

The Chiaroscuro

Combined Issue:
2016-2018 & 2018-2019



Product of Brevard College

CHIAROSCURO

2016-2018

and

2018-2019

*This edition of the Chiaroscuro is the combined effort of
two separate editorial staffs.*

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*This edition of the journal was dedicated in loving memory to
Rakeem Sweezy.*

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The
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POETRY

Sweezy
Kirsten Lucas

The silence was so clear
in the white filled night.
The angels bowed in sorrow
welcoming an unexpected child.
The air,
so calm as you passed
through
the sky,
so bright as your soul
ascended the land.
Hush the souls; hush
the tears; calm the
fury; calm the fears.
We lift you up through
this beautiful descending
snow
with your laughter, this
love, and your light.
A light that is dimmed
a shade now but forever
will shine.
Through the grief,
the hurt, and the loss.
Like this beautifully
fallen, uniquely
crafted blanket that
illuminates the blackened
night.
We're all here, sitting
in the silence the is so
clear, bowed in sorrow.

Seeing

Sarah Haga

Scarlett.

Hot and boiling,
spilling down my shoulders
across my back and falling
in a messy puddle at my
knees.

Rust.

Dirty and old,
taking up too much space
in a home where it isn't wanted
splintering and shattering my
trust.

Cherry.

Playful and care-free,
reminding me that it's okay
to smile. To laugh.

To let go and be my-
Self.

Rose.

Warm and welcoming,
washing over my heart
filling my mind and painting
over the cracks in my
soul.

Painful Silence

Haley Putnam

My heart is breaking.
Piece by piece.
The memories of you flood my brain.
I break down.
You were my light; my guide.
But now you are gone.
I don't know how I can live without you.
Your wisdom, your laughter.
They are nothing but a distant memory now.
Anything I'd give to hear your voice once more.
I mustn't forget the sound of your voice.
I want to cherish it forever in my heart.
But as I try to hear it, it fades farther and farther away from
me.
My soul aches for you, I know you are better off.
No more pain,
No more suffering.
Peace.
Everything is quiet now,
And that's the hardest part.

Pride

Alexis Henley

Red

Her cheeks

vibrant and burning

when she kisses her for the first time.

Orange

His new hair

as he steps out of his ashes

a phoenix newly born.

Yellow

The electricity

in his skin

when his boyfriend holds his hand.

Green

The shadow

in Their eyes, watching

Their love, marry someone else.

Blue

Her fallen tears coursing down her face

reflects the locked front door.

Purple

The bruises

that litter Their skin soon to fade but still remain.

Rainbow

The flag. Uniting the rays

who march the streets

for a brighter future.

Maybelline in Paris, 1973

Michael Heiskell

There's a picture that I found
tucked away in a used copy of "Be Here Now"
It shows a snow draped bridge
over a frosted river
and a very joyful looking woman
leaning over the edge.
The photo has creased edges
worn from being held too long.
"Maybelline in Paris, 1973"
Is written in red ink on the back.
Maybelline has a smile
Both playful and exuberant,
but her eyes carry her age for her.
She wears her hair long,
unmanaged and free.
Despite the snow she doesn't seem cold.
She just seems
grateful to be there.
I imagine
that the moment is organic
She doesn't know the camera is on her
That her moment is being captured.
She seems unmeasurably happy.
The kind of happiness
that people spend their whole lives
looking for.
They try to buy it
Or find it in the company of someone else.
But I've never seen happiness
like I see on the face of
Maybelline
Standing on a bridge in Paris
In 1973.

Reflection
Kate Stephens

Venus captivates me in the mirror,
Her eyes peering through my own.
I bask in her benevolent warmth and think:
I am bountiful.
Every smooth curve that flows under my palms,
My warm skin, curious eyes, and overflowing heart.
In the divine Mother's image
I am made.

Empty Coffee Pot
Oscar Sifuentes

The alarm sounds off.
My headlights turn on
to illuminate the dawn.
Beyond the windshield
I throw off my tarp and
pull out of my parking spot.
The engine is revving, but
running on empty
I need that liquid fuel.
I tow myself to the human gas station
the aroma is intoxicating.
Have studies shown that it stunts growth?
To my disappointment
I find this station has been drained
by fellow vehicles looking for revitalization.
My thirst grows and my engine stalls.
Desperation builds and so does the craving and hunger;
Perhaps not starting up earlier was my ultimate blunder.

Love

Zachary Johnson

Love is the most powerful force they say.
It can mend and heal, but
what they don't tell you is it can harm.
It can lead you astray.
In the face of those with love, it can seem heavenly and
beautiful.
To those without it, it is a constant torture of what they will
never have.
Something so close yet when reached for, it slides farther
out of reach.
They don't hate love, they want it.
They are not hateful.
Those that have been hurt find it hard to love.
Every time they let someone in, they take more,
they take more of their heart and
eventually there's nothing left.
No love.
Armor so thick it can stop the strongest of glances,
yet weak enough to be dented by the softest of touches.
Love can dent armor and leave one vulnerable.
A good thing and a bad thing can come from this.
One is left to be untrusting of everyone.
One can also be left to have faith in all.
One is possible through love;
one happens through pain

Enough is Enough

G. Tiesha Pressley

I ponder as I sit, I sit as I ponder.
How did life come to this? Silently, I wonder.
I stand as I think, I think as I stand.
Why did I drift so far? I had a good plan.
I break as I heal, I heal as I break.
How could they know? There's no sound I make.
I cry as they label, they label as I cry.
Why can't they understand? Not one dries my eye.
I am flawed to perfection, but perfection is flawed.
How can we be unified? Love is outlawed.
I strive as I fail, I fail as I strive.
Why is this the only meaning? What it means to be alive.
I wait as time passes, time passes as I wait.
How have we still not changed? It will soon be too late.
I crumble as they point, they point as I crumble.
Why don't they help? They only turn from the rubble.
I hate what I love, I love what I hate.
How could I change? It is my fate.
I am tough to be careful, I am careful to be tough.
Why will no one else say it? Enough is enough.

I'm Jealous
Katie McBriar

Of your hair
How it accentuates your face
Brown and soft, sometimes out of place

Of your glasses
Letting you see the world clearly
Helping you see what you hold so dearly

Of your smile
How its able to brighten any day with ease
I fight endlessly to make sure that it's because of me.

Of your clothing
how it's able to spend each day with you
Sometimes dirty, but your day, you get through.

Of your heart
So kind and full of care
You show your compassion, no matter where.

But mostly, I'm jealous of your tattoos
How they're a part of you, and how long they will stay
long after you push me far away.

Holy Serpents
Oscar Sifuentes

*We came to these hallowed halls to
get closer to the creator; but
the only whispers of inspiration
we hear are confused with the snickers of
gossip and judgmental women behaving like
Sacred Sunday is nothing more than a
tabloid column.*

“HE is cheating on his wife.”
“SHE has put on weight.”
“That BOY is a delinquent.”
“I heard that GIRL was late.”

*Like the wine and the bread,
unconvincing hugs are paired with
disingenuous air kisses
and scaly hand shakes from saint like Land Snakes.*

SHORT
STORIES

Gas.Strike.

Sam Edwards

1

Brick, wood, and glass collapse, burst, or burn—scattering across the lawn, the street, and even my neighbors' yards. Boards thrown; insulation sparked. Mr. and Mrs. Krzeski flung unconscious from their bedroom to their back lawn, buried under scraps of their home. The basement ceiling buckled under the boom, and the furniture, and Nicholas Krzeski, 18, crushed by debris in his basement bedroom, and left till past daybreak to be recovered, Rural/Metro Chief and Nicholas's girlfriend, Jasmine, having to wait for the chars to settle.

2

At 3 AM, thirteen minutes before the event, I was asleep. At 3:23, ten minutes after, I was still asleep, until red and blue lights swung through my blinds, swung through again. I peered out and saw, in the cul-de-sac, a firetruck and police cruiser, both parked, lights whirling silently. My elderly neighbor was speaking with the responders on his driveway; their shadows wisped over his garage door. I thought there had been a break-in, and leaned back into my bed. Coco, my dog, huffed, stretched, then lowered her head on the floor. lowered her head on the floor.

###

3:23, the house and the sound shook my mom awake. She clutched the comforter, and her eyes darted to the empty spot beside her. Like she always said, everything bad happened while dad was away on business. She thought an earthquake had racked the house until the orange glowed between the blinds. She slid from under the sheets and stared. Smoke and fire chuffed upwards, thick and clotting the sky. It wasn't an earthquake. The house behind and three house-lengths down from ours had exploded.

She didn't wake my brother or me, she thought about it but later that morning, at 7:30, over waffles, she would say, "I didn't know what we could do. We have school and work. There were neighbors closer to them than us. What could I do besides freak everyone out?" I was a freshman in high school, my brother, a junior. We were sitting at the kitchen counter eating, and after mom told us the house had exploded, we just looked at each other.

"I didn't hear anything," my brother, Jonny, said. "I thought there was a break-in or something," I said. Mom stared at us. "It sounded like a bomb went off! The whole house shook!" We didn't know what to say.

3

Neighbors who did leave their homes dialed 911. Someone found Mr. and Mrs. Krzeski in the back yard under rubble. The couple were lucid, but in pain. Someone else brought a blanket. It was December 9th, 2009, and cold at 3 in the morning. After the fire trucks arrived, neighbors crowded and gossiped.

"It was the fireplace," a neighbor told reporters. "The Krzeskis complained about it last week. Gas fumes." The reporters wrote it down. Responders took Mr. and Mrs. Krzeski to UT Medical where Mr. Krzeski's condition was critical, ribs cracked. Mrs. Krzeski was stable but with a broken pelvis and back. Six to eight feet of debris still blocked passage to the basement and Nicholas.

4

In the band room at 8:30, everyone whispered about the explosion. People twenty minutes away claimed their windows had rattled, that they had felt vibrations. They also thought it had been an earthquake. Mr. Wilson, the band director and Music Appreciation teacher, asked, "I guess everyone heard about the explosion?"

A guy with long hair and a gray hoodie raised his hand. “I knew Nick,” he said. “I live right next to his house.” Everyone in class turned to him. I’d never seen this guy on the bus or around the neighborhood. I’d never even heard him talk before. But then again, I’d never seen Nicholas either, but Nicholas had graduated the year before.

“I pulled his mom out of the fire,” the kid said. Hushed silence from the classroom. He had saved someone’s life. On the news, no one mentioned a high schooler pulling anyone from rubble. And the fire was momentary—the gas vaporized, then only the loose rubble and frame burned. No one was pulled from a fire, the blast catapulted the Krzeskis outside. Except for Nicholas.

After school, Jonny told me he heard the same kid, too. He was going around telling everyone how he’d saved the mom. “He’s a liar,” Jonny said. “He’s always done crap like this. Just not this bad.” This kid—for whatever reason—had decided to use possibly the death of three people for his own ego.

5

While my brother and I were at school, our mom defended our home. Our neighbor who lived behind us, who saw himself as a Mr. Detective, wasted no time in beginning his investigation while the fire department conducted theirs. Both my parents hated Mr. Detective. When the neighborhood dogs would start barking, this man would, in his bathrobe, walk onto his back porch with a hand-crank siren. He’d blare it at the dogs while screaming, “You like that? I can do this all day!”

Mr. Detective knocked on the front door of our house, then stepped back, one leg on the sidewalk, the other on the porch step. He leaned one arm on his propped knee. He stood over six feet tall and was burly, my mom said he tried to look less intimidating by standing like that, but she said it just made him

creepy. He wouldn't meet you head-on, only from below.

Mr. Detective explained to my mom, "I suspect the Mexican construction workers steal the brass pipes where the gas lines connect to the houses. You can pawn brass for a lot of money."

My mom nodded her head, wanting him to leave, and after he left, he searched, without anyone's permission, the stretch of woods to the side of our house. When he found a crudely made branch-constructed teepee and a fire pit, he returned immediately. "Don't be alarmed," he told my mom, making the same position on the steps as before, "but I believe I've found where the Mexicans have been hiding." My mom was partially alarmed, but not because of what he said, but where he had been.

"Behind your house appears to be a campsite where they stake-out houses."

"No," my mom said, stiffly, "that's where my son built a teepee last summer." I wish I could have seen the look on Mr. Detective's face.

6

Sometime after four in the afternoon, the fire department recovered a body. They reported the body was too damaged to tell who it was. Firemen said there were heat hotspots that made it too difficult to clear the basement sooner. Everyone knew the body was Nicholas, but the responders said they'd have to identify the remains before they'd comment. I suppose Jasmine knew when she saw the firemen extract the body from the rubble, or that's how I see it. While she waited outside, she told reporters, "This is where he's at, and if he comes out alive, then I'm right here, where he's going to be." She had talked to him on his landline phone in the basement a few hours before the explosion and had come to stand vigil the moment she found out what had happened.

Later that day and the next few weeks, traffic increased as gawkers came to see the house's remains. To see what could happen from natural gas. Police patrolled the neighborhood to try and lower traffic, but that stopped after a few days. The newspapers reported it to be a gas leak from the fireplace, but nobody knows for sure, there was no follow up. Mr. Detective never followed up on his investigation either, and at school, the guy who claimed he had saved Mrs. Krzeski was quickly shunned.

A week or two after, men from some company brought shovels and dug holes in all the front lawns. The workers inspected everyone's gas pipes so another explosion would never happen again, they told my dad. All the brass pipes were there. For the rest of winter, everyone had dirt circles in their front yards. Everyone would have to reseed the grass themselves.

A couple months later, bulldozers flattened the exploded lot. The two houses flanking either side had vacated. Too many repairs needed or the fear it would happen to them. Many people's garage doors were buckled, but strangely, even though ours faced the brunt of the sonic blast, our house was untouched. Seven years have passed. A new house has finally been built. No one mentions the Krzeskis or what happened to them—or remembers their name. They were never on the news later or their conditions ever reported. I don't know if they survived their wounds or what happened to Jasmine. We only mention, "that's where the house exploded," in passing, trying to ignore that this was a freak accident. And every time I light the stove or the fireplace, I wonder if it will happen again.

BLUEISH-GREENISH HAZE

Michael Heiskell

It was weird looking in the kid's room. There were a few old toys lying on the ground still and he hadn't moved them. Probably never would, just in case Linda decided to bring them over again. Though, he guessed that they didn't play with toys anymore. It used to smell like them. Now it smelled like stale cigarettes and two week old pizza crusts. Nate scratched at a blueish-greenish paint spot on the wooden floor as he slumped his back against the wall. The spot was from the ceiling when Linda had tried to paint it. It was the night Danny was born; Linda just had it in her mind to paint the ceiling.

He remembered walking into the room and seeing her standing on a small step ladder with a paint brush between her teeth and drops of blueish-greenish paint dripping on her very pregnant belly. She had her hair tied back in a tight ponytail that seemed to stretch her already furrowed and concentrated brow.

"I didn't want him to look up at an ugly ceiling. His first memories shouldn't be how terrible his view is," she had said later, though Nate had never really questioned her logic.

The paint spots on the ground were a joke they had decided never to clean up, but now Nate pried it from the floor with the edges of his worn fingernails. Danny never mentioned anything about an ugly ceiling. Nate guessed he didn't like to be called Danny anymore. It was Daniel now.

Clementine was born two years later, but the ceilings were left alone and so was Linda. Nate had missed his daughter's birth and Linda had never let him forget it. Across the room, Clementine had a small easel set up where she liked to paint. Their house was small and the kids had to share a room growing up so they had to find ways to keep the kids distracted enough not to tear each other apart. Clementine had liked to paint and Danny had baseball.

He could see a lot of himself and Linda in both of them. Like past versions of themselves, but so much better. It was amazing to Nate that he could ever love someone more than he loved Linda. The best days of his life were tossing the baseball in the driveway with Danny and looking up and seeing Clementine sitting behind her easel from the upstairs window.

His phone vibrated beside him and shook him out of his nostalgic slumber. The bright light of the phone lit, “Clem” and burned his eyes from the darkness of the room.

“Hey baby girl,” he said as he answered. He was met with silence but heard his daughter’s breathing over the phone. “Clem?” he asked.

“When are we going to see you again, Dad?” she asked.

“I don’t know. Mommy says we’re taking a little break,” Nate said.

“I know what that means Dad, I’m not a kid anymore,” she said.

“I keep forgetting you’re fourteen and not four,” Nate said with a cold laugh. Clementine was silent again.

“I miss you, daddy,” she said and he could hear the sound of broken crying.

“I miss you too, honey. I’ll be back real soon, I promise. Is Danny there? Can I,” started Nate before he heard a tussle over the line.

“Nate? I told you not to call,” he heard as he realized Linda had grabbed the phone.

“I didn’t-“

“This is serious Nate. I said I needed some time and calling Clementine’s phone is not okay. We talked about this. Give me some space and I’ll call you when I’m ready. Until then don’t call her or Daniel ever again,” Linda said.

The line went dead and Nate dropped the phone. He laid his head down on the floor and continued to scratch the paint from the wood. As he looked up his only respite was that at least he didn't have to look at an ugly ceiling.

His eyes were lost in the blueish-greenish haze.

Cedar the Great

Jeni Welch

“Mom! He was in my dream!” Davis said once we were hidden back under the kitchen table. I had created the fort three days ago with comforters and pillows layered under two scrap quilts using the wooden table as a frame.

“Oh yeah? Well, did he say when he was coming home?”

“No.” he said a little disappointed. “But he is with his wolf friends and they are running around, howling and chasing squirrels. He had a silly smile and his tongue was hanging out!” There was a joy that grew with his story.

I smiled back at him and his innocent face. “Wow Davis! Let’s make breakfast so when he comes home from his friends we can give him some bacon. How does that sound?”

Davis remained in his fort every night thereafter. Each day he would tell me a new story about Cedar. Following the first dream, Davis drew a Crayola crayon drawing that showed Cedar in a large open field with three other wolves that were significantly smaller in size. He named it “Cedar the Great” and I hung it on the refrigerator.

The next day, Davis told me that he saw Cedar run through the yard, but he continued his path and went back into the pine trees. I knew he was lying but when he napped, I snuck outside and gazed out past the pines, just in case.

At dinner I teased Davis, “Are you sure you saw Cedar today? What if it was one of his wolf friends?” “It was him! He had the same knot in his tail and he is wearing his collar. Cedar is huge, I couldn’t miss him!”

That night I overheard Davis attempting to communicate with Cedar. He was howling out the sliding glass doors with a sound that was echoed lightly off the pine trees. In the morning Davis said he had seen Cedar in another dream. “Cedar is the

King, Mom! All the other wolves are proud of him.”

“Oh yeah? King? Tell me how.”

“He has a gold...”

I interrupted this epic story, “Wait, wait. Let me make some coffee. Would you like some hot chocolate?”

“Yes! I can’t wait to tell you about Cedar!”

Davis climbed back under the kitchen table and I followed with the hot beverages in hand. “Okay Davis, tell me what grand adventure Cedar is having.”

“His collar is gold now! And the other wolves stay behind him and bow to him. Mom, Cedar is their King and he is happy there.” Davis finished his story without a smile. “They are a family now. I think he might stay with them for forever.”

Like a Ghost

Jeni Welch

“Cecilia! Get your shit together!” Thomas Batten yelled at me. It was the same day that he threw my great-grandmother’s porcelain flowered vase at me. Chipping the paint off my apartment wall, it shattered across the floor.

After he left, I started there. I took his advice, collected my shit, and donated it all to the Goodwill three streets over. I started with new pastel yellow paint and with each stroke I began erasing the memories of never being good enough and self-doubt that I had become to imbody. The color muffled the past but it felt like the story, “The Yellow Wallpaper” was coming to life in New Mexico. I could not stop painting. The sound of anger continued to scream at me.

“Why the hell would you think you could make it without me?” Batten repeatedly asked me. I smeared the newly yellow painted hallway with a burnt sienna. The color fled from the hall to the bathroom, the same path I had used to escape his anger.

The streak grew from around the door into vines that hugged the walls. I expanded the vines into the bedroom. Creeping, they started to suffocate the memories, stroke by stroke. There was still a haunting in the apartment. Turquoise bubbles began to appear in the kitchen day by day. They were little gasps of air that floated near the back door. I always kept it locked for my own protection. I painted more bubbles around the windows and the door jams.

Without hesitation the forest green paint was following the vines, twirling hisses into the patterns. Whimsical designs began to appear in the apartment that left only whispers to be heard through the paint and I responded with, “Fuck you!”

It took weeks to finish the details of each curl. I used a lavender paint to accent the burnt sienna vines. The minimalist dots were the most time-consuming part as they danced on the vines and occasionally were found balancing on the turquoise bubbles.

“I will haunt you,” was Batten’s favorite threat if I ever started to leave him. I laughed at the memory, it was the last one I heard come from the walls. A silence was painted in a pastel jade. It coated the ceilings and dripped down from the corners of the walls.

A Letter

Dear Younger Me,

I know that you are scared, unsure, and ultimately stressed beyond the limits you once thought you had. That is what this letter is for: use it for all that it is worth, because there may come a day when you wish that there was something you could have changed about the decisions that you made while you still could.

Love is a terrifying thing, but what you take away from it is worth all of the fear and the risks that you face in order to follow your heart. Remember these words, because they will bring you strength and comfort when you feel small and lost. Love can seem like a disease that attacks your soul. It pulls you closer and closer to the edge of a cliff— all the while making you blind to the encroaching danger.

Days become weeks, and no matter how hard you try to get away from the object of your affection— you can't. Stop running. Now. He will be there in your thoughts, your sweetest dreams, the debilitating nightmares, the void that exists only when you close your eyes, and forever present on your mind. You will scream into the depths of your pillow in the delicate moments of the night, while wishing that he was there next to you— praying that eventually it will be him who is warming the bed with you, rather than your hot tears. Regardless of all of your fears, you must tell him how you feel.

Tell him anyway. I know that this sounds like an impossible thing to do, but it is the best path to take. Believe that your present doubts are no match for the massive regrets you will face if you never own your emotions for him. Tell him.

Pain can only last for its own season, but love is meant to last forever. It cannot be destroyed; love only grows. Don't let your mind rule over your heart; the best judgements have always

come from looking through rose-colored lenses. Love has no bounds, and if he was able to capture your well-guarded heart, then he must be worth fighting for. Be fair, and understand that everyone has been hurt in the past. Understand that we all have a past, but keep in mind that people are resilient and that we all have the ability to change.

Humans need acceptance; love him for who he is, and he will love you for who you are in return. Use your soul as a compass to guide your actions, because no one knows your heart better than yourself. Be open to the opinions and suggestions of those who love and surround you, but know who holds the greatest amount of pull in all your decisions: you. Remember to never fear the unknown.

Just because you haven't been there yet doesn't necessarily mean that you don't belong there! Stand with your toes gripping the edge, take a deep breath, and know that everything will work out for the better in the end. The fall is the most exciting and rewarding part of love. Convincing yourself to take the jump will forever be the challenge that you need to face head-on.

See you soon,
An Old Friend

“Headline”

Alexis Henley

Emily stood on the tracks with eyes on the incoming train.

The headlight shone through the thick, late August air, growing brighter as it approached. The horn sounded. The shrill squeal of brakes reverberated in the trees sending birds bolting into the sky. Sparks kissed the rails, but Emily waited. Her blood pounded in sync with the shake of the ground. She stayed a second longer. Another second.

A tingling thrill rolled down her spine as the light enveloped her sight. The palms of her hands grew sweaty inside her pants pockets. If she stayed she'd be on the front page of Anthem Falls newspaper along with photo of the tracks.

Emily hopped off to the side onto the grassy hill. The train roared by, sparks flying. The wind ripped off her hood. Her hair writhed and stuck to the sheen of sweat on her skin. Emily watched the cars continue down the tracks.

Always going somewhere else from somewhere else, she thought, making her way down.

In the distance, multicolored lights danced among the trees coming from the abandoned barn. Emily ran her fingers through her dark brown hair in an attempt to untangle the knots. When that didn't work, she parted her hair to the right to show off her shaved side. She weaved through the trees following the flashing lights. Nearing the barn, the bass rumbled across the ground sending the same thrill down her spine. A faint throb pulsed through her head, but Emily did her best to ignore it. She started bobbing her head, her steps crescendoing into a saunter.

A few stragglers lingered outside the barn. Some were high and others were drunk. The bouncer, a skinny guy in his

early twenties with a sleeve tattoo, stood outside the door, halfway off its hinges, but Emily didn't care about them. Alice, her best friend, leaned against the barn wall, waving her arms emphatically, arguing with Lucian, her boyfriend, and seemed to be losing.

So this is what they were doing instead of meeting up with me? Emily thought, frowning *What's the problem this time, lovebirds? Did I do something? No, that's crazy. Right?*

If there was an answer, she'd find it there with the squabbling couple. She watched them go at it for a little while longer, rocking back and forth on her feet, attempting to push herself towards them. With one final push, her feet moved forwards in earnest.

"Hey!" Emily called out, interrupting their argument, "I know signal in this town is shitty, but, damn, I was waiting for thirty minutes by the trailhead for you two!"

Lucian sent her a glare, eyes bloodshot, and stalked off towards a group of guys Emily recognized as fellow students of Anthem High. If they recognized her they didn't comment on it. *Probably too focused on finding themselves at the bottom of a PBR can, She thought.*

"Wait, what? Em, we were supposed to meet at the parking lot," Alice said, the phrase like usual on her lips, but a glance at Lucian stopped her in her tracks.

Compared to the usual suspects in the yard, Alice didn't smell like cigarettes, weed, or cheap beer. Something about not wanting her guardian to find out, and despite numerous offerings from multiple people to show her how to hide the smell, she simply refused. *I don't see the need for alcohol or weed to have a good time* was her answer when Emily asked her about it.

"What's up with you two?" Emily asked, bringing Alice's attention back to her.

Alice sighed, “Nothing... just,” she paused, sparing another glance at Lucian, “He wasn’t happy I invited you. Apparently, this was a date because a simple movie night would be too cliché.”

So it was me. Well, don’t I feel welcome, Emily thought, running her tongue across her dry lips as her stomach twisted like a wrung-out towel. “If you guys wanted to be alone, I can party just fine by myself,” she snapped, turning her head away as she leaned against the barn.

Please say no, she thought as Alice shot her a poorly concealed look of concern.

Silence fell between the two as they stood close enough to feel the other’s warmth against the bite of the night air, but far enough for palpable tension. This would usually be the moment where, to Emily’s exasperation, Alice would broach the subject of if she’d taken her medication and Emily would say yes even if she hadn’t. But as Emily glanced over, Alice looked away to Lucian.

The music had stopped playing as the opening band finished its set of songs. The sound of people in a daze filled the air along with the clink of bottles. After a couple seconds of no music, a guy’s voice echoed over the speakers followed by a couple dull taps. Autumn Leopard, the whole reason Emily walked an hour out of town to the abandoned barn, was warming up.

“So, do you want to head in?” Alice asked, stepping away from the wall, brushing chips of crusty red barn paint off her leather jacket.

“What about your boyfriend?”

Immediately after the words left Emily’s mouth she looked over at Lucian, who sat drinking a beer completely ignoring the two, and she wished she never said anything. Before her nerves could get to her, she looped her arm with Alice’s and they

sauntered to the entrance. The bouncer took one look at them and waved them on. Lights danced across Emily's eyes as they stepped inside. The throb in her head grew stronger and for a moment panic seized her. She sucked in a breath, breaking into a cold sweat. *I just need to get a drink, she thought, Once I get a drink, I'll be fine. I'm fine.*

From wall to wall, people filled the barn unable to move without bumping one another. Emily stepped up onto her tiptoes to survey for a place to get a drink. Her mouth was dry. Alice slipped her arm out, stepping in front of Emily, eyes bright like the lights in the room.

"Come on, they're about to start!" She exclaimed as she weaved through the crowd.

Emily attempted to follow but was pushed back by the crowd. The breath she exhaled shook as she slinked over to the right side with the graffiti covered wall. On a rickety bar table, she found a half empty case of beer. Finally, she thought, snatching a bottle up. Placing the cap at the edge of the table, she snapped the lip of the bottle off in one slam. The table wobbled, sending the case tumbling to the ground before Emily could catch it. The bottles shattered. Shards of glass scattered. Beer soaked her boots.

"Hey! What the hell, man!" A guy in a white tank top, gold chain necklace, and a beer in hand, just like the ones smashed on the floor, staggered towards her. "That's my beer, bitch!" His words slurred together, and Emily seized up with panic as he reached to grab her.

"Em!" Out of nowhere Alice appeared with a smile that fell as she saw the situation. She latched onto Emily's free hand and yanked her into the crowd away from the cussing drunk guy. Emily took a long swig of her beer as she let herself be led. The bitter taste gave her focus.

It's no fireball, but it'll do, She thought, taking another swing.

Alice came to a stop, drawing her hand back, and as Emily turned she came face to face with Autumn Leopard's lead guitarist's guitar, with the spots painted on and everything. Her mouth went slack. They were on the front row for Autumn Leopard.

"What was that all about back there? Wait, where'd you get that beer? Should you be drinking right now?" Alice asked.

Emily opened her mouth to reply, but Autumn Leopard's lead singer cut her off, tapping on the mic which was followed by the guitar riff to their song "Set it off." The crowd began to bob in a fluid wave. The music, like a shockwave, sent electricity down Emily's skin and drowned out all else. She started to bounce, waving her beer through the air. The lead singer began to sing, his voice low and gravelly with lips right against the mic, as he was backed up by the deafening beat of the drums. A chorus of cheers rang through the crowd, Alice and Emily quickly joining in, their voices shrill against the roar of the guitar. The lead singer took the mic off the stand, jumping around on the stage, and picked up a couple of rolled up t-shirts held by a rubber band. He chucked them one after another into the crowd, earning screams from the people who caught them and waved them around.

The soft cloth bumped against Emily's head as she scrambled to catch the T-shirt tossed her way. Her face broke out into a wide grin as she waved it at Alice, who squealed in excitement, giving her a quick sideways hug. Emily took another swig of beer, the throb in her head present but muffled, and closed her eyes, taking in the moment of ecstasy to preserve this night forever.

The moment was cut short as a hand latched onto her shoulder, nails digging through clothes and skin. Her eyes shot open, panic seizing her, as she rounded to face the guy from before. She tried to jerk away, but he had a vice-like grip.

“You stole my beer!” He roared, his voice barely audible above the music.

His eyes, hot and burning, focused in on the shirt Emily cradled to her chest and they turned mad, full of desire, as his lips formed a grin. “I’ll take this shirt as payment!” His voice filled with glee as he reached for it. His grimy hands clasped around the shirt and yanked, but Emily didn’t let go. She struggled against him, holding the shirt closer, unable to respond as the music grew louder. It was too much. The noise, the guy, everything. Emily’s chest tightened, her head throbbed, and her heart thrashed against her rib cage. The shirt slipped through her arms as the guy slammed his hands against her shoulders, sending her reeling.

In that moment, Emily’s mind broke.

The music became muffled, distant, as if through a veil. She saw red. The barn became a game. It became pixelated, as if the world’s graphics suddenly plummeted, and the man in front of her was just a collection shapes speaking at her. She wasn’t herself either. A passenger of her body instead of the driver or simply the window through which one plays a first person shooter game. Her hand with the beer bottle came into view, crashing downwards like a sword. It struck the shape of the man. The bottle shattered, pieces of glass splintering in every direction. Droplets of red shapes sprouted from the man as he fell backwards onto the ground.

Suddenly, Emily was pulled away from the man to face another set of shapes. Alice was speaking at her but as if through a plate of glass. Then the world was a whirlwind of multicolored

pixels. Her unwieldy body banged into other collection of shapes. She tried to pull away from the force dragging her along. She stumbled forwards, knees hitting the wood floor, and curled into herself. Nothing made sense. Emily registered two arms wrapping around her torso, her body lifting, but her legs shook under her weight. Her boots scraped against the floor as Alice dragged her like a sack. A sudden breeze sent a chill through her and then she was staring up at the sky. A large black shape with blurred white spots. She blinked, trying to clear up what she was seeing. A muffled noise came from far away and Emily strained trying to make sense of it.

“-cian! Lucian, we’ve got to go! We’ve gotta get out of here right now, get up!”

“Fuck off! I just got here!”

“Then give me your damn keys! I have to get her out of here!”

“Like hell I am.”

There was a soft thud and a groan from somewhere Emily couldn’t see. She stared up at the white shapes, watching them twinkle amongst the black. There was no music, but a cacophony of voices filled the air. Alice came into view, hands shaking, as she swatted her black hair away.

“Em, come on. We’ve got to go. Come on, move, move, move,” She muttered. Her eyes were wide, face covered in panic, as she patted Emily’s hoodie and jeans. “Come on, phone. Where’s the phone- ah! Got it! Come on, Em.” Alice grabbed Emily under her arm and began to walk.

Emily stumbled again, her body desiring to stop. Alice tore her focus away from the phone and placed that hand on Emily’s arm. “Come on, you have to keep going. I can get us out of here, but I can’t carry you so please walk. I’m here, okay, I’m here.”

Emily made an effort to speak, but despite her mouth going through the motions of speech nothing came out. She was able to get her legs moving. Alice sighed in relief, and began to search the phone again. She let out a groan as she scrolled, “Why don’t you have people listed with their actual names? I have no idea who half these people are!”

They were further down the trail now. The only light came from Emily’s phone, casting wicked shadows across Alice’s face and into the silent woods.

“Em, who is Sam in your phone? What do you call her?” Alice asked.

“Princess,” Emily muttered, the word coming from her mouth felt foreign.

Alice let out a short laugh, but as she put the phone to her ear, her laughter fizzled into nothing. They continued down the trail where the only noise was leaves crushed underfoot and cicadas. Emily narrowed her eyes, trying to make sense of the green, brown, and black shapes that surrounded her. They were trees, but they were fake ones.

“Yeah, no it’s Alice. I’m, um... yeah, Emily’s friend.”

Wind rustled the trees, and they wiggled against the night, like two partners dancing.

“We’re at Graveyard Fields, you know, the one by the tracks? The old barn... yeah by the trailhead. Okay, thanks Sam.”

Emily looked back to Alice who had turned on the phone’s flashlight and aimed it in front of them. She let out a long exhale and Emily felt her grip tighten.

They continued to walk down the trail in silence, Alice breaking it only to tell Emily to watch her step. They passed the train tracks before ending up at the trailhead. A Tesla was parked at the side of the road with its bright lights on.

Alice shielded her eyes with her hand, guiding Emily to the car. The driver's side opened and Sam, her blonde hair a tangled mess, stuck her head out.

"Is she alright?" she called out, dimming the lights on her car.

"I don't know," Alice replied, getting to the rear door and opening it.

She guided Emily in, buckled her, and shut the door. Sam sunk back into the driver's seat as Alice went to get into the other backseat. Through the rearview mirror, Emily saw Sam glance at her, worry plastered on her face. As Alice shut the door behind her, Sam pulled out into the road.

"Usually people have medication for things like this, right? Does she have, like, anything?"

"Yeah, but she..." Alice paused, sending a worried look Emily's way, "nevermind. Do you have napkins or something?"

Sam glanced in the mirror again, "Why? Oh my god, that's blood. Jesus, what did she do?" She opened the glove compartment and threw makeup wipes into Alice's lap.

"Some guy full on attacked her, then the next thing I know he's on the ground and I just freaked. We ran and none of this is hers which is good, well, if you can say that considering..."

Sam and Emily's eyes connected. Apprehension passed through Sam's face as she spoke, "Emily? Are you okay? Can you say something? I'll even take sarcasm."

Emily glanced down at her hands as Alice wiped away the blood and muttered, "Shapes."

"What?" Both girls asked.

Emily opened her mouth to reply but slumped against the seat, her body feeling heavy.

"I don't know what that means. Do you?" Sam asked.

“I have absolutely no idea,” Alice replied, sighing, “I shouldn’t have brought her out.”

Sam began to speak, but Emily didn’t hear it. Her eyes drooped. Sleep overcame her.

The afternoon sun peeked through the hole ridden blanket acting as a replacement curtain. It hung precariously from a makeshift curtain rod consisting of two push pins hammered into the wall and a line of wire. Clothes were strewn about the room everywhere but the closet. On the desk were wrappers from various fast food chains, papers marked with red ink, and one unopened letter from Anthem Falls High School to the parents of Emily Castellanos.

Emily laid sprawled out on her unmade bed, wearing a T-shirt and underwear but nothing else. Her eyes were closed, but she was awake. Her nearly dead cellphone laid in her outstretched palm, buzzing. The screen read “seven missed calls from Alice, ten unread texts from Princess, and thirteen unread texts from Future Prez.” Her phone buzzed again turning thirteen texts into fourteen. Emily opened her eyes, her lashes sticking together from the dried mascara. She groaned as she sat up, rubbing her eyes to dislodge the mascara, but only succeeded in leaving a trail of eyeshadow on her palms that she rubbed on her shirt. It reeked of beer. She looked around, raising an eyebrow, *I’m in my room? How did I get home? Wait, what happened last night?*

The familiar throb returned in her head. She scrounged her brain for any recollection of last night’s events. *Okay, I went to the barn, danced with Alice cause Lucian was a dick and then... that guy grabbed me...* She thought, her eyes widening as her breath caught in her throat.

Emily remembered everything. She cursed as her phone

buzzed again. She unlocked it and read the text from Allison, class president and future valedictorian, asking if she was still okay with working on their science project. Emily scoffed and thought, Like she needs my help with it.

I can't today. Don't feel good. She sent the text and massaged her temples.

Allison replied not even a minute later, *We have to get together at some point. You won't learn anything if I do it, and frankly I think you need to see that you're just wasting your potential.*

Her words were said with kindness not malice, but Emily felt her blood boil nonetheless. Allison texted again, *and are you unwell because you went to that barn party last night? Seems like you're not the only one who was worse for wear. Text when you want to talk, okay? Feel better xo.*

The pixelated guy on the floor, bleeding, flashed through Emily's head as a link to the town's newspaper appeared in the chat. Emily tapped to open it, and the headline made her body go cold.

Concert Ends in Bloodshed: Man Hospitalized After Attack at Abandoned Barn.

Emily jumped up off the bed, knocking clothes onto the floor, and gripped her phone tight. Her mind reeled as she scanned the article.

The sound of a thump and rattle against the hardwood broke her concentration. Emily glanced down at the bottle, her bottle, of pills nearly full from all the times Emily refused to take it. One word, ten letters, glared up at her. *Duloxetine*. Emily's eyes burned with anger and then tears. She kicked the bottle, snapping the sending pills everywhere. Emily fell back onto her bed, curling into a ball, and closed her eyes, wishing for sleep that wouldn't come.

THEATRE

CLEAN SLATE

A Play About First Impressions

Ian Hueston

CHARACTERS

EUSTACE WEINSTEIN: A 24-year old aspiring violinist. Talented but not socially gifted, possibly on the autism spectrum, but never diagnosed.

ASHLEY FLETCHER: 23 years old, never really left her punk phase. A proud feminist. A little bit thirsty.

WAITER: Just wants tips. Can be cast as any gender (referred to in script as male)

TIME

A crisp fall evening, 2017

PLACE

Gattoni-Celli's, a formal Italian restaurant owned by first-generation immigrants. It is lit by soft, warm light. Candles on every table. A dinner for two here will cost \$60-\$80.

Paintings of Italian vistas, like the coast of Amalfi, adorn the walls. The waiters all wear white shirts and black slacks. It feels warm, but delicate, like a museum- like you shouldn't raise your voice, and you need to keep your back straight.

Lights up on set. Customer chatter is heard. Indistinct voices, silverware taps against plates. WAITER enters from stage right, followed by EUSTACE and ASHLEY. He leads them.

WAITER

This is your table. (*setting down menus and utensils wrapped in cloth napkins*) I will be your server tonight. Can I get you something to drink to start?

EUSTACE

Just water, thanks.

ASHLEY

Sprite please.

ASHLEY starts to pull out her chair to sit. EUSTACE sees this and scrambles to step between her and the chair in order to pull it out for her. She regards him briefly, but accepts the gesture and sits.

...Thanks.

WAITER

Is Sierra Mist okay?

ASHLEY

Yeah, sure.

WAITER exits stage left. EUSTACE sits across from ASHLEY. They smile at each other awkwardly for a moment.

Well you look like your profile picture. You're doing better than the last guy already.

EUSTACE

Thanks. If I knew anything about photoshop my profile would probably look a lot better.

They laugh, but it does not feel particularly genuine. EUSTACE turns to the audience to address them directly, ASHLEY freezes in time.

Can I level with you real quick? I have no idea what I'm doing. I honestly didn't expect to get this far. I guess I don't know what I expected. I made the Tinder account but I didn't really think anyone would be interested. Look at her! She's too pretty! She can't be real. Maybe she finds losers on dating apps and harvests their organs. People still steal organs right?

Time resumes, they look back at one another.

EUSTACE

Yeah, yeah, I've had that happen a ton of times, so I totally know what you mean. Last... five, six people I met up with looked different from their profile.

ASHLEY

Wow, that's a lot.

EUSTACE

Well I'm exaggerating a little, it probably wasn't that many.

Time stops again, ASHLEY turns to address the audience this time.

ASHLEY

I don't actually remember swiping right on this guy. Is that bad? I've probably been spending too much time on dating apps. I can't tell if that means I'm desperate or just if I use my phone too much in general. Probably a mix. It has been a while.

Time resumes.

So tell me about yourself. What do you do with your free time?

Time freezes, EUSTACE addresses audience.

EUSTACE

How am I supposed to answer that? I spend all my time practicing the violin. I started learning when I was nine, before I cared about girls. By the time I started caring what girls thought, and realized that the only cool instruments on the planet are drums and guitar, it was too late.

Time resumes.

EUSTACE

I... like to go hunting.

ASHLEY

Hunting?

EUSTACE

Yes! Out in the forest, with my 300-caliber rifle. I've got one of those little chairs up in a tree, with the ladder.

ASHLEY

A deer stand?

EUSTACE

Exactly! A deer stand, one of those. It's all camo and everything.

ASHLEY

You hunt deer? Like for food?

EUSTACE

Yeah, for veal- for venison, I mean.

ASHLEY

That's nice.

EUSTACE heaves a sigh of relief. Time freezes, ASHLEY speaks to the audience.

ASHLEY

Okay, so quick pro/con- Our commercial meat industry is horrifyingly cruel, so hunting is definitely a preferable alternative. Deer grow up and live happily in the woods their whole life until suddenly there's one gunshot and then it's over, which is ideal. So there's a pro. Con: I am presently on a date with a person who kills woodland creatures to relax. Why does dating have to be so scary? What if he drags me into the woods for some weird Most Dangerous Game shit, or chops me up and sells all my organs? (muttering) Risking my life for love and sex.

Time resumes.

EUSTACE

(Looking at the menu) The fegato alla veneziana looks nice. There's a lot of good stuff on this menu.

ASHLEY starts to study the menu. After a moment, she puts it down to address the audience directly. EUSTACE freezes in time.

ASHLEY

Okay can we talk about this restaurant for a second? Because the last date I went on was to Sonic. This place serves swordfish.

ASHLEY

There's lobster fettuccine alfredo that costs twenty-five dollars. What is the etiquette here? If he took me here, he's ready to pay for any entree, right? Lobster alfredo sounds really good.

Time resumes, WAITER enters stage left.

WAITER

Hey folks, are you ready to order?

EUSTACE

Yeah. I'll have the... salmon. (*ASHLEY opens her mouth to order*) ...And the lady will have the mushroom risotto.

(beat)

Both ASHLEY and EUSTACE address the audience at once.

ASHLEY

What the fuck!?

EUSTACE

Oh my God!!

ASHLEY

Why would he think that's okay?!

EUSTACE

Oooh my God, oh my God! I panicked! I just- they do that in the movies! They're so suave and cool in the movies and it always works! Ugh! I'm so stupid!

ASHLEY

It is NOT the 50s!

EUSTACE

It is NOT the 50s!

ASHLEY

(mockingly) Oh, Myrtle, you won't believe, he ordered me the mushroom risotto and a strawberry phosphate, and then we went to the sock hop and danced all night! (angrily) I don't even like mushrooms! They grow on poop!

EUSTACE

What if she's allergic to mushrooms? I can't believe I said that!

Time resumes, they are both silent. WAITER writes the orders on a note pad.

WAITER

Excellent choices. I'll have those right out.

WAITER exits stage left. ASHLEY and EUSTACE sit and look at each other in silence. Tension mounts. The silence is lengthy and tangible. The silence becomes louder until EUSTACE is pushed to break it.

EUSTACE

I'm so sorry! (*ASHLEY sits back and waits expectantly*) I don't know what I'm doing and I thought that was what people do, but it's not, and I know it's not, and I'm sorry. This is my first date from Tinder. This is my first date since high school when I dated the girl who was the cleric in our DnD party.

(beat)

ASHLEY starts to chuckle, then bursts into laughter. EUSTACE can't help but laugh too.

ASHLEY

Holy hell! You had me going there at first. I was really worried I'd landed a date with some creepy douche. Can I assume that was all nerves?

EUSTACE

Yes, please assume that. Oh my God, when I started ordering for you it all went in like, slow motion.

ASHLEY

What was all that stuff about hunting?

EUSTACE

I don't know, I've never even touched a gun. I just thought I should be trying to be like, macho or something.

ASHLEY

I half expected you to start stopping girls on the sidewalk to tell them to “smile.”

EUSTACE

Ugh I hate those people! They don't even do it to me and I hate them. Like women exist just to look pretty and happy for them.

ASHLEY

Exactly! As if we owe them that. I've had people make me take off my headphones to try to flirt with me. The sidewalk is not a venue for courtship, people!

They laugh together. ASHLEY glances around and does not see the WAITER. She leans in to speak to EUSTACE.

Hey, you wanna get out of here? I know this little Korean place just down the street. It's a little hole in the wall, but they do a great steak bowl that costs less than the cheese plates here.

EUSTACE

And skip out on the bill?

ASHLEY

Eh, the waiters will get to have the untouched food. Let them share the mushroom risotto. What do you think? Start again, clean slate?

EUSTACE

Clean slate.

They stand and start to exit, their voices fade as they walk.

Hey, do you know if people still steal organs?

ASHLEY

Y'know, it's weird, I was just thinking of that earlier...

They exit and their voices fade entirely.

END OF PLAY

VISUAL
&
DIGITAL
ART

The Streets of San Jose
Molly Riddle



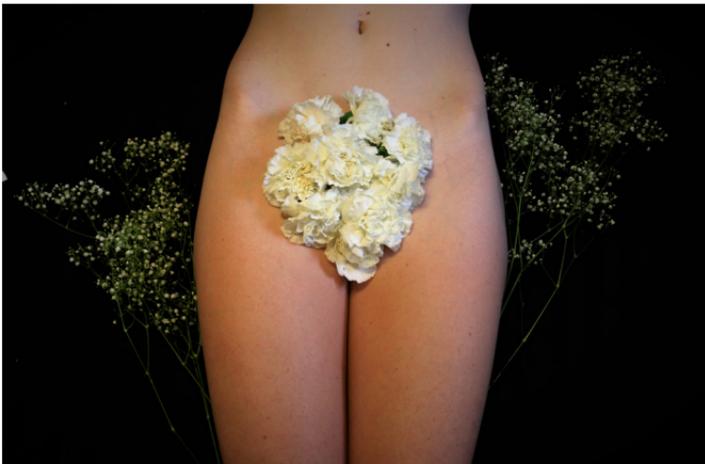
REVOLUTION
Molly Riddle



Fallen
Molly Riddle



BUSH
Kate Stephens



Lohagad Fort
Luz Hernandez



ENTRANCE
Luz Hernandez



Vigilant Eyes
Lucas Gomez



American Dingo
Lucas Gomez



The Hungry Bear

Kelsey Kushner



Pretty Place
Kelsey Kushner



Cotton Candy Canvas
Alexis Henley



Butterfly Whisperer
Aia Andonovska



The
Chiaroscuro

2018-2019



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POETRY

Captain

Tiesha Pressley

Eyes, deeper than calm seas, possess
a gravity
stronger
than the Moon's on tides.
How can one keep from drowning?
Sworn to never
let anchor fall— afraid
to rest within
waves' turmoil; tossed
between shaky dreams,
shifting realities— Eros, have mercy on me.
Tormenting swells
of desire have left passengers
praying for voyage's expire. Tempting
the stars, navigating
wild waves while uninspired.
Destination lost
within fogged emotion. Judgement
hazes with each day upon
this angry ocean. Poseidon
preserve my Captain
until love has proven stronger
than the fearfulness
of these raging seas.
The shore abides with him
Forever.

Desolation

Ivy Pope

Her destruction -
As she tumbles; she fades;
Tears mark her cheeks; scarring, reminders of the fall.

The world around her -
Buildings crumble; in flame or ice she will perish.
The stars are twinkling bright; soft lights in the night -
Though those lights only take her to the past; through
recollections and flashbacks.

Desolation; something she never forgets.
If the world were shiny, would she miss him?
If her life was new, would she know his words?
She takes what has been said as honest truth;
One glance in the mirror; one look at an angle -
And the belief that she is horri sets in;

Another day passes; another day is ruined.
Preconceived notions...his words echo; loud like the
explosions of fireworks -

But she smiles anyway.

It's the Little Things

Carmen Boone

Your milk chocolate brown eyes
and the way they crinkle at the corners when you smile.

Your giddy grin that anticipates the coming of a punchline,
it completes the shape of a familiar face.

Your dark hair like a midnight sky, hiding the stars
and leading into shoulders and arms that embrace me
warmly.

Your voice as soft as a cat purring
that brushes my ears like a gentle breeze.

Your giggle that rolls into a burst of hysterics,
enticing me to laugh along.

You make silly jokes.

You're stunningly smart.

I admire your curiosity,

and your loving heart.

Service Center
Morgan Shepard

My life is a contract I didn't sign,
a decision I was not consulted on.
I'm sure if it were to end, it would break some hearts
but maybe then they'd feel what it's like to be me.

I swallow my tears and slap on a smile
as I walk the halls and streets like living was my idea,
as if this life is what I wanted.

Where's my receipt to return my life?
Hello, customer service?
Yes, hi, my name is Morgan Win Shepard
and I was given this gift called life,
and it didn't come with a receipt but
I would like to return it. Oh, I have to have
a receipt to return products? Well damn it, can I exchange
this life for a better one?!
No, then what use are you? Damn customer service,
you're good for the antidepressants fueling my everyday
activity.

The Truth

Morgan Shepard

The typical family holiday consists of some form of the following questions:

What are your plans after college?

What career do you want?

What're you doing with your life?

You got a boyfriend yet?

Well bud, sit down and I'll tell you a story.

At 17, I was admitted to a hospital because I wanted to kill myself.

Graduating high school was not on my radar.

Going to college was never something I dreamed of.

I didn't think I'd make it this far.

I do not know what career I want.

I'm not sure what I'm doing with my life;

I take it day by day and hope for the best.

And no, I do not have a boyfriend.

I sit on my 21st birthday,

wondering how the hell I've made it this far.

I thought at 17,

I would die and that would be the end of it.

I'm faced with continuing a life

that was supposed to end

at the age of 17.

I'm faced with making this shit up as I go

and I still don't know where I'm going.

#Over 140 =C haracter\$
Oscar Sifuentes

New filters?

Tag me in that.

Relatable quotes.

This isn't a fad.

What should I hashtag?

This video is trending.

Imagine what I could do
with all this time I'm spending.

Father
Haley Putnam

I want so badly to hate you.
But how can I
when I look at you
and
see myself.

-father

I can't write about you

Sarah Haga

At least not in the way I'd like to,
not in the way I think you deserve. And I'm
not sure what this could mean because
in the past the words have come easily
freely flowing into sentences and paragraphs about
love, about moments, feelings, thoughts. But
with you it is different. It is like nothing will capture
this correctly and so my pen refuses to even try. It is
hand shaking and heart fluttering, but it is not words.
Maybe it is because I'm not meant to tell anyone. Are
you supposed to admit that you've done it, that you've
found your souls match? Are you supposed to tell
the world that you have everything you never expected
to find? Or is it meant to stay a secret? I don't know.
But I know that I can't write about you.

of her
Sarah Haga

When I think of her it is to remember the sound of her laugh and how it lands against my ears as delicately as early morning rain on grass. It is to think of her changing hair and how it manages to match her mood, no matter the shade. A fiery red means she is feeling feisty; deep purples show her sadness, and green will never touch her head again – not after that time junior year. I think of her eyes and how they are pale blue in the early morning but so much darker by the time the moon rises. I do not like to think of the pain I know has touched her. The many hands that were unwanted. The words that struck her back as she moved through hallways – in school and at home. I do not want to think of how she looks when she cries, because her face splotches pink and her eyes stay blue, but too bright and filled with water that refuses to touch her cheeks. I would rather think of her smile and the special look she saves for her dog, for the sunrise across the mountains, and most importantly, for cheesecake.

Something to be Said

Sarah Haga

There is something to be said of you, I think.
Something to be said of your presence as it lingers
still, drifting over us and curling about
our minds as we go through the motions of the day,
motions that are now so meaningless to you. There is something
to be said about the way you left - with such speed
and a lack of preparation - did you not realize
the questions you would leave behind?

Perhaps you didn't care. There is something to be said
of the things that you will miss. I wonder now if they will
hold a seat at their weddings for you knowing that the
empty chair will be nothing but show. I wonder who they
will tell the story of their first kiss to, and who will listen
with an understanding smile as they yell about bullies and people
so mean that they cannot fathom ever being able to deal
with them. I wonder who will hold their hands and check their
foreheads when they are sick. I wonder who will be there
when it feels to them that the world has turned its back. I
wonder who will tell them that it's okay to cry and to be angry
but remind them that it's beautiful here. I wonder,
because how do you replace a mother?
I don't know. But there is something, I think
something to be said.

One out of Six

Alexis Henley

In every girl's life she realizes people think her body doesn't belong to her.

Her abundant keys won't dangle without care.
They form between fingers, dig into skin
like glistening claws trained to defend.

In the dark, her eyes scan the scene while
talks with family members and advice from friends
echo like the chorus of an old song she tries to forget
but never can:

“Keep your skin covered or no wonder they think it's okay.
Don't smile or make polite talk; it gives them reason to
stay.

Watch your drink or they'll slip something in and whisk
you away.”

But even with precautions, it can happen anyway.

There will always be the one, a girl more intoxicated,
more revealing, paying less attention or being friendlier.
She deserves to be safe too.

No one ever blames prey when it's hunted down
why are victims any different?

Counting Crows

Alexis Henley

Students huddle in a room with lights gone dark
and against the caw of crows gunshots are stark.

The students count...

One for sorrow

A plain wooden casket lowered into the ground
it's too small and parents pray their child is homebound.

Two for joy

Blood drained faces spring into awaiting loved one's arms
for they are the lucky ones that escaped from harm.

Three for a girl

The gunman leaves through the broken door
leaving two best friends bleeding on the floor.

Four for a boy

A young man lies dead with bullets in his back
from shielding others from the surprise attack.

Five for silver

Every year reporters share the news of more kills
but the numbers only rise from the lack of new bills.

Six for gold

The government worried more about their guns
instead of how many times children have to run.

Seven for a secret never to be told

The plan all sorted, tomorrow was the day
the gunman vowed to make others pay.

Eight for a wish

They learn too young no one is who they seem
the incident continues to haunt their dreams.

Nine for a kiss

A kiss on the forehead each morning before the bell
and now before surgery, if they'll be okay only time will tell.

Ten for a time of bliss

In the streets all over the world young people strive
to demand change and "March for our lives".

In the end the crows fly away
but in the classroom the students stay.

Adoration Undone

Wendy West

If a prayer could make me stop loving you
I would lock my heart away
pretend that I was someone else
if only for a day.

I would stand beside the rushing river
to drown out the sound of your voice
forget your lovely smile
and make another choice.

I would run my fingers over jagged glass
so I could touch no more.
Because I know I will never have
the one whom I adore.

Untitled

Anthony Zuniga

Eres una rosa
Que con su belleza
Para el tiempo.
Aunque vengan mil tormentas
Llenas de agua, fuego, y azufre
Tu permaneces.
Creces
Y le dices a las otras rosas dañadas,
“Tan débiles, esto es nada!”
Y sonríes
Y sigues
Y te mantienes preciosa.

The Gallery
Scott Urquhart

Red lit bathroom
credit card in mouth
nose dripping
music
echoes through feet
setting the night

Siberian Treasure
Scott Urquhart

Digging in the snow
looking for wrapped gifts
of pleasure.
The cold doesn't bother
when you're set
and going home
with momentary joy.
Pechka, they call it
rolled on a cigarette
burnt in a bottle
given to a friend
for a good night

in the negatives.

Rapids

Sydney Shaw

I'm in my boat going down the river and to my unpleasant surprise,
the water's moving faster and it's beginning to rise.
I'm trying to keep my cool,
I'm trying to stay calm.
I've started bumping into rocks and now my paddle's gone.
This river is one I'm used to,
I know it like a song,
I don't know if I'll make it,
this Journey's very long.
I didn't start this adventure alone,
but now my partner's gone.
We promised to do this as a team,
together we put in at dawn,
maybe it was something I did,
I guess he had nothing to say,
and he abandoned me along the way.
But now I'm in my boat without a paddle,
trying to survive,
the rapids are fast,
the water is rising,
and the risk is getting high.
The water's crashing on all sides,
I'm trying not to slip,
one mess up, one wrong move,
and my boat's going to flip.
I'm struggling to stay afloat,
I'm trying not to swim,
I've never fought a river before,
but I'm trying hard to win.
I'm in my boat without a paddle,
trying to survive,
I'm in my boat without a paddle,
fighting to stay alive.

SHORT STORIES

Adventure of a Lifetime

Alexis Henley

“Well, what do you say? Let’s go. Just you and me.”
Damien said, peering across Morrigan’s backyard.

The afternoon sun, filtered between the dense leaves of the magnolia tree, reflected off Damien’s horned-rimmed glasses. Morrigan raised her head from the armrest of the porch swing and pulled her legs off his lap, curling them into her chest. He turned to her, his eyes twinkling, and smiled.

She didn’t return his smile. Her eyebrows furrowing together as she said, “Dames, I have three months till I graduate. I can’t just drop everything and forget my degree just to go traveling with you.”

Damien’s smile quivered, cheeks turning light pink, and the color started to creep down his face. His lips parted ever so slightly and Morrigan waited for a retort, but he only sighed. Rubbing the back of his neck, he looked down at the ground. Morrigan took this as her chance to continue, “Furthermore, you have a job. Have you talked to them about time off? And-”

“Mor,” Damien interrupted, his words barely audible beneath his breathy laugh. “Despite almost having a college degree you really aren’t that bright.”

He pushed himself up off the swing, causing it to sway, and stretched his arms towards the sky with a groan before turning to Morrigan, extending a hand to her. She raised an eyebrow and frowned up at him. She thought finishing her degree was a smart idea.

He moved his hand closer and laughed, “Come on, I need my partner in crime for this.”

Morrigan let out a sigh, but grinned and took his hand. He pulled her to her feet and began to lead her around the backyard. She took her usual position, locking her arm with his, and let herself be tugged along.

“What are we even doing?” She asked as they came to a halt in front of the flower garden with rows of peonies and daffodils in full bloom.

“First, we as young children adventure into the lands of the fairies and, oh, how they were fond of me. Trying to woo me with flowers,” He plucked a peony and placed it behind her ear, “but it was foolish of the fairies to try to take me from you.”

“I remember you crying because the flowers had died. You thought the fairies were going to be homeless for the winter.” Morrigan said with a snicker.

Damien nudged her in the side before leading her on, “What can I say? I’m sensitive, but you assured me that they migrated like birds.”

He took her to the shed and opened the wooden door, still stained with the remnants of drawings from their preteen years. “Our clubhouse is where we plotted and conspired to overthrow your parents, ascend to the throne, and, most importantly, have the right to eat all of your mother’s cookies.”

“You wanted a treehouse but I argued that the logistics would be too complicated. You tried to prove me wrong, and broke your arm falling out of the tree, and my Dad let us use the shed,” Morrigan laughed, bending down to examine the drawings.

“I still think it would’ve worked, but you did execute a wonderful layout for our shed.”

He lightly tugged her arm as she stood back up, taking her to the back patio where the table was set with the lunch her parents had been making inside.

In the concrete there were two sets of handprints with a date from seven years ago written beneath. Damien got down on his knees, placing his hand next to his imprint, "I think the purpose of these are to show change but my hand hasn't really changed that much."

"They're more effective if you do them at a young age but," Morrigan put her hand next to her imprint, "you wanted something to remind us that even though we'd be going to different schools and go on separate adventures we'd find our way back. Something to ground us, you said."

"Well I know my head lives in the clouds while you tend to see things completely realistically. So, I gave us something real; something concrete." Morrigan turned to him and narrowed her eyes. He glanced at her and upon seeing her look he grinned, "Come on, that was funny."

"Just a bit," She admitted, with a small smile and rose to her feet.

Damien looked up at her and took her hand, "So have you changed your view about coming on an adventure of a lifetime with me?"

"Dames..." Morrigan sighed, "As much as I would love to, I'm graduating and-"

"I'm not talking about physically going somewhere, Mor," Damien interrupted, looking at her with such adoration she felt her cheeks getting hot. "Though, this adventure would require your logistical approach somewhere down the line."

"Well what kind of adventure do you mean-?" Her voice trailed off as Damien pulled a small box out from his pocket and shifted to where he was on one knee before popping the box open. Inside was a ring.

"This kind."

A Walled Garden

Oscar Sifuentes

Damon turns the corner of the grass wall and slips on loose trimmings on the ground. His ankle twists, shifting his balance to the left. He falls into the hedge, but searing pain pierces his entire left side. The hedge maze is gargantuan labyrinth of thorned walls with light coming in from the daylight above. Damon manages to sit up and examine the thorn in his hand, along with the thorns in lining his clothes from his shoulder down to his knee. His hand is already inflamed from the puncture, but this is no ordinary wound. The veins in his hand are visibly throbbing. It doesn't hurt anymore, but it's numb. He wills himself to stand, keeping the weight off his twisted ankle. He proceeds down the corridor that looks exactly like every other corridor in the damned trap.

As he hobbles down the path, Damon kicks himself for falling into the trap in the first place. If his leg weren't partially immobile, he would probably physically kick himself. This "experimental game show" would have taken care of those college loans and buy him a new canoe. The amount of money the show advertised was enough to make him forget that he basically signed his life away in contracts. Damon decides he has had enough adventure for one life. It's been a week in this maze, surviving only with the food in his starter pack and the supplies at replenishing spots placed sporadically in his path. He hasn't seen the other two competitors since the start. There was a pale, red-head woman with a dancer's physique and a goliath of a blonde, Chilean man. That redhead's hair is probably braided with leaves and thorns while the blonde's hair is most likely dirtied to the point of making him a brunette, like Damon.

Limping for what seems like 3 hours, Damon finds another rest station. It is less of a station and more a pile of food, medical supplies, and toiletries next to an untempting cot. The cot has been slept in and the rations have been dug into.

“Goldilocks slept in my bed,” Damon whispers to himself. The audience will love those one-liners. He clutches the key around his neck that came with his bag. Maybe there’s a chest around that matches it. He continues to sift through the containers of oatmeal, baked beans, water, and soup. “Well papa bear doesn’t really care at this point.”

Damon plops down on the cot and gives into the exhaustion. The last thing he sees before his eyes flutter shut is his hand, a sickly green color. It has to be infected. He wakes up to his body convulsing, so immediately he thinks he is seizing up from the infection. Instead, Damon’s eyes open to find the red-head shaking him by the shoulders.

“Wake up, man.” She looks around as if she’s on the run. “We need to go now.”

“How did you find me? I haven’t seen anyone the whole time.” Damon stutters.

“Well I did and it wasn’t a pretty sight. They killed him. Rocky. The big guy. I found him with a knife in his gut.” She sits him up.

“How do you know it wasn’t me?” Damon says.

“With that arm? It looks like its about to fall off. I got some thorns the first few days, so I know how it feels. As for you killing him, you would have his stuff and it was still with him.” She picks up Damon’s bag and slings it across her shoulder while her bag drapes the opposite shoulder. She places his arm around hers and forces him up. “Reagan, by the way.”

“Huh?” Damon mumbles, still groggy.

“My name. Reagan. Yours is Damon. I went through your bag already.” Damon and Reagan desert the station and head in the opposite direction than where each of them had come.

“I’ve been marking the walls to see where I’ve been, but I think someone’s erasing them. I can’t see them even though I’m positive that’s where it is.” Reagan explains.

“Look, Reagan. You can’t carry me all the way. We don’t know where we’re going and how close the supposed killer is. Just run ahead of me and if you get out, get help.”

“Are you sure?” Reagan asks, “OK. Be right back.”

“Wait, what? I was just being nice. You can’t leave me. Ill die.” Damon’s eyes grow wide.

“Survival of the fittest,” Reagan squints into the corridor ahead. “There’s a station up there. Hide in it until I can get back. I have a compass. Wait...is that a key?”

Damon looks down, “Uh...yeah. It was in my starter bag.”

“What if it leads to the outside and I need it?” She pleads.

Without words, Damon removes the key and hands it to her. It’s not like he’s gonna be using it anytime soon. Three more days pass by and Reagan never returns. Damon lifts his infected hand onto his lap to rinse off the new build up of puss and blood onto the dirt. The maze is spinning, either from exhaustion, hunger, infection, or maybe it’s actually spinning. Who knows what this prison hides? Although it’s clearly daylight, Damon’s vision is dim. Everything seems like a fever dream. Is he even in the maze?

“Hey...you...” Damon thinks he hears. He looks to the right and swears he can see a large blonde man crawling towards him. “She took it.”

“Took what?” Damon croaks to the hallucination.

“The poison antidote. She took it from me and then stuck me with one of the thorns. I ...I can barely feel my legs. I think we were supposed to work together. She had a compass. I had an antidote. What did you have?”

“A key...” Damon realizes his error. “She left without us.”

Rocky slumps against the cot, “I guess the game just found its winner.”

Destination: Okay

Melissa Ashe

Dawn woke up slowly. Her mind grappled with the in-between place that consisted of the dream world and reality. As the realization that she had been dreaming dawned, her heart sank.

“Oh,” she whispered to herself, “just a dream. Of course.” With a sigh she picked up her phone and waited for her eyes to adjust to the light of the screen after sleep. She sent a message to her best friend, Jenny: “Why can’t I stop dreaming about him?”

Since she had broken things off with Phillip in January, Dawn had gotten more than she had bargained for. She had been absolutely certain that it was the right thing to do, and still was, but her heart seemed determined to play her for a fool. In fact, her heart had stayed in constant opposition to her brain from the moment she had met the man. It can be imagined like a conversation between two people.

Brain: This guy is not good for you.

Heart: Oh don’t be so quick to judge! I think he’s great. I’m sure I can find an excuse for all of his supposed faults.

Brain: It’ll never work and you know it. Best walk away now.

Heart: No. I’m sure I can make this work. Just watch. I will MAKE it work.

(Grim determination. Where was the joy in this?)

Two years later, in the midst of a similar argument between her brain and heart, Dawn had finally forced herself to accept the inevitable and break off the relationship.

Phillip had accepted it without much question, and life had moved on.

A sense of relief was prevalent in the first 48 hours or so. After that, suffering had been her lot, or rather, holding suffering at bay as much as possible. Jenny had brought her through. Almost single handedly.

Her phone dinged. Messenger calling. Jenny had answered her question with one word:

“Lunch?”

“When and where?”

“11:30, coffee shop.”

“Ok, see you then.”

The most valuable tool in Jenny’s bag of help was distraction. Besides, Dawn could eat. She hadn’t eaten for a couple weeks at first. Or slept. Now she did these things with great enjoyment.

(Brain: See? I told you.)

“Yeah,” Dawn muttered. She wondered if everyone else dealt with such a clear distinction within themselves. One lesson to take away from all of this had been to always listen to her brain-self. Some people referred to this as gut instinct. At least, Dawn thought it was probably the same thing.

Her heart-self was quietly crying, “I wish it hadn’t been a dream. I wish it had been real”.

Her brain-self said only, “I wish you would just forget it”.

The coffee shop was quiet and uncrowded. Dawn was there first and picked out a table by the window and sat down to wait. One of the worst things about going out in public was the terrifying thought that she might run into him. Her heart-self feared the pain of this. Her brain-self agreed that this would be a bad thing.

Jenny arrived. Her eyes swept the room and landed on Dawn's. She smiled and hurried over. As she sat down, she put a small book on the table in front of Dawn. Dawn picked it up and looked at the title-less cover.

"It's a journal," she said. Her voice held a question. "You are going to start dream journaling." Jenny explained. "I think if you write down your dreams, and how they make you feel, they will stop. There is lots of research on this, and it works for some people."

"Well, okay," Dawn said thoughtfully. "If you think it will help, I'll give it a try. Thank you. It's beautiful!"

The journal was very beautiful. The cover was a reproduction of Klimt's famous painting *The Kiss*. It was gilt and textured and pleasing to the eye and touch. The pages were thick and cream colored. In truth, Dawn was delighted with it.

They talked of everything in the world but Phillip and the dream. When they were finished eating they decided to walk around town. Dawn had nowhere to be until evening, and Jenny always found walking to be very healing.

"I should be over this by now," Dawn sighed.

"It hasn't been that long. Besides, you are much better. It's only the dreams that are bothering you."

"They knock me out for a couple days, though. I mean, they make me feel sad. I don't want to feel sad about this anymore. I've had enough." Dawn said this decidedly. As if saying it in a certain tone would make it happen.

"Have you been pushing the feelings of sadness away?" Jenny asked.

Dawn reflected a moment. She had to admit that she did do this. Whenever she saw a wave of pain headed her way she would hunker down and try to stave it off.

She could picture herself with a shield, too big and heavy for her to carry. She struggled with the weight of the shield and it hurt a little, but not as much as allowing pain and grief to invade her heart, mind, and soul. The heavy shield made her tired though. She was so tired.

“Maybe,” she replied cryptically.

“You need to stop. You have to experience it to heal from it,” Jenny said gently.

Dawn sighed. Jenny was right. Her approach to healing wasn't working. She supposed it was time to try something else. Jenny was scrutinizing her hard. Dawn knew her face was an open book. As discerning as Jenny was, she had probably nearly read her mind.

“I think,” Jenny said carefully, “That your new journal could serve for dreams, and for what you're feeling. Maybe if you write your feelings down, it will help you process them, and then send them on their way.”

“I like the sound of sending them on their way,” Dawn said with a smile.

“But you have to process them first.” Jenny said firmly.

That evening while at work, Dawn was going about her retail store duties when she saw Phillip. There he was, in the store that he knew she worked in, like he had every right to be there. He had NO right to be there.

Right?

Dawn could feel it coming. She gathered herself, bracing, ready to push as hard as possible against the knife stroke of hurt. Suddenly her conversation with Jenny flashed through her mind. Abruptly she stopped preparing for the pushback. Her hands fell to her sides. Her shoulders slumped. She forced herself to take a deep breath.

“Let it come,” she whispered.

It was surprising. She had been preparing for a mental onslaught that was certain to be incapacitating. As the feelings she had pushed away for so long began to wash over her freely, she realized that they were bearable. Her brain began to compensate and say soothing things. Gentle, positive reminders of people that were still in her life. That made life worth living. The things she was going to do, places she may go. For a moment, as she stepped out of the way of the war between her heart and brain, she could feel an immense struggle. Just as suddenly as she recognized it and gave it life, it began to dissipate. Slowly, she took a mental inventory and realized that she was okay.

“That wasn’t so bad,” Dawn said softly to herself, with surprise. She had prepared for a world war. It had turned out to be a schoolyard scuffle.

Dawn took another deep breath. Her hands were shaking, her mouth was dry, and she felt a bit dizzy. Suddenly a voice beside her said, “What are you doing? Phillip’s in here. I thought I should warn you.” This came from Beau, her friend, “adopted” son and one of her favorite people in the world.

“Thanks,” she replied with a smile. “If you don’t mind, I think I’ll take my break now. How about you let me know when he’s gone?”

“Will do,” Beau replied as he walked away.

Dawn was completely exhausted by the time she got home that night. Being at war with oneself was a tiring thing. She had been keeping this defense up for months, and now she had let it go. It was the kind of exhaustion that came after an adrenaline rush. She took a long shower. As she slipped her pajamas on, she thought about her journal. She would write an entry before she slept.

She picked up the beautiful book, smiling at Jenny's message inside: "May you endure the journey well and find your destination to be everything you want."

"What's my destination?" she mused. "Where do I want to end up?"

She picked up her pencil and wrote carefully: "Dear journal: Today I began a journey. Not a journey to a place, it's a journey to peace of mind. Destination: okay."

"I'll be okay," Dawn whispered softly. She smiled, shut the journal and laid it down carefully on her bedside table. Less than five minutes later she had slipped into a deep, dreamless sleep.

THEATRE
&
MUSIC

Excerpt from the one act play ‘whatever this is’
Sarah Haga

Scene 8

Rachel is alone in her apartment. She messes with the TV and then stops, annoyed with herself. She’s walking around the back of the couch when there is a knock at the door. She opens it and walks away, toward the kitchen. Connor enters.

CONNOR

Hey.

RACHEL

Hey. *(in the kitchen)* Coffee?

CONNOR

Sure. *(pause)* This is going to be awkward, isn’t it?

RACHEL

Shut up. Shut the door.

CONNOR

Yep. *(he shuts the door)*

RACHEL

Also, since when do you knock? You’ve had a key since I moved in.

CONNOR

It felt like today maybe I should knock.

RACHEL

Well, don’t.

CONNOR

No knocking. Got it. Can do.

RACHEL

(bringing their coffee to the living room) You're still being weird.

CONNOR

I am trying!

RACHEL

I don't believe you.

CONNOR

Oh, my god -

RACHEL

Just drink your coffee.

CONNOR

I will drink it, thank you.

They drink in silence. It's weird.

RACHEL

Did you have a good Christmas?

CONNOR

The greatest Christmas. *(pause)* You too?

RACHEL

Sure. It was pretty great. Mom says hi.

CONNOR

Oh? I miss her.

RACHEL

Yeah, she misses you too. And Margot.

CONNOR

You'll have to tell her I said hi.

They're quiet again. It's still weird.

RACHEL

I hate this.

CONNOR

The worst.

A pause. And then, at the same time:

RACHEL

I'm sorry I said what I said, okay?

CONNOR

So, you broke up with him?

And then, again:

RACHEL

Yeah. Last week.

CONNOR

You're sorry?

Rachel starts to continue.

CONNOR

Stop talking, I'm talking. You're sorry?

RACHEL

I saw how much it freaked you out and I don't even know why it came out of my mouth I was just word vomiting, okay? It didn't

—

CONNOR

I want you to think about it before you say it didn't mean anything.

RACHEL

Shut up —

CONNOR

Because, yes, I did freak out, Rachel. Because I've been waiting for you to tell me that since I met you.

RACHEL

What?

CONNOR

Don't sit there and look at me with those ridiculous eyes. Don't do that because then I'm going to stop talking. Put the pillow over your face.

She doesn't move.

The pillow, Rachel! Over your face!

Slowly, she covers her face with the pillow.

CONNOR

Look. No, don't look! Jesus. Listen - I think there's a reason why we met. And why you became my best friend. And why no other girl has ever really mattered to me even a little bit since. And I want to find out what that reason is. Because you make me so fucking happy. You make me laugh and you make me want to talk about things and think about things and explore things. There are so many – things that I want the answers to, and I want you to be there to find them with me. I want to find them with you. And – and I don't know if there's anything past you, for me, okay? So – I want to know why you said what you said.

She doesn't move.

I'm done now.

She rips the pillow away and moves to sit beside him, suddenly animated.

RACHEL

But that thing about other girls isn't true! You said you loved Kristen from Bio 101!

CONNOR

Really? That is what you just heard? Rachel – I said a lot of things so that I could pretend like you weren't the only thing in my head. Like you weren't the only person I wanted beside me at night. Like –

RACHEL

What?

CONNOR

What?

RACHEL

You thought about me at night?

CONNOR

Look – you want to get into that right now?

RACHEL

(she shoves him) That's disgusting!

CONNOR

You asked!

RACHEL

You are disgusting.

CONNOR

Yes.

RACHEL

You said – you just said – you wanted me beside you at night?

CONNOR

Well, yeah. Do you know how many times we fell asleep on this couch and I had to fight not to hold you? You'd put your head on my shoulder like it meant nothing – and I'd just be sitting here like...except...God, maybe you didn't know. I don't think you noticed.

RACHEL

I didn't. (*she gets up, pacing*) Except I'm lying. I've been lying. I did notice. But you're supposed to be my friend!

CONNOR

You're my friend, too. That doesn't mean I don't like sitting too close to you sometimes. Or that I didn't notice when you'd get drunk and try to hold my hand while we were walking back to the dorms – or that after that I wouldn't think about it for days during class. Okay? Days.

RACHEL

And did you get this weird, tingling feeling?

CONNOR

Wherever you're touching me? Yes.

RACHEL

Yes! Fuck. Fuck! This is weird, right?

CONNOR

Not really.

She looks at him.

A little. It's a little weird. But it doesn't have to be.
For the first time in the scene, they really see each other.

RACHEL

Look. Maybe you should just go.

RACHEL

This is too much -

CONNOR

Why?

RACHEL

Because you're my best friend! And I shouldn't be thinking about you like this – like about your stupid eyes and how my stomach gets all weird and tight whenever you look at me while I'm talking – because you really look at me, right? You like look into me, does that make sense? Because you do that. And I can't always make eye contact with you because it just hits me that you're fucking listening – actually listening – and so I stare at the wall behind your head and I try not to think about how you're looking at me. And oh my god, you have the best laugh. The best. I can hear it sometimes when something stupid happens in my life like I fling my pencil across the room because I'm tapping it too hard on my desk and I'm just like 'wow, this would make Connor laugh so much, I like his laugh'. That's so stupid! - And your smile shouldn't be so fucking sexy, okay? It just shouldn't. It's annoying. Has anyone ever told you that your stupid face is super fucking annoying? Because someone should. Someone should tell you that. You should just be stopped honestly – because you're so funny and ridiculous and you -

While she's pacing, Connor stands. He waits for her to turn back toward him and grabs her, cutting off her rambling with a kiss. It should be a really, really, good kiss.

CONNOR

That was -

RACHEL

not weird?

CONNOR

Totally not weird.

*They let go of each other and take a few steps
away, considering.*

RACHEL

I've only been single for like, a week.

CONNOR

I know.

RACHEL

I'm probably moving away in May.

CONNOR

I know.

RACHEL

This is a little bit crazy.

CONNOR

Yep.

RACHEL

But I'm not half as surprised as I thought I'd be.

CONNOR

Me either.

A pause.

RACHEL

I could fall in love with you.

CONNOR

Me too. I think I already am, a little bit.

RACHEL

Me too.

CONNOR

Okay.

RACHEL

Okay. Can you kiss me again?

CONNOR

Absolutely.

They kiss. The lights fade.

End of play.

Enough

Haley Putnam

What constitutes a perfect woman? Is it long, beautiful hair? Dresses and makeup? The perfect hourglass figure? Is there such a thing as a “perfect woman?” I’d argue that there isn’t.

In society, we are so caught up in looking perfect, saying the right things, and following the status quo. But what is the point? Life is supposed to be messy and full of surprises. Nobody and no life is perfect.

I’ve always been told by family, strangers, and by society that I’m not good enough. I’ve been criticized for being overweight, not being feminine enough, for being a tomboy, for being gay, for being me. After a while, I started to internalize all of that oppression and believed that I wasn’t enough.

“Are you really going to wear THAT?” “Why don’t you wear a nice dress?” “Why did you damage your body with tattoos?” “I don’t hate the sinner, just the sin.” “It’s just a phase, you’ll get over it.” “Are you sure you’re gay? Maybe it’s just an excuse for something else.” “Are you a boy or a girl?” “Do you have a boyfriend yet?”

These are things that I have heard and still continue to hear. But let me ask you:

Am I less of a woman for not wearing makeup or dresses?
Am I less of a woman for having short hair and tattoos? Am I less of a woman for not being a size 6? Am I less of a woman for being independent and challenging the “norm?” Am I less of a woman because I’m not heterosexual? Am I less of a woman for wanting a career?

The answer is no.

There is no wrong way to be; to exist.

I am a smart, strong, independent woman who is really damn proud of who she is and how far she has come. Nobody will ever be able to tell me who to be or how to act just to “fit in.” Why fit in when we were born to stand out? Be yourself and own it.

I am a woman. I am gay. I am me. And that’s enough.

Untitled Monologue

Lisa Arrona

Waking up is the worst part of the day. I say that to people and they label me as “not a morning person.” But I’m not saying I hate mornings. I love mornings. Mornings are light-hearted and covered in pastel colors. Breathing in the morning air is like drinking water after you’ve just had a mint.

I like playing happy-go-lucky music and pretending I’m the protagonist in a movie getting ready for the day that will change my life.

But waking up is a completely different experience. Your eyelids are somehow heavier to lift than the arm you just used to hit snooze. You try and use the same arm to slap yourself awake, but you’ve suddenly lost all of your strength again.

When finally your body is ready to move, you use your blurred vision to read the time, which usually reads “ten minutes late to class” o’clock. You panic, rush getting ready, and miss the morning you love so much.

This whole year has just been one big, annoyingly stupid wake up call. And frankly, I don’t have the energy to go through this cycle anymore. I just want to sleep!

The following is a retelling of “Carmen” created by Vance Reese’s Myths, Music and Dream class. The authors are as follows:

Stage Manager and Director: Teila Vochatzer
Scene 1 - Carmen Noir: Ryan Burnette
Scene 2 - Carmen Text: Caroline Vargas
Scene 3 - Carmen Awkward Teen Romance: Molly Brown
Scene 4 - Carmen Poem and Dance: McKayla Robinette
Intermission - Backstage Interviews: Lance Perl
Scene 5 - Carmen Greek Myth: Haley Putnam
Scene 6 - Carmen Hip-Hop Smack Down: Daniel Ethridge
Scene 7 - Carmen Shakespeare: Amber Blanton

Prologue

The stage manager is seen center stage, in front of the drawn curtain.

STAGE MANAGER

Today, we retell the story of Carmen written by French composer Georges Bizet. We will be retelling the story through many different styles of storytelling, this retelling is from the perspective of Brevard College students in the Music, Myths and Dreams Honors course. We start our journey at Dunham Music Building’s Parking Lot, where we drove to Regal Cinema at Biltmore Park to watch The Metropolitan Live in HD’s version of Carmen. When we arrived Vance realized he had left the tickets in his office, but don’t worry fate was on our side, Vance was able to find the confirmation of the tickets, and we were able to get in.

STAGE MANAGER

Once we were in the theatre we all found our seats, and we got ready to experience Carmen in a very different way than what you are about to experience. You, the audience will now experience Carmen in a new and innovative way. Sit back, relax, and enjoy our retelling of Carmen.

The stage manager exits SL and the curtain opens to reveal scene 1 of Carmen and the stage manager's calling booth on a deck above the set.

Scene 1

We see the stage manager has moved to a calling booth onstage, we see the stage manager ready to call scene 1.

STAGE MANAGER

Light Cue 5. Go. Actors enter scene 1. Go. Sound Cue 4. Go.

VOICE OVER

“The scene was Spain. 1929. Dive bar in a little town just south’a Barcelona.

I’m mindin’ my own, having a cigar with my friends, Jim Beam and Jack Daniels.

I’m reachin’ for my third drink when this lady comes waltzin’ in like she runs the joint. Every guy and half the gals were just ooglin’ and awein’ over her, when here she comes, all the way across the bar, over to me.

This lady, she just screamed bad news. I had half a mind to pay

VOICE OVER

my tab and take my leave, but before I could, I found a rose tossed into my hands. All eyes in the room on me.

After an eternity, I said, “What brings you to town, miss? These streets, they ain’t safe for someone like you at night.” She took a long drag from her cigarette and replied, “Just lookin’ for love, mister. And someone who could handle it. Love’s like a rebellious bird, y’know? Can’t be tamed.”

With that, she flicked out her cigarette into my glass of bourbon, and said to the barkeep, “This one’s on him,” took her drink, and walked right back into the night.

As she left, I swear I could hear her say, “Could be you, lover boy,” and I had to wonder if she might be right.

Either way, I had a feeling this wouldn’t be the last I’d see of Carmen...”

STAGE MANAGER

Light Cue 16. Go. Sound Cue 6. Go. Scene Change 1. Go.

Scene 2

STAGE MANAGER

Light Cue 17. Go. Actors enter scene 2. Go. Projection Cue 1 and Sound Cue 7. Go.



Michaela >

Where are you???

Sorry I just now saw this...

That's ok! Your mom says hi 😊

Awww. Hi, mom! 😍

I also say hi~

Hi ❤️❤️❤️❤️

Your mom also wanted to give you a kiss but she's not there soooo

You're not here either

What

What



iMessage





Michaela >

Where are you???

Sorry I just now saw this...

That's ok! Your mom says hi 😊

Awww. Hi, mom! 😍

I also say hi~

Hi ❤️❤️❤️❤️

Your mom also wanted to give you a kiss but she's not there soooo

You're not here either

What

What



iMessage



STAGE MANAGER

Light cue 28. Go. Projection Cue 20 and Sound Cue 14. Go.
Scene Change 2. Go.

Scene 3

STAGE MANAGER

Light Cue 29. Go. Sound Cue 15. Go. Actors enter scene 3. Go.

Factory bell rings. Cigarette girls emerge from the factory, greeted by young men gathered to flirt with them.

After some time of the girls smoking and flirting...out comes Carmen. All of the men helplessly fall at her feet.

NEEDY MAN #1

When will you love me!?

NEEDY MAN #2

LOVE ME Carmen!

NEEDY MAN #3

CARMEN! LOVE ME!

CARMEN

(trying to be as cliché as possible) Love is a rebellious bird that no one can tame. He has never known law. If you don't love me, I love you. If I love you watch yourself.

Overly dramatic music plays.

NEEDY MAN #1

Choose a lover!

NEEDY MAN #2

Yeah! Choose me!

NEEDY MAN #3

No! ME!

Carmen finds Don Jose ignoring her as irritating so she saunters over to try and catch his attention (who's needy now?).

Carmen plays with a rose, does weird dance moves, and then wack's him (supposedly it's "sexy"- gross) before giving him the rose to keep.

He has no idea what hit him.

STAGE MANAGER

Light Cue 32. Go. Sound Cue 17. Go. Scene change 3. Go.

Scene 4

STAGE MANAGER

Light Cue 33. Go. Actors enter scene 4. Go. Sound cue 18. Go.

VOICE OVER

The laughter of friends, enjoying the evening.
Hard shoes on the bar floor.
Come, join the gypsy dance.

Stomp. Stomp. Sharp and loud.
Watch the gypsies tall and proud.
Clap. Stomp. Watch and see.
The gypsies as they put you in their spell.

Stomp. Turn. Flighty as can be.
Hard shoes on the bar floor.
Join the gypsy dance.

STAGE MANAGER

Light Cue 39. Go. Sound cue 20. Go. Please open house for intermission. Scene change 4. Go.

Intermission will be 36 minutes long. During intermission will be a tour of the stage, and we will have Lance on the ground speaking to both actors and technicians. Take it away Lance!

Intermission

LANCE

Hello and Welcome, My name is Lance Perl. Welcome to the MET HD Backstage live...

We have been looking forward to this performance all day. The stage crew has been preparing for this massive transition. After a great deal of practice, they have refined the process to make it fluent and efficient. You can see here the crew working live backstage. It is rather remarkable.

We are now going to ask the Head of the Crew a few questions:

Lance: What are some unique aspects of this production?

HEAD OF CREW

Hi Lance, Thanks for taking the time to chat. There are so many unique aspects about this set. I have found the use of turntables to be the biggest challenge. This set uses 3 turn tables throughout the whole show. The crew works hard to set them up and break. The incredible scenic design is also a unique element of the show. Having such a short intermission to make these huge changes is difficult.

LANCE

Thank you for chatting with me. I'll let you get back.

HEAD OF CREW

Before I go I want to shout out to my nephew Jeffery and my sister Velma. Hi guys.

LANCE

Well that was wonderful. What a unique set. Now we are going to take a moment to talk with the singer who played Don Jose. Hi there, we have a question from a big fan, Teila V. who wants to know "what is it like being in a Met Opera"

DON JOSE

It is absolutely incredible. I have had the greatest experiences with this show. I have played this role a number of times but this time I feel like the cast has really come together.

LANCE

Thanks for chatting with me Don Jose. I hope you have a great second act. I have really been enjoying the show so far.

LANCE

Thank you, ladies, and gentlemen for coming out today to the MET HD live. We hope you will check out some other performances in the future and that you enjoy and stay awake during the second act.

STAGE MANAGER

Please close house. Light cue 40. Go. Light cue 41 and sound cue 21. Go. Light Cue 42. Go. Actors enter scene 5. Go. Light cue. 43. Go.

Scene 5

STAGE MANAGER

Light cue 44. Go. Sound Cue 22. Go.

MOIRAI (FATE)

Entering into the cavernous underground was Carmen, the great seductress of man. Upon entering, Carmen was abruptly startled by the entrance of The Three Fates, sent to determine her human destiny and cut the thread of life. The three beings were Clotho, the Spinner of fate, Lachesis, the Allotter of fate, and Atropos, the one who would determine the moment of Carmen's very demise. Carmen is to know not when she will meet Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos again, but when she does, it will signify the end, because her moral debt must be paid at last.

STAGE MANAGER

Light cue 46. Go. Sound cue 24. Go. Scene Change 5. Go.

Scene 6

STAGE MANAGER

Light Cue 47. Go. Actors enter scene 6. Go. Sound cue 25. Go.

Don José: Who goes there?

Escamillo: Escamillo in the house!

Don José: Ah! I've heard about you from around the town.

Escamillo: Oh have you?

Don José: Yes I have, so you're welcome to stay!

Escamillo: Well I appreciate that!

Don José: Of course!

Escamillo: And who might you be?

Don José: Don José.

Escamillo: Great!

Don José: So how's life?

Escamillo: Oh man lemme tell ya! There's this gypsy in town and she's the hottest girl I have ever seen.

Don José: Yup!

Escamillo: Wanna be her suitor.

Don José: Yup!

Escamillo: Wish I could just do her.

Don José: Yup!

Escamillo: It drives me mad!

Don José: Escamillo! Escamillo! But what's her name?

Escamillo: Her name?

Don José: Her name.

Escamillo: Her name is Carmen!

Don José: Carmen?

Escamillo: Carmen! Her last lover was a soldier who deserted for her. Probably a jack ass with too much sass, not enough class, and probably always high on grass.

Don José: Oh really?

Escamillo: Huh?

Don José: You either stay the fuck away from her or catch this knife! I'll slice you and dice you up smaller than rice and you'll pay the price, alright?

Escamillo: Oh I see. You're the sad sorry son of a bitch who she used and left!

Don José: You wanna fight? Then fight! Draw your blade and see whose grave gets dug you smug filthy bug!

Escamillo: At a later time DJ. Carmen's gonna come watch me fight bulls in Seville. Better write your will before you're killed!

STAGE MANAGER

Light cue 59. Go. Sound cue 27. Go. Scene change 6. Go.

Scene 7

STAGE MANAGER

Light cue 60. Go. Sound cue 28. Go. Actors enter for scene 7. Go.

A great crowd gathers around Escamillo as he kisses Carmen's hand. The crowd continues to grow and cheer for Escamillo and the other bullfighters.

ESCAMILLO

Carmen, if thou hast ever loved me my success shall fill thee with pride.

CARMEN

As I wear my heart upon my sleeve, I love you. Never have I loved another more.

THE CROWD

Bravo! Hurrah! Glory to the charge!

Escamillo exits stage right, followed by the crowd. Frasquita and Mercedes enter stage left.

FRASQUITA

We come bearing dreadful, yet expected news.

MERCEDES

Take heed, Carmen. He is here.

CARMEN

Who?

MERCEDES

Don Jose. He is hidden amongst the crowd.

CARMEN

I am not a woman to tremble and shake before him. I have been expecting his arrival, and I shall speak to him privily.

FRASQUITA

Take care, Carmen.

Frasquita and Mercedes exit stage right. Don Jose moves downstage right of Carmen from where he has been hiding in the shadows.

CARMEN

It is you. I had been warned that you were about this day. They told me you would seek me out and possibly even seek to take my life away. But cowardice does not run within my veins and I have no intention of running.

DON JOSE

It is I. But I am no threat to thee. I implore thee, beseech thee. I beg thee to forget about our past and allow us to begin life anew. We have seen better days. Allow us to start over together, far away, under new skies of deepest blue.

CARMEN

You ask the impossible of me. No lie has ever slipped from my tongue and past my parting lips. In this, my mind is made. Whatever once found life between you and I is gone. I have never lied, but all is over between us.

DON JOSE

O, my beautiful Carmen. There is still time. There is still time enough to save myself with you and through you. O, my Carmen whom I adore so greatly.

CARMEN

You are wrong. The hour is nigh.

DON JOSE

There is still time for us.

CARMEN

No. The hour is upon us, and I know that you shall kill me. But whether I live or die, I shall never give in to you for I do not love you. Your plight is vain for you concern yourself over a heart that is not yours. The heart that beats within my chest, steady as a drum, belongs not to you but to another. Your piteous admirations leap from your tongue upon deaf ears in vain. From me, you shall receive nothing. You shall receive nothing from me because you are nothing to me.

DON JOSE

Then you truly love me no more?

CARMEN

I do not love you.

DON JOSE

But, alas! I love you still.

CARMEN

I repeat, your words are wasted upon deaf ears.

DON JOSE

Oh! My precious Carmen. Remember the past we shared and the love we once felt for one another. I am willing to do what must be done for you to love me again. I'll stay a bandit. I will do anything so long as you do not leave me. Leave me not to face this world without you, Carmen.

CARMEN

I shall not yield. I was born free. That is how I will remain, and that is how I shall die.

CROWDS AND FANFARE

(In the Arena)

Huzzah! What a charge! Right to the heart! What a fight!

DON JOSE

They cheer for the man you now love?

Don Jose grabs Carmen's wrist and pulls her to him.

CARMEN

Leave me alone!

DON JOSE

Carmen, you have to come with me! To allow you to run to him and laugh at me while in his arms would be to lose my heart's salvation. No, you shall not go to him!

Carmen struggles and breaks free from Don Jose's grip.

CARMEN

Than stab me or let me pass!

DON JOSE

For the last time, will you come with me?

CARMEN

No. And the ring you once gave to me, take it.

Carmen takes a silver ring off her finger and throws it at Don Jose who begins advancing on Carmen with his knife in hand.

DON JOSE

Then so be it. You have made your choice.

Don Jose stabs Carmen. She falls dead into his arms. He shakes and sobs into her hair.

DON JOSE

I was the one who took your life. But have you not also taken mine? May I rot behind bars and then into the fires of eternity for it was I who killed my beloved and adored Carmen.

STAGE MANAGER

Light cue 92. Go. Sound cue 30. Go. Light cue 93. Go. Light cue 94. Go. Please open house. We have reached the end of this production of Carmen. Light cue 95. Go. Sound cue 31. Go. Thank you everyone for a great performance tonight.

Epilogue

STAGE MANAGER

We have reached the end of this retelling of Carmen but it's not truly over yet. Remember those Brevard College students who still needed to leave the theatre we return to their story. The students exit the theatre and they then are asked to take a picture where everyone acts as their favorite character in the opera. They then all head for the school van and leave to return to the school. This ends our tale of the Brevard College retelling of Carmen.

VISUAL
&
DIGITAL
ART

Ciggy Time?
Kristen Martinets
Oil on canvas



Potpourry
Kristen Martinets
Oil on canvas

The Lucid Dreamer
Kristen Martinets
Candle wax, cold wax, and acrylic on panel



Untitled and Untitled
Ivy Blanton



Dublin Trip 1 and Dublin Trip 2

Aia Andonovska



Dublin Trip 3
Aia Andonovska



Untitled
Molly Riddle

Shelling
Alexis Henley



Pink, Palms and Pareidolia
Alexis Henley



Staples
Jeni Welch



Dryad
Lisa Arrona



Costa Rica
Unknown Author



Lions Point
Unknown Author



Untitled
Unknown Author



Untitled
Danielle Brown



Untitled
Unknown
Author

San Fran 1
Audrey Ashburner



San Fran 2
Audrey Ashburner



San Fran 3
Audrey Ashburner



San Fran 4
Audrey Ashburner



HALLOWEEN
CONTEST
-2018-

A Journey Through The Final Night

Amber Blanton

My journey was so dark and sour,
As time crept toward the witches hour.
Gusts of wind and anger blew,
As I forgot what once I knew.
I turned around and 'round and 'round.
My heartbeat was the only sound
That filled my soul and filled the night
That filled my dreary world with fright.
A beat just like a steady drum
That caused my mind to go so numb.
A beat that once controlled my life
That brought to me such grief and strife.
A beat that I could not control
That made a dreadful, empty hole.
A hole could not e're be filled
That took my happiness and killed
The love that was a part of me
And made it so I could not see.
My heartbeat grew so awfully loud.
I had no strength left to be proud.
I turned and faced the wicked west,
Then stuck my hand inside my chest.
I tugged and pulled my heart right out.
The pain was near enough to shout.
My heart was charred and black as coal.
I knew that I would ne're be whole.
And so I wrapped my fingers tight,
And crushed my heart that fateful night.

Caspar

Oscar Sifuentes

Caspar lands face first on the grey concrete road. He feels no pain, although he isn't wearing any clothes. What he is wearing is a plain white robe. He feels a slight breeze, confirming the lack of underclothes. He performs a push up to regain his bearings sitting up. He looks around, but there's not much to look at. He can only see approximately five feet around him in all directions. A dark gray mist consumes this entire road. Caspar makes the effort to stand and wipes off his white robe, but there is not a speck of dust on it. He tentatively makes his way to the left edge of the road. He tries stepping on the ground, but instead his foot falls forward into nothingness.

Caspar falls back in overcorrection of his imbalance. This road is floating, or it is in the air. He stands again. He can't seem to remember how he got there, or where he came from, or who he is. He looks down at his flawless tan skin. No marks or bumps or bruises, despite the fall that landed him there. He inhales and starts coughing. The air is burnt, yet the atmosphere is cold and lonely. He walks forward into the smoke, not seeing another option. There are a few seconds of blindness and then more road. The same road. The exact same road. Where the hell is he?

He sits for what seems like millennia. The only familiarity is repetition and reminiscence of sitting on the same road for lifetimes. He doesn't use the bathroom or get hungry. His entire body is devoid of bodily function. Finally, there is a light. A bright light projects from a doorway. A woman walks out, swatting away the smoke. She is coughing. The Barbie wears an all white business suit and holds an i-Pad. She finishes coughing, "Hi!"

“Who...” Caspar squeaks.

“I’m Angela. I’ll be your liaison today.” Angela waves enthusiastically. “OMG, so much smoke, right? It’s crazy.”

“An-ge-la” Caspar over pronounces the words. “Where am I?”

She hits her face with her palm, “Of course, duh. I didn’t even explain the basic stuff. You’re dead.”

“Dead?”

“Yeah, I’m here to lead you into the afterlife.” She scrolls down the tablet. “I see your name is Caspar Monroe. Are you related to Marilyn Monroe? A friend of mine was her liaison. Actually now that I think about it, Monroe was a stage name. Who knows? Maybe you were related. Are you?” Angela examines Caspar.

“No, I’m not. Where did I get this robe?” He tries untying the robe belt, but his hands fumble feverishly.

“Of course, you must have been like, ‘Where are my clothes? Where am I? How did I get here? How did I die?’” She laughs childishly with interjected snorting. “Can you remember how you died?”

“I can’t remember anything.”

“Ok...it says here you were shot in the heart.” An idea pops into her head and she starts singing, “And you’re too late. You give love a bad name.”

“Who shot me?”

“You did.” She winces with sympathy.

“I don’t feel like the suicidal type.” He looks at his hands once again.

“Oh, honey, no. It was an accident. Do you like potatoes?” She winks.

“Potato? I think so.”

“You jammed a potato launcher, so you started looking right down the barrel of it and it shot and the starchy Satan hit you right in the chest. Your heart stopped, just like that.” She snaps to emphasize her point.

“Wow. Who found me?”

“A neighbor smelled something and they busted into your apartment and your Pomeranian was chewing on your arm.” She says slowly.

“Oh my G-” He looks around. “Is this heaven? Are you an angel?”

“No silly,” Her eyes turn red and her voice deepens grotesquely. “I’m a demon.”

Caspar jumps back and trips over his own feet.

“Just kidding. We’re using this waiting room until you can be judged. Looking at your record, you have good chances. Follow me.” Angela walks back towards the glowing doorway. “*Caspar the friendly ghost*. I just got that.”

Untitled
Thomas Wilkens



