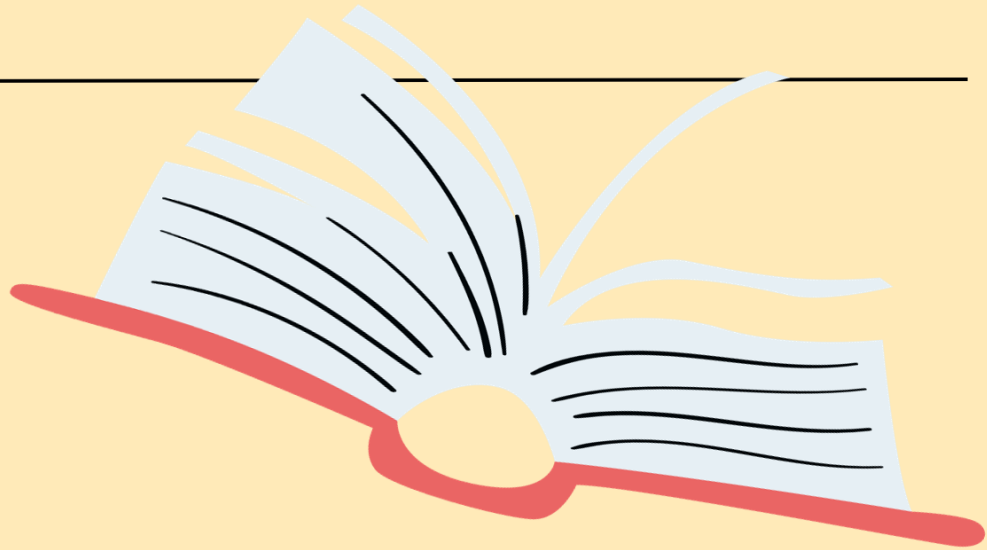
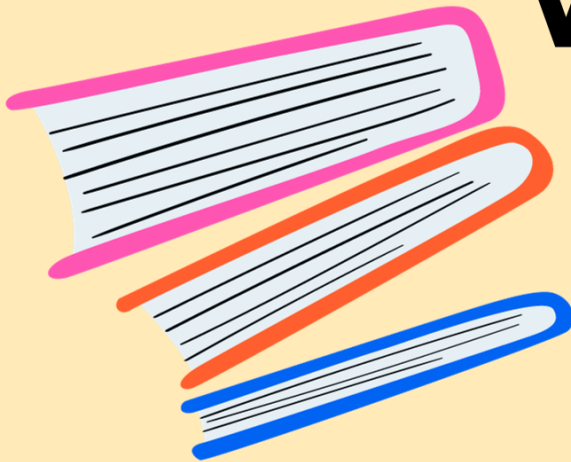


FALL 2023



WORD PLAY



TUTORING
AND
LEARNING
CENTER



UW-STEVENS POINT

WORDPLAY

Fall

2023.

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Nutrition Facts of the Tutoring-Learning Center
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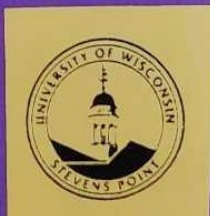
Supporting

Social Science Writing

Calligraphy!

treasure

Exam



Acknowledgements

Writing— meaning making with words— is as important now as it ever has been. With the specters of AI, burnout, and exhaustion lurking on the edges of our discourse, we (the coordinators) wanted both tutors and learners in the '57 series to have the chance to share their craft with the world in the Fall 2023 edition of *Wordplay*. We want to share the magic of words with you.

Wordplay and the Independent Writing classes that support it could not be without the Tutoring-Learning Center. Like our secondary cover expresses, there's a lot going on in the TLC. It's a place where you'll hear references to FNAF, Tolkien, Taylor Swift, Pearl Jam, sea shanties, and Dr. Who alongside info dumps on every subject imaginable, plus a few that are unimaginable. There's always coffee on and you can pretend to study here any time. Sometimes we even have grilled cheese and tomato soup for cold days when everything is bad, complete with hand hug and/or real hug, if you want it (because everyone needs a little TLC).

For me, CCC 234 is a place where words bring us together, and maybe most importantly, where our stories and poetry give us windows into the triumphs, traumas, and trivia that make us human. Thanks to all the tutors, learners, and friends who make the TLC the special place it is for so many people.

So much appreciation and thanks to our coordinators for their tireless efforts to support the mission of the TLC and each of us, no matter what we're going through, and no matter what they're going through. Thanks to Jen, Amanda, Bethany, and Lou for everything you do behind the scenes to make the Independent Writing program a success. And another thank you to all the front desk folks who keep us on track— Katie P., Abi, Reilly, and Isabelle.

Three of our most seasoned veterans will be leaving the TLC this semester for their next steps. To Amelia, Chloe, and Lexi, the TLC just won't be the same without your maturity, knowledge, and leadership. You're graduating from here, but you'll always be in our hearts.

Finally, thanks to Chloe for the cover design, to Micah for all the work on the secondary cover, and to Reilly, Lindsey, and Taylor for feedback on general formatting, and to Print & Design for making the magic happen.

- Jarita Bavidó,
Fall 2023 Writing Center Intern

P.S. A note on fonts: where they vary, it's at the request of the writer.

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Voice Lessons

Content Warning: Religious Trauma & Corporal Punishment

There's a lot people don't know about me.
 It's easy to namedrop my traumas--
 men, cults, misogyny, and all of those phobias
 xeno-, homo-, and trans-

It's not easy to talk about how it felt--
 Living that skin crawly feeling—you've done something wrong
 Prickles of sweat and heat on your neck. *How could you?*
Wicked. Sinner. Wretch.

It's not easy to talk about how it roared
 Those waves of breathless panic choking you
 An unwelcome savior coming to judge
 Every floor creak and door squeak spelling your doom.
Unrighteous. Unholy. Unsaved.

It's not easy to talk about how it crescendoed
 That wild despair of knowing you don't belong here,
You don't belong anywhere
 Because even heaven doesn't really want you--
Worthless. Useless. Friendless.

It's not easy to talk about how it broke me
 That steady *WHAP! WHAP! WHAP! WHAP! WHAP!*
 You'd better cry, but not too much.
I do this because I love you too much not to.
Disobedient. Dishonest. Disowned?

It's not easy to talk about how it hunted
 That rush of voices, their sticky word webs
 Spurting forth from pulpits of lies,
 trapping, devouring, spirit sucking
Eve. Delilah. Jezebel.

But every time I talk about how it felt,
 every time I speak my truths and tell my stories,
 I feel my voice returning and it's strong enough
 to crack with cold rage, incandescent and powerful.

Trading Trauma Metaphors

My traumas are ephemeral shrouds on the parts of me that I can't part with. Some days, the tattered remnants gape open, and I see the strength of the little girl who never stopped asking questions and always knew she mattered. Other days, it's gloom I feel. Shades of shame and self-flagellating whispers of despair make me shudder. I look at the ways I accepted their phobias and bowed under the weight of expectations, conforming to an imagined ideal that could never be me. Instead of letting the little girl think sapphic thoughts and dream of ivory towers, she learned to believe that the agonizing knots of anxiety were faith and the prickly-necked feeling that something was "off" was an overactive imagination. She was too much, too wild, too profane, too curious, and maybe a little too voluptuous. Wait a minute. Was the problem my hips or my voice, my breasts or my brain? Or maybe, because I was a woman it was all problematic. My curse too bare, or was it my cross to bear? Teehee.

These are shards of a person, hard edges sharpened with years. What if I put the pieces back together? What if this was my whole body and being and it was safe and welcome and sought out and cared for? What if the trauma wasn't ephemeral and it wasn't a shroud, and it would always be here. What if it made a mosaic full of wild abandon and sunbeams and firelight against tenebrous chaos of dark violent clouds? Once, I was piously plucking away at the threads of a tapestry God made for me. I had no agency, just watched as the weft and the warp stamped out one more virtuous woman. But, what about this mosaic? These odd-sized shards would make a shit *kintsugi* because they come from so many different parts of me. But a mosaic? That has potential.

"Over the course of the semester, I have had the pleasure of being able to deep dive into Jarita's writing with her. Each piece brings such a raw sense of emotion and I love being able to see her voice shine through every piece of writing. It has been a joy to work with her on building confidence in that voice and being able to free herself from her own ideas about her writing. From the beginning to the end of the semester, I have loved watching her take more pride in her writing and being able to confidently tell me why she writes the way she does, without selling herself short. It has been, and always will be, so exciting to see every piece she created spark such an insightful and passionate conversation between us. I can't wait to see where she goes from here."

- Elliot Heiling

every day, I feel like something outside of myself

on good days,

i feel like off-brand scotch tape,
thick snowflakes gluing eyelashes together,
communal backwash at the bottom of a shared lemonade

i am the fine line between *neutral* and *bad*,
the 30 minutes after being “fine” and before being buried alive,
a clogged gutter in spring

on bad days,

i feel like air that hasn't been washed,
the dusty stationary bike that we *had to have*,
the last memory of the first best friend you hated

i am uselessness in a can,
unground coffee beans in the back of a cupboard nobody opens,
something built to rot

on in-between days,

i feel like everybody i could be has already been taken,
someone with blood that isn't red and refuses to spill,
the second breath you take on new year's day

i am unlike an object and more like a thought,
a walking stain in a house without bleach,
schrodinger's consciousness

on days,

i feel like someone no one could ever meet,
a green-screen colored marionette doll,
the first thing to ever use a mirror incorrectly

i am the faceless thing that haunts a stranger's nightmares,
an unsuccessful game of telephone stuck in a body,
a disappointed whisper about god

the lifestyle of a human mess

here i come,
kicking and screaming,
writhing like a girl who once lived as a dying dog,
a nightmare on the streets,
a mangy mess with just enough instincts to survive,
wishing everyday for a savior and biting the hands that reach,
here i am,
prickly and harsh,
pupils blown wide like an atom bomb,
nails sharp like the words of an old, meaningless man,
an anthropomorphic house fire,
raging just to die

“Reilly’s poetry style is a gorgeous explosion of imagery, a sensory plunge that feels like a cross between the lyrics of Taylor Swift, Los Campesinos! and Lovejoy. Reilly understands the delicate human condition all too well, and it just hits different. When they’re in the booth with a learner, sparks fly. They have a unique ability to set their learners at ease. Their insightful and impactful feedback is like an invisible string that often leads to epiphany— they’re a mastermind. In the blank space of the TLC, Reilly brings authenticity, camaraderie, and compassion to a place otherwise sterile and institutional— like a comfy cardigan. If karma is real, Reilly’s reputation will be with us forever and always— evermore. Long story short, it’s nice to have a friend like Reilly, and every once in a while to be given a peek into the haunted wonderland of their writing.”

- Jarita Bavido

Ode to the Sun

In total darkness, the stars shine so bright
Your endless rays begin to peek just over the horizon
Reminding us once again that you are always in our sight
I remember where my love for you first began
Just up and over the mountain, where the city limits end
And begin, your vast colors spread all throughout the sky
Now your light shines, glistening all over us down here
Your warmth, your shine, all for us to enjoy.
Your luminous shine doesn't last forever
As much as we wish, but your descent brings us a euphoric feeling
As your hues dance throughout the sky
Blues turn into pinks, reds, oranges, yellows,
Then into purples, obsidian blues, then to dark
I can't wait for you to come back, and to do it all over again.

"Avery started English '57 with an open mind and willingness to write, despite struggling with writer's block. Once she had an idea for a short story, though, she took off and it was amazing to see her excited to write. We focused on her short story, which has progressed so much from where it started as simple prompts. Although we did not discuss any of her poems, I am sure they reflect the style within her prose. Throughout our sessions this semester I have seen her grow immensely and am hopeful she continues to write, whether that be prose or poetry."

- Paige Biever

Elijah struggled with the three men holding him back, he shouted and protested, pleading. Liam stood on the side, bloodied, and beaten, but I couldn't rub it in, I couldn't laugh. I looked at Elijah, fear and desperation mixed in my mind, and I wanted to scream for him, but it wasn't his life on the line.

It was ours.

The cuffs burned my skin, as I tried to use my powers. I nearly scream but it's like the pain I've felt when another unnatural dies. Amelia is being held by another man - the same cuffs on her wrists. She tries to jerk her body away; head butt the man but it's not working.

I was hoping she'd get away, just her. I didn't care about me; I wasn't worth it.

I'm forced to my knees, with Amelia by my side. I let the burning sensation dwindle as one of the hunters approached us, my head down and Amelia glared defiantly.

"Release us," she demanded, though it was the only thing she could do.

He laughed but then backhanded her. Though her head only snapped to the side, I assume that's due to her durability, it looked like he put a lot of power into it. I raised my head, eyes blazing, and the cuffs burned; but I continued. His eyes found mine, his widening, and mine igniting, then his nose started to bleed.

I smirked; my teeth coated in blood from the punch earlier. He backed away as others tried to grasp what was happening. I could feel Elijah's eyes on my best friend and me. I hoped he was proud of what I did, fighting back; I could still hear the men struggling to hold him.

The men surrounding their friend were looking back and forth between me and him. His blood was still flowing, his eyes rolling and showing the white of his eyes. Blood began to seep from his mouth and eyes as well, him dying slowly but surely.

"Sorry about your friend," I laughed, blood dripping from my lips. "I guess the cuffs didn't help much."

The man croaked, and his breathing stopped. The smile remained on my face, happy I killed one of them, but I knew that would be the death of me, of Amelia, of us.

The other men stared at their friend with shock and horror, thinking this was some sick joke. Two young ones even shook him, trying to get him to breathe or even blink, he died staring at the sky, and I only proved their point in ending our lives. Some of them looked at me, some glaring and some looked horrified, then Liam approached me.

"You're a monster and you just proved that to us," He spat, and I scowled, lips and mouth bloody.

My charcoal brown eyes glared into his forest green ones, his face painted with a scowl and mine with a bloody smile.

"No," I shook my head slightly, looking at the dead man on the floor. "That just makes us even now."

He stepped forward but Elijah yelled, anger fueling his threats. "Don't touch her! Liam, I swear to God, if she or her friend dies, I'll kill you myself!" Elijah yelled, nearly getting past

the men. Liam looked at his brother and then at me, ignoring him but I could practically smell the fear. "Don't touch them!"

I looked at Elijah and Elijah looked at me, his anger vanishing.

I wanted one last look at him. My charcoal brown eyes and his emerald, forest green eyes clashed and mixed, yet it brought me peace. Like always, I felt bare under his eyes like he could see everything I had to hide and everything I hated about myself, yet he still loved me.

He was beautiful, for a man. He was every bit of perfection I thought I'd never see, every time I laid my eyes on him, I'd remember why I loved him so, why I preferred his company, and why his presence made everything better. His touch made me feel alive, not because he could easily take away the pain if he wanted but because it made me feel something other than pain.

Pain was all I knew until Elijah.

Turning away, a bitter taste filled my mouth and I looked at Amelia with tears in my eyes. "I'm sorry," I whispered, wanting to take back everything I did that brought us here. "I'm sorry."

She forced a smile, tears in her eyes, and was uncaring about the people around us. "Don't be, Dani. I'm with my best friend, one of my sisters. We were born with tragedy carved in our bones; we were born to die. You and I, our time has come."

'Cause you and I, we were born to die, Lana Del Rey. I wanted to laugh, we were suckers for her and in a way, Amelia was right. I breathed out laughter, tears falling as I did.

A knife came into my eye view, pressing at Amelia's throat and I let out a shuddered breath. I then felt one press on my neck, poking and prodding at my skin. I closed my eyes, and I felt a tear falling, accepting death.

Elijah's yells seemed to muffle, drowning out like my head was underwater. I could hear him screaming and shouting, calling my name and even Amelia's. They became best friends, I nearly smiled at how close they got. I wanted to hold Amelia's hand one last time, needing my best friend but I knew I couldn't.

Amelia was right, she and I were born to die.

"Throughout the semester, Jolie has shown remarkable progress in her writing skills. Her grasp of grammar and vocabulary has noticeably strengthened, enabling her to convey ideas with precision and depth. Moreover, she's become more confident in experimenting with different tones and writing styles, showcasing a new-found creativity in her work. This progress reflects her dedication and commitment to enhancing her writing. Every day she comes in with a new piece and a positive attitude. Great work, Jolie!"

- Matthias Smith

Local Anti-Oxford-Commist Eats Dog in Grammatical Tragedy



Nancy Campbell reacts to her grandson, Rick Farlson, eating his dog

NOV 26 2023, 9:03 AM CDT

By Kyra Hagen

RACINE COUNTY, WI — Earlier this week, 34-year-old Rick Farlson was found in his Mount Pleasant home devouring his two-month-old puppy, Zero, whose name now speaks for itself.

The man’s grandmother, Nancy Campbell, says she witnessed the gruesome event:

“I walked into his house, but I didn’t see him, so I called his name. Like this. ‘Rick? *Rick!*’ He didn’t answer. But there was this weird noise... like a squeal or a whimper? And the chewing! My god, he was smacking and gnawing at that thing, all mangled and falling apart and stuff—it was horrible. Really quite nasty...” she told reporters on the scene.

The 81-year-old said that she had called her grandson the morning of the incident asking how his job search was going, seeing as he’s been living in his mother’s basement.

“He’s a real bum. Been living there since February of last year,” says Campbell. However, according to Campbell, “last year” was 2014, so it is unclear exactly how long this has been Farlson’s living arrangement.

During their conversation, Campbell says Farlson told her he had just submitted an application for a barista position at a nearby Starbucks, Farlson commenting that the questions were “easy-peasy” and that he “aced that b----!”

Unfortunately, it wasn’t a job application Farlson filled out; it was an *All About Me* assignment left behind by a kindergartener named Evelyn Robins, whose name was still at the top of the paper. Her self-portrait in the top-right corner of the sheet was identified by her mother after the paper was given to police as evidence.

Under the *Things I Like* category was written, “I like to eat my dog and my grandma.” Mount Pleasant Police used the establishment’s security cameras to determine whether it was Robins or Farlson who wrote the threat on that paper. Clips from the security footage that morning reveal that Rick Farlson was in fact responsible for the written threat.

Farlson denies any claims that he intended to eat Zero or that he planned to eat his grandma, insisting it was a simple grammatical error that caused the incident and that he simply likes to eat, like[d] his dog, and likes his grandma. Campbell isn’t convinced. “This isn’t the first time he’s claimed to have made this mistake,” she says.

Farlson once again vehemently denies these allegations.

“It has been an absolute honor to work with Kyra this semester, and to see her continue to grow as a writer. She never failed to bring a smile to my face, whether it be with a joke or with another phenomenal piece of writing. She has a natural gift for writing that she continuously works on honing, and I have been put in awe at her ability to write poetry, as well as her skill at writing prose. I can’t wait to see where she goes next and I hope you enjoy this piece as much as I did.”

- Micah Kurtzman

Autobiography

My favorite thing about trauma is that it feels like the love-worn yarn of my baby blanket,
Rough in every way I know and need,

I know when to lie down, dead in the street, to show my belly and feign tears,
I know when to carve myself out of stone and make an example of myself.

My favorite thing about it is that it makes me a martyr.

My second favorite thing about my childhood is that no one doubted I was hurting,
Second-hand recounts of mom's chemotherapy and dialysis and cheating and heartbreak,
Of bad sex and medical bills and divorce attorneys and violence,
When two size four Converse met the open air an unfatal four feet out of a tree,
There was someone to fight off the confused laughter of seeing a friendship-bracelet noose.

My third favorite ex-boyfriend is the blueprint of how my heart remembers to love,
"Hold your breath, don't move, I like it when you seem afraid,"
He leads me by the hand to the darkest corners of me and holds my chin to the mirror,
"You've become someone I don't recognize and that hurts me the most"
I don't remember when I began thinking of him as separate from me.

My favorite divorce was the fourth,
Watching it made me feel like I could truly be an actor,
I ran screaming to my father and he knew everything while I resented myself for knowing nothing,
My first-favorite second-dad became my three-person family's fourth Great Tragedy,
My fifth time grappling with the reality that I'm the common denominator that allows it all to add up.

Dear the One Who Haunts My Day Dreams,

I will never understand why you hide from me. Why you slink away when I grow closer and hide your face when I look in the mirror. I can feel your presence behind me as I ascend dark stairwells or when I climb into my car alone at night. Every time I stand, holding my eyes closed for a second longer so I prepare to finally meet your eyes, you aren't there. Honestly, if I didn't know better, I would think you didn't exist.

Do you remember the look on your father's face when he realized you weren't who he thought you were? Do you remember the look on your brother's face as he threatened to stab the part of your neck where the tendons ripple, so he may watch you bleed out? I always thought that was strange, considering his fixation on automatic weapons. Maybe he thought that was too easy. I will never understand how I look at him today and feel safe knowing he said that to you. Can you and I only be one to my mother who wishes I hadn't killed the earliest version of you?

I have always envied you, you know that? I will always wish I could be you. You float through life so beautifully. The way you laugh and joke and put your feet up on the school desk. You owned that whole building. Teachers in the palm of your hand, unable to resist your informal charm. Everything always came easily to you. You were always so shameless, in the best way. I loved the way you smiled with your teeth when you told the stupidest jokes. Down to the way hair hid your eyes religiously, no matter if your family thought it was silly. You were so unapologetic on the outside. I wish I had your talent for convincing yourself.

I wish we could reconnect. I want to hold you close and embrace in the beautiful way. I want to feel your hand reach for the back of my head and your eyes squeeze shut with intensity as you push your head into my chest. I want to fuse. I want to dance effortlessly and I want to float with you. I want to hold your face in my hands and see myself in your eyes. I want you to share your burden with me so that we may share mine. I want to love you as much as I say I hate you. I despise you, in theory, but I love you for everything you are and how you are everything I know I had the potential to be but I am not.

You haunt me. You are me, but I could never be you. My eyes glaze over as I stare at the picture of myself I took a month ago morph to have your face. What is the time frame of where I end and you begin? Why do you have every talent I watch drain from my cracking hands? Why do you lock everything away from me that I love and tease me with the idea that I have the key? I would love to kill you without knowing that means I can never become you. If I grovel at your feet will you tilt my chin up and kiss me so we may become one again? If I conjure a field of wildflowers will you run through them towards me and leave a path so I may follow after?

Always painfully yours,

The One Whose Dreams You Haunt

Playground of Bolts and Wires

In the endless childhood rut,

 You sit in the same accursed place forever,

Forced to relive “fond” hazy memories in the name of reminiscing,

Ignoring the wires that pinch and prod

 and remind you of the place you find yourself today.

The songs your young throat squealed makes your ears bleed,

 And you wonder:

 “Who would want to spend their nights in a place like this?”

If only you could warn the newcomers but the tide will never stop,

 Death will replace life in beautiful and heinous ways,

And you will always be forced to watch children enjoy things you detest,

 Resentment breeds on endlessly sticky hands,

 Pizza sauce or tears or blood or all at once.

“Though I have only been Elliot’s tutor for one semester, we have been working together on writing and revising long before. Elliot truly is one of my favorite poets—his work is always engaging, thoughtful, and cathartic. He uses strong imagery and metaphors that really transport you into his mindscape. I love what he’s written this semester and I can’t wait to see more from him! :)”

- Reilly Crous

As the Seasons Change

We are no different than the natural world.
Our lives move forward, just as time does.
And with time, we change,
Swiftly switching to what time demands us to be

We start out bright and blooming
Filled with bursting energy and new life
We grow and blossom into beautiful flowers.
We buzz from plant to plant with ideas
of the new things we may grow.

The saplings sprout into sturdy trees
that are yet too young to worry about being chopped,
but we build treehouses and put them on their branches
where we can dream and love and discover.
We are ready for what the world has to offer,
believing the sun will always warm us

but the leaves fall from the branches,
the cold and wind blow away our carefree nights
so we climb down from the treehouse
and return to our responsibilities.
We cut down the tree to build a fire to warm us.

Then finally, the cold sets in.
Frost and snow smother our green fields
and the comfort of warmth is a memory
Our endless hibernation is growing near
as the plants around us wither
Until it is finally our turn.

“This semester with Elizabeth has been amazing. We both came into this year fresh and unsure of our roles. Over the past twelve weeks we've grown together. Elizabeth has a sense of what she does and doesn't like in her writing and makes the effort to revise it into something she likes. It's been incredible to see her grow in her writing, especially poetry, and come into her own style. I'm excited to see what she does in the rest of her academic career.”

- Kacey Schmidt

The Humanitarian

War in the Middle East
Poverty in the United States
Bombings in Ukraine
Just a sample of the issues you expressed your anger towards
Because you are a humanitarian
Yet when it came to me
A singular life in the horde of humanity
Those events suddenly meant nothing
You saw and heard of people being tortured
You heard them begging
Screaming
Pleading for mercy
And you still took advantage of me
You tortured me
You heard me beg
You heard me plead for you to stop
You manipulated my mind
My body
You constructed another tragedy on this planet
You are a self-proclaimed activist
A feminist
Frowning down upon the monsters that prey upon women

You took advantage
You listened to me unload the trauma bestowed to me by my father
You were my savior
Telling me I would never be hurt like that again
You hid your intentions behind charisma and a toothy grin
Traits that women are expected to trust
You committed a crime
A crime that you will never pay for
You can walk around as free as the American Dream lets you
A devil amongst a crowd of angels
Dismissing everyone who has heard my story
You can say I overreacted
You can tell me to let it pass
But you cannot
And you never will
Silence me
For I am the humanitarian
I am the activist
I am the feminist
I will never stop haunting you
The way you will haunt me forever

The Love Unseen

"I don't believe you love me"

The night after our first date
I told my friends that you were the one
You were different
You were charming
Generous
A fresh start
You made me feel free again

"I don't believe you love me"

The notes app on my phone would tell you stories
Every time you said something relatively kind
To the list it was added
Because for once
I was being valued for more than something physical
You saw me as a person
Someone with passions and ambitions
Not an object for the male gaze

"I don't believe you love me"

I opened up to you
I let you in
I reached a level of intimacy I never thought possible again
You made me feel safe
You helped patch what had been broken
And you were patient with me
When the flashbacks came flooding in
And I could not stop them
You were there

"I don't believe you love me"
I saw a future with you
I saw the cinematic cliches
The suburban house with the white picket fence
The golden retriever
The baby
I saw lasting love
Something I never saw in my own household
Something I could not gauge to be true
You taught me that it could be
You were home
Something I could return to
You illuminated the path I walked on
And allowed me to learn that constant altercations
Emotional and physical abuse
Were not how relationships were supposed to work
You broke the cycle

"I don't believe you love me"
Is what you pierced through my mind
Over
And over again
How can someone
Be so blinded to reality
For it was not I
Who did not love you
It was you
Not accepting
The love I had to offer
I molded myself
To fit your expectations
I changed myself
Into the girl who could give you
What you so desperately desired
All to no avail
I would never have been enough for you
Because in the end
I don't believe you loved
Me

labyrinth

sometimes i have this inescapable feeling of loneliness
superficial interactions with those i call my defenders
a system of support that crumbles beneath me at the mere whisper of emotional destitute
intimacy that's employed as a means of time fulfillment
a meager speck of counterfeit excitement in a pool of birthed development
a fraud donning a mask of artificial content
progressively withering into dust that feeds what rots under the surface
wanting to run away to find peace in the earth that produced me
i'm running but i'm underwater and i'm suffocating
sinking deeper little by little until there's nothing left for the world to observe and analyze
what is living if not a false sense of existence

"I had a wonderful time working with Brianna this past semester. Each week, she brought in a poem that explored a different concept, emotion, theme, or style, which prompted frequent discussions surrounding word choice, structure, and tone. Throughout the semester, I remained consistently impressed by her ability to incorporate such depth and complexity into her poems, all while ensuring they remained accessible and relatable to readers. Although all of Brianna's poems are worthy of being published, the ones she selected for this publication are among our favorites. As you are reading them, take a moment to explore beneath the surface a bit, and you'll discover more than what initially meets the eye. I hope you enjoy them as much as we do!"

- Anna Pulvermacher

a quiet december

the night was wintry yet peaceful,
and now that i was with her
i could only hope
the crunching of the snow
beneath our steps would be softer.

but once we were away
from all of it
our lips never stopped,
not once—
not until we were intoxicated.

i held onto her gaze
and watched her thick breaths slow
and mist into the cold air
with my own.

nights with her

as the moon gleams down
and we lie down
i'm met with the prettiest eyes
often smiling
half asleep in my arms
until her body molds
into place with my own.

her forest hair
feels enchanting
entangled in my hands
like the feeling of lush grass
between my fingers
brushing away any worry.

a grounding motion
through and through.

Punk Rock Feminism: The Riot Grrrl Movement

“I would much rather be the obnoxious feminist girl than be complicit in my own dehumanization.” This is a quote from Kathleen Hannah, a punk feminist icon and the lead singer of Bikini Kill. For centuries, women have been deemed as weak objects, even in spaces that rejected society and tradition. Punk was supposed to be a space filled with people rejecting classism, racism, and all the patriarchal systems in place; but it was still full of misogynists. Punk rock needed something more powerful in meaning; punk women, or rather riot grrrls, pronounced “riot girls,” took the stage and taught that real punks are feminists.

To understand the origin of the riot grrrl subgenre, punk as a subculture is important to learn first. According to Britannica, punk’s origin came from a growing concern of hippies invading rock and killing it completely with their materialistic ideals in the 70s. Rock was meant to prioritize the working class and reject society’s mainstream views. While the place of its birth is argued, Sex Pistols, a UK band, was one of the leading bands in the punk movement inspiring fans with the song “Anarchy in the UK.” Punks wrote songs about their views, protested against commercialism, and took on a DIY attitude with their clothing and lifestyle, anything from making their own posters to producing and recording their own albums (Savage 2022). While the intention of tearing down mainstream ideas was the goal, punk was still stuck in a patriarchy that called for feminist punks to take it into their own hands.

The punk scene was male-dominated, and most of the bands and fans were men. Furthermore, female-led bands were not getting as much popularity. In most Riot Fests, a popular rock music festival, only 15% of the bands were female-led. Riot grrrl was created to encourage women to take up space and start a girl riot within the punk scene, especially when hardcore punk scenes were filled with hypermasculinity and toxic behaviors (Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College 2021). Even so, women were rarely taken seriously and were often seen as obnoxious “pop” singers rather than meaningful artists like men were considered. Even if they did infiltrate the rock scene, countless women were seen as overly sexualized vocalists rather than serious performers (Strong 2011). Women would soon battle against society to promote a movement to defeat sexism in the punk scene.

In the spring of 1991, punk women sprung into combat. Allison Wolfe and Molly Neuman, members of the first established riot grrrl band, Bratmobile, worked with fanzine editor Jen Smith to create a feminist zine called *Riot Grrrl*. Punk fanzines were DIY publications that depicted art or phrases often political or for a band that they were inspired by. The crowds of punk women varied from different ages and backgrounds to unite with feminism, and they worked together to plan



music, activism, and fanzines. Within the next year, *Riot Grrrl* became a national movement within punk communities all across America from D.C. to Olympia (Dunn, Kevin, and May S. Farnsworth 2012). However, riot grrrls were criticized for their aggressive punk attitudes and were often called “feminazis” because of their radical feminist notion that women should be seen as equal. They also received backlash for their “awful sounds” and “tomboy.. punky tantrums.” Band members from Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill were even reportedly physically assaulted by men who snuck into their women-only venues (Downes 2012).

There were plenty of popular bands within the subgenre like Bratmobile, Huggy Bear, Calamity Jane, and Heavens to Betsy, but one of the most influential bands was Bikini Kill. Kathleen Hanna, the lead singer of Bikini Kill, was a strong believer and leader of the Girl Revolution (Dunn, Kevin, and May S. Farnsworth 2012), and she defined the identity of riot grrrls by publishing the “Riot Grrrl Manifesto” in 1991 in *Bikini Kill Zine 2*, a DIY form of publication. The manifesto represented punk ideologies against capitalism mixed with an angry riot grrrl feminist ideology. Because women were frequently talked over, Kathleen Hanna believed that women needed to be more aggressive. Riot grrrls created the name by “adding a growl-like spin to the spelling.” to fight against what it meant to be traditionally a soft, weak girl (Wright 2016). Kathleen Hanna was an icon of the movement and subgenre.



The movement and subgenre were solely for women, and it was a community of activists. Riot grrrls talked about taboo topics that punk men refused to acknowledge, like female desires, body parts, and subjects such as incest and rape (Strong 2011). They sang about issues central to the movement: sexual identity, self-empowerment, racism awareness, surviving sexual and domestic abuse, rape, women’s reproductive health, and equality (Dunn, Kevin, and May S. Farnsworth 2012). Oftentimes, riot grrrl band members would dress in provocative ways as well by using DIY to create words like “KILL ME” and “SLUT” on their clothing. Bratmobile’s Allison Wolfe performed with painted handprints over her chest, and Bikini Kill’s Kathleen Hanna sometimes performed in solely a bra and underwear (Tastemakers). Their methods of protest and education were brassy and dynamic throughout their expressions in style, music, and zines.

The Riot Grrrl movement inspired Americans to look at feminism in a new light through the academy and overviewed by scholars by looking at fanzines, newspapers, and written interviews. In classes like sociology, women’s studies, and cultural studies, scholars looked into the riot grrrl history to further understand different elements of feminism. Under the microscope of musicology classes; however, riot grrrl would be deemed as a disgrace to rock despite its powerful feminist ethos because of their mockery of 70s hardcore punk yet hypocritical musical sounds which have been deemed as “musical anorexia” by Simon Reynold and Joy Press in *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock n Roll*. Unfortunately, this notion of riot grrrls ruining rock only enforces that punk must be hypermasculine, especially when referring to it with terms

like anorexia to reinforce the stereotypical aesthetic of women being inferior to men. Viewed in the eyes of men, women using DIY and aggressive attitudes to express their female rage and need for equality is often only seen as “derivative, inadequate, and immature.” It’s important to remember that riot grrrl crowds were a safe space for women to bond over their struggles and create emotionally charged music to let out their socially repressed anger (Downes 2012).

The Riot Grrrl subculture inspired many other women and minorities in alternative subcultures to go about progressive protests through art forms like music, fashion, and fanzines. One of those smaller fashion movements took place in the riot grrrl and sometimes grunge scene, where women dressed in provocative clothing for the feminist movement. The most notable people for this style were the grunge singer Courtney Love, and the frontwoman of the riot grrrl band Babes in Toyland, Kat Bjelland (at right). Kat Bjelland wore more feminine dresses that were pink or white with Peter Pan collars and frilly details and wore lacy socks; however, she would also rat and roughen her hair and wore fishnets or combat boots to make her look more unrestrained and aggressive (Tastemakers).



Another subculture that rose was queercore, a punk subgenre that advocated for the safety and liberation of the LGBTQ+ community through music, fanzines, and fashion. Although this movement and subgenre often went under the radar, queer punks found that this new subgenre gave them the ability to freely express themselves and embrace the punk ideals like rejecting societal norms. Some queercore bands started in the 80s prior to the birth of riot grrrl, and it’s important to note that even Kathleen Hanna admired this punk subgenre as well. Their DIY ideals, aggressive behaviors, and “approach to [sexual] liberation was direct inspiration to riot grrrls like Kathleen Hanna who, in Queercore, shares that the movement was both a precursor to riot grrrl as well as a concurrent kin.” Queercore was provocative to many outsiders and rejected heteronormative cultures by even encouraging people to exaggerate queer stereotypes like man-hating lesbians. Queercore was inclusive to everyone, even transgender folks and other people who did not align with the “normal” gender identities. Some notable American queercore bands were Pansy Division, Tribe 8, and Team Dresch. According to queer journalist Trish Bendix from INTO, these bands inspired “a new generation of artists to fuse their sexual and gender identities with their artistry and anger to create inspired new work that not only spoke to queers and trans people but centered them in the process.” Queercore opted to stand out and be abrasive by keeping it political and radical in every sense (Bendix 2018).

Today, the riot grrrl scene remains alive with its fierce female rage. Throughout the decades, feminism has progressed with the help of riot grrrls and their inspired counterparts. Protests can be in the form of music, fanzines, and fashion, whether it’s acceptable art or not. It’s important to stay true to who we are and fight against the societal pressures that tell us not to be free because no one wants to be complicit in their own dehumanization.

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“Abby has been great to work with this semester in English 57: she always brings interesting material which causes deep conversation and insight on many different topics. She experimented with structures and poetic elements, showing impressive variety. Even though she tried different styles, her distinct voice always came through in her poems. While some poems dealt with personal or emotional topics, she was able to convey them beautifully and in a way that could relate to everyone. It is obvious to me that she has a deep understanding of poetry and all that it can accomplish.”

- Paige Biever

Lucille

Tell the time, it flies–
wings off the ticking time
tricks the mind. You
don't look as well as we met
before the clock chimed.

“Grandfather!” exclamations– as you
wilted, wasted, reckoned beyond
belief. Titus, ticked, tocked.
Rung bells, wrung rags,
brung stalls, brought hags
to feed off his mildew corpse of midnight.

Lucille, *what light you bring with Hell.*

Envisioned your stench of pine
that encased the bell of life.
Strike the twelve and see him
once more. A belittled man,
product of the sod, grime, roots destroyed.

Cracked, shattered, disillusion of time–
five hours and forty nine, pay up
the fickle fine. God
frowned upon your sweetest smile.

Wishingbirds during the Day; Lifelights at Night

I. Wishingbirds

I saw two hummingbirds stop by,
one fern, one cedar.

If stars were birds, creatures of day or night,
they would be hummingbirds whirling
and whizzing goodbye.

Don't wait too long or even blink an eye,
for wishes are granted once in a lifetime.

I saw two hummingbirds stop by,
and I cried— for I missed not once—
but twice— opportunities to wish
for more hummingbirds to stop by.

II. Lifelights

We drove past ditches filled with fireflies,
miniscule moons floating at night.

If fields were filled with fireflies— lifelights—
they would be embezzled by the lofty grass that hide
their wee glowing bodies tonight.

Stare a bit longer and let me see,
your eyes glistening at the sight of thee.

We drove past ditches filled with fireflies,
and I stared with wide eyes— counting needless
tiny chances to see your face,
in the dim moonlight.

You and I (Two Stars in Space)

If stars were you and me
in vast space and endless time,
we would glow on for infinity
until senescence cuts our line.
Yet your sickly smell sticks,
holding me dearly in the dark,
I know there is no quick fix
to mend your dust left in stark.
Alas, the speck left from you
shimmers so shaky one last night,
growing cold while my tears too
fall gently at the sight.

As I continue to slowly decay,
I know you'll be there, and I'll be ok.

“Amelia and I first met last fall in PSL 300, and by chance sat next to each other. In the short span of a semester, we grew from strangers to friends and our class became a family of sorts. Since then we've been there to cheer each other on through triumphs and to comfort one another in difficult times. We've been there to lament our woes about Tinder and reach shelves that are too high before heading to some college basement. And even as Amelia—among other members of our class— graduates, I know that our little family will remain and that there are still memories to be made. So cheers to you, Amelia, and all of the great things you will do out there. Keep on girl bossing. 🎨 ✨ “

- Lexi Kurszewski

Excerpts from *Just One Look*

I will never forget the day I saw him for the first time. I was sitting outside the cafe, relentlessly chewing on a day-old donut. It was the only thing I could get around here for free. The crumbs landed on my afghan, like sawdust, matching the brown hairs of the felt. He was smoking a cigarette outside of an old movie theater across the street. I always loved the movies, the brilliance of it all. How so many people came together to make something so wonderful, so otherworldly. That was a word I used to describe him; He was so different from what I was used to. At 20 years old, I found this exciting, almost mesmerizing as I blocked out the entire world for him. My only thoughts were how I was feeling at that moment. It was ironic considering that was the one thing I was trying to feel my whole life. I suppose it all sounds like some sort of cliché.

I watched as the ashes sunk to the ground, creating a small grey pile on the sidewalk. I saw the way people looked at him, as if he wasn't supposed to be there or that he was in their way. It was strange to me as I felt the opposite. He blended in coolly into the streets of Los Angeles, while simultaneously having a bold air of confidence. He was much taller than I, with sandy brown hair that had turned into light highlights from the relenting Californian sun. He seemed to dress a bit more old-school, like I did. I always felt drawn to some other timeline, not quite fitting into the confines of the present. This makes sense as to why I struggled so much with it. He wore black dress shoes and pants that fit over a black shirt. Instead of the traditional blazer, he wore an old brown leather jacket, one that looked accustomed to rough wear. It looked out of place compared to the rest of the outfit, but I knew even then how much that jacket meant to him.

The sun began to set, and I watched as he quickly put out the cigarette, stomping it into the concrete. He then turned and made his way inside the theater. I felt a rush of embarrassment and instinctively looked around to see if anyone had noticed me staring at him. Looking at the kitchen door, I didn't see any point in caring.

"Come on Jamie! We are going to be late!" I yelled, pounding on the door.

We were on our way to Steve's annual Christmas party in the midst of Beverly Hills. In a true story of rags to riches, my brother climbed the corporate ladder and landed himself a spot as the CEO of one of the biggest record companies in the world. Our family was perfectly comfortable when we were kids, but that quickly changed when Dad got sick. Steve and I worked hard for our money and tried our best to keep our mother together. I could not imagine losing someone in that way. However, she did pretty well after Steve left. It was a shock to all of us. She started going to a support group and quickly gained friends there. They entertained them-

selves by gambling or playing euchre at each other's houses. When I knew she would be all right, that's when I left too.

I moved around before I settled in Los Angeles. I tried the East Coast but didn't like it much. It felt too crowded and dark whereas on the West Coast, the land seemed to stretch a little further and the sun shone a little brighter. I didn't mean to follow my brother here or to ask him any favors, but I ended up staying with him for a while until I got settled. I met Jamie at one of his Christmas parties. She was invited by a friend of one of Steve's friends to attend her first L.A. party. I will never forget the way Steve looked at her for the first time. It was then that I knew I had to talk to her, someone that actually piqued my brother's interest instead of being a mindless game to him.

I love him, but he seriously needs to get a grip.

It turned out that Jamie and I had a lot in common and we laughed and joked all night long before she brought up that she was looking for a roommate. How could I say no? That turned into the tradition of going to his annual Christmas party every year. The one to which we are very late.

I could have been dancing for 30 minutes or 30 hours, I honestly wasn't sure. I broke away from the crowd with sweat streaming down my face and my vision a blur. Sitting down heavily on the velvet couch next to me, I put my head in my hands. No matter how much rubbing of my eyes I did, the world didn't seem to come clear. I felt dizzy and feared that I was going to vomit when someone crouched down in front of me.

It was him. The guy from the movie theater.

His face was so close to mine that I could not doubt that it was him. It was the same hair, the same eyes, the same face.

"Are you alright?" he asked. His voice was low and rough but sounded far away.

"Audrey, are you alright?"

Jamie sat in front of me shaking me by the shoulders. "Hello?"

It wasn't him.

I blinked forcefully to get Jamie into full focus. Her brows creased fiercely in the middle of her face as she searched my eyes for some sort of recognition.

"Jamie?" I managed to say.

I heard a sigh of relief followed by a pair of rolling eyes. She lifted me off the floor with effort and wrapped my arm around her shoulders. I must have fallen off the couch when she found me.

"Okay," she grunted. "We are going home now."

"But we just got here?"

"No, hun, it's been about 4 hours now."

"Whaaat?" I exclaimed before I busted out laughing. I must have sounded ridiculous.

Somehow Jamie was able to carry me over to the front door, grab both of our coats, and my keys by herself. Even more impressive was that she was almost able to escape before Steve came hurtling toward her once more. He was never very smooth, and especially not with her.

"Hey, are you guys leaving already?" Steve asked.

“Yeah, I’ve got to get this one home before she makes a mess of herself,” she pointed briskly at me. “Nice party though, thanks for having us again,” Jamie said, quickly picking me up again.

“Anytime. Say, Jamie do you-” Steve was cut off short as Jamie waved and rushed out of the door. She started laughing as we approached the car.

He was sifting through the stack of horror films, staring intently at each title, careful not to miss even one. Suddenly, he looked up to match my gaze. His eyes subtly grew wide at the recognition. We stood that way for a few seconds before I turned away, hesitating before going to the counter. However, before I could reach it, a hand reached out to stop me.

“Hey,” he said softly. “I’m sorry to bother you, but you look so familiar. Have we met before?”

I paused, surprised.

“No. I don’t think we have,” I managed to say.

He stared at me a little bit longer with a look of knowing, but also confusion.

“Oh, all right then, sorry to bother you.”

I watched as he resumed his previous position. I stood there, a little stunned, and felt like I wanted to say something to him. No words seemed to form like my throat was caught on something. I wanted so badly to, but I decided to leave well enough alone.

The fact of the matter was, I had recognized him. Yet, I did not dare to admit it. I felt a sense of defeat wash over me as I placed the tape on the counter. The worker rang up my rental and I was soon back to my car, pizza also in hand, ready to clear my head on the drive home.

Only, I couldn’t. After turning the keys into the ignition, the engine coughed in refusal.

“Shit,” I muttered. The same thing had happened a few weeks before, but I couldn’t seem to find the cause, or at least one that I would have preferred. I worked on cars with my dad ever since I was young, so it troubled me that I could not find an easy fix. The car was getting old and carried a lot of miles. I just hoped it wasn’t giving up on me yet.

Opening the hood of the car, it let out a loud screeching sound. I checked the oil. Good. Next, I checked the cables around the battery, and they looked good too. I just got a new one over the summer, so it shouldn’t be a problem. I checked everything else that would have been a possibility, but I had no luck. The last time this happened I did get lucky as it somehow started back up on its own. I walked back over to the driver’s side and tried again.

“No, no, no,” I started to panic as it choked once more. I waited for a beat before trying again.

“Come on!” I yelled as it refused once more, slamming my hands on the steering wheel.

I sat, my head in my hands, for a few minutes before I heard the chime of a bell. Footsteps made their way towards me, and I saw a pair of black boots appear in front of me before I looked up. He held a strong look of concern.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I replied. “I don’t know what’s wrong, it seems to be acting up a lot lately. I can’t get it to turn over.”

“Can I take a look?” he said, gesturing towards the front end.

“Uh... sure.”

I worried as I watched him walk over. I did not feel like being patronized by a man, but I also wanted to know what was wrong. I had a vague idea but hoped it wasn't true.

He knelt over the engine and sat there focused for a while. He ran his hands over the parts I had just checked previously, nodding in approval. After it looked like he had finished, he looked back at me. I didn't realize I had been leaning over him, intrigued by his inspection. I felt too close to him, so I backed up before asking him the question.

“It's the starter, isn't it?”

“I think so. I mean, everything else looks good.”

“Shit,” I say a little louder this time. I run my hands through my hair and over my face in frustration, trying to figure out my next move. I could leave the car here until tomorrow, but how would I get back to the apartment? I was not sure where the nearest bus station was or even if it went to my part of town. But also, could I trust that my car would be okay here? Some people were too filled with greed for it to be left unscathed. Or... we could push it.

“Say, I've got an idea,” the stranger said. I couldn't have read his mind faster.

“Oh no. No, we can't do that. There's only two of us.”

He looked back at me, a cheeky grin on his face.

“Oh, come on, it'll be fun,” he laughed, opening the car door.

I scoffed, “No, you are going to break my car.”

“Not if you help me wheel this thing out.”

I took a moment to consider. If we could somehow get my car rolling, I could manually get it started, no problem. I had done it before, but I also had about three times the help.

“Fine. But at least tell me your name first.”

“It's Nick. And you?”

“Audrey.”

“Nice to meet you, Audrey,” he said, holding out his hand.

“Nice to meet you, Nick,” I said, shaking it.

“Alright then, let's see what we can do.”

I hurried over to the hood and let it gently fall shut. I braced against the bumper, pushing with all my strength. Slowly, the car started to roll backward.

“There you go!” he said.

I watched as he turned the wheel slowly until we were finally out of the parking space.

“Okay, now trade!” he yelled at me.

“What?” I yelled back, confused.

“I'll push the car forward if you want to take the wheel and try to start it.”

“Okay...”

“Okay. Ready?”

I nodded.

“1, 2, 3!”

Running back to the driver's seat as quickly as I could, both of us laughed as I awkwardly took the wheel from him. He went around to the back and started to push, picking up more speed than I had. Once we started to, I stopped and hopped into the driver's seat, quickly putting

it into second gear and turning the ignition.

The engine let out its familiar roar.

“Ha-ha!” I yelled but quickly realized I couldn’t stop now, and the smile dropped from my face. I heard Nick yell similarly and he ran to the driver's side window.

“We did it!” he said, jogging along the car like a little kid.

“Thank you so much! I don’t know how to repay you,” I tried to sound sincere but the awkwardness and absurdity of my car not being able to stop made me nearly burst out in laughter.

“No problem. I’ll see you around then?”

“Yeah,” my heart sank but I didn’t know what else to say. “I’ll see you around.”

We shared another knowing glance before he took his hands off the windowsill and let go of my car. I watched as he slowed to a stop and started to head back.

“Thank you!” I managed to yell, and I waved goodbye out the window. I watched through the rearview mirror as he did the same.

“Over the course of the semester, Angel and I have been working on a short story that turned into a novel. Most of our sessions included brainstorming for the next step of the story, whether it be introducing our other main character or deciding what events should take place next. I loved working with Angel and her writing, it’s enchanting, detailed, and it feels a lot like my own. I won’t get to see her next semester, but I know this story she’s been working so hard on will be perfect!”

- Halle Reeder

Shiny Things

A couple got engaged across the restaurant while Molly was working. Henry made her go into the back of the freezer to pull out the miniature cheesecakes they had accidentally ordered a while back. Molly had been sneaking them the past few weeks and was sour about having to share. She picked out her least favorite ones before joining the rest of the staff in congratulating the couple.

“It was so stupid,” Molly complained to Beatrice late that night. Beatrice was lying on her side beside Molly who was on her back. She had her head propped up on her hand, the other near her side.

“Mhm?” Beatrice hummed. Molly sat up so she could look at Beatrice while she talked.

“Like, who gets engaged in a bar?” Molly asked.

“People who are in love, I suppose.”

“I wouldn’t like it if you proposed to me in a bar,” Molly stretched to release the tension in her back, watching Beatrice’s face carefully. “If we were in love.”

“Noted,” Beatrice said with a smile, her face not changing much beyond that. “No proposals will be done in bars.”

“But I wouldn’t mind it,” Molly said quickly. “If you proposed.” Beatrice laughed. She shook her head as if Molly had just told a well-timed joke.

“I’m married, Molly,” Beatrice replied, tipping her head to the side. She looked amused but Molly swore she saw something like sadness in her face, hurt behind her eyes. Molly squinted as she focused on that.

“Yeah, but if you weren’t,” Molly said.

“I think,” Beatrice said as she moved on top of Molly. “There are other things we can think about instead.” Beatrice leaned down to kiss her, efficiently shutting her up. Of course, Beatrice must be upset about the whole ordeal of her current marriage and not want to think about it. Her life was awful, truly awful. A wife who couldn’t understand or appreciate Beatrice in the way Molly could. Molly put her hands on Beatrice’s back and her thoughts of marriage went to the back of her mind.

They met up as often as they could, usually a few times a week. Always in a hotel since Beatrice couldn’t stand to be in the suffocating multi-million estate her wife controlled with an iron fist. Molly couldn’t blame her and did her best to try and help Beatrice with anything and everything she needed.

In return, Beatrice bought Molly gifts, high-class extremities that Molly had never heard of pre their relationship. Room service, high thread count sheets that felt like heaven on Molly’s back, things that made Molly forget for a moment that she worked as a waitress. Her ignorance during the stolen hours was bliss as Molly and the limit on Beatrice’s credit cards had yet to

meet.

Her favorite thing to get were jewelry, clothes, anything that would make people look at her twice and Beatrice look at her even longer. Molly's favorite was a gold ring she wore on her left ring finger. People would croon to it, hold Molly's hand to examine the craftsmanship more closely, and always ask about the person who bought it for her.

"Who is your husband?" An older woman had asked while Molly had been working brunch one morning. Molly smiled with her teeth as she let the paper-skinned woman stare at the ring.

"My wife, actually," Molly said. "She works in finance."

"Well," The old woman said. "She must love you a lot to spring for something like that."

Molly pulled her hand back to examine the ring with a grin, validation coursing through her.

"Yes, we've been married for five years now." She shrugged like it was nothing, a very easy feat. "I'm the love of her life."

"How did you two meet?"

Right where Molly was standing. Beatrice had just had an argument with her real wife, Teresa, and gone to try and calm down. She had seen Molly at the restaurant bar and immediately began to talk with her. They had an instant connection, love at first sight if you will. Molly adored the attention and let Beatrice lead her home. While it was a groundbreaking story about the persuasiveness of love, people usually took it the wrong way. Molly didn't want this woman to think she was a whore.

"College," Molly said instead. "We ran into each other, literally. She dropped my books all over the ground and my coffee nearly drenched them. She took me to buy a new one. That was our first date. We never looked back."

"That's lovely dear," the old woman crooned. "Are you still in school now?"

"I dropped out to take care of my mother, yeah, she got sick my junior year and," Molly paused here like she always did when she told this story. "Sadly, passed away." Molly's very much not dead mother, Eleanor, lived five blocks from here and smoked a pack and a half a day. Despite that hobby, she was as healthy as a horse but that wasn't the narrative Molly wanted to say. "But when I was in school, I was a literature major."

Being a literature major sounded impressive and would give a delightful opposites attract appearance to her and Beatrice's relationship. The finance guru and the English literature expert, if that's the identity Molly wanted to live as this week. It got her the reaction she wanted, wide eyes and the older woman's mouth forming an *O*.

"Wow, well you quite a pair," the old woman said. Molly beamed, only slightly ruining her aloof, confident exterior by doing so.

"Oh, do I know it," Molly agreed. "It's great, I'm getting her to read all my favorites."

"Well, I hope you two have a very lovely life together," The woman said before she finally took her card and returned to her table.

Molly watched her go, feeling proud about their conversation. She had said it all perfectly and no one would expect any of what she said to be a fraud. The woman didn't ask what Molly's favorite book was, *Romeo and Juliet*, which was disappointing. Molly adored comparing the two love stories, hers and Shakespeare, which she considered to be on the same level. Her and Beatrice's relationship mirrored so many of the themes. Star-crossed lovers, never meant to be, fighting against all odds against the naysayers. Like Molly's friend Mary who still couldn't see the truly exceptional love Molly was experiencing.

"I don't think you should keep doing this," Mary said as the two got coffee. Molly was wearing the new necklace Beatrice had gotten for her the day before. It was silver, elegant, and tight around Molly's neck. The tightness of it made it hard to twirl around her fingers to get Mary to notice it but Molly tried her best.

"I won't break it, jeez," Molly replied as she dropped the chain and went to pick up her coffee cup. Mary shook her head.

"You know that's not what I mean."

"I'm afraid I never know what you mean," Molly sighed. She grinned over her lid. "We're in different tax brackets now."

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Molly," Mary rolled her eyes and her head with them, clearly annoyed. "She's fucking you, not marrying you."

"We're in love," Molly said defensively. Mary snorted.

"You're in denial," Mary said as she picked at her raspberry danish. "Isn't she married? Even if you were in love, I doubt that means anything to her if she's picking up chicks at bars."

"You wouldn't understand," Molly argued.

"What happened to J.C? He was nice," Mary asked. "Or Liz, she was sweet."

All J.C. wanted was to get up Molly's shirt and Liza only did one load of laundry a month. Beatrice bought Molly lingerie and had assistants doing her chores. She was handsome and lean, and her smile was equal parts emotional and distant in a way that had Molly itching for more every time. So what if she had a wife, neither of them cared about that.

"You're jealous that I'm happy and you're alone," Molly huffed as she sat back in her chair. Mary rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, we'll call it that," Mary mumbled into her drink. "Is she even doing anything for your twenty-ninth?"

Molly paused for a moment. "She's going to take me to Seattle."

Mary raised an eyebrow. "For your birthday?"

When Beatrice had first asked, there had been no mention of the two being related. Molly had remarked on it and Beatrice had stared at her for a few seconds, seemingly slightly confused, before agreeing. Molly assumed that it must have been meant as a surprise, scolding herself for ruining it.

"Yes." Molly elected to leave out the part where Beatrice would be in and out of meetings with investors. "It's a special trip."

"Yeah, real special," Mary said, and the conversation died there like a gasping deer on

the edge of a road.

Molly pretended that the conversation didn't faze her as she sat in first class later that week. Beatrice was already in the city doing whatever it was she did. Molly could never be sure since Beatrice never told her exactly, always telling her that it wasn't something she needed to worry about.

The flight gave her plenty of time to think, something Molly never really excelled at. She thought back about what she had achieved in the last nine years. Her face tightened as she thought harder and harder for an example of that. All she could think of was Beatrice but that had only happened in the last year and a half.

It brought her back to one of the last conversations Molly had with her mother. Eleanor had not been surprised when Molly announced she was dropping out of high school. She had looked Molly up and down.

"You're lucky you have tits." Eleanor let out a stream of smoke, holding her cigarette close to her lips so she could do it again. "You've got ten years to lock some rich bastard down."

Molly bristled with indignancy. "I'm bisexual, mom."

Eleanor raised an eyebrow, unimpressed, and turned around to walk out of the kitchen. "Women make less than men, you remember that."

Molly still didn't know if her mother accepted her identity, but that comment was lost by what came before it. Molly pretended that her mother's warning didn't bother her. At the time, Molly had assumed correctly that Eleanor was just pissed no guy wanted to sleep with her at that moment but as the years drew closer to her thirtieth, the pit of anxiety in her stomach found newer and newer depths. When she landed in Seattle, the thoughts in the air followed her.

"Ms. Watson?" Molly looked over to see a man waiting at the gate for her. Beatrice had said she'd send someone. Molly had been hoping it would be her. The tall man in the well-pressed suit was fine she supposed. She stared at him, wondering for a moment what it would be like if a different name came out. A Mrs. with Beatrice's last name attached. Mrs. Molly Foster felt demanding, like she could control a room.

Molly didn't see Beatrice until the day of her birthday. Beatrice had gotten back to the hotel room late and fallen asleep almost immediately. The next day they had breakfast together but that was interrupted by the news.

Beatrice was standing as she watched the economic part of the news. Molly tried watching it too, but it made just as much sense to her upside down as it did right side up. Something must have gone Beatrice's way since she smirked and turned off the TV as the regular news picked up. Molly sat up as Beatrice began putting on her jacket.

"Are you leaving?" Molly asked. Beatrice looked over but Molly couldn't read her expression.

"Duty calls."

"Maybe I could come with you." Molly hadn't ever been around Beatrice's place of work, she hardly even knew what she did. Some sort of investment banker or finance guy. It

didn't matter but the separation was starting to gnaw at Molly. Beatrice chuckled in a way that made Molly feel as if the walls were closing in on her, leaving her and Beatrice in perfectly crafted separate rooms.

"It's tremendously boring," Beatrice insisted. She looked at Molly with something close to pity. It made her feel a little better. "You would hate it."

"I just, wanted to spend some time together."

"We will, Molly, just after." When that didn't satisfy Molly, Beatrice went to join her on the bed. She put her hands on Molly's shoulders. They were cold. "I promise okay."

Molly sighed. "Alright."

Beatrice went still to not show that she was annoyed. Her hands move slowly in a half-hearted massage. "I promise, we will tonight. We'll go out for dinner, there's fantastic sushi down the street, how does that sound?"

Molly supposed it was a nice compromise, but she was getting tired of the short term, she felt like she needed, deserved, something more.

"When do you have to be back?" Molly asked. Beatrice was taken aback by the question at first.

"Whenever I want, babe," Beatrice assured. "I could be, persuaded, to stay a little longer if you like."

Molly beamed a little. "So, I'm more important than her, right?"

"More important," Beatrice said like the answer to the question was easy. "Trust me, if I could get rid of her without losing over half my estate, I would."

"Really?" Molly asked.

"Of course," Beatrice said. "Hell, if they'd annul gay marriage I'd be in the clear."

"But then they'd put it back again," Molly said. "So we could get married."

Beatrice looked tired when Molly said that. Or maybe she was annoyed. She looked both so much now that Molly never knew what to think. "I've got to run, we'll talk more later, okay?"

"Okay." Beatrice kissed Molly before walking out the door and leaving Molly alone.

Molly felt a little better after the conversation. The nervousness in her mind dispersed some with Beatrice's reassurance and she decided that she didn't need to worry about it. She trusted that their love would overcome anything and went about distracting herself the rest of the day. She ended up calling Mary around lunchtime.

"You're still in Seattle?" Mary asked. Molly looked out the window and at the city-scape.

"We're here till Friday," Molly said, getting a thrill from the word *we*. Molly walked across the balcony and went to sit in one of the chairs outside on the balcony.

Mary laughed sharply. "Did you spend any time out of that hotel room?"

"Yes!" Molly shot back. "She brings me along because she knows how much I love to travel." Molly looked down at the streets below that she had dragged Beatrice through the night before.

“And because you put out without her having to ask,” Mary muttered into her end of the call.

“It’s more than that,” Molly said. She looked to her side where another chair sat beside a glass end table. “I think she might leave her wife soon.”

“Now you’re talking shit,” Mary replied like she knew anything. Like Mary who’s ever only had three boyfriends and a fiancée who worked as an assistant knew nothing when it came to the dramatic aspects of love.

“No, you don’t understand,” Molly argued. Her face was beginning to get hot from anger. “I love her and she loves me.”

“All right, fine,” Mary sighed. “Just don’t come crying to me when she ditches you for someone younger.”

Molly blinked. She hadn’t thought about that before and for some reason it made her feel uneasy. How old was Theresa again? Not much older than Molly, that’s for sure. A year, maybe two, or three. A year. What was that 365 days? Nothing, nothing at all.

“Yes, I will make sure not to do that,” Molly assured before hanging up the phone.

Molly learned five minutes later that Teresa, Beatrice’s wife, was in fact five years older than Molly. Mid-thirties. Molly knew all about what it meant to be in your thirties, her mother had been insistent on telling Molly that her youth would be fleeting then and that she better lock something down. But Eleanor made her living sleeping around with older men, it wasn’t like what Molly had with Beatrice.

Molly shut her laptop, the bright light of its screen disappearing and leaving Molly in the darkening room. It was approaching winter, and the days were getting shorter. A heavy feeling Molly had been ignoring as of late demanded all attention. But it was nothing, just silly nervousness about something that wasn’t worth worrying about. Molly knew that.

When Beatrice returned that night, Molly had been checking herself for wrinkles in the bathroom mirror. She hadn’t even heard the door as she smoothed out a line, she was certain was just dirt.

“Happy birthday,” Beatrice said as she wrapped her arms around Molly from behind. Molly let out a gasp out of surprise. She relaxed, trying to remind herself that there was nothing to fear from Beatrice.

“Thank you,” Molly replied. She turned to look at Beatrice. “How was your day?”

“Awful, thought of you the whole time,” Beatrice replied. The tightness lessened in Molly’s chest but a similar, strangling feeling remained. Before Molly could focus on it too much, Beatrice took out a box from her pocket. “Which led me to this.”

She reached into her suit pocket and pulled out a small box. Molly’s heart spiked. Was this it? Was this finally the moment? Molly took the box out of Beatrice’s hand and held it in hers to get the most out of her anticipation.

“Bea,” Molly said. Beatrice kissed Molly’s cheek.

“You’ve been talking my ear off about it enough,” Beatrice said, sounding smug. “Thought it was time to give it to you.”

Molly felt her breath hitch. This was the moment. Beatrice could have done better with the atmosphere but Molly would let it slide. Molly truly wasn't expecting Beatrice to propose on her birthday, so she got points for that. After a few moments of letting, it all sink in, Molly opened the box.

It was a bracelet. A nice bracelet but just a bracelet. Molly stared at it; her mind not able to comprehend what was going on for a few moments. Where was the ring?

"Do you like it?" Beatrice asked, her voice coming from all around Molly. "It's the one you told me about, right?"

It was perfect. Molly was shocked Beatrice even remembered the offhand comment she had made a month ago. But that didn't make it what Molly wanted.

"It's beautiful," Molly said as she held the thin material in her hands. It caught the light but didn't shine.

"Do you want help putting it on?" Molly nodded and Beatrice reached up to take the bracelet from her hands and clasp it on her wrist. Her fingers ghosted over the shell of Molly's wrist and that, despite anything else they would do that night, would be the most intimate touch of the day. Molly lifted her arm then and pretended that there would be dinner after this. Five-star meal with dessert and appetizers and waiters bringing cake out to her.

"Thank you, Beatrice," Molly said. Beatrice squeezed her tightly before her hands slowly began to move.

"Thank *you*, Ms. Williams." Molly thought that Watson would fit her first name better. Molly Foster, *Mrs.* Foster. Mrs. Foster, your wife sent you these, Mrs. Watson the car's waiting out front. Molly wanted it more than the dress on her back or the bracelet on her wrists, but it was the one thing she could never get.

And it was all that damn Teresa's fault, snatching Molly's title from her before she even had a shot to fight for it. Like a parasite infecting its host, Teresa was sucking away all of Beatrice's lifeblood. If this kept up, Beatrice wouldn't want to get married after she and Teresa finally broke up, and then where would Molly be? She didn't know how much longer she could take this, she needed to do something. As if her thoughts had made her appear, Beatrice was suddenly in the street. She was wearing a sweater, the collar of her shirt sticking out from underneath it, and next to her was a woman.

It had to be Teresa. Even though Molly had never seen her before, she knew it was her. Molly could feel the hackles on her neck rise at just the sight of her. She was beautiful, gorgeous, annoyingly so. She seemed to float off the ground in a way that made her look like an angel.

Molly dropped the garbage on the ground and watched the couple make their way across the street. The woman on Beatrice's arm made some sort of comment and Beatrice scowled at it. They were arguing. About what, Molly didn't know, just that Teresa was being as tyrannical as Beatrice told her. Someone had to do something, that's how these things worked out.

Before Molly knew what was happening, she was marching over to where the couple

were. Molly didn't know what she was going to do but knocking out one of Teresa's teeth was not what she had in mind.

"Molly!" Molly felt Beatrice pull her away. She wasn't gentle, having to rip Molly off of Teresa with the strength of a gladiator. Molly felt herself tumble to the ground as Beatrice let her go, now on the same level as Teresa who was getting to her feet.

"You know her?" Teresa's voice rang in Molly's ears as she felt herself get pulled away into the crowd that had gathered. Henry's hand was on her shoulder bringing her away from the area before the cops showed up. Molly heard Beatrice's disgruntled sigh. She looked around the crowd around her and leaned slightly closer to her wife.

"Yes," Beatrice said, exasperated. Teresa looked at Beatrice, then at Molly, and then back to Beatrice, her jaw tightening.

"Are you fucking that psychopath?" Teresa asked, appalled. Molly straightened her shoulders, ready for Beatrice to defend her.

"Like Mordecai was any better," Beatrice said back instead.

"At least he didn't try to kill you in the street!"

"You let him steal nearly half of my watches!"

"Oh well, I'm *sorry* about your wardrobe!" Teresa gestured to where Molly was sitting. "She pulled my goddamn hair out!"

"Like any of it's yours!"

Someone got slapped in the face and from the way Beatrice was suddenly holding her cheek, Molly guessed it was her. She thought about saying something, doing something, to help Beatrice but she stayed where she was.

"You're an asshole!" Teresa said.

"Yeah," Beatrice agreed. "Makes you want to sign the papers, huh?" She turned her head to the side so she could stare right into Teresa's eyes. That look had always been able to pin Ava to the spot. Teresa didn't even flinch. She leaned in closer.

"I'm going to bleed you dry before I do," Teresa said before turning and marching down the street.

Beatrice watched her go, mumbled a loud *fuck* under her breath before turning to look at Molly. Molly's chest seized up but not in the way she was used to.

"What was that?" Beatrice asked, fuming. Molly didn't answer for a few seconds. She was busy trying to recognize the person in front of her.

"I was...helping," Molly said. "I didn't like how she was talking to you."

"And that gives you the right to *attack* her in public?" Beatrice demanded. Molly nodded without even thinking twice.

"Yes, I love you, I won't let people diminish you," Molly insisted. Beatrice flinched back all of a sudden, her eyes going wide.

"We're not in love," Beatrice said with certainty. "I do not love you."

Molly felt as if someone had ripped the rug out from underneath her, leaving her to tum-

ble down a very deep and very familiar dark pit. “What?”

“I believe I made myself clear from the beginning,” Beatrice replied. “I’m only in this for you,” she looked down at Molly’s body and back up to her eyes again. “Company.”

Mary and Eleanor’s words rang back like bells in her head as Molly tried to find a way to grapple with the situation. She didn’t know how; she didn’t know how to deal with the truth.

“I—”

“I’m leaving now,” Beatrice said. “Don’t follow me.”

Molly watched Beatrice walk away in the opposite direction Teresa had walked in, muttering something about crazy women. She was probably going to get a drink, that’s what Beatrice did when she was stressed. Molly tried not to think about how she was headed towards a bar one of Molly’s much younger friends worked at.

Molly tried telling herself that this was a spat, couples had them all the time. They would be back together again soon enough; she would just need to bide her time. Molly lifted her bracelet above her eyes to better inspect the damage. It caught the light of the sun and blinded Molly for a brief moment. She tipped her head as she took in the crimson-stained silver, wondering how much it was worth.

“I was the tutor assigned to Nat's Independent Writing course this semester. From the moment I read Nat's first '57 piece, I knew they were a talented writer. Nat writes each story with passion and creativity. Throughout the semester, their characters have grown in dimension and complexity. Nat builds character relationships with support from impressive dialogue sections. These sections are cohesively intertwined with moments of exposition and detailed settings. Overall, I have enjoyed reading Nat's work this semester, and I am proud of their progress.”

- Gabrielle Sullivan

The Walk To Collins Classroom Center

It's a fifteen minute walk from my dorm room in Watson Hall to class in CCC
Only a fifteen minute walk, but it always seems longer than fifteen minutes
I go down the ramp of my building, around the corner, on to Isadore Street
From there, it's a straight shot, cross the street, and turn left towards the front
Of the building where I spend most of my academic time in, I don't think much
And of myself in the midst of all the other students passing by, I don't think that
Today is much different from yesterday, but the hours nose to the grindstone run
Together; my peers, my professors, and I Are one in running the hamster wheel

Together, my peers, my professors, and I are one in running the hamster wheel
Every time we turn in assignments, there are more that get plopped into our laps
You read the text, you write your thesis, and you make your argument crystal clear
Staring at a screen, I type the words that will get turned in for the grade that will
Ultimately give value to the time, effort, and elbow grease I put in this semester
And if you ride the train far enough, you'll graduate, get a good job, live a good
Life in the future is what you make in the little choices you make every single day
And I do have stuff I want to have in the future, but I'm not thinking about it now

No, I'm not thinking about it now; what I am thinking about is who is with me
Hundreds of students walk the same sidewalk that I am walking on; going past
Me is the me who is growing up and learning what it means to be a proper adult
Towards where I am headed, it seems as though the road stretches on forever and
Maybe it's just my imagination, but I get the feeling that someone is behind me
Perhaps there isn't someone there literally, but figuratively, there are many people
Behind me on the way to who I'll become; there are people cheering me onwards
"I can't let them down," is what I'm thinking, and, "I must do the very best I can"

Crossing the street and opening the same door every single day, my thoughts are
Always on the people that say “I love you,” “I’m proud of you,” “You’ve got this”
It’s both encouraging and daunting; the pressure behind my eyes mirrors mentality
There’s the pressure for me to perform well, and there’s pressure to make others say
“Congratulations,” at all of my successes and “Better luck next time” at my faults
It’s a lot to think about, and it’s a lot to care about; only so much attention to give
To my surroundings and my circumstances, I feel grateful for everything, everyone
So it’s only a matter of time before I can smile when I open and walk through the door

“Throughout our '57 sessions, it has been such an amazing experience getting to know Ray not only as writer, but a person as well. Ray has been working on writing various sonnets and free verse poems throughout our time together this semester. They have decided to share one of their favorite poems with you all, “The Walk to Collins Classroom.” It has been a pleasure working with Ray, and to see their growth firsthand, has been incredible. One of the major things we worked on this semester was discussing the reasoning and choices behind the topics and structures of the poems Ray wrote. It was very interesting to hear how Ray crafted these poems from scratch, and they taught me a lot about what it means to write poetry. Their ability to write sonnets and their use of rhyming was one of Ray’s greatest strengths as a poet. In every session, Ray truly impressed me with their ongoing commitment to their poems, and it was great to see how passionate they were about it. I wish them the best, and I have really enjoyed our time together this fall semester.”

- Chloe Spitzer

Excerpt from *Winter Stained Our Warm Lives*

A faint, yellow light seeped through needley branches of tall trees that have long-since stood on the edge of my family's property. The grass was tall, it was green, and it certainly provided a wonderful cushion beneath the blanket that my sisters and I were strewn about on. Étienne twisted her arm behind her head and provided herself a pillow, whilst Zanobia tucked herself away on the edge of the blanket to dig at the dirt and bugs. I sat tall at the base of the tree, balancing a stuffed cat atop my knees.

Étienne sat up suddenly, jolting awake from a nap. She blinked wildly as the sun hit her eyes through the branches above before turning to me, tucking her chin to her chest before a yawn. "Dre-dre, you haven't seen father yet, have you?"

I lifted my gaze from a stuffed cat. My eyes rounded as I cast a few quick glances, one to my sister's, one to the door of the house and then, the window that peered into the kitchen. "He said lunch is goin' to take a minute," I whistled through the hollow gaps left between my teeth. Our father's voice called from inside to my sister, Étienne. Wasting no time, she pulled herself to her feet and gently waved at me and Zanobia. She carefully tucked the book she had been reading beneath her elbow before poising herself to run. "Be right back!" she called to the two of us.

"Where she going?" Zanobia asked, pulled from her deep focus on the anthill she was devastating.

"Food, I guess." I pulled my knees to my chest, tucking a stuffed cat beneath my chin to protect it.

Zanobia toddled over to me and plunked down onto the blanket next to me. Her tiny head rested on my still tiny shoulders. "Why does Étienne not want me to have Étoile?"

"Because, you're still little." I puffed my chest out in a moment of pride, two years my sister's senior. "But, you can watch her... I'm gonna go check on them."

Zanobia's eyes lit up with glee. Her arms stuck out, eager to receive the stuffed cat. I gently set it into my sister's arms before darting across the lawn, wildly sprinting in hopes to catch them before they would begin to carry food out with them.

My father stood tall in front of our stove as he carefully plated food. He worked meticulously, careful to not spill the food he had spent the last few hours cooking. Étienne stood by my father's side as she took plates of food and rested them on the tops of her forearms. Quiet conversation sounded between the two of them; said conversation quieted as soon as the door I came barreling through closed.

My father spun on his heels to stare down at me. The careful, yet sad, smile he had for my sister fell into a grimace upon seeing me. He sank on his haunches to sit level with me. Anger rolled off of his shoulders like steam into sunlight as he watched me, his only son, stand before him awaiting food to take back with me. His only son, blood that had

flown through his veins, incited an unexpressed contempt in the shadow of his mother's loss. My father stood before me, wearing one of his many ensembles of his mourning—mourning that has persisted over the course of a year. He raised shaky hands and gently braced my shoulders, as if he was afraid to touch me. Yet as a child, I knew when someone was afraid. “Ysandre, why don't you... help your dear sister and I?” My father paused, casting a look back at the bowls of food he had prepared. “We've quite a number of things to carry.”

I lifted my gaze to look at the food and then let it land on my father. With a small nod, I stepped back from him as he had turned to grab a few bowls of food to carry with him, but also to give to me. Whatever I had been given by my father, I cradled carefully in my arms as I began to make my way towards the door.

“Look at you,” Étienne giggled as she watched me toddle towards the door. “Here, Dre-dre—”

She kicked a foot out and pushed the door open for me as I passed through. “Careful!”

I walked down the sloping hill and back to the blanket. Zanobia, just as eager to help, jumped straight up from the blanket and came trotting towards me with her arms outstretched. I let a bowl of food that I was carrying pass into her hands. Together, Zanobia and I began to lay out the bowls of food and the plates that I had been given.

Not long after I had arrived, Étienne and my father arrived too. Between the lot of us, we had a fair spread: leafy vegetables doused in vinaigrette, yogurts and fruits to be fashioned into parfaits, hard-boiled eggs, hearty bread, and a carafe of vinegary wine that my father held onto with might. The real treat, however, was a butter cake filled with a jam and cream center. While I did not have the sweet tooth, both of my sisters did. And, both of my sisters, upon seeing the cake being set down on the edge of the picnic blanket by my father, turned their attention to it.

“Uh-uh,” my father tutted, “not so fast.” He lifted the silver platter of cake free from Zanobia's or Étienne's grasp. “After lunch, I shall cut the cake and the three of you may have some. But you must first have a proper meal.” He cast a glance down at the spread of food between us. Étienne let out a quiet groan before she turned to grabbing plates out for my sister and I. Zanobia, by contrast, was rather verbal with her complaints— “No fair! I can't... I don't ever get to eat the cake after I get to eat my lunch,” she grumped, “always too full.”

“Then, mind your stomach,” Étienne scoffed. She looked towards our younger sister with a cheeky grin. “Don't eat too much too quickly.”

Zanobia shook her head, letting her neatly braided hair hit her face. “Eugh, fine!” She began her defiance by haphazardly plating berries and pouring yogurt over top of it. And for a moment, she thought to grab an egg and tap it directly into her yogurt. A hand hovered over the plate, with the boiled egg in hand. A clear expression of deep thought and calculation shaped her round features.

Seeing this, I scooted closer to Zanobia and gently elbowed her ribs. “Don't... do

that.” I leaned forwards and grabbed the egg from her hand and set it on the edge of her plate. “Father would make you eat it anyhow,” I explained, maintaining a whisper.

“No, he wouldn’t!” she exclaimed, yet keeping a whisper.

I giggled and began collecting myself my lunch: an egg, a slice of the bread and a healthy dollop of butter and jam, and— feeling particularly adventurous— a few forkfuls of the greens my father had laid out. “He really would.”

Zanobia capitulated, having had no energy to argue with me further. Besides, she was now focused on diving into her yogurt and neglecting the boiled egg she had taken to suit her devious misdeeds. Étienne and my father chatted quietly between themselves over Étienne’s schooling and studies. Myself, I worked through the scant plate of food I had given myself to work on.

Come finishing the plates, my father had stood up with Étienne and the two of them had taken our dirtied dishes back into the house. Soon, they had returned and in hand, my father had a knife to cut the cake, as well as a small plank of wood tucked beneath his arm. I cast a small glance to Zanobia, who could hardly contain her excitement— and then one to Étienne, who was much more subtle with her glee. When the first slices of cake were cut, my father handed Zanobia and I the smaller slices and saved the two larger slices for Étienne and himself.

I sat back on the blanket with my plate in hand and began to dig into my slice of cake. Within a matter of moments, I had scarfed down my portion of cake while the rest of my family was still working on theirs. Étienne and my father were still talking among one another, practically ignoring Zanobia and I for the moment. Instead, I craned my neck to the side to spy on Zanobia.

Zanobia was struggling greatly with her slice of cake. Yes, while she was happy to have gotten dessert, she was gingerly plucking a few measly crumbs into her mouth at a time. Her big, brown eyes were threatening to swell with tears in frustration. And I, a big brother and an opportunist at heart, leaned over to Zanobia once more and tapped her shoulder. “What’s the matter?”

“I want cake...”

“But, you have cake.” I tilted my head to the bits of cake she had cut up and cast my glance back at her.

“Yes, but...” Zanobia paused to let out a quiet burp, “my stomach hurts.”

The magic words. I grinned from ear to ear as I set my empty plate down and offered a hand out to Zanobia’s. “Here, we can split this piece. I’ll make sure to snag you some later.”

Zanobia’s eyes rounded with gratitude, instead of the tears of frustration that had threatened to spill. She set the plate between the two of us. Pausing, she moved to pull Étienne from her pocket, and set it behind the plate and between us. A satisfaction buzzed between the two of us as giggles.

Of course, I let Zanobia have the first bite. After all, it was her cake. I took mine conservatively, pulling back bits of the dense cake back from the cream and the red... jam?

The red oozed onto the edges of the plate and was soaked up— dark and thick— by the spongy cake. Instead of taking a bite, I jammed my fork into the cake again and pulled back a heavy clot. Blinking a few times, I stared at what should've been my bite of cake. And yet, it was fine, just stained a light pink with cream and raspberry filling. I took the bite and let it melt.

Seeing that I had taken my bite, Zanobia stuck out her hand to grab her own. I watched her from the corner of my eye, to see that she had taken her bite before I took another one. Contentedly, Zanobia plopped another bite of her cake into her mouth. I shifted to go to take my bite, dropping my gaze from my sister.

A clump of knotted viscera sat neatly on the ornate plate. It, too, oozed its red liquid to the edges of the platter and solidified itself in my sight. In a matter of a few heartbeats, the edges of my vision had started to darken, as night had poured itself back in. I tossed a panicked glance up to where my younger sister should've been— to find nothing but the dark of my room. I tossed a glance to my right, to where my father and sister should've been— to find nothing but the dark of my room. I idled on my hands and my knees— alone and in the dark.

Winter nipped at the back of my neck, but not as harshly as realization had. A hunger that I had not yet acquainted found itself sated. In this, I mustered the courage to look down at the ground. And instead of cleared, wooden flooring, I found my sister, Zanobia, beneath me. Her face and the side of her neck had been gored beyond recognition. My cheeks felt wet, yet I had not shed a tear. My blood ran cold, just as my sister's had down the sides of my face.

In a dramatic whipping motion, I threw myself back and off of her body, sprawling onto the ground behind me. My shoulders hit the icy flooring with a thump, sending a hollowed sound reverberating through my chest where a stronger pulse should've been. In this moment, everything I had ever felt came to a head and diffused across my delicate nerve endings, as if burning me away in its path. I let out a confused shriek of agony, trying desperately to orient myself in *this* reality. This reality, where I was a monster— more than I had been that day I invited myself to my younger sister's dessert. My head banged against the ground without my volition, sending shockwaves that rattled my sister's bedside table. With rapturous clattering, an unlit candle rolled off of the table and brought with it, its metal holder and second, more weathered one with it, *mine*.

"Ah, I see you've given in." The taunting voice seeped in, like mud into cloth. It was grating, yet it was heavy. "Good luck."

This is but a dream, I tried to convince myself of. But, I could taste the rot on my tongue where sweet should've been.

"Hunger, it changes you," he tut. "But starving, well..." he paused, "It leaves its mark on a person, hollowing them..." The faint sensation of fingers tracing the base of my neck sent shivers up my spine. "And leaving something more desperate behind."

No. I wanted to hide— to shrink myself into something smaller than what I was now, or at least small enough to shield myself from what I had done. *But, no, I was always*

too conscious, wasn't I? And with this, I threw myself to my knees and back onto my hands and began crawling to my door as the burning sensation continued to ravage my body. *But, I don't know what I did.*

"Help!" I screamed, as the call ripped through the lips of someone who hadn't spoken in nearly fifteen years. "Please, somebody help me!"

Tricks of firelight danced from behind me, and cast me in long, red shadows out of my room. And not only does this light illuminate the horrors I have personally committed—my sister's body and blood dragging from underneath me, but the shape in which 'help' and 'somebody' made themselves apparent. I cast a sheepish glance over my shoulder and at the window that was now overcome with light. This was something beyond my imagination, as familiar faces stared daggers into my back. I felt their stabs land into my chilled flesh, as if tearing through my clothes with it.

Exposed, I continued to scramble down the corridor. The clamoring and the slams grew louder and louder as I half-crawled, mostly writhed down the hallway. I came trampling down the hallway with heavy feet, tearing down whatever I had to in my path to keep going— to get away from what awaited me. And I ran for what felt like forever, as if I could escape the only weapon that had ever hurt me: recognition.

And I met it as I rounded the corner into the parlor. Familiar faces, my neighbors and people I wished were strangers much alike, stood waiting for me. Before I had much time to think or to react, I was falling again.

"Lyiem is the kind of writer who knows exactly what they want to write and knows they're good at it. My sessions with Lyiem mostly consisted of me praising them for their detailed descriptions I am convinced no one else could possibly conjure. I deeply admire Lyiem's ability to write so confidently, and I have enjoyed every single piece we have talked about. I have nothing but faith that Lyiem will go on to be a great writer!"

- Halle Reeder

Gatsby

I once called my dad “Gatsby”.
He wants what he had:
with his life,
with my mom.

When we talk,
after she’s gone,
he says he’s waiting for her to change back;
that she just needs time.

Since the alcohol is gone,
she’ll be what she was.
She won’t hurt me anymore,
she’ll be a mother.

But I can’t understand why my dad
doesn’t see her cruelty,
even when she’s not diluted.
Her stumbles turn into stubborn arms,
mumbling words become venom,
vacant eyes are now daggers.

Even after the last drop,
she glares as I walk past,
stares at my back,
piercing me.

After the last drop,
she calls me not her daughter,
calls me selfish,
mean.

The last drop,
she forces her body between,
blocking me from outside,
caged.

My dad makes every excuse,
every effort,
to explain her to me.

Except it all sounds empty— hollow.

Because I watch the way his eyes dart to old
wedding photos.
I hear his angry pleading to his God for legs
that work right.

So, as my mom insults my dad in the kitchen-
his haven-
for not doing enough,
when he does everything,
I see the green light he is searching for,
but I no longer say it to him.

I’m my father’s daughter,
not yours.
I will not defend you
or accept you.

Dust

Underneath frigid stars,
watching distantly,
I walk in silence.
Beneath my plodding feet,
snow crunches sharply,
and my heavy breath is a blanket of fog;
yet, I feel brisk air piercing my skin.

I look around and see only
darkness—black consumes my eyesight.
Though, wishful light glares
down upon the ground,
where I stand.

My dry hands flake like snow,
shedding flecks that melt into water,
which are absorbed by dirt.
Different parts of me already joined the earth,
but all of me from it.

Stardust creates its shimmering glow.
Dust that knows the world,
as it has been
or will be,
and sees all.

I follow that light.

“Katie brings their whole self to every moment in the TLC. They are passionate about destigmatizing mental health discussion, and accepting and championing neurodivergence. One of my favorite things about them is that they are always ready for friendly philosophical debate. In their writing, they explore themes of existentialism and the heartbreak of maternal rejection. Writing about such personal topics takes a lot of courage. It's Katie's courage, sense of justice, and deep care for the people around them that I most admire.”

- Jarita Bavido

Elizabeth**April 22, 1882**

My Dearest Elizabeth,

My soul aches in your absence. I know we have only been separated a few nights but it feels an eternity. I could not help myself writing to you so soon. You might recognise the paper. I pulled out the nice stationary you gifted me last fall. It felt right to use something so beautiful to write to my love. I am even using deep black ink instead of pencil so that my words to you may last a bit longer, I apologize ahead of time if I smudge any.

Your absence is felt throughout the entire estate, as though you were the brightest star in the night who suddenly blinked out of existence. I feel as though I am a sailor who has lost his way and I can no longer use your light to guide my way home. As deep as your disappearance affects me, I know you are still on this earth lighting your own path home. I only pray that your path home somehow comes to a crossroads with mine.

You left at the strangest of times. The mistress announced to us yesterday she was expecting a child. You must be some sort of fortune teller, darling, did you not predict this a fortnight ago? I mourn for the future child, they will never experience your shining smile and delicate attention. The warmth of your eyes when you looked upon the mistress' young nephews when they came to visit last winter was captivating. You were so good with them, even through all of their misbehaving and antics. Does your new placement have children? They should be so lucky if they have a friend such as you around to play with. I wish I could give you the life with children you deserve, but fate is a tricky thing. It tempts us with the one thing we cannot have. I know in your heart you want children of your own, and I curse every God above I cannot offer that to you.

As I am writing, I remembered you left one of your favorite hair ribbons in my bedchambers. I do not know if that was because you wanted me to hold onto it or because you simply forgot, but I cherish it dearly. I've tried to tie it into my own hair but it never wants to hold. Perhaps it is the straightness of mine that causes it to slip, your own curls hold onto it better I suppose. I miss your soft curls. I miss running my hands through them and carefully brushing out knots after a long day. I miss the smell of your soap lingering between the strands after a long bath. I miss you.

Write to me soon my love,

~C

June 24, 1882

Gorgeous Girl,

As you well know, this summer has been long and hot. We are not one month into the

season and I already wish for it to end. I suppose it is silly of me to begin my letter with talk about the weather but I do not know what else to discuss with you. It is hard to keep the conversation moving forward when one side is silent.

I often sit awake at night wondering about your life. What friends you have made, what dresses you wear, what kinds of duties of the house they have you perform; it's all very intriguing to me. On clear nights, I imagine you looking up at the same sky in your own quiet space. Although we are miles apart, we gaze upon that same moon, the same planets in orbit, the same stars that guide us through life. There is something beautiful in that.

When I cannot sleep and cannot see the night sky, I use a tad of your perfume. I confess I took a small vial of your signature scent for my own use. The delicate caress of jasmine flowers and fresh air. Your presence lingered in the air whenever you wore it, like mother earth herself had just brushed through the crowd. I hoard the intricate bottle like it is the most precious liquid to ever grace my presence. It is worth more to me than gold and silver, more than expensive spices or the finest fabrics. I dab some on my wrists and the base of my neck before crawling into bed. My hands always find their way snug under my chin on those nights.

I'm still awaiting your return letter. I suppose it could be in transport, I know the train system isn't always perfect. On quiet nights, I can hear the thundering of the train tracks and the faint dissonant horn. I imagine abandoning the house and running away to find you. I'd sneak out the back door in the middle of the night. I'd run away from the estate to become yours. I'd risk the danger of blade-sharp wheels and train robbers just to look into your eyes one more time. Ask me once and I'll run for you Elizabeth.

Listen for the train whistle,

~C

September 6, 1882

Darling,

The lingering heat of daylight is making me sentimental. Despite the open windows and linen sheets, I run so hot I cannot sleep. You race through my thoughts constantly. I feel as though I am chasing you but never able to hold you close. Running through trees to catch a glimpse of your hair or lunge at the hem of your skirt. My breath runs ragged, but I cannot stop my body from pushing itself towards yours. I fear the day my legs fall out from under me and I must watch my girl escape into the depths of the wood.

The firelight I write to you by reminds me of your eyes. Your beautiful golden brown eyes, streaks of copper and bronze, more precious than any metal. I miss seeing them light up whenever you would receive a letter from your mother or when you would suggest escaping our duties to explore the estate. I could spend eternity getting lost in them, exploring and hunting for your soul. I'd never want to leave. I catch myself moving closer and closer to the flame, transfixed on the flickering light. The depths of my love for you will kill me, I'll burn myself on your flame.

Your absence has made a difference in me. The other girls are beginning to notice that I am not myself. Mornings after I lie sleepless thinking of you, I find myself in a daze. I wash the same spot on the floor for far too long, thoughts wandering and eyes drooping. I fear the mis-

dress has noticed this change as well and will send me away. I don't wish to return home, my father is already weary of my position as a maid and has begun to push me towards religion. He wants me to join the church as he had. Imagine *me* as a nun, I don't know where he gets the notion that I'd be so holy. He is a foolish man for thinking little Miss Millard a pious woman.

Your ever faithful,

~C

January 11, 1883

Beautiful Bride,

I hear congratulations are in order. You've found a husband who can care for you better than I ever could. Did you wear your jasmine perfume? Or did you save that scent for me? I bet your wedding was as beautiful, you always had a gift for decoration. And capturing a wealthy businessman? You've done well for yourself, darling.

I was aware of whispers circulating about an engagement but I always believed you wouldn't marry, like you had promised me before you left. I cannot help but feel some sort of betrayal, no matter how silly that sounds. I suppose I understand though, you could not stay unmarried your entire life. You need financial support and protection from all the wicked gossips. He would be wise to be careful with the gift he's been granted. If he is not showering you with riches and spoiling you with elaborate trips, I will come to you and set him straight.

Much has changed since I last wrote. For one, I am now an official sister of the St. Joseph's convent, not of my own will of course. When I returned home for the holidays, my father sat me down and gave me an ultimatum. Find a husband or take up the Lord's hand in marriage, so I chose the lesser of two evils. I found it impossible to engage in a marriage that did not involve you in some way. If God is in everything like they claim, he is also in you. In a way, I am married to all of his children, including you my dear Elizabeth. I hope your new husband does not mind sharing. I admit, I do not hold the same love in my heart for God as my fellow Sisters do. I should feel a sort of guilt for that, but I cannot. My heart is too full of you to allow Him adequate space.

I spend my endlessly long days transcribing verses and sitting for hours in uncomfortable wooden pews. The priest here is incredibly boring, his voice has no life and he rambles on for days about the same topics. I can only stand so many sermons about how great God is. I feel lost in this space, the Sisters here have no trouble praying for hours and dedicating months to quiet contemplation, meanwhile I cannot sit without shifting my weight every five minutes. To make matters worse, I had to leave behind the vial of your perfume and I cannot seem to sleep as deeply without it.

When I am supposed to sit and pray, I think about you. Instead of asking for peace on earth, I ask Him to bring us back together. I cannot survive here long without you Elizabeth.

Please write,

~C

February 6, 1883

Darling Girl,

My eyes finally landed upon you after so long. When I went out walking to escape the stuffy air of the church and Mother Superior's constant criticism and saw you unlocking the door of your new home. I am glad I recognized your cream-colored dress and brown hair, for now I have an address to send my love. It's a beautiful house, perfect for sheltering my girl.

Until we cross paths,

~C

April 29, 1883

Beloved,

I fear Mother Superior has caught on to my "sapphic tendencies" for lack of a better phrase. I've always suspected that my letters would be my own downfall. You are my sun and unfortunately I've found myself becoming Icarus. She caught me writing. I suppose she saw the dying fireplace illuminating the night and decided to investigate. I swear I did not hear her approaching. I do not know if she had time to read any of it before I noticed her presence in the room. I assume she read the beginning where I referred to you as love, but I don't know if she had seen your name (though in my mind Elizabeth and Love are one in the same). Instead of shouting and berating me like I had expected, she stayed quiet. My heart pounded in my throat, I was terrified of what she might do to me. I imagined being flung out into the street with nothing but shame to keep me warm. I tried to make up a story about my illiterate brother who wanted me to send letters to our parents but I knew she did not believe my lies. I looked like a fool, stumbling over my words and panicking at her feet.

What she did, however, wounded me more than any physical punishment could. She held up the stack of written letters I intended on sending and the inkwell I was using and brought them across the room to the fireplace. She looked deep into my eyes as she dropped the inkwell and sheets into the hearth. She burned them. She burned your letters. All of them. Without a word, she threw my soul into the flames.

Even writing to you now, I put my position as a nun on the line, but you need to know why I cannot write as often. I do not know what punishment I will receive if I am found writing again, but I do not think Mother Superior will be as kind the next time around. I need you to know, even though my letters may slow, my heart still beats quickly for you. Keeping you hidden away does not mean I don't wish to call you mine. I'd call you mine till my lungs burned to ash.

Until next time,

~C

October 10, 1883

My Love,

I saw you again, Elizabeth. In the town square pushing along a stroller, you have a child

now. A baby of your own. I could forgive the marriage, I understood. I'm not stupid, Elizabeth. I know I could not give you a family, but I could give you my love. I hope your child never feels heartbreak like I have. They do not deserve that pain.

Yours,

~C

December 29, 1883

Elizabeth,

I've made a terrible error. I'm such a fool. I do not know how I could be so careless again. I risked writing to you late one evening in the dark silence of the church and misjudged my ability to stay awake. When I woke, Mother Superior stood over me. I had ink smudged on my cheek and a love letter pinned under my forearm. I'm such an idiot. I've tried to be so discreet with my writing. I'm so sorry Elizabeth, your first name was written at the top. I pray it cannot be traced to you, there was no surname. No address written. I wish I had a better, less dangerous, way to tell you how much my heart longs for yours but alas, I have no other way to communicate with my darling girl.

By the time this letter arrives, I'll be on the next train home. I was asked to return my habit and robes and escorted to the front stoop. All I have to my name is the clothes I arrived with, some meager personal possessions, and just enough to cover a train ticket. I was able to snag a sheet of paper and a pencil in town and spent my last few cents on a stamp. I do not know what I am going to do. I'll have to face my father at some point, what do I tell him? I cannot risk being sent away from home as well, I'd have nowhere to go. I'd be stuck in the streets, dying of starvation and shivering through cold nights. I'll catch the flu and perish in a rat-infested boarding house. Perhaps I could travel to you, become part of your staff? I could watch over your child, become a maid. You know I'd be a good worker, obedient.

I need you to reply, Elizabeth. I could forgive any hesitations before now but I need to know you are out there and hearing me. It doesn't need to be long, or even a letter at all. Send me a telegraph, a postcard, a stamp, I do not care. Please Elizabeth, I beg of you.

I'm so sorry,

~Cecilia

"This is my third semester working with Kacey! We've continued to build off of the framework we created over the past year, branching out into different genres and styles. Kacey and I have so much fun in our sessions, and I am very impressed by her growing ability to recognize places for revision in her own work. I love what Kacey and I have worked on this semester, and I can't wait to see how her writing continues to evolve. :)"

- Reilly Crous

Pandora and Prometheus

Edith Carraway woke to the smell of cinnamon and dish soap. Mid-morning light crept in past the sheer curtains, filtering through the leaf-patterned lace. June had picked them up from the thrift back in '86, dyed them sage green to match the trees beyond the window. The sheets were cold next to her, and she couldn't hear the sound of June's breathing, but "Super Trouper" filtered in from under their bedroom door, accompanied by the unmistakable clatter of June's ridiculous ceramic plates slipping against each other as they were carried from the sink to the cabinet. She stilled for a moment, staring up at the ceiling and taking it all in. Over the low buzz of the radiator, Edith heard a muffled crash, silverware colliding with tile, and then the familiar sound of June cursing under her breath before a drawer rumbled open. It made her smile, unconcerned. They had no bottles to break.

There was something warm about it, lying there in that room June and herself had transformed, something Edith wanted to grab onto and hold in her fist until the sun burned out and the world stopped turning beneath her feet. Edith got to keep this. No one was running. No one was leaving. There was no standard she had to meet, no person to bargain worthiness from. She could just be, wake up and be Edith Carraway with all her quirks and doubts, and that was enough. It was irrational. It made absolutely no sense. It was one of the only things the universe had ever done right by her. Edith would take the suffering any day for the privilege of waking up to June Garvey abusing their kitchenware to a soundtrack of god-awful disco pop.

Even as the crows had stopped seeming so much like a warning, more like guardrails than death knells, Edith still couldn't shake the pang of fear that hit her every time their number foretold something disastrous. *One for sorrow, two for joy...* She'd hear them, crowing and cawing, pecking at the siding of the house, see them perching at the birdfeeders June put up to get a better look inside, and it'd feel like the world was collapsing in around her. Then, she'd hear June re-winding tapes in the other room, or see her jacket hung beside Edith's on the hooks in the hallway, and it'd all feel a bit less terrifying. Some days Edith didn't know what to do with all this love June had inside of her. It was voracious. Overwhelming. Edith wished she could find a way to get used to it, how loud June's love was, but Edith had no way of making herself fit. There was no fixing her. June told her every day that there was nothing that needed fixing and, given the alliance June and the crows in the garden had maintained since one found the wedding ring she lost while pulling up the potatoes, Edith could almost trust that she believed it. Edith was working on believing it, too.

June Garvey had more light inside of her than the sun itself. Her bones were probably made of it, golden and warm and perfect in every way that mattered. When June looked at her, Edith felt transparent, thin as a new leaf, like someone had held her up and all the veins and cracks in her facade were glowing orange with stolen daylight. She was known, seen, and for a second it was terrifying, but then June's eyes would go soft. She'd smile in that way that made Edith's heart skip a beat, gesture her over or get up herself, reach for her. She wanted to pour herself into June, live inside her like a mouse in the walls, because no amount of skin could ever be

enough. She wanted to devour June and be consumed by her, teeth and tongue swallowing tail until the sun burned out, until every myth and legend but theirs had been forgotten, until the universe used its dying breath to whisper their names. It was electricity, magnetism, moons in orbit around their planets, and, God, Edith had been so close to never knowing what it was to be one with June Garvey.

Edith had gotten the chance, though. She'd seen what June looked like covered in blood and bruises, half-swallowed up by twisted metal and shattered glass, had opened her eyes in the hospital to brown hair and stardust moles. She'd been to beaches and bars, followed June everywhere the wind took her. She'd been there on the five-crow day when June and Jay had come home from a flea market two towns over with matching grins. Edith had cried her eyes out when June pulled out the little velvet bag that had been burning a hole in her pocket all day and dropped to one knee, talking about a tarot reader there selling rings who'd told her to go for it 'because the moon doesn't care what the law says.' They'd bought a home together and held onto it until it felt lived in, until Edith couldn't imagine coming home to anywhere else.

June Garvey made Edith think about gods—not the kind the people of Wright's Peak favored, Lutheran and United Methodist sharing street corners with Baptists and Evangelicals, the Catholics praying up in a stately hall on Dawson Hill. Not the old kind, either, the ones dotted throughout her writing, Eldritch or Greek, built on stories and ancient civilizations. June made Edith think of her grandfather's gods, the ones who lived and died by their word, the ones that had streets for veins and stars for eyes, who charted out towns with the lines on their hands.

Edith's grandfather's gods kept the air in your tires and your gas tank full, helped you find the \$20 bill someone dropped in the grocery store parking lot, fed on community and the stories old men told in the park. June Garvey, with her ridiculous luck, hand packed boxes of homemade cookies for the neighbors during the holidays, and determination to help... She would have fit in better with those folk than Edith's own. Somehow, despite it all, Edith had been granted the privilege not just to love her, but to keep her. Something out there in the universe had decided that Edith was good enough, had stopped sending the crows to warn her about June and sent them to help her instead, and it made the marrow in her bones sing. There was no relinquishing in their love. No surrender. They gave to each other without giving anything about themselves up, and that made all the difference.

It was for those reasons that, when Edith finally made her way out of the bedroom, she paused on the threshold. She basked in the way June's sweatshirt gapped at the collar, hung loose over Edith's shoulders and brushed against her knuckles as she watched her wife stumble around the kitchen. It seemed that June had finally gotten a solid start on the eggs, and two places were set at their tiny table. Tea today, not coffee, sat kitty-corner to the plates their kids had given them two winters ago, decorated at one of those glaze-your-own-pottery places. The colors looked soft, stained glass suncatchers sending rainbows skittering across clumsily painted flowers and thrifted placemats.

There was warmth here.

Love.

It was so bright, clear, and technicolor-vibrant that Edith wasn't sure how she'd missed it. She walked over and took her seat, dropping a kiss at the base of June's neck as she went. Edith let her fingers reach into the glass trinket bowl playing centerpiece, sifting aimlessly through guitar picks, spare dice, and cardboard squares of embroidery thread that June hadn't put away just

yet. They were warm from the sun like she was, and the textures were nice against her fingers. Edith picked up a heavy chain from the bottom of the dish, listened as it clinked against the glass. June was still working in the kitchen. She angled her body a bit more towards Edith, glancing out at the garden before breaking the gentle quiet that had settled over them.

“Hey, Dee, those crows are back again.” Edith took a deep breath. *Cinnamon, June’s perfume, toasting bread.* “By the garden boxes?”

June fiddled with the pan. “Yeah. They must have a thing for strawberries or something, I don’t know.” The silence sat for a moment. June ground some more pepper over the eggs. She continued. “Dee?”

“Yeah, Sweetheart?” Edith crossed her ankles under the table and took a sip of her tea. It was perfect, just the right amount of milk and honey. The mug was warm in her hands.

“Do you want to see?”

Edith smiled gently, taking another breath. *Cinnamon. June. Bread. No smoke. No blood.* “No, I don’t think I need to. Not today.” *She was safe here. There was no other shoe.* “Tell me about the kids again. You said Laine’s skateboard finally came in?”

June turned to face her fully then, continuing to sprinkle shredded cheese mostly within the general area of the frying pan. “Oh! Right! Yeah, She’s so pumped about it. It’s badass, honestly— I see why. Wish she would have let me help more, but y’know. I’m just so happy she decided to try again...” Her eyes creased up the corners, so bright when she talked about her kids. Their kids. Edith would never get tired of this. There was still an itch in the back of her mind calling her to the window, a not insignificant part that wanted to double back to ask June how many birds were waiting for her beyond the threshold— but that fear wasn’t the sort of thing that would ever really go away. She’d learn to live with it, let new skin grow around the bullet that had tried and failed to kill her, take that ugly thing between her palms and choose to accept it for what it was.

It didn’t matter if the crows were right. Edith was going to sit at the table with her wife. She would eat scrambled eggs that were 40 percent shell, spread jam and butter thickly over toast that her Junebug had burned just for her, and do some living while she was alive. Edith Carraway had a life full of color, more love than she knew what to do with, and a murder of crows waiting to find what she’d lost and ferry it home. It was more than she’d ever thought she’d get. The fear hadn’t left— of course it hadn’t— but it had been joined by other, far more powerful things. Stubbornness. Devotion. Trust... Hope. They swung in her soul like bells, drowned out the fear and tempered it to something manageable, stole back the fire and kept it alive without burning her with it, and that was enough. The year was 1988, daylight was pouring through the kitchen windows, and Edith was eating breakfast with the woman that she loved. She couldn’t imagine anything more worthy of protecting.

“Taylor’s heartwarming vignette is a homey vision of how love should be. The story feels just like Taylor— smart, evocative, playful, and ultimately, satisfying. They are equal parts Prometheus and Pandora, bringing knowledge, warmth, curiosity, and a sprinkling of chaos to the TLC.”

- Jarita Bavido

A New Perspective

*There is something so nostalgic
About being on the water.
Something so charismatic
It makes you ponder.*

*The perspective you gain
Will transport you afar.
Making your brain
Transpire the cerulean mar.*

*Water has enormous strength
Because it can destroy anything.
But it also has various depths
Which helps you escape something.*

*Being on the water is so effective
Because it gives you a new perspective.*

Why on Earth Did You Buy Me This?!

I do not understand what goes through one's mind,
When going shopping for another person.
If you are walking around a store,
And you see alpaca fur mittens,
Please think logically before picking them up.

Do I seem like a gal that would enjoy
A bright purple pair of alpaca fur mittens?!
If you think so, then you definitely
Do not know me like you think you do.

Of all the colors, they picked bright purple,
Which can be seen from a mile away.
Could you imagine seeing a college student
Walking down the street in their
Bright purple alpaca fur mittens?

Not to mention that they were itchy,
Scratching my delicate skin.
They were a waste of money that
Could have gone towards a gift
I would have enjoyed and used.

My advice to you gift givers
Is to think really hard before
Buying a gift for someone else.
Because no one wants a pair of
Bright purple alpaca fur mittens.

So, the question I have for my gift giver is:
Why on Earth did you buy me this?!

My Succulents

My thick fleshy succulent plants
Why do you have to be so cute?
I can almost hear you do some chants
As if you were in a glorious pursuit.

My petite cactus stands proud
Despite his small stature.
His emerald green color is loud
But his trifles paint a perfect picture.

My pineapple plant brings me delight
Because it reminds me of someone special.
Every time I see the plant, memories ignite
Because he is with me ever so gentle.

If you can't tell by my subtle hints
I am obsessed with my succulents.

"Throughout this semester, I've worked with Chloie in surveying poetry. Each week, she brought in poems exploring everything from nature to personal experiences and abstract concepts. Chloie's practice and passion for her work every time we met were continuous as we collaborated to revise her work and make it into something truly special. It's been wonderful and very rewarding to see Chloie's skill and confidence in exploring multiple topics through poetry grow and improve throughout the semester."

- Jazmyne Johnson

My Father Is A Gun

Content Warning: Gun Violence

I heard the gun cabinet open next to my bedroom door
 My dad pulled out his pistol
 What is he doing?
 I need to go see
 My dad pulled out his pistol, to take his life with
 My mom took it and ran, telling him, "Stop! The kids are watching."
 I need to help
 What can I do?
 My mom took it and ran, but she wasn't very fast
 My dad chased her around the house to get it back
 What can I do?
 Mom can't outrun him
 My dad chased her around the house to get it back
 I grabbed his arm to stop him, I could feel the rage in his eyes in my soul
 Mom can't outrun him
 I can't be weak
 I grabbed his arm to stop him
 But he was too strong
 I need to be strong,
 My sisters are watching
 He was too strong and got away
 He got his gun back
 My sisters are watching
 I cannot let them see me tremble
 He got his gun back
 He is the gun
 I cannot let him see me tremble
 I will become cement
 My dad is a gun
 You never know when he is going to explode
 I will become cement to block my sisters
 A gun cannot break me then

"Over the semester, Autumn was one of the most consistent and reliable '57 learners in the entire TLC— always on time and prepared. As I got to know her, I found that her identity as an older sister was a big part of who she was, and that her sisters and family mean more to her than anything. This poem is visceral and haunting, a testament to Autumn's strength and resilience. I was honored to work with her and be given this glimpse into who she is."

- Jarita Bavido

Bury Me in Poppy

When i die, if you must
bury me in a field of poppy.

Tie the red string in front,
the green in back,
and place that sliver necklace
upon my chest.

Let me leave behind our generational
regrets in plains of agony,
that fragrance of genocide and horror
no longer on me.

Those scented sweets
in its beautiful violet pink,
forever shall i rest
on that field of origin.

One of earth's again.

Gentle Wind

Oh, gentle wind.
 To ride freely on you
 back to my ancestral grounds
 and our river of histories.

It's glory and beauty knows
 no bound. How sad for I
 to know of none.
 Pitiful: I truly am.

Oh, gentle wind,
 would you care to listen?
 A landless orphan and her many wishes.

I live on stolen grounds
 and breathe the white man's air.
 A type of poison that kills my spirits.

My ancestral grounds would
 do me no such. Its
 poppy fields would heal and hurt. But my
 spirits were free to roam.

Oh, gentle wind,
 what was it like?
 That beautiful river of golden yellow.
 How long it stretches in their
 hearts and sight. Truly, only when I see it
 would my heart be satisfied.

“Tsis pom dej daj, tshej siab tsis nqes.”

Oh, gentle wind
 won't you take me?
 If not, forever
 I will live on foreign ground.

My Language of Riddles

A lyrical ballad of complexity, in
the strangest forms of methodology--

tunings of metaphors in
morphing butterflies, sparkling
dusk of dew,

light shower creeks
of mushrooms, singing bells of bypass
wind, lullabies of night's stars,

flames of karmic crossing, in
the agingness of
time--

it's a language of riddles.

Mother, why
must we speak of so--

a secrecy of open gossip, pictures
instead of truths, a hush of skepticism in
obedience of the absolute,

flowers of
crowned feces, in sweets of honeys--
in language of riddles.

Poppy Flower

Oh our poppy,
the beauty of our tribe,
the passion of our people, you are
our only confidant.

In foreign land of alien customs,
you were the only sane. With
the highs of missing our home, you filled
that lacking in mere presence.

The cure of our hearts,
the poison of our tribesmen, you are
the trademark of our peace.

How you had followed us
in our journey and all. Across the oceans
and over the lands, running
with us to earth's end.

The distance's far,
the distance's wide, it matters not
to you. By our sides, you've always stood.

Down to China, you came and
out of China, you also went.
Highlands, lowlands, mountains and
what not, you not once left.

Our ancient friendship knows
no bound. Be it present, future,
or past, you will always be there till the
truly end. Oh our poppy, our most loyal friend.

Nowhere is Home

A longing of wants,
yet no place for songs. America
never felt like home.

An oval ball of fruited life,
nowhere could I settle my heart. Pieces
here, pieces there,

little pieces everywhere.

My emerald green of distant past. Dirt,
I miss you much.

But no matter the
missing, home it never was

"I have had the pleasure to work with Hlee Yang this semester for her English 257 class. Every week, I look forward to seeing Hlee and learning about her culture through her writing. She is a strong writer who writes meaningful poems and creative stories. She wishes to one day publish her work for all to read and enjoy. I have no doubt she will be successful in her goals in the near future!"

– Andrea Schmitz

