

XANADU 2021



DOANE UNIVERSITY

XANADU

“The road to hell is paved with works-in-progress.”

Philip Roth

**Doane University
Literary Magazine
2021**

Xanadu is the student literary magazine of Doane University, Crete Campus. Published continually since 1956, the magazine is edited by members of the student body.

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Letter from the Editor...

Dear Doane Community,

It is no surprise that this 2020-2021 academic year has been a little unorthodox. What with coming back to campus after being so abruptly removed the previous spring, going through “creative” solutions to attending classes in a world where every student, faculty, and staff member were all masked, the uncertainty of when a vaccine might finally come, and much more. We’ve gone through in-person classes wearing masks, zoom classes from our homes and from our dorms, and hybrids of the two.

Still, this year, we have been able to create. We have made theater, art, stories, poetry, and more. Xanadu has always continued to strive to bring out Doane’s finest creators and writers and this year proves no different. Doane University continues to create and nurture beautiful creations of art and writing.

Xanadu itself this year has gone through a change. If you’re reading this, you know that *The New Xanadu* has found a new home online and is moving forward into the 21st century. We have started to be vaccinated, we are meeting in person once again, and we are moving forward. Xanadu will continue; as will Doane and its community as a whole

Much love to you and yours,

Jean Chevalier
Xanadu Editor
Spring, 2021

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Navigation

By Elizabeth Bose

How does one navigate
When they are still learning how to steer

I feel as if I have been floundering
While my feet have been firmly planted in the soil

I've only just begun to ask myself
If I dare to uproot

If one could only know
The consequences of their actions

years in advance.

Unknown

By Elizabeth Bose

I have been pushed into a realm
That is unknown to me

There were bright lights and chatter surrounding me
I became overwhelmed
So in shock
I did not even cry out

I have been learning the customs
The set rules that came before me

The rules that will survive long after I am gone

Untitled Poem

By Lexi Burke

down, down, down
I go under
lower, lower, lower
because my time has come to an end
below, below, below
it's time for the light blue to change

paint in the orange,
streaking across the heavens
brush in the pink,
blushing all around
sprinkle in the lavender,
blooming in fluffy cottons

I started in the east,
rising as time went on
I traveled all-day
strongest as the bell tolled twelve
I will end in the west
as I've done many times

it's time now
pitch-black surrounds all
it's time for
the reflection of a star
it's time to
not guide the way

I am sorry
that I must leave
I apologize for
not lasting longer
I am remorseful
but I have to cast my light somewhere else

do not pity me
for I will rise
do not fret
the earth still turns
do not cry
the darkness will not last long

my time has come
to break the darkness
my moment has arrived
to relight up the sky
my significance cannot be questioned
for I am the sun.

Untitled Poem

By Claire Carpenter

name: Aniya

identity: young black woman, 15

world status: racial reckoning

raised by whites, around whites, and alongside whites

how could she be prepared for her first time experiencing racism?

when raised with black parents

car and front door conversations are

“what’s wrong with our world and it’s inability to be kind”.

but, when raised in a white family

grocery store and shopping mall conversations with strangers are

“wow, she’s the cutest ever”

until...

she’s too old to be cute.

suddenly, there’s a target on her back

a seven year old is stopped at the store exit by security:

“ma’am, I’m going to have to check your backpack”.

he dug through a pink Dora bag full of barretts, headbands, and hair ties...

what could he possibly have been looking for?

The Echo of Joy

By Nicole Carraher

When I'm home, I sleep in my basement living room on a couch worn by little jumping feet. The cushions on this couch—to my mother's dismay—are used daily as springboards for frontflips and somersaults, and it shows.

I am not sure why I sleep here, with a perfectly fine bed upstairs; I just know that the air is cooler and the lights are dim. Even after the daycare kids have gone to their own homes, their own sisters, I imagine that I can hear them giggling and watch them play with their chosen toys, completely enamored for five minutes before discarding them in favor of the next closest one. When I nestle into the couch, I feel the sharp edge of a lego digging into my back.

I am not sure why I sleep here; I just know that these blankets have been used for naptime—used to stifle giggles when my mom chides them for talking and used to cover half-closed eyes when she walks down to check on them. The cold air from the vent above the couch feels cleaner, lighter than the air in the rest of the house. This is their realm, the realm of playfulness and giddiness and joy. This is their home as much as it is mine.

I am not sure why I sleep here; I just know that this is the couch they sit on when we tie their shoes. That this is the couch they pack themselves onto to watch cartoons with those dimmable lights— “the movie lights”, they call them. That this is the couch I jump on with them when my mom is upstairs making lunch.

This is the couch I curl up on during weekends I visit, trying to appease the ache that comes with the absence of these tiny humans. The ache that comes when they hide my keys “so you can't go back to college.” The ache that comes with waking to a quiet dorm, wishing I could hear voices behind the door calling me to come out, waiting to play.

The Confessor and the Pendle Witch Child
A Historical Re-Telling
By Jean Chevalier

Miss Jennet Seller sat in a state of peace as she worked on her sewing. Where she lived in Lancashire, the evenings were often calm, and she enjoyed taking advantage of the resulting silence. Only the sound of the fireplace broke the stillness of the air. The crackling of the burning wood relaxed her. The air was especially cold for a night in late July. Jennet knew what it felt like to be stuck outside at night in the cold with no fire and no warmth of any kind to speak of, so she was grateful to be sitting in a house, however poorly constructed it happened to be.

Her serenity was interrupted by a booming knock at the door. She wondered who it might be so late in the evening. She was wary to respond, knowing full well about the talk that was circulating around the village. She closed her eyes and sighed deeply before replying; “who’s come?”

“Jennet Seller?” a deep voice bellowed from behind the door.

“It may be,” she said.

“May be? It must be,” the voice called. “This is the Seller house, is it not?”

Jennet stood and placed her sewing aside. She walked slowly to the door quietly from heel to toe, mindful of each step. “If you have to ask, sir, then you may not be in the right place.”

“I’ll need you to open the door, ma’am. It is a legal matter.”

She halted then and placed one hand on her stomach to measure and calm her heaving breaths, hoping to calm them. Again, she closed her eyes. “A legal matter, sir?”

“I’m afraid so, Miss Seller.”

Jennet kept her eyes closed for a moment, hoping the source of the voice would simply vanish. She took a deep breath and nodded to herself, steeling her nerves before approaching the door. She placed each hand on the wood of the doorframe and leaned forward, putting her ear closer to the voice. “I’ll ask you again, sir. Who’s come?”

“Open the door, ma’am.”

She hesitated for a moment but opened the door. She was greeted by a younger man, about twenty-six or so years old. He was dressed well, a white collar, clean boots, a tall black hat, and a long black coat that was draped around his shoulders. He carried a large staff, strange for a man of his age. He had thick, dark brown hair that came to his shoulders and a beard that was not quite full. Jennet knew him. “Mr. Hopkins, sir.” She stared at the man who had come to call himself the *Witchfinder General*. He was different than she had expected. She knew of his work and had imagined him older. Not someone so young who stood with such unwarranted

authority.

“A pleasant evening, Miss Seller.”

“A pleasant evening indeed, and to you as well, sir.”

“Might I come in?”

Jennet did not reply. She simply nodded and opened the door wide enough for him to enter. He slithered inside and strode towards the fireplace, each footstep landing with an authoritative thud. “I am sorry to interrupt you this late at night.”

“I am sure you have sound reasoning, sir,” Jennet said, shutting the door so as not to let the cold into the otherwise warm room. “I must say, I did not expect to see you here.”

“You mean darkening your doorway?” Hopkins smiled, staring into the fireplace, watching the flames jump and flicker.

Jennet watched the bright yellow light reflect in his eyes. It seemed as though it belonged there.

“I said no such thing, Mr. Hopkins. I merely meant that I couldn’t think of a reason for you to be here.”

“Might we sit, Miss Seller?”

Jennet gestured towards the chair where she had been sitting before the knock at her door. “I have to ask you, Mr. Hopkins; why have you come alone? Do you not typically have assistants that travel with you?”

Hopkins chuckled. “Usually. But I’ve given them leave to take the night to themselves. They work tirelessly. They deserve it.”

“I see,” Jennet said, moving another rocking chair so that she could sit across from him. “Awfully kind of you, sir. There aren’t many who consider the wellbeing of those they employ it would seem.”

“Thank you.”

“So why *have* you come here so late in the evening, Mr. Hopkins? I wouldn’t want to accuse you of being rude.”

“Of course not,” he smiled. He took a deep breath and stared back into the fire. “You know my business, Miss Seller?”

“Naturally,” Jennet laughed. “I do not believe there to be a single soul in Lancashire who does not know the name Matthew Hopkins, much less the service you provide. I have to thank you of course for what you do.”

“You may not want to be thanking me just yet, Miss Seller.”

A sharp pain shot up Jennet’s spine. Her face felt hot. She placed her hands on her lap and began ringing them together. She grasped a piece of her skirts and began twisting it in her fingers. “Why is that, sir?”

Hopkins looked away from the fire and caught Jennet's eyes. He locked onto her gaze for a moment before speaking. "Miss Seller, there are those in the village who believe---"

"Wait."

"Who believe that---"

"Stop, sir. Please, I've done nothing wrong."

"Miss Seller!" his voice boomed and echoed around the small room, startling her.

She felt tears collecting in her eyes which she swiftly wiped away with her sleeve.

"Miss Seller, there are those in the village who believe that you have been consorting with the affairs of the devil."

"Never have I dealt with the devil, Mr. Hopkins. He is not in this house, sir."

"Unfortunately, the good people of the village do not see it that way." Hopkins stood as he spoke. He began to pace around the room, his hands grasping each other behind his back. "There are reports of the curse of impotence on the men of this town, as well as nightmares had by many of the women in which they claim to have seen a black dog---a familiar spirit---that is suspected to be yours. Crops have died, a plague on this land to be certain." Hopkins sighed and looked back to Jennet who was staring firmly into the fire. "Jennet Seller, you have been accused of the crime of witchcraft. What have you to say for yourself?"

"None more than I have said, Mr. Hopkins. I am not guilty of witchcraft. I have never dealt in the affairs of the devil, nor have my kin, sir."

"Your kin?"

Jennet looked from the flames to glare into Hopkins' eyes. "No, nor my kin, sir."

"Interesting," Hopkins said. He sat back down and leaned forward. He watched Jennet's face, his expression oddly warm. He smiled gently at her. "Jennet, you've been accused; there is little I can do for you. Still there is a glimmer of hope..."

"Why have you come alone, Mr. Hopkins," Jennet asked.

"As I said. I gave my men leave---"

"Then why have you come tonight? If you gave your men leave for the night then why should you come now rather than another night when they might aid you?"

"The work of the Lord our God waits for no man and gives no rest."

"The work of God," Jennet chuckled. "Is that what this is?"

Hopkins grinned. "You know that it is, ma'am."

"What is this *hope* you speak of, Mr. Hopkins?" Jennet leaned back against the back of her chair, carefully observing his movements. "I've seen these accusations before. I know how they are. What hope could you possibly hope to offer me?" she spat.

For a moment, Hopkins said nothing. He relaxed his shoulders and tilted his head backwards to stare at the ceiling. He took in a deep breath and let it out slowly before

beginning to laugh. "I'm aware that you have seen these sorts of accusations before."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Seller," Hopkins whispered.

"What?"

"How did you come to be called Seller?"

Jennet said nothing. She shook her head and leaned forward. "It is my *name*, sir."

Hopkins returned his gaze to Jennet and stared at her, his eyes reflecting the light of the fire once again. He smiled at her, this time showing teeth, as if he'd just thought of a particularly amusing joke.

"Is there something amusing, Mr. Hopkins?"

"I've been curious about you for a while, Jennet," he said. He took another deep breath and shook his head. He removed his hat and placed it on the floor beside him, taking a moment to run his fingers through his hair. "Jennet Seller. It wasn't until recently that I found it."

"Found what?" Jennet asked.

"Your tombstone."

Jennet's heart felt as though it had sunk into the floor. She shook her head and began to chuckle, almost hysterically. She placed her hands over her eyes and started to breath quickly and heavily. "My---" she tried to speak but instead continued to laugh. She ran her hands over the top of her hair, removing her bonnet and throwing it to the floor. "My tombstone?"

"That's right," Hopkins said. "At least, I found Jennet Seller's tombstone. In Newchurch cemetery."

"What are you saying, Mr. Hopkins, because unfortunately I find myself rather confused. You found the tombstone of Jennet Seller?"

"I did," Hopkins replied. "And I believe you did as well."

"So you're not merely accusing me of witchcraft, I take it."

"I will tell you, Jennet, what I did *not* find. That would be the tombstone or burial records of a Jennet Device of Lancashire."



Jennet closed her eyes. When she opened them, she had returned to.... She was only a small girl, nine years old, once again before the court. Among the accused, she saw her mother, her grandmother, her sister, and her brother. Her mother seemed to be screaming at her but no sound came out. The crowd around her seemed to be the same, all of their mouths open, their eyes aflame with fury and hatred, but no sound. The only thing that Jennet could hear was the

sound of her own breathing. The magistrate stood behind her and the judge sat in front of her, slamming his hand down repeatedly on the wood of the pulpit before him.

Suddenly, she could hear her mother's words. "A curse on you, Jennet Device! You *stupid* girl, you know not what you do!" she cried out in a shrill and terrible screech. "Why do you say such terrible things? Why?"

Jennet heard her own voice, although it was not the voice she had come to know in recent years. It was the voice of a child. "Please sir, I cannot speak whilst my mother stands there," she had said. She watched as two men of the law dragged her mother from the room with chains around her wrists. Once she was gone, Jennet was lifted up by the magistrate to stand on a table so that all the members of the court could see her more clearly and hear her words.

"My mother is a witch and that I know to be true. I have seen her spirit in the likeness of a brown dog which she called Ba'al. The dog asked her what she would have him do and she answered that she would have him to help her to kill..."

In a flash of light, Jennet was no longer in the court but rather standing before the gallows. She watched as one by one, the stools were kicked from beneath the feet of those against whom she had testified. She saw her mother, Elizabeth, her sister, Allison, and her brother, James, as well as all the other members of the town she'd condemned. She found herself unable to look away as they suffered the short drop, their faces changing color and their eyes bulging from their skulls as they gasped for breath, their feet kicking beneath them for a bit of earth to stand on that would never come. With her grandmother dead from an illness in Lancashire prison, Jennet had successfully killed her entire family.



Jennet opened her eyes and saw Hopkins grinning at her. "To have been the chief witness at such a young age," he said. "And now here you are, living not unlike the family you condemned to death; a beggar living off of scraps in a decrepit home."

"It matters not to me what you think of my position in life. Nor that you know my true name, Mr. Hopkins," Jennet said. "What was true those many years ago has not changed. I am no witch. I can assure you of that."

"You said that you had never seen the devil, Miss Device, nor had any of your kin. I find that to be a fascinating contradiction, given your history."

"My *kin*," Jennet hissed. "My kin are all dead, Mr. Hopkins. *They* were the witches, not I." Hopkins nodded and stood. "Yet, you were one of them, were you not?"

"What are you asking, Mr. Hopkins? That I am a Device? You *know* that I am. I've been accused of witchcraft before. I was pardoned. I can do it again just as easily."

“You were accused of the murder of one Isabel Nutter, is that correct?”

“*Accused*, Mr. Hopkins, not *guilty*.”



Jennet remembered that day just as clearly as the other. She saw herself again, a younger woman. She was thirty-one years old when she herself was on trial for witchcraft. She saw the young boy, standing on a table in the court just as she had twelve years before. His hand was outstretched towards her, his finger pointing. She saw his mouth form the word but she could hear no sound. “Witch!” he had cried. She could see Edmund’s father standing behind him, a shadow that glared at her with eyes that burned through her skull. She felt herself huddled together on the stand with the others, like swine in a pen. She felt the sweat and fear of the women that surrounded her. She heard the screams and shouting of those that sat before her, a deafening, thunderous barrage of voices all accusing her of the same thing: consorting with the devil.

She remembered sitting in the prison with the others. She sat in the corner, doing all she could not to look into the eyes of the other prisoners around her. The iron of the chains that held her to the cold stone floor felt cold around her wrists. The room was filled with the overwhelming choking stench of urine, feces, sweat, and blood. She heard the weeping of the other woman as well as the cries and screams that pierced and echoed through the small chamber in which they were all tightly packed into. She remembered being whipped and thrashed until she fell to the floor. She remembered the feeling of her own blood dripping down her face and her chest. She remembered trying to sleep there. She never could. The cries in the night haunted her more than any spirit. She remembered her grandmother. She had died in the very same prison. For many nights, she wondered if she might suffer the same fate and she debated with herself which would be worse; to die of illness on the floor like a dog or to be put through hanging, the rope not long enough to break her neck but only to suffocate her---the same punishment as her mother, brother, and sister.



“It was a child that accused you as well, was it not?” Hopkins asked.

Jennet said nothing, lost in her own memory. Eventually, she nodded. “Yes, Edmund Robinson. Rotten little boy.”

“What makes you say that?”

“I care not for little boys that tell *lies*, Mr. Hopkins.”

“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.”

“You need not recite scripture to me, Mr. Hopkins. I know it very well.”

“Was it a lie?”

Jennet looked up at him. “It was. He was a little boy telling lies, just like his father. It was all his father’s doing. He wanted me dead, Mr. Hopkins.”

“And why is that?”

She froze. She shook her head. “I cannot say.”

“Can you not?”

“I will say that he wanted me erased from this world for his own actions, not mine. He was a ruthless, inhuman creature. Bound by wickedness with no remorse for what he’d done. He wanted nothing more than to simply cleanse himself of his own sins by destroying me.”

“Why did you not accuse him in return?”

She laughed. “Who would believe me, Mr. Hopkins?”

“What *exactly* did he do to you?”

“I do not need to explain to you.”

“You can stop this, Jennet.”

Jennet scoffed. The two of them stared at each other for a few moments of silence, agonizing for Jennet. Hopkins’ eyes resembled those of a wild jungle cat, starved for a piece of meat. In a swift motion, he pounced and knelt before her, placing each hand on an arm of the rocking chair in which she sat, trapping her. He leaned forward to speak into her ear, so close that Jennet could feel the hair of his face rubbing against her cheek. He spoke in a gentle whisper, “I am your confessor.” He backed away slowly, still remaining only inches from her face. “If only you would confess, the sentence may not be so cruel.”

“You are suggesting, sir, that I confess to a crime I did not commit.”

“I might be able to save you. If you return to the Lord our God, if you come to the light...if you come to *me*, Jennet, I can release you from the flames of this world, as well as the Hellfire that awaits you below.”

Jennet stood and shoved Hopkins away. She walked past him to the other side of the room, wanting to put as much distance between the two of them as possible. “What exactly do you mean, come to *you*, Mr. Hopkins? And I will ask you again; why have you come here alone? Why have you come without the other two other men who aid you in accusing and *murdering* the innocent?”

“You’re saying I murder the innocent, Miss Device?”

“I am saying that not every man and woman you accuse is guilty of witchcraft, Mr. Hopkins.”

"I am not the accuser, Jennet," he said as he stalked her again. "As I said, I am the confessor. I am *your* confessor."

"I'll not be confessing to you, Mr. Hopkins. Not when I am innocent of what you have accused me of."

Hopkins sighed. "If not to me, Jennet, there will be another. Perhaps a magistrate."

"A magistrate does not use your methods."

Once more, Hopkins stalked. Once more, he closed in mere inches from her. He placed both constrictive and firm hands on her upper arms, harshly enough that Jennet was concerned he might leave a mark. "Jennet, you have little choice. The town expects an answer from me. You are in a difficult position."

"And you are suggesting you can *save* me, is that right?"

"I think you and I might be able to come to a...conclusion of sorts."

"You mean a deal, sir?"

"If you prefer to put it that way."

Jennet stared harshly into his eyes. "I will ask you to remove your hands, sir."

"Would you prefer the hands of *multiple* men, Miss Device? You know our methods." "I have heard of them."

"We do what we must to find the evidence we need."

"By defiling and degrading innocent women, correct?"

"Finding a witch's mark is not an easy task."

Jennet laughed. "You will call your henchmen to remove my clothes and shave my head, is that right, Mr. Hopkins?"

"It can be me alone...or it can be all of us, Jennet."

Jennet violently pushed him away. "You will not do this to me, Mr. Hopkins, I am innocent. I am no witch." She began to briskly walk past him, hoping to make her way to the door.

"You cannot walk away from me, Jennet," he commanded. As she walked past him, he grasped her by the waist, his fingers digging into her side. He pulled her closer, pressing his pelvis against her skirts. With a firm hold on her, he leaned forward to whisper into her ear again. "I told you, I am your confessor. And you will give me what I want."

"Let go of me." Jennet fought his clutches. With every movement she made, his arms wrapped tighter around her waist and her chest, constricting her as a snake devouring its prey.

"I said let go."

"All you have to do is confess."

"I will scream, Mr. Hopkins."

"There are none who will respond to the cries of a witch."

Moving quickly, Jennet managed to slip away from him. Her hair dangled in strands across her face. She glared at him and smiled. "You say that I have been dealing with the devil. However, to agree to this deal with you would be to make myself guilty of the crime you have accused me of."

"What exactly are you saying?"

"I see no devil in this house besides *you*, Matthew. I must ask you to leave." Hopkins scoffed, looking half-offended and yet partially amused.

"You call me a *devil*, Miss Device?"

"I do not *merely* call you a devil alone, Mr. Hopkins. I call you a plague. A plague on this land, taking the lives of the innocent in your wake, a shadow without feeling that takes the lives of those who have done no wrong."

Hopkins laughed, taking another step towards her, making her take two steps backwards. "I will have a confession from you, Jennet. It does not matter to me *how*, but I will have one." He rushed forward and grasped her hand, pulling her violently towards him. "In fact, I shall have more than just that. You wouldn't want the town knowing your true heritage, would you?"

"Leave...this...house."

As Jennet spoke, the door opened. A young man stepped in. He looked younger than Hopkins. He wore rugged work clothes and had even more rugged hair. His feet were bare and the skin on his hands was rough and dirty from hard labor. He looked startled at the sight he'd walked in to see. "What is going on here?" he asked.

Hopkins released Jennet and brushed himself off, walking towards the man. He turned towards Jennet who was looking intently at the floor. "Who's this?"

"James Seller, sir," the man answered, reaching out his arm to shake Hopkins' hand. Hopkins looked back at him and grasped his hand firmly, shaking it in response.

"Matthew Hopkins."

"Oh I know, Mr. Hopkins. What brings you here at this hour?"

Hopkins turned back to Jennet as he continued to speak to the young man. "James, you said?"

Jennet kept her head tilted towards the floor but glanced sideways. "My son."

Hopkins chuckled and looked back at James. "And who is your father, boy?"

"I'm afraid I do not know."

"You do not?"

"No, sir."

Hopkins looked back at Jennet and smiled. "And I had wondered why Edmund Robinson's father had wanted you erased from this world so badly." She glared at him. He

smiled and shook his head before looking once again at James. "James. Hm. No doubt named for your uncle."

"You think I feel no remorse, Mr. Hopkins?" Jennet sat back down in her rocking chair, not looking away from the floor. "For my own blood? What I did was necessary."

"He was a *child*."

"He was a threat!" Jennet yelled. She whipped her head to look at Hopkins and stood again. "They all were; my grandmother, my mother, Allison, *even* James. They had to be dealt with."

Hopkins grinned. "And you do not count yourself among them?"

"What's happened, Mr. Hopkins?" James asked.

Hopkins took a moment so as not to break eye contact with Jennet. Slowly, he looked away and turned back towards James. "Mr...." he sighed. "*Seller*. Mr. Seller, I hate to inform you but your mother has been accused of being a witch."

"I am innocent, James. He has asked me to confess to the crime of witchcraft but I am *no* witch. You know this."

James nodded and sighed, placing one hand on the back of his neck and rubbing it slowly. "I see," he said calmly. "Yes, mother, I know that you are no witch."

"Do you have proof, sir?" Hopkins asked.

"I do."

Hopkins rolled his eyes. "Then please, by all means, share. Your mother's life is at risk." James took a moment to look at him. He stared into his eyes for a moment before he began to chuckle. Soon, he was laughing wholeheartedly. "Matthew, you've made an error."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Seller?"

"You can call me *Device*, Mr. Hopkins, since it is clear you know our family's secret. I've been following what you've done, Mr. Hopkins. I've got to say I'm somewhat partial to your work in Manningtree. Six women, correct?"

Hopkins paused. He said nothing for a moment, merely staring at James. "Uh, that is correct."

"Six women dead," James said, shaking his head. "That's right. Six women. And they were *witches* as well, right?"

"They were, Mr. Device."

"Of course." James walked past Hopkins to stand by his mother and stare into the fire. "I have to tell you, Matthew, you have a tendency to accuse the wrong person." "You think so, sir?"

"I know so. My mother, Jennet, is no witch. I should know."

"Mr. Device, there have been reports of the curse of impotence on the men of this town, as

well as nightmares had by many of the women in which they claim to have seen---

"A black dog, is that right?" James looked up at Hopkins.

Hopkins said nothing. His eyes locked with James' and could not pull away. "Yes, sir."

James smiled and looked back into the flames. "Those men didn't deserve to procreate. And as far as the women go, well..." he chuckled. "Perhaps if they wouldn't spread such vicious and dangerous rumors then maybe they would not suffer through such haunting visions in the night. However, my mother is not responsible."

"What are you--"

"I'll ask you to be silent, Matthew." James lifted his hand and made a sort of claw. Suddenly, Hopkins could not speak. He covered his mouth and tried but was unable. He clawed at his chin and throat, his mouth open but no sound coming out. "How funny," James said, lowering his hand. "I've taken your voice. It's rather unpleasant, isn't it? I wonder if the others felt as you are feeling now, Matthew. No voice of their own, no way to plead for their own lives." Hopkins reached into his coat and pulled out a small knife, holding it threateningly towards James. James laughed. "Oh, don't be so aggressive." He raised his hand again and snapped, causing Hopkins to drop the knife to the floor. He lowered his hand slowly and as he did, Hopkins fell to his knees.

"James, don't," Jennet said quietly.

James looked at his mother, not moving his hand. "I'm sorry, mother. I won't stand for this anymore." He looked back to Hopkins. "How does it feel? To be the one brought to your knees in fear? How many have died at your hand, Matthew? How many have suffered, been tortured? Are you even able to say just how far your carnage has spread? Or are each of those lives merely coins in your pocket?" He lowered his hand further, causing Hopkins to fall forward, his hands and his forehead pressed to the ground. "So you see, it's like I told you. You've made an error. This time, you've gone after that which is mine." He was silent for a moment, taking the opportunity to enjoy Hopkins' position. Finally, he spoke. "I curse you, Matthew Hopkins. I curse you to feel a plague, not unlike that which you yourself have been to the people of these lands. I curse you to be consumed by illness. Before this, the year of our Lord 1647 is at its end, you will be no more."

"James, give him his voice back," Jennet said.

"Why should I?"

"Because," Jennet walked slowly and calmly past Hopkins to stand behind her son. She placed her hands gently on his shoulders and smiled. "I want to hear him beg." James smiled. He kept his eyes on Hopkins and placed his hands into his pockets. "I find myself obliging to my mother's request. What have you to say for yourself, Matthew?" Hopkins looked up, finally able to move. He pushed himself upwards to his knees, sitting back on his own feet. "You

two..." he spoke in a course and rough voice. "Are unnatural creatures of Hell."

"Not unlike yourself, eh Matthew?" Jennet smiled. She walked forward and crouched in front of Hopkins, placing herself inches from his face. "You see, it's like I said. I am no witch. My family, however, most certainly were." She sighed and shook her head. "I'll tell you a story, Matthew. You see, the gift was passed through my bloodline from my grandmother, to my mother, and to my brother and sister. I was not so generously blessed. For some reason, the gift passed me by. So you know what my family did? They ostracised me. They tossed me aside and cast me out like common rubbish. All because I was not born with the gift. I was just a child, not yet ten years old, and they thrashed me so harshly and so often that it nearly killed me. So, you see, I didn't lie to you, Matthew. They were a threat. I was saved."

"Then she herself was accused," James added.

"Yes. For the murder of Isabel Nutter. Nasty woman. However, I didn't kill her. You see, James was only eleven at the time. He didn't have real control over the gift just yet. Isabel's death was an accident."

"Your *son* killed her," Hopkins said.

"An *accident*, she said, Matthew," James interjected.

"Correct. So I sat in Lancashire prison for several years. When I got out, I knew that I could not keep the name of Device, the weight it carried was too much for me to bear, especially with a young son. So I found a woman, recently dead, Jennet Seller, and I took her name. No one has found me until you, Matthew. I must applaud you."

"Why are you telling me any of this?"

Jennet smiled. "You know, I'm not sure." She chuckled. "I suppose because it won't really matter, Matthew. You aren't going to tell anyone."

"What makes you think I won't?"

"Because," she said. "You and I can come to a...conclusion."

"What?"

Jennet leaned forward to speak into his ear, brushing her cheek against his. "I am your confessor, Matthew," she whispered. "I can save you from the suffering of this world and quite possibly the next."

"What do you want with me, devil's whore?" Hopkins spat.

"I want you to confess," Jennet said, backing away and lifting Hopkins' chin with her forefinger so as to look directly into his eyes. "To the crime of murdering the innocent." "I will not."

Jennet stood. "Then you will die."

"And take your *plague* with you," James said.

Hopkins struggled to get to his feet. He brushed himself off and pushed past James and

Jennet to get to the door. He turned back towards them and glared. "You will regret this," he hissed. "I will *make* you regret this." He rushed to open the door but stopped. He began coughing violently. Hunched over, he took a handkerchief from his coat and covered his mouth. When he was finally able to take a breath, he pulled the handkerchief away and noticed a large spot of fresh blood that had not been there before. With widened eyes, he looked at Jennet and James. He took a few gasping breaths and threw the handkerchief to the floor. Just before leaving, he raised his hand to point a finger at the two of them. "Witches," he cried. "Witches!"

The Poem of My Life

By Ty Crandon

The years feel shorter the longer we go
Why waste the time if I already know
I know I'm ready to grow
If only I could go out on my own

Trying hard through the years
Only me, no kin to ask for help
Now I'm 21, where did it all go
I just hope the "real world"
Doesn't feel so mundane

I only heard "I'm so proud"
Why don't I feel the gratification?
Living for my future
But I can't enjoy the current minute

Thoughts of joy and freedom
That feel so far away
Just another year is what they all say
It's hard to get out of your own way

The rat race of life has its twists
I still have my feet to push forward
Just one more year
We can all move forward

Almost 8 billion people
Each with their own story
How can you not feel lost
We all want our own glory

Too Long Awake
By Autumn Galloway

It was nearing 2 am when Johnny's phone went off and startled him awake. "Shit," he grumbled. With bleary eyes, he flailed his arm around the coffee table. He cursed again when his attempt caused the phone to fly off, crashing to the wooden floor with a loud thud. Thank god he was in the living room; he didn't want to accidentally wake up Ash. The bright phone screen strained his eyes. He blinked and rubbed his eyes until the contact name came into focus: Sarah.

The instant he saw her name, his stomach dropped. Calls in the middle of the night were never a good thing, especially for Sarah. He prayed it was something small, like her debit card getting declined, before he answered the call.

"Hello?" he answered.

"Are you free right now?"

He sat up with a groan, "Yeah. . ."

"Were you sleeping?" she asked.

"Napping."

"At 2 am."

He didn't know what to do other than give a sleepy chuckle.

"You should go back to bed," she told him, "I'll just call Mitch."

At the mention of Mitch, Johnny shot up, the exhaustion dissipating. He stood quickly, his leg bones cracking from the movement, and went to grab his shoes. "Wait, do you need a ride?"

"Yeah."

“Where are you?” he put her on speaker.

“Outside this gas station on 34th street.”

He frowned, “The hell you doing over there?” It was on the other side of town, a few miles from her apartment.

“Are you sure you can get me? You sound tired.”

“Just give me 15.”

“Okay,” she hung up. Not a minute later, she had texted him the address. Johnny threw on his shoes and grabbed his jacket from the closet. When he got outside the complex, he was surprised to see it had started raining, and hard. The sky had been clear when he got off work. Just another reason to hurry, he rationalized.

The streets were empty save for a few cars leaving the bar. He saw the flashing blue and red of a cop car on the side of the road, likely giving out a DUI. It was a Friday after all. People always make dumb decisions on these kinds of nights. Sarah wasn’t always rational, but he took comfort knowing that he would never have to deal with *that* kind of phone call.

He found the gas station a few minutes later. Sarah stood out like a beacon, on account of her bright red jacket that caught the flickering fluorescents, even when soaked from the rain. She held a cigarette in her shaky fingers, her blonde hair stringy and wet. Johnny parked the car in front of her, and in the headlights he could see her eyeliner was smeared. She looked like a stray mutt. When she didn’t extinguish the cigarette, he got out.

“You look like shit,” he told her.

“I feel like it too.” With her free hand, she dug around in her bag and pulled out a crumpled ten dollar bill. “Can you buy me a 6 pack?”

“Busch Light or Blue Moon?”

“Busch Light.”

That confirmed his suspicions. It took every ounce of his will to not ask “*So what did you do to piss him off this time?*” Instead, Johnny let out a heavy breath and took the bill. He caught Sarah’s eye as he did so; although it was brief, he could see her pleading for him to just let it go. But that was much easier said than done.

Inside, he wandered up and down the freezer. To the store employee restocking the shelves, he looked like he was just browsing. In reality, he was just buying himself time. He wondered how this conversation was gonna go without her getting pissed off and yelling at him. Truth was, even if she didn’t, he would.

When he got back, Sarah had already gotten into the passenger seat, her jacket abandoned. She was using the sleeve as a makeup wipe, taking off the remains of her mascara and eyeliner but making an almost bigger mess. He handed her the case when he got inside, which she took it with a weak “thank you” before breaking into it.

“Where do you need me to take you?” he asked as he started the car.

She didn’t answer immediately, opting to take a long sip from her beer instead, “Just back to Mitch’s.”

He turned up the heat and pulled out of the parking lot. As he drove, Johnny debated on how to ask the question. There was no simple way to ease into it, so he just asked: “Why were you out here?”

She took another gulp, “I was at the bar with some friends. I thought I could walk home.”

“Why the bar? It’s not like you can drink.”

“Obviously. I was just there to hang out.”

“With who?”

“Emily,” she answered fast.

“Why couldn’t she drive you home?”

“I didn’t ask.”

“Hm.”

“What?” she responded defensively.

“Emily knows it’s too far of a walk.”

“Well, she was drunk. Or she probably forgot.” Sarah rolled her eyes and stared out the window.

He let her simmer for a minute before asking, “How’s Mitch?”

“He got laid off today,”

Unsurprising. “Sorry to hear that,” he told her in the most sympathetic voice he could muster, though they both knew it was forced by the way his jaw clenched.

He thought back to the first time he’d met Mitch on a night similar to this. A midnight text from Sarah asked if Johnny could bring her backpack to an address he’d never been to before. Probably a new friend’s house, he’d thought. Afterall, she was in college now. It came as a surprise, then, when it wasn’t Sarah that answered the door, but rather a guy that was very clearly a few years older than your average college student. A gross feeling stirred in his gut, and he had just *known* from that awkward greeting and weak handshake that something was off.

A flash of yellow snapped Johnny out of his thoughts, and he slammed the breaks, stopping at the intersection just before the light turned red. As they watched a singular car pass through, Johnny leaned back and took a deep breath.

“So Mitch. . . is he. . . ?” he asked

“What.” He could feel the tension building in her voice.

“Just wondering how he’s doing. He doesn’t handle stuff like that well.”

“I know.”

“He’s not taking it out on you, right?”

“For fuck’s sake Johnny,” she shifted in her seat, “you act like he’s beating me up.”

“Well, he sure isn’t nice to you.” There was an edge to his tone. He did his best to keep his focus on the road, but the rain was pouring even harder now. It hit the windshield like bullets. The light finally turned green.

“He’s got a lot going on.”

“So do you.”

“Yeah, like studying for tests and trying to figure out what the fuck APA is. Not wondering how I’m gonna pay rent.”

“Well maybe he wouldn’t have to worry about it if he didn’t always show up to work drunk off his ass.”

“Seriously Johnny? Why the fuck do you care?” Sarah threw her hands up and turned to him.

“The fuck you mean ‘why’? Who else is gonna look out for you and tell you how it is if you can’t see it for yourself?”

“Don’t give me that bullshit. You argue with Ashley all the time.”

That stung for a second, but the feeling was enveloped by anger once more. “Yeah, because I forgot to put in the fucking laundry or some shit. But she doesn’t tell me how useless I am for just existing. And if she did, you think I’d still be with her? That’s not how relationships work. It’s not fucking healthy.”

Sarah exhaled loudly before going quiet. Looking ahead, Johnny saw the intersection he needed to turn left at. He kept going straight. Thankfully, Sarah didn’t seem to notice. If she did, she didn’t comment.

For a couple of minutes, they just listened to the radio. Johnny had never paid attention to this station before; it was some rock station, but neither modern nor classic. For a second he thought it was just instrumentals, but then the lyrics started. He couldn't really hear the words, but something about them made tension in the car lift, but the air got heavier at the same time.

It was only after the song ended that Sarah finally spoke again.

"He kicked me out."

Johnny wasn't surprised to hear that. Shocked, a little, but not surprised. He didn't know how to respond so he just sighed heavily. "Was he at the bar with you too?" he finally said.

"Yeah. I don't remember what I said but he got mad and left without me."

"Dick."

"He's just drunk."

"That's not an excuse."

"He'll be better in the morning," her voice cracked.

"Only while he's sober."

"He *knows* how to stay sober. Once he finds another job he'll be fine again. He's just stressed."

"And how long will that take?" he realized how accusatory his tone was and stopped. He couldn't have this turn into another argument. "Look, everyone's got their own shit to worry about. But that doesn't mean he should be taking it out on you,"

"But I want to be there for him. Like you are for Ashley."

"But the difference is that Ash is there for me too. I'm not trying to sound like an asshole, but what has Mitch ever done for you?"

She went silent again. Johnny could hear a quiet snuffle.

"I'm just so fucking tired," Sarah sighed. She roughly wiped her face with her jacket before turning back at the window. He hoped she meant it in the way he felt.

For a few moments the car was silent again. At some point during the drive, the rain had let up, now lightly splashing against the windows rather than trying to break them.

"You missed the turn a while ago," Sarah finally said.

"Oh, I know."

She didn't argue with him and instead chuckled, "Asshole."

"You can sleep on the couch at my place."

"You sure? You should ask Ash first."

"She won't care. She worries about you too, y'know."

"Fine. I'm having another beer though."

"Might wanna shower while you're at it. You look like a wet dog."

Sarah let out a tired laugh and lightly socked his arm.

Five minutes later, they'd made it back to the apartment. Inside, Johnny grabbed one of Ash's shirts and a pair of sweatpants, careful not to wake her up. Sarah waited in the hallway, looking at the pictures of Johnny and Ash on the wall.

He walked up beside her and looked too, for what felt like the first time in years. The one that stuck out to him was from two years ago: it was a blown up picture from Ash's phone the day they graduated and before he got the balls to ask her out. He looked like such a fucking idiot with his slicked back hair. It was a shock to find out that Ash was ever attracted to him. She looked different too, but still beautiful.

A few frames over was another picture from high school, this time an old group photo from their Speech Club at Finals, junior year. He and Ash stood together, once again, but this time Sarah stood with them. Ash had taken her under her wing; her "freshman baby," she

always called her. Johnny never called her anything dumb like that, but she felt like a little sister from day one. Sarah's smile in the photo was bright and inviting, an ode to a time before she became acquainted with deadbeats and alcohol.

They didn't say anything for a while, content to stew in their nostalgia and grief. Johnny turned to look at her. There was a look to Sarah he couldn't quite place. It was like a ghost staring at the outside world from the window.

A shudder snapped him out of his thoughts, the weight of the clothes becoming apparent again. "Here," he said, handing them over to her, "I'll get some blankets."

Sarah took them from him and went to open the bathroom door. Before she did, she turned to look at him. "Johnny?"

"Yeah?"

"Thanks. For. . ." she made a circling gesture, "all of this."

He smiled, "Don't worry about it."

She returned the look before closing the door.

Back in the living room, Johnny saw the case of Busch Light on the kitchen counter. Apprehensive, he grabbed a can. He let it roll between his hands and stared down at it, Mitch's face flashing back into his mind. Johnny chuckled at the idea of throwing the can at him and wiping that smug, phony grin off his face. He popped the tab open and took one long swig.

Cheers, asshole, he thought, and dumped the can down the sink.

Untitled Poem
By Parker Hansen

Rising and falling
As we all do
Sit back and relax
Because what can you really do?

Control what you can control
Always view the glass as half full
A wise man once said
This will silence those thoughts and keep your heart whole

Take a breath
Relieve some stress
This will be your key to success

Do more or do less
All in all, this life is a mess
What drives you, will not drive me
Let's all agree to live life happily

White Lines
By Logan Marie Hayek

It's race day. The team and I tensely get off the warm, running bus one by one like soldiers ready to go to battle. Most of our eyes seem to be glossed over as we had a three hour drive from Crete, Nebraska to Yankton, South Dakota. Without a single word being said, because race day nerves are a thing, we set up camp. The tarp is laid, bags are dropped and tense smiles are given. Coaches gather us up, giving us a stern, cheerful pep talk. I'm not sure about other runners, but for me, these pep talks always seemed to ignite my race day nerves. Something about my coach's voice on race day always made me uneasy.

All my life I have wanted to succeed in everything I set out to do. At a very young age, I began to see how successful my father and mother were with their farming business. Success was something I grew up with, it was something I saw my father work towards my whole life. So, naturally my head coach's pep talk before warm up took me to a place of anxiousness but yet, also to a place of excitement because success is in fact, exciting.

"I want to do great for my coach, and my team" were the words that always ran through my head.

Stretch. Stretch. Stretch. This was the most difficult part of race day. The nerves were always strongest during stretching. There was always too much time to think and panic. Those unwanted nerves seemed to make stretching take forever. But, just as life is, things do not come with ease.

Life was not easy when I was little. My dad was always gone. Not gone, as in a dead-beat dad, but only the opposite. My dad is a farmer, a *big-time* farmer. He started his own company, Hayek Harvesting, when he was 19 years old. He loaded up one combine on a trailer and headed for South Dakota. My dad would be gone for four months (basically the whole summer) while on the wheat harvest. I was lost without him during those long days of summer. My dad is my person, my confidant. No one gets me like he gets me. This is probably due to the fact that we are the same person. I even look like him. To get the point across on how much I look like him, I will share a little side note story.

When going on part runs all over Saline county with my dad, we will run into folks who know

of him (he is known by so many). These people stare at me oddly, making my face turn bright red. I am always polite and say “hello” (I was raised that way). People around home would always say something along the lines of, “oh boy you must be

Doug’s kid”. I am always proud to say yes. Everyone I encounter is always pretty astonished at how much I look like him. I am proud of that too.

As a child, I ran when I missed him. I ran down the street to the stop sign where he turned left at. For a split second, I felt free while I ran to that faded, red stop sign. The pain of missing my dad was gone in those few, short seconds of running, until I reached the stop sign at the end of 609 West 2nd Street. I had the biggest heartache (literally my chest would hurt) while tears would trickle down my face as I watched him drive off into the distance.

After watching his pickup fade into the distance, I ran back down the street to our house, finding myself in my dad’s closet. I grabbed my stool in front of the bathroom sink, set it down in front of my dad’s hoodies, climbed up, and grabbed one of his hoodies off of the hanger. The smell of my dad brought ease back into my body.

I take off my dad’s hoodie as we got back to camp from warm-ups. I gently fold it up, taking in one big sniff before I put his hoodie into my bag. My team and I flutter off into the distance once more for a shake out. The nerves begin to run their own race inside my body as we made one big circle back to camp. *Thump. Thump. Thump.* My heart begins to pound faster as I reach for my racing spikes. I have always liked this moment, where it was just me and my spikes. It is a moment of complete calm where I am able to focus on my goals for the race. I tie up my dirty white spikes only to find myself retying them multiple times before we all make our way to the start line.

Moments before the gun was about to sound, my team and I trot over to the starting line like deer in headlights. Fistbumps and good lucks are given to us from our coaches. No more pep talks, they know better than to mess with a bunch of nervous lady runners at this point on meet day. We get a few last-minute stretches in, each of us going through our own superstitious routine. Jay (our 5th year senior) gathered us together in our box. I live for this moment where it is just us in that tiny box. When we are all grouped together as one in that box. Nothing can beat that feeling (other than running).

Jay set her watch timer for one minute. We all toed the white line as she said,

“ready...set...GO!”

Adrenaline kicks in and not a thing in the world can stop my strong strides. This is my absolute favorite moment before we race. It is only us on the course for that single minute in time; an ambush of orange Tigers finally set loose after a long week of bonding over the shared pain of training.

I wonder if my dad had the same type of adrenaline when he loaded up for home. I am sure he did, by the way his voice sounded when he would call me saying he was on the way. I think I felt the same thing during our runouts as a team.

After Jay’s watch makes its high pitch beeping noise, we stop, gather our breaths, and join as one in a huddle. We all touch our toes together, making a circle on the dewy, green grass. Our hands on one another’s shoulders bring us all in, close. We angle our heads down as the crisp morning breeze cools our steamy bodies. We close our eyes as Jay begins to speak.

“Dear baby Jesus,” she proceeds to say in a southern accent, impersonating Will Ferrell’s famous prayer as race car driver Ricky Bobby. We fill the course with high pitched laughs as Jay says, “okay for real this time, dear baby Jesus, help us run strong today.”

At this point, we are antsy, our legs beginning to wobble side to side like we were shaking some tail feathers. We go around the circle, each sharing a few words of wisdom. My turn comes along and I tell the girls that we have to stay strong in our moments of weakness. I mention that those hills may seem long and steep, but all we have to do is mount up those wings on our feet and soar right on over them. I remind them that we must be fearless for 3.1 miles.

My dad always told me to be fearless when he left for the wheat harvest. I never understood what it meant to be fearless as a child. Only years later, did I understand the lessons in the stories my father would tell.

One of my favorite stories my dad has shared with me over the years was one about his combine starting on fire while cutting wheat.

I sat on the porch, breathing in the night time air as my dad began to tell me his combine started on fire. I nearly dropped the phone when he said those words. I gathered my emotions together, soon realizing he was on the phone with me, he was okay. I spoke to him rapidly, asking a bunch of questions, as little kids do. “Daddy, are you hurt?” I squealed.

“Just a few burns on my arms. My jeans turned into jorts, Logie.”

We both let out matching laughs.

“Daddy, were the flames big, were you scared of them?” I asked.

My dad didn't say anything for quite some time. I sat there, with the phone to my ear, listening to static as he finally said, “No Logie bear, I knew I had no choice but to be fearless.”

I turned my head to the side, in a confused way and asked him, “Well daddy, how were you fearless.”

My dad let out a big sigh as he began to say, “Sometimes in life, things happen that are out of our control. We don't know when things will happen, but we have to be ready for when they do. In these moments, we have to be stronger than we seem, we have to be fearless.”

As a kid, this was a lot to digest. I wrinkled my nose as I asked, “Daddy, did being fearless help you put out the flames of the burning combine?”

“You betcha, baby!” He said back to me.

“Daddy, I still don't know how you weren't scared of the flames.” I said in a confused tone.

“Logie, there are times in our lives when we cannot be scared. I could not be scared, or I would have lost my combine and my customers grain. I needed to succeed for you, your sissy and your momma. It was an uncomfortable situation that I was in but, I knew I had to get those flames out.”

As a kid, my mind could not be serious. “Oh, okay Daddy. Well did you whack the flames with your big muscles?” I asked excitedly.

“Yeah logie, something like that” he giggled back.

This story taught me that uncomfortable situations often lead to success. If my dad had not been fearless towards the flames, he would have lost everything. I understand now, that sometimes, we all have to feel the flames.

After we finish sharing our words, we all throw our hands in the circle, grabbing the nearest finger, and chant, “Tigers on three, one, two, three, Tigers.” We always give hugs and fistbumps to each other as the circle loses its shape. Once again, I lunge down to tie my racing spikes. The girls never get tired of laughing at my nervous tick. Humor helps the nervousness.

We jog back to the starting line without a word, the only sounds coming from our racing spikes as they pierce the soft, cold earth. Shouting from our coaches ignites our running brains. Here I am again, back at the white starting line. My blood pumps with adrenaline, two minutes from the gun sounding.

It's time to toe the white line. I make my way to position at the start, look down and line my big toe up to the edge of the line.

I have always loved that the starting line is white. For me, white is a sense of strength. When I look down at the white, jagged starting lines, I think of lightning bolts. I think of the force within a strike of lightning and how powerful the strike is when it meets the ground. I too, am a lightning bolt, ready to make powerful strikes with the ground as the gun goes BANG.

The first mile of the 5K is a fight. Girls elbow and trip each other. I was used to it, unfortunately. In high school, I was always pushed around by girls; on the course we had no choice but to jostle one another. Not because we liked to, but because we literally had little room. Running outside the white lines isn't an option. If you stray too far from the white line, you are disqualified. So it was a bloodbath for the first mile, literally. Getting spiked happened to every runner, every race.

The first mile is very important because it determines the whole race. Runners are trained to find the right pace for the first mile. Too fast, and you're out of energy for the last two miles of the 5k. Too slow, and you will have a hard time making up those lost seconds the last two miles. After so many races, I don't have to think anymore. My brain and my legs communicate without even including me in the conversation.

When my dad would come home from the harvest, I would run to him after he would jump out of that old white pickup truck.

"Run faster", he would yell to me as I ran my way to his arms. "You've gotten faster", is what he would say to me when I reached his open arms.

The battle among teams rages on as the pack weaves like a snake up and down the hills of the course. Heavy breathing kicks in about 1k into the race (0.62 mi), but adrenaline keeps my heart throbbing as I push towards the front of the pack.

2k into the race (1.25 mi) and I have a steady pace that sets me up for a good spot. I hear my coach's voice from a distance, which breaks my running brain concentration, taking me out of focus. He's mummering some words that I can't pick out yet. With great form, the Usain Bolt kind, I can pick out my coach's voice in a crowd full of yelling mouths.

Over the years of my running, I have developed the ability to shut every other voice out of my head, other than my dad's and my coach's. My coach was jumping up and down yelling, "keep the form, keep the pace! You got it, nice and steady now, we need you". I always got stuck on, "we need you". As a runner, to hear this from a coach can be a great blessing but also a curse. It was always in my head that I cannot fail my team and coaches. To succeed for my team and coaches, I put my body through agony. I trained with the fearless mentality that my body *had no limits*. I made sure that my training times were faster with each rep. Faster times brought more success.

My lungs are burning, my legs fatigued to a point where I can hardly feel them, every stride landing on the white line. That feeling, the lungs burning, took me back to one horrid day in December of 2019.

Grandpa and I were cutting wood from old cedar trees. We were having a great old time doing it too. If others were watching, they would have thought otherwise. It was a cold, frigid day in December. Wind guts howled, blowing snow all over our uncovered faces. We would occasionally spit a few sentences out in Czech to make the cold time pass.

Grandpa was the epitome of a hard working man; he taught me the foundation of hard work when my dad couldn't be there to do it. I remember one of his planters broke down during planting season. Now, planting season is the most stressful and important part of the year for farmers. If that seed does not get in the ground and sprout, you are sh*t out of luck and deeper in debt.

It was very late one night when we were in the shop trying to fix the issue. I don't remember

what was broken but, that's not the point. The point is that my grandpa was out there late at night working his tail off to fix the planter. I was handing him many tools of which I have no idea the names of, and black electrical tape. That damn electrical tape was a life saver, let me tell ya. With his tedious work, he got the planter running again. It was at this moment that I knew I came from a long line of hard working folks.

After what seemed like four hours, we finally finished cutting the wood. I told my grandpa to go sit in the truck and get warm; his cough was beginning to worry me. I tried to move my cold, stiff body as fast as I could while loading the wood in the old, beat up trailer that was probably as old as my grandpa, or even older. I ran back to the truck and saw a big smile on my grandpa's face.

"Proud of you, kid", he said gleaming.

I try to keep my gasping breaths under control as I trudge my way up a muddy hill, or should I say quick sand? Lactic acid has set in, making my legs feel like jello. I feel my body breaking down; I want so badly to stop. My legs feel as if they were going to give out on me. My chest tightens as my lungs burn from the cold air. I begin to perform my regular magic trick of turning purple. I am relatively certain that my O₂ levels drop below 90% (this is a bad thing) making me feel dizzy. Stars begin to appear, bringing me out of my running brain again. I gather myself as I lengthen my strides. I breathe in deeper, giving my muscles oxygen. I hear my strides getting lighter, like a deer bounding through the woods. Things are pleasant for about 400 meters and then a cramp. My left side feels like I am getting stabbed over and over and over again. My breathing becomes faster and faster. I then reach the dreaded state of self doubt. My brain is telling me that I can't finish, that I have to stop. All of a sudden, I hear my head coach screaming, "you're doing great" as I jet into a tunnel of cedar trees. The smell of the cedar brings me back to that night.

Grandpa and I unloaded the freshly cut wood and set it right next to the little cedar tree we cut down early that morning. Grandma always had to have a fresh cedar tree for her christmas tree, so that's what grandpa and I gave her. Gramps and I unbundled our winter clothing and made our way to the kitchen for dinner. It was the perfect evening. Laughs were shared as we went down memory lane. He shared a secret from the harvest with me that night; one that I will never tell. We all cleaned up from dinner and said our goodnights and I love yous not

knowing it would be our last.

My head coach continues to cheer me on as I lead the way out of the trees. My body has gone completely numb as I chase the four wheeler leading me to the 3k marker (2.0 mi) that is too far in the distance. Here, I dig down deep into my racing heart and remember that I am doing this not only for myself, but for the girls who look up to me, and for my coach who believes in me more than I believe in myself. "I got this, I am fearless".

I gasp for air as I close in on the 3k marker. To my surprise, gasping for air quickly fills my dry eyes with running streams. I wonder if this is how grandpa felt that Christmas morning.

It was a normal morning, until it wasn't. Grandma and I got up early to prepare the food for family christmas while grandpa looked out the window at the snow covered scenery.

"GEESE", he yelled with excitement.

He looked at me with glazed eyes and said, "should we go pop em". We all laugh as grandma goes into the bedroom to get ready. Grandpa looked at me, confused and asked where grandma had gone. I proceeded to tell him that she went to get ready.

"Oh, okay", he slowly remarked.

I remember getting a funny feeling after he said that. Maybe I should have gone to shoot geese with him. Maybe that would have stopped what was going to happen next.

A few moments later, he again asked where grandma went. I again told him she went to get ready in the bedroom. At this point, I knew something horrible was about to happen. He told me he wasn't feeling well as he got up to go lay down. Grandma began yelling from the bedroom, "logie, call 911, NOW".

I remember racing to my phone and freezing. I couldn't move, I couldn't speak. Time seemed to stand still as fear rushed into my body. I heard grandpa gasping for air trying to get words. This horrid sound broke my moment of being frozen in time. I dialed 911 as I began to sprint into the bedroom where

life was leaving. I gave grandma my phone; she began to frantically speak to the operator.

Grandpa began to seize. I rushed to his side. Just as I got to the bed, he began to seize so violently that I had to catch him as he fell out of the bed. I felt his trembling body on my hands. I tightly squeezed his hand and I rolled him on his side so he wouldn't choke on the white foam spilling from his mouth. I cradled his head to protect it from an unwanted blow. I continued to squeeze his tired, limp hand. Grandpa rushed back into the bedroom and cried, "oh God".

I asked her when the ambulance would be here.

With a heartbroken look she cried, "not soon enough".

She knelt down beside me and we both held grandpa together in that room. All three of our hands were together as one for one last moment in time as the sun shone through the curtains.

Grandpa had stopped seizing. Grandma and I began yelling at him, telling him to "spit it out", the foam/mucus that is. All grandpa could do was make gurgling sounds. "Where the hell are they", I yelled out loud. Grandma got up and reached for the phone, calling 911 again. As she asked where the ambulance was, Grandpa started to seize again this time, more violently. I positioned my little body down on him as I cradled his head in my lap. I looked down to see my tears on his blue colored face.

I began to feel nauseous as a heat wave from the african desert hit me. "You can't be dying grandpa", I whimpered out. As I held my dying grandpa in my arms, I whispered, "I hope you know how much you mean to me. If you need to leave this pain, it's okay. I'll take care of grandma and make sure she gets her cedar tree every year for Christmas".

His body tensed up as he squeezed my hand letting out a big gasp of air. In that moment, my heart sank out of my body and went to a place that I cannot even describe. I yelled at Grandma saying "we need to start CPR". Grandma rushed in as I layed grandpa in a prone position on the bedroom floor I layed on as a child. My CNA training guided her through what was going to happen next.

I remember frantically giving grandpa 30 chest compressions and then telling grandma to plug grandpa's nose and give him two big breaths.

Grandma left the operator on speaker. She, the operator, heard my guidance and spoke, "you're doing great logan, don't stop until the ambulance gets there". For the life of me, I can't remember what I said to her.

We continued trying to save grandpa for what seemed like hours. The sirens started to hum from a distance. Grandma kissed my forehead as she rushed out of the bedroom to go

open the garage doors.

I continue to do 30 chest compressions. When 30 came, I froze. To see his lifeless, purple face and sunken closed eyes was something I *never* imagined I would have to see.

I pulled myself together as I leaned down to plug grandpa's nose. I gave him two, last breaths of my air as the EMT team bursted into the bedroom.

It's a small town that we live in. I recognized these wonderful people, all of whom knew us enough to know even my father's nickname for me.

"We've got it from here logie, you can stop now", one of them said. But I couldn't stop.

"I can't". I said, still pounding my grandpa's chest.

The other EMT gathered me up in his warm, broad arms lifting me off of my grandpa. I began to realize that would be the last time I would ever feel my grandpa's skin.

A few minutes later, the EMT sat me down in my grandma's lap as we wept together on the bedroom floor. I remember telling grandma over and over again that I was sorry.

"I'm sorry I couldn't save him grandma, I'm so sorry".

We sat there together, tangled up in each other's arms as we watched them shock grandpa's lifeless body with a defibrillator. No sinus rhythm, just that long, dreaded beep. They called it, time of death, 10:19 am.

I finally approach the 3k marker. One mile left I tell myself. You've just got to be fearless for one more mile.

I'm running like a mad woman now. I feel the blood pumping through my veins as I weave through the course. The smell of the four wheeler fumes make me gag as I move closer and closer to the finish line. I feel my heart thumping with excitement as I lead the way to the 4k marker (2.50 mi).

As I race to the 5k marker, I pass up a golden corn field that brings me back home to my roots.

My dad didn't just cut wheat, he also picked corn. Picking corn is crazy let me tell ya. The combine fills with kernels faster than you can imagine. The grain buggy hardly has any

time to dump on the semi trailer before the next combine is full and ready to be dumped.

I spent a lot of time in the combine with my dad. I used to get bored sitting in the combine for hours (as one could imagine). My dad would stop the combine, let the dust settle, and dump me off to go run. He would time me as my little legs would carry me across the uneven terrain of the corn fields.

The Doane crowd is cheering frantically for me as I close in on the finish line. I focus on my form as my body has reached its racing limits.

“Hip to lip, hip to lip,” I mumble over and over again.

I tell myself again to be fearless at this point of the race. My dad always told me “it will only hurt if your mind lets it, you gotta be fearless, girl.” To me, being fearless means being brave in tough endeavours that life likes to throw at us. We all have a choice in life. We can either let moments in time control us, or we can be fearless and control these moments. I chose to be fearless.

I pick up the pace, pulling the sprinter in me out as I reach the tunnel of cheers. My coach is somewhere behind me yelling, “nice and easy into the finish!” At this point, close to the finish line, I am one with myself. I hear my tired breaths puff out into the open while my long strides peacefully meet the damp green grass. The wind makes my oversized jersey top skin tight as my hair swayed back and forth on my bib. With the sun shining in my face, my vision gets blurry as I am steps away from the white finish line.

At this moment, I can't help imagining what my grandpa was feeling in the minutes of his passing. Was his vision blurry when he followed his white finish line to victory, too?

I see my coach, ready to catch me. Two more strides and I cross the finish line as the first runner. I look down at my watch, 10:19 am. I smile with quivering lips; I know my grandfather was with me.

I don't stop running until I reached my coach's smiling face. I fall into his arms. Collapsing after a race was never my best running trait. I lie there in his arms as he proudly tells me, “you did it again kiddo, first place and a new PR. Your dad is going to get a kick out of your time”. I smile tiredly as I ask for my time. “19:00 minutes flat, speedy,” he laughs and

goes on to say, “why so fast today?”

“Memories coach, I raced to and from the memories.” He gave me a tight squeeze as he knew exactly what I meant. Within all these memories, are unforgettable moments, moments that shape us into who we are, who we are meant to be. There was the Hayek history pulsing through my veins that day. My grandpa and dad’s hard work and determination to succeed pulsed through my veins, carrying me to a victory, a success. I am proud to say that my blood comes from two of the most hard working men I know.

I get up, grabbing a cup of chocolate milk from our assistant coach. He gives me a pat on the back while saying, “you’re fun to watch, kid.”

I giggled shyly. “Thanks.” Then I raced back to the finish line to cheer on my teammates as they made their way through the finish line.

I do believe my dad made me the runner that I am today. In his leaving, I ran. I ran from the pain of missing him; I ran to him when he returned to me after those long summers on the wheat harvest. My dad not only gave me unconditional love, he also gave me a passion.

Running has kept me grounded. It’s kept me fearless. It keeps me connected to my dad and grandpa, what they taught me and where I come from. Running will always be a part of me. When one mile ends, the next one begins. Like life. All you have to do is, follow the white lines.

We loaded up the vans and turned left on I-80 toward Nebraska and home. I reached for my dad’s hoodie in my xc bag as the van shook, reminding me of those bumpy combine rides. I laid my head back in the seat as I dialed my dad’s phone number.

“There’s my logie,” he said, his voice reflecting the wide smile on his face. “How’d it go, champ”?

“Well dad, I’ve got a story for you,” I said, as the white lines passed by outside my window.

Art

By Luke Henricksen

Ancient humans sang more than we,
In celebration and as expression.
If you could not sing you could dance,
If you could not dance you could paint,
If you could not paint you could play,
And if you could not do any you could be free,
And that required no lesson.

Art was not a skill, it was a need,
A requirement for being alive.
If you could not hunt you could fish,
If you could not fish you could gather,
If you could not gather you could farm,
And if you could not do any you could still make art,
And you would truly thrive.

Our culture now has strayed from that,
Art takes talent and innate skill.
If you're not a good singer you can't sing,
If you're not a good dancer you can't dance,

If you're not a good painter you can't paint,
If you're not a good musician you can't play
And if you're not good at any you can't be human,
You have a void you cannot fill.

Ancient humans sang more than we,
But the ones who sang are not gone.
If you want to sing you should sing,
If you want to dance you should dance,
If you want to paint you should paint,
If you want to play you should play,
And if you don't want to do any you should be free,
Find your passion to build upon.

Laments of an Immortal

By Luke Henricksen

Tell me what it's worth,
To celebrate my birth.
Ancient history it seems,
Something I recall in dreams.

Tell me what it means,
To be surprised by new scenes.
It seems that I've forgot,
The emotions it once wrought.

Tell me how you feel,
Experiencing each day as real.
Instead of only drifting through,
Never seeing anything new.

Immortality, as it were,
Is a curse, a bane, a lure.
A fish gets close, and before it knows,
The trap-jaws of eternal life close.

I was the fish, as you may know.
The trap is tight, yet I still grow.
Memories I thought I could keep,
Fall away with each eon leap.

But tell me of your life,
Every joy, struggle, and strife.
For no matter how long you live,
Important still, is another perspective.

Leaves

By Luke Henricksen

Swirling, dancing leaves peel
From their branch in autumn air
Yet none come close to let me feel
Intangible, to all but one sense.

Did I not grow the tree from whence
They came before the drift of autumn wind
Came to rip them from the branch and hence,
Taunt me with orange glow?

I can see what autumn leaves show
But I can't catch or hold them at all
And thus I fear the winter snow
When the leaves are buried, invisible to me.

But it is fall, and I think that maybe
If I can catch and hold these leaves
I can put them back on their tree
Where winter cannot block my view.

But the leaves are many, and I've lost many too;
I don't have a way to catch the rest
Winter is coming; there's nothing I can do
I see the flakes, and the wind is cold.

They say this only occurs when you're old
That losing yourself only happens near the end
Am I near the end? Or did these "gold
Years" never happen at all?

Swirling, dancing memories fall
From my mind and taunt me
My tree of self still stands tall
But without leaves, come winter, it won't survive.

ELEVEN POUND BOULDER

By Wendy Hind

I wish I could remove
the eleven pound boulder
in order to have
some peace.

The piece of uncut beauty
has the potential to be skillfully crafted
and beautifully polished,
but is currently rough and jagged.

The eleven pound boulder
looks remarkably similar to others,
yet is completely unique in its
chemical and physical composition.

It's only relief comes at night,
when its allowed to rest and
dreams reveal its pain,
but also its ability to heal.

OUT TO SEA

By Wendy Hind

Beautiful locks of long beach waves
swing to the side as your
head pivots toward the hall
leading to your room.

The moment you know he's sick,
your head lowers by an inch or two
and you slowly turn and wade away.

You've been drowning in
this pattern of sickness and health
your entire life.

We never really talk about
how it affects you,
your life,
your health,
your mental health.

Off you go
to do homework,
or check social media,
or maybe to make your blue
eyes glow by releasing salty water.

The Day the Clowns Cried

Kylie Hughes

After spending so many years on the road, I grew quite accustomed to falling asleep under the lull of the train's engine. Gears grinding and horns blaring eventually became my lullaby. The gentle movement as the train chugged along, helped me fall into a deep dream state. I remember what a peculiar feeling it was to be sleeping on a train that was not moving. There were no gears grinding or horns blaring. Only the sound of my own heart beating and the quiet breathing of those around me.

I always hated the silence. Maybe that's what drove me to become a circus performer. Life in the circus is never silent and it is most certainly never boring. That, and the fact that I had no family and no aspirations in life. The circus has always been known as a safe haven for misfits, and misfit I was. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus took me in as a teen when I had nowhere left to turn. They embraced me and quickly became my family. It was a good thing we were so close because in my line of work in trapeze performances, one wrong move and they will be peeling my broken body off of the ground. So, we practiced together, performed together, ate together, laughed together, and all slept in the same train carts that would take us from one performance to the next.

That night I remember wondering how everyone can sleep so soundly in the silence as they too had grown accustomed to sleeping on a moving train every night. We had stopped just outside of Chicago in Indiana earlier that night. It was something about a mechanical problem that needed to be fixed. While the train waited to be fixed, it sat on the tracks, as passengers slept in the last few cars.

I laid in my small bunk of a bed tossing and turning. I should be tired, with the performance I just had. I should be resting for the performed that would follow in the next few

days. Instead, there was a nagging feeling in the back of my mind exasperating the silence. It must have been about 4 a.m. when I got out of bed to pace. I walked up and down the narrow aisle of the train car, guided by the light of the oil lamps, careful not to wake anyone. Back and forth, back and forth. While I paced, I tried to go over my routine. Flip, grab the bar, hold out hands, catch performer, gain momentum, flip again, grab—The slight creak in the floorboards woke up Jennie, another trapeze performer, like a sister to me. “Go back to sleep,” I urged her, placing my hand on hair. With a sigh, she rolled over.

As I continued down the aisle of the car, I noticed a strange light out the back window. As I was located in the last car, that window led to the rest of the tracks. As I walked closer to the window, I wonder what could be lighting up the tracks at 4 in the morning. I pondered this idea as I peered out the window. In the moment of realization, my blood ran cold. I squeezed my eyes closed and opened them to make sure that this was not just a terrible dream. When my eyes reopened, they welled with tears. That light was coming from another train on the tracks. The light grew larger and larger as the train got closer and closer to our car.

I tried to swallow but my mouth went dry. A single tear streamed down the side of my face. That train was just seconds away from collision. By the way that train was not slowing down, it was a safe assumption to say that no one on my car would make it to see the sun rise that morning. There would be no use to wake up my fellow passengers just for their last moments to be filled with panic. I thought about Jennie, hoping that she went back to sleep and that I would be the only one awake to endure these painstaking last moments. I hoped it would be quick. I hoped that no one has to suffer.

The next moment seemed to go in slow motion. I turned to look at the rest of the sleeping car. These were the people who raised me. There were the trapeze performers, the clowns, the strongmen, the bearded lady, and all of the other people who made the show

happen. I always heard that in your last moments, that your life flashes before your eyes. Well, this was my life. These people, rejects from society, nobody's to the world, but somebody to me. I thought about how none of these people went to bed the night before thinking they wouldn't get up the next morning. But that's life isn't it? One second you are doing what you love, the next second you are gone.

What happened next is an image that will forever be seared in the back of my mind. There were bodies everywhere. So many bodies. The last few wooden train cars were in rubble. Every single person in the last three cars died upon impact. I watched from a distance. Bodies that were ejected from the train lay in the dirt, letting in run red with blood. Two witnesses, ran to go get help. I felt sorry for all of what they saw that day that they would never unsee.

Just when I thought that the worst was over and help was on its way, I could smell the smoke. Inside one of the cars that was on its side, I saw an orange glow growing and growing until suddenly flames spewed through the windows and the entire car was engulfed. The flames did not stop there, they spread to the next car and the next. It happened so fast, that the people inside were unable to escape in time. I remember watching in utter horror. I wanted to help them, I needed to help them, but I couldn't. There was something, perhaps a force greater than myself, stopping me, denying me the chance to go and pull people out.

The roar of the fire was loud, it shattered the silence of the night. Yet, that roar was nothing compared to the screams. People begging for help. Yet, it was even worse when those who were pinned under the debris watched the flames get closer and closer screamed asking for someone to put them out of their misery. I remember watching an old husband and wife. They joined the circus only months ago as part of the crew after their children grew up. They were both pinned under debris too large for rescuers to lift. They watched the flames make their move inward. The husband, with terror behind his eyes, begged the rescuers to kill them before

they had to burn to death. When the rescuers refused only standing by helpless, the wife held an outstretched hand. The husband's fingertips grazed his wife's. They looked into each other's eyes and all that was left in them was love for each other and acceptance that this was the end of their story. I was unable to watch yet unable to look away. I watched them until I lost them in the flames. When all was said and done, they were nothing more than charred bone.

There was one thing that overpowered the sounds of the screams and it was the elephants, crying out in agony. Most of the circus animals were transferred to a different train the night before, yet the elephants were still on, trumpeting as they burned. Rumor has it that today, over a century later, that if you stand at that location during the dead of night, you can still hear the faint cries of the elephants in a plea for help.

By the time the fire department arrived and even managed to get some sort of handle on the fire, it was too late, the smell of burning flesh already lingered in the air. Rescuers consisted of the fire department, nearby residents, and circus workers who were only injured. Sometimes, I think about how the rescuers ever recovered from the things they saw. In many cases they could not help those trapped under rubble. Those who were pulled out of the rubble with minor injuries, screamed, not because of their injuries but because they wanted to die with their friends and family. Specifically, there was a father who survived with minor injuries while his wife and children were trapped under heavy debris. Frantically, he scrambled to pull them out. When he watched his family succumb to the flames before his eyes, he lay on a stretcher writhing in pain, screaming, "I wish I could have died with them." There were so many cases of wives who survived when their husbands did not, children who survived when their parents did not, and friends who survived and did not. An estimated 86 circus workers lost their lives that fateful day with 127 more injured. This was all because the train that crashed into us had

an engineer who fell asleep on the job. The worst part is this was his second job as a train engineer after being fired previously for falling asleep on the job.

Within the following days many of those 86 dead, were buried in a mass grave in Woodlawn Cemetery in Forest Park, Illinois. Since then, the plot has grown as many of the survivors chose to be buried with their family after they lived long lives. The most painful part is that only a few of those who died in the train wreck received names on their headstones. Part of this was because the bodies were so charred and unidentifiable. Another reason is because many people were new or only known by their job. "Smiley" and "Baldy" were written on headstones because their true names remain unknown. My body was one of the unidentifiable ones but I died instantly upon collision. My headstone, simple and with overgrown grass, reads "Unknown Female No. 43." I was buried in the mass grave with the rest of my circus family. In death, I was forced to helplessly watch the rest of that night unfold.

They call the place we are buried is now known as "Showmen's Rest." How am I supposed to rest having seen the things that I saw? How am I supposed to rest knowing that my only legacy as that of many other members, is merely "Unknown Female?" No one even knows my name. I cannot rest knowing that the world has forgotten our story. Very few know the sacrifices made of brave circus men and women on June 22, 1918, "The Day the Clowns Cried."

Lost at Sea
By Mason Morrill

As I sit, huddled in my nest,
Longing for the final surge
That has yet to breach,
To wash away this perpetual anticipation,
I catch a glimpse of a beacon,
Small and distant
Yet muscling its way through the darkness.

Through my porthole at night
I can see, in a window
Across the street,
A single
Lonely
Bulb
Hang
ing
By
A
T
h
r
e
a
d.

A simple fluorescent, left
On by a crew having long
Since abandoned their vessel.

No one has come or gone
From the home, but every night
This lighthouse stands blazing,
Casting its candlelight into the void.

My beacon calls to me, yearning,
But I am left with more questions

Than answers.

Who left you on?

Why leave you on?

Are you a signal of hope, of
Another life braving the storm?
Or are you a warning, a signal
To steer clear of this ghost ship
And the danger it poses to all
Who still stand adrift?

But maybe the simplest answer
Is the truth of my light:
The house was just abandoned long ago,
And someone just forgot to turn off a light.
No solidarity or hope,
Just a misremembered switch.

Maybe that's all that's left for us out there.
Empty sounds. Hollow vessels.
An ocean of echoes without a source.

Here I remain, huddled in my nest,
Longing for the final surge

That has yet to breach,
To wash away this perpetual anticipation.

But until that final rush takes me,
Whether that be to land or sea,
I will leave a light of my own
So that you may see
One other source of hope,
Of perseverance in the face
Of our shared squall.

Untitled No. 3
By Mason Morrill

Note: A / indicates where the next line begins.

Darkness.

The sounds of glaciers shifting, booming, cracking in the distance. This crescendos, shaking the seats of the theatre. This slowly decrescendos into the sound of an ice cube being dropped into water.

It cracks.

Lights crawl up. The sounds continue.

Morgan sits alone in a kitchen.

They take the glass of water to the sink, empty it, and fill it up with more water.

They return to the table. There is standing water on the table that slowly trickles onto the floor.

Morgan opens a cooler full of ice, pulls out a cube, and drops it into the water.

Crack.

A breath.

Morgan repeats this process.

A breath.

Headlights flash through the kitchen window as we hear a car pull up.

Crack.

A car door closes.

Keys jingle and the door opens.

Sidney enters, carrying an exuberant number of grocery bags, and turns on the lights.

SID: Oh, thank God, I was worried you'd gone to bed already...

Sidney continues to unload groceries and run back and forth from the car throughout this.

Morgan continues with the ice.

You would not believe the crowds that are out right now. Like everyone is afraid the world is ending. Or at least that we'll stop making *(Pulls an item from one of the bags.)* dairy-free, non-fat, non-GMO, vegan, paleo, organic cheese, an essential to any World War III survival kit. All these descriptors are meaningless. What the hell is this stuff even made of? How do you even have fat-free cheese, let alone all that other crap. It seems to me that there is a fundamental starting point for cheese, and without that, what do you get? Some flavorless goop that is just meant to trick your mind into thinking that you're eating cheese at four times the cost. That's what really gets me. The price. I get that it's supposed to be healthier because "this is how the cavemen" ate and "we should return the natural diet that God intended for us" when he dropped us into the world six thousand years ago, but something tells me that Neanderthals didn't have *(Picks up package again. Struggling with the word.)* Carrageenan to make their cheese-less cheese more shelf stable while Ugg was out chuckin' spears at the next woolly mammoth to wander by. And since when were doctors all about these holistic, lifestyle diets as a form of treatment? Do they really believe this shit will cure cancer? My guess is they actually have stock in Bullshit and Brothers' Dairy Farm and they gotta help keep those earing reports up, just like every other schmuck with a bottom line in the back of their minds and pockets.

A breath.

Anyway, how was your day?

By now, Sidney has finished bringing in all the groceries and is putting everything away. Morgan has continued with the ice, unwaveringly methodical.

A breath. Sidney stops.

Babe?

Morgan stops. Sidney registers the water and ice for the first time.

MORGAN: It's strange, really. How ice reacts when you introduce it to some water.

SID: What do you mean?

MORGAN: They're made of the same, fundamental building blocks. Two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen. The three atoms required for the beginnings of all life. And yet, with just a simple change of physical state and a short introduction...

Crack.

The shock causes one to rupture and burst. They're so familiar and comfortable with one another. They should be, at least.

A breath.

And, eventually, the ice loses its form, overwhelmed by the surrounding water and just succumbing to a new state. Unable to coexist with the simple difference in temperature.

SID (*Sitting.*): I understand what we're going through / but...

MORGAN: What *we're* going through?

SID: You. What you're going through.

MORGAN: There's a difference between living *adjacent* to cancer and *co-fucking-existing* with it.

SID: You're right, I'm sorry I just thought that / this was...

MORGAN: Well stop thinking and just listen to me...process. Please?

SID: Okay.

A breath.

Crack.

(*Taking Morgan's hand.*) This isn't the end. And even if it were, think of all the time we've had together and still have / to spend...

MORGAN: Who's Jordan?

Beat.

SID: Sorry?

MORGAN: Who. Is. Jordan?

SID: I don't think I know any Jordans...

MORGAN: That's interesting, because one seems to know you. Pretty thoroughly.

Silence.

(Laughs.) I just burst, you know? I thought, I knew we were made of the same structure. The same basic building blocks for this life of ours. I had an idea, of course, I suspected. You're attractive, inside and out. You're passionate about your work. Your cells aren't destroying one another from the inside out. But the surprise drinks out with friends, delays at the grocery store...I just wasn't ready for the shock. So I just...

Crack.

A breath.

The real question is how long it will take for me to just melt away.

SID: ...

MORGAN: What did you share together?

SID: What do you mean?

A breath.

MORGAN: So you don't deny it.

SID: What's the point? We've been together long enough for you to know when I'm lying.

MORGAN: Why?

SID: Because this was the first time I've gotten to connect with someone sexually in over two years.

Morgan slaps Sidney. The sound of shifting glaciers echoes back.

A breath.

MORGAN: How dare you. Is that all we are to you? A connection that only has meaning so long as you can get your rocks off? Let alone the fact that I *can't* have sex. At least you have the option to find some worthless fling to set fire to our...everything.

Sidney takes this in. They get up, take the glass of water and dump it in the sink. They take the cooler full of ice and dump the ice back in the freezer, then return the cooler to a cabinet. Sidney takes a towel from a drawer and begins wiping up the water from the table and floor. They return to the sink to wring out the towel or take another towel from the drawer as necessary.

SID: If it makes you feel any better / I didn't...

MORGAN: Whatever you're about to say, it won't make me feel better.

SID (*Nodding.*): Alright.

Sidney continues to clean.

Why did he come?

MORGAN: He was here for you, obviously. (*Laughing.*) He was dressed as this UPS guy? Or some kind of delivery man. Anyway, I was sick in the bathroom when he showed up, and he kept ringing the doorbell for a good ten or fifteen minutes, which eventually devolved into pounding on the door. At that point, I was going to tear the head off of whoever was at the door, but when I opened it, I see this boy in a *deep* V-neck with a name tag, and tiny brown shorts holding a box with your name written right on the front. Of course, the package he was delivering was *his*. But he really was not expecting to see me.

SID: Why did he tell you?

MORGAN (*Shrugs.*): I guess you can ask him that yourself.

SID: *What* did he tell you?

MORGAN: That you two have been sleeping with each other for a few months now. That you've only just started rendezvousing here for a week or so ago. That you can't come unless you're in control, no matter how much you love to be submissive. How much you love to have your ears played with, and that you tend to bite just a little too hard and need to be reminded of that almost every time you fuck. How you're not a talker in bed, and it drives him about as insane as it does to me.

SID: Why did you want to know all that?

MORGAN: I wanted to see how far you had taken it with him. I needed to know. So I can figure out if this is a situation where I can even consider moving past...*this*.

A breath.

SID: What do you want to know?

A breath.

MORGAN: What did you share? Like...how did you hold each other after you finished? What songs did you jam out to in the car? *Did* you jam out in the car? Did you look at him in a different way from how you look at me? What were some inside jokes you had with each other?

A breath.

I just need to know what was sacred to us.

Sidney thinks, searching for an answer.

Morgan watches.

The sound of glaciers slowly builds. As the sound rises, lights shift to reveal cracks throughout the kitchen.

Lights crawl down.

Blackout.



The Mask

By Bill Norris

I love the logo
But hate wearing it
It's been over an year now
I still can't hear you
Breathing is impaired
I'm sorry, say again
I can't hear you
Your mouth is covered
What did the instructor say?
I don't know, I couldn't hear him either Darn! I forgot again, I'll be right back
I know I had 3, or 4 of them in here
Ah! There you are sucker
I've had both shots
Why do I have to wear this?
I'm sorry, say again
I can't hear you.

Did you say something about a man and a date?

2:32

By Jess Pelchat

When she was a child she was warned about the Jabberwock
She fought it all her life

But at 2:32 am, she would fight one last time
And lose

She took her vorpal sword in hand

The blade went snicker snack but much
Much slower than that

At last the Jabberwock was slain
And she, the girl, in no more pain

And now, who here would win or lose?
The girl or Jabberwock? You choose.

The vorpal blade had left her dead
For the Jabberwock was in her head.

Monster

By Jess Pelchat

If no man is an island, you left me alone and less than human
Before you I was a monster yet, a creature with misshapen dreams
Too abstract to live and too concrete to die

But how cruel to strip such a creature of their illusion of humanity

And love. Oh, love.

What be love but a drug and life our dealer

But love and life are wicked sisters

They lie and deceive

They steal back what they have given

The hypocrites, they create only to destroy

There is but one promise to be kept by these witches: the promise of an end

And here I walk, wandering

I run, skip

I dance into this darkness unknown

For dark is more known to me than the light

And I never feared.

Mystery House

By Jess Pelchat

She is a mystery house.

No one can quite understand. Full of confusion, twists, turns, dead ends; a veritable maze that everyone has given up trying to solve.

For you enter the maze and you take a wrong turn and then the sobbing fills your ears, almost like a song, a chant echoing down her barren halls but her voice is not melodic for all it does is scream.

And there you are, lost and you can smell the stench, the rotting of all the lives she has ruined.

Their ghosts still wander, scratching my wallpaper, tearing her up from the inside and shrieking slander and horrors that can be heard even over her cries.

All they can do is ruin her as she did them, give her what she deserves.

And they beg you to stay away from her hidden doors and trick staircases lest you be trapped too,

For all eternity.

They escape but they leave behind their demons to torture her for what she has done.

Hopefully one day she'll learn her lesson and shut her doors for good.

Or, better yet, burn herself to the ground.

Part of Me
By Jess Pelchat

December 5th

You took a part of me. But no, you didn't take, I gave.
I gave you a part of me and you gave me the same.

Most of me thought that you would stay forever.
Part of me knew better.
But I still gave you that part of me.

Part of me says it doesn't matter.
It's a social construct.
It's my body, I can do what I want with it.

Part of me wishes it had been more special.
Part of me wishes I had saved that part of me.

If I had listened to the part of me that knew you would leave,
I wouldn't have given you that part of me.

Part of me doesn't care.

Part of me misses being whole.
If I had given that part of me to someone who would stay,
the rest of me wouldn't feel so betrayed.

Part of me still feels diseased on the parts of me that you touched.

Part of me says it's alright, that part of me never existed in the first place.
It doesn't matter who has it.

Part of me knows you don't deserve that part of me.

Why didn't I speak?

By Jess Pelchat

Why didn't I speak?

I wanted to speak but I didn't.

The opportunity presented itself, a silence ready to be filled
But I sat in the center of the empty box
My words building up behind my tongue, like water against a dam
There was a second that I could have spoken
Then that second passed
Someone else spoke
And I was drowned
Out

Why didn't I speak, why didn't I speak?

I have things to say, words, emotions, thoughts, a soul that needs bearing
But my tongue turned to wax and my lips to stone
I am a soul trapped behind my own eyes
Why didn't I speak?

I try to be something, to exist.
Not a nothing, to be blown away with the wind
I wish to be bigger than I am
Bigger than my form
Bigger than my body
I wish to grow within my bones
And show the world that I exist.
I am not nothing.
I am a something.
A beautiful, loud something of volume and space
I am a small, quiet breath
Of swirling art.
And I am here.

Both My Reasons

By Maddy Sladky

My melancholy is all I can sense

Because I'm upset with you

And me

I try to fill the void with every man I meet

And at night those tears are triggered Of the sinister thoughts regarding my own life But

I don't want to hurt you

My Love

By Maddy Sladky

The vastness of your steel, blue eyes Has nothing on my radiant mind

The masculinity of your tattoos,

Revel your toughness

But there is a settle kindness in your element Over the past year, your name has defined me

You have became the sun to my earth My center rock if you understand

Whatever this feeling, I can't explain Except for always finding myself standing... Next to
you.



Untitled Art Piece 1
By Bailey Cordwin



Untitled Art Piece 2
By Bailey Cordwin



Untitled Photography
By Bailey Cordwin



Untitled Photography
By Bailey Cordwin



**Untitled Photography
By Bailey Cordwin**



Untitled Photography
By Xiaoyang Guo



Untitled Photography
By Xiaoyang Guo



Untitled Photography
By Xiaoyang Guo



Untitled Photography
By Xiaoyang Guo



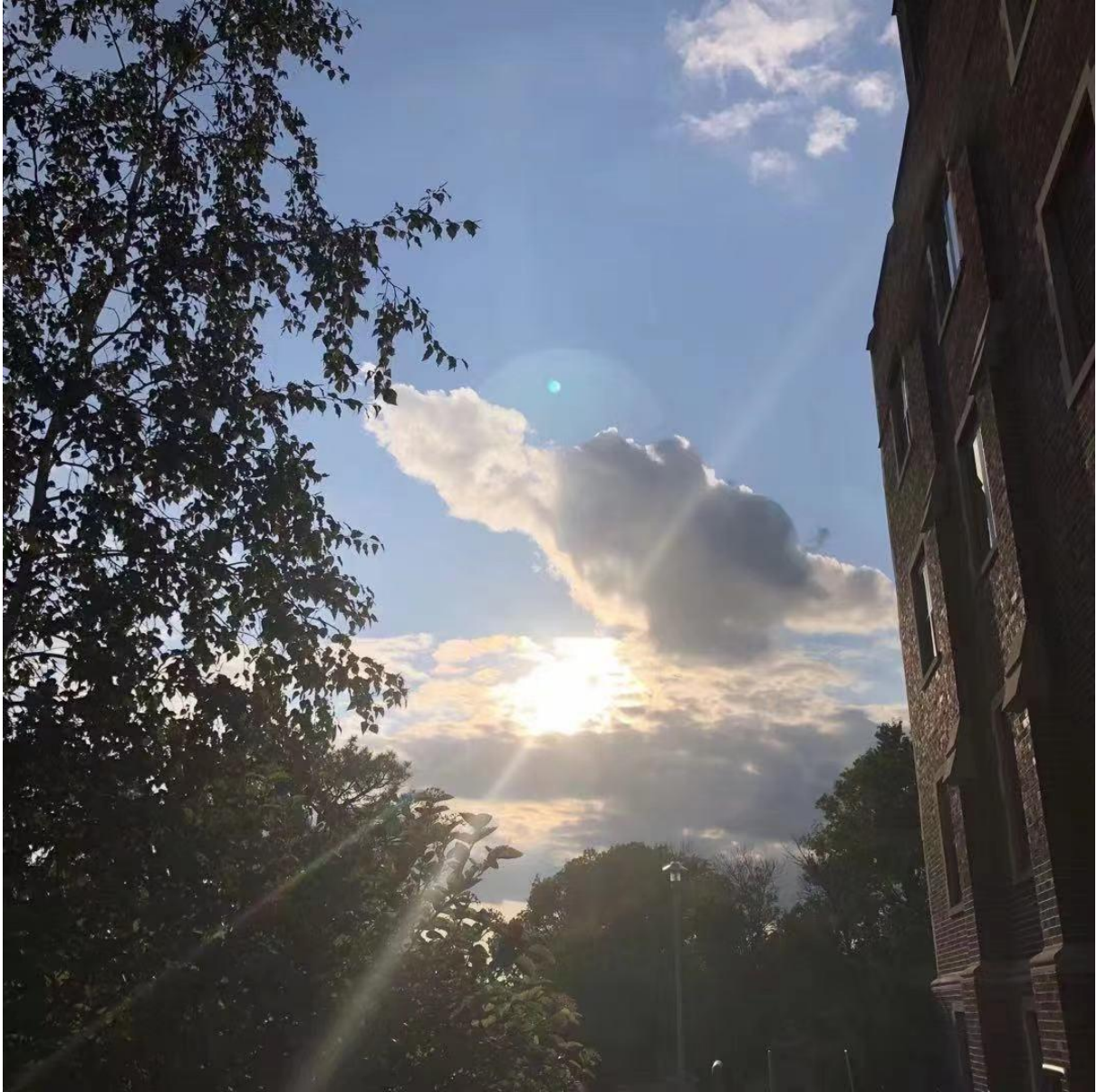
Untitled Photography
By Xiaoyang Guo



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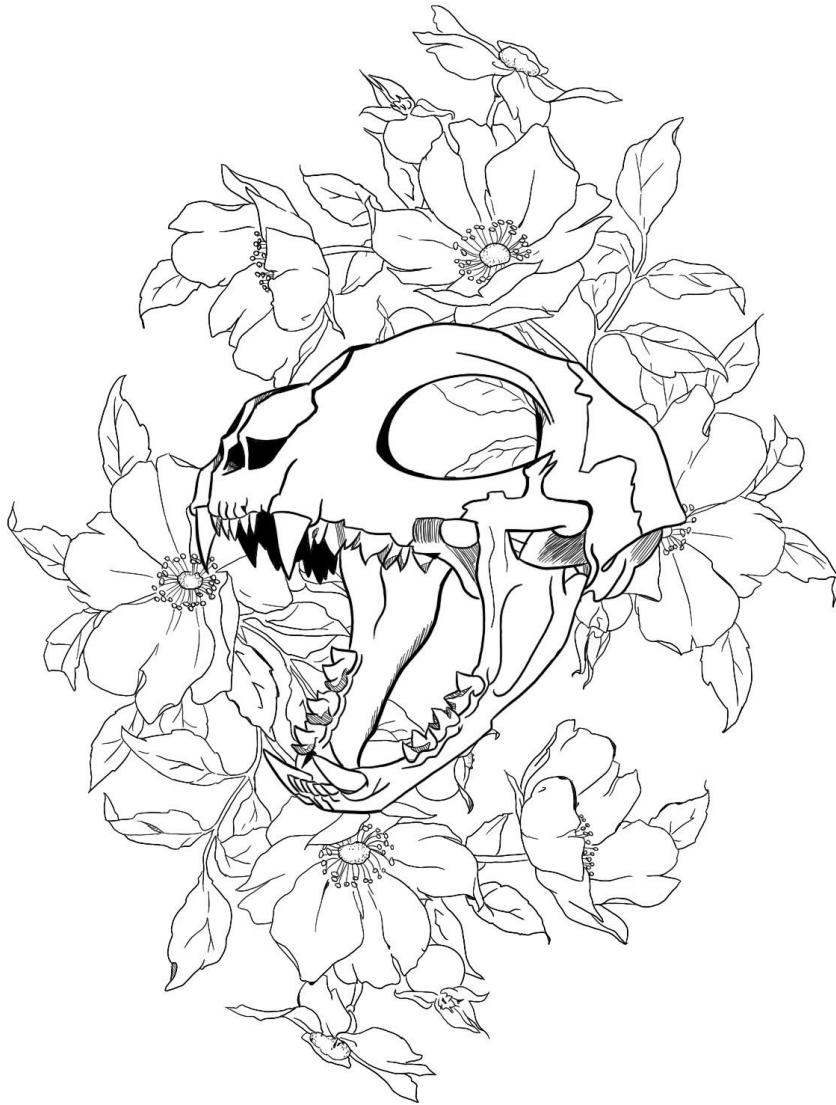
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By Xiaoyang Guo



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Untitled Photography
By Xiaoyang Guo



Untitled Art Piece
By Savannah Householder



**Untitled Photography
By Savannah Householder**



"Grayscale"
By Jameson Officer-Thurston



"All the Piercing Eyes"
By PJ Ramsey



“Cycles”
By PJ Ramsey



"Fallen Queen"
By PJ Ramsey



"Frozen in Time"
By PJ Ramsey



“Fuzzy Shadows”
By PJ Ramsey



"Boxed Identity"
By Emma Ryan



"Closed Curtains"
By Emma Ryan



“Heritage”
By Emma Ryan



“The Treehouse Treasures”
By Emma Ryan



"Timed Recollections"
By Emma Ryan

BIOGRAPHY
GUEST WRITER: WENDY HIND

Wendy Hind, PhD/JD, writer and poet, is a former university vice president, professor, policy advisor, and attorney. She has published health related poems and essays in several journals including, *The Healing Muse*, *Blood and Thunder*, and *Hektoen International*. Her Poem, "My Tattoos," was featured on New York public radio and is included in a soon to be published chapbook by the same name. Hind is also the founder and curator of the tiny poetry project.

“In three words I can sum up everything I’ve
learned about life: it goes on.”

Robert Frost



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