would know  
 the ocean gifted us with the same salinity  
 that we carry within our blood  
 and yet she is still more than able and willing  
 to gouge out stone  
 to round out glass  
 we leave marks on everything we love, you know,  
 whether we realize it or not -  
 and the way the sun leaves little pyrite-gold flecks  
 on the deep lapis of our skin proves it  
 we break off flower heads press them between pages  
 to remember  
 we carve letters into trees and leave locks on bridges  
 to remember  
 we ruffle sleep-tousled hair and leave bruises and bites  
 to remember  
 that we are alive;  
 that we have been there;  
 that we will always exist;  
 we will return to the stars from which we came  
 and i, for one, look forward to spending the rest of never  
 with the likes of you.

# Oxcarbazepine

## Twice Daily

I fear I'm going mad.

I've got heaven on my forehead and a devil tooth inside my mouth. Angelic clouds are a halo tangling with the tendrils of my brain, but the feathers stick between my thoughts. And that tooth. It throbs. It throbs and lets out a sinner's howl. I fear I'm going mad.

I feel my body buzzing. A thousand termites beneath the surface. Crawling in hoards, in waves, in great furies and itching ramblings.

My veins are too full of oxygen.

I swallowed a match to steal that oxygen, but it burnt my throat. I tried to cough it out, but only ashes spilled from my lips.

My body isn't decaying. My body isn't rot. My body is flesh, my body is blood, my body is teeth and tongue and eyebrow. But I'm being cooked at much too high a temperature and my blood is boiling. I can feel it. I can feel it.

I am God. My fist can smash a mountain. I can coerce your prayers. I can feed your empty belly with the coals in my eyes. I can scream until the clouds shake, letting in the sun. I can baptize my skin and peel it clean, reinvent, rebirth, resurrection.

But my skin I use up too fast

This pale white skin cannot contain a god

This pale white skin

This pale white skin. It's mine. It's my skin. These scars and cellulite. I broke this nail. I ripped my lip. I have felt every inch of this body but I cannot recognize it in a mirror.

I fear... I fear I'm going mad.

I've swallowed cigarettes, chasing down the match.

I can't make it quiet if I don't move. I can't lower the volume of my own mind.

How much salt can I wring out of these two eyes? If I twist them tight like towels from the shower? Or mash them like a jam?

My body has cast anchor.

I could open my mouth and let in the water. Replenish my body with lake water. Fill myself until my eyes turn blue. Fill myself until there's no room for anything but water.

To you, I am singular. You can label my anatomy. But I... I am a thousand bodies roasting. A thousand bodies sinking to the bottom of the water bed. And one. One. One body that's going mad. One body that's going mad. One body that's going mad.

Two arms. Two legs. Lips, I remember you. I can't see the eyes... I don't remember the jaw. I can't count the teeth nor know the hairs on my head. But there's something about that neck...

I am multitudinous. Too vast for near sighted eyes. I am clamorous. I am alone.

The clouds have parted from my mind, the tooth has lost its pang. This could be it, the day I sail away. How much ibuprofen does it take to coat my mind like sound-proof walls? Rip away my fingernails, dig below the surface. Who needs skin when I've got blood who needs blood when I have oceans and mountains and a tooth that rot inside my mouth. A halo wrapped tightly around my neck. A god looking down at me with the eyes of my father. Who needs blood when I can drown myself in the volume of my mind.

I have no fears anymore. No fears to count the days. I live with uneasy certainties and the distinct smell of cigarettes.

I live and I die and I swallow the moon with my lips parted like a gaping fish. I live and I die and I am going mad. I am mad. I am mad and I am me. I am mad and I am skin and bones and water and a single sharp scream. I fear...I fear I've been mad all along.

# Picnic Parenting

I.  
 I wear a potato salad smile, yellow  
 Kind of squishy but soft like a  
 “my mom makes it better” – don’t you know?  
 Still disappointing, but a quiet type  
 Like you were expecting not to taste  
 What you wanted potatoes to taste like

II.  
 My finger gets stuck in the hole  
 Of a plastic picnic table with the bench  
 Attached at the side – you know the ones  
 That leave honeycomb crescent marks on  
 Bare thighs you promised mom you wouldn’t  
 Bring today like she expected you to listen

III.  
 Her hand is heavy plastic on my shoulder  
 A squeeze and go somewhere in between  
 A sunflower yellow and something hole-like  
 And squished empty. I pull my finger out  
 and walk away only imagining the look  
 on her face seeing the skin below my shorts  
 Doesn’t make the potato salad mustard  
 Taste like Jessica’s mom mixed it instead

# Potassium-Based Chemical Retransformation

Yesterday you were slow  
 Down crosswalk sign  
 Yellow and curved like an  
 Apostrophe, comma, slow  
 Down there are children here  
 Avoiding you.  
 Today you are still curved  
 But speckled  
 Brown leopard print hickies  
 Speak of the heavy kiss of air  
 In the heat of nighttime chemistry  
 A disease, it moves on  
 To your cousins  
 Huddled around you  
 -ex stealers and tattletales  
 A medley of thrown fists  
 That don’t have any weight but  
 leave marks all the same.  
 Tomorrow you will still be curved  
 But shriveled slightly and brown  
 Halfway to decomposed and  
 Sweeter than you started and  
 you’ll be perfect to mash and  
 blend and shape and combine and  
 bake into a breakfast delicacy and  
 I’ll look at you fresh  
 out of the oven and give you  
 a new name: banana bread muffin



## i. take one

fragrant petals float around the endless spring of my subconscious and i think, yeah, i can roll with this.

pink and yellow and blue. pastels abound. no money but really, isn't it better this way? lunches packed by hand paired with sticky notes and buns so sugary they're sickening. nothing but the sickly sweet promise of obedience. nothing can go wrong. the naivety of smiling at strangers and expecting a wave back.

sunny skies and the taste of strawberry cream. picking blowballs and trying to catch starry seeds on tongues. dropping flip phones and setting up blanket tents in the backyard. tasting the lilac on the air while the sprinklers turn on. pink clouds and yellow daffodils and blue skies. could things get any better than this.

the sun sets. the pink clouds turn red. yellow wilts to brown and blue fades to black. skinned knees and concrete-torn hands. misplaced bandaids and the sting of alcohol disinfectant. stinging voices and mud all over once-brand-new lace socks. oh. so this is what spring is about. haunted winds and hiding under the covers. doe-eyes watching lightning and gazing helplessly at the flames that lick at the fence across the street.

shivering in a drenched nightgown and waving goodbye. walking down to the river that used to house giggling neighborhood children and not stopping when the river starts to clutch at necks. chalk-dusted fingers swirling down the storm drain right alongside the worms and bath toys. skipping stones in shoes fluttering down to the marsh of the graves of frogs.

the first time i died, the river took me, all childhood innocence and not knowing any better.

## ii. take two

the chatter of sprinklers fills my ears and suddenly i'm above water. this time, i think to myself, the taste of mud still heavy on my tongue, i will be complete.

the taste of orange creamsicle and chlorine. dawn sunbeams and afternoon rays. peeling sunburns and almost working the poor aloe plant to death. tongues sticking to jolly rancher popsicles while thighs cement themselves to plastic chairs.

bleached polyester swimsuits getting caught on fences while sneaking onto roofs. ignored homework and puppy love.

picnics in the park. itching grassy knees. white converse stained green, green, green. fresh strawberries and raspberry-thorn kisses. scaling canyon walls just to stand on the precipice. hummingbird-bright eyes. swimming all day and forgetting to eat. watermelon and celery and honeydew. pet names that feel more like tightening leashes. barking dogs and buzzing mosquitoes. tie-dyed hands and salted caramel.

melty ice cream and lactose intolerance. starting fires just to throw in old clothes and old scripture. late nights and sneaking out past tattletale alarms. gazing at the moon turned red from wildfire. showering in the dark with music at max volume. dousing old t-shirts in bleach. at-home piercings and meaningless stick-and-pokes. breaking hearts and stealing back a will to live. throwing out blood-stained shirts and teeth. spitting out the punch and reveling in the bittersweet rebellion of coffee. the taste of iron and the sting of holding your breath for too long.

trying to swim laps without breathing. mechanical waves tangling hair and sitting on the bottom of the pool. watching breaths bubble up to the surface as panicked arms wrestle you to the deck. cracking ribs and agonal breathing.

the second time i died, i let myself be embalmed out of pure spite, all chlorine, no heart.

## iii. take three

spluttering water out of my lungs, i awake to fiery orange. last time i got all too caught up in the moment. this time, i think to myself, this time i will appreciate what life has to offer me, even if it isn't much.

messy cars and late-night drives. afternoons as jittery as the leaves and nights as cold as the breeze that bites at knees through ripped jeans. skin as golden as the leaves and brown eyes as warm as chai tea lattes. stolen hoodies and hands hidden by sleeves. sunsets gone wine-dark. looking in the mirror and feeling somewhat unsettled.

cropped sweaters and ripped pants that do nothing to protect from the cold. losing feeling in fingers and toes. bright red noses and lips cracked from breathing in

cold, cold air. seeing breath and being brought back to a reality no one asked to be brought into. feeling cold inside and out. eating a popsicle anyway.

windy days and cuddling under blankets. black cats and misplaced scratches. staying up late and warm milk with vanilla. do not disturb and ghosting friends. sneaking out to climb up water towers and stare at the sky. celebrating autumnal equinoxes while still feeling unbalanced.

brown sugar and frosting. hoodies and sweaters with no shirts underneath. band-aids no one can even see. halloween candy and haunted houses. neglected scabs and cheap vampire fangs. not eating and blaming the sweets. staring up at heaven for hours on end instead of seeing friends and still having the audacity to feel left out.

warm baths and cinnamon-scented bubbles. taking apart a razor. vanilla glitter and clove tea and water turning fiery orange orange orange. staining a favorite hoodie and the heavy smell of iron. short days and even shorter lives. witchcraft and cinnamon-induced hazes. falling into the fur of a childhood pet. yellow gone orange gone red.

the third time i died, i bled candy-corn blood into the tub, all sugar and nothing of substance.

#### iv. take four

fighting to open eyes, i awake to an unknown twilight. the dark says nothing indicative of morning or evening. i have not seen the sun in days. this time, i say, i will be my own source of light.

peppermint tea and rosemary perfume. hot chocolate and handmade mittens. pot roast and rice and the heavy feeling of being loved. seeing paw prints in fresh snow and wrestling sweaters onto cats. cold violin strings and calloused fingers.

visiting family and enduring well-intentioned interrogations. smiling through biting jokes and comments. seeing snow for the first time and yearning for the simple things that used to bring out a sense of awe. admiring the snowflakes but stepping into slush.

eating snow but tasting dirt. breathing air so cold it freezes in chests. looking around the world and seeing only white white white. shattering hoarfrost and feeling as naked as the newly-exposed branches. staring at the sky and feeling the sun set beneath eyelids.

not leaving bed for days on end only to get up and see that it's been two hours. bags under eyes heavier than blankets could ever be. the taste of lemongrass and concerned maternal glances. fever-dazed sledding and laughing like tomorrow will never come.

the flicker of an old dollar lighter in a storm. sliding into a ditch at 5 mph. tongues burnt from hot chocolate. coming back from a walk and taking a bath and burning alive. rice and oats and milk and lavender. arroz con leche and digital fireplaces.

fighting off the seasonal affectiveness with road trips. light nights planning and early mornings of last-minute packing. a hundred dollars and a backseat full of snacks. joking stories and late-night confessions. feeling closer to being whole yet never being more aware of being broken. broken nutcracker jaws and smiles.

going for late-night walks. loving concerns and being told the door will be left unlocked. leaving and locking the door anyway. unplanned last goodbyes. unforgiving lunar tides and saline icicles. gripping cold guardrails with icy hands. climbing up and preparing for eternal numbness.

the fourth time i died, i jumped into the eternal embrace of the ocean, sinking into rocky cliffs and the reality of being forgotten.

#### v. take five

i have witnessed the change of seasons. i am none of the people i once was. do not fall into the saccharine promise of "tomorrow". mortality adores the mundane.

# Tree Song

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

John  
Robert  
Pollock

Play it one more time, play it again, I say to the yew  
tree — the one about frayed nerves and sickly face.  
Crunch and bend, pluck and strum as notes chew  
your bark to the boney sap nub, allow me to uncase  
the chords and notes from stripped wet wood.  
As lyric and word flow each ring of age shredded  
down to tree bone dust, a tough one you good  
trees are, but soon you'll be beheaded.  
The final chip splits and the song signals your fall  
to the dirt, your closing solo, the grandeur in ending.  
The slides, the shifts, and the riffs are all that call  
to cascading crashes of chorusing limbs floundering  
fluttering then lying ever so very still.  
My standing ovation singing out from the tumultuous thrill.

# The Best Part

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

Jamie  
Jo  
Marble

and when Sisyphus saw  
that the boulder had once again  
rolled down the hill,  
he smiled  
and rolled himself after it.

# The Flight

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

Janzen  
Jorgensen

A fat, greasy raven takes his leave from atop a barren pine  
which, from the ground, looks too flimsy for a bird his size.  
He flaps in opposition to gravity's tentative grasp,  
torts the wind with obsidian razors that tip his wings  
and cuts the tethers that restrain us with a languid swipe of feathers.  
The raven bobs and tips through the cold desert sky  
harbining fate, staining the blue, and hunting fast food.  
Oily, cheese stained paper and deer carrion  
paint the interstate - a worthy raven's breakfast. However,  
He knows the dangers of the road, moves along, mocks  
and croaks at the cars that barricade his breakfast, then  
flies again, now to a dumpster behind a restaurant  
where a drunk waiter hit a dog with his car.  
Nothing came to claim the carcass.  
Raven knows there's better refuse, though,  
so he awaits the bus boy's smoke break,  
when he throws his smoke away,  
and leaves open the bin, raven will strike.

# A Chiral Desert Experience

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

Claire  
Leticia  
Chesnut

The sun pours down like honey, soaking into scaly lizards.  
Coyotes thrive on untouched land and homegrown bird gizzards.  
Sweet days birth glorious winds that emulate howls.  
Star glazed nights flourish a bounty of land guarded by little owls.  
The pour of yearned rain kisses the ears of grateful cactus prickles.  
Each honest acre of land remains at its purest when left untouched by sickles.  
An unspoken history of natural creation found in rocks colored the absolute reddest.  
Sheets of bursting stars breathe life into desert silence existing at its deadest.  
Crackling terrain plays god raining everlasting life in the driest fountains.  
Everlasting sunsets kindly dust the peaks of the misty mountains.  
Blistering heat makes organic love to each blossoming sapling that discovers happy  
truths on chiral desert floor.  
The desert's selfless gift of itself is presented to humanity in hopes of continuous  
preservation of what it means to be abundantly natural strictly at its core.



# In Father's Hall

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

C.K.  
Coombs

Therein doth soft beauty lie:  
Where sparrows call and angels fly  
And age and death men's souls defy  
And rove the saints with single eye.

Aloft there falls the quiet light  
That beckons gods in noiseless plight  
To come and heal a spirit's blight  
Yet never steals the heart outright.

The beauty soft in realms above  
In silent light and whispered love,  
Its pull's a word and not a shove;  
Can you hear it, o withered dove?

Can you fly on broken wing  
To mansions where the heart may sing  
And yet the muted stillness rings  
Beneath the gaze of King of Kings?

Tis not so, yet altars call  
To tattered trav'lers, rags and all  
To leave the fields where godlings fall  
And sup with friends in Father's hall.

# Summer Evening, 2006

Kolob  
Canyon  
Review

Connor  
Sanders

There's a black widow under the trampoline.  
We hurl rocks at it, then sip Otter Pops on the porch.  
Sticky faced, we pile onto the black canvas.  
A Fisher Price hoop sprouts up next to the launchpad  
jump shots, rejections, dunks, underwear.  
Your shorts didn't make the journey into the sky.  
Flailing legs, ascending beyond the clouds.  
One accomplice, connecting with the trampoline,  
propelled me into a bird's eye view of the backyard.  
Fearful flight. A floppy flip for good measure.  
Wal-Mart plastic balls, invented games, childhood.  
The house is growing, your family is too.  
Off to another yard, this launchpad is too crowded.  
We lay claim to another friend's trampoline  
one with no younger siblings and  
a cheese grater net curling along its edge.  
This time two friends launch me into the stratosphere,  
Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no.  
The net splits under the weight of a teenager  
First the crack. Then the thud of air exiting lung.  
I try to scream but can only wheeze.  
First the ER. Then back to your house.  
No more takeoffs on foreign soil. Back to the safety  
of what's known. I soar above the horizon and see high school.  
I rebound even higher and see graduation.  
You already went inside. The wind pushes  
an empty swing and whistles along the curvature of the slide.  
My heart keeps leaping and falling.

# You, my dear. (Mrs. Bandis' class 2004)

You, my dear, are so sweet,  
you're the marshmallows  
in my Lucky Charms.

You, my dear, won't exit my mind  
during math time. I can't focus on  
fractions with your face across the table.

You, my dear, turn recess into a honeymoon.  
I could chase you around the playground  
or maybe we could just play basketball?

You, my dear, make me want to learn to tie my shoelaces.  
And get new sneakers and handsomer clothes.  
I put moose in my hair this morning.

You, my dear, speed up the big clock,  
remind me of cheesy romantic movies  
and mom and dad kissing on the couch.

Do you, my dear, see how I drew you  
in your new glasses or how I started  
bringing lunch from home to sit by you in the cafeteria?

You, my dear, deserve this bouquet of dandelions  
and the Snak Pak my dad packed, too. Don't listen  
to those bullies. Four eyes are better than two.

My dear, for you I'd drop out of second grade  
and work all day at McDonald's. We could get a doggy  
named Lucky and watch romantic movies.

So, it is for you, my dear, that I write this poem,  
to ask the question I'm fighting in my mind.  
My dear, do you like me?

Attached is my e-mail and phone number. If  
the answer is yes please call, and ask for Connor.

cougarconnor@comcast.net 801-260-0264

# Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Firearm

An imitation of “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” by Wallace Stevens

I  
Among twenty high school classrooms,  
The only moving thing  
Was the trigger of the firearm.

II  
I was of three minds  
Like a safe  
In which there are three firearms.

III  
The firearm kicked in the autumn woods.  
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV  
A man and a woman  
Are one.  
A man and a woman and a firearm  
Are one.

V  
I do not know which to fear,  
The weight of the firearm  
Or the size of the bullet,  
The boom of the shot  
Or just after.

VI  
Shells filled the long window  
With defensive glass  
The shadow of the firearm  
Crossed it, to and fro.  
The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.

VII  
Oh thin men of the city,  
Why do you imagine collection?  
Do you not see how the firearms  
Lay at the feet  
Of the people you love?

VIII  
I know ammunition  
And aim and concentration;  
But I know, too,  
That the firearm is involved  
In what I know.

IX  
When the firearms flew out of sight,  
It marked the beginning  
Of revolution.

X  
 With the sound of firearms  
 Mixing in concert light  
 Even those packing  
 Would cry out sharply.

XI  
 He pulled over Khalil  
 In a sirened car  
 Once, a fear pierced him,  
 In that he mistook  
 The shadow of a hairbrush  
 For a firearm.

XII  
 The firearm is firing.  
 People must be dying.

XIII  
 It was evening all afternoon.  
 It was snowing  
 And it was going to snow.  
 The firearm sat  
 By the cabin door.

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Kolob  
 Canyon  
 Review

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**Kathryn  
 Neves**

# Swinging on a Cold Evening

The dark earth records the flight of the swing as it  
 Slices the tingling air. It's late October,  
 A time of crows and trees and solid earth seeded with sleeping things.

Our feet, painted with earth's blood, are two razor blades,  
 Slashing at sky above and scuffing the dirt below.  
 Surely we see the darkening sky—yet we swing still.

We soar, wishing our feet could ripple across the starless sheet.  
 The night clouds marble like thin ink seeping across a canvas—  
 The work of some watercolorist, perhaps, or a master printmaker.

Light clouds spread and needle their way into the sky's deep fibers  
 But we don't see them; only the path our feet are carving.  
 High in the air, like an acrobat, no net but the sprawling grass below.

Not a pretty lawn below, not clean or kept like others beyond fences  
 With fresh lawn clippings piled coldly at the curb.  
 Here is sharp crabgrass, dormant anthills, hard rocky soil.

When we fall, as all children do, we'll leave scars in the ground,  
 Deep blemishes of gravelly mud trailing in our wake.  
 No matter; we cannot see the earth from the sky.



# The Backwoods King

You wish to see the King of the forest - she asks you, which one?  
You tell her to take you to her forest king - and she does.

There sits the Backwoods King  
in a crown of brambles,  
his calves ravaged by thorns  
and heart swarmed with mosquitoes.  
His voice is as a wasp sting.  
He reaches to you, pulls you close.  
His hands are hot, sweaty, uncomfortable.

You kiss him once.

His lips taste of honeysuckle nectar,  
his breath on your cheek an autumn breeze.  
You hear, then, the bird song in his voice  
as he whispers promises of  
lazy, sunny days on the river.  
Dogwood and dandelions bloom on his collar,  
and his eyes are the greenest you've seen,  
flashing like fish in the water.

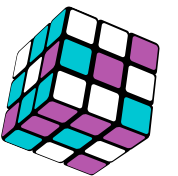
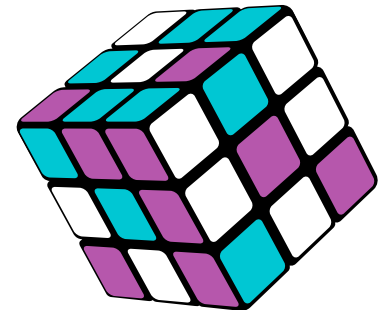
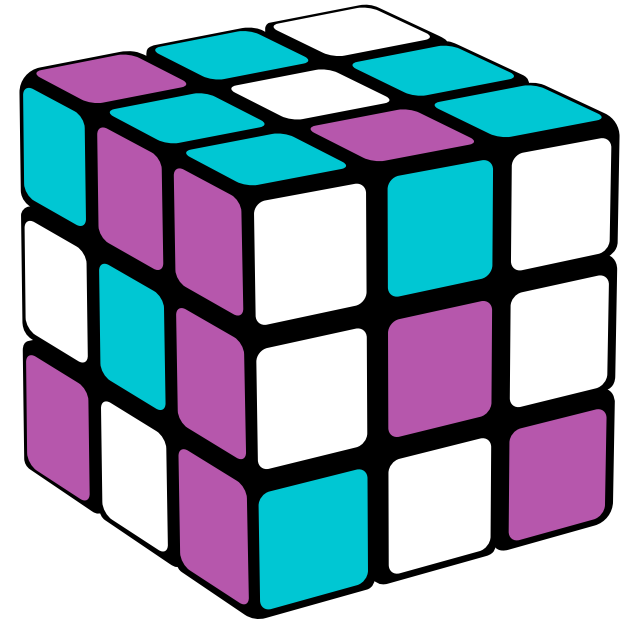
But then you hear the mosquitoes, and his briar crown pricks you as you realize  
you'd done a bit more than kiss. The song and the sting as he speaks mingle uncom-  
fortably, confusingly. His breath does little for your comfort in his hands.

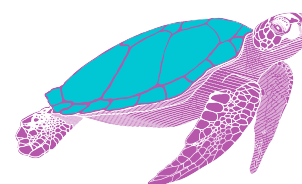
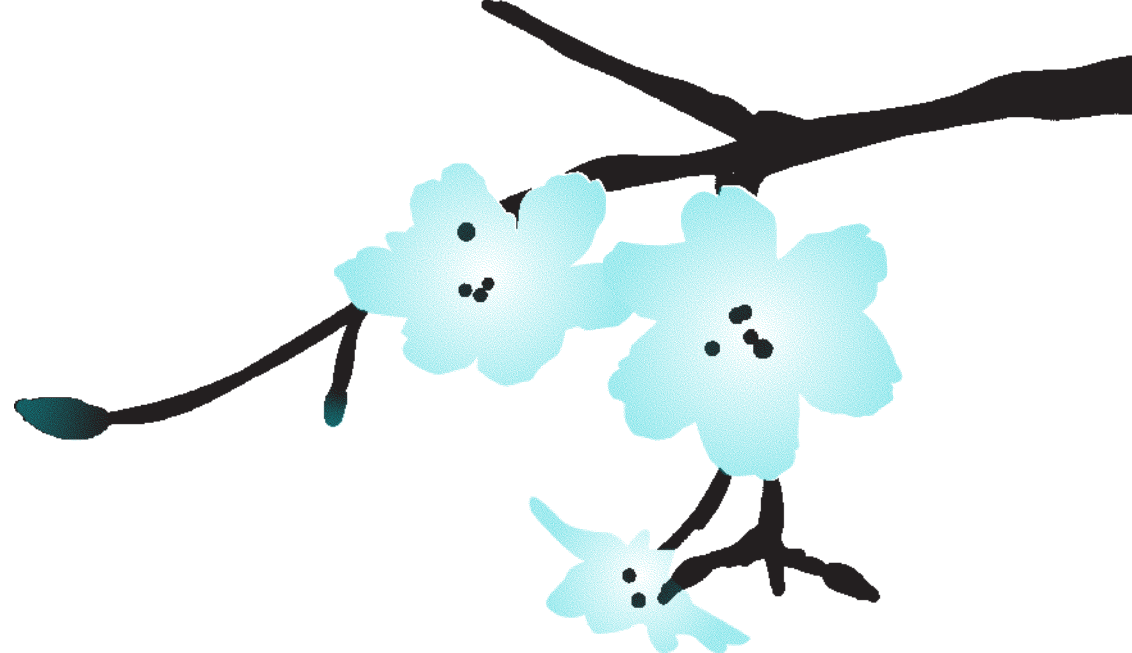
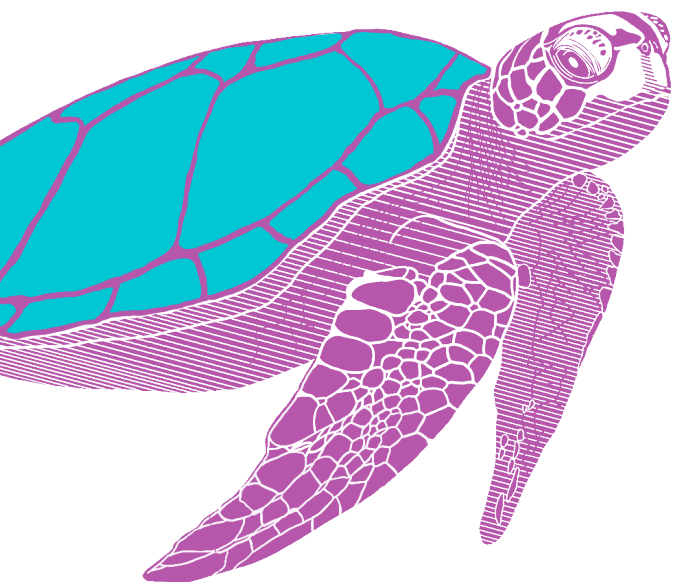
You run far, far away from his court. You shower in snow and let rushing rivers fill  
your ears. You fall into the embrace of another Forest King, tall and regal like the  
Redwood, or vibrant and wild like the Jungle.

But the taste of his lips still lingers, and his mockingbirds call your name.



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## MEGAN WARNER | *Editor-in-Chief*

Megan Warner is an English major with an emphasis in Creative Writing and Technical Writing and a minor in Graphic Design. She loves writing short stories and poetry and pretending she's good at both. She wants to be an editor in the future and write on the side. In the very little free time she has, she enjoys reading, painting, knitting terrible scarves, and petting cats.

## MADELEINE WALTERS | *Assistant Editor*

Maddie enjoys reading and writing more than anything. Many friends and roommates have been concerned by the sheer number of books she both buys and checks out from the library. Maddie is a Creative Writing major on the cusp of declaring a minor that she's nearly completed. She enjoys storytelling in theatre and movies as well. She has been known to laugh too hard at random things and will go on a midnight Denny's run at a moment's notice. Maddie wants to be an author when she graduates.

## CASSIDY WALLACE | *Assistant Editor*

Cass is an English major with an emphasis in Creative Writing and Technical Writing, as well as a minor in History. While sleeping in big knit sweaters and cuddling her pup are among her favorite pastimes, thick paperbacks have always held a special place in the world of this daydreamer. Hoping a life of publishing or academia is on the horizon, she will get there with a book in one hand and a cup of cocoa in the other.

## KILEYANNE LARSON

KileyAnne is an English major with an emphasis in Creative Writing. She has been described as a late-night, curbside philosopher, and is an advocate for the goblin mentality: catch cool bugs, hoard things you think are neat or pretty, eat what's tasty, die young, etc. She's a collector of all sorts of things, from neat rocks, to old books, to words. Her hopes are to one day return the words, published.

## ELIZABETH ARMSTRONG

Elizabeth Armstrong is an English major with a minor in Communication and a Creative Writing emphasis. She is currently a sophomore at Southern Utah University and can usually be found working on stories for the University Journal or listening to Taylor Swift. She grew up in a small town in Northeastern Nevada called Spring Creek. She has five siblings, the best parents, and is a triplet with her two brothers. Liz dreams of becoming a journalist, traveling the world, owning a golden retriever, and enjoying everything life has to offer. She has a passion for literature and leadership, admits to being a hopeless romantic, and believes very strongly in being kind.

## WHITNEY BROWN

Whitney Brown is an English major with a Creative Writing emphasis and a minor in Theatre. She enjoys speeding around campus on her scooter and watching funny animal videos. When she is not reading fantasy series or mystery novels, she can be found people-watching or wandering aimlessly, collecting random leaves and flowers to admire for a day. She likes to spread her animal knowledge to those who will listen.

## MADISON THOMAS

Madison is a Senior English major with a minor in criminal justice. She enjoys reading for hours, writing when inspiration strikes and snuggling up on the couch with her dog and a favorite movie. She hopes that one day she is able to help change lives either through her writing or actions.

## WHITNEY FORREST

Whitney Forrest is a senior Interdisciplinary Studies Major with an emphasis in English creative writing, business marketing, and communications. She is also working on receiving a technical writing certificate as well as a digital communication and social media badge. Her dream is to one day work for a publishing house in New York City or Boston. She enjoys traveling, listening to music, reading and writing whenever she gets the chance. She currently serves as the VP of Community Relations for her sorority Alpha Phi. She enjoys planning their service projects to serve the community of Cedar City. If she isn't spending time with her sorority sisters you can find her nose deep in a romance book.

## KATHRYN NEVES

Kathryn Neves is studying Creative Writing and Shakespeare Studies. She loves playwriting, poetry, and fiction, and basically any other kind of writing. Named after the shrew from Shakespeare's famous play, she spends way too much of her time memorizing Shakespeare she'll never recite. When she's not writing or agonizing over not writing, she can be found book-binding, playing The Legend of Zelda, or reading epic fantasy novels in the squishiest armchair she can find. After graduating, she plans on pursuing grad school, and (fingers crossed) finding a job writing somewhere in the great wide world.

## KAREN OLSON

Karen Olson fell in love with stories at an early age. Her love of language led her to study English and Spanish at Southern Utah University where she is a senior this year. A country girl at heart, Karen loves listening to country music in her truck with the windows down.

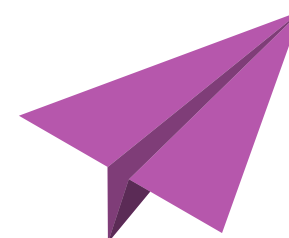
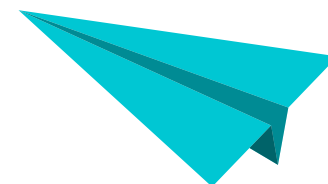
## KATHERINE PETERSON

Katherine Peterson is a current English Major of SUU and general consumer of anything creative. When not battling with constantly respawning schoolwork, and her internal critics, she can be found with her trusty sketchbooks and notebooks on hand and in various states of use. Her goal is to create someone's favorite story and dreams about having the world know she exists.

## TIAGO RODRIGUES DA COSTA

Tiago Rodrigues da Costa is born and raised in Lisbon, Portugal, 10 minutes away from the beach. His passion for journalism brought him to the United States in 2016, where he's been majoring in Communications and Media Studies and minoring in English Literature at SUU. In meantime, he lived in Oregon and East-Timor. He is a member The National Society of Collegiate Scholars and Investigate Reporters and Editors. Rodrigues da Costa is a senior pursuing long form journalism, both as writer and photographer. His topics of preference are society, politics and religion.





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