

# THE FIORETTI



SPRING 2018

# THE FIORETTI

2018

A STUDENT-LED LITERARY JOURNAL  
CELEBRATING 80 YEARS

MARIAN UNIVERSITY  
INDIANAPOLIS

## DEDICATION

This edition of *The Fioretti*, also commemorating the literary journal's 80th anniversary, is lovingly dedicated to the Sisters of St. Francis Oldenburg, whose commitment to liberal arts education has made the Marian community a place of beauty and learning since its founding.

Marian University, previously Marian College, has been fostered by the humanities, reminding students of their place in the journey of humankind. Devotion to courses such as art, literature, and music as well as philosophy and the social sciences have set Marian apart from other colleges and universities as an institution nurturing a deeper understanding of human existence.

May we continue to care for this beautiful garden that is grown from a liberal arts education. May we never forget Marian's roots.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

In sitting down to write this little introductory statement, I found myself wondering where exactly I should begin. Every good piece of writing needs a nice hook, line, and sinker after all (unless, of course, you happen to be the sort who doesn't care much for editor's notes or introductions, in which case you will simply skip over this section and all my fussing and fretting will have been for nothing). I suppose I could start then, by throwing in a few dragons (dragons always seem to get people's attention, I believe it's the fire breathing thing), or a couple of vengeful geese (it should be known that geese are very much like dragons except for their lacking said fire breathing abilities). But after glancing outside and noticing a small patch of flowers poking up out of our most recent spring snow, I knew a beginning when I saw one. So then, flowers lead the way.

The word "Fioretti" translates into "little flowers" and refers to the teaching stories employed by St. Francis of Assisi. From this simple anecdote, one can see how it is in every way the perfect namesake for Marian's small literary journal. Reflected in its eighty years of existence within the pages of each edition, we see an authentic glimpse of the heart of Marian College / University. If we listen, we can hear its pulse.

We find a special reverence for stories, cultivated in each generation of students who contributed to the journal. Whether it be in the poetry or prose, the sketches or photographs, the plays or prayers, the stories contained within these pieces seem to be asking more of us—that we stop to listen, for they all have something to teach us.

From the pages, we get an intimate view of the world, of life, from the diverse perspectives of students. We see reflected in their works broader concerns and aspirations of the moment in history where their lives intersect. Yet their individual experiences are validated as their stories are able to be told, their lessons shared. Fostered by the liberal arts environment inextricably merged with the Franciscan values, students have blossomed, the evidence of their flourishing planted within these pages.

*The Fioretti*, then, might be thought of as a small garden where even the smallest of flowers reveals some truth of human existence from a generation preparing to use its voice. Here, we swap our flowers, showing unique and authentic sides of ourselves. Here, we see the students of Marian and the impact

of history past and present. Here, we are invited to think sociologically and see the world from different perspectives. Here, there are little stories with things to teach us. Little flowers. Flowers poking up out of the snow on the brink of spring.

Flowers reminding us why we are here—to learn.

Hannah E. Sobhie

N . E . K .

#### THE AUTHOR'S CATHARSIS

The typewriter clicked and clacked  
The author's inspiration had flown  
He wrote of his demons.  
Wrote of the constant pain inside.

“What is a legacy?”  
He wondered constantly as he sat  
Saddened about the sonnet  
That he could not convey aloud.

When the clicking stopped,  
He had looked at his work.  
He found it to be blank  
An easel with no canvas

The demons that he had wrote fled  
His pain was mitigated  
He felt catharsis  
Catharsis of writing and deleting



*Bramble* by Brandilyn Worrell

## BRANDILYN WORRELL

### BRAMBLE

Spikes crisscross and overlap  
Warding off those who dare to get too close  
At direct odds with the symbol of hospitality  
That he is said to be

However as the ball unrolls  
And the hissing emanating from it subsides  
A small wet nose peaks out  
From amidst the pale quills

Soon after two dark and bulbous eyes are revealed  
A bit off-putting until you look more closely  
Then the spark of curiosity shines forth  
As the previous hisses are replaced by inquisitive snuffles

Exclamations of wonder escape each onlooker  
As the brave explorer makes his way across the table  
They crowd in and begin to converse about their own animals  
Friends and strangers mingling together

They are brought together by this prickly pet  
He entertains and welcomes those who were previously detached  
Breaking any tension or uncertainty of separation  
A true symbol of hospitality



*Cinnamon* (2012-2018) by Sarah Storm

TO CINNAMON

A field of kale that gently waves  
beneath a gentle sunlit sky—  
where whisper streams and rivulets,  
the piggins play as days go by.

At end of days, we'll meet once more  
and stroll the garden-fen.  
My Cinnamon, forget me not—  
I'll come and find you then.



## HANNAH SOBHIE

### TO THE GIRL WITH THE HEART UNBROKEN

Sleep child.  
Sleep sweet girl.  
For this unkind world is on the verge of ending  
and the yellow moon still smiles to you.  
Dream now, Sorrow's daughter.  
Death won't wake you yet  
it's just an owl sitting silent on the roof  
and there's no such thing as leaving.  
You're safe for now in the arms of the night.  
So slumber away.  
Chase lightening bugs on the breath of a turtledove's call.  
Run through flowers blooming petals of snow.  
Past the graves yet undug  
the notes yet unwritten.  
Look to the morning  
away from the sadly autumnal eyes you will adopt.  
When grief lifts the sun,  
arise and dance with a heart unbroken.



*Veins* by Hannah Sobhie

## UNTITLED

Michael—  
     No, no...  
 Tears cascade  
     Falling, Falling  
 Moistens the ground  
     drowning, drowning

Untitled, nameless  
     This poem is

Untitled, nameless  
     This child is

Untitled, nameless  
     This child is... is

The mother lies in pain  
     silence

Her child lies covered  
     silence

A moment of joy is  
     silence

The lush grass  
     is dotted with stone

The stone, grey & cold  
     is dotted with rain

A brother, a body, a corpse is  
     Untitled...

## EIGHTEEN

Every four weeks, Avery moved our seats in ninth period American History. Being a social studies teacher, the walls in his off-white room were plastered with world maps and portraits of every president to have ever taken office. Our desks, while lined up in rows, were placed at an angle opposite of the doorway instead of directly facing the whiteboard to give the room some “substance” (his words). Avery’s desk was positioned in the back corner of the room and was surrounded by tall, black bookshelves littered with humongous textbooks on American foreign policy and pictures of his wife and small daughter. They named her Emily. Emily had Avery’s thick, brown hair and piercing hazel eyes. Avery looked just like Maddox, and subsequently, so did Emily.

At the beginning of the semester in January, on the first day, I sat farthest away from Avery’s desk, in the row closest to the door. I was in the fourth desk from the front of the room, behind a girl whose given name was Kathleen but liked to be called “Cady” like Lindsay Lohan’s character in *Mean Girls*. Cady spent over two hours on her makeup every morning and had been obsessed with growing her hair out since she was in the seventh grade. Every time she moved her arms or shifted in her seat, I caught a whiff of her perfume; she smelled like she had walked right out of a Victoria’s Secret catalogue. Cady had a group of friends who claimed their places in the desks in front and around her, charm bracelets dangling from their wrists and Birkenstocks covering their feet, even in the dead of our bitter Northeast winter. Every day that I walked into class, their once overs of me had me pulling the sleeves of my oversized sweatshirts farther past my fingertips and running my hands through my short hair that made me look like an “ugly dyke,” according to my aunt, to whom I promptly stopped speaking. Cady and her friends were the epitome of upper-middle class, suburban, spoiled, trend-obsessed teenage girls.

They were also fucking stupid.

The first day of class, shortly after the bell rang, Avery sauntered in and closed the door behind him. I gasped. One of the youngest teachers on the entire

school staff, his khaki pants covered his long legs and were secured with a black belt. A black Under Armour polo was tucked into his waistband and the only piece of jewelry he wore was a simple silver band on his left ring finger. Stopping in the middle of classroom, he faced us with his hands on his hips and surveyed everyone in the desks. He panned left to right, reaching my row last, eyes scanning over the other students, and then Cady and her clones, before stopping on me. His gaze shrunk me down, making me feel smaller than I already did sitting behind the girls, than I already did feeling like I was looking at Maddox instead of my teacher, and I dug my fingernails into the skin of my ankles which were crossed Indian-style on my seat. Avery swallowed. I dropped my shoulders and blinked. Avery exhaled. I held my breath. Avery's hands fell to his sides. I clenched my jaw.

"Welcome to your second semester of U.S. history!" he exclaimed to the class with a smile, breaking the silence and forcing me to jump out of my skin. "I'm happy to see that I recognize the majority of your faces and that the final at the end of last semester didn't cause y'all to go running to your counselor asking for another teacher."

The rest of the class giggled while I furrowed my eyebrows together, not understanding the joke. I opted to take my first semester of history online to make room in my schedule for creative writing, the class I really wanted to take instead. I got B's in both of them. They both ended up being a total waste of time.

"But, for those of you who don't know, my name is Mr. Thomas. I teach both U.S. history to you juniors and economics to the seniors. This is my fifth year here at McHarrison and my ninth year teaching overall. Before this, I was full time teaching eighth grade history over at Kinsey Middle, and don't tell the thirteen-year-olds this, but I like high school much better."

Another round of giggles filled the room. Avery flashed his crooked smile that caused the laugh lines around his mouth to wrinkle. It was now my turn to swallow. He smiled a smile just like Maddox.

"I coach both the boys and girls golf teams, I have a two-year-old daughter and a son who's due in June, and my wife and I just celebrated our fifth anniversary," he continued. "We're die-hard Yankees fans, and for my thirtieth birthday this past September, she bought me tickets to a game. Third base line, four rows up. Those are the pieces of paper I have framed above the whiteboard."

Avery, who was only fourteen years older than me after I did the math, pointed to a small black picture frame resting on the wall in the front of the room and I tore my gaze away from his face to look at it. I scoffed as a twinge of jealousy crept into my stomach. Baseball was a tradition in my house growing up. I'd always wanted to go to a Yankees game. Maddox promised he'd take me one day.

"Alright, enough about me," Avery sighed, clapping his hands and rubbing his palms together. "Where did we leave off at the end of last semester?"

"With the Roaring 20s," a deep voice from the back of the room shouted out.

"Ah, yes, the Roaring 20s." Avery walked over to the whiteboard and grabbed a red Expo marker, his bicep stretching the sleeve of his shirt as he wrote a date on the board in large, stark handwriting: October 1929.

"The era of raging parties, jazz music, and prohibition. As we exit the 1920's, we're going to witness the worst economic downfall our country has ever seen, and it all came to fruition after this date, right here." Avery dropped the marker on its holding tray and pointed at his handiwork. "What happened in October 1929?"

*Oh, that's easy. The infamous stock market crash of 1929. I did a presentation on the Great Depression in the fifth grade. Maddox even helped me paste pictures on my poster board.*

I chewed on my cheek instead of answering. People shuffled around. Someone cleared their throat. Avery raised his eyebrows. Cady finally spoke up.

"The World Series?" she inquired. I rolled my eyes. Wrong.

"Nope, try again," Avery shook his head.

"We elected a new president into office!" she tried again. Wrong.

"Try again."

"World War Two broke out!" *Seriously?! You're like a decade early, sister.*

"Try again."

"JFK was assassinated!" *You've got to be kidding me.* I threw my head in my hands.

"Oh my god, no!" I shouted, my voice muffled by my palms. "The stock market crashed in 1929! It was the infamous stock market crash of October 1929 that propelled us into the Great Depression!"

The room fell silent. I looked up from my hands. Everyone was staring at me, including Avery. He had a smirk on his face, the corners of his mouth turned

up in a cheeky way. My eyes widened, realizing what I'd done. And then so did his smirk.

"That's right..."

"...Amanda," I finished for him.

"That's right Amanda, new-student-who-I've-never-had-in-my-class-before. Excellent."

Avery turned around and began scribbling more dates on the board, but I wasn't paying attention anymore. Heat rose to my cheeks and I sunk down in my chair, crossing my arms over my chest. *I can't believe I did that. I yelled at her in front of everyone. I'm such a fucking idiot.*

I berated myself for forty-seven more minutes while the rest of class passed in a blur. Finally, the bell rang.

Keeping my head down, I began to throw my laptop and folders into my bag before fishing for my iPhone. I untangled my headphones and popped one earbud in, about to press play until I saw a shadow approach out of the corner of my eye. I glanced up. Avery was standing over me. I caught a whiff of his musky cologne.

"I'm so sorry about that," I began, stuttering and tumbling over my words. I didn't mean to be rude, I just—"

He held his hands out to stop me. I looked around. Everyone else was gone.

"Don't worry about it, Amanda. I found it quite humorous actually, but that will just be our secret, okay?"

"Okay. Thank you, Mr. Thomas."

"Please, when we're not in class, call me Avery."

"Okay. Thank you, Avery."

"You're welcome. Are you alright?"

"Alright?"

"Yeah, I guess. You seemed flustered."

"Did... you hear some of Cady's answers?"

"I did. I heard all of them."

"Then yeah, you could say I was flustered."

"Do you like U.S. history?"

"I love U.S. history."

"Where'd you inherit that from?"

"My maternal grandfather. He's an Italian immigrant."

"Is he really?"

"You sound shocked."

"Not shocked, just surprised."

"Well... I'm full of surprises."

"I see. What were you about to listen to?"

"Oh, I, uh... you probably won't know them."

"Try me."

"A band called Motionless in White."

"You like metal?"

"You know them?"

"I'm full of surprises."

*Hub. Apparently so.*

The warning bell to notify students that they only have two minutes left of passing period sounded over the P.A. system.

"I'll let you go so you won't be late for class. I'll see you tomorrow, Amanda."

"See you tomorrow, Avery."

Four weeks later, Avery moved our assigned seats. We were entering the 1950's, moving past the darkness of the Holocaust and being ushered into suburbanism and the Cold War. When moving our seats, Avery saved me for last, reading off the name of all the other kids in the class before mine at the beginning of the period, and placed me in the desk right next to his own. Cady and her clone friends were placed roughly three desks to my left. They gave me their daily once over again as I shuffled through the rows to take my place in my new home and I pulled my denim jacket in closer to my body. The hole in my black skinny jeans caught on a loose screw in the desk in front of my own and it took me a couple of seconds to untangle myself; as I sat down, I felt the eyes of everyone in the class glued on me and heat rose to my cheeks. I looked at Avery through my mascara-covered lashes, who began mouthing words to me. *Just breathe*, he was saying silently. *Take deep breaths*. I exhaled several times following his lead. When I felt the fire leave my skin, Avery nodded. I laced my fingers together tightly. He stood up and began class.

"Prior to the 1950s, what was the most common form of leisure entertainment in the average American household? Do we remember from our last unit?"

"Radio shows," I hesitantly whispered out into an otherwise quiet room.

Avery nodded. "Do we know what's going to change that in the upcoming decade?"

*The introduction of the television to the middle and upper class.* I chewed on my cheek. Silence.

“Anyone?”

*The introduction of the television to the middle and upper class!* I wanted to scream. I chewed on my cheek some more.

More silence.

“Amanda?” Avery raised his eyebrows and we locked eyes. My stomach dropped. “Do you know?”

*Of course I do. And of course you know that I do. And of course you’re going to call me out on it. Again.*

“Uh, yeah... I think I do.”

“Would you mind telling the class what you think it is?”

I sighed, wishing that he would just let me stay quiet for one class. “The introduction of the television?”

“Bingo,” he snapped his fingers, his signature smirk pulling at the corners of his mouth. I sighed and caught the gaze of Cady and her clone friends as they bore into my soul.

“You know, people are going to think I’m even more of a know-it-all than they already do if you keep pining for answers from me,” I told Avery after class that day once everyone cleared the room. I threw my supplies in my backpack and zipped it closed before sitting on the surface of my desk with my short legs dangling over the edge to face him in his chair. Over the past month, these after-class conversations had become a daily occurrence, slowly turned more comfortable and personal, and constantly made me late to my tenth hour study hall. Finally, after Avery wrote me my sixth consecutive late pass to class, my study hall teacher suggested submitting a request to my counselor to become Avery’s teacher aide to avoid a possible in-school suspension. Since getting that request approved, this was the second day I didn’t have to worry about running halfway across the building to get to class after having yet another discussion with him that caused me to lose all track of time. By some twist of fate, tenth hour was also Avery’s prep hour, allowing us exactly fifty two minutes to spend in an empty classroom alone. I had fifty two minutes alone to spend with someone who reminded me of Maddox.

“Your classmates think you’re a know-it-all?” he asked over his shoulder as he pounded away on his keyboard, working to respond to an email.

“Four and a half weeks into the semester and you don’t notice the way they look at me every time I walk into the room?”

“Sure, but I never thought that had anything to do with your intelligence.”

“Well, what else could it be about?”

“Your individuality,” he stated matter-of-factly. “In my nine years of teaching, I’ve never come across a sixteen year old girl who’s so comfortable styling a short hairstyle and sporting men’s clothing.”

I moved my jacket out of the way to look down at my striped cotton jersey that I pulled off a rack from the men’s section in H&M because it looked like an old top Maddox used to own. “How’d you know I was wearing men’s clothes?”

Avery glanced up at me and cocked an eyebrow, as if to say *I also have a dick, you know.* I swallowed and rolled my eyes, suddenly realizing what a stupid fucking question that was.

“You’re right,” I muttered. “Never mind.”

He chuckled before continuing. “But the one thing that I don’t understand about you, Amanda, is that for as confident as you are on your exterior, you cower away from anything that showcases your soul.”

I choked on my spit at his comment. “Avery, that was *the cringiest* thing I’ve probably ever heard in my life.”

He shut the lid of his laptop before turning in his chair to face me directly with a grin. “Okay, fair, you’ve got me there. I may or may not have been trying to sound poetic... But I’m serious, Amanda. You have so much to offer. Why do you let people’s unwarranted opinions of you hold you back?”

I sighed and broke from his gaze, tears beginning to creep into the corners of my eyes because Maddox used to say the same thing. My eyes roamed the room around Avery as he sat still looking at me, his fingers loosely intertwined in his lap, until they settled on a framed picture of Emily wrapped up in an oversized Cinderella towel. Her hair was dripping and her skin was glistening from the wetness of the bath she obviously had just been pulled from. Large hands were holding onto her sides as she was grinning a cheek-splitting grin, her eyes sparkling with joy. She was captivating to look at and it made me sick to my stomach.

“Why’d you decide to name her ‘Emily?’” I wiped at the tears before they had a chance to fall down my cheeks.

Avery turned to glance at the photo. “Sarah and I—”

“Sarah, your wife?”

“Yes, sorry. Sarah, my wife and I, we had picked out both ‘Emily’ and ‘Eileen,’ after Sarah’s grandmother, but you can’t really know if the name fits until you meet your kid.”

“And when you met her...”

“She was definitely an ‘Emily.’ And thank God, too, because I don’t know how well I would have stomached having a daughter named ‘Eileen.’ I wanted to usher my kids into the twenty first century, not get them stuck in the twentieth.”

“‘Eileen’ would have carried on the family tradition, though,” I tried.

Avery eyed me. “It’s also ugly.”

I paused. “...Okay, I’ll give you that much.”

We both chuckled.

“Do you love her?” I eventually asked him.

“Sarah or Emily?”

“Either one. Both.”

“Very much so. Emily... she’s a light. I thought I knew love when I married Sarah, but it turns out that I didn’t know anything about it until I saw Emily come into the world. Watching what Sarah went through in labor—it was a hard labor—and then looking into Emily’s eyes for the first time, it... it changed my world.” I watched as Avery began to space out, the memory clearly entering the forefront of his mind. His eyes fluttered back and forth as his thoughts danced in his brain and I licked my lips when he broke out into an involuntary smile.

“Would you ever leave them?” I asked as he came back to the present.

“Why would you ask something like that?”

I shrugged, hearing Maddox’s last words to me ring in my ears. “I don’t know. It’s a stupid question. Never mind about that one either.”

Avery paused while raising an eyebrow, debating on whether or not to change the subject.

“What about you, Amanda?” he eventually asked. “Are you interested in anyone? Talking to anyone? Dating anyone?”

I thought about burying Maddox seventeen months ago. I thought about how no one would get close to me even with a ten foot pole because I was all grief and no human.

“No,” I spat, my tone colder than I had intended. “Absolutely not.”

“No one at all?”

“Nope.”

“Yes, you are.”

“No, I’m not.”

“You’re lying.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Your body language and voice.”

I slowly uncrossed my arms from the front of my chest and relaxed my spine, both which apparently had pulled themselves into their respective positions without my knowledge.

“Better?” I asked him.

“Better. But you’re still lying.”

“I’m avoiding,” I corrected him.

“Fine.” Defeated, Avery pushed back in his chair and grabbed a stack of papers from the corner of his desk. “You’ve got a red pen?”

“Yeah, in my bag, why?”

He handed me the stack and I took it into my lap. “If you’re not gonna talk, you’re gonna act like a normal T.A. and grade the quizzes for me from yesterday.”

“But I don’t have an answer key.”

Avery looked at me and winked. “I looked at your quiz answers already. You don’t need one.”

Another four weeks passed and Avery moved the seats of the class again. He placed the kids who were notorious for sleeping during lecture in the front row and finally split up Cady and her clone friends; they were more interested in the gossip that invaded the lunch room that day than working on their homework and their blatant disrespect for Avery’s authority had finally sent him over the edge. I was kept in the same desk right next to his own.

Avery was so easy to get lost in, just like Maddox, and it was something that I admired about him. Every lecture he gave was a marvelous story that only seemed probable in the movies or the most outrageous fantasy novels, but as he would often throw his foot on the seat of a desk and rest his elbows on his muscular thigh, he’d claim them to be true *and* had the newsreels and government documents to back himself up. He spoke with his hands to emphasize just how insane certain events were (*And just like that, a bullet went flying straight through JFK’s brain in front of the American people!*) and changed the octave of his voice when

discussing incredibly shameful events (*So the government came up with an idea: Japanese internment camps*). But today was different. Today, I didn't even look twice at Avery.

After everyone settled in their new seats, he began with the Watergate Scandal, an event that I had watched countless documentaries on over Christmas break out of curiosity. Any other day, his dramatic and quirky introductions to new decades in our history would have made me smirk and wonder how he didn't become a news anchor or a Broadway actor instead of a teacher, but the fresh red lines in the skin on my ribs were causing my vision to blur and fog to envelop my brain. They weren't there when I went to bed last night nor when I woke up that morning, but Facebook's memory they so graciously reminded me of popped up on the top of my timeline as I was scrolling through during lunch caused otherwise. In the picture posted by my mom, Maddox's head was laying in my lap as he was taking a nap; the post sent me running to the bathroom to throw up my food as soon as I saw it. After I puked, I pulled my pencil sharpener from my supply bag and used it to draw eighteen lines, one for every month it's been since the funeral, next to seventeen older scabs and sixteen older scars and fifteen older marks. After, I patted them with a paper towel, pulled my shirt down and went to Avery's class. On the way, I smiled at the principal and waved at the girl I sat next to in Algebra 2.

Regardless of every word Avery muttered, I could only hear my wounded skin.

"And then Nixon..." Avery was rambling on. *Pain.*

"Microphones were wired..." *Pain.*

"The offices were raided..." *Pain.*

"See, impeachment involves..." *Pain. More pain.*

"Instead of going through the impeachment process..." *Pain. Pain. Pain.*

"People are still confused about..." *Searing pain.*

*Only pain.*

The bell finally rung. Everyone left. I stayed seated.

"Oh my god Amanda, you're bleeding."

I looked up at Avery as he approached my desk. "Huh?"

"You're bleeding under your shirt. Were you bleeding all of class?" When I didn't answer, he continued. "Can you stand? Can you move? We need to take you to the nurse."

I tried to stand. I got dizzy. *Excruciating pain.* I shook my head and sat back down. Avery pressed his lips together. I swallowed. Avery sat down at his desk and dialed the nurse's office. *More pain.* I placed my hand on my side out of reflex and discovered that Avery was right. My shirt, my white shirt, was getting more soaked by the second. It was a bad day to wear white.

*That's a lot of blood.*

"Oh my god, that's a lot of blood," Avery commented when he hung up with the nurse and grabbed a towel from the golf bag under his desk. He pressed it to my side and applied pressure. His fingertips sent shockwaves through my body and I gasped. *Searing pain.* That was the first time he physically touched me.

"The nurse is coming, okay Amanda?" Avery looked up at me through his thick eyelashes. I nodded and placed a hand of mine over his, forcing him to press into my skin even harder. *So. Much. Pain.* I closed my eyes and tried not to smirk. That was my favorite kind of pain.

"What happened? Do you know why you're bleeding?" he prodded.

I nodded again.

"I need you to tell me if you can, Amanda. The nurse is going to want to know."

I shook my head.

"Don't do this to me now, Amanda. Don't shut down now."

"You let me before," I pushed out. *Pain.*

"You weren't bleeding through your shirt before."

I stayed silent.

"Amanda. What. Happened."

*Maddox happened,* I wanted to tell him. *Pain.* The nurse walked through the door with a first aid bag. Avery motioned her over to look at my ribs.

"Hi, Amanda. I'm going to need to lift up your shirt to look at the bleeding, okay?" The nurse blushed her blonde hair out of her eyes and spoke to me like I couldn't understand English. I rolled my eyes and shifted in my seat to allow her to take a peek at my wounds. Avery backed up to make room for the nurse and peeled the towel off of my side. *Pain. Pain. Pain.*

"Alright, this might hurt because the fabric is stuck to your skin, so just bear with me, okay?" The nurse wrapped her fingers around the hem of my shirt. Avery reached out from behind me to place his hand on my shoulder. I laid my cheek on his skin and closed my eyes. The nurse lifted my shirt. *PAIN. EXCRUCIATING PAIN.*

I screamed. Avery tightened his grip on my shoulder. The nurse gasped. Avery craned his neck to see what she was looking at. I winced. He knows now. *He knows what I am. He knows what I've done to myself every 30 days since Maddox left.*

"Oh my god..." he whispered.

"We need to call an ambulance," the nurse spat, grabbing her bag at lightning speed to pull out butterfly tape and gauze. "She needs stitches. She's bleeding out and I can't tape this up."

Avery shot up and called 911 on his desk phone while the nurse bent me sideways to apply pressure to my cuts. *Searing pain.* I screamed again. Avery walked back over to me, phone in hand while talking to the operator, and took my hand in his. His touch sent shockwaves through me again. I squeezed his fingers until his knuckles turned white.

"Which... which one is it? Which one's bleeding?" I managed to ask through exhales of agony. The nurse was trying to pinch my skin together as best as she could to stop the bleeding and tape the wounds closed.

"How many do you have? Eighteen?" She counted just to be sure. "There's four that are deep and profusely bleeding. Six altogether that I think will need stitched."

I looked up at Avery through the tears that began to form. *She's hurting me,* I mouthed to him. He nodded with pressed lips. *Did you do this?* he asks. It was my turn to nod. *Did you mean to?* he wanted to know. I shrugged. I meant to hurt myself. I didn't mean to do it for attention.

*Too. Much. Pain.* I began to black out.

"I... I can't see anything, my, my vision's going in and out," I told the nurse.

"The ambulance will be here in one minute," Avery reminded me, his voice soft and soothing. I still had a death grip on his hand. "In case you black out, Amanda, I need to be able to tell the paramedics why you did this."

I didn't want to but I knew I had to. "Oh god, please don't think I'm crazy," I wheezed. The black spots in my vision were getting bigger. *Pain.*

"I could never think you were crazy, Amanda. I care about you and want to help you but I need to know what happened."

"...Maddox," was all I was able to spit out.

Avery stood silent for a moment, confused. "Maddox? Maddox Reid? The senior baseball player who hanged himself last year?"

"Eighteen months ago today... eighteen months, eighteen cuts," I breathed. The nurse pulled on my skin. *Pain.* I screamed again.

"Amanda Reid..." Avery mumbled my full name, his eyes widening as he put it together. "Maddox was your older brother??"

"You... you look just like him..." I said, nodding. "You've been the first person I've felt safe with since he left me, the first person who hasn't shut me out or talked about me or bullied me, who let me be *me*..." I thought about Cady and her clone friends. My vision began to blur. I could no longer see Avery's hazel eyes. I could no longer make out the tears that were falling down his face.

"Amanda," he shushed me, running his free hand through my hair as the paramedics stormed into his classroom with a gurney. "It's okay. You don't have to speak anymore. We're gonna get you help." I could hear the nurse mumbling to them in the background.

"Don't leave me..." I pleaded, fighting off the nausea that was taking over as my vision deteriorated even further. "Don't leave me like Maddox did..."

"I won't, Amanda. I'm gonna be right here the whole time. I'm going to make sure you're okay."

"Will you be there when I wake up?"

"Only if you want to wake up."

"I do, if you want me to."

"Of course I want you to wake up."

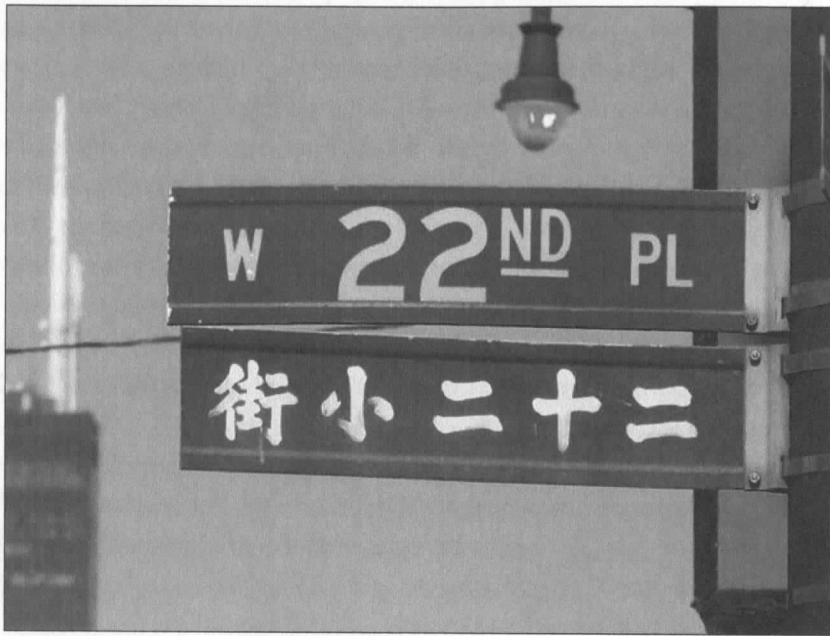
"Promise?"

"Promise."

Avery smiled. I weakly squeezed his hand again. Someone from far away was asking me my name, what I did to myself, who my parents were, how to contact them. I opened my mouth to answer.

Everything went black.





*Chicago Characters* by Hannah Sobhie

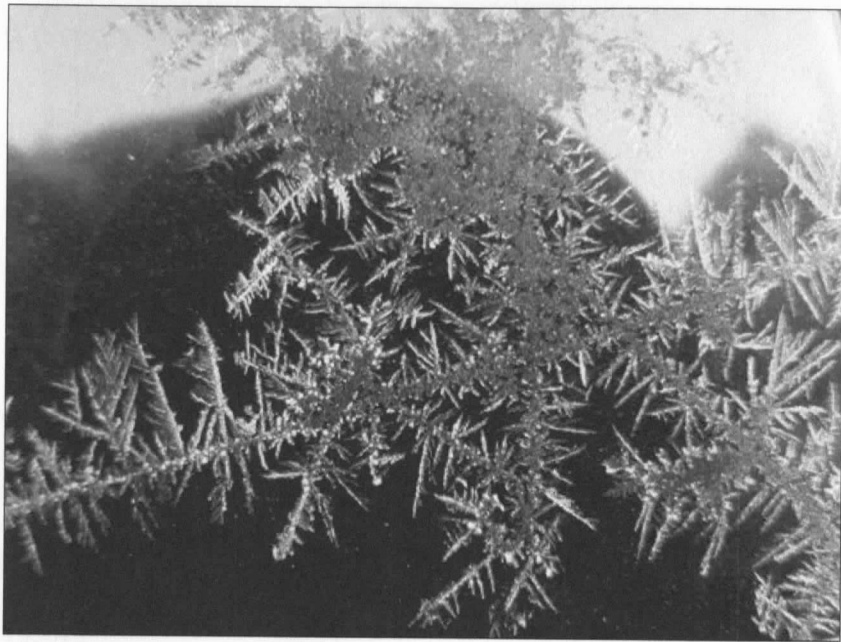
ABBY HENDERSON

CHICAGO: THE PULSE LINE

Duneland safety gate  
opens to an Indian Boundary sublime.  
South Shore Line leaks into the city,  
vomits its passengers into a giant hole  
beneath a tight cluster of Art Deco buildings.  
They stretch and graze  
the lower parts of an unknown heaven.

I feel like a lamb in the city,  
a body without a name.  
Temples stand on each corner  
of every block and every space that falls between,  
catering to a religion of people.  
A religion no church has ever devised;  
prayers spilling onto the sidewalk.

In a world where pedestrians play dumb,  
pigeons are the poets.  
They spin an urban gospel—  
a dirty parable stamped onto a colorless sky.  
Rock salt in the sidewalk cracks  
stirs under the steps of each wandering, city disciple.  
And I can't be moved by any of it.



*Shattered* by Hannah Sobhie

NICK MCKINLEY

WEEPING WOMAN ON THE TRAIN

Weeping woman on the train.  
Collarless blue striped shirt  
with a jockey of red.

With matted brown hair; down.  
But you do not seem to care.  
Why do you weep your tears in the city of Love?

You hold back the tears so that none may know.  
It seems to work, for no one has noticed.  
But in a way you have failed.

For I noticed and I knew your pain.  
The train speeds fast, yet you remain stuck.  
Tell me your pain that strains you this day.

Received your walking papers?  
A lover has left?  
The rotary rings, about the death of your father?

You get off here.  
But my last stop is not until Bougival.  
Never will I know what made you weep that day.



*Paper Petals* by Hannah Sobhie

KAYLEIGH HUTSON

BEATEN DOWN FLOWER

Tiptoeing around everyone's feelings  
Your voice gets lost in the sea  
Afraid to speak up  
The flower within yearns for the sun  
Seeking only for a chance to speak out  
But only receiving hailstones—  
which brings the flower to slowly wither and die  
The multitude that has clamored for the voices to be heard and respected  
Has no remorse when an opposing opinion is trampled—  
which only begins the cycle anew  
Nothing truly changes  
Best to skip everywhere you go  
regardless of the opinions of others—  
if only to keep a part of yourself intact.

# ANONYMOUS

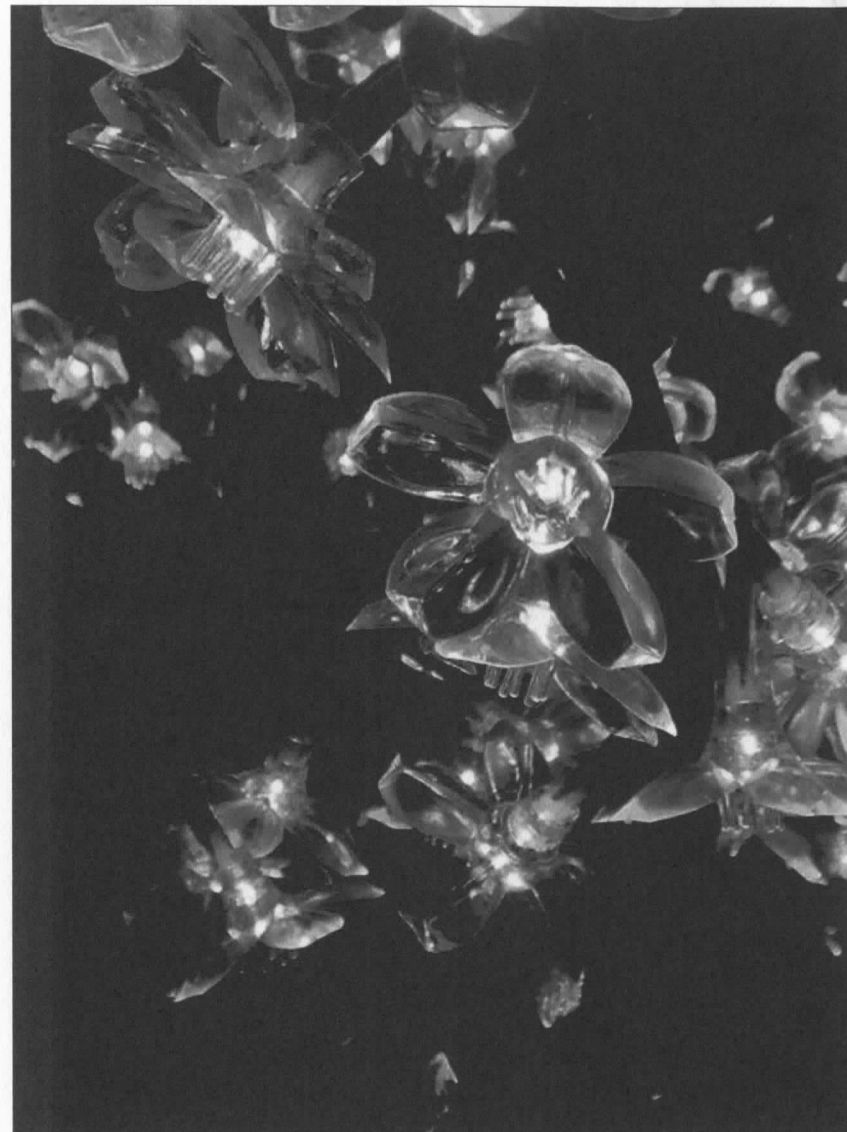
## BLUE LIGHT

A dark room  
Blue light from the tv  
Characters talking  
People downstairs  
Lying together  
Suddenly  
A hand on my throat  
Lips at my ear  
Threatening words  
Anger dripping from his voice  
Flashbacks to the floor  
Flashbacks to fear

His hands prying  
Fighting for my jeans  
Pushing him away  
Kicking  
Fighting  
Failing  
Escaping

Back  
Tears in my eyes  
Rolling away  
Curling into the floor  
Silent sobs  
No apologies  
No emotions  
Only fear

Only scars



*Golden Christmas* by Colleen Schena

# BRANDILYN WORRELL

## THE LIGHT

The light that made her shine so bright  
Caused her so much pain.  
It seared, it scorched, it scarred her skin;  
It made her melt away.  
But, in the distance, a small spark grew  
As it gazed at her small light  
And sparked a thought that blazed like day  
And drove away the night.

## THE DARK

It settled over me, a heavy blanket about my shoulders.  
The cold seeped through my skin and secured itself to my chest.  
At least one of us felt secure.  
Its clammy hand would grip my shoulder as each new crisis entered  
And each person left.  
After a while that hand felt reassuring—  
At least I could still feel it.  
At least I could still remember times when it wasn't there.  
A deep breath and the blanket would slip a little.  
A lit candle and the hand would loosen its grip.  
A closing door and we'd start all over again.



*You Were Here* by Hannah Sobhie

# DANIEL BURKHARDT

## HOW I PERFORMED MY GREATEST ILLUSION

My introduction to magic occurred when I was a young boy, when I was still known as Dempsey Plumber. My parents were very loving and attentive to their only child, but sometimes their attempts at being proper parents were misguided. For some reason, my family thought that a trip to Las Vegas was a suitable vacation for a 6 year-old child. Aside from the smoke-ridden casinos and stripper-ridden streets, Las Vegas had one saving grace: magic. And not the stereotypical, cliché “magic of the Las Vegas Strip”, but the performers who devoted their life to the craft.

The first magician I ever saw was located on The Strip. This man managed to combine comedy and magic, and with his unique combination of showmanship and humor... I couldn't tear my eyes away. I was enthralled. After the show, I begged my mother to buy his book of magic tricks so that I may learn his secrets. As the magician was greeting audience members in the lobby, I approached the man and handed him my book. He scribbled an encouraging note to me and handed the book back with a smile. To this day, the beat-up, auto-graphed copy of his book sits in my bookshelf.

By reading his book, I learned much more than I had ever hoped (and I mean that literally, I had never hoped to learn how to magically move a dollar bill so that I may tip an exotic dancer). After finishing his book multiple times, I needed more. I craved it. Like an itch that refused to go away, I just kept reading and working. I learned card magic, stage magic... even a bit of street magic. By age 12, I had mastered almost every trick that I read about. I decided to enter my middle school talent show. And for the first time in my life, in front of a real audience, I made magic.

I won, of course.

But when I moved onto high school, my illusions weren't as popular as they were in middle school. My peers weren't as easily fooled and my teachers no longer pretended to be impressed. The skills that I had learned from my books were mere parlor tricks; I needed to improve. I took a trip to the local magic

shop and browsed their wares. I picked up a few props and purchased a book that instructed me on how to construct my own. I also signed up for woodshop class so that I may have access to all the tools I needed; I created works of art, some from the book and some of my own imagination (you never would've guessed, but my famous Conundrum Box was designed by yours truly).

My creations, however, still did not impress my peers; instead, they ridiculed me (high school students are quite cruel). So I turned my sights onto freelance performing. Under the stage name Dempsey Black, I would find venues that offered open-mic nights and I would make magic. The crowd would ooh and aah as I performed illusions nobody had ever seen before. After graduating high school, I decided to not attend college in pursuit of my dreams. And by age 22, I had acquired my first paid performance.

It was a child's birthday party. I still have nightmares about those snot-nosed monsters screaming at me, but it was a paid performance nevertheless.

Luckily for me, a parent of one those monsters happened to be my saving grace. She was a producer at the Starlight Theatre, which was hosting a famous comedian and they were in need of an opening act. She told me that not only would I be paid, but also my name would be on the marquee, directly beneath the comedian's name. She went on to say that there would be talent scouts and agents present, eager to hire young and enthusiastic talent such as myself. However, she had a suggestion.

“I think you need an assistant.”

“An assistant?” I replied, “What for?”

“To liven up the stage a little. You know, make the show a little more interesting.”

Although I was entertaining on my own, I had to admit that it was a good idea. Many people in an audience (typically simple-minded men) have a tendency to get captivated by a beautiful assistant, distracting them as I worked. Thanking her for the idea, I asked if I could hold an audition in her theatre and she happily approved.

I got to work setting up an open audition at the *Starlight Theatre*. Once I opened the doors, I found a myriad of different women waiting to audition. However, they all had one thing in common: they were convinced that this was their ticket to stardom. They waited patiently in the lobby, waiting for me to call them to the stage. One by one, they came onstage and performed a rehearsed routine. Although many of them were quite beautiful, none of them truly caught

my eye. They all lacked a genuine interest in magic. I was bored. I prayed for a miracle. And that miracle came.

Ellie.

I will never forget the first moment I saw her. I walked into the lobby and called her name from the lengthy list of women, "Ms. Eleanor Wood?"

"Right here!" she said, her curled red hair bouncing as she leapt onto her feet. A lively woman, barely younger than I, came across the lobby and shook my hand. "And please, call me Ellie."

At that moment, all the strength in my body left me. She was lovely. I couldn't take my eyes off of her. My heart felt lighter in my chest and my thoughts became immediately clouded. In hindsight, I still cannot recall what came over me in that instant.

Once we were back in the theatre, I watched her perform her routine. Although her routine was rather mundane, there was something about her that captivated me.

"Ms. Wood, I have a few questions, if you don't mind."

"Ok."

"Why do you want to be a magician's assistant?"

"Well, I've loved magic ever since I was a little girl. I would come home from school and my dad would be waiting to surprise me with tickets to whatever magician was in town. It's just a part of who I am, you know? But don't get me wrong, I have no intention of being your assistant."

My heart dropped. "...excuse me?"

"I have no intention of being your assistant. Instead, I want to be your partner. We would work together, not me working for you."

"My partner?" My mind was racing. I was the main attraction, how dare she think I would even consider taking on a partner. I should have kicked her out right then and there, but her passion for magic was inspiring. There was something unique about her that I knew I would never find in another woman.

"Ok, Ellie. I'm going to make you an offer. I have an upcoming performance in a few days and it's too late to rework my act. So, if I hire you, you will act as my assistant for this first performance. After that, we'll discuss this 'partner' business. Do we have a deal?"

She contemplated my offer for a few moments before an excited smile crossed her face.

"Deal."

With Ellie as my new assistant, the night of our performance at the *Starlight Theatre* rushed to greet us, and we were ready. I was decked out in a slick black tux with matching top hat and red bow tie (typical magician garb) and she...

"How do I look?" She asked me. *Incredible*. My heart wanted to say. *You have the kind of looks that could make any man weak at the knees. Your hair is curled to perfection and your red dress makes you shine even more than usual.* But what I told her was even cornier:

"Like magic," I said. "You look like magic."

And she giggled. She always did have an adorable giggle.

The stage crew informed us that we were ready to go onstage, so we both held our breaths and walked onstage with our heads high. And we made magic.

The crowd was in awe as we worked in tandem. There was some kind of chemistry between us that I couldn't place, but we seemed to recognize each other's actions without even looking at each other.

I had mentioned earlier that a lovely assistant could captivate a simple-minded man, but that night, I was that simple-minded man. Throughout the entire performance, I was unable to concentrate on anything but her. In fact, I seem to recall messing up an illusion since I was so distracted; the only person who seemed to notice, however, was Ellie. After our set was finished, we received uproarious applause. It was magnificent.

A sharp-dressed, middle-aged gentleman approached us shortly after we left the stage. He introduced himself as Mickey Granger. He gave us his card, saying, "Contact me if you need an agent." As soon as his back was turned, Ellie and I embraced in joy for a quick second, before quickly retracting in embarrassment.

Blushing, Ellie said, "You were amazing out there".

"Thanks, you looked pretty amazing yourself." My face immediately went red.

I caught a shy smile briefly appear on her face. "Thanks."

We contacted Mr. Granger, and soon enough, he had numerous shows booked. Every one of them was a major success. Ellie and I made a great team, and we learned more and more about each other as time went on (we made a point to have a celebratory dinner after every performance). I listened to her speak for hours on end. As she talked about her past and her interests, I kept track of every tiny detail that she shared with me. But no matter how many dinners we had together, I still had trouble gathering the nerve to speak myself. I was really starting to fall for her.

We continued our act and our name spread like wildfire as Mickey was able to book even more high-end gigs. We were living the dream. Well... I was any-ways. Ellie was still acting as my assistant. It wasn't her childhood dream that we were living. It was mine.

After a show one night, she pulled me aside and reminded me about our deal at the audition.

"It's not like I don't enjoy working with you, Dempsey. It's just... you promised that I could be your partner."

I couldn't even look her in the eye. She was right. Here I was, being the center of attention while she was being ignored.

"Ellie... I'm so sorry. We'll start making arrangements as soon as possible, ok?"

She couldn't contain her excitement. She gave me a surprise hug and dragged me to her hotel room so that we could start making plans that evening (when I said "as soon as possible", she took it quite literally). Together, we edited the dialogue and collaborated as to who would do what. For hours, we discussed the changes and traded illusions between each other (she joked that *I* should be the one who gets cut in half).

As the night went on, I kept stealing longer and longer glances at her. When she finally noticed, I was staring helplessly into her eyes. Ellie grabbed me by the collar and kissed me softly. Simultaneously stunned and thrilled, I gently grabbed the back of her head and pulled her back in.

That night, I laid in bed for hours with Ellie curled up next me. I had never been more content in my life.

The tour continued as usual, only I was no longer the headliner. It was Ellie and I, working as partners. We maintained a steady relationship offstage and snuck playful glances onstage whenever we could. I finally started opening up to her and she even prodded me to talk about myself. She made me laugh and I made her smile. We spent every day together and I'm hesitant to say that I was almost... in love. And as far as we were concerned, our shows were better than ever now that we were together.

Mickey, however, did not agree. One day, he called to invite me out to lunch at a nice Italian restaurant. But what made me wary was that I was not to tell Ellie that this meal was taking place. The pleasant smell of garlic bread was not enough to distract me from Mickey, who sat waiting with an unsettling look of solemnity on his face.

"Sit down, Dempsey," he told me, "There's something you might want to know.

I took the seat across from him. "What is it?"

"Have you, by any chance, noticed a decline in audience members recently?"

"Not that I've noticed, no."

Mickey picked up the menu in front of him and thumbed through it. "Well, there's been a decline in ticket sales recently. It's gradual, but they keep getting lower." Keeping his eyes on the menu, he casually grabbed a bit of bread and took a bite.

"Is that why you called me here?"

"No," he mumbled, struggling to speak through the bread in his mouth. "I wanted to tell you *why* ticket sales are decreasing."

Crossing my arms, I leaned back in my chair. "I'm listening."

He swallowed. "Can you guess when ticket sales started getting lower?"

"No."

Mickey set down the menu and sighed. "When you took Ellie on as your partner. Ticket sales decreased the moment she stopped being your assistant."

I shook my head in disbelief. "It has to be a coincidence, there's no way it's her fault."

"The numbers don't lie, Dempsey. Either you drop her as your partner or you lose your shot at stardom."

I stood up angrily, bumping into the table and shaking the glass of water in front of him. "No. I would never do that to Ellie. We're a team. Either you accept that, or I get myself a new agent." And with that, I stormed out.

However, weeks passed and I started to notice the decline in audience members that Mickey was talking about. And the audience members who actually showed up clapped and cheered less. They stopped applauding. They stop admiring. But I kept telling myself that there was no way it was Ellie's fault. However, it was something that I wanted to bring to Ellie's attention and see what she thought. I went to her hotel room and told her everything: What Mickey had said and what I had been noticing recently. I asked her what she thought about it.

"Crazy," she called me. "You are absolutely crazy. Do you honestly think people aren't coming to the show because I'm not your assistant anymore? You just can't stand the thought of somebody else sharing the spotlight."

"That's not true!" I explained. "You're just as important as I am."



“Bullshit. It’s always been about you. It’s *all* about the great Dempsey Black.”

“Ellie, ju—”

“Save it. If you want to fire me, be my guest. You’ll see for yourself that the ticket sales have nothing to do with me.”

“I don’t want to fire you! I just want to do a couple of shows with you as my assistant again. See if there’s any change in ticket sales.”

Ellie began to tear up. “I thought you cared about me,” she said. “I thought you cared about my dreams. But you’re obviously too concerned with your own to care. If you want to be the star, fine. I’m done.” She wiped the tears from her eyes and pushed me out of her room.

“Ellie, please don’t do this.”

Before she slammed the door, I heard the last words I would ever hear from Ellie:

“Go to Hell.” I can hear those words perfectly to this day.

Reluctantly, I left to find Mickey and informed him of what happened. Indifferent, he made plans to find me a replacement assistant. He went on to tell me that I made the right choice and that I would be far more successful without her.

I continued my tour, joined by some airheaded girl that Mickey found. Although she wasn’t nearly as good as Ellie, she did her job. And she made sure to never forget that she was merely my assistant. She was not my partner. She was no Ellie.

Ticket sales skyrocketed and the crowd went wild once again. I was booked more and more shows as my name became the number one most recognizable name in magic. And before I knew it, I found myself performing in Las Vegas, where this all started.

And in Las Vegas is where I stayed for a good ten years. As I grew older, so did my assistants, so Mickey made sure to replace them every year or so to keep attendance up. The crowds were enormous and I couldn’t even distinguish their faces from each other. The audience was one massive blur of adoring fans. But something inside made me feel empty. My only wish was that I had Ellie by my side. Without her, I no longer made magic. I simply performed.

Then one night, a familiar scene played out as I was greeting fans after a show: A redheaded little boy, no older than 6, approached me. I turned to see a copy of my book on magic in his outstretched hands. I smiled and took the book

from him; after I scribbled an encouraging note on the inside cover, I handed the book back to him and I could see a wonder in his eyes. The same wonder I had when I was a child. He thanked me and I watched as he ran back to his mother, a beautiful woman who I recognized almost immediately.

“...Ellie?”

My heart sank as she gave me a faint smile and exited the building with her son in tow. I felt like someone had set my stomach on fire. At that point, I would’ve preferred Ellie sawing me in half. The smile left my face and I retreated back to my quarters. That was the last time I ever saw her.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how I performed my greatest illusion.

I made the love of my life disappear.

ODE TO AN INTERSECTION

Time is but a matter of taste of differences  
Alterations that elude the greatest inferences

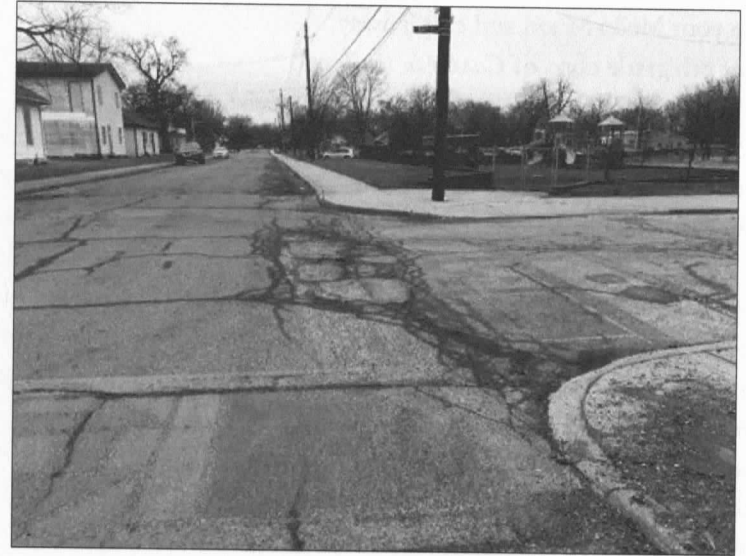
From the closing of a teenaged haven  
To a barber shop in the business of whiskers shaven

Time shapes and molds the greatest century  
Only to remain a strange and omniscient mystery

But hope drives the progresses that are made  
Hoping to instill a snowy mount of change; a domino effect to cascade

From the groups of youth of naïve innocence  
Brought to this world of hopeful remnants

Hope shapes and molds the greatest century  
Hope seems only to remain an omniscient mystery



THE INTERSECTION OF MY EYES AND YOURS

The glass is too shattered to read the label  
and the newspapers too wet to unfold.  
Across the street from the schoolyard,  
your worn-out tennis shoe grazes a flattened  
package of Kool cigarettes as you bend down to check  
if anything's left in the abandoned bottles of New  
Amsterdam Pineapple and Corona.  
You like to jump on the manhole cover outlined in green  
spray paint, making a clank-clank, thumping sound  
which is almost in rhythm with my heartbeat.  
The green paint-peeling fire hydrant watches  
from across the gravel street.  
Do you even know what green fire hydrants mean?

I do—enough water, but too many fires.

*Look!* “Two trees which grew together” but clearly,  
they are growing apart.

You sip your Mello Mood and cast it away  
like your 8th grade copy of *Catcher in the Rye*.

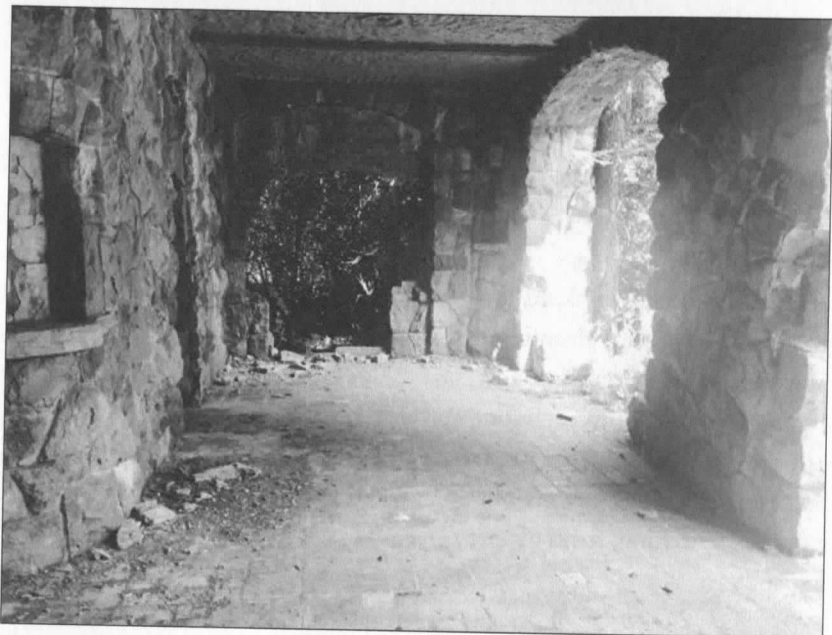
*Peace*, you think. Peace is stained in the center of the road.  
Ironic that no one will ever know all the pieces  
of your soul, which the street has hidden  
between the dying leaves and the pavement.

An open-doored helicopter flies above  
and clearly sees the wild dogs approaching you.  
The First Officer nudges the Captain as he wishes  
to warn you. But a white man on the other side of town  
is having a heart attack, so the helicopter departs.  
You look for houses with only a storm door  
between you and safety.  
Your mother told you yesterday  
to take the sexual assaults rather than the dogs—  
“They’ll rip you to shreds,”  
she says, “We’ve all survived the rapes.”  
“I’m brave,” you tell her. You face the dogs  
as life itself trickles down your forehead  
and whisper, “I’ll survive.”

A violet-painted stump offers refuge.  
*Rest!* It calls from a forest of broken trees.  
I ache to think you walk hand-in-hand with the darkness.  
The letters C-O-F-F-I-N-S  
have been carved into the outer layers of your spine  
for all the ducklings in the river  
to see. You turn to look back at the painted trees,  
but we lock eyes and in that moment  
our universes collide.

THE SEARCH

They circle, sharks smelling blood in the water.  
The light glints off of their gleaming exteriors  
As the sun beats down from above.  
Their shining eyes lock onto each lone traveler  
Cautiously weaving between the hunters.  
Predators revolve through the green and gray ocean  
Searching, ever searching, for their prey—  
A parking spot.



*Reclamation* by Colleen Schena

## KAYLEIGH HUTSON

### DAWN SHINES UPON THE TRUTH

A murder of crows flies overhead  
As the realization dawns  
That my hero is dead  
Or rather, was never truly alive  
How old must a person be  
Before they are able to see  
the truth behind the façade  
How many broken hearts must there be  
Before the late-night phone calls  
cease to be needed  
And young girls can have the protection they need  
The problem becomes  
That once the image shatters  
Our own disintegrates as well  
And with no one left to pick up the dust  
We are left to blow across the universe with the wind.

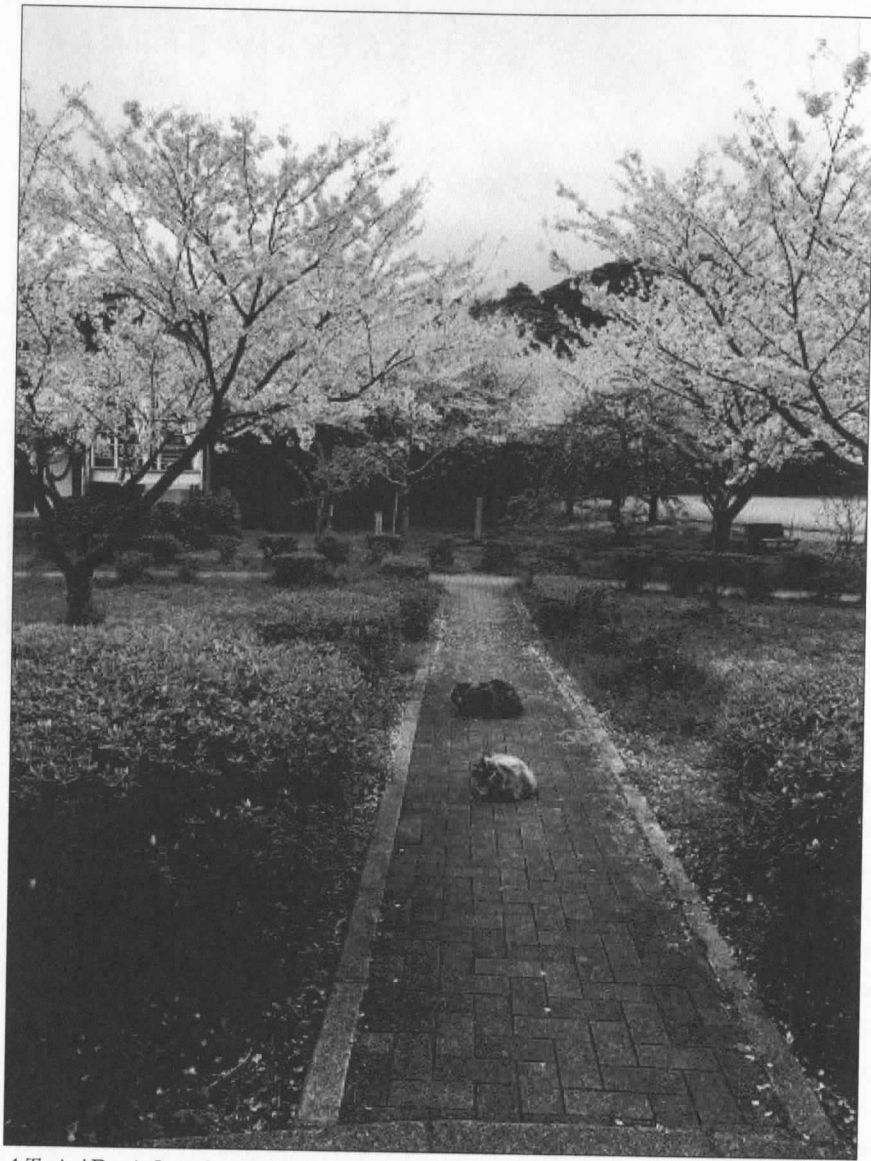


*Into the Woods* by Colleen Schena

## SAFWAN BARNAWI

### OUR LEADERS TODAY

Our world today is filled with lies and painful rage  
Wars, destruction, and fear with senseless hate  
Many leaders' obsessions to become super great  
Led to killings without thinking of the one who creates  
Don't they worry about the day in hell they'd suffocate  
Or is it lack of faith, yet thinking everything is fate  
All they worry about is how history will narrate  
Heroes, or villains, depends on how you translate  
sometimes depends on how your faith accommodates  
Christians believe their faith is superior you shall celebrate  
Muslims believe heaven is through their way you must navigate  
Didn't God tell you to him only you must dedicate?  
And killing your own is a sin that he shall not tolerate  
Yet behind the mask of religion you all instigate  
A war of self-interest then meaninglessly advocate  
"The older you grew, the wiser you became"  
Oh, wait, wait, wait! could you illustrate?  
Because our leaders have grown into a psychological stage of "Childate"  
Making decisions that even a child wouldn't appropriate  
Now I tell you, the end of the world we shall anticipate  
For peace is far, far, far away from the stairs of our gates  
Pray to the only God who taught us how to appreciate  
And hope that one day humans will better communicate



*A Typical Day in Japan* by Clare Impicciche

MASK BEHIND A FOREIGNER

I do not wish to visit another planet  
I reach an end of the road  
Down to the confusion street  
While wrapped in shyness and awkwardness  
The accent I carry, foreign  
Keeping my distance with liquid eye and nervous mind  
Turn into narrow street of tracing home  
Know there is no room for me in conversation  
Well, rooms aren't anything I recognize anyways  
I don't come from another planet  
But, they say I speak like an idiot child  
Smell like alien spice beneath my sweater  
Talking me to the gap  
With words that wash through me beneath every syllable  
I wander out into the hall but can't see the sign of grace  
They stare me out of me differently, deeper, and part of mask  
Go ahead and grab me by the elbow,  
Twist me and pull me like the world shallow by the sea  
I will chew my lower lip and it will become poem once again  
My hope. Unfindable began to fade  
I stopped wishing on falling stars  
I could not breath so I stopped and panted  
Unable to crawl any longer  
I am in pain, throw up, hard, long, into a gutter  
I have gone as far as I dare, but unable to crawl any longer  
Sobbing in the street, lower my head,  
moving away from others, making low gulping noise  
Unselfconsciously and heartbreakingly  
The thing with the liquid in the eyes when the world blurs

Reluctantly, I get up  
Experiencing of pushing air through the mouth, vibrating vocal cords  
through the way  
Feel this thing inside me, fluttering, pumping and squishing  
I will extend my arm long  
Until it is touching to the stars.  
This time, I am the messenger  
“I am a poem!” I repeat  
Let me forget everything  
Life beyond death that wraps up in a psalm,  
This one thing alone, I shall remember  
Storms used to be in my hill, threading me through the maze  
I will not look back, and will not stop until they shiver in chill  
I will put it all into the poem, to reveal the mask behind the foreigner.

From: “How to Talk to Girls at Parties” by Neil Gaiman

ABBY HENDERSON

BAGGAGE

36,000 feet in the air,  
probably somewhere above Otero County, Colorado.

I sit in 19E.  
19D says, “You write, huh?”

gesturing toward the worn notebook in my lap.  
“I guess,” I say,

Imagining that 19D was an eyeless figure  
in an Edward Hopper painting.

“What about?” asks 19D.

*Mostly about how old buildings are destroyed  
before anyone can properly love them*

*and cracks in walls that spill muted memories  
and flakes of grey plaster—*

*the stuff that actually comes out of the walls, behind chipped paint.  
I write about my little brother’s laugh*

*and how old ladies are always wearing  
rings too big for their fingers.*

*Sometimes about the endearing quality of wobbly school tables—  
when one of the legs is slightly shorter than the rest.*

*I try not to write about ethical consumption  
because it kills me.*

*Once I saw a bumper sticker  
on the back of a '95 Suzuki Samurai: "Meat is Murder!"*

*But people are killing people  
in Central America over avocados and bananas.*

*People kill me.*

The airplane breaches a patch of clouds.  
My carryon shifts overhead

and I realize that I must be sitting beside  
a poem with legs.



*Downtown Streetcars* by Catherine Bell



# BRANDILYN WORRELL

## OLYMPIAN NIGHTLIFE

The neon “OPEN” sign flashed red then blue then green outside of the bar and onto the streets of Olympus. Janus stood at its entrance keeping an eye on things inside the bar and out on the street as the shadows lengthened across its bricks. Helios slowed his Mustang and prepared to pull in for the night. Sol waited at the garage ready with a hose to clean off the reddish dirt that caked the wheels and sides of the car and dulled its glow. Apollo strummed his guitar as he sang on a street corner. His curls covered by a grey beanie, he serenaded the group of Muses, their golden headbands catching the last rays of light.

Locking up the library, Athene scoffed at a throng that made their way down the street. She knew where they were headed, straight to that neon sign. Dionysus’ bar still did a roaring business even though her library did not. Sense and wisdom were not in style. She missed her Greek philosophers and the bustling squares full of questions and the desire to learn. Now people sought advice from their bartender—as if Dionysus could give advice on anything other than which drink would intoxicate them the fastest. Her bright eyes lit up at the thought of putting her spear through that upstart’s finest collection of wine. Then the moment passed and with a sigh she turned away. Her only consolation was the thought of sharing a nice cup of tea with Minerva, the only other god or goddess who appreciated the library and helped curate the museum. Someone opened the door to the bar and a cacophony escaped from within. “Perhaps we’ll have something a little stronger than tea,” she said to herself as she rolled her golden eyes and took off up the now quiet streets.

Within the bar, things were a bit livelier. Bacchus was advertising his new drink, the Thyrsus. Dionysus had turned the music up, and there was a fierce game of darts going on; Artemis was leading on the scoreboard with Diana close behind. Aphrodite was trying to get Ares to come dance with her, but Venus was giving her a run for her money. Venus had perfected the thick winged eyeliner and Smokey eye before Aphrodite and made sure to flaunt it whenever she could.

Vaping in the back of the bar, Persephone and Hades enjoyed surveying the other patrons. It was their night off while Pluto and Proserpina watched the funeral home and graveyard. You never knew when someone might arrive at the Underworld, and it required 24-hour service.

Zeus reclined on one of the softer benches at the back of the bar, a small hill of glasses already sitting on the table beside him and an enormous cigar created a small cloud of smoke around his head. He hummed along to the music and struggled to watch the game of darts; he had quite a bit of money on Artemis. However, he had hit the drinks a little hard tonight, which was making it difficult to focus. Hera was hounding him about some woman whose name he could not even remember. Unfortunately, she did. With a sigh, Zeus tried to forget about the scolding that was sure to come when he went back home.

“You’re looking quite down in the dumps tonight, Zeus,” came a voice from the next booth over.

“Not for long,” replied Zeus, a hint of irritation in his tone, “Artemis is about to destroy Diana and then you’ll owe me big time.”

Jupiter emerged from the booth and sat beside him, placing a massive arm around Zeus’ broad shoulders, “Testy tonight, aren’t we? Trouble in paradise with Hera?”

“Stay out of it.”

“You know, I’m pretty exclusive with Juno and things go much more smoothly. You might try it sometime. Though I know that might be a little ‘tame’ for you.” He smirked and poked Zeus in the side with a small bolt of lightning. Hardly painful, but just irritating enough to get Zeus going.

“Don’t start with me, Jupiter,” he rumbled.

“Or what?”

“I’ll show you what a real god can do, you watered-down excuse for a deity.” The humans’ meme of “Gucci vs. Walmart” amused him, and he had anonymously sent around several of him compared to Jupiter.

“You think I’m a rip-off, huh? Tell that to someone who doesn’t have an entire planet named after him. All you’re known as is the guy who went around assaulting women!” Zeus glanced around the now quiet bar. Several of the women there were glaring at him. He had been a major player in the #Metoo movement on Earth and in Olympus, though not in the solution.

He snapped back to the present and let out a short burst of laughter, “Oh, yes! Very impressive. They named an uninhabitable planet after you. It’s full of

gas and has a giant red spot. You've got one of those down, but let me help with the other." Swinging a massive fist, he sent Jupiter sprawling onto the floor, as the other customers scrambled out of the way. They were used to Ares getting into it almost every night with some other drunk god or goddess (everyone knew to leave the bar before 2 a.m. or they would likely catch a bottle to the head because of these tussles), but Zeus and Jupiter rarely were involved in all-out brawls. Some of the bar's inhabitants fled out the door, but the remaining gods and goddesses took up strategic places behind tables and the counter, grabbed some of Demeter's popcorn, and settled down to watch the ensuing fight.

Leaping to his feet, Jupiter wiped the ichor from his nose and proceeded to lunge at Zeus. Zeus sidestepped him, swatting Jupiter on the back of the head for good measure.

"Must have been a while, Stupiter," laughed Zeus, stumbling a little as he tried to determine which of the three swaying Jupiters was his actual opponent, "You're rusty!" Bellowing with rage, Jupiter rushed back at Zeus this time connecting with his stomach and knocking him over. A grappling match ensued. Tables, chairs, and peanut shells were broken and crushed as the two patriarchs rolled across the floor and struggled to gain the upper hand. The other gods and goddess glanced at each other, wondering if any should dare to get involved and try to break it up. Dionysus and Bacchus were sobbing in the corner as their display of three-thousand-year-old wine lay shattered on the floor.

Two pillars of flame blinded the inhabitants for a moment, and then in their place stood two goddesses. Their dark, disapproving eyes were framed by equally dark hair as they gazed at the scuffle in front of them.

"Zeus!" cried the shorter of the two, her voice soft but firm. The two gods froze and turned to gaze at the newcomers.

"Hestia!" cried Zeus, leaping to his feet and pulling Jupiter up with him.

"Vesta! I didn't realize you were coming tonight," said Jupiter with a nervous smile as quite a few red spots blotched his skin.

The two goddesses shook their heads and picked their way through the glass and splinters with bare feet.

"Baby brother," said Hestia, wiping debris from his shoulders, "What do you think you are doing?"

Zeus shot Jupiter a nasty look, "He started it."

Vesta raised an eyebrow, "Surely two ancient gods can talk things out in a civilized manner? What on Olympus could have started this?"

"I gave Zeus perfectly good advice. It's not my fault if Zeus is too thick and impulsive to respond well to constructive criticism," shrugged Jupiter.

"And what was this constructive criticism?" she asked.

"Nothing important!" interrupted Zeus, "Can I please just go?"

"Fine," replied Hestia, "But I came from speaking with Hera, and you are going to wish you had behaved in a more civilized manner. You are giving her more fodder at this point." Zeus sighed and grabbed his coat, shooting Jupiter another dirty look before slamming the door.

"You better go home too, Jupiter," said Vesta, "Juno will not be happy about this." Jupiter groaned then begrudgingly followed Zeus out.

"Show's over, everyone. Back to your drinks," said Janus, keeping an eye on Zeus and Jupiter as they made their way up the street. The other gods began righting chairs and tables, and the music returned as Hygieia and Salus swept and mopped up the broken glass and wine.

Hestia made her way to the other side of the bar, "Hades! Why didn't you talk to him? Were you just sitting here the whole time? I know Poseidon enjoys a good fight, but I thought you would have had better sense."

"We all know that Zeus does whatever he wants," shrugged Hades, fixing the asphodel flower that Persephone had placed in the button hole of his charcoal suit jacket.

"But you know that if they were allowed to continue that, they would destroy this place."

Hades dropped a few gold coins on the table and rose to leave, taking Persephone's hand, "I can die with that. This place needs a makeover." And with that they left to catch a ride with Charon.

Vesta and Hestia exchanged exasperated looks. "Want to go see if Athene and Minerva are still up?" They too left, strolling up the street arm in arm. Astraea waved at them as she scattered stars across the sky. Just another night on Olympus.



*Unexpected* by Clare Impicicche

## GABRIEL PROCTOR

muse

what may be said of the sky? of the clouds?  
that they be blue, and white, and gray?  
or may there more be said of these  
that which is present night and day?  
one may speak of the waters above

the ocean deeper and yet unreached  
we turn our eyes upward in awe  
the muse of beauty to us has sped  
the vast white reefs carried with the wind  
carry also the house, the dog, the bicycle

with my dreams go they across the ocean  
they could not have been, the must is fanciful  
she enters the ears and makes way to the mind  
never regarding or caring for time  
she takes what she feels may be form of the lost

ever she aids me in making the climb  
when she comes or goes i do not have a say  
she is rarely unwelcome, but often desired  
she may be provoked, that i have found  
and many a day of great joy did transpire

never comes she at the break of the day  
when sun has just risen and animals play  
when awaking from slumber is no less than a feat  
she stays in the ocean, the waters above  
when noon-time has passed, she finds her seat



*Neuschwanstein Castle* by Daniel Burkhardt

## KATHERINE TIMMERMANN

### MARGINALIA

Hello to someone,

I don't suppose this message scribbled into the margins of this Tennyson collection will ever be found, but my options are a bit limited right now. I'll have to just content myself with imagining your responses, reader, as the long months of my captivity wear away.

Well, that was a bit melodramatic. It's not really captivity to be on a visit to Great Aunt Mary's, though there seems to be no definite end in sight and I always find another task for the old crone around the corner of the hour. She has me wearing the housemistress's dresses, and sometimes even the head butler's clothes, never mind that they're for a man, because they've both left of course—no sane servant with any kind of resources stays here, but here I am, scrawling in a castoff book with a borrowed pen.

Anyway, I'm mostly writing this to record a bit about the castle she lives in, because it is the most unexpected amalgamation of aesthetic statements that I have ever seen. All of the walls are covered with artwork—she doesn't let anyone touch it—paintings and sculptures and tapestries and stained glass and even collected sets of antique suits of armor. But the thing is, every work is a counterfeit! Apparently, Great Aunt Mary spent her youth going to art shows and buying specifically the fabricated works, and now her collection is the pride of her antiquity. I simply can't comprehend her. Also, I'm sick of the noisy basement and the towers that flood.

The food here is another oddity. It is prepared by the only servant who consistently stays, and only then because of the obscene rate she pays him to cook

“delicacies” from European peasant culture during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Peasants! We eat cabbage soup and boiled potatoes and grainy bread every day, and she likes it!

The most outrageous part of this place, though, is Great Aunt Mary herself. Sometimes I swear she’s going to leave me the family fortune because she’s simply so grateful that I’m here for her twilight days; she can’t imagine living in this big old place without a bit of youthful company. She just hates to see me doing all of the work keeping her comfortable because she’s so grateful, but then I come back into the room and she can’t stand to look at me! She has a pet rock collection that no one can touch, with even severer consequences than touching the artwork: I know that because a hapless maid tried getting rid of them (they look like a collapsed wall or something, so I don’t blame her), and she didn’t eat for three days! She likes to talk to the chimneys and hallways as if they were her old friends, and she introduces me to them sometimes. There’s a cavernous chimney on the second floor that she simply adores and has introduced me to at least five times. I think it’s her beau from when she was young. She falls asleep in the middle of sentences, and she talks about the good old days when the buffalo ruled the earth. I don’t know if this is worth it anymore.

Well, it feels good to have recorded a bit of this place. I hope whoever this message finds, it finds you well.



*Snowy Bridge* by Colleen Schena

## LORI AREND

### MIRACLE

I have friends who rip me inside out.  
My expanse of pale silk,  
so dearly bought,  
is turned, cornered,  
mortified into paisley velvet ultra suede  
fringed and unhinged—  
for my own good, it's true.

The queen of the quick reversal,  
I undo  
and undo myself undone until it's white  
clean and unbroken,  
not a chink in sight.

They sigh and sputter to see it returned.  
They will spurn me soon.  
I stand stock-still,  
just as cryptic as the moon.

Bystanders flinch  
(or should)  
to see  
this half-made caricature resembling me



*Passing Through* by Hannah Sobhie

# GABRIEL PROCTOR

## Falling into Tipton

“What’s that town over there in the distance? I haven’t seen anybody going to or from there the whole time I’ve been here.” I asked after a moment of silence, trying to change the subject.

Jeremiah looked over his shoulder to see what I was referring to, although he likely knew what I was talking about even if he hadn’t. “That there is Tipton. You’re not likely to see any commotion over there.”

“Why’s that?”

“It’s empty.”

“Like a ghost town?”

He shook his head, “Not necessarily. Nobody’s ever lived there.”

I pondered that for a moment. “Why’s that exactly?”

He looked at it again, “Nobody really knows as far as I can tell; it’s been empty for as long as anybody can remember.”

“That doesn’t make any sense; those look like new buildings.”

“Oh, they are. Just nobody’s livin’ in em’.”

“So they keep up construction somehow?”

“Far as I reckon. You see crews comin’ ‘long the way to build something every year or so. They work damn hard too; never been there myself, but I know a person or two who has.”

I stared at Tipton with him for the next few minutes. Even in folklore I had never heard of a town completely uninhabited from its conception, much less one that had regular crews working to keep it up and not only maintain it but build new things.

He suddenly turned to me, “I know what you’re thinkin’. People come from all over just passing through and they ask if it’s a town for the “gods.” They get in a tourist mood expecting me to give them a tour or something, and I tell them all the same thing. Now I don’t know exactly what’s going on over there, but I can tell you I’ve never even heard stories about anything like that. We don’t have

a religion here, if somebody does then it’s their business. From where I’m standing, it’d be an insult for anyone to build something like that for us.”

That was the question I was going to ask. I’ll admit that it would have been oddly euphoric to find a place that was so devout that they would build an entire city for it. The feeling of that I imagine would be like going to ancient Greece and talking to somebody about Mount Olympus. In any case, that’s not what’s going on here I suppose.

He added something as a side-note, “and I don’t think you would ask this, but just to clear the air it’s not a bomb test facility either. Most people figure it can’t be, but a few have asked that.”

“It’s too close to living people; that wouldn’t make any sense.”

“You’d be surprised about the types that come through here. They see something in a movie and everything that they can’t explain can be explained by what happened in it,” he said, shaking his head.

“I believe it.” He pulled out a cigarette and lit it, the ember making a delightful contrast with the twilight sky.

“Is there anything stopping me from going there myself?”

He shrugged. “I’m not the one to ask about that. I don’t see a fence from here, so I’ll tell you probably not. The story from somebody who’s been there might be a bit different.”

Undoubtedly like so many others who were just passing through, I was intrigued. It was hard to believe that construction was the only thing going on there. Stranger things have happened I guess, but I can’t imagine what.

“You said you knew some people who had been there before. Any chance of me getting a tour from them?”

“I doubt it.” He huffed. “Anybody that’s been there usually doesn’t want to go back. They don’t come running or anything. I suppose they just find it boring and don’t want to waste any more time. It’s quite a drive to go all the way there and all the way back.”

“Do you know anybody I could at least talk to about it? Maybe get an idea of what it’s like?”

He hesitated, “I don’t give out the names of friends.”

I nodded.

“Alright, well I think I’ll be getting off to bed. I’ve got a long day ahead of me tomorrow.”

He nodded and walked away.

I wasn't exactly sure what I was going to do the next day. Family has always held a special, if bittersweet, place in my heart, but there was something about Tipton that wouldn't leave me alone all that night up until I fell asleep.

I woke up all of a sudden after a couple of hours of troubled sleep, having been attacked by a nightmare that left me sitting up in a cold sweat in my hotel room. I couldn't recall exactly what it was about, but I remember a completely white room with six walls and three windows per wall in a pyramid form. The strangest part was there wasn't anything coming out of the windows. They were the same shade of white as the walls with one small black figure in one of them. At some point, I walked over to that window and immediately felt myself falling, but I looked down and the floor was the same beneath me. All of my surroundings were exactly the same, the figure in the window was at the same spot, the only difference was that I was falling although the ground never left my feet.

The figure never ended up getting any closer, but at the point that the cavernous white became overwhelming and the being had remained too still for my sanity to handle, my mind panicked and woke me up. That was where I was at, wide awake and not entirely sure what was so scary about the dream.

I keep a dream diary; I like to catalog these things to keep track of what's going on in my head so that I might be able to find some kind of pattern. The more I wrote about it, the less I remembered. All I could remember was that white bleeding into myself, and falling into nowhere. I flipped through the pages of my diary to see what this might mean, but nothing lined up with it. There were several about my hometown, a couple about my ex, one about living inside of a squirrel. Not being a squirrel by the way, actually living inside of it so that I felt all that it did, and it felt like my body, but I wasn't in control.

This one was escaping me though. There was no line where I could connect them, and I'm not sure whether the drowsiness or my novice ability to interpret dreams was at play here. It was likely a result of both working together, but nonetheless even when I wasn't scared anymore the dream wouldn't leave me alone. It kept me wide awake, occupied my thoughts absolutely. I tried sleeping pills, praying, anything that I'd heard would prompt someone to sleep, I really did, but the feeling of falling always pulled me back as though it was jealous of my attention.

At some point, I stood up and decided to have a cigarette outside on the patio of my hotel room on the outskirts of town. After I lit it, I took a drag and looked at my cell phone.

3:00 AM

Of course, it was 3. What other time would it be?

I woke up again at 7 AM with no recollection of any dream. I got dressed and went to the nearest diner, just what you'd expect from a diner I suppose; decent service, slightly less decent food. I talked to the waitress for a while about what I was in town for, told her I was just passing through and I should get on my way soon.

"Where are you off to?"

"California. It's my brother's birthday and I thought I should pay him a visit."

"Not the rest of your family?"

I shrugged, "Suffice it to say my brother is the only one I'm willing to go there to see right now. If the rest happen to show up, that's what happens, but I'm not going to see them."

She didn't push the matter.

I suddenly remembered the conversation I'd had with Jeremiah the other day; she was beginning to walk away when I asked, "Do you know anything about Tipton?"

She turned around, "It's nothing really. My cousin went there once and it was just what it looks like from here, an empty town."

"It seems a bit odd, doesn't it?"

"Of course it is, but I don't have a problem with it. I look over there every once in a while and find myself caught in a kind of trance just thinking about the possibilities of what it could be. I wouldn't visit it though. People have already told me it's nothing special. If I went it would just take that little moment of mystery away from me. At least now I can entertain the possibility that it might be something more. If I go then I'll know that it's not."

She left to take care of another customer and I took a sip of coffee. I thought about what she said, and then about the fact that I probably wouldn't be here much longer anyway so I wouldn't have that problem. It'll just be like it was before I came if it ends up being nothing, right?

I paid for my meal and left. I walked to the car. Before I got in I looked at the silhouette of Tipton in the distance and thought, "what's the harm in going?" I was curious, plus I wasn't too hot on seeing most of my family, so I'd put that part of the trip off as long as possible.



I got in the car and drove to Tipton. You know how something always looks a lot closer in the distance than it actually is? The drive ended up taking about an hour going Northeast, really the opposite direction that I wanted to go, but at least the question of “what is Tipton?” would be put to rest.

I parked on the side of the street next to a modern-looking building made completely of glass. I got out of the car and listened for a moment. Nothing. I don’t know what I was expecting, but you couldn’t even hear the wind really. Something tells me I could’ve heard if there were even a slight disagreement between two insects; I would have been able to hear it, but rest assured that likely wouldn’t happen as I was probably the only person for a few miles.

I pulled up to a building and walked in, surprised to find that it was an automatic door. It looked like it would have been a bank of some sort if it were being used, but it clearly wasn’t as it was devoid of all furniture, plants, desks, ATM’s, lights. It was beautifully crafted, but it truly was just an empty room.

I saw some stairs in the corner and decided to up them. Behind every door I looked in was the same thing. Nothing there. The weirdest part is that it didn’t look like it was built for anything to be there. It somehow looked like it was complete even without furniture or any kind of decoration beyond the wallpaper depicting several archaic looking animals in a sort of totem style, although each was an inch apart. The closer I looked the more I saw that no two of the animals were alike. Each one couldn’t have been more than three inches in diameter. It held as much detail as a real animal, but with more of a unique and almost human personality. They all looked like they were tired.

What was most disturbing was that in each room was the same wallpaper with the same idiosyncrasy. No two animals were alike, but they all looked like life had left them despairing and no longer willing to fight against it. I left the last room and went down the stairs. I slipped. I guess I thought there was one less step than there was; I guess that’s what I get for having a habit like that. This happened all the time. I would count steps and then after a while I would forget what they were and anticipate a count, looking around while going down somewhat slowly and putting one foot down harder than the other one. I ended up being alright though. It was just a slip, not a big deal.

As I left the building, I decided that I was going to try and look at some others, but I suddenly felt that falling sensation that I’d felt in my dream upon approaching the door. Nothing around me moved, but my body felt the fall. This went on for about a minute. I held on to the door, not sure what was going on.

There was no added sensation to the fall, either. I was just falling, plain and simple, although not to anywhere.

It stopped, and I was disoriented. I didn’t quite know what had just happened, but I kept walking and everything seemed to be normal. I entered my car and thought about leaving for a moment, having gotten to the point of putting the keys in the ignition and ready to turn around and leave this fever dream of a city. I thought to myself that I’d driven an hour to get here; I might as well keep looking to see what this place is about. I was hoping more than anything that falling was just an illusion. Maybe I perceived the floor differently than usual; I’ve heard the mind can play all sorts of tricks on you.

I turned the key and the car started. After a moment of confused deliberation, I drove down the block, no two buildings being the same. Everything around me seeming that it was nearly perfect, exactly as you would expect driving down a street to be. The only difference was that nobody was around. Nobody.

Nobody.

I turned left at a quaint looking townhouse, a small garden fence around for decoration and a cozy and tight red-brick construction, and decided I would walk around. I parked next to the sidewalk on the right side of the road, next to the townhouse, and I turned off my car, opened the door and got out. I shut the door and paid attention to the echo; it was louder than I would have expected the echo to be. These buildings were built so close together that it probably made sense that that happened. I’m no architect, but, whether or not that was the cause, I reached a level of uneasiness that would usually be reserved for waking up in the middle of the night panicked that these visions were capable of haunting my dreams, but without the growing calm that came with waking up.

I started walking what I thought might have been North and decided to just go in a straight line, because if I didn’t then I probably wouldn’t be able to find my car. I would take a few steps. Then stop. Then take another step. Then stop again. I started to run. It’s not because I heard anything really; I guess I just needed to feel something. I’m not one to believe in ghosts, and I don’t anticipate that I ever will, but there’s a difference I think between being here and any time that I’ve gone hiking with nobody around. You go hiking and at least there’s some level of chaos. Trees around everywhere, animals making their way to wherever they’re going, and you’re in the middle of that. When I’m hiking I don’t feel alone. There’s always something around, even if I can’t talk to it, I can still feel it. Here it was like I was completely alone. Signs of life everywhere, but

nothing to confirm it; running down the street of a city and actually being able to hear your own footsteps like paying special attention to one spark in a fire, except for there was no fire, only the spark. I was also wearing those shoes that aren't supposed to make any noise; I think they might have been running shoes or something.

As I was running along right next to what looked like it could be a diner, except of course with no furniture or decoration but that wallpaper, I fell again. My feet never left the ground just like last time, except for when I surrendered to the floor and collapsed. It lasted for longer than the last time. I was falling. I didn't care if I was on the ground or if I could feel the asphalt on my face. I was falling. You can try to convince me otherwise, that doesn't change anything.

This time it felt like hours, although I can't be sure of how long it really was. I used to be able to tell what time it was from the sun, and it might have been because I'd just forgotten or that I was shaken, but I couldn't tell how long it had been. I knew I should've bought a watch.

In any case, the disorientation turned out to be universal as it applied also to my sense of direction. I couldn't tell where I'd come from, and being the idiot that I am, I just started walking, not knowing in which direction, and finding out, after remembering that I should have some bearing on where I am, that I was walking away from sanity. I didn't see my car.

As I'm sure many people would do, I started to panic. I fell again and just decided to stay on the ground while I tried to think straight about what was going on, sporadically having these weird attacks. I shouted something. I'm not sure what it was, but I'm sure that I just did it to hear something other than my own heartbeat in my ears. I thought I heard a voice, but that didn't seem likely. I hadn't seen anybody this entire time; there's no reason to think that there was an actual person on the other end of that voice.

I got up again and went into what looked like it might have been a theater, again it's hard to tell what anything is here. I can tell you that things shifted, though. Not necessarily in a way you'd expect. I was upside down, but everything else was too. If everything is upside down, though, can you really be also? Isn't everything just the way it was? Anyway, I felt like everything was. My perception told me that I was; I'm not sure how much that matters at this point.

I walked into the building and saw the same wallpaper as last time, uniformly all over the walls that weren't stone. The oddest part of this place was that the walls didn't seem to exist in the sense that they were solid or in a constant shape

and texture. It wasn't like water, or any other liquid in that it didn't ripple when I touched it. It didn't recoil either, but it also wasn't afraid of moving when I was touching or looking at it. It felt like the room was playing with me, messing with my perception so that I would go insane or something. It might have been working. Reality doesn't seem real anymore. What is any of this?

I think we can know the world, but it's not anywhere near as tame as we'd like to think. The reason people don't know automatically is because they'd kill themselves or go insane in an instant. I understand it's easy to go around thinking we can confine reality to our own understanding. Thinking that maybe the world can be predicted or manipulated. It's more comforting to think that way too. I wish I could.

I can't tell you how long I watched the undulations and rhythm of these walls. I don't know whether it was minutes or days, it could have easily been either; I would have learned the same amount about them. The only reason I broke out of my trance at all was that I fell again. At this point it began to be less of a shock and more of a prompting into submission, so that's what I did. I knew I wasn't falling, but my body didn't; all I could do was get used to it and keep staring at the wall.

During all of this, there was no sound. Not a child playing in the park across the street. Not a squirrel scurrying around the tree outside. Not a plastic bag floating around in the dull wind just outside of those doors. My heart beating in my ears was the only sort of sound I could hear at all. The only things that existed were me and this building. Maybe that's all there was. Maybe I'm not writing this for anyone but myself. Am I alone?

A couple of days or hours passed of similar experiences, all without uttering or hearing a word. The world became Tipton. The world was Tipton. My world is Tipton. This isn't ideal, but it's all I know now. Nothing can pull me out. No man, woman, or child will come in search for me because I am only another sojourner among many. I've seen them every once in a while. Once every couple of months I catch a glimpse of another person. Maybe it's an illusion, maybe it's not. I am a nameless tombstone in Tipton, but it's become such a part of me that it feels like home.

I'm nearly convinced that I'm already dead, maybe this is purgatory or limbo. I always heard about it when I was a kid. I never could have guessed it would be Tipton.

One thing I can't get out of my mind is how Jeremiah told me he knew people who'd been there before. Maybe he did, but I doubt they actually came back. The thing about Tipton that you should understand is that I could just walk straight in any direction and eventually escape. I know that. I can't leave. My soul won't escape. My mind is captive. This place that people talk about is more than you thought. You don't see people who have been there. You feel them. It's almost like you can reach out and touch them, but all the same you can't. They walk and talk and work the same as everybody else. The illusion of my body is with my brother right now. Back in California, spending some quality time with family and repairing relationships. Where am I?

Do you really have to ask?



*Memories* by Hannah Sobhie

# NICK MCKINLEY

## GALLERY

Baby saddled on the chest, turned away from art.  
Cracked grey pavement exhibit.

Neon orange marks the spot.  
Bullet casings, yellow tape.

A warning; but an invitation.  
To be a part of something real.

A Spring flowered dress graces the room.  
A resurrection around the corner.



*In the Tunnels of Indy* by Catherine Bell

FORCED CREATIVITY

Creativity reaches out  
her delicate hands are before me  
Joyfully, extending my arms,  
we brush fingers  
feeling surges of fire from the energy

without warning, she disintegrates under my touch  
and a cold wall of steel erects itself  
I can no longer gather up her pieces  
I pound the freezing metal until bloodied knuckles leave me weeping

I am sorry my darling friend, for I was not fast enough  
and my head is now pounding from forced fixation  
Maybe I should just take a walk  
until my head clears

WHAT WE DO

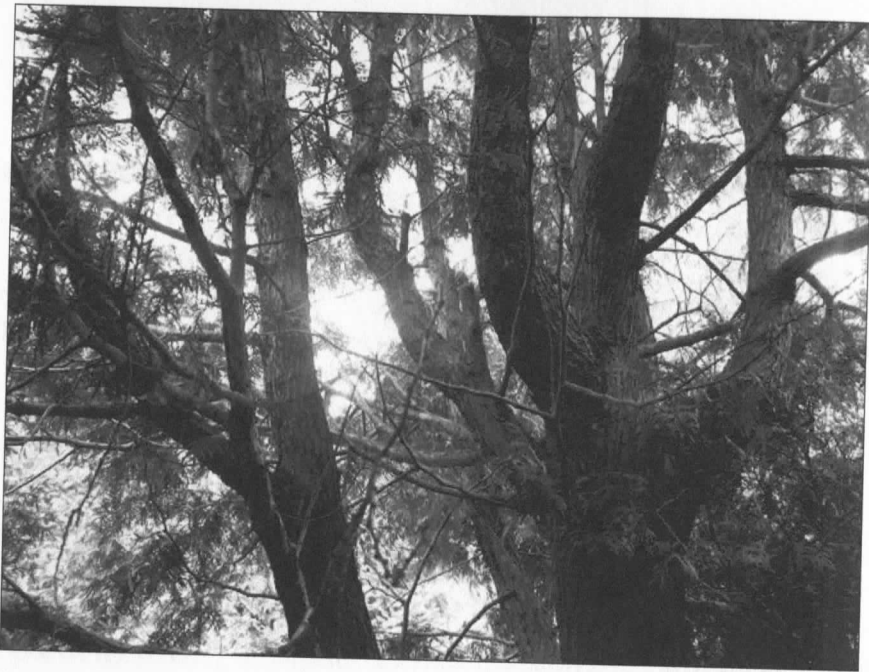
When someone touches my hair,  
I hear their fingers  
as they brush each strand of hair away from my face,  
my heartbeat and theirs as they look me in the eyes.

When someone hides their face,  
I hear them say that I'm not strong enough,  
brave enough  
—just enough—  
to hear what they have to say.

When someone ignores me,  
I hear old, scabbed over wounds open up  
as they shut me out and  
act like I am nothing to them  
and that I never have been.

When someone smiles,  
I hear the birds chirp a little louder  
as I feel their happiness

and know that I am worth something.



*Lost in the Woods* by Hannah Sobhie

N. E. K.

### THE NIGHT BIRD

The circular face calls into the night  
The forest listens for the wisdom  
of its call into the moon's light

Another call, another silence.  
Rodents find it safe to seek  
but little do they know the darkness

Without a sound, without a cry.  
The majestic shape leaps to fly.  
The rodents impede the silence to die.

The night bird flies silent  
It makes a dive for its  
food which calls for this.

The owl's majestic silence.



*Leda* by Hannah Sobhie

CAROLYN SWARTZ

BLUE NOSE

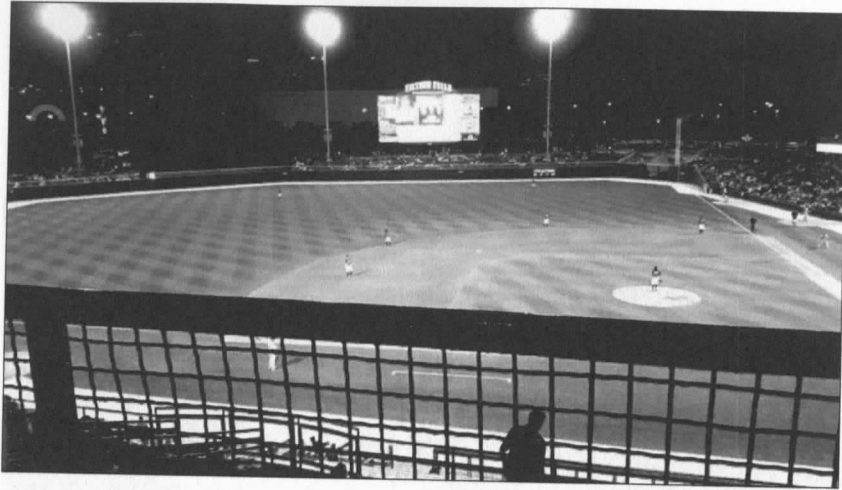
If I Stayed,  
would you have stayed too?  
or dropped the anchor in my bed  
instead of a ship crest at moon's light?

Dry land and urban romance,  
a statement to my mother.  
Straight arm bar to her hankering,  
my dirty sailor secret.

Would I be broken in two  
in the belly of a whale?  
constructing this verse  
about false love drowned in Navy seas?

Would you smear my name,  
bare ink on bare chest?  
The colorful sleeves you wear  
that parade your maritime, adventures

Cease, foul mouth.  
If I stayed,  
would you have sailed the seven seas  
or docked on my abstemious shores?



*Summer 2017* by Sarah Storm

## RAGAN WILLIAMS

### GYM

Pierce sat alone. He didn't watch the basketball game that was playing out on the gym floor, but rather kept to himself. He quietly searched through his iPhone, bored. His mother still forced him to come to these social outings, thinking that he would somehow regain a friendship.

Reality was that it wouldn't happen. He was just being subjected to watching how happy everyone besides him was. It was miserable, but Pierce's mom was relentless.

At least the concession stand had sugary candy and over-buttered popcorn for him to stuff his face with. The game itself was insanely loud, and two of their basketball players had already been injured. Pierce glanced up when the pretty cheerleading team began to dance. His classmates cheered along with them, and Pierce rolled his eyes before averting them back to his iPhone screen.

He focused on the game before him. It was a ghost story walkthrough that he was trying. It started out with you putting in information such as your name, age, and gender. Pierce was careful enough to lie on that part. The character he designed was nothing like him.

He had a character named Audrey, after his girlfriend. She had passed away in a freak car accident last year, and today was about two months before the anniversary of her death. It brought him some comfort to play the game as Audrey, as he even designed his character to look like her. He missed her crazily, but seeing her on the screen eased the pain at least a little.

The longer he played, the more the character's brown eyes seemed to mirror Audrey's, and her dark brown hair became increasingly life-like. The character even had the same beauty mark beneath her left eye, and when he looked close enough, the same freckles along the base of her nose. The game temporarily relieved the hole in Pierce's chest that Audrey had once filled.

He was almost finished. He had entered an action scene where Audrey had just discovered all her friends had been captured by the ghost. She was running for an exit, as it was imminent that she, too, could be caught. There were many



potential endings to this game, and Pierce hoped he'd found a good one. Even if she was just digital, he couldn't bear to lose her again.

There was a confrontation as the ghost appeared before Audrey. Pierce hit the correct buttons, swerving out of the green ghost's grasp. He had one more button to hit and he would be home free, as Audrey could race the few feet left to the exit.

"Pierce!" He was startled. He nearly dropped his phone, and by the time he'd caught it he'd hit the button too late. The game cut to a scene where the ghost grabbed Audrey and dragged her backwards. Pierce watched Audrey disappear down the hall, and then the frigid words, "The End," filled the screen. Anger that transcended losing the game burned Pierce's throat as he looked up at the girl who had called his name.

Her name was Madison, and she had once been Audrey and Pierce's friend. But she had never understood how poorly Pierce had taken the loss, nor the extent of his suffering. Instead, she'd selfishly ranted about how much she'd missed Audrey on retreat, without even a consideration for what others had gone through.

"What do you want?" He snapped. He couldn't be nice, not when he was at some crummy basketball game two months before the anniversary of Audrey's death.

"Sam and I were wondering if you wanted to sit with us." Pierce looked past Madison and met eyes with Sam. Sam gave him a wave, but Pierce turned his head away and ignored him. Sam and Pierce used to be close, but Sam had failed Pierce too. Neither Madison nor Sam had come through when Pierce needed them. They hadn't understood anything besides how they missed Audrey, as if they'd been in love with her. They hadn't, he had, and his pain was a thousand times worse than theirs. After all, he had seen them laughing and enjoying the basketball game just minutes before.

"Just leave me alone, okay? I don't want to sit with you and Sam." Pierce snapped. Madison looked hurt, but what did that matter? Pierce turned back to his game. He unpaused it, and the game began to show him credits. It started to scroll through death scenes as Madison continued to talk.

"Pierce, look, Sam and I have done what you wanted and left you alone for nearly a year, but it hasn't helped anything! You have to get over Audrey!" Madison cried, as the game cut to a default scene. The ghost threw Audrey to the ground, and a second later its green hands were wrapped around her neck.

Pierce clenched his jaw. Audrey was dying again, right in front of him! He turned to Madison.

"I have to get over Audrey? Are you out of your mind? I'm the only one in this entire school who's mourned her at all! The rest of you failed her, failed me, and for all I care you can die!" Pierce said before he could stop himself. Madison's blue eyes filled with shock and hurt, and she turned, running down the bleachers. Pierce felt a bit of guilt, but he didn't chase her, instead turning back to the game.

Audrey was on the full screen. She had bruises around her neck, and an eye was missing.

"Now it's your turn." She said, a smile on her face, and suddenly Pierce's iPhone turned black.

"What the—" Pierce cut himself off when the gym lights flickered off. He expected to hear a bunch of dumb girls scream, but there was nothing besides his own breath. Pierce's grip on his phone tightened as the lights came back on, this time casting a strange green glow on the empty gym. Rows of abandoned bleachers, still containing popcorn bowls and candy wrappers, preceded a basketball court where a lone ball rolled towards the home team's bench, bouncing off of it.

Pierce looked around frantically, shooting out of his seat. Everyone was gone, from the sweaty basketball players to the short-skirt-wearing cheerleaders, to Madison, Sam, and everyone else in the stands.

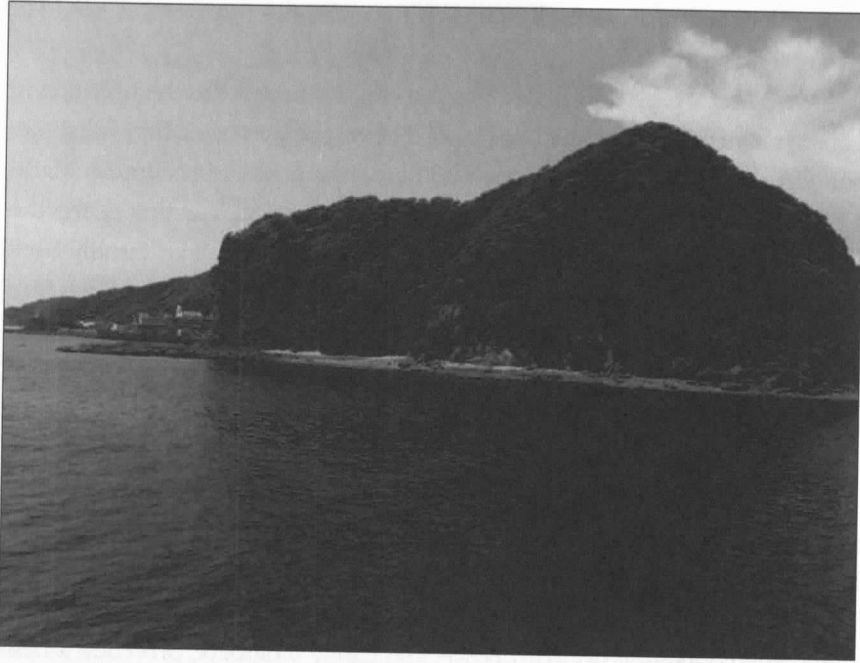
"Hey! Where'd everyone go?" Pierce shouted. The lights flickered for a half-second and he saw a glimpse of her, a ghost of green, walking into the basketball locker room, and he realized that this was the opening scene to his horror game. This time, instead of playing as Audrey, he stood in the place of the main character.

The lights flickered again and he turned around to see the ghost standing behind him. He leapt back, toppling down the bleachers and landing with his elbows twisted behind him, neck craned to look up at Audrey's ghost.

"All you wanted was to be with me, Pierce. Now, let's be together."

The lights flickered off for the last time.

And, somewhere far away, a basketball game moved along, Sam and Madison laughed at a bad joke, and an iPhone sat alone on the bleachers alongside an opened bag of Skittles.



*Freedom* by Clare Impiciche

## NICHOLAS RIVELLI

*A poem for Papa Rivelli. May his soul, and all the souls of the faithful departed, rest in peace. This poem is titled: A SESTINA FOR SERENITY*

Regardless of the time of day,  
you can proclaim loud and sing.  
I will remain constant in my pursuit of the way,  
and even if I run out of time  
I'll remind myself that I can give it all to Him  
without seasoning or thyme, reasoning or rhyme.

I'm not seasoned but sometimes I'm just feeling a rhyme  
so I unleash with paper and ink, unwittingly seizing the day,  
instead of turning my mirror into a puzzle (asking, "Am I him?")  
I strike a chord with my heart like harps sing.  
Still, regardless of whether I'm passing (or failing) the test of time  
it seems that I'm melting into semisolid particles like curds and whey.

Yet I will that when I wake I may weigh  
as light as a feather and morph words into rhyme  
within a special place inside space and time.  
Like back in his era, fair weather during pops' day.  
Cats rocked in cradles and the canaries would sing.  
Now? his stitched together verse is transforming into a glorious hymn.

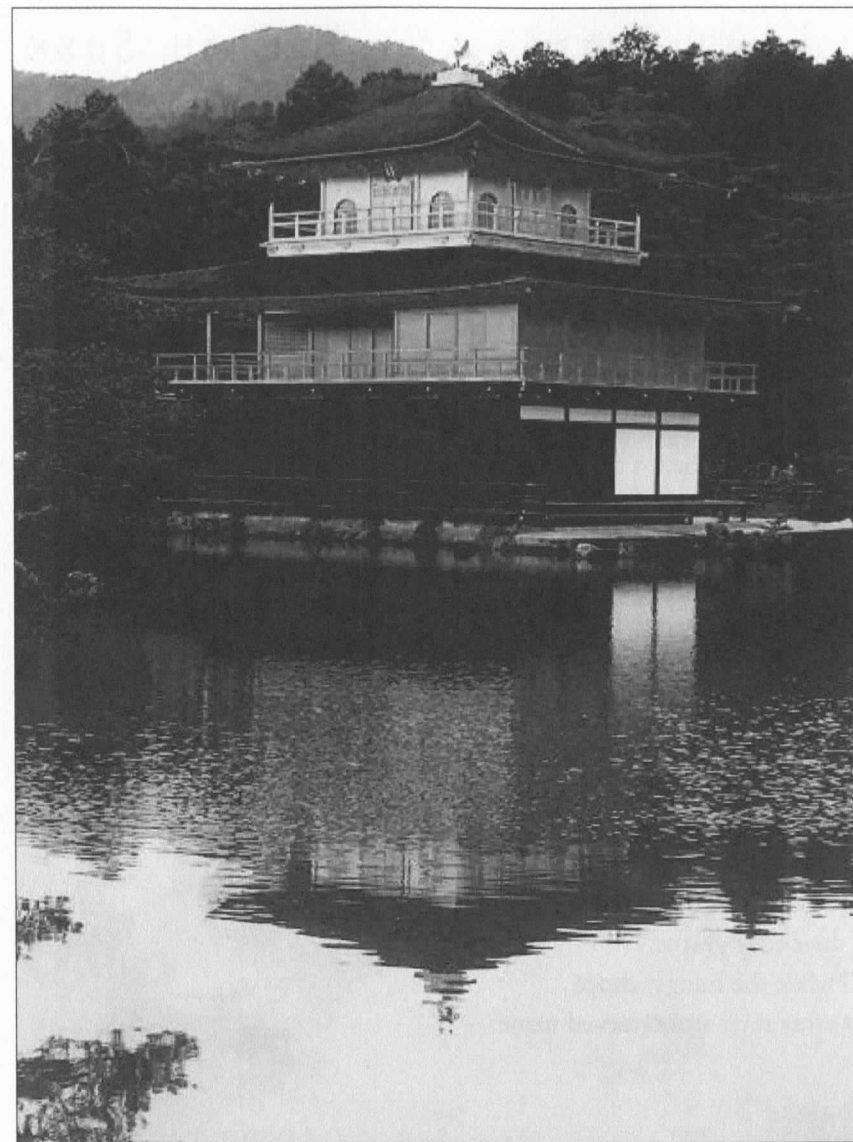
In fact, his angel serenades the face of Him:  
He who is great. He wills wholeheartedly that the way  
his croon resounds, even if he feels too tired to sing,

will maintain its sound. You see, He, through my papa, taught me these:  
1st— Rhym-  
ing can be connective. 2nd— I may not always feels blessed, but grace is  
as sure as the day  
turning into night. It's not a matter of perspective...though often it takes  
time

for our eyes to incline into the Silver Line. 3rd— Money can't buy you time...  
but rather with it you can lie. You can hide him  
from her, us from them, night from day,  
the clay from the world. He'd sing, "If you lose your way,  
then that's okay. Cause even if the skies are gray, little guy, I still make rhyme  
stones from dry bones...and you can always hum along with me as I sing

up in the sky." But you see, his voice is a buzzing baritone, so I must sing  
low so that my song can be sweetened—my composition, time-  
less. I dream, picturing this scene as a rhyme  
scheme painted lime green, imagining man acting not solely  
for him-  
self, sending up his notes like rocket ships on a way-  
ward path, until he at last reaches the end of day.

I hope that the Healer will take my heart and hem  
it, hone it into a holy habitat. Papa, I'll admit, sometimes I wonder if I've lost  
my way.  
But I pray to reflect soulfully the light you shined, until I arrive at that great,  
last Day.



*Reflections in Kyoto* by Clare Impicicche

THE TAKE AWAY RAINS

These are the "Take Away Rains."  
The "Hushabye Rains."  
The rains which make the gloom turn drowsy  
and weep on our behalf.  
Dull becomes the lot we suffer  
as patter on the roof  
and Eden seems somehow  
the least that we could lose.  
The drops shiver down the windows  
and up the weary's bones  
and make the living groan to leave  
the beds they've made their homes.  
And in the cemetarian  
the drops have turned to haze  
and make the numb dead glad  
that they are snug and warm  
in their cozy graves  
All while the hungry drops  
eat away their stone-carved names.



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