

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features a central, dark purple, almost black, shape that resembles a stylized figure or a large splash. This central element is surrounded by lighter shades of purple and lavender, which are further accented with streaks of bright green and yellow. The entire scene is filled with numerous small, colorful bubbles and droplets in various sizes, creating a dynamic and textured effect. The overall color palette is rich and saturated, with a strong emphasis on purple and green tones.

**FORCES** 2015

I’LL NEVER FORGET sitting crossed-legged in front of the new color TV, nose close enough to touch the screen, my mother swearing this new invention was going to turn humanity “cross-eyed.” Then, it happened. Dorothy stepped out of that house, opened that door, and suddenly I was transported into Oz, a scene as if Van Gogh and Monet and Toulouse-Lautrec all rolled themselves into a ball and then exploded color and form into my black and white world. Mother was right; I was cross-eyed for months trying to digest my new eyes, working both at the same time out of harmony, in separate directions trying to see, to understand how only *my world*, up to that point was color. Up until then, kids across the sea were black and white, two tones, contrast and focus; the world went from a simple “yes” and “no,” “right” and “wrong,” to the visible spectrum of color somewhere over the rainbow. The dark black on a uniform startlingly became what it was: red rich blood. The ocean became azure crystal. Snow became a new white – it was *snow* white. I was curious yet confused, elated yet scared. I suddenly felt a responsibility to grow up a bit and see the world as it was - a beautiful, conflicted, glorious, horrid, curious spinning blue marble against a black backdrop, sprinkled with glittered galaxies, the stars reaching their prism fingers, calling for conjecture.

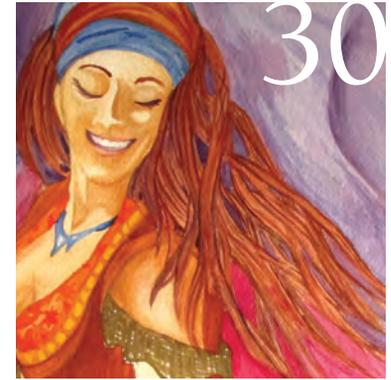
This edition of Forces is our first all color edition, granted approval by our ever, farseeing Board of Trustees.

This edition is quietly, humbly dedicated to a long supporter of Forces, of the arts, of work ethic, of a “good hamburger,” and of the colorful life: Bill Kelly. One human being I can truly say that, “Because of Bill Kelly’s life, passion, and service, the world is a better place.” I would add, “God, rest his soul,” but, I’m sure he’s, “busy being.”

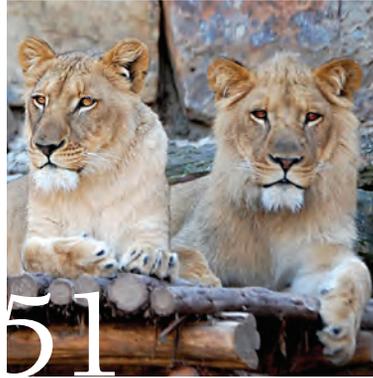
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**OIL AND INK** Amy Bedinghaus



**BLUE GREEN IRON** Rock Morris

**TRUEST TRUST**

Beth Turner Ayers

The greener grass  
 Called from the other side.  
*Of course* we wanted to go there,  
 To let our youth wander in another world,  
 See sights unseen, gather souvenirs.  
 The other side, not easily accessible,  
 Guarded by the silent sentinel  
 Seems a daunting task, but possible.  
 Entry requires cooperation,  
 Access requires the truest trust.  
 I volunteer to be the first  
 To venture onto new soil.  
 I place my hands with care and  
 Push down hard, avoiding rusty barbs,  
 Guardians to the field of wonders.  
 And I trust her, like best friends do,  
 To push upward on the top wire,  
 Knowing that she fully understands  
 That my life is in her hands.  
 One prick and I must endure  
 The torturous tetanus shot,  
 Praying that it works to

Prevent that campfire story clincher,  
 The dreaded lock jaw and  
 Wasting away in agony.  
 With wire opening wider,  
 I lift one leg across the  
 Teeth lined jaws of the shark,  
 And I do not breathe as I  
 Lean through to touch new earth,  
 To straddle then pass through  
 The mouth of the beast.  
 We are separated for a moment,  
 Friends, divided by danger,  
 But she trusts me, like best friends do.  
 So we reach our goal,  
 Ready to explore,  
 Knowing that we must pass, again,  
 Through the jaw of the beast  
 To be home in time for supper.

**RUSTY TWO** Rock Morris



**MODERN LOVE** Derrick Hamm

## CLARITY

Melissa Ackerman



AS I SAT ON AN AIRPLANE 30,000 feet in the air packed shoulder-to-shoulder headed to New York City, I could smell nothing but feet and the cheap perfume that came off of the elderly woman that sat beside me and I knew I had hit a crossroads. I had walked with the only person I could trust, Andrea, up and down a fast food ridden terminal over and over while she lectured me for three hours prior to the flight and I felt wedged between a rock and a hard place. Forced to choose between whom I believed could become my one true love and myself, I thought about how my heart had endured so much pain caused by a self-destructive and manipulative boy. Despite what he had told me, nothing would change. Despite what I wanted to believe, I knew it would always stay the same no matter how much I wanted it to change. I had begun to remember every harsh word, every bitter lie, and every bruise he had left me with. My soul had tarnished and when it all finally caught up with me, I couldn't help but cry. I turned to the look out the window so no one would notice the tears that poured down my face when I saw the inspiring, addictive, blinding lights of New York at my feet. Then in that moment with the push of one button, I had obtained peace. I ended a poisonous abusive relationship and started living, not for someone else, but finally for me.

I sat on the plane waiting to park at gate B24 at JFK airport and compiled all my memories of Ty and the relationship we once had. I analyzed every fight we had, all the times he won with a swing or smack. All the times I let him guide me to the wrong decision. All the fear he instilled in me. All of it came back and I began to feel broken. Then I tried to remember the good times

DESPITE WHAT I WANTED TO BELIEVE, I KNEW  
IT WOULD ALWAYS STAY THE SAME NO MATTER  
HOW MUCH I WANTED IT TO CHANGE.

we had, I thought happy memories would make the pain go away but my mind had drawn a blank. I could not recall any good memories with him. We didn't have a single good memory, everything ran through my head but not one memory of him turned out positive. "Why did you stay with him for so long?" I whispered to myself. "Because he made you believe that no one else could possibly love you or want you. Because he told you, you were nothing. Because if he treated you like you were dirt, maybe you actually were." I finally answered back to myself. I found myself wondering if I had made the right decision leaving him, after all he did love me, at least he said he did. My energy exploded into thousands of pieces as I grabbed my luggage

WE DIDN'T HAVE A SINGLE GOOD MEMORY, EVERYTHING RAN THROUGH MY HEAD BUT NOT ONE MEMORY OF HIM TURNED OUT POSITIVE.

to get off the plane. "If he loved me why was he so awful in how he treated me? Actions speak louder than words and his actions said, 'I hate you.' So how did he love you?" I kept thinking. I gestured to Andrea who sat four rows ahead of me that I ended things with Ty and she smiled. That smile dragged my energy level to the stars, she knew leaving him would cut the pain out of my life and I realized, I came out of that relationship beaten down but knowing I could still put up a fight. I pushed my way through a sea of half-asleep businessmen and women to get to Andrea and hug her. I drowned her in tears of happiness and relief. The fear had faded and a new soul invaded me.

After eight months of pure torture, it eased my mind to know that I finally freed myself from someone so pompous and gruesome. For the first

time in what felt like my entire life, I didn't need to fake a smile. "I hope you know what you're doing here. You'll never find anyone like me again." Ty texted me, I chuckled at the thought of him thinking I would want someone else like him.

"I know. That's the point Ty. I'm done with you and everyone like you. I've let you control me and tear me down for far too long, and I'm done." I replied. My courage increased by the second, I controlled my own decisions, thoughts, and life for once and it felt like I had advanced to a new chapter. I walked down yet another fast food ridden terminal, but this time I felt powerful rather than powerless. I presented myself with a relaxed demeanor and it felt like a sparkle had appeared in my eyes. As I walked to baggage claim I thought of how had I crawled out of the dark into this new vibrant light and I loved it.

Andrea and I collected our things and went out the doors of baggage claim into New York. The smell of garbage and rain filled the air, and all I could only hear car horns and two people fighting over a cab, I didn't mind though. Despite New York traffic, the taxi ride to Times Square felt relatively short. I was so struck with the flamboyant sites; I didn't pay attention to time. We walked down Eighth Street towards Forty Second Street; the scent of spoiled meat, body odor and heaven filled the air. Surrounded by a sea of tourists and New Yorkers that pushed and shoved their way past me as I stood dead center of Times Square. One breath at a time I took it all in, lights so bright my pupils constricted, wind that blew so hard I could barely stay still and rain that poured down by the pounds. It all completely paralyzed me. The sense of stability reformed in my life right as another

text from Ty came in. “How could you do this to me? After all I did for you! You can’t leave me. You don’t have anyone else. You’re trash. No one else will ever love you like I do!”

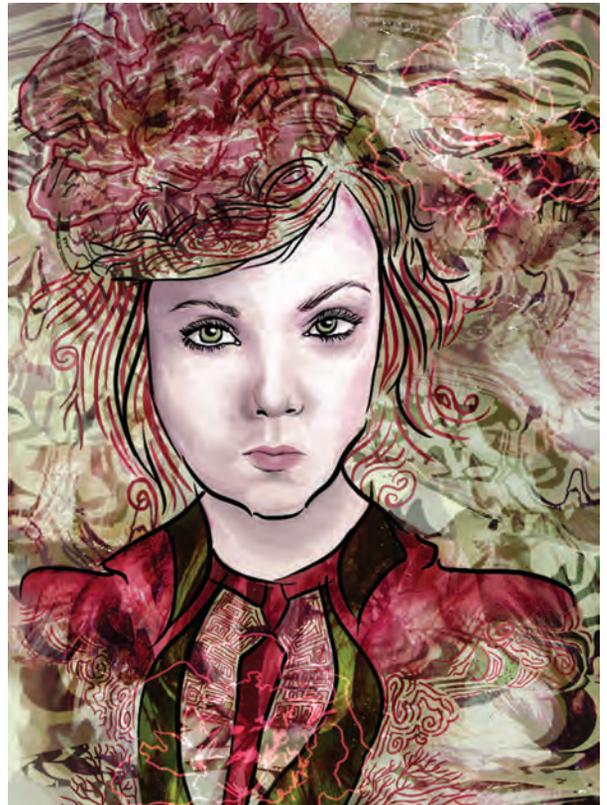
“After everything you did for me? Don’t you mean to me? How many times did I take you back after you slammed your fist into me then promised it would never happen again? How many long sleeve shirts did I have to buy to hide the bruises you gave me? Even now as you’re trying to fight for me, you’re treating me like dirt. I’m completely and utterly done with you.” I replied as I embraced the ever so cliché setting. It felt so good to tell him off. The way this city gave me courage and transformed my outlook on everything enthralled

**I ALWAYS HAD THE ABILITY TO LEAVE TY, BUT NEW YORK GAVE ME THE COURAGE TO DO SO.**

me. I’m not usually one to become speechless but I failed to grasp any word in the English language. Nothing could form as I stood in the middle of Times Square for what felt like hours and soaked up this great big powerful city and all it had to offer. New York became my home in milliseconds, even though it did smell like a homeless man’s breath. It dripped with perfection. “If home is where the heart is, I’m never leaving this city.” I said to Andrea as she took an outrageous number of pictures and then it finally hit me. I always had the ability to leave Ty, but New York gave me the courage to do so. Placed in the city of my dreams I finally saw what I had missed from my life the past eight months, passion and joy. My passion for

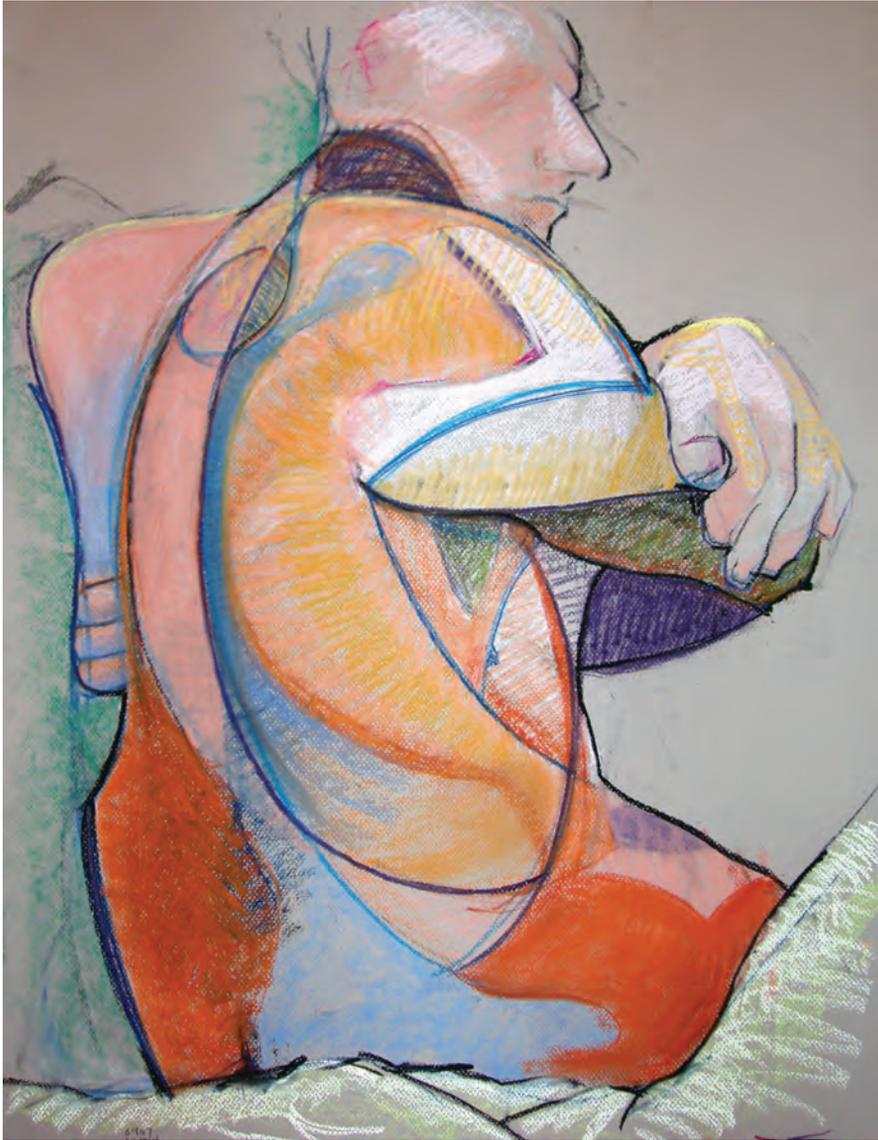
living life to the fullest reemerged inside of me. I could see again. I saw how much life truly had to offer me and how I could not let anyone control my own life.

I woke up the next morning to the sound of car horns. The scent of freshly picked roses filled the room. I dashed out of bed and danced my way through the morning as I dressed for a fantastic day planned in the city. New York motivated me; I redeemed solitude and I knew I would storm the street of this unique and flawless city as the best me I had ever been. It truly transformed me and I am forever in debt to New York. It saved my life.



**UNTITLED** Vivian Qian

**MY PASSION FOR LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST REEMERGED INSIDE OF ME. I COULD SEE AGAIN.**



**MALE BACK** Rock Morris

**DEAR DADDY**

Saffyre Falkenberg

Remember when you bought me Fuzzy Wuzzy, the teddy bear with the matted brown fur and dull glass eyes? He lived on my pink polka dot bedspread for all those years, propped against the pillows.

Remember Rapunzel the plush white rabbit? She had a pink bow that I tied around her black button eyes, so she didn't have to see what happened. She sat beside the Care Bear that matched the ones on my panties.

Remember when you gave me Bananas, the monkey with Velcro hands? I stuck them to her ears, so she didn't have to hear. Or Patrick Puppy, the stuffed beagle whose noises sounded like yours once the voice box in his tummy began to wear out.

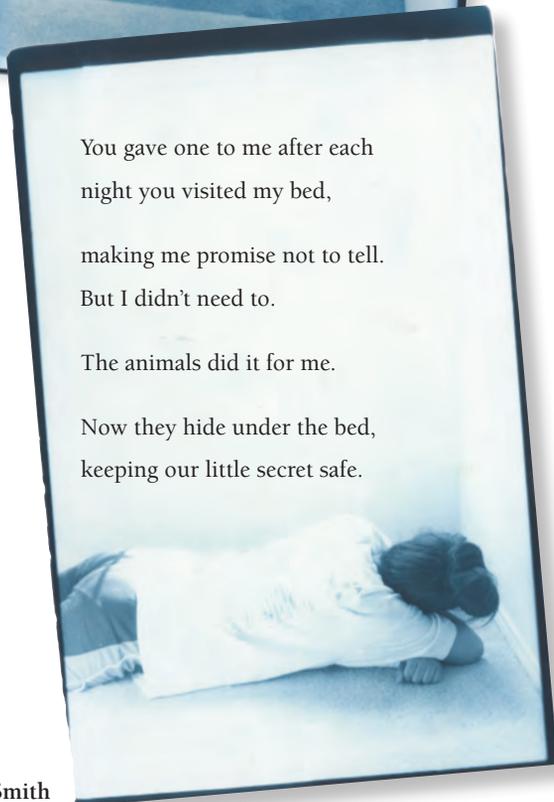
Remember all those Beanie Babies, more innumerable than the nights you spent with me? They all stayed on my bed through the years, a cotton and polyester monument to the silence you purchased.



You gave one to me after each night you visited my bed, making me promise not to tell. But I didn't need to.

The animals did it for me.

Now they hide under the bed, keeping our little secret safe.



**#2, #3 PHOTOS** Tommi Smith



**DEAR YOU**

Aaron Ly

Salute to days of solitude apart  
Where open hearts and shallow marks are equal  
The well of water known as “I love you”  
Has been reduced to dribbling drops  
While soda pop and Tequila shots inhabit  
The world around you but she still lives by that well  
And with an ocean in between  
With distance anchoring their dreams  
The only thing that ties their strings is postal literacy  
But the years got by  
And with every stroke constructing letters

**EXCHANGE** Claire (Qu) Wu

She tries to grow another feather  
But there's so many now, they weigh her down  
And only her spirit keeps her tethered to the ground  
But the only sound that you can hear  
Is the scribble and scratch of a pen and pad or piece of paper  
And it doesn't have to be neatly tapered  
It doesn't have to be college-ruled  
Because like a fool she blissfully wrote out these  
Letters of love on the back of her tax bills  
Her rough drafts consisted of the backs of grocery receipts  
And leaving no method obsolete she  
Disobeyed the physics of her heart  
And disregarded that ocean for the sky  
In her right hand is a pen. In her left is a string  
Because as a child when she was first plunged  
Into the darkest depths of "school"  
There were only three things she found comprehensible:  
The first was that boys have cooties  
The second was that THIS was how you hold a pencil  
You take your index and middle finger and with the utensil as a barrier  
You squeeze tight and you write, but what she wrote was incomprehensible  
That was when she learned the third thing  
That THIS was how you STRING together letters and words  
And you let them RING throughout your head almost  
As if the metaphysical was physical  
So she tightens her left hand into a ball and lets her wrist roll  
And she doesn't let go, and it's not because she can't  
It's because she doesn't know  
How, so every night, I can see the silhouette  
Of a feathered quill against a piece of paper  
Ending each continuous string of thought  
On, "I hope to see you soon." With emotion  
In every word she prays a silent prayer  
To her savior and with the next line,  
The next page, the next letter: "Dear you,"





## DECADENT SKY

Safia Hagi

The sky shattered into fragments of red, orange and yellow.  
 We were the ones that fractured it with our broken dreams.  
 The tastes of lingering fantasies were on the tip of our tongues.  
 But the ends of our fingertips were caressed by hollow winds,  
 Not quite grasping the melody of accomplishment.  
 Tessa stood staring at the horizon of Scarborough beach,  
 The decadent sky of artistry was an intact example of aspirations.  
 Cities were now becoming more hipster.  
 “My, that Tessa bird’s a reet bobby dazzler!” was yelled from the distance.  
 But as Gin Rummy always said, “The absence of evidence is not the  
 Evidence of absence.”  
 The color orange reminded her of death.  
 Tessa will die eating an orange.  
 The rainbow colored dog stared at her silently before he started to talk,  
 “Je T’aime.”  
 Effie watched silently as Tessa flew away into the distance with her  
 Multicolored friend.  
 The sky shattered completely and was embraced by ebony black.

**NIGHTTIME LIGHTS** Taylor Roseberry



**THE BLUE BELL** Hayley Earnest

**DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY**

Brandi Litton

**D**“DO WHATEVER MAKES YOU HAPPY” is an order that encompasses contemporary society with an almost plaguing consistency. Logic would typically dictate that with such an overzealous use of a statement, the answer to how one may achieve happiness should be easily obtained. Unfortunately, a concrete definition has eluded mankind for ages; after all, the wolf’s perception of happiness differs from that of the sheep. While it is true that happiness is subjective, the foundation remains consistent: happiness is a joyous emotion that results from one achieving any degree of personal fulfillment and overcoming obstacles.

*Marcus Aurelius* stated that “very little is needed to make a happy life” (774), and my experiences have enlightened me to the truth of this simple statement. I was brought up in an environment that excelled in instability; my mother was a lover of the convicted and would constantly introduce a new “wronged man” to her young children on a near bi-monthly basis, my biological father did nothing in his power to protect his offspring, and when my mother’s constant influx of men started abusing her and her family, she so often searched for a new home that we rarely unpacked our things from their boxes. Chaos became our reality, and my mother’s unwillingness to learn from her past transgressions made her its vassal.

As I blossomed into womanhood, I went to my mother in hopes of gaining an understanding. “Why do you do all this? Why do you think you need a man in your life?” I asked her. With a broken smile and blue eyes that once held a passion for life, she responded with: “Because it makes me happy.” Despite having been only a child, I knew even then that happiness was not forcing yourself to sacrifice all you had to offer, merely for the sake of retaining a partner. It was this epiphany that resulted in my

UNFORTUNATELY, A CONCRETE DEFINITION HAS ELUDED  
MANKIND FOR AGES; AFTER ALL, THE WOLF’S PERCEPTION  
OF HAPPINESS DIFFERS FROM THAT OF THE SHEEP.

Understanding of happiness in such a manner, that upon reading author Danielle Crittenden's thoughts on happiness in her work *About Love*, I viewed them as inconceivable. She wrote that:

The pull between the desire to love and be loved and the desire to be free is an old, fierce one. If the error our grandmothers made was to have surrendered too much of themselves for others, this was perhaps better than not being prepared to surrender anything at all. The fear of losing oneself can, in the end, simply become an excuse for not giving any of oneself away. (801)

Crittenden's ideas on contemporary feminism are flawed; had her thoughts been as true as she claimed, then sacrificial women such as my mother should have been ecstatic at the thought of having husbands at their sides, regardless of quality. However, these women are pushed to the point of desperation and cling to what miniscule hope they have left, all under the influence of a crooked view of how one establishes happiness.

As the young witnesses to the corrupt joy enshrouding our mother, my brother and I were required to discover our own methods of merriment; we quickly discovered that it wasn't material possessions that made an enjoyable life, but the satisfaction of having an escape where we were queen and king of our own fantasy domains. My brother inspired fulfillment within himself by throwing on his toy gun and cowboy hat and pretending as though he was a savior and defender of the weak, and I achieved such a feeling by sitting alone and drawing pictures of what my life would entail once I had left this chaotic hell behind and displaying my agony through the rough strokes of my pencil. My mother's children were happy





**BOY POWERED CART** Hector Reyes

when they were fulfilled, even if our successes were merely illusions of our own devising with the intent of survival plaguing the backs of our minds.

The Dalai Lama's comment on such an elusive joy was unknown to us at that time, but the spiritual leader concluded: "if you have a strong sense of contentment, it doesn't matter whether you obtain the object or not; either way, you are still content" (793). Despite being children, we had learned to discover joy without requiring possession of the newest toy or trend; our happiness was abundant once we set goals for ourselves and successfully executed them. It was a boost to our young egos, which had been crushed under the weight of our abysmal world; we experienced joy from the only thing that truly allowed us room to do so: ourselves. We knew that while our home was a bleak and occasionally fearful place, we didn't have to continue living in such standards once the time came for us to fly from our nest.

The key to our successful happiness was taking pride in ourselves for any minor achievement; if we trained ourselves to focus on what the future contained instead of wallowing in our present

#### THE KEY TO OUR SUCCESSFUL HAPPINESS WAS TAKING PRIDE IN OURSELVES FOR ANY MINOR ACHIEVEMENT.

tragedy, we claimed a victory. As life continuously threw obstacles our way, we overcame them with thoughts of our hidden potential and what we would strive to accomplish upon growing older. As Henry David Thoreau claims in his work, *Walden*: "All men want, not something to *do with*, but something to *do*, or rather something to *be*" (779). My brother and I suffered in one of the worst scenarios of a home life, and our ecstasy derived from doing well in school, promising ourselves a better future, and managing to survive another week in Hell; refusing to surrender under the agony of our domestic life by striving

for our true potential was our method of achieving inner joy and peace with our surroundings. Once we learned how to sail both the calm and rough waters of the abusive typhoon, jaws dropped at how indifferent we became to the danger that dwelt within the closed doors of our three-bedroom house. My sibling and I ourselves are proof that Epictetus, in his work: *The Handbook*, spoke accurately that "when you behave in accordance with nature, you will take pride only in some good that is your own" (787).

Let us now shift our focus to a similar happiness under dramatically alternate circumstances; it does not take the worst situations to acquire such a joy. Upon entering the spring semester of my first year in college, I enrolled in Beginner's Karate; the purpose of this class was to learn the basic fundamentals of the Wado style and successfully execute them in stressful situations, not to achieve a higher belt status. I had always enjoyed learning and applying physical manners of self defense, so I was ecstatic upon entering this class. As the semester progressed, I found myself setting daily goals and exerting myself to reach them; I beamed with pride after each triumph, more than content to push my limits. However, contentment soon became a stranger as I realized that my peers were not all striving with the same foundations; they congratulated themselves for merely attending the class and surviving another day of sweat (and sometimes, tears).

I finally inquired my sensei (teacher) about furthering my lessons in the dojo (martial arts training hall) where he trained; I was enrolled within a matter of weeks. As with any new experience, I was consumed with anxiety and doubts; what if I looked foolish as a result of my being so new? What if everyone scorned me for holding back the class? Thoughts such as these were not foreign to me, so I commenced my usual plan: setting up a timeline of goals, no matter how small. Every small success,

whether it be finding my class, asking someone a question, completing paper work, or executing a correct technique, was an obstacle that I prided myself in overcoming.

Within a week's time I had adjusted to the practices of the dojo and began focusing on my forms. My daily ritual was discovering what needed improvement and what had already engraved itself upon my mind; each failure promised an eventual success. No critique or embarrassment kept my goals at bay; one glance of the black belt on the wall rekindled my motivation and I knew that my mistakes would eventually pay off. In his work, "In Pursuit of Unhappiness", author Darrin M. McMahon narrated such motivation as though he knew me personally: "Those are only happy... who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; ...some art of pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way" (785).

Happiness, regardless of a negative or positive influence, is acquired through the acts of overcoming obstacles, reaching goals, and obtaining personal fulfillment from such successes. Contemporary America is shrouded with the belief that true joy and achievement are results of how much money one earns, or one's marital status; such values result in a society consumed by a stigma that allows unions to transact too early in life and the majority to dirty its hands in order to obtain large doses of currency. If humans would pause their exhausting endeavors and attempt to better themselves instead of their possessions or marital status, our world would be a much more tolerable and enjoyable place to live. However, should we continue on our self-mutilating path of following the herd, we shall soon find ourselves trapped in a vicious circle, unable to escape the wolves at our door.

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**QUILT PROGRESS** Carol Cocking

“WHEN YOU BEHAVE IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATURE, YOU WILL TAKE PRIDE ONLY IN SOME GOOD THAT IS YOUR OWN”.



**COLUMN AT DALLAS HALL** Hector Reyes



**Florence Mae Dixon:  
CAMPUS EXPANSION DELAYED  
AFTER DISCOVERY OF 2,000 UNMARKED GRAVES**

Saffyre Falkenberg

I was 19 when my husband sent me to Jackson, Mississippi, away from the child I was sure couldn't be mine. He called it a hospital, but the white, stone columns, sprawling lawns, and enormous magnolia trees couldn't hide what it really was.

"Stay in bed," they said. "Don't wear yourself out." I was left to be coddled like the babe I left behind, rocked to sleep by mindless wails and the screeching of mockingbirds.

I wasted my days in bed, kept company by the smells of burning coal, kerosene, and melting wax. They didn't allow me to rest outside during the hot Mississippi summers, when the mosquitoes were the only visitors and the air was its own swamp. I was a number, just another lunatic; one more woman with a case of nerves.

I was 22 when I was moved to the new sanitarium, as patient # 29 gave me the "consumption." I suppose keeping white skin away from black skin was more important to them than keeping the sick away from the healthy. But we're all sick here.



**BENCH ON BISHOP** Hector Reyes



I became a living skeleton, drenched  
 in feverish sweat and hellfire. No point  
 in making friends with the other bodies;  
 they came and went quicker than there were beds.  
 We were all just coughing, sneezing bed numbers.

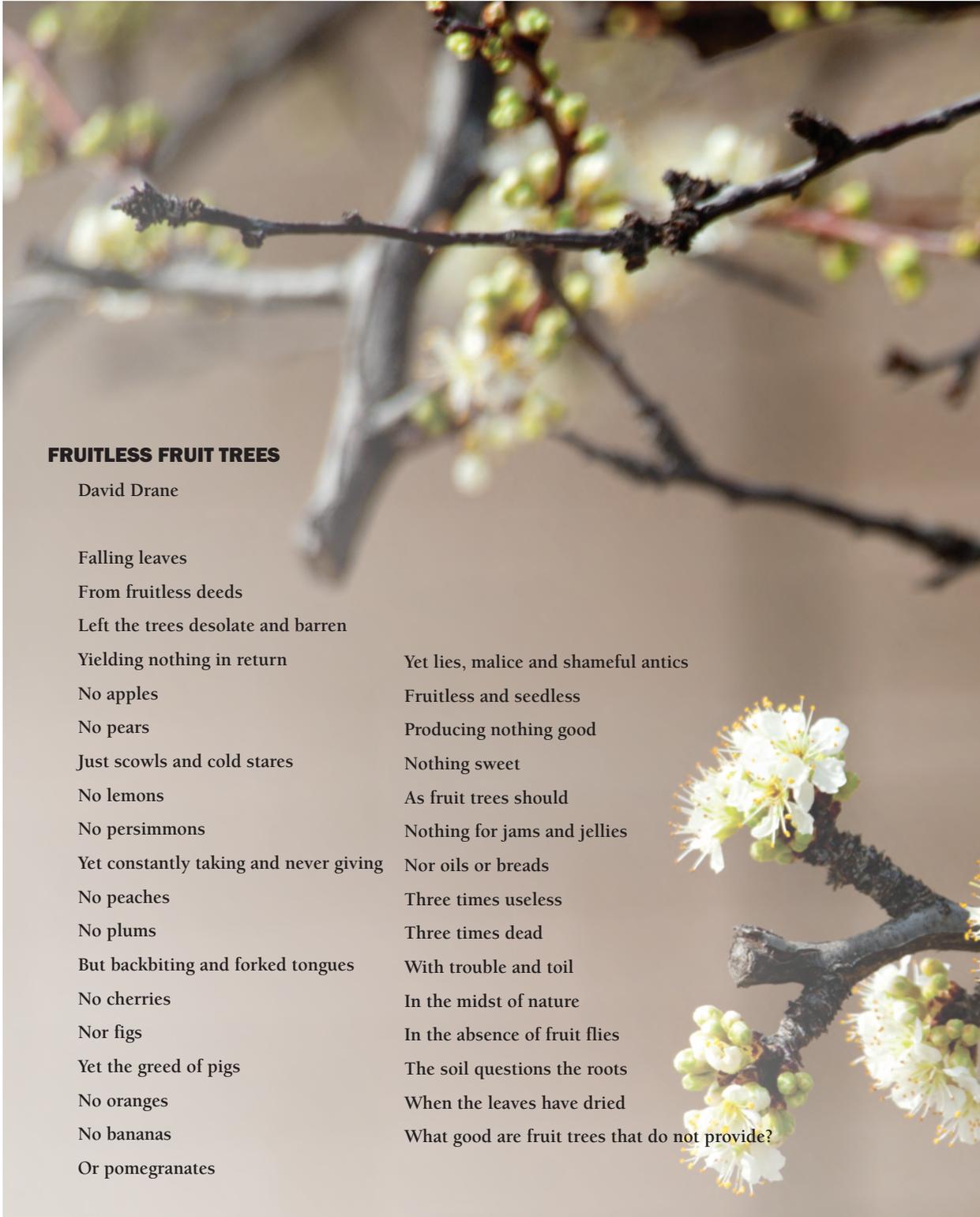
I was 25 when I drowned in my own lungs,  
 disappearing into the night like the sun. My  
 husband had stopped writing years before;  
 it was no surprise that he didn't claim me like  
 he once did. They tossed me in the ground  
 behind the asylum like a sack of moldy grain, with  
 nothing to show that I had ever haunted those halls.  
 Many other "numbers" from the Mississippi State  
 Lunatic Asylum joined my plot of earth. Our only  
 acknowledgement came from the wildflowers  
 Mother Nature brought us each year, the worms  
 holding feasts of celebration over our convenient demises.

I was 138 when I saw light again; it wasn't  
 at the end of the tunnel. They took  
 me to another hospital, the stench  
 of my rotten body clashing with the sharp  
 smells of sterility and alcohol.

Instead of finding my family, they found  
 out how much it would cost to rebury me.

Instead of learning my name, they learned  
 I was one out of two thousand.

I am still a number, another body, simply  
 one more corpse in an unmarked grave.



**FRUITLESS FRUIT TREES**

David Drane

Falling leaves

From fruitless deeds

Left the trees desolate and barren

Yielding nothing in return

No apples

No pears

Just scowls and cold stares

No lemons

No persimmons

Yet constantly taking and never giving

No peaches

No plums

But backbiting and forked tongues

No cherries

Nor figs

Yet the greed of pigs

No oranges

No bananas

Or pomegranates

Yet lies, malice and shameful antics

Fruitless and seedless

Producing nothing good

Nothing sweet

As fruit trees should

Nothing for jams and jellies

Nor oils or breads

Three times useless

Three times dead

With trouble and toil

In the midst of nature

In the absence of fruit flies

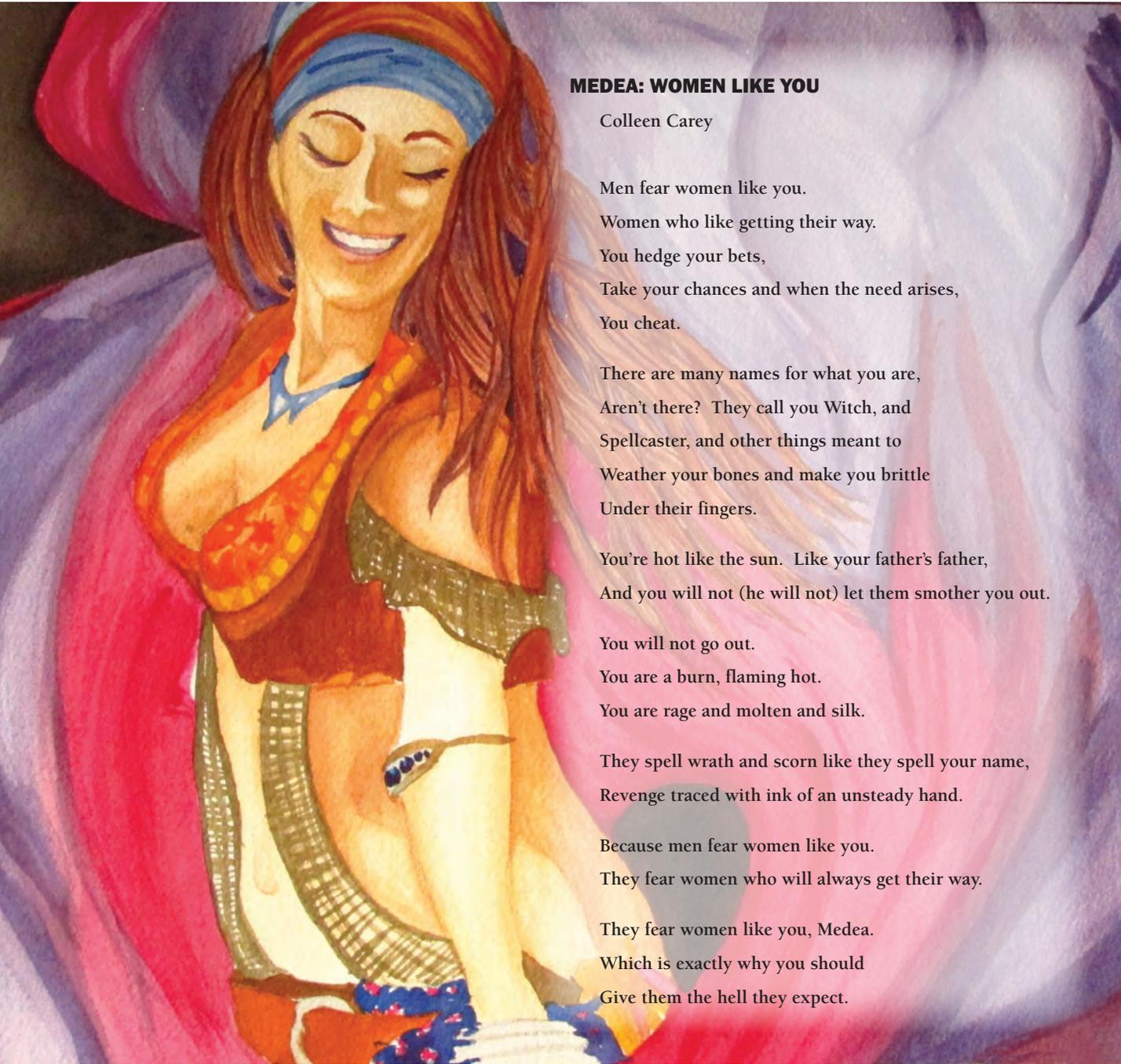
The soil questions the roots

When the leaves have dried

What good are fruit trees that do not provide?



**BEE** Taylor Roseberry



**MEDEA: WOMEN LIKE YOU**

Colleen Carey

Men fear women like you.  
Women who like getting their way.  
You hedge your bets,  
Take your chances and when the need arises,  
You cheat.

There are many names for what you are,  
Aren't there? They call you Witch, and  
Spellcaster, and other things meant to  
Weather your bones and make you brittle  
Under their fingers.

You're hot like the sun. Like your father's father,  
And you will not (he will not) let them smother you out.

You will not go out.  
You are a burn, flaming hot.  
You are rage and molten and silk.

They spell wrath and scorn like they spell your name,  
Revenge traced with ink of an unsteady hand.

Because men fear women like you.  
They fear women who will always get their way.

They fear women like you, Medea.  
Which is exactly why you should  
Give them the hell they expect.

**THE BELLY DANCER** JoJo Rock

**JORMUNGANDR**

Alexander Connell



In the ox head fell cracking  
     The glass of the Atlantic.  
 Down it sank waiting to catch hold  
 Of my quarry, my prize.  
 The line caught and began  
 To dredge up my trophy.  
 Heaving and pulling, assisting  
     Until the glass shattered  
     And sprung forth a mighty  
         Serpent.  
     Shaded and grinding it turned  
         To face me, eyes as  
             Twin moons, cold.  
             Inhaling sulfur and salt to  
             Gather strength I raise my hammer  
                 The end times,  
                 The world serpent.  
             Hemlock dripping from fang,  
             Thunder rolling overhead. The  
                 World,  
                 Breaks free of its constraints.  
             Take what you can,  
             Give nothing back.  
                 The  
 End of days is upon us  
     Ragnarok has come.

**ONE**

Kerry Jeffrey

And then there was one  
One that survived  
Trapped behind its cage since birth  
One that endured pain for others  
Silenced only by happiness of others  
One that bled its voice over logical thought  
That stood by idle as time created rust  
One that had so much to say  
Shouting a warning upon deafened spaces  
One that protected you  
Gave you life  
One that strengthened  
Telling you that love is powerful  
One that showed you the truth about you  
And then there was one  
One...just one...lonely heart

**LOOKING UP** Taylor Roseberry

## MOTHER'S DAY

A. J. J. Bourque

Based on true events



**I**F YOU LISTEN REALLY CLOSELY you can almost hear the ocean when you breathe in and out. Sometimes when it's quiet, and I'm alone, I think about my grandparents' house near the beach, and the summers I spent there as a kid. I haven't been back since I was sixteen. A lot can change in a few short years.

It's four o'clock. *Ellen's* on TV. Mom's drifting in and out of consciousness, but a part of her mind must know she's on. The steady cadence of her heart monitors slows with every joke, rolling like the tide: in... and out...

I've been picking up extra shifts at the paint store. Four hundred dollars. All I need is four hundred dollars and this all goes away.

This was never the plan. Not at nineteen. Not now... Now, at the absolute worst moment of all; now when Mom needs me mos... when I need her.

But... I can't involve her. Not with this. She's got enough to think about already.

So, I don't tell Mom. She doesn't need to know. No one needs to know. Just four hundred dollars. I can do this. I can get through this.

You know, she asked me about it once. We were doing laundry, and she was watching me out of the corner of her eye, and then she turned to me, and said, "Leah, honey... are you pregnant?"

And what was I going to say? I mean, how many times has she said, "Just look at that, girls: another teen mom-to-be. Don't they know they're throwing their lives away? It's a shame. Just a real shame."

So I lied. "No, ma'am," I said, and we haven't spoken of it again. Because there's nothing to say. In a few weeks there won't be anything left to say.

But...

But then I think about how it happened, and I'm mortified. You know, he tried to put this all on me. Can you believe that? He said that it "wasn't his problem," and that I was "manipulating him." As if I would *choose* this at nineteen. As if I *could make it happen* all by myself. But no... of the two of us, *he* chose. *He* wanted this, and I... I just tried to think about the ocean, and the beach, and just... breathe.

I HAVEN'T BEEN BACK SINCE I WAS SIXTEEN.  
A LOT CAN CHANGE IN A FEW SHORT YEARS.

**BUDDING BALLERINA**

Jessica Gonsoulin

(For Remy)

Big brown eyes  
staring around a door  
at ballet school

Almond eyes lit up  
poised in a door  
another afternoon

Couldn't get dressed.  
Where's the black leotard?  
Hanging by the washer.

Next comes the bun,  
hair to be pulled back  
smoothly like a tire.

First, the pony tail.  
Hair is distributed,  
fastened with bobby pins.

Long, wild hair  
is not long confined.  
A quick elastic band.

Out the door to the car.  
Left on the kitchen table:  
Pink ballet shoes

I waited until two months after to take the test. I figured... I mean, I couldn't tell— If I had said something *then*— If I had gone to the hospital, or called the police, or told *someone* right *then*... it would have made it all real. Every bit of it. And I can't let it be real. Because, you know, I always thought it had to be a *stranger* to do this to a woman. I never thought it could be a "friend."

But that's fine. It's fine. You know, I've got it under control. I'm fine, I'll just take care of it, and that'll be that, and we just won't speak of it. So I've been picking up extra shifts? So what? That is perfectly normal, thank you very much. I mean, I'm a teenager. I need stuff. That's not so unusual, right? I mean— Just four hundred dollars, I— I can have that in a few weeks, I— No, it's fine. I'm okay. I'm calm. I'm fine. Really.

But...

You see, the thing that nobody ever tells you about certain "problems," is that the farther along— I mean— you know, the longer you wait, the more expensive it is. So... by the time I was going to have the money, more weeks had passed, and the price had gone up. It's almost funny. I guess you can put a price on—

But, you know, that's fine, it's... It's not the end of the world, I— I'll be okay. I can get through this, I can ... I'll be...

Hey, you know, Mom— Mom has been, you know, she's getting stronger, and her tests look good, and she's, she's pulling right along, just— just watching funny movies, and playing with the dogs, and... and being a Mom to Megan and I.

So that's good. That's good news. That's something to celebrate, but, you know... for me— for both of us— time keeps on ticking, and... Sometimes, when I'm alone, and the steady beat of Mom's monitors tells me she's asleep, I go into my room, close my eyes, ball up my fist and... I just close my eyes, make a fist and... And then I stop, and I wait, listening for any sound in the hall, any sign that I'm not alone, that someone is watching over me, that someone might find out.

Megan's at work, or out with her friends, and Dad got out long before this became his problem. It's just the four of us tonight: Mom and her monitors, and me and my problem.

I hate you. I. Hate. You. I hate you for putting me through this. I hate you, who chose this, and I hate you for doing this to me now. And I hate... myself... for not doing anything about it. Well, there is plenty I can do about it. I can just go to the medicine cabinet right now and I can do something about it, I can— Is that Megan? Is she outside the door?

“Just a minute!”

No answer. Good. Nobody has to see. If I hide the marks under my clothes, then nobody has to see. Oh, they can check my wrists all they want. They won't find anything there. But my hips?

N—No, I can't. I can't do this. I— no. NO.

I'll just... I'll just breathe. And I'll—you know, I'll just take it one day at a time, and I'll just make a little trip out of town when it's time. Just another hospital in another town, and no one needs to know. Just breathe.

You know, between working and being there for Mom, time gets away from me. Days turn to weeks, and weeks into months. Mom grows thinner, and I... I mean it's perfectly normal for a girl my age to wear, you know, baggy clothes all the time. I mean, who doesn't love a hoodie three sizes too big? It makes you feel safe, you know?

Like wearing this big, squishy armor. Like having these arms wrapped around you. And anyway, this isn't about me. Okay? It's about Mom. It's about getting Mom well again, about getting her what she needs, and—

And time is getting small now. Any day now I'm going to make that trip to the hospital, and that will be it.

Mom's going downhill fast, but she's alert enough to ask me again, all slow and coherent, “Leah... are you pregnant?”

“No, ma'am.”

“You know you could tell me if you were, honey. We'd get through it together.”

“... No ma'am.”

The day arrives. I'm climbing in my truck by seven. I'm at the hospital by eight, and by noon... by noon a perfect little miracle has happened... for someone else's family.

I am trembling, and raw, but I can't stay here. I can't afford to waste any amount of time feeling sorry for myself, because my mother needs me, and if I don't get out of here right now and go to her... No, it's fine. I'm fine. I'll just take deep breaths... and think of the ocean. Just one breath after another... and think of the ocean.



**SPECIAL / LION** Navida Sulemi Roman Payne



**THE VIETNAM MEMORIAL** Carolyn J. Jones

**PROBABLY SHOULD HAVE WRITTEN SOONER**

Kyle Mercantile

Probably should have written sooner  
Even though the truth squeezes my throat  
And suffocates my heart at the slight remembrance.

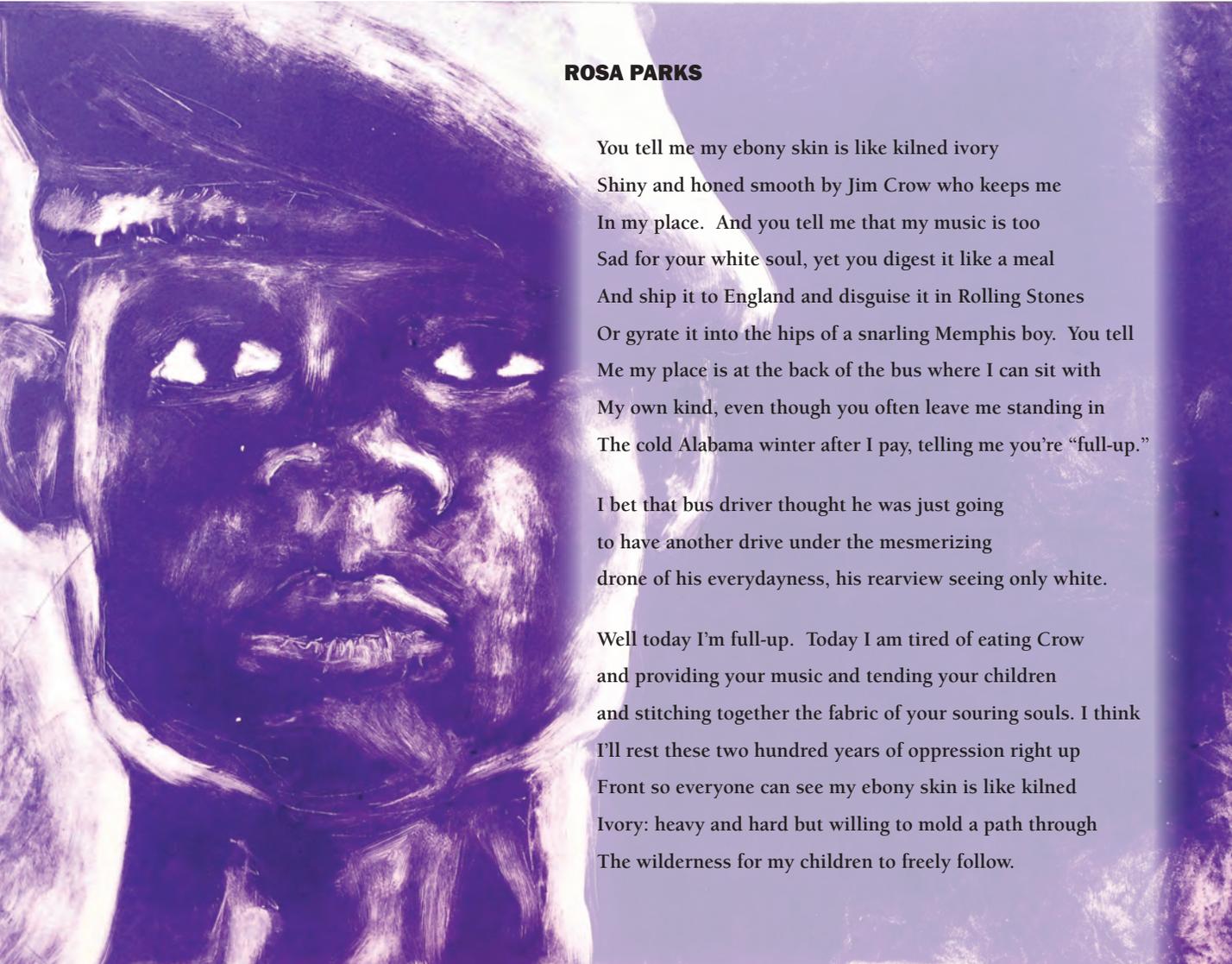
Because your passing was like the end of an era.  
My roots are scarred and leaves withered  
In the absence of your light.

The flow of time slowly erodes our life together  
As sand slipping to the ocean floor  
Hidden and heavy.

Like the sun you laid down  
Yet the moon endured  
Waiting for its turn.



**PHOTOS** Amy Carter Ishmael



**ROSA PARKS**

You tell me my ebony skin is like kilned ivory  
Shiny and honed smooth by Jim Crow who keeps me  
In my place. And you tell me that my music is too  
Sad for your white soul, yet you digest it like a meal  
And ship it to England and disguise it in Rolling Stones  
Or gyrate it into the hips of a snarling Memphis boy. You tell  
Me my place is at the back of the bus where I can sit with  
My own kind, even though you often leave me standing in  
The cold Alabama winter after I pay, telling me you're "full-up."

I bet that bus driver thought he was just going  
to have another drive under the mesmerizing  
drone of his everydayness, his rearview seeing only white.

Well today I'm full-up. Today I am tired of eating Crow  
and providing your music and tending your children  
and stitching together the fabric of your souring souls. I think  
I'll rest these two hundred years of oppression right up  
Front so everyone can see my ebony skin is like kilned  
Ivory: heavy and hard but willing to mold a path through  
The wilderness for my children to freely follow.

**E. PLURIBUS UNUM** Ashley Autrey

**ROSA PARKS**

R. Scott Yarbrough

Translated by Sonia Jatem

Tú me dices que mi piel de ébano es como marfil calcinado  
brillante y pulida por Jim Crow que me mantiene  
en mi sitio. Y me dices que mi música es demasiado  
triste para tu alma blanca; sin embargo, la digieres como una comida  
y la envías a Inglaterra y la disimulas en Los Rolling Stones  
o la haces girar en las caderas de un rebelde muchacho de Memphis. Tú  
me dices que mi puesto es al final del autobús, donde me puedo sentar con  
mis congéneres aunque a menudo me dejas esperando de pie en  
el frío invierno de Alabama después de haber pagado, diciéndome que estás “completo”.

Apuesto a que ese conductor de autobús pensó que él sólo iba  
a hacer otro viaje más bajo el influjo hipnotizante de  
su cotidianidad, viendo sólo blancos por el retrovisor.

Pues hoy, yo estoy harta. Hoy estoy cansada de tragarme la ley Crow  
y de proveer su música y de cuidar a sus niños  
y de mantener unido el tejido de sus almas amargas. Pienso  
que descansaré de estos doscientos años de opresión en la parte delantera  
para que todo el mundo pueda ver que mi piel de ébano es como marfil  
calcinado: pesado y duro pero dispuesto a trazar una senda a través  
de los montes para que mis hijos la sigan libremente.



**CLASSICS** Amy Santos

**SHARE IT!**

 Aygul Porsyyeva

**JUNE 2005. IT WAS MY FIFTH SCHOOL SUMMER BREAK** and my brother's first. We both had been waiting for it impatiently, counting every single day. It was not because we were going to be off from school for almost three months, but only for our parents' *"we will go to the beach on your summer holiday"* promise.

We lived in Turkmenistan, far away from the Caspian Sea, in a small village partly surrounded by a desert. Waking up hearing roaming animals and breathing dusty morning air was how our typical days usually began. We had never been out of the village, so my brother and I felt like little birds who have just learned to fly and can't wait to explore the world outside of their nest.

Dad got our car thoroughly checked and ready for a long trip. Mom helped us with all the packing. We could hardly sleep that night. The next day, at about 5 o'clock in the morning we set off. Our dog Alaja was the one who saw us leaving, while the rest of all the living creatures in the village were still asleep. It was a dark, quiet morning. No light was in sight except the twinkling stars and the car's headlights. I stared at the stars behind my window in the rear seat. After a while I found my brother sleeping calmly in his seat which made me fall asleep, too. I slept like a brown bear until I heard my brother's voice, tapping on my shoulder with his right hand and jiggling two of my favorite jam cookies in his left hand.

"Aygul! Wake up, otherwise I'll eat your share!"

Mom looked at him from the front seat with her usual kind smile.

"Are you being fair in sharing the cookies with your sister, honey?"

"Of course, mom. You gave me four and I left two for Aygul."

"My good boy."

I grabbed the cookies from my brother's hand and looked outside as I started to eat. The Sun was on its before-noon position, but I could not find anything to satisfy my curiosity. All around was covered with gold-colored sand hills. No plants. No animals. Flames of sunshine were dancing unsteadily above the hills which meant the weather was very hot. We did not feel that though. The car fan had been doing a good job to

WE BOTH HAD BEEN WAITING FOR IT  
IMPATIENTLY, COUNTING EVERY SINGLE DAY.

keep us all cool enough. As dad said, we still had an eight-hour-drive to reach the sea. Our red Zhiguli (a popular Russian car) was moving forward like a ship in the sand ocean.

Feeling a little thirsty after eating the cookies, I asked mom:

“Can I have some water, mom?”

“Sure, honey!”

Mom reached her hand to the plastic bag next to her feet, which was filled up with snacks and drinks, took out a bottle of water and a cup. She then handed it out to me: “ Here you are! Share it with your brother!” I did so, letting my

brother drink half and then I drank the rest myself. The radio was playing joyful music. Mom and dad were talking about the seashore conditions in the old days, how much it had changed since then and so on. During their conversation dad would frequently look at us from the front mirror and told us about how it would feel like seeing a real sea for the first time. Mom would hand out snacks, juices whenever we asked and would just say “Share it!” My brother got more involved in *sharing*. He put the snacks on his side, carefully divided them as equally as he could and handed me my share.

We were lost in fun playing cards when suddenly we were interrupted by our parents’ shouting. Their voices grew louder and louder that we forgot what we had been playing and stared at them in silence, trying to understand what the matter was. Within a minute it became clear that mom wanted dad to drive across the city, so she could do some shopping, but dad refused, explaining that it was a waste of time and insisted on driving through the suburbs. The city was on our way, but the sea was still 350 miles away from there. Their argument ended as suddenly as it had begun.

“You never have respect for my ideas!”

“Get out of the car if you want, but I won’t change my mind!”

Mom looked at dad as if she would burst with another shout, instead she just turned her head away from him. Dad lit a cigarette, still frowning. I was sitting in the back of my mom, my brother of my dad. Nobody uttered a word. Even the radio



**IRRESISTIBLE** Angela Chapman

began to play blues, deepening the family sadness. I peeked from the back of mom's seat to see if she was okay. I could only see half of her face. She was looking into the distance. The tears on her cheeks reflected the afternoon sunrays. It was the worst feeling ever. I wished I had been blind, so I wouldn't have been able to see those tears of my beloved mother. Not knowing what to do, I looked at my brother who was gazing at his share of the snacks. His thoughtful face had an expression "*I don't want it this way!*" I then aimlessly looked down, closed my eyes to escape from the real scene.

"Daddy!" yelled my brother as if he was going to ask a question. I unconsciously opened my eyes and looked at him, so did my mom and dad from the front mirror. After making sure that he was being paid attention to, he immediately hugged dad tightly, kissed him on his cheeks and said : "Please, share it with mommy!"

Our eyes lit up. The disappointment on our faces flew away. The atmosphere filled up with mom's and dad's laughter again. My witty brother turned his head to me in satisfaction and winked. I winked back turning my thumbs up as our parents kissed.



**UNSUSPECTING** Angela Chapman

"IN THE END IT IS NOT GOING TO MATTER HOW MANY BREATHS YOU TOOK, BUT HOW MANY MOMENTS TOOK YOUR BREATH AWAY."

AYGUL ALLANUROVNA PORSYYEVA



**SILENT EVENTIDE** Amy Bedinghaus

**THEY WALKED IN THE NIGHT**

Jacob K. Hammack

She walked in the Night,  
 Cigarette in hand.  
 Dogs howled  
 Fenced in their yards.  
 She walked in the Night  
 In a forgotten neighborhood.  
 A gleaming silver key hung on a chain  
 Loose around her neck.  
 She walked  
 In the shadow of the Old Way.  
 Her Way.  
 She glanced at the Moon three times.  
 Heard a person calling Her name three times.  
 Without calling Her name.  
 Silence.  
 She walked in the Night  
 Dropping her key on the ground.

He walked in the Night,  
 Looking without searching,  
 Calling without screaming.  
 He walked in the Night  
 In a forgotten neighborhood,  
 When the Dogs started howling.  
 The smell of smoke filled the air.  
 Following footsteps he could not see,  
 A voice he could not hear.  
 He walked in the Night  
 Lost with a sense of direction, his feet scrapped the ground.  
 Something cool  
 Something smooth  
 Brushed against his foot.  
 A silver key beamed like a star in the Night.  
 He glanced at the Moon three times.  
 Whispered a name he'd never spoken three times.  
  
 They walked in the Night  
 In the shadow of the Old Way.  
 Their Way.  
  
 They walked in the Night.



**VERTIGO** Amy Santos

## THE CHAPSTICK CHRONICLE

Greg Williams

SUZY DIDN'T JUST BURST onto the scene; she EXPLODED onto the scene, with...aplomb. That's one of those rarely used words like "verve" that are reserved for opportunities to describe with a flourish. Aplomb seems pregnant with possibilities and, therefore, proper for this projection of perfection. I was a pimple-experienced, mid-western male in the throes of a protracted puberty, of which, a special uplift occurred when privileged to her image. She was retina-pleasing fuel for an active young imagination.

She was Suzy ChapStick. A pseudonym, trade name, nickname that would attach to her and endure like a brand—which it was. Born Suzanne Chaffee, Suzy modeled in New York, acted in Hollywood, and competed in the Winter Olympics as, get this, a freestyle ballet skier, with...aplomb. She finished 28th, but it didn't matter to me. Suzy was generous with her contagious smiles, gracious, and engaging. It must have been Suzy's multi-faceted and marketable wholesomeness for which the makers of ChapStick snapped her up for an advertising campaign. And why not? Suzy's realm was frigid ski slopes with thirsty mountain winds and high-altitude exposure to solar mass ejections. Those conditions could impart volcanic eruptions upon the lips of the Mikest of Tysons. Imagine the harm that might be inflicted upon the soft, red, pouty, sensitive lips of our (my) cherished Suzy if she wasn't made impervious by quick, soothing applications of ChapStick.

A 4th-dimension-like layer separated Suzy and me. Suzy was a debutante from New York City and Hollywood. I was a young kid from the flat, horizon-less Kansas wheat fields. Suzy probably drove a snow-white, blended BMW/Mercedes/Lamborghini designed and created especially for her. I was trying to earn enough

SUZY'S REALM WAS FRIGID SKI SLOPES WITH THIRSTY MOUNTAIN WINDS AND HIGH-ALTITUDE EXPOSURE TO SOLAR MASS EJECTIONS.

money to buy new (or used) tires for my rust-“colored” car. To put it mildly, we were worlds apart—vertically. Suzy *juuust* might not be interested in me, but only because I was a member of the modest working class. I mean, I was kinda real smart and soon would be the owner of a functional vehicle with new(er) tires, but I realized that as a member of the negative side of our polarized society: Suzy and me could never be. The barrier that separates the economic classes is the only thing on Earth harder than a diamond. The commercials slowly subsided, and to many young men’s chagrin, Suzy ChapStick went away. It’s okay. Trends come and go, styles change, music evolves, societies morph, and time moves on. Goodbye, Suzy ChapStick. Goodbye.

An eon later, on the first day of my employment as a pharmaceutical rep for A.H. Robins, I was handed keys to a new company car, presented with a company credit card, and gifted with tickets to sporting and theatre events. That first workday was over by three o’clock but hard work lay ahead; from my home recliner I was to

THE COMMERCIALS SLOWLY SUBSIDED, AND TO MANY YOUNG MEN’S CHAGRIN, SUZY CHAPSTICK WENT AWAY.

labor an agonizing four hours per day studying the company’s prescription medications and another couple of hours learning the mechanics and vernacular of Golf, the weapon of choice to a soldier of pharmaceutical sales. Two weeks later, I embarked a flight to historic Richmond, Virginia, for the first of many two-week training sessions at corporate HQ. Things were happening fast. It was an unusual sensation but I was ascending through the heretofore impermeable barriers that separate the economic classes.

The final evening of the first session, all new representatives—noobs, were to dine with the Board of Directors and the President and CEO, E. Claiborne Robins, Jr., (The grandson of the company’s founder, A.H.) in his home. Shine time. My fellow trainees, all briefly to become nemeses, were everything I was, and more, much more. They volleyed multi-syllable words with ease. They had memorized the closing tick, the DOW, and the scores of sporting events of years past. They spoke, gestured, and laughed with precision timing. They stood erect, nodding, smiling, and drinking while holding their drinking arm slightly forward and positioned at a perfect 75-degree angle from the vertical plane of their body. As we mingled, we discussed topics of mutual (corporate) interests such as managed healthcare, performance reports, market share, saturation rates, and margin comparisons to the offerings of our Consumer Products Division. Of these, some were designed in-house and some were acquired but all were pure American-bred and had become profit generating icons of A.H. Robins, Inc. They were namesakes such as Robitussin Cough Syrups, Sergeants Pet Care, Z-bec Multi-Vitamins to name a few, and to my shocked surprise, ChapStick.

It was easy to be intimidated in this microcosm of corporate one-upmanship. Margins of credibility were at stake and risks ran high. I preferred not to be in a crowd when I introduced myself to Mr. Robins, but time was compressing. So I boned-up, adjusted my drinking (left) arm slightly forward and then up to 75 degrees, adjusted my weight forward of my center of balance and toward Mr. Robins and his intimidating entourage. With concealed trepidation I approached, thinking, “I got nothin’.” Mr. Robins noticed my approach and though we had never met, hailed, “Hi Greg!” Wow!

How'd he know? Mr. Robins instantly put me at ease. We shook hands, exchanged pleasantries, then the time had come. Do or die. Sink or swim. Go hard or go home. The entourage was observing, waiting, wondering what was going to emanate from my lips. "Mr. Robins, I remember Suzy ChapStick. That campaign established ChapStick as the hallmark of lip-care. The best of campaigns don't resonate forever, but people will recall Suzy ChapStick. You need a renewal campaign. You need a ChapStick Guy and I think it should be me." The silence was resounding, but I maintained my eye-to-eye with Mr. Robins throughout. Gradually, incrementally, it happened. Mr. Robins's expanding grin imparted reassuring validation and confirmed my place at the table. "You know, Greg, I've had thoughts of expanding that market. During your next session I want you to bring this to my attention along with some ideas about how you think we should characterize *your* ChapStick Guy." I had done it. I had prevailed over all of the top-of-their-class, multi-syllabic, fastidious, buffed and polished, 75-degree-arm ... noobs.

**THE BEST OF CAMPAIGNS DON'T RESONATE FOREVER,  
BUT PEOPLE WILL RECALL SUZY CHAPSTICK.**

Over the following months, my imagination went into hyper-drive as I planned, envisioned, and daydreamed of my long-deserved fame in a nation-wide campaign as the elusive, mysterious, to-the-rescue ChapStick Guy, "Defender of Lips Everywhere." My taglines were: "Do you know where he is?" "Is he near you now?" "Do you know what he's doing?" I imagined myself making appearances at busy, chapped-lip ski slopes wearing a parka with a hundred elastic loops on the front and sleeves, each holding and offering ChapStick, free for the asking—from The ChapStick Guy.

Mr. Robins and I discussed the ChapStick Guy campaign on several occasions and it was slowly developing into something palpable. Though I did receive thousands of ChapSticks to freely distribute, Mr. Robins's primary objective was navigating the company through the tempest of the Dalkon Shield class-action lawsuit. The



**PATHFINDER** Annie McRae

campaign was never formalized, so any excursions to crowded slopes being the famously mysterious center of attention would have been at my own expense. But I had accomplished something satisfying. I became a part of something that as a youth, I would never have imagined I could be part of ... Suzy ChapStick—in the "Upper Class."

*I am the ChapStick Guy. Do you know where I am? Do you know what I'm doing?*

## CONCRETE SKY

Alexander Connell

My hand slipped and dropped  
A bottle onto the slanted pavement which  
Impedingly began to leak through  
A now cracked cap. Reaching  
To retrieve it, my eyes caught  
The image which was now being  
Drown across the ground by invisible  
Fingers of the wind into lines who  
Branched off of each other as parts of  
Them are stolen by rogue gusts. A few  
More daring fingers flick away a dozen  
Tiny droplets who land in the next tile  
To alone, dot a concrete sky above  
A liquid forest acting as beacons towards  
Which the fingers will blow wishing  
To catch something beyond the current  
Slab. Free of confinement and open to the sky.

## THE PLAYGROUND: A MYTH

Saffyre Falkenberg

Kronos and Rhea drop their brood off for  
the first day of school, waving goodbye as  
the little gods and goddesses enter the classroom.

Zeus makes friends with all the little girls.  
He throws stormy tantrums when things don't  
go his way.

Little Hera is jealous of the attention Zeus gives  
the other girls. She wants Zeus to only play house  
with her.

Poseidon is in charge of feeding the class's pet fish.  
He always fights with his brother, Zeus, even though  
he never wins.

The teacher is concerned about Hades, since all he does  
is draw pictures of people getting killed. She will call  
his parents in for a meeting.

Ares likes to kick sand in the other kids' faces and  
push them down. Though he always seems to  
be in a fight, the teacher never notices.

Athena sits in the corner and reads storybooks  
most of the day. When Arachne says she can  
color the best, Athena puts a spider down her shirt.

Apollo blows on the recorder all day long to impress  
the little girls. They think he's gross and hide  
behind the trees in the playground.

His twin sister, Artemis, pays him no mind.  
Declaring that all the boys have cooties, she catches  
bugs on the playground with her band of friends.

**MY DUTY** Mustaffa Shahid

Hermes never gets caught passing notes in class. It must be his magic shoes. He climbs the tallest tree in the playground and jumps off, believing he could fly.

Demeter is in charge of snack time, passing out juice and crackers to everyone. She won't give any to Hades though.

Dionysus drinks all the grape juice boxes. He's the youngest in the class, but that doesn't seem to bother anyone.

Hephaestus only likes to play with Legos. He's got a crush on Aphrodite, even though she'd never go for a kid like him.

Aphrodite is the new girl at school. She marries Hephaestus on the playground during recess, though she's smooching Ares behind the slide by lunchtime.

Kronos and Rhea pick them up from school, trying to ignore all the squabbling in the backseat as they head home to Olympus.



**PAINTING** Vivian Qian

### **STORY OF A STORM**

Bethany Rose

Barefoot in a puddle.  
Lightening flashes across the sky.  
Then suddenly you're looking at the storm through heaven's eyes.  
The air is crisp and clean; the rain is long since gone.  
The clouds part and the sun shines through,  
The entire world has been made new.  
Storms.  
So beautiful, so very strong.  
Their sound is relaxing, like a deep summer song.  
With every flash the thunder rolls,  
With every boom the mood takes hold.  
The restless power of a beautiful storm,  
With the end of a rainbow so peaceful and warm.  
Just like people who are down and depressed,  
In the end the storm parts to the sun's kind caress.

## WHY I HATE LIBRARIANS

Cody Kapocsi



AS A VERY RATIONAL BEING, I STRUGGLE with the people and situations that are inherently irrational. I'm the guy who is constantly saying, "Why do it in four steps, when you could do it in just two?" or "Why wait until the last minute, when it would be far easier to work on it bit-by-bit over a large period of time? Hmm?" Which makes me a fan favorite, I assure you.

Anyways, it was the summer between my junior and senior years of high school. I was 17, had a car that was only a year old, and was generally enjoying the freedom that only 17-year-olds with a car could enjoy. Namely: bumming around the house. It's real hot in Texas in the summer, and going anywhere took a great deal of effort, especially just summoning the courage to open the door and face the near literal waves of heat.

So, it was an extra special occasion when I asked my sister if she would like to go to the library. We had been going since we were very young, both of us having library cards that dated back to our earliest memories, and perhaps beyond. Mine was evidence that I had been very young once, my name written in shoddy cursive, my letters connected but ugly. Nevertheless, we both enjoyed getting books, and it had been something of a summer tradition before my mother had gone back to work, teaching during the year and during the summer at local colleges.

It was one of those days where you had done everything you wanted to do earlier in the week, leaving nothing to fill the time. Which made books all the more enticing, since it would give us something to fill the next hour, and hopefully entertain us through the weekend. It all seemed to be going fine: we got to the library with no trouble, it wasn't too crowded, and the checkout lines were short. I had no problems at all; there weren't even fines to pay, despite the fact that I was notoriously bad at returning things on time.

WE HAD BEEN GOING SINCE WE WERE VERY YOUNG,  
BOTH OF US HAVING LIBRARY CARDS THAT DATED BACK  
TO OUR EARLIEST MEMORIES, AND PERHAPS BEYOND.

But then my sister wanted to check out. Now she didn't have her card, because she was fourteen, and had always gone with my mother, who kept my sister's card in her purse. Today, my mother was at work, but that shouldn't have been any special problem. Cards had been forgotten in the past, and always, always, the solution had been to give a librarian our phone number and have them look up the account info. It should have been the same today.

Of course, it wasn't.

"Does she have any I.D.?" the librarian asked.

I'm sure that she didn't sound like Roz from *Monsters, Inc.*, but that's how I remember her voice, and if you imagine her that way, I won't be offended.

"No," I said. "Can't we just look up the phone number on the account?"

"No," she replied, defying convention.

Which was crazy, given that librarians are the drug dealers of the educational world. They want you to be addicted to books, to read for the rest of your life, possibly at the expense of your health and sanity. Don't believe me? Think back to your elementary- and middle-school years.

I bet you anything, that one day a teacher stopped in the middle of class to allow the school librarian to give a speech. It always said something about how wonderful books are, how much you'll enjoy them if you try them, how "hooked" you'll become if you just read just a single one.

One day, a librarian corners you in the hall.

"Hey kid," the librarian says.

"Yeah?" you reply.

"Ever tried any Tolkien?"

"Well, no," you admit, looking around to make sure no one overhears this conversation.

"Why not?"

"I guess I'm a bit scared. They're pretty big books, you know, and I just don't think I can handle it. Besides, my parents always say fantasy is bad for you."

"Nonsense! If fantasy was bad for you, all the cool kids wouldn't do it. Besides, it's not as dangerous as they say.

## WIRELESS MASTER

Sean Ferrier-Watson

small & portable  
resting @ the hip  
my wireless Master  
beckons

straight out of Star-Trek  
this handy gadget  
receiving & transmitting  
signals from space

transceiver of thought  
compeller of language  
instrument of narration

it rings & summons me  
to the Call

There's a reason that all the celebrities do it, 'cause it gives you such a rush."

"Um, I don't think I should be talking to you anymore."

"Look, kid. I can see you're scared of the Tolkien. I get it, trust me. I wouldn't start on the Tolkien, either, oh no. Here, try this J.K. Rowling. The high you'll feel isn't as great as the Tolkien, but it's easier on the system. And besides, your parents don't ever have to know."

She hands you the book.

You reach for your wallet.

"No, no. No need to pay me, this one's free."

"Thanks, I guess."

At this point you just want to run away, so you break eye contact, hoping to escape without any further questionable activity taking place.

"Hey kid," you hear her call out.

"If you like that one, just come see me. There's six more where that came from."

At this point, you're at a full run, just hoping to get through the day without getting caught with a, \*gulp,\* book in your backpack, intending to throw it away as soon as you get home. But you don't, because you glance at the cover, and you think:

"Just once can't hurt. And the librarian's right, my parents never have to know."

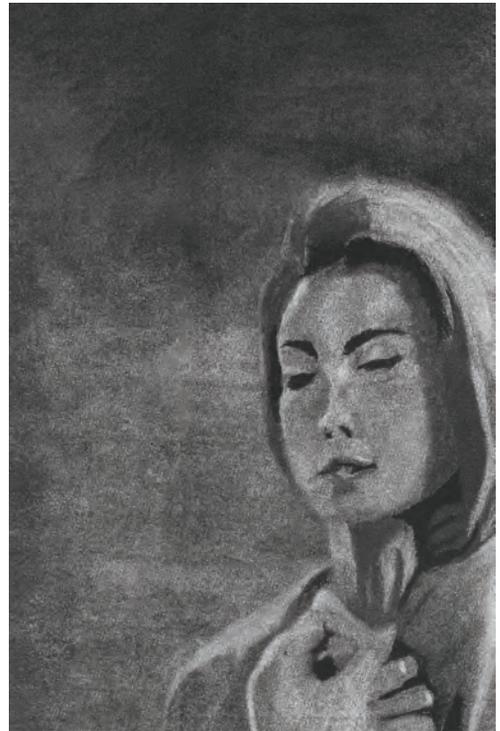
Later, you find yourself in your room, under both the cover of darkness and your actual covers, reading a book by flashlight.

And then you're hooked.

So, on the day that the librarian said, "no," I was shocked that a librarian wouldn't check my sister's books out. It would have made sense if we were trying to steal books, but we weren't, we were trying to put them on her card. But even if we were attempting to steal them, by my estimate, libraries are like food banks and donated-clothing storage facilities. If someone wants what is inside these places so desperately that they are willing to steal it, then you might as well let them keep whatever they stole. They clearly need it.

"I need her to show me some I.D." the librarian said.

"Like what?" I asked.



## DAYDREAMING NEAR THE WIDOW

Caleb Copin

d

“Driver’s License, School I.D.”

I looked questioningly at my sister, who responded with a negative shake of her head.

“She doesn’t have any I.D.” I said, racking my brain for a solution.

I thought of something, a bit of a dangerous gamble. After all, it’s like they say: desperate times call for desperate measures.

“What if I show you my Driver’s License?” I asked.

I could tell she didn’t want to see it, as the I.D. I proffered didn’t belong to the party who wanted the books, but ultimately I believe that her general desire to just see some I.D., anyone’s I.D., won out.

“Fine,” she said.

So I pulled out my card, and showed her, and then we checked out and left.

As I was walking away, I realized something funny. No 14-year-old has any valid I.D. during summer vacation. Each and every one is too young to have even a driver’s permit, and if their parents are smart, their Social Security Card and Birth Certificate are locked away in the bank. And the thing about that School Identification, well, it’s invalid in the summer. Clearly printed on it is the designation that it runs from 2012-2013, or 2013-2014. Valid during a school year, but not the summer, when school’s out of session.

Looking back, I’m not entirely sure what I.D. we could have shown. But I realized something else: if the librarian is a drug dealer, then I’m at best a user and an enabler. I can’t seem to kick the habit of reading, and I’m willing to vouch for the legality of others’ habits. I suspect I will be hooked for life, both using and adding to the collection of “street books,” despite the lure of other forms of media. And despite all that, there are worse things to have in your hands when you die than a book. I just hope I’m reading a good one.

I CAN’T SEEM TO KICK THE HABIT OF READING, AND I’M WILLING TO VOUCH FOR THE LEGALITY OF OTHERS’ HABITS.



**GWEN STEFANI** Kerry Jeffrey

