

# PORTALS

*Literary and Arts Magazine*

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## ***CFCC Portals Magazine***

wishes to extend appreciation to the CFCC Student Government Association, the CFCC Foundation, the CFCC Arts and Sciences Division, Jill Lahnstein and the English Department.

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*Portals* submissions are selected anonymously by student, faculty, and staff judges based on creative merit. The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors.

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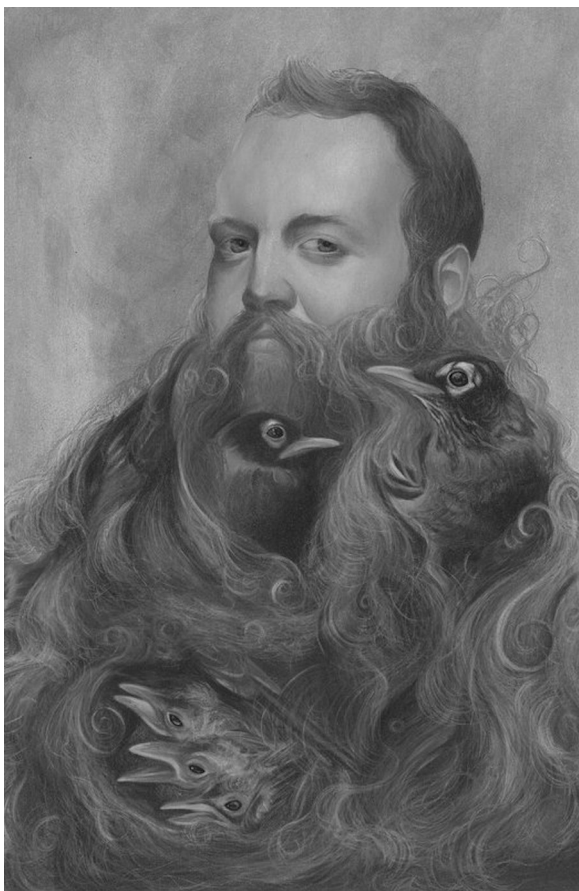
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**This issue is dedicated to Jill Lahnstein, English Department Chair, whose ten years of steadfast support for *Portals* and inspirational leadership in the English Department are unsurpassed.**

*Jill Lahnstein*

**All Ears**

This world is made of stories--of tales spun like a wide and wondrous web that is perpetually woven, interwoven, and rewoven. Human beings have a calling--a strong inner longing--to record or create these stories and to share them. Everything we see and do, everything that happens to us, and everything we can imagine becomes a story in some form, and these stories help us make sense of our lives. The Big Bang, the Garden of Eden-- or countless other accounts of creation--tell us how the world began. History tells us what happened in the past. News stories tell us what is happening in the world around us right now. The story of our families and the stories our families pass down help us to know ourselves, and we get to know each other by sharing our stories.

Often it is the artists and visionaries in a community who tell the stories that endure. Writers, painters, sculptors, photographers, singers, and dancers step up and step out to tell important stories about themselves, their lives, their communities, and the world around them. Some of these stories are based on actual events or people. Some are not. Some express urgent news or lessons, while others intend to entertain and inspire. The oral traditions and musical performances of the West African griots and the artistic renderings of the cave paintings at Lascaux and Altamira chronicle specific events and assign cultural meaning. The pyramids of Egypt regale us with stories of royalty, divinity, and life after death. The grand sculptures we know as Stonehenge tell mysterious tales we are still trying to decipher, and Galileo completely rewrote the story of the sky. Shakespeare wrote from both fact and fancy, and Georgia O'Keefe painted depths of meaning into every wave and ripple in each flower petal. In his rhythmic poems, Langston Hughes told his own story and the story of a time, a place, and a people. Ansel Adams let the

beautiful mountain peaks and other natural subjects tell their stories through his lens. Artists like these invite us into their lives; they pull us into their worlds, wrap themselves around us and lead us into their conflicts and their triumphs. And we go willingly because this attraction to story is in our blood, in our hearts, in our psyches.

This very issue of *Portals* bears witness to our human desire to share our lives, ideas, values, and experiences. On these pages, you will find one particular and exquisite excerpt in the story of each poet, writer, and visual artist. Embedded in this collection--between each page--you will find even more stories--the story of *Portals* since its inception over twenty years ago, its revival twelve years ago, and its development each year since. You will hear echoes of the stories of every editor, judge, and contributor in that evolution.

This issue of *Portals* even contains my story, one of an English instructor, a department chair, and a lover of stories. It holds the story of my pride and of my unwavering support. Most obvious, I hope, is the story of my deep and abiding respect for the storytellers--all of them--for I believe that telling stories is one of the ways we express our humanity.

Enjoy.

*Melody Wolfe*

**Cartography**

For such a long time, my hands were searching, searching for  
something that I could not seem to figure out where to find  
They moved in large, messy paintbrush strokes on the parchment  
paper

Unsure if the islands I was painting were accurately placed, or if  
they even existed

I had only heard the stories of this “New World”

The day I woke up beside you, the compass was invented and  
my hands became a printing press

Your skin was the only map that I ever wanted to chart again

The freckles along your shoulder blades

The scar on your hip from when you had your appendix removed

Every crooked, or chipped tooth

The callouses on your finger tips on your left hand

The brown flakes scattered in the intense green color of your  
eyes

You taught me about satellite imagery and gave me an aerial  
view on all of the undiscovered land

My map of you is more accurate than any other

My hands have never been more sure

*Tini Howard*

## **DOGSIDE**

I grab Mercedes' shoulder as she fills the sour cream bag. "HEY." I'm shouting. It's a struggle to be heard over the beeping of microwaves and cash registers. "We're good for this weekend, right?"

She turns, and for a moment her lip rings look like fangs in the light. It's comforting. "Huh? Yeah, I work these next three days, you work next time off for me?"

"Yep, that's fine. Just fine."

"Your parents are so weird," she laughs, bagging four Taco Blasts atop an order of Nacho Average Nachos. "They're seriously not at all negotiable on what days you see them?"

I shake my head, my mouth a very sincere line. "Nah. They're really strict. It's like, a Catholic thing."

"Really?" She slides the bag out of the drive thru window, ignoring a request for hot sauce. "That's weird, I'm Catholic and my parents have never cared."

"Oh." I scratch at a fresh pink scar on my arm. "We're a different sect. Orthodox Catholic."

"Oh." That works for her. It works for me. I run to the schedule clipboard hanging beside the OSHA regulations and mark it in first thing. *May 11-14. Mercedes.*

It's only three consecutive days every month, but when I phrase it like that, the managers rankle. Randall, the skinny forty-something who should use his time off to visit his wife and doesn't, likes to make fun of me. He insists I'm on my *period*. He says he doesn't trust my kind. It makes me think I can feel perigee thrum in my veins, makes me aware of how the fast food chicken we serve doesn't come apart in my jaws like real muscle.

He tells me women are dangerous, we bleed for five days and don't die. Reminds me of his ex-wife.

I give him a snap and a point, picking up my burrito bag with the other hand. *Right. Women.*

Down the street a building is being demolished, sending the scent of upturned soil into the air. The smell drives me mad. The nearby coastline feels bigger, the ocean smells bigger as the moon turns toward the Earth.

I head home from work twitching in my shoes, grateful I rode my bike. I want to run, to sprint through the streets on digitigrade with my tongue hanging out, but that's not advisable at the moment. On my bike I can at least go fast enough to feel the wind in my face, beat my legs hard against the pedals and go, go, *go*. I ride around my building three, four times once I arrive, because I hate to go inside. Not now. Not when the sky has just turned golden from the sunset, when animals and humans make their choice for the night, to roost or run wild. I head down the damp, stone basement steps.

My apartment is in the worst part of town, not the street nobody likes to walk down, but the one behind that, the one they've forgotten about. My housing requirements are ridiculous for my budget - \$400 a month tops, basement preferred, need my own entrance, no roommates. What it's gotten me is a basement in an as-yet-ungentrified area with a corner shop toilet and a deep sink. I survive in Laundromats, cafes, the gym at the local college. I thank the mother earth for student loans.

I know a guy from one of my support forums who lives not too far out of town, in a trailer he's parked on some long-dead fruit orchard. He stays in or around his trailer, or runs around in the trees when it gets too bad. Lots of dead wood to break, and no one around for miles. It sounds perfect, but the gas costs to get to work and school would just kill me.

I lock the door behind me, once with a key, and then the deadbolts. Behind the deadbolts go a baby gate, three or four shoved into the tension of the doorjamb. I jam a few curtain rods in there vertically and screw them into place, followed by trash bags, a tarp, duct tape. Most of this is mental, a psychological deterrent. None of it would really stop me, not really. As an afterthought I pull a Sharpie from my pocket and write across the duct tape - *DO NOT GO OUTSIDE*. Sometimes it's words that pull me from the frenzy.

I pop a Benadryl and stretch out on the mattress with headphones, the bag of burritos beside me. I reach for a smoke as Sigur Ros chirps helpfully at me, wordless and sweet. I hold it in my lungs until it burns, which doesn't take long. Smoking's not really my style most days, but with the Benadryl, a full belly, and some soft music, it can make the transition less painful. I unwrap the first of a half dozen burritos and scarf it down,

shutting my eyes and thinking of cold stillness, of darkness, and how to quiet my blood.

In my dreams I am loping in the snow, and loping feels nice. The cold hits me on the bottoms of my feet, the tips of my ears and my wet, pink gums. I am padding to a stop after a long run and the air comes into my lungs cold, leaves them hot and wet. I see something red dance between branches, a cardinal bird in a bright hat and coat, and my claws come up off the icy ground, ice cracking as the sprint finds me again. I am low to the ground so when I leap, I reach out with teeth and claws at this taunt, this toy of mine.

I wake with a snarl as something buzzes against my side and I want it dead. Panting, I wipe the froth from my lips and paw at the phone, knocking it to the ground twice, three times, before I recognize my own hands, brown and unchanged. There's a text message, three missed calls and a voice mail from Mercedes.

*So sorry. Hope you haven't left yet. Real emergency.  
Dad in hospital can't work for you tonight*

I let out a breath that sounds suspiciously like a hiss and move toward the door. I ignore my handwritten warnings from earlier because the children playing outside sound *good*, their laughter sizzles like steak in a pan. My guts twist and I catch myself, palms against the sticky wall of duct tape. I'm lying, with sweat pricking at the back of my neck, that it's the burrito twisting at my guts, even as the muscles in my thighs pull and ache like I'm going through a growth spurt.

Not going to work isn't an option. Randall's said it a thousand times, it's not the responsibility of the person covering the shift; it's the person whose name was printed on the schedule. That's me. That means it's me that's out of a job if I don't go, that's me who owns five burritos in a bag and twenty-two bucks in my checking account. That's me who has already traded my real phone for a pay-as-you-go phone, who lives in a basement with a single light bulb and attends sales seminars that prey on broke college kids for the free pizza and donuts they provide.

I want to be understanding of Mercedes, but when I think of her I think of her frightened, prey-like eyes and how her scent -hair dye and menthol cigarettes- would be unbearable to

me right now. Something red hot uncoils in the back of my brain and the human ego that is fighting this off can't do anything about it but squeeze out a few furious tears as I take quick stock. Benadryl, lighter, burrito. A bottle of overly sweet iced Kava tea that advertises its 'stress relieving' qualities. An iPod.

The uniform's black polo goes over my t-shirt, and the wet rice and processed cheese scent coming off of it makes me want to vomit. My stubby human nails claw at the duct tape, ripping it from the door, right past my earlier warning. The remaining letters dangle and spell out

D O G SIDE.

It's not funny.

The gates and bars come down far easier than the deadbolts. Twisting the lock is agony right now, the dry skin on my knuckles feels like it might burst. Outdoors, the cool air both soothes and stokes the fire in my middle, there are sounds coming from deep in my chest, sounds I wouldn't even know how to make on a normal day.

I have to try and ride my bike. When I let myself run, I feel the telltale pins and needles start under my skin, the beef jerky feeling of my muscles stretching to burst, and the growing pains in my bones. I can't run without changing, running will make my body too wild, effort will make a monster. The other option is to ride, so I climb on my bicycle and want to sob at how my feet feel wrong in their human shape, in shoes, on bike pedals. In my heart I am a beast balancing on a circus bike. I kick the pedals once, twice. I go.

Taco Grande lights up on the horizon between a gas station and a highway exit. The cars are damaging my fragile control and the lights come at me head on. They don't want to get out of their lane for what looks like a tweaker on a bike, but I'm seeing a challenge, beady bright eyes and a growl in the metal monster's chest, and when I open my mouth to breathe, fat, frothy gobs of drool land on my jeans. The car swerve and whines at me. I howl back.

I stop my bike with my feet and it skids to one side, the chain biting into my legs as I kick it into a waxy, manicured shrub. I get to the door, wet and shaking, and the jingling bell that announces my arrival sounds like a stupid bird. Looking up



to kill it, I find myself temporarily blinded by the fluorescent lighting, until Randall the Manager hollers at me.

“You look like shit, but at least you’re here in your uniform. Get back here.”

A few patrons stare at me from over plastic trays and Yellow Fever Blast sodas. I can’t turn to look at them *and* walk, not with my body feeling like a puppet, like a coat I’ve outgrown. When I try, my arm sweeps a counter and knocks over a display of Grande size cups that bounce with a sound like hailstones on a tin roof. I freeze, baring my teeth. A child with a sopapilla in his hand bares his teeth back at me. It’s a challenge.

The mother’s voice cuts through the roaring in my ears, lilting at her son. “Who are you smiling at? Are you smiling at the lady making faces at you? Is she being silly?”

Randall calls my name and I gather my focus like I’m making a drunken phone call. “Yes?” I’m leaning on the doorjamb with both hands.

“S’matter with you?”

I’m breathing through my mouth so heavily he must think I’m in labor. The back of my sleeve is soaked in bubbling spit as I wipe it away. “Thought Mercedes’s gonna work for me tonight. Took a cold medicine. S’okay.”

He inhales wetly through his nose and shoos me away. “Go do prep. I don’t want you talking to customers acting like that.”

My hands feel like mittens as I press them along the concrete walls, finding my way to the freezer. Blood blisters are pooling at my fingertips where dog’s claws try to push their way out. The freezer is quiet, and the cold will feel nice, will stop the sweat that soaks through my undershirt and slides down the back of my pants. I can restock the cheese, meat, sour cream, and I can take my time for just a moment. I can’t lose my job tonight, I won’t. I’m here.

Everyone hates me tonight and I know it. I have heard the word ‘dramatic’ bandied about more than once, have heard the story of me knocking over the cups in the dining room told through the walls. Someone at the drive thru window complained because they heard me ‘snarling,’ but I’m fairly certain I swallowed that down. I am making things worse for them, I’m not even useful like this, but I really need this job and I am *here*.

I fling the freezer door open. My back burns as something forces itself from under my skin, like wet pine needles. I pull the door shut behind me and hate the safety latch there beside the handle. I'd love nothing more than to claim I was trapped.

This place couldn't hold me in. And for some reason, I think it might be best to let the kettle steam, to let the dog out for just a moment, and that's all it takes. My body is already in overdrive trying to warm me up as entropy takes effect and I lose my heat to the room's icy air. I react like any animal who has lost something of theirs. I attack.

The sound of my clothes tearing is drowned out by cracking bone and the squeak of stretching flesh. My pathetic whine becomes a bassy growl as my chest triples in size; that pine needle feeling returns as thousands of long, waxy hairs push through my flesh. The itching in my gums is unbearable, it quickly turns to pain as blood mixes with the frothing drool on my lips. The itch only abates when my hands, bleeding and clawed, grasp a chunk of frozen ground beef and bring it to my mouth.

It's a solid block of ice and meat, but it splinters under my strength. I think it was red, but colors aren't so easy for me anymore. Sounds are good – I can hear every penny in the cash register, and I can see brilliantly in the dark of the freezer room, but colors are gone to me now.

That's okay. I'll just eat and I'll change back. I'm not sure what I'm going to do yet about my clothes, but I stop thinking about it when the door opens and the sudden light is blinding. I place these paws on the ground and push off with my back feet. The power is intoxicating. I'm knocking bodies down like duckpins and moving forward like a muscle car as something absurd creeps into my brain – I don't need a job. I can stay like this. I am a hunter.

Tonight I can go – thankfully I snapped the backpack up in my teeth before I took off – and keep going, eating raccoons and the guineas in the park until the moon wanes, and I can be wild. Once my paws are hands again and can work a phone, I can find that guy who lives in the trailer, far outside of town. I don't need college, a future, or a job at a taco hut that proudly bears a B-minus sanitation rating.

I wonder if I can be a wolf forever. If it's as easy as wishing to never change back.

The stabbing pain in my leg is a mystery quickly solved as the warm body clambering atop me becomes clearer. The Taco Grande regulation visor falls to the ground and his long hair ends up in my mouth. I bite down and yank my head to one side, part of his scalp coming away with the chunk of hair, and oh god, if I wasn't already fired, I sure am now.

I throw him before I know what I'm doing, his hair and flesh sliding out from between my teeth as I pant, and I am *tired* – tired in the way beasts don't get after short sprints. There's a chilly spread from the stabbing in my leg, something collects in my veins that feels like handfuls of snow. The burn that follows is destroying me and it's moving towards my heart. I stop, I know that the harder I run, the faster the poison in my veins will spread, the faster the end will come. I fall, and the syringe slides out from my skin and clatters to the tile.

"Silver nitrate," says Randall, shoving a towel between his bleeding scalp and the Taco Grande hat. "Told you 'bout my ex-wife didn't I? Didn't I say to worry 'bout women like you? Wasn't kidding. Thought I'd give you a chance but you done jacked it up. Sooner or later y'all change all out on a full moon, no matter how hard y'try. Been suspectin' you for a while, though. Mercedes was happy when I offred her the night off, though. Nice girl, her." He sniffs, spits.

"Ain't no beast in this world ain't got a hunter for it," he promises me, the shotgun leveled between my eyes. "Ain't no one gets to live free."

The gun goes off and I whine. He can't possibly hit me and he knows it, soaking his khakis in piss as his one shot fails. His eyes go so wide I can see my own teeth reflected in them. He cries for hours, whimpers all the way as I carry him in my jaws out past the edge of town. I can't take the highway exits, but the back roads by the marina are a better run anyway.

The silver's not so bad after a little while. It's just one little syringe, and I'm a big girl.

He dies in my jaws somewhere near the closest campground, which makes him easier to handle. The mountains from here are purple and blue against the sky, and even *my* ears

can hardly hear the cars on the highway anymore. I'm fired, so very fired, but I am free.



*Colin Wiebe*  
**Pay First**

*Andi Southern*

**I Don't Know**

I need the mind of an infant  
To mold play-dough, like Plato.  
Just one single instant  
Of not knowing what I know.  
A moment of bliss,  
Of innocence,  
A spec in time to feel as I please,  
Instead of twisting tainted thoughts  
Into philosophies.  
A moment of bliss,  
A moment to seize,  
To be reborn into Socrates...  
Then I'll shape this old, weathered world  
If I'm able  
With the mind of an infant,  
And the reality of a fable.  
I will ignore being here inside this capsule.  
Inside this realm of math, art, and sound,  
I will collide with every path I've sought and never found.  
Point the helm towards self-reliance,  
Breathe guidance not defiance,  
And finally let my thoughts  
Melt into  
The silence.

*Nathan Mckenzie*

## **Social Injustice in Haiti**

Looking down from 30,000 feet above the Caribbean Sea, the idea that “[i]n order to maintain inequality, people from advantaged groups must be psychologically conditioned to assume their roles in the social order” (Goodman 98) seems as foreign to me as the landscape below. Unwittingly, I have embarked on a journey that would open my mind to the realities of the world around me, shed light into the darkest corners of myself, and reveal my indoctrination into a belief system that supports narcissism, racism, and classism.

The searing heat of summer overwhelms me as I step onto the tarmac in the capital city of Port au Prince, Haiti. The air is thick with dust and fumes from many bustling vehicles of all shapes, sizes, and colors. I notice a honeycomb of square concrete buildings painted with a patchwork of bright island shades lining the roadway adjacent to the airport entrance.

Making my way towards the pick-up area, I pass through a gauntlet of merchants selling a plethora of differing goods from paintings on canvas, to bracelets, earrings, soda, and cigarettes. Walking through a cloud of smoke from a large crackling grill cooking chicken, a low murmur of an unfamiliar language can be heard. I quickly and quietly shuffle past as to avoid drawing any unwanted attention to myself as I am still in shock from the sensory overload of so many new sights, smells, and sounds.

Through the sea of dark shining faces, I quickly spot my cousin Paul, his blonde hair and fair skin sticking out like a sore thumb. “Nathan!” he shouts, waving his hands above his head as if I don’t see him. I chuckle to myself. Upon exiting the crowd Paul and I greet one another with a firm handshake and a tenuous smile. He introduces me to the two Haitian men flanking him. “This is Billy and Junior,” he says. “Comment ou yay, how are you!?” they exclaim. “I’m fine, thank you,” I reply, still unsure about my safety and wrestling with the overwhelming feeling of the situation. “Let’s get a move on boys,” Paul shouts, breaking the uncomfortable moment. I grab my luggage and heave it into the bed of the small blue truck then hop in the back with Billy.

Driving down the bumpy streets filled with litter, motorists, and massive potholes, I feel as if there are a million

eyes piercing me like tiny needles. A man with a wheelbarrow standing on the roadside looks me directly in the eyes and shouts something in Haitian Creole while running his thumb from the left to the right side of his neck. I ask Billy what he said, but he avoids answering me.

While idling at a red light we are surrounded by street children who are filthy, malnourished, and in rags. A few of the boys climb in the back of the truck asking Billy if the Americans have any money. A number of other boys remove their shirts and begin to wipe down our dusty vehicle. I am overcome by a strong sadness. Paul, seeing my discomfort through the rear view mirror, pushes a box of protein bars and bottled water into the bed of the truck. Billy and I quickly hand them out. As the light turns green, the boys hurriedly shuffle along with the vehicle trying to get every last piece of booty. I am instantly nauseous.

"Billy, why are those children alone in the street?" I ask. "They're orphans. The street is their office," he says frankly. I could tell that the others were accustomed to seeing children living in this state of existence. I think to myself, Why isn't this front page news? How am I so ignorant to the reality of life in countries like this? My mind races and spins as my perception of the world is shattered in an instant.

As we pull up to a large metal gate set into a ten foot high concrete wall topped with rows of barbed wire, I hear Paul shout facetiously, "Home sweet home!" A large green military vehicle inches by as we open the gate. Large white letters "UN" are painted on the doors and the soldier manning the .50 caliber machine gun mounted on the top salutes us. I am suddenly struck with the reality that this is a very unsafe place but once inside the gate I feel somewhat safer.

I unpack my belongings and take a seat at the table with Paul, Junior, and Billy for a bowl of noodles. I ask Billy and Junior how they learned to speak English. "We're Throwbacks!" they chime as they devour their noodles. "What's a Throwback?" I inquire. "Our families made it out of Haiti but we got into trouble so we were sent back alone," Billy says sadly after a moment of reflection. "Junior was in New Jersey and I was in Quebec." "Why the hell would your parents send you back here?" I say with an angry tone. "They were too scared that they

would be deported if their children were causing trouble,” he says. I am shocked at the idea.

Paul, the leader of our ragtag group, instructs us to get some sleep as we have much to do in the morning. As I lie on my cot, the faces of the street boys flash across my mind. My eyes fill with tears but exhaustion gets the better of me and I drift off into a deep sleep.

The sun rises and the loud call of a rooster catapults me to my feet. I realize I’m not at home in my comfortable bed with my pets and loved ones near, but I make my way to the lavatory to wash up. I turn the shower knob but nothing happens. Angrily, in my spoiled American way, I wake Paul and ask why there is no hot water. My question wakes the others and they all start laughing hysterically. “There is no running water in Haiti unless you are very rich, my friend!” Billy says while trying to hold his laughter. “And even the rich rarely have hot water.” “We use rain water,” Paul says while cleaning the sleep from his eyes. “We collect it in large black drums on the roof but it hasn’t rained for days. Also, power only comes on for a few hours a day, if we’re lucky, so you should get some breakfast while you can.”

After some toast and a banana we head to a village on the outskirts of the city. The streets are mud, and I can see people bathing and using the bathroom on the side of the road. Paul punches me in the left bicep. “What was that for!?” I shout while rubbing my arm. “One punch for pee two for poo,” he says jokingly. Paul has always had a talent for making a joke out of any situation. I suppose it is a natural defense to seeing such horrible living conditions. I take note of the rules to this new game and plot my revenge.

“So, what are we doing today?” I ask Paul.” “We’re digging a septic tank for an orphanage because the kids are dying of cholera,” he says bluntly with his eyes hidden behind dark sunglasses. I could tell he was hiding his emotions. He had become a professional at doing so over the past few months. “Where’s our equipment?” I ask. He slaps the top of my hand and says “Right here, buddy.” “I thought you said Haiti was like camping, just a little worse!” I exclaim. “I lied,” he says with an evil grin on his face.



Arriving at the orphanage, the four of us unload the truck and make our way through the heavy metal gate, very similar to the one at our compound. Once inside Paul and I are instantly mobbed by a horde of orphans. They feel our hair and rub our skin in amazement. I realize they have never seen a white person before. They climb on us like jungle gyms, laughing and shouting all the while, their bare feet covered in mud and their faces painted with concrete dust. A small girl with big brown eyes jumps into my arms, melting my heart. I notice she has small bumps that cover her face. "H.I.V.," Billy whispers in my ear. I continue holding her as she rests her head on my shoulder. I wonder to myself, When was the last time you were held?

As the children watch, we begin to dig. I don't mind now that I didn't get to shower this morning, this is more important. We dig and dig until blisters form and the Haitian summer forces us to temporarily halt. We catch our breath under the shade of a massive mango tree. The same bottled water and protein bars are happily consumed.

Once we cool off a bit, I start talking with Billy, his dark skin covered with beads of sweat. "Do you get paid for this work, Billy?" "No," he says, "Junior and I survived the earthquake so we can help the children." "How do you eat?" I ask. "God gives us what we need," he replies. "I am happy to have met a person like you Billy." I say. I am silenced by his way of thinking, followed by an intense feeling of guilt and shame. How can I live in a big house, drive a nice car, and have all the food and clothes I could ever need without helping others? I ponder. I have seen images of third world countries on the news and in movies but I would always think to myself Those people must be lazy. I work hard for the things I have, they should too. My own ignorance shocks me as an internal battle between my preconceived notions, and reality rages in my mind.

We spend three days at the orphanage working and playing with the children. On the third day we say our goodbyes and head back to the compound. My temporary home with no running water or electricity now feels like the Taj Mahal after sleeping on the dirty concrete floors of the orphanage.

As we relax and reflect on the children and all the work we accomplished, the rain starts falling heavily. We all run outside, strip down to our underwear, and bathe in the cool rain water. We laugh at ourselves knowing how silly we look but are very happy for the rain. The downpour continues late into the night.

The deluge concerns us because the city is built into mountainous terrain, and the weak concrete houses are not known for their strength. Paul instructs us to get some gear together in preparation for a possible landslide. We load the truck with shovels, ropes, flares, first aid kits, water, and protein bars as we brace for the worst.

As one a.m. approaches, my eyes grow heavy, and there are no reports of landslides. I doze off but am awakened moments later by Paul. "Wake up, we have to go, there's been a landslide on the other side of the city!" The stress in Paul's voice assures me that the situation is very serious. "We have to hurry!" he yells. "People are trapped under the debris!" We pile in and make our way towards the scene.

The little blue truck splashes through the deep puddles and water running like a small river down the steep city streets. My heart races as I put on my head lamp and rain suit. Junior and Billy sway and bounce in the back of the truck gripping the side railing tightly.

After what seems like a lifetime, we arrive at the scene of massive destruction. An area of homes on a steep hill had collapsed under the force of the rushing water. The area was as wide as a football field and twice as long. We traversed, with our gear, down into the steep ravine where we had been told survivors had been heard shouting for help. We see a group of Haitians sobbing and yelling in the dark. Billy and Junior quickly gather them and ask them to help search through the heavy mud and concrete. We form lines and pass pieces of rubble making our way to the bottom of the pile. I grab a long piece of metal and, with the help of two Haitians, pry a massive concrete slab out of the pile. Moving the slab reveals a young mother with two children held close. Their bodies were still warm but motionless. I reach down and grab the small boy to check for a pulse. There is none. I hold him until his warmth dissipates. Paul fetches a mattress out of the rubble and takes the

boy out of my arms, placing him on the mattress. We fill six more mattresses. We dig and listen for any signs of life until the sun rises over the mountains and illuminates the scene. There are no survivors.

Somberly we make our way back to the compound. Soaked, exhausted, bruised, and filthy we return, but there is no talking or celebrating our achievements. We should have kept digging, I think to myself. We pour ourselves out of the truck and sleep the entire day.

When I wake up, I feel like I am on a different planet. I want to go home. I want to get away from this horrible place. To forget everything I have witnessed. It is too late for that. There's no turning back now, I think. I can't unlearn the things I've seen.

Quietly sitting at the table eating, we listen to the Haitian news broadcast as Billy translates. "The president of Haiti is saying his rescue teams were on the scene of the landslide." I can't believe my ears. Is the president lying and using these people's deaths for political gain? I ask Junior to translate to be sure. He says the same. "The people are congratulating the president for trying to save the poor people in the ravaged neighborhood." I have never been more upset and angry in my life.

I spend six more weeks in Haiti, and over this time, Billy and I become kindred spirits. We share the exact birthday and have very similar thoughts about life. I come to realize that he is simply a reflection of myself cast in a different light. I am not better than him because I am a white American, I am simply lucky enough to be born here and not in a country like Haiti. As an American with such high quality of life, it dawns on me that it is my responsibility to help everyone in need achieve the happiness, safety, and comfort that we have here at home. After all, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr., "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (337). We should consider this carefully moving forward; oppression and injustice have no borders, so neither should our good deeds or good intentions. We must not see people in any part of the world as distant or separate from ourselves because, in reality, there are no "countries". There is one shared planet of brothers and sisters, so if one suffers, all suffer in some way. Let us not turn a blind eye and ignore the less fortunate, but let us tear down the walls of

oppression that separate us, so we can create a better world for all mankind.

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*Liz Harman*  
**Hamatsa Indian**

*Jordan Adams*

## **The Flight of the Dove**

I grew up liking classical music. It was the only thing my mother played around the house. The only time I'd been exposed to other types of music was when I went to school. Regardless, classical music was the only thing I liked. I used to sit and listen for hours in my beat up, two bedroom apartment, listening to Debussy or Chopin, drowning out the noises of the night—which consisted of dogs barking, bits of conversation and laughter, far off screams and other various things.

My mother – a strong, kind woman—would even let me go onto the roof so I could gaze at the stars. You see, I really only had my mother. My father went away when I was about nine. The few memories I had of him weren't good ones. One of them being the time he'd hit my mother across the face, his other hand sloshing around a vodka bottle. He was nearly always drunk, as I later came to find, and that hadn't been the first time he'd hit her. I remember flashing blue and red lights shining through my window as I hid underneath my bed, frightened and scared to death that he was going to come up to my room and get me next. That wouldn't have been the first time either.

The day he went away for good was firm in my mind. It was a Saturday, sunny, and I was excited to go out and explore. We lived in a poor district in Maine, a shabby town by the name of Beckley. My dad, from what I remember, worked as a mechanic and my mother worked at a book store in town.

The best thing about living in a poor neighborhood – everyone was the same. No one wore designer clothes. All of the kids my age found fun just from throwing a baseball in the street. The freedom of being a kid and not an adult was like a silent blessing. We relished our youth; we felt we'd be young forever.

But my dad had begun drinking heavily that day. I watched, cowering in some bushes just beyond my garage, as he worked on an '85 Mustang, jeans and t-shirt stained here and there with oil. He would often come out from under the car, crack open another beer, and guzzle it down—sometimes in seconds.

This wouldn't have been that big of a deal, but my father didn't know when to stop. He'd down six or seven beers in a few

hours' time, then continue to drink well after he was drunk.

Careful to be quiet, I watched as he slugged down another one, growling and burping as he did so. He crushed the can and tossed it into the street, a small mountain already forming. I wondered why he was doing this. I'd heard him and my mother arguing a few days before. Something about work not going well. That had been the very first time he'd hit her.

My dad leaned back and hit his head on the hood of the Mustang. "Fuck!" he yelled.

I had to clamp my hands over my mouth to keep from giggling—after all, he'd said a bad word! My mother had popped me in the mouth a few times for saying bad words.

But my dad had heard me laughing.

"Who's there?" he called, angry. Heat flashed through my body.

He stood, wiping dirt and excess oil onto his pants, then he sauntered closer to me. When he saw me – I'd crouched, praying he wouldn't find me—his eyes flashed, red fury.

"And what the hell are you doing here?"

I didn't answer; I couldn't. My breathing accelerated, and I was wishing that I'd just stayed away

He walked closer, gazing down at me with vitriol.

"Thought that was pretty fucking funny, huh? Me hitting my head. Gave you a good laugh, didn't it?"

"Daddy, I—" His hand flashed out, smacking me across the face. Shock overpowered the pain for a brief moment, but then my face began to sting. He'd knocked me onto the ground. Tears came, but I did not want to cry in front of my father.

"Think you're so funny, huh? Little bastard."

I sniffled, keeping my face away from him.

"I'm—I'm sorry," I breathed.

"You're sorry, huh? Alright, turn around. Let me see your face."

I didn't want to for fear of being hit again, but I would not disobey. I turned and he reached down, gently pulling on my chin so that I was looking up at him. Something flashed in his eyes, and I couldn't interpret what it was. Regret? Love? Hate?

"Don't know why you're crying, didn't even leave a mark. Little bastard."

I didn't say anything or even breathe.

"Go home," he ordered, turning. "And don't you say a goddamn thing to your mother."

I did as I was told, covering my face.

When I made it home, I rushed upstairs so that my mother wouldn't see me. I ran to my room. My cheek still stung and my crying had subsided to sniffles here and there. That was the day I truly began hating my father. Young as I was, I felt so bitter about him. How could someone be so awful?

My mother had cleaned out the attic earlier that week, and a few of the remnants she found buried up there were placed here in the corner of my room. Old boxes that we just never opened; an antique record player and a few vinyl records. Curious, I made my way over to them and glanced at the top ones in the stack.

There was a Beatles record, as well as an old country one I had no interest in. But the one that caught my eye had no title. I picked it up, not really sure what I was doing. After all, I had no idea how to work a record player. I'd only seen my mother do it a few times.

"Ben?" came a voice from the doorway.

My mother stood there, holding more boxes in her hand. Her expression changed as she saw my face, from curiosity to concern.

"Ben, honey, what happened to your face?"

She charged over, dropping the box and leaning down to me, examining my mark. "Benjamin, what happened

(daddy i)

to your face?"

(don't you say a goddamn thing to your mother)

I didn't say anything because I knew what would have happened if I did. I just looked down at the blank record in my hand. My mother didn't say anything, but when I looked up at her, her face told me that she knew exactly what had happened.

Her lips were in a tight line and her eyes bred a fury that I couldn't have imagined from her. She stood, still not saying anything, and left the room.

I came to realize later that she'd called the police and I watched, half-grateful, half-saddened as they hauled my father into the back of their cruiser. My mother had called the police

on him before, but I knew this time he would be going away for a while. I knew that I should be happy. I should have been glad that he was gone and would no longer be able to hurt my mother or myself. But a part of me wished he were still here because he was my father and because I still loved him, somewhere inside.

I heard my mother crying in her bedroom hours later. I knew she thought I couldn't hear because her door was closed but I always heard her and I felt so bad, because I didn't want her to be sad.

I waited until she stopped. Then I heard her door open and her footsteps coming down the hall to my room.

She hugged me tightly and I hugged her back, just as tight. I knew that she was definitely happy that my father was gone, but at the same time I knew she missed him like I did. Funny how these things happen.

"So, where's that record you had earlier?" she asked, her voice thick.

"Over there by the wall."

"Want me to put in on for you?"

I nodded.

She walked over, grabbing the untitled record. She messed with the player a bit, but then got it to work. I watched the disk rotate.

And then the music started to play and I had never heard anything so wonderful in my life. Emotions were conveyed so well and so beautifully that I couldn't imagine anything more perfect. Clare de Lune. And for that moment, I forgot about my father and what he'd done to me and my mother. Nothing else mattered except the mesmerizing notes that continued to play, freeing me of my sorrows.

That's when I started listening to music on the roof of my beat-up two bedroom apartment, watching the world go by.

One morning, I came out there and saw the most peculiar sight—a beautiful, white dove sat on the ledge of the roof. When I approached it, it spread its wings and took off into the morning sun. It took me a moment to realize that I was just like this dove – free, in a place where I could no longer be hurt.



Lesley Richardson

## The Crow

hangs by its feet, silhouetted against the setting sun,  
the noose wound tight around her feet that now arch  
toward heaven. *I need you to shoot a crow*, my grandmother

told my husband on the phone, *they are eating all my pecans*,  
she whispered in her barely there voice. The car accident  
had taken her gusto; she wanted to get it back. She had heard

that a dead crow hanging on her pecan tree would be a deterrent.  
*Well, I would think so*, I told my husband, half-jokingly,  
half-amazed that he would even consider her request, but when

she demands something, one listens. Everyone does. She was  
born in 1926, and she is hard. She patents her biscuits with two  
solid finger prints in the middle, stamps them with warm Karo

syrup and butter. My grandfather farmed tobacco and she  
cooked;  
she could wring a chicken's neck while catching another  
between  
her knees, the present body still flopping at her feet. As my  
husband

shoots the crow across the field of dirt, out of the yellow-orange  
sky,  
my heart aches; the crow dropped for no reason at all except to  
warn  
the others to avoid the pecans, their one luxury in this world.

My grandfather developed diabetes and lung cancer as he aged,  
and instead of staying away from cigarettes and sugar, he hid  
them,  
in aluminum tins in the barn, and behind the seat of his blue Ford  
150.

After his death, my grandmother found Snicker's bars for an  
entire

year in various hidden places. When she stumbled upon the first miniature brown wrapper, damp and mildewed in his glove compartment,

I thought she might explode into a million fiery particles. He was not about to give up the things he loved. Like my mother, he was a romantic; they often played piano duets for hours on Sunday afternoons after church.

He wrote poetry on the front porch at night, his words spiraling off the page into the smoke rings he exhaled, a little bit of him melding with the universe he would say. My mother is the middle girl out

of three in the family: the oddball, the artist, the most untraditional of the bunch. As she helps my husband sling the rope over the branch and around the crow's feet, I am surprised by what she will do

for her mother to win her approval. The others swoop above and below the skyline, descending upon the tree instead of avoiding it, their multiple calls a mournful serenade, their fallen friend's limbs gnarled and tangled

in the tree they also loved – the trunk that they will now peck to death in retribution. My grandmother rocks on the porch. Her family charm bracelet clangs against the metal glider and echoes in the thin air.

Her mission is complete. A smirk slides across her face as the sun shatters; she and the crow stare at one another long into the night and my mother cries.



*Gordon Miller*  
**Desert Roots**

*Katrina Moore*

## **Integration Through the Eyes of a “Colored Child”**

My earliest memories of the movement to end segregation in my hometown are imbedded snapshots of local church gatherings, community meetings, planning and strategy meetings held in my parent’s small living room, parents, children, and elders working side by side making signs, banners, and billboards, women cooking to feed the large groups of people that would gather, men with shotguns, rifles, and pistols always on guard, angry white faces, angry black faces, small children afraid and grasping tightly to the hems of their mothers’ dresses or their fathers’ strong hands, and covering their ears from the loud chants and angry, threatening voices, babies crying, chants of “I’m Black and “I’m Proud,” Motown music (James Brown) blaring from car radios, horns beeping, vulgarities, name calling, (terms such as “nigger” and “cracker”), gunshots in the night, people clothed in white sheets with pointy hoods over their faces carrying guns and crosses, policeman armed with tear gas, large, angry, barking, snarling German Shepherd dogs, and above it all my daddy’s deep, clear, even-toned, authoritative voice, whether speaking to one or many, leading the call for equality in education, an end to decades of segregation, a new beginning for all of the county’s children, and a better quality of life for all of the people in the county.

I was born in Engelhard, N.C., a very small and rural area that has seen little economic development or social change. This was even more apparent in 1966 when I was five years old and my parents were preparing to enroll me, their youngest and last child, in kindergarten. In 1966 the Hyde County, North Carolina school system was still segregated, as was almost every aspect of the county. Little did I know what a significant impact “this division” would have on my formal years of education as well as the educational values I would instill in my children.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were expanding their civil rights efforts not only in the southern part of the United States but moving steadily northward on a mission to eradicate slum conditions and improve the quality of jobs and education for minorities nationwide. My daddy, who had only received an

eighth grade formal education because of poverty standards and educational biases in the county, was deeply engrossed in the movement, as were many minorities. He was one of the more prominent figures in the local movement to end segregation in our county's school system. This was a dangerous undertaking for any "African American" to participate in but even more so in Hyde County because of the large percentage of the White or what was then typically classified as the "Caucasian" population's membership in or sympathetic ties to the KKK.

Daddy, against my mother's strong and multiple objections, would not enroll me in my first year of school and defiantly abstained from any local or state compliance as did several other black parents in Hyde County that year. This initiated the call to action to integrate the county's school system, which activists such as Dr. King, my daddy, and others strongly believed would lead to an equal and higher quality of education for minorities.

My most poignant memory of the movement, as it was called, was the march on the county seat. My father and other black leaders of the movement had repeatedly invited county officials and school board members, all white, to meetings to discuss the black community's issues and concerns regarding continued segregation of the county's schools. Each invitation had been met with absolute refusal by all of the county's dignitaries, so in response a march and rally on the county seat was proposed as a last ditch effort to express to the local officials and the white community the determination of the black community regarding the county's school wide integration. I remember one particular morning my mama dressed me in my prettiest whites (white laced dress, white laced ruffled socks, and white patent leather Mary Jane shoes), braided my long, red-sandy colored hair in three ponytails and handed me over to daddy for "final inspection." I didn't think much of it at the time because one day of the week was always designated daddy/daughter day in which I spent the entire day with daddy riding around in his big red Pontiac. You see my daddy and I shared a love of cars and the open road at even the young age of five. (Or so he chose to believe. I, on the other hand, just loved my daddy and the color red.)

I knew it was no ordinary daddy/daughter day when crowds of people dressed in their Sunday best started gathering at my parents' house with large signs and bullhorns. Vehicles began lining up at the "Negro School" across the street and the elderly or disabled were given priority to ride in the procession, which was approximately seventeen miles long on an already hot, sweltering, early July morning. Daddy and other group leaders addressed the burgeoning crowd, reminding everyone of the purpose of the march and the peaceful and orderly conduct that was expected of young and old alike. The pastors of the local black churches led the group in several prayers, and we began our "trek toward educational equality and integration of school and community."

I remember white people standing outside in their yards and on their porches glaring and yelling, "Niggers!" at us, some with guns or baseball bats, or watching us quietly and fearfully inside their homes behind locked screen doors or parted window blinds. I remember my daddy purposefully and proudly with soldier-like cadence steps leading the group of marchers. I remember riding on the hood of the lead car, my brother's red Cadillac convertible, as a symbolic gesture or reminder of what the march was really about--the children. I remember my daddy leading the crowd of men, women, and children but ever vigilant of his own wife and child and noticing when I began to squirm on top of the car from the intense heat of the sun beaming down on the car hood and beginning to burn my bare legs and my white laced covered bottom and ever so gently picking me up, smiling at me reassuringly, and placing me on his proud, strong shoulders. I remember my daddy and others keeping a watchful eye for any threat of danger even while singing old gospel hymns such as "We Shall Overcome" and chanting, "I'm Black and I'm Proud."

I remember as we got closer to the county seat, the sea of many angry white faces increased, and angry, bitter, and hateful voices intensified. I remember at some point skipping along with my mother and other female relatives in the crowd, some of them carrying umbrellas to shelter them from the sun and listening to them sing a favorite gospel when suddenly a group of white women emerged from their adjacent houses, swearing profusely at us, and began throwing rocks in our direction. I was hit by a

few of the small rocks, which I remember feeling like really sharp painful beestings when you walk barefooted in the grass and step on a nest of yellow jackets. A bigger rock cut me on one of my legs and it starting bleeding. I remember the throbbing pain and the long, thin, dark red stream of blood that ran down my leg onto my pretty white ruffled socks and white patent leather Maryjanes. I don't remember crying, just being confused and frightened. Mama, a gentle but fearless woman, along with several other women began to retaliate, but Daddy and some of the other men restored order, which was not an easy task he later told me because he had seen his "youngin" injured and because "your mama and those other damn women were a handful." Daddy was aware of the risks when he organized the march and also knew he had to stay focused on the purpose of the rally. He also knew that the white women antagonists were a ploy implemented to offset the crowd and start a riot, which would result in arrests and cancellation of the rally.

We finally reached the center of the county seat, and by this time, men had removed their suit jackets that they started the long trek wearing and their crisp, white, starched shirts were soaked in sweat. The women's carefully applied make-up, having long since evaporated in the hot sun, was now either all wiped on white handkerchiefs and towels, or mixed in with the sweat that had dripped from their faces, staining the collars of their blouses and dresses. Riot clad policemen were waiting for us, and before any of the "black leaders" could speak, the sheriff of the county ordered us to immediately disperse and return to our homes or we would be arrested. Daddy and some others continued to try to speak but we were sprayed with water from enormous fire hoses and deputies from inside the second or third floor windows of the courthouse threw canisters of tear gas down on us. This indeed incited a riot, and I remember, before my mother ran with me from harm's way, seeing a group of teenagers and young men begin to climb the fire truck ladders to the top of the courthouse to engage the deputies throwing the tear gas. I remember people running or fighting each other with bare hands or whatever "weapons" they could find.

The rest of that day is a blur. I don't know exactly how it ended or how my mother and I got home. I don't remember how long after the incident before the schools were officially

integrated. I do know that I started school much later in the fall of the year than school normally began. The day that I stood in line with my parents to enter the school which had been previously known as the “nigger school” but was now the “fully integrated” Davis Elementary School was a moment in history, but at now six and a half years old, I didn’t realize the significance of those first small steps into my first classroom setting. Years later as I entered middle and high school at the larger institution of learning situated seventeen miles away, I began to realize just how important those events eight years previous were to my education and career goals. This singular “experience” became an integral part of my personality, my character, and my integrity.

I can emphatically say that if I had not experienced the biases and racism in my small hometown during the integration of our school system and witnessed the class and dignity that my parents, my daddy in particular, embodied during some of the most dangerous moments of the movement, my reactions to my own personal indignities suffered at the hands of others merely based on the color of my skin/gender would have been completely opposite. My value system is rooted in experiences such as the integration movement in my small hometown and the lessons that I have learned from each of them. My daughters know from my history as well as from the history of their ancestors that education is an invaluable commodity to their individual achievements and personal successes. They also know my expectations of them and the high emphasis I place on education in their lives.

Finally, 1966 is the reason I, a fifty-three-year old multiracial, but once considered by popular classification guidelines, Negress/Colored/Black/African American woman proudly walk these collegiate halls of equal opportunity and higher institutional education with black, white, brown, young, middle aged, and older students. 1966/67 was the beginning of my formal education, 2014 is the middle of my academic years, and only I will, not any other race, nationality, gender or government entity determine the end.



*Jillian Oliver*

## **The Visiting Room**

I despised the clean funeral parlor.  
The dead body tucked beneath a cover,  
Sleeping decently  
His hands folded properly.  
My father's lids hid his glassy eyes.  
I despised the classical music playing gently  
From a poorly concealed CD player.  
I despised the paintings of fruit bowls,  
Vases and gardens  
That lined the white walls.  
It wasn't a comfort  
To see light shine on such a grim scene.  
He wouldn't turn to speak to me  
And recognize me once again.  
His frail body, afflicted with a lifetime  
Of suffering, like battered furniture,  
Could only lay damaged and still.

*Heather Jones*

**Half Alive But Mostly Dead**

She was slight imperfection.  
Burning sun in constant transfixion,  
Dry tongues, screaming at the sky,  
But the wind just breathes words in.  
Making us feel half alive, but mostly dead.

Naked bellies on the cool soft ground,  
Lying in open fields blanketed by the night sky,  
And kissed by the stars.  
Flushed red lips flirt with the sky,  
Making us feel half alive, but mostly dead.

A forest fire nibbles our veins,  
Crawls up our arms running away with our minds.  
Burns our dry thoughts like leaves,  
Sending us into tranquilizing spirals of exotic places far away.  
Making us feel half alive, but mostly dead.

Despite the rain, soaking our skin,  
Our soiled hands hide behind our backs.  
Wildly we run 3 miles on daisies with sprained ankles,  
Just to watch the moon kiss the sun,  
Making us feel half alive, but mostly dead.

Intoxication of whispering winds bewilder,  
Making us feel half alive, but mostly dead.



*Malinda Fillingim*  
**Passage**

*Anitra Louis*

## **To You**

I was 7 when I  
started fantasizing about  
my Mother:

A princess from Paris  
Her name was Michele. Princess Constable Michelle DuBois.  
She sat outside at 14k gold bistro tables eating flaky pastries  
filled with whipped cream and fruit jelly, writing me letters—  
intimate mommy letters  
About her first kiss  
About her favorite things to eat in Paris  
Every letter would be sent by Eagle—the fanciest bird to me at 7  
And each letter would be addressed to her dear Mon petit amour.

At 12, likely 13  
Mom was an African heiress  
Her royal parents forced her to give me up  
Fairytale style  
“There will be no tarnishing the family name,” they barked at her  
And she would use diamonds and sapphire and topaz  
To make me necklaces while sulking in her room  
“And I know you don’t like Topaz,” she would whisper in hopes  
I hear  
“But it’s the month you were born, which makes it special and  
beautiful. Like you.”  
She made plans to run away with my father  
Rebellious. Like me.

At 23  
She was a young criminal  
Like the kid who taught Oliver how to pick pocket.  
She fell quickly from my graces  
“She was 16,” I would say to myself. “How stable could she  
have been? Who gets pregnant at 15 *and* 16?”

But now  
Woman

Mother  
Human Being  
I understand

Her best possible gift  
To me  
Was more than a gift  
A superpower, perhaps  
To violently and completely love  
The only mother I know  
And to quietly, and slowly  
Let her go



*Abigail Brinks*  
**2 Lilies**

*Jillian Oliver*  
**A Heavy Desk**

It was the second week of sixth grade, and Edwina scribbled into her battered desk with a ballpoint pen and waited for class to start. She drew an outline of Saturn as she listened to the clock ticking drowsily past the hour. Mrs. Garrett was late.

"I'm leaving in exactly one minute!" a boy behind her shouted. Moments later, Mrs. Garrett walked in with her gaze set on her desk, as if the students weren't there. Edwina noticed Mrs. Garrett's perfectly erect back, tight, orange skirt, and high heeled shoes, which looked four inches high. She clearly thought she was on a runway, Edwina thought to herself. After wiping black ink from her nails onto her jeans, Edwina opened her notebook.

"Today," Mrs. Garrett spoke softly, still not looking at the roomful of students before her, "we are going to experiment with center of mass." She then asked everyone to rise from their seats and move the desks so there would be a clear space in the center of the room. The boys began gathering chairs, one for each hand, and taking them across the room as the girls watched. Edwina observed the boys lifting tables high up in the air. One of the largest boys picked up two of the desks and rested them on his shoulder as he made his way to the other end of the room. His biceps flexed under the intense weight.

She was reminded of a month ago, when under the ninety degree heat of July, her father moved mowing equipment from the front lawn to the shed in the backyard. She watched from the roof of the house as he heaved two large canisters of gasoline on his strong shoulders. She stayed on the roof until nightfall, staring at the cloudless sky. It was ablaze with stars that kept her busy searching for her favorite celestial objects: Venus, Rigel, Sirius, and Jupiter. Nearly every night she would focus on the brightest object in the sky and call it whichever one she wanted to see. That night she found Orion sitting gracefully above the alder trees that were scattered around the block. She turned her head to the side, trying to make out the image of the Greek god the constellation was named after. She saw an hour glass and a torso, but no god within the formation. She repeated the names Rigel, Betelgeuse, and Bellatrix again and again to

memorize all the stars in Orion. She stopped when she heard her father's voice shouting her name from the back porch. She scooted toward the front of the roof to remain out of sight.

"Edwina!" he shouted again.

His voice carried forth through the night with such force that one would think he was letting out a battle cry. His old, suede boots shuffled against the gravel as he came to the front of the house and onto the lawn. She heard the sound of ice cubes chattering against glass. As he turned toward the roof there was a tall drink of whiskey in his hand.

"Hey! What're you doing up there?" he called out with less lung power than before.

"I was just coming down, Samuel." She tried to keep her voice steady, but she felt unsuccessful.

"Hurry up, your mother wants help with the dishes!"

Edwina crawled toward the ladder leaning against the roof. It had been there for over a year since her father forgot to repair some loose tiles on the roof. She left the heavy, hot air and entered the air conditioned living room. She was met with the smell of stale cigarette smoke and some reality show playing on the TV at its highest volume. Her father sat and watched the show with his bottle of Kentucky Vintage on the coffee table. He did this most nights. He smelled like window cleaner whenever he stood close to her. She went into the kitchen to find her mother at the sink. She stood there in a denim shirt dress that hugged her wide hips and upper thighs. Deep blue veins lined her pudgy calves and ankles, and her bare feet were grounded in place as always; never moving. Edwina grabbed a cloth to dry the pile of dishes that were just washed and waiting for her. Her eyes fell to the tight hem of her mother's dress.

"Do you ever find that skirt confining?"

Her mother dried her hands then slid her wedding ring back on her finger. "No," she answered with a shrug.

Edwina sat at the kitchen table with a large frying pan. "I mean, you can't sit the way you want. You always have to worry about showing your underwear." She looked towards the floor for a moment, then back at her mother. "You also can't run."

Her mother was now reaching into a lower cabinet for a baking sheet. "There's no reason I need to run," she said, furrowing her brow.

could to fall asleep. She would see her mother the following mornings setting breakfast plates on the table with bruises along her arms. She once saw a girl show up to school with bruises like that and the girl was taken away from her parents. She knew it wasn't a good sign, but she had to dismiss it.

Edwina closed her eyes and tried to imagine she was somewhere else: the surface of a distant planet, the rickety benches at the railroad station, or back on the roof stargazing. But the scent of stale cigarette smoke brought her back. The TV went off. The silence she was hoping for came, and yet she felt even more uncomfortable than she had before. Edwina knew she would have very little, if anything, to say to him, so she got up and headed towards the staircase. Immediately Samuel called for her to take a seat next him. Once again she complied. He smelled like a mixture of body spray, alcohol, and the musty scent from the hardware store where he worked. He ran his hand underneath her tee shirt. "Let me rub your back," he said.

When she was younger, her father would often give her backrubs when they were on the couch watching TV. She didn't see any harm in it then and she didn't want to now. She thought of just getting up and leaving, but she didn't want to look afraid. His fingers were cold and damp from holding his chilled glass for most of the night. When his hand ran across her bra he unfastened it. "I've done this so much I'm pretty much an expert," he said. Edwina looked down at a Women's Health magazine sitting on the coffee table. Samuel's whiskey glass sat over the face of the woman on the cover. With his free hand, he reached for a cigarette protruding from his pack of Camels on the table along with his lighter. He lit his cigarette and moved in closer to her, "The stories I could tell you, young lady."

His ashes fell from his cigarette down her arm. As the shower of ash rolled down her skin, she wanted the heat to distract her from him. He moved his hand around to the front of her body and clutched her breast. She gasped and moved away. He laughed piercingly loud at her. His smoke became stronger than it had been when he first lit the cigarette. It engulfed her face and made her nauseous even though she thought she'd grown used to the smell. She saw him watching her from her peripheral vision, his dark eyes staring at her intently as he sucked his cigarette. She turned to meet his eye. She hated



looking at him. His face wore a scowl that was imprinted on his face by deep creases around his mouth and between his brows. But once and a while he wore a self-satisfied smirk. He now wore that familiar smirk. He looked down toward her chest and then met her eyes. "Look," he said, directing his eyes at her chest once again. She looked down and saw her nipples showing through her white shirt, though she was uncertain if this was what she was supposed to be seeing. "You're excited," he said.

She stayed awake that night. The cold from his hands was still wearing off. Light beamed in through her open window from the waning gibbous moon as she sat on the floor. She sat with her head pressed against the side of her bed, feeling the heavy air seep into her room. A brown, cardboard box rested in her lap, the flaps open on all sides allowing Edwina to look in at its contents. There laid an eight by ten square plot filled with dirt and clay. It was an archaeological kit her parents had given her on her birthday. Buried beneath the tightly packed soil were artifacts meant to resemble those of Ancient Egypt. Plastic Pharaohs smothered in gauze were among them, as well as clay urns and sarcophagi. And after Edwina had chiseled and hammered away at the block and uncovered the objects, she wanted to rebury them just to dig them up again. She couldn't even remember the excitement she'd felt only two years ago upon receiving the gift. So she flipped through her magazine, paying close attention to the parts about the Maya. She remembered how excited she was the other night to see pictures of pyramids in the jungle. But they looked like any other building tonight. She then climbed under the covers and stared out the window into the night sky. Blankets of clouds had taken over since she last looked up. Only occasional pockets of stars appeared between the grey, and the moon shone no brighter than lamplight behind a curtained window. She replayed the night's events until she finally fell asleep.

Now she stood remembering the events again and again while gazing at the young men and girls in the class. Some girls had their arms folded as they watched the chairs and desks being rearranged around the room. There was high-pitched laughter and whispering from a pair of girls at one end of the room. Memories of that night overtook Edwina. When she looked upon the young men, with their strong arms, she wondered if her own

arms could take the weight. She knew she wasn't supposed to, but the desire filled her gradually and intensely. For a moment she listened to shoes shuffling against the floor as the chairs and tables clanked and crashed. She saw Mrs. Garrett trapped behind her desk, absorbed in a piece of paper. Edwina's gaze fell to two chairs in front of her. She lifted them swiftly, as high as she could, feeling her biceps flex. She carried them to a wall and set them down with a loud thud. Mrs. Garrett looked up. Edwina caught the attention of some students who looked her over; some with indifference while others chuckled. She lifted her own desk, with its picture of Saturn, and settled it on her shoulder before one of the boys could grab it. The center of the room was clear. The girls still whispered and the clock's steady rhythm still thumped through the room. Blank glances occasionally passed in Edwina's direction as she stood with her desk still propped up on her shoulder. Her cheeks were flushed and her fingers trembled against the cold, steel frame.



*Megan Bartlett*  
**School's Out**

*Barbara Brown*  
**Growing Older**

I may not have been the best parent.

But as a baby, I loved you...

and held you...

and bathed you...

and soothed you.

As you grew older, I watched you play...

and splash...

and learn...

and grow.

As you grew older, I helped you with schoolwork...

I cheered for you in school band...

I drove you and giggling girlfriends to

all the places teens without a license need to go.

And I would never, ever expect anything in return.

But as I grow older,

I may ask you to drive me to a doctor appointment (or two or three).

And maybe one day we can go for a ride with no destination, just because.

I know it's not convenient.

And maybe as I grow older,

when my medical bills make no sense

and my banking account no longer balances,

you can help me straighten it out.

Even though you are busy with your own life.

And as I grow older, (this is a little embarrassing...)

but I may need help getting in and out of the bath,

or washing my hair.

(It hurts so to keep my arms above my head.)

And when I grow older,

will you remember to hug me gently?

To rub lotion on my feet that I can no longer reach?

Or just to sit quietly by my side,

when I grow older?



*Heather Jones*  
**Disgruntled Child**

*Cody Leutgens*  
**The Off Season**

I'm from a rust-green bridge that swings level to one of the longest waterways on earth, that's at high *or* low tide. The same flux tide growing white barnacles on a wooden pier built twice over. From its planks, black men sling what were once cane poles, but now tie on barbs and weights with pyramid shapes penetrating any surface after their arch, even fiberglass, even skin and bone. But when their lead strikes close, I'm angry like Larry Rice whose eyes bulge like dunes, sea oat flailing arms, awkward lips, sharp and alive as oysters. And then the law arrives pointing megaphones and jail threats at bobbing targets. But that wooden landmark remains a battlefield, remained a battlefield for Atlantic proprietorship even before I drove my grey Jeep. Before that, rollerblades, skateboards or bare feet trekked the only island road three miles north, slid around the S-curve, right at the only light and land at the pier parking lot, the landmark, Buddy's. Or The One Eyed Parrot before that. Or, originally, The Sandpiper. The same Sandpiper now tattooed on my right thigh so when I'm wrapped in a towel, stuffing into necessary neoprene, anyone in the now paved lot can see my insignia, my rite. That chosen scar is my naked home, which I bear with each *badump badump badump* back across the swing bridge. It is the pier, its barnacles, its seaweed camouflage spoiled pilings, even the one piling that dangles near the farthest poking tip, the pillar leg that broke during the same storm that drowned Kurt. And it hangs still, noose-like, or in southwest wind its mass sways unlike its sturdy surroundings, a grandfather clock pendulum. And Kurt has a cross, now. It sits sunburned beside the gazebo draped in leashes and piles of broken fins and scraps of surfboard and wax and conch and the rare state shell, and a necklace his girlfriend made from whole sand dollars, but are now just fractions of nickels. Yet, the gazebo still stands strong, and I'll stand under it at dusk and see Kurt's weathered cross, be reminded that his father moved to a different ocean, and on the hour the bridge will swing behind me and the spot fish and speckled trout will run and the black men will toss lines at surfers and we'll break those lines with our teeth, their weight will fall to the seafloor, like Kurt, covered in waves and

whitewater. Then December 5<sup>th</sup> will arrive, and pier laws pause until March 15<sup>th</sup>. Then the 16<sup>th</sup>, when business locks unhinge, bridge traffic begins, and Mayor Guy tucks in his shirt, smiles at another approaching summer



*Denis Spahic*  
**Panerai**

*Denis Spahic*  
**War**

I was born in Bosnia and at the time it was a very warm and peaceful country.

Neighbors respected one another no matter what their ethnic or religious background was. Even after the split of Yugoslavia our economy was growing, people had jobs and were able to provide for their families. Suddenly things started to change. Politicians became greedy and their lust for power soon threw the entire Balkan region into war and turmoil. My family and I were caught in the middle of it, a very serious conflict that soon turned into one of the worst human rights violations Europe had seen since the Holocaust. Images from the experiences with my family during this time of turmoil are vivid in my mind, and these experiences are the ones that shaped my childhood and who I've become. Bosnia went through a metamorphosis, pre-war, during the war, and post war.

Before the war began, Bosnia was a great place to live and raise a family. It was a place where families were able to live well and support themselves with little family businesses and where everyone knew each other. The landscape was scenic. Beautiful green vegetation spread from mountainous snow-capped regions of the country to the lowlands and the ocean front. Fruit trees grew plentiful even in people's backyards. Beach communities spent their summer months sailing and fishing the Adriatic Sea while inland people spent the warm days on the river swimming, camping and spending time with friends and family. People spent their time without a worry in sight during the presidency of Josip Broz Tito. There was no thought that a war was near because everyone was content with their own daily rituals. Unlike many of today's communist countries, Yugoslavia set itself apart by putting the interest of its citizens first, truly caring for the people of the land, and Bosnia was literally the center of its prosperity. Crime was non-existent, people respected and cared for one another with a sense of community. School children were safe and were provided with a proper education. At night the neighborhood bars were filled with people from all ethnic backgrounds enjoying each other's company. It was a cultural hub, a place ruled by the Ottomans

for four centuries and later occupied by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Also, like many other countries in Europe, Bosnia had experienced the horrors of two World Wars.

Though at times the land was at peace and people got along, it was a region stricken with underlying conflicts from the day of its conception. Beneath the beautiful scenic views and humanity of the people was a horrid ethnic tension that dates back to the Ottomans and beyond. The people of Bosnia were no strangers to occupation and foreign rule. The Turks took over the region and instated Muslim law, prompting its citizens to convert to Islam or face penalties ranging from taxation to death. Bosnian people are survivors, and historically the Balkan people were primarily atheist. The lust these people had for life was greater than any religion or rule that could bind them to do as wanted. Practicing survival by adaptation, the Bosnian population slowly started converting to Islam while its neighboring states, Croatia and Serbia were not so inclined to give up their Christian beliefs and suffered the consequences. As time progressed, the Ottoman Empire was slowly squeezed out of the region by various sanctions and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After a short rule that ended with the death of Prince Ferdinand and started World War I, Bosnia found itself thrust into Nazi occupation and yet again thrown into another war, World War II. With the demise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime, a prosperous Socialist Yugoslavia was born and lead by Tito. While Bosnia was one of the poorer states within the federation, the country recovered quickly both financially and culturally.

With a stable government the region quieted down and life returned to a normal pace. Having seen its share of peace, unfortunately the region fell into turmoil once again. Shortly after the death of Tito, Bosnia entered into what is known now as the Bosnian War, its last and most gruesomely remembered conflict. The spark that ignited the flame was centuries old. The neighboring states of Croatia and Serbia let their resentment of Bosniaks be heard after the fall of Yugoslavia. Christians in the neighboring states were holding on to grudges formed over time and wanted revenge for the suffering they endured during the many years of Muslim rule in the region. They saw it fit to blame the Bosnian people for their turmoil and proceeded to act in



outrageously hideous crimes against civilians, women and children, until they openly declared genocide against the Bosnian population and proceeded to engage a war that lasted over three years. This time the war was uglier than any other before and my family and I became victims of it. War did not skip generations in my family tree. It was carried right along from my grandparents who both survived two world wars to my mother and father and myself at a very young age like some genetic disorder that was hell-bound on its path of destruction.

My parents were in their early twenties, still innocent to the world and just starting out as a family with the birth of their son. My grandparents, on the other hand, seemingly considered themselves veterans of conflicts in the region and thought they could manage. Unfortunately a few sleepless nights turned into weeks of unrest and turbulence. It was decided amidst the shooting outside of our home that it was time for my parents and me to flee the region. The war had reached our doorstep and with no end in sight it was time for us to go.

Many people died during the war; the numbers are in the hundreds of thousands, with hundreds of people unaccounted for until this day. My parents and I were fortunate enough to not have suffered the full extent of the war. Although I have memories of events that can never leave me, my parents did their best to guard me from the horrors that occurred. I have vivid memories of us fleeing, running from gunfire. I remember us hiding out in a relative's house only to be ambushed and fired upon from the Serbian military forces outside. We slept in kitchens during nights so dark and long, we thought they would never end. With the sound of evacuation sirens filling the cold night air, we slept in bathrooms with my mother guarding me in a bathtub, a place that seemed the safest at the time while my father kept a watchful eye on the situation outside. We were finally able to cross the border into Croatia only to pay homage to more scenes of destruction and death. Bodies covered in blood soaked sheets lay on the side of the road, people, families hiding in mine infested fields alongside it. Many dangerous paths were crossed with bearded, armed individuals that could have at any point ended our journey. Once we were out of Bosnia we headed to Germany, where we spent the remainder of the war. My grandparents followed shortly thereafter and we were all once

again safe. We managed to pick life up where it had come to a halt and proceeded to live productive lives.

The war was short but, nonetheless, brutal and destructive. Towns had been burned to the ground, factories were destroyed leaving no supplies or equipment to help rebuild a broken state. Many people continued to leave the region even after the shooting had stopped. There was no economy, no jobs and for a lot of people no place to call home. Fifteen years after the war I traveled back to the place I once called home, only to see that not much had changed. There was no more shooting, but houses still showed signs of bullet holes that once rippled the sides of them. Paved roads were riddled with holes from where mortars had once fallen, burned buildings still black from the smog that once engulfed them. Worst of all, the people had nothing, no jobs, no money to pay for groceries and basic necessities.

What stunned me most about the war happened on my last trip to the region. It was 2010, and I was going to visit my grandparents who had moved back to our hometown after the war. As I drove up to the border crossing guarded by men in blue and black uniforms carrying pistols, I could not help but notice the "Danger" signs on both sides of the road. As I was sitting in my car amongst the traffic, waiting on my turn to have my paperwork checked, I skimmed over the area, looking to see what was so dangerous. I then realized, I was in the middle of a mine field. And a field it was, overgrown shrubs a foot or two tall with no clear view of the environment surrounding them. As I continued looking, I saw a little boy no more than four to five years old walking through the field and overgrowth. It was a shuffled walk, as I would imagine the child was lost, clearly distraught. But he proceeded to walk up to the road, in his rag doll outfit and torn up shoes. He walked towards each car and begged the people inside for money, for food, for anything they had to spare. Most people gave up what they could, but some didn't bother to even take notice of the kid. As he came walking up to my window, I scrambled for some paper notes I had tucked away safely in my socks in fear of being robbed by a more suspect party. I handed him a few bills and some loose change and he was off to the next car. Later on, when I had crossed over into Bosnia I noticed the same boy walking across the field

again. This time it looked like there was some one expecting him, hiding in the shrubs. He walked up to the person, and they shared the bit of food and money the boy had collected. Then he was off again, for another round of cars. The point of this story is that though the war ended, some families still have not made it out of a poverty stricken state.

The main lesson this war has taught me is that I was born a survivor. My country saw terror and mass destruction, but it still bore people who were bred to survive. Controlling a hostile environment is impossible when you are a victim but surviving it is always an option. The war in this beautiful country that I will forever think of as home may have robbed the beauty of the streets and filled it with memories of sorrow, but it could never change the fact that our people share this experience of loss and most importantly, survival.



*Gordon Miller*  
**Streets of Venice**

*Antonio Cooper*

## **The Protest**

He is on his knees!  
Don't shoot him, please!

Yes! He may be the culprit--  
But, does it warrant a bul-let?

Or two, or three, or four, five, six?  
And if you don't miss, he will surely be missed.

By friends and family--  
A Fer-gu-son tragedy

It could all be averted with ease;  
Don't shoot him, please!  
He is down on his knees!

His hands are in the air--  
Tell me, do you care?

If his family is to grieve--  
While his friends bereave?

Is deadly force a necessity?  
Please, ponder carefully

It's your authority, sir--  
But, we the people do not concur

We stand together, united--  
And you are sure to be indicted  
Or start a riot--

If you kill this child of He whom sits high--  
On that Day of Reckoning, what will be your reply?

What will be your excuse?  
Is your fear

so severe  
that you choose to  
EX-E-CUTE?

Officer! We understand your plight--  
Please, don't rush to judgment and extinguish the divine light

That is embedded in us ALL--  
But it is your call

To serve and protect--  
Or infect our neighborhood with regret?

Let us learn from the past instead of repeating our mistakes—  
Wait!

BANG-BANG! BANG-BANG! BANG! BANG!

Now, it is too late.

William Linn

## Fuji

(Dedicated to Cal Tjader)

Even with all the excited chatter between Sarah, Henry, and Eli during the ride from Gloucester to the Boston Museum, she was still stunned within minutes of entering the exhibit area. *It's supposed to be the most comprehensive showing of Oriental masterpieces in one place, ever*, Henry had said. *It's the Museum's first event to celebrate the national bi-centennial*, Eli had said. *It will be wonderful*, Sarah told her.

On wall after wall were masterpieces, miracles of color and composition. It was no wonder the Impressionists revolted from classic realism after studying the techniques – and responding to the emotion – of these works. *Eli was right*, she thought. It might be a cliché, but it was still true: There was something childlike in the eyes of these artists, able to see the world with wonder and lack of artifice, like a child does.

As she studied them, Eli generally stayed a respectful distance. But he was clearly interested in her reaction to what she saw, often appearing seemingly out of thin air to add commentary to any painting at which she lingered.

“The Chinese,” he told her, “were the first to ‘paint’ the landscape itself as the object of the painting. Before the Impressionists, the landscape in Western art is only a prop, a background to the human objects in the painting. Can you imagine the revolutionary effect of such a paradigm shift?”

Among the Chinese miracles, there was the beautiful *The Five-Colored Parakeet*, by Emperor-painter Hui-tsung of the Sung dynasty. “Imagine such an artist as your Emperor,” he almost whispered to her, a touch of awe in his own voice, then leaving her behind as he walked off with Sarah and Henry.

A few paintings later, she caught up with the other three again, standing in front of and so blocking her view of something that had Sarah ooh-ing and aah-ing loudly. She stepped forward and nudged between her and Henry to get a close-up view.

“We’ve been waiting for you to catch up,” Eli said, leaning around Sarah to smile at her brightly.

“This is,” he announced loudly, extending both arms out from his body, “this is *The Prince Botima*. This is a court

reproduction and, as the story goes, a 17<sup>th</sup> century reproduction of an earlier reproduction. The story also claims that the original is still extant, hidden, a treasure somewhere in northern China, or perhaps Tibet. How the original could still exist in such a harsh climate seems preposterous to me. In any case, this unattributed painting is still marvelous in its own right.”

Eli fell silent, smiling at it again, and she stepped forward from the others to claim a closer look.

It was a large painting, and still another that she had never seen in any book. It was dominated by a young man in a flowing robe of royal purple, slightly turned, seeming to glance over the viewer’s left shoulder. He held his two hands out in front of him, a cup to catch the flow of blood from his chest, a rushing torrent in that stylized manner that she saw in the flow of water in many of these paintings.

To the viewer’s right, behind the Prince, stood an ornately costumed woman with the knife still in her raised right hand, red with blood, her face contorted with unmistakable hatred.

In the foreground, at the man’s feet, lay the crumpled body of another victim. Another ornately costumed woman, her face nearly unseen in the dust, her long black hair, with one long streak of gray, covering most of her body as if to shelter it, but it was too late: she lay in a pool of blood as well. But it was a small pool, a delicate ladylike pool compared to the torrent from the young man’s chest.

The power of the painting, however, was the haunting look of the man’s face. How did the painter capture such a look of utter surprise, of shock, of disbelief in a face still stylized in the common Oriental manner of the time: elongated, with oversized ears and eyebrows, the hair drawn to a barely visible masculine ponytail, his mouth open, shaped exquisitely to form a soundless cry of horror at the sight of a river of blood gushing from his body.

*No, no, not ‘horror,’* she now realized, *not horror at all.* She looked closer at his eyes. It was something else, something else....

“I don’t understand the look on his face,” she said, finally, but continuing to stare at the painting. “It’s not horror, not horror at all. More like...disbelief? No, not ‘disbelief,’ not

*just* disbelief, but disbelief and...and recognition of some kind? Look at his mouth....I can see the beginning of a...a *smile* there. Do you see it? Am I wrong? She looked back squarely into Eli's bemused eyes.

"You see what you see, my dear. You don't have to defend what you think you see, even to me. Actually Sarah was saying the same thing while we waited for you to catch up. In fact, she was as self-effacing about her opinion as you."

"We've been waiting for YOU to catch up," Sarah said sarcastically. "I asked the same question, but Henry and I were told to wait for YOU."

She saw Eli smiling at the two of them, first watching Sarah's bluster and the chagrin on her own face in turn. "I'm sorry," she replied, before her own thinly disguised and irritated response, "I didn't know we had to constantly stick together."

"You don't," Eli responded quickly, cutting short any attempts to prolong the sniping. "Now, where were we? Ah, yes, the expression on the Prince's face . . . ." He turned back now to face the painting.

"Yes, you both caught the essence of the story that the original artist and apparently some number of masters following have, in my opinion as well, managed to capture in the face of our prince, this dying Botima, his mother at his feet, his bride-to-be, the murderess, contorted with hatred behind him.

"But I will leave the telling of the legend behind the painting of *The Prince Botima* for later. He paused, then added, "But take a last look at his face, and commit it to your memory."

So they moved away and left the prince to stand in disbelief, bewilderment and horror, recognition and even delight that his life was flowing out of him to the dust at his feet, while spectators moved by, far removed from the epiphany of his discovery. Some few seemed shocked at seeing him, in his moment before death. Most, however, merely glanced, nodding approvingly at the colors and the painstaking craftsmanship, and then simply moved on, otherwise untouched by his fate, by the story which this solitary picture could not tell.

She quickly became separated from the group again, unconsciously wishing that her reaction could not be judged by the others. She stepped around a corner and found herself standing in front of the famous *Buddha under the Mango Tree*,



borne of the legend of Buddha commanding his gardener to plant a mango seed, whereupon a full, towering mango tree sprang up immediately. This was a picture she was familiar with: Buddha in a stunning red robe like a Van Gogh, holding a mango, while all the kinetic colors of the tree flowed around him. But this – this was so much more incredible to see than a picture in a book. The plaque said it was nearly 83 inches tall by 28 inches wide!

“This scroll is actually a court copy of an earlier painting: Unknown artist; 16<sup>th</sup> century; Ming Dynasty. To my knowledge, the original is lost,” Eli whispered into her ear, before stepping away again, leaving her alone to study it slowly. He had appeared out of nowhere – she could not see Sarah and Henry at all. Had he waited somewhere, watching, waiting for her to come around the corner and into this alcove?

Conveniently, there was a block bench behind her, situated nearly in front of the painting. She sat down to take a longer, more comfortable look at *Buddha* when she was struck by a moment of *déjà vu*, thinking of Eli watching her from somewhere behind, feeding her information about any pictures at which she paused, reminding her of how the table had been turned, turned on her. . . .

She took Mark to a special exhibit of Impressionist paintings at the Carnegie Museum before they were married. He was so ignorant of art then, warning her ahead of time that he didn’t like “modern art.” She understood. He didn’t want her to be disappointed in him if he didn’t like what she was so enthusiastic to show him.

She smiled thinking of it, bemused that Sunday afternoon in the silence of empty halls. Once he stood in front of a Cezanne with his mouth literally agape. She remembered standing off to his side, watching his face full of shock and wonder. Later she heard him talking (loudly) to himself, standing in front of Turner’s *Rain, Steam and Speed*.

“I didn’t know,” he told her later, defensively. “Cassie. I didn’t know.”

Eventually she got annoyed as he moved from picture to picture. How could he know nothing about Monet, Cezanne, Renoir, Turner? He thought all “modern art” was Salvador Dali and Jackson Pollock.

But now the table was turned. She was the ignorant one, and Eli was watching her, instructing her, as she had done with Mark. She looked around – he was nowhere to be seen now, having moved onto another room, apparently, as had Sarah and Henry.

Instead of leaving, she sat and watched another couple who had just entered this same partition, but coming from the opposite direction. In their 40s, immaculately dressed and stylishly coiffured, they would pause briefly in front of a painting (*a masterpiece*, she reminded herself, *a miracle*) barely acknowledging it, while engaged in chatter that sounded only more meaningless as they passed in front of the *Buddha* before moving on. They were hardly looking at the paintings themselves, as if content to be seen surrounded by pretty wallpaper, instead of seeing these wonders as she saw them.

A wave of sadness overtook her. It was a curse, this madness to paint pictures when so few people understood, so few cared. What could she ever paint that would truly stir people like these two, if these paintings did not? *Why DO we paint*, she thought. *Who do we paint for?* And, inevitably, *How can I ever make a living out of obeying this obsession?*

She thought of Mark, again. At least when she started her campaign to teach him what he missed, he took her hand, he smiled, he thanked her, and she danced with joy in her mind that she finally found someone to share an understanding and appreciation of the wonderful colors and forms of the Impressionists, of the humorous world of Miro, of the antecedent eroticism of O'Keefe's flowers, of the complete and utter sadness and beauty of Van Gogh.

She looked back at the *Buddha*, now alone in the room with him, again. *Mark should see this*, she thought, a little guiltily. *He would understand what I see – what we see*, she corrected herself. He would see what the four of them saw here.

But he was not here, she reminded herself, as she stood up to take another close look at the *Buddha*. He only stared back at her, as enigmatically as Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* had done for the West for centuries.

They were admiring painted Chinese scrolls, the three young people, when Eli suddenly appeared and told them the

story of the scroll painter who “disappeared into one of his own landscapes, fleeing for his life.” One morning his pursuers could not find him, but his loyal servant noticed a new figure in his master’s favorite painting, “recognizing his master, who had promised what he would do if there seemed no other way to escape.”

(This reminded her of a recent dream. Mark had disappeared – somehow she knew in her dream that he was missing and she had to find him – and she was searching for him frantically in a large apartment or house: opening drawers, looking under furniture, behind curtains, in wastepaper baskets. As if he might be any size.

“It sounds like *The Incredible Shrinking Man*,” he told her, amused when she told him about it, then explaining the movie to her.

(But what she did not tell him was that she eventually found him in the dream. She looked up and there he was, now the single solitary figure in one of her otherwise deserted street photographs. In her dream she realized the photograph had been of a deserted street, but now he was in it, she could see it was him, knew in her dream it was him, gone forever, trapped in her picture.)

“Perhaps the story is archetypal,” Eli went on, drawing her back to the present. “Think of the Dorian Gray legend. Think of the stories of native peoples afraid to have their picture taken, afraid the picture will steal their soul. It is a story with many variations that touches a deep emotional chord in most of us. Disappearing into another world, a better one, perhaps of our own making, by our will. Or someone else’s.”

(But hers wasn’t a dream of disappearing into a *beautiful* world of her own making, she remembered. Quite the contrary.)

He did not approach her again until the three young people again wound up together, ooh-ing and aah-ing over some jade figurines, jewelry and toiletry items.

“Did you know that jade was not only the most precious of gem stones to the Chinese, but to the Aztecs of South America, and perhaps the even more ancient Olmecs of Mexico as well? In fact, it is part of the confusion and tragedy of Cortez in his meetings and misunderstandings with the Aztecs: He

believed gold to be their most valuable possession. How could it not be? To them, however, their most valuable treasure was jade.

“In contests of skill in ancient China the ivory scepter was awarded to the man who came in third, the gold scepter to the man who placed second. The victor received the scepter of jade.”

They had dinner at Faneuil Hall, at an upscale restaurant that seemed to cater to young professionals, while he intermittently came up with more jade stories. Like –

“There is an account of an English explorer in Southeast Asia who reported that young maidens would strip and walk naked in the streams at night. Being female – yin – they would attract the male – yang – jade. Feeling it nuzzling against their feet, they would reach down and capture it. Is that not a delightful tale? It is a painting I would so like to do, but have not yet figured out how best to capture it.”

And –

“Anderson claims that Buddhist mystics used jade to reach *samadhi*, which is the highest state of contemplative experience in Hindu and Buddhist religious experience. It is often defined as something like the direct, instantaneous perception of reality. Perhaps the mystics somehow use the stone’s resonance to reach this state. There is evidence of the use of jade in ancient musical instruments.”

On the drive back from Boston he had one more jade story.

“In the late 1960s, I was once invited to a jade auction of uncut stone boulders in Hong Kong. It was the most incredible experience. Merchants must grasp the auctioneer’s hand covered with a cloth, so the bid is private between the merchant and the auctioneer as he passes around the room. Bids are conveyed solely by the pressure of the fingers: by finger talk, finger pantomime. Not a word was spoken. It was all conducted in stereotypic Oriental silence. Completely different from the Western concept of how an auction should – can only – be conducted.

“Ever since that auction, I have often been struck by the irony of two people arguing viciously, over some political or social point typically, arguing vehemently when actually they are

in agreement; or agreeing, when actually they are in disagreement, all because the words they use are the same words, but with different meanings to each party. It seems to me to happen constantly. Our symbols of reality become so powerful they separate themselves from the things they represent.”

“That sounds like Anderson describing Buddhism,” noted Henry.

“Perhaps. But in any case it is why I do objects of art, and I am not possible as a writer. To me the picture cannot be misinterpreted – or if it is, it is a mistake. To use words we must sit and define, come to an agreement about the definition of each one. But a picture, a sculpture, an object of art? Its ‘definition’ is one thing – or should be one thing. It should by-pass the intellect and speak directly to the heart, the emotions. How does it make you *respond*, not what is it *describing*.”

They rode back mostly quiet, with tired feet all, and all individually reflecting on the day, sorting out their feelings and responses to what they had seen, the three young people also trying to characterize their feelings about this still-living legend in the art world who was their benefactor.

They were also silent, she thought, because they all, all four, realized that together they had shared a nearly perfect day.

Breaking the silence, somewhere between Boston and Gloucester, Eli told them, “I will tell you the story of Prince Botima when we are home.”

*Home*, he called it. She was touched, noting his use of it, while she sat in the backseat. It was indeed ‘home’ to Eli. But what of Sarah and Henry? And just where was her ‘home?’ Where was ‘home’ now, she wondered, as the miles passed quietly beneath them.



*Robin Metty*  
**Sunsweet**

*Jillian Oliver*

**The Alley**

Flies surround a carcass, partly decayed,  
As black ants crawl in a uniform line  
Between a broken bottle of wine.  
But even as I lie here, cold asphalt against my lips,  
I can see the sky in a shattered mirror at my fingertips.  
Animal blood glides in the mirror's cracks.  
It streams like rain down a summer tree,  
While struggling ants drown in the red sea.  
And I lie here, watching people fall  
Like hail at the end of the dark alley.  
They cluster like shadows in the sky;  
Rapidly they race in the frantic street,  
While reflected stars sparkle in a broken heap.



*Joh Hoehn II*  
**Still Life**



Sarah Stevens stood outside the Piggly Wiggly and felt alone. She stared at the sliding glass doors and wondered if anyone would care if these doors slammed shut on her. The shoppers maneuvering by her would not care, and the two Cub Scouts selling gourmet popcorn beside the Pepsi machine would not care. After the news report of a high school junior being crushed to death at the Piggly Wiggly, why should anybody care about or remember Sarah? She was second runner-up in the Homecoming Queen's Court. As treasurer of French Club she was responsible for twenty-four dollars. Those accomplishments wouldn't make a good college application, much less a decent obituary.

Would her family miss her? Her father would be relieved. He would no longer have to let her practice driving his BMW. Her father claimed the car was a classic, but to Sarah it was just the Old Blue Bomber with a manual transmission. Every time she tried to shift into third gear and made that grinding noise, she saw her father's jaw tighten, and this morning, he had cursed at her. "Damn it! Sarah, that's a clutch, not a foot rest." A father who talks like that wouldn't care if his daughter were crushed by sliding glass doors at the Piggly Wiggly.

"Come on," said her mother, pushing a shopping cart with her baby brother, Charlie, riding in the seat. Sarah followed, wondering if the doors would slam shut on her. They did not.

Who would miss her? Her mother wouldn't, until she had to pay a babysitter. Sarah always had to help with the baby. Charlie would not miss her. He didn't care who fed him or cleaned him, and in the future, he would be the perfect son, get straight A's, and captain all the varsity teams. Charlie would never wear out the clutch by resting his foot on it, and he would never scratch the BMW's rear quarter panel while backing out of the garage for some unsupervised parking practice. Thank God for Tyler during that crisis. Tyler would miss her.

Tyler was a boyfriend, not her boyfriend, not yet anyway. When she scratched her father's car (And really, shouldn't garage doors be wider?), she texted Tyler: FRENCH

CLUB EMERGENCY!! MY HOUSE!! HURRY!! As vice president of French Club, Tyler had to respond. Three minutes after her text, Tyler's car skidded to a stop in front of her house. "Finally! You've come to your senses. It's time for a *coup d'état*. Let's overthrow her now." Tyler was referring to Julie Tompkins, the president of French Club, Mathletes, Drama Club, Show Choir, and Yearbook.

Sarah apologized for misleading him and said she really had no one else to trust. Tyler assured her of his help, as long as Sarah swore her loyalty to him when he made his move to end Julie's "Reign of Terror" and dance around the guillotine with him. Sarah swore, hoping Tyler didn't have a real guillotine.

The man at the parts counter laughed. Even if that color were still available, the paint would have faded over the past three decades. They'd have to repaint the whole car. "*Ridicule*," said Tyler. "We'll go see my cousin."

"Does he know about cars?" asked Sarah.

"No, Cousin Lori does not know about cars. She is a tawdry slut and has tons of hideous blue nail polish."

Sarah watched in awe as Tyler applied various shades of blue and silver polish to the scratch and re-created faded Bavarian blue. The scratch disappeared, and Sarah fell deeper in love. She liked the fact that Tyler was as tall as she was, nearly six feet, and his feathered light brown hair was absolutely sexy.

Sarah first fell in love with Tyler when they presented a skit in *Madame Newburg's* French class. Other students performed skits about when the train from Nice arrived or ordered their *escargot al a carte*. Tyler was Jean Luc, a double agent inside the Vichy government, and Sarah was Celeste, a nightclub *chanteuse* in Nazi-occupied Paris. They smuggled weapons and information to the French Underground and could never reveal their love because the lives of millions hung in the balance. *Madame Newburg* wept.

Sarah fell in love again when Tyler installed her as treasurer and nominated her for Homecoming Queen during a French Club meeting when Julie was absent for some rehearsal. Sarah knew she couldn't win because of her deformities. She was too tall with a giraffe's neck and bony knees. Tyler said her height gave her presence, she had a gorgeous Audrey Hepburn neck, and an asymmetrical hem line would draw the eye away

from her knees, which were adorable anyway. She hadn't won, but her third place finish put Sarah on the cusp of popularity.

"Get some cereal, nothing too sugary." Her mother treated Sarah like a servant instead of the eldest daughter and first heir. The only reason Sarah volunteered for this trip was to drive her mother's SUV with its automatic transmission and radio controls mounted on the steering wheel. Those controls were there for a reason, and her mother was wrong to yell at Sarah and accuse her of messing around with the radio and not paying attention. Anyone else would have hit that squirrel, too. Her mother was partly at fault for having all the radio presets tuned to stations with kiddie songs about eating vegetables or, even worse, techno songs from the '80s. That squirrel's blood was on both their hands. After the squirrel's demise (And really, shouldn't they have a fence to keep squirrels out of the road?), Sarah's mother insisted on driving. Sarah sent out two text messages about her grief and guilt. Tyler responded immediately, as any good friend should: *QUEL DOMMAGE* ☹

Now, as she read cereal boxes for sugar content, Sarah finally received a text from JD, her boyfriend: U SQUISH HIM GUD? ☺

Sarah knew that her boyfriend and her boyfriend didn't like each other, especially since last week. She and Tyler were having a secret French Club meeting *sans* Julie at lunch when JD plopped down beside her, slung his arm around her shoulders, and kissed her cheek. JD had escorted her at Homecoming and kissed her on the mouth. Since then his affection had become more physical. He even tried to run his hand under her shirt after she drank half a wine cooler at Tina DeMarco's party.

"Great news, Sar. Coach says because I helped him draw up some new plays, I just passed geometry," JD said through a mouthful of beef jerky. JD played football. Sarah wasn't sure, but he either tackled people or tried to keep people from tackling people. JD opened a small bag of Doritos and poured its contents into his gaping maw. The chips vanished. "Watch this," he said as he took six Oreos, stacked them high, and shoved them in his mouth. Three seconds later he boasted, "Those are double stuffed, my personal record."

Sarah saw Tyler's icy stare. She thought she should say something before ---

“It’s a magic trick, right?” asked Tyler. *Leger de main?* Prestidigitation, some sleight-of-hand, makes it look like you’re eating all that food. Am I right?”

JD cleared his airway of the bologna-and-cheese sandwich and responded, “Nope. I swear it’s real.” He took another six cookies and performed the feat again.

Tyler turned to Sarah and rolled his eyes. “*C’est magnifique.*”

JD was glad Tyler was there. “Coach says if I want to play football for State, I should take a foreign language.”

“Is that really necessary?” Tyler asked then sipped his Perrier. “Won’t that bastion of higher education give you life credit for Neanderthal or Cro-Magnon?”

JD gnawed at another sandwich. “No. Coach says it has to be a class they teach here. You can help me with French since I can’t take Mexican.”

Tyler tried to suppress a giggle. “*Oui?*”

“Yeah, you and me.” JD chugged down a half-pint of chocolate milk. “I wanted to take *Señorita* Clark for Mexican, but the schedule says she just teaches Spanish.”

Tyler bit his apple wedge then remarked to no one in particular, “This is so rich it must be fattening.” When JD explained that he already knew some Mexican words like *taco*, *burrito*, and *cerveza*, Tyler commented, “Why, you’re practically immersed in the culture.” Tyler went on to suggest that JD petition the school to add Mexican to the curriculum, or, better yet, take his cause to Channel 4’s *Action News on Your Side*. JD would be a hero. Other football players could take Mexican class, too.

Sarah saw the mixture of confusion and excitement in JD’s eyes and barked, “Stop it, Tyler!” She could feel Tyler’s patented glare of indignation as she squeezed JD’s hand and explained, “Honey, he’s kidding. You just need to take Spanish.” She could see JD slowly processing this revelation as his eyes squinted and his brow furrowed beneath his red crew cut. Sarah tried again, “JD, it’s like we speak English in America. They speak Spanish in Mexico.”

JD’s freckled face turned completely red. “Dude, if I wouldn’t get expelled during football season, I’d kick your ass.”

“*C’est la vie*,” remarked Tyler as he hid his face in a book, his sign of dismissal.

JD stood, fuming. “You think you’re so smart because you read books.”

Sarah touched his shoulder to calm him. “Sweetheart, why don’t you ask *Señorita* Clark about taking Spanish?”

JD shrugged her hand away, determined to provoke Tyler. “No way, Sar. What he’s reading is stupid, and it’s wrong.”

Tyler peered over the top of his book. “Oh, really? Enlighten me, JD. Just how is *The Myth of Sisyphus* stupid? Where did *Monsieur* Albert Camus go wrong?”

JD pressed his advantage and jabbed his finger at the book’s cover. “The title’s wrong for one thing. It’s no myth. It’s real. Coach said in health class it’s a bad STD, and some types of it doctors can’t even treat anymore.”

Tyler stared at JD, with what Sarah thought was a mixture of pity and disbelief, then put the book on the table. “JD, as an existentialist, it pains me to say this: OH MY GOD!” He again raised the book. “Sarah, when you have concluded your business with this troglodyte, we shall resume our meeting.”

Sarah watched JD sulk away from the lunchroom then turned her attention to Tyler, who lowered his book and looked very cute with his eyebrow raised. How was he able to be sexy and smug? “Tyler, don’t tease him.”

“That’s your boyfriend? *Incroyable!*” Tyler shook his head and poked at his salad.

Sarah watched his gorgeous locks of feathered brown hair settle back in place before she spoke. “So? He isn’t very smart.”

“Your *petit ami* is the missing link that proves Darwin was right!”

Sarah stared into Tyler’s blue eyes. They were darker when Tyler argued passionately. Of course, Tyler was right about JD, but maybe Tyler was jealous. “Well, picking on someone who isn’t smart is cruel. You’re so *bourgeois*.”

Tyler’s eyes turned purple. “*Excusez-moi?*”

Sarah couldn’t help herself. Tyler was so cute when he was angry. “You heard me.”

Tyler hyperventilated, caught his breath, and then exploded. "How dare you! I am an existentialist, or maybe I'm an absurdist, but I am certainly *avant-garde*."

"Tyler, sit down. Everyone's staring," Sarah begged.

"*Je ne suis pas bourgeois! J'accuse!* The real *bourgeois* are people who accuse other people of being *bourgeois*!" He sat down and raised his book again. "*Au revoir*." Sarah did not budge. "I said, '*au revoir*.'"

Still, Sarah did not leave. "You had your chance," she said softly. She had asked Tyler to escort her to Homecoming before being fixed up with JD.

Tyler lowered his book. "Like I said back then, I won't be disloyal to Cosette."

Now Sarah wandered down the freezer aisle. The eight members of French Club had each contributed three dollars for their upcoming banquet, and, as treasurer, she had a vote in deciding the menu. The bags of frozen Chicken *Cordon Bleu* Bagel Bites were intriguing, but Tyler would never approve. They were on sale and promised elegant French cuisine fresh from the microwave, but Tyler would veto them as quickly as he had vetoed dating her because of Cosette.

Sarah was sick of Cosette, Tyler's girlfriend he met last summer in Montreal. It seemed to Sarah that most boys would have kept quiet about a Canadian girlfriend and dated around, but maybe another reason she loved Tyler was because of his devotion to Cosette, poor thing. Tyler said she had a rough life. Cosette was born in Paris, Kentucky. Her single mother worked long hours in a factory to provide a meager existence, was sexually harassed by the foreman, fired, and then died of tuberculosis. The orphan Cosette fell through the cracks of the foster care system, winding up in a roadside honky-tonk bar mopping floors for a neglectful and abusive couple. Strangely enough, the former owner of the factory adopted Cosette. Now a successful Canadian industrialist, neither he nor Cosette dares return to America because, as a young man, he had a minor scrape with the law, and an over-zealous Kentucky sheriff relentlessly pursues him for violating probation.

Given her limited options and very limited funds, Sarah decided to call Tyler for advice about the banquet. She pressed

speed dial and heard his phone from the next aisle. No one else had “La Marseillaise” for a ring tone. “Tyler?”

He rounded the aisle, rushed up to Sarah, and grabbed her arms. “I’ve been looking all over for you. Your dad said you were here.”

“Why didn’t you just call me?”

“We can’t have phone records now. It’s too important. Look.” He showed Sarah a picture on his phone. “It was forwarded to me an hour ago. It’s Julie Tompkins. She’s at Morgan’s Pharmacy, Aisle Six.” Morgan’s Pharmacy was two counties over and didn’t check ID’s when teenagers bought cigarettes or beer.

“So?”

Tyler was nearly bursting. “Aisle Six is family planning and foot care, and I don’t think she’s buying bunion pads. Don’t you see? She’s morally unfit to hold high office.”

Sarah didn’t like this side of Tyler. “You can’t spread that rumor.”

“Of course not,” Tyler agreed. “That’s what Drama Club and Yearbook are for. I’m deleting this picture now, so I can maintain deniability. Show Choir will join us because all the altos hate her, and then the math geeks will fall in line. Listen, we never had this conversation. I’m off to the barricades. ‘The day of glory has arrived!’ Do not even think about buying those grotesque Bagel Bites.” Then Tyler left her alone.

In the checkout line, Sarah contemplated her future. She should break up with JD soon, before prom. JD wasn’t making Tyler jealous, and now she knew the truth. Tyler didn’t love a Canadian girl named Cosette; it was more pity than love. Tyler, JD, parallel parking, a calculus test, college applications, an underfunded banquet, and the other complications of life awaited her unless... She would be spared life’s miseries if, as she left the Piggly Wiggly, the sliding glass doors slammed shut on her. They did not.



*Ashley Thompson*  
**Two Deer**



*Suzanne Clark*

## **Black Magic Sunshine**

How's that Hunter 38'?

Is the shaft still shiny, does the dinghy inflate?

Is the aft side still pointed at the sunset?

Can we rename it just like we planned, and paint the bow black  
as charcoal briquette?

Oh love, didn't anyone tell you I wasn't done yet?

Having trouble relating to the real world after life on the water  
Losing hope for the fleeting thought you'll give me a son or a  
daughter.

Send in the clowns, rip off the masks and cry together

S.V. Black Magic Sunshine, a queen of mahogany and leather.

The clock's tick becomes ominous as I realize your final full  
moon may be near

Every laugh, kiss, chat and spat becomes memorable and dear.

I'll never see a sailboat without thinking of the California  
Republic Flag

With every sunrise, I feel the aura of your humble brag.

I've made it far on the strength of your love, it's a hearty tea

I want to see our candle aflame, before my eyes are taken from  
me

Take care of the Hunter, as our lives are represented by it

Our love is a blunder, with so many offended by it.

*Christopher Libert*

**The Heat of the Beat of the Night**

The Heat  
of the Beat  
of the Night that  
portrays the sounds  
of my brothers and sisters  
that hold us down!  
That bring us up!  
That keep us down  
from coming up!  
Can't stop  
the Heat  
of the Beat  
of the Night  
that cries out loud  
for my brothers and sisters  
who haven't been heard!  
Who want to be heard!  
That can't be heard!  
That won't be allowed to be heard!  
Bring the Heat  
of the Beat  
of the Night  
to teach  
all brothers and sisters  
the pain that has been!  
The pain that will be!  
The pain that will never stop!  
From the Heat  
of the Beat  
of the Night!

*Shannon Reed*

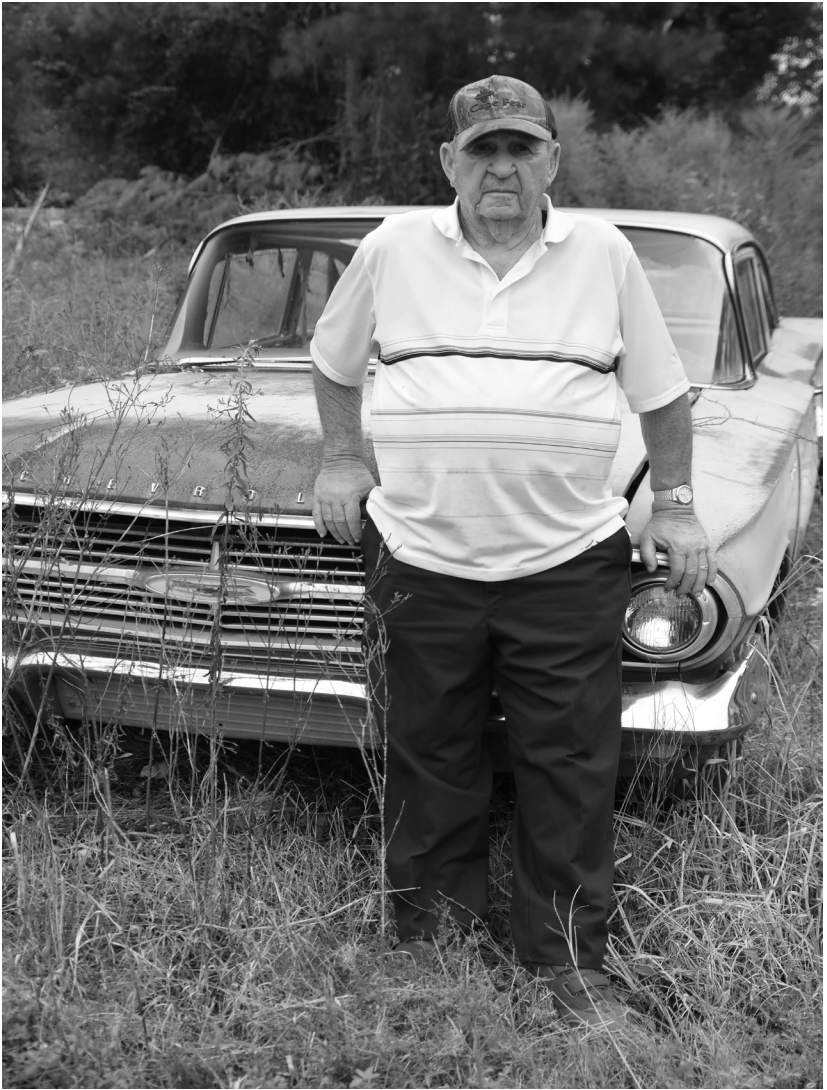
**To the Strong Young Man**

To the strong young man with the buzzed head  
who helped the elderly woman next door find her missing cat.  
She knocked on your door but no answer, you must have been in  
bed  
She slid a letter with a few dollars under your doormat.

To the strong young man with the blistered rough respectful  
hands  
who helped that family back in Afghanistan,  
The family who tried to thank you, but you did not understand.  
They smiled and said you were a generous man from a faraway  
land.

To the strong young man who wore combat boots  
who lost his life in action protecting us Americans just the other  
day.  
Are your boots shined? Are your buttons in line? Are you salut-  
ing the American way, while being laid to rest on this fateful  
day?

To the young mother, daughter, wife, and sister  
who mourn the loss of their kind and selfless young man  
Here is a flag, here are his dog tags, take them in your hands  
This is all we have left of our strong military man.



*Jerry Mann*  
**Old Friends**

*Victoria Blum*

## **Rainy Days and a Coffee Shop**

It is the last day of summer and although still humid, there is a gentle breeze. The kind of breeze that would let someone know that fall was on its way. Maggie takes advantage of the weather and decides to wear her favorite outfit, a royal blue dress with a cinched waist that she bought before Lily was born. She feels confident and thankful as she strides hand-in-hand with her daughter. As they walk down the narrow cobblestone street to their favorite coffee shop, Maggie feels the wind coming off of the bay waft through her hair. She catches the slight smell of fish.

Standing by the door to the café are Harold and Marty, fisherman that used to work with her dad. “Looks like a storm might be on its way. Gettin’ dark off in the distance.”

Maggie agrees with Marty, “Sure does” as she pushes open the door to Southern Grounds Café. The bell on the top of the door jingles and the baristas greet her.

“Hey, ladies, how are y’all doin’ today?”

“Oh, we’re just fine. Could I have my usual? And I think Lily wants a chocolate milk.”

She knows that this may be a strange place to take your five year old daughter, but unlike any other coffee shop she has ever been to, they have a box of board games. Lily tends to gravitate toward the dominoes, though she doesn’t know how the actual game is played, she just likes to stack them and make houses out of the pieces.

They take their seats near the box of games at a small, round table in front of a large window overlooking the boardwalk. Usually there are a lot of people down by the boardwalk. Her dad used to take her down there when she was a kid to go fishing. Now lots of young people like to hang out there since they built the new rides. But today, the boardwalk seems to be deserted.

As Maggie sits down, she smooths her dress over her legs and closes her eyes. As the sunlight starts to peek out from behind the clouds it hits the side of her face and she relishes in the sensation of warmth.

“Medium Soy Latte for Maggie!” The barista’s voice booms through the small coffee shop, jolting Maggie out of her daze.

“Lily, sweetie, why don’t you get out a game to play. I’ll be right back.” It didn’t take any convincing before Lily jumps out of her seat and ran to the box to push through all of the obstacles keeping her from getting to her dominos. Maggie strides over to the counter and picks up her coffee. Before returning to her seat, she gives Chelsea, the name specified on her plastic tag dangling from the top of her collared shirt, a friendly nod.

“Enjoy, ma’am!”

“Thank you, I will.” Maggie gives her a generous smile, places a dollar bill in the tip jar and walks back over to her chair, now warm from where she had been sitting. While sipping her latte, she observes her busy child carefully stacking the dominos on the small table top.

Watching Lily makes Maggie sad, thinking about how she was just a baby not too long ago and how the time has flown by. She thinks back to the time when Lily got into her paints and decided to make a masterpiece on her bedroom wall. They were in an apartment at the time so she had to paint over it, but although she may have been mad it was still Lily’s little masterpiece.

She had just had her first birthday and was still learning to walk. As Maggie was cleaning up from the party earlier that afternoon, she sat Lily down in her bedroom with Penny and Friends on the television. She peeked through the crack in the door and watched as Lily bopped along with what was going on in Penny’s treehouse. It didn’t take but three minutes while Maggie was finishing the dishes for Lily to rip the lid off of her plastic container of paints and begin to smear the colors across the wall. When Maggie entered the room she gaped at what was going on for a moment in disbelief before swooping Lily up in her arms and rushing her to the tub.

“No Lily, that’s a bad girl. We don’t paint on the walls!” She was angry but Lily kept laughing. How carefree and fun must it be to be a child? No worries, just new and exciting adventures. The memory makes Maggie snicker as she watches Lily’s deft little fingers shape the dominos.

“What’s so funny, Mommy?”

“I’m just thinking about you when you were a baby, the time you got in to my paint.”

“Oh yeah, Mimi told me that story before.” Mimi likes to talk about that story a lot, whether it is with strangers, or with the family who has heard it a million times. A ripple of thunder makes Lily jump in her seat.

“Whoa, did you hear that? It’s gonna storm.”

“Yeah, it is. You heard Marty out there tell us a storm is on the way. We’ll just have to wait it out for a little while,” Maggie answers. Just as the words are spoken Maggie glances out the window to find a man, jogging down the middle of the boardwalk, obviously trying to get to his destination before the rain really starts to come down. Poor man has his hand on the top of his fedora to keep it from flying into the water or elsewhere. He doesn’t have on a rain jacket but is carrying a green umbrella. Apparently it isn’t raining hard enough yet for him to actually have it open. He is wearing a black, short sleeved shirt, now clinging to his arms from the drizzle of rain. Maggie takes a minute to admire his muscles as he jogs in front of the window to the coffee shop. He has broad shoulders and is about 6’2. Tall, the way she likes them. As he turns the corner she realizes that he is about to enter the café.

Maggie begins to adjust the skirt of her dress and crosses her legs, aware that sitting this way makes her calves look good. Her fingers tousle her bangs and she pinches her cheeks to give them some color. If only she had remembered some lipstick. She sips her latte as she hears the bell to the door jingle. She is not facing his way but she doesn’t dare turn around, that would be too obvious. So she waits.

“Jeeze, it’s turnin to crap out there.” His voice is deep and purposeful with a slight southern accent. It sounds familiar. She continues to listen as he places his order. He orders a large black coffee. Typical man, Maggie thinks to herself. Just as he finishes placing his order he walks past, but stops. Maggie notices him eyeing Lily. *Why would this man just stop and stare at my daughter?*

“Excuse me?” Maggie asks the man. He turns his head to look at her and they lock eyes. As she looks in to his pale blue eyes she explores his face. Those freckles sprinkled over his

nose, those dark arched eyebrows. She knows him. He has more facial hair than before. He looks different with a full beard and mustache. It has been almost six years now since she has even seen him. She doesn't know what to say.

He breaks the silence by saying, "She looks just like me," as he looks back at Lily, mesmerized by her appearance.

"Yeah," is all Maggie can choke out. After what feels like minutes she finally continues, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm visiting my dad. He's in the hospital. Nothing serious or anything, he fell the other day but he should be fine." He replies without taking his eyes off of Lily.

So it's taken him six years to come in to town, Maggie thinks to herself. I have never seen him around here so he must not visit very often.

"Um, I'm sorry to hear that," Maggie answers only because this is the type of response that feels right to say.

"How have you been?" he asks her.

For some reason this makes her angry. *How have I been? For the past six years raising your child while you are nowhere to be found? No calls, no visits, no nothing. And you want to know how I have been?*

"Good. We're good," making sure to put some emphasis on the "we".

"Well that's good. She is beautiful."

At this point Lily is staring at him. Not like she has any idea who he is. She has never met him before. Maggie leans across the table and says, "Lily. This is Jeff. Can you say hello?"

"Hi," Lily whispers.

"Well hello there, Lily," Turning to Maggie he says, "Man, she's gotten so big."

"Yeah. She's five now. It's been a long time."

"Yeah it has. You look good. Pretty I mean. In that dress."

"Oh, this old thing. Thanks. You look... different. Good though. It's weird seeing you with facial hair." He looks confused and laughs.

"Yeah I guess you're used to my high school baby face," he says as he scratches his beard.

For some reason she feels embarrassed for even checking him out earlier. How did she not realize it was him? A



boom of thunder rumbles outside along with a bright flash of lightning. It has just started to pour down raining. The sky has turned dark grey and Maggie hopes that she doesn't have to wait out the storm in here with Jeff.

Her heart is beating so hard she feels like he may be able to notice it through her chest. Her mouth has become dry and she notices herself continuously licking her lips. She realizes that she needs to stop being so stupid about this whole thing. She is nervous, but for what? He means nothing to her anymore. They have not had a relationship since before Lily was born. Why would she even care about him? Though just looking at him brings back memories. Long, distant memories that have been hidden in the depth of her soul for the past five years. Memories that she has willed herself not to think about. Memories that would have haunted her if she had not had her daughter there to bring so much joy in to her life.

She remembers the night when she found out she was pregnant. She was nineteen at the time, in the middle of her freshman year at the community college. She and Jeff had been dating pretty steadily for four years. He was the only one she had ever known, the only one she had ever wanted. They were high school sweethearts. She had taken the pregnancy test the night before her midterms and as she sat on the lid of the toilet, waiting for the pink line to show up, she noticed that there was two lines that appeared on the test, not just one. She was pregnant. There it was. Loud and clear. Those two bold, pink lines would shape the rest of her life.

That night she cried, thinking about what she was going to do. How would she tell her parents? How would she tell Jeff? How would he react? She lay in bed, sleepless the entire night.

The next morning, she was exhausted, and had other things to worry about, like her midterms. But she decided to tell her best friend Jamie. The two met outside of her first period class when Maggie blurted out, "I'm pregnant."

"What did Jeff have to say about the whole thing?"

"Well, I haven't told him yet."

Jamie's eyes widened with surprise but she replied, "Don't worry about anything, it will all be fine. You have got to tell him some time, I mean you guys have been dating forever." Jamie seemed so cool about the whole thing.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.” This made Maggie feel better. For some reason telling Jamie gave her more confidence, enough to at least tell Jeff. So she decided to tell him after school.

As she sat facing him on her pink quilted bedspread, she outlined the knitting with her finger as she thought of what to say. “So I took a pregnancy test last night and it says I’m pregnant.” The words burst out of her without any warning. She waited to see how he was going to react. He just sat there, not moving a muscle. She searched his face for an answer, for anything. Anything to give her a clue about what he was thinking.

“Are you keeping it?”

She remembers this part. Because this is the part when she told him, “Of course I’m keeping it,” like for her there would be no other option, and he said nothing back.

It was never the same after that. The calls became fewer, the visits started to stop. He slowly inched his way out of her life completely. It was one thing to lose someone who had been in your life for years, who was the love of your life, the one you thought you would marry, and it is another thing to have to deal with the doctor appointments, the endless stares at your big belly, the continual loneliness of losing friends because you can no longer go out and party and do things that you used to be able to do. She never thought that she would have to go through this on her own. She has resented him for this. Too many nights were wasted crying over him. Too many tears had fallen thinking about what her life would be like if he had stayed. But these thoughts went away with time, and they didn’t come back. Not until today.

Today was the first day in years that she had thought, “What if he had stayed?” She looks over at Lily’s face, still staring at him with confusion. Poor little Lily has never had a dad growing up. He has missed everything. He has missed her first steps, her first babbling word that was so hard to figure out what she was trying to say but after minutes of coaxing her she finally said “mama”. He has missed all of her birthday parties, never a card or phone call. He has missed her first day of kindergarten, the first time she tasted a lemon and the distorted, angry face she made. How is it that after all of this time he

shows up out of nowhere, in Southern Grounds Café, where they have been so many times, but the one time he comes in they are there as well?

Maggie can feel the heat rising in her cheeks as he looks at Lily. She wants to tell him to take a good long look at her and realize what he has been missing this whole time.

“You okay?” He asks as Maggie catches a glimpse of the way she remembers him. The way he used to make this face, with one eyebrow raised.

“Yeah, I think your coffee is ready.” He doesn’t say anything as he turns and walks away from them toward the front counter.

“Who is that, Mommy?” Lily asks.

For a moment she doesn’t know what to say. She turns around in her seat and watches him pick up his coffee and grab a newspaper.

“That, my darling, is an old friend.”

Lily just nods and continues on with her dominos.

Jeff comes back to the table, only briefly. “It was good seeing you, Maggs. Do you want me to walk you home? I have an umbrella.”

She contemplates this for a moment. Unsure of whether or not she should accept the offer. “Sure, if you don’t mind.”

He gives her a smile, “Alright then,” he utters.

As she scoots her chair back to stand up, she looks at Lily and says, “Come on Lily, Jeff is going to walk us home.”

On the walk home Jeff insists on holding the umbrella for the ladies. He flips his fedora back on his head and walks in confidence. It feels strange to Maggie to have him walk her home. His body is so close to hers that she can feel the heat radiate off of his body. Being with him feels so natural, even after everything that has happened.

She keeps her eyes straight ahead to focus on the houses they pass and the different people walking by. Some running through the rain and some clinging tight to their umbrellas. She squeezes Lily close as they try to stay dry.

Rounding the corner they approach the entrance to the lobby of her condo. She slows to a stop and looks up at Jeff’s face, wet with rain. “Thank you for walking us home.”

“It was no problem, you didn’t live very far away anyways.”

She thinks about what to say next, knowing that this will probably be the last time she will see him. “Well, bye, I guess,” she says to him as she and Lily step under the overhang.

He tips his hat and raises the umbrella over his head. “It was very nice to meet you, Lily.”

She smiles shyly up at him and wraps her arms around her mother’s legs. Maggie watches Jeff turn to walk back toward the café and feels a sort of resolution. The rain suddenly has stopped, and she can see the sunlight emerging from behind a parted cloud. She is not sure why she feels this way but standing there with the damp air surrounding her, after all this time she feels as though everything has happened for a reason. He turns around one last time, gives her a quick wave and continues on his way.



