

the watermark



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thank you to the all wonderful, hard-working
people at the English Department

dedicated to Donna Neal

editor's note

This year has been a hard one for *The Watermark*. Donna Neal, a mainstay of the UMass community for 34 years and lifeblood of the student press, passed away this January. In and out of the office the last year and a half, Donna still did the work of three people, and ever since those behind-the-scenes have been playing catch-up, helplessly trying to replace the irreplaceable.

I didn't know Donna as well as many of my colleagues did, but her absence has been no less cavernous. She was a giant, and *The Watermark* happily thrived in her shadow. Now it must continue on without her. As must we all.

Art is the best friend of struggle and the sister of grief, so I invite you all—those grieving Donna and those simply fighting to get through the days—to take some comfort from these pages and in these poems, stories, photos, and works of art. I know I have.

A special thanks to Joy O'Halloran and Charles Henriques, without you two this year's edition wouldn't be nearly as good as it is. And the biggest thank you of all to our many contributors, without your submissions this journal wouldn't exist at all.

In the final words of Steve Jobs during his 2005 commencement speech at Stanford University, "Stay hungry, stay foolish."

Ruben Circelli
Watermark Editor-in-Chief

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poetry

An Ode to Unrequited Love

Alisa Ferguson

What is this force of Nature that dares act so bold?
Tearing down city walls and turning young men and women old.
Whilst the old are made to dance and churn verses,
To please young fair maidens, alas incurring nothing but their curses.
Forswooth, I pine for one not so green in years,
Yet he leaves all womenkind blue, wracked by tears.
His breath is bathed in ambrosia yet teeming with retort,
For he is kind, but his kind is the unkindest sort.
Breeding in my heart the cruelest, most cankerous Love,
That even in the knowledge of his unobtainable fair, I cannot remove.
The master of my soul carries a deep cavern in each cheek.
Thus, when his two ripe cherries break forth into a bellowing guffaw,
All my practiced prose and eloquent witty replies I cannot speak.
Left lost gazing into his equally captivating twin turquoise lakes, in awe.
Those fountains of grace kill me with a look,
It is this madness that undid Narcissus in such a brook.

Amnesia

Amina Miliani

Mellow state;
Lips like rose petals
cheeks cherry blossomed.
Nostalgic conversations
enticing flashbacks.
A longing for what once was
and a craving for what will be.
Our neurons retrieving the memories
that hide within our minds
not always wanting to be found.
Drunken state;
Temperatures rising
slurring of ideas
swaying of hips
the rhythm in your step
heats my girlhood.
A sensory experience
of the external world
elicits that instinctive reaction.
Intoxication;
spinning with the planet
lacking judgment and understanding
destructive words reflecting
truth.
The world not on its axis
rendering the ability
to formulate adequate thoughts.
Recovery;
Pulsing regret
a loss of memories
Secrets of the night
revealing themselves as
snippets of the past.
Wondering what occurred in those late hours
but only blackness prevails
in my memory.

Complaint Department: Closed Indefinitely

Brittany Pereira

Whining and worrying will wind your next
step to the wine just to feel the next
chance to release all the stress in your neck
that you carry when you're weary of what's next...

Modes

Danny Gibbons

You are like New York City:
Central, fast-paced, vibrant.
Like a city that never sleeps,
(And you probably don't sleep enough)
You move from one hustle to the next
Never ceasing to impress,
Never ceasing to strive,
Never ceasing to work even hours after your body and mind beg you to just
Stop,
And slow down.
You take no breaks, and yet
You appreciate the little things:
The warmth of sunshine on your skin,
A chocolate croissant from a local bakery,
A vocal lick in your favorite song;
The nitty and gritty, which
Makes a life worth living.

Yellow Sunflower

Helen Herrera

Why is it that I see myself as a black and white sunflower?
Maybe it's my composed personality.
Maybe it's my quiet voice that gets silenced by whoever speaks louder
Maybe it's my somewhat emotionless face expressions that lead you to believe I don't care.
Maybe I just won't bother
Or maybe it's the fact that I do not speak my mind when an ignorant asshole speaks their
own
Or perhaps it's my shyness that ruins it all.
I don't know. Why is it that I see myself as a black and white sunflower?

Why is it that I see myself as a black and white sunflower?
When all I crave is the sun radiating.
The sun, my lover, he is everything.
But even when I'm showered with his light, and my roots feel strengthened, I can't seem
to make this silence seem less empty.
But you see, Inside I feel the energy.
Expanding through my roots, my stems, my dark brown eyes
I feel the yellow sunflower that I am meant to be.

(American) Haiku

Jack Whitacre

Perched in eyelets of chainlink fence
the sparrows don't mind
modernity.

Crane in October waters
No unnecessary move.

Butterfly and bee
Meet on the Buddleja.

Painted Poverty, Splashed Riches

Kathleen Bazarsky

A Found Poem with: "A Journey To Colombia's Coffee Belt" By: Gustave Axelson

The straight black back door met the pastel splashed harvest season.
As morning introduced itself to the fluffy clouds and a shooting sun,
People indulged in chocolate colored beans beaten into a drink,
Sipping and socializing as they relaxed.

Nearby,
A Raucous cacophony came from the pounding discoteca
But,
As the hearts of people were carried in paper cups and travel mugs
The rich stabilized and poured a layer of beans into the town.
Bold people drank bolder coffee,
While Paper money was exchanged for labor.

The double spired basilica was nestled near streetside parking
And mountains painted the mornings bright blue.
The accented chair nearest the wall was painted with poverty,
While teacups and cervezas were being sipped.

Nearby,
We shouted
And Nearby,
We vanished.

Fine.

Maeve O'Beirne

Julie's a waitress at the 99

She'll finish this shift, then she'll be
fine.

Her baby boy, Jamal, just turned 5

"Daddy won't be home tonight," *again*. Everything's
fine.

"He won't even make the effort..." Into the phone, she sighs

"...to go to his son's baseball game—It
...s fine."

"I might be home late tonight" She tells her baby, as her pieces break inside

aching joints and cigarette butts left as a tip. "*Service was
fine.*"

And she knows it's a sin to lie.

But may-be just once, it would all be
fine.

Red Lipstick

Maeve O'Beirne

When I turned 9,
 I saw my catcher's mitt through eyes that shined
 like Christmas lights.
I saw the world in shades of green and red, not pink and blue
and if someone asked me what I wanted to do
when I grew up I would have said:
I'm going to be baseball player.

But then someone told me, in their 9-year-old wisdom,
that despite the scrapes on my knees and my intrepid mannerisms
 I was born a girl.
My chromosomes matched
like my shoes, and my earrings, and my bra straps.

You see, women, we are born into a world without homeruns. A world
where big hands slide up little skirts,
where talking too fast makes you a flirt.
And when someone crosses "blurred lines"
we are told that we dramatize,
we are over sexualized.
We become marginalized
 in the bindings of books, we wrote ourselves.

When I turned 19, I realized my
legitimacy is balanced on a scale.
A scale of 1-10 and
back again.

On a statistic that was not my batting average.
I became a ratio. The 1 out of 4.
The statistic nobody prints on a brochure.

But when I saw the sword of judgement unsheathed over my head,
I realized
 that steel
 is not born.
 It is forged.

We are not made of glances over shoulders
or whistles in the distance.
We were forged in the fire of a dauntless persistence.
We were made from sweat and from strength and red lipstick.
And we were not born
 to be broken.

Flickä

Mia Bunker

I laid down on the summer dew grass
By the lake, it's about 1 AM.
Why do I always find myself here in,
This translucent white gown?
Here I am dancing with the ghosts,
It's a lot better this way.

You saw me from a mile away running
Across the forest floor,
Were you happy that I took my meds this time?
I can never remember

It's just us now baby, who cares if anyone else can see.
Just our skin in this ultraviolet mist
I didn't take that drink, but sometimes I wake up questioning
Did it ever really happen?

I can splash this gold paint around,
Paint my nails hooker red and it's alright,
Trash my old relationships
Because who said you have to keep them?
Keep only the humble ones, blood or not.

I heard the word love and saw the behavior,
But you were emotionally unavailable.
Everyone praises you and I'm the only one,
The only one that really knows you,
I'm done waiting for you to come back..

Dancing alone is better anyway.

Back and forth on these train rides to hell,
I find myself in these circles, when will they become
Unpredictable and pretty?
I want to flip Friday's back to magic
There's a smashed disco ball in the corner of your bedroom floor,
The paintings are crooked and these walls are stained with cigarette smoke,
My body is ready

I feel it in my bones,
They rattle in my flesh,
The shows amplified melodies,
They pound through my heart.
I dance with the confetti and the strangers,
What a mystery, this universal pulse we share

Casting Shadows

Mikey Jimenez

He is demanded to remain centered;
to stand still so his bones won't break.
His muscles hug his skin in fear.
His eyes, a river of desperation.
Their reaction, another demand.
Order him to raise his hands.
The cells in his body tell him to run—
Suddenly, his melanin cracks on concrete,
coalescing with the ashy stains on his skin.
No moisturizer would ever repair the damage.
His blood crying, unwillingly flowing across like it did
during the middle passage. It has been a few hundred
years since then, yet his DNA remembers to electrocute
the ground against death to leave behind a light
so no one would go blind to his absence.
After a chalk outline and black plastic,
djembe drums encircle the yellow tape.
His people meditate with candles lit
on the pavement. They cup hands and look to
the sky— they sigh, finishing with an aché amen.

Mind Reader

Mirian Nunes

I wonder what goes on in your mind,
Like if I rummage through it, what will I find?
 Any thoughts of me?
Any thoughts you don't want no one to see?

The Beauty of Inconsistency

Mitchka Herard

This time last year the sky collapsed into a million transparent fragments.

Clumsy bright flashes appeared & dispersed as if mimicking the actions of a heartbeat

The only thing missing was violent shrieks of thunder you claimed were occupying the empty spaces in your lungs

This time last month white dainty flakes rested on the edge of cold, frail lips

You screeched not one, not two, but three times, irritated by the harmless balls of snow that fell onto your eyelashes

They piled on top of one another, promising the very ground they laid upon that this would be the last time, until next time

This time last week spring reared its dainty head again

The sun never shined so brightly, glazing our melanin induced skin as we walked, just walked. No confirmed destination in mind.

You cried out that the authentic aroma was poisoning your airways

Vision blurred by a stream of tears dying to escape your eyelids

This time last night there was a full moon, it stood silent, hovering over us

I could smell the dense scent of envy radiating from you

You confessed that you felt smaller than usual, intimidated by its beauty ... "I wish you looked at me like that" you said

As I stood there shamelessly gawking at the sky

This time, today, I could finally see you, cornered by a misty cloud coated with pessimism

Unable to remember clearly the way your lips used to curl
as effortlessly as the beauty behind the earth's inconsistency

Big Wheels

Nina Hayes

They looked across the width of Broadway
Not old enough to cross the street.
Each boy on a sturdy plastic big wheel,
Poised at the top of M Street hill.

A silent signal starts the race.
The frisky five year olds
Speed to the bottom
Swerving before busy L Street.

Neighbors peek from behind window curtains
Praying the youngsters will be safe.
Mothers appear with harsh words and
The boys' race days come to a halt.

Grade school days are filled with homework.
Seasons change the sports they play.
Summer swim and sail, winter it is hockey
They play baseball, soccer in between.

College means different goals for boys so much alike.
Mass Maritime for Engineering,
Mass Art for the dreamer.
Spring break they get tattooed.

The years advance for these two young men.
Daring adventures and elaborate experiences are compared.
The rigors of Boot Camp at Parris Island
The celebrity life style of Los Angeles

Grown men with families of their own.
The years have passed too swiftly
Best friends, now big wheels, on each individual's journey
One shoots in Afghanistan, the other shoots in Hollywood.

Moon

Patrick Carreiro

Is it from the nether you gain your twisted pleasure?

Full of solitude,
But found in another dimension's latitude.

Sound made pleasure to you,
Right in plan view

Quick now you're fading back,
The Big Bang gave you a cancer that turned your heart black.

The taint of interaction with existence is a priority and a must,
Born Ashes to Ashes,
With the pleading of Dust to Dust.

I'll leave my house anytime,
But in my head I remain, I have to draw the line.

Do you mind if instead I mimed you?
The other half of time escapes you.

Hollow me out and replace me with metal.
Replace my Morales with gears, and smelt me into a devil.

A Poem Kind of About Writing With ADD and Dyslexia, But Not Really

Rachel Freeman

Slam is art
Hand me a pen
And I color over the lines
Cross "I"s
Dot "T"s
Everything is a canvas
When I'm not careful
I let slack out on an idea
Until it slips through my
fingers
Before I've found a pencil
I watch, stolid, as a story runs
away without leaving a
forwarding address
Not even a note

I have this slam
I really like it
it's only on display
In the gallery
in my brain
It lies in repose against an
easel
That groans when
I press pen
To paper
It doesn't want
To be finished

So it sits there
In a purgatory
Between works
Already filed away
And canvases as dry
As my loose-cannon tongue

And canvases as hollow
As my basket-case heart

And canvases as barren
As my imagination

And canvases as untapped
As my potential

I never could look at a blank
page
And know what to say
Your art
an extension of yourself
for all the time we've had
alone
My brain and I, we struggle
to pay attention to one
another

Slam is an art
And I am an apprentice
With no Sage to help me
master the craft

I'm an autodidact
To mine own self
I preach
TEACH!
I study and study and listen
and study
And listen
I've been working on my
poetry voice
The one that knows on a first
read
When to roar what they
believe
And when to get low to make
people listen
My poems always rise and
fall like this

No good poet ever had to be
shown how to purge their
soul

They were doing it already
I want to be good at this
I want to make art with my
words
Not stuff that hangs on walls
Something delicious that
dribbles down chins
and makes a mess

Gil Scott-Heron
My Revolution Will Not Be
Televised!
It will have no antecedent
It will not remind you of
something you read once
Something you've heard
before
It will be a landmark
movement
in the history
Of me

I will get there
To the very brink
Stand at the wall
It's another vacuous page
My loose-cannon tongue
Will take that bitch down
And my scatter-brain games
Will be good for something
All the focus I didn't have
Will stand at perfect attention
Organized into brigades
Covered in anaphora armor
Wielding simile spears

A delicate wrist
Will constrict
To a fist
Close in around the leash
And let the poem stretch me
Across lined paper

I will finish this damn slam

And how many times
Have I tried writing this
Metaphor?

Dark Carnival

Tayla Bennett

She no longer looked forward to the rising sun,
The vibrant pinks and oranges never seemed more dull.
And the smell of the rain,
It just didn't excite her like it used to.

But it wasn't until they told her,
That she, in fact, was so beautiful,
That she realized that she had a problem.

Her lip didn't curve into a smile
Until she pulled it into one, and uttered the words "thank you",
but in her head she was begging them not to lie to her.

That's the funny thing about hating yourself,
you become your own worst enemy,
your own realistic nightmare.
You don't even realize it,
But you've created your own dark carnival.

You're the everyday face painter,
Painting on beautiful blue eyes,
And a smile that promises them that you actually are fine.

The conductor of a lifelong roller coaster,
Encompassing the complexity of the turns.
And while you do all these things,
None of them bring joy.

You're nothing but the carny that doesn't entertain.

Deliver Us From Home

Will Haertel

Behind curling black smokes of Cold War superstition
buried beneath the ashes of
a crumbling American Dream
the ruins of the suburbs are smoldering

Where ancient streets twist and writhe
longing for their paved-over cobblestones
studded with leaning tall houses that loom
like stalking butlers over concrete shattered by frost heaves,

Where gnarled oak trees scrape viciously at the sky in winter
and proud pines punch holes in heaven
with their golden green peaks, and the houses are shadows
layered against the sour New England skyline,

Where blooming rose sunrises become white noise on American televisions,
static, shrouded with black and gray and white,
a stale fog of industrialism creeping through Pocomtuc skies,
like blankets tossed on virulent primal fires by the cities of soot to the south,

Where tall-masted vessels slashed the calm of rolling Atlantic tide
bringing great slick beasts from the black infinity beyond the rocky shore,
their bodies violated by hundreds of protrusions
like a gorey lion's mane death mask,

And north, up that convoluted winding river, where man drew lines in dirt
to say who he shall worship as God and how,
they feigned tribal dances like rituals to civility,
and they built the suburbs in gleaming Babylonian marble.

Chronic Death

Zainab Salejwala

I've been mourning your death. She isn't dead. Yet. But she isn't quite alive either. But neither am I. I inherited your brown skin, short fuse temper and the too easy pit fall into forever sadness. I've been mourning your death ever since you birthed me into this life. Sometimes you'll have IV's in your neck, or blood transfusions but most of the time it's arms that hold sixteen gauge needles since you were seventeen and scars that are old but can easily come undone. Hands that turn child resistant medicine caps, although there is no child in the house anymore. Propranolol. No alcohol with this medication or you will probably have an overdose. Every day. Colchicine. Please refer to patient information leaflet that tells you all the side effects. Every night. Allopurinol. Drink plenty of fluids while taking this medicine and no, your salty tears don't count. Every week for the rest of your life. This machine takes out your blood and your urine and vitamins too. Cleans it. Puts it back into you but not the urine or the vitamins, obviously. Three times a week. You'll have eggs and toast when you get home. If you have the energy. When you get home. With sunken eyes and cold cheeks. When you get home. With your dark red lipstick. If you'll come home. Swallow Prednisone. All your levels are out of whack. Take five tabs the day before and day of procedure. *You can come if you want but it's okay if you have homework to do. I'll be fine.* And you'll tell me to clean my room, take out the trash. Sandimmune, 250 dollars a month without health insurance. Should be administered with adrenal corticosteroids but not with other immunosuppressive agents. *Zainab didn't I tell you to take out the trash, take out the trash, take out the trash! Clean your room too!* Sometimes I can't tell if it's you talking or the disease or the medications. Or all three. Amlodipine. May cause dizziness *but that's okay.* *And when you leave the house, take out the trash, take your keys, do you have your phone? Did you take your Charlie card and don't forget to take out the trash! love you!* Acetaminophen. Extra strength, my ma got that. Temporarily relieves aches and minor pains. *What about the long term ones?* End stage renal failure *comes with a free package of suffering.* If you have questions, **don't** check with your doctor or pharmacist because they really **don't** care. *Your medical procedure was not covered by your current health care provider.* You tell me you don't feel like doing anything today. That you feel sluggish. Is it the same type of sluggish when we fast during Ramadan, ma? Is that the type of sluggish you feel every day? Colcrlys. Avoid grapefruit or grapefruit juice with this medication. Yet you still manage to knead dough and make roti and dinner even when you get cramps in your hands. Atorvastatin. Helps with cholesterol. Hands that clean countertops and turn the washer on. Revela. Take one three times a day with meals. Still pick up and fold clothes off of her daughter's bedroom floor. Fingers that take off her own Band-Aids and brown stained gauze pads from dialysis. *Zainab can you get the peppers from the bottom of the fridge.* Omeprazole. No heartburns. *My back is killing me today.* Maybe it's your failing kidney. *Zainab can you get the pan and the oil from the cabinet.* Atorvastatin. Do not chew or crush pill. *Zainab can you get the phone, I can't put pressure on my feet. I think they're swollen.* Hands that hold my hands. *We are going to switch you to the generic brand because of your health insurance.* Hands that pray. *I'm fine. Just tired.* Levothyroxine. Take on empty stomach. *Sometimes when I wake up the thirty-one-year-old stitches throb like fresh sutures.* I realize I become an extension of legs and arms. An extension of legs and arms that can no longer

work. *I'm fine. Just tired.* That are decaying? Or already dead? You say you're tired of life. So am I. I've been mourning your death. She isn't dead. Yet. But she isn't quite alive either. But neither am I. *I'm fine. Just tired.*

prose

The Haunt

Chelsey Grasso

When the landlord called from Connecticut, the first thing he told Eva was that he had found her mother's blanched body splayed out on top of the carpet, her hair still covered in sticky, brown serum from the dye-job she was in the middle of performing. Presumed heart attack. The landlord gave his condolences, and that was the end of the call.

Eva got up from her cubicle and wandered to the bathroom after she hung up. She stared at a small clump of toilet paper that floated on top of the water from the stall's previous occupant. A spot of red on the tissue made her feel nauseous as she leaned against the rusted, brown wall. She lifted her foot up to flush and watched as the clump made its way round and round the white bowl. As soon as it was gone she vomited, the backsplash hitting her pale, bloodless face. A few strands of her hair fell into the toilet while she heaved, the tips catching the water's edge as the bowl refilled itself with water. When the woman in the neighboring stall asked if she was all right, Eva told her that it was just a little morning sickness, that she was already sixteen weeks along and that it should be stopping soon.

On the drive home Eva's fingers gripped the steering wheel while her thumbs traced over the smooth curve. As she pulled into her asphalt driveway, the borders of it steamed from where the sprinklers had trickled onto it in the California heat, crossing over from the dead, brown lawn they were meant to be watering. A vibration hummed on the dashboard, and Eva peeled her back away from the leather seat as she reached forward to silence her phone. She took the keys out of the ignition and read the waiting text message. *Sorry again for your loss.* It was from her mother's landlord.

The heat in the Kia Sorento was close to unbearable with the air conditioner now turned off, but Eva remained seated on the stiff, black seat for another minute, not wanting to go inside her own empty home. She hadn't realized how much stuff her ex had owned until it was no longer taking up space in the house. Her phone buzzed again. *Your mother's apartment needs to be emptied by the end of the month.* She opened the car door and threw up the little that was left in her stomach onto the driveway's black asphalt. Another buzz. *There's a waiting list for the unit.*

*

Eva's mother had subscribed to a weekly newsletter that compared the size of the fetus to a different fruit each week, and she forwarded the emails to her daughter throughout the first trimester and into the second. Eva's most recent update, and subsequently, the last email from her mother, had informed her that the baby was the size of an avocado.

Eva thought about this on the plane ride to Connecticut as a toddler kicked the back of her seat, a six-hour drumming that didn't stop until the final seatbelt light had gone off and they taxied to the destination gate. The mother seated behind Eva had tried to reason with the child, but her words were squandered as crackers flew and screams pierced the ears of nearly everybody in the back half of the plane. The shireks drilled

into Eva, and every time she peeked between the seats she saw a mother with eyes that brimmed like swimming pools, her child diving into them with each howl.

The avocado rolled around inside of Eva during the entire affair. She didn't bother trying to reason with it. Instead she rubbed her belly and got up three times to use the bathroom, not sure if it was the turbulence or morning sickness that prompted her. She had felt queasy ever since the first pregnancy test. Eva let the mother and child exit the plane before her and watched as the woman's slumped silhouette made its way down the aisle.

*

The cab ride to her mother's apartment was brief, and Eva found the silver key beneath the trampled mat when she arrived. She hadn't lived in the apartment for over a decade, and her once white-walled bedroom had long since been turned into an art studio of sorts. The "No Parking" sign was the last remnant of her childhood still on display, now crookedly hung from a plastic utility hook on the outside of her former bedroom door. Inside the room, hundreds of acrylic paint bottles sat stacked in a spinning carousel, overflowed from desk drawers, and teetered on poorly constructed shelves that were purchased at half price from the local hardware store. Her mother had picked up the hobby when Eva left for college, saying she needed something to keep her busy now that her daughter wasn't around.

Like all hobbyists, her mother had started with flowers. The first canvas was filled with daisies, the petals mixed with too much purple and the stems showing too much curve. She had sent it to Eva, framed and matted, during her first month away at university. Next came the limp lilies and the seemingly-dazed Birds of Paradise. By Eva's second semester her mother had moved on to fruit—pears that were a little too plump, lopsided grapes, kiwis that might well have doubled as rocks.

The walls were bare in the traditional sense, but covered with color all the same. Eva's mother had eventually given up on painting actual objects and gone the abstract route, flinging colors at canvases and walls that she deemed as being "much too empty." She coated the walls of her daughter's old haunt with speckles of color, and as Eva now taped the moving box shut, her surroundings overwhelmed her. She couldn't help but think of the work the landlord would have to put into repainting the room. Her mother had flung the acrylics onto the walls so many times that their layered surface somehow felt alive now. It was as if the room had a heartbeat, the hues silently throbbing.

Once, when Eva had gone to a sleepaway camp during the summer before sixth grade, she helped write an entire play with a few of her fellow campmates. They sewed the costumes themselves from the clothes they found in the Lost & Found, painted backdrops of castles and dungeons on large slats of cardboard from the recycling bins, even held auditions for the ensemble who would share the stage with them. When it was time to run through the first full dress rehearsal, Eva took her place on stage beside the other campers. They got about two lines into the opening song when Missy, the bossiest of the children, brought everyone to a hush.

"Stop, stop, stop Eva Williams is *not* singing in the right key." Eva's face darkened into a deep shade of red, and when the singing recommenced she was sure to lip sync for the rest of the performance. Since that day she had never sung again in the company of others, and even when she was alone she wouldn't surpass a low hum.

The first thing Eva's mother had told her to do when she found out her daughter was pregnant was to sing to her stomach. "It's good for the baby," she'd said. "They can recognize the same songs that they heard inside of the womb once they're out of it, and in a world like this one, every baby needs that comfort." Eva had attempted this for the first couple weeks of her pregnancy, when the baby was supposedly the size of a grape, but she stopped when she decided it was silly to sing to something so tiny. The real reason, of course, was that she couldn't carry a tune.

Her mother's clothes took the better part of the evening to pack up. No matter how many scarves and cashmere sweaters Eva pulled out, a dozen more always seemed hidden beneath. Her mother had taken over every closet and bureau in the house after Eva left for college, and she filled them will all sorts of treasures that were hunted out at local thrift shops—golden bedroom slippers, wide-legged trousers, silk white blouses that weren't even missing one button. Eva came across the oversized derby hat her mother had insisted on wearing to church every Sunday despite the dozens of eyes it drew towards them, or perhaps because of it. She found the faux pearl strands that always accompanied the hat. One of her mother's boyfriends, James, had given her those pearls when he moved in with them, and her mother had also been wearing them the day he left. The memory stuck with Eva like gum on the bottom of her shoe. No matter how many times she tried to scrape it away, it always felt sticky.

Eva spent the next few days after her mother's breakup at her best friend Natalie Wilkinson's home. They stayed up the first night watching a T.V. marathon about haunted houses, where ghost hunters talked to spirits and felt cold chills wherever they went. Hiding beneath the covers when it was time to go to sleep, Eva's heart raced every time she heard a floorboard creak or the refrigerator groan. When she spotted James at the gas station about fifteen yards away from Mrs. Wilkinson's car the next day, she ducked in her seat. Natalie assumed this was some new game Eva had made up, and dropped her own head below the window's reach.

"What are we hiding from?" she asked Eva.

"Ghosts," Eva whispered back.

Now, Eva at last made her way to the kitchen, using her remaining few boxes to pack the little she could find in the barren room. Her mother mostly ate out, and the only thing she found in the kitchen's cabinets was her good dinnerware, an heirloom passed down from Eva's grandmother. The dishes sparkled in the bright, fluorescent light of the kitchen, stacked neatly on top of themselves. Eva used her mother's remaining sets of pastel blazers to wrap up the china, her stockings for the crystal.

*

A static-ridden image appeared on the monitor, muted but filled with such tremendous depths Eva thought she might have held an entire galaxy in her swollen belly. Even the slightest shift of the probe over the cool, sticky jelly that covered her abdomen set the black and white nebula swirling into motion. She closed her eyes as the sac of amniotic fluid churned on the screen, not wanting to get sick from the grayscale. "Would you like to know the sex?" the doctor asked.

*

The pile of pamphlets Dr. Swanson had handed Eva after she asked about the adoption process flapped on the passenger seat while she drove home, the air conditioning blasting them with its icy breeze. *Planning Your Family. The Facts of Life. What It Means to Be a Mother.* She pulled into her driveway and as soon as the car was shifted into park, *The Facts of Life* brochure ended up in her hands, its muted colors making her question its age. She opened it and flipped to the stage of the fetus at nineteen weeks.

Baby now has longer legs than arms, and baby might now be using those legs to let you know he/she's there! Expect to feel some kicking in the coming weeks. While the sensation will be subtle, your partner may be able to feel something by gently resting his hand or ear against your growing belly.

The only two hands Eva had were her own, and she pressed them down on her abdomen with enough force to leave white outlines of her fingers. She watched as the color filled back in, her blood warming up the vessels once again. She wondered if the baby could feel her, or if there was too much separating them. She wondered if it would bruise just as easily as a piece of produce might.

*

The dishes arrived on her California porch first, a large cardboard box with the word FRAGILE stamped along its sides. Eva lugged the box into her own kitchen and unpacked a crystal champagne flute, something special to drink her sparkling apple cider out of. After that it was the polished serving spoons, utensils Eva had never actually owned, and by the end of the week she was only eating off of the delicate antique dishes. Mostly take-out. Her chow mien covered the blush-colored geraniums, the noodles imitated their golden stems.

The morning sickness had at last subsided, and Eva made up for her loss of appetite over the past few months with a ravenous one that now overtook her. Every morning she stopped by the local donut shop for a bacon and egg sandwich (something she couldn't even bear the thought of only two weeks ago). The pamphlets had said this was perfectly normal. They also said that her sex drive was likely to return during this trimester. That, she couldn't attest to. As for the baby, it was now between five and six inches and weighing just under six ounces. Eva couldn't imagine what kind of fruit that would be. She debated between a peach and a Red Delicious before deciding it was best to stick with an avocado—the Florida kind though, not the California kind.

At work the office secretary threw a baby shower for her, where most of the party was spent debating whether green really can be considered a gender-neutral color. The whole office chipped in to get Eva a two-hundred-dollar gift certificate to a crib store, and she brought home half of a strawberry shortcake and ate it for dinner that night. The next day, when Eva returned to her cubicle, all the balloons from the party had deflated and fallen to the floor, making a swampy green obstacle around her ankles while she sat at her desk. The janitors took them away at the week's end, but not before at least three of them had popped while rolling her chair around to answer client calls. When the clients heard the balloons burst on the other end of the line, they would ask if everything was alright, to which Eva responded with long-winded explanations of the baby shower and the deflated decorations. "Oh, it sounded like someone was getting shot," was always their most frequent reply before they steered the conversation back towards business matters.

Four boxes of clothes trickled in over the next week, and Eva filled her dresser drawers and hangers with her mother's wardrobe. She jammed her mother's silk robe into the closet alongside her own terrycloth one. She hung the fedoras and beach-brimmed hats alongside her knit beanies. She lined up her mother's leather mules beside her own beaten-down clogs. Eva found the faux pearl necklace at the bottom of the last box. She tied it around her neck and looked at herself in the window's reflection. The pearls hung like a rope of weighted stones. The reflection startled her.

She began layering on her mother's clothing. Lace tights and a corduroy skirt. A polka-dotted blouse with a paisley silk scarf. Bright blue espadrilles. Like a child playing dress-up, on came the costume jewelry and the cubic zirconia rings, the rose-patterned kimono and the derby hat.

In the kitchen, out came handfuls of acrylic paint tubes and she began twisting off their caps. One by one the caps fell until they surrounded her as if a glass jar of tiny pebbles had just burst all around. Next came the colors, slick beds of reds and purples and blues and yellows covered the table. She squeezed the paint from the tubes and then discarded their emptied remains to the floor. The linoleum tiles below her feet became a graveyard as the table in front of her burst into life.

The costume jewelry swinging around her neck clacked against the faux pearls. The scarf slid off her shoulders from a draft coming in through the kitchen window. She repositioned it and the baby kicked.

At that she unbuttoned her blouse and began painting, from beneath the curve of her breasts and on past her belly button. Swirling her fingers through the colors and over her stomach, she covered the black and white static that had haunted her at the ultrasound appointment.

Once the first layer had dried, she painted a second coat and a third. Then she sang. She sang as loudly and as boldly as she could. She painted and she sang until she started to feel woozy.

Only Summer

Chelsey Grasso

Gate-to-gate it's fifty minutes.

Two airline stewardesses follow me off the jet bridge. They kiss each other's cheeks before they separate, presumably going to their homes. To their families. Though perhaps they're only going to hotel rooms. I can't be sure of these things.

The terminal is sleepy, and because of my early arrival, I know my father will not be here for at least another twenty minutes. I sit for a while watching a family of five pass a bag of pretzels between themselves at the gate. When they get to the bottom of the bag, the youngest daughter's damp fingertips stick to crystals of salt, and I pick myself up and begin wandering the air-conditioned halls of Terminal A.

Lobsters dressed in Hawaiian shorts with smears of sunblock between their antennae. Lobsters wearing chef hats and stirring pots with wooden spoons. Lobsters reading books under the shade of striped beach umbrellas. These lobsters are Portland's souvenirs. I consider buying one for my dad, but I know he'll just wish I hadn't.

As I'm making my exit from the store, my eyes fall on it: a hand-drawn map of Maine's entire lake region printed on pre-yellowed paper hoping to imitate age. Though small enough to miss if you weren't looking for it, Lake Clearwater was there.

"That's twelve dollars, honey. You want a cardboard tube to protect it?" the cashier, a woman with greying hair who wears a name tag reading Cheryl on her crisp, white blouse, asks me.

"Sure." I watch her begin to roll up the poster. "How's your day been going, Cheryl?"

Hearing her name, she looks up. I wonder if I've spooked her, but there it is, her name printed in bold, black letters on her chest for all of Terminal A to see, if they were looking. But they're not. I'm the only one looking.

Just as she is about to respond, my phone buzzes, cutting her off.

Safe flight? it reads on the screen. The cashier of course can't read this, but perhaps she can read something else. Perhaps the narrowing of my eyelids and the furrowing of my brows tells Cheryl something.

"Just fine, thank you, miss."

*

"Olivia!" my father proclaims as he gets out of the driver's seat and walks around his 1997 VW Station Wagon. Like I'm royalty or something, standing beside my worn, rolling suitcase in arrivals. Like he's too scared to say my name in any other way.

"Hey dad."

He holds me for a few seconds longer than he should and then gives me a kiss on the forehead.

“Give me that.” He takes my suitcase and lifts it into the trunk, but I hold onto the cardboard tube.

“How does a lobster roll sound, Olivia?” He prompts me once more, “To the Gull?”

I shoot him a giant smile. The old man is my father, after all.

*

The dirt parking lot has four cars in it, about half-capacity. I follow my father’s lead through the battered screen door and take a look at the menu that hasn’t changed over the past three decades, with exception to the prices. I order what I always order, the lobster stew, and my father orders what he always orders, the fried haddock sandwich with extra tartar sauce.

We take the paper receipt and grab a seat at one of the tired, red picnic benches outside.

“I hate to ask you again, but I hate not to,” my father says as soon as we’ve popped open our bottles of Bud. “How are you feeling?”

After drawing a few circles in the dirt with my sneaker, I reply. “I don’t know. I feel duped. I feel embarrassed.” I spin the wedding band on my finger.

He keeps his eyes on the circle I’ve dug into the earth.

“You didn’t tell everyone at Clearwater, did you?” I ask him, though I know the news I fear sharing has already made its rounds. And even if it hasn’t, I’m not sure that even helps.

My father looks up at me, meeting my eye with a look that can almost be described as fierce. He’s a wounded animal protecting his cub. How I hate to be the cub.

“I haven’t told a soul.” His eyes soften. “Did he really do that, Olivia?”

At this I stop twirling the wedding band around my finger. My feet stop scraping the ground. “Does it really matter?”

As if he’s heard me, as if there aren’t three hundred miles between us, my phone starts vibrating. Jason’s name shows up on the display. My father sees it.

“Of course it matters,” he replies.

Number 26 is called from the loudspeaker, and I jump to my feet to get our food.

“Of course he did it,” I say as I silence the phone and head into the shack. My father looks burdened, but not surprised. Neither was I when I heard the truth.

At the counter, the cashier slides our tray over to me with the haddock sandwich in a grease-soaked cardboard box and my stew nearing the brim of a large paper cup. As I walk out of the shack, an elderly man holds the screen door open for me, “Best lobster stew in the state,” I say. He nods his head and I pass through the door back over to the picnic table where my father is sitting, twiddling his thumbs in a way that makes him look like he belongs in a cartoon.

As soon as I set down the tray of food, my father digs into his sandwich. I pick up my spoon to stir the stew, taking a long breath as I do it.

A thin layer of pure liquid butter rests on top of the heavy cream base — like nothing you'd find in Manhattan.

*

We turn onto Blue Herring Road and then onto Cobb Hill Road. Almost instantly everything seems familiar, as though it hasn't changed at all during my lifetime. The old, overgrown graveyard looks exactly as it has for the past three decades, and the familiar white church at the top of hill is still standing, steeple and all. We pass the same single-story houses and yards that have always stood here. My father slows down the car as we approach the final turn onto Ivy Lane. Standing at the top of the steep, dirt hill is a pine tree with boards with family names nailed to its side. I scan the list for my own maiden name. It's there. It always is.

My father shifts the car into the lowest gear and makes a tight turn onto the sharp, shaded road. We take the drive slowly, around the curves and over the bumps, but as soon as I'm starting to enjoy the turbulence of the road, it ends and my father switches gears. We make our way down the backend of the shorefront, passing by the Lawton's, the Matthews', the Palmer's, and the Beehive before turning onto our lot.

I follow my father into the cabin and head to my room, tossing my suitcase onto the lumpy queen mattress that's been covered with a square-patch bedspread. I look out the room's window and see my dad already sitting on the dock, a bottle of Bud in his hand.

My phone rings. My husband's name again shows up on the screen. I suddenly feel so heavy the weight is almost tangible. I decide on a swim.

I begin to feel taunted by the summers I missed my chance to spend basking in this cabin-life as I instead made my own reality in Manhattan, which now moves on without me. I think of the years before my marriage to Jason, the days of my childhood, my youth, spent in anticipation of June and July, where I would get to leave school behind to come here.

The moment my feet step onto the battered, worn wood of the dock, I feel as though no time has passed at all since the last swim I had in this lake. It's as if there was no New York City. Only summer.

My father turns to face me from his wicker chair.

"Going for a dive in the fountain of youth?" he asks me.

"First swim of the summer," I say as I drop my towel onto the splintered wood. I start to descend the ladder, one step at a time.

"I don't know why you do that," my father says to me.

"Do what?"

"Torture yourself like that."

My feet touch the lake's floor and goosebumps rise on my arms. I'm waist deep, and there's no turning back now.

"Why don't you just jump in and get it over with?"

At that I immediately push myself up off the lake's floor and into a shallow dive under the water. I go for as long as my lungs will allow, swimming twenty feet out.

“Chilly?” my father calls out from the dock, taking a swig from his beer.

“Like bath water!” I yell in response to him, slowly beginning to tread my way back towards the dock.

I swim up to the ladder and grab the bottle of Dr. Bronner’s we leave down by the water. I cover myself with it, making suds on the top of my head and working down to my toes. I cover every crevice. I fill all my empty spaces.

Jumping back into the lake from the ladder, my fingers run through my hair. I swim out to the largest rock in the cove, about forty feet from where our dock ends. It sticks out above the water by only a few inches, but when standing on it I have a perfect view of the entire shoreline. The Lawton’s, the Matthews’, the Palmer’s, the Beehive, and our place make up the small cove, each cabin separated by close to a hundred feet of pines. My grandfather originally purchased this section of the shoreline in the sixties. The cabins were all part of a rundown girls’ summer camp that had been shut down fifteen years prior and fallen to ruin. Purchasing the old camp on a bank loan he’d never be able to repay on his own, he divided the land and cabins and sold them to his closest friends. The property hasn’t changed hands since then, instead being passed down from generation to generation. The Beehive, originally the camp’s dining hall, was split between the four families and still serves as a communal lodge area where we all gather for birthdays, holidays, and potlucks during the summer.

Our cabins are luckily sheltered from most of the waves caused by large wakes. The boys’ camp is directly across from us, their shoreline covered with colorful sailfish boats and tin canoes that stay the same year after year, though the campers are constantly matriculating. There’s also the rope swing, hanging from the ancient, curved tree that grows nearly horizontal out above the water in between the Palmer’s cabin and ours. And then there are the giant rocks that stick out along the shoreline, like the one I’m standing on. When I was younger I would give them names and race the other kids in swimming from one to the other. Jason and I had a small weekend wedding here, and we did the same thing with our friends and family — though Jason didn’t know the rocks’ names, and I didn’t tell him them.

For the next twenty minutes I swim, I take mermaid dives, and I collect freshwater clams until my hands are so full that they all fall back to the lake’s sandy floor. When I finally climb up the ladder and wrap myself in my towel, my father is no longer there. From where I’m standing I catch his silhouette in the kitchen. Twilight is coming, and a calm yellow light spilling out from the cabin’s windows draws me back inside.

“Pasta for dinner?” I ask him, seeing the box of rigatoni on the counter.

“Mac and cheese. There’s going to be a potluck at the Beehive.”

“Who’s going to be there?”

“The Palmers got here last week, and the Lawtons are here too. I don’t think the Matthews will be showing up until next week.” He drops shredded pieces of cheddar, gouda, and Havarti cheese into a large saucepan heated on the stovetop.

“Stir this, Olivia,” he says as he hands me a small metal spoon and adds a little milk to the concoction. I focus all my attention on whisking the cheese, the simple motion of it. As the motion begins to comfort me, my father takes over, stirring it faster and more delicately than I had.

I open the box of noodles and pour it into the large pot on the back burner, enjoying the smooth sounds of the rigatoni as it glides over itself before sinking into the boiling water.

“You should come tonight, Olivia. You can’t hide from it forever,” my father says at last.

I head into my bedroom, hang my towel on the door’s back hooks, and change out of my damp bathing suit into some dry jeans and a flannel button-up before collapsing onto my bed. The tears start falling, and I don’t stop them.

*

My father knocks on my bedroom door a little past six o’clock.

“I’m going to head over to the Beehive. You ready?”

“You go ahead, I’ll meet you there.”

I hear my father’s footsteps retreat from my door and the screen scrape the floor as he heads out of the cabin.

I take my time waking up from what had become a nap and listen to the gentle sound of the lapping water outside. I pick up my phone and lift it to the plate glass of the window. I take a photo of the sun setting over the dock, the place Jason and I exchanged our vows nearly six years ago. Then I send it to him.

Almost instantly my phone starts vibrating. I silence it.

Then from him, a text. It’s a photo of the Manhattan skyline as taken from our apartment window, but it’s been doctored. Some quick editing has made the lights brighter and the buildings more vibrant. The photo’s followed by another message. *Come home soon?*

*

It’s been ten months since I’ve stepped foot into the Beehive. The old building’s front beams are still sinking deep into the water it overlooks. This is where we’ve always gathered, but now I’m afraid to make myself known.

The Lawtons and the Palmers are there, as is my father, who is already dishing out the mac and cheese beside a table filled with roasted potatoes, grilled pork, rosemary bread rolls, and cobs of corn.

Lydia Lawton, the maid of honor at my wedding, is the first to approach me. Her long brown hair is showing hints of grey, though her eyes shine as if she is still twelve years old and we are discovering new paths through the pines that separate our cabins. She engulfs me in her arms and then grips my elbows.

“How long are you staying?” she asks me.

“Not sure yet. How about you?”

“My parents signed the cabin over to us this spring. We’re going to try and winterproof the cabin and make a go of it here year-round!” Lydia’s eyes manage to brighten even more, like floating orbs with crow’s feet just beginning to form creases around them.

“Wow,” is all I can muster.

Her daughter runs up, grabbing me around the waist and pressing her small blonde head into my stomach. Lydia's mother, Terry, is right behind her, and she follows her granddaughter's lead, except instead of pressing her head into my stomach, she gently takes mine and presses it into her shoulder. Like my father at the airport, she holds me a few seconds longer than she would normally.

"Olivia, it's so good to see you," she tells me as she releases me from her hold. "Can you believe my daughter, winterproofing the place? I'm always surprised to see the cabin still standing when we arrive in June." Her eyes glisten as she says this, though I'm not sure if they're watering from her old age or something else. Her long grey hair rests woven in a braid that falls low on her back. I never knew Terry's husband. I wonder if Lydia ever met him, or even asked about him.

Lydia tells her mother to stop worrying and leads me to the porch. People I've known my entire life approach me without hesitation. They ask about the classes I taught this past year, they ask if I think my sister will be able to make it out here this summer, and they ask about how bad the crime is in Manhattan. The one thing they don't ask about is Jason, though each and every one of them served as witnesses at my wedding half a decade ago.

Sopping up the leftovers on their plates while popping open cans of PBR and topping off plastic wine glasses, for a moment I feel as if nothing has happened. For a moment I swear that Jason is standing beside me, whispering something in my ear. Something about the people, or the place, or the water. But of course he isn't.

I find myself beside Jordan Palmer, a few years my senior and once my boyfriend for all of two months. He's married now, and his wife, Jenna, is seated beside us while their two children play a game of Go Fish. His wife is the type of woman you would expect a man like him to marry.

"Is it taking its toll on you?" his wife asks me.

Jordan shifts his attention back to his wife too quickly to ignore. Jenna realizes her mistake and clarifies her question as a slight blush fans out over her cheeks.

"The city. New York. The first few years I lived there, I thrived in it. The energy worked with me, and I felt like I would never want to leave," she elaborates. "But it was three years for me. Three years and all that force started to turn on me. I felt like I was working against Manhattan."

"You know, it's not the worst thing. It's also not the best." I excuse myself from the conversation, not yet ready to talk about me. Not yet ready to talk about what I know is on everybody's minds. I am here, alone, and that has already confirmed it for these people.

My father catches me as I head for the door. Handing me a piece of peach cobbler, he leads me to the back of the enormous cabin where layers of drawings, photographs, and crafts cover the wall. I let my eyes scan the artifacts — Polaroids of Lydia and I canoeing, stain-glass mirrors that Terry has made over the years, large prints of Jordan and the Matthews boys sitting around a bonfire, crayon-drawn self-portraits of my father and I.

"Here," my father says as he hands me a cardboard poster tube, "I found this in the car on my way over."

I recognize the poster I bought earlier at the airport and take it out of the cardboard tube. I spread the rolled up paper out onto one of the Beehive's large wooden tables, its yellowed edges flicking up beneath the painted rocks that I place on all four of its corners.

Terry walks up behind us. She's come with two bowls of cobbler in her hands and she offers one to my father. "That's a nice addition," she says, looking down at the map and then back up at the walls.

Lydia is close behind her, holding her daughter in her arms as she approaches. "So they've found out about our paradise and are printing it on regional maps?"

I grab some tacks from the small tin canister on the nearby bookshelf. I pin the map onto the wall. We all stand around in a half circle now, eating our cobbler and staring up at the newest addition to the Beehive. Jordan walks up to join us with one of his sons in his arms. He doesn't need to ask what we're looking at.

Then we talk. We all talk. We talk about how close the sailfish boats have gotten to our side of the lake this year and if anyone has tried out the rope swing lately. We laugh about the rocks and debate over who really was the fastest when it came to swimming from one to another. Lydia talks of them as if they're actual referees, calling them by names I haven't heard in so long. As my father recalls the story of how my grandfather acquired the property, a tale I've been told more times than I care to remember, my phone begins to vibrate in my pocket. It quivers like a rabid animal begging to be set free. This time, I do not silence it. This time, I let it wail.

Neighborly

David Carillo

“I really don’t care that you do it, just don’t do it in the basement. The smell creeps up into our floor,” my father said to the kid.

“I wasn’t even doing it,” was the answer.

“Yeah, alright. Don’t do it again.”

With that, the kid leisured upstairs from the shared hallway of our two-family home into his upstairs apartment. He was around seventeen, and tall; about 6’1” or 6’2”, I’d always assumed. He was quiet, too. He kept to himself in the year or so that we shared the same roof. I didn’t learn his name until my family got hold of a copy of the local newspaper he was in. For the sake of his privacy his name will be Scott.

Scott once tried to suffocate his mother with a pillow right upstairs from us. He fled the house after his attempt was unsuccessful. His mother, we’ll call her Amy, pressed charges on him. The noise from the police report led to an article in the local paper as I’ve previously mentioned. That’s when we learned his name.

Sometime after his attempt at murder, he was welcomed back into his home with open arms. The family that had the title of my upstairs neighbors never came off as friendly, which was fine. We don’t need to be friends with everyone, nobody does. There is, however, a line of civility that people should respect for the sake of common sense and decency. If any family lacked those two qualities, I assure you these people were it. I could go into detail about a few other incidents where my family was wronged by Scott’s family, but for the love of entertainment let’s just jump right to the tipping point. This tipping point starts with my father having enough of poor Scott smoking pot in the shared basement we keep.

Tonight was the MTV Music Video Awards. A complete shitshow neon distraction featuring terrible music from terrible musicians. My family and I just can’t get enough of it. We’re packed in the living room together as one unit. It’s me, my mother, my father, and my sister. We’re watching this disaster on TV when we hear footsteps coming down from the hall outside of our door. The footsteps continue into the basement and about five minutes later the smell of freshly burned pot is ripe in our noses. My father, obviously agitated after being annoyed and stressed out by at least one member of that goddamn family for the 600th time, decides to go downstairs and tell Scott that he can’t do that when he’s seven steps below us.

Now that we’re up to speed with everything I’ll pick up where I left off. Scotty boy proceeds to go upstairs after the conversation ends and we proceed to enjoy the debauchery that is the awards show. I wish I could tell you that that was the end of the whole ordeal.

I wish Scott just went upstairs and thought to himself, “Maybe he’s right. Maybe I shouldn’t smoke pot five feet away from another family. Maybe my family aren’t the only people under this roof,” but nope. Scotty boy went and told his precious mother, Amy, about the whole ordeal.

Not because he was wronged in any way, but because he just wanted to give his sweet and pleasant mother an excuse to cause more trouble, and boy did trouble ensue.

About ten or fifteen minutes after Scott went upstairs, and we all resumed watching our wholesome family program, we hear very loud thumps come tumbling down the hallway stairs. These thumps are quite familiar to us, and belong to none other than pleasant Amy. The booming thumps ended at our door, and were accompanied by fast, thunderous knocks. *BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG*

My own mother opened the door to Scott's. My mother didn't say anything when she met eyes with Amy, which caught her off guard, I think.

"Were you just talking to my son?" *Oh fuck here we go.* The tone was about what you'd expect.

"Yeah we were telling him he can't smoke pot in the basement," was the response from my mother.

"He doesn't do that." *Is she fucking serious?*

"Yes he does, he left it downstairs." My mother being sharp as always.

"Show me."

My mother said alright and eagerly went downstairs to where Scott must've smoked.

There was only one place to sit in the basement; a weight bench. *Our* weight bench.

(Never used.) Pleasant Amy followed.

Of course I never saw what exactly happened downstairs since I was frozen on the couch, but I certainly heard everything.

So my mother proceeds downstairs, and Amy follows suit. That becomes the end of my visual experience temporarily. The next thing I hear is a mixture of soft, delicate footsteps and loud, obnoxious ones. After a brief moment, another conversation begins, fainter than the first one but still very audible. This is not a big place.

"Here it is," my mom said, after seemingly pointing out the weed.

"This isn't my son's, he said he don't smoke that kind," Amy boisterously proclaimed.

"What kind would he smoke? I thought he didn't smoke at all?" was the response.

"Okay now *you listen*...do not *talk* to my son and tell him what to do...*I* will talk to him *not* you..." She was starting to raise her voice at my mother. I don't think any member of the family was thrilled at that, especially my very outspoken sister.

My sister had made her way downstairs soon after my mother and Amy, yet I barely took note while that happened. I had realized she was in the basement with them once I heard her interrupt Amy. Everyone heard her interrupt Amy.

"Who the fuck do you think you're talking to right now!?! You need to calm the fuck down and lose the attitude real quick..." From there all I heard were shouts. The mixture of three loud and not-so-friendly voices was as inaudible as it was disruptive.

It was at this point that members of both families rushed down to meet in the basement. My father, Amy's boyfriend (or whatever you want to call him) at the time, and Amy's daughter, who was roughly the same age as my sister.

After the rush of footsteps joined with the yelling, it all just turned into louder yelling. The only two people who weren't involved downstairs were Scott, who wasn't seen the rest of the night after going upstairs, and myself.

I found myself frozen. I had no idea what to do or how to react. I was essentially catatonic for the whole event. In the matter of about fifteen minutes I went from witnessing musical atrocity to witnessing actual personal atrocity. I was useless while this havoc built itself around me and reared its ugly head. In the middle of that half-thought, something happened that truly surprised me. The shouting, which I had thought already reached its tipping point, spiked; and it spiked violently.

My sisters' voice was the loudest, which is ironic considering she was the smallest person in the entire situation. I had assumed the yelling and tension had finally gotten physical. I raced for the basement, but to my surprise, I was cut off before I got past the hallway door by Amy's daughter Beth; who was sprinting up the stairs and back into her apartment. When I say sprinting, I mean *sprinting*. For the nanosecond I saw her flash before my eyes, I caught a glimpse of her face. It was the face of a girl running for her life. She might as well have been in Texas Chainsaw Massacre. I'm serious, someone very well might have pulled out a gun downstairs based on her reaction. When everyone else had joined me on the first floor, I learned it was a different story.

My sister was raving like a rabid dog. She was trying to chase down Beth but was unable to because my father had her in a bear hug. Apparently downstairs my sister and Amy were the two who were really going at it. It seemed my sister had enough of Amy's pleasantness toward our family over the course of a year and had decided to give it back. They were at each other's faces when suddenly Beth snuck around and actually punched my sister from behind. That had obviously sent her into a frenzy, one in which Beth wanted no part of. She was halfway up the stairs before she was even face to face with the girl she just cowardly struck.

A punch was just thrown, and tensions were at an all-time high. I had decided to make myself somewhat useful and dial 911. Everyone knew police were on the way, and I think that's the only real reason there wasn't a full blown brawl. It would've been ironic if there was a big physical fight between the families, since the two that served as the catalyst for all the bullshit were safely tucked away upstairs.

After about five more minutes of shouting, all of Amy's pleasant tribe made their way upstairs. Five minutes after that police arrived. Two officers clad in full uniform. They stepped out of the wailing, flashing car and into the home. They got both stories, and decided to have a talk with us before they left to fill out a report. Both officers knew exactly who Amy, Scott, and the rest of the gang were. They even knew about Scott's domestic incident with Amy. There was a reputation built around these people, and we lived in the same house. The police were aware of the family as soon as they saw the address, which is my address too. Although none of it was our fault, I couldn't help but feel embarrassed by the whole thing, and I think other members of my family felt the same.

They asked my sister if she wanted to press charges for assault, to which she replied with a resounding, "Definitely."

The officers also told us what Amy had claimed to them. She had said we planted the weed ourselves, and denied Beth had thrown a punch completely. There were so many blatant lies and holes in their account that the police had laughably balked at the idea of taking them seriously.

It's almost anti-climactic how the police left. We said our "thank you's" and "goodbyes" and that was pretty much the end of it. When the door closed behind the officers we all sort of sat there in silence. It was a hectic hour to say the very least, and we all just tried to process it in our living room. I still wonder to this day what Amy's family was doing at the same time. All and all, after a couple of deep breathes, we directed our attention back to the MTV Music Awards. If that was the only disgrace I had to watch that night...

They Got What They Deserved

Faith Speredelozzi

The Witch

Our town had turned against us. The accusations grew and grew and grew until they finally exploded like the fiery hail that rained down on Egypt. My sisters were jailed and hanged as if they had committed the crime of Judas. My brother was pressed as if he were the Pearl of York.

Chaos screamed in the wind, but we were not Noah. We did not receive God's blessing and the rain did not stop. I felt as though my magic was slowly dying.

Maybe it was.

Either way, I was going to be next.

The men marched me to the ladder. If I could, I would have changed their felt hats, ruffs, doublets, breeches, and garters into galeas, tunics, and armor.

But I could not.

As the craven executioner put the noose around my neck, he avoided eye contact. Still, I stared at him, he who had undone me. He knew what he was about to do to me and his unborn child. My love, my traitorous love, convinced the magistrates, justices, and jurors that our babe was not his, but the spawn of Lucifer himself. So our wronged child must die with me.

I hope he enjoyed Goody Count's withered French pears.

My pigeon-hearted executioner was just about to kick the ladder out from under me when he screamed. He pointed upwards. I and the rest of the town looked up to the heavens.

Sliding out from behind a cloud was a giant vessel. It was shaped like two china dishes that had their rims pressed together. It glowed like candles and the noises it made sounded like a distressed and dying sparrow.

After a moment, the wrath of God rained down from the vessel. It was as if the Angel of Death had returned, furious with righteous anger.

The lightning bolts the vessel sent down cracked and exploded when they hit the people who had betrayed me. I saw Goody Count, my mother, my father, my best friend, all of them, every single person here, burst into smoke and body parts and gore that flew through the air.

My executioner quickly took the noose off of my neck and lifted me from the ladder.

"Lambkin," he pleaded, "Thou must stop this madness."

I said nothing.

"Lady bird" —he put one hand on my back and the other on my belly—"if not for thine own sake, then for the sake of our child!"

Finally I spoke.

“Mine babe is Lucifer’s. Dost thou forget what thou said to the magistrates?” I pushed my executioner away with my magic. He stared at me in horror before attempting to flee the scene.

I watched as he joined the smoke and gore.

Others, the ones still alive, pleaded with me to stop the carnage. I knew I could stop it, but somewhere, in the back of my mind, I heard a whispering say:

“Waste not thy magic.”

So I watched. I watched as those who begged and pleaded joined Goody Count and my executioner. I watched until I was the only one left.

The Unearthly

We watched as their town turned against them. We were too far away to stop it.

No.

We were too far away to stop most of it.

We were close enough to stop the last one.

The last one was the only one with actual supernatural powers. The others were all frauds, but that didn’t stop the two-legged ones in power from killing them. The poor bastards never deserved it.

But the two-legged ones in power would get what they deserved.

We would make sure of that.

An awful brute of a creature was about to kick the ladder out from underneath the fat two-legged one when we finally got within close enough distance. We laughed as we saw him scream and point. Then we zapped each one of them as they tried to flee.

We wanted the fat two-legged one. It was the only creature in our known universe to have these coveted supernatural powers. This planet did not deserve it and its abilities. We would be able to learn from it. That’s all we wanted in the long run.

Once all the stupid two-legged ones were dead, we planted our ship amongst the blood and guts and smoke.

“We may have overdone it,” Xanth stated.

“I agree.” Xinth nodded. “We overdid it.”

I shrugged. “Open the gate. We’ll worry about the particulars later.”

“I think this is a scenario where we can worry about the particulars *now*,” Xenth commented.

“We just saved it,” I argued. “Just give me the translator.”

“If you insist.” Xanth handed me the translator. I hooked it onto my belt and took the handheld radio part in my third tentacle.

“Let’s roll.”

Xinth tapped a purple button lightly with their first tentacle. The door to our ship slowly slid open and the ramp rolled down onto the bloody dirt.

We had been studying the mostly harmless little dirtball for long enough to know that we could breathe the air. We also knew that the fat two-legged one was potentially dangerous—even if its arms were tied behind its back. Even so, I walked down the ramp and towards the fat two-legged one.

“Good morrow!” the translator said as I spoke into the machine. “How do you fare?”

The fat two-legged one squinted at me for a moment before starting to laugh. Its laugh was oddly sinister. The noise actually frightened me. It was unlike anything I had ever heard in my entire life. I looked back to the ship. Xanth, Xinth, and Xenth waved me on. I tried again.

“How now??”

It continued to laugh.

Perhaps the translator was broken.

Thomas in the ICU

Hugh Stringer

“It’s Shacida!” After all these years, in my mind’s eye, I feel her presence. I shout her name loud enough to wake me out of a medically induced coma. She’s here to tell me she knows I’d not rejected her. She knows I enjoyed our friendship and now, in the ICU, I enjoy reliving it.

My wife Graciela, son Peter, and daughter Samantha are here with me; and as I drift between deep dream clarity and wakefulness, the fear that prevented me from telling Shacida, thirty years ago, how much she meant to me, makes me want to hide my affection for her today.

What does Graciela think of my shouting “Shacida?” It’s not that Shacida’s ever been a secret lover, but I’ve never told Graciela about her. And here is not the time or place to explain a friendship from so long ago.

The nurse says she’s going to up the morphine from two to three drips per second, ‘a little something’ to calm me down. But I don’t want to calm down; I want to keep this moment alive.

When Shacida and I met in September 1966, at the start of what became my one year at St. Augustine School in the South Bronx, one year after I’d taken final vows, thirty years ago now, she was a thirty-something Sister of Charity and I was a twenty-five-year-old Christian Brother.

We both taught sixth grade; she the girls, I the boys. At first, we met to discuss syllabi. Then we just met to discuss. In the beginning, I was uncomfortable talking to a woman. Particular friendships were fraught with danger, more so when they were between a man and a woman. But I reasoned I could separate my doubts about staying in the Brothers from my romantic feelings for her. Yes, there was tension, she being a woman, but I thought her multi-layered black habit and my white collar would protect us. Besides, Irish-American men and Afro-American women could hardly be thought of as having romantic relationships. We planned our meetings so we’d always be in public places. I’d prepare topics to discuss. Most Sundays, we’d meet in a park or museum, always where we’d not have to pay an entrance fee, and never where we’d be alone. We liked the Cloisters Museum in Upper Manhattan. On Sundays they played recordings of Gregorian chant and had free admission. We dressed as we would when visiting family. Shacida let her hair show, under a scarf. I couldn’t help but notice that she looked good in black, dress and sweater, with a white blouse. I wore black pants, shoes, and black socks, white shirt and a white clergy collar with a black vest. We weren’t deceiving anyone, only ourselves. We paid subway or bus fares with money from our respective community petty cash boxes. On ledgers, we’d write the amount we’d taken and the reason: bus or subway fare to wherever.

When I had her to look forward to, I wasn’t obsessing about leaving the Brothers and was a more focused teacher, but I was talking about stuff that mattered. I lived week to week thinking of where we’d meet and what we’d discuss.

I entered the Brothers a day after graduating high school. I believed I had a vocation to be a Brother. I became a teacher because the Brothers were teachers. I never chose the career and was not sure what career I'd pursue after I left them. My friendship with Shacida helped me transition. I couldn't speak to the Brothers about my doubts. It was taboo to discuss leaving for fear of sparking a stampede. I still remember what Shacida said about mothers inspiring vocations. She said mothers can also inspire someone to leave one vocation for another. She felt whether they want to or not mothers keep moving the goal line; so, even long after they're dead, we still try to please them. It all made sense then and it still does. Only now I think of Graciela as my stand-in mother and try to please her.

I remember thinking that it was too late for Shacida to begin a new vocation. Even she thought she was facing a false choice: if she left the Sisters she would face life as an old maid, alone in "the real world." If she stayed with them, though she no longer believed in what they professed, she'd be living a lie. I thought it wasn't too late for me. I could leave, get a job, and marry. My market for a mate was any single woman over twenty. I could choose rich or poor, black or white. My market for a job was not so wide open.

Brother Director learned of my meeting with Shacida and feared a scandal. He had me transferred to LaSalle Academy in Albany. Ironically, I thought the transfer fit into my plans. If I continued seeing Shacida, we were sure to become romantically involved. Sex would upset a smooth transition; I saw the move as an excuse to stop communicating with her. At our last meeting, I told her I wouldn't be seeing her again and wouldn't write. If she said anything, I didn't hear it.

A month after leaving the Bronx, I learned Shacida had left the Sisters and suffered what at the time was called a nervous breakdown. For the past thirty years, I've felt guilty thinking she must have felt I'd rejected her. Before she'd left the Sisters, I hadn't thought she had feelings under her multi-layered black dress. I still feel guilty that I was responsible for her breakdown. Now, seeing her here in the ICU I think all along she knew how much I loved her and how much I feared that love.

I want to tell the nurse to lay off the morphine but can't get the words out. I hear Peter say that I'm reliving the bike accident that got me here. When I shouted "Shacida," Peter heard "Should see da [car]!" Samantha says I'm reliving the anger I felt when some of the Brothers dismissed my doubts by calling me just another "Doubting Thomas." She heard me quoting from the Gospel of St. John where Thomas tells the other apostles he'll not believe until he puts his hand in Christ's wounds. She hears me say, "Should see da [wounds]!" Graciela says that I'm telling her to go watch Doctor Phil on TV. She heard me say, "Should see da Doct'a [Phil]!"

I'm happy thinking that when I get outta here I'll not have to explain my feelings for Shacida and happy morphine has been so wonderful. I'll tell everyone I said "Should see da [stars]!"

The Wonders of Mayonnaise

James Lucas

I started dating this girl from my graduating class right after leaving high school. We weren't really great friends while in school, but we were cordial and polite to each other.

She invited me to dinner with her family.

When I went to her house, it was her, her older sister, her mother, her father, and her paternal grandmother.

The older sister was sweet and pretty. I had met her before, and she was always kind to me.

The mother was a shrew. Prim, proper, and ugly of spirit, she regarded me in a way that was as calculating as it was dismissive. I once heard that a journalist called Nancy Reagan's smile "a study in frozen insincerity." This lady was the same way.

The father had a lazy eye and was remarkably disinterested in the guy dating his younger daughter. He grunted some kind of greeting and left before I could respond.

The grandmother was in her 80's, wheelchair bound and had no filter when she spoke. She wasn't senile, but she talked about the old days, and apparently her old days were pretty racy.

We all sat down to eat.

The grandmother talked the whole time. I don't think she even bothered to pick up her fork as the rest of us ate. She had an audience, and she was having a ball. My girlfriend and her sister kept trying to stifle their laughter. The mother grimaced between mouthfuls of food, and the father ate with indifference. Clearly, he had heard all this talk of favorite threesomes before from his mother.

The grandmother looked at me and my girlfriend. Then she locked eyes with me and said, "You know, in my day we used mayonnaise, because it was an excellent sexual lubricant."

My girlfriend and her sister almost spat out their food and turned beet red. The mother's sense of propriety was so mortified that she started to shake; she was all gritted teeth behind what was supposed to look like a smile.

The father put in another mouthful of food, unfazed.

I looked back at the grandmother and said in an informative tone: "I hear it's really good on sandwiches too."

Passion of Life

Medgine Fleury

“It is your passion that empowers you to be able to do that thing you were created to do.” – T.D. Jakes.

Four years ago, a 7.0-magnitude earthquake hit Haiti, destroying its capital of Port-au-Prince and killing more than 300,000 people and leaving at least 500,000 orphaned. After the earthquake I travelled to Haiti to volunteer at an orphanage. This place helped kids who had suffered trauma from the catastrophe. I got to work with several of them who were dealing with different issues. Although they came from different backgrounds they all had one thing in common: they knew the real meaning of pain and the feeling of loss. At first, for me, it was a big challenge because I had no experience with that kind of work. It wasn't just babysitting. It was more than that. I was dealing with kids that were completely broken inside. I was frightened. I couldn't stare at them. Tears were all I had left in my eyes, but those kids weren't looking for my sympathy. They were looking for someone who was patient and who didn't look at them differently. I knew I wasn't the right person for this job but because they had no better option I stayed the whole summer. I got to know them. I listened to their stories. I was there when they woke up in the middle of the night screaming, having a nightmare. I was there as they learned how to love a stranger. After this first experience, I always went back to volunteer. I knew I was not the kind of person to work with kids, but then I decided to be a child psychologist.

I had come to Haiti for just a quick visit with my relatives, but I ended up staying the whole summer, volunteering at an orphanage. When I first arrived the place was deserted. There were no signs of life. Everything felt so empty and lost. The kids were running around but each one of them had a broken leg or arm. They were dealing with something no one can ever explain. When I was there I worked with a special girl named Lucie. She is my motivation for becoming a child psychologist. I remember vividly the day I first met her. She was sitting down all by herself in a dark room facing the wall. The shadows seemed to swirl around her feet. The room was so dark I made sure my eyes were wide open, fearing I would go blind. It was sweltering in that room, so stuffy I could hardly breathe. I shouted out to her “Qui est la?” I could hear the echo of my voice coming back to me. She responded to me “C'est moi Lucie”. Her voice seemed to flow like a river, so warm and comforting even the stingiest of strangers immediately would be warmed by it. I asked her why she wasn't outside playing with the other kids. She didn't respond, and she didn't turn back to look at me. She just sat, facing the wall. I knew she wanted privacy to let her mind wander the unknown world where she could find peace.

I went back to my room, but I wondered if I made the right decision, leaving her in the dark all by herself. I didn't know what to do. I lost myself in my other distractions and forgot about her. The next morning when I woke up I went back to the room, but then it was morning and it was bright, so I could see where I stepped. Lucie was still sitting down, facing the wall. I walked in front of her and there I saw that beautiful face like an angel, but her eyes were filled with hate, dark and stormy.

Brimming with revenge, darting as if searching for someone to vent upon. They were empty too, though, because behind the rage there was pain, veiled by a thin wall of defensiveness.

That's when I realized her legs were missing. My hands started shaking and heat bloomed across my face, but her face was so soft and gentle I was distracted. I sat down next to her and we started talking, but right away I knew by her language and gestures she wasn't stable yet. She was missing something. Something must have been taken away from her. She told me her parents died in the earthquake. They were having dinner when the roof of the house fell down on them. She was the only one that got away but she still suffered physically and mentally. She didn't sound like a normal nine-year-old girl. Her body was too weak, and every time her mind took her back to the tragedy she would scream for help.

We talked almost every day that summer. I was moved by her story and her courage in accepting and living a different life. I became her therapist but more importantly I became her sister. She laughed at all my jokes. When, in the middle of the night, she had a bad nightmare, she called my name. I would go in to her room and lie down next to her and hold her tiny hand and sing until we both fell asleep in the same bed. That summer I found the strength in me. I loved my experiences there. Now every summer I go back to work in the same place with the same kids, especially my special Lucie. They've become part of my family. We all share unbreakable bonds. I've never looked back at life in the same way or taken everything I have for granted. I'm grateful for my mission to make the world a better place, because of Lucie.

Childhood psychology is a specialized branch of traditional psychology that focuses on children, mainly their development and behavior. I found my root by finding something I love to do and something that makes me so happy. By becoming a child psychologist I can learn more about the brain and how to best help kids with mental issues. I will develop techniques to help provide better for those in need.

Baby Goop

Michael Donahue

The small maternity ward room felt oppressively loud with white noise. People talked on the TV, machines made their various hums and beeps and boops, and out in the hall there was a hospital's typical mess of commotion. A man and a woman were the only two current occupants of this room, neither of them made a noise. The woman lay quietly in an uncomfortable bed, staring at the television without seeing the people on it. Tears had secretly carved paths through the makeup she had applied to her face so many hours earlier. The man in the room with her hadn't noticed.

He paced slowly up and down the length of her bed, trying to act calm, failing to be calm. He was fighting a compelling urge to open his phone and mentally remove himself from the hospital room, to escape to the world of Twitter. He would be more comfortable there.

But his phone stayed in his pocket and his mind stayed in the room with his girlfriend.

His son had just been born.

The doctor had informed him that he was now the proud owner of a healthy baby boy. The doctor had continued talking in the father's ear, the father hadn't been listening. He was trying to commit the exact moments of his miracle to memory. The brave screams of the woman, the confident dialogue between the doctor and nurses, and the inspiring cries of the son as he was released onto the world. He tried to preserve it all. The doctor had cut and wiped the son before he weighed him and then measured him. After the formalities had been taken care of, the faceless doctor transferred the child to the mother's arms. She had nuzzled her child, kissed him and whispered foreign words in his ear. After the mother had told the child all that was on her mind, she passed him off to an attentive nurse who offered the son to his father.

The father had scrunched his nose and shook his head as if he had been offered a foul-smelling dish while out to eat. The nurse had taken the child away to be properly cleaned and clothed and left the father to ponder his decision. It was something that had happened automatically, without a moment of thought given to it. Now, that moment of pure instinct was haunting the anxious, pacing man.

His mind chased itself in circles while he tried to solve the complex riddle: why had he forfeited the right to hold his son? As he feverishly examined himself for an answer, his mind wandered to equally troubling matters.

What did the child's mother think of him after that? He had probably already failed her low expectations of him as a man.

What had the nurses thought when he grimaced at the idea of lifting his son? He probably shouldn't care. He did though. Too much. They probably knew he was a loser. They could probably tell he was scared. Nurses were experienced with that sort of thing, they were like wild animals, they could smell the fear on him. They could tell he hadn't wanted to be a father yet, they could tell he wasn't ready.

They probably thought that a few months from now he would pack up and abandon the young family he had ignorantly started.

Minutes passed while the man paced alongside the bed of the woman he said he loved while she continued crying quietly. A dark creeping dread slowly set over the man's mind. More and more rapidly he had longing thoughts of the lives he once wished for himself, which had now been put out of his grasp permanently. He had dreams, aspirations, goals, all of which had been set on fire 7 months ago and turned to dust 11 minutes ago. How was he supposed to start his own company when he had a child to keep alive? How was he going to make enough money to buy a mansion when he was going to be paying for braces and private high schools? How was he going to travel the world when the price of college kept going up? This child had already ruined the potential his life had once held and they hadn't even been formally introduced yet.

In the lonely room the distant rattling of wheels through the hallway outside was like a bomb siren; the mother and father's heads both flipped to face the door while their bellies filled with a brief inexpressible fear.

When the mother saw the small clear plastic bed on wheels that held the child enter the room, she let out a nervously relieved laugh.

When the man saw the bundle of white linen topped with the blue and pink striped hat that seemingly had a place on every newborn child's head, his mind went blank. He stopped seeing the room, he stopped seeing himself, he stopped seeing the futures concocted by his nervous mind. All he saw was his son. He scooped his son from his plastic pen without asking anyone's permission first. He held his boy's head in the crook of his elbow like he had learned online and looked down at the beautiful scrunched up face. He almost wondered if his son could see him through those closed eyes.

"Hi—" he tried to say before his voice broke off. He stopped trying to speak. He stopped trying to do anything. He stood and looked down at his son's sleeping face, becoming lost in what lay beneath those closed eyes. While he made eye contact with those delicate lids a newfound confidence settled inside him, accompanied by a truth he found comfortably inescapable.

He would try to be a good father to this child. He would try. He didn't know what he was doing. He had never known what he was doing. But at least now he knew who he was doing it for. Because he was all of a sudden sure that he was no longer his own first priority. The trips that he would miss, the opportunities that would pass him by, and the experiences he would never have; none of that mattered. His entire world had suddenly shifted and it now revolved around his very own son. He could never know how much more life he had in front of him, but he knew that whatever he had left would be spent for the sake of his son.

Tears formed and flowed from his eyes as he fell in love with his son. He bent his neck and kissed his child's forehead just below the brim of his hospital hat. "I love you," the father said breathlessly.

In this moment, the father and his son hold love in its purest form. As years pass and their lives go on, the complexities of the world will inevitably breed tension between these two. Time will tarnish their love as it tarnishes all things.

One day the son will say goodbye to the father or the father will say goodbye to the son. While that day is distantly looming, it seems illusory in this moment. This moment has connected these two souls together for the rest of their time.

photos

Light Beam

Elaine Happnie

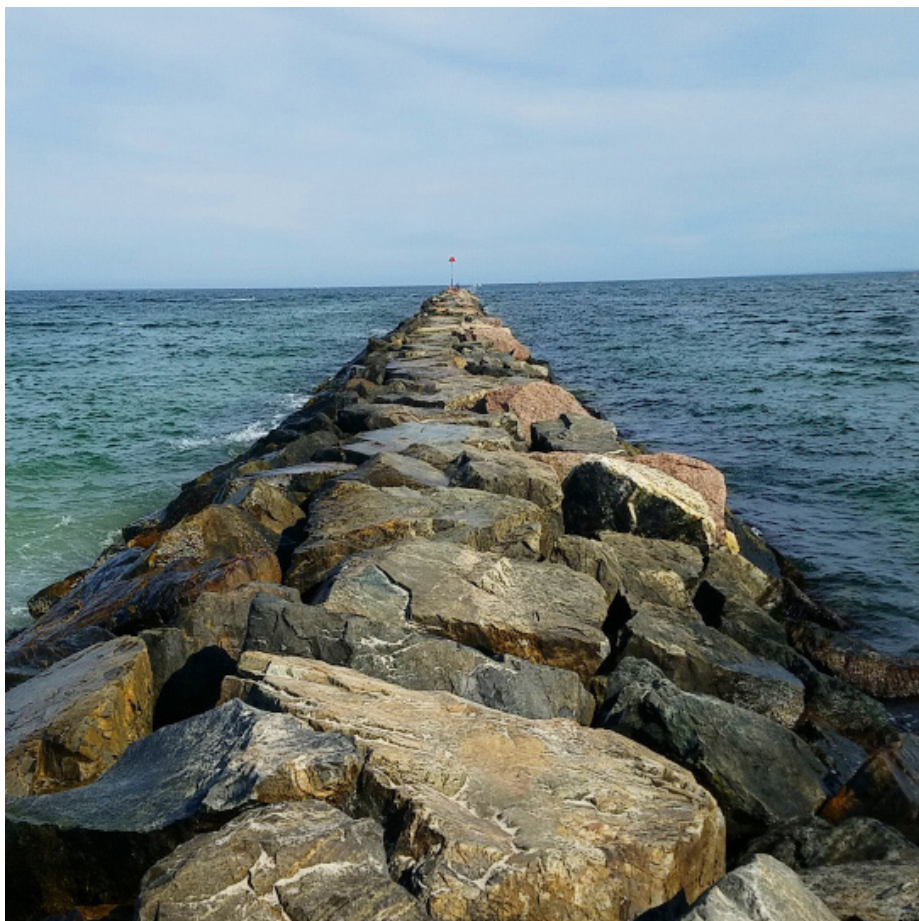


Tell Me Crystal Ball

Elaine Happnie



Untitled
Joseph Krentzman



Sunset on Universal
Katelyn Brennan



Last Summer Night
Liliana Granados



Untitled
Patrick Carreiro



visual art

Untitled

Dara Shanahan



Liz

Elaine Happnie



Puerto Rico Hopeful
Jesus Pizarro



Self Identification
Katelyn Brennan



get involved

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