

THE

SPRING 2021

# OWL





# OWL

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# Table of Contents

Letter from the Editors.....	9
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## Art

Owl.....	8
017.....	18
016.....	26
002 and 003.....	36
012, 000, and 004.....	42
019 and 018.....	58
Where Will I Go When this is All Over.....	59
Classic Breakfast.....	72
Eclectic.....	73
Bayard Rustin Poster.....	84
006 and 015.....	99

## Fiction

Lullaby for the Fall.....	19
Reforestation.....	28
Unfinished Poems About Her, Love, and Metalinguistics.....	60
Of Memories In Route.....	74
End of the Line.....	85
In Making Sense of Places Inhabited, Then and Now.....	95

## Interview

T. Kira. Madden.....	47
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## Plays

GRUMPY.....	51
-------------	----

## Poetry

Autumn.....	27
The Tree.....	34
Ghazal.....	37
Made in Florida.....	39
The Island of St. Thomas.....	41

Aquarian Age.....	43
Lotus.....	46
Heavy Dreaming.....	56
Good Kids.....	69
For Marcus.....	81
bugs in the bathroom.....	100
Witch.....	101
Phantom Lady.....	103

## Nonfiction

The Value of A Bird.....	10
Team Property.....	92
Contributor's Notes.....	104

# In Remembrance of Dr. Sean I. Kay



September 7, 1967-November 13, 2020

“The Beatles ended one of the greatest rock and roll records ever – Abbey Road – with this line: ‘And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make.’ ... Sometimes the simplest message is the most powerful. If it is true that, in the end, love trumps hate and fear, then certainly all you need is love.”

- Dr. Sean I. Kay

*Rockin' the Free World*



"OWL"  
Olivia Anderson



# Editors' Letter

From All of Us Here at The OWL

We appreciate everyone who contributed their pieces to the magazine. We are inspired by your commitment to furthering the arts of nonfiction, fiction, playwriting, poetry, and visual images. A big thank you to Professor Caplan for encouraging us as we decided and allowed us the freedom to make our mark on this OWU tradition and to Jill Kerins for printing our vision. The Owl does not reflect the views of Ohio Wesleyan University nor of any one editor, but was a collective effort with many eyes. Thank you to our readers, who are a passionate and important part of this cycle. We couldn't do it without you.

# The Value of a Bird

by Teddy Zayas

*Compiled and arranged information comes from “Birds and Humans Are Depicted Together in this Rare Scene From 12,000 Years Ago” (2019) from smithsonianmag.com, an article titled “Humans Cannot Survive Without Nature” (2019) from humansandnature.org, answers to a question titled “How are birds similar to humans?” (2018) from Quora.com, an article titled “Newly Discovered Convergent Genetic Evolution Between Bird and Human Vocalization Poses a Severe Challenge to Common Ancestry”(2014) from evolutionnews.org, an article titled “What if humans had no emotions?” from philosophy.talons43.ca, and an article titled “Without Nature, We Are Nothing” (2018) from think.cz.*

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What is a bird?

Do you know what makes a bird different from other animals?

Is it the bill or the beak? Is it the eggs? Is it the wings?

What is a human?

Are we merely just a piece of walking meat with emotions?

What does it mean to be human?

Or, putting the point a bit more precisely, what are we saying about others when we describe them as human?

Answering this question is not as straightforward as it might appear. Minimally, to be human is to be one of us, but this begs the question of the class of creatures to which

“us” refers.

When it comes to birds and humans, physiologically, we’re both warm-blooded.

Psychologically, birds are capable of the same mental tasks that mammals are, and much more specifically, some of them are in the rarest of company with us — they are near-sapient, just like our close relatives.

The Eurasian magpie has passed the mirror test for self-awareness. Some birds are tool-users, able to count, and some have been able to learn some rudiments of our language.

Some birds, like some mammals, are capable of empathy, altruism, and appear to mourn, or at least acknowledge, their dead.

Corvids assume characteristics that were once ascribed only to humans, including self-recognition, insight, revenge, tool use, mental time travel, deceit, murder, language, play, calculated risk-taking, social learning, and traditions.

We are different but by a degree.

What if people had evolved as birds?

Humans evolving from birds isn't as crazy as it sounds. Modern humans are unique in the animal kingdom, but the list of evolutionary adaptations that were required to get us where we are is actually pretty short; an advanced brain, cooperative social structure, toolmaking, and language to speed up cultural transmission can carry a

species a long way. Some bird species are at least partly there. Who knows — if a roll of the evolutionary dice had wiped out early humans, would some other species have achieved our level of success instead? Perhaps most importantly: Would bird people be able to fly? Would we lay eggs?

I look at the question, and scratch my head — humans evolved from birds? That sounds familiar.

I do a quick google search to confirm, and yes, it is a familiar concept. Throughout history, people across the globe kept imagining people who had come from birds. They imagined them to have bird-like qualities - flight, singing voices, etc.

In Buddhist mythology, two of the most beloved mythological characters are the benevolent half-human, half-bird creatures known as the Kinnara and Kinnari, which are believed to come from the Himalayas and often watch over the well-being of humans in times of trouble or danger.

Birds have appeared in the mythologies and religions of many cultures since ancient Sumer. For example, the dove was the symbol of the ancient Mesopotamian goddess Inanna, the Canaanite mother goddess Asherah, and the Greek goddess Aphrodite.

A 12,000-year-old piece of limestone found in Spain includes something extremely rare: depictions of both human and bird figures. Only a handful of examples of Paleolithic European scenes depicting birds and humans

interacting have been discovered to date.

The only other sites where humans and birds appear in scenes created during Palaeolithic Europe—which stretches from approximately 1.4 million years ago until around 10,000 years ago—are located far away from Margalef. The caves in Lascaux, France, include a half-man, half-bird figure as well as a nearby image with a bird on top of it. Images of birds and humans also appear engraved on a baton in the Teyat region of Dordogne in southern France and on the Great Hunter image found in Gönnersdorf, Germany.

It remains unclear who those early-arriving prehistoric people were; their presence is marked only by cuts and scrapes.

In their biological communities, birds perform a variety of functions that benefit other beings in these communities, including humans.

Homing pigeons have been used to deliver small messages since the time of the Persians. Mail delivery by animals has been used in many countries throughout history.

The archaeological and historical records suggest interdependence between humans and vultures for millions of years. Like other animal species, early humans probably used these birds as beacons signaling the location of meat, in the form of carcasses, in the landscape.

Can you imagine a world without birds?

How strange it would be to wake up to a world without birds; it would be an eerie silence, a disturbing quietude,

one that would be immediately missed.

We are often surrounded by nature's symphonic bird song, yet don't recognize it, nor often pay attention to it. Yet this beautiful wonder of life signals something that gets to the heart of an essential balance in nature.

How could we enjoy spring without the birds flitting busily in our garden or dropping by to check out the flowers in our urban window box? Can you contemplate America without the soaring bald eagle or even those scavengers like the pigeons and gulls that clean up discarded food scraps on our city streets and waterfronts? How diminished our lives would be without them.

What would happen to our planet if human beings simply disappeared?

Take the keystone from a bridge, and what happens? The entire edifice collapses. On earth, much the same can happen; many species represent this keystone of nature, and birds are no exception.

The fact that Earth hosts not just life, but intelligent life, makes it unique.

When looking at intelligence, researchers examine how animals use cognitive abilities such as thinking, acquiring knowledge, sensory perception, memory, individual recognition, and language, while sentience, or consciousness, deals more with how animals perceive what is around them and what they feel or think.

To have this uniqueness taken away would not make Earth, Earth.

Most researchers agree that animals experience more primal emotions, such as fear and aggression. These emotions, after all, are responses to a threat and can save an animal's life. But what about the more abstract emotions, such as love, hate, or jealousy?

I cannot name an emotion that is uniquely human.

Without emotions, our lives as humans would be void and pointless, with no motivation or inspiration to do great things. We would live in a dull world where nothing had meaning. Ambition would not be captured or understood and we would operate like robots or artificial intelligence.

Think of emotions as color. All the neon and highlighter colors would turn into a gray scale. The world would seem black and white, figuratively and literally.

Literally, our world would be black and white. Figuratively the world would lose meaning or purpose.

Emotions describe physiological states and are generated subconsciously. Usually, they are autonomous bodily responses to certain external or internal events. By contrast, feelings are experiences of emotions and are driven by conscious thoughts and reflections. This means that we can have emotions without having feelings, however, we simply cannot have feelings without having emotions.

Nature works simultaneously with humans, and humans work simultaneously with nature to produce an ongoing output and input of life on earth. Whether we realize it or not humans are interconnected with nature. Humans

cannot survive without nature.

Nature is one of a kind. It cannot be tampered with. It is evident that this relationship is a critical component of the cycle of life. Unknowingly, we develop these bad habits and are not conscious of the damage that our bad habits cause. This unconsciousness causes us to become separate from nature. If we try to separate ourselves from nature our life cycle brings us right back to nature.

Humans and nature are like a baby to its mother.

They will always have a bond. Because even when humans are unconscious of their negative impacts on nature, we still are affected. We forget that our existence is not entirely controlled by us. But that is a two-way relationship between humans and nature. Since we unconsciously make decisions and ignore the effortless energy that nature keeps going so that humans can be sustained.

Without nature, we are nothing.

Birds make our gardens interesting, they bring with them a small bit of wilderness into our parks, and they ultimately bring us closer to nature. As well as the direct impact on our ecosystem, much art and poetry has been inspired by these wonderful creatures. A world without them would be a dark world indeed.

The benefits birds bring us aren't just cultural. Birds play an essential role in the functioning of the world's ecosystems, in a way that directly impacts human health, economy and food production - as well as millions of



other species.

Birdsong enriches the outdoors for many people, and birdwatching is one of the fastest-growing recreational activities. Birds also were the primary inspiration for human flight.

Some might not realize the tangible value of birds, but it would be foolish to underestimate how tough life would be without them.

Simply put, a world without birds would be chaos, and what we take for granted is often fundamental to our way of life.



"017"

Elise Crawford

# Lullaby for the Fall

by Isabella Bernstien

There is a noise outside. It sounds like the loud whisper of the wind on that tall tree that stands in the backyard, but she thinks she remembers it falling to the ground in a thunderstorm the fall before. Yes, she remembers. She hadn't been afraid of lightning for a couple or so years, since she turned seven, maybe, but that night when the old tree fell she remembers crying under the covers as the dog barked at the nothing that haunted the world outside. Was the dog alive back then? It must have been. It barked when the tree fell. She remembers being thankful the dog was so loud because her parents would not hear her cry and know she was still afraid. Yes, the tree had fallen down just a few months ago, she remembers, but when she looks out the window, it stands there quietly as it always has, every morning and every middle of the night when it seems like every single person in the entire world is asleep but her. The tree didn't fall. It must have been a dream.

The sound is a blurry mystery, the strange fading line between what is true and what isn't. It must have been a dream. But she is awake now, and the silence of sleep is gone, so quickly. Something seems odd, she realizes. From somewhere far beyond the glass window there is the sound of the birds chirping, softly and cheerfully and so quietly she finds herself unsure they are really there. Every morning the bluebirds sing, she knows, but never any earlier than sunrise. It could not possibly be late

enough, because the sky is still pure darkness, the sun hidden somewhere above she cannot reach to grab it. What season is it, again? It must be late spring, she thinks. It's still the season for the bluebirds to sing, but if the sun has yet to rise, they should not be waking her yet. It's not time yet, it's definitely not time. Couldn't be. It's late spring, she grows more certain as the delirious quietness of sleep seems to fade completely, but a thousand tiny shivers run through her body, her arms and her spine and her thin legs, and is it really spring? It feels like an early December morning when the street outside is already sprinkled with hopeful Christmas lights that stopped blinking sometime in the middle of the night, and then, snow begins to fall, and there is no school today. But it could not be December. The bluebirds would not be singing, then. Something is strange.

She trembles with the cold, but the bed covers are too heavy, the weight on her neck almost choking, almost unbearable. She uncovers her weak body, and there is something strange, she begins to notice after her eyes finally get used to the darkness of everything. The covers are light green cotton, but she so clearly remembers going to bed under the flannel white with the little colorful butterflies Mom had sewn. Dad had read her a story, one about a princess or a fairy. It was her favorite bedtime story, she thought, but now she could not really remember what it was about. He read her the book and kissed her forehead and turned off the yellow lamp and covered her with the butterfly flannel covers. Hadn't he? She reaches for the lamp, but all she grasps is empty air. The lamp

used to be here, didn't it? It isn't, though. Everything is so strange. The bed is too big, too cold. The window used to be on another side of the room, and the walls seem to be a cream shade of white, but when she fell asleep they were still baby pink. It's so dark, dark like winter nights without any power, but she can see everything so clearly, now, every shape and every color, even though the night light that used to be on the shelf seems to have died. And when she looks at the tree outside once again, she is unspeakably terrified; the trunk is much thinner and a darker shade of brown, the branches weak and partly naked, and though she can see the leaves so clearly, something within, some part of her brain that is still asleep, stops her from understanding whether they are blooming or falling. Is it fall or is it spring? The tree is not her tree. This is not her room. Her instinct is to yell for her father, but she is nine now, and it has been almost two years since she woke her parents because of nightmares. Is her father even home? The house feels empty. Her instinct is to yell for her father, but some odd thing deep within her does not let her be afraid. There is no reason to, really. This is not her room. This must be a dream.

She laughs quietly at her silliness. Mom always says being able to laugh at your silliness is the very first sign of growing up. Tomorrow, at breakfast, when she really wakes up, she will tell her parents about this dream. She will tell them about the skinny tree and the bluebirds and cream walls, and how she looked in the mirror on the closet doors and she looked like an old woman, small and frail, the lines on her face so real for a second she forgot it

was a dream. Mom will smile kindly. Dad will laugh as he makes them all eggs. She will get on the bus to school and go to class and maybe pass Patrick a note during math. Is tomorrow Sunday or Monday? She can't remember. She will wake up tomorrow and eat eggs and forget this dream entirely, probably. She laughs. Where did all the lines on her face come from, so quickly, overnight?

She gets up from the bed, for no particular reason. The creaky wooden tiles are freezing against the sole of her feet, but it doesn't seem to matter. The coldness is unthinkable like she imagines it would be to roll around naked in a pile of Christmas snow. It stings and bites like a thousand tiny ants, but it doesn't hurt at all. Things never really hurt in dreams, she thinks. No, it doesn't hurt. Instead, the freezing air feels almost like an embrace, like finally being in her mother's warm arms after two long weeks at summer camp. Everything smells like chocolate cake. Even if the cold did hurt, it wouldn't matter, because everything smells like the chocolate cake Mom always bakes for her birthday. It isn't her birthday yet, but someone must have baked a cake. Is it her birthday yet? It can't be. She would remember, she loves her birthday. But there must be cake in the kitchen.

She walks down the stairs carefully and holding her breath, so as if not to wake anyone up. The house seems very empty, though. Is this her house or a house she made up for this single dream? She can't remember. Her body feels light but her legs are too weak, her weight keeps shifting and balance is hard to find. But it couldn't bother

her, of course. On the wall against the wooden staircase, there is a crooked line of framed pictures following the way down. There is one of her they took a couple months before, outside at their sunny backyard, standing on the picnic table during one of those family barbecues. Mom was wearing a blue and white polka dot dress as she held the camera, and Dad was behind her making one of the jokes he always made so we would laugh for pictures. It seems like it was just yesterday. The tree stood steadily in the background.

She doesn't know anyone in the other framed pictures. They are all just variations of strangers' faces, collections of wine glasses and big dogs and birthday parties and unknown living rooms and odd clothes and backgrounds of places where she has never been. She doesn't pay too much attention to them. She doesn't pay too much attention until the last one. She stands at the last step, still holding tightly onto the banisters. She doesn't know what it is about it that silently yells for her to stare, but she cannot take her eyes off it. It's the face of a man, dark curly hair and honey eyes and the unpretentious smile of the happiest people. She has never met him. He might be in the other pictures, maybe, but she has never met him. She could not say his name if she tried, she could not attempt at guessing what his voice sounds like or what songs he likes or what movies he hates or if it was him who painted the walls cream. She has never met him, she's sure, but something about his eyes is so terribly familiar. She must have met him in a dream, once. She must have. It feels like she has dreamt of him a thousand other times. An

unspeakable, unexplainable urge to burst into tears almost takes over her trembling, weak body, but for some reason the urgency of it all cannot quite reach her. She does not cry. She misses him desperately, though she does not understand why. Something deep within her aches and burns, but her wrinkled face remains unmoved. She stares for a little while.

The kitchen is dusky and empty. It smells of chocolate cake, but there is nothing on the counter. She looks through drawers and cabinets, behind milk cartons and bottles of medicine and rotting bananas, but the cake isn't anywhere. Is this really where the silverware used to be? Strange. She holds onto the counter. She is very sleepy and her legs are quite weak and this is a very, very strange dream. In the darkness of the kitchen, she sees shadows of colorful days moving around. There are so many of them, like tiny fractions of the same memory, and she sees it all in the back of her eyelids, as if she stared at the sun for too long. There is a woman who looks a bit like her mother by the oven, cracking eggs on the side of a frying pan. The woman laughs at a joke she can't hear. She thinks this slightly familiar face was in some of the pictures too, but it's hard to be too sure. By the side of the fridge the man with curly hair stands, pouring just a little milk in two mugs filled with coffee. The coffee smells like chocolate cake. The man makes a joke she doesn't understand, and the three of them laugh.

They seem so real she almost believes in them. It's very easy to believe in them. They seem so real it is as if she



dreamt for the two of them an entire life, an overflowing collection of summers and falls and winters and springs. She has dreamt of them, she is sure. They seem real like beautiful things so often do in dreams, but when she opens her eyes the kitchen is still empty and still very dark. She holds onto the counter, but her body weighs on her legs, and balance has become too hard. Everything is very strange and she is very, very tired, and upstairs seems way too far. Holding onto wooden chairs and that credenza they bought at the flea market a few Christmases ago, she finds her stumbled way to the burgundy couch. It's so cold, and the couch is so, so soft, so comfortable. Things are almost never this comfortable in dreams. If she falls asleep here, her parents will think she snuck out of bed to watch TV. They will ground her, probably, but she is so tired and her legs are so weak that right now tomorrow doesn't seem to matter very much. She'll apologize for getting up and explain to her parents over breakfast this strange dream she had that she was an old woman with an entire life or so of half colorful memories. Mom will laugh, Dad will smile. Maybe they won't ground her, after all. That's a problem for tomorrow. It feels like the sun is about to rise, but through her half-opened eyes all she sees is the darkness of the middle of the night. From somewhere far, though, she hears it again. And with the morning song of blue birds chirping, she dozes off into quiet sleep.



"016"

Elise Crawford

# Autumn

by Allie Otworth

The trees all lose their leaves with patient ease  
all basked in hues of red, like fallen men  
the barren branches lay like rusted swords  
the grandest time of year, a dying pyre  
The time is nigh, for all that lives to die  
a war-torn field of bloody hues, the sun  
will fall below the sky to leave us cold  
and bury broken bodies under snow  
I met you in this brutal autumn wind  
back when my hope was fresh and we were young  
I held your hand to walk across thin ice  
So careless of the cracks that stretched so wide  
Our garden sits, the gate is locked, and all  
the flowers curl and die, but just like them  
I shall return when time is right, more full  
of life, and blood to pump my aching chest

# Reforestation

by Katerina Barry

There was a kind of light that is only found in moments like this. Influenced by the way it filters through the heavy morning fog, wringing itself in between the groves of pines. It whispered dew onto the window, like a ghost begging to be let in. Even here, sheltered by the topper of the bed of my truck, the air felt heavy on my skin. My body pulsating with a soreness that as I had only learned after so many bent backs, always came before the solidity of strength. A binary of give and take. Laying here, I close my eyes, and steady my breathe until I could imagine every blood cell traversing their course- dotting my transparent body like stars.

There was an easiness in the buildup of bubbles as the percolator continued to heat over the previous evening's embers. I knelt close by, warming my tight hands above the small heat. Like the winter bark of trees, they felt calloused and rough. The crevices of lines and scars momentarily met in folds as I rubbed palms together. Anticipating the cold wetness of my work gloves, I indulged in this small comfort while watching the hazy sun ease towards its peak and the framing of everything else in between. The blue jack oaks with their cobalt tinted leaves; the sweet gum's golden smelling sap, encrusted on the surface of bark after so many warm days.

Slowly, a rustling began, as planters left their scattered camps, tents, vehicles, and an occasional pull-behind

trailer. As this job called for constant movement, the ways in which people chose to make up temporary homes was always telling of their character. There were the young kids, reluctant to leave home but driven by some idea of needing to prove something, reasoning and answers I imagined they had not yet grasped- who insisted upon the pop-up camper with its dual batteries and laptop outlets. Then the even greener ones, who slept upright in the seats of their Camry, whose cracking beer cans and whiskey lullabies often fluttered through the Texas pines as soon as the sun went down. Naive but hard-working, with still soft hearts.

Then there were those more accustomed. The married couple with their expert lean-tos made up of tarps and bevy sacks. Not fully committed to the life of the laborer, but whose habitual company every season spoke of a love for simpler things. Some nights, her rare soft humming voice could be heard over the stirring of her teas, the muffled tap of metal against the iron pot, its presence warming the barren air across the grassy field between camps. Other nights, when sleep came less swiftly, a small light would resonate from their provisional home, where he would awaken to write the makings and prophecies of his untold dreams.

There too were those men whose livelihoods began and ended in work like this. Whose sun wrinkled faces and leather necks proved glimpses of the only life I could now fathom for myself. Simple and unassuming, yet rich with a depth of seeing something more akin to urban dwelling

may go their whole lives not knowing. A thing unspoken. Only recognized in the sheen of their marbled eyes, in the expertise of their swinging arms and the lifting of shoulders. An understanding, or at the very least, absolution. Careful in the lives they openly shared with others, saving only a story for telling on unexpected evenings around the fire. It was in men like these to which I fashioned my work ethic, trusting that with this alone, all other things would eventually make sense of themselves.

As more faces emerged around the morning embers and good mornings were shared over steaming coffee, we turned to the grey winter skies, wondering to each other if the heavy rains would come this season. Anticipating the growing ambiguity of the elements, I grabbed my gear and headed towards the distant wood line.

The hickory handle of my planting hoedad lay slumped across my shoulder, rubbing its hues of greys and black aged grime into my shirt before preparing myself for its first swing. Holding it up high over my head, my dominant hand slid down the handle as I dropped the blade down heavily, caressing the indentation in its wood, worn down from so many movements identical to this.

Then, a relief when the narrow blade fell easily into the earth. I could never judge the intensity of the land before this moment. In some places, the ground was so thick with clay we would have to work twice as hard for half the desired outcome, while others were too wet with swampy ditches making the likelihood of the fragile young trees' survival rates unnervingly low. Looking out over the

cleared woods in front of me against the just soft enough dirt, I was reassured of a gratifying day and long hours.

Here, there is an image of a wasteland. Where what little life left clings to whatever it can, save for the feasting ticks which flourished, a rare bird in flight, and the fresh pine saplings that dotted my path forward. Yet there was a comfort to this. A guideline, or a map to move forward. It is in these things, I thought, which I have come to find ease. Some semblance of a forward motion. Maybe not so exaggerated as the paths many budding men find themselves urged into traversing, but still just enough to mime some type of substantial enough direction.

There was too, a certain quiet found in the logged acreages and desolate plains which was unlike the quietness in any other field I've so far experienced. It was unlike the cold rhythmic beating of the Atlantic's waves against the small skiff where I pulled in seaweed for feed, fertilizer, and at times, upscale snack industries. Unlike the trudging through blueberry fields, where the sounds of harvesting rakes clanked against boxes on every side, with the incessant buzzing and biting of black flies.

Here, there was an almost apocalyptic silence competing with nothing else but the cracking of death below my feet and the rare thudding of a distant somebody's hoe against cold ground. Somebody, whose sight was so rare until you slowed down or they picked up speed, passing each other, or sometimes for a moment working alongside each other, until someone's blistered fingers called for a pause.

It was a scene where the peculiarities in felled timber are

the only landmarks. Stumps and trunks, too gnarled to bother with processing. Left behind by the lumber workers to decompose, make way for the young saplings that tugged at the leather sack on my back. Up to three hundred in one haul, one by one, in spacings of six to eight feet, until I'd run out and walk back to camp for more.

As time slowly passed, sweat began to trickle past my sleeves and cap. The pellucid droplets stung the scratches which covered my forearms from so many unforgiving brambles and thorns that often inhabited and flourished in the wasteland remains. At times, they were unavoidable, with no other escape but to crawl on hands and knees to make my way through. But this was a pain I savored. It inspired contemplation of something more tender. A reflection of things society suspects as inherently undesirable or ill.

“What kind of person would want to live the life of a migrant laborer?” Unsettled, unprioritized, misguided, or a lack of agency. I too, at times, wondered what it was that drew me away from more socially acceptable institutions—the stability in professions, in educational degrees, and the purchasing of homes for a potential family. Husband, wife, and kids. Debts and retirement savings. A routine to manifest an idea of comfort and safety, entombed by concrete walls and glassy skyscrapers reflecting the constant movement of a self-promoted and proclaimed advancing world.

Instead, the only developments that could manifest the



realization of my desires were found in the singular thing I could discern as factually true; the limitlessness of the body when paired with an unwavering mind. Muscle as it hardens under thinning but stiffening flesh. The sun-scorched freckles and burnt backs. Glimpses into habitats of almost wildness, or at least, what is left of it. For some, it is a work in monotony and repetitive motions, but for others, a type of worship that transcends pulpits and pews. One only found in the meeting between physical tenacity and the supple endowment of the earth.

Reaching the end of the plantable terrain, I stood upright, facing the woods. Leaning my ho against the ground, I pull the empty sack from my back to shake the loose needles from its depths. The veils of gray high up in the sky mimicked the cool breeze that penetrated my damp clothing.

A faraway thunder rang out while the last of the visible and lingering sun trickled through the dead of pine limbs, introducing the commencement of a soft cold symphony of mist and droplets. The smell of rain passed through, saturating my senses. In the distance, I heard the holler of another tree planter, who I imagined stood witnessing the same scene. The hearty rains and downpours indeed would greet us again this season as I always have and even now could continue to trust on.

# The Tree

by Lucas Lidenmuth

My favorite tree is the one right by the lake,  
the weeping willow whose branches stretch towards the  
earth like

slender fingers reaching to caress the shoulder of a lover.

The willow whose leaves are just beginning to yellow,  
weeks behind the oaks and birches of the forest  
whose leaves have already ripened off the branches,  
brought on by the early October chill heralding the new  
season.

Sunlight glints, glimmers off the surface of the lake,  
sparkling like diamonds, but infinitely more valuable.

The willow's roots hug the earth like they're afraid to let it  
go,

and sometimes, when I sit there among the roots, resting  
my back against a spot of soft moss,

I think I belong here.

A black ant crawls, steadfast and brave, up one of the  
willow tendrils,

seeking out an objective I can't know with the dedication  
of a mindless soldier. Marching, climbing, counting the  
steps until she reaches somewhere she didn't expect to be.  
She stops at the moss, unfamiliar. Lost. But I know exactly  
where she is. A flutter in the distance--brownish silhouette

against the glittering water. A butterfly, not a monarch but almost the same colors,

riding the breeze wherever it takes him, flower to wildflower, blues, purples, and reds. He drifts through his task, undisturbed by a turbulent mind.

The shine atop the water is disturbed, rippling the light.

Must be a fish, but I haven't seen anything more than a splash.

She doesn't come above the surface. Trapped in such a finite place, I think it must be hard for her, must be lonely, must be suffocating.

Every creature is alike in some ways, after all.

The cool wind grabs at the willow, pushing just enough to help it sway, dancing its soft, gentle, unimpressive dance that I could watch all day. These wooden monuments withstand the tempests of time

like nothing else can but the earth itself; but even so, I know that in twenty years, the willow will die.

Those slender fingers, that graceful form, the elegant simplicity,

everything I admire most about it will be gone, a hollow husk, a memory. But I'll still come to the willow's grave.

I will remember it,

all the long hours spent pondering, admiring the vibrant world around it, and some day, I will join the willow in its eternal slumber.

"002"



"003"



Elise  
Crawford

# Ghazal

by Joey DeRusso

Leave behind your voice for all when you're gone.

It would be a shame for me not to recall when you're gone.

Emptying out the rest of the house, memories overflowing  
the cardboard boxes. Your watches and music albums will  
be in the U-Haul when you're gone.

Driving through Patten, taking mental snapshots one last  
time.

I can't forget petting the sheep and cattle at Bradford Farm  
in the fall when you're gone.

Gas got low on the Highlander, had to stop at the old  
Rutters for a fill up. You're going to miss those cherry and  
blue raspberry ICEEs when you're gone.

The thunder cracks above me, the clouds' droplets  
running through my hair. Who's left to tell if it's the rain  
or my tears on my cheeks when you're gone?

I dry up, using the Grateful Dead t-shirt you got from  
Woodstock as a towel. We will never again have that ball  
when you're gone.

Finally get to the new abode, not too far away from shore.

Hopefully have brought enough wherewithal when you're  
gone.

I still hear your voice, fluttering in the wind alongside the  
bay.

Even the seagulls' cries can't mute your calls when you're gone.

Gliding my finger across the port of the boat, waiting for you on the dock. Will I be ready to be the captain of the Crystal when you're gone?

Of a life already filled with journeys and adventures, we have come so far. Why then, Joe, does it feel like my life has stalled when you're gone?

# Made in Florida

by Sarah Jonassen

This place'll fill your lungs with salt,  
Hollywood Beach, sandy plain with  
square houses, square apartments, bare feet.  
As kids we dug past the silt till we reached clay.  
You were flesh, and I was made of the same  
gray earth between our nails, our toes. We  
slept facing the waves washing dead fish and  
tiny bones onto the shore. When would  
the water take us too?  
When we were teens, we swam.  
The sea was so heavy with salt,  
we felt like Lot's wife staring at Sodom.  
In the end, we didn't swim much.  
We laid on the beach and kissed,  
your tongue warm and wet like a  
living thing, my mouth was the  
underwater cavern we found  
last summer, cold and wet and hard,  
and you said slipping in was like  
icy water on a summer day.  
You hear music from a yellow house on stilts,

playing electronic dance, red light reflected in the  
windows,

the clinking drinks bright and colorful,

and walk away from the shore.

Go on without me. I was never meant to leave.



# The Island of St. Thomas

by Alexander Gillooly

Remember

Visiting the shore

The rolling waves crash onto the beach  
As the tide rolled  
in

There was peace

Distantly

The lights of the boats

Faint lights shining against the water  
Will the party end?

Unlikely

Suddenly

High winds shake the boats

Heavy rain strikes the once calm waters  
The trees blow  
over

Destruction

St Thomas

Beautiful island

Did you hear about the hurricane?

It stole the party

Not the soul

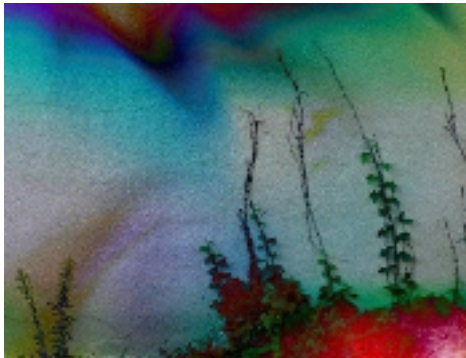
"012"



"000"



"004"



Elise  
Crawford

# Aquarian Age

by TaTyana

When astrologers speak about the Age of Aquarius they are describing a phenomenon that refers to the earth's movement backward (or in "retrograde" motion) into the sign of Aquarius. As you know, there are 11 other signs of the zodiac — the earth will retrograde in each one. It will take the earth 25,868 years to visit all 12 signs. If you divide 25,868 by 12 signs, you will get roughly 2,100 years to a particular "age". Thus, once the Age of Aquarius is upon us (and many astrologers, myself included, feel we have reached this point) it will stay the Age of Aquarius for two thousand years. The "precession of the zodiac" that underlies this principal was first discovered by the Greek astronomer Hipparchus of Nicaea (c. 190 – c. 120 BC). It is due to a slight wobble in the earth's rotation. The precession of the zodiac is a term that describes the constellation that lies behind the Sun at the vernal equinox, which changes gradually over time. Rather than negate the dates of the Sun signs, this precession adds a unique tone of character to each of the signs. But classical astrologers do not feel the precession of the zodiac changes the inherent qualities of the signs.

The age before the Age of Aquarius was the Age of Pisces. Since the earth is moving in retrograde motion, we have just left the Age of Pisces, which marked the years 1-2000 AD. This time coincides with the age of Christ and Christianity. Pisces is considered the last sign of the

zodiac, a compendium of all the signs that came before it, from Aries to Aquarius. Pisces is the sign known for universal love, compassion, self-sacrifice, altruism, creativity, intuition and deep spirituality. Pisces know the truth of the universe but can't quite say why they know it. It doesn't matter, for Pisces know that "truth" is always in flux. To Pisces, what is in the human heart is true, for it is true to the soul. Pisces is an introspective sign. This Piscean mindset has been the way humanity has approached the world since we evolved and has colored everything that we have encountered during that period. Early Christians used the symbol of the fish (symbol of Pisces) as a secret symbol of their faith. The emphasis on washing of the feet as a ritual signifying purification of the spirit ties into Pisces symbolism as well, for Pisces rules the feet. Pisces "carry" the cares of others and often have sore feet. Christ spoke of his role as servant to his flock, which is also a very Pisces notion. Pisces says, "I believe," whereas Aquarius, the age we are in now, says, "Prove it to me scientifically." Christ's mother Mary embodied all the qualities represented by the Pisces polarity of Virgo, namely, modesty, commitment to service, and acceptance of what must not be changed. In Pisces, there is a strong need for seclusion, and Christianity puts value on retreats, convents, cloisters or spiritual pilgrimages. Aquarius puts emphasis on group activities and community, thus we have the Internet and the eye of the global village which we call television. Aquarius is a very social sign. Pisces is

something of a “psychic sponge.” Pisces like people too, but need regular time to themselves to rinse away the everyday cares they have absorbed. **The Earth Has Seen Six Ages**

Astrologers of the world community generally agree that mankind has experienced six separate “ages,” dating from the first appearance of humanity on earth. When each period starts and ends is slightly imprecise because of the huge time frame involved. (Over 25 thousand years, and there is always a plus or minus tolerance to any mathematical curve.) Also the ages overlap slightly because, in fact, some parts of the zodiac also overlap in the heavens. The signs of the zodiac are of unequal sizes, too, with some signs taking up more real estate in the heavens than others.

# Lotus

By Dmitri Ashakih

Fill my lungs with water and plant the lotuses there.

Lay me under the midday sun so the tubers may grow  
pale roots around my ribs as the leaf stalk protrudes  
from my throat. Hurry before the pink blossoms unfold,  
come close.

# Interview with T. Kira Madden

*T. Kira Madden is a nationally acclaimed literary essayist and the author of Long Live the Tribe of Fatherless Girls.*

**Q: How do you know when a novel is finished, in particular, what moment told you that this novel was finished? Did you find it difficult to stop writing?**

A: I think it's a strength for some people that they know they've taken a piece as far as they can take it. I'm interested in repetition and I'm interested in revisiting the same work and editing and changing things and revising and adding on, so really that process of continuing the same piece would be my process for my whole life if the industry or publishing didn't literally tear it from me. So I don't have a good instinct for when something is done.

**Q: Do you often find yourself shaping your writing to what “feels right” subconsciously or do you tend to start writing with a clear plan?**

A: Great question; definitely the former. The bulk of writing for me, craft-wise, is trying to tap into those subconscious decisions and surrender myself to the page. As a control freak, and as someone who does like to have a plan, writing is a place for me to really let go of that. I can go in with a rough idea and sometimes I can go in with a strict outline but I always have to be ready to change my plan, to make mistakes, and listen to those mistakes telling me what might be the proper direction for the story.

**Q: Why did you choose to write this novel in the style of fragmented essays and did you ever feel pressure, whether it be from yourself or others, to write in a more traditional autobiographical style?**

A: I wrote the only memoir I knew how to write and I think that's important, to always lean into our interests and the things we know how to do. I am interested in fragmentation and I love the short form. I was a fiction student before I wrote non-fiction and my interest in fiction was short form, like under 500-word flash pieces. That's what I find really exciting. The only long pieces I have are short pieces tacked together with hopes that no one will notice that's what I'm doing [Laughs]. I think there is a lot of dignity and artistry in fragmentation and a cohesive linear hero's journey plot arc is very specific to a certain western white canon. I don't necessarily fit into that nor do I think I should.

**Q: How difficult was it for you to write this memoir? Did you struggle with sharing the intimate and personal parts of your life as well as your family's lives? What helped you separate the past from the current life you are living?**

A: The expected answer is always that it was really hard to share the most intimate details of my life but it honestly wasn't [laughs]. I think that's because I'm a really shy person who's always struggled with communicating and with having any agency coming from an abusive household. Writing is a way for me to finally get to speak and do it in a safe way, where I feel like I can have my time to build what's inside of that book. It allows me to introduce myself to the world in a way, to have some form of control when my life has felt like it lacked control and I



lacked a voice. There were difficult conversations I had to have with family and friends and people who are in the book but for the most part, it went really well. It's vulnerable, but the scariness is overridden by the joy and connectedness I feel with people when they read the book and share their experiences with me.

**Q: At the beginning of *Long Live The Tribe Of Fatherless Girls* you wrote, "While the material in this book comprises extensive research, interview content, photographs, and journals, much of it is based on memory, which is discrete, impressionable, and shaped by the body inside of which it lives." Were there any particular memories that you struggled to portray to your satisfaction?**

A: I think I did the best I could with the recollection and building the memories. And what I mean is, memory can be collaborative and many of these pieces were pieced together because I had conversations with other people and they were able to bring other details and images to the scene. I did my best in terms of photographs, the research you mentioned in the author's note, and those conversations. I'd like to think there is nothing too wrong [laughs]. If that is the case no one has brought it up with me yet, knock on wood. There are certainly memories that are blurry or practically nonexistent but I still did the best with evidence I had to build the scene for the reader and that required making some things up. Which people don't like to hear with non-fiction but that's how it works. Dialogue, things like that, requires literally making things up to the best of our ability with the evidence we have and the conversations we have.

**Q: Is there an essay in your memoir that you like the most or liked writing the most?**

A: I think *Womanly Things* is one that makes me laugh a lot when I read it. The one with the wicked witch of the west and my queer awakening as a young 90's clueless child. It brings me a lot of joy and it's fun to celebrate those moments of queer awareness without understanding. My crown jewel of the book in my heart is the essay *The Greeter*, about my mother. Which was a really difficult one for me to write but I felt proud of that piece from the moment I wrote it. I think there is so much love there for my mother and honesty with something she had trouble talking about for a really long time. I know she was moved by that piece and I felt as if I offered humanity to addiction which is so often a damaging trope in media. The trout scene is my favorite craft move, when I found that ending I felt really excited.

**Q: Let's talk about your upcoming fiction novel. What are you most excited and or nervous about in writing this new book?**

A: It's so new it's not sold, there is no publisher. I have to finish writing it first and I feel so scared of this book and that's what makes it feel worthy of my time and attention. I think sometimes we have to write the book that won't get out of the way. Maggie Nelson I believe has called it a "boulder book" when she tried to write other projects and her aunt's murder, *Jane Murder* was the book, and it was the boulder in the way of the other writing. I thought *LLTTOFG* was my boulder book and in some ways it is, but then this book came.

**Q: You mentioned in the reading you gave last week that you felt like you weren't done writing about sexual assault, so why shift to fiction to continue that discussion in your upcoming novel?**

A: I felt like hangups with my own story were too strong and too emotionally flat. I think something can be an intense strong feeling and flat at once and by flat I mean lacking perspective and dimension. In terms of my own legal case, that only wrapped a year ago. I still just feel extremely angry and that wouldn't make for an interesting book. It would be a rant if I were to just write about my own case and how that case failed me, how it failed his other victims and survivors, how this person's parents testified against me. All of these things that make me angry. How the system failed him, the abuser, when he needed help with mental health. I don't think you can really write about something in an interesting way when you're not willing to take a step back and see the light, the shadow, the good and the bad, and the messiness. It's an issue I care deeply about for all the reasons we've talked about, even today, of the #MeToo movement, the hierarchy of perfect survivorship, and what it means to parent an abuser.

So I thought, with fiction, I can really take my time to step aside, take other people or versions of other people, other cases, and do research outside of my own experience to learn more about what that does mean for a parent of an abuser? What does that mean for other survivors who don't get to write a book? To have those conversations that I hope in the end might help me find some peace.

# GRUMPY

by Danny Rodriguez-Hijo

Author's Note: *Grumpy* is a short, experimental take on the story of Snow White, in that the dwarfs, named only by their number in which they enter the stage, represent different moods and how people can affect and be affected by how others act.

*The stage is dark and fairly barren. A spotlight comes on to reveal ONE played by an actor on their knees, just like every character with a numbered name. ONE reacts poorly to the spotlight, as if they have been blinded, and then look out to the audience in a huff. They cross their arms, bothered.*

ONE. Grumpy!

TWO. (*Entering with a kind smile, looking around the space as the space is now lit up with more stage lighting for the whole space. To the audience.*) Kindly. (*Walking up to ONE.*)

ONE. (*Muttering to herself.*) Grumpy...

TWO. (*Now beside ONE, speaking and gesturing in a sympathetic nature.*) Caring. ONE. (*Getting annoyed.*) Irritable!

TWO. (*Caught off-guard but attempting to help.*) Sympathetic.

ONE. (*Even more bothered.*) Peevish.

TWO. (*Again, emphasizing the difference in the beginning of the new word..*) Empathetic. (*ONE gets mad and walks away from TWO a few feet. Beat. TWO repeats the same tone as before.*) Supportive.

ONE. (*Really aggravated now.*) Grouchy!

TWO. (*Attempts one last time.*) Concerned.

ONE. (*Wishing to put an end to the banter by quickly listing off words.*) Cross! Crabby! Prickly! Testy! Bearish! Factious! Cranky! Snappy! (*Drawing out the final word to make the point known.*) Ill-humored!

TWO. (*Beat. Taken aback by the outburst.*) Pitying.

*ONE and TWO both sit in silence on different side of center stage; not too far apart and not too close. THREE enters with a smiley disposition upon their face.*

**THREE.** *(To audience.) Happy! (Chuckles to themself. Sees TWO and approaches them.) Rapt.*

**TWO.** *(Happy to see a positive remark.) Warm.*

**THREE.** *(Reciprocating.) Content. (Taking note of ONE, asking TWO.) Sad? TWO. Unsympathetic. (THREE nods in understanding, heading over to help ONE.) THREE. (Approaching ONE from behind.) Sunny.*

**ONE.** *(Turning around.) Crusty!*

**THREE.** *(Rebutting.) Cheery!*

**ONE.** *Crotchety!*

**THREE.** *(Trying to strike a middle ground.) Gay?*

**ONE.** *(Raising an eyebrow, then turning away with a judgemental attitude in their voice.) Touchy!*

**TWO.** *(Seeing what just happened and coming to THREE's defense. To ONE, in an accusatory tone.) Sensitive! (ONE brushes it off. TWO brings THREE to the opposing side as before in an attempt to comfort. Patting them on the back in a family-esque embrace.) Consoling.*

**THREE.** *(In a sad manner.) Sad.*

**TWO.** *(Consoling.) Comforting.*

*TWO continues to hold onto THREE, letting THREE rest their head upon their shoulder. FOUR enters with an upright, confident posture and a smile of reassurement.*

**FOUR.** *(To the audience.) Confident! (Walking up to ONE.)*

**ONE.** *(Noticing FOUR and yelling, wishing not to deal with any banter from them.) Disagreeable!*

**FOUR.** *(Pausing in response. Beat. To audience, unfaded.) Cool.*

*FOUR walks center stage, a little further up stage than anyone else, reclining on the floor in confident, show-offy positions. FIVE enters with heartfelt eyes.*

**FIVE.** (*To the audience.*) Loving. (*Immediately taking notice of the situation with TWO and THREE and rushing over to help.*) Caring.

**THREE.** Sad.

**TWO.** (*Affirming.*) Caring.

**FIVE.** (*Rubbing THREE's back.*) Tender. (*Beat.*) Fond. (*Beat.*)

**TWO & FIVE.** Warm.

**THREE.** (*Back upright, wiping off their face.*) Content.

**TWO & FIVE.** (*Embracing THREE.*) Warm.

*SIX enters, not really noticing others or the audience.*

**SIX.** (*Off to the side, towards audience.*) Thoughtful. (*Observing the embrace of TWO, THREE, & FIVE.*)

**TWO & FIVE.** (*In an inviting tone.*) Caring!

**SIX.** (*Dismissive.*) Preoccupied. (*Walking over and observing ONE.*) **ONE.** (*Beat. Noticing SIX, getting uncomfortable.*) Short-tempered! **SIX.** (*Again, dismissive.*) Absorbed. (*Walking center stage, by FOUR, observing them.*) Musing.

*SIX stays there, hand on chin, thinking to themself. SEVEN enters, looking frustrated.*

**SEVEN.** (*To audience.*) Offended! (*Observing the stark contrast of moods between the three different sections of the stage. Deliberately approaches ONE and stands, waiting in an upset manner.*)

**ONE.** (*Notices SEVEN and turns to face them directly and stares back with the same scowl. This goes on for way too long. Deciding to test the waters and not be as cold by being calm.*) Bad-tempered.

**SEVEN.** (*Greatly bothered by this and over exaggerating.*) Insulted! (*Acting weak, heading over to TWO, THREE, & FIVE.*)

**ONE.** (*To self, humorously.*) Ornery.

**TWO.** (*To SEVEN.*) Compassionate.

**FIVE.** Nurturing.

**SEVEN.** (*Again, in a swooning motion.*) Wounded!  
(*Making their way to the center stage with FOUR & SIX.*)

*They do not notice them, which angers SEVEN. They try again to overreact and get their attention, but when none is given yet again, they fall to the ground in a huff in front of them, facing the audience, arms crossed.*

**SEVEN.** Hurt!

**THREE.** (*Walking up to SEVEN.*) Joking?

**SEVEN.** Aggravated.

**THREE.** (*Trying to lift their spirits.*) Glowing!

**SEVEN.** Vexed! (*ONE hears this conversation and begins to get upset again.*) **THREE.** (*Trying again.*) Beaming?

**SEVEN.** Miffed!

**THREE.** (*Final try, not confident.*) Delighted...

**SEVEN.** Peeved!

**ONE.** (*Hearing enough of this and deciding to end it.*)  
Peeved? (*Pointing to a person for every word.*) Peevish!  
Peppery! Chippy! Eggy! Short-fused! (*Accenting in a weird way.*) Waxy!

*Seeing everyone has stopped what they were doing and appear saddened, ONE finally feels proud of himself and turns away from everyone in a huff. Everyone else is saddened and disheartened, and sort of lined up, facing the audience.*

**TWO.** Unkindly

**THREE.** Unhappy.

**FOUR.** Unconfident.

**FIVE.** Unloving.

**SIX.** Unthoughtful.

**SEVEN.** Un... offended? (*Thinks to self, shaking head.*)  
Offended.

*SNOW WHITE enters with bags in tow. She is excited and enthusiastic and almost motherly to the Dwarfs.*

**SNOW.** (*Not seeing them yet.*) Everyone, I'm back. I even

got some extra apples this week because I know how much you all love them. A cruel irony, I know. So, you missed little ol' Snow? (*Finally seeing what she's walked into and that they are all sad, she grows very concerned.*) Oh no, what happened while I was gone? (*ALL murmur to themselves in a frustrated tone.*) Did you all get caught up in trying to name yourselves again? (*ALL stop murmuring, look amongst themselves, and then nod. Attempting to embrace them all at once.*) You're okay. (*Slightly disciplinary.*) You guys cannot get caught up in all that! You're not just some labels, you're people. I mean, little people, but people. Just be yourselves and let your actions speak for who you are. I love you all the same, with or without names, because I can tell exactly who's who by how you act. Did you know that? (*ALL shocked and amazed, shaking their heads. Embracing them all again.*) Each and every one of you is unique, and words couldn't do you justice anyway. (*ALL light up and smile.*)

ALL. Happy!

SNOW. (*Laughing to herself.*) I'm glad you're all happy now. You know what? I say we all make our way to the kitchen and enjoy some delicious apples together. What do you say? (*All let out celebratory noises.*) Come on, let's go! (*Grabbing her bags again and leading them off stage.*)

*Blackout.*

*End of scene.*



# Heavy Dreaming

by Allie Otworth

I know that I won't have to wait long, since I texted her on the way,

so she comes quick from above, skipping steps, rushing to kiss me while her dog barks atop those craggy stone stairs.

It has seen me here for years, yet still it barks, over and over, like the drone of an alarm, unwilling to be ignored;

I wish it would stop and let me dream this heavy dream.

This is still the girl I love. I know because she tastes like coconut chapstick, and her hair is short, but long enough to hold and rub between my fingers, or clench within my fist.

When she hugs me, I can tell she's still running. Her body is

hard but soft where our chests meet. She still fits there like she belongs — not like she's trying to make herself fit.

We're not comfortable yet. Our hands are still shy. I haven't

traced the hills and valleys of her back, or mapped the delicate

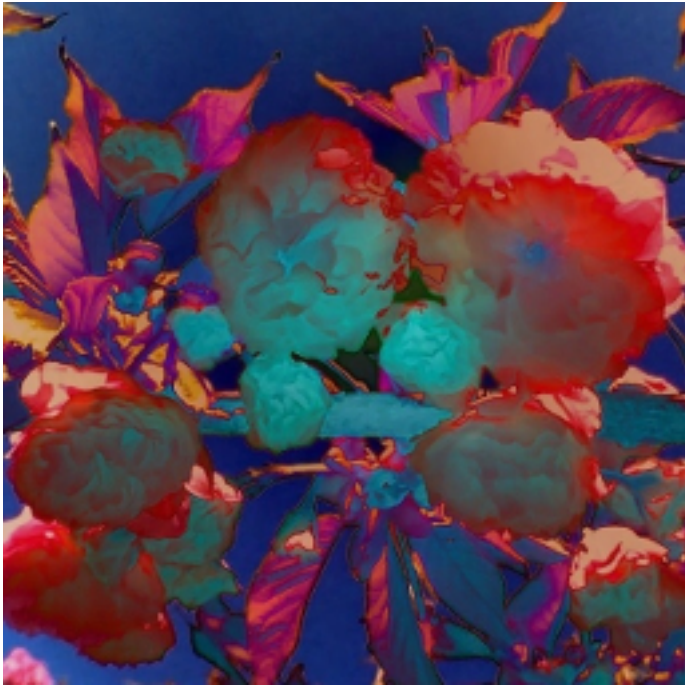
spots along her legs and stomach. She's new and fresh and mine.

I feel seasick when she leads me inside. This is how sailors

must feel while sirens lure their ships to the sharpest  
rocks.

Let me crash again, like I did before.

"019"



"018"



Elise Crawford



"What Will I Do When This is Over"

Olivia Anderson

# Unfinished Poems About Her, Love and Metalinguistics

by Isabella Bernstien

And it's as always an alluring alliteration: the dreamlike descant of the first time I hear her laugh, the blissful break of the ice between us, the simplest, sweetest sound of her nails against a glass of white wine between the stories we share, the frightful freedom of the first secret she will ever tell me, the timid turn of my metal key as we open the lock to a lifetime or just a few months, the delicate shuffling of her dark-blue dimity dress between my fingers, the easily envisioned eager tapping on the keyboard comes in the early morning because of course, I will have no choice but to write about her, the wishful whispers by my ear which wake in me a well-known warmth and in the dark a wide wistful smile, the unmistakable unique rhythm of the blithe breathing of someone who not so long before was nothing but a slightly stranger.

Same melodic soft sounds, the never-changing soundtrack to the start of something beautiful, always so easy to believe in.

The day after always brings the sweet aftertaste of her lips with which inevitably comes the bitterness of the agonizing truth about a poet who falls in love too easily. The first half of the first page is always filled with half-finished sentences, and I scarcely ever really know how to finish them. She is alluring, amazing, she is

beautiful, bewildering, she is captivating, delicate, dazzling, she is entrancing, fantastical, graceful, she is honestly so pretty, hopefully forever, and at some point between verses, I begin to run out of words.

I collect uncountable anaphoras about her, whoever she is, the same first half of a sentence each time I am sure I will finish, each time I am proven wrong. I collect uncountable adjectives that seem to fit just right for every poem I start and never finish, for every girl I write about, whoever she is, and I collect uncountable nights in all of which live the same dream, over and over, a dream that whoever she is this is the girl about whom I will finally write that one perfect poem. I collect uncountable words that are supposed to mean something, but each verse they mean a little less, bound to the pile of unfinished poetry about girls I have begun to forget, and as sunrise haunts me with the crude reminder of time fading, I refuse to let myself notice I don't quite remember whatever it was about her eyes that I loved so much last night.

The day after always brings the sweet aftertaste of her lips, and with it inevitably comes the bitterness of the agonizing truth I refuse to see, the truth about a poet who might have fallen in love with her too easily, whoever she was.

And every single time I close my computer or throw the pencil behind my shoulder and I promise myself, for the millionth time this year, I will get back to it just later, this is the poem I will finally finish. I begin just then to play a romantics favorite game, a never-ending tournament

between me and myself – the game of hyperboles, when every single day lasts a thousand years, and in every single second there is not one thing but the color of her eyes.

I am then certain she is unquestionably and indisputably the most beautiful girl I have ever seen, perhaps simply because I need her to be. And if I ever thought it was someone else, anyone else, what a fool I was, the biggest fool that ever lived, a man in love but a kind of love unlike this one, because that lasted only a second or two, and this time it will last forever and perhaps even a little bit longer. This time I know she is all I have ever asked for, all my dreams were about even before I understood it was her face I saw in the darkness every night.

I am then certain her lips are softer than those of any other woman almost as beautiful as her, shaped so perfectly like a heart, a kiss that tastes like honey and expensive wine and reminds me of poetry I could never write. In her eyes live a million different stories about love and a million different shades of the same color, each more divine than the last, which fade quietly into each other and in them, I see the picture I am now certain is the most heavenly piece of the universe I have ever hoped to inhabit.

In every hour before I call her again an entire lifetime starts and finishes – I die over and over again. The far too patient ringing of the phone seems to be mocking the poor desperation of my heartbeats, and when she finally answers, as fast as light I tell myself once again her soft voice has become my very favorite song.

Though somehow every time the ringtone seems to sing a little faster, and my heartbeats seem to have mastered the art of slowing down. It seems, though I hardly ever admit it, I may be losing this match of the game of hyperboles entirely against myself. I do not love her yet, I tell myself, of course I don't. Love is not as simple nor as extraordinary as I have for so long wished it could be, I know. But I will love her, I tell myself. The day I will love her like I was so certain I would that first night is coming, I can feel it, it is rushing towards me as desperately as I am rushing towards it.

It will be here in no time, I tell myself after every phone call and every date, and every time she laughs I promise the next time will sound as beautiful as the first.

Tomorrow night, I promise every night, will be as young and as hopeful as they were once upon a time when I did not know her, whoever she is.

And yet there lives in me the most foolish of all things, a not so quiet hope for the love I refuse to stop believing in, the love I have yet to accept I cannot find within her eyes. I kiss her honey lips and with the tip of my fingers, I trace the same path on her body as I did every night before, a path of sweet kisses and long phone calls and yellow bricks and some love songs, a path that always takes me to the exact same place. I whisper glass secrets which I hold so carefully, and in her eyes I keep looking for at least some metaphors of the sky and the sea and yet the only one I find is a slightly cracked mirror, and when stare at it eyes half-closed of course all I see is myself.



I have always been bad at metaphors.

Still some nights, a few months in, I find it in me to once more tell her I will write about her, and so often she is as happy as a child who believes in things as simple as promises. Of course afraid of the lie I convinced myself I am not telling, I promise to her and to myself, hands to my half hopeful heart. And I promise too that not as many metaphors as words will allow will ever be remotely as beautiful as she is when she believes in me.

She asks, "Will you say my lips are sweet as honey? My eyes are the darkness where you found a glimpse of light or blue like the ocean of the most beautiful beaches, the waves crashing to the low melody of your favorite love song?"

I close my eyes and keep them closed for a second as if not to roll them. That is a simile, not a metaphor, I explain to her, and as simply as things should be she asks if, in a way, they aren't just the same. She throws a pillow on my face or sticks her tongue out in indolent annoyance and turns her eyes back to the TV, or she asks why were we talking about this in the first place, anyway?

Will I say then that love is a prison or love is a fire or a love is the last candy in the bag, I ask myself when she's no longer thinking about it, and at some point before we go to bed I decide I really am hopeless with metaphors.

And yet I wait, perhaps more quietly, for the love which is so certainly rushing towards me, almost here. I pretend the haunting thing I am so afraid of hasn't happened –

that I am not the hopeless romantic that has, at last, lost all hope. I kiss her and we laugh at some bad jokes and she watches my favorite movie and I read her favorite book and I kiss her, and love is not here. I pretend I don't see the empty shadow somewhere in the future, staring right into my eyes from the place where before love stood, beautiful and so graceful, waiting for me. It is not coming, the silence under the bed tells me, and yet I wait.

For I can never admit to the game I have lost, before it's quite over I begin to play another: the game of the hopeless, a game of euphemisms. Of course, the girl I have been dreaming of these last nights is not faceless, of course in the fog of the image of someone I don't know I can find the shape of the nose and the heart lips and the dark eyes of the one who is asleep next to me. Of course, and I tell myself this tiny collection of made-up truths, words made of glass which I so desperately hope will not break.

She asks me what's wrong and I tell her nothing at all. Maybe she asks about those poems I mentioned a couple of months back and I tell her they are almost over, both a euphemism and a hyperbole, if not simply a lie. I tell myself it's not so bad, it's not over just yet, I can love her still, I may not be a fool; I play a game of lies, and I call it a game of euphemisms.

The ringtones tell me I don't love her voice as I did once. The white walls of my bedroom watch as I kiss her and she kisses me back, and when I stare at the ceiling after she is asleep, it stares right back at me. It looks down at me and

perhaps it seems to laugh a bit. The silver heart pendant I gave her from that store at the mall where I have been too many times gives me a steady and slight look of judgment every night, sparkling quietly from her neck, the biggest of all lies. It is then when I want to give up, when I beg the pillow to tell her after I'm asleep, when despite being thoroughly unable to write a single perfect metaphor or clever personification, the things around me start revealing all the secrets I still want to keep.

What convinces me of the obvious ending is the very thing that started it all. The pile of unfinished poems that sits quietly and dusty on my desk whispers all the things I don't want to hear, each night a little louder, until one day maybe around our anniversary it is yelling at me so loudly my ears will soon begin to bleed. It is yelling that love isn't coming, that I will never finish that perfect poem, that this girl is not the girl I am looking for, whoever she is. Each piece of paper, typed and handwritten, filled with poems that always begin the same way and always end before they are really finished, all of them scream at me that I am something worse than a fool. I want to hate them, I do. I want to yell back and scream my lungs dry about whatever it is love must be, but I keep quiet. I keep quiet because they are just pieces of paper and bad poems and because no personification will allow me to write myself into falling for her, and I keep quiet because they are right.

And as I wait for the doorbell to tell me she is here, I always find myself facing, painfully and inevitably, the most haunting of all paradoxes. I crave so desperately to

write about her, and yet in spite, or perhaps because of this urgent craving, whenever I think today is the day words will ensemble into a perfect collection that says whatever it is I know I have to say, I find myself static, staring at the darkness of the bleak light of a blank page which says to me so much. I see her from far away and on that first night I am so certain, I have so many verses that could begin the perfect poem, and I crave to know every single thing about her, every secret and every fear, and when I do at last, in her eyes I see nothing but a mirror – the face of a man who is worse than a fool, a man who has yet to fall in love.

I tell her a pointless variation of the most shameful thing I could. It's not you, it's me, I say, perhaps with slightly different words but never different enough. A poet, I call myself, and yet I have barely words of my own, so I write the end of this story I have begun with clichés I found anywhere but here. In her eyes, I see heartbreak or pain or confusion, maybe a quiet hint of relief, and of course, I see myself. She leaves or cries or gets angry or hugs me, and once she asked about those poems. My answer, whatever rehearsal of empty words it is, kills in me, at last, the dream of that perfect poem about this girl. A poem about love as I wish I knew it, the perfect balance between truth and hope, a beauty alive beyond paper and ink, and the perfect strange title, sprinkled with the sweet irony that every truth needs, something so terribly perfect no one will it enjoy but me.

Maybe I should reconsider writing about love, I say that

night and the void coldness of my bed often agrees. It's always a silly game I can never win, a game of fooling myself with pretty words I have not written yet. I trick myself with ideas of having at last fallen in love, and each time over I understand the only thing I love that desperately is that perfect, wordless poem about a girl with no face standing in the darkness. But the next day the sun shines so kindly, so quietly hopeful, every face I see is the one of my dreams, every song becomes my favorite, and as always it is an alluring alliteration, all I need to begin writing that poem I will never finish.

# Good Kids

by Alexander Gillooly

I want to go back to those summers,  
last minute plans sleeping over in the living room.  
Rylee's three dogs woke us up at 7:30  
after late nights spent gossiping around a smoldering fire.  
Who's dating who, who doesn't like it, do their parents  
know?  
How did we feel about it? Have they kissed yet?  
Not once did the neighbors complain  
about the laughter that echoed down the street  
as we played tag and hide and seek among the bushes in  
the yards.  
Sometimes we'd just sit in the street under the lights,  
almost daring cars to drive down our street  
as if we owned the whole block.  
Sometimes we would go on walks, snaking through the  
neighborhood,  
taking turns wherever we pleased, trusting that we'd make  
our way back.  
Hayden brought the cigarettes that he stole from his  
parent's desk drawer, American Spirits.  
They smelled rank with a hint of something sweet, like  
candy you knew you shouldn't have.

The smoke hits the back of your throat, hot and thick compared to the crisp fresh air.

Sometimes we would have to spit afterward, just to get the taste out, other times we were smart enough to bring gum

On our walks we'd spent hours on the swings at the playground,

just looking at the nighttime sky.

Stars shined as brightly as they could, despite the suburban streetlights

casting their neon glow all around.

Sometimes we would break into the liquor cabinet, which was never locked after our parents had gone upstairs to bed, knowing they wouldn't come back down till morning.

We'd make drinks, mostly Mountain Dew with the smallest drops of Smirnoff mixed in so we could giggle about being rule breakers, even though no one seemed to like the taste.

I still remember our only Halloween party, it was unusually warm outside and daylight saving time meant an extra hour of nonsense.

We tried crazy food combinations that were totally gross and Hayden snorted pixie sticks that turned his nostrils green.

We watched Boogie Nights, a movie far too explicit for our tween eyes, although we rarely paid attention to them until the high was over.

We played "Never Have I Ever" as we sipped our spiked Mountain Dew.

It was almost sweet enough to mask the jungle of what was mixed in.

Our laughter was louder than the movie we had put on, no one was really watching as the life of a porn actor flashed by on the screen.

Occasionally we'd look over if there was a loud scene, someone yelling or gunshots going off or something, but we never lingered on it too long before moving on.

We were always so preoccupied with our little games.

It was really about who's sitting next to who, and who's holding hands.

This was the high school experience we'd seen so many movies about and we were living it, the drinking, the drama, the drugs,

but as soon as the movies ended, when the dogs ran down the stairs,

we were the good kids again.





"Classic Breakfast"  
Olivia Anderson



"Eclectic"  
Olivia Anderson

# Of Memories In Route

By Katerina Barry

It was almost time. The clattering of metal against metal began to slow. A familiar message. The haziness of greens and grays softened into clarity. I slipped from my half-sleeplessness and out of my sleeping bag. The leftover dew chilled the surface of my skin, but soon enough, it began to evaporate as the sun had almost reached its morning peak. This was not a dissimilar route to the many I had frequented before, yet still, the glimmering of the Mississippi at my side teased something new, something I couldn't yet put my finger on. A fleeting idea, like something similar to, but not quite nostalgia.

The reasons for attraction are often perplexing. You were not what I had expected to find or what I was seeking, if seeking is what I had actually been doing. You appeared in a flurry. An apparition that came and left as quickly as the wheels below your feet could carry. So what was it that inspired you to slow, to stop? To decide that for a short time, you would walk?

The giant steel knuckles connecting my porch to the train car in front of me eased in its steep back and forth movement as signs of the city moved swiftly into view. This is how the juxtaposition always worked. There was no blurring of lines between the world as it was, and the explicitness of colonization. It jarred with its sudden presence, even more so after the twelve-hour ride through east Texas pines, dipping into sprawling swamps and

bayous. A gradient of landscapes. A shifting of biomes. The haunting groves of cypress trees; clustered roots shooting vertically from the marshes below, mimicking the horizontal sprawling of the thin, milky clouds above. Admiring the groves of tupelo trees, I briefly wondered how many other sets of eyes have met their limbs and crevices. The men who built these lines, and perhaps the lighter-skinned men who took credit in history books and television specials. Conductors and brakemen. A rare vigilant traveler. People rarely acknowledge the vastness of land almost completely untouched by European settlers. Almost. This is the reason I continue to move in the ways that I do. The only gift granted exclusively by the industrial revolution. Riding the rails imparts an offering seldom recalled on by the American's intemperate forward motion. Forty-nine miles per hour is the hastiest speed my heart has ever necessitated. That was until I found you.

You were an unemployed transient as far as the state was concerned. This was one thing we had in common at the time. Like many New Orleans residents, you financially slipped by via donations and tips tossed into your guitar case while you busked on the street corners of Canal and from the doorways of empty shops. Locals and tourists took your photo, while your moodiness and depth transpired through your music in ways I would never learn to keep up with. Your chipped front tooth always embarrassed you, keeping you from cracking a smile. But it was this; the raw nerve ending that sometimes became bloody which caught my attention- the rarity of that full

grin. Our second commonality: one thousand, eight hundred and sixty-nine miles from home. A place where you and I were both born. Why is it then, that our paths waited so long, only to cross here?

As the city arose around me, what was once a thin far away slice on the horizon grew in definition and clarity. The Crescent City Connection arced the Mississippi like a perpetual moon. As the speed of the train decreased, I took my cue to toss my pack and followed suit with a swift forward landing. Stretching my limbs, I gathered my things and watched as the train continued on towards the yard. There would be no risk of interacting with the bull on watch today, although, in a town so heavily traveled by drifters and new age hobos, I imagined the rail workers began to turn a blind eye long ago.

Even in a town as progressive as this, you never felt safe to admit it. You always did prefer to maintain an air of elusiveness about yourself. If it wasn't for the rarity of a calm and almost emptied street the night we met, I wonder - would you have reciprocated the stare? It wouldn't be long before the artists of New Orleans took notice of your presence. Your tip jar filling far past its capacity. An upgrade from the battered guitar you brought with you from home to the eight hundred dollar steel-bodied resonator. Its perfectly round face echoing what you never could transcribe into words. Now, a collection of instruments line your walls. Handcrafted. Gifted. You no longer need to busk the streets, but on occasion still find yourself there. A loose connection to

your roots. But these days, mostly, you are found in jazz halls and nightclubs - where door fees bridge the gap between who you once were and who you have become. Between those who pay your bills, and those who watch from windows. But this is not about your evolution. Instead, it is about the history of memories. Or, rather - of two memories colliding in time.

It was still that time of morning when there was a lingering softness about the light. It echoed and bounced off of the cobblestone sidewalks and from the faded pastel bricks of the shotgun Creole townhouses which lined the street. Slouching iron fire escapes and window porches marked the path above my head, alternating with the prestigious double balconies of those buildings reclaimed by millionaires. Purple, green, and yellow metallic beads still hung from their rafters even though it was well into the month of June. Leftover neon plastic cups from the night before dotted the gutters, which still dripped from the early morning street cleaning. An anomaly, that a city which necessitates nightly sweeps to contend with the liter could maintain such a romance about it. There is something to say about the Victorian aesthetic clashing with the voodoo traditions of the African diaspora. The cheap gris-gris amulets alongside feathered masquerade masks which lined shop windows - their generational evolution into a clichéd appeal for tourists and non-natives seeking an escape from the monotony of their coastal homes. Strip clubs, pharmaceutical museums, brass bands, and palm readers. Half naked caricatures of deities and Halloween homages. The intoxicating clashing

of cultures was undeniable in its appeal. Maybe it was the city alone, which influenced you to catch my eye. That tempted you to slow. Nothing more, but the conjuring of the New Orleans night air.

Immediately, I could tell that this was not something you often gambled. I was a wager too hefty to bear. At least, for the long run. Till then, you took your chances. You were caught off guard, or at least that's what you played, when our first night turned into two, and then into two more until eventually I could outline the stains of your ceiling as if they had been imprinted in the blacks of my eyelids. Expression outside of strings and keys was never your strong suit. Instead, you favored an ignorant stance, a misunderstanding, a ruse I expected was born only out of fear. Unrecognized. Its flourishing was not unlike that of your ascending fame. In many ways, it resembled how the city swiftly experienced change in so many of its wards, leaving only the most desolate behind. This too was one part of you left disowned.

As I continued on into the city, I was almost surprised at the ease with which my leathered soles navigated the streets. Of all the things we try so hard to remember, how is it that the things we want so much to forget, so easily remain? But as I approached the corner of Decatur, I thanked my feet for their foresight. The peeling beige doors that lined the exterior of Envie Cafe flung open, as the baristas set out their tables and chairs. I ordered my coffee, and sat, watching the unfolding of the morning into early afternoon. But as this ritual has proven, the

richness of browns found in the warmth I held between my hands distracted my thoughts with the memory of you. Of cool breezes on sweltering summer nights known to me from the very same seat I sat in then. At first, while biding my time before making my way to whichever ruined house I'd call home for the evening, then later, to patiently await you. Envie's was deep enough in the quarter to busy myself with diversions of impromptu parades and dancing, but close enough to the edges as to not run into too many familiar faces as we made our way back to your room.

For years after, you would continue to write songs about that time. Even after I left. But still, we never talked about it. Once, I came to visit and you showed me some of these songs. One of them was bought by Starbucks. I imagined people drinking burnt coffee and ordering fancy lattes over their laptops and notebooks. But in the mornings you refused to walk with me to the French Quarter. Skateboarding was always faster. Still, we never talked about it. Your tooth was still chipped and bloody then, but it would only be a couple more years until you could afford to get it fixed.

As the afternoon shifted into evening, the streets of Frenchmen and Bourbon filled. Ragtime bands and cellists permeated all fissures of the streets. Clowns on tandem bikes mimed the well-to-do couples and tall costumed women. Here, in a city that sits in a crook of the great Mississippi, all standards of life meet. I sit now, in Washington Square Park, exchanging stories with other



travelers and playing fetch with strange dogs left unleashed to interact with park goers as they please. There is a safety about this space which surpasses the work of the iron gate that borders it. A safety I cling to as the sun gently dips, as a nagging vulnerability creeps into my heart. It was no difficult feat to learn of which jazz club you would be performing at this evening. With a name like yours, there was no confusing the players. I take my time winding through the blocks of Elysian Field and Chartres. Taking unnecessary detours to lengthen the time until I arrive. The crowd in front of the Spotted Cat Jazz club is already bolstering with energy. While some linger out front, dragging their cigarettes with no hasty intentions to return inside, most swiftly enter the thumping green door. A pause. A last contemplation. But I have already come this far. This desire outweighs the need to guard the burden of my heart. I approach the glass windows that frame the entry. As quickly as you had once vanished from my sight, you now so abruptly appear once again. A theme of yours. Maybe mine, as well. As it was on the first night we met, and the countless times we continued to cross paths after, the time it took you to look up and reciprocate the gaze was minutes. As if you knew I had always been there. You don't look back up a second time and I wonder if you notice when I finally walk away, back to the chair that has always sat in front of Envie's Cafe. To find out if even tonight, you would choose to take the same route home as you always did.

# For Marcus

By Jordan Marco

For you, growing up in a conservative town must've been hell and I want to apologize, although I can never understand what it felt like. With everyone around you being straight, or they were too afraid to admit they weren't, so

while our friend group went out and explored the kind of love only a high schooler can know, you had to dance to the slow songs with your arms wrapped around a friend that you felt no attraction to whatsoever as everyone else held hands and pushed their bodies close to someone they hoped to be more than friends with by the time the night was over. You didn't get to feel those nervous butterflies when their eyes met yours and they finally asked you out. You didn't get to hear them tell you how stunning you looked and for that moment you got to feel cared for and loved, even though realistically we were sixteen and it never would have lasted. Senior year I think you wanted something like that for yourself and you went to his house at 3 am because he asked you to, and you got on your knees to please him in the dark on his porch surrounded by shrubbery.

When he finished he didn't tell you he cared about you or even thanked you, he asked you to leave, and you had to ride a stolen blue bike home by yourself in the cold to beat the curfew that you had broken for him. You were too proud to cry in front of me the next day as rumors

circulated about you,

started by the same boy who had asked you to come over just that morning and had enjoyed everything you did. I avoid confrontation, you know that, but for you, I couldn't say nothing but stopping more from starting didn't erase the damage that had already been done to you. Going to high school, there wasn't a shortage of boys for you to look at or chase after, but they were too adamant about their sexuality being traditionally correct and you didn't get a real relationship like you deserved. Finally, we left high school and you found someone to pursue a relationship with, he wouldn't come out to anyone which you were understanding of. You went out of your way to never be seen in public with him by someone you both knew.

When I went out to eat with you both I could see how happy you were, but he barely looked at you the whole night and I knew you were putting more into it than him. The red vinyl of the booth became your focus and I texted him, telling him what to do and say to make you feel better, I never told you that. And I didn't stop talking to him, not when he was my only line to figuring out how you were doing and if you were eating, but you got jealous that we were talking. I didn't blame you, and I stopped talking to him, so I lost my line to you, one of the only friends I had. Two years later and you dedicated over two years of your life to him and he left you for someone who was supposed to be your best friend. I truly am sorry for how your first love turned out but I can't bring myself to wish that you were both still together, not when I saw how uneven the effort was, and not when your break caused us

to talk again. It's selfish but I missed you and now he denies that you had a relationship with him at all and he calls you the same horrible names you escaped in high school all those years ago but it doesn't matter, because I'm here to make sure you eat everyday and sleep enough and someday you'll have someone you deserve, someone who loves you.

# End of the Line

By Ali Dyer

“Hanging!”

“Fire!”

Soldiers from the Rock Infantry lined the streets of Büllingen, Belgium. The screams of the Infantry go in one ear and out the other. Grenades are going off on all sides. Bullets are whizzing past, coming too close for comfort. Loading the mortar was the only thing that he could do. It was as if his body was on autopilot, just trying not to die. Don drops the shell into the barrel and crouches to cover his ears. The mortar shoots and he lifts his head to see where it landed. A direct hit to the broken-down factory. He looks to his left and sees Skip, a man he had been with since boot camp, take a bullet to the head.

At the beginning of the war, Don would stare wide-eyed and have tears form in his eyes. At this point in the war, it seemed to not affect him. *Should have kept his head down*, he thought to himself. The heavy artillery ringing in his ears made his mind go numb. He doesn't know how much longer he can keep doing this.

“Don, Camel! Get your ass back to the town square! Go ‘round that grocery store. Take out those last mortars!” Captain ‘Boots’ yells from across the street. He puts the wooden lid back onto the box of mortar shells and grabs his rifle from the ground beside him. Dwayne, who the company had renamed ‘Camel’ due to the staggering amount of cigarettes he possessed, picks up the mortar

**“NOW I TRIED, SECONDLY, TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT IN A SENSE FORCING THEM INTO THAT POSITION DID NOT CREATE VIOLENCE BUT RATHER BROUGHT ALREADY-EXISTING VIOLENCE TO THE SURFACE SO THAT THEY RECOGNIZED ITS EXISTENCE AND WERE ABLE TO DEAL WITH IT. I POINTED OUT THAT THERE ARE**

**MANY, MANY THIS IS ALMOST THE SOUTH OR SITUATION HAVE BEEN LONG PERIODS AND WHERE BRUTALITY IS WHEN BASIC WILL ALSO VAST DEAL VIOLENCE, AND IS NOT A MAN OF VIOLENCE OPPOSED TO IT**

# **BAYARD RUSTIN**



**TIMES—AND ALWAYS TRUE IN ANY OTHER WHERE PEOPLE SEPARATED FOR OF TIME GENERAL ACCEPTED—SOCIAL CHANGE INVOLVE A OF PHYSICAL THE PACIFIST WHO IS AFRAID NOR IN A SENSE BECAUSE OFTEN**

**SOCIAL CHANGE CANNOT BE MADE EXCEPT UNDER SITUATIONS WHERE VIOLENCE IS TO A DEGREE INEVITABLE. THE PACIFIST IS OPPOSED TO USING VIOLENCE, BUT HE MUST BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT IT AS A PART OF SOCIAL CHANGE, KNOWING THAT SOCIAL CHANGE IS OFTEN IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT IT.”**

**"Bayard Rustin"  
Karina Primmer**

and turns to take cover in the run-down building beside them.

Camel and Don had grown up in the same town. Camel had helped him when he was getting beat up behind the school due to reasons that both of them had long forgotten. They had been drafted and miraculously been placed together for the duration of the war so far.

Don follows and tries not to draw attention to himself, though, he was already in the sight of the enemy, hand grenades and mortar shells still going off at an alarmingly fast pace. They had gotten the orders to try to take the next town over that morning. All of the men knew it was a bad idea to try to take it, knowing the Nazis had been there for the duration of the war so far. And the number of men in Rock Infantry is getting lower and lower as the war struggled on. Yet, orders were orders.

“No rest for the wicked, aye kid,” Camel says.

“You’re only three years older than me. We need to get to the town square without dying,” Don says breathlessly, readjusting his gun on his shoulder. He knows it will be a miracle if everyone in his Infantry survives this battle.

“Well come on then, they aren’t going to kill themselves,” Camel replies in an almost annoyed tone. The pair of soldiers stand and Don checks to see what path would be safest.

“If we go through back alleys and stay off the main stretch of fighting then we should be able to make it,” Don looks to Camel.

“Don’t look at me, you’re the one leading us,” Camel says shrugging his shoulders. He takes a deep breath and rounds the left side of the building. They have to run to the other side of the street to be able to connect with the pathway of allies. He sticks his head out to check if it’s clear. A string of bullets strike the wall beside his head and he turns back around to his partner.

“Sniper, in the church tower,” he says. “He knows our position now. Run back to the right where John and Rocky are and ask them to take him out. Meet me across the street in the ally when you’re done.”

“You got it Donny boy” Camel replies, taking off in the direction of his friends, leaving the mortar leaning against the wall. Don takes the few seconds he has to take a deep breath and close his eyes. *Please lord, let me live through this.* He opens his eyes as three loud shots ring out close to him.

“Sniper’s out,” he hears Rocky shout. He checks quickly for the sniper to make sure and he sees the dead body slumped over the side of the church tower wall. Don takes one last breath as he sprints across the street, bullets following his footsteps behind him. Making it to the ally, he checks that it’s clear and lays down the box of mortar shells at his feet.

He looks across the street to see Camel waiting for him to give a sign that it’s clear for him to cross. He puts his rifle into position and slowly rounds the corner to check that there are no other snipers. Deeming that the coast is clear he lowers his gun and gives Camel the signal to make his



way over to him. Camel picks up the mortar and begins to jog over to his partner.

He makes it halfway across the street before a shot is heard, and he sees his best friend's chest get blown out. Camel falls to the ground and cries out in pain. Don rounds the corner but before he can take a shot at whoever hit his partner, a grenade lands in a building and blows the top to pieces. Don looks at Rocky and realizes that the grenade came from him. He rushes into the street and grabs Camel by the shoulder straps and drags him to the ally.

“You dumb bastard,” Don says quietly, trying to assess the damage done. “Corpsman!”

“Well Donny boy, I think you’re going to be alone for the rest of the mission,” Camel says weakly, breath getting more shallow by the second. Don looks down at his friend and sees that Camel is right, this might be goodbye after all.

“Corpsman where the hell are you?” he yells again. Don hugs Camel, almost as if holding him tightly would heal the wound.

“Open my right breast pocket, there are two letters,” Camel whispers as he starts coughing. Blood comes up with each cough, drops of it hitting Don in the face. He flinches but keeps his hold on his friend with his left arm as his right digs around in the pocket. He pulls out two blood-splattered papers and holds them up.

“These?” he asks.

“One is for Lucy, send it to her. The o-o-other one is for you,” he shudders at the end of his sentence. “Please Donny, it hurts so bad,” he continues, eyeing the pistol at Don's side.

It takes him a moment to realize what his friend is getting at. His hand moves to the pistol and unclasps it from the holster. He moved Camel to lean against the building closest to them. He reaches shakily for the hand the pistol is in and moves it to his forehead.

“You’re too stubborn to die on your own,” Don laughs bitterly. He cocks the gun and a lone shot rings out. Every other sound seems to stop. The mortars, the rifles, the screams.

The blood creates a halo around Camel's head on the wall behind his now lifeless body. A crimson streak runs from the corners of his mouth down his neck, running beneath his uniform.

Grabbing his gun from the ground, Don stands and looks down on his friend for the last time. He looks to his right and starts walking once more to the town square. Don tries to remember happier times than this. He thinks of his wife he left back in Iowa. He wonders if he will ever meet his daughter, or if she will be one of the thousands that never meet their fathers. No, he can't afford to think like that right now. Not when he has a chance for revenge on those that killed his best friend.

Once he makes it to the end of the ally, Don crouches down and turns to his left to check the next path he must

take to get to the town square. He holds his breath as he moves his gun from side to side to determine if anyone else was in proximity to him. Once he is sure he is alone he moves into the ally and starts running to the end, wanting this mission to be over as quickly as possible.

\* \* \*

“Rock Infantry gather up.” Captain Boots yells out. The remaining men of the once overflowing Infantry gather around the steps of the church, or what seemed to be left of the church. “We move out tomorrow to head back to base. I know with the loss of some of the company, a few days of rest would do us all some good. Report back here at 07:00 with full packs tomorrow. Dismissed” Boots says. The soldiers murmur amongst themselves as they shuffle around.

Don waits for the men to clear out before he moves to the inside of the church. He walks up the altar until he takes a seat in the third row of pews, dust from the seat clouding around him as he plops down. He puts his head in his hands and takes a deep breath before a sob escapes his throat. *Is this war worth it? Is it worth this many lives?* He thinks.

Don looks up at the sight in front of him with watery eyes. Broken statues of divine beings stand before him. He reaches into his breast pocket and takes out a piece of crumpled paper and a small pencil and begins to write.

*Don,*

*I hope this letter finds you doing well. If you're reading this then something must have happened to me. Please don't remember the bad times that the war brought. Remember the times in our youth that brought us together. Remember the times that we would go down to the river and catch crawdads in the summers. Please tell my girl I love her. Tell my daughter that I loved her. Tell them the same things that I have told you. Let them know that the world will still go on without me in it. I'm a small price to pay for the world to be at peace again. I love you Donny boy. Don't forget that.*

*-Camel*

Don's tears fall onto the paper as he crumples it in his hand. His head hangs and a scream echoes out into the broken church.

# Team Property

By John Keller

Coaches demand violence when you're six foot and 200 pounds freshman year of high school. They keep track of your penalty minutes and tell you there are not enough. They tell you over and over that they "would have killed to be your size". They will call you a pussy, too soft, lazy, a boy in a man's body. The others can play however they want. You are an enforcer. The team needs you to punish, to destroy, to inflict pain. You might score or make great plays, but never forget your role. Your coaches will scream into your helmet, snatch your own stick to slash you with, force you to undress in between periods, and slam you in the chest with their open palm to remind you of it. Don't you dare complain, because it's not all about you. You are there to help the team win. You are team property.

When you do as they ask, they will not be satiated. Your aggression is just proof that you were holding back before. If you finish the hit on a kid who is half your size and you knock him unconscious, they will pat you on the back and smile. Despite the fact that you were thrown out of the game, they will be happy. Your coach will say, "He won't try that again." The team parents will walk all the way around the rink just to encourage you. They will assure you that it was a bad call and a clean hit. And you'll wipe away a few tears as you put on your street clothes in the locker room and hope that the kid is okay. You try to repeat to yourself the hollow lie that it was worth it,

because it is what the team needed.

\*

The locker room stunk so bad that you could smell it across the rink. But you had been in it long enough that the smell had become imperceptible. You sat starrng, waiting for your coach to quit yelling so that you could go back out to play. Suddenly, he turned to you, “You know what Keller, you had your chance. Take your fucking gear off. You’re not playing out on the ice; you might as well watch from the stands.” As the rest of the team watches, you pulled your jersey over your head and began to undress. The amount of padding hockey necessitates was suddenly a blessing; you hoped that you might be alone before you were naked. You dreaded sitting there in your towel as the rest filed out to finish the game. Even as you striped, you knew they were watching you. You saw your coach glance over, too. You were half-naked, working on untying your skates when he suddenly turned back. “Are you going to play if I give you another chance, or are you just gonna half-ass it?” It dawned on you that this public shaming was also an asinine motivation strategy designed to help you remember your place. You just nodded.

\*

“Keller, lift up your shirt so I can see your stomach.” Your face revealed your confusion. “Your midsection son, let me see it.” You lifted your shirt until it was bunched up just below your nipples. He stared at your exposed body before he commented that you “must be in okay shape”. His tone revealed his surprise. Your teammates gather

around after, to ask if Coach had actually just asked to see your gut. Everyone knew their bodies were team property, but it was rarely this overt.

\*

The team spreadsheet revealed that most were encouraged to gain weight. Across from your name: Weight – 230, Goal – 205. This was just the beginning. You were lazy. You were too slow. The coaching staff was never happy. Clearly, they thought your commitment wasn't serious. You work to eviscerate your body and rebuild a new one in its place. You run to the point of throwing up. You know you still had not gone far enough. You watched your family eat your favorite meals and only imagine how the steak tasted. Because you had to do your duty.

# In Making Sense of Places Inhabited, Then and Now

By Katerina Barry

How is love for a place born from despair? Maybe the answers are only found in the subtle details. In the markings of chipped paint in between slats of wood. Gaudy fences with failing structures. Wide front porches outlining neighborhoods pockmarked with potholes, an occasional empty lot. Adjacent lawns either kempt or unkempt between rusted-out vehicles and the bicycles of children trusted to lie freely in driveways. In the creeping lichen up the sides of walls. Maybe the answer is found in the creaking apartment building behind the blocks of bars I tried to make home. In the high ceilings, in the comfort of dog paws. Next to the mulberry tree blooming against the graffitied brick wall, not quite art but a relief from monotonous purity nonetheless. Maybe they're in the dark stained sidewalks once the mulberries ripen and drop. The same woman pushing her cart of groceries. A crowded laundromat with familiar faces. In the bowing of wood floors where people once danced, prayed, cried, laughed. In the arcs that frame windows and the creaking of age. In the scuffing of floorboards and the decorative trim hidden beneath wind-worn stains. In the intermittent pastel houses to brighten gloomy winters. The smell of bonfires and knowing the names of every person on the block. In the green rectangles and brown lots with tall grass. Missed opportunities, but it's still not too late. Two



of the poorest wards in the county touch and blend at their seams, 4000 vacant lots, homes, but that are still homes. Some people call this place a nuisance. Somewhere to avoid. Train tracks divisively act as boundaries, barriers. Newspapers call it a blight. Chain linked fences around buildings that might be inhabited. Dogs tied to posts. Trash and debris against the flourishing raspberries, blackberries, crab apple trees where I step over glass for the sake of canned applesauce to last into fall. I too at some point, counted down the imaginary days to the time when I might leave and cursed the ways I ended up here. I, too, wasn't always able to see the little things.

\*

How is it that a place can both break you and give you a reason to be? I wonder as I drive through a new town that feels less like a town than it does a commercial advertisement for middle-class families and daydream I'm somewhere else. A place I came to, to escape the winter that broke me and the city that witnessed. But here, young adults seem to never need to leave home. Here, the wood floors are not bowed and they are not real wood. The ceiling fans work and my cast iron skillets clash with the electric stovetop. I try to learn how to cook all over again but there is no one here to cook for. Meals lose purpose, as my own purpose feels faulty while I look for the details that aren't here. Not like in the other place. My neighbors have no names. The paint on my walls are pristine and the plastic panels that make up this house's siding embarrass

with their cleanliness. White. Pure. A lackluster idea. I visit the home of a friend which isn't a home, but a mansion named after fast-food corporations. Ready to assemble and order by mail. Modern. Interpretations of a home. The American dream. There are three stories, not including the basement which is also a bar. A game room. A library for dusty books. A theater. A man cave. They feed me to a fullness that aches but I still leave hungry. There are jacuzzi jets in every bathtub and a chandelier that looks like it's made of marble but it's really Styrofoam. People who live here are sometimes proud of this fact. Some pretend they don't know. There is an idea of safety. Of comfort. Of gates and locked doors and windows which never need opening. There is air conditioning in summer and heat in winter and it's conveniently programmed to automatically adjust, no spinning of dials necessary, no stuffing of door jams. But here, there are no subtleties. Untouched by despair. No worn-out armrests of chairs where a friend's mother and her mother used to sit. No vacated spaces, hopeful, waiting for a second chance. The toys of children don't lay on the sidewalks and neighborhood dogs don't stop by for visits. There are train tracks here too, but the cops quickly show up if you sit to watch too long and there is always a harsh knocking at the door when the lawn reaches my ankles, leaving no room for love to grow.

\*

Maybe you can't make sense of one without the other, love and despair. Perhaps the clusters of budding crocus in

spring only make sense against the foundation of the rotting greenhouse on the dead-end street. The one I thought I'd never walk out of, the place I'll likely never return. But that was before. The overgrowth of trees, the unchecked vines. The old Chevy truck with a rusted-out bed. The relief of the evening breeze found on the front porch only made sense with having to learn how to ignore crowds of mosquitoes, the car jack holding the roof above your head, watching the hollyhocks you planted bloom from the cigarette butts below. The questionable but shady river-side hideout to wade on sweltering days, to rinse the dirt that covered from head to toe. The cheap, tiny greasy diner where they know your name. Coffee, fish, and grits. A consolation. Absolution. The incessant chopping of wood, kindling just to warm winter bones, there is no warmth comparable. Old family photos of people you'll never know in a basement where you learn to hide. The histories of spaces. Maybe you have to leave a place and come back to learn how to see.

\*

Maybe it's not a question of space, but time. Where the answers are only known for brief moments. The time of morning right before dawn. When everything makes a little more sense. Fleeting. It's a pale pink and a velvet gray-blue. It's the soft tingle of birds chirping through the air. When all known places compile through the cracks of blinds to make one. A momentary relief. The answer is a haze and then it's gone, but it is there.

"006"



"015"



Elise  
Crawford

# Bugs in the Bathroom

by I.A.

He was sick of scrubbing between the tiles of the grotesquely germy bathroom floor, blood in the grout, grime in the grout, bugs scuttling out from the crevices in the walls, and maybe sometimes they were imaginary but man, oh man did he hate the little leeches worming around his peripheral vision, the stench of his bleach so strong and hearty he's considered chugging it to scrape his throat raw and flush the thought of insects out of his intestines. But instead, he'll settle for scrubbing, even though he was so fucking sick of scrubbing, the itch out of his arms and he'll rub his eyes with the backs of his hands because there are chemicals on his palms and fingertips and he wants to keep his eyes from burning, or maybe he wants to add a drop of bleach to them just to get rid of the sight of those small little legs crawling in the sink. He hopes drinking the chemicals will flush out the taste of bug shells on his tongue, and, oh, he still needs to keep scrubbing the grime out of the grout, and maybe the overflow of blood too. Maybe if he just keeps scratching at the floor the dirt will be gone by tomorrow. Maybe he will be too.

# Witch

By Dmitri Ashakih

You're afraid of what's in my blood.  
Pumping, gushing, sugary red  
syrup your mouth fell so in love  
with, you forgot that you could scream.  
They insisted I was the newborn lamb.  
Oh no, I was always the witch.

Tied at the stake, we saw a witch.  
Her face was painted with womb's blood.  
You said she smelled like roasted lamb  
and the blaze made your skin glow red.  
Hand in hand, we listened to her scream.  
For you, mercy was never part of my love.

I hid my grief for the fallen sisters I love  
as you spoke of those arousing witch  
hunts, where revolvers would scream  
with gun fire on the night when blood  
looked black. Skin flushed and red,  
You met my gaze, a virgin lamb.

My eyes darting inside the lamb  
witnessed you replace the love  
you so desperately lacked with red  
fistfuls of tender and rare witch  
meat. You liked the taste of blood  
The meat is sweeter, if they scream.

The knife slipped. You didn't scream,  
only sighed fondly as the lamb  
gently lapped up your blood.  
You asked if I drank out of love?  
Peer into the depths of my witch  
cauldron. Inquire why the brew is red.

Dreaming, you said the sky was red.  
You were right but please don't scream.  
Chant my name, *witch, witch, witch*  
as I drape my skin in soft lamb  
wool, and I'll watch your love  
drain faster than your blood.  
The witch will endure the red  
hot brand of a blood curdling scream.  
The lamb waits for a new love.

# Phantom Lady

By Sarah Jonassen

I meet Lillith on the stone path to the  
graveyard. She says, *don't breathe*  
*in a dead place or you'll inhale ghosts.*

She smokes, like my mother,  
and I'm a secondhand drunk  
high off hellfire.

I hope she doesn't leave, but she leaves  
like a monster does, never really, cause I see her  
in the dreams that good people don't speak about.

The gravediggers ask me who I am  
in the place where the graves are blank  
and the grave men grieve for the saints.

I'm here for the lady with the horns  
whose breath leaves burns on my skin.

Am I monster fucker? Yeah, she's hot.





## Contributer's Notes

**I.A.** - I collect dead cicadas and feel like scum if I accidentally step on a worm. I'm on level 1,013 in Bubble Pop and I think sharks are cool as hell; thresher sharks, whale sharks, bamboo sharks, zebra sharks, scalloped hammerhead sharks... and the bathtub barracuda.

**Olivia Anderson** is a jack of all trades and a master of fun. She is an Art History/Fine Art double major who lives by the idea of "too much." Taste Your Lemonade is her art brand and business which allows her to express herself through funky and eclectic visuals. She dabbles in playful poetry that matches her colorful art style. Find Olivia's work at [tasteyourlemonade.com](http://tasteyourlemonade.com) and @tasteyourlemonade on Instagram.

**Dmitri Ashakih** has a fascination with all things gothic and strange and you can often find him gardening, thrifting with friends, or reading about the occult.

**Katerina Barry** - I am majoring in Creative Writing, English Literature, and minoring in Botany. I like to write both fiction and creative nonfiction, with particular interest in the vague spaces in between. I write about traveling, ideas of home or belonging, and the strange ways disjointed memories create identity.

**Isabela Berstein** - My name is Isabela and I'm from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I'm a Creative Writing and Comparative Literature double major with a minor in Psychology. When I'm not studying or writing, you can find me complaining about missing my dog or rewatching Breaking Bad or BoJack Horseman.

**Joey DeRusso** is a sophomore at OWU and planning on majoring in Management Economics. He is a member of the baseball team and a Christian-based organization on campus. During the summer, he will be working at a school supplies company near his hometown of Northfield, Ohio.

**Ali Dyer** is a mother of a black cat who she forces to listen to her stories.

**Alex Gillooly** has the unusual habit of going to UDF around 1 am for a donut. It's almost like clockwork at this point.

**Dabiel Rodriguez Hijo** - Actor for nine years, director for seven, and playwright for four, Daniel Rodriguez Hijo (known by his colleagues as Danny) is a tireless theatre practitioner. He is currently the project lead for The PC Trinity Theatre Company and is a member of the Plain City Arts Council.

**Sarah Jonassen** is a junior and Creative Writing major.

**John Keller** was an English and Philosophy double major. He graduated in 2020.

**Lucas Lindenmuth** is an Arby's employee (yes, he does have The Meats) and a part-time cryptid haunting your local state park. Imagine a lanky goblin with a sandwich, a stick, and 1920s flapper hair, and you pretty much know everything you need to.

**Jordan Marco** is a pre-med pre-dentistry junior at OWU.

**Jenna Nahhas** - My name is Jenna Nahhas, and I have no idea what I am doing (read: undeclared major). I draw, write stories, learn sad songs on the piano, and over-analyze poorly written television to convince myself it's actually good. Why yes, Taika Waititi is my role model: how did you guess?

**Allie Otworth** - I wrote these poems in the fall of my first semester here at OWU while thinking about how much had changed in the last year. In many ways, my portfolio is simply about the way things begin and end.

**TaTyana Payne** accidentally ran over a kid on her sled when she was 12. She's never been sledding since. Sorry kid.

**Karina Primmer** is an artist of unknown origins... but probably lives in Lorain, OH when not on campus. Despite coming in as a Creative Writing major, theater has completely taken over her life (as her only major now), though her passion for illustration does still thrive (minoring in Fine Art - Studio). She has no idea what she wants to do after college but hopefully it'll be some sort of creative/artist thing, whether it's in 2D or performance.

**Teddy Zayas** - I just vomit words on paper. Sometimes I think my words are incomprehensible, and to this day I don't know if that's true or not. In the end, all I really care for is if someone gets something out of it, and I hope my words mean something to you.

# Reader's Notes





