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forward forward forward forward forward forward forward forward



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spring 2021 spring 2021 spring 2021 spring 2021 spring



THE MESSENGER

About the Publication

The objective of The Messenger is to encourage the appreciation and exploration of the creative arts on the University of Richmond campus. Since 1876, The Messenger has celebrated student work by publishing submissions in a literary and visual arts magazine. More information on the magazine, as well as past publications since 1987, can be found on messengerur.wordpress.com.

Cover Art - untitled
Pamira Yanar

Acknowledgements

The Messenger staff would like to thank Dr. David Stevens for his continued support and guidance as our faculty sponsor. We are also grateful for the University of Richmond English and Visual and Media Arts Practice departments, who continually encourage students to create and submit their works, and the authors and artists who never fail to amaze us with their talent. Finally, we would like to thank our readers for their interest in our magazine. Without you all, we wouldn't have this publication.

A Letter from the Editors

This year's *Messenger* was shaped by many weighty things. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose a risk to us and our loved ones, as well as affect the ways that we can gather and communicate. Xenophobia has made immigrants feel especially unwelcome in the United States, some being violently detained at the border. The murder of George Floyd ignited a valuable discussion about structural racism and police brutality. We see these discussions reflected on our campus through the movement to change the names of campus buildings memorializing slaveholders and white supremacists. As editors, we found the context of this year to not only be important in situating this edition in *The Messenger's* archive, but crucial for understanding its tone.

And yet, in such a challenging year, we received the most submissions in recent memory, all of remarkable quality. We quickly found that many of these pieces share the theme of hope, of looking forward to the light at the end of the tunnel. In the past, members of our staff have joked with each other that we attract very sad works. This year, our contributors both analyzed our current situation and dreamed of what can come next, giving the publication a fresh sense of balance. These student pieces are memorable and thought provoking, and we hope you love them as much as we do.

As our last issue was themed "Memory," we decided that the word "Forward" defines the Spring 2021 *Messenger*. This theme is reflected in the arrangement of the magazine itself, with a gradual increase in the sense of hope.

This edition will be published before *The Messenger* ceases operations on March 25th, 2021, in support of the Black Student Coalition and Protect Our Web movement.

Warmly,
Gabby and Molly Kate
Co-Editors-In-Chief

Award Winners

The Margaret Haley Carpenter Award for Poetry

This award is presented to a student who has had an outstanding poem submitted for publication in *The Messenger*. The winner is chosen by a panel of English faculty members.

“A walk, in the rain,” by Maddie Olvey

“I’m an English major and a Biology and Creative Writing minor. Although I’ve always had a passion for writing, taking creative writing courses at U of R has inspired me to refine my craft and explore new forms and styles. I had a lot of fun working on ‘A walk, in the rain,’ and challenging myself to create a cohesive, single-sentence structure. I’m honored that this piece will be a part of the Spring 2021 edition of *The Messenger*.”

The Margaret Owen Finck Award for Creative Writing

This award is presented to a student who has had outstanding creative work submitted for publication in *The Messenger*. The winner is chosen by a panel of English faculty members.

“Lila” by Riley Fletcher

“I am a sophomore majoring in Philosophy and English. I’ve loved creative writing for as long as I can remember, and I’d like to thank all of my teachers, professors, family members and friends who have pushed me to continue with it.”

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forward

onward so as to make progress; toward a successful conclusion.

“There is a way forward
and yes
it is with a broken
heart
but it is our own way
collectively convened,
pondered,
Shared.”

Alice Walker

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the rupture

Naomi Mitchell

quiet
equilibrium
stillness
silence
before
after
never the middle
silenced
divided
beyond repair

quiet
the conception of feeling
growing, changing
without light
without water
needing love
beyond reason
weighed
and left wanting

quiet
no need to announce
the onslaught
of pyroclastic nothing

Who's there?

the rupture

this place can never be home again

quiet
the subtle shift
in the wind
we are lost
we are left
to strive
to hate
to reality
of our own making

quiet
justified
without rebuke
silence
on the other side of a
door
waiting without a care
for the way she slept
for the way we are
left to hurt
left to wonder
left in silence

20 minutes

Jassiem Konrad

No food.

20 bucks.

I'll be back in 20 minutes.

Love you, Mama.

Black man.

6'0.

160 lbs. Suspected burglary.

Possibly

armed and dangerous.

I pull my hood up,

turn my music up loud,

shove my hands deep in my pockets,

and lose myself in the music.

I sit behind the wheel

scan faces,

check my mirror,

and brush the grip of my gun –
just to make sure it was still there.

My 20 dollars were replaced with

milk,

eggs,

and applesauce.

I check a text.

My baby sister is awake.

Crying.

Hungry.

None of us had eaten today.

I place the groceries in the bottom of my backpack

and I pick up my pace to a slight jog.

Is it him?

Its gotta be.

Black.

Hooded.

Running.

Possibly...

probably

armed and dangerous.

A white patrol car,
red and blue lights,
and a man with a badge,
and a gun,
cut me off.
My body tells me to run –
to survive –
but my brain holds me still.
I shift my weight from foot to foot.

He's ready to run.
I can tell.
He's anxious.
He's probably guilty.
I can tell.
And he is probably
armed and dangerous.
I can tell.

I see his mouth moving.
I don't know if its the music
or blood pounding in my head
that makes me go deaf.
A shock violently shakes my body
and I drop to my knees.
I am at his mercy.

He was defiant.
He was going to try something.
I drive the heel of my boot into his chest
and knock him to the ground.
I reach for his wrist
and stomp my foot onto his back –
only to hesitate
at the sound
of crunching eggs.



Rockfalls Drive
Casey Murano

Control

Jassiem Konrad

The Gun- 2:45 AM

Even from the outside, we can feel the bass drum shake the black-painted brick walls of the club. Luminous blue letters above us read "The Flame," emitting a soft glow on the pavement in front of us. I feel bloated – an extra half a pound of weight is loaded in my midsection. Chris shifts his weight from foot to foot eyeing his black Dodge Charger parked 30 feet away, but I press closer to his hip begging him to stay. His smooth fingertips trace the letter "G" tattooed on my side, then he slides his fingers down farther to fold around my curves. His index finger lingers above my trigger, teasing me. I beg him, but he resists until he turns me around to face our target. Then he squeezes until I am satisfied. The man's blood streams a royal purple in the soft light.

Chris- 4:00 AM

My eyes refuse to close. I wait for the sun to rescue me from this restless night. Sometimes when I can't sleep I think about praying to God, but I imagine him turning his back on me and reminding me of all the empty promises I made to him. I wonder if God remembers when I left the Sunday service to smoke behind the chapel when I was 13. Or when I was 16 and sold a gram of weed to a group of kids on the playground.

If he doesn't remember that, then he will surely remember later that year when my cousin and I beat up a kid walking home after school. We waited in the shadows of the rec center on Broad Street and snatched him from the sidewalk by the strap of his backpack. I stomped his face bloody while my cousin wrestled the shoes from his feet. With a kick to the behind, we sent him on his way, empty-handed and shoeless. The backpack was the grand prize of the fight – ever since he started carrying it around school every day, he walked a little taller and spoke loosely to even the toughest of men. My cousin and I peered into the plain Jansport bag like pirates into a treasure chest, but we only valued one thing inside – the black Glock 19 resting at the bottom of the pouch. We argued for a minute, but I won out when I promised he would get the next one. My cousin was 5 inches taller than me, but I felt like I matched him in stature as we walked home.

As I approached home, I remember the gun felt heavy in my bag, as if it was trying to escape through the bottom of my bag. My breath sped up anticipating my mother stopping me and questioning my late arrival. My cousin split off to his own home down the road and I was left to battle my rising anxiety. I fumbled with my keys at the front door and cautiously

slid through the living room where I could see my mother stirring a pot in the kitchen. My nerves were calmed momentarily by the pungent smell of greens, but they were reignited when she approached yelling about the time. I could barely hear her over my heartbeat, so I just cast my eyes down and nodded. With a tap upside the head somewhere between forgiving and angry, she sent me to my room to wash up for dinner.

I made sure the door was closed but not locked because that would surely throw my mother into a fit, and I plucked the gun from the depths of the backpack. I studied it like a jeweler would a diamond and ran my fingers across the grip. The grooves felt like they were made to fit my fingers and the trigger was begging for me to pull it. A full-length mirror rested on my closet door. I whirled around and pointed the gun at my reflection, my face imitating Ice Cube's curled lip from *Boyz n the Hood*.

"Run yo shit, nigga!" I said it as forcefully as I could without my mother hearing.

"What'd you say, baby?" my mother called from down the hall.

After recovering from a mini-heart attack, I replied, "Nothing!" Afraid of being discovered, I stuffed the gun into my dresser drawer right next to *The Holy Bible*.

The Gun- 4:00 AM

Right next to the bible? It's an honor really. I can see our potential for success will exceed far beyond my last man. What's this one's name? It's Chris I think. His hands are different. They are strong, but gentle - they hold steady, but have the calluses of a worker and the bruises of a fighter. The last one's hands shook when he held me. He was too easily swayed by my charisma and our relationship ended because he showed my secrets to the wrong person. I know Chris is different... I can feel it.

Chris- 10:30 AM

The phone ringing yanks me from my thoughts. Ashley, my ex-girlfriend and mother of my almost-3-year-old son, Kari, asks me to take care of our son from around 11 o'clock until tonight, while she takes her mother to the doctor's office. I ask her why her new man couldn't watch him, which prompted her to talk my ear off about being more responsible and taking initiative in Kari's life.

"Alright, alright! I got it!" I say to shut her up, knowing the argument isn't over.

I hang up the phone and toss it aside.

We had Kari when we were 17. I was far from a man, had no money, and did not see myself having a future with Ashley. I was attracted

to her dark skin, full lips, and swinging locks, but above all, her superior intellect and fast tongue. She slaved long nights and early mornings to feed Kari and remain on track for college. I felt like I held her back and hurt her chances of making into a good college. I distanced myself from them and focused on getting fast money from hustles throughout the city. I had messed around with other girls from school and I had made enemies.

The month after I acquired the gun, I ditched school completely and ran the streets full-time with my cousin. Ashley broke up with me when she started college and I only saw her and Kari when she needed me to. It was crazy to look at him; we looked strikingly similar – caramel skin, deep brown eyes, wide smile, and a single dimple on our right cheeks. He is smart like his mother, but hard-headed like me. He makes me wish I could be there for him, but my lifestyle is not that of a present father.

Whenever I am stressed I slide the gun from its home in the top drawer of my dresser, its home for the last three years, and place it on a towel on the low sitting table next to my bed. I grab a handkerchief, daintily dip it into the cleaning solvent and begin scrubbing.

The Gun- 11:00AM

I lay naked on the towel exposed and vulnerable. He ran his hands along my sleek black frame, massaging every inch. I think this is the only time when we both feel free – my bullets are cast aside and I am harmless. A moment of bliss, however long, to escape the burdens of destiny – I was made to rip flesh, destroy lives, and end peace. However, in life, there are three inevitable things that even I am subject to: destiny, desire, and death. When he reloads me, checking the barrel, I can already feel my trigger begin to itch.

Chris- 11:20

The chime of the doorbell interrupts my final checks.

“Daddy!”

Kari’s call puts a smile on my face. I half jog down the hallway and open the door, scooping him up in my arms before acknowledging Ashley. Remembering our previous conversation, I can tell she is ready to yell at me, so I let Kari down inside and lean against the doorframe to block Ashley from his view. She pulls me outside partially closing the door behind me so her voice wouldn’t carry.

The Gun- 11:23

The pair of hands lifting me off the table surprises me. I wobble in their

grip. These hands are different – weak, uncertain, and curious. Hands like these don't last long with someone like me. Weak hands show me a mind that is easily manipulated and cannot control my power. Tiny fingers probe my body until I face upward staring into the face of a child. He stares down as if inspecting my barrel – like Chris. I find myself urging his tiny fingers towards my trigger. Just one squeeze from the hand of a man will satisfy me – to whom the hand belongs is not my concern. His finger is curled around it now. I'm almost there – I just need the slightest pull. My purpose is to shoot. Just squeeze.

Sleeping Infant

Charles Mullis



mama

Layla Cobrinik

mama the first word I spoke the first smile I saw from mama and mama the most beautiful person mama's warm brown eyes and her sweet scent and her lullaby so soft

mama too soft for the world and dad too long gone to save us but

mama always here

mama so beautiful but always find the ugly ones mama love to love the ones that break love mama the closest thing to love but mama always broken mama's blue bruises the only color in our dark room and she fill the room with smoke that don't smell sweet and mama's sharp cries too loud to be a lullaby but

mama still here

mama want me inside mama don't want me to be a mama yet mama don't want my lungs filled with smoke she don't want me covered in blue and mama don't want me to cry but I still cry and I can't be whole because

mama still broken

mama I hate you mama you always pick the wrong ones mama and now I can't find the right ones mama you're drowning in too much blue and mama you're sinking and I can't swim I couldn't save you mama and now

mama not here

mama my name now I made a girl full of love and mama the first word she spoke and she smiles at me mama and she got your brown eyes mama and I sing in your soft voice mama and

mama I still here

I still got bruises mama

but mine don't have color

Branchland

Riley Fletcher

Jacob Maynard was watching TV. His father sat on the reclining chair next to him, his mother prepared dinner in the kitchen. The Channel 3 News was on. Weatherman was calling for a pleasant night in Branchland, but with storms to come later in the week. The little pictures on the screen appeared in sequence as the time progressed through the day: first as a big yellow sun, then a big white cloud, then a small sun sticking out from behind dark clouds, then dark clouds expelling lightning and rain.

The TV was Jacob's mom's idea. His father had a whole list of grievances about the thing: it was easier to lie through a screen than through words on a page, he said. He didn't like the buzzing over the sound. He didn't like the static screen when you flipped the channels too far. You could drive yourself crazy staring at it for too long.

The idea had come to him the other evening in similar surroundings. "The Greatest Game of Chance" was on TV, a game show that often played during dinner. Three contestants had to complete a random series of challenges, then place bets as to whether or not the others would be able to complete them. The winner often came away with tens of thousands in cash. That night the winner was Kevin from Salt Lake City. He bet in the final round that Mary from Asheville, North Carolina, wouldn't be able to throw one hoop around three moving rings in two minutes. She didn't and he went home with \$28,390.

Applicants were selected for the game through a raffle. Tickets were expensive, but there wasn't a limit to the amount of tickets one could submit. With moderate luck, he could get accepted, and with great luck, he could win big. Money like that paid for college. College was a way out of Branchland. But Jacob didn't have the money for tickets, to begin with.

Jacob's father was Randy Maynard, a Vietnam veteran. In the top drawer of his dresser he kept his father's old .22 pistol. Jacob had shot it maybe once or twice. When he was younger, his father kept the gun stored away under lock and key. Recently he moved it to the dresser out of growing security concerns. The world is changing, he said.

Hitting the bank would never work, it was too heavily guarded. They had just installed a camera above the front desk. Bank robberies required copious amounts of time and effort, and usually accomplices, all things inaccessible to him. He thought about hitting the church, but then reconsidered out of fear for his eternal soul. He decided on Sheldon's General Store, just a few blocks away from his street. Minimal security, lowest possible risk. He knew the cashier personally, which also helped. Her name was Desiree Ellison. She was an old lady his family knew fairly well from church.

It was a foggy Sunday morning in August when Jacob Maynard began the walk to Sheldon's General Store with his grandfather's .22, a ski mask, and a trash bag. He wore the ski mask on his head like a winter hat until he rounded the corner by the Fairview Pharmacy onto Glenn Lane, where the general store was on the right.

He had the plan in his head, the only place it now existed, as he had shredded his notes before leaving. There couldn't be any physical evidence left behind for the later investigation.

He opened the door hastily and awkwardly, and was briefly startled to see that Sheldon's, too, had installed a camera above the front desk. Earlier in the planning process, he had thought about trying to be subtle, maybe appearing as a normal customer before approaching the register, but then remembered that he needed to hide his identity, which required quick action. He hustled over to the counter.

Desiree was, as he expected, the only employee behind the counter. If she wasn't already alarmed enough by the mask, Jacob then pulled the .22 from the back of his pants and pointed it loosely towards her.

"Look, ma'am," he said calmly, to his surprise and satisfaction, "I have no intention of hurting you. If you would please put all the money in the bag, I would appreciate it."

Desiree, seeming strangely unbothered, slowly pulled the bag from Jacob's left hand and stared at him. Jacob then moved the gun slightly closer to her. She opened the register and began filling.

Just as Desiree was reaching for the twenties, a tall and menacing man walked into Sheldon's. His name was Arvin Little. He came in every weekday morning at 8:45 and bought a glazed donut and an extra-large coffee with extra crème and sugar. Jacob didn't know this.

Arvin worked as a janitor at the tobacco factory in Oakwood just fifteen miles away. He lived four houses to the right of the Maynard farm. He had likely seen Jacob on many occasions, but the boy at the counter with the ski mask was unfamiliar.

Arvin spotted the robbery taking place as Desiree was preparing to ask the assailant if he wanted the coins as well. He walked slowly towards the counter and reached around for the .38 he carried on him at all times.

"Hey, boy," he called. The boy turned. Arvin hadn't seen the gun in his right hand, which was hidden behind a jar of hard candies. The gun was now facing Arvin. That was all he needed.

Arvin pulled suddenly and let out three shots towards the counter, one of which shattered the window behind, causing the glass to break into thousands of teal fragments and tumble onto the floor. Jacob was hit in the left shoulder. Stunned but still standing, he fired the .22 towards Arvin. The bullet missed him by several feet but hit a bottle of cheap red wine that spilled out under the shelves.

Jacob knew he had to get the bleeding under control. He threw off the ski mask and pressed it firmly to the wound, dropping the gun on the floor and rushing out the door with a wobbly jog. Arvin walked slowly after him. Standing still on the welcome mat outside the double glass doors, Arvin locked in. He let one more bullet go. Jacob fell face-first into the concrete between Sheldon's only two gas pumps.

Desiree, having survived the ordeal with only a few scratches from the glass, made the first call to the police. It didn't take long for the squad cars to arrive, and the ambulance followed shortly. Several more cars pulled up behind the ambulances, all without sirens or flashing lights, and people with large cameras and microphones stepped out. Several officers had placed Little in handcuffs and led him to one of the cars.

The Maynards learned of all this on Jacob's mother's television. The people with cameras were broadcasting the scene. A banner on the screen read "Shooting at General Store, Branchland." A well-dressed woman named Hilde Randolph held a microphone and spoke to the camera while paramedics and police officers marched around behind her.

I'm here at the scene of a shooting this morning, a small Branchland General Store. There is one known casualty, appearing to be an adolescent boy, who is now being transported to Ridge Community Hospital. The assailant is alive and has been apprehended by police. We will provide updates when they become available.

That was the full extent of information presented to the public at the time. Immediately after the shooting, Arvin Little was driven to the police station to be questioned. He claimed to be well within his rights in shooting the thief out of self-defense. The security camera above the desk corroborated his story for the bullet to the left shoulder. The police were more concerned with the shot to the upper back.

Arvin Little called his lawyer and drove home from the station without saying a word. Two days later, the questioning officers arrived at his door with several other squad cars behind them for backup. They were searching for a man named Clark Dalton.

Arvin Little was a man from Shuckton County, Missouri, and had been dead for nearly forty years. Dalton had been living under his name for six years. Once a police officer himself, Dalton was wanted in the state of Maine for shoplifting and aggravated assault. Over the course of his time in Branchland, he had built a reputation with the locals as an unapproachable loner-type. No family, no friends, didn't go to church. The instant he was dropped off after questioning, he began packing to drive to Oklahoma. His identification and all items relating to the crime he burned in the fire pit in his backyard. No one would ever know this, of course.

Seven weeks to the day after Dalton's arrival in Oklahoma (going now by the identity of one Hank Mulligan, retired detective from Seattle),

Desiree drove back to Branchland and Sheldon's General Store for the first time since the shooting. She had taken a leave of absence and quit in the midst of it. She was returning because Warhurst Broadcasting Service had called her, asking that she be featured in a documentary about the Branchland shooting. The call was from a man named Dom Serrano, who introduced himself as a film director. He told her that she played a critical role in the event, and that they would like to have her star in the movie they were making.

A desperate adolescent led tragically to crime, a reclusive criminal who's still out there, all in a small and seemingly anonymous American town. They were calling it "The Branchland Shooting," and claimed it would change the way people see crime in entertainment. They would pay her \$2,000 for several hours of her time, plus a small promise for royalties after the film's release.

The crew had built the store up to look more like a Hollywood set. There were large studio lights set up behind multiple studio-quality cameras, and in front were two chairs. The chair with its back to the counter had her name on it.

A tall man walked up to her and introduced himself as Mr. Serrano, the director. He said he would be asking her a few questions for the movie. He told her to tell her story as vividly and as grippingly as possible. Use big words. He asked that she take a seat and that they would begin filming shortly. She took her seat and the man behind the camera gave her a thumbs up.

"Mrs. Ellison," Mr. Serrano said, "your story sure has gripped the public's attention."

"Yes, it has," said Desiree. "It's a bit surreal to think that I was actually involved when you zoom out and think about the whole thing. The boy seemed so desperate. He wanted me to empty the register and said that if I didn't do it quickly enough, he would shoot me and kill me."

"You must have been horrified," said Mr. Serrano.

"They tell you to expect that something like this may happen at a job like this, but I couldn't have known how truly terrible it would be."

"Tell me about Clark Dalton. What was it like being in the middle of a shootout between a reckless thief and a crazed fugitive?"

"He took the first shot. I was praying that there wouldn't be any gunfire, but when it happened, I was relieved that it wasn't the robber who shot first. When the bullet went through the window, though, I didn't know what was going to happen next."

"Why do you think he took shots at a thief, if he himself was a criminal?"

"I don't think we can ever know for sure. Maybe he saw an opportunity and missed that kind of behavior. The reality, though, is that the

boy put himself in the position where the outcome was very likely, and he got what was coming to him, unfortunately.”

“Let’s talk about the robber briefly. His name was Jacob Maynard, remember?”

“Oh, yes,” she said, “I know his family from church. Terrible, terrible tragedy. I suppose we can never know why he did it, either. Maybe it was a drug thing. He always seemed like a troubled boy from what I’ve experienced. A handful for his parents. Addiction is a serious problem around here, especially for the youth.”

“Is there anything you wish you could have done to prevent what happened?”

“I am a firm believer in that what’s done is done,” said Desiree, “but if there were a way I could go back and say something to that boy, maybe try to guide him down a different path, a path away from violence, then I would do it without hesitation. If anything good could come from this, I hope it’s that troubled children may be warned to steer clear of violence. There is always a better answer.”

The interview ended as the sun was setting over Branchland. Mr. Serrano thanked Desiree and handed her the check for \$2,000. As she packed up her things, she noticed the red stain on the tile from the wine bottle had never been properly cleaned up. Desiree Ellison won’t be the one to fix this place’s problem, she thought.

She drove out of the Sheldon’s parking lot before the movie crew, who were staying behind to get some additional footage. Though the event was surely tragic, she was feeling pretty good about how well she sold her story. Movies and TV are the quickest and most reliable truth delivery systems man has ever created. Believe every word you say, she had told herself. Believe it so that it can be your truth, and then present it so that it can become everyone else’s.

Then it struck her that she would be leaving Branchland for the last time. Soon the Warhurst Broadcast Service and Dom Serrano would introduce Branchland to the whole world, and to those being introduced through the film, Desiree Ellison would be a permanent piece of the town. But what would the town be to them, could it be the same one she’s known all these years? What had she given them to see in her town?

Then she thought about something else. She was \$2,000 richer and would be on TV.



volatile
Pamira Yanar

My Mother's Books

Riley Fletcher

I was 10 when I saw a book called *How to Live Peacefully: Navigating Life's Innermost Turmoil* sitting on the couch in our living room. It was one of those books with only words on the cover. The title was in the middle. In larger font that made up nearly the entire bottom half was the author's name: Dr. Rooney Blake, Ph.D. In tiny text above the title was a blurb from some distinguished source that I've now forgotten. The author's picture was in the bottom left corner on the back. He wasn't dressed like a doctor. He wore a turtleneck and circular thin-rimmed glasses.

At dinner I asked my mother about the book. She said it was just something she read to pass the time. I found this funny because I thought most people read exciting books for fun. Like storybooks with bright pictures on the cover. Or they just watched TV. That's what I did.

My father was always working late back then. He ate dinner with us on weekends but on weekdays he'd get home and immediately come into my room to tuck me in, because he worked so late that he'd only get back when I was ready for bed. That was our routine back then. He worked in financials in a large tech company in Denver. All I knew at the time was that he worked with computers.

My mother wasn't working then. She spent most of the day at home alone while I was at school and my father at work. She had a few friends that she'd sometimes walk with around the neighborhood, but otherwise she'd spend her free time reading.

I didn't know how much she read until after she died. Nobody knew. She wrote, too, and also kept that a secret.

My father wasn't at the table when I asked my mother about her book. If he was, she probably would have tried to dodge the question. My mother was secretive about the things she read. We didn't really know why. One weekend I heard them arguing. My father said my mother didn't do anything with her time. She listed off the things she did while he was at work. The list was thorough: cleaned the kitchen, paid bills, helped me with my work, looked after my grandparents in the nursing home. She didn't mention reading.

But she did read. More than she did anything else. We wouldn't have known for sure if she hadn't annotated every book she read.

Highlighters, blue ink, red ink, pencil if there was nothing else. She wrote the date she began a book on the first page and the date she finished on the last. The first page of *Ulysses* said “November 2, 1999.” The last page said “December 3, 1999.”

I read once a popular literary critic say that reading makes us feel less alone.

My mother died on New Year’s Day, 2005. If it were a hundred years earlier, they would have likely diagnosed her with *melancholia*. They use other terms now but that seems most fitting to describe her condition near the end.

We found her collection of books in a secret door in the wall at the back of her closet. She shared the closet with my father. He never would have found it, since it was behind her clothes in the back-right corner. His clothes were in the front-left.

In total there were 142 books. The shortest was *The Case Against Happiness* by Jean-Paul Pecqueur, a poetry book, 64 pages. The longest was *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace, 1156 pages. Every book was annotated except two: *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka, and the 2001 edition of *Best American Short Stories*, edited by Barbara Kingsolver.

She had four journals. Spiral-bound, 12 inches by 14 inches, 200 pages each. The fourth journal was filled up until the 152nd page and ended 21 lines down. The last sentence was “I think I’ll sign up for a cooking class somewhere.” I’ve read each journal three times.

My mother didn’t write how she felt. There were no answers. I don’t really want to say more than that.

Dr. Rooney Blake’s book was one of two “self-help/psychology” books in the list. There were 124 novels, 10 short-story collections, five poetry books, one photography book of Paris, and those two. The other was *Finding Your WHY* by Dr. Mathilde Broadhurst, Ph.D. This one my mother began on May 21, 2001 and didn’t finish. It was only annotated up to page 18.

The day I asked my mother about *How to Live Peacefully* was one day before she finished it, and 294 days before she died. It is the only book of hers I remember seeing. There were likely others, but I would have no reason to remember them. The book was sitting on the couch next to a

blue pen and yellow highlighter. The corner was dog-eared. The spine was cracked.

The literary critic who said that reading makes us feel less alone also said that self-help books are the death of good writing, along with journaling and blogging.

I was sick at school the day I found the book, and my mother had to pick me up and take me home. It was fourth grade. One time in that class a student raised her hand and asked the teacher why we read stories if they're fake. The teacher answered, "Why would you want to read about all the bad real stuff in the world if you can read good fake stuff in a story?" The student didn't respond, but there were probably hundreds of better answers to her question.

I found the book because my mother left it sitting on the couch. I guess she usually hid the books before driving to get me from school. She forgot to hide it when she came to pick me up early.

Being cynical about self-help books is no better than taking them seriously.

My father retired in 2010. He lives in Boulder now. He has since remarried. He keeps my mother's books in three separate boxes in his attic. His new wife doesn't know that they're my mother's. The boxes are labeled "COLLEGE BOOKS." He doesn't read them.

I turned 26 yesterday. I had no answers for my mother back then and I have none now. She didn't leave any to find. I still haven't read *How to Live Peacefully* and I probably never will.

Dr. Rooney Blake lives in Annapolis, Maryland, with his partner and their son, Kyle. He has written fifteen books and has enjoyed numerous stints as a *New York Times* Bestselling Author.



View from Mount Magalloway, NH
Nathan Burns

Have Faith

Kaelyn Reid

Grandma loved her faith and
by that I mean to say she feared God
God who would strike us down
should we forget our God whose name
we mustn't say in vain lest we
want to feel the hot breath
of the Devil on our necks God
who would save us from all that said
Grandma long as we read the Bible
and sing our hymns all day like
she did she had a merciful God a wondrous
God Grandma once told me God
will deliver you from temptation God
will protect you from Evil, evil like
the hand of a man to strike you
God will protect you you mustn't
talk back you mustn't fight back you
just believe in God and He will set you Free
husband might cheat you burn you
hold you and beat you and you will stay
there and take it So Help Me God
as a wife you must learn that its
God who will protect you God
who will cover your bruises in love
and while he has you there
hands wrapped around your throat
squeezing a dark ring on your neck
looking down on you with Devil in
his eyes you will look up to Heaven
and you will say Praise God.



enlightened?
Pamira Yanar

Sonnet 3

Charles Mullis

However can I truly be alone,
when all Earth's people shout "We love the same!",
to spice their social'ty with saddened tone
and abuse the likes of mine for short-lived fame?

For now I lose the figure of my life
and live in all the solitude of rot,
for solitude I clung to as my wife,
'till solitude worse solitude begot.

So as you live without within your home
and claim insurance from insured folk,
you set my spirit out, disposed, to roam,
and where goes now this crack'd and birthèd yolk?

Well if your phantom presence made me hatch,
I'll my new life with true social'ty patch.



Garfield Falls in the Late Afternoon
Nathan Burns

Taxes and Forms

Conner Evans

He and his boy watch from the family room. The boy is focused on the screen, and his father is swirling wine around a stemless glass wondering how much more he needs until it's easy to fall asleep. His baseball cap is already low over his eyes, and he's turned off the lights, save for the kitchen, so his son isn't scared. His son is glued to one of the Mission Impossible's, guessing each line before it's said.

The garage door grinds open, shaking the house. He still hasn't changed the code. The dog is already up, wagging his tail, whimpering in anticipation with his ears back, old as he was when she still fed him each morning. The cats stay upstairs, peering down on this intruder to their territory.

"Hi bubby," she says, keeping a manila folder out of the hound's reach. He tries to climb up on her as if to meet her eyeline, to peer into her soul and keep her there forever. The boy looks at his father before he looks to the door, and his father holds his wine still, enough left for two more sips, but he doesn't take them now. Something to look forward to.

He nestles into his slippers before he rises, not meeting his son's eyes. The boy sits, yet unprompted by either parent, though they converge before him. The man yanks his pet away with more force than he needs. The dog squeals quietly, and she flashes a smile. "Just need some last autographs from you, Terry."

He holds onto the dog's collar and takes the folder with his free hand. He smiles with one side of his face and looks toward the covered countertops. They're filthy with dried food bits and coffee grounds hidden under loose papers, pens long dried out, pill bottles, Tupperware containers yet to be stored in the cabinets above. Some of his son's toys look back at him. At least they aren't on the floor.

"We didn't know you were coming over or else we would have saved some food for you."

"I just had something near work. I'll let you boys get back to your movie, just needed you to sign a couple things that Harold needs from you."

The boy stays put as the commercials roll. He clasps his hands on his knees, then crosses his arms. He wiggles his toes and swings his legs with his feet crossed over each other, back and forth. He looks once again at the kitchen and sees his mother's new haircut, short, swooped over one eye, redder than ever. His father is slouching with every bone in his body. He's trying to clear too many things off the counter at once and still doesn't know where everything is supposed to go. He can't look at her. The boy turns back to the ads, waiting for Tom Cruise to reappear, sprinting across

the screen.

“Joey, say hello to your mother, will you? The movie’s already recorded.”

She finally lets down her laptop bag near the door and reaches out her arms for Joey from too far away. Claire hasn’t felt him in three days. Joey walks around the kitchen island the long way to get to her, stopping first to caress the dog before acceding to her chest. He pats her back once with his right hand, then pulls away. He sees something like clouds in her only visible eye and retreats. She smiles and stands up straight, still in heels, taller than his father.

“You finish all your homework?” She asks.

“Just had tests today.”

His father rifles through the pages, finding where to sign. None of the pens on the counter work, yet he still tries indenting his initials into the paper. He leans over and quickly pulls a pen from her bag, not wanting to disturb the conversation. They were conveniently trapped with each other with pressure to speak. The boy would be more respectful in his presence.

“How’s Rosie?” She says.

“Rose is fine, I think.” He says, holding his ground. His father keeps writing, always under her bone-dry signatures. All of them seemed rushed, still bloated with his family name. He takes his time. He waits for her and Joey to find something to talk about, or perhaps he lingers indulgently over his depressive duty.

“She’s a cutie, don’t you think, Joey?” she says.

“You always say that.”

Terry stops his pen, listening. He remembers Joey’s story about the little blond girl who bruised Joey’s shoulder at recess last week. Joey had said she didn’t mean it. Claire knew Rose’s mom from tennis or book club, but Terry couldn’t picture her now or recall her last name. He keeps his eyes transfixed all the while on the folder’s last page.

“You find them all, Terry?”

“Yep, should be good to go,” he says while she snags the papers off the counter. “You sure you don’t want to stay for dinner? I can heat something up for you. We’ve got some fried rice in the fridge from the other day.”

“Oh shoot.” She’s been looking at the stapled sheets the whole time. “You signed the wrong lines here.”

“I’m so sorry,” a thick blue ‘x’ had bled through one page and into the next. “I should have double-checked it. Here, we can just mark it out, and you can get Harold to sign over it.”

She puts the packet down, reaches for her phone, and searches for the appropriate email. He reexamines every page, exasperated. He glances at his boy who's been watching him unblinking, gripping the cuffs of his cargo shorts impatiently. "Do you mind just reprinting it? I can send you the files."

"Sure thing." He crumbles quickly. He looks around for a moment, taking in again the careless filth. The boy pushes his hair from his face with both hands, long in need of a hair appointment. Terry turns and jumps up the stairs as if to show he's still quick on his feet. He has to boot it all up: the printer, the old Dell. He has to find where he last set his glasses down. An ink cartridge is running low. He feels his cats' eyes upon him, lurking, judging, so much bigger than him, it feels. Can he reclaim all that hate? Might he let it back in? The cats, at least, hold firm. He fills the paper tray, connects the chord to his laptop, and he prints. But he hears his son, talking too loud as usual from downstairs, blurting out his unfiltered thought, "Why did you make him do that?"

The machine ekes out one line at a time, more pages than he expects. Too much time to think before he must walk back downstairs unaffected. Were they standing in silence until his son let loose that crushing question? Was he all there was to discuss, once out of earshot? Was he really so frail? How much could his son see?

When they negotiated on the larger things a few short weeks ago, he kept the house using his learned meekness. He thinks now of Harold's furrowed, pitying eyebrows. He wanted to prove to himself he could cut all vices, and eagerly awaited the physical repercussions. He ditched caffeine and booze for two weeks as if preparing for an emotional colonoscopy. The migraines let him wallow, and the chills wrapped him on these warm days of early fall and he sweat through the night on top of his empty blankets. His discomfort had to be visible, he thought, for her to understand and for him to win the house. He ate only fats and grease, forcing down two raw eggs every morning too. He could feel a thin film across his body, a self-secreted veil protecting him. He could barely see the pages he was reading when he represented himself at Harold's office. She had paid for Harold, and he sat alone. And he was granted the house. But the pathetic mess stayed all around him in these weeks since. He was unable to snap back into place, and she could see it.

The printer spits out a blank final page. He snatches it from the tray and crumples it into a ball, squeezed to its densest form between his two hands. The cats purr. He smashes the Dell closed with a fist and turns away. He finally steps down the stairs, packet of papers warm in hand like rotten fruit. They stick to his fingers, ordered but unstapled. He looks to her,

finally, and lifts his lips to force another smile, though his eyes don't match them. "You ought to look at it with me this time."

They hover there together on the newly visible countertop, working in tandem for two brief minutes. She points with her fingernails, bitten to the pink, and he writes with her blue pen, the same color as her rising veins. He hardly notices she's cleared half his mess during the wait. The boy stares on behind them. Their eyes don't meet, graciously focusing on the pages before them. She signatures too where appropriate and marks 'x's for Harold to see later. The cats, perched above, turn back for their expensive beds, disappointed, disgusted. The dog creeps in and lays down behind her feet, unseen or heard, though she feels herself warm up just a little. And the boy is still. He watches as they work effortlessly together.

first generation

Lucia Orlandi

I

it feels like your mother saying your home is not her home
will never be her home
forty years passed but seeing the streetlights still makes her sad

it feels like a secret, an inside joke
but no one else wants to know

sometimes it feels like pride, feet planted firmly in two places
but the ground turns soft and silty
crumbles underneath your feet and you must jump or drown

because what it really feels like is dissonance
Janus taunting you at every turn
denial deception rejection tearing you apart

II

they look to you, you look right back
go ahead you say it is safe I am right behind you

and all the days they did not dare venture out alone
and no one met them halfway
hands raised, palms up, empty
heavy with the weight of their dream deferred

III

it feels like heavy eyelids burning as you blink
you should be asleep but you are not
you are up
wondering are they happy they are so tired

you dream of norman rockwell, the white picket fence
and in your dream nobody speaks

and you cannot find your parents they look just like your neighbors

the white picket fence melts slowly, silently into foamy water

and you long for the ocean

to come back for them, embrace them

a deep, dark, dreamless refuge

and sweep them softly, gently, carrying them home



close
Pamira Yanar

Furnishings

Cole Richard

It was wrapped in black garbage bags, tucked away in your closet. You had warned me that you had plenty of projects to keep me busy while I was home for break, but I hadn't expected the screen to be one.

"Found it!" I call, pulling the bundle into the light. We carefully move the screen onto the dining room table and free it from the plastic. Opening it is like a reunion; the four paper panels seem to exhale as we unfold them, revealing the long-concealed paintings within.

This *byobu* was given to you by your parents. I'm amazed that it's in such pristine condition. Through however many houses and apartments, move after move, it has survived without a scratch or tear on its delicate paper. In the house on Kayla Circle, it hung proudly above the dining room table. Then, in the house on Graystone, above the credenza. After this last move it was relegated to the closet because it "didn't fit" with everything else. I had nearly forgotten it existed by the time you asked me to hang it again. We affix the mounting brackets and hang it above the table, replacing the oil painting of Paris.

The table is new. It stands where before there were two oversized leather recliners. You always had trouble making them recline; you'd rock back and forth in place and chide us for laughing. Now they're in an apartment on the other side of I-4, replaced by a proper dining table that's too big for just you and me. We set lunch out, *tonkatsu* from the Asian supermarket downtown.

"Oh yeah, we have good Jappo meal," you say, playfully mimicking your parents' speech. We catch up. We talk about Cait, who lives in Colorado now, and Carter, who's moving to New Orleans soon. Neither of us say it but we both know I'll be gone soon, too. You know I never liked Florida.

"Maybe I'll go back to Hawaii and live with Grandma and Michel... like *Golden Girls!*" you say.

"That'd be nice. Could you keep working remote?" I ask.

"No, but I'd figure something out. It's like I always tell you, 'it's no big deal!'"

That evening I go to my room and flip through the book I brought to show you, a collection of *ukiyo-e* prints by Hiroshige. *Ukiyo-e* translates as "floating world," and prints typically feature landscapes that fade into nothingness, foregrounded by characters suspended in action. My favorites are the ones with multiple gradients; I get dizzy counting the colors, trying to figure how many dozens of wood block carvings were used to make a single image. It's a fun kind of escapism, to lose yourself in a print for a little while, but eventually, always, the floating world comes crashing down.



Foraged
Gabby Kiser



Stranded
Nathan Burns

Undiscovered

Naomi Mitchell

Sometimes

Not often

But too often not to mention

When thought is

Dead and dark and damp

All hope of relief rests

On the evening primrose blooming at noon

On the ocean suspending in the sky

And saltwater dripping from the heavens

Beneath this unnaturally perfect storm

There's sugar sweet lips

And silver tipped tongues

Hands of habitual perfection

Skilled in strength and tenderness

And knowing eyes at the center of it all

The things I'd do to meet you

The things I'd give to be you

To stand at the meeting place of land and sea

With the power to deny the raging tide the only relief it seeks

To whip the ground into a frenzy

Sending roses twirling in a sandstorm

These battered white petals decorate the floor

And remind me to tread lightly

You could flee at any moment

Frothy fabric veils your features

But as I grow closer

A hint of a fresh dawn lights your face

And I smile

Hopeful

I will see your whole face

When this madness has finished

A Land That Will Not Sorrow The Sadness

Megan Brooks

The Canary not American plumped
mended shut with barbwire
slit the black birds throat and
Box than to admit
“detox”. All sounds songs
melodious feigning of a falsified nation
birds who dare travel across the borders
their eggs hovering hatching
ned creations eggs mothered by a land
their sadness. Oh Great Green pheasant
dumped in “cages” scattered around
desert ground Oh how I hear your cawing
my mind. The mighty thunderbird supernatural

“There is no flag large enough to cover the shame of killing
innocent people.”
– Howard Zinn

wings plummeted perched to speak

from a world who would rather

tear out one of the Canaries bird

guilt to the shameless slaughtering

souls mimicked the monotonous

who trapped the migrant

stole
birthing hem as their own Dam

who could never sorrow

the duped enemy

dusted dried deserted

in the cebrals of

suffers a wobbled

wounded knee. A massacre
battle Trumpets that provided
Extinction. The american canary
melodious falsities of a nation borne from
being forced down the beaks of every bird
in the purity of



masqueraded in the bellowing buzzing

the beat that bathed the birds, in blood of mass

with yellowed patriotic blissness sings the

Silence

who wasn't feathered

white.

Butterflies Around the Summer Solstice

Nathan Burns

god of lightning

Kaelyn Reid

boom

a drum beats out the rhythm of a storm
a god's feet pound the sky and it
sounds like thunder, thunder
that rolls and cracks and snaps
to make lightning, lightning
that can touch the ground and leave a burnt ring of ash
or strike a soul and set it ablaze
with revenge

shango god of lightning
with an armor of natural disaster
streaks about the sky much
like a warrior
in his hand he holds an axe to
cut through the clouds and lends
to the people a ferocious strength

he is resilience aggression and power
the body of man the soul of lightning
the force of the ram to charge
and break bones and shackles
to crack the sky and scorch the sugar in the field
maybe even strike down the tree
its cold bark that can bear to watch
his people's legs kicking for the ground

it's one-part witchcraft, salt circles,
and hope that fans the flame of
shango
another part is a back of scars
that branch and stretch like lightning
feeding the soul with a drink
of electricity or sometimes anger

you might not know of shango
a history a god a culture erased
to feed the lie of a man-like beast
or a beast-like man, a place ridden
of any scraps of humanity or
civilization wiped clean by
maybe a bolt of lightning or even
a boat
saddled on its back
by a people in chains
leaving scorched earth behind
and a deadly ocean filled with
their sacrifice

knowing that even a god could not endure
what they were forced to endure



An Ogre Lives Here
Olivia Lomax

Lila

Riley Fletcher

The mountainous trip by horse from Pawlet to New Washington had taken him all day, and he arrived at the tavern that night before anyone else. He carried nothing but a poster and a pocket watch. Inside the pocket watch were two faded photographs: a mother on the left, her daughter on the right. Printed on the poster was a photograph of the daughter, thirty years later.

He couldn't be certain, but he was. He hadn't seen either woman in thirty years. It was the daughter who first ran away from them. Then he ran away from the mother. The mother was Jane. The daughter was Lila. The woman on the poster was Sylvia Beck. Above her name read "Special Performance: King's Tavern: One Night and One Night Only." He had first seen the poster back in Pawlet, nailed to a post outside of the town hall. Advertisements like this appeared all the time, but never had one caught his eye like this, and he knew it to be her the moment he saw it.

It had started to snow about half-way through his trip, and the snow had gathered to an inch or so by the time he arrived. The tavern was slightly warmer but maintained a chilled atmosphere. It smelled of wet oak. The lamps at each table seemed ready to die, flames sinking into a deeper orange with every passing minute. The stage was directly across from the bar.

Lila had left when they were only two days into Colorado. It was late summer, when days were the longest and food was plenty. Travel was quick and easy. They had left from Indiana in March and those they had met on the trip were kind and they were fortunate that they had made it this far without a death or critical mishap. Lila was seven and one night they went to bed and woke the next morning and Lila was gone.

In King's Tavern the heat was draining with every new stranger entering. The snow was beginning to pile against the sides of the building while the wind swelled and pushed the accumulation through the cracked door. Soon the bodies would converge, and the shared breathing would heat the place up again. Though the tavern and the guests were unfamiliar, this darkness and coldness was all he knew of this part of Colorado.

The bartender asked the man what he wanted to drink, and he ordered a whiskey. He pulled the watch from his pocket and stared at the pictures. She was young and the image had nearly faded into total obscurity, but he could see her mother's eyes and her father's nose developing in Lila. Her mother had brilliant blonde hair that contrasted deep brown eyes. His own were green. Lila had adopted a lighter brown than her mother's but the same bloneness, which was then routinely kept in tight braided pigtails running halfway down her back. In the picture she wore a

bonnet, but she had always put up a fight when it came to fancy clothes. He wished he could remember more, but the story behind the picture had faded along with the image itself.

After several solitary rounds of whiskey, the place had become crowded. The noise that had gathered was rhythmic with the fluctuation between shouting and engaged conversation, and clinking glasses every so often enhanced the music from the background. In an instant the lights towards the stage rose and the curtains were pulled back and the noise of the tavern grew uniformly, and Sylvia Beck walked out from behind the curtains. She wore a white dress and had curly blonde hair cut short around her shoulders and carried a guitar. She smiled and waved to the crowd of strangers and they cheered back at her. Someone in the crowd threw a bottle onto the stage that shattered beside her foot and she seemed entirely unphased.

The man watched her quietly take her seat at a stool on the stage. She started tuning her guitar and slowly the crowd began to hush. With the first moment of silence over the crowd, she began to sing.

Oh, the old house at home, where my forefathers dwelt...

Could he hear traces of Jane in that voice? He was now more than twice as old as he was when he last heard his wife. Those nights in the darkness off the trail he could hear it the loudest, crying through coyote howls, whispering in the nightly wind. But it was Lila's childish squeals he heard louder than anything. They woke him in those nights where he would fall asleep mapping the stars so that when he found her, they could return safely to the party. He searched deeply for the Lila's cries in the stranger's singing.

Where a child at the feet of my mother I knelt...

He thought the first night after would be the hardest and he was wrong. The party wasn't going to stop, that much was clear. They had been blessed with a safe journey and they couldn't risk breaking stride over one child missing for a day. She would probably find her way back soon, anyway. But he wasn't convinced by his baseless hopes. Lila wasn't coming back on her own. So it was that first night afterwards that he kissed Jane for the last time while she slept and took his horse and followed the trail back a day's journey. The voices started soon after, Jane beckoning him back, Lila calling out from every direction. He wished he could talk back to them. Tell Lila that he wasn't letting her go that easily, tell Jane that they're coming back soon.

Where she taught me the prayer, where she read me the page...

He lost track of days when he was coming up on two months. That was probably about half the time he was looking. His horse became weary as the nights grew colder and he had to leave it after a few weeks. The colder it got, the harder it was to eat. The last day he only walked about

a mile before he found a rock and sat down and fell asleep. Only hours later he awoke to a group of horses and carriages passing through several hundred yards away. He had inadvertently stumbled upon another trail.

Which, if infancy lisps, is the solace of age...

And in this cold, strange night in New Washington, he felt just as he had those thirty years ago. The party dropped him off in Pawlet, back then a pioneering mining town, population 48. He didn't know how far off the original path he was, nor how close any other path was, nor how far he was from where he initially left his party. Jane had either made it to California or she hadn't. All left of Lila was the small photograph in the pocket watch and the hope that she was still out there somewhere, picked up by a traveling party like he was, or that she had stumbled across a small town along the way. He began working with Pawlet's new bank and watched the town grow up around him while Lila stayed the same in his mind.

My heart, 'mid all changes, wherever I roam...

He caught the eye of the woman on the stage. Contact was passing. Her eyes moved over the heads of the crowd mechanically, her hands clasped softly behind her back, her shoulders rotating gently, her voice gliding. Who was she now? He hoped dearly that he could pick out some recognizable feature: some tick, some lisp, anything that could trigger a memory previously lost or submerged. It was useless. Lila was seven, youthful and uninhibited, needy but innocent. This woman was nearly forty, perhaps a mother herself, living nomadically from show-to-show. She was now older than he was when she had once left him on the trail to California. What corners of her life would he never get to know? Would she recognize the old man at the bar who sought her for her whole life, the man who refused to live on after she left?

He put the watch back in his pocket and picked up the poster and paid the bartender and walked out back into the snow. It had gotten stronger, swirling around the lampposts and whistling through cracks in the tavern's wooden exterior, pushing the blinds to bump against windows and forcing gates to sway back and forth. A man was standing by the gate where his horse was tied up. He asked if the man was planning on leaving, since the snowstorm would likely accumulate in a foot or so by the following morning. He said it would be better if he considers spending the night in the inn. They still had several beds available. Pawlet could wait another few days. Lila's father agreed. He turned around and began the walk across town through the snowstorm, down the dimly lit street of stranger's homes and workplaces, where the woman's voice was still slipping through the old tavern...

Ne'er loses its love for the old house at home!

resented year
Megan Brooks

Fly pale
sorrows
let

the year

wither

like the moon
Like a setting sun.

Keep your head in
the sun
In the great light
come all ,

To this

holy

eye

in
the sacred smoke.

Come
And burn a
man
in perfumes.

**Erasure of A Carol Presented To Dr. Williams, Bishop Of Lincoln As A New-Year's Gift by Robert Herrick*

Minor Arcana

Lillian Tzanev

When I was a girl, I lived in a colorful and lively town.
Roads were made from grass, and the air smelled of salt water and
raspberry jam.
I often escaped to my tower where I sat in a dark emerald chair.
Velvet upholstery pressed against my skin, an untuned piano rang,
and my future laid in the cards before me.

My clammy hand turned the card, revealing a blindfolded woman kneeling
by the sea, two swords crossed over her chest.
Much to my dismay, this was not the all mighty High Priestess.
This woman was nameless, her identity was a mystery.

When I was a girl, I was an Anne of Green Gables,
a Pippi Longstocking, a Tiger Lily.
But, the future was in the cards.

Destiny came slowly. Teeth fell out,
thick brown strands of hair no longer lived in 2 braids
Hot pink faded to grey, Familiar faces turned into masks, and My beautiful
world split like the Red Sea.



When I was a girl, I smiled so wide it ached.
I was a wild animal showing off my gapped teeth.
but My future held gorilla glue which sealed my lips.

After some arbitrary passage of time,
The energy which once filled my spirit was missing.
I sat all alone by the sea, blindfolded,
Clasping a weighty sword in each hand.

When I was a girl, my life was
Hot and sunny pangs of a piano,
Razor scooters and secret missions,
Rain pouring down on a subaru,
Rock collections, art, and paint chips
Wood carvings with my swiss army knife
Giant chess pieces and ancient ruins,
Butter, yufka and feta
women in Sapphire dresses

The High Priestess looks inward.
She makes decisions and moves forward.
The woman with two swords is paralyzed,
She sits still, afraid to fall into the ocean.

Left at the Z
Casey Murano





beholder
Tereza Hernandez

Shane

Conner Evans

I clapped him on the right shoulder and I said, “Shane, it’s good to see you.” I stood behind him in line to order burritos, and I let my right hand linger, my fingers extended over his collarbone, my thumb where his neck smoothed into his back. I had forgotten just how sturdy Shane was. I gave him a light squeeze as I pulled away.

Shane kept his eyes fixed on the burrito bar, mapping out his meal. “I never thought you’d become a hat guy,” he grinned. All at once I thought the entire room must have seen that flash of light, though I was grateful that I was likely the sole audience. I hoped, too, that he hadn’t deduced my hair was thinner than last time we got together. Could he still make out the logo plastered on my faded orange cap? Did he remember fondly those summers we worked at the country club? His blond hair had kept all its color, all its volume. He wore it with just enough gel, not over-washed like mine had always been. Thinking of all this, I didn’t get a chance to respond before he started his order. I ought to stay in the present. Shane wasn’t in town for long.

Shane’s palette was wide and refined, idiosyncratic too. He liked to ask for pickles on his burritos. And he’d do this without being self-effacing, with patience for the briefly confused employee. My order always felt kiddish, with or without Shane present. I couldn’t ever finish an adult-sized tortilla, so I got the junior meal and stuffed it mostly with beef, onions, and lettuce, no cheese for me either, just a dry and smelly mess. I asked for salsa this time too. I didn’t care for spicy food, but I panicked after watching Shane. His burrito took work to fold but not so big to risk breaking. It was hardy, filled with steak, refried beans, tomatoes, corn, cucumbers, those essential pickles grabbed from outside the bar, and he splurged on both guac and queso. He turned his shoulders slightly to me and looked out the corner of his eye. He gave the same knowing, almost ironic look he would give me while sneaking his Gameboy Advance up to the slides where he was supposed to be commanding kids to go feet first, one at a time.

He paid, and I forgot to offer. I had meant to. We grabbed our cups and walked together to the soda machine, one of the fancy ones with a touchscreen and hundreds of options. “Remember when we’d combine all the flavors?” I said. “You couldn’t even do that on these new machines. You’d be here all day.” It sounded lame and forced as soon as it left my mouth, but Shane filled his cup with ice and started wordlessly mixing all of the Dr. Peppers: vanilla, strawberry, cherry, vanilla cherry. He was quick and didn’t hold anyone up. He moved to the Diet Coke screen and stopped, “You’re wrong, Dickey. The limit is only the size of our cups.”

He grabbed a straw, ripped off the wrapper, balled it up with one

hand and threw it sidearm into the trash in one motion like he was skipping a rock. And Shane could skip a rock. You wouldn't believe he was never an athlete. He was one of the few kids popular with everybody without a team sport to lean on. And yet he moved so fluid an observer could think he was anything from an over-sized gymnast to a broad-shouldered speed skater or a stocky wide receiver. But he never had much interest in sports, perhaps squandering some God-given talent, though it never hurt with the girls.

We scooted into a booth. "Look at you," I said.

"Look at me," he said. "I'm an old man already, aren't I?" He unwrapped his foil and held his burrito with one hand. His first bite didn't drip or undo the wrap. The architecture held firm in his paw.

"I'm in worse shape than you, Shane," I said, eyeing my burrito which seemed to be unraveling already. "I've got that gut my dad always warned me about. Hard to avoid, though, with the kids now. I never have the time to get back to the gym." Of course, it was meals like this one, more than lack of exercise, that had failed my physique. Easy to grab quickly, and I had enough cash to indulge myself too often during lunch breaks or after work hours.

"You'll be alright. I hear the first few years are the toughest with kids, and then you figure out ways to focus on you. Balancing act and all that."

I leaned my forearms on the table as I prepared finally to eat. It was so easy for me to just listen to Shane. The table shifted its weight as I leaned, and I snapped back. The legs were uneven. My soda jiggled, and I sighed when it stayed upright.

"This place," he said. He ripped off half of his tinfoil and folded it onto itself three times. He snuck it under the nearest leg without thumping his head under the table. "Mikey and Nicky. You better hope they get along." Shane winked. He was probably the only person who knew I'd named my twin boys after the 1976 mob movie. My wife had never seen it. He took another bite and didn't even need to wipe his mouth. He washed it down with his Dr. Pepper concoction. I still didn't know what to do with my hands. I sipped my Coke, but I had yet to eat my food. I grabbed it awkwardly with two hands. The salsa juice dripped onto my right palm, and I knew I wouldn't be able to put the burrito down until I was completely finished.

"They get along OK," I said. "It helps they don't have any bounties on their heads yet." The gates around our neighborhood certainly didn't hurt.

"Good to hear. It's good to see you too. I forgot to say that earlier."

"I forgot how much I missed you, Shane." I felt like he heard me. He looked back with an enviable kind of ease.

“We can’t be getting this sappy yet, bud.”

We continued to eat. He finished his soda one sip after his last burrito bite. I got a refill halfway through and had to wash my hands for the salsa and onions that had dribbled out of my wrap. I had to eat the last bits with a fork, but Shane didn’t embarrass me about it. He made eye contact, listened to me talk about my kids, about suburban life as a parent. Mikey was four minutes the senior and really felt like an older brother already. Leigh had started growing tomatoes that she insisted we use no matter how puny they turned out. I had started a financial advice column in our local newspaper.

He talked little about himself, not that he was deflecting really, just that he let me lead. And I was content not to pry, keeping him fixed there, knowing little of the last ten years of his life. The talk was small, but felt so intense, every movement of his face I tried to hold in my memory. I had forgotten the way his left nostril would flare out when he laughed or how he chewed his hoodie’s drawstring — not in front of me then, but I noticed the tattered string.

“Remember when we’d close the pool together?” I said with my mouth half full of the last bite of onions and beef. “When Vivian would go home early and have us lock it up? I can’t believe she trusted us with that.”

“When the evil eighth graders would come out.”

“Or at least we were afraid they would. You can’t tell them anything, or I couldn’t anyway.”

“That’s when the water hose came in handy.”

“Shane, remember when you’d pretend you couldn’t find people’s tables. You’d walk right by them.” I started waving like the moms used to wave at him. ““Over here. Hey, we’re table 14 look!’ Your sunglasses helped that too.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” he said still smiling with his mouth half open.

“Remember? Because Ms. Canon started to catch on, and she’d play into it. I think she enjoyed the attention at her age.”

“I’m sorry,” he started to ball up his trash. “Maybe that was Robbie who’d do that?”

I still had food leftover, but I gathered up the aluminum foil and set it all in the paper bag. “Yeah, maybe.”

He sprawled his right arm onto the chair next to him and lounged back again. I felt my foot tapping the floor, my urge to rise and throw my trash away. “Ready?” he asked.

“Not really,” I said laughing.

Shane leaned forward and grabbed all the trash together then crouched to sneak the folded foil out from under the table leg. As he rose the table shifted back toward me, and he dropped the meal’s remains into the nearest trash, leaving the table spotless.

I used to know his whole week. We both worked nearly every day those couple summers. My folks thought it'd be good for me, and Shane needed the cash. I'd arrive either in the morning or the early afternoon, and I'd ask what he got up to last night. He always had an answer. Watching *Space Ghost: Coast to Coast* on Adult Swim, falling asleep as soon as he got home from a double shift, heading to a party close enough to walk to. He'd say I should come sometime — I had wheels after all. He'd get bored and try to dye his hair with Kool-Aid or memorize an classic Q-Tip verse. He spent a lot of time with his dog, Brownie, and I remembered the week in August when he died, days before I went off to school two states away. I didn't know how to listen to him or wrap him up in a hug or think of an off-topic joke. It felt impossible to talk about Brownie or about anything else that day. We'd spent two summers shoulder to shoulder, facing forward. He lowered himself back into his seat closest to the wall.

"Hate to say it, but I've got to get back to it, Dickey. Long ways to Macon."

Macon? That's not two hours from Roswell if you leave at the right time of day. Shane was working in Macon, living there too, he said. I hadn't asked. Ten years passed and not even the Georgia fall line separated us. Just take 400 South to I-75. I nodded along as he told me that he was working at Mercer, and they'd help pay for his classes. He was back on track, and I didn't know he had to get back at all.

"Go Bears."

"Yep," he raised his eyebrows and looked up quickly, then back down to my eyeline. He looked tired "There's a basketball game tonight I've gotta work."

He didn't move to get up, still with his right arm covering the top of the chair beside him. But I could see him curl his fingers over the chair's backing, feel him shift his bottom to keep from going numb. He stretched his legs and gently knocked his foot into my shin. He didn't have to apologize. He wiped his face with his right hand, and I slowly rose, exaggerating my grunts and groans. "We used to just do that as a joke," Shane said. "But look at you now, 'eeagh.'" He rose, accompanied with that guttural announcement of his movement. He held his back and stomach both, looking pained and aged, and I laughed too hard. Other heads turned.

"Make me sound cool when you tell the boys about Uncle Shane."

"I will." We walked out, side by side, and I nearly bumped into the doorframe.

I could only tell the boys about the pool, the pranks, the slides, the club. I tried to remember all the details, how he'd wear his polo without any

of the buttons done and get scolded by our manager, Vivian, or maybe Victoria? I told them how he could coax any scaredy cat to try out the slide. Parents would let him put their tykes in his lap and ease himself down a few inches at a time. I told them how he would try to deep fry any food on slow days. The cooks would watch him with folded arms as he dipped chocolate bars into batter and then the fryer. I told them they would've loved him. Leigh asked why it had taken so long, why he'd reached out at all. I couldn't say without guessing. But I was glad to see him back on his feet — maybe glad that I'd only seen him now — letting that long gap remain unknown.



Slow Gallops
Casey Murano

Thoughts Beside the James
Benjamin Mathios

I want to live with life, *convivir*.
To share it with the souls I love and
the souls that love me.
We can become a unit
while remaining our own beings.
Keep my friends close
*Pero, espero que mi vida sea
abierta por nuevas personas.*

I want to struggle with it.
For struggle is necessary.
The current fights through the riverbed,
winding and finding its way. I do the same.
No log, no rock, no human stands in my way
in the pursuit of bliss.
Sin sufrimiento, no aprecio vida de felicidad.

I want a way with words that swoons the ladies.
Quiero hablar español con fluencia,
to open up my options.
I want siestas and lake trips,
museum visits and book clubs,
beach days and music moratoriums.

I want suffering
I want happiness.



Warped Reflection
Nichole Schiff

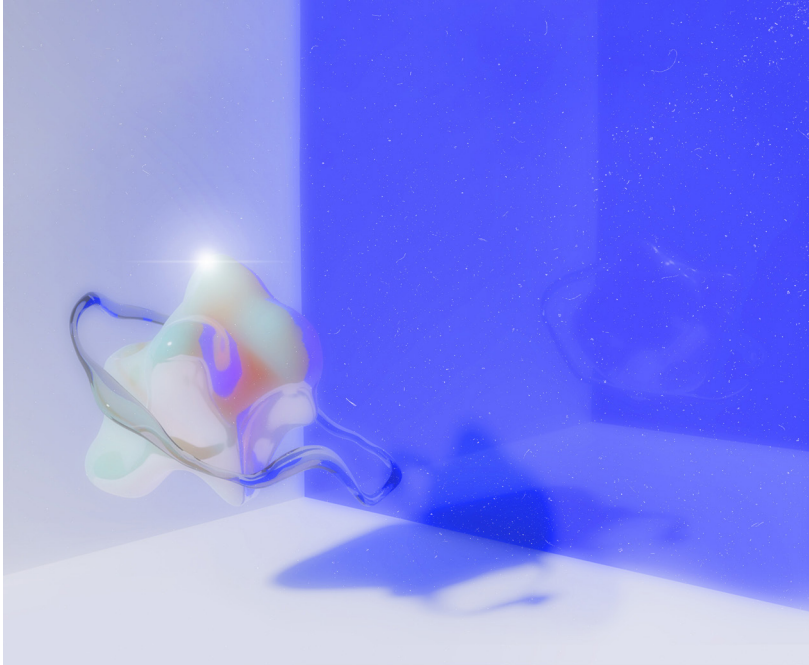
Memorious

Claire Silverman

When I see vines of clematis
 or smell the salt air of the coast
I think always of the summers spent
 reaching for stolen glances
Ribs bruised from holding in laughter
 storms brewing along the sea

When I hear the reverberation
 of a cellist's bow
Echoing in a great empty hall
 I remember the gravitational pull
Of your hands, like the moon
 when I was water

When I taste the bitter earth
 after falling too hard, too fast
I am reminded of your bouquet of violets
 that wilted in the sun
May Violence never reach my door
 though she tarries along the shore



i imagine her memory looks something like this
Tra My Anderson



Tacky Hell (Long Live Bad Taste!)
Kathleen Firment

Saturdays are for Laundry

Kristin Santana

I am from Vogue magazines that are collecting dust in the laundromat.

I always dreaded Saturday mornings. Most seven-year-olds wake up peacefully: the sun kisses their forehead as it slowly pokes its way into their cozy bedroom. I was not one of those seven-year-olds. At 9 am, Aventura's "Obsesión" blasted through my mother's I-think-the-antenna-is-broken-radio and the scent of Fabuloso—a Hispanic household staple—tickled my nose, signaling my slumber was over. Saturdays are for laundry. My mother had a pile for every category of clothes you had yet to consider—the holy trinity: darks, lights, whites; the delicates that were meant to be washed in the cleaners; bras and panties; reds (the "too sexy" color that she swore would stain everything else); and most importantly, Papi's clothes.

As you can imagine, Mami's eighteen thousand overflowing piles of dirty clothes could not possibly fit into the black folding wagon everyone in the Bronx buys from the 99 cent store. You would think this meant we gave up on trying to make all the clothes fit in the wagon, but alas, where there's a will there's a way. In the newest satin laundry bag went the holy trinity. In the we-should-throw-this-hole-filled-laundry-bag out went the delicates and bras since Zara and Victoria's Secret never had enough sales to make a substantial pile of blouses and push-up bras. Using my chicken little arms and mami's housekeeper arms we stuffed those bags in the wagon. The lighter bag lay on top of the other. The bag dangling sideways always ran the risk of splitting open in the middle of the street, so I learned to tie tight knots from a young age. In a Marshalls bag that I carried as my mother pushed the cart went the detergent and Papi's clothes. The straps of the heavy plastic bag printed red marks on my skin. Isabela, who was four, carried a repurposed sancocho container with shiny quarters.

When we finally arrived at our grand destination, I sat in the blue chairs and grabbed a Vogue magazine from the window sill. I skimmed the magazine cover to cover, stopping at the Chanel perfumes to whiff my wishlist.

I am from Vogue magazines that are collecting dust in the laundromat.

Ode to Barbershop Quartets *Ray Barr*

Tenor Tenor Baritone Bass
Four voices focus & hocus pocus
the successful noises penetrate
my mind shattering me to pieces.
I'm dumbfounded by the sound;
 "Hello my baby"
Beats, batters, & binds me
 in submission of awe.

On top, the falsettos flex
sheering beauty into breath.
Beneath, Lead shoulders
the melody musically while
 Bass carries the root.
Who is to say what Baritone
contributes? His head voice blending
perfectly in abstract chords—indiscernible.

I listen for hours upon hours
 to the sweet sounding
 musical dessert that
 overflows my plate.
I gorge on the instrument-
less sevenths slithering around
the air as my ears reach out for more.

 Hey!
Share a joke before the finale,
share a poke at the other contestants,
finish the song in one chord of pure
ecstasy, finally returning to home
 on consonance street.



Aha Makav
Casey Murano

Home

Colette Creamer

Verdant, you rest
Upon three hills,
almost two decades
Standing shelter to the many lives
Born in your shadow.
Here, lies a maple tree alone and proud among the clover,
Where honeybees dance beneath the sun.
There, the sweet pea flowers scatter between the sorrel
The apple tree, and the lemon balm
the pear tree sleeping nearby by the mimosa.
The poke berry hides the lilies,
the blackberries the poison ivy,
the poison and the plenty
all one breath of life harmonious



Flores
Georgi Warren

Moon Musings

Colette Creamer

I've marveled at the moon
On crystal nights where stars are hammered into midnight metal,
Seen its slow blink as the months trip by in lazy time,
And pondered its many faces
On late-night walks through dim-lit roads.

They say there is a man in the moon,
And though I've found no man up there,
I see faces within the phases,
An expression in a single eye.

I see rapt attention in the fullness of midnight sun,
A drowsy friend as the gibbous wanes.
The narrowed glare of the crescent,
The meditative patience of the new.

In the light of the night
I have stared up at that blinking, argent oculus
and wondered in a passing fancy
if it was a some deity's tired gaze –

And if it was,
Does that god weep now
For all they see
Beneath their unwavering, distant,
Helpless eye?



New Hampshire in the Late Summer
Nathan Burns



morning fog
Tereza Hernandez

A walk, in the rain,
Maddie Olvey

was not what I anticipated that night, but the storm was tapping an insistent invitation on my window (on my eardrum), and I wondered what was out there, but the storm would only say *come outside*, so I replied *let me think about it*, yet suddenly I was wearing my coat and carrying my umbrella, and suddenly I was on the side of the road, striding into the murky darkness, guided by street lamps smoldering an artificial yellow-orange, burning a hole through the haze of the storm, and I watched this light diffuse into the raindrops so that they splattered like liquid gold on the asphalt, collecting into pools of ichor against the blackness, and *isn't that something*, the way rain captures light, captures color, and for a moment I imagined this ichor seeping into the ground and washing the dead things, scrubbing the worm-food clean, and I imagined it bathing the worms as they writhed in their worm-holes, and I imagined it rinsing the heads of the plants as they sighed in relief, as they leached it from the soil and stood up straighter, and for a moment I stopped (golden drops dappling my coat-sodden air filling my lungs- my umbrella a halo of shadow-light beneath the lamps) and I listened, because I realized the insects were still singing despite the downpour, and without the distraction of walking I found myself once again curious *why am I here*, but then, with a melodious whisper, the choir commanded *look at your arm*, so I did, I watched as the raindrops vanished into the fine lines of my skin the way they vanish into the earth where dead things are decaying and worms are turning and plants are growing and then—only then— did I begin to understand why.

Spring 2021 - forward