

Transfer Magazine

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As part of the social justice mission of San Francisco State University, the Department of Creative Writing centers anti-oppressive, anti-racist pedagogies and practices. All of our individual and collective identities, differences, similarities and intersectionalities bring opportunities for discussion, learning and radical empathy in the classroom. We of the SF State Department of Creative Writing are committed to the proliferation and visibility of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ voices and perspectives. We welcome discussions about how writing and literature can actively serve to create empathy and dismantle damaging power structures, hierarchies, stereotypes and other dehumanizing forms of marginalization that exist in society. We strive to create a departmental environment free of racism, anti-Blackness, colorism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, fatphobia, ageism, ableism, classism, xenophobia, prejudice against immigrants of any status or any other discrimination. This statement is not geared toward censoring what we read or write, but rather toward working together to create the world we envision through our writing and through the community we foster in the classroom.

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Under the Willow Tree

by Riley Amadore

Eliau hardly felt the stunted rocking of the cart below him as he stared into the gently misting sky. He faintly registered the clapping of the horses hooves and the prickle of hay beneath him, but his thoughts were elsewhere. He thought of the blood on his hands, the reality of his childhood dreams, but mostly he thought of family.

Varden Kilkenny had quite possibly been the closest thing Eliau had ever had to family and now he had to tell his real family that he was dead. Varden was dead and Eliau was alive and how was that possibly fair.

Varden had told him about his family sitting on sunwashed grass in moments of peace. He spoke of the small farm he grew up on, of the little cottage he lived in with his mother and five sisters who all cried and held him when he left and told him to hurry back. He told him of the lame goat that was born last year that was particularly attached to him and would follow him on his rounds, trampling the crops as it went, until Varden picked it up to carry with him. There was the well a short way down the hill that the ducks kept falling down and so he'd pull up a few in the bucket with each morning's water. And the old donkey that would kick you where it hurt if you didn't feed her quick enough.

Of all of Varden's stories, Eliau liked to hear of his mother the most. Of how she sewed their clothes, cooked their favorite foods each birthday, and sang them to sleep after nightmares while stroking their hair in her lap. Her loud kindness that showed even in how strict she was with the chores. According to Varden she was a short, strong brunette woman who could take care of damn near anything on the farm he could, but he was still excited to show her how strong he'd become in the knighthood and how much more he could take care of for her, having grown from the scrawny ginger he once was. His final words to Eliau were to promise him to do that for her, for him.

He'd once told Eliau how he knew she'd react when he brought

him home. How she'd pull him into a bone crushing embrace, make them a feast, then put them to work. Varden liked to talk of what they'd do once the war was over. How they'd work together on the farm, just as in sync in peacetime as in wartime if not even more. How they'd take their lunch to this big willow tree on the edge of the farm and eat and laugh and rest, truly rest, for the first time in a long time. Elian looked over now at the battered sword and helmet that would let Varden rest under that tree now.

Varden had only asked about Elian's family once. After that he waited for him to bring it up first. Elian had spent so long avoiding any thoughts of his parents, but going to see Varden's mother he couldn't help but think of his own. She was blonde with hazel eyes to match his own, tall, willowy, and always a bit somber. He knew what she'd say if he tried to return to his own home. She'd ask who he was and he'd say he was her son. She'd tell him she had no son, that she'd only ever borne a daughter and she passed years ago and he must have the wrong person and to please leave her alone. No trace of the gentle smile she gave him as a child. The care and kindness that was always for her daughter, never for Elian.

He may go home someday, to that little stone house in that busy little town where he'd first seen a knight and set his sights on what he would one day become. He might trace those familiar streets, with those familiar shops, in that familiar little town where no one would recognize him. Just nod, perhaps ask if he needed directions, and move along.

Varden's family home was part of a village you could barely call a village. Each house was spread far from one another and they traded with each other like independent nations. But they had a main hall and a mayor and they got together once a month. He wondered how long it'd take for them to recognize him, Varden said it wouldn't be long at all.

Varden had even had a few friends from his village that he'd write home to and tell about what was happening. A few of them had even enlisted as well and they would exchange letters between regiments. He'd told them about his best friend Elian and all the things they could show him when he brought him back home. One of them once suggested he marry one of his sisters to Elian so they

could be real brothers. Varden almost looked like he was considering it, then didn't write to the boy for a month. He seemed sure they'd recognize Elian from all the times he'd described him in his letters.

They'd discussed death before. Specifically, what they wanted the other to do if they died. Varden told him to tell his family in person. He said they deserved to hear it like that and not from some stuffy military letter, but Elian knew it was really to make sure he went to the village even without him.

Elian simply asked him to send them a letter he'd written. "Sir and Ma'am Redgrave,

I performed exactly as you expected.

Sincerely, Your Son"

The cart pitched a bit and sent Elian sitting up and grasping the few belongings he had.

The air was clear now and the sun was shining. In the distance he heard a faint whistling melody. He told the driver he'd get off there.

"I'm still going a might bit closer," he told him.

"That's alright, I'd like to walk. Thank you again for the ride."

"Suit yourself." Then with a call to the horse and a jerk of the reins he was off.

Eilian brushed hay from his back, tossed his satchel over his shoulder, and gently cradled Varden's helmet and sword in his arms.

"One foot in front of the other," he told himself. He shifted a foot slightly forward and took a breath. He walked steadily forward along the barely beaten road, along its twists and turns until he found himself at the base of a hill covered on one side in just flowering crops, the whistled tune much clearer now. In front of him was an old willow tree. He stopped there, his breath and blood loud in his ears, and loud as it was he felt as though he wasn't getting any, as though every last bit of air was gone from his lungs and the blood drained from his body.

They would hate him. How could they not? Their beloved son and brother had died and what did they get for it? A strange boy

carrying a bit of his armor who hoped to receive their kindness. What right did he have to any of this? He should have been the one to die, not Varden. The thought had been in his head the moment it happened, since he'd screamed to an indifferent heaven to take him instead. Varden had told him to never think like that, that he was glad he could live, that he should live a happy life. But how could he with the only person who ever cared for him gone? Varden had people who loved him, who depended on him, who wanted him home. It should have been him.

He fell to his knees and clutched what he had left of Varden to his chest. His eyes, nose, and throat burned as sobs ripped themselves from his chest. He wasn't sure how long he stayed like that, sobbing, then breathing heavy, then silence. He'd promised Varden. And at the very least he would keep his promise.

He pulled himself up and set his reddened and puffy eyes on the house atop the hill. That beautiful little cottage that had been described to him so many times, painted in loving words. It was even more beautiful in person. And it terrified him.

Small steps and he was at the gate. The gate closed behind him and he cast his eyes firmly down. The worn wooden door he'd imagined stepping up to side by side with the man who'd become his brother stood firm before him. He drew in a deep breath and held it. When he finally let it out, he knocked.

A young girl with hair even redder than Varden's opened the door. She blinked up at him with his same eyes, and Elian bit the inside of his cheek.

"Mum!" she called into the house, "It's a knight."

In an instant a woman both exactly and nothing like he imagined was at the door, wide eyed and looking both hopeful and terrified.

"Hello ma'am. My name is-"

"Elian." the woman spoke softly as she stared at his face, seeming to already predict what was coming, her eyes shining with the threat of tears.

"Yes," he was taken aback that she recognized him, but he broke then, the words tumbling forth from his mouth. "I tried to save

him, I promise I did. He loved you to the end, he always thought of you and told me so much about you. I promise to help you in any way I can. I promised him I would. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so, so sorry."

She held him tight in her arms, crying into his shoulder.

"Thank you for being with my boy. Let us take care of you now."



Powell St. Eye

by Klyde Java

The Kiss of Death

by Riley Amadore

Kisses are small acts. Little things that we pass through the day to those we love. But the kisses I laid upon the lips of the man I loved most would doom us both.

It was a usual Saturday as I walked to The Apollo, the English gentleman's club to which I belong. The crisp air of the coming winter nipped at my exposed skin as I hurried inside, greeted by the musky smell of cologne and whiskey. I made my way directly to the small bar in the back to order my usual bourbon. I sat on the leather barstool and gazed out at the room. The worn leather couches, filled with men conversing, the bookshelves lined with cracked spines, before finally settling on the pool tables. That is where I first laid eyes on him. Something in the curve of his brow and the curl of his dark hair was so striking. Not to mention that I'd never seen him here before and The Apollo was a rather old club. When the bartender handed me my drink I decided to drink it whilst playing a bit of pool. I waded into the crowd of players, Matthew, old Barry, Tom, and my mystery man.

“Right then lads, think I could have a go?”

A chorus of excitement and teasing rose up from the small crowd, various exclamations of how I'd show up one or the other, likely from the loser of a previous game.

“Elias! We're just about done this round, but drink your stuff, you're in next time.” Tom patted my arm before aligning his shot, “This look right to you?”

I pushed his arm up a tad and his cue to the right, “Take the shot.”

And with a few clacks, the ball rolled right in, to celebration and annoyance. It took only a few more shots for the game to be finished. I played against Barry then Tom. Then Paul and Edward joined, and I offered to step out this round and coach, making my way to my mystery man as casually as I could muster. He didn't seem much older than me, likely in his late 20s and a strapping bachelor. He wore a

sage green vest, his black jacket discarded to the side. I couldn't help but feel pleased at how it complimented my own deep purple one. His honey-brown eyes flicked to mine as though he'd been expecting me.

"Might I ask your name? I don't believe I've seen you here before."

"Ambrose. Ambrose Foster." he spoke, his voice flowing like wine and intoxicating me with each syllable, "Yours was Elias, yes?"

"Yes, Elias Griffiths. Pool player extraordinaire." We laughed and I could feel myself falling into him. Could he feel it too?

"Well Mister Extraordinaire, how's my shot?"

I stepped beside him, adjusting an arm, a finger, an angle. Swing after swing I advised, our shirtsleeves rolled up and my skin brushing his. Upon his victory we cheered, amid groans of how it was unfair.

"Well Elias, your drink is empty, as is mine. Shall we make our way to the bar?" he asked.

"Of course," I replied.

And that simple invitation and acceptance sealed our fates. We drank till our speech slurred and the patterns on the glasses we held seemed to put us in a trance. We yelled our goodbyes to the room before stumbling our way to my flat. We sobered up in the soft candlelight of my sitting room. In hopes of accelerating the process we moved to the small balcony. I pulled my cigarette case from my breast pocket and offered one. He accepted and asked to see the case. We stood in silence, and I stared as his lithe fingers trailed over the gold embossing.

"Keep it." I blurted without thinking. He looked to me surprised. "I couldn't."

"Please, it suits you much more than it ever has me."

"Thank you, Elias."

And in that moment, I swore I could feel the weight of the heavens in his gaze, the pull of

the stars between us, and then it was broken. A siren screaming through the night to some poor bastard who'd likely simply left his

stove on.

“I should go.” he said, “It’s late, and I wouldn’t want to keep you up.”

“I have enjoyed your company enough that I had hardly noticed.”

“Until next time then.”

And just like that he was out my front door and gone, and I didn’t see him for over a

week outside of my idle daydreams. Then, on Thursday after a tiresome shift, there he was. Sitting in the corner of The Apollo, reading something off the shelves. I sat a few meters away, and ordered a coffee. I passed the time glancing out the window and the steadily growing rain and at him. Finally, he seemed to finish whatever it was he was so engrossed in and returned it to the shelf. It was then that he saw me and I pretended the window had my full attention, using it to muss down my brown locks after a day of gripping them to stay sane.

“Look who it is.” came that voice I did not realize how much I’d missed. “Ah, Mister Ambrose.”

“Please Elias, don’t pretend we’re not already good friends.”

“Alright, then I won’t. What was that you were reading?”

“Some poetry,” he hesitated, “I’m a poet myself actually.”

In all our talking he had avoided the topic of occupation. It hadn’t struck me as terribly odd at the time.

“A poet? Well I can think of nothing more suitable for you, the stories you told held such life.”

“Thank you,” he looked at me with a true sincerity, “I was just about to go somewhere, would you like to come with me?”

“Just ‘somewhere?’” I quipped, “Well I’m not opposed to a bit of adventure.”

He simply smiled and led me out of The Apollo, and off. He walked with such swiftness I hardly had time to retrieve and open my umbrella.

It turns out that “somewhere” was paradise. He led me to a garden, hidden deep within a nearby park, encircled with trees, bushes, and vines, and at the center of it all sat a greenhouse. Inside the walls were lined with various plants and a small area had been made com-

fortable with various blankets and cushions. Ambrose sat on them and beckoned me over. We lay side by side and he told me how this was his private oasis, where he came when he was in need of inspiration. We must have stayed there for hours, watching the rain hit the roof, listening to its muffled sound and each other's breathing. I turned to look at him and he to me, and in that moment, in that place, our lips met for the first time, and for a second time, our fate was sealed.

We were scared at first, of what might come, but we were both so intoxicated by finally feeling a romantic touch that we couldn't stay away. We exchanged letters, written with love sewn and hidden between the lines. We'd drink and spend time with the other men at The Apollo, quickly becoming known as an inseparable pair, "the best of friends." The garden and the greenhouse was also a favorite, particularly when we needed to lay low. We could sit and talk and just be for hours. We'd spend nights at each other's flats, talking late into the night and holding one another until the morning sun danced softly across our skin. And every morning how I hated to let him go. My head buried in his neck and the dark, sweet smell of his cologne. He'd turn to me and stare into my eyes, brown meeting green in earthly delight. And we wouldn't need words, we'd know.

But all good things must come to an end. Our's started the night of the opera. We had gone to watch the premier of the scandalous Salome, and I had gotten us a box. We arrived in white tie and waistcoats. The opera was an incredible one, even censored as it was. And something about it emboldened me to do what I did that night. Nestled high and secluded in our box, I gave my love a small kiss. He smiled at me and I at him with a warmth we'd exchanged many times. But our box was not an alcove of secrecy for the two of us. It was a fishbowl, for unwanted eyes to stare. And so it happened that when the opera finished and the curtains closed and the crowd erupted in applause, and we shuffled down the velvet hallways, raving about the piece, and made it into the chill of the night to where we had left my car we were greeted with the police.

What happened next is not something I like to remember, but it is likely something I will never forget. Even now it all moves in slow motion. My heart was beating through my chest, and my blood was

roaring in my ears. We tried to be casual, friendly, and ask how we could help the gentleman, but we all knew why they were there. We were discovered, and my golden days spent so wrapped in love were soon to be spilled before me.

They reached for us, just as we reached for each other. Our hands near rending the flesh from each other's arm as we clung to one another, but were pulled away. I have always considered myself a courageous man, but that night I was paralyzed. My mind blank and my head and vision swimming, my eyes wide, and my ears deaf to anything but my own fear.

To this day I wonder if I had simply come to my senses sooner this all could have been avoided. I was roused by the sound of my love and of struggle. My ever strong, brave, rebellious man. He broke free. And what they did to him will be told as an accident, but I will never accept it as one.

As my love ran toward me, to free me as well, an officer lifted his baton. I wish I could say I went numb, went blank, but the crack that I heard, the crumpling of his body to the wet ground. I will never forget. I dropped to my knees then. My hands bound, I laid my head upon his form and cried out to the night. To the unfair world that could have taken someone so beautiful, so beloved. I was soon wrenched up and away, I could barely see him as I was taken to the back of a car and whisked away, his blood still on my knees.

I stood trial a few months later and was convicted of sodomy and resisting arrest. I couldn't bring myself to defend myself, nor care of the outcome. As the judge read my sentence I didn't listen. I am no longer whole. And so what does any of it matter? My lips have already felt the kiss of death.



Lake Study

by Sofia Yon

Loma Prieta Afterthought

by Lawrence Lincoln

The I-880 freeway looms again over West Oakland at Adeline and 5th, resurrected after its collapse in the big quake of 89'. A concrete behemoth, soot-stained combustion gray, it cuts through the city, dividing viral time. On one side, glass spires prick real estate skies, a pricey future, shimmering bright above suicide streets. Hidden in its shadow, the past melts away into eminent domain. Cave paintings etched by mad graffiti can hands illuminate the overpass, its vaulting arches a cathedral over rows of blue shapes crowding the median below. To west bound commuters, rushing in critical mass towards manifest destiny, the trash alley shanties blur unseen beneath them. Down there,

Invisible citizens of no place be somebody build temples out of trash in a tarped skinned city called Loma Prieta Mundo, the home part of homelessness.

Only fleeting shards of light ever find their way under this freeway, flashing for an instant on tent pole bones that disappear back into the dark when the headlights stream past. No one there ever sleeps or dreams or sees themselves as others do. Stormy plays at making up a vision of herself, staring for hours into the camera on her phone, bending her glitter painted eyes with Manga filters, and posting gravity defying selfies on Facebook, only to get three likes on a good day. Robert could care less what he looks like. A mirror hasn't seen his face since time was a toddler and he was young enough and brave enough to look at himself, fix his reflection with a stern menacing gaze, and say, "I'd fuck you". Now, all he'd see with his one good eye that hasn't long since gone lazy, permanently down cast to the right like it was trying to watch his own ass, would be a gray pallor mask stretched tight across his toothless skull with a hollow, vacant expression, so sour you could smell it. It doesn't matter, though, because the only person who ever sees him is Stormy and all she sees is a broke down legend who once made the lights go out in the Oakland Coliseum on game night, or so the

story goes, when he pulled so much wire out of the ground in the parking lot that the electricity had no place to go but to arc out of the ground, throwing a manhole cover 50 feet in the air.

To hear Robert tell it, “That current rose up outta hell like a ball bit Banshee, the only light for ten blocks and just hovered there looking like it wanted to strike down and weld me into a puddle of pudding.” Besides, she only ever looks to him when it’s time to score and when it’s time, he gives her the money and sends her down the median to the last pallet palace on the left.

With no door to knock on, she sings louder than the cacophony of traffic above, “Someday I’ll wish upon a star and wake up where the clouds are far behind me!” This lets the troll inside know who she is and what she wants. A hand with the words Pay Up Sucker tattooed on the palm jets out from under a frayed tarp, attached to a forearm, more battle scarred than hers, with a picture of a blue Genie riding a hundred-dollar bill magic carpet etched over the track marks. She puts a wadded-up bill in the hand that disappears faster than it came out. After more than a while, the hand returns holding something white wrapped in plastic. She snatches it up. The hand disappears again, and she can hear a scruffy voice echoing inside, “Na, Naaaa, Na, Naaaa, Na, Naaaa, Na, Naaaa, Na, Naaaa, Na...”, sounding like a European cop car.

She goes back to their spot where Robert lies folded up like a lawn chair, cradled in burnt blankets, striped wire, bike parts, and piles of grimy clothes. In silence, they perform the ritual— orange capped needles materialize, the only clean thing in their dirty world. The smell of rubbing alcohol bursts out with the sound of ripped open paper packets of single use site scrubs. Water from a plastic bottle fills a bent spoon, dissolving the white power that bubbles molten inside while Stormy aims a butane lighter underneath. The flame lights up her face. Robert rolls up his grubby sleeve, takes off his belt, loops it twice around his withered bicep, clenches his fist, and surrenders his bare arm to Stormy. With practiced precision, she draws the shit from the spoon into the needle, taps the air out, squirts liquid through the needle, and takes a

deep breath. Staring into Robert’s eyes and holding firm to his wrist, she slides the spike into his battered vein. She pulls back on

the plunger, drawing a mushroom cloud of blood up into the rig and drives it home with the gentle force of an eager lover. Robert's

eyes roll back under fluttering lashes. A truck roars by above as a wave of warmth rushes through his body. He shudders as the drugs perform an exorcism, wringing the pain out of him. He collapses as only an already prone man can. Stormy sets his limp arm down gently in his lap and goes about sorting herself out. On her, the drugs light a fuse, setting off a chain reaction that explodes in her eyes. She sees the lights refracted from the freeway flicker and spark. They turn her dingy blue cocoon into a sparkling shrine of spectral colors. Prisms dance like deities around her. The cold air

turns from a solid mass she fights every day to a fluffy landscape of frozen sparkles, cartoon crazy and electric. The whirling clatter of cars grinding by turns to techno music, cascading in color all around her. She becomes her spirit animal, Foxy Faun, the anime

avatar of her inner child. So spellbound by the snow globe wonderland around her, she slips into breathless awe. Everything becomes stop motion, time lapsing into infinite stillness. Even Robert looks serene, floating there in peaceful grace above the garbage that melts away like a summer cloud. Stormy lies down next to him and cuddles up in his arms. As if her energy flows into him, Robert becomes animated, his eyes wide and bright, and starts telling one of his stories. Stormy holds him tight and listens.

“You Know we’re ghosts, right?”, Robert says.

She’s heard this one before. It’s the one about the time the As’ played the Giants in the world series and the sky fell down. It’s cool though. She’s happy and high and falls into it as he tells it again.

“Right at 5:10, just after quitting time for the normies, when they were all in their cars packed tight on that freeway up there, trying to go home, it was a double decker in those days, the ground got to shaking like jiffy pop popcorn and that highway I 880, the

Nimitz back then, came a tumbling down, collapsing into a pancake, squishing all them commuters, in all them cars, so flat they couldn’t tell the bodies from the rubble. They had to bury the whole mess right here on this spot. That’s why Caltrans lets us squat here. We’re their ghosts.”

The word “ghosts” seeps slowly out of his mouth like air through a leaky valve, the “s,” hissing as he deflates.

“What if we’re not ghosts”, Stormy says.

Robert lets out a rattling groan.

“What if we’re just Karma’s cursed stepchildren, just waiting here in limbo, fixen’ to get born into the future?”

Robert nods out beside her, twitching, a twisted look of shock gripping his face.

“Ya, maybe we’re just incubating like butterflies do? Ya know, when they’re done being caterpillars?”, she says, “Maybe when the world finishes falling apart, we’ll pop out of our cocoon, open our wings, and soar into the aftermath.”

Robert starts convulsing, small tremors at first then violent contortions, his muscles memory quaking.

“What the fuck, Robert!” Stormy screams.

His arms seize up around her. She presses her head to his chest and listens for the rattle inside. Hearing nothing, she looks up to see his lips, purple and shivering.

With the same reluctant practicality of someone going for jumper cables when their car won’t start, she fishes around in her bag and comes up with a tattered box marked Narcan. She rips the box open, taking out the white dome of an inhaler with one hand while holding Robert’s head in the other. She slides the plastic nozzle, lovingly, into Robert’s nose and pushes hard on the button. For a moment, nothing, then with spit drooling out his mouth, Robert gasps and sits up with a start, only to fall back down in a heap on the cold dirt floor. Stormy presses her lips to his and feels air rushing in and out. She kisses his forehead and whispers in his ear, “Not today ghost boy, not today”. The spell is broken. No longer Foxy Faun, she holds Robert tight and thinks to herself

“So what if we are ghosts? At least ghosts don’t die”

Somewhere, a real ghost is laughing so hard it cries and speaks to no one.

“This poor waif of a girl got herself so high she figured it out. She knows she’s a figment of her own imagination, that the world is just one of those old daguerreotype photos of dead children,

posed to look like they are still alive. All those people flying by on the highway, thinking they are somebody with someplace to go, some place to be, are lost, just driving around on the road to nowhere, afraid like hell that they'll be dead someday, and here's this dopey little girl, cartoon heroic, playing at being alive, more real than she even knows just because she believes in legends and knows she is already dead."

The night cracks with the sound of sirens blaring in the distance. Blue and red light strobe across Loma Prieta Mundo. Somewhere a car crashes and somebody won't be going to work in the morning. Stormy and Robert are coming down as the first biting light eats away at the sky. Soon, they will have to get up and hustle because that is what they do. For now, they are still. Nobody sees them. Nobody knows where they came from or where they are going. They're some made up problem nobody knows what to do about but to blame them for haunting the American dream. They are ghost, capable of stopping a major league baseball game, surviving an earthquake inside their own body, or disappearing all together, only to reappear under some other freeway, yet to come tumbling down, becoming a place where only ghosts live, or don't live, or don't do whatever ghosts don't do. They won't get up early and burn dead dinosaurs, rushing to work, so they can afford to live in a house and take pictures to remember what they looked like when they could afford to live in their dreams. That would be crazy because to dream means going to sleep only to wake up to realize that time never really happened.



Peaking at the Moon

by Evelyn Jo

This is How I Want to Remember You

by Rose Albano

This is how I want to remember you. Look back at the days when you would caress my cheek and adorn me with warmth and loving words, affection ridden and with your heart filling the air between us both. I was so small then, so very small, yet you poured your soul into mine with honeyed embraces and your motherly aura - an aura I cannot explain save through experiences of comfort, content, fuzziness in my chest and absolute bliss swimming through my head. The taste of lavender and milk, that striking glow of coffee passing through my chilled body in the Tahoe mornings, that aroma of a hearty home cooked meal and that tingle in my lips at the sight of you with your crimson hair done up while you crisped up those heavenly white edges of my fried eggs, just the way I liked it. I cannot comprehend it any further than these memories, these thoughts that elate me and make my heart swell like nothing else.

The memory of you is intoxicating, a drink I cannot stop

sipping. Yet I know for a fact you would not let me be consumed by even nature itself, because the strength of a mother is unmatched, because the sacrifice a mother is willing to endure is immeasurable, because the love in my mother's heart is unending. I know it too well, because you have taught me these values. They are core, principle, and absolute. Your will is not so easily broken, I know, because only I have broken it. A selfish daughter, unaware of my ignorance to your care, I struck down your trust without remorse and became the only thing that could truly make you kneel. Your love was no match for my shallow enlightenment of independence, but you still walked on despite it. To this day you stand tall and tread forward, ever waiting for me to welcome you back into my arms.

Your Wayward Daughter, she is so far off the beaten path, so willing to find a way to destroy what you built so delicately between us. This is how she wants to remember you, as estranged

and departed from my siblings and myself. She, within my mind, thrives off the idea of your abandonment and atonement, that you might be unremorseful of your relationships with us yet ever proud of your duty as a soldier. She, within my bones, feeds off the concept of your separation from the family and dedication to war instead, believing you are obsessed with the wrong battles and the wrong family. Her solution to this misconception is wrath incarnate, to adopt the lifestyle you swore to protect me from and destroy everything you and yours stand for as the duty bound men and women you are. She, within my words, hungers for your fall, her rage is complete and unfettered. My words fall upon a strengthened mind, reinforced by ignorance, and weaponized by hate. She has made us into the Wayward Daughter that you bemoan, that I fear.

The mornings we would share in the mansion have become tainted memories, each one sewn with gold linen but stained by coffee brewed out of resentment. Delicate as they were, the memory of you is something she refuses to allow us to relish with purity. Between my nights spent with you beneath fabricated,

digital stars and early mornings impatiently awaiting our meal together, the thought of you is purged or twisted.

My favorites of them all have to be when we would share a dirty chai together while we warmed our puffy mitts against the warmth of the mug. I cherished every winter with you. Your hair looked so majestic when painted against a forest of pine and bountiful snow, stark in its bloodiness but smooth and flowing like that wine you would only ever drink when the whole family was together. Winter was lucky to have you, but I was blessed. You had a braid done, a tightly knit one but draped down beneath your pierced ear. We shared a single cup of that dirty chai, and you'd never let me have my own. Not because you didn't love me, but because you did. "When you're older and more tired, you can have your own, but we can share the energy in this one. Okay, Nessy?," you'd told me in my feverish attempts to negotiate for my own serving. I reluctantly nodded, my lips covered by that leather scarf you'd passed down to me from Uncle David. It was his. He was your only family before us, aside from Auntie Vera being so

far away. But you loved him, and you kept that scarf close to you every waking moment. Then you gave it to me that one indiscriminate morning, beckoning me to keep warm. My curious eyes peeked down over my nose to look at it, the steam of the coffee swirling upwards towards my eyes as I looked downward. My mitts were warmed, but I sniffled.

“Mm?”, you murmured at the sound, facing me fully. I sniffled again, and you laughed gently, your breath huffing into the chilled air. “Need some help there, little love?” Before I could answer, you pulled Uncle David’s scarf down and nudged the ceramic mug against my lips. I drank instinctively, tasting the bitterness of the espresso subtly underneath the hot milk and your addition of a spoonful of honey as a sweetener. My hollow chest would burst to life with every sip, feeling that burning river trail down and provide a well of comfort in my belly. I must have tipped the cup too far back, or dipped my head too far down, because once I was finished drinking you had swiped the tip of my nose with your glove, wiping off a dollop of creamer from it. Back then I was smaller than

you, the top of my head only up to your elbow. But you always swore I was tall for my age, and you were a small woman by nature. You were right. Memories of looking up to you are foreign now that I have to dip my eyes down to speak to you.

I sniffled, though a smile infected my face and crinkled my pale cheeks. “Thank you, mother,” I spoke softly, my voice whisked away by the unmoving winter winds. You shook your head at me and knelt down to kiss my cherry tipped nose, then pulled Uncle David’s scarf up and over. You held your hands out, and I knew to lend you the cup. You drank with ease and confidence, smooth and swift. It was another day for you, another coffee. I wanted to tell you that you were beautiful, and that you were even prettier with your dusky cheeks reddened by the cold. I think I just stared at you instead with my eyes never to wander, and my mittens stuffed firmly into my coat pockets. I knew you knew I was looking. Your supple, smug grin told me so, and I could only feel myself scrunch my face into a swollen pout. Hidden as it was under the scarf, we both knew I was contorting my face at your si-

lent slyness. My chest thumped and beckoned me to burst some words out: "I want you to braid my hair like yours." I blinked, brows arched and eyes narrowed. I stalked your face for an answer, or a hint of one that was to come. You were quiet, and I was bursting with silence. Personally speaking I was never one to care about my appearances enough to lodge in more than half an hour of effort (until my baby sister fixed that), so I'd figured that you were stunned by my demand. Processing this possibility, it was quickly ruled out by the fact that I had never truly surprised you until years later. I was your little book, that story you knew so well, the one that you'd memorized from start to finish. Or so I was.

You turned to me once more, mug cupped in both of your hands. "You don't have any school dances coming along. You wouldn't go to one if there was one soon anyways. Why the sudden change, little love?" I, tongue caught and gears stopped to a halt, shrugged in response. Your response of laughter only confused me. "Just 'cause? No reason? You're always so thoughtful in your decisions, Nessy. I'm curious to know what's driven you

to impulsiveness."

Your little book, your little story just as I'd said. I knew why I wanted my hair braided like yours. In the end it would become a ritual memory that would only serve the vindication of your Wayward Daughter, but one that I pray to remember in all of its truths. "Because it...", I trailed, eyes wandering off to her shoulders, "I think it would look good on me, too."

"Oh? So I look good with it then?" Your teasing nature was something that always, without fault, dismantled my entire facade of seriousness. Firm as my posture was before, I could recall the feeling of me haunching over with arms crossed and ready to spout at you. Arguing was my way of coping with embarrassment. There was no use in getting you to stop laughing. At some point, I knew I was smiling, too. "First you start going on boat rides with Mia, and now you want to change your hair? You're becoming quite bold, Nessy. Try not to grow up too fast. I might not recognize you soon."

"I don't want to change my hair, just add something different!" This earned a raise of your hands, as if my tongue had sharpened and held you at knife-

point. Entertained as you were, I demanded an answer afterwards. I swear your hands were in the sky by this point, reaching to the unbroken gray clouds above us. “I’m not growing up fast, either. So? Can you braid my hair?”

“I don’t know. I could. Maybe I can braid Ana’s, since she’s not prone to shouting at me.”

“Mother!”

I stomped my boot, crunching a layer of snow beneath me, and tightened my arms across my chest. There you were. The clearest image of you. Your Wayward Daughter may rob me of the memory of you, but this one she cannot take. You always told me you were anxious about the scar on your face, timid by its deepness through your skin and how jagged it was. There was no escaping the look of it. You described it as a rusted dagger, broken and uneven on the left side of your cheek to down your neck. Around colleagues, I would never see you with your hair tied up. My best guess was that you’d hoped it would cover your scar if it were let down. Yet even in pieces of memories, you would never tie your hair around me or my siblings either. Even now. It was down, my mind theorizing that you would treat it

like a curtain to conceal the privacy of your skin. Precious as it was, it was never something I thought to be admonished by. I saw every bit of you in that scar. Your eyes were fierce, your lips reminiscent of mine, and hair was alluring, but your scar was your story. The way you smiled as I cried at you moved it, letting me see it breathe with you. This scar was your tiger stripe, a window into who you are. I’ve come to learn that women have plenty of tiger stripes, and they are all painful and ugly and telling in their own ways, which makes them beautiful. Your anxieties and worries were woven into that torn flesh on your cheek, but bliss ruptured it with every smile you gifted me. I could see it now, frame frozen, your hair and shoulders peppered with freshly fallen snow. There was no semblance of shame in this moment, only the desire to enjoy what this very moment of our interwoven lives had given us; the briefest shutter of innocence in an otherwise indifferent world.

I wish I’d told you how amazing your dimple was. I’d thought I’d have all the time in the world to tell you this. Another moment would surely come. We drank dirty chais every week

together, sharing the same mug between us both, but I could never pull that confidence from my chest again. That morning would shape our dirty chai mornings differently, allowing the indulgence of you to braid my hair before we'd slip into our puffy long coats and fuzzy mittens. I relished in our similarities, small as it was. Truth be told, I always wanted to look like you, but you told me once that I look more like my father than I do you. I've never met him, and you also told me I never would. There was never a need to meet him, but there was always a need to look like you, to be recognized as your daughter. Orion and Ana were granted that luxury and I envy them both. In comparison I look more like your ghost than I do look like you.

That's why I wanted you to braid my hair. You are my world. I think of you nonstop, more than I do my own child and husband. We are blood, we are creed, yet I never felt like I belonged with you. I tried to keep you for myself in those dirty chai mornings but you would eventually leave again. Work beckoned, you are an important woman, but you were my important woman. I wanted to

tell you that, you know; that you were mine, and that I wanted to keep my mother around selfishly. I knew it was greedy, but what daughter wouldn't miss the hugs of their mom? Especially yours. Even outside in the frozen tundra of Lake Tahoe, you warmed me, and set me at ease. You have anxiety in your scar, and I have it in my bones. With braids like yours, I was reminded that I was yours and you were mine. I knew in these fleeting moments that I was your daughter, but that would escape me as soon as the chai would be drunk. Your dimple was something to envy, because no matter how hard I would smile, I would never have one. I don't even know if I braid my hair the same as you do anymore.

I can only reenact this memory sparingly before she begins to warp it and turn it inside out. If I fall onto the pillows of your smile too much, I begin to see you for what you aren't. I would get to the part of you teasing me, calling me bold, saying that you might not recognize me. You would face me, but instead of seeing your scar and your smile and your dimples, I would be woken by the featureless face of a mannequin with your skin

and hair. There was no smile to reflect on, only tears in its artificial flesh that gave way to the jagged teeth beneath. Its mouth was stapled shut, flesh grown over like overgrown vines, its skin dry and chipped like rust. Your voice echoed through the tear in its face, while the scar hissed like a searing steak, livid and wiggling as if it were alive. The hands that would be holding a cup were elongated, fingers sharp and metallic, nails grown to lengths that would allow you to flay me alive. The chai was not present in its palms, but instead it cradled a knot of blackened feathers and barbed wire. This mannequin, the crippled imposter that mimicked your voice, clutched it with its bladed fingers. I watched the blood rush from between its limbs before it would offer this idol to me, one stinger plucking my scarf from my lips and moving to press this conglomeration of feathers and metal to my mouth. But I would always wake from this, only to be trapped behind my own eyes in the darkness, watching as that ignorant daughter you no longer recognize destroys us both. The truth is I don't recognize you any more than you do to me.

She remembers you this way,

and I another. I swear to you she is dissimilar to the daughter you know and raised. I am still here, caged within her ribs and thoughts. She has entrapped me here within these darkened hallways of terrible flesh, her beating heart deafening my ears with yearning and resentment. The monsters here remind me of you, but unfamiliar and horrifying in appearance. They share your voice, but it is sharpened and metallic, and the more I listen to them the more their words scratch against stone. Their bodies are fractured and in pieces, their flesh stripped off and leaving way to unimaginable metal. There is fury in their eyes that I have only heard of through rumors and stories, and they leave me paralyzed. They keep me here in hiding, her memory of you twisted and corrupt, the rooms here distorted but barely familiar. They stalk the halls calling my name. "Nessy, myNessy," while haunting my ears and eyes. I hide in the kitchen that we would cook in, where I would impatiently wait for you to finish frying my eggs. They drag their feet against the rusted floor and brace themselves against the bleeding walls that surround us, claws tearing through the flesh of

our shared mind and body. I run to the garden to retreat beneath the weeping willows where we would lay and take naps beneath during the simulated spring mornings, only to find that they surround our sacred resting place with their crooked and paint chipped bodies. I tried to find a way to my bedroom where you would braid my hair every weekend, because I asked you to, because I liked how it looked on you, because I wanted to be as beautiful as you were with your crowned braid. I only found broken combs and a monstrous you facing my mirror, tearing her claws into her head and extracting handfuls of hair, silently screaming through her stapled lips. These apparitions woke me and tainted my thoughts of you... But I still knew how I wanted to remember you. That belief in itself enthralls me every day I wake up here, amongst these crying, bleeding hallways and between these walking falsities of you. I wake up because of you.

I still love you, and she knows this. She denies this truth as her own, constant with her efforts to suppress her wrongness in it all. I am still here, and she knows it, and she wants to listen. I will make her listen one day,

mom. Please await that day with patience, and meet it with that familiar embrace you used to deliver onto me every morning. I am still here, your little love, your baby girl. I always will be. This is how I want to remember you. This is how I want you to remember me.

Wait for me, Adrian.

Wait for your lost and wandering Vanessa, your dear Nessy. We are consumed by the seas, but I will help us to swim ashore again.

O Where Is My Fair Sun

by Six Veiled Black Crows

Where is my wife?
This champagne tastes horrible
I don't know anyone here
Why did I attend this?

“Can someone help me find my wife Juliet!”
“Excuse me, can you-nope”

Oh god oh god oh god someone's coming near me
I don't know what to say
What should I say?
Should I just run to the bathroom?
No no no no no, please just ignore me, I'm looking for Juliet, I can't-

“Hi! It's so nice to see you again!”

Have I ever met him?
He's just talking on and on
Maybe I can sneak away
Where is Juliet
I don't know what to say to these people
What if I say the wrong thing and everyone thinks I'm a weirdo?

“I'm so sorry to interrupt, but can you-
I'd also love to hear your story-”

What did he say it was about?

“But I need to find my wife!”
Can someone please help me find her!”

Everyone is talking so loud
Why can't I breathe?
Where is my wife
The voices are too loud now They're screaming all around me Screaming

So much screaming
I'm going to die right here aren't I?

The voices are getting louder
Louder

Louder
Oh god I can't breathe
Everyone is screaming so fast
Screaming
Why is everyone screaming like this?
I can't shut the noises off
"Can everyone please just stop screaming!"

Goddamnit, Romeo
What have you done?
If I had any chance of navigating this party before
I sure as hell don't have it now
Couldn't keep your damn mouth shut, couldn't you? Jesus Christ, they're
all looking at me
Probably think I'm a fucking lunatic

"Get out of the way!"
"I'm sorry everyone, I just can't talk right now!"

Thank god, the bathroom is empty
Peace, quiet
You can breathe easy
Where is my wife?

"No, no, no, you can't freak out again"

I can't go out there now
Can't face them after this disaster.

“Juliet’s fine, Juliet’s fine, she would have texted me if she was hurt”

What if she’s dead?

“You would have heard sirens, Romeo”

What if she left you?

“No, no, she wouldn’t do that!”

Are you sure?

“Shut up, shut up, SHUT UP!”

Wait, there’s someone in the next stall.

“Juliet, are you there?”

“Yes, honey, I’m here.”

“I’ve missed you too”

A Lexicon in D Major

by Rachel Parks

Dialogue: My mind is full of words that never seem to stop flooding in until I get them on a page, and when I can't or don't have time, I feel like I might just explode from all the words words words like air filling a tire.

Digestion: To the doctor who stole my gallbladder: at least let me turn the stones into jewelry so I can have some piece of that part of me you took.

Dairy: Tell a child at age nine that ice cream will forever make her body ache and pizza will turn quickly to humiliating bathroom visits and she will never be able to enjoy a cheeseburger without knowing it will cause more pain than it satiates her hunger. Tell her no milk chocolate. Tell her no whipped cream.

Dog: Let her tongue be what reminds you that your love is not one-sided and ignore when people say it's disgusting because to you it feels like love.

Drown: The anxiety will try to crush my spirit but my therapist once told me that you are never safer than when you are having a panic attack because it means your body is putting itself into defense mode, just for no reason. It's overprotective, like a helicopter parent.

Diary: Everything that isn't written has no proof, and I need to remember what I had for dinner last week.

Declare: Although my voice may shake, it is strong enough to move one or two people or make them laugh. I cannot stay silent in the back of the class. I will tremble my way to something poetic, something strong, something that makes a difference.

Paper Bark

by Bradley Hoge

How can this be bark?

Hardened exterior

—protector of the vulnerable

—armor against outside world—

onslaught of wind and rain

Stoic protects me

from projections of my pain.

Honed in middle school to hide

the sudden knifing pain

of celiac disease.

Confident protects my mediocrity

—presenting myself as it

my accomplishments have produced

any value or contribution

Calm hides anger and frustration

from living so many lies.

My facades are deliberate

misrepresentations—of course—

but they are necessary.

of steadfast love?

It is merely paper

—thin layers torn

from pages exposing

wound and scars meant to stay hidden.

A lifetime spent

forming layer upon layer.

Solidified with sap.

Wrapped around ego

like bandages—never to be removed

—never to be vulnerable again—



Love Poem to Erotica

by Zoe Sparks

I want to talk about the power of erotica
and not that glorified twilight fan fiction
that somehow became a franchise.

I want to talk about the Kindle Unlimited erotica
the AO3 erotica
the erotica you read on Tumblr because Pornhub could never give details
about Sherlock and Watson the same way as that one anonymous blogger.

I want to talk about the books written for those of us
that saw that one scene in Scary Movie II
when she was fucked by a ghost and went....
I get it.

I want to talk about the omegaverse
about why choose romances
I want to talk dirty to each other

I like talking about sex
more so, I like reading about sex
we can say it's because I'm not getting any
but that would be a lie

The truth is
I read about sex because after my rape I was too afraid to open my bed
to anyone that wasn't fictional,
My vibrator became a rechargeable partner
that only did what I wanted it to.

I could be fucked by the Mandalorian or Ghostface
masks on, of course,
without actually being touched by another person!
Kylo Ren did that with his lightsaber
and I was consenting.

I want to write a love poem to erotica.
Thank it for reminding me that my body is my own.
I want to thank every author that writes
dirty, smutty little books and allows me to read them
again
and again
and again.

If you look at my bookshelves
between the textbooks
the poetry books
the nonfictions and fantasy
you will find romances.

Romances that made me believe in consent again.
Erotica that made me enjoy sex again
gave me my orgasms back.

//

Adam might have made Eve out of his rib
but what she did with it after
made her body her own

A Lover's Goodbye

by Sofia Green

I wish your father never loved you
His coddling turned to suffocation
So your care turned to negligence

His failures rippled through you
So you drowned me in waves of regret

I tried to understand you
I tried so hard to care
But the blood that rippled through you
Twisted every word I said

He loved you
But he never did it right
I can't do it for you
And you can't even try



Lone Magpie Among Wilting Magnolias

by Evelyn Jo

Dyslexic Displacement

by Lawrence Lincoln

“NOTICE TO VACATE”

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

VACATE ILLEGAL

Every person without permission
of the owner
is guilty
of a violation of California law.

LOCATION:

8th St on-ramp underneath pepper tree
Bryant street along right of way fence”

INSTRUCTIONS TO OCCUPANTS:

ALL PERSON
DEBRIS
IS TO BE
REMOVED
ALL PERSONS

LEFT AT THIS SITE
THIS TIME
WILL BE
CONSIDERED ABANDONED
ANY PERSON
NOT DISPOSED OF
RECLAIM
CALL
FAILURE TO RECLAIM
WILL
RESULT
IN
DISPOSAL
CONTINUED VIOLATIONS
WILL
RESULT
IN
CITATION
AND/OR
ARREST.
VACATE BY DATE

TIME:
VIOLATIONS NOTED AT THIS TIME:

CALIFORNIA PENAL CODE section 647(e) Unlawful camping or lodging. Every person who commits any of the following acts is guilty of disorderly conduct,

- lodges
 - in any building
 - Structure
 - Vehicle
 - or place
 - public or private
 - without permission
 - of the owner
 - or person entitled
 - to the possession
 - or in control of it.

□ CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE section 23112 (b) Depositing litter, debris or garbage on state right-of-way:

- No person
- Place
 - Deposit
 - or dump
 - or cause to be placed
 - deposit
 - or dumped
 - Any rocks
 - Refuge,

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NOTICE TO VACATE ILLEGAL CAMP SITE

Every person who camps or lodges or stores property on state property without permission of the owner is guilty of a misdemeanor violation of California law.

POSTING DATE: 04/04/2022. TIME:

LOCATION: 08-RIV-010 EB 12.95- 13.5 PM

I-10 EB 8th St on-ramp underneath pepper tree and Bryant street along right of way fence”

INSTRUCTIONS TO OCCUPANTS:

1. ALL PERSONAL PROPERTY AND CAMP DEBRIS IS TO BE REMOVED BY THE TIME AND DATE NOTED BELOW.
2. ALL PERSONAL PROPERTY LEFT AT THIS SITE AFTER THIS TIME WILL BE CONSIDERED ABANDONED.
3. ANY PERSONAL PROPERTY NOT DISPOSED OF WILL BE STORED FOR NINETY (90) DAYS TO RECLAIM PROPERTY CALL (951)849-2539
FAILURE TO RECLAIM BY

7/3/2022. WILL RESULT IN IT'S DISPOSAL.

4. CONTINUED VIOLATIONS WILL RESULT IN CITATION AND/OR ARREST.

VACATE BY DATE: 04/07/2022.

TIME: 07:00 AM

VIOLATIONS NOTED AT THIS TIME:

- CALIFORNIA PENAL CODE section 647(e) Unlawful camping or lodging. Every person who commits any of the following acts is guilty of disorderly conduct, a misdemeanor who: (e) lodges in any building, structure, vehicle, or place, whether public or private, without permission of the owner or person entitled to the possession or in control of it.
- CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE section 23112 (b) Depositing litter, debris or garbage on state right-of-way: No person shall place, deposit, or dump, or cause to be placed, deposit, or dumped, any rocks, refuse, garbage, or dirt in or on upon any highway, including any portion of the right-of-way thereof, without the consent of the state or local agency having jurisdiction over the highway.

COMMUNITY SERVICE ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE AT:

BANNING POLICE DEPARTMENT, 125 E. RAMSEY. ST. BANNING CALIFORNIA 92220, (951)922-3170.

RIV. CO. E. PT. OF SOCIAL SERVICES, 63. S. 4th. ST. BANNING CA. 92220, (951)822-7000



Y'allternative

by Kayla Ferry

Paneriai

by Nicolau Sparer

*Paneriai (Ponary) is a forest near Vilnius, Lithuania.
It is the second largest mass grave in Europe.
Of 100,000 murdered there, 70,000 were Jews.*

Of all the things I should have not seen
what puzzles most: the fruit between

your fingers. I watched
the scattered upturning

leaves upon leaves shattering
feet deep in a forest of corpses

but what you pluck out
like an eye from their ashes

are bright berries, bitter red
fruit grown from our dead

now disappeared
somewhere between your jaws

and the crush of your tongue
still pressing the pith to your teeth.

Wiley's Cold Metal Kicks

by Lawrence Lincoln

Museum lights hold dying grace hostage
still life ghosts made of trauma and steel,
paintings as bright as a narcoleptic dream
suspended in an endless pain I recognize
my friends, petrified and immortal, reclaimed
by the vines of Eden to decompose in peace

E Major shot to the curb, here a Dying Gal
Still wearing Air Jordans, eyes down cast
in bronze, forever broken, his time surrendered
to memory, lost, enshrined in a hoodie

There's Zazu, who forgot to wake up and breath
entombed behind class, phone in hand.

I still can't erase her voicemails, haunting
the dead air left in her wake. God, I miss her!

Wiley makes gravestones of Nike Flights
Loved kicks, loved ones walked away and died in
Those shoes I wear, their faces I can't see anymore

forever standing alone, cursed by not forgetting
survival guilt a stain I can't wash off the laces
the shame of still standing makes me walk away

Sitting in another part of the mausoleum
in the shadow of a giant horse with dead rider
"An Archaeology of Silence" unearths my tears
I cry for my buried friends who will never see
themselves here, brave and defiant in their dying

Counting the tears, I do the math of mortality
subtracting their lives from the equation
adding mine, ghostly, a number still alive

In my county 9,490 of us go unsheltered nightly
Last year 389 of us died with no place to be
5.8 times more than the general population
Black people represent 41% of total homeless deaths,
compared to 19% of general population deaths
and only 11% of the general population.

Preface to a Twenty-Nine Volume Realization Note

by Evelyn Jo

Lately, I've become accustomed to the way,
 Your smiles bring me in and warm me
Each time I see
 you staring back
 at me
 And those loving gestures you make
 to me
When I do nothing in return...

I have realized that.

And now, each night I count my stars,
But how do I tell the universe
 it's you?
and all the mocking voices
 you exist?

I have realized that.

 Each night you bring me a star,
Bright, they all remind me
 of you.
Bursting warm hues with vibrant life,
 you'd shake your head in doubt
When I reveal the truth.

I have realized that.

And each night the stars I count differ,
 though your consistency
depends on my mood,
 Each night you bring me a star.

And I've got to remember
how to count all of my stars regardless

of how I can hear
the songs of your soul.

You have realized this.

And then last night, I opened my windows calling
for you
Bearing my soul, its core, and my truth,
by you
And you paused to listen to mine.

You have realized this.

And when I was finished, I left you there,
alone on your knees, lightly grasping
Black beads left behind,
Stellar remnants of each star you brought me.

Three Years Always

by Nicolau Sparer

Slowly and then
all at once you are
apple tea from Syria, shisha
from some corner store. Coils
of tight green scent
crisp fruit in ghost of smoke

you call out
like some place surrendered
or overtaken, look

where the pain is
the parts of a brain
we were killing, sharpened
our overlapping hands break
bowls and pistachios shells
silt and simple seed coat
a culture I could
never say you
never met me

say instead that I forgot
the heft
of petals, sweat
on the palm
za'atar
on my tongue, in

tangible distance, explain.

Dead, thick, summer air

by Zoe Porter

Your living curtain breathes and suddenly
I feel as undeserving and small as a gnat.
The weight of the bottom of the ocean rests upon your arms, then my
chest, as if it is your movement
that pushes the window shade of night down forcibly across a quiet sky.
The molten colors of rotting fruit swirl
like a hurricane on my face; you tie me like a bow.
The curtain moves again and I am woven into folds of cotton;
taken in between the mortar and pestle of your hands,
dismembered and at last— crushed.

Harboring Monstrosity

by Lizzy Means

carnivorous, ferocious, cravings for
the skin-crawling, bone-shattering
delectable, delicate, and delicious taste
of cells, stolen and burdened with
creating carnivorous abnormalities, the
body begins to bend in all directions,
growing in the only way it can, around
the clumps of goo formed within, leaving
them by the thousands to attack and
desecrate the inside of this damaged
body.

it lingers behind the mind, like
a malicious mortician hoping for the
next patient to come back dead, but
instead, it lives filled with disgusting,
foul, death-bringing, dubious, old, and d
usty cells, they claw at the neck so
it swells and balloons, bubbling up and
over like how the body hurls every
night, nastily—not so neatly—but
slowly wasting away, slowly waiting for
something to change, for something
to get better, slowly waiting to
die.

absorbing the assault from the
assailant, attacking and invading the
body until all it can do is give
up and wallow in its suffering, letting
the body swell and grow stout until it
finally blows up, spraying and sprawling
particles of death dust, leaking pieces
of the heart to rot on the floor, yearning
to be put back together again in the

hopes of healing, harboring harmony, and finding peace apart from the pain, maybe the cells will stop reproducing randomly and rampantly, though the wish is a farce as it never goes away—the pain never goes away—reality never goes away, it sits with you, even when you are dying, and all you can do is try to live.

Awake

by Serrae Bell

Insomniac by nature
The night vast and vacant
Welcomes me with open arms
To the sweet stillness of her silence
She goes on for miles
Souls clinging to her clouds
While I wander beneath
Searching for a way up
In her depths I find
The depths of my mind
A crowded room of one,
A melody circling with no means of escape,
Shadows reluctantly vanquished by the light
The night is familiar
But unpredictable, unexpected
So often I'm stranded within her
And still I never see it coming
But when cracks start to form in her sky
When her stars, windows to beyond,
Burn brighter before they dull
There is enough light to see a ladder
With each rung I become more weightless
And when I can smell the liquid density of the cloud,

Feel its mist on my face
I slip into its soft white cotton At last
At peace
At once
Free

i would let the bear lay with me

by Lizzy Means

deep in the thickening thatches of the forest of fir trees, i would rather lay in the grass made of gruesome blades of glass than walk into a room full of you, i will not be the bones of a belittled beast, but deep in the fir forest filled with fine pungent flowers even if the big brown bear comes to greet me.

standing tall like a giant, redwood tree, the big brown bear lays beneath me, head in the bed of the fine, pungent flowers, i have cultivated for us to live harmoniously.

you tread with heavy, harmful feet, heaving your way into the fir forest, taking down the tall trees and fine, pungent flowers with every step, with so much disregard, like all the power is yours to wield.

ignorance, it is a broad, boastful field, and unlike you, the big brown bear might maul my face off, but it won't wrap its paws around my throat and steal my virtue from me.

it might swipe my stomach, but it won't be lurking ludicrously behind corners waiting to steal from me.

it won't destroy the fir forest and the fine, pungent flowers, and stomp steadily across the loose leaves, it won't rip open the coverings of my chest to steal a glance at my bare breast.

and so i walk deep into the thickening thatches of the forest of fir trees, and i lay in the flourishing fields of fine, pungent flowers and the big brown bear lays with me, harmoniously and care free.



Blooming Dreams, La Lune

by Evelyn Jo

Sinners

by Angelo Hillstock

An imp's throat was dry one night in Hell.
The ground his feet knew was an ocean of orange dirt.
The sky his eyes glazed on was an abyss of tar
infested with bloody stars, sores on an endless ceiling.
The moon that told his time was a yellow, swollen planet that mocked
an imp's life, housing angels that swayed in solar winds.
The music that was his night's soundtrack were out of
tune guitars, pianos clogged with dust.
One step,
 three,
 two,
 five was the pattern he marched
as he stumbled through the wastelands, throat parched.

Boom-boom-tap ba boom-boom-boom-tap.
Boom-boom-tap ba boom-boom-boom-tap.

An imp's head bobbed to a riff that beat its heart somewhere in the
dark.
Nah, this imp had never heard a groove like this.
But in his bones the groove planted
itself, and his stumble evolved into a stride.
Into the night he strode, closer to
the beast that called him.

An imp's eyes were flooded with cool, blue and
purple light, leaking from a club that bounced
to the beat of its sincerity, jams of its truth,
melody of its soul, boom of its doom.

Electric
Smooth.
Fine, so very fine.

Through the windows he could see an army of

demons getting down, their voices angelic in their
impurity, saved in their damnation.
His chest sung at the sight, and he
wished he was one of them.
Why couldn't he?

The front doors towered miles into the sky,
a Gatekeeper guarding them with a mouth
full of gold and eyes burning auburn.
Above those doors, a neon yellow sign
claimed the club with soul cleansing honesty.
Sinners, it read.
From his distance away, an imp
observed and learned,
was educated and so contemplated.

A wayward demon wielding a bass guitar stepped before
the Gatekeeper.
You got rhythm in that soul, brother? the goldtooth
bouncer tested.
The demon readied his stance, armed and deadly.
He grinned.

Boom-Backa-Boom-Boom-Boom-Backa-Boom

The demon's fingers danced along the neck of the
bass, flowing sensually and at home from fret to fret,
plucking and slapping the strings at a down to earth pace,
his body grooving with the waves of sound,
his heart realized.

True, brother.
The Gatekeeper smirked, stepping aside.
Soul confirmed, the bass slapping
demon ascended into his rightful place,
the club devouring him.

The testing of merit continued,
one sinner after the other
confronting the Gatekeeper and

in their own way exposing their
soul for all of Hell to bear witness.
But whether there was any truth to it
was up to the Gatekeeper.
Always the Gatekeeper.

The imp watched this pattern
with hungry eyes and starving ears.
A demon conjured smoke
from their palms and from it a drum kit manifested,

their beat having a kick
that in the heat never went stiff.
From their hat a demon pulled out a keyboard
and belted out a groove that made everyone move.
Old men in straw hats singing the blues,
afro helmeted heartaches singing how they ladies was cruel.
B-boys and B-girls, deejays stealing what was old
and crafting it into tales never been told.
Old women hitting tambourines above
they nappy headed curls
with a tried and true rhythm they
knew since they were girls.
A tribal demon dance around a pit of fire,
the beat of their drums sending the embers
higher and higher.

All of it and more to the Gatekeeper's liking.
Until the saxophone player.
A plump demon with a pitch black
saxophone around his neck
took stage in front of the Gatekeeper.
This demon wrapped his fat brown lips
around the mouthpiece and began.

Light of all colors began to move from the
mouthpiece down the saxophone's body,
lighting the dark instrument like veins that
discovered how to live again.
The keys his fingers pressed shone like jewels.
The tune was smooth, seductive, deep and true.

But a momentary slip of the demon's
finger brought a sharp howl out of the
saxophone's bell, sending a chill down
the imp's spine.

The Gatekeeper frowned.
Before the plump demon could
pick up the pieces of his tune,
the ground beneath his feet burst into blue flames.
Screaming his last scream in Hell,
the poor soul descended into his appointed place,
the flames devouring him.

Now the imp understood.

Heart pounding, rage infused with ambition,
the smell of charred flesh hanging in the air,
he took his turn with the Gatekeeper.
The Gatekeeper cackled at the sight of the imp.

You lost, kid?

The imp shook his head.

Don't waste my time.

The imp began.

**You can feel it.
Believe I can too.
Believe my words may
hold an ounce of truth.
Believe in the wind
you cannot see.
Believe in the love
that once roamed free.
You let a killer in
cause he can slap a bass.
You let a demon in
cause he has a dark face.
I don't waste time,**

I only taste rhymes.
I only dance with
the souls of the divine.
You can shut me out,
but I'm as bad as any sinner.
You can cut me off,
but I'm as black as any nigger.
You can stand on your high ground,
but don't act like what you ain't.
I'd rather die as a sinner
then live as a saint.

An imp breathed heavily, awaiting his judgment.

True?

The Gatekeeper smirked.

Very.

The Gatekeeper stepped aside and the front doors opened, the Sinners of Hell accepting the imp with open arms.

It was like he was underwater.

Cool, dark, concentrated.

No one was still, bodies moved together as a unit.

Music with a kick lived its eternal life on stage at the back of the room.

The crowd cleared and the imp had a clear view of the band.

The devil, wrapped in a golden robe and with glistening hair that touch his ankles, carried an electric guitar made of bones.

A silver chain draped his neck, not weighing him down but lifting him up,

marking him not a slave but a free man.

He raised a hand above his head, and with a single strum shot purple lightning from the strings, striking the imp in his chest.

The ground left the imp's feet
as the devil played electric funk,
the last stand at the end of the world,
the deepest well of water in a desert.

An imp's vision blurred as
the room swirled into a cyclone
powered by the devil's guitar.
Every sinner's heart in the room
beated as one,
and they were true.

An Elegy from a Maiden

by Angela Torres

*Dionysus came down from the Heavens turning water to wine,
pour after pour:*

*This naive nymph drunken with this heavenly nectar,
Became somber with dread and as the deceitful make prey on thy flower.*

*Under the malicious spell of men with no morals,
For show, in a falsely drunk stumble,*

*lie the Ape Man eager to unleash the beast of greed and hunger raw.
“Maidens to be indulged with lust- spite of drunken spell,
Make haste- ‘tis even easier!”*

*With this wine laced lies,
In soft spoken comfort that her drunken ears cannot decode:
“You look like Aphrodite”*

Between sounds of muddled confusion from Deimos.

O dreadful Curse!

Tales foretold these mortals to be struck down upon the temperament and jealousy of the Gods.
Even Themis herself turns her binded eyes hearing this condemnation.

When this fair, poor maiden heard this damnation-

This death sentence upon his wretched lips,
Through her straggled broken thoughts of inebriated coercion,

“Aphrodite,” the nymph prays with pleaded repetition,
“Do not fret, not any being beyond comprehension, can compare to your eternal beauty.

Do not punish me, please I beg of thee mighty queen.
Do not strike me down as I am merely a maiden taken against lack of somber wishes to the
submission of the ravenous nature of the ape headed men.

‘Tis I, a victim.

Medusa I call upon thy mercy to turn thy eyes to this swine not I.”

Medusa writhed down who called upon her for feminine justices.
For this Maiden,

to place the Ape Man’s severed head on a stake to be made stone for all of eternity,

‘Tis not a just enough ending for this foul creature.

Nothing will ever suffice in comparison to this ever so consuming suffocating darkness she faces.

Demeter and Persephone nod solemnly, understanding. Mother,

Daughter,

Aunt,

Cousin,

Friend,

*Alike in never ending cycle of brutality.
Women, even goddesses, forevermore be an object before Flesh and Blood.*

*Women the givers,
Women the servants,
the eternal defenders of life.
The Divine Feminine,
are to be released from masculine violence.*

*I pray thee, Aphrodite,
Grant her peace,
Grant her healing ambrosia to heal this shattered mind curse from the mendacious abuse.
Grant her the chance,
for True Love exists within those and herself.*

*May Women be granted true harmony in Elysian-
away from such vile creation from the perverse mind of Prometheus and his vile mud.*



Graveyard Shift

by Sofia Yon

I Will

by BellaVonnie Williams

one day i will return to the woods.

i will surrender myself to the dark,
and the dew.

i will bathe in the fog that has quietly tangled itself in the trees.

i will coexist with the animals, and the bugs,
and the damp night air.

i will forgive the soil, and the stars.
i will forgive god.

i will lay once again
in the arms of my father the way i did when i was a child.

i will no longer wear my longing like a veil.

instead, i will float where no one will find me.
knowing everything,
and saying nothing.

one day i will walk tall into the ocean.
from the white crashing shores, all the way to its deepest,
darkest
embankment.

i will flutter with the fish,
and dance
in the long rays of sun that have projected onto the sand.

one day i will return to my mother.
i will return to her blood.
i will once again sleep warm in her womb water.

i will study my life with my ancestors,
i will ask every question in the world.
i will be proud,

i will be safe,
i will be nothing.

dust to dust,
again what i once was.
nestled into my own quiescent cavity in the endless chest of the earth.

Reverie

by Angela Torres

Looking in every corner, every crack, every spot in where You might be hiding from me.
Do i not receive wishes You'd grant me if I go looking for You?
Must I only stumble upon You to receive Your magic?
You, a childhood myth.
Is it a myth because i have never seen You myself?
Must I be selectively chosen?
Why haven't I been chosen?
Cheeks redden sheepishly when people ask me what I'm looking for and I tell them You in all
your glory- laughter ensues.
"Good luck with that. That's nearly impossible. Don't go looking for it, it won't happen to you. It
comes when you least expect"
With my chin held up defiantly, I remain unsteadily determined.
Feeling a childish sort of silly looking for You,
You, an idea that I was told as a kid just to help children entertain themselves with daydreams.
Yet me at my grown age still looking for You?
I still have the child in me who so desperately wants to be special.
I know if I found You, that day i think i would understand why people say "Heaven is singing"
You'd be this magical thing that would breathe life into me
Something so small to others is a lifeline to me.
Is this a test from the universe to see how much I truly am worthy?
You in all your magic daring to be different so proudly.
Maybe You exist only in books.
In the minds of the hopeless,
who have nothing left to lose.
And yet i can't give up my search for you,
In my lifetime i pray I find You.
this isn't about four leaf clovers.

My Lovely Pantomime

by Tyler Wong

“I wish I could kiss you,” I type in my phone while lying in bed, my hands stony and aching as my prose, its language flowery and its sentences limp, evokes a pair of knees falling before your feet. My freezing, tender thumbs—digits twitching and eczema blotches stinging—will such an image into existence, wherein a cold trail winds in circles, the path long abandoned by those who have outlived their curious love and grown to understand the limits of worry, and a personifying device gawks at the mirror in the single-stalled, wood-paneled restroom of that high-end place it’s always wanted to try off of Washington St., where the sinks are outside the stalls and run in a ceramic trough, and in the dim lighting and Hey Ya! atmosphere, it washes its hands and fixes its hair and blows its nose and scrubs the grime off its knees and washes its hands again and dabs paper towels against its perspiring brow and wishes it could kiss you and washes its hands yet again before it gets your text—Hey uhhhhhhh did u fall in? hehehe—to which it flies back to your table with the crisp mast of its suit bouncing against its damp stomach, pretending it never saw your message so as to have something to joke about upon returning to its seat: “Oh, yeah, that’s funny,” it will say, “No, yeah, I’m sorry to keep you waiting, I know you took the trek all the way out here for my sake, so thank you for being here, in spite of that, really,” and when it draws its hand across the tablecloth, you will realize as you stir awake—as I lift the comforter off ourselves, slink out of bed, redress, and idle in the doorway while you pretend to fall asleep, before finally leaving—how little I have held you. All the time you have wasted coming home to me and playing the loving partner, the devoted light, waiting for the real thing. I want to be sorry, I want to be so sorry, I want you to like the things I write, I want you to like me, no matter how much you really, really do, you promise.

Breathing Manually

by Serrae Bell

I was born not knowing how to breathe
A machine welcomed me into the world
With its cold arms
Pumping life into my body
Because at five pounds, my efforts
Were not enough

I was born with another
But we were raised each to be one
We were taught that we were not
Two copies of the same person
That we were not each one lung,
A pair that could not function without its other half,
But that we were two,
Breathing in sync but independent
Individual pieces
Cut perfectly for each other
By the careful hands of fate

I was raised in an incubator
Surrounded by the life force of family
Oxygen in the form of
Encouragement and support
Shelter and protection
Breath in the form of love
I didn't have to think about expanding my lungs
To take it all in
My body did it anyway
And exhaled it right back out
A perpetual cycle of safety

When I finally got
A key to the world
Stepped out on my own
Felt untouched air for the first time

Plunged into the unknown
I became conscious of my heartbeat
And the life that pumped through
Without the familiar comforts
Of what I had to leave behind
I had to focus on keeping myself alive
I had to tell my lungs to open
And take in the new air
Each breath irregular
Each step unprepared
I forgot how long to hold it
A second, maybe more
And then a forced release
Just like so many times before

Ida is a Person

by Tyler Wong

She has her own problems and solutions, ups and downs, wants and needs. She is the same woman at the start of a day as at the end of one, in-person or online, together or alone—all those faces that evoke (but on their own could never encompass) a whole person and the untouchable nuances under their skin. She fears, she worries, she doubts: whatever it is, it could happen. She knows what it is like. She sleeps on it.

She has an essay on the Edison Company due after winter break. She has an appointment with a graduation counselor this Friday. She smiles at dogs in cars while the WALK light blinks at her. She rides the 92 line to Safeway with her roommate Natalie every Monday for groceries. She takes 5mg of melatonin a night. She needs to return something at the post office. She prefers to cuddle in polyester blankets because they remind her of her dachshund's forehead; she named him Barbie and he died of stomach cancer before anyone could put him down. She sings her "Um's" when considering her next words.

She deleted Tinder, Hinge, Bumble, and Feeld from her phone. Her Tinder bio read, Have you ever had a dreams... that you um you ah had your uh that you uh wanted them to do you so much you could do anything. Her profiles sit in everyone's decks and feeds until their apps hide them out of inactivity. She broke it to four Matches and two Likes and five Connections that she is no longer interested in ice cream dates or movie nights at their apartments.

She collects porcelain soap dispensers shaped like bunnies and fills them with lavender soap or hand-sanitizer; the one in her bathroom sports a pair of overalls and a tooth-shaped crack in its whiskers. She names all her bunnies Shimmy.

She keeps a city of books on the mat near her bed where her feet would go: post-apocalyptic Romanticist novels, Italian journalists' memoirs, anticapitalist theory. She wants to dress more masculine, but not so much that she loses her style to hoodies and jeans. She buys pop-up birthday cards at World Market for her friends, regardless of the day of the year: puppies for Arturo, orchids for Conniesha, Darth Vader for Matteo.

Her homework lives in Google Docs. She wears her wrist tapping the Delete key. A driver's permit study-guide has been open in one of her

Safari tabs for the past few months, sitting between Wikipedia articles on Harold Bloom and Edward Hopper and Percy Bysshe Shelley and André Bazin. She says half of the time she spends on her phone is waiting on Kate Bush or Phoebe Bridgers or Leonard Cohen to play.

She makes it a New Month's Resolution to read more economic theory, smoke less weed, do something with the landscape photos bloating her phone's storage, wipe the dust off her snowglobes and the foreheads of her deskside stuffed bears and dogs and Oshawott, invest in a typewriter, watch more foreign movies, get into watercoloring, wear more sunscreen, put a cap on her hours on Instagram (to curb the nausea), and watercolor the landscape photos bloating her phone's storage.

She rests on her reflection in the sheet-metal door of her refrigerator as she creates films in her head. Through her lens, every immediate corner of a room alights with drama, as in a story on the mundanities of suburban living: a spine of bare-bone plaster—buried under robin egg strokes—forms in the corner where ghosts of webbing and dust-bulbs hang between adjoining walls. Chocolate brioche buns stuck with wax paper soaked in grease. A crumpled moth's corpse on the tile. Crumbs and crumbs and crumbs and crumbs.

Problems and solutions, ups and downs, wants and needs. Ida is a person. She is all he could ever want in one.