



ENGLISH '57 SERIES

WORDPLAY

SPRING 2025



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Hi, TLC Nation!

Another semester has come to an end! Woohoo!!! I am so proud of all of you for your continued hard work, both inside and outside the TLC. Together, we have made such a fun, homey space, and I'm so grateful to you all for creating that community.

Our front desk staff-Abi, Isabelle, Sophie, and Katie-always keep us running smoothly. Our student managers-Jarita, Katie, Kacey, Zoe, and Sidney-are committed to making the TLC the best it can possibly be, and they have been so much fun to work with. And as always, watching our tutors' continued hard work and growth has been so incredible. Thank you all!

I would like to thank all of our coordinators-Jen White, Bethany Kobiske, Amanda Meidl, Joe Zawacki, and Tristan Persson. Without them, the TLC would never have gotten back in the groove of being a successful, well-run center. They have done so much to facilitate positive, confident energy among our staff and learners, and I am so grateful that they have been able to keep the integrity of the TLC while simultaneously continuing to grow and adapt our space and programs.

I would like to personally thank Bethany, Jen, and Amanda for always being there for me when I needed them most, whether that meant I was bored and wanted attention or I was upset over a less-than-stellar session. Their encouragement, kindness, and willingness to have fun has been a grounding force for me in these last semesters of college.

Speaking of the last few semesters, we have to say goodbye to some amazing student-staff. Jarita, Paige, Lilah, Zoe, Mydasia, Sophie, and Isabelle are all graduating and moving onto bigger and better! All of them are incredible leaders that have had an immeasurable impact on the TLC, and while they'll be missed, I know they're going to do amazing things.

I'm going to get sentimental now! The TLC has been integral to my college experience. It saved me from dropping out after freshman year, back when I hated Stevens Point and getting through school seemed impossible. The TLC was the first place away from home that made me feel comfortable, safe, and happy, and I don't even know how to express the impact that had on 18-year-old me. Tutoring has taught me how to adjust to new situations and how to feel okay being myself. Most of all, you all have taught me how to have fun even when things get hard.

Thank you for all the friendship, joy, and love! Thank you for changing my life for the better! Thank you for being the TLC! Love you guys :)

—Reilly Crous
Writing Center Intern

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Yari Amparo	Eros and Psyche	1
Jarita Bavido	Poetry As Philosophy: Disruption and Hope in Mary Oliver's <i>Wild Geese</i>	9
	Notes From an Exam	12
Paige Biever	<i>Sciurus Carolinensis</i>	13
	The Pleiades	15
	Meskousing	16
Zoe Boyd	The L Word	17
Angel Bronk	Beyond the Window Dressing: Sui Sin Far's Use of Orientalist Tropes and the White Gaze	21
	<i>Crafts, Contests, and Control? An Insider Analysis of Bias and Its Effects Within the Cosplay Community—Basting Stitch: A Brief History of Cosplay:</i>	25
	It Was a Precaution	27
Kaylie Cartwright	Red Bridge	28
Casey Cashman	To The Letter	32
Logan Charles	survival has NO cost	34
	propagate	35
	Hypocrisy	36
	iron Caged bird	37
	Lavender	39
Reilly Crous	loving, breaking, loving again	40
	at the end of this	41
Natalie Daute	that house	42
	Known	43
Dezmond Donnelly	When the Raindrops Fall	45
	Those Days are Gone	46
	My Favorite Tree	47

	Am I Afraid?	48
	Sing to Me	49
Elise Fulmer	Hitched	50
Hunter Graff	The Statue of Old Ren Holly	58
Ravyn Grosse	Moonlit Walk	64
	Winter	66
	I Live in a Balloon	67
Kyra Hagen	<i>transubstantiation</i>	68
Steph Hefter	Work Force Slaughter	69
	“Transactional Benefits.”	71
Jazmyne Johnson	To the Drinks I’ve Known Before	72
Brianne Kieta	“i miss you” definition	76
	untitled	76
	I found you, or did you find me?	77
Tessa Krause	Forever Written, Forever Gone	78
Oliver McKnight	Happy Birthday	83
Ankica Montgomery	Welcome to the Hunt	84
Anastasia Mucha	The White Rose	86
Gwen Pabich	Fools Spring	88
	Would you be mad?	89
	<i>Can you accept the night?</i>	90
	<i>My Twin Flame</i>	91
Josh Paulson	Big Red Marble	92
	The Start of Nothing	95
	The Void House (or Equilibrium)	97
Malayna Preder	Prologue	99
Grady Roesken	Lovely Jade	103
Katie Scheder	From Above	114
Kacey Schmidt	Sea of Nanagons	118
	Person Forgets, then Remembers the Ocean for the First Time	119

Jordan Shamion	REAL LIFE < – > MACKINAC ISLAND	120
	I Made It	122
	Minutes	123
Sam Zajkowski	Translation of Aleksandr Blok’s « <i>Ночь</i> »	124
	“ <i>Tsela</i> ”	125
	Death of the Ladybugs	126
Joe Zawacki	A Garbage Can	127

YARI AMPARO

This was Yari's first-time doing English 157 and it was my first-time being a tutor! There were a lot of learning curves that we both got to work through together. It was so much fun working with Yari, especially since the story she wrote was so rich with detail! It was such a pleasure working with Yari and I hope in the future she continues to write!

—Grady

Eros and Psyche

Screams echoed through the palace hall as the queen, Europa, endured the beautiful agony of motherhood. This wasn't her first child, but in fact her third. She knew the feeling of birth well but this time something seemed to be different. Her eyes were fluttering shut while sweat coated her pale skin. Outside the quarters the king, Croesus, clasped his hands firmly behind his back. His face was pinched together with the deepest dent in his brow and each step felt heavier as it echoed in the hall.

His daughters waited next to him, sitting on the floor and playing with their dolls. Gently a smile grew on his face as he watched them play. Thoughts of his new child filled his mind, and he grinned at the thought of his family finally being complete.

Abruptly his thoughts were broken when the door to the quarters finally opened. Croesus beamed at the midwife before his brows slowly pinched together washing away his grin. Everything went quiet except for the pounding against his ear drums. Involuntarily each of his legs carried him forward before he burst through the doors to find his wife. Blood drained from his face as he padded closer towards the bed seeing the weak frame of the love of his life.

With a shaky hand he firmly took hold of hers, interlocking their fingers. Her eyes looked dull, but he forced his attention to shift towards their newborn. Croesus gently pressed his wife against his side before placing his hand on his child's head. His eyes burned with tears threatening to escape.

"Isn't she beautiful? She's going... to have a fire ...that moves people, I know it." Europa's breathless voice broke the silence and finally her husband's heart.

He pressed a single kiss to the top of her head. "I'm sure she will be, my dear." He agreed with a broken tone. Water slipped from his eye making its way down his cheek knowing that his wife's light was fading.

"Psyche." The queen breathes. "That is her name." She states with a soft finality.

"Psyche." Croesus whispers as he embraces his wife and newborn firmly against feeling his wife's body go limp in his arms.

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"Psyche!" Croesus shouted, calling his daughter back from the garden. Psyche tossed her hair aside as she carefully picked up the array of flowers.

"I'm coming!" She shouted with a laugh. The warm ground caught her feet with each quick step as she approached her father.

His brows scrunched giving her a deep frown. "Psyche, this is no laughing matter. Suitors will be here any minute. You're of age now. This must be taken seriously."

She rolled her eyes in a humorous manner while her father wiped the dirt from her cheek. "I *am* taking this seriously. That room is as thrilling as a prison cell. You need color if you want romance to blossom." Her lips curled up as she tapped the bouquet against her father's chest.

Laughter escaped from Croesus's chest as he shook his head. "Alright. But please go meet your sisters. You need to get ready." He exhaled, looking at her with concern.

She gave him a smile in return and placed a kiss on his cheek. "Don't worry. I'll be ready on time." She replied sincerely before walking towards the palace.

Psyche's footsteps padded through the hall as she made her way into the dressing room. Her sisters were already dressed as their lady's maids did their hair. They gave Psyche side glances, eyeing her. There was dirt on her brow and on her dress. Her hair was messy, and pieces of her hair had fallen out of her once perfect hairstyle. Miraculously her skin looked radiant, and the fallen pieces of her hair perfectly framed her face. Psyche's lady's maid immediately approached her, barely giving her a chance to greet her sisters. She was quickly washed up and dressed before her hair was tended to. The conversations ended when there was a knock at the door.

Psyche looked in the mirror watching her father enter the room. Her sisters were already downstairs in the sitting room waiting for the suitors. She gave her father a weary look before turning around to face him. He smiled warmly in return before placing a hand on her shoulder.

"I have something for you." Before she could say anything, he placed a gold tainia carefully on her head. It was a beautiful mix of leaves and rhinestone flowers. The tainia shined brightly in the sun. "It was your mother's. She wanted each of her daughters to have something special on this day."

Psyche's eyes welled up as she hugged her father tightly. "It's perfect, thank you." She replied gratefully.

Her father embraced her in response before clearing his throat and holding her shoulders. "It's time." He stated kindly, letting go of her shoulders and ushering her out of the room.

When they walked into the room it was already full of suitors. Psyche stood a bit straighter and inhaled a breath. Suddenly everyone went silent as Psyche stepped in. Everyone's eyes were stuck on her. Psyche put on a smile and walked into the crowd. Secretly the god of love, Eros, was watching the event. It was his job to match new couples so naturally he needed to move amongst the crowd without being seen. However, when his eyes fell upon Psyche his heart pounded and his breath hitched. She was the most beautiful human he had ever seen. Throughout the event he couldn't bring himself to allow other men to converse let alone look at Psyche.

Psyche sat by herself watching as the men swarmed her sisters. She fidgeted with a rose as she observed everyone in the room. This time it was hard for her to brush off the heavy feeling in her chest. She tried to accept the disregard everyone had for her. In a way, it was a nice change since she was constantly bombarded by people. On the other hand, this was supposed to be a day of love and instead it felt like a harsh rejection.

The night carried on and the number of men slowly dwindled away. "Wow, Psych, looks like no one could handle your beauty tonight." Her sister, Dione snickered.

"Do you really think so?" Psyche chimed with hope as a small smile formed on her lips.

“Of course, my beloved sister. Men are always so immersed with you. They couldn’t handle seeing you up close instead of far away.” Thalia added, covering her mouth as she laughed under her breath.

Psyche smiled and thanked her sisters for their kind words before retiring to her bedroom. She lay in bed, staring at the ceiling while thinking back on the day. Runny mascara slid down her cheeks, soaking into her pillow as she closed her eyes to get some sleep.

Silently Eros landed on the balcony of Psyche’s room. He snuck in, taking steps that didn’t echo beneath his feet. Moving like a ghost through the dimly lit room, he made his way over to Psyche’s sleeping form. He bent down beside her bed taking in the princess’ face. Gently he reached out and wiped away a stray tear from the unsuspecting Psyche. His chest tightened giving him an unfamiliar feeling. Gods weren’t meant to feel this way. They’re powerful beings who do as they please. And yet he couldn’t help but frown at Psyche’s disheveled appearance. Granted that her runny makeup didn’t take from her beauty but that didn’t make her tears a pleasing sight. Eros placed a soft kiss upon her forehead before taking off through the window with the intense force of his wings. The room was still leaving no trace or sound that he was ever there.

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Croesus paced back and forth across the floor with a deep scowl. “This is disgraceful! It’s been weeks and Psyche still has no suitors!” His voice echoed through the room causing Psyche to flinch. She has never seen her father this upset.

“Yes, but Dione and I have managed to find husbands. Isn’t that worth celebrating?” Thalia chimed in. Her lips were curved upward with a smug gleam in her eye.

“Of course it is, but Psyche should have been proposed to by now... Something must be wrong. I’ll have to pray to the gods for an answer.” Croesus exhaled and rubbed his brow in defeat.

“Everything is *always* about Psyche.” Thalia muttered to Dione turning up her nose at Psyche. Her head was down as she looked at her lap and fidgeted with her fingers.

“Father, that isn’t necessary. I don’t need a husband. I can just stay here with you and tend to the garden.” Psyche added with a soft smile on her face. She didn’t want her father to fuss over her. This was a problem that could figure itself out eventually.

Croesus shook his head in disapproval, looking at Psyche with concern. “No, I want you to have a life of your own. I refuse to let you stay hidden away in this castle with nothing.” He stated firmly with a stern look. “I’m doing this for your own good.” His voice was softer, but the sharp crease of his brow remained. Psyche sighed softly and nodded before turning her gaze away from her father with defeat.

Later that night Croesus traveled to Apollo’s temple to ask his god of song for guidance. His feet echoed on the marble floor as he moved deeper into the temple. He was desperate for answers, and he needed something that would get the god’s attention. Croesus burned a piece of fabric from his late wife’s dress at the foot of Apollo’s statue as an offering before kneeling and praying to the god. “Apollo, God of the sun and music, I pray that you hear me. My daughter, Psyche, is in no luck of finding a husband. Please, what can I do?”

The pleading tone in his voice and the precious offering given by Croesus reached the god of music. There was a shift in the air, causing Croesus to look up. Apollo stood before him with an indifferent expression. “Your daughter has been cursed by the malevolent beast, Eros.

A so-called God, who travels between our realms. He has claimed your daughter, refusing to let her marry another.” Apollo’s voice boomed through his temple as he looked away with contempt as his words left his lips.

“How can I prevent that? There must be a way.” Croesus reasoned with a look of desperation.

“I’m afraid there is not. Lest you wish death upon your daughter.” Apollo scorned.

“No! What...What must I do to free my daughter from her curse?”

“Deliver her to the edge of the abyss in marital attire. There she will be taken away.”

With those final words Apollo disappeared, leaving Croesus in despair. He had no choice but to leave his youngest daughter in the hands of a monster.

Light peeked through the curtains of Psyche’s room when she heard a knock at the door. She sat up in bed and rubbed the sleep from her eyes as her voice broke the silence. “Come in,” Croesus opened the door and hesitantly made his way to his daughter. He sat down next to her and explained everything. Psyche sat silently as the words her father had said echoed in her ears.

“I am so sorry, my daughter. It is the only way to keep you safe.” Croesus croaked. He watched Psyche intently as she remained silent. Despair and shame filled Croesus’ chest the longer the silence remained. After a while he finally stood up with his heart feeling heavy in his chest. “The maids will be here soon. You are to depart by noon.” He finally said before leaving quietly without a second glance at his daughter.

Noon finally came and Psyche felt her stomach tighten and twist as she stepped out of the chariot. Her fate was laid out in front of her, and it felt unreal. The carefree attitude she once had vanished the moment she was told her life was now in the hands of a monster. A monster she was fated to marry. Her hands trembled as she stepped closer to the edge of the abyss. Not a single member of her family was allowed to be by her side in this awful moment.

With a final step, she was at the edge. For a moment nothing happened. Hope surged through Psyche before her feet were suddenly off the ground. The god known as the west wind engulfed Psyche with a powerful gust of air, lifting her off the ground and towards the sky. Psyche screamed as the air carried her higher and farther away from land. Her hair thrashed around her face but from what she could see it was like a fast-moving wind that almost resembled clouds. It was almost like being tucked in the eye of a hurricane. Soon after she was lifted into the sky, the wind gently placed her down onto a hard surface. This time the ground beneath her was a winding pathway composed of limestone.

The path curved its way around what could only be portrayed as a floating mountain. Psyche’s eyes trailed from the path as she rose off the ground in awe. Clouds encircled the mountain as sunlight bled through them. On the outside of the path’s wall, in the midsection of the mountain was a waterfall that disappeared as it reached its end. She trailed her hand on top of the path’s walls as she climbed the steps leading her to the top. Just a few feet away from the foot of the steps was a grand water fountain. In the center was a swan statue that looked as if it was frozen in time just as it was about to lift off the ground. Water sprayed out of its wings and into the basin. Around the fountain were bushes of roses, peonies, and lavender. The symbols of love. On the mountain’s peak rested a Parthenon that was vast in size and glorious in beauty. The white marble reflected the sun, creating gorgeous beams of light that made the temple stand out from all else.

Psyche marveled at the beauty before her. She couldn't believe that a monster lived here. Monsters are known to live in dreary, horrifying looking ruins or caves, not beautiful temples that shine. Her feet padded along the limestone ground as she walked closer to the Parthenon's doors. Just as she approached it the doors opened, welcoming her inside. She was about to thank the beings that opened them but there was no one there.

"Hello?" Psyche said, her voice echoing through the temple.

"Welcome to your new home Ms. Psyche." Chimed a gentle voice.

"Thank you? I'm sorry but I can't see you. Where are you?"

"I am in front of you miss. Do not worry about my appearance, every member of the household can only be seen by the gods. Our bodies are not built for human eyes." The voice explained in a musical tone.

Curiosity filled Psyche as she took in the words the voice told her. "What's your name?"

"Aspasia but you can call me Asia. I'm the head of staff here in the palace. Now if you follow me, I will lead you to your room." With that said, Asia grabbed a candelabra and lead Psyche to her new room. The hallway glistened with the light of the sun shining in through the windows. Each wall was lined with rose quartz pillars, gold decorating its tops and bottoms. Gold was scattered along the white marbled walls of the hallway along with various statues between the pillars. Psyche marveled at the beauty and details around her. She found it pleasing that the inside of the Parthenon was decorated with rose quartz stone. It made her all the more curious about her new husband.

"We are here, miss." Asia said, snapping Psyche out of her thoughts.

"Oh, thank you. Asia, may I ask...what is he like?" She fidgeted with her fingers nervously awaiting the answer.

"The headmaster? Well, he is quite the character. Most days he remains out of the palace but when he is here...let's just say, I have my work cut out for me." Asia answered, through an airy laugh.

"It sounds like your headmaster gives you trouble?" Psyche questioned with a frown.

"Yes, but he is not so bad at times."

Psyche's frown deepened as remorse filled her chest. Her footsteps fell into a steady pattern as she followed Asia towards her new room. A feeling of dread was starting to manifest in Psyche's stomach at the thought of staying in the palace with her new fiancé.

The doors to her room opened after their conversation fell silent. Psyche gasped softly as she stepped into the room. Pink silk woven with intricate designs covered the walls. The patterns of the walls were found on the drapes which framed the windows to make a V-shape, letting in the sunlight. On the ceiling were four beautiful paintings, giving color to the detailed but plain white top. The largest one was in the center of the ceiling in the shape of a circle. The three others were oval shaped and found on the sides and bottom of the largest painting. The room was heavily furnished, each piece matching in color and style. "Is this all, mine?" Psyche asked, looking around in amazement.

"Yes, miss. Headmaster said that he wanted you to have your own room until you were comfortable with sharing his suite."

Psyche clasped her hands gently on her mouth as she walked further into the room. Asia set the candelabra onto the dresser. "The headmaster will be here for dinner. Until then you are welcome to stay here or when you're ready, one of the other household members will give you a

tour of the palace.”

The excitement Psyche felt quickly vanished at the mention of her betrothed, reminding her of the situation she was in. “That’s alright. I’ll stay here for now, just to get used to my room.” She smiled kindly, hiding the unpleasantness she was feeling.

“Alright miss. I will come back when it is time for dinner.” Asia replied, the door closed indicating that she had left the room.

Psyche looked around the room, taking in her surroundings. Something inside of her twisted and tightened at the thought of having dinner with the owner of the castle. She was going to meet her new fiancé. The idea echoed in her head like a siren warning her from danger. The possibility of her husband to be being a monster didn’t seem so far-fetched anymore.

Psyche took in her surroundings, looking at the candles and trinkets that decorated the desk and dressers in her new room. It all seemed too orderly and natural, as if this room was made specifically for her. Unease wrapped around her stomach, squeezing it tight.

When the sun began to set the candles lit on their own startling Psyche. She squinted at the unusual sight, tilting her head and examining the candles with curiosity. Just a moment later there was a knock at the door. “Come in.” Psyche moved her head towards the doors, drawing her attention away from the mysterious candles.

“We’ve come to dress you for dinner miss.” Rang a voice that held a white gown with a blue sash. A brush and tainia floated next to the dress. Psyche assumed that it was two other staff members who had come to help her. The items moved into the room, so she walked after them, closing the door behind them.

The staff worker holding the dress helped Psyche out of her martial gown and into the glamorous evening gown, dressing her for dinner. “Please sit miss.” One of the other members said, referring to the chair in front of the vanity. She sat and marveled at the sight in the mirror. It seemed like her hair lifted on its own, twisting itself together to form a perfect crown shape before tying itself together in the back. The rest of her hair fell against her back in waves of brown.

When the members finished Psyche stood, taking in the sight in front of her. The dress she now wore, hugged her curves before falling loosely around her legs. The white color beautifully complemented the blue sash that connected up from the gold band hugging her waist. The sash trailed up, falling behind her right shoulder. Gold sparkled from her neck and ears as the tainia sat perfectly against her hair. “I look amazing, thank you all so much.” Psyche said, a polite grin covering her face.

“It is no problem miss. If you’ll follow us, we will take you to the dining room.” A different voice spoke this time, but their voice sounded just as pleasant.

One of the staff members grabbed the candle and led Psyche to the dining room. She fidgeted with her fingers as her heart banged against her chest. She willed her feet to move steadily one in front of the other no matter how much she wanted to run. With one final step she was inside the dining room. Her stomach sank before she looked up. Suddenly she could breathe, and her body relaxed. Her fiancé didn’t appear to be at the table. Relife washed over her body. “Where is your headmaster?” Psyche kindly asked the staff.

“He is running a bit late miss, but I can assure you the headmaster always keeps his word.”

Psyche thanked the voice before sitting down at the table. It was set with candles lining

the middle as endless plates and bottles of nectars and wines covered the table. Psyche picked up one of the forks, twisting it back and forth between her fingers. After a moment, footsteps echoed through the hall and the candles on the table dowsed. Psyche flinched in surprise at the sudden darkness that engulfed the room. Candles on the far end walls suddenly lit and a figure appeared at the opposite end of the table. "I apologize for the wait. For a god, work is never-ending."

Psyche stared at the figure for a moment, completely taken aback. The voice of this being sounded like that of a man not a monster. It was rich in depth, followed by a slight rasp. Its silhouette looked almost human, apart from the wing shapes darting out from behind his back.

"It's rude to stare you know, or do they no longer teach manners to humans?" His voice rang with impatience.

Psyche felt her cheeks flush and she looked down at the table, setting down the fork she forgot she was holding. "I'm sorry, you just surprised me. I wasn't expecting such a grand entrance."

"Why would you expect anything less than grand? Everything in my palace must be extravagant. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to outshine the others."

"You must outshine them with materials only, considering you're hiding right now?" Psyche said in a snide tone.

Eros sat up straighter, his form straightening against the chair. "Hiding is for cowards. I'm masking my form for your benefit. If I showed you my true self, you would go blind from my beauty." He mused before clearing his throat. "That's enough questions for now. I'm sure you're starving so please, eat." He said, gesturing to the plates on the table.

Psyche rolled her eyes before narrowing them to the silhouette in front of her. His earlier words rushed back to her causing her to look away. Unlike him, she had manners. A plate moved in front of her, setting down gently. She picked up her fork and brought the food to her lips. The room was silent apart from the sounds of silverware hitting against fine China. She looked up and realized the sounds were also coming from the other end of the table. To her surprise he was actually eating as well. "I didn't know gods ate." The silence in the room was severed with her words.

"Of course we do. That's why gods are given offerings. If we didn't eat, we wouldn't want food."

Unease crept into her chest at his words. "Oh." She said softly, taking a bite from her food.

Eros noticed the crease in her brow and let out a soft laugh. "I can assure you we wouldn't eat people either, if that's what you're worried about. There are more enjoyable things than food." Amusement tangled with his words, and he brought his glass to his lips, watching Psyche with a satisfied gaze as her face twinged pink. "So, how are you enjoying the palace so far?"

"It's beautiful. Your staff are very kind." A smile crept across her lips as she spoke.

"Good. I'm glad you're adjusting well."

Psyche frowned as her brows pinched together. "I don't know how well adjusted I can be, considering that I'm stuck here."

Eros scoffed, lifting his head to look at Psyche. "Well for someone who is 'stuck here' you don't seem to be making such a fuss." He retorted before taking a sip from his chalice.

“Would you rather I did? What good would that do to anyone if I started throwing a tantrum like a child?”

“Fair point. However, compliance isn’t something you have to do so easily. It makes it seem like you don’t mind being here.”

Frustration was starting to take over, but Psyche wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of making a scene. “If I was being so compliant then we would be having a civilized conversation. There are some things here that I obviously haven’t taken a liking to.”

The sudden screech of wood against marble caused Psyche to flinch. Eros was now standing and making his way towards Psyche. His face was still hidden by the dim lights. It seemed as if he would walk past her, but he stopped and bent his head next to her ear. “I would watch how you speak to me, sweetheart. It’s true that I have brought you here, but I refuse to allow you to disrespect me. Dinner is over. The staff will escort you to bed.” The finality and sharpness of his tone caused the hair on Psyche’s arms to stand. She finally relaxed again after Eros left.

Later that night Psyche stared at the ceiling. She knew she couldn’t stay here with this being, no matter how mystical this land was. She needed to escape. Psyche sprang to her feet and put on shoes and a cloak to keep warm. Quietly she snuck out of her room, making her way back to the dining room. Thankfully the staff had not cleared the table. Psyche stole one of the bottles of nectar and carefully padded towards the front door. “Miss? What are you doing?” Asias’ voice caused Psyche to flinch. She stood up straighter and smiled.

“I wanted to apologize to your headmaster. We got off on the wrong foot earlier, so I was hoping to surprise him.”

“I see. Well, you won’t find him out there. He is in his room. I can take you to him if you wish?”

“No, that won’t be necessary thank you.” Psyche answered in a kind tone. Her heart pounded and her blood ran hot in anticipation.

“Alright. Good luck, miss.” Asia stated politely. Taps followed insinuating that they had left.

Psyche exhaled then quickly left the palace. She walked down the winding path, making her way to the end where she had woken up. “West wind? I need your help. I want to go home. I’ve brought you an offering, please help me.” Psyche pleaded softly, making sure no one could hear her except herself and the open air. The night was quiet and nothing seemed to happen. Psyche sat in despair, doubting that she had been heard. Suddenly a gust of wind began to form around her, growing faster and faster until she was being lifted into the sky. She was going home.

JARITA BAVIDO

Words cannot express how much I love and am thankful for Jarita every single day. Even when there's a million things going on in her life, Jarita is our stabilizing force in the TLC. She is one of the most dedicated, considerate, and giving people I have ever met, and her unwavering commitment inspires me. From the first day I met her, I knew she was destined for success, and I am so proud of her achievements. Jarita is someone I look up to, who has kept me sane for the past three years, and who I feel so lucky to call a friend <3

—Reilly

Poetry As Philosophy: Disruption and Hope in Mary Oliver's *Wild Geese*

In *Wild Geese*, Mary Oliver crafts a poem rich with natural and religious imagery that superficially speaks to a longing for community. On a deeper level, it repudiates illegitimate bifurcations and oppression, even as its ambiguity leaves open a host of interpretive possibilities. By intertwining the thought of woman philosophers with my own analysis, in this paper, I seek to treat *Wild Geese* as philosophical text and not poetry alone.

"You do not have to be good." In an instant, the first lines of Mary Oliver's *Wild Geese* resist a casual juxtaposition of good and evil, and reinforcement of old dualisms. Her "good" is not the Platonic form of the good—rather it represents a gentle rejection of cultural expectations of femininity, a paradigm shift born out of her positionality. For a woman, what it means to be good, in the words of Roxane Gay, include being "charming, polite, and unobtrusive, modest, chaste, pious, and submissive."¹ In her next lines, Oliver rejects this abstracted, impossible "good" that so often results in isolation, shame, and self-flagellating destruction for the one who does not measure up. Renunciation and self-abnegation might be good, but that does not mean they are good *for* anyone, least of all the women doing the self-sacrificing, whatever paradoxes feminist theologians trying to rehabilitate Augustine might say.² Too often, according to philosopher Sarah Hoagland, these are "virtues of subservience" that result in women's reconciliation to oppression.³ Oliver is speaking to everyone silenced or diminished "for their own good," or told to "be good," when good meant adhering to societal expectations and denying oneself. However, she makes no positive rule to enforce some new normativity. "You do not have to be good," does not carry the moral burden of "Thou shalt not be good."

Likewise, Oliver says, "You do not have to walk on your knees...through the desert repenting," evoking imagery of starving ascetics and bloody knees—splashes of crimson on an inhospitable wasteland of scorpions, sandstorms, scorched skin, parched earth. For anyone whose authentic existence has been deemed a sin by religion, the sparse language is a powerful frame for expansive and excessive queer readings. Oliver does not reject faith or belief. Rather, she is rejecting the construction of humility, guilt, and unworthiness that empties and destroys

¹ Roxane Gay. *Bad Feminist: Essays*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014): 261.

² Han-luen Kantzer Koline. "Of Birds and Breastfeeding: Augustine and Feminist Concerns About Kenosis." *Modern Theology*. (2025). <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uwsp.edu/10.1111/moth.12960>.

³ Sarah Hoagland, "Lesbian Ethics and Female Agency," *Explorations in Feminist Ethics*, E. B. Cole and S. Coultrap McQuin, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992): 156-164; Amanda Cawston and Alfred Archer, "Rehabilitating Self-Sacrifice: Care Ethics and the Politics of Resistance," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 26, no. 3: 456-477.

rather than empowers—the “corrosive humiliation of self [which is] taught by those who profit from keeping others in their place” described by Mary Potter Engel.⁴

When Oliver tells us, “You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves,” her honor of the “soft animal” of the body is sensual and visceral—abrading Cartesian hierarchies that place the mind over the body. Similarly, this framing rejects the possibility that one’s sexuality or sexual orientation is fearsome and dreadful. No—Oliver’s soft animal and its love fold the material and immaterial together, rejecting the “hierarchized binary” without naming its Other, and in so doing repudiating its power.⁵ “You only have to” is no command either—rather it is reassurance and comfort, a gentle reminder that existence is enough.

Abruptly, Oliver’s *meanwhile* pauses this tender introspection and interoception, marking a transition to a vivid awareness of external sensory input. Hierarchical binaries or not, “the world goes on.” She has brought us somewhere else now, hinting at the “persistent displacement” she feels. Before, normative expectations were comparable to a desert, poisonous and choking, destructive and dangerous. Now, displaced though we are, the wilderness surrounding us is full of life. Sunshine and rain are harbingers of growth and green. “The prairies and deep trees, the mountains and the rivers,” are well-watered, fertile, majestic, and powerful. When I read these lines, it evokes the idea of *viriditas*, found in the writings of Hildegard von Bingen, that is the creative and recreative energy of “greening” that infuses the universe.⁶

Then she points out the wild geese, aloft in the boundless blue, “headed home again.” It is spring and the world is beginning. The crush of normative expectations in the first half of the poem had powdered souls and reduced existence to a lonely mirage in the desert, a creeping *ariditas* that is the corollary of Hildegard’s greening.⁷ Now, Oliver implies that allowing desire its rightful place opens the whole “world to your imagination.”

But then, the sentence continues, and she compares the world to the call of the wild geese going home— “harsh and exciting— announcing over and over your place in the family of things.” Does “harsh and exciting” describe that haunting feeling you get when you hear geese call, or a train whistle far away, or an orchestra tuning up—a feeling of melancholic and hopeful tension amidst chaos? Is it a sense that you, like Frost, have “miles to go before you sleep,” or “world behind and home ahead,” as in Tolkien’s *Walking Song*—where home is some utopic space of comfort and health, reached only in the imaginary? Or is it rather a nod to the “harsh and exciting” seduction of once-rejected binaries, the siren call to create new categories and new labels to build a new taxonomy and nihilate ever more harshly the Other, so we can once more have a “place” in a “family”? Or—and this is the interpretation I prefer—is it a nod to the abrasive and loud expression of queer joy? Maybe it references an expansive definition of family, a kinship network that transcends narrow, Eurocentric conceptions of the term. Maybe it is about a “place” that includes humans, animals, plants, and even rocks in a delicious symphony of togetherness and reciprocity. What if this is hope—that thing with feathers that

⁴ Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, “Revisiting Feminist Discussions of Sin and Genuine Humility,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 1. (2012): 108+.

⁵ Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 149.

⁶ Elisabeth Weber, “Conjuring Green: Jacques Derrida’s Plants,” *Derrida Today* 16, no. 1 (2023): 47-66.

⁷ Michael Marder, *Green Mass: The Ecological Theology of St. Hildegard of Bingen*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021): 9-29.

sang a tune and perched for Dickinson but honks and caterwauls like a wild goose, disruptive and dissident in Oliver? A hope like this one cannot be held at the individual level alone. It must be an expression of a shared imagination, a collective act of solidarity.⁸

Mary Oliver abrades “naturalized binaries” around the dualisms of good-evil, mind-body, and desire-denial, questioning and even embarrassing the status quos we accept. And yet, her work is open to interpretation. When I read it, I see sparks of feminist and queer theoretical ideas along with an even more radical connection to the erotic, to sensuous (not sensual!) knowledges that transcend argumentation and language. *Wild Geese* disrupts binaries that inflict damage, demanding attention to the worlds within and the worlds around, daring to articulate a hope of home.

Wild Geese, Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.⁹

⁸ Maggie Fife, “The Generative Power of Collective Hope,” *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 10, no. 4. (2024):1-22.

⁹ Mary Oliver. “Wild Geese.” Mary Oliver’s Wild Geese. Accessed February 16, 2025. http://www.phys.unm.edu/~tw/fas/yits/archive/oliver_wildgeese.html.

Notes From an Exam

My Mennonite grandmother, in a misguided attempt to keep me straight, told me more than once that it was a sin to speak as I did— with hyperbole and embellishment and life. She called up the memory of my sainted great grandfather to establish her authority on the topic. Yet even in my earliest writing, I was not content to use the words I'd been given or the expected perspectives. I played with the margins and the unseen, read the dictionary seeking words like rhapsodic and loquacious and soliloquy, listened to sermons for the new words I could learn. Thinking this way, speaking this way, writing this way—all of it made me an outsider in my own family, an outcast even as I performed belonging.

But now I see how queer it all is. Whether it's sentence structure or word choice or alliteration or wordplay or subversion or the non-existent boundaries of propriety, my favorite thing is that we do not care about traditional expectations, boundaries or limited and limiting vocabularies. With words, we are extravagant, flamboyant, excessive, tempestuous and loud. For the traditional, professional, staid world of language and conversation, we are by times too much, too invested, too vociferous, too dramatic, too dark, too heavy, too esoteric. But it is in this space of too muchness that I finally feel at home.

PAIGE BIEVER

Paige and I are the last tutors left from our incoming group, and I'm so glad we got to spend this last semester together. The overall consistent, high standard in everything she does is so admirable. She is truly one of the writers I look up to the most, and I'm so glad we've spent so much of the past three years together. I know Paige will do amazing things, and I'm so incredibly, insanely proud of her <3

—Reilly

Sciurus Carolinensis

Squirrels, some people like to think, are another kind of rat
and while it is a rodent, I prefer it over the others.

They are everywhere in the reserve right off campus
and I enjoy watching them scurry and leap from tree to tree on my way to or from class,

little bodies spanning great empty distances

from neon and black trashcans to basswood trees
as their shadows flicker across the ground. Here, they are

beloved creatures akin to school mascots.
Their chittering, scraping of their scampering claws,

sounding like an anthem. Yes, they are not
the same as rats or mice or childhood hamsters

with their bristling gray-brown tails
a study in the eye's deception of softness, fullness.

They are far from nondescript: their coats a blend of
taupe, chestnut streak down the spine, soft cream underbellies

and their eyes plucked pieces of gleaming coal. Take notice for the first time
of the white backs of their rounded ears, stark against their umber faces.

Sit, watch them, the quick jerkiness of their movements like acorn addicts,
cradling nuts in pale hands. Crunch of
yellow-stained teeth breaking barriers.

Squirrels have a certain *je ne sais quoi*
that we may easily recognize compared to their other rodential cousins

more evident awe of their spasmodic yet assured bounds
which in some way, I suppose, we would wish to replicate despite the heaviness
of our human bodies.

The Pleiades

Father—

I seek you in the novantrone stars clustered in the cold
mid-winter evening sky, with snow shuttered lashes

and—

where can I find you

in that murky vast expanse of nothing, of the fathomlessness of my heart?

My mind has buried you amidst fearful dreams of futures and frozen night-shed tears

and—

I wish on the Pleiades, sisters of loss, in search of something

I cannot name.

Father—

when you carried all the heavens on your slumping back I

wished to scoop some of that tremendous impalpable weight onto my own shoulders.

Now I would lift my arms and plunge my hands into the depths to cradle you,

carry you back down to me

yet—

who better than I know the suffering you have been spared from in that celestial body?

I would pry apart the weeping constellations to get you but I cannot

take such peace from you.

How do I—

Meskousing

Gathering of many waters, thousand islands among streams dissecting red earth—
place of:

sandstone and limestone,
dolomite and state's red granite,
sugar maple and wood violet,
mourning doves and robins
honey badgers and honeybees.

—Gathering of big chilled water, miles from the soft crest of crinkling pine earth
:place of

unknown stone and unknown soil,
towering oak and small blooming wildflower,
thinning out pines from years of windbreaking,
cardinals and ravens
wild flying wasps and white-tailed deer.

ZOE BOYD

Zoe and I have curated an excellent vibe in our sessions, and I'm so glad I got to spend my last semester with someone so kind, talented, and fun. She always brings a much-needed calming energy to the TLC and never fails to make me laugh. This semester, we've played with a lot of genres, and I am so proud of how much her writing has grown. Zoe's good energy is completely infectious, and I know that she will achieve so many amazing things after graduation! :)

—Reilly

The L Word

Learning how to love will always be at the top of the list of “things I wish they would have tried to teach me in school instead of trigonometry”. I'm not really one for long intros or outros in songs, but I remember the first time I listened to “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill,” from start to finish, and she had my ass *sat* for 1 hour and 17 minutes. The album opens with a 47 second intro of a teacher taking attendance amid the chatter of a grade school classroom, and every few songs her stunning voice would fade away as she brought us back into this classroom scene. The first time around, the teacher writes out L-O-V-E on the chalkboard, asks his students what it spells, and if they know any songs or movies about love. The next time, we return to the classroom after Ms. Lauryn Hill and Carlos Santana marched us “To Zion,” and the teacher inquires deeper into his students' love lives: “Okay, how many people here have ever been in love?”

Giggles and conversations erupt. One boy admits to being in love, describing it as “willingness to do everything for that person”. After quieting down the chatter to give the boy a chance to speak, the teacher presses him further: “You said you love somebody, you should know why you love them right?”

We know the early years of one's life are a time when proper love and care is especially crucial, yet there's a deep ignorance about love that culture often attributes to youth. As though the less time spent on earth and less experience makes a child's idea of love any less worthy of attention and exploration than mine or yours. Of course, those with more years to grow might look back on “puppy love” with fondness for the naivety that colors our first intimate relationships, but I wonder at what age we begin to forget how real and important everything felt in those years. When I heard those sweet kids chirp about what it means to love one another at the end of the track, I couldn't help but smile to myself. I imagined their confident faces as they listed off all the reasons why they could love someone in their lives, from “the way they act” to “it's like he got a glow or something”. Only a few songs in, and it was clear that the realization I came to was exactly the one Lauryn was hoping for when she released the album: What would it be like to talk and think about love openly and honestly with one another? What if love was the topic of conversation as often as the weather, and it was something we never stopped learning how to do?

It's not so much that I wish someone would have packaged up all the answers to the Big Secret of “how to love” and delivered it to me in a perfect lecture; even as a kid I would have been rightfully suspicious. But these days, I wonder how much sooner I would have figured out how to “love myself”—and, as a result, be able to love others more deeply— if somewhere along

the line, someone had asked me what I thought love meant.

For a long time, basically all my adolescent and young adult years, love was doing things for others so that they would love you back. That I had the capability to love others seemed a self-evident truth, it was my own worthiness that needed constant proving. To think that I might be inherently deserving of love just as a consequence of being was totally foreign to me.

When the advice I could find in my personal life on how to love myself basically boiled down to “Just Do It,” I started to search for my love in psychology books and feminist theory. And honestly, it was nice to have some new words to put feelings and patterns to like “people pleasing” or what it meant to have “low self-esteem,” and how one would even go about trying to nurture the self. And while I wasn’t completely on my own side just yet, the inconspicuous mouthpieces of The Patriarchy™ that lingered in my thoughts and behaviors, once revealed to me, became common enemies that even my most critical self could team up with me to beat the fuck out of.

When I felt like I had the words but lacked the strategies, I did what any resourceful 21st century girl would do: looked up tutorials on YouTube. Surely there were other twenty-somethings with cute patchwork pants and toe rings who have figured out something about loving themselves that I haven’t. And honestly, it was nice just to hear that other people felt the way I did too. For some, the process of loving yourself started with learning to just tolerate yourself. Some encouraged getting in touch with my inner child and journaling, others insisted upon dancing naked in the mirror, and I would try anything at least once. Over time I equipped myself with quite a few positive habits and strategies, so yeah, you really can learn how to do anything on YouTube.

Naked and a little less afraid, I continued along this path to loving myself and arrived at a major crossroads in my junior year of college. One thing I think moving homes often at a young age primed me to better handle is the ephemerality of love and friendship. In both childhood and adult friendships, I learned that absence doesn’t necessarily make the heart grow fonder. That it is often in absence that a connection once overflowing with energy can freeze in space and time to become a sweet and strange memory. However, I would come to realize at this crossroads that the ache of slowly ending a relationship with a mutual understanding of the circumstances is a luxury in comparison to the discomfort of growing apart in close proximity.

*it wasn't so long ago
that this door felt so
heavy
back when the kitchen
was a warzone
and i would have sooner
pissed in bottles
watching the berries stashed under my bed
shriveled
shrouded in white fuzz*

*than feel the air change when i
turned that handle*

*and stepped out
into the open*

I wish you wouldn't look at me like that.

When I finally felt the dirt crossroads beneath my feet, I looked down and saw myself and some of my closest friends in a patch of flowers blossoming between cracks of dry earth. I crouched down to tend that little garden, growing confused as the days passed as to why their petals seemed to unfurl bigger and brighter as mine curled and yellowed. I watched them become so tall that the sunlight could only reach me in short bursts between their blooming bodies, and our roots that had once overlapped in affectionate embraces began fighting for survival in the thirsty ground.

that room was my only solace

*i overstayed my welcome
and one day i looked up to find
your irises tinted the walls
that same
sickly
green*

*pressing my ears to them
searching for my name through cement
i let that nasty green laughter
wash over me*

*i started to search for that hue in everyone
and found it everywhere i looked*

If it's true that speaking kindly to plants helps them to grow, it became clear to me over time that these friends were intent on watching my flowers wilt. There was no longer enough space for me in this little lump of earth, and I had begun living the people-pleaser's worst nightmare: cold, hard rejection. And because this harsh treatment only confirmed a belief that had been lying dormant in my roots—that I was not worth the space I took up—I was content to lay on my side watering that patch with hushed tears for quite some time. To make a long story short and put the flower metaphor to rest, this friend breakup was so shitty that I felt like I genuinely died there on that bed of flowers, slowly decomposed into worm food, and had to sprout anew in hard, dry dirt before I was ready to stand again and walk a different path.

*i finally held that
ice cold water in my palms
and dipped my swollen face
soaking the cuffs of my sweater
and looked up to find
strawberry pink eyes with*

shriveled
sickly green leaves
I wish you wouldn't look at her like that.

As a twenty-something with toe rings of my own now, I can see and feel how much potential I have to love deeply. The path to coping with rejection and loss was a murky one that I traversed barefoot and uncomfortable, and even now when my feet get stuck in old wounds, I'm not immune to tripping and landing flat on my face. And while the process may have been dirty and daunting, I can confidently say that I've made it out on the other side as a better friend and lover to myself. My partner has been a crucial ally in this process, and many days it's through their love and patience that I'm motivated to keep learning and doing better for them and myself. Dating a therapist isn't exactly conducive to living an unexamined life; they make love and change and growth in even the most uncomfortable times feel not only possible, but inevitable. When I was at odds with myself that year, it was them and Ms. Lauryn Hill that kept love at the forefront of my mind. Even now, I find myself experiencing each track on that album differently as I find new questions and answers about what it means to act and feel and be in love.

Before writing this, I had the question cross my mind: "What authority do I have to speak on love?" Now I wonder where that voice came from that believes love is something to be commanded or spoken about with utmost certainty. I chose to replace it with the voices of those young kids in Ms. Hill's classroom that speak confidently about love because they do it, and are curious about love because there is more of it yet to be experienced. So, if these pages were the classroom, self-love was the topic of discussion, and Ms. Hill called on me to report on a few of the lessons in love I learned over the school year, here's what I might share:

1. I have something in common with everyone I meet, and that is the need to be loved.
2. I am worthy of love because I exist, and there are no other prerequisites.
3. Not everyone in this world will love and accept me as I am, and that is okay. Some may have fair reasons, some may not, but it is not my responsibility to change myself just to change their mind.
4. I will spend more time with myself than anyone else in this lifetime, so building a kind, loving relationship with myself will always be a worthwhile effort.
5. Specifically, to my fellow humans socialized to be pleasant young ladies: nothing has gotten in the way of my ability to form loving, authentic relationships quite like people-pleasing. Intentional or not, when we make and develop relationships from a place of seeking approval, we place unfair expectations on others and limit all party's ability to be their true selves in a relationship.
6. My thoughts, attention, and words have power. When I think and speak love into myself and into the world, it multiplies.
7. Love is as love does. Love is not just a passive feeling, it is an action, a choice, and an intention. And every day I can choose to lead with love.

ANGEL BRONK

Angel is such a dedicated worker, both in and out of the TLC. He is always grinding away on a million projects at once, and I find that so impressive. His writing is at a consistently high level, and I'm always excited when he says he wants me to read his work. Angel is an excellent tutor, writer, and friend, and we are so lucky to have him!

—Reilly

Beyond the Window Dressing: Sui Sin Far's Use of Orientalist Tropes and the White Gaze

When examining literature centered on minoritized groups and the issues they face, stereotyping and bigoted tropes typically serve as obstacles for the protagonist to overcome. Such language and beliefs ordinarily serve to cause harm and spread hate, never quite crossing that line into further depth or utilization. "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu" crosses this fine line, detailing a young Chinese woman's journey to the United States amidst the 19th century's East Asian immigration wave. Pau Tsu's arrival to the States comes packed with extreme pressure to assimilate to Western standards from her husband, Lin Fo, who has fully adopted Americanized ways and wishes the same for his wife. Sui Sin Far's short story has long received criticism for its appeal to the White gaze through its exotification of Asian women and Orientalist elements. While Far's appeal to the White gaze in "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu" appears troubling on the surface, further examination reveals her use of Orientalist tropes as nothing more than window-dressing to a greater narrative concerning the damage of assimilationism. Far's painting of Pau Tsu with language and imagery commonly used to exotify Asian women, as well as the roles she assigns her main Asian and White characters, serve not to approve such beliefs, but as a bit of sugar to make the medicine of her message about assimilation go down. Despite Far's use of Orientalist tropes, "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu" remains heavily critical of the pressure to assimilate, illustrating its damages while remaining palatable to an audience who normally would have rejected any form of critique.

Pau Tsu's first appearance in "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu" is heavily adorned with language and imagery associated with the "China Doll" stereotype, a trope many Asian women, both fictional and real, were subjected to by White audiences. This stereotype portrays Asian women as meek, and fragile, as if they were delicate porcelain dolls adorned with a variety of exotic accessories and no thoughts beyond submission. Far's use of the stereotype begins fairly early in "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu" with the titular Pau Tsu's first real appearance: "The tiny bride was really very pretty – even to American eyes. In her peach and plum colored robes, her little arms and hands sparkling with jewels, and her shiny black head decorated with wonderful combs and pins" (Far 92). The section begins by noting Pau Tsu's size, describing her body and hands as small while noting how such stature is so pretty it transcends cultural standards. Additionally, the language around Pau Tsu's apparel is laden with exotifying comments; her "peach and plum" robes, fruits originating from Asia, and "wonderful combs and pins" for her hair market Pau Tsu like a dress-up doll for young girls.

Alongside dollification, many Asian women subject to stereotyping were reduced to submissive, childlike individuals with no thoughts outside of pleasing those they resided with, more often than not, the men they married. Pau Tsu is painted with this very same brush when discussing the friction between her and her husband, Lin Fo: “It was seldom, however, that she protested against the wishes of Lin Fo. As her mother-in-law had said, she was a docile, happy little creature” (Far 93). While this remark is rather off-hand, it is one amongst quite a few in which Pau Tsu is uncomfortable due to Lin Fo’s urging of her to assimilate, yet she holds her tongue and is framed as “docile” and “little.” Pau Tsu is not permitted any thoughts or opinions of her own, essentially a decoration to Lin Fo’s life dressed up in exotic wares and ornaments. While these descriptions of Pau Tsu as a fragile figurine could unsettle a modern audience, they encourage White readers of Far’s time through the door of her highly critical story. Putting her audience at ease gives Far the space to develop Pau Tsu and the pressures she is soon to face for an audience she knows could turn defensive at the drop of a hat.

Far’s appeal to the White gaze extends beyond Pau Tsu, as her decision to depict Pau Tsu’s husband, Lin Fo, as the source of assimilationist pressure further puts White audiences at ease. Instead of a White person pressuring the delicate Pau Tsu into adopting Western ways, a move that would make White readers feel villainous or wrongful, Far chooses to have an Asian man hold these expectations over his wife. Lin Fo’s pressure on Pau Tsu, from the language she speaks to the kind of doctor she sees, serves to introduce the assimilationist ideals onto a character the audience is already sympathetic to without her readers becoming defensive. Before Pau Tsu is physically in the story, Lin Fo’s position as the arbiter of assimilationist pressure is made clear as his desires for her Americanization are blatantly presented to the audience, “‘I shall be so glad to know her. Can she speak English?’ Lin Fo’s face fell. ‘No,’ he replied, ‘but,’ – brightening – ‘when she comes I will have her learn to speak like you – and be like you’” (Far 92). Lin Fo’s conversation with Miss Adah Raymond sets an expectation of Pau Tsu before Lin Fo has even met her, as he is the only one disappointed at Pau Tsu’s lack of English fluency. It is Pau Tsu’s Asian husband who sets his sights on her being exactly like Miss Adah - i.e. an English-speaking, intelligent American woman.

Lin Fo’s insistence on Americanizing his wife continues upon her arrival, infecting every interaction had with her to the detriment of her own health. Lin Fo remains the sole force of this pressure, pushing Pau Tsu far past her limits when she is vulnerable due to illness, “‘She must have a doctor,’ said she [Miss Adah], mentioning the name of her family’s physician...‘No! No! Not a man, not a man!’ she [Pau Tsu] cried...Lin Fo’s face was set. ‘No!’ he declared. ‘We are in America. Pau Tsu shall be attended to by your physician’” (Far 96). Despite Pau Tsu’s pleas not to be examined by a male doctor, something she views as a violation of her modesty, it is Lin Fo, the one who would understand the cultural extent of this violation better than anyone else, who demands Pau Tsu maintains his image of the American woman. He is the one pushing past her boundaries, not this American doctor nor Miss Adah who suggests the physician in the first place, furthering her distress and displaying just how far Lin Fo is willing to go for his idealized Western woman. Lin Fo’s position as the sole source of assimilationist pressure within “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu” allows Far to critique the expectations placed upon Asian immigrants of the time without making White audiences uncomfortable. Having an Asian character push another Asian character to assimilate and not the White voice within the story, despite her serving as the basis for Lin Fo’s image of Pau Tsu, means White readers can

sympathize with Pau Tsu's plight and begin to understand the damage and pain caused by expectations like Lin Fo's.

"The Americanizing of Pau Tsu" appeals to the White gaze beyond exotifying Asian characters and having Asian characters inflict assimilationist beliefs onto each other. Far's tale frames its main White character, Miss Adah, as the one most attuned to the sympathetic Pau Tsu's deterioration and voice of reason to the strict Lin Fo. Miss Adah's position plays to the ego of White readers through her position as the most competent character in the main cast, seemingly knowing more about Pau Tsu than herself and being the one to break Lin Fo's stubborn adherence to assimilation, thus providing readers the ultimate White savior. Throughout the story, it is Miss Adah above everyone else who notices Pau Tsu's growing plight, something so noticeable no one could possibly ignore it, yet only she can point out: "Adah Raymond...could not fail to observe that Pau Tsu's small face grew daily smaller and thinner, and that the smile with which she invariably greeted her, though sweet, was tinged with melancholy" (Far 94). It is not those closest to Pau Tsu who point out her deterioration, but the White acquaintance Pau Tsu has been compared to even before her arrival in America. This note sets Miss Adah up to drive the resolution of the plot, acting as the one to give insight into Pau Tsu's state to the other characters and the audience, making her the favorable, admirable, White lead.

Miss Adah's role as the White voice of reason culminates when Pau Tsu flees her marriage with Lin Fo. Lin Fo begins to search for Pau Tsu, only to come across Miss Adah. Quickly, she begins to scold Lin Fo for his treatment of Pau Tsu, "'Oh, you stupid!' exclaimed the girl. 'You're a Chinaman, but you're almost as stupid as an American. Your cruelty consisted in forcing Pau Tsu to be - what nature never intended her to be - an American woman...I saw it long ago, but as Pau Tsu was too sweet and meek to see any faults in her man I had not the heart to open her eyes - or yours.'" (Far 98-99). Miss Adah focuses on Lin Fo's mistakes, not only bringing his race into question during her confrontation but also remarking upon the "nature" of who Pau Tsu is meant to be and the motivation behind Pau Tsu's actions. Pau Tsu is not given the chance to speak for herself, nor has Miss Adah even had a conversation with her regarding Pau Tsu's feelings. Instead, this scolding is framed as what snaps Lin Fo out of his assimilationist adherence, not the note from his wife nor her leaving of him, but what Miss Adah tells him after she finally "has the heart" to open Lin Fo's eyes to his own predicament. Far's appeal to the White gaze, as it relates to Miss Adah, is centered around the importance of a White character in a story intrinsically about the struggles of non-White individuals. Miss Adah is never painted in a negative or critical light, rather she saves the day with her infinite insight into Pau Tsu's head and dressing down of Lin Fo better than Pau Tsu's vulnerable letter ever could.

Sui Sin Far's "The Americanization of Pau Tsu" lures White readers with the tropes sought out during a growing, albeit heavily exotified, interest in the East, only to subvert expectations with a deeply moving tale on how strict adherence to Western views devastates and deteriorates. The ribbons and bows of Pau Tsu's exotification, Lin Fo's role as the arbiter of assimilationist pressures, and Miss Adah's placement as a White savior serve to get readers to unbox a story many would refuse due to the fragility of the White ego. Despite this, Far crafts a narrative condemning the pressure to assimilate enjoyable for audiences of and after her time; using stereotypes to connect with White audiences of the 19th century while winking at the

camera just enough to push modern readers to explore beyond window dressing.

Work Cited

Far, Sui Sin. "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu." *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. Modern Library, 2011, pp. 90-100.

Crafts, Contests, and Control? An Insider Analysis of Bias and Its Effects Within the Cosplay Community—Basting Stitch: A Brief History of Cosplay:

Fandom spaces and cosplay have existed for far longer than many would think. Common recollections of fan culture tend to reach back to the 1960s, yet nerd culture began as early as 1926 with a man named Hugo Gernsback and "the rst English-language 'scientiction' magazine" (Culp). Gernsback received many fan letters directed toward his magazine, discussing such responses in numerous editorials throughout the magazine's life span. What Gernsback discovered, even at the inception of fan culture, was the "surprising" proliferic presence of women readers of his magazine. Despite the extreme lack of women in the fan space as authors and as characters, the passion of the magazine's feminine fanbase stood as an early, yet unrecognized sign of the importance of marginalized communities to the development of fandom.

This importance becomes even more clear with a fellow founder of fandom and the mother of cosplay herself: Myrtle Rebecca Douglas, known by her Esperanto nickname Morojo. Morojo had long been involved in the creation of fandom spaces, not caring about the lack of feminine presence in authorship or media representation as she spent more than ten years involved in the sci- scene; Morojo's contributions and legacy long brushed over in favor of her partner Forrest J. Ackerman. Morojo and "Forrie" were highly involved in the development of fan culture, both active in the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society as writers for its 50-issue zine *Voice of the Imagi-Nation* and their independent fanzine *Novacious* (Culp).

Where Morojo is denied much of her well-deserved credit is in the creation of the rst cosplay. Despite her achievement long being attributed to the Trekkies or Star Trek fans, this early fandom's accomplishment was actually made nearly thirty years earlier with the debut of Morojo and Ackerman's Things to Come "futuristicostumes" at the 1939 World Science Fiction Convention. Taking from the popular H.G. Wells *Im*, Morojo and Ackerman donned costumes unlike anything seen before at the Worldcon; with Ackerman in should pads and trousers with Morojo in her iconic ruby red ball gown: the rst transforming cosplay as the skirt of the gown converted into a cape, revealing a romper underneath. Morojo and Ackenman's costumes shook the nerd space, yet such a splash came at a cost: "While towering Ackerman made a great model for his costume, he had nothing whatsoever to do with its construction. Both of the costumes were envisioned, designed, and laboriously hand-made by Morojo!...Given modern cosplay's intense focus on individual creativity and craft, it's bizarre that Ackerman is the one most often credited as being the O.G. cosplayer in fan literature. Morojo, who made the futuristicostumes, deserves the bulk of the credit" (Culp).



Morojo's legacy is one many marginalized individuals endure, as while her contributions to cosplay, fandom, and nerd culture were instrumental, something admitted by her own colleagues, she has long been erased by a history dominated by and centered around men. Her legacy as the mother of cosplay has only recently been discussed within the scene, most cosplayers still attributing the birth of their beloved hobby to the Trekkies of the 1960s. While yes, the term cosplay was not coined until many many years later by Nobuyuki Takahashi at the 1984 Worldcon, the practice of dressing up like a fictional character for the expression of one's fandom was, indeed, conceptualized and created by a woman: one long dedicated and talented in a field that had yet to even exist if not for her creativity, her skills, and her craftsmanship. As Ackerman himself would admit many years later, following Morojo's unfortunate passing, "Perhaps no one would be more surprised than Myrtle that I am contributing a memorial about her because I had scarcely spoken to her for 20 years...However. I will say this. I remember Morojo as the greatest female fanne who ever lived" (12).

It Was a Precaution

It was a precaution.

They told me, just a precaution.

An injection to inflame my veins

To illuminate my malady.

To light up my lungs like a highway collision

To remedy a result in error text.

It was just a precaution, the pitying nurse relayed

As he unfurled my arm for the third shot that day.

You feel a bit stupid, I must say

Hiccuping into hospital-grade tissues.

Your mom frantically dialing family because

A father-bound curse has just passed to the son.

All because of a precaution.

It was just a precaution.

They promised it was a precaution.

At this point, it better just be a precaution.

You feel a bit stupid, I must say

When results come back normal, hysterical horseplay I suppose.

“You’re free to go,” arms now wrapped in cloth

Just half an hour before, a surgery bed was wheeled outside the door.

Without solutions

Without resolve.

You’re left with three punctures

and precautions.

KAYLIE CARTWRIGHT

Working with Kaylie has been an absolute blast! Her ideas are always so creative and fun. Kaylie has mastered whimsical fantasy world and story building. I wholeheartedly believe that her mind will take her far. I appreciate Kaylie's ability to challenge herself in her writing and writing processes. She comes into sessions with well-defined goals, sets of questions, ambitious ideas, and a bright attitude. This short horror story was such a treat to read and help her with! Her combination of real life influences and creative (and unnerving) fiction creates an immersive story that makes your hair stand up! It's been such an honor to hear her thoughts and be a part of her writing journey this semester.

—Lilah

Red Bridge

The bitter wind met me and my friends at the exit of the dorm hall and I pulled Jon close, hooking my arm through his as we walked to the parking lot. Hans stuffed his hands in his pockets and hunched against the wind, chatting with Gavin. The snow on the ground had started to look brown as winter grew old and tired. Ariana stepped on the scarce patches of ice gathered along the edges of the sidewalk, making crunching noises with each step. A truck drove past and called something out their window to us. The wind swept their words away, and I didn't hear what they had to say.

We all filed into Hans's truck. He cranked up the country music and sang loudly to it until we joined in and Gavin practiced his fake country-singer accent. Ariana and I exchanged smiles as we accelerated onto the interstate. The vehicle slowly warmed up to a comfortable temperature that finally let me appreciate the late winter view that passed outside the windows. Some snow clung to the sparse branches or laid in clumps in the ditches. On the lonely country roads, Hans sped up so fast that Jon told him to take it easy. He switched off his headlights and drove for a moment in a darkness so complete my breath caught in my throat and all the horrors of what might happen in those three seconds filled my vision. The moment lasted forever, but the lights came on again, and when I saw Ariana's uneasy face, I laughed and cast my worries aside.

Hans handed Gavin his phone. "Play some white girl music."

"It is his specialty," I agreed.

"Turn right?" Hans asked, already turning the wheel.

"Straight," Gavin said, and Hans swerved. We were all thrown into each other's laps in the back seat as *I Love it* by Charli XCX started playing and the words blared in our ears.

We all yelled the lyrics. "*I got this feeling on the summer day when you were gone... I crashed my car into the bridge, I watched, I let it burn.*"

We passed an old school house with a graveyard behind it. It looked like it was deserted years ago and we all turned our heads to watch it go past. The little town we entered was dark. There were no warm lights in the windows of the old homes, no glowing street lamps, and no cars on the street to fill the road with their lights like two yellow eyes, watching. Even the moon had abandoned us.

"Straight here," Gavin directed.

"A dead end?" I asked, staring at the yellow sign, and Ariana shrugged.

Ahead, a small bridge with short red guardrails rested over the frozen river that separated the town from the forest. The bare branches of the trees were tangled spider webs over the

road.

“A bride on her wedding night crashed her car here and went o the bridge,” Gavin said, but I remembered the story.

We started to roll slowly over the red bridge. I heard the crunch of the tires over the road and felt the vehicle humming beneath me. I saw Hans’s eyes widen in the rearview mirror. The truck jerked to a stop in the middle of the bridge and my seatbelt locked against my chest. “I thought I saw someone behind us,” Hans whispered.

“You did not.” Ariana insisted quickly.

Before I could warn him to keep the car running, he turned the key and the engine went quiet. I clamped my mouth shut. Everything was quiet. We all sat there, listening for nothing

“If your car is on the bridge at midnight, she will appear in your rearview mirror, and the car won’t start back up,” I murmured to Jon who looked sideways at me with half a grin that told me he didn’t believe it any more than I did. “It was probably a deer or something.” I offered as an explanation.

Hans shook his head and his door opened with a rusty groan that made me flinch. Everyone followed him out of the truck, including me, and suddenly I was weighed down by an awful feeling in my gut that I tried to ignore.

“Look at the stars, babe,” Jon said quietly. I could hear the smile in his voice, and his breath made a cloud in front of him.

The stars were so bright on such a cold, clear night, but I could hardly appreciate them. “Beautiful, yeah. Maybe we should go,” I said, gently tugging him back to the truck.

“In a minute. Look at me,” he said, and I did, “I’ve got you.”

I nodded and smiled. It was too dark. There was barely a reflection on the river. I walked to the red rails on the side of the bridge and ran my hand along its cold surface. This part of the bridge was newer with a fresh coat of blood red paint.

“Hello?” Hans called, startling me. A hollow echo followed.

I looked around and squinted to see Jon, Gavin, Ariana, and Hans, though they were all within feet of me. Their faces were turned toward the sky to admire the constellations, then all of our heads snapped toward the noise at the end of the bridge in unison. It was the quietest noise, and easily dismissable, but it made my skin crawl like a hundred tiny spiders. No one spoke. I shrieked when the noise got closer. It reminded me of someone tiptoeing, trying to be so quiet.

I bolted for the truck and paused only briefly to throw open the door. Seconds later, I heard another scream and the doors all opened. They scrambled over each other to get into their seats. My eyes stung with fear. I slammed my hands on the back of Hans’s seat. “Go! Drive!”

The key was in the ignition and he was turning it frantically, but it only made a sputtering, failing sound that drained the color from my face. Jon and Ariana locked their doors as Gavin said he swore those were footsteps. Everyone was saying something, talking loudly over one another. The “white girl” music came back on but it was slow and loud and nearly taken over by static. I clenched my teeth as that heavy, suffocating feeling of dread settled over me. It was like I was buried under a foot of cold, cold snow that melted away when Jon locked his hand with mine. I met his steady gaze and pressed my lips into a tight smile that was torn o my face when something banged into the back window, right behind my head. I screamed and ducked. When

I looked behind me, there was a bloody handprint smeared across the glass.

The story of the Red Bridge must be true: the ghost appearing in the rearview mirror, the vehicle not starting, the handprints.... and I knew what was coming next. I glanced out the window to my left, past Jon, to the repainted bridge and the ice below.

“We have to get out, now!” I yelled over the chaos. No one seemed to hear me. The phone to my right was ringing, and then Ariana was on the phone with a 911 operator. Hans and Gavin were yelling in the front seat. I reached over Jon to open the door but, even unlocked, I couldn’t open it. “GET OUT! EVERYONE! Please,” I begged, tears blurring my vision, shaking the door handle furiously.

The vehicle started to move, and I gasped, hopeful. The truck wasn’t on. I twisted in my seat to see it standing behind us. The long white dress would have been beautiful if it weren’t for the broken figure beneath. Its skin glistened with glass shards and dripped with blood and river water. Like headlights of a car, the eyes beneath the veil were bright and round with an expression that may have once been fear. She placed her hands on the back of the truck and pushed. It started to move slowly toward the bridge and Gavin kept repeating, “no, no, no, no.” But we could do nothing to stop it, could not escape. Hans kept turning the key until it snapped in half. Jon hit the window and yelled, “Translucent asshole!” The truck moved steadily until it ran into the guardrails on the side of the bridge. They creaked and squealed as they bent. I pressed my palms against my ears and squeezed my eyes shut tight. The red rails broke and the metal scraped against the sides of the truck with a screech.

I felt weightless for a moment.

The windshield erupted with white lightning when we broke through the ice and we all flew forward in our seats. Someone screamed, and maybe it was me, but I braced myself, the truck standing on its nose in the water. My head spun. Leaks sprouted in the cracks of the window, water started bleeding from the gaps around the doors and Ariana pulled frantically on the handle while Jon started to kick at the door to my left. “My fucking truck!” Hans yelled, slamming a fist on his steering wheel. Everyone was trying to escape, but I sat there for a moment, stunned. I turned around to bang on the back window, but stopped. Through the thin layer of water that washed away the handprint on the back window, I could see up. Up to the sky, to see the blurry lights of the stars dancing. And there, on the bridge, was the ghost. It peered down at us, almost curiously, its hands clasped behind her back as if it had nothing to do with the incident.

The current pushed the truck and it started to fall over, upside down. I lowered my fist, watching the water rush in. Instead, I grabbed Jon by the shoulders and turned him to face me. His eyes, so wide, met mine. I pulled him close to me in a final embrace as the world started to go upside down and the water was rising. The scream rose in my throat but I choked it down and dug my nails into Jon’s clothes, letting my tears fall against his neck. I heard Ariana calling her mom while Hans cursed the ghost with the most horrible words I had ever heard to the beat of his foot against the window and Gavin was rocking back and forth, holding himself upright, mumbling something or crying. The water made this horrible gurgling, bubbling noise as it pooled at my feet. Jon and I awkwardly tried to brace ourselves in the nearly upside down truck as we hugged. I felt Jon’s body heaving with sobs, and I pulled away from him to wipe the tears from his face even as my own tears warmed mine. I tried to say something hopeful, but it wouldn’t come out.

I put my lips close to Jon's ear and whispered, for whispering was all I could manage, "I'm so lucky I found you." Because that was all I was certain of at that moment.

I hoped that when the police fished our bodies out of the water, I would still be holding onto him. I hoped the cold eyes of our phantom killer remember us as well as she remembers her anger from the night she died on that bridge. At least then something out there would remember us—isn't that what everyone wants? Something that will be here longer than humanity itself, forever waiting for victims to fall neatly into its trap: a spider waiting patiently on its web.

But we were merely flies.

CASEY CASHMAN

Since the very first meeting, Casey has been full of super creative storytelling ideas. Despite their demanding schedule, they show up each week with well-written and thought-out additions to an ongoing story. They always appear genuinely excited and passionate about their ideas. It's fascinating to see their ideas come to life each week!

—Josh

To The Letter

Hark, young dreamer of this dream,
Fear not, and stay your heart.
I come in peace, a messenger,
With wisdom to impart.

Now, young dreamer, listen well,
The tale I tell is true.
And should you heed its warnings well,
My fate won't fall to you.

A beast revealed itself to me,
One night within a dream.
It pulled its sodden, rotted corpse
From deep within a stream.

"Young dreamer," said the beast to me,
Its voice the hiss of reed,
"Come closer, I've a wish to grant,
If but my words you heed."

Slowly, I approached the beast,
Unsure if I believed.
Yet even so, I must admit,
I felt a bit intrigued.

It spoke to me as I drew near,
"A wise choice you have made.
Yes, you can wish for anything,
All for a simple trade.

A single day's exchange of fate
Is all I ask you for.
For a wish, you'll live one less,

While I shall live one more."

My heart began to flutter then;
I thought about the deal.
It sounded too good to be true,
But what if it was real?

I asked, "If you can truly grant
Whatever wish I make,
Why only ask a day from me?
Why limit what you take?"

The beast, it chuckled, long and low,
Its laughter shook the ground.
It gazed upon my mortal form
With eyes from all around.

"It's true that I could ask
For whatever I see fit.
Once, long ago I did,
But long ago I quit."

A plan took shape within my mind,
My doubts all fell away.
Excitement filled my heart then,
For I knew just what to say.

"If you speak the truth,
And there's no limits as you claim,
Your power sounds the best to me.
I want one just the same."

The beast, it laughed then, loud and full,

The sound like breaking stones.
Its lungs wheezed weakly, shook and
 gaspd,
Behind its barren bones.

“You’re sure that this is what you want?”
It looked at me askance.
“I advise you think it through,
You’ll have no second chance.”

“I’m sure!” I said, “I’ll use it well,
More well than you now do.
You may bind yourself with rules,
But don’t think I will too.”

“Very well,” was its reply,
Still humor in its voice.
It grinned with teeth in countless mouths,
All mocking of my choice.

“There’s one more thing that you should
 know,
If you’re to use it better.
Be warned that any deal you make
Will bind you to the letter.”

Beast and dream alike, with that,
Began to fade away,
And then with one last echoed laugh,
I woke to breaking day.

LOGAN CHARLES

Logan has been an absolute joy to work with. Every session I am impressed by his ability to turn his poems into visual works of art when he plays with formatting. In a world that is increasingly stressful and scary, Logan has skillfully captured the fears, anxieties, sadness, and anger with his powerful words. When I see something in the news, I catch myself thinking 'Logan is going to write something incredible about this.' Simultaneously, Logan has the ability to write poems that capture the soft, joyful, and loving side of humanity. Logan is such a powerful writer, and I am glad that I got to learn poetry from him.

—Lilah

survival has NO cost
i will never blame the animal
for its bite
it's only doing what it is demanded of it
pushed to its limits its' no wonder
why violence has become a necessity
and when violence
becomes survival

propagate

they'll call him an alien
before they call him ~~by his name~~

they'll call him an alien
unaware of what survival really looks like

they'll call him an alien
as he grows contributing to a country that hates him

they'll call him an alien
to separate humans into categories

they'll call him an alien
and be unsurprised when violence on him is afflicted

they'll call him an alien
and when he has always lived here and unaware of a different life

they'll call him an alien
until people have killed him and his people

and the alien has shifted to the

Next ~~Group~~ batch

Hypocrisy

Are we Great?

Removing Navajo
leaders and decoders from the Pentagon

Are we Great?

Allowing children to starve
while billionaires gorge themselves

Are we Great?

Defunding cancer research
while tokenizing a child cancer survivor

Are we Great?

Now that the stock market crashes
and a recession looms

Are we Great?

Stabbing our allies in the back
and allying with wannabe dictators

Are we Great?

Now that theres no penalties for Government
buildings to allow sergregation

Are we Great?

After establishing the Trans community as an other
and trying to rewrite our histories

Are we Great?

When public land no longer remains in the hands
of the public but now serves as firewood for oligarchs

Are we Great?

Now that SHIT can flood
drinking water because 5 people ruled so

Are we Great?

Now that we're trying to kill education
actively harming progression of America for decades to come

Are we Great?

Now that food prices continue to skyrocket
as the amount of income stagnates

Are we Great?

When Nazis promote hate on the wide screen
and then try to sell us cars and rockets after

Are we Great?

If the Greatness was never
for the American

People

iron Caged bird

Styled after Craig Santos Perez

Dedicated to the victims of mass deportation. Nobody is illegal on stolen land.

salt submerges the wisconsin floor
as the iron Caged bird
plumets to rest at a tent where fertile land is abundant
please stay in the iron Caged bird

i assure you that
you're not the ones caged
it's the twigs
who sprawl across the floor

while shivering in ambivalence
instead of uniting in a blaze

because they experience it together
the cold
but cold
isn't enough to alarm them

just

stay
in
the iron Caged
bird
Twigs
will sprout
as more sunlight

dances

Leaves of
Certa
inty will blossom
in
the sea
son
coming
ju st
Please
stay
in
the

iron
Caged
Bird

NO NOT YET

light is just above the horizon
just cling to the walls of the iron caged bird
till knuckles are white as snow,
till the light showcases the tents shadow,
of orange tapestry, concealing
the stars
the stripes
the free.
you're so close to heaven
just please don't leave
the
iron CAGED bird.
don't allow yourself
to be blinded by the
camo and the foreign
tempting tongue of the
leaves

just:: stay:: in the:: Caged bird

sunlight:: begs:: of it

I:: beg:: of it

you need::

it::

Sending Migrants to Guantánamo Bay Is a Costly, Abusive Shift in Immigration Detention

Posted by Chris Opila | Feb 7, 2025 | Abuses, Detention, Enforcement



Lavender

Lavender

patches live in blazes

after the scorched earth sears

the land lavender patches remain.

Lavender patches under threats of chemicals

try to exterminate Lavender patches but still

Lavender patches remain.

Lavender patches, their tears get

stolen and placed into soaps on kiosks

and still Lavender patches remain.

As water washes the Lavender,

so now is the water Lavender,

As the tears became skin care,

so now is the skin Lavender,

As the skin is *mine*,

now I am Lavender,

As my skin touches the pen,

so now is the ink Lavender,

As the ink fondles the page,

so now is the writing Lavender,

As the writing is Lavender,

so now readers realize they are Lavender,

As more Lavender blooms,

Now everything is Lavender,

Which means

it can no longer be exterminated.

REILLY CROUS

* Here I go standing on my soap box to talk about Reilly one last time :) * Reilly has been such an inspiration to me as a tutor, student manager, writer, and overall human. Their dedication to everything they do, especially their own work and the TLC, has motivated me each and every day to become more like them. If I could gain just a little bit of Reilly, I could be a little bit more. I truly think Reilly is destined for great things, and I'm excited that I get to say they were one of my best friends in college (when I finally go to ask for an autograph, of course). <3
—Katie

loving, breaking, loving again

I love you, my favorite holiday, my biggest celebration
I love you loudly, with myself, yourself, the world
I love you, my persistence, my peace, my candle
I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where
I love you indeterminately, as a facet of myself
I love you because I was born to love and you were born to hold
me, so close that I don't mind the banging of your heart, so close that
I think of home and run to you.

i am gone and quiet, i am something
that pops, my sizzling is heard from the operating room
i miss you, i miss
you, i miss you.

at the end of this

At the end of this,
all of this,
I didn't think.

The thought of you
swelled up
inside me
until my chest ached
and every breath felt
like homecoming,
dying,
or baptism.

I wondered: What's different?

The buzz of life
sounds like
horns,
sandpaper,
rushing water,
plastic,
heart monitors, and beating.

I heard the buzz and I wondered:
What has to give?

Because it's the end of this and
everything is changing.

It's the end of this and
everything is melting.

It's the end of this and
something

has to give—

I didn't think.

I didn't think.

oh—

NATALIE DAUTE

Natalie has been an excellent addition to the TLC! One of my favorites parts of the day is greeting her as she walks into the room with a smile and a cute outfit. Natalie brings so much joy to the TLC, and I'm so impressed by the positive energy she brings to tutoring. I have no doubt that she will continue to do incredible things!

—Reilly

that house

i can't see two feet in front of my face
all the "smoke and mirrors" and the belt on the back of the chair and flowers in the garden out
front and the dirt patch in the back and-

and the poor dog. he doesn't mean to, i can tell. he says he's sorry but he will not change and
it's not his fault and he's trapped in the bedroom he wants out he wants to be free but-

not by the kids!

the dog can't go by the kids, he will hurt them.

no let them play instead
with the knives and the chopped up body parts and burnings flags and tanks and hateful words
and-

"honey bunnies"

See the dust covered bible and the rosary on the nightstand and that rotting smell. of smoke, of
flesh, of amber bottles
and-

Jesus still loves you and-

i still love you

I have watched the tree in the yard grow old and bleed and it hurts me and-
and i can't (won't) stop loving it.

Known

On June 30th, you told me I reminded you of raspberries
And pink lemonade, almond milk, and sunrises.
And pink tulips. My favorite flower. But you already knew that.

On July 1st, I reminded you of more things.
Partly cloudy days, caterpillars, and yellow crayons.
And peanut butter cups. Your favorite candy. But you knew I'd remember that.

You continued your extensive list:
Haiku poems, sandcastles, and snowflakes.
And paper lanterns, like the ones in the movie that played during our first kiss.

But you didn't know that yet,
Because our first kiss was 217 days after you made that comparison.

The list didn't stop there.
I reminded you of candles, rope bridges, and pocket watches.
And stars. Like the ones we watched lying on the hill three years ago.

You couldn't stop listing,
Gardens, well-formatted essays, and lilac.
And old songs, like the one playing at the drive-in the first time I said, "I love you".

But you didn't know that.
Because I said "I love you" 312 days after you made the list.

You went on, listing more things I reminded you of
I'm not sure why I didn't recognize it then,
But I'm fully convinced of it now.

On July 30th, I started loving you.
It wasn't because of the sweet compliments or pretty comparisons.
It's because you saw it all, good and bad, in me.

The comparisons continued,
A total of 46, 46 ways you saw me and understood.
All the little things I thought no one noticed.

You told me once that you don't understand poetry:
That you don't really like writing.
And that's what makes this so much more special

That you wrote me a love poem 295 days before you said the words.

I think a small part of me knew it then,
Because I have always believe it to be true:

“To be loved is to be known”

DEZMOND DONNELLY

Dez is a writer so in-tune with emotion and style. Dez has worked very hard this semester to expand his horizons and refine his style; something I am so proud of him for. My hope for Dez is that he continues to write, as his stories of love and loss speak to anyone who has gone through heartache. Keep it up, Dez!

—Angel

When the Raindrops Fall

When the raindrops fall,
The prettiest flowers bloom,
The crops set their roots,
The trees bear their fruit,

When the raindrops fall,
The roads are flooded,
Homes are swept away,
Lives are drowned out,

When the raindrops fall,
Couples dance in the mist,
Kids jump in the puddles,
Babies feel drops on their nose,

When the raindrops fall,
Bunnies drown in their burrows,
The dogs outside freeze,
The birds won't flap their wings,

When the raindrops fall,
They fall to the ground,
They float to the clouds,
All over once more,

The raindrops fall

Those Days are Gone

Soft candlelight adorns the walls.
Scents of white lilies fill the air.
Shrieking from our youngest daughter
Sadness as they lower you to the ground.

I push you along the park trails,
We listen as the doves sing our song,
The young lovers pass us by,
We go back home for our last night.

Annabelle was born on that rainy day.
Joseph came home during the blizzard,
Life didn't always come easy for us,
But nothing was easier than loving you.

Your sprawling wedding dress,
I'd never seen you so beautiful.
I fell in love with you all over again.
I traded a ring for a life with you.

Our first date at the ice cream stand.
I kissed the caramel from your nose,
You whipped the chocolate from my chin.
Butterflies danced in my stomach.

We walked that road together every day.
The sparkles of your eyes took me over,
You were just here for the summer.
I was yours once you said hello.

I never believed in love.
My life was changed.

My Favorite Tree

The dewdrops fall from your soft leaves.
I breathe in your scent of freedom.
I shudder at the strong feelings inside,
The sensation within my chest grows.

What do I do with this feeling?
Do I chop you down to build a home?
Do I burn you to ashes?
Perhaps I water you and let you grow?

The possibilities are endless;
I am spoilt with choices.
My hand feels your rough bark,
My soul feels your potential.

Your blooming flowers in spring,
Your strength in summer,
Your beautiful colors in fall,
Your barrenness in winter.

The forester comes Thursday morning.
You are marked with orange paint.
By the evening, you're chopped to the ground.
End of day Friday you're a plank of wood.

You were perfection.
Why were you destroyed?
Was it something I did?
Or something I couldn't?

Am I Afraid?

The dark fills with fear.
Monsters, are in the dark.
I sleep with the lights on.
For my sun is gone.

I hate heights.
No rollercoasters.
Never climb trees.
Alone, at the peak.

Elevators are too cramped.
I take the stairs.
I don't explore caves.
Way too tight for me.

My first dog died.
The unknown was scary.
I remember when you died.
Now it's my turn.

To a better place,
One with no fears.

Sing to Me

Sing to me
Sing me to sleep
Sing your beautiful song

Sing once more
Sing our first night
Sing your beautiful song

Sing out your perfect sound
Sing it just for me
Sing your beautiful song

Sing from your heart
Sing one last time
Sing your beautiful song

ELISE FULMER

This is my second semester working with Elise, and I am so proud of her creative growth. She constantly surprises me with new, exciting ideas, and it is so fun to workshop them together. This submission is part of a larger screenplay that she hopes to complete in full. Elise is my learner, my roommate, and one of my best friends, and I am so proud of everything she's accomplished over the past four years. I have no doubt that she will go on to do amazing, incredible, fantastic, and truly epic things <3

—Reilly

Hitched

18 EXT. BENNY'S SEMI — DAY

18

At the end of the block, Celine and Bruce stand outside of a large white semi truck. It has a small logo on one of the truck's panels.

BENNY, a stocky individual with a full bushy beard in his late 30s steps out of the truck's cabin.

Bruce and Benny shake hands and then go in for brief hug.

BRUCE

How the hell have you been, buddy?

BENNY

Same old. Same old. Y'know.

They step back from each other. He notices Celine. He directs a confused glare at Bruce before leaning in to ask him a question.

BENNY (CONT'D)

(hushed)

Who's the girl?

Bruce doesn't lean back into Benny. He is standing up straight and responds out loud for Celine to hear.

BRUCE

She's a new friend of mine. We've got some errands to run in Seattle.

Benny steps back. This isn't the first time he's driven Bruce in his semi. But it is the first time he has brought a guest.

Benny turns his attention to Celine. He towers over her as he looks down at her. She can feel his breath on her.

BENNY

I don't usually take strangers on my truck. I can get you in a lot of trouble if my boss catches wind of this. You hear?

Celine cocks her head to look him in the eyes. She narrows her eyes on his.

CELINE

You won't even know I'm here.

Benny takes one step back.

BENNY

I stop when I stop. Ok? Nothing extra. Even when you need to piss.

He wags a finger in her face. Bruce puts a comforting hand on Celine's shoulder.

BRUCE

We get it Benny. We won't be any trouble.

Benny turns around and heads towards the cabin of the truck.

BENNY

I know you won't be any trouble, Bruce.

Benny enters the cabin and slams the door shut.

Celine turns to face Bruce. She grabs him by the arm and pulls him in close.

CELINE

(hushed)

Your "buddy" is gonna smuggle us in his truck

across the country?

Bruce looks around before answering her.

BRUCE

Look, I don't know what stick is up his ass.
But we won't have to talk to him for a while.
We won't be in the cabin.

Celine breaks eye contact with him.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

I'll talk to him, ok? I've never seen him act
like that before.

CELINE

I'm gonna go find a bathroom. As much as I want
to piss in his truck, I don't want to get into
anymore trouble.

Bruce lets out a little chuckle. He puts his hand
on her shoulder before she turns away.

BRUCE

Seriously, Celine. I'm going to talk to him.

Celine nods. She hands Bruce her backpack.

CELINE

Give me like five minutes. I'll even let you
time me.

They both share a laugh before Celine turns away to
find a bathroom. Bruce takes their bags and heads
towards the cabin.

19 INT. BENNY'S SEMI — NIGHT

19

Bruce and Celine are nestled between several
cardboard boxes. The inside of the truck is pitch
black. The truck moves with every bump in the road.
They are constantly jostled.

Celine leans against a stack of boxes with her eyes
closed. It is impossible to fall asleep with all
the noises and movement.

CELINE

Bruce?

Bruce is laying down perpendicular to her feet. He doesn't move. Celine sighs.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Bruce, are you awake?

He makes a soft murmur but does not get up. After a few moments Celine grows restless. She softly kicks Bruce. It finally brings him out of his slumber. He sits up and is unbelievably groggy.

BRUCE

Everything ok?

CELINE

Yeah, I just can't fall asleep.

He rubs his eyes.

BRUCE

It definitely takes some getting used to.

CELINE

How many times have you done this?

Bruce runs his fingers through his hair. He cocks his head when he realizes that he can't come up with an exact answer. He chuckles a little bit.

BRUCE

I think I've actually lost count.

CELINE

You seem a little old to be sleeping on the floor all the time.

Bruce shifts to sit next to Celine.

BRUCE

Well, it's better than having a car payment.

Celine laughs under her breath.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

What?

Celine shakes her head.

CELINE

You can't make fun of me.

Bruce shrugs.

BRUCE

We've made it this far.

CELINE

I don't know how money works.

BRUCE

What do you mean you don't know how money works?

Celine sighs.

CELINE

Like I don't know what things cost. I've never had a job. I've just existed.

Bruce is speechless. He can't fathom this sentiment. They sit in silence for several moments.

CELINE (CONT'D)

I never said I was proud of it.

BRUCE

I didn't say anything.

CELINE

Oh. Well I guess I just don't like pointed silence.

Bruce chuckles.

BRUCE

Oh, it's pointed now?

CELINE

I don't know it just feels wrong.

Bruce places his hand on Celine's knee.

BRUCE

Well, from what I've heard, it sounds like you've had a rough couple years.

Celine sighs.

CELINE

I guess that's one way to put it.

They sit in silence. After a couple beats, Celine rests her head on his shoulder.

Bruce glances at her without moving his body. He doesn't know how to react but he wants to savor it.

Celine fills the silence.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Do you know what time it is?

Bruce shakes his head and leans back.

BRUCE

I don't even know what day it is.

CELINE

Where is Benny dropping us off again?

BRUCE

I can't really say until he drops us off.

Celine nuzzles further into the crook of Bruce's neck. Bruce lets out a charged sigh. He tries to keep his focus straight but it is growing increasingly difficult.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

I'm hoping we'll make it to at least Iowa.

CELINE

Iowa sounds nice.

Bruce lets out a hardy laugh, causing Celine to sit upright.

BRUCE

It's just a bunch of corn and Republicans who claim they're moderates.

Celine insists on standing her ground.

CELINE

Well it's new to me.

Bruce turns to face Celine.

BRUCE

Alright, alright. Just don't get your hopes up.

Celine faces Bruce. She lets out a little laugh.

CELINE

Oh, I have mastered the art of not getting my hopes up.

Bruce leans in closer.

BRUCE

Yeah?

They are practically touching noses now.

CELINE

I mean, I am the one who has been in a loveless relationship for the past eight years.

They both laugh at this sentiment. They savor the levity. After it dies down, they look into each other's eyes. A slight smile emerges on Celine's face.

After a moment, Bruce places his hand on the back of Celine's head. Celine sharply inhales. He is embarrassed and drops his hand. He rubs the scruff on his chin and turns away from Celine.

Celine places her hand on his shoulder to turn him

back around. Without any hesitation, she pulls him back and places her arms around his neck. Bruce sharply exhales before finally going in for the kiss.

Celine immediately leans into it, as if she has been waiting forever for this to happen. They kiss for a few more beats before they briefly pull away.

BRUCE

Does this make me a homewrecker?

Celine leans her head back and cackles.

CELINE

I'm pretty sure I wrecked my own home.

They both share a laugh. Celine pulls Bruce back in and they kiss again. She leans into it. Bruce pulls her to sit on his lap. They continue to kiss.

FADE TO BLACK.

20 EXT. REST STOP — DAY

20

Bruce and Benny stand outside of a dingy rest stop. Celine is using the restroom. Bruce is catching Benny up on his escapades. Benny quickly looks around before speaking through gritted teeth.

BENNY

You fucked in my truck?

HUNTER GRAFF

Working with Hunter has been nothing short of an awesome, amazing, and enlightening experience. Hunter writes with and comes from a point of view where he thinks everything is a process, which makes tutoring him so fun. We talk shop about a variety of story and writing things every week we meet. Being able to watch the process of "The Statue of Old Ren Holly" has been such a cool journey, and I can't wait to see what Hunter does next!

—Katie

The Statue of Old Ren Holly

The statue was an old thing, left over from a time long in the past. It stood as the city's guardian, casting its ever-vigilant gaze over its people. It depicted a man, old Ren Holly. He had been the founder of the city, and the statue was brought up just after his death. The statue was made of smooth grey stone and was meticulously maintained through the years. At this time, by an old man named Ben. I met Ben when I was taking photos of the statue for my photography class. He went out of his way to show me all the best angles and when the lighting would be just right. Ben loved statues. More specifically, he loved what they stood for. He loved how they reminded us of the past, the challenges overcome, and battles won. There wasn't a single day that Ben wouldn't be tending to the statue as I passed by on my way to class. Each morning, he would be diligently working on some task, whether it be weeding the flowers at the statue's feet or shining its large stone boots. This day was no different, except that it would be a day to change my life. The day I met Aria.

* * *

It was the second week of September, and the morning sun cut through the shades on my window. The rays of sunlight reflected off the mirror on my wall and shined right onto my eyes. I rolled over and grabbed my phone to check the time, 7:45. Relieved, I set my phone down and rolled over. My alarm wouldn't go off until 6:00 so I had a bit longer to sleep. No, something about that didn't seem right. After a moment, realization cut through my drowsiness, and I threw myself out of bed. I was going to miss my first class if I didn't hurry. So, after throwing on yesterday's clothes, I left without even eating breakfast.

As I opened the door to my apartment, the cool breeze hit my face and took away any lingering tiredness. It was only a ten-minute walk to the university so I would be cutting it close, but I should make it if I hurried. I followed the same route to the university everyday: down 6th street, through the square and down 8th. It was the fastest way, and the most picturesque. With a brisk pace, I made my way down 6th until I reached the square. The square was a scenic spot in the city. It was home to many old stone buildings that gave the area its charm. A few trees grew in small patches of grass in the corners. At its center stood the statue of old Ren Holly, with its shiny grey surface catching the glint of sunlight at the right angle. As I approached the statue, I saw Ben gathering up his supplies.

He looked up at me and waved, "Morning Mr. Will," he said with a smile, "You're late today."

"Morning Ben, missed my alarm," I said, "I have to hurry."

Ben chuckled, "You know, something I learned: If you're late, you're late. Not much

difference between five minutes and twenty so don't go stressing over it."

I smiled at him. "Whatever you say old man, but I might still make it if I hurry."

I picked up the pace and jogged past Ben and the statue and turned towards 8th, feeling the breeze flow through my messy hair. But as I turned, I heard the sudden screeching of bike tires and a girl's voice.

"Look out!" she yelled.

It was too late to move, and she hit me, causing us both to fall to the ground.

"Watch where you're going asshole," she said. "My bad," I said. We sorted ourselves out and rose to our feet, noting just a couple of scrapes. "I'm late for class."

I recognized the girl. Her name was Aria, and we had our first class together. She always sat in front of me in the lecture hall. We had never talked to each other before, but I always thought she was pretty. But me being the quiet type, I knew I had no chance.

"Now we're both going to be late," Aria said, her dark blonde hair dancing in the breeze and glowing as it caught the morning sun.

I blushed, "Sorry."

"You should be," she scoffed, "It's all your fault."

Technically she hit me with a bike, but there was no use arguing, "Can I make it up to you, for getting in your way?"

She thought for a second before a small grin formed on her face, "Well, since we're going to be late already, you could buy me a drink from Rise, then I'll think about forgiving you."

"Deal."

Rise was a cafe near the university. It boasted the best coffee in the city and a soothing atmosphere desired by many. Natural light brightened the room. Various pieces of art created by the students filled its walls, and a variety of unique plants were scattered about. I bought us our favorite drinks, coffee with hazelnut cream for me, a chai latte for Aria and we found a table under a landscape painting I was quite fond of. We talked and discovered we had a lot in common. We both loved movies and hiking. We were both also graduating next year. I told her I was the president of the photography club in charge of publishing the student photo magazine, and she told me that she worked as an intern at an architectural company. She was determined to make it big as an architect while I had dreams of being a professional photographer with my own studio. The conversation flowed like a winding river, and we ended up talking for over an hour before we left.

"Besides being in my way, you're not too bad, Will," Aria said as we left the cafe.

"Sorry again," I replied.

She smiled, "You would be the one to apologize for getting hit by a bike. Honestly, I should be the one apologizing," There was a small spark in her eye. "Oh, I know," she grabbed her phone and handed it to me. "Give me your number," I typed my number into an empty contact and handed the phone back to her. "I'll call you sometime," she said, getting onto her bike.

"Y-yeah."

She smiled, then she rode away, leaving me standing outside of the cafe where I stood for a few minutes, wondering if I was dreaming.

She did call me, we went on a couple dates, and before I knew it, we were a proper couple. She began to wait for me in the mornings outside of my apartment and we would walk to our class together. Each time we went the same route: down 6th street, through the square and down 8th. Each morning Ben would be there tending to old Ren Holly, and this day was no different.

I was reading a text from Tyler, the vice president of the photography club, when I heard Ben's voice call to us.

"Morning Mr. Will," he said with a wave. "And Miss Aria."

We waved in return.

"Good morning, Ben," Aria replied.

I looked up at the statue, its surface was gleaming with fresh polish that gave it a pristine glow. The morning sun cast perfect shadows and highlighted the detailed craftsmanship of the stonework, "You really are incredible Ben. You do amazing work caring for this statue, and you never miss a single day, it's inspiring."

"Oh, you're too kind Mr. Will, you might even make an old man tear up," he said, wiping away invisible tears.

Aria was staring at the statue when she turned her gaze to Ben, "Excuse me Ben, but why do you care for the statue every day?" Aria asked.

Ben's face lit up, "That's a good one, you see, this statue is made of stone so you think it would be strong and durable, right?" he placed a hand on one of Ren Holly's large boots, "This stone is actually weak and brittle, and that's why they used it, because whoever made it was lazy and liked how easy it was to shape. Now, if it's not taken care of, it'll surely crack and crumble."

Ben continued his impassioned rambles as I looked at Tyler's text,

There's a ton of submissions this year. We need to meet more often.

I replied,

Ok.

The days slowly started to grow cold, and we regretted the fact that we hadn't gone hiking together. So, when we were blessed with one last warm day, you can bet we made the most of it. About an hour from the city there was a great trail that was one of Aria's favorites. I had never been there, so I was excited for a new experience.

My camera was my prized possession, a true top-of-the-line camera befitting a professional. My mother fully supported my dream of professional photography and gave me the camera as a gift before I went off to the university. I made sure to bring it on every hike I made.

When we arrived at the trail, I noticed Aria and I were dressed quite differently. She wore a tank top and leggings with her hair tied up while I wore a thin flannel, unbuttoned, and cargo shorts.

"You're hiking in that?" she asked.

I looked at her, slightly puzzled, "This is what I always wear hiking," I reached into the back of my old car and pulled out a small bag.

"Is that your camera?"

"Yeah, I heard this trail is beautiful so I'm sure I'll get some great pictures."

"Won't that be awkward and weigh you down?"

"It's not that heavy," I said, closing the car door, "Alright, you ready to go?"

We set out and it was even more beautiful than I imagined. I found a small patch of trilliums and admired the way their white petals caught the sunlight through the trees. We crossed a bridge over a stream, and I got a great picture of a handsome heron catching minnows near the shore. But my favorite picture of all, my crown jewel, was a picture of the gorgeous view from atop a bluff near the end of the trail. I could see the entire valley below and the stream that cut down its center, all cast in the late afternoon sun, and a hawk that I didn't see until I looked back at the picture. When we returned to the car, it looked like Aria was bothered by something.

"Are you alright?" I asked.

"I'm fine," she said, "We just hike differently. When I hike, it's sort of like a race," she looked at the camera bag I was setting in the back of the car, "I kept getting ahead of you while you took pictures."

"Well," I said, "When I hike, I like to take it slow and experience all the sights that nature offers, and take amazing pictures to remember the moments," I grabbed my camera from the bag and brought it over to her, "Look at these."

She quietly looked through photos and I noticed her eyes go wide, "All of this was on the trail? I had no idea,"

"It's all there if you know how to look, I can show you."

"I'd like that," she said, handing the camera back to me.

The sun was beginning to set and bathed the land in a warm orange glow when I got an idea.

"Come with me for a second," I grabbed her hand and led her to a spot I felt was right and put my arm around her, "Ready?" I asked, holding the camera towards us.

She smiled and I snapped a picture, my new crown jewel.

"My new wallpaper for my phone."

* * *

"The others are just better," Tyler said, "We just don't have the room for this."

We were in the club room at the university reviewing the submissions to the magazine and we were in the phase I dreaded the most, cuts. We had a string of long nights as the deadline for cuts was just a few days away. The other members had long since gone home for the night, but we needed to make sure everything got done on time.

"But I like it," I said, looking at the photo on my laptop. It was a photo of a little purple flower taken at a slightly odd angle. The angle alone was enough for Tyler to reject it, but I thought it gave the photo a unique charm.

Tyler sighed, "I know you do, but we can't accept every photo we get. We just don't have enough room in the magazine."

"I wish we could."

"Well, we can't, so let's make a decision so we can move on, we still have a lot to go."

"Fine, cut it."

"Great, next one,"

He pulled up the next photo on the laptop and started talking when I felt the buzz of my phone in my pocket. I pulled it out and saw it was a text from Aria,

Can we watch a movie tonight? It's been a while...

I felt a small ache in my chest. Of course I wanted to, I wanted to spend every moment

with her, but I was so busy. I couldn't just blow off my responsibilities with the club. I glanced up at Tyler, ranting about a photo of a little brown rabbit and started to reply. But before I could finish typing, Tyler interrupted me,

"Talking to your girlfriend again?" he asked, "I can't be the only one working on this, Will."

"Sorry, I'll focus," I put my phone back into my pocket where it buzzed again almost immediately. It hurt, but I ignored it and focused on the photos.

* * *

The looming thought of finals filled our minds with worry. Each morning Aria and I would walk to class, following the same route: down 6th street, through the square and down 8th. Each morning Ben would be there tending to old Ren Holly, but this day was different. Ben wasn't tending to the statue; he was nowhere to be seen. I figured something must have come up and he would be back tomorrow. But he wasn't there the next day, or the next day, or even the next.

On the fifth day, it was dark. Thick grey clouds threatened rain and cast the world in dreary darkness. As we passed the statue of old Ren Holly, we saw Ben's daughter Cassie, a woman of about forty, looking at the statue.

I waved, "Hey Cassie, how's Ben-" I stopped when I saw she had set a picture of Ben and a candle at the feet of the statue.

"Hello, Will," she said. She had the sunken look of as if she'd been crying, "I'm sorry to tell you but my father passed away earlier this week."

"Oh...I'm so sorry Cassie; I had no idea."

"It's alright," she feigned a weak smile. "He talked about you pretty often."

"Really?"

"Every time I would drop off his medication, he would mention how you always greeted him every morning," she reached into her purse, pulled out a card, and handed it to me. "The funeral is this weekend; we would love to have you both."

"Yeah, of course. Thank you," I said, taking the card.

Cassie left and we sat on the bricks next to the statue for a while as I stared at the card. It was silent until Aria spoke.

"We're going to be late," she said, "Are you alright?"

"I don't know," I said, "I didn't feel much of anything, "I think I'm just going to go home."

"I'll go with you," she said, touching my hand.

I moved my hand away, "No, you shouldn't miss class just because I'm a little down," I said.

"But-"

I rose to my feet, "Tell the professor I won't be there."

* * *

Without Ben, our walks to class were more solemn. I never realized just how much his greetings had brightened our mornings. A couple of days after the funeral I began to feel like myself again, but as the semester neared its end, I became busier. I would spend at least three days every week meeting with the photography club and the others taking photos. The days I wasn't busy with the club, Aria was at her internship, so our time together dwindled until it was just our morning walks. This went on for the last two weeks of the semester until we had finally finished

the magazine and planned a release party to celebrate and show off our hard work. I was relieved, I could finally spend more time with Aria; we had plenty of movies to catch up on.

I was reading a text from Tyler as we walked through the square,

You ready for the release party tonight?

I replied,

Of course, I glanced over at Aria walking silently beside me. *Cool if I bring Aria?*

I turned my head to Aria, “You want to come to the magazine release party tonight?”

She said nothing.

“Is everything alright?”

She said nothing.

“Aria.”

Nothing.

“Aria!”

She stopped in place, “What?! Now you want to talk?!”

Her eyes were red as tears streamed down her face.

“Aria, what’s going on?” I reached out to grab her hand and she jerked it away.

“Don’t touch me!” she backed a few steps away, “You don’t act like you care,”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’ve obviously been stressed and upset,” she wiped her eyes, “And we barely see each other anymore,” her tears became stifled sobs that racked her body, “We don’t even talk anymore.”

Her sobs continued as I stood there, trying to find the right words to say, “I’m sorry, Aria. I had no idea,” I took a step toward her, “I’ll have more time now-” she backed away. I took another step; she backed away. We stood, the silence growing between us like a sea. As she cried, a gentle snow began to fall, the first of the year. Snowflakes landed in her dark blonde hair.

The silence stretched until she spoke again, “Leave me alone Will,” she turned and ran towards the university, leaving me standing in the snowfall.

I felt my phone buzz and looked at it, Tyler’s message blocking our eyes on my wallpaper,

Of course you can bring her!

I clenched my jaw and threw my phone as hard as I could. It flew right past the statue of old Ren Holly and hit the ground, filling the square with a loud crack. I stood in the snow, feeling flakes hit my face and melt. Just me and old Ren Holly who, after the cold November rains and freezes, had begun to show signs of neglect as cracks riddled his surface.

* * *

On the final day of the semester, I walked to class. The snow continued and blanketed the city in brilliant white. A gentle breeze flowed through my messy hair, biting at my ears as I followed my usual route: down 6th street, through the square and down 8th, always the same. Each morning the square would be shrouded in a delicate silence. And this day was no different. Except as I walked through the square, I passed the statue of old Ren Holly. His weakened head had broken, fallen, and laid at his own feet.

RAVYN GROSSE

Ravyn was the first English 57' learner I had as a new tutor and she was an absolute pleasure to work alongside with all semester long. Much of our sessions focused on taking the strong focal points she had in her writing and expanding those thoughts, adding context and tone. She brought tons of creative pieces to our sessions, delivering her passion of reptiles, nature, and thought-provoking ideas in a rich and creative way! I hope you enjoy her writing as much as I did this semester.

—Ben

Moonlit Walk

I always enjoyed going on lone walks during the night. The streets and sidewalks were much less crowded, the air cooler, and the lack of noise helped me relax in comparison to my loud, sweltering factory job. Usually, I never dared stray too far from the streetlights, the fear of being abducted grained into my soul by my mother. Tonight was different, though. It had been especially stressful at work, and I felt the need to bask in the nothingness that was the dark woods that stretched out behind my home.

Going against what I had been taught, I ventured down a gravel path that snaked between the trees. After what felt like a mere twenty minutes, I reached an area deep into the woods where not even the light pollution of the city reached me. Nearby was a creek I wasn't aware existed, with an old tree stump covered in moss and fungi near the edge. I sat down and basked in the glow of the stars, smiling to myself when I spotted a constellation. The stars were something I rarely saw while living in an urban community, and I adored those out-of-reach balls of fire sprinkled across the sky. I closed my eyes, listening to the sound of the running water, rustling leaves, twigs snapping, and what sounded like... breathing?

My eyes snapped open as I became aware of just how secluded I was out here. Moonlight bounced off the rushing waters surface, accentuating nothing. I pointlessly scan my surroundings. I didn't think to grab a flashlight before I left, and not having one was only making me more anxious. Maybe I'm just being paranoid? Then too, maybe I'm not.

I stand and turn toward the trees and squint, trying to identify anything out of the ordinary. I begin walking back down the path, painfully aware of every sound the trees echo back my way; the leaves rustling, and gravel crunching beneath feet.

Crunch. Crunch. Those aren't my footsteps, are they? I stop in the middle of the trail, straining my ears to hear something. Anything.

Crunch. Yep, definitely not mine, and I'm not dumb enough to hang around and find out who they belong to. I take off at a dead sprint, not wasting any time getting away from whatever, or *whoever* was following me.

I heard shoes slide on gravel followed by a crash as they fell. "Fuck!" a male voice shouts out behind me. Guess I caught them off guard.

God, how far did I walk? My calves sting and lungs burn as I barely avoid getting a face full of tree bark. I can still hear the footsteps behind me, also running, chasing me, getting closer. *Shit, shit, shit!* I slip, rocks piercing my palms and knees as I hit the gravel, hard. I don't have time to bask in the pain as I push myself up and keep running, almost falling a second time. My legs feel so heavy.

I hear a twig I passed only two paces ago snap as they stomp on it, closer yet. Panic begins to set in, and my airway starts to feel like it's constricting, my wheezing becoming audible as tears begin to blur my vision. *Damn asthma!* Somehow, I push myself to go faster, my feet feeling like bricks as they hit the earth. The bright moonlight nearly blinds me as I suddenly burst out into the field separating my humble abode from the cursed woods.

In record time, I reached my glass patio doors, swiftly unlocking them and stepping inside. I turn and am barely able to lock them again as I fall to the floor, my legs giving out as I gulp down as much air as my lungs will allow.

Once I've somewhat caught my breath, I look up from the floor to see a tall, wide human silhouette standing in the trail head. We stare back at each other, neither being able to make out any features. They didn't turn away as they backed into the woods, disappearing from my view. I look back down at the floor, the cold sweat sending a shiver down my spine.

Winter

I shiver as the wind blows through the trees; a sign autumn is coming to an end and winter is approaching. Brown, decaying leaves crunch below my shoes, any greenery that remains barely visible through the leaf layer. The insects that once bounced off logs, emitting a low hum as they traversed the forest floor, now hide in the underbrush, out of sight and without a sound. The rhythmic songs of frogs and scurrying of snakes dissipate as their cold-blooded nature slows, hiding in their burrows, ready for brumation. The forest above me no longer traps the remaining heat as the once lively canopy lays scattered on the ground. Squirrel nests become visible in the bare branches, their occupants wandering the forest floor in search of food to store. Large snowflakes begin to fall all around me, melting into my sweater and causing a chill. How much snow will we get this year, I wonder, as memories of snow forts and sledding down large hills flicker through my mind. The crunch of the leaves becomes less as the snow gets heavier, the ground slowly becoming coated in a soft, white blanket. With my nose and fingers red, and my breath visible in the dry air, I turn back towards home, ready to be swallowed by the warmth of a fireplace.

Cold air freezes my nose
as the snow begins to fall
and winter comes forth.

I Live in a Balloon

I live in a balloon
My prison made of rubber
Don't pop it though
Or else I will falter

My balloon is my safety
And yet it is my jail
I once tried to leave it
But I started to wail

Then came along
A woman so nice
She came to me and said
That she had some advice

Leaving my balloon
Isn't so scary
But I wasn't so sure
And still felt quite wary

She smiled as she reached in
Taking my hand
She pulled me from my balloon
Into this bright and new land

Now I call her "best friend"
Of which we both stand proud
For without her here
I'd still be balloon-bound

KYRA HAGEN

Based on her sessions, you would never guess that Kyra is a new tutor. She goes above and beyond in everything that she does, and I deeply admire all of the work she does in every aspect of her life. Kyra is also one of my favorite poets, and I feel so lucky to be able to read her work. I know she'll do amazing things in the future!

—Reilly

transubstantiation

i've been trying to relearn grief
retrace its steps
across the ungrowth of unfettered cries
which don't quite fit in a backpack

or anywhere, really

or, in the crook of your arm
where you sit with her still

and brush soft strokes down her wet cheeks
let her shriek into your chest

melt your hearts into one molten pair of wings
let the flesh of her spirit
hold you tightly,
your heart and your horses

STEPH HEFTER

Stephanie is an amazing writer, and I'm so honored to have had the opportunity to work with her this semester. She's brought in so many beautiful and powerful poems and is now sharing two of them with the world! Throughout this semester, she has been working so hard and constantly blows me away with her work. I'm excited to see where she goes after this semester.

—Kacey

Work Force Slaughter

I'M SORRY.

I'VE RIPPED OUT YOUR EYES, FOR YOUR SHAME CAUSED RIVERS .

I SEALED YOUR LIPS BECAUSE YOUR LAUGHTER BROUGHT VULNERABILITY AND TIDAL WAVES TO MY
SUMMERS DAY.

I TORE YOUR EARS , FOR THE SOUNDS I HEAR WOULD CAUSE YOU EXTREME PAIN.

YOUR HOLLOW SOCKETS STARED DEEPLY AND I KNEW I CAME TO REGRET THIS.

THE SOCKETS BECAME LIKE A DREARY AND COLD ABYSS AND I FELT MY HEART DROWN.

YOU'VE RIPPED YOUR STITCHES AND BEGAN TO KICK AND SCREAM EVEN SLAM AGAINST YOUR RESTRAINTS.

WOULD YOU ACCEPT WHAT WE'VE BECOME?

I'VE FORGOTTEN OUR BELOVED JOY.

BUT I HAVE NO TIME TO WASTE BECAUSE I HAVE TO BURY YOU.

I'VE PLANNED THIS ALL OUT DOWN TO THE CHOPPING LIMB FROM LIMB.

I BEGAN TO CRACK YOUR RIBS OPEN AND PLUNGED MY HAND INTO YOUR CHEST.

I GRASPED FIRMLY TO YOUR WEEPING HEART.

I FELT YOUR HEART THUMP BETWEEN MY FINGERS TIPS AND

I SQUEEZED TIGHTLY, WHILE YOUR HEART OOZED.

THEN YOU BEGAN TO RATTLED OFF YOUR LAST EXHALE.

I STORED EACH LIMB AND BURIED THEM DEEP.

I LOWERED YOU DOWN AND SOMEHOW I STILL FELT YOUR PRESENCE.

LIKE THOSE DAMN HOLLOW SOCKETS STARING THROUGH ITS CASES.

LIKE THE WALKING DEAD ,YOU'VE RISEN TO TAUNT ME ONCE MORE .

YOU LOOKED THE SAME AND THERE WAS NO TRACE OF MY CRIME.

WHY WAS THIS NOT FINAL?

I CAN'T LIVE WITH YOU OR WE WILL BOTH DIE.

DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?

THERE IS NO ROOM FOR YOU IN THIS LIFE, NOT ANYMORE YOU SERVED ITS PURPOSE.

YOU BEGAN TO SMILE AND THE MEMORIES BEGAN FLOODING BACK AND RATHER SEEING YOUR ANGER OR SADNESS, YOU HUGGED ME.

I CHILLINGLY ACCEPTED MY FATE AND ALLOWED MYSELF TO SMILE ONCE MORE.

The transformation from child to adult is a confusing one and while I lowered you down into the dirt I realized I was wrong to suppress you and I allowed work to consume me again. I thought I needed to abandon you in order to survive but I became as hollow as those taunting sockets. I allowed a workforce slaughter without even realizing it.

“Transactional Benefits.”

Over and over, I have given more of myself to others. I've begun to question if I'm nothing more than a paycheck or another body they can claim and show as a trophy.

These past scars have hardened my trust and stolen the color from my heart. I have tried to paint over the scars, but my eyes have seen through its attempts.

Too many times, I've allowed my heart to inhale intoxicated fumes and poison the controls. As these fumes blind me, I begin to let others use me for their own gain. I long for a simple connection yet this transaction seems to only deal in benefits.

I'm beginning to wonder if I'm broken or if a simple friendship and relationship is nothing but fiction. To me a best friend sounds like a myth. I've allowed my head to be filled with these delusions of prince charming or best friends that I try putting my heart out only for it to be grinded into tiny pieces.

Do not get me wrong I enjoy the quiet and the empty however my human nature clings on to its sociable nature. It longs for attachments, yet my brain argues against forming such bonds. I feel at ease in the empty yet there is this nagging pain within my own silences.

Humans sing and write and even create these relationships through multiple forms and yet I feel like a slab of meat or an ATM whenever they're in need. Somehow, I've molded into the caregiver at a young age and even now I can't escape it. I'm the one that pays for your laughter and I'm always paying for your empty stomach. I do not mind being your shoulder to lean on but when I need someone to lean on, they're gone and all I can do is cry with my shadow. I want to be more than someone's benefit I want to be treated more than another conquest or an open wallet for their needs. Is this selfish maybe but I'm starting to feel like garbage, and I need to eventually clean out the rot.

JAZMYNE JOHNSON

I feel so lucky to have gotten closer to Jazmyne over the past year. They never fail to make me smile, even when we're moping about all of the assignments we don't understand or want to do. But we mope together! Jazmyne's writing and tutoring is always impressive, and I'm so proud of everything they've done this semester. I'm so sad to leave them, but thank god the Internet exists! I have full confidence that they will continue to grow and accomplish amazing things :D

—Reilly

To the Drinks I've Known Before

Dear Beer,

You've probably been in my life the longest. You were always grandpa and mom's drink of choice, and in a place with as many breweries as Wisconsin, that's saying something. You seem tough and sturdy like everyone who seems to drink you; reliable and always there no matter the occasion. At this point, you're practically an honorary member of the family. You roll up on your motorcycle and ruffle my hair and tell me you remember when I was just "this big" like I'm supposed to have any idea who you are.

Can I be straight with you? I don't know what hops are and I don't understand how grains get turned into a transparent liquid, but people love you, so you must be doing something right. Keep it up, I guess. According to the world wide web, there's a whole spectrum of different drinks that fall under the umbrella of "beer". Amazing! Have I been stereotyping you? I didn't realize the autumn leaf colored multitudes you had hidden within you. Why couldn't you have made *that* a topic of conversation at the family reunion?

Beer, let's real talk. I hate it when you pull pranks and say you're empty when you're not and it results in my hands getting all sticky. I know you always think it's funny because I see you laugh until your face turns red and you're gripping your sides but try walking a mile in my shoes and then we'll see who's laughing. Is it just because we're from different times? Maybe we've just got different senses of humor.

I'll be cordial next time I see you since everyone else thinks you're so great, but don't be surprised if you catch me side-eying you from across the room.

See you then,

Jazmyne

Dear Wine,

We've never really spent much time together. I hope this message finds you well anyway. Are you having a good time hanging out with all the moms who make it a point that you're their best friend? Do you get tired of being relied on by so many people to get through the day? I've heard about you in passing, but I've only ever met your cousin Champagne. She's kind of fun and bubbly, I guess. Like the grape juice I'm told you're sort of like, not as mature. Maybe everyone who's said that has only ever seen your baby photos and it's painting a false representation of you.

You're a refined lady, Wine. People have a lot of respect for you. I can tell why. You pair well with so many things. You're a classy woman in a long dress and sharp lipstick that everyone stares at when you walk into the room. Elegance. Poise. Wealth. A lot of wealth, actually. Do you ever feel like your legacy is more than you can handle?

How does it feel to hate your twin sister who's been forced to live life in a box? Have you ever considered doing anything to help her out and make things a bit more equitable between you? Sorry, that's probably an impolite thing to ask. I'm sure you're very charitable. She *does* seem like she could be more my speed, if the time was right. More down to earth. Is it rude to ask you for her number? I only have the best of intentions, I swear.

I await your response.

Jazmyne

Dear Point Milkshake Malt Porter,

You SCOUNDREL! You tricked me, lured me in with your cute vintage packaging and promises of things like "chocolate aroma" and "creamy mouthfeel" at a time I was most vulnerable, and you didn't even hesitate to throw it all away after. How dare you?!

I know what you really are. You should really stop trying to open up, stay in your lane, and know your place. You can put as much vintage clipart and candy-cane colored advertisement as you want on your can, but on the inside, you're still as rotten as they come. It's not cool to catfish people, but this is probably all going in one ear and out the other anyway, so why try explaining it to you?

You know what, Point Milkshake Malt Porter? You're going to sit and listen to what I have to say if only for me to have the chance to get this off my chest. You act like a nice guy and tempt people like you're willing to share a chocolate milkshake with two straws at a cute little '50s diner until you get them sat down and "accidentally" spill it all over them and make them pick up the check after. How do you sleep at night?

I'd like to say I believe you could go on a journey of self-improvement and change, but honestly, I'm not so sure. I'm not open to giving second chances when I've been hurt so deeply. You're really not my type anyway, and if you started seeing someone else, I feel like it wouldn't end well for the two of you, either. Or maybe you're both terrible and you'd be perfect for each other. In any case, I don't want to know.

Delete my number,

Jazmyne

Dear Margarita,

First thing's first, you are *not* like a slushie. I appreciate the effort you go through to appeal to people, how you present yourself, how you can appreciate the value of a good sweet/salty combo just like I can. Unfortunately, I can't give you a pass on your aftertaste, and I'm not so shy I can't let you know it this time. I suppose I can give you points for fruitiness. Keep it up.

You're someone with a sense of showmanship, and you're always two-for-one at my

favorite Mexican restaurant three days of the week. Do you feel like you've made it because you've got your very own special glass to be served in? How many people have you given a brain freeze? Maybe it's just part of the experience of "you".

I admire how tropical you are. You seem like someone who knows how to party and have a good time with how flashy you can be, but Margarita, if I'm honest, I'm really not so extroverted. I know, I know, "opposites attract", but I'm afraid this time I'm just going to have to give in to my inner hater and acknowledge that we're just not meant to be. You've been on the party circuit a lot longer than I have, and I think our personalities just aren't compatible enough for this to work long-term.

Sorry it has to be this way. Maybe I'm just being judgmental because I'm sick of the snow around here, and in another, more 80-degree life, we could make things work. Can we break this off like adults? It was just one night. I think that's all I needed. You won't even notice if I'm not around now, honest. There's fish in the tropical sea that would be more compatible with you

Cheers,

Jazmyne

Dear Tom and Jerry,

I haven't seen you for a couple Christmases, so I hope you're doing okay. I know things left on a bit of an awkward note between us, and I *know* you know that I only act the way I do around you to be polite and keep things civil for the holidays since other people are always around.

Let's cut to the chase: you're better without the alcohol. Let's say "better" in quotes, because at the end of the day you're really still just eggnog with cinnamon. Have you tried milk instead? You sit under a blanket of foam and froth just to strike with your aftertaste at the end. It's just that I don't think you're the most pleasant when alcohol gets involved. You're a bit two-faced. You're on your way to becoming a real Point Milkshake Malt Porter if you're not careful.

I think that might have come across as a little too harsh, sorry. You still have room to grow, and at least you're not pretending to be something you're not. I can respect that. Maybe I'm being too cynical.

I guess it's just a matter of knowing what's good in moderation, you know? It's not like I'm telling you to cut yourself off or anything, that'd be unrealistic. I don't want to seem too controlling. You're totally free to add a little spice to your holiday with a splash of rum or whatever if it helps you loosen up, just... be kind of mindful around me, if you can. Is that too much to ask? I'd do the same for you, if it really bothered you. It's not like we have to see each other every day. Can we compromise, just this once?

We both remember the good times we had together when I was younger, don't we? Before life got in the way and we started growing apart? Maybe we can give it another *shot* sometime. Some alcohol humor for you. Just be on your best behavior next time I see you and I'll try to be on mine. We'll see if it works.

Happy Holidays,

Jazmyne

Dear Mike's Hard Lemonade (Strawberry),

How have you been? I know we haven't talked since that one summer a couple of years ago when my dad introduced us. I still remember our time together fondly, even if it was fleeting like a shooting star. You showed me that there is still hope out there, that everyone who says there's something out there I might like because it tastes like soda might still be onto something.

I really think you're sweet. That's not too sentimental, is it? You just seemed to have that perfect sort of fizz and sparkle that I really felt I could connect with. I shouldn't have been so quick to dismiss you when I first saw you... I think it was just that I thought you were too good for me and I couldn't measure up. Maybe we'd like each other too much and end up like those teenagers who get connected at the hip and gross everyone else out. I didn't want to risk it.

Sometimes, I still wonder what could have been. Do you? What would "us" be like? Maybe we'd be a power couple. I know my parents would be happy to see us together at parties. You get along well with them. Anyway, I was just checking in. I don't want to take up too much more of your time. I'm sure you're off doing great things nowadays while I'm still right where I was when we first met. Maybe someday we'll catch up. Text me if you need anything. I wouldn't mind giving things another go.

Yours truly,

Jazmyne

BRIANNE KIETA

Brianne was great to work with this semester—she always brought such a good energy to the booth and that made it really easy to talk about her wonderful poetry! She was collaborative and always open to suggestions, which can be difficult when dealing with more personal poetry. I hope she continues to work on her poetry going forward!

—Paige

“i miss you” definition

i can't wait to no longer say “i miss you”
i can't wait to no longer miss you, because missing you is missing a part of me that is you
missing you is so frustrating because i know every possible way to get to you,
but it seems like everything is holding me back
these things will keep me down now, but soon, i will pluck them off of me,
like a clump of lint off my sweater
i can't wait to never be held back from you again

i can't wait to no longer miss you, because i won't need to
i'll be with you
you'll be the first person i see everything, and the last person i'll talk to every night
you'll be the one i share my meals with
the one who will watch me brush my teeth
you'll sneak up behind me while i comb my hair
we'll laugh together, cry together, and just be together
i can't wait to never miss you again

untitled

your muse is your art
not what you put on paper
but what you see in their eyes
how you think they see the world
that's the real poem, how another feels that one sees

I found you, or did you find me?

before you, i was just a girl
lost in this world, trying so hard to figure out the next steps in my life,
where to go, who to be, and what to do when the hard things came
a chapter had just closed, the only one i'd really ever known
i didn't know how to navigate this new part of my story
until i found you
you have helped me transition from being lost, to being found
you taught me what no one had the patience to sit down and explain
you encouraged me how to be independent, how to manage being on my own
you helped me see that life isn't all daydreams
but you showed me that it's okay to let my mind wander to us dancing in the kitchen
or your homemade dinners by candlelight
and then i suddenly realized that you, in this short amount of time,
had become my new everything
my new life
my next chapter
my new dream

TESSA KRAUSE

This is my second semester working with Tessa, and it's been incredible seeing Tessa grow as a writer but especially in her own confidence. This semester has been about focusing on the process of longer works and refining those longer works, which has been really interesting to see with her! We've had a bunch of fun and also been close to crying at times (which has really meant Tessa bringing me to tears). Every semester, I'm excited to see what Tessa does.

—Katie

Forever Written, Forever Gone

To The Guy I Just Met,

What gives you the audacity to be the exact duplicate of my main character's love interest? Kameron, with a "K" instead of a "C," which you made sure I noticed after you put your number into my phone.

I'm afraid, though. Afraid because of what this could mean.

Sure, this entire situation could be a coincidence. But it doesn't feel like that to me. When you nearly knocked me to the ground by bumping into me, I felt something. I could never tell you exactly what it was, but it was something!

Dread, probably.

If you've made it this far into my rambling nonsense, I might as well tell you. I wrote a story recently. It is the roughest of drafts, the very first one. The only problem is that I currently have multiple endings. Some have the two lovers living happily ever after. Some end with a grave, six feet deep.

I want to delete those endings. I don't want them anymore! Despite not knowing you well enough, I don't want either of us to die! Regardless of whether or not we work out, which could also happen. I think there is an ending where the two lovers don't last.

I have a feeling that even if I do delete the endings that are less desirable, our lives are on the crash course to the true ending of my book. I guess the only thing I can do is pray and get ready for our first date.

From, The Girl You Just Met

P.S.

Please, don't take it personally that I immediately ran away from you after you gave me your number. I was freaked out. I had more coffee running through my veins than actual blood. Plus I've spent more time dating my laptop than actual people because of my writing.

To My Boyfriend,

It's almost too much to bear. Pretty soon I'll be spilling my guts about this entire bizarre situation! You're so perfect, in so many ways, that you've even smashed the incredibly high standards of a book girlie. Honestly, I'm impressed. You make me feel so beautiful, so appreciated, so seen. You're my real-life book boyfriend, Kameron.

This secret is tearing me to pieces. I want to tell you, I really do. I'm just afraid that if I do, then it'll be more real. So that's why I'm writing in one of my journals. Admitting this on the page makes me feel a bit better, until I remember the perfect gentleman that you are.

Would you break up with me if you ever found out? Would it be weird for you? Would you be upset with me because of it? Because I've waited far too long to tell you now? I feel like I've already passed the point of no return, that I just can't now.

Pretty soon the story I wrote will have to diverge. Pretty soon we'll be past the versions where the main character and her love interest, Kameron, break up. Maybe that will be a good time to tell you. Or maybe not? Maybe this is just one secret I'm meant to keep.

I love you, Kameron. I really, really do. I don't know if I say or show you that enough, so if you're reading this now, know that I love you. So much.

I really want to be hopeful. I want to meet your parents, your family, your friends, everyone. I also want to introduce you to my world. I want to get married, buy a house with a white-picket fence, start a family, and watch our babies play in the yard. I want to grow old with you, watching as our grandbabies start playing in the exact same yard. Every night I want to sit on our back porch in an identical pair of rocking chairs, admiring all that we have. I want to explore the world with you. I want laughter, joy, sadness, tears, as long as I have you by my side.

And maybe it's a little too early in our relationship for thoughts like this. I might scare you off if I tell you all these things. So I'm writing them down, and maybe you'll find them someday. I might even show you them. But for right now, I'm writing these feelings down.

Love, Your Girlfriend

P.S.

I don't think we'll break up. I love you too damn much to not fight for you, for us. So, I think we'll be each other's ride-or-die. I'm hoping that our relationship will be like fine wine, getting better with age. Fingers crossed, hoping that whoever decides our fate has a soft spot for us.

To My Fiancée,

Saying yes to a life with you was the easiest thing in my entire life. I couldn't imagine living in a world where you aren't by my side. You are the best thing in my world, and I can't wait to steal your last name.

I'm sure by now, since we've reached this milestone, that you're wondering if I'm going to tell you about my story. After writing that story with all of its different endings, I have moved on. It was way too freaky to even touch again. I won't show you that story, at least for a little while, until I'm sure that we're in the clear. However, I've been very transparent with the stories I've worked on since. Those ones don't give me the heebie-jeebies.

I'm writing this after I got overwhelmed with everything that has to go into a wedding, and we even hired a wedding planner! I don't understand how some people could do this on their own. So, instead of actually doing the bare minimum of what little is already expected of me I'm writing this.

I do want to go back to that pesky story of mine. We have gotten past the point of us breaking up, obviously. However, if our lives are steamrolling almost parallel to how my characters' lives were, then we're either going to live happily ever after or be star-crossed lovers. If you ask me, I don't think any one person wants to face the tragedies of ending up as starcrossed lovers. I wouldn't mind watching your handsome face develop smile lines and grey hairs.

I'm so excited to finally have the last of our boxes moved into our new house. A cute four bed, two bath house with a small front yard, but plenty of room in the back for whatever we want. I still can't believe that a house this perfect was on the cheaper side of the market, especially since we didn't have to renovate too many things. I knew this place would be our home when we first stepped through the doors. I could already see our kids padding down the hallway, chasing one another.

I'm still scared senseless. I don't want to lose you. I love you too much. You're my soulmate, my far superior other half. I don't know if I could go on with life if you aren't in it. That's why I'm secretly hoping that when we're very old that I die first so that I don't have to live in a world that doesn't have you. I'm trying to be brave, for you, for us, my love.

Love, Your Fiancée

P.S.

I really didn't want to alarm you until I was absolutely sure, but I'm almost a week late. Very rarely have I been this late, as you know. I would say two days, max, for being early or late. I think we're going to have to set up that nursery sooner than we expected.

To My Husband,

Who could've predicted that our little one would make her appearance just after we said "I do!"? Not me. And please, if you are even still slightly worried about my wedding dress being ruined, don't put another thought to it.

Right now, you're asleep on the chair right beside me. Our beautiful little girl is sleeping as soundly as you are. I can't help but beam at the two of you.

I will give whoever decides our fate some credit. I did not have this in my story. I was not expecting to get married and welcome our first baby all within the span of about five hours. But I wouldn't want to change a single thing about today. Now we'll get to share our special day with our precious daughter.

Just like her daddy, our baby girl couldn't wait and decided to make her entrance a couple of days before she was actually due. I should've just listened to you about pushing it tight with her due date. This will be the only place where I'm more willing to admit this freely.

There is a bright side to all of this, honey. All of our family and friends are around to support us, and they're mostly sober because none of the festivities actually started. This is a blessing because you know that your parents hate traveling, and it's going to be a little while until we can again. We were also able to get married, so now we all have your last name.

Now I feel like I'm a tribute in *The Hunger Games* because we're making it past life stage after life stage, but I'm just worried. It breaks my heart to think about, especially seeing the two of you sleeping so peacefully. It eats me up, the thought that I might be the reason that our love doesn't last as long as it should.

Our baby girl needs a name, honey. I'm not picking it because of that cursed story. I just don't want to encourage this any more than I have to. I already hate how long this story has been at the back of my mind. I wish someday that I never would've written it. It seems to be doing more harm than actual good.

It definitely hasn't gotten me a publishing deal.

But I guess, in a way, it kind of gave me you. That might be stretching it.

However, none of this deters my love for you, and now our little one.

Love, Your Wife

P.S.

Since you won't see this until well after our daughter has a name, I'll reveal the ones that were on the page. Ella, Ivy, and Yasmine. I also just adore the names Savannah, Margo, and Marianna. Maybe someday you'll read these names and get a good chuckle out of them because of how wrong they'll be. But I don't care. I just want you, and now our family.

“It’s been five years since we lost you. They say that time heals all wounds, but I think that’s absolute dog water. If that was true, your loss wouldn’t hurt so damn much.” I clutch desperately to the leather-bound journal in my hands. They’re trembling. “I wish you could’ve told me about this story. I wish you would’ve been upfront with me. I wish that I wasn’t the one standing here, left with more questions than answers.”

I pull out the laminated pages of the printer paper, along with two bouquets of flowers. I tie the folded pages to one of the bouquets. “I can’t stay long. School starts at eight, and someone has to educate the young minds. Someone has to tell your stories.

“I’m just glad that we all have everything out in the open. I think Dad knows now, Mom, if you never got to tell him yourself. I know it was eating you up inside, so hopefully that brings you some peace. Dad, I can almost see you laughing from down here.” I touch the gravestone, tracing my fingers over the grooves.

“I appraise the strength and resilience of my siblings; you did a good job raising them that way, while you guys were still here. Zeke, the wonderful man who choose to marry into all of this, still makes comments about how strong and resilient we are as a family. Bless him, he hasn’t had to deal with death in a manner like this. So sudden. He didn’t know me when I had to see grandma and grandpa make arrangements to bury their children. I’m glad he didn’t.

“I know that the both of you have been watching over us, I can still feel the warmth of the parental love you guys had for us like a giant hug. I know that you’re still here, caring for us, looking after us, even though you’re gone.”

I tie an ultrasound to the other bouquet. “Guess what? You’re going to be grandparents. I know that you would’ve been so excited. Especially you, Mom. Over the moon! You really wanted to be a grandma. You guys really wanted to be grandparents.” I chuckle, “sometimes you were almost too pushy about it. In nine months or so, your dream will come true, just not the way I wanted it to.

“Sometimes I think about the man who ran you off the road. He was drunk. It was dark. He decided to drive. He killed you. The both of you. Well, he was nearly stabbed to death in his cell. The medics were able to save him for today.

“Am I a terrible human being, a terrible daughter, for being thankful that you guys were the only ones in the car? That I’m happy you guys were killed, and my siblings got to live?

“Zeke disagrees wholeheartedly, but what does he know?

“I do think that God was looking out for Margo, Saul, and Marianna that awful night. However, I didn’t quite understand why he needed both of you at the same time, until I found your journal.” I glance at my watch, sighing, grounding my palms into my swollen eyelids.

“I just wish we had a different ending, Mom and Dad.”

OLIVER MCKNIGHT

OLLIE! Oliver and I have worked together for two semesters now, and it has been such a joy for me to watch them grow and push themselves in new ways as a writer. When I read “Happy Birthday” for the first time, I thought back on our first couple sessions together and how they had been working through writer’s block. Now, every word on the page makes me feel so much pride in them. I know I put them through many *trials and tribulations* in our sessions, but I’m so grateful that they stuck it out and are continuing to share more and more of their incredible talent and creativity with the rest of us.

—Zoe

Happy Birthday

Let me try to fragment together
A piece on the complexities of age
And the passage of time.

There’s a deep depression that
roots itself into me,
An unshakeable anxiety —
A disconnect.

I am where I was one year ago,
Blowing out candles on a birthday cake
Tears threatening to put flame out instead of
breath.

I wish for security,
For something to change,
For some glimmer of hope in the unknown,
Something
To make this life easier.

20 years later, I still stand
At the edge of that unknown;
The crossroads of scared
And hopeful.

Maybe I’ve fallen behind.
Unsure of *where* I should be,
Who I should be.
The anxiety is relentless.

However,
Perhaps this is how it should be:
Dark, looming fear entangled

In the brightness of living.

There is some kind of beauty
In being afraid.
Maybe this is what it’s all about.

I am living proof of this,
Of life and its persistence
Despite all things.

Let this poem find you
as it did me:
Built from anxiety
(And perhaps foolish hope)

Bathed in the glory of
The complexities of age
And the passage of
time . . .

ANKICA MONTGOMERY

Wow, is Ankica a phenomenal writer! From our first session, I knew I would enjoy our sessions together. It's been so wonderful seeing her ideas come to fruition through her intricately crafted worlds and characters—it is truly remarkable how much thought she puts into fleshing out these details!—and I'm so proud of all the hard work she's put forth. It's been absolutely delightful working with Ankica, and her sessions and stories will always be a highlight!

—Kyra

Welcome to the Hunt

PROLOUGE

Eden was going to die. There wasn't any way around that, he supposed. It seemed like a waste to him, to die before he could really live, but that was the way of things. Well, he amended, watching Eris spin around from where he lay, it was the way of things for those not blessed enough to be chosen by the fates-that-be.

As he lay on the ground, events flashed through his mind, memories that would be lost and times that would be forgotten. A boy with pastel pink hair, smiling softly at him. A knife flashing before his face, instantly imbedded in the wood next to his head. A rainy day only made sweet by the gentle violin echoing through the manor. A slip of paper falling gently to its brethren like snow upon the ground.

He looked around to where he was now. Bodies of those he once called friend and foe littered the ground around him. Dark clouds covered the sky- a sky only visible now that the roof had caved in, leaving walls that should have been safe from rain and wind for another hundred years. The statues surrounding the room were nothing like they had once been- now covered in filth and blood.

The battle raged around him, screams and the clash of metal ringing out. He had fought, but he hadn't won. He couldn't. It wasn't his fate-to-be. Instead, that string, red as blood, belonged to—

Eris's lightning struck the ground again and again. She spun, dodging venom and steel alike. His story was over, the final chapter drawing to a close, but Eris's was just beginning. She had left him to fight, to *win*.

He could only watch the battle and wait to die. The poison had finally reached his heart, but it was taking its merry time to actually kill him. Almost dreamily he wondered what would kill him first: that infernal poison now coating his heart or the giant stake piercing the stone floor and his stomach directly above it. It didn't really matter, but he was curious nonetheless.

He tried to take a breath, wincing as it rattled through his body. His lung was pierced, certainly.

Eris really was beautiful. Her eyes flashed gold—no wonder they chose her as the Champion—her hair spun out from behind, long having broken from the ponytail—he always had wanted to know what she would look like with her hair down—her mouth was open, either speaking or screaming—he couldn't hear over the rushing in his head. Something struck his side, and he grunted from the impact. Slowly, laboriously, he shifted his head, trying to seem what had assaulted him. Finally he saw it: The head of one of the

statues, now scorched and nearly unrecognizable. It was Exiled-Saint Pierre, he realized, and he would have laughed if he had been able to do anything at all.

His eyes closed.

Yes, Eden decided. He never should switched that damned slip of paper.

ANASTASIA MUCHA

Ana was the very first '57 learner I had the pleasure of working with, and our sessions together have been a highlight of my time here in the TLC ever since! We matched one another's silly energy from the beginning, and ever since we have shared more bouts of crazed laughter than I can count. Her appreciation and consideration of the world around her is evident in her ability to turn everyday moments into beautiful works of poetry, and she never ceases to impress me with each new piece she composes. When her first book is published, you can trust I'll be the first in line to get my copy signed.

—Zoe

The White Rose

Red roses used to be my favorite.
The symbol of love, romance, strength, and beauty.
I once yearned to receive red roses.
I used to think they symbolized me as a person.
Loving,
Beautiful,
Vibrant,
All on the surface.
But,
Once you pick it up,
You see the stem,
You start to feel pain on your fingers,
You look and see red dripping down.
The red thick fluid matching the color of my petals.
I loved red roses.
But now,
I love white.
White resembles purity.
I was pure once.
Pure as a white rose.
But one day,
Someone's blood dripped on me.
I kept soaking it up.
They kept bleeding on me.
I kept soaking it up.
I became red by the age of thirteen.
My petals started to wilt and fall off.
Then,
Someone picked up one of my petals,
Saw the damage that had been done,
Instead of trying to get the blood out,
She buried me in the dirt.

Little did she know,
I would grow ten times the roses,
Whiter and brighter than ever.

GWEN PABICH

Gwen is one of the most talented young writers I have come across. Their stylization, down-to-earth themes, and evocation of emotion through unique word choice and relatable themes results in works that any depressed college student can relate to. Gwen continues to be a rising star in the English department and I cannot wait to see what magic they continue to conjure up.

—Angel

Fools Spring

In Fools' Spring, a glimpse of future's grace,
A respite from the endless pall of white's embrace.
Your gaze, once dimmed, now sparkles with the dawn,
As blossoms sweetly burgeon, their splendor drawn.

The sun, a tender balm on famished skin bestowed,
Revives the heart where winter's chill has growed.
The larks, aloft, declare a victory near,
While shadows of the frigid past begin to clear.

Yet still, the echoes of the frost persist,
In whispered tones, they weave an icy mist.
Though trees stand bare, and grasses fade to gold,
The earth beneath laments with tears untold.

You inhale life, your spirit yearns to soar,
With every heartbeat, crave an essence more.
The vibrant palette of spring unfurls anew,
Where once the hushed lament of winter flew.

Amidst the colors, joy and sorrow twine,
For life returns, yet stillness weaves its line.
You savor sweetness in the morning air,
Yet know that fleeting hope can lead to despair.

Will we revert to cycles of heartache's reign,
This fleeting joy, a much-needed refrain?
Is it wrong to seek to banish winter's woe,
With fervent prayers for warmth to surely flow?

In Fools' Spring's ballet, the heart ascends and falls,
Through ephemeral beauty, we embrace it all.

Would you be mad?

Would you be mad if I dared to flee,
Packed my belongings, drove fast, wild, and free?
Left the echoes of our tempestuous scene,
Ripped the guilt from its skin, let my pride glean.

Would you be mad if I cast it all aside,
Forsaking the anguish, the memories denied?
Scraped the gunk from the gutters of my mind,
Ran from the trails of dread that entwined.

The fights, the shouts, the tears in hollow halls,
If I laced my shoes and answered freedom's calls?
Would you seethe if I switched my name and hue,
Transformed my essence so I no longer bore you?

What if I severed each photograph's tether,
Painted the walls to erase all the weather?
Burned the cherished mementos you hold so dear,
Bottled the ashes, cast them far from here?

Oh, what I could be if shadows did not cling,
If not for the presence that to the seabed would bring.
If I could shed hope, release every dream,
Abandon the passion that fuels my heart's gleam.

If I could eclipse all the feelings I know,
I'd journey afar, let my true colors show.
I would forge a new emblem, a phoenix from scars,
Rip out the vision where once you were stars.

Would you be mad? Could you even contain
The tempest that brews within your soul's domain?
Would you lament the liberation inclined,
Would you be mad, if I left it all behind?

Can you accept the night?

What if, one fateful dawn, the sun refused to rise? The moon, a luminous sentinel, remained suspended in the vastness, full and radiant. What if the tender dew clinging to the grass never dried, and the stars, those eternal gems, never yielded to the dawn? What if the fires blazed with fervor, and porch lights flickered steadfastly in the night? Would they find a way to move on?

Would they embrace the night, fashion their lives around the persistent darkness, donning cozy sweaters and long, flowing cloaks? Would they ignite fireworks year-round, a riot of colors against the canvas of midnight? Would every journey be accompanied by the sweet rush of wind through open windows? Would they shout their souls into the cosmos? If the moon were to hold its place in the sky, would they revolve around its glow? Or would the sun's whispers linger, a haunting melody of longing, ever tempting them to seek more? For the moon can never be the sun.

Perhaps, in time, they would learn to love the moon with the same fervor once reserved for the sun. Perhaps their culture would transform, with string lights illuminating every bough, and glow sticks worn like talismans against the blackened backdrop. In the sanctuary of shadows, they might discover their truest selves. They would stroll under the veil of night, savoring candlelit feasts on soft grass. Each first date would be a celestial ballet, stargazing from the bed of a pickup. The rebels would rise and reign. Perhaps they would laugh with abandon, weep with intensity, and love would trickle back into their lives, gradually filling the void. The moon would be enough—enough for them.

Yet, upon spotting a flower tucked away from sight, all eyes would cast upward, searching for the sun's embrace. When they reach for the light, only shadows remain. They might curse the moon for its inability to shine like the sun; they might lash out, hurling their pain, screaming against the cold indifference of night.

Resentment would blossom—how can one truly love the moon when the sun remains elusive? How could they ever forget the warmth? The sun's caress, like a gentle whisper on their skin. How could they forget the brilliance? Ever radiant, ever beckoning. For they orbit the sun, while the moon orbits them. Flowers stay tightly closed in the dark of night. Breath falters under the weight of knowing. Knowing that the sun exists, still, beyond the horizon.

They will forever seek the sun, resenting the moon's pale glow. The moon, stripped of its brilliance, hangs heavy with longing. When the moon casts its silvery light, they close their eyes, praying for dawn. The moon knows that when the sun rises, their joy ignites. They beam wider; cheeks blush like blooming roses, hearts thumping with life. How could the moon ever rival the sun? What if darkness stretched without end? Would the moon ever find acceptance, or would they remain eternally in pursuit of the sun?

My Twin Flame

Their candle crackles and burns wild. They smell of cranberries and pine. Their wax flows down carelessly. They draw eyes, they radiate a holy light. Their body rolls to music. They laugh proudly, snorting in between echoing giggles. Their tears stream down angelically, they speak from a pure heart. Their eyeliner runs thick, and their jean shorts tight and high. They scream at their father, plead at their mother. They throw the first punch. Words fall out of their mouth with no hesitation. They take long, confident steps, strides of pride that paint the ground beneath them with their own ambitions. Over-lined lips, big hips, serving a quick glimpse at those who dare to wince.

My Twin Flame

They read the classics for fun, underlining passages that seem a little ego-heavy. They adore fresh lilacs, and the bees that buzz around them. The rips in their grey-washed jeans reveal bruised knees engulfed in fishnets. They enjoy bitter matcha, lemon bread, and hot bisexual baristas they shamelessly flirt with. A seductive wink, a wide smile, a slip of paper with their number written on it. So unafraid of their own human expression. They love hard and hold grudges. They stand for what they believe in, they see the good in each person, and those who aren't get met with a fat "FUCK YOU". Their arms are covered in patchwork black and grey tattoos. Their face is pierced with rings and studs. They love modern art. They are in awe of the creations of the Renaissance. They believe all works of passion are meant for the public. They always say "Please" and "Thank You". They tip 20%. Always authentically themselves, so secure in their body, so content in their heart.

My Twin Flame

Their mom is distant, their father angry. They have a sibling, but not the good kind. Their "life story" contains an avalanche of pitiful tales of a lost gay kid stuck in the Midwest. It can only be described as an Iliad of trials. You'd never know by looking at them how much their soul yearns for a loving father and a brave mother. They know it's ok to feel that way. They know that these broken pieces left by the bashful creators are theirs to clean. They know that the earth revolves around the sun, not them. It's comforting to them to know that the world is not on their shoulders. That those who take the Atlas stance of the world are in a sadistic relationship with themselves. They see themselves as a tall, strong, beautiful Kintsugi work.

My Twin Flame

They are passionate, adventurous, benevolent, caring, diligent, humble, and honest. They will lock hands with any two people and dance. They give it all to those who need it. They are a humanist creation of triumph. They burn wild, emitting light, casting intricate shadows. My twin flame is out there, breathing, living, experiencing, dreaming, creating, inspiring. My twin flame is blazing to the beat of their own heart.

My Twin Flame

JOSH PAULSON

Josh has been such a fun learner to work with because of the intricate refinement his writing needs. This semester, I have seen in-progress works, more completed works, and works that have barely been started. All of them have been so successful in their own ways and have needed their own different brainstorming of ideas between us both. All of these works are amazing, and I'm excited to see what Josh does in the future!!

—Katie

Big Red Marble

A snowy, colossal spacecraft inched toward the planet.

The colony ship known as Providence neared its year-long voyage through the last frontier. Its thrusters which gave the humans a comforting white noise faded. The 380,000 humans who escaped from an overheated, overpopulated Earth marveled at the big red marble. Delicate scars and spots lined the amber mass, black swirls splatting against the spherical canvas.

A family dressed in matching teal jumpsuits stood in their reserved square room huddling a wispy man in a hospital bed. The old man lay in bed, face still, taking labored breaths from a tube in his throat, the frail chest rising and falling from the puffs of the machine adjacent to the bed.

Blue strips of light shined on the little girl by the picture window. She held her father's hand and pointed toward the window. "Daddy, why do we call it Mars?"

"That's what the Romans called it, named after their god of war."

"Who are the Romans?"

"A group of people from a long time ago."

"Is he real?"

"They thought so."

The girl stomped her foot. "Be serious, Daddy! Is Mars real?"

"I can't be sure, but I don't think so."

She looked back at the bed. "What about Grampa?"

He chuckled. "Is Grandpa real?"

She groaned. "No. Is Grampa dying?"

Splutters and awkward shuffling of feet staggered the pause. A half dozen of the old man's immediate and closest kin touched the bed with stony faces: Two younger brothers, a sister, and a few cousins.

"I don't know."

"What did the doctor say?"

"We don't know, pumpkin."

"Is he coming with us?"

"Maybe."

"I'm hungry."

"Let's get a snack." He ushered her to the door.

Two nurses passed the father and daughter and entered the old man's room. They smiled, scrunching their faces at the girl. He led his daughter down a flight of stairs, guiding her,

the little girl descending each stair with both feet, leaning heavily on him.

He tapped the plastic card against a vending machine and mashed his finger on the screen. It spat out a white bag with an image of a graham cracker. She scooped out the bag as he held the pick-up port open, and they found an empty table.

He split open the bag and handed her a cracker. She nibbled slowly, yet consistently. "Daddy, aren't you proud of me for no more booster seat?"

"Of course, pumpkin."

She scraped the edge of the soggy cracker across her gapped baby teeth, the front top two protruding farther than the rest. "I sit like you now."

"You sit just like me." He broke off a piece of the second square from the pouch and ate it.

"Did you need a booster seat when you were a baby?"

"I did."

"Did Grampa?"

"Yes, and so did Grandpa's brothers and sisters."

"But then they wasn't babies anymore and didn't need them?"

"That's right, pumpkin."

"Why you crying Daddy?"

"Because Daddy is sad."

"Sad about Grampa?"

"Yes."

"Daddy, when I'm your age, and you are sick, I will be sad too."

He laughed, a mild snort interrupting the inhibited sniffles. "Thank you. Are you sad about Grandpa being sick?"

She twirled her half-eaten graham as the gritty paste trickled down her fingers. "Yes, but not as sad if *you* were sick."

An automated message blared from pinholes in the ceiling. "Touchdown to destination in two hours. Expect mild to moderate turbulence during surface landing... Touchdown to destination in two hours. Expect mild to moderate turbulence during surface landing."

After they finished, he kissed her on the forehead and they went to the bathroom to wash the graham sludge off her hands. Although she couldn't reach the soap dispenser, she insisted on pumping it with her hands, activating the motion sensor to release the water herself. He held her by the waist as she made the sink her sudsy waterpark, and he was the lifeguard. He held the door open for her and they went back up the stairs.

"Where is the seat now," she asked.

"Teddy has it. Remember giving it to baby Teddy and his parents?"

"Because they forgot to bring it on the ship?"

"Mmmhmm."

"We're nice for letting them have our stuff, right Daddy?"

"That's right."

He directed her back to the room. The two nurses stood on both sides of Grandpa's bed. All his other relatives were gone.

"Where did everyone go?"

"I don't know, pumpkin," he said, both standing in the doorway. "What's going on?"

“Are you the OFM,” one of the nurses asked.

“Yeah, that’s me.”

He thought back to the moment Grandpa, his father, relinquished the privilege of Overseeing Family Member, to him. Right before they registered for the exodus. Before the everyday forest fires, choking even the most secluded of suburbs with thick smoke. Before the senseless nihilistic violence; masses of societal humanity burning in concert with the Earth. Before finding out that the Garcia family was eligible to board Providence, along with a fraction of a percent of the human population.

Por si acaso, sabes? Grandpa would chide.

The other nurse chimed in. “ID?”

“1162-6048”

She read something off the screen on her watchband. “Mr. Garcia, I wish there was more we could do. The clots weren’t caught in time. The ventilator is keeping him breathing, but his brain activity is dwindling at an alarming rate. I’m sorry.”

He stifled a sob. “That is fine. Thank you both.”

“We will give you some time,” said the first nurse. “We’ll be back with some refreshments.”

He moved from the doorframe to let the nurses pass and knelt beside the bed. His stomach churned and fizzed at the idea of food. Specks of graham cracker wadded at the back of his throat.

The young girl tugs at her father’s jumpsuit. “Is Grampa coming with us?”

He met her eyes, cupping her arms softly. “No honey, Grampa isn’t coming with us.”

“Will he watch us from the ship? Will he watch us from above?”

A grin altered the old man’s lifeless face, lips curved upwards, quivering with what muscle and control he could muster.

“Yes, pumpkin,” he cried. “Grampa will watch us from above.”

The Start of Nothing

Steve and Matt crossed the bridge to the run-down house on Water Street. They lived in the same dormitory across the hall. Steve was from Minnesota, tall, cheerful, a smooth talker, a great guitar player, and an all-around nice guy. Steve could ice skate shortly after he could walk, and his father was a prominent high school hockey coach. When he met Matt in his freshman year of college, Steve taught him how to play hockey, giving Matt his first lefty stick.

Matt was shorter, rounder, with blaze orange hair like a hunter's jacket. He lived ravenously, eating gas station junk food, drinking rum, smoking cigarettes and weed. His ACT scores were good enough but skipped courses and avoided homework. Matt was an "AP kid" from Wisconsin who pushed too hard in high school and burned out at the first taste of freedom. He savored moments with his friends and relished the memories for too long, never knowing when discipline begins and where hedonism ends.

After a few blocks along the river, the boys stop at the concrete steps of the two-story college house. Chips of weathered gray break the white paint. Cracks of moldy dirt seep through the vinyl siding, even in the navy blue of the crisp fall night. Overgrown clovers sprout between the tectonic plates of the sidewalk covered in crunchy orange leaves. It was late, all the thin windowpanes were dark. A passing sedan buzzed the loose panes with its subwoofer blaring trap music.

Steve combed a hand through this long-slicked black hair. "Looks like Dallas is at the bars, or he's asleep."

"Don't matter, we won't be long," Matt scowled.

They stepped onto the porch; the wood creaked in place of a doorbell. Matt entered the house without knocking and Steve followed. The doorway led them to a living room, dark but cozy. A long leather sectional slumped against the wall, with a coffee table to match. A treadmill in the corner gathered floor crumbs around the polyester belt. A picture of Dallas and his family stood at the end table, each set of their eyes watching the boys.

They sat on the sectional. Matt emptied the contents of his gym bag on the coffee table. The drawstring bag had some snacks, loose change, a student ID card with the corners mangled, rolling papers, and a mason jar with a half-ounce of marijuana.

Steve eyed the mason jar. "So, you want to burn one?"

Matt grimaced. "The dorm girls said they'd buy it if they were joints." He fumbled the rolling papers, struggling to wrap the herb with the paper. Matt looked at Steve sheepishly. "Do you know how to roll?"

"Of course! Here, I'll show you how." Steve reached for the papers. "For starters, you gotta do this." Steve crumpled the rolling paper into a ball with his index fingers and thumbs, then unfurled the wad until it was flat again. He sprinkled the bud in fine pieces into the wrinkled paper. It seemed effortless to Steve as he licked the gummed end and wrapped the roll. Lastly, he took a lighter and dried the gummed end for an even burn. "Now you try!"

Matt picked up the papers again, this time crumpling the paper like Steve said. He ripped the paper when trying to smooth it back out. "This is too hard, would you roll them?"

"Sure, as long as I get to keep one."

Steve rolled 14 one-gram joints and tucked the last roll behind his ear while spouting the latest Gopher hockey news. Matt sat on the leather sectional, holding his cell phone in the air and using the screen as a flashlight. He stared at Dallas' family portrait. "I'm not coming back

for spring semester.”

“I thought you were doing better after academic probation.”

“Wouldn’t matter anyway, Steve. I don’t have the money to keep going.”

“What about a loan?”

“Bank won’t give me a loan. I already have student loans.”

“What about your parents?”

Matt chuckled mirthlessly.

“What are you gonna do?”

“Go back home, get a job, I guess. Move back into the basement and get a front-row ticket to my parent's separation.”

“Dude. Matt, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be, it’s been a long time coming.”

“Are they fighting?”

“Non-stop since Thanksgiving. Mom is wound too tight, and Pops could use some winding up,” Matt shrugged, breaking his gaze from the portrait to the floor.

“You’re coming back, right?”

Matt hesitated, then looked at him.

“After you save up through spring and summer?”

“It was a good run, Steve.”

They packed up without exchanging another word. Matt put the joints in the mason jar and swept the rest of the items into the gym bag. They left Dallas’ house the same way they came and walked back toward the bridge.

Steve stopped at the riverbank. He drew an honest breath, let it out slowly, and pulled the joint from behind his ear. He sparked it. He inhaled deeply and passed it to Matt.

“Steve! What if the cops see you? See us?!”

“What are they gonna do? Kick you outta school? Send you back home?”

Matt smirked and took the joint. Steve exhaled and the smoke drifted with the current. They finished the joint on the river, cop-free. Matt grabbed two bags of chips, gave Steve one, and munched their way across the bridge.

The Void House (or Equilibrium)

He wrapped the hood on his coat closer to his face and walked along the gravel path, his boots champing the light dusting of snow into the rock. Mud froze his boots rigid and sharp. The wooden and chicken-wire fence along the path stretched into the horizon. There were no tracks in the snow but his. Damp air, howling wind, and stinging snow swallowed each step's crunch. Pine trees on the horizon froze stiff all through the powerful icy drafts. He couldn't tell the time, or whether it was day or night. A terra-cotta red sifted through the gray sands of overcast skies that no dawn, dusk, or twilight could, or would remake.

He trudged on. The fence led him up a steep hill. He slid twice but found sure footing when making it over. The muscles above his knees burned, each step more laborious than the last. Biting wind stung his nose as if he had run into a door, the dusting snow like needles. He asked himself why he was there.

At the top, he saw a figure sitting on the fence. They wore an enormous puffy coat, white as snow, with a long hood like his. Further down the fence line was the shape of a house. As he drew nearer to the figure, he could make out a face through the hood. He couldn't see what was on the other side of the fence.

All his attention was on her. The stranger was no larger than a child, dangling their short legs while sitting on the fencepost. She turns to him, revealing a face resembling a little girl, painted red, pink, and orange. "Where are you going?"

"I'm looking for someone," he nodded toward the house further up the fence.

"Who are you looking for?"

"I don't remember."

She trailed a snowdrift with her eyes. "She's not here."

He stammered. "Pardon?"

"Where are you going?"

"To look for someone in that house there. She lives there."

"No one lives there."

He snorted. "Okay, friend. You take care."

She chimed in a sing-song voice. "No friends, no foes. No joy, no woes. Synthesis requires sacrifice. *Equilibrium*. All are parts of the sum, and the sum of parts will *never* be whole."

He shook his head and walked on for some time, annoyed by what he deemed the small Sophist. He could not remember exactly what she said but gathered it was contrary. He thought he knew more than a child, even though he could not recall their words, or when they last spoke.

The house was distant. It was a modest shelter. The one-bedroom shack had a small annex for firewood and tools. There was no smoke from the small black chimney sprouting from the snow-capped a-frame roof. He doffed his coat, the heat radiating from the house felt like it was on fire. He could not make out the siding or where the door was, only a silhouette and his imagination filled the rest. He rubbed his eyes. Each step closer would not reveal the details, the uncertainty of darkness ever-present. Snow drifted from the roof and clumped onto the ground silently. He walked closer, desperate for the shadow to reveal itself.

The house expanded, the silhouette engulfing the snow and the fence. Nothingness swallowed pieces of the tangible like a sinkhole. The void no longer resembled a house but a

blob; a vapid, insatiable monstrosity devouring the physical. The wind screeched like a radio station searching for a signal. He turned away from the house to run back to the hill. His legs were seared, and his feet were numb.

Standing behind him was the Sophist. Fingers stretched from her hands, wrapping across his neck and chest like thin boas. “Where are you going? No one lives there.”

He gasped for air as the tendrils wrapped around his throat.

“No one lives there.”

The void house inched closer. He could not reason between freezing or burning. They were equal. Pinpricks coat his skin like a tingling salve. The unknown seized and constricted the space. It felt tight, stifled, like a belt cinching past the holes. He croaked for air, wanting to scream at the sensation in his flesh, his lungs, mouth, ears.

“She’s not here. You’re lost.”

He watched her vanish into the void until he could not.

MALAYNA PREDER

Malayna is a writer with so much imagination and whimsy. Throughout our time together, Malayna has introduced me to a world unlike any other I've seen in a fiction series. Malayna has such a knack for character development, beautiful word choice, and worldbuilding that I know will inspire a generation of younger teenage readers. I am excited for the release of their series and hope to be one of its first readers.

—Angel

Prologue

Fate is such a cruel thing, even more so as a Goddess. The sound of her heels clicking against the marble floor echoed throughout the hall of the Divine Nexus as Fate made her way to the meeting room of the Gods. Servants scattered like leaves in a storm, their hurried movements dwarfed by her commanding presence. With gloved hands folded neatly before her, she approached the towering doors. With a flick of her hand, she flung them open, a tendril of smoke unfurling around her like a living shadow. Her black and violet gown shimmered, flowing like liquid night. As she entered, the room fell silent. Every gaze fixed on her veiled figure, an enigmatic force that demanded reverence and took her place in her seat.

Vivian's yellow eyes looked at Keres before she looked away nervously, finger combing her curly ginger hair. Veta sat by Vivian's side unamused. Kyrant, the God of War, was standing, looking at Keres and leveled her with a look with his fiery red eyes, anger. There were twelve Divine Gods and Goddesses, but now they were down to eight and she knew the truth. Once the rest of the Divine got settled, Kyrant took the lead.

"We failed," he said, his voice trembling with barely contained fury. "And now, the prophecy will begin again. This time, we must *win*." His fists clenched, veins taut with anger and despair.

"We will," Nekoda replied softly, his tone carefully measured as if treading on broken glass. "We will find him. We will save your son."

"This time, we'll have a better plan..." Blaine offered, though his voice wavered with doubt. Kyrant's piercing glare silenced him, the weight of his gaze heavy with frustration.

"I need all of you," Kyrant snapped, his tone cutting through the air like a blade. "I won't let that *monster* take him from me again."

Keres clenched her hands into a fist beneath the fold of her dress and glanced at Vivian, who kept her eyes glued to the floor. No one noticed their demeanor. As the Goddess of Fate, Keres often found herself shackled by her own power. Speaking out was dangerous, for Fate demanded its due course. While she could influence its flow, the cost was steep, and prophecies were not to be messed with. Once they are made, they couldn't be changed. The Pantheon was growing weaker and unstable without the two Divine that were missing, but the third was imprisoned for her crimes. She was still able to balance her power to the Nexus, but they were running out of time and the cracks in their unity were beginning to show.

"Once they show themselves, we don't have time to waste, we must intervene," Kyrant stated. How wrong he would be.

"What about the mortals and hybrids?" Veta piped up. "The hybrids, at least, possess

fragments of our power; it's not uncommon for the missing Divine to become involved in a group. And... after all we created the hybrids, why not give them a chance?"

Kyrant sighed. "The mortals are insignificant, but I suppose finally communicating with hybrids would be beneficial to us."

Catur turned to Keres, his voice tinged with urgency, "have you seen anything that could help us?"

Kyrant's gaze followed, brimming with desperate hope that made Keres's stomach twist. She maintained her composure, her tone steady as she replied, "Unfortunately, no. But I will keep trying." The room fell into heavy silence, the weight of her words sinking in. Kyrant stared at her in disbelief. His hand slammed onto the table making Vivian flinch, but Keres kept her cool.

His jaw clenched as he leaned forward, eyes narrowing at Keres. "You're the Goddess of Fate, and you're telling me you've seen *nothing*?" His voice was sharp, like the crack of a whip, each word laced with anger and disbelief. "Using the Strings of Fate is your entire purpose!"

Keres met his glare, her expression unyielding, though the weight of his accusation dug deep. "I don't fully control Fate, Kyrant," she said, her voice calm but firm. "I can guide it, influence it, but I cannot rewrite what has already been set in motion. Prophecies are not to be tampered with."

"Tampered with?" Kyrant spat, his voice rising. "We are *losing* everything! My son, the Pantheon, the balance, everything is crumbling around us! Don't talk to me about rules and limits when lives are at stake." The room felt suffocating, the tension thick as the other Gods shifted uncomfortably, unwilling to interject.

Keres's gloved hands gripped the edge of the table, her own frustration threatening to break through. "Do you think I don't care?" she snapped, her voice sharper now, a rare crack in her composed demeanor. "Do you think it's easy to watch all of this unfold, knowing I can only do so much without shattering everything we've built? The prophecy binds me as much as it binds you. I am trying, Kyrant, but Fate is not your pawn to command." They wouldn't be in this mess if it hadn't been for Kyrant.

The God of War stared at her, his chest heaving with anger, but her words struck a chord, even if he refused to show it. They were running out of options, and even the Goddess of Fate couldn't guarantee their salvation.

"Is there anything we can do?" Zira asked, hope showing in her eyes.

Keres didn't want to crush the hope she held onto because it was her brother they were talking about, but in time everything would come together. "We can't, but we survive and maybe bend what comes next." Zira looked uncertain before looking at the moon. Keres felt a tug from the Strings of Fate, it was time. She rose, smoothing out her dress. "We'll figure something out, time is on our side currently but now I have other things to attend to." Kyrant's expression tightened, a clear sign of his dismay at how she could brush off such a serious problem, but right now her plan was getting started.



Making her way to her chambers, she pulled off her gloves, tossing them aside and locked her door. She stood in the middle and let the Void consume her room. Purple Strings of Fate appeared in her domain, and she touched the one that was glowing brightly, appearing before a man looking worn down. He flinched, taken aback by her presence. This would be the

man who set her plan in motion. Hopefully. Her gaze pierced him from behind her veil and she looked at what could happen.

“Hello, Ignatius,” Keres greeted, her voice warm but carrying the weight of an unspoken purpose.

Ignatius hesitated, watching her, then slowly dropped to one knee before her, his shaggy brown hair falling onto his face. “Lady Goddess,” he said respectfully, his tone tinged with uncertainty. “To what do I owe the honor of your visit?”

She smiled at his politeness. “Today you found a hybrid boy a little older than ten and that is why I came to you. You know nothing about him, and I came here to ask if you will accept your Fate for taking in the boy.” Ignatius looked confused as he stared up at her, finally standing up.

“What do you mean?” He asked.

She didn’t want to scare him, but he needed to understand the gravity of the situation because it would be a crucial point in the boy’s life. “He is marked by me and has come across paths with you. You were chosen for this role. *I* choose you.” She knew Ignatius was a kind man, crafted and molded by the new world. He was a leader that defied all odds of the cruel world where hybrids are destined to fail. Hybrid drawn to hybrid.

“Why.... me?” Ignatius said carefully. “I’m not exactly a good soul here, the shit I’ve done. He would grow up in a difficult environment.”

Keres already knew that every hybrid has a hard life. “He will regardless of who I choose and in time, he will make the choices of destruction or peace.” Ignatius eyed her warily and took a step backwards running a hand through his hair. She couldn’t blame his cautiousness and shrank her size down to be more level with him.

“Surely there’s someone else more... capable. Someone stronger.” He asked. “You talk about Fate like I have no choice in this.”

“You do have a choice,” Keres said, her voice softening once more. “At least at the moment, if you reject this, he will go to someone else and they will take your place. If you turn away now, you’ll be free but you will carry that burden forever. Fate has placed this path before you, so choose.” Ignatius’ chest rose and fell heavily, the weight of her words pressing down on him. He turned his conflicted gaze back to her. “And if I say yes? If I take him in, what happens to me? To him?”

Keres hesitated, the silence stretching between them like a taut string. “I cannot promise it will be easy,” she admitted. “The pain you both will face will be unimaginable.” Ignatius seemed to read her even without seeing her face.

Ignatius let out a bitter laugh, though it was devoid of humor, his shoulders sagging further under the weight of Keres’s words. “There’s no happy ending for me, is there?” he said, his voice tinged with resignation. “That’s usually how it goes, isn’t it?” His breath wavered as he spoke, and he ran a hand over his face, as if trying to wipe away the exhaustion etched into his features. “What about my team? They didn’t ask for this. They’re not a part of whatever... destiny you’ve decided for me.”

Keres’s veil shifted slightly as she tilted her head, her expression unreadable, yet her tone carried a strange mix of firmness and sorrow. “If you accept, Ignatius, their paths will also be bound to the boy’s. Fate rarely chooses just one thread, it weaves an intricate tapestry, connecting those who are meant to walk this journey together. Your team will share in the trials

ahead, for better or for worse.”

Ignatius clenched his fists at his sides, his eyes narrowing as frustration and guilt churned within him. “So, they’ll suffer too? Because of me?” he asked, his voice barely above a whisper. “Because I can’t say no?” She didn’t know what to say or how to comfort mortals, so she told him the truth.

“Yes,” Keres said, her voice soft but steady. “It’s never easy, and it never will be. If you need someone to blame; blame us. It is our fault that this burden has been placed on you and your team.” She paused, her gaze lowering slightly, a flicker of something almost human in her otherwise serene demeanor. “It’s not fair for you to suffer for choices that were never yours to make.”

Her words carried a weight of regret, but there was a distance in her tone, an unspoken truth lingering beneath. She could see the threads of their fates, the pain and struggle that awaited them, yet she could not truly comprehend it. Not the way they would. For all her power, for all her insight, Keres would never walk the path they were destined to tread. She would not feel the fear, the loss, and the anguish that would be carved into their souls.

“I can only ask for your understanding,” she continued, her voice quieter now, tinged with something like sorrow. “It’s all our fault it happened, and it will keep happening unless things this cycle can be changed, or your anguish will be in vain.”

Her words hung in the air, a heavy, inescapable truth. Ignatius looked at her, his expression a storm of emotions, anger, frustration, and a faint, flickering ember of acceptance. “At least you admit it,” he muttered bitterly. “That’s more than most would do.”

Keres inclined her head slightly. “Admitting it does not lessen the burden.”

Ignatius let out a shaky breath, his hands tightening into fists. “I don’t want to suffer,” he said quietly. “But I’ll do it. Not because of you, or the Divine. I’ll do it for the boy.”

Keres nodded, a faint smile touching her lips, though it was tinged with sadness. “Then you are stronger than you know, Ignatius.”

He nodded slowly, though the tension in his shoulders betrayed the apprehension he still felt. “And if I fail?” he asked, his voice quieter now, almost hesitant. She wouldn’t let it happen regardless.

Keres stepped closer, her presence filling the space between them that seemed to buzz with energy. “Failure is not the end,” she said firmly. “It is only a step. Even in failure, there are lessons to be learned, paths to be uncovered. As long as you stand, as long as you try, you will be guiding him to his true purpose whether you realize it or not.”

Ignatius nodded and finally noticed the mark on his wrist, a Celtic knot binding him to her till he fulfilled his role. “Then I’ll do my best.” It was all she could ask for.

“Even the smallest light can guide someone through the darkness. Be that light for the boy, Ignatius,” she said quietly. With a final glance, Ignatius turned and vanished from her domain, the lingering shimmer of his departure fading into the stillness. Alone once more, Keres stared into the endless expanse of her realm. The world would not be kind to the boy, but she knew the outcome relied on every piece she attempted to put in place. If the world chose to be cruel, she could be crueler to make sure everything went exactly how she intended it. For every action, inevitably, a price would be exacted.

GRADY ROESKEN

I'm so glad Grady joined our tutoring team this semester! He has been such a fun person to have in the TLC, never hesitating to start a Cribbage game or join in on ridiculing Ben (lol). He has grown so much as a tutor, always ready to ask for or give help wherever necessary. Grady fits right in with our TLC vibes, and I know he'll continue to do great things :)

—Reilly

Lovely Jade

When Sawyer Phillips thinks about Love, he pictures an everlasting happiness. An eternal candle lighting the black abyss of human existence. He believes that when you fall in Love, you can't crawl out. To Sawyer Phillips, Love is a flower that never withers. He has never been in Love before. Not to say our charming Mr. Phillips hasn't had the chance, he has dated many women, but each one lasting shorter than the previous. If Sawyer didn't see a future with a girl, he would simply end things. He didn't take to wasting the girls time with a hopeless future, God forbid his own time.

Sawyer wasn't an unattractive man, quite the opposite, really. He was tall, about six foot two. He kept his body fit by going to the gym most nights. His brown hair, speckled with blonde from the sun was cut short. His slender jawline was always cleanly shaven, the only exception of this was if he had an overnight with a girl and had forgotten his razor at home. His most notable features though, were his eyes. Green eyes. Nobody had ever seen eyes so green. They glistened like emeralds.

Jade Downing was 17 the first time Sawyer Philips laid his emerald-green eyes on her. She was a pretty girl. Not too tall. Her long, slim legs made up for her short torso. Her face was milky white, but not pale. No, not a pale white. Her blonde curls fell just past her shoulders. She was to attend university in the fall, and Sawyer Philips wouldn't see her again for over a year.

During that year, Sawyer graduated from Princeton two semesters early; he was very proud of that. He started a job at a large, New York law firm as a junior case analyst. He spent nights getting drunk with friends and showing up to work hungover. He was promoted to associate case analyst. He travelled to Europe for a month and spent those nights getting drunk with friends but sleeping until lunch and doing it all over again the next night. He returned to New York and was promoted to senior case analyst. All while thinking about Jade Downing.

This girl, who he had only seen once before, continued to run through his mind. He wondered how such a girl was able to take up so much space in his thoughts. Sawyer Philips was never the type of man to hyperfocus on a girl. Was this Love? he thought. Could it be Love? A girl who he had only seen once before. But it wasn't only once. He saw her every day, whenever he closed his eyes, she was there.

I

It was now June, and the sun shone through trees in patches. Sawyer Philips was on a date. Her name was Abigail; he had forgotten her last name. She was pretty, but her

conversations were dull, this bored Sawyer. He knew he wouldn't call her again, but since he was already out, he decided to see through the night. He hadn't gone out much after getting promoted to senior case analyst, and he told himself that he deserved to have a good time.

They were walking downtown; him and Abigail with the last name he couldn't remember. It was hot and the air was thick. The sun was resting along the horizon and the sky was a mosaic of pinks, oranges, and reds. All around the daily lives of people were coming to an end; stores were being closed, business shut-up for the weekend, and for a moment, the city was quiet.

Suddenly, they were surrounded by a circus of life and the evening's schedule was about to begin. They ducked inside a bar to escape the heat and the bartender asked them what they'll be having.

"Gin, with a little bit of lemon for her, and I'll take a Brandy, neat." They sat down at a table and their drinks were brought to them. "Are you hungry?"

"I would have thought you'd never ask. All that walking in the heat has got me unable to think. I almost toppled over about a hundred times before we got here. You're lucky I'm such a strong lady, most of the dolls in here wouldn't have made it to 5th street walking in this heat. They're lucky with all their fancy cars and chauffeur's. I thought you had money, what's got us walking all this way? Don't you think a lady like me ought to be driven around, my feet feel like they're about ready to fall off, and I sure wouldn't blame them."

"What do you feel like eating?"

"I can't even think about eating, Sawyer, this heat has got me all worked up! If you'll excuse me, I'm going to go compose myself in the lady's room."

She got up and went to the bar to ask the bartender where the bathrooms were. He pointed her towards them, and she slowly disappeared into the crowd. Sawyer got up and made his way to the bar.

"Another Brandy, please."

"Neat?"

"Make it on the rocks this time, anything to help beat the heat." His drink was placed in front of him and by the time Abigail had returned he had had three more, each one switching from on the rocks, to neat, back to on the rocks.

"Sawyer, you must take me home," Abigail was visibly shaken. "There are just too many people in this bar and the heat is making me dizzy." She turned to the bartender, "are there any fans you can bring out here, I've been losing focus all night because of this heat, don't you have any fans?"

"The fans we got are all already set out, ma'am," the bartender said. Sawyer started to laugh; the alcohol had finally gotten to him.

"Sawyer! You're drunk!" She couldn't believe her eyes. Sawyer Philips, who she had met just hours earlier, who seemed like such a put together man, with a stable job, large apartment, lots of money, was now causing a scene in a bar, he couldn't stop laughing. It was unimaginable!

In reality, no one had noticed besides the bartender who was making another Brandy, this time neat.

"So, what I'm drunk? I haven't been drunk in months!" This was true.

"Sawyer, please stop, you're causing a row." Abigail started to cry, no one would be able to tell because the heat and sweat had already ruined her make-up. He continued to laugh aloud. "I will storm out of here if you don't stop this ruckus!" She was pleading now. She liked

Sawyer. She liked his money more, but he was an attractive man, so what could go wrong? This is what could go wrong.

Sawyer continued to laugh. He didn't notice Abigail leave. He didn't notice the rest of the bar leave. He sat at the counter and drank his Brandy and laughed. He stopped laughing when the bartender, Scoot, placed a hand on his shoulder and told him the bar was closing for the night.

"Bathroom still open? I don't think it's a good idea to piss my pants on my walk home."

Scoot nodded. "You know where it is." He was racking up the last few chairs when the door opened.

"Excuse me," a soft voice said. Scoot looked up. It was a pretty girl, not too tall, blonde curls that fell just past her shoulders. And in the moonlight, her skin looked a milky white.

"Sorry, ma'am but the bar's closed for the night."

"Oh, right. This is Scooters, though, right?"

"Yes, ma'am, it is. Can I help you with something?" Scoot normally didn't have the patience this late in the night, but for a pretty girl like this, he'd have all the time in the world.

"Oh no, it's alright. I was told by some friends to meet at Scooters, and it's been so long since I've been in the city, that I guess I lost my way. I'll just give them a ring when I get back home. Thank you, sir."

"You be safe walking home," Scoot said. She left.

Sawyer Philips came out from the bathroom. "Is it just the alcohol, or did I hear you talking to someone out here?"

"You're not that drunk, Sawyer. Someone just lost their way and was needing help; a pretty girl, too."

"Oh good."

Sawyer paid his tab, and left Scoot a sizable tip. This wasn't the first time he was the last to leave Scooters, and it sure wouldn't be his final time. He thanked Scoot for the service and wished him a good night.

Walking home on a warm, summer night always felt good to Sawyer Philips. Even better when he was alone. He did feel bad for Abigail Don't-Remember-Her-Last-Name, she was a nice girl, and pretty, but incredibly boring, and Sawyer never wasted his time. The moon shone over him, the sky was clear, and the lights from the empty stores lit up his walk home. Someone ahead was getting into a taxi. They had blonde hair that reflected the moonlight. The taxi jerked to a start and was soon out of sight. Sawyer watched the sky above. If he looked hard enough, he could see Venus. He made it back to his apartment and the concierge welcomed him. He went up to his flat, undressed, and went to bed.

II

Sawyer Philips was woken up at quarter past eleven by his phone ringing. He rolled out of bed and dragged his feet to the phone.

"Hello?"

"Good morning, you old bastard," said the voice on the other end. "Did ol' Bill wake you up?"

"Oh, go to hell."

"Evening was that bad, huh?" Bill Langer always knew when to call at the worst times.

Sawyer had a raging headache. "I heard from ol' Van Patten that you caused quite a row down there at Scooters. He said the girl you were with left in quite a frenzy."

"Van Patten needs to mind his own business. And then go to hell."

"He said you couldn't stop laughing, and the girl, a pretty one according to Van Patten, started bawling like a child."

"Oh, what does Van Patten know? He's an idiot."

"He seemed quite sure, to me."

"Oh, can we stop talking about Van Patten. That man gives me a headache."

"He asked if we'd care to join him for lunch at Andersons. I told him I'd ask you."

"Oh, tell him to go to hell."

"Be there by noon. I'll see you." Bill clicked off the phone.

- - -

Sawyer Philips arrived at Andersons at 12:25. He was late, but he knew Bill and Van Patten would wait for him. When Sawyer got to the table, he saw that he was right. He sat down and they ordered. Andersons was nice, not as nice as The Château or *La Giada*, but better than *Il Focolare*. Sawyer liked it because it was rarely crowded during lunch, and they didn't allow smoking; he couldn't stand cigarettes. Andersons ran along the Hudson and watched over Jersey. The dinner service was especially nice because the lights from the boardwalk reflected off the water creating a spectacle of stars that twinkled and glistened among the waves.

Van Patten was the first to start the conversation, "What exactly happened last night, Sawyer? Heard you made quite a scene." Him and Bill laughed.

"Can you just drop it, Van Patten, I've got a raging headache."

"He can't handle his liquor like he used to," Bill said to Van Patten. They laughed again.

"Damn both of you."

"Is that O'Malley who just walked in?" Bill asked.

"By god, it is," said Van Patten, "I thought he was in Italy!"

"Call him over here!"

Van Patten stood up, "O'Malley!" When O'Malley saw, he waved and started walking over.

"Afternoon, lads," Chuck O'Malley said.

"I'll be damned, O'Malley," Bill said, "I thought you were in Italy."

"Got back last night." O'Malley had a slight Irish accent, almost unnoticeable unless you paid close attention. "Afternoon, Sawyer."

Sawyer stood up and shook O'Malley's hand. "It's good to see you, Chuck. How was Italy?"

The four men sat down, and O'Malley ordered food. When the waiter left, O'Malley spoke: "So Philips, what happened down there at Scooters last night?"

"Has everybody in this god-forsaken city heard about what happened last night?" The three men with Sawyer started to laugh, he joined them this time. His headache was gone.

After lunch, Bill and Van Patten left to have a smoke. They both told O'Malley that it was great to see him and that they should all get dinner soon. Then, Sawyer watched as both men walked out the door and down the street out of sight. He looked out the window at the murky waters of the Hudson. He saw two people fishing on the boardwalk, a man, and a

woman. It appeared to be the woman's first time fishing because the man kept taking her pole and showing her how to cast. Sawyer noticed how the man never seemed to get upset when he had to show and reshew how to do it. Every time he would smile and laugh, reel the line in and demonstrate again. He handed back the woman's rod and kissed her on the head.

"Sawyer?"

He was brought back to Andersons. For a moment he found himself on the boardwalk next to the woman showing her how to fish. Instead, he was next to O'Malley, who seemed obviously concerned about his friend's state of awareness.

"Yes? What? Did you say something, O'Malley? Sorry, I guess I was dreaming."

"I just asked if you had any plans to see that girl from last night again."

"Oh, right. No. No, I don't think so. Actually, I think dating is the last thing on my mind right now." He took a drink of his water. "I've got work to deal with; did I tell you I got promoted to senior case analyst? I also must start worrying about finding a new place to live because I just cannot stand the concierge in my current building. I also must find a time to travel to Italy, you speak so highly of it, and it sounds like such a Lovely place. What else? I know there was something else."

"Is everything okay, Sawyer?" O'Malley looked at him. O'Malley seemed to be the only person Sawyer ever talked to who actually listened to him.

"Yes, yes. Everything is fine, O'Malley. I've just got a lot on my mind at the moment."

"Well, if you need an escort through Italy, give me a ring, I know I just got home, but I'm already dying to go back. Anyway, I do have to run, it's been great seeing you, Sawyer."

The two men grasped hands. "You too, O'Malley. Come get dinner with Bill, Van Patten, and me when you're free."

Sawyer walked over to the bar. A man named Gene Dumont was the bartender. "Can I get you anything, Mr. Philips?"

"Just a Brandy, Gene, neat."

He sat at the bar for a while. Gene Dumont had finished his shift and now a man named Carl Freeman was bartending. Lunch service was over, and the dinner crew was preparing for the Saturday night specials.

"How are thing, Mr. Philips?" Carl Freeman asked.

"Just swell, Carl, how are you?"

"I can't complain, it's going to be a busy night tonight, I can feel it. Whenever the weather gets all humid like this, everybody tries to find their way to shelter to cool off. Speaking of, do you got plans tonight, Mr. Philips?"

"I'll probably head back to my flat and read. Possibly catch up on a few cases for work."

Just then, someone walked up to the bar. "One moment, Mr. Philips," Carl Freeman said.

"Excuse me," said a soft voice.

Sawyer heard Carl Freeman speak. "Yes, ma'am, how can I help you?"

"Sorry to bother you, but is *Olivies* nearby?"

"Sorry, ma'am, but I believe *Olivies* is on the other side of town. Is there anything else I can help you with?"

"Oh, no." The voice sounded sad. "I was supposed to meet friends there in 5 minutes, but I couldn't find my way. The same thing happened last night. Oh, I hope they don't think

I'm snubbing them. Do you have a phone I could borrow?"

"Yes, ma'am, we do. It's around the corner."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," the voice said. Sawyer felt the brush of wind as the owner of the voice ran past him. The smell of perfume drew his eyes from the bar and before this stranger could round the corner of the bar, Sawyer saw for the first time in over a year the blonde curls and slender legs of Jade Downing.

- - -

The rest of that night felt like a blur to Sawyer Philips. He knew it was her. The girl he had only seen once, over a year ago. The girl who had taken up so many of his waking thoughts. It was her, and she was here. He waited for her at the bar. When she turned the corner, she thanked Carl Freeman and began to walk towards the door.

"Excuse me." Sawyer couldn't let her leave without saying something. She turned to look back at him, he was out of his chair. The sunset shone in through the window and reflected off her blonde curls making them sparkle like glitter. She was beautiful. Just as beautiful, if not more so, as Sawyer remembered her.

"Yes?" She said to him in that soft voice. The voice that sounded like a light breeze blowing through trees on the hottest day of summer.

Sawyer couldn't speak. He felt that anything he said wouldn't be worthy enough to reach her ears. She deserved—no, required—only the most thoughtful and perfectly constructed responses; it was the least he could do for such a girl. Finally:

"Did you say you were headed to Olivies?" It was the best he could come up with. She looked at him. "I did, why?"

"Oh, it's nothing, just, I'm also supposed to meet friends there later tonight, and I wanted to know if you'd like me to walk there with you. I've lived in the city most of my life, so I know my way around fairly well, I'll make sure you don't get lost again."

"That's very sweet of you," she said. She smiled at him; her lips curved up into half-crescents. It was a smile that had no ill intention behind it. "Though," Sawyer drew in a breath and prepared for the worst, "I was planning on taking a taxi there, since I'm already so late."

Sawyer smiled in sadness, he felt empty. "Yes, yes, that makes much more sense. Silly of me to ask you to walk across town when you're already late. Yes, yes, shall I ask Carl to call a taxi for you?"

"That's very sweet of you, but I called one while I was back by the phone." She smiled at him again. "Would you care to join me?" And to not sound too eager, she added: "I mean, since you're also meeting friends there."

Sawyer Philips' father wasn't a mean man, though he was hard-nosed. Ever since the death of Mrs. Philips, Sawyer noticed a change in him. Mr. Philips was never a talkative man, but he became closed off. Sawyer wasn't given any guidance; there was no connection between father and son. As Sawyer got older, he started doing what he wanted; he would sneak out late, come home in the early morning without a word of where he had been. He craved his father's attention and would rather choose an argument over silence. Mr. Philips never gave in; Sawyer hated him for it. Mr. Philips never remarried, and by the time Sawyer graduated high school, he left home without saying goodbye. Sawyer never visited his home, the only contact he had been in with his father was a single letter he sent him, which read:

Dear Father,

I have graduated from Princeton. I start a new job at Rodger & Wells next week. Rapbstcomb told me Hoover gave you the sack. Try to find work, you're no good sitting around all day.

Inside this envelope you'll find a check for \$50, and I'll send one every month until you find a new job.

I hope you're well.

*Your Son,
Sawyer*

Sawyer didn't attach a return address because he knew if he did, the checks would be sent back. It had been over a year and Frank Rapbstcomb told him that his father was still without a job. So, Sawyer continued to send the checks, but he increased them to \$65 a month.

"I would Love that," he said to her. "I'm going to pay my tab and then I'll meet you outside." He was going to faint. He turned to Carl and asked for a water.

"You don't look so good, Mr. Philips."

"I'm fine, Carl, trust me, I'm more than fine." Sawyer paid his tab and walked towards the door and left Andersons.

Outside, the heat was worse than the previous night. There were people all around and Sawyer couldn't see Jade. He scanned each face and looked for her blonde curls, but she wasn't there. All of a sudden someone grabbed his hand. He turned and there she was, even more beautiful in the natural light.

"I figured you wouldn't be able to find me with all these people, so I waited by the door. I didn't think you'd walk right past me." She laughed. He thought it was impossible for somebody not to fall in Love with her.

Sawyer couldn't think of anything to say, he stood there, looking at her. "C'mon," she said, "the taxi is this way." She led him through the swarms of people, he felt like a kite being dragged seamlessly through the air. People flew by him in a blur. He didn't even see her stop in front of the cab, and he clumsily bumped into her.

"Oh, sorry! I guess I wasn't paying attention."

She looked back at him. "That seems to be a common thing with you." There were the half-crescents again.

He laughed awkwardly.

"Do you always make a lady open her own door?"

"What? Oh, no, no! I just—"

"I'm only teasing," she said with a smile. "Us girls know how to open doors too." She reached for the door; her slim fingers wrapped themselves around the handle. Sawyer could tell her nails and the tips of her fingers looked that she bites them, quite frequently it seemed.

Once they were both inside, she spoke again. "So, we're sharing a taxi, but I don't even know your name."

"My name's Philips, Sawyer Philips."

"It's nice to meet you Philips Sawyer Philips, my name is Downing Jade Downing." She extended her nail-bitten hand out to him, and he grasped it firmly. It was cold, he hadn't

noticed it outside because of the heat but she was freezing.

"And you, Downing Jade Downing." They both smiled at each other, and the taxi pulled off towards *Olivies*.

III

At *Olivies*, they split the cost of the fare and got out. This side of town was far less crowded, and the sun began to set.

"I must say, Sawyer, has anybody ever told you that you have the greenest eyes?"

"What about you and your blonde hair?"

"What? Do you not like it?"

"No, no, I Love it. Especially in this light, it looks almost iridescent, changing from silver to blonde to white and to yellow. It's quite magical, actually."

The half-crescents rose, and she stood up on her toes and placed a kiss on Sawyer's cheek. "You flatter me too much, Sawyer." She giggled. "Well, I really should be going in, I've already had my friends waiting for what feels like years! It's been a real pleasure getting to know you, Sawyer."

She turned towards the entrance of *Olivies* in one fluid motion.

"Say, are you free tomorrow night for dinner?"

She stopped and turned back towards him. Through the half-crescents she said, "Yes, I am."

His heart leapt. "Would you care to join me then, tomorrow, around 8 o'clock?"

"I would Love to." She reached inside her bag and pulled out a pen and notepad. Sawyer watched as she wrote something down. "Here," she handed him a piece of paper, "this is the number of the apartment building I'm staying at. When you call, ask for room 111A."

She was inside *Olivies* in a flash and Sawyer stood in the setting sun happier than he had ever been before.

IV

The next morning, Sawyer woke up with the birds, he hadn't slept more than three hours. The sun was peaking over the horizon and the rays of light were slipping through the slits of his curtains. He had a busy day ahead. He would shower, get dressed, eat breakfast, drop his suit off at Bryant's for dry-cleaning, head to Fernando's for a haircut, stop at Andersons for a drink with Bill and Van Patten, meet George Greenberg for a round of golf then lunch at The Château, pick up his suit from Bryant's, return to his flat, nap, shower again, call Jade's apartment to confirm the time, and call a taxi to pick him up.

He started with the shower. When that went smoothly, he moved onto the rest. He was halfway down the stairs when he realized he had forgotten his suit, but this didn't upset him, he told himself that a few extra stairs couldn't do him any harm.

Halfway down the stairs—this time with his suit—he decided to give his father a call tomorrow. This was the first time he thought of him outside of writing the monthly checks. It had been long enough, his father deserved a son, and he deserved a father. He reached the bottom with a smile. *Oh, how a girl can change your life*, he thought.

The weather was cooler today. The sun still shone its mighty rays, but the air wasn't as thick. There was a breeze, but not enough of one to disrupt golf. He could breathe and think

clearly.

He always Loved New York. While he went to school in Jersey, his heart was always for the bigger city. The constant life and energy it has, the options and opportunities; he wouldn't choose any other place to live. He looked out across the street and saw Bryant's. He maneuvered through cars until he was safe on the other side.

Jon Paul Bryant was a large man; intimidating to those who don't know him. He stood six foot five and barely fit into his own store. He had a bushy black beard and donned a flannel shirt every day. To some, he looked like a good old-fashioned lumberjack, but to Sawyer Philips, he was the best damned dry cleaner in New York.

"Sawyer!" Jon Paul roared, "how the hell are ya?"

"Absolutely fantastic! And how are you, my friend." Sawyer extended his hand but instead of taking it, Jon Paul stumbled around the desk and grabbed Sawyer and pulled him in for a hug.

"It's been too long, Sawyer, you need to get your clothes dirty more often." Jon Paul laughed.

"I think you just want more of my money," Sawyer accused with a grin.

"You might be surprised by this, Sawyer, but I do enjoy your company. To an extent," he added with a chuckle. The two men laughed together. "Anyway, what can I do for you today?"

"Just this suit," Sawyer held it up. It was a navy-blue jacket with matching slacks and a sky-blue button up shirt. "I know it's not much, but I've got a date tonight and you do the best dry-cleaning in the city."

"You're damn right I do. Who's this date with? Is it that girl you couldn't stop laughing at?"

"Go to hell," Sawyer said with a laugh.

"Hey, remember who you're talkin' to, you wouldn't want that suit to come back to you two sizes too small, aye?" Jon Paul grabbed the suit. "Ah yes, this would look much better in a size small, don't you think?"

"Oh, shove off it."

"I'm just pullin' your leg, kid, but really, who's it with?"

"Jade Downing."

"Ah, the Downing girl, I heard she was back from college. Little young for you, don't you think?" Jon Paul roared with laughter; it could be heard down 7th street.

"I'll be back around 3 o'clock, you think you'll have it ready?"

"Dumb question, it'll be done."

"Thank you, Jon Paul. I've got to run; I'll be back later."

Walking into Fernando's, Sawyer was greeted by the desk attendant, Julie Casings.

"Good morning, Julie."

"Good morning, Mr. Philips, beautiful day, isn't it?"

"It's gorgeous."

"Mr. Silva should be ready for you; you can head back."

Sawyer Philips navigated his way to the back end of the shop where Fernando Silva was waiting. He was given a clean shave and a short trim all around. When Fernando was finished, he shampooed Sawyer's hair and gave him a quick towel dry. He thanked Fernando, said

goodbye to Julie, and made his way downtown towards Andersons.

“What’s gotten into Philips?” Van Patten asked, “he seems too happy.”

“Haven’t you heard? Sawyer here’s got himself a date with a Mrs. Jade Downing.” Bill gave a sly glance towards Van Patten.

“Word does travel fast in this city,” Sawyer said with a sigh.

Van Patten looked amused. “Is that Peter Downing’s daughter?”

“The very same.”

“Be careful there, Sawyer. I heard Peter Downing killed the last kid that asked out his daughter. They say he’s got a thirst for blood.”

“Oh, shut up, Van Patten, you don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.”

Bill and Van Patten both laughed aloud.

“Anyway, I must be going, I have a round with George Greenberg in an hour.”

“Can’t you stay for another drink?” asked Bill.

“I can’t, I told George I’d get there early to have a drink before we set out.” This was a lie, but neither Bill nor Van Patten had to know.

“Good luck tonight, Philips,” Van Patten said, “I know I can be hard-nosed, but this Downing girl is a real gem.”

“Thanks, Van Patten.” Sawyer stood up to leave, “I’ll call you later, I told O’Malley to get dinner with us soon.” He shook hands with Bill and left.

His lunch with George at The Château was pleasant, even more so because he had just shot his best nine holes of golf. Leaving lunch, he headed back to Bryant’s to pick up his suit. When he walked in, Mrs. Bryant was at the desk.

“Oh, Sawyer, Jon Paul told me you’d be stopping in. He had to run an errand, but he told me your suit is all ready. It’s hanging at the end there.” She pointed to a rack filled with never-ending suits and dresses.

“Thank you, Mrs. Bryant, tell Jon Paul that I’ll be sure to bring in clothes more often.”

“I will, sweetie, good luck on your date.” Mrs. Bryant gave Sawyer a smile. He left and made his way back to his flat. His lunch with George Greenberg ran longer than expected so Sawyer had to cut out his afternoon nap, and head straight to the shower. He washed, making sure to hit every spot twice, shampooed, dried off and put on underwear and an under shirt.

It was nearing 6 o’clock so he figured he would call Jade’s apartment to confirm their time. He walked to his phone and grabbed from his jacket, the slip of paper that had her number on it. He dialed and waited for the tone. After a few seconds a voice picked up.

“West Street Apartments, how can I direct your call?”

“Hello, my name is Sawyer Philips, I’m calling for room 111A.”

“One moment, Mr. Philips.”

“Thank you.” He waited. The tone rang through the other end. After a while someone on the other end picked up.

“H-hello?”

Sawyer didn’t recognize this voice. “Hello, this is room 111A, correct?”

“Y-yes, can I ask who’s c-calling?” It sounded to Sawyer like this person was crying, or at least doing a poor job of holding back tears.

“Of course, this is Sawyer Philips, I’m calling for Mrs. Jade Downing, we had dinner

planned for tonight at 8 o'clock."

The voice on the other end broke out into clear tears. Sawyer could hear them place the phone on the table. A moment later the voice on the other end spoke again.

"S-sorry."

"Is everything okay?" Sawyer asked, he was getting progressively more concerned. Had something happened? Was Jade okay? Why is this person crying? All of these thoughts ran through his head, every situation played through his mind like a movie that never ends.

"J-jade was k-killed last n-night."

Each word hung in Sawyers ear and wouldn't leave.

"What?"

"J-jade was killed in a c-car c-crash last night. I'm s-sorry."

This must be some kind of joke. Jade was a funny girl, she liked joking around with Sawyer. That's it, that had to be it.

"This isn't funny." Sawyer didn't want to play around with her joke. "Now can you tell me where Jade is?"

The voice on the other end started crying again, this time more fiercely than before. "I'm s-sorry, b-but she's d-dead! O-okay? D-dead, gone, k-killed. I have s-spent all d-day contacting h-her f-friends and f-family and this is the l-last thing I n-need. I'm s-sorry. G-goodbye." Sawyer heard the line click off and was met with the monotonous tone of a dead phone call.

V

Dad?

Hi, son.

What was it like when mom died?

It broke my heart. She was the only woman I ever Loved.

Did she Love me?

You were her whole world, son. She Loved you more than anything.

Did you ever get over it? The pain, I mean.

I don't think you ever fully get over it. But each day it gets a little easier. Each day it hurts a little less. But Love never truly goes away. You can never get over Love. It's always there, even if we try to forget it.

Dad?

Yes, son.

What is Love like?

Nobody really knows the answer, son. But I like to think of Love with a capital L. It's not just a feeling, it's a thing. But that's why Love is special, it doesn't follow any single definition. You get to define it yourself.

Dad?

Yes, son.

I Love you.

I Love you too, son. Welcome home.

KATIE SCHEDER

Katie really is one of the best people we have in the TLC, and I am so serious about that. They are always striving to do more, whether that's as a tutor, student manager, or as a general entity in the space. Katie is one of my closest friends in college, and I'm so grateful for everything they've taught me. I know that Katie will go on to do incredible things because they already do incredible things! I'm so proud of them, and I know I'm leaving the TLC in capable hands <3

—Reilly

From Above

Jenny didn't like to be at home. And, if she was stuck at home, she would hide away in her blue-grey room. Shielded behind her wooden door. *It was peaceful then*, at least that's what she told herself. Some days she'd walk down the street, just to see if her parents would notice she wasn't in her room. But, Jenny was always back in her room by the time they *needed* her—usually for dinner. And some days, she'd climb out of her window and onto the roof.

Jenny had never been on a plane, but, while sitting on the roof, she could imagine soaring through the air like the blue jay in front of her. She had always wished she were a bird. A bird that could fly far, far away from here. With its white belly and round, bright blue wings. All the sights she'd see. She looked out beyond her house which was a blob of brown-beige surrounded by lime green grass. From above, she could see the blue jay land on her old play set that had been drowning in weeds. The dark green overtook the once-bright red, yellow, and blue metals that were rusted from age.

Jenny's eyes followed the bird as it then circled around the sky towards the woods that trapped her yard. It zig-zagged in between branches of pine trees. She could almost hear the other birds chirping in the trees and the rushing wind. It was peaceful; white noise to her ears. Jenny imagined the bird's point of view as it dodged pinecone missiles as they fell because of the brushing of its wings. She felt finally free in the vast air. As light as a feather.

But she was lonely. A lone blue jay.

Jenny sat watching as the bird then zipped towards her and her brown blob of a house. Her blue jay flew towards Jenny's bedroom window below her feet, but it couldn't find its way inside. With its beak, it *tap, tap, tapped* on the glass, but the shiny glass didn't let it inside. After its failure, the blue jay joined up with the two squawking cardinals that had just settled themselves on the play set right in front of her.

It was almost like they were talking. She could imagine the conversation well. People always said she had a very vivid imagination.

"You're never home! Always coming home later than you say you will!" the brown mom cardinal squawked. "Why don't you tweet me when you're running behind schedule?" Her brunette feathers fluffed in anger.

"I'm trying to provide for this family! It's not my fault that you lost your job because of your drinking!" the fire red dad cardinal cawed in return.

The mom cardinal burst into chirping tears, and the dad cardinal stood annoyed.

It was quiet. She watched the blue jay cry at the cardinals. But all that came out were small chirps. The cardinals seemed like they couldn't hear it. Gradually, its cries started to gain

volume until it was letting out full bird calls.

“Pay attention to me!” it cried.

“Yeah! Pay attention to them!” Jenny called out, too.

And yet neither of them turned to look at it! So, it started to tap on the play set: *tap, ting, ping*. Finally, the dad cardinal turned its way with an annoyed look on his face. He stared at the blue jay and hobbled towards it. Looking straight in Jenny’s eyes, he hopped towards the blue jay, startling it back.

“What’re you doing?” she cawed suddenly.

“There’s a blue bird right there,” he responded. “It feels like it’s watching us.”

She scoffed, “Just quit it, you’re being ridiculous.” There was a pause. “Let me cry in peace.”

“Oh, so now I’m the bad guy because of a little birdie.”

“You heard me.”

He rolled his bird eyes, “You’re being ridiculous. You know that?” The dad cardinal flew away into the forest, and the mom cardinal followed. Disappearing like a swirl of autumn leaves. They bickered, squawking back and forth along the way, ignoring Jenny, and her blue jay, once again.

She sat on the roof until the sky turned a burning orange—this time had gone on too long, but she couldn’t go home. Jenny sat and sat. Just like the blue jay who Jenny watched fluffing its feathers and closing its eyes, sinking into itself.

Jenny was spiraling. *When will they notice I was gone? Will they even care?* she thought to herself. All Jenny wanted to do was to go to sleep and pretend everything was okay. She missed the warmth of her purple blankets and the comfort of her bed. Tears started to fall down Jenny’s cheeks, and she used the back of her hand to brush them away. She knew that if she went inside for dinner they would just be arguing. Jenny could already hear their rumbles below her feet.

So she stayed.

She waited and waited. Waiting for her parents to notice she was gone.

Jenny watched her blue jay disappear in the inching blackness, still hugging itself. And although she was drifting to sleep, her yard in front of her shined causing her eyes to snap open. The brown house lit up like a glow stick in the ever-darkening sky.

Her dad walked out onto the patio and shouted her name, “Jenny!” She scurried and brought her legs up to her chest, shielding herself from the sound. She knew he wouldn’t see her.

Through the dark, she crept closer to the edge to see what was happening. She leaned her head ever-so-slightly over the edge. Jenny could see her father’s firetruck red hair under the patio light. Her mother came out to join him. There, Jenny saw her parents arguing once again on the patio, but they were arguing about her.

“You’ve never cared about her!” her mom squawked. Jenny scrunched her face at that. She thought her dad always was there for her when she needed him.

He exhaled heavily, “I’m done with this.” Another sigh, “Can we focus on our daughter? For once?” He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands.

Her mom’s face crumpled in the dim light, and her brows furrowed together. “I am focusing on our daughter, it doesn’t seem like you are at all,” she spit at him like a snake. “She’s

missing, and that's all you can even say?"

And as her dad's eyes burned with anger and his nose flared, Jenny called out, "Just knock it off already!"

Both her parents turned towards Jenny with wide open eyes and mouths, like cartoon characters. Jenny crawled on her hands and knees towards the patio where her parents stood unmoving.

"Be careful!" her dad cried.

"Stop!" her mom yelled at the same time.

"I'll be fine, don't tell me what to do. I've been up on this roof more times than I can count," Jenny paused. "Not that you'd know," she mumbled. Jenny eventually made her way to the patio with ease. She looked at the few feet drop below her and decided to climb down to stand with her parents. *It couldn't be as bad as jumping off the swings in elementary school.*

"Give me space," she warned. And with that, she placed her feet on the railing, keeping a hard grip on the roof. There was only darkness that surrounded the patio, but she decided not to focus on that part. When Jenny got her feet settled, she brought her right hand down to hold the railing and then took a little leap of faith onto the wooden patio. Jenny blew some of her hair out of her face when she landed. She looked down at her feet.

"What were you doing up there?" her dad questioned.

Her mom parroted, "We were so worried; what do you think you were doing?" They kept twittering on with one another: question after question they asked.

Instead of the tearful welcome Jenny imagined, she was being bombarded with questions. And each question made her angrier until she burst, "Why does it matter?" She could hear the frogs croaking in the quiet. Her parents looked at each other, stunned.

Jenny repeated, "Why does it matter?" and she continued, "Why does it matter if I'm on the roof if you never even notice I'm gone until it's suppertime?" More croaks.

"Is that all I am to you? Someone to feed? Someone to care about when it's convenient?" She took a breath. "What if I really ran away this time?" another pause, "You need to get it together. Otherwise, why am I even here?"

Her dad tried, "Boo Bear, I'm sorry—"

"Sorry isn't good enough anymore." She sighed, "do better."

Her mom stood silent, chewing her lip, and her dad frowned, running his hands through his hair.

"I'm tired. I'm going to bed. Please, no more fighting tonight." As she walked into the house, in the reflection of the sliding glass door, she saw her dad silently grab her mom's hand.

She passed out as soon as her head hit the pillow.

Jenny woke up to the sound of tapping: *tap, tap, tap*. She rubbed her eyelids and looked towards where the sound was coming from—her window. Her blue jay from yesterday tilted its head when Jenny saw it. "Hey, little birdie," Jenny spoke softly.

She walked towards the blue jay, and when she reached it, she opened the window. "Is it okay if I touch you?" she questioned. The blue jay looked at her. "Look, I've got blue on me just like you." She gestured to her dyed blue hair. Jenny brought her hand towards the blue jay and pet it with one finger. *It was so soft.* Her blue jay closed its eyes and ruffled its feathers like before, hunkering into itself once again.

Until there was a caw that caught her blue jay's attention. Behind the blue jay, the two

cardinals were flying about in a playful manner. With one last glance at Jenny, the blue jay lifted off toward the cardinals. They flew off together into the sky where Jenny lost sight of them.

KACEY SCHMIDT

Kacey was my very first learner, and I never would've imagined that we'd be so close three years later. I'm thankful for all of the work she puts into making the TLC a fun place to be, and I'm extra thankful that she's always able to make my days better just by being in my general vicinity. Kacey is an excellent tutor, student manager, writer, and friend. I am so sad to be leaving her this semester, but I know that the TLC is in safe hands, and I know that she will do so many great things in the future <3
—Reilly

Sea of Nanagons

Ship horns cry out in agony
Wounded by stabbing-cold water
Trembling and thrashing like a wounded dog
Afraid of being seized by the neck

Waves crash against the cliff
Spraying salt onto the aged spire
Sharp light cutting through the fog
Calling to the hounds, warning them

Just as wounded animals fear man
Sailors fear what lies ahead
Hiding in the shadows, cowering from the beam
Suspicious of the stranger who controls it

The ancient bulb is the source of their fear
The jagged rocks are the source of their death
Slicing through the strong mahogany stern
Casting their seafaring souls into her depth

Person Forgets, then Remembers the Ocean for the First Time

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Waves [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED] wo [REDACTED]
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JORDAN SHAMION

I've had the privilege of working with Jordan on her poetry this semester, and getting to watch her grow has been so rewarding. She's taken on new forms and styles in her poetry, and I've really appreciated her constant effort and willingness to try new things. Jordan always has a good attitude, and her poetry all semester has been a reflection of her hard work and vulnerability in her writing. I know she will continue to grow in her poetic ability, and I'm excited to see what beautiful work comes from her in the future!

—Natalie

REAL LIFE < – > MACKINAC ISLAND

Quietly I struggle
Visions of my shortcomings
bubble up inside of me
Why do I have to feel like this.....

This summer
Was one to never forget
The job I worked was different
Better
Than any I'd ever had
Like a vacation every day
Excitement in the eyes of little girls
As I brought them a garnished kitty cocktail
Quickly moving around the patio
Like the delicate dance of a talented running back

Things changed indefinitely when
Eye contact with my manager
Turned into 7 months of
“Good morning beautiful” texts

There is extreme difficulty in accepting
An incredible experience is over
Stage 1 was leaving the island
Stage 2 was not getting asked to come back

Internally I shout
I'm pissed off and I pout
Pinned face to face with self doubt
I tell haters stay mad but I'm mad at myself

My dream
Is to be part of a team

This place showed me belonging
For which I'd been longing

Some things aren't fair
I know it's good to share
Processing thoughts can be deep
Tired so I start counting sheep
Wake up in the morning
Everything is boring
It's raining and,
It's pouring.
I know April showers
bring May flowers
But it's February
And I'm drenched and freezing
Left to simply imagine the warmth of the sun
and a breath of coastal air

I guess there's always the next ferry

I Made It

The grass was always greener
My body could always be leaner
Bedroom could always be cleaner
Woke up one day a college senior

I wanted it to be over
I almost still do
each step grew heavy, sad, and slower
weight of my world opening up sits on my shoulder
So colorful but kind of drowned out by blue
bargaining self talk wondering what is even true

One night this weekend, soft and sweet
my teammate coos from under her bedsheet,
“Jordan, you never miss a beat,
it’s like the hurt just dies beneath your feet”

What a wide eyed freshman perspective
How that dialed me in, I got reflective

My efforts are not in vain
simple statement
worth all the pain
of touching down on pavement
To know I’ve inspired
fired
me up
filled my cup

For a few minutes, i was
Higher than any podium
Rich without the gold
Muscles are tight and I’m getting old

My legs still ache
But tonight its somehow easier to take

I smiled as i fell asleep

- *because i know... nothing i could ever win could make me feel better than this*

Minutes

Minutes minutes minutes
Oh how you pass me by
People say you slip their fingers
Well everyone but I
You never say quite where you're going
Unless she knows
what she wants
with her time
So alive
so divine
in her prime
Then suddenly minutes catch up
Acting all tough
Could be an email
Could be a grade
Could be a missed flight or a boat or a high speed train
Disdain
To live within the minute is to be blessed and cursed
Idk what time she gets there but she certainly isn't the first

SAM ZAJKOWSKI

Seeing Sam grow into a more confident tutor this year has been so great. This semester, he has taken a lead on our Russian tutoring, and I really admire his dedication to the TLC. He is such a consistent presence in our space, and it just wouldn't be the same without him. I know that he will continue to grow and do great things!

—Reilly

Translation of Aleksandr Blok's «Ночь»

The night, the street, the lamp, the pharmacy,
The night so dismal and so meaningless.
Alive another quarter-century—
There's no escape and all is hopelessness.

You'll die—only to be once more reborn
With everything itself left to repeat:
Night—icy ripples the canal has borne,
The pharmacy, the lamp and then the street.

“Tsela”

I am your other side.
I’m all that you forgot.
I am your blood & bones;
I am your tender spots.

I still can feel the rip—
The tearing of the flesh.
My scars and bruises ache
From when I became Less.

Together we bear nations,
Apart we “fight like girls;”
And yet we’re all we have here
In cruel dying worlds.

Like apples in the Fall,
I’m covered up with leaves;
And so your keen eyes miss
A thousand little Eves.

And yet you still obsess
Over the thing you lost.
But you have paid the price
And did not count the cost.

So sit upon your rock,
Explain what God’s about.
How hard is it to speak
With apple in your mout’?

Death of the Ladybugs

When sunset comes to crown the shaking eaves,
With frost apparent on the autumn air,
The ladybug will flee her castle of leaves.

Far on and on she'll fly in autumn air,
That air so cold, half-dead, of which she breathes,
Flying more hurriedly than she would dare,

Until she lands upon the shaking eaves,
To catch her breath awhile on window warm—
The warmth she felt within her castle of leaves...

But then she's set upon by a dreadful storm:
A storm of other buzzing bodies—Thieves!
They huddle close to remake summer-warm.

And yet, the sunset slips below the leaves,
And soon the frost invades their sunlit bower
Upon the quiet sunlit shaking eaves.

Eventually, they'll steal inside like thieves,
Invading my once-peaceful homely tower;
But even when they've passed the shaking eaves,
They always fall like orange autumn leaves.

JOE ZAWACKI

Joe is our first coordinator featured in *Wordplay*, and I'm so glad that he submitted! He always brings the best energy to the TLC, and even when he's not around, his plants are there to give us an aura of fresh air. We have been so lucky to have Joe this past year, and I'm so grateful for all of the energy, commitment, and fun he has brought to the position. Everyone go find Joe and tell him he's the best!!!

—Reilly

A Garbage Can

The can that I live in
Is cold and it's cramped
The bottom is rusty
And the metal is damp

My brow is quite furrowed
Though my belief is sky high
Yet you'd never guess it
While just walking by

The grumpy facade
That you see all the time
Is part of the play
Of a Grouch in his prime

But I dream of the day
That I leave this old bin
And head for the hills
And shed the harsh tin

A grouch who turned happy
What a story that'd be
My mind is made up
Just watch and you'll see!

The plot has been made
I'm ditching the hand
A puppet no more
An escape has been planned

You heard it here first
My blood has ran hot

Besides

I live in a garbage CAN
Not a garbage CANNOT