

The background of the cover is a complex, abstract pattern composed of numerous irregular, multi-sided polygons. These polygons are filled with a variety of colors, including shades of pink, magenta, teal, light blue, beige, and cream. The shapes are arranged in a non-repeating, mosaic-like fashion, creating a vibrant and textured visual field. The entire composition is framed by a thin, solid brown border.

# Periphery

*Art + Literary Journal* | Edition 56









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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Poetry

<i>Colonization of Face</i>   Faiz Ahmad	17
<i>Act of Survival</i>   Laurel Cramer	18
<i>Buying the Morning After Pill</i>   Laurel Cramer	19
<i>The Poem I Cannot Write</i>   Carrie George	22
<i>Parce Domine</i>   Allison Kaefring	24
<i>Dead Grasshopper Lay Hidden in van Gogh Painting for 128 Years</i>   Alexis Kreft	26
<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>   Talitha Greaver	27
<i>Bells and Waffles</i>   Hagan Maurer	28
<i>Birth by the Sea</i>   Alexis Pearson	30
<i>Hearts in our Hands</i>   Alexis Pearson	32
<i>Love you, GI Othello</i>   Caleb Kinseth Peterson	34
<i>A Son Much Like Dreaming Icarus Maneuvers a Father Much Like Cursed Daedalus</i>   Caleb Kinseth Peterson	37

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Prose

<i>Giving and Taking</i>   Kyle Cornell	41
<i>Spectral Light</i>   Lillian DeThomas	47
<i>Monster</i>   Liz Dohrn	49
<i>Stone Cold</i>   Jon Freymark	61
<i>Brownsville, Texas</i>   Drake Lohse	63
<i>Who's Missing from Aunt Deb's Wake?</i>   Tess Lydon	67
<i>Flower Girl</i>   Marvin Ogbunezu	79
<i>Encounters with Dick</i>   Hallie O'Neill	83
<i>A Teacher's Guide</i>   Helen Trisko	87
<i>Twelfth Floor</i>   Olivia Williams	89

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Art

<i>Drowning Girl</i>   Amelia Brisk	95
<i>Naptime</i>   Amelia Brisk	96
<i>Queen v. King</i>   Amelia Brisk	97
<i>Duplicity</i>   LiJune Choi	98
<i>Field Trip</i>   LiJune Choi	98
<i>Landscape Wonderland</i>   LiJune Choi	99
<i>Confetti Sunset</i>   Juliette Jarabek	100
<i>Guardian Angel</i>   Juliette Jarabek	101
<i>Motherhood</i>   Juliette Jarabek	102
<i>Connection</i>   Koo Yeong Joo	103
<i>Japanese Woman</i>   Agnes Jung	104
<i>Red Buddha</i>   Agnes Jung	105
<i>Skeleton</i>   Agnes Jung	106
<i>Flipper Fair Lover</i>   Cheyann Neades	106
<i>Athena</i>   Carlye Patterson	109
<i>Untitled 3</i>   Carlye Patterson	110
<i>Untitled 5</i>   Carlye Patterson	110
<i>Perspective</i>   Joe Sheehan	111

# ABOUT

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# SUBMISSION PROCESS

Submission to *Periphery* is free and accepts submissions from undergraduate students from across the United States, but are happy to be able to publish undergraduate work from across the globe. *Periphery* accepts stories, photographs, poems, music, essays, paintings, videos, interviews, new media work, sculptures, graphic narratives, spoken word, comics, and genres that have yet to be created or recognized. All submissions are sent through a blind review process by the Editor-In-Chief, Art Director, and Editorial Staff only. *Periphery* reserves the right to edit any and all submissions, but does not claim the rights to any published work.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The creation of Periphery 56 has been a transitory time in the history of the journal. A full staff of editors was hired at the beginning of the cycle, and new leadership will take hold here at end. Through it all, I want to thank my stalwart Art Director Hannah Trochinski for dealing with my last minute requests and for always finding time in her day to talk about posters and art submissions. I would also like to thank our new advisor, Carol Spaulding-Kruse. She always seems to have a new idea for us, and her support has and will be invaluable to the Journal for years to come. Periphery 56 would also be nothing without the team of editors. I would like to thank Abbey Bethke, Deanna Krikorian, Hailey McKinney, and Hannah Nuss for their ability to see the best in submissions and willingness to stick their neck out for them. Finally, thanks is due to Jeff Inman, the Board of Student Communications, and the staff at Christian Printers. Without all of you, this journal would cease to exist.



# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

It is not a novel thought to say that literature, and broadly art as a whole, acts as a sort of mirror, but it is how I have approached art for some time. What stands out in cinema, or in poetry, or in paintings are the emotions and experiences with which a viewer can connect to strongly. How much more do you enjoy a description of a thunderstorm, when one rages around you? How much sweeter do love songs sound, when you can pair their words with a specific person? The meaning brought to these examples of art is incredibly subjective and individual, more based on the viewer than the art. The meaning is less experienced, than it is constructed.

If understanding of art is created through personal experience, that means that through art, we can only ever truly see ourselves. What we enjoy or hate about a novel or movie can only ever reflect the things we enjoy or hate about the larger world around us. In paintings, poetry, and prose, the faces might be different, and the we might dance to a different tune, but the characters and experiences can only ever reflect aspects of ourselves. This introspection, I feel is the elegance and importance of art: it makes us examine ourselves.

Therefore it is with that idea that I introduce you to Periphery 56. The stories contained herein range from the melancholy, to the irreverent, to the mythic. They are a collection of poems, short stories, and art that work at reflecting new ideas, far away from the commonplace. They will take you on the wings of proud vultures, to the depths with a drowning girl, and to the insides of a Van Gogh painting. It is my hope that these stories reflect the parts of you, that make you reconsider, that make you stop and wonder: if just for a moment.

Graham P. Johnson  
Editor-in-Chief, Edition 56



The background of the slide is white, framed by a thin pink border. There are several large, abstract pink shapes scattered around the frame, resembling torn paper or decorative elements. These shapes are in various shades of pink, from light to vibrant magenta. The word "Poetry" is centered in a large, pink, serif font.

# Poetry



# COLONIZATION OF FACE

*FAIZ AHMAD*

The white troops that you dispatched  
landed near your own face

Your indigenous eyebrows lay massacred  
Your eyelashes wept for years  
Your lips illegally migrated to unknown lands

They jailed the remnants of your forehead  
They annexed the hearing from the old kings of your ears  
They forced the farmers to sow wrinkles

Your peninsular face gradually turned into a colony  
of your own forgetting

# ACT OF SURVIVAL

*LAUREL CRAMER*

I wash my hands  
and draw the dog tongue paper  
across my white palms.  
And hope to be a better person  
when I'm done.

I have white knuckled it for so long  
that they are bleached by others wants.  
The only thing I know how to do is survive,  
but survival is not the talent  
It is not the ability to make or love  
or make love, it is just survival.

There are not houses that a woman  
has meticulously painted the south facing wall  
to match the sunset through her window.  
There are not gardens yielding sage, rosemary,  
and chives. And there will never be handmade  
scraps of colored paper shoved in corners  
with children's language scrawled on them  
in the lands of survival.

Lovers do not wake up well rested  
from an overly springy mattress  
to cook eggs on a stove that takes  
a few tries to light. Survival does  
not have room for these things.  
It does not need these things.

We simply survive and slowly  
wonder where the foot stool  
has gone, where the tv has gone.  
Where did the couch go?

They talk about grit.  
I have been made of  
fletched stone before  
and I would always rather  
eat cake than rocks.

I have knelt on rough brick  
for hours and prayed to a  
blue sky. And the whole time  
wished for the grass.

The last man standing  
is nothing more than  
the most tired one.





# BUYING THE MORNING AFTER PILL

*LAUREL CRAMER*

the weight of his gaze was between my shoulder blades—  
I was running through the isles from the looks  
dodging eyes behind milk cartons

I had chosen to make the long walk alone  
the farther I went the more exposed I was  
each shelf was stripping a piece of fabric off me  
exposing skin by inches— priming for a sharp tongue to split it

thumbing through the boxes of pills to try and find a cure—  
how do you put a price on an uncapsized future  
my security is white powder pressed by hands  
just like the wafers I ate twice a week and once on Sunday  
in parochial school— I've been taught how to swallow a life

it's bound by metal caging so no one can steal it  
man forbid a woman wield that kind of power  
an agency that could end the human race

I slide it across the counter and watch  
as the man's marble eyes roll on the floor  
and his mouth forgets to work as long as I'm  
a visible whore at the register

# THE POEM I CANNOT WRITE

*CARRIE GEORGE*

I promise I cannot write this poem.  
I guarantee I can't.  
I have nothing to say about the oriole  
in the run down bird house  
in the crooked tree we named Nelson.  
Nothing to say about fireworks  
smuggled across the Pennsylvania border  
in January, set off  
at the end of my driveway in July.  
I am silent about my mother's curl pattern  
thin now from a stolen thyroid,  
the invisible hole down her throat.  
I cannot tell you about the eyeliner  
in the bathroom cabinet  
when I used to stand on the toilet  
to reach the stash of expired make up  
while my mother snored into the morning.  
Cannot write about sleep apnea.  
Something about legs twitching all night  
sleeping without resting  
always waking always tired.  
I could tell you, if I tried,  
about the Susquehanna.  
The bookshop in the town that's always  
underwater. Where my mother found a copy  
of *The Canterbury Tales*, navy blue  
like her brother's alma mater  
gold etched, boxy like a kitchen drawer.  
I can tell you how paper smells  
in a hurricane. Irene and Sandy,

women who flooded our basement  
with their wrath. Wet hands that  
overflowed the drain pipe  
so my father and brother spent the days  
off school shoveling drowned leaves  
and fistfuls of water  
out the back door.

## PARCE DOMINE

*ALLISON KAEFRING*

Stain glass windows  
a blurry light through a holy plane shattered  
and cut like a martyr beneath the axe  
I tried to put the pieces  
back together in the window  
but nothing fit and everything stained red. Blood dripped from where  
the fragments sliced my skin  
as I puzzled my way through  
a tale of St. Jude.  
Once mistaken for Judas the Betrayer he took every prayer he could  
get and then he was he's stuck with us- the desperate maybe dying.  
I'm losing words I'm losing  
sleep. I'm losing- I don't remember how the story  
goes. I need to  
consecrate  
I mean congregate  
I mean focus-  
It wasn't like this 4 years ago  
When the sun threw  
The colors unto the floor  
And distorted the depiction just enough  
To see. This wasn't a part of my diagnosis. This fresh hell wrapped me  
in its cotton Mouthed warmth and moved me.  
I'm not going back  
to the Doctors and I've stopped  
  
talking to St. Jude  
he's found new friends and his mosaic has a spot on the wall above  
the ninth Station of the Cross.  
I see all the stained glass

jagged and cobbled into pictures  
and stories of someone who watches  
as I fall. The wind from the window blowing me back and adding a  
sense  
of clarity that comes with the cold.  
St. Cecilia is my patron Saint anyways.  
But, I can't sing for stuttering  
and the incense fills my head and chokes me so I ascend with the  
prayers  
and crash back down  
through the glass and the stories  
that I used to know

# DEAD GRASSHOPPER LAY HIDDEN IN VAN GOGH PAINTING FOR 128 YEARS

*ALEXUS KREFT*

The creature must've been dead  
upon arrival, they say.  
But what if it wasn't? What if the insect  
is still alive in there?  
What if he watches through the layers  
of paint as the museum-goers ogle  
like a lion fish peering at humans  
through an aquarium tank?  
What if he struggles to escape, all  
stick-like legs bursting in captivity,  
like a child being tickled?

I know what it feels like to be trapped  
in something larger than myself,  
to live in a painting of someone else's creation.  
I exist in a mound of cubicles  
that's alert but uncaring, like an ant hill  
that doesn't mind it's about to be crushed.  
Each square office suffocates me further.

Raging against insignificance,  
I'll stick out a rogue limb,  
signaling my consciousness through  
the brush strokes of oil.  
But the curator never comes,  
and the people keep passing by.

## THANKSGIVING BREAK

*TALITHA GREAYER*

I've always enjoyed museum tableaus—  
the old quilts, the antique typewriter,  
the mannequin looking prim under her feathered hat—  
I love walking in the past.  
Even more, I love walking in my past.  
I am protective of it, jealous of  
my perfectly curated memories.  
Maybe I am born of dust and cracking paper and  
obsolescence. And maybe I don't know  
the difference between gold and mold,  
between anchors and chains and maybe  
I only love in hindsight because it's safer to fall  
for what's already lost.

# BELLS AND WAFFLES

*HAGAN MAURER*

I

It was 5 am and the cold  
Gray morning drooped across  
The hills and placid houses,  
Dropped in a line like Legos  
Spiraling in a cull de sac.

I never knew the bells  
Rang this early in the morning.  
They echo through the town  
And the first train horns blare  
as the homeless man shouts up the hill.

But everyone was asleep,  
Safe  
And sound could never interrupt that.

The policeman asked me  
“Are you going to hurt yourself?”  
I smiled and said “of course,  
Not,”

It was a knock on the door  
That woke my parents up.  
I hung there balancing.  
“I’m sorry,  
Did I wake you?”



They put me in the shower  
 And went to bed.  
 Why waste their emotions on 5am?  
 God! That water felt good.

## II

The wooden legs were definitely broken.  
 My parents stood in awe at the destruction:  
 A tipped chair, a busted TV (Probably the foot),  
 A cracked pool cue and many old toy  
 pieces sprinkled the ground.

I stared them down;  
 They couldn't handle another wrath,  
 So they left.  
 I hung there dazedly looking around  
 The basement where my brother taught me  
 To fight and how to lose.  
 It slowly faded  
 And I slept on the floor.

That night my mother came down  
 And wrapped me in a blanket.

## III

I woke to the smell of breakfast  
 And my dad reading the newspaper:  
 HEROIC FATHER SAVES FOUR CHILDREN FROM FIRE  
 They actively didn't look  
 Too long at my entrance.  
 I sat down and my mom  
 Smiling, poured syrup on my waffles  
 Over my shoulder.  
 "Morning dear" she said  
 and kissed me on the head.

## BIRTH BY THE SEA

*ALEXIS PEARSON*

The onyx fingers of mankind wash themselves  
in the ambrosial waters of lechery,  
a nexus between  
Ares' spear  
and  
Aphrodite's seashell  
and  
if you must drown then sing a dulcet  
sea song and bless the waters you dance in with  
the derisory gaze of the sirens –  
it is jealousy they know of –  
jealousy and destruction –  
and you are both and that is how  
it was supposed to be.  
Our love was the salt of the sea,  
not the sea itself,  
for that is the love of the cathartic souls  
that plant their love on the hilltops and we  
are the flick of a fish tail in almost cold water,  
watching the moon bounce off the sea,  
how it flounders when the water ripples  
and I question the sincerity of reflections,  
a momentary refraction  
us  
wanting intimacy but not knowing  
how to touch each other without making  
the water turn to blood.

And if you asked me,  
I would tell you that walking on water  
is overrated.  
My fingers prune  
and you tell me devotion  
doesn't know how to breathe  
in the water.  
I feel the salt invade my body.  
If not here then  
where.

## HEARTS IN OUR HANDS

*ALEXIS PEARSON*

We play cards in the dark naked  
and call it love making,  
well I call it love and you  
call it Friday night and  
they call it poker  
(poke her).  
With what  
(all I have is this card).  
So draw another  
and I'll count the stars while you do  
and wonder how it is that nothing  
ever makes sense despite all these patterns.  
Patterns.  
(Pat her).  
With what  
(all I have is this joker).  
(Joke her).  
Nevermind.  
You forgot to remove the jokers  
again.  
But I like to laugh.  
But that's not what –  
nevermind.  
Deal another,  
a flush of hearts,  
ironic, no?  
(no).

Count the stars again  
one, two, three, heart.  
What?  
Four.  
I thought you said heart.  
I did.  
What game are we playing anyway.

# LOVE YOU, GI OTHELLO

*CALEB KINSETH PETERSON*

I can't help but think  
about the burly nights  
in the clutch of Afghan sands  
where I steep myself  
in wishing I was yours,  
the pounding in my ears  
when you dragged me out  
of the cascading hellfire.

These side glances  
like to vanish when I do,  
like this tiresome war  
when you're in my eye  
and in its place is one  
of a scarlet cot  
we brawl within,  
the only promotion  
I crave.

But do you see these eyes  
that match your fatigues,  
when you talk to her  
through grinning webcams?  
About her?  
I should know better  
than to ask, to tell  
you, because

I have my own ill-fated  
marriage but that is from your  
thieving, coaxing grasp  
reaping all I have in rapid bliss,  
like you're selling god to the devil.

So, you will smother her  
out of your life for my  
strawberry sweetness slithering  
in your ear, turning our insides out  
to fix our lopsided love.





# A SON MUCH LIKE DREAMING ICARUS MANEUVERS A FATHER MUCH LIKE CURSED DAEDALUS

*CALEB KINSETH PETERSON*

A phone call. A tender voice. Interrupting automated  
messages reminding that others may hear the slicing  
pauses. Pauses sounding like your smashed liquor  
and snorting. Hesitant, stuttering lies like  
I love you too, Dad.

Oh, labyrinth of stories rather than something tangible:  
Fond yet tainted father. Parent of devotion  
and bloody noses. Abuser of all that was loved.  
Oh, towering nightmare gone yet lingering; a phantom  
pain or just a man waiting on the other side  
of the line? Begging for the truth.  
Begging for another toy box  
of wax wings like an addict.

Oh, tumble down into a sea  
of those decimated bottles. To imbue  
I with their shards. To become a reflection  
of what a man isn't so you finally see  
what you are.



The image features a light gray rectangular frame centered on a white background. In each of the four corners, outside the frame, there are teal-colored geometric shapes that resemble stylized, overlapping paper scraps or torn corners. The word "Prose" is written in a teal, serif font, centered within the gray frame.

# Prose



# GIVING AND TAKING

*KYLE CORNELL*

Young egg, one day you will stalk the desert, dressed in your jet black feathers, with a naked head and neck just like yours sprouting from your body, just like a chick. I'm not long for this world, young egg, and there are important things you must learn about the Life and the Gift. To others of your nest and others like you, and to your Motherbird, you are a Child of the Gift. To the other animals, we are vultures. Never forget that.

It will be like this. I waited by the nest until the sky started burning and I heard the sun sounds, as I always did. The sun burned so bright and hot that it rattled my ears, alarmed me like an oncoming stampede. This is how I always knew it was time to Wait.

Just as my mother taught me, I circled the sky, waiting for animals who were ready to give the Gift. I saw a lion, with a faded and ragged coat hugging each individual rib. His crown was patchy. He lurched. Just as my Motherbird taught me, I perched on a rock far, far away, and if I had to follow, I followed high. This lion had doubtlessly spread the Life all across the savannah, raising a dozen beautiful cubs, and he did not deserve to see my black feathers before he died. It's disrespectful. And so I glided from rock to sky, sky to rock, for several hours, Waiting. The sun sounds shook my head, imploring me to pounce, a call to arms deep inside me. But one must Wait, and so I did. You are not a lion. You do not pounce. These same sun sounds pressed on the thin body of this slowing lion, searing its brain and drying its mouth. My Motherbird insisted on things like this; the lion was preparing to yield the Life, to give the Gift, the food that sustains us. You receive a Gift, you do not take it. It's disrespectful.

Whether you think of things this way or not, this is what it will be like. The lion dropped behind a rock, for sure never to rise again. I held still, far behind. The sun sounds blared. But I Waited until dark,

circling the sky, shielding the lion from the sun while watching him, looking for the Life. By dark, he no longer filled with air, and he could no longer clench his fangs. I descended, the lion having given the Gift of his body, and I received the Life. This is how it will be for you, as it was for me for all of my days.

This is how my Motherbird taught it to me, and she was strict. She told me to clean my feathers when not out Waiting so that they do not drop on an animal preparing to give the Gift, to never interfere with other Children who are Waiting. Do not Wait on another Child, it is selfish and perverse; we receive the Life from other animals, and we return to the earth, whose herbs are Gifts for the other animals' children, and those children are Gifts for our children. To take the Life of another Child, therefore, is to cheat the other animals. Most importantly, do not ever deny another animal's Gift. It is wasteful, for they give that Life to you so that you can return to the earth to give the Gift to their children, and their children will feed your children. Most shamefully, you allow a noble giver to pass alone into Death for nothing, with no one to bear witness to their struggle and no greater purpose. Motherbird would always tell me that a Child never wants this stain upon their feathers, young egg.

But as you get older, this story may start to seem untrue. You will see many proud hunters and hidens and children and parents wobble and drop, wheezing with illness. If you are like me, you may find one day that you see misery in these animals and wish that they never had to die. You will no longer feel the Gift in their bodies or the Life in their children or in your stomach. For some animals, most certainly, will fight you to keep their Life.

I had stalked a hyena for about six hours. It dragged a hind leg behind it, limp and twisted like the rat bodies that hyenas drag by the tail through the dirt. The sun sounds had reached their crescendo, splitting the clouds; the hyena was likely an outcast that dug its fangs into the wrong antelope ;one of the greatest crimes among animals is denying others food, especially the young. The bad leg was perforated with teeth marks, a dishonorable mark

I perched on a rock behind it, the hyena, like Motherbird taught me. I perched, and I Waited, and I flew, and I perched, and I Waited. The hyena would limp, but he would hardly wobble. This carried on for hours, and I was hungry. Its dragging was faint enough that all

I could hear were the sun sounds, like my tail feathers were burning behind me. It lurched behind another rock, perhaps hoping for water. There was no water. I wanted to pounce, but this is what it means to Wait for the Life.

My uncle had learned what it meant to Wait for the Life. You can tell when a prey is faking, refusing to yield the Gift, if you look. He had also stalked a hyena, Waited and perched and flew for hours. He was also doubtlessly hungry, his last Waiting having been almost a week past, which will happen to you sometimes, young egg. But he did not Wait, he gave into the pushing of the sun sounds. The hyena limped behind a rock and dropped. My uncle had pounced, but he was not a lion. The hyena took his Life from him that day. Afterwards, my Motherbird told me, as she often did, that if you let the sun sounds eat your head then a hyena will eat some too.

As I Waited on this hyena, I recalled the story of my uncle. On my rock behind him, I took to the air, but I flew heretically close to him before ascending, letting him hear my wing beats behind the rock. As I thought, I saw the hyena's head snap to lively attention from the sky. I had to Wait on this hyena for another day to receive the Life. I was spiteful at the time, so I did not think about it. But I began to consider that I did not deserve the Life; I had evaded Death that day because my uncle had not. I began to yearn to give the Gift that I had been taking for so long. I grew tired of seeing animal after animal struggle against the sun sounds, ignorant of the bottom feeder that loomed far behind them. But, for many of my Gifts long after the hyena, I simply saw the Waiting as eating, thinking only of my stomach and of my safety. My Motherbird passed on, and I lost her reassurance. There was no more Gift or Life or Waiting. Just waiting to eat, occasionally wondering what it would be like to Give myself instead of taking selfishly. I gave no thought to laying eggs, to propagating the Life, to finding a mate; I thought only of eating, the disgust that came with it, and dying. This was when I Waited on one of those hairless animals, dressed in some of that detachable fur it carried with them.

Like many animals, they reside far to the east, and if they've strayed far enough into the west, they are already doomed. They walk on two feet instead of four, but they have no wings. Their sharp, shining fangs are in their hands sometimes. Like any other animal,

they are ready to Give when they crawl alone and their skin becomes part of the dirt. I call them the naked ones.

I saw one crawling in the early morning, a remarkable sight to me, for they never crawl if they can help it. I could nearly distinguish its ribs from the sky. I perched on a rock far behind, watching it weave lines in the dirt left and right, navigating away from snakes' holes and the distant movements of hyenas. I thought it quite shrewd, like a hyena. I watched it crawl for six hours. I caught a glimpse of one of the naked ones' shining fangs in one of the holes of its removable fur. If you see one someday, young egg, you will find it astounding; they have no talons or venom, but they carry deadly tricks in their detachable fur and in their hands. I called it beautiful. For an hour, I forgot I was Waiting.

The sun rose high and its throbbing heat was louder than my thoughts. I could feel the urge to pounce, the urge to Wait, but I did not want to. I wanted to see this creature live, stalk it in its Life, watch it make things more marvelous than any nest. The gleam of its sweat caught my eye; their lack of true fur exposes their skin. They look like they melt as the sun beats on them. I had not felt such pity while Waiting before, and I never would again. Even in its watery lurch it ducked and bobbed to avoid snakes, swung its head left and right for food and water, for something to dig its shiny metal fang into. It crawled behind a large rock, out of the view of my admiration, after circling it, watching for snakes. I saw its shining fang one more time, revealing it from its fur before it disappeared behind the rock. It looked sharper than any talon. It was prepared to fight.

This was when I had made my resolution. I would descend upon it and sacrifice myself to its trap so this naked one might live. I thought of the Gifts that I would be giving back, and of all the lives that I had taken so that I might live. I felt the sun sounds in my head and, for the first time, felt what I thought the donors had felt, the sun's burning preparing me to die. I hesitated, hearing the faint shuffling and kicking of dirt behind the rock. I stomped in place, preparing to take flight, to make the move that would undo me, that would show me destiny. I lept, beating my wings low to the ground, propelling me to the rock ahead to perch in violation of everything that Motherbird taught me. My wings and abdomen tensed as I took hold of the rock, and I closed my eyes, preparing for the evisceration of the naked one's



cold fang.

When it did not come, I opened my eyes, witnessing the tremendous shadow that myself and the rock had cast. Nonetheless, I was within talon's reach of the naked one as it lay on the ground, its beady little eyes staring up at me, its face hollow, the air and the water completely sucked out. I could see its cold fang trembling in its grip, and I wondered why it didn't strike. I stared down at it, trying to ask it questions with my eyes, when I heard it scream. You will hear animals scream in your life, young egg, but not like this. When other animals scream, it is high and loud yowl or growl, the head swinging from side to side, calling for aid from others of its kind. This is not what I heard. It was loud but it was low, its whole face squeezing together, hiding from everything. Had I heard this despair in my nest in the night, it would have kept me awake, but I was at its center. The naked one spilled the last water in its body all over its face as it wailed, reaching far and doubtlessly disturbing the lives of several creatures. The cold talon fell from its grip. When it opened its eyes to look at me and the low despairing cries mixed with higher, horrified cries, I realized what I had done. I could see into its mouth, at its feeble, mostly flat teeth. This thing could not eat me. It could not crack the thinnest of my bones, chew through my gristle and lean muscle. And if it did, it had no water; it was deep in the plain, with naught but fields of snake holes and stampedes of hyenas for hours before it could find water. I watched it splayed on its back, staring at its ribs, and I could hear the dryness of its mouth. I realized that all I had done was exposed my long, dark feathers to this dying creature, blocking the sun with the pitch black body of a bottom feeder, my naked head and neck sprouting from the shadow, just like a chick, waiting to feed. I had secretly hoped that it would kill me, not make my gesture for naught, or at least for it to die so that I could eat, but I could not eat this after what I had seen. I fled in shame.

I could not eat or Wait for days until hunger compelled me. At the perch of every rock, I imagined the wail of the naked one stowed away in every head that I tailed. Eventually, the urging of the sun sounds and the pain in my stomach compelled me to eat again. I followed every word that Motherbird had taught me from then on, but it was not the same. I forgot that wail as best I could by laying you, watching you hatch, just as my Motherbird taught me. Motherbird

always said that our code is for the young. I believed in it again, for a time. But the fear of that wail compelled me to obey until the end of my days, and I knew I would have to recount its tale to you someday.

I was wrong when I thought I heard the sun sounds as the donors do, young egg. I hear them as they do only now, as the sun dries my mouth. I hear them, now, like a distant call, sounding dinner for someone else, for the feasting and killing that goes on in the flatland. You will have to go there someday, young egg. As I say it, I don't know what else I needed to tell you. I gaze into your bare skin and see a lifetime of feeding, behind you and ahead of you. There is no right way to do it.

# SPECTRAL LIGHT

*LILLIAN DeTHOMAS*

The walls were a jaundiced yellow. They were bleached to a crisp, but not by the sun.

Like a frog in boiling water, the walls encroached on the residents. Old nails stuck out of them, reminiscent of a medieval torture chamber. In the end, the man and the woman that lived there would be fine. They shared the house and lived a simple life. Sometimes the woman cooked and the man cleaned and everyday distractions were sobering for them. Even though there was something in the air, they had each other. The woman couldn't set herself at ease. She began to tell the man she felt unwelcome in the house, like she was being watched. He rationalized her fears and they went back to menial living. The shadowed corners of rooms loomed, as though soot were leaking from the ceiling.

Again the woman complained of apprehension, and again the man dismissed this. It was December now, and there was that slant of sun that comes through windows in angled light. It brightened the prudish heart of the house, which was only ever touched by incandescence. This caught the attention of the man and he asked why the walls were so barren. Surprised at his forgetfulness, the woman responded that they had removed the pictures together. He asked why the rooms were so dark, to which she responded that they kept the lights off to save on electricity. He asked why she felt as though she were being watched, to which she responded; "it's your daughter."

She looked to where I sat on the sofa, transparently reading a book. Bewilderment seized and then retreated on the man's face as though he had forgotten he had children. And then, as though he smelled something pungent, he went back to cleaning. His wife went back to cooking. The walls went back to making the rooms claustrophobic.

I stood up, floated down the dark, frost-bitten corridor that the light tousled. Running my fingers across the old paint, I whispered to the walls that I was sorry, and their movement ceased. They were listening. I traced where family photos had been. The time we drove all the way to the coast to run barefoot in the sand. My pasty forehead grazed where baby photos had been. They were alive once, the walls that is. They once held tender portraits of my childhood. They once held my mother's face, and my sister's crooked smile.

I could see this army of specters. They floated absently in the space, which was looking like the surface of the moon: devoid of life. I drifted to the family room, and examined a small cohort of spiders feasting on a fly. Hovering to the kitchen, I looked at my father who was cleaning. I looked at his wife who was cooking. We paused for a moment, regarding one another. He asked if I was hungry. I told him I already ate and materialized into my room.

Sometimes the man talks to me, but mostly I keep to myself. His wife understands that the house is haunted and knows not to talk to ghosts. He doesn't know that he lives on my grave. He doesn't know that he's the one who buried me.

# MONSTER

*LIZ DOHRN*

“Breaking news! A young man has unleashed his Monster in the middle of downtown Newbridge. So far no one has been injured, but officials advise everyone to steer clear of the area. Onto the weather report...”

I could hear the roars of a Monster on the loose. It deafened the news report on the electronics store’s TVs. The ground shook. Huh. It must’ve been a big Monster then. The streets laid empty before me, wrappers and shopping bags still full of goods scattered around. I sidestepped a gallon of leaking milk. Couldn’t have Rachel yelling at me again. I already toed the line with my “bracelet”. Milk covered shoes might push her over the edge.

A slow chatter rose, getting louder and louder as I trekked my way to work. I looked over, blinking at the small crowd that was forming. My feet changed course, walking toward the crowd. In front of them, policemen stood with large plastic shields and yellow tape that said “DO NOT CROSS”. A few were yelling at the people, trying to get the crowd to move. I stood on my tippy toes and blinked.

This Monster moved like velvet. Rows upon rows of sharp teeth snapped at the boy running away from it. He stumbled, and the Monster revealed shining claws that swiftly snatched him up. It brought the boy to its mouth, uncaring of his struggling form. Sensing his impending demise, the boy screamed.

“Help me!” His voice cracked, still emerging into its adult shape. “Please, I don’t want to die, help me!” But the police did not move.

The others around me whispered and gossiped. Their voices slick like vipers, they chattered.

“Oh, the poor thing...”

“It’s his fault. Shouldn’t have let it get that big.”

“This is why we should just get rid of all the people with Monsters! They’re a danger to everyone!”

“He could have at least gone to a field or something to do this. He didn’t have to go into public.”

“Probably planned it. Wanted the attention and didn’t expect the price.”

I watched as the boy’s desperation slowly transformed into horror. He shrieked, wordless and painful. Tears poured down his cheeks as he looked out for some kind of savior. His eyes met mine. He stared, a hand outstretched. His eyes shone and sparkled. His fear swallowed me whole, rooting me into my spot. Sharp teeth replaced his blotchy face. The deed was done.

The Monster rumbled. Its hunger sated, it curled up and closed its eyes. Smoke rose off of its back into the heavens. The police lowered their shields. “Show’s over everyone!” The crowd grumbled. Such an anticlimactic ending. At least he could have put up a little more of a fight. He wasn’t even trying.

I stared at the decaying Monster. A familiar hiss filled my ears.

“This will be you one day,” My Monster whispered.

No, it won’t.

“You can’t fight me forever.”

I can.

“You’re naïve.”

I know.

Rachel stood disapprovingly when I walked into work. “And where have you been? You’re fifteen minutes late!” Her voice shrilled like a whistle, red talons biting into her arms. She must have gone to get a mani-pedi again.

I clutched my purse a little tighter. “There was a Monster incident. I had to go the long way around.”

She huffed. “That’s no excuse! You should already have three different ways to get to work in case something like this happens! We can’t have you coming in late and wasting our time!” Rachel flipped her hair, showing off shiny pearl earrings. They looked new, polished and gleaming white. Maybe her boyfriend got them for her. To make up for a fight. I looked at the concealed bags under her eyes. Or maybe they were still fighting.

“I’m sorry,” I apologized, though I knew she didn’t care. My

Monster grew just a bit heavier, weighing on my head.

Rachel grabbed my time card and shoved it at me. "Make sure it doesn't happen again or we'll have to let you go," She scolded. Her nose wrinkled at me as I checked in. "At least you got rid of that bracelet. The headband is a better alternative, if you must wear something snake related." I reached up for my Monster and headed toward my desk.

Papers with different assignments littered my workspace. I settled into my chair, preparing myself for another long day ahead of me. Michelle settled down next to me, a cup of coffee and a cup of cocoa in her hands.

"Hey, Rachel go off on you again?" she asked, though I'm quite sure she heard the whole thing. The office's walls were too thin not to.

I took the cocoa gratefully. "Yeah. A Monster incident happened while I was on my way to work. She wasn't happy about it."

Michelle winced. Giving my shoulder a sympathetic squeeze, she looked down at my bare wrist. "Hey, what happened to your bracelet?"

I ignored the stab of panic. "It broke. Cassie's fixing it." My Monster laughed, its breath hot against my ear.

"You can't break me."

Frowning, Michelle scrunched her eyebrows. "Do you hear hissing?" I froze. My hand shot to my Monster, squeezing it. It stopped laughing. Michelle looked around, huffing and throwing a glare at the broken vent in the corner of the room. "Stupid thing." I sagged a bit in my chair as Michelle kept talking. "That's super shitty that your bracelet broke though. I know you said Cassie got it for you for you guys' anniversary."

"It's fine. It'll be back before you know it," I reassured.

Michelle smiled. "Well that's good. I really liked that bracelet. It looked almost like a multi-headed snake wrapped around your wrist." I laughed, though my heart pounded at the truth hidden in Michelle's ignorance. My Monster shifted, one of its many heads caressing my ear.

"She doesn't care about you, you know."

She does so. It's why she's talking to me now.

"You're just convenient. Easily replaceable."

No, I'm not.

“Do you think she would notice if you didn’t show up to work for a week?”

She would. She noticed you weren’t a bracelet anymore.

“You’re lying to yourself.”

I know.

My Monster weighed a little bit heavier on my head.

The fans on our computers droned while Michelle and I worked. My cocoa went cold by the time we had to go to our weekly staff meeting. “For morale,” our CEO had reasoned on one of the few occasions he visited. “If you all feel connected and heard, then you’ll be able to work in a more productive way! This is all to improve your work life!” He didn’t mention the huge increase in profits the company would receive for faster work, but it felt implied.

The actual meeting included various team building exercises. Rachel always led them, as floor manager. She smiled a wide clown smile and pointed toward the board. My heart constricted at the curly red letters spelling M O N S T E R S. My Monster chuckled, a raspy thing it should not have been able to make. I sat down next to Michelle, stiff and unnatural. She smiled at me, nudging as she looked up. “I like your headband,” She whispered, her own sort of confidence booster before we were subjected to Rachel’s tyranny.

My Monster chuckled louder, and I pinched its scales. “Thanks.” I smiled back, though it felt faker than the potted plants around the office.

Rachel clapped her hands, clearing her throat in that high pitched “Heh-hem!” that everyone liked to mock. She rested her hands on the back of her chair, standing over us as an emperor stands before his conquests. “Today, we’ll be talking about Monsters! Since there’s been an increase in incidents, I would like to go over our emergency procedures for what to do if there is an incident in the office.”

A few of the other employees grumbled. Michelle rolled her eyes and nudged me. I didn’t nudge her back. Complaints grew louder. Rachel’s clown smile formed into an irritated grimace. A tired and balding man shouted, “Why do we have to do this?” The rest of the group quieted under his complaint. “It’s not like any of us have Monsters!”

Rachel breathed harsh through her nose. She kept smiling. I wondered if her cheeks would split open if she smiled hard enough.



If she did, would she end up with scars? I imagined Rachel with the Joker's smile scars. The image fit a little too well. She heh-hemmed once more and scrapped her red nails against her chair. "Well, while we don't have any Monsters here, it's still a good idea to know in case one ever does show up." She stared at me, her smile twitching a smidge wider. "After all, we can never be too careful!"

"She knows."

No, she doesn't.

"She looked straight at you, of course she knows."

She can't. I have you hidden.

"It's only a matter of time."

They'll never find out.

"They'll fire you when they do."

They can't.

"They'll see you as a villain."

You won't get big enough for that.

"I'm still growing."

I know.

Monster incident emergency training was fairly similar to other emergency trainings. Evacuate the building. Bring nothing with you. Don't try to save the person. It's their fault for letting the Monster get so big. Save yourself before helping others. It all reminded me of the fire escape drills of elementary school.

"Did Cassie get that headband for you?" Michelle played with her hair, watching as Rachel inspected the rows of disgruntled office workers. "I never pegged you for the type to like snakeskin stuff."

My Monster cooed, shifting once more. I grabbed its body and pinched, pretending to adjust. "No, I've had this for a while. Cassie doesn't really like this headband too much."

Michelle nodded, her face solemn and sagely. "Well, I think it's a good change. Shows more of your face. You should wear headbands more often. They look cute."

Different wheezing chuckles echoed in my ears. I resisted the urge to pinch my Monster again. It had far too many heads for my own good. "Thanks. Maybe I'll get some more." My Monster flicked a forked tongue.

"If only she knew."

She'd understand.

“So you’d like to think.”

You can’t hurt me.

“You’re a fool.”

I know.

The rest of the work day crawled by. My Monster grew heavier, slowly but surely. By the time I clocked out, it was too large to pass as a headband. I waved my goodbyes to Michelle and ducked into the nearest bathroom. Looking underneath each stall, I sighed and pulled my Monster out of my hair.

Its beady eyes stared. I didn’t say anything as I settled it against my neck. It moved without prompting, slithering its multiple heads into my scalp and winding itself around my neck. More of its heads laid close to my ears, easier access to spit and hiss I guessed. I took a moment to look in the mirror.

My Monster could pass as a gaudy necklace. Not something I usually wore, but necessary for the time being. Its scales shone dark green and silky. I brushed my hair over my shoulders.

“You’re ugly.”

No, I’m not. That’s childish.

“It’s childish but true.”

I frowned and leaned closer. Lines spider webbed out from the corners of my eyes. Pimple scars pockmarked my cheeks. My nose dominated my face, large and proud and unwieldy. Bags nestled themselves beneath my brown eyes. My hair curled and frizzed, framing the mess that created me.

“You’re getting old.”

I’m only 27.

“You’ll never be attractive.”

Cassie thinks I’m attractive.

“Cassie feels sorry for you.”

No, she doesn’t.

“She pities you.”

She loves me.

“You’re only hoping that’s true.”

I know.

The shopping bags were gone as I walked home. People must have returned for their purchases once the Monster had finally gotten its fill. Noise returned to the street as students and adults ambled

about. Kids laughed and joked, eager to start the rest of their lives. The adults talked fondly of their children, wishing to return to the days of their youth. I straddled the middle, forever observing. Forever wondering.

A shout caught my attention. I turned, watching as a few bigger children threw pebbles at a small girl. She crossed her arms in front of her, her Monster sitting near her foot. It was no bigger than a hamster, its back covered in quills and blue as the sky. It bristled at the bigger children, baring its little fangs. A pebble hit it square in the face. The girl flinched. She scooped the Monster into her hands and shielded it from the larger children as they threw pebbles at her.

"He isn't hurting anyone!" The girl looked up at her bullies. "Please stop!"

The children sneered. "You'll hurt people!" The leader argued. His voice held a mean and snarky tone, something clearly inherited. "That's all people with Monsters do! They destroy buildings and hurt everyone! You're dangerous."

The girl shook her head, hiccuping. "That's not true! He just needs a little care. I can control him! I won't let him hurt anyone!"

The leader scoffed, throwing another pebble. "Why don't you just go to a ditch and let your Monster eat you already? That'll be all you're good for!" The children snickered and laughed, shoving the girl aside. They had run out of pebbles to throw at the girl, leaving her with her Monster. It had grown, and scuttled up her arm. The girl sobbed as she rubbed at her bruises with little hands. A particularly large one bloomed across her forehead, right where her monster had been struck.

I stared. My feet felt cemented to the ground. Memories of long ago, of cousins shoving me into the shed, of cruel children who did not truly know, of my Monster twisting around my arm flowed unbidden. I should help her, I thought. I need to help her.

"You can't help her."

I can try.

"She is the same as you."

She needs help.

"You're hopeless."

I know.

I walked toward the girl, holding out my hand and clearing my

throat. She startled, but grabbed my outstretched hand. I hauled her up to her feet. "Thank you." She sniffled. I searched my purse and handed her a Kleenex.

"This happen a lot?" I asked, pretending I did not know the truth. For this, I could be ignorant.

She nodded. "Th-they don't understand..." She paused, listening to her Monster whisper and squeak. "I... I'm a bad person."

I shook my head, kneeling down to look her in the eyes. I believed that was what you did with children. Kneel so they are not intimidated. Kneel so they view you as an equal. Kneel to let them know you are serious yet caring. "You're not a bad person. Your Monster's just a liar."

"I only speak the truth."

I am not speaking of you.

Wiping away her tears, the girl looked at me with wide eyes. "R-really?"

I nodded. "Yep. Your Monster just wants to get bigger. If you believe what he says, then he gets to grow big and strong. If you don't, then he stays little."

She gasped, staring as if I had spoken the meaning of the stars. "So, if he stays little... he won't hurt anyone."

"Yep." I smiled. I hoped it was a reassuring smile. My Monster hissed at my attempt.

The girl looked over at her Monster, which had shrunken back to the size of her palm. "But... What if everyone says it's true? That my Monster's right? What if I can't control him?"

I gripped her shoulders. "Listen. You are stronger than your Monster. Even if he gets a little bigger, that's not his real form. He's just a tiny guy, and you're a lot bigger than him. No matter what he says, remember you're stronger than him."

Galaxies sparkled in the girl's eyes. She looked around before leaning closer to me. In a whisper, she asked, "Do you have a Monster?"

My heart leapt. Swallowing it back down, I hesitated for a moment. "... No. I don't. But others in my family do. They're all just as strong as you are." Disappointment fogged the galaxies, though they still shone brighter than my own. The girl thanked me and ran off.

"You're a liar."

I'm aware.

"And a hypocrite."

Also a fact.

"You're not stronger than me."

I wasn't talking about you.

"You're weak."

I know.

My Monster felt heavy on my neck as I walked up the apartment building's multiple flights of stairs. I should have just taken the elevator, but the exercise was good. By the time I reached my door, my bones ached to their core and my shoulders slumped with the weight of my world.

After a few fumbles, I managed to unlock the door. "I'm home," I called. Cassie didn't respond. Kicking off my shoes, I noticed hers were gone. She must still have been at work.

"Or she's left you."

She wouldn't leave me.

"She would. You're a terrible girlfriend."

No, I'm not.

"You don't deserve her."

I know.

Slipping into our bedroom, I grabbed the first pair of pajamas I could and slunk into the bathroom. My Monster wound tighter on my neck as I undressed. The coiled muscle pressed against my throat, but I did not pull it away. The shower scalded just a smidge, but I didn't move. With a renewed vigor, I washed away the day's worries.

"They won't go away with a shower."

But I'll be clean.

"That still won't fix your problems."

It'll make me feel better.

"That's selfish of you."

It's not selfish to take care of myself.

"You just take and take."

I don't.

"You really are selfish,"

I know.

Once my skin was rubbed red and raw and the shower finally grew cold, I stepped out. The mirror fog made it hard to brush my

teeth, but I managed and pulled on my pajamas. Walking back into the living room, Cassie still wasn't home. I grabbed my book and sat on the couch.

"You're not making dinner."

I'll make dinner with Cassie when she gets home.

"You should make dinner now."

Why are you worried about dinner?

"Because you are useless."

My Monster coiled tighter. Its scales pressed uncomfortably into my neck. I breathed a little shallower, trying to focus on my book. Its multiple heads spoke in turn.

"You can't do anything right."

That's not true.

"You were late to work."

That's not my fault.

"You're a liar."

I'm not.

"You lied to Michelle and that girl."

Breathing became hard. I grabbed at my Monster, but didn't pull. It wrapped tighter. I scratched at its scales, but it did not move.

"You're a villain."

I'm a person.

"You'll hurt people."

I won't let you get that big.

"You'll be like the boy today."

He was just a kid.

"That will be you."

I couldn't breathe. I gurgled and whined, clawing at my Monster. It hissed louder in my ears. I clawed, but did not pull. I would never pull. I could never pull.

"You deserve this."

No, I don't.

"Yes, you do. You are a worthless being."

I am worth something.

"You're a liar."

Cassie says I'm worth something.

"Cassie lies to you."

She cares about me.

“She does not truly care about you.”

Spots flashed before my eyes. My Monster’s heads ran through my scalp, almost a soothing motion. I kept clawing. I had to keep clawing. Ice filled my veins. What would happen if I stopped clawing?

“This is how it is supposed to go.”

I can’t do this.

“Just let go.”

I have to keep trying.

“Everything will be so much better if you’re not here.”

Would it? My mind swam. I supposed Rachel would feel less frustrated not having to yell at me all the time. Michelle wouldn’t have to waste her time worrying. That girl had parents to take care of her. I was but a stranger butting her nose in.

“Their lives don’t need you.”

Cassie needs me.

“Cassie deserves better than you.”

She did. Cassie deserved the world. She should have never settled when her mind was sharp as the wind and her lips as sweet as magic. Without me, she could find someone just as witty to push her. Without me, she could truly be happy.

“Yes, that’s it... Just let go now.”

My hands stopped clawing. Spots of color flashed against the darkness. My lungs constricted in my chest, but for once I felt full.

“This is for the best.”

It was. My hands fell against my sides. All at once, my body weighed nothing and everything. Meteors danced in front of my vision. Afterimages of souls twirled and delighted. My chest burned with the beauty of the universe.

“You deserve this.”

A wave of calm crashed through my limbs. My blood sang with the music of the unknown. Around me, angels rejoiced the defeat of another demon. Fire skipped up my throat. I was an exploding star.

“You want to die.”

The realization came softly. As I was dragged away from the glories of the world, I knew that this was what I truly desired.

The weight constricting my throat left all at once. I choked as I was able to breathe, air returning. My chest ached, sharp pains echoing through my lungs. I grabbed at my throat, unbelieving. A wetness

rolled down my cheeks. Oh. I was crying.

My vision swam back into reality. Ears ringing, I blinked as a gentle voice scolded my Monster.

“-again, I will find a way to... Addie!” Warm hands wrapped around me. I leaned into the familiar warmth, nearly sobbing as Cassie clutched me close. “Oh, Addie, I was so scared! I walked in and you weren’t breathing and your Monster wouldn’t let you go and-”

I sobbed, grabbing onto Cassie. “I nearly let it get me... Cassie, I’m so sorry. I’m so, so sorry!”

Cassie’s panic softened. She held me tighter, kissing my tear stained cheeks. “I love you, Addie. Don’t apologize. I love you so, so much.” She rocked me as I cried, adrenaline from the incident rushing through my veins.

It was only once I laid against her, eyes puffy that Cassie asked, “Bad day?” I nodded, too tired to properly speak. She stroked my hair. Cassie’s Monster hopped out of her bag. It wound against me, purring as it did so. I stroked its fur, rubbing its catlike head. My Monster slithered around Cassie’s wrist, small and defeated.

“Hey Cassie...” I looked up at her. She waited, green eyes forever patient and understanding. I stared at the stars in her eyes. “I love you. I don’t deserve you.”

Cassie smiled, sweet and real and only for me. “I love you too. And your Monster’s lying.” She leaned forward, and our kiss sparked a trillion solar systems. Love and understanding and kindness filled my chest. For a moment, I could see the universe. It was glorious.

Once we broke apart, Cassie pulled me up. “Come on, let’s make mac n’ cheese.” We spent the rest of the night in each other’s arms, our Monsters wound together.

“I’m sorry.”

I know.



# STONE COLD

*JON FREYMARK*

Heroes should stay dead, they leave no room for the living. Achilles, hero, heroic, champion of the Trojan war. Shown striding across battlefields with his massive spear. His legacy lives on in statue form, glistening marble, seen by children on their 8th-grade field trips, most of whom laughing, making jokes amongst abashed unamused teachers about how the sculptor forgot to sculpt a pair of pants on the mighty man.

•

“Statuesque”, the word used to describe the hero of legend. A towering pillar of strength. A being so great he exceeds the capacity of man himself and lives in his own world of myth, passed down from generation to generation, from a father’s father to a father’s son. Each new time met with beaming faces, burning eyes, a desperate longing to become a hero, an unyielding titan, a man.

•

Manhood, personified in heroic statue. Unassuming stone carefully crafted into a representation of everything that it means, meant, to be manly. An ideal, a notion, an expectation, living on within the chiseled abs and bulging biceps. A corpse of a concept living well beyond its lifespan preserved like a tinned fruit within the confines of a marble mausoleum. An antiquarian attempt at articulating all the aspects of Achilles.

•

“Heel”, an instruction, a command, given to dogs who misbehave.

To “heel”, to withdraw, to “hold back”. The same command given to young boys who start crying on the bathroom floor during their 8th-grade field trip because Tony made fun of their makeup. Hidden amongst the bodies of Achilles, Ajax, and Agamemnon, a failed attempt at replicating what it means to be a hero, agony.



Emotion, not something considered when sculpting a hero. To be a hero is to be a man, to be a man is to be indifferent, immovable, stoic, statuesque, repressed. To coat one’s mind and body with the same iron woven into the veins of the ancient heroes. But these are not qualities of a “man”, they are qualities of a rock. A pallid, dead, unfeeling, unthinking, rock. To be Achilles is to be a rock, mind trapped within the marble.



Crabs, Clams, Crayfish, when they die they are encased in stone. Little lives powderized, souls unwittingly given to become limestone. Limestone subjected to centuries of pressure, crushed, constrained, constricted, caged, only to become marble. A pale, ghostly rock made from millions of graves. Whatever the content of the statue, the marble, the hero cannot exist without first taking advantage of lifetimes of lifetimes. Lifetimes of oppression.



Pressure, the pressure felt by all men to be protectors. Protection, what most men need, their marbled masculinity fickle, fragile, far too easily wounded. Even the most transient of touches leaving the most permanent of pockmarks. Colossal egos silently cracking under their own weight, a cascading weakness.



Achille’s heel, a fault, a flaw, a failure, a fundamental part of the hero absent in the artist’s marble. If Achilles is a hero then to be a hero is to be flawed. Heroes leave no room for men. Flawed men, imperfect

men, cracked, broken men. Men who cry on bathroom floors, tiny tears welling up like cut jewels on cold linoleum because maybe they liked the way they looked that day, maybe they were proud of it, confident of it, in themselves. Isn't that what the statues were meant to represent? The hero's glory, his courage, not his Promethean physique or Phrygian power. Heroes should stay dead, and it is up to us to kill them, in order to make room for men.



# BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS

*DRAKE LOHSE*

Laura says it's best to eat what God puts in the Earth. Vegetables and fruits and meat. She owns her own grapefruit farm on the island.

They wake us at 6 in the morning. God's will. Laura says it's best to get up as early as possible. God wants you to have as much day as possible. Some go to the beach. If you don't go to the beach, you have to stay and meditate for an hour as a group. Some days I stay. Then it's time for the medication. We all get different medication. We are all fiends. God's will.

I am scheduled with Laura most days. Some days she hooks a monitor to my ear and puts headphones on me. They string quartets of snaps and blinks until I can't hear anything else. I take a nap after. One day she put me in a wooden box. It was full of water and Epsom salt so that I would float. There was no light or sound. I was naked. When she opened the box it had been five hours. I missed dinner. God's will.

They keep the fresh ones in a separate wing. They give them Seroquil right away to help with sleep. Ben from Brooklyn got here yesterday morning. He's a professor with a PhD at some university. He teaches Finance.

Last night I went to the cafeteria where the schizos and freaks gathered to write letters to their mother. Ben from Brooklyn was pissing in the bush outside with his pants around his ankles.

I go to the cafeteria at night to eat yogurt and play Pinochle with Graham from Los Angeles and Jerry from Denver. God's will. Graham does not write letters to his mother. He plays Django Reinhardt on the guitar that has a swastika drawn on it. Jerry sometimes writes letters but never says who he's writing them to. He doesn't sit with us when he does. I do not know how to play Pinochle.

Last night we sat in the cafeteria and ate yogurt and watched the

schizos and freaks write their letters. Jerry was writing a letter. Graham flicked yogurt at him with his spoon and hit him on his very bald head. God's will. Jerry looked up and thought it was me—he laughed.

“You think that's funny you Hitler Youth lookin' son of a bitch?” and he bit a chunk of his apple and tossed the rest at me. He missed and hit a schizo instead. God's Will. Graham was out of yogurt. God's will.

“You have the body of a full grown man but the head of a newborn baby” Graham said to Jerry. We laughed again. One of the nurses had left his sunscreen bottle on one of the tables. We emptied it and filled it with mayonnaise from the fridge. Then we microwaved Jello and dish soap. Some of the schizos and the freaks stopped writing their letters and were laughing too.

A nurse with a nose ring heard the laughing and told us we couldn't throw food and wouldn't be allowed to go to the beach in the morning and that it was time for meds and bed. God's will.

The next morning I went to the beach. There's oil rigs on the horizon. When I first got here I thought it was the skyline of Houston. I thought that until someone told me Houston was in the opposite direction. God's will. The nurse with the nose ring came with us. Before we went he applied the mayonnaise sunscreen. When we got to the beach, the Texas sun blended the mayonnaise with his skin. He smelled of hard-boiled eggs dipped in vinegar.

“Guys—I'm sorry. I don't know what it is—I shower, I promise.” He said.

“Maybe you should go to the doctor or something man.” Said Jerry from Denver.

“Yeah—maybe” said the nurse as he lathered on another layer of sunscreen.

When we got back we ate breakfast in the cafeteria. No one was writing any letters. We ate with the staff. Jerry unscrewed a light bulb from his room and busted it on the table while we ate more yogurt. God's will. He stood up and cut his wrists the long way. Blood misted from his tendons and painted the walls and the table and our faces and our yogurt. God's will.

# WHO IS MISSING FROM AUNT DEB'S WAKE?

*TESS LYDON*

**Evan:** What are you doing out here?

**Mar:** It's raining.

**Evan:** Come inside.

**Mar:** It seems almost a little too on the nose if you ask me. Rain on the day of a wake. The universe is pathetic.

**Evan:** Mar, please come inside.

**Mar:** Forecast says it should rain harder on the day of the funeral. It's like the universe couldn't resist the cliché.

**Evan:** Everyone's looking for you.

**Mar:** Then tell them to come onto the front porch.

**Evan:** Now is not the time to stage a protest, Mar. It's a wake.

**Mar:** Oh, so now I'm being selfish?

**Evan:** I didn't say that—

**Mar:** She outs me in the middle of Thanksgiving, and I'm the selfish one.

**Evan:** You know, Uncle Matthew really wants to talk to you—

**Mar:** She tells me, ‘No offense, but I’d rather not endorse that kind of lifestyle’. She actually said that, no offense. I’m surprised she didn’t say I was going to hell.

**Evan:** Mar.

**Mar:** You heard what she said.

**Evan:** I did. And I don’t think it was right, but you’re her family. We both are. And—

**Mar:** ‘This is just what we have to do’? ... I don’t owe her anything, Evan. And neither do you.

**Evan:** Everyone else is inside. They want to see you.

**Mar:** How can you stand there and do this?

**Evan:** There’s a cheese-and-crackers platter inside. Dad made sure to get Brie.

**Mar:** She didn’t treat you much better.

**Evan:** Plenty of carbs to gorge on.

**Mar:** All those side comments about basketball and your birth parents. How many times did she call you urban?

**Evan:** It isn’t about me, Mar.

**Mar:** Maybe it should be.

**Evan:** No, it shouldn’t. It’s her— ...God, you know what, if you want to make a scene and sit outside with your blanket and your hurt feelings, go ahead. I’m going to go inside and be a good host so Mom has time to go off and cry.

**Mar:** I’m not making a scene. I’m being true to my feelings.



**Evan:** Call it whatever you want.

**Mar:** Hey! Come back here!

**Evan:** What?

**Mar:** This isn't easy for me.

**Evan:** No, you're making that very clear to everyone.

**Mar:** What is that supposed to mean?

**Evan:** You're sitting on the front porch. Everyone has to walk past you in order to get inside.

**Mar:** Well I'm sorry I'm not a carpenter. I can't exactly build myself a back porch to sit on.

**Evan:** If you don't want to be here, why don't you just leave?

**Mar:** I'm staying upstairs in Jimmy's old room.

**Evan:** Fine. Upstairs then.

**Mar:** I tried to stay in my room. But apparently it's a closet now, filled with the ghost of New Years Past, yoga mats, a stationary bike, and exercise galore—

**Evan:** Why don't you just stay upstairs then?

**Mar:** Upstairs doesn't have a bathroom.

**Evan:** So?

**Mar:** So eventually I'd have to go downstairs to pee and then someone would see me and then Great Aunt Katie-Marie would ask me a question and I'd have to answer her because she's got that iron grip and then she'd lead me to Uncle John who

would then talk to me for forty minutes without pause and then I'd have effectively joined the wake.

**Evan:** So how exactly is the porch a better plan?

**Mar:** What?

**Evan:** You do realize, Mar, the porch doesn't have a bathroom either.

**Mar:** ...You know what—

**Evan:** Seriously, what was your plan? Pee in the bushes? I thought girls couldn't do that.

**Mar:** If you're just going to mock me, I'm going to stop talking to you. Forever.

**Evan:** Pinky swear?

**Mar:** Fuck you.

**Evan:** Just face it, you wanted people to see you purposefully not attending the wake.

**Mar:** I seriously hate you.

**Evan:** You wanted the attention.

**Mar:** You are the worst brother—

**Evan:** You wanted to make a statement.

**Mar:** Gee now I really want t—

**Evan:** You wanted to stage a protest.

**Mar:** And so what if did? So what if I do? ... I'm angry, Evan. I'm still so angry at her.

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** And what am I supposed to do with all that anger now? I'm just supposed to forget it all happened?

**Evan:** No one is saying that.

**Mar:** I can't yell at her. I can't shove my beautiful girlfriend in her face. I can't do anything.

**Evan:** I think that's the point, Mar.

**Mar:** What are you talking about?

**Evan:** Scooch over.

**Mar:** Why?

**Evan:** Relax. I'm not going to steal your blanket. Just listen.

**Mar:** Fine. Don't swing us too far either.

**Evan:** Okay, fine.

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** Look, Aunt Deb wasn't the best person. We both know that. For one thing, she gave the worst Christmas presents. I swear she gave me a basketball like five times.

**Mar:** Oh I'd say at least eight.

**Evan:** I kept hoping that eventually she'd upgrade to Jordans. I mean, white people know about Michael Jordan. He's like the only basketball player they're guaranteed to know.

**Mar:** I think we at least know LeBron by now.

**Evan:** You think Uncle Matthew knows who LeBron is?

**Mar:** Well if we're going by Uncle Matthew standards then we're hopeless.

**Evan:** And her cooking wasn't great.

**Mar:** Oh my god. Do you remember those eggs?

**Evan:** You can't talk. I actually ate the turkey she cooked for Thanksgiving.

**Mar:** And how many times did I tell you not to eat it?

**Evan:** She put me right next to her. What was I supposed to do?

**Mar:** Switch the name settings.

**Evan:** Point being, she had her faults, her ... blind spots—

**Mar:** 'Blind spots?'

**Evan:** Her opinions—

**Mar:** Her prejudices—

**Evan:** She had her beliefs. Some of which were stuck back in 1953. But she was our aunt, is our aunt.

**Mar:** So what?

**Evan:** Mar—

**Mar:** No, I'm serious. Everyone says that, but it doesn't mean anything.

**Evan:** Of course it—

**Mar:** What about your family then, your birth family? You don't seem to think that their blood in your veins means anything.

**Evan:** Okay, first of all, that's not true—

**Mar:** Why don't you go find them then?

**Evan:** What?

**Mar:** You're their family and that 'means something.'

**Evan:** Aunt Deb didn't have a family. She never got married. We are what she has.

**Mar:** But you don't go looking for them.

**Evan:** Look—

**Mar:** Because you know, just like I do, that some shared DNA is a crappy excuse for letting someone into your life who has told you to your face they hope you never love anyone.

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** I know it was misplaced, but she genuinely thought she was making it better.

**Mar:** By suggesting I should die alone and unhappy just like her?

**Evan:** She never said unhappy—

**Mar:** No, she just said she'd only feel comfortable around me if I died a virgin.

**Evan:** You know that's not what she meant—

**Mar:** I can't believe you're defending her!

**Evan:** I'm not defending her! I'm communicating her perspective.

**Mar:** Call it whatever you want.

**Evan:** Will you just listen to me?

**Mar:** Why?

**Evan:** Because she's not here!... Because, like you said, she's not here and there's nothing you can do anymore to set fire to your relationship or water it down.

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** So I don't see that there's any point for you to hang onto this.

**Mar:** You wouldn't.

**Evan:** Excuse me?

**Mar:** You're Evan. You don't hang onto things.

**Evan:** Right, and you're Mar who would hold a grudge against the entire universe if it would make her right.

**Mar:** I do have a grudge against the universe.

**Evan:** I was making a joke, Mar.

**Mar:** I'm not. It took her away.

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** And left me with this mess.

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** This confusing, irritating, depressing, angering, mess of feelings.

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** Come inside, Mar.

**Mar:** She wouldn't have wanted me in there.

**Evan:** You think Aunt Deb would've turned anyone away at her wake? I'm surprised her will doesn't stipulate that a 100 people must be in attendance.

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** You're already wearing the black.

**Mar:** Half my wardrobe is black.

**Evan:** Come inside.

**Mar:** To be the elephant in the room?

**Evan:** Oh come on, you're not fat.

**Mar:** So everyone can whisper and stare at me? And see how I've given up?

**Evan:** And what exactly would you be giving up by grieving someone who helped raise you?

**Mar:** My principles, my dignity.

**Evan:** Don't be so melodramatic.

**Mar:** Don't be so dismissive.

**Evan:** You're not going to fix any of that stuff by sitting here.

**Mar:** Maybe it's not about fixing it. Maybe it's about acknowledging that it's a part of it too.

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** I can't go in there and play the part of de facto daughter. Oh, you remember how she got you all those American Girl dolls when you were little? Oh, she told me you're becoming a lawyer too. She'd be so proud. Oh, she loved you so much, Mar, you know that. I won't do it, Evan.

**Evan:** Is any of that a lie though?

**Mar:** No, but—

**Evan:** But you'd rather dismiss everything good—

**Mar:** But I'd rather acknowledge that she wasn't the perfect human being that everybody suddenly becomes once they die.

**Evan:** A eulogy is not a complex character analysis.

**Mar:** Well, maybe it should be.

**Evan:** Maybe.

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** You should go inside, Evan. Give Mom a break.

**Evan:** Seems like you're the one who needs the break. It's hard work, resenting someone.

**Mar:** Already lost two pounds.



**Evan:** Is that true?

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** I don't think the LGBTQ police would blame you if you wanted to get some cheese.

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** Or if you wanted to remember some of the good parts.

**Mar:** Evan...

**Evan:** I already have a foolproof Great Aunt Katie-Marie distraction.

**Mar:** I don't know.

**Evan:** You could make a run for the bathroom. That way you'd never have to leave— much better than the porch plan.

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** Cousin Ollie's here. Back from Ecuador.

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** No one's asking you not to be angry. We're just asking you to be sad with us too.

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** There better be some Brie left.

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** Your dress is nice.

**Mar:** Isn't that your tie from ninth grade band?

**Evan:** I'm just glad it still fits.

**Mar:** Ha ha.

**Evan:** ...

**Mar:** ...

**Evan:** Hey, look.

**Mar:** What?

**Evan:** It's stopped raining.

# FLOWER GIRL

*MARVIN OBGUNEZU*

She stands on a cliff overlooking the entirety of the world

Barefoot footsteps dancing on the very precipice of change

Royalty blooms from her every orifice

Roses sprout from her eyelids, watered by her heavenly  
tears

Hibiscuses force their way through her lips, threatening to suffocate

Marigolds spring forth from her ears and lavender coils outward from  
her nostrils

She tears at her flesh and digs with shaky hands into the complex  
sinews nestled within her jaw

She unearths secrets within pulsing veiny petals, known to her and her  
alone

The inky secrets hidden within do not seek to reveal themselves

But rather they hide, they have seen the light of the world and they  
have no use for it

Flowers withdraw in their blooms when faced upon the harsh air

Hands claw at red strings pulling at her arms

In an instant, orchids and chrysanthemums burst from her  
raw wrists

Her veins transmogrified, roots in their place

She pulls at the strings at her legs prepared to bask in the glory of her  
truth

She tears apart the cocoon she formerly called her body

And takes solace in her pact never to let herself be misgendered

She claws her way out of her shell, the lies and the pain drip off her  
raw form

All manner of sprouts grows upward, waiting their entire lives to see  
the light of day

They fear the world, but they love it so much more  
now that they bloom in their true light

Dim fluorescence and feigned freedoms never comparing to the  
blinding nature of naked truth

With a heart burst through her chest, she takes off her final yet  
greatest disguise,

her face

She claws it apart and all the sticky effluvium attached with it

Dahlias in all colors bloom brightly from her form, finally freed

Glistening tears of joy spill down her face

She stands aglow, taken by her form

Her body new and raw, a galaxy borne from a supernova

Infinitesimal stars make up her new form

She glances back at her old form, a fractured  
glance to the past

Stagnant and dripping with cruel expectations of a hapless society

She stares at her old face, pain and loss etched into its seams

Black tears drip forth from the eyes

She does not look at this old form with pity, but rather with strength

An absolute metamorphosis, an ultimate sign of her blossoming

She does not know where she's going, or if this transformation shall be  
her last

What she does know, is that no matter what harsh tribulations the  
world holds in store for her

She shall deal with it in her truest form

She knows that at this point in her life, she is not one person,  
but neither is she two people

She's an experience, and with her new form and her heavenly flowers  
blooming in the wind

She's going to be a good experience.



# ENCOUNTERS WITH DICK

HALLIE O'NEILL

Emma and I sit on her living room couch, our feet tucked underneath our bums and our hands warmed by steaming cups of tea. It's become our little ritual, our intimate time together outside of the drama of high school. Our favorite things are theater, choir, and English class. We're "geeks," I guess.

Neither of us have ever had a real boyfriend before. We talk about what it might feel like to be sexual with a boy, whispering when it comes to the word penis. We giggle nervously around this word. We agree: gross. Never would we want to touch one, let alone have one in our mouths. Bleh! We giggle some more.

*—This is a foreshadowing.*

I don't really remember the first time I cupped my palm around a penis. It was after my first boyfriend silently put his hand down in my own private place, so I just assumed I was expected to reciprocate the deed. Neither of us spoke.

I didn't know what it was supposed to feel like. It seemed to be a pretty good size, not that I had anything to compare it to. I was just so nervous about it that I couldn't pay attention too closely, but later, I did receive some instructions on how to touch it.

*—A new curiosity is erected.*

In Florence, Italy I see a glorious, drop-dead gorgeous man. I can't stop staring at him, that magnificent body posed so regally. I love a guy who's confident like that. He's 17 feet tall, every inch of him perfectly sculpted and shaped. He's made fully of marble. His name is David, and Michelangelo created him nearly five centuries ago.

*—His Dick is kind of small though.*

*Holy. Shit.* What a *cock*. I couldn't believe it—I was shaken up. Like, this thing was *incredible*. I've never felt passionate about a human penis before, but there I was. His was magnificent. Worthy of *italics* and a longer paragraph. Big, like very sturdy, with visible veins and lots of skin and plenty of surface area. I *loved* his penis. And I've never loved a guy's penis. I'm always just like, "Ew, a penis," because, I mean, it's a penis. They're normally sort of gross. I'm never super excited about getting down there. But his, somehow, was different.

I stopped kissing him for a second and looked down while I was doing my work and WOW. I probably smiled visibly, open-mouthed and joyous, because it was a fucking work of art. He noticed my gawking. "Is everything okay?" he whispered. I snapped my head back up, grinning like a fool. "Oh, yes! It's just nice."

—*The first time I touched an uncircumcised Dick.*

There's one at the bar that I really, really want but neither of us have a condom. We walk around the place hand in hand, "DOES ANYONE HAVE A CONDOM?" The whole crowd gets involved, genuinely and emphatically cheering us on.

—*He found one for us; Dick gets what he wants.*

The other day, a stranger rubbed his bare penis up against my thigh on the public bus. The bus was so crowded that I didn't realize it until some muscular dude started shouting and pulling the creep off of me. That's when I looked down and saw it, all wrinkly and sad dangling out from his zipper. I tried hard not to cry, but I shouted, "WHAT THE FUCK?" to his face because, you know, I'm tough.

If you don't believe me, I can prove it with the little splotch of cream I still haven't washed off of my favorite striped dress.

—*The day I realized that Dick knows no boundaries.*

"Once girls hear my accent, they can't resist"; "British boys are bigger and better"; "American girls are so easy"; "Let's go get a drink, bitch"; "Chill, it's just banter."

—*A Dick in human form.*



“Cazzo!”

*—Italian word for Dick (also “fuck”).*

“Cozze!”

*—What I yelled over and over as I fucked an Italian. It means “clams.”*

There’s a gigantic homeless man all sprawled out on the sidewalk, his legs open wide, that bulge blaring like a siren between two meaty thighs. He rubs his gigantic belly when I walk by. He hisses at me like a cat would. Or a snake.

*—I bet his name is Richard.*

“Greek boys like me love Czech girls like you. They’re tall, brunette, and they know how to fuck good. They like to be fucked, too.”

“Sorry for my language. It doesn’t make you uncomfortable, does it?”

*—Dick preys on women walking alone.*

Chlamydia in my mouth. I taste it as soon as my tongue touches the already-wet tip. It tastes nasty, like infection. Tastes like manipulation, too.

*—The last time I saw the worst  
Dick of them all.*

Unwanted penis videos sent to me through Facebook messenger from a bed 4,800 miles away. Makes me feel sad.

*—Lonely Dicks all over the world.*

I’m in Tokyo exploring a sex shop in Akihabara. I buy a “Grow It Yourself!” penis, teensy tiny, just an inch long. Baby pink. I bring it home with me and plunge it into a bowl of water and it swells up big, just as big as a real one. It stops growing and I close it up inside a Mason jar, twisting the cap tight. I put it up on the shelf – perfectly contained, perfectly displayed. I glance at it every once in a while, just to make sure it hasn’t grown large enough to bust open the jar. I

always sigh a breath of relief when I see that it's still safe inside.

—*Why am I so obsessed with Dick?*

Emma and I lounge atop the couch in her parents' home, palms cradling scalding mugs of coffee. Talks these days are about her psychology thesis, the places I've traveled to lately, our love and sex escapades. We're much older now, and I remind her about that conversation we had back in high school. She laughs. She doesn't remember it, but I do.

"Well, look at us now," she says. I smirk.

—*Emma dates girls now; I haven't caught on yet.*

# A TEACHER'S GUIDE

*HELEN TRISKO*

The English department lounge was a place of communion. My fondest memories are of sitting on the scratchy couches, chatting and laughing until three o'clock in the morning. The walls were covered from floor to ceiling with books. The contents were mainly literary criticisms by Freud, Kant, or Forester. Hidden between the stuffy works of mad men, there were un-edited drafts of memoirs, collections of poetry, and a littering of children books.

There was one professor, Dr. Fielding, who always said on the first day of term: "Do not come to me with a question if you have not yet searched for the answer in the lounge." I could see through his façade, his breath always smelled of stale coffee with notes of loneliness.

I was the only woman of my year in the department. I wish I could say I was drawn to literature, but I was instead sent there. On my first day of kindergarten father, the smell of last night's brandy oozing from his pores, proclaimed that reading was my way out. If I read every day and got good marks, I could get a job as a schoolteacher. He showed me that forth grade English was my purpose.

High school was a blur. I didn't have many friends and I felt like a ghost.

I moved to Chicago for college. I was seduced by the wind that came off of the tall buildings and rustled everyone's hair. In a city where bad hair days were a result of the environment, my wiry and uncooperative feathered bangs never looked out of place. In the city, I grew to love the winter. On cold Friday mornings I would walk down to the bookstore and watch the flocks of businessmen bowing their heads in submission to piercing winds.

After I graduated I moved back home to a small town in Iowa, leaving the wind from the lake for dull wind that rolled over farms.

Everything looked the same, except the corner store, which burned down in a freak fire and was seamlessly replaced by a brand new Safeway. That was where I met my husband, an insurance appraiser with kind eyes and a receding hairline. He walked past me with such command that his body created a gust of air, the wind tingled my eyes. I introduced myself a few minutes later. We were both waiting on the acne-faced cashier, my husband's cart was full of ground beef and eggs, and mine felt bare, only water crackers and soup. We dated for six months. I said a quiet "yes" when he proposed. We had one son; he was all my body could handle.

I quit my job at the school. I loved the books but I hated how the kids asked so many questions.

Last month I took my son to Chicago to drop him off at college. He is going to be an insurance appraiser, just like daddy. I tried to find the English lounge but it had co-opted by the cybernetics department. I peered through a crack in the door to find that the school's brand new computer had replaced the shelves of books. I'd say this was a pretty foolish change, computers raises a lot of question but don't have any answers. I asked the department secretary where all the books had gone, but she must not have heard me over the sound of the computer's droning hum.

Now I have a lot of question and not a lot of answers. As I lay, lonely, in my twin sized bed, my husband snoring across the room and my son two-hundred miles away, I can smell Mr. Fielding's breath. I don't say my questions out loud, but I know I could answer them if I could just get back to the English lounge.

# TWELFTH FLOOR

*OLIVIA WILLIAMS*

When Jackie Alderman stepped onto the elevator at 9:45 a.m., she nodded at the elderly man in the right-hand corner and avoided eye contact with the twenty-something guy standing on the left. She aimed for exact middle of the lift, and got it, and stood facing the elevator doors with her black heeled booties pressed together.

“Which floor, miss?” Wrinkled, brown-spotted fingers hovered above the lift buttons.

“Oh, twelve please.” A slight nod. “Thanks.”

The older gentleman nodded and smiled back. He pressed the button. He stepped back to his tile in the right-hand corner and shoved his left hand back into his brown corduroy pants.

Jackie turned away from the elderly gentleman; slid her eyes from the slit in the elevator door to the floor; examined the reflective stainless steel tile.

Ding. “First—floor.”

The female announcer spoke with a symptomatic choppy pause between each word.

There were no clear images reflected on the polished floor, only warped blurry shapes of humans, bags, gaudy white ceiling lights.

Ding. “Second—floor.”

The older man’s rubbery shoes scuffed slightly against the tile. Jackie tottered her right boot out, then in, then out again. Is that a spider? She followed the shuffling black dot’s journey along the base of the elevator wall from the corner of her right eye.

Ding. “Third—floor.”

Jackie’s eyes wandered left, to the watery reflection of the young man. The tall, quiet shape stared back. She dared her gaze slowly upward; she caught sight of his red and white sneakers and khaki brown pants.

Ding. "Fourth—floor."

Further up she dared. Her eyes met his right hand tucked in his pocket; his left-hand fingers lolling lazily across his Samsung screen.

Ding. "Fifth—floor."

Twenty-something's right hand shifted; her eyes darted back to center stage. She counted the crosses in her shoestrings; rubbed the splitting seam of her brown collegiate satchel. The shuffling black dot looked larger now, sending ripples through her stomach.

Ding. "Sixth—floor."

"Forty-nine's backed up today." The elderly gentleman punctuated this statement with a decided clicking noise from the back of his throat.

Jackie's head jerked up to look him in the face—not his eyes, his face, vaguely speaking. "Oh?" she said to his nose, and made a "huh" expression at his wrinkled cheeks.

Ding. "Seve-nth—floor."

The pronunciation of seventh held a certain amount of ceremony for the elevator announcer: more than halfway there.

Jackie's eyes had returned to the spider during the announcer's utterance of seventh's first syllable. It was indeed larger than she had first thought—the size of her big toe, it seemed—and no longer sticking so rigidly to its course along the wall. It weaved toward the older gentleman's shoe, stopped, turned back, faced Jackie's feet.

Ding. "Eighth—floor."

The twenty-something coughed, and Jackie resisted the urge to say "hmm?" She used the spider's new trajectory towards her booties as an excuse not to look into twenty-something's face. The elevator groaned inwardly, as it always did on the eighth floor. The elderly gentleman responded with a muttering humph. Jackie considered the best way to move further left without actually getting closer to twenty-something.

Ding. "Ninth—floor."

Even the spider threw a dark, bulbous reflection onto the steel floor as it made its way toward Jackie. When it was within ten inches of her right foot, she involuntarily took a step towards twenty-something; then, remembering him, she took a conscious step backwards. The old man merely shuffled. Twenty-something took no notice.

Ding. “Tenth—floor.”

The older gentleman stepped toward the opening elevator doors—only now did Jackie remember the backlit number ten that had warned her of this moment. The older gentleman turned back, nodded his trout-lauding baseball cap at her—“Have a good one—” smiled, and continued off the elevator and down the hall. Jackie, trapped inside a 7 x 5 metal box with a large-sized spider and an average-height young man, inwardly screamed.

Ding. “Eleventh—floor.”

Faster faster go faster. Jackie no longer hid her darting glances at twenty-something; he didn’t notice them, and the spider already knew she was anxious. (Animals—and, supposedly, therefore insects—can sense fear, and no one said they could only sense fear that they induced.) She lifted her bootie to step to the left, but the spider pressed closer on, and she froze, mere inches from the elevator’s rear wall. She felt a sneeze rising as she lowered her foot and the spider drew nearer—

Ding. “Twelfth—floor.”

The undeniable triumph in the female announcer’s voice was drowned out by Jackie’s resounding sneeze. Simultaneously, the spider came within three inches of the right bootie, and the elevator doors slid slowly open. After a second sneeze, Jackie removed her face from her moistened jacket sleeve. Say nothing, do nothing, just leave. She hopped boldly over the spider, made her way across the threshold of the elevator, as twenty-something looked up—

“Bless you.”

“Thanks, you too.”







Art





*Drowning Girl* | Amelia Brisk









*Naptime* | Amelia Brisk (Left)

*Queen v. King* | Amelia Brisk (Above)







*Duplicity* | LiJune Choi (Top Left)

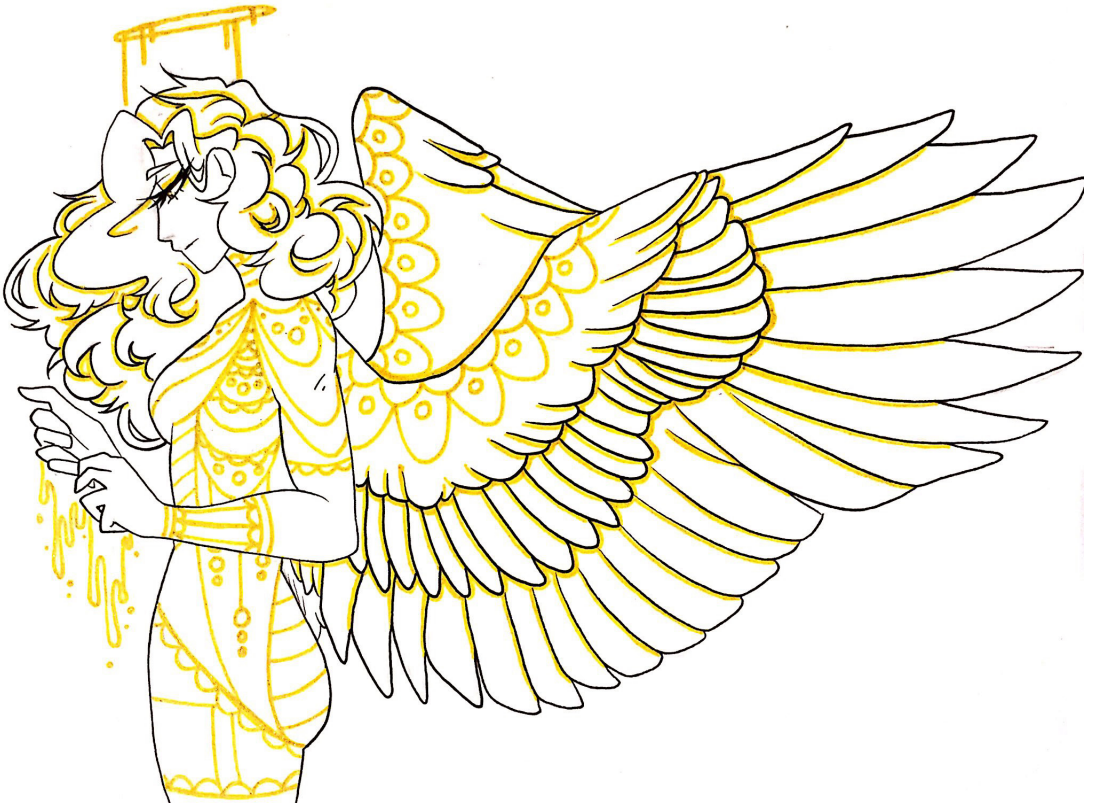
*Field Trip* | LiJune Choi (Bottom Left)

*Landscape Wonderland* | LiJune Choi (Below)





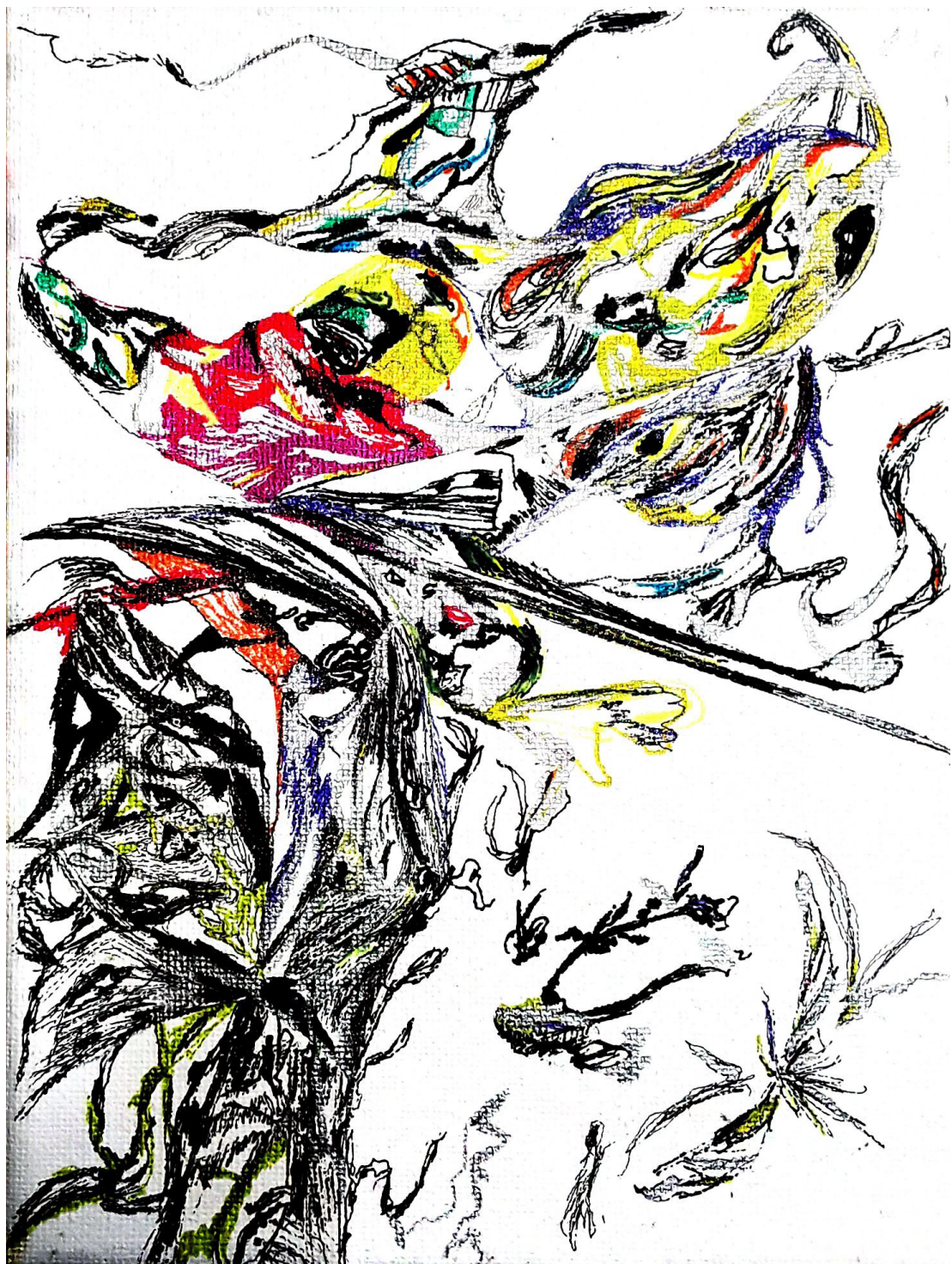




*Confetti Sunset* | Juliette Jarabek (Left)  
*Guardian Angel* | Juliette Jarabek (Above)  
*Motherhood* | Juliette Jarabek (Next Left)  
*Conecttion* | Koo Yeong Joo (Next Right)











*Japanese Woman* | Agnes Jung (Above)

*Red Buddha* | Agnes Jung (Right)









*Skeleton* | Agnes Jung (Top)  
*Flipper Fair Lover* | Cheyann Neades (Bottom)

*Athena* | Carlye Patterson











*Untitled 3 | Carlye Patterson (Top Left)*

*Untitled 5 | Carlye Patterson (Bottom Left)*

*Perspective | Joe Sheehan (Above)*









