

The Reflector

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Journal of the Arts

2021

The Reflector



The Reflector, founded in 1957, is the annual Undergraduate Arts Journal financed by the Student Government Association of Shippensburg University. We accept works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, interviews, and artwork year-round. Works are considered for publication based on a blind submission policy. Submissions are accepted electronically at reflect@ship.edu. All writers/artists retain rights to their work.

For questions regarding our submission policy, contact: reflect@ship.edu. Visit The Reflector on Facebook (The Reflector, Journal of the Arts) or Instagram (@shippensburg.reflector). The Reflector office is located in the old section of Shippensburg University, in the Creative Writing Wing of Horton Hall, Room 301.

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A Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

I suppose in this year of the coronavirus pandemic, riots, a truly memorable presidential election, online learning, closures and openings, and a whirlwind of firsts, *The Reflector* would, of course, be no different. The collection of works in the 2021 edition is one that is truly unique to the year and the incredible individuals who've still created art in a time that feels like it is full of darkness and uncertainty. I am so proud to have been part of this club's incredible work this year, despite the ridiculousness of doing it all during a worldwide pandemic.

I think *The Reflector* has always been that source of positivity and inspiration on this campus since the moment I walked into my first *Reflector* meeting as a first-year student. Before I started college, I thought I would just show up to classes every day for four years and then walk out with a degree at the end of it all. But someone told me about a small publishing club opportunity that piqued my interest in writing, and so I bravely walked into Horton Hall and found a group of people that would become some of the most influential people in my life. The club was loud yet inviting, demanding yet exciting, and encouraging of every single one of its members to take on larger roles within the community. After my first year, I wanted to take more and more of a role in its work until eventually, I became its Editor-in-Chief. As I close out my final semester and final weeks as EIC, I feel as though I'm leaving behind a part of myself with this production, and I'm moving forward with memories that I will cherish forever.

To show my gratitude, I would first like to thank every one of the people who took the brave step to hit send and hand off their beautiful creations to a group of strangers to judge and review. You are truly an inspiration to not only have created art in a world with so little inspiration, even in a normal world, but to create something in one ravaged by an unpredictable disease and mass confusion is truly something to be proud of. Every piece that

was submitted to us could've been the cover, the first in show, or represented the journal on its own. The risks you all took inspire me to be a better writer and to want to continue this path in life, so I thank you all sincerely.

Also, to my overwhelming talented staff and editors, I want to thank you as well. You all have shown up and continued to make the creative juices of this club's passion flow just as vibrant as ever. Even though we hardly got to meet up in person and always had to remain socially distant and always had to send a million emails to stay in touch, you all remained a constant flow of positivity and excitement that created the atmosphere of our club. The time and dedication this organization demands of its members and, especially our genre editors, is challenging for people who more often than not are involved in other places on campus, are incredible students academically, and still maintain a home life. So, thank you for sharing those precious moments of your life with this club.

Additionally, with the support of my talented Associate Editor, Luke Hershey, and our amazing PR Chair, Kaitlyn Johnson, this book would not be here today. They have been my rocks through this whole year and have helped create a club and a journal that I'm so proud to be a part of. Our advisor, Professor Neil Connelly, is also equally wonderful in his wise advice and large dedication to wanting to see us succeed. All of the people mentioned above have been crucial in the creation of this year's truly unique *Reflector*. They have made saying goodbye to this organization incredibly difficult.

I've had many ideas for this book and where it will take those who choose to read it, but my one hope is that it opens your eyes to new voices and new perspectives. Our world chooses to overlook so many differences that it's almost nauseating. However, this small light into the future may bring change and happiness into a world that will certainly emerge with new scars and new traumas to overcome. Art is a channel that we can express diversity and hope in a way that is manageable to all humans and it is one of the most beautiful ways to experience

change. Without it, we are merely blobs of flesh bumping into each other from time to time.

Take what you will from this collection, but I hope it inspires you to believe in the power of multiple voices and the power of art to influence the world.

Yours truly,
Angela Piper

/or

Loud Mixed Woman

First Place | D'Orazio-Carragher Prize of Excellence

To all of those hoping I will smile more, talk less
 Today I have decided that my hands
 Look strong enough to hold a part of the world
 And maybe they can shape it into
 A vernacular that makes sense to some
 And excludes those who don't, can't see
 The strength of my small hands.

Today I have decided that my back
 Is wide enough to shoulder a load of ugly
 And bring it to the river for washing
 Because ugly that thick must be mud
 And mud can, will be washed away
 To show the quilt of many colors beneath
 And oh! Is that what I've been shouldering
 It's gargantuan, but I must be resilient.

Today I have decided that my tongue
 Feels loose enough to speak my own mind
 And not the mind of the person who wrote me
 That can't, won't understand me as long as they live
 Whose hands were stained by innocent blood
 Because don't I have the right to speak too.

Today I have decided that my voice
 Is loud enough to be heard above the cries
 Of the obtuse
 who won't, can't let anyone speak truth
 For fear that someone would notice their lie.

Today I have decided that my eyes
 Are clear enough to see the hurt of many
 To witness a plight so stricken by fear
 That it should, will be seen by ten million more
 So they will be windows to the scorned
 Not shutters for those who do not want to see.

Today I have decided that my skin
Is thick enough to withstand attacks
Of mind and body, of flesh, of flesh
I have been gifted with tougher hide than that
So let them come and throw there rocks
Shoot off at the mouth and shoot off.

Because today I have decided
that smile means speak
And less means louder!

First Day of College

Second Place | D'Orazio-Carragher Prize of Excellence

When was the last time you slept? Three days. You're not even tired.

When was the last time you ate? You can't recall. You're not even the slightest bit hungry.

Bugs are crawling under your skin. It started off simple, light. A light crawling sensation, their little feet scrambling under your skin, their bodies rippling beneath the surface. Scratch. Scratch. Scratch. Your fingernails are clawing at your skin, frantic to get the insulting insects off. You start to feel blood well up under your nails. You look down on your arm, just to see little wounds cutting up and down your arm like gory sprinkles. The pain doesn't even register to your wired brain.

Distractions. You need a distraction.

You turn on the television. You see moving pictures. You hear words being spoken. The words don't make sense and the images flash meaninglessly. You cannot connect the words and the images and the images and the words...together they are like a slinky tangled. Unable to bounce, or move, or do anything useful. It's like a dark mass of knots, little rhyme nor reason. You turn off the television, haunted by the fact you couldn't comprehend it.

You turn to a book. You start small, by flipping a page, you start by reading a single line. And then another. And another. Progress? No. You couldn't remember the words. They start swimming on the page, floating around and jumbling like the devil himself turned your book into a demented alphabet soup. You close the book, shuddering. How could something you used to love so much lose any meaning?

You start to walk on campus. You've run out of time and it's close to your first class. Wait. Where was it? What building? Where is that building? What building? Where? What? Where? Your thoughts run in a loop you cannot escape. You can run from people, animals, places, things. But you cannot run from yourself, not when you're living in your head. It's a literal broken record, stuttering and spitting out the same worries. You can't decide which direction you want to go. It takes you a moment, but you eventually register you're walking in circles. Circles. Circles. Circles. This is what insanity feels like. You're going in circles in your head in circles in your head in circles in your head.

You want to cut. You want to slice your thighs, hidden under your clothes. You want it to be your dirty little secret. You want to grasp your dull blades and grace your skin lightly, before slashing harder and harder and harder. You want to draw blood. You want to feel pain, something outside of your own mind. You need an escape, and this is it.

You want to die. It was subtle at first, the itching to jump in front of a speeding car or the urge to devour your whole medicine cabinet in hopes of a deadly concoction. Then the weight got heavier, the urges got stronger. You started planning it out. How you would tie the noose. How you would obtain the gun. What you would write and to whom. What would be your reasoning?

I'm sorry Mom, I was never meant for this world. The weight of living is just too heavy.

I love you my partner. You were there for me when the world was too much. This isn't your fault.

Dear cat, you're the most lovable asshole I've ever met. My sister will take good care of you.

You go on and on and on, planning the right diction. You are vying for just the right words. You're trying to pick them like someone does for a love note. In some ways, that's just what you're doing. A love note to your loved ones, a love note inviting Death himself.

To all my friends and family. I'm at peace now.

You stop abruptly in your fantasy. Would you be at peace?

You stop your thought. Peace. Serenity. Peace. Serenity. Poetry of words with meaning as foreign as color is to blind folk.

How would you describe red to someone who's never experienced color?

Much like that, how would you find peace if you're constantly at war with yourself?

Red. It tastes like a red delicious apple. Red feels like the heat of the sun on your skin. Red is the texture of a snakeskin. It's the feeling in your cheeks when you're with someone you're infatuated with. Red is the heat of your rage. Red is when you see injustice and you want to do something about it. Red is the liquid that leaks from your wounds. It's the pain of a

picked scab. Red is the rush in your head when you feel something move your soul. Red is passion. Red is burning love causing your soul to ache.

Peace. The clouds on a sunset. Looking into someone's eyes you not only love, but trust as well. Peace feels fluffy like a cuddly animal's fur. Peace feels soothing like running water in a stream. It flows through your fingers, leaving a tingling wet sensation on your skin. Peace tastes textured like a fluffy marshmallow, but the flavor is of your favorite home-cooked meal. Peace is a hug that lasts a second longer than normal, tight and fulfilling. It's curling your fingers around your favorite person's hand. Peace is when you feel safe. Content. Satisfied.

Peace for you is something that feels out of reach. Right when you think you can caress it and pull it closer; it floats away. Death feels like the only way to reach peace...no, no, no, no, no, no, no!

There's got to be something better than this, you ponder, this can't possibly be all that there is.

You look to the sky, your eyes devouring the clouds above the sunset.

Maybe peace isn't always going to be out of reach.

Abandonment

Third Place | D'Orazio-Carragher Prize of Excellence



Elizabeth Peters

Why I Stopped Writing Poetry

I stopped writing poetry
just when I had the most to say.
When I can't breathe became a rallying cry
I felt guilty for even having a voice.

I stopped writing poetry
because I was afraid to admit
I had not stood up to live,
that I didn't need others to stand up
so I could live.

I stopped writing poetry
when I couldn't figure out how to write about
the things I didn't even know how
to think about.

I stopped writing poetry
because I knew that if I couldn't use my voice
to speak for the ones on ventilators,
the ones who had their breathe shot out of them,
I didn't deserve to use my voice at all.

I stopped writing poetry.
I tried to fade away into the background,
stop calling myself 'poet'
because poets don't cower
instead of using their power
for the ones who have theirs taken from them.

I stopped writing poetry
because I was afraid of failure.
I was afraid to name the privilege inside of me,
afraid to admit that I am still learning.

I started writing poetry again
because the lives of others cannot wait
for me to get over my guilt,
they cannot wait for me to teach myself everything
before I even think about opening my mouth.

As long as others have to live their lives in fear,
I will use the fear in my own lungs
to write 'poet' back into my name.

Andrea Kling

I Dream a World Pt. 2: Dr. King Would be Disappointed

I dream a world where imagination runs free,
Where kids play happily on city blocks,
And people open their doors to everyone that knocks.

I dream of a world where hope and faith rest in our hearts,
And wretchedness, harm, or despair always do us part.
A world where people saw someone's character before their skin
Where what mattered was within and not based on one's preference of religion

Where beauty had a broad definition
And no individual influenced others to fit into their narrow definition of it

Where money and greed were not synonyms used constantly
And unique names were pronounced correctly

Where fear did not cripple believers and dreamers
And faith was used as wings

Each individual striving for their sole purpose
Meeting success without meeting jealousy

Where great included all
Not limited to one man's decision
Where great incorporated all the visions of the ones living who strived for greatness creating a broad definition of it

When kids remember there's more to life than technology and T.V.,
And children again begin to pick up books and read

The world a framed picture of things to be,
Not a mixture of things, we don't wish to see.

I dream of a world where ghetto, ugly, slut, and curse words don't exist,
And when someone offers you drugs of a cigarette you are able to resist.

A world where happiness and harmony exist too,
Where sorrow and tragedy just won't do.

Our journey a mountain not mattering how fast we get there,
Or what's waiting for us on the other side,

Our journey depends on the climb.

Yes it sounds cliché
 But this term has never been overused
 I assure you

I dream of a world where when someone asked you what violence is,
 You wouldn't have a clue.
 And instead of wasting time walking to greatness,
 We picked the race and flew.

Uniting ourselves with hot glue,
 Checking for worn out shoes that need to be mended for the journey anew.
 Impatiently we wait for the exquisite view,
 Getting ready to go, waiting for our cue.

And at the end of our journey,
 We'll tell the story,
 Of how we threw away our extra weight,
 And how our paths changed from narrow and curved,
 To nice and straight.

And our trials an interesting book to tell,
 Chapters and chapters of how we climbed the hills and fell,
 And got back up again,

Because of this glorious day we wished to attend.

Not knowing the address, we got to our destination,
 Eyes glistening in the process,
 Our creation a new generation.

Finally we pushed past the doors of death to the future,
 Now our trials and tribulations fewer.

This world we can get to if we try,
 But we must first learn to push our worry and struggle aside.

We must learn to change from within,
 Shrinking our struggles in a bin,
 Listen to our kin,
 Only then will our lives spin,
 And we will be able to win,
 This voyage.

These things might be hard to do,
But changing this world starts with you

And when you realize these things are not as hard as they seem,
Then my friends this is the world I dream.

Our differences are what make us unique
Believing that we are all equal is what unites us
Because there is unity in diversity

Debbie Matesun

When a Democracy Goes to Therapy

America is the withering flower
that's been in my room for four years,
and I try my best to
keep her alive in my dreams.

Tonight we take a walk
through the valleys and vessels
deep inside of her
to see where it all went wrong.

I show her the melancholy skyline,
how the people are as hollow as the trees
and she shows me her ribcage,
where pillars collapse and dead bills gather.

I dissect the emptiness from her heart
and collect the past with a dustpan.
I excavate her cold apathetic lungs,
and plant a brighter future into them.

In this dream America faces her abuser
and I remind her that we have always been predator first, not prey.
We; owl-natured and quiet,
our kindness, more than a weapon
kills to protect those that cannot protect themselves.

Flowers grow best when watered
and right now America is gasping for
freedom, justice, liberty.

I gather empathy from the river
and dump buckets of it on her
until she is united within herself,
until we all are.

At Peace

A breeze blows into the room, casting the curtains aside and allowing the moonlight in, one sliver at a time. Dark stains are scattered throughout the navy carpet, some having been there awhile, and others are just now setting in. The sickening stench of spoiled milk and rancid eggs filled the house, but the man sitting in the corner of the living room seems unbothered by it all. His shirt is moist and sticky, and his fingers twitch around the grip of the object in his right hand before relaxing again.

Staring straight forward, he wonders how much longer he'll have to wait. He's always the one waiting, but he prefers it this way. Being alone with his thoughts is refreshing, it reminds him of his own mortality, especially now. It's always good to be reminded of one's own mortality, and he tries to remind others of that almost every day. They just never understand what he means until he shows them. It's sad, really, he's just trying to lead others to the light, to a new beginning where they can start anew. No one understands him, and the cracked picture of his deceased wife on the end table is an everyday reminder that he'll always be alone. Forever, alone. She would still be alive if she hadn't found his handgun in the back of the closet. The memory of finding her in their room after he returned home from work one afternoon still haunts him to this day, and in this moment.

Sirens and flashing lights illuminating the room snaps him out of his pensive thoughts. Closing his eyes, he whispers to himself, "Finally." He relaxes his body as the boys in blue burst into the room, surrounding him with guns drawn. The smell of arrogance wafts in behind them. He rolls his eyes.

They demand so much more than he thought they would. Do they want silence or confessions? Hands up, or on the ground? Gun dropped, or slid across the floor? Whatever it was, he wasn't listening. He had been planning his last moments ever since his wife had executed hers. He thought it would be romantic.

The officer in front spat out, "Any last words, vermin?"

This was his cue. He looked up at the ceiling. "We'll be reunited soon, love."

Before any of the officers could react, he whipped his pistol up and rested it in his mouth before pulling the trigger. No hesitation. The cops sighed. The coroner was called. Everybody went home.

Carlisle Bird*Matthew Hathaway*

Addicted

When you ask most addicts, they'll tell you the first high is usually the strongest, and that the subsequent highs are often a feeble attempt to chase it. The rush and the euphoria associated with those highs are good, you get something from it, but you don't get that same exact feeling of flying. I did not find that to be true for my addiction. I have come to find out that the more I do it, the more hits of you I breathe in, the more of you I sniff, the more of you I want. I just can't get enough of you; I don't think I could ever satisfy my craving for your love.

Each high I got from you became stronger and stronger, intoxicating my senses. The smell of your hair tingles in my nose. The smooth feeling of your skin against mine makes me dizzy with love. I love tasting you, kissing you, it brings me to cloud nine. Your love is trippier than acid, more euphoric than ecstasy, and more calming than pills.

When I first became intoxicated by you, I felt you course through my veins. Your kisses made me drunk with love. Feeling your skin is the most euphoric sensation I can indulge in. I crave hearing your breath hitch as I wander my hands across your body. Bruised veins, healing scars, and all the blemishes grace under my nails as I lovingly kiss them with my hands. I love you for you, imperfections, and all. I trace symbols of endearment on your arms, your shoulders, your thighs...anywhere that you'll let me I will claim as my own. I kiss you softly, tenderly, and sensually. I want to devour you whole, but I hold back. I want to cherish you first and foremost. I want you to feel loved. I have always intended to make you feel loved.

You were never an easy person to love, but it was always worthwhile. I don't regret the love I gave to you; I only wish I could've given you the love you needed. I wish the love I gave to you was enough, but I don't think it ever will be. I don't even think the drugs are enough to give you what you need. I don't know what void you're trying to fill but what you're doing isn't working. It's not only breaking you down- I see your tired eyes and shaking hands- but it's also breaking us apart.

I don't know when it started taking over your life. When we first met, I was the most important thing to you, as you are to me. Your temptations were not a priority...so when did it change? I honestly can't recall whether it happened creeping over the years or suddenly and all at once. Maybe it was my fault for not saying something sooner, but I thought you could control it. I was so wrong. I was wrong about a lot of things when it came to us. I honestly thought love would be enough, that the drugs wouldn't become consuming, that you wouldn't fall into the trap of the game. Now you're out staying late at night sneaking, and if I'm lucky, you'll sneak back

into our home in the morning. It kills me that I don't know where you are anymore, that I don't recognize your friends anymore, that I barely recognize you anymore.

Yet, that's not what kills me the most inside, ripping my soul into dozens of shards like broken glass. What hurts the most is I don't know when it's going to be the last time, I see you alive. You're fucking with some hard shit from some sketchy people. I know you're not safe out there and every time you fuck with it, you place your life in jeopardy. I need you to be safe because I love you so much. I feel you pulling away with every hit of that vile shit, and I honestly don't know how much more I can take.

Honey. I love you so much. So much it literally kills me when you do these things. It hurts me, it's been hurting me, and I've tried countless times to help you, but I don't know what else to do. I love you so much, I'm addicted to you. But you're addicted to something else and something has got to give. One of us is going to have to break our addiction. I don't think you can do it so I'm breaking mine, despite how much it hurts me. It's like I'm losing a piece of myself. I'm so sorry, it hurts me...but this is goodbye. I have to break my addiction of you.

*Whispers**for RBG*

The wind whispers
 through the trees,
 Listen hear
 her name
 rustling
 among the leaves

Listen hear
 The murmurs between
 the branches of
 a mighty oak
 Notorious
 Exemplary
 The roots have taken hold
 with wisdom
 Ageless
 She will not be forgotten

Men will try to forget
 change the landscape
 Turn from
 the wind
 Listen
 Hear
 The wind
 gently whispers Equality

What Matters

Black faces protesting in the streets
Lynching images etched in their minds
Anxiety hanging in the air like nooses
Centuries of being shoved off the ladder
Killing the dignity of basic human existence.

Lady Liberty offers hope but no reward
Inequity of opportunity the unwritten law
Vivid possibilities spoken but unacted upon
Economic wealth an unattainable aspiration
Sated by the oppressors filled with hate.

Marchers demanding to be seen and heard
Attacking undeniable ignorance and racism
Terminating injustice, the absence of hope and
Threatening the system of our original sin
Even as some leaders of our nation
Refuse to actually say their names.

Anonymous

Efflorescence

I was born in the chrysanthemum month, a tender perennial with petal soft fingers and toes. Before I could walk, my mother and father made sure I was outside to see the sun and feel the grass. My home was nestled under a large magnolia, and I came far before the dogwood fell. I hoped to be as tall as those trees. In those days, my hair was auburn, and my cheeks were freckled, and I was almost never without a smile. After all, what else is there to do when the rain only means puddle-jumping after lunch? My mother made a garden for me, and it was here that I germinated, roots set into the Berrell Avenue soil before I could pronounce the name. I grew in love.

According to family legend, my first word was 'hydrangea.' It is my grandfather's favorite story to tell people who have heard it a good thousand times before. My grandparents farmhouse became my home away from the one I knew while my parents worked at the garden center. My name was rarely my real one when I was younger, and rather became 'Tiger Lily,' showing off my adventurous spirit. My grandmother and I would fingerpaint until my hands were all shades of periwinkle, peony, and poppy. We picked strawberries as I soaked up enough sunlight to last a lifetime. I ran circles in the backyard and read the story's pictures in between the little white daisies. It was here that my colors bloomed into view, where creativity and curiosity were always encouraged. I grew with time.

As my summer feet were given school shoes, my focus shifted, widening from blossoms and bedtime stories to other children. Friends. Boys. Every flower was plucked clean, fingers crossed and hoping he didn't love-me-not. The farmhouse visits and sleepy mornings were less, but I never wilted, because the sunshine never really faded. There will always be another autumn afternoon, another goodnight kiss, and another season for the chrysanthemums. And I will grow.

Only Human

*A story for all those who've hurt and been hurt.
We are all merely flesh and blood.*

I. You • A Great Big World

I noticed you.

Whenever Ethan had you over to the house, you'd humor me and we'd talk about old marching band jokes from high school. And I thought about it, I did. But I was Ethan's older sister to you—I admired you from afar, since that's all I knew how to do. Never really been kissed. Twenty years old and never really been kissed.

But that one night you stayed over with Ethan's other friends, I mustered up the courage to try something dumb.

It was after 3:00am. The sun faded ever-so-slightly through the dark night sky, your friends started to drop like flies, and you—you'd been glued to my side since the evening began out around the fire pit. Once we settled down inside the house, you laid on the floor next to my couch. You always sprawled out on that couch when you slept over at our family's house, but that night you took the floor.

When I reached out and grabbed your hand, you didn't resist but didn't take it, so I tried again. One finger at a time, then you squeezed my hand and looked up at me.

Blue—a deep, oceanic blue visible even in the dim light of the den. I'd never really noticed before then, and now I didn't want to waste a second looking anywhere but into those eyes.

Everyone had passed out now, so you sat up off the floor and ran your hand through my hair. You wore a nervous smile.

Is this okay?

I smiled and nodded, wrapping my arm around the nape of your neck.

Yes.

A few more nervous breaths and nervous smiles, and this was what I'd been waiting on, what I'd been waiting to feel. Alive. You leaned into me and

I leaned into you. I didn't know what to expect, but I'd never really been kissed. I never told you that.

I wasn't expecting fireworks from a nineteen-year-old guy, and it didn't feel like fireworks—it was better than that, actually. Warm and clumsy and sweet. Like you.

You wouldn't remember this, but you didn't let go of my hand until you passed out on the floor after sunrise. Not once.

II.  Tee Shirt • Birdy

I yawned and collapsed on my bed—I was still exhausted from the other night. We didn't do anything besides lay awake there with each other, but we didn't need to.

You left the house without my number. I didn't even know what I wanted when I woke up the next day. All I knew was that I'd never felt more alive than when I'd kissed you and I wanted to be with you again. So, I stopped by your work and left my number with your boss like it was 1998. I hadn't seen you at all, but we'd been texting.

The other night was really nice.
June 25, 1:15PM

Yeah, it was really nice.
June 25, 1:17PM

Did it mean something to you?
June 25, 1:20PM

Yes. Did it mean something to you?
June 25, 1:21PM

Yes.
June 25, 1:22PM

I clutched my phone against my chest and tried to reign in my fluttering heart. It did mean something and I wasn't crazy and you slept on the floor for me and you didn't let me go.

A knock sounded at my door and my brother's chestnut hair peeked its way through the crack.

Come in, Ethan.

He pushed the door open and wandered over to my bed. Hey. What're you doing?

Nothing much.

Ethan nodded, hovered over my shoulder for a second too long, and saw your name on my screen. I thought there was something weird going on with you two the other night.

Do you have a problem with it? Be honest.

Nah. But if I were you, I wouldn't go there with him.

I paused and sat up in bed. Why not?

'Cause he's not normal.

And you are?

Ethan shook his head, sighed. Not what I meant. I've got to go to work, but Mom and Dad are downstairs. Don't do anything stupid while I'm gone. With that, he strode out of the room.

Another notification echoed through my bedroom.

Is there a place we can meet?

June 25, 1:27PM

III.  Like Real People Do • Hozier

We decided on the park.

It poured that day, poured like I hadn't seen it rain for the entire summer. That evening was miserably humid, but when it stopped, you met me there anyway. It was vacant, so it was you and me and a frisbee. We tossed it back and forth and you learned how to talk to me about something other than our usual pleasantries. You knew we had something here, and I wasn't Ethan's sister or a former high school bandie anymore, no—someone else, someone you hadn't met yet.

But we weren't there for long until the torrential downpour resumed and the awning over the pavilion wasn't enough. We had to make a break for your Honda Civic.

I heaved down into the passenger seat and slammed the car door shut. The rain water seeped through my hoodie and my socks and my sneakers. I looked over at you from the passenger seat, then laughed.

You snickered, uncertain and awkward. That was rather sudden, wasn't it? You always spoke like a piece of prose, and you made me hold onto almost every word that left your lips. Never told you that.

Yeah, for real. I shivered and tugged my hoodie tighter around my torso. I'm cold.

Oh no, I'll turn down the air. I don't want you to be cold. You reached for the knob and switched it off. Here, give me your hands. I'll warm them up. I always used to do this for people back during marching band. My hands are always warm, even when it's freezing out.

You wrapped my hands in yours, and wow—warm like a wood fire on a bitter cold day. You rambled on and on about jokes from high school marching band, something you already knew how to talk about with me, Ethan's sister. Me, an acquaintance from our high school days. Me, a stranger whose lips you'd learned last Friday night.

I listened while you spoke, wondered how I ever managed to look past you for all those years. Didn't matter what you said. Just that the sound of your voice steadied me.

You looked up at me with your blue. Blue like the ocean. That better?

Much better.

You smiled and leaned back in the driver's seat, then slid your fingers into mine. You rested our elbows on the divider, and our arms swayed back and forth. Together. And you felt like a late-night car ride, a lazy day, a lullaby; you felt like something I didn't know I needed until I had you.

You spoke and snapped me out of my thoughts. Should we go somewhere else?

Sheets of rain swept over the windshield, one after another. No, I don't think so.

We can wait it out.

I nodded and squeezed your hand, running my thumb along yours. We sat. Listened to the rain for a few minutes.

'Cause he's not normal, Ethan had said. My heart thudded in my chest and you must've felt that through the palm of my hand, you must've. Heart thudded harder. Took a breath. Spoke.

I'm nervous.

You furrowed your brows and squeezed my hand. Why?

I dunno. I'm just...I'm really new at this. And I dunno what I'm doing.

Something flickered in your eyes, but you didn't look away. Yeah, I'm not really good at this stuff, either.

Perfect.

IV. Your Hand in Mine • Explosions in the Sky

We sat in the backseat of your Civic, and my head laid in your lap. Tame Impala pumped through the car radio and we listened as the synth dissipated. I spoke.

Great song.

For real.

Here, let me play something. I reached out and took your phone.

You laughed, light and boyish. Hey, now. That's mine.

Shush, it's my turn. You'll like this.

It'd only been a few days, but we had a routine at this point. Walk around the empty park, talk about our days, then hop in the backseat of your Honda Civic once the sun started to set. You'd hook up your phone to the aux cord and we'd take turns playing music, making out, talking. Playing music, making out, talking. And the backseat of the Civic was a tight squeeze for you even with the front seats pushed forward, but you said you didn't care as long as I was there.

Then I hit play on Your Hand in Mine by Explosions in the Sky and it seeped through the speakers, slowly. Slowly. I sat up a little bit and curled

into your chest. You stroked my hair the way you did, and I wrapped my arm around your neck. Always so warm.

You rubbed my back. I'm a great pillow, right? It's all that baby fat.

I giggled into your t-shirt, then looked up into your blue. Don't you get it? I like it. I like you.

A pause.

I like you, too. And oh-so-softly, you laughed.

What's so funny? I looked up at you from where I laid on your lap.

Your lips curled into a smile, toothy and genuine. Nothing. Just...I'm happy.

I smiled.

We sat. Listened. Held each other. And this was it—this was bliss. Where had you been? That's all I could think to myself. Where the hell had you been?

Once the strings faded out, you spoke.

That one was beautiful. I see why you like them.

Yes.

I sat up a bit, and you set your hand on my shoulder. We glanced out the windows at the vacant pavilion, the rusty goal posts, the flourishing lilies along the sidewalk—all of it disappeared into the shadows as the sun sank. No one around for miles. No one but you.

I looked at you.

Do you wanna play one now? Almost whispered. Almost.

You looked at me.

No, it's okay. Come here.

Five words—that easy.

You rested your hand on my back and I wrapped my arms around your shoulders and this wasn't the usual clumsy and sweet. Something new. Couldn't breathe, but couldn't stop. Warm, still warm. But even with my tongue in your mouth, even with my arms around you, it wasn't enough. After a few minutes, I broke away from your lips and held you. Just...held you. You needed it. More than you knew. You said you were happy, but you seemed so...sad.

A pop then a crackle, and I sat back to look out the rear window. In the distance, someone was setting off fireworks. I spoke.

Look. No, look. Fireworks.

You followed my gaze and we waited. I could smell your minty breath against my cheek and wanted to stay like this forever. With you. Waiting for the colors. And then a palette of vibrant hues peppered the sky, disappeared. Again, then again—brilliant.

I spoke.

Wow—they're so pretty.

Yeah...yeah. Really pretty.

The sky darkened and the night stilled, save for the crickets. I turned to face you and your ocean blue. Much deeper in the dark. And I thought for a minute that I loved you. But we'd only been...doing this for a week. Your friends didn't know. My parents didn't know. Ethan kept his head down and covered for me. It wasn't real yet, so how could I love you?

You spoke.

And you're...you're really pretty.

Five more words, and yes—I loved you. Not deeply. But in that moment, I did.

You drove me home, and once again I crept up to my bedroom. Collapsed on my bed. Texted you, because my chest hollowed out as soon as I wasn't with you.

What the heeek? I miss you already, ugh.
July 3, 11:23PM

I knowww. Wish we could've stayed like that forever.
July 3, 11:25PM

Me too. Pretty fireworks, huh?
July 3, 11:26PM

Yes. I thought of you after each one.
July 3, 11:27PM

I can't tell if you're being sarcastic or not.
July 3, 11:28PM

No, I wasn't. I dunno, I mean it was nice being there with you.
July 3, 11:30PM

If I knew you at all, you meant it. Still, it seemed rather curated. Almost too specific to be believable. Easily the cheesiest text message I'd ever received.

So...why did I feel all warm and fuzzy inside?

V.  Breathe • James Arthur

I thought you had questionable taste in friends. Never told you that.

Had to love 'em, because sometimes those dudes made me laugh, but none of them ever discussed anything of substance. All sounded like noise to me, but then sometimes you made sense.

Like that night you slept on the floor for me.

Waaay before everybody passed out in the house and we kissed, you and I sat on the dead grass around the fire pit. Your buddies wandered back and forth between the screened-in porch and the fire for s'mores. And even though the sun was sinking under the horizon, a few of the others tossed a football in the backyard. As people came and went, you spouted off on a moral rant and I'm fairly certain I was the only one who tuned in.

...and all I'm saying is that sexuality shouldn't be such a big deal. It's not to be mistaken for a personality trait, either. Fucking other dudes would not make me an interesting person. Hell, it's no more relevant than the fact that my eyes are blue. Nobody cares. Nobody should care.

Exactly, I echoed. And looked you in the eyes. And inched closer to you on the grass. Just a little bit. Why do people feel the need to accentuate our differences?

You shook your head. I don't know.

Suddenly, Ethan plopped down in a lawn chair near me and you. And he glanced at me, then spoke.

You look traumatized, so he must've gone all philosophical on you again. Give it a rest, man. Nobody ever understands you.

I understood you. But I didn't understand you, not once I started spending more time with you—you talked big, but only because you didn't know what you wanted to do with yourself. You didn't want to face that, so you always focused on things you couldn't control instead of the things you could control. And I wasn't any better.

And once we started sneaking around, I kept thinking there some sort of catch. Why did you like me? What did you see in me? Where...where was this going?

You had similar thoughts, didn't you? I could tell, the way you wouldn't hold my hand in front of your friends. The way you flickered in and out when I asked about your family. The way you looked at me—in that deep abyss of blue, something that I wanted to see wasn't there. I didn't have all of you.

I never had all of you.

VI. Latch (Acoustic) • Sam Smith, Disclosure

My parents weren't born yesterday, so they knew I wasn't going out to the park till midnight for kicks and found out—not a big deal. We weren't great at hiding, and we weren't trying that hard. You said so yourself.

Even though you came to the house to hang with Ethan, you weren't there to see me. So I invited you over for an afternoon, and we didn't leave my room the whole time. We laid under the soft glow of my twinkle lights and watched stupid YouTube videos and talked. Nothing. We did nothing. A fantastic stretch of nothing into the night.

You hadn't dated many other girls, and I could tell. Just could. When I closed the door, we ended up kissing, really kissing, and you...tried so hard. I didn't want you to feel like you had to be good at this, like you had to be

pleasing me every second—your being there was more than enough. For all I cared, we could've laid there and took turns playing YouTube videos like we did songs in your Civic.

Every now and then, I broke away and looked at you. Looked into your blue. Saw layers and layers of things you wouldn't show me yet. Saw fondness, fear, hesitance. A scared little boy inside that nineteen-year-old body.

I wanted you to talk to me. I wanted to talk to you. I wanted to ask you something, but what would I ask?

And I didn't know, so I kept kissing you and kissing you. Like I could make you better.

After a while, I caught the clock out of the corner of my eye and sat up. Oh wow. It's one in the morning.

Is it really? You shifted on the bed and laid your head in my lap.

Yeah. Guess my parents went to bed already.

A pause. Listened to your breath, watched your chest rise and fall, again and again. Ran my hand through your hair and traced your freckled cheek with one finger.

I know you've been working a lot. Wouldn't blame you if you went home.

You looked up at me. I'll stay, but only if you want.

Really?

Yeah. You slid around and curled into my side, a contented smile on your lips. I remember how good that smile made me feel. It made me feel good to make you feel good.

I could go home or stay here. Whatever you want, I'll do.

And that last part—my heart skipped a beat after those words left your mouth. You scared me. I'd never felt like I'd ever mattered that much to someone else. And now I needed you and you needed me. Like air, like water. Couldn't go without each other.

Scared the hell out of me.

I want you to stay.

You smiled wider and laid your head on my chest. Okay. I'll stay.

Five words—that easy.

VII.  slumber • Lewis Watson, Lucy Rose

I still don't really remember how much I slept.

But you slept heavy, and you held me the whole time.

Sleeping and waking and sleeping and waking, and then the sunrise lit the sky with iridescent hues, vibrant yellows and crimson reds and deep purples. All bled through the bedside window like watercolor, like fireworks. I didn't wanna wake you, so for a while I traced your pale cheeks and flitting eyelids. And lay there. With you.

I passed the time beside you while you rested, then tried whispering sweet nothings and shaking you to wake you. When that didn't work, I kissed you a few times. Ended up having to shout your name, though.

You made that sound people sometimes make when they wake up. Then you gave me a kiss through a sleepy haze. You spoke.

Good morning.

Morning. You're not easy to wake up, you know that?

You laughed and rubbed the sleep from your eyes. I know—I'd sleep through anything.

Then you smiled and threw your arm around me. You stuck around making lazy conversation with me until the last possible minute, then left for work. One more kiss at the door, then I released your hand one finger at a time and watched you drive away in your Civic.

Whatever you want, I'll do, you'd said.

I climbed the carpeted stairs, went back to bed, and curled up under my flowered quilt. It didn't feel quite right without you there.

And I closed my eyes.

Closed my eyes.

Closed my eyes.

Where on God's green earth had you been?

VIII.  Before You Go • Lewis Capaldi

A few days later, some of my college friends came into town and I was busy playing tour guide. I didn't text you much for a few days and you didn't text me, but I knew you had plans with your friends.

By the end of the weekend, my friends all went back home and I wanted to see you. Over the course of those few days, I left you a few little messages—not crazy bitch material.

Hope you're having fun.
July 11, 10:17PM

Be safe and smart!
July 13, 2:03PM

I miss you.
July 14, 12:04AM

Days passed, then weeks. Every day, my heart felt a little heavier. I'd never seen you without your phone, so it wasn't as if you weren't getting these messages. By late July, I figured you'd already made your decision when you stepped out the front door that morning—I wasn't even worth a goodbye.

I didn't listen to Ethan.

'Cause he's not normal.

Didn't listen, didn't listen.

Hadn't I tried hard enough? Was I bad kisser? Had something happened to you? Did I do something wrong?

Did I do something wrong?

I needed to know.

Hey. I wanted to ask where you went. I'm not trying to get you back or anything like that, but I deserve to know why. I like you and it hurt when you disappeared on me.
July 24, 4:57PM

I didn't expect a response, but I sent it anyway. I wanted to call you out. Horrible, but I wanted you to hurt as much as you hurt me. I'd always heard heartbreak caused physical pain, and it did. My whole body ached—not a sharp pain, though. Dull. All day. Every day.

One evening, I was hanging laundry out on the line and my phone dinged with a notification. When I saw your name followed by a message too long to fit on my lock screen, I freaked out and dropped it in the basket with the clothes pins. I forced myself to finish hanging out the bedsheets. And then once I was finished and shut away in my room, I checked it.

Sorry. I've been trying to think of what to say. It's been very difficult for me to admit, but I am just not mentally able to be in a relationship. I really do like you, but I just can't mentally handle it. It's nothing you did. I'm just not mentally mature right now and I really need to work on myself.

July 27, 4:32PM

I laid down on my mattress and read it over and over—I figured it'd be the last text you'd ever send me, so I waited a few hours before texting you back. I said that was okay, but I wished you'd told me sooner. Told you I understood why we couldn't be together now, but maybe we could if things ever changed. Mentioned that you could still come by the house to see Ethan and your other friends.

And while knowing why you left made me feel a little bit better, a little less crazy for feeling so attached to you...it made matters worse in a sense. That message contained a brief summary of everything you'd been hiding behind your blue, everything you weren't showing me. Everything I couldn't fix for you.

I remembered the scared little boy I'd seen behind your eyes that night you stayed with me.

And I kept kissing you and kissing you.

Like I could make you better.

IX.  flickers • Wrabel

I should burn this.

I should burn this.

I should burn this.

And I stared down at the dark blue diary filled with letters I never sent you, the only diary I'd ever managed to fill. I stood over the firepit at the edge of my backyard and held a box of matches in my hand, dropped it in the dried autumn grass. Then I flipped through the pages and caught excerpts of words I'd scrawled out to you.

"...like I couldn't hold on to you tight enough...still miss you, some days more than others...you had your guard up...not mad at you...disappointed, maybe...going to hurt for a while...got scared that you weren't enough, didn't you?...wish you hadn't run away, but you did...feel like I can let go."

It'd been months since you disappeared, and I needed to burn this.

I leaned down to pick the matchbox out of the oak leaves littering the ground. Twisted it around in my hand, grabbed a match and set it alight. I'd gathered some old newspapers and twigs to use as kindling and set the diary beneath everything. Then I threw the match into the pit and watched the flames lick at the edges of the diary, slowly melting. Burning.

By the time everything was said and done, I loved you without ever really knowing you. But if I woke up tomorrow in June with the choice to opt out of what we had, then I'd want you to know that I wouldn't have to think about it for a second—I'd do us all over again.

And I'd try harder this time, because maybe this time, you'd engage with me. Maybe this time, you'd tell me why you talked to fill the silence. You'd tell me why you always kissed me so hard, so desperately. You'd tell me what kept you up at night, what made you cry. You'd tell me everything.

And I'd tell you.

Anonymous

Roommate*Kimberly Braet*

Ears

Keno was an artist. He would sit, propped on the sand dunes and paint the ocean at sunrise. His knuckles were smudged with paint when he stopped in at the Ace Hardware on 68th street every Friday. He always paid in change, sometimes crumpled dollar bills that the Lithuanian cashier begrudgingly straightened out before printing his receipt. She watched him wait for the bus, sometimes for over an hour. Then, he was on his way to the work. He dragged his easel to his spot on the boardwalk and waited in the heat for some curious tourist to come look at his work.

He usually didn't sell much— most of his income came from passerby's pitying the deaf artist's situation who left a few coins in his open satchel. His art was beautiful, their lips read, but the excuse often was that they were too far from their car to buy a painting right now. Others promised to come back later, feigning interest only to never return.

Today is no different.

When the fluorescent lights of the Jolly Roger Ferris Wheel illuminated the skies, Keno packs up and walks towards the bus stop at the end of the Boardwalk. The driver always waits for him, even if he's a minute or two late. The ocean breeze whips through his hair, and he wonders what it might be like to hear it, or the cheerful tune of the circus calliope, or the laughter of families after climbing off the Tidal Wave coaster, or the roaring of the waves at high tide.

The bus comes to a halt, already filled with tourists going back to their respective condos after a long day at the beach. Seeing no open seats, Keno takes a step back, deciding to take the next bus instead. He's not in any rush, but his easel weighs heavy on his aching shoulder. Twenty years he's been doing this, promising himself that today will be the day he finally reaches his goal of having enough savings to purchase a cochlear implant and finally hear the world.

And that's seven thousand, three hundred times that he's come home to the darkness of his trailer with no such luck, two decades of quiet as the prices of cochlear implants continue to rise. Yet every morning, he gets up and presses on, hoping for what may never happen.

The sea is beautiful even without the howling wind in his ears and seagulls harps as they dart across the sand. He knows this to be a fact, for he's spent many a morning capturing beauty that could only be seen by the eye. The soft pink and orange clouds of an early summer sunrise, the crystal white sand pressed flat from the beach cleaner the night before. The

abandoned purple and blue shovels and buckets long since washed away from a forgetful child. The old fisherman who stands knee deep in the water, casting his line again no matter how many times he came home empty-handed.

It's a beauty one can't find anywhere else, and music of the world or not, Keno knows, and he loves being here. If only he had more time to enjoy it.

With the city bus out of sight, Keno decides to walk down to the water. He once read that the sea air is good for one's health, which is why in Victorian literature so many heroines dying of modern-preventable diseases came here on holiday to lift their spirits. Though one can't feel it as strongly anymore, the ocean's healing nature can still be found here. Keno sets his easel and satchel down on the lifeguard's stand and toes off his worn loafers.

His feet ease into the cool sand, and the pain starts to fade from his body with each step he takes towards the shore. The unending breeze tugs away his worries, his uncertainty of what life may hold tomorrow. Outstretching his arms, he wonders if it can take him, too.

Icy cold water rushes laps at his feet and calves from a recently crashed wave, sending feeling back into his body. He should probably head back to the bus stop.

Tomorrow, he promises himself as he turns his back to the sea. Tomorrow I'll reach my goal.

Sirens' Rest

If ever
They were
To lay eyes
Upon you,

They would
Silence
Their song,
And whisper
Their condolences

To the many
They had drowned,
And deprived
Of your light

The gold
In your hair

The spark
In your eyes

The spell
On your lips
As you serenade
The stars

Turning over
Lullabies

Drifting
In the dark

Oxymoron of War

A born warrior,
Who does not like the weight of the sword.
The blade that slices,
And the tip that pierces deep.
Because deep down she has the urge to pray for her enemies
A veteran who has never fought a battle,
But is fighting a war
Thus, the reason why every wound cuts deep
What's the point of healing when the scars are still visible
Ugly reminders of war tattooed into the skin, etched into the memory
Scars from a war she was drafted into
There is no time for resentment
She must grow accustomed to the sword
Or she will be held ransom by the wounds on her soul

- The Story of the Stagnant Warrior

Update

I haven't gotten better,
I've just gotten better at hiding it.

My mind feels like static and my heart feels like lead.
The voice that I had told you had gone says that I'm better off dead.

I am not happy.
Nor have I recently been.

This is an uphill battle,
I feel that I'll never win.

I feel guilty for feeling happy,
But I've not been faking this.

This life without my demons,
Feels like there's something amiss.

I've been lying to you.
I can't tell you why.

I guess I want to save you the pain.
Who would want to see me cry?

I've isolated myself so that no one is there.
After all and in honesty, why would you ever care?

Matches

When he is nine, he steals matches from Eliza's desk drawer and takes them into the backyard. He tries to light one against the rough edge of the box, once, twice, and the third time a gossamer spindle of smoke singes his nose hairs and the match head darkens and he has to stop because he's scared.

Deep breath. Try again.

He presses the match against the striker. It's fragile, and his fingers are large and clumsy. Eliza used to catch butterflies in glass jars, and once she let him hold a monarch, and its wings were so thin that his pudgy baby hands tore one down the middle. Holding the match is like that.

One quick pull down the side of the box. One smooth movement, and there's the smoke again, there's the smell again, but this time the head snaps off. Eliza killed the monarch. Crushed it under her bare hand, slammed its struggling body into the kitchen countertop over and over while he screamed Mommy Mommy Mommy. She said it was his fault, because he damaged it. It was beautiful, she caught it because it was beautiful and you ruined it Thomas why do you ruin everything Thomas. He drops the broken match and it disappears into a clump of chickweed.

Deep breath. Just pretend it's the Fourth of July. That smell, like the fireworks Eliza's boyfriend sets off down by the railway tracks. The matches are red and white and the box is blue. Eliza makes him hold an American flag and they stand beside the railway tracks, and the fireworks go boom boom like his heart pounding in his ears. Pretend it's the Fourth of July.

He picks a fresh match out of the box.

Eliza only smokes after she and her boyfriend have sex. She always closes her bedroom door but he still hears them, and afterward she sits at the kitchen table and looks at him with smoldering eyes and talks around her cigarette. Tosses the word from her mouth as if it's not strange and scary to him. Yeah, we had sex. You could hear us having sex, right? At least the sex is good. She cups her hand around the end of the cigarette when she lights it, as if it's something to be protected.

Press hard, but don't break it. Use your fingernail. Crush its raspberry tip against the striker.

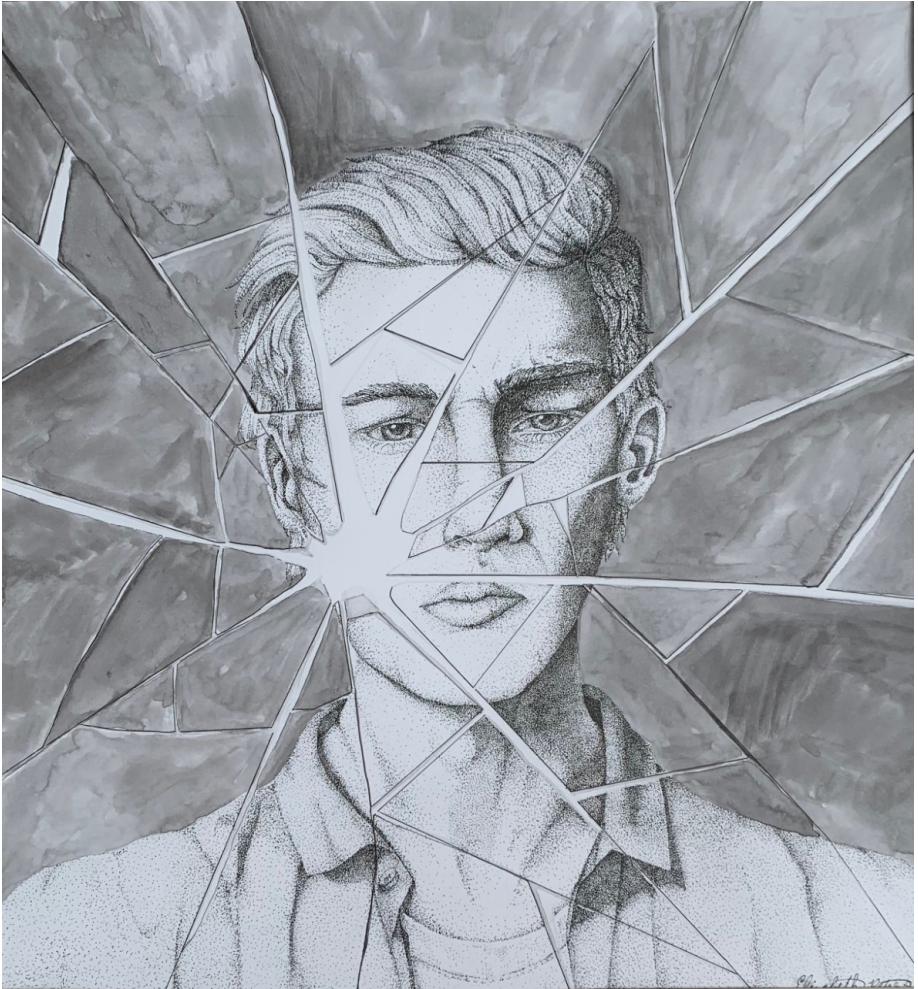
Once, she was crying and smoking at the same time, and he reached for her hand, and she dropped the cigarette and burned her foot.

One quick pull. Pretend it's the Fourth of July.

The match head erupts into flames that swallow the stick in great greedy gulps. Orange and yellow and the wood burns black and he wishes he could stop ruining everything.

The flames nip at his fingertips. He cries out and drops the match and it falls in the chickweed and he stomps on it kills it before the fire can spread.

Eliza doesn't catch butterflies anymore.

Shattered Dreams*Elizabeth Peters*

The Mouse and the Puddle

In a small house in the middle of the woods, there lived a young boy.

One day the young boy decided he would venture into the woods in search of new and interesting things.

And just when he was about to enter the woods, he looked down and saw a small puddle with a mouse standing near its edge looking at his reflection in the water.

Curious, the boy stood and watched the mouse, wondering what it would do next.

Suddenly, the mouse jumped headlong into the water and started paddling toward the other side of the puddle.

“What are you doing down there?” said the young boy to the mouse.

Naturally, the mouse didn’t respond, he just kept kicking his little feet in the water to keep himself afloat, trying to get to the other side.

But the mouse got tired, and soon began to sink into the water.

Fearing the mouse would drown, the young boy fished him out of the water, and dropped the mouse at his destination.

The mouse, seeing that he had gotten to the other side, looked at the young boy and bowed his head in thanks.

The mouse then ran off into the woods.

“How strange,” said the young boy. “I wonder if he will be back tomorrow.”

The next day, the young boy walked back out of his house toward the puddle, and there again he saw the mouse sitting at the puddle’s edge.

Will he jump in? thought the young boy.

And he did, the little mouse jumped straight into the little puddle and began to swim toward the other end while the young boy watched.

But again, the mouse started to sink.

And again, the young boy fished the mouse back out, and placed him at his destination.

The mouse, seeing that he had gotten to the other side, looked again at the young boy, but instead of bowing, he just stared at him, as if he were waiting for something.

The young boy looked at the mouse and said: “You went a little farther this time. Did you know that?”

The mouse looked back at the puddle, and then at the boy, and bowed again.

The mouse then ran off into the woods as he had done so yesterday.

Huh, thought the young boy. I think I’ve found something very interesting.

After that, the young boy would venture from his home to the small puddle every day, and every day the mouse would be waiting there for him, seemingly wanting the young boy to help him and watch him swim.

Sometimes the mouse would make it all the way to the end with no help whatsoever from the young boy, and sometimes he would get tired and need assistance.

Sometimes he would get very close to the edge, to the point where the boy just shoved him forward rather than lift him.

And sometimes the mouse wouldn’t get close to the edge at all, and the young boy would have to pick him up and plop him over to his destination.

But each time, the mouse would look at the young boy for a response, and when the mouse felt like he had been given one, it would run off into the woods behind him, not to be seen until the next day.

One day, right before the mouse was about to begin his swim across the puddle, he looked up at the young boy who had come to watch him yet again.

“What is it?” said the young boy.

The mouse quickly looked at the small puddle and then back to the young boy.

The young boy chuckled. “Do you want me to carry you across the puddle?” said the young boy.

The mouse again looked at the small puddle and then back again at the young boy, seemingly to answer the question.

“I’m sorry,” said the young boy. “But no. I’ll only help you if you really need me to help you.”

With that response, the mouse trotted leisurely into the puddle and laid in it, his head fully submerged under the water.

The young boy waited for him to swim, but he just didn’t do anything.

Oh no, thought the young boy. He’s putting himself in danger, so that I’ll help him.

Angry at the mouse, the young boy quickly grabbed the mouse out of the water, but instead of placing him at his destination, he placed him at the starting point.

The mouse, seeing that he wasn’t at the end of the puddle, looked at the young boy with a confused stare.

The young boy leaned in to the mouse’s face, so that they almost touched, and he said:

“That was not funny. I am here to help you when you are most in need of it. You are capable of crossing that puddle on your own. I’ve seen you do it. Do not test me, mouse.”

The mouse looked again at the puddle, and again at the young boy, and again at the puddle.

And, like he had done so many times before, the mouse jumped in.

He kicked and paddled his little feet until he was almost to the edge, but just before he got there, he started to get tired. And he was so close, he could almost touch the other side. The mouse waited for a hand to come and lift him out but none ever did, instead he heard a loud booming cheer from the sidelines of his swim.

“Go!” yelled the young boy. “You can do it! You can make it!”

The mouse believed him, and even though he was tired, he gave a few extra kicks, and reached the edge of the puddle.

The tired mouse stood triumphant at the far edge of the puddle, apparently happy that he had pushed through his limits.

He looked up at the young boy, and again waited for something to be said.

But the young boy said nothing. He just smiled.

The mouse bowed and again retreated into the woods.

Wow, thought the young boy. I wonder how long this will last?

It did not last too long.

The seasons were beginning to change, Summer was fast approaching, and with its close arrival came the evaporation of many puddles.

Every day the young boy visited the mouse at the puddle and every day the puddle would get smaller, until one day it had gotten so small that the mouse no longer seemed to need the young boy’s help or guidance.

What used to be a daunting task for the mouse now seemed more casual by each passing day.

On the day before Summer arrived, the puddle was only a slightly larger droplet, one that the mouse splashed through with ease and grace. The mouse’s challenge was over, but still he respectfully bowed to the young boy, who he knew had helped him many times before, and who still chose to watch him even though the mouse no longer needed help.

The mouse then ran back into the woods as he had done many times before.

The young boy looked at the remains of the puddle and said:

“I wonder what tomorrow will bring?”

On the day Summer arrived, the young boy again ventured to the puddle. There he found an empty space of dried ground where the mouse's puddle used to be, but with the mouse standing there in the middle of it, looking directly up at the young boy.

Like he was waiting for something.

The young boy leaned down and spoke to the mouse:

"It looks like your puddle's gone? You can't swim anymore?"

The mouse did not remove his gaze from the young boy. Almost as if he no longer knew what to do.

The young boy looked behind him at his small house, and then again at the mouse, who still hadn't moved an inch.

"Well," said the young boy. "Maybe you shouldn't swim anymore."

And the young boy picked up the mouse in both his hands and walked back toward his home.

"I think you'll find there's many other things."

This I Believe

If I write, “I believe in love,” you’ll sigh and get ready to hear another conversation about storybook romance. So I’m going to tell you about chocolate milk.

I shared chocolate milk with my boyfriend the other day, the same day my family put up our Christmas tree, while we sat on opposite sides of the kitchen counter and talked about how much we both liked this book I’d given him. I looked at him through the three PM sun and something felt like it fell into place. Moments that feel big are sometimes small. As I held that glass in my hand, I kept thinking about all the fingerpainted memories of kindergarten, and when I put it down, I was surrounded by the voice of someone I care about very much. The nostalgia came in, soft and warm, and nothing felt more like home.

My mother and father used to sit with my sister and I and do big puzzles surrounded by cups of chocolate milk and tea - Lipton, two sugars. It was during these sun-blanket Sundays that love became true and real to me. My grandfather never stops telling me that love is spelled t-i-m-e, and it has gotten so deeply woven into my conscience that I don’t always fully comprehend what he means. Thinking back to little moments, simple pancake-mornings, I couldn’t agree more. Helping someone grow through life is more than sun and water. It is sharing your warmth and truth, sitting down and drinking chocolate milk together. In this world where you’re constantly bombarded with expectations, giving and receiving calm moments is the best thing you can do.

I drove my friend to Wegmans when we were both feeling crushed under pressure, just to watch the train over the milk aisle. That night I smiled more genuinely than I had in months. My friends taught me that love is the biggest inside joke in this world. You just need to know how to laugh. I look at my dearest friends and am overwhelmed by just how much I care about them. Real love can happen at any age, between any people, and it will take you by surprise. “True love’s kiss,” is a cat figurine, a wink in the hallway, and a glass of chocolate milk. It is sharing the party, opening your arms as wide as you possibly can to spread your love, and no expression is too small.

I apologize, I can’t tell you how exactly to love, but I can tell you that I believe you must. People might feel like your greatest enemies, but this shouldn’t dissuade you from finding your truest friend, no use crying over spilt milk. Love is the most powerful force of which I am capable, and I believe in putting it out into the world. Being kind to others is more

important than being right or being accomplished. After all, no one is too good for chocolate milk, this I believe more than anything else.

Note to Self

Send your soldiers packing,
Open the can of worms,
Because maybe you've mistaken
Caterpillars for worms.

Maybe you've built walls meant to be broken down,
Maybe it won't hurt when they fall,
And you won't get shot down on the other side,
But maybe you'll go down saying,
"I tried."
"I loved."
"I love."

One day you won't be afraid to fly,
Because all that weight will be lifted,
And you won't be afraid to fall.

Only then will you learn...
Avoiding love, out of fear of loss,
Is perhaps the biggest loss of all.

Flower

On the day you got bored, you planted me in your garden
 You told me I was the most beautiful flower you have ever seen
 You told me all of your other flowers could never compare
 When your friends came over you showed me off
 Neighbors were in awe of my presence
 I grew and grew and grew and wanted to be the best for you

One day you spotted a tiny leaf sprouting out of my stem
 You looked at me and frowned and exclaimed
 "You look better without this leaf here" right before you snipped it off
 I looked down at myself and felt bare
 I liked that leaf and cherished it like a mother bird with her nest
 After pulling myself together and thinking really hard
 I grew and grew and grew and still wanted to be the best for you

Eventually you got more friends
 You stopped showing me off
 You barely glanced over at your garden or at me at all
 The ground became dry around me and I no longer had a healthy
 environment that I could grow for you in
 Even throughout the drought
 I tried to grow and grow and grow and still wanted to be the best for you

The day came when you came back for me
 There was no apology or excuse that you cared to come up with
 You came over to me and held onto me
 I felt the life coursing through my body and the anger melted away
 The hours and days of feeling betrayed disappeared
 I washed myself in your affection
 Once again, I grew and grew and grew and wanted to be the best for you

That feeling was short lived
 You eventually snipped my stem and left me there to die
 Left me there to drown in my own pain and loneliness and despair
 You planted me because you were bored
 But then you got bored with me
 I remembered when you used to show me off and hoped this wasn't real
 What did I do wrong?
 You have to still love me...
 I still try to grow for you

Anonymous

Icarus and the Sun

Icarus looked out over the stone ledge, scanning the golden bathed horizon. The salty breeze from the soft crashing waves below washed over the young man as the sun gently warmed him over. He watched the rolling sea, following the swells quietly, with no true judgment. Icarus was looking out not to find something he longed for as his father would. He watched the world, not because of a boredom that filled him. Instead, the young man simply let the gentle, harsh sun and the beautiful, terrible sea cast a spell on him. Icarus leaned on his hand, allowing the contrasting, contradictory forces to work their magic while he simply observed and admired.

“Icarus!” A sharp call came from behind the boy.

Icarus turned back to look at a man who stood on the other side of the tower’s roof that they found themselves on.

The man was bent over a pile of feathers, a pile of candles, and a pool of hot wax. With steady, calloused fingers, he held a candle over a small lit fire, allowing the flame to lick the slowly melting stick. The man snatched a feather from the pile and stuck the tip into the wax before meticulously sticking it in a line of other waxy feathers. Each motion of the man was fluid and well-rehearsed, although quick. His long, greying beard had a drop or two of wax that had dripped from his working hands. Despite their swift and precise dance from candle to wax to feather to line, the man abruptly put the warming candle down as he placed the latest feather in a row. He motioned the boy on the other end of the roof to come closer, although his eyes never left the materials before him. “Come try these on.”

Icarus gently pushed himself up off the ledge he leaned on and went over to the man across the roof. “Are they ready?”

The older man stood, picking up the strange contraption as if it were made of gold and melted silver. “By tomorrow, they’ll be fine enough for the journey. I can better them at home,” he stated before his eyes finally landed on the younger man. “Turn your back, boy, so I can put them on.”

“Yes, father,” Icarus replied, obeying his elder.

The new rows of wax and feathers pressed against Icarus’s bare skin, searing the flesh like hot pokers sticking into him. Leather straps tightened around his upper chest and each of his arms, constricting him as a snake suffocates a mouse. The soft feathers brushed his back here or there, creating an urgent desire to scratch and claw at the affected skin.

Icarus began to squirm, his shoulders knitting desperately together to reduce the exposure on his unprotected back. His hands clenched to resist the urge to tear off the device that was attached to him. Still, even with this effort, he couldn't hold back the slightest whimper of pain. "Father—"

"Hold still." the older man ordered, his tone neither angry nor sympathetic. His crafter's hands held Icarus's arms, guiding them to go up and down while outstretched at the boy's side. He followed the movement of the wings with a sharp gaze, scrutinizing every last detail. Finally, he started to undo the straps, taking the contraption in his light grasp. "Go find more birds, Icarus. If we are quick, then we should leave by tomorrow."

The young man nodded. He remained still as he could manage while the feathers were taken off his back, but the second he was free, the young man rushed to the other side of the roof. Icarus glanced around the area, locating the jumbled piles of twigs as he ran his hand tentatively across the stinging patches of skin along his arms. After a few moments, he went about finding feathers for his father.

Hours of work came and went. The golden sun soon was all but gone, with the last beams stretching across the sky as a final desperate effort to light the darkening heavens. Icarus's father continued his craft, his hands working as elegantly as a skilled dancer's feet. Meanwhile, Icarus sat by the ledge once more, stroking a small, iridescent bird that perched in his palm. Every now and then, Icarus would gently pluck a feather that seemed to stick out of the bird's molting wings.

It was just as the sun was setting when a voice yelled to the two from a trap door in the middle of the roof. "Daedalus! Dinner!" From a small opening in the trap door, a loaf of bread was nudged out.

The older man stopped his work, standing and going towards the door. "What else do you have for me?" he asked, his voice the one that adults use with their children.

"I'm not giving you any more." the voice retorted sharply, shutting the opening with a loud thud. "The others'll notice what's going on. Don't you got enough?"

"I need one more. You can do that, can't you? The others won't question one extra candle going missing, will they?" Daedalus replied, kneeling to the trap door. "Besides, I'll give you an extra drachma if you do this one last candle."

The offer was met at first with only the smallest mutterings from the outside door. Of course, it only took a second or two for greed to overcome survival and honor. "Make it two, or I'll tell all of Crete about your nephew."

Daedalus frowned, his shoulders knitting together. His gaze shifted towards the young man across the roof. His eyes bore into Icarus, scanning each detail of the boy's face in the way he would with a particularly difficult invention in need of repairing. Slowly, he leaned closer to the trap door and whispered so quietly that Icarus almost couldn't make out the words. "Five if you never speak of that in my presence again."

A shuffling came from the trap door before the small latch opened, and a hand shoved a candle out.

Daedalus snatched the candle and stood, making his way back to his station. His face remained contorted into a glare, which he threw only towards the heavens.

Icarus didn't dare to look anywhere but the trap door, where the small opening was swiftly closed. The young man continues to pet the bird in his hand, picking the feathers blindly as the presence nearby on the roof stewed. He could sense the craftsman take up his work, and he attempted to ignore the harsh grumbles that emanated from the man's throat. In his precaution to avert his own gaze, Icarus stared into the sun, which only proved the great level of effort he exerted to do so.

How brilliant the sun seemed compared to the drab stone Icarus stood on. Apollo was carrying that massive ball of heat across the sky with a team of brilliant steeds. The god was a father, just like Daedalus. He had sired Phaethon, whose tragic death had happened when he tried to control the very chariot Apollo used to carry the sun. The sun deity had passed on his medicine skills to Asclepius, who was said to heal the dead. Apollo was even the father of the musician and poet, Orpheus, whose songs moved the underworld. He was the god of music, prophecy, poetry, medicine, and of the sun. Somehow, his children had all met terrible ends, and yet as Icarus watched the golden ball of light crawl below the horizon, he couldn't help but wish he was one of those sons. True, they met terrible ends, but they had lived. Orpheus had love, fame, and a legacy that followed him as he wandered the earth. Asclepius was in the stars and was now immortal as his father. Phaethon, too, had left a mark in the world. His fateful course left a deep gash that splattered the sky and burned part of the world into desert. His fault was allowing the chariot to go too high up and then allowing it to fall to the world below. Even with such a tragic legacy and pain, Phaethon

was able to—at least for one moment—fly. He etched his name into the long black and blue fabric of the night sky in a way that would remain.

Icarus could not do this. He could never change the world so dramatically. His singing was weak, his healing abilities non-existent, and his lineage was that of a man that defied the gods with each new step. The boy lived under Daedalus' shadow, and yet he was bothered more so by a ghost instead. The name Perdix remained on his mind but never reached his tongue. He never dared to tell his father that he knew the name or the story that came from it; The story of a young apprentice that worked with his uncle and was killed for surpassing him. Icarus never told his father that he knew the true reason they had family in Athens and yet lived on Crete. Icarus never dared to tell of the night he had spent trading stories with Ariadne, Crete's princess and the daughter of Daedalus' boss. He never described the sickening pang in his stomach when his friend told him that his father murdered that young boy, with all the potential in the world before him. Icarus never asked his father why or if he would be next. Instead, Icarus lived with that name, always present but never spoken. Perdix could have been the next Asclepius, the next Orpheus, but he was the nephew of Daedalus, not a son of Apollo. Icarus knew this, and so he remained in the shadow rather than dare step out. At least when he was hiding there, he could watch the sun's glow.

“Finished,” Daedalus said in a sigh, sitting back to look over the completed project.

Before the inventor sat a pair of wings, held together with melted wax, and wearable using leather straps. The feathers had the slightest shine of blue when the light hit them just right. Even in the darkness of the rooftop, lit by only the candle used to melt the wax, the wings were enormous and beautiful as the birds Icarus had plucked to make them.

Icarus glanced towards his father, roused from his musing by the older man's voice. “So, we'll leave tomorrow, right?”

Daedalus nodded as he stood. “At dawn, when the sun is at its weakest and the sea is at its calmest.” He explained, going to a thin pile of hay that was spread on the stone floor. “We must be careful to fly between the two tomorrow. But for now, get some sleep, Icarus. You'll need your strength.”

The boy nodded, staring at the now sunless splattering of white shining lights in the sky, so impossibly far above him. He could see the scar left by Phaethon, a boy who had tried to prove his lineage and went too far. How foolish he seemed, compared to his brothers. How dull of an achievement, and yet, it was an achievement nonetheless. If only mortals could leave such

a mark. The next day, Icarus would take part in his father's achievement. He'd receive second-hand acknowledgments about how he flew beside his father in some great climax of Daedalus' genius. It would never be his accomplishment to own. Instead, it would be another small link between himself and the shining man that brought him to life. He'd be a footnote in his father's story, leaving no mark of his own on the page. Icarus would fall into obscurity, but perhaps tomorrow, he would finally live.

The next morning, the winged Daedalus tightened the leather straps around his son's chest and arms. "Recite back to me the rules. Where do you fly?"

"The middle," Icarus replied, clenching his fists as the straps constricted around him.

"What happens if you go too low?"

"The feathers absorb the water and become too heavy to fly."

"If you go too high?" Daedalus challenged, raising his eyebrow.

"The wax melts, and I fall anyway." Icarus recited, scanning the lavender-colored sky for the rising sun. His gaze was clouded, in contrast to the clear blue heavens stretched above him.

"Correct. Remember, our wings can only carry one of us. We cannot fly anyone other than ourselves." He warned, fastening the last strap on his son's wings. "We go straight to the northeast, and we'll stop once we find civilization." Finally, he stepped away, going to the ledge and looking over. "No one is there, now. If we are to do this, it must be now." He looked back to his son. "Are you ready?" he asked, his tone once again falling to that quiet and deceitfully concerned softness.

Icarus swallowed back the growing lump in his throat that threatened to suffocate him. "Yes, father. I'm ready."

Daedalus nodded and turned to look out once more. He licked his finger and held it up to the air, testing the strength and direction. "I believe everything is ready. All we need to do is—"

The older man was cut off as feathers brushed against his wings, swiftly hurtling towards the ledge. Icarus was running, forcing himself once again to look only at the sun on the horizon. With each step, he could feel his heart beat faster. With every panting breath, he felt some part of him screaming to stop before he fell. He scrambled onto the ledge, and for just a brief

moment, he knew that whether he continued to jump or not, he would be going over the edge of the roof. Faced with this knowledge which, faster than his legs, warned him there was no return, Icarus did what any young person might do. He saw his destiny and leapt towards it.

The first moment was as if time froze. Icarus felt himself suspended in the air. He was in the middle, neither flying nor falling, neither son of a god nor an orphan, neither alive nor dead. He was in the gap between, staying in an eternal state of moderation. It was here that Icarus felt that sharp pain strike his heart; that fear that he was about to die filled him to the core. Then, as it always does, the world continued to move, and with it, Icarus began to desperately flap his wings.

The motion was difficult. With each downstroke, Icarus took a gasping breath, trying to keep himself stable. Despite gravity's strong pull, the young man soon found that he wasn't falling. As he continued to flail his arms, he began to synchronize their movement. Icarus started to slow his breathing and lean into the wind which he felt embrace him like an old friend. Just as the breeze may scoop up a falling leaf, so too did it hoist the young man up above the stone tower he once thought so high up. Soon, Icarus found that he barely needed to flap the wings at all. For once, some invisible force held him up and allowed him to soar.

"You're doing it!" Daedalus called with a great laugh from his spot on the ledge. The man was grinning from ear to ear, something Icarus had never seen appear on his often-stony face. The man stepped away before getting his own running start and bounding off the roof himself.

Icarus didn't hear this, though. He didn't care to turn back and see his father. Instead, he looked up at the untouchable void of blue above him. Excitement took over fear, and he found that he began to glow just like the sun. The sun... The sun was just to the right of him. Icarus turned to see the ball of fire rising over the horizon. Apollo's chariot would be riding up there, so close he could touch it. The boy felt something new fill his every sensation. It was a desire so strong that he could swear it had always been there as an invisible force throughout his life. It was a connection-no, a destiny. It was his destiny. His destiny to go to the god of music, of healing, of the sun-of the sons. Icarus saw the void between his new self and that untouchable ball of light, and he felt the string the fates weave tug on his still young fluttering heart. Icarus shone with his new purpose and began to beat his wings.

"Icarus, I'm here!" Daedalus declared, working his worn limbs to keep afloat.

Icarus didn't hear his father. He didn't see the ground growing smaller and smaller. Instead, the boy heard a song. It was a simple tune, hidden from him for all of his life, and yet it felt so familiar. Icarus heard the song of the universe, simple, clear, and true. He set his movements to the beat of this melody, and he matched his breath with the silent breath of Mother Earth herself. Icarus saw only the sun's light and felt only its warmth. It grew closer and closer as Icarus flew higher and higher. He always thought it would burn, but it didn't. The golden rays embraced him, like the hug of a mother he never knew. It was the hug that his father never gave. The gap was closing with each downstroke. For Icarus, the only way to go was higher.

"Icarus! Stop! Come down! Icarus! Do you hear me!?" cried Daedalus, but for once, his voice went unheeded. Besides, it was too late.

Icarus closed his eyes, feeling himself finally make it to the edge of the gap between himself and the light he idolized. He stopped his flapping and felt the world's never-ending movement beneath him. He felt more than the sun's warmth. Icarus could feel the heartbeat of the cosmos, and he matched it to his own. For one moment, he hung there in the sky. He was flying. He was no longer only the son of an inventor. He was Icarus, and he was alive.

Then, pain broke him out of his state. Melted wax seared into the unprotected skin on his back. Icarus's eyes flashed open, and he squirmed to look behind himself as pure happiness gave way to the feeling of being numb. Feathers covered in liquid candle fluttered away from him into the clouds below.

Icarus gasped in his attempt to take in enough air. His stomach was filled with a sharp pang as his heart stopped. The boy grasped at the air, reaching for the sun so close. Looking back towards the great ball of light, Icarus desperately flailed, hoping to catch hold of something-anything, but nothing was there to hold. The gap between himself and the sun was just too wide to bridge alone, and no one came to meet him. All too soon, Icarus felt himself falling against the too weak wind. Tears filled his eyes as he began to plummet.

This couldn't be the ending. He couldn't die like this. He only just got to fly-to live. It isn't fair that he was stopped so soon. It wasn't his fault that Apollo didn't help him. He was left to fall alone-or was he? Icarus squirmed in the air, searching and scanning the growing waves below him for his father's figure. It took only a moment before he saw the older man, only just a bit further than he was. Icarus reached out. "Father! Father, help me!" He called as the ocean grew exponentially bigger and closer to him.

Daedalus looked back towards Icarus. There were tears in his eyes as he watched, but he did not stop his march forward. He didn't turn around. Daedalus simply watched him for a moment before he looked away to the north and continued the course.

Icarus felt his face grow hot and his stomach churn. "Father-Father Please!" he cried out to deaf ears. Tears began to leak out of him and fly up towards the sky he could no longer reach. "Dad!"

The gap, so seemingly close, became a chasm, a dark sea of suffocating void. By the time he hit the water, Icarus had already drowned.

Untitled*Autumn Garibay*

Old Main in Snow



Matthew Hathaway

The Art of Limbo

Middle school is a tough time for anyone, but if you want to go through it on hard difficulty be fat. When I was in seventh grade, I was 5'4", 280 pounds and I did not wear the weight well. Unfortunately for me I had more than just my mirror to remind me. Chad McDunderson was the back-to-back roller rink limbo contest champion and my rival. He would always taunt me about my "big bones," how I'll never kiss anyone, and remind me that I could never be the limbo champion. I used to think he was right until I saw something worth fighting for. I heard in the cafeteria line that the next limbo contest was giving away a year's supply of Big Macs. I had never wanted anything more than I wanted that prize and I would stop at nothing to get it.

The annual Middletown, Pennsylvania roller rink limbo contest always happens the first Friday of the new year which meant I had two months to prepare myself. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I would be at the roller rink mastering the art of limbo. My dedication to the craft eventually got me noticed by Jonesy Williams. Jonesy is the only person to have a picture on the limbo hall of fame board. He went undefeated in both his middle school and high school limbo career. I was at the rink on a Monday and Jonesy walked out from behind the food stand and made his way over to me. I was so nervous to be in his presence I fell while going under my Wilson limbo bar. He reached out his hand to help me up and said, "Not bad, kid."

I replied with, "It wasn't my best."

He laughed and told me, "I've been watching you practice for a while now and I think you have what it takes to go all the way. I'll teach you everything I know about limbo." I didn't think I could win by myself but with a coach like Jonesy I stood a chance.

The following Monday Jonesy had me come to the rink when his shift started, and I stayed until his shift was over. I asked him what we were doing for my first training, and he said, "Fill up the soda fountain with ice." I looked at him, confused, and he quickly said, "Hey kid, which one of us won seven limbo competitions?" My face went from confused to worried and I quickly ran into the basement to fill the soda machine. Right after I poured the ice in, Jonesy came up to me and said, "I have a new task" as he handed me a broom. He told me that there was a homeless guy sleeping in the alley and to take care of it. I went out into the alley and there I saw the homeless man covered in his own urine. I held in my breath and poked him with the brooms handle. This startled the homeless and he screamed, "NOT THIS TIME YOU KOREAN BASTARDS!" Suddenly he took the broom and with

one swift motion swiped my feet from underneath me. The homeless man then threw the broom in the air and ran away screaming “THAT’S FOR PVT. PECKER.” I went back into the roller rink, bruised and bleeding from my elbow. Jonesy was hiding in the manager’s office smoking a joint and drinking from a flask.

“Is this what you have been doing?” I asked.

He said “Nah, I’ve also just did a whippet.” In that moment of time, I knew Jonesy was just a loser. I decided to do the rest of the training by myself.

The energy at school the week before the big contest could only be described as rowdy. There were 11 fights leading up to Friday. All the kids who were friends turned into bitter rivals. It got so bad on Friday there was a stampede of horse girls that ran out of the school when it ended. That day there were 12 kids injured, and we all sent our thoughts and prayers out to the families. It was 4:00PM and the contest was two long hours away. I was so bored I decided to count how many red bricks were used around my house. At one point I just started making up numbers, but if you are interested in the total brick count, it is four million billion bricks. I’ve never been more excited than when I heard my mother say, “Go to the bathroom before we go.”

Pulling into the roller rink made me feel like it was my time to win. When I walked through the door, I was greeted by a McDonalds employee who handed me a Big Mac and winked at me. It was as if she knew the power hidden in the Big Mac’s umami-filled secret sauce. I inhaled the delectable burger and began doing my warm-up stretches. Midway through my stretches Chad came cruising by, and of course that’s when I fell. Chad said, “That rumble had a Richter magnitude of at least 6.2.” He thought this would hurt my feelings, but it only fueled my fire. There were 43 kids who entered the competition and slowly one by one there were only five of us left. Henry Genzel was the first of the final five to go, but unfortunately for him he got too nervous. Henry threw up on the floor right in front of him, causing him to spin out and break his ankle. Everyone at the contest got down on one knee as Henry was wheeled off crying in the stretcher.

Todd Crissy was up next, but he had always been a lanky kid and when he went to lean back his legs couldn’t support his surfboard frame and he crumbled. Finally, I got to watch Chad go. Chad’s strategy was always to go as slow as possible to allow maximum time for micro adjustments. Slowly Chad came rolling under the bar, but he never made it all the way through. The panic on Chad’s face was so good I took a picture and made it my profile picture. He was underneath the bar for what felt like five minutes,

desperately waving his hands trying to get enough momentum to go forward. Eventually he gave up and let gravity do its thing.

I felt my heart begin to race when I realized it was my turn. I, with the most graceful of strides, made my way to the bar. I bent my knees, bent backwards, and prayed for the best. I watched as my chest cleared the bar and then I tilted my head back. I felt a bump on my second chin from the top, then I heard the screech from the airhorn of failure. Although I lost, I kept all of my chins high because I made it further than I thought I could. The last person to go was a girl I barely knew but always thought was cute. Her name was Jenny and she was always the runner- up. Jenny sprinted towards the bar and at the last second went into a split and slid under the bar. When we were all standing on the finalist podium, she whispered in my ear “Meet me by the Skee-Ball machines.” I waited the appropriate amount of time then headed my way over. I saw her next to the ski ball machines and before I could say hi, she ran up to me and kissed me then she left without saying anything. Five minutes later I was broken out of my daze by the intercom saying, “Jenny McDunderson please come to the ticket counter to redeem your prize.”

From the start I was doubted because of my weight. Chad doubted I would ever kiss a girl and then I kissed his sister. I might have lost the limbo contest and the year’s supply of Big Macs, but I got the best comeback possible: “I kissed your sister.” In my mind, I won everything.

Sprite

I like the way that sprite tastes,
how it tingles in my throat.

I like the way that flowers smell
even through their winter coats.

I like the color of the grass,
vibrant green and yellow.

I like the way clean sheets feel
so soft and cool and mellow.

I like the way that you taste,
how your mouth fits onto mine.

I like the way that you smell
so warm and gentle and kind.

I like the color of your eyes,
green and yellow-brown.

I like the way you make me feel
not lost, but suddenly found.

Knitted

We entwine ourselves into one another.

Our spiritual limbs interlock
until we disappear into the knots.

Missed stitches here and there
are soaked in our sweat and tears.

I hope we will never unravel completely,
but I know we will never be completed.

We will always be an unfinished, abandoned project.

The Crowns

Once upon a time there was a silver palace nestled in a far valley between the green hills and blue mountains. Each year as the days grew shorter and the storms grew fiercer, the young people of the area would flock to the hills in their finest. They knew that was the time when the magic was strongest, that they would be able to see the princes and princesses who lived there and dance with them. So, they would go, dressed in rubies and silks, top hats and corsets, to find the palace that no map ever told the location of. Paths to it had been created, but within three days they were no longer there, mapmakers attempted to write it down, but would wake up the next morning to find the paper blank. Many who searched found the palace, but no one ever recognized those they knew from outside the mountains once inside the palace walls. They would arrive with dirt on their hems and spiders in their coats, but as soon as the first waltz began, the stains and pests would be as if they never were.

The princes and princesses who lived at the palace had no names, and therefore no relation to each other save that they were all known as De Dansers van de Zilveren Heuvel. They themselves were not magic, but their palace was, which is why they were there. Once a year they let the magic that kept them hidden fall for three months to reveal to the shining silver columns and white polished floors. The princesses' pastel dresses of purples, blues, and pinks would glitter with crystals and diamonds, their tiaras likewise as the arrival of the guests drew near. The suits of the princes would become crisper, their bold blues, purples, and reds darkening as their crowns and buttons began to shine. As a rule, that was never placed but always known to be followed, the visitors of the palace would be the only dancers for the first dance. The permanent inhabitants would stand along the edge of the room, watching as they whirled across their floor. During the season the princes and princesses who had spent ages dancing together, did not recognize one another and could not pick their own out from the crowd after the first dance began. Though they never grew old, the princes and princesses delighted in their party and the many new faces that would fill their halls for them to laugh and dance with. They had seen generations of dancers pass by, and always enjoyed watching and dancing with the sons and daughters of past favorites. Once an outside dancer had danced four seasons at the palace, they could never go back, even if they were taken there by a younger person. If they chose, the royals could give up their eternal youth to go back with the visitors at the end of the season but would never be able to see the palace or dance again. Few ever chose this route, for four short seasons of dancing was not long enough to fall properly in love. Not to fall far enough to give up dancing and everlasting youth.

It was the second week of the season when they met. Her dress was lavender, so pale it was nearly white, a popular color that year amongst the visiting ladies who hoped to marry into the palace. She had broken her tiara earlier that night, and the magic would not fix it until the next morning came. He, however, had simply forgotten his golden crown that evening as he dressed in deep red, and had already begun to dance when its absence was noticed. Uncaring as to whether or not he was known as a prince that night, he continued to spin in time with as many ladies as he could before the dawn rose.

As the final hours of the ball began, so did a twisting dance with ribbons, and the princess in lavender paired herself with the prince in red. He had no objections to this, as she was the finest dancer he had danced with all season. They danced together, and no steps or beats were missed, no hems or shoes were stepped on, the only fault made was that they continued to dance after the music had stopped. As he bowed to her and kissed her hand, the prince without a crown asked the unknown princess for the next dance. She accepted, as no partner had ever danced half as well as he, had never righted her missteps by making them part of the dance. The next song began, a sweeping waltz, and as they whirled around the room, catching the eyes of the other couples. After they finished and drank glasses of a pearly liquid together, she proposed that he be her partner for the rest of the evening. Knowing that once he left her, she would be swept away into the crowd, he agreed. They danced to every song that was played by the unseen orchestra for the remainder of the night, always in time and perfect step with each other. Much was spoken between them, but nothing either could remember once the dancing had finished. She never told him what to call her, as she assumed that he was from the outside world and he would not remember her face once the night had ended. Likewise, he did the same, thinking she was from outside the palace and would not remember him when the sun rose. So, they danced, neither knowing that the other was one of their own, and uncaring of this falsehood since both were excellent dancers. All those from outside knew that the pair was royal, but all the princes and princesses saw them as strangers, not recognizing their closest friends. As the sky grew light, the pair danced their last dance, each hoping to recognize the other again the next night, and the night after that. The music ended and didn't begin again, and they realized that they were the only two left in the hall. The prince bowed as the princess curtsied, each going in opposite directions to the rooms they called home.

The next evening began, she in her tiara and a pink dress and he in his crown and a blue coat. Each danced less than half the dances, ceaselessly looking for the other, unable to find them due to the charm they placed upon themselves. Many times they passed by each other, brushing shoulders

more than once, but too busy searching for the stranger to see beyond their own magic as to see who was in front of them.

For the rest of the season, two and a half months of dancing, they searched for the other in every corner of the palace. Those three hours spent together was enough that the couple knew they had to see each other again, and after weeks spent looking, both were nowhere near giving up their search. On the last night of the season, when all the visitors dance their last dance, princes and princesses who wish to leave the palace may join them, to signify their departure and break their magic. The princess wore a dress of deep red and her tiara of silver, and the prince the palest coat he could find to complement his golden crown. Thinking that their partners from the night long ago were leaving that morning, they paired themselves with unskilled dancers. The poor abilities of their partners did not matter, as with each step they felt their magic being taken from them. With each step they felt the ground more firmly, took each breath sharper, saw the faces of their royal friends clearly for the first time in months. As the song ended, the prince and princess found themselves outside the gates of their palace, surrounded by the young who had stood in that spot three months prior, waiting for the gates to open the first night.

Snow was falling from the grey sky, the fog closing in on the group through the trees as the sun rose, a pale pink light that seemed closer than the stones on the ground. Friends embraced, recognizing each other after three months of being strangers though sharing dances every night, laughing and crying over the experience they just had, making plans for the next season. Only two stood still and silent in the crowd. A boy in pale blue held a golden crown in his hands, and a girl held a silver tiara against her red bodice. Their eyes met and saw the crowns.

Light in the Storm

As another summer gale assaults the mass of rock known as Matinicus, Luce Collins' cabin is reclaimed by the sea. The winds rip the American flag just outside the window to shreds, yet it still clings onto the pole for dear life—“a symbol of the American spirit”, as the old lightkeeper, Josiah, would put it. But as she watches the island submerge under the unrelenting surf, she can only hope that the American flag will represent her at the end of this storm; still clinging on, still alive somehow.

Water rushes through the lower levels as another wave smashes into the side of the lighthouse, taking the supplies she couldn't lug up the stairs with it, and she can practically hear Josiah asking her where her head's gone, even though he's still dozens of miles away. To handle such strenuous situations that Matinicus Rock often challenged, all she had to do, according to Josiah's expertise, was to never be afraid. “Fear fogs up your mind, kiddo,” He'd always say. “Your brain's gotta be the light in that storm, so you can do what you gotta do.”

And if Josiah was here with her, if anyone was, for that matter, she might've been able to heed that advice. They've had many a gale before on Matinicus Rock, after all, and she's grown used to hauling supplies up endless flights of stairs at ungodly hours of the night to avoid the ocean's wrath. Josiah would make sure that she and his sons weren't afraid by teasing them, telling jokes or stories, even if he might've been afraid himself. It was just easier to do this together. But when the only sound above the crashing waves and wind is her own turbulent thoughts, fear runs rampant.

The Pelletiers are two weeks past their expected return late after their journey to the mainland, leaving Luce to man the lighthouse alone. She hasn't received any word of their return, which is highly unusual given how dangerous the Pelletiers, especially Josiah, know Matinicus Rock to be. It is a lighthouse that cannot be kept alone; not with the treacherous weather conditions and exhaustive duties that come with the maintenance. Josiah knew that, but he left her alone anyway because he trusted her to be capable enough to hold down the fort for a few days. “I trust you're just as capable as any other assistant,” he'd said, “And I know you're going to do great.” With his failing heart, she had to do great. There was no one else available to cover for him during this impromptu visit to the mainland. She didn't have a choice but to accept.

His absence could not have come at a more convenient time. Having just turned twenty, Luce recently had her first encounter with doubt. Ever since she came to Matinicus five years ago, she's had her mind set on lightkeeping like her father and all male Collins descendants had in ages past.

But as her teen years ended, she started to wonder more and more about what a life might be like outside of the solitary world of lightkeeping. It's not that she didn't love what she did and the freedoms that came along with it, but the twinge of doubt grew increasingly stronger as the months passed, until now, when she was given the chance to see what life as a lightkeeper is truly like.

On her race against the gale up the eight flights of stairs, she somehow managed to keep hold of the heavy Keeper's Log. Now, it's all she has to keep her from losing her mind in this deadly silence. Flipping through the pages of this heavy, worn book, she can find her father's handwriting, and Josiah's, and her own, lacking the confidence in her words that the two men held. And pressed against the back page to dry lies the root of all of her doubt, written in looped, black ink from Wellesley College and bearing the words Miss Collins, we are very pleased to offer you admittance into Wellesley Women's College for the Fall 1913 Academic Year.

The whole point of being a lightkeeper was to be isolated from the rest of society, and Luce has waited for her chance of true isolation for years. As a child, she was entranced at the idea of being alone. There was something magical about the life of a lightkeeper, and she idolized none more than her father, Hux Collins. She watched him go about his duties every day with fascination, copying his actions in secret when her parents weren't around. Her mother had never elicited such intense emotion in her entire life as she did when Luce announced that she would be applying for a position as a substitute keeper as soon as she could. But her mother begged her to stay, because Luce was her only child, so she mustn't ever leave her. And Luce promised her she wouldn't, yet her eyes still wandered towards the open sea, as did her dreams.

But life wasn't always kind to the Collins', and Luce's dreams were placed on the backburner when her mother died unexpectedly one cold winter morning. The light went unlit that night for the first time in Luce's memory. At the time, her father manned the Burnt Coat Light on Swan's Island, but just a week after her mother's funeral, he applied for transfer and moved out to Matinicus Rock. Insisting that Matinicus was no place for a young lady, Luce was shipped off to Berwick Preparatory school in Southern Maine until she was fifteen, when Hux ran out of money to spare for such an expensive education. He deemed her education "good enough" and asked a friend of his, Josiah Pelletier, to bring her out to Matinicus with him and his family.

She traveled to Rockland by train and welcomed the ocean like an old friend after many years apart. Berwick taught her to sit properly, but she couldn't help but to spring out of her seat when she caught sight of the

endless rolling sea before her. Matinicus would be a hard life, she reminded herself, but she wanted a change. She wanted to be by the sea and live up to the Collins' name, despite all odds pointing against it. Six generations of lightkeepers before her ended on the tragic note of Greta Collins bearing only a daughter during her thirty-seven years of life, and yet it was Luce who always felt the weight of her descendants' disappointment. Before her grandfather's death, he'd speak with melancholy of the good old days, of adventures on the open sea and manning Matinicus Rock Lighthouse himself when her father was just a boy. Lightkeeping was in the Collins' blood, he'd say, adding that it was a terrible shame that such a fantastic legacy had to end. As Luce disembarked the train and crosses the way towards her next travel companions, she wondered, Why must the legacy end here?

Josiah Pelletier's younger son Alfie became immediately seasick once the charter boat left the docks. Tomas, the elder, punched him a few times, teased him, laughed at him, but eventually became nauseous himself. It was more than a twenty-mile trip out into open sea, and she often wondered if the boat would capsize against the sizable waves. She held onto her seat, though she was not seasick. Rather, she found herself growing increasingly eager to lay eyes upon the island in the sea. She heard its foghorn before the rocky island came into view. "What's that?" She found herself asking, despite promising herself not to speak to the seasick boys beside her.

"Foghorn." Tomas replied bitterly. "Day and night, every twenty seconds."

"I'll go mad." Luce said, concern twisting her stomach. "Why can't they turn it off during the day?"

"Are you stupid? The only way that foghorn goes silent is if a gale floods the island and wipes it out. You'll get used to it."

Exactly twenty seconds later, the foghorn bellowed again. Luce felt as if her skin was vibrating.

As they neared the island, the waves knocked them into each other, soaking the ground as a few men ran down to the rocks to tie off their boat the docks. What was possibly louder than the foghorn and roaring waves were the birds, hundreds of birds swooping around the island and screeching along with the noise. This must be what hell is like, she thought as a round, burly man lifted her off of the boat and onto the slippery rocks. "Go on up!" He shouted over the noise, and Luce numbly followed his command. When she reached the top of the rocks, she rested a trembling hand on the side of one of the buildings while she tried to calm the nausea building up in her stomach.

Matinicus Rock was windy, day and night, summer or winter. The wind never stopped, and for the first night at the keeper's house, Luce couldn't sleep. In the bunk across from hers, Tomas snored soundly, as if he was somehow used to it already. But Alfie stayed awake with a good book for much of the night, until his glasses drooped down on his nose and his book slumped over.

Sighing, she turned onto her side and stared out the window at the open sea, the light reflecting off the water every few seconds, followed by that loud foghorn— which, yes, is probably why she was unable to sleep above anything else. Resigned, she slipped out of bed and tip-toed towards the window. It could never completely shut and the draft was unbearable. She found herself shivering despite the thickness of her cotton nightgown. Across the way was her father's quarters, the lights dim. After so many years apart, he was unrecognizable. It took hours for her to realize that the man who helped her ashore was the same man she once knew as her father, and she hadn't seen him since. In a way, she supposed bunking with two boys was more comfortable than sharing a room with him. Regardless, she couldn't sleep.

The floors creaked even without her light footsteps, so she didn't worry much about her host waking up. The bright light above the house guided her across the yard— thin sprouts of grass atop the craggy rock that cover the island. She was glad to be wearing her slippers, as her soft feet had never known the toughness of the earth on her mother's insistence. The strong wind ripped through her hair, ruffling her nightgown all around like it was trying to play with her. Looking up, she imagined she could see every star in the universe, uninterrupted by any buildings or light— other than the lighthouse, of course. Matinicus wasn't so scary at night. And without the birds, it wasn't so overwhelming. Not at all. As she crept across the yard, she wondered how her father's routine at Matinicus might differ from their life at Burnt Coat Light. Did he sleep through the day, keeping a vigilant watch out at the turbulent seas all night? What did he do to pass the time? How did he bear all of the noise? Her mother once said that Hux hardly ever paid any mind to the world, its noise, habits or rules, and that was why he fit so well as a lightkeeper. "But me? I hate it, Lucy," She'd said, "I hate the lack of rules and regulations, and your father swims in it. If society would collapse without structure, then how can I expect to last?"

That was back at Burnt Coat Light, an island populated by two dozen people. Greta Collins wouldn't have lasted a day at Matinicus Rock, and Luce had always believed that she wouldn't either. Because that had to be why her father didn't take her along with him when he moved here five years ago. But now that she was here, she wasn't so sure. Maybe it was the

Hux Collins in her, but the realization that there wouldn't be as many rules regarding her behavior as a young lady, strict schedules set by preparatory schools, or expectations towards her future away from the rest of society, was thrilling. Her pace quickened on her walk, but she came to a swift halt at the edge of a cragged cliff on the edge of the island. Mist from the large waves blew against her cheeks, salt sticking to her face. The bottom of her nightgown was soaked with the icy water. Reminding herself that she was miles away from the rest of the world, she hiked up the nightgown and tucked it into her bloomers, leaving her bare legs victim to the cold wind and mist. Women in popular novels might use this opportune time to leap to their death, and nothing could be seen as more poetic, but Luce standing on the edge of the cliff all alone, watching waves crash against the shore by the light of the moon and the lighthouse was much more romantic. She decided that she wouldn't mind Matinicus as much as she originally thought, and that maybe, with time, it might be possible to continue her family legacy here. The only question left was, what should she do with that decision?

The door to the lighthouse creaked open. Luce spun around, unexpectedly meeting her father's gaze. Why did a single look leave her regretting everything she'd ever done? She quickly pulled down her nightgown, cheeks burning from the shame of her previous actions. She turned back towards the Pelletier's house, hoping he wouldn't call after her.

"Lucy."

She froze in her tracks.

"Come here. I want to show you something." He said, propping open the door with his elbow. "Hurry up then. Don't got all night."

The winding steps leading up to the top of the lighthouse were narrow and her legs ached before they were even halfway to the top. Hux's lantern, a good flight of stairs ahead of her, was the only light guiding her ascent. "Spend a week running' up and down these and you'll be fine." He called back at her, voice echoing off of the walls. "You'll be quicker than me one of these days."

Out of breath, she clung to the railing on the top step to steady her wobbling legs while her father tapped his foot impatiently, having long since been waiting for her. There was a narrow door across from the light, leading out onto a slim balcony surrounding the room. "You better not be afraid of heights, young lady."

"I'm not."

She was. Burnt Coat Light wasn't half as tall as this, and it'd been years since she climbed it. But Hux was waiting, and she'd already come this far. So, she crossed the room. She walked out onto the iron balcony, and she looked down. Her knees buckled at the sight of waves crashing just below them, and the wind was much more intense than it was at the cliff. Surely, she would fall. Yet Hux just stood there, leant over the side, making everything worse.

"Stop doing that." She said without thinking.

"Doing what? This?" He leant a bit further. "I'm not gonna fall. And so what if I did?"

"You'd die."

"So? We all die someday."

She bit her lip.

"Shake that fear out of you right now, Lucy. Cause you can't live on this island if you've got fear in you. Got it?"

"You must've been scared at least once in your life, Dad."

"Me? Scared? Never. Nope. By your age, I was already assistant out at Minot's Ledge. Most dangerous lighthouse in the world, that was. You know how I got that job? Shaking that fear off before I even got a look at it. I marched right in and took that job, did my work. It paid off, right? Now I get to be here. Even more isolated, even more dangerous. Us Collins', we love danger. Laugh in the face of it, if that's how that saying goes. And so will you, Lucy."

By then, Luce could hardly breathe from the wind—and maybe a fear of heights, too. There was too much noise, she was too high off the ground, it was just too much. "I'm going downstairs." She managed to mumble before stumbling towards the stairs again.

"Just as I thought." Hux sighed, shaking his head in disappointment. "The Collins name dies with me."

Stopping dead in her tracks, she said, loud enough for him to hear, "It won't."

Icy



Bailey Milnik

Coffee Shop

Hundreds of times a day, the shopkeeper's bell above the door chimed, accompanied by a customer after their daily dose of caffeine. Some customers wanted their Matcha Lattes with no foam and vanilla soy milk instead of regular soy milk, while others just wanted a cup of black coffee and a toasted croissant. Occasionally a customer would fuss that their espresso wasn't "hot enough" or their caramel-swirl iced coffee didn't have enough caramel, but most people just took their drinks and left.

But Claire was waiting for one person in particular to wander through the door.

When she started her job at The Grind Café to help pay for college, she had hoped that it would be like those coffee shop stories that kept her warm at night. One day, her soulmate would sound the bell, order something extremely specific but not too difficult to make – this was important; she had to be able to have it memorized to surprise him later – and take a seat at the corner table by the window, only to later approach her and ask her on a date. Soon, after several dates and late-night texts, he would convince her to skip work, instead taking her on a moonlit picnic.

She sighed. As she scrubbed the coffee grinder before closing time, Claire lost herself in her fantasy: a soft smile, deep and intelligent eyes. She almost didn't hear the bell ring with one final customer for the night.

Moonlight

We are the children
Who were raised by wolves
But managed escape

Who taught ourselves to
Walk upright and wear
Smiles that hid "wolf"

But in the moonlight
Our hearts still do howl
And break a little

And I don't know if
We wear sheep's clothing
To hide or fit in

But I know I'd like
To be loved and learn
To love in return

And to stop myself
From always crying
Wolf

Love Poem #69 / Non-Sexual

when I finally get to see you again
I'm going to spend the next twelve years
buried into you.

I'm going to compose sonnets
about the way your nose scrunches
and whisper odes into the mole on your neck.
I'll craft sestinas
to the scar on your knee
and epics about the way your eyes flicker
when you watch movies,
I'll fill whole volumes with haikus
about the way you smile,
and when I'm done, there will be a canzone
for each one of your fingertips.
I will write lyrics about the bend of your elbows
and rondeaus about the way your hair
falls across your face,
I'll make found poems out of your eyelashes
and write ballads to your heartbeat,
but nothing I create
can even come close
to the poetry
of hearing you say "I love you."

Andrea Kling

Dearest Rae

Dearest Rae,

I hope this letter reaches you in a timely manner. I suppose I could have called you but these days my thoughts are often scattered, and the pen keeps them in line a bit better. I can only hope that your mother has kept you informed and that what I am about to tell you does not come as a shock. I am dying. They say it's some kind of cancer, but they don't realize that I am well aware of the truth. They have been slipping things into my food. I am no fool; I see them watching me to see it hit me when I start to feel more like myself. Regardless, I am writing because what I wish to leave you when they take me cannot be placed in a will.

Years ago, when I was still young and not weighed down by this poison, your uncle and I were staying in an old hotel out in Albuquerque. He claimed we were getting away, but his plans were not hidden well considering he wasn't the type of man to whisk me away for a romantic weekend. Nevertheless, I joined him and took it as a chance to get caught up on some much-needed sleep. It was late Sunday night when I heard it — an ear-splitting scream. The kind of scream I had only heard when I was a child and my grandfather mistakenly drove over a rabbit's nest with his tractor. A scream let out by a dying creature who never expected their end would come. I reached for your Uncle Randy, but realized he was not asleep beside me. I listened again, but the silence was filled with only the memory of the terrific scream, repeating in my head over and over. I slipped out of bed and peaked through the blinds. They were mostly drawn shut and I was sure not to ruffle them too much so that whoever was below didn't notice me. Even then, I knew it was not wise to bring attention to myself. Down below were a few men crowded together in the dim light of the streetlamps. They stood very close and their shadows made it difficult to tell how many were there, but I am sure there were at least three. One of the men stepped back to light a cigarette and the spark from his match brought just a glimpse into the horror below me. Among the shadows from these strangers lay a small, crumpled woman. I knew it was a woman from the pool of fabric around her lower body. I only assumed it was a dress and not a pool of something else. I watched them stand around her as if she were a warm fire, passing around matches and chatting away as if she hadn't just let out the most horrific cry the world had ever heard. After a few minutes they began to disperse. Two of the men grabbed the woman as if she were an old duffle of sports equipment and tossed her into a nearby vehicle. The third man watched them climb into the front of the car and drive away before walking back into the hotel in a way that stopped my heart and caught the air in my lungs mid-breath. I knew that walk. I scampered into the bed and tossed the duvet over myself trying to look as though I had

been fast asleep. Trying to look even a fraction less petrified than I was. When I heard the heavy click of the hotel door, I forced my breathing to sound slow and deep. He could never know.

It has been 47 years. I have lived with this memory for 47 years and yet when I tell it to you know it is as if I have told it a thousand times. I never told a soul. When your uncle passed, I was sure someone would come to me, asking about what he did. Maybe the police, maybe one of the other men I saw that night. But no one ever came. But that doesn't mean no one ever knew. The nurses at the home knew. The cooks who looked the other way when they began slipping things into my food, they had to know something. The awkward man I see out of the corner of my eye each morning when I cross the street to get my morning coffee, he must know. And now, you know.

When you finish reading this, you must burn it. You must never tell anyone what you know. Not even your sweet Nicholas and absolutely never tell the children. Before I die, I just needed someone to know the truth. I am so sorry that with every word I write, I am likely killing you as well. They will find out. You must be watchful at all times. Trust no one and question everything. I can feel it stripping away at me. My bones feel cold and stiff. Soon I will be just like that poor girl in the street, heavy and silent. Please, my sweet girl, remember what I have told you and know that I am deeply sorry for passing on this grave truth. Watch for my obituary, it will be any day now.

Love you always,

Sarah

Hannah Specht

50's Summer



Sadie Walshaw

Self Portrait



Kimberly Braet

Half Full, Half Empty

The sun was just beginning to rise and the air felt much damper than usual. As the two girls locked their apartment door, it stuck a little more than it had when they moved in. One of them had to pull the door shut with all of their weight while the other forced the key in until a click was finally heard. As Alex grew increasingly frustrated with it, Zoe became optimistic. Every time the door stuck a little extra, she would walk away thinking it happened for a reason. Stalled her from driving to work so she would miss the pile up accident on the freeway. Kept her for an extra minute so she didn't have to say hi to the overly talkative lady that lived on the first floor. Alex on the other hand, well, she just wanted to feel like things went right for once.

When they finally made it down the flights of stairs and left the building, the amount of dew in the air stuck to them as if they just opened a shower curtain. If only they always woke up that early. Zoe would love the peace, the quiet, the chilly air that blew just the right amount on their deck. She wondered how Alex would feel about it.

Zoe walked to the driver's side of the car, opened the door, and hopped right in. She found beauty in the creaky doors of her 2002 Honda Civic. She never minded that the keys constantly got stuck in the ignition. Alex on the other hand was still struggling to open the passenger door. When it finally gave in to her tugging, the rubber liner fell off the window, making them run late. Alex wondered what her father would say.

Eventually, they were on their way. They drove through the small rundown town, into farmland, where the only sights to see were barns with giant crosses and one too many cows. Zoe always loved the cows. Sometimes, she would even get so distracted by them that the steering wheel would drift out of her hands and the car would move into the opposing lane. She would then lose her composure. Laugh at the top of her lungs in a way no one else ever got to see. Alex on the other hand, well, she wondered how someone could be so careless. Maybe it was because the insurance money would get her a car that didn't steal your keys every time you parked crooked.

The optimism and pessimism were in a constant battle. Like a brutal war that had no end in sight. But at one point, there was a small sense of peace. It was right after the road stopped winding. When they finally arrived at the mechanic, a silence had fallen over them. No words had been exchanged for the past thirty minutes, which felt like an eternity for some and the blink of an eye for others.

“You ready for this?”

“Hopefully my card won’t decline,” said Zoe.

It declined. It always declined. Money seemed to disappear from her account as if it was stolen before payday. Zoe began to panic, not knowing what to do. Her cheeks turned bright red and she began to swallow harder than usual.

“No worries, I got it,” Alex handed over her card, which had never declined. She checked her bank account too often for that to happen.

As they waited in the car, tears welled up in Zoe’s eyes. Alex’s mind was spinning out of control trying to think of some way to make her feel less ashamed.

“I can’t catch a break,” said Zoe.

“Zo, it’s not a big deal. You work really hard. You pay all of your bills on time. You moved out with \$8 in your bank account right after graduation. I really don’t mind helping out once in a while.”

“I just don’t know how to get ahead. It’s like I’m always one step behind.”

Alex considered this statement for a while before saying, “Aren’t we all?”

The drive home that day felt a little longer than normal for one of them. Alex took over the wheel and realized how thankful she was to have that car in her life. It wasn’t even hers, but the squeaking of the breaks and the cracked windshield had a sense of home to it. And she fell in love in it. As Alex looked around, she dreamt of her future. The country roads were so peaceful, she thought about living there forever. She hoped Zoe was thinking the same. Zoe was too busy to think about her future as she grew frustrated with the stickiness in the air and the smell of the farms, causing her to roll up her window and find something new to reflect on. Alex wasn’t used to the breaks, causing her to press them much harder than she needed to at every red light. Zoe wondered how someone could be so careless.

When they got home, Alex flew up the stairs, unlocked the door, and laughed at how hard she had to push it to get inside. The dying flowers on the counter made her think of her mom. She couldn't help but smile. Zoe took the flowers out of the vase, threw them away, and began cleaning.

"Why did you just throw those out? They weren't dead yet," asked Alex.

"They were barely surviving."

Alex tried to think of something to make her smile, but all she had left in her was a few words.

"Aren't we all?"

Scarred

You want to know what my scar looks like.
It is long and deep. It runs from my head to my heart,
lands in my stomach with clenched fists.
Pulsates inside of me like a hot poker burning a
tattoo on my soul.

You want to know where my scar came from,
Paralyzing fear, body shifting, floating to the ceiling,
watching the terror as a casual bystander. A small
girl sobbing, waiting a lifetime to hear, you are loved.

My scar is like a cat, I pet it when I am scared.
When I distrust, when I am anxious.
In return, my scar protects me. It purrs, tells me to hide.
Always on high alert for the next ambush.
My scar is amber and gold like a can of Genesee
or a Black Label bottle. My scar comes from being a child of an alcoholic

My mind is padlocked, the scar is the keeper of secrets.
My scar is magical. I became invisible.
I have no original thoughts. Frightened to speak.
A dragon guarding a crumbling tower.
Nobody gets to enter.

Starbathing

How?

That's all
I want
To know

While the hum
Of your breath
Echoes
Through
My bones,

The waves
Within your hair
Build
And break
To the currents
In my fingertips,

And the weight
Of your head
On my chest
Keeps me
From falling
So deeply
Into the stars

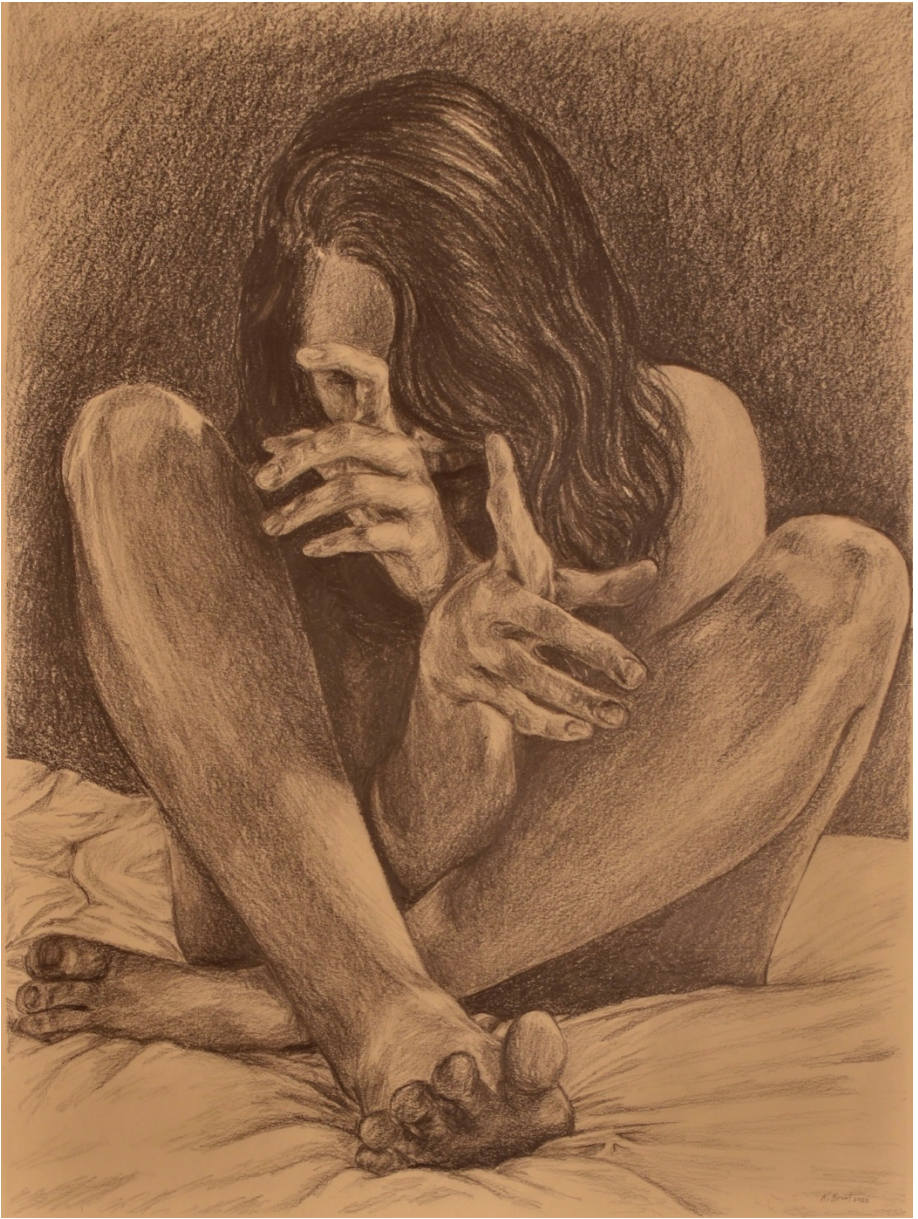
Just the way
I fell for you-

I want to know
How
They could say

You're wrong
To love
The way
You do

Above

Taking a deep 4 count inhale, then a shallow 8 count exhale. I grab the cold railing as I walk up the stairs. Asking myself Should I go through with this. The voice in my head is asking me why not. If I stop now ill only be even more of a coward. Such a coward I was even too scared to end my own misery. No, I'm no coward. I begin to force open the icy steel door a energetic breeze glides across my face. As I slowly walking closer and closer to my demise. I put my lifeless hands on the rough jagged ledge in order to stand tall above this nightmarish city. Is this what a coward feels like, its as if my body wont go through with it. taking a deep 4 count inhale, then a shallow 8 count exhale. I can't, I won't. I gently move my right foot to get off the ledge, only after I'm thrown off balance. Its over now, I couldn't even make the decision to taking my own life, gravity had to do it for me. Good riddance, I don't have to make any more decisions, I don't have to please anyone else in this world. I opened my eyes to witness my last view from above.

Hiding*Kimberly Braet*

The First of the Last Quesos

Denis and Reina tied the knot in her parents' backyard on the same day Usain Bolt won his first gold, and by the time the next-door neighbors hung Christmas lights, they were the proud owners of a hole-in-the-wall Mexican restaurant with a big red sign out front that read "ALWAYS OPEN." He had worked extra hours at the shipyard and she sold movie tickets on Thanksgiving just to scrape up enough cash for the down payment. It was their dream, their magnum opus, their baby, and they poured every drop of their humanity into making that building sparkle. The churros tasted like their abuelitas'.

On the tenth anniversary of the restaurant's opening, some lady found, buried in her queso dip, a cherry tomato-sized clump of black hair. Denis whisked up the dish, apologized six or seven times, and promised complimentary entrées before snaking across the crowded room toward the kitchen.

When he kicked open the door, Reina was hunched over the grill, intently flipping chicken breasts and monitoring the browning of the fried rice. To him, she looked like God standing over all that half-cooked food.

"Hey," he called.

She dragged her head out of her work, looked in his direction, and raised her eyebrows.

"Ven aquí," he said, motioning with his free hand. His voice was small.

Reina flipped another chunk of chicken and turned the temperature gauge on the grill to six o'clock. She was still holding a spatula as she peered into the dish of queso. "Looks like I left someone a little surprise."

She touched the hair held captive behind her ear and a thin strand fell to the floor. They both studied the group of homeless spindles for a few seconds. They were instantly reminded of the night earlier that week when Reina had called Denis into the bathroom after her shower. The drain was clogged with dark locks, and there were five inches of water in the bottom of the tub.

Denis sighed and dumped the queso into a trash can. "Maybe you should take over the host stand tonight? Don't think I don't remember how to whip up an enchilada."

They locked eyes, and Reina forced a teeny-tiny smile. As she held the spatula out to be taken, her arm shook like a busted dishwasher. He knew instantly that the handoff would require a little prying.

Eleven months later, the “ALWAYS OPEN” sign by the road was contrasted by a much smaller handwritten notice in the window that said, “closed indefinitely.”

Doesn't Really Matter How Old You Are

he steals matches from 7-11
 so he can set things on fire.
 twelve years old he rips his heart
 from his sleeve holds it in his palm and
 crushes it.
 his fingers are red and he
 hates everything and he
~~doesn't want to hate anything~~
 burns what is left of his heart but it doesn't help.

he builds his dreams out of paper
 so he can add them to the ash pile.
 five years old he wants
 to be a superhero like in the comics
 and he wants a red cape and eventually
 he realizes that he can't be a
 superhero because superheroes
~~win~~
 don't steal matches.

he is supposed to love his parents
 so they can love him back.
 fifteen years old he knows
 what love is he's seen
 romeo & juliet but he doesn't
 really get this shakespeare guy and he doesn't
 have a balcony cause he's not rich and he doesn't
 really
~~love his parents~~
 like romeo & juliet cause they die at the end.

he hears it all the time
 so he knows exactly how to get their attention.
 ten years old he repeats it to himself
 a lot,
 don't burn the money. don't burn the money.
 money is for alcohol and frozen pizza and pills,
 don't burn the money.
~~you can set your dreams on fire but~~
 don't burn the money.

he has holes in his sweaters
 so he's glad he doesn't go to college.

twenty years old he understands
 only rich kids go to college and they
 judge people like him and they
 have really nice sweaters and they
 are all greedy bastards, at least
~~his dad says so~~
 he thinks they are.

he doesn't really know what to do with himself
 so most days he walks on the train tracks.
 twenty-five years old he feels
 them coming cause his feet vibrate and
 one day he lies down and tries to take
 a nap.
 because he is
~~so~~
 tired.

he says bad words sometimes
 so he puts quarters in the swear jar.
 four years old his dad tells him
 doesn't really matter how old you are,
 i ain't gonna censor myself,
 you not a pussy, boy.
 but he still puts quarters
 in the swear jar cause he doesn't like
 when his dad
~~says things like pussy~~
 tells him what to do.

he sometimes feels as if he doesn't have a mom
 so he keeps a picture of her in his pocket.
 nine years old she doesn't
 leave her room that much and she doesn't
 eat when she's sad and she is
 sad all the time. he hears
 trains pass at night and he
 can't sleep he is nine years old and
~~so tired.~~

24 Notes

The soldier stands as straight as Liberty herself
Please accept this honored flag
On behalf of a grateful nation
She closes her eyes and a coffin full of memories flood her
Memories of nervous first dates
An even more nervous wedding
Then the joy as they brought new life.
The agony of leaving and the promise to return unharmed.
A promise now as broken as her heart.
She cringes as the rifles offer their salute
And weeps harder thinking it was his last sound
Never to hear his baby's laughter
Never to beam in pride on her graduation
Or walk her down the aisle toward her new life.
She takes the flag and braces for the next
The haunting sound of the 24 notes.
A nation's final tribute to a fallen warrior.
Rest soldier.

Anonymous

Taking Off Glasses

Sometimes, I take off my glasses. I'll be sitting outside near autumn trees, and carefully take them off. The shapes blur, and I am left with indistinct blobs of green, with a gradient of orange-gold to vibrant yellow. The rain becomes harder to see, joining the particles of confusion as my subconscious struggles to make sense of the lack of information. In the smearing and smattering of color, I feel safe. I forget the cold invading my fingertips and creeping stubbornly up my arm. All is indistinct and connected, and I feel I am not alone.

But every so often, when in this state of being gone and yet aware, I feel a gaze. Though I have not recognized the cold, I shiver under the unseen eyes.

In the corner of my vision, then, it appears. A pair of hands, one on either side of my head, reaches its claws, inching slowly but surely across my sight.

I used to be brave. I'd hold my state as long as I could, but by the time the talons reached the middle of my eye, my heart would tense, my throat close up, and I would shake out my head. The connection to all things dissolved, but so did the hands.

Recently, I have avoided taking off my glasses. It's been two weeks since I last looked at any trees. By now, I wear my glasses to bed each night so that if I accidentally wake up in the night, I will not see them.

So you can imagine my fear when, about a week ago, I started to see the hands in real life. I'd be behind the wheel of a car when I noticed the sharp tips of claws poke out of the corners of my eyes. I haven't driven since. I chalked it up to paranoia and began to ignore it.

But ignorance rarely solves things, and so I should have known this wasn't the solution. I began to see the claws when I would stare at anything too long—be it a screen, papers, books, or even a plate. I've taken to sleeping as much as I can, the pounding of my heart becoming too deafening when I was awake. I no longer ask whether I will see the claws again, only when.

You can imagine the horror last night when I saw them in my dream. Inchng further and further, I found myself trapped in the illusion for much longer than I thought possible. I tried to wake up, but it wasn't until the talons almost covered my entire sight that I could break free.

They are there now. They are in the corners of my eyes-just the tips... Recently, I have seen them in sharp detail. Its skin is grotesque, dark purple, and wrinkled. Scratches and scars littered the skin-and the open wounds were there...

Blood seeps from them even now, as they conceal half of my field of view. Their nails are black as obsidian and sharp as daggers. They curl in, as if close enough to gouge my eyes out.

I've stopped! I've stopped looking at everything! Is that what they want!? Yet still, the talons are coming closer and closer to my eyes. I am shaking my head, but it's not working. Nothing is working!

I can't see anything but the hands now. Not even the blobs of color I used to see are left. I-I see darkness. Everything is disconnected and so far away. I can't feel anything, even myself.

I am taking off my glasses. I see only nothing.

A Couple

A man slowly stumbled up a flight of stairs and groaned to himself. When he got to his apartment door, a woman stared him down as he tackled the wall laughing.

“Where were you?” the woman asked.

“I just went to get change,” the man replied in a sloppy voice.

The woman pulls him into the apartment and locks the door. “For two hours! Junior.”

“C'mon baby, relax here's yours,” Junior said with a smile.

“How could you? We were doing great, four years destroyed,” the woman replied.

“Vicki, Vicki, Vicki, you're overthinking it,” Junior said with a chuckle. “Here, drink up.”

Vicki took it out of his hands and sat it on a brown coaster.

“I want you to leave, pack something for tonight and get out,” Vicki replied with a cracked sob.

“Oh, come on! It's not that serious. Dr. Lei doesn't even know what he's fucking talking about,” Junior said.

“Get the hell out, please!” Vicki shouted.

Junior's smile evaporated from his face.

“I don't know what the hell has gotten into you, but you need to fix it,” Junior replied.

“Leave,” Vicki said softly.

Junior opened the apartment door, slammed it, and trotted downstairs. Vicki then sat down. As she tried to hold back tears, she grabbed the bottle.

Afternoon Sun



Julianna Vaughan

Swimmer's Ear

It was someone's party. Maybe birthday or graduation. I can't quite remember which. I can't quite remember whose. What I do remember was that it was my father's side of the family. The one with all the tension and pent-up anger. After all, my grandfather did leave everyone when they were just kids. My father being the oldest brother had to step up and fill the shoes his own father left behind. There was an old picnic table. The dark brown wood stung against the back of my thigh and I feared I would get a splinter before the day was over. We all sat around in a grassy area filled with lawn chairs everyone brought for themselves. A cooler full of drinks. Alcohol no doubt. My grandfather struggled to get the grill going. It was one of those ones with coals. I felt lonely that day. My two cousins closest to my age were my best friends at the time. After all, my mother always said cousins make the best first friends. I'm not sure why they weren't there that day, but I was rather shy without them. At some point the sun became unbearable. I had sat there for hours on end watching all the big kids jump off the highest diving board. And I mean that. It was the highest diving board I've ever seen to this day. But was it really that big? Who knows. Eventually I got the courage to take a turn myself. Once I got past that first jump, no one could stop me. I jumped, the water hit me like a bucket of concrete, my skin stung, and I went again. I was still jealous though. Everyone else was diving or doing flips while all I could do was jump in with my feet downward and my eyes closed. That was the deepest pool I'd ever been in. A few days later the doctor said I had Swimmer's Ear. It was the worst pain I've ever felt in my life. And I mean that. But then again, that's probably how all of the adults felt that day. Sitting in the hot sun with no bathing suits. Talking about their new jobs or house projects as if their father never left and everything was normal. We must've all had some sort of Swimmer's Ear.

Abigail Long

Resoluteness

Survival is commitment
 but
 lucky is a word a dead girl will never speak.

Call it a brave act
 when you wake up in the morning,
 this performance out the belly of the beast.

Turn your house into a barren landscape.
 Empty the cabinets of poison.
 Look at the mess you've made
 don't try to clean it up-
 the stains have already set in.
 Pick apart the sun. Swallow.
 Remind yourself 70,000 people
 didn't get the chance to be you.

Lithium for breakfast
 so you don't become just another statistic,
 as sirens from a past life still echo in goosebumps.

Being born on a ledge,
 you learn there's nothing more than
 just a tightrope of choices
 running through your soul.

On that dark night I reached for the sky
 as a stranger held me close and
 told me to stay,
 told me you will grow wings
 but you won't fly-
 gravity loves you too much to let go.
 He told me I was one of the lucky ones.

To be born again,
 less girl gone ghost
 and more girl on fire
 is a gift.

You once asked
 "what does it mean to survive?"
 I think it means this.

Morgan Stahley

The Collector

He lives
By the ocean

In a house
With one door
And no windows

A cot
And a kettle,
A garden out back
A table by the wall
And a pouch
Of broken glass

Hearts in pieces
Broken, scrapped
Edges polished
Free of cracks

Shattered
Weathered
Tossed together

A jigsaw puzzle
Of his past:

One piece contains
Her patience,
And the next
Resembles her fury

He's gathered
Fragments
Of her wit,
Her smile,
And her touch

He's thrown around
So many hearts
Just to
Scavenge
The color
Of her eyes

And in his home
Above the waves
He works without
Mention of time,

To try to
Reconstruct a love
That never
Should've
Died

The Redhead at Dollar General

Secure Browser: chicago.craigslist.org/mis

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Posted 11 days ago

The redhead who works at Dollar General.

You probably don't remember me, I'm not anywhere near as remarkable as you or those bouncy curls you wear in pride. I came in last week in the blue shirt and my two friends who, well, I saw you immediately when I walked in and knew I wanted to know you more but my friends mocked your ginger locks and the freckles which shaded your cheeks. They called you Strawberry Shortcake and asked if the curtains matched the drapes. You looked like you were going to cry. I'm so sorry.

I know that I have no chance with you, but I want you to know that I'm not like them. I don't do that, I wish they didn't either. I wish I could make them stop. We've all changed so much since freshman year but I can't abandon them. We've known each other since kindergarten. My mom used to invite them over and we'd eat homemade Mac n Cheese on the porch swing. I wish it were still that easy.

If there's anyway I can convince you I deserve a second chance, write me back. Tell me what I bought and I'll believe it's you.

Jackson

Ashley Ivanoff

We in the Bathroom

(GRACE sits by a toilet in a bathroom, leaning against it for the cool surface. She hugs her knees, rocking slightly to allow some outlet for the energy that fills her to the point of suffocation. Her face is red from tears, yet she doesn't cry anymore. She feels that she has already let out most of her emotions, and perhaps the worst is over. All that is left is attempting to make sure that the aftermath remains that, and doesn't grow into a second attack. Offstage, laughter and chatter can be heard, although it is the type that is good-natured and accepting. For GRACE it serves as a reminder of the support and happiness that is waiting just behind the bathroom door.)

GRACE

(She is counting quietly, to avoid being heard. With each number, she finds herself gaining speed. The numbers are not numbers, but more like a pattern she has memorized to the point that repeating them at great speed requires no thought, so they do not help her calm down.)

1... 2... 3... 4...5..6.78910-come on Grace-

LOGIC

(Hearing GRACE struggle, LOGIC steps out behind the toilet where they were hidden. They stand tall, arms folded, with a stoic yet slightly encouraging presence. Any emotion they show is subtle and less upfront. They are logic, and they take no sides.)

Count by 7s-like that one book says. It will be more difficult so you have to pay attention to it.

GRACE

(GRACE speaks notably slower. Inaccuracy and any stream of consciousness the actor uses to count by sevens is encouraged. The point is that counting by sevens is not natural or easy, and so it distracts. LOGIC echos her, repeating in an emotionless statement. They repeat back any inaccuracies.)

7, 14, 22.. 28... 35... 42... 49... 50 something-56...
seven minus one is six and nine minus six is three-
63...

LOGIC

There you go, Grace... once you get past 7×12 it will be even harder than that.

(Offstage voices laugh suddenly. Despite the lack of any malicious intent, the volume and sudden nature are cause for a start. GRACE jumps at the

sudden sound, just as EMOTION jumps out from behind the toilet. EMOTION is panicked and excitable. Every reaction is more dramatic than a normal person's would be. They are emotion and they are unbound by reason.)

EMOTION

We're going to be hurt!

LOGIC

(They roll their eyes. LOGIC is what holds back EMOTION from extremities.)

Relax. It is just laughter.

EMOTION

(EMOTION instantly switches to disappointment. They are fickle as the roll of the dice. Sometimes, this can help, but at the moment, they seem to remain on the pessimistic side. Even in their despair though, they are brimming with energy)

Right. They're out there having fun while we're in here... how pitiful are we? We should be out there.

LOGIC

If we go out they will know something is wrong. Our face is bound to be all red. They catch that stuff fast.

EMOTION

They'll be so hurt-we'll ruin their time if we go out.

LOGIC

They would tell us to tell them.

EMOTION

(They repeat themselves. Despite the new information, the same thought is appearing twice, asserting itself regardless of the context)

They'll be so hurt-we'll ruin their time if we go out.

LOGIC

(LOGIC is getting caught in the same loop. They speak with the same matter-of-fact tone, unsympathetic. They simply are expressing the truth, and what it means doesn't matter to them.)

We will have to tell them.

EMOTION

We hurt.

LOGIC

(Starts to connect the action of telling to the memory they have a connection to. They, however, cannot complete it alone, since it is outside of reason.)

It is like in elementary school-

EMOTION

(EMOTION picks up where LOGIC could not. They are haunted by the memory, and panicking once again.)

Crowding. They'll crowd around us. They'll not let us go till we tell.

LOGIC

(For the first time, LOGIC is repeating EMOTION. On this one point, both LOGIC and EMOTION agree. Still, they remain emotionally detached.)

They won't let us go until we tell.

EMOTION AND LOGIC

(They speak in unison, although LOGIC speaks matter-of-factly while EMOTION's voice is dripping in fear)

They won't let us go until we tell.

GRACE

(GRACE curls into herself, as frightened as EMOTION appears to be, although they speak in a way that is attempting to appear calm, like LOGIC.)

I can stay here.

EMOTION AND LOGIC

(Once again in unison, although this time they command GRACE to do as they say.)

Stay Here.

(Let the command ring out through the audience. Let them feel the discomfort. When GRACE does count again, LOGIC counts one number behind, and EMOTION counts one number behind LOGIC. LOGIC counts emotionlessly, EMOTION counts with a tremble in their voice, and GRACE counts with both of their speech combined.)

GRACE

7, 14, 21, 24-no 28, 35... 42, 47-49... 56... 63-

LOGIC

(LOGIC breaks the counting suddenly. GRACE's actor should not be prepared, and so the line will be a surprise to everyone. LOGIC could have let it go, but they speak only because they know the truth.)

We are trapped now. We cannot leave until we are sure they are gone.

EMOTION

What if someone has to go? They'll knock and we have to answer-

LOGIC

They will hear our voice crack and know we were crying.

EMOTION

(EMOTION is beginning to speculate and irrationally cause fear.)

They're coming any second. They're going to knock-

LOGIC

(LOGIC knocks on the toilet, connecting the situation with the most likely responses, following this line of thought instead of contradicting. They knock hard and fast, with a force that is as sudden as the earlier laughter.)

That's what we are about to hear.

(LOGIC starts to knock again without stopping as they wait for the knock to be replicated by someone real.)

EMOTION

(EMOTION is becoming firm once again)

We can't let them in.

LOGIC

We cannot let them in.

EMOTION AND LOGIC

(This is a second command, with a force greater than the first time.)

We cannot let your friends in.

(We hear GRACE begin to whimper. This isn't a sound that she is forcing, but rather it grows as her stomach churns. This is the scream that she is barely keeping back. Grace bounces her knee constantly, and at a fast pace. She does not yet cry, but is on the verge.)

LOGIC

Crying this much is going to make our face look worse again. It is going to hurt when we try to sleep tonight.

EMOTION

(Disappointment and fear sharply turn to anger towards GRACE. The blame and pain are being turned inward, in an irrational attempt to understand or stop it.)

We're pathetic. Our friends are out there having fun and we're here sobbing. We hate anxiety.

LOGIC

It could just be our period. It causes mood swings.

EMOTION

(EMOTION starts the internal debate once again.)

That's sexist!

LOGIC

It is true, and hormones do not make anxiety better. We also only got a few hours of sleep last night. We are sleep deprived.

EMOTION

We are such an idiot. Why do we do this to ourself!?

LOGIC

(Suddenly they step over the line, speaking the unspeakable which could very well be true.)

Maybe it is a form of self-harm.

EMOTION

(EMOTION deflates, losing their energy. Their stomach is in knots, and they are forced to swallow to hold back the possible throw up that can come from it.)

But... then we would be broken.

LOGIC

(For the first time, LOGIC shows empathy. They are pained by this knowledge that they unloaded, regretting it but being too wise to wish they could take back those irreversible words. They take a moment to think through their response.)

We are broken.

EMOTION

(For the first time, EMOTION becomes emotionless. They straighten their stance, though their hands tremble with this burden of knowledge.)

We are broken.

EMOTION AND LOGIC

We are broken.

GRACE

(Quietly, voice cracking, GRACE repeats what her mind tells her, only this time, she acknowledges that it is not “we” but “I”. Her words are that deep difficult type, forced out with revulsion towards each syllable and the truth they hold.)

I am broken

(She finally begins to sob into her hand to muffle her wailing so that she will be left alone. It is an ugly, forceful cry, where what sound comes out is already forced down as much as possible.)

(Leave a long pause at this moment and allow the audience to feel how GRACE does; alone and stuck with this knowledge. GRACE should continue crying, but slowly calm down until LOGIC starts the next line)

LOGIC

(They almost regret having to speak again, but they go on with it anyway.)

They are quiet out there now. If we go quickly, we can avoid being seen.

EMOTION

(EMOTION speaks in a sombre tone, but there is a desperation for this comfort)

But we want to see them. We just want someone to hold us. They will.

LOGIC

If they see us, they will ask. We will cry. They will know.

EMOTION

(They speak with authority, for this is a subject they are in charge of.)

We want to lie down. We want someone to hold us. We just want someone to wrap their arms right around our shoulders. Right here.

(ALL THREE touch their shoulders in unison, for in truth, they are one.)

It feels so light there. So bare right now. We just want to be held.

LOGIC

We have a blanket in our room. We can curl up in bed, in the dark, and sleep. We can leave.

EMOTION

We should leave.

GRACE

(She stands, this time she is the one commanding.)

I'm leaving.

(GRACE starts to exit the stage, her pace slow and completely unsteady. A spotlight goes on her, allowing LOGIC and EMOTION to leave the stage. She softly counts by 7s, at first echoed, but slowly LOGIC AND EMOTION's echo disappears until we hear GRACE alone)

7... 14... 21... 28... 35...

(continue until GRACE has left the stage)

FIN

Author's Notes

- 1) Throughout the scene, Grace should be watching Logic and Emotion, and reacting to them. There are no scene freezes.
- 2) The offstage voices should be any crew members backstage, or if needed, a recording of the three actors.
- 3) The counting by 7s should often be incorrect and hesitant. The idea is that it is more difficult than counting normally.
- 4) The repetition of lines is intentional and should be used to their fullest extent.
- 5) Logic should remain mostly stoic throughout the work, and Emotion should be much more expressive. The only deviations are directed.
- 6) The audience should be warned about the triggering content.
- 7) Logic should speak without contractions, as written. They are meant to feel almost robotic. Emotion can input slang as desired.

Among the Moss



Sadie Walshaw

Dysphoria

Nothing feels right.

I feel like I'm suffocating inside a body that doesn't belong to me,

It feels like a suit, a mask that I don't belong in.

Someone else's skin is wrapped around my bones.

I'm in someone else's house, and I can't seem to find the exit.

Mostly because there isn't one in sight,

There's no way out of this prison,

And there's no way around the horrid things everyone calls me.

Especially out in public,

The derogatory language rolls off the tongue of my peers.

Everyday I am reminded that not only am I not understood,

But I am not understood because the way I feel is unnatural.

Unheard of.

My own mirror stares back at me day after day, waiting for me to acknowledge its presence.

I constantly attempt to shake the feeling of its eyes that peer into the depths of my soul.

It latches itself onto my insides,

I look into it and it swallows me whole as I gaze into the clear glass that casts off my appearance.

Staring back at myself creates a fire in my chest

I get the feeling that something is not right, something is out of place.

Or maybe it was never in place to begin with.

Anonymous

Say Their Names

Say Their Names:

George Floyd - May 25, 2020

A photo-op, bible in hand, meant to project strength.

Instead bone spurs cast a yellow pall from the spine of the bunkered.

More golden than the piss showered on the first amendment
by the orange man with his knee on the neck of Lady Liberty.

“I was inside and could not have felt more safe.” - Donald J. Trump

“Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent
revolution inevitable.” – John F. Kennedy

Say Their Names:

Carlos Ingram Lopez - April 21, 2020

Breonna Taylor - March 13, 2020

Rivers of red on the boulevards of history.

Shouts of “Black Lives Matter” by
peaceful ebony marchers and their ivory allies.

Tear gas, flash grenades and rubber bullets raining.

“When the looting starts, the shooting starts.” - Donald J. Trump

“To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of
men.” AL

Say Their Names:

Ahmaud Aubrey - February 23, 2020

Byron Williams - September 5, 2019

Vincente Villella - February 3, 2019

The “good people” from both sides
make the list longer. One group by their
actions, the other by their inaction. Neither
side knows anything of justice.

“Riot is the language of the unheard” - Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Justice will not be served until the unaffected are as outraged as
those who are.” - Benjamin Franklin

Say Their Names:

Marshall Miles - October 28, 2018

Cristobal Solano - May 1, 2018

Hector Arreola - January 9, 2017

Fermin Vincent Valenzuela - July 2, 2016

Enough is enough!

Just once in your life, do the right thing.
Just have a little courage for a change.
Just say their names, damn it.

“Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do
for your country.” – John F. Kennedy

“Protest beyond the law is not a departure from democracy; it is
absolutely essential to it.” - Howard Zinn

Michael Brown – August 9, 2014

Trevon Martin - February 26, 2012

Emmett Till – August 28, 1955

Haywood Patterson 1913 - 1952

Clarence Norris – Unknown

Charlie Weems - Unknown

Andy Wright - Unknown

Roy Wright - Unknown

Olen Montgomery - Unknown

Ozie Powell - Unknown

Willie Robertson - Unknown

Eugene Williams – Unknown

“This many black bodies deep, the synonymy between ropes and
gunfire is lost on no one.” - Joshua Bennett

I Go Back to the Woods

It's a gravel type of parking lot, no lines, and a wooden fence barring off the main road. There are deep rivets at the mouth and a Maine to Georgia trail sign. I take the back corner that's shrouded by sappy smelling pines which kiss the black and blue sky. It's drizzling, with that wet worm kind of smell. My feet sink into the pebbles like quicksand, gushing between my naked toes and painting their coldness up my ankles.

There's a man, about 60, looking through his telescope. He's no taller than me, wearing a tan bucket hat which twins his dampened trench coat. He acknowledges me curiously.

I walk away from him, towards trees and trails. There's an owl overhead, and he greets me with a crisp cooing, playing king of the trees. Around him, stars are shouting, can you hear me? It's obnoxious.

Then, a car on the main road. Its moving headlights are broken by spruce trees, playing a game of shadows. It pulls into the lot behind me, jumping across uneven gravel. The brakes squeal to a halt, and the engine cuts off. I continue walking toward the trail's opening.

I cling to tree branches and shove through the overgrowth. The moon shines down on pines, blanketing the clearing in silver and shadows. It smells of powdery dirt and dewy grass, the ground tickling my feet. I trek over smooth boulders and jagged roots.

Ahead, a deer crunches leaves underfoot, stopping short. The crickets chirp as its doe eyes glare into mine. Wind comes in a gentle draft, its soft ears twitching. My foot shifts on the soft earth, twig snapping.

In a flash of light, she returns to the trees.

High Rock



Matthew Hathaway

Daddy's Little Girl

Dear Da,

Hey there,

Hi,

You don't know me but I think I'm your kid. Your daughter to be precise. My name is Reaper. Reaper Delano. And ever since my sixteenth birthday things have been a little strange. OK, more than a little strange. Either I'm going crazy or I can see and speak to the dead, and umm... other stuff. The dead they hang around me like I'm some kind of celebrity. I told my mom about it, I don't know if you remember her. She's a cool lady, Lyra. My mom is really pretty, I can see why you fell for her. Though she has a few gray hairs now. But I'm getting off topic, my mom looked really nervous when I told her. I'd never seen her lose her cool like that before. She asked me if anything else weird was happening. It was. I'm starting to lose my sense of taste, and the world has been shifting into shades of grey. I'm sure you know about that Dad. But the scariest part is that some dead things won't stay dead when they're near me.

I found that out the hard way. Did that ever happen to you? Did you ever raise something that should have stayed dead? Well I did. I haven't told my mom. She'd freak. It was a small dog. It had been runover God knows when. One eyeball dangled from the socket like a Christmas light. The other eye red with blood stared at me lifelessly. The poor thing's ribs had pierced its side. I could count its bones. To top it all off I could see bits of its brain splattered on the side of the road. And the smell, God the smell of rot and decay was unbearable. The stench flooded my nose. I was gagging on it. The poor creature was well and truly dead. That is until I came along. I could only watch in horror as those lifeless eyes began to light up. The thing rose slowly, I opened my mouth to scream. Nothing came out. Not at first. Not until it fixed those awful yellow eyes on me and took its first steps towards me. That's when the screaming started. I couldn't stop screaming. Every time I close my eyes, I see its small misshapen face. I want to keep screaming.

Daddy... I'm scared. I get that running the underworld is a hard job... but... please, please... Help me. I'm afraid of what I'm becoming. I hate to say this, but my mom won't admit that she's afraid too. Afraid of me. I can see it in her eyes, in the funny looks she gives me when she thinks I'm not looking. A lot of people have been giving me funny looks lately. I can hear them whispering behind my back. They don't think I can hear them. But I can hear so many new things now. Things you wouldn't believe. But wait

who am I kidding of course you would believe it. You're like me. Different. Yeah... So, I don't know if you'll get this letter or if you'll even care. But if you do, come and find me.

Your Daughter,

Reaper

Clowns

The fact that I collect clown dolls is, a feel, a very telling hobby. I haunt thrift shops in search of them, I have my friends help me name them, and I display them around my room. I refer to them as my children sometimes when people ask why I love them so much. I don't even wholly and completely understand my attraction - I'm honestly decently scared of clowns to the point where I'll jump depending on the face they're making - but need I justify it? My clown collection, I think, really exemplifies how I'm just a tad strange, be it endearing or off-putting. and I like that about myself. I'm up to interpretation. My clown children feed into my motherly side, my thrifty side, and exemplify my poor impulse control and fixation on the strange.

I came upon my first clown when I told myself I wasn't allowed to spend any more money that month. I fell in love with him, his little blue hat and heavily lashed eyes, the fact that he played "Send In The Clowns," and spun around on his little pedestal when you wound him up. Love at first sight. Really. All my friends told me no; do don't buy that clown. You said you were saving money. Piper, I swear to god. Please put him down, he is so scary. I did not. I was in my depressive to manic shift, I lacked control and craved it, I needed a good thing to focus on. And thus I spent five dollars on this wonderful little clown. The start of my collection, maybe, or the beginning of my downfall. Depends how you look at it.

I bought another one a few months later because it was identical to the first one. I was somewhere else, and the same clown decided to show its painted face, and I felt the same swell of emotion. Maybe it's because I crave consistency? Maybe it's because I look for symbols in things, like how I dig through my horoscope for any sort of shallow meaning and generalized guidance. This seemed like a pretty good sign from the universe. And hey, I'll take it. Whatever it meant is beyond me. So now I own two clowns that spin around together, but play "Send In The Clowns," at different tempos. I don't love them equally, which is probably rude to them, as I consider them my kids; I love the one that's paler blue with the more delicate face and the taller hat. There's a name written on the bottom, a girl's name in scrawling cursive, right on the leg of that one. I forget who it is because I'm in the hospital and can't look. Doesn't matter much now because it belongs to me and not her. You wouldn't know the difference between them if you weren't me and couldn't see the name. Maybe they were both meant for me. The second clown was fifty cents less than the first.

My third clown happened by accident. I showed up to marching band half an hour early and so did a friend of mine, who I don't really like but develop a crush one when we're together and bored and sleepy. Warm. He

suggested we go to a yard sale that he had seen a sign for. I said sure, because I didn't know what else to do and I liked to drive. I would've rather gotten a coffee, but having a friend is more valuable. I didn't really know where it was or what to expect. He bought a box cutter, an extension cord, three joke books, chalk, and a few wrenches. I didn't ask why. I bought a new clown and a pack of baseball cards that were stupidly expensive, but after I asked the older gentleman I really couldn't say no, now could I? And I accidentally stole a DVD of 50's classic TV shows. Black and white. Obviously. We won't talk about that one. This clown was handmade - toilet paper roll, googly eyes, craft store pom poms and with tragically, albeit delightfully, limp limbs - and had three brothers and sisters I separated him from. I feel kind of bad about it. I probably shouldn't have broken them up. They might be mad. He used to live in my locker, where he didn't totally fit, and I don't know how happy he is despite the sharpie-d smile. I gave him to my English teacher by accident when school shut down and he became locked in the basement for months on end. I hope he's okay out there. His hat is a little squished, but he cost me three dollars and fifty cents less than the first. They asked me how much I wanted to buy him for and so he could've been less. Probably. All of them would've been six dollars. Hindsight is always 20-20. You do the math.

Now I'm in college and notably clown-less. My friends picked up on my hobby and got me more for birthdays, Christmas, and graduation. A nun doll joined the collection, as did a harlequin. They all stand or slump in my childhood bedroom. My dorm room has plenty of other things: a furby, a mannequin head, my portrait of The Jonas Brothers, etc. Despite me writing this entire essay about my clowns, I named them "unnecessary," and left them behind. Maybe it's because they take up space, but maybe it's because I felt scared to be different, even in my own living space. And then I dyed my hair green and still wonder why people glance at me a little sideways.

Listen, knock me all you want and I'll take it. I just like my clown babies and their eclecticism. I can handle pointed looks - reminiscent of kindergarten - when a new teacher asks about my hobbies. I expect, "Oh god I'm terrified of clowns." I'll sarcastically say yes to the, "Are you going to clown school?"s. It's fine in the way that people say it where it truly means they're fine. Call me quirky in a bad way. Dare you. Because, you know? It's true. I'm stuck in a constant battle between Me and Myself. Call me what you want. I don't know either.

Mask of the White Death

A Modernization of Poe's Masque of the Red Death

The White Death ravaged the country
 Attacking those who were most weak
 And Suffocating them six feet away from their loved ones.
 Two Hundred Thousand lives fell before the disease.

But the Proud Ruler of this great land
 Was not afraid, though his dominions were destroyed.
 He summoned many of his light-hearted friends
 And many of his silent enemies
 To a party within his grand white palace.

Excess filled the halls of this place
 To the point where the glittering of pleasures was blinding.
 The party shone
 With Beauty and Entertainment
 And they were only Without the White Death
 And Without any masks

There were seven beautiful rooms to go in
 Each colored by the stained-glass windows
 And illuminated by a light outside
 The first, in blue, was filled with couches and food, and drink
 Enough to gorge yourself on.
 The second, in purple, was full of mounds of gold and jewels
 That sat functionlessly in their piles
 The third, green, housed swords inscribed with detailed scenes of war
 Muddied with dried red in their grooves
 The fourth, orange, contained luxurious beds
 and thick curtains to hide those under the sheets
 The fifth, in white, boasted case after case of trophies,
 Each bigger than the last
 The sixth, in violet, held many mirrors, all posed at odd angles
 So that you could see only people around you
 And finally, the seventh was dark but bathed in red light,
 With only a clock on the far wall

Every hour the clock would toll
 Sending music throughout the white palace
 And silencing everyone
 Who, frozen, would harken to its song
 Before returning to their conversations.
 Donning on the cloak of denial

They would forget about the White Death lurking outside.

One night, at the height of the revelry
 A stranger appeared amidst the crowd
 Wearing a white full-face mask
 that rivaled the lifelessness of a corpse.
 The crowd became aware of this stranger's presence
 And one by one inched away
 To avoid them
 As the stranger coughed viciously
 Towards any who came too close

The Proud Ruler of the palace,
 Going from orangey to red with rage,
 Cried out, "Who dares insult us!"
 But he was given no response.
 In a fury, the ruler began to charge towards the figure,
 Pulling out a dagger from his pocket.
 "I'll show you!"

And so the chase began,
 As the Proud Ruler ran after the stranger.
 Through the blue room, the ruler stumbled and crawled
 Into the purple room, where he caught his balance
 As he charged into the green room, raising his dagger
 Before reaching out to grab the stranger in the orange room.
 The Proud Ruler gasped, his pace slowing as he jogged into the white room,
 And by the violet room, his walking became a staggering, coughing prowl,
 Before he finally halted in the red room.

It was here that the stranger had stopped,
 And so, the ruler finally stepped forward and raised his weapon.
 The stranger turned, taking away their mask.
 There was a sharp cry
 And the dagger hit the floor
 Preceding the fall of
 The corpse of the Proud Ruler of the white palace

One by one, the party would fall
 And the lights in the rooms die out
 And Darkness
 And Decay
 And the White Death
 Held dominion over all.

Isabella Brignola

Since Monday

For a moment I forgot
that I told myself
it was over.

So when I faced the sea
on that Sunday
I think I loved you.

And since Monday
I've been waiting
for the storm.

Matthew Hathaway

Sincerely St. Peter

Dear Mortals,

Here's something that not a lot of people know about Heaven...Well, what a thing to say. Arguably nobody knows anything about Heaven. Sure, I bet there's one, maybe two, wise meditative sages; or a lucky/unlucky 10-year-old boy who had a near death experience, that can tell point-blank the nature of the great beyond. But other than that, it's mostly just conjecture. No one's got the exact same Heaven.

But, ya see, the world runs off archetypes. Regardless of personal belief there is still an abundance of images and pictures that just involuntarily pop into our heads when we think about a particular subject. Now, with Heaven, those archetypes are – Angels, God, trumpets, wings, music, happiness, honey in everything, you get the picture – things that constitute, when all is said and done, a realm of fantasy. And by fantasy, I mean a domain of magic, a world beyond simple mortal understanding where everything that is visible or invisible works off of forces beyond simple comprehension, waves of hand that – without explanation – can manipulate the movement of clouds and sway the hearts of celestial beings into calm. Yes, Heaven, to most, is simply magic.

Well, that's bullshit. It's all science. And I should know, I'm Saint Peter, yes THE Saint Peter, the guardian angel of the Heavenly Gates that you've likely heard of, but only because TV shows like to parody the shit out of me relentlessly. For the record, that's not what I'm doing, I really do sound like this. Anyway, it's all science. Heaven runs on science, primarily good old Benjamin Franklinian electricity, good old Thomas Edisoninian AC current. Or is it DC current? I don't know. I'd like to look it up, but Heaven's Google is temporarily down, as is the gates, which is the purpose of this note I now write to all mortal men. Sorry if I've taken too long to get to the point, but here it is:

Heaven is experiencing technical difficulties. Bet you never thought you'd hear that in your life. Yep, technical difficulties. And as of now, the switch that opens the pearly golden gates won't do anything, no matter how many times I flip it. On and off, on and off, makes no difference. And the IT guy, that is, God, is taking his fine-ass time getting here. And by the way, I can be blasphemous because I'm already dead. Yes, that is indeed how it works. So I would just like to tell all you mortals reading this letter - Please just keep yourselves alive.

I know this is asking a bit much. I know that with the virus locking you all in your homes you sometimes feel like blowing your own brains out or

jumping off a high rise building or just going out into public and getting coughed on. But please, for me, don't do it, there is still so much to live for.

What about the election? If you die, who will vote against that filthy pig Trump/Biden, and raise up the savior of the coming 4 years Trump/Biden. You gotta stick with me! You gotta devote your time to some kind of cause, because that is what keeps you alive...as long as you do it quietly. Ya know, no protesting. Obviously that's not really good for the virus, but it just invites so much shit. Honestly, it could start a war, and yeah I know that sounds dumb, but there have been some dumbass wars that have just waisted entire days for me. Have you heard of "The War of the Oaken Bucket?" About 2,000 people died because some soldiers from an Italian city stole a bucket from another Italian city's well. Seriously! Google that shit! FYI the Wikipedia page will say that the bucket being the catalyst for the conflict itself is a myth, but I know, I was there, in the sky, signing em' all in! And I'm Saint Fucking Peter.

Let's see, what else? Oh! Here's a message for any IT guys out there, perhaps anybody that graduated from MIT specifically:

KILL YOURSELF.

I mean it. I mean, what do you have to live for anyway, a bunch of frustrated baby-boomers calling you over to their house every two seconds because they don't have the mental strength or patience to figure their Smart TV out on their own? Do you just straight live to tell the same 70-year-old man for the umpteenth time what the definition of WI-FI is, as well as how to pronounce it? Is that what your college years were spent in preparation for?

No, because I'll tell you what they were spent in preparation for - opening Heaven's Pearly Gates and helping me download the full list of dead African children on my SkyPad. The list just has too many damn megabytes or gigabytes and I don't want to have to get a new SkyPad. It's a pain in the ass! So just come on up here, I'll make sure to get you pardoned from suicide, but it's only gonna be for the first 20 to come up here, so get shooting or car crashing or pill popping or whatever your preferred method is. And I reiterate, this is only for IT people, not any joe shmo or casual practitioner of coding or wiring, 'cause your ass'll get dropped STRAIGHT TO HELL.

Seriously though, hurry, Heaven's clouds are only so big and if we don't get the gate open soon, the unjudged will just start falling off the cloud. And I don't even know what happens if that happens. Do they die again and go to Super Heaven? Stop existing? Fall back into their bodies so they can live

again or die again? (Depending on where the body's at). Oh Edison or Tesla or whoever, why have you forsaken me? I don't know! And I'm Saint Fucking Peter!

Anyway, that's the situation up here in Heaven, you can take this letter and toss it, worship it, build a crazy-ass cult around it for all I care. Just don't fucking die. You hear me?! DON'T FUCKING DIE!

Unless you're in IT.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'St. Peter' written in a stylized, cursive script.

St. Peter

In the Trees



Bailey Milnik

What Happens After The Bee Movie?

Subject: Reconnect

Hey Ken,

It's Vanessa.

I know it's been a while. Last time I saw you, we were on opposing sides of the court room. You thought I was stupid to fight by Barry's side for the rights of bee-kind, and it hurt. It hurt that you didn't care about nor support my passions, and I felt that we needed a break.

As I think you know, Barry and I got married. It was a little difficult finding someone who would marry us, but Barry's friend Adam finally officiated the wedding. We bought a beautiful blue two-story house out in the suburbs and became co-owners of the flower shop. Everything seemed to be going so well; we even adopted a daughter. Her name is Beatrice, and she's the cutest thing.

But that's not why I'm writing to you today. A few months ago, Barry and I started fighting. I've caught him staring at other women – both human and bee – but he always denies it. He's also been going out more at night, leaving me to care for Beatrice all by myself. But worst of all, I've had no sex life since we got married. How would it even work? Regardless, it feels like I'm back in Catholic school again.

I think I've been needing some human companionship lately. Would you want to go for drinks sometime and see where it goes?

Love,

Vanessa Benson

Emily Sterner

Voicemail

Alex...is not available. Please leave a message at the tone. To add a callback number, press 5.

Alex... This is the tenth call I've made to you and I don't know when I'll be able to stop. If I'm being honest, I do it just to hear you say your own name. I'm surprised you went that far into creating a voicemail system. You know, you left your sweatshirt here. I did not tell you right away because I wanted to make sure it was washed before returning and you know how long it takes me to do a complete cycle of laundry. But it's clean now, you can come get it. And remember that time you let me borrow your notebook? I know it's been a few years, but I still have some pages left if you want them back. I mean, I know how you are about wasting paper, you'd be mad at me to know that I've kept a half-used notebook this long and using other ones instead. "It's wasteful" is what you always tell me.

Listen, I... just wanna understand why you did it. We were so happy, and everything was perfect. I knew you were in a bad mood and sometimes you just get down like that. But to up and leave me... It's fine, you never listened to other people's advice anyway. You were always good at hiding things and motives. Not that you were ever a liar, but you definitely withheld the full truth. I just wanted to let you know that I love you even if you can never respond again. Hopefully after your funeral your family will finally cancel your phone plan and voicemails can't be received anymore. Only then I'll be able to sleep at night.

Click.

Anonymous

We Are More Than What We Are Labelled

Publicity hounds I used to call them

Where I was born freedom did not have much meaning to me
 An identity I thought was given I didn't fully understand
 I didn't share the same family tree or dark history
 For as far as I was concerned we were not dropped off on the same land

Publicity hounds I used to call them

But life had different plans for me
 Soon I realized it didn't matter the family tree we had come from
 Hate their skin their very existence is what the media did teach
 The slogan plastered on every channel doing continuous runs

Publicity hounds I used to call them

I used to think they craved attention
 Their continued fight for freedom was never mentioned
 They etched this negativity into every young mind
 Creating prejudice, bias, and racism that would last a lifetime

Publicity hounds I used to call them

Till one day a group of students stood their ground
 Hatred rose up in me, blood boiled, I found anger where I thought could
 never be found
 Coffee, juice, and syrup spilled from head to toe
 Resilience in their stance they did show

Publicity hounds I used to call them

For their strength stood in their stillness, as if they knew
 That one day their freedom would ring true
 They looked forward heads held straight as if they could see the glory of
 what their skin would become
 And in that moment I realized that we were all one

Publicity hounds I used to call them

I had been blinded by the façade of what the White man wanted me to
 believe
 To trick me into believing my own skin was the enemy
 For the true enemy was the enemy within

A sin that had seen committed time and time again

They became we and then became us
And from that day on is what I vowed to only trust
I vowed that I must fight for what is just
And every time opposition would bark
I would fight, for the new dream that lay deep at the core of my heart
Till the day death do us part

For publicity hounds I used to call them,
I used to call us

A Forbidden Existence

Eighteen years of silence
shakes the floor beneath us
as a fire of repugnance ignites
in the foundation of our home.

Smoke pours out of my heaving chest
as an ashy residue coats my lungs,
laboring my every breath.
You see, this is the construction of truth.

How do you carry the weight of all the lives
you lived before the one you were born to?
How do you express that the closet
is not a home without sounding unappreciative?
How do you learn to be fearless
in a world that will never accept you for you?

The expectations of mainstream womanhood
placed upon me by the world
strangles me with it's nonexistent hands.

Life doesn't come
with a tutorial
of how to beat
the lesbian out of yourself

Trust me, I've tried

/or

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