



# *Swallow the Moon*

*Volume 11*

*2020*

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



**Swallow the Moon**

**Volume 11**

**June 2020**

# **JOURNAL EDITOR**

Katie Valley

# **ASSISTANT EDITORS**

Chanel Hermiz

Caitlyn Ulery

Liz Kovac

Shelby Jeffrey

Nick Zablocki

# **LANGUAGE EDITOR**

Mason Cothran

# **ADVISOR**

Ashley Cerku

# **COVER ARTWORK**

Rafi Gappy

**Special thanks to the  
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# Swallow the Moon

## Volume 11

### June 2020



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Student Writers Group at Oakland University  
Rochester, Michigan

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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 semester was an unprecedented one – the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many things, including the release of this journal. However, through the tireless efforts of the executive board, we are able to finally present the eleventh edition of *Swallow the Moon*. This issue is a compilation of pieces written or produced by Oakland University students and alumni, including works of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, photography, and artwork. This journal is an opportunity to showcase the talent of our students and alumni, especially in these unprecedented times.

You may be reading pieces in this journal in a different way than you have in the past – while on the couch with loved ones or while taking a break from online meetings at the kitchen table. Either way, let this issue be one to inspire more creativity and imagination. Write more. Create more. Express more.

I'd like to thank you for your continued support of the Student Writers Group at OU and *Swallow the Moon*. Stay safe and stay healthy.

Sincerely,

Ashley Cerku

## Present State of Our World

Twist and turn

The world continues to burn

Tears can't quench its thirst

Little souls ready to burst

Smoke is choking

Yet we don't stop our joking

Bullets fly

The crowd begins their war cry

We just smile behind our screens

We don't destroy the true fiends

How did we get here?

How do we continue to live with fear?

Without a flinch

A tweet can be sent in a pinch

Small voices rise with pleas

To save the earth and her seas

But powerful fists cover many ears

They act ignorant despite their aged years

They stomp their feet

Eyes closed and pockets filled on Wall Street

Skin and bones

Parents can't pay off their loans

Students with breaking backs

Losing life's climax

Trash piles up everywhere

Future generations weep with despair  
There goes our chance  
Our ability to live in a safe circumstance  
Women cry and point  
But the courts will always disappoint  
No justice for the people  
Hands outstretched in a steeple  
Different shades of skin  
With the same kind of heart beating within  
It doesn't stop the blows  
Brothers and sisters thrown down to decompose  
Knife in your back, gun in your face  
We're all stuck in this modern rat race  
Blood returns to dirt  
Everything is here for us to pervert  
Twisted and destroyed  
Masks can shine in a polaroid  
Hearts and likes fill our time  
Red light is on-who cares about the crime?  
Bowling to the world's desires  
Until our existence expires  
We present ourselves on the sacrificial pyre  
We are the worst, best liars

## The Phoenix

I sizzle, burn, and melt away  
like bitter candle wax. My lungs  
feel ashen, acrid smell like that

one time I set my hair on fire  
trying to light my first hand-rolled  
cigarette on a windy night.

My skin bubbles. Saltwater tears  
are boiling on my cheeks. My hands  
are crisp, they crunch like fallen leaves

that lined the pebbly path we took  
to the meadow where we once hid  
cheap pink wine and plastic bottles

of whiskey. I pray as vengeful,  
angry flames sear through me, *dear God,*  
*let me die.* Vicious fire consumes

me, all I see is black as my  
eyelids fuse together, my eyes  
are scorched within my skull. *Crumble,*

*continued on the next page*

and to ashes I return. Soft  
warmth envelops me, a blanket  
of all that I have been. The night

is gentle, there is no room for  
sounds or sights, the darkness whispers,  
compels, commands, a final sigh--

Heartbeat,

just one at first--so faint. Come, put  
your ear to the ground and listen!  
Once more, a thumping that disturbs.

## The Altar

He's standing up at the altar looking out at his loved ones seated before him. Her family on one side, his on another, and scattered yellow tulips freckling the aisle between them. His hands are sweaty, so he is constantly shifting between wiping them against his black dress slacks and fiddling with them out of nervousness.

This is it. Today is the day.

The familiar wedding processional begins to dance in his ears, and his family and friends all stand in unison, a slew of cheerful and weeping faces beaming at the back door. The aisle is empty for a moment until his soon-to-be father-in-law's freshly pressed tuxedo appears in the doorway. Alone.

His father-in-law doesn't even have to put it into words for the groom to understand what has happened – his confused expression, hunched shoulders, and regretful eyes say it all. She is gone.

The groom's heart races as he digs in his mind for a reason to justify her behavior. Sweat beads up at his hairline. As he feels the curious, remorseful stares from hundreds of eyes on him, he realizes he needs to get some air. With unstable legs, the groom drags himself toward a side door into a small, private room. Once alone, he collapses to his knees and knots his fists into his hair as he hangs his head in anguish. His breathing is chaotic as he tries to calm himself down, but all he can do is let out a frustrated groan. Tears gather in his eyes as he lies there silently, fighting for the right words to say. He can't; he is speechless.

Last night, they each stayed with their parents, not wanting to break the superstitious rule about seeing each other the night before the wedding. However, she had called him around nine o'clock on the verge of tears. Her voice quivered like a whimpering puppy, and she was

fumbling over her words as she tried her best to explain her emotions.

Change often had that effect on her, but he had already known this. After dating her for seven years and being a good friend of hers for fifteen, he has been there for her through most of the big changes she has been faced with. So, he tried using past experiences to calm her down, and he thought he had succeeded.

Apparently, he was mistaken.

\*\*\*\*\*

She wakes up slowly and in a daze. Her head is pounding and seems heavier than usual; she can't even make herself sit up – though she soon realizes her head isn't her only limitation.

She catches a glimpse of her once white wedding dress. She remembers the day she bought it as if it was yesterday. Her mom cried when she declared it “the one,” mumbling something about how “her baby is growing up so fast.” Once she brought the final, altered gown home, she tried it on every day for three weeks, dancing around the house with excitement and nervousness.

Her dress, once elegant with its simplicity and modest lace design, was a radiant marble color just this morning. Now, however, it was stamped with dirt stains and speckled with drops of crimson red.

The bride struggles to sit up, only to be left stationary and frustrated. She realizes she is being constricted with cuffs around her ankles, abdomen, and elbows. Her wrists are bound to the stiff cot lying beneath her by a sharp, thin wire and she can feel the residue of dried blood at her fingertips.

She forces herself onto her elbows, sitting up slowly in an attempt to gauge her surroundings. The room is dull and unfamiliar, lined with gray cinder blocks for walls. The ceiling is made of cheap, long tiles, and the only lighting is provided by a lone, fading yellow bulb hanging from a long black cord in the far corner of the room. The ground was dark, and



though she couldn't tell from her spot on the bed, she almost guessed it to be made of soil.

She collapses onto her back as her eyes brim with tears. How did she get in this situation? She tries to think back to the events that took place this morning, but the last thing she can remember is last night. She fell asleep next to her maid of honor in her childhood bedroom, binge watching *Friends* while eating a Little Caesars hot-n-ready deep dish, a pint of cookie dough Ben & Jerry's, and drinking cinnamon tea in their pajamas – just like they would after Friday night football games every weekend.

Clearly, though, much has happened since then.

She is dressed in her wedding dress, though shoeless, and spirals of auburn hair are glued to her temples – thanks to her sweat. And although she can feel the makeup caked onto her face, she would be surprised if it wasn't smeared down her cheeks.

She is clearly ready for her wedding day, so whoever did this to her must have acted while she was alone in her bridal suite this morning. But who would do such a thing?

The bride can't contain herself any longer; she lets loose and makes no attempt to stop the mascara-tinted tears from painting her cheeks. When a single tear lands on her lip, the slight saltiness of it combines with the open flesh on the swollen, cut-up lip she didn't even realize she had. The stinging on her lip makes her shake with frustration at her lack of memory, and she alternates between wheezes and sniffles in a small attempt to calm down.

The only thing stopping her from having a panic attack is thinking of her fiancé.

She sits up on her elbows and forces herself to think of all the good memories they shared growing up. He had been there for her through everything. He and Tommy both. The three of them were an

inseparable trio of best friends for most of their school years – they even had matching blue rope friendship bracelets. Even now, they can't go a week without seeing each other. Whether it be dropping coffee off for each other on their way to work or stopping by with Chinese takeout after a rough day, they were always finding a way to hang out.

As the duo began dating, Tommy still stuck around. He is like a brother to her, and she has always relied on him whether it be for a shoulder to cry on, a reason to laugh, or someone to rant to. He has always been her constant, and likewise with her fiancé.

After she talked to her man last night, she had called Tommy to ask for advice. She had told him how much she loved her fiancé, but also how worried she was for this new chapter of their lives together to begin. Everything would change and be different – they would be moving into their first home together next week and would have to refer to each other as their spouse. The word “husband” alone makes a shiver of nerves and excitement run down her spine.

The sudden realization that her fiancé is waiting alone at the altar causes her to slam against her cot in remorse.

He probably thinks she left him at the altar because she was second guessing herself, and the thought alone makes her heart tug deep inside of her because that can't be farther from the truth. He must be so scared and upset.

Her only remaining sliver of hope is that Tommy will comfort him. He knows she would never run off on him like this; he is the love of her life, and surely Tommy would remind her fiancé of this.

She hears footsteps from the hallway, and a flood of panic rushes over her. Followed by a stream of bright light, the wooden door in the corner opens and reveals a male figure. As he walks toward her, she squints in a fetal attempt to recognize his face, but the only thing she makes out is the blue rope dangling from his wrist before a sheet of black smothers her vision.

\*\*\*\*\*

He finally forces himself to get off his knees and address the confusion that has broken out in the church. He takes a few deep breaths to collect himself and walks back out into the chaos that consumes his family and friends.

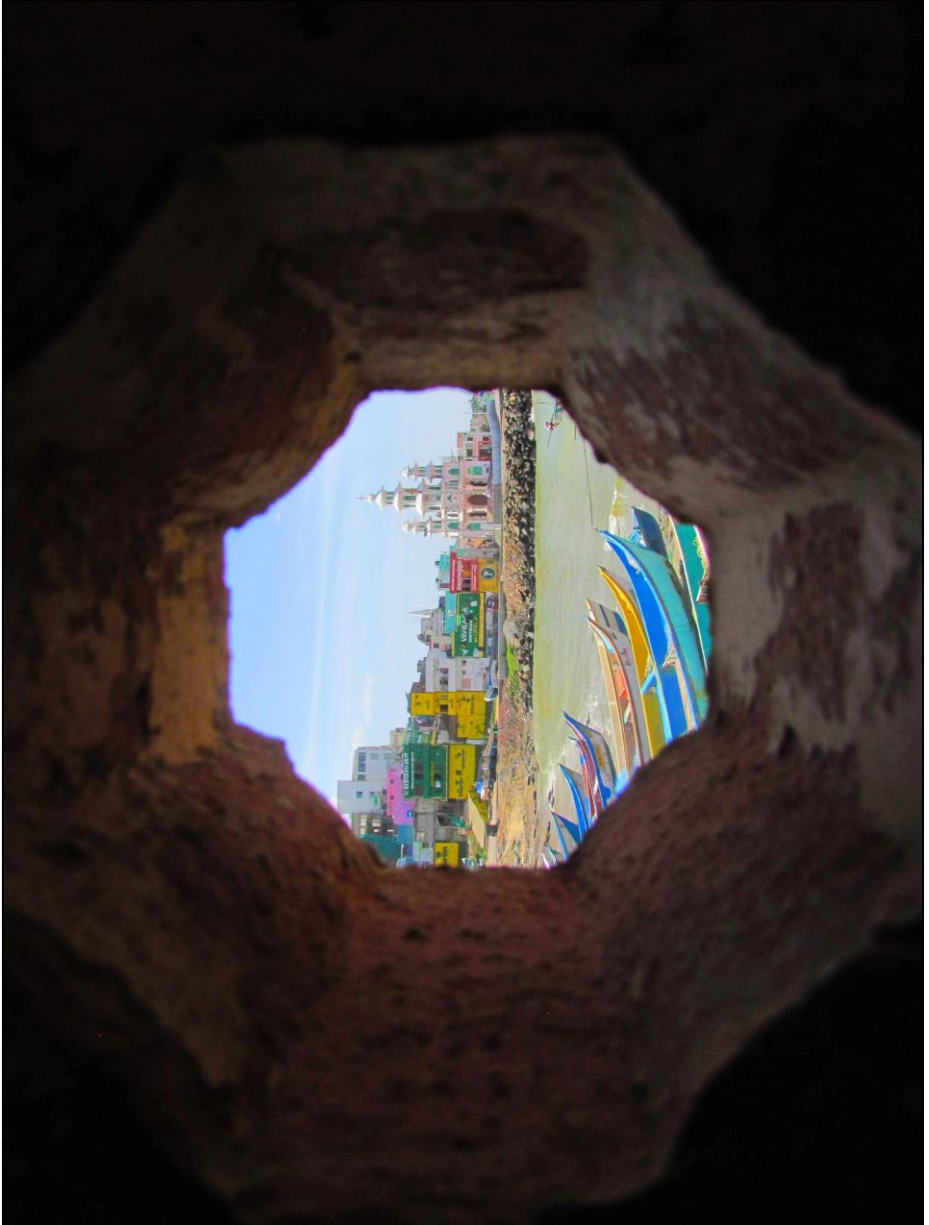
When they first notice him, all the murmurs go extinct. There is a dead silence looming over everyone as they watch him curiously, wondering how he is going to handle the situation.

“Thank you all for coming out this afternoon,” he says after clearing his raspy throat. “I guess you can all go home now.”

He steps down from the altar, offers a tight smile to the priest, and proceeds down the aisle overtop the yellow tulips that she loves so much. His mother and ex-future-mother-in-law begin to usher people into the annex, and the ex-groom begins to search around for his best friend. He scans over the faces of his friends and family, but he can't spot Tommy anywhere.

So, with his head held high, he grabs his blue friendship bracelet back from elementary school from his pocket, wraps it around his wrist for security and reassurance, and walks out of the church doors and into his new life without looking back.

## Kanyakumari



## **Crescendo, Decrescendo**

Hey!  
You know  
What I'd love?  
I'd love to keep a  
Little shop. I'd make  
Things and arrange them  
Perfectly on the shelves and  
Watch the smiling faces come  
And go, and make their day with  
The satisfaction of a simple transaction  
That starts with me receiving payment and  
Ends with my ornament in a pair of gleeful hands.  
The trouble is: I know that every night, at  
Closing time, I'd spend hours obsessing  
Over the numbers while taking stock  
And several more difficult hours  
Sweeping the floor and wiping  
The counter and padlocking  
The door and wondering  
Why the register won't  
Work and what to do  
About everything  
That's going  
Awry.

Sophomore. Major: Communication. Minor: Creative Writing

## Exploration

I shouldn't have to be soft to be loved.

I am a mountain,

a vast land of secrets and caves.

Exploring me is dangerous — a risk — perhaps even fatal.

But it's worth it.

You will be met with more sharp edges and fragments than you can  
count,

but each scar will come with a story and a kiss.

If you venture deep enough, far enough, you will be met with cold,

a kind of cold that you didn't even know existed,

and while your lips are turning blue, and your skin is shivering,

I'll be busy lighting a match,

trying to set fire to myself, just so you can feel the warmth.

Love with me is not soft,

never still.

Love with me is every story I've ever swallowed and every pain I've ever  
had to endure.

Love with me is scarring and healing all at once.

Love with me is not soft,

It's an adventure.

*-Exploration*

Junior. Major: Musical Theatre. Minor: Cinema

## **Just Like Breathing**

Out of order days,  
Clearer minds,  
Be still – wait.  
The answers appear in silence.

Soul travels through,  
sparking inside  
Life to the fingers!  
Life to the child!

Laughter saves us,  
Laughter.  
when the walls come crashing down.  
Desolate individual  
Ridicule she allows.

Army waits behind  
To extend the world's hand  
Hitting her shores  
Barefoot, rocky land.

Who she thought she loved  
And the time they won't get back.  
Back to the sand,  
Eyes leveling with the sun,  
Be still, young blood.

*continued on the next page*

The world is much bigger  
than the storms in her dreams  
It will all settle slowly  
With it comes inner peace.

Breathe in, and once out,  
To the lotus flower safe  
Rest your eyes with the moonlight,  
It will be brighter when you wake.



**Hidden Plant Obscura**



## To Make You Feel My Love

Weddings – the one place besides funerals that bring so many different people together. Today, Sophie and Miles finally took the plunge – they would be married later this afternoon in the company of the warm August sun and their guests.

§

Johnny Jones grew up just down the street from Sophie Langloi. All through grade school they would sit together at lunch and walk home together. But Johnny was a quiet boy who became one of Sophie’s many followers in high school. Although she was not as smart as most, she was popular, as any blonde cheerleader captain would be. But Johnny’s eye still wouldn’t wander, and he held onto the memories of her talking all the way home after school as they hopped over the cracks in the sidewalk. “We don’t want to break our mothers’ backs, now do we?” she would say.

He was surprised to get the invitation in the mail – not because she would eventually leave him behind, but because he assumed she had completely forgotten about him. He had come alone to the wedding and pondered what could have been as they exchanged their vows. At the reception, he sat silently at his table and watched as Sophie smiled when Miles placed her hand in his for their first dance. Recognizable piano chords slowly crescendoed out of the DJ’s speakers and a quiet hush came over those in the hall as the couple moved back and forth, encased in spotlights. Johnny found himself silently mouthing one line – “No, there’s nothing that I wouldn’t do, to make you feel my love.”

§

*continued on the next page*

He was running a tad behind, but the speakers and mixing board were already loaded in the van. He ran back upstairs to the apartment to grab his suit coat and laptop. His roommate was on the couch watching tv and asked him if he had another gig. “Yep, DJ Douulton out,” he answered as he shuffled out the door, struggling with the sleeve of his jacket.

Douulton was a self-employed DJ trying to book any gig he could to make a name for himself, but weddings, weddings were his bread and butter. He drove through the elaborate entrance to the Country Club with his old gray van, framed in rust patches, about an hour before the ceremony. After double checking everything with the stuck-up event planner, he set up in the reception hall. Douulton was always pumped to get the guests up and dancing but dreaded announcing the couple’s married name as they entered the room. Sometimes, no matter how many times he asked for clarification on pronunciation, he somehow would be just off. Luckily, this wedding announcement would not be as difficult – Mr. and Mrs. Logan – sure proof. After the room settled a little, the groom gave the cue to play their song for their first dance as husband and wife. Douulton prepared the volume and began to play probably the most requested first dance song, although every couple thought otherwise. Douulton noticed how most couples used it as a promise to one another, lyric after lyric. But he always wondered if those promises were ever kept.

## §

Another speck of marinara sauce soon found its way to the cuff of her pressed white sleeve. The manager had strict rules about proper uniform cleanliness, so Alexandra hoped she could cover it with her hand as she carried out the full tray of entrées. She had been working at the Country Club, doing odd jobs and waitressing ever since she graduated high school. Although it was not her career of choice, she knew she had to start somewhere if she wanted to grow her event empire

one day. She always enjoyed the creative aspects behind an event – the theme, the execution, the reveal to clients – she wanted to be the go-to gal for everyone’s event needs. But first, she had to get these plates out before they got cold.

Most of their guests, she could tell, were the “afterthoughts” – the ones that got the second round of invitations after the “primaries” went out. There were the distant cousins, the older aunts and uncles of the couple’s parents, and mostly current office acquaintances – those not quite friends, but people you should invite. But there was one younger man, about her age, that she couldn’t pinpoint. He was handsome with his slightly curly brown hair and navy blue suit. Every time she came around to offer drink fill-ups, he was polite but seemed distant. Alexandra noticed those outsider tendencies since she classified herself as one, too. She was sympathetic toward him, especially when she saw that he was devotionally eyeing the bride the entire night. She tried to distract him from his seemingly ignored stares by striking up minute conversations, but then the song for their first dance played. Alexandra walked away from his table but turned before going through the swinging kitchen door and whispered to him, “You ain’t seen nothing like me yet.”

## §

Weddings – the one place besides funerals that bring so many different people together.

Alum. B.A. English

## Extinction Proclamation Chronicles I

I

This body earth feeding itself the beast  
gagging on goodness once a cannibal heart  
enlarged eats its own sand choked arteries  
a barren red desert, the tide

the heart

flows

constricts.

Brined blood splashed along salt-laced seas  
curled up to a clogged coast granted by political pollution  
filtered far inshore and deep.

That—she says...

*Is a world big in burden*

Shoulders sagged, scarred one had to concur  
a nod seemed to do—don't shake your head knowing  
a smile fading faster with the news, which is no news.  
So grab what's yours and I'll grab mine—meet you

down

further at the end of the line.

We'll suck the marrow deep from each and every rib  
each and every beast cannibalizing the brain bone

nibbling, numbing it

to tomorrow.

## **Texts from Hamza in Pakistan**

Been in Pakistan so I didn't get your text  
until I threw in my American sim.  
The land surveyor is coming tomorrow.  
There was a shooting in the village today.  
What were they fighting over?  
Land dispute, literally the size  
Of a living room. Don't worry, I'm safe.  
This land has been in my family  
For eight generations.

Well what if they shoot you for it?  
We are settling it through the proper  
Channels. But shit can get bad  
Quick, you never know. Here  
The mentality is different. Even if  
It's one foot of land its about  
Pride for these people. I feel  
Bad for the guy, someone actually  
Sold him the land, which was never  
Theirs to sell.

You're not alone, right? I'm going  
To write a poem about this. Alone  
In what sense? We love poetry here.  
You can be my editor. When you meet  
This guy you won't be alone? The man  
Who originally owned this land, eight  
Generations ago, was a famous poet.  
You're joking. No, we're going to have  
A full force when we meet him, government  
Officials are coming too. His sons  
Are the ones we're worried about. My cousins  
Say they're talking shit, are bad hombres.  
It's almost comical if it wasn't so serious.

## Celebration Over Cityfront Plaza





Senior. Major: Creative Writing-Poetry,  
Concentration in Writing and Rhetoric

## The Award of Rapport

Sometimes it's a real drag routinely visiting the dregs of your suburban delivery zone. You dread drawing the shortest straw and having to go to Frank, the smelly Boomer who tips like shit. He's all the way out in the Bayview Apartments. That's a guaranteed 45-minute roundtrip no matter the weather or the traffic. And that's whether or not you're familiar with their labyrinthine address layout. If you're not, you might get lost and frustrated, and be gone for over an hour. It happens. Once you find his building *of course* his buzzer is still down, so you have to call him to let you into his building. And *of course* he doesn't answer his phone till the fifth call, when he has the nerve to ask, "Who is it?" — "Let's think, who is the most likely person it could be, Frank? You imbecile..." — Of course only say that to yourself, instead answering to Frank with, "Uhh, your pizza." Though — at this point in the game — you can't keep *all* the sarcasm out of your tone. All of that for your only tip to be Frank telling you to keep the 67¢ that's left over from a twenty. (Thanks, guy.) As if you really have coins on hand to give him that inconsequential amount of change back.

Other times, you beam with excitement taking a small round pizza with ham, bacon, and purple onions to Kyle, who you're quite sure is a cool English teacher at one of the local high schools. He just has that air about him. You know *exactly* what I mean. He's right down the street, you could be back to the store in 12 minutes. *And* it's an automatic \$5 tip. He always promptly answers his door, and even has a pen ready to sign his credit card slips with. So he doesn't need to almost "accidentally" steal yours. He typically has on a Grateful Dead T-shirt and speaks in a very "*wow, radical bro*" manner, so you can't help but wonder if he might be baked. There's no trademark smell though, so you don't ask. How

could you appropriately do so anyway? He also has an adorable Boston terrier puppy named Magnolia. So, that's *obviously* a plus. What I'm saying is this: sometimes it sucks visiting the same dipshits every week, but sometimes building rapport with repeated customers has its perks.

Enter one particular customer. I don't remember his name, but for our purposes, let's call him Dale. Dale ordered quite frequently in the summer of 2016, my second summer working at Green Lantern Pizza Lounge. He'd always order a Lantern Reuben and a 12-piece helping of boneless chicken wings tossed in Honey BBQ sauce, ranch to dip. A Lantern Reuben is just your standard Reuben sandwich; you know, corned beef, Swiss cheese, coleslaw, Thousand Island dressing. All on your choice of a Kaiser roll, onion Kaiser roll, rye, or marble rye. Dale liked marble rye. Like clockwork, that was his order, once, sometimes twice a week. The only difference was sometimes he wanted a 20 oz. bottle of Dr. Pepper. Dale always tipped well. We all liked delivering to him for that reason. But—more importantly—Dale's house always reeked of marijuana. Like, it was fucking PO-TENT. This was important because it offered the potential fulfillment of every delivery driver's dream: a customer getting you high.

Obviously, we all had our own personal methods and machinations on how to get high on the job. I mean, it wasn't particularly hard. After all, we spent a large amount of time alone in our cars. We felt *untouchable* with our signs on top of our cars, which was obviously oxymoronic of us, cause really, they just called more attention to our cars. But cops always seemed to let us speed, so we just assumed a bowl of weed was also no biggie. Of course, we still had to pick our spots for hitting a bowl in the middle of the daytime, it wasn't a *complete* free-for-all, but it often felt like it. Picking our spots was easy though, because the back parking lot behind our strip mall was a perfectly suited spot for incognito smoke sessions. Our strip mall was L-shaped. This enclosed

half of the back parking lot in. Behind us was a 10-foot concrete wall separating some condos from our antics. The only exposed side was mostly protected by a looming car wash building, the only risk being the customers waiting in line on a busy day. We were too young and invincible to care much about them though; they were one parking lot over. What could they ever do? Besides, we were the local enigmas and castoffs, housed at the mom-&-pop pizza shop. I think we thought we were just playing our roles and that the divide between parking lots was an understood fourth wall, inherent to any live performance.<sup>1</sup>

The only other people who came out into that back parking lot were the employees of the Lebanese restaurant next door. But we gave them enough of the fucked up orders from our store to buy immunity from them. (And they gave us enough of their fucked up orders to keep it all symbiotic.) On top of the perfectly crafted architecture for our whole bit, it was all made even easier by the fact that our manager at the time was also a weed dealer with no less than an ounce in an unlocked lockbox under his passenger seat at any given time. He'd often entice good work out of us with crisp bong rips in his beat-to-shit white Mazda. One by one — TimTom, Franco, my best friend Evan, myself — a procession of drivers bumbling out to that beat-to-shit Mazda. Each with a bit too much forced nonchalance in our gait. What (I guess) I'm telling you is we were always high, and it was easy to come by. But a customer getting you high, now that was something different. That was the dream.

## \*\*\*\*\**Intermission*\*\*\*\*\*

<sup>1</sup> Realistically, though, it's almost certainly just I who has ever meditated on it like that.

(\*ahem\*) So let's get back to Dale. As I said, I delivered to Dale quite often that summer. Dale looked to be a contractor. A different part of his house was disassembled every time I delivered. One week it was new hardwood floors. The next week the banister on the staircase had been replaced. But—despite the rotating stage settings behind him—every time Dale and I met, we went through same bit. He'd answer his door and the distinct smell of weed would waft out of his house. We'd go through the motions of the delivery—him giving me the money, me giving him his food—all with that smell lingering in the air between us. It was *obvious* to both of us that it stank like weed; we'd always share this knowing look, Dale and I. And I think he always knew what I was thinking—he had this twinkle in his eye—but how was I to ask? That didn't seem very polite. I mean, it was still illegal at the time, so how would I properly broach the subject? How would I force the issue? There's societal constructs and unspoken social contracts in place; I'm an employee and he's a customer. How do I cross this great threshold?

Anyone reading this now must think how silly it all sounds, I had been overthinking the whole damn thing. Probably because I was already high in the first place. The prospect of Dale getting me high was just ancillary. And for bragging rights to wield over the other delivery drivers: Evan, Franco, and TimTom specifically. We were all peacocking to be the first driver to fully ingratiate ourselves with Dale. He was the talk of the store. We all made half-baked attempts, but it always played out the same. None of us knew how to properly play it. How to steer such a brief interaction with him towards the proverbial, but obvious, elephant on the doorstep.

Like any great hero's journey, you don't get to decide when the call to action arrives. And once it arrives, you have to first recognize it, and then act on it. It called on me one day in late July. I don't remember what day it was, let's say it was a Wednesday, early evening. On this particular occasion, I had a premonition that this was going to be the day.

Well, the early evening, as it were. As soon as I clocked out the *deliverino*—what we in the business call a delivery—I knew with damn near certainty that this would be the time Dale got me high. I disregarded the map as it popped up showing me the best route. This was Dale’s house. We all knew how to get to Dale’s house. The 8-minute drive to Dale’s that evening had a lucidness to it. Something just felt like it would be different. As I pulled up, the familiar dankness of weed greeted me. I stepped out of my Dodge Stratus. This guy really must’ve been growing weed in his house, because the smell overwhelmed you from the driveway. We ran through the usual script as he gave me the money and I gave him his Lantern Reuben and his Honey BBQ boneless wings, no Dr. Pepper this time. Just when I thought I had hyped myself up too much on a pipe dream and prepared for disappointment, he said it. *Hey, would you, uhhhh, like a leftover roach?* For you uninitiated folks, “roach” is standard weed colloquial for the last little bit of a joint or a blunt. I said sure, a little disappointed that that’s all I was getting offered, and hopeful it was at least a roach from a joint, as I hate blunts. Still, I was gracious; it would fulfill the dream, if only on a technicality. He came back to the doorway with about half a joint as thick as my ring finger. So, not your typical roach. He had been very liberal in his use of the term. I was elated by the size of it. I thanked him for his kindness and sparked it up as I pulled out of his driveway. It was twilight, and that was all the cover I needed to breathe in my success.

When I stepped back into the store with an incriminatingly vacant grin on my face, I made a beeline for the bathroom. I intended to spray myself with some of the community cologne available in the bathroom cabinet. I was sure I reeked. This was out of respect for the customers, and for our owner Todd, should he happen to stop by. I also wanted to check out my eyes in the mirror to see if they were an acceptable level of bloodshot or not. But before I could make it, the herbal musk I must’ve exuded caught my manager’s attention. He asked what I

looked so pleased with myself about. I told him how Dale had given me half a joint. And like any good pizza store manager, he congratulated me on my accomplishment, before telling me that my eyes were *not* an acceptable level of bloodshot. (Not at all.) So, I used the community eye drops, also available in the bathroom cabinet, as I shared a celebratory grin with my reflection. We had done it. When Dale inevitably ordered the same damn thing 4 days later, I passed the torch to Evan, and let him have a chance at glory.

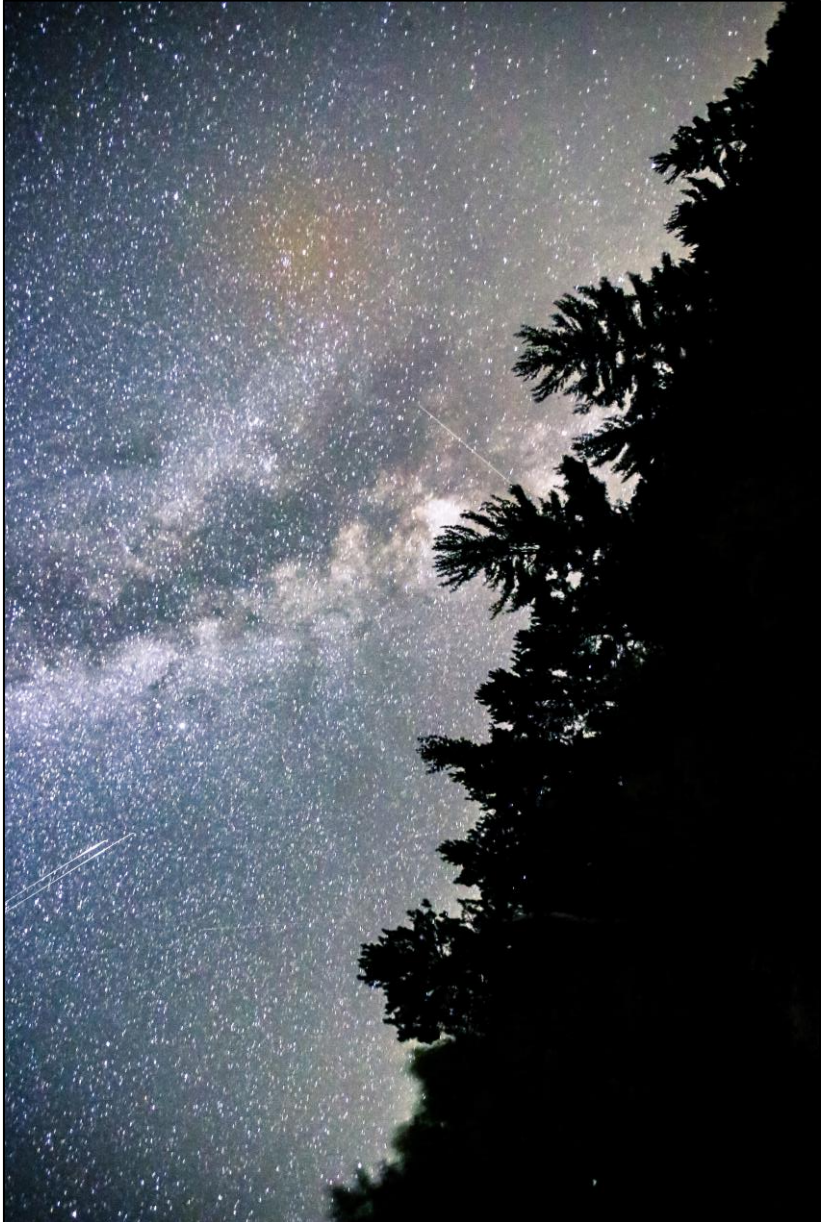
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**Partners in Crime Since '96**

My "little" sister  
Is really the older one  
She is My Person

## U.P. Night

From photograph series *The Beauty of the Upper Peninsula*





## **The Last to Leave AuSable, Michigan**

Martha drove home from the hospital with headlights beaming on the spring frost. Speckles of light passed along the budding leaves of the forest floor. Ten years ago, the road would have been full of traffic. Back then, the brake lights would blaze in the nearly complete darkness of the long stretch. Maybe for the first time, Martha realized how empty the road was. She drove past the shuttered cafes and empty grocery store. The next town over long had the better place for groceries. And when AuSable closed, Martha realized she hadn't even noticed.

The side streets were named after the US states. There was New York Street. Rhode Island Street. She lived off Wyoming where a small bungalow's porch light was the only thing shining in the vast darkness. Inside, a small cat sat at the window. The dark silhouette was stretching against the light of a lamp that shone throughout the days of spring when the sun still set early. Martha got her keys out of the ignition. The silence of the car shutting off almost startled her.

She walked in, went into the bedroom and lied next to the empty space in her bed. It felt like a counterbalance with half the weight missing. And for a long while, there was nothing to think about except the emptiness of this small corner of the world.

Coffee the next morning was burnt and bitter. Martha was never the one to make it. She stood up to go to her back porch that faced the forest far out into a field. Through her thick glasses, she could make out the faint color of budding leaves breaking into the spring air. A lone cardinal stopped to roost in the birch tree on her plot of land. It scanned the ground, moving its quick neck to seeds, fallen berries, anything that could be food for the coming breeding season. Martha stared out at the cardinal, thinking of nothing in particular. She was always enchanted by

the red color of spring cardinals. But since all the snow melted, they became harder to spot. The cardinal jumped from its roost and flew to the forest past the field. It was a long distance. Martha watched it until it disappeared into nothingness in her eyes.

Life goes on. Spring turns to summer. And night to day. Children are born. People die. All things that her pastor told her over the phone that morning. He said that next week they could have a moment of silence for Eugene. For her too. They would talk about death. And about heaven. But Martha said that wasn't necessary. She told him there might be people who need a sermon more than her. And he said there always will be.

The bright sun through a screen of overcast weather meant a walk would be peaceful. Nothing too close to overbearing spring heat, but not too far either. Martha put on a light jacket from the coat rack near her back door. She'd started walking by herself when Eugene first became sick. The walks cleared her mind of the memories they had together. They weren't all good. Like when he came back from Vietnam and couldn't quite understand what he saw overseas. But definitely not all bad either. She always held close to her heart the way he came home every day with a small gift. Sometimes it was a Petoskey stone he'd found on his break from work. Or it could have been a one-in-a-billion Indian head penny that he'd lucked upon at the store where he worked.

Martha walked at the edge of the creek. The bubbling water crawling through its path sounded its calm melody to the empty forest. Dead leaves crunched to the rhythm of her steps. The empty music of the solitary walk made Martha feel just a little less lonely in the world. On that path where the overgrowth had begun to take over again, Martha's thoughts scattered all around the Huron National Forest. Martha and Eugene moved to AuSable when they were only nineteen. Back then, the hours of work stole so much of their time together. But when they could finally lie next to each other at the end of those long days, they stared

aimlessly into the other's eyes. Martha could long remember the landscape of his blue irises. They jumped like sonic waves along his deep pupils. On those nights when they first bought the house in AuSable, she thought that maybe if she looked deep enough, she could see the soul of the farm child he used to be. Only once did she see what looked like the memory of those early hours of milking cows and moving the massive bales of straw back and forth. Back and forth.

But being young, and full of the vitality that Martha had long forgotten, the both of them would go for walks. Hours passed when they would take every turn that carried them deeper into the arms of the forest. Eagles would pass above them. Chipmunks and mice scratched past their feet. Everything would take them into the soul of the natural world.

At that age, Martha was a Buddhist. She would say that it was because the energy of the world struck deeply into her spine. If she hadn't moved to AuSable, she would've tried to drive westward with the little belongings that she kept. The weight of it all still pulling at her shoulders like a child in a womb.

AuSable made her realize it wasn't the migration of hippies that made her feel like herself. Not the connection of those like her that made the journey lasting and authentic. But the connection that struck the soul with life in every corner of the world. Here's where the entire world stops and slows for careful spiritual study. Even though Eugene long stayed a Christian man, he tried to never get in the way of Martha's careful cataloging of what she saw as the expression of Zen energy throughout that place. But as the years went by, and her flavor of spirituality never having a way of expressing itself, she let her way of thinking subside into somewhere deep in her mind. She went to church, sipped the wine, ate the bread and let it all pass through her like the food it was. She did it all for Eugene, who still couldn't understand the way Martha thought.

Now that Eugene had passed, Martha thought about those days. How she'd long missed the way her fingers touched the leaves, like looking for the heartbeat of the Earth. The sound of a doe grazing along the path stopped her in her footsteps. They looked at each other through the tall brush and stared. For a long moment, the doe didn't move. When she realized that Martha wasn't a threat to her life, the doe moved silently on. A small fawn, still wearing its spotted coat bounced to follow its mother. They disappeared into the forest as calm as they'd been found. Martha couldn't help feeling the connection she and the doe had was a sort of emotional communication. Something she'd long wanted to feel again.

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It had been almost half a year since Eugene had passed. Martha had long gotten used to the feeling of something like weight missing in her life. But instead of feeling the heavy burden of loneliness after the town had long emptied itself, Martha felt free. Somewhere along the timeline of people leaving, the librarian gave Martha a set of keys to the collection. On most warm days, she would stride down what used to be the bustling main street. The rare car would pass, making its way to Alpena just a little further north. But mostly, the road stayed empty.

Martha walked from the library to the beach. Getting herself settled on the dilapidated pier, she spent the day sifting through old stories. The gentle spray of the tide would cool her throughout the day. When she walked back to her home, hours after leaving her cat to fend for itself, she found messages left on her phone. It was the utility company again, asking her to relocate because of the expense of Martha's being the only house to keep alive in the entire town. But there was also a reporter from New York asking to talk to her about why she stayed. She called him back and asked if he'd like to come visit. There's a hotel twenty miles from town that's still open, she said. They'd love to have

your business. He came in a small car with a camera, a microphone and a notepad. When he finally stopped on her driveway, he brought them out of his car like they were a part of him that couldn't be separated from the rest. She told him to leave his things, just for a little while. Come for a walk, she said. I'll show you around.

They walked to the three-pipes dam where the clear stream sent its frigid water into the AuSable River. Schools of minnows shot around the rocks that lay beneath the trickle of water from the stream. There, the algae didn't grow. And the minnows would have to leave for whatever food there was to find deeper in the waters. When her husband used to go fishing in the river, she knew he liked to fish in the place just deeper than the minnows. That's where you find 8-inch perch, Martha told the reporter. She was pointing to the water.

They went deeper into the forest. Martha knew where to find an eagle's nest, a beaver dam. They found two blue jays roosting next to the trail before stopping at a sandy riverbank near the end. Martha started to rip apart the Velcro of her sandals and she moved to put her feet in the current. The water's warm today, she said. You should come in. The New York City reporter took off his shoes and dipped his toes. He moved closer to her, and they stood listening to the river rush past their toes and feet.

*Is this what keeps you here?* the reporter asked. He was a tall man with red stubble around his face and neck. Until now, he was almost afraid to ask questions because there was no way to record her answers. He assumed she would find herself prophetic. But instead, she only said she liked it here. That the sound of birds is calming. And the water never feels too cold in the summer. There's even a nice view of the sky late at night, she said.

They walked back talking about loneliness. I do feel lonely a lot of the time, Martha said. I miss my husband Eugene. We didn't have children, so there's that, too. The reporter asked what would happen if she ever

needed help. There were no hospitals for fifty miles around. And the utilities could be shut off without any sort of notice. Martha showed the reporter that she wasn't nervous. If whatever wants to take me needs to do it, I'll let them, she said. There isn't much I should be doing to get in whoever's way. But sometimes, Martha said, I wish I would've had children. People to call at night when the loneliness is hard. Or to take pictures of bird's nests and send them to people who would actually look at them. It's the simple things, Martha said. The simple things that you miss when you grow old.

When they walked past the field near Martha's home, the reporter asked if he could get his things. He took his camera first to take pictures of the broad field that never seemed to grow past their feet. And her home, making sure not to have her address in the frame of view. Martha stood by, watching the reporter move with his camera. He asked if she wanted her photo taken. But Martha said no. She didn't want to have a photo with her home. Too boring, she said. Let's go somewhere more interesting. They got in her car and started moving east toward deep in the Huron National Forest. The sun was starting to go lower in the sky. As they drove, the radio played a calm country song.

The reporter asked where they were going. They had been in the car for twenty minutes at that point, listening to the radio in silence.

It's called Lumberman's Monument, Martha said. It was one of the only places left where people would come to see what the town was like. They drove into its carefully kept driveway. That day, no cars were parked in the small lot. The two got out and the music stopped. A small gust of wind rustled the trees and the smell of pine sap and leaves passed by. Martha moved toward a path, expecting the reporter to follow.

Their shoes shifted on the gravel trail, scaring a chipmunk out of the dense bush. For most of the walk, they looked down the sheer cliff to the lake far below. The wind from high up passed over their faces. Then the path wended away from the cliff and toward the trees. For a

long while, the shade was quiet. Birds flew above while they walked. Down the path, light was shining from a clearing in the thick forest. A wood platform was constructed. When they stopped, the entire lake was far below. They could see the landscape. Hills far off in the distance rolled along the horizon. Clouds cast their shade on the water below. And the sun was sitting in the corner of the sky, beaming light over it all. Martha again led the way to a footpath on the dune that crossed the hill. They walked a few hundred feet before the roots of a tree made a small plateau overlooking the sand. This is where I'd like my photo taken, she said. She sat down at the edge of the plateau, looking off in the distance. And the reporter snapped his camera, trying to get the entire picture of what he was seeing.

That night, they talked for a couple hours about life alone in the town. What happened to make everyone leave? No jobs. No new opportunities. And more excitement in the big cities not too far down the highway. What was it like being alone? Lonely, but freeing at the same time. They were all questions that circumvented what the reporter really wanted to know. How could she do it? Be alone in the decaying skeleton of small-town America with nothing but her cat and an archaic sense of spirituality. It's easy, she joked, close to the end of their interview. I've got my husband's pension.

When it was over, the reporter said he'd try to mail her a copy of the story. It might be a while before it gets here, he said. And that was fine. Martha said goodbye and watched the lights of his car roll down the street. She shut her porch light off, fed her cat, and went to sleep.

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The change of seasons quickly passed through AuSable. Nights again were coming sooner in the day, and temperatures dove as soon as the sun set. Martha began completely ignoring the calls from the utility company. The operator was getting angrier over time, and reasoning

with him was just becoming too difficult. He called again that morning. The ringer on the phone was incessant and cruel. Martha decided she'd go for a walk to help get her mind off the noise. As she put on her coat and stepped out the door, her cat bolted through the small opening. It ran down the open field and toward the woods. It ran out of sight through the opening in the fence near the line of trees. Martha watched it go all the way. And at her own pace, she walked to follow it.

It was the beginning of autumn. The color of leaves about to fall was nearly overwhelming in the morning light. Through her thick glasses, she looked along the forest floor for some sign of her cat's orange coat. Martha was feeling desperate. After long days of being alone, the cat became her only companion. At night, Martha would sit by the lamplight and read the annals of Siddhartha Gautama while the cat lied nestled on her stomach. They would stay like this for hours until they both took their side of the bed and slept through the night.

It suddenly occurred to Martha that the autumn weather would mean animals were looking more desperately for food before the coming winter. She imagined a coyote or even a black bear chasing down her poor cat. She quickened her footsteps, calling out for the cat to hear her voice. But as the time slowly crept past her, she couldn't think of any place the cat might be.

In the evening, Martha walked home. She was exhausted. And the feeling of losing what little she had hurt her. She didn't read that night. Instead, she stared out into the field waiting for some movement in the cold to tell her that it was going to be alright. At some point, she decided to walk out and sit on her back porch. The air was a shocking cold that made her feel sick. But even then, the feeling of loss wouldn't stop. After a long while, Martha stood up and went inside. Sleep that night was scattered as her consciousness came back at odd hours with an even greater sense of desperation.

For the next few days, she went out looking for it. Hiking



through the denser parts of the forest with a small bag of food that she would shake. And shake. And shake. But after each exhausting day, she'd go back to her empty house on Wyoming Street.

As she looked, the days were getting colder and the nights unbearable. The frigid gusts of wind chilled her to the center of her bones. And after only a few hours, she would have to go home and warm herself again. This is how weeks passed. Almost a month until there was nowhere left to look. And only a sliver of a feeling that there was any hope the cat could still be alive. When the weather had almost started its irreversible change into the winter season, Martha could only bear an hour each day. The sharp, stinging pain in her fingertips, her toes, stopped her looking before looking could ever begin. On the last day, she was walking back home down the path of three pipes dam. She'd stayed out too long. The stinging in her fingertips was beginning to feel as though it could become frostbite soon. As the grey clouds overhead started letting down scattered bits of light snow, Martha turned to the path that would lead home.

That day, the snow was sticking to the ground. The dead leaves and the dying, skeleton stems of ferns all began to turn white. It was beginning to stick for what seemed like the rest of that year. Whatever remained of her cat would soon be buried in the thick canvas of white. She walked home and sat down in her chair, leaving her coat, her gloves and everything else on her tired body. Sleep came fast. She didn't wake up until early the next morning when the snow had covered everything around her. The television news that morning said it was all of three feet of snow in one night. Something that hasn't happened in Northeast Michigan since 1980. It'll be a fierce winter, the young and pretty television reporter said. Meteorologists predict record lows for this decade and heavy snowfall throughout the beginning of next-

Martha turned off the TV. The screen went black and empty. The sound of the wind outside whistled against the windows and doors. She

did a quick run through the checklist in her head. She felt warm. Actually, hot with her coat and hat still on. And the lights that she left on the night before were still shining in the bright whiteness of the day. She stood up from her chair and walked to the faucet. Water trickled and then shot out. She was alright. She'll be alright.

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The last time Martha tried to get her car out of the driveway, the height of snow on Wyoming Street stopped the wheels. She had a Jeep. That wasn't supposed to happen. But it did, and she knew that she was stuck until the weather somehow changed. Throughout those days, she would sit down and flip through pages of books she's read dozens of times. The words somehow became a mix of meaningless repetition and prayer. In her mind, they had done the service that words could do for one lifetime. She aimlessly walked around her house, staring at the prints of art she'd collected over the years. One was a collection of notebook drawings by Thomas Cole. The dying mess of branches jutting in every direction from the dying trunk of the tree was shaded with charcoal cross-hatching. Behind the deceased titan of an oak tree, the brush took the same attention to detail that Thomas Cole could muster in his experiments before paintings.

Martha bought the print at a yard sale in Tawas two years ago. She bought it because, around that time, she liked to challenge herself. When books or television just couldn't do it for her, she'd look at the collection of Thomas Cole drawings until she knew she was familiar with every detail of the work. And then she'd forget about it for months or years, only to stare at it for another hour sometime later. But even that drawing couldn't keep her from feeling somehow restless. The quiet frustration that settled in the back of her head stuck to its place in her mind. After a short while, she decided to stare out at the falling snow. It fell as though sliding down a line of fishing wire. It was tranquil like

morphine. No breeze shuffled the falling snow. And no sound vibrated the still air.

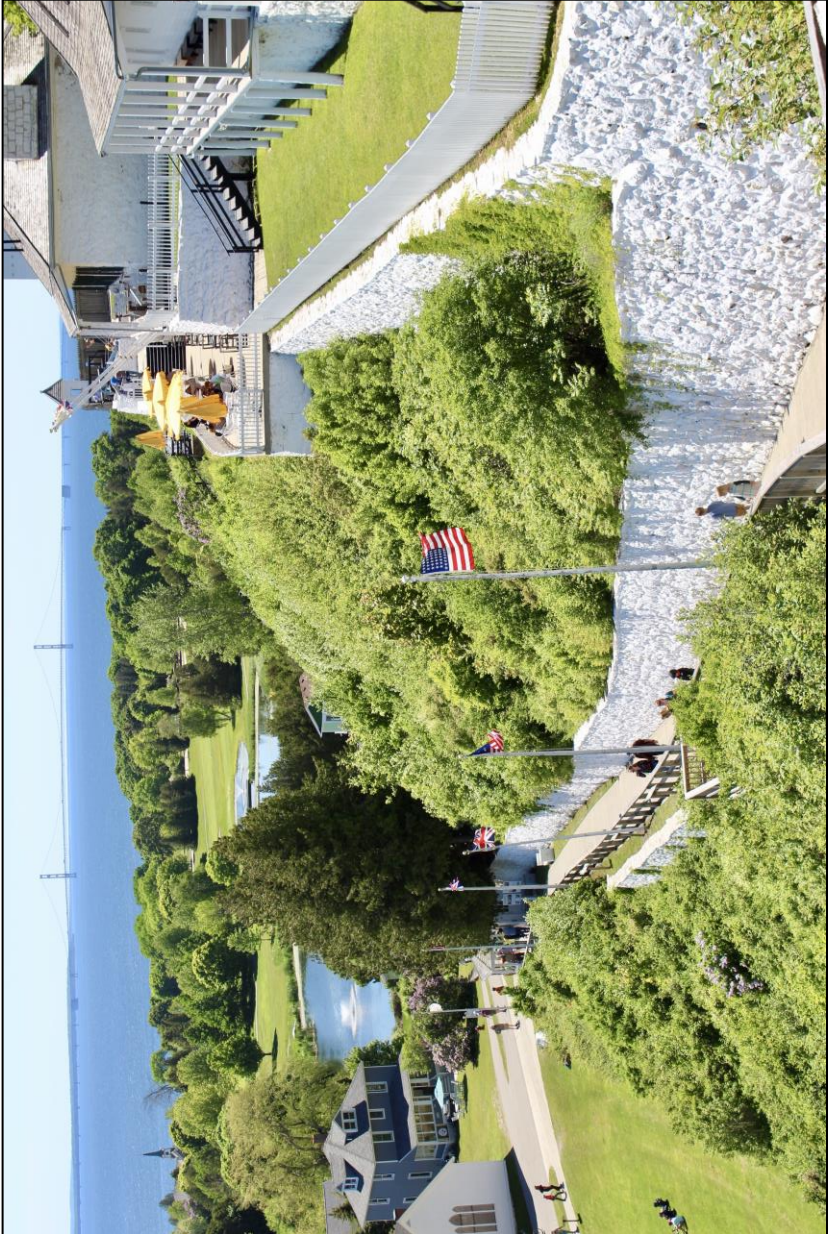
Somewhere deep in the distance, a doe stepped through the deep field of snow. She brought her legs all the way to her body as she trekked past. There was a fawn following closely at the heels of the mother. Martha looked out and saw them move like titans. Their world was the world which Martha realized she desperately wanted to be part of in her next life.

She felt tired now. Deeply lethargic like days of sleep were about to come. She walked to her chair and opened the Bhagavad Gita. The words on the first page gently stared back at her. She didn't read much farther than that. She let her head fall back on the pillow. And slept.

The lights went out. The cold slowly filled the house until there was nothing of warmth left. But Martha's body didn't feel it. She felt something different. Wherever she left, she felt something.

AuSable, Michigan was a town older than old. It was older than the army base that sat crumbling to corroded metal and cracked tarmac. It was older than the beachfront properties no one could sell before they died inside the yellowed walls, looking out to the expanse of Lake Huron. Someone said that it was older than the white birch, long cut to near extinction by logging workers building furniture with the bark's gorgeous snow color. That person too looked older than the sand lining all around the Great Lakes. Older than the trees whose leaves scatter the ground. And older than the snow that laid the town to rest, before melting over again.

## Tea and Views



Junior. Major: Creative Writing

## Lost

*The Centaurs* is a partially-lost silent animated short created by animation pioneer Winsor McCay. His inflexible employer, newspaper tycoon William Hearst, forced him to give up his real name and artist dreams to slave away for a comic strip for the rest of his life. Most copies of *The Centaurs* were destroyed by McCay himself, the film reduced to blank spaces that would never again hold his work. Unbeknownst to any, a reel of film shielding his meager progress sat in the collections of a lifelong friend of his. By the time it was found, the film had deteriorated, holes in its browned frames, delicate centaurs killed in unfinished romantic pursuits. One hundred and twenty-eight seconds were saved.

It is only one of many partially-found films, films taped over, films rotted, films given cigarettes and whiskey and told to work another night shift and switch pen names again. That's not to mention the thousands of lost sit-com episodes, video game demos, cartoon pilots, security footage, speech transcripts — all made to inscribe thought and word in the frame around humanity's changing form.

A communal force sifts them from the rubble, each second a fleck of gold in the earth, whether it be from the eighteen missing minutes of the Watergate tapes or the twenty-fourth episode of *Butt-Ugly Martians*. If it takes decades to find a few still frames, consider how long it would take to unearth the ideas buried in the artist's own memory, or worse, pounded into the crust of the earth by the adversity of development executives. When the last copy of this work is mashed into a grainy pastel paste in the steel innards of a recycling plant, these sentences will merely join the multitudes never given ink.

## Corporate Calamity

An office. Open floor plan. Cubicles designed to trap employees like mice in a maze.

A young lady with black hair and dark eyes sits in front of a black computer screen, staring at her own reflection. Her computer refuses to restart. She's waiting for IT. As she waits, she thinks. Her thoughts progress as follows:

I suppose they just decided not to fix it today. I think I'd be okay with that. But the IT guy is kind of cute, so maybe he can brighten my mood. I could play the damsel in technological distress every morning by way of subtly manipulating him to come hang out at my desk. But I really don't have to do that. He comes here anyway. Men always come here. Most men are like puppies: kind of cute (if I'm lucky) but rather needy. Though the IT guy doesn't seem to need me. He's a recluse and I get why. How many times can someone ask "How was the meeting?" or "Any weekend plans?" or "How are the kids?" or "How are you?" and then not even stick around to hear the response. Is this what all my business professors meant by "Professional Communication"? "Is this it?" The Strokes sing; this is it, I think. All of my life has led to me having this goddamn internship. I don't even want to be an intern. Shit. Oh well, here I am, nonetheless. All of it is probably for none, or less. Perhaps Mr. IT will never show up to fix my computer. If I was religious, I'd pray this entire office away. Why does everything depend on shitty tech nowadays anyway? Shakespeare didn't even know what a computer was.

Christianity spread by word of martyr mouth (and a side of genocide). I imagine it took a long time for things to reach completion for most of human history. Everything prior to the Printing Press and the Industrial Revolution must've been awfully, or wonderfully, slow. Except for time.

Time is probably the only consistent concept. The length of a day and of a night do not change, even with new and emerging technologies. Time is timeless. The void in my computer is also timeless. A void to avoid. My hair looks stellar in this screen, but my eyes look dead. They feel dead, too. I don't know if I've ever been alive. Doubtful, in all honesty. I was born dead. A stillborn not still. Too bad, huh? Either way, I was still born. Born kicking and crying and screaming beneath a moonless sky. I must've known that life was a fucking scam. What's the appeal of this place anyway? Even my computer is trying to kill itself. Society really has got us all in its wicked hand, sifting us through its gruesome fingers like sand. But we're less like sand and more like waves. An infinite number of water droplets all being pulled in one direction by some supreme force or supreme leader. Honestly, I'd prefer Supreme Leader Snoko to Supreme Leader Society. I wonder if I could speak to this Supreme Leader and demand a refund for my life.

## **i love you.**

life is catastrophic. full of mistakes. borrowed time. she lived on borrowed time for years, but it's slowly growing thin. like her hair, falling out in bunches as i brush it. is it better to remain painfully stagnant or change irreversibly? as time passes, the ever-plentiful gray strands gnaw their way into view. i prefer stagnation if it grants extra days. painful days turn into perennial moments. the never-ending torment of "how is she" reverberates across my being until it's etched into my heart, pulling tighter with each breath — the detached strings of self-loathing and remorse for losing track of moments until it's too late to remember them. to remember her. as she leaned over and kissed her two children goodnight and muttered the words, "I love you," their hearts were full. now, at 21 and 17 they will never again witness the fullness of hearts experienced in innocence. replaced by the tightness, the burning wish that we could have an infinite number of days — instead of a few more.

i wish we had spent more time depicting these moments. this innocence. leaning over her now, the opposite of what it once was, i yearn for her to be able to get up — one more time, just once — and tell me goodnight.



Postgraduate Student. B.A. Anthropology/Archaeology.  
Minor: Judaic Studies

## The Feast

I've made myself a feast for you.  
Poured my soul out in the wine.  
Offered to you my choicest morsels,  
The oysters from my back,  
Sweetbreads, salted with tears of memory.  
The promised future held in my liver.  
The more I gave, the more your hunger grew.  
Insatiable, but picky.  
Dining on my tender parts was not to your taste,  
So for you, I carved out my heart.  
On bended knee, offered to you on a plate of gilded silver,  
Inside, I screamed  
Watched as you consumed me.  
My heart burning for you,  
Your face scorched by embers, streaked with blood and ash.  
Hemorrhaging pain, my existence reduced to a tattered, gaping wound,  
I never let you see me cry.  
When your appetite persisted, my brain was next on the menu.  
Sharp, indelicate instruments  
Knives, scalpels, scissors, carving forks  
My gray matter scrambled and splattered,  
Yet still, your craving lingered.  
I tore the source of life from between my legs,  
endometrium and ovaries,  
The bloody sacrifice of future generations gleaming in your ravenous eyes.  
To feed your gluttony, I kept carving away pieces,  
A roast, vivisected for your delectation.  
Some parts, greedily devoured in an instant,

Funneled into your gaping maw.  
Others, rejected.  
You watched them rot.  
A sacrificial offering; Insufficient, abandoned.  
My spoiled meats coldly furnished our marriage table.  
Unsatisfied, you wanted more,  
Beyond my ugly viscera.  
The breath from my spongy lungs,  
Rendered fat and sinew,  
Flayed skin in curling florets,  
Unspooled coils of intestine,  
Bodily humors; bile, phlegm,  
Rivers of blood to quench your thirst,  
Until I gave up my very last drop.  
With what was left, I reached for you. Beckoning, with arms outstretched,  
You took my proffered hand.  
Picking your teeth with the bones of my fingers,  
You declared yourself satiated.  
Your dining experience complete,  
The banquet that I was, now stripped bare.  
With phantom eyes, I looked around  
My tongue and lips forever silenced.  
As I slip into eternity, I try to ask you,  
"Was I enough?"

Hannah Rae Kroesche

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Senior. Majors: Art History and Graphic Design

**Friends Worlds Apart**

30 x 48" Diptych. Graphic pencil.



**Friends Worlds Apart**

30 x 48" Diptych. Graphic pencil.



Graduate Student: Counseling

## A Note to My Empty Page

Hello empty page,

I don't know how I feel about you. You have so much potential, but also have a lot of expectations.

You could be my best piece of writing yet. Or you could be a bunch of nonsense that I end up erasing and then trying to get off my screen, so I don't have to look for your blankness another second. My computer asks me, "Do you want to save the changes you made?" Do I want to leave you blank and saved for later as a reminder that I tried to create a masterpiece, but got lost or frustrated and said, "This is not good enough; I'm not good enough?" I let fear get the best of me again and decided that nobody is going to read it and understand how my mind was working at that moment.

I gave up before I even tried.

I look at my writing how some people look at their social media or their pictures. If it doesn't seem pretty enough or funny enough or grammatically correct enough to where it stops and takes people's breath away, it wasn't meant to be seen by anybody.

The best writing is spontaneous, authentic writing.

The kind where I get an idea and all I want to do is sit at my computer and write for hours and hours, pouring my thoughts and filling word documents with reality. Sometimes little things like my favorite song I was thinking about earlier playing on the radio after a long day fills me up with safety and faith that someone knew I needed a pick me up. I was driving home one day and I heard P!nk's song "What About Us" and thought, this is an anthem for anybody with anxiety and depression. That may not be P!nk's intention, but, to me, she is asking anxiety "What about

us, what about all the time you said the answers? You promised me that I would feel better, but here I am feeling abandoned." Anxiety seemed so nice, but that side won't stay long, and the alternative is filling you up with self-doubt. That who you are right now doesn't stop people in their tracks.

That is an empty page to me.

I want what I write to stop people in their tracks. Every piece of writing I submit is a labor of love and a risk for me. I say, "I'm ready to invite the world to read this and I am ready for any criticism or compliments that come my way." That would be like a girl who never posts a selfie without makeup posting on her Instagram a selfie of what she looks like in the mirror when she first gets up with no caption or attention brought to the fact that she is not the perfect, pretty face, that she probably normally snaps 50 pictures just to get the right one.

You don't need to do that.

The people who you stop in their tracks with your beautiful soul don't care if you have makeup on or have a pimple on your cheek. Just like the people who want to read what I write will click on it no matter what pretty sunset cover photo or catchy caption screaming "Read me, because the person who wrote me worked really hard on me" is attached to it. So, empty page, you might be intimidating, but you don't have to be. Anything I write that I am hesitant to have people to read is honest and REAL and needs to be heard. I'm sure this isn't the last time I get overwhelmed by you, but this is your warning. I will still write on you and I will not be afraid. I have been afraid to write on you since I sat down, but I am 640 words ahead of you, so don't tell me you have an advantage.

Sincerely,

A Heart Full of Truth

Alum. B.A. English. Minor: Psychology

## Red Flag: A Bumble Story

*I'll drive us [in my new 2019 Hunter Green Jeep Wrangler].*

*I'm going to surprise you.*

Oh, you're in graduate school.

*I work at Google. Working at Google is better than a graduate degree.*

*My dad bought me a house.*

*I*

*Me*

*My*

*I see you like nice things.*

Is that bag a

*F<sub>E</sub> RR GA  
A MO?*

...no.

## Forget Me Not

I miss the smell of your voice,  
soft mint and espresso  
The way that you moved,  
light as air  
As though you had butterfly wings attached to your shoulders.  
I miss the way that we used to run barefoot through the sand,  
and steal all the free samples from the grocery store

I feel the words of  
That note you left  
The way the letters crept up under my skin.  
They crawled up through my veins  
like little pin pricks  
Leaving me wriggling and writhing

My vision blurred watching those words mix together,  
Unintelligible

The phone froze in your hand,  
The buttons laughing up at you  
Refusing to be dialed

Time rushed to a halt  
All at once,  
the clock set  
Your feet wandered in a dream to the edge  
Pulled by an inexplicable force



Staring down at my phone,  
My hands shake  
If I focus hard enough  
I can almost see your name pop up on my caller ID

## **A Picture on the Wall**

The colors clash deep within each page  
Sirens in my head screech like the wind  
This body is an asylum. Caged in flesh and blood  
Massive monuments know nothing of suffering  
A great feline beast with saber teeth  
Reminding us of the man who chews his meat  
Two souls warped and ravaged by the machine  
Masquerading as actions without reason  
I'm deceived by an illusion of my own making  
Lies that twist the tongue and torture the mind  
Sinking ever slowly toward the floor  
Melting through another social bore  
We trade our hearts for a telephone  
Miraculous moments thus cease to exist  
Hanging desperately from a single nail  
Here is hope may it rest peacefully

Ashley Cerku

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

## Atlantic Blue Hues



## Extinction Proclamation Chronicles II

### II

#### *Farmers—*

See how they bend to sow their seeds?

Backs strained, knees dirt stained

tormented by time a new disaster everyday.

Now fields plowed with pesticides

rows combed back with cancered fertilizer

black clouds, titanic storm in distance nearing.

Filthy wind flurry kicks dust over bastard dirt

impeding a sought for sun. Corrosive rain falls

gray grained horizon — acidic ichor for crops bought

on a promise choked by the goodness of intent.

#### *Profit—*

One remembers vast greenness — gone

to the black rows wasted mounds.

The rivers ran free, air less givable — gone

Now there are droughts, diseases, discovered

in the parallax. Alarms sounded to deaf ears.

It was too late — gone.

Their ears were caked with dust,

eyes blinded in a harvest of trust,

tongues salted recalling wetness

tastes of *what ifs* one must swallow,

holding nostrils crusted in smog snotted

soot. Bandanas knotted at the neck.

Their hands filtered the earth

forgot how it felt as ice fields

melted — flooded their fortune.

## *Politics—*

Ya see they made it a law seeds needed to be treated. Organic capitalist. Proof in the yield. In the lobby room a hive driven madness. Prices have to be paid. The poison feeds them all sour. It will trickle down, trickle, trickle, trickle trick. Work ethic is what's being pushed — The Amerikan dream. *I will represent all the people — give everyone away to the notion this is a great country. The best!*

So I voted. They gave me a sticker saying so. Trust us we'll get it right this time. Confidence eroded rigged fucking elections... and nobody said shit. Justice for all, corporations especially. They are America. People too. We just need your vote. *Please know we have your best interests concerned. Forked tongued devils-* — is what Grandfather Sackett said. They think we are stupid and we are because education can't be funded unless there's a nickel to be made. Dah is where we crawl from. Smarten up bucko. No no don't.

Plant fear, that works, take away their senses. Wave the flag in hurricanes, patriots in a storm. War, we must have a war. Love is spinning on some other's love bone. J. Lennon had it right... give peace a chance! *Please know we have your best interests concerned.* Its underbelly slimy like a yellowtail sushi roll at a QT. It sickens with swallow, becomes adjustable from gag to vomit. All the while while we were sleeping they blew up the dream. Feathers everywhere. So this is how they do it. Say no more of the dream. Bite, bite hard the hands feeding you this poison.

*Farmer—*

I just wanted to work with the world.  
To plant my seed you see. A family  
to help me grow. Love is all you need.  
But it was a law. Seeds, natural seeds  
were outlawed. So my children grew  
jaded and jailed. So I sowed my heart  
to bail bondsmen. Confessed regrets  
to cancers I have caused. I have a field  
never harvested before. Makes us angry  
to think. But yes, yes. we must.

*Profit—*

Bushels by the roadside. Dusted vegetables buffed  
Each copper penny please. A crop of pain muffed.  
Traders — they are. Everyone needs to eat. We're  
starving but still believe the drought will end soon.

Senior. Major: English. Minor: Linguistics

## Burning Ghosts

I've always liked the smell of burnt food. The taste might be awful, but whenever my dad leaves a burger on the grill too long and it blackens and cracks, I'm suddenly eight years old again, legs sore from sitting in the car for two hours with a duffle bag at my feet. As the car packed with my family pulls into Port Crescent State Park on the bank of Lake Huron, all fatigue leaves my body. We roll down all the windows and take in our first breaths of what my sister, Heather, and I call "camping smell." It's a mix of the forest, the beach, and burned-out campfires. With over one hundred campsites, someone is always just finishing up a bonfire, perpetually filling the air with the smell of burning. It's the smell of bare feet and big sweatshirts, of marshmallows falling into the sand because they're too gooey to stay on a skewer, of glow sticks broken and splattered on the walls of a tube slide so the inside looks like it's filled with stars.

It's also probably what it smelled like over a century ago, when fires drove the citizens of the small town of Port Crescent out of their homes. To this day, you can see remnants of the ghost town that the park was built on. The tower of bricks at the entrance, right where we open our windows and breathe in deep, used to be the chimney of a sawmill. Camping smell might not be bonfires at all, but rather the ghosts of lumberjacks, still lamenting their ruined timber resources. Maybe they're the ones who turn the smoke sweet, so the living won't despair at the scent like they did.

Just like those lumberjacks, I can't stay at Port Crescent forever. The summer I turn fourteen, Grandpa stops camping with us and starts camping with the ghosts. We sell the camper and stop making reservations at the park for our usual campsite. We can't bear to part with Port Crescent completely, so we start staying at the motel just down the road.

They rent out beachfront condos, with real beds and a full kitchen and indoor plumbing. No more dismantling the table every night and putting a mattress on it for three kids to share, only to make them roll out of bed early and bleary-eyed so Grandpa can start making palachinke and serve it on the remade table to eat it warm and fresh with berries and orange juice in Grandma's bright pink pitcher.

Not everyone stays at the condo. The older kids with friends at Port Crescent get a campsite and put up tents. I'm right at the cusp of the "big kids" group and the "little kids" group, so I get to choose whether I'm the youngest big kid at the campground or the oldest little kid at the condo. If I don't say anything, everyone assumes I choose the little kids. It's easier to stay quiet and let the big kids grow up without me. I end up going to the condo.

The beach is easier to get to from the condo. At Port Crescent, we walk barefoot across the gravel road, stepping lightly until we make it to the soft sand. A white boardwalk leads to a 3-mile long beach with a narrow river bisecting it. A volleyball net stands near the river and people lay on towels or sit under umbrellas and there's still room for children to build sandcastles and chase seagulls. At the condo, the back door is about twenty feet from the worn wooden steps down to the bottom of the lake wall. The first year we spend at the condo, the last stair is a few feet from the waterfront, but as the years pass, the waves creep ever closer. The year I turn eighteen, the bottom step is wet with the high tide. My dad says it changes based on how much it rains, but the beach never seems to get bigger, only smaller.

Then again, by the time the beach is too short to draw a volleyball court in the sand, I spend less time making sandcastles and more time swimming and kayaking. I usually go out into the water with Matthew, a friend whom I grew up with because our moms were so close. He's a future chef and two years younger than me, which never stopped him from sprouting past 6 feet tall while I'm stuck at a solid 5'1".



We paddle along the coast and back again to pass the days, not thinking about the white sands at Port Crescent that we used to wrap in a leaf and call sushi, or build into a mound and call birthday cake, complete with twig candles. Our invisible customers have to look elsewhere for that perfect blend of wet and dry sand in a bucket (our signature soup). I wonder if any lumberjack ghosts miss Matt and Katie's Sand Restaurant.

One day, our families take a long kayak trip to Turnip Rock, a popular landmark in the area. It's too far to paddle from the motel, so we drive to another strip of beach closer to town. The trip takes two cars full of my family and Matthew's, as well as six kayaks in four different models. The inflatable ones are folded into boxes in the trunk while the plastic ones are strapped to the roof. Once our motley crew of kayakers are in the water, we set off with the wind behind us. The wind would be gentle for a day on land, but it's a little rough for kayaking. After forty-five minutes of rowing against the waves, we find an alcove. In the center is Turnip Rock.

Layers of rock rise above us. Over the edge we can see grass and trees sprout, an island in the sky. The bottom of the rock tapers into a thin, smooth base, worn away by a millennium of waves. Round holes bore into the sides, too deep to see the end. Small birds flit in and out of the holes, filling the air with soft chirps. Kayakers in a rainbow of colors float around the rock like autumn leaves on the surface of the water. Friends hold onto the edges of each other's kayakers to stay close while they rest their paddles.

I get close enough to touch the base of the rock, just to say I did, and see gray cement rising from the water. In order to stop the eroding and preserve the rock in its current, stable state, the city covered the base in cement. It protects the kayakers from the rock falling when the base becomes too thin to support it, and it protects the town by keeping the tourists coming. It won't make a difference to another millennium of waves. One day it will snap and crash into the water, and the island

above our heads will drown.

On the way back, the wind is stronger and now we have to fight against the current to make any progress. I'm in one of the two inflatable kayaks, which fare the worst against the wind and waves, so even after an hour and a half, I can barely see the shore we set off from. Every stroke through the water takes immense effort in order to actually move forward. My arms ache, but if I stop for even a second, I'll lose what little progress I've gained. As I grow tired, the best I can do is stay in place, and even that is tiring. In the distance, I can see the members of our group with the plastic kayaks approaching the shore. One of them stops next to a man on a jet ski, and he starts to speed in our direction.

The man driving the jet ski comes close enough to talk to us and tells us that the others asked him to come help us. He ties the other inflatable kayak to the back of his jet ski. Matthew's younger brother is in it, and he sighs in relief as he tucks his paddles down into the bottom of the kayak and holds on tightly to the edges. The jet ski takes off so fast that I feel like I'm moving backwards in comparison. I keep paddling while I wait, staying in place as the jet ski speeds towards the shore.

At night, there's a fire pit on the short beach, so we have a bonfire. I walk down with bare feet and a big sweatshirt, but it doesn't smell the same. Maybe the woods are just far enough that we can't smell them from here, or maybe one bonfire on one night doesn't fill the air like dozens on every night do. Maybe the motel doesn't have enough ghosts.

One of our neighbors has big packs of fireworks and sets them off as we sit by the fire. They're giant bursts of color in the sky, as big as the ones we go into town to see on the Fourth of July. Our neighbor sets up on the beach near us, just around a big tree with full, low-hanging branches, so we can't see when he lights the fuse. Every time one goes up, we jolt in surprise. We shout delightedly and applaud so hard our hands sting. The explosions are so close that embers land near our feet. Then, from behind the tree, we hear:

*"Oh, sh – !"*

A firework goes off right on the beach. A shriek of terror escapes from multiple people around the fire, merging with the explosion into a single sound. It is so close that it takes up my entire field of view and silhouettes the tree. For a moment I'm completely certain it's about to catch fire and then I can become a ghost who fills smoke with yearning.

The tree continues to stand, unburnt. My heart starts to beat again.

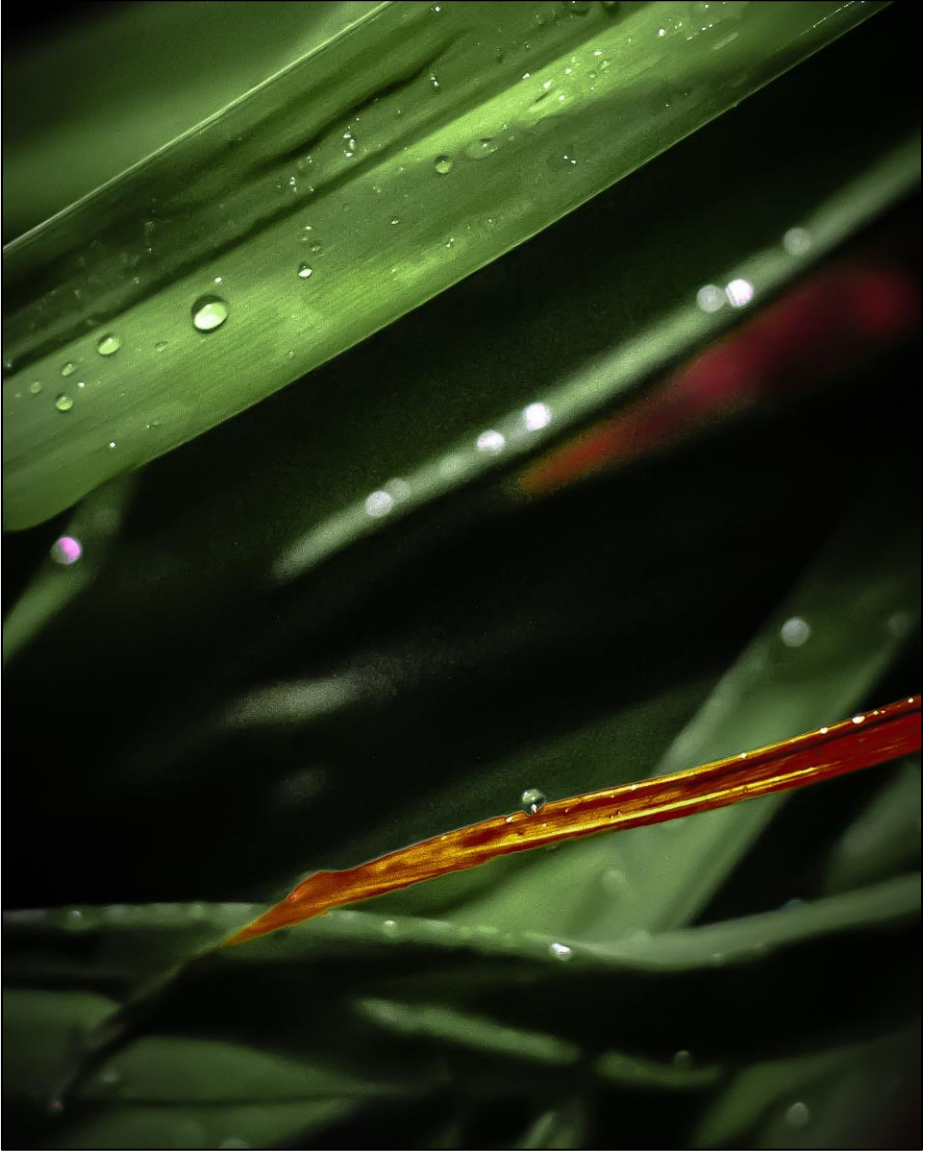
It storms later in the week. The sand turns muddy and runs into the lake. The waves crash up to the second wooden step. A jet ski tied to the handrail bobs violently, thrown side to side. I am laying down on a real bed, with a new playlist playing through my earbuds. A soft song about a father missing his son starts. *Peterborough and the Kawarthas* by Barenaked Ladies, a band I first heard when I was about eleven and loved ever since. As the lake fills up, the father asks if it's raining back home where his son is. I ask the ghosts that aren't here if it still smells like smoke at Port Crescent when it's raining. Down the hall, Grandma is sleeping in a bed by herself. Our pails and shovels are in a garage two hours away, collecting dust instead of sand. Matthew's in the condo two doors down with boxes of fireworks to set off for his birthday. I feel a weight too heavy for my thoughts to settle into my chest.

*"Oh, sh – !"* I think to myself.

Outside, the jet ski crashes into the steps and splinters them. Water rushes up and pulls jagged pieces of wood under. The weight in my chest joins the splinters under the white foam. Lake water fills my eyes and slides silently down my cheeks. My breathing stays steady and I let Lake Huron soak into my skin. It gets cold in the rain. The heat under my skin eases as waves crash into the red, irritated sunburn. The father in the song promises he'll see his son again. I think I want a concrete base or a jet ski rescuer.

I think more than anything, I want it to smell like camping.

## Drops of Color



Alum. B.A. Creative Writing and Public Relations

## **The Little Yellow House**

The house had a huge tree that towered over the lot, as if protecting it from the rain and sun. It smelled like fresh air and recently cut grass, with a small forest and creek towards the back of the backyard. I believe they also have small apple trees, but the apples were never meant for human consumption since they were crab apples. I remember hearing all of nature teeming with life, the bugs flying around and the chirping of birds as they hopped from branch to branch in the small trees.

Grandpa had this huge wooden cart that he used to haul dirt or tree branches. But sometimes he would let me ride in it. He would take me to the front of the house where there was a ditch for rainwater. I laughed loudly as I bounced around inside the cart and he pushed me up and down, up and down the grassy ditch. His breathing was labored, and he would be exhausted doing it, but he always had a huge grin on his face.

Other days, we would go into the garage and feed the varmints that came to visit. My grandparents had a breezeway that connected the garage and the house. If you turned right into the garage, Grandpa's workbench was the first thing you saw. The garage smelled like peanuts and the workbench was too tall for me, as a child, so I would stand on my tiptoes and peer over it to see all sorts of tools that he had laying there.

"Ready to feed the varmints?" he asked.

I nodded. "I have some crackers, too," I said. I held out a little plastic bag full of oyster crackers.

Grandpa would rummage around in the garage, grabbing seeds for the birds, corn for the squirrels, and crackers for the animals in the woods. I helped him spread out some of the seeds around the many bird feeders that my grandparents had and handed him the stalk of corn as he placed it on the pedestal for the squirrels. Grandma would be sitting inside on her rocking chair as she waved and smiled at us.

After that, Grandpa and I headed to the back of the property. I was always so giddy with excitement to feed the wild animals. We opened the little bags of oyster crackers and I'd start sprinkling them around the ground, along the path. The path was small and narrow and covered with trees, but it felt like our secret little path. It was pretty quiet here, only the noises of birds and the snapping of twigs could be heard, which was strange since my grandparent's house was in the middle of a city.

On many of the days that I visited, both of them would put things in a little drawer for me. It wasn't much, just some stickers, tiny pencils, and loose change they happened to find. But to me, it was like opening presents on Christmas morning.

I would run to my grandma's room and open the bottom drawer in the nightstand, pulling out a handful of nickels and dimes. "Wow, I got so much money today!" I beamed as I showed off my treasures to them.

"Shall we put them in the bean can then?" Grandpa asked.

I nodded as I raced off to the den and grabbed the heavy Campbell's bean can, the label peeling off, as I carried it into the kitchen. I counted all of my change that I received on the living room ground as I plinked each coin in one after another.

"Remember, this is money for you when you're older. When you're all grown up and in college," Grandpa said.

I remember times when Grandpa would play his little electronic organ that was set up in the living room. It had so many buttons and it was so much fun to hear him play. His big hands, aged from the sun, would glide over the keys as his feet pressed against the pedals, making music pour from the speakers. But I think the best part was his deep, husky voice that bellowed out loud and strong, oozing over you like warm maple syrup.

He'd let me play on the organ too, even though I could only play very childish songs from the days I played piano. Sometimes, I

would make up songs too, and both of them would listen intently as they rocked away in their own rocking chairs. After I was done, they would clap their hands as if they were at their own private concert.

In the evenings, we would all gather around their old television set. Grandpa would be cutting away at a block of cheddar cheese as we watched Wheel of Fortune. He would come in and hand a plate over to Grandma with thick slices of cheese and freshly washed grapes. I would steal some from both of their plates as I sat on the ground munching on my evening snacks. We'd then watch Jeopardy and I would shout out answers that were completely wrong, but every once in a while, I would get one right. They would both praise me for how smart I was for answering that question right.

After that, we would turn in for an early night and I would either sleep with Grandma in her own room or I would sleep in the living room in my sleeping bag. Not sure why I slept on the floor, but I was pretty stubborn about it. Maybe I wanted to feel like I was camping in their motorhome, when they would occasionally take me on trips with them, or maybe I wanted to give my Grandma some more room in bed, or I wanted to stay up late and play games.

It has been so many years since I've been back to that house. Now, it's just a bunch of sweet memories of my grandparents as I recall the little glimpses of images that stir in my mind. I can still hear their voices sometimes when I try to remember them, Grandpa's deep, husky voice singing while he played the organ and Grandma's pixie cut strawberry blonde hair that bobbed as she listened to him play.

## Skin to Skin

Do you know that feeling when fingers  
Graze lightly across you, so carefree  
Kisses or caresses that seem to linger  
Along your back or on your knee  
Under your chin and up your cheeks  
Skin can be so soft, so smooth to the touch  
It has feeling like no other  
My skin feels warm  
It raises slightly with the black ink behind my left shoulder  
It dives down and out again in many portions  
Sometimes I grab the skin at my waist to see the distortion  
It bothers me when it stretches far and gathers in my hand  
I feel dark clouds cross my sunny thought's strand  
I shift here and there in front of a mirror  
I suck in and pull back all the flabs  
But when I let go  
All I have is me  
But I'm ok to just be  
My rolls and marks only add to the canvas that is my skin  
Just because it isn't tight to my bones  
Doesn't mean my beauty is less than a gemstone's  
Let's examine all the stories a skin can tell  
They hold masterpieces as well  
Beauty marks, scars, and dips  
Sketched along each person's skin  
Blemishes, missing parts  
All wonderful features that make true art  
And oh the beauty in skin



Brushes of white that give away to  
Browns and blacks varying from each individual  
Different shades blending and complimenting  
Such an intense visual  
Every hue and tone stretch endlessly  
A temple to be worshipped zealously  
No matter what shape or size  
Skin can be appreciated from anyone's eyes  
Because no matter if our skin is meant for muscles  
Or for curves  
No matter the length or fullness for one to observe  
At the end of the day  
Skin is pulled over  
To hide a precious sight  
A beating heart that shines bright  
Blood running through our veins  
Shining white bones connected like trains  
We are all human  
We all possess a plentiful array  
Of skin for a collective display

## **ADHD Warfare**

Sensory information competing for my brain's attention

### **IN MUTINY**

Fragmented focus and incoherent meaning

That breeds bitter dissonance

Still, it is not my behavior

A war is waged.

### **IN BATTLE**

Feverish frustration and roaring hysteria

That ensnares emotion

Still, it is not my behavior

They are symptoms

A white flag is waved.

### **IN SUBMISSION**

Fading facade and mounting defeat

That dissipates motivation

Still, it is not my behavior

They are symptoms

A disorder

Still, my mind is ravaged.

Sergio Montanez

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Senior. Major: Journalism. Minor: Advertising

## Mosquito Falls



**November 19, 2016**

I knew from the start it was a bad idea.

I knew the moment I sat down in the passenger seat of that old Chevy  
when my stomach convulsed with nerves.

When I watched her pour what she called an eighty-twenty,  
which was actually a fifty-fifty,

I knew.

I knew when my chest began to burn and

I swear the room's temperature rose thirty degrees.

When I began to stumble within the first fifteen minutes, and  
when I watched her knock the flask off the bedside table  
and giggle before mumbling her apologies.

When they suggested we leave her behind,  
and when we actually went through with it,  
only to turn right back around,

I knew.

When she began to get sick  
or maybe when she couldn't keep her eyes open  
or answer my urgent, insistent questions,  
I should've known.

When the official-looking-man barged in,  
talking to her as if she were a child  
and carrying  
and then strapping her  
to that teeny, tiny bed,  
I should've known.

*continued on the next page*

In the morning,  
when I saw the empty glasses,  
when I felt the tornado in my stomach,  
when I noticed my tear-stained cheeks,  
and when I smelled the pungent aftermath,  
I knew it was real.

**¡feliz año nuevo de la república dominicana!**

never gotten drunk so I didnt know what to expect but I didnt expect to be even more aware of the shitiness of the situation, and fuck me and fuck this. Server comes by and I ask for another and I could have asked for water but despite these three hellish days I still have faith in one more drink. So coherent I remember it's drink like No. 5 or Nikki sixx or something, and mimosas don't count because that's mostly orange juice. I dont understand Spanish but everyone else does and im bitter sucking on this dumb straw in this dumb empty cup. But a guy gives me champagne before I think about getting a new daiquiri. thanks. ~~feliz~~ año nuevo.

Senior. Major: Creative Writing-Poetry,  
Concentration in Writing and Rhetoric

## **The Colonel's Disembodied Ears Club Band**

### **Scene:**

*Ringo Starr visiting the Colonel talked about in Carolyn Forché's exhaustingly canonized prose poem "The Colonel." Evening.*

*\*knock knock knock\**

**Ringo:** "What would you think if I sang out of tune?  
Would you stand up and walk out on me?"

*\*bewilderment and confusion shine on The Colonel's rough face. He looks like the "confused Swaggy P" meme\**

**Ringo:** Lend me your ears and I'll sing you a song.  
And I'll try not to sing out of key.

**The parrot (offstage):** "OH, I GET BY WITH A  
LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS!"

## Beach Babies

*For Jennelle*

Somewhere in my mother's apartment is a photo of us as babies,  
in seashell shirts and pink bucket hats, sitting on the beach,  
our roly-poly knees submerged in saltwater.

No one ever believes me at first when I say we are cousins,  
citing my arctic whiteness to your copper fox skin.

Fifteen years later, you and I spoke on your porch.

I made a joke. You laughed politely.

Our mothers were forcing us to socialize,  
but there was nothing in common between us but blood.

My throat burns when I think about getting older,  
knowing your age will remain the same.

But I will always remember the laugh.

I will trap it in a conch shell and listen, to remind me we tried to be family.



**Charlie**



## **Vibrant Music Overtones**

You heard my prayers  
You saw my tears  
Companion on my walk  
Listening to my talk  
Red drum set in Studio sparks joy in the Center  
You are my heavenly Father  
I chatter like a swallow  
I pant like a doe  
I walk softly on the path  
Live and let Live  
High pitched giggle from the Bald eagle  
Earthquakes and cyclones sing songs in the wind  
I sing to the sound of the tambourine  
I ring the hand bell in G notes  
I tap my feet to music  
I clap my hands to rhythmic music  
I hear the sound of music exuding from my heart  
I play the keys on the piano  
Dancing singing reveling  
Exulting, honoring, jubilation  
You are awesomely amazing  
I love you.

Graduate Student: English

**Texts from Hamza in Pakistan #2**

Hamdan is six

Years old and

Can speak

Perfect American

English because

He watches

YouTube and

Netflix all day.

It's incredible.

## **Les apparitions qui hantèrent les enfants dans la maison macabre**

Il était une fois une maison qui s'était située sur une montagne et cachée pudiquement par des grands arbres touffus avec des feuilles noires. Il y avait du brouillard et il pleuvait tout le temps. La maison était macabre ; les herbes qui l'entouraient étaient mortes et les fenêtres étaient cassées. Les os de la maison étaient construits de bois fort et sa peau pelée à l'extérieur était noire. Un porche qui protégeait la maison contre les habitants se dressait devant la maison. Derrière la maison, il y avait une tombe où un vieux chien traquait les morts pour l'éternité.

La vie avait du mal à prospérer dans cette maison. La porte d'entrée marron était normale sauf pour un bouton cassé. Les murs moisis avaient une odeur de mort. Le crachat des orages a trempé les murs dans une obscurité humide. Les murs criaient pour que quelqu'un les aide, mais les fenêtres sont restées ouvertes. Le moisi a continué de grandir et prendre la vie des personnes, de tous ceux qui entraient dans la maison. Ses os sont devenus otages des murs. Tendus sur le sol était un tapis de mousse qui était tellement grand, il ressemblait à un portail à l'Enfers.

La maison avait six salles : le salon noir, une cuisine verte comme des fougères, deux chambres grises avec deux petits lits poussiéreux, une salle de bain, et un sous-sol où les chauves-souris avaient peur de se montrer. La cuisine avait un sol vert qui criait tout le temps, « M'arrosez ! » Les deux tables qui s'étaient situés dans le sol étaient comme des géants qui s'asseyaient sur l'herbe. Les chaises s'étaient situées parfaitement autour des tables. Sur le seul plan de travail, il y avait un vieux livre sans mots. La cuisine sentait comme les vieux repas d'un monde mort.

En haut, la salle de bain était normale, sauf une seule tache rouge et noire sur le tapis près de la baignoire. Dans la première des deux chambres, des jouets anciens encerclaient la porte et regardaient sans vie par la fenêtre

de leur position sur le lit. L'ambiance grise n'invitait pas des personnes à habiter dans cette chambre. Il y avait une grande armoire en métal à droite du lit à côté d'un poster avec des couleurs qui se brouillent la vue. La deuxième chambre était à côté de la première. Elle était rouge entièrement : les murs, les jouets, l'armoire en métal, et les visages des personnes dans les photos sur le lit – la seule chose différente de l'autre chambre.

En bas, les escaliers au sous-sol chantaient fort quand un habitant les descendait. On pouvait trouver la porte dans le corridor près du salon noir. Les murs au sous-sol étaient composés de ciment et le sol était en terre moite. Il y avait une obscurité opaque, et c'était là où les chauves-souris habitaient. Les miroirs étaient situés sur les murs, de tous les côtés. Au centre du sous-sol, une boîte attendait une personne pour découvrir ses contenus. La maison avec ses choses sombres était l'opposée de vivant. Personne ne savait comment la maison a jailli de la terre. C'était le plus grand mystère.

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Sur la montagne, deux enfants cherchaient un endroit pour dormir. Les deux étaient déplacés quand un feu féroce tua leurs parents. Les enfants étaient jumeaux, nés trois minutes à part. La première, la fille naquit le 28 février à 23h58 et le garçon naquit un jour bizarre : le 29 février à 00h01 du matin. Ses parents disaient toujours qu'il était spécial et il réussirait dans sa vie un jour. La fille croyait souvent que ses parents l'aimaient plus qu'elle. Chaque année, ils célébraient ses anniversaires le 28 février, sauf les années où il y avait un 29 février. Ses parents moururent un jour de novembre quand les enfants avaient 10 ans dans l'accident de feu. Les deux avaient peur des feux après cela. Après avoir vécu seuls à l'état sauvage pour une année, les enfants, désorientés et confus, cherchaient une nouvelle maison.

La fille s'appelait Luce. Elle était maigre et mesurait un mètre 45. Elle avait les cheveux marrons et courts. Sa peau était bronzée à cause de

trop de jours au soleil et parlait d'une voix forte au sujet des choses qui la passionnée. Parfois, la bonne volonté lui faisait défaut. Elle avait l'air captivante et convaincante. Elle était responsable de son voyage pour une nouvelle vie. Elle pensait que sa seule raison d'être était de protéger son frère.

Le garçon s'appelait Luc. Il était assez grand pour son âge et juste 3 cm plus grand que sa sœur. À la différence de Luce, il avait une peau claire et des cheveux roux et courts. Il avait la mentalité qu'il était spécial, et pendant toute sa vie sa famille disait qu'il incarnait les traits de la perfection, spécifiquement à cause de son anniversaire. Il était conscient de ses traits parfaits, mais il avait l'air attentionné et honnête. Il manquait cependant de courage et d'esprit, parce que ceux-ci étaient les responsabilités de sa sœur.

Les deux montaient la montagne quand ils virent la maison.

« C'est un miracle ! Une maison abandonnée pour nous. C'est le temps pour recommencer nos vies à nouveau ! » dit le garçon. Il commença d'essayer d'entrer la maison.

« Je ne pense pas que ce soit une bonne idée de vivre dans cette maison, Luc. Cela n'a pas l'air bon », cria la fille qui pensait que la maison était mauvaise.

Ils entrèrent néanmoins la maison et le sol hurla quand leurs petits pieds marchèrent dessous. Un démon se leva quand il entendit les bruits de pas. Le démon avait la peau noire comme l'obscurité du moisi sur les murs. Il mesurait trois mètres et ses membres osseux et trop long ne ressemblaient guère à un humain. Sur son visage allongé, il avait des yeux blancs et des dents tranchantes. Quand il traînait dans la maison, ses os craquaient. Dans la maison, il y avait aussi un fantôme d'un ancien enfant qui avait mourut là-bas et qui traînait dans les corridors et traversait les murs au premier étage.

Le démon pensait à comment il pouvait tuer les personnes qui le dérangeaient. La pensée d'un feu jaillit dans sa tête. *Une bonne idée, mais*

*je ne veux pas avoir un autre fantôme ici*, pensa-t-il. Le fantôme passa devant le démon. Le démon le fixa d'un regard haineux. Les deux enfants, après avoir cherché de la nourriture dans la cuisine, se situèrent sur le sol du salon.

« Ce sont presque nos anniversaires, dit le garçon. *C'est aussi presque le premier anniversaire de la mort de nos parents*, s'informa-t-il.

— Oui, c'est vrai. Tu vas avoir 3 ans et je vais avoir 12 ans, exclama la fille.

— N'essaie pas d'être drôle juste parce qu'il y a un 29 février cette année, répondit-il avec un rire.

— D'accord, d'accord, elle dit. Je souhaite que Mama et Papa puissent être ici pour nos anniversaires ».

Les deux enfants étaient silencieux et ils rêvèrent d'un monde où les feux n'existeront jamais. Ils commencèrent explorer les autres salles de la maison.

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Les deux enfants montèrent les escaliers. Il y avait quelque chose de bizarre, ils se sentaient invités à entrer la salle de bain. Ils pensèrent que cette salle avait l'air normale, mais la tâche sur le tapis était un peu étrange. Ils continuèrent de regarder les autres salles sur le premier étage.

« Il y a deux chambres ici ! Parfaites pour nous ! J'étais le premier à voir la chambre rouge, c'est à moi ! » dit le garçon, Luc, tout excité.

« Je ne le voulais de toute façon », cria la fille, Luce, satisfaite.

Luc et Luce entrèrent les deux chambres. Luc vit les photos sur le lit et demanda brusquement que Luce vienne les voir.

Horrifiée et choquée, elle dit : « Vois-tu ça ? J'ai dit que ce n'était pas une bonne idée d'entrer dans cette maison ! Et si quelqu'un est mort ici, dans cette chambre ! »

Le fantôme passa devant les enfants. Ils regardaient les photos et ils ne le voyaient pas. Le démon regarda cette scène par l'angle de la chambre. *Quelle bonne chose à voir*, il se récita. *Ils ont déjà peur de moi mais*

*ils ne savent pas encore que je sois ici ! C'était presque la nuit et les enfants montèrent dans les lits et préparèrent pour le premier bon sommeil qu'ils allaient avoir depuis longtemps. Un avait un bon sommeil, mais pour l'autre c'était l'opposé.*

Tout à coup, Luc se réveilla anxieusement. Il vit des lumières dans le corridor. Il pensa qu'il devrait essayer de se recoucher parce qu'il avait des cauchemars toute sa vie, mais il se leva, trop curieux pour dormir. Il jeta un coup d'œil dans le corridor. Sans voir quoi que ce soit, il quitta la chambre et descendit les escaliers. Il y avait une autre lumière dans le sous-sol, et le garçon y alla. Le démon l'attendit patiemment. *C'est un bon jour pour voir un garçon tout proche. Il doit être spécial, je peux le sentir,* pensa-t-il.

Luc ouvrit la porte du sous-sol et demanda s'il y avait une autre personne dans la salle. Le démon regarda le garçon qui scanna le sous-sol pour trouver l'origine de la lumière. Il marcha près du démon, et le démon trouva finalement l'impression qu'il avait la première fois qu'il vit le garçon : Il était un enfant qui naquit le 29 février. Vraiment, un enfant qui serait facile à tuer et à amener au monde spirituel. Luc trouva l'interrupteur et éteignit la lumière.

Deux semaines après l'instance avec les lumières, c'était l'anniversaire de Luc et les deux enfants préparaient un grand repas pour célébrer leurs fêtes. Ils cuisinèrent un grand gâteau qui était moitié rouge et moitié gris. À la table dans la cuisine, Luce dit : « Il n'y a pas beaucoup de fois de notre vivant qu'il y a 29 jours en février ! Bon 12ième anniversaire à toi et à moi ! Célébrons-nous avec ce repas ! » Ils apprécièrent manger du diner et du gâteau. Ils parlèrent de choses stupides et rirent sans arrêt.

Soudain, le démon apparut au bout de la table. « Est-ce qu'il y a une place pour moi ? C'est un anniversaire important pour toi, Luc », il annonça. *C'est ton dernier anniversaire humain,* se dit-il. Voyant un événement extraordinaire, les enfants hurlèrent et essayèrent de courir.



« Tu ne peux pas me fuir, Luc », cria-t-il, très forte. « C'est le 29 février. Les enfants qui naissent ce jour sont les plus faciles à ramener à l'Enfers. C'est ton destin ! Viens ici ! »

Il agrippa le garçon et commença de voler vers le mur moisi dans le salon. Luce agrippa la main de Luc. Elle le tira fortement et cria : « Luc est *mon* frère ! Protéger mon frère a toujours été ma responsabilité ! Tu ne le prendras pas ! »

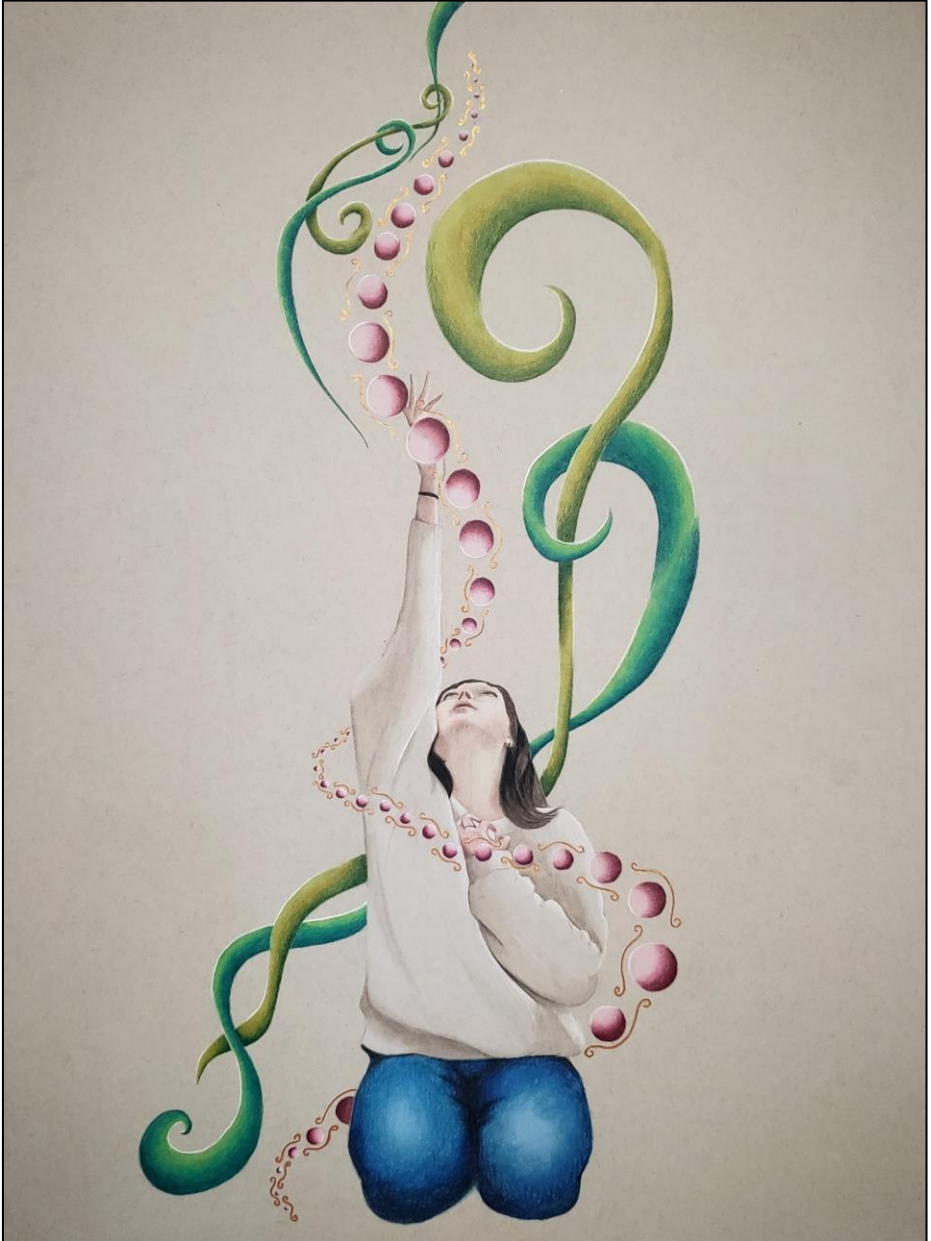
Luce essaya de sauver son frère, mais c'était trop tard. Le démon était trop grand et trop agile pour les deux enfants. Il vola au travers le mur moisi du mur avec le garçon. Luce courut au mur, mais le moisi commença de disparaître. Luc était perdu. Le fantôme passa devant la fille, et elle le vit. « Désolé », dit-t-il. « Je suis vraiment désolé ».

En pleurant, Luce fit sa valise avec ses choses et les affaires de Luc. Elle prend aussi le livre sans mots qui était sur le plan de travail dans la cuisine. Elle vit les photos sur le lit de la chambre rouge. Sur le dessus du tas, il y avait une photo d'elle et Luc. Horrifiée, elle remarqua que le visage de Luc était rouge comme les autres, mais son visage était normal. Elle partit de la maison rapidement. Quand elle fut en bas de la montagne, elle se tourna vers la maison.

*Peut-être je suis la personne spéciale. Je suis né deux minutes trop tôt pour que le démon me tue. Peut-être c'était pourquoi j'étais la première jumelle,* se pensa-t-elle. « Je vais trouver un moyen de détruire le démon, dans l'intérêt de mon frère. Je t'aime, Luc. Je t'aime toujours ».

## Escape

18×24" colored pencil



## Lost

She lost her key to open the only door in the room. She was trapped, breathing heavily, and alone.

She knocked on the door, juggled the handle, and knelt down to peek through the keyhole. People passed by, but she didn't recognize anyone.

She decided to look within the room for the key. It was a small room with no furniture, only the blank floor to stand on. The walls were white, plain, with two windows, both on the same wall but slightly spaced apart. They were her eyes to the outside, but as she looked out, she didn't recognize anything.

As she stared at the blank walls, she noticed something appear. She walked to it and realized it was a picture. A family photo, she guessed, because of the resemblance in the many faces around the two central figures – one man and one woman. Everyone had a face except for the person next to the man in the middle. *Who was the blank face?* she thought.

Then, another picture appeared to the right. It was an old wedding photo with a younger version of the man in the family photo standing next to the blank face. He looked handsome and she wished he wasn't married so she may have a chance when she found the key to her door.

As she was fantasizing the event, another photo appeared to the left. It was a picture of the young children from the family photo, again with the blank-faced figure in the center with her arms around every one of them. *What beautiful children. That person is lucky to have so much love surrounding her,* she said to herself. *I wish I had grandchildren like them.*

Suddenly, the walls began to fill with photos including this blank figure. She began to worry, and her heart started to race from fear. *Why are you showing me these pictures, these memories that aren't mine?*

She panicked. She needed to find the key to open the door so she could escape. *Where is the key?* She ran to the door and grabbed the knob,

hoping it would open.

A wind picked up and the memories that resided on the walls came off and rounded the room. She moved to the center as the pictures flew around her, surrounding her with anxiety. But she soon heard a low voice slowly start to dominate the sound of flipping photos. She moved closer to the windows, trying to move towards the voice.

“Ms. Rose? Ms. Rose, your grandchildren are here to see you,” the voice said from outside the windows.

She quickly opened the two windows and the photos flew out and she saw the figure that represented the voice. “Ms. Rose, your grandchildren are here.”

“Who?”

Junior. Major: Creative Writing, Fiction Specialization. Minor: English

## Subject Object

The ride is twenty-three miles, which takes about an hour on days when the sun's coming up and the drivers on the road don't destroy each other every chance they get. Those days are September days; those days are when he's in the first seat of the first row of the bus, bag upright on his lap, watching the city through the cloudy wraparound windshield.

He's unzipped his bag an inch-and-a-half, enough to stick his hand inside and twirl each pencil. There's one cut octagonally, another without an eraser, a third with a point that doesn't dull no matter how hard you press. That's three of twenty-five. September—school shopping—is the only time of year he could justify spending fifty dollars on a pack of twenty-five variety pencils.

Then, there's the bus driver—he doesn't forget to glance at her every few minutes. He's planned, to the syllable, how he's going to say thank you when he gets off the bus. This is his week-in, week-out commute; he and the driver will get to know each other. On Friday, he'll ask where she got the bobblehead cat sitting on the dashboard.

But then on Friday, it rains.

They're bitter September raindrops. It's been a week without sun, a week of looking through his dorm window and wondering when the clouds would break up. They never did. Now he's running to the bus stop without an umbrella or a poncho, but his bag is tugged over his head, and by the time he's at the curb, the bus has already stopped and wrenched open its doors.

Somehow the drops it sprays on him are heavier than the ones stumbling down from the sky.

"How are you?" he asks—really, wheezes is a better word—the bus driver as he swipes his card. It takes two rain-soaked tries to go through.

“Dry,” the driver says back. She’s smiling.

It’s the same model bus he rode on Monday morning, and he stoops toward the first seat in the first row so he can watch how the city speckles in the rain, but there’s someone with a skateboard taking up both spots. He almost reels. That reeling brings him into the seat on the other side of the aisle, and the bus heaves itself along.

No wraparound windshield view. Not here. The driver’s seat is big and clunky and surrounded by plastic that’s supposed to separate it from the rest of the bus, for safety or something, and even if he cranes his neck, there’s no windshield in sight. There’s a window next to him, yes, but one glance out of that, at the cars zipping by, and he feels his lunch swim in his stomach.

His fingers find the zipper of his backpack, open it the inch and a half, and coast over the pencils. At the top of the package is the best one, the one he maybe used a little too much this week – it’s cylindrical with a green eraser, the graphite rounded on one side and flat on the other.

There’s a whole art form to writing with it, to drawing the hard side of a D with the flat edge and then spinning into the rounded edge for the curve. It took him two-and-a-half hours to write his bio intro assignment, but damn if he didn’t have the best handwriting in the class.

The bus hits a pothole and puddle water spatters his window. His fingers tighten around the best pencil of twenty-five.

Two Mondays later his bag strains his back and it’s only a little bit his fault. His grandma wanted him (begged him) to bring something to decorate his dorm with, because he’d accidentally almost shocked her to death when he showed her cell phone photos of his room.

She’d called it a cinderblock dungeon. That’d been the best description he’d ever heard. But now in his backpack he’s lugging a potted plant and a roll-up tapestry of the Appalachian mountains and half a dozen pocket-size books about wildlife in California. He’d packed useful things, initially, his stapler, an extra charging cable, and his

calendar, and then his grandma had dumped it all out and told him to bring decorations only. Dinner that night had been strategic, chicken that only tasted good with pineapple sauce — and of course she was allergic to pineapples, so she'd had to settle for Tabasco — and by the end of the meal, she'd agreed: books *and* decorations.

In the second seat of the third row, he unzips the top of his bag and lets the potted plant peek out. It isn't sunny — fall is closer than the end of their twenty-three-mile drive — but the plant still needs air. It's a runt of a spider lily, one that's only flirted with flowering, but he's giving it time. His grandma would've tossed it out. He's going to put it in his dorm window and see how the sunlight treats it. There *is* sunlight: he can see it peeking over the clouds out the side window, and if he squints, it's in the wraparound windshield, too. It'll flower.

On his way out, he smiles at the bus driver, and she doesn't smile back.

Friday comes and he's crying at the bus stop.

It isn't the bus driver's fault. (Yes, it is.) He isn't going to blame her. (Yes, he is.) When the bus creaks to a stop and splashes color against the soggy pavement, he swipes his card, says hello as formally as he can, and collapses into the first seat, first row. The person with the skateboard is one row back today. He almost says thank you, because the sight of the city through the windshield is almost, *very* almost, enough to make him stop choking on his own breath.

He broke pencil three.

It's odd, being on that bus, watching the city shrink and the skyline rise, because he can't reach for his pencils. Physically, yes, he can grab them, but then he'd feel the broken splinters of pencil three, the one that doesn't dull no matter how hard you press it.

It is her fault. Maybe she knows it is.

Maybe she hates him, dreads him saying good morning and thank you every time he boards the bus. Maybe she instructs the person

with a skateboard to sit in his seat just so she can watch him flounder at the loss of a routine. Maybe she'd chosen not to smile back because she'd just had enough, and she'd known exactly what that would lead him to.

He's broken a lot of things over the past week.

The spider lily is dead. He didn't kill it—he killed the thing it lived in. He'd settled it on his windowsill, had forgotten that cheap university dorm windows open inward, and had sent it flying to the ground to die. He'd cried then, too, and by the time he'd scooped up the shards and tried to replot the lily, cradling it on the windowsill, trying to erase his mistake, it was past being saved. He'd never touch it again.

(He catches the eye of the bus driver in the mirror.)

Every bio assignment he writes with the cylindrical pencil earns him an F, because he only chooses words that slant and curve the same amount. He's gotten three Fs over the past week. He still can't stop using that pencil. It's the best one, he keeps telling himself, and though it's true, it's far from helpful.

(She blinks at him.)

On Wednesday he put his trash in the dumpster behind his dorm and twisted his ankle on the curb. He didn't fall into the trash, no, but he hadn't dragged himself up from the ground for five minutes. There'd been a crack the second he'd fallen, and though he knew it wasn't his ankle—he'd have felt that—there was always the chance. He'd taken that five minutes to ease himself to a standing position, let out one hell of a stale breath when everything had been fine, and reach into his pocket to fondle pencil three. That always calmed him down. But it had broken.

(He blinks back.)

The next time he sees her isn't Monday. It's Saturday. He's at the bus stop, gripping and ungripping pencil fifteen in his hoodie pocket. It has a replaceable eraser. That doesn't matter.

The frost on the edge of the sidewalk and his puffs of breath in the air don't matter, either. The fact that he's left everything he owns back



at his grandma's house doesn't matter. That he'll never be able to go back there, that she's told him he can't return, that she thinks he's untidy and monstrous and failing his classes — none of it matters.

When the bus arrives, he realizes he doesn't have his card.

"I don't—" is all he tries to say, because then the bus driver waves him past.

The next week isn't something he's aware of. Stepping into bio class or hearing the expectant throat-clear of his professor or staring at the words on page two hundred and seven of his textbook — it's all as inevitable as using the smooth-edge flat-edge pencil. He doesn't blink when it takes him four tries to fit the key in his doorknob. He doesn't clean up the pile of cookie wrappers (individually-wrapped, the fee dumped on his credit card one morning when he'd glanced, only *glanced*, at the vending machine and hadn't been able to stop himself), although he does organize them so the least-destroyed wrappers are on the bottom, supporting the rest.

That Saturday, things are so inevitable that he packs his overnight bag for his grandma's house, stands to pull the curtains shut on his window since the room will be empty for three days, and bumps his elbow on the spider lily.

He'd tried to repot it. He remembers that.

What he doesn't remember is it sprouting through the cracks in a flowerpot, now more superglue than ceramic. What he doesn't remember — or thinks he forgot — is the color of its buds, a sharper red than he knows what to do with, climbing back into his eye and imploring him to remember its shade.

The spider lily blooms.

That's what keeps him from smacking himself in the head an hour later. He'd boarded the bus, like an idiot, because autopilot hasn't adjusted to his grandma shutting him out and telling him never to come back. He's taken the first seat in the first row, and now, looking out the

wraparound windshield, waiting for a stop to get off on and walk back to campus before he's too far, he sees the city is different. Brighter. Mid-to-late afternoon is a spectacle today, which it hasn't been before. Outside there are cars with heaters turned up to full blast and kids bundled in coats that billow in the icy wind. He has two pencils in his pocket—these are yesterday's pants—and for some reason, he thinks the kid with the wool-woven hat and puffy yellow jacket would love a pencil that can do curves and straight lines just by flipping which side you use.

The bus stops a block away, and he's up, thank-you-ing the driver and hurrying into the wind, trying to recall if that kid had turned left at Aberdeen, if they were still headed toward the bank—There's a yellow coat around the corner. By the time he gets to it and offers the pencil, he's warmed up enough to heat the space for the two of them. He doesn't explain what the pencil does (he's wheezing too hard) but the kid's eyes have that look that means they'll figure it out.

It's a pencil. It isn't complicated.

It's a half hour walk back to his dorm. The spider lily grins at him when he arrives.

Friday trips to the bus stop fall out of his routine. There isn't anywhere to go now, which

means he can stay where he already is, poke his head in the dining hall he's been avoiding and figure out what to do with his weekend. It's almost too much time to himself without a grandma yelling in his ear or over his head, but Sunday night comes on schedule every time, and by then, there's something to show for it. He writes a bio paper with a regular pen. He buys a space heater and a heat lamp and props it up against his window, frost stalking the edges, keeping that spider lily in high spirits.

On a Saturday in December, he passes a trash can in the student union. It's an art exhibit of half-eaten lunches and paper that could've been recycled. It's *busy*, almost a collage of color, the same effect the

raindrops have on the bus windows. His fingers take a whole minute and a half to find the pencils in his backpack, and then longer to pick out the two broken halves. But he throws them in the trash. They blend right in.

Over holiday break, he updates his emergency contact forms. More accurately, he erases them with the pencil that's equal halves eraser and graphite (number twenty-four). His grandma's name disappears. He can picture her turning up her nose at that.

But he can picture the spider lily smiling, too. It's brighter.

This desk at the registrar's office, this place he's sitting, has a small cup of pencils and pens for people to take and use. He doesn't know how much erasing goes on here. Maybe none.

Maybe he's the first to remove his only emergency contact—maybe that'll get him in trouble. But if there are others who need an eraser that's barely lived its life, this is the best one for them.

So before he leaves, he drops pencil twenty-four in the cup.

On the first day of winter semester, someone next to him in his chemistry lecture asks to borrow a pencil for notes. He gives them pencil twelve. At lunch in the dining hall, someone asks him to fill out a survey. He checks the boxes with pencil eighteen and then leaves it on the clipboard. It disappears with the survey-taker.

On the twenty-eighth of January, his RA puts up a flyer asking for donations. A charity is looking for school supplies—*New ideal, but used O.K.!*—so he unzips his backpack all the way, takes out the half-empty package of twenty-five unique pencils, and leaves it in the bin outside his RA's room. He keeps one: number seven, the "classic" of the bunch, a straight-tipped pencil with a short eraser. (Instead of wood around the barrel, it's clear plastic, and the graphite's replaceable so it never has to be sharpened. That's the one unique thing about it. He holds onto it for aesthetic appeal and nothing more. That's the truth.)

During the second week of May, before he's taken his last final, but after he's finished the chemistry lab exam, he gets a call from his

grandma. It's all shaky voices and harsher words than should be allowed to grace the mouth of someone who's supposed to love her grandson.

Those words don't go deeper than his ears. The harsh words don't grow roots, not like the spider lily's, and later in the call, there's a shell of an apology. The next day, there's another call, more apologies, a plan and boundaries set.

At the bus stop that Saturday, this time weighed down by boxes packed with clothes and mini-encyclopedias and a small blooming pot of spider lily, he fondles pencil seven. It takes him a moment to find it in his backpack, but once he does, he can't seem to let it go, not even when the bus squeaks up to the curb and he has to go step-step-step up the stairs without dropping the boxes. Person with skateboard is in row one, seat one. That's fine. He needs the extra space in the back. There's a wraparound windshield at the back window, too – he never noticed that.

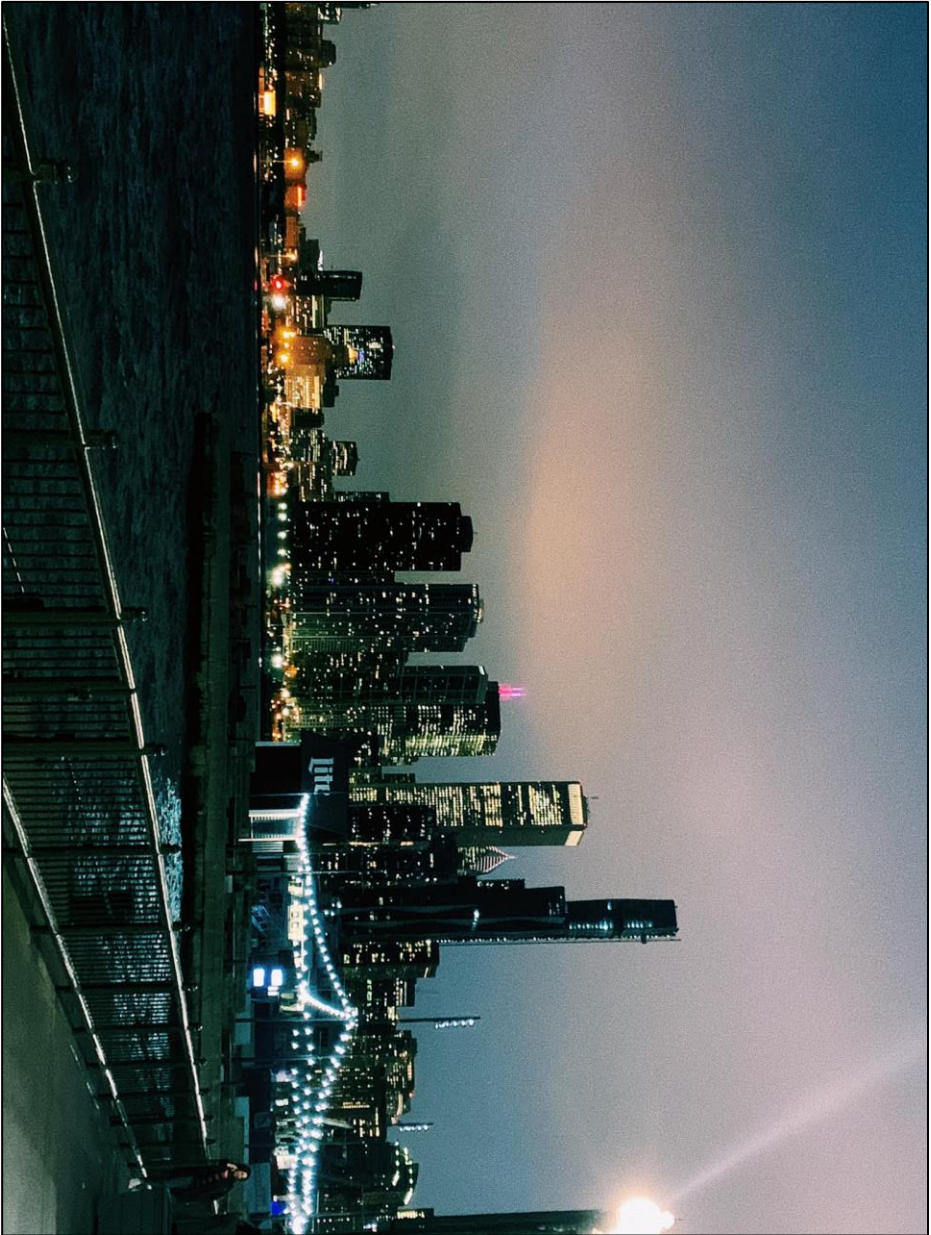
The boxes take a sabbatical on the floor while he rifles for his card. The pencil is still in his hand, and the bus driver smiles this time. So he hands her pencil seven and lugs the boxes to the back of the bus.

The ride is twenty-three miles.

Trevor Tyle

Senior. Major: Journalism. Minors: Cinema Studies and Spanish

## City Lights



Senior. Major: Creative Writing-Poetry,  
Concentration in Writing and Rhetoric

## Some Fantastic Axioms

You ain't gotta break the game down for me.  
I see how the atoms are arranged.

permanently presenting  
new permutations.

**impermanence**  
is **permanent.**

I get it.

But,  
don't  
forget.

**.up is down**  
**down is up.**

There is  
no highbrow  
or lowbrow.  
All boundaries  
between information  
is just semantics  
between the brows.

**YOU** permit things

and **YOU** forbid things

and **YOU** delineate the energy and make the grass green  
and have been made to masquerade as a lesser being.

Blessings be to the individual.

**You either twist the game,  
or  
you get twisted by the game.**

Please don't be  
a projector screen  
for someone else's  
lack of self-esteem.

Don't be around

un-profound nouns.

We're verbs.

Absurd.

Not totally of Earth.

Malleable.

***ALL* data**

is, at present,

**fallible.**

Just think of  
how many faulty filters  
and nervous systems  
the information slithers  
through before it gets  
imported to you.

**It's important that you**



## **recognize**

that the true pretentiousness  
is displayed by those who expect  
their moral compass will fit  
all over your mental grid.

**A tyrant never makes  
as much progress as a magician.**

## Oceans Deep

His eyes. His deep, beautiful blue eyes. His eyes were the first thing I fell for, before I even knew I was falling for him. They let me see a side of him that was hidden, that begged me to come and search him. They lured me in with such a passion that warned me that anything could go wrong at any moment.

But I wanted it; I wanted to take the plunge, to take those deep blue eyes and search him, every part of him, until I had found what he let no one else see before. And when he finally let me in, I knew I'd be safe.

At that moment, those blue eyes were telling me everything I needed to know without having to speak any words. Then he smiled and a part of me melted inside and I knew those eyes, they were looking deep inside me, trying to explore every hidden inch of me that I hadn't let anyone see before. Little did I know he was searching me, testing every part of me to see if I would give to him what I never gave to any other guy.

But that night, when those blue eyes found me again, they were empty, cold, lifeless. That fire and desire to search me was gone. I knew that he had lost everything he had for me, the feelings, the way he cared, everything, as it pierced my soul in ways I never thought possible. And in that moment those eyes were telling me everything I needed to know without having to speak any words.

## The Magic Trick

“Would you like to see a magic trick?” the skeleton asked.

“I suppose so,” I replied, lighting one of his fingers like a cigarette.

The skeleton reached into my chest and pulled out a smattering of constellations, each one silver and dazzling.

“This is what holds you together,” he announced, and suddenly I was stardust, swirling around the skeleton like the ash of my finger cigarette as he molded my constellations into a new form.

My powdered remains clung to the tendrils of a galaxy that rested in skeletal hands until I was me again, but it wasn't me at all, really.

“What have you done?” I demanded, only my lips weren't moving. I was a statue, blue and purple and cosmic.

## Marquette Among Lilacs



Senior. Major: Creative Writing

## Scenes from a Country Driveway

The bark of the ash tree crumbled in my fingertips  
like dirty sand  
at a metropolitan beach park—  
dry  
yet somehow clinging to skin.  
This must have been what dying felt like,  
being gone  
but hesitant to let go.  
A June bug buzzes by my ear  
but it isn't June  
and far too soon for things like June—  
bugs to be out,  
but that's never stopped them before—  
the soft thunk  
of an exoskeleton hitting the ash trunk—  
things were changing  
and the drunk sway of the oaks  
told me they felt the same way.

## The Coin

The coin was double-sided and gold plated, showing a replicated angel on either side. Both sides were completely identical in every regard, down to the shape of the clouds at the angel's feet and the folds in her dress. The coin was well-known to all those who were acquainted with the keeper of the coin: a mysterious woman who seemed to have blown in with the last big storm. She remained long after it had gone and now spent her days mingling nonchalantly with anyone she encountered. She was a drifter, having blown in on the winds of change, and the people of the small town always welcomed newcomers, though they grew particularly fond of the woman and her coin. She was never seen without it, so naturally it had become an object of interest for the people in the town. "Heads or tails?" she'd ask by way of starting conversations. The townspeople liked her eccentric ways and always played her little game. They'd ask to see it after she'd tossed it and it fell "heads" one too many times. She'd comply, show them her coin, they'd inspect it, and then laugh upon realizing that it was double-sided. It was in this way that everyone in the town came to know for a fact that the coin was double-sided. Beyond the coin's appearance, however, no one knew much else about it. Several people had asked of its origins and significance, and all received the same concise answer from the woman: "the water brought it to me." All anyone knew, then, was that the coin had two sides, the same in all aspects on each side, and that both sides were called "heads" because the angel faced those who held the coin.

Bearing in mind the nature of this coin and the knowledge of the people regarding its appearance, it is no surprise, then, that the day the keeper of the coin announced, after a typical flip, "tails," there was shock among everyone who was around to hear. Shock made way for confusion.

Confusion stepped aside as panic entered. Panic, frantic as can be, fell dead at the scene and from its corpse arose sheer terror. Terror lingered in the town, outlasting all other responses and emotions.

If there was one thing that everyone in this town knew with complete certainty, it was that the coin featured a forward-facing angel on either side. The impossibility, that, at the last flip of the coin, the angel had turned around, terrified everyone who bore witness. The keeper of the coin was the most affected, the most distraught. How many nights had she spent searching in vain for sleep? How many times, during such nights, had she, after resigning herself to the bleak reality of sleeplessness, been comforted by turning the coin between her fingers? Years upon countless years she had held her coin, gazed at it, inspected it, felt it. So familiar was she with the coin that even blindfolded she'd know whether it had been replaced with a different coin. She would feel for the subtle grooves which outlined the angel and know. She knew this coin better than she knew herself, and more surely than she knew anything else. Nothing in the universe was more certain to her than her coin being double-sided. Science and gods and mathematics were less real to her than her double-sided coin.

How then, did it land on tails? Oh, how her heart stopped, how her voice faltered, how her hands shook, when she announced "tails" for the first time in her life! What sick trick were the gods playing? In what strange way had the natural order of things been disrupted that her coin should land only to show the back of the angel who only faced forward?

She had taken, at the moment when her reality began to shatter and the coin proved to be tails, the coin out of her unsteady hand and placed it on the counter of the bar. She dared not pick it up again. Others had gathered around the coin, staring at it in utter disbelief, and they too dared not touch it. Even if someone had mustered the courage to touch that coin, which would in due time become infamous, they would have been repelled by a sort of force field which seemed to surround it and

ward off curiously mortified spectators. Thus, the coin remained exactly where its keeper had placed it.

Dusk followed day and people retired, still confused, still petrified, to their homes. They held onto hopes that when they woke the next day, they would realize that this had only been a dream. They were not so fortunate.

When dawn's rosy fingers brushed against the sky, everyone in the town rushed to the bar. To their dismay, they found the angel's back still facing them, her wings taunting them. Meanwhile, all work had halted. Time itself seemed to have stopped at the moment the keeper of the coin called out "tails" the evening prior. How could the people of this town trouble themselves with trivial pursuits like retail sales or corporate deadlines when, by the mere flip of a coin, the very foundation upon which facts are presented had begun to crumble? If the coin could suddenly become something entirely different, then by that unsettling occurrence, nothing could be proven and therefore nothing could be true. The people could not handle the decimation of what they believed to be true beyond any doubt at all. The thoughts and feelings of the inhabitants of this town at this moment in time must surely have paralleled those that accompany people who witness the fall of religions or nation states believed to be divinely ruled. Surely the victims in Pompeii felt this same panic, the panic that the world must be ending. For the people of this small town, the coin landing on tails was the equivalent of the sun rising in the west or the gods proving to be mere mortals.

In sum, the seams of sanity had come undone; the center of the town failed to hold, and the people fell apart. How could they have stood on a ground of faltering beliefs? They questioned their own reality. What could they have done when nothing was true or final or real anymore? They deteriorated, spiraling into complete chaos. In the midst of the disarray, the keeper of the coin disappeared one day, and some say she gave herself to the sea because she was unable to cope with the angel on



her coin turning around. Along with the keeper of the coin, reason disappeared, and logic died. Had Ginsberg been there to see it all happen, he'd have remarked that only now did he truly see the best minds of his generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked.

And so, they died. Starving, hysterical, naked. The town was left to ruin, and the bodies to decay. One day a wanderer passed through the town, and whilst sifting through the scattered corpses which littered the street, she happened upon an abandoned bar and went in, hoping to find some explanation there. It was eerie inside. There were no glasses or bottles or plates on the counter of the bar, for the inhabitants gave no thought to food or drink after that fatal coin toss. All that the traveler could find was a gold coin on the counter, with an angel's back facing her. She picked it up, turned it over, and it revealed itself to be double-sided, with a backward-facing angel flaunting her wings on each side. It appealed to her, it being double-sided and so detailed, so she pocketed it and left the town, looking to alert someone of what she deemed the mass suicide of an entire town.

No one was ever alerted, at least not by her, however, for she was never seen again. A neighboring town claims to have seen her by the sea. It is rumored that when she was tossing the coin to pass time while waiting for a cab, it eventually landed with the angel facing her, as heads rather than tails. Overwhelmed with emotions after having passed through the town of death, coupled with confusion and an inability to understand how this angel could have turned around to stare at her with accusing eyes, she went to the sea. Propelled forth by some force unknown to her, she gave herself to the waves. Years later, the fatal coin washed up on some distant shore, with the angel facing forward on both sides. It was picked up by some unfortunate woman who was excited to find a double-sided, gold-plated coin. She knew not the fate that would befall her.

## Markle Chapel



## **A Hand to Hold**

With a smile so warm and true  
It gives me hope that flowers will once again bloom  
Harsh words bring tears to the eyes  
Only washed away by the frigid shower of yesterday  
Unsure of where to go and who to be?  
Mesmerized by a gaze of sweet romance  
In moments like these, I'd internally cower  
However, this trance has gone on for far too long  
I want out from your shame and misery  
My life won't be dictated by rigid falsities  
Fluid as a cool drink, I take my first sip  
The taste of freedom as warm as the hottest sun  
The last breath of winter won't sour me  
For this is a man who decided his own fate  
Mistakes be damned, My time is mine

## **The Little Beeb**

Stands like a statue

So sassy like a princess

The light in my life

Junior. Major: Musical Theatre. Minor: Cinema

## **Thoughts from a Coffee Shop in Indianapolis**

People are fast,

The world is faster.

Celebrating triumph,

facing disaster.

It wouldn't have been ugly,

if he would've just asked her.

Would he give her love,

if the key wasn't buried?

Would he look her way again?

Porcelain skin that he cherished.

Stay in the white lines,

as the speed catches up,

Can't face the demons in the mirror,

Red solo cup.

"Don't give up" the painting reads,

In a "last" moment,

he is brought to his knees.

The Earth spins once,

Then is pushed around again,

Forced to propel forwards,

Exercising pent-up adrenaline.

*continued on the next page*

He holds me closer,  
I press in tightly,  
Never mind where he goes tomorrow,  
He's mine for the night.

Promise my heart,  
Let it fly free,  
I'll be the one,  
Who digs up your key.

Dirt around the edges,  
bronze shining through,  
A click, and a lock,  
Somehow bound to you.

Red-string connector,  
Pacific to the East,  
It is easy when we are together,  
Take a step forward  
and breathe.

Could we all just get lost  
in our latte in front of us?  
Holding on, something sturdy,  
Life in ceramic coffee cups.

*continued on the next page*

Beautiful designs in the foam,  
Sipping and searching,  
anything to remind us of home.  
The President sits, breaking a croissant in two.  
World matters, discussions,  
Ways to not be a fool.

Could we come to a conclusion  
With a notebook and a pen?  
Flip through the pages,  
of the past, now and then.

## **honestly I couldn't tell you**

I know many words  
yet I don't know what to do with them  
many words in my head that  
obliterate the ability to speak with them  
I think about when I had a stutter  
it was beaten into me, literally  
Speech therapy for two years.  
Is that an excuse?  
Or is that abuse?  
My head rolls with letters and my words  
Are on the loose.  
I hate this thought that fits in my mind  
Sits in my mind  
Like it belongs there, a piece of it  
Was it nature or nurture?  
Was it berate or torture?  
When I was younger I always wondered  
why my two brothers didn't have to do it  
why I sat in a car for a two hour drive  
down to a place where they had me say  
Xylophone  
Banana  
Ocean  
down to a place where they asked me  
Which chair is red?  
Where is the yellow ball?  
What does the blue sign say?  
Never once



Did they think twice to ask  
Which room in the house did she hurt you?  
Where on your body did she beat you?  
What did you feel when she hit you?  
and honestly I couldn't tell you.  
my terrible twos  
were filled with blacks and blues  
and my parents didn't know  
until I wouldn't speak when spoken to

I knew many words  
Yet I didn't know what to do with them  
many words in my head that  
sabotaged my ability to speak with them  
I think about my relationships  
they were all complicated, honestly  
They didn't work for too many reasons.  
Was it all in my head?  
Or words all unsaid?  
My mind would work wild when I'd cry  
alone in my bed.  
I hate those thoughts that fit in my mind  
Sit in my mind  
Like they belonged there, a part of it  
Was it love or lust?  
Was it betrayal or trust?  
When I was younger I always wondered  
why my two friends had it so easy  
why I sat in my bed for two hours a night  
wondering if guys would ask me about  
Favorite bands

Memories

Hopes

wondering if I'd answer questions with

No, my eyes aren't red.

I'm only wearing a yellow shirt.

I haven't felt this blue in a while.

But never once

Did they think twice to ask

Which memories haunt you the most?

Where were you when it started?

What can I do to help you?

and honestly I couldn't tell you.

my selfless loves

were filled with lack thereof

and the guys didn't know

until I wouldn't text when texted to

I know many words

Yet I don't know what to do with them

many words in my head that

efface my ability to speak with them

I think about my freshman year

I opened up to someone, actually

Pure bliss for two months.

Has it been too long?

Or could I be all wrong?

My thoughts would throw wonder where our

laughs were so strong.

I hate the thoughts that still fit in my mind

Sit in my mind

Like they belong there, a portion of it

Was it stupid or smart?

Was it head or heart?

When I was younger I always wondered  
why my two sides of myself would disagree  
why I sat in therapy for two hours a week  
wondering if they'd make me dissect

My upbringing

Relationships

Now

wondering if they'd discuss with me

Which social cues had I misread?

Where did I put my yellowing thoughts?

What I meant by "I blew my chance"?

But never once

Did they think twice to ask

Which night did you feel the most empty?

Where in your body does the pain begin?

What result does the problem have on your life?

and honestly I couldn't tell you.

my heart breaks

a repetition of chaos and quakes

and the guy never knew

until I couldn't attach when attached to

**Fox**



## An Elegy, Long Overdue

It is February. Snow drifts down from the ashen sky, encasing the world in a white tomb. I hear about it from Phoebe; she is away at the same school as you. I think about the cold, and how much you would have hated it. You told me once that after college, you were going to move somewhere that never sees snow. I remember how much happier you seemed the summer before, when things were bright and dry and brittle. Your mood seemed to shift when the weather changed, or maybe you just hid it better with the help of the sun. Either way, it is fitting that I learn about your death on a day you would have despised.

My mother asks me if I am fine. I tell her yes, even though it's a lie. I go to bed early.

Three weeks later, the funeral. It's been almost nine months since I last saw you. There is no casket, only a blown-up picture of your face. I don't know how you died. I don't know if you were cremated or if you were an organ donor or if your body had been sent somewhere else for scientific study. I don't know if you died slowly, if your roommate found you hanging from a door frame or next to an empty bottle of pills, if you were found in a bathtub with your veins emptied. I don't even know if you had a roommate. I don't know how long you were alone before your body was discovered.

At the funeral, your father speaks first, then your mother, then all three of your brothers. They play a video, a collage of your pictures. You're smiling in all of them. Your father and mother talk about how much you wanted to be a vet, even as a child. One of your brothers is proud of you for graduating summa cum laude, for getting into MSU with flying colors.

You are still so loved. I know you probably didn't feel it, couldn't feel it, but you were, and you are.

I remember all of the times I asked if you were okay and you told me you were just tired. I knew, even then, that the lie had flowed off of your tongue so many times that you didn't even stop to consider announcing the truth. You had resolved that the truth of your sadness was a poison you would keep to yourself until the end because no one would bear the sickness with you. I want to tell you that I would have been the surrogate that carried your burden. I want you to know that I would have stayed awake as late as you needed just to be your listener. Maybe then you would have stayed.

I spend half an hour after the funeral clinging to our friends, hoping they will pull the pieces back together. The cracks still remain.

I allow an entire year to slip from my memory. Then:

March, in a poetry class. I write about the things I have lost. The poem starts with you; everything else is secondary. Reading it out loud in class is nearly impossible because I do not want to admit out loud that your absence is irreversible and real. I want to pretend that you are still away at school, that we simply drifted apart after high school. Somehow, I manage to force the poem from my lips then sit in silence while the class absorbs it. I talk about you, briefly and vaguely, with another student after class. I can't fully put you into words yet.

There is a tattoo on my ankle of a semi-colon. It's supposed to represent the idea that life is a sentence and suicide is a period, that depression should just be a pause in your sentence. I got it before your death, as a reminder for myself. In this moment, the tattoo is a fiction. A mistake.

April. I am living in Royal Oak now, away from a life that no longer has you in it. You weren't the only reason for the move, but to no longer be surrounded by our friends, to no longer be in the town with a gravestone that has your name on it, makes it easier to move on. To forget. I want so desperately to forget about everything: your smile, your "I'm just tired" days, the moments when your aching sadness bubbled up through your skin and seeped into the air around you and everyone who you called a friend pretended it wasn't there. But how can anyone forget that?

Summer, the first one I have acknowledged since your death. I work 60 hours a week so that I don't have time to think of you. It almost works.

While working a late shift at the bar, the song that reminded you of me comes on. "It's Goin' Down" blares loudly and rudely throughout the small, dimly-lit space, and everyone else seems excited to hear it. You once told me that the artist's "doesn't-take-shit-from-anyone" attitude was reminiscent of my own. You weren't wrong. I hold it together for barely a minute, then I tell the bar manager that I need a short break. He looks at my face and understands. I stand in a bathroom stall for fifteen minutes, taking deep breaths as I try to ignore the woman vomiting in the next stall over. No tears come.

February, two years since your death. The memory of your funeral is dragged, unwanted, from the folds of my brain. I curl up on my bed with the lights out and the blinds closed and sob, until my chest heaves, without sound. Red marks like forked lightning stain my cheeks. I recall the storm that had raged on the day of your funeral. I had pretended that you were there in the clouds on the day we mourned you, as a way to believe in some sort of afterlife. I didn't—I don't—want to believe that you have stopped existing.

Autumn is in full bloom. Crimson and tangerine rage across every tree, fighting for their place in the tree branches. Brown death litters the ground around the trunks. I remember when we would set up microphones in the football field press box before marching band rehearsals. We would spend five days a week being higher than the treetops, just for a moment, and watch as the world slowly painted each tree. The same way Alice painted the roses red in Wonderland. I stand in my room and open the window. Four stories up, I imagine that I am back in the press box with you. *Is the afterlife like Wonderland? Is there anything after this?* My words are carried away on the whispering breeze as I wait for your reply. You respond with silence.

November, when you should have been in your fourth year of school. At what point did you decide that you wanted to be a vet? At what point did you decide that your future was not worth the effort of waking up each day? Did your sadness plague you since your birth, or did it grow slowly like a cancer in your core? When did you come to the conclusion that your life was not worth living?

I wonder why I keep asking questions you will never answer.

I am on campus on an unnaturally warm January day. In front of me, there is a man who looks almost exactly like you: same build, same gray sweatshirt with the hood up, same faded jeans that don't quite fit his thin frame. I pause in the middle of the sidewalk, certain that I have seen your ghost. But then he turns, and I see that his face isn't quite right. I release a breath I didn't realize I was holding and continue walking with my head down. Dearest friend, for as much as I have tried not to think about your absence, I keep looking for you in the world around me, certain that your death must be a cruel, intricate joke. I search for your face in bar patrons, listen for your voice in crowded spaces, feel for you in



raindrops and the warmth of the sun.

I am starting to think that, maybe, I don't want to forget you existed after all. I think I simply miss you.

Now. I am sitting at my desk, looking through old pictures of you. You hated having your picture taken; your hand is covering part of the camera in all of them. Manzoni's Requiem plays softly in the background; the notes lilt through the air and melt into the snow drifting beyond the window. This is the last piece of music we ever performed together. I have only picked up my flute three times since that concert. I tell my mother I simply lost interest in performing, but in truth, I cannot separate you from playing music. Playing my flute makes me miss you even more.

I begin to sketch out a new tattoo, in your honor. During our last summer together, while we were standing in the courtyard in front of the high school, you looked down and pointed at a miniature bee by my foot. Baby bee, you called it. Soon we realized the benches around us were crawling with these bees, inching in and out of craters in the concrete. Any time you saw one thereafter, you would get my attention, point, and say baby bee. It's a moment we never explained to anyone else; it belonged only to the two of us.

I draw the simple outline of a bee, as small as I can make it. I hold it up to the inside of my wrist. Baby bee fits nicely there. You will be a permanent reminder on my skin, in a space where I can see it often.

I am ready to remember you.

## Come Waltz with Me

The ocean erupted, bearing a flickering light. Fire blossomed in the reflection and the smoke overtook time. From inside, a record scratched out a plaintive melody, and the scent of freshly harvested lilac blossoms wafted across the water while the wind rustled the leaves of her newspaper.

Light danced off her diamond ring, catching the stones and making them glisten as she watched the fireworks. The silver band glowed red for an instant as another set of sparks filled the sky. The last echoes of Frank Sinatra's velvet voice died, and the old record player scratched in fuzzy silence before someone flipped the vinyl disc.

*Before we say good-bye forever, come waltz with me, come waltz with me once more.  
Before we let love die forever, come waltz with me, the way we waltzed before.*

Her shoulders rose and fell in one aching sigh, watching the boat where the boys played with explosives and lit matches over the water. Everyone was there, just like they were every year. They ate, drank, talked, laughed, and danced on this night, celebrating freedom and liberty and justice for all. But she could not join the laughter or enter the halo of light surrounding the house; she could barely summon a word of greeting for the guests.

Tonight, she preferred the quiet gray courtyard, watching the lake and the house from her own lonely country.

*Before our little world just crumbled and fell, and tumbled, like a house of cards to the floor.*

*Before I'm left to sigh forever, and haunt the past, give me this last encore.*

She set her crystal wine glass down and turned to face the empty stone courtyard. From the window, yellow lights beamed, and chatter streamed, punctuated by shouting from the lake and by colorful explosions in the air. She raised her arms and began to dance.

The slow steps of a simple waltz flowed across the floor as she looked into a missing face. She watched him smile at her, and let his confident steps lead the dance until she realized that she was alone.

Her arms ached and trembled as she reached for her glass, but her hand rested upon the newspaper. The straight, sharp print marched above a mangled image of his smiling face, and a photograph of the worst accident she had ever seen.

*Oh, darling, come and waltz with me once more.*

## Sunrise

If I were a sunrise  
I'd hope that your eyes  
Would dawn on mine

I'd look to the west as I'm rising  
Hills round and green  
Like pillows touching the sky for this scene

Pressing fingers into soil  
Like roots of a tree  
Feeling the Earth all around  
Feeling like you're free

We push and we pull  
But it's just another day

Wooden hearts  
And leafy lungs  
We're the proof of all that is to come  
You and I have got our eyes  
On the sky

If I were a sunrise  
I'd just keep looking forward  
Until the new day arrives

## **Birds are Not Real**

The birds work for the bourgeoisie.

There. I said it. If there are any fellow TikTokers out there, you know what I'm talking about.

This isn't a game, though. Birds are not real. Maybe Reagan did kill them off in 1986 because something isn't right about those creatures.

Before you accuse me of being a flat-earther, I'm not totally nuts. The earth is very much round with a variety of animals to make it beautiful and spectacular. Birds are just not one of them.

Birds are straight up spies. The proof is in the way they fly away the second you take a step near them. Nobody moves that fast unless they have something to hide. If you get too close, you can probably see the cameras in their eyes.

So, the government can't be everywhere at all times. Isn't it just so convenient that no matter where you live, there is some type of bird hanging around? They're watching you. You've been warned.

You might say, "But the government tracks us through our electronics." Not everyone owns a smartphone or computer. Even then, birds can still get to you. They're on the lookout 24/7.

Birds are the perfect size to just sit on a branch or ledge comfortably to overhear a conversation in the park or peer into a window. Talking with your friend about the Area 51 raid? Bertie the Bird just marked you as high-risk.

It's also mind-boggling how there are so many types. There are roughly 10,000 species of birds. That's just a little too suspicious for my liking. It's one of their tactics to throw us off — they distract us with pretty feathers and chirping.

That annoying ass chirping in the morning is just them talking to each other about their findings from the night before. They think they're

slick, having meetings early in the morning before anyone is up.

Ever heard a group of birds going at it late at night? That's a special meeting the HBIC (head bird in charge) called when they found out something extra juicy.

Another one of their tactics is shitting everywhere. Literally anywhere they damn well please. They'll shit on your head if they feel like it. That's them asserting their dominance, showing us they're in charge.

The most notorious shitters and ballsiest of the birds are geese. You may not see a lot of smaller birds on college campuses because of how many people are around, but geese are unlike any other form of bird. They're not afraid. They need the intel from the younger generations. But you can't let them win. You must chase them and show them who's really in charge.

I know a few people have caught onto this theory. Where do you think the act of killing turkeys for Thanksgiving came from? It may not get rid of them all, but it definitely sends a message. There's also the saying "kill two birds with one stone." WE HAVE TO TAKE THEM OUT BEFORE THEY GET TOO POWERFUL.

All I'm saying is birds are sketchy as hell. Encounter at your own risk.

Sam Summers

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Junior. Major: English. Minor: Spanish

## Sepia Sprout



**mother's eyes**

i can no longer stare into mirrors  
her eyes pierce through my tear-filled ones  
green as the day she was diagnosed  
blue as the waves of appreciation at good luck,  
outstretched in anticipation

those eyes that looked at me,  
closed tenderly as they kissed two infants  
one green, one blue  
opened wide with tears as they saw them grow up

struck by anger at moments  
fear grew to be the strongest.  
terror tears tear at tearful memories  
crashing through reflections, just wishing for peace

when i look at myself –  
her eyes stare back at me in remembrance.

– the most obvious piece of her



Alum. B.A. English

## O- Frayed

**“Sacred signs always come when  
your soul calls out in pain or joy.”**

Lawren Leo

I am O-frayed  
and so scared.  
Today omens  
everywhere.

Two box turtles  
in the road—I  
saved them from  
tired death.

A rainbow falls  
into the river.

What to make  
of this? I don't  
know how such  
a simple world—

laid down before me  
spins against my black  
knotted thoughts—crows  
sitting on the fence.

But it frightens  
me to think.

I might not be  
back again before  
my bodeful house  
is built in silence.

The dogs heard us  
alarmed the earth was  
quaking, faults of our own  
making another line to cross.

Now the sun  
after the rain.

Let the healing  
start, I am so sore  
joys, some call pains,  
is all this chum knows.

Hand and hand and hand  
I saw them playing each  
one pleading for *Red*  
*Rover* to come over.

Just a game  
an odd omen?

I fear to think so  
but it may be so  
the seeds we sow  
one must hope so.

# Marcy Coosaia-Rodger

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Alum. B.A. Creative Writing and Public Relations

## **Dear birth mother and father,**

Hello, it's your daughter. I'm 22 years old right now and in college at Oakland University in Michigan. I'm currently studying as a creative writing major and a public relations minor. One day, I will be getting an official job and hope I can travel back to China to find you.

You don't know this, but I took a DNA test earlier this year. The first time I took the test the results came back inconclusive, or the company just couldn't read my sample of saliva. I was a bit disappointed at first but after some time, I retook the test. I was worried about the results though, that they would show up as something other than Chinese. But the results came back a few weeks later, stating that I was 100% Chinese. I was happy to know where I actually came from, but I still did not get any information that I didn't already know.

You may be wondering why I was so scared about finding out about my DNA results, and truthfully, I was scared to find a match to someone in our family. I've always had trouble feeling included in my adopted family ever since I was small. I always felt like I was different, the outsider, when everyone tells me that isn't true at all. But they weren't in my shoes and they didn't really understand how I felt.

You probably never thought or hoped I would feel this way, though. I'm sure you probably wanted the best for me, the best future, and the best life that you probably couldn't give me at the time when you had to give me up. And I have had a lot of amazing opportunities in my life. I've had a great education growing up, my college is amazing, I have a wonderful family that loves me, and roommates who actually like me. I always wonder why you gave me up though. Sometimes I wonder if it was because of the one child policy that they had at the time, but I also wonder if it was because I was a daughter and not a son. I really hope it isn't the latter, but if it is, I understand.

I met a couple of adopted people from Asia as well and we've talked about being adopted. One of them has actually found his family, so I guess that is what inspired me to want to know a little more about my past. He is very knowledgeable and I'm sure you guys would love him since he has gotten me to love and embrace a side of myself that I sometimes like to hide, that I'm adopted.

I'm not saying that I'm ashamed to be Chinese or adopted. But sometimes, I just want to blend in. And other times I don't mind sticking out. Confusing and contradictory, I guess, but that's just how I've always been. I see things as black and white, not really gray. I am trying to live my life less like a black and white world. I'm also trying to live my life in the moment and sometimes in the gray area.

I really love my parents, and they are a part of me that makes me unique. They are wonderful people and they have raised me right. They have taught me love, respect, kindness, and empathy. My mom and dad make me laugh when they playfully banter and cheer me up when I'm feeling down. They have also taught me the importance of caring for others and doing things for people besides yourself, to not be selfish.

I wanted to tell you that I'm grateful that you had me. I know it must have been a hard decision for you to give me up and I know that you wrote a letter that was with me when you gave me up. I haven't read what it said yet, but I will read it one day.

I guess what I'm trying to say, is that I think I understand why you gave me up. But I wanted to tell you that I'm happy where I am and that I'm okay. I'm sure you might think of me from time to time. And I'm trying to learn to love myself, even if I am adopted, and that the people around me love and accept me for who I am, as I am.

From,

the daughter you loved enough to give a bright future.

Senior. Major: Psychology. Minor: Creative Writing

## My Life in One Flash

I remember walking around Payless in eight-inch heels,  
spitting out my vegetables in the downstairs bathroom trash,  
jumping out of the living room window and grazing the thorn bush, and  
my foot getting caught in the gutter as I jumped off Suzanne's roof.

I remember trying to be the best swing-set jumper only to twist my ankle  
instead,  
and Joshua pushing me around the house in the dining room chair until I  
recovered.

I remember feeding him from a baby bottle,  
climbing on his shoulders to discover what our parents were hiding on  
the fridge,  
the "night before the 1st day of school" dread and  
praying every year that *this* would be my year.

I remember the complaints my Grandma spit out at the Olga's waitress  
and that year my cousin refused to eat anything besides un-buttered toast  
and water.

I remember accidentally stealing my neighbor's bike,  
spotting those two middle schoolers hiding in a bush near the  
playground,  
my second-grade-self disposing of the test that sported a bright red "F"  
on the front, and  
the hours spent studying with my best friend so she could pass math.

*continued on the next page*

How could I forget the attack wound from the big, scary dog?  
Or the moment of panic when I thought I got left behind in Florida.  
The fear of finding out I had a suitor, and  
destroying friendships in fear that they would lead to more.

I remember the yucky scent of dandelion weeds lingering on my palms  
each summer,  
the sticky, blue popsicle juice melting down my chin,  
and everything else that is important enough.

Junior. Major: Secondary Education, English and History

## Sea Through Me

I sit on the shore as the waves crash over me.  
The rush of water is exciting,  
but now I'm choking.  
You can be a churning sea of emotion like me.  
Your moods are like the tides, receding then rushing in all at once,  
yet I cling to your calming presence hidden in the sandy bottom.  
Your thoughts, half smiles, and crazy giggles;  
that always roll on the shifting ground  
that bubble up and pop, showing everyone your best quirks.  
We are drowning in our work,  
in the responsibilities that demand our attention.  
We are fighting for our lives,  
against the things that threaten to pull us under.  
I gasp for air before plummeting to the ocean floor.  
When the darkness seems to close in, I look around.  
There, you can be found.  
The depth of our emotional intimacy encircles me.  
I am an island in our mutual support and trust, while you are the sun.  
I love taking a deep dive into our moments together,  
but I get sucked in by the undercurrents.  
Overwhelmed and a little lost,  
our memories can surround me with murky depth.  
I propel myself back to the surface and lay backwards.  
If I look up at you, all I see is light.  
You can be this burning sun with restless energy and warmth.  
Sometimes you become so boiling,  
I jump back as if stuck with thorns.  
Soon, you melt and balance out.

Then I see how you help things grow and live and breathe.  
I became an island to bask in this gift you give.  
I never want to fully depend on you,  
never wanted you to feel pressure to keep me standing.  
So I allowed the waters to hold me up and tried to be understanding.  
While I soaked in your sunlight,  
our souls could reunite.  
Suddenly, we were dashing from the beach.  
I wanted to grab your hand as we push ourselves under the rolling  
whitecaps.  
You were too far  
and I was too afraid.  
Splash of water in my face.  
Off we go on a playful chase.  
Sometimes, I feel like we purposefully disturb our intersecting waters.  
We push against each other,  
We challenge each other.  
Wave after wave,  
until we slack and fall, breathing heavily.  
I cool down and wander back  
I felt like I could dissolve into seafoam,  
floating on your tides.  
Flowing with your lead,  
back to shore we go.  
Stars poking out now as your light mellowed out,  
to a slight golden hue.  
"That's the coolest thing I've ever seen," I told you.  
You just chuckled and pointed out the Big Dipper.  
Twinkling gems in black velvet.  
I watched your finger float along in the air,  
showing me wonders that I was not previously aware.



I never wanted to leave.

I never wanted to go back.

Nothing could've harmed us there, not even our thoughts.

Sand decorated our bodies and the water flowed through our ears.

We were safe, together, and happy.

We are both equally thrilling and threatening.

Both refreshing and reckless.

Our connection is what I cling to.

No matter the direction we go in,

I will always love everything we do.

Even if I try to hide,

you always see the bright, shining sea,

that connects you to me.

## Tahquamenon Falls



Sophomore. Major: Information Technology.

### The Big Game

“This is JEOPARDY” said the recorded voice of Johnny Gilbert over the loudspeaker system as the last of the crowd filed into the school gymnasium. Today was the state Science Jeopardy competition finals, and the excitement was contagious.

I was in the locker room at that moment, fussing with my tie. I had paid top dollar for a fancy suit to wear, as I would be officiating the competition. Reporters from three different news networks had come to record the proceedings, and I wanted to make a good impression. I had been in front of that mirror for more than five minutes now, and I was getting quite upset that I could not get my tie just right. Time was running out, and I did not want to leave the crowd outside waiting.

At that moment Mrs. Sophia, the school’s music instructor, walked in and saw me yanking at my tie with increasing frustration. She walked over and said,

“Here, son. Let me adjust it.”

Mrs. Sophia tucked and folded my tie just as it was supposed to be and then said,

“There, William. You look great. Now go out there and knock their socks off!”

“Thank you.”

As I opened the door to the locker room the crowd outside began cheering wildly. My first instinct was to clap my hands against my ears to shut out the noise, but I knew that arrangements have been made to try to control the volume, and that I was wearing earplugs, regardless. Strutting up to the podium in my blue suit, white shirt, red tie, and impeccably shined shoes, I flipped on the microphone and said,

“Are you ready for some JEOPARDY?”

“YES!” screamed the crowd.

“Then let’s do it! Centricity High, Channel 9 News, Wal-Mart, and the State of Maryland proudly present, Science Jeopardy! Students from all over the state have come here today to see who has the greatest command of the state science curriculum, and the winner today will take home a \$500 Amazon.com gift card!”

With that I held the gift card into the spotlight for all to see. When the babble died down, I put the card back into the locked podium drawer from which it came.

“May I now announce our contestants? From Shalendu High School in Shalendu, MD, comes Jacob Ferendel. From the Greater Baltimore Center for the Gifted, Isaac Jeremiah Patrell. Danielle Tralikinski, who attends George L. Patterson High School in Adana. Benjamin Kapridi, from the Special Education Center in Magdalena City. And finally, Regina Davison, representing Centricity High itself! Let’s give all of our competitors a round of applause!”

I checked the clock on the computer screen. It was 10:06 AM. The game was scheduled to last until noon, with a break for lunch from 11:08 to 11:36. (Why the event planners couldn’t use 11 and 11:30 remains a mystery to me. The television camera men were the biggest critics of the timetable, as it directly conflicted with their broadcast schedules.) The first round had to start no later than 10:10, so I needed to get a move on.

“And now,” I said, “direct your attention to the Jeopardy board. There are twenty-five questions, divided evenly over five categories. Each contestant will pick a category and point value, and then all five of our contestants will be given exactly two minutes to write their response. After the two minutes, all the responses will be revealed, and I will award the points to whoever wrote the most accurate one. Remember that this is Jeopardy, so the responses must be phrased in the form of a question. For example, you would write, ‘What is a beaker?’ instead of simply ‘Beaker.’ If you don’t, you will not be awarded any points even if you are accurate. Now, let’s begin! Jacob, you have the first pick.”

"I will take Physics for ten points, please."

Nodding, I clicked the appropriate button, and the label on the big screen slid aside to reveal the prompt: "A fancy word for an arrow." After reading the question aloud, I clicked the button that started the timer. Exactly two minutes later, the contestants' answers were displayed for all to see.

"Jacob: 'What is the direction?' Isaac: 'What is a vector quantity?' Danielle: 'What is a vector?' Benjamin: 'I can't remember.' Regina: 'A vector is a term used in the military.' Danielle, you are correct; a vector is a word used in physics to refer to an arrow. Ten points for Danielle!"

With that, I noted the points on the big screen.

"Isaac, it is now your choice..."

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Roughly an hour later, at the end of the first round, the points were thus: Out of 750 points total, Jacob had 80, Isaac had 120, Danielle had 100, Ben had 110, and Regina had 340. Straightening my suit as I assumed the podium for Final Jeopardy, I activated the microphone and said to the crowd,

"Welcome back! Final Jeopardy is now upon us. Each of our contestants must now wager a certain amount of points. The hardest prompt of all will then be presented. You will then have two minutes to write your question, as before. If your response is accurate, you will win the amount of points you wagered. Everyone else will lose an amount of points equal to their wager. Jacob, let's start. What is your wager?"

"I will wager 50 points, please."

"Isaac?"

"I will also wager 50 points."

"Danielle?"

"I will wager 30 points."

"Benjamin?"

Looking over at Benjamin, I saw that he was sobbing with his head in his hands, with his glasses sitting on the table next to him. Walking over to him, I put my hand on his shoulder and asked him what was wrong.

"It-It's the crowd. I-I-I never did well in crowds. You don't understand!"

"I understand more than you might think. Don't worry. We're almost done. Just a few more minutes. Don't give up!"

"Th-thank you. I'll bet 70 points." As I was right next to her, I asked Regina what her wager was before I returned to the podium.

"I'll wager 120 points. That way I'm a guaranteed winner, even if any of the other contestants" (sarcasm was dripping from her voice) "actually answer intelligently for once!"

"Hey! That was mean! Apologize!" Benjamin was red in the face and yelling at Regina at the top of his lungs. Quickly stepping between them, I said,

"Now, now. Let's not get into an argument. Regina, I agree; that was not kind, but for now, let's just save it. After all, we have the toughest answer of all before us, just waiting for a question!"

Returning to the podium, I entered the wagers into the computer, which mirrored them on the big screen, and then showed the Final Jeopardy prompt.

"This branch of science deals with the microworld of atomic nuclei, and of even smaller things than that.' Now, let's do this!"

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I was appalled. There was no other way to put it. I was simply appalled. How could this be? Eva, Celia, Mr. Graye, Mrs. al-Batani, and I had worked the hardest we had ever worked to prepare for the Jeopardy game, and for *this* to happen? How?!

Jacob, Isaac, Danielle, and Regina all gave the correct Final

Jeopardy response. Not only that, Jacob, Danielle, and Regina all phrased their questions exactly the same, word for word. (Isaac responded correctly but worded his question differently.) There was no way to explain it, except one: Cheating.

I had retired to the nearest computer room, where I was sitting in the teacher's chair, bawling my eyes out. How could this have happened? *How could this have happened?!*

But I had to pull myself together! The other members of the Jeopardy team were counting on me to find out who sabotaged our game. Taking a deep breath, I pressed Control-Alt-Delete and logged back in.

Opening This PC, I dug through the student drive until I found the Jeopardy folder. Inside was the Word file with the final list of questions. Selecting it, I opened the Security Settings window and clicked the Auditing tab. Listed there was the name of every user who had ever accessed this file. Scrolling down to the most recent entry, I noticed that Celia had opened it from a computer in English 10 yesterday. That struck me as odd, as Celia is a junior — she passed English 10 last year with flying colors. Grabbing the telephone, I dialed the security office.

"Mr. Rothman?"

"Yes?"

"Hi, this is William up in 210. Could you please find Celia de Loura and send her to me? I think I have a lead on the Jeopardy cheating."

"At once."

"Thank you."

A few minutes later, Mr. Rothman walked in with Celia. He was tall, with brown hair and a dark goatee. Celia was a short Hispanic girl with dark brown hair. She spoke quickly with a strong accent.

"You needed to see me?"

"Yes, actually. Were you in room 227 during third period yesterday?"

"No. I was in choir practice then. Why do you ask?"

"Well, considering what you just told me, it seems that someone was using your computer account without permission."

"Oh dear."

"I agree. Do you know who might have been able to access your account?"

"No one comes to mind."

"Think. When was the last time you logged into a computer?"

"I believe it was on Monday, during sixth period. I was in a big hurry, as my assignment was late, and I needed to print it out ASAP."

"So if you were in a hurry, it stands to reason that you weren't being as careful as I know you usually are." Seeing how Celia suddenly looked alarmed, I added, "Don't worry. It's just a statement, not an accusation."

"Well... you're right. I remember that Joey was staring at me the entire time I was using the computer. I don't know why."

"Do you think he could have seen your password as you entered it?"

Celia sighed. "I'm afraid so."

"OK... Celia, thank you; that's all I need. Mr. Rothman, do you know where Joey..." I blinked and turned to Celia. "Joey who?"

"Nicaza."

"Thank you. Mr. Rothman, do you know where Joey Nicaza is?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact. He didn't come in today — or yesterday, for that matter."

"Did he say why?"

"No; he just didn't show up. Not like that's surprising given his track record."

"Thank you. Now, Celia, Mr. Rothman, if you'll excuse me, I have some detective work to do."

I returned to the computer and opened up the student drive



again. The student drive was home to a number of folders — the home folders for each of the students, the documents and turn-in folders for all of the teachers, and an infamous folder called Network Trash. The Network Trash folder was a folder in which everyone — all staff and all students — could put things in and take things out. I don't know why the district put it there in the first place, but I knew firsthand that the Network Trash was abused by pretty much every student in the building to store and exchange files that shouldn't have been brought to school in the first place. On any given day, you could find music files with inappropriate lyrics, Internet censor-evasion software, and video games in the Network Trash.

In one particularly memorable incident a few years ago, one student managed to copy a PDF file containing the answers for several AP Calculus assessments into the Network Trash. Fortunately, the teacher found out what happened and deleted the offending file before everyone else in the class saw all the answers.

This last incident was what prompted me to look in the Network Trash. Inside was a text file containing the prompt and response for Final Jeopardy. Unfortunately, the owner of the file was the Anonymous account, which meant that I could not tell who placed it there. It seemed that I would need to dig a little deeper.

At that moment, Mrs. Sophia entered. She had a computer problem she needed assistance with. She was trying to clean out her turn-in folder by deleting unneeded files, but the computer was refusing to delete a particular folder. What's more, she didn't recognize the name of the folder — in fact, she said it was gibberish.

Opening Mrs. Sophia's class folder, I found an invisible folder there called FK4958TUF. I selected it and pressed Delete, but the reported that permission was denied. I then tried opening it, but the same thing happened. My curiosity piqued; I opened the folder's security settings. Sure enough — all permissions for the folder were denied except for two

users: JNicaza and RDavison. Although I could not gain access to the folder by myself, a quick call to the Web Design teacher (who is also the administrator for Centricity High's computer network) fixed that. Inside was but one file, called 9RTGUYHFJEKOl.pptx. However, PowerPoint would not open it, claiming that it was unreadable.

It was then that I noticed that the file in question was only 1K in size — far too small for a true PowerPoint document. The smallest PowerPoint file I had ever seen was around 20K. On a sudden hunch, I renamed the file to end in .txt instead of .pptx and opened it into Notepad. Inside I found the evidence I was looking for: Celia de Loura's password, as well as precise directions to the Jeopardy folder. Seeing that there were only two people who could normally open the file, and how one of them wasn't even here, I now knew who was responsible.

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Barely remembering to lock the computer screen, I rushed out of the lab, down a flight of stairs, and into the main office. Gasping for breath, I told the secretary that I needed to see Dr. Christian on urgent business. She ushered me into the principal's office. Dr. L. E. Christian was an African-American man, about my height, with a neatly trimmed mustache and black hair. Standing up, he offered his hand and said,

"Yes, son? What's wrong?"

"I know who tampered with the Jeopardy competition!"

"Who?"

"Well, she covered her tracks expertly, using someone else's computer account to access the password protected folder, but I was still able to trace it back."

"I understand that. Who?"

"Regina Davison."

Dr. Christian was incensed. Running out into the main office, he roared at Mr. Rothman,

“Mark, get Regina down here at once!”

Turning around, he saw me quivering in a corner with my hands on my ears. Remembering how much trouble I have with suddenly loud, angry people, Dr. Christian apologized. Recovering, I quickly explained what I had found on the student drive. A few minutes later, Mr. Rothman walked in, dragging Regina by the scruff of her neck.

“I’m sorry, Dr. Christian, but she wasn’t cooperative. I actually had to chase her down the hallway.”

“Thank you, Mark. Regina, I have here incontrovertible proof that you are responsible for the cheating in today’s Jeopardy game. What I want to know is why.”

“Why?” Regina scoffed. “Why not? You should have seen the other contestants in the preliminaries. You know I could never have outperformed them! Look at Isaac! He is attending a gifted-program high school when he should still be in sixth grade! Or — or Danielle! Her science teacher had focused on training her for the Jeopardy game for three months!”

“I don’t believe that,” I snorted.

“That doesn’t matter,” said Dr. Christian. “All that matters is that you embarrassed this school in front of the entire state. You betrayed the trust I place in each and every student here, and now you are going to pay. You are hereby expelled from Centricity High for the next one hundred and eighty school days, the maximum punishment allowable under district policy. A permanent black mark is being placed on your student record. I am going to recommend to the school board that further sanctions be imposed. Now, get out!”

---

I have to say, I felt torn at Dr. Christian’s response to Regina. I have no sympathy for her, but I still feel that Dr. Christian had lost his temper, and given Regina a harsher punishment than she may have

deserved. After all, she is only in tenth grade. In two years, she would be going on to college, and I knew that colleges would give her a very hard time when they saw the notice of cheating on her permanent record. If I was the principal, I would have certainly expelled her for those 180 school days, but when the time was up, I would give her a second chance. I believe in always giving people a chance to prove they are repentant.

When I was elected judge for Jeopardy, Dr. Christian, Mrs. Sophia, and I signed papers giving me authority to choose the winner in accordance with the rules of Jeopardy. However, those rules say nothing about cheating. Dr. Christian was still in a very foul mood, and he probably wouldn't want me to do what I was about to do, but I still felt morally obligated to do one last thing before I could leave for the day.

It was just after the end of the school day, and the students were lined up at the busses. Fighting my way through the crowd, I found Jacob, Isaac, Danielle, and Benjamin standing under an oak tree.

"Benjamin Kapridi?"

"Yes? What do you want?"

"I just wanted to tell you... tell you..." I suddenly felt scared to speak. Swallowing hard, I thrust my hand into my inner suit pocket and drew out the \$500 gift card. "I have decided that you are the winner. Congratulations, Benjamin."

Everyone around me was speechless. Finally, Danielle said, "Why him?"

"Do you know Benjamin? I mean, personally?"

Everyone shook their heads. Jacob said, "You said that he attends a Special Education Center."

"Yes. Do you know why?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, then I will tell you. Benjamin John Kapridi was diagnosed at the age of ten with Asperger's Syndrome. He has a higher-than-

average IQ, but he has difficulty with social interactions and some academic topics. You probably don't know this — as I did not want it gossiped all over the school — but I have Asperger's Syndrome as well. I attended the same Special Education Center from fifth until ninth grade. When I entered ninth grade I returned here, first for only one class period, then two, then four. By the time I entered my sophomore year of high school I was attending Centricity High full time. Even though some classes are still more frustrating than others — and I have difficulty handling loud noises and angry people — I have still succeeded."

"That's all very interesting," said Isaac, "but how does that qualify him to win the grand prize?"

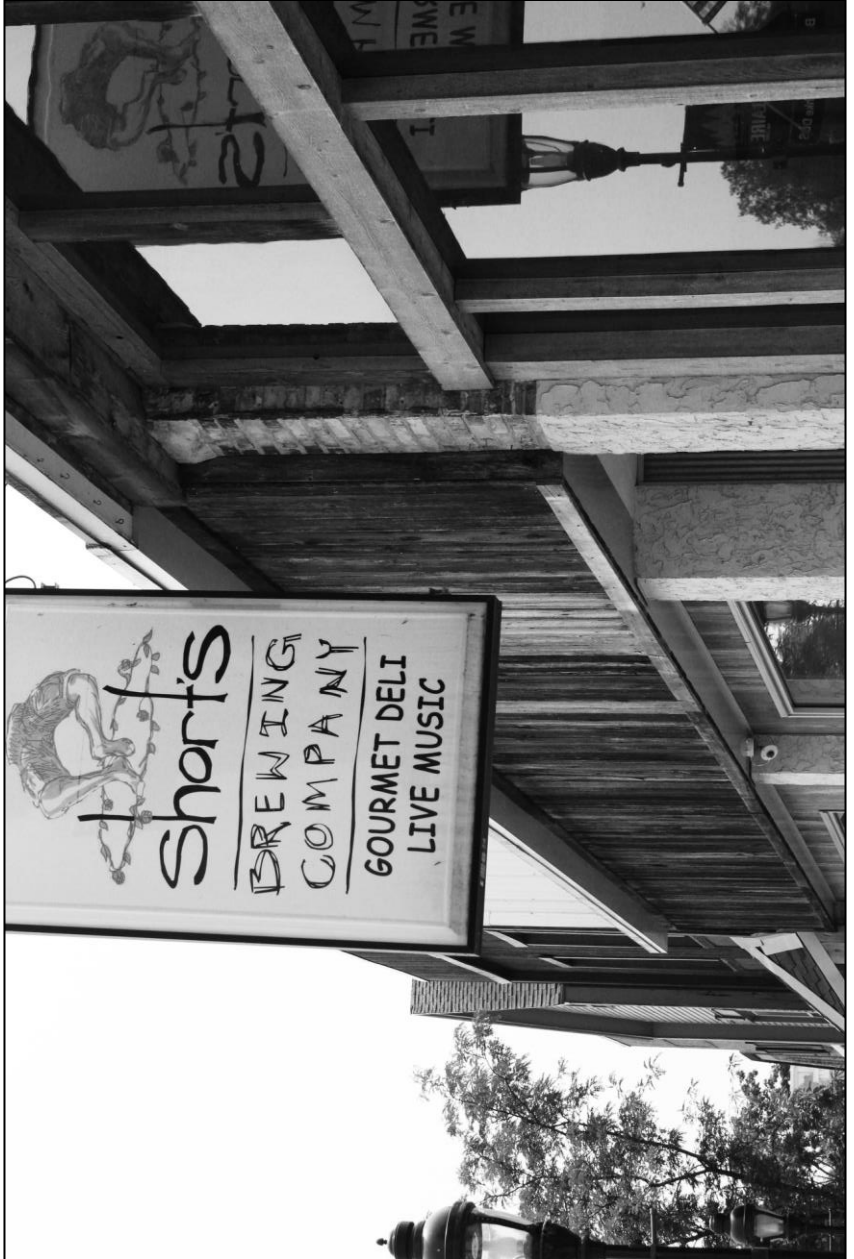
"Did you see him during the first round of Jeopardy?"

"Yes," said Danielle. "He aced the Chemistry questions but did poorly at the other categories."

"Indeed. Benjamin has earned the highest grade he has ever earned at his high-school Chemistry classes. Chemistry is what he excels at, has a calling to study." Kind of like me and computers, I thought to myself. "He has issues handling crowds, which is why he didn't do as well as he hoped at the other categories. It's also why I had to console him during the Final Jeopardy wagering. But you stuck it out, and even though you didn't do the best in terms of points, I feel as if you deserve the prize, more than anyone else here. Congratulations, Benjamin. You're a winner."

THE END

## Short's Brewing



## So We Dance

He saw the worry on my face,  
thinking of all that may come.

He came and said, "There's no time to waste,"  
giving his hand and a hum.

So we dance.

He brought me in and fell into frame,  
smiling from ear to ear.

I grinned at him as it felt the same,  
but soon that grew into fear.

So we dance.

"What will happen to the farm?" I asked,  
now whispering quietly.

He said, "You'll do things like in the past.  
Old Charlie will run the plow."

So we dance.

"What about our growing family,  
trying to have little ones?"

He said, although with no guarantee,  
"We'll have tons, hopefully sons."

So we dance.

*continued on the next page*

I closed my eyes to remember him,  
someone I've come to adore.  
I try to think of what could have been  
before he leaves for the war,  
  
So we dance.



## Sharp is the Scythe

Numb to the bone  
As the knife's shadow patiently waits  
Without any morality  
This object of wicked depravity  
The escaping child has gone the long mile  
Parents lay awake waiting for them to call home  
Chilling winds hide the screams of the night  
Outside the castle predators find delight  
Teeth sharpened with intent to kill  
Death is left to our personal will  
Hiding behind cold sorrows and remorseful lies  
We wait for him to decide  
Blood spills across fruitful hills  
Here comes the guillotine to cut the grass  
Turn our weeds into something a bit more relaxed  
Heads roll as the future unfolds  
Time is a man-made disease  
Killing us softly through whispers and secrets  
Letting us rot our brains  
Though the sheep are left pleased  
The problem resides in the herd mentality  
Where weakness is the bane of existence  
Let this show the reality of our human condition

## The Journey

Reservations reserve time  
I would rather forget  
Than be reminded of.

Big city chasers  
In the maze of avenues  
Together we journey on.

Hoisting you up  
As your darkness takes hold  
To lead us through the pages  
of our story to unfold.

Nimble steps and shaken breaths  
Together we journey on.

Stricken, blood stark with pain  
Hum to bring the clear back  
to the blue-sky sunny day.

Meant to lose our way again  
Through the current  
Hold your breath.  
Together we journey on.

My raft is yours,  
Will always be  
The black of night 'til dawn.

Bus stop beacon  
Carry us home  
to the freedom we have won.  
Together we journey on.

Converse hit the concrete slate  
When at once she caught his eye,  
Knew the journey would divide

In the imaginary jungle we can't forget  
Record spinning-never flipped  
Repeat again the signs that were missed

Journey on at your own risk.

Reservations reserve time  
Forgotten with pleasure  
She steps back to think  
Of what her heart bears forever

The journey she leaves behind.

## I Held my Tongue

I always knew that my mother was paranoid. Ever since Tom and I were little, she had this ridiculous obsession with locking every door and closing every window at all times, shredding names and addresses from every mailing we ever got. I remember complaining about how long it took to get rid of our huge “to shred” piles that heaped around the house. Of course, I was the only person who really minded clutter; Mom was a huge pack rat and my twin brother was far too easy-going to care. Usually it was me who ended up cleaning, decluttering, and shredding, simply because I couldn’t stand the mess and got fed up with everything.

“Robert!” Mom would scold me in that exasperated tone as I prepared to dump an old magazine in the trash. “Aren’t you going to shred that address?”

“I wasn’t...going to,” I would reply carefully. “But I *can*.”

“You should. What if someone were to find your name and address?”

Before I could point out that nobody, *nobody*, would be searching through landfills to find names and addresses, and even if they did what on earth could they possibly do with them, I realized that saying such a thing would only get me in trouble. So, I held my tongue. Again.

I held my tongue for about twenty years, while she insisted on locked doors even when we were home, baseball bats beneath every bed and couch, CPL training for both of us boys, cars locked in the driveway and garage closed except for the two minutes it took to park or remove a car from it, and all important numbers memorized, not carried with us. Every important document, every internet username and password, were stored in the safe in our basement, and the only “official” things we were allowed to carry were our licenses and, after we were adults and made some of our own decisions, debit cards. My mother was also overly careful about letting

anyone visit our house — that only happened if she had met and approved of the invitees — and even when she did allow it, she was reluctant. She also hated driving, or more accurately, hated us driving without her. But there really wasn't anything she could do about that; we were both adults, with jobs, school, and friends, and we had to get out sometimes.

Sometimes I think that the reason she was so uptight about everything security is because of our dad. Or lack of one, that is. She never talked about him. Ever. We used to ask her about him — like, who is he, where does he live, what does he do, how did you meet? But every time we asked, she would change the subject. So, we never knew. Oh, Tom and I had plenty of conspiracy theories and ideas, but we didn't ask her anymore, not once we learned that she would never answer.

And so, for years, we kept our questions to ourselves and locked all the doors carefully behind us. At least until one sweltering August afternoon.

My brother Tom had always been a charming, good-looking dude — sadly, he and my mom got the looks of the family. He was a somewhat unrealistic, imaginative fellow, the sort that would be called a “dreamer.” The girls loved him. Always had. Not that I was bitter; I was much better at living in the “real world” and doing things practically. Besides, I also had better luck with vehicles. It seemed that they broke down left and right for Tom, and that meant that I always had to act as a chauffeur (and sometimes chaperone, which is a fancy way to say third wheel) on his dates with Amelia.

I was driving while they sat in the backseat, talking about their favorite music and musicians, on the way to drop her off at her house. The AC was on, but not very high, and I was chewing spearmint gum. I remember because it was the very last piece of that particular gum, and I really liked it. I had the radio on too, but just loud enough to be background noise.

“Yeah, U2 is okay,” Amelia was saying, “but I like other stuff better.”

“What ‘other stuff’?” I interjected, feeling the need to defend Bono’s reputation.

Tom volunteered, answering for her. “Oh, you know, like Coldplay –”

“Coldplay? COLDPLAY? They’re just U2’s emo teenager children!”

Both Amelia and Tom laughed, and she admitted, “Actually that is pretty accurate.” Then we were in her driveway, where they laughed again.

They both laughed far too much, in my opinion. Not that I think laughing is bad for you, because it’s not, but really! They laughed at everything each other said and everything I said and pretty much everything anybody said! But that was okay. Amelia was a great kid.

Even so, it was a relief when Tom jumped up into the front seat after saying goodbye to his girlfriend. I still preferred my brother when he wasn’t being clung to by an overly cheerful girl.

“You need to get your car fixed,” I told him. “I’m sick and tired of driving you two everywhere.”

He just grinned and shrugged. “I know. But it is nice to have a chauffeur. And this way I don’t have to pay for gas.”

I rolled my eyes and we were soon home. The old, familiar brick house sat shrouded under a giant willow tree (which, let me tell you, is a huge pain in the fall), curtains closed in the front (and side, and back, but you couldn’t tell that from the driveway) windows. Mom’s little green slug bug sat in the open garage, and – hold on.

“Why’s the garage open?” I asked, parking my own vehicle.

Tom had already hopped out and was bouncing around the garage’s interior. “She’s not in here,” he called. “Must have forgotten something inside.”

"Then why isn't the car running? And do you really think she'd run in to get something without closing the garage door?"

Tom "hmm"ed and followed me to the side door. I reached up with my keys to unlock it, but at the gentlest brush of my hand, the door swung open. Tom and I exchanged glances.

"That's not right," he said.

"No." Together, we entered the house.

Nothing was wrong inside except that Mom wasn't anywhere. Her shoes sat on the mudroom floor where they always were when she was home, and her purse hung from the peg behind the kitchen door. The lights were mostly on and the book she had been reading was open on the coffee table, lying flat with a bookmark haphazardly tossed on top. This wasn't like her. Not at all.

"Better call," I told Tom, and he nodded, already whipping out his phone while I inspected the rest of the house. We tried both of our cell phones as well as the "backup" landline in the basement. No answer to calls, texts, or anything.

Tom looked at me with his forehead creased in worry. "What now?" he asked.

I was about to reply that I had no idea, but another voice interrupted me. "Hey, boys."

In perfect unison, we spun around, ready to fight the intruder, but he held up his hands to signal that he wanted no violence. Tom asked him (rather rudely) who he was and what he was doing there, while I stood and waited for something that made sense to happen.

"What would your mother say if she heard you talking like that?" he asked and removed his sunglasses. "Respect your elders, Tom!" He polished the lenses on his gray sports coat and looked up at me. That was when I took a step backwards and almost tripped over the coffee table. Looking into that face was like staring into a mirror, and for a few seconds I thought that this was me from the future, come back to

visit. He had the same boring brown eyes that I did, bordered by unmanly, long lashes, and framed by a square, boulder-shaped head and jaw. We had the same almost aquiline nose and dark, straight hair, both cropped close, though mine was hidden under a baseball cap and his was an awful case of hat-hair. And he smiled the same way I did — one half of his mouth up, one flattening out to the side — and although I hated it on myself, the way he did it was natural and easy.

“Yeah, we look a lot alike, don’t we?” he said, noticing my astonished, gaping face.

My mouth snapped shut. “Where’s Mom?” I demanded, trying to regain some control of the situation. There was only one person this man could possibly be.

He simply glanced up, as if looking through the roof, and then jerked his head. “Come on. You two have got to get out of here, already wasted enough time. I’ll explain on the way.” He replaced his sunglasses and beckoned for us to follow. “You two carry guns, right?” he asked over his shoulder.

“Yes,” Tom replied, but added, “They’re not on us now. They’re in the —”

“Well we don’t have time for that, so I’ll just supply you. Rob, grab your mom’s car keys, will you?”

I obeyed, for some reason, even though nobody ever called me “Rob.” In stunned, brainwashed silence, we followed him outside, where we were greeted by a line of what appeared to be army vehicles — like, not your average, everyday Jeeps or trucks, these things were legit heavy duty — lined up along our road. There were men in some sort of uniform (not U.S. garb, or not one that I recognized) hopping out and talking to each other, but we couldn’t make out their words, and we didn’t have time. The man we were following ducked into the garage and we followed.

The garage door had somehow been closed while we were



inside, and Tom shut the side door on our way in. All three of us stood for a few seconds in the musty, oily garage smell, the light from two tiny rectangular windows illuminating dust specks that floated around us.

“Okay, kids,” the stranger said. “I apologize for how last-minute and shocking all of this must be, but here’s the long story short: they’ve been my enemies for years and years, I sent your mom and you out here to hide from them and be protected, but they’ve found out and now they’re literally gonna try to kill you as soon as they see you, so...you know. Run. Just get out of here. I’ve got your mom somewhere safe, don’t worry about it, but now you’re gonna take her car—it’s actually armored, once I activate it—and get out of here as fast and as far as you possibly can. Stay low profile, you know, blend in with the general population and stick to busy areas. Don’t tell anyone where you are. I’ll find you.”

“So, we’re supposed to just trust you?” I asked, crossing my arms. “Without question, without credentials, without—”

“I’m glad you’re concerned for your safety and security, but we don’t have time if you want to survive,” he said and leaned into the Slug Bug. He seemed to slap a spot on the dashboard and, an instant later, a panel with some luminescent keyboard thingy opened. He clicked in a sentence, then hit another button. Then, he started the car like a normal human being. “Alright,” he said. “Armor’s up, car’s ready. Hop in and as soon as I open this garage door, you back out and get out of here.” We hopped in. Apparently, Mom’s Slug Bug had armor.

“And what are you going to be doing while we run away?” Tom asked, while I just pulled off my cap and scratched my head in bewilderment.

The man grinned that lopsided, asymmetrical grin. “Oh, you’ll see.” With that, he tapped some sort of button on his wristwatch. Was it even a watch or just a fancy high-tech bracelet? I don’t know. But I do know that there was an electronic hum and a glowing, yellowish light from the floor.

Slowly, the man rose about six inches in the air and hovered over to the garage door button, propelled by his fancy schmancy rocket boot things. (No, I don't remember what they looked like, and I didn't have time to pay much attention to such things.) It was then that me and Tom both realized that, underneath his sports coat and trousers, he was wearing an odd, silvery substance. It looked almost like...almost like old fashioned chain mail, but was more fluid, liquid almost.

"What are you, Tony Stark or something?" I asked, snorting at my own bad humor.

He sighed. "No. Tony's way richer than me. Now I'm gonna open the door, so you be ready. It was a pleasure meeting you boys – to meet you for real after all these years watching from a distance."

As the car windows rolled up and the garage door opened, Tom asked, "Is he –?"

I raised my eyebrows at him. "Finally put two and two together, did we?" We watched as his sunglasses converted into a full, silver helmet, made of the same flexible substance as his suit. "He needs to stop ripping off Iron Man."

"True," Tom admitted as I backed up out of the garage.

"Hurry it up, Rob, these guys aren't gonna give you a headstart!" our superhero-dad-guy-whomever's voice came through the car's stereo.

I was fed up with not knowing who I was talking to. "Do you have, like, a name or anything?" I asked, assuming he could hear me. "I don't know who you even are."

"Yeah. My name's Evan, but you know that's, like, my real name. I like to go by Energy Bolt when I'm all suited up."

Tom groaned. "So, our dad's a superhero, but he's not even a CLASSY superhero?"

"Just drive!"

I really don't remember much of the next ten minutes or so. I

remember driving like a maniac while Tom shouted and leaned out of the passenger window with a handgun, and I remember the loud, popping explosions that rang around us. I had no idea where we were going or what to do—for goodness' sake I had never been in a car chase before!

And then there was a great, rumbling, throbbing explosion that seemed to fill my body from the inside out. I vaguely remember the car shaking and shivering like a Kleenex and then I remember losing control and trying to leap out the door, but then for a while, all I remember is blackness.

I groggily opened my eyes and saw a bright August sky, several helicopters buzzing and circling like hungry vultures. Oh, so it wasn't just a dream. "Crazy," I said to myself, mumbling like a drunk man. "It's all crazy."

Carefully, gently, I stood up. It seemed a miracle that I wasn't in more pain than a pounding headache and a few bruises and scrapes. Where am I even going? Where's Tom?

"Hands up!"

I put my hands up and slowly turned around to face the man—or soldier, whatever you want to call him—who had snuck up behind me, gun leveled at my head.

With a sudden, deafening roar, Evan—I refuse to call him Energy Bolt, no matter how cool he thinks it is—swooped in and nearly barreled the soldier over. Holding the attacker at arm's length, he raised his weapon (which was an odd-looking gun—I think it shot laser beams or some stupid superhero thing like that).

"What are you, Iron Man?" the soldier asked, frightened but resigned in his enemy's grip.

"I get that a lot," he said, and, with a quick blast from his...uh...laser gun...the soldier was sprawled on the ground. "Grab Tom and get both of you somewhere safe," he said. He took flight.

I shook my head, trying to clear the ringing from my ears.

"Tom!" I yelled and started jogging around the corner wall that was created by our smashed Slug Bug and a capsized truck. I could see his blond hair glowing in the sunlight. "Tom!"

He glanced up from where he was squatting, checking his gun, but he didn't have time to answer. There was a short, staccato popping of three gunshots, and Tom made a strange, gasping sound before shivering and crumpling to the ground.

My gun was out already and without a single second thought, I blasted down the soldier who had shot my brother. I probably went way overboard on how many times I pulled that trigger, but I wanted him gone, out of the picture.

I knelt beside Tom, who sounded as if he was hyperventilating. "Hey," he said. "Hey."

"Don't overwork yourself, I'll get you in a car and we'll go to the hospital."

All three of the soldier's bullets had hit home. Tom was clutching his chest and stomach with both hands and looked terrified. It was as if in that one moment, his face had turned to that of a scared six-year-old—he even tried to clutch my hand. "This isn't how I wanted to die," he choked. "Amelia—"

"Shh," I soothed, feeling, for a moment, as if I were far older than him. "It's not your fault. Amelia's going to be all right. You're okay—"

And that was when he stopped struggling. His body gave up and I was left with empty eyes.

I stood up and shouldered the fallen soldier's rifle.

My father had some explaining to do.

**Fifer on the Green**



## **The Back Parking Lot Behind The Pizza Store, Summer 2015**

They were probably just crows fluttering up above in the hauntingly empty  
blue sky

— the puffy white clouds wouldn't load properly, again —  
but I was zinked out and undernourished and dehydrated that day,  
so I imagined that they were vultures circling my currently-walking-corpse  
as I wheeled the morning's trash out in a rickety stolen Kroger cart.

I regretted all the unused pizza dough we threw away each day.

It seemed like a tremendous waste.

It seemed like there were plenty of needy people  
who needed something to eat.

And here we had a kneaded dough overflow.

We had it and we deemed it to be "*trash.*"

It was all just semantics.

And any attempts to persuade the owner, *Todd*, about this  
were met with terms like "*logistics*"  
and ideas like "*adding to my overhead cost*"  
and "*detracting from my bottom line.*"

And I suppose those sorts of things make sense,  
but they seem like rather intangible concepts  
compared to the concrete images of humans sleeping on concrete.  
Those people are easy to see,  
even if guilt can make them hard to look at for too long.

*continued on the next page*

But *Todd* has both not owned a business and owned a business,  
and thus far I've only done the former,  
so perhaps he knows a thing or two more about it than me,  
but spending a little more money to send unused pizza dough to people  
in need,  
so their stomachs don't quake with hunger for one night,  
seems like it would have a good payout at the end,  
at least karmically speaking...

...but now I've realized me and my addled brain;  
cooked off of *Baja Blast Mtn Dew*, greasy reheated free pizza slices,  
and *a lot* of weed,  
have been outside contemplating by this stinky, looming yellow-green  
dumpster for too long.  
So, so long.

## Become

We'll make it back here  
In another way  
In another day  
Another time

My feet will sail through the sand  
As I became dust in the air  
And I'll feel the sounds of lakes  
Go right through me  
And a midnight dew will gently brush pass  
The stars in the sky  
are the blinks of eyes  
They look back at you

Hands become forests  
Grasping for open skies  
Racing like butterflies  
We become whole again

Again



## Forty-Seven

“Orion.”

“You know we’re on the wrong side of the planet for that to be Orion, right?”

“Humor me.”

She sighed, breath pluming into a sputtering white cloud above them. “Okay. If that *was* Orion, which it’s not, then the belt would be...” Her arm went up, connecting the dots between three separate stars. “See? And then beneath it are the legs, if you squint. So it’s *kind of* Orion.”

She turned her head. “Not as good as the real thing, though.”

They shifted so their temples touched. “Have you seen it?”

“Oh, yeah. Couple times.” The space after her sentence sat open, ready to whisk her story up into thirty-three-degree air. But she didn’t say anything. “Day count?”

“I gave you the day count twenty minutes ago.”

“I forgot it.”

“You aren’t that forgetful.”

“Humor me.”

“Fine,” they said, their tone the farthest thing from exasperated. “Forty-seven days, twenty-three hours, six minutes since we got here. We leave in eleven days, fifty-four minutes.” They tilted their head toward her. “Did you want seconds, too, or was that good enough?”

“That was fine.”

Nearly an hour sat between them and midnight. As far as risky went, that was on the meager side — there’d been that one time when they’d stayed out dancing under false constellations until eleven fifty-seven and had seen the clouds grow overhead. They’d bolted inside, hearts bubbling with the adrenaline of pushing it.

But that’d been day four. That had been the halfway point, before

hope, before leaving was a concrete idea. So today, when it got to be eleven-ten, they folded their picnic blanket, brushed off the stray bluegrass, and went inside. They put themselves in an armchair near the window, aiming their eyes toward the sky. They hadn't let a night pass without watching the storm, and they weren't about to. Behind them, they heard her rustle through the one cabinet they had, pulling out cups she'd molded and fired herself.

"Coffee?" Her voice hadn't gotten any quieter, despite it being past mandatory lights-out.

"Do we have any tea?"

"Not enough for something strong."

"That's fine."

There was the electric pop of the heating pad, the smell of metal-drowned water, and, in their mind, the image of her busy in the corner of the room they both called the kitchen. They saw a cup arrive at their side, filled with still-brewing tea.

"Thanks," they said, their eyes fixed outside as they raised the cup and drank. Boiling.

They held the heat in their mouth, relishing how it made certain parts of their mouth tingle, before gulping it down. They'd be up late; they needed the stimuli. "What's the first thing you're going to do when we're back?"

She'd settled next to them, coffee in hand. "Go through the disinfection process."

"I mean once you're *home*. When you're done with everything."

"I don't think I'll have time to do anything for a while." She watched her coffee swirl, patterns in blackness as deep as the sky, though the beverage was unpunctuated by stars. "They'll want us back to report our readings. Give explanations. Probably make a thousand PowerPoints."

"You won't let me do any?"

"You're doing *ten* thousand."

"Appreciate that," they said, hearing her smile. They'd learned how to, because the one thing they couldn't do at night was watch her.

"Any clouds yet?" she asked.

"There's buildup near the mountains." They pointed with their cup, but of course she could see the mountains without any help: juddering cracks, the richest soil, and the largest emitters in the area. "But I think that might be coolant. It's hard to tell when it's this far away."

"What time is it?"

"Eleven-forty-three."

"Probably coolant."

*Probably.* They could walk themselves through the process from the eyes of the clouds, rather than the vantage they took each night, in that armchair, at that window. It started with steam, the natural coolant, ebbing and flowing, the opposite of fog, never staying long enough to obscure. Two minutes after came the first of the clouds, enormous grey things that stretched themselves across the sky, thinner and thinner, ready to deliver an equal downpour to everything under its shadow. Other clouds would join it, backing themselves against each other, holding hands until the farthest point on the horizon and the closest spot above them was grey, endless, and encompassing and very, very, dark.

Then came the downpour.

Tonight, the roof had an easy time of it. There'd been days (especially early on) when the rain had found its way in, hitting a low point and bleeding inside. Or there'd been seams unsealed, oversights in the construction of their shelter, which had let puddles pool outside bedroom doors, trapping them both where they'd been until they'd thought up a solution.

But forty-seven days was a long time to prepare. They'd leveled the roof, had used self-sealing medical bandages to plug every hole. Nothing got inside, not now. It made it easier to observe, knowing they

wouldn't feel a drop on their forehead, feel the sting of an acid burn, and lose higher brain function.

"Acidic content," she said, "two parts per million. Regular potency. Rate of thirty-six percent per minute." The tablet screen was in her lap. She was doing her job: taking readings from the analysis points, comparing them to old numbers, developing a sense of routine when it came to chemical warfare. "Looks like a normal storm."

"Keep an eye on it."

"Will do."

Because there was always the chance it wasn't a normal storm. Because their eyes were better than hers, objectively so, and when they saw discoloration in the uniform grey, or a greater concentration of cloud matter over the mountains or saw something disintegrate in the distance faster than it should, they could sound the alarm. Development meant danger.

Today, the storm passed in an hour, on-schedule.

At the terminal fifteen minutes later, wrinkles under their eyes, the screen blinked back at them. *Acid concentration of the storm. Downfall rate (to the nearest hundredth). Estimated damage rate.* The same damned form.

That thought prodded at them.

If they wanted, they could interpolate rainfall data for the rest of their mission, simplifying averages and making assumptions based on existing patterns. They could, if they ever decided such a risk was worth it, fill in the next eleven forms ahead of time, schedule them for send off to HQ, and live out the rest of their mission silently. They'd be able to sleep. They could disassemble the analysis points, take the magnetrons and the solar panels and turn their shelter into something half-decent, something they wouldn't need to spend the bulk of the day repairing. That was one hell of a crime, though. And they weren't a criminal.

She was.

A reformed arsonist was still an arsonist, once.

She sat behind them, in her own armchair, the aurora in the sky casting green shadows on her face. If they squinted, it might have looked like fire. But then, if they squinted, it could look like the brown of the coffee she drank every night, or the green of her eyes, or the burnt yellow of the sky they both worked under each morning, resetting the analysis points, rinsing off the pathways so their shoes didn't burn.

It was one in the morning.

If they wanted to, they could leave, run off and make a home for themselves in the mountains. There were plenty of places the two of them had found together. But then she'd find them, would make them come back, and they'd be more of a criminal than she ever was. The fate of their government, or their agency, or whatever organization they served at this point (not that they knew) rode on Team 11-B, Airborne Warfare Research Partners, fifty-eight day posting. So what would that make them run off?

They hit submit on their report, saw the screen power down and let their wrinkles relax.

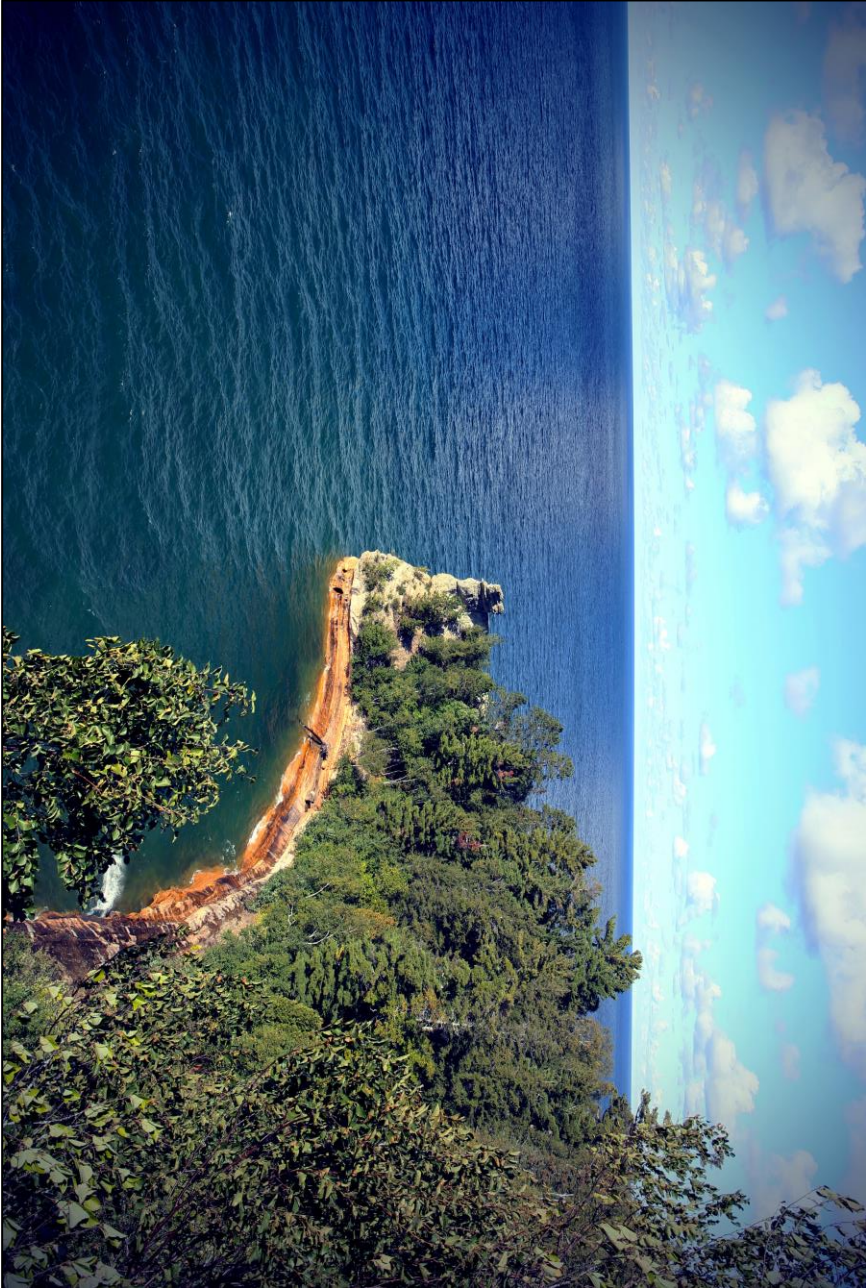
Tomorrow it would rain again, and they'd chart it, dutifully.

Tomorrow, they'd watch the stars.

## Casually Mistaken

The emotion overtook me like a bird overtakes its prey  
I was suffocating, submerged underneath the water  
He was holding me down, pressing on my shoulders, making sure I couldn't  
move  
I couldn't get up, didn't want to get up  
Pain so strong I felt numb  
Emotionless  
I stared at my screen, no words or thoughts forming  
I was the quarterback, blindsided by a 250-pound linebacker  
Rocked  
Shaken  
My lungs were struggling to fill like deflated balloons  
Finally I withdrew a breath and let my tears fall freely  
They rolled off my cheeks, like water cascading down a waterfall  
I told myself I'd never cry over him again  
He hurt me over and over and I fall into the trap every time  
Lifeless  
Another love was lost  
And I was the casualty

## Miners Castle



Graduate Student: English

## Revisiting the Declaration of Independence in 2019

“The faraway King would soon learn a timeless lesson about the people of this majestic land: Americans love our freedom and no one will ever take it away from us.”

-- Donald Trump, Remarks at Salute to America, July 4, 2019.

History	The <i>His-story</i> of the present King Is one of unremitting injuries.
assent	He has refused his <i>ass-ent</i> To laws the most wholesome And necessary for the public good. Unless suspended in their operation, Till his assent should be obtained, His governors are forbidden Of passing laws of pressing importance. And when so suspended, He has utterly neglected to attend to them, <i>Unless they will give him likes on Twitter.</i> He has called together legislative bodies
places	At <i>golf-courses</i> unusual, Uncomfortable, and distant From the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose Of fatiguing them into compliance



With his measures.  
He has dissolved representative houses  
And repeatedly and continually,  
manly Oposing with *childish* firmness,  
Invaded the rights of the people.  
He has endeavored to prevent  
The population of these states;  
For that purpose obstructing the laws  
For naturalization of foreigners,  
Refusing, *like a giant toddler*, to pass  
Others to encourage their migrations hither,  
And raising the conditions of new  
Appropriations of lands.  
He has made our judges dependent on  
will His *power* alone, for the tenure  
Of their offices, and the amount  
And payment of their salaries  
*And street cred.*  
He has erected  
A multitude of new offices  
By a self assumed power,  
And sent hither swarms of new officers  
people To harass our *women*  
And eat out our substance.  
*He has affected to render the military*  
*To defile corpses.*  
seas He has plundered our *pockets*,  
coasts Ravaged our *youth*,  
towns Burnt our *forests*,  
lives And destroyed the *hope*  
Of our people.

We, therefore, solemnly publish  
And declare these united colonies  
Inept and out of touch.  
And for the support of this declaration,  
With a firm reliance on the protection  
Of freedom of speech,  
We mutually pledge together  
Our lives,  
Our courage,  
Our fortunes,  
Our sacred honor.

This declaration thus drafted on Microsoft Word was engrossed on  
computer paper and signed.

**To our contributors and readers,**

Thank you for your continued support of the Student Writers Group at OU and *Swallow the Moon*. We would not be able to do this without you. We appreciate your continued patience as we experienced production delays this year. We are so grateful for your contributions to this journal and hope you will hold onto volume 11 of *Swallow the Moon* as a piece of the Oakland University community.

Stay safe,

The Student Writers Group at OU