

XVI

RACC

# LEGACY

Reading Area Community College



2017



ENTWINED  
LEGACY XVI 2017

## Acknowledgements

The staff of *Legacy* is very excited to share with you this year's edition, *Entwined*, another inspiring example of the creativity and ingenuity of RACC's student body. As always, our deepest thanks go to all the students who submitted their writing, art, and photography. The pieces you see between the pages of *Legacy* attest to their potential—and their willingness to take risks and go beyond what is expected of them. Without their work, *Legacy* would not exist. Our gratitude also goes to the faculty who foster such attitude and intellectual curiosity in their students.

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Alison Cave, *Untitled*, Ink

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# PROSE

- |           |   |            |  |
|-----------|---|------------|--|
| <b>2</b>  | <b>Heads or Tails</b><br>Francheska Guzman              | <b>80</b>  | <b>Did She Know?</b><br>Christopher Smith-Thompson |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>In Heat</b><br>Austin Graczyk                        | <b>90</b>  | <b>Dreaming of Yama</b><br>DJ Plante               |
| <b>16</b> | <b>Imagining the Difference</b><br>Ashley Beck de Muñoz | <b>104</b> | <b>An Altered Record</b><br>Amanda O'Donohue       |
| <b>38</b> | <b>Inside It Never Stops Raining</b><br>Jon Roz         | <b>114</b> | <b>Losing Me</b><br>Elizabeth Boyce                |
| <b>42</b> | <b>Unsung Songs</b><br>Nicholas Fulwood                 |            |  |
| <b>44</b> | <b>Last Christmas</b><br>Joshua Templin                 |            |  |
| <b>54</b> | <b>Out of Season</b><br>Anisa Jackson                   |            |  |
| <b>62</b> | <b>Damnation</b><br>Zac Godwin                          |            |  |
| <b>64</b> | <b>The Amulet's Curse</b><br>Austin Graczyk             |            |  |
| <b>72</b> | <b>Horrific Misconceptions</b><br>Tiffany Eastman       |            |  |

# POETRY

**5 | Memories of Melodies**

Mallory Staub

**6 | Wait, Dear, Wait**

Sarah Belles

**12 | Only Briefly**

Kristina D. Leshner

**15 | Sacrifice**

Christopher Smith-Thompson

**32 | The Vomit Sonnet**

Austin Graczyk

**35 | Sandman**

Nicholas Fulwood

**36 | The War**

Abigail Chen

**40 | Where the Willows Weep**

April Conrad

**41 | Sewn Shut**

Catherine Mahony

**52 | Make a Noise Before You Go**

J. David Roslin

**58 | Light Whisper**

Christopher Smith-Thompson

**58 | Dark Whisper**

Christopher Smith-Thompson

**60 | Alms**

Nicholas Galiano

**70 | MIA**

J. David Roslin

**96 | The Question**

Sarah Belles

**102 | Thighs**

Anisa Jackson

**113 | Five More Minutes**

Christopher Smith-Thompson

**117 | Free Will**

Catherine Mahony

**118 | Growth**

Nicholas Fulwood

# Art/Photography

- |              |  |           |   |
|--------------|--|-----------|---|
| <b>Ackn.</b> | <b>Untitled</b> , Ink<br>Alison Cave                         | <b>23</b> | <b>Stop War in Syria</b> , Ink<br>Anna Makdissi-Elias     |
| <b>1</b>     | <b>Mystical Eyes</b> , Ink<br>Diana Bara-Popa                | <b>26</b> | <b>Reflections</b> , Photograph<br>Amanda O'Donahue       |
| <b>2</b>     | <b>Deep in Thought</b> , Charcoal<br>Kylee Naugle            | <b>28</b> | <b>Looking Up</b> , Photograph<br>Amanda O'Donahue        |
| <b>4</b>     | <b>Death of Peace</b> , Ink<br>Anna Makdissi-Elias           | <b>33</b> | <b>Mantids &amp; Moonbeams</b> , Photograph<br>Emily Case |
| <b>7</b>     | <b>Sweet Dreams</b> , Mixed Media<br>Hannah Elizabeth High   | <b>34</b> | <b>Sunset Landscape</b> , Pastel<br>Anna Makdissi-Elias   |
| <b>11</b>    | <b>Texas Chapel</b> , Acrylic<br>Cynthia Gingerich           | <b>36</b> | <b>Untitled</b> , Ink<br>Karissa Stitt                    |
| <b>13</b>    | <b>Symmetry</b> , Photograph<br>Emily Case                   | <b>40</b> | <b>Hopeless Reflection</b> , Photograph<br>Emily Case     |
| <b>14</b>    | <b>Beauty is Pain</b> , Mixed Media<br>Hannah Elizabeth High | <b>43</b> | <b>Nyctophilia</b> , Ink<br>Sabrina Readinger             |
| <b>17</b>    | <b>Olive</b> , Charcoal<br>Sarah Belles                      | <b>47</b> | <b>Lighthouse</b> , Pastel<br>Abigail Chen                |
| <b>19</b>    | <b>Faded Blues</b> , Acrylic<br>Cynthia Gingerich            | <b>48</b> | <b>Judy</b> , Ink<br>Sarah Belles                         |

# Art/Photography

- |    |   |    |  |
|----|---|----|--|
| 49 | <b>Nature vs Industry</b> , Photograph<br>Emily Case            | 74 | <b>Dream Catcher</b> , Mixed Media<br>Nicholas Galiano       |
| 53 | <b>Candy Storm</b> , Pastel<br>Hannah Elizabeth High            | 77 | <b>Blades of Grass</b> , Acrylic<br>Sarah Belles             |
| 57 | <b>Far &amp; Wide</b> , Digital<br>Alma Angelina Cortes         | 78 | <b>Resting Place</b> , Photograph<br>Emily Case              |
| 59 | <b>Perspective</b> , Photograph<br>Emily Case                   | 81 | <b>Do You See Me?</b> , Mixed Media<br>Hannah Elizabeth High |
| 61 | <b>Psychedelic Chaos</b> , Mixed Media<br>Hannah Elizabeth High | 85 | <b>Ambassador Wolves</b> , Pastel<br>Abigail Chen            |
| 62 | <b>Path Untraveled</b> , Photograph<br>Emily Case               | 89 | <b>Suga</b> , Pencil<br>Mayra Perez-Barajas                  |
| 63 | <b>Astral Chronoscope</b> , Ink<br>Alexa M Rodriguez-Rodriguez  | 97 | <b>Dream World</b> , Photograph<br>Wilhen Suriel             |
| 67 | <b>Flower Woman</b> , Pencil<br>Anna Makdissi-Elias             | 98 | <b>Him</b> , Photograph<br>Wilhen Suriel                     |
| 69 | <b>Mr Piggles</b> , Photograph<br>Sarah Belles                  | 98 | <b>Shades of Grey</b> , Photograph<br>Wilhen Suriel          |
| 71 | <b>A Full Life</b> , Pencil<br>Martin Valle                     | 99 | <b>Bluest</b> , Photograph<br>Wilhen Suriel                  |



# Art/Photography

**99** | **Corrupted by Nature**, Photograph  
Wilhen Suriel

**100** | **Entwined**, Photograph  
Wilhen Suriel

**100** | **Freefall**, Photograph  
Wilhen Suriel

**101** | **Tranquil**, Photograph  
Wilhen Suriel

**101** | **Ever Green**, Photograph  
Wilhen Suriel

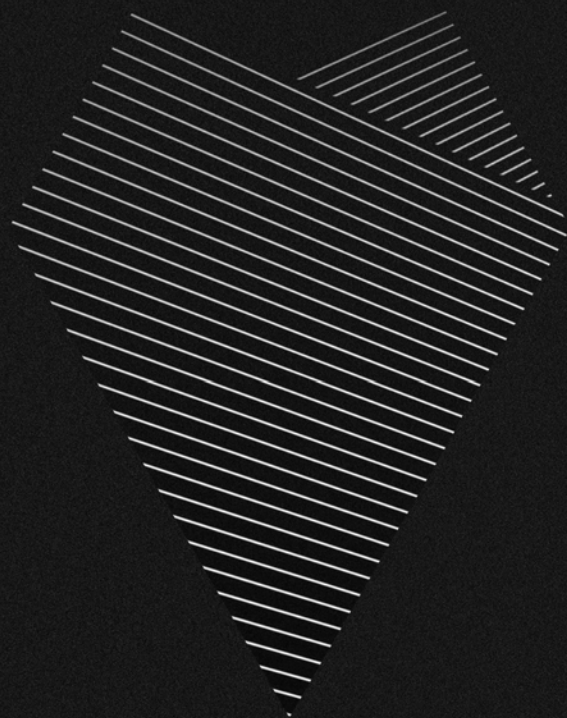
**103** | **Lovers Meet Again**, Mixed Media  
Mayra Perez-Barajas

**105** | **Do you see it, Mommy?**, Mixed Media  
Hannah Elizabeth High

**110** | **Night of the Circus**, Ink  
Diana Bara-Popa

**Cover image: Masters of Why**, Ink  
Courtesy of Stephanie R. Holloway-Peidl

**Photography portfolio: Wilhen Suriel**  
Pages 97-101



# To the Reader

This year, the staff at *Legacy* wanted the theme, *Entwined*, to explore a wide spectrum of artistic influences: the notions of stark beauty in everyday situations and the awe available if one cares to look for it in the right light—and the places we may not always wish to visit, but that we never really leave. The two ends of our spectrum, grotesque and carnivalesque, may be far removed from each other, but they never truly separate. They are inherently entwined.

In literature, the word 'grotesque' denotes a dual emotion: disgust at what is portrayed, but also empathy. That empathy is what allows us to see the darkest parts of another person without seeing them as a villain. It lets us delve into our own caves, dust off our own skeletons, without believing ourselves to be monsters. The dark, disgusting aspects of one's personality rise up from time to time, especially in the minds of those as creative as our contributors, but giving them a place to live, a page to bring to life, allows empathy for them from a global perspective.

Baring our hearts and souls, we admit the worst parts of ourselves, and we see the worst of others. As we accept them, we realize they also accept us. The staff at *Legacy* hopes this edition will create more empathy, more love through riding out suffering as part of the human condition. We hope it reminds us all, while embracing the romantic and the classically beautiful, to also explore the worst parts of ourselves and the fact that we all share them.

The other end is carnivalesque, the world liberated from dominant assumptions. The feast of Carnival was wild, loud, the players dancing and cheering for the audience. Performative art, not whispered but shouted, existing entirely for those who would consume it, to make them feel and grant them freedom they could only dream of. It was for the people, not the players, who shed all need for empathy and authenticity towards themselves.

Actors, faces covered in masquerade, breathing falsehood into life for joy and agony.

Where grotesque is intimate, carnivalesque is public. Where grotesque is brutally honest, carnivalesque hides its true face. If grotesque is whispered into inviting darkness and understanding ears, carnivalesque is sung in the spotlight with nowhere to run but into the music itself.

It's art, all of it, and whether it's painful in its honesty or performative to the point of hysteria, it's important, and it's valuable, and we want it all. That's our *Legacy*.

—Austin Graczyk

Diana Bara-Popa  
Mystical Eyes  
Ink



# Heads or Tails

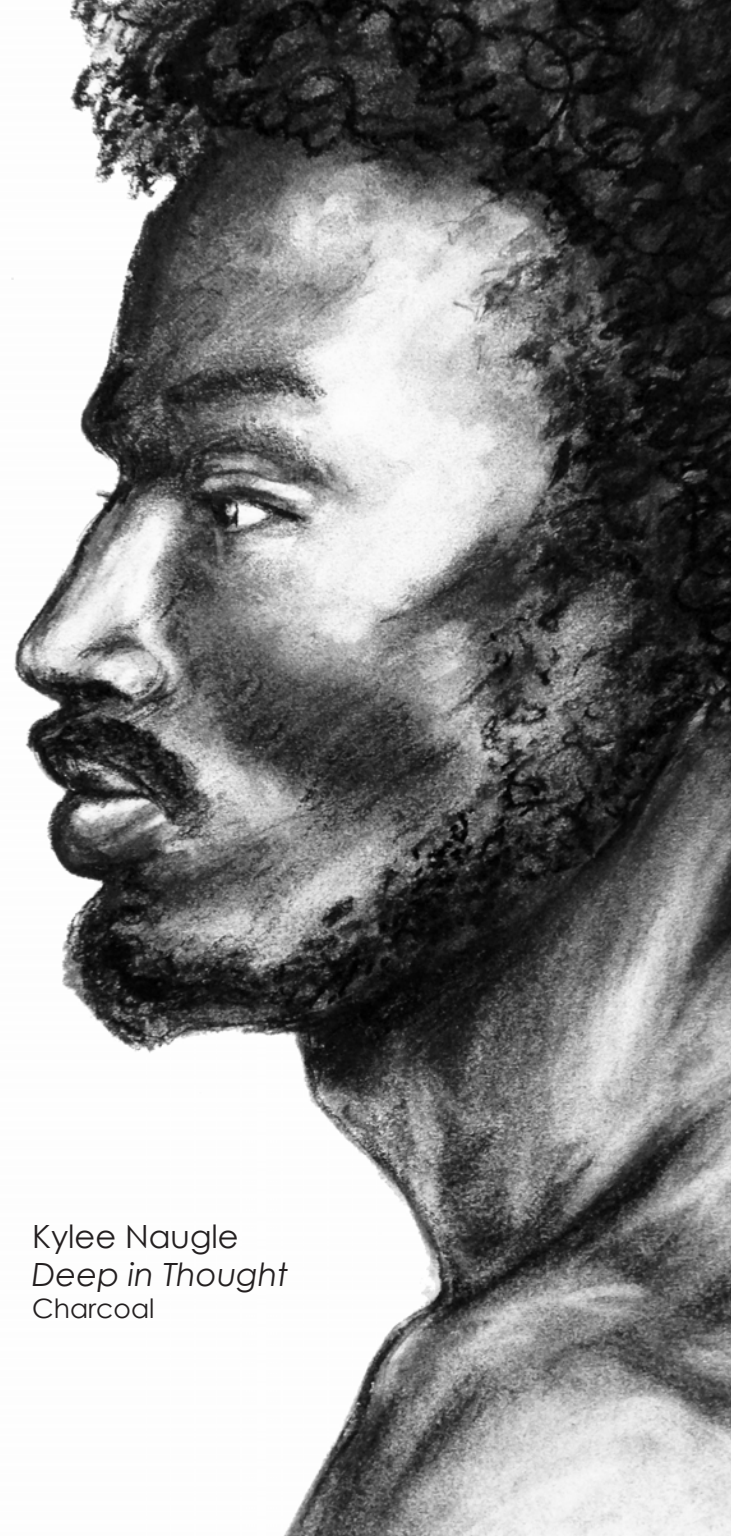
Francheska Guzman

When you are four, you watch your mother sing in church. Her eyes are shut tightly, her arms outstretched, her body swaying from side to side. She is crying, and yet she is smiling. You never quite understand why.

When you are six, a woman in a big tan hat and matching dress gives you a book. Inside the book is a comic strip of two kids around your age going through their day performing different tasks. At the end of the comic strip, one of the boys goes up to heaven to play with all of the other children; everyone is smiling. The other is pulled down into a 'fiery underworld,' tears streaming down his face. You are terrified.

When you are twelve, you and your friends participate in an inner-city youth outreach program that requires weekly visits to an all-white, all-wealthy church. You are each given a Bible. Your best friend carves out a hole in the center of hers, deciding that it is better used for hiding dutches. You hide your shame the afternoon you are all caught lighting one up in the bathroom. You are thrown out of the program, and all of your friends throw their Bibles out the bus windows on the way home that day. You keep yours.

When you are thirteen, you and your friends go back and burn down the storage shed that overlooks the all-white, all-wealthy church courtyard. You run as fast as you can



Kylee Naugle  
*Deep in Thought*  
Charcoal

when the women in their big hats come out, the smoke rising up and filling your lungs, each breath requiring a deeper intake as your speed increases. You wonder if it will be this hard to breathe in hell.

When you are fourteen, you don a plaid skirt and knee-high socks every day. You meet your first Father. Later on, after you question his absence, your classmates tell you he will meet his first cellmate that winter when his charges of sexual abuse are proven in court.

When you are fifteen, you attend your first house party and watch the same people who read verses on drunks never 'inheriting the kingdom of God' fill up their red plastic cups with their mothers' cabinet stashes of vodka.

When you are sixteen, your grandfather and your aunt die. Your mother assures you that this is the will of God, and you wonder how many Hail Mary's they managed to utter before they were killed almost instantaneously by a head-on collision with a semi-truck on their way to a prayer meeting.

When you are seventeen, a Marine officer with broad shoulders and a charming smile speaks to you about enlisting. You have been told that your body is a temple, but this man's actions show otherwise. On a night you can hardly remember your name, he sees his window, invites himself inside, and makes a ruin of it.

When you are seventeen, your suicide attempt is unsuccessful. *Is there a God?*

When you are eighteen, you and your classmates go on a school trip to the Dominican Republic to spread the Word and build a church in an impoverished city. A beautiful brunette with bouncing curls and coffee bean eyes thanks you in between her cries of joy. The men, women, and children get together to have the first service in their brand-new building. They thank you and your classmates through a vocal performance when the locals get on stage to sing to you. You watch the tears of happiness flow from their eyes as yours begin to mimic. A young girl, no older than six, comes down from the stage to hug and sit next to you. She says God has told her about you. She grabs your hand and kisses the scars on your wrist. You sob. *Is there a God?*

When you are twenty-one, you find yourself wandering into mass.

Stand up. Kneel. Stand up. Kneel. Rub a couple of beads in your hands. Chant a couple of non-sensicalities. Close your eyes. Open them. Repeat. Drink the grape juice and eat the stale cracker. My hands struggle to remember: Is it up, down, right, left, up or down, left, right, up?

As the priest starts to segue into the evening's message, your mind begins to wander. It has been years since you last sat in the uncomfortably padded pew, but everything still looks exactly the same. *Is it worth it?* To put your own belief aside to blindly follow another for fear of flames or promise of perfection...you

shift in your seat and look around the room, desperate to seek the answer from those in attendance. They are like statues, appearing seemingly motionless with the exception of a head nod or an escaped and mumbled "Praise God."

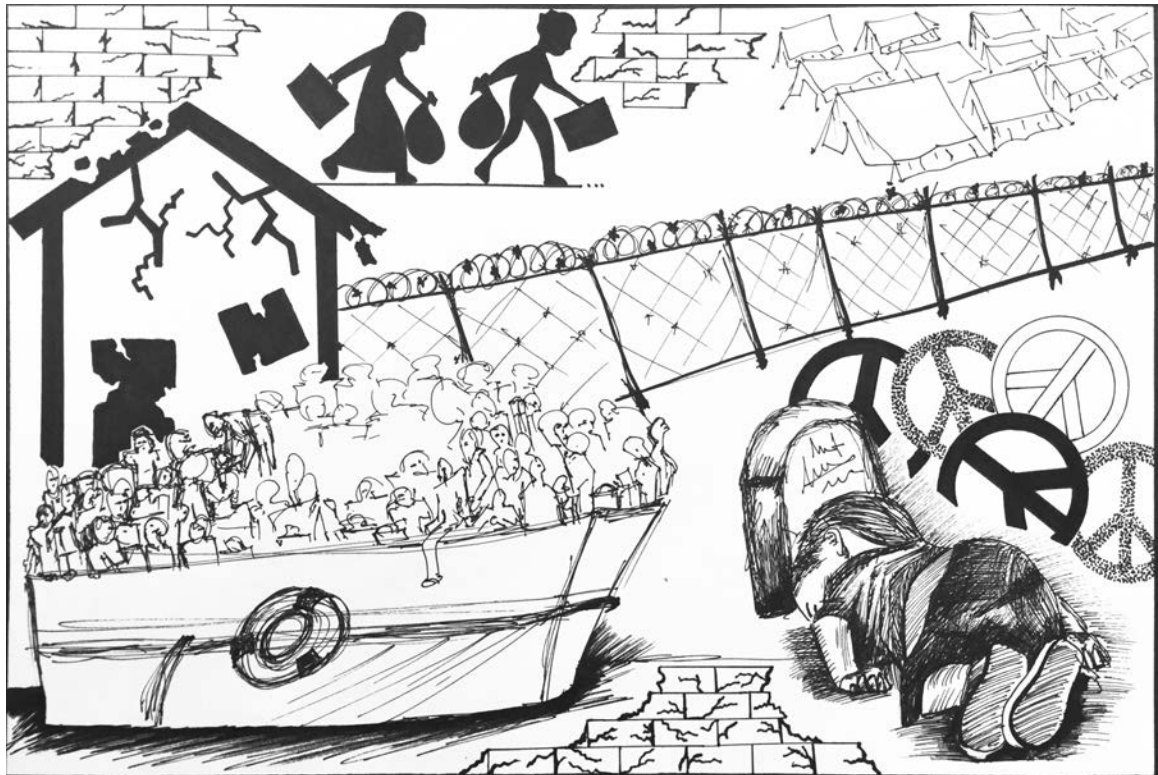
These people seem so sure, and you are immediately filled with envy. You have tried to achieve faith of this kind with a sense of certainty, but have never been successful; your mind has never been forgiving, questioning still as the Father drones on and on. *Is there a God?*

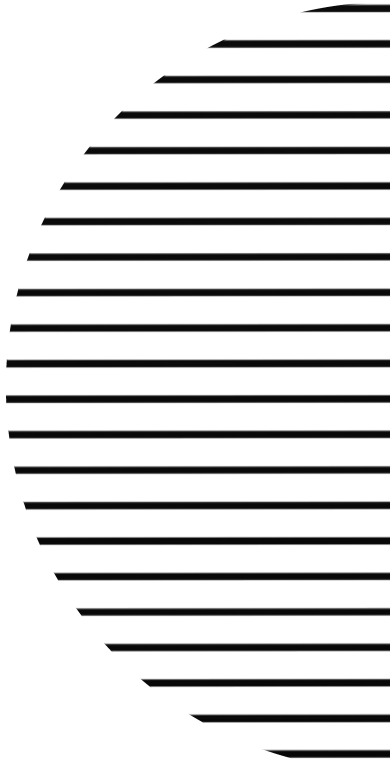
You look down and notice something shiny on the ground next to your foot.

You reach down, grab it, and exit the church to get some fresh air. The quarter feels simultaneously light and heavy in your hand as you flip it up into the air. It occurs in slow motion, and as your hand lies on top of the quarter, you feel the universe hold its breath.

You sigh, walk back inside the building, and toss the quarter into the collection plate.

Anna Makdissi-Elias. Death of Peace, Ink





## Memories of Melodies

Mallory Staub

i —

the melody

and you —

the harmony

once a euphonious pair,

echoing softly and sweetly

in our affection.

we've fallen out of tune.

a clash between my desire to love you

and your absence

creates a dissonance

that rings relentlessly in my ears.

fading —

we grow quiet,

and become a song

of a distant memory

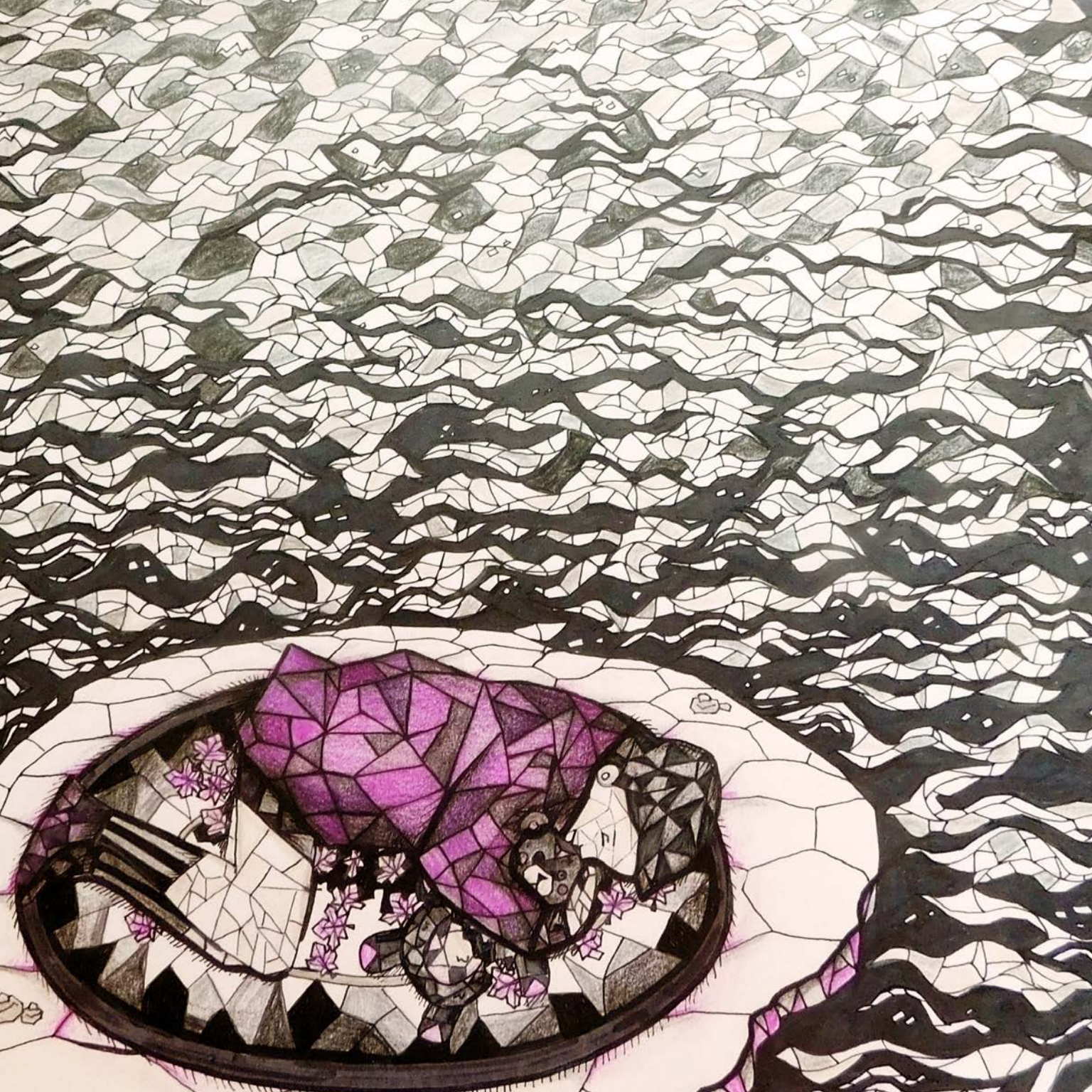


## Wait, Dear, Wait

Sarah Belles

Would that I could go away  
And stagger not here to decay  
Whittling my hours by  
To see the pretty flowers die  
But little is the recourse given  
When bodies forget why they're driven  
It helps not I, nor you to wonder  
At the gold of modern plunder  
So take these gifts, I'll do the same  
Making real life into game  
And maybe someday I will find  
Some other place within my mind







## Austin Graczyk

The heat makes people do strange things.

It can turn an ordinary breakfast into a black and white crime scene photo of a man slumped over his eggs and a puddle of blood, with the knife that killed him plopped into his champagne glass.

The police cars at the gate told me something had happened. Turns out, they'd gotten to the house right before I had and were taking Harold into custody while the rest of the staff trembled in the corner.

A clear-cut case of the-Butler-did-it, as far as they could see. He'd doped up on something, took too hard a hit, and went nuts. I couldn't bring myself to look at him as they escorted him out, and an officer moved me so I'd stop staring at my husband's body.

I went up to our room after that, turning on fans and opening windows to try and get rid of the damnable hellfire eating the place alive. This house had always been stuffy, the bedrooms worst of all. It magnified the smell of Spencer, the cologne he'd worn since before we'd met. I couldn't let it freak me out, though. Going too fast here could destroy our reputations, everything we'd worked to build over the years.

How was I supposed to react in this situation? I imagined most men didn't come home to find their spouse murdered in the middle of breakfast.

I always thought I'd be ready for anything, but remembering the look in Spencer's glassy eyes when I walked in, the complete surprise there, made my stomach turn. I stumbled against the bed and reached over to the nightstand. A quick spray from the water bottle there cooled me for a second, but caved to the summer air too soon.

Two knocks at the door, then slowly, too slowly, it opened, the maid looking in, a woman behind her. I nodded and motioned the detective inside, and as the maid shut the door on her way out, some of what was going on downstairs bled into the room. Overly loud camera shutters, antiseptic smell.

The detective said she just wanted to ask me some routine questions.

Where was I when it happened?  
Tennis.

Did I know Harold was a user? No.

How long had Spencer and I been married? Almost three years.

How had we met? I was a delivery boy for a grocery store. I fell for the guy who was in the kitchen the afternoons when I'd drop stuff off. Spencer and I were married not long after his parents died.

Any idea why Harold wanted him dead? None.

Her card, in case I needed anything.

I got up, poured myself a drink, and then offered her one. She declined and made to leave, but stopped herself and told me to be careful in this weather.

I guess the cost of a priceless antique home is a shitty air system. But I thanked her again. I finished the drink alone and walked over to look out the window. The staff were out on the back porch now, huddled around the head groundskeeper, Charles. Good. He was a strong leader. If he comforted them, they'd feel comforted.

I drifted away from the window to the portrait of Spencer and me on our wedding day. Two tuxedos: one black, the other white. A little inappropriate. He was no virgin.

And I should've seen it coming, I guess. After all, Charles was strong. Commanding. But still not callous. Still vibrant. It had only been a matter of time before Spencer's wandering eye landed on him.

And my husband had charisma. If

he'd gotten the chance to make a real play for Charles, there's no telling what would've happened.

Spencer didn't understand love, only possession. Maybe that's what happens when you grow up rich, I don't know. I was something he liked looking at. I was shiny, and he could get a reaction from me with the smallest flash of his wealth. After a while, I guess I just wasn't the sparkliest thing around anymore.

He wasn't bad; he wasn't evil. He just owned me. In his world, he was the sun and the rest of us were just planets. He certainly never expected us to have a will of our own. Planets exist for the sun, not for each other.

I was his Mercury, and I got the full force of smothering heat on my face. And overwhelming cold on my back from those farther away from him.

I don't know how long I stared at the picture before there was another knock at the door. Long enough for the real sun to reach noon and make the bedroom somehow even more sweltering.

Charles walked in and came up behind me.

A different heat now. One that had burned between us since we'd first met, in this very house, in the kitchen where my cow of a husband had been murdered.

# I'll pretend to be sad instead of free.

Everything went perfect. Harold didn't even know he was drinking it, and he won't have any memory of what happened.

Good. No one will suspect us.

He smelled like fresh grass and aftershave, even now. Back then, the balance had been different, but the effect was the same. One look, one whiff, one word from him, and the delivery boy I'd been then had melted in heat just like this. Internal. Lava, not sunlight.

But he was working for college, and I was just working. We'd have nothing, like all the servants before us who'd had nothing, living in the shadow of the wealthiest people around.

Until Spencer saw me, and I saw my one, long-shot chance.

I reached up behind me into his hair, feeling less restricted than I'd ever been before.

He must have felt it, too. His arms circled around me, and the two of us stayed close despite the burn.

For the first time all day, I started to sweat.

And now, I'm lying here. Staring up, out the window at the full moon. The night hasn't helped the temperature, or the smell of Spencer that still clings to the sheets and the curtains and everything that isn't Charles or me.

I can feel warmth from the other side of the bed, but it's comforting instead of smothering. In the morning will come the funeral arrangements. I'll pretend to be sad instead of free. Someone will eventually ask me how I feel about Harold, about what he did.

We'll never know what was going on in his head. The heat makes people do strange things.



Cynthia Gingerich. *Texas Chapel*, Acrylic

# Only Briefly

Kristina D. Lesher

With few words my heart  
is consumed by love. I thought this  
was over. I thought you  
moved on. I learn  
from the distance. Accept your  
quiet, tangled tongue. But you  
are always  
cold. And I  
am always  
broken.

You come back, but  
only briefly. My world  
returns to you. I am  
yours. I wait, yet

nothing.

Your Nothingness is as  
empty as the hole  
in your heart. And we return  
to your silent storm like a sea of sadness.

Until  
You resurface, here  
but oh so still.  
I tread water around your  
whiskey words. You give little,  
you give nothing.  
Only briefly.  
And we  
return to  
your  
silence.

Emily Case  
Symmetry  
Photograph









## Sacrifice

Christopher Smith-Thompson

Everything  
Between you and me  
Isn't what it used to be.

Yet, there is a balance:  
With the passing of my joy  
Came the birth of yours.

Hannah Elizabeth High  
*Beauty is Pain*  
Mixed Media

## Imagining the Difference Educating Girls Can Make in the Third World

Ashley Beck de Muñoz

*The greatest transformations will not be achieved by one person alone, rather by committed leadership and communities standing side by side . . . only through genuine collaboration will we see real progress in the new global sustainable development goals.*

— Amina J. Mohammed, Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General

In the United States of America, the right of the individual to think for herself and to become whoever she wants to be—or the right to receive an education of good quality is too often taken for granted, while girls in many countries around the world do not have access to basic education opportunities. They are often held back, held down, and oppressed. Those who dare to dream for more are quickly brought back into line by their harsh cultural and political realities. One young girl whose experiences demonstrate this clearly is Malala Yousafzai, a human rights activist, who was shot in the head by the Taliban after publicly speaking out for education rights for girls (Yousafzai and Lamb). Even this extreme personal violence has not silenced her voice. Her dream of an education, not only for herself, but for all girls of the world, has driven her to continue to demand that the world recognize these girls, their dreams, and their potential. Her recently created charity, *the Malala Fund*, invests in local education programs “in the most

vulnerable communities around the world” and advocates for more resources in safe schools (“About the Malala Fund”). There are many other organizations that understand the calamity of the lost hopes of millions of girls in developing countries and work hard to help create a world full of educated women combating poverty, cultural barriers, disease, and war.

Because the governments of many developing nations are unable or unwilling to provide girls with an education, and uneducated women often do not have the resources to demand something more for themselves or their daughters, this is an area where compassionate citizens of the world and charitable organizations can make a difference. By providing donations to groups that focus on granting scholarships to girls whose families could not otherwise afford to send them to school, the future of individual girls along with their families and communities can be radically changed. Rather than being satisfied with the slow improvements of developing nations' current literacy rates,

American citizens can refuse to stand by while millions of girls are condemned to a future of dependency and oppression. Each girl, when given the opportunity to learn, becomes a beacon, shedding light on hundreds of other girls like herself who can be given the tools and confidence to pull herself and her children out of poverty. And, by supporting the work these organizations are doing to provide girls with an education, we can help improve global well-being and build a better tomorrow.

Parents of the world depend on schools to provide their children with a safe environment for learning and transmit the cultural values that are crucial to maintaining a community's identity. The value of the socialization that occurs in schools worldwide cannot be overstated. Children are taught self-discipline, positive response to competition, and productive ways to deal with failure. Many schools also serve as community centers offering after-hours opportunities for adults such as literacy classes and counseling. As gathering places, schools frequently provide a neutral space for group decisions to be made on a small-town level. Most importantly, however, schools are centers of education, and education provides a distinct advantage to every community that has access to it, while communities deprived of this fundamental human right are crippled socially and economically.



Some parts of the world do not experience these crippling effects. Every fall, millions of households in America participate in going back to school through weeks of preparation and the first-day-of-school pictures which embody the hope of learning, growth, and social development. These rituals, however, are not nearly practiced in some other parts of the world. While low-income parents also dream of a future for their family, they face daunting obstacles in educating their children.

### **Poverty: Breaking its Cycle**

The barriers to education in the developing world are many and varied, but by far, the largest is poverty. Primary education in many countries is not free. Even when schools do not charge for their services, parents often are responsible to provide uniforms, books, and other supplies. Poor families work long hours and sacrifice to send their children to school. When all of this is not enough, they must choose which of their children to educate based on who will benefit most from their studies and who is the most likely to lift the family out of poverty. Often, they choose boys. The girls are then left to work at home preparing the meals and ironing their brothers' school uniforms. In cases of even more extreme poverty, these girls are sent to work in the fields or sold as child brides. Even the families who initially send all their children to school soon find the burden too much to bear as evidenced by the 116 million young women aged 15-24 in developing countries who have not completed primary school ("Girls' Education – the Facts").

Many impoverished families rely on the participation of every available set of hands to survive. Since modern household appliances are not common in these homes, girls as young as five are often responsible for backbreaking

housework, including hauling water for miles, gathering firewood, caring for their younger siblings, and preparing meals. An extreme illustration of this is found in Somalia, where preteen girls can spend up to 26 hours a week on household chores (Mullins). According to *the Education Policy and Data Center*, up to 96% of these girls are not enrolled in school ("Somalia"). To combat the problem of children risking their future in order to earn money for the present, many governments have been encouraged to provide cash incentives for education to their most impoverished citizens. These incentives reimburse the family financially for time spent away from home duties. Such incentives have proven effective in Malawi through *the Zomba Cash Transfer Project*: Girls whose families received the equivalent of \$15 a month had a significant improvement in attendance (Lang). India also has found that cash incentives make parents more willing to delay marriage for their daughters. These cash incentives allow families to send their girls to school without having to provide the money for uniforms, supplies, or transportation fees, and, by reimbursing labor wages the girls might bring into the family, improve gender equality ("Investing in Girls"). This means that girls who were once working outside the home to fund their brothers' education now have the chance to study and improve their own futures.






"They were just waiting to be married."

Another simple way to make a difference in keeping girls in school across the developing world is to feed them. Dr. Jim Yong Kim, World Bank Group President, and Ertharin Cousin, Executive Director of *the World Food Programme*, say that their research shows how school meal programs help get children into the classroom and keep them there (qtd. in "Ground-Breaking"). In her article "Food Aid Helps Keep Girls in School in Developing Countries, Stephanie Mercier also writes about the positive results of such programs: "In 32 African countries in 2008, attendance for girls rose twice as fast in schools with a WFP school feeding program than in schools without such a program." School feeding programs relieve the families of the struggle of feeding mouths that are not immediately contributing to the family's finances. Also, knowing that their children are receiving at least one nourishing meal a day lessens the pressure on the family's food budget, freeing up funds for school supplies. These programs allow parents to

imagine a future where all their children become active, involved citizens of the community working together to solve the roots of their poverty.

#### **Cultural Traditions: Changing Perceptions**

While poverty is the largest obstacle to educate girls worldwide, deep-rooted cultural traditions also hold back many young girls. Men and women's responsibilities are clearly delineated in most of the developing world. Considered liabilities instead of assets, girls are expected to leave their families, marry young, and honor their husbands by raising many children. Boys are considered more valuable because they carry on the family name and will care for their parents in old age. Very few people lead lives outside this prescribed pattern; thus these traditions endure. Ziauddin Yousafzai, a United Nations Special Advisor on Global Education shockingly says, "They were just waiting to be married," to show that many families consider early marriage for their girls a foregone conclusion, and they do not see how anything else could be beneficial (qtd. in Yousafzai and Lamb).



Shirley Burchfield, director of the *Girls' and Women's Education Initiative at World Education*, says, “[Parents] don't know that their daughters can learn in school about nutrition, or treating malaria, or how to be good mothers” (qtd. in Useem). Fortunately, when these girls are given charitable scholarships, parents reconsider their perspectives. Moreover, when outsiders see girls as valuable resources, suddenly parents recognize education as an investment instead of a waste. When girls are given a hand up by caring individuals through sponsorship or scholarships, they also become advocates for education of girls in their community.

Of course, educating girls when their cultural traditions do not mandate it is not without concerns. Many people fear that by accepting education, girls must deny or reject their culture, religion, or family. However, this may not be the case. If teachers and education advocates are respectful of traditions, education can provide the opportunity for girls to actively explore the meanings of their traditions and religions. This type of learning environment allows girls to make choices for themselves rather than relying upon the belief system forced on them by their husbands or families. Educating girls today will provide the girls of tomorrow with female teachers from their own cultural background, who will encourage cultural preservation as well as work to improve the status of girls and the condition of their lives. Lauren Hersh, Director

of *Anti-Trafficking Policy and Advocacy at Sanctuary for Families*, writes, “Efforts to change harmful traditions are most effective when they originate within the culture that practices them.” Rather than outsiders choosing which cultural practices to abolish and which to preserve, educated girls can choose which traditions best serve them and their families and which diminish the humanity of girls and women.

### ***Healthy Communities: Preventing Disease through Education***

Beyond the cultural/social benefits of educating girls, the physical health benefits that accompany increased education are substantial. Because girls who receive higher levels of education marry later, they are less likely to have children before their eighteenth birthday and more likely to get prenatal care and give birth with the help of a midwife or skilled birth attendant, which improves outcomes for both mother and child: “Almost 60% fewer girls would become pregnant under 17 years in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia if they all had a secondary education” (“Girls' Education – the Facts”). Waiting for adulthood to reproduce generally makes for fewer children per family, increasing the funds available for each child. The increased nutrition knowledge that accompanies general education means healthier children as mothers make better food choices for themselves during pregnancy and for their children's diets afterwards.



If the world decided to provide the twelve years of basic education to all girls, as Malala Yousafzai demands, twelve million children could be saved from stunting malnutrition. When girls are educated, they become women who understand their options and the consequences to their decisions. These women take better care of their children, are more likely to vaccinate, use mosquito nets, and seek medical attention more quickly than their uneducated counterparts. One additional year of education makes a significant difference in a mother's ability to prevent and successfully treat pneumonia or diarrhea, two of the three largest threats to children's lives in the developing world ("Sustainable Development"). According to the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report of 2013, child death could be cut in half by simply educating their mothers ("Girls' Education – the Facts").

Lack of understanding plagues uneducated girls around the world. For example, since the 1980s when human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) was identified and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was officially recognized and named as a disease, it has ravished our planet and the lives of the individuals that it touches. Although once a death sentence, now with improved testing and treatment, many HIV positive people in the United States live long, healthy lives. From the beginning, this disease brought with it an unprecedented amount of

discrimination equal to the ignorance of the disease's transmission and progression. This ignorance, however, lives on and many people in the developing world find their lives destroyed upon revealing a positive HIV test. Women are shunned by their families, peers, and communities. It is not uncommon for HIV positive girls to be forced from their homes and thrown to the streets where they face starvation, harassment, and violence. These girls can become increasingly marginalized until the stigma of HIV overwhelms them with complete loss of hope and feelings of worthlessness. Because of this, many girls delay testing and thus continue to spread the disease since they are seen as vessels to impregnate in a predominately male-driven society ("Education Plays").

While many governments and organizations are working to prevent, diagnose quickly, and treat HIV/AIDS, it continues to grow at a rate of two million new cases a year. In 2014, \$19.2 billion was made available to combat the transmission of HIV in low income countries. However, despite all attempts, it is estimated that by 2031, \$35 billion annually will be needed to continue to combat HIV/AIDS ("Funding for HIV and AIDS"). Many methods are needed if an elimination of HIV is to be accomplished, but the education of girls is proving to be an effective part of prevention. Educated girls, as opposed to girls who drop out of school or are never enrolled, often delay becoming sexually

Anna Makdissi-Elias  
*Stop War in Syria*  
Ink



active until their eighteenth birthday or later. Those that do become active earlier, usually make safer choices, and are more capable of resisting sexual violence. The significance of this is made especially clear when considering the African country of Congo, where 30% of rape survivors are infected with HIV ("Sexual Violence"). The positive effects of education on HIV transmission in the developing world is exemplified by a study, conducted in Uganda in 2004 by Damien De Walque, which demonstrated that each additional year of education for girls could reduce

their chances of contracting HIV by 6.7 percent when combined with HIV specific education.

The effects of such numbers are incalculable—as they mean not only fewer babies born to a bleak future of unexplained poor health, but also fewer missed days of work or school on the mother's part due to illness or doctor's visits. Countries struggling to meet budget needs for HIV treatment will finally see a plateau in demands for funds. The societal benefits are immense as thousands of men, women, and children will be free

# "When armed conflict is at its worst, it creates refugees,

from the sense of impending doom that an HIV diagnosis can bring in the developing world. Instead, these people are free to pursue their own personal development and can more freely contribute to their societies. Members of a fair and ethically minded community cannot sit idly by while hundreds of thousands of innocent babies are infected yearly with an appalling disease, destined to suffer not only physical trials, but social deprivation when the transmission of this disease is preventable with education. Rather than committing humankind to future expenditures of billions of dollars to treat HIV and AIDS, compassionate individuals can affect the rates of transmission by donating funds to support education in general and HIV education specifically. By eliminating HIV infection as a major threat to these communities, their resources as well as outside financial aid can then be centered on resolving remaining social problems.

## ***Armed Conflict: Combating Violence through Education***

To complicate the obstacles girls in poor communities face, many families also find themselves living in areas of armed conflict. Armed conflict does severe damage to a country's level of education by instilling civilians with fear and awaking a survival mode outlook on life. Parents begin to focus on surviving the violence and food shortages of today rather than

having the privilege of planning for their children's future. Because schools are often targeted by suicide bombers working with rebel regimes in places like Sudan and Pakistan, parents keep children home from school out of fear for their safety. Decisions made by parents in the Congo and Colombia not to educate their children are reinforced because of the frequency with which terror organizations, such as the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, abduct children from the classrooms and turn them into soldiers ("Hidden Crisis"). In many cases, this is also where rape occurs as either a prize for the victors or as a strategy for domination. Parents thus become more protective of their daughters and keep them home, which magnifies the gender disparity in school attendance.

Extreme cases—such as in 2014 when Boko Haram, a Nigerian terror group, kidnapped 230 school girls to serve as their kitchen and sex slaves—temporarily draw media attention worldwide. However, long term consideration for the safety and education of the girls trapped in these situations is the only solution to such global violence (Duthiers, Karimi, and Botelho). For example, *the Malala Fund* is providing the few girls who have escaped from Boko Haram with counseling and scholarships to complete their secondary education, as well as implementing safe school alternatives



## **interrupts classes, and separates children from their teachers."**

such as long distance learning for Nigerian girls. This organization, as well as many others, depends on the donations of those individuals who understand that by peacefully combating this violence with education, they are providing girls born in these conditions with the courage to speak out and demand the world's attention to their plight.

When armed conflict is at its worst, it creates refugees, interrupts classes, and separates children from their teachers. To make matters worse, many conflicts are not resolved quickly, causing refugees to spend years away from their homeland and more unnecessary funds to get tied up in waging war for no real solution. Because low income countries average twelve years in resolving conflict, thousands of children have more than a year or two of gap in their education. Some children completely miss the opportunity to attend school, creating an entire generation without education ("Hidden Crisis"). Funding safe education for these children is paramount since education combats future violence by promoting social equality.

Because education also creates a sense of self-worth and hope for the future, it can be a vaccine against future armed conflict. Educated children of both sexes are much more able to resist the call to violence and quicker to invent peaceful solutions. Furthermore, much of what is learned in school is not

found in the textbooks. Children learn critical thinking and problem solving from their peers and their instructors. When girls are permitted to become teachers, they also become role models for those in their care. In fact, even after Malala's personal experience with Taliban violence, she believes that educating girls is the most important step towards the goal of world peace: "I began to see that the pen and the words that come from it can be much more powerful than machine guns, tanks or helicopters" (Yousafzai and Lamb). Contrary to everything all too many cultures believe, it is highly possible that these forgotten girls are not only valuable, but are the very necessary instruments of peace.

However, the girls of the third world cannot reach their full potential as peacemakers and leaders of the future while they still remain voiceless. Illiterate, subservient girls are unlikely to have the courage to change the status quo. To break free from the bonds of enslaved despair, they need to grasp the hand of someone more powerful than themselves. When citizens of means speak out and validate the basic human right of education for the girls of the developing world by supporting awareness and by donating funds, they are giving these girls permission to reclaim their dreams once more. While not within their grasp alone, together,



the world can be made a place where every child's potential is realized.

When only 30% of refugee children complete high school, girls usually lose out. This is especially highlighted in Pakistan where security issues combined with religious and cultural factors mean that only four refugee girls attend classes for every ten refugee boys ("Hidden Crisis"). Because armed conflict destroys opportunities for education for children, it perpetuates a cycle of poverty, hostility, and ignorance of a peaceful lifestyle. Adding a lack of education to the list of obstacles refugee children already face, it is understandable that many of them are easily recruited by

any movement or regime promising a better life, which takes and manipulates their limited education. It is inevitable, then, that some regimes will resist the education of girls who do not wage war for these causes. By keeping half of the population ignorant and powerless, extremists encounter less resistance to their policies.

### ***All for Hope of Opportunity***

Despite relentless pressure for girls to stay home and accept the roles imposed upon them by their traditions, or in the case of Malala, by a new religious regime like the Taliban, girls like Malala and their parents continue to insist on the basic human right

of education. Ziauddin Yousafzai, Pakistani diplomat, father of Malala Yousafzai and United Nations Special Advisor on Global Education, says, "We are scared, but our fear is not as strong as our courage," to show that while fear of violence is great for girls like Malala, the fear of a future without the hope of an education is greater (qtd. in Yousafzai and Lamb). Many girls, given just the slightest opportunity, are willing to stand up for their right to become a person of substance, a productive individual, and a citizen of the world. Foundations like *the Malala Fund* are working to increase the possibilities of education for girls around the world by providing grants to vulnerable girls and repairing damaged classrooms.

This is where the world can actively get involved in changing the plight of the vulnerable and under-recognized girls of our age. Individuals who decide not to sit back and allow millions of young lives to be squandered and abused have many options to make their stance heard. While donating money is the most common response, there are many other ways to support *the Malala Fund* and other organizations that focus on girls' education. By raising awareness or heading up a fundraiser, people can amplify their voice and encourage others to acknowledge the denied rights of girls worldwide.

This solution will also help women find work and create a drive for fairer pay to improve the stability of the household and improve women's social status. In Pakistan,

women with a secondary education earn 70% of what men earn while women with only a primary education earn only 51% of what men earn. A single year of education increases a woman's earning power by 10-20%. What's more, women reinvest 90% of their earnings in their family by purchasing food, clothing, and educational opportunities in comparison with men who reinvest only 30-40% in their families (Dhondt). This also allows women to participate in household decisions that affect the entire family dynamic. Esther Duflo, Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist and director of *the Center for Economic and Policy Research*, says, "When women command greater power, child health and nutrition improves" (qtd. in Kristof and WuDunn).

Having an education increases women's self-awareness and assertiveness. Educated women are more likely to prioritize education for their own children, making the benefits of educating girls exponential. Educated women are aware of their rights and are less likely to tolerate domestic violence or psychological abuse towards themselves or their children. The freedom their education gives them increases their independence within the marriage or even allows them the freedom to choose not to marry. They may become more active in local government, promoting laws and policies that benefit women and girls ("Sustainable Development"). This freedom allows them to have a hand in writing their

Amanda O'Donahue

*Looking Up*

Photograph



future, the future of their offspring, and future of their nation.

Beyond the tragedy of the lost aspirations of millions of girls is the reality of a society that is not taking advantage of developing half of its citizens, creating a forced dependency and an increased potential for societal breakdown. These societies could be benefiting from twice the number of doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, and community leaders that

they currently enjoy. By trying to build a community with only half its resources, much of the developing world finds itself desperately trailing at the heels of other modern nations, while they are subject to increased poverty, disease risk, and wars. By educating girls, entire communities will gain teachers, mothers, and community leaders who value education, allowing organizations like *the Malala Fund* to continue to set up the necessary structures to educate all girls.

Across the globe there are girls who are willing to defy their oppressors. They are ready to risk their lives and security for the hope of a future. These girls will combat the bombers and the machine guns with knowledge and personal growth. All they lack is for the world to recognize their need, support their efforts, and give them the opportunity to change their world. While in 2014, \$135 billion was spent on general foreign aid, education is still vastly underfunded (Anderson). Humanitarian aid is consistently focused on necessary, but short term needs like nutrition, health, and shelter. Gordon Brown, former prime minister of the United Kingdom and United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education, notes, "Instead of developing all the potential of all the world's children, we are developing only some of the potential of some of the world's children." Recognizing the benefits of educating the girls of the third world should increase the willingness of the individual and the public alike to prioritize

education of girls as a method to combat extreme poverty, global health crises, and gender discrimination. Lawrence Summers, American economist and one time Harvard professor, emphasizes that investing in girls' education may well be the highest return investment available in the developing world (qtd. in "Hidden Crisis").

Individuals who are interested in combating the world's problems in the most efficient way possible should consider donating time or money to an organization that prioritizes educating girls and maximizing their potential. By starting fundraisers or campaigning for congress to support girls' education, more people will be convinced to join the cause and increase awareness. More people will understand every dollar donated, every book purchased, every classroom restored, and every signature on a petition is one step closer to offering a real future to a real girl who is struggling to make sense of the world she was born into. More people will stand up and seize their chance to be a voice for the voiceless and a hero to the oppressed—and, as compassionate world citizens, will acknowledge the suffering of these girls and send a loud message to their oppressors that such injustice will not be tolerated.

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# The Vomit Sonnet

Austin Graczyk

We're goddamn idiots. You know that, right?  
This happens every time we try to drink.  
We wind up spending an entire night  
Inside a deadlocked struggle just to think.  
The first time, retching makes us feel okay.  
The second, food gets stuck inside our nose.  
By three times in, clear acid paves the way  
For four and more to keep us in their throes.  
So, realistically, this hurts us more  
Than giving in to pain and circumstance.  
But pretty bottles and the bathroom floor  
Give us illusions of a fighting chance.  
Internal brushburn silencing the sound  
Of feelings that we'd rather fucking drown.



Emily Case. *Mantids & Moonbeams*, Photograph

Anna Makdissi-Elias. *Sunset Landscape*, Pastel



# Sandman

Nick Fulwood

The desert bursts open,

His throat thirsts,

Hoping.

His gaze flies far,

Thrown,

Across the sand.

Death is in the Sun,

Life is in the land,

Soaked in the sand.

He laughs,

Not for the rain,

But for the pain,

Sand slips underfoot,

Mirages flicker,

Peripheral.

The Sun bakes,

His skin,

And cakes,

His Smile.

# The War

Abigail Chen

A shattered soldier lifts his head high  
A silent roar turns into a piercing cry  
Regrets seep from his very core  
Lost sight of what he was fighting for

A damned soul searches for the light  
A sense of rightness, of Heaven's might  
Endlessly looking, he hopes to find  
The gift of redemption through sacrifice

A righteous heart with his head bowed low  
A tangible darkness in his bones  
One dark choice will send him down a path  
With no chance of redemption, only inevitable death

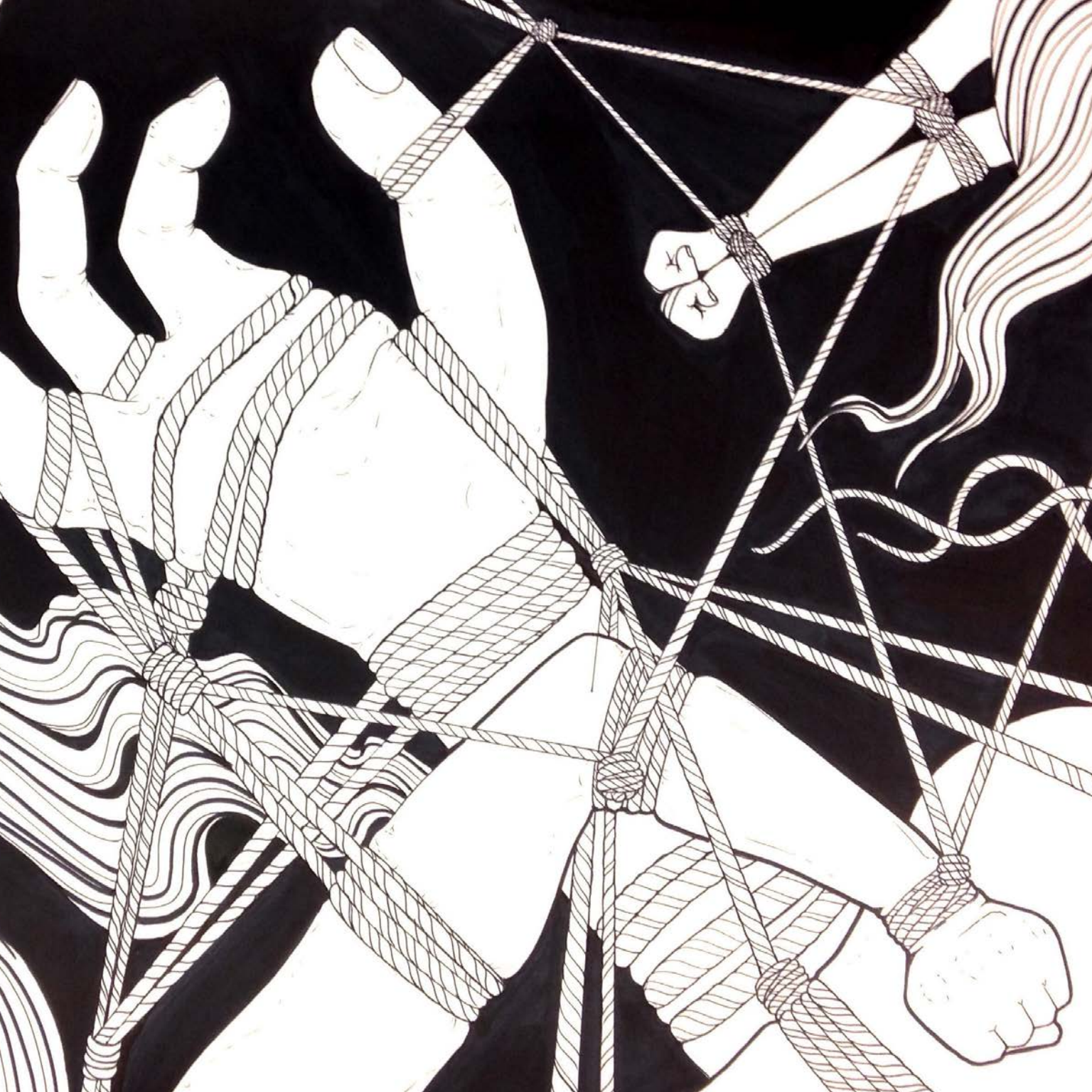
My conscience, he says, is a voice I rarely heed  
Forbidden desires, along with greed  
If something doesn't change, shift in the world  
My demons will destroy my angels at their very core

But if you decide to destroy my demons  
You might kill my angels too  
One without the other is pointless  
Just statues outside an empty tomb

While my demons run  
When they know the battle is won  
My angels soar  
When they have a reason to go to war



Karissa Stitt  
*Untitled*  
Ink





# Inside It Never Stops Raining

Jon Roz

*Due to the restriction placed on me by the U.S. Government, names and locations in this story have been changed.*

It never stops raining. I am wet to the bone, and the moisture in the air is so thick I can barely breathe. I am alone, hidden in a large bamboo thicket. My poncho covers all of my body, and I pull my steel helmet lower. A small river runs between my legs and sandaled feet. Only my eyes move.

No light reaches down to the floor of this jungle. Jennings and Senate are not far away. They wait to rescue me should I get spotted by the Viet Cong. They must be as wet as I am. Dizzying fear and the constant sound of raindrops, broken only by my shallow breathing, make me lose all track of time. Alone, I sit in a black cocoon and wait in this god-forsaken place.

It is late Wednesday night, and the villagers are asleep. Our boats drift quietly in the darkness, coming to rest behind the high bushes along the canal between two villages. Aboard the boats tonight is a company of the ARVN—Army of Vietnam—soldiers, along with their U.S. Special Forces Advisors. The plan calls for us to station observers outside each village; the observers will signal when the enemy is advancing. When the signal is given that the Viet Cong are in one of the villages, the ARVN will attack. The gunboats will reinforce them from the river.

The problem is we do not know which

village they will hit, and there are not enough men to watch both at the same time. The operation depends on someone who can use the radios to let the troops and the boats know which village will be hit. That is where Jennings, Senate, and I come in. The three of us wait in the bush outside the lower village. If the Viet Cong pass us, we will give the signal.

Our orders are not to engage. There is nothing left to do now but wait.

The moisture is getting ever thicker and my eyes continue to adjust to the dark. Isolated and alone, I start to doze off. I stay still as voices come out of nowhere. My ears strain to hear more clearly what I cannot see through the darkness. They have a scout out. He is the man who breaks the trail for the Viet Cong infantry. He shuffles past me, close but not near enough to see. Can he hear me breathe?

Every bone and muscle in my body has frozen. I can hear when he passes by me in the darkened jungle; I can barely see the gang of the Viet Cong that comes up behind him. They push their way through the jungle and pass down the nearby narrow trail. They are speaking loudly, unaware of the danger here. They are confident enough to move in a large group. Suddenly, they stop. The

commander gives an order and a lone soldier falls out of the band. The rest move on towards the village.

The signal must be sent to the boats that they're coming, but if I move, I am dead. My eyes are glued to that lone sentry. What to do now? He must not see me.

The sentry's back is to me, and he is sitting just off the path. He, too, is hiding.

The signal must be sent, or the whole operation will have been for nothing. Right now, I am the only one who knows where the Viet Cong are headed. I must use the radio, but that guard is only yards away and will hear the static. There is only one solution: I am going to have to kill him before I can send the signal.

I am going to have to kill him.

Sure, they taught me how, and it all seemed so easy then. Just cover his mouth, jerk back his head, shove the knife up into his throat, his windpipe. I have been trained to do this, but can I do it for real?

His head starts to nod. Falling asleep, maybe? Send the message if he falls asleep. He will never know. Suddenly, he stands up. He turns around and looks in my direction. My heart leaps into my throat.

Oh, my God, he can he see me.

He is looking right at me. How could he not see me?

He turns around and sits back down. That son of a bitch is not going to go to sleep. I am going to have to do it. I am going to have to kill him.

My hands move under my poncho ever so slowly and take the knife out of its scabbard; with all of my strength, I grip the handle. My heart races faster. Then, I piss myself. The warm water runs between my legs and mingles with the water and mist of the forest.

Thoughts continue to run rampant inside my head. Do this quickly with a single motion. Get closer. He must not have a chance to cry out or scream. Do not hesitate for a second. If not done right, it will be my body and not his littering the jungle floor.

His head starts to nod again. I must catch him while he is in that twilight sleep, when his hearing and his muscles are relaxed. Make no sound. Never take your eyes off him. He can't hear me. He doesn't know I am here. Do it now! My hands cover his mouth, and at the very same time I plunge the knife upwards and twist. I can smell him. I can smell the sweat on his neck and in his hair.

With a few beats, his blood will run out—and so will my innocence.

# Where the Willows Weep

April Conrad

When sorrow becomes too heavy,  
A burden you can hold no more,  
Make your way down to the water,  
Find your peace on the shore.

Here, if you listen low,  
The spirits take gentle form,  
They will whisper, they will call you,  
And bring your tears into the storms.

Close your eyes and listen,  
They will guide your tired feet,  
To the willows that are weeping,  
Hiding space on a sacred seat.

All souls can meet again,  
And here, we all are one.  
Tears will fall and flow into rain,  
But open your eyes, the storm is done.



# Sewn Shut

Catherine Mahony

Such a familiar face,  
Lips and eyes sewn shut.  
Such familiar hands,  
Crossed politely over a still chest.  
Her skin  
as taut as an African drum.  
Her dress  
something she would not be caught dead in.  
She is silenced.  
She is flawless.  
She is beautiful.  
The viewers can't see from my vantage point.  
My back pressed against ceiling tile.  
My hair entwined in lighting fixtures.  
Their words echo in her mind,  
Words like;  
Lost, hopeless, and tragedy.

Such a familiar face.  
Lips quivering and eyes kaleidoscopes of tears.  
Such familiar hands,  
Fidgeting nervously in pockets.  
Her skin  
As white as a water lily.  
Her dress  
Something she would not be caught dead in.  
She is silent.  
She is innocent.  
She is a mirror.  
The viewers can't see from her vantage point.  
Her back to the wall as medics hurried in.  
Her hair matted to wet cheeks.  
Words echo in her mind,  
Words like;  
Orphan, motherless, and traged.

# Unsung Songs

Nicholas Fulwood

It was quiet at the karaoke bar. One girl had sung all night, and everyone else had watched, hearts heavy with emotion. The old man was lonely, thinking of how much this girl looked like his late wife. The young guy who stayed after his friends had left was scared, scared that this girl was making him feel something. The lady in the corner was too numb to feel much of anything. Her hair had fallen into her whiskey.

The singer didn't know why they were all there, but they were, and so was she.

After the last song she left, disappearing into the night, but she was back the following week. She sang about heartbreak, and the crowd cheered, even if none of them could name the song. When she got home that night, she cried. She cried until she was dry heaving.

The week after that, she was back again. And the old man was there, his beer flat and his heart heavy. She sang again, this time about fear. The crowd cheered like before. The old man tottered over to her, his voice gravelly and gruff. He asked her if she would sit with him. She said she didn't drink. He told her it was just a seat. She shrugged and sat down.

They were silent as the next act came on. It was a young couple. After downing his beer, the old man turned to her and asked her why she always came to sing.

She smiled and told him that she couldn't write and she couldn't draw, but she could sing.

He asked her why she didn't join a band.

She said she didn't know enough people. They sat in silence, the old man looking stumped.

She leaned over and put her hand on his arm. She asked him if he wanted to know why she sang. He nodded.

She told him that was how she shared the bottom of her soul where her fears rested. He asked why she didn't just talk to people.

She smiled again and said, "It isn't enough. Anyone can talk, put words in front of words with someone else. Making someone feel, really feel, has to come from deeper—from your gut, your soul, whatever you want to call it."

He nodded, thinking. Then, he asked what a guy like him was supposed to do. He couldn't draw; he couldn't write; he couldn't sing.

She told him that she cried, every night, for all the unsung songs.

He asked why.

She said it was not because she pitied those who couldn't sing, but because she really got tired of the same old songs.



Sabrina Readinger. *Nyctophilia*, Ink

## CHRISTMAS

Joshua Templin

## Home

*It's Christmas.*

I have to repeat this mantra in my head: *it's Christmas*. Like any phrase you repeat over and over, it becomes sort of rubbery and elastic. *What are we celebrating?*

We've never been religious, but tonight especially I'm watching the whole celebration as if I'd never seen this weird holiday before.

Mom and Dad are sitting across from my baby brother, holding hands. My brother is ripping open the wrapping paper on another video game. It's the eighth one he's opened tonight, along with his new system.

There are shreds of different wrapping paper and discarded boxes everywhere. The TV is off, and nobody has a cell phone in front of them.

"Sam, do you want to open your gift?" Mom asks, motioning to my folded hands.

I look down at my plaid pajama pants, crossed Indian style, and the little package in my lap.

"Yeah, I just..." I'm hit by sadness again. I don't want to cry. It's Christmas.

I open the gift on my lap that could only be a book. I read the dust jacket: *A Dance with Dragons*.

I spent all last summer watching *Game of Thrones* on HBO. It makes me think of how much time I must've wasted.

"Oh, awesome." I try to smile a little. "I hope I get to finish it," I say, and the bottom of my stomach drops out. "I mean... I'm glad I'll get to read it."

My dad looks to my mother, grimacing. She grabs his hand.

I'm thinking of when Dad and Mom were separated, and Mom would drop me off at Dad's tiny apartment above Santino's, with neon lights that colored everything blue through a haze of cigarette smoke. The men at the bar would stare at me—I was a tiny girl in this basement where men hid from their wives. On the rare days my dad had money, he bought me spaghetti and meatballs covered in parmesan cheese.

*Pop.*

The loud bang jars everyone a little bit and stirs me out of my memory.

It takes a second for me to realize it's a firework. Usually, people don't shoot off fireworks on Christmas, but this Christmas is different.

"So, honey, are you gonna read tonight?" my dad asks me.

I look down at my feet and see a pile of books and wrapping paper; then I hear the buzzing of my cell phone on the table to my left.

"Hold on, Dad." I put my finger up and grab my phone.

A text from Ramón: "Wanna come over tonight?"

I don't even hesitate. I write back, "Yea, hold on. Let me talk to dad."

Dad seems concerned. He doesn't want me out on Christmas with some boy, and I remind him we've been dating for over a year. It's my mom who steps in and assures him I should go and have a little fun.

I rush past everybody to my room and scan my piles of clothes looking for a hoodie. After I throw that and a bra on, just as I'm running out, I realize I'm still in pajamas.

I grab a pair of black yoga pants and change into them; they're mostly clean.

When I close the door behind me, the cold grabs me by surprise, but I don't even bother throwing my sweatshirt on.

It's just starting to snow as I cross

the street and open the door to my car. I toss the sweatshirt in the backseat and turn on the engine, cranking up the heat as high as it goes.

Through the foggy windshield, I can see a party on my neighbor's patio. I can only hear the *thump - chk - chk* of bass and snare drum; it sounds like reggaeton. My dad would call it "Spanish music," and I imagine this is what all Spanish music sounds like to him: just muffled percussion noises.

Just before I'm going to pull out, the neighbors start singing. I can't make out the words—I can't even make out the language. The only thing I can hear is everyone singing as loud as they can, louder than the music.

A firework blasts into the air from the street, but I can barely hear it explode over everyone singing.

### **Ramón's House**

I'm sitting on Ramón's white couch, while he plays an Xbox game next to me. Everything in his house is monochrome with clean minimal lines. Even the exterior looks like a big white rectangle.



Ramón's parents are visiting his grandmother in the city, but Ramón lied and told them he was sick to stay home. The house seems especially empty with just us and the glow of the TV.

"What'd you get?" he asks me, not looking away from the screen.

"Books, mostly. And a fancy expensive curling iron."

"That's cool. Do you like it?"

"I guess. I asked for it in October."

Ramón doesn't say anything. Back in October we were all making plans for Halloween and then Thanksgiving and Christmas. Even though I didn't know what I wanted to be for Halloween, I still had so many other plans in my head. I wanted to take more art classes my senior year. I wanted to apply to NYU. I wanted to "figure things out." Now I don't know what I wanted to figure out, I just know I wanted time to think about it.

"Do you remember the day we all found out—I mean, found out for sure?" I ask.

Ramón keeps his eyes on the screen and says, "Yeah."

"Ramón, can you stop playing for a sec and talk to me?"

He pauses the game and turns. "Yeah, babe, sorry. You were saying about October?"

"The day we found out, I was still working at CVS. I was peeling these little red sale stickers. Every week we put up a bunch of stickers and take down the old ones. Anyway, I was doing that when Doug asked everyone to come up to the front. I could see that

something was wrong. He told us about the announcement and just said, 'Go home to your families.' Then he walked out of the store and everyone followed him. But I just wanted to go back to the candy aisle and put up all the Halloween stickers. It was like I didn't even hear him."

Ramón puts his hand over mine.

"You didn't wanna believe it was real," he says.

"No. Not that night. It wasn't until a week later that I quit. The first day all I wanted was to go back to the stickers. But the next week, when it was time to do the sales stickers again, I realized that Halloween was still gonna come and we were all gonna act like everything was normal. But it's not. I didn't wanna spend another fucking day putting up sale stickers and 'facing.' We could all pretend like it made sense but it didn't. It feels like we're all doing an act until it ends."

Ramón lets out a big sigh.

"Well, shit. I guess I know what you mean. Everything feels weird now. We're all talking about it but at the same time, we're trying to pretend like it's not real."

"Yeah." I say and pause. "So I kind of want to make the most of our time. Maybe something besides video games."

"Well, everything's closed on Christmas. What do you wanna do?"

At first I can't really think of anything, but something is driving me away from the TV and video games, away from everything we would normally do.



Abigail Chen. *Lighthouse*, Pastel



"Do you remember our first date? You took me across that bridge and you said you wanted to know what it would feel like to climb out onto the edge. I kind of want to know how it feels too."

### The Bridge

I turn the radio dial as we drive to the bridge. There is almost no traffic anywhere.

I hear the measured speech of a news reporter: "...comet—for now just a star in the night sky—is still expected to

impact next year—" I turn the dial again, settling on Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Free Bird."

I hate the song, but I'm glad to hear any music. Ramón reaches to turn the dial, but I push his hand away.

"Don't. We're almost there," I tell him.

As we approach the bridge, my eyes climb its trusses. I think about all the people who had to teeter on those steel beams to build it. I think about everyone who might've died by falling into the water below.

I wonder if in a few months the bridge will still be here.

I pull over to the curb, the street covered in a thin, white layer of snow. It's that time just before the traffic and grime turn it all into a mess of ash and slush.

I look over to Ramón, and his eyes are completely lost in the white ahead of us.

"You ready?" I ask.

He snaps back to here and now and smiles. "Yeah, definitely."

We cross the street and walk along the bridge's sidewalk, holding hands. We walk along the sidewalk, stopping when we're right in the middle of the bridge. I lean on the green railing to watch the river below. It's dark, but I can see the white bubbling outline where the current meets the concrete pillars.

On the bank of the river to our right is a highway, which extends off into the horizon. Everything on it looks yellow from the glow of street lights.

I listen to the lights humming faintly, as if they were actually quieter than the silence of the night.

Ramón doesn't say anything as he climbs over the green barrier onto the stone ledge. He turns to me with his hand outstretched. For just a moment I'm terrified to cross that railing. The thought of stepping over that ledge makes my head spin, but tonight I'm stronger than that.

I step over, holding Ramón's hand, and carefully hug the railing as I cross over it.

At first I'm unable to squat down and sit on the ledge. My arms are flung

out at both sides like I'm walking a tightrope.

"It's okay. It's a big ledge; there's room," Ramón says.

After I finally sit down next to Ramón, we both dangle our feet above the rushing water. It reminds me of when I used to fish with my dad.

One red car passes along the highway and adds another mechanical hum to the air. The hum gets lower and quieter until it seems to settle under the sound of the buzzing lights.

I look to Ramón. "Where do you think they're going?"



Emily Case. *Nature vs Industry*, Photograph

Ahead of us in the sky, we see a green firework  
blazing a path through the yellowness.

Ramón looks at the road which stretches off into a dim yellow murk. I'm looking into Ramón's brown eyes from the side. When he turns his head to look at me, I quickly turn my head to the Dead Kennedys pin on his denim jacket.

"He's probably gonna blow something up," Ramón says.

I laugh a little. "Is that what you wish we were doing right now?" I ask him.

"No. But we're all crossing shit off our bucket list, right? I bet half the planet's getting laid tonight."

"Uh huh. Don't think that half the planet includes you," I say.

"Damn. C'mon, we're not the last people on earth, true, but we're in our *last days* on Earth. That's gotta count for something, right?"

I sigh and watch a white van on the highway.

I feel a question rising in my stomach and it just kind of bubbles out:

"Where do we go... like after this?"

"Back to my place, probably—it's a little cold," Ramón says.

"No, I mean... after we die."

Ramón chuckles and it hangs in the air a little bit. "I don't think I'm the right man to solve the mysteries of the universe."

Ramón looks at me, and he can see that I'm scared. I'm trying to hide it but I feel like the fear is everywhere. It's clinging to everything like the snow.

He relaxes his smile a little. "I'm sorry, I'm just playing." He takes a breath. "All right, I'm gonna tell you how it all ends—where we all go when we die. Close your eyes."

I look down at the river again, unsure.

"I'm not gonna scare you; just close your eyes."

"Okay." I close my eyes and just listen.

"First, everything is black, just like what you see now. I mean that's the first thing you'll notice. Then your life flashes before your eyes and all that shit. It's just darkness. So you're sitting in this darkness, like you're aware of everything, but you can't see anything or even hear anything. Then you hear this voice and it's booming all around you. You can kinda recognize it a little. It's a really nice voice, though."

"Okay, is it a man's voice?" I interrupt.

"Hold on, I'm getting to that. So you hear this voice and yeah: it's a man. He says, 'Don't worry about anything. You're safe with me.' Ya know, he's very calming. For some reason, you just feel comforted. And then, the room you're in starts to come

into view a little. First you see just like a white wall, and you start to see you're in a plain white room. You start to see the man in front of you, like he's coming into view too. He's dressed head to toe in white. So everything's still a little blurry, but you finally recognize who it is."

I wait for a second. "Uhh, okay. Who is it?"

"Drake."

We both start laughing and I open my eyes.

"It's Drake? He's the first person I'll see when I die?"

"Yeah, it's Drake. I know that's fuckin' weird, but that is exactly what happens."

"Uh huh. Well, I guess I'm glad it's not Justin Bieber."

Ramón laughs again and I get another one of those pangs. Every laugh I get to hear inches closer to the last one I'll ever hear.

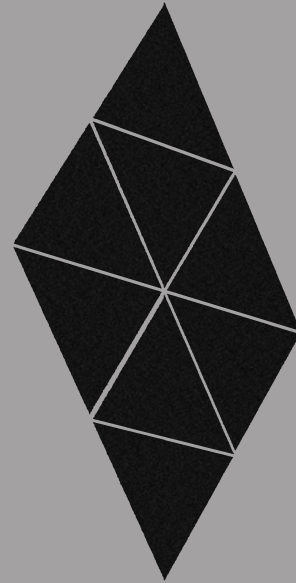
Just in an instant, Ramón stops smiling, and he can see it again in my eyes. He says, "But seriously though, whatever happens after this: I'm glad we've come out here. I'm glad we've spent the night together."

My nose is freezing and I rub at it. Then Ramón cups my face with his hand.

"I'm glad, too."

Ahead of us in the sky, we see a green firework blazing a path through the yellowness. It feels like I've never seen a firework before, as if I were five years old.

Just as quickly as the green embers are there, they're gone.



## Make a Noise Before You Go

J. David Roslin

If in the forest a tree should fall,  
Would anyone hear or care at all?  
Would no one hear its loud last cry?  
Would anyone know that it has died?

For some the answer is plain as day,  
It sends out vibrations right away.  
For others, its passing leaves no mark.  
Just rotting, lying still in the dark.

Can't you see how this poor tree,  
Could just as well be you or me?  
Some will in their gods put trust,  
For we will all soon turn to dust.

Leave something behind that will remain  
Be it a story, a song, or a short refrain.  
And maybe, as the years go marching on,  
Some will remember that you have gone.



Hannah Elizabeth High  
*Candy Storm*  
Pastel





Anisa Jackson

Everyone has their season. The season that makes the year feel like home, that makes everything okay again, even if only for a moment. I used to think that my season was fall. The time of year where the stirrings of everything autumnal flood your belly with a warmth that you could never find in a bottle of cider, or by the fireplace, or even under the thickest of blankets. I used to think that the burnt orange, burgundy, plum, tawny-colored sea of leaves that blanketed the sidewalks, streets, and yards come mid-October were the only true colors that would ever leave me breathless. I used to believe that the fall rainy days and grey skies would leave me the most inspired. I used to think that I had found my heart and myself in those autumnal days. But that was all before I experienced the love of spring – your season.

You were unexpected and completely out of my element. You snuck up on me, as an early spring so often does. You made yourself comfortable and melted all the glittering snow, and in turn washed away my well-loved fallen leaves. But, never the inconsiderate one, you patiently stood by my side and helped me pick the most magnificently vibrant flowers

to replace them all. You were adamant about finding me burnt orange, burgundy, plum, and tawny colors. With that crooked smile of yours that can make things right side up again, you apologized for stealing away my cold months a bit too early. However, we both know that the forbidding cold wouldn't have thawed out as quickly as it had if I hadn't loosened my hold on the reins. But you are neither demanding nor boastful over the situation. Slowly, we allow the unspoken thoughts and searing prideful moments to melt into the streams and become tempered by the tender warmth of spring.

Soon enough the frozen nights melt into chilly mornings, olive green grass coated with fresh dew. The chill in the air and our bones is none too eager to give way to warmer days. But, still, you persist. You say the prettiest flowers come from the most stubborn of buds and that it really is quite silly to expect a bud to bloom before its petals are capable of standing tall in the sun. You have enough optimism for the both of us—so much so that it is infectious, and I hold my tongue to keep it from the unspoken worry.

There is no need to speak the obvious, because speaking it gives it a power and presence—as if the lingering

chill between us wasn't enough. We're both aware of the fact that there are some buds that will never open and that some flowers out there will never feel the sun in all its glory. And I can't help but wonder which is sadder. To never witness yourself in full bloom—to never see the you that you fought so long and so incredibly hard to be. Or to never feel the loving warmth of the benevolent sun pulling you out from the shadows.

I find myself forgetting about the autumn, bit by bit, day by day. As I try to step backwards to find some form of foothold in what is quickly becoming the past, you tug on my hand and with a frown and say, "Only forward. Remember?" But I'm scared, and the newness of it all is beginning to fade away. The past is the past, and it has no place in an enlightened future—that, I know. Yes, fall has come and gone, as it does every year, but this time it left with a part of me—the part of me that held me up for so long and acted as my anchor. While the colder months are barren and frigid, they offer up resiliency and pride. I know that I have spent too many seasons and too many years tethered to the resilient and ever-proud colder months. But asking me to let go is like asking a drowning man to not reach

out for the rescue buoy. Asking me to let go of what once was is asking me to let go of who I was. I open my mouth to speak, but the words I so desperately need are nowhere to be found. Instead, I muster up tearful eyes and a tight throat.

Shakily, I say, "I'm not sure I know how to be what you want me to be."

You look so terribly sad and beside yourself. I wait for your grip to falter and you to stumble as I've been clawing my way out of the deep freeze. But you're never the one to lose hope. Just as quickly as your face falls, you pick it back up again and hold on to me tighter. And you smile at me and make me wonder why the warmth flooding my belly has escaped autumn's grasp and found a home in you, instead. From those ever so deep robin's egg eyes to that lovingly crooked white smile, I can't help but feel as though it's already too late for me to turn back.

But I won't turn away from you. That would mean I was being reckless with your heart.

However, the real heartbreak in turning away from you would be turning my back on the me that I see in your eyes. In the way you stare at me. In the way you say my name. In the way you slow your pace to put me at ease. I look at you, and

## I look for who I was always meant to be.

I see all that I can be. I see a prelude to all that could be and should be. And it isn't because you validate me. It's because you have shown me where true strength and resiliency come from. Not from pride, but from love and appreciation.

All this time, you persisted and insisted on sticking by my side through the thaw.

I thought I had been strong and proud before that thaw. But you showed me strength by having enough faith to plant new flowers where there had been no room for hope or love. You were resilient in your endeavor to protect the fragile buds from the intense cold. You were adamant about wading through the waters of change with me. You were dogged in your attempts to keep me from wilting and from running back to all that had been familiar.

"All I've ever wanted is for you to see what I see," you say quietly.

"And what do you see?"

"Someone who deserves love. To love and be loved. To love the life that the

colder months know nothing about."

I bite back a small nervous smile. "I think...I think I'd like that."

Gently, you squeeze my hand and nod your head back towards our unfinished garden. My heart and head are so heavy, but my feet are light as we walk through the soft, inviting grass. I don't look back. I won't look back. I focus on that sun-kissed head of yours. I think of how warm your hands are compared to mine, and how nicely yours wrap around mine. I think of how one of these days, our garden will reach the height of its bloom.

I look forward to the day that the air is warm and heavily scented from all the vibrant and beautiful flowers that have yet to show themselves. I look forward to all the good to come. I look forward to the day when I will no longer feel the pull to look back and search for who I used to be.

I look for who I was always meant to be.

And I look for us. Always us.



Alma Angelina Cortes. *Far & Wide*, Digital

## Light Whisper

## Dark Whisper

Christopher Smith-Thompson

Hello, it's me again  
One of your many friends  
Light Whisper is my name  
And I reside from deep within  
The voice heard through the night  
Guiding while you dream  
The voice that takes them to the light  
And leaves their mind at  
I encourage both goodness and truth  
Throughout the day and evenings  
To always do the right thing  
Regarding all other's feelings  
I bring the best out of you  
But there's no thanks needed  
Though I do have one last message  
A warning that must be heeded!  
Pay no attention to the other whisper  
He's nothing but a liar  
He doesn't want what's best  
He'll only lead to fire  
He has his own intentions  
His presence is nothing more than a curse  
He'll guide you in wrong directions  
Turning life from bad to worse!  
You won't remember this conversation  
You'll forget me when you've risen  
But I'll always be there for you  
So long as you're willing to listen.

Hello, it's me again  
Your one and only friend  
Dark Whisper is my name  
And I dwell from deep within  
The voice heard through the night  
Snickering while you scream  
The voice that takes them from the light  
And leaves nightmares within dreams  
I persuade all to be mischievous  
Throughout the day and evenings  
To always remain devious  
Disregarding all others feelings  
I bring the worst out of you  
I should be thanked for my lessons  
Though I do have one last thing to say  
So you better pay attention!  
Don't listen to that other whisper  
He doesn't know what he's saying  
Too busy sitting on his high horse  
To enjoy games we're playing  
He doesn't want to have fun  
With foolish rules of being good and honest  
Just stick with me and then you'll see  
The joys of being bad, I promise!  
You won't remember this conversation  
You'll forget me when you've risen  
But I'll always be there, lingering  
So long as you're willing to listen.



Emily Case. *Perspective*, Photograph

# Alms

Nicholas Galiano

Good morning, sir.  
My name is Lonely and Lowly and Holy  
I'll weave you a basket if you swear not to listen to the wickers,  
As they gently whisper together in the still air.  
God bless you, sir.  
God  
Sparks that turn to fire and back to electricity,  
Pulsing into thee,  
Into and through your ears,  
Which eventually lose all warmth and turn  
To brutal chilling stone.  
Does the spirit of the entire universe care about lowly me?  
Well, maybe I don't care about it.  
God bless.  
My feet have been cold for many nights of heart-hurt,  
My aging and aching back to the hard earth.  
When did it stop being pain and change to misery;  
And why does it still hurt?  
I don't know where my children are, or even if I have them.  
God bless you, sir.  
And I wish I could wish you well,  
But you do well,  
And I can't wish you too well;  
Truth tell,  
If you look at me past my misery,  
You'd see I don't see, I don't want your injury,  
I don't even want your sympathy,  
I don't want your pity currency,  
I want your fucking shoes  
God bless you, sir.  
If you heard them, you'd call me a mourner for certain,  
So on second thought, let's take it back from good morning:  
Good morning, sir.  
My name is homeless and hopeless and soulless  
Look down on me and pass me a crumpled dollar,  
And I'll probably spend it on booze or dope...  
Or something.

Hannah Elizabeth High  
*Psychedelic Chaos*  
Mixed Media





# Damnation

Zac Godwin

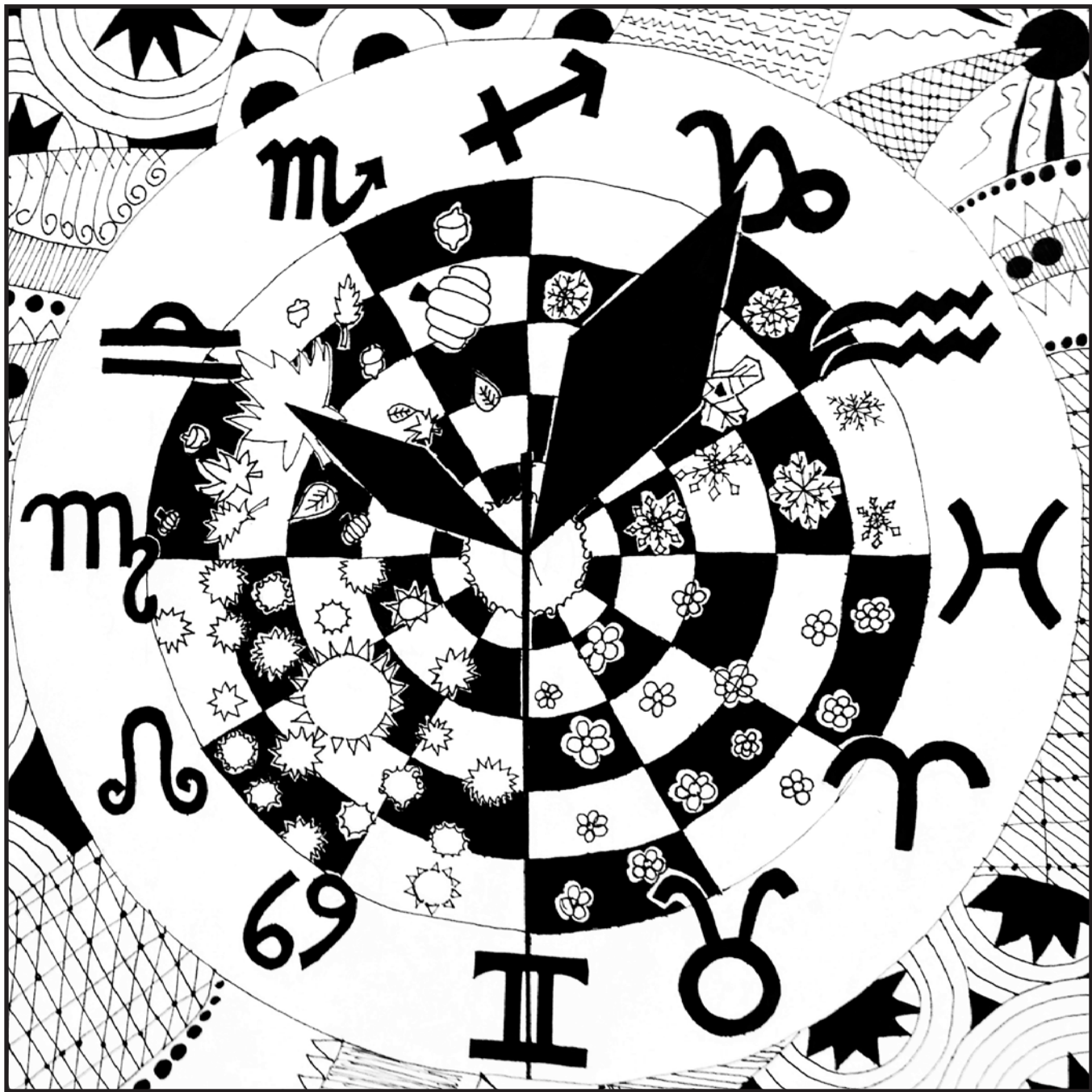
In a sea of decaying corpses, I stand on an island just enough for myself. As I look towards the horizon, guilt crushes my chest. Pale arms shoot up from the water. The hands of the drowning flail back and forth, trying to grab something familiar. Their tears of agony send ripples across the stagnant surface.

My eyes and hands reach out to them. My voice grows rough with meaningless apologies. My feet refuse to move. Dear God, how I tried to dive into those waves and take their place, but I nailed my toes into the ground long ago. One day, I will rip my feet from the rock and plunge myself in after them. After the very people that I have damned.

But until then, I'll stand here. Listening to the same cries of desperation day after day.

Emily Case. *Path Untraveled*, Photograph





Alexa M Rodriguez-Rodriguez. *Astral Chronoscope*, Ink



## The Amulet's Curse

Austin Graczyk

Sitting here now, I still can't believe all I've seen.

I forced myself to read through Great Uncle Peter's journals twice, beginning to end—every gruesome detail from his trek through South America until he could no longer write. The artifact he found there was sealed away in his safe, and he swallowed the key.

My uncle had just gotten back from a dig somewhere in South America, and my parents, my brothers, and I all went over to his house to welcome him back. He wouldn't tell us where he'd been, exactly, or why it was secret, but he brought home souvenirs nice enough to stop the rest of the family from asking too many questions.

Maybe it was because I was the only niece, maybe it was because I shared his interest in archaeology, but for whatever reason, he always seemed to give the best present to me. When he handed me my little package, dirt brushed off his hand and onto mine.

"Sorry about that," he said. "It's been too long since I had a really good shower."

I laughed it off. "It's alright." If you didn't know the family, you might think the brownish cast on his skin was a tan. To us, it looked like he'd been caught in a sandstorm.

We didn't stay long, but I promised I'd be back soon to talk about the dig.

He nodded a little absently and waved to us, shutting the door before we got to the car.

A week later, I rang his doorbell again, and Rita, his motherly maid, answered it with a smile. We talked a little as she led me up to Peter's study, and then she left us to go make lunch.

"What happened to your neck?" I asked.

He wrinkled his forehead and felt around before recognition dawned in his eyes. "Oh, the Band-Aid? I cut myself shaving this morning." He put away the book he was holding and sat down in his usual chair by the window. "So, what do you want to know?" he asked with a smile.

"Everything."

He took me through the whole expedition, minus the "secret" stuff he wouldn't go into. The dig had been open for a month before he went down, and he stayed there for another six weeks, trekking through the jungle, looking for lost treasure.

Rita brought us lunch just as he was finishing up, and we switched subjects.

"I officially put in archaeology as my major," I said in between bites of sandwich.

He smiled and took a sip from his tea. "Good for you. Go become a professor."

I gave him a wry look. "Maybe."

He chuckled. "There's something else I wanted to give you." He got up and wobbled a little on his way to the bookcase.

"You alright?"

He came back and sat down. "Just getting old, is all." He passed me a box wrapped in brown paper, about the size of a book, but heavier by a lot.

I unwrapped it and pulled out a golden-brown brooch that fit in the palm of my hand. "Whoa."

"I'm glad you like it," he said with a smile. "We found a few of them, and I managed to keep one away from the museum hounds."

"It's great," I said, pinning it up into my hair. "Heavy."

He nodded. "Don't tell your parents, but we think they're solid gold."

I shook my head. "Holy shit."

Over the next couple of weeks, Peter sent me home with armfuls of books every time I saw him. He hadn't done anything like that since he was trying to get me interested in reading as a little girl.

About a month after he'd gotten back from his trip, I knocked on the door, and Rita stopped me from coming inside.

"He's a little under the weather," she said. "But he wanted me to give you these." She passed me a backpack and gave an apologetic look before shutting the door in my face. I took the newest bundle of books home and found places for them on my rapidly swelling shelves before deciding to try back in a few days.

I usually only visited Great Uncle Peter on weekends. Even though he was retired, he still had a lot going on, but I went back on Wednesday.

Rita was shocked to see me, but let me in. She sat me in the living room and walked out. When she came back, she brought Peter along in a wheelchair, the same dusty color to his skin, a blanket over his legs.

I jumped up and crossed the room to them. "What happened?"

He gave a weak smile. "I probably caught something on the dig."

"What disease takes a month to show symptoms?" I looked closer at him and saw another cut on his neck like before, smudged with what looked like clay. "What's that?" I moved it to touch it and felt some of it come off on my fingers.

He took a breath and then sighed. "Here, sit down. I didn't want to tell you yet."

I sat but kept my eyes fixed on him.

"I have a blood disease. It's genetic and it's fatal. I found out right before I left for the dig, and it's catching up to me now."

I put a hand to my face. "That's why you've been giving me all the books."

"Right. You, your parents, and your brothers are the only family I have left. I've been getting things set up the past few weeks."

I glanced up at Rita, half-turned away and dabbing at her eyes.

He kept going. "So, you all are going to be left with everything except the house, and money for the taxes on it. I'm giving that to Rita. She's been here with me for decades; it's practically hers already."

I nodded. "How long do you have?"

"At the rate it's going, probably another month."

I nodded again, slower this time. "There's no way to fix it?"

He opened and shut his mouth. "There's a medication to slow it down, but that would just prolong things. It would be expensive and painful, and I'd rather save that money to pass on to all of you. I'm staying here, too. I'd rather die at home than in some hospital."

I rested my face fully in my hands, then looked up at him. "Damn."

He nodded and shifted the blanket covering his legs. "Trust me, you don't want to see the state of my skin under this. It's working from the bottom up."

"When are you telling the rest of the family?" I asked.

"Soon, before I'm a total invalid. But when that happens, I'm going to need all of you to stay away. I don't want you to see me like that."

"Right. I just—can't believe."

"I know. Trust me, I know."

We sat in silence for a few minutes before he gave me another pack of books and some of his personal artifacts from other digs.

"When the family comes over and I give them the news, I'll hand off the last of what I'm saving just for you."

As we were all leaving Great Uncle Peter's house the night he told them, my parents teary-eyed and my brothers stoic, Rita hugged me and passed me one last backpack. I slung it on and leaned in to squeeze Peter's shoulders. He patted my back, barely able to move his torso now. I was the last one he said goodbye to.

I opened the backpack in the car and saw that most of the books were journals from his digs. I was too drained to start reading them that night, but within a few days, curiosity got the better of me.

The project in South America hadn't even started with archaeologists, it turned out. A mining company was poking around



Anna Makdissi-Elias  
Flower Woman  
Pencil

and discovered ancient writing on some of the rocks, along with pictures carved next to it. No one could make out what the pictures were supposed to be, so they called in Peter and a few others.

The archaeologists worked with the miners to get farther into the ground and eventually into caverns deep underneath. Peter and the others went down against the advice of the company. They spent the rest of their time there scrambling through the tunnels, recovering artifacts from whatever people had lived there—mostly religious icons and a lot of life-sized statues of people in painful poses.

In between two journal pages was a glossy photograph of a gold-colored amulet with a green jewel set in the middle. Peter's notes had become frantic: his normally legible handwriting was shaky and staggered, and what he wrote sounded almost insane.

Peter knew it was an amazing find—but the glyphs around the altar claimed it was cursed, that anyone who touched it would “suffer the same fate as the sentinels.” Peter had quoted that part directly but been confused as to what it meant. He wrote it off as the fantasies of a long-dead religion.

That was the last entry about the dig itself. He seemed to have written the rest of the entries once he got back; so I decided to take a break and look through the books Peter had given me to see if they said anything about the amulet. It looked like he had given me a little of everything. I mostly

reviewed the books on South American cultures, but there was nothing much.

A busy week passed before I was able to go back to the journals. That week cost me more than I would've guessed at the time and caused me to see the most gruesome sight I'll probably ever take in.

The glyphs on the wall had been right: the amulet cursed Peter from the moment he touched it.

His increasingly weak scrawl documented everything that happened to his body throughout his “disease.” It had started with his blood and skin, so *that* hadn't totally been a lie. He'd noticed, the day he cut himself shaving, that the blood came out brownish instead of red. When it dried, it looked like clay.

That was when he put it together with the residue that had been coming off his skin.

Soon, the dust started hardening in place and he couldn't move his toes. He didn't fully understand it, so he wrote the other archaeologists from the dig. Doctors came and went, people he could trust.

By the time he'd had Rita turn me away at the door, he was certain he was going to die.

When I came back, he agreed to see me, even though his legs had turned to stone from the knee down.

I couldn't stop reading the journals, even through the fear and revulsion in the back of my throat.

On the night of the dinner, when he told the family, I knew he couldn't move his

torso very well—but I never could have guessed at how far the disease had advanced. He had been solid rock from the waist down.

When I finished reading, I jumped right into my car and drove to Peter's house. I banged on the door for ten minutes straight, called a few times and left messages, screamed for Rita to let me in.

I ended up busting through the glass in the back door. There was no one on the first floor, so I started for the stairs. Rita's bedroom door was open, and I looked in to see her lying faceup, staring blankly at the ceiling.

I went on to the study. I fought the urge to throw up when I walked in, and instead moved to read the last of Peter's journal entries, handwriting almost totally shot as his arms and then fingers had turned to stone, too. At the end was Rita's neat script, describing briefly how the magic of the artifact—the curse of it—had kept him alive even after his whole chest had been turned to stone, saving his head for last.

It had been painful, every second of it, and it made him understand why all the statues in the amulet hall—the sentinels—had looked like they were screaming.

I took all his journals, his safe, and a few keepsakes. Rita and I burned the house to the ground later that day. It looked like an electrical accident.

She's gone, now. Fled town to start a new life in her golden years.

I don't think I'll ever really be able to tell my family exactly what happened, what she

and I witnessed happening to Peter. Maybe they'll read this someday. I hope not, but if they do, maybe they'll understand why it had to be done.

I'll never be able to get my last glimpse of Great Uncle Peter out of my mind—what I saw when I walked into his study. It's there when I close my eyes, when I dream. It's burned into my brain. My uncle, sitting at his writing desk, looking like a statue of himself, his mouth forced open in a silent scream.



Sarah Belles  
*Mr Piggles Knows All Your Secrets*  
Photograph



# MIA

J. David Roslin

A letter came in the mail that day,  
From the Army: her son was MIA.  
She wept to think he would not come home,  
That she would spend eternity all alone.

Years have passed and still they say  
That her son is MIA.  
She held out the hope that he would come home,  
Before they laid her down alone.

Every night she would get on her knees and pray  
For the son who was MIA.  
If he could be found in a grave alone,  
Maybe he could be brought back home.

The letter came on a Saturday.  
It said, "Your son is no longer MIA.  
We found him laid out in a grave alone,  
And the time has come to send him home."

Once more he will rest outside their home  
Neither one need ever be alone.  
None again to her will say  
That the son she loved is MIA.



Martin Valle. *A Full Life*, Pencil

# Horror Misconceptions: Reconsidering the Monster Metaphor in Cancer Narratives

Tiffany Eastman

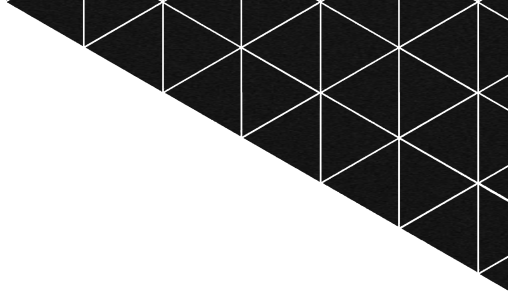
*Metaphor is a major and indispensable part of our ordinary, conventional way of conceptualizing the world, and that our everyday behavior reflects our metaphorical understanding of experience.*

—George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live by*

In society, there are subcultures that exist solely for the purpose of connecting to specific experiences, and providing support and an outlet to express feelings and emotions that only members within the group can relate to. One such subculture is a group carved out by the painful, sometimes tragic, effect of cancer. The members of this group range from those who develop cancer and undergo treatment, to those indirectly affected such as family members and friends that offer support. There is no requirement of age, race, gender, religion, or social stature. The sole criterion for inclusion is experience with the deleterious effect of cancer. Many individuals in this group chronicle their experiences with cancer through blogs and other social media outlets and often use metaphorical language to characterize their cancer. Some people feel that these personal narratives provide needed information to others who are

afflicted and find that the process of writing their stories help them deal with their own emotions as well. However, not always are these stories welcome within their community. Some who have been affected by cancer feel that the language used by others within their community to describe their experience with cancer is overly frightening and that the discourse in cancer narratives is often morally objectionable.

Personal narratives are a method of capturing and communicating experiences for which the teller and the listener can gain a deeper understanding. Many people affected by diseases such as cancer find that personal stories help create a bridge between them and the outsiders. In a nursing research article, "Understanding the Person through Narrative," Joanne Hall and Jill Powell define narrative as "a means of communication that reflects time-ordered events with a discernible plot



and cast of characters and that impart personal and cultural information from the teller to the audience in a coherent whole” (2). Storytelling allows individuals to communicate in a manner that the listener can incorporate related events into their own lives and experiences. A personal narrative is acknowledged as a way to frame specific events and feelings so that others may develop an influentially emotional response for future references. In many ways, this method is like planting a seed. Narratives permit strong connections of empathy to be conjured in such mystical ways that it does more than create a deep understanding of the afflicted. Narratives can also invite an inspirational aspect on specific issues and ideas, which helps evolve this subculture's views to a heightened perspective on a more social level.

The experience of being sick is often diminished by the hustle and bustle of the world and the members in this group often feel alienated. Penny Frizzell shares, “I just don't think people understand what it is that I'm really going through in my mind.” Even medical professionals' bedside manners have been characterized as lacking sympathy and compassion for

their ill patients. In a review of the study on why “etiquette-based” communication is not commonly practiced, Lauren Block notes, “It's no wonder patients don't feel connected to what we are telling them, because many times we are not doing as much as we could to make that connection” (qtd. in Desmon). For these reasons, many individuals and organizations try to publicize the hardships of sick and terminally ill patients and their families by voicing the physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges that accompany this group.

Rose Gates claims that there are therapeutic benefits to cancer patients telling their stories: “When people become ill, they try to make sense out of their experiences by telling stories” (1). It is human nature for people to look for ways to connect their circumstances and experiences to meaning. Disease is the most confusing. Stories help individuals in their search for answers, serve as a method of recovery therapy, and provide a voice and a means of connection to the outside world.

Every good story needs a conflict and traditionally the conflict needs a hero and a villain. In the classic *The Art*


Nicholas Galiano  
*Dream Catcher*  
Mixed Media

of *Fiction*, author John Gardner explains the function of conflict in stories: "In the relationship between character and situation there must be some conflict: Certain forces, within and outside the character, must press him toward a certain course of action, while other forces . . . must exert strong pressure against the course of action" (186). The conflict is necessary in order for the story to be engaging and create a reason for the listener to care.

In stories, the villain is often framed as a monster. And cancer patients tend to frame stories where they are the hero battling some type of monster, which represents the cancer they are afflicted by. This characterization creates a connection of something strange in which the patients and their families are now able to identify aspects to make better sense of their circumstances. When Patricia Jackson was diagnosed with cervical cancer, she felt very confused and betrayed by her body: "I was in shock. The questions of how and why were running through my head. I had no symptoms at all, no bleeding, no pain, nothing. It simply did not make sense." Medicine often does not provide answers to such questions raised by disease – "Why do I have cancer?" – and the clinical language of the medical field that describes diagnosis and cure fails to capture the emotional experience of someone losing control of his or her own body.



The use of the monster metaphor seems to allow patients to identify and categorize something that otherwise are intangible, inviting the human mind to perceive sickness as evil and wage a war against it. In their now-classic work, *Metaphors We Live by*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain, "Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them—and, by this means, reason about them" (26).



"Many accounts of storytelling depict patients' experiences as battles with malevolent supernatural forces."

And metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson write, help us "see beyond 'the truths' of our culture . . . as though the ability to comprehend experience through metaphor were a sense, like seeing or touching or hearing, with metaphors providing the only ways to perceive and experience much of the world (239). Categorizing and conceiving of disease metaphorically as the monstrous does not just give cancer patients something to understand; it also gives them something to fight.

Many accounts of storytelling depict patients' experiences as battles with malevolent supernatural forces. Lindor Reynolds was diagnosed with brain cancer one month after she celebrated her fifty-fifth birthday, and Reynolds, a reporter for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, chronicled her struggles using the language of horror, specifically horror's concern with the uncanny. In her article, "I'm Fighting Monsters after Cancer Diagnosis," Reynolds speaks of the experiences that led up to her diagnosis and how it felt to inform her family: "Something rank and odious slithered into our home." The language Reynolds uses describes a monstrous element that seems to invade the sanctity and safety of her home. Once Reynolds distributes the traits of a monster to the cancer, the metaphor takes on a life of its own, infringing itself on everything familiar.

Neurologist and psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud once conducted a study on the uncanny, which, translated from "unheimlich," means "unhomely": "For this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression . . . the uncanny as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light" (13). As humans, we are aware that our time on earth is limited, and that one day

death will come knocking on our door. However, the thought of dying can be so psychologically disturbing that we often suppress the certainty. In Reynolds's case, death was calling her and in that moment, her remembrance of death triggered the uncanny. Reynolds framed her experiences regarding cancer as a supernatural phenomenon. She identified the cancer as a monster and in forging that idea, her home became an unwelcoming and eerie place. Sadly, after a fifteen-month ordeal, Reynolds died of brain cancer.

The use of the concept 'monster' seems out of place in relation to cancer. However, many personal accounts of disease composed by patients, survivors, or their families, just like Reynolds' story, categorize disease as a monster—and many people associate disease with the qualities of a monster. The word 'monster' comes from the Latin word 'monstrum,' whose "root meaning does not only mean to warn but also to instruct," show, or demonstrate in a divine sense ("Monster"). In fiction, a monster usually appears after the occurrence of something morally objectionable or something that goes against nature, which signifies something is wrong in the natural order. Monsters are meant as a tool to punish those that defy the natural laws of order. Stephen T. Asma, a professor of philosophy at Columbia College, Chicago, explains the function of monster stories in his article "Monsters and the Moral Imagination":

. . . monster stories are encapsulations of the human feeling of vulnerability—[they] offer us the "disease" of vulnerability and its possible "cures" (in the form of heroes and coping strategies). Few monster stories remain indefinitely in the "threat phase." When fear is at a fever pitch, they always move on to the hero phase. Hercules slays the Hydra, George slays the dragon, medicine slays the alien virus, the stake and crucifix slay the vampire.

Being a victim of cancer—or being vulnerable against the threat of cancer—is difficult to accept, so it is important for patients to have a fighting spirit. Should they then hold on to the monster metaphor?

"Gothic monster tales—*Frankenstein*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dracula*, Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*," as the critic Christopher Craft notes, "rehearse a similar story structure. 'Each of these texts first invites or admits a monster, then entertains and is entertained by monstrosity for some extended duration, until in its closing pages it expels or repudiates the monster and all the disruption that he/she/it brings'" (qtd. in Asma). However, thinking in terms of 'beating'—or "repudiating the monster"—can create a sense of failure, and add to patients' fear, when things do not go well and the treatment becomes ineffective. The monster metaphor conveys that

Sarah Belles  
*Blades of Grass*  
Acrylic



patients are the heroes fighting to gain control over their illness and, at the same time, emphasizes the threat of cancer. Clearly, such a double-edged message can be misleading, therefore inadequately framing the disease.

The characterization of the disease as monster also disservices both those who suffer and those who search for a cure. The monster metaphor used in the narratives of some cancer patients is what makes other cancer patients in this community afraid to hear those stories. This is because monster is a term used to describe something that is harmful with

several frightening characteristics. Monsters have physically revolting appearances that clearly differentiate the human from the monstrous by exploiting the visually unexplained abnormalities that instinctively arouses fear. And their supernatural abilities, as they present elements surpassing human capacity, cause a feeling of inferiority, inadequacy, and confusion in patients.

Monsters create the idea that there is something otherworldly or superior that can dictate the fate of humanity's future and categorizing these traits to that of cancer is irresponsible to those that search for a cure. Former cancer patient, Judy Meineke feels bothered by stories that provoke or insinuate that there is a hidden meaning or superior purpose as to why people get cancer: "Having cancer sucks, but I don't believe that anything paranormal caused my cancer; it is completely ridiculous to even think that." Nevertheless, when some people become overwhelmed with the questions of "how" and "why" flooding their mind, they tend to characterize, or interpret, their experience as monstrous. For those that reject the idea that they carried any fault for their disease find some of these narratives extremely objectionable and offensive because not only do such stories suggest that they did something wrong, but they may hinder their hope for a cure.

A broadened view on what a monster is and why the term exists in language shows that the connection between disease and such imagery is inconsistent. Furthermore,

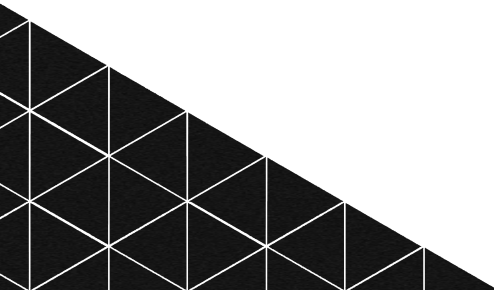


moral implications arise when categorizing cancer as a monster that implies the disease is caused by some kind of ethical violation that requires punishment and is incurable. Disease is already a heavy burden—and a person suffering from cancer should not be subjected to guilt and have to question his or her own morality. In her book, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*, Susan Sontag, a cancer patient herself, explains how metaphors attached to cancer can intensify the suffering of patients: “As long as a particular disease is treated as an evil, invincible predator, not just a disease, most people with cancer will indeed be demoralized by learning what disease they have” (7). And she adds, “Nothing is more punitive than to give a disease a moralistic meaning” (26).

Is there anything shameful about having cancer? Is it something that should not be disclosed and is the solution then to be secretive—or as Sontag writes, “to rectify the [mis]conception of the disease, to de-mythicize it” (7)? There is no higher meaning or supernatural circumstances as to why certain people develop disease, nor is any disease evil. Though evil comes in many forms, cancer does not willfully or methodically manipulate human cells just for the fun of causing chaos and disorder.



Emily Case  
*Resting Place*  
Photograph



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# DID SHE KNOW?

Christopher Smith-Thompson

My fourteen-year old form stood in front of the casket as gospel music filled the air, its melodies mixing with the various conversations surrounding me in the church. A mixture of cologne and perfume filled my nostrils. Family and friends had gathered under the house of God, all attempting to properly mourn the passing of our dearest loved one. Gentle sounds of weeping strained my already weakened heart. I looked at my grandmother's face as she lay quietly in her eternal slumber. Yet I couldn't cry. I felt like I didn't deserve to cry.

I remembered an old television show that described how cold the flesh of the deceased was. It made me refrain from reaching out and touching her, but oh, how I wanted to. I wanted to feel the peach fuzzed hair that seemed to compliment the puffiness of her cheeks—and the soothing softness of her face as it rubbed against my own cheek while I hugged her close. She looked almost exactly the same. She could have opened her eyes at any moment and just woken up. "God, I wish she would. Just for a little while. Just so I could let her know."

"Your grandma is going to be staying with us for a little while, alright?" my mother told me as we sat on the living room couch on a warm Saturday morning.

I glanced in her direction for a second before turning my attention back to the television screen. A new episode of Pokémon was on, and I couldn't miss a second of it. The weekends were the only time I could really enjoy myself until homeschooling flooded me with work for the rest of the week. Life was tough like that for an eleven-year-old.

"Really? Oh, well, that's cool." I was too distracted by the cartoons to really put too much thought into the situation.

I understood that my grandmother wasn't feeling well at the time and was forced to move out of her house into a nursing home in West Reading, Pennsylvania. I was too young to grasp what sickness was ailing her at the time, but I assumed it was nothing serious. The only person stronger than my mother was my grandmother, and the fact that she had made my mom only caused her to be that much more magical to me. I was going to live under the same roof as my two biggest heroes. I probably should have been more excited about the news at the time.



Hannah Elizabeth High. *Do You See Me?*, Mixed Media

"Are you alright, Chris?" my mother's voice called out from behind me. I could hear it crystal clear, even with all the church music and chatter going on around us.

I tore my eyes away from the body of my grandmother and turned to face my mom. She looked so drained, tired, and worn out. She was the only one listed in my grandmother's will to handle the arrangements and deal with the financial issues. It all rested on her to make sure everything was right for my grandmother, and it took so much out of her—so much that she didn't even have time to properly mourn. I wanted to weep a sea of tears for my mother's sake alone. I wanted to flood the church with the emotion she tried so hard to hold back. But I knew I couldn't.

"Yeah, Mom. I'm fine." I approached her and wrapped my arms around her. We held each other for what felt like forever. "Let me get you something to drink, okay?" I told her, raising my head upwards to look her partially in the eye. She forced a grin and pressed her lips firmly against my forehead before nodding her head.

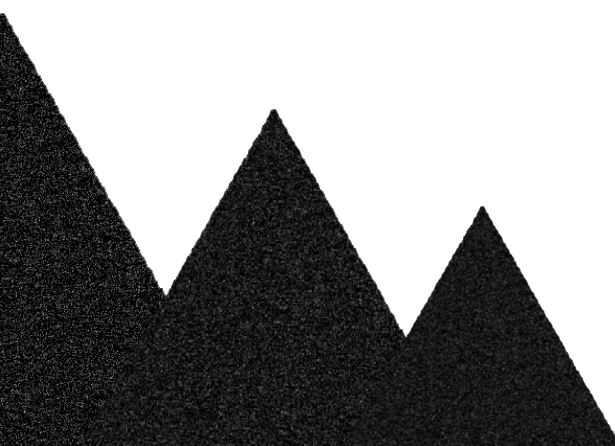
"Thank you, baby. Thank you so much."

A few months after my grandmother moved in with us, it seemed like she'd always been there. She was on the second floor, close to our only bathroom, in the spare bedroom where we stored all of my home-school supplies and assignments. I didn't mind sharing. Despite my room being on the third floor, I often spent most of my time with my grandmother in the guest bedroom. It was quality time that I hadn't received since I was a little kid. She was one of my heroes and I couldn't get enough of her.

"What are you typing up now, Chris?" she asked me while she lay on the bed, sheets and blankets layered over her.

"Just another story," I responded, wiping a bit of sweat off my forehead while adjusting the fan that seemed to be blowing nothing but hot hair in my face. In the middle of December, it was over 100 degrees in the room. My grandmother would get cold very easily, so we kept the heat blasting for her. It was a small price to pay to ensure Grandma felt comfortable.

"Another one of those Superhero tales? Who is it this time? Batman versus Spider-Man?" she questioned, a sly grin forming across her face. My grandma was a writer herself. She was very passionate about poetry. Some of her work had actually been published. I knew a part of her was proud that I had taken a natural interest in writing too.



"Wow. Grandma. Really? Those two guys aren't even in the same comic book universe! They're part of two different worlds. Batman's DC and Spidey's a Marvel character. They can't fight each other." I took advantage of the few times I could share knowledge on something my grandma didn't know, because it seemed as though she knew everything already. She giggled sweetly and glanced over towards her small television set we had placed in her room. I imagined it was *Judge Judy*. She loved her court shows.

"Well, maybe you could read me some of it a little later after dinner? Explain the difference better. I still don't really understand. Superheroes were so much simpler when I was a kid. You had your good guys and bad guys. The end." She'd go on a few more minutes just fussing to herself about the complexity of today's generation and the simplicity of her own time. I loved sitting back and just watching her fuss. It never failed to put a smile on my face.

I remember sitting down in a pew located in the second row of the church. I wanted to be as close to my grandmother as I could. I used the back of the first row's pews to prop my folded arms while I rested my chin on top of my hands. I hadn't noticed that I was the only one sitting in that section of the church. One by one, people came forward to share fond memories of my grandmother. Some were very heartfelt

and sentimental; others rather humorous and lighthearted. I could hear most of the people in the church laugh at the jokes. I wished I was able to find the motivation to smile. Instead, numbness consumed me. I felt tingly all over, as if my entire body had fallen asleep for a while.

"Would you like to say something about your grandmother, Chris?"

I wasn't sure who the woman was that suddenly approached me and asked me that question. I could tell that she was warm and kind-hearted. She obviously knew who I was. Was she perhaps a cousin or auntie that I hadn't quite gotten the chance to know? There were so many family members and friends at the funeral that I'd never seen before. I couldn't tell if I managed to speak words or if she could just read the expression on my face, but the woman simply rubbed my shoulder and nodded her head.

"It's alright. It's alright. You don't have to say a thing. You don't have to say a single word." I was relieved. I didn't speak my piece. I might have not said much the entire day, as a matter of fact.

Christmas had come and gone. Money was tight around the house, considering we had to make special accommodations to another member of the household, but that never stopped us from making the best of things. My mother, her partner, and my sister gathered what they could to assure there were presents

under the tree for my little nieces and nephews. I received a Halo 2 game for my Xbox console. It was less than I usually received, but I was more than grateful.

"Chris, I have to talk to you for a second," my mother said to me as she pulled me aside into the dining room away from the rest of the family.

"What happened, Ma?" Immediately all the things I could have possibly done wrong popped into my head. Did I forget to feed the dog? Did I not take out the trash? I knew I brushed my teeth this morning; I just knew it!

"I wanted to tell you that I probably won't be able to help you out in homeschooling as much as I used to, Chris. Dealing with your grandmother is a tough job, you know? And I just don't have as much time as I used to." She gave me a disappointed look, a look as though she was failing me. I just shrugged my shoulders nonchalantly as if I didn't care. But I did.

"Yeah. No problem, Mom. I get it." I did get it, but I was upset. I didn't like the fact that suddenly my mother couldn't take her time out to help me when I needed it. I disliked even more when I had to re-enroll to my middle school to finish off the rest of my school year.

I watched as they carried my grandmother's casket down the aisle. It was odd that seeing my grandma lay still in a casket hadn't upset me all that much, but watching that casket being hoisted

up by six men and towards the exit of the building completely boggled my mind. I wasn't ready to let her leave yet. No. I had to be ready. I was ready, but I just needed a little more time with her.

I wished dearly that someone had asked me to assist one of those six men, to help them carry my grandma out of that church just so I could be as close to her as I possibly could once again. To touch the same wood that her body was touching. To have just another opportunity to let her know what I wanted her to know—what she needed to know. I should have spoken when I had the opportunity. I was so stupid not to have spoken when I had the chance. Now I was just stuck, standing there with a lump in my throat while they transported the casket into a vehicle that would deliver her to her grave. Why didn't I just let her know?

Time seemed to fly the moment I enrolled in school. The kids were just as annoying and immature as they always were, which was one of the main reasons why I left public schooling in the first place. I sat in classrooms, barely paying attention to the teacher explain the difference between an X and Y chromosome, while I could hear kids behind me make fun of my dreadlocks. The milder children called me "Worm-Head" while the bolder ones went for more colorful insults like "Shit-Locks." A part of me cared, but then a part of me



didn't. Looking back now, it all seemed like a bunch of background noise that filled a space in time that I barely remember. My focus wasn't on school or snot-nosed brats that didn't know how to keep their mouth shut. My real focus always resided back at home.

My grandmother continued to grow sickly as the months passed. She couldn't even move herself to the bathroom anymore, let alone walk up and down the stairs. It was clear she needed more medical care than expected, so she was assigned a nurse to come by the house and visit often.



To make the transition easier, a medical bed was placed in our living room so that she was on the same floor as the kitchen. She was given a portable bathroom that was placed beside her bed. With me being in school, my stepmother working and my sister living in her own place, my mother had become the main caretaker of her own mother.

Months continued to pass. I could see the life being sucked out of my mother's body. She was on constant vigil. At night, she'd watch the baby monitor next to her bed, carefully listening, waiting for my grandmother to call for a cup of water or assistance to use the restroom.

"I can't sleep." I overheard her saying one night as she spoke on the phone with one of her friends. "I'm too afraid to. I'm the only one that can stay up and listen out for her." Her words were muffled by the sounds of her slight whimpers. "I have to listen. I have to pay attention and make sure she's okay. Sometimes I just stay up for hours making sure I can hear her breathing, because if I fall asleep and wake up, I worry she won't be there anymore."

I was only able to understand the very surface of my mother's pain. I wasn't aware of the reality of death, at least not entirely. At my age, the idea of me or my mother dying any time soon was so farfetched that it was ridiculous to even think about. I could not fully wrap my head around my mother's particular fears and pain. I was, after all, going through my own issues at the time.

I hated what was becoming of my strong, beautiful mother. I hated seeing her lose all her energy the minute she got out of bed. I hated the fact that she had absolutely no time for me. I hated that she felt so sad and depressed. And I hated my grandmother for making my mom feel that way. I hated her so much that I couldn't even sit in the same room as her. Why couldn't she just be well? Why did she have to be so needy? Why couldn't it just all stop?

One night, my living room was flooded with flashing red lights. The ambulance crew rushed into the living room to retrieve my grandmother. She must have had a really bad night. Bad enough to call 911. My mother grabbed her keys and looked to me and my sister.

"You both sit tight. I'm just going to follow the ambulance and make sure everything's alright, okay?" My eyes were focused on the window, watching the men wheel my grandma into the back of their truck. I was worried and afraid. I knew that something was seriously wrong. A part of me was worried and afraid. Only a part, however. There was something else inside me that felt just the slightest twinge of relief. A hope that maybe things within my home would go back to some levels of normalcy it once had now that someone else was going to take care of my grandma. Both my sister and I acted as if we understood everything, but we didn't know what was going on. We didn't know what was about to come.

A few weeks later, in October, my grandma's kidneys failed. She was on life support, and my mother had to be the one to tell the doctors to take her off it. I sat in the hospital chair staring at the floor. I could hear a few of family members arguing about something in the background, but I couldn't make out their words. My mind was too busy trying to process my current reality. My grandma was dead. The same grandma that I both loved and resented. My mind played back every dirty look I gave her and every negative thought that crossed my mind about her. The last few years riddled with anger and selfishness—mistakes that I could never apologize and make up for. The regret settled on my body like a weighted vest. The shame festered in my wounded heart. What had I done?

Shortly afterwards my mother went straight to work on preparations. Funeral arrangements had to be made. Family had to be gathered. The exact date of her death always remains fuzzy to me. Perhaps because it's a day I want to forget.

Some weeks had passed since my grandma was buried. All extended family and friends departed to live their own lives while the rest of us were left to sit in the heaviness of loss. I was angry for that whole week, snapping at anyone that looked wrongly in my direction. I tried picking fights in school and nearly got myself suspended. One night, my mom, my stepmother, and I were sitting in the living room watching

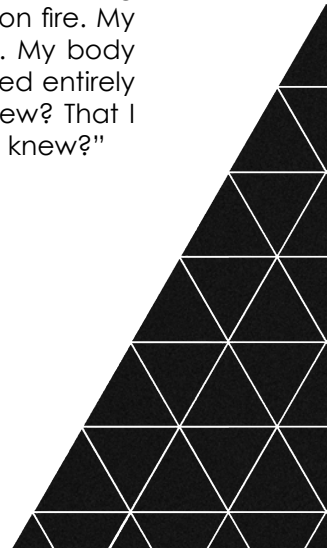
television. The show that was on didn't matter. I wasn't paying attention. I was too busy trying to manage the bottled up emotions that were clawing to escape from within me.

I finally had my mother all to myself, just as I wanted, yet I couldn't appreciate it the way I thought I would. I spent so much time being secluded, not opening up. I still felt as if I didn't deserve to speak. Yet my boiling point was beginning to reach its limit.

"Mom," I said simply, still keeping stern focus on the television.

"What is it, Chris?" she questioned.

"Do you think Grandma knew I loved her? Do you think she knew before she died?" By this point, I could feel the heat radiating off of my face like a hot furnace. The only cooling relief came from the tear drops flowing down my cheeks and the liquid from my nose. "Because I was really mad at her, Ma. I was really, really mad at what she was doing to you. I hated her, and I'm scared she died thinking that I hated her." My face was on fire. My mouth hurt. My throat was sore. My body was shaking. My vision was blurred entirely with tears. "Do you think she knew? That I didn't mean it? Do you think she knew?"



Our sobs meshed  
together like a  
sweet symphony  
of sorrows.

Mom hugged me so tightly I could barely breathe. I needed that embrace. Our sobs meshed together like a sweet symphony of sorrows. I don't think I ever cried as hard as I cried that night.

"Of course she knew, Baby. Of course she did. She always knew you loved her, no matter what."

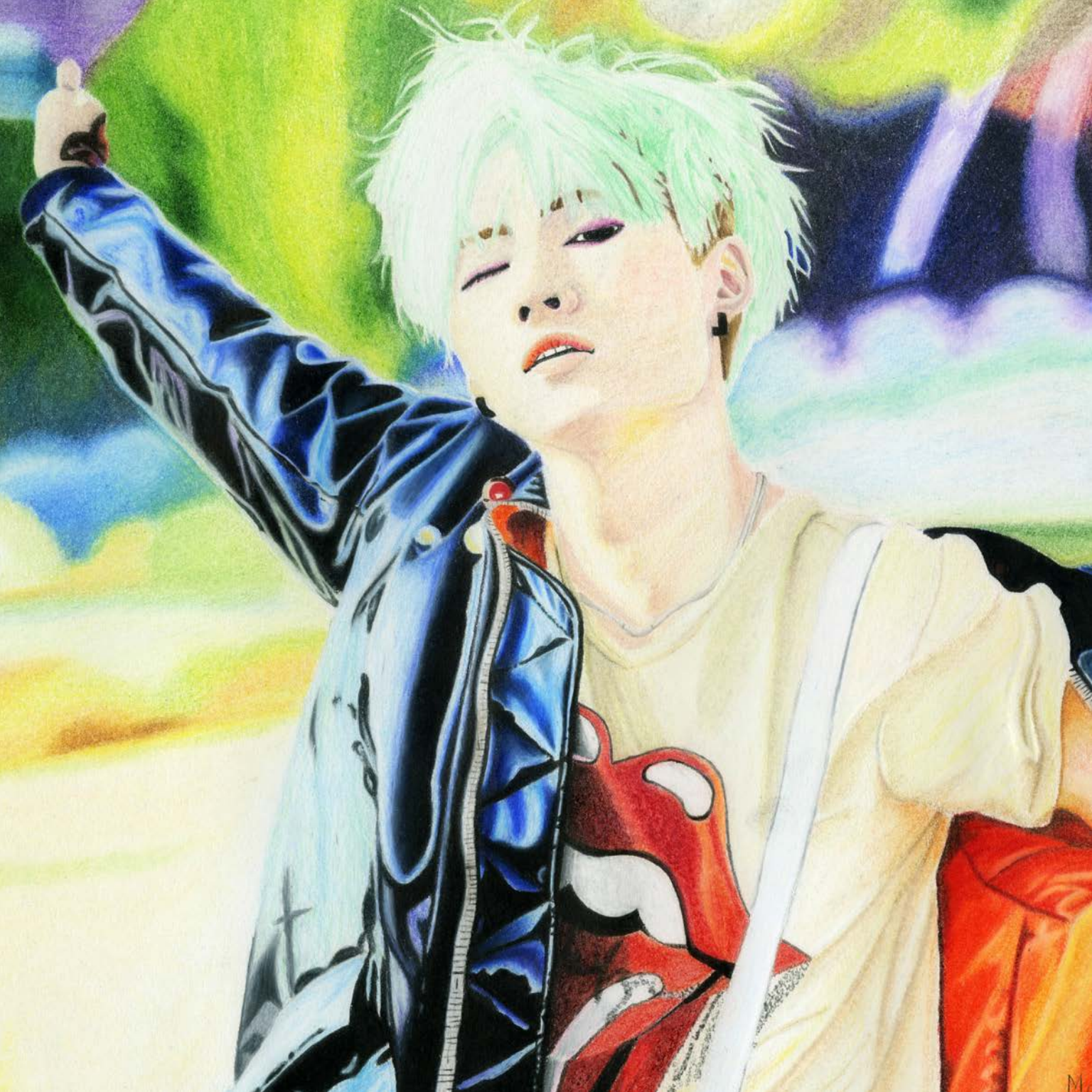
My strong, beautiful mother. To have cared for another so selflessly when that person needed her most. I admire

those qualities—those that I lacked during the last dwindling days I was able to spend with my grandmother. Her love for her mother carried her through one of the toughest periods of time in her life. My love for my own mother, mixed with my selfishness, kept me from doing and saying all the things I now wish I was able to while I had the opportunity.

If I could go back in time, would I have changed anything? The way that I treated, or rather, didn't treat my grandmother at times? Could I have been more understanding of the situation and be less angry and resentful over my mother's missing attention? I want to say that I would, but there is a side of me that remains uncertain.

I attempt to hold onto the words my mom spoke to me that night, and try to remind myself that my grandma knew how much I really cared. I convince myself most days that it is true. I always shed a few tears when I think otherwise.

Mayra Perez-Barajas  
*Suga*  
Pencil



# Dreaming of Yama

DJ Plante


*In the Katha Upanishad, Death is personified as Yama, a wise teacher.*

Death is often spoken of in hushed tones. We are often at a loss for words whenever a close friend or even an acquaintance loses a loved one. It is as if all our compassion and concern for them are stifled by our reluctance to accept death. Why is this? We all become acquainted with death at an early age. Many of us have grieved after losing beloved pets. Without question, we all have grandparents, and for some of us, they too have passed. And yet, even as adults, we deal with death as if just speaking about it might leave a toxic residue on our tongues.

I have lost three family members in just the last eight years alone. And each death has afforded me an opportunity to not just reflect on those for whom I have grieved, but to also take a good look at myself and the manner in which I approach life. In each instance, I have tried to realize something beyond its initial impact and, I hope, gained some insight into my own life. But it was about sixteen years ago, with the death of my mother that I first began to seek some sort of sense in both our living and our passing.

My mother was blind—and her blindness became many issues over time. She was not born handicapped, but suffered from a progressive eye disease. She started losing her sight in her youth, and then became completely blind after the birth of her second child. I was her fourth. I can only imagine how she must have grieved for her sight and perhaps resented, and therefore resisted, the many challenges that she had to face in a now dark and frightening world. I look back and wonder at how she was able to clean the house, bathe us when we were little, wash, fold, and put away clothes, and get dinner on the table. Yet none of this did she do without unpredictable tempests of mood ranging from the serene to the downright violent.

In addition to losing her sight within months of my oldest brother's birth, she had also lost her mother and beloved youngest brother in a house fire. It was during an unusually cold Canadian autumn that the family's wood burning stove overheated and set the house ablaze. After the fire, she fell into a deep and spiraling depression. It was at this time my dad sought medical help, and she was prescribed valium. How could anyone know just how life-eroding this cure would be? It was then, many years before I entered the picture, that the path for my relationship with my mother was paved.

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I can still remember the cab rides with my mother, going from one doctor to another for her prescriptions, as well as from one pharmacy to another to fill them. I also remember many walks to the liquor store with her hand tightly gripping my arm. “Now, be careful crossing the highway, mind you,” she would say—sometimes nicely, sometimes venomously.

This relationship was further complicated by the fact that my father, having the liberty of being an adult and the excuse of being the sole provider for the family, chose to spend as little time with this unpredictably volatile woman as possible. It was left up to us boys to play surrogate for him. And though there were four of us, it was usually my younger brother Paul and I who bore this weight, as we two, being the youngest of the lot, were the least likely to disobey her and the most desirous to seek her approval.

Soon, the kids in the neighborhood began to shun Paul and me. They would point and smirk whenever one of us led our mother, her arm in ours, to the pharmacy, to the liquor store, or even to the corner store for her cigarettes. Having known no other way to walk with one's mother, I could not understand their ridicule, but it made me feel ashamed. Soon, I was no longer

welcome in the neighborhood games of baseball, tag, and hide-and-peek. As this communal scorn spread to school, the pain and isolation became such a part of my life that it began to define me. I was filled with self-loathing, and a deep and profound sense of emptiness. I was the opposite of becoming; I was *un-being*.

By the time Paul and I became teenagers, I began to resent the position we had been put in. I think Paul's feelings were mostly directed at my mother, but mine were toward both of my parents. I was silently angry at my father for allowing me to be in such a difficult situation during such a significant time in my life, but I was boisterously angry at my mother. I returned her cruelty with some of my own. I began treating her with contempt and derision. I should have been hanging with friends, and dating, and being a teenager—instead, I had become reclusive, withdrawn, and resentful.

Many years after I left home, my mother was diagnosed with liver cancer. By this time, my father was no longer living in the family home, but would drop by occasionally to bring her groceries and see to the household bills. My brother Paul and I had a few turns at caring for her in our respective homes while she went through

chemo, but when she had to be put on hospice, I moved back home to see her through to her death.

Though I packed lightly, I could not help but feel the weight of all that I still carried with me. By necessity, I dropped all of my emotional baggage at the door, and found within me the love and courage to care for this now-fragile woman—the same one that I had adored as a child, and, in spite of everything, still loved very deeply. Here, in the quiet and stillness of the house in which I grew up, I saw the veil of her ego pulled back, and could, for the first time in my life, fully appreciate her for all she was. My mother was someone just like me—a deeply wounded person with her own baggage, trying to make do as best she could with the few and faulty tools she had been given. In looking beyond my mother's ego, I was able to see our shared and mutual selves—the very spark and unison of the divine within each of us. I saw in her our shared humanity.


Recently, a friend of mine told me his definition of forgiveness: "Forgiveness is letting go of all possibilities of ever having had a different past." Before my mother's death, I would have thought this a strange thing to say—it would have been incomprehensible to me. Yet those words resonate with me as I look back on those final hours with my mother.

During our last night together, as I sat by her bed, her breathing became shallower and less regular. I sensed her

letting go of her grip on life, and I felt myself letting go also. I was letting go of the past, the resentments, and the weight of so many long-held grudges. And I felt the wonder of forgiveness.

I cannot imagine anyone calling death a miracle, but in those last few hours with my mother, I experienced something akin to one. I sensed her forgiveness of me. It was as if she had looked beyond my visible lesser self and, lovingly and tenderly, regarded the "me" that lay deeply hidden beneath the many layers of my own ego. We found the power, both she and I, *while alive*, to forgive one another. I had never been so profoundly touched by death. Upon her death, I had such a lightness of being that I knew I wanted to practice forgiving others at every opportunity I had.

I began rebuilding my relationship with my father. I would visit him and he would visit me. Whenever we said goodbye, whether on the phone or in person, I would always tell him that I loved him. In the beginning, he would simply reply in his Down East accent, "Eeyuh," but soon he was saying that he loved me too. We began going on outings together every week. We would visit the local state parks and go hiking and bird watching. We often had quiet conversation at my kitchen table, both of us trying to come to terms with our shared past, yet growing in appreciation of each other's company and the men we had become.



My father's death was a bit like my mother's, in that he too had been diagnosed with cancer. I kept working full time, spending my days off with him at the family home which he had moved back into after my mother's death. My boss was kind enough to schedule me around my dad's treatment, but, as I saw his health declining and his body ravaged by the chemo, I took a leave of absence from work in order to care for him. It broke my heart to see him go, but having lost my only sister and oldest brother between my parents' deaths, I was now well-practiced in the art of letting go.

I had a sense of peace in my father's passing. We did not have to gather all our inner resources and expend our energies trying to reconcile and find forgiveness. Together, we had forged a relationship of comfortable companionship and mutual admiration for each other. Today, I am both happy and sad to say that when I lost my father, I lost the man who was my best and most faithful friend. But the last and most tragic death in my family that left me reeling and struggling for meaning and healing was that of my brother, Paul. It was a severe blow that pierced deeply.

Paul was always brash and loud, rowdy and raucous. He was almost two years younger than I was, but he was the one who taught me how to smoke. He was the one who brought me out of my shell by taking me to parties and introducing me to his friends. Even when we were very young,

he was the fearless one and I the cautious one. One of my earliest memories is being in a double baby stroller with him. I can remember that every time the stroller hit a bump, the hood would come down and leave us in complete darkness. When the darkness fell, I would be filled with such fear that I could not even breathe. I wanted to scream, but I could not even get enough air into my lungs. But Paul, to my little mind's amazement, would laugh and giggle as if this was a much improved game of peek-a-boo. That was Paul, fun and fearless.

When Paul and I were old enough to go out trick-or-treating on our own, he ingeniously conceived of a way to combine Mischief Night and Halloween into one night of wickedness. He had been saving little packs of mustard, ketchup, and relish from the school cafeteria. I was mystified. "What are we supposed to do with these?" I asked. "Squirt people's houses with condiments?" "No," he said. Then he explained that all the doors of the apartments in the complex where his friend Tony lived, opened outward. "So one of us can get the treats, while the other one stands behind the door and holds the packet of ketchup in the crack where the hinge is, and when they shut the door... Splat!"

He would knock on the door and collect the treats while I slipped the condiment packet through the opening. The unsuspecting victim would ooh and ahh over Paul's costume, drop candy in



# You will always be playing the games of “what if”

his bag, shut the door, and then, “Son of a bitch!” We would run down the stairs of the building, taking them two at a time, until we were safely outside, and drop to the ground laughing. I can still remember the flash of adrenaline rushing through me, the chill of the autumn air and the dampness of the grass penetrating my costume and cooling my overheated little body. Then, after catching our breath, we would go to the next building and do it again.

Once, when my mother was in one of her rages, Paul dared to stand up to her, refusing to give her a direct answer to a question. I can no longer remember what they were arguing about or how it started, but I do remember how it ended. My mother screamed, “From now on, when I ask you a question, it’s ‘Yes, ma’am’ and ‘No, ma’am.’ *Do you understand me?*” Paul impishly looked up at her and said, “Well, yes, ma’am and no, ma’am.” I could not believe it. I tried to stifle my laughter, but when I looked at Paul, it was no use. We both laughed like fools, while my mother vainly slapped the air in the directions of our laughter.

Where Paul was fearless and careless, I was pensive and careful—except when it came to trick-or-treating. We complemented each other easily while young, but these differences slowly led us in different directions. Though we never really lost contact with one another, we saw each other less and less and our conversations became more halting and began to lack the natural ease they once had.

In the weeks prior to his death, Paul had called and left a couple of messages on my answering machine. I could tell, in each instance, that he had been drinking, and I did not have the energy to hold a conversation with him while he was drunk. I had been meaning to call back later, but the days turned into weeks, and then I just forgot all about him.

When I got the phone call telling me that Paul had killed himself, my heart seemed to stop in mid-beat. Everything stopped. I felt dizzy—not because the room was spinning, but because all my thoughts had stopped. For that one brief moment, nothing else mattered. I had no worries for the future and no concern for the past. I had no other thought than the present. I was truly, as they say, in the moment.

I do not know how in the world I got through the days immediately after my brother’s death. I had no choice but to work, as the only other two store managers were on vacation. In addition, I had his funeral to plan. It was not until about a month after his suicide that I began to be able to grieve. And in the process of my grieving, I plumbed the depth of my feelings of guilt. I sobbed, thinking how utterly alone he must have felt, how beyond repair he must have viewed his life, how unlovable and unwanted he must have felt. Even now, when I try to fathom his reasoning, I still tear up inside.

I know I will never be the same again. I do not care who you are, if someone in

## and “if only” with yourself—and you will always lose.

your family takes his own life, you will feel guilty. You will always be wondering what you could have done differently. You will always be playing the games of “what if” and “if only” with yourself—and you will always lose.

It was not long after his death that I learned about the Mexican Holiday, El Dia de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead. I was so deeply moved by the reverence paid to the departed on the Day of the Dead that I decided I too would celebrate this holiday. On the thirtieth of October, I gathered what few family photos I had and brought them down to my garden. I lit candles and burned incense, and honored my loved ones. Nothing spectacular happened—just an outpouring of love toward my mother and father and my sister and brothers.

Two nights later, however, I received a visit from my brother Paul. I dreamt that I was walking across an intersection of brick paved streets, just like the kind we grew up with in the old colonial section of Dover, Delaware. These bricks were a dusty shade of pomegranate, and the curbs that bordered them were a soft, rich shade of burnt orange. The world was filled with dappled sunlight, which fell through leaves of pink, orange, rust, and red. As I walked across the intersection in this pastel rendered world of rich autumn colors, I thought I saw my brother walking past me in the opposite direction. A feeling of loss and sadness swept over me.

I considered walking on, but I had to be sure.

I stopped right in the middle of the intersection and turned around. “That is Paul,” I thought to myself. “Paul! Paul!” I called out. Almost reluctantly, he turned around to face me. I ran to him. I had to know why. “Paul, why did you do it? Why?”

“I was lonely,” he replied simply.

“Oh, Paul. I’m so sorry,” I said, as my eyes welled with tears. “I didn’t know.”

He touched my arm, and in so doing, turned a beautiful, powdery shade of blue that only a Hindu deity could get away with. “It’s okay,” he said. “Now you’re the one teaching me.” I was confused. He smiled good-naturedly and said, “You’re showing me that much can be resolved in a single lifetime.”

With tears in our eyes, we embraced, and suddenly we were weightless. I felt the freedom of being disembodied. It was as if we had become pure energy. The city spun in circles below us, becoming a dizzying kaleidoscope of reds and yellows. I turned to Paul and saw that the arms that held me were now wings of white. Looking down at my own arms, I realized that both he and I had become embracing doves. Laughing, I said, “Look, Paul! Look! We’re doves. I never dreamt it could be so beautiful.” And as the words left my mouth, I felt myself gently sinking back into my bed with less than the full weight of my former self — and I let go.

# The Question

Sarah Belles

How far does the light reach?  
I cannot see it yet, and I am in need of others to describe it.  
Are its rays warm?  
Do they last? And for how long?  
When they reach me, will I be able to touch them?  
Or will they only move across the room when morning turns to noon?  
Noon to evening, then to night, as I hear the order goes.

Where does the light come from?  
And where does one find it?  
Or does it find you when you're not looking?  
Should I be patient and keep on waiting, or quit and seek it out?  
I need someone to tell me this, as I am still quite in the dark.  
Feeling the stillness that fills in corners and empty door ways.  
Perhaps it will fill me too in time.

Why does the light shine?  
Does it do it out of duty, convenience, or pleasure?  
Is it apt to change its mind? Does it choose who or what it illuminates?  
How intensely will it beam down on one's shoulders?  
And how long can one take it before it becomes too much?  
Do any of these questions really serve a purpose?  
And will the answers given, be the ones I want to hear?

Wilhen Suriel

Dream World



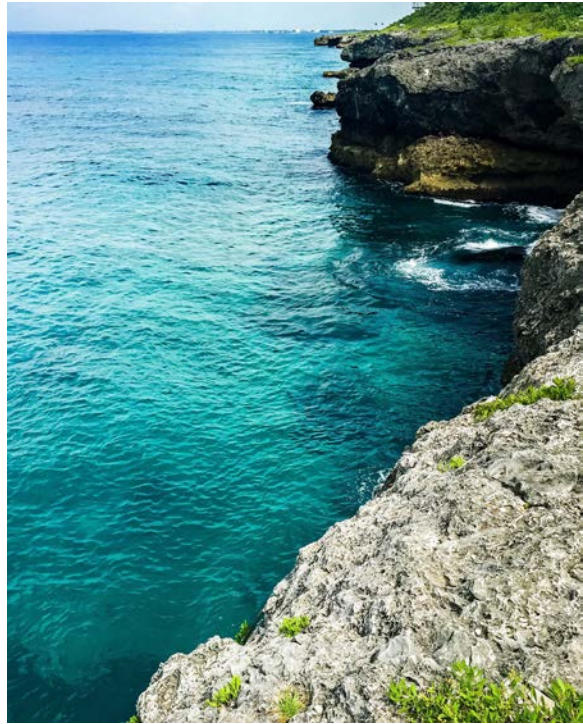


Him

Shades of Grey



Bluest



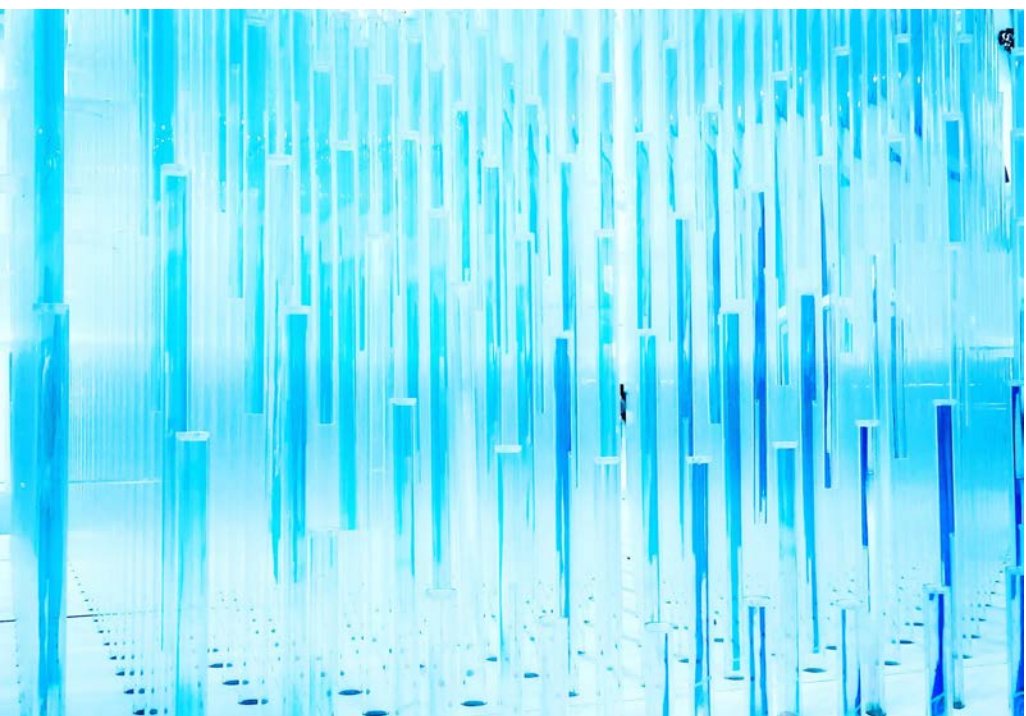
Corrupted by Nature



Entwined



Freefall





Tranquil

Ever Green





# Thighs

Anisa Jackson

The warm wood dug into her thighs;  
exposed splinters scratched against silky smooth skin.  
The scratching and poking of the wood against her body  
felt like the heaviness in her chest that was scratching and poking at her heart.  
Inhale, exhale; she matched her breathing with the gentle tumble of the waves.  
She imagined each breath being carried off on the tips of the waves, into deeper waters.

Her toes curled back, to the worn balls of her feet, as they grazed against the cool water.  
The wooden dock creaked and moaned as the waves  
circled the dock and whispered to her heart.  
Sea salt spray graced her thighs.  
Under the sun, the droplets shimmered on her skin;  
But under the sun, shivers still flooded her body.

Sea foam collected on top of the aqua-colored water,  
as the tension in her chest began to push up against her skin.  
The heavy tension pinned her thighs  
to the wood, and smothered her body.  
This uncertainty was eating her alive, starting with her heart.  
She begged to be swept away by a wave.

Unheard, she tossed her prayer into the water  
And smoothed her fingers over her skin  
that was riddled with tiny scars; and rippled like small waves.  
The scars were reminders left on her thighs.  
Reminders of the daring escapes her sadness had made from within her body.  
Still, the sadness pounds at her heart.

Mahogany eyes stare down into the bluish waves'  
depths. Hypnotized by the water,  
she dreams of unscarred thighs  
and an unburdened heart.  
Dipping and curving, her skin  
refuses to let any of the heaviness escape her body.

Embraced in a dark mystique, the water  
beckons to her heart,  
and implores her body  
to sink under the waves.  
the sea promises to ensnare and encase her thighs,  
as the sea salt spray dries on her skin.

Taunting and daunting, the waves  
whisper as they glide over one another. Her body  
trembles as she leans forward and the water swallows her thighs.



Mayra Perez-Barajas  
*Lovers Meet Again*  
Mixed Media

## An Altered Record: The Influence of Photography on Memory

Amanda O'Donohue

*While a painting or a prose description can never be other than a narrowly selective interpretation, a photograph can be treated as a narrowly selective transparency. But despite the presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness, the work that photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth. Even when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience. . . . Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are.*

—Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

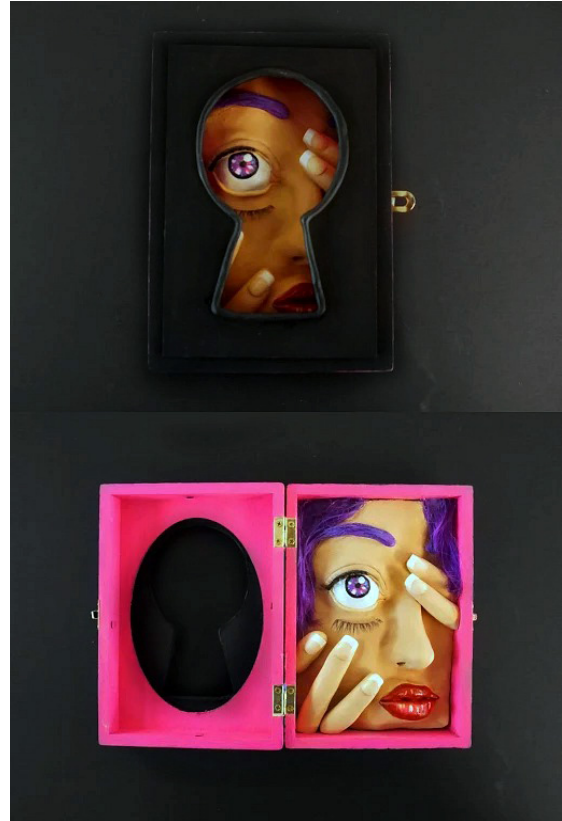
In some ways we can say that our memories darken with time. An event, a face, a conversation, bright and detailed when we first recall it, in time will fade into darkness. The word photography is based on the Greek *phos*, meaning “light” and *graphê*, meaning “drawing, writing.” Together they mean to “draw with light” (“Where”). It feels like a spark goes off when we stumble upon an old photo of a seemingly long forgotten moment—and all the memories the artifact holds come flooding in. The photo serving as a lantern in the labyrinth that is our stored memory quickly exposes buried experiences, drawing them to the forefront of our minds. This “light writing” serves a mnemonic purpose, quickly and easily creating artifacts of events and human actions. It brings to light many things that would be impossible to illuminate otherwise, allowing

us to document and share past experiences around the world and across generations. It transports us to another time or another place in ways unlike any other medium. But still a photograph is merely a simulacrum. It can encompass an image wholly and in detail in its representation, but it is still a representation—a representation of a moment of the original phenomenon.

Photojournalism has opened up a new realm of photography and is now a field of work in existence solely because of the desire to document through photographs. Photojournalists document and publicize events and people, shining a light on things otherwise unseen and unappreciated. In his article for *the Atlantic*, “Pictures that Changed History: Why the World Needs Photojournalists,” editor David Rhode insists, “Professional photographers are vital. Without them, the world’s conscience

will wither. They bear witness for all of us." It seems, as Rhode suggests, photojournalism is essential for communication across the globe. Photography, like a well-written book, can transport us to a different place, a different era, a different place on earth, into another's life. But unlike any written work, it does so instantaneously. It is harder to shove an uncomfortable image to the back of our minds than the written word: "Their [photographs'] context and presentation can greatly influence the way we understand everything from historical narratives to current cultural issues and situations" ("Photography"). Because of this dominating characteristic, photojournalism has changed the way we see the world, showing us in full detail the sometimes painful reality that exists elsewhere. Publicizing world events and giving us visual representations of them, photographs solidify their place in history for long after its generation passes.

But does photography capture the world in full detail? Yes, it is true that photography is considered to be the most accurate and vivid medium for documentation. But even so, it is merely a representation—a copy of a captured moment. Not everything can fit in the frame. We tend to view photographs as objective representations because they putatively are not personal accounts of an event. They are not written narratives from the author's point of view. And although this may be true to some extent, photojournalists still choose



where to point the lens and therefore what they capture is not a perfectly unbiased representation. Further still, there are certainly many cases in which the media site publicizing the photographs are selective in which photographs they use, possibly projecting a certain impression of an event that is less accurate than we are led to believe. Katy Parry of the University

## What comes first—the photographs or the feelings?

of Leeds in the UK discusses this in her research article, “Images of Liberation? Visual Framing, Humanitarianism and British Press Photography during the 2003 Iraq Invasion”: “Selected visions of war are produced, circulated and viewed within specific historical, cultural and political circumstances, and via diverse media outlets which themselves tend to carry their own identifiable properties of genre, style and political partisanship” (1186). Through such selective publishing, photojournalists can portray an event in a way that may not be entirely honest. As Parry discusses, war is a prime example of the selective publishing of photographs, which leads to the question: what comes first—the photographs or the feelings?

We can undoubtedly see that photographs we find from WWII are portrayals of good against evil, heroism amid turmoil. Certainly, there are many photographs that simply represent the atrocities of Nazi Germany. But would we have less of these photographs if the playing field was reversed? There were thousands of German soldiers held in Prisoner-of-War

(POW) camps in the United States, who were civilized and hard-working, but we do not often see photographs of them. Mel Luetchens was a young American boy during WWII. In an interview for *The Smithsonian* on POWs working on his father’s farm, Luetchen expresses, “I looked forward to it. They played games with us and brought us candy and gum” (qtd. in Garcia). War photography seems to bring humanity to something we are desensitized to. But does it only offer humanity to those we want to see as human?

Photography is compelled by human sentiment and, like any other medium, is influenced by our standpoints. Objective photography is not totally possible. “Photographs,” according to *MoMA Learning*, “are forms of representation, shaped by a series of decisions made by the photographer” (“Photography”). Our photographs represent only the things we choose to present. Even candid, unedited photographs are taken for a reason. Our personal interests and reasons drive the photographs we take—and that is

what makes photography a powerful medium for personal documentation and artistic expression. But when it comes to objective documentation, it is apparent that photography has shortcomings. It is easy to take photographs as gospel truth, especially in the case of documenting situations that are hard to see. But ultimately, the photographic record's integrity is influenced by what is seemingly *not* present in that record: human sentiment and quite possibly ulterior motives.

The issue of motives is especially important when analyzing the use of photographs in social media. An average of 52,000,000 photos is posted daily to Instagram alone ("Instagram"). That does not include other popular social media sites such as Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter. According to *Merriam-Webster*, the word "selfie" was first used in written form in 2002 ("Selfie"). It was not until 2012 that the word started to gain popularity and it was named "Word of the Year" in 2013 by the *Oxford* dictionary ("Oxford"). A selfie, just like the act of photography, is so common that its presence in our lives is often unnoticed or unrecognized. This careless and self-centered recording is the perfect indicator of how photography has morphed into what it is most often today: a means for self-glorification. We can use it to give ourselves and our lives a polished aesthetic that evades the true subject matter and eludes our true intention behind sharing it. The ability to share our

photographs easily through modes such as social media is not wrong in and of itself; rather, it is our overuse or misuse of it that creates the problem. Social media offers us the vessel to hold romanticized versions of ourselves through our photographs at arm's length while giving our images exposure across the globe. This attention inflates our sense of self and distorts the purpose behind photography: it is now a resource to spotlight ourselves.

In her treatise on aesthetic, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*, Susanne Langer makes the argument that art creates "the paradox of objective feeling." Through experiencing an artist's work, we can have a shared emotional experience and that emotional experience is predictable. If we trace the objective feelings back to their origins, we will find an artist whose goal is to share personal interpretation, feelings, or experiences. In the miracle of art, the artist transfers a personal feeling into a physical form that is viewed by others and processed emotionally. In this sense, art is a receptacle for shared objective feelings to take place.

If we view the purpose and effect of art through the lens of Langer's theory, then we must judge the function of a photographic image in this way as well—as a symbol of expression. From this perspective, photography, just like any other form of art, by creating a virtual reality of some sort in the images of the objects that it produces, brings the artist and the audience together

and becomes expressive of human feeling. Now, however, the proportions are tilted: photography, today, is mostly self-centered with little shared feeling. We have hijacked it to use for our own personal promotional gain. In the selfie, we are presenting ourselves as art—not art as a record of a shared emotion. The selfie exemplifies our internal drive in our use of photography. We are not using it as a form of aesthetic communication; instead, we are toying with the medium of photography to promote ourselves, or rather, an idealized version of ourselves.

Because of the common self-centered misuse of photography, the line between art and public relations is becoming blurred. We use photography so often to aestheticize our lives and present ourselves as art while simultaneously promoting ourselves for a self-esteem boost. The purpose of our photographs is to seemingly connect with others, but in reality our intention is to simply get a positive reaction. Art and public relations (PR) are different. Art is intended to call upon our shared emotional experience, whereas PR is intended to give an impression, whether true or false, to elevate the person or company producing the artifact. It is defined as “the profession or practice of creating and maintaining goodwill of an organization’s various publics (customers, employees, investors, suppliers, etc.), usually through publicity and other nonpaid forms of communication” (“Public Relations”). PR

performs its functions by using social media as a means to communicate a self-image, but we try to integrate both aspects, or PR and art, into our own photos—to promote ourselves and our image.

The reliance on photography as a tool for documentation is inarguable. We rely on it in countless everyday situations and we rely on it especially in rare situations. We have an innate trust in photographs and the authenticity behind them. This unrealistic trust may have dangerous consequences. Because we trust photographs, but are also using them to our advantage, there is the risk that they will affect our memories.

Because we are using photography to lend ourselves a romanticized version of us, we are shifting our current perceptions of ourselves in a way that may cause us to live vicariously through the internet version of ourselves that we have created. The simulacrum is becoming the self, which will at the very least leave us with memories of an ultimately lonely and fleeting portion of our lives. A good example of this self-centered use of photography is a previously Instagram-famous teen, Essena O’Neill, who earned herself over half a million followers and a modeling contract through her photos. Her Instagram, not unlike many Instagram accounts that currently exist, consisted entirely of photos of her lounging on the beach, relaxing by the pool, or in seemingly luxurious venues. O’Neill admits in an interview with *Time* magazine that

We have an innate trust in photographs and the authenticity behind them.

she decided to quit social media because it was consuming her life: “Social media, especially how I used it, isn’t real. Its contrived images and edited clips ranked against each other” (qtd. in McCluskey). Essentially, the majority of O’Neill’s photos were sponsored. These candid-appearing photographs were actually the results of staged photo shoots that lasted hours, after which she would post only one or two from the hundreds that were taken. Like O’Neill’s ‘staged’ life, if the lives we create through photographs are not truly real, then our memories will not be, either.

Photographs can also influence our collective memory as a society because they offer selective slices of a period of time, a certain event, or certain people—and because the portion they capture is small and may only account for a minute part of an event that is not accurate to the broader story behind it. But there is another important question: “who is telling the story—or rather, who is behind

the camera?” Photographer Anastasia Taylor-Lind addresses this question in her article “How a Lack of Representation is Hurting Photojournalism”: “The value of a photograph goes beyond the magazine, newspaper or web page it is placed in. It’s part of the editorial content we [photojournalists] collectively generate, not only as a piece of journalism but also as a historical record.” Her statement reiterates the impact photojournalism can have on the collective memory of our society. Photographs produced by photojournalism are often used to perpetuate historical events—to solidify their place in history, but there is a risk that comes with this collectively-generated historical record: as Taylor-Lind explains, the risk of creating “a single homogenous narrative that can lend too much weight on a small part of the larger story, which is often created by “a lack of diversity in photojournalists.” If “the bulk of the narrative” were created by “the predominately white middle-class heterosexual man from the world’s richest countries,” it would limit our perspective of the world and understanding of history. Such homogenous narratives would then shape the way we perceive history and the way we remember it.

In addition to the way photographic images can misrepresent people or events, the accessibility of photography can impact our memory as well. This happens through the combination of two phenomena: The Photo-Taking Impairment





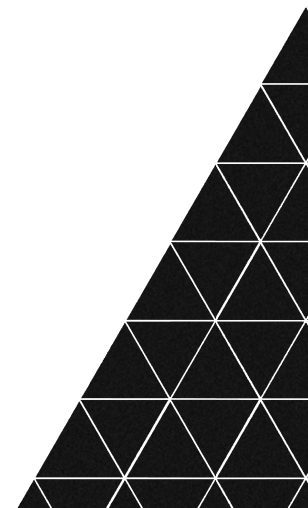
Effect and The Google Effect. The Photo-Taking Impairment Effect was discovered by Linda M. Henkel, a psychological scientist, who claims that the effect takes place because often taking a photo distracts us from the subject of the photo thus impairing our memory of it. The findings of her museum visitor survey suggest that

there are crucial differences between the mind's eye and the camera's eye: "If participants took a photo of each object as a whole, they remembered fewer objects and remembered fewer details about the objects and the objects' locations in the museum than if they instead only observed the objects and did not photograph them."

The Google Effect comes into play when we pull our phone to snap a picture every time we see something that we have even the smallest desire to save. The Google Effect is described by Betsy Sparrow, Jenny Liu, and Daniel M. Wegner as “[t]he social form of information storage [that] is also reflected in the findings that people forget items they think will be available externally and remember items they think will not be available” (778). The volume and accessibility of information affects our memory negatively because we tend not to try to remember experiences when we know we can later access the records of those moments later. Many of us have hundreds of photos stored on our phones and computers. We take a photo to ensure we will remember that moment and be able to relive it later, but never actually get around to doing anything with it. Therefore, not only is the initial creation of our memory impaired by the act of photography, our memories of the subject of the photograph are buried with the photograph itself in our camera roll, and we will likely never touch it.

These effects of photography on our memory have silently snuck into our lives and have become blown out of proportion. There is great importance in cultivating awareness of the potential influence photography can have on our memory as individuals and society as a whole. The effects of our misuse of photography through social media could impact our

lives in ways that we cannot imagine now. The way we treat photojournalism—and the way we create and archive the photographic images of major events could influence how we view them and ultimately alter our perception of history. And the constant urge to photograph life events, instead of simply observing them, could have a negative impact on how well we remember those moments. The ubiquity of photography is here to stay and with that the influences it brings. We must therefore be conscious of the potential negative change it can bring to our lives, while also trying to utilize it well and for our benefit as individuals and as a society.



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## Five More Minutes

Christopher Smith-Thompson

My alarm clock rings  
Small mockingbirds start to sing  
Sunshine peeking through

Sunday morning air  
Blows gently through my dark hair  
While cooling my room

My nostrils flair wide  
Bacon and eggs made inside  
The distant kitchen

Both eyes remain shut  
I promise I will get up  
In five more minutes

# Losing Me

Elizabeth Boyce

Anorexia stripped me of my own existence. The disease made a home in the concaves of my body for over a year. It started out simple, miles away from harmful, but it quickly and silently morphed into something else. It was the beginning of 2014 when I decided that eleven years of being obese was enough. I began to exercise daily and eat healthier, exactly what the doctors had told me to do since I was five years old. I continued down this new journey, and in September of that same year I learned about an app that would help me control the number of calories I was putting in my body—exactly what I needed.

My sixteen-year-old self, who should have only been worried about being noticed by the cute boy in her English class while observing him, getting her driver's license, and hanging out with friends—was suddenly using up her spare minutes in a day to calculate the calories she so consciously put in her mouth and the ones she burned. In the midst of this complex and awful disease, I did not see anything wrong with my behaviors, but my eyes have been opened since then. I now know that I was slowly killing myself without my own permission. I now know that there are hundreds and thousands of other girls just like me doing everything they possibly can to put their already too-frail bodies into a smaller pant size. I now know that there

are girls just like me that are sitting in doctors' offices, and listening to medical experts tell them they need to lose weight. I am now aware of how the media and marketing companies skew their advertisements and purposefully fuel the voice of disordered eating in their heads. I now know that this sickness is stealing life away from innocent girls, boys, women, and men.

It was one a.m. on a Saturday, and it was my eleventh trip to the bathroom. Each time I entered, I forced myself to pee out any small bit that was left in my bladder. I then quietly sucked in my skin and bones, as if it would make a difference, and stepped on the scale. I closed my eyes, crossed my fingers, breathed out, and looked down: disappointment. Again. After losing sixty-three pounds, going from two hundred ten pounds to one hundred forty seven, and being five foot seven inches tall, there is only so much more fat that can be brutally erased. But the invasion of anorexia did not allow me to realize this.

There is no single moment that I can look back on now and say, "Yes! That is what must have woken me up from my sleepwalking self!" Yet there are many moments I look back on now, and I see them differently from what they seemed to be at the time. Those moments—moments that should have shaken me awake, actually



fueled me to keep holding on so tightly. There is one day that sticks out the most: during the winter of my junior year of high school, I packed my lunch of  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup blueberries, 3 pieces of broccoli without the stem, and a small orange. I stared down at it—and made sure to check that the space between my thighs was still there. It was, but inside, *I* was gone.

I began lying to myself and others around me. My stomach was being filled more with the compliments of others than actual food. I was exercising for two hours every day, burning eight hundred calories and hardly eating eight hundred calories. Crying over eating half of an Oreo became the norm. Crying at one a.m.—because I was afraid of gaining every pound back—was no longer out of the ordinary. Those who grabbed my wrists as if they could explain the entirety of my existence—were amazed at the cold piece of flesh that covered only bone, and fantasized about living a life such as mine. I looked in mirrors, and, though my collar bones protruded, I thought it was still not enough.

No one talked about the hair that fell out of my scalp and clogged the drain. No one knew the reason. It was as though my mom had unconsciously rehearsed a response to my great uncle's comment: "You should look out for your girl! She's getting too

skinny." Or to my mom's boss' reaction to seeing me for the first time in months: "Wow. She is too thin. Is she okay?"

"Yes! She's fine! She's healthy, and she just wants to get healthier! No need to worry!"

But my idea of "healthy" was skewed. Healthy is not having a panic attack two weeks before Christmas over how many cookies you will end up eating. Healthy is not avoiding friends so that you can fit in your third workout of the day. Healthy is not being the smallest you have ever been in your life and still despising the person in the mirror.

A year and three months after anorexia took me captive, I had a checkup at my doctor's office. I was expecting to go there and be commended on how I had finally changed my life, but instead I was told to eat more. My whole life I was told to eat less; so I did. I was mortified, embarrassed, and confused as to what I had done wrong.

My recovery from anorexia was not a simple one. There are days when it tries to creep in, but I have found that I am now stronger than it is. I have gained back weight, and I am currently recovering from the physical and mental damage I did to my body while under anorexia's hold.

Eating disorders are not beautiful; yet they seem to have a sort of mystique. The idea that thin equals beautiful is imprinted

into girls at a young age—and does not seem to leave sometimes. While having a conversation about my anorexia, a friend of mine, who has a young daughter of her own, said, “Oh, my gosh. I wish I had the self-control to be anorexic.” I was so completely baffled that I did not know what to say. This past summer while working at a daycare, I heard a table full of six-year-old boys discussing their weight. One boy chimed in and said, “Yeah, I skip meals sometimes so that I stop getting fat.” He then explained how food had calories and calories were bad. This was a six-year-old boy who was the size of a normal six-year-old-boy—and my heart broke. Big players in the diet industry give promises: “ten pounds in a week”—and vulnerable people who have low self-esteem and distorted eating habits fall for such pledges. Grocery shopping, I found a bag of popcorn that said, “Guilt free! No need to fear the weekly weigh-in anymore!”

We are taught that feeling guilty while eating is normal, and we should only eat for the sake of what appears on the scale. We are brainwashed to believe that we are unlovable because of our size. The media takes women’s bodies and alters them to the point that their bodies are no longer theirs. There is too much pressure on teenage girls to be small and petite, and quiet and submissive. There are too many television shows and movies with the fat person being the comedic relief, the one that ends up with no one except for the box of pizza. Health magazines portray only completely fit

and fat-free men and women—not normal people living healthy lives. The media tells us that being healthy only exists when we are thin, but the truth is that the way a person’s body is shaped does not often determine their level of health.

In the past year of recovery, I have learned that sometimes gains are not losses, which is an incredible change compared to crying over a half pound gain a year ago. These days I am alive. I remember a cold February day when I was off school because of the snow. This is a day that I hold close to my heart, because I realized how much more life I had in my bones. I spent the morning being strong enough to shovel snow and not avoiding lunch with my family—and the afternoon reading a good novel. As I closed the last page of the book, my heart felt whole. And I remembered a time when I had trouble getting through sentences on one page, because my mind wandered to what I would eat next and how I would burn it off. I was stolen away from myself, but now that anorexia has packed its bags and left, I am able to feel again. I am able to look in the mirror and tell myself that I was created good even when I do not feel it. I am able to breathe in the wind without fear of falling over. I am able to go to parties and eat a piece of cake if I would like to. I am able to run and actually enjoy it, because I am doing it to be stronger, not smaller. I am able to share my story, so that girls and boys who are in the same place as I was are able to see a life of hope and freedom.



# Free Will

Catherine Mahony

I rested on rails made for trains,  
Dumber creatures than I have met the same fate,  
But where animals can wander fences remain.

I have left behind only stains.  
I settle on slabs of iron rich slate.  
I rested on rails made for trains.

My bones will be switches for change--  
My body used so others reach gates,  
But where animals can wander fences remain.

I stand on raised platforms, estranged.  
The only thing left to do now is wait.  
I rested on rails made for trains.

People hurry by their faces deranged.  
Their feet keep moving at a staggering rate,  
But where animals wander fences remain.

The train whistle still bellows refrains,  
My screams and its piping still resonate.  
I rested on rails made for trains,  
But where animals can wander fences remain.



# Growth

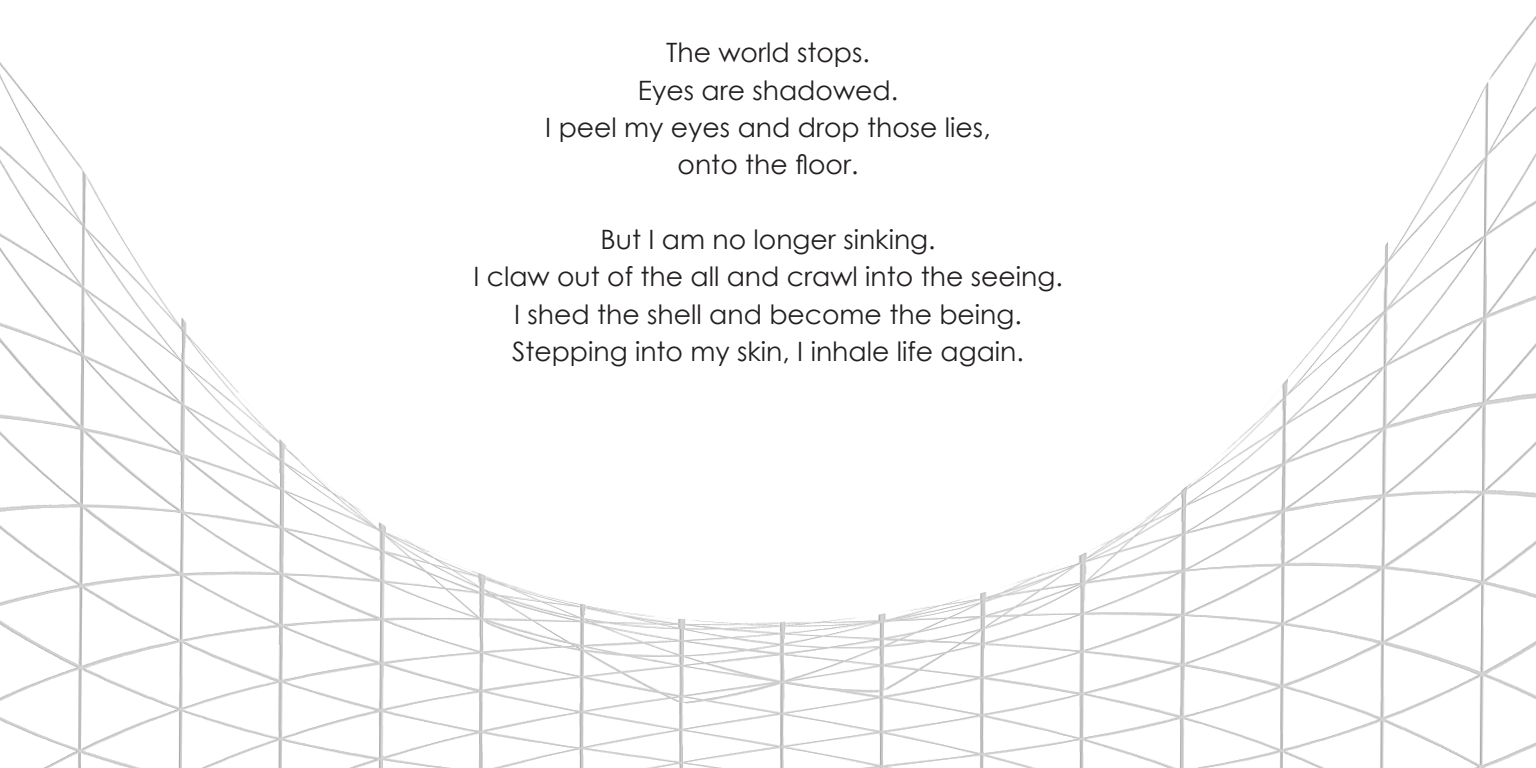
Nicholas Fulwood

Images flash past like lightning,  
Past memories crash into one another looking for escape.  
Blindsided, my bones grind to the rhythm of time.  
Cloaked in the past, I choke on memories.

My heart stutters,  
Beating fists and breaking wrists.  
Generating tension, I resist.  
I breathe deep and it seeps, into my bones.

The world stops.  
Eyes are shadowed.  
I peel my eyes and drop those lies,  
onto the floor.

But I am no longer sinking.  
I claw out of the all and crawl into the seeing.  
I shed the shell and become the being.  
Stepping into my skin, I inhale life again.



# Editorial Policy

**L**egacy has been published for a general college readership since 2001 by the students of Reading Area Community College. *Legacy's* student staff seeks to inspire intellectual curiosity, excellence, and creativity in research, prose, poetry, and visual arts by presenting student work in a publication that honors the principles of the college—equality, diversity, and community.

*Legacy* is published once a year by students currently enrolled in credit courses at Reading Area Community College. *Legacy's* main purpose is to provide an annual showcase for outstanding student work—research, prose, poetry, artwork, and photography. *Legacy* is the property of Reading Area Community College and available free to all students. *Legacy* is a member of the following press associations: *Columbia Scholastic Press Association*, *Community College Humanities Association*, and *Associated Collegiate Press*.

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## Colophon:

The sixteenth annual edition of *Legacy* was designed using Windows-based personal computers. The software used in this production included Adobe InDesign CS5.5 and Adobe Photoshop CS6. 400 copies of Volume Sixteen were printed by Reading Eagle Press Commercial Printing, Reading, PA. The cover was printed on 100# Sterling Premium Matte cover stock using a 4/1 color process in an 8x8 inch format. The body of the journal was printed in black and color ink on Accent Opaque Smooth 70# Text paper. The font for the body copy was Century Gothic. The font for the titles and authors/artists of submitted work was Century Gothic.

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