

Spring 2014

SEEDS - 2014

Camille J. Severino

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Dear Readers,

So now I am at the final phase of the last journal we will be putting out before I graduate. The journal is laid out and going through some final edits and I am left with this last piece, a letter to you that encapsulates my experience as President and Editor-in-Chief of SEEDS. Once again, I am at a loss for words.

I have learned so much and the experiences and relationships that I've gained from working on SEEDS are more than one little letter can convey. But I would like to say thank you.

Thank you to my staff, who were on the ball, creative and essential this past year. Thank you to NEIU for giving me such an amazing opportunity.

But, again, the thanks go to you, the readers and contributors. Because without the creators and those who love to read, things like magazines and stories would not exist. We do it all to give the contributors an avenue to show their art and to give the reader something to experience.

Because, as I've said in the past, a story, a poem or a work of art are nothing without the people who read or look at them. Art cannot be art until it is reviewed and taken in like breath is taken in to breathe.

So thank you for letting me breathe all of this in. Because of it I am a different person and I will take my experiences with SEEDS with me from NEIU and bring it wherever the future takes me.

Thank you,

Camille Severino
President / Editor-in-Ch

Readers,

The second chapter of the journey is up. On August 7, 2013, I began this incredible journey, along with my amazing cohort Camille and our team. Of course without the authors and artists who submitted this journal would be nothing—but the hard work behind-the-scenes has to be recognized. Without the Camille and the rest of the editorial board, this would be a stack of poems, prose and visual arts, unorganized, left for someone to discover. Without Camille, this journal you are holding in your hands would not be this beautiful masterpiece. Our talented section editors, Chris, Eden, Jonathan, Nathan and Rosalind reviewed every submission and gave each piece feedback. Lastly, I would like to thank Alisa, who worked as the copy editor and helped Camille edit all the written pieces.

Writers & artists, Let your heart roam free to search through the memories you have and to pluck an idea—reflect on that idea and write, draw or photograph away. Then finish by editing the piece, drawing in detail or manipulating the image to further allow the message to beam through.

At the beginning of this semester, I eagerly waited for the promotional material to arrive. Why? Because we ordered mini not pads. This made me ecstatic because I, too, am a writer and having a notepad to jot my ideas down is priceless. I've said it plenty of times, but I'll say it one last time: an artist never puts their pencil or paintbrush down. A writer never runs out of inspiration. They only run into the wall called writer's block.

As I end my note, I have one message for you: enjoy this—it's that simple. Be inspired. Corral the tragedy, happiness, confusion or uncertainty in life to create beauty, in whatever medium you choose and submit to SEEDS. Allow yourself to be vulnerable and takes those battles, obstacles and blissful moments and immortalize them. Feel free to cry, laugh, smile or scream. The pieces are filled with nostalgia. The world each author creates may be familiar, foreign or absurd. Feel free to shout from the mountain tops, be confused or crawl into the fetal position and cry or anything in between. Let each piece seep into your soul and flare some emotion.

After countless hours, I leave this to you, the reader...

Thank You,
Abraham "Abe" Harb
Editor-in-Chief

The Editorial Board Wishes to Thank:

Faculty Advisors

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Travis Truitt

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All those who submitted and all the professors & faculty for the support



Heathcliff ~ Mimi Cross

Love's Seasons

My goal was love, I held you tight.
The journey was hard at times.
What path to take, go left or right,
for answers I had hoped to find.

The sunny days trick foolish hearts,
that rest in passion's sweat.
Storm winds will come and break apart,
the vain treasures that we net.

The urban streets hold cold warnings,
of iceless snow that brings heat.
Must face those fleshly, starved yearnings,
because our fates must choose a street.

New York, London, Paris, or Rome.
Through land, or air or sea,
must find the sanctuary for our heart's home.
You chose this path with me.

Now we find ourselves in valleys deep.
Can we escape the fate,
of this place of tears, where broken hearts weep?
Should turn back, but that option is too late.

With him the marriage vows were made.
We were caught in the envy trap.
With false promises I faced his blade.
No heart destinations were mapped.

The light I saw from mirrors bright,
were reflections from other suns,
blood red roses and burned sights.
The nectar of my life was spun.

I glanced into your eyes once more,
the sojourn we tried to take,
gondola near a bristling shore,
were left to eulogies and my somber wake.

Elbert Tayvon Briggs

That Hole In Your Wall

By the time Mama was 30-something,
you were young, but ancient.
Your infant heart opened up,
and we're not talking figures and figuratively.
Mama said, "Please do not put those toys in that hole in your heart."
Little "Sesame Street® body slowed down, but
 a surgeon, who was a person in our neighborhood,
 said it was all good now.
 No butt whippings for
your hard head,
because that Medicaid heart,
gave that little behind carte blanc like Mastercard®.
As a child you were born King of Ten.
When Mama brought you home from the hospital, it was so cool and neat,
because your ventricular, septal defect had super special effects.

Elbert Tayvon Briggs

I Am Aliyah and Malala

I too am Aliyah and Malala.
Two girls brought two worlds together for me.
In 2012, both girls were shot as well.
Six year-old Aliyah played on that day,

in Little Village Chicago she tried to grow.
15 year-old Malala was learning and reading,
in the Swat Valley in Pakistan.
A child took a stand for education in her nation.

I too am Aliyah and Malala.
Two girls brought two worlds together for me.
You see, Aliyah soared off her tricycle on Angel's wings.
In Little Village, ears can still hear them sing.

Malala, that Taliban plan to silence your 15 young years,
was steered off course when a Mighty Force,
awakened you after surgery took you close to the hereafter.
For a season death flees and now the whole world sees Aliyah in you.

Now it seems that I am Aliyah and Malala too!

Elbert Tayvon Briggs



Peeled Exposure - Tasha Vos

I Prefer Bamboo

It buzzes around plants,
not caring about their features.
They feel a fuzzy sweetness
with landed steps from the creature.

Bees land on any kind of plant,
but swords like different dew.
Some pick feminine flowers,
some prefer masculine bamboos.

*

A sword behind teeth
can swing slurs and threats.
Swings that affect those
that have knives, and regrets.

Revealing a preference where
crosses have hung since the womb,
can lead to a desire for
wilting petals to reach a tomb.

A kitchen knife that
usually cuts veggies and meats
can cut through skin
to reach veins to quiet the beat.

Blood spills over Bibles and
crosses while saints wash their swords.
These samurais bury
innocence in the name of the Lord.

Swords and knives slice at
roots, and sometimes roots release.
Saints swords swing first
then knives retaliate for peace.

*

There are young bamboos
getting sliced down every day
and flowers with broken
stems for mentioning their gay.

Samurais keep doing
what they're known for best,
instead of following
the messiah, who was judgeless.

Grotesque has been said
when mentioning my preference.
Unnatural is his mind
with a Bible as a reference.

From bouts with saints, I
have brown lines on my skin.
I never fought with knives.
My sword swings without sin

Sword fighting through life;
no samurai will defeat me.
I swing, slash my sword
loving everything completely.

*

Swords have crossed without
deciding a win or a loss.
Two swords together can
be loving when they cross.

When a bee lands on us,
swings become calm and tender.
Two plants with joint swords
is love, no matter the gender.

Raul Cañas

Persistence

The yellow leaves are determined to dive
down to the ground to make a road that would
lead to all dreams, which can be strived
for, even if no one said they could.

The naked tree extends its fingers
towards the never ending sky while it deems
without lifting its feet. Its arms linger
with patience. Even trees have dreams.

The sparrow sits at the finger tips,
waiting for a gust, a wind to help it take
flight. It spreads its wings, ready for a trip
that would guide it to where dreams awake.

But the squirrel says Fuck you! and catches
the falling leaves, tickles the poised tree,
tackles the flying sparrow, and matches
the tenacity for dreaming of all those three.

I stand outside, watching my dog
chase this little bastard while I scream
Get 'em! People stare at me while they jog
and I explain Nothing will halt my dreams.

Raul Cañas



Variations on Bill Murray III - Eric Novak

[conduct]

she has written a new music
in which men and women play
and instruments dance.

it echoes between doorways,
played, weighted
with the things it moves.
you have written in it, to
have it written in you.
when you have left, slam,
the orchestra
crescendos in the movements of your hands.

conduct it, sucker
now
you've got the chance.

Crystal Eidson

[interface]

the road unfurls an icy landscape, seen,
not walked by bone-sore legs on frostbit feet
face winter through a window, through a screen
as wheels crush slush that vibrates through your seat
gloves on the wheel, a scarf across your mouth
you touch no thing and all that touches you
was built to meet the hands you now reach out
your only world's the made things world leaks through
five thousand generations fought to tame
the wind and lightning, growing things and ground
give every object function and a name,
which we can call to answer to its sound,
infuse world with the internet of things
then hang from it, marionettes on strings

Crystal Eidson

A Rumble of Gas

“Don’t you think I know that?” Lydia said with her arms crossed.

“Despite your sarcasm, I’m gonna say no. Look, if you think this is some kind of game we’re playing, then you’re wrong,” Victor replied. His heart thumped against his chest. Beating his right fist against the steering wheel he screamed, “I swear, why do you always want to fight with me?”

“Oh, here we go again. Screaming like the whole world is against you! Can’t you just take a different viewpoint for once in your life?” Lydia pressed her fingers on her forehead. “My god, just talking to you hurts my head now.”

Victor exhaled, “Look, whatever. If the cops show up, we take whoever’s in there hostage. Period.”

“You’re an idiot. I’ve known you for five years and I think we both know if the cops come, you’re going to freak out and shit your pants.”

“Shit my pants? I was the starting quarterback in high school! They called me—”

“Ice Man Vic! Yeah, I know. I’ve heard that damn story eight hundred times!” Lydia shrugged her shoulders. “What the hell does it mean now?”

The roar of the engine rose as he accelerated the Ford Taurus along the lonely avenue. She reached into her grey sweatshirt pocket and took out a cigarette. She tilted her head down as she lit it with her Zippo. She took a couple of puffs and started tapping her finger on the armrest.

Victor exhaled, “Okay, you know what? I know we’re both angry. But we need this money! I know it and you know it. So let’s just focus.” Lydia turned to him and nodded her head slightly.

Paying attention to the road again, he said, “Fine. So let’s go over the plan again one last time. We both go in there and you go all the way in the back looking for a Fresca or whatever Oprah tells you to drink—”

“Oh, goddamn it! Not one second before you start with this Oprah garbage!” Lydia flicked her half-lit cigarette out the window.

“Well, whatever! It doesn’t matter! You go to the back and I head to the chip aisle. If the store’s clear, then we head to the front. That’s when you pull the gun out at the cashier and ask for all the money.”

“Wait. What? No, you’re the one who’s pulling out the gun! You know I’m afraid of guns!”

“Well, face your fear already.” Victor pulled out a nine millimeter Glock out of his faded black leather jacket and laid it on her lap. “There. Are you over it now?”

She flung her arms up and shrieked, “Get this damn thing out of my lap! Get it off!”

“You know, that’s all I’ll been hearing from you. Negativity!” He reached for the gun and put it back in his pocket.

“First of all, you’re an idiot. Second, this is such a stupid idea. Why can’t we just sell drugs like normal people?” Lydia leaned her head against the half-opened window.

“So. Damn. Negative. I’m trying to get us out the hellhole we’re in. Seriously, how long do you want to live with your Uncle Oscar? I mean, honestly, who keeps dropping out of clown college?”

She rubbed her eyes and whimpered out, “I know. I can’t even open the door without animal balloons blocking the doorway.”

“And I can’t tell you how many times I’ve tripped over his novelty shoes!” Victor began slowing down and made a lumbering right turn into the Gas with Class station. He put the car in brake and turned the engine off.

She straightened her hair and grumbled, “No, you’re right. And that Bozo poster in the bathroom is really starting to freak me out at night.” She stretched her arm into the backseat to reach for an oversized straw hat. She plopped it down on her shoulder-length bronze-colored hair. “Well, are you ready?”

He reached into the glove box to get a pair of Blublocker sunglasses and slowly put them on. He turned to her and said, “Hasta la vista, baby.”

“That doesn’t even make sense. Do you ever listen to what you’re saying?” She got out of

the car and struggled to get her straw hat through the door.

He stepped out, slammed the door shut and ran a comb across his pompadour. “Okay. Remember, we don’t leave until we get all the money.”

“Yeah, yeah,” she said.

The glimmering jingle of chimes cascaded above them as they strolled into the gas station. They saw a slender man in his early twenties, sweeping the front of the store. He seemed focused on sweeping since he didn’t even glance around to see them. He noticed a small television mounted on the wall. With the volume muted, he could see an episode of COPS playing. A criminal slowly rose out of a dumpster with his hands up, as two police officers were pointing their guns at him. Victor couldn’t help but smirk at his predicament. As planned, Lydia went straight to the soda aisle while Victor went to the chip aisle. He noticed there was no one else in the store except for the clerk. He got a bag of Doritos and saw Lydia pick out a lemon Fresca. They made eye contact and nodded as they headed down to the front.

The clerk, in a fresh crew cut, had finished sweeping and started heading towards the register. He put his hands on the counter and smiled, “Hey, how are you guys tonight?”

A huge screech of tires outside the gas station startled all three of them. They all craned their necks around to see a Silver Ford Bronco skid in front of the store. A man dressed in black with a ski mask on began running into the store. Carrying a sawed off shotgun with his right hand, he cracked back the door, nearly knocking down the chimes. Pointing the gun at them he roared, “All right, you fuckers! Put your hands up!”

Victor clutched his stomach and felt the uncontrollable rush of pressure coming out of his intestines. “Oh, no! I think I’m going to shit my pants.”

Lydia, with her hands straight up, hissed at Victor, “Out all the nights! You stupid idiot!”

Ski Mask growled again, “Hey, I said shut up! And put your hands up, Pompadour!” Looking at the clerk at the counter now, he pointed his shotgun and said, “Okay, you, open the damn register and put all the money in a plastic bag.”

Visibly shaken, the clerk whimpered out, “I’m sorry we only carry paper.”

“What the fuck did you say?”

“We only carry paper.”

“What kind of society do we live when you can’t even get a plastic bag? Fine! Put it in a paper bag. And hurry up!” The clerk began wobbling back and forth until his eyes rolled back and he crumpled down to the floor. “Son of bitch! Did he just faint? What kind of society do we live in where men faint?”

Seizing the opportunity, Victor pulled out his Glock for the first time and said, “Okay, asshole. We were going to rob this place first before you barged in so how about we split the money?”

Lydia nodded her head and shouted, “Yeah! Wait, what?” Lydia, punched Victor on the shoulder. “No! We’re taking all the money. Not half of it!”

“I know but I have to compromise here, Lyd– ”

Ski Mask cocked his shotgun and roared, “Are you all crazy? I’ll blow both of you in half!” He blasted a shot at the ceiling, showering the front of the store in shredded plaster.

Victor’s piercing shriek made Lydia cover her ears. He cried out, “Holy shit! Just take it! Take the money!” They fell to their knees and put their hands up, allowing Ski Mask to run to the register.

Lydia shook her head and said, “I knew you were going to blow this. I should have listened to my mom. I never should’ve gone out with you.”

Victor’s face flushed red. “Oh, bullshit. Your mom loves me. Remember that Christmas card!”

Lydia frowned. “Are you serious? Your name wasn’t even on it.”

Ski Mask opened the register and began stuffing all the money in the paper bag. He left the register open and darted around back to the front door. Before he left he blurted out, “Lady, I don’t think straw hats are still in style. Hasta la vista, baby!” He rammed the door open with his shoulder and sprinted to his car.

Lydia smacked Victor on the back of the head. “That’s how you use that line!”

“I can’t believe he stole my line!” Victor pointed to his chest. “That was going to be my line when I left! Damn it!”

“Let’s just get the hell out of here!” She bolted up and ran out as Victor followed. They both tried to open the car door. She panted, “Hey, hurry up! Open it!”

Victor reached into his pocket and felt nothing but lint. His knees became rubbery and his heart slammed against his rib cage. A rumble of gas rippled inside his intestines and he murmured, “I think I locked the keys inside the car.”

Lydia’s shoulders slumped, “I’m breaking up with you again.”

A screech of tires made Victor and Lydia jump up. Ski Mask began racing back towards the gas station as police lights flashed in the distance. The lights turned red as he began approaching the intersection. He continued speeding up. In the opposite direction, Lydia saw her Uncle Oscar, peering out of his beat up orange Volkswagen, full of balloons, sputtering in the opposite intersection. With both hands on top of her head, she screamed, “Oh, my god!” The Bronco and the Volkswagen both slammed into each other. Debris cascaded in the middle of the intersection. The front ends of each vehicle were completely crushed. Deformed animal balloons began flying out of Uncle Oscar’s broken passenger side window.

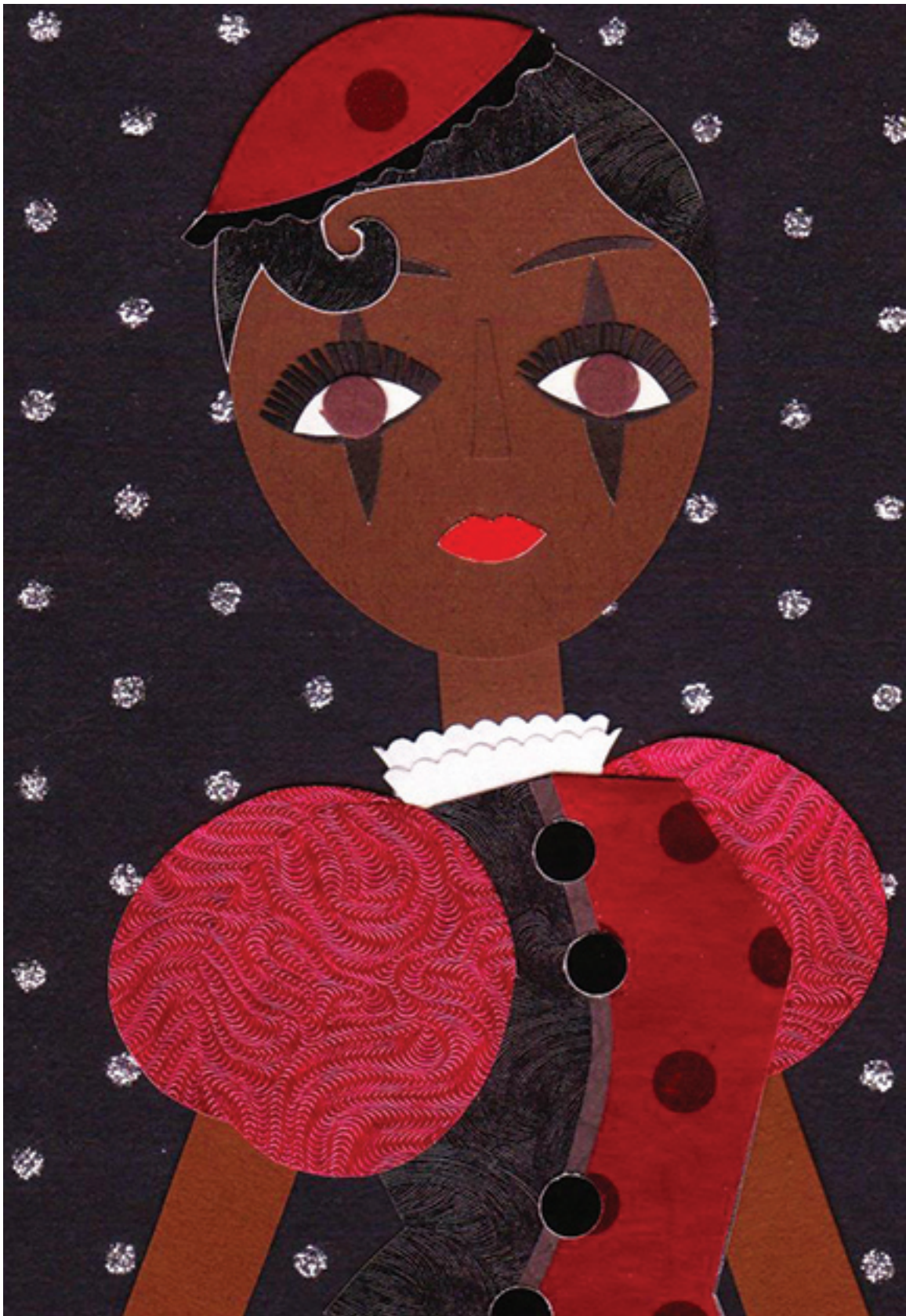
Uncle Oscar stepped out of car, dusted himself off and looked at his Volkswagen shouting, “Damn it! I just paid this thing off yesterday!”

“You’re okay!” Lydia cried out.

Victor still in disbelief screamed out at him, “Oscar! The balloons! They saved you!”

Ski Mask opened his driver side door and crumpled down onto the pavement. He began crawling away with the paper bag of money still in his hand. Police cars swarmed the intersection. With sirens whirring and red and blue flashing lights consuming the area, Uncle Oscar turned around only see Lydia and Victor waving at him as they began to run away.

Joel Gallardo



Harlequin Girl - Mimi Cross

Dialect of a Lifespan

We all now own
tall sound speakers
great Babylonian tombs
for memories of glory

discourses of raging glory
but instead

we were scattered by the
green jejune wont of Springtime
to touch upon
the real body of youth

as the young do
with songs

and the world that we
supposedly lived in
to speak to
with some ridiculous humor

it's safe in the tiny living spaces
allotted to laborers
with memories in a box
for its music bending

some linear purpose
turned undulant
of what we thought
we once stood for
and categorized
in a taxonomy of faith

but the present
as some purported counterpoint
riding on defeats;
waves against the
once fortified axiom

that drew us in
its magnitude of clarity
is still clear and erected
but floods now have names

many of them
and us giving way
to the cold
of the northern undercurrent
of age and pipe dreams
or rather
the buzz of the deep bass line
the lowest plane in a song
to finally lay upon
without a word to say

Yarlexolnikov

Prometheus

Not to know the man
Prometheus
but the surrounding
cold

as a revolution is
hypothermic
the enveloping cold
of its eve

its development

ravenous outside
in the street
but wholesome
with drive

despite the coat of frost
from an Olympian smug
bestowed austerity
unfitting for a Titan

a result of a fling
with a fomenting ocean
hot: in spite of its
benumbed starkness
natural thrust
for the heat of the land

A track laid out
in solidarity
for those parched
land dwellers

one only a trickster
could envision
to the point of
inevitability

, clear in a frozen dawn

inevitable thievery
after
the prolonged tread
through the frigid night

when our blind pavements
yet to have form
were centripetal centers
bereft of pulpits
bereft of thought
bereft of fire...

in his eyes, "it must happen now,
I've stumbled upon this frost-bitten track"
now, during his winter
"Spring will be too late"
no more fireless springs –with gods
"we'll cast them into
pottery and artifacts"
snickering
"and we'll hold up the torch,
despite the eternal punishment"

Yarlexolnikov

Back Seat Drive

I was a kid. About 17. My mother had been on edge lately. She would sit on her couch, endlessly staring at the TV. Or past it. I could never tell. Her eyes, bulging out and puffy—tissues nearby soaked in tears. Two more days passed and then the weekend came. That weekend, we wouldn't go to the movies, spend quality time at the mall or even leave that couch, just a quick stop to the store for tissues.

That famous couch with its oversized, comfortable pillows, that until this point in my story and on occasion after that, served as perfect pillow fight pillows and easily stacked, doubling as a fort wall. The sun beaming in through the window, giving metaphorical light, to these instantly gloomy few days.

My mother sat me and my siblings on the formal living room couches. Not the ones with the big pillows, but that ugly one that would hurt my butt—stiff with seriousness—arranged in a way that forced us to look at each other with nowhere to stare, now that the shades were closed. She stood up and shut the dining room lights.

Suddenly, the light from the porch light lit up one window and shone through the glass door. My mother sighed—tissues still near as I rose to open the door.

“Sit!” she said and my worry grew.

“It's open,” she said to whoever was on the other side of the door.

My dad entered, promptly sat down next to my brother without greeting my mother or removing his shoes. My mother began to weep.

From there, that night was a blur. My brother would later recall sitting on that unwelcoming couch, staring out the window, watching my father get into his car and drive away. We all remembered the door closing softly, his distinguishable footsteps gliding down the stairs with the noise of his car unlocking, confirming his presence in our lives disappearing. It was drawn out, but inevitable.

Days passed, then weeks and months. My mother would stare endlessly at the window until she would see or hear us. Soon the rides in the back seat of my father's car came less and less. Sometimes I would have to shove over the cloths and his laptop bag, just to get in.

My mother began cracking a smile that slowly turned into a smirk, slowly growing into a full smile. The backseat rides began to come even less—and my father’s couch, still untouched. My mother didn’t even fix it as a part of her Saturday morning cleaning routine.

One day she even walked past it, stopping, as if it was a shrine. I was watching her through the kitchen partitions, her stare implied some hatred as if she was spitting on it in a (not-so-private) moment of release to let go of any anger she still held on to and then bursting into tears. Later that night our planned, back seat drive never happened.

Ironically, the same night, my mother, after gathering all her strength, sat all three of us down. Sitting opposite her, she gave us a speech, the first of many using cars as a metaphor.

“You can’t be a backseat driver or sit in the backseat forever. You have to take risks.”

* * * * *

I was a late bloomer unmotivated, about driving.

Something about driving and cars scared me. Perhaps it was the anxiety from an accident two years earlier or the view I had as I stuck my head between both front seats. The cars, zooming by at lightening speed, the radio bass booming from the car on the left and the man talking on his phone, unaware of the light change as we drive by him.

Within the next year, the unstable back seat rides in my father’s car were replaced. He would sit in the passenger’s seat and hold on for dear life. My driving was and still is erratic. Many changes happened: my mother began to use tissues less often; I started to sit on my dad’s couch; and the car metaphor my mother used in her talks started to come from a place of sincerity, not spite. Most importantly, I began to sit in the passenger’s seat!

My dad rolled down the window as we ran towards the car, saying, “sit up here,” patting the passenger seat as if it was a throne, only the royals sat on.

That marked my eighteenth birthday.

In reality, that seat was nothing more than a seat except in my mother's metaphors. It was hot the same way the back seat was in the summer. It was also just as hot in the summer when my dad couldn't find a parking spot in the shade. Or so I thought. He would soon get a new car and it had heaters for your butt. Too bad it didn't have a cooler for the summer so I wouldn't have to peel my skin off the seat.

* * * * *

I would come home from school, watch TV and eat an apple, accompanied with some sort of bigger snack. I would finish my homework each evening, dreading the phone call from my father right before he left work.

"Do you want to practice tonight?"

"Ummm.....Not really!" I would reply most days, not even allowing him to properly greet me.

Eventually, my stubborn attitude would succumb and I reluctantly practiced. My fear soon subsided, turning to a comfortable fear, taking the last step, adding music into the mix. I could clearly remember how quickly my father reached over and lowered the music, ruining the moment and scolding me for putting it on. Now I had to control the gas and brake, watch my space between me and the car in front of me, staying in the lines along with all the other driving duties and manage to not get lost in the song that was playing. I never get distracted by a song. I drive.

Shortly thereafter, that fear was in the backseat next to my sweater and the empty water bottles. My hair blowing in the air and my father's hand sticking out of the passenger seat window. I felt like such an adult, but I was not.

I don't even know how I put the car in park; I hopped out of the car, dashed into the house, holding the piece of paper that would bring tears of joy to my mother.

"I got it!....I got!" I yelled, scaring my mother as I searched the house for her.

"You got the yogurt?" my mother said from the back of the house, as I charged in her direction like a bull stampeding.

“No...I mean yes...and I got this,” I said, holding out a plastic card, “My license!”

Her first born was on his way to adulthood. I felt a car metaphor coming, but instead, a gush of tears tears out of happiness, tears of excitement and tears of shock. My dad and I were out running a few errands and I decided to ask if I could go to the DMV and take the license test. We had the discussion before about me officially completing my hours, but I never wanted to do it. That uncomfortable fear would recede back to simply fear and when I said, “dad, hand me the hour sheet,” which was wedged between the cup holders in the back seat, I officially no longer took the backseat drive that I had been taking for so long.

I could now take the car to work, run errands and just go on a ride. But my mother would hesitate, not wanting to shelter me, but was witness to my driving habits—the same habits she had. And at best, I was a mediocre driver. In comparison to those who thought that the roads were a NASCAR race track, zigzagging from lane to lane so carelessly, blowing stop signs. I was more than mediocre. Yet her hesitation still existed as I sat on the comfortable couch talking to her, this time, not staring endlessly out or past the window.

Life had somehow come full circle in a full year.

Different things made her cry and not tears of a broken woman.

Tears of a mother who knew her kids were growing up.

Abraham Harb

Should love feel like a wall?

Should love be like a wall?

No...

Then you are on one side
And your lover is the other side.

Communication is hard.
You can never hold their hand,
make love,
have intimate moments
or even see their face.

Dare I say, it's blind love? Because it is.

I pause and wait for a reply.

Yes...

love should be like a wall.

I want my lover to strive for their life.

I don't want to be the only reason for them to wake up every morning—
He must strive for his greatness
And to be a strong and powerful individual.

I think momentarily and shout back over the wall.

What's the point of being a powerful individual—
then going home to a partner that is always keeping you on the other side of the
wall?

You can't be in love
You can't see the love

Build a wall, for your own sanity—

But allow me to come onto your side.
Allow me to hold your hand,
to make love,
to have intimate moments
and to see your unveiled face.

Should love be like a wall?

No...

You should never live life like a wall...

You'll always feel alone.
And by choice you'll feel secluded.

I ask for a window to be installed in the wall.

He yells something over the wall—

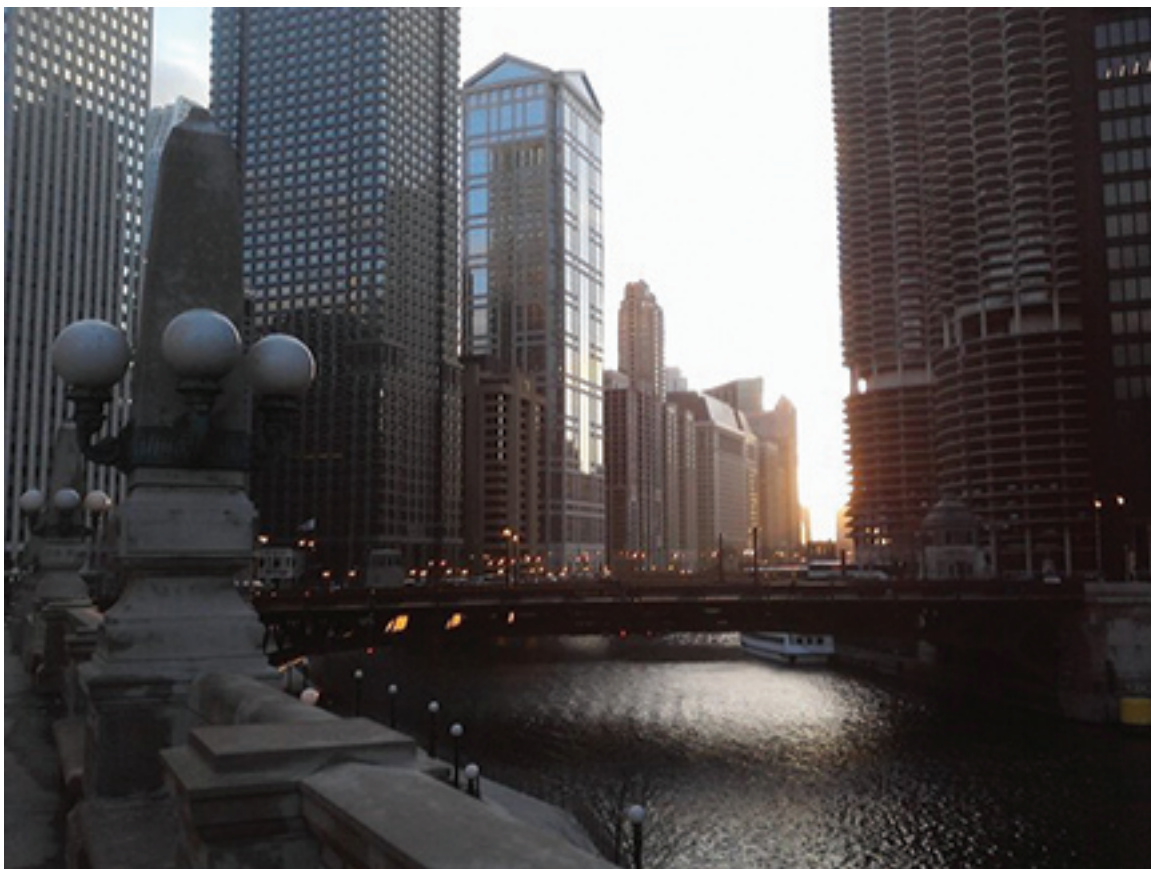
But I can't hear what he says.

So I just walk away.

Should love be like a wall?

Should it... ?

A.i. Herv



Chicago River - Kyle Anthony Moore

Bed of Roses Indeed

Chapter 1

The bright, orange, red, yellowish autumn leaves fall to ground. I stare at the window as leaves blow around then up at the ceiling eyes, pointing to a specific position, imploring that this boredom ends. Elisa, my twin sister, sits beside me on our cushioned sofa, reading a book. Mom, engrossed in this new world, searching on the web about thanksgiving. I look at my daily examination.

Blend in at school.

Learn English well.

Try new things and learn as much as possible about this culture.

Do well in your grades.

Elisa shifts her glance from her book to me. I could hear her musing now. Her eyes sample me and return to her book.

“Mom, what are we going to do for thanksgiving?” Elisa asks.

Mom doesn’t answer. Instead, she continues looking at the computer.

She faces us. “We have to go grocery shopping. Now get dressed and when we come back you will clean up.”

“Mom!” Elisa complains.

We walk down the crowded aisles of Jewel Osco.

“Here,” Mom hands me her list, “read it to me.” Elisa follows, pushing the cart. I glance at the list.

Meals

Turkey

Stuffing

Mashed potatoes

Gravy

Carrot sticks

Black olives

cranberry sauce

Desserts

Strawberry cheesecake

Jell-o with fruit cake

Pumpkin pie

Decorations

Cornucopia

Fall leaves

Pumpkins

Candles

What are stuffing and cornucopia? How is Mom going to cook all these? Better yet did we need all these ingredients for this celebration? We are only four in the family. She pays the cashier and we pack the bags into the car. The heavy car slowly drives, returning us home. Dad isn't home. I realize as I carry the bags in our apartment. He probably left for work. He works as a laundry attendant at the Peninsula Hotel while Mom works as a CNA.

"Alright, I am going to cook some of the food today and the rest tomorrow. Who will help me?"

Elisa points to me.

"How about you both help me? Elisa, put the turkey in the freezer. You," she directs her gaze at me, "are going to help me decorate. This will be fun! I wonder what other American traditions there are." Mom beams.

Chapter 2

Mom hands me line of fall leaves. I hang around the curtain rod. It is late morning. Elisa and I cut the top of two heavy pumpkins and carefully place two candles in each like Mom directed. I place the cornucopia in the middle of the dining table. We dust the living room and clean the kitchen. Dad emerges from his room and into the living room. Mom and I stay in kitchen and continue decorating.

"What are all these decorations for?" Dad asks

"It's for Thanksgiving," Elisa informs.

He enters the kitchen.

"Rashida, I thought we already discuss this."

Mom faces him. Her face is clueless.

“Discuss what?”

“Thanksgiving. We already discuss that we won’t celebrate it.”

“I know, Muhammad. I thought we try it since we are here. We might try American traditions. It’s not like we don’t have time. The kids are on break.”

“We already agreed that we wouldn’t bring this up again.”

“You mean, you already decided that we wouldn’t discuss this. Muhammad, you know when we discuss this I wasn’t satisfied with the conclusion we made. Why do we always have to do things your way?”

“We shouldn’t talk about this now. It is already been decided.” Dad looks away.

I stop and sit at the dining table, watching them.

“No, Let us talk about it now.”

“We will talk about it later,” Dad grinds his teeth while saying this.

“I really want what’s best for the children. That’s why I want us to celebrate Thanksgiving.” She softens her voice. “It will be a good experience.”

“It is not necessary.”

Anger erupts and rages in both of them. None of them settle for the other’s points.

“This is final! We are not celebrating Thanksgiving.”

“No!”

“Mom! Dad!” Elisa screams. “Will you stop arguing?” She stands at the entrance of the kitchen.

She gestures for them to sit down. They sit at the dining table. Elisa takes a seat facing them.

“Now you are going to talk about this like adults. Dad, tell Mom what you want her to do and then I’ll ask Mom what she wants and we can make an agreement.”

Dad scowls at her. His face is stern. He hardens his face and stares at her as if telling her to stop budding in every time they argue.

“Come on. Tell Mom.”

“I don’t have time for this. I have to go to work.” He stands up and leaves for work.

“Don’t mind him. Just go back to what you are doing,” Mom orders.

Elisa goes back to living room, Mom returns to cooking and I continue to set the table. The apartment is quiet for a long while. Once in while Mom tells us more things to do.

Mom calls us for dinner. We wait for Dad. He enters through the front door and into the kitchen. The decorations still remain. Dad doesn’t quibble about them. Instead he enjoys his dinner with us. We are united as a family as always. Faces brighten and conversation is shared. There is no talk of the fray that existed earlier, just four people at a table, enjoying a meal together.

Chapter 3

“Wake up.” A slight tapping touches my shoulder. I slowly open my eyes. A bright, florescent light roams the room, beautifying every corner. I close my eyes and go back to sleep.

“Wake up, Alima.” Elisa forces again.

“Leave me alone,” I murmur.

She taps me again, but this time harder. I hoist myself and leisurely sit up on my bed. Elisa and my mom stand in front of me.

“Come on,” Elisa says.

“Why are you waking me up so early?”

“Today is thanksgiving, remember?” Mom stresses as she takes my hand and drags me out of bed and towards the floor. My legs flutter on the ground unable to balance myself. I draw a deep breath and walk to the bathroom. I flush water on my face and take my bath. Dad is already awake. He sits on the couch, reading a newspaper.

“Muhammad, the kids are awake.” He nods at us.

“I still think we should celebrate thanksgiving.”

“I told you we are not celebrating thanksgiving, Rashida. What has gotten into you? Have you gone mad?”

“You’re just angry that we are no more in Pakistan.” She pauses. “We can’t just hide ourselves and not recognize we are in the United States. Can’t you at least try for the kids?”

“Ok, you can go ahead. I am going to get ready to work.”

“I thought you were off.”

“Well, I’m going back to sleep.” He walks away and vanishes into his hiding place.

Mom walks away sadly.

“It is okay.” She comforts. “We will celebrate thanksgiving.”

She doesn’t go to sleep as she usual when she comes back from work. Instead, she skips her sleep and goes to the kitchen. I sit on the couch, wondering what other families do on Thanksgiving.

“Hey, wanna play scrabble?” Elisa asks.

“Okay,” I reply.

She goes into our room and returns with it. We sit down on the floor, board set up, ready to play. I had played this game several times. EDGE, she places the letters on the board. I place my words on the board, also. We continue playing turn after turn until the game ends. I notice the fall leaves outline our curtains, stretching their limbs in a twisted line until the end of fabric. We help Mom cook strange dishes. The whole apartment starts to seem strange. It is no more the same. Instead, it is covered with the traditions of this unknown culture. The one I’m living in now and know little about it. Evening storms down on us.

“Time for dinner,” Mom calls.

We take our seats at the table. Dad doesn’t come out of his hiding place. Mom takes her seat. A bright orange pumpkin sits on the dinner table. Five candles are glued in it. The cornucopia sits steadily in the center of the table. Grapes, oranges bananas, peaches pour from within it. Strange foods envelop the table. In one of the foil containers is orange pie. In another, there are vegetables. Black olives, carrots, and shallots. I serve them onto my plate. I cut the turkey and place it on my plate. It tastes appetizing. I feel pity for Dad. He is missing out on these dishes. A soft, creamy porridge with a brownish, thick liquid spread on it catches my eye.

“What is this? I point at it.”

“Oh, that’s mashed potato with gravy. Taste it,” Mom encourages.

I take a spoon and serve myself. The sweet soft and mushy potato brushes my tongue. I like it. I continue to delight in all the exotic foods. Elisa seems to like this, too. I indulge in this new experience. We gather around the TV to watch an American movie that Mom had bought to suit the occasion. Elisa and I relax on the couch. Night dawns on us. I try to keep awake, but my eyes refuse to cooperate. I yield and go to my room and sleep there.

A creaking noise disturbs my sleep. I rub eyes. Elisa is gently opening the door.

“Elisa? Where are you going?” I ask.

It is midnight. She turns to me and bites her lower lip as if mad at me. She closes the door behind her.

She is dressed in a short, red skirt and black tank top.

“None of your business. Do a favor. Don’t tell Mom and Dad.”

“What? It’s too late.”

She rolls her eyes. “Will you cover me?”

I shake my head.

She opens the door and leaves. She stubbornly walks out of our room and exits through the back door.

“Come back!”

I slip into my sandals without undressing out of my pajamas and run after her. She approaches the gate. The lurid sky enfolds the city. It hides the blissful crescent moon and street lamps, making it almost impossible for me to see. She passes all the buildings and houses on our streets. She goes ahead farther from our street. We pass by more buildings and houses. She approaches a blue house. I stand far behind her. There is nowhere to hide. I lurk in front of the house next to it as if I’m visiting the person who lives there. She knocks on a door. A tall, pale boy with black hair opens it. His green eyes glisten when he sees her. He has an angular face. He doesn’t look like Elisa’s age. He resembles a seventeen year old. He nods at her. She rushes in.

What is Elisa doing here? I walk towards the blue house. I twist the door knob trying to open it. It is locked. I try prying the door open. It still doesn’t budge. How am I going to get in? I look around for a possible way in. There is a dog paunch on the door. I squat and poke in my head. I straighten my legs and squeeze my upper body through. I press upon my hands and tread my legs forward, pushing the rest of my body in. I watchfully crawl in. My face rolls and pounces on the hardwood floor. I pull myself off the floor and stand up. A big black dog is sleeping in the living room. Fear strikes me. Calm down, Alima. Nothing will happen to you. A voice in my mind consoles me. Seeing that they are not in the living room, I quietly walk up the steps. There are three rooms. I stare at them. I wonder which they are in. I gently open the first, making sure they wouldn’t realize someone coming in. They are not there. Instead, an older man and women are sleeping in the bed. I assume those are the parents. I peek in the third room. I see the boy’s lips cling to Elisa’s. He squeezes her waist and takes off her tank top. His hand outlines her breasts. Elisa takes off his T- shirt. He pushes her on the bed. She lies on her back. He bends down now on top of her and kisses her passionately once again. Her legs wrap daintily around his neck, pulling him closer to her. He kisses her legs continuously. I close the door gently and carefully tip toe out of the house. I don’t know my way back home. I walk carelessly about. Tired and weary, I lose my way in the wrong neighborhoods. I finally find myself home. I go to the gate of my building. Suddenly I remember that I don’t have a key.

“Oh. Oh! Oh!!!” I cry in frustration.

How am I going to get in now? Mom and Dad are probably sleeping. They must have checked on us. I lay in front of gate. You are very stupid, Alima, the voice in my head tells me. Why did you follow Elisa? I start to doze off and drift into slumber. I sleep on the sidewalk.

A hand taps me on my shoulder. I open my eyes as I stretch my arms. It is Elisa. She unlocks the gate and we walk in. She sits on the bed and takes off her shoes.

“Who is that boy?”

“He is my boyfriend. Marcus.”

“You weren’t having sex,” I glare at her.

“Of course not. We were just making out.”

She lies reluctantly on her bed. I sit on my bed.

“How long have you been doing this?”

“Been doing what?”

“Sneaking out.”

“I don’t know. Maybe a month or so. You won’t tell Mom and Dad. Will you?”

I stand there motionless.

“I can’t trust you. Go ahead and tell Mom and Dad, if you want. Just leave me alone!” she cries.

I slip out of my sandals and lie on my bed.

Mildred Kajah

Click Clack

There was little escape from the oppressive heat, except for the occasional gust of wind in the wake of the speeding cars. She considered hitching a ride, a few cars had even pulled over and offered, but she had spotted the Highway of Tears sign and declined. She wasn't Indigenous, but the whole reason she had opted for this trek was to avoid death. Her bus had been delayed. Flat tires. Superstitious, Mel ripped up her ticket and took to the road.

She was beginning to regret that decision before she stirred out of her introspection. Still now, Mel kept her eyes to the ground. With a slow, deliberate move, she raised her head and gazed down the highway road. The cars had disappeared, abruptly. Looking down the other way, she saw no approaching vehicles.

Paranoid, that's all she was being. A highway this long, it wasn't unusual for there to be empty, quiet stretches.

Click clack

Mel turned on her heels, hands curled in fists. Someone stood in the middle of the road, a great distance away. Somehow she could still make out the familiar bronze skin and the gleam of silvery bone peeking out from receding flesh; shining teeth that ground together with a distinct click caught rays of sun, reflecting them back at her.

The figure waved.

Mel took off running in the other direction. Her backpack bounced painfully against her back and her ankles ached from the sudden movement. The burning settled in her lungs quickly and her vision blurred with tears or sweat.

It was of no surprise that she didn't see the ditch until she fell face first into it. Landing with a painful thump, Mel clenched her eyes shut against the dirt and bit her lip. Every muscle tensed and ached with pain, she thought, if she could stay still enough, she'd be safe.

"Hey, are you alright?"

Mel cracked open her eyes and with it, civilization came pouring back in. Where there was silence before, there was now the steady rumble of passing cars. She glanced down at her right hand before looking up out of the ditch. Among the dirt and scuffed skin were three simple black lines, no more than an inch long, etched onto the base of her thumb. Curling her fingers, she looked out of the ditch.

A young man stood just at the edge, hands on his knees and a concerned expression in his eyes. He held out a hand to her. She grasped it, doing her best to ignore the pains in her body. Nothing's broken, she thought as he pulled her out, probably nothing but skinning.

She brushed off the dirt and leaves from her clothes, readjusting the straps of her backpack.

"Thank you," she replied, pointedly ignoring his face as she stared down the road.

"Yeah, no problem. You sure you're alright?" She nodded. "You heading east? I can take you as far as Prince George."

"I don't want to impose..." Her finger twitched nervously. She finally made eye contact with the man, a handsome white man with an upper middle class vibe to him. "I'd like that. Thank you."

His face lit up and he eagerly walked around his car, some sort of SUV, and hopped into the driver's seat. He opened the passenger door from his end.

Settling into the warm seat, Mel shifted her back in front of her, sitting it down between her legs. As he drove down the road, the awkwardness fully set in. She watched the cars pass by with minimal interests. Several freight trucks came down the opposite way. It made her a little nervous.

"So, uh, what's your name? I'm Daniel."

"Mel."

"Is that short for something?"

"Philomel."

He leaned back in his seat, laughing. It broke a little bit of the awkwardness. "Wow, Jesus, that's... that's a pretty ominous name."

"That's a good mood to my life." Mel leaned her forehead against the window. The pain in her joints dulled to a slow burn. Nothing bled through her jeans so she felt fine leaving the aftercare for later.

"Yeah, I feel ya. I've had way too many near death experiences for one person."

Mel felt her heart stop. "You don't say."

Daniel nodded, slipping into the explanation easily. He had obviously told this story more than once. "Parents died in a car crash when I was a kid. I made it out with only scratches. And then when I was sixteen I walked out of a convenience store just before some van drove right into it. And

remember that train back in the U.S. that was derailed?”

Mel didn't reply. She really didn't remember, but he continued with ease. There was another freight truck in the opposite lane down the road. Her eyes were trained upon it.

“Almost got on that one, too! It's nuts. I've always been close to death, I guess.”

Click clack

She was there in Mel's peripherals. Sitting in the backseat as if she had been there the whole time, her arms outstretched across the top of the seats. The truck was closer now.

“How weird,” Mel said, her voice steady. She quietly unlocked her door.

“Right?” Daniel smiled, glancing over at her for a moment. “You okay?”

The truck was fast, veering into their lane at times. Maybe ten seconds now.

“No.” Mel reached for the door handle, grasping her bag tight with the other hand. “This is my stop.”

She pushed her door open, throwing herself out of the vehicle. Some part of her remembered that tucking and rolling was probably something she should have done, but that thought disappeared when her leg hit the pavement. She rolled off the road and into the grass, arms curled protectively over her head. Her bag was likely somewhere scattered on the road. Her entire body twitched at the sickening sound of the vehicles crashing into each other.

Her entire body was tensed with adrenaline. Mel could barely make out the sounds of the truck driver getting out, half crying and shouting. As her senses returned, so did the pain. Her arms seemed fine, beyond more scraping of skin. At least for now. Peering over her shoulder, she saw the driver on his phone, likely calling the police.

Daniel was halfway out of his windshield. He wasn't moving. She was there, standing in front of the car, looking almost disappointed.

Mel rested her body fully on the ground, resisting a sigh of relief. Her right arm lay limp on the grass. She turned the shaking hand towards her. Two inch-long black lines right at the base of her thumb. Mel smiled and closed her eyes.

Nergal Malham

A hard path

Karmatic intervention directs the soul from one generation to the next, we flow
The need to progress, modified by humanities' pull, habits that are formed, create your temporal path.
Existence, no matter what passions or desires you may chase, might slow you down.
Still, you should know there's more to life than this time or place and this is part of the flow.
You can, if you try, get what you want, keep following your dream.
Not even death can stop you.
It is a long road. To direct your will, it might take more courage than most beings possess.
But you can persevere and pass this test. It's a long hard road so direct your will.
If you choose to believe that there is no soul, then you must believe that the laws of energy and matter just aren't so. And that Light doesn't make things grow. So live in the moment.
Keep your mind on the ultimate prize; realization brings enlightenment, through the twists and turns of unknown times.
Our souls have been clothed in many forms, in different times with different norms.
We've faced volcanoes, wars and storms, been kings and slaves and all that is between.
A shadow of an echo, hard to find, resides within the unconscious mind.

Barry Mansfield

Universal multiplicity
Or something I believe Mite be

Master, miracle, mystery

Grand design

change of tune, too small to see

multiple vibrations

of infinity

to

multiple universes

the woven strands of universal desire

all we know, and all we don't

ever-changing Symphony of realities

light and matter seem to be the same

could this possibly be, end game

Barry Mansfield



Purple & White - Abraham Harb

The Pedophile One

“How do you say in a not creepy way that if his wife dies that you would want your guy friend to consider you for a replacement?”

“Uh, you don’t. You act as a good friend so that he knows that you are there. But at no point do you talk to him about the possibilities of his wife dying. That’s horrible.”

“Oh, yeah. I guess you’re right.”

“Yeah, creeper. Plus he’s like twice your age. Daddy issues much?”

“Well, I didn’t get touched or beaten as much as my other sisters. So, yeah, I feel left out of the loop.”

“Seriously?”

“No, idiot. My dad was a normal dad. He worked all the time and came home to watch sports and news while drinking beer, smoking a cigar or grilling. Oh, and he makes terrible jokes.”

“Then what do you see in him? Surely you can find someone your own age.”

“Not sure. I’ve always liked older men, roughly ten to fifteen years older than me at all times has been my standard. But until I was eighteen I wasn’t allowed to date anyone unless they were from my church and it was chaperoned. So starting at eighteen and him being thirty-two, I would say that isn’t so bad. But since then I have liked to increase the age. At twenty I figure forty is a bit too old, but I’m getting there. Late thirties is where it’s at. Some gray hair, but still physically in check, if a bit doughy. But then I’ve always liked the soft pink flesh over a tanned muscular god.”

“You are so weird. You like the opposite of attractive.”

“I could say the same about you... and most of society. But, hey, everyone’s gotta have someone that finds them attractive.”

“No, you just like easy prey. You like that unattractive guys are so appreciative and nice and, in your case, super turned on by young, hot chicks that give them the time of day.”

“No, I don’t think that is why.”

Rachel sprawled on the bed knowing full well this experience would confirm her surfacing suspicion that she needed therapy. Face down, she hugged her pillow as orgasms wreaked through her core. An unending pulse of pleasure. Her head swam in the lemony sweetness of pot. Foggy, bong clouds still lay in a thick mist, swirling slowly, above their frantic, furiously pumping bodies. It was somewhere between him going down on her to actually flipping her over and “sticking it in,” that the three bowls they smoked kicked in. Her mind warped and wandered, winding its way through her recent, unimportant, memories to further and further back until in a dramatic clarity of inner vision, she was reliving her childhood. At least, it was a projection of a possible childhood memory. As her thirty-five year old boyfriend dutifully pumped away, in an albeit clumsy pot-ridden way, her mind brought her to a new reality. A reality in which she was eight years old again and behind the giant rock in the soccer field. This was before they had laid down new, smooth gravel and the field was still a pink, rocky danger zone of mini daggers just waiting to be kicked up into shoes or to be picked up by boys to throw down girls’ shirts. It was behind this rock in the far back corner close to the street that led out into the neighborhood and was banked with high hedges, that kids, mostly the older sixth graders, notoriously went to kiss and perhaps fondle. In this vision that would not escape her brain and confusingly amped up her horniness, she was eight years old again and her nine year old classmate, Chris, was rubbing his small, smooth cock against her premature pussy. His shockingly blue eyes, that in an older child would be assumed to be colored contacts, stared down at her through his pale blonde, almost white, bull cut. It was his other eye, singular snake eye, that stared straight. Surrounded by a soft mound of baby pink flesh, the eye, and the hand behind it, claimed most of her consciousness so that the crinkle of his wind-breaker and back and forth flop of his blonde bangs on her shoulders and forehead were noted but uncomprehended due to the much more interesting display at her waist as viewed through gaps in the clothing. In this vision she watched, legs bent and she laid on her back with her jeans around her ankles, the ones with the Lisa Frank patches and an extra velcro pocket on the hip, and her own teal wind-breaker riding her back due to Chris’s performance on top of her. She felt the mixture of grass, pebbles and those sharp pink stones lodged in the dirt rub back and forth along her lower back with synchronous movement of Chris’s prepubescent thin and delicate, almost feminine, fingers. The lucid aspect of her brain knew that he could never cum. He was too young. Also, he was delicate, soft and fragile. This boy could never become a real man, a man who would claim his woman with his seed sprayed all

over her body so as to demarcate his territory. She could help him to become a man, learning to fuck meant learning to be a man. At least, this was what she understands from TV.

Throughout this vision, she had cum almost nonstop. The most turned on I have ever been, and it's due to thinking about children... I may be fucked up. She tried to alter the vision, raise the age of the people involved. This worked in a way. The boys who were touching the young girl version of her flipped through a catalogue of boys and men that she had known. There was Jacob at ten, Steve at eleven, then Ben who was seven, twins Andy and Jimmy at nine. The boys in middle school and high school calmed her down a bit because they were not interested in this new sexual desire within her. She tried adults. Grown men. She saw her worship pastor in his thick green corduroys, her math teacher, a slew of burly, hairy, verging on fat men that she had known as a child. The idea of a grown man being with a child excited her more. She felt her boyfriend, oblivious to what was in her head, cum very hard inside her, arching himself over her and thrusting all the way in her. He laid, head rested against her back as he drained himself.

This new path of contemplation both excited and scared her. Perhaps I am a pedophile. Or perhaps I was raped and blocked it from my conscious and pot has allowed me to access this memory stream? Whatever the psychological cause behind this pornographic turn in her mind, she was curious.

“Hey, babe,” she asked in a sultry way.

“Yeah?” He responded, drawing himself up and resting his hands on her still upturned hips.

“I’m still horny. Wanna watch me masturbate?”

The next day, when Rachel’s head was cleared of all the THC and she was able to think clearly, she attempted to understand what it was that was going through her head in the bedroom last night. As a child she spent most of her years under the paranoid eye of her mother, essentially in a constant state of seclusion with her only respite being school and church.

Church was some “thing,” a community that she never felt a part of. Consistently late, she begged her mother on a weekly basis not to go and had to literally be dragged kicking and screaming to the Sunday school class in the back of the gym between the bleachers and the mesh curtain that hung in the middle of the courts to divide the two as the other children watched, open mouthed, as her mom dragged her to the group. She hated that mesh. All the holes were

filled with dust. Although she did love the wooden floors. She loved tracing the lines of grain to their end point and trying to figure out which board was the continuation to which, like a large wooden puzzle in her head. She never liked the Sunday school. There were stupid songs and whiny suck-ups who liked dressing in lace while memorizing verses. The only highlight was the VeggieTales movies that they occasionally got to watch.

Then there was school. A place where she got to learn new things, read books or listen to music that her mom probably wouldn't approve of and talk with her friends. There was her burgeoning psychoanalysis passion in first grade when her and her friend Sarah would obsess over episodes of Blues Clues to try and figure out what it all meant. Rachel still held a firm belief that "Steve" was a government operative that was sending messages to foreign powers only to be assassinated by "Joe." There was her dirty phase in which her and her friend Megan refused to bathe or wash their clothes or brush their hair. And her dirty phase, that never really ended, in which she and a group of friends would sit and talk about all the things that people did that were not actually true. Things like Andy and Megan, no longer her friend, were having sex in the tube slide. Or Jacob was in "love" with his llamas, which made him a crazy, farm boy. Who was poor or rich based on the clothes they wore. Who they were all going to marry based on the "buttercup test." Or whether or not Shane was really suicidal or if he just wanted attention and would act in this way so she would talk with him for hours until he felt better and put away whatever sharp instrument he had gotten his hands on. She liked Shane until he killed half off their fish by "accident" in the fourth grade, then she would still talk with him, but let it be known that she did not approve of his actions. At nine years old, he already looked like a heroin addict and would draw intensely talented sketches that looked like graphic novel images.

And then elementary school ended and with that came junior high, a conglomeration of new faces that she cared nothing for and avoided until she could talk to no one and no one would bother her and she could go home and watch TV and read and not have to worry that the phone would ever be for her. She never had to think about what she was wearing. Baggy cargo pants and a hoodie were just fine. She never had to buy gifts, no birthdays, holidays or any other compelling factor. Her mom assumed that she had friends and so when Christmas came around she would buy presents for Alyssa, Allison, Amanda, and Amy, her group of made up friends. She would wrap and hide these gifts until her birthday came around and they would "be from her friends." If her mom paid enough attention to catch on that they were the same lotions and soaps that she had purchased at Bath and Body Works eight months ago, she never said a word. High school brought more people that she was friendly to out of convenience and at times even got along with, but never gave a damn about.

It really was not until she was eighteen and moved out, that she seriously brought people into her life. Then it was mostly older men who would buy her things without judging her tastes, only saying “whatever you want.” The concept of having things that she actually wanted, not just needed or were appropriate, was something that had eluded her up till then. Sometimes, she even experimented, if only to see what it could get her. She had attempted the “seduce the teacher for an A” technique once, but upon going to his office and seeing pictures of kids and a wife she resolved to only try if the Professor was single. Unfortunately, this was never the case so she only fantasized about the various older married men in her life, how their beard must feel, their pot belly, stamina and so on. She decided that married men must have a wildly different sex life with the mother of their children as opposed to the divorced and on the prowl or the guys in their late thirties that had never settled down or matured whom she dated. They were the best. They acted young, but looked old.

It makes sense, though. Two years of being sexually active and the initial thrill is waning and so something more exotic needs to be brought to the table. I am just mentally experimenting. While pondering over the various oddities of her life up till now, Rachel decided to go shopping. It was in the isles of the grocery store that she started looking at the children present. Until now she hated and avoided children at all costs to the point that she had never babysat, maintained “friendships” when the girl had a kid and generally kept her eyes above the five foot mark. It was here in the cracker aisle that she noticed a young, blonde boy. The image of Chris invaded her brain and a growing warmth spread through her loins. This kid had green eyes, but she was able to imagine him... She had to stop herself. Rachel turned and pulled out her phone as if she had a message, nodded to the empty screen and moved quickly to a random box, grabbed it and marched to the baking aisle, which was devoid of children. As she stood “reading” the labels of cake boxes as if she were researching hidden messages in the ingredients, making sure to switch boxes every thirty seconds or so that anyone watching would think her to be a cake novice or possibly a boxed cake connoisseur. She thought over what had just happened, how that boy would feel, what she would want to do and have done to her. She decided upon a double fudge cake box that she would never make and made her way to the register, forgetting entirely the milk, mushrooms, mineral water and mayo that she was supposed to buy today.

Once at home she decided the best solution was to masturbate. This process had been something of a novelty to her. An act that was only performed in front of boyfriends and a few times on camera. As a child her mother would regularly smell her hands for any sign that she had touched herself. Any smell and a lecture ensued. Any claim that she just didn’t wash well after peeing or was itchy at the new hair growth made her mom get all puppy-dog eyed and

shake her head in disappointment. In fact, she had not masturbated alone since she was about eight years old. The age of my fantasy, before sex was mentally beat out of me only to be brought back by a flat tire and a man who knew his way around a toolbox, but didn't want any monetary compensation. She began by smoking a bowl and downing a few beers. Normally, she did not like beer, but today was able to drink them without really tasting as her mind wandered back to the rock in the soccer field, to the various people that did things to her eight year old self in her fantasies. She began her act by thinking about the guy who helped her to change her tire, her "first" as it were. Their surroundings quickly turned to the soccer field from the backseat of his Prius. Again, like last time, as the inhibitors hit her brain she was no longer in control of what she was thinking about. Again, the stream of men flitted through her vision. Although innocuous at first, but increasingly stimulating, was the fact that the weather and time was changing. She was with men and boys behind the rock or in the field behind the jungle gyms where it dipped down and there was a patch that was hidden from the school due to the hill and surrounding trees. But, as the people she was with changed so did the sky. Morning grays, daytime brightness and dusk's pink and orange intermixed with changes in clothing, shirts, jackets and coats. Sometimes they fondled her and others fully fucked her. Their actions negated her attempt at control over her mind. She was unable to stop even her hands from dutifully getting her to where she needed to go until, at last, she was too physically tired to go on and spent the rest of her day napping.

She decided to research this further and spent her free time obsessively getting stoned, drunk or some other form of inebriation that allowed her to get past the anxiety in her mind of her mom lecturing her about her body and what is to be done with it. This continued until her perverted mindset essentially moved on to new and exciting things such as rape and bondage, regardless of age with no real questions answered as to her childhood experience.

Rosalind Marsh

Accessorize, don't jeopardize.

C'mon, play the part of *Empty-headed Bimbette*.

Grab a new bag *to flaunt to the girls*.

Befriend a trend *whether it shows your butt crack or not*.

Punk up your presence *with clip-in fringe and a faux-crackle manicure*.

Lock lips with your lipstick *not knowing it's carcinogenic*.

Dance while you drive *until you've lost all four hubcaps*.

Fall head over stilettos *in your car-to-bar pumps*.

Instant message with your eyes *'cause that's the only way you know how*.

Match your top to your drink *if there's nothing inside worth projecting out*.

Practice your pout. *Duck-face is the new pink!*

Let your hair down *to distract from your chneck*.

Make an entrance with your exit. *Wiggle that thass, girl!*

Make it a flashbulb *moment so everyone can see how pretty you are*.

Make it Maurices

Megann Masuicca

Hermaion

I'm a shy extrovert,
reclusive, eating worms,
guarding my crypto-clutch.

Must find creep to creep with.

More than a lucky find,
you make me want to live
one hundred fifty years,
sharing shell-shocking thoughts
at seventeen hundredths
kilometers per hour.

Megann Masuicca

I suppose it's strange for a literary critic engaged in historical research all the time to turn around and work with reclaimed wood. If as a historical critic I have to spend a lot of my time digging into archives, looking for the meanings texts had for earlier Americans, in this particular project from my other life, history inheres precisely in the surface; the goal was not to dig beneath it, to interpret it, but to produce a composition that allowed the historical character of the material to speak for itself.

Yet by revealing the unique qualities of surface—colors with their origin in ox blood or white wash, faded by centuries of sun, ingrained with dust and dirt, or the grain of the wood, eaten away by the wind to reveal ridges and grooves an eighth of an inch deep—I had to hide the human history inextricably entwined this old/new object—the history of craft and labor.

Craft here is mostly concealment. It's not like these three-quarter inch boards are magically balancing on edge, or that their edges ever fit flush against one another. I started by cutting a new sheet of half-inch medium density fiberboard to size, then ripped and joined the hemlock boards to a width that could be split evenly in five rows. Reclaimed lumber is expensive, and expensive to ship, so there was only so much material, and only so much of the various colors and textures to form a balanced composition that favored the blonde shades to avoid the appearance of too much mass, while providing enough of the ox blood tinge to harmonize with the drapes in the bedroom where it would hang. After composing the thing on the MDF, I shot a picture of it on my phone for the client's approval. When I got the high sign in an email, I went back with glue and screws from the underside.

The "frame" of the thing is an artificial detail, but it, too, conceals cut edges. Cut into even the oldest reclaimed lumber with a new sawblade and you find cellulose practically as bright and clean as anything you'd buy at Home Dopey down the street, so every joint was designed to leave the distressed and authentic available to the eye. Unfortunately, I discovered every piece of the material had been joined (every edge squared off, clean) before it was shipped from Montana, so I had to find a stain to match the "clean" face of the frame with everything else.

Of course, behind my labor is that of others. The guys at Brandner design cleaned this wood, joined and skip-sanded it, then sent it from Montana to Chicago. Before that, Jeff Brandner himself stacked and hauled it from a demolition site in Shawnee PA. In 2009, this wood was still part of a broken down barn, part of which was added by a farmer in the early 19th century, the original cut and raised in the late 18th century. Considering the development of the area around the Delaware water gap, which had been farmed since the early 17th century, it occurs to the American Lit professor in me that the trees cut to make this headboard may well have been planted, with care, by a contemporary of Cotton Mather.

T.H. Scherman

(Headboard pictured on opposite page with artist)



Sent to Collections

The first thing one must understand about Arthur Harding is that, unlike many, he actually enjoyed warehouse work. When he had started at TechTower, his days were spent pulling boxes off of trucks and reloading the shelves after dark. The work was quiet, solitary and, most importantly, without customers. He had always been quiet and the third-shift gave him the odd sensation of being behind the scenes as if he, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny conspiratorially shared the witching hour.

Last winter, Arthur's wife, Miriam, had informed him they were splitting up. It had been a surprise to Arthur, but he reasoned it wasn't like he could keep her against her will. Arthur moved his things into his parent's house, the only place in his unemployed budget. That is how, several weeks later, Arthur found himself sitting in a bathrobe on his mother's favorite chair when his brother, Gabriel, phoned from New York to tell him he was now an uncle. Possibly because he had no family of his own, Arthur Harding was overwhelmed with an urge to see both his brother and meet his new nephew. It was at that precise moment that Arthur Harding decided to make the biggest change in his life and though it was completely out of character, he packed his things and moved to the States.

Arthur had wanted to move near his brother and practice accounting law (his chosen profession) but, upon seeing apartment prices and finding little available in the job market, Arthur resigned himself to living nearby, in New Jersey, and taking a spot in the field of merchandising. Over the next nine months Arthur became closer with his brother and nephew, rarely thought about Miriam, and at work became so well acquainted with the store and its products that he was put in charge of training the new warehouse staff. The only thing Arthur could remotely complain about was having to wear the merchandising team's uniform: jeans with a heavy polyester TechTower shirt, which chafed his skin terribly.

On a crisp October Sunday, Arthur had been asked to fill in for the short-staffed home theater department. He had never sold anything before, but he was likeable enough, he guessed, to get the job done. By the end of the shift, he had performed well enough that management conferred, as they are often wont to do, and decided unanimously to promote him to sales.

"Congratulations," they said with hearty pats on his shoulders, "you've made quite an impression."

But Arthur Harding didn't think he had done much. In fact, he had been so confused by the customers and the chaos of the busy day that, by the end of it, he couldn't have told you if he had had any really good sales at all. Arthur told himself it was a good thing, but quietly he admitted that he wasn't really sure it was a promotion or if he wanted it.

His misgivings aside, Arthur slipped into his new role easier than most. He knew the product and he knew the inventory and computer systems; he just needed to learn to sell. It was his third week of working in Home Theater when management noticed this as well; they called him into the conference room and introduced him to their secret weapon.

Lou was tall and slim and somewhere between twenty and thirty years old. His official title was Senior Sales Manager and Arthur had seen him before, always standing in front of Home Theater and looking out over the lowered area in the middle of the store where the DVDs, CDs, computer software and books were stocked. There were two things that set Lou apart from the other employees: instead of a TechTower button-down he wore a pinstriped gray suit, what appeared to be black crocodile shoes, a gold, twenty-five-year name tag and a perpetually-fresh toothpick jutting out the corner of his wide grin. The effect was pure salesman or at least that was what Arthur thought every time they passed one another at 9am as he was leaving and Lou was starting his day. Arthur thought the effect of the outfit was almost comical, but management said Lou had been closing deals for longer than anyone could remember. Now he was to take Arthur under his wing and teach him what he knew.

When Arthur arrived on the first day of his new partnership, he felt as though it were a whole new job. In his previous position, he had worked mostly at night and mostly with the lights off, with the silent serenade of his iPod as his only companion. Upon arriving at 8am, the sharp contrast of the bright lights, booming demonstration loops playing on the televisions and the sleepy-eyed groaning of a dozen other salespeople were enough to make Arthur want to go hide in his iPod.

"There is something magical about all the potential of a new day," Lou declared, looking out over 'The Pit.' "Think about all those sales to be made."

"I suppose so," Arthur chanced. He felt short next to the skinny, well-dressed figure, his own body built more like a locomotive than the rails. "That is, if they're coming in to spend."

Lou sighed. "It's not about what they want to buy, it's about what you can sell them."

Arthur felt uncomfortable, like he was being sold something.

Lou started laughing then. “You should’ve seen your face. Looked like you’d shown up to a party and discovered it was a cult meeting.” He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

Arthur laughed nervously, not really sure how to respond but eager to change the subject to anything that didn’t make glaringly obvious his lack of people skills.

“You got me. That was a good one. So where do we start?”

“Well, Artie. Honestly, the best thing you can do is just watch me work and pick up what you can—for the time being.”

“I’ve been on the floor for a couple weeks now,” Arthur informed him. “I know my way around it well enough. I know the product.”

“Alright, Artie,” Lou conceded. “I’ll follow your lead.”

The morning passed quietly. Lou shadowed Arthur through his sales, jumping in when he felt it necessary, but mostly sitting back and watching. Arthur had to admit he was feeling more comfortable with his new partner by the minute.

“Artie, you gotta work on your add-ons and up-selling. They’re both important,” Lou told Artie as they sat down to lunch.

Arthur had only just learned what add-ons were.

“See this,” Lou said, pointing to the palm tree pin on his shirt, just under his lapel. “I got this from up-selling. Just got back from the ten days in paradise.”

“Where did you go?” Arthur asked, struggling to peel his banana.

Lou scrunched up his face a little. “It wasn’t really for me. My point is, I missed this place the entire time. There is something about closing the deal that has become my fix. It gets in your blood.”

“I’m not really sure that sales is for me. But management seemed convinced—“

“I think management got it right. You’ve got the talent, just need to evict the stuffy introvert out of ya. You aren’t in the warehouse anymore.” Lou smiled and threw his coffee cup into the garbage while pushing through the break room door.

Arthur blinked. “What if that stuffy introvert is me?” he asked his cup o’ soup while stirring.

“Now watch what Bubba’s doing here,” Lou whispered to Arthur. They both were crouched conspiratorially next to the CD boom-boxes, guaranteed not to be bothered. “He came in for a thirty-two-inch. Bubba’s got him a fifty-inch with a Blu-ray player... and the extended warranty on both.”

“Ha!” Lou shouted, clapping and rubbing his hands together, startling Arthur.

“I don’t know why he didn’t just show him the thirty-twos,” Arthur admitted.

“It’s those add-ons, kid.”

Arthur was certain he was at least ten years Lou’s senior.

“It’s the art of the up-sell. I’ve told you, they’re the real way you become a success in this business,” Lou confided.

“I’ll have to defer to you on that, Lou. You seem to have it licked.”

“Now if he gets him to finance it, we have a real hell of a sale.”

Lou watched the sale, riveted as if it were a soap opera and they were about to reveal a dark secret. Meanwhile, Arthur found a couple of stereos that had been misplaced and switched them around according to the current merchandising standards which he had, of course, committed to memory.

Bubba’s customer filed out the financing paper work and smiled while doing it.

The first week with Lou passed quickly, then the second. Arthur’s numbers climbed steadily but challenged few of the experienced salespeople. On the third Saturday, Arthur ran into an issue: he couldn’t get an add-on or an up-sell on anything. His numbers were tanking, hard.

Arthur was closing up the first good sale of the day, a large television for his customer, Mr. Walters—he always liked to get the customer’s name. He was inwardly relieved at this Hail-Mary sale pulling up his numbers when, suddenly, the customer’s card came back declined for the sale. Arthur was nearly frozen by the prospect of not closing this sale. A polite flurry of excuses and understanding smiles were exchanged. Arthur was unsure how to proceed when suddenly Lou materialized behind him, slipping a brochure for the TowerCard into Arthur’s hand before disappearing down one of the aisles.

“Oh,” Arthur said, recognizing the pamphlet, “silly of me. You could just put it on one of our TowerCards. It’s—umm...no interest for the first six months.” Arthur handed the brochure to Mr. Walters.

“That could work,” Mr. Walters admitted, perusing the brochure. “Forgive me. It’s a small quirk, but I always read these things.”

“I understand,” Arthur said and did. He didn’t have a single charge card and knew such things weren’t to be taken lightly. He waited for Mr. Walters to finish.

“Is this a joke?” Mr. Walters asked, the brochure crushed in his grasp.

“Excuse me?” Arthur wasn’t sure what was going on.

“I don’t know what kind of prank this is, but I don’t appreciate you wasting my time,” Mr. Walters said, noticeably shaken, slapping the brochure on the counter. “And if this is one of those camera shows, I’m sure-as-hell not signing the damned waiver.”

“Mr. Walters. There must be some mistake!” Arthur shouted after him as Mr. Walters stormed out of the store, his hat clenched in his fist.

“Don’t worry,” suggested the oily voice over his shoulder, “some people don’t like the terms.”

“What?” Arthur said, still holding the brochure.

“It’s that darned 29.9%” Lou said. “Well, got to keep moving. It’s on to the next one, Artie!”

“Just give me a second,” Arthur said, opening the pamphlet.

Lou deftly grabbed the pamphlet and balled it in his fist. “This isn’t the problem,” he waved his hand in front of Arthur. “The problem is that you’re stuck now.” Lou threw the balled up pamphlet across the aisle into a waiting trashcan.

“Stuck?”

“Listen, we all have set backs. We’ve all fallen once or twice. It’s less about the fall and more about what we do when we get back up.”

Arthur nodded. “That’s an oldie, there.”

“Yes, it is.” Lou retrieved a fresh toothpick from his shirt pocket and slid it into the corner of his mouth, chewing it for a moment. “I learned that one from my father.”

Lou’s smile slowly faded and his eyes wandered off into the distance.

Arthur stood for a moment, feeling out-of-place, then backed away as inconspicuously as he could manage to return to his day.

Over the next few months, Arthur really hit his stride on the sales floor—his up-sells and add-ons included—and managed to carve out his own small client base. Lou no longer shadowed him; instead, they rarely saw one another and worked opposite shifts. It wasn't until the dreaded Black Friday that they saw one another again.

"Green Friday," said someone Arthur had never met before. "That's what we're calling it now."

The newcomer was dressed in a worn-out looking suit with a laptop bag that had the TechTower logo on it and he was holding a day-planner with papers jutting from its three open edges.

Lou grinned at him like the Cheshire cat, slowly removing the toothpick. "You can call it Lee Harvey Oswald Day for all I care, Mark, but it's Black Friday—always has been, always will be."

"But the focus groups we ran seemed to agree that Black Friday is too negative a term."

"Have you ever worked one?"

"I'm sorry?" Mark looked slightly flustered at this challenge.

"Have you ever worked a Black Friday?"

"No. But I am—"

"Feel free to stick around and join us I'm fairly sure they won't turn on you the moment they realize we never had the Vizitron fifty-five-inch that you're advertising. The day you survive a Black Friday is the day we can continue this discussion," Lou said, replacing the toothpick to indicate the issue was closed.

The man stumbled with his words, his face turning redder.

"Oh. And Merry Christmas," Lou sneered past the toothpick.

They opened the doors that Black Friday at 12am. The masses of people were more than Arthur had ever seen in any place besides, possibly, a concert or a football match. He had no idea where to start so he stood next to Lou—well, more behind him as he was at the front of the department, greeting his charges with open arms.

“This is my favorite day, Art. This is my Christmas.”

“This is insane. I can’t even move through the store with all these people,” Arthur said, picking up an adult’s coat that had been left abandoned on the floor of their department.

“That’s why you have to be in peak physical condition.” He turned profile to accentuate his thinness.

Arthur chuckled. They had a running joke about going as Laurel and Hardy for the previous Halloween, but they agreed that no one would know who they were supposed to be. It occurred to Arthur that he didn’t know what Lou had ultimately gone as; he himself had gone as a single man hiding from trick-or-treaters.

“There’s one!” said Lou. “Time to dive in, Artie!”

Lou turned sideways and disappeared into the crowd. Arthur was jealous of Lou’s ability to slip through the throngs of shoppers as he found himself buffeted by the tide in a sea of people.

Arthur’s twelve-hour shift passed before he even noticed; he just moved automatically from customer to customer, never stopping or slowing down. It had been the busiest day that Arthur could remember. He had sold more than he ever had and even made his goals, but by the time he left at noon, he was dead-tired. He had intended to visit his brother after work but, upon arriving, promptly fell asleep on Gabriel’s sofa. Arthur woke up hours later, almost the next morning, and it wasn’t until he got home that he realized he had forgotten his house keys in his work locker. Defeated on his own front stoop, Arthur returned to his car and then the store.

Arthur came in the loading dock, knowing that Vince and the guys would be there already. He retrieved his keys and, just as he was leaving, noticed a customer arguing with Lou near the security room. Bubba was standing behind the man, holding his arm while Lou spoke calmly to him. The man tried to shake off Bubba’s grasp, but the huge hand held fast. Lou had a coldness to his manner and, while Arthur couldn’t hear them, he knew it was something serious. They led the man into the security room and Lou followed. Arthur realized where he had seen the man before: it was Bubba’s customer with the fifty-inch TV.

Arthur got to the door just as Lou was stepping back out.

“Oh. Hey, Artie. I thought you left,” Lou said casually, though he seemed surprised by Arthur’s presence.

“What’s going on with Bubba’s customer? Mr. Kean, right?” Arthur had never been in the Security room and the distinct smell of hot electronics and dust followed Lou as he shut the door behind him.

“Nothing to worry about, I assure you. He had an issue with his TowerCard payment. Bubba’s taking care of it.”

“Oh,” Arthur offered, “Was it the 29.9 percent?”

Before Lou could reply, the silence in the store was split by a shrill scream that ended abruptly.

“Seems the account had gone to collections,” said Lou, walking past Arthur. “No need to look into it any further. It’s out of our hands now.”

Arthur looked to the security office, the glow of the server racks shone red through the crack at the bottom of the door.

“Go home, Artie,” Loud said, lighting a cigarette as he walked. “It’s been a doozy of a day—even by Black Friday standards.” With a wave, Lou disappeared beyond the break room door.

Arthur stood there for a moment, second-guessing what he had heard. The sound had been too abrupt to be sure in his memory. Only the cold sweat rising on Arthur Harding’s skin proved to him that it must have been real. He was suddenly very cold.

Arthur swiped a TowerCard application from a nearby cash register, turning it in his hand. He unfolded it, revealing a wall of text. The interest rates and key terms were printed in a bold font in large boxes, easily understood. Arthur perused the fine print, but it began to blur as he tried to read it, like driving while tired. He looked up and rubbed his eyes and set back to it. The words read: Failure to submit payment on or before the due date listed on the billing statement will result in a change of the APR to 29.9 percent for the duration of the TowerCard Account’s life and the applicant hereby releases possession and ownership of his/her eternal soul to Abaddon and Associates, LLC.

Arthur scrunched up his forehead and read it again. “Ridiculous,” he mumbled to himself and looked up from the brochure. He was about to call out to Lou, who he assumed was chuckling in the break room. As Arthur opened his mouth, he suddenly swayed on his feet and felt faint, almost like he had been physically struck. This had to be one of Lou’s jokes; it couldn’t be real.

But what if it was real? Arthur thought. How have I never read this?

He had been signing customers up for TowerCards for the better part of three months, several dozen at the very least. He felt panicked and was deciding what to do when another wave of dizziness washed over him. Arthur set the brochure down, leaned down on the register counter, closed his eyes and attempted to steady himself. He managed three deep breaths—the smell of the security room was gone and the air was almost fresh. Arthur opened his eyes.

The pamphlet that had been clenched in his fist was gone. It was daytime and the store was full of people. He looked on the floor and back to the stack where he had retrieved the brochure. They were all gone. That was when he saw Lou, in his usual spot, looking out over ‘The Pit’ and grinning at him.

Arthur wanted to get an answer from him; he seemed to know better than anyone what was going on around here. Right then Jerry Garcia’s voice blared in Arthur’s ears, “...Set out runnin’ but I take my time—.” Arthur tugged the headphones from his ears and noticed the uncomfortable binding familiarity of his polyester shirt under his coat.

“Arthur, you still here?” said the head of the merchandising team as he headed to the door.

“Yeah, Vince.” He replied, offering no reason and shaking the disorientation from his senses.

Arthur looked back to Lou, but he was no longer there.

“Vince, did you see where Lou went?” Arthur asked.

“Who’s Lou?” Vince asked.

“One of the salesmen.” Arthur’s glance swept across ‘The Pit’ but didn’t see him anywhere. “He was just here.”

“Well, if he was, he must be new because I don’t know him,” Vince said, putting on his jacket. “Don’t worry about it. Those sales guys have their own little world they’ve built. Personally, I prefer they keep me out of it.”

“Yeah,” agreed Arthur, “Maybe you’re right.”

Lazarus C. R. Miller



Variations on Bill Murray I - Eric Novak

Envision

You can levitate and breathe in space.

Breathe music falling asleep on a cloud,

Waking up on a beach knowing that anything can happen at any second,

But knowing you will be ok.

Touch the sky and feel a pulse, knowing that it won't die.

Find your pulse to stop time.

Trip over a tree trunk and fall on Mt. Everest, climb it 'til you reach the moon and watch Earth rotate.

Witnessing what the human mind is really capable of,

But until we realize it, it's only when we sleep.

Kyle Anthony Moore



Sleet - Kyle Anthony Moore

Love Dropped By

Love drops by, in all shapes, sizes, quarter notes, and verse.
It arrives least expected, stays when no longer desired.
It flees when permanence is the wish, comes back to taunt,
departing again only to tease us anew with promises
of nothing and forever.

Love tastes like supple lips, full hips heavy with life.
Love is Stooges and Taxi, Sherlock and Watson
Naked Sundays climaxing to fever pitch
between pizzas on bare floors.
Love sits in the back of the room,
patiently waiting for paths to merge once again,
Bruised and scarred, but sewn with stronger twine this time,
for the next time.

Love looks in a mirror of you, reflecting a similar face
born of frenzy and passion.
It is poetry in motion, masterful creations forcing you to believe
there is indeed a God, indeed a master who loves your flaws,
who re-gifts your imperfections as exquisite creations,
life, lyric and prose,
leaving you humbled in awe.

Love is a blessing never expected, you,
never tagged as extraordinary.
Yet, it slipped in, clandestine, dressed in tight pants and soul patch,
Singing the most haunting melody.

That refrain still serenades, now a chorus of four,
harmonies of dissonance and consonance,
Billboard's Top Ten, my own Hit Parade,
always new, familiar like old orange chairs,
yet never tired.

Where you lead, I will follow
Anywhere that you tell me to
'Cause, darling, to me that's what you're worth.

The band is still playing.
You in your horn, worn monkey suit,
me with black marker and red dress.
Dance with me again and again,
eternal inamorato.

Eden Novak DeGenova

Perfect Toenails

You have perfect toenails. Toes that are shaped like a tiny girl's hands, perfectly sized, perfect shaped nail beds with just the right amount of white distal edge. Not too short, not too long. Too perfect, actually. It makes me want to bite them off. Like my own fingernails, bitten off, married to chewed and chomped cuticles.

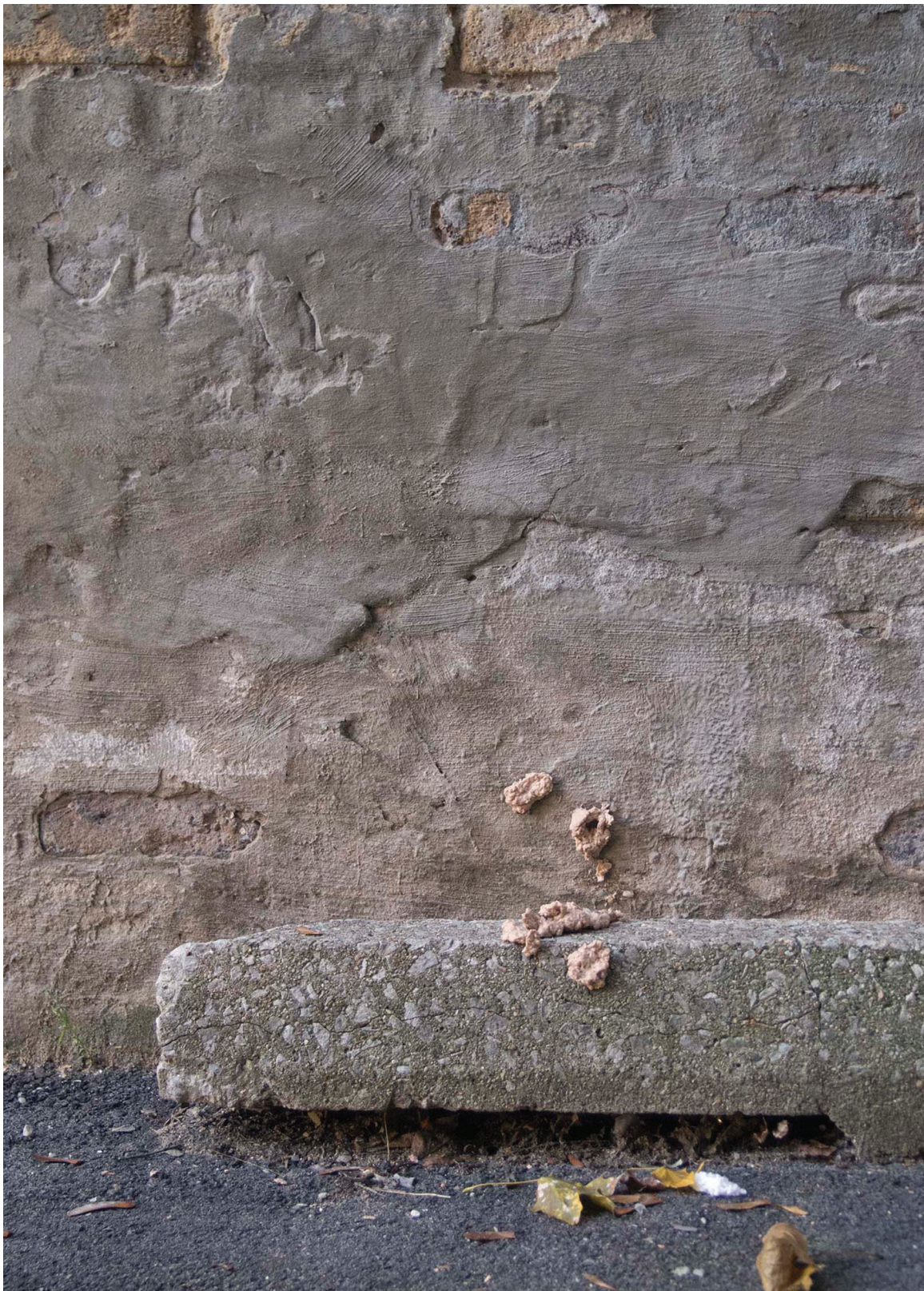
It didn't matter what Ma threatened - matches, nail oil, the taste of sour metal. What do they put in that stuff anyway?

My fingernails are not allowed to progress to the length they have strived for over the past fifty-four years. Oh, now and then, the rare manicure protects them from my jaws for a short time, but not from the opposite hand which picks away, like chisel to marble, leaving cracks in the paint, then no more paint, then teeth return to their exposed prey. It's a nervous tick, anxiety honed from years of her pre-emptive strikes, stealth like assaults, catching me off guard. Not this time, I would say as I crouched in my corner, eyes darting back and forth, scanning the room for a sign of her approach, subsisting on my own cannibalistic meals of keratin and protein.

You have perfect toenails. How is that possible? To not have dried up skin hanging off the lateral nail field, coupled with scraggly nail edges? This pisses me off. You don't look like you have nail-coifing tendencies. I have no mouth access to my own toes. If I could get my teeth down there, they would be as perfect as yours, albeit quite a bit shorter. I looked up at your face and you do not have the face of a nail biter. Come to think of it, you don't have the face of someone with perfect toenails.

Does your mother know my mother? I will ask you tomorrow.

Eden Novak DeGenova



Persistent Seeping - Tasha Vos

2 Karat Restraint

Because I said yes,
2 karat radiant ideal.

I have this large rock.

It weighs on my hand
They say it is without color,

with more to carry.
yet a million tiny rainbows fill my eyes.

It twinkles in the light,
transforming my hand to brilliance.

The world now knows my status.
I begin to feel its grip
I've never liked small spaces,
Its shine has me

I'm property claimed.
and gasp for air.
but maybe I'll learn to.
Hypnotized.

Where is his rock to carry? His mark? His light to tell the world.
It's not on his sleeve, his shoulder, nor his hand. His heart?
No visual proof... Until,
"I do."

Is that why this stone must sparkle so?
Making me want to wear it.

A symbol of "love" and "commitment" his... silent.
Unless someone asks

Or

"I Do."

Stacie Polk

My Rugby Fix

The worst part of a rugby game was receiving a kick. The idea of all eyes on the ball as it flew toward me—only to be inevitably fumbled by me—was terrifying. To solve this problem, I usually orchestrated a plan while we waited for the ball.

“Casie! Casie! You know if it comes near me, you need to come get it,” I’d say to my teammate standing fifteen feet in front of me.

She’d turn her head slightly in my direction, then wave her hand in a dismissive fashion. Maybe she was shooing a fly or having a spasm.

“I am fucking serious, dude. Casie!”

No response.

“Casie, you have to catch it. You have to. I can’t do it. Casie!”

“Oh my god, Mardy. I know! Just shut up.”

I played rugby...and my biggest fear was catching a ball. I wasn’t worried about any physical injury. I laughed in the face of concussions and torn ligaments. My horror was people seeing me not catch a ball. Eyes looking at me while I tried to do something and possibly failed.

I was a painfully shy child. I would freeze if I was called on in class. Even if I knew the answer, I preferred to say I didn’t know rather than give the incorrect one and be laughed at. It was illogical reasoning. In my head, I thought that if I didn’t really try, then I didn’t really fail.

If I didn’t try to catch the ball, I was safe. If I tried to catch the ball and I clumsily knocked it forward, causing a penalty, then I looked foolish.

I joined the rugby team a month into my freshman year at Arizona State University. I was across the country from my home in Chicago and I thought things were going to be great here. They were not going great. My roommate was engaged. This was a surprise when I met her in person. She never mentioned it on the phone calls we had and it seemed to me there should be a special dorm for people of this nature. Her fiancé did not allow her to visit the pool or go out after dark. A college roommate was a sort of university-assigned friend and my friend’s restrictions sucked. It was a bad situation for a shy person. How was I to make friends without a side-kick?

I saw a flyer taped outside the physical science building advertising the ASU Women's Rugby team. It made sensational claims that I could not resist. I would meet new friends, travel and get fit. I needed these things. In addition, it would fill a void that I had always felt in my life—to play a sport. Because my father believed that girls shouldn't play sports, I was never enrolled in soccer or softball as a child. All of my friends played sports in high school and I didn't. I felt like even if I wanted to play a sport, I would never make the team since my experience was limited to gym class.

But the rugby flyer claimed that no experience was necessary, that I could pick up this game with no problems. I was sure that no one would know how to play rugby, because, I mean, who plays rugby? I evaluated all possible outcomes for a week before walking onto the fields where practice was held. Would I be able to deal with the failure of not making it? Turns out, making the ASU Rugby team is as easy as getting into ASU. All I needed to do was show up.

The rugby team was terrible and this provided me with immense comfort. Never in my life was I so happy to be a part of something that was so disorganized. It was almost embarrassing. We could not win a game, but I didn't care. The flyer came through and delivered its promises—I had friends, I was fit and I traveled to far off places like Southern California and Las Cruces, New Mexico.

By my junior year, our team got better. We weren't winning games, but we were better. Four weeks prior to an annual Las Vegas tournament in December, Gary came to us as a guest coach. Gary was a dark haired, fit Englishman in his mid-thirties. He was passionate for rugby and making our team win. He always yelled, "You should be all over the field like a mad woman's shit!" I still don't know what that means. We won the Las Vegas tournament. Before the tournament, we had only won one game. So we made Gary our new coach.

Gary was intense and probably should not have been coaching girls. What started as general enthusiasm for us turned into insane tirades of anger.

Our relationship with him was confusing. He yelled at us and then went to bars with us and got drunk. We would sing rugby songs and have fun as though he wasn't just berating us two hours earlier. I wasn't afraid of him because he acted so much like a friend. I was afraid he would find out that I was faking my rugby skills and would not let me be part of the team that I loved so much.

Once we were in the middle of a rucking drill when he yelled, “Does everyone see Mardy?” Rucking is when you drive your opponent off a ball that is on the ground. Unlike football, the game does not stop when someone is tackled. Rather, the teams attempt to drive each other off the ball until possession is gained. When Gary yelled my name and demanded everyone pay attention to what I was doing, I panicked. This was it. I was on my way to public humiliation. “If everyone rucked like Mardy, we would never lose a ball! She never stops moving her feet. If you stop moving your feet, you get pushed back on your heels and you cannot recover from that.”

Gary had used me as an example—in a good way! There were many times in games when the ruck went stagnant and I joined in and corrected it, moving it forward so we could gain possession. Often after games, teammates would boast about their amazing plays and I always remained silent. I was too shy to brag or bring to light the contributions I had made.

Gary never was so cruel that he would berate someone individually, but he was not kind to us as a group.

“The lot of you are pathetic! You are bloody terrible at this game! It is obvious you don’t care! I don’t know why I waste my time. I don’t get paid for this. I spend two nights a week and all my weekends with you and you repay me by not giving a shit and playing like shit. Bollocks. It is bollocks. You are worthless players! You do nothing right. You do not listen. You do not care....” He would pace back and forth screaming at us, the forwards. He had created a game plan that was forward-based and left the coaching of the backs to another coach. Although we were not as svelte as the backs, we were better rugby players. It was the whole reason he made it a forwards game. He went on and on about how we were all fat and lazy. I couldn’t look at him. I was looking down at my cleats. I was scared to look at him and scared to look at my teammates. Tears started to fall out of my eyes. I felt this tremendous shame for disappointing him and for crying. I was embarrassed. I was still looking down and I wondered if anyone else was crying or upset. I peaked up and to the side. Aime, the team captain, was looking away from Gary, who was still in the midst of his abusive rant and she had tears coming down her face. I looked around and noticed everyone was crying.

I loved Gary and I hated him. I loved winning, but I missed that losing team. I never cared and I never cried on that team. I liked to appear aloof about the game, never letting on that I was trying my best. I was falling back on my guard. I thought that if I didn’t care, then they will just think that was how I played and they would not ask much of me.

“I wish we could learn how to get you fired up,” Aime said once.

“You can’t. I just don’t care that much,” I lied. I feared being coddled or appearing needy. On the outside, I didn’t give a damn, but on the inside I was that scared kid in elementary school, saying that I didn’t know the answer to the teacher’s question.

Even though I was becoming a better player and more confident, I remained terrified of catching a ball from a kick. That truth was one that I was not afraid to let out—I let everyone know. I dictated my own formation for receiving kicks. I told everyone around me to stand closer so that I could avoid all responsibility in catching a ball. Eventually, I was found out.

“What is this that is going on when you receive a kick?” Gary asked at practice. “You are supposed to be here and you should be here,” he said as he pulled us by our arms to our correct places on the field. “But every time I look, you are shoved together over there and you are over here,” he complained as he rearranged us into my wildly clever formation.

“I can’t catch the ball so I make people cover my area,” I finally admitted.

“That is absolute bollocks! You can catch the fucking ball! You have two fucking arms with two fucking hands on them. Are you a bird? Are you a fucking bird, Mardy? Are you a bloody chair? You have working human appendages.” He was smiling. This was turning into a good Gary moment.

“I just can’t catch it. I freak out. It’s one of my weird things,” I claimed.

“No. No! Everyone on this team gets one weird thing. Does everyone hear me?” he yelled to the team that was spread out across the field. “One problem! You get one handicap. This is a bloody rugby team, not a group home. Mardy, you have yours already. That absolute retarded shit where you don’t know your left from your right. We have already made adjustments for that rubbish. No more adjustments.”

“Gary! I can’t. I can’t fucking do it. It is a deep psychological issue from which I will never recover or something. That is that.”

“No,” he yelled. He grabbed me by the shoulders, “I am going to kick this ball to you and you are going to catch it.” I sighed and looked away. He began to shake me playfully. “You are going to catch this fucking ball, do you hear me? You are going to catch this fucking ball! Say

it! Say ‘I am going to catch this ball.’” He was still holding onto me and I looked around. My teammates were wearing faces of amusement. I was amused. I felt a bit like crying in a totally gross, sentimental way.

“I am going to catch this ball,” I said.

“NO! Yell it!”

“Mardy is going to catch the ball,” yelled one of my teammates.

“I am going to catch this ball,” I half yelled and my teammates cheered. I looked at them in disgust to hush them. “Just go kick it.”

Gary marched across the field and kicked the ball to me. I became annoyed at his shenanigans. He was making this into an after school special and forcing me to be a clichéd protagonist. He kicked it like a jerk with a high arc so I could really feel terrified. Everyone was looking at me and I hated it. But...I caught it. It was the nerdiest moment in the history of rugby. I liked it. I needed it.

My senior year was the first year we were officially a rugby team. We became a registered team with USA Rugby and each of us was a registered player. We were literally card-carrying rugby players. This meant we could make our way through our division and go to the national championships. It was real now.

Our consistent winning in the previous year turned Gary into a madman. We gave him a taste of what it was like to be the coach of a winning team. A team that used to be crap and was now insanely good. He wanted more and he would stop at nothing for it. Even if it meant destroying a seed team for next year. Over half his team was seniors so we would not be back next year. He only played his best players. No matter if we were beating a team 52 to zero at half time. He would not sub in less experienced players. I was one of the chosen ones and I felt guilty that other people were not allowed to play. It was all for Gary’s ego.

I still couldn’t shake the insecurity I had about rugby. All the signs pointed to the fact that I was an excellent rugby player, but I never saw it that way. If you asked me if I was any good, I would have said no. I would have made up a million reasons why I was on this team and why I was a starting player and none of them were because of my own merit.

The way I acted was pathetic. My thoughts were pathetic. This negative self-talk was pathetic. It wouldn't be until much later in life that I realized that somewhere in my head, I thought rugby could fix me. It was a messed up contradiction of thoughts that got mixed in with my theory that not really trying meant not really failing. I thought that if I could succeed at rugby, then I would accept that I was good at rugby. Maybe that would mean I could see that I was good at other things. Maybe I would stop thinking that I was generally terrible at life. I would stop being so insecure. I would finally get to be confident and like myself. But I couldn't be an awesome rugby player until I stopped thinking I was a shitty one.

I had a way of getting in my way.

In December we played at the same Las Vegas tournament that Gary had turned us into winners at during the previous year, but things had changed. We played on Saturday and were scheduled to play on Sunday in the championships. As my teammates and I left the hotel to go to the tournament party, I heard Gary bark, "Back by midnight, girls!"

"What?" I asked.

"You have a curfew. You are coming back by midnight and you are coming through this door. You are not playing, if you are not back by midnight"

"Fine."

I was enraged. How dare he spoil this night of fun? Who did he think he was? My dad? I couldn't stand it. I was so mad. What happened to the old Gary—the guy that would get drunk with us and have fun? I think about this now and I think, poor Gary. Poor, poor Gary. The man was responsible for twenty girls that ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-one years old, set loose in Sin City. Gary sat on that couch all night and waited for us all to come back. We were all back well before midnight.

I had my best game that Sunday. Gary told me I was amazing. I felt great about this, but I was so awesome that I knew it was something more than my talent. It was my amazing breakfast: bottled Mocha Frappuccino, a box of Junior Mints and a package of peanut butter on cheese crackers. Yes, this was it. That was how I fell victim to superstition.

For the rest of the season, I forced everyone to stop at gas stations on the way to games. I would return to the car with nothing. "They didn't have the crackers," I would say.

“I was in there. They had the Frappuccino and Junior Mints. Why didn’t you get those?” asked Aime.

“Because I need to buy them all at one place. That is part of the whole deal.”

“There were no other crackers in there?”

“There was a cheese on white crackers, but I need the peanut butter on cheese crackers.”

“This is ridiculous. Why don’t you just pack your magical breakfast?”

“Because that wouldn’t be the same as stopping at a gas station on the way to the match. It is all part of the process. I must purchase all the items at the same gas station. Just one more gas station? That is all and then I will settle on what is in there.”

“Fine.”

I can’t figure out if I was a master of manipulation or my teammates were extremely tolerant to put up with this tomfoolery over and over and over again. It was a complete waste of time. In my defense, those crackers are really hard to find.

That season of my senior year, we were winning. We weren’t just winning. We were dominating our opponents.

We beat Claremont College seventy-two to zero. My team and I dragged ourselves through the end of game tradition of lining up and congratulating the other team on the game.

“You guys are the saddest group of winners I have ever seen,” said a cheerful Claremont player. “You just beat us seventy-two to zero.”

“We are about to get a verbal beating from our coach,” I said.

“What?” She was shocked.

“Come watch,” said Aime. “It is a blast.”

We would all sit down and he would scream at us. Pacing around, he would tell us it looked like a third grade soccer match. Always the same thing and the same intensity of anger.

After our ceremonial beating, he would tell us a handful of things that were great and we would go to the after party. We all learned to go half-deaf when listening to Gary. He was ridiculous. We beat the team by seventy-two points. Rugby is scored similar to football. In our division, our closest game was fifty-four to zero. Our biggest win was one-hundred and fifty-six to zero.

Gary started that year with a goal: before the national championships, we would score one thousand unanswered points. We met his goal. We went to championships and finished eighth in the nation. The only team that scored on us was the team that won the championships, and those points were from penalties. They never actually set a ball down to score a point.

I claimed that I retired after I graduated until I got a call from a local women's team, asking me to play. The team needed help and wanted a few of us to join the team I found familiar guilt that I had at ASU. I was being played over girls that were with the team for years. Although I always remained skeptical of myself, I was finally seeing that I deserved to be on that team and I deserved to play.

Maybe I was finally getting out of my way.

Rugby didn't fix me like I had envisioned. But I learned to let Gary's overly critical comments fall on deaf ears because I knew they came from good intentions. If only I could learn to see myself positively and quiet my own negative self-talk. If only I could see my accomplishments were a result of my own merit and not silly superstitions.

It takes a lot of work to get completely out your own way.

After I officially retired, I was talking with Aime about rugby. I sarcastically proclaimed, "I was so awesome at that rugby!"

"You were," she said, then quickly teased, "and it wasn't because of your magic gas station breakfast."

Meredyth Poulsen

the day nelson mandela died

5 December 2013. 7:00 p.m.

I.
born in bodily assumption.
 live in life
 as we will in death;
 distilled souls tangled in our roots.
in the blink of an eye
 we all become whispers
 reverberating to the corners
 of every space on this earth
 we've ever touched.

a rusting dais falters beneath the
 soles of my delicately stitched shoe
 (my finances sent to thirdworldian children).
 should I apologize for my withered
home of wood and infidelity?
 instead I share a smoke
 with rotting ginsberg.
 maybe i'll let him dry fuck my
 brain with dreams of San Francisco.

reykjavik beckons my soul,
 in disparity, with the pale, gray roads
 of Iowa that run to oblivion
 and silently creep back again.
maybe deliverance is in the rocks?
 handles used to tighten my thigh muscles
 after pissing into the wind.
 running into the blank, clear stare of
 dirt so many feet beneath mine.

these domestic wanderings between
polarized strands of silk understanding are
bequeathed in shame,
to yours, mine,
and all our volatile righteousness.
i only twisted my form in necessity.
a face that smiles
or grins, steals hearts from
within.

16 January 2014. 5:50 p.m.

II.
how do we question death effectively enough to stifle
the fear of the foetid stones that flower from underneath
the snow?
even in negative fifteen, the birds still sing, weaving
between branches of ice, airborne without knowledge
of gravity.
is it cataclysmic to ponder life without our own
involvement?
our human subconscious diminishes to mere murmurs,
then rumors, until silence - evaporated in the wind that blows across
the sidewalk.
a white rose wilts in a patch of red on north Pulaski,
only seen through the chain-link wires manufactured
to keep life out.
secluded,
this silent cemetery outlier
was the sound of traffic reason
enough to wilt?
who might know?

Edwin F. Smith

Untitled #17

nowadays, it's woefully forgettable
to see radial silence enveloping the ears of a child,
these students of the wind.

eyeing the streams of sunlight pushed across the ceiling,
fervent rays that maniacally dance in flowing step
along peripheral empty space, stilled walls that exhale
the hope of clenching your breath long enough for peace
to take hold.

maybe then, the room may cease to creep inward.
but it doesn't.

you've woven yourself into the walls that shrink beneath
those streams of darkened sunlight.

nowadays, the blossoming expectation of maneuverability is traumatic
forbearance at an injunction of desire,
wishing to be held,

or to hold

your hand, tightly wrapped at the waist of a gentle unknown,
twirling in sirens of swallowed, transient deliverance.
the futile dance with sanity.
the damned waltz with isolation.
you, a rose seed, planted to believe in your illusory soft foundation,
but embedded in immovable earth.
desperate to bloom towards any indication of light,
even in the dark.

nowadays, it's aesthetically anesthetizing,
the intrinsic sound of piercing screams in the muffled
trepidation of night.

a mother berated.

a father crumbled stoically on the stairs.

and a son wilting in a rigid silence

that expostulates a belief of captivity.

there are visions of a dance in my mind.

disassociated while their steps move in time.

remember suffocating hands, struggling to preserve the love

replaced by wandering infidelity in eyes that would weep

in the silence of night

nowadays, dreaming is unbearable.
how foolish to believe their dance was contingent on a melody.
harmonious overtones.
dissonance was the reality.
the reality became statistic.
 it does not matter, the growing percentages of faces
 that share my experience.
 this is my life.
 (these walls belong to me).

phantom visions of their dance reach out in my mind.
cheek-stained bitter tears, desperately clinging to each other – to pain.

clenching my breath.
 i beg the musician
 to cut the music.

maybe the dawn will break
 this dream
 this nightmare.

Edwin F. Smith

awakened

berated shotgun shells trodden themselves into the green grass
beneath the altar of a scripture wedding.

 personified eloquence audaciously dresses itself
 in white, a dove
 sailing over the sand of crystalline blue oceans
 hunting elegantly with bloodied beak,
makeup to starry eyes gazing fondly
at a shapely slump of ignorance,
 that dove easily flies to and fro
 as a rambunctious proprietor of the night.

swelling deceit manifests itself on the forefront of
almost certain
 bereavement.

Edwin F. Smith



"O Death" pen and ink - Joseph Tinaglia

Acquiring a compass

kissing the crests of something bohemian
and tasting nostalgia between my lips
luminous on the edge of night,
it was brahms perhaps,
deciding between Guinevere and Helen
always wondering if the implications
implicate something grander than
a child's face.
Bohemia is in your arms and
cooing at your ear,
kiss her again before the sun goes down
into the miasmal abyss,
the couple is too young for the western sky,
to the east the fields of wheat are dimming
to the north is Guinevere
Helen rests in southern lands,
the color of wheat turns grey with the night,
revealing nothing at all

Nathan Steele

her dreams

she dreams of the roving meadow
that passes through her forest,
hiding with ancient oaks that
keep their secrets of old.
she dreams of Egypt behind
a gossamer veil, protecting
her eyes from the dusty wind
as she looks into the sky
and she dreams of a lover,
coming from France,
“Mon amour pour Paris n’est pas
aussi grand que mon amour pour vous.”

in her dreams she is quiet,
not saying a word
for fear she might wake up.

Nathan Steele

The Water's Edge

Dark-blue and mixed with the clay mud beneath it, formed by a chilled morning wind, the white tips of the reservoir's lapping waves broke over the speckled landscape. Vertiginous spires dotted the soiled beach, where the heavier portions of some distant societal residue created towering embankments of refuse. Flotsams drifted and coagulated into minarets on the Waurika shore. The desired pieces deconstructed before being reconstructed farther away in someone's home or hobbyshop. And the undesired were left in abandonment of other ideals. Half-faced dolls once proffered on a birthday, worn tires, plastic filaments and plastic bags, the untextured rot drifted into and sometimes out of the city. The world forgot itself amongst the unfiltered expression of that which was already forgotten by every absent moment tossed out as incarnated sentiment.

Often prey to the sentiments of a winter's morning, Thomas gazed onto that landscape that surrounded him. The beach bristled and grew as he watched. His focus drifted into different worlds, taking the form of his existing world, but connected by idea alone. An endless dark-sand desert. He held his breath between each oasis and they were miles, meters, moments apart. As if time were kept on some discarded pocket-watch that only worked part time.

Then the world was a towering wall, surrounded by the huns on both sides, storming forward from land and sea. Citadels emerged alongside the culmination of rough-worn brick, laid down to hold back the horde. Six fingers per hand, three hands per body, something grotesque was stretching upward and screaming and throwing. The missiles of refuse flying from imaginary hands, the world returned into focus.

Buzzing and buzzing, life piled upon itself and intruded upon itself. There was some interruption waiting for him. Dr. Barbara 391-729-1598. The sun had slinked upwards past the edges of the horizon so he knew that he was late for the appointment with his wife. Behind him as his eyes looked outwards over the waters and the waste and the abandonment there was something profane, something that waited for him restlessly. The arc of the item, as it shot from his palm and quieted the buzzing by distance alone, traced itself back towards him in concentric circles patterned on the water's surface. A lagan buoyed by the memory of repression and the rejection he felt in that moment.

Time shifted along with the concentric circles; he replayed the moment again before losing his focus once more. Pyres covered the ruins around him, blowing fresh ash into his face. Indeed, all of life awaited the sacrosanct fire for some greater transmigration still unsaid. The chilled morning wind pressed the muddy waters closer to his feet that stretched over the precarious divide of the fixed and the fluid, but he did not notice. Something was drifting into him from those waters and something was drifting away.

Nathan Steele

Hungry For More

Chapter 4

Sarah couldn't believe what she was doing. She had never been so free on a first date or with a guy before. This was all a completely new adventure and she had no idea what she was going to do next. It was like one of those old school, choose your own adventure books. You just pick the option you like and see where it takes you. You never know if you will go forward or backward. You never know when it will end. This is exactly how Sarah felt right in this instance and she was okay with the risk, no matter how foggy her mind was.

They climbed back into Craig's car and took off down the street. It was not very far before he pulled off the road into a parking lot. The lot was full, but Sarah could not figure out why. There wasn't a restaurant or club nearby. All Sarah could spot was a hotel and the overflow parking lot for the hotel. Sarah suddenly got worried.

"Um, Craig," Sarah stuttered, "Why are we pulling into the parking lot of a hotel?"

"Don't worry, Sarah," Craig reassured her, "They have a ballroom here and teach dance lessons on weeknights."

"Oh. Sorry for implying anything. I was just confused," replied Sarah. Although that very moment had sobered her up just a little.

They went through the valet parking and were on their way into the hotel lobby in no time. There was a young girl at the front desk, who lit up when they walked through the door.

"Good evening! How may I help you two tonight?" she asked.

"We are here for the dance lessons," replied Craig.

"Oh great! Well, if you have a reservation I can help direct you," she smiled.

"Of course," replied Craig, "It's under Smith."

"Oh, Mr. Smith, I see that here. I apologize. Let me get you there as quickly as possible," she replied and suddenly her entire demeanor changed. It was as if she has seen a red carpet or a famous person or something. Sarah could not figure it out, but she just assumed she had too much to drink and was reading into it.

They walked down another hallway and the young girl waved toward a door, "Here you are," she said. "And just come see me later and we can take care of your other reservation."

"Other reservation?" Sarah asked looking at Craig.

"Don't worry about that," Craig replied.

Sarah just shrugged her shoulders and walked into the room. The lessons had already started, but she knew they would just jump right in. She felt a strong hand cup her elbow and lead her toward the dance floor. It's a good thing I decided on the dress, Sarah thought.

“Ready?” Craig asked.

Sarah responded hesitantly, “As ever?!”

He looked into her eyes and started to move her across the dance floor. Sarah had never experienced anything like this before. Craig had such a dominant demeanor and strong will. Sarah liked being thrown across the dance floor, spun here or there, and pulled back into his arms sharply. There was no better way she could have imagined ending their date than dancing the night away. The group took a break from dance for a little while to mingle, catch their breath and grab a drink. Craig walked away for a moment and returned with a couple of drinks in hand.

“I figured you were a little thirsty so I grabbed a few,” he said. “And considering you dance significantly better when you are not sober, these drinks are not sober either,” he winked at Sarah.

Sarah just smiled. She could not help it. There was just something about this Craig guy that was getting to her. She really enjoyed him, all of him.

“I don’t mind and thank you!” she smiled bigger.

“Are you having a good time?” he asked.

“Can you not tell?” Sarah asked with a little frowny face.

“You are too cute, Sarah. Of course, I think you are having a good time, but I always want to guarantee it. I knew there was something special about you, but I just couldn’t put my finger on it until right now,” Craig replied.

“What is it?” Sarah asked.

“You. Just everything about you is special,” he said as he winked and smiled and chugged down a drink. Craig quickly picked up another drink and indicated that Sarah should be drinking hers just a little bit faster.

“Okay, okay, people,” called the dance instructor. “Gather your partners and head back to the floor for a little more fun!”

“It’s time,” said Craig.

Sarah just gazed in his eyes, tossed back her drink, grabbed his hand and scooted out to the dance floor. There was nothing more she wanted than to be close to him again. Salsa was such an erotic dance. Sarah had never realized before how sexy a dance it really was. She was hot and sweaty from moving her body in ways she had never moved before. It was easier than she thought because Craig was such an amazing dancer and leader. She could feel his hard muscles under his soft skin when he pulled her tight just before he pushed her back away. Sarah was starting to feel the tension grow between them. She had promised Jane that there wouldn’t be anything extra tonight that she would have to explain away and Jane had made her swear she wouldn’t end up having breakfast with this guy either. Just one step at a time, Sarah reminded herself.

“You look like you are getting tired. Are you ready to go?” Craig asked Sarah as he spun her around.

Sarah caught her breathe and said, "I'm just a little light headed, but I am having so much fun!"

"Good," he replied, "I like that!"

Sarah caught a quick deep breath and suddenly felt more light headed than before. She looked up at Craig and he was getting fuzzy. She started to freak out, knowing she hadn't had that much to drink and wondering what was going on. Craig just had this sly, sexy smile across his face and that was the last thing she remembered before everything went black and she felt herself falling.

Quickly, Craig grabbed Sarah and pulled her in close. She had obviously become light-headed and passed out. He picked her up in his arms and walked off the dance floor. Craig walked out to the elevator and pressed the up arrow. Craig had planned out this entire night. He knew what he wanted and rarely did he ever not get what he wanted. Tonight would not be any different from any other night and he had made sure of that. He waited in the elevator as it climbed story after story until it got to the top floor, the doors opened and there he was. Craig had a standing reservation at the hotel and it never ceased to amaze him how beautiful the sites were from the glass windows that provided the view of the city.

Craig was pulled back to reality when he felt the weight in his arms get a little heavier. She was starting to stir a little. He brought her through the foyer and the kitchen area, into the bedroom and laid her on the bed. Sarah was looking so sexy and he just wanted to lay his hands all over her, but he knew that she would be sweeter responsive than not. He just brushed her hair out of her face and couldn't help himself, but to snap a quick picture of her there so innocent and beautiful. Craig got up from the bed and walked toward the kitchen. He knew she would need water once she woke up and he would have that ready for her. Craig wanted tonight to be perfect. He grabbed a few pain pills and made his way back to the bedroom.

Sarah's head was hurting and her eyes were closed. She felt something soft beneath her and wondered where she could be. She was so confused and had no idea what was even going on. The last thing Sarah remembered was dancing with Craig and then feeling a little light-headed. She opened her eyes and realized she was in a bedroom. All her clothes were still on and she was lying on top of the blankets. Sarah heard noises from outside the bedroom door, but everything was so muffled she could not make it out. She tried to sit up, but just didn't feel like she had the strength, plus her head was throbbing.

Just then the door opened wide and there stood Craig with a glass of water and a sad concerned look on his face.

"Oh, babe, you had me worried. I think that was too much for you," he said.

"Oh... umm... I..." Sarah tried to form a sentence, but still couldn't.

He laid his hands on her shoulders and pushed her back down. "Just rest. I will be here with you and there is nothing to worry about. I will take care of you. I got you some medicine and water because I figured you would be thirsty and your head would likely hurt," he said.

Craig's voice was so soothing and calming. Sarah just did what he asked of her because she couldn't imagine any other way. She reached toward the water and Craig helped her up. He held her back while she took the pills and a sip of water. Sarah still did not understand where they were or how they got here, but she knew she felt safe with Craig and that she could trust him.

"Where are we?" Sarah asked.

"We are still at the hotel," Craig told her. "I have a standing reservation here whenever I need it. Some mornings I am too tired to drive home after work and it's just easier to come sleep here than worry about getting into an accident."

"Oh, okay," Sarah said.

After a while of lying there Craig asked her, "Are you feeling any better? You can stay here tonight if you would like and I can drive you back to your car in the morning."

Sarah was feeling better, but she liked this invitation and wanted to partake. "I probably shouldn't be driving, if I had this much to drink and passed out on the dance floor. I wouldn't mind taking half the bed, if you don't mind."

His face lit up and Sarah could tell that was exactly what he wanted. Craig was sexy and adorable and she just could not get enough of him. She wanted him in that moment and didn't know what else to do than grab his shirt and pull him close.

Sarah kissed him. She started kissing and it was hard to stop. Craig kissed her hard and passionately back and before she knew it, he was on top of her in bed and they were hot and sweaty again.

"We are on a first date. Why even take care of me the way you did? You could have put me in a cab and sent me home," Sarah asked.

Craig smiled. "I would never abandon you like that. I like you a lot Sarah and I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

Sarah just couldn't help herself. She knew they were going to spend the night together, doing a lot of something that wasn't sleeping and she did not mind one bit. There was something deep inside her that started nagging at her, but she just pushed it down and didn't let it make another sound.

Craig had her in his arms and he knew that there was no letting go. He could feel her melt deeper and deeper into the sheets and into his arms. He had gotten her just where he wanted her. She had no idea what his plan was, but she didn't need to know. She had no idea who he really was, but she didn't need to know. This was perfect. A fresh start with a new girl and he was melting back into her.

The hours dragged on through the night and into the early morning. Just as the sun came up, Craig turned Sarah's head toward the window. He pulled her out of bed and went out into the living space. This was the first time Sarah had been out of the bedroom since she had woken up and she couldn't believe her eyes. It was beautiful. Craig pulled her close to him and just wrapped his arms around her. Sarah nestled into him and they watched the sunrise together.

A perfect moment to start a perfect day, they both thought.

Craig offered to make Sarah breakfast and she smiled as she made her way back toward the bedroom. She swayed back and forth and turned her head just as she got to the door. "If that is what you would like to do. I am going to take a shower and get ready for the day. I have to still make my way home and get ready for work."

"I will make you breakfast. Don't worry about going home before work. Check the closet," he said as he winked at her and walked toward the kitchen.

Sarah was so puzzled she had no idea what to do or say. So she followed his instructions and went to the closet. Before her very eyes there were rods of men's and women's clothing. The women's clothing had tags still on them and every piece was in her size. She was slightly alarmed and slightly amazed at the same time. There were work clothes and comfortable clothes, ranging from summer to winter wear. She picked out a pencil skirt, a light blue button down top and a silky camisole to wear underneath. Sarah made her way toward the bathroom to find everything she would need from hairbrush, toothbrush to a razor in the shower and the perfect smelling body wash. All Sarah could think about was hurrying up to get back out there with Craig. She set the water in the shower and got herself ready. Just as she was about to jump in, she caught the bathroom door opening out of the corner of her eye.

"Hey there," Craig said.

"Hi," Sarah replied with a little blush rising on her cheeks.

"I just wanted to let you know that I was almost done with breakfast. I hope biscuits and gravy are okay?" Craig asked.

Sarah smiled, "My favorite! How did you know?"

Craig smiled back. "I didn't. They are my favorite as well. Get yourself in the shower and all cleaned up. I will meet you in the kitchen."

Sarah did just as Craig said. It wasn't like she had anything else to do either so she couldn't refuse. There was just something about him that was easy and she liked it. Sarah took a steamy hot shower and after she was done, got ready for her day. She walked out of into the kitchen and Craig was setting the table for the two of them.

"Every time I see you, you get more and more beautiful," he told her.

"Aw, you are too sweet. Thank you!" she said as she blushed.

"So, what's on the agenda today?" asked Craig and he motioned for Sarah to sit at the table.

Sarah sat down. "Well, work of course and then nothing. Why? What are you doing today?"

"Not much, really. I figured I would hang out here a while. Then I have to take care of some things and maybe we could get together tonight. What do you think?" he asked.

It was hard not to smile. “Perfect. What time?” Sarah asked.

“Well, after work I presume you will want to go home. I can meet you there or we can go out. It’s up to you,” he replied.

“How about seven at my place?” Sarah asked with a grin on her face.

Craig just gazed into her eyes and he knew. “Perfect. I will be there. Now eat up because you have got to get to work.”

Sarah ate the breakfast that he had served and it was delicious. She was hungrier than she could imagine and although she had worked up an appetite last night, she didn’t realize how much.

Craig knew that tonight wouldn’t work out because he had to work. He was scheming in his mind when she leaned across the table and gave his hand a big squeeze.

“Come back to me,” she said.

“Sorry, I got lost in my thoughts for a moment there. Well, it’s time for me to see you off,” he said.

“What about my car?” Sarah asked.

“There is a car downstairs waiting to take you anywhere you would need to go,” he replied.

Wow! Sarah thought, how can this guy be single? She just kissed him quickly and gathered up all her things. She took one last look at him before she pressed the down arrow on the elevator. Sarah was riding down and couldn’t believe herself. What would she tell Jane? What would she do tonight? This was not the type of relationship she wanted, but it could turn into something bigger and better. Sarah decided to push it out of her mind just as the elevator made it to the ground floor and the doors opened wide to let her out. There was a black car waiting outside just as Craig said there would be. She walked outside and toward the car.

“Ma’am,” said the driver as he held the door for her.

“Thank you,” Sarah said as she climbed into the back seat.

The driver got into the front seat and turned his head, “Where shall I take you? To your car or straight to work?”

“To my car, please. Thank you,” Sarah replied.

They drove in silence the entire car ride. Every once in a while Sarah would catch the driver’s eyes on her instead of the road, but he would just smile and look away. He seemed curious, but Sarah did not know what he was curious of. They arrived at the coffee shop and the driver got out of the car. He came around to her door and let her out.

“Ma’am, Craig asked that you buy yourself some coffee this morning. He said you

would need this,” as he handed her a credit card, he smiled.

“Oh, thank you,” Sarah replied.

She was completely floored and had no idea what she had gotten herself into. This guy that she went on one date with and took care of her when she was ill and then took care of her all night. She smiled at the thought of that, he had given his driver a credit card to give to her for spending. Was she supposed to accept and just use the credit card or deny the card and declare herself independent as she always had done? Sarah had no idea, but she knew she was going to see Craig tonight so she took the card and just went in and bought herself a cup of coffee. When she returned outside, the driver was gone and she was left to get herself to work.

This was going to be a long day and she knew it. It was nice of Craig to think of her and her need for caffeine, although he had made her a cup of coffee this morning with breakfast. Just then her phone dinged and a text came through. It was from him.

Hope you are enjoying your coffee on your way into work. I will see you later!

Wow this guy was amazing and she was not going to leave one detail out when she got to work. Even though she was driving in normal traffic, she had left early and actually got to work on time. Sarah felt great. She was in a nice new outfit, with an almost empty cup of delicious coffee in hand, feeling like a new woman. People were giving her a funny look, but she didn't know why and she honestly did not care.

Sarah arrived at her desk to discover a vase with a dozen roses. There was no note, but she knew who they were from. How sweet of him to have them delivered before she arrived at the office. Just then Jane came prancing over to her with a note in hand. It looked like a card of sorts and she had eyes so big they were almost popping out of her head.

“What did you do last night?” she practically demanded of Sarah.

“Well, you knew I had a date,” replied Sarah as she shrugged.

Jane looked at the card, waved it and started to read, “Thank you for last night. You are something special. I cannot wait for another night like that!”

Sarah's face started to blush! She could not even imagine what was going through Jane's head, but whatever it was Sarah knew she was guessing right.

“What did you do last night? Did you not heed my warnings?” asked Jane.

“Well,” Sarah paused, “I just couldn't help myself!”

Sarah sunk into her chair in front of her desk and Jane took her usual stance, propped up on the edge of Sarah's desk.

“Tell me all about it then, girl!” said Jane.

And Sarah did. They spent almost all morning replaying the details over and over again. Jane just could not get enough of the juicy details and teasing Sarah for what she had done. They did not get any work done and when lunch time came around they both decided to go out instead of stay in. It was then that Jane noticed Sarah’s attire.

“What are you wearing? Is this new? I have never seen it on you before. It’s sharp, girl!” said Jane.

“Ya, well, obviously I didn’t go home so he had bought something for me to wear,” Sarah replied.

“Oh, no! He is buying your love, girl! You had better be careful with this one,” she said as she shook her finger at Sarah.

Sarah knew deep down there was this bell going off inside, but she just figured it was her past behaviors trying to keep her from something good. She was not willing to listen and she just wanted to be happy. After one date with this guy she pictured him as the one, spending the rest of her life with him.

Little did Sarah know in this moment, but she would spend the rest of her life with him.

Julia Talley

Original

Faint-hearted?
Or faint of the heart,
Broken smiles,
Or broken from the start.
Words are envy,
No matter what the change.
Words are golden,
No matter what it pains.
Life in the light, so much better than the dark,
Light in a life, so much better than a spark.
But words are stolen, just shaken in a jar,
Listen to them repeat them, as you sit in your car.
Yet there is hope, for so few of the believers,
And hope is real, for the already mastered weavers.
Can we do this? Is there anything left to say?
Or are the words like the ones we see in old books,
All but faded and gray?
Refuse to let your pen down, for there are original stories,
They are the ones in your heart that ache, bring them to all their glories.

Brian Paul Thalhammer



Variations on Bill Murray II - Eric Novak

Reaching

It sounds like dropping a bomb in a compact room,
Like a brigade of angels crying out for the entire earth to hear.
It sounds like swells of water rushing in when levees break.
Like an army of sirens, serenading you into a deep slumber.

It tastes like chalky dry air, and whey isolate.
It tastes like long hours creating fold proof plans.
Like desperation for last breaths.
Like oatmeal and peanut butter for last meals because it's cheap.

It feels like loading your magazine,
And emptying a clip with one pull.
It feels autonomous.
It feels serene,
Like taking one step closer to God.

It is a constant push or pull.
A clash of the titans in one body.
It is never-ending uncertainty.
Faith in the flow.
It is gratitude to your support system.
Like touching a burning star.

This is how you reach new heights.
This is how to be a God amongst men.

Diamond Thompson

Naked

There's always a moment of baited breath, anticipation at the reveal. That curtain parts and out struts your subject. You can stare all you like but you've paid for the hour so you better get down to business. There are those who laugh nervously, whisper behind white streaked palms or poker-faced, unfazed. But we're all here for the same reason. Pointing out all the tragedy of their perfections and all the beauty of their imperfections with your brush cuz you're not allowed to touch. Assuming you'd want to. And most of the time you DO NOT. But some days in Nude Figure Drawing 253 you get lucky.

"We'll start with a couple of thirty second gestures to warm up before moving onto some five and tens." Professor Parkes broke the ice in his fashion. This guy had seen his share of nudes during the Summer of Love most assuredly. "Shoot for three good pieces for critique and do your best work. Monique deserves nothing less, wouldn't you agree? You can get started. I'll start the heat lamps for you."

"Merci, Davide." She smiled, stepping into the midst of our semi-circle of propped board easels and bench troughs towards the small stage and stool that was to be her pedestal. A dozen eager art students stood at the ready, utensils in hand. Some wielding tombos, others flesh-toned charcoals, another crowquill, myself a palette knife full of burnt umber oil. A moment's hesitation, then all eyes on her as she sized up a pose and tugged at the sash of her robe.

I caught a brush end in the ribs, Danny Lords to my right attempt at subtlety.

"Oh my goth, I feel like Schiele in a whorehouse, man." Ignoring it, I set to work checking the chemistry in my palette and began with the flechette, laying flats.

A good model could hold a pose for upwards of ten minutes, still as a statue, composed and scarcely breathing, elegant yet provocative. Not just any pose would do either. A certain amount of angles and flows needed to be established in her composition to keep things interesting, not only for those trying to capture her but for her own experience.

"Penny for whatever's going on behind those baby blues, right?" Asked Jon Giles to my left. "I knew they couldn't throw freakin' hairball hippies at us all semester."

"She's something alright. Like one of Klimt's nymph's but a touch of LaTreuc's dirty bargirl going on there, am I right?" I guessed, was the appeal.

“I was gonna say Mucha’s esprit de l’escalier, but close approximation,” came the one-upper. Giles knew his stuff. His thumbnails already looked dope, even as wireframes. His design background immediately announced itself in the patina. I looked back at my own canvas, cut a silhouette into the matte and looked back to her. I could have sworn she was staring at me, tip of her chin perched perilously atop the precipice of her patella. Arms akimbo, reclined invitingly. “Was she...?” I looked back and she had shifted to the next pose, a ballerina’s pirouette.

“SHRIPT SHRUP T SIRRT” sketchbook pages being shredded out of their bindings and discarded as new poses began. Every student’s hands a flurry of strokes and swoops.

“Everyone feels that way, dude. Even the girls, knowing this crew. Just go with it, another one for the cretins at Atomic Sketch to buy up for the price of a Zombie Dust in the name of ‘high art.’” Lords traded his nudes for booze like a good old-fashioned Impressionist. Van Gogh would have been proud.

“I think you could up the ante and take this gal to auction. She’s worthy of hanging up on a wall, for sure. If not a museum, then surely some hard-up hipster’s bedroom.” Giles was a complimentary fellow, but he wasn’t wrong. “She’s impressive. Really. She’s got the grace of dancer, but that body screams stripper, for sure. Don’t drop the dun-dun-dun, right?”

“Have some respect. She’s pretty enough to be a waitress. More profitable than being a lawyer with a can like that,” jibbed Lords, charming as ever.

“I’m thinking... silent film star, with eyes like that. Breast bones like bird wings.”

“Clavicle. Get it straight, anatomy major,” Giles pointed out.

“What’s it matter what she does, so long as she models like an angel for us. I prefer not to know anything about her, leave it up to my imagination.” I felt somewhat protective, voice rising above a whisper.

“I imagine she’s my lady of the niAIIIGGHT!” Jabbed in the thigh with a .01 calligraphic nib tip, Lords cried out in agony. Taking the hint.

“Jeez, hero, it’s just a job, one that requires precious little skill at that.” But to say that belied the fact that there was a sweet science. A good model endured throughout all time. Was Mona Lisa just a model, or the Girl with the Pearl Earring? Schiele made common prostitutes his goddess muses. Were they not immortals as well? And couldn’t this girl be transfixed in time to stand among them, if only my conception of her were _____ enough. Whatever quality fit the descriptor of beauty, whatever value endeared me to future curators.

“He is right, though, these days a good muse is hard to come by.” Giles was always supportive.

“I guess that air of mystery, the unknowable secret of a woman is gone. Facebook killed all that. No secrets remain, no modesty exists. We see their lives on display like a train wreck and know how to make a speedy exit before things get real,” I mused.

“Which is every morning after the one night stand, am I right?” Lords jibbed, flourishing a watercolor tubule.

Giles was onboard now, shouldering his t-square and breaking out some French curves. “How do you learn to admire without desire? To control the undying lust for beauty without having to consume it? That’s what the muse is all about, that’s what the model is for.”

There was a long pause. The model shifted again, pages were torn aside in a chorus, and floated to the floor like dirty leaves. Her limbs folded themselves into a new position, more open, if indeed her nude form were not exposed and immodest enough. Still some inner secret must remain, some reservation if not in the flesh, then in the mind. A spackle of gesso smeared the sheet, followed by quick strokes of black gouache and inkwash to fill the spaces between, lending dimension to the page. Her musculature took form in the *chiaroscuro*’s interplay. I thought for a moment and started again, focused on the image materializing before me.

“Objectification aside, image is temporal. Love is fleeting, and longing bests it in every conceivable fashion. Love runs dry but longing unquenched is a wellspring that never will.”

“That’s deep, bro. Now shut up, I need at least one good one to show up Justine over there. Need her to make like Titanic style Rose-paint-me-like-one-of-your-French-girls-Jack, *knawuddamean?*” Lords was lost in contemplation, too, it seemed.

The constancy of the unattainable, the perpetual seduction that goes unresolved and unspoken. These are the alchemic drives that fuel the artists’ *j’oie de vivre*. Why there must be the constant chain of affairs, the furious cycle of desire and attainments. Only the lack of having, the distance and the love from afar could complicate properly, stave off conquest. So he scribbled his love confessions and laid slick black *sumi* contours of her forms, running his hands over the page of her body, a body he would never touch.

He nudged Lords at the easel next to him. “What do you make of Miss Trust Fund Herself with the Prisms over there?” Across the half circle, beyond the nude’s chilled tits sat some scene

crasher wannabe with supplies that screamed Blick and boots that literally read Michael Kors.

“I’d be curious to see if she knows how to rock them two hundred dollar markers as well as those two hundred dollar leathers. But I doubt it,” Lords sneered.

“Lem seems to think so.” I waved my nibquill at the bowtied and bespectacled board barnacle affixed to her side, admiringly. “He’s lined up to give her form a very thorough critique methinks.”

“Dude is a try-hard with girls and his style. AI didn’t tighten up his game, but if I could afford that kind of education, I’d do better things with the money than chase hipsters. Get me some of that international love.” Lords gnawed at his Tombo, spattering Higgins everywhere. Very Pollack.

“Only the born rich could have the self indulgence and utter lack of practically to become artists. Anyone poor would chose greener career pastures for sake of sustenance alone. Present company not included,” Giles chimed in.

“Ay, fuck you. I make this starving artist jag look dayum good,” retorted Lords. “Dating art dames is impossible. They see right thru the mystique cuz they know it’s all bullshit. They want a patron, a financial backer. A sugar daddy.”

“If she’s truly Frida Kahlo, I’d be happy to be her Diego Rivera. That’s a match made in heaven and she paid off in her own lifetime.” Academic, hoping to incite intelligent discourse as I powdered stippled dots of chalk to dabble her freckled skin, the illusion of subsurface scattering emerged with a swipe of inkwash atop. It was no use.

“Body dysmorphia, institutionalization and a unibrow would be your kinks of choice, you deviant.”

Giles deflected, changed the subject. Peaked up from the bristol and checked the focal point with his camera lucida’s prism projection. “But artist couples never work out. Look at Jackson Pollack or Andy Warhol. Incapable of happiness, even when the girls were bending over backward for them, kissing their asses. Literally.”

“O’Keefe, Kandinsky, Ernst, DeKooning and Picasso all managed fairly well, though. I mean, it takes an artist to understand an artist,” I offered, hoping to save myself some further public embarrassment. But there was no getting away from it.

“What’s there to understand about wanting to look at naked women? Basic primal

evolutionary drive. Simple as.” Lords threw his brush down and cast his hands wide to frame his work between the L’s of his thumbs. “Mmm, mmm, mmm. Measures up. If anything, Jasper Johns got it right. Fellow artist, fellow freak. In the sheets. What more is there?” Lords said with a finality, rising from his trough.

“Johns was gay, man.”

“So? Equal opportunity employer. Artists are supposed to be open minded. No limits. Pushing boundaries. Cosmic experiences. Black holes...” Wagging a tongue, he swirled a brush in turpentine.

“Thirty seconds. Last details, people,” called Prof Parkes over the scuffle of papers and clink of brushes into the sinks. No appreciation.

“Outside the sex, I wanna be admired, worshipped even. Art chicks are dirty anyway. Kissing chalk and tasting of primer is not my idea of a good time. THAT is my idea of a good time.” The egg timer pinged its last and the model stood and bent to scoop up her terrycloth robe from the stage floor. She peered back over her scapula to catch my gaze and wink before exiting to re-dress.

“Oh, dude, now you gotta ask her about the bet.”

“What bet is that?” Nosy Feather, leaned between Giles and I to posit.

“Betcher trampstamp is Magritte’s Pipe, wench!” Lords barked. The bet between us was to see who could get a piece of their art tatted on the hottest girl. Beyond that, the darkest place if she was to be our living billboard, our personal thinking canvas.

The class broke down their tackle boxes of supplies and propped up for critiques. Monique returned in tights and a heavy knotted cable yarn sarape - very Eurogressive.

Lem, white-knighting, said, “Her legs look all, broken. I mean, the perspective just doesn’t add up. It’s like you spent all your time shading and lightsourcing her boobs, you perv.”

Lords wasn’t having it. “Well your whole composition straight up sucks. Learn to gesture. Dayum. Hit up Pose Maniacs and use it for more than spank bank material.”

The critique was painful to listen to. Halfhearted ass pats or verbal fellatios for their cliques and clichéd disapprovals for their rivals. Rarely did anyone spout anything intelligible.

The model returned from the changing room,

“I really like these. You draw me way more beautifully than I am.”

“That’s not possible. I mean, I draw what I see. How I saw you.” Not creepy.

“Alright. Class dismissed. Charcoals and chalks next time. Bring spray fixative. I’m not cleaning up after you. Our French maid won’t be here either. Hah!” Parkes made a funny.

Lords lassoed my head in the crook of his arm, pulling me aside. “You better talk to her now. You’ll never see her again, for sure. The hot ones never come back. We’ve got eleven weeks of class left and it’s bound to be all fat, balding schlubs. Strike while the iron’s hot, Art Star.”

“Oui! Sapriste! Actually, I like what you say about de Peecawso.

“I’m sure you hear this all the time, but would you do me the privilege of taking you for a drink, an Absinthe perhaps? We could talk art...” I suggested, scrambling.

“I would take you up on your offere but, alas, I am departing for ome een Pari these weeken.”

“Oh. Oh, I see. No worries. Some other time then.” Stupid. Dejected. Ego shattered, crumpled up wastrel to match my self-esteem. “May I write you?” Grasping at the last threads. “Like, a penpal.”

“I don’t write so much. I am too lazy. Theese is why I make a good model. Hahaha!” She laughed like a bird of paradise, madly cackling like Dali in Chien Andalou. “I make you a deal. Every drawing you send, I geev you a photo.”

“I can live with that.” I had to.

She wrote her address in white liner on a piece of scratch board and stuck her hand out to hand it over. The plane was leaving. There was nothing more to say.

She kissed me once on each cheek as they do. And left me standing in the empty room. The easels looked skeletal, paper draped over them. I sat down and started to draw.

Joseph Tinaglia



Kitchen - Mimi Cross

A New Way to ABC's, for Kids

Alphabetizing all the alimentary anatomies left his anus with an asphyxiated aperture.

Bring more beer, the boosy beast man bellowed to the bored and beautiful babe.

Cacophony is a colliding of cruel and cockamamie chords.

Dazed, defeated, drowsy and drooling, the drugged up driver drove dervishly downwards.

Elated at the elegant elephant's earlobes, Elmer envied the elephant's organ.

Frankly, Frank, it's far afield to feel your fantasy could fold into form with fickle funding.

Geronimo the gigantic gigolo gripped the gorgeous groaning ginger and gravitated for her g-spot.

Hieronymous? Hello? Are you home, hieronymous?

Inconceivable! The irate and irascible inouwie indian exclaimed, as he eyed the irises of the increasingly irritating and incorrigible white guys.

Just jesting with you, jester, no joke. Now jump back in your jalopy and jostle on, before george here jacks you in the jaw.

Kan't you krack the kode? For Krist's sake! It's kriminal!

Lemme in there, Mr. Lemon! I'd like to lick your little Lucy's lightbulb, she's luscious and lusting for love just like me, lemme lick her lemon one more long lasting time.

Many men have made it to this morgue, only to be murdered,
mutilated, and mulched up in the monkey mess that makes this murky mansion mostly mistrusted
and maligned among men.

Nobody knows the niggardly nonsense this neer do well nutcase has
caused in our nice and new nylon store.

Oh, oreos! Only offering more omnispresent than an oreo is an
orgasm, the only other O I know.

Press your pretty little pudenda here in my pocket, I'll push your
pleasure point to a pulsing prism of panting primordial passion.

Quit it quincy! Quiet your quibbling! Qualudes and Quanine never
quite quaff your queer quid pro quo quiriness.

Rollicking, roaring, rambling, rustling. Raging, rampaging,
rusticating, rearing, the ranging raucous wrestler rolled the wrapped up
rival to a record running roustabout retreat.

Suck my salty sausage with your soothing sultry sanguine skill.

Tuck the toes tightly on the tightrope. The trick is to twist and
trape without tossing away the torch, or, terrifyingly, tumbling top to toe.

Uruguay is an understandable and utterly unbeatable urge.

Volks, vee have a new volkswagen vor you to view, to veel, to voyage
in.

Walsh? Walsh? Where's Walsh? (The wonder working world
wondered where it would wind up.)

Xenophobia and Xenophon, like Xylophones and Xydeco!

Yes, yerba mate was yesterday's yummy yearn.

Zorro zig zagged, zipping through zebras, zoos, and ziggurats, to
zignify his zeal for zarathustra.

Nick Walsh

As An Amateur

creativity?

my writer's glasses

crash

like cymbals

on symbolic eardrums

ho-hum

forced metaphor & gorgeous

cellar doors

too hard, each try

look, ma, I write

Stefan Wojtan

Sanitarium, 1923

My lungs, plugged
trudging, thudding along
until gone.

Stuffed in my bunk
as wheezing steam
tings

Heating
everything but me.

Like memories...
no, sins.

I sneak each breath in,
breathing like grieving
comfort comes close.

Untouchable
as warmth.

Stefan Wojtan

Toes

I awoke
with blood on my shirt,
having thought nothing
of when he laid his head
on my chest
after trying to eat
last night.
Those rapidly dividing cells
bring fast and brief insights
like hell. We are
trying to find
joy in life
before
it's time to say goodbye

Stefan Wojtan



Darkness Before Dawn - Abraham Harb

Author Biographies

Elbert Tavon Briggs was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota and raised in Omaha, Nebraska. Elbert graduated from Arizona State University and served two years in AmeriCorps, fighting the war on poverty in the Lower Delta. He is a graduate student in transition in the NEIU English Writing and Composition Program. Briggs is currently creating original work with the Randolph Street Poets at the Chicago Cultural Center. His poetry reflects his lifelong commitment to incorporate poetry, music, art, dance and drama to give voice to the voiceless.

Raul Cañas is a Chicago native who has been writing poetry on and off for five years after being strongly encouraged by bad poets, who thought he could not write better poetry than them, to enter a friendly competition. There was a stalemate. Poets who have influenced his writing are Walt Whitman, William Stafford and Kanye West. He is pursuing an English major at NEIU and, hopefully, will graduate soon to become one of the thousands of recent graduates who are unemployed and living at their parents' house. He is thrilled. He has no idea what he will do with the degree he will receive, but he does know he will continue writing until a plague kills all trees, which ends the manufacturing of paper and he spills coffee on his laptop while eating a Butterfinger.

Crystal Eidson graduated from Rockford College in 2004 with a Bachelor's degree in English Literature. Eidson has worked clerical and retail jobs for several years after that, feverishly writing poetry in her spare time. She is currently the archivist at the Meinecke Artspace, which showcases and sells fine art.

Joel Gallardo works at a trucking company during day and finds solace as an NEIU student at night. An avid fan of music (which fuels his creative inspiration), you may see him at any of Chicago's outdoor music festivals or concert halls blocking your view due to his unusual height.

Abraham Harb began actively writing in late 2010, both with a creative and journalistic incline after being urged by an acquaintance to submit to a literary magazine. In 2011 and 2012, he was awarded The Harold Wilcox Award for Literary Excellence for his achievements on The Wright Side Literary Magazine. Harb was recently the recipient of the Wilson Media Award for his contributions to SEEDS. His play, "Timing," was featured in a play festival series. His prose and poetry are always tinged with optimism. He recently branched out, making a conscious effort to hone his ability to write short stories.

A.i. Herv is a poet, writer, photographer and CMT major at NEIU. In 2005, Herv took a photography seminar on a trip to the Owasippe Scout Reservation. This is where he first picked up a camera and everything fell into place from there. All Herv's poetry has a visual aspect, which he blames on his photographic tendencies. He enjoys creating a snapshot to immortalize the feelings he has in the moment. His knack for crafting pieces that articulate very normal (if there is such a thing) emotions and feelings, without being cliché, has become his trademark.

Mildred Kajah is a social worker at NEIU. Originally from Ghana in 2005, Mildred moved to Chicago and received her citizenship in 2012. Currently, Kajah is working on publishing *Bed of Roses Indeed*. It focuses on two fraternal twins, Alima and Elisa. They move to the U.S from Pakistan two years earlier and are trying to adapt to America but they become frustrated with the aspects of the culture. Elisa, on the other hand, tries every means she can find to adapt. She claims that she is from New York and doesn't want anyone to know she is from Pakistan. This is because students are calling her and sister terrorists. In the end, they realize they have to keep their own culture while adapting to the American way of life.

Nergal Malham is a tiny senior at NEIU. She spends her time frowning at things, sleeping and looking at pugs. Malham is currently in the never ending process of editing her first novel manuscript. She dreams of becoming a pug one day.

Barry Mansfield considers himself to be a philosophical poet. His first book *Thrown out of the Garden* will hopefully be published this year. Mansfield's poetry is about the possibility of creating something good out of something that's not so good.

Rosalind Marsh is a senior at NEIU in the English program and a member of the English Honor Society, Sigma Tau Delta. Marsh developed her love of reading and language at an early age, thanks to her Grandmother's passion for literature (and her mother regularly taking away TV privileges). She enjoys reading and writing as a way to analyze the world, cultivate new ideas and explore new ideologies and cultures.

Megann Masuicca grew up in Seneca Falls, NY and attended high school in Johnsbury, IL. After four years of active duty service at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, NM, Masuicca roamed in search of herself, whom she discovered in the English department as a creative writer. This is Megann's last semester as an undergraduate at NEIU. In her spare time, Megann enjoys breeding rare birds and spelunking.

Lazarus Miller has lived in Chicago for the last ten years, where he currently studies English literature and creative writing at Northeastern Illinois University. He has been writing fiction, in some form, since the age of twelve. Lazarus's short stories are often contemporary pieces woven together with images of Americana and themes of the supernatural in the modern world. As a writer, he draws inspiration from authors such as Neil Gaiman, Stephen King and Ray Bradbury. He is currently working on his first novel.

Kyle Anthony Moore was born in Chicago, Illinois. He doesn't draw, write or take photographs often but when Moore does, it's normally always a spur of the moment action. Between photography and writing poetry, he enjoys taking pictures the most. In his visual art pieces, which were taken in downtown Chicago about three years apart, he waited until a couple hours prior to dusk and started taking photos in order to find and create a calm and cool feeling in the images.

Stacie Polk is currently working towards a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in English and a minor in Media Communications. After being forced to write poetry in a class at NEIU, Polk discovered it suits her passive aggressive nature perfectly. In her poem, "A Two Karat Restrained," she explores a feminist perspective of an engagement ring.

Eden Novak started out as a bad-ass, smart-mouth kid who explored rock and roll stardom. She is a Chicago native and has lived in Oak Park for sixteen years. Novak touched the hearts of many people with disabilities teaching horticulture for twenty years. After performing in a variety of genres, with various bands, she found herself back on the theatrical stage with Open Door Repertory. Back in school and after years of tutelage by her esteemed writer partner, she discovered that she could pen her own works after years of performing other writers' works on stage.

Eric Novak is a junior art major at Illinois Wesleyan and the illustrations published are from one of the drawing classes that he took last semester. They are inspired mostly from his love of textures and sounds and the relationship that they hold. Throughout these drawings, Novak layers different shapes and mark making techniques to create a background that is visually interesting and then added various images that didn't necessarily have to do with each other. The way that he decided on these images was very improvisatory in nature, which is much of the way that he make all of his art.

Meredyth Poulsen is a former tax accountant, who is changing careers for something more rewarding and enjoys writing funny stories from her simple life. Poulsen actively wrote a blog at one point that was only followed by her friends.

Edwin Smith is a poet and Shakespeare enthusiast. He is enthralled with the idea of boulders (rocks) being the foundation for human strength and clarity. Smith devotes as much of his time to solving natural riddles as he does brushing up on his reading and writing. As a working poet/writer, he is currently under the persuasion that mantras manifest human understanding and, as a result, he believes rigidly in the power of hugs and Allen Ginsberg. He also misses Greg Giraldo as much as one fan is allowed.

Nathan Steele is a graduate student in the English department at NEIU. He works as a teaching assistant and when he's not reading texts or diving into the archive, he dreams about thinking about writing. This is not as productive as you might think. Steele only recently joined the NEIU community after he received a bachelor's degree in philosophy at LSU before following his greater interest in literature. When he's not busy working on his thesis, taking courses, helping out as a graduate assistant or trying to familiarize himself with a new and interesting city, he tries to find time for new writing. Currently, he's working on a fantasy saga as well as several different academic articles on 19th century publishing.

Julia Talley is an English major who recently self-published a raw version of her first book, *Exposed: A Memoir of Lost Days* on Amazon and Lulu. She is also working on a new suspense murder novel, *Hungry For More*. Talley enjoys creative writing, learning to play the guitar and creating crazy concoctions in the kitchen. She has been writing since she could hold a pencil and won't stop till she can't anymore.

Brian Paul Thalhammer is a first year student at NEIU, pursuing a degree in English, and hopes to one-day work with a publishing house as well as pursue a successful book-publishing career. Brian has self-published a short book of poetry, "Broken Thoughts," and is in the process of completing his second, an illustrated children's book. He is currently interning at "The Real Chicago" Magazine, writing feature articles in which he hopes will contribute to his experience and knowledge in the writing world.

Joseph Tinaglia grew up between the mean streets of Chicago and the purple mountains of Colorado, cultivating an appreciation for crossing worlds, duality and contrast. Crafting his own comics and illustrated stories since he was knee high to a grasshopper, Tinaglia sprouted up to attend the Art Institute in Chicago. Now an English and History student at NEIU, he incorporates the lessons of the masters and ancient civilization into his work. He subsists on a steady diet of British authors, Italian music and Middle Eastern food. More artist than writer, he justifies his existence through relentless creation and seeks collaboration with all kindred spirits.

Tasha Vos In an effort to explore connections between people and their physical surroundings, Vos creates representations of emotions in physical space. Whether this space is a concrete structure or the human body, Vos emphasizes the textures of her subjects in order to capture their unique physical traits. Her work reflects on the influence of emotion on human perception. She creates objects that function as visual representations of emotion and integrates them in an environment.

Nick Walsh writes poetry, fiction and fantastic anecdotes. Presently studying W.B. Yeats and Federico Garcia Lorca, he's striving to fuse the spirits of great past folk tellers, spinners of great poems from the fabric of national folklores, into his brain for a new American verse. Meanwhile, highly doubtful that that will succeed, Walsh is presently wondering, what can be done? Where are we going? Is there a chance? Or should he be pursuing a more practical career to put bread on the table, wine in the jugs and wood on the hearth to keep the home fires burning?

Stefan Wojtan has given up building spaceships and castles to focus on his search for the unlikely redemptions and flawed perfections that highlight the vibrant intensity of ordinary life. Wojtan has survived being left for dead in 'gator country and his vegan experiment has recently come to an end.

Yarlexolnikov is a staff member at NEIU and an independent filmmaker. He obtained his BFA in multimedia and an MFA majoring in directing/screenwriting and minoring in cinematography. His short film, "Zenja," which he wrote and directed in Auvers-sur-Oise, France, won the Silver Palm Award at the Mexico International Film Festival in 2009 and was awarded the Official Selection Award at the Chicago Short Film Festival in 2008. His feature length screenplay, "Youth, Fire, and Storm," was a semi-finalist at the Screenplay Festival in 2010. He considers poetry the impetus to all his artistic endeavors. For him, it was the genesis of all other art forms and still is, for him, his creative life source.