



2022-2023

Editors' Notes

A true student publication is hard to come by, and I'm proud to be the Editor of The New Xanadu, a publication showcasing the creative talent of the people at Doane. This year saw some amazing submissions, and I couldn't have asked for better content to arrange on these pages with Jess.

As I get ready to take on the rest of my life after graduation in May, I wanted to give the Doane community the best magazine they have received. Who knows if I succeeded, but I do hope everyone appreciates the work I've compiled. There are pieces that address really personal struggles, death, overcoming anxieties, visiting one's childhood room, a fictional world, and everything in between. Nothing was left unsaid, and for that, I want to say thank you to those of you who submitted your work.

My experience at Doane has been one filled with challenges, work, tears, but also laughter, adventure, and unforgettable memories. I had the privilege of studying abroad in Bilbao, and I have been able to run Doane Student Media for almost three years.

The New Xanadu, however, became a sort of passion project. Not only did I want to produce something beautiful to look at and meaningful to the contributors, but I wanted to make it more accessible. Instead of voting on which submissions are included, I decided to include everything. Instead of scrambling at the last minute to put the magazine together, I made sure to plan ahead in case something went wrong.

This whole time that I've been working on this magazine has been approached with an attitude of change and reform to benefit the community.

This is not my magazine. This is the community's magazine.

It displays the great work and potential that we all have, whether realized or not. It wouldn't exist without those brave enough to submit their work because, in all honesty, it takes a lot to put yourself out there. It has taken me four years to tell my truth, and as uncomfortable as it is to share, I know that's why I wrote it. That's why I took the time to intentionally create a narrative that encapsulates what bounces around in my head.

I hope you all enjoy the 2023 issue of The New Xanadu. Take time to leaf through and appreciate what this community has offered up to all of us. Thank you for helping create a space in which people can share their art.

Special thank you to Phil Weitzl for creating this medium and always encouraging me to get out of my head. My work wouldn't be what it is today without you.

Abrianna Miller
Editor

My small hometown did not offer a place for stories to be shared anywhere but the bar and the newspaper. Coming to college and meeting the English department here I never knew that such a place where people could have the liberty to share their own creations and feelings could exist in such a small town. Authors talk about writing as not a hobby, but an obligation that they have to do. Whether they do it to share warnings with other people, get their feelings off their chest, or to have an escape from this world. Every person who submitted a piece is an author in the same right as the ones who are publishing best selling novels.

Being assistant editor, I have had the privilege to offer a space where the students of Doane can come together. Learning the skills and the hours of work it takes into putting together a magazine. But most of all, I have learned the satisfaction of seeing it all done and published. Thank you for taking the time to submit, read, and enjoy The New Xanadu.

Jessica Himmelberg
Assistant Editor

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* winner of The New Xanadu art and writing contests

Written Pieces

Joshua Johnson

The Poet

Poems whisper in the evening,
into men's hearts they go
without a sound they're leaving
like spirits in the snow.

Yet always there's a meaning,
inside of each we know
for poets are so scheming
with the gifts that they bestow.

Tonight you're disbelieving,
but I'll tell you this is so,
the poet is now dreaming
of things for you to know.

Reconstruction

We've built a city of fabricated
skyscrapers
representing a nightmare that
we call life.

It's populated by crude imitations
of people
that busy themselves with artificial
canopies of garbage
raining down from smog filled
skies.

The suburbs teem with peeping
toms
eager to gaze through a window
into any world other than their
own.

Meanwhile the countryside is
empty,
pristine plains & vast forests sit
untouched
by men too busy worshipping
spreadsheets to notice.

The sunlight offended them
because its brightness couldn't
be captured on film
and they were too unimaginative
to paint.

Those who stopped to smell the
roses were put to death
by blind executioners who
couldn't see life
taken from themselves.

History & tradition were put
into the fire
where golden calves made of
silicon emerged
and grazed upon the empty husk
that once was man.

We've built a life of empty
desperation

on the bones of fulfilled content-
ment.

Typology

Some people think man can be
quantified, dissected, atomized.
That we aren't beyond mathe-
matical comprehension.

Robotic racists see only machine
men - computational, mechani-
cal, programmable.

Every machine is built to serve -
but we are made to live.

Not as I am are you - nor are
you as I.

Gentlemen are not as ladies, nor
can man be typified.

Telephones, trees, & tambou-
rines belong in catalogues.

Here though is where we are -
breathing, bleeding, breeding,
and brooding.

Sometimes I think of my own
death, why I am here, who I am
or am yet to be.

Funnily enough - typologies can-
not answer me, nor you.

I skip rocks across the surface of
my subconscious.

No man-made construct can
contain me, nor can it explain
you.

Devious minds may try to re-
strain, restrict, and box
you in

Eager to typify, classify, and con-
strain you.

Refute them - be yourself.

Twilight Times

Twilight Town in twilight times,
how odd it was in those days of
fading lights.

When all we had to do was fill
our cheeks

and sometimes also stroll the
streets.

Squinting through the windows
of those dying streets
accompanied only by the twi-
light, glowing cross the heath,
we oft did spy a family, with
nothing left to eat.

The sun it set without a care,
while many slept within their
chairs

But we?

We strolled the streets.

Beautiful Blue Eyed Girl - For Riley

Beautiful blue eyed girl, I think I
like you.

I like your hair, golden as the
sun
and shining with such radiance
until the day is done.

I like your smile - a sea of porce-
lain in the night,
that warms this sailor, whenever
it's in sight.

I like your skin - soft, light and
glowing - until the day I met you
I never thought I'd be compos-
ing.

Beautiful blue eyed girl, I think I
love you.

I love the way you stick out your
tongue and wiggle it about -
the way you cock your head
sometimes & pout.

I love the way you think cows
can only go uphill,
even though you're so much
smarter than a daffodil.

I love the way you look at
Christ, the way his cross dangles
on your chest -
of all his fine creation, you truly
are the best.

Beautiful blue eyed girl, I want
to know you.

I want to know what you think
and feel,
your emotions and all of your
appeal.

I want to know your taste in art,
cinema, and song

to dance with you and know that
we belong.

But most of all beautiful blue
eyed girl

I want to know your kiss, to feel
your lips on mine, and get lost in
your abyss.

Abrianna Miller

Room To Walk

*A reflection of "The Prime Of Miss
Jean Brodie" by Muriel Spark based
on my own experiences
with early academia.*

Jenny's assault on her
walk is not unique, especially not
in a small town in the Midwest.
Obscure Midwest towns breed
the worst of us, and the great
tragedy is that children like me
weren't allowed the freedom we
craved, all because a perverted
exhibitionist was up at 6:30 a.m.
Everyone's mothers were ap-
palled and their children were
left mourning the loss of their
beloved trails.

My mother always de-

spised my tendency to be inde-
pendent, never wanting help.
She would (and still does) beg
me to do something, anything
with her, but my path is busy
and I have no time to rest. My
resistance is probably what
inspired my mother to prohibit
me from walking to school; she
wanted to preserve any shred of
connection she had left. I wasn't
allowed to leave the house alone,
much like Sandy's solitary con-
finement, forced on account of
an irresponsible adult.

For years I tried in vain
to win over my mother so that
I could proudly walk those 7
blocks to school. My time to
shine wouldn't come until I was
an ocean away with my mother
waiting at the airport, afraid to
step foot on the plane, but even
more afraid to lose me forever.

Fortunately for me, I was
able to retrace my steps every-
day in Bilbao. Go left around
Moyúa, left on Iparraguirre,
right on Alcalde, over the bridge,
and into the university. Without
fail, I methodically passed by the
same shops twice a day, being
stopped by the Guardia Civil
only once.

Apparently the King was
in town, something I assumed
would have been announced,
and I was suspicious in the way
I darted my eyes around and
ducked in between people. The
officer didn't let me pass and de-
manded my passport or money.
The alternative was jail, and my
body shook at the thought of
being incarcerated in a foreign
country. This shake down was
very illegal as I would come to
find out from my host family.
My host family was irate, being
unaccustomed to injustice and
rash treatment from authority.
I had a lifetime of experience,
though, and I'd be damned if
a euro or a minute was taken
from me. I hadn't done anything
wrong, so why should I be pun-
ished?

Being home as no longer
a reprieve- my brother and I
couldn't even walk to our grand-
mother's house without being
supervised. After trusting us for
years to be safe, my mother was
suddenly skeptical of our ev-
ery move, and I was filled with
betrayal. Nothing bad happened
here, how could it? My mother's

anxieties were the antithesis of home. She was covered in clouds and tears, and the world was shrouded in warmth and dew. Being kept from the security of my escapades was the single largest threat I could have been faced with.

Suddenly, the clouds in the sky and the constant drizzle were no longer comforting, instead it lent itself to the turning point in any quality film. I obsessed over the police officer for reasons different from Sandy. While she is infatuated with the authority and power of the officer, I was scared of what may come should I see the officer again. My walk across town seemed plagued with warning signs and threats of extortion. What's particularly strange, however, is that Bilbao still felt like mine. I was not a stranger or at risk of losing this routine. There was just a bump in the road to keep me on my toes, no matter how intimidating it was.

My mother would never swerve, avoid, or ignore the bumps- each one piled up until they all came down on her in one swift earthquake. The walls washed down, the filters melted away, the sensibility crumbled at our feet. It became a sort of game, deciding which battles were worthwhile. Do I avoid this at all costs on the off-chance it goes awry? Or do I push forward with the limits and conditions imposed on me? I usually forged a resolution in the form of bargaining. A transaction would be made, if I couldn't walk to school then I had to be allowed to wander after school, until I decided to push my mother further at a later date.

Over the years I stopped asking- asking to do things, asking to go places, asking for forgiveness. My relationship with my mother transformed into her sneaking peeks into my solitary experience, and me creating an evermore autonomous life known only to myself, the ultimate betrayal that my mother would never discover even when the truth was delivered, post-marked from Bilbao.

Welcome to My Kitchen

It had been weeks since I caved and went to a party, but there I was stumbling through my front door at 3 a.m., and honestly, I had a good time but had been desperately craving the comfort of being home for hours. Cue the music blaring

from my and my roommates' thrifted TV and the last few beers of the night disappearing from each of our mini fridges. We three drunkenly recounted the night around the dining room table and its two chairs. The other two broke over the summer by pure accident. Re-enactments brought the cheaply-installed tile to life beneath our feet, and we clumsily took turns lying about going to bed.

I found myself upstairs in my bedroom after some time, contentedly reliving the moments posted up on my walls. Sleep was creeping up on me, so I grabbed my water bottle and headed back downstairs to the kitchen to fill it up. I knew I would need to drink the whole thing before bed if I had any chance of being productive the next day.

Passing through the living and dining rooms, I heard a familiar voice, but I couldn't place it. Then I turned the corner and was met by a lost friend. Our faces mirrored each other, shock, then recognition, then confusion. He was there to hook up with my roommate; I was there to get water. But that didn't make any difference.

We fell into an old rhythm, forgetting my roommate was even in the kitchen. It was just us catching up on the past three years, releasing some sort of tension that we snapped after the first hello and hug. An hour or so of conversation and memories passed between us, but I could have sworn it was only 15 minutes. Then my brain decided it was time to panic, and I pulled my roommate aside.

Our conversation was brief, me insisting he leave immediately and her not knowing what to say- she didn't know. I made a deal with her, I get to ask him one question and no matter how he answers, he can stay. He just has to answer.

He sat on the couch opposite me as my roommate explained the conditions of his one night stand. I watched the dread rise up in his face, but I knew what I had to do to sleep that night. He turned to face me as the only question I had been sitting on for three years came out of my mouth.

"Why are you still friends with Tanis?"

April 2020 was a weird time for the world, and as a freshman in college, my story is no different. Everyone got sent

home, everything was closed, but I found a loophole. My parents live close enough to my university that I could drive 20 minutes and redeem my freshman year experience whenever I wanted to, which is exactly what I had been doing for about a month at a party house. To be fair, I knew all of the people pretty well, and they liked me, so it was a win-win.

I spent every spare moment I had playing drinking games, improving my shotgun time, and doing stupid shit with nice idiots. It was great.

At the end of a three-day drinking spree, I was at the party house like always, and I was playing beer darts. I was wearing a neon orange fishing shirt and leggings for what it's worth because the day before I had been dressed up. Two days in a row would have been too much.

My limited athletic abilities channeled themselves into beer darts, so I was dominating damn near everyone in the circle, only accidentally striking a few people. We were out there for god-knows-how-long before we called it and moved inside. Music screamed at us from some back room of the house, and I joined the stoners upstairs. I don't even smoke; I just find they make good company.

Sitting in one of the three couches that somehow fit inside this guy's bedroom, I felt the couch strain next to me. He had sat down, and while we weren't very close, I didn't mind it. He tried to strike up a conversation, but I was too drunk and he was too high for it to work. So it goes.

Once everyone else in the room was sufficiently baked and the bong had returned to the table made out of road signs, I made my exit to go sit on the porch. That was my favorite part of the house, the wraparound porch that made the gentlest creaks as I walked on it. I found a patch of sunlight that the trees failed to mask and made myself at home on a rickety bench. Someone was grilling, and a few other people were bullshitting on the other side of the porch. The stoner eventually made their way outside to me, appreciating the sunset and the way the wind flowed around us.

I didn't encroach on the conversation, rather I centered myself and enjoyed the freedom I had been lucky enough to harness. Before I knew it, it was dark. Living room it is. Another

couch, another bong, another conversation I didn't care about.

He sat down next to me again, this time closer, and I begged my friend to give me an out. He laughed, told everyone else, and then they all laughed and watched me fumble through an unwelcome intrusion. Eventually I just bolted out of the room towards the bathroom, and found my friend in the kitchen. I asked him to help me; I didn't want anything to do with this guy. But he told me nothing would happen, so I took a minute in the bathroom because I had stopped drinking hours ago at this point, and if I didn't get a handle on myself then I knew I would have a panic attack and run away from embarrassment. So I calmed down and walked back to the living room.

Without the sun to hint at the time, it's nearly impossible to tell how long we spent listening to music and trading dumb stories. Then it was time for me to go home. My parents had already agreed to a very generous curfew, and I wasn't about to fuck it up.

I echoed goodbyes around the room and made my way out the front door. I had just climbed down the stone steps when he exited the house in a cut-off and athletic shorts- not great for low-40-degree weather- and I offered him a ride. He said no, he would be fine, but I insisted, it would be no trouble. We got in my car, and I asked him where he lived. His apartment was in the opposite direction that I was heading, but I had a few minutes to spare, so whatever.

The conversation on the four-minute drive to his apartment was boring at best. He directed me to an apartment building that was on its last legs with a half-circle drive filled with more cracks than concrete. I offered up a generic goodbye as I parked, and he shifted the conversation. It became an interrogation, a low blow to gather any information out of me that he could. This was unlike any interaction we had all semester, and I squirmed in my seat hoping I would find satisfactory answers to his questions.

The clock was taunting me on the dash, reminding me that every second I wasted talking to him was an eternity past my curfew. I still had to drive home and here he was,

sitting in my passenger seat discussing my breakup with my ex-boyfriend Sean.

He never really knew my ex; he knew a side of Sean that was designed to appease him. A mirage shaped like a cocky asshole.

The real Sean was insecure and witty and never wanted me to leave him in the morning without laying on his chest and kissing his cheek. Sean was not a pawn in his game to fuck me.

His words started to melt together, fabricated stories interspersed between promises not to tell Sean- he wouldn't want to hurt Sean like that. He couldn't have sex with his friend's ex-girlfriend without a little bit of guilt, and his pleading to make sure I wouldn't fuck him just to "get back" at Sean proved the point. I insisted that I did not, in fact, want to have sex with him, I just wanted to go home. It was a mute point, though. His sights had been set.

A few kisses here and there followed each time I asked him to get out of my car. My requests took a life of their own, morphing from courteous to demands. At this point he had been manipulating me with a false narrative about my own life for at least 20 minutes, and I was hopelessly begging him to get out of my car. He could feel my anger bubbling beneath the surface but convinced me it was my own guilt for trying to hook-up with my ex's friend.

The worst part is that he started to make sense. If you nail something into a person's brain for long enough, they'll start to believe it, and that was my downfall. Then, he got out of my car.

All the air I didn't know I was holding in came out across my steering wheel. A breath of exasperation, of relief. The moments before he opened the back door of my car were the most comforting seconds of my entire life. Of course it can't last forever, though.

The back door opened, and I whipped around in my seat with disbelief. He sat down in the seat behind the passenger seat and told me to join him to talk. I rejected the proposal and yelled at him to leave; it fell on deaf ears. I considered my options for a few minutes; physically drag him out of my car, continue this useless discourse, or join him so he would leave sooner.

The latter won the case. I

only registered my mistake when he pulled me closer to him before I could even properly sit down. My body was basically resting in his lap as he continued the same bullshit about Sean, me pushing away and being pulled back.

The rest of my encounter is best described in my deposition to the state. And the cross examination. And my therapy records.

Finally leaving the apartment building parking lot after resituating the back seats, a text from my mom pops up. It reads somewhere along the lines of "I can't imagine you're doing anything to be proud of this late." No mention of being late, no mention of talking about it later, just pure disappointment and worry. I make my way through town, the lights blurring together; it could have been because of the tears or the dissociation. Hard to say. Either way, my car finds the highway. Halfway home I wake up. If I just didn't follow the curve in the road, it could all be over. I'm awake; I can decide. But I never got the chance to decide as my car dutifully followed the road's intended path anyway.

The next two weeks withered away with me. I stopped eating, but I kept throwing up. And no one noticed, or no one cared to notice. My family had to put our dog down. I don't remember much of it, but I do know it was in my backyard and I passed out in the grass. I slinked inside the house to retreat to my room, but my dad caught me halfway there and chastised me for not being there for my mom. Sorry, Dad.

My then-best-friend was the only person that saw something cracking inside of me. Then, one night it all came out- everything from the new shotgun time record to the burns on my knees from the back of my car. The pregnancy test came back negative, a light in the tunnel. She convinced me to go to the cops, and since I hadn't even told my parents yet, it was the only counsel I had.

The court case was resolved through a plea deal. Apparently he was an "upstanding participant" in drug court, and they didn't want to mess up his progress there. I requested to speak before the court, and with shaking hands, I left everyone in the room in tears. If no justice was going to be served, everyone needed to know the weight of

the implications, and the devastation that haunted me.

My friend checked on me once, mostly to save face. We both knew my friend was still hanging out with him everyday, so it didn't matter; the outcome of our relationship was sealed.

I lost my boyfriend, all but one of my friends, my 4.0, my previously-established living arrangement, my case for a restraining order. I lost my progress in therapy, my sense of security, my trust, my confidence, myself.

Floating through classes became routine, as did getting drunk to fall asleep. The beer canson my bedside table turned into decorations, and any money I had was funneled to the liquor store or my gas tank.

Then I left. With two suitcases and a backpack, I went to Spain for four months. An ocean away from everything that hurt and that I lost, I was able to breathe. I touched the ocean for the first time in my life; I went to the bar alone; I walked the streets at night smoking cigarettes; I found a part of myself that had been left in the backseat of my car, a part of myself that I recognized. But those things can't last forever, so I packed up and returned to the place that I had desperately fled from.

My body was dropped in the middle of a modified social dynamic, one that I couldn't keep up with. I found myself unable to remember things, unwilling to stick to an eating schedule, and alone. Surrounded by genuinely good people, I had never felt so alone, so I fell back on the bottle, the one thing I knew like the back of my hand. More friends left, my grades slipped again, and I lived paycheck to paycheck like a broken record.

Some people started to really like me, though. I finally felt like I could leave my room, and I spent more time partying than I had in years, that is until I broke my hand. I was quite a bit too drunk in my dorm, and my roommates invited a few guys over to smoke. Everything was fine until one of the guys made a rape joke, and when I called him out for being an asshole, he made more jokes.

The concrete walls crashed down around me as I backed away with nothing but tears. One of my roommates held me, but still, all I felt was pain in every inch of my being.

The guy let me hit him, but it wasn't enough, so I ended up slugging the two-inch thick wooden door leading to the bathroom. Then the pain in my hand overpowered anything else and I could finally think.

It's hard to say how long I was crying on the floor clutching my hand, but I do know it wasn't enough time. I wasn't just leaning into my pain, I was grieving for the loss of myself. How did I end up sobbing on a dirty floor with a broken hand and an almost-empty bottle in the other? What did I do?

It's a trudge to rebuild your life, everything has to be so intentional, and it is exhausting. I'm lucky if I recognize myself most days. My reflection is a mirage taking the form of whoever the people around me need at the time. But I'm learning. I'm learning to laugh without feeling guilty, how to cry without worrying it will never end, how to sit in my own presence. These painful lessons have allowed me to accept more than I could have ever imagined- even welcoming an old friend that never truly cared about my well-being into my kitchen.

Jessica Himmelberg

Piecing it All Together

The quilt my mother made me was a simpler pattern than my siblings. Though my siblings do not use theirs like I do. They haven't worn theirs in from use and washing. The batting in it still makes it tent over my body but still keeps the heat in. The cotton fabric is no longer scratchy, it has turned to almost a flannel like texture to where you can feel the individual and the hand quilting.

I started learning the art form at a young age with small sticky fingers by watching my mother make these quilts. Her nimble hands would work across the fabric with precision as to not poke herself with her needle. Giving me projects designed for kids that would put me ahead in my class for motor skills.

She learned these skills from her mother, my grandmother, Sherri Buescher. She was self taught. Buying her first sewing machine in high school, she bought books to supplement her knowledge she learned from taking a high school sewing class.

Having an insight to the dedication it takes to make a quilt, she has become a collector of ones important to our family. “I have one from my Grandma Ziggafos’s mother. But I don’t have that anymore, I think Donna has it. It’s in pretty bad shape,” she stated.

Later when visiting her sister Donna, she took pictures of the quilt. It was hand stitched by Great Great Great Grandma Hlavaty. She embroidered the state bird and flower for each state there was at the time, a grand total of 48. Knowing the times I have slept at Donna’s house, it likely kept me warm at night.

Sherri’s collection has grown to include other historical quilts made by women ancestors as well as some rare vintage quilts made by women not in our family.

“I also have a quilt here that I got from Lyle that’s called a yo-yo quilt. And I don’t know how old it is, but it’s all hand stitched. Every piece is hand stitched together, and I’m restoring it. And it’s going to take me weeks, but I’m going to do it.” Said Sherri.

Quilts like this were very popular from the 1920s-1940s. They use a lot of scrap fabric up, which is why they are so popular, and make a decorative top later for light summer bedding. Though they take a lot of time and scrap fabric for something that isn’t super practical, especially for the time period where money was tight and something decorative isn’t necessary, which is why our family considers it a rare find.

Sherri’s mother-in-law, my great grandma, Eileen Buescher, in her assisted living apartment has a quilt draped over a rocker chair in the corner. It isn’t hand embroidered or quilted like the ones she used to make. It’s made out of flannel, an uncommon fabric for quilts. What makes it special is that the flannel was repurposed from the shirts her husband wore, to comfort her after he passed.

Seeing the comforting quilt my great grandmother owned was my first experience with quilts made to comfort. My next experiences would be red, white, and blue in the basement of my new quilting mentor, Kay Theer.

When asking Theer how quilting makes her feel, she said “I think the word satisfaction comes to mind. Just the satis-

faction Putting something to use that was saved by someone thinking we can’t throw this away, because I inherit a lot of fabric from people.”

Kay just finished up four remembrance quilts out of scraps from a fellow quilter that had passed for her grandchildren. She said, “There was a lot of satisfaction in that project. There was a lot of satisfaction in working with you girls on Quilts of Valor. Then I do some piecing for tie quilts for altar society.”

The Quilts of Valor I helped her with. It’s an organization that makes quilts for veterans who have struggled with the images of war, after the founder had a dream that it helped them feel comforted. I gathered up a group of younger girls in my 4-H club and together we made two quilts for local veterans.

Knowing the time and dedication that has been put into quilting over the centuries, I am proud that I was taught the skills it takes. I want to pass them onto the next generation to keep my family tradition alive.

Luke Henriksen

Like a Stone

An excerpt from a larger story.

Lucy Cowell helps her mother wash clothes, just as she’s done every week since she was six. It annoys her a little – how she has to do chores now that she’s older – as if age immediately granted her “responsibility” like her father said. Or maybe he said she has to learn it now that she’s older, but the specifics don’t matter. What matters now is that it’s hot, she’s bored, and her arms are getting tired from using the washboard.

Her mother is pinning up a set of clothes to dry, leaving Lucy alone with her thoughts for a few minutes. She scrubs the shirt she’s holding one last time, tosses it into the clean basket, and tilts her head back with a groan. The heat covers her like a thick blanket despite the water on her arms.

After a few seconds, she hears a stifled chuckle from the clothesline, and snaps her head down to glare at her mother. She has her hand over her mouth and exaggerates trying to look nonchalant as their eyes meet.

As her mother walks over to pick up another basket of clothes, the trailing sounds of her half-hidden laughter only serve to fuel Lucy’s frustration. She grits her teeth and reaches for another piece of clothing – almost falling into the empty basket. She stares for a moment at what used to be a pile of dirty laundry, then giggles a little despite herself.

Her mother returns with the basket, helps Lucy up with her free hand, and walks both of them into the house. Lucy sees a smile still playing on her mother’s face as she puts her basket down in the living room. Rolling her eyes, she starts to fold some of the clean shirts, very pointedly trying not to smile, too.

Lucy’s mother suddenly looks over at the door. Lucy follows her gaze, seeing a shadow accompanied by the sound of heavy boots. The door opens to reveal a sun-hardened face, almost rockier than the mountains themselves. The man behind it walks through the threshold, with such a weight to his steps that it was a wonder he didn’t fall through the floor. Though if he did, he might make a better foundation for the house.

He takes off his hat, thumping it onto a hook by the door, and Lucy’s mother helps him with his jacket, placing it on a nearby rack. He leans down and gives her a kiss. “Val.” His head turns to Lucy, with the slightest grin on his face. “Lu.” At this, Lucy gets up and runs, slamming into her father’s side with her arms around his waist.

“Rane Cowell,” says her mother, with one arm around him and one gently brushing Lucy’s hair, “you’re late.”

Rane grunts, then picks up Lucy, heading for the couch. Lucy laughs in his arms, and allows herself to be placed on his knee. “I really did try this time,” he says, then looks at Lucy. “Hey, have you been growing today?” He measures her against himself, and sighs as Lucy giggles. “Are you sure you’re only 8?”

“And why, if you really tried, are you almost half an hour late for dinner?” Val tries to scowl through her smile, but settles on hiding it behind the kitchen door frame.

Rane’s head follows her as she sets a pot to boil. “Well, we were about done for the day, but a couple of kids thought they could sneak some... stuff... past Lawrence and I.” He gives

Lucy a look that means she’d learn when she’s older, and she better not try to learn now.

“Oh?” Val looks back with a raised eyebrow. “Does that usually take long?”

“No, but it turns out they weren’t the only ones,” Rane says with a sigh. Silence falls for a moment, then he claps his knee. “But anyway, I’ve got something else to talk about tonight. It wasn’t just some bad kids that kept me.” He picks Lucy up off his knee and sets her next to him on the couch.

Val walks in soon after with three bowls of hot stew, but none of the family moves to eat. Val and Lucy’s eyes are locked onto Rane, who sits gathering his thoughts. He runs a hand through his short brown hair and lets out another sigh.

“There’s someone who wants to buy the town,” Rane begins, looking up at Val, “and I don’t know what he’d want to do with the thing, but it ain’t gonna be Beacon if he does.”

Val leans in slightly. “The whole town? What’s he offering?”

“It doesn’t matter what he’s offering, we’re not selling.” Rane makes a fist and brings it down into his palm. “I don’t trust them. Lawrence says they’re bad news too, he’s seen them run business elsewhere. Besides,” he says softly, putting an arm around Lucy and pulling her to his side, “I doubt they’d want the old sheriff hanging around the new place.”

“You mean we’d... have to leave?” Lucy looks up at her father, who looks down with his usual unreadable expression. She likes their house – and the town. Where would they even go?

Rane grunts, cracking the slightest grin. “That’s only if they get the town, kid. And they have to get through me.” He squeezes Lucy’s shoulder, then lets go, standing up. “I’m gonna hit the sack,” he says, stooping to give Val another kiss, “It’s gonna be an early day tomorrow.”

Lucy watches him as he walks heavily up the stairs. She thinks about what he said, how they would have to get through him to get the town.

Might as well build a new one, she reassures herself, they’d sooner get through a mountain.

She glances down at her mother, catching her expression as she watches Rane move out of sight. Val looks down to see

Lucy staring. “Eat your stew, Lu. It’s probably cold by now,” she halfheartedly reprimands.

Later, when Lucy has been put to bed and her mother has left the room, Lucy sits on the edge of her bed, mulling over the events of that night. Most prominent in her mind is the look she saw on her mother’s face when she didn’t think anyone was watching.

She keeps trying to place it, but can’t tie it to any one emotion. Eventually, she settles on the feeling she has when she thinks of moving away.

There’s a long road ahead.

“I just can’t see why they want this place so bad.”

Rane sits behind his desk, listening to his deputy, Lawrence, work through the same issue for the third time today.

“It’s not like we have all that much besides ourselves,” he continues, “we don’t even have good farms! And if you wanted to get a big town, by Hel, we ain’t even close to the biggest town this side of Midgard.” Lawrence leans back in his chair, knocking a few times on its armrest. He starts to say something else, but Rane cuts him off.

“Yeah, I think you convinced me,” Rane says, deadpan, “They’ve got no reason to be here.” He leans forward, sharp gray eyes boring into Lawrence. “But they’re here all the same.” He waits a moment for the comment to settle in. Lawrence opens his mouth, but Rane holds up his hand. “This ain’t the problem we gotta deal with, Lar,” he says slowly, “they’re here, they wanna be here, with whatever reasons they’ve got. What we gotta do is get them to leave.”

A sharp tap sounds on the door. Before either man can ask who it is, the knob turns, opening the door to reveal three men in dark suits and hats. The man who opened the door steps aside, letting through a tall, stocky man with long dark hair. Rings glitter on his fingers as he takes off his hat.

Rane and Lawrence stand up as he enters, Rane a bit slower than his deputy, but the man waves them back. “No need,” he says in a deep bass, “please, sit.”

Lawrence hesitantly goes back into his chair, eyeing the other two men who now flank the doorway. Rane pauses, looking around at the three of

them. The stranger with the rings holds his gaze, and gestures at the chair behind him. Slowly, Rane sits back down.

The man looks at Lawrence with the same level gaze. “Would you excuse us? I’d like to speak to the sheriff.” Lawrence opens his mouth to protest, but Rane holds up a finger. Something in the stranger’s stance tells him that wasn’t a request. At a nod from Rane, Lawrence stands and backs out of the room – trying not to seem rushed.

“The name’s Torre,” the man says as he takes a seat in the now vacant chair, “C.B. Torre, from Nidhogg & Co.” He leans back as he speaks, putting one leg up on his knee. “I trust you’ve heard of me?”

Rane’s face unreadable, he offers his hand over the desk. Torre doesn’t so much as glance at it. Pulling his hand back, Rane tries to copy the man’s casual air. “Cowell. Rane Cowell. To what do I owe this pleasure?”

Torre motions to one of the men at the door, who pulls a piece of paper out of his suit pocket. Torre takes it without looking back, and unfolds it, showing Rane an unsigned deed. “This town, this... Beacon... is of a particular interest to my superiors. They’re willing to part with a large sum of money to obtain this place, and so I’ve come to you.” He slides it across the desk to Rane.

The deed has already been filled out in some places, including the name. Rane feels a pit forming in his stomach. He locks eyes with Torre. “And what if I don’t sign?”

Torre’s face splits into a grin that reminds Rane too much of a wolf. “I’m afraid that’s not something my superiors will be happy to hear.” He gestures towards the pen sitting to Rane’s right.

Rane holds his gaze for a few moments, then looks down at the deed. He picks it up, stony face stock still, then stares directly into Torre’s eyes as he rips it in half. He lets the pieces fall to the floor, the rasping of paper on wood filling the silence.

Torre lets his grin fade, then nods, standing up from the chair. Rane makes no move to get up as Torre follows his men through the doorway. Torre turns around at the threshold, and says in a dismissive tone, “we’ll check back in a few days.”

Then they’re gone. Rane makes sure to follow them

through the windows as they file into a black buggy, not taking his eyes off until they drive out of sight. Lawrence pokes his head into the room, watching the car in silence as well.

Lawrence clears his throat. “Well, that was certainly convincing.”

Rane looks over at him, seeing the man’s determined expression. He feels the same, there’s no way he could sell his town to that man. But the question was never if he would.

The question was how much time he’d have.

Lucy strains her eyes, trying to get a good look at a performer through the crowd of adults, but a tug on her hand brings her further from the square. Shooting a glare at her mother, she takes one last mournful look at a spout of flame behind her.

It had been a few days since they had that talk in the living room, but that didn’t seem to make her mother any less anxious. Even if she didn’t say it, Lucy could tell that they were preparing for something. She had listened in on a few late night conversations, where her parents whispered quietly about getting a buggy and what they should buy at the market.

Another tug on her hand brings her back to the busy market street, and a scowl from her mother keeps her from protesting as she hands Lucy a few baskets of food. Once her mother looks away to negotiate with an apple seller, she gives her own scowl to the baskets she’s holding. They’re full of carrots, potatoes, beans – things that go into a stew. *Why do we need so much? Is this all we’re having for the week?* Even at 8, Lucy knows her mother hates doing the same dish twice in a row.

Lucy looks up, then freezes. A man in a suit stands on the corner of the market, not buying or conversing with the sellers like everyone else, but he almost seems like he’s looking right at Lucy and her mother.

She tugs on her mother’s arm, grabbing her attention from arguing a price, and points. Her mother follows her finger, seeing the man right as he turns the corner out of sight. Lucy watches her expression harden, and sees her shove money into the shocked farmer’s hand, grabbing the basket of apples as she ushers Lucy away.

Lucy follows her mother,

wondering who that man was, and why they’re going the long way home. But she stays quiet, copying her mother’s action of pausing at each corner to look around.

At the front door, Lucy’s mother fumbles with the key, trying to fit it into the lock with more difficulty than usual. Lucy looks around again, and sees the same man in the suit walking down the street. In the setting sun, his shadow almost reaches to the front steps.

“Mom?” Lucy tugs on her mother’s arm, her eyes not leaving the stranger.

“Hold on Lu, almost...” says her mother, and the key finally slides into the lock. She quickly opens the door, pulling Lucy through as she shuts and locks it.

Lucy looks up at her mother as she picks up the baskets. “Mom, what’s going on?” She takes a deep breath, trying to steady her voice.

“It’s alright Lu, it’s okay,” her mother sets down the baskets on the counter, then rushes to Lucy, kneeling down to pull her into a hug. “I’m sorry baby, it’s okay.” Lucy pushes her face into her mother’s shoulder. After a few moments, her mother pulls back, rubbing Lucy’s arms. “It’s all gonna be alright, just you...”

Her mother looks over at something on the floor. Lucy glances too – it’s a sheet of paper, kicked a little ways from where it landed under the mail slot. Neither saw it when they came in, but now Lucy can see what looks like her father’s handwriting on it. Holding Lucy close, her mother picks up the paper and reads it quickly, stuffing it into the bag at her side. Lucy only catches the first couple words: “they’re coming tonight.”

Lucy helps her mother stuff the food into a few sacks, and brings it to the large cupboard under their sink, where a few more bags full of clothes are already stowed. Lucy, silently ordered by her mother, climbs inside of the cupboard on top of them. Her mother cautiously peers out the window, then immediately draws the curtains on whatever she saw. Lucy moves over as much as she can to give her mother room in the cupboard, then watches as the doors are pulled shut and everything goes dark.

They wait there for what seem like hours – Lucy’s head pulled into her mother’s chest

– until the sunlight around the edges of the cupboard door starts to dim. Then, the familiar sound of heavy boots coming up the front steps reaches their ears. Lucy struggles to try and get up, but her mother pulls her back down. “Not yet, Lu,” she whispers, “Not yet.”

Rane lets the front door swing shut behind him. He looks around at the room – his eyes lingering over the sink cupboard for a moment – before he starts to take off his hat and coat. He hangs them up on their usual pegs, then takes out his revolver from the holster at his side. Checking that all the chambers are full, he flips the cylinder back and nods to himself, sitting down in the chair facing the doorway. The gun rests on his knee – one hand placed on top.

Seconds after, the sounds of boots come up from the front steps. The door handle doesn’t even start to turn before a kick crashes into the door, cracking the frame. A second kick shatters it, and the door crashes down to the ground. Two men in suits – pointing shotguns at Rane – step inside. Spreading out into the living room, each takes a position on either side of the chair. Rane keeps his hand on his revolver, narrowed eyes flicking from man to man.

Another pair of boots sound up the front steps, and Torre steps around the fallen door to make his way between the other two. His hand is held to a gun at his hip, undrawn, but ready. He glowers down at Rane, who matches his intensity.

An unstoppable force meets a stone wall.

Rane sits without so much as a shiver, hand still ready over the revolver. “Torre.”

Torre nods, his face full of disdain.

“You know I won’t sell.” Rane holds Torre’s gaze with a glare that could make any decent man reconsider what he was doing. “How about we wrap this up nice and civil?”

Torre’s eyebrow twitches slightly. “How do you propose that’ll be done?”

“Spare my family,” Rane says in an even tone, “let my wife and daughter go, and I’ll go quietly.”

The usual wolflike grin splits Torre’s face. “Who do you think you are?”

Rane’s gun snaps up, and a shot rings out.

Torre, still grinning, low-

ers his own revolver. He motions to the two men on either side, who sling their guns and rush to the chair. Rane tries to dive for his gun on the kitchen floor, but one of them kicks him in the ribs. He grunts in pain and struggles as he’s pulled to his knees, trying to get his footing. A hard blow to the side of his face makes his vision flash red, and he falls limp.

As they drag him from the house, he weakly pulls against the men one last time, getting a rifle butt to the stomach. Torre leads them to the middle of the street, motioning for the men to kneel Rane down in front of him.

Rane can just barely make out the grin in the dim moonlight. He tries to focus on the face in front of him, but his vision blurs. A hand pulls his head back up, and he sees Torre’s revolver pointing down to his chest.

“You didn’t answer my question,” Torre shouts, loud enough for the whole block to hear, “who do you think you are?” He glances at the curtained windows, imagining the terrified faces cowering behind them.

His grin widens.

“You’re hope, Rane Cowell. That’s why you need to die.”

Lucy is grabbed away by her mother, and both run from the back of their neighbor’s house. They had stopped at that corner so her mother could make sure they weren’t being followed, but Lucy could see her father in the street. And that man with the grin, pointing his... gun... at her father...

A shot rings out. Then another. Then another. Then another.

Four shots in quick succession, then orders to search the house. Lucy pushes down her thoughts and keeps running, trying not to think about the shots even as they echo through her mind. *Just make it there*, she forces herself to focus on the frantic directions her mother gave her, *Lawrence is there, just a bit further, Lawrence is there...*

Shouts begin behind her, but her mother pulls her into an alley a few houses down from theirs. Lawrence’s voice cries out, “y’all here? Where’s Rane?”

“Drive, Lar!” Val pushes Lucy into the horse-drawn buggy, throwing the bags inside before climbing in herself. Lawrence barely waits for the

door to shut before whipping the horse’s reins, not stopping until the buggy is going as fast as it can down the street.

Lucy tries to look out the back, but is pulled down by her mother as more gunfire and shouts ring out. Wood and glass spray across the cabin.

Val crouches protectively over Lucy to shield her from the shrapnel, and Lucy covers her ears with her hands – eyes shut tight and face pressed into the floor.

Gradually, the din starts to diminish. The sound of bullets hitting the buggy’s side is replaced with the occasional rock kicked up by the wheels, and the shouts fade into the distance. The buggy slows slightly as Lawrence eases the horse into a canter. Val raises herself up from Lucy, keeping a hand on her back. Waiting until after her mother takes the hand away, Lucy starts to raise her head to survey the scene.

The cabin is peppered with bullet holes and coated in shrapnel. Shards of wood and glass cover Val’s hair and clothing. She still holds the revolver from when she grabbed it off the kitchen floor, her knuckles white around the gun’s grip.

Lucy pulls her eyes away from the revolver, looking up at her mother’s face. Her gaze goes out the remains of the back window, a familiar expression on her face. Lucy knows what it means.

There’s a long road ahead.

Heritage

They live on in me –
I leave things in my pockets,
Just like my grandpa.

Wrong way

I ask myself: “what do I want to do?”
There is no reply
For that is truly a stupid question.

“So,” I ask myself, “do I want to draw?”
“Do I want to run?”
“Do I want to talk?”
“Do I want to write?”
And to each one the answer is no.

How else should I react
To questions so insensitive?
Asked as if I were a child
Or mentally disabled.

I do want to draw.
I want to draw sorrow,
To draw love,
To draw awe,
To draw horror.

I do want to run.
I want to run hard,
To run fast,
To run far,
To run free.

I do want to talk.
I want to talk events,
To talk concepts,
To talk openly,
To talk deeply.

I do want to write.
I want to write poetry,
To write books,
To write stories,
To write memories.

These wants are within me,
As wrapped in me as I am with them.
They are not toys to pass the time.
I am not a bored child.

My disinterest and dysfunction
Are not problems to “fix”.
They are not obstacles,
They are signs.
Bright neon signs with flashing lights,
Clearly spelling out:
“WRONG WAY”

The Source

I look at you,
Dancing,
Singing,
Smiling,
Laughing,
And my world gains some light.

I look at you,
Crying,
Frowning,
Stressing,
Suffering,
And my world leaps to help you.

For, like any human worth their ancestry,
It is light and warmth I desire.

And you,
My love,
My moonbeam,
My darling,
My sky,
Are my source of both.

Seasons

Darkness of Spring

A friend once told me
Her favorite season was spring.

But not the bright spring,
Cheery spring,
With sweet smells and warm air.
The dark spring,
Emerging spring,
Was her favored time of year.

Not many I know
Share that same view,
With spring as dark forests,
Raging rapids,
Awoken eyes.

The life that waned in fall
And waited through winter,
Converges in spring
To dance the oldest dance be-
fore summer.

Treacherous Summer

With the first beams cresting,
A warm dawn breaks.
What little dew had gathered
Wicks away,
To once more join the air.
Those who slept begin to stir,
Foraging before the hunters
Or hunting before the heat.

The sun glares down,
Not halfway through its arc,
And dries both fiber and flesh.
Insects swarm to moisture,
Both water and blood alike.

The sun, once a bringer of mo-
tion,
Shines relentlessly;
Curling grass,
Cracking earth,
Grinding life towards stagnation.

As the arc completes,
Heat still lies thick,
A blanket under the night.

Falling Autumn

Wind whirls leaves from branch-
es,
Which dance with each other
Through swirl and swoop
In the cooling air.

The air thins and moves slower
And slower still.
The life from summer
Prepares their food,
Or puts on nightclothes
To start settling down.

Frost in the morning,
Clouds in the day.
The world begins to slow,
And draws in breath
To hold through winter.

The land seems to steam,
Coming down from its boil.
As it sits and simmers
Anticipation grows.
What will survive?

Swallowed by Winter

Those who sleep dream not,
Those awake dream of warmth;
Of a pocket of shelter
From the winds,
From the snow,
From the ice in their blood.

Darkness burned away by sum-
mer
Slides back into the night.
Warmth drains quickly from the
air.
Water turns hard,
Food turns harder,
All is enveloped in smothering
white.

The world is still;
A stagnant struggle.
Keep from the ice one more day,
Then another,
Then more,
Ever praying for change.

Devil's Train

Lela is panicking. The
tunnel stretches far in front of
her torchlight, a speck of what
seems like the sunlight shining
far past the darkness. The walls
are rough stone, with no side
passages in sight. She can almost
feel the weight of the surround-
ing earth pressing in on all sides.

And the rumbling is get-
ting louder.

At first it was just a buzz,
the cold iron track vibrating
beneath her feet. That was
enough to get her worried. She
doesn't know where she is, but
she knows what the coming of a
train sounds like.

She started walking a
while ago, and rounded a corner
that now appears to lead out,
toward daylight. But the torch in
her hand grows dimmer.

And the sound of the
train grows.

Breaking into a sprint,
she drops the torch, letting it
sputter on the ground. The
distant light is her only guide,
and twice she stumbles. The
rumbling is deafening now. She
needs to run. She needs to get
away. To the light. To the...

She stops. The light
is moving towards her. It's
growing, faster now, barreling
towards her, moving with the
rumbling.

She takes a step back.
A steam whistle shrieks and
rips through the air, slamming
into her ears. She tries to turn,
to run, to get away. Her foot
catches a loose rock, and she

falls backwards onto the track.
Something in her back snaps.

The light thunders to-
wards her. She can only stare at
it as the whistle shrieks again,
her own screams lost to the
sound...

Lela's eyes snap open,
her lungs gasping for air. For a
moment, she doesn't register her
surroundings, still lost in panic
as she sits up. The wind on her
face soothes her a little, letting
her mind slow. Her lungs let out
the held breath, and she relaxes
her shoulders, unclenching her
hands from her blanket.

She takes a moment to
breathe and list the items in her
room – the dresser crammed
in the corner in an attempt to
avoid both the bed and the door,
and her drawing desk on the
opposite side, almost too large to
allow the small chair in front of
it to be sat in – before she turns
to the open window at the foot
of her bed.

It's a warm summer
morning, the breeze carrying the
smell of flowers from her neigh-
bor's windowsill garden. Lela
smiles, the dream already start-
ing to fade in her mind. Then
the wind shifts. The smells of
the city overwhelm the flowers;
horse manure and coal smoke
being the main contenders. With
the wind comes the faint sound
of a train whistle.

Lela slams the window
shut, locking it. She purses her
lips. The trains aren't supposed
to whistle near the apartments,
but those sounds are meant to
carry for miles. There's nothing
to be done about it, she reminds
herself, best to just forget the
dream.

Putting on a work dress,
she ties her hair into a bun and
maneuvers her way to the door.
I really have to sell this thing,
she notes as she squeezes past
the desk.

Her foot kicks a piece
of paper on the floor, sending
it flying over to her boots. Her
expression deepens to a frown.
I thought I packed all those up,
she thinks, looking at the box
under her desk.

Sure enough, the top is
slightly askew, and some pa-
pers have been pulled out and
dropped onto the floor. The
ones that are face up depict
schematics for a train, each
detailing the different systems.
Crumbs of charcoal from a fall-
en pencil are scattered across the
pages.

Lela ducks under the

desk to gather them up. Looking
closely at the yellowed paper,
she notices smudged finger-
prints that weren't there when
she packed them. I have to stop
drinking, she reprimands herself,
recalling other times that she
had a late night urge to look at
these depressing reminders. I
swear, it's like the Devil himself
takes over.

Gathering the paper into
a haphazard stack on the floor,
she dumps the pile back into the
box – placing the lid on with a
thunk. Now is not the time to be
reminiscing, she reminds herself.
She crawls out from under the
desk, grabbing her boots and
sliding them on.

A flash of white catches
her eye as she sits down on the
chair. The page she kicked is still
on the floor. She sighs, finishes
lacing up her boots, then steps
over to the paper.

Picking it up by the cor-
ner, careful not to smudge any
of the writing, she turns it over
in her hands. It's the general
schematic for the train depicted
on the other sheets, complete
with annotations pointing to
each moving part of the vehi-
cle. The descriptions are very
detailed, referencing the other
sheets by the number in their
top right corner. This one's cor-
ner has a stylized "#1" written
in the same penmanship of the
other titles on the page.

In the top left, a list of
the authors is written below the
name of the train, which ap-
pears to have been painted over
and rewritten as "Model No.
4." The engineer and investor
credits are all signed in their re-
spective contributor's hand, but
Lela's eyes lock on to the illustra-
tor credit. "Raymond Jordan"
reads the text. Innocent-look-
ing enough at a glance, but to
anyone with eyes for detail, it
may seem strange that it doesn't
appear to match the rest of the
writing.

But who would find that
odd?

The chiming of the clock
downstairs tears Lela's attention
away from the paper. 5... 6...
7... she counts to herself. Her
eyes go wide as the clock contin-
ues. Cursing to herself, she folds
the paper along old creases and
stuffs it into her dress pocket.
She pulls open the door, grabs
her keys off the dresser, and
locks the door behind her before
nearly running down the stairs.

She arrives at the coffee
shop in almost half the time
it usually takes to walk there.

The store owner looks up from pouring someone's cup just long enough to give a disapproving glare as Lela disappears into the back room. She throws an apron over her dress, and walks out to meet the late morning line, still tying the apron behind her.

The first customer in line, a middle aged man desperately trying to appear younger by combing his thinning hair over a bald spot, stands impatiently at the counter. Lela takes his order; one crepe, one coffee, and one hot chocolate.

The next person is a young woman, the extra embroidery on her dress somehow having the opposite effect on its style. Lela can tell it's supposed to look like metallic filigrees, but unfortunately just looks gaudy. She makes a mental note to try to restyle it in her sketchbook later.

The orders start to run together as the line continues to grow. Lela allows the exact orders to drift away after she writes it down, letting the paper keep it organized instead of her mind. She and the other girl working the counter take turns writing the orders and making them, but each time Lela returns to the register she has to resist rewriting the notes. Rachel isn't disorganized, but she's certainly not as efficient as she could be.

Lela finishes taking the order of a modestly dressed – but still obviously well off – young man, when she feels a tap on her shoulder. “Could you grab me a pen? The gears are stuck again.” Rachel gestures back to the coffee grinder.

Lela nods, and reaches back for the pen she doesn't use as often. Her hand brushes paper, and before she can grab it, the order she wrote flutters over the counter and to the floor.

Handing Rachel the pen, Lela starts to lean over the counter to grab the loose page, then pauses. The young man, who gave the name of Lou for his order, scoops the paper off the floor. He starts to hand it to her, a faint smile playing on his face, then his eyes catch the writing. For the barest hint of a moment, his face twists into a wide grin. The look in his eyes makes Lela uncomfortable, he seems almost... hungry. Then, as quickly as the expression formed, it returns to an apologetic half-smile.

She blinks. What was that? She wonders, trying not to stare as she reads his body lan-

guage. But nothing looks wrong now, just someone being nice. She accepts the note, nodding to the man with a semi-forced smile.

Turning to start making the drinks, she tries to forget about that strange expression. But what made him do that? She thinks, was it what I wrote? She turns back to the note, re-viewing the order.

Her eyes go wide. There's an address written there, right below the last item. She's sure it wasn't there before she dropped it.

“Oh, you have an admirer?” Rachel says, smiling over Lela's shoulder. Lela quickly shoves the note into her pocket, busying herself with making the rest of the order. Rachel just shrugs, moving to take the next person's.

Getting the order out as quickly as possible, Lela walks it over to his spot, one of the closest tables to the counter. She looks at him closely as she draws near, but even his slight nods to other customers don't seem out of place to her. Then what was that look for? She questions, focusing on his face.

He turns, meeting her eyes. Lela catches a glimpse of flickering light in them, as if they're reflecting flames from an inferno. Then, once again, the expression shifts into a warm smile as he accepts the coffee. She gives him a quick farewell, then turns and walks back behind the counter. When she turns back again, his face is gone from the growing crowd.

Once her shift is over, she takes out the note again. The address is one she recognizes, the Teichler-Raymond Steam Museum. Everyone in the inner-city knows where that is. Few have the connection she has to it.

What seems even more unnerving is the writing below the address. It reads simply “you know,” scrawled in an angular, but clear hand.

The part that worries her is that she might.

The day is growing old by the time Lela makes it to the museum gates. The museum itself is made of concrete and steel, almost garish in its artistic vision. It was meant to display just how precise some of the new inventions for construction equipment could be, with steel girders jutting through the sides of the building into the ground

at 45 degree angles.

Viewed from above – such as from a zeppelin docking at the tallest spire, a trip reserved for very wealthy donors – the structure resembles a spiral made with the golden ratio. Everything about it is meant to marry art and science into one vision, one purpose: moving mankind forward, like an engine.

Or at least that's what it says on the dedication plaque. The quote is credited to Harry Teichler, whose face was immortalized in bronze, plastered with a determined expression facing westward. His larger-than-life arm stretches outward, a single finger pointing to the setting sun.

Behind him, facing the museum with hands on hips, is his partner. Raymond Jordan is the man credited with making the vision into a landscape; where Teichler had ideas, Jordan provided the details.

Lela stares at his face, its features lit with a similar determination to the other's. These are the men tasked with shaping the future, the ones who stood out against the rest. The ones who didn't have to work in a dead-end coffee shop job just to pay rent.

Gritting her teeth, she forces herself to look away, and walks up the stairs to the entrance.

Walking inside, she notices the crowd has already begun to thin, the remaining people spending just a few more moments admiring the interior before the museum closes. She doesn't see anyone she recognizes, and sighs in relief.

The floor of the main entryway is taken up by a glass-covered clock face, which reads 8:26. About 30 minutes then, Lela notes, let's see what this is.

She begins to walk further into the exhibits, eyes pointed straight ahead. The man who gave her that note will probably be at the main exhibit, which she knows is at the exact center of the museum.

After all, she designed it herself.

The hallway opens into a vast chamber. The walls are lined with timelines and pictures, detailing the progression of steam power through time. At the center of the room sits a steam locomotive, a replica of the first model ever built. The room is empty save for one

person, who stands admiring the dark steel and plated brass filigrees.

The man's back is to her as she approaches, but she recognizes the back of his head from the way the dirty blond hair is styled. It's parted simply, combed to the right, but with each side having a slight cowlick – making the hair on either side of his head stand up a little.

He doesn't turn at the sound of her footsteps, but as she gets closer he starts to speak. “Quite a marvelous thing, don't you agree?”

Lela stops a bit behind him, putting a hand on her hip. “Who are you?”

“With such an eye for detail, who knew you'd be so blunt?” He turns around, chuckling. His smile is the same warm grin from when she saw him in the shop. “The name's Lou. And you are?” He extends his hand for a handshake.

Lela's eyebrow rises. “I thought you'd know my name, given everything you've been doing.”

Lou's grin widens. “Who says? Either way, I'd like to hear you say it.”

The comment makes Lela pause. “Lela,” she says at last, meeting the stranger's hand.

His grip is firm, confident, and professional. Lela guesses he's a businessman, though he'd have to be a young one. Maybe an inventor? She returns the firm grip, and shakes once before letting go.

To any other woman, this would have been a strange gesture from a young man like him. Lela, however, starts to guess that this isn't just some chance encounter with a would-be gentleman. *The question is, she thinks, what the hell does he want?*

She clears her throat. “So, Lou, what pushed you to give a random girl in a coffee shop the idea to meet some man in a museum? This would certainly be the strangest way to court I've ever seen, so I'm guessing it's not that.”

Lou chuckles again. “No, I'm not pursuing a relationship in that sense. More... professional, I'd say.” He turns back to the train, eyes and grin widening. He looks almost hungry to Lela.

A few seconds pass before he spins back to face her. “I'd like to make a deal, Ms. Jordan.” His expression looks a little more excited, almost frenzied.

Lela manages to keep

herself from stepping back, and crosses her arms. “What kind of deal? And how do you know my last name?”

“Oh, pay it no mind, I know a lot of things. As for the deal, I would like to offer you what you’ve wanted since this museum became a glint in Harry’s eye.” The frenzied look fades to a mischievous grin, and Lou begins to circle around her. “I offer you vengeance. A chance to bring the men who wronged you to atonement, a way to end this silly misunderstanding of who really deserves the credit for ‘moving humanity forward, like an engine,’ did I get that right?”

“It’s ‘moving mankind forward,’ not...” Lela’s breath catches. A misquotation like that would usually mean that a person didn’t care enough about the source to repeat the quote correctly. But that specific error...

How does he know? Lela thinks the phrase over in her mind. *Only two other people would know how I said it, and neither of them would go about telling anyone.*

Lou stops in front of her. “Well? I’m sure you’ve figured out who I am by now.”

The pieces start to fit together. Lela knows the stories; a person who seems unremarkable revealing themselves to be the Devil of old, coming to collect after convincing some poor victim to sell their soul. *But that’s impossible*, she reminds herself. *The Devil is a fairy tale.*

“For trying to be the ‘Father of Lies,’ you sure have a terrible poker face.” Lela stares him down. “What kind of person goes around claiming to have the powers of Satan?”

Lou’s face shifts through a range of shocked expressions, and settles on anger. “You don’t believe me?”

Lela scoffs. “Come on, everyone knows the ‘Devil’ is just an old wives tale.” She looks him up and down. “You don’t even look like you could be his disguise.”

Rolling his eyes, Lou sighs. “Why do I keep having to explain this, I’m not just some bright-red freak with goat legs okay?” He points a finger at Lela. “I’m offering you the deal of the century, and you’d just dismiss it as a story!?”

“Listen, I didn’t come here to sell my soul, I came here to see what kind of crackpot I was dealing with.” Lela pushes Lou’s finger out of her face.

“And if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to find the police so they can lock another madman away.”

As she storms out of the chamber, she half expects the man to call after her, to try and stop her. Nothing echoes after her, however, and a glance back at the end of the hall finds him still standing there, staring at the train.

What a creep, she decides, walking into the cooling air, *what gives him the right to prey on people down on their luck?* Who cares how he knows about me, only someone truly demented would try to masquerade as Satan, of all things.

At the bottom of the steps, she looks up at the setting sun, and sighs. A glint of metal catches her eye, and she turns to the statues by the gate. She stares at Raymond’s face, the growing shadows making him look almost smug. Walking closer, she reads the dedication plaque at his feet.

“Raymond Jordan is the pen that wrote the future. His artistic view and eye for detail gave life and dimension to Teichler’s vision, bringing the engine of mankind closer to its fuel: the combination of art and science into one discipline. When these days pass us by, the effects that this one man had on the world will still remain. As timeless as the works he created.”

Lela reaches into her pocket, fingering the schematic she took from her apartment. She hesitates, then pulls it out. Unfolding it, her eyes focus on Raymond’s signature, then look over the detailed drawing of the train.

You hack, she thinks, directing her gaze back to Raymond’s statue, *that was my work. Now everyone eats out of your hand, and you don’t even have the decency to build another statue.* A tear falls from her eye, but she folds the schematic back up before her emotions can run away from her.

Lela turns back to the museum. Lou is standing at the top of the steps now, looking down at the statues. Walking up the steps once more, she meets his eyes. They look sad, understanding even.

“I can give you all that you want. No more idols towering atop a pedestal of lies.” Lou extends his hand again.

Lela looks back at the statue, then sighs again, shaking her head. “Well, what do I have to lose?” She takes Lou’s hand and shakes it.

A train whistle rings out

through the air as the sun dips below the horizon. Lela lets go and spins around, panicking for a moment, but realizes that it’s just the 5 minute warning for the museum’s closure. Sure enough, people begin to file out of the museum doors behind her.

She turns back to ask what Lou plans to do next, but the strange man is gone. Scanning the crowd, she sees no trace of his head going down the steps. She considers asking a passerby if they saw him, but thinks better of it. There have been enough questions for one night.

Lela sits bolt upright in her bed – jolted awake, again, by the same nightmare she’s had every night for the past week. She looks out her shut window as the sun begins to crest over the streets, and shakes her head. There’s nothing to be done, she reminds herself.

It’s the morning after she made that deal with Lou, and – unsurprisingly – nothing feels different. Did I actually believe him that moment that we shook? She ponders, or did I just want him to leave me alone?

Pushing those thoughts aside, she opens the window to let some fresh air in. The sounds of the streets float up through the window, including the sound of a paper boy telling a new story. Half listening, she starts to get ready for another day.

“...hear the news...freak accident...is steam safe?”

Lela pauses. Climbing over her bed to the window, she watches and listens as a crowd begins to form below.

“Read about it here! Teichler’s factory blown to bits, famed inventor bites the dust! The culprit? One of his own steam turbines! Hundreds dead or injured, only ten cents a paper!”

The crowd grows, murmuring to each other. Some walk up and hand the paper boy a few coins, showing others the paper as they leave.

Not possible, Lela tries to tell herself, *how would they have been so careless? They knew a disaster like this would do more than just kill them...* Her thoughts trail off as she remembers last night.

No more idols... the phrase floats through her mind.

Lou didn’t mean bringing them to justice, he meant destroying them, she realizes, he meant tearing down their rep-

utation, and everything they’ve built.

Thinking about it more, she shakes her head. *No, even if he really wanted to do that, there’s no way he’d be able to get into the labs, she reasons, but now all the weight is on Raymond’s shoulders, how is he going to convince the public to trust them again?*

Rushing to get dressed, Lela barely remembers to lock her door before almost sprinting to the museum. A group of people have already gathered outside the gates, guarded by two skittish men dressed in the museum’s uniform. It’s not a mob... yet... but some of the people are starting to yell at the men on the top of the steps, asking for an interview, a comment, a response.

Even from here, it’s easy to tell who they are. Robert F. Potts, the museum curator, and Raymond Jordan. Both men look uneasy as they talk to another young man, likely telling him what to say to the press at the gate.

Lela makes it to the gate, pushing past a few reporters trying to get the guards to talk. She walks over and taps a guard she knows on the shoulder. His eyes go wide as he sees her.

Lela steels herself. “I’d like to talk to my husband, Leonard, if you don’t mind.”

Leonard looks confused, but thankfully doesn’t ask why. He moves to unlock the gate to let her slip in.

Lela feels a tap on her own shoulder.

“Excuse me miss, who are you?” A squat reporter with thinning hair straightens his glasses. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to know how you convinced that guard to let you in.”

Lela shakes her head. “I’m sure you would. Excuse me.” She passes through the gate, Leonard shutting it behind her, and ignores the questions bombarding her from behind. Walking up the steps, she fixes her eyes on the men ahead. Seeing her approach, Raymond pulls the other man in front of him. “Lela, now is not the time...”

“Save it.” She stops a few steps away. “How could you be so careless? Both of you? This has done more than just take away your friend, and you know it.”

Raymond looks past her at the growing crowd. “I am... painfully aware of that fact, thank you. Why are you here?”

Lela hesitates. Why is she here? To reprimand? To help? *No*, she thinks, *I think I might know*.

She stands up a little straighter. "I'm here to watch you crumble. To watch your lies come undone. This is the culmination of all you've done, and I'm here to see what happens."

Watching him squirm behind the confused Robert makes her smile a little. That felt good, she thinks, if a bit dramatic.

With that, she turns on her heels, walking back down to the gate. The mass of people has grown larger, and she has to push her way through to get to the street. The reporter who questioned her is now at the back of the crowd, interviewing someone who arrived later. She catches a small part of the conversation before turning the corner.

"I'd just like to get answers, you know? We don't really know, now, if steam is actually safe..."

Lela starts to walk faster. People on the street brush past her, moving to the source of the rising voices. *This might get serious*, she thinks, *but at least it's not me. At least it's someone getting what's coming to him*.

Turning another street-corner, she feels a strong hand clamp on her arm. Looking up, she sees a familiar, grinning face. Lou guides her to the side of the corner shop, out of the way of the people walking by.

Keeping his grip on her, he leans in towards her ear, as if telling a secret. "So, how'd I do?"

Lela pushes him back, and he lets go of her arm. "What?"

His grin grows wider. "Are you ready to 'see what happens'? To watch your husband crumble?"

Lela's eyes widen. *How does he know that? Her mind races. He couldn't have been there...*

"I didn't have to be, Ms. Jordan." Lou doesn't make any moves to stop her, but Lela finds herself rooted in place. "With such an eye for detail, who knew you'd be so dense?"

He begins to circle her, her eyes unable to look away, her body only able to turn around to follow his path.

This isn't real, she tells herself, *this has to be a dream, some extension of a nightmare*.

"You called me the 'Father of Lies,' but do you know what that truly means?"

Lou's grin fades, replaced by an expression of anger. Then of surprise. The expressions begin to change faster, until Lela starts to feel dizzy, nauseous even.

"It means I know how to lie." The voice comes clear to Lela, despite his shifting face. "I wear expressions like you might don a mask, I can read anyone I speak to like words on a page, and I know how to hide even the smallest details in plain sight." He stops circling, taking steps closer to emphasize each phrase. "A lie, within a lie, within a lie."

Lela's mind reels, only now seeing the pattern she fell into. This... thing... it knew what she would do even before she thought of it. It knew how to manipulate her, how to hide the danger by presenting a ridiculous claim, and now...

Lou's – its – expression settles on an unsettling warm smile. "Very soon now, that mob will become rowdy enough to charge the gates. Certain... people, let's call them... will be able to talk them into giving him a taste of his own medicine."

Lela gets the vivid image of looking up from a train track, feeling the telltale rumble from the rails below. A tear rolls down her motionless face.

"Before it arrives, though, he'll have a chance to say a few words. Would you like to hear them?" The thing leans closer, looking her in the eyes, its face still held in that out-of-place smile.

No, Lela tries to say, *no, I don't want this. I didn't want any of this*.

The smile grows inhuman, gleaming with malice. It speaks in a perfect impression of Raymond's voice. "No, please! This isn't right! I- I didn't even come up with the idea! Who did? No, it wasn't Harry either, please! The engine was my wife's idea, she drew all the plans! I swear! I don't have an artistic bone in my body!"

Lela's eyes grow wide. Panic flutters in her chest. Those people are out for blood, looking for anyone they can blame.

The being masquerading as human nods, as if in agreement, then continues. "I- I can tell you! I can tell you where she is! Just let me go, please! 245 Elmwood lane, that's her address! Wait... what do you mean you'll keep that in mind!? No! NO!"

A distant train whistles in the night, punctuating the plea. Lela finds herself able to

move again, and she begins to run. She doesn't pay attention to where she's going, just as long as it's away from that creature at the corner. She doesn't even register when she hits the woods, and only realizes where she is once she runs onto the tracks.

She stops a moment to catch her breath. Everything seems so quiet, so peaceful in the early summer afternoon.

Then the howling begins. The sound of hunting dogs hot on a trail comes from behind, and she can hear them crashing through the foliage. They sound large. Snippets of the old stories surface in her mind about the Devil's hounds, how they hunt down those who sold their soul.

She starts to run again.

The snarling is all around her now. She runs down the tracks, unable to take cover in the forest. Eyes and teeth gleam from the brush.

As the tunnel comes into view, she stumbles. This is the place. Her nightmares have shown her this tunnel every time she's gone to sleep. There's nothing to be done, her mind says, the thought calm despite the situation. Driven by the snapping of jaws at her heels, she enters the darkness.

The snarls start to fade, diminishing into a low growl. Lela looks at her hand, seeing that she grabbed the maintenance torch without thinking, but she can't stop now. The growling echoes through the cave as she scrapes the torch against the wall, lighting it.

Eventually, she slows to a fast walk. The growling has faded further, but is still somewhat audible behind her. She doesn't know how long she's been running, but feels exhausted. A small pinprick of light ahead gives hope to her muddled thoughts.

She steps on the track, trying to wake herself with a shock of cold metal.

It vibrates beneath her foot.

Confused, she tries to figure out what that means, why it scares her. She's so tired, it's hard to think straight...

Her eyes go wide. Adrenaline and panic clear her mind in an instant as she realizes. She drops the dimming torch, letting it sputter and die on the ground, and runs for the light.

The rumbling grows louder.

Twice she stumbles. Her

only thought is to get to the light, that is the escape. She just has to get away. To the light. To the...

Her stomach drops. The light is moving. She tries to turn. She tries to run again.

The train's whistle shrieks.

Catching a loose rock, her foot slips out from under her, and she falls hard on the track. Something in her back snaps.

The light thunders towards her. She can only stare at it as the whistle shrieks again, her own screams lost to the sound...

Sabrina Renderos

Immigration

"Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life" (John F. Kennedy). Immigration is a huge part of my life. All of my family members have migrated from El Salvador to the United States to make their American dream a reality. It has affected us in good and not so positive ways. Regardless of the outcomes, they have been able to reach all the goals they have set for themselves in this country. I could not be more proud of the sacrifices all immigrants make to give themselves and their families a better way of living.

According to dictionary.com, an immigrant is a person who migrates to another country, usually for permanent residence. ICE stands for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The agency is under the U.S Department of Homeland Security. It was established under the Homeland Security Act in 2002 (after 9/11 took place) and its founder was the 43rd President, George W. Bush. The powers ICE holds are investigating, apprehending, arresting, detaining, and deporting undocumented immigrants (ice.gov). There are 200 detention centers where ICE holds immigrants. In 1994, there were about only 5,000 detainees, now there are as many as 500,000. Ice.gov informs us that, "In Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) officers arrested approximately 143,000 aliens and removed more than 267,000 – which is an increase in removals from the prior year."

Once an immigrant has been deported, it is very unlike-

ly for them to return, but not impossible. This also ties in with the government placing a specific number of years from returning. The bar is set at 10 years maximum and it is seen as a form of punishment. ICE has over 20,000 employees. There is an academy that the staff members have to complete that takes 13 weeks. ICE officers are not able to enter your home unless they are assigned a warrant, but there are some immigrants that have not been informed of this fact. With Trump's "zero tolerance" policy, there are more and more immigrants being deported and not being able to seek asylum. Even with this policy, Trump's numbers of deportation still do not match all of the deportations that were under the Obama administration. The budget for ICE is eight billion and it is split in three ways along with Homeland Security Investigations, Enforcement and Removal Operations, and Office of Principal Legal Advisor (ice.gov). The job of a deportation officer is to identify, arrest, and remove immigrants from the country if they have committed any crimes (including coming here illegally).

My mother, Maria, pursued her American dream September 23 in 1999. Like most immigrants, she had a "coyote" help bring her to the United States. A coyote is someone who smuggles immigrants into a country. Coyotes charge thousands of dollars and are usually paid after the person has entered the States safely. There are a lot of unfortunate times when immigrants do not make it and lose their life in the process. It is very dangerous and you have to be aware of everything around you every moment throughout the journey. Some immigrants are lucky; their crossing is short. Others are not as lucky and it can take them over a month to get here (worldvision.org).

My mother was one of the fortunate ones, along with the group of people she was with, and her journey was only about a week long. One of my uncles was not as lucky. It took him 40 days to reach the states. Maria migrated from El Salvador and her first stop was in Guatemala. She crossed the whole country on a bus, staying three nights there. Later, she reached Mexico and stayed in a hotel for one night. While crossing the whole country of Mexico, she reached a town called Agua Prieta, which is right at the

border of Mexico and the United States. The desert was the hardest part for her because she spent six hours walking across with only a water bottle in her hand. The bus arrived and the ride was 38 hours until she finally made it to Phoenix, Arizona.

At Phoenix, a truck picked them up and dropped them off at another hotel so she could rest to make the riskiest part of it all. From the hotel, she called her brother that lived in New York and told him she had made it. She got on another bus that took her to Los Angeles, California and was given a fake I.D. that showed she was documented when she really was not. Fake I.Ds and fake social security numbers are really common for undocumented immigrants (apnews.com). They are used to apply for a steady well paying job. It is also risky because if it is confiscated and it can also be reported to an Immigration Center. With the fake identification, she was able to complete the riskiest part of it all- get on an airplane and not be detained at any airport. She managed to fly to New York and land in LaGuardia, where her brother and other family waited for her. October 1, 1999, she was finally able to breathe realizing that she was safe with her family.

There are plenty of sacrifices immigrants make as they pursue their dream. Not only is crossing the border extremely dangerous, but what waits for you on the other side can be harder the detention centers. Quite a few immigrants turn themselves into ICE right as they cross the border. They file their report and get their biometric screening taken care of. Detention centers are what follows. Most of the centers are not coed. Some, but very few detention centers hold immigration courts or asylum offices within them. Due to that reason, they have to have interviews and/or hearings through phone or video calls. There are times that you may be eligible to obtain a bond, but with this, you will have to do check-ins or have an ankle monitor. If you are not given a bond, you have to stay in the detention center until your case is complete (nolo.com). The public has also seen the unjust conditions immigrants are living in. For example, the tin foil blankets and the cement floor that is provided for them to sleep on. Also, the overcrowdedness, rapes accusations towards the

ICE staff, and most recently, the whistleblower statement that informs us immigrant women are being forced to get a hysterectomy.

Once my mom reached the border, she did not become an asylum seeker, like most immigrants are. An asylum seeker is a person who has fled their home country because of war or other factors harming them or their family, enters another country, and applies for asylum, that is, international protection, in this other country (aph.gov). Asylum can be granted to people who are unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion (www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org).

Maria spent her first year in the United States undocumented. She later was able to file for a TPS. TPS stands for Temporary Protected Status. It was created in the 1990's for countries that had suffered from war or natural disasters. The natural disaster my mother was able to file under were two earthquakes that occurred in El Salvador in the early months of 2001. There are a total of around 400,000 that the U.S. has granted TPS for. The main country being El Salvador which contains 247, 697 TPS holders that are living and working here and one of them includes my mom. The other countries include Honduras, Haiti, Nepal, Syria, Nicaragua, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and South Sudan (immigrationforum.org).

Being a TPS holder has allowed my mom to live and work in the United States for a certain period of time. It was not until I filled out my FAFSA that I found out my mother's social security was not the same as mine. Above her social security number it states, "VALID FOR WORK ONLY WITH DHS AUTHORIZATION". I had never realized it or thought anything about it until that day. Along with her social security, she also holds her actual TPS identification card. My mom carries her TPS card along with her wherever she goes. Her lawyer advised her to carry it with her in case she were to ever get pulled over, involved with the police, or if Smithfield, where she works, was to be raided by ICE. The TPS card states underneath

of it, "NOT VALID FOR RE-ENTRY TO THE U.S.". Due to it stating that at the bottom, she has to file a travel authorization if she would want to leave the country.

Travel authorization for TPS is issued as an advance parole document if USCIS determines it is appropriate to approve your request (www.uscis.gov). Maria has only filed for travel authorization once and it was back in 2012. I vaguely remember being detained once we tried to come back to the country. We had to go to this other section of the airport in Texas and went through some paperwork proving that she was granted the authority to travel. The one part that stuck with me from all of that was when I interpreted, at the age of 10, for this girl and her mother which had recently migrated to the United States. They did not know a single word of English and did not understand what the officer was saying to them. My mom and I were sitting right in front of them and I approached the ladies telling them that the officer wanted their signature and their fingerprints. The officer and the ladies both thanked me and before I knew it, we were headed back home. It had never clicked with me that translating for that girl was my first encounter with immigration until I became older. Filing a travel authorization is crucial if you are in the United States and it was so important for my mother to carry her letter of travel approval. If you do not file and still leave the country your chances of entering the U.S. are very slim.

Along with the TPS, there also comes an expiration date. For El Salvador, it has continuously been extended. It was supposed to expire September 9, 2019, but there was an extension until January 4, 2021, along with five other countries that were included with the new expiration date. If the TPS does not get another extension date, that means that the holders will no longer have a legal status. Their two options are to willingly leave the country on their own or the government can deport them (nolo.com). The only reason they would not be deported is if they are filing another case to hold legal status.

Every year or so, my mom goes to the USCIS Omaha Field House to update her biometric screenings. The past years, she has only had to put

her fingerprints on different files. This is crucial for her case. If she misses one appointment all the years her residential application has been waiting can be put down the drain in just a second. If for some reason, the application is denied or goes over the timeline that is set, once I turn 21 years old, I will be able to file for her under my name through an immigrant petition that would grant her a residential status. My mother is filing another case and that is why the next few months will not affect her directly as it will others. This is great news for my own family, but brings a burden to those that may soon have to leave. It has left people like Jose Palma, director of the National TPS Alliance, conflicted and unsure of their future and the decisions they will soon have to make for themselves and their family/home they have been able to create here over the years (pri.org).

Immigrants contribute a big portion to our economy, especially in the hard times the whole nation is going through right now. According to immigrationforum.org, “TPS holders from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti contribute a combined \$4.5 billion in pre-tax wages or salary income annually to our nation’s gross domestic product. The total Social Security and Medicare contributions of those individuals is estimated at more than \$6.9 billion over a ten year span. TPS holders are working as ‘essential critical infrastructure workers’ working shoulder to shoulder with Americans during the coronavirus pandemic and helping with our economic recovery in a number of industries including healthcare and food services.” That is solely just TPS holders.

Now if we contribute all immigrants, it is an even greater benefit to the country. Cbpp.org states the following, “They (immigrants) work at high rates and make up more than a third of the workforce in some industries. Their geographic mobility helps local economies respond to worker shortages, smoothing out bumps that could otherwise weaken the economy. Immigrant workers help support the aging native-born population, increasing the number of workers as compared to retirees and bolstering the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. And children born to immigrant families are upwardly mobile, promising

future benefits not only to their families, but to the U.S. economy overall.” They hold plenty of jobs. For males, the categories are usually construction/ painting, driving/ delivery, janitors, gardeners, cooks, or store clerks. Female jobs tend to lean more towards- maids, nannies, cooks, clothing factory workers, as well as store clerks (immigrationforum.org).

Due to the pandemic, there are international students that can be deported if they don’t attend in person classes. According to dictionary.com, a visa is an endorsement issued by an authorized representative of a country and marked in a passport, permitting the passport holder to enter, travel through, or reside in that country for a specified amount of time, for the purpose of tourism, education, employment, etc. Visas are not being issued to students if they attend a university that is only doing online classes. Those that are already here with their visas are not allowed to go back home due to the fact that they could be jeopardizing their reentry to the country (civilbeat.org).

A green card is a form of legal identification that shows the person has permanent residency in the United States. Those that are able to obtain a green card have civil duties. Green card holders must obey the law, file income tax returns, support the government, and register with Selective Service if they are a male between the age of 18 through 25 (uscis.gov). They must be renewed every ten years, but if you have committed fraud, any other criminal activities or abandonment, it could potentially be revoked.

Another form of receiving documentation can be by marrying a United States Citizen. This was the route my father took. The basic eligibility requirements for a fiance petition are the following: you must be a U.S. citizen to file a fiancé(e) petition. In your petition, you must show that: you are a U.S. citizen; you and your fiancé(e) intend to marry within 90 days of your fiancé(e) entering the United States; you are both free to marry; and you have met each other in person within 2 years before you file (uscis.gov).

He met a woman in New York, who was a United States citizen and they got married by law. She was able to file for him under her name and continued with the petition to give him

a legal status. She later passed away, but the application remained in process. It was approved, but since he entered the U.S illegally, he had to return to El Salvador and serve his punishment time. For him, it was only about three months, but the maximum can lead up to 10 years. After he came back from serving his time, he received his residential card. Ever since he became a resident, the only thing he has to do is renew it every 10 years. Once you become a resident, you can become a citizen by taking the next steps. They consist of completing the application, attending an interview, and lastly passing an English and civics test. If my dad would have had kids before getting married to her, she also could have filed for them as long as they were not over 21 years of age and were also not married.

In conclusion, immigration is something that I hold very near and dear to my heart. It has affected my life before I even knew what immigration was. I was finally able to understand it more clearly as I grew up and got deeper into it. Now, I never hesitate to interpret for a non English speaking person, whether it is at the store, or at an airport detention center. Holding a legal status in the United States is such a blessing and privilege especially when it comes to the process and not knowing if you will be approved or denied. I hope to help as many immigrants as I can and hear their amazing story of how they pursued and continue to pursue their American dream.

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Morgan Craig

bliss.

As the sun sets and the stars awake, the lights in the room dim. The two of them lie next to each other reading – one a research article and the other timeless romance. With heavy eyes, she closes her book and rests it on the nightstand along with her glasses. She switches off the lamp, rolls onto her stomach, and embraces him with warmth. He gently wraps his arm around her and she lifts her chin to look

at him. Still fixed on his reading, he slowly brushes through her hair with his fingers. She gives a soft smile as she releases the tension in her eyes—she takes a deep breath and falls asleep. He felt every muscle relax throughout her body. He looks down at her face snuggled up onto his chest. He stares for a moment longer before kissing her on the temple. After setting his morning alarm, he places his phone on the nightstand and switches off the lamp. He kisses her once more before resting his cheek on her head.

“I love you.”

65

I'm walking to my 9 am Spanish class at Communications this morning. It's a little brisk out, but the cool air is refreshing. I love how beautiful the campus looks during autumn: all of the browns, yellows, and oranges. The wind rushing through the trees is loud, but the leaves that trickle down from their branches are silent, twirling with the breeze.

Leaves alter their colors in the later months of the year because daylight hours decrease—early mornings and late nights, losing track of time, and change. As the temperature cools and the days grow more demanding, I notice my patience shortening. My heart rate begins to increase along with the thoughts that start to accumulate.

I usually give myself some leniency, considering my training in maintenance—a couple of deep breaths, a present focus, and controlling my controllables. “I am in control of my thoughts,” I recite. My therapist is outstanding at her job; she has helped me grow so much over the past few years. Alas, some days are a bit more exhausting than others.

Quite often I catch myself stepping on each crack in the pavement, categorizing the different shades of orange each tree exhibits. One after another my eyes dart back and forth between thoughts. My mind is racing a mile a minute - the scenery is merely a blur in my peripheral. My mind drifts somewhere else, a place of my own creation, or self-sabotage by another definition.

Maintenance; the process of preserving my sanity and quality of life for as long as time

allows. When someone attends therapy consistently, more often than not there will be routine appointments for maintenance. I usually go about every other week, just to check in and see how things are going. About three years ago maintenance would look like an outrageous amount of reassurance and a lousy attempt at empathizing with the girl in the mirror. Now, I'm medicated, taking long, hot showers, and take my time walking to class in the mornings.

A couple of deep breaths, a present focus, and controlling my controllables. At the start line, I reset the blocks in my lane that the person before me left behind. As I line up each footstep, my body trembles. I turn around and the track seems endless, engulfed in a crowd of fans. My heart is racing before the gun ever goes off, and I have to sprint to catch up to it.

“Runners to your mark.” Again, I take a deep breath. I go through my usual routine, stretch my arms out, and then crouch down to get into the blocks. Coach always tells me to clear my mind, but in the heat of the moment, all I can do is think; it keeps me in a present focus. I line my hands up against the white line, lean my shoulders forward, and rest my eyes on my shoelaces. With a deep breath in, I release the tension in my shoulders. “Focus;” a quick pep-talk before the race. *Slow exhale.*

Although competing in track and field at a collegiate level has always been a dream of mine, I knew that it was more of an obligation than an aspiration. I am the first of my family to go to a university and have the potential to graduate. But, I knew my family and I would struggle financially if I didn't go to school on scholarship. That being said, I knew that my level of performance would only have the potential to compete at the NAIA level; Concordia, or Doane University.

My growth as a track athlete only improved as I went through high school, but it was never an outstanding performance for college coaches to notice. I have only placed in an individual event twice in my high school career, and qualified for state my junior and senior year with my relay teams... one of which placed last each year we ran. Despite it all, a gold medal or a state championship title doesn't mean the whole

world to me. I value individual growth, personal records, and leadership, which I take a lot of pride in. I will always give my best effort and practice until I get it right. If there is one label that I value it's “hard worker.” I am proud of how my high school track season ended - I was finally running times that were good enough to be a collegiate athlete. But, I wouldn't have made it there without my support system. The relationships I formed with my teammates and coaches are something that I will forever be grateful for. They're the reason I've come this far.

On the other hand, I have always been successful academically without it being a requirement from my parents. Although, it definitely developed into an expectation. An expectation that was normalized, overlooked, and unnoticed. I just want recognition: for the work I've put in; the expectation I've maintained and exceeded. I'm self-motivated to feed my ego, and when I don't get the praise I think I deserve, that ego shatters, and I'm left to stare at the shards that lie beneath my feet. And yet, I'm still stubborn enough to sweep it all up, piece it back together and continue, time and time again, to try to be enough for everyone else.

On “set,” I slowly lift my rear into the air. There are four pressure points on my hands and feet, but my stomach is churning into knots—the expectations from my coaches, teammates, and myself tortures me. Meet after meet... 8.42, 28, 65. No improvement, just consistency. I've spent 6 months training at this point and the sun will soon set. We're down to the last few meets of the season, and it's time to cash in on all of the work I've committed to enhancing my performance. This is it. I'm running for myself today, not anyone else.

Whether stemmed from jealousy or ignorance, my boyfriend Kalen has D1 offers from the midwest to the east coast for pole vault—and I hate it. Kalen is humble almost to a fault. He never gives himself recognition, praise, or even slight acknowledgment of his accomplishments. In some aspects, I understand that he's just being respectful; he's a fantastic guy. I also understand that he just doesn't like talking about himself. But, for a moment, I just

want him to own it. Not only for himself but for the people he competes against, his present and future coaches, and for the sake of my sanity.

Last year I qualified for the state championship meet in both my 4x100 and 4x400 relays. My 4x100m relay was projected to place 5th at that meet, but one bad handoff knocked us out of the rankings. I was so upset - that was the one chance I would ever have at placing at a state meet and I lost it by a second. The other girls on the team had qualified in an individual event as well so they had nothing to get too worked up about.

While my 4x400 team and I were lining up for my final high school competition, Kalen was standing on the podium for the medal ceremony. I was so proud of him. He had an entire section of the bleachers cheering for him - family and friends, coaches and teammates. He is so loved.

We didn't place in that race either, but we all ran personal records which is something to be proud of. With my emotions unraveling, Kalen was there at the end of the field waiting to congratulate me. Except when I looked at him my heart sank. He was standing with a group of friends holding his waded-up medal in his fist. I was furious. For the second year in a row, one of the best pole vaulters in the state is standing in front of me not wanting to wear his medal because he was worried about what everyone else would think of him. I was absolutely outraged. I had just finished my high school career placing last in a relay event and he doesn't want to wear his stupid third-place medal. A medal that I would never receive, let alone have the opportunity to.

“You put that damn medal on Kalen,” I yelled holding back tears.

Kalen is a role model in my life; someone I admire and really strive to be. He is the most selfless, charismatic, and kindest person you will ever meet. I absolutely adore him. That being said, I will not sit here and allow him completely disregard celebrating himself when there are so many other people who would do anything to be in his position, like me. I wasn't being scouted by college coaches for a spot on their team, I asked for a spot thinking I had

somewhat potential of being successful athletically in college. I'm not an extremely talented athlete, but I've worked my ass off to get to where I am and my stubborn-driven work ethic reflects that. As much as Kalen deserves all of the opportunities in front of him, I just despise how humble he is because I can only dream of being half of the person that he is.

A gust of wind hits the trees and I watch as a few more leaves sprinkle onto the cement. The woodland area to my left used to be so thick with life, but now I can see straight through it. I notice a similarity between our journeys, but I'm not sure I'm ready to brave the changing season. I want to keep all of my leaves - I would hate to see them go. It's interesting how we perceive things until we discover the truth. How are the trees so willing to undress before so many strangers—bare, raw, vulnerable? Although, their battered ends and decomposing ruins reflect beauty rather than struggle. The branches intertwine with one another as if they're holding each other up. While the trees' stripped layers rest scattered on the ground, I release my breath in defeat. Time waits for no one, and whether the trees like it or not, winter will still come, and they still have to brave the cold.

Pick, pick, pick—the callous on my thumb breaks open. Tearing away the skin from the sides of my fingers makes me feel safe. A feeling of sanity during a moment of perceived chaos. My destructive twist on thumb-sucking and nail-biting. I take in another breath of cool air and tuck my thumb into a fist. It's an awful habit, I know.

BANG.

The first three seconds of the race are euphoric. A build-up of anticipation and adrenaline that's all released in three quick steps. Everything that I had bottled up prior to this moment is exerted onto the track with each step. The first 100 meters around the curve and the first straightaway are fast and aggressive; big arms and strong, quick feet. I relax my arms to finish the first lap and kick my legs back into gear at the start of the second. My eyes are on the back of my opponent's head and they won't leave until I pass her. The stands erupt in a roar as we fly around the corner to end the

race. With all I have left, I get on my tip toes and sprint with whatever I have left in my tank, and I pass her.

With trembling legs, my eyes bolted to the scoreboard. "Craig 64.9". A wave of emotions crashes over me as I feel the weight of every expectation, doubt, and belittling thought hitting the ground. With tearful eyes, I walk off the track to be met with a huge embrace from my teammates. I've never felt more loved and supported, not by my team or my family, but by myself. That race was dedicated to me, and I gave her my absolute best. She's long overdue for the bare minimum from me.

It's important to surround yourself with people who inspire you to be the best version of yourself, and I think I've found some of the finest to hold that title. Although, I would argue that you're unable to reach such a level of self-achievement if you cannot look yourself in the mirror and genuinely smile at the person staring back at you. Out of all of the validation I could gain from a comment on an Instagram post, a medal from the GPAC Indoor Championship, or a simple affirmation from my partner as he pulls me to his chest at the end of the night, it has no meaning without acceptance. I have to love myself before I can accept the love that so many others generously surround me with. I will clench the torch and perch myself on the podium, at the top this time because for too long I have given it to anyone else and praised them without recognition of all of my accomplishments. For once, I will smile during my medal ceremony and strut off of the field with my head held high. This medal doesn't dangle from my neck with a golden crest, but with an uncertain emptiness, as an emblem of peace.

I'll rest easy tonight knowing that I can tuck myself in, tell her goodnight, and that tomorrow we'll try again, because there's much peace in knowing the sun will again rise, and so will I.

Again the breeze teases my hair as I walk up the stairs. I release a breath of relief and smile. As I open the door, leaves scatter with the rush of air and clear the entrance for me. Cheers to the new day and grace to the changing seasons; tranquility in endurance.

Rowan Jolkowski

Ashes and Stardust

By the stardust we are made of,
back to the stars we must return
It's what happens to everyone
and everything;

Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles
Pets, House Plants, and Former
Elementary Schools;
More Grandparents, Birth
Parents, Friends, and people my
own age;
Pain, Innocence, Love and Hate
etc. etc.

Nothing is left untouched

"Ashes to ashes; dust to dust"
From the fiery soup of the uni-
verse that flared life into being
Folded into the molten core of
the earth's embrace
By the stardust we are made of
back to the stars we must return
Reborn someday, one way or
another.

Don't you know, Did anyone
ever tell you?
You are made of stars.
Someday stars will be made of
you.
You are you right now however,
And you will be you until you're
not
Until you become the starmatter
from which you came
A hauntingly beautiful inevita-
bility once accepted
Acceptance that leads to the
awareness of the here and now
Finite meaningful blip here and
now between the infinite Ash
and Dust

I take comfort in the thought of
my end
being something else's beginning
More comfort than being
dammed to hell
or trapped in heaven
More comfort than being con-
scious and rebirthed to a differ-
ent family or a different species
More comfort than being in a
state of stagnant limbo
until judgment day

When my time comes I'd like to
say I'll be ready,
But that will depend on a mil-
lion different things.
Regardless, I won't have a
choice
And I am as ok with that fact as
I can be
As ok as I've become having lost
many loved ones

I just think to myself,
"How brilliant, beautiful, and
just, it would be to be a part of
something else. Anything else.
Let the cycle continue restarting
with my loss."

As small and insignificant I feel,
though my place in this inde-
scribable universe is akin to the
smallest
fraction of a second
I will always be apart of some-
thing bigger."

And so will everything, and
everyone
By the stardust we are made of
back to the stars we must return

Untitled

Context from the Author: I wrote this piece for my English Composition class originally. The assignment was to find a specific point in time during your school years and relate it somehow to "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" by Muriel Spark. I choose to do that in a couple different ways, one of which is the quote at the beginning of this piece but also in some flow choices and switching from past to present to future in some spots.

"The progressive spin-
sters of Edinburgh did not teach
in schools, especially in schools
of traditional character like
Marcia Blaine's school for girls.
It was in this that Miss Brodie
was, as the rest of the staff spin-
sterhood put it, a trifle out of
place." (Spark, 43) Like
Miss Brodie, I've always felt a
little out of place, especially
during high school. I don't
think I was ever disliked in high
school, at least not to the point
where I felt like an
outcast. However I was just
background noise to everyone.
Everyone knew about me
because I was the child of an
elementary school secretary and
the sibling of the middle
school secretary. They knew my
mom kept close tabs on me. A
fact made evident after
she showed up to the school one
afternoon and accused me of
self-harm because one
of her teacher friends reported
to her that I had a bandage on
my arm.

The friends that I did
have were always cautious
around me in school out of fear
of my mother reporting some-
thing to their parents. Their
fears were validated after my
mom told me she was worried
about one of my friends failing
math, which she found out by

stalking their accademic record with her secretary privlages. I have vivid memories of my mom telling me who I should and shouldn't hang out with based on their Power School information. In my mom's best effort to set me up for success, she doomed me to a life of superficial conversations with my peers. Logically, I know she was just trying to help. I was her youngest child, and being adopted also complicated things. I just wish she had treated me the same as my siblings growing up. But because of her behavior, I felt like everyone except my closest friends were walking on eggshells around me.

Because of her, the nihilistic attitude I had about the world at that time in my life, and my interest in Dungeons and Dragons, horror, and fantasy novels, I definitely felt out of place. My existence was static in everyone else's more interesting lives.

Then the hardest year of my life happened. In a span of 3 months during my sophomore year of high school, my Aunt Betty died, my birth mom, who I had been building a better relationship with, died, and I became aware of my adopted mom's drinking problem. To sophomore Rowan's credit, they persisted in the face of the massive wall of never ceasing noise going on around them. But sophomore Rowan was angry a lot more often. They spent more and more time in the bath, by themselves, and asleep. They only felt safe and able to think in silence. They told their close friends what was going on, but they still hurt. And their Mom never kicked the alcoholism.

My mom's drinking got worse during that time, and I hated being around her because of it. I looked for any excuse to avoid home. I already didn't have a place at school. By this time it was spring semester and I had just gotten out of theater one where the teacher was advertising for the spring play. I had\ crippling stage fright (and still do), so I asked the theater director, Mr. Stoll if I could do something backstage.

"Get Smart" was the first show I ever helped with, and my job was assistant props. Play rehearsal was from the end of the school day to 9 pm. For the 3 weeks I was involved, I stayed away from home until 9:30, sometimes as late as 10:00 p.m. if I could get away with it. I met

new people who didn't really care about my mom at all. I met the love of my life and best friend who I am still with almost 4 years later. More importantly though, I found a place where my uniqueness was celebrated, encouraged, and supported. After "Get Smart" I was assigned to microphone/assistant sound designer for another show, "9 to 5". Mr. Stoll asked me if I was still interested in continuing with sound tech. I was very interested and so I became the theater's sound designer for the rest of my time at Westside.

The first sound design project I was given was for the one-act competition, where we chose the one-act "Front". Stoll's teaching method for sound design was to tell me to read and mark up the script where sound cues were listed, and then he showed me a "YouTube to MP3" converter online and sent me off in the deep end. Other than that small direction, I had no idea what I was doing. After hours of messing around with sound editing software, and days of trial and error I figured it out. I learned that not only was I capable of doing sound design; I was also really good at it. I learned that I have a knack for knowing when parts of the script need some kind of underscoring or if the scene unfolding is more powerful in silence. I know the ins and outs of sound cue websites to find the perfect sound effect that fits the show and makes sense. I'm also fairly good at choosing pre-show music that fits the theme of the show and won't put the audience to sleep.

What I learned from doing sound design was how to listen and react. It's one thing to listen to everything all at once when considering sound design; the underscoring, the actors, individual sound effects, the mic volume, feedback from speakers wired incorrectly, and anything that could go wrong. Trying to take everything in all at once causes one to be overwhelmed and stressed and unable to do anything well. It's another thing to be aware of all the separate sounds happening and focusing on one thing at a time, analyzing everything you can from that one sound byte; how it feels, how it fits into the chaos, responding in a way that complements it and does it and all of the other moving pieces justice.

After the one act competition, I asked Mr. Stoll for notes on my sound design. He told

me that he didn't have any notes, and when I expressed my disappointment he said, "Successful sound design is hardly noticed." In other words, if the sound design doesn't make anyone think consciously about the deliberate effort you put into the sound design, then you did your job right. But the idea of doing a job so well that no one notices your existence is translatable to many other different paths of life.

I think about that a lot and how my existence in other people's lives is so lonely. I good at being aware of everything going on around me at once and I can attribute that to my background in sound design. From my sound booth in the back left-hand corner of the Westside auditorium, I watched and listened to everything. Through all the director's notes, all the blocking, all the line bashes, and interpersonal actor drama, I watched the shows develop. But I was removed from the action. This theme of being passive in an active world has reared its head in my life over and over. I had the amazing experience of watching all the shows from the sound booth, and from start to finish and I got to see the process of everything from a third-person view. I felt omniscient. But I didn't get to be a part of the community that was being built backstage. I knew everything about everyone else. To them, I was a person that was friendly in passing and had a good ear when needed, but so removed from the action it was difficult to build a better relationship. I was a 2-D cardboard cutout. A trifle out of place.

Jordon Bocock

ALMOST

The depth of horror crawling along the walls
Craving the freedom of fresh clean air.

Instead, I am stuck within the grimy steps
The steps creeping like the whispering willows

The loudness straying from the background.
The weak and weary life stuck to the floor of the room
climbing upon the dusty window sill,

*struggling,
weeping,
all in misery*

The glass of the window,
urging to open
With one slight steady breath
gaining the bravery,
To open the window

NO
but to break the window
The clash of the shattered glass
recoiling
throughout the hallways
throughout the house

I was almost there
I almost made it
I almost had my chance

but the dainty glass was a protection that sucked me into the cruel inside world that was pulling me away from Reality.

Here I am again,
Sitting in the dusty window sill
Seeping into my imagination
Trying to understand
Trying to figure out
How I was almost there

Samuel Province

Pushing

Our knees are nearly perfect mechanically even if most of us experience some existentially terrifying knee hiccup at some point in our lifetimes. We're told our knees aren't wonderful, strong, lubed up knobs by our overworked and underpaid parents and grandparents and learn to resent them before they even start to fail. The knee cap (patella) turns the leg into a second class lever, allowing the beefy muscles of the upper leg to move the lower more easily. Our arms are designed similarly with the omission of a patella-equivalent on our elbows. They're not doing as much lifting day to day and gravity reduces a lot of the mechanical load. I didn't feel perfect, strong, or mechanically advantaged when I was handed a brain lifted from a plastic bucked of embalming fluid.

Concrete battering the bottom of my feet didn't wear out my callouses as quickly as I expected, though running four times a week did. My eyes darted between my surroundings and the ground, the sidewalk is cracked, deformed, and moun-tenous. I place the ball of my

foot quickly and precisely on the face of many cracks, being intentional to place the majority of my foot over the edge to facilitate my next push. “You have to push through exhaustion to run marathons,” repeats itself and I run through a series of other mantras; “Relentless forward progress,” “You can handle this,” and “It can be done,” dominate the monologue. Sunlight is my enemy today. I have to re-adjust my specialty-running-cap more often than I’d like and eventually gave up the thing on the latter half of the run.

Hundreds of runs, miles, and thousands of strides: zero injuries. The ACL is a tendon on the inside of the knee, it helps stabilize the knee and keeps my strides picturesque. The durability and fallibility of it, along with the achilles tendon in the calf encourages rest days when the motivation and endorphins kick in to run a few extra times per week; throwing up, passing out, and limping with drained calves is the closest I’ve been to complete debilitation and afunctionality. Losing control. Some runners defecate or urinate during marathons to avoid losing time or breaking their stride. It will run down their running shorts as they stride confidently, arms wide and shorts flapping in the wind through the finish line. I’ve been lucky enough only to urinate on myself once during a speech in high school. I run as often as I can, only until I become aware that my achilles or feet are straining do I take rest days. My ACL has proven it can take it.

Serated below the patella through the tendon, they lift the tendon and cap from the cadaver’s knee. It’s been stripped of enough essential stuff to allow for a detailed examination of the joint – it can bend – the gap between the femur and tibia thrust itself upon me. Our host bent the knee, exposing the ACL, a wire the diameter of a dime, a fleshy moldy twizzler, like a red bungee cord pulled taught. Like bungee jumping and taking a knife and cutting myself free, plummeting into the water. This fallible ribbon cannot be everything everyone says it is. But if bodies didn’t have a limit and ACLs couldn’t randomly give out and I could run forever, we would be bored out of our minds.

Through nitrile gloves, the cold weight, and formaldehyde burned me. The brain

is obscured by a sheet over its folds, a veiny bald cap. Weighing it in both hands I tried to find some understanding based the once-in-a-lifetime intimate contact; the heft and density of the brain gave me no insight. I turned it over. Tentacles squirmed from a wound and adhered to the wet surface of the brain. We were now obligated to become intimate with death with our gloves, the keen professionalism and expertise of our professor, and something more interesting than average to pass around but if I held onto the brain for too long my peers would assume me a psychopath or a pervert. I pass it on to the next person in the circle surrounding the cadaver like passing on a piece of quartz in high school Geology or a family memento at a long awaited reunion.

My styrofoam cup of coffee was sitting on one of the black science tables (gas valves for busen burners, sinks, and low chairs for calculations abound), I couldn’t shake the feeling that some prankster took a piece of muscle or tendon and dropped it in. I drank it anyway.

Human bodies become less human when you cover the sex and face bits. It’s a lot easier than you’d think to poke and prod at the tendons, muscles, and organs of a year deceased geriatric (who apparently suffered from hyperthyroidism and a long life) when a microfiber cloth obscures the parts full of life and personality. We’ve never seen inside ourselves as intimately. It was dried out, removing any gorey implications of violence or distress leaving only scientific examination, questioning, and dissection. We went as far as fat shaming a cadaver who, prior to fileting, had about six inches of fat tissue on all sides. Fatty tissue (or adipose) absorbs an extraordinary amount of embalming fluid, submerging the body in brothy, cold, and ominous fluid. Knowing how much work had to be done to strip his living habits from his body for his study and the miniscule musculature of old age sunk my chest; suddenly I am meat and matter.

Bodies and death quickly lost their appeal. Questions dried out, backpacks were lifted from the floor, it was over. I became a student again.

“I got to hold a brain today,” maybe someone would think this was interesting. I was

usually met with shock instead of curiosity, I interpreted this shock as horror and suddenly I’m a mass murderer who dissects bodies for sport, mashing brains with a cake mixer, ejecting gray matter around the room. This anecdote faded as quickly as the others. The idea of holding a human brain captured disgust instead of intrigue, “I don’t think I could do that...” instead of “What did it feel like?” I decided to shut up. Maybe tomorrow I’ll get hit by a bus or overhear some personal gossip, that should do it.

“...this is my last resort, SUFFOCATION, NO BREATHING” Last Resort is the first thing I hear after wandering in a desert.

My grip is sure. If I had a millimeter less my fingertips would give way but I pull myself over the lip of the cliff and I’m here. Somehow the shoes on my feet hold up under the stress of distance running. I’m carried off by compulsion and insanity towards a dot. The grass is fragile and the air is rich (cloying), the sun is lying to me. A stench of sucrose makes the hairs in my nose jeer, begging to sink back into the snotty pores from whence they came. The unfortunate consequence is nausea that sucks my focus and fills my mouth with saliva. I feel like a tuning fork.

Yet I persist and my sneakers degrade. The seams scatter, splaying the shoes like a banana peels, only held together by my shoe laces and necessity. I was pushing my hands through the grass, keeping arms high and ready to keep danger and quickly my soles turned to sand. The brush cushioned my bare feet. I couldn’t stop running if I wanted to, the only way out was through. My feet began to bleed, I was now leaving footprints. I focused on the dot in the distance and regulated my breath, in in out out in the rhythm of my footfalls. There was no pain on the soles of my feet, only pressure. Running well requires attention and standardization. My left knee reaches its apex, my right

arm pumps forward simultaneously. My hips help this process with a slight rotation as my legs jut forward. I must move forward because there isn’t anywhere else to go and the dot becomes cubic after a time. My footprints become darker and stamp the ground, I’m losing control of my toes. My tendons are being sanded and my bones are losing their strength.

Grasses like this populated the Great Plains of America before the mediocrity of the Midwest moved in. It splayed suburbs and shopping malls on top of the beetles and buffalo-grass but here it was and here I am. I’m losing my eyes. They refuse to focus even after some facial muscular cudgeling.

My phone feels cold and I reflexively hit the power button. It’s 7a.m. and I’m ;

Tumbling - a shallow pond. I feel the grain of the water against my eyes. I stand take handfuls of sediment, I see fist fulls of mud instead. I shake my hands clean in the water and lose my footing, the mud shifts under my feet, there is no opportunity to slog out of the mud, resisting suction, only tectonic plates shifting the axis. The pond grows jaws, the beak of a great bird, the formation of the mountains, the ground licks the seal as I’m stored and neatly sets me away. Away is cooler and a breeze pushes me, I don’t know where down is; I’m a leaf without mass, a nearly-invisible grain of dust floating through a laser beam, a fish lazily around its bowl. I remember a documentary where they tell you to spit if you’re caught in a snow drift to know where ‘down’ is so you can dig in the right direction. My spit simply floats in front of me and wanders away.

7:06a.m. I’m swinging my legs over the edge of the bed. I don’t trust the ground as my feet thump to the hardwood but I don’t have any other choice. I can feel my ACL

working, a sharp razor down the center of my brain that I force off the y-axis to the x. Grabbing a towel I jog to the shower, I catch the gaze of a roommate and he quickly averts his eyes to something else, blank faced, distracted, disgruntled. The mist of the shower and the antianxieties push away the conjured-insult of his action.

I pick out my heaviest sweater, the one with the ribbed cuffs and embroidery, my cushiest pair of shoes. Nothing about today will hurt my joints, I will banish discomfort at any cost. The back door is never locked and I glide through, stepping on the concrete stair;

Cracking on the edge of the concrete, his skull splits, no one in his house is awake. No one will find him for three hours. He lives for at least two of those, slowly bleeding out, disoriented, losing and regaining consciousness, flapping arms aimlessly; jumbled groans resembling "What," and miscellaneous gurgled hisses create a puddle of spit adjacent to his blood. He doesn't remember how much he suffered.

Jules Damme

Old Man's Memory

We open in a family restaurant, perhaps something in a small town that has been as much a part of the family as the people itself. Patrons are enjoying their Sunday brunch with the loved ones they gather close, and they revel in the appreciation of memory. They will not remember what they ate, or what they wore. They will not remember the things they said about church that morning or who they are around. But they will remember the peeling paint that yellows around the edge. The faint smell of greasy hash-browns that has soaked into each tablecloth and napkin due to use over time. A friendly smile from a distant stranger. Playing at a dull roar, a worn radio plays a soft melody while dust bunnies waltz along in the grooves of the speaker. They are wistfully moving along onto the mismatched China and silverware. Everything is moving intentionally slow. We are merely observers to the Old Man, but an equal player

in this story.

Young Boy with a chipped gap in his smile skips into the view of the diner's guests. His overalls are messy with farm work and time, with one strap unhooked and slung into the front pocket for safe-keeping. He seems to jingle along with the random baubles and bits he has collected in his 11 years. Young Boy sits at a typewriter placed intentionally atop the bar of the diner and he works. He works a minute for every year he has been wondering about his future. Eventually he musters up courage to ask a hostess for the daily paper. He cannot read, but can admire the Sunday funnies. With a newfound appreciation for his own voice, Young Boy orders a plate of chicken and mashed potatoes. His favorite. Mama's favorite. Eventually, he finds a reason to leave. He swears his Mama was calling for him to come in the house, and he will leave without hesitation. Whether the diner guests think he is just a distracted child or endeared by his Mama is up to them.

Young Boy is replaced by an older, but still lively man who no longer has a chipped smile and holds himself with an air of unfamiliarity. Is it sadness? Lack of pride? Old Boy sits at the typewriter and clacks away for a time before expressing his love for the people around him, greeting them with a fading smile that one could only describe as "grieving". His handshake is dry and cracked. He orders his favorite hot meal from the waitress. She has had his heart since they were in cloth diapers. He savors it. The paper is ordered and he takes a leisurely break from work to catch up on town happenings. When his Mama calls for him, he takes note of the urgency in her voice and leaves. Old Boy doesn't even take the papers with him. He does not return for some time, so the typewriter and the half-filled pages are for the taking of the patrons. Some are too curious and will take them for their own collections. Some will observe and not touch.

A long silence before the Man comes in. He is wearing his best black clothes and his body is worn down. He does not move quickly like when he was Young Boy but still has a flint-stricken curiosity within his core. Before sitting down at his typewriter spot, he looks for an unknown

something on the floor. Whether it is a physical object or something within his own heart, he cannot find it. The typewriter keys now seem too clunky and small underneath his bleeding hands and he is anguished by the inability to do something he once loved. He orders his favorite hot meal from the waitress who has served this meal every Sunday. She loves Man and sees him as more than an old orphan. His newspaper is already waiting for him, finishing a waltz these two have had for some time. It has been a long time since he had Mama to require him home, so Man lingers in his confusion. Something has escaped him since he was last here. He doesn't recognize any of the patrons anymore and doesn't find it in his heart to greet him. He silently leaves this setting without bringing much attention to himself. The food sits untouched.

The Old Man with no apparent sense of direction or belonging finds himself standing in the door of the family restaurant. His overalls are now worn with aged time. One of the straps hangs loose with no button to hold it in its place. He is far too Old to climb his way onto the bar stool, so he will not sit at his typewriter. Can anyone say that it is even his anymore? He pulls a pen out from behind his ear and starts scribbling furiously onto the newspaper that was, for some reason, already opened and waiting. Patrons wander by him and don't notice the tears staining the page, blending the ink of the blue tornado into the blue barn onto the blue grain. He writes notes for his Mama over and over and over again. He occasionally cocks his head towards a nonexistent window and smiles with his gappy and chipped tooth at someone. He orders a hot meal for himself. The waitress looks familiar but his fogged brain will not clear for an answer. A past lover? Family? A stranger with a friendly face? He doesn't pursue this investigation any further when she brings him his chicken and mashed potatoes. He is reminded of home and reminded of the backbreaking work he used to do in order to eat this good. A hunch in his back comes into view, and soon he is laying down onto his papers and his news and his food. The soft radio has become so loud that you cannot hear the sobbing coming from the man. Suddenly, it all stops. Bare, restaurant

chatter. He lays there until the restaurant closes. Then, he is gone.

Now no one remembers Old Man. Of course, there are whispers of town gossip that maybe there was never an old man at all. The waitress insisted on his existence but she became a forgotten memory herself. So, Old Man is not spoken of again. There are no more memories of Man with his pitiful confusion, or Old Boy with his handsome smile. There is no one left to remember the Young Boy who first came in for a fresh, hot meal. There is nothing left but a worn-out spot on a bar stool and a rusty typewriter, in a trash can on the curb.

Jarryd Stone

Life Advice

Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud. Whatever you are, be a good one. Never change who you are or what you believe in because of someone else. *You don't always need a plan, sometimes you just need to breathe, trust, let go and see what happens.* Live life taking nothing for granted and don't major in minor issues. *In business, do what you love, and you will be successful, and success is measured by you not those around you.* Be like a tree, stay grounded, connect with your roots, turn over a new leaf, bend before you break, enjoy your unique natural beauty, and keep growing. *Always keep your eye on the prize, keep smiling and have a lot of fun on the way.* Enjoy your life - always remember those less fortunate than you. *Everything will be okay in the end, if it's not okay then it's not the end.* When you look in the mirror, do your best to see the person you want to be - at the end of the day you will always have to answer to that person. *Stay as respectful and humble as you are, and the world is your oyster.* Respects your efforts, respect yourself, self-respect leads to self-discipline. *Never leave a beer unfinished. Don't burn bridges, always maintain good relationships.* Find a mentor who will help you do what you are passionate about. Set yourself high standards. *Prepare for adversity, life is hard. Never be scared to fail because it's the best way to learn.* If at first you don't succeed, then skydiving definitely isn't for you. If you have integrity in your life then nothing else matters, and if you don't have integrity in life

then nothing else matters. *Eat off your own plate before trying others.* This too shall pass, time is your ally and if nothing else, just wait it out, everything happens for a reason. Whatever people think about you has got nothing to do with you. *You must face the storm to get the rain.* When in doubt, whip it out. SHIT HAPPENS. *Do what makes you happy, be responsible, kind, and a man of your word. Money isn't everything, but it sure helps so save as much as you can. Move life forward.* Remember that you are always loved, especially by Jesus. *Worrying and complaining changes absolutely nothing.* Don't take criticism from people you wouldn't take advice from. Travel the world. Boundaries show maturity and create time for you to show up for the people you love. If it feels wrong, don't do it. People will always remember how they made you feel. *Learning to set your ego aside is uncomfortable but liberating.* Learning to take accountability for your words and actions doesn't mean you can expect the same from others, they might just not have the same capacity to. *If you are embarrassed to buy something, get a birthday card with it.* Always wait for the morning to make big decisions, most decisions made just before or after midnight turn into pumpkins. Don't eat yellow snow. *Work so hard that one day when you walk into a room you don't have to introduce yourself.* Commitment is what gets you started, consistency is what gets you somewhere and persistence is what keeps you going. *There are no secrets to success, it's a result of preparation, hard work and learning from your mistakes and failures.* Believe in yourself and you will be unstoppable. Live everyday as if it will be your last, with no future regrets. *Make sure you live every day to the fullest, being able to look back on your life with no regrets is worth more than any house, car, or bank balance.*

Ivana Lopez

Manifesto

How do you get yourself through your helpless moments? In part, it is a question I receive professionally, academically, and around family. The answer remains along the same lines: I see the brighter side to every situation. My beliefs started when I was around the age of six, something my first grade teacher said

when reading a book out loud: "The grass is always greener on the other side." It is a quote that resonated with me as a six-year old and continues at the age of twenty. As I continued to grow up, this saying became more prominent in everyday experiences; from feeling lost in my algebra homework, to being interviewed for employment.

What steps do you take to proceed in a problem? Many interviews that I have experienced follow the same procedure. I am allowed to express my views on problem-solving scenarios in which I may partake upon receiving the employment position. The same environmental saying about grass nags the back of my head. Idealistically, nobody wishes to encounter a situation in their employment that may escalate quickly if action is not taken. It can scare people to the point where nothing is done to advance at all, instead striking fear of failure. Humankind tends to be pessimistic, and can create mental barriers that cause us to lose sight of our goals.

If world leaders would see world gains through a looking glass infused with positivity, officials could create ties with nations based on positivity, not with blackmailing. The potential to create a united human race as a whole lies with a feeling that everyone carries within but fails to embrace. Positivity, something that politics don't take into consideration or try to disband. The answer is lying right under our noses. It all starts with one person, one who can start the movement and the rest can follow. I believe that seeing the white along with the black is the key to the future of mankind.

Black, white, gray, various shades of colors that associate the good, bad and the in between. I believe a lot of people fail to see the white of their problems. Instead they indulge in the black, then trouble themselves by overwhelming their thoughts with helplessness. A few, though, are in the phase I'd like to call "graying out" which by dictionary term means: a transient dimming or haziness of vision resulting from temporary impairment of cerebral circulation. To me, it means people are in the process of believing that there is good to every situation but don't fully embrace the idea, hence being mostly "gray". Not only do three colors represent the good and bad, but also

the entirety of the rainbow. All the colors are feelings of their own kind and can be interpreted with their own associations of good or bad.

A quote from the film *Ice Age, Continental Drift*, "Even though things look bad, there's a rainbow around every corner," from my all-time favorite character, Sid the Sloth, has resonated with me by symbolizing a rainbow. The scene includes Sid, Manny and Diego stuck on an iceberg as they approach a storm over water. After a rough toss around the ocean, they are thrown into the air, above the dark clouds and see a rainbow before plummeting back down to the iceberg. The scene ends with them floating in clear skies, alive and with each other. I believe the idea of seeing a rainbow raises the spirits of anyone who gets to experience the sight. Although a rainbow is only able to be seen after a storm, it signals the end of the rough weather.

Symbolism has been one of the greatest ways to spread positivity smoothly, for example a four leaf clover, symbolizing luck or wealth. This also can be seen in Irish mythology with the rainbow symbolism of finding a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. Positivity has many faces that are overlooked constantly in our everyday lives; living in many quotes passed down for generations, quotes in which we don't generally understand until we are older. A quote from my father, that resonated with me at a later time than when it was told to me, was, "In order to love the roses, you must learn to love the thorns." I believe this quote embraces the meaning of accepting the bad in order to see the good. In many cases, and I am guilty of it, we choose to take the bad news and simply deal with it. We don't think about ways in which that news can be useful or better yet, bring us hope. I believe laziness also forces us to deal with what's given to us instead of being positive and finding a loophole.

My belief is that the bridge between optimism and pessimism lies within our habits and how "lazy" we allow ourselves to be. In my early adulthood, I find that my mental and emotional state has been in a better place since I began to take most of these quotes to heart. Since I started embracing the greener side of situations, I trust that it signified a self

growth in which I have seen myself develop. I was able to grow as an individual and continue to grow wiser for others with every day that passes. Although I can say some days it gets tiring to be the balance between seeing good and bad for many people, it has allowed me to develop character. I think that developing this trait of being positive has allowed others to view me as a positive individual as well. I am seen as the person who determines whether news is good or bad, somewhat like an interpreter.

In lieu of interpretation, another quote that resonated with me from *Ice Age, Continental Drift*, "Bad news is just good news in disguise," as stated by the infamous Sid the Sloth. The quote was one that did not impact me at first, but rather was a progressive one in which I understood the second time I watched the film. News can never be defined as good or bad, it is just news in my opinion. It takes one's interpretation to make it good or bad and end up choosing the latter. I believe that interpreting the situation at hand incorrectly can lead someone to lose hope in accomplishing the task. Humans need a mood booster, or a sort of reward to raise their desires and aspirations. If keeping a positive attitude brings about that booster to continue forth, it can change perspectives in a larger audience.

I believe that everything happens for a purpose. Somehow and in some way the universe or whatever it is we believe in, made and wrote the book of our life. The things we do, how we react and listen are all written in stone from the start. Although I think there is a small loophole to it all: we can change our emotions to satisfy our surroundings. The way we react can go one of two ways, positively or negatively. The result of that reaction can go both ways as well but our emotions can remain the same, or change. For example, a homework assignment looks extremely long and at first glance it seems we don't remember anything. The end result will be that we finish the homework, but our emotions can remain the same as at the start or change into a positive one in the end. As we finish we could view the assignment as something time consuming and negative, or we can be relieved we finished and found out it wasn't as bad as we made it

seem at first. It takes us to make the first move towards change.

Finally, the last quote that resonated with me since the first time I read it in the eighth grade, “To the stars who listen, and the dreams that are answered,” by Sarah J. Maas in the book *A Court of Mist and Fury*. A shooting star has been a symbol of hope, or of a dream that we carry within and want to wish into existence. It takes one step, that we alone must take to view things positively, and we alone can make that choice. We are human, we make mistakes, but we learn. We can learn to dissect the good from the bad.

Jonathan Doll

Dig Deep

Six months after being given added job duties as a district administrator because of the pandemic, I struggled to stay caught up. Our school district had moved a fellow district leader to be a principal and gave me their duties on top of my other work. I was doing okay till the fifth month when I tried to take a vacation and ended up working on four of the five days over Zoom. Returning to work the next week, I felt less rested than before I left.

My fatigue gave way when I sent a district feedback survey reminder to a group of parents but unintentionally included thousands of parents whose children had already graduated. By seeing me venting frustrations one day, my boss knew I was not seeing the brighter side of things.

When I was at a conference one week later in Atlanta, our district’s compassionate leadership took the reins to help me. My superintendent and the interim HR director met with me by Zoom and put their concerns on the table. Because of my errant behavior, I felt deeply distraught and knew I was letting everyone down.

After that meeting, I asked for large groups of friends to pray for me. Even family and friends who had known me for decades. And they prayed.

That night’s sleep was fitful and the dreams were filled with sorrow and struggle. Surprisingly the next morning, I woke up refreshed and knew that people had been praying for

me.

It was still early and I thought a walk would help, so I ventured out onto the streets of downtown Atlanta in the Peach Tree state. Seeing all the street signs and shops that had peach or peach tree on them made me smile.

As I walked, only one thing was on my mind, heart, and lips. I had temporarily lost my center, but I knew that God would always take care of me. Again and again, He made good things out of bad ones, and there was never an exception. So I made prayers of gratitude that morning for the situation I created and those involved. Most of all, I said hearty thank you to God in advance for what He would do!

As I walked, my head was up higher and my shoulders more relaxed. I knew that God would do something miraculous because He always does. So I smiled and reflected on the goodness of God.

When I was on the last few steps of my walk, a sense of gratitude was center-stage in my heart. I knew I would do whatever I could to rectify things either by making changes or having the change come and find me.

Before finishing, my eyes connected with another person out walking who was in need. I made quick conversation with him and he said his name was Jimmy. Feeling a tug on my heart I asked if I could take him to breakfast, and he said yes.

As we walked toward a place to get fresh, hot coffee, I could tell that Jimmy was downcast. He said he was originally from Chicago and that his grandmother had a significant impact on his life early on. Somehow he had lost his way.

He seemed more hopeful as he talked of the earlier times in life, so I continued to reflect with him on these better times. It was striking as I watched him bounce back to being hopeful.

As he munched on a breakfast sandwich, we talked about his family and his grandma’s impact on him. Then our conversation took an interesting turn.

It made me remember that in Isaiah 40:31, there is a verse about waiting on faith in God in order to gain new strength.

As we talked, I asked Jimmy what he thought about the new strength that his higher

power promised him, and his response caught my attention. He looked right at me and said that to follow God in the right way, I needed to dig deep. His eyes lit up as he shared it.

Jimmy said this idea of digging deep was in the Bible, and I thought of where Jesus taught about a wise man building a house on the rock and that the house was able to withstand when wind and storms came. But digging deep? I reminded Jimmy that the Bible did not actually say that.

“It does say to dig deep!” he reminded me firmly.

I looked up the parable from Jesus’ most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 7, and showed my phone to him. Digging deep was not a part of the story. But Jimmy insisted.

To give him another chance, I checked my phone again and saw the passage where it said Jesus’ tomb was made of rock, but again nothing was about digging deep.

Right then, Jimmy surprisingly pulled his own phone out of his pocket and spoke into it, ‘Google story Bible saying dig deep.’ He turned and listened to the search results and then told me to look in Luke chapter 6.

I was then shocked as I read the passage. In Luke 6:48, Jesus says that a wise person building a house needs to dig deep so that the foundation will be anchored into the solid rock beneath it.

Jimmy proudly looked at me and reminded me that God wanted me to dig deep so I could have a strong foundation. He was right, it was as certain of a truth as the rest of the promises in the Bible.

The tables turned and I was his student. He again reminded me to “Dig deep!”

As we walked down the sidewalk after breakfast, our conversation continued about his life and how he needed to get back on track too. We talked about available jobs and the conversation aimed toward possibilities. Jimmy said that the world needs people in trash removal because people always will have junk to get rid of. I said I’d pray for him to find a good job, and asked him to contact me in a year to share what happened in his life as he looked for gainful employment.

As we parted ways that morning, Jimmy’s words were not lost on me. I thought of the

junky thoughts I had been carrying for the past few days about how miserably I had acted on the job and how much I’d upset my boss. I also thought of the cost of not dealing with excessive tiredness and decided to dig deep by scheduling some more time for rest and refreshment. That way, I knew I would be better at staying on top of things going forward. “Dig deep,” I agreed in my heart!

We had both learned some important lessons that day. The new steps to be taken were simple and straightforward. They involved us digging deeper into the foundation of our faith in God and in His goodness.

Anna Prauner

Mind Over Batter

I step into the batter’s box. Front foot first always. One would be hard pressed to find a hitter without a routine. My left hand extends to the umpire. I reach my bat across home plate just to the point where the end would be considered painting the black on the right hand side. My ritual remains unchanged. Yet, this time my knees betray me. They shake uncontrollably.

The air is warm enough. It’s an early September day, and daily temperatures have not yet succumbed to the change of fall. I can feel a bead of sweat escape the pad of my helmet and drip down my face. The heat makes me believe I am still in the middle of club softball season.

Club ball tournaments no longer fill my calendar. They have been exchanged for my freshman year at college full of new faces and physical distance from my family. Those tournaments are now a thing of the past. After this past summer, I am not entirely devastated to leave that behind. My performance was anything but glorious, or at least that is what I had convinced myself. I never did poorly enough to get taken out of the lineup and could still consistently put the ball in play. Still, it was hardly how I wanted to go into my first season as a college softball player.

Now, the senior starting pitcher stands 43 feet away from me and begins her windup. *Strike one.*

Damn it, swing the bat you know you cannot start down

in the count. I try to reset. My attempts to change my train of thought fail. During car rides back from long July tournaments, my thoughts would twist and turn like the many miles of the roads we traveled. Always returning to the unavoidable-my game performance. Two for twelve hits on the day that is significantly worse than last weekend.

“What’s on your mind, Bean?” my dad asked, attempting to alleviate my disappointment that hung in the air with the nickname he has had for me since birth.

“Nothing,” I mumbled.

It wasn’t the truth, of course. In my mind, I knew that my thoughts were fighting against themselves. At first, I tried to be positive. You have more opportunities left; you can go hit tomorrow. But, eventually I would succumb to the cycle of negative thoughts. My swing is regressing. My batting average needs to be better. I will not be good enough to play in college. I tried to fight my mindset, but negative thought still led on to negative thought. This pattern eventually led me to seek professional help in therapy where what I was going through was given the title performance anxiety. Those words seem too simple of a phrase to define what was raging in my mind.

I scanned the miles of corn fields stretching across the passing landscape that I had seen many times before. The setting sun shone through the stalks. I replayed at bat after at bat from the tournament like a film recorder rewinding the tape.

My mind fixated on every detail. What was wrong with my swing? The pop up in game one. Strike out in the fourth inning. I would tell myself that this week I needed to take twice as many swings in the batting cage than I did before. My barrel whips through the zone. *Strike two.*

Win it, win the count. You can not strike out. This summer I told myself the same thing even though my strategy probably never worked even 25 percent of the time. Now, I internally repeat this mantra in college ball. My travel ball coach this summer had told me on a humid Oklahoma morning to picture myself doing something that I enjoyed besides softball before stepping into the box. After looking at her stupefied, I replied traveling.

Florida, I tried to tell myself, think of Florida. This worked for a while until I convinced myself that my swings were actually getting much worse. Eventually, old habits emerged like a friend you had previously outgrown.

You can not strike out, I tell myself again. The pitcher takes the mound. Cleats dig into the packed dirt, and my body coils readying for the yellow ball. *Strike three.*

Softball, like baseball, challenges your sense of excellence. Statistically speaking, a batting average of around .300 means you are a good hitter. Hitting .400 and above makes you one of the greatest of all time. Yet, the hitter is still failing six times out of ten. Meaning that by failing over half the time, you are still one of the best to ever step in that box. How do you let go of perfection in a game of failure?

When the warmer Nebraska months give way to the chill of a Midwest winter, practices move indoors. Shoes kick up turf instead of dirt. The thin walls of the facility do nothing to keep out the freezing January wind. Indoor practice means hitting. I appreciate defense. Catching a fly ball and running the runner down at home plate to keep her from scoring is better than any drug. Even better when it is a diving play to end the game. But, hitting for me has always been the best part of the game.

Nothing else compares to the intricate dance of timing your swing to the pitcher’s windup so that the barrel of the bat enters the zone to meet the ball at the right moment to send it soaring into the outfield. A sixth sense occurs that all hitters know where you feel the barrel meet the ball in the sweet spot; a connection that will undoubtedly result in a hit.

The feeling is perfect. I would argue that this feeling for most hitters can become an obsession. The more I reached that perfect feeling, the more I wanted to stay there and would do anything to achieve that.

I hunch underneath the net and into the makeshift batter box in the cage. The pitcher stands at the opposite end. Hitting off a live pitcher indoors gives me a sense of foreboding. The black nets cage us in to-

gether. The ball, confined in this box, means someone might get hit. My helmet feels noticeably looser atop my head; my batting gloves, drenched in sweat, hang slightly off of my hands. I go to fix both before the pitcher gets annoyed with how long I am taking to settle into the box. I believe I am ready now. *Pop up.*

Flush it; next at bat. Just focus on hitting the ball. Sentiments all heard by hitters at some time or another. If only it were that simple, but my thoughts replay that hit over again like a broken record. I want to hit off the tee. The urge to fix what must be wrong with my swing was overpowering. Coach had other plans, and I found myself back in line to hit again. Sending a prayer that Coach could not read how frustrated I was, I made desperate attempts to collect myself. You have to hit the ball. This time you have to get a hit.

My mom could always tell I was frustrated just by the purse of my lips or hunch of a shoulder. She confronted me on this after a tournament by standing outside my bedroom door so that I had nowhere to run. Arms crossed and eyebrows furrowed, she undoubtedly noticed every inflection of my face where I tried to hide the doubts running rampant in my mind.

“What can we do to help,” my mom pleaded.

“I don’t know,” I automatically reply.

Not a total lie. My mom’s voice continued like a rolling wave, easily tuned out. She droned on about how worried she was because she could tell I was no longer having fun. My head swam with the positive self talk from her and myself. I was drowning.

“If you won’t talk to us, we can find someone like a sports psychologist for you to talk to,” my mom offered.

Head shaking instinctually, I took a gulping breath. As she continued to ramble on, my stomach ached. The feeling of failure sat in my stomach like a rock. Even the good hits I had were sucked into this feeling that threatened to grow and overtake me. I wrap my arms around my waist tighter, as though the pressure will compress the rock into nothing but tiny bits of dust.

At some point my dad had joined this conversation. I quickly wiped away the tears that, unbeknownst to me, had

covered my entire face.

“At some point, this is all going to be over but you will continue to do this to yourself. Whether it is at law school or in the courtroom, this pattern will just transition into another aspect of your life. You will be miserable,” my dad said.

I squirmed under his words but could not invent some quick retort. He was right. Just wait until you get to college softball, I told myself. Everything will change then. *Ground Out.*

How do you know when to ask for help? Maybe it is when you feel the tears fighting to be released in the middle of a practice, or when you have the urge to throw your bat like a javelin into the outfield. I might argue that it shows how much you care. But, maybe the problem is caring too much.

After practice, I type furiously to my mom while driving. I mindlessly cut through the roundabout on the way back to my dorm. This feels urgent. If I do not do this now, I may never muster the courage to do so again.

The finished paragraph fills up the entirety of my massive, overpriced smartphone; my innermost thoughts are completely exploded into the message. All that to basically tell her, fine, I will talk to someone. A sports psychologist or regular run of the mill shrink, I really do not care.

My index finger forcibly presses send text messages; my last ditch effort projected out into space. If no amount of time spent tirelessly in the batting cage or sweating until my shirt hangs off on me on the field, maybe this would work.

I pride myself on always having the right answer. Probably a combination of my affinity for books and the road trips where I had ample time to read, knowledge and solutions come easier for me.

Now, sitting dumbfounded in my car, I feel like this might be what rock bottom feels like. How silly, an indoor softball practice can do that to you.

My mom responds to my message quickly. Yes, we can definitely do that for you, she writes back. I will make some calls tomorrow; I think that is a great idea.

In the steps to building self confidence, I heard from

my parents and many self help books that you should always put in the work to improve the skill you want to be good at. Then when you are in an actual game, you will instinctively know what to do.

This became my personal mission. I returned habitually to the batting cage, field, or a simple tee in my front yard. I wanted to perfect every detail of my swing, thinking that would give me the confidence I desperately needed.

If I did not go to the cage that day, I would internally kick myself for the rest of the day. It is not that I had to force myself to go, I genuinely want to hit all the time. I want to be the best in the time I have left to play softball. What are you willing to do to achieve the results you want?

Staring at my bright computer screen, I sit anxiously waiting in my dorm to be let into the meeting. A video chat therapy session differs a lot from the idea I had of laying on a couch telling my innermost thoughts to a complete stranger.

I see her face on the screen before I hear her. She asks me about myself, all of the standard get to know you questions that usually I find tedious. Now, I am grateful for the conversation that temporarily keeps the ball from dropping.

Finally, she asks the golden question: What has been going on; Why are you here? I consider holding back and just telling her enough to make me still seem normal. As I begin to form the words, everything that has happened since this summer spills forth. I tell her every thought I have had about my swing; how I feel like everyday I am failing more and more, and that with every minute spent in the cage I feel less confident in myself. All of which leave me feeling utterly exposed.

“Here’s what I want you to do for me to start: go through your swing step-by-step,” she says, not batting an eye at my confession.

One of the first things my dad taught me when I was first learning how to swing the bat was to squish the bug. This was another one of those phrases they use to teach young athletes proper form like put your hand in the cookie jar when shooting a basketball. He meant that I should rotate my back leg to rotate my hips and transfer my

weight through the swing. To teach me, he mirrored his movements to mine since I had been a left handed batter from the time I first picked up a bat. He would often move my own back leg to show me how I was supposed to squish the bug. Then he let me do it myself.

I swung my obnoxiously pink bat again and again. Sometimes he would pitch to me in our front yard. This was before I actually started playing travel club ball and had grown into my body so that the ball went past the infield. When that happened, my mom ruled no more front toss in the yard.

Before this happened, my dad pitched to me over and over again in the yard. Not that I was great by any means. Granted, I was around five years old at the time and could not really be great at anything yet. My dad would still coach and throw to me until I put the bat down.

“Squish the bug, Bean,” he reminded me.

They no longer teach squish the bug to young players. Most coaches believe this actually teaches more problems and results in players repeating the same pattern of rotating their back leg with no leg power. Still, nearly fifteen years later I remember those mantras clear as day.

I begin to guide her through my swing. Honestly, I would rather show her instead of tell. The movements that have been muscle memory for over a decade do not flow off the tongue quite like a bat in my hand.

My voice comes out shakier than I wanted. I start with my load then go into the front step and weight transfer. Wait, I forgot to add the part about keeping your hands back, knob of the bat toward the catcher.

Step-by-step, I narrate the movements I make on a regular basis. Catching myself second guessing myself, my breathing begins to come out faster than before. Tears have welled up in my eyes to the point where I can no longer keep them in place. I feel them stream down my face, as I narrate the point of contact and extension in my swing. By the time I am done, I feel myself overthinking more in this one session than I had this past year.

I hurry into the shed that will be our practice facility to get

out of the chilly afternoon. At this point, I regularly practice with the varsity team. Being on the varsity team roster was my main goal since I stepped onto campus way back at the beginning of the school year.

Still, I do not stop to celebrate that accomplishment. My new therapist says that is one of the things I need to work on: celebrating the goals I achieve. But, I was never wired to make a big scene when something went right for me. Maybe it was because of my Christian faith upbringing that that preached humility, or my hardworking parents who taught me that you always have to continue to work at the goals you want to achieve. My focus had to be on batting practice now anyways.

The facility we were in clearly looked like a homemade batting cage. Not that I minded; I tried fruitlessly for years to get my mom to agree to install something similar in our basement. A tarp hung on the far wall separating us from the owner’s massive collections of vintage cars. We begin the usual routine: Tee progressions, other miscellaneous tee drills, and usually front toss. This time my Coach had me pause after warmups.

“I want you to wait for someone to get here,” Coach explained. “I think he may be able to help you with your swing.”

Continuing to finish my tee progression, I tell myself that I am not going to do nothing while I wait. From behind where I stand at the plate, the door creaks as it fights against the wind to open. A man enters, presumably the owner of the shed. Silently, he stands towards the back. I feel his eyes following my swing.

“Try sharpening your front elbow. Right now you are straightening that arm resulting in an arm bar,” he suggests, breaking me from the silence.

His simple explanation reminds me of my dad. I soak in every word, returning back to the cage with a new perspective.

I begin to swing again. Sharp front elbow, I tell myself. Just when frustration starts to seep in, the ball starts to fly off the bat harder. I am enthralled by the increase in my exit speed. Rep after rep I take until I am covered in sweat. I can not set the bat down now, not when I start to feel like this is finally my swing again. Eventually, my Coach cuts me off. The feeling

of urgency to continue hitting does not overtake me. Instead I feel satisfied with the work I did today.

“When you step into the batter’s box tomorrow, do not focus on making this adjustment,” he tells me, as I exit the cage. “Just hit the ball.”

Through therapy, I continue to understand that as a human there is no way to prevent all negative thoughts from coming in. The thoughts will enter like a wave rolling onto a beach. If I change my focus to a positive, simple thought, I find that this makes all the difference.

Mental toughness takes as much time and dedication to develop as the physical aspect of softball. Talking to myself like an observer instead of a judge. Process over outcome. Progress over perfection. Shifting to this focus is an art form.

Some days I find myself able to do this as easy as the muscle memory of a swing. More frequently, this takes more conscious effort and energy than I like to admit. There are still times where I stand defeated in the batter’s box, thinking that I am regressing.

In these moments, I try to remember to breathe. With each exhale, I can see through the fog of frustration and negativity. This way of reframing the brain will last longer than the years I have left to play softball.

It is one of those spring days where the dew still coats the grass into the early afternoon. The air feels cold enough that I need the thermal long sleeve underneath my jersey. I know by the end of the doubleheader, the sun will warm up to the point where I will be peeling the thermal off. The mid-April breeze brushes the ponytail sticking out of my helmet. Still, the chill is not enough to cause my body to shake.

My cleats dig into the on-deck circle. I take a practice swing, timing up the windup of the pitcher. Dirt sticks to my shoes, already wet from the damp grass of the outfield. Cheers for my teammate getting on base echoes from our dugout. The sound signals that it is my turn. Batter up.

The clumps of dirt hanging to my cleats fall off with each foot I put in front of the other. I cross home plate to the left handers’ side. Instinctually, I look to my Coach. She does not

call out any numbers for a sign.
With a nod of her head, I know
she means to tell me to hit the
ball.

Breathe in: 1, 2, 3, 4.
Breathe out: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Rac-
ing thoughts start to slow down.
My heartbeat stays contained
within my chest. Hit the ball
hard. I step into the batter's box.

Macie Sefrit

my childhood room

What do I say
To these four stone walls
That rise like guardians
Holding me under thralls

How do I bid
These walls goodbye
I can't get it right
No matter how hard I try

How do I tell
This part of me
That I no longer need it
How can it be?

That it's time to move on
To admit that I've grown
Out of the sunflowers
Out of my own

Life, it seems
Has its way of persistence
To make us move on
To expect no resistance

I would say all of the time
"I want to leave this town"
But I had no idea
As I look around

How hard would it be
To abandon it all
To turn my back
And not cave under the wall

As I cry in my bed
Like I have times before
The same walls meet my gaze
Those sunflowers I adore

I cannot imagine
Leaving my books all behind
The pieces of my soul
Carved into their spines

No one knows me as well
As my mattress and sheets
The mountain of blankets
That warmed my cold feet

No one has seen me at my worst
Quite like the canvases here
Always watching and guarding
Year after year

No one has supported me
Quite like the walls that I see

They knew me back then
When I was carefree

None know my mind
Quite like the shelf of stories
That I fill up relentlessly
And help ease my worries

How do I say farewell?
To who I have been
My most loyal companions
It feels like a sin

To let part of me go
To be stuck here in time
Nothing exists
Not even a rhyme

Part of me gone
Never seen again
Who am I now?
Is it all a sham?

It's like a cruel game
Growing up with these things
Expected to move on
To sever all strings

So now I must leave
And carve out part of me
With the cruel knife of life
The blade of reality

And I'll leave it here
To live on for a while
Until it dies
Subject to exile

And when I return
For a short repose
I will cradle it close
And hope that it knows

It was the best part of me
That I had to lose
To move on again
Becoming a muse

It was who I am
In the purest form
A gentle breeze
Instead of the raging storm

I will never again be
Who I leave in this room
Her gentle sweet smile
No sense of doom

But I will return once again
As it so often goes
To find the fractured part
And pull her close

caught in between

I look around
At the empty grey walls
That held my life
Just for a while

I take a breath
Listen to the room
The stories it tells

With a yearning smile

Empty room
Empty drawers
Empty mind

Empty heart
Empty soul
One of a kind

I will never be this person again
Standing here, alone
In my empty room
Thinking I am grown

I will never be this young again
Living the dream
I am no longer the girl I see
It makes me want to scream

I am still defined by my grades
Expected to make my own
friends
But I don't know how to manage
Life's twists and bends

Who am I this summer?
She is completely new.
Will I recognize her when I look
in the mirror
Or is this something she knew?

What am I now,
Full of fear of being judged.
Where do I go
Being banished from the town
that I once loved.

What does it make me?
Full of fear of the future and
regret of the past
Should I have met more people?
With the love for me even last?

What do I do with the knowl-
edge I've gained?
If no one seems to respect it
For I am still a kid,
My opinion cannot be trusted

My mind runs away
The wind blowing it around
Going on adventures
Leaving my body bound

I am caught in between
The world of living and belief
Only a moment worth of clarity
Time is our thief

Who am I now?
After trying to discover
What am I meant to be?
A friend? Enemy? Lover?

Why does it feel like a mara-
thon?
Sprinting as I plea
But I never quite catch
The person I should be.

I don't know who I am
Or who I'm supposed to be

And it's terrifying
It scares the shit out of me

I want to be perfect
For the ones I love
But I'm still learning how
And I'll take off my gloves

And show my skin
For who I truly am
And be the best
And love who I can

Because as I look around at this
empty room
There are things I realize
As I take a deep breath, lock the
door
And hold in my cries

I may never again be the person
I am
But I can visit in my reveries
Because I may grow and change
But I will exist in the memories

I will always be who I am at
nineteen
Scared of the world but set on
changing it
As I grow in life
And push myself, determined
not to quit

So what does that make me
now?
Where do I go from here?
What makes me who I am?
I am done with my first year.

The room remains empty
And outside falls the rain
But I find solace in the thought
The room, mind, soul – will be
filled again

Closed eyes, sad heart, confused
mind
Basking in the afterglow
One final deep breath
Now it's time to go

trying.

My heart bleeds yellow
Stuck in the cage
Of creating smiles
The bookmarked page

How to create smiles
To spread love
Drawing in the self
Can't rise above

Who am I now
After I let everyone down?
Who do I become
After I drown.

I don't cry for a week
Then I break, weak.
I brace the dam in me
My heart begins to leak

What am I made of
If I can't be strong
How awful am I
To bring them along

My anger is red
Fire and Ice
When I break it explodes
And it's shot is precise

To those that I love
Burying in their heart
How can they love me
As I fall apart

We become what we fear
And we fear what we are
And I scratch to dig up
Hoping I scar

Because I need the pain
No matter how severe
Because something in the red
Reminds me I'm still here

Even when I should leave
Take the road that ends
I don't have to hurt
I won't make amends

Because sunsets are stunning
And I think mine would be red
And maybe people would think
After I've bled

But that road wouldn't help
I would be eternally damned
By the ones that I love
So here I stand

Dry for a week
Weak for a month
Wishing I could be okay
Be happy just once

Because I try so hard
To not shoot red
To want to stay
To be gentle instead

But my mind is made of jagged
rocks and cliffs
And my heart leaks itself dry
I try to sand and plug myself
But some things you cannot
deny

Like the force of nature
Anchored within your soul
To exist, just exist.
To fight for control

Over that red icy anger
And the deep blue of your grief
The green of your pain
And the orange of belief

And the pink of love
The yellow of joy
The purple of comfort
That you try not to destroy

I want my colors
to outweigh the pain

And I try, God I try
Over and over again

To resist the sunset
and welcome the day
And maybe life
Will stop looking so grey

death

I am not fond of Death
I don't like the way he calls
I don't like the emptiness
Or the vacant halls

I don't like the stench of Death
Of disappointment and rotting
soul
I don't like the way it feels
The wide, gaping hole

I don't like the stale air
As you struggle to catch your
breath
Or the tears running down your
face
And the eyes you didn't know
were wet

I don't like the thievery
As Death plucks from the living
The people you least expect
Unrelentless, unforgiving

I don't like the vapid silence
That always fills rooms
But I hate the "I'm sorry" more
And the never-ending gloom

I once wished to meet him
To be warmly embraced
To give everything up
My life, a waste

I sought out Death
Angry at him
For leaving me behind
Like a forgotten hymn

I banged on his door
Screaming his name
Only to see me there
Mirrored in shame

I hate the way Death creeps
around
In the shadows, lurking
He is constantly there
Stealing as he's smirking

I hate the way Death is finite
The way it cannot be undone
The way it's a sure ending
But something has just begun

So what does it make me
As I seek out Death?
Am I a hypocrite?
As I wish for my last breath

He still would not take me
Through all of the loathing
He pushed me away
The door always closing

I begged him to take me
Into his warm embrace
But I was met with cold distance
The vacuum of space

If it could have only been me
An eye for an eye
They wouldn't be hurting
No one would cry

Now all I can do
Is hope it is gentle
Like walking a lily field
Soft and inconsequential

I wish the sun shines
And laughter is near
I hope it's a warm hug
I hope there's no fear

I wish it is like
A cold rainy day
Spent inside in a blanket
Not a thing in the way

I wish it is like
Being in the arms of the one
With kisses and smiles
And responsibilities? None

I wish it was me
Who Death had to cheat
So those poor, hurting kids
Didn't have their empty seat

I wish it was me
Who Death took away
So they weren't in pain
Only sad for a day

I don't know what to do
Now I cannot change fate
The stars have been written
And I am too late

I can't help but think
If I had done it back then
Maybe it would've changed
If I had tried it again

Maybe Death would be satisfied
With my tortured mind
He could've opened his door
And left them behind

Majd Kara

My Haunted City

It was at midnight
with a hope shone bright
with a hope that after long years
if I should go back
How should I meet you!
And deeply tell hi
Let my whims dream
And my feeling shall feebly move
In that ambitious dream
Shall I meet you with a smile
and tears!

Come again to my heart, in my
dreams only
Centuries from my life vanished.
From Syria, from the high
mountains
My dry life was...

Walking alone through my
haunted city

To imagine there is peace.. there
is love

My haunted city.. How feeble
you are!

How destroyed you are..

Faces have been changed....

The angel faces seem grey

Hatred language is talking..

I still remember your smile that
will never die as my tears will
never dry.

Tell me why you changed your
map and decided to leave me
simply.

Many years vanished in vain.
And I have nothing,
Only to stay away.

That night was a thousand years
Waiting for the ocean to be a
river..
But in vain . . .

Forgive me. . .For what?!
For I have grown. . .For running
away..

The echo was whispering...Dear
heart I have no other heart.
Nothing will return.

Many years vanished in vain.
And I have nothing,
Only to stay away.

Cristobal Salazar

What role does the bible play in black theology, civil rights, and Black lives mat- ter?

Contemporary theology
is a type of theology that focuses
on manifesting the importance
of the meaning of the gospel
and the meaning of life in peo-
ple (Cone, page 31, 1969). This
essay will raise the challenges
and changes presented by the
gospel in each generation and
focus on some of the issues and
changes, specifically with the
theological perspective of the

Black community, their civil rights, and the origin and impact of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Some contemporary theologians observe that both in the past and the present of the history of the United States the slavery of Black people stands out, which makes evident the little relation that exists between Black slavery and the Christian gospel (Cone, page 31, 1969). Because of this, black theology is presented, seeking to be a partner in dialogue with theological developments around the world to expose the experience of Black people in the first world and achieve contact with the rest of the human community (Deotis, page 8, 1987).

“Unfortunately, black theology found it necessary to apply the liberating power of the gospel to blacks who were under white oppression” (Cone, page 31, 1969), because “Christianity came to the black man through white oppressors who demanded that his concern for this world, as well as his blackness, be rejected so that whiteness could be affirmed” (Cone, page 33, 1969).

On the other hand, black theology is also considered a branch of “liberation theology,” which aims to employ the liberating power of the gospel to Black people who are under white oppression. It also focuses on political and social theologies that seek to modify the impact of God’s word on human history (Deotis, page 104, 1987).

Furthermore, Black liberation theology analyzes the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of oppressed Black people so that they can see the gospel as inseparable from their humiliated condition and empower them to break the chains of slavery and oppression. This means that it is a theology specific to the Black community, which seeks to interpret the religious dimensions of the forces of liberation within this community (Cone, page 5, 2010).

Also, it is of significant importance to emphasize that black theology is synonymous with Christian theology, since “there can be no theology of the gospel that does not emerge from an oppressed community. This is so because God is revealed in Jesus as a God whose justice is inseparable from the weak and defenseless in human society. Also, black theology is

centered on Jesus Christ, for there can be no Christian theology that does not have Jesus Christ as its starting point. Unlike white theology, which tends to make the Jesus event an abstract and disembodied idea, black theology believes that the Black community is precisely where Jesus Christ is at work” (Cone, page 5, 2010).

It is worth noting that the gospel message focuses on social solidarity, action, and equality and is used as the basis for the various activities and rhetoric surrounding the civil rights movement, which is considered by many to be the collective triumph of Black people to organize and force the nation to address racial inequalities. The church, mostly Black community, has received much praise for helping to achieve the goals of the movement, as it was not only a place for physical resources, such as meeting rooms and funding, but also a source of the psychological needs to create, sustain the movement, and emphasize social justice (McDaniel et al., page 14, 2018).

Although the movement in 1960 addressed the political and civil rights that Black people were denied, such as access to and use of public accommodations, guaranteed fair employment, the right to vote, and better housing opportunities, it did not address the racialized degradation that Black people suffered. However, the various demonstrations made by the

Black Lives Matter movement demanded that Americans begin to value Black lives (Harris, web page, 2015). Black Lives Matter is a movement that began almost by accident when in July 2013, when George Zimmerman was found not guilty of the murder of a Black teenager in a gated Florida suburb. This accident was seen by a worker’s rights activist, who posted on a social network “Black people, I love you, I love us, our lives matter” (Altman, web page, 2015).

On the other hand, Black Lives Matter is considered an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black people are indirectly seen as objects of disappearance (Garza, web page, 2014). This movement goes beyond a publication on social networks, as many artists, designers, technicians, and cultural workers support the unique contribution of Black

Lives Matter that goes beyond extrajudicial executions of Black people by vigilantes and police officers (Garza, web page, 2014).

It is important to note that this movement highlights the lives of black trans people since it not only seeks to fight for racial justice but also seeks to end transphobia and get the rights that the LGBTQ community deserves, especially black trans people. Black Lives Matter also highlights Black people without documents, Black people with disability conditions, without any kind of registration, and especially Black women, focusing on those who have been set aside within the Black liberation movements (Garza, web page, 2014).

However, some white Christians try to understand and engage with many Black Christians who see different examples of racial injustice. They also question whether they should accept the existence of Black lives with the words “Black lives matter” manifested by the Black Lives Matter movement and which are the opposite of what is stated in Scripture (Williams, web page, 2020).

Even though the Bible states that “Black lives are created in the likeness of God” (Gen. 1:26-27), in the United States there is little respect for the importance of Black lives due to the dehumanization of Black people. White Christians must begin to support the disagreement against racism with biblical and theological studies of the problem and with a biblical presentation of the solution to the problem since it commonly employs diverse common elements under the authority of the Scriptures to be able to eliminate the evil of racism in the power of the spirit (Williams, web page, 2020).

The issue of racism contradicts the word of the gospel of Jesus Christ and God’s perception to rescue and unify creation through Christ and keep people living in a reconciled way, being able to be a new people. In conclusion, people who believe in the word of God should oppose racism, since God through Christ teaches us to walk according to his word and in a loving way that allows us to love ourselves and the people around us regardless of skin color.

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Jessica Buss

One of Medusa’s

You took something from me
The joy that radiated through
It made me never simply be
How did I not see?

See through your sheep skin
To glance at the wolf beneath
How simple would that have
been

Instead I fell for your grin

Those months I will never get
back
The pain will always be woven
In my chest, encrusted in a hazy
black
Making me feel like a tightrope
walker about to fall through the
crack

But that will not define me
I will not let it
Medusa allows me to see
And be seen, to be free.

Nothing Rhymes with Leukemia

Months and months go by
A phantom pain haunts you
And no matter how hard we try
We can't make you feel new

Visit after visit, you attend
Each doctor shrugs
And fails to amend
Whatever pain bugs

We hold your hair as you cry
Wishing we could help
No matter what we try
You still welp.

Finally, we discover
What you have been fighting
But when we hear we cover-
Our months and scream out
spiteing

My mind imagines you alone
Hooked up to beep, beep, beep-
ing
Machines that make you look
like a clone
Oh, how that makes me want to
weep

Because nothing rhymes with
Leukemia

Home

What is home?
Is is the place you grew up, or
The place you end up?
Because where I grew up
Doesn't quite feel like me
But neither does here.
When can I shed the
Skin of adolescence
To move on-
Or out?

S.A.D

In the wintertime I get older
The gusty winds bring in a air
that is colder
So it seems there is a switch in
my mind
That feels like I need to stop the
grind

It feels like being a numb little

bug
Who is caught snug in a mental
rug
Where time seems to stop-and
My motivation is unable to land
black
Life feels bleak
And I must work hard to not feel
week

But spring will be sprung
And those feelings will be flung

Until next year
I do fear

Shelby Ingerscroll

Untitled #2

It's 7 am, are you waking up?

I'm being rapidly pulled from
the night's latest terror into the
sounds of reality bringing trauma-
tic emotions and uncertainty
into my morning. When they
began years ago, I admitted
guilt to a serious offense against
my marriage and ever since
have been stricken with reliving
my mistakes in the worst ways
imaginable when I try to sleep at
night. At least I don't cry any-
more.

It's 8 am, are you eating break-
fast?

My stomach cramps hard making
me fold up in pain the minute I'm
conscious and brings
with it extreme nausea. I know I
can't eat yet. I get my first Pepsi
of the day to help give me the
energy I won't get by not eating.

Time to dress, are you ready to
go?

If I have too much time in the
morning I can get in a daze staring
at my clothes numb from the
overwhelming amount of things
I own I can't wear without
causing myself pain. "I'm a pro-
fessional now, sweatpants don't
work anymore." Even on my
off days, slipping on sweat pants
brings the intrusive voices of
my past peers not realizing their
damaging words, "I wouldn't
be caught outside my house in
sweat pants or not dressed up".
I grab leggings as the only safe
middle ground that provides
stretch and can be dressed up
since I am held to a dress code
now as a professional. I always
leave sweats or night pants ready
for my return home. The count-
down to pain begins.

It's 10:30 am, can you hear the
birds singing?

The growling begins in my
stomach starting as an ache but
eventually pulling into a deep
relief of a grumble giving me
another few minutes to try to get
through work. Guilt struck as it
gets louder I remind
myself that the pain I would be
in if I did eat has a high chance
of ruining the rest of the day
and hiding behind my smile. I
take another drink of the same
Pepsi hoping to fill my stomach
with fluid enough to hold me
over for a few more hours.

It's 2 pm, are you working?

Wrapping up my work, I feel
the flush of heat as I become
lightheaded and reach for my
Pepsi. If I eat now, I could end
up trying to have a bowel move-
ment and not be able to pick up
my kids from school. I must not
eat yet!

It's 7 pm, are you at home?

My husband is the provider and
the cook. Never learning to cook
made it easy to learn to de-
spise food. But how much pain,
dizziness, and extreme hunger
can I take? Finally able to eat, I
indulge in my main meal of the
day, forgetting every time to not
overindulge. Two servings are all
it typically takes before my gas-
troparesis kicks in and I am in
extreme pain radiating from my
chest into my stomach. Moaning
and swearing never to eat again,
I wait for my irritable bowel to
kick in and see how I will pro-
cess
tonight.

It's 8 pm, are you playing with
your kids?

If I'm lucky, I can have a bow-
el movement by using deep
breathing but even the release
brings on greater pain. As I sit
sweating, still cramping, I try to
straighten up making it feel like
razors tore out my intestines. My
kids are at the door wanting to
play and my husband just wants
some time with me. I lie
about how bad it hurts and give
my kids the attention they need.
It'll be hours before the cramp-
ing finally stops.

It's 10 pm, are you in bed?

Those leggings squeezing on my
bladder all day left me in pain as
well so I sit snuggling with my

permanent heating pad in my
bed. At this point, I am doing
my best to give my husband
attention but often suffer as a re-
sult of sharing myself. Often the
question afterward while I am in
the fetal position in a hot bath-
tub is, "Was it worth it?". Does
the connection and euphoria in
the moment make up for the
extreme pain that often lasts
into the next day or flares up the
other areas? I have stopped try-
ing to answer. As I lay my head
down, I feel the exhaustion fall
over me, I tuck the heating pad
against my abdomen where I
have burns from 20 years of use,
hold my small dog in my arms,
and let myself fall into
the next nightmare.

Blair Kampovitz

Untitled #3

The field where I grew up is
gone
I never come here anymore
Yet still my field awakes at dawn
This is the place that I adore

A songbird sings a pleasant tune
My field is where I longed to be
The pretty flowers are in bloom
My friend the wind puts me at
ease

I tried to keep my eyes closed
tight
To my dismay they opened wide
I guess my dream took me in
flight
Up to my field where I reside

Art/Photography

Lauren Farritor
Assisi, Italy



Assisi, Italy

Gannen Ingalls

Sculpture 1

Sculpture 2



Sculpture 1



Sculpture 2

Gannen Ingalls

Sculpture 3

Sculpture 4



Sculpture 3



Sculpture 4

Anabelle Daugherty

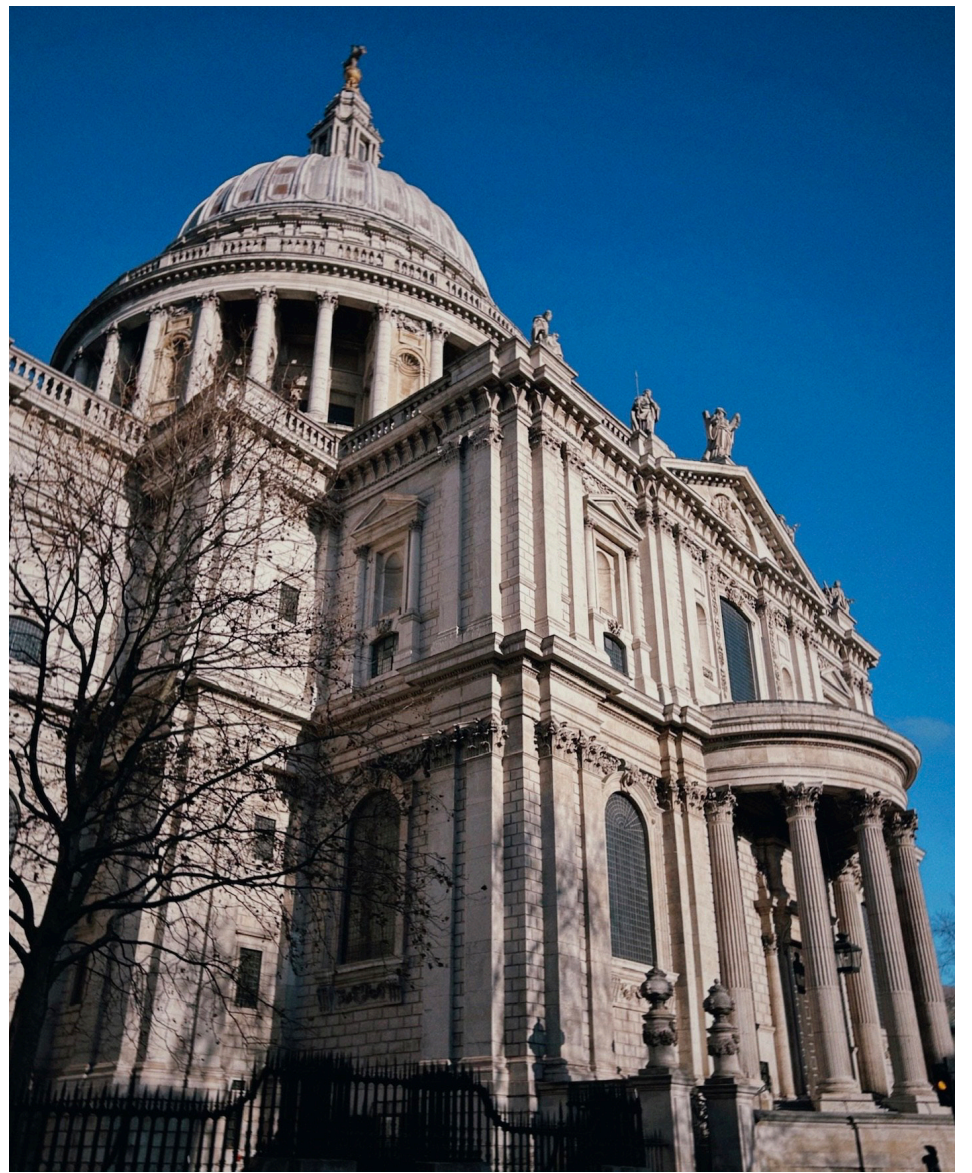
Cliffs of Moher, Ireland

Windsor Palace, England

London, England



Cliffs of Moher, Ireland



London, England



Windsor Palace, England

Anabelle Daugherty

Westminster Abbey, London, England

London Eye, London

Lakewood, Pennsylvania



Westminster Abbey, London, England



London Eye, London



Lakewood, Pennsylvania

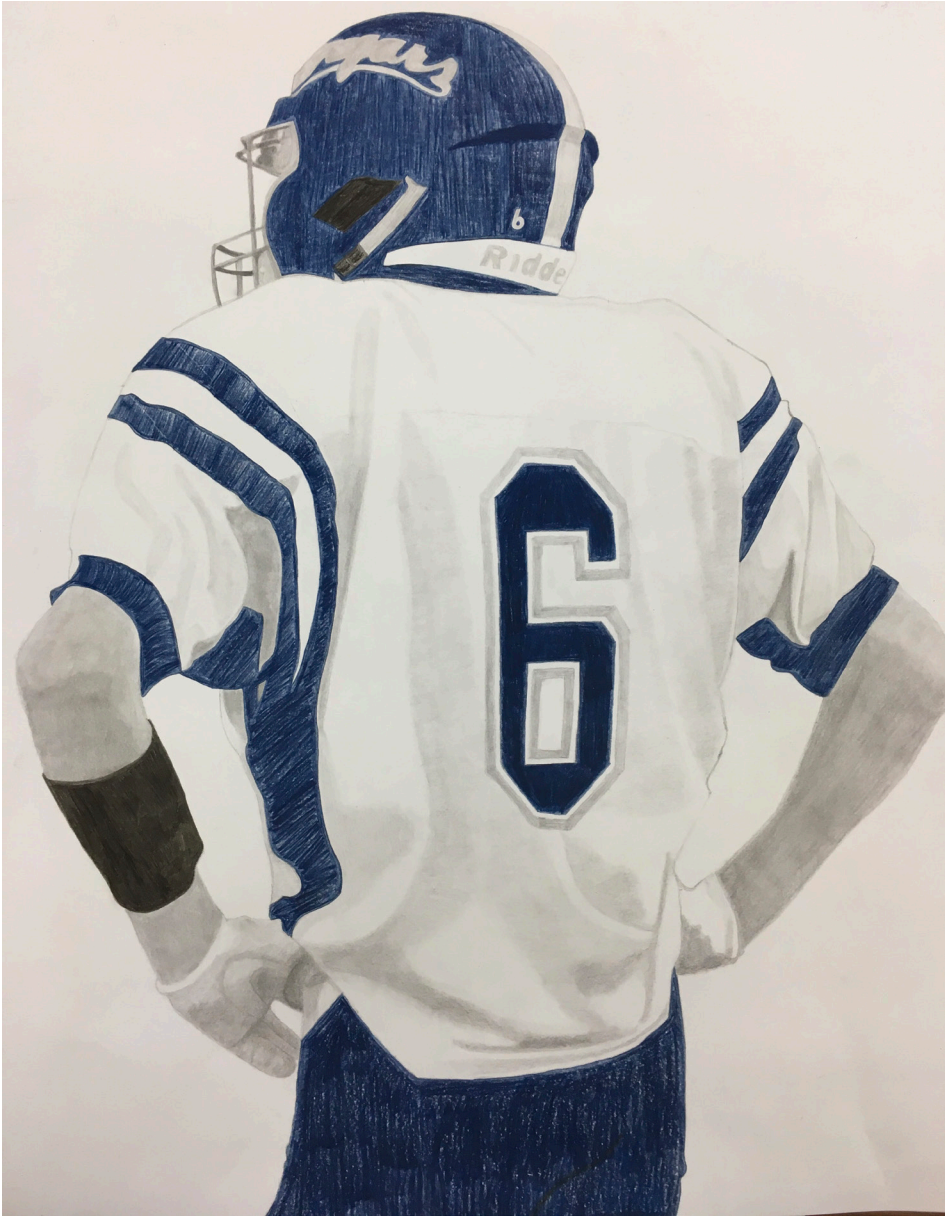
Elena Koenig

#6

A Life of Sports Blooming

Eyes of Distress

Raven



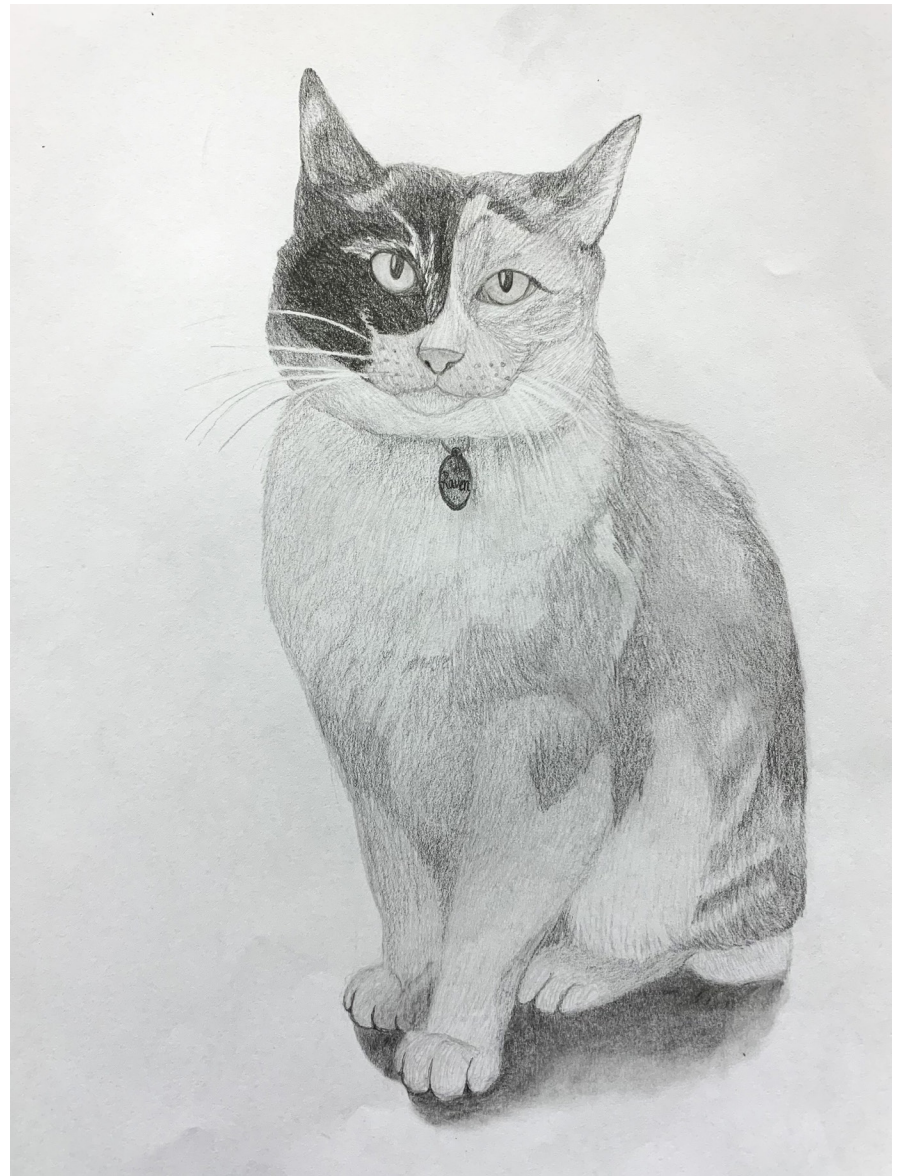
#6



A Life of Sports Blooming



Eyes of Distress



Raven

Elenna Koenig

Riggs

Rocket

Serendipity

Waldo

Two Faced



Riggs



Rocket



Waldo



Serendipity



Two Faced

Jamey Rhea

Untitled 1

Untitled 2

Untitled 3



Untitled 1



Untitled 2



Untitled 3

Jamey Rhea

Untitled 4

Untitled 5

Untitled 6



Untitled 4



Untitled 5



Untitled 6

Jose Villalpando

Untitled 1

Untitled 2

Untitled 3

Untitled 4



Untitled 1



Untitled 2



Untitled 3



Untitled 4

Jose Villalpando

Untitled 5

Untitled 6

Untitled 7

Untitled 8

Untitled 9



Untitled 5



Untitled 6



Untitled 7



Untitled 8



Untitled 9