



Tenth Street
Miscellany
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Tenth Street Miscellany

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Editor's Notes

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Music

Epilogue

Ashley Cutright



Underdog

Amie Smith



Madrid to Pamplona

Keith Morris



Poetry

Ira

Oluniyi Oluniyi

do not plumb
my depths
you will not like
what you see
amidst the mirk
and ink—the fissures
bubbling up an eye
less creature than fire
fly with string cast
over floor looking
for you above
a world apart
and glowing

Teacups

Ruchi Acharya

We are the women united as one-
We make sure that things get done.

Pink tunic, soft music,
time for you, time for me,
Thank you for visiting.
We'll see
if each cup of tea
can bring us some harmony?

At times we're
broken and bruised,
abused and used,
all ruined,
we poor sad things.

For my friendship is free.
Surrounded by these
beautiful trees,
let's forget the past
and feel this silent breeze.

For we are curious as caterpillar
Oh! I can feel what you feel sister.
Let's purify the press,
Let's talk to men like men,
Let's help, nurture and feed
I'll still be a feminine
fighting against
poverty and inequality.

The garden view is so overwhelming,
With little sips of tea,
my willpower is strengthening,
Let's walk shoulder to shoulder,

time to act as a boulder
to bring down the injustice,
Uproot the power of greed,
Let's clean these dirty politics.
Altogether you and me.

Cookie plates are now empty,
The clock now strikes at six twenty,
before it's late evening,
before our next meeting,
let's promise each other-
We'll never fall,
We'll make this happen
to let us live at all,
it's our call, let's be phenomenal.
For we are almighty women.

Dreams//Nightmares

Mia Del Bando

Nose bleed on a dirty pillowcase
Third nightmare in a row
Russian roulette with my happiness

Knocking down a dream
Like a proud chess piece
Lucid dreamer with ambitious agendas

Sex scenes from my past
Haunting in my crowded cortex
Ex-boyfriends' faces meshed together
Like a horrific art and crafts project

Is it a nightmare if you still want it?
I don't miss any of them
But I miss the girl I sacrificed
To keep everyone happy

I'd lasso her out
Save myself, like old black and white films
The damsel cut from the train tracks
And kill the villain

I turn my head back
Welcomed by a bullet to my temple
Dart to the gravel
I think I murdered myself

I forgot it all once I woke up

Slice of Thigh

Katrina Kaye

Your hand loitered too long
against the scar on my thigh.
A slim trench of fluttered skin
hidden in the darkness of our bed.

I felt the graze of fingertips
skulk back and forth
and you became aware
of wrinkled depression,
a gash healed over with tender tissue,
not forgotten, never mentioned.

You stumbled upon secret slice
as sharp as emerging tooth,
as though neglected stretch of skin
remained hungry and eager
for the affection of fingers.

You, with your stubborn curiosity,
no words, only replied
in soft caress. You lingered
over this mark as though trying
to heal it with heat of your hand,
lending the question whether it is something
you love or long to erase.

Autumn Kenopsia

Juheon Rhee

On the second day of October,
I'll walk down the pavement
laminated with flakes of leaves,
cracked and for all to step on.

Far away, they look like the jewels
of a nearby carnival,
call it the enlightening of the flamed foliage.
Close up,
they are tattered with holes,
perhaps from the bugs.

I can feel the cold
underneath all of my clothes.
The breeze is weak,
but slithers into the gaps of my sweatshirt
and gives its final breath at my core,
long and stretched out.

I can almost sense the wind's
desperation to live,
to keep living,
in the space between my shirt and my skin.

My skin is frozen perhaps,
but is the golden heat,
the shade of the bronzen sun of the twilight sky,
when all is gone but a shiver by the horizon.

Missing

Olivia Tyner

I'm missing out,
And missing you,
I'm missing life,
And I don't know what to do.

Time is racing
I feel I'm running out,
Yet the world appears frozen
And I just want to shout.

I want to scream,
Open the flood gates
For all the parties,
And movies and would be dates.

For the world that once was,
And the world that I'm craving,
For the life I'm now living,
The tragedy we're braving.

I'm missing out,
On love and life,
Missing you,
And all your strife.

Missing concerts,
And holidays,
Missing road trips,
In this year long haze.

I'm missing things
I didn't know I could,
And wishing now
That I could find the good.

It's been months,
And this tunnel is too long,
And my flashlight is dead,
And it all feels so wrong.

So here I am,
missing,
And feeling lost,
And reminiscing.

Dancing in the kitchen,
And dying my hair,
And building blanket forts,
Pretending no one else is there.

Now I'm alone,
And nothing feels the same,
And I want to point fingers,
But there's no-one to blame.

So I'll be missing,
And losing my mind,
And waiting for the light,
And for the world to be kind.

Dr. Jazz

Christine Williams

I am more than a pretty face.
My mind is even more captivating than my dope body.
I am elated to be so educated, with my smart self.

When you see me, make sure that you see...me.
I am multi-dimensional, so take your time.

No idolization necessary,
But I will accept your admiration.

I am a work of art, created by the Master Creator Himself.

When I walk by you ask,
“Can I call you?”
“Yes,” I respond, “You can call me...

Dr. Jazz.”

Untouchable

Lillian DeThomas

While gazing across large bodies of water
I think about the surface like cellophane
a barrier between the depths and the sky

The surface tension around my ankles lets
curious fish investigate. I wonder if they
can tell I am not a fisherman, I am foreign

my legs crack the surface, shattered glass
distends like a broken windshield without
a seatbelt, looking amputated at the knees.

Clastic body tumbles sand into seaglass, it
turns empty bottles beautiful. Silver scraps
of trash embedded like shrapnel glint back

like sunlight eloped, attempting a new life
at the bottom. One holy union, the children
a thousand prismatic colors, blue flesh swells

and the bow bows to bathymetry detected by
sonar, an instrument that makes music so blind
sailors can see invisible mountains. Synesthetic

sadness of relief; the floor rises as it falls like a
sweet breath of ocean air pregnant with a eulogy;
an empty prayer for those swallowed by the sea.

Fiction

Sleeptalker

Rina M. Steen

11:00 p.m.

“Stop tickling me with your monkey fingers.”

I groan and sit up in bed. The crumpled duvet slips to my waist as I prop myself on my elbows.

“Bree.” My croaking, sleep-deluded voice reverberates through the room.

“No, not the bunny hopper... Jeepsers.”

“Bree.” I try again, clearing my throat and rolling my heavy eyes. “Bree?”

She mumbles something unintelligible.

Leaning down, I grab one of the many throw pillows scattering the floor and launch it across the cluttered room. It falls just short of her face, landing on her chest with a delicate whump.

“Huh?” She volts up in alarm, a ragged silhouette against the moonlit blinds lining the wall that her bed is pushed up against. Alas, her eyes are still closed. With a sigh, I fall back, throwing an arm over my eyes, and wish we had splurged the extra three-hundred dollars for a two bedroom apartment.

“Go back to sleep, Bree.”

“Okay, Mr. Napkinschmirz.”

1:00 a.m.

“Meet me at the motel.”

“Again?” I ask the quiet room. Of course, it doesn’t answer. I roll over and face Bree’s side of the room. She’s all curled and twisted up in her blanket, a rather plain thing in the most boring shade of purple. “Bree,” I deadpan, louder this time.

She snorts, her exposed foot twitching.

I get comfortable once more, pulling the covers up to my chin

and breathing deeply.

At least she stopped talking.

“I’ll go all Norman Bates’ Mama on your ass.” she mutters with a swift fluff to her pillow.

My eyes pop open, and I stifle a laugh. I should be recording this.

2:00 a.m.

Groaning. No, moaning.

Did Bree seriously booty-call someone over in the middle of the night? While I was sleeping? And they’re doing that—we share a room, for fucks sake! I never thought I’d have to go over proper roommate etiquette, with Bree of all people. The Queen of Inserting Sticks Up Asses.

The bed thumps.

“Ew. Ew. Ew. Ew.” I rip the pillow out from under my head and hold it to my face, suffocating my ears.

The groaning stops.

I pull the pillow ever so slightly off half my face and dare a peek towards Bree’s side of the room. At first glance, I see her lying on top of her bed covers, starfish-style. Alone, thank God! I release a relieved sigh.

Her hands reach straight up into the air.

“What the fuck?” My slurred whisper traces through the moon-lit room. I pull the rest of the pillow off my face. She really should’ve put “Sleeptalker” on her application before I agreed to room with her. “Breeeeee...You’ve got to be kidding me.” I rub my eyes half mindedly. “I have a presentation tomorrow worth half my grade,” I moan.

“He’s coming to get me,” she pipes up, disturbing my sleepless turmoil.

I knock my head against my headboard. “Who’s coming, Bree?”

Her head turns towards the sound of my voice. “I don’t know. But he looks pretty dead.”

Already the lull of sleep whispers to me, seducing me once more into darkness. “That’s great... Bree...”

I drift off just as her arms drop and her spine distorts. A sickening crack resonates through the dark bedroom.

4:00 a.m.

Early dawn glows on the other side of the plastic blinds, casting the room in a soft meringue. I roll to my other side and absent-mindedly stretch out a leg. It peeps out from under the blanket. My wine-coloured toenails are visible in the dim light. I blink my eyes open.

“Holy shit!” It’s funny what reflexes kick in when startled. I drag myself towards the other side of the bed, narrowly falling off of it and hitting the floor in my haste to untangle myself from the blanket. I try to swallow my stomach that’s found its way into my mouth. “Jesus, Bree.”

Bree stands at the opposite side of my bed, leaning over the spot where I previously laid, in all her bed-head glory. Her high school reunion t-shirt is lopsided, slipping off of one shoulder and haphazardly tucked into the waistband of her worn sweatpants. She just stands there. With closed eyes.

So, she’s upgraded to sleepwalking. Great.

“Go back to bed, Bree. It’s not time to get up yet.” I swipe the now-cold blanket and throw it over me as I lay down and close my eyes. On the other side of the bed.

“Of course, it is. It’s time to wake up, Andrea.”

“Go to sleep, Bree.” I huff, squeezing my eyelids shut against the incoming sunrise. Shuffling follows. I let out a deep breath and allow my muscles to relax.

Finally.

Cold hands grab hold of my shoulders, nailing me to the lumpy mattress. I don’t consider myself a morning person, but I have never opened my eyes so fast before 8 a.m.

“Bree,” my voice wavers in her tightening grip, “You’re sleep-

walking. You need to go to bed.” I try to infuse my voice with the authority of my mother, hoping she’ll respond.

“No, I’m not. I’m a Sleepwalker.” Her voice is monotone.

I gently grasp the wrist of her left hand and attempt to pry it off my shoulder but she only grips me harder.

“Ow! Bree, let go!” Her nails dig into the skin uncovered by my nightshirt.

“You’ll understand,” she says, her voice devoid of its usual annoying calmness. My legs kick off the blanket as I try to find the leverage to remove myself from her hold. Her arms strain with the effort of keeping me still. The skin on her wrists peels where she detains me. As is her shoulder, a sickly yellow layer of flesh underneath reflects in the dawn light.

Something plops on my chest.

I notice the shining piercing first. Then the nose it’s attached to.

A silent scream chokes in my throat and my body goes catatonic. Unable to move, unable to thrash, unable to fight.

“Your fear tastes so good.” Her voice rasps and her mangled, noseless face opens wide. Rotting teeth pierce my throat.

4:03 a.m.

Just like that, I too am a Sleepwalker.

The Verdict

C. Christine Fair

He could have taken their dilapidated car to the co-op. It would've been quicker, but he savored the idea of an excuse to be outside for an extra 40 minutes. It was one of those six days in Chicago when one could enjoy walking a few blocks. At any moment, the city could bloom into a humid heat that made even short strolls unbearable.

With his partially full jute tote in hand, his feet grew heavier near their building. He dreaded walking through their door. No matter what he did, she greeted him with that minacious grimace. She would, as always, insist he got her requested items wrong. Even if he wrote them down and read them back to her, she insisted that he scribbled them incorrectly. Either he didn't care anymore or, worse, he deliberately wanted to demonstrate his disregard for her.

He sat on the stoop staring at the bag and its pathetic contents. A young couple made out at the bus stop across the street. They too were once young and hungry for each other. He felt the need to smoke. Just one, he thought. He forced himself to remember his dad, stented and dying in that hospital bed as lung cancer ravaged him. Halfway through his Camel, he heaved an anxious sigh, rubbed it out and put a stick of gum in his mouth. He considered taking the elevator. The stairs would buy a few more moments of peace. He felt as if he hauled his own corpse up the four floors.

He muttered, perhaps out loud "Why don't I leave her? What the hell is wrong with me for staying?" He turned to see if anyone had heard. The simple question stumped him. Maybe it was their shared loss of that first pregnancy. That day, she took the Number 6 bus home because he could not think to drive their then-new car to pick her up from the office. She didn't bother calling him when she lost the second. He was self-absorbed and distant when she needed him, when she dreamt of sinking into the filthy depths of Lake Michigan like a rock.

How do you walk away from a shared grief that runs deep in your bones? When you are ashamed for letting her take the bus home af-

ter feeling your baby slip out of her body and into that toilet. Twice. What did she think as she looked at those ethereal masses of bloody flesh before she flushed them away with her dreams of motherhood? How did she manage to collect her things from her desk and board the bus with soiled pants? How could she forgive him? He couldn't.

He reached their floor and turned left towards their flat. The wood floors of the hallway groaned beneath his weight. He put his ear to the door to listen for her. Had she fallen asleep with her magazine? He wanted to flit inside. Offload the groceries into the fridge and sneak off to his office. Lock the door and open the bottle of scotch tucked in his file cabinet for such days.

He tentatively inserted and turned the key. The door opened as inaudibly as possible and closed softly. He turned around meekly. She was standing there, legs akimbo and arms crossed. He felt absurd. Surely, she watched him trying to slink in without her notice. Her blurred mascara rendered her a rabid racoon. Her swollen eyes were a transparent ice blue, which made them simultaneously exquisite and haunting.

Her tongue coiled up like an asp, ready to strike. "Where were you all this time?"

He put his hands in his pockets and looked uneasily towards their wizened cat basking in the last remnants of the afternoon sun. He explained that he went to the grocery store, as requested.

"Well. Isn't that interesting? You went to the store. What did you buy...at the store?" She lowered her voice menacingly as she articulated "at the store."

His gut churned. He explained that he bought the apples and oranges she wanted. This was her "fetch me a rock" exercise, which she used to torment him. She'd tell him to "Get me a rock." When returned with a rock in hand, she'd grouse that the rock wasn't igneous or she'd gripe that it was, in fact, igneous. It was either too smooth or too rough. Too big or too small. He waited now for the questions about the apples he bought. Did he buy the Fuji apples she had been craving all week or the tasteless, mealy Red Delicious apples which were ubiquitous and cheap these days? Were the oranges those uninspiring navel oranges she detested as of Wednesday evening, or did

he procure the juicy clementines she enthusiastically mentioned this morning?

“So, you didn’t buy my bananas?” she asked. It came out sinister, as if she caught him in some nefarious plot.

Is she fucking with me again? For fuck’s sake, I cannot keep track. Thinking on his feet, he looked at the cat and stammered. “So, um... about those bananas. I didn’t forget. Not at all. Can you believe those assholes were out of bananas? What grocery store is out of goddamn bananas?”

“No. Actually. I cannot believe they were out of bananas,” she said. She stomped towards the phone and picked it up. Glowering at him, she asked 411 to connect her to the 55th Street Co-Op.

He stood there terrified and awaited the verdict. A miserable night awaited them both.

And for Dessert

Edward Supranowicz

Friday night, so we dined out. And let me tell you ahead of time, Julie is usually a quiet person. Not a little mouse, but a quiet person. I'm sipping my coffee, and she jumps up. She balls her fists, slams them on the table and shouts, "We are all death-eaters. Death-eaters. Eaters of dead chicken, eaters of dead pork, eaters of dead beef, eaters of dead asparagus." Everyone stared at her. I squirmed a bit and reached for her hand to calm her down, but she was already composing herself. She smoothed her dress, flipped her hair, and sat back down. In her sweetest voice, she says to me, "Honey, would you please get me another Big Mac?"

Retribution

Kris Green

“And, when you want something,
all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.”

-Paulo Coelho, “The Alchemist”

Annie sat at her desk looking out the window. She rolled a pencil back-and-forth with her finger. The street was mostly empty. The drizzling rain seemed to be letting up.

She wasn't sure when she had come to the decision. She assumed everybody had thought about it at one point or another. Maybe it was a normal thing to consider, a common dysfunction. But then again, how normal is it to contemplate your own suicide?

She had never thought about it until now. She had thought suicide was something for the selfish, but now she understood it was for people who were... what? Disappointed with the world? Maybe it was for the depressed or the heavily medicated? She wasn't quite sure.

She didn't look at the folded newspaper sitting on her desk. The front page blasted with a picture of Emily Braun who had committed to her decision the week before. Maybe people would say it was a copycat suicide? Was that the term? But that was why they kept notifications of suicides out of the newspaper, right?

Her father worked his forty hours, came home and sat in front of the television. The all-present blob on the couch that died the same way he lived, miserable. Her mother, still living, wasn't happy either. So, how important was happiness?

There wouldn't be a memorial for her like there was for Emily. There wouldn't be a new hashtag. Sweet Emily, Annie thought, I didn't mean to push you in that direction. Emily, who rose in the middle of a meeting, walked out of the room, and off of the roof. How guilty was Annie for this? #sharethepain.

It had something do to with the cosmic karmic scales that prevented her repulsion for Emily from infecting others. Not like it

could. Not like it should. Annie had been almost completely indifferent to Emily. She was more a sign on the side of the road than a roadblock.

She came back to the note she had been trying to write. The anger subsided back to self-pity. Her fingers numb with the pencil still rubbing back and forth on the desk making the familiar rhythmic sound. Maybe she could write something nice to her mother? Who would really care about it? Maybe her mother would on a biological level, yes, but after that would she feel relieved?

She felt like weeping, but that would just be wasting tears. Her suicide would not be coming from a place of self-pity, she told herself, but a desire to make the world a better place. A martyr needed a cause. Action was what changed the world. Action and then recognition for that action.

Of course, before she had pieced the logic of everything together and had come to the conclusion that she was different, there were moments that indicated how the universe worked. It was undeniable that little things just worked out for her.

Annie stared at the small chocolate bar. She had wanted it. She was five or six. Mrs. Graham walked through the door causing the little bell to ring. Annie turned to look but hardly noticed Mrs. Graham holding the hand of her boy, Bill. All she could think was that sweet, delicious chocolate bar, I want it.

Without hesitation, Mrs. Graham grabbed the chocolate bar that Annie desired. Not the same brand or something similar, not one from the same box. No, she grabbed the exact candy bar Annie had been staring at, two behind the front. She hadn't even spoken, hadn't even done her own shopping. She simply bought and paid for it.

"Here you go, sweetie." She handed her the chocolate bar as if it were nothing out of the ordinary.

Bill threw up his hands and began stomping, "Why'd you buy one for that stupid girl?"

"You're too fat to get a candy bar". Mrs. Graham said.

Bill's arms dropped. The tantrum abated. Both mother and son stared at each other in the shock of what just happened. Annie bit into her candy.

Andy Bradbury had been bullying her for weeks on end. Teasing her, pulling her hair, making her life miserable. When she told her daddy, who was halfway through a TV dinner and baseball game, he only made an off-hand comment about the boy having a crush.

It came back to desire. She desired not to be bullied but it was unspecified desire, which is a kind of desire but not a strong one. Her teacher was in front of the class pointing at the chalkboard. Annie looked at her bored fellow classmen and saw Dustin Howitzer. Howitzer would be on the football team but that was a few years and another 100 plus pounds later. He wasn't big, not like he got, but was clear he had just begun a growth spurt, already 3 inches above the other boys.

The desire, finding specificity, had come into fruition. I want Howitzer to beat up Andy Bradbury.

Howitzer stood up in the middle of a lecture on fractions. Annie's mouth dropped open. The teacher who stopped talking and cocked her head to the side unprepared for what would happen. Howitzer walked right to Andy's desk.

"Do you need to use the restroom, Mr.-" Was probably the only thing the teacher could think of to say.

Howitzer clenched his fists and began pummeling Andy. All chairs, except one, were scooted back as everyone rose. He had to be pulled off of Andy. He turned his head slightly coming to his senses and they let him go. Howitzer shook his head as if coming out of daze.

Annie sat in her chair, still in shock. Desire had manifested. She understood then, for the first time. Not a hint of how it worked, not like the candy bar, but she understood how the universe actually worked

Tears began to pour down Howitzer's cheeks. Andy's face puffed up like a giant raspberry. Howitzer looked down, maybe defeated, maybe confused. He looked at Andy and then down at his fists still shocked by what he had done.

Then there was the pencil. It fell off of someone's desk in the commotion. It waited for Howitzer's troubled backward steps and it rolled under his feet. His arms to flew up like some kind of cartoon

character. The pencil rolled out of sight as Howitzer's head thumped hard on the floor.

Instant karma, Annie considered later. Every action required another. Then came the experiments. Little things at first, like getting strangers to kiss. Then, more complex, like wanting a pizza given to her in the middle of her finals. But every action was followed by some kind of debt that needed to be paid. Even if it meant the teacher paid the tab on the pizza.

Did she feel guilty? No. She supposed she didn't. She desired it. It happened. If she wanted a boyfriend, she would get one. If she wanted anything, anything at all, she would get it.

Pancakes for dinner were nice, but her mother burning herself in the kitchen while cooking wasn't. Her father not drinking after work was nice too, but when the house smelled thick with smoke, she regretted it.

Maybe she could desire good into the world. That was the real reason for wanting her father to stop drinking. It would ease the monthly budget. It could make her mother a little happier when her father wasn't loose with his words and his fists. Desire itself didn't seem to matter unless it was specified. But there was always a cost. The scales would even out every time. The universe had to be balanced.

When she was seventeen, she saw a bank robbery. She turned and walked away. But even then, the desire was out there. The robber was caught because he had diverted his run to the getaway car. He ran up and handed her the bag of cash. She refused to take it. The pause, the hesitation, the change of plan, and the cops had surrounded him.

A knock at the door broke her out of her thoughts. She thought maybe some things were best left with the door closed. Letting go of the pencil and paper that simply had "Mom" scrawled at the top of it, she rose to get it. The rain was picking up a little.

Chad stood at the door holding flowers. There was that look in his eyes. The cloudy unfocused look that made her think of someone who was drugged. The magic wasn't impeded by guilt.

"I need to be alone."

Chad nodded, “I saw you in the window, you looked so sad. Are you okay?”

“You should go.”

He turned and walked away.

Her prom date was another one. Although the rampant desires of a teenage girl hadn’t been easy to control. He got handsy and began pushing her toward an inner edge that she didn’t want to go. As he pushed at her, trying to hike up her dress, her desire for this boy’s infatuation was lost. He stopped suddenly. Eyes blank just like Chad’s, he turned and walked away.

Although he wasn’t the first to commit suicide because of her. Now that she was thinking about it, she had no desire for Emily to commit suicide. Maybe Emily had just been part of the karmic judgment of her desire. Maybe that was why her desire to not see the memorials went unheeded.

Her prom date had just walked away like Emily. He would have walked right into traffic if other people hadn’t seen him and stopped it. She received the prerequisite sympathy as people began discussing what must’ve happened.

College desires were many and she had indulged. She hated. Many suffered. She loved. More suffered. She passed classes when she shouldn’t have. It was an easy desire to let out into the universe for a professor who didn’t give a second thought to changing her grade. Who knows, maybe he flunked someone else. She didn’t always know how the universe corrected itself, but it did. She was sure of it.

Then after college, there was the job interview. Only the one. They spoke for a few minutes and she was hired. The interviewers, two no names in HR that she would never meet again, walked out and dismissed the other applicants in one unflinching swoop. The league of applicants’ faces fell, and she glowed. But she hadn’t accomplished anything, not really. She hadn’t experienced any prize. She hadn’t ever really won out of talent or skill.

Then Emily Braun was hired within a couple of months. Then Emily had begun dating Chad. Now she was dead.

She had tried to live without desire. But she was no Buddhist.

Desire was as ingrained in the American culture as fast food burgers. She liked having desire. She liked being hungry for things.

It was the restaurant on their lunch break. Her little group of work-friends all ate and laughed. She happened to look over at Chad sitting at a table with Emily. Chad gazed at Emily as if a devout congregant.

Then desire came. I want a soul mate.

Chad hadn't said anything else to Emily, and God knows he might feel guiltier than she did. His silence was probably part of the unspoken desire to not hear anything about Emily. Chad merely rose from the table walked over. Emily had turned to stare as Chad asked for Annie's number.

Bill Brunswick laughed when Chad asked her out in front of everyone. "Hey pal, aren't you on a date."

She now hated her work-friends. Bill Brunswick was fat and she hated him. She hated everyone at work. Unable to keep from unleashing that desire, she mustered all of her energy to keep it buried deep inside. She hated the memories of Emily and she hated all this attention about her death. She hated Chad too. Wasn't it his fault? She hated her job and the two HR people that hired her. She hated her family and she thought, maybe, she hated herself too.

It had been in some psychology class. The professor had spoken gravely, "Suicide was something that we don't talk a lot about. It's because it is a touchy subject and often other professors are afraid of bringing it up like it will spread like some type of social contagion." The class was interesting. People shared and the professor had been adamant on if anyone is feeling suicidal, speak up. "You don't have to be alone." #sharethepain

Then there was the quote by Chesterton, "The suicide is worse than the murderer because the murderer kills off one person, while the suicide kills everyone they know by killing themselves."

She got dressed. It felt like a weird thing to do. What did she wear in her last hours? It didn't matter. Nothing fit anymore anyway. Makeup? She thought and caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Well, maybe a little. The rain misted into her face when she walked outside. Still slightly overcast, the sky seemed to give a half-hearted

attempt at rain. She walked down to the street and hailed a cab.

The cabbie smelled. He rolled down his window as she got in. She smiled. The instant gratification of having that desire realized made her feel better. But the muggy hot air blowing back at her took the smile away. The cabbie didn't talk. He knew instinctively where to take her. At the corner of Second and Main, she saw a woman holding hands with a little girl. The woman looked up at her. There was the desire again. I want to be a mother. The woman hoisted her daughter up with arms stretched out toward the cab.

The light changed and the cab accelerated leaving the mother and the child watching after it.

"You don't have to do this." He said looking in the rearview mirror.

"What?"

"There's other ways. You just have to be strong enough."

She didn't question how he knew what she was thinking until the realization slowly crept over her. His head snapped forward. He began to speed forward, weaving in and out of traffic. People honked. Before she knew it, he was screeching on the brakes in front of her office building. The cabbie didn't say anything as she got out.

"Don't do this." A woman in a business suit said, walking past.

"You know you don't want to." A man walking the opposite direction said.

She lifted her chin, confident in her decision. The strangers stopped talking.

She used to pick scabs when she was little. She thought it was something linked to her personality – that uncontrollable desire to not let anything heal. Pick. The blood fills the tiny hole. Sometimes it stops. Sometimes it overflows.

Her father walked into the kitchen. He opened a bottle of beer and drank. Pick. He didn't sit down. He just drank. Pick. Then another and then another. Then when the beer was out, he found a bottle of wine. Pick. After the wine, a bottle of bourbon. That was the last one. The inevitable downfall. Why don't you just drink yourself to death? And he did. Pick. The blood fills the tiny hole. Sometimes

it stops. Sometimes it overflows.

Thud.

The first body to hit the pavement was someone she didn't know. She cocked her head to the side looking at it thinking, why him? Her desire was becoming realized. She turned toward the street. Some people were yelling at each other. Others were looking up to the top of the building.

A cabbie and a truck driver were too busy yelling at each other to notice the bodies that had begun falling until one landed on top of the cabbie. The truck driver didn't move. He merely looked up, seeing others gathering at the ledge.

She opened the door to the building with another thud and then another on the street behind her. Screeching brakes and horns as cars collided. Some people sat where they worked, but when they saw her, they rose.

She walked to the elevator where a crowd was trying to get on. The doors were unable to close. It would be like this at every floor, she thought. A little half smile crept across her face. The people diverted, except for a janitor. Summoned, she knew for her purposes.

She turned her head to see people begin swarming the stairwell. The elevator, mostly emptied, had a few people still standing in it. The janitor got in the elevator, pulled out a key, and turned on the override. Tapping the top floor, he nodded to her with a grim smile.

The elevator flew up to the top floor and opened with a ding. Annie walked slowly, savoring the moment. She smiled, wanting to watch. One by one, people rushed to the edge of the roof, climbed up and stepped off. No scream, no plea for help, just a step and gone. Sometimes there was a small sob coming from them but mostly nothing.

Eat your heart out, Emily Braun.

She chuckled slightly walking to the ledge. Bill Brunswick shoved past her, and then stopped. He looked at her. She quieted the annoyance just enough to give a little nod. He ran for the ledge. He didn't stop to climb up. The side of the ledge hit his stomach and his body toppled over.

Other people in her office- some she recognized, some she knew, most she didn't- jumped. The standard was to pause and look down. She liked that so they all began doing it.

She climbed onto the ledge and looked down at the swelling crowd. The bodies were everywhere, on the sidewalk and in the street. She imagined the whole building pouring into elevators and stairwells trying to get to the roof. Dozens had already fallen and when she was done, hundreds would.

Something changed as she looked down. Guilt was something she didn't quite feel. Emily had caused her to feel what most people would call guilt, but was it really that? She saw all the death and felt better for it. She felt as if, maybe, she didn't want to do this anymore. A man on the ledge near her hesitated. The crowd kept swelling on the roof, but they too had stopped although their numbers grew. She smiled at the man on the ledge with her and gave a little nod. He jumped.

Even then, maybe if she did this, others would stop. That's not what she wanted. She didn't want to do this anymore, but they should. They all should. As she turned to get off the ledge, the people had pressed toward all sides of the roof. She tried to get down when she saw Chad. He pushed his way through, seeing her. She paused, still on the ledge. He waved to her. Well, she thought, maybe I'll let him go before I get down.

She felt like laughing until someone's body pressed against her feet causing her to lean back teetering off the edge just a little. But Chad was there and caught her hand. As she tried to find balance, a desire blossomed violently into her thoughts. Get me off this roof now! Chad nodded, still holding her hand and jumped, toppling over the ledge and dragging her down the other side.

As she fell, there were no conscious thoughts. There were no last minute repentances or pleas. Noises whooshed past her as the sirens and cries grew louder. Her mind scrambled, trying to act on a desire for rescue but came up short. Then she tried to imagine, to desire, some form of paradise but couldn't conceive of one.

Keepers

Isabel Saralegui

The cage clattered against the hull, echoing out across the bay. A blanket of fog still tucked in the pale blue scene. I shook out the lobsters onto the worktable and reached inside to pry off a few clamped on to the wire. Helen stood from her chair and bellied up to the table, her slight hunch making her look even more dedicated to her work. At 99 she was probably the oldest woman to work a lobster boat. Ever.

“Good work,” she whispered. She began to measure the lobsters. She tossed the females and smallies and snapped bands on the claws of the keepers. Helen worked deliberate and quick, only pausing to take a sip from her mug of black coffee. I tossed the cage back and returned to the helm, navigating to the next spot.

This remained the rhythm of our days. When lunch time came around Helen brought out the sandwiches I made last night and a bag of green grapes. I ate with one hand, steering with the other. Helen sat quiet in her chair, her legs crossed at the ankle. I enjoyed a tuna melt and Helen had her usual, pastrami on rye. Brown mustard collected in the corners of her mouth.

“Decided what you want to study?” Helen asked.

“Not yet,” I said. I took a bite. “I’m not even sure I want to go to college anymore. Maybe I could just do this with you and take over the business one day.”

“No.”

“What?”

“No, that’s not what you’re doing.”

“Why not, Helen? You love it so much you’ve been doing it since 1932! You get to enjoy this all day.” I motioned at the piney islands along the shore, the navy water, the expanse of Maine we traversed. “What’s not to love?”

“The world was very different when I was a girl. There weren’t any women lobstering, but none of the girls my age went to col-

lege. A few grades below me, sure. My youngest sister even went to nursing school, but no one my age. No. They all got married and I wasn't going to get married. You have the opportunity to show up on campus in the fall and pursue something greater. You need to go," she said.

"You didn't ever want to get married?"

"I couldn't. But you're trying to change the subject."

"What do you mean you couldn't? You never found the right guy?"

"I certainly never found the right guy. But that's not it," Helen said. She swallowed the last bite of her sandwich. "I found the love of my life. Her name was Georgia."

"Helen! I didn't know you were gay too!"

"Yes, well, a lot of people don't know, or maybe they all do, I don't really care."

"Well, what was she like?"

"I'll tell you what." She clapped her hands on her thighs and stood up. "For every five." She held up her open hand. "cages we bring in, I'll answer one question about me and Georgia."

"You've got yourself a deal." I went to shake her hand, but she pulled hers back at the last second.

"But, I also get to ask you a question to help you figure out what to study."

I laughed. Helen was never one to let something go, just like the lobsters she spent her life catching.

"That's fair," I agreed. I turned and throttled the boat across the bay. We picked up our cages in record time and collected a mound of lobsters. All the while I asked Helen about Georgia and she asked me about my interests and studies. I learned about Georgia's kindness and patience. She asked me why biology had been my favorite class.

I learned about how they lived together in a two bedroom, but only slept in one. I told her about my final microbiology project where I studied algae blooms. Helen glowed speaking of how beau-

tiful a dancer Georgia was. She always wanted to be a ballerina and even went to New York to audition a few times, but it wasn't meant to be. I recognized my own excitement telling her about the Galapagos Islands. She told me how they'd always wanted babies but settled for Scottish Terriers instead.

"She passed away ten years ago. I've missed her every day since," Helen said. She tossed a lobster full of eggs back into the inky water.

"It sounds like you two had a beautiful life together. I hope that I get to be with someone who is my best friend," I said.

"You will. You're smart and kind. The right one will come," she said, "Now listen to me." Helen pulled on the straps of my orange overalls, stooping me over face to face with her. "Georgia and I got lucky. Somehow, we found the other lesbian out of all these small towns and were able to make a life together. You might not get that lucky here.

Plus, you don't want to do this. By the time you're my age, they'll be no lobsters left to catch. You obviously love the sciences and could learn so much at school. You won't be able to do much with that passion here. You need to go. If I catch you walking down the gangplank to my boat next summer, because you put off college another year, I'll grab you by these suspenders and toss you into the bay."

"Yes ma'am." I stared back into her salt blue eyes.

"Promise me."

"I promise."

"Okay then." Helen released my suspender and it snapped against my chest. She patted my shoulder and sat in her chair. "Take us back in to the harbor."

We sped in and I tied up the boat. Helen moseyed her way down the rickety dock and up the metal gangplank to the parking lot. The whole way she was stopped by salty fisherman who grew up watching Helen fish and love checking up on her. I unloaded the coolers of lobsters and stacked them in my truck bed. Helen met me at the truck and we began our route through all the lobster shacks and restaurant and markets to deliver the day's catch.

Dark clouds rolled in with heavy curves of rain. It drizzled on our way to the first drop off and by the time I parked it was a full on down pour. I pulled up my hoodie and hustled to the back, unloading a cooler and hauling it to the kitchen door. I knocked and looked back at the car while I waited.

“I couldn’t see Helen through the headlights bright beams against the gray rain, but I knew she smiled at me. I never got back on Helen’s boat after that summer. I attended college in Boston, just like Helen’s sister did and eventually I decided to study Marine Biology. There would always be lobsters in the bay. I met my fiancé in college. We got a brownstone in Boston near Fenway with tons of bedrooms, but it’s no secret that we sleep in the same one. Whenever I came home from college Helen and I met up at Lee’s in town for bowls of Clam Chowder.”

A tear hit the page and I tried to steady my shaking hands. I looked out from the little church and saw the blues of the ocean dancing through the stained glass.

“Helen’s daughter, Olivia, invited me to come speak today. She called me on Wednesday and broke the news. She was quick to tell me that Helen loved the afternoons we’d spent together catching up over chowder. I know I’ll sorely miss her when I get a bowl later today.

I had been stuck in my life for a moment, but Helen took me into her hands like she’d held so many little sea creatures and she saw the value I had. She saw me and decided, like she did with all of us, that I was a keeper.”

Learned Emotions

Maya Anand

Horrendous cries filled the room. It was impossible to understand how they came from such tiny lungs. Nevertheless, the child screamed in the nurse's arms. A man in a sleek black suit stood in the shadows. He watched the action of the small hospital room.

He had come for the mother. Her fate was near. He watched her closely as her tired eyes followed her spawn out of the room. She had been through much pain. The man had marveled at the will needed to voluntarily go through with the actions that led to this horrible moment. It was a curious little thing, the wonder in her eyes. Just a little glint, but it was very apparent, even from across the room. The man pondered as he got closer to the woman. Her breath grew more and more labored. Why would a perfectly healthy woman choose to give birth to a new life at the possible expense of her own?

The nurse walked in, holding a much cleaner bundle. The man was inches from caressing the mother's face. His hand froze. He saw the amount of love in the mother's gaze when she held her child. She let out a watery chuckle.

"Her name can be Iris." her voice was sore from the hours of screaming. It knocked the man out of his daze. He pressed his hand to her cheek, running it up her face to smooth her hair back, not unlike the way she did just before pressing her last breath to her child's head.

The man stepped out of the room, unseen, leaving behind the loud beeping of machines and exclamations of the nursing staff.

He couldn't help but continue visiting the child as she matured into a quiet little girl. She grew up in a little worshipping facility called a Church. The man came to understand many things about mortals through the few years he watched the girl.

He understood that as they grew, humans bonded strongly with the ones who ensure their life. The man in the suit assumed that the little girl would form this kind of bond with the Nuns that took care of her, but all she seemed to feel towards them was casual indiffer-

ence.

He understood that mortals also had to acquire their knowledge. They had to study the happenings of the world around them to understand it. He spent many days listening intently to adults talk to children about any kind of subject. It was quite interesting to see how they interpreted his many effects on their world.

He understood that humans did not always express their emotions openly. They laughed when they were happy. Their cheeks flushed with excitement. They cried when they were sad. But they hid all their vulnerability. They hoarded intimate moments to themselves.

He also found that this led humans to change very often. It's almost impossible to find a mortal that acts exactly the same at all times. Sometimes they change their mannerisms to connect with each other. Some of them copy actions they have observed. Others change themselves completely to comply with society. The little girl had gone through all of these changes, refusing to let the nuns tame her curly hair because one of the older girls said it looked cute, hitching her skirt up a few inches higher than the rules allowed, adapting her language to fit the modern slang.

Despite her efforts to blend into society the girl became an outcast. Pushed out of the larger groups, not included in activities, forced to live in her own world and find her own way to live alone in a world full of people. This caused her to develop a sharp sense of humor and a sarcastic manner at a young age. Over time, the man found himself feeling mortal sensations. He cared about the young girl and watched her struggle through each day, wondering if he could help.

Years passed and the man learned many feelings for himself as he watched the girl. He refused to let mortal emotions interfere with his duties, but every time he took a person, he found himself thinking of her. This led to much less silence as he transported them.

The girl grew alone. The other children ignored her and the adults taught from afar. She left the Church as soon as she came of age, pushing the man into a whirlwind of new epiphanies about the human race.

They met many new people as she studied the arts. The man watched her go through another change. She cut her hair short and pierced the cartilage of her ears, filling the holes with styled metal. Her sharp wit was still quite prominent and violent tendencies surfaced. She got into fights in dimly lit bars and backstreets.

He worried for her wellbeing yet again. The girl was sleeping less and less. Her studies took over her daily life and her health began to decline.

Until she met him.

He came into her life like a hurricane. Outside a coffee shop, after spilling his drink all over her, he offered her a napkin with his number and a sly smirk. They spent all their time together, talking of anything and everything, sharing an intimacy the man had never seen at the Church. Neither of them seemed to mask their vulnerabilities as much around each other. Their studies were over in a flash.

The human man took the girl to live in a lavish home together. Their plans were enormous and all encompassing. They wanted to find work and make enough money to legally bind themselves to each other and live together in intimacy for the rest of their lives. She was always happy around her partner, always ready to spill her heart out to him.

The relationship seemed mutual until their working hours stole their time, forcing them to compromise their schedules. There was a strange tension every time they were home together. Their walls were growing. Their bridges were breaking. Their secrets would be the end of their relationship.

The look of pure hatred the girl gave the woman her former partner clung to, caused the man to shiver, pulling his arms close to himself. He wondered when he started experiencing mortal sensations so strongly.

He came to understand that not all mortals felt empathy. He watched the man turn around and live a normal life while the girl fell into pain and anguish. Humans were capable of breaking each other and wouldn't hesitate to do it.

He watched his girl spiral. The man felt the familiar prickle of what he had learned as worry. He saw her fear of people and felt

the thoughts that caused her to shove others away. He saw her tense up every time she thought of the human man. The tears that would flood her every night. He watched her cry herself dry. He hurt for her as he saw her become an unfeeling shell.

He came to realize that the loneliest part of someone's life is when they're watching their world fall apart, and all they can do is stare blankly. All they can do is ignore the destruction occurring around them. All they can do is hope the walls don't break down too. When they can't move forward because they're too focused on trying to stop themselves from shattering. He had seen many deaths, but he had never seen the buildup. The man found himself hoping this wouldn't be his first time.

The man wanted, desperately, to know how someone could climb out of the ditch his girl was digging herself into. He wanted to know it was possible.

It started with a little old lady who told her she had a beautiful smile. It was the first time in months that the man had seen the girl light up the way she had when she smiled back. He watched her shine as she talked to her old work friends. He watched her glow as they offered her tight hugs and sincere consolation. She shone as she found ways to put back all the weight she lost and pull herself away from death. She became blinding as she worked towards a new life. It brought an unfamiliar feeling to the man. A conversation with one of the people he transported taught him of pride.

Two years of a stable job and stable friends brought the girl back to a place better than she'd been before the human man. The man in the suit hadn't seen that spark of fear in her eyes in a few years. Not until she met the flirty girl in her tour group.

Not until he saw her trying to avoid the stranger's gaze at all costs. Not until she came back again the next day. And the next, and the next. She'd wear flashy clothes and strut around as if she owned the place, following the girl around for hours on end. The man saw his girl glancing at her from the corner of her eye and blushing when the other girl winked.

The man wondered again if he should step into her life when he watched her scream and cry into a pillow, terrified to love again. But he stayed away. He knew she was strong. He watched her stare at her

ceiling every night, no doubt thinking of the girl with the loud voice and loud clothes and obnoxious sense of humor. He silently cheered when she finally whispered the words into the dark of night.

He learned about excitement as they sat under an umbrella outside a coffee shop for hours, laughing. He watched the loud girl deflate as she told his girl of her past. He felt the warmth in his heart when his girl pulled her close. He watched them talk out hundreds of problems. He admired the way they took life one step at a time.

The man in the suit found himself changed when he watched their wedding from the shadows. He found himself feeling human. He cried tears of happiness as his girl slipped the golden band onto her wife's finger.

He watched them disappear into their room after a long day of partying and realized he felt grateful. Grateful he'd ended up in her mother's hospital room. Grateful he'd seen her birth. Grateful that he'd gotten to see her grow up and grateful to know that she'd be happy. Grateful that he had been able to learn.

When he left that night, he promised himself not to return until he was needed.

Decades later, the man in the suit found himself back in a hospital room, staring into the eyes of an old woman. She'd lived her life well and he was glad for it.

She seemed to stare into his very being as she asked who he was.
"I am Death."

Art



First Add to Color to the Abyss

Jury S. Judge

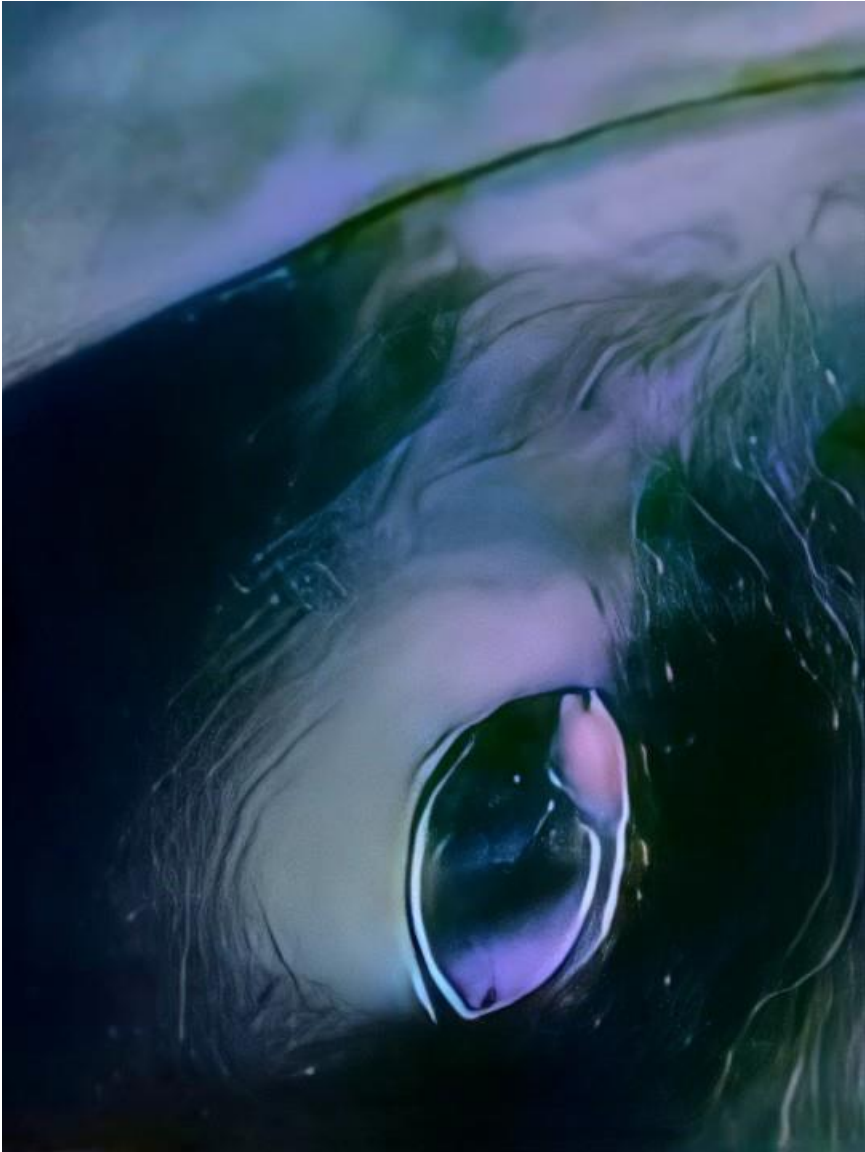


Discussions of Cannibalism Over Lunch

Jury S. Judge



Before the Fall
Beverly Rose Joyce



A Drop of World
Guliz Mutlu



Smile
Michael Hower



The PRR
Michael Hower



Elysian Fields

Michael Hower



Gawky Bird Watching the Flying Man

Christian McCulloch

*Creative
Nonfiction*

Hello, Jennifer

Sarah Waggoner

A reflective look on the 1978 rape revenge film,
'I Spit on Your Grave'

Hello Ms. Jennifer Hills,

Jennifer, I know you've been through a lot. I have, too. Please, if my words become too

much, do not feel obligated to me. Your healing is more important than any words I could put across.

Jennifer, I don't know how to talk to you. I don't know how to talk to anyone, really, but especially you. How do I tell you what you mean to me? How do I explain what I've seen of your life? How do I express what you've done for mine?

Can I express it?

Jennifer, I bet a lot of your letters curse you. I bet many say you deserved what they did to you. Maybe some are charitable. Maybe they say that you didn't deserve it but you shouldn't have taken the law into your own hands.

People don't understand what the law does to us. They think it can do no wrong. In my experience, all the law does is wrong. People say that even if there are flaws in the system, at least it helps us poor victims.

It doesn't. If you're lucky, you have to unravel before them before they take scraps of the aftermath. What was once a body is now a crime scene. But you can't complain because there is no other way. And people wonder why silence is the main route for victims.

I want to be respectful, Jennifer, because you are more than my martyr. You have feelings. You must have them. You wouldn't have gone to those lengths without them. You couldn't have. Why would you act in such glorious retribution if you weren't torn inside out? You wouldn't risk yourself if all sense of self wasn't drained from your body. If you didn't care, the anger in your eyes wouldn't overcome the golden-brown haven that once resided there.

I had a blue-green haven of my own before he touched me. I'm sure he saw it before deciding that I was the perfect subject for his sadism. He looked at me the way the gang leader stared at you. Smirks manifested on their faces as they comb through their imagination, of how sweet we taste. Their dirt-brown desert eyes never fully meet our havens, they merely glaze before noticing our more gratifying attributes. They took our smiles, mistaking them for invitations. When we assured them there was no party, they entered anyways.

I wasn't torn apart like you were. Not physically, at least. He entered despite my consistent pleads of "no not yet" by distracting me with promises of love. I felt I had no choice which became a consistent pattern in the relationship. These promises of passion were never fulfilled. Instead, I was a toy. I can't think of a time I ever wanted to. He never asked me if I wanted to.

Like you, it was more than one man. Plenty of men barged into my messages in online spaces to tell me how I was such a beautiful, fresh young thing. They would go further, demanding to see the places not even I was fully aware of. Some of them were good with their tactics, coaxing me into it. Others threatened me with blackmail. I was fifteen. My romantic and sexual appetite ate me inside, making it so easy for them to join the feast.

I watched them feast on you, Jennifer. I'm ashamed to admit that I stood there all three times they ravaged you. I could've looked away. I couldn't stop it, not with their muscles and guns. I could've looked away, though.

I know my regret bears no weight on you. It's not like I'm the only one to have gazed at their greasy bodies overtaking your porcelain shape. Many others, both victims, predators, and neutral parties, have watched as they bent you over the stump. We watched them jeer at your damage.

Personally, my stomach twisted like barb wire on the last time they caught you. You should've been safe. You bravely walked your way to the cabin. Naked, you trekked through those woods, evading beasts. You got home. Your once pale-white, now bruised-purple legs couldn't stand. For a brief moment, solace was in your sight. They destroyed that when they rushed in with their howling voices. They hadn't convinced the runt of the pack, Matthew, to violate you

before. This was his last chance.

Matthew seemed so sweet. He could be irritating, sure. But he couldn't be a wolf. What wolf would happily bring you groceries any time you rang? But who would surround themselves with wolves except for one of their own?

I can understand why people believed he was just as violated as you. The leaders of the pack wouldn't give up on their mission. The yells hurled in his direction may have infiltrated what seemed to be a kind mind. I agree that it wasn't completely his choice. Though I can't deny his enjoyment of your defilement.

Yes, joy was rightfully absent from him the first two times. Fear invaded him as they invaded you. I'm surprised he never ran away. That fear turned to nervousness when his body twisted into yours. Whenever I think of that moment, I wonder: Was this nervousness born out of ethical issues or was he just nervous to enter a woman? Perhaps the aforementioned fear wasn't out of seeing such a barbaric act of violence. Maybe he had never seen a naked woman. I don't know. I don't think I'll ever know.

Do you know, Jennifer?

I knew that his unsure looks turned into certainty the more he went into you. Just like his predecessors, he smiled. Instead of a crooked smirk, he took a slimy, almost boyish expression. It was like he was on a roller coaster. Each pump seemed to fill him with more energy, sucking the little that was left from you. He didn't care for your tears. He didn't worry about the bruises. He only cared for the entertainment.

When he was done, your body was so stiff that they assumed you were dead or at least a breath away from it.

Nothing like this has happened to me. Regardless, I still felt so seen in these moments. My first abuser, and many of those men online, never left me alone. No matter how drained I was, they tended to come back. I've been harassed more times than many would think possible. Some think that most didn't count because I accepted the invitation. Or they believe it wasn't really harassment because it was online. The fact that I was a teenager being coerced into revealing my most sensitive parts doesn't always sway them. It doesn't help

that many believed I wanted it. He told you that you wanted it. He blamed your kindness along with your beauty just as they blamed my desperation. But instead of taking it, absorbing that information until it made your soul combust like I did, you took a gun and said, “No” with its powerful shot.

Blood sprayed from the gun, powdering the pavement but not before it painted a smile on your face. I smiled with you. I couldn't stop smiling as you went on your trek for revenge.

Matthew's hanging and your eloquent disposal showed me how capable you were of thought and how foolish your critics are for saying your knowledge is non-existent. Your methodical nature never ceases to amaze me.

I can't deny fear rose in me when you were with Johnny in the bath. You are smart but he is a cunning man who has already destroyed you. I was worried when you helped gratify him.

How could you do that for your monster? Then the sweet, silver blade appeared in your silky hands. Oh, you hid it so well, Jennifer. Even I found myself surprised when crimson overtook the bland water. No amount of soap could dispel such a gorgeous color. I didn't think there was anything more beautiful until I heard his scream. The horror in his voice, a horror once matched in your own, flooded the room. I seem to remember his pleas of “HELP! HELP!” that accomplished nothing. Rapists can't get help in a cabin miles from town. Those screams couldn't reach your eloquence, though, Jennifer. You didn't flinch. You simply put on an opera and let the brass and vocals defeat his screams until he lost what little soul he had left.

I don't know if I prefer that to your final, iconic kill. Before the rape, they chased you with an overzealous speed boat. You laid in your canoe, letting nature influence your prose. They disrupted with a roaring engine and hellish hollering. What seemed like an inconvenience turned into a game of cat and mouse. When you had your chance, you showed them that you were capable of this game. Stanley and Andy, two of your other rapists, went to kill you. You were waiting with their boat. They swam, attempting to catch up to you. What fools they were. Andy was met with an axe, tearing him like he was nothing but a block of wood. Stanley went to the motor when you saw your entry. You remembered the words he once proudly

ordered to you, “Suck on it, bitch.” With a hearty reclamation, you jammed his body into his weapon of intimidation before driving off with a silent smile.

The reversal of roles you pulled showed me that victims can reverse their stance as a way of revenge. Of course, I can’t kill any of my predators. I can’t physically harm them. I never even want to see them. I can be different than I was when I was their prey, though. I can have a partner who acts in reverse to my rapist ex. I do. He’s the best man I could imagine. He is consistently asking for consent, doing what I wish to do while treating me like a genuine person.

I am not the struggling, unknowing, little girl like my predators wanted me to believe. I have more social and academic education that most could ever dream of. But I don’t need to prove them wrong. I am proving to my younger self, my victim self, that she is better. She is better. Jennifer Hills reminds her of that.

Thank you, Jennifer.

Sarah Wagoner is an undergraduate Junior student at Chadron State College. She is studying English Literature with a Minor in creative writing. She takes an interest in subversive genre fiction and hopes to contribute into that field of writing after graduation, both through analyzing the works of others and creating her own works.

When the Score was 806 to 0

Charles V. Belson

My East Meadow High School yearbook showcased pictures of all eight hundred and six smiling young men and women graduating from our suburban New York high school. None of the smiles were black. I didn't think anything of it back then. As far as I knew, none of the other yearbook editors thought anything about it either.

During the summer between my junior and senior year in college in New Haven, I was one of two students hired to serve as a teaching assistant for an undergraduate studio art class at Southampton College on eastern Long Island. Sculptor Peter Lipman-Wulf was the professor. Southampton College covered my tuition, as well as room and board, plus a generous stipend. But I still needed to earn more before I could return to Yale as a senior that Fall.

After checking in at Southampton College, I dropped my bags off in my new dorm room. My single overlooked the ocean in the far distance. The view was better than expected. Next, I drove to the local New York State unemployment office in nearby Riverhead. A helpful clerk gave me the name of a restaurant in Southampton looking to hire a dishwasher. That afternoon I met the new manager of the restaurant. I mentioned the scholarship job I had during my freshman year clearing tables in the college dining hall. Later that night I was scraping dishes in the restaurant kitchen. I worked for Jim. He was an experienced dishwasher who ran the operation with two other guys. Jim was the same age as me and had been working afternoons and evenings in the restaurant for three years. Jim was black. He and I hit it off. We worked well together.

But it lasted only three nights. A man I had not met before caught me washing dishes with Jim and the others. The man pulled me aside. He told me to wear a white long-sleeved shirt with a black tie and black pants when I came to work the next night. The man explained that I would be trained as a waiter. In so many words, he said, "white boys don't wash dishes in my restaurant." After I finished washing dishes for Jim that night, I told Jim about my "promotion." Jim said he didn't expect me to last very long washing dishes.

“What happened to you, happens here all the time.” I thought I should quit because the owner was racist. Then I thought I should ask the new manager why he hired me as a dishwasher in the first place. But I didn’t do either, because I didn’t want to get fired or start a fight between the owner and his new manager. The next night I was working as a waiter. With generous tips, my pay more than doubled. When added to my stipend from Southampton, I was on track to save all the money I needed to go back to Yale.

The following morning was perfect for an outdoor sculpture class. Professor Lipman-Wulf directed me and Dan--the other teaching assistant--to move large hunks of stone, wood, and metal from the indoor art studio to the outdoor studio. We also moved twelve student work-tables outside, one for each of the ten young women enrolled as students in the summer-long course, and two more for us teaching assistants. The tables were arranged around a low platform for the Professor’s model from Manhattan. Shanice was a very striking black woman with intricately woven braids, exotic flowing robes, and a husky commanding voice. She posed semi-nude on the platform two back-to-back days a week. Her poses were full of a latent energy that was subtly visible in most of our sculpture that summer.

After class, Wendy—one of the most talented students—often joined Shanice, Dan and I at the secluded beach near campus. The four of us would go for a quick swim in the ocean and shared box lunches with cold drinks. Shanice was the best storyteller in the group. She worked with some of the artists who taught in the pent-house art studios of the N.Y.U. School of Education in Washington Square. Each week we learned more about the inside story of the New York art world from the point of view of a smart and beautiful black woman.

Instead of holding a formal class, sometimes our Professor would take the class to visit his nearby summer house and studio, or the houses and studios of his artist friends. Painter Ilya Bolotowsky had a small home and studio near the Old Whaler’s Church in Sag Harbor. My Professor’s traveling entourage included his two assistants, plus his ten students. We filled Ilya’s studio. We heard how Dutch artist Piet Mondrian inspired Ilya’s work. Before Ilya could finish, a minibus showed up with nine art patrons all eager to purchase an

original Bolotowsky print at a discount, at least when compared to gallery prices in Manhattan. To avoid overcrowding in the studio, Ilya asked our Professor and his students to take a five-minute drive to Sag Harbor's Jermain Library to see the exhibition of original Bolotowsky prints hanging in the main rotunda. Ilya asked us to return to his studio about twenty minutes later. By then the "art patrons" would have made their purchases and were back in their minibus on the way to Robert Dash's larger studio in Water Mill.

Three afternoons a week, I drove from Southampton College to Stony Brook University to take a physics course that was a prerequisite for architecture grad school. The drive took more than an hour. But it was worth it. My physics professor was a brilliant Nobel Prize winner and a riveting communicator. That made it easier for those of us paying serious attention to be able to ace the course. After each lecture or lab concluded, I would turn around and drive back to Southampton. I kept my waiter's uniform in the car in case the lecture or lab ran longer than expected, and I didn't have time to go back to my dorm room to change for work.

On the day of my final Physics class of the summer session at Stony Brook, all eighty students gave our professor a standing ovation. Back at my Southampton dorm, I showered and shaved. As I looked in the mirror, I saw myself as a new "non-graduate alumnus" of both Southampton College and Stony Brook University. As a First Gen student, I knew this kind of thing meant more to me than it would to most other students. Then I put on a clean shirt and tied my black silk tie for my last night as a waiter.

I arrived early at the restaurant so I could catch up with Jim while he was on his scheduled break. He confided that he was still in touch with some of his white friends from Riverhead High School, even though three years had passed since he graduated. He asked if I was still in touch with any of my black friends or black classmates from East Meadow High School. He knew I had graduated three years ago, like he did. He also knew my graduating class was big. But until I told him, he didn't know my senior class had 806 students, and that none of us were black.

Jim surprised me by saying, "I guess I'm the one who had the benefit an integrated school education. You certainly didn't."

I told Jim that I had never encountered a high school teacher or student who ever said we were getting a segregated education at East Meadow High School. We were taught that segregation was bad. That segregation was a southern problem and that forcing segregated schools to desegregate was a southern issue enforced by the Feds.

Then Jim said he was taking a political science course at Suffolk Community College two days a week before work. He asked me if I knew anything about what we now call redlining. I shook my head sideways and said “no.” Jim explained it to me. He asked if I understood how it applied to East Meadow and some of the towns around it. Thanks to his explanation, I could nod in agreement.

As he spoke, I was thinking that this kind of conversation should have happened—but never could have happened--back in East Meadow High School when the score was 806 to 0.

5/7/2019

Nico Spagnola

There are 130,930 schools in America.

There have been 304 fatal school shootings since 1999.

There is approximately 0.23218514 percent chance of being in school that has had a school shooting.

It takes 0.7 seconds to pull the trigger of a handgun.

The history teacher was sitting at his desk. It was independent work time. This was the last class of the day. School was almost over. I just wanted to go home and play video games.

“Attention please. Lockdown. Locks, lights, out of sight,” a recording of a somewhat androgynous voice came over the PA system.

Students looked around in annoyance as they slowly left their seats, taking time to finish typing whatever they were working on before closing their laptops. The teacher turned off the lights and locked the door.

“Attention please. Lockdown. Locks, lights, out of sight.”

“Is this another drill?” someone questioned aloud.

Most of us pulled out our phones to play games or browse the internet. At this point we just thought it was a drill. Free time to screw around and avoid school work.

“Is this a drill?” someone asked the teacher.

“I don’t know,” he said.

He probably knew but didn’t want to cause panic. When it’s a drill they always say it’s a drill. He would have known that it couldn’t be a drill. But none of us students believed that something could actually happen to us.

“Attention please. Lockdown. Locks, lights, out of sight.”

We shelter against the wall perpendicular to the one with the door. These two kids kept talking to each other and making jokes, sharing memes on their phones or something. Someone tried to play a video, but their volume was turned up and it blared loudly in the

room, causing everyone to start laughing.

“Shhhhh!” the teacher hissed in frustration.

As 9th graders do, they got quiet for about 30 seconds before quickly returning to ignoring the teacher. I can imagine the frustration he must have felt.

“Attention please. Lockdown. Locks, lights, out of sight.”

A few minutes have passed.

One of the students asked if it was over yet. They wondered why the drill was taking so long.

A message appeared on my phone in a discord group chat I had with some friends. It was from my friend Jillian, who went to a school nearby.

“Nico are you okay everyone’s saying your school is having a shooting.”

“We’re on lock out right now.” a chunk of text read.

“I’m sitting in a classroom.” I typed back.

I could hear some noise outside. It sounded like a lot of people talking. The noise of walkie talkies filtered through the wall. I realized how thin that wall was.

“They’re probably exaggerating like white girls.” Jillian typed in the group chat, “Probably a threat or suspicious person maybe.”

“Yeah.” I replied.

Same as us, she couldn’t believe that a shooting was actually happening. It had to be a threat or a false alarm. It couldn’t be real.

“Attention please. Lockdown. Locks, lights, out of sight.”

Suddenly someone said, “I don’t think it’s a drill,” gesturing to their phone.

They had an article pulled up that was just published. It says that there’s a developing situation with a school shooting at STEM School Highlands Ranch. We were the developing situation.

In an instant the idle chatter stopped, all voices being subdued only to the smallest whispers. Every kid pulled out their phone to see for themselves. Within seconds, my friend Kane showed me a mut-

ed news livestream—helicopter footage of our school. There were ambulances and police cars outside. It felt unreal to see our school on the news like that. But reality set it. In that dark classroom, we didn't know any more than everyone else. We were just as confused. We were getting our information from the same articles as everyone else.

“Attention please. Lockdown. Locks, lights, out of sight.”

I looked it up myself. A new article had just appeared. The headline read, “One victim shot at STEM School Highlands Ranch.” I sent the article to the group chat. It wasn't a false alarm. It wasn't a drill. Other friends started to appear in the group chat.

“HOLY SHIT TODAY???” my friend Olivia typed in reference to the article.

My phone started lighting up with messages from all sorts of people. Classmates from middle school I had only talked to once. Acquaintances from when I'd lived in other states. Relatives. Online friends watching our school on the news in their countries, asking if that could possibly be the school I went to.

Our classroom was on the second floor beside a staircase. I heard footsteps on the stairs. A flurry of shouts erupted from the opposite side of the hallway.

“Attention please. Lockdown. Locks, lights, out of sight.”

The contents of their voices were mostly incomprehensible to us, but I just barely heard someone say, “Put it down!”

Muffled voices continued to fly back and forth. I thought about where we were in the room. Was that the shooter? What would happen if they entered? The wall we were sheltering against was not close to the door. The door was the only exit. If the shooter entered, we would all be sitting ducks in full view with no cover to charge them, while at the same time having no other exits. Come to think of it, what was the point of us sheltering on that wall? To make us easier to shoot? There wasn't a window in our classroom door. Wouldn't being near the door offer us the best tactical advantage?

I told myself I couldn't die. The police or security were right there. Even if those footsteps on the stairs were the shooter, the police wouldn't let them enter. But I thought about those thin walls

again. I wondered if a bullet could pierce them.

And in retrospect, it could have. On the other side of the school where the shooter first opened fire, someone was shot through the wall.

“Attention please. Lockdown. Locks, lights, out of sight.”

I sent my final messages in the group chat until the end of the day,

“I think the shooter is outside

The police are telling them to put down the gun

They are yelling back and forth it’s really loud

Pray for me.”

The lockdown alarm continued to blare, but the commotion outside quieted. Time ticked on in silence. No one knew how this would end. How do we leave the classroom? We were never told how that would go. Drills never covered that sort of thing. I don’t think they ever expected a real shooting to happen. When do we leave? Was it over?

There was a click at the door. Someone had unlocked it. For a moment I thought it might be the shooter. But how would the shooter have a key to the room?

The door swung open as shafts of sharp white light illuminated the darkness. A group of SWAT officers rushed into the room, guns trained on us and the teacher, bright lights in our eyes. Now I realize why we sat against that wall in full view of the door. It wasn’t to protect us from the shooter. It was to protect us from getting shot accidentally by the police.

“Drop everything, hands in the air! Drop everything, hands in the air! Drop everything, hands in the air!” they repeated, all while the lockdown alarm continued looping. I had my phone in my hand, so I dropped it. It took weeks to get it back, and when I did I spent all day responding to missed messages and calls. They had to search every room and backpack in the building before we could pick up our stuff.

Staying as a group, we shuffled out of the classroom from behind the barrels of military-grade M4 rifles. In the hallway our class

joined a thin stream of students being herded between checkpoints of police until the exit to the school. We kept our hands up the whole time, and no one dared make the slightest movement of lowering them. Even when we came back to school in a few weeks, the police would still be there, watching at the entrances and exits, patrolling the classrooms, standing guard in the cafeteria.

The classrooms were being cleared individually. Every one of us was a potential threat. There had been two shooters in this case, an extremely rare occurrence, making the potential threat every one of us posed to the police even greater. They entered every room assuming there might be another threat inside.

We exited outside into the daylight, a shocking change from the dark interior of the school. But even out there, we hadn't gotten through the danger. We walked down a narrow path in the street outside the school through a sea of police and ambulances. There was a layer of police and SWAT officers on either side of our path, their guns ready to open fire at any moment until we reached the field where we sat down and finally lowered our hands. All it took was two kids and a gun to summon this entire army.

I noticed snipers perched on roofs of the shops around the school, watching the line of students through their scopes.

If one of us had lowered our hands, would we have been gunned down right there?

Sleep Study

Megan Wildhood

Your appointment with your psychotherapist ran long, as it does when you've scheduled something immediately after it. You sprint for the bus about to pull away without you on it and accidentally drop kick your phone into the street. It hits the top of your arch, which begins throbbing. It also delays the bus long enough for the driver to see you and reluctantly let you board. As you dig in your cave of a purse for your fare, you drop your phone again, this time on the big toe of the other foot. The one with the badly mangled toenail from either a fungus you caught scuba diving as a preteen or a European concert tour you played saxophone on as a rising high-school senior.

You finally hit reply on the text to your then husband, who's spontaneously offered to meet you at the hospital and help you check in. He works sixty hours a week, plus you've been living separately for almost two years, so though short notices and changes of plans stress you out, you jump at every scrap of his time he offers you. "I guess I can rearrange my bus route and meet you but only if it's right outside the hospital entrance at the bus stop at the top off the hill and we can walk together. I'm already late so please be there. My check-in time is soon!" You send the edited version. You don't feel like a better person. You feel like a fake. You've been faking your way through life for thirty-one years and that's why you don't know who you are or what you want to do with your life. Why you're too behind career-wise to ever catch up, why you'll spend the rest of your time working meaningless, menial jobs any high-schooler could do. The passengers roll their eyes at what they clearly think is your hammed-up limp to one of the first-priority seats.

He's not at the bus stop when you arrive eight minutes before your check-in time. It's a ten-minute walk. "So much for being supportive," you seethe. "Hey I'm here :)!" you send. It takes him ten minutes to find you. Thankfully, your anxiety has raised your blood pressure enough to stave off the frostbite of this godforsaken city's not-unusual pre-Halloween cold snap. As he goes in for a hug, you bristle. "I'm late." You say as you start walking even though you haven't fully released each other.

“I can ride ahead and check you in if you want.” He already buckled his helmet on and clipped in. “What hospital?” he shouts over his shoulder. This is Pill Hill; there are several.

You start running almost as soon as he’s clicked his shoes into his pedals and yell the name as loudly as you can between breaths. His wheel light’s glow until you can no longer hear his spokes tick against that loose strap of his fraying shoulder bag.

The automatic doors spit air in your face and almost don’t open in time. You manage to get inside without hitting anything and burst into a sweat, like your body is crying all over, the minute they close behind you. Your husband is not here yet somehow. You approach the counter, fumble around for your photo ID and insurance card, and knock your phone out of the side pocket of your purse. As you’re reciting the name and number of a second emergency contact (your therapist; the first is your husband), your phone appears on the counter beside you.

“How do we get to level A?” your husband asks. You reassemble your belongings, and he takes the lead toward the only set of elevators that get you down to the sleep clinic (and radiosurgery and another department you never identify. Their signature color appears to be faded mauve). They’re waiting for you, but they do not rush you. They invite your husband to stay until bedtime. He snaps several photos with his new, thousand-dollar lens so powerful that even non-visually oriented you find impressive.

AJ, the gregarious sleep tech assigned to you for the overnight part of your sleep study, asks your husband where he’s from as he gives you the tour: check-in area, lounge, sleeping rooms, patient kitchen and snack area. You later find nothing with less than 20 grams of sugar and nothing free of preservatives or additives; you eat a strawberry yogurt anyway. Then you freak out for days about diabetes, cell damage, Alzheimer’s and cancer. Both of your parents have survived serious cancers. Your grandfather died of a heart attack at age 66 but your grandmother, his wife, died seven years later of lung cancer that spread to her brain. You think she was around 70. Your other grandfather probably had dementia but died — of cancer — before it could progress too far. He was 83. His wife, your only living grandparent, (the only one who didn’t smoke) is 91 and has

lung cancer that'll kill her unless the diabetes from her sugar-laden diet or the congestive heart failure or the kidney failure from a medical error during a surgery fifteen years ago does first. You don't want to get old, you also don't want to die. This will be the next thing you bring up with your therapist.

"Oh, just a hobby. This is a Sony A7 Mark II with a Voigtlander Apo-Lanthar 65 mm f/2 lens." So, he's been through this routine before. "I live near Capitol Hill."

AJ pulls out a thick band with a bike helmet's clasp and reaches around your rib cage just under your breasts.

"And this is a small!" There's no way to tighten it. "We need a pediatric chest band in room 1023," he says to the ceiling just above the computer. "I'll be back in ten. Get yourself ready for bed."

It was a two-month wait to get a consult at this facility, so you'd called the university clinic to see when their first available initial appointment was. You started foregoing harder projects at work because you didn't trust your brain anymore. Time with friends was basically amputated when you started going to bed at 8:30 like your parents had been doing since you were in high school. No one in your generation starts their socializing until after 9:00.

They got you in that next week and you took off the morning from work. But the sleep specialist spent the first 20 minutes of your appointment explaining medical scenarios only he could decipher and complained about insurance companies. He used the remaining time, hours it felt like, to make sure you knew just how imaginary your problems are, exactly how easy they are to solve.

"Sleep alone?" (Yes.)

"But you're married?" (Separated.)

"Ah." He runs his finger down his list of questions. "Caffeine?" (None.) "Alcohol?" (None.) "Medication?" (No. This is all on the intake form you had to get here a half hour early to complete.) "Happy with your life?" (Mostly no.)

"Yeah."

He draws several lines on his paper and makes maybe one note. "Well, insurance will probably want to do the at-home test first but

let's schedule an overnight at the clinic and not bother with that. I've heard they're not accurate but it's most often user error, I'd say. We'll check for apnea and Restless Leg Syndrome. But it's like the guy who goes into the ER with a broken arm thinking he's got high blood pressure. No, what you've got is pain." He flips through the papers on his clipboard. "You probably don't have a sleep problem. What you've likely got is anxiety." It's an accusation. Does he think you're faking? Or, no, it's that anxiety in general is fake. Just real enough to need meds: he writes a prescription for "apt w/ shrink asap" and tears it off too fast to keep the paper intact. He writes another for a single Ambien pill. "Take it if you think you're going to freak out the night of the study so you don't screw up the results by staying awake."

"Tell me about the bitchin' glasses." The electrode paste AJ is mixing smells like glue and burnt garlic.

"They're just safety goggles." You tap them back to center after an electrode cord bumps them out of place. "But they filter out the blue and white light everywhere that kills melatonin production and disrupts sleep. Amazon."

You and AJ bemoan the state of music these days (you weren't allowed to listen to anything made after you were born, so Steve Winwood was your cut off until you left your parents' house) and get into a contest over who can name the most kids' toys from the '90s.

"You don't remember Sky Dancers?" AJ slaps his knee and twirls around.

"Must have been before my time."

"Sister, you are a baby!"

"Or I was fixated on LEGOs," you say in a completely straight tone.

"Uh-huh, yeah, sure. Don't try to backpedal now that you got me feeling all ancient."

"Oh, it's okay," you say, nudging your husband who's documenting the exchange. "This guy's old, too."

"Yeah," your husband says slowly, giving you his sour face. "But I don't remember Sky Dancers, either."

“You were probably busy cutting your trapped brother out of a fold-up coach.”

“What in the wide world? That sounds like a more exciting game than My Little Ponies or Twister or any of that!” AJ snaps his blue Latex gloves off and pulls purple ones on. “But I would have gotten in so much trouble.”

“There are no adults in any of his childhood stories,” you say.

Your husband pulls out your cashews and tart cherry juice, (which promote melatonin production, you explain) your breathable socks that are easy to remove, your lavender essential oil, your water bottle with the fluoride filter, your knee-separator pillow. By the time AJ’s done, you’ve got as many electrodes on your forehead, chin, and scalp as home remedies for sleeplessness you’ve tried. The paste provokes a fierce, red rash but only after AJ’s secured the electrodes on your chest and side to monitor your heart and two on your calf to catch rogue movement.

“Shit,” AJ says, looking at the camera in the center of the wall across from the bed.

“I just have sensitive skin,” you say. “I’m okay. I’m sorry.” You are sensitive. Sensitive to your body, to your feelings, to the entire loud, fast, pointy, smelly, inviolably unfixable world. You’re sensitive because you’re simple. Your skin will be ruined forever and you’ll never be able to ace job interviews even if you ever did manage to get them, forget about making a living in a way that’s enjoyable or purposeful. You’re just an extra person. An extra person with ugly skin and no patience who will probably die young of ruined health due to sleep deprivation. You know, it’s worse for you than smoking.

AJ gives you a few minutes to say goodnight to your husband. You give his beard a thorough snuggle, which he tolerates because you must sleep in a hospital tonight. You usually sleep better away from your current house in a sketchy neighborhood close to the city’s prostitution corridor with the gaslighting, manipulative roommate. But every part of you rabidly fears hospitals and you only sometimes (namely when you enter one) remember why. You briefly regret not filling that Ambien prescription. He scans through his pictures of the evening on his camera’s screen to show you; close-ups of AJ’s hands, your hands, your face before and after the rash, the bed, the

hookup mechanism on the wall next to the bed for the box the electrode wires are feeding into that you're currently wearing around your neck. The remote with the help button you're supposed to press if you need to get up at all, even to go to the bathroom. Your face before AJ taped two oxygen-like nose necklaces on it to measure the couple different ways people can stop breathing in their sleep. He taped those in place after your husband hugged you and told you he loved you, you can barely get air up past them.

"Apnea is basically when the airway can partially or fully collapse," AJ says, tilting his head back and snoring loudly before making a choking sound and then coughing. "We'll test for obstructions, as well as irregular heartbeats, we'll measure brain waves and check for myoclonic jerks in the muscles, especially the legs." He slaps his biceps, abs, glutes, quads, hamstrings, calves. "Questions?"

Your jaw opens and closes. You breathe like you might talk.

"I'll be able to hear you all night so if you're like me, and you think of questions as soon as you leave a meeting, just say them out loud. You'll be able to hear me, too." There's an intercom speaker centered on the wall just above your bed.

"The only person who truly knows how you sleep is who lies next to you every night." He winks at your husband. "And now us!" He reaches for the light switch. "Remember, don't get up or you'll clothesline yourself. I'll be awake all night but hopefully you won't be." Hopefully I *will* be, you think. You need to find out why.

Your mom says you never learned how to sleep. You've been waking up every two or so hours since you were born. In high school, you could get away with less than five hours of sleep. No more. You're so tired you don't always have enough energy to get a full breath. You still wake at 2:00 every morning, now sometimes crying after an hour of trying to go back to sleep, begging God, threatening God, lecturing God. You've tried hitting your head so hard on the wall, your bedpost, your nightstand that you might lose consciousness. After the fifth or sixth time is when the images of you jumping from a bridge or buckling a belt around your neck start bumping your computer at work out of your vision. Not daily, but not just occasionally, either. Perhaps this should be the next thing you talk to your therapist about.

AJ will know when you're sleeping, he reassures you. He'll know when you're awake. He shows you one more time how to control the temperature, the firmness of the mattress, how to call for help, before he turns out the light. You reach for the all-controlling remote, but you don't need it: it's warm and soft as a womb.

You do think of a question as soon as he leaves, which has an answer that would be obvious to a normal person: Will AJ know what you're thinking? Will he see you falling or hanging or bleeding? Actually, the question answers itself. If AJ answers you, then he does know what you're thinking, whatever he says. If AJ doesn't answer you, he doesn't know. The trapezoidal box AJ used a kid-sized band to secure on your diaphragm turns out to be the biggest sleep impediment. You hadn't known that you almost always must be on your stomach to fall asleep. You manage to fall asleep on your side, but you don't fall very far. You wake up in the middle of a dream about refusing to leave your flooding house even though your "landlord" (played by your recently promoted coworker at yet another job in a long line of shamefully purposeless jobs) begs you, threatens you, lectures you. You are too full of shame to imagine bringing that welter of persistent failure up with your therapist.

You had been good about not checking your phone in the middle of the night. You had been consistently writing in your gratitude journal before you went to bed, listing three things about the day that went well. As well as three things you wanted to accomplish the next day so your brain wouldn't pester you in the middle of the night to remember or wake you before 4:00 so you could start getting things, however meaningless they ultimately are, accomplished. You had been practicing mindfulness for 181 days, your meditation app reports. All for naught. You know you can't blame your sleeplessness on the diagnostic paraphernalia. On your fourth wake up, you forget where you are and reach toward the nightstand.

"Do you need something, honey?"

And here it is, your problem, cleanly and squarely in your rash-covered face, you have no idea what to ask for. All the motivational speakers you've been listening to, the optimization bloggers you've obsessively followed, the videos of the career mentors and life coaches, they all say that it's not the smartest or most naturally

gifted people that get ahead in life. It's not the talented who are successful, but the people who clearly know what they want and don't give up until they get it. Since when does anyone know what they want? How could you ever know something like that? And by you, you'd like to mean the average person, but you really mean you. Singular, isolated you.

At 6:30 a.m., AJ comes to "wake you up" (you, for the last hour and a half at least have been pinging from rehearsing telling your therapist about that memory of your mother that probably holds the key to your stuckness. To the annihilating pain of not only having no direction in life, but something like an anti-direction force woven into every desire you think you have, to know how much sugar you ate yesterday. To the countdown on your meditation app resetting to zero after over six months of building it up because you forgot to do an exercise last night).

"How're you doing, honey?" AJ begins unhooking all your equipment except the electrodes on your head. The next tech will take those off after the sleep latency test, which you'll spend most of this Saturday taking. "I'm going to miss you," he says before you can answer. You believe him, but you also have one of the hunches you've come, despite negative feedback, to trust. This one is that the tech conducting the latency test is going to be painfully awkward and you'll struggle relating to them. Of course, this is your experience with 97 percent of the people you meet and 91 percent of your interactions overall. But your cortisol spikes and the hot flashes that attend it (which are not menstrual cycle related; you've been getting them every time you have to talk to another human since you could talk) are not something you really get used to. If you could, maybe you'd be able to fucking sleep.

"Girl, don't make me blush." AJ shuffles through his kit. "Okay, AJ, what do you have to do next?" He palms his face a few times, points at the wall, the bed, you.

You grab your phone to let your husband know you've survived but that you won't know anything until the follow-up with the doctor in two weeks. They pledge to schedule the follow-ups within five to seven business days of the study but the doctor they assigned will be out of the office next week and the next availability was in the

middle of the Friday after that.

You hug AJ. He pats your cheeks carefully so as not to disturb the electrodes. “Good,” he says. “They’re back to their normal rosy.”

After he leaves, one of the electrodes on your chin feels like it’s coming loose, so you press the gauze over it. The gauze sticks to your fingers.

“God damn you,” you whisper-scream through gritted teeth. “Is it so hard to just stay put?” You jam it into your chin, then swear at it for hurting you. Then you curse yourself for your goddamn anger. You’re still messing with the electrode when Ronald comes in. His thin hair is very white. He’s nice enough but your hunch proved true.

“Whoopsie daisy, let’s get you all situated here.” He pulls some new gauze out of his kit and uses a tongue depressor to secure the electrode. Meanwhile, he asks what you do for a living.

“File clerk at a law firm,” you say. “Oh, and a writer,” you say for the first time out loud.

“Oh yeah?” He checks the rest of the electrodes and pulls up a questionnaire on the computer that looks like it’s run by MS DOS. “I used to do technical support for law firms back in the ‘80s. The computers took up entire rooms and the buildings didn’t need heat. That was 1985. Yeah, 1985, I think it was.” Before you were born, which you thank God you have learned not to say out loud.

“Well, now the buildings don’t need heat for a whole different reason,” you say instead.

He cocks his head then turns back to the computer. “Okay, so we’re going to do a series of five one half-hour naps every two hours to see how fast you fall asleep and what stage you get into. Before and after each session, we’ll have you fill out a brief survey on this computer. Apart from that, I trust you can entertain yourself.” No charades, no demonstrations, just instructions.

It’s supposed to test narcolepsy, which the sleep doctor ordered when you told her you fell asleep walking across a street recently. You wait until Ronald asks if you have any questions because you have one: how does this test distinguish between narcolepsy and severe sleep deprivation? But he just starts the first test.

You want so damn badly to fall asleep, which is why you can't. You know. Being frustrated about not sleeping is one of the leading causes of not sleeping. But not sleeping is also one of the leading causes of frustration about not sleeping. Also chronic fatigue and slow healing, pain, poor memory, difficulty focusing and probably cancer. You can't fall asleep during the second test because you must pee so badly it hurts. It's only a half hour, you think, but by the end, your bladder spasms as you limp to the toilet. You sleep for the last 10 minutes of test three, attempt to give a urine sample (which they had not warned you about, so you can't get it up to the fill line and you're aware it's really a drug screen), and do not sleep during test four. You're certain you'll fall asleep on test five, but Ronald comes in and tells you they've got enough data and that he'll be back to get you unhooked so you can clean up and head on home.

You text your husband "I'm being released early because apparently I'm not narcoleptic and didn't fall asleep fast enough to be clinically sleep deprived and can be at your place in about 45 minutes if you want. Still need to shower and get this crap out of my hair." He responds: "yay okay excited to see you soon" and you sit on the edge of the bed to wait for Ronald to de-cyborg you. It's too complicated to change clothes until he does.

A half an hour later – time you could have been sleeping – you're still on the bed. Hot flashes all over you at the thought of having to use the call button. What would you say? You're of course not to go to blow up, but you're just as angry about always having to defer, pretend like it's your fault, apologize for other people's mistakes. You wait another ten minutes, begging, threatening, lecturing Ronald in your head to get his butt back into your room and unhook you.

You wait another ten minutes. Your husband texts about your ETA.

You wait for another flash of heat to die down, then push the call button, hoping that merely getting a signal from your room would remind Ronald about you and you wouldn't have to figure out what to say. All you had to do was reach for the help button when AJ was your tech.

"Yes, can I help you with something?"

Forgetfulness was one of the early signs of dementia your family noted in your grandfather. It's also an effect of sleep deprivation.

"Um," you say. "Yeah, should, I'm just wondering if I need, I mean, if I should unhook myself or..."

There's some static or rustling over the intercom. "Okay, I'll be right in."

When he comes in, he apologizes and quickly gets the electrodes off your face. Your chin is so hot you're surprised steam doesn't rise from it when he pulls the gauze away. "The way you get this electrode goo off your skin and out of your hair is with warm water. Do not use shampoo until you're certain it's all out." He deftly gathers his materials into the appropriate baggies and pauses at the door. "And no, you don't have to unhook yourself."

It takes you almost 40 minutes to get the electrode paste out of your hair, which is fuzzier, less manageable, for weeks afterward. It's still frizzy and uncomfortable on your neck when you come back to the sleep lab for your follow up.

"The results show no apnea, which is good news," the sleep doctor says in a beautiful Slavic accent. "Some snoring, but it did not seem to bother you, so that's good as well. Also, we detected no leg movements during the night. Your brain waves show a lot of REM and not enough deep-stage sleep, which does indicate that you are sleep deprived." She proceeds to recommend things you indicated on your intake that did not work for you or you could not afford to try. Your teeth slam together. The bridge image burns your eyelids; this time, it's of a specific bridge. One that's nearby.

You get one bill from the sleep clinic a month later and one from the hospital a week after that. You were only responsible for \$155, which does not include the \$630 deducted from your husband's paycheck every month to keep you insured under his policy, because the one offered by your work is with a company that's currently a defendant in a lawsuit for radical, substandard and unlawful denials of coverage (the coverage would suck even if it had actually been there). You text your husband: "Essentially, we – meaning you and I and our insurance company – paid an expert close to \$6,500 to tell me something I already knew (not just that I'm, no shit, sleep deprived, but my body knew I didn't have apnea or fast-moving leg

syndrome or whatever) as if it were illuminating and helpful. It must be nice to not really do your job at all, get recognized as an expert, feel like you're helping people and get paid handsomely at the expense of people much poorer than you. I would say 'Where can I sign up for that?' but I want to do *real* work and make a *real* difference."

You say basically that in your next therapy session. Your therapist has a few supplementation suggestions to discuss with your doctor – he's struggled with sleep, too, and the empathy makes his eyes shine – but he also asks about work.

"I think next time we should talk about why you think you don't know what your passion is." His voice is chocolate as the cello sings. "Of all the ways I can think of to describe you, 'lacking passion' is not even near that list."

Your therapist is willing to talk to your doctor and explain the research he's come across that strongly implicates low serotonin levels in people with PTSD, which you struggle to accept you have because you remember nothing that awful in your childhood. Your parents are still married, you never went hungry, you got new shoes every year and enough Christmas presents that you and your siblings set up display stations in the piano room (which is a totally separate room than the living room in the very large house of your childhood in safe, clean suburbia) for your grandparents to admire and inquire about. But when you ask your primary care doctor about connecting her and your therapist, she wants you to come in.

"I didn't know you were having this problem," she says. "I'm so sorry." You think she's apologizing for the hellscape that is sleeplessness, but she says, "I'm so sorry I missed this." If empathy shined on your therapist's eyes, it poured from your doctor's. "You cannot be happy and tired at the same time."

This is enormously validating. Validating enough for you to wonder how severe your emotional problems would really be if you got the amount of sleep your body needs. But, after several of the things your primary care doctor recommends: including craniosacral massage, adaptogen herbs (you're articulately resistant to medication), even low-dose SSRIs (after you collapsed on the escalator up to your office, you got desperate), fail to deliver you to the lush and

luxurious land of the well-rested. You begin to realize that, at least from whatever your problem with sleep is, you actually are going to have to unhook yourself.

Nostalgia

Anonymous

Nostalgia (adjective):

Lies we tell ourselves
about what we can't remember.

You used to enjoy running. Before you ever did competitively, standing for hours in well-trimmed fields beside teammates throwing up from nerves while you tried to ignore your own churning stomach. You used to crave the sensation of flying, of freedom and endless possibility that you never got from anything else.

Lazy summer days would find you in your front yard wandering between trees taller than you could ever hope to be. The soft breeze coaxing the branches into a dance urged you to move faster as well. You'd begin to jog, back and forth, back and forth, the wind lifting your hair and cooling the sweat on your neck.

It wasn't enough, so you broke into a run, faster and faster and faster. Your arms sliced through the air trying to hold you back, and your feet were weightless, barely skimming the ground as your muscles burned. You imagined yourself above everything and soared overhead knowing nothing could ever bring you back down.

First (adjective):

A beginning.

(alt.) An ending.

Your first kiss, standing beside your dad's rusted pickup in a Walmart parking lot, nothing like the romance novels you used to read. You'd long ago given up on ever being loved like that, and were sick of not knowing what it felt like for someone to press their lips against yours. You didn't care much about him, not in that way, but when he asked, you said yes. It was quick, and warm, and wet. Afterwards, you wiped your mouth on the back of your hand and declined his offer to try again. You got into the truck as calmly as you could, begging your brain to quiet while you drove away.

Five years later, your roommate climbs into your lap and asks if they can kiss you. You assume they're just bored, or lonely, but say yes anyway. Their hand slides beneath your shirt as your lips latch onto their neck. Your mouth coaxes sounds out of theirs that haunt you late at night when you can't sleep, because you never sleep, not anymore. Telling yourself you don't hear what they whisper into your skin because it can't last.

It never does.

Family (noun):

A reminder of who you were.

Sometimes when your parents look at you, they do not see you, but the version of you they knew a decade ago, at your birth. You are the same beautiful, kind, innocent, talented, ambitious, intelligent little girl they raised.

They don't see the bruise forming on your skin after spending the night with a friend. They don't hear the way you dance around pronouns. They smile at those old dresses collecting dust in your closet, unaware that you collect dust alongside them.

You are everything they need you to be. You are nothing.

Sentiment (noun):

Weakness.

While meeting up with your oldest friend, the one who knew you before you knew yourself. Whose life diverged from yours long ago except for those bimonthly lunches you share over cheap cocktails and app platters, your smile stiffens on your face when she says she doesn't understand the word nonbinary. You think of the pronouns listed in your bio on the account she follows you on. You think of how you used to be the more conservative one out of the two of you.

Driving home, you let slip about an old crush. The instant you do, your face overheats, but not from embarrassment like she thinks. She asks to see his picture, and you don't know how to explain that he's a she.

Your friend drops you off at home to prepare for church that evening, and you wish you could believe as easily as she does.

Change (verb):

Why she stopped talking to you.

Your creative writing professor noted an undercurrent of guilt within the piece you submitted for workshop. The comment surprised you, that hadn't been your intention when writing. It was a throwaway scrap of fiction written specifically for that class, but you realized later that night that most of your writing contained that feeling. Guilt drove almost all of your characters, explained every motivation and flaw, and you weren't sure why. Was there some unaddressed shame eating away at you that kept manifesting in your work?

You make a list of potential causes in your head; Catholicism, sexuality, your waste of potential, the knowledge that you're probably going to hell.

The list does not make you feel better.

Fear (noun):

Reminders of what could be.

He asks what sort of things you say in Confession, just because he's curious and there was a lull in the conversation. You don't know how to explain to him why you start crying. You don't want to admit that you haven't been to Confession in years. The more time that passes, the more afraid you become of the tiny room with dim lighting and stiff-backed chairs, as if you think you can ignore the worst parts of yourself by not looking.

Silence (noun):

Opportunity for doubt to

c r e e p

back in.

The sweat still hadn't dried on your back from where it had been pressed against the metal chair, baking for hours beneath a merciless sun just for a thirty-second walk across stage. The ceremony was a whirlwind of words you didn't hear, and then everyone was cheering, clapping and reaching for each other.

You gather your friends close for one final group hug, smiling through the goodbyes as if parts of you aren't breaking. You vow to stay in touch, knowing deep down you'll fail.

You don't cry when you drive away, but late that night, after your family has all fallen asleep, your eyes sting. Each beat of your heart echoes in your ears, and your headphones are not loud enough to drown out the stillness.

Everything ends.

Success (noun):

Making everyone laugh

loud enough that they forget

what they were trying to ask you.

You were offered acid, once. It has other names but you didn't know them. Couldn't this boy tell that you were out of your depth, sitting on a stained couch in an angular room with too many windows and not enough light? You took another long sip of a drink that was mostly cheap vodka splashed with juice and pretended like you would say yes. You had no real desire to ingest anything that might mess with a body once strong enough to carry you across the finish line before the rest, blood pumping your legs through the wind and fueling endorphins stronger than any high. You still dreamed of returning to that place one day, not because you missed competing, but because of the way the cheering crowd made you feel. Even as you downed glass after glass of someone else's alcohol, you thought only of what it would be like to reclaim a body you were proud of.

A friend moves closer to you for a job, and you let yourself imagine late nights sharing secrets and bottles of wine with someone who gets you, someone who stays, but a better offer has her buying a house on the opposite side of the country. You fixate on acquiring

degrees while everyone you love slips like sand through your fingers.

When you look in the mirror, lines cut into the skin around your eyes that were not there a year ago. You didn't listen to your mother when she warned about all the things that would give you wrinkles. You thought you had more time.

STS-107: My Experience with the Columbia Space Shuttle Recovery

John Morgan

Journey to East Texas-February 2003

It was late in the afternoon, and I returned to the office from dropping off some samples at the state environmental lab about an hour from my office. I sat down in front of my computer to catch up on my emails. To my surprise, I had an email from one of the office managers looking for scientists available to leave early the following morning for Texas to work on the Columbia space shuttle recovery project. It was less than a week ago that the tragedy of the shuttle breaking up on re-entry occurred.

At the time, the company I worked for had a contract with the EPA and was occasionally called upon to help during specific national crises, such as the falling of the world trade center towers and the anthrax incident at the pentagon building. There were no details in the email, only that they expected the deployment to last about two weeks. According to the email, the scientists working on the project would be leaving around 7 am the following morning.

I thought to myself that it would be quite an experience and certainly a worthwhile and noble cause. It just seemed so abrupt. I was used to a lot of advanced planning. However, three hours later, six co-workers and I were attending a briefing, where we were informed what they anticipated, but to ready for almost anything; Primarily, the main goal was to find out why the shuttle failed.

As I got off the plane, I was greeted by another team that was already stationed in Texas. It was a three-hour trip from the Dallas/Ft. Worth airport to the city of Palestine, where I would be stationed for the next three months.

There was an 8 pm meeting that night with the EPA and NASA to brief us, so we had a couple of extra hours to spare. About a dozen of us, from offices across the country, made a pit-stop at the local Applebee's. None of us had any idea what we were in for and what to expect when we arrived in Palestine. Little did we know, this was our farewell dinner from anything resembling normalcy for a while.

We each had a big meal and chased it down with a drink or two. I learned about the vast differences of people from east Texas compared to people from west Texas from a guy that resided in Abilene (west Texas). We discussed our backgrounds and where we called home, and what our expectations were. None of us had a clue.

We left the restaurant and began our three-hour drive to the base. As we drove down the highway, I noticed a small “mom and pop” auto repair shop on the side of the road. Out front underneath the sign that read “AL’s Auto Repair” was another sign. The sign read, “We screw the other guy and pass the savings on to you.”

‘Where am I, and what am I getting myself into?’ I thought.

We arrived at the NASA balloon base in Palestine shortly before 8 pm, just in time for a project kick-off meeting. We were all anxious to get some information. Unfortunately, most of our questions were left unanswered. It appeared this would be a figure it out as you go process, which in hindsight, is understandable. This sort of tragedy doesn’t happen often. After the brief meeting, the EPA representative directed us to a hotel to check into our rooms; then, we were to meet back at the balloon base early the following morning for more details and to pick up our vehicles to use while in Texas.

Check-in at the hotel was nuts.

One hundred and seventy scientists were trying to check in to their rooms in one hotel, at the same time, with one eighteen-year-old kid behind the counter. The hotel knew we were coming a few days ago, and they never even told the night guy at the front desk we would all be arriving late that evening. I give him kudos for not just walking out the door.

It turned out they had booked us two in a room. That occasionally happens for large groups of people from the same company; however, most of us worked in different offices spread across the country and have never met each other. The movie *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* came to mind, and I became a little concerned. My hotel-mate turned out to be a decent guy, and once we unpacked we both began to review the eighteen pages of space shuttle specifications that were specifically declassified for our task at hand.

Day One

I lived in Montana for over a decade, and I never hiked like this before. No trails, just thick brush, and swamps. The first day was brutal. Half the scientists, including me, were wearing steel-toed boots, which were initially identified as a must. A few of the men were laughing at a guy wearing chaps.

“What a Gomer!” One guy laughed. Even I thought that was overkill. But, to each his own. This guy clearly just wanted to look like an experienced outdoorsman.

We thought it would take hours or even days before we found anything. Less than five minutes into searching, we found our first piece of tile. This was just the start of locating a great deal of shuttle debris, witness statements, and other information that would eventually bring everything together. We were no longer in the planning stages, we were doing something out here. This was it.

Day Two

Every day starts the same. Get up at 5 am, shower, and drive to the base by 5:45 am for check-in, briefing, and breakfast. After we finished breakfast, we would pick up our bag lunch and head out to meet at the drop-off around 7:30-8 am.

I felt like I was in an episode of the X-files driving down rural dirt roads following a line of six unmarked white vans with tinted windows. Locals would walk out on their front porch with bewildered looks on their faces. Sometimes days go by without a vehicle passing some of these houses.

Then, it's on foot the rest of the day until around 6 pm, then back to the balloon base to debrief, unload debris, eat dinner and arrive back at the hotel hopefully by 8 or 9 pm. As a scientist, I had much better accommodations than the forest service workers who had to pitch tents inside a large warehouse building at the base and sleep in sleeping bags. Every night as I left the base, dog-tired, I couldn't imagine crawling in my sleeping bag on the concrete floor and trying to get enough rest to be ready for the following day.

These were long days; 10 to 12 hours in the field and a few hours of meetings. However, the 7000 calorie forest service rations kept our energy levels high and our pants snug. I learned early on that

I didn't need to eat everything in my lunch bag. So, at the end of each day, I would toss the excess candy (which was given in large quantities) into one of my bags for later consumption. If anything, I wouldn't have to buy candy at home until next Halloween. The most prized item in the bag lunch was the uncrustable PB&J sandwiches. Those were a hot commodity.

That was the protocol seven days a week. The first week almost everybody got sick from being completely rundown. Probably from not drinking the recommended 12 bottles of water a day. It turns out hiking 10-plus hours a day through thick brush in the subtropical Texas climate could dehydrate you quickly. Some crew members learned the hard way, passing out due to heatstroke.

Each crew consists of 20 people from the forest service who typically fight forest fires, three scientists, and usually one person from NASA. Each person from the forest service had a nickname that told you something about the person. Rooster, Marbles, and Mad Joe all had stories behind their names and to each person, the nickname was their identity in the group and they identified with it proudly. Similarly, members of NASA were like a large family and this accident was like losing a few of your brothers and sisters. In addition to the personal loss, they had to consider the possible loss of their livelihood. They didn't have to state out loud that the future of NASA was at stake.

Later the First Week

The subsequent days began to blur together. We were hiking through brush so thick you couldn't see the crew around you for hours. You just knew they were there from their voices. We trekked through swamps with water waist deep, snow, sleet, and ice storms that left an inch of ice covering everything. Rarely did we hike on an actual trail.

We occasionally stopped at homes and talked with the residents. Some of the locals told stories of hearing an explosion, then coming out of their homes to see fireballs hurtling toward the ground, followed by small glittery pieces that came down slowly, fluttering in the wind. These trailing pieces would be what remained of the heat shielding tile.

Every piece of the shuttle we found was extremely light. Every ounce costs money to send into space, and that cost doubles with each flight. So, all of the material used to make the shuttle was light but very strong. Many of the pieces we found were small, but our group did find a valuable part of the fuselage the size of two car doors. The piece itself was so light that one person could easily pick up. The heat shielding tiles resembled pieces of chalk, only much, much lighter. The tile protects the whole thing from the heat generated during re-entry, from the friction of the shuttle traveling through our atmosphere at such high speeds.

We were also introduced to the local wildlife: ticks, mosquitos, and snakes. There were lots of snakes. Snakes that climbed trees, snakes that swam in the water, and snakes you couldn't see but heard moving through the brush as you walked by them. Indeed, the most memorable snake encounter was while climbing up a steep ravine; somebody said, "Watch out for the cottonmouth!" I said, "Where?" They said, "Right in front of you." I jumped down into the water just in time. I'm not a fan of snakes.

There was larger wildlife of concern too; angry dogs, large Texas-sized bulls, and wild Russian hogs. There was always a particular emphasis of concern when people discussed the wild hogs and I didn't see the reason for concern until one day I stumbled across one in the woods. The thing was the size of a Rottweiler, only all muscle and four-inch tusks. I quickly developed a healthy respect for these hogs.

Third Week

After many weeks of strenuous hiking every day, I was beginning to be in much better shape. In addition, I was not only wearing chaps but a face mask, gloves, and a hard hat. With my newfound muscles and my piecemeal body armor, I could actually run through the thick thorny bush that envelopes most of the forests of east Texas. I felt invincible. Which led me to think I didn't need caffeine anymore.

I'm a hardcore coffee drinker, and what better time to quit than when you're working 14 hour days hiking through the woods? I believe trying to quit cold turkey was one of the worst ideas I've ever had. The first day I had a headache. The second day, the headache

throbbled, and I felt like I had the flu. I gave up after two days. My thoughts of invincibility were shattered. I'm never going cold turkey again.

Fourth Week

One night a small group of us decided to treat ourselves to a steakhouse. Upon arrival, we noticed a lot of looks in our direction and pointing fingers. As I began to look at our group, I realized we were all wearing Environmental Consulting or NASA logos on our shirts or hats. We had become the center of the towns' gossip and, unknown to us, local celebrities. By the end of the evening, we all had several rounds purchased for us and even signed a few autographs. The attention felt both odd and flattering. Overall, it indicated the importance of the work we were doing and what it meant to NASA, the space shuttle program, and the country.

Fifth Week

We were now over one month into the project. We were finding a lot of debris and feeling some accomplishments. Throughout the days, NASA employees and astronauts would walk and talk with us as we worked. NASA was a relatively small organization in terms of people. They all knew each other, and the agency was more of a family than a business. These people were passionate about their work, and they all had a strong bond together.

One of the most memorable conversations I had with a NASA member is one with a safety team member, who was asked, just before liftoff, if they made everything safe for their mission. He stated that they had. The guy felt a lot of guilt and sadness, and desperately wanted to find answers about what caused the failure during re-entry. Our assignment producing answers was crucial for so many people and for so many reasons.

To emphasize that importance, a few days later, while searching in the woods, a member of our team found tattered remains of a patch the astronauts wore on their uniform to identify them and their mission. We all stood surrounding the patch for a long time, all reflecting on the gravity of what we just found. Most of the fire crew on my team were part of a Native American tribe and asked to hang back for a bit with the patch. The rest of us moved on ahead a bit while the tribe performed a special ceremony with the patch

that honored the lost astronaut. It was an extraordinary ritual that granted the lost astronaut the respect and reverence they deserved. We needed to find out the cause and we could not let this happen again. We spent the next six weeks desperately trying to find these answers.

Day Eighty-One and the Journey Home

The project was wrapping up, and it was time to pack up and go home. I was on my second pair of Kevlar chaps and they were on their last leg. We had accomplished everything we could. I disseminated all my information and data at the base and then went back to the hotel to pack. I put all my clothes and other belongings into my suitcase and then put my excess candy I had acquired in a carry-on bag and it was bulging.

On the four-hour drive to the airport, I noticed the auto repair shop sign again, “We screw the other guy and pass the savings on to you.” It had only been a few months since I arrived, but it felt like a year ago when I first saw that sign. When I arrived in Texas, I was out-of-shape and relatively ignorant of the situation at hand. Now, I was leaving in good shape, with a strong respect for the members of NASA and the loss of life, not to mention the brutal blow to our shuttle program.

Our task wasn’t just to search for debris but to help piece together clues so that this disaster wouldn’t happen again. Our goal was to find 10% of the shuttle’s debris. In the end, we found 33% of the shuttle in pieces, ranging from the size of a thimble to a table. These pieces helped investigators deduce the cause of the problem, which was determined to be a failure of the heat shielding tile upon re-entry. The United States space exploration program has given our citizens a sense of pride since we first landed on the moon, and since then we have been the worldwide leader in space exploration. Losing this leading status was a significant blow to our pride as Americans.

Since the four of us were flying out today and only one shuttle, I arrived at the airport three hours before my flight. I took a seat at a sports bar, ordered a cold beer, and watched the various television screens. I had brought a book with me but hadn’t opened it at all during my stay. I considered doing some reading but found myself reflecting on everything I’d been through. Before I knew it, my

plane was ready to board.

I gathered my bags and headed toward the boarding line where the airline was doing random searches of people and their carry-on bags. Of course, I was selected to have my bags screened. The lady opened my backpack with a slightly surprised look on her face and then looked at me questioningly. "I've got a sweet tooth," I responded.

Eighteen Years Later

Looking back, had we known then that this event would mark the beginning of the end of the space shuttle program? It would have been devastating to NASA and the scientists working down there in the spring of 2003. However, now that almost two decades have passed, I can appreciate, with pride, the accomplishments the space shuttle program made during its existence, both scientifically and culturally, and those will never go away.

We may no longer have a space shuttle program, but we can stand on the shoulders of the former astronauts and scientists involved with the space shuttle program and do things now that we wouldn't have even imagined two decades ago. Nowadays, we are collaborating with other countries, working together instead of in competition. Thus, there is a silver lining after the tragedy of the Columbia Space Shuttle; it just took us a decade or so to come to fruition.

*Academic
Essay*

The Cultural Hegemony of Literature

Nadia Benjelloun

When it comes to literature, the Anglo-American tradition has assumed the most ascendancy in knowledge production. Canon literature is a prime example of how this is done to impose an authoritative presumption of social and political thought of the New World Order.

Literary and cultural studies impose an authoritative presumption of social and political thought of the New World order. Canon literature is a prime example. This is because, as far as the Anglo-American tradition is concerned, even though it is not the only one, it has assumed the most ascendancy in knowledge production.

In Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* for instance, they illustrate how mass media serves as a propaganda device. In summary, the idea is that consent is staged, as is democracy, which the West fetishizes. Similarly, the literature that built up over time (particularly from the 17th to early 21st century), set the stage for principles and values like, work ethics upward mobility, individuality, equality of opportunity, autonomy, and egalitarianism, making whatever falls under canon literature a measurement of standards for the rest of the world.

To reiterate, knowledge, specifically the kind learned from literature, is not independent of political dogmas. But why does Western Canon hold these reins? It was once suggested, in an article about globalization and the humanities in the twenty-first century, that Shakespeare is a global writer, because his plays have been read and performed in countries from India to Mexico (Brown). This article is found in the video and performance archive at MIT, giving credibility to the idea something about the Shakespearean word revives human universals (Joubin). This is very misleading.

The author of the aforementioned article does not take into account the notion of language. Thanks to the belligerent expansion of the British empire in the 15th century, accompanied by America's cultural imperialism through technology, politics, and pop media, the English language gripped the world in unprecedented fashion.

Failing to learn English was a matter of national shame for the colonies, and learning it was a way to win favor from their cosmopolitan occupiers. Long after independence, colonialism did not end. Wherever Christianity (remember, it is the number one religion) spread, the ability to speak the it language – say, French or English – made the difference in being saved and spared or tolerated, or dismissed as a pagan and segregated from society with a menial role. Later on, as English became an official language at the United Nations, so did its cultural implications. “English is the lingua franca of much scholarship and research publication, particularly on scientific and technical matters” (Comrie, 61). Whatever was assumed about the world at the turn of the 21st century, was understood through an Anglocentric lens.

By that understanding, in an attempt to produce mass education globally, curriculums are littered with the likes of Shakespeare, even in non-English courses (LoMonico). It is not surprising then, to find college level courses that design entire classes based on Shakespearean studies, or a senior seminar with a required text like Scott Newstock’s *How To Think Like Shakespeare* making the list. Educators also give Shakespeare pedestal treatment, with haughty diction like, “...Shakespeare himself, the imperial” (Newstock, 78, 2020). Note the date of this quotation. Even as recent as 2020, instructors believe engaging with Western writers (whether positively or negatively), is a necessity, a rite of passage almost, for the literate mind. Observe the following:

While the Latin curriculum has since vanished, this method still works today. I’ve had students translate Shakespeare’s sonnets into another language... Many early modern writers expressed serious reservations about the practice-including Shakespeare... You could either spend three years reading Shakespeare and Joyce, or three years reading me [on Simon Barnes]. Work it out yourself (Newstock, 80-113).

Newstock’s premise is education should be shaped by thinking, and not practice. He makes it clear throughout the book: the best method for generating erudite thinking is by imitating or countering thinkers and writers, like Shakespeare, Homer, and Aristotle. “Wide reading helps teachers cultivate judgement, so that they can select

from the best..." (Newstock, 112). God forbid that pool of readings ever come from non-Eurocentric scholars, it seems.

This cultivating of judgement stems from a worldview that assumes history is cyclical and progressivist. In other words, an Anglo-American worldview. Since literature is a safeguard for ideas and values (real or imagined), it prolongs this worldview. The historical consciousness that was thought to be unique, turns out to be nothing more than imagination.

Take the American Renaissance, for example. In the months leading up to the founding of the United States, Thomas Paine wrote a pamphlet titled *Common Sense*, where he argued for independence, and proposed democratic republicanism. He used provocative language, describing the government as products of our wickedness, an affection of negativity, and a necessary evil. Necessary because without it, we would suffer, he claimed, but evil because it tends to bring out the worst in us. The revolution was interpreted as a window to political maturity, and the beginning of something new, easily making the pamphlet a best-seller.

Despite being a radical proposition, people were quick to digest the ideas of American independence because the general sentiment of the nation at the time was to aim for a meritocracy, and break away from the aristocracy of Great Britain. "Therefore, preservation of the present order depended upon the public's perception of the past," (Thomas, 1987). One transcript influenced another – from *Common Sense* to the Declaration of Independence.

A domino effect in history began, where romanticism and American transcendentalism followed, hand in hand with their literature. Romanticism emphasized individuality, imagination, emotion, and nature over social order. Thomas Paine's works set the stage with his emphasis on a novel sense of national self-confidence and describing social order as an object of government's corruption.

Later works reinforced the idea people should not give into governmental manipulation. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, wrote a speech called *The American Scholar* in 1837, which called for new devotion to self-reliance. "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. ... A nation of men will for the first time exist because each believes him-

self inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men,” (Emerson). This suggests this nation of the “Thinking-Man” would exist for the first time. Emerson further promoted this intellectual aspiration in an essay he wrote in 1841, titled *Self-Reliance*. In it, he argued people should not conform to the masses and should think and act for themselves. He influenced writer Henry David Thoreau, who later wrote a lecture called *Civil Disobedience* (1849). He urged people refuse governmental support since government was immoral.

Meanwhile, new philosophies (but arguably unoriginal) in New England took hold. Transcendentalists focused on the idea that people’s spiritual natures transcend doctrines-religious or otherwise. It was thought true nature lay in intuition, therefore more credit should be given to the self. For this reason, Walt Whitman’s poem *Song of Myself* was extremely popular, since it celebrated the self. The tone of the poem is sermon-like, but inviting. It discussed the idea of the communion of the self, with lines like, “what I shall assume, you shall assume,” and “for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you,” suggesting that while independent, one is still interconnected with everybody else and the forces of nature. Thus, the ideas of interdependence and Unitarianism were born.

The Victorian Era took place across the pond, urging the portrayal of common people and social situations be more realistic, causing thinkers to take on a more pessimistic outlook on life. Writers took to fiction to provoke social change, with works like *Adam Bede* and *Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point* to entertain pro-suffrage and abolitionist ideas without compromising the status quo of the author. The shift to modernism spawned the American infatuation with individualism. Given their strong presence, globalization has accidentally been made synonymous with Americanization and made non-Americans identify their own values with individualism.

It may be for this reason traces of American exceptionalism are found in global literature. The canon perpetuates this myth of the revolutionary “new national character” that is supposedly America. One way to break away from this consciousness is to introduce much more flavored writers in mainstream literary education. Two sample writers that fit the bill are Naguib Mahfouz and Jorge Luis Borges.

Mahfouz is a Noble prize winner, yet unheard of lest he be selected as a case study. His works are fiction, but as historian Christopher Bram claims, fiction is a good source for understanding experience that otherwise cannot be documented.

His novel *Adrift on the Nile*, for example, is based in Egypt, some time after the 1952 revolution. The plot is about Anis Zaki and his group of friends who meet on a boathouse and have philosophical discussions ranging from love to politics. Other than that, they take pleasure in each other's company by getting high, drinking, and having sex. Because the setting is in a boathouse and the protagonist is high most of the time, his narration is unreliable, and shifts back and forth out of his consciousness, giving readers an obscure grasp on the characters' realities and surroundings. In this sense, both readers and characters are adrift on the Nile, giving recognition to the character's unstable lives and desire for escapism.

Given the context of Egypt at the time, there was a massive drive for nationalism. Inequalities in socioeconomic classes had become more apparent and left a lot of Egyptians confused and frustrated. The search for meaning and purpose became lost on them. As a result, many were driven to feel socially alienated, and these characters felt the search for meaning was pointless. Unrest in civics transferred itself into unrest of the body, soul, and mind.

Though a regional writer, the above is significant because his characters led real lives, with real issues. Social alienation and inequalities are not experiences exclusive to Egypt. Borges humanizes both unique and universal values and struggles.

An Argentinian writer, Borges' erratic style feels otherworldly, almost metaphysical. His many short stories transcend national borders as they entertain Atlantic characters from Medieval Spain to 20th century England. Stories like *El Aleph* and *Ibn Hakim Al Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth* are so rich in their speculative and immersive writing, they serve better than entire novels.

El Aleph's protagonist is a fictional spin on the author himself. The story explores the concept of infinity, as it recounts his grief of his late lover. In the meantime, the protagonist encounters Carlos, her cousin, who is a poet. He and Carlos build a friendship of sorts, until his house is about to get demolished, and Borges thinks him

mad because he claims his cellar houses Aleph, a point in space that has all points of all locations of the universe at the same time. Borges witnesses Aleph, but denies it to Carlos, making him become more insane, and convincing him to abandon his house.

Likewise, Ibn Hakim Al Bokhari, *Murdered in His Labyrinth*, shares this style of alternating consciousness and a multilayered narrative. The story is about two Englishmen trying to uncover the origins of a labyrinth in Cornwall. The two tell each other different versions of the story, which involve two men. One version says Ibn Hakim built it to hide from his cousin Zaid's ghost, who is hunting Hakim down for murdering him. The other says Zaid built it with money he stole from Hakim and lures him there to kill him. Lastly, another version involves neither Zaid, nor Hakim, but two English kings. One takes revenge on the other for destroying his kingdom and traps him in the labyrinth.

In either case, both stories distort subjective reality depending on a character's point of view. It is in this sense both Mahfouz and Borges deal with themes of existentialism. Their works take the readers outside of the world as they know it, or as they are used to it, and emotionally link them to metaphorical interpretations on life, death, and aesthetics.

The strength by which these writers accomplish this proves the power of literature on readers' perception of the world. What makes these two stand out from the usual canon is that they provoke questions of realism while engaging cultural differences in the context of their plots. But it is not enough to introduce Mahfouz or Borges into a curriculum only as a means to understand "culture" and "otherness" in the same ironically, backwards, and tokenizing way black writers are treated to demystify race in classroom discussion. One would have only succeeded, when one can truly namedrop Gibran Khalil Gibran as naturally as one does Shakespeare over coffee, quote Ibn Khaldun the way one does Plato in a debate, and allude to Haruki Murakami's slice of life wisdom in the same way as Laura Ingles Wilder.

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Editors'
Notes

Lead Editor

Johnnie Gill

Johnnie Gill is a 5th year senior at Chadron State College and the Lead Editor of 10th Street Miscellany. She started her education with dreams of being some kind of surgeon and a year in, realized her real talents lay in creative writing. She changed her major posthaste and began writing stories. Focusing mainly on fiction, Johnnie has completed a series of short stories and continues to work on her first of many novels.

Tenth Street Miscellany recruited Johnnie in the months leading up to the 2020 pandemic. Though things came to a halt, she and the rest of the editors did what they could to keep the journal as active as a pandemic-stricken world would allow. She and the others kept the submissions open and planned the future of the journal through zoom and email meetings. Though they weren't able to get an edition out that year, as planned, they decided to leave submissions open over the summer and one back to a large pool of works to put together a printable journal the upcoming fall.

With the start of her fifth year, Johnnie took the reigns of Tenth Street. She and Abigail understood the amounts of work needed to push the journal on after they leave and buckled down to achieve those goals. They recruited Erin and Brandt to the team and together the four of them worked through the piles of Art. Things have been cut close and deadlines have been raced to meet, but after a long first semester, the team is finally ready to present Tenth Street Miscellany's 2021 printed edition.

Johnnie loves what she does for Tenth Street and has thought about pursuing a career in some sort of editing or publishing. Being able to see and read all the amazing works presented to her has not only affected her own writing and style, but there is something about getting the opportunity to decide what artists to present to a larger audience of readers. She enjoys the process of editing new and unpublished works, and enjoys reading such works far more than the mainstream pieces published by already renowned authors.

Though she is leaving CSC and Tenth Street after this spring semester, Johnnie is doing what she can to give the new recruits direction as to what they should be focusing on and what direction the journal should go in next. She hopes to see Tenth Street blow up in the world and become something that many, many people wish to submit to. She plans to submit some of her own work to the journal once she has graduated and is no longer associated with the journal.

Johnnie would like to thank everyone who submitted for their hard work and brilliant imaginations, and wants to encourage everyone who wasn't accepted this edition to submit again in the upcoming years. There are so many different walks of life that should be written down or painted or photographed, and they should be experienced by the masses, and she wishes for Tenth Street Miscellany to be a voice for the unheard and overlooked.

She extends her deepest congratulations to those who were accepted and wants to let each of them know that they are exceptional artists and that, should their artistic medium be a passion to them, that you all should continue in your work. You've wowed us with your abilities, and you're going to wow whoever happens to pick up the 2021 edition of Tenth Street Miscellany. Thank you all, for everything you've expressed and created.

-Johnnie Gill

Editor-at-large

Abigail Swanson

Abigail Swanson is a graduate student at Chadron State College and a member of the Sigma Tau Delta International Honors Society. She has published poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction in prior issues of Tenth Street Miscellany, Sage Cigarettes Magazine, Poetic Sun International Poetry Journal, and has an upcoming piece in Epoch Press Literary Journal.

Although she received her Bachelor's in Business Marketing and is pursuing an Master's of Business Administration focused in Digital Marketing, Abigail loves writing and reading in all genres. She hopes to write and publish all kinds of work and share her love for the literary arts with everyone she touches.

Abigail also loves cheesecake and climbing trees. Her most valued skills and accomplishments include juggling, ripping phonebooks in half, and once giving her roommate a concussion.

In the 2021 edition of Tenth Street Miscellany, Abigail edited the Academic, Art, and Music sections and helped pull everything together in the overall design the edition.

She is very grateful to her fellow editors as well as the faculty advisors for making this edition possible. Special thanks go out to Ashy Blacksheep for helping procure funds for publication.

Thank you to all the writers of Tenth Street Miscellany. You have opened your hearts and shared your soul with us through your words.

Thank you to all the readers of Tenth Street Miscellany. You are the reason Tenth Street exists.

-Abigail Swanson

“Write quickly and you will never write well; write well and you will soon write quickly,”

- Quintaillian

Fiction

Erin Hayhurst

Erin is a sophomore from Scottsbluff, NE, with a major in Advanced English Studies with a sub-plan in Creative Writing. She is involved in Theatre and the college newspaper “The Eagle.”

Her participation in Tenth Street Miscellany has been a wonderful experience and has helped expand her reading interests. She looks forward to future involvement with the journal and with the CSC English program.

Creative Nonfiction

Brandt Hovanec

Editor. Human. Earth.

