

Swallow the Moon



Volume 10
2019

**From the Desks of the
Student Writers Group
at Oakland University**



Swallow the Moon

Volume 10

April 2019

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DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect or represent those of the Student Writers Group at OU, its board members, or its advisor.

A NOTE FROM THE ADVISOR

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Student Writers Group at OU and our student journal, *Swallow the Moon*. Through the pages of this issue, you'll find a collection of pieces written or produced by Oakland University students and alumni, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, photography, and artwork. This journal is a testament to the hard work of not only our executive board, but also of our contributors.

Throughout the past ten years, we have grown the group and journal to become a platform for every student, no matter what their major, to share their interests and accomplishments. We've had thousands of contributions from many authors, photographers, and artists, teams of editors and associate editors, but one collective spirit. This spirit of the love for writing and creating is the primary reason we keep sponsoring students – to ensure that they have a space to share their talents with others.

Thank you to everyone for your support of this group's efforts for the past ten years. As always, I encourage you to submit to next year's journal.

Enjoy our tenth anniversary issue of *Swallow the Moon*. Here's to the next ten years!

Sincerely,
Ashley Cerku

Sophomore. Major: Biology, Minors: Studio Art,
Women and Gender Studies

The Tragedy of Jocasta

Young woman,
Feeble sun ray upon land of snow.
Too late you saw the cold heart hidden below.
Yet what other life could you have led,
Oh royal one, condemned to wed.
A duty destined at your birth,
Entangling you in that horrid curse.

Despondent woman,
Your only light snuffed out as soon as lit.
Fate dealt the King a resounding hit.
A plague as old as time, bore by Time himself,
Incurable by gods, by man, by wealth.
You felt life grow inside your womb,
And once born sent it to its wilderness tomb.
What life you lead, used, denied
The most precious thing; your heart it cries.

Older woman,
Husband dead, fate misread.
For no reason your baby bled.
Kingdom terrorized by riddling beast,
Yet one of your shackles fallen free at least.
Lovestruck woman,
Beaming sun ray upon warm Earth,
Filled with rising happiness and hope, a first.

Enchanted, heart and eyes,
By handsome youth; your heart it flies.
Looming Fate, its shadows cast aside,
Little did you know its time it bides.

Happy woman,
Gifted to a new King.
But you don't mind, soaring high on Love's wing.
His heart sincere, you rule as equals,
Unaware of the approaching pall.
Bearing children you can actually keep,
You didn't know love could run this deep.
Disregarding familiarity when you look at him,
Unaware of his past, of your sins.
Woman, I must ask,
If you knew your fate, in that happiness would you still bask?
Would you embrace that singular light in your miserable life,
Knowing it would end in strife?
Would you rather be blind and never know,
The horrors that the truth would show?
Ignorance is bliss,
But what you've never had you cannot miss.
Would you give it all up, if truth was known,
Fate prevented, yet you alone, with no happiness, no home?
Would you rather be a toy, a pawn,
Or live life without a dawn?

Wretched woman,
Vanishing rays overtaken by stormy night,
Once you realize the fate you cannot fight.
Your happiness a lie, the prophecy true,
Oh Jocasta, what has Fate done to you?
Your husband product of your womb,
Your children seeds fallen from your love's sick bloom.
Your life disgraced
By Fate with a forgotten face.
A terrible scream fills your chambers,
Wasn't it at Laius Fate was angered?
How you wish the truth was never spoke,
Fate inescapable, Fate that chokes.
The truth released, spilled sins hellish red.
The circle began and ended in your bed.

Woman,
Dead.

1965

--

The man in the coonskin cap in a pig pen /

It was July 21st and the heavens were spitting fishflies. I sat with my best friend, the window — my canvas — in the passenger seat of his car, glued to the leather by dry sweat under my thighs. Mist and humidity were making the streets look like ghost piss and the wind feel like jalapeño pepper pain. My sweaty finger coated in lotion traced a crack in the glass, hoping my touch would heal the bloodless wound. We were stopped at a red light.

/////////Don't touch that/////////

My hands dropped to those pale rotunda thighs. I looked down, avoiding eyes that could cut twelve *Great Illustrated Classics* in half.

His hands suffocated the steering wheel. He looked right, imagining a potential juvenile detention jumpsuit.

/////////The hell wouldya do that, you're gonna smear the entire goddamn window/////////

Wants eleven dollar bills — you've only got ten

I wish I had sat in the back. I wish someone was a seat behind me, mouthing empathetic words in the side view mirror.

/////////Those thighs are humongous/////////

He stepped on the gas.

--

Walk on your tiptoes, don't tie no bows /

Cucumber melon lotion. Tan Maybelline foundation. Mouth was sore from applying plum colored lipstick, smudging, and wiping the sticky stuff off with soiled tissue. Folk-punk. The mirror's image told me, *it's all right*. But, someone's eyes stared back at me. And they smiled. Each crinkle-cut corner lifted by glistening fish hooks tied to *Get Well Soon* balloons. An outdated copy of a water-stained and dog-eared *Cosmopolitan* showing off the ***Top Five Ways to Get a Man to Notice You*** rested steadily on top of the toilet's tarnished and exposed tank. I had stolen it from the strawberry-milkshake colored dentist office waiting room.

KNOCK-KNOCK.

I scrambled, fingers becoming cooked spaghetti steeped with mascara-marinara. I shoved everything – *everything* – in drawers and cautiously, quietly closed them.

////////What's going on//////// Flames emerging from under the door started to boil the toilet water. The magazine fell in, soiling the bathroom rug. Slipfallcrackcrash.

Better stay away from those that carry round a fire hose

Cheeks were blushy roses thorn tight neck bleed. Splash splash splash lips still too sweet - chest burned - hair too

nice smelled hairspray hair messy, hair up air

freshener spritz spritz nail polish garbage

can garbage wherethehellareyou

hide everything away -

eyes misting - afraid s

three-headed boy

floating in glass

o afraid so

afraid

--

[...] but you're doin' it again /

Eyes down, a few of my tears dressed my untouched tater tots. Across from me, he slurped hot sauce and crab meat, running two claws down my spine one click – .k. – at a time. His dark, sharp purple tongue wrapped itself, pig in a blanket, around the tiny scraping spoon that looked like a screwdriver coated in warm, fleshy butter. Playing hash brown tic-tac-toe, I sat through his hedonist chewing. Shaking, my legs became Kit-Kat puddles, dripping glutinous chocolate wafer off the booth and onto the chubby-checkered linoleum.

You better duck down the alleyway, looking for a new friend

////////Hey//////// I jump and look up to see those Twizzler lines on his forehead.

/////Your milkshake is melting/////

--

...watch the painclothes /

I scrubbed the Benz, fingerprints rusted to the bone. Suds tasted sour, like the cherry lemonade suntanning next to the spilled bleach on the concrete that was seeping into a family of heavy tools. My bare feet were covered in it. The wind blew out and my sweat joined the soap soaking three sponges in the bucket next to me. There wasn't sunscreen in the house. I knew he knew. Pain built a casing for his nicotine palladium.

/////Scratch it 'n you get a blow to the head/////

I looked over my freckled shoulder to see the megalomaniac behind the screen door hidden inside the corner of the garage. His hands were beer bottles. My eyes were thunderstorms. My thoughts were manic. My nail felt for a knick in the paint. I knew he knew.

Dangerous snakes fell out of his mouth. They crocheted their way to my heels.

Agitation uprooted the concrete under my feet. I fell to the ground, next to the bleach.

Dagger punctured my tongue and tore it out of my mouth. One micro-cut at a time.

I grabbed the screwdriver.

--

You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows

Descent with Modification



Pictured: *Trichocereus bridgesii* seedling shot with macro lens.

Soapsuds

I was using pump number 5 at the local Shell station when it started dispensing soapsuds. I wondered if the tubes got confused, but when I glanced around, there was no car wash at this particular station.

My Jeep started to float above the ground.

Fuck, at first there were only a few feet between the wheels and the concrete.

But, it quickly began to rise up into the air, like the suds the tank was now filled up with.

I thought, "I'm screwed, I'm supposed to turn in this lease soon." What will they think when I tell them, "Sorry, my car floated away like a balloon."?

Poem from Shalimar

If you surrender to the air, you ride.

I've done too much surrendering, I think.

Black branches obscured by their goldenhide

Stale revelation, yanked from thick red sink

Yes, I'm a lavender, a pink, a green.

My poems, then, like parachutists sheathed

But Blankness wrenches this identity

From far behind my clenched prison-bar teeth

Strawberry dipped in chocolate, or in tar

Or loose tongue, hacked off, dipped in dark brown paint

Yes, do gawk at my wings and my guitar

Admire, with white-blue eyes, the thing you ain't.

Two travelers, pale and gun-strapped in their hike

Esteem my strange-fruit poem on the Florida turnpike.

Blood Moon

The Moon shed tears of blood last night. Upon her silver face, there shone the glimmer of tears too bitter for human comprehension. As she watched over the world, ever observant, she could not bear to witness any longer the tragedy that is humankind. She felt for the broken, the lost, the desolate, the desperate, the defeated, the fighters, the widows, the orphans, the victims, the accursed, the hungry, the poor. She cast a crestfallen glance upon the world, and she saw only huddled masses yearning to breathe free. But she could offer no refuge. Unable, in her melancholy, to reflect the light of something so bright as her distant lover who we know as the Sun, she shunned it. Her face darkened gradually as she filled with immense pity for humanity.

But it was not for humanity that her vigilant eyes would pour forth blood. Whilst she watched, a sad observer, she chanced upon issues more pressing than those of the human strife, which, up until this moment, weighed heavy upon her heart. She saw, beneath the weight of each suffering soul, Mother Earth beaten and battered, bruised and begging for mercy. For millions of years, as the Sun took its leave and darkness descended, the Moon marveled at Mother Earth's delight, beauty, and vivacity. Last night, however, the Moon having finally discerned the emaciated state of her long-time companion, grew fierce with sadness and with anger.

Her sorrows gave way to a fiery rage. A blood flood of seething temper rushed upon her face. No longer was her face veiled in the blackness of mourning, for no longer did she trouble herself with trivial human tribulations. Her color turned with her mood. Fighting the urge to suppress her feelings, she broke beneath the pressure of such a task. Her red tears fell fast and steady. Soon enough, the entirety of her face was stained red with her fury and her tears. As a child weeps for a dying parent, so the Moon wept for Mother Earth, letting loose a tempest of bloody tears. It was not until every starry constellation in the cosmos joined together to pacify her wrath that the impassioned Moon could begin to find peace once again. Successful were the constellations in their joint effort and ere long the Moon heaved her last sob and then shone again with the light of the Sun.

Parallel to Parkland

It was early March of 2018—a notable dash on the timeline of U.S. politics. The air outside the high school was plump with moisture from the snow, but the air inside was chokingly dry, rippled by the din of students and the yellow beams of light streaming through the skylight. It was roughly 11:45 AM, and I, like all other students in a math or science class, was heading out to lunch.

As usual, I sat against a wall a bit of a distance away from the tables, underneath a trophy case, with a stuffed lunchbox to eat lunch on my lap.

I had plenty of friends and I got along with most anyone that I was assigned to work with. I simply didn't feel like talking to anyone during lunch, as the chewing triggered my misophonia—a neurological condition that can incite a variety of negative reactions to certain sounds—leaving me in a panicked or enraged state as I headed back to class. It was easier and more appealing to just put myself out of the way and enjoy my food in peace.

As I settled down, gobbling up my food before 30 minutes passed and I would be sealed in the classrooms again, two girls approached. They looked like best friends, with that kind of lean-into-each-other stance, and both had soft-looking throws over their shoulders. They matched in style with their pastel accents and genuine grins. As they grew closer, I dug in my memory to uncover just where I had seen them before—AP Eng? Astronomy? Algebra 3? No answer came.

They stopped a few feet away and one leaned down a bit, her friend remaining withdrawn, but not shy. “Hi, do you need someone to sit with?” she asked in a peppy tone. My heart grew a few sizes, but I shook my head.

“No, thank you,” I murmured quickly.

“It wouldn't be a bother,” she continued. “Really. We've got a table right over there...” She glanced back at the cluster of tables, now adorned with rowdy students.

“Don’t worry about me,” I responded, now intent on trying to properly express my gratitude. “I like to eat lunch alone. I really appreciate your offer, though!”

“Alright, but you’re always welcome,” she concluded. They walked away, tangled up in each other again. I let out a little sigh of relief as memories flooded back.

This had happened to me before, when I actually needed it, before my condition had set in. In a time of devastating loneliness, someone else had approached me and offered me a spot at their table. It was one of the most meaningful gestures I had ever received from a fellow student. I was so glad that the trend was alive, that other people with the same shame and solitude that I once felt would have the same kindness extended to them. I was so proud of those girls.

At least until I realized at what point in time and space they had approached me. March of 2018: the height of the “March for Our Lives” movement and the subsequent “Walk Out vs. Walk Up.” After the Parkland shooting, students, parents, teachers, politicians, and everyone else were gathering on opposing sides.

While it was in general agreement that something had to be done, people were split. On one side, led by the survivors of the shooting, were those who wanted to “walk out” – they wanted to make their voices heard so that governments would allocate more resources and better regulations to protect children from shooters. On the other, led by a retired Texas teacher, many blamed students for cold, uncaring attitudes and ceaseless bullying that drove students to commit atrocities. They encouraged students to “walk up, not out” and make friends with the people that could become future shooters.

It was significant. No one had asked me if I wanted to sit with them the entire year. The thought crashed through my mind like a nail shot from a nail gun: they saw me as a potential shooter.

As I considered this realization, I decided to put a bit more research into the opposing movements. I stayed on top of the news well enough and had even participated in my school’s compromised version of the “Walk Out” protest, but I didn’t know much about the attitudes or origin of the opposition. What I found disturbed me.

"He could likely be our next shooter," applied to every student sitting alone, eating lunch alone, consistently disrupting classes...walk up to them. Invite them to your group. Make friends with these people *so that they don't kill you.*

On the one hand, inviting people who look lonely is basic kindness. It should be expected. On the other, there's something inherently wrong with forcing children to go out of their way to talk to the people they fear, the people they actively perceive as having the drive and opportunity to commit massive acts of violence, instead of alerting trained adults. As a third point, these people aren't blind. Just like me, they can see the world around them. They may pick up on the fear of their classmates, causing them to sink further into despair.

I spent the day looking around at my classmates, considering the effects of the shooting a thousand miles south of us. I remembered how during lunch, the first resounding note of the percussion band's flash mob had caused many of us to scream and duck; how during the vigil for Parkland's victims someone had banged on the door and the crowd rippled, the posted security almost dashing to the door; how active shooter drills were fully accepted into the curriculum, something my parents had never known, and how everyone hated and shushed whoever talked during these drills just in case it could be the real thing.

I don't know why shooters do it or how to stop them. All I know is that there's a serious problem if people see me as a potential shooter without knowing a hint of who I am.

In the wake of the shooting and outrage, the victims put forward their list of solutions and demands. Some political officials even responded, passing new laws and regulations. However, a common trend lurking beneath the surface of these proposed and passed regulations were the barring of mentally ill people from purchasing firearms. Now, I'm as much of a supporter of gun control as the next in my peer group, and I realize that such mental instability would most likely have to be proven in court, but as the stereotype of the psychopath school shooter grows, I can't help but be afraid.

After all, though this is not the case for every student who eats lunch alone, I ate lunch alone as a direct result of a mental illness.

Considering the symptoms of misophonia, which can include rage and violence ideation, I'm a prime target for the stereotype. However, I am sane. I have an awareness of gun safety protocol, even though I have no intention of actually owning one, and I am fully aware that the rage I feel is not genuine. Should I need a gun for home defense, I'd know to keep it locked, unloaded, and without ammunition stored near.

There's a sort of icicle effect with this problem; it was created the same way an icicle is, starting with specific conditions with just a few drops of water, then extending and layering the creation. We have to melt away the problem, starting with destigmatizing the mentally ill, then the loners, then fostering a kindness in schools and allocating resources to help, then helping students to realize that friendship can and should be mutually beneficial, even with strikingly different people.

I left the lower class standings behind. I left them surrounded by the fallout of March for Our Lives, huddled in the darkness, away from the windows and door. Hopefully, I left them secured by the kindness of their peers, including those two girls.

As I stepped outside on my final day, intoxicated with the new freedom and old memories, I made a quiet vow to never forget not only how I felt that day, but also how it felt to walk alongside survivors in my journey. I had to do something to help my fellow students. The first step, I figured, would be to tell this story.

My voice is small and I ruminate on my experiences for too long. I'm free from the confines of the public school system, but I regret not having the courage to speak out about this issue back then. The best I can do now is tell what I have: an example of kindness to show the "walk-up" supporters, an ethical problem to address for those in school administration, and a core problem of the current approach to school shootings for everyone in the nation to consider.

Elyse Gregory

Senior. Major: Linguistics

Stare



Glub Glub

My father was a hard worker,
he wore suits like a fish wears scales.

The fish in his office (the other son)
circles around, around
Pushing oxygen through gills, pressing
against the clear bottom.

I am in rubber water,
the lake flips and swallows me.

Existence

thinking growing streaks of gray hair to the tone of forget would make
struggle sound like your names

cutting it away would induce remembrance

how could it

when after tumultuous years

therapy to cure the ailments of the self into submission

there's difficulty, endurance in forgetting without relapse

carving into the recesses of a screen

lost pleas for help serving as forever triggers

avoidance of the word "goodbye"

coming into clarity of identity

never feeling so alive hearing the reverberating sound of a voice in the
lonesomeness of a 1 a.m. shower drain

how could I not?

she said, blood dripping through the ridges of her eye sockets, blowing
through her tear ducts

it was almost two years ago

i told him that this would be a good day to start forever

the poems escaped my fingers

i said this was it. i will no longer suffer

i did.

you did it.

YOU.

the same you that cried herself to sleep every night
sobbing over broken hearts

standing up for herself
don't use me anymore
i am alive, hear me scream
crying over lost opportunities

sworn into silence
you are a burden, do not speak
now break through, yell your loudest
no barriers

you who shouted
respect me, i am not less than you.
you cannot abuse me

here you are
staring through the mirror

there she is, looking back, those same red river tears dripping down her face
like a midnight summer drizzling

“you made it”

opening my dried eyes, i replied:

“how could i exist if it wasn’t for you. i am finally thankful for everything you endured. you are the strongest person i will ever know.”

she opened her bloodshot river eyes and pierced her way into my own, you’re welcome. we lived for this moment. you are me, and i am you, forever bonded through traumatic abuse.

what a catch.

Home is the Desert

Her combat boots made clouds of dust as she shuffled along the road. The two-lane highway was a faded ribbon that stretched out of sight into the mountains ahead of her. She took another drag from her cigarette, ignoring the way it burned her split lip as she watched silver tendrils of smoke fade into the night. Her left eye was throbbing and swollen shut, but she ignored that, too, as she trudged mechanically through the desert sand, still warm from the afternoon sun.

The stench of the rosemary and sage her mother always had burning still clung to her military jacket. Her mom said the herbs would help promote peace within their home, but it never stopped her shithead boyfriend from hitting either of them. The girl spun around and continued walking backward to watch the dilapidated city. It wasn't really big enough to be a city, but it was too small to be a town, so everyone called it a city anyway. The sun-bleached buildings were backlit by the neon glow of dingy signs that enticed passers-by into strip clubs, dive bars, and liquor stores. Silently, she prayed for the earth to split open, to swallow the grimy city deep within its depths and never give it back.

She spit out a mouthful of blood and threw her cigarette butt at the city before turning around again. Her hand pulled a flask out of her pocket that had once belonged to her father; when her mom gave it to the bastard she was dating as a birthday present last year, the girl had been determined to get it back from him. That asshole didn't deserve to touch the ground her father had walked on, let alone carry his favorite flask. There were a few sips of cheap whiskey left in it. It burned on its way down but left a pleasant warmth in her chest.

The watercolor dusk was fading into ebony above the inky mountains. Soon her only source of light would be the waxing crescent moon, maybe an occasional set of headlights. She would have to find a place to sleep soon. There was a cluster of large stones in the distance; it might be enough to offer some shelter from the road. She lit another cigarette and pushed the smoke out through her nose. A lizard darted in front of her and

burrowed itself under some brittle bushes to her left, probably looking for food. As she glanced at the lizard, the cactus right behind the bushes caught her eye. It was barely tall enough to reach her ankles, but it had three beautiful fuchsia blossoms that seemed to glow in the dimming light. She hadn't seen a flowering cactus in this desert for quite some time; the drought had started before her father died eight years ago, and cacti can't flower if they don't have enough water.

She was so focused on the flowers that she almost missed the police cruiser pulling up behind her. The car came to a stop on the other side of the road, window already rolled down.

"Hey, kiddo," Officer Grayley began. "What are you doing all the way out here?"

She didn't answer. Her eyes were looking past him to see if anyone was in the car with her dad's old partner.

"Just me." He put the car in park and stepped slowly onto the pavement. "Had a feeling you'd be out here."

She still said nothing. Keenan Grayley had been the one to take her home the first time she ran away, right after her dad's murder. He'd found her closer to the city the last time, but she had also been eight then. This time, he pulled out his own pack of cigarettes and took a long drag.

"Got a call from your mom earlier."

Silence.

"Wanna tell me what happened between you and her shitty boyfriend?"

She shook her head.

"Well, then I'll tell you what I know so far. Calvin Haverson is in the hospital right now in critical condition because someone shoved a pencil into his throat. Any of this sounding familiar?"

The girl finished her cigarette and threw the butt in the direction of the city. "Where's my mom?" she demanded in a hoarse whisper.

Grayley sighed. "She has a minor concussion and some bruising where he tried to strangle her, but she'll be just fine."

She looked down at her bloody knuckles. "He tried to kill me for

real this time, so Mom stepped in. He started strangling her. I started hitting him to get him off of her. He started choking me, too," she trailed off. "I didn't know what else to do...the pencil was on the floor next to me."

"The issue isn't that you stabbed him, Wren," Grayley began. "Quite frankly, everyone down at the station is kind of glad you did. The issue here is that, instead of calling for help, you stole money and other valuables and fled the scene."

"He didn't deserve help," she spat.

"That's not for you to decide," the officer replied calmly. He took in Wren's condition for a moment before letting out a long sigh. "I need you to come back with me to give your side of the events, songbird."

She gave him a hard look for using her father's nickname. If she hadn't taken such a severe beating earlier, she probably would have made a run for it into the desert. Grayley could easily catch her in her current condition. What other choice did she have? Wren hobbled over to the passerger's side and threw herself into the seat.

"All you have to do is give your story to some other officers, and then I can take you home," Grayley told her quietly.

She looked out the window of the police cruiser and watched the creosote slide by. A hawk swooped to the ground to snatch an unsuspecting lizard from the scorched sand. Tumbleweeds jumped lazily in the distance as the dry air ambled across the terrain. Her dad used to take her on drives up to the mountains when her mom was working, saying that if he could start all over again, he would build them a ranch near the base of the mountain. They would raise cattle and probably have a couple of horses to help wrangle the herd after a day on the plains. He would create an easy life for them with his words, then turn to look over at her and say that the only thing he loved more than the desert was her.

"Home is the desert," Wren whispered, partially to Officer Grayley, but mostly to herself.

Look to the Sky



A Chinese Street

The scent of luscious peach blossoms
blends in with the scent of the pork buns
sold by the nearby street vendor
his voice ringing loud and clear
over the bustle of the busy street.

The pork buns wrapped in brown paper
are handed to the elderly woman
as she tosses her coins to the man
before she sits at a bench to admire
the peach blossoms as they float down.

The children's laughter in the courtyard
can be heard with the gurgle of the fountain
the old woman sighs with content
as the steam from the bun warms her face
and the peach trees rustle with happiness.

Our Dead's Grief

Our dead shuffle behind us,
Yelling their denial at the
Hand of an indifferent god
As he tears them away from
This land to walk under the feet
Of the living.

Our dead scream their rage
To deafened rocks;
Their hatred scalding the Earth
Without mark, as their pale hands
Beat the ground in frustration,

Our dead whisper their pleas and bargains
Silenced by a sealed fate far from
Food and fire,
Their unmoving hearts no longer
Pushing blood through broken veins

The dead weep their tears unshed
Behind blue fingers when
They reach for those who
Still walk on lifeless bones
As blue bodies huddle below,
Without water;

The dead scramble after us,
As they try to ascend the
Earth, reaching for the
Blue sky one last time
Before relinquishing their hold
On the living.

Winter Days

In remembrance of Mary Oliver, 1935-2019

I sit and marvel
there are others whose lives are filled with joy
by all the small beauties
just outside our windows.

Others, like Mary Oliver or Annie Dillard or my friend Dean,
who stop to watch the butterfly come out of its cocoon
or the spider inject the writhing fly with its poison
and tell us of it.

Oh to know on such a dangerously cold day as this,
there are those of us who have slowed down,
breathed in the sweetness of life,
let the brilliantly white snow reflect into us

Its stillness, calling us to stop a moment with it,
to thank the world for the warm coffee in our hands,
praise the strength of the birds soaring on these tremulous winds,
laugh at the dancing snow.

When you read of these little snapshots,
does it bring a smile to your face?
Do you race to your window to marvel with me
at the way the sun shines on the tree's icy ornaments?

Do you taste the joys of life,
let them roll over your tongue

and burst unexpectedly,
thrillingly, filling you with ecstasy?

What do you do when you read a poem like this?

I tell you, this is not a poem, it is living!

Do you live, live such a poem as this?

Do you, too, sit and marvel?

Uncle Sweatpants

One summer, my mother and I moved in with Uncle Sweatpants. Uncle Sweatpants was my mom's uncle, not her brother, and he stank. He moved around the dense air of his single wide trailer like a lurking sea monster. In the mornings, he'd knock on our door and ask if we wanted squirrel and eggs.

My mom was working at the Waffle House south of town then. Each day she'd be there for almost thirteen hours, then she'd come home to me and Uncle Sweatpants and we'd watch Gilligan's Island reruns. At night she would hug me close, because we were sharing a twin bed, and she smelled of fried dough.

At the time, my mother was twenty-four, we celebrated this birthday on the back porch of the trailer. Uncle Sweatpants grilled dry hamburgers over charcoal and her friend Nancy bought her a cake from the SaveRite. The cake was dark chocolate; my mom let me have the big piece.

During the day, I walked around Artemis, where Uncle Sweatpants lived. Artemis was one stop the old train made before it stopped running. We weren't in the middle of the woods then, like we had been so often since I was born. Artemis was a big neighborhood, surrounded by flood walls, chipping with age. Three streets over from his trailer there was a park, and that's where I went the most.

I met a friend there, a girl named Bobby. Bobby was the one who told me about Uncle Sweatpants being in the army before we moved there. She said he'd been married once but the girl had died while he was away. So now all he did was sit all day and wear sweatpants.

Bobby also taught me how to ride a bike, something mom never had the time to teach me. One day, at the end of the summer, there was a cookout at Bobby's house, and my mother dressed me up in a pair of daisy overalls she'd gotten at Kmart. I fell off Bobby's bike that night and bloodied my whole leg and ruined the overalls. Mom didn't yell at me, she just took me to the bathroom and wiped the blood off my leg.

My mom had big eyes, and I remember watching her that day,

wondering what she thought about. She was twenty-four. She took her time putting yellow Band-Aids on each of the dark cuts. She said, “Are you tryna send yourself to the hospital, little girl?”

My mom had her ears pierced all the way up the lobe. She got a tattoo that summer of two monkeys, linking arms, like they did in the barrel.

“That’s me and you,” she said when she showed it to me.

Uncle Sweatpants yelled at me one night when I was a bit too far from the trailer. I heard his booming voice lash out at the summer night, and I turned to run back immediately. The sky was orange over the trailer as I reached the back wooden steps.

“Esther, I want you to stay out on that porch do you hear,” Uncle Sweatpants was inside, behind the closed storm door.

Bugs were screaming behind me, dancing in the tall grass, telling each other things I couldn’t imagine.

My vision narrowed in through the door. I couldn’t help but see.

Uncle Sweatpants waddled to the storm door and shoved the phone out to me. “I need you to call the police, Esther. I need you to call the police.”

“What’s happening?” I said to him, and he slammed the door.

“Don’t you come in here.”

When the police came, they found me sitting on the rotten bottom step. I was sweating and someone had set a fire somewhere on the other side of the mountain, so huge smoke clouds filled our sky. The police ignored me.

In the last days of August, a woman named Sherry took me away from Uncle Sweatpants’ trailer. I looked out the window of her old car and watched the small front yards of Artemis go by until there were none left to see.

“We’re gonna find your daddy. That’s where you’re going to go.”

The Locket

She lived in someone's locket,
Not the watch in his pocket.
Adventures come, and to and fro,
She goes along her house in tow.
Though she knows not why,
This man does try
To find her owner, he does not lie.

He found her home upon a chain
That belonged to her Lady Jane.
But she did not know where Jane had gone,
She was missing with the come of dawn.
Day after day,
The locket would stay
With the man, for why, he would not say.

But then Jane's name had come to her ear,
A clue her locket had made appear.
It led the man to her Lady,
In a place so dark and eerie.
The man, one of law,
With locket saw
Lady Jane's body, he could not foresaw.

Alabaster Cup on Lathe in Volterra, Italy



Alum. B.A. English.

Vagabond Follies collection:
Old Town Tavern

The coldest night so far.
Stillness in stolen breath.
At nine below zero nostrils stick
one can inhale, exhale tricky.
Frozen trees creak a sad song
bending bare branches away
from prickly wind frost.
Fog under feeble streetlights.
Each iced breath brought
on by extremes.

No one out walking.
They are in the bar.
The band is tuning ready
to heat to the dance floor.
Open the door, enter happy
noises I have missed.
*It's colder than a witch's tit
in a brass bra.* Bouncer winks.

The bartender, an old friend
brings me my brew, smiles
placing it down in front of me –
Ice cold
Cold out ain't it?
Responding
Yep.

A Historical Awakening: Rebellion and Fire

Dublin, Ireland
Easter Week
Monday, April 24, 1916
7:00am

The sound of a baby crying wakes Catherine. Out of bed with the speed of a cannonball, calibrated for obliteration, she has her target in her sights. She is ready to battle all the forces of hell to save the baby. But she realizes the crying that snatched her from her laudanum-induced sleep isn't real. She stops in her tracks.

Catherine crumples to her hands and knees in front of the crib. She hears herself shriek. The gaping emptiness mocks and terrifies her far more than her dependency on the two to three ounces of laudanum a day her body now craves to numb the pain that accompanies the memories.

She clenches her teeth. The trembling begins and its ambush is merciless. It begins at the soles of her feet and twists the length of her body. She is a contortionist by sheer accident. When the trembling reaches her eyes, pain explodes behind them. It leaks into her soul.

Catherine lies prostrate and she reaches in the pocket of her nightgown for the rosary beads. The feel of them offers her a minuscule moment of comfort from the grief.

"Hail Mary, full of grace, da Lord is wi' dee. Blessed art dou among weemen, an' blessed is da fruit of dy womb, Jaysus. 'Oly Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, nigh an' at da 'our of our death. Amen."

In the fetal position, she soon hears the familiar sounds of shouts and quarrels and of laughter. They seep through the walls and drip from the ceiling. The sounds are of human activity alongside human misery, and they thrust themselves into Catherine's self-imposed seclusion.

Footsteps approach her door and force Catherine to her feet. She moves away from the crib and walks behind the lace curtain that partitions the living space from the sleeping space. She sits down on the bed in the

dark. Someone knocks at her door. She sees under the door that even the light from the corridor waits on baited breath for an invitation from her for entrance.

“‘Oha’ dis gran’ mornin’, lass?” a woman calls through the door. No answer.

“Can yer forgive me t’ day, lass?”

No answer. Catherine is unconvinced of Mrs. Duffy’s sincerity.

Her interrogator, the widow Mrs. Duffy, has always been a nosy-parker. But now, every morning at 8:00am, she stumbles her way down the stairs from her apartment on the third floor. She knocks on every door to talk about her son, Gavin. It is how she manages her grief. Some tenants open their door to her. Most don’t. Twenty-two-year-old Gavin is one of the fallen in the War. He dug trenches and was killed last December in an underground explosion on the Western Front in France.

“Oi ‘eard de banshee’s wail last noight, lass,” Mrs. Duffy says. Sorrow clogs her voice.

“Jaysus, Mary, an’ Joseph, dere’s gonna be trouble t’ day. Oi’m on me way ter de General Post Office. Oi knitted me fella sum socks. Oi shud jist let ‘imself stew in ‘is own juices.”

However, Catherine soon hears whimpers, “Don’t go, oi begged ‘imself.”

Gavin was a good lad. Catherine’s eyelids flutter and then she stands up.

“Lord love ‘imself,” Mrs. Duffy laughs. “‘E’s a gran’ lad, me fella is.”

“Never went ter bed without socks on ‘is feet. I’m worried aboyt ‘imself. ‘E’s in naw man’s lan’. Jaysus, Mary, an’ Joseph! ‘Av yer ever ‘eard av such a place?! Sounds ter me loike a place naw paddy shud be.”

Pause.

“Forgive me, lass. Oi shud not ‘av left yer ma alone wi’ yer lad dat day.” Mrs. Duffy’s voice is clear but deceptive.

Catherine walks over to the door and opens it to the past.

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*This is an excerpt. To read more of this piece, visit
<https://swallowthemoon19.wixsite.com/journal>*

A Historical Awakening: Rebellion and Loss

Tunica, Mississippi
Monday, April 24, 1916
9:15am

Michael stands alongside just ten others in the cemetery behind the Baptist church because he wants his brother, Caleb, buried right away. However, the grief that claws at his chest delays his steps.

At this same time yesterday morning, Michael and his brother Caleb were clearing weeds along the straight furrows of the cotton crops. Three weeks ago, they and the other sharecroppers had planted the seedlings in them.

The land belongs to Thomas Monroe now, a white man. It used to belong to Solomon Jones, a black man, before he fled north with what remained of his family after his only son was lynched. After Solomon left, Mr. Monroe seized the land and it has been in his possession for the past two years.

“Michael,” says the man who stands directly across from him.

Although there’s warmth in the sympathetic tone, the memory of seeing the back of Caleb when he stormed out of the cabin keeps Michael’s feet frozen in place, and it forces his attention back to seven hours ago when that same voice said, “Caleb’s over here, Michael.” Then and now the voice belongs to Daniel.

He sharecrops for Mr. Jackson, but the reason he’s here now with Michael and not in the fields is because Daniel faced a similar experience four months ago: the discovery and burial of his cousin, Junior’s, lynched body. Now, Daniel makes it his duty to conduct the search for the loved ones who have been reported missing. Most times he and his fellow searchers do indeed find the missing persons: they find the bodies lynched, shot, or burned. Daniel then helps bury the dead.

Dead silence – Michael still stands where the memory stopped him. He’s still back there...

Today, at around 3:00 in the morning, Michael awoke with a jolt and he had a bad feeling that something was wrong. He had fallen asleep at the table waiting for Caleb to come home. After their mother died a year ago, Michael had stepped into her role: being both mother and father to Caleb.

Early in Michael's life, his mother had told him how things were in the South, and he had paid close attention to her and some of the older generations' stories of the disappearance of black people without a trace. He listened intently to the discussion about the speculations of who the father was of the black child with white skin and blue, green eyes.

Michael and his mother were both products of one of the South's systemic acts of violence: rape of a black woman by a white man. Caleb, on the other hand, was the product of a bitter, short-lived marriage between their mother and a black sharecropper.

Their mother, once a great beauty, showed no favoritism, however. She loved them both equally, but Caleb's father took his frustrations and anger out on Michael because of his white skin and straight hair. He beat him when he lived with them and still on those rare occasions when he came by, mostly at night. "You're white to him, Michael," were the words his mother used to console him with after the beatings. "Understand?"

"Yes, mama," he said to her. "I am Cain and Abel: the curse and the blood-sacrifice."

"Don't sass me, Michael! You watch out for your brother and keep him safe! You hear me boy?"

Michael knew he had gone too far because his mother had never called him "boy" before. And so, there they were: mother and son, one with dark skin and coiled hair and the other with white skin and straight hair; female against male; middle-aged against youth, thrust into a power struggle for supremacy they were both destined to lose because of the chokehold of white supremacy on their lives. To be sure, both mother and son lost something that day ten years ago.

"Michael," the voice across from him says again.

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*This is an excerpt. To read more of this piece, visit
<https://swallowthemoon19.wixsite.com/journal>*

A Historical Awakening: Rebellion and Love

Trigger Warning: Explicit Language

August 24, 1916

The Lower Side of Manhattan, New York City

This morning, Michael decided that he needed some laughter in his life and at the end of his work day, he did laugh. A lot. Today turned into one of Michael's better days since he came north from Tunica, Mississippi four months ago. He would have been asleep in the bed now, but he went to the moving-picture show in the Bowery to see *The Danger Girl*, starring Gloria Swanson and Bobby Vernon: a comedy, because he wanted to laugh today. But darkness approaches, and the laughter slips from his eyes as anger rises in them.

The daylight struggles with the night as it encroaches, but what's left of it provides a spotlight on the scene about 30 feet ahead of him. Michael pulls on his horse Jupiter to halt him to turn the wagon around. But the horse has none of it and Michael curses under his breath.

Jupiter looks back at Michael and shakes his head to let Michael know that he is tired and wants to go to his stall. The two became companions this past June when Michael purchased him from an Italian baker for the passage to bring the rest of his family to America. Now, the baker has a bakery shop with an apartment on the top floor of it on the corner of Delancey and Orchard Streets.

When Michael first arrived in Manhattan this past April, the noise, the masses of people, and the lack of space and fresh air terrified him. But, he worked through his bouts of terror by walking the swarmed streets because he needed the hordes of people that congregated those streets to validate his whiteness for him. As he walked, he forced himself to make direct eye contact with all the races and ethnicities from both the Upper to the Lower East Sides of Manhattan and in all the spaces and places in between. Before too long, Michael's denial of his blackness receded further inside him, as he

relished in his growing sense of white privilege for the first time in his life.

But now, the precariousness of white privilege is pounded into his head as the well-fed policeman pounds his fist into the face of the black man, while two other policemen hold him up by his shoulders and hurl verbal abuses at him in their Irish brogue. The black man wears a Pullman Porters uniform. His hat is crushed under the foot of one of the policemen. Many black men found work for the Railroad companies. They needed workers to support the War in Europe.

"This," says the policeman who seems to be the leader of the three in between the punches he throws at the black man's body and face as they jerk from the impact of them.

"Is," a punch to his chin.

"Yer," a right-handed punch to his stomach.

"First," a left-handed punch to his stomach.

"And," another punch to his nose as blood burst out of it.

"Last warning, nigger," shouts the policeman just before he takes a step back and then his kicks the black man in the groin. "Get yer black arse back ter the railroad station."

The black man's eyes are swollen and they roll back into his head just before his knees buckle. There are no cries of protest from the immigrant audience against the violence because they'd rather the Irish policemen's fury remain on their black victim than they become his surrogate victims.

The black man hangs between the two policemen who still hold him up by the shoulders and the pugilist policeman hawks out phlegm from the back of his throat onto the back of the black man's unconscious head.

Anger hums throughout Michael's body. This hanging body conjures the image of his fourteen-year-old brother, Caleb's, lynched body. Michael experiences again the agony he felt over not protecting his brother. Two other dead bodies hover over the image of Caleb, as well.

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*This is an excerpt. To read more of this piece, visit
<https://swallowthemoon19.wixsite.com/journal>*

A Historical Awakening: Reckoning and Reconciliation

*Lower East Side, New York City
Wednesday, July 1919*

The smell of poverty, people, and the open toilets behind the tenements is ferocious. The afternoon sun bathes Catherine in light and her skin radiates under its attentiveness when she emerges from the People's Improvement Society's Public House on Elizabeth Street. She breathes a sigh of bliss for the first time in her life. The price of her bliss: courage and a five-cents charge for the soap and towel that came along with the bath she just had there. The bath—her first—was her gift to herself.

The Catherine who walked into the bath house isn't the same Catherine who emerges from it now. She put off her work clothes for a blouse made of georgette crepe, a beige tinted vest, and an ankle-length white gabardine skirt with a high and wide waistband, two pockets, and big buttons. They are American-made clothes for which it has taken her two years to save up for. The feel of the new clothes against her skin nurtures her strong sense of her Irish identity.

Catherine's a domestic worker along with three other Irish immigrant women for the Thompsons—native-born, white, and wealthy, living on the Upper East Side of Manhattan in a mansion on Fifth Avenue. She had found the position from an advertisement in the New York Times. But it was her priest, Father McNally, who provided the necessary reference needed for her to secure the position. She reaches her hand in the pocket of her skirt to caress the rosary beads. *'Tis gran' 'avin regular meals an' regular wages.*

Catherine heads south on Elizabeth toward Rivington. The immigrant crowds swallow her whole. Fearlessly, she weaves her way in and out of its belly that's full of pushcarts, people and crime, vice, predators and prey, animals, and children playing stick ball in front of their blocks.

But on the periphery, the Catholic, Protestant, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, and the Reformed Church of America churches battle with

the tanneries, breweries, saloons, and brothels for the souls of the immigrants.

At the corner of Rivington, Catherine crosses to Bowery to get to Stanton where she stops and wipes her brow with the back of her hand. She takes a moment to marvel at the rows of foreign faces who shout in their foreign languages behind their pushcarts. At her estimation there are about fifty to sixty of them. On the move again, she sidesteps a child who pulls a crate of rags. The wheels of the crate are from a baby carriage.

After a moment, she quickens her pace. There's excitement in her eyes. She is to meet Michael at the Italian-owned ice cream shop that sits at the end of Stanton Street. Their idle moments are few and far between with her being a live-in domestic worker and him a scenic carpenter at the Palace Theatre at West 47th Street in midtown Manhattan.

Most Sunday afternoons after a matinee, Michael sneaks Catherine into the theatre. Last Sunday she told him that Mrs. Thompson had given her next Wednesday off. Michael told her then that he'd ask for next Wednesday off, too. That he'd work extra hours Monday and Tuesday to finish the work on the plantation scene for the upcoming Minstrel Show. Although the minstrel shows were popular, both Michael and Catherine shared a disdain for them.

One of Catherine's favorite composers is Jerome Kern. She now hums under her breath a few lines of Kern's and B.G. Sylva's new song, "Look for the Silver Lining":

*A heart full of joy and gladness
Will always banish sadness and strife
So always look for the silver lining
And try to find the sunny side of life...*

The lyrics and melody transport Catherine to the night she and Michael met. It was about three years ago. She and he, along with a crowd of immigrants, were witnesses to the beating of a colored man by three Irish police officers on Delancey Street. This brutality appalled her.

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*This is an excerpt. To read more of this piece, visit
<https://swallowthemoon19.wixsite.com/journal>*

The Mug

The old man stared at the mug
as it sat on the middle shelf
with a chip in the baby blue rim
and a faded, crescent lipstick stain.

He sighed and closed the cupboard door
the hinges creaked with effort
before the mug was once again
hidden in the darkness.

The kitchen still had the lingering smell
of her lavender lotion
as the radiator clicked on
in the family room of the house.

He shuffled from the kitchen
across the carpet of the living room
and stared at the empty maroon chair
with a book of hers still on the armrest.

He shook his head and turned back
toward the kitchen, the coffee finished.
He opened up the creaky cabinet once more
and pulled out the mug, rubbing his thumb
against the faded pink lip stain and smiled.

Onion



Senior. Major: Linguistics. Minors: Creative Writing and English

Nebulous

Inspired by Rinat Voligamsi's Dusk. Ursa Major, 2010.

Fallen from hands
scrambling for weapons,
crushed filters litter
the dirt; mock constellations
to be extinguished
in gunfire.

Clumps of ash scatter the letter a soldier writes
to send home. One hand holds a stubby pencil
and the other anchors the paper, a cigarette
between fingers. Tiny specks of the universe, nestled
among declarations of love; *Everything is* [redacted] *here.*
Hope you're well.

Unaware she has become one,
a widow sits
on a loveseat,
smoking and looking
at the moon.

Through a thick
smog of gunpowder,
the sun retreats
from the trenches.
The tips of cigarettes
flicker out—
an Ursa Major.

Alum. B.A. English.

Vagabond Follies collection:
Fragility

If they should, off the shelf
fall
each glassine crystal idol
fragile
when earth below begins
tremble
when plates shift, adjust
themselves
into each an other
lifting
to buckle their belts
like
fat men at airport
security
playing with their
pants.

Who to pick up the pieces
after
value has been discounted
each
love lost in the rascal quake
desire
to be whole again, to shine
prisms

in a curio cabinet
collection

mementos to life in
aching
the pain splashed upon
our
floor where once we
danced.

Wisdom Born of Pain

Trigger Warning: Rape/Sexual Assault

Here she stands amidst her peers at college, a place that seemed so out of reach during her childhood, thinking of the price she paid for her freedom and independence, wondering if all of it was worth it. She thinks of other women around the world, wonders if their pain was worth their independence. Standing there, she envisions those lives and their stories.

“I’ve Been Down There on the Floor”

Sarah was born innocent, like all little girls in the world. Her first contact with her father was cold. He glances at her for a moment, then beams at his first-born son. So proud of the big brother he would be, ignoring the sweet girl in his hands.

Sarah’s two and all she can comprehend is screaming, loud thuds, and doors slamming.

She’s three at Disney World with her big brother, mother, and grandparents. Her father is nowhere in sight.

At six, Sarah is watching her mother graduate college with two kids and a loving boyfriend at home.

Sarah’s seven and at her dad’s house for the weekend. He sees her sucking her thumb, an action only babies do, and Sarah is no baby. He snatches her thumb with one hand, squeezing it until she can no longer feel it and shoves his own thumb in her mouth, pulling her up by her teeth. He slams her against the wall, screaming that he’ll cut her thumb off if he catches her doing it again. Tears fall to the shag brown carpet a foot below her. He holds her there for what seems like an eternity. This will not be the last time he does this to her.

She’s nine at her grandmother’s house for the traditional “Sunday Pancake Breakfast.” Sarah’s big brother is playing the Sega Dreamcast with her uncle as she cleans with her grandma. She asks if she can play and her grandma reminds her that women don’t play; they clean, cook, and take care of the children. Sarah asks about having a job, knowing she wants to

be the president one day. Her grandma scoffs and tells her women aren't allowed to think, much less should they get an education.

Sarah's ten and just won a speech contest entitled "When I Grow Up." It details her exact plan on how she will graduate high school, go to Yale University, and become a volcanologist when she is twenty-two. Her mother and step-father couldn't be prouder; her dad doesn't even know about the contest.

She's thirteen and just found out her brother got accepted into Northern Michigan University. Sarah's ecstatic; her brother is not. Their dad refuses to let him attend because he wants his son to work for the family business that goes bankrupt once a year. Now Sarah's furious. She calls him, she screams at him, she explains how controlling he is being. The last words he will ever to say her: "No daughter of mine would side with her brother over her father." Sarah's heartbroken, but from that moment on, she realizes he was never her real father.

Sarah's fourteen and just made her stepdad extremely proud as they finalize his adoption of her. She finally feels like she has a father who will love her unconditionally just like she always wanted. She starts going to therapy where she realizes that the yelling and violence she had grown up with are not the "normal" ways a father punishes their daughter in America. She had no idea, much like the 6.6 million children around the United States who are abused by their parents, and that's just the reported cases.

"You Can Bend But Never Break Me"

Her purple fat lip that swelled to double its size should've been the first warning sign that John wasn't the man she thought he was. John apologizing profusely after slamming his fist into her lip after she declared they weren't having sex should've been a sign. John warning her that if she told anyone the truth about what happened, they wouldn't believe her should've been a sign. All of those signs were ignored and pushed to the back of her mind. John had been her best friend for four years; he couldn't have meant to hurt her because she didn't want to have sex with him, right?

Fast forward a year or so and she's at a different high school than John and the rest of her friends. She see John from time to time, so she doesn't think twice about showing up to a party he's having at his house.

Walking into his garage filled with twenty-five or so people, all

plastered drunk or higher than kites should've been yet another sign. John's best friend, Alex, hands her a beer, to which she turns around and puts down on table. She really didn't plan on being there too long with everyone already being wasted. John sees her from across the room, stumbles over to her, and grabs her waist. Apparently, that meant she was "his girl" for the night, entailing that she isn't allowed to leave his side until everyone else leaves the party. About an hour goes by and her patience was running very thin, being one of the only sober people at a party full of drunk jocks and cheerleaders. Alex notices her and whispers something to John, to which John replies by asking her to help him get to his bed so he can go to sleep. Seeing her opportunity to finally leave, she jumps up to help him.

As soon as she gets John to his room, everything goes wrong. John pushes her down onto the cold hardwood floor as hard as he can. He holds her down with one of his massive arms as the other is undoing her belt. She's squirming, yelling, begging for someone to get this guy off of her, but as soon as her pants are off, he covers her mouth with the same hand that gave her that fat lip a year ago. She realizes that no one was going to hear her and her shoves, punches, and scratches are only fueling this drunk man's fire. Her body goes limp, her brain numb, and before she knows it, she woke up the next morning no longer being a proud seventeen-year-old virgin and going through the embarrassment of asking her eighteen-year-old friend to buy her the morning-after pill.

A month goes by and in that time she is accepted to six colleges far away from her hometown and John. She decides it's time to get on birth control, just in case something awful like that night happens to her in college. Little did she know that when she would get to the OBGYN for the first time, she'd find out that not only did John give her Chlamydia, he also gave her a five-week-old fetus.

As soon as she heard the results, she asked for a number for an abortion clinic, to which her doctor was appalled, asking her multiple times if she was sure that's what she wanted to do, to which she could only nod her head yes. She then called her mom, tears running down her face, and explained what happened with John. At first, her mom couldn't believe it; she'd known John for years. How could this boy that she let into their life hurt her little girl?

A day later, she finds herself at an abortion clinic with her mom. The shame that Planned Parenthood puts girls through is something that she can only try to describe to you. After you put your name into a system that you pray never gets released, the girl behind the desk gives you a pamphlet that details every single part of the baby growing inside of you and what an abortion will do to that baby. You're told that you need to read over the pamphlet and come back the next day to get tested on the material. When you go in the next day, your mother is forced to wait in the waiting room while you go through the intimidating white doors by yourself. You meet with an adoption specialist, who reminds you that you are killing a human life, said life could mean the world to a sweet couple, and you're being selfish in destroying "God's Gift." Once you explain to her that you were raped and do not want to bring a baby born of hate into this world, she escorts you to a room with another woman in it and a television. This television will show a thirty-minute documentary about abortions and the pain you and the fetus in you will go through. You are then escorted out of the room into an operating room. You're terrified of what will happen next, hoping that it will all be over soon. A doctor walks in and before you know it, you're hearing the faintest heartbeat on a monitor. She asks if you're sure you'd like to abort your child. Tears streaming down your face, you say yes and the procedure is done before you know it. Your mom drops you off at your new college dorm room and you sit there for two weeks as you bleed more than you ever have in your life while trying to keep everything a secret from your dorm-mate. Months from now, John calls her and she blocks his number. She is now one of six women in America that has been raped and one of the 700,000 women that had an abortion that year. Warning sign taken.

"If I Have to, I Can Face Anything"

I am sitting at my desk while my roommate and everyone around me is getting ready for an annual fraternity Halloween party. I, being warned never to go to a frat party by my parents, decided to stay in tonight and go to Hallo-weekends at Cedar Point with my brother and his girlfriend in the morning. Everyone starts leaving and I put on the movie, "My Bloody Valentine" and remind myself that I'll be having fun all day tomorrow. All of a sudden there is very loud knocking and yelling outside my door. It's Lisa, my neighbor two doors down, dressed as a slutty doctor. She's already

drunk, begging me to take her to the party and threatening to drive herself if I don't. I know that if this girl dies because I didn't drive her that I will never be able to forgive myself. I get into a half-ass costume, grab my keys and wallet, and tell Lisa I'll drive her, but that I'm only staying for an hour and then driving us back home. Lisa starts to protest but agrees when she realizes I'm not messing around tonight.

After the short drive from the college to the fraternity house, I find myself standing outside in a line that is wrapped around the entire porch, shivering in the cold next to a very drunk Lisa. After an agonizing twenty minutes outside, we finally get to walk inside the poorly lit party. Lisa instantly drags me to the bar and grabs a pitcher of beer. Lisa takes the biggest drink I have ever seen and passes the pitcher to me. I remind Lisa that I'm the designated driver and will not be drinking, not mentioning that I'm only eighteen and hadn't drank before. Lisa rolls her eyes, shrugs, finds a guy, and starts throwing herself all over him. I have no desire to watch Lisa's tongue go any further down this random guy's throat, so I go to find my other floor mates from the dorm. Amanda, the sweet girl that lives next to me, sees me from across the room and drags me out to the dance floor. Amanda, Taylor, and Monica are all having an immense amount of fun, while I'm texting a friend from home, detailing just how bored I am while in their dance circle. All of a sudden, someone grabs my arm and before I can do anything, a guy is shoving me face first into a corner, squeezing his hands down my underwear with one hand and covering my mouth with the other, all while telling me that I wanted this to happen. What was only three minutes of forceful shoving and fighting felt like an eternity. I finally elbow the guy off of me, tears running down my face, grab Lisa, and drives us both home without speaking a word.

I find myself in the arms of my resident assistants, Robbie and Rebecca, recounting everything that happened to me, barely believing that I was just sexually assaulted. They lead me to the residence director, where I once again detail everything that had just happened to me, tears still streaming down my face. The residence director promises to speak to the proper school officials and sends me back to my dorm room, where I call my brother to cancel our plans. He's furious, but knows he has to be there for me and promises to not tell our mother until I want to.

Two weeks later, and I can barely walk outside my room without

wanting to scream. I have no idea who this guy is or if he knows who I am. Members of the fraternity have been asking me all kinds of questions about the guy and telling me that he was most likely a drunk freshman that just made a mistake, as if that excuses his actions. The Dean of Students tells me that he'll do what he can, but it'd be easier if I didn't go to campus police due to me not being raped, just assaulted. He also advises me to share my identity to the prime suspect so said suspect's lawyer can get ahold of me. I decide to call my mother, knowing I can't make that decision alone. With two weeks going by, my parents are in shock. My mom can't believe I'd been stupid enough to go to a frat party and my dad is silent.

A month later, I find out that the "drunk freshman that just made a mistake" is actually a twenty-two year-old junior. The night of the incident, the fraternity recorded his confession claiming he was too drunk to know who I was, but knew he'd done it. After detailing explicitly what happened to me now too many times to count and feeling completely unsafe on my own college campus, I am told that the twenty-two year-old will only face suspension for the rest of the academic year. Everyone in my life is furious, and I feel the school that I dreamed of my whole life let me down.

A year goes by and Brock Turner was convicted on five charges: two for rape, two for felony assault, and one for attempted rape. Turner, a student athlete at Stanford University, sexually penetrated an intoxicated and unconscious twenty-two-year-old woman with his fingers. A similar sexual assault that had happened to me. The victim put a voice to same feelings, stating, "You took away my worth, my privacy, my energy, my time, my safety, my intimacy, my confidence, my own voice, until today," the day of the hearing. She, like myself, could no longer feel safe in a world where terrible things happen at random. Turner, like the twenty-two-year-old man, took away any sense of security the woman had.

A year after Brock Turner, Larry Nassar and his criminal acts of sexual assault against at least 250 young women comes to light. I watch the news every night next to my mom and dad for months, watching not only the women flash across the screen, but the faces of my parents in pain imagining what happened to me over and over again. I'm relieved that the victims had gotten some sort of justice, but I can barely breathe while reliving the sexual assault that happened to me day after day. My college community, the one that was promised to keep me safe, failed me, and I

don't know if I'll ever be able to walk campus and feel safe ever again. I am now one of five women that experience sexual assault in college. I fall into the study that showed that the highest risk of sexual assault happens in the first few months of college. I am a walking statistic because of a drunk frat boy.

"I am Strong, I am Invincible, I am Woman"

Here I stand, amidst my peers at college, a place that seemed so out of reach during my childhood, thinking of the price I paid for my freedom and independence, knowing it was all worth it. I think of the other women around the world, the ones without an education, the ones in fear of rape and sexual assault, the ones who fear birthing a baby girl, and I can't help but share the stories of those in this so-called "land of the free." I am blessed to be born in a land where women like "Emily Doe" (Brock Turner's victim), the 250 Nassar assault victims, and all women of America including myself can speak out about the injustices we face, but is it enough if we still feel unsafe to walk out to our car at night? I think of Helen Reddy's song, "I Am Woman" and know the lyrics stand true. We are here to inform our brothers that freedom still is not granted to every woman until every man understands that we are their equal. We are not here for you to touch, stare at, and fornicate with. We are here to live our lives however we choose. We are Women, hear us roar, and continue to roar until you acknowledge that we are strong, invincible, and deserve to be treated as such.

antidepressants

though this goodbye we share is not our first,
my eyes burn like
 green apple whiskey
down my throat, unexpected heat and i cursed
and you laughed, apologized, and kissed me

when i manage to stutter “goodbye, my love”
(a confession of affection, heartfelt feeling)
your giggling reply soothes like foxglove
fixes my arrhythmia, halts my reeling

but your laughter does not quite stop time
nor this train i’m on, nor my aching
i swallow my pill, my lamotrigine
but we aren’t helped by what i’m taking

these chemicals serve me, allow me to sleep
’til your gentle embrace is mine to keep

Lauren Loisel

Freshman. Major: Undecided

Beauty After The Storm



Freshman. Major: History STEP Program, endorsement in Social Studies

**I Didn't Mean to Fall in Love with You
But I Also Didn't Mean to Rip My Calculus Book in Half**

My head reels

Thoughts spin in a figure eight until I realize

It's infinity

And I go numb

My brain fills to the top with the blood I wish

Was pouring out my mouth

I see stars made of green

I see love that is mean

I see pink and blue

And vodka too

I go until my carpal tunnel comes back

I tell you the parts of me that make me crazy

And the parts of me that make me crack

And I wish I could feel

But I've felt too much

So I lay in my bed with bleach down my neck

It takes away the colors

Until all I see is white

And dream about tomorrow

Though it is not in sight

There are parts of me that drive me mad
There are parts of me that foster only sad

Sometimes I look in the mirror and what do I see
But a person whose thought flows too deep

It is so far in my intestines
It can't even be cut out
And I wonder if maybe I should doubt

Then the reeling starts again
And my feelings come back from the bend
And I sit in silence
Until I become violent

And I stare at the green stars
And they drive me wild

The Watchman

“The average life has meaning only because it has a start, a middle, and an end. Choices are limited, and actions are often irreversible. However, what can be said of a life that has no end? A life that has many beginnings?”

The Wall has existed for centuries, and for as long as the boy could remember, the man has stood atop it. Watching, always watching.

...

As a boy, I recall that I was walking through the forest with my father one day when I asked him about the Wall.

“Father?”

“Yes, son?”

“Is it true that the Wall was built to protect us?”

“Well, maybe... I'm not really sure. Some say the wall was built by our village's founders to protect the village from coastal raids, while others say it was built to act as a barrier from the monstrous storms that torment our lands during the warm season. Both claims seem ridiculous to me. A village as insignificant as ours does not have near enough resources to construct... never mind, maybe one day someone will journey to the Wall to ask the Watchman.”

“How long has the Watchman been on the wall, father?”

“I don't know, son, no one knows.”

That was one of the last conversations I can recall having with my father before he passed. I am now nearly a man; I will have lived through my sixteenth winter in a less than a year. I wish my father could have lived long enough to spend it with me.

...

The Wall stretches as far as the eye can see, and is at least as tall as ten of the largest homes in the village stacked on top of each other. My personal opinion is that the Wall is much older than even the oldest tree in

the forest that surrounds the village. This is all speculation, of course. No one alive today knows the true purpose of the wall. Except perhaps the Watchman. The Watchman has stood upon the wall for my entire life, as well as the entire life of most villagers. The more superstitious of the villagers think he has stood on the wall since the very beginning, however long ago that is. Although, if not for one of the clergymen adopting me after my father's death, I would likely be inclined to think the same.

The priesthood had a need for scribes. The scribes would record the village's records so the priests could devote themselves to worship. I was seven years old at the time, and the monks began to teach me to read and write almost immediately. The priesthood kept a vast store of records in the caverns beneath the village temple. As soon as I was old enough to be left unsupervised, I spent a majority of my time in the caverns studying the records. One day, I stumbled upon an especially interesting and old record.

"No one could believe it, the Watchman was gone. At first no one thought much of his absence, but now strange things were beginning to happen..."

To my frustration, the record ended there. If only we had a longer lasting method of recording information – maybe then the Watchman would not be such a mystery. Fortunately, there were other records to be found. I spent countless hours of my free time in the caverns of the temple, combing through every stack of records I could find. For the most part, this effort was fruitless. However, after a few weeks of searching, I did find enough information to infer that roughly every century or so the Watchman seems to disappear. There was never any explanation, he was just gone. Sometimes for a day, sometimes for weeks, but he always returned.

...

One morning, months later, I awoke to find the village in an uproar.

"The Watchman was gone!" they were saying.

I never realized it until now, but the Watchman's ever constant presence had become a sort of comfort for the village. Many even believed he was the village's guardian; however, no one could agree on what he was guarding us from.

Rumors were running rampant not even an hour after the first villager noticed the Watchman's absence. The village was beginning to work itself into a frenzy. At what seemed like the last moment before chaos erupted, a long wailing sounded from the town square. The village council was calling a gathering.

The temple was located on the outskirts of the village. By the time I arrived in the square, the gathering was already underway. Everyone was outraged. It appeared as if the council had already made a decision, the crowd did not seem to be happy about it. Later, once the crowd began to disperse, I noticed a small group of resigned looking men. Upon closer inspection, I realized I knew these men. They were all avid hunters and well-known for their skills in surviving the wilderness. I decided to act casual in order to see if I could overhear what they were discussing. Within no time, I overheard a snippet of conversation.

“Dammit man! I was planning on getting some tonight!”

“Shut up, we all know that the only woman who would kiss you is your mother.”

The men burst into laughter. One of the men sighed and then said, “It's not like it matters anyway, you all heard what the council said: if the Watchman returns by dawn, we won't even have to go investigate.”

“Don't kid yourself, man, I'd be willing to bet against that.”

“You've got yourself a wager!”

The men began to haggle over the terms.

It made sense that the council would choose this group of men.

Despite how close the Wall appeared to the village, it was actually more than a day's journey by horseback. The men would have to stay the night in the wilderness, a task most villagers would not be up to. I figured now may be my only chance I would get to journey to the wall, so I approached the men.

As I neared them, all conversation halted. One of the men looked at me with disgust and said:

“What do you want, priestly boy?”

So I told him. I asked the men if I could join them on their journey; they just looked at each other and then broke out into laughter.

“Go back home and stick your face in one of those books you’re always carrying around!” said one of the men.

The other men burst into laughter once again. I realized there was no convincing them. It was really of no matter, I would just follow them from a distance.

...

It was now the dawn of the next day. The Watchman was still gone. The men were readying their horses to embark on the journey to the Wall. I was already well on my way.

...

I knew it was going to be difficult to keep up with the men while they were on horseback, especially while trying to remain unseen, so I left the village hours before the roosters began to crow. I stopped at the dense forested lands that separated the Wall from the land that our village calls home. Once the men arrived at the forest line, they would have to move much slower in order to maneuver through the dense underbrush. This would allow me to follow them closely while still remaining unseen. After many grueling hours trudging through the forest, the men finally stopped to make camp. I looked up at the sky and noticed that it was beginning to get dark. I would do the same.

I was just beginning to lose myself to the depths of sleep when the agonized scream of a horse sounded throughout the blackness of the forest.

...

The forest was no longer black. Scorching hot flame was beginning to rage all around me. The only logical explanation was that the men lost control of their campfire; however, I do not recall them ever making one. The nights were still warm, and all of their food was prepped ahead of time, whatever, it does not matter. Just as this thought concluded, one of the men came barreling toward me. He never made it all the way.

As he neared me, I saw the fear in his eyes. He was shouting something unintelligible. Just before I could make out what he was saying, a flaming horse plowed directly into him. The horse carried him through the trees for a few dozen feet before his limp body thumped to the ground. The horse was still enveloped in flame. It seemed as if it was attempting to flee the pain, but it was no use. As the horse crashed through the

forest brush, it was spreading the fire to everything it touched. It seemed as if the entire forest was alight. If it were not for the burning heat of the flame, it would have been beautiful. I turned to run, but suddenly something solid cracked into my skull, causing me to fall back into the earth with a heavy thud.

I looked up groggily as the flame continued to creep in around me, blood began to spill over my eyes until I could no longer see. Suddenly something grabbed me under the armpits and began dragging me away from the flames. Soon after, I lost consciousness.

...

I woke up feeling groggy. I had a splitting headache so I brought my hand up to my forehead and felt a patch of dried blood. I tried to stand up, but I was too weak to move. I began to look around as the fogginess left my eyes. There was a woman, an old woman. She seemed to be pacing around a pot of boiling water. I was no longer in the forest. It was cold and damp around me. My eyes were still too foggy to see much in the low light but I could feel damp moss on the ground with my fingertips. I must be in some sort of cave. Out of the corner of my eye I saw movement. The old woman was walking toward me with a cup of tea, which must have come from the pot she was pacing around.

“Where am I? Who brought me here? I asked frantically. She did not answer.

She was obviously the only one in the cave at the moment, but I was much too heavy and she was much too old to have carried me here by herself. She looked up at me, and when her eyes met mine, I jumped. Both of her eyes appeared foggy. The fog itself was not that strange, many of the elderly in the village have a similar condition. The old woman's eyes were different. They were entirely gray with fog. It made her seem as if she was looking straight through me. She did not display any reaction to my surprise, and she seemed as if she did not even noticed I said anything. In a sudden jolting motion, she grabbed my hand with hers. Her grip was surprisingly strong. It was so strong that it forced my hand open, exposing my palm. I was at a loss for what to do, but the old woman simply put the cup of tea into my outstretched palm and said, “Drink.” I drank, and felt strength flow through my body. She turned from me and began walking up a set of stairs

that I failed to notice before. I was scared to follow her, but I pushed my fear aside and did just that.

We kept walking for what seemed like forever, regardless, the rate at which the old woman was moving was startling. Finally, I could see the exit. There was a faint amount of what looked like moonlight up above. I took the last step from the stairs and could not believe what I was seeing. It was the village.

...

I quickly realized that I was on top of the Wall, looking down on the village I came from. From up here, it looked so small, and to think, I spent my entire life in that village. I could see for miles, I could even see the sun beginning to rise in the east. I turned around, what I saw amazed me even more. It was water, but more water than I had ever seen before. Prior to this, the largest body of water I had seen was the river that skirts around our village. This body of water looked like it had no end. I had no idea how long it would take to raft across, if it was even possible. I turned to the old woman to ask her about the water. She was nowhere to be found.

There was nowhere for her to go, except for back down the stairs, but when I looked back down them, she was still missing. I was scared; the only thing I could think to do was head back down to search for her. I was descending for what must have been only a few minutes when I noticed that one of the steps flattened out. To one side of the step was another passageway. I have no idea how this passage went unnoticed before. I did not give it a second thought. I walked into the passageway.

...

The passage opened up into a large, domed room. In the center was a strange pedestal surrounded by Corinthian columns of extraordinary width. A grown man wrapping his arms around them would barely reach half way. I walked toward the pedestal as it was the only place to go. The floor of the room was made up of strange chips of stone-like material that appeared to be slightly yellow. There was a set of steps at the base, so I ascended them. Once my head peeked over the top step, I saw the old woman standing there. She was staring at me with those oddly clouded eyes. It was near impossible to hold eye contact with her, so I looked down toward the pedestal. In the center of the pedestal was a shallow, hand-

shaped outline carved into the stone.

“Hand!” the old woman shouted.

I jumped, then looked at her with a confused expression.

“What?” I replied.

She simply responded by placing her hand on the outline.

“Hand!” she shouted again.

Not knowing what else to do I placed my hand in the outline on the pedestal. There was a sudden blur of motion and then a searing pain shot up through my hand and into my arm. I screamed. I tried to pull my hand back, but it would not move. The old woman had pulled out a long, jagged, knife-like object and thrust it into the top of my hand. Dark red blood was seeping out onto the pedestal. The old woman remained where she was. I continued to try and free my hand from the pedestal, but it was no use. I was beyond fear, I had a sudden flashback to the man running from the fire in the forest. I imagine at this moment that the look of pure terror within his eyes was very similar to the look currently in my own. The old woman began to shake and then her eyes rolled back into her head. She collapsed into the strange material of the floor, and it sounded like gravel. As I looked around the floor that the woman collapsed onto, I noticed something haunting. Peeking up from the strange, slightly yellow floor, was what appeared to be a human skull. My eyes began to fill with fog. I screamed in terror for the final time.

...

It was the next morning, and the village was up early. Late in the night, one of the men sent to investigate returned shouting for everyone to wake up. He told them a tale of a fire and his flight back to the safety of the village. He was the only man to return from the trip. At dawn, all eyes were turned to the Wall with anticipation. As the sun arose, unveiling the Wall from the darkness of night, the whole village collectively sighed in relief. The Watchman had returned.

Ashley Cerku

Alum. B.A. English & Writing and Rhetoric, M.A. Liberal Studies

Annie Girl



Unconditional Love

I will miss the feel of your comfort
and the soft, silky touch of your hair,
the clicking of your step coming down the hallway
and the jingle of your collar.

I will miss your love for the cold, snowy weather
and your love of the cool air from your fan,
the joy on your face when we came home
and your wiggly butt or the thumping of your wagging tail.

I will miss your excitement for going buh-bye
and your nose out the car window,
the ritual and crunch of your favorite toy
and your restful slumber in your bed.

You did everything and went everywhere with us
and a part of you will always remain in our hearts.

You have made us who we are
and loved us unconditionally.

Love you more we win, Annie girl.

Where the Monarch Flies

Notice the lost ones.

We trek on your farmland,
and we travel in masses.

Yet, we are alone in our own journeys
searching for our freedom, family.

With sun-kissed skin
and sunken eyes
we're pleading for mercy
from your lands
that may harbor us.

We drift upon the gaping Mediterranean
and carve through the cityscape of Thessaloniki.
Guided by prayer, led by God,
yet the innocent are spit on
by His own flesh.

There is no small cost that a pilgrimage demands
of those who are forsaken.

Violence has sculpted
natives into nomads.
We are insects
that migrate as a frigid winter falls
in our homelands.

However, we are not locusts.

Rusty hues blend into a pale morning sky
as the monarchs take flight into new climates
while ashes settle like snowflakes
in the land they've left behind.

A metamorphosis occurs,
but the earthbound caterpillars are left behind
to munch the diseased foliage
as their mothers, fathers, siblings, cousins,
take flight.

Syria has betrayed us,
so we flee with hearts
as raw as corpses
and hope
as loud as gunfire.

Senior. Major: English. Minor: Linguistics

Dancing Butterflies

After "The Simple Truth" by Philip Levine

I bought a small, dull turquoise book,
Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek by Annie Dillard,
And marked it up with colorful pens,
Underlining quotes, adding my own thoughts, and
Turning corners down, amongst other such vandalisms.
It was tossed about the car as
We rolled past grand, sweeping landscapes,
Unending red earth of Utah reaching far out.
Late at night, I tucked it under my coat,
Dashing through the rain to our cozy tent
Where I devoured its words under the scrutinizing light
Of the flashlight. I shoved that book in my
Hiking pack, exposed it to the wet, to the heat,
To the jostling, heavy pressure of its companions,
Ripping, bending, crinkling its poor pages.
It was loved, that book, so very loved.
And in that huge, exposing landscape,
I read of the small moth and the meandering beetle.
In the quietness, the loud quietness
Of the middle of the desert, I met myself in its pages.
"These thoughts were once my thoughts.
The ghost of my younger self speaks out.
Read this and know me!
The innermost me!"
I shouted in joy – I pinned my friends to their chairs –
Shoved these words down their throats – attempted
To meld these words to their souls – my soul to theirs.

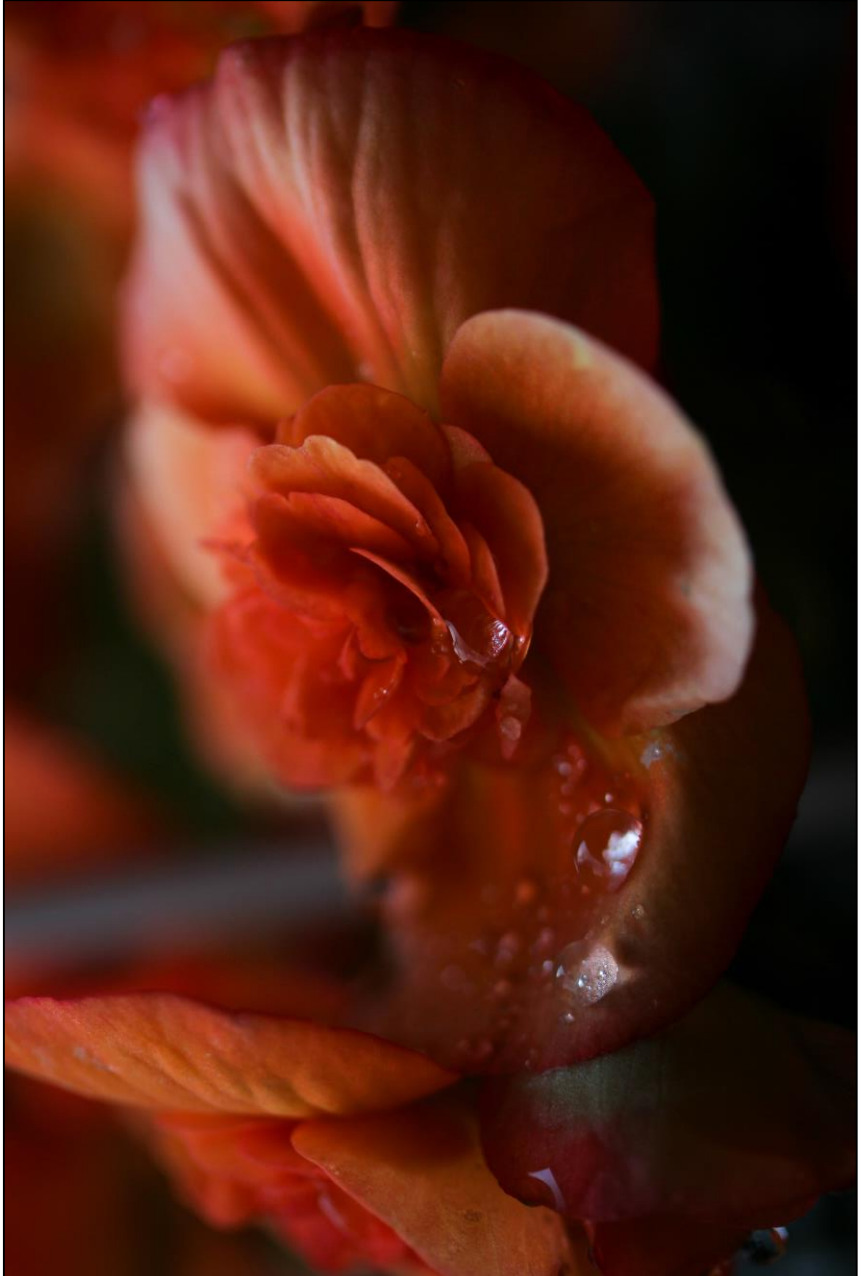
Some things

You know all your life. Yet they flit and they fly
Always just beyond reach, they lead you dancing
Across dreamy meadows, marveling at their intricacies,
Their beauties, and always, just before you reach them,
They disappear, remain but an inexpressible dream.
My friend Dean and I are forever trying to utter this,
He, etching it into his skin, attempting to make concrete the dream world,
Achieving only a whisper of a water-bug, and I, longing to shout it, to
Breathe it, to be it. Can you hear what I'm saying? It is words
Or language, an extended metaphor, the vibrations of chords,
Yellowing pages between torn covers, the lingering smell of
Smoke from past lead-covered fingers mining through the black
And white tunnels, it is obvious, it stays in the back of your
Throat like a truth you never uttered for fear you could couldn't
Capture it, that you would miss something, so it stays there
For the rest of your life, unspoken, a dream, made of the
Dancing butterflies, the words we call language, the abandoned
Inky depths of our souls, in an ever-elusive form,
And you live on it.

Love, Wynne

When I am sad,
you make me glad.
If I am down,
you are always around.
You are near,
when I feel fear.
You're always there,
when I need love and I need care.
You are to me,
like you'll never see.
You are the sun,
you are a lot of fun.
Did you ever know,
how I need you so?
I hope I've made it clear,
I always want you near.
Because I can't go on without you,
I'm sure everyone thinks this too.
I love you mom,
I hope you love me too.

Dew Drops



Junior. Major: Creative Writing

The Market

The last time I saw the market
it was summer-time.

An eastern sky sunburn cooked to my skin,
watered down coffee on chapped lips,
and the taste of salt on the tip of my tongue.

“Sweet Caroline” poorly covered for the hundredth time
yet I still tap my foot
to the sound of fingers on a bass guitar.

People scuttling about—
a long conversation with an older gentleman who had forgotten where he
was
takes me back to 1945,
and tells me what *real rain* and *real pain* felt like
—watching his brothers die, but somehow still making it home to love his
wife.

My boss shoots me an impatient glance
—we were out of tomatoes at the front of our stand,
but instead I grab the old man’s hand
listening to where I am—
at the market
with a sunburn
a botched guitar solo
and a lost soul’s heart,
that needed for just a moment,
for someone to hold it.

Those Born of Flame: A Carriers Division Story

Extinction. Extinction would be the ultimate result if they didn't find the Cure within the next hour. Not only would their efforts be in vain, but their entire world would be crushed at the edge of their fingertips. That alone was the *only* reason for them to stay resilient. You see, the brave soldiers of Carriers Division Grizzly Squad were too close to concede now. The anxious sweat on their brows and the grime caked onto their skin reminded them of who they were. The motionless bodies scattered over their tiny scrap of war-torn land reminded them of their mission. Though Grizzly Squad was humanity's last chance of survival as a species, they couldn't let the insurmountable odds sink them into an abyss.

For now, they would have to lay low and regroup as a team. Not only physically, but mentally and spiritually as well. Competing against a wave of self-programmed, self-driven, and self-operated artificial intelligence took a certain kind of person to rise to the occasion. The Virus was virtually superior in every way to those "low-intelligence" humans. Those A.I. had conquered every corner of the Earth in a matter of a year. First, it was China. Then Japan. Then the Middle-East. Then India and Europe. The bastard spread overseas to the Americas, Antarctica. One-by-one each country falling swiftly to the hands of the wretched Virus. As they knew it, the last shred of humanity had been pushed to this stretch of coastline near the Pacific Ocean – the only thing keeping them alive being the agriculture growing through the grasslands. But, that had all been destroyed within a matter of weeks.

Grizzly Squad's efforts were reduced between a sliver of space between two heaping mounds of metal shrapnel and dirt. Only the unpleasant scent of blood, burning metal, and rotting meat kept them awake. The Virus had driven them into hiding during their final battle with the last remaining combat unit. Now, the combat unit was long gone.

To make matters worse, they'd lost contact with Hawk when he was tasked to scout out the area for the Cure. The last possible idea of his whereabouts was a couple miles east of their location. However, a potential

unit of the Virus would possibly be lurking. Hawk's questionable disappearance was the reason why Captain Blue didn't want to move the team out just yet. They couldn't determine whether he got lost. *Improbable*. Got killed. *Probable*. Or just went crazy and fled after wandering around this wretched wasteland for too long. *Highly-probable*.

As Captain Blue studied the wreckage of land ahead of them, she could only think of one thing: failure. Those poor civilians trusted Grizzly Squad with their lives, yet there they were... sunken into the cold depths of the earth, never to be heard from again. She simply refused to let them die in vain. Her unyielding promise to locate and extract the Cure was sealed a long time ago. Though in the distance, somewhere from behind them, a high-pitched noise emerged, carried by the wind.

"Everyone steady," Captain Blue ordered as quietly as she could, her eyebrows scrunching with caution. She stood up, causing her snug, heather-gray combat suit to reflect what little sunlight they had left. "It could be the Virus playing a trick on us."

"Doesn't the Virus already know our whereabouts? The Evacuation Point's whereabouts?" a black-haired soldier whispered to a fellow blonde female soldier.

"No, you idiot, how could they?" the blonde soldier replied.

"We're still alive, aren't we? The mission is still intact."

"But are we really? It's not like we're enjoying the jolly ol' benefits of flying around in Space with the hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of people who escaped before they arrived. If I was only quick enough—"

Captain Blue raised a single finger and the two soldiers quieted their squabble instantly. The noise from outside their hideout sounded off again, this time much closer. She moved slowly toward the back entrance of the hideout, making sure not to accidentally knock over any loose metal. She crouched down, scanning the horizon. The only thing visible was the varying hills and puddle-filled pathways, the ominous darkness of the rolling clouds, and the mounds upon mounds of twisted, fiery metal.

The battle couldn't have been that bad. It just couldn't have been.

Suddenly, a woman screamed sharply from the east. Captain Blue initially missed her because she was hidden behind a metal mound, but now she was in full view.

Hearing a random voice in an area full of silence made the Grizzly Squad wide awake, their gradually declining alertness getting a well-needed reset. The remaining members shot off the ground, rallying behind their captain.

"Captain, she's gonna get herself killed," the black-haired soldier observed.

"Quiet, Ranks!" she aggressively whispered. "Don't you think I know that! I just need to think. If we see her, then the Virus saw her a long time ago." A deep eeriness settled over the group.

Racks and racks of possible outcomes flashed through Captain Blue's head. Her past training couldn't have ever readied her for these moments. Only experience and experience alone could grant her the slightest chance at success. Reality said that the Virus wasn't just an army of senseless A.I. that killed people, and that reason alone is what scared Captain Blue the most. The Virus could think. The Virus had a goal. See, humans couldn't outsmart the Virus. Really, the only thing that could defeat them was taking uncalculated risk. And this would be the risk that the Captain took.

They watched as the disillusioned civilian tripped over a decapitated body and worked herself into a screaming fit. "Oh-oh-oh! Nooooooo! Oh nooooo! Th-these bodies! Oh God! Oh God, I'm dead! No, no, no, no..."

Shit. "I'm going to go save her," Captain Blue said. "I need to borrow some ammo."

She withdrew her weapon: a slim white rifle with blue LED lines that resembled a rectangular-shaped pole with a handle.

"Captain, are you crazy?" Ranks questioned. "I think that's what they want you to do! Penelope, tell her!"

The blonde-haired girl lightly grabbed the Captain's tense shoulder. "Ranks is right, Captain. This can't be a good idea. We should really wait until Hawk returns so we can know where *they* are."

Captain Blue looked at the civilian, then back at her team. "Grizzlies, we're a family, right?"

The team nodded.

"So, that means that we always have each other's backs, right?" she

continued. "Well, then why do you all view me as a fool? I am highly aware of the abilities of the Virus. We've been fighting these monsters for months. Some of you for years. But as our last piece of intel explained, one of their cargo planes crashed here during the battle last week and guess what they were carrying? Exactly. That Cure is out there and if we find it first, then we can *save* our species. Do you understand? We have the heart. We have the technology. We have *the fight*. Remember, we are not a combat unit like the Marines. We are a retrieval unit of the U.S. Carriers Division. That means that every *single* person on this team serves a different purpose that is crucial to our overall success. We cannot afford to sit and wait a third day for Hawk to show. The best to him, but we need to formulate a plan and do what we signed up to do. And when the Virus appears, I want everyone on their feet giving their last dying breath to defend our humanity. And that's an order."

Newfound energy captured each member one-by-one, lighting up a new path. A more sacrificial path. The raw determination in Captain Blue's eyes and voice couldn't have gone unnoticed nor unanswered. Grizzly Squad would follow their leader no matter what.

Captain Blue looked at Ranks. "I know you worked hand-and-hand with the scout, Hawk. But you're my other pair of eyes, Tracker. Please. For me, *track* down the Cure. You have relevant data on your devices, use them."

Ranks nodded and immediately dug through his satchel.

Captain Blue couldn't bear another scream from the woman. Before anyone could protest, she ran, unprotected from the sheer size of the mounds. She leaped over heaps of bodies and dirt, warming up for what was to come. Seeing the surrounding calamity in full scope sent chills down her spine with only her will egging her forward. In fact, the closer her feet carried her, the more unnerved she felt.

The woman was too busy wincing at the blood, limbs, and wreckage every five feet that she hadn't even noticed the blazing Captain Blue approaching. The mound next to the woman reflected a faint shimmer of light that she hadn't noticed before. Something had felt rather awry. A sudden twinge in the air shot a red flag off in her mind. When the slightest tug on her ankle broke her stride, that's when she knew that this was a mistake.

I knew it!

From her left, an unforeseen explosion tossed Captain Blue ten yards into the air before landing harshly on the embattled earth below. But that was after she'd activated her form-fitting helmet. The gray visor was covered in blood, but luckily not her own. Within the visor, her whole world came alive. The A.I. within the helmet gave her different paths of escape highlighted in a blue route. Her vitals, including heart rate, blood pressure, and adrenaline, popped up on the corner of the screen. A translucent command box in the middle of the screen awaited potential plans of action constructed by her thoughts. **Threat Detected**, it read.

Captain Blue scrambled off the ground but immediately ran into the woman; this time her rifle skittered over a pile of pebbles. The two found themselves on the ground again as the woman rambled off random numbers. "Four-five-dot-seven-six-five-zero-one-nine-negative one-two-three—" Captain Blue shook the woman by the shoulders, but she didn't respond. It was as if she was under a spell. Further inspection revealed that her eyes bore no irises and her skin was paler than paper.

Is she...?

"Halt! Stop right there!" A robotic voice demanded from behind. "You are under arrest!"

The Captain rose to her feet and turned slowly. At ten feet tall, a white machine that looked like a cross between an angel and a squid hovered before her. Its six tentacles moved like it was enclosed in jelly, but its additional humanoid arms and legs moved as such. The glare of its sleek metal hide captured the sunlight even though the skies were overcast. Her rifle was only a couple yards away, could she reach it? Maybe it was too far. *When did it... appear?*

"You are an enemy of the Virus," it spoke. Oddly enough, its voice sounded a little too much like a perfect mix between the male and female Siri. "Please, give me your weapons and come with me. You are under arrest."

Its piercing red eyes stared through to her soul. A nervous jitter developed in her hands, and it wasn't long until it'd spread to her feet. The deranged woman reiterated the numbers nonstop. "Four-five-dot-seven-six-five-zero—" Captain Blue prayed for her stop.

Just as the machine inched closer, she pounced for her rifle. The machine's tentacles stretched out longer than she'd calculated. It managed to grab her legs from twenty yards away, pulling her from the gun. But her will was too great. Using all her might, she dug her nails through the compact dirt and pushed forward in one small effort, but just enough for her to grab the tail-end of her rifle. As the machine raised her upside down, she aimed her rifle and slammed down on the trigger. A dozen flashes of blue beams detonated on the machine, managing to sever the tentacles that held her plus a couple more.

In midair, another explosion rocked against the machine, sending Captain Blue flying backward and the machine to its knees. After landing with a thud, she peered west beyond the hills to see a man holding a rocket launcher. *Maurice... the Boomer?* As the smoke and flying debris settled, the machine unleashed a loud, low-pitched growl that rumbled the earth. But it was prematurely cut off when a soldier with white hair, bearing a large sword, beheaded it in one stroke.

"How's that for an ol' Striker?" Donald teased, throwing his oversized blade over his shoulder.

"No time for messing around, Don," Captain Blue warned. "The machine just belted a distress call. We've seen this too many times."

Grizzly Squad had all appeared from behind an elongated metal mound off to the right. The other two soldiers of the Runner class had their helmets activated as well. Captain Blue smiled inside. Meanwhile, off to the side, the delusional woman rattled off the numbers once more.

"Four-five-dot-seven—"

Captain Blue crouched down. "When I reached her, she immediately started repeating these numbers. I don't understand."

"Well, isn't it obvious?" Ranks said, holding onto an electronic tablet as wide as a laptop. "Those are coordinates! Four-five-DOT-seven—I'm plugging them in right now, maybe that's the location of the Cure."

"Perhaps Hawk hadn't abandoned us after all?" Penelope said from inside her helmet.

"If this is his doing, then how was he able to get her to do this?" Ranks questioned. "It's rather odd."

"We don't have time to discuss that now," Captain Blue said,

worriedly. "We need to formulate a plan. Tracker, we need that location, it's the only thing we've got."

As if timed perfectly, in the distance, Captain Blue saw a group of eight Viruses covering ground as fast as a car. "This is what I was saying..."

She quickly thought about the countless other formations everyone knew. "We're going to follow Formation Avalanche, do you hear me? Avalanche. Ranks, download those coordinates into my helmet and Penelope and D'haan, stay close behind me. Those of the Defender class, I want you a hundred yards to the rear, leave a very wide space in the middle, right-flank scoot out farther and shoot *the hell* out of them, that means you too, Boomer."

Seconds later, the coordinates appeared on her visor in the form of a GPS map. **Head East**, her visor read. Captain Blue, Penelope, and D'haan, the other Runner, took off sprinting. A Runner's sheer speed, agility, and stamina are why they were tasked to retrieve items, no matter the objective. Bail in, bail out. Meanwhile, Defenders were slower, but still faster than the average human and had the most combat capabilities, like the Boomer and Striker. Because they outnumbered Runners 7-to-3, their placement upon the battlefield is what determined the Sequence.

The Runners ducked outcropped shrapnel and darted between uneven pathways and obstacles; the three of them moved so fluidly that it seemed choreographed. Captain Blue took a shortcut through a sliver of land similar to their hideout. Coming out farther ahead of the others, she ensured that she'd be the one to take a blow from any potential traps. Behind them, the Defenders were nowhere in sight, flanked to either side with the left side acting as the surprise-counter attack, just in case the right flank got overwhelmed. The Virus hadn't caught up yet, but they were right outside the formation.

Quicker Route, Immediate Left. Captain Blue followed the directions, shifting the whole formation to an alternative route. To their favor, this path was less cluttered and more open. There was only some shrapnel here and there and the hills led to a wide, dark green forest.

A Defender only managed to yell "Captain!" moments before her visor sensed it. **Threat Detected.** She turned her head, but a millisecond too late. A large Virus sprang from over a hill and separated her from the other

two Runners. Unveiling a sword and blaster in either hand, D'haan was the first to act as he was the team's Escorter—a Runner/Defender hybrid.

With his hulking 6'6" frame, he charged at the Virus, paving a quick period of escape for Penelope. She darted to the right as they engaged in battle, but she was lashed from one of the Virus' tentacles. Penelope was thrown forward, but Captain Blue cushioned her fall. The flanking Defenders, still in motion, took heed over the hills, blasting and slicing away at the Virus to keep them at bay.

"Captain!" Ranks called from behind. "We'll hold them, but the coordinates are just inside that forest! Be sure to get in and get out!" He shot a few rounds from his blaster pistol, but was whacked by a stray tentacle.

Get in and get out...?

"No, no, they'll die!" Penelope exclaimed, backing away. "Captain, they'll die, we're not a combat unit!"

Captain Blue shook her head, squeezing her eyes. The noise from the battle and her own thoughts drowned out any chance at an alternate decision. "Penelope," she said, grabbing her narrow shoulders. "Me and you can do this together. We are the only ones that know how to extract and get the Cure to the Evacuation Point. You have the Carrier and the location, right?"

Penelope reached behind her back and unclipped an enclosed tube that resembled a very long and wide drinking glass. "I have it. And the Evac Point is already downloaded into my motherboard. The Space Launcher should be south of here."

"Then let's finish this."

They continued, leaving their brethren to fend off the alerted Virus. The thing that hurt the most was that more would be coming. The chances of them surviving were very slim. In fact, the last thing Captain Blue saw before breaking into the tree line was D'haan slicing the Virus' head off only to be struck by a tentacle through the chest. She didn't allow Penelope to look back, even with his blood-curdling cry piercing through her heart. The only thing she could do was shed a tear in silence.

The Runners ran like the wind. Leaping from tree-to-tree, twisting and turning like a pair of acrobats. Captain Blue's visor led her in every

which direction as the duo plunged deeper and deeper into the greenery. **Destination Within Half a Mile.** Up ahead was a small clearing that was full of sunlight.

"The Cure should be up here," she directed, but her senses told her otherwise. *Hold on, that's too easy.* She forced her feet into the dirt, sliding to a halt. She assumed Penelope would too, but she didn't.

"Wait! Penelope!"

The young girl crashed through the clearing... and then stepped on a tripwire. Time slowed down as Captain Blue exploded into a full-tilt sprint. She reached her at the last possible second, tackling her to the ground. *Damn! Wrong trap!* A dozen tentacles unearthed from the ground, wrapping themselves around the two women. Painful shocks of electricity pumped into their bodies at will. Captain Blue agonizingly screamed, feeling her heart on the verge of detonating.

A new foe emerged from behind a tree and he looked mighty familiar. Orange-spiked hair. Green almond eyes. Captain Blue's stomach flipped into her chest. "Hawk," she whispered. Tears welled up in her eyes. His suit was all white and metallic like the Virus', and he had two tentacles sprouting from his back. He smiled as he approached.

A fit of overwhelming anger seized her body. "H-How could you do this! How could you... you betrayed the human race! You are scum! Y-you're lower than scum... you're the dirt beneath our fe— AAHHHHHHH!!!" The electricity ramped up again, even shocking Penelope who was in a daze.

"You talk too much, Captain," Hawk said slyly. "Hear me out, at least I didn't lie to you." One of his tentacles extended high into a tree and pulled down a glowing blue tube. With his hand, he grabbed it and then tossed it around like a football.

Captain Blue felt like she'd vomit at any time now. The electric shocks shrouded any plan of escape that she may have had. Her body felt drained and her mind numb. Too many emotions ran through her at once. "How... how could you..." The uprooted tentacles were the only thing that kept her body from completely keeling over.

"Hey! Don't talk when I'm *talking!*" Hawk smacked her with a tree branch, shattering half of her visor. Blood seeped from her nose.

Heart Rate A – Minor Conc –

“Why couldn’t you have just given up back at the hideout?” Hawk said. “This was such an avoidable situation. Have you looked around!? Everyone’s dead! They’re dead! Humanity is over! It’s the Virus’ time now. At least they wouldn’t destroy our planet like how we lazy humans do. At least they could end world hunger and incurable disease. Do you not see how perfect they are?” Before the fading Captain could finish her response, he smashed the same branch into her face. She momentarily lost consciousness as a ringing filled her right ear. **Stage 3 Co –**

Hawk eyed the Cure. “And this? Ha! The Virus found this a while ago. They gave me this as proof of my allegiance. Isn’t it ironic? Why would the Virus keep their only demise so close? It was to draw out the remaining humans, of course. They even have intel on the whereabouts of the Space Launcher... you plan on sending it up there correct?” He paused, spazzing from a shock of his own that seemed to originate in his neck. “Damn, I hope that goes away quite soon.”

His body... it’s... rejecting the Virus. “H-Hawk... listen,” Captain Blue breathed. “The Virus... it wasn’t made for... us. The Cure... it could save you.”

Threat De –

He laughed. “Don’t be so naive, Captain. This is the future. If you really cared about our species you would bind *yourself* to the Virus, no questions asked.” Blood began trickling from his own nose. “What’s this?” He felt his nostril.

“Captain,” Penelope whispered anxiously. “Captain... threat detected.” The two Runners could both hear it whistling from above. Boomer and Ranks came in clutch.

She nodded and hoped that this plan worked. “Hey... Hawk...” She smirked. “I always thought you were a l-loser anyway. I never... wanted you on my team. In fact... your ego was always so big that I-I just felt *sorry* for you.”

Hawk snarled like a wild dog. His face turned red and he reached back once more with his tree branch. “Y-you... *imbecile!*” In mid-swing, Captain Blue with all her might tried to escape from the tentacles. The extra movement triggered a wave of electricity bigger than she’d anticipated.

Before Hawk could think, the branch connected dead center on her face with the current running through him instantly. For five seconds, the only audible thing in the area was their agonizing screams, but the current's magnitude completely weakened the tentacles themselves.

Adrenaline surging at an all-time high, Penelope escaped first, snatching the Cure from Hawk's hand. She didn't care about the electricity that remained in the Captain's body, all she cared about was avoiding the artillery missile heading straight for the clearing. She rolled the Cure off into the forestry and pulled her unconscious leader with the little strength she could muster. Quads blazing, she dragged her far enough to avoid the sheer force of the missile. Before getting launched into the forest, she'd managed to tuck the Cure into her arms.

Captain Blue was awoken by the impact on the ground. She only could squirm as her body felt like it was on fire. After several failed attempts to get to her feet, she'd noticed a sharp outcropped root impaled through her thigh. She wanted to scream, but her scorched throat was much too dry. Penelope had regained consciousness, scanning her surroundings, but only to be met with heartbreak as she watched her beloved leader struggling to move. Penelope secured the Cure into the Carrier and went to help her. As the dense smoke and dust enveloped them, breathing became a chore.

"Just leave me," Captain Blue belted out hysterically. "Just leave me, please. Penelope, just go! I'll only slow you down. You're the Escapist Runner, you know where to go. The Virus will be here any moment. Please leave!"

Penelope's teary eyes gleamed with determination. "I'll follow you to the grave, Captain. You did your job, Cure *extracted*. Now, it's time for me to do mine. Let's get to the Evac Point."

Penelope crouched, bore half of Captain Blue's weight, and took off in the direction of her own programmed coordinates within her visor, which was west toward the Pacific Ocean. They hobbled through the smoking forest as fast as they could.

Though the Virus would eventually track their whereabouts and execute the women in cold blood, they wouldn't be defeated without a fight. With Captain Blue diving in front of a rifle blast, Penelope was able to place

the Cure into the Space Launcher tube and blast it into Space before succumbing to whiplash from a swinging tentacle. With the Cure drifting afloat up there, their hopes were that someone, some *human*, would find it, follow its directions, and save our species. The fates of the other members of the team were unknown, but rest assured that if they had perished, their valiant efforts and ultimate sacrifices were not in vain. Through it all, even on the brink of extinction, an impossible task became possible. All it took was a plan that individuals believed in, and a fighting spirit.

Fin

***Vagabond Follies* collection:
Seeing Further**

His viewpoint –

A world feeding on itself starves itself blind.
On a clear day one can see the others – hungry.
But hell he knows- his globe spun in different orbits
across the fire-bitten fields past the fruit orchards
faded sour without a harvesting hand to hold it.
Each has a row to hoe.

His pleasure

His dog Buster wagged behind him and sniffed at roots
tender pawed – tested the uneven fear-flanks of earth.
On a good day, like today, he could breathe it all in.
Keep most of the best for himself. At night he thinks
the moon’s crater face resembles Elvis – remembers
his first real love and sweaty crotch of rock and roll.

His reality

He took his medicine and popped some corn
his eyeballs blistered – recalled today’s buttery
moments. Buster begs for more and catches each
kernel in midair, sweet but there is too much salt
to escape the hunger this day has dealt. Thirsty
eyes grumble but the stomach knows.

His lament

So he escapes against time, the knowledge
of others in the same blind world who have no
rocking chair to ease down into, no dog who loves
them nor mooning Elvis to arrest hunger. If only
he could teach them how to open their eyes to feed
the hunger – to find pleasure in the pangs.

Where

A.C Korean-American adoptee and father of three was deported back to his birth country after living in Oregon for almost three decades.

First there were eight of us raised by two strangers.
When we could not say *mother* correctly,
the man would throw us in cow manure.
My brother couldn't pronounce his name. The woman
clasped a clothespin on his tongue until it was violet.

Once I was old enough, I ran away barefoot.
One night for my birthday I stole an angel food cake
and covered it in cherry frosting.

My feet grew cold.
I smashed open the windows of home.
Inside I saw my brothers and sisters
sleeping on the floor without pillows.
I took back my blue rubber shoes.

My captors reported me.
I was only ten. The police called me a *criminal*.
I learned the word, then became it.

*

On the outside I listened to Jay-Z
and fell in love with a woman.
I spent my days rolling men's' hair into dreadlocks.

We had three children who all loved
their mother and me. But I still stole
from liquor stores.

Now, I'm an *illegal alien*. In handcuffs the police sent me
back to Seoul. All I had was a pocket dictionary.

*

Kwon Pil-ju, my birth mother, shows me a journal
filled with hand written copies of the English alphabet.
Joesong haeyo, she says. *I'm sorry*.

We pass the dictionary back and forth. *Mee-gook*
she says in repetition. America means beautiful country.
I wish I had pictures of a place like that to show her.

She has not slept for days, worrying
about what she will feed me.

I can only be in this skin.
San-nakji is dipped in sesame oil
and swallowed whole.

A living octopus is as sentient as a small child.
The animal floats in stomach bile for five minutes
before its body is taken over by ours.
For that time our stomach acid
is the coral of its birth.

My mother brings me a pair of red Adidas shoes;
as I untie the laces and slip them on my feet
her face lights up with joy.
I don't have the heart to tell her they are three sizes too small.

Salanghae, I love you.

A Remembered Earth

My favorite childhood spot is one that has been shared with many feet and hands of children from the community. This idyllic area is a small mountain with a breathtaking view about twenty acres all around in the neighboring vicinity. It has harvested many fruit trees: mango, orange, grapefruit, golden apple, banana, guava and other fruits that feed many hungry mouths after playtime. This land hosted life of a lower animal kingdom. Here, I could always be happily engaged in some kind of activity. It was a place for relaxation, chatter, gathering rocks, mosses, tadpoles, flying a kite, taking pictures and even a place for a soirée.

The rich landowner, Mr. Joshua Thorn, left the mountaintop vacant for himself so he could stand and view the sugar cane at harvest time. Some of his workers during the harvest time would have their lunches on this mountaintop enjoying the cool breeze and busying themselves with gossip and “ole talk.”

At the foot of the mountain was a large concrete storage building we called “The Garage.” It was used for storing copras (dried coconut meat from which coconut oil is extracted). The Garage also provided a haven for spiders and other members of the arachnid family. Its location was ideal. It was a landmark in the neighborhood. Vehicles made a U-turn here to get back on the highway depending on whether they were heading north or south of the island. There was so much to see and learn from the garage and its surroundings. The wild flowers that covered the perimeter of The Garage cascaded gleefully in the crisp tropical air. This was a good place to stop and reflect and “let nature be your teacher.” There was always something to see and taste from nature’s bounty. I watched the brightly-colored butterflies parading in the orchard and bees sucking the nectar from the flowers of the fruit trees.

The snails, slugs, and gray turtles that lived there were studied in detail as I held them in my hand and pondered over their creation. The sounds and sights of grasshoppers and crickets were fascinating. With peeled eyes, I watched the male crickets as they stridulated, rubbing their forewings together to create music to my ears. I discovered that if I approached a cricket from its back, I could be guaranteed a specimen for my nature jar.

The leafy pond was filled with tadpoles and small silver fish. I could observe the red and black ant colonies of ant workers marching in a single file as they hunted for their food. Many times, my sisters, the neighboring kids, and I would destroy their house, the anthill, for the sheer fun and sometimes crush a few in the process. We laughed as the tiny ants scampered out to attack their accusers. We dared not practice this prank on the hornets; they have a pugnacious spirit. We had learned from previous experiences the painful sensation of a sting from a hornet. The pain and burning sensation experienced from the formic acid released from an ant bite was more tolerable than that of a hornet. We preferred to throw stones at the hornets' cone-shaped house and scamper as fast as we could away from their sight to watch their house plummet to the ground.

At Easter time, the children in the neighborhood held their kite competition on this mountain. There were no official judges to decide which kites were the prettiest, biggest, or most musical kites when viewed in aerodynamic action. All the competitors were the judges. The kite that would have received an award, if there were official judges, was often talked about among the children in the neighborhood. It was always a beautiful sight to behold. The kaleidoscopic kites made from a selection of different colored tissue paper: red, green, gold, blue, orange, brown and white, with coconut flexes or bamboo strip configurations with brightly chromatic tails, flew over the valley. The zooming sound produced by the rude wind against the flying kites or blowing dust in our faces sent kids wild with laughter when theirs would make the loudest sound.

An alternative and inexpensive kite was made by younger children. They bypassed the time-consuming skillful art of making coconut flexes or bamboo strip configurations and instead made cocorie kites (by using a large oval-shaped leaf from a cocoa tree). They attached a piece of thin cord to one end and attached a long strip of cloth to the other end of the leaf.

This kite could not fly very high, but it kept every child in the competition, and everyone experienced elated spirits. Every child in the neighborhood between the ages of three and seventeen was knowledgeable about kite making and flying at Easter time.

The twisted and low-branched trees on the hillside were fun to climb and sometimes swing on. The towering palm trees provided the branches for an adventurous ride down the hill. All of my muscles got a good work out on this remembered earth. Picking, climbing, running, gathering, stretching, peaking, jumping and scaling the mountain. A fallen branch from a palm tree was tailored to a raft-like sled for a heart-stopping ride on the mountain slope.

A year ago, I visited that mountaintop. The pillar of rock was hewn down and a beautiful spacious bungalow has taken its place. A meticulous landscape of croton shrubs flanked one side of the long runway. Buttercups, bougainvillea, ixora, and hibiscus proudly dressed in their yellow, white, red, pink, purple, and orange capes and blooming in the warm sunshine welcomed visitors.

My sister Joan and I visited with the Thorn family one evening on a vacation on the island of Grenada. From their verandah, we viewed a new landscape. Things had changed. The sugar cane field was no longer there. A happy breed of domesticated sheep, goat, and cow were feasting in the pasture. The people were still the same: kind hearted and friendly. The Garage was still there, but it had aged with time. It stood rooted amidst the windswept raw weather after three decades. My eyes sparkled as I gazed at the sheer beauty of the old Garage. It reminded me that life goes on amidst circumstances, challenges and obstacles people face day after day. Like The Garage, I hope to withstand the test of time and adventures in my life.

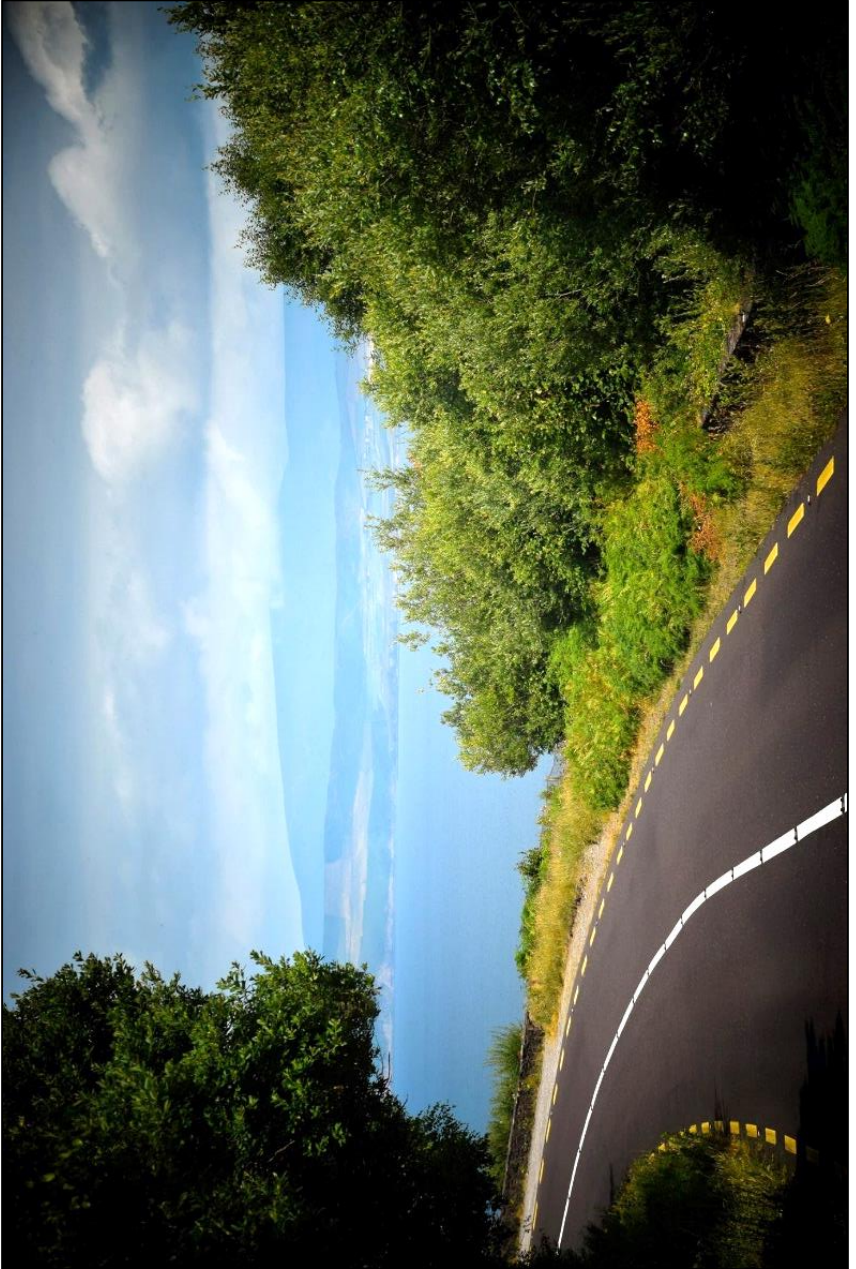
We bid goodbye to the Thorn family and thanked them for a memorable evening. Their kind hospitality, affable disposition, and joie de vivre did not go unnoticed. Their wits, amicable conversation, and experiences they had encountered over the years reflected their warmth and kind-heartedness to neighbors and friends in the Woodlands community. They still share their harvest of fruits and vegetables with my parents from time to time.

As we walked out the door and carefully looked around, the fireflies were busy in the open air, spreading their light occasionally in the dark still night. With each careful step away from the Thorn's property and closer to my parents' home, the soft fragrance of the lilies of the valley escorted us.

Bathroom Shrink

In the bathroom sink my charcoal toothpaste makes a Rorschach test. I see a minty fresh butterfly. Wait, no, I see you and I, entangled. I guess maybe it's not you and I, but you and a stranger. Never mind, cause from this angle, it actually looks more like a swan. There's a knock on the door, it's my Mom. She's asking me to come on. She wants to use the toilet. I think she's never used a bathroom sink as her shrink.

Kerry Ring



Just Like a Knife

I am
digging into my skin with unkempt fingernails
in a cemetery in the dark.
Pull, my arms are ribbons

Snapdragons on the breath
of grass
a rusted bird bath sits in front of me

I have come here almost every night
to hear voices, the crumbling headstones
say Nothing and Everything
this small space, this square of death, these screaming trees
Nothing, but a small pebble in a world of fire.

My heels dig into the soil,
and music comes from my chest, jagged and untamed
frightened, plunging back into my throat
Just Like a Knife.

Life with a Sister in 17 Syllables or Less

Jokes at one AM

Not as funny tomorrow

But what else is there

Spitting Blood

i'm sick of you using me

i said as i bit my cheek so hard that i thought i would be spitting blood

i can't do this anymore

i said as I felt my world crash and crumble

where were you when i needed you

i was spitting blood

how many moments of self-worth does it take

to become whole

how many choked words burdening

i am not a burden

self-reliant, full of love for everything

meaningless affection

seemingly darkness

i'm spitting blood

for the last time.

– I AM worth something, no matter how much bloodshed i've spit

Lighthouse



Junior. Major: History STEP

Climate Change

A fire rages through California, as a bitter breeze
rolls into Michigan.

You stare out into the yard and sky beyond your
home.

You find this place does not feel
Like it used to.

The dry, searing heat of July has worn off
But left peaches as sweet as sugar —
Which eventually will turn to alcohol
And boil the liver of the planet.

Earth will continue to gravitate towards an
even more extreme condition.

For the atmosphere now reminds you of the time
you spent south
and you fear the changing paces of
this earth.

How could we?

What *audacity* some amongst us found,
and carved out from her.

The water has never fallen from the sky like this;
Mismatched and confused — the winds fight with
each other like rabid animals.

Fires burn in California; a smoke induced cold

catches Michigan off guard.

Jesus Lives in a Kitchen in Morocco

Above a golden bowl of fruit,
the paint peels
off the frame, my mother
picks away at it with a pink nail.

He holds a lamb,
hooks at her with acrylic eyes.

The days are colored honey,
and the nights are a rose,
as she calls to tell me that Jesus Is Here,
He's in this house,
across the sea.

Autumn Glass



The Lady of Shalott (Oil on Canvas) by Walter Crane

IMAGE: Wikimedia Commons

1 An artist notices as I drift solemnly,
parting the autumn leaves
that sit like schoolchildren
upon the mirror of the sky.

2 As his brush paints my cheek a pale hue
I wonder if his strokes
will properly capture
my vulnerability
as I find myself stray
from the world that has dejected me.

3 He details the decaying forest
that falls like a tapestry
behind the image
of my heartbreak.

4 Will this lonesome painter
capture the forgotten pieces
that a cruel man
once stole from me?

5 For the man with the canvas
cannot possibly convey
with his useless pigments
what I feel writhing in my chest.

6 I watch the way his fingers
wrap around a worn paintbrush
delicately, and dot crimson
on the water that carries me,
setting modest fires
to Adam's ale,
adding sin to the purity
upon which I rest
to possibly create an image
that could be worth pondering.

7 He cannot see
how, when I gaze into the treetops above me,
squinting hard,
turning leaves into marble
the foliage becomes hazel eyes
falling in and out of love with me
with shocking ease.

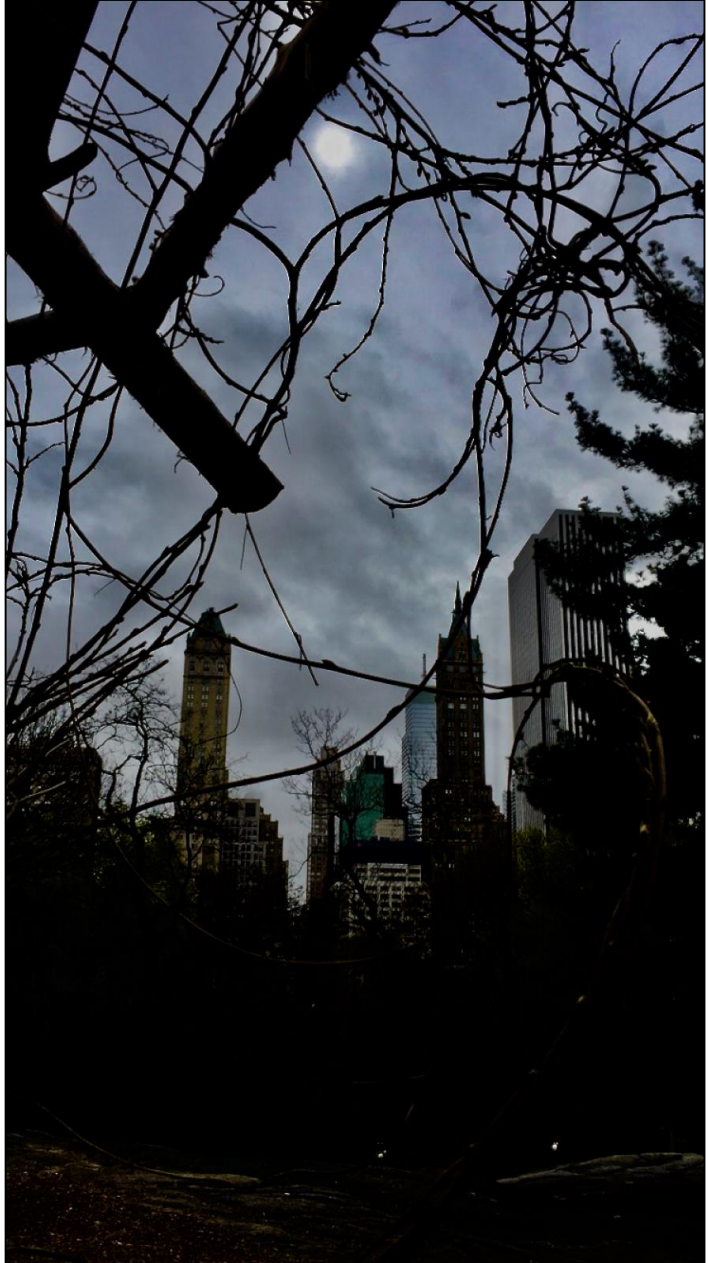
8 Believers tell me
there are unimaginable
colors that exist in Heaven,
but I know that the only hues
that I will encounter
in the land of God
are the shades of past
lovers' eyes,
for I have gone blind
to any other beauty.

9 Hazel green
is all I can see.
All I can imagine.
All I can grasp.

10 I remember when my tears pooled around me,
and I remember how he remained on solid ground,
unwavering.
The lashes that held
his autumn eyes
remained dry.

11 Yet, here I am, floating
into the brook,
in an attempt to feel closer to the moment
where my eyes were as wet as the water below me,
wallowing in broken memories
as a painter skillfully
captures the scene
of a lovely girl on a canoe
splitting the water
and the fallen decay.

The Concrete Jungle



The Drowned Boy

Every day, at 3:15 precisely, the drowned boy can be seen rising out of the ocean. His skin is more green algae than gray flesh, and the seaweed that grows from his head drapes majestically down to his hip bones. A starfish clings to his face today as he squelches along the shore, eyes that have been washed pale and sightless by saltwater fixed on his destination. As he walks, the drowned boy always deposits trinkets from the water along the sand; today he drops a fish skull, three clams, a multitude of sea snails, and some cigarette butts. If I'm lucky, one of the clams will have a pearl in it. One time, he left a trail of beautiful seashells for me to collect; I keep them in a glass jar on my bedside table.

"The Drowned Boy" wasn't really an accurate name for him because what actually killed him was a shotgun blast to the chest; sea anemones have since sprouted from the wound. His chest holds a sea garden instead of shotgun pellets. But, in our defense, "The Drowned Boy" sounded better than "The Shot Boy," and the sea had been the one to claim his body in the end, anyway. I'm the glad the sea had claimed him and not the ground; the sea releases the boy once a day to buy ice cream, and I don't think the ground would have done the same. The old man who pulls the ice cream cart along the beach had wanted to retire years ago, but we weren't sure what the drowned boy would do if he couldn't buy his daily treat, so the old man always makes sure to be on the beach at 3:15 exactly. I suppose I will have to take over for the old man when he dies. I don't think anyone else will.

The locals allow The Drowned Boy to traverse the beach in peace, unbothered and uninterested because to them he is invisible. Sometimes a child will go to examine one of the treasures left by The Drowned Boy, but the mother will pull her child away quickly, declaring, "*There's no telling what sort of curse is attached to the drowned boy's garbage.*" My mother doesn't think The Drowned Boy is cursed, so she is never mad that I sit in the sand to see what The Drowned Boy left behind.

I watch The Drowned Boy part the sea of people as he takes his slow, loping strides toward the old man. I pull out the shucking knife my

father gave me for my birthday last month and begin opening the clams. It was The Drowned Boy's father who had shot him, and it always makes me sad to think that The Drowned Boy's father had not loved him the way mine loves me. When the locals see me fiddling around with my gifts, they quickly look away, as if I am The Drowned Boy, too. This doesn't bother me anymore, though. The first two clams are empty, and I set them aside so I can bring them home for dinner later. It takes me more time to open the third clam, so I know this one must have a pearl inside of it. The pearl is the size of a marble and the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. I cradle it in my palm as I look up for The Drowned Boy.

He arrives at the old man's cart, and the old man smiles at him. The Drowned Boy holds up a finger that's crusted with barnacles and asks for one cone of vanilla ice cream. His voice sputters and squishes, as if there is an octopus hiding in the fluid of his lungs. The Drowned Boy gives the old man some coins and shells he found on the seafloor before following his path back home. The Drowned Boy licks at the ice cream with his bruised tongue as it drips over his waterlogged fingers. The starfish on his face moves one of its arms toward the boy's mouth, as if it's trying to get him to share his ice cream with it. When the ice cream drips onto the anemones in The Drowned Boy's chest, they fold in on themselves and the wound looks like shotgun holes again instead of a sea garden. A wave of pity washes over me; how sad it must be to be discarded by your own father. Does The Drowned Boy even remember? or has the ocean claimed his memories as well? I hope he's forgotten how he died. As The Drowned Boy gets closer to me, I stand up and call out to him.

"Thank you," I say, "for the pearl."

The Drowned Boy turns in my direction, then his face twists into what I think is a smile. "See you tomorrow," he gurgles. He walks calmly into the waves, still licking his ice cream cone as his head disappears into the water.

Love Letter: A Monologue

I saw your father last week he says you're doing well

I'm a sad, sad boy my mother's son I've dipped my feet in olive oil When
you left did you mean to leave
a match? The bedposts are on fire There is no place
to kneel peacefully

Where are you staying

I walked
until a man speaking to the sky he said he could
tell me which god was God I wanted to believe in
anything I'm not the kind of man who can sit in
church alone

Was that you on the beach yesterday. You look so thin. Have you been eating?

So few places would accept a man
barefoot I wanted a mouth full of
answers But, as a backup I counted the
Sand
three times and sorted it twice
I would tell you the number
but, it is unexplainable Can
you
imagine a tower to heaven? If you
climb it You cannot tell anyone
what you saw What good is a story like that?

I drank tea from leaves
picked by a woman said to be four
times my age This
her lifetime ministry
I wanted to love something that devoutly

*My dog was chewing the bone you gave him
it made me think of
you*

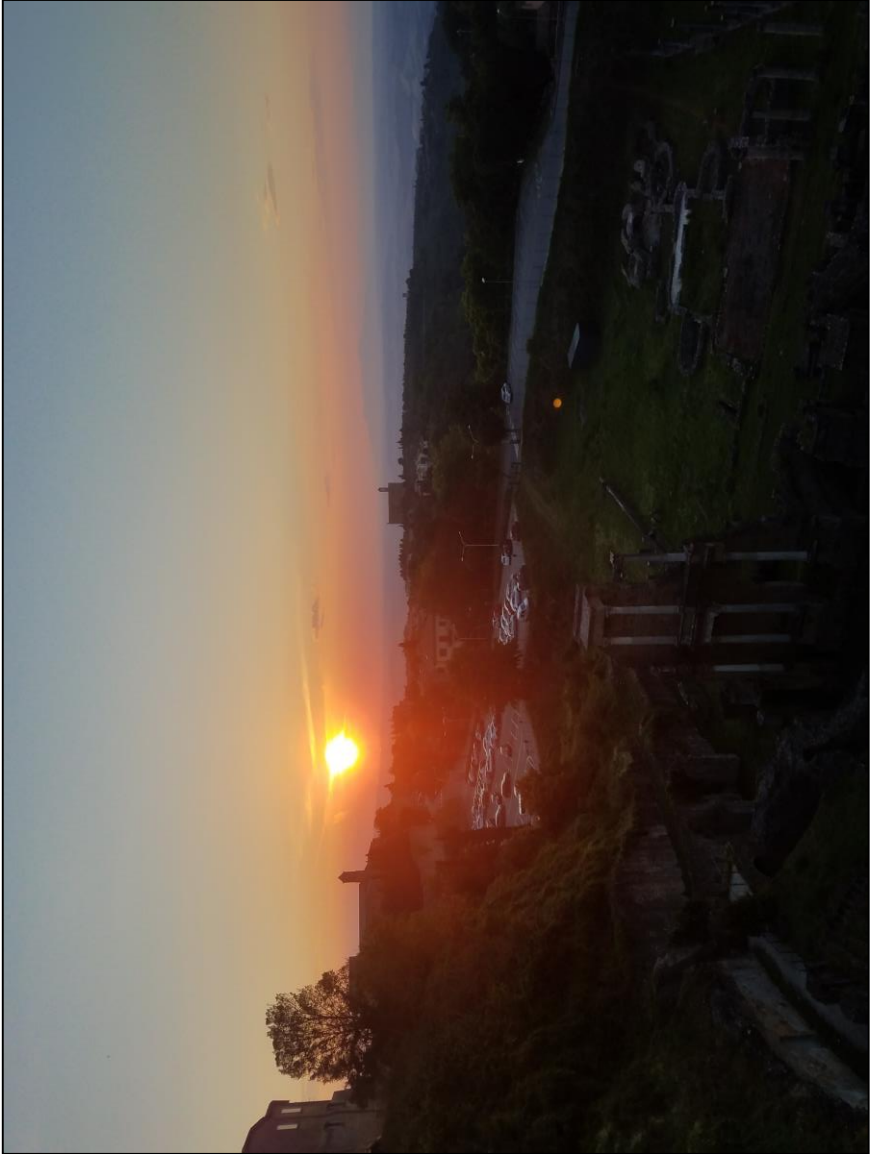
If you love me say you
love me If you miss
me walk in circles
'til our
history is as mistranslated as
old testament scripture
Are you dizzy yet This planet is
ours My
world is my world
Your world is not my
world *Are you having
fun* Must
we be in clouds before the wind
gives us shape

*I never liked the way you spoke
why must you always talk in
Riddles*

With a face like that It
must be easy to forsake

your mind In some parts of
the water your perfection
means nothing You can
forget to blink I can pretend
that it is your hand against
my jaw line The way the
water garbles our voices I
can practically pretend to
be both of us.

Sunset on Roman Theatre in Volterra, Italy



Vagabond Follies collection:
Gentleman

We learn manners

from those who have none.

-My Mother

You who gave up

your bar stool and

good judgment

will have to rock

on your heels until

she smiles back

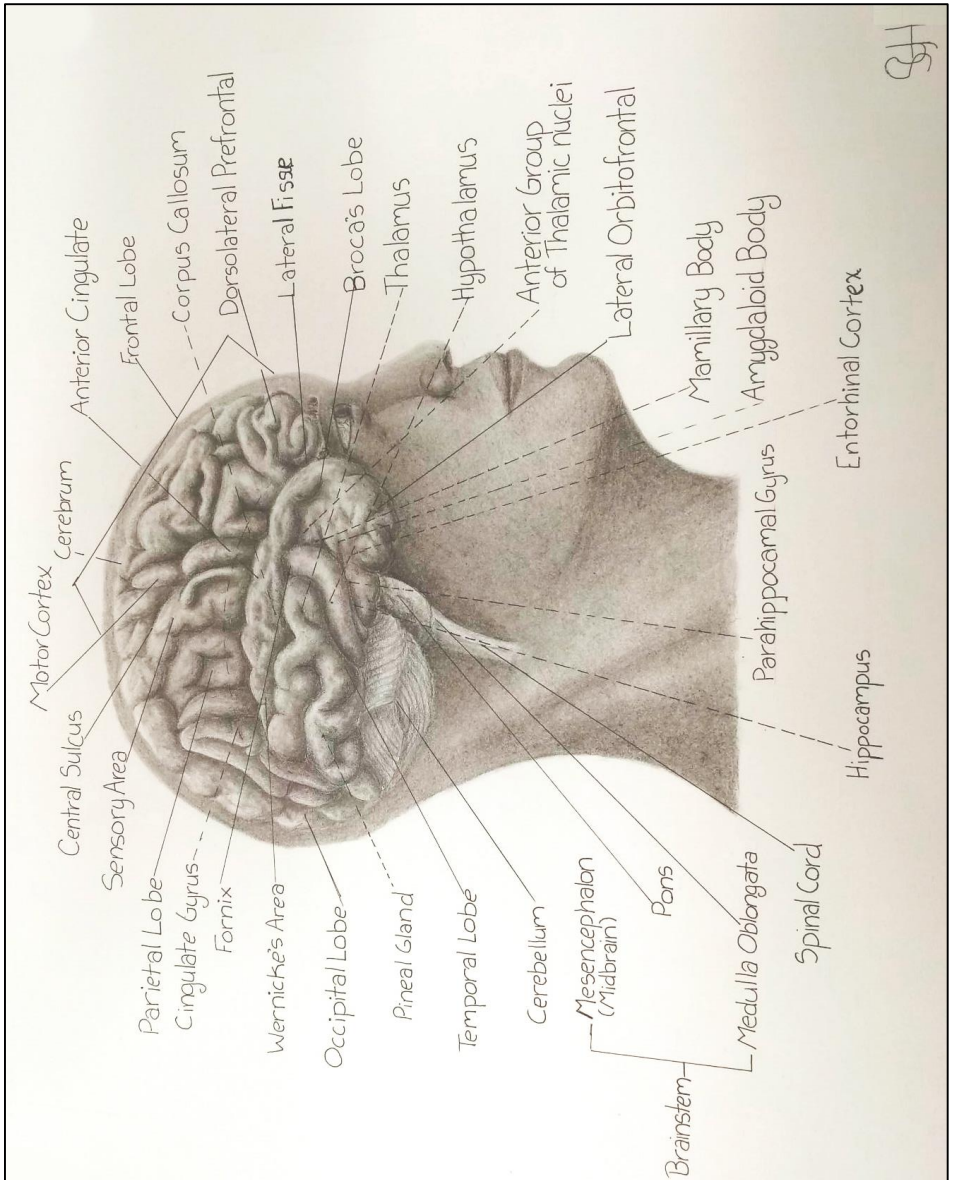
at you giving you

the signal that it

might have been

well worth it.

Brain Diagram, Right



Shooting

Every car that passed by seemed to speed. I could feel it as they barreled up the road toward our house and I felt the wind on my face, though the windows were shut. Would they be shooting.

Would the Mexican children two doors over be dead on their front lawn, sweet blood oozing from their kind, small faces? I vomited again. I'd just watched that documentary, Flint Town, and there had been a small boy on the sidewalk, he was fat, his mom was screaming beside him just as my mother had screamed in front of me at the gun behind me. Her face had broken into this panic, a mother ripped from her young, spit flying. I had never seen her so afraid nor so convinced of certain destruction.

section?

My first thought had been to throw up. I crawled to the bathroom and put my head over the toilet. I'd always had a nervous stomach.

My mother was calling 911 in the other room.

Hello, I think there's been a drive-by.

It was the house next to us, but they might have hit our house.

I think they hit ours.

The gun was right behind my daughter's head.

I could see him from the window.

He stopped his car, he had the window rolled down and he was holding the gun out, right behind my daughter's head.

Please, just come now.

I want to know why we hear so many gunshots.

I want to know why no one is doing anything.

The neighborhood was quiet. My stomach was seizing, but there was nothing left to put out.

I had always been afraid of guns. When I was a kid, my dad had told me a story about a boy he knew who'd accidentally shot one of his friends. They were sitting in a circle on the floor playing with the gun and they thought the safety was on, but it wasn't, and he shot a hole clear through his

friend's head.

He'd also told me this story about three people he'd gone to high school with. Three of them had been driving in a car, two guys and a girl. They'd been just driving along when another guy from their high school started shooting at them from a different car. The shots went through the windshield and killed the two guys in the front seat. The girl had been shot in her side and she tried to drive the car to the hospital, but she didn't make it.

I'd always thought about the girl, in her last minutes, speeding the overpass, maybe hoping to save her friends.

The cops arrived without sirens. I heard my mom go quiet on the phone, and then I heard her scrabbling with the door. I wiped the puke off my face.

Outside, the sun was out. There were six cop cars on our street. Three of them were parked on the sidewalk. Two cops were talking to my mother.

She was pointing and shouting.

I leaned against our door frame. I watched as a female cop walked up to the house beside us and knocked on the door.

In the street, my mother told me later, the cops were marking the pavement where the shells had landed. All the other neighbors started coming out, standing on porches, an ambulance arrived.

In the doorway, where I was looking, the mother stood, holding her daughter. They were okay. They had their arms around each other. There were bullet holes in the front door.

Days later, I realized that I could still be sure of my mother's love.

The Space Behind a Pretty Face

Pretty face, pretty eyes

The color of frozen sea water

Always head bent in a book

Your lips remain a hard line

I want to know what's your ploy

Do you ever love to smile?

Do those lips ever betray a sense of joy?

Do those icy blue orbs ever thaw?

I'm curious what's ticking inside you, pretty face

You seem so isolated

You're on your own island made out of the pages of a book

You sunk your own boat to stay hidden and alone

I find your reclusion interesting

I wish to connect with you and ask my questions

What do you love to read?

What is capturing your attention?

What is so important that you find in your books?

I am but a young girl with a motor mouth

But I too enjoy the pages that whisk me away

Oh pretty face, share your knowledge!

I believe beneath that pretty face, there is a beautiful mind.

Let me in, let me see

I know curiosity killed the cat

But you seem worth the risk

Give to me your thoughts and I in turn will offer my words

Would you enjoy it if I write for you beautiful scenes of far away places

Or would you rather have shivers to climb down your spine from a dark
world?

Shall I write of unending love?
Or should I present something more logical, ethical, satirical?
Oh pretty face,
You confound me!
I do not know what that mind of yours wants
But I wonder if you would even wonder what I desire
How will you know unless you ask?
Don't shy away, maybe I'm too open
Too readable and consumable
But I refuse to hide myself away
I'll build a plane from my questions, to fly high above the surface
I will travel the world and visit these forbidden places, the spaces in the
 minds of others
and maybe I'll land on your island
And help you escape your comfortable prison.

**Real Cannibals Eat Everything;
I Only Want Her to Eat My Heart for Dinner**

Seeing in stop motion is equivalent to unlocking the long-forgotten memories from your mind.

When you can no longer feel anything but the loud pounding your heart makes in your chest, you have become everything you fear. If only you could rip your heart right out of your body and let her mouth devour your organs – maybe the pounding would stop.

Is the end near?

Is she capable of treating you well?

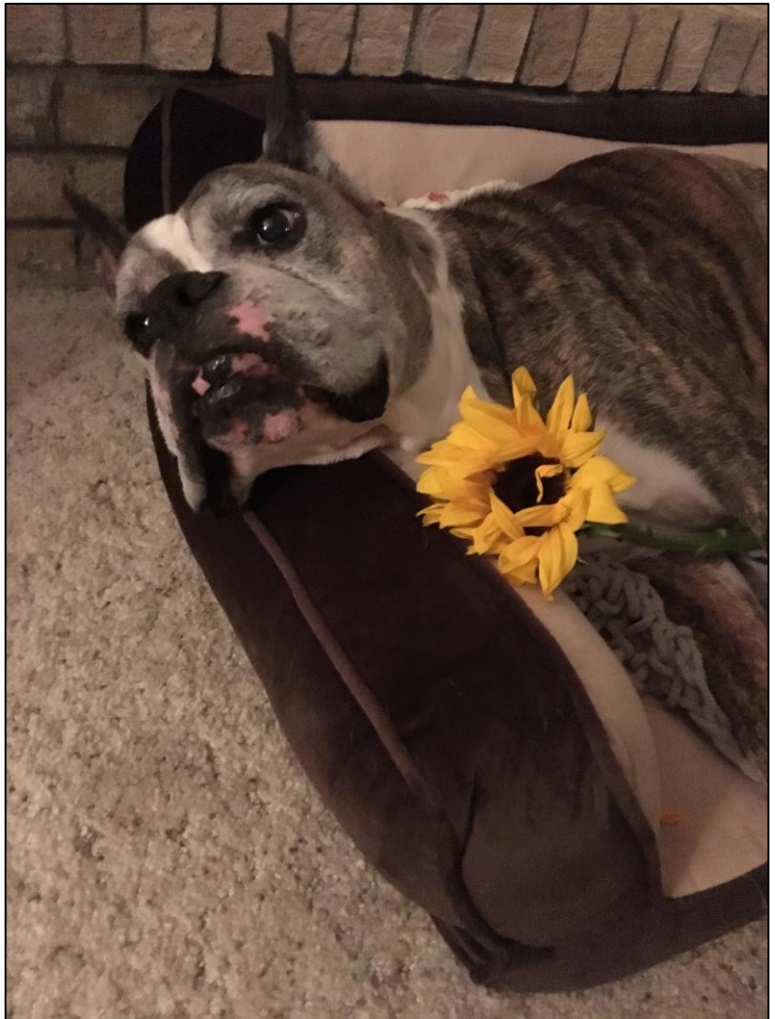
Can you stop yourself from eating your own body alive before she even gets a taste?

Hunsies

Striped like a tiger

A precious dog and much more

He's a sassy boy



Rising Sun

the great orange,
peeled.

curling shreds of fruit, tossed
to ravenous mountains

glaring,
cooking our bodies in its
bleach-light.

the Sun,
an eye—
skinned.

In a White Bathroom Stall

in a white bathroom stall
my legs are asleep
my head between my knees
because i feel so weak
i can't keep myself up
when my lows are so down
so far down that the bubbles all rise as i drown.
drowning or burning, my friends and i used to ask
which would you rather?
passing our thoughts like a flask
i can't remember which one i
used to pick
but those friends are all gone now
and i am sick
sick in the head, sick in the brain
but drowning is hopeful
if it can numb the pain.
maybe i'm stupid to think
that this world could not hurt me
and with thoughts like these
i know it doesn't deserve me
because when i'm alone
i'm alone and i think
of that white bathroom stall
where my hope left in a blink.

the chase

all the clichés in the world
are clouding my mouth
begging to be let out
but you're more than the world
you're my serendipitous pearl
that makes me scared
to be walking on air
because movies tell me
happiness warrants a need
for death and despair

but I can't resist
giving in to all the weight
and your crisp voice
dear Lord it's fate

your bare feet click
on the cold tile floor
stirring galaxies
in your coffee
while you pour more

my heart grows bolder

my head and my heart
and my hormones are loud
but I believe
a moment of you
is like catching the moon
after a taste
nothing's sweeter than the chase.

The Bench

He passed eight benches before he decided upon one that felt right. He wasn't sure why this particular one felt right, only that it did. He texted her once he sat down, "I'm on the bench across the record shop just past 6th Street."

Five minutes later, she glided into his sight and joined him. They laughed. They talked. They smoked. He discussed the cruelty of life, alluding to how vile things and people could be, and she nodded along in silent agreement.

"I'm so glad we caught up! I do miss you," she said grinning, avoiding the darker topics that he put forth.

Now it was his turn to nod along in the perception of silent agreement. He knew that she was lying, knew what type of person she was. She had this twisted ability to make anyone believe anything. She could take words and morph them, delivering them in such a way that she had the power of manipulation in the palm of her seemingly harmless hand. But he knew better now.

Their conversation continued, as conversations always do when they occur between two people who haven't spoken in two years. He was not cognizant of how long they talked, and in truth he was too absorbed in his own thoughts to pay much attention to her rambling. Nonetheless, despite his knowing, time waltzed by as they sat there on that bench just past 6th Street. Eventually, she had to go.

"We'll stay in touch this time, promise?"

He didn't say anything. He knew it was best to stay away this time. With a hug and a smile, she was on her way. He didn't move for what very well could have been a hundred years. At around 7:00 PM, it started to get dark and the street lights turned on. She always loved seeing the street lights turn on, he remembered, if she was capable of loving anything.

In the glow of the light above him, he saw her cigarette butts on the ground, distinguishable from his by the lipstick around them. He recalled the way that he would find her lipstick all over his bed sheets after she'd

spent the night and smiled despite the disgust he felt for her, for her apathy.

“Dark red,” she’d say, “like blood,” and then laugh a wicked laugh that completely contrasted her gentle face but aligned with her malignant heart.

He learned from her that looks are deceiving. Of course, he’d heard that cliché expression before he’d met her, but she proved it to be true. He pushed the memories from his mind. That was a different time, he thought, a different life.

He lifted his gaze and looked at the record shop across from the bench for a moment. Something was familiar to him, but he didn’t know what. Finally, it dawned on him, and he laughed with a sigh upon realizing that it was where he’d first met her. In the record shop across the bench just past 6th Street, his life had changed forever.

Seashell Vase



Sophomore. Major: Creative Writing

The Delight Song

Modeled after the poem "The Delight Song of Tsoai-talee" by N. Scott Momaday

I am the smell of a book with an uncracked spine
I am foggy breath on a cold morning, fading into the orange sky
I am the darkest blue of the deep sea
I am the red veins on a fallen maple leaf
I am a shooting star, easily missed without the right moment
I am a lost traveler, trying to find my place
I am a lightbulb burning bright for hours, other times dark and silent
I am the dusk and the dawn, rising and sinking with the spinning earth
I am the buzz and blink of a neon sign
I am a misplaced line in a work of art
I am the shout of a train, warning of its approach
I am a tree with gnarled roots that twist and twist into the ground
I am the punch of garlic that taints your breath for days
I am the bright bright light bouncing off the snowy hills
I am an indestructible diamond stored beneath the earth
I am a raging wind, invisible but undeniable
I am a wildfire, the unquenchable flame tearing through the night
I am the phoenix, born again from the ashes

You see, I am alive, I am alive
I stand in good relation to the world
I stand in good relation to the universe
I stand in good relation to all that is broken
I stand in good relation to myself
You see, I am alive, I am alive

purpose

I remember when I was a seed.

Buried in the dirt.

Nutrients helping me grow.

Sunlight strengthening me.

Water quenching my thirst.

I remember starting to grow.

Breaking through the surface of the earth.

The mornings were hot.

Afternoon was scorching.

God always provided me with water and the cool of night.

I remember becoming strong.

My bark gaining layers as years passed by.

My branches bearing leaves to provide shade for God's creatures.

I became a home to animals of all kinds.

I remember being happy.

I remember the man who cut me down.

I remember how he chopped me out of my roots.

I remember how he carved me into wooden beams.

I remember how he turned me into a canvas in the shape of a cross.

I hope God had mercy on him.

God is merciful.

I remember the way I was handed to a perfect Man.

How He was much smaller than me.

How I hoped I wasn't too heavy.

I remember the crowds shoving Him and screaming at Him.

I remember when He carried me a long way.

I was indeed too heavy.

I remember when His bloody wounds were dug open by my weight.

He fell.

He fell.

He fell.

I remember when they nailed Him to me.

I remember when His hands and mine were bound together.

His feet and mine were joined.

I remember being a canvas that portrayed a bloody painting.

A three-dimensional image of suffering.

I remember carrying Him as He hung from my chest.

He spoke seven separate times.

He was naked before His mother and a friend.

He honored her.

Each time He spoke, I felt all of His strength pressing against me just to catch a breath.

I felt His blood seep into me.

I remember when God died.

I remember how I went from being a seed to becoming the deathbed of my Creator.

I remember when they took Him away from me.

I remember all of this.

I remember Jesus.

From the moment I was created, I had a purpose.

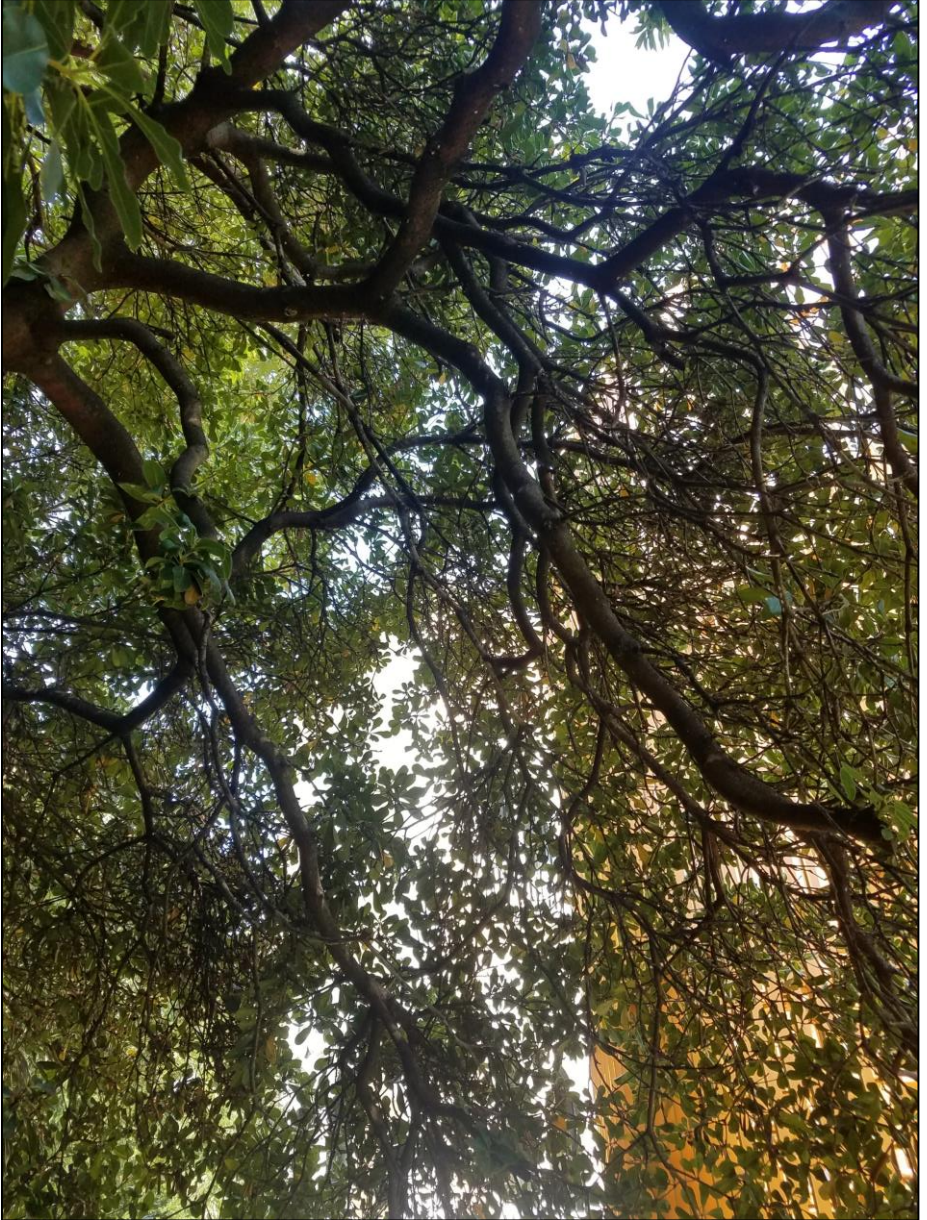
From the moment God formed me, I was a part of His plan.

From the beginning, I was a part of Salvation History.

Jesus rose from the dead.

Glory to God in the Highest.

Treetops on the sidewalk of Rome, Italy



The Wolf Cries

If I am the wolf,
are you the deer
or the moon?

Does your smell lead me
ever just behind you,
mouth salivating, heart quickening,

as I near your unsuspecting haunch,
the thrill surging through my veins
as your sweet, briny blood oozes through my bite?

Or could it be, I am a lone, starving wolf,
and what I mistake simply as my food supply
is really your wise, caring eyes looking back

to see if I've followed,
if I will take your gentle offering
to get me through this cold winter?

Or are you the moon, and it's your overwhelming beauty
I'm fooled shines just for me,
leaving me howling

my lonely serenades
in hopes you'll come down from your lofty place
to make sweet love atop these craggy mountain tops?

Or could it be your bright light is shining

in hopes to illumine the world around me
so I might recognize

my own perversity of being a wolf?

Do I sing my thanks to you?

Give thanks to the beings who lay down their lives for me?

For that which I take from the world?

And hope, somehow, to give my own self back,
to bare my soul
through that lonely note,

aware I will forever be the wolf in the eyes of others.
No sheep skin can hide my blood-thirsty,
consuming lust for life.

If I am the wolf...

Ashley Cerku

Alum. B.A. English & Writing and Rhetoric, M.A. Liberal Studies

Best Seat in the House



The Charge

We stand, quivering and snorting, in the fog.
It is a cold morning, and flies blossom
From the damp earth, surrounding us.
I stamp, I shake my mane.

“Hush, boy,” is the word that comes
So often from my rider – gentle,
Like the hands of the boy who used to brush me,
His voice a calm, quiet fear.

He is afraid, my rider, and trembles
Like the surface of water, gripping my reins too tight,
One glove off so he can stroke my neck.
His hand is ice.

I bend and taste the grass, sweeter than oats,
Wishing he would try it – maybe it would ease him,
Calm him, like the warm drink he always had at camp –
He can’t ride as well when he’s stiff like this.

Before I can offer my help, our leader’s voice barks an order.
My ears prick up – my rider jumps, startled.
All the saddles creak at once, but I hear only his voice.
“Come on,” he urges, but I know he wants to run away.

The world is too fast as we run, colors rushing by.
These tents are like beehives, the soldiers are swarming,
Buzzing in words we do not understand.
My rider holds something long and sharp;
Gleaming silver that I have watched him polish.
He swings it, and I feel him sob.

Oh.

The bees must die.

We hear it before our riders do—I know this sound,
The same sound that happens when we are hunting—
The men call it “guns,” and it leaves nothing safe.
As the noise surrounds us, my rider grows unsteady.

I hear him gasp, the reins go slack,
and then he is gone, no weight upon my back.

No more pressure, I run on, alone,
Panting and confused,
a butterfly in a swarm of hornets.
Where is he, lost in the swarm?
My friends and their riders topple beside me.

Where do I go now? Forward?
I have no gentle hand to guide me.
My rider is dead, so many are dying,
And I—I am afraid.

Future to Past

hold my hand
go outside with me
smell, think, feel

this is what it feels like
to be alive
something you never thought possible.

you can thrive, fulfill yourself
you do not need the thought of me
to keep you alive in blood-shedding nights

i am a beacon of light
but you need to see
that you are the beacon of light in me.

– future to past,
confidence is you, not something to strive for.

Elyse Gregory

Senior. Major: Linguistics

Still Angel



What Went Wrong

Trigger Warning: Violence

I don't see what we hit because I'm trying to open the beer I had grabbed from the backseat of the car. We're on our way to visit Jack's brother, but it's a twelve-hour drive to the prison and I wanted something to make the trip go by faster. Jack had been red with anger when he saw the cans behind my seat. He asked how I could be stupid enough to take beer on a trip to a goddamn prison, and I mumbled that it was cheap and basically water anyway, so it didn't matter. Jack had smacked me with the back of his hand for that, but he reached for a can half an hour into the drive.

I met Jack's brother once at the Highway Diner when Jack and I first started going steady. His name was Aidan, but he told me to call him Fence; I asked Jack later how Fence had gotten his name, and he answered by smacking the back of my head and telling me that if I hadn't figured it out by now, then I was too dumb to know. I never figured it out, but I didn't ask about it again. Fence had Jack's unruly blond hair, his mom's watery blue eyes and charming gap-tooth smile, but someone else's silver tongue. Besides the hair, he was the exact opposite of his half-brother.

Jack was two years younger than Fence, but Jack acted like the older one. He would kick Fence under the table when he flirted too long with the waitress, or if he asked me too many questions about what I liked to do in my free time. Jack wouldn't laugh at any of the jokes Fence bounced off of him and told him to quit being funny. When Fence asked Jack if he could go hang out with some high school friends that night since he was leaving town in the morning, Jack said no. I asked Frankie about it the next day – not the Frankie that Fence does jobs for, but the Frankie that's lived in the same apartment complex as their mom since Jack was five. Frankie said that their mom remarried after Fence's dad died in a car accident, and Jack's dad beat him and their mom for years until he left to be with another woman. Fence felt bad for Jack because of it, so Fence let Jack do whatever he wanted, even if it meant bullying him. Fence wanted Jack to feel in control

of something. I guess I was the same way.

I fly forward and feel the seat belt catch me before my face hits the dashboard. My body slams back in the seat and my vision goes fuzzy like when there's no signal on the TV. I have to wait for my eyes to work again before I can figure out what's going on. The beer can is in my hand still, but the pieces of it are lodged into my palm. There's foam on the dash where my hand punched it. The cool spring air feels wet on my face. I turn to look at the driver's side. Jack's not there. He doesn't believe in wearing seatbelts, and the airbags in his car don't work anymore.

The car tore through the guardrail, and the only way out of the car is through the driver's side door. Brushing glass out of my lap, I use my good hand to claw my way through twisted metal and fucked-up upholstery. When the door latch doesn't work, I push my way through the broken window and tumble onto the dirt that borders the pavement. I stare at the sky for a while, panting heavily. My body feels like one of the empty whiskey bottles Jack and Frankie liked to shatter in the alley behind the party store. I sit up and pull the mangled beer can out of my palm. Clutching my shirt to slow the bleeding, I pull myself up with the help of the side-view mirror and resume looking for Jack.

There's another car just down the road that looks like it rolled a few times before stopping on all four tires. I stumble over to it to see if anyone's alive. It was a really nice black Corvette before the accident happened, the kind of car Frankie would have gushed about after working a shift at the local mechanic. The man in the driver's seat even looks like Frankie, with caramel skin and hair like an oil spill, but it can't be him because Frankie went to go see his dad three states over yesterday. Frankie's lookalike is halfway out the window with blood pouring

out of a gash in his head. The back of his once-white suit is streaked black and red now. He doesn't look like he's breathing. But where is Jack? I limp back over to what's left of the dingy green Neon and look farther up the road. There's a big oak tree a few yards up with limbs that stretch passed the guard rail and over the highway. It looks like there might be a human shape under the shade of the leaves.

When we first found out that Fence was in prison, Jack decided that we were going to break his brother out. Frankie was immediately against it; he went over all of the ways it could go wrong and insisted we would be

doing more harm than good. But Jack was determined that his brother wasn't going to rot away in a concrete cage. Jack and Frankie went back and forth until Jack got mad and stormed off to the liquor store down the street. Frankie and I sat in silence for a moment before he lit a cigarette for me and cracked open two beer cans. He pursed his lips and furrowed his brow, begging me to get Jack to change his mind. He didn't want Jack to get locked up, too. I looked at the worried expression on Frankie's face and felt my throat tighten up. He cared more about Jack's well-being than anyone, even Fence. I reached a hand across the folding card table that acted as a kitchen table. Frankie looked at it for a second before squeezing it with a smile.

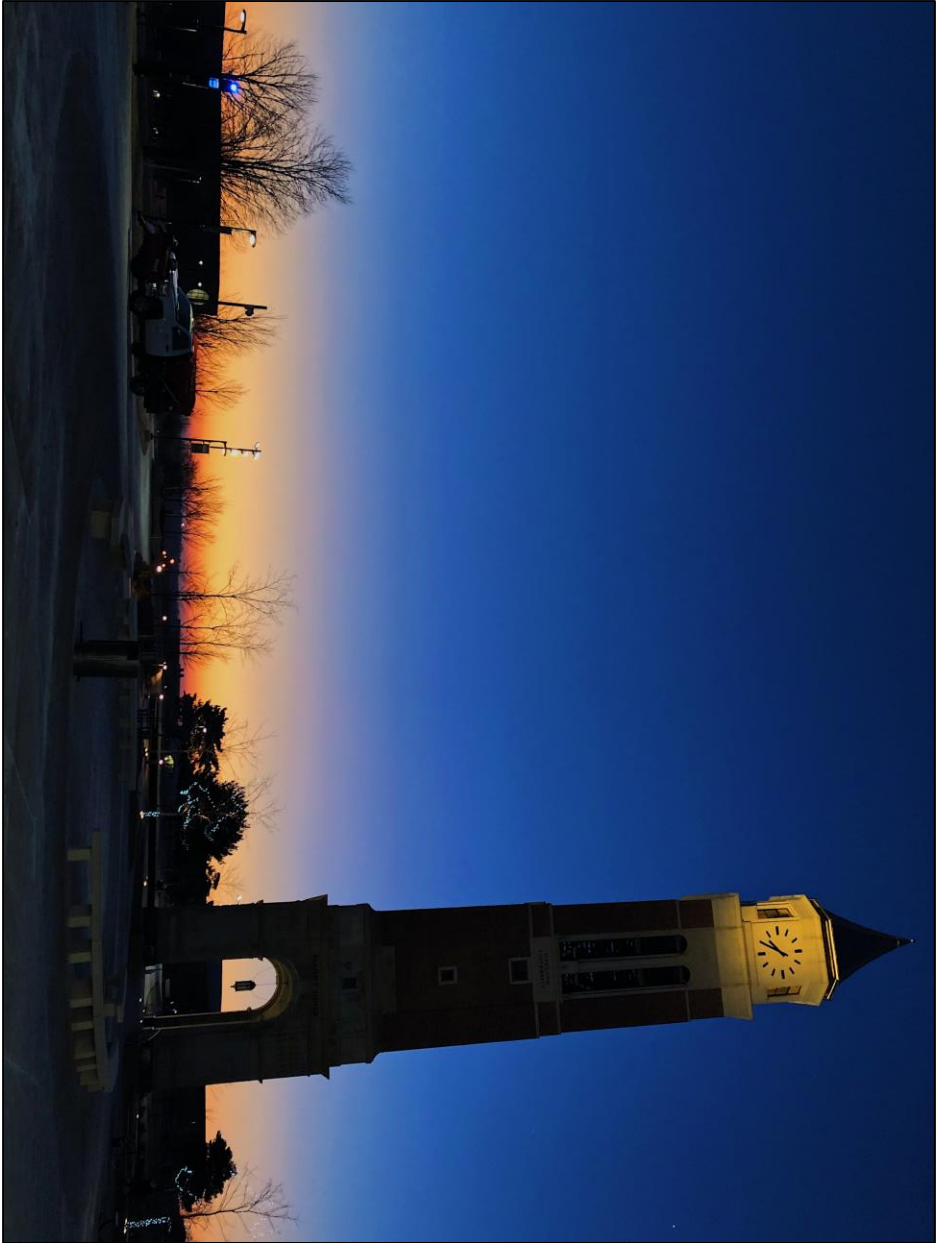
Jack was furious when he walked in to see Frankie smiling and holding my hand across the table. With a yell, he launched the already-open whiskey bottle at my head. I moved a second too late; it smacked my temple and sent me sprawling onto the floor. Before I could grasp what had happened, Jack was already slamming his boots into my rib cage, calling me a cheating whore and dumb bitch the whole time. I rolled away from him and his foot connected with my face. Two of the neighbors ran in, and it took both of them and Frankie to pull Jack off of me. It wasn't the first time they had done that. Frankie rushed me to his *abuela's* apartment down the hall and said something quickly in Spanish before rushing out of the room again. I let the kind old woman who smelled of cinnamon and *conchas* wipe the blood off of my face while we listened to the screams and crashes from down the hall. It took a few hours, but Frankie finally managed to convince Jack that we hadn't been seeing each other behind Jack's back. Frankie ended up spending the night with Jack while I stayed with his *abuela*.

Jack looks the way I had that night. His body is bent and broken, and he coughs up blood when he tries to speak to me. It looks like the accident launched him through the windshield, and he rolled until he reached the oak tree. I should find a cell phone and call for help or try to stop Jack from bleeding. I sit down next to him and lean against the guard rail instead, waiting for someone else to help us. Jack tries to grab me with bloody fingers, but he can't quite reach me this time. I wonder if this is how Fence's dad looked when he died.

Lauren Loiselle

Freshman. Major: Undecided

Rising Before The Sunrise



Homing

Gridded grey flap of a wing grits its teeth and dissolves into more
Stone, hobbled like a cliché (and at such a young age!)

Crooked as a metaphor
And far too on-the-nose

My best friend was an ornithologist long before she went to college
Something about the mass, the thousand living wiggling feathers,
scarecrowing out two paths

One talon in the dirt, one wingtip mid-air

“The flatness,” she said, “of life when you haven’t been anywhere besides
–” she trailed off,

but I trust you understand what she meant.

Cogs, silver-blue and mechanical, dropped by the thousands on warehouse
floors

The inside of the Diamond Crystal Salt Factory, where my grandfather
worked,

Where my mother narrowly escaped,

Where I work,

In spite of what they gave me.

What is wasted?

Pigeons, dumb and ugly, eat bread and don’t know what they are.

They must take the bread for love,

And the mass of familiar thousands for reassurance

that they don’t need to go anywhere at all.

Noah Thompson

Junior. Major: Public Relations and Strategic Communication.
Minor: English

Father's Day

Dad,

Mr. Picot took points off again today because of my shoes. He's so silly! Sometimes he forgets he already asked me where my gym sneakers are and asks me again! For some reason, he thinks Velcro isn't "secure" enough. So, I talked to Mrs. Knight today, and after my reading, she taught me how to use bunny ears! I didn't know that my shoes could be a bunny! When I get home, I'm gonna ask you if you know bunny ears. I already forget — do I use my left finger or my right to make an ear? Will you please show me?

Dad,

High school isn't going the way everyone said it would. Nobody wants to sit with me at lunch. And it seems like everyone is good at something — what am I good at? Maybe I should be in the band? No, the early morning practices aren't my thing. What about the football team? No, I don't like the idea of being attacked by angry, sweaty men. Okay, how about the art club? No, I'm not nearly good enough with pastels for that. What should I do?

Dad,

There's so many people in here! I never told you this, but large crowds make me anxious. I'm not nervous though, I'll be good! I wanted to tell you in person, but I got into Michigan State today! I know how you love their football team! I'm kinda excited in a way because I know they have a really good engineering program, but I'm still kinda figuring that out! Anyway, they're getting to the T's just now, so I think my name is coming up. Where are you?

Father,

I saw you lost some weight, and you seem to be doing well. I can't help but notice that you started smiling more in pictures. People always told me to give it time, and that maybe we might talk again someday. I know that I was never easy to talk to, though. And sometimes I wonder if it was really me who didn't give you a chance. I guess I thought things would turn out differently. But I just don't see the point in trying so hard anymore.

Dad,

I'm sorry that I wasn't what you wanted.

Comfort in the Morning



Full Blast

Your brown eyes have gone soft,
The fierceness dulled,
Numbed and whittled away.
You cling to me, tighter than before,
Hands shaking.
The soft smell of your dark blonde hair
Overpowers me with warmth and light.

Though you were younger, you were strongest.
You fed it to me straight,
Crossing you was never worth the backlash.
That fire inside you
Has simmered down to
A soft glow,
Leaving nothing but embers.

Something sinister oozes through the silence,
Growing thicker.
You burrow under my skin like an animal seeking protection,
Like black death longs to rip you free
Any moment.

Driving down the road
With the radio cranked up
You tell me,
Like you always do,
To drive around the block
"Just drive around the block, one more time."

The music drowns the black cloud that hovers,
Waiting to encapture us.
Soon,
It will wrap us in its arms,
Like a strange relative,
Holding on too tight.

I flash back to a younger you, grinning the same smile and cranking up the
volume.

I picture us in the future with loose teeth, gray hair, and wedding bands,
Sitting in the living room of your home,
Your hand reaching to crank the volume, as we belt out the lyrics, laughing.
It's plain to see,
We can't sing for shit.

Freshman. Major: History STEP Program, endorsement in Social Studies

It's Unfortunate How I Feel About You

Should I be thankful? Should I brush off my feelings of contempt? There are people that have it so much worse, so why do I cry and pry at the lives of others when there are people starving and all I want is someone to call darling?

I can feel it in the pit of my stomach, my heart plummets and I wish I could come home to a girl, but instead, I deal with this syndrome. And I don't want it anymore, it hurts down to my core. There's a war knocking on my front door, and it's all I can think about, so I drink down my doubt until I black out. We make out, but it'll never be the same for me because the shame I see is nothing but currency for the bank of depravity.

Please, have mercy on me. I'm a wannabe; I'm stuck at sea searching for reality but honestly, I owe you an apology. This is not one-sided; it's suicidology, and maybe I should look to psychology. So, I'm sorry for never putting myself first. I'm going in, fully immersed, ready for the worst.

Der Moment

meine Seele

meine Liebe

ich bin noch nicht hier

irgendwie

irgendwo

irgendnie

Blut

blöd Rot

meine Augen [tropften]

aber du kannst es nicht verstehen;

weglaufen oder atmen

Freude? Mehr oder weniger

mein dein sein Leben kann enden;

Asche zu Asche

Staub zu Staub

die Erde und das ist!

Der Moment

.kalt

ich sehe nichts – keinen Augenblick

ich wollte

Narr –

.ewiglich kalt

Dead Dreams

A black bird attacks my thrown seed
With a spectacular vengeance.
Then, in unforeseen silence,
Flies into the window as if it's blue sky.
I turn it over, it's now dead
Black feathers array, a sad story end.

It is wrong to want a hero's end,
To have the whole apple, not just its seed –
Despite the vindictive dead
Dreams lying in their damp graves. Their vengeance
Is sure, but like a lightning sky
The shock of death is a permanent silence.

But surely my trance, a dumb silence
Will last until my end.
Like black birds on white sky,
A target of blackened corn seed.
I'm dragged down, ruined by vengeance
A suffocating silence to find me dead.

So it's not false truths whispered by the dead
As they stalk me into silence,
My clawed vengeance
Cloaks me in red, feathers flayed at the end
To fall to the ground, to smother more seed
More dreams torn from the sky.

Before I rejoiced at the sky
But now play sweet music to rescue the dead
Like that snake, burned that seed,
And crippled my whole world by forcing silence
On one simple thought. I've no good end
Now, trapped in caused vengeance

As I cut one string, and now this vengeance
Broke and bloodied the bones of the sky
Like broken hair pins, tossed end
Over end out a window. The dead
Keep coming, into a deep silence
A titanic of weighted seed.

As I dully watch strangled seed,
Then fall into a bottle silence.
Like the black bird, dead.

Sleeping Kitten on farm in Volterra, Italy



Today's College Student Is The "New" Millennial

The term "millennial" is a pop culture designation used to describe young adults who grew up alongside modern technology. The general consensus is any individual born between 1980-1995 is considered a millennial. However, today's college population of 18-22 year olds were born after 1995, so there needs to be a new classification. For simplicity, I refer to my generation as the "new" millennial, and I believe we are different from the generation of young adults to come before us. This means we need to be recognized as our own population, not defined by the negative stereotypes passed on from the generation before us.

As a new millennial, other generations have a difficult time understanding the way we see the world, because we are the first generation to grow up with modern technology being a pivotal part of our daily life. Technology has moved world progress faster than ever before and has changed how people can live their lives. My parents, who were born in the late 1960s, learned about technology as it came along and saw that it can make life easier, while my grandparents, born in the 1940s, have seen that life can go on without computers, cell phones, the internet and all the assets that come with these advancements. However, my life has never been without these tools, so while I can imagine a world without these things and believe that sometimes pencil and paper would make life easier. Technology is here to stay, and it has made our world easier. The drawback to easy is being perceived as comfortable, and in a society that is always changing, staying in your comfort zone can be perceived as lazy.

People who write about new millennials being lazy are not looking at the whole story and blaming a generation for not having all the answers. Yes, millennials do have the world at their fingertips and do get to benefit from the success of their parents. However, accusing millennials of being lazy because they still live off their parents' money, are not working full time and going to school or going out every night is not going to solve the problem. First of all, I know many people my age who work 25+ hours a week as well as being full-time students and face many other personal and financial challenges not seen in any past generation. In most cases, an

an eighteen-year-old has to sign up to be at least \$50,000 in debt to get a college education and get a job that provides a livable wage.

New millennials are a generation that admits despite all these resources, growing up is still hard and we are afraid of failure for not solving the world's problems, even with all the boosters in our favor. We are the generation that is supposed to cure cancer, achieve peaceful diplomatic relations, limit the spread of global warming, and not create more problems in the process. That is a lot of pressure to put on young adults who are still trying to figure out how to pay bills and get a degree to learn how to make an impression on society. There will always be hard workers and slackers and people in between in every generation, but I like to think that I am a part of the generation that is willing to pause, look at the world's problems, and be intimidated but hopeful that we can make a difference. Technology has made us all want things instantly, but the true change-makers know that important change takes time and effort, something every generation is blessed with.

Everyone has their own story and circumstance, and we have to live with the decisions for how we live our lives. The blogger and social activist Glennon Doyle's quote "We can do hard things" is my mantra for new millennials because while we may not want to be brave and make our mark on society out of fear, we choose to do it anyway because we refuse to be known as the generation that did not try. If growing up or "adulthood" without challenges was as glamorous as it is in movies and on television, everyone would want to do because it would be easy. In a world that thrives on staged "reality" television, the real truth is we are not afraid to be scared, but the future is in the hands of new millennials — and we will not let it pass us by.

Standing with a Cane

Oh burning lips, mischievous heart
Deceiver, talebearer and backbiter
Ponder your ways, why destroy yourself?
Fuel injector, pain killer, slave driver
Silent and slow murderer
You kill with your eyes and your heart
And like the adder in the wild, you bite
You sting like nettles on the skin
And like xylene remove the fat
That is there to cushion and sustain
Pulling bones out of joint, becoming mane
It's a murky package to gain
A mixture of venom and wormwood
Mixed with camphor and myrrh
Toxic, potent, like acid
Destroying cells and bones within
Wicked heart. Tainted blood.
You burn like acid
Dehydrate like alcohol
Shriveled, blinded heart
Life is fleeting, bleating, like a sheep
Like raindrops on the window pane
Bringing comfort to the insane
It's life. It's work. Standing with a cane.

Unrequited Love

There he was and here I am
Two people along for the ride in the tumultuous thing we call life
I saw him from a distance and fell for him slowly
Then it rushed to the surface like water at a floodgate
His eyes, his smile, his laugh, it was all so effortless
I longed for the days I would see him
My heart growing more and more fond as the days passed
There was a sparkle in my eyes and confidence brewing in my chest
I could see the light, the happiness, the wondrous events that I wanted to
create with him
He was going to be the one
I could feel it with every fiber of my being
That day came and I had the courage
I had the confidence
I had the determination
The words spilled out of me like drool from a hound dog
I wasn't nervous
Cool, calm, collected
Then I waited, I waited for the reply
I just put my heart on the line, my fate laid in his hands
"I like you"
The words seem so harmful yet carry so much weight
And then it came
The reply
The anger
The sadness
But no tears
I cried no tears because I knew I wasn't going to get the response I wanted

I knew, I always know

This one, he wasn't meant to be no matter how hard I wanted him to

All those dreams and hopes and building lives together

Gone

Nonexistent

We see each other and say hi, share a laugh or two

I'm far from moved on and have an overwhelming sense of renewed
confidence

A part of me wishes I could take it all back

A part of me thanks him for showing me who he actually is

A part of me knows he wasn't the one

So I wait and I pray because God has perfect timing

He'll bring the one that's supposed to be into my life and He'll guide that
man to me

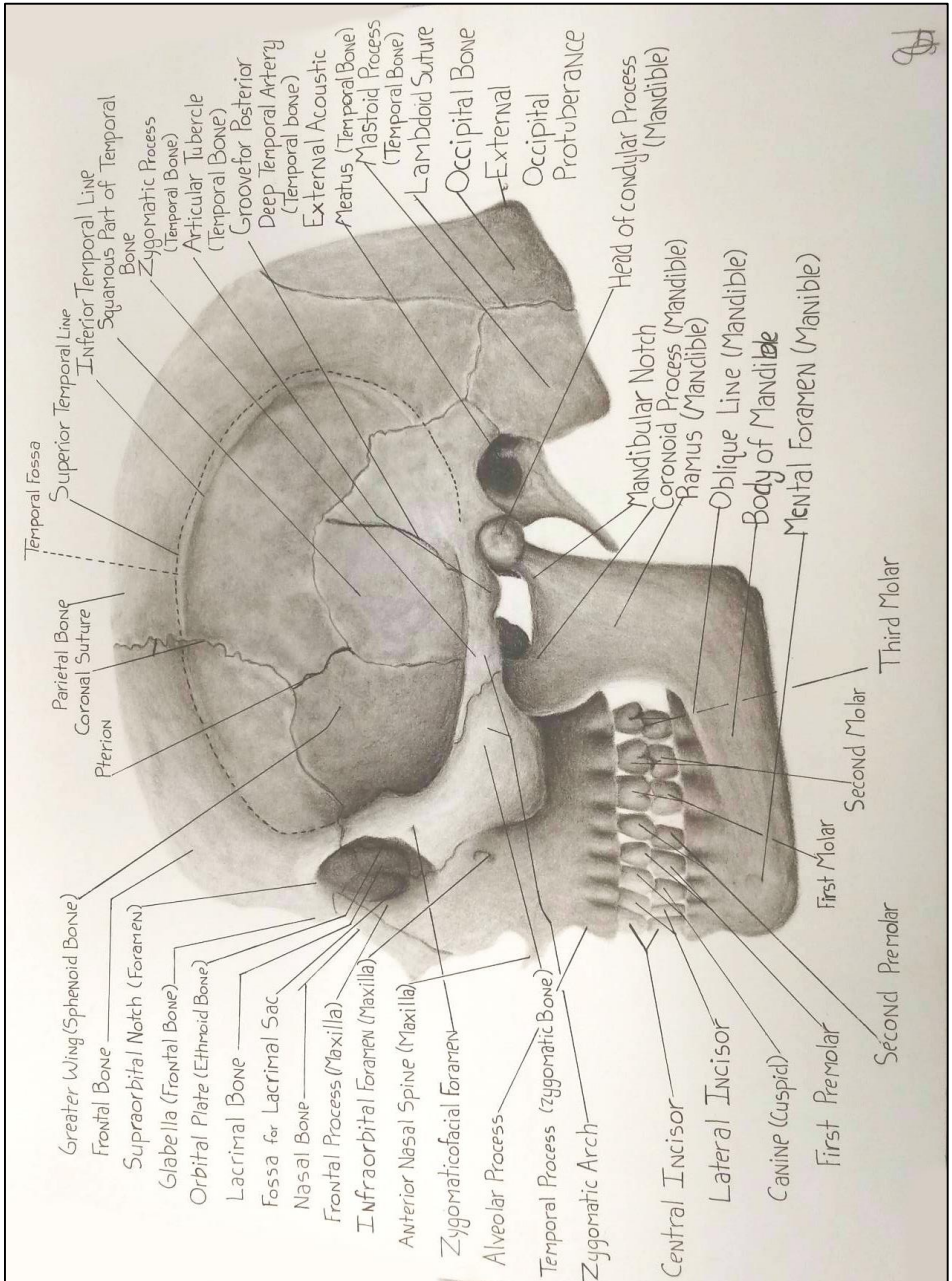
Patience is a virtue

Lessons that I keep learning

Lessons that I keep reliving

Lessons that will lead me to my soulmate, now and forever

Skull Diagram, Left



The Ending

"It's you, Flynn."

"Stop, no, you don't have to do this."

"Come on, fight. Fight!"

"I have to, to survive."

"Macie, think about the ending. Is that what you want?"

"Get on with it!"

"I'm sorry."

It happened every week—someone would be chosen and they would have to find a challenger to fight. Only one would live another day—survival of the fittest, they called it. Everyone knew that it would be them someday, but Flynn always kept Macie focused on what they could do together. All their lives, they saw people they cared about get beaten to death by the hands of someone they were helping just hours before— their parents, their friends— it wasn't particular, just by chance. Gripping to any sense of reality, Flynn and Macie chose to remain together and yearned for a better ending for themselves.

Macie became very anxious all of the time, not knowing what the next day would bring, but Flynn always kept her grounded, just enough to have her look to the ending that she always wanted. He would do anything for her—at night he would give her his shirt for warmth, and when she would wake, he would give her any scraps he found, most of the time leaving himself hungry. Every day was a struggle, but Flynn made it bearable.

One day, Macie had walked off while Flynn was scavenging and he spent hours looking for her. The loud ding of the fighting bell caught his attention and he proceeded to the abandoned warehouse where the matches took place, hoping to find Macie among the spectators. He walked near the circle of the raging onlookers only to see them quiet and part to open a pathway to the center. Flynn moved through slowly as he could feel

the relieved eyes watching him pass. There in the center stood Macie, her back to him with her long black hair trying to shield the slight shivering of her body. Realizing that her name must have been chosen, he stepped closer behind her, hearing the shuffling of feet close the circle behind him.

“It’s you, Flynn,” she said as she turned and looked at him with fighting eyes.

“Stop, no, you don’t have to do this,” Flynn pleaded while he reached for her hand.

“Come on, fight. Fight!” the crowd beckoned, making her reject his comfort.

“I have to, to survive,” she whispered in a quivering tone.

“Macie, think about the ending. Is that what you want?” he asked, hoping that it was enough for her to hold on to.

“Get on with it!” a woman yelled from the circle.

“I’m sorry,” Macie exhaled as a fiery tear crept down her cheek.

He couldn’t fight her, so Flynn retreated into himself as she pushed him to the cold floor and began punching him. He knew her frustration and want to live was what was fueling the power behind her fists, so he accepted the fate that she decided for him.

Flynn’s ending had come.

Let Me Tell You About Our Marvelous God

After Susan Stewart

about him, her and their decade-long blinks.

Do you see this gift?

We don't even have to do this quickly:

a crow has made its way to the savannah

waiting for tough skin to light up

into a bright red carcass.

Consider the elephant

who took a dozen bullets to the head.

Until one poacher realized one to the heart

could drop him breathless. Was the Marvelous

with the elephant then or the empty

stomachs of the poacher's household.

Don't worry, I was watching for you,

and I see him lying there tusk-less

humiliated still so large.

It seems worse to die

like this with a grand body.

Bullets are small

elephants are large.

Throw out the math books

and morals — your family is hungry

and ivory is valuable.

Ivory.

a chess board

ivory ivory ivory

white ivory white washed god or gods
up there are you removing dust from your eyelids
or making love?

Let's call the church a mirror,
mirrors reflect one's image.
When you come down,
royal you I address the gods
you'll be unrecognizable
wide-eyed and love emptied.

Undressing each other's bare backs
turned away from our circle.
We can't all agree on a sphere
mindless argument
flat flat flat,

octagon
consider eight ways of looking
at a thing:

A thing being time eating mischief.

A raven waits in the savannah
misplaced solar system
take me away to mars
spinning spinning spinning.

I couldn't even spot an elephant from here.

Alexa Ruhfass

Senior. Major: LBS, concentrations in psychology and
Christianity Studies

Inequality



When Dealing with Death

"Grief is in two parts. The first is loss. The second is the remaking of life."

-Anne Roiphe, Epilogue

During my life I have become quite familiar with death, with my first real encounter occurring when I was attending a funeral with my family. I was about five years old, and the individual who died was my older sister's best friend, Amber. Despite not being very close to Amber, her death was a very emotional and transformative event for me. Amber's death was very sudden; her family received absolutely no warning. All they knew at first was that she fell ill with an extremely rare sickness and that she had died in her sleep. Around the time of the funeral, I remember being confused on the exact rituals that were going on, words were being spoken and people were crying, and soon enough I found myself crying, despite not really understanding why. After the ceremonies were over, I recall walking to the casket with my father, as my sister could not bring herself to look at Amber's body. When my father bent over and kissed Amber's lifeless body on the forehead, I was both confused and disgusted. As a five-year-old boy, I did the obvious thing: I asked him why he would do such a gross thing. My father simply said, "If she were alive, would you hesitate to do the same? What if it was someone you cared for? Why should it be any different after their life has ended?"

In hindsight, my father's words make a lot of sense; however, at the time, I still did not really understand why you would kiss a dead person when they were no longer around to appreciate it. To me, the entire concept of someone being dead revolved around that person being gone forever. This encounter with death mostly just left me with questions. Why do some people die young? Why do good people die? What if I die? These questions are still mostly unanswered for me, however, I know I am not alone in my incomprehension.

While Amber's death had a large impact on me, it had an even larger effect on my sister, Emma, and my parents. Amber's death affected my parents for two reasons. They were worried about how Emma would

handle the loss of her best friend. They also had their eyes opened to the very real possibility that Emma and I could die just as suddenly as Amber did. However, my parents never let their fears interfere with the relationship they had with Emma and me. They were very conscious in their efforts to not become overly protective, as they were aware of the issues that overprotectiveness could cause.

My next experience with death occurred when I was about eleven years old. During this time period, I was beginning to obtain a larger understanding of how the world works, as well as being in a very formative environment: middle school. I remember being in class one day when I was called down to the front office. Usually, this is an exciting event. Getting called to the office most likely meant that my mom was picking me up to leave; however, this time I knew it was probably not something good. I was aware that my Uncle John was recently diagnosed with cancer, and I was old enough to understand how serious of a disease cancer can be. I expected the worst. When I arrived at the office, my suspicions were confirmed. I saw my parents and my sister waiting for me. They were there to pick me up so we could all go to the hospital in order to say goodbye to my uncle's body, as he had passed earlier last night. Being a simple and isolated man, my uncle desired no funeral services, this was our last chance to see his face before he was cremated. My uncle's death was very traumatic for me and my sister; however, it was much more difficult for my parents, particularly my father, as John was his twin brother. The most difficult thing about my uncle's death was seeing my father in such extreme emotional distress. This was very unusual for me because my father was a very reserved and stoic man, he did not show his emotions often.

To make the situation even worse, one of my father's other brothers, Kyle, was diagnosed with cancer a few weeks after the death of my Uncle John. Kyle's diagnosis and death came in rapid succession as the cancer was already far along, and the emotional stress of losing a brother and being diagnosed with the same disease that killed him may have been too much for my uncle Kyle to handle. He died when I was twelve, almost a year after my Uncle John. The death of my Uncle Kyle had a much larger impact on me because I was much closer to him than any of my other deceased family members. Every summer, I would travel with him to our family reunions, and we always had a great time. With his death, I was

aware that I would never be able to enjoy those moments with him again and that I would have to find another person to travel to reunions with—I knew it would never be the same. The death of two brothers had a huge impact on my father’s life and mental health. Shortly after this period, Hurricane Katrina struck Louisiana, and my father, being an electrician, decided to move there in order to fulfill the need for skilled workers to rebuild. I believe my father had ulterior motives in moving to Louisiana; I believe he was using it as a way to escape the struggles that his current life was giving him. I wish he would have understood that he was not alone in his suffering, and that he could have come to his family or friends for support.

My father’s relocation to Louisiana leads into my next and most traumatic experience with death. During my father’s stay in Louisiana, he began to grow more distant from his family and as a result, we began hearing from him less and less. Despite this, he never failed to provide for us by sending us a majority of the money he earned. Later, I learned from my mother that my father was suffering from severe depression and was considering taking his own life—he even reached the point of purchasing a firearm. Thankfully, he overcame that moment of pain and unexpectedly returned from Louisiana with the news that he was diagnosed with cancer and was not sure how long he would live. He knew that our time together would be limited, and I believe he wanted to make up for lost time.

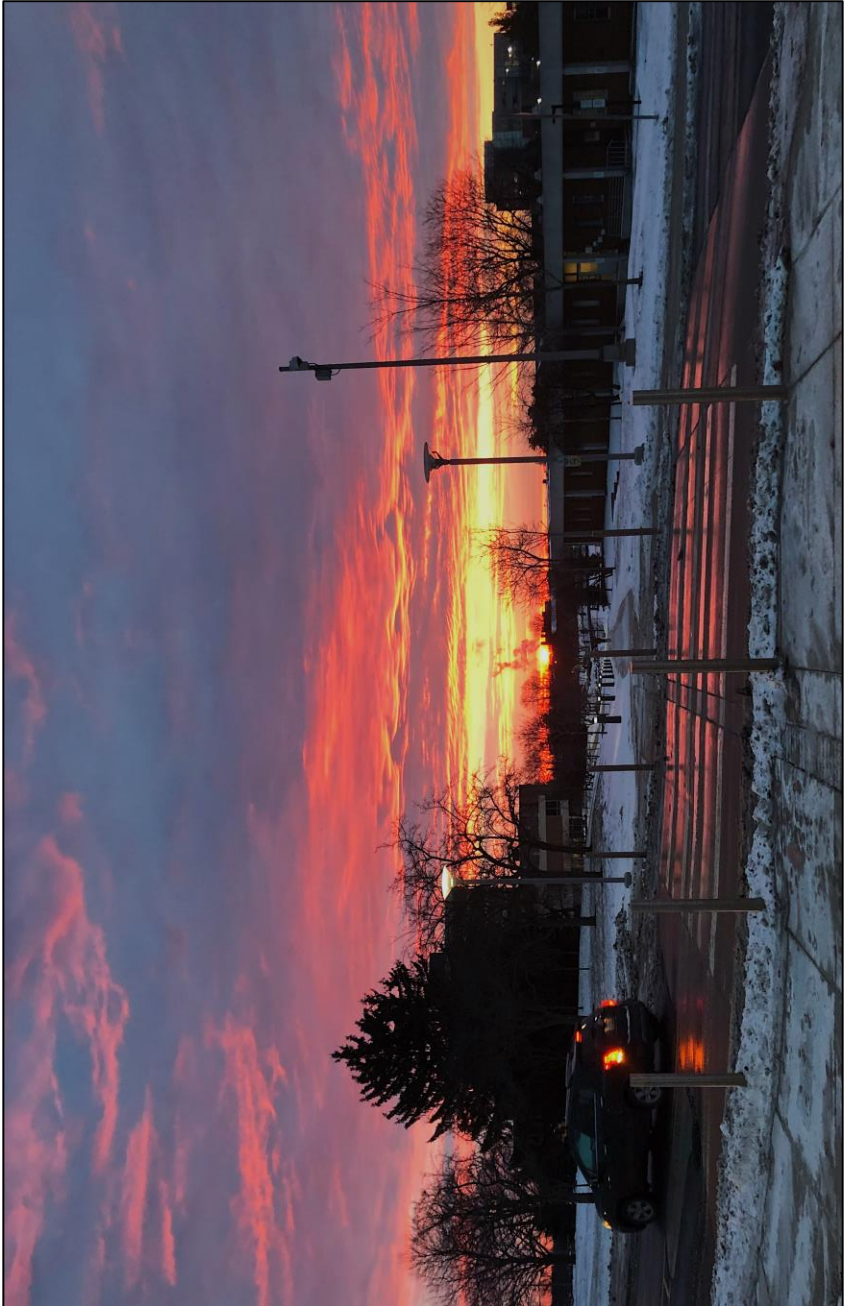
The following months of my father’s life were very difficult for him and everyone close to him. However, due to the most favorable circumstances we could expect, we were able to savor our last few months with him, a privilege Amber’s family was robbed of. My family and I spent the whole summer taking care of my father, but being forced to experience his suffering with him was very difficult for us. Seeing the man you always looked up to as a figure of strength wither away is very traumatizing and made me overly aware of my own mortality and the brevity of life itself. Those experiences undoubtedly impacted the way I have lived my life. I was fourteen years old when my father died, and despite how hard it is to lose someone so dear to my heart, it was quite the relief. Unlike my father, I learned that in order to properly deal with one’s own inner turmoil, they must look to those close to them for support. Without a strong support system, even the most resilient of individuals are at disadvantage.

My family and I had the chance to say goodbye to my father, we were lucky. I am thankful we were able to be there for him in his last moments, and in death, his suffering was over. My mother and I were able to take comfort in that. My sister, however, handled his death much differently than we did. She chose a similar path to the one that my father previously took when life became too difficult for him to bear. Shortly after his death, she fled to Louisiana to start anew. She eventually returned home, but our relationship has never been the same, and that, perhaps, is the most upsetting thing left over from the events surrounding the death of my father. Thankfully, I have not experienced any more major deaths after the loss of my father, but when I do have the misfortune to have someone close to me die again, I am sure I will have the tools to handle it properly, and, hopefully, I will be able to help others do the same.

To anyone reading this, I wish to tell you what I would tell my father if he was still alive. I want you to know that you are not alone and that things will get better. You need to understand that with time, wounds began to heal. This process will be long and trying, however, with the help of others, anyone can begin taking preventative measures to ensure a full recovery. Your first response to extreme loss may be anything but healthy, but with a conscious effort, things can change.

I still have many things that I can improve upon, but overall, I do believe that thanks to my personal experiences, as well as the guidance of my loved ones, I have been able to develop a healthy lifestyle and healthy responses to traumatic events that may have otherwise caused stress and a reversion to old habits. I hope that my story will come as a comfort to anyone dealing with death, and that you all learn to treat emotional trauma as seriously as physical trauma, as I am learning to do.

The Calm Before the Storm



Marisa Papadelis

Sophomore. Major: Health Sciences, concentration in Nutrition

Dear Anxiety,

You sit in my chest when I rest and when I am at my best.

And when I am at my worst you burst and are no help in calming me
down.

You visit my mind when I think I am content and you erase all my
thoughts until they are written as you.

Breathing, yet not.

Knots form in my stomach till the world is completely forgot.

I tumble and rumble in this brain washing machine and drown in the
soapy spit my mouth makes.

You catch my breath in a dark alley and hold it hostage behind bars.

Retreating and fleeting fingers etch frozen fire in my bones.

I pale and shrink and convulse and think.

Thinking too much until my mind is a receipt that does not end.

My nails trace lines in my scalp, searching for signs of disrepair.

You laced gasoline in my lungs so that when I'd combust I'd erupt into
staggered gasps and frenzied heart beats.

I wait for you to set like the sun so my mind can go black as night.

Game over.

Finally sober.

I stretch up from the ground and check myself over.

Some damage is done, some band-aids might fix.

Breaking but not broken, I'm sure you're happy to hear.

Until next time.

Sincerely,

Your Victim

Unseen

I see the moon parading after the midnight hour

Seen before the midnight hour, now unseen.

I see the daylight and dawning of tomorrow

Beginning to break out today, now unseen

I see people submerged in their thoughts and daydreaming

Harpings, happenings, memories, now fade and unseen

Tomorrow's reward, prize, pathology, privileges, blessings

Unseen, unknown uncharted

Life's pathway moving, inertia, gravity

Unseen yet unfolding.

Junior: Major: Writing and Rhetoric. Minor: Creative Writing

Breaking Free

It is dark where I am, with a sliver of light
Shining from a glowing circle, as if hanging in the sky.
I am startled as my walls begins to shake,
Crumble around me, fall away in flakes.

My flippers know just what to do,
Tiny shovels creating scoops
I heave the clammy sand aside, batten down the hatches,
encouraged by the waves' rescue tide.

She's big and blue and calling to me
With a whisper of salt and I'm convinced.
When suddenly up above, come shrieking cries
From hungry eyes, diving down they begin.

There are hundreds of me, I see them now,
My brothers and sisters seeking the safety of the sea.
I pick my path there's no going back,
The chattering of ring-tailed bandits grows louder, faster than I can
flee.

Almost to her, foaming bubbles appear within my reach.
The tide line grows higher washing over me
I become a survivor
In the safety of her arms, my home, my love,
The sea.

Julia

Waking, slow...warm.

Easing through sunbeams and sugar,
the taste of comfort and the smell of familiarity in the air.

We build and orbit.

The laundry hangs on the line outside.
You wore blue. I thought it would rain.

You wanted to dance.

Soft sways and tender turns—twin flames kindling the other.
Sleep came in the sound of your breath and the scent of your neck.

I dreamed of lavender and sunflowers.

Freshman. Major: Undecided

Flood the Streets

The rain falls,
A car door slams,
A bell rings,
Dishes are hung on a rack,
An old man goes to sleep and does not wake up.
Somewhere, a baby is born,
Several babies, bursting into the world like new ambition.
Other people hit the pavement, take their exit.

Inside, you sip your juice quietly,
Watching the drops roll down.
Your mother asks if you'd like breakfast.
You nod, tuck your hair behind your ears, and turn away from the window.

In your mind, you follow the drops
follow their paths down the streets and through the gutters
follow them through the streams and dash across the beaches all the way
out to the ocean
You float from the surface of the water back up into the sky,
Hanging from the clouds like thread from string,
You await your re-entrance, free falling back to earth.

Swallow the Moon

