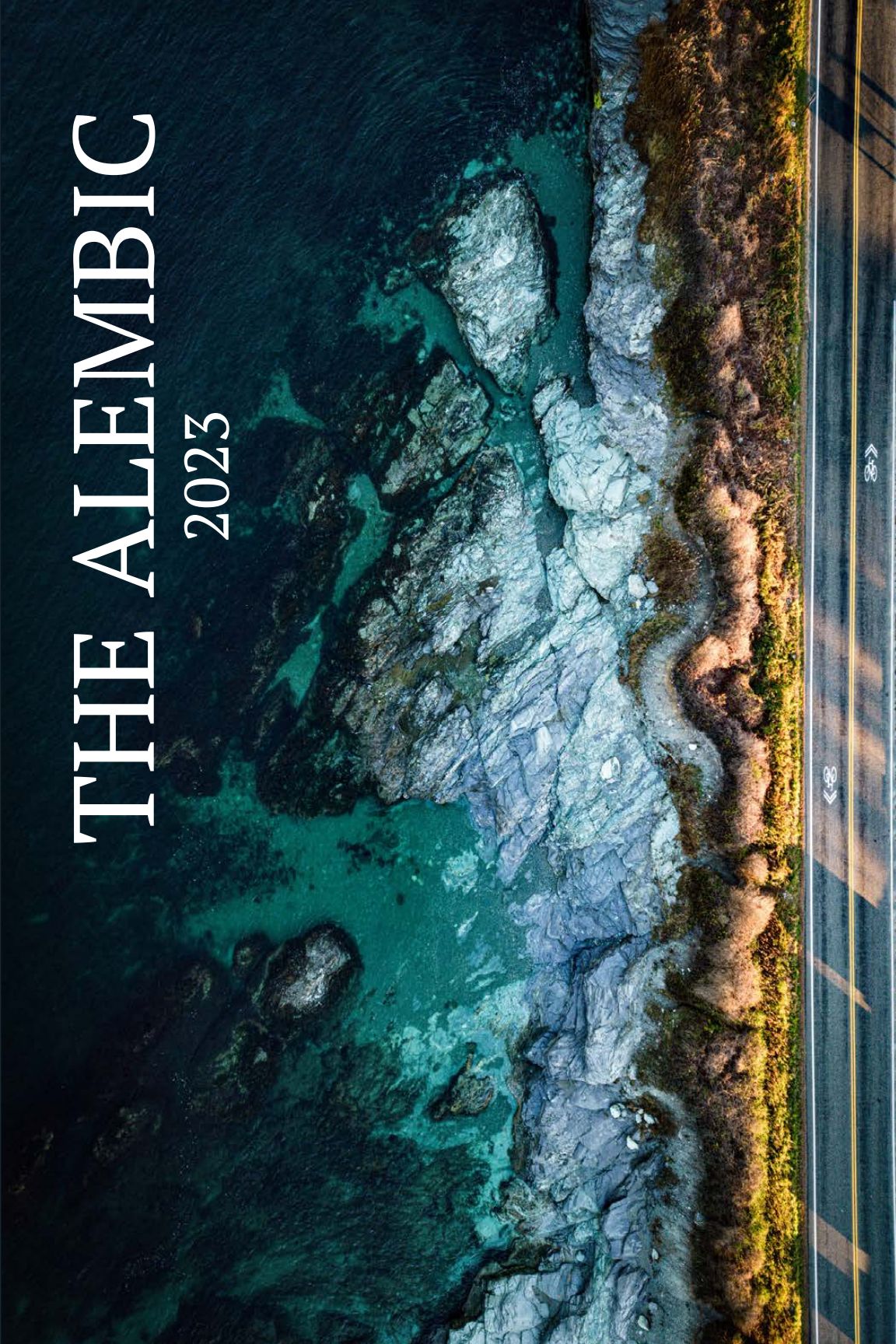


THE ALEMbic

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Dear Reader,

We would like to thank everyone who came together to be part of this year's edition of *The Alembic*. We are so proud and grateful for everyone's time and creativity, without you we would not be able to produce the book in your hands. As you read the words on the pages and take in the art that fills the book, we hope you find the beauty we have been so fortunate to publish.

Emma Snelgrove and Morgan Stoffel
Co-Editors in Chief

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FICTION & POETRY

Sofia Bibars is a senior at Providence College. An English Creative Writing Major with a minor in Business Innovation, Sofia's short story "The Glittery Bits in Our Home" earned third place in Providence College's creative writing contest in 2022.

The Glittery Bits in Our Home

My mother told me to never marry a Muslim man. She would always supplement this advice with cautionary tales of the things my father used to do -or I should say, the things he wouldn't do.

"Your father is narcissistic, lazy, and careless. Part of the reason he's like that is because of where he's from. His family, especially his mom, babied him in Dubai. That's usually how men are treated there, like royal princes. They can do whatever they want and the women there are expected to bow down to them, and cook and cover themselves from head to toe. Your father forgets I'm not one of those women," she said.

I was only eight years old when my parents relationship was reaching the end of its life cycle. They were together for fifteen years. When I got older and could begin to grasp more mature concepts, I would think about my mother and father and wonder how their marriage lasted for as long as it did. I still want to believe that it was their love that stabilized their relationship.

My father was your atypical "stay-at-home" dad.

A few years ago, he owned a hookah lounge that was right beside a university campus.

He was making decent money off the college students who went on weekend nights. Eventually, some

company purchased the property. They gave him a few months to close the business and clear the space. Since then, my father hasn't worked. His pride would not allow him to work for someone and all his plans of becoming his own boss were undennined by plausibility.

So, every morning, he would watch my mother prepare breakfast for us and as soon as she left for work, he would start to clean. From 8:00 A.M until around 5:00 P.M, the time my mother returned, my father would scrub every surface and vacuum every space of the apartment. He would even crouch on his knees and wipe the tiny fingerprints under the glass surface of our dining room table.

“You guys need to stop putting your hands underneath the table. Look-” He pointed the Windex bottle at the smudges, “its filthy.”

When my mother came home from work, she immediately started preparing dinner for us. She wouldn't acknowledge the polished state of the apartment.

She wouldn't even acknowledge my father.

We would always eat dinner together. This is what led me to believe that we were a functional family.

My father and mother sat at opposite ends of the table. My older brother, Isaac, usually sat to the left of my father and my younger sister, Julia, and I sat closer to my mother.

No one ever spoke much during dinner. Our forks scraping against the plates awkwardly poked at the silence. I used to think that the reason we were so quiet during dinner was because we were enjoying the food.

My mother is very good at cooking. Every recipe

she attempted would come out delicious.

I swallowed a lump of mashed potatoes and ground beef.

“Mama, you should open a restaurant. You know the restaurant that closed down near our house, like right next to the baseball field? You can buy it and open your restaurant there!” I said, shoving more food in my mouth.

She laughed, flattered that my little head could imagine her as a 5-star chef.

“I wish it was that easy, Maya,” she said, glancing across the table. “Not many or the Portuguese people who live here would appreciate no pork on my restaurant menu.”

“Well, they like to eat what they are,” Isaac responded with a small smirk on his face.

My father smiled in silent approval. He would later in life tell me that the worst mistake he ever made was marrying a Portuguese woman.

There was a brief look of hatred and disgust on my mother’s face. There was something about Isaac that always irked her and her hostility towards him became more noticeable as he got older.

He was in 8th grade, about to fail three of his classes. There were some nights where he would sneak out around 2:00 or 3:00 to go hang out with his friends. My father didn’t know and my mother didn’t care. She didn’t seem to wonder why Isaac never had a report card to show her or why he never did homework with Julia and I on the dining room table. My father, on the other hand,

assumed everything was okay and continued to spend his days picking up every crumb on the carpet with his hands.

I felt safe knowing that marriage and the expectations that came with it were far away from me. Marriage seemed like a bitter union. Sometimes my sister and I would play pretend and forge an imaginary world where marriage was sweet and affectionate.

I deepened my girly voice and called out from the bedroom door, “Honey, I just got home!” Julia, wearing her Cinderella dress from last Halloween, would walk over and smooch the air an inch from my mouth, pretending that we shared a romantic kiss.

“Chad, I love you so much. You are so handsome and rich. Come inside, I made us a yummy dinner.” Maya pulled out a tray of plastic cookies from her toy oven.

“Mmm so so ywnmy, Tiffany! I love cookies and I love you. Tomorrow, I’m taking us on a trip to Hawaii and you can go shopping to all the stores there and I will pay for everything,” I responded, pretending to take a bite of the plastic cookie, or “dinner.”

We pretended to be like the married couples we saw on Disney Channel, or the married couples that attended parents’ night in October of first grade. I was jealous of my classmate Beverly. She was beautiful and her parents loved each other. They were constantly giggling and touching one another. They held hands as they approached my teacher and I could tell that she admired their youthful and passionate bond. It was the kind of bond that makes people believe in the existence of soulmates.

It was also liberating. I knew this meant that Bev-

erly could marry anyone she wants.

My father told my sister and I that we needed to marry a Muslim man. He said it was a part of our religion. At night, while lying in our bunk bed, Julia and I would joke about it.

“What if all the Muslim guys I meet are ugly and mean?” Julia playfully asked me. I giggled. “I guess you’re just gonna have to deal with it for the sake of God.”

On a Saturday night, a couple of weeks later, my family and I went to some Italian restaurant downtown for a change. I thought this was a good sign. My mother wore a pretty skirt and silk blouse. It was refreshing to see her wear something other than her work clothes or pajamas. My father wore blue jeans and a striped button-down shirt. Wrapped around his neck was the silver chain my mother bought him as an anniversary gift from Italy a few years back; at the center of the chain was a black stone and some writing engraved on the back.

My mother and father sat next to each other at the restaurant. Their voices and laughter harmonized, producing a melody that was more lovely than the Italian opera music in the background. Isaac, Julia, and I could feel that the omnipresent tension surrounding our parents was loosened by a tacky Italian setting and extremely doughy garlic knots.

During the times we were not waiting for food, my mother would get up to use the restroom: after we requested for drinks, she excused herself and returned to

the table five minutes later; after we ravaged our appetizers and waited for our entrees, she excused herself again and returned to the table about ten minutes later; after stuffing ourselves with spaghetti (minus the meatballs because they were pork), my mother got up again and went to where we assumed the restroom.

This time my father got up and followed her to where she was going. I noticed that her glass of lemon water was practically full.

Fifteen minutes turned to twenty minutes. They still weren't back. The waiter awkwardly approached us - a group of young persons - and asked if we were ready to order dessert or if he should give us a few more minutes to contemplate.

We knew something was wrong. Isaac told us that he was going to go find them and see what was happening.

"Do you think they're arguing?" Julia asked in a whisper. It felt like everyone at the restaurant was observing our table. But it seemed like they knew. Now I realize that adults are familiar with broken relationships.

Isaac returned with cash for the bill. I asked him if everything was okay and Julia asked if they fought. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't tell. They're both sitting in the car, just talking. Papa rolled down the window and gave me the money and told me to pay and grab you guys."

Splotches of tomato sauce stained the white table linen. A half-eaten garlic knot was left on a napkin and there were dozens of crumbs decorating the table. It was a mess, but we left regardless.

The silent car ride fooled me. As soon as we got home and shut the apartment door, the flawless public facade my parents had on crumbled. It was like the time Isaac accidentally dropped the snow globe our mother purchased from an antique shop. The glass sphere shattered and the liquid it was encompassing gushed out; white particles and pieces of glass made the puddle shimmer. The little house ornament inside was exposed.

An intense combination of anger and sadness and despair radiated from their screams. But it was satisfying for both of them. They both seemed free. With every word or curse they shrieked, there was a bit of weight lifted, giving them the power and energy to continue ripping each other apart.

This was it. The breakdown of two people who should have never been together.

Julia was covering her ears and sobbing. Isaac was consoling her. I tried to make out the things they were saying and piece together the reasons why they were so unhappy, but I was left feeling disoriented. There were too many emotions, too many memories, too many details that my little head at the time could not comprehend.

Finally, my mother laughed hysterically. It caught us off-guard, even my father.

“Why are you laughing?” My father asked, breathing heavily.

She glared at him - her eyes carried the same

hatred and disgust she had a few weeks back at the dinner table, but this time she was smiling.

“I’m sorry, I just think it’s funny. Actually hilarious. You spend the whole fucking day cleaning the house and now you suddenly think you’re a good husband, even a good father.

Every day - every single day - you watch me work my ass off to support this family while you sit around and do nothing. Let’s face it,” she let out another chuckle, “You’re just an entitled Muslim. You don’t even deserve to be called a man.”

“Oh, and what, you’re supposed to be a perfect wife and mother? Huh? You came from a family of Portuguese greenhorns! Before you met me, you were socially backwards just like them. I got you to change - to blend more in with me, with my family, with my culture. But you’re still a rude woman. You get up three times at the fucking restaurant to hide outside and text your stupid friends as if they are more important than me and the kids!” He screamed.

Isaac stopped consoling crying Julia and began to cry himself. I held his hand. My mother and father finally glanced over at us. It seemed like they forgot we were even watching.

My mother wiped her eyes and softened her tense features. “Come on guys, it’s time to go to bed. It’s been a long day. Me and Papa are going to talk in private in our room, right?” She looked over at him for confirmation.

He blinked and the tears streamed down. He forced a smile and said, “Yes, you guys need to rest. Me and Mama are going to talk and fix things. We love you

so much.” He looked at my mother. She was looking the other way.

The next morning, Isaac, Julia, and I woke up to him placing his neatly folded clothes into a black suitcase. He looked sad and tired. We asked him where he was going and he said back to his family in Dubai. We started sobbing. Isaac asked if he could go with him. He shook his head and said that all of us needed to stay with Mama.

She was in the kitchen making breakfast. It smelt like scrambled eggs and burnt toast.

Before my father left, he spoke to each one of us individually. I was the last one he spoke to.

“I love you, Maya. Remember, you are Muslim. Keep praying to God. He will guide you during bad times. And also remember this. I wasn’t the one who broke this family,” he said.

He gave me his silver chain. I read the inscription on the back of the stone:

Star-crossed.

My mother moved on pretty quick. About a month later, in March, she introduced us to a man named Tony. He was Portuguese. He was also the manager of a distinguished hotel downtown. He lived in a nice two-story house in the suburbs with a deck and a huge backyard.

He even had a separate dining room that was used for holidays or celebrations.

The first time we met him was at a fancy waterfront restaurant in Newport. He seemed really nice and my mother seemed really happy. He tried to joke around with us. We talked about our favorite movies and classes and all the things we did for fun. It was mostly Julia and I that engaged in conversation with him. Isaac only spoke when he had to. Regardless, my mother smiled the whole time. She seemed happy and that made me happy.

The waitress brought us our food. Julia and I got a burger and Isaac got spaghetti.

Spaghetti was always a safe option for him whenever we went to restaurants.

Tony and my mother ordered pulled-pork sandwiches.

My sister and I looked at each other when she happily bit into it. She very briefly closed her eyes and slowly chewed on the shredded pork and lettuce. It seemed like she missed the flavor.

Isaac observed her eat it with a bit of disgust on his face.

“What, the sandwich doesn’t look good to you, Isaac?” Tony asked. Isaac didn’t say anything.

Around the end of April, we moved into Tony’s nice house. Isaac called our father and told him that we were leaving the apartment. He screamed and cried. He didn’t care that my mother was with someone new. He said that he already knew that she was with Tony. My father felt

betrayed that she brought us to live with a man who was not our father and someone she wasn't married to. He told Isaac to go and live with him in Dubai. My mother refused.

I remember something my mother said to him. He called her to try and persuade her to have us move with him overseas and that my mother and Tony could begin a new life together.

“The kids need to move on in their life with me, Amir. You know this. You know it's for the best. They want to be able to live normal lives and do normal things.”

I never believed that what she said was right and I knew that Isaac and Julia felt the same way.

It was difficult for Isaac, Julia, and I to detach ourselves from our childhood home, but I knew my mother was ready to abandon it - to finally shut the apartment door and let the bitter memories fill the vacant space.

But we did have our good memories there, even if she wanted to forget about them.

I remember when our father would sit against the wall, my siblings and I around him, and he would tell us parables derived from the events of his life. We listened attentively, soaking up his words as if they were coated in God's grace. He would tell us about Islam and his childhood in Dubai. He would tell us about our mother and the time he met her. It was at a jewelry shop she used to work at. He caught a glimpse of her as he walked by and decided to go in. She took notice and smiled. He sent flowers to her job the very next day.

I remember my mother would tuck us into bed and

then accompany my father in the living room. They would cuddle on the couch and watch a movie. On the nights I couldn't sleep, I would tip-toe towards the living room and hide under the dining room table. While they were watching the movie, I would sit and watch them. The television lit up their faces with fleeting flashes of colors. They laughed out of nowhere, I assumed because something funny happened in the movie.

Even then, I recognized this moment would be short-lived. We would wake up in the morning; every twinkling speck of hope that our house could handle the pain was swallowed by the night.

I remember taking one last look at the empty apartment. Orange beams of sunlight poured in from the windows. There were no shadows casted and everything on the carpet, from lint to tiny balls of paper, were exposed. At the end of the dining room, I noticed tiny bits of glass that the vacuum failed to consume. The bits glittered like stars.

Celine Christiansen graduated Providence College in 2022. Her senior year of college her short story, "A Good Man's Grave" placed first in the Providence College Creative Writing Contest.

A Good Man's Grave

When I first heard the news that my father had died, I didn't cry. Instead, I said, "Thank you for letting me know," and hung up. I refused to plan or help out with the funeral arrangements, and my uncle, Tom, said it was okay because people all mourn differently. Though I wasn't helping, I flew home to clean out the house to sell it. The father of a neighbor was interested in buying the house, and I wanted to avoid real estate fees, so I agreed, being in between jobs after graduation. Tom offered to drive me home from the airport, but I declined. He asked if I was going to attend the funeral, how people would like to see me there, especially after all these years.

"Funerals are depressing," I said. "And sometimes comforting." "In a way," I said.

"Well, we hope to see you there, if you change your mind. I know it's hard, especially being in the old house. Your father... he would be proud of how well you're handling everything. He was never the emotional type."

"No, he really wasn't," I said. "I have to go. I'm boarding."

"Catherine—" he started, but I hung up anyway.

#

Being inside my childhood home ached like a tooth. I dug my fingernails into my palm, pushing back the ghostly memories that have haunted me across the country. The walls had been repainted an ugly shade of

green, and my dad had filled in the holes. Besides that, everything looked the same: the same blue curtains my mom had picked out decades ago, dusty, and old, moving with the wind; the water damage in front of the bathroom door; the same rug I had spilled spaghetti sauce on as a kid; the uncomfortable couch I had lost my virginity on; the brown chair my father loved to sit in every night; the cross on the wall.

People had been kind enough--or perhaps cruel enough--to send me their condolences via text, voicemail, e-mail. People I hadn't spoken to in years suddenly cared, for the first time, how I was doing. I didn't bother replying to the pity-filled messages that reminded me I was an orphan now. Instead, I got some boxes I found in the basement, some tape, and started to store everything to give it away.

I hadn't been back home since college had started. In high school, I was so desperate to leave my hometown that my friends often joked I sounded like a Green Day song--always wanting to escape the same crappy town, wishing to bum it to the ground. I knew it was true, so when my boyfriend, Daniel, whom my father had no idea about, and I had kept so secret he never even visited the house, applied to a college in Washington, I did too. Daniel was nice enough; he was smart, funny, and when we kissed, I felt like that elementary school science experiment when you rub two balloons together and the hairs on your arms would rise. And, during the beginning of our junior year, I moved in with him off-campus in an apartment I knew I could barely afford until I found out Daniel's parents were wealthier than they let on.

I didn't like that I couldn't contribute as much, but I felt okay with him-safe, something I struggled to feel. Yet, when I went to surprise him outside his chemistry class with lunch, I saw him with her. She was tall and brunette with pretty green eyes-the kind of green that brought the earth back to life after an unforgiving cold, that reminds you of a new spring growth-bright but soft all at once. And I bet she was nicer, nicer than me, with a lot less baggage.

I wanted to hurt her, to paint the streets with their heads, to ask how he could do that to me when he knew I depended on him, had nowhere to go, no one to turn to. Instead, I left with whatever little dignity that remained. It was the first time I understood why my father liked whiskey so much.

I had called my dad the next day, asking for help when I never did before. But he turned me away for moving in with a boy without first marrying him and not focusing on my studies that perhaps if I repented, and asked for forgiveness, God would help me. We didn't speak for a long time after that.

The funeral service was happening as I packed. I looked up at the ancient grandfather clock in the living room, taping the last box that was left before going to the basement to get more. When I moved back up the stairs, the wind picked up, blowing the basement door shut in my face.

It forced me to stare at the scratches on it, trailing from just above the doorknob to the bottom. White, long, and uneven, some red tracing the lines.

With a shaky breath, I opened the door and continued to

pack.

#

I wanted to see the burial, but I didn't want to participate or be seen or give some moving speech about all the great things my father had done. So, I stayed back, watching from afar behind a large oak tree. As I expected, there were crowds of people circling around like a people garden as the burial vault containing the casket got lowered into the ground.

Trying to avoid the eyes of the people weeping, crying as if they actually knew him, I watched my father's second funeral. When it was over, and people started to disperse, I couldn't peel my eyes away from the site. Then, a long-time friend and coworker of my dad's spotted me, and before I could turn away or hide fully behind the tree, he started to walk towards me.

"Catherine?" Shit. "My, you've grown these past couple of years." "Oh. Hey."

"I didn't think you were coming. Tom said you weren't," said John. "The guys and I were just talking about you. David mentioned you often, how proud he was with your school accomplishments and all."

I nodded. "I see you brought the entire fire department."

"Ah, yeah, we gotta pay our respects, you know?" he said. "He was one of us. We always show up for our own. He was good, too, helped so many, always the first to run inside, could handle any medical call-well, except for kids, that was his soft spot, and..."

"Yeah," I said. "I remember."

John was quiet for a second, looking as if he was

chewing on his words. “Did he ever tell you that story about a kid that got hit in the throat by a football?” I shook my head. “Well, we got this call about an injured kid at the elementary school down the road, and we all rushed there. David was the first one to get off, immediately placed the IV, started CPR, all of it. He was perfect.”

“I don’t think he did,” I said. “I remember a lot of the stories from when he was just a paramedic—mostly the gross ones. Did the kid survive?”

“No, no, unfortunately ... the kid—ah, he died in his arms. It haunted him for a while, felt responsible for it. Similar to what happened with your mother...” John paused again. “Are you, uh, coming to the dinner? I got happier anecdotes than that one.”

“No, I have to finish packing. Mary’s dad, Peter, wants to buy the house—be closer to her. The sooner I’m done, the sooner I can leave.”

“How are you holding up?” he asked.

“Fine,” I said, a little too quickly. “I’m okay. Hey, I’m donating all the stuff at the house.

If you want anything, you can just come by and grab it. There’s nothing there I want to keep.” “Alright,” he said. “We’ll miss you tonight. You won’t get to hear some hilarious stories.

David—your father, he was a good man. Raising you alone... Well, he was a good man.”

“It was tough for all of us,” I said. “I had to step into my mother’s role. I hope you guys have a good time.” John hugged me, and though I flinched at first, I hugged him back. Then, with a faltering smile, he walked away. For fear of getting caught in another conversation, I

quickly left back home.

#

That night in the guest room, I had a nightmare with a deafening ringing in my ears. In the dream, I dropped to my knees, my hands covered in blood, and a puddle of water surrounded me in the middle of this void. I soaked my hands, over and over, but the bloodstains remained untouched. The water turned a scarlet red, and I felt my lungs beginning to deflate.

When I woke up, sweaty hair stuck to my face, I turned on all the lights in the house, raided the cabinets for the whiskey I bought on the way home today, and settled into my father's chair. As I sat there with heavy eyes, letting my blood turn into alcohol, I thought about the dusty blue curtains in front of me and the seas of scarlet blood, and I wondered if my life would always be stained with this purple hue.

#

The next day, I started to get visitors. People from the neighborhood thought they were being thoughtful by bringing me all kinds of foods and items-shitty casseroles, dry baked goods, smelly flowers. All were trying to sympathize with me-- "I'm very sorry for your loss" and share whatever anecdote they probably practiced before coming-"your father helped me get rid of a wasp nest, and then they started chasing him"-all in effort to relate to me and whatever pain I may be going through.

Mary came by as well. I let her in, bringing the lasagna she made with me to the kitchen. "Thank you so much again for doing this," Mary said. "My dad is very grateful-he's been wanting to live near me and my son for

a while. And he's getting older, so I want to be there to help him out."

"I get it," I said.

"Oh, I'm sorry, was that insensitive?"

"I would rather talk about things other than my dad. Part of the grieving process, I guess.

"I would rather talk about things other than my dad. Part of the grieving process, I guess. Thanks for bringing the food."

"Of course. Do you need any help packing?" There were boxes all over the kitchen, half of them full.

"I-sure, okay." We started packing together. She asked if there was a specific order or method, but there wasn't. I just grabbed whatever was in a cabinet and stored it away.

"Did you see on the news there's a stonn tonight? Explains all the wind."

"Uh, yeah. Uncle Tom's coming by to bring me fuel for the generator in case the power goes out. I don't like the dark all that much."

"My son doesn't eithert she said. "Sorry again, I don't mean to compare you to a four year-old."

"No, no, that's accurate."

She laughed, and I smiled, but that quickly wavered when she lifted up the sleeves of her sweatshirt, revealing gaudy purple marks all over her anns.

"What are those?" I asked, leaning forward.

"Oh, those are nothing." Mary pushed the sleeves back down. "That's not nothing, you're bruised."

"Seriously, it's nothing," she repeated. "I have lupus. I bruise easily, and chasing a toddler around, wrestling with him-well, it takes a toll, but I'm okay. Don't look so concerned, alright? No one's beating me."

I was about to say something else, but Tom had arrived with the fuel. Mary seemed to take this as an excuse to leave, saying she had to make dinner for her son. Tom refueled the backup generator and gave me instructions on how to start it if it doesn't automatically.

"I brought you plenty of fuel in case you run out, but I doubt you will. It's in the garage." "Thank you," I said. "Hey, what do you know about Peter? Mary's dad?"

"Not much. I've seen him 'round a couple times. Nice enough guy, strict. War veteran," he said. "Ain't he the guy you're selling the house to?"

"Yeah, but nothing is finalized yet."

"Having second thoughts?"

"I don't know," I said. "Thanks again. I'll call you if I need help."

Tom gave me a flashlight, some candles, matches, and a lighter. He repeated the instructions on how to start the generator, then he left.

#

I had the same nightmare. When I woke up with a gasp, I shut my eyes tight. My thoughts were too convoluted and incoherent, spiraled. I could see her. I could see him. The windows rattled in the darkness-a darkness that

takes up so much space it leaves no room for anything else.

I turned on all the lights again, but this caliginous shadow remained present, a roommate I couldn't evict, a butcher that sharpened his knife with every thought that I gave. With the bottle of whiskey in my hands, I moved to my father's chair again. I thought of his grave, and the people who cried. And though I didn't want to think about it, I also thought of my mother, and the last day she was alive.

I was seven years old. I remember telling my dad earlier in the day I didn't think Mom liked me.

"That's nonsense;" he had said. "She loves you." Then he kissed my forehead, kissed his wife, and left for work.

I had asked my mom if she wanted to play with me, wiggling my dolls in front of her face, but she said she didn't feel good. She never felt good. So, I played by myself, sitting on the rug. I watched my mom from afar take these blue pills with shaky hands and red eyes.

When she finally got up, she hugged me for the first time all day, crouching in front of me. "I'm going to take a bath. Don't call for help, Cathie. I'll be okay. I'm just taking a bath. You'll be okay."

I wasn't sure what she had meant until I saw the water seeping from under the locked bathroom door. I knocked, calling out for her, but she never responded. I started to hear ringing in my ears as I screamed for her, waiting, and waiting, my feet splashing the running water that was still spilling out. I called for help.

Within ten minutes, the fire department, the ambulance, the police—they all had come. I got pulled away as my fa-

ther bashed down the door to look at his beloved wife, the only woman he ever loved, the mother of his only child, the woman he took a vow to. Lifeless, pale, cyanotic. I had leaped forward to try to look, and I saw my dad pushing on her chest murmuring, "Come on, come on, come on." She got taken away in a black body bag.

"Why didn't you call for help sooner?" my father had asked, shaking my shoulders. "She asked me not to."

"Why would you listen? She must have been in there for ages. Why didn't you get help? Answer me!"

"I'm sorry-I-she asked me not to," I repeated, my eyes welling with tears. "Is she in Heaven?"

My father hugged me, breathing out. "No, no, she isn't."

We never talked about her, and he would tell people she was sick and had died, ashamed of the sin she would burn in Hell for. One night, I snuck downstairs and saw him in the chair drinking whiskey, crying, something I never saw him do before. I knew then my father had died with my mother.

As the years passed, and he became more attentive of me, my nightmares worsened. Daniel had been my safety net-the only man that could touch me without me flinching. I wanted to know what my mother felt-somehow, I thought if I did, it would help the nightmares. I told Daniel I'd be taking a bath, but I didn't lock the door, and I didn't keep the water running.

I got in the tub and submerged my head. I waited, and counted, and waited. It became agony, and I breathed in underwater, my lungs aching. I sat up, coughing loudly, and Daniel ran inside the bathroom and held my sides.

"Are you okay?" he had asked. "What the hell were you

doing?”

“I--”

“Are you on your shit again?” Daniel turned my head. “Look at me! What were you doing? I thought we were past this.”

“I’m sorry,” I had said in-between gasps. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t do that shit again. You promised,” he said.

“I can’t-I can’t always be watching you, always scared. Maybe-maybe it’s time to go to therapy again.”

“No, I’m fine, I’m okay.”

“Catherine...”

But I had started to cry. “It hurt so bad... It must have hurt so bad.”

Daniel held me as I wept, caressing me. I hated therapy. I didn’t think it did anything. Then my therapist used the word almost. I was “almost” there. I wasn’t sure if “there” was an actual place or a state of mind. But to me, almost only reminded of failure, the epitome of nonfulfillment, and I didn’t leave my hometown for an almost. I quit soon after, and I had promised Daniel I’d get a new therapist, but I never did.

I felt protected in his arms, always secure, and his hands didn’t burn my throat. In moments like these, I missed him. As I sat in my father’s chair, staring at the uncomfortable couch, the blue curtains, the cross, all I was starting to see was red. And I thought then, maybe almost is all I would ever be.

#

The following day, the gusty winds continued to

shake my windows as I erratically packed. I had finished the kitchen and most of the living room. I had been trying to avoid my bedroom and my father's for as long as I could. After finishing the bottle of whiskey, I walked into my old room, which looked exactly the same, and the scorching memories flooded back.

“Have you stayed pure, Catherine?”

I winced. I opened a box and shoved everything from my old birch bureau inside--the dusty candles, the cheap jewelry I left behind. My throat felt drier as I packed, and my breathing became ragged. I stared at myself in the mirror, digging my fingernails into my palms. With the bagged eyes, and the pale skin, I looked like the person on those “don't do drugs” posters.

“You'll have to repent.”

I breathed heavily and heard noises from outside, so I dragged my heavy body to the window and pushed it open. The sky was a metallic grey, autumnal leaves flying everywhere, their deluded crimson and amber color catching my eye until I saw Peter and Mary. I couldn't make out what they were saying, but it sounded like they were arguing. Peter grabbed her arm, and I flinched. He pulled her inside as it started to rain, closing the door behind them.

It felt as if my mind was a sink and my thoughts a tap left running. I left the bedroom, slamming the door shut, and raided the cabinets for another bottle to bum my throat.

#

I had known my father was going to die. Two months prior to the phone call announcing his death, he had called me. He was in liver failure, drank himself into it, and wasn't eligible to register for a transplant until he was six months clean—he was only 60 days.

“Please. I can get a donation from you, if you're a match,” he had begged, but I stayed quiet. “I'm sorry—I know I've caused you a lot of pain. But please... you're my last chance. You can at least get tested.”

I thought about doing it. I had no one left, and though he left scars, he was the only parent I had now, and he had been a good man. But instead, I said, “Maybe if you repent and ask for forgiveness, God will help you.”

It was now nighttime, and I was still haunted by a good man's grave. The untuned thoughts and the ragged breath overwhelmed me. Rain hammered down, and thunder claimed the land. I jumped, dropping the half empty bottle of whiskey all over the living room floor. “Shit,” I murmured, fetching some paper towels to clean it up. As I picked up pieces of glass, I cut myself. I stared at the blood on my hands. My thoughts, overflowing like the blood, the blood, blood. The blue curtains, the cross on the wall, the bruises—a purple hue. Breathe. Repent. Breathe. Repent. The power went out.

I grabbed my phone, using it to illuminate my way to the generator in the backyard to see if I could start it myself. I followed Tom's instructions, making sure the fuel valve was on before turning the engine switch and pulling the recoil cord. Nothing. I tried again. Nothing. The inside of Mary's home was dark, and her white curtains were drawn, making it difficult to see if Peter was in

there with her.

I debated calling Tom for help, but I kept staring into Mary's house, looking for Peter and the bruises, and my throat burned. I didn't want him to have the house. I didn't want anyone to have the house. There was too much blood.

The rain purified my skin as I walked back inside. I paced in the living room, suffocated in the darkness of my dream.

"You need to repent for what you made me do. "

"Stop!" I screamed, exasperated. I climbed on top of the couch and tore the cross from the wall, tossing it. But his voice kept reverberating in the room, and my throat and thighs felt as if they were on fire, and I could feel his hands on me again. I flipped his brown chair and ripped down the curtains before I moved to the garage to grab the fuel Tom had left behind.

I rotated the nozzle open and began to pour the liquid all over the house: the uncomfortable couch, the cross, the chair, the curtains, my old bed, his, the water damage in front of the door, the scratches that trailed down from just above the doorknob.

When I tried using the lighter from the kitchen, it didn't work, so I grabbed the matches instead. Repent. I walked to the front door, pressing my back against it, and suffocating in the sweet smell of gasoline. Repent. I shakily grabbed a match and quickly dragged its head along the striker. Repent.

"Keep yourself pure. "

It flared up, but the wind blew it away. I breathed

out and dropped the old match, grabbing a new one. I dragged it again.

Out.

Again.

Out.

Again.

It stayed lit, and I could feel its warmth near my fingers. My throat didn't burn anymore. As I started to cry, I whispered, "Forgive me."

The flames, kindled with ardor, beheld my sight. There was no purple. With it in my hands, I walked a razor's edge between goodness and destruction. But the flames danced, and in their briefness, so vibrant and careless, they looked so pure and free, and in that moment, all I saw was red.

The End

Fiona Clarke is a senior at Providence College. An English Major, Clarke's poem "By the Rivers of Babylon" earned first place in Providence College's creative writing contest.

By the Rivers of Babylon

Were you in the swim last night?
I could have sworn I saw you balanced on one hand
On the banks of the river, and on the ties of the railroad—
But then, love and a hole in the earth
Sometimes run all together.

Today I stand transfixed where the orange trees grew,
For when I went outside to look at the stars,
I saw a cleft in the chin of the earth
That I had not seen before,
And I saw the rain pouring out its heart
Where I used to pour out mine like water,
And now the sea is full.
Today I stand transfixed where the orange trees grew,
And look and see: every surface is
One face shifting into another.

Richard Dinges, Jr. lives and works by a pond among trees and grassland, along with his wife, two dogs, three cats, and eight chickens. Writer's Block, Rockford Review, Ibbetson Street, Nebo, and Stickman Review most recently accepted his poems for their publications.

Conductor

Electric pulses
pass words etched
in black on cold
flat screens to my
eyes that blur and
shock my fingertips.
Mother and daughter
utter no words.
I am a conduit.
Ungrounded, I hope
to join hands again
someday, speak to faces,
secrets bared in
blank expressions.
Now I am a typist,
bearer of pulses
that beat deeply
in heated hearts.

Grim Reaper

After sun sets,
sky a pond smeared
in muddy blood,
a dark figure
walks at water's
edge, rifle slung
over his shoulder,
a casual stride
through impending
night, face turned dark
toward a pond that
glows in sky's blood,
watches for something
to catch his aim
and die before
light's last fail.

Raising

We tilled dark soil,
held delicate seeds
between fingertips,
planted and buried
in even rows, hoed
weeds and watered
dust through hot
days and into dusk,
raised these fervent
green and red fruits
of our labor that now
rot, insect eaten
and soft bruised sides,
as we go our separate
ways, harvest one
chore too far.

I have led a solitary life of suffering, study, and versification. As far as my intellectual and my literary pursuits are concerned I am sheerly primitive. The spark that I have for those endeavors is something that I feel can't be taught. I live in immediate proximity to a local professional theater and the staff and students there have accepted me into their circle as a fellow "creative." With all the unmitigated negativity a person is likely to encounter it is quite tonic to associate with constructive people who truly care about a better world. I feel that the greatest poem I have ever read is "Fern Hill" by Dylan Thomas. Shakespeare certainly resides in its shadow. Not only is it prismatically peerless but the meaning it conveys is uncompromisingly poignant. I award Dylan Thomas the blue ribbon for being such a sincere artist with such a distinctive oeuvre.

A Lady Named Art is Sorrow's Bloom

She walks the streets to sell the moon
 A lady named art is sorrow's bloom
 She'll say heaven's more than just a word
 but then it will pass like a lonely bird
 Her fragrance sweet will make you believe
 and then the perfume's loss you'll grieve
 You'll never know any greater beauty
 than her hair after an early honest rain
 You'll want to leave the morning light
 but don't believe in the dawn's refrain
 The truth is often clothed in the petals of a rose
 Don't wait for an answer to the questions you pose
 Love is fantasy that has found a door
 only imagination is reality's whore

Mariela Flores is a senior at Providence College. Mariela is an English creative writing major and will be the first in her family to graduate college. In 2022, her poem, “My Name” placed first in Providence College’s Creative Writing Contest and her short story, “The Hardest Thing to Say is goodbye” placed second. In 2023 her short story “Trash Day”, placed first, and her poem, “5 Ways to Look At Hands”, placed second in the same contest.

My Name

Mariela

I say my name the way my mother does—
Sweet syllables sewn together slipping smoothly off the
tongue

A soft emphasis on the “R” reminds those around me
where I am from.

My name is *cafe con pan* in the morning for breakfast.

I say my name like a song,

A melody that sticks to the ears of anyone nearby, a song
you sway to, slowly.

It is hips finding a rhythm, legs entangling themselves in
the words of *Romeo*.

It is dancing in 4/4 time, with your friends at the school
dance.

They say my name and turn it into a puzzle.

They try to fit their own sounds into my rhythm,
but it is off key.

My name, no longer sweet, is bitter black coffee
coating their tongues
making it uncomfortable to swallow.

They take my name and tear it at the seams, until I
am two names— “Marry Ella”

My name sounds more foreign through their air,
than it has ever been in my life.

They strip me from *cafe con pan*, *bachata*, my mom.
Left, is only strings and fragments of who I was.

They take my name like land,
as if were theirs to keep.
They peel back the layers of my skin
and chew on the parts they like the taste of.

But my name is *Maria y Jose* meeting each other
in a land far from home,
in a cold place where they watch their skin pale.
It is them falling in love, or something close to it,
holding each other through the trials of “a dream.”

My name is healed scars on brown skin,
it is my *abuelita* losing her mind in El Salvador
it is longing for the colors of Guatemala.
It is not quite fitting here nor there.

They say my name like a question,
and sometimes they do not say my name at all.

I say my name the way my mother does
They have not met my mother.

Five Ways to Look at Hands

ONE

I fashion a gun out of cold flesh,
and point it directly at my enemy.
There is no hesitation in this kill,
you are at the mercy of my hands.

TWO

When the wind turns my bones stiff
and the ground is frozen,
warm hands find my flesh
and thaw my body.

THREE

Millions of natives were slaughtered for the shine in their
land.
Millions of slaves were drowned on foreign ships and lost
in the sand.
Millions were charred in the name of a Man.
 Look down to see the weapons of this destruction
and you
 will find your hands.

FOUR

There are no words a voice can carry
that capture so movingly what hands can say.
 Like birds flying through wicked winds,
 or fish floating through thick currents.
Hands push through space loudly with so much to say.

FIVE

Oh, how wonderful a thing it is to see nothing.
Nothing carved
nothing molded
nothing sculpted
into something, by some hands.

The Hardest Thing to Say is Goodbye

You're not supposed to be lined up with a hundred people, outside of a funeral home on a hot July day. Not when the air is thick and clings to every inch of your skin and tears evaporate before they can fall onto the steaming cement.

Yet here I was, on this hot July day drenched in sweat as if I had fallen into a pool of water. I thought we all looked ridiculous standing uniformly in a straight line, wearing all white and using the funeral program as makeshift fans.

I stood near the end of the line, with my friend, Flora. She was shorter than me with long black hair she let grow out in the summer. She had freckles scattered around her nose that stood out against her tan skin. It was odd for a pure Mexican like her, but she embraced them, saying they were "markings from a past life". She always had a dreamlike explanation for everything, but not even she could come up with a good enough explanation to why we were standing, outside of a funeral home, in July, waiting to say goodbye to our dead friend.

We watched people entering the funeral home sobbing and leaving drenched in tears. I brought my hand up to my face and thought I should be crying, but I hadn't cried since I found out Alma died. I was too angry at her to cry.

There was a silence that echoed between Flora and I, neither one of us sure of what to say. So, I said the only thing I had been wondering all day, "Do you think she's warm right now?"

"What?" Flora asked.

"Alma. Do you think she's warm in there? I can't

stop sweating.” I moved my hands up to my face and felt the heat burn through my skin.

“I don’t know, but I sure am glad she made us wear white,” Flora said.

“I don’t know how much choice she had,” I replied, looking down at my white ensemble. Alma’s mother wanted us to all wear white, saying black was, “too depressing”. I thought that was funny, with everyone around us crying, kneeling, screaming at God and asking, “Why did you take her?”, there was nothing un-depressing about this, even in our white clothes.

“I think it’s annoying she decided to kill herself in July,” I said.

“She could’ve at least checked the weather,” Flora replied.

We smiled at each other then, knowing Alma would have stood right between us. She would have held our hands, smiled and joked right on cue, “I didn’t plan that far ahead, fuckers,” and we would’ve broken out in laughter.

It was the first time I had allowed myself to imagine her laugh. I could hear it ring through the heat like a song coming out of a car radio, loud and heavy.

“I hate that we’re here,” I said.

“Me too,” Flora replied. “I wish we were at McDonalds.”

Every Friday after school we would head straight for the McDonald’s near our home. Alma would always run ahead of us yelling, “I need a McFlurry right McFucking now!”, and Flora and I would look at her in amazement. Alma was so loud and unafraid, not noticing the

looks of the people walking by. I would get annoyed with her. “Alma, stop yelling!” I would say.

“Marta, I’ll stop yelling when you stop being cute!”

“You’re the dumbest girl I know,” I replied.

She would give me the finger while smiling, slowing down, and waiting for us to reach her.

“You’re annoying,” I would say grabbing her right hand while Flora grabbed her left.

I wish I could have been annoyed with her one more time.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do when I get up there, do I touch her?” I asked. I hated the idea of touching a lifeless Alma.

“I think you do what just feels normal?” Flora was as stuck as I was.

“Nothing about a fifteen-year-old killing herself is normal.” We nodded in agreement looking ahead of each other and biting our lips in unison.

We stood in silence for a long time before we started to move in the line. Moving closer to the door where we would greet her mom, her little brother, and all the people that had loved her.

“We shouldn’t have to do this,” I said in a whisper, “She kills herself and we’re supposed to say goodbye? We’re supposed to walk in there, look at her lifeless body, and pretend it’s not the dumbest thing she’s ever done? She didn’t even say goodbye to us!” My mind was bleeding red with images of Alma.

“Marta, calm down. It’ll be quick, we go in, say goodbye and we leave. Maybe it will be good for us: we have to face it at some point,” Flora said.

“No, it won’t be good for us. How is looking at our dead friend good for us? Fuck this, fuck this whole thing. It’s too much, Flora, too fucking much. We were just with her, how could she do this to us? How could she do this to me? Now I have to go inside and pretend it doesn’t hurt at all?” I said.

“No one is asking you to pretend. You’re the one who decided crying wasn’t cool,” she said. Flora never got angry. That was the thing about her, she was always cool and calm and held you in the palm of her hand like a bird, so delicate, afraid to break you. But Flora, spat at me with anger.

“I’m sorry. I just don’t know if I can do this,” I said as I grabbed Flora’s hand.

“No one knows if they can do this, we just have to. You’re not the only one who lost her Marta, I did, too. She was my friend, too. Now stop yelling, her family is right there. It’s almost our turn inside and I’ll be damned if we’re the only ones who don’t say goodbye to her.” Flora let go of my hand and stood silent in front of me. I watched as she took a step forward entering the funeral home.

When Alma was alive, she would greet me by grabbing me at the waist and lifting me in the air as if I weighed nothing.

“Alma, put me down right now.”

“Give me a kiss and I will.” She loved making me blush.

“You are insane,” I would say as I plopped a big messy kiss onto her cheek.

How was I supposed to say goodbye to her now,

without a hug, without a twirl, without a sloppy kiss. There was no mind in her body now, just a shell, an empty shell.

The funeral home was cold. Flora went in first, saying her condolences to Alma's mother and walking towards the casket. I could see her open and clench her fists as she tried to calm herself down. Her black hair swayed softly with her every step. She glanced quickly at the poster board near the casket and shook her head. Flora reached the casket and looked down and began to cry. I looked away then, wishing we were anywhere else but here.

The funeral home was filled with Alma's family; her abuela sat near the front next to her tias; they were all crying and holding each other's hands looking at the casket. Her mom was standing near the door greeting every single person that walked in. Next to her was Alma's little brother, Andres, who had turned five just a month prior. He was holding onto his mom's long white skirt, looking blankly at the ground. I wondered if he knew what happened or even where he was. Alma's mom kept one hand on his shoulder rubbing it periodically as people offered their condolences. When it was my turn, Alma's mother spoke before I had the chance to offer mine.

"She loved you, you know?", she said in a small sad voice.

"I know. She was my best friend." I looked down at my hands. I couldn't find the strength to look her in the eyes they looked too much like Alma's.

"But it was so much more than that, wasn't it?", she asked.

I broke the stare between my eyes and hands and looked at her mother. How could she know what I felt before I did?

I tried to find the right words to say, flooded by all the things I wanted to tell her. I wanted to tell her that Alma's favorite book was *The Little Prince*, I wanted to tell her that her favorite song was "What Makes You Beautiful", but if you asked her, it was "Obsesión" by Aventura. I wanted to tell her that Alma would always pick up rocks on her way to school because she wanted to collect something, and rocks were the cheapest thing she could find. I wanted to tell her that Alma loved scary movies but would use my hands to cover her eyes when it got too scary. I wanted to tell her about the time Alma volunteered to read my presentation for me in class because I was too scared, and Alma was never scared. I wanted to tell her that you could find honey in her eyes if you looked close enough. I wanted to tell her about all the corners and blunt edges of Alma's mind I got to know.

"Yea, I guess it was," I said instead.

She looked at me with her sad smile and took me into a tight hug.

As I walked away from her, I moved closer to the casket where Alma rested. I looked around me and saw the big poster board with pictures of me, Alma, and Flora all over the surface. I stopped, noticing the most recent picture that hung there. I didn't recognize myself standing next to Alma with her arm around me and another around Flora. We looked so happy.

Four weeks ago, Alma, Flora, and I were at the playground near my house. Alma dragged us there want-

ing to go on the swings and feel the air. She had me push her and I was never one to say no to Alma, even when she was annoying. Flora was on the swing next to her reaching out to grab hands. It all felt perfect. It was nearing the end of the day, so the summer heat had transformed into a cool sunless sky. We were all wearing sweaters that were too big on us and shorts. My curly brown hair was up in a bun that sat loosely on my head while Alma and Flora had theirs down, letting it fly in the wind. I was about to go in and push Alma when she hopped off the swing and said, "Let's take a picture." She was smiling so wide it looked like it hurt her cheeks.

"A picture, right now? We look crazy," Flora said, hopping off her swing and taking out her phone to fix her hair and check her makeup.

"Please?", Alma sounded urgent, we didn't know why at the time.

"Fine. For you," I said, grabbing her face with my hand, "the world."

"You have to smile, like actually smile, teeth and all," Alma said with a demanding tone. I looked at Alma carefully noting something behind her honey eyes.

"Everything okay?" I asked.

"Everything's fine, just want a picture of my best gals," Alma replied.

"Okay," I said walking towards Flora, "Flora, you take the picture," I said.

"But I'm the shortest one!"

"Just take the picture and smile!" Alma said.

The three of us stood next to each other with Alma in the middle, wrapping her arms around us. Flora took

out her phone and extended her arm as much as she could and on the count of three, we smiled big, crooked teeth on full display. We looked happy.

I walked to the casket, took a deep breath, and looked down to see her. Her short hair was combed to the side and her usual tan skin looked white lying in the wooden coffin. Her arms were crossed over her chest and her nails were plain, when they should've been painted bright blue like she always had them. They put her in a white dress she would've hated, wearing light pink lipstick, and blush to make her look alive. But Alma looked dead.

I reached down to touch her hands and felt the coldness of her body.

"So, you're not warm," I whispered to her.

My eyes began to sting as I held her cold hand in mine. Looking at her, the girl who was too loud, who knew just how to annoy me, stiff and motionless, made no sense. I was angry at her for making this funeral the last time I saw her.

The last conversation I had with Alma happened one week before she died. It was late and we were talking on the phone in hushed tones.

"What do you think Sophomore year will be like?" I asked

"Probably the same as Freshman year," Alma replied.

"Think we'll still be friends?"

"Of course, Marta, it's us forever."

"Forever, can you imagine? I wouldn't mind a forever with you," I said.

“Marta, are you confessing your undying love for me?” I could hear the smile in her voice.

“Maybe,” I said blushing, “You know what I’m trying to say,” I said.

“I do. You know, I wouldn’t mind a forever with you either,” Alma said taking in a deep breath that echoed through the phone, “I’m sorry, if we don’t get that,” Alma said.

“Now you’re just trying to break my heart.”

“Never. I am sure I will love you as long as I live,” Alma said.

I wanted to sink back into that moment and get lost in the memory forever. I felt the tears come before I could stop them. I cried loud and hard down into her coffin realizing then that I would spend the rest of my life missing my best friend. I could feel her family watching me, but it didn’t matter. I tried to say goodbye to her, tried to pick the words from my brain and lay them next to her. I couldn’t say it, couldn’t say goodbye, so I said what I knew she would want to hear,

“You’re the dumbest girl I know,” I whispered to her as I bent down to kiss her cheek.

I tried to wipe the tears off my face as I walked back outside to the group of people who had already said their goodbyes. I found Flora sitting on the sidewalk behind the funeral home and I sat next to her. She rested her head on her palm and looked at me.

“You cried,” she said matter-of-factly.

“Yeah. Actually, I’m still crying,” I said, in between broken sobs.

Flora wrapped her arm around me and let me

cry loudly and messily until my breathing evened out. I looked at her, her eyes were red, and her lips were chewed so badly they were bleeding.

“She really fucked us over,” Flora said squeezing my shoulder. “She left us as a duo knowing we only worked as a trio.”

“This is her way of getting us to bond,” I said.

“What a shitty way to go about it,” she replied.

We sat there, on the sidewalk, looking at the cement. By the time we finally stood up, the air was cooler, and the sun was beginning to set somewhere far into the clouds. We looked at each other, unsure of what to say next.

“Want to get McDonalds?” Flora asked.

“You know me well.”

Trash Day

Trash day is my favorite day. On trash day mami tells me and Ana, to put on our shoes and a sweater, an old one, she specifies, in case we get dirty.

My uncle started our trash day tradition when he collected all the beer cans he had lying around his apartment one Tuesday and brought them to the big liquor store with a recycling machine that turns the cans into money. Mami asked him if we could go with him, he said yes, but we had to bring our own cans if we wanted any money.

“I don’t want to touch other people’s trash,” Ana says.

“We are not rats; we do not touch trash. We are only collecting the cans,” Mamí says. “Vamos Ana, help your sister with her zipper,” she points to me.

Mami says we are helping papí on these days, using our hands to make money just like he does. The last time we helped papí we found a Gameboy someone had thrown away and two toy cars I begged mami to let us keep them, even though I knew they were for boys.

“I hope we find gold this time,” I say tying my shoe.

“We’re not going to find gold, just a bunch of beer cans,” Ana says.

“When I find gold, I’m not sharing,” I say lips pointed to the sky.

We walk around the city up and down every street with a big black bag. We throw every can we see into the bag. I learn all about our neighbors this way. The blue house two streets over drinks Corona beer with limes pushed to the bottom. The house on Cowden Street, near the middle school only drinks Bud Lights. There are some

houses mamá will not let us go to because they prefer drogas to beer and she is scared we will accidentally get pricked by a needle.

“Beer smells bad,” I say. I try my best to move my hands around the wet cans in the recycling bin.

“Does it taste good?” Ana asks mamá.

“No. It tastes like rotten vegetables, no good, you two will never want to try it,” Mami says, picking up a Heineken can.

“Will we want to try drogas?” I ask.

“Ay Dios mio,” mamá ties a knot on the black bag, “No drogas! You will break mamá’s heart if you ever do.”

By the time we walk back to our home the sun is setting somewhere far away. Ana looks golden in the sun’s heavy colorful heat.

“Gold!” I say throwing my arms around Ana’s shoulders.

“Marisol, get off!” She yells.

“You are my gold,” I say laughing in her ear. I get off her and smile, liking the way my big sister looks older when the sun is pushed down into the Earth. Ana is only three years older than me, but in almost darkness she looks much older.

“You’re so weird,” Ana says.

“Paren de pelear. Let’s go to your uncle, he leaves soon,” Mami says. Mami holds the trash bag in one hand and my hand in the other as we walk back home.

We wait by my uncle’s red truck, placing the big black bag in the back of the truck. I don’t like my uncle’s truck; it smells sour like the cans. My uncle comes down with three big bags and signals for us to get in the truck,

not saying a word. My uncle plays no music on our ride, instead telling us big loud stories about his time in El Salvador. His stories make me miss papí.

At the liquor store Ana and I help mami put the cans inside the machine one by one. Each can is worth one cent. Mami never tells us how much money we bring home to papí, she only repeats that we are helping him, sighing as she gives the receipt to the man at the cash register.

“Do we have to do this again next week?” Ana asks.

“Ay mija, yes. It is only for a little while longer,” Mami says.

When we get home the sun is no longer in the sky and the stars peek through the misty clouds. Ana and I eat, brush our teeth, and go to bed.

“Goodnight,” we yell over to mami, watching as her shadow passes by our door.

“Goodnight, I love you,” she says back.

“I love you, que dios te bendiga.”

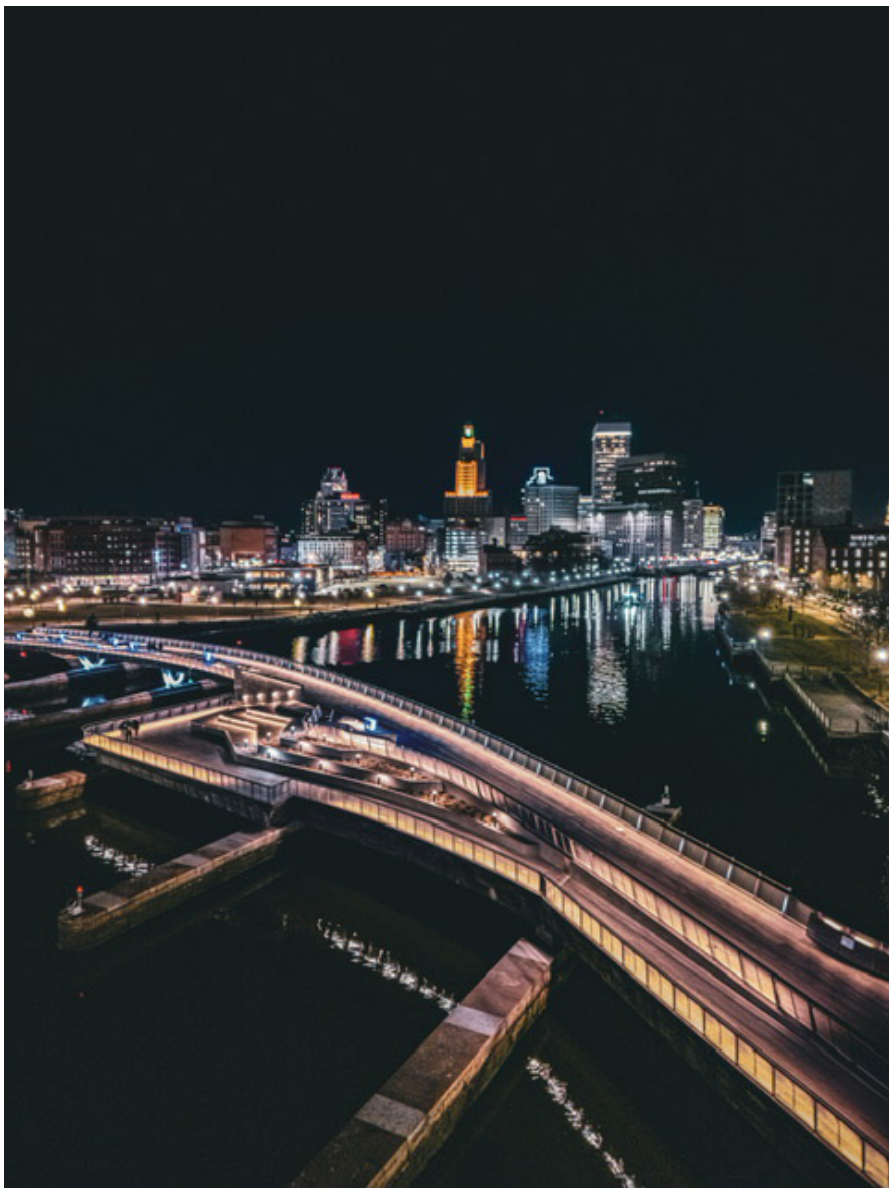
“A ustedes tambien,” mami says closing her door.

“Okay,” I reply shutting my eyes.

Falling asleep is easy on trash days. The walking always makes my bones feel heavy sinking me into the Disney princess sheets mami got for me from Savers. I fall asleep waiting for the echoing sound of papí opening the door. I fall asleep dreaming about gold and cans and toys hidden underneath smelly trash. I dream of all the money we must have now and how happy papí will be.



PHOTOGRAPHY



MARC BONTEMPS



MARC BONTEMPS



DIANE POLANCO

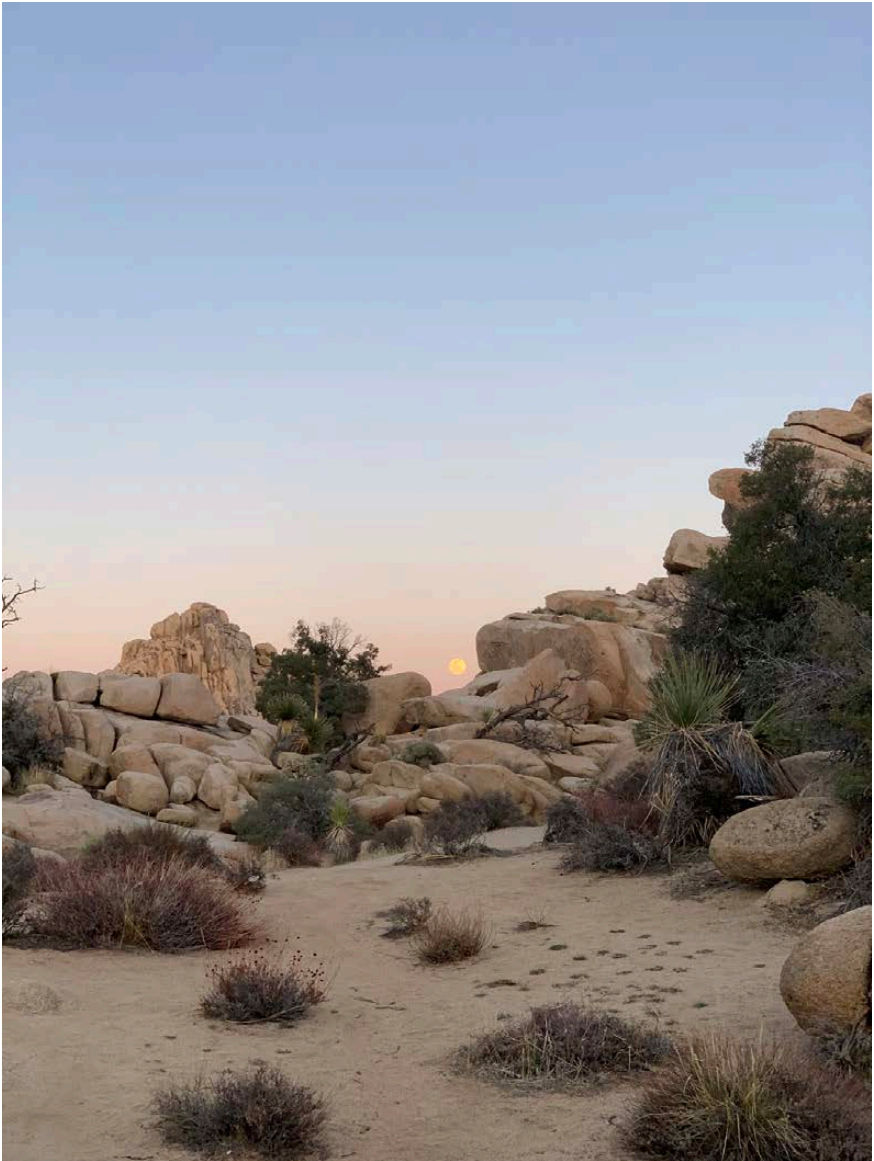


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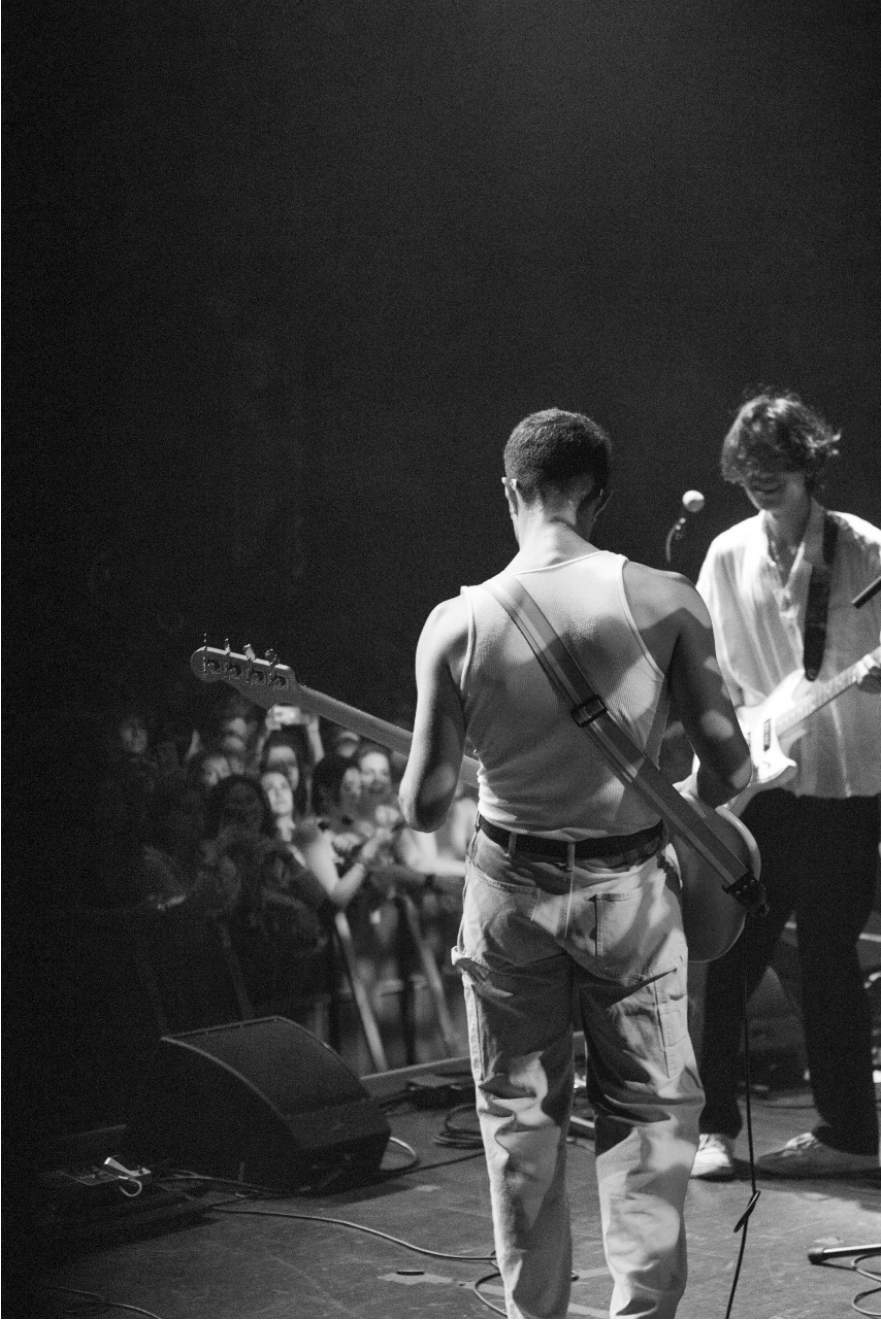
DIANE POLANCO



MARTINA SCARPA



NOAH SNELGROVE



NOAH SNELGROVE



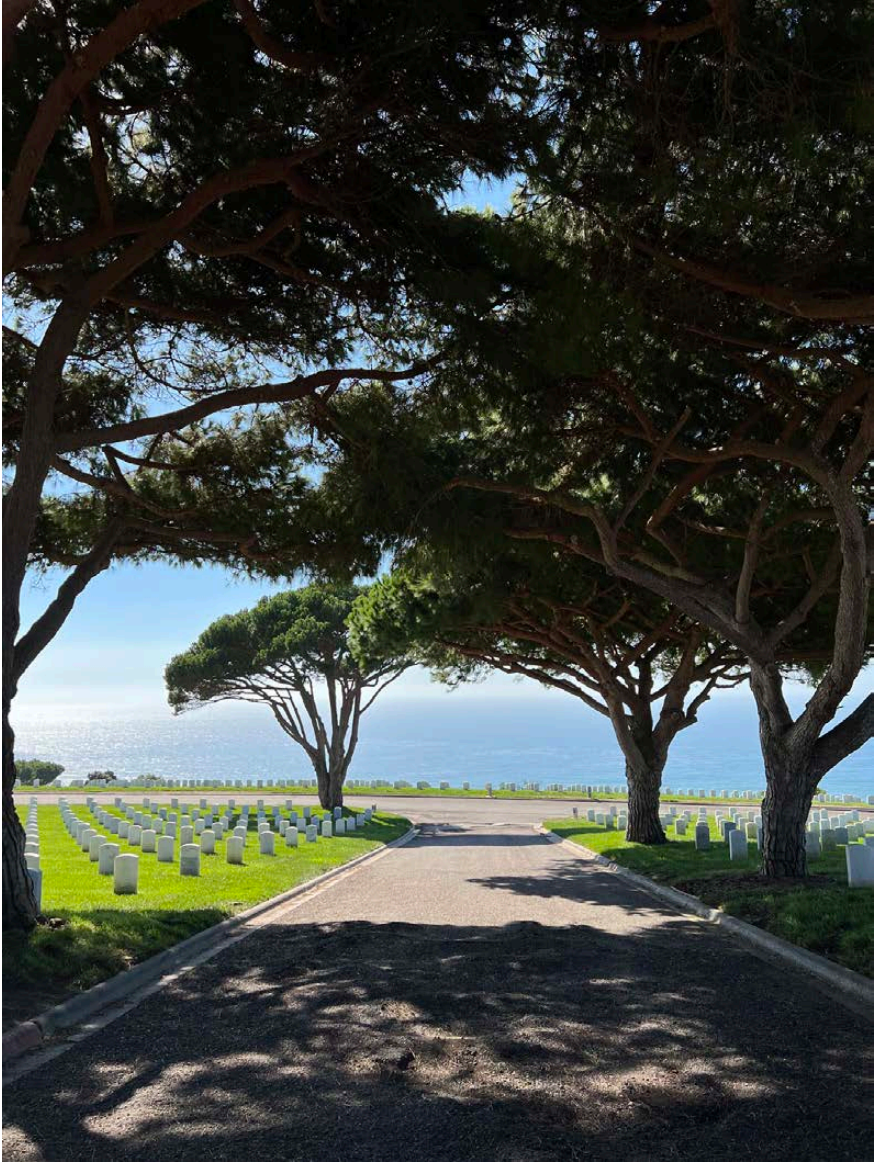
NOAH SNELGROVE



NOAH SNELGROVE



NOAH SNELGROVE



NOAH SNELGROVE



FICTION & POETRY

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Stand, Washington Square Review and Floyd County Moonshine. Latest books, "Covert", "Memory Outside The Head" and "Guest Of Myself" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the McNeese Review, Santa Fe Literary Review and Open Ceilings.

A Widower Dates Again

How welcome
the resurrection.

Coming
so late in life.

A restaurant
instead of Saturday night
network television.

A self
I'd lost touch with,
shaken out of
a ten-year stupor.

Time to
recapture
the golden days
of dating women

Look in the mirror/
Smile.
Think new.

Remember,
I'm a man.
Not a medium.

Don't summon up
the spirits of the dead.

The 5.30 Chorus

It's 5.30 p.m.,
when people I don't know
pull into their nearby driveways,
car doors slamming,
(maybe on
the imagined fingers
of their bosses),
a coughing bout
from a day of breathing
factory grit,
and a sigh as big
as nine to five.

It's what I call
the neighborhood symphony,
with players I only recognize
by sight.
And sound of course.
If it wasn't for them,
5.30 would be no more
than a moment in my time.
But, thanks to the
cacophony outside,
it's a reminder of
when I too held down
a day job,

My own 5.30 sound
was the squeak of shoes,
the brush of briefcase,
and the loosening of my tie.
Many strangers still
know me by that.

*William Heath has published two poetry books, *The Walking Man* and *Steel Valley Elegy*; a chapbook, *Night Moves in Ohio*; three novels: *The Children Bob Moses Led* (winner of the Hackney Award), *Devil Dancer*, and *Blacksnake's Path*; a work of history, *William Wells and the Struggle for the Old Northwest* (winner of two Spur Awards); and a collection of interviews, *Conversations with Robert Stone*.*

Boccaccio's Theft

During the dark ages when only rats digested the classics and the light of learning was a guttering candle, Boccaccio visited the Benedictine Abbey in Monte Cassino, found the library in a deplorable state: the door unbolted, left open, grass spouting on window sills, manuscripts coated with dust, torn pages scattered on the floor, precious parchments mutilated, torn into strips to make psalters for boys, amulets for women, sold for a few soldi. Reduced to tears, or so he says, he left the desolate place in despair, but not before he retrieved from that scene of neglect the sole surviving manuscripts of Books 11-16 of the Annals, what remains of the Histories by one Cornelius Tacitus as well as works by Varro and Apuleius, including *The Golden Ass*. The question is: Did Boccaccio tell a tall tale to cover up his theft? Either way, we say thanks.

Lydia (1954-1991)

Her pregnancy conceals
the tumor that endangers
her life. Back from the dead,
a baby boy in her arms, she
no longer questions the meaning
of life but answers the cry.
“I’ll be very thin for a while,”
she says, “and then I’ll die.”
Cancer cured her skin problems
but now there are eight scars
on her chest and an implant
she calls her third breast.
She walks with a limp
from the bone marrow transplant,
the bones of her hip crumbling
a cell at a time. When I gently
hug her goodbye in the hospital
she cries out in pain.

Ken Holland has had work widely published in such journals as Rattle, Tulane Review, and Southwest Review, with poetry forthcoming in a half dozen others. He was awarded first place in the 2022 New Ohio Review poetry contest, judged by Kim Addonizio, and was a finalist in the 2022 Lasciaux Prize in Poetry. His book length manuscript, Summer of the Gods, was a semi-finalist in the 2022 Able Muse book competition, the 2022 Washington Prize and 2023 Longleaf Press contest. He's also been nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize. He lives in the mid-Hudson Valley of NY. More at his website: www.kenhollandpoet.com

FLIGHT

I hear the night-driven semis and I'm counting them in
my head
Like they were part of one great flock, as if warm-blooded
with
A four-chambered heart.

Migration is no less valid for machines than for wilde-
beest
Or the displaced.

I don't know why dawn doesn't come, just what
Its problem is. Someone must have thrown some
Leg irons around its feet.

Turn migration inside out and you get the word shackle.

Someone somewhere has compiled the number of birds
That streamline their death each year into the flashing
beacons
Of power grids, all those false moons that are meant as
warnings;
But only to our species.

Shackle any species and there is no migration.
Though no one's yet counted how many migrants
Have been walked back in shackles, bound at the wrist.
Take a look at the shape of handcuffs—
They're just another Mobius strip.

Birds disoriented by human light send out flight calls
That pull in other birds, the way a person drowning
Will grab another person's arm and pull them down
To where air is too scarce for a wing's panic.

Have you ever tried screaming underwater?
What rises to the surface makes no sound at all.

How is it that an albatross bears the curse of being a
burden? Think of the way it navigates the ocean, how it
spends
The first six years of its life without touching land.

Show me the migrant who wouldn't want to be attached
To a ten-foot wing span.

Show me the migrant who doesn't understand flight.

Sarah Klema is a senior English Creative Writing major at Providence College. In 2023, her poem “Autumn Gold” won second place in Providence College’s creative writing contest.

Autumn Gold

The sun in the noon-day sky is a giant beaming dandelion
severed from its stem,
Freely floating over the earth.

A disembodied puff of flower head
Liberated from earthly laws,

Immortalized above the clouds despite the passing
of its sister buds in the onslaught of November frost.

Upon a barren hill,
My fingers reach as headless stems

In vain to trace
Each honeyed, golden petal.

So fragrant sweet they cast their warmth
Unto the world below,

Greet my frosted cheeks
With floral kisses.

Days of plenty have laid themselves to rest in fallen
leaves,
Now I, a beggar on a corpse of earth, reach out

To grasp its proffered petals in my palms,
Pocket as many as will fit within the confines of my coat.

Smuggled warmth stowed away
For colder days to come.

The Little Match Girl:

“‘She wanted to warm herself,’ the people said. No one imagined what beautiful things she had seen, and how happily she had gone...”

—Hans Christian Andersen

On a cold winter’s evening, the last of the year, she finds herself wandering about the city barefoot, penniless. Only a handful of matches to sell. No one wants them, no one looks her way. She might as well be a ghost—invisible, dead to the world.

At the crossroads of the city, coaches and buggies mill about—those on foot brush past her as formless shadows, faces stripped of color. She calls out to each one, brandishes her meager wares, each time unnoticed. A living girl drifting in a world of dead things.

They might as well be ghosts... so... cold.

She shakes her head to clear it of the growing fear and continues on. She is searching for something: a soul to care, or perhaps a light to claim as her own.

Passing through a market street, she observes tilted faces and twisted homes, and tries to find some small bright scrap of self in this, with which to fashion an image, an identity, an ideal. A shred of hope to cling to. But the lights are going out along the streets, and the darkness is so thick, swallowing her small figure in shadow.

The faint specs of light that remain are now so much harder to possess.

Still, she is unfazed—no longer hope to sell her wares, she will use them for herself! One match struck, and a golden spark is lit—barely a flicker.

No, a flame. And in that flame a fairy dancing!

She burns through three more matches—and beholds the vision multiplied.

More golden dancers to entertain me! Ah, look—they are inviting me to be a part of their fun! The stars are kind, to have granted me the company of such dear friends in this dark. Tonight, I think I hold heaven in my hands.

Dancing through the soulless streets with matches blazing, ignoring the protests of her frozen feet, she becomes one light among many as the matches, yielding up their fire, lend their bodies to the dance. The dancers bend and break, crackle and split and sigh. They die out one by one, consumed by the ravenous night.

Match by match by match she goes along, already nothing more than a faint smudge of light wavering against the backdrop of grey houses—more spirit than girl.

Ten matches gone now, and still the cold penetrates deeper. It seeps into the hollow spaces of her spine, constricts her blood vessels to the breadth of poppy seeds. Still, her

eyes burn with inner fire, celestial light. She doesn't notice that all her wares have burned through, their charred corpses circling her fading figure in the dust of the street.

Body numb with cold, she curls up in the snow to sleep—mind aglow with flaming visions—the brightest night of her life.

The Pale Lady's Potrait

There she hovers, just beyond the court of silent stars:
the moon. A steady and somber mistress,
pasty skin illumined against the sable night sky. Round
of face, yet strangely hollow, she is staring fixedly into
something far below—an object that has ransomed her
attention.

It is nothing more than her own figure, cruelly distorted.

Glistening black with captured light, the placid surface
of the autumn lake reflects back her ashen countenance.
Flat and formless shines forth the image, a pitted, dim-
pled surface, composite of light and Shadow—eternal
Shadow that haunts her features, lurks in every crevice of
her flesh, lends a fatal pallor to her heavenly glow.

Skeletal clusters of trees, their leaves long since stripped
from their frames, extend their bony fingers towards the
edges of the sallow disc that is her face—reflected on the
water with light borrowed from the Sun—not truly hers to
possess, even as she rules the night.

*Surely this cannot be I, she shudders inwardly. This wasted
figure, so desolate, so starved for want of outer beauty, inner
light!*

Confronted in her nakedness, she stands in awe bewil-
dered. Transfixed by self-loathing. Loathing which com-
pounds upon itself—inflicts its bearer with unequaled
dread and bitter shame. How stretched, how dull, how
barren she looks! Surely, she was whole and bright and
round once, a rival to the Sun, an equal sovereign over
the earth.

No, but all too well she knows her flaws—or, thinking them known, embodies them all the more. Solemn stillness is the robe she wears. Thin pallor emblazoned on the water.

Then, suddenly, the surface of the lake is broken. A heron bending low to snatch a fish. *Ripple*. A thousand scattered selves retreat into the night.

Craig Kurtz came to national prominence with The Philosophic Collage in 1981. His light verse is featured in many literary journals, including Dalhousie Review, Reed and Stand. His first novel Surviving the Dream will be self-published summer 2023.

Secrets

“The tabby cat. Fracois, was sitting on his botom right in the middle of the room. Solemn and motionless, he was looking at the two lovers with wide-open eyes. He seemed tp be examining them carefully without blinking, lost in a sort of diabolical trance.” Emile Zola, Therese Raquin.

I tell you, friend, I’ve seen it all-
it sometimes helps to be so small;
they barely notice I’m around-
I lurk about without a sound.

There are no judgments that i make
sometimes some morals are opaque;
what people do don’t make me fret,
as long as I get my needs met.

So here we are in this small room-
the grunts are fun, so I presume;
prehaps nobody here is wed-
why would I care since I’ve been fed?

Athwart the bed the lovers roll
I couldn’t say what was their goal;
they shed their clothing in a heap
which gives me a warm spot to sleep.

They had me fixed when i was born
so i don't need romance or porn;
what people do is their affair-
though i have been known to stare.

And when the lovers are all spent
they view me with embarrassment;
perhaps it seems ridiculous-
I try to mind my own business.

I tell you, friend, I've seen it all-
it's like I live in a brothel;
and 'tho it's called a tender trap,
i'd rather have a cozy nap.

So, if, by chance, I could locute,
why would I dash someone's reput?;
of all the creatures known as pets,
it's cats who best respect secrets.

The Neglected Cat

For Pheobe

My girlfriend's cat, and nothing more-
a creature scratching at the door;
a yowling voice that always begs
and rubs her hair across my legs;
a pet that paces to get fed,
then throws up all over the bed;
an animal that's simply there-
a cat loaf with a vacant stare.

we used to play, the cat and I-
we stopped, but I can't recall why;
there seemed less time, as time went on
and she got more and more withdrawn;
the cat ceased to be a house pet,
becoming chores that we'd forget;
and so she aged, with private thoughts,
curled up behind the kitchen pots.

And after our first child was born,
the lonely cat felt more forlorn;
she was a nuisance on the stairs

and on the sofa, left more tears;
an indoor cat, forced to stay put,
how sad she's always underfoot;
a cat who spends her time alone,
whose dry food's all the care she's shown.

A new job, and the movers came
and life was never once the same;
a bigger house that smells brand-new,
a front yard she cannot get to;
the baby naps, the house is still-
the water dish could use a fill;
the doorbell rings, the mail arrives-
she'll try another nine lives.

Richard Levine, a retired NYC teacher, is the author of Selected Poems, Contiguous States, and five chapbooks. Now in Contest is forthcoming from Fernwood Press. An Advisory Editor of Big-CityLit.com, he is the recipient of the 2021 Connecticut Poetry Society Award, and was co-editor of “Invasion of Ukraine 2022: Poems.” “The Spoils of War” is forthcoming in American Book Review. website: richardlevine107.com.

Restoration

for Soraya Hadasah Levine-Brooks

The cardinals on Myrtle Avenue sing
of spring as if nature belongs to its winged-self,

despite the houses and concrete,
despite the cars lining alternate sides
of the street on alternate days

of the week. And everyday it is so,
that people return from work and park

under power and telephone lines
with the Gabriel-like trumpeting
of cardinals singing Cheer! Cheer! Cheer!,

as if welcoming them home,
as if restoring them to nature.

Bahbe

What made her so cold, so distant –
never hugging, never touching,
except in posed photographs. Even then
she needed to be told – move closer,
put your arm around his shoulder.

Was it something in the Russian
folk songs she hummed, but never taught?
Did she know the words? Did she sing
them to her children, lullaby
my mother to sleep with them?

What made her so cold, so distant –
was it the consonant-hard hatred
and hunting of Jews, the famines?
How I longed for signs of her love,
that woman I never saw smile.

Skip-Striding the Lonely

I remember thinking that the child-brilliant questions my daughters asked, were like stones that I had to keep skip-striding over the lonely deep to the far. Why are ripples round? Why are eyes?

My answers did not always float, clear and bright as their questions did. So we'd consult a book, stretching out on the floor with it; I'd read, and together we'd pour over pictures.

Once, on a camping trip, one of them pressed her cupped hands to my right ear to hear a cricket clicking. Excitement made her face glow and her eyes big. How do we build a cricket house?

Disappointment rippled her face when I said we had to let it go. Even when I had the answers to their question it was never easy, or as much as I wanted to give.

Mike Manerowski holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Hamline University and is a longtime resident of Saint Paul, Minnesota. His writing has seen publication in various literary journals. He edits fiction, mentors developing writers, teaches ESL, works an office job, and is a father to a wonderful son.

Day in America

The sky comes in blue
eye shadow
the silent angry
heat of the sun
fingernail veneer paid in silver
bullet holes paid
in lives

the souls
precious
an ash
blackened smudged
stains the air

cars like a pack of thieves
race by

the families of victims
night after night
washing the blood out
from their dreams

New Cosmology of Loss

When her mother passed
young
she concluded what's
to get upset about
must have been
her time

when the coal earth crushed
miners' bodies well
that's mining

when the bridge
collapsed and the dancer
downward twirled
her posture the shape
of a driver's seat
within a dashboard
door and windshield
cage

when pigeon wings
snapped with concrete
and the Mississippi spewed
steel plates and blood
she argued

I can't feel
sorry for any of them
tragic events are
too massive
I tell myself
people are just like
bridges

bridges stand
gaining nothing
serving their purpose
supporting whatever
crosses their path

and in their time
bridges will fall
without loss

Angela Mitsuma is a senior at Providence College. Her short-story “Cambridge: An Experience in Three Parts” earned third place in the Providence College’s 2023 creative writing contest.

Cambridge: An Experience in Three Parts

Part I:

The tadpoles were unexpected. Back home, the rivers were murky, clouded with algae, and had a bad smell. Seeing to the bottom was impossible and encounters with life were rare. But here I watched, hunched and bent, as they stirred up smoky wisps of sediment, clearly visible in the pale water. They wriggled their little bodies along with the current, seeming to laugh as I blinked my eyes in surprise.

The sky above me rumbled. A different kind of laughter. I stood and the tadpoles faded into ambiguity once again.

In the dimming light, the willow tree swung over the water like a musician’s bow that had been cut and discarded, no longer useful and unable to speak. “This is my favourite spot,” he told me. What else would he have said? I flexed my fingers over the cover of my book and wondered what he was doing with his. Would he read it? Would he think of me as his eyes glossed over the pages like mine once did?

A gust of wind blew my hair into my face. I tucked my

book between my knees and grabbed my hair tie, a new addition to my wrist. My hair had grown long over the summer and the city's water had not been kind to it. The daily battle between me and my hair was more like a battle with Medusa until I would finally concede to a ponytail. I began walking, my hair swaying with each groan my steps elicited from the spongy earth.

Distance should have been clarity. Distance in time, distance in countries, distance in thought. Distance in five. Five hours difference, five days apart, five red flags. But distance was pointless with the phone in my pocket. Even turned off, its weight was a reminder that distance is a façade. So close, yet impossible to reach. I took it out and turned it over in my hand.

He could still send a message. Perhaps he would tell me what he thought of the characters or some symbolism he noticed or his opinion of the writing style. Would he go a step further? A splat of water fell on the screen as I powered it on. I looked up and saw the outline of the weeping willow, her hair now indistinct with the clouds covering the sun and the drops of water blurring her form.

Sometimes distance doesn't work.

Part II:

Two limoncello shots, please. Yes, we followed the instructions on the menu for the free ones.

Thank you.

Two vials of yellow liqueur are set in front of us. I place my fingers around mine and handle the glass with uncertainty.

Do I down it quickly? I've never had one before.

You've never had a shot before?

No, remember? The drinking age in the U.S.? A sound of understanding from the other side of the table. So, what do I do?

You can smell it first, taste a little bit, and then go for it.

So I do. I swirl it around and marvel at the almost fluorescent quality of the liquid. When I lift it to my nose, the smell matches the color. Then, I *go for it* and discover that it tastes like the color too. Fresh lemon like starlight chases the stickiness of my meal from my tongue and the alcohol quickly follows, setting my senses aglow. I look to him and notice his eyebrows furrow as he swallows. He's not supposed to drink right now. Maybe that adds to the experience. Placating sugar hurries to soothe the tension and our glasses hit the table in unison.

That was strong, he notes.

It was and I'm glad. I need it to distract me from what I had done two hours before.

Two of us walk home. The other girl had to leave and we

are alone now, walking in the night. Streetlamps of limoncello light are strung up before us in a glowing chain, but he stops in shadowed places and looks at his phone. He has the same expression as when he drank.

What's wrong?

Nothing, everything's fine.

We keep walking.

To my right, I see a ferris wheel, barely visible with her glowing red eyes flashing at me from a distance. I turn away to ask him a question, but his phone vibrates.

Sorry, I have to take this.

He puts the phone to his ear and shifts to the side. I notice him fingering it anxiously and I twist away, suddenly uncomfortable. The ferris wheel catches my eye again and her buckets swing temptingly. A ride for two. Taunting for a woman in my position. I shake my head and she seems to blink in sympathy. I blink back, knowing we've reached an understanding. He returns to me and tells me that others will be joining soon to walk back with us. Oh, is all I can say. He scrambles to explain and my body goes cold. Why does it have to be like this? We continue walking and I look back to the ferris wheel, but the lights are off. She must be done for the night.

To my left is the church. Our Lady of the English Martyrs.

I come every Sunday, but tonight it is hollow and unfamiliar. As I try to make sense of the blackened stained glass, I feel a dying inside. Can you show me the way? The road home? The path I should take? But the sanctuary remains impenetrable. There is no safety for me here and the others have arrived. I cross the threshold and shut the door behind me. My ringing keys upset the silence and I quickly grasp them to stop the sound. When I look up, the kitchen door beckons me with the promise that he will be there, but I know it isn't true. Even so, I carry this knowledge with me as I descend the stairs and enter. All is quiet and darkness within. I stand in subliminal space, fighting the stifling darkness yet unable to turn on the light. It would be just as suffocating in its own way. My eyes rove the room until they land on the kitchen table. The gift is still there, still wrapped in that silly paper bag. A mockery of wrapping paper. An unconsecrated offering. He has to open it tonight and I feel a desperate need to make sure he does. I take my tablet from my bag and pull out my chair. It cries as I drag it across the floor but I sit anyway. The air is heavy and tense and I'm not sure what to do. I fold my hands and pause in the glow of my screen.

There's an emptiness here, but I'll hold vigil nonetheless.

Part III:

8.19. 10:01 PM.

I place my hand on the doorknob with a floating sense of finality. There's nothing I can do, but the doorway teases me with the illusion of choice. Nothing will be the same if I leave and to move into this outer dark is to admit defeat. But he has already left and I know I must as well. The door opens with a sucking sound that takes my breath away and I am left with the street before me. The moon's

filtered light has turned the buildings into something strange and unfamiliar. Scaffolding wraps around the structures like kudzu and fluorescent yellow eyes inspect me from within their metal foliage. I step out into this foreign territory and am assaulted by voices. He sees me. He *has* to see me. And he must know what I'm doing. He's talking and laughing behind me, but I'm silent and walking faster.

I'll come meet you downstairs, she said. Is she almost there? I bow my head as I pass under a streetlamp and hope that darkness is enough to hide me. Her stoop is empty when I arrive and I stand in restless anticipation. This is my last refuge and his voice is approaching. I take out my phone to send a cry for help when the door opens, bathing me in light and leaving me utterly exposed. But look! Mira, standing aglow in the doorway and looking down at me. She is beauty and warmth and compassion wrapped up in a long dress and milkmaid braids. I look to her and watch her outline blur as tears fill my eyes. *Oh, come in!* She and the hallway light become indistinguishable as I ascend the stairs. I cannot see, but I can clearly feel the comfort of her hug and hear the sound of her voice guiding me to her room. She sits on the edge of her bed in the warm light and I sit at her desk, both grieving my loss and marveling at the kindness in front of me. She was the first student I met when I arrived and now she is the last I embrace before I leave. The only one that I truly embrace. Perhaps this is God's offering to me, an offer of true friendship. Something more holy and fitting than I could have anticipated.

Darcy Mueller is an undergraduate student at Tufts University studying history who greatly enjoys creative writing in her free time. She is originally from Wyoming where she lives with her parents, two brothers, and sister.

Fighting the Sea

When I was young
I thought I could fight the sea
That if I took a plastic bucket
And threw the water onto the beach
And sand into the waves
The sea would dry up and shrink away
The ocean scared me
With what lived inside
So I believed I could make it go away
Four years old
Barely able to walk
And yet I thought
I alone could fight the sea
Hours I spent with my plastic bucket
Trying to drain the sea away
Convincing myself of the shrinking of the waves
As the ocean roared back
Crashing waves of angry blue
Foaming at the mouth, attacking me
But still I tried to fight the sea
Till at last progress was made
But it was of the sun slipping below the still thrashing sea
Till my parents call me home
My weary legs stumbled back defeated
As I went to bed that night
I heard the sea raging from outside

Sharon Lopez Mooney, poet, is a retired Interfaith Chaplain from the End of Life field, living in Mexico and USA. In '78 Mooney received a CAC Grant for rural poetry; co-published an anthology; co-owned an alternative literature service. She was "Best of the Net" nominee, chosen "Editor's Choice", and "Elite Writer's Status" in 2022; and facilitates a poetry workshop.

A stroll with god

i sense your hand on my hip,
lingering
i see delight in your eyes as we sway
teasingly,
along the open invitation of sea
where you hum so softy
silver luna fish have to break the surface
to catch your subtle melody
your footfall is silent
on the dark wet sand
i feel the lusty breeze of your eyes
encircling me
softer than a gull's shudder in early morning
our excitement is
as high as clouds
kissing the horizon
you are the scent of the fresh waves i inhale
as we two hawk pilots, you and I,
fall back on wild currents
in swooping shouts of mirth across
the drunken bahía
i argue with the drops of rain, but the deep lilt
of your voice
beguiles the clouds with the pleasure
of releasing
dissolving those pushy storms
with our passion for love in the wild sunset

William Nunez' previous poems have found homes in publications such as Gravesiana, Aldebaren. Poetry Salzburg, Exit 13, Northern Stars and Narrative amongst others. He is a film/television director who has worked for CNN and NBC and just directed the upcoming feature film The Laureate based on the life of the poet Robert Graves.

Luminous Children In Moonlight

Crickets chirp as the night air stirs,
The moon is full.
From the woods, children emerge as if from Shakespeare,
Illuminating the forest leaves that only one can dream of
Their faceless figures that lives have lost chant,
In the middle of the cross-border road.

Everyone gathers around the table,
Clasp hands and sing until
Voices across the foothills
From the high point mountain sing aloud
So that three states can hear us
Once and for all.

Hey!

Hey! (wait four seconds) Hey!
The echo yells back
Rounding out at high pitch tones
As if inside a metal container
One-way conversations are the norm these days
Isolation! (wait four seconds) still waiting

Cuban

I am Cuban
Although I will never say it
And you will never know
Appropriations that lead to advancement

One looks the other way
I turn the opposite cheek
While my people just love
My head bows in shame

I will eat their/my food
Snicker as others criticize them
In the oak paneled room of the Princeton Club
I light a cigar made by my descendants

Foreigner is what I have been called
Citizen is what I am
The changing times does not preclude
Gamers that are always left to chance

Softly laughing, silently praying
That progress does not jump off
Distortion rings false from all sides
As reason and empathy subsides

Is it easy to sit in my lounge chair
To be judgemental as others judge me?
Rather than watch the skies and exclaim
I am Cuban

Julia Pietrogallo is a senior at Providence College from Connecticut. Her poem "Well Water" earned third place in Providence College's creative writing contest in 2022.

Well Water

We shower in well water, my mother says
 For that's why my hair strays passed its strand,
 longing for something other,
 Cutting it would rid what is destroyed, she says,
 But I like how it collapses to my knees, fraying,
 Concealing the bruises from the bricks of my childhood
 pathways—
 the ones outside the sliding door.
 the ones my father built our deck over,
 the ones my mother never bandaged.

The well water has too much iron, she says,
 as I feel daint in every stance within her observation,
 Plagued with diffidence.
 Deduced for rattling bones, shaking skin,
 For what worth would I have without the
 Extent of my body,
 But my blood is slowing, my cheeks are paling,
 and I am lifeless, yet staggering, closer to her beautiful;
 my mother's face doesn't seem so distant from mine,
 just a bit more.

The well water brings in bugs, she says,
 and that's why spiders find home in the drain,
 For their cravings for water surpass mine,
 I let them drink.
 And her words are parasitic—
 I let them feast on my breathing remains,

For any voice of damage would rouse her denial,
I cannot suffer more denial.
 I've tried ripping her words out of my chest;
 they fossilize each time I reach out my touch.

She condemns me to what is purified,
 Foreign places bottled in plastic,
 Streams stolen of its passengers, newfound hostages,
 My lip is guilty against the cap,
 And has the same quiver of my mother's denial.

I fail to drink enough of it.
 And my lips, deprived, chap and break,
 crack and whiten—I relentlessly pick at their flaking.
 The other kids treat me as their fossil too,
 Pointing fingers at an image of what used to be,
 They jump at my difference, of my fading
 but—I haven't been drinking well water?
 The only words I know are of deflection.

The well water isn't good for you, she says,
 But I relish in its flaws, where the minerals swim—
 I imbibe.
 My veins widen,
 And year's ago, when my knees were still split.
 I did not want,
 Nor like
 That feeling.

Yet,
 I'm older when I see her face fading from mine,
 the one she worked to craft as her's
 the lines cornering her frown no longer carve my skin,
 but her sculpt remains in my eyes,
 in the harshness they carry,
 opposing their origin
 opposing their artist.

The fingers stop pointing—
 I suppose fossils aren't supposed to revive—
 when my gaze starts to harden,
 and when my lips stop shaking,
 I'm beginning to quirk them,
 and when my mother says to clean my room,
 I'm starting to crave a civil war.
 The glass cups look like headstones, she says.

I fill them with the shower's water,
 and empty everything but the droplets
 clinging to the rim,
 Quenching the plants that linger among my room.
 I douse them in it,
 And maybe their vines twist wrongly,
 Maybe stretching too far towards an unreachable,
 longing for something other,
 They are the only liveliness I'm beginning to hear.

And from my head against my pillows,
 They grow to whatever sky they find suitable,
 And if one day I give in,
 Where I stretch too far upwards into an unknown,
 twisting all my wrongs,
 I can lay smong them.
They look so pretty from here, I say,
 Knowing they are still beautiful,
 and they'll make me beautiful, too,
 Even if drowning in well water.

David Sapp, writer, artist, and professor, lives along the southern shore of Lake Erie in North America. A Pushcart nominee, he was awarded Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Grants for poetry and the visual arts. His poems appear widely in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. His publications include articles in the Journal of Creative Behavior, chapbooks Close to Home and Two Buddha, a novel Flying Over Erie, and a book of poems and drawings titled Drawing Nirvana.

Cardboard Pleasure

We crave we desire
 Hanker at the very least
 We gorge our orifices
 Bottomless gullets
 Yum yum yum
 Implacable gourmands
 We insist upon
 A nameless hoard to
 Manufacture our accumulations
 Plush toys weed eaters flip flops
 New and improved silicone
 Battery-operated vibrator dildos
 In stock and on sale now!
 Ships bump at our shores
 Brimming with our gluttony
 Trains trucks men women
 Push it all pull it all
 Hurriedly here and there
 Convenient cardboard pleasure
 Buffets on our doorsteps
 We sigh we moan
 Sated for fleeting moments
 And then used up we
 Launch it all out our asses
 Shove it all to the curb
 It is the American Way

Wouldn't you agree?
Eventually all that's left
Are hills of empty plastic
Eventually all the dildos
Fill all the landfills for
A thousand years.
Eventually all the forests
Are shaved from our skin –
So much stubble on
Legs crotches chins
All that's left is highly
Confidential memoranda
Regarding merchandise avarice
Receipts for our demise

A Precious Transience

As soon as the stars
Were born their deaths
Were inevitable
The stars are dimming
In their nativities
And we are informed
Physicists surmise
There are no more
We live out our days
Indifferently act as if
There are plenty of stars
To go around
Our vision narrows
To what's within the frame
Of our bedroom window
We busy ourselves
We obsess we squabble
Over petty details
We deny and we deny
The heavens fade
Our sun like us
Increasingly fragile dies
A little more each day
And a lifetime is
Required to comprehend
Our stark predicament
In the meantime
How are we not
At every moment
A precious transience
Reflecting upon the depths
Of space the spinning
Of distant galaxies?

How are we not
Spending our last
Hours making love
Or playing with children
Or holding one another
In our demise?

Lorenzo's

November, on our way to lunch,
finally our gray heads certain,
we idly muse, giddy, red states turning blue,
foolishly convinced of eager chameleons.

All the tables at Lorenzo's are quaint,
wobbly, jerking, everything rickety,
tired, loose-jointed roller-coaster rides.
Hang on! We're thrilled. We scream.

Plates and pizza slide and crash,
a very little disaster for our waitress.
Unnerving my wife, playfully,
too cocky, I exaggerate the quake.

We recall a time when nothing seemed precarious,
indulging naivete, romanticized nostalgia,
when table legs were sturdy, fixed to tile
(Though we didn't care for the pattern).

Abruptly, the amusement gone, a roar,
terrifying tremors, like too many stomping
jackboots, we're straddling a fault,
a gaping crevice, a hideous maw.

Table, floor, foundation, the earth rips
in half, this fissure swallowing us up,
rising magma oozing about our knees.
The culmination of our meal apocryphal,
too shaken, we forget the tip.

Matthew Sprieng's full-length poetry book Good Work won the 2019 Sinclair Poetry Prize and was published in 2020 by Evening Street Press. Since 1990, his poems have appeared in publications across the United States such as North American Review, Tar River Poetry, Rattle, Louisiana Literature, Southern Poetry Review, Prairie Schooner and Poet Lore. He is an 11-time Pushcart Prize nominee and winner of The MacGuffin's 23rd Annual Poet Hunt Contest in 2018 and the 2015 Common Ground Review poetry contest. Website: matthewjsprieng.com.

Madison Boulder

Huge as a storybook pebble
left by a race of giants to dwarf
normal things—trees that reach
to rise above it, humans who circle
its base—it belongs with sequoia
instead of here, a glacial erratic
laid down on a New Hampshire hill,
oddity ogled by little men,
at home with gods of the Earth.

Speaking of Poetry

“I, myself, like a fairly transparent surface.”
– Edward Hirsch

Thin ice is a fairly transparent surface,
though if the water is very deep you cannot
see bottom. What you imagine may be there

may not be there at all: muck and water plants
may instead be a shelf of rock; fish may be
absent. But if the water is shallow, all that

lies below may be perfectly evident. And if
you really want to know what lies below,
step out on thin ice as if it's a floor.

*Sienna Strickland graduated Providence College in 2022.
Her poem “Renunciation” earned second place in Providence
College’s Creative Writing Contest her senior year of college.*

Renunciation

They suggested names
but my mom stood steady
not on the shoulders of Hollywood giants,
caring little for stars or cars or Italian scenery,
but on the ground I was named for.
Her defiant hunch whispered *sienna*
In her ears while she was dreaming,
rusty brown, a type of mud, “of the earth,” and “old soul”
some of its meanings.

“Strickland” is imported from Britain,
my father’s father’s father’s father’s surname.
A dour armor, stoic and severe.
A corset, suffocating and regal.
Gasping for air.
A stiff coat of arms they would
not be permit me to wear.
A colonial mark that still stamps my skin,
like the red lashings on the brown backs
of my helpless, marred kin.

It is the coming of civilization!
and the ending of others.
The beginning of brands!
and the tilting of lands.
The creation of noble martyrs!
who fought the onslaught of
slaughter...

They suggested names
 but my mom stood steady
 not on the shoulders of Hollywood giants,
 caring little for stars or cars or Italian scenery,
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It is the coming of civilization!
 and the ending of others.
 The beginning of brands!
 and the tilting of lands.
 The creation of noble martyrs!
 who fought the onslaught of
 slaughter...
 It bounces brightly off the teeth.
 Slicking through class time reveries—
 Strick-land!

Nothing like the river of *si-enn-a*
unconstrained by consonants.
A mystical, undiscovered, unconquerable continent.
Slithering off the tongue,
caressing the root of the mouth,
or curing it.

A whisper of the wind,
or the deafening screams of a storm.
Seductive and destructive like a siren song
that lures lustful explorers in
to their demise on a shipwrecked shore.

I tune into the ancient chant of my muddy first name.
It whispers to me.

Jane Stuart lives in W-Hollow, Greenup, KY., in the middle of a nature preserve. She enjoys theme writing and has contributed to poetry magazines such as Gusts, Bard, Poem, Red Lights, and Vallum. She is working on haiku, tanka, and haibun and recently got published in English and Italian by Edizioni Universum.

The Snow Globe

Up, far up, away
from all that was part of home
a new world waits,
a universe made from
the Phoenix's egg

Red rocks, rip of blue sky
and dreams a fortune teller
left for us to find
Cliffs carved from clouds
and moonbeams dancing on air

Fate has been kind
if what we seek is there—
it is—merciful and kind—
and was but lost inside
indifference until you came

And we looked for
what was, up and away,
a new world wrapped in snow
that falls tenderly—
a new mystery

Vocabularical exists in the schism wrought by am and ought. Their expressions explore themes of Blackness, intersectionality, mental health, coming of age, family, love, and societal dissonance. This is their first publication.

Dear Chadwick Boseman

I never met you,
 And it isn't really that I ever knew you,
 Nor was it were you the first and only:
 Denzel is the George of my cinematic esteem,
 A founding father of Ebony and silver;
 I rushed more for Morgan and Sam,
 James and Jamie, too;
 So many monumental moments—
 Until you pounced on the screen in 2013:
 Clad in the cleats of history,
 Belting bold soulsong loud and proud;
 Lending lawful leverage toward tipping the scales of justice to the oppressed, Yes—
 As presidential as any pioneer,
 Catalogued in the chronologue of Black meteors,
 Earning your place in a streak of space
 Sliding between bases and noble burdens,
 A protector of legacy and lineage,
 Reminding us our strides:
 Where we've come from, and
 Where we must keep going,
 To get home.
 An afrofuturism in the rhythm of clear skies and sunrise:
 We are the genetics of redemption,
 The technology of unity—
 The blueprint of audacity.

You bore something I cannot fathom, A sacrifice in silence,
 While you gave the world Everything—
 And the future, Even more.

Why you—?
 I wonder if you knew?
 We missed each other, lapsing:
 You moved through stages—alone,
 While performing in ensembles
 Shadowed by the brilliance you cast;
 You owned the stage.
 And now we grieve—together,
 While reconciling insufferable emotions
 Shocked because of the genius of your performance—
 This stage owns me:
 I can't move past denial.
 Where do I force this fury?
 Fierce and focused you fell to the fallacy of fairness:
 That hard work and a generous heart are the recipe to a
 long-lived life,
 That fearing God forces fickle fate to finagle fatality
 far from now into the future, That fighting for freedom
 means freedom from fighting—
 I could faint from the futility of it all.
 Fixed in the fissure of my faults and failures: What's the
 point?
 What's the calculus of good and evil?
 The cause of cosmic consequence?
 The hand seems heavier the darker the complexion. I'm
 not saying I'm bad,

But I'm certainly less good:
 I think about the times I've failed to act—
 Through and upon—
 The nonsense I've centered:
 The piddling conflict I have with others,
 How much space I've consumed complaining about the
 pettiest things, How many charities I don't give to,
 Cents I don't round up,
 Children I don't mentor—
 All my abuses of self-indulgence...
 I don't know why it had to be you.
 I could give you a roster;
 My name tops the list in any order— Alphabetical or im-
 moral—

Of who should not still be here To see you gone first.
 Just know this:
 Something follows from every colon, Even cancerous
 ones,
 It must.
 Know you leave nothing behind, Except for we who live
 on:
 In the space you gave us
 To stretch,
 To sing,
 To fight,
 To roar—
 Such that when my time comes,
 I will have offered more,
 Before the afterthought.
 —To Chadwick Aaron Boseman

Chadwick Boseman was an American actor and producer, known for playing several historical figures such as Jackie Robinson, James Brown, and Thurgood Marshall; as well as the superhero T'Challa (Black Panther). He died on August 28, 2020, after privately dealing with colon cancer for four years. We will miss him dearly.

Matthew Wilson is a first-year at Providence College. His short story "Ghost Stories" earned second place in the 2023 Providence College creative writing contest.

Ghost Stories

Before I had become a writer at the age of thirty-three, I was once a young boy sitting on my father's lap. Even then, I had noticed his pale eyes and gray hairs, his ever-deepening wrinkles, and his liver spots that seemed to only grow larger with each passing year. He sat down and adjusted himself in his chair, and once he was pleased, I would take my place beneath his chin.

"Tell me a story, Dad."

"What type of story?" he asked. Though, I'm pretty sure he already knew the answer.

"One of your stories."

"You know your mother doesn't like it when I tell those." He leaned his head to the side and looked past me into the kitchen. I followed his eyes, but when I turned back to him, they were intently upon me. He leaned into me—into us—and spoke in the same voice he always used when he told one of his stories: not quite a whisper, yet not quite talking either.

"Well, I don't think I've told you this one," he started, and in his blue eyes, I could see my own reflection, my own curiosity. "I was nineteen, and I was a soldier then, and at that point in my life, I had simply gone by Will. We had been marching in the region of Quang Ngai, around the villages of Son My and My Lai. We didn't call them that, of course, but those were their names. It had rained for thirty days beforehand, and that day was no different.

You see, me and Kelly—you've met him; he was here last Christmas—me and Kelly, well, we hadn't been told much at the time, but there must've been some sort of... Well, some sort of massacre..."

He paused, and once again, his head leaned to the right to see into the kitchen.

"What's a massacre?"

"So, Kelly and I—and the rest of our platoon, I suppose, but we were working in two-man teams at the time—we just started lifting these bodies, these people into the back of a truck. There were piles of them—the bodies, I mean. Kelly and I had to work together and swing each one up and into the bed of the Jeep. I can remember swinging them. I can remember that... Somehow, they felt heavier than I thought they would be. I had seen lots of bodies, and I could tell that these were old. They were bloated and cold and they smelled. The dead has a certain smell, you know? No... No, I guess you wouldn't know."

"Why were they dead, Daddy?"

"Well, they were VC. But we hadn't killed them. Someone else must've been there before us, because we hadn't done it."

"What's VC?"

"And I remember... I remember how Kelly would stand on one end, and I was on the other, and together we would pick up the body, build up a bit of force, and then we would count to three, and when we threw it, it would land on the rest of them within the back of the Jeep. They went from the ground to the truck, but either way, they formed these large piles. And sometimes, one of them

would land in a funny position. Their arms would flop down, or the whole thing would bounce and land at some odd angle. I remember how they fell after we threw them.

“Some of them had blue feet. Some of them were blue all over. But I didn’t look at their faces. I saw their hands and feet and arms and legs, but I don’t think I can remember a single face.”

“Why didn’t you look at their faces?”

“They wore rags, really. And some of them had shoes, but most didn’t. They were lying on this trail, and they were strewn about, side-by-side, laying in odd positions on top of one another. There were children, too. Some of them... Some of them were your age, even...”

“Why didn’t you look at their faces, though?”

“What? Oh, yeah.” He coughed and repositioned himself in his chair. “Well, I guess... I guess the thing is that when you see a body, it’s just a body. There’s nothing really much to it. But when you see their faces... Well, when you see their faces, then they’re not just bodies. They’re people. They have lives and families and jobs and responsibilities. They got up each day and went to sleep at night. They had dreams. They dreamed. They were... They were human beings, you know? Well, I guess you wouldn’t know about that either...”

Again, he looked down at me, his blue eyes staring into mine. I was young then, but even so, I could tell there was a sadness there, deep within them. I could see myself in them, too, and yet I don’t think if I had reached through, I could have ever found myself through the layers of grief that had built up inside.

“But anyway, I didn’t get to the point of the story

yet. The point is that—”

“But isn’t that the point, Dad? That you couldn’t see their faces? That you didn’t want to see them? Isn’t that the message?”

He tilted his head at me and furrowed his brows. The wrinkles of his skin contorted in a funny way when he made this face, to the point that even today, as I sit here and remember the story that my dad had told me, I can still remember them. And they’re just as deep as they were back then.

“Message? I didn’t say anything about a message. What message? I said point, not message.” His words had a sharp edge to them, and I felt that quick, fleeting pain in my chest that you can only get as a kid, that you can only get when your father talks sternly to you.

“But Miss Lindley told me that every good story should have a message. She said that when someone reads a story, they should learn something from it. That’s the point, she said. That’s the message.”

“Your teacher told you that?”

I nodded.

“Well, sometimes adults say things that they know nothing about. Even teachers. Tell me, what did you learn from the story I just told? What was the moral in your eyes?” I thought hard about what he had said, looking down beneath our knees and studying the beige-colored carpet that covered the floor.

“I guess the message is that you should look at the faces. Even though you didn’t... I think you would’ve looked if you were there right now. I think you would have liked to see.”

My dad leaned back a bit, his neck rubbing against the leather of his chair. His whole face scrunched up again, but I could tell that it was more out of puzzlement than anything else.

“You’re right. I would look. I would look at them if I could. Right now. But that’s not the message. That wasn’t the point. Here, if you want to hear a story with a moral to it, I’ll tell a different one.”

“But you never finished that last one, Daddy.”

“I think I was twenty at the time, and we were outside some small village north of My Lai, the place with all the bodies.”

“You’re always outside some village.”

“It was raining here, too. It rained for months at a time.”

“It’s always raining...”

“Kelly was there. And Brown. And Reed. All of them. They were all there. But honestly, I had never felt so alone in my entire life. I was huddled under some giant bush, some type of foliage that you could only find in... That you could only find over there. I couldn’t see but what was in front of me. It was some field—there were so many fields—and behind it was the village. A little village. And it was raining. It was wet. It was just so wet. It was just water, water everywhere. Just water. And shit. Just fields of shit and blood and VC. And us. We left a part of ourselves behind, too... We had become part of the land, and we had left on it a mark as deep as they had. VC, Americans. Us, them. What did it matter once they were covered in earth? What... What did it matter...?”

I was focused on his throat. His Adam’s apple was

twitching as ferociously as the words were spat out of his mouth. His chest was rising and falling, and I could feel it as if it were my own. At some point in his story, he had broken eye contact, but now he looked back at me, into my eyes. He cleared his throat.

“Anyway, I was under cover. It was wet. We were outside this village north of My Lai, and we were taking heavy fire. I felt like I would come face to face with God at any moment. And then it happened. The point. Once I saw his face, I knew it was gonna be either him or me. All I had on me was my .45—I don’t know what happened to my rifle; maybe I had it with me. But I couldn’t get to it. I just froze up so bad. My hands were shaking. They couldn’t stop shaking. I couldn’t stop shaking. He hadn’t seen me yet, and I think that’s the only reason I’m still here today, John. But the worst part was when I... when I saw his eyes. I saw them between my sights. The Colt has tiny little sights, you see, and yet I could see both his eyes between them. He was searching for something. Searching for me, I realized. And then... And then he found me. He saw me. And I saw his eyes go wide... Between my sights, I see his eyes go wide...

“And then nothing.”

As a child, I don’t think I fully realized the gravity of that story, and even now, I still don’t think I can ever truly understand.

“You shot him.”

“I did. I killed him.”

Before that moment, I don’t think it had ever occurred to me that my father could have killed anyone. Sure, he had told me plenty of stories before this, but I

guess I never really saw him as the person who was in them. Not entirely, at least. He was different. He wasn't like others he talked about. He wasn't like Kelly, who scratched notches into the barrel of his M16. Or Miller, who had kept ammo slung across his chest and shoulders. He didn't really fight in the war; he was only there when it happened. The two were entirely separate things, my father and Vietnam. Only now, for the first time, I saw them for how they truly were: Inseparable.

"But what is the message, Dad?"

"What message?"

"The lesson. You said this story would have a moral to it."

"Well, didn't it?"

"I don't see it."

Looking into his eyes, I became lost within them. They were cloudy, full of dust and mud and bodies. He wasn't looking at me anymore. He was looking through me, looking for something inside of me that I didn't know existed. That maybe had never existed.

"Well, it's there. Certainly, there's a moral to it. A message."

"I don't see it, Daddy."

"You're just not looking hard enough. You just don't understand."

"Then tell me, Dad! Tell me the message. Tell me what I'm supposed to be learning."

My begging must have alerted my mother, who stepped out from the kitchen to see what had riled me up.

"What's going on? William! William, did you tell him one of your stories again? We just discussed this not

too long ago—you go too far! Come here, Johnathan. Get off your father’s lap and come here.”

“No, he hasn’t told me yet.” I grabbed the inside of his jacket and tugged on it slightly, but he didn’t look down.

“Tell me, Daddy. Tell me what the moral is. Please. I wanna know. What’s the message? What did you learn? What was the meaning of his eyes? Why did you look at his face?”

My mother walked over to us and put her hands on my shoulder, gently.

“Daddy, please... What’s the message?”

I looked into his pale gray eyes, pleading, but he was already somewhere else entirely.

Marc Bontemps grew up in Montreal and moved to Rhode Island 10 years ago. He has always loved photography, videography. He was gifted a drone 18 months ago by his father and he was able to hone in on his love for aerial photography. Cityscapes and coastlines are his go to. Follow him on Instagram to see what he's up to! @captured.by.marc

Diane Polanco is an artist. She is a junior at Providence College, majoring in Studio Art and minoring in Black Studies and Business Innovation. She's been experimenting with photography lately with a few different mediums, so they can't say they have a specialty. She loves creating and capturing the beauty of anything and everything and hopes to share more of my work with the world.

Martina Scarpa is a current sophomore from Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey. She is double majoring in Political Science and Women's & Gender Studies. In addition to this she is minoring in Studio Art with a Photography concentration and Writing. In her free time Martina enjoys reading as well as watching and making movies with her friends. She is constantly taking photographs, so she is very excited at this opportunity to get her work published by The Alembic.

Noah Snelgrove's friends and family call him Noah B. He's originally from a smaller town in Massachusetts but has lived all over. From Mass, to San Diego, Australia, and now New York City, each place has shaped his eye and style of shooting. He likes to capture the moment whether that be between friends, shows, nature, or something in between. It's often that a photographer uses the 50mm lens for portraits but to him, shooting with the "nifty fifty" always feels like he can imagine himself in that room or in the exact spot the photo was taken. Follow him @noahsnelgrove and @nah_snel !

Caitlin Bartley is a junior from Staten Island, New York currently studying English at Providence College. She enjoys writing poetry and short fiction when she gets a break from schoolwork. She loves lattes, long walks, and online shopping. And she hates writer's block. Her love for reading and writing comes British literature and her favorite female authors (shout out Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath). She hopes to one day become a publisher and own her own apartment in New York City.

Aidan Fitzsimons is a senior at Providence College and is graduating in the spring with a Bachelors in English and a minor in Film/Video Production. He is from Verona, New Jersey.

Mariela Flores is a senior at Providence College in Rhode Island. First-gen, low-income, queer, and Latinx, Mariela embraces every one of the intersections of her identity. Raised by Central American immigrants in Central Falls, RI, Mariela uses her talent for writing to break generational curses. Mariela is an English and creative writing major and will be the first in her family to graduate from college. She was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa as a junior. She works fearlessly as a resident assistant, writes and edits for her school's newspaper, is a mentor for first-generation college students, and is a singer in the co-ed a cappella group. Mariela is working on her portfolio for graduate school and hopes to study for an MFA in creative writing.

Allie Hannafin is a graduating senior from Albany, New York. She is a Creative Writing Major with a double minor in Film and Production here at PC. Following graduation, she hoped to pursue her career as a screenwriter for a studio. Her favorite genres of writing are fiction and comedy. Having many influential professors and family members throughout her life, she is excited to take everything she has learned here at PC with her to the Westcoast!

Anna Pomeroy is a senior at Providence College, working towards a Bachelors in English and a minor in Film. She has always had a love for literature and tries to write as often as she can for PC's newspaper, The Cowl. Working with The Alembic has been an honor and it was such a pleasure to read everyone's great work. It's nice to see how many passionate writers and artists there are out in this world!

Kerry Sheridan is a Communication and Media Studies major and Marketing minor at Providence College, graduating in May 2023. This is her first year with The Alembic as a staff member, and she is grateful to have joined such an amazing group.

Patrick Smith is a freshman at Providence College who enjoys writing in his free time. He has been previously published in Confic Magazine. He is from Tampa, Florida where he resides with his rescue Rat Terrier, Serena.

Emma Snelgrove is graduating from Providence College in May of 2023, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science, and a minor in English. She is looking to pursue a career in editing and publishing, and aspires one day to be a Senior Editor at a world-renowned publishing house. This is her second year working on *The Alembic*, as she was first a student editor, and then was promoted to this year's Co-Editor in Chief. She is honored to have been able to be a part of *The Alembic* team, as it has been incredibly rewarding to be around individuals that share a love and passion for literature.

Morgan Stoffel is a marketing major and writing minor at Providence College, graduating in May 2023. She has been part of *The Alembic* for two years, first as a staff member and this year's Co-Editor in Chief. Following graduation she will be joining EY as a Business Transformations Consulting Staff in NYC. She has hopes of one day publishing her own book, but for now she will continue writing in her journal.

Sara Vijfhuizen is currently a senior and is graduating from Providence College in 2023. She is an English major and plans to pursue a career in editing and publishing upon graduation. Originally from the Netherlands, she derives her passion for writing from her family and friends. Ever since she was a young girl, she has been writing Dutch poetry as an outlet for her thoughts and observations of the world around her. She is honored to have been a part of this publication and aspires to one day become a publisher in Amsterdam.





