



The Fioretti

Spring 2017

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The Fioretti:
A Student-Led
Literary Journal

The Fioretti:
Spring 2017

Senior Editors:
Lori Arend and Hannah Sobhie

Marian Writers Press
2017

Dedication

The 2017 edition of the Fioretti is dedicated to all who advocate and hold a passion for the arts. Literature, music, and visual art speak for the soul when the soul cannot speak for itself, and we pledge to strive to help others understand the consequences of the light that, without the arts, would be extinguished.



Photograph by: Sarah Storm

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Acknowledgements

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Editor's Note

I'm notoriously terrible at writing reflections. It's probably the most challenging task I've encountered at college, because (despite the heroic efforts of some very compassionate and longsuffering professors) I'm really not certain exactly what reflection means in an academic context. The bits and bobs of knowledge I'm constantly taking in are, even as I type this, settling in and finding their places among my experiences and emotions. Is that a reflection?

My consciousness is a creek in the woods, into which all manner of detritus might fall, some items light enough to be carried away, floating in the gentle current and others heavy enough to sink to the velvety floor, where they will be ground indistinguishable. Does the creek feel itself to be lost somehow when it finally flows into a rushing river, or does that union of water to water turn the babble of the creek into a force more wondrous and powerful than it was when it meandered through the woods alone? The sticks and leaves carried on the surface are rushed onward, flying towards their destination (whatever that may be) and the heavy objects rolling along the silt at the bottom might also be reborn as a delta.

As my creek has flowed into the river of this university, I have learned that we are not lost as individuals when we flow together. We are wondrous and powerful. We come from the woods, from the mountains, from the deserts, from the cities, from the plains. We bring objects with us, both light and heavy. Some we will carry with us and others will be left behind. Which ones are which? Does it matter, or does the union of water to water create a type of magic with its unpredictability? Water can only reflect when it is still - when in motion, it shows fragments of the world outside itself, bathed in the sparkling lights of the sun, distorted by the droplets of rain, cloaked in the haze of mist rising from its surface.

So, here is my reflection - the following is a collection of the fragmented, the sparkling, the distorted, and the mist-cloaked. This is our river.

- Lori Arend.

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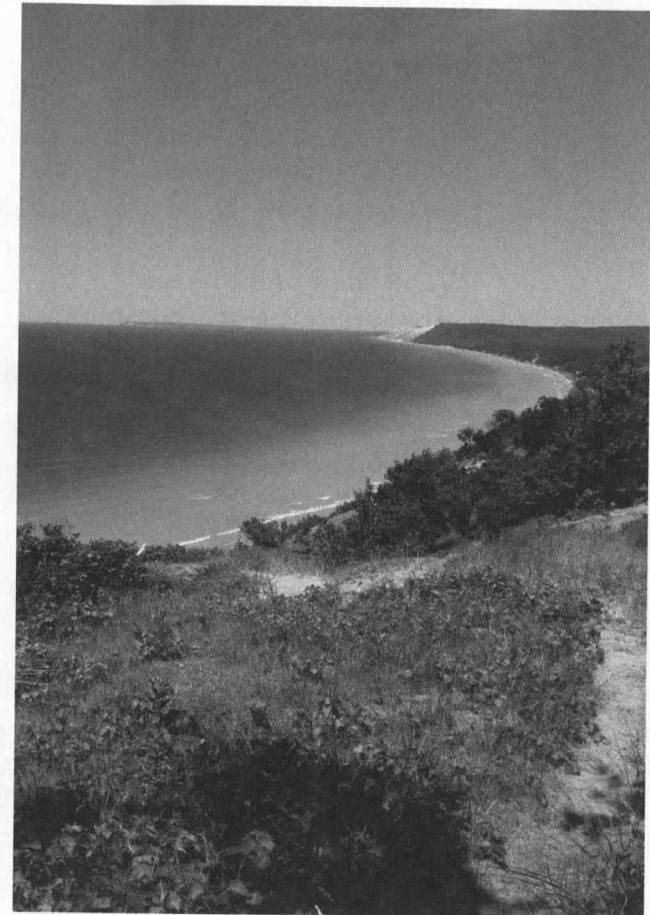
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Nicholas Koppol
Cynthia Proctor
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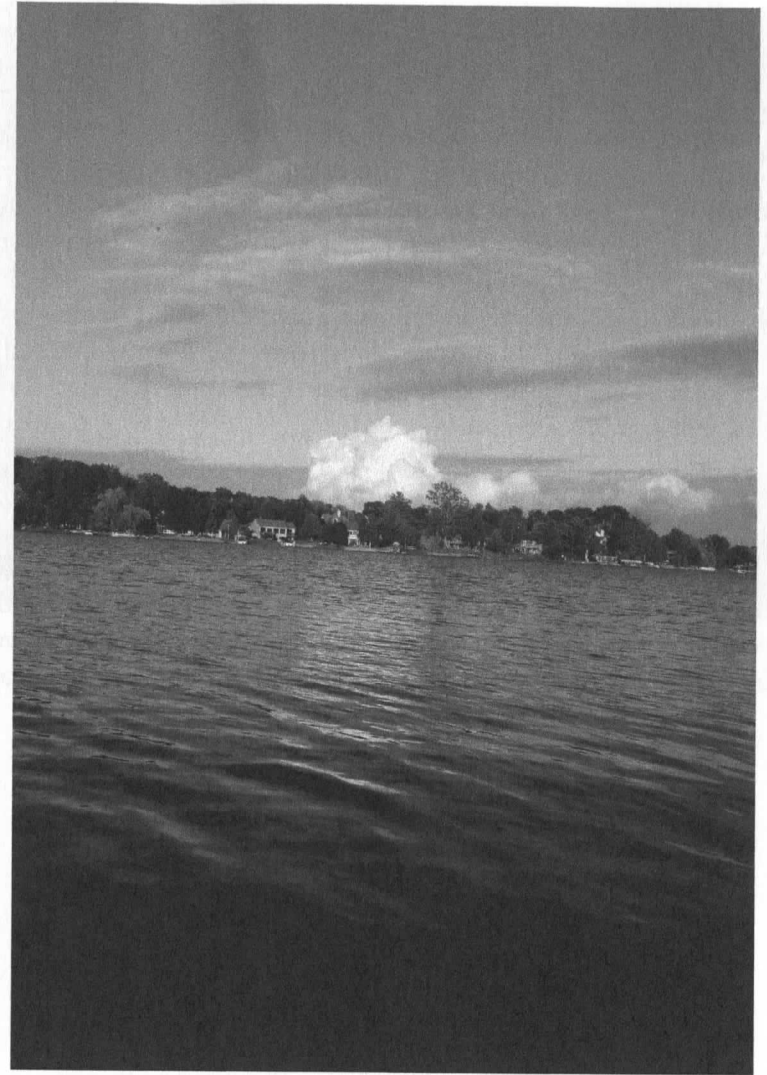
Photograph by: Sarah Storm

Meeting the Sea ~ Julius Austin

Standing in the soft Sand
Watch the gentle rocking of the Sea
Far from here is another Shore
The sea beats on it it does Here
Nothing but water and Sky
How do they view the Ocean

We all know of the Ocean
The soft feeling of Sand
Clear bright Sky
The smell of the salty Sea
We become lost Here
Stood on this Shore

Sky will always meet Sea
Here is where you find the Shore
Ocean always beginning at the Sand.



One Drop of Water ~ Julius Austin

Just one drop of water, starting in the sky as nothing but a cloud.
Just one drop of water, collecting with others to fall from the sky as rain.

Just one drop of water, in a storm can turn a gentle rain into a raging flood. Just one drop of water, that pools to cover the world as it storms.

Just one drop of water, freezing can turn the world to ice. Just one drop of water, makes a snowflake falling from the sky. Just one drop of water, adds to the blanket of white coating the land. Just one drop of water, melts as the sun comes out. Just one drop of water, turns the world wet when the snow leaves.

Just one drop of water, filling holes and making puddles, making lakes, and making rivers. Just one drop of water, in a river can carve through even rock as it flows. Just one drop of water, comes together at the end of its flow to form into a vast ocean. Just one drop of water, sitting in the ocean can evaporate back into the sky. Just one drop of water, starting in the sky as nothing but a cloud.



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

The Stars ~ Sarah Meer

The stars come out

like they know how to take their time
like glaciers move like mountains climb
like hour hands tick before clock towers chime

But I know the stars come out at night
because of the way they dazzled the girl
lying on the dock, half in love and all in shock
watching them fill up the navy blue sky

like they know how to take their time
like snails move like planets align
like making a million one cent at a time

She watched them with her feet pressed up
against rough gray boards and her shoulder
pressed up against his warm brown skin and
her eyes pressed up against the bright white stars

that came out slowly taking their time
like they know how to smell the roses
like a turtle moves like the door closes

slowly slowly when she's tiptoed inside
after crawling all over back roads at night with
that brown-haired boy in his brown pickup truck
crossing her fingers to hold onto her luck

careful not to make a noise
careful not to break the spell
and bring back the dark sky she knew so well
Because after years and years of taking their time
the stars, they finally came out that night



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

An Ancient Greek Day ~ Julius Austin

Apollo starts the day pulling the,
Bright ball of fire we call the sun across the sky.

Crowds gather at the temples.

Dionysus smiles as they,
Enjoy the bounty of wine in his name.

Fertility promised for them for such,

Great praise to the wine god.

Hermes takes flight to deliver messages.

Into the lion's den might Hercules marches.

Jason is off on a quest for fleece of gold.

King Minos' palace stands, beneath sits a

Labyrinth, the twisting turns and tunnels built to hold the

Minotaur, the half bull man a blight on his house.

Nearly a decade later,

Odysseus still sails the seas,

Poseidon his enemy keeping the mortal from home.

Queen of gods Hera asks to be carried across a

River, in the guise of an old woman.

Styx, the river of Charon flows

Through the deepest bowels of the

Underworld, ruled by Hades.

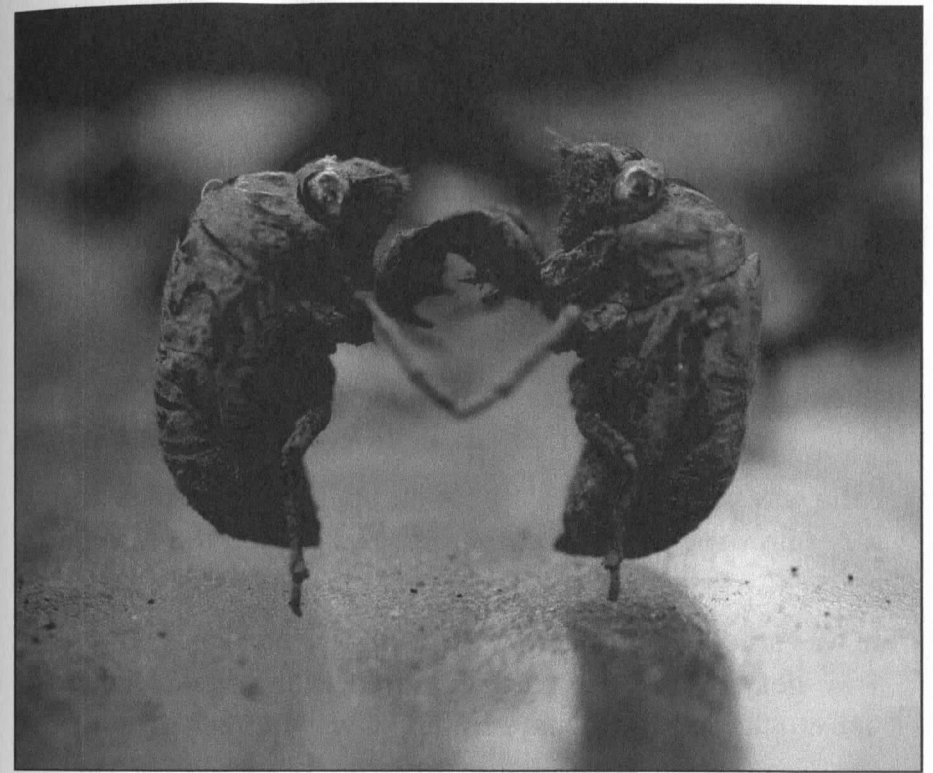
Victory coming on the

Wings of the Pegasus that beat for Perseus

XII, 12 titans buried for many

Years so that the gods can rule

Zeus, who stands above them all, to call the day to a close.



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

Sandwiched Together ~ Julius Austin

They both found new homes on the same day, set separate in
vastly different places.

He was in the light, warmth all around him every day.

She was in the dark, the coolness around her in her small
home.

Neither would come to see the other. Always they stood
separate where they lay, as different as day and night.

She was volatile and easily shook up, being complex and
almost exotic in her nature. Never seen the same way
twice and always spicing up where she went.

He was smooth and plain, what is on the surface is what you
get. A calm and earthy nature lending well to what he
added too, always finding a way to stick around.

It wasn't till someone else took them out of their comfort
zones, out of their separate homes did things change.
Laid side by side their depths plunged, and laid bare so
nothing was hidden as they were pushed together.

Soon they learned how well they could complement one
another when put together as this, a perfect treat for
anyone.

This is how you make a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich.

Chromatic ~ Gabby Pabon

We were warm Skittles falling from our package,
melting on the floor of a hot car.

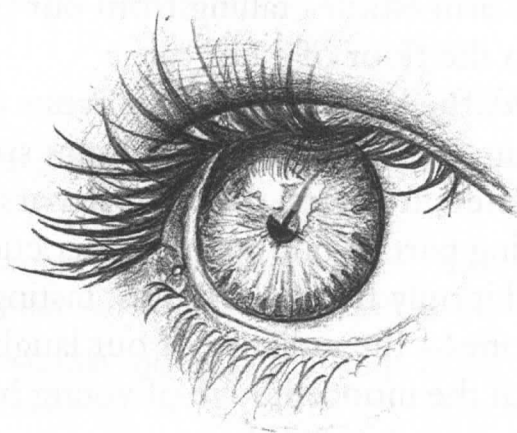
We melded, the brightness of our eyes
blending into the elegance of a vibrant sunrise.

We had different colors, different flavors,
all becoming part of our unique concoction.

We sipped it only from our minds, tasting
vibrant stories-- the radiance of our laughter
tender with the innocent love of young hearts.

We contaminated each other,
hands dripping with the colors of our souls,
Red, Purple, and Tangerine.

We each made an impression on a blank canvas.
We were not disappointed.



Picture by: Clare Stephens

Fox Eyes at Night ~ Lori Arend

thick along the dark strands
pavement that roots down
all the way

little things mind their own
tiny necessary lives
tunnels endless underneath
seethe with errands

every frond a bridge
in the hidden
negative space world
spanning for inches and miles

the tiger fox strides
best of show
blue beam eyes guarding egress
he eats what he finds there

king of the afterlight
sentinel predator
small fish in a miniscule pond
tail flash white and gone

Free ~ Gabby Pabon

“Work Will Set You Free”-Auschwitz

Her hands soft and pink, wrinkled with time, hiding her tattoo so I
wouldn't see it,
her souvenir from 70 years ago, shame marked in green---work
never set her free.

Some things she couldn't hide, like her daughter whose mind was
split between two worlds
psychotic from the years of experiments mom participated in---
work never set her free.

Love was a rock she threw at those who beat hate across her back.
Peace she sought
within herself, a body she carved out from skulls, though---work
never set her free.

Irony was her dream from when she was thirteen, freedom from
mud-toil,
freedom from industrial chains, but though she worked all her life--
--work never set her free.

Obligation to eat the crumbs, etiquette of the destitute, their sin
being to let any parcel
stray from the mouth. Though now she had money---work never
set her free.

Grandpa died when I was nine, he saved her from an enemy they
failed to destroy, but
despite their efforts, she was alone again---work never set her free.

Fear is the shadow of a looming death, clinging to her throughout
her life. She didn't know
of shadows until death whispered in her ear. She tried to forget but--
--work never set her free.



Photograph by: Rachel Carroll

Green eyes fresh as spring,
Glimpse like morning rain -a glow
so much softer than the sun's,
which kissed your caramel skin
in gentle, supple, breezes.

Fingers tangle in your black curls
tender as our toes in the sodden grass,
and the warm whispers you sweeten down my
neck,
are wind-swept graciously into my heart,
baring the essence of lotus flowers.

Yet you fear the day when you must go
Home to such a faraway place,
Never to see your lotus blossom
Into a soft kiss across your face,
But I whisper back to you;
“When the night settles upon us,
and you're lost without the sun,
may my heart be a constellation,
to allow you to trace the stars
back into my restful arms.”

I entered a little coffee shop on 86th. The place that we decided to meet. I was excited, I'm not going to lie. I had reconnected with her after 10 years of not really having any contact worth speaking of. I just felt like I finally met somebody that might be able to fill this hole that I've never tried to fill before. A hole that makes me who I am, although it's not a place anybody should visit, much less live in. It's what sparks my creativity, a craving for distraction from this crevice that I've dug for myself.

I see her pull up in her Honda Civic and feel butterflies. Actually, if I'm being honest they feel more like moths because butterflies are pleasant and go away when you don't want them to. Moths on the other hand are just little monsters that go wherever they want and will congregate around a warm light refusing to leave unless you give up something that you want. Light.

I sipped my black coffee, put it down, then waved to her from across the shop. I'm really not even sure if she knows what I look like so I was going to call her name after taking the sip and swallowing the coffee, but she saw me and began to walk over anyway.

“Hey!” she said, very enthusiastically like I imagined she was in nearly every social situation.

“Hey, how've you been? I haven't seen you in a minute.”

“Yeah, hasn't it been like 8 years?”

“10 actually,”

“Wow, that's crazy to think about. I didn't know what to expect before I saw you in person. Your picture on Facebook looks completely different.”

“Yeah, I took that in like sophomore year of high school after I cut my hair. I was way too proud of how it looked to deprive all my friends of that fresh cut.”

"It's really that old? How have you not changed it more recently? You look older now and people you know might not notice you."

"Well, the way I look at it is, people that I'll be friends with already know who I am and what I look like. I don't really see any use in posting a new picture every year."

"But there are a lot of people that you've known for a while that might want to look back and see how you're doing or what you look like. What about them?"

"Eh, I clean out my friends list every once in a while. If I haven't talked to somebody in over 6 months, I'll unfriend them. Except for my family of course. If they're related, they stay." I took a sip of my coffee, "I saw that you have a lot of friends, there's no way that you talk to all of them right?"

"I do my best to talk to everybody on my friends list every once in a while. I feel like, if they were my friend at one point, they'll stay that way, and I don't want to cut any ties just because we haven't seen each other."

"I guess that makes sense. I'm kinda weird though, I change literally all the time. My mind is never in the same place for more than two weeks. I guess I just get bored with being in the same place ideologically and not changing my mind about anything."

"That sounds really sad." She laughed at how different she found out that we were.

"Yeah, it's not all bad though. Every time I change, I find myself revisiting things. It's a lot of recycling of old ideas and convincing myself of new ways to think about things."

"That sounds exhausting."

I shrugged. "Honestly, it's how I keep myself busy. If I didn't constantly change my mind about everything, I don't know what I'd do with my life."

"Can't you just hang out with your friends and distract yourself?"

"Not really, I haven't found anybody that can really satisfy me like consistent reevaluation does."

"Maybe you just haven't given them a chance."

"I'm scared of that, to tell you the truth. I'm terrified of what that might mean for me."

"Well I think you should try it out for a little while."

"Maybe," I paused for contemplative minute, then said, "we've talked about me a lot. What about you? What have you been up to?"

"I've just been in school and working a lot, hanging out with people, you know. I've been singing a lot more though. I've got videos up online; I guess I'm just bored without them. If nothing else, it keeps me sane."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you have something in your life where you just can't survive without it? Some constant that just stays with you? Actually, I just realized that I haven't gotten anything yet, hold that thought."

"Alright, I was wondering when you were going to notice," I chuckled, "I'll be here."

"Ha-ha, alright I'll hold you to that."

Kate was a girl whose family and mine were very close at one point in time. We both lived in a pretty affluent community in Indianapolis. Our older siblings always hung out with each other and we basically lived down the street until I was about 2 when there was a situation with my family that made us move about 4 times in 2 years. After we came back to Indiana, the familial relationship was never really the same. We

reconnected after about 7 years for a month or so then fell out of contact again.

I just recently started talking to her again because I saw some videos of her singing and felt like being congratulatory. I just knew that it was almost impossible, as an independent singer on the web, to get any meaningful recognition. Then we talked for a while and found that we had a lot of the same interests. Finally, we decided that it wouldn't be too out of the way to meet up and get coffee somewhere.

I was optimistic for the appointment. I see getting coffee as being the perfect situation for a first meeting of any kind. Whether it's a business partner, a friend you haven't seen in a long time, or even a quirky and hipster first date. It's great because you don't have any real obligation to stay for any period of time, it's very low-key and doesn't need a lot of preparation. Also, it doesn't really require any significant commitment.

For example, you can make a first date that's just dinner and a movie. That would be exciting, getting the relationship off to an ambitious start. The problem that I've always had about it, though, is that with this I always feel like I need to make an impression. I can't just be myself because, after the movie, I'm competing with the movie for a conversation. We're not talking about her, we're talking about how well Brad Pitt played that part.

If you would just get dinner, you have a sense of expectation. You're asking somebody out to eat with you, one of the most intimate and vulnerable moments a person can have. You also can't do a first date at McDonald's or something, unless you know them really well in which case it would be more like getting coffee. Depending on how fancy the place is, there's some sort of pre-made label put onto you by her before you even go out.

With coffee, there's no expectation. It's a blank slate where you can just be yourself and have the freedom to leave whenever you want. Being able to leave is probably the most important part to me. I never

do, but I always want to know that there's a risk-free way out in case something might go wrong or there's a "time-restraint".

"I'm back," she was back.

"What'd you get?"

"Something called a 'Java-Cola.'"

"What? So it's like coffee and soda?"

"Yeah! They said it was good when I asked what it was and they said it was like a root beer float but with coffee and whipped cream instead of Ice Cream."

"Does it hold up to expectations?"

"Actually, weirdly enough, yeah it does."

"Mind if I get a taste?"

"Sure, go ahead."

I took a sip of what had to be the strangest drink I've ever tasted. Imagine you opened up a Dr. Pepper laying out on a hot day that still had its carbonation. It's got a new label though, "New Coffee undertones" you'd think it's a joke, but you taste it and kinda do a double take. You don't know what you were expecting, but you feel the tingly carbonation of soda and the usual soda taste. Something else that you didn't expect is there though, a taste of coffee and extra caffeine. It's hot like coffee, but it tastes so, so different.

When I drank it, I felt violated by a piping hot Pepsi that disguised itself as coffee.

"It's...interesting." I finally said after fully appreciating the odd taste that had just raided my mouth.

"Yeah, I kinda like it though, I wouldn't get it every day, but when I forgot what it tasted like I would probably get it."

"I would probably just stick with black coffee"

"Gross, why?"

"I just really don't see the point of getting some sugary drink and wasting money." I shrugged, waiting for a response. I knew she loved coffee more than anything and was anticipating the indignation from her side.

"But it's like the perfect drink to experiment on! You can't do that with water, we found out you shouldn't do that with soda."

"It's all I need, I don't feel like coffee is something that I need to tamper with, it's good as it is."

"You're like an old man." She chuckled. "Just thinking things should just stay the way they are without any experimentation."

I took a sip and thought for a second, enjoying the Miles Davis that was playing in this little coffee shop. I looked over for a second saw that the barista was hand-grinding the coffee and putting so much care into what she was doing. I also noticed that everybody in the shop was on their phones, including Kate.

"Yeah, I guess I am." I finally responded. "To be fair, I've also convinced myself of that because I can't really afford a \$6 drink." I said laughing.

"Okay, well that makes a little more sense, but I know you're lying." She smiled the most adorable and sly smile I've ever seen in my life. The moths came back.

"Yeah, well I'm just a pretty dry person. I only really like a few things. I honestly don't even know what they are, just that I notice them when they make themselves visible."

"Try to think of just one. One thing that captures your interest."

"Okay. Well, I guess that one thing would have to be writing. I like getting my thoughts down on paper and talking about conversations both real and imaginary to an audience that may or may not be there."

"You write? Do you have anything with you?"

"Well I have this paper I wrote for a class, it's called 'after the concert'"

"Can I read it?"

"Yeah, if you want."

I gave her the paper and told her I was going to go get a coffee refill. She said "Okay," and I left her alone to read the story.

I walked over to get myself some dark coffee, I've found that I can appreciate that more than blonde or medium coffee. I feel like if you do anything, you have to do it to the extreme. Like with coffee, if you're not drinking dark and black coffee, you're not really appreciating it for what it is. You have to feel what you're doing to the extreme to be able to understand it completely. If I was hooked to blonde roast coffee, I would be feeling a fair-weather connection to it. With dark, I realize that it doesn't taste perfect, but it does have certain qualities about it that are worth experiencing over and over again.

Beside me was a man who was dressed from head to toe in a business suit. It looked like he had just gotten out for lunch.

"You like black coffee too?" I asked him, after all, It's not often that you see people like us.

"Yeah, I can't take sugary or creamy coffee. Give it to me straight or don't give it to me at all." He said.

"Exactly, that's how I feel about it. Nobody else really gets it though."

"Eh, fuck em'." I was taken aback by the language. "If they don't want to try it out then they can't give you anything for it. Once you get used to it, it's almost like a club of black coffee drinkers, not unlike

smoking. People that don't do it look at people that do it like a scourge upon society."

I agreed with him. Not really wanting to continue the conversation, I said I had to get back to my table and told him Kate was reading my story.

"Alright, with a sweet piece of ass like that, let's hope your story's good."

"...yeah let's hope." I said, wanting to get away from this guy. He seemed way more pretentious than a person should be about coffee and smoking, and he talked about Kate like she was some kind of object.

A while ago, I didn't really understand why, but I felt the same way about any given girl. I could look at a girl like a prize to be won from some kind of manly feat. Ever since I reconnected with Kate, though. I can't look at women that way. She made me realize more fully how depraved this society is by always selling meaningless sex as the best case scenario of a meeting with a stranger of the sex you're attracted to. I now see that it's not like that at all. Women are complex creatures that I never could hope to understand, but in the Venn-Diagram like way that I can see me relating to them, it gives me just enough resources to almost understand them, but never completely. I'm just so intrigued that it's a lot harder for me to just see a woman as a pair of tits, which I am very thankful for. It's relieving actually.

I go back to Kate and it looks like she's done absorbing my work.

"What did you think?"

"I loved it, what's your major again?"

"Accounting and philosophy, why?"

"Have you considered English?"

"Yeah, but it always seemed like a dead end. English majors can't usually make any money unless they publish a few bestsellers."

"I think you could do it, just a suggestion."

She handed me back the paper. I grabbed it and put it in my bag.

"Thanks. I don't really know what to think about it. Being an English major that is."

"What is there to think about?"

"The lack of income, the sheer oddity of the whole industry, things like that."

"If you love writing, you should do it."

"I'll see. I want to test the waters first, that's partially why I wrote this," holding up "after the concert" "I wanted to see how good I was before I ever really made any sort of decision as to whether I would pursue and English degree or not."

"What's stopping you?"

"I feel like people don't respect English majors, especially if they're guys."

"You shouldn't worry about that. I would imagine anybody else who read that, think that you've got a gift and you shouldn't waste it. What good will your writing do if you're in some accounting firm crunching numbers for rich guys?"

"Well, none. I don't know the real reason to tell you the truth. I guess I'm just afraid of change."

"Well this is a good change. You're pursuing your talents, which is something most people can't do."

"Still, what if I couldn't make it as a writer?"

"Well then you won't make it, you'd make a good teacher I think."

“Why would I teach? I don’t know how to tell other people to do what I do. I just write how I write and I don’t know why some people like it.”

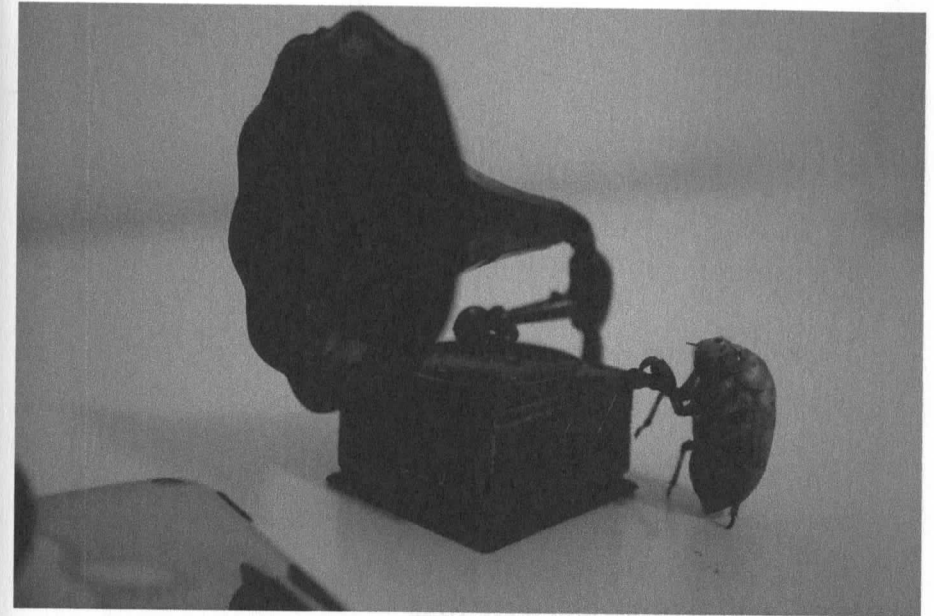
“Well, if it’s really that way, maybe you should just take the plunge. It’s something you’re good at but you don’t know how or why. Usually, when there’s a situation like that, you can only get a lot better. Because you have raw talent and other people have to work to get where you are. I have no doubt that you could be a good author if you tried.”

“Maybe.” I said as I picked up my coffee and began to drink.

“I just think it would be a waste for you not to.”

I contemplated what she said. Would it really be a waste? Why do people need to hear what I have to say? I don’t know anything, my opinions are based solely on what I’m thinking and on a selfish need to survive. What I have to say won’t help anybody. It’ll just show people how much of a hedonist I really am. I mean writing down things just because I feel like it? That seems like the perfect profession, but what right do I have to pursue it? I’m no Hemingway or Bukowski. I’m not changing the way people think, I’m just giving them an outlet by saying things as bluntly as possible, which I guess is what Bukowski did anyway.

“I think I will.”



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

Box Man ~ Nick Keppol

A man came to me one day,
With eyes white and hair gray
A package he had with him
An intriguing little curious whim

He handed the package to me
That warm day in Tennessee
Not a word he spoke therein
But disappeared as if he a goblin

I looked at the curious little box
And with a smile like a sly fox,
I opened the peculiar item
Inside was nothing but a totem

This totem which had faded and
Seemed to be crumbling in hand
Was white and was an odd gift
Might have been from a store of thrift

I looked deep into the totem's eyes
The man appeared in some guise
His life seemed to flash in parallel
To mine until a fresh type of peril

The lifetimes seemed to meet in the middle
Who was this box man with this morbid riddle?
Shall I run, shall I hide, no I can't
Within his gaze I am naught, but an ant
For the Box Man is nothing but I alone



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

A Part of His Heart ~ Therese Miller

He gave me his watch.

I held out my wrist and he put it on for me. The watch was beautiful in its simplicity. It had a white face with a picture of Tigger from Winnie the Pooh doing a handstand on it, surrounded by Roman numerals. Its brown leather strap wrapped gently around my wrist. He said it looks better on me.

Does it light up? I asked.

It used to, he replied. Now it just ticks and tells time.

He loves watches. He collects those plastic Swiss watches, Swatches. He's almost always wearing one. His Swatches tick loudly.

When I hear my watch tick I think of that night in a dark movie theater waiting for the show to start. We sat in complete silence, all I could hear was the ticking of my watch and his. They ticked in unison, like heartbeats.

When I hear my watch tick I think of resting my head on his chest, hearing his heartbeat, my heartbeat, his watch, my watch

The White Flakes ~ Nick Keppol

The white flakes dash across the ground

A roaring fire

A cooling chill

A frozen lake

The snow falls to call all the children

The child looks out her window

A loving mother

A respectable father

A caring family

These thoughts keep the child warm

This bitter cold shakes the child

A broken window

A growing pain

A searing burn

The pains that bring her to reality

The child attempts to seal her box

A lost home

A forgotten child

A welcoming grave

The child sleeps forever dreaming

Dreaming of the home she'll never know

What to Write ~ Nick Keppol

Characters:

Lee – A local award-winning author around 35 years of age

Christina – Lee's wife around 30 years of age

Zachary-Joseph – Their son around 10-12 years of age

Two people in white coats

(Lights up. There is a desk on center stage with an open notebook and a fountain pen. There is a window on stage left and stage right. A box fan lies beneath the windows and a small desk fan is running on high. It is hot. There is a door found on stage right and one in center stage. LEE, a 35-year-old writer enters through the stage right door. He is a big man and is kind of disheveled. As soon as he enters he notices the door on center stage. A wave of terror inundates him. He shudders and walks to his desk in the center.)

LEE: (sitting down and in an over dramatic, Shakespearean style) Twelve years and I still can't do it... I have been celebrated throughout the years as a great author and now I can't even get this right... I don't know what to do. This gift will never be presented. This course can't be charted. (he hears something) What's that!? Wind? Friend? Foe? Why can't mine eyes see the danger that hallows through the halls... Damn these tiresome eyes, see the wind!? (he hears the sound again) See the friend!? Or perhaps the foe? (CHRISTINA enters from the stage right door and crosses towards the desk. She is pale. She is thin. She wears a white dress and refuses to look at LEE.) Christina! Dost mine eyes deceive me. 'Tis you? Really you?

CHRISTINA: (not looking at LEE) Yes, my husband, it's me. I'm here.

LEE: Why won't thou looketh upon me. Speak wisdoms to mine face. I must understand why I can't present thine gift. Why can't I see the world, but see you as pure as day? Why can't I who have peppered words upon the paper throughout the years can no longer see the words

that I write. How do I write again? How do I escape this heat? Damn this pen! Damn this heat! (He hears something again. He turns towards the stage right door. Sees nothing. He turns toward the center stage door and sees that it is cracked. He rushes to shut the door in a full-fledged panic.) NO! Stay shut, damned door. (pause) I am not leaving yet. Not until mine eyes see the gift I shall present.

CHRISTINA: (Still avoiding looking at LEE) Why must you find this gift? What does it hold for you?

LEE: (turning from the door) Everything is crashing down upon me. Mine eyes are as dark as the Cave of Hades. I wrote words to a novel long ago that made me a celebrated man, but now the words mean nothing to me. I see nothing, but you are a clear vision to me. I see you, dost thou not see me. Christina, my love, my wife, why won't thou look upon me? Why won't thou chill me with thine icy stare? Why must I suffer this damned heat!?

CHRISTINA: (still avoiding eye contact) Why can't you understand. Why won't you just give in to the pain that dwells within these walls? There cannot be any damned reason for you to try to finish this. Just give in.

LEE: Why won't thou see me? Why must I suffer this torturous heat? This damned torturous heat... Christina, I am desperate for your gaze! I need to feel your cooling gaze. (rushing towards CHRISTINA) Tell me what to write! Where is the muse? Where is the gaze that inspired me? (He hears another noise) What? What comes towards me now?

WHITE COAT 1: (offstage) What's this? Why is this room locked?

WHITE COAT 2: (offstage) I don't know. I wasn't even aware of this entire floor.

WHITE COAT 1: (offstage) Well, get the kid! He'll know.

CHRISTINA: It's Zachary-Joseph, Lee. It's your son-

LEE: OUR son.

CHRISTINA: He's your son. You lost the right to call me his mother.

LEE: Please, Christina. Look upon me. (collapsing in anguish behind CHRISTINA while grabbing her dress train)

ZJ: (offstage) You asked for me.

WHITE COAT 1: (offstage) I'm sorry to bother you, but we need to get into this room. Do you know if there's a key somewhere?

ZJ: (offstage) That room doesn't have a lock.

WHITE COAT 2: (offstage) Are you kidding me? Well how do we get in?

ZJ: (offstage) I don't know, but I'm going back downstairs for a minute,

CHRISTINA: (without looking at LEE, turns from her position and starts to cry) Why wasn't I enough? I should have been enough Lee! They say the life of a writer can be torturous sometimes, but I should have been enough for you. But you just needed to have more "inspiration." My heart was broken when I found what you had done in our bed. I wanted to kill you, and that... thing. But I decided to move on. I went on to write without you and I was destined to become a great author. They say that when you die, your life flashes before your eyes, but it's not what people think. My life didn't flash before my eyes, but my past, my present, and what should have been my future flashed before my eyes. I will never forget that moment. The moment where my husband, the author, a man regarded to be an architect of linguistics, shot me down in cold blood.

LEE: (Desperate. Weeping.) Christina, I'm sorry!! I had never meant to hurt you! I just wished to return my muse...

CHRISTINA: (Finally turns to look at LEE. She is frenzied and angry and spiteful. The lights slowly start to turn red leaving LEE and CHRISTINA in silhouette) HOW DARE YOU CALL ME YOUR MUSE!!!! You lost that opportunity! I am now a muse of blood and

desperation! And then you, left to while away the rest of your miserable (center stage door slowly starts to open while she speaks but does NOT fully open) life. You believed yourself to be a poet among men and now look at you. You are nothing more than a repeat of Ernest Hemingway without the greatness and without the publications.

LEE: (terrified of CHRISTINA) Why must thou yell at me? Why didn't thou leave me!? I was your husband! Now our child is left alone. I cannot raise him. He'll have to learn the aspects of life without me. Christina, looketh away. I cannot bear the sight of thy cool gaze. It burns like ice and freezes mine soul.

CHRISTINA: (now only making eye contact) It is too late for you and you shall soon see the true terror within these walls.

LEE: (attempting to look away) Why my sweet? Why must thou hurteth me? Why did he send you of all the people in Heaven? (noticing the door) Damned door hath attempted once again! I hath told you that you shalt not take me. (rushing to the door) Stay shut this time, damned door.

CHRISTINA: (walking to the center table and looking at the book. She pauses. Then with a sudden and tumultuous anger) It is too late!!

(Suddenly, the door on center stage flings open and two people, who were the WHITE COATS, rush the stage. There is a struggle between them and LEE, but they over power him. They start to drag him through the center door)

LEE: (shouting as they drag him away) Wait, I am not finished! I am not ready!!

(The figures drag LEE through the door. CHRISTINA starts to exit Stage Right as the lights fade out. There is a blackout. A spot light appears on the book in the center stage. ZACHARY-JOSEPH walks onstage through the stage left door with the WHITE COATS)

WHITE COAT 1: I suppose you were right, kid.

WHITE COAT 2: (noticing the book) What's this?

ZJ: Oh. My parents were writers. I guess this was my parents work space. After my dad killed my mom in this room, he hanged himself in here. I was only nine. I can't believe it's been three years since then. I was left with nothing. I hate Lee. That damn jerk left me alone with no one. Just me and Julliane, my little sister who didn't even make it to see five.... Why should a kid need to grow up before even hitting puberty? And now, I have nothing but this house, which I have kept for three years for the fear of my parents' spirits. (crossing to the book) This book is my father's unfinished legacy, not even started, just like his family. (reading from the book) "Dedicated to the muse who instructed me and told me what to write, my Christina."
(Lights fade out, and the curtain falls)

Cancer - Jonas Smith

This poem is dedicated to Sandy Buchanan. A Mother. A Grandmother. A Wife. Always in our memories.

Predetermined before life
Killing those who cannot fight
Opening doors for those who are blind
So that they may peer through with some light
And allow them to see who their real friends are
Time and time it rises again
Pushing the host to find a friend
Someone to love, someone to hate
Someone to walk with them through the Pearly
Gate
And someone to laugh with before they die
It comes back stronger
Killing their hope
Ripping their soul
Destroying their family
Depleting their strength
Death finds everyone
Some too soon
Cancer finds the loved

And takes the ones who sing the happiest tunes

The Refugee ~ Gabe Proctor

So, I ran, unable to see because of the cascade of tears streaming down my face. The direction didn't matter, so long as it was far away from here. East and West, Left and Right, I don't even recognize what they were anymore, I've been running so long.

"Ciate nino, ciate! Corré!" Mama screamed at me just minutes ago when she heard me whimpering. We were both hiding somewhere that we thought might be inconspicuous. Behind a fruit stand that used to be run by Señor Hernandez. I remember that he was so proud of every single thing that he sold; right down to the last dented orange which he would swear was more tender and delicious than all the rest. He gave life and personality to all of these fruits and somehow make them so delectable that the happiness I would feel whenever Mama would tell me we were going to see Senor Hernandez was unparalleled. That trip didn't come often; she would save it for special occasions like birthdays since Papa wasn't with us anymore... He was killed on his way to work two months ago. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time and we never got to grieve him because we were in constant fear of the same fate. The fruit stand was a distraction. To me, to mama, to my brothers and sisters, or I guess just sister now...

It had all started early this morning, Mama had told me that she was going to visit Señor Hernandez. This usually meant a free mango for me if I came along, so of course I did. Everything was so peaceful, the skies were blue as the ocean, the birds were singing their sonorous melodies of hope, assuring us that everything would be okay, and I listened to them. Foolish of me.

We arrived, and I played with my friend Franco Hernandez. We had grown up together, played fútbol along with our other amigos, and ran to and from the fierce ocean waves nearly every day as a sort of game we invented. Whoever could get closest to the water without touching it wins... He's gone now. They don't care about children here. They see everybody as cannon fodder or an obstacle to getting what they want, whatever that is. Revolution? I doubt it.

The first bullet rang through the street like thunder; an omen of the imminent torrent that would soon flood everything in sight. It hit Señor Hernandez in the chest; and, too quickly to be merely reactive, mama. Franco, and I dove behind the cart, already knowing it was too late for Franco's father and left us no time to grieve. Franco tried to run away soon after... why did he run away?

Mama yelled at me to leave after bullets were flying through the air a little way down the street from us. That she would follow soon. That she would follow soon...

I ran faster than I can ever remember my legs carrying me. I was running for my life, and it wasn't the first time. I knew to duck behind everything that could cover me for a few seconds before starting to run again. I knew to rush into an alley at the first opportunity. To get away from this onslaught as soon as possible.

I finally found the alley that I knew all too well and hid until the sunlight of silence finally made itself visible. I sat under a sheet that was drying with more holes in it than I could count. Whether it was more from the age, or the bullets, I could never tell.

I sped home, the tears seemed like they would never dry. And in a way, they never did.

My sister Maria was crying for a different reason when I came into her sight as she was sitting anxiously on the doorstep.

"Está vivo!" came running over and bawled while clutching onto an embrace for what seemed to be hours. I can't tell you how comforting it was to finally feel like I was safe in her arms, if only for a moment.

"Mama?" She asked. The tears came flooding back. I couldn't answer her, but she knew what this stream meant.

"Vamos... Ahora..." She said. I looked up at her. For the first time, I saw her with a look that said she was done. With the death. With the suffering. With the constant fear of walking to school with all of

your friends and not returning with each of the original members of your posse.

We were on a bus that night. All the things that we needed fit into a small bag. One more pair of clothes for each of us, 160 pesos, our passports, a drawing of the family that I had done with everyone present, and mama's necklace that papa gave her on her birthday. It had been in the family for years, and it only seemed right that the last surviving members would take it to Mexico with them to start a better life with some memory of the little good that we experienced in Honduras.

On the bus, I saw that there were many like us. An exhaustion that could only come from lying awake at night wondering if you would live to see tomorrow. Nobody was sleeping, though. The bus was alive with the anticipation of what would happen next. The unsurmountable fear of what would happen if they were deported from Mexico back into the very hell they had left so quickly.

I was hopeful. Enough tragedy had come upon our family. We had never done anything wrong. Surely God would not let Maria and I succumb to the same fate? Mama always said God was merciful and loved all of his children. But did he love the cartel? How could he? They were putting an end to the lives of so many of his children. Literally children. Did he love them even though they were burning and cutting to pieces anybody that wouldn't join as an example? Does he love them now?

We arrived at the southern Mexican border. An intimidating fence met us there, blocking our way to what we saw as paradise, acting as a guardian for the country protecting her from all forms of foreign evil. Every man, woman, and child ran off of the bus before the destination could even be announced by the driver. We were free. No more death of our friends and family. No more constant fear of happening to be in the middle of a cartel drive-by. We were finally in a place where we could be people. Live as God wants us to live. Where we can, at the very least, live on merely hungry instead of hungry and riddled with bullets. I am going to work. Even if I'm not as old as Maria,

I will be the man of the house now. I can provide for us. I'll slave in a factory. I don't care. As long as we aren't living that nightmare of the past, I will be happy.

We stood in a long line. Waiting, but not impatient because we knew that a better life was worth waiting for. I saw other children a few streets past the border patrol station where they were playing fútbol like Franco and myself. Even getting into fist fights over whether the ball was out of bounds. What I wouldn't give to be playing with them.

We were finally at the front of the line and a woman was running the direction that she came from with such sorrow as I had never seen. The man in uniform said mechanically, "Nombre," in a very bored voice. Didn't he know that he could be the savior of hundreds of people? How could he not greet every morning with enthusiasm and be overjoyed that he was to be an emissary of freedom to people in desperate need? She gave him our names and our passports, eager for the process to be over.

After a short, but heated, exchange, she turned around. She made a face that I knew all too well. That every person on this bus knew. It was the face of defeat. I knew now why the officer could not wear a smile. He knew what he was doing was wrong, but he had to desensitize himself. Nobody could possibly stay happy knowing they lived in a world where they would be the face of rejection and certain death for thousands of people that would look back at him with eyes that had known death, and will know it again.

Maria had the face of a person that had done everything they could to save their own lives, but had them dashed in the dirt by somebody that held them in their hands and valued it less than the dirt itself. Her eyes welled up. I didn't think I'd ever see that happen again. Except maybe for when we got across the border where she would be crying tears of joy.

"Vamos..." she said to me. I struggled and tried to get away from her grabbing my arm and dragging me back to the bus, hoping that this wasn't true and that she was just playing some sort sick joke. What had God allowed to happen? Why would he let us go back? Why... It was true. He doesn't love us.

As we on the bus to go back, I no longer had the capacity to care. I have given up all hope of ever being safe again. Maria and I will die like papa...mama...Miguel...Amelia...José... Maybe we will meet them in heaven and God can explain why he ignored our prayers...

A Poem That Doesn't Belong ~ Hannah Sobhie

This poem doesn't belong here... or so it's been told.
It's a foreigner.
This poem is a child and it is scared. It has nowhere to go.
It is tired.
This poem has been pulled from rubble, has held its ears when the
bombs came.
It stopped crying long ago.
This poem's feet hurt, but it cannot rest, for men with black masks
and blood-stained knives
raid its dreams. They rape its mother and behead its father.
This poem can't close its eyes because of what it has seen: children
who look like they're asleep
but their parents wail and rock them, men lining up to receive a
bullet in their brain.
It has smelled burning flesh.
This poem is cold, like the child in a manger. It knows He
understands and sometimes feels
Mary wrap motherly arms around it. Her veil smells nice,
like lavender, like incense, like its mother used to.
This poem prays facing Mecca. This poem is Allah's child –
just like you.
Sometimes, in between the screams echoing in its head,
it hears Allah crying.
He says: "I'm so sorry child."
This poem is a casualty of Greed. It knows Greed wins.
People forget, they start to move on.
So will you.
This poem doesn't want to die, but it probably will.
And what difference would it make?
"Foreign Policy" will run it through. Make it another headless child.
Another washed up on a beach.
Make it another rotting corpse.
Another place for flies to place their maggots.
This poem wants to go home, but it can't.
This poem wishes it was never born.
It knows the world doesn't care.

This poem is dying, like the Prophet Mohammad did
when the terrorists murdered him.

In his own name and in the name of God.

"In the name of Allah, the compassionate and the merciful."

This poem has a question, but it already knows the answer:

Will you let it in?



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

In the Lines ~ Nick Keppol

There are worlds of mystery
In the lines
Worlds we never understand
In the lines
Worlds engraved in history
In the lines

Worlds created in ink
In the lines
Worlds buried with words
In the lines
Worlds that make one think
In the lines

Libraries are portals
In the lines
Portals to limitless worlds
In the lines
Worlds bound by immortals
In the lines

Hemmingway, Fitzgerald, Poe
In the lines
Shakespeare, Shelley, Hughes
In the lines
All work in misery and woe
In the lines

Ye writers listen clear
In the lines
There are no limits
In the lines
There are no constrictions
In the lines
There is no fear
In the lines
Of a book

The End of Heather ~ Austin Tebelman

Her body feels as if it is as light as a feather
She can still hear everything around her
She cannot wake up she is stuck in the nether

Outside her family struggles with whether
Or not to pull a plug and what would occur
At this point her will is the only tether

Consciousness is encroaching body and mine soon together.
She must race the family's decision of legal transfer
She cannot wake up she is stuck in the nether

She used to smile, laugh, and cry with such great pleasure
Her only thought now, she must her family deter
At this point her will is the only tether

Trying to move but held by straps of leather.
Inside her head she soon began to stir
She cannot wake up she is stuck in the nether

She gives up hope like a poor trapped in sledger
Fate is accepted, death covers her like fur
At this point her will is the only tether

Death takes her hand they are off together
Her final thoughts even to her sound like a slur
At this point her will is the only tether
She will not wake up she is frozen in the nether

Your desire for me to love you
was only to recover you from the years,
and you grasp my arm to break through
the barrier of your own futile fears.

You built me a coffin
out of the white walls of my room.
You nailed me shut with the kisses you softened,
the dirt of your words, forever my tomb.

Take back your forlorn love, I want to go home
but the shrill nails cut into me, and they pin me
down,
and your words condescend what is already
known-
that screams are not heard far beneath the ground.

You left me to fester within myself--
a shriveled flower once yearning to thrive,
tossing away your newly reaped wealth,
dismayed with the petals, plucked from my life.

Love is the ultimate pain killer
But I'm all out of pills, out of refills.
I misused them, abused them, addicted.

Now the empty bottle mocks me,
Mocks me, mocks me in my misery
Mocks me, mocks me in this incurable pain
Because I'm all out of pills, out of refills.

Love ran dry.
Love ran dry and love ran cold.

Who is to blame?
No one to blame but the addict.

I misused, I abused
And now the empty bottle mocks me
Mocks me, mocks me in my misery
Mocks me, mocks me in this incurable pain.
There's nowhere to turn, no turn, no cure in sight
Because love is the ultimate pain killer
But love ran dry and love ran cold.
No one to blame but the addict.

I'm the One ~ Austin Tebelman

When there is nothing happening
And you wish there was. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

When you think it is not going to work, Suddenly!
it kicks in. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

When the euphoria overtakes you, you are no longer in control.
Now is my time! I'm the one who keeps it tidy

You look like you are having a great time, then
just like death there is black. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

Welcome to my home, I have been expecting you
Pardon the mess but soon you'll know. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

The pain is immense and the terror is delicious
You are falling apart. while I'm the one who keeps it tidy

It's just me and you, nobody can help
You cannot be saved let them try. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

You wish it would end but we have just begun
Stick around, let's have some fun, and don't worry. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

You want to go home?
That hurts my feelings sweetheart. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

Hour 4 and we are halfway through
I'm not feeling so nice anymore. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

Get the fuck back here! You cannot leave just yet love,
Even in this shit. I am the one who keeps it tidy

You can try to lie down but I will not let you escape; don't worry I'll be gentle.

Your bed is a mess, don't fret. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

You do not know who you are anymore, the person in the mirror isn't staring back
Suddenly you are scared of yourself...as you should be... I am the one who keeps it tidy

There is one way out, let's see if you can fly
When you hit the ground. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

Go ahead, freak out, see if it helps
Here is a hint: it won't. Good thing. I am the one who keeps it tidy

2 hours left and I will make them hurt
My boss loves me because. I'm the one who keeps it tidy

I will come back to you anytime. You know what to do
Just promise me you'll make a mess. I am the one who keeps it tidy

I've hurt you, I've terrified you, you will never sleep the same
All the while. I'm the one who keeps it tidy



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

Her ~ Carolyn Swartz

She wakes me by the hour
I tell her it's time to sleep.
She lets it go for a while
Until into my dreams, she'll creep.
From inside she wakes me again
To her, it's time to play.
She wants to talk about tomorrow
And my mistakes from yesterday.
Shutting her out, I pray
Rehearsed prayers until I doze
Before I'm ready my alarm clock sounds
And yet another morning I arose
She was already up, waiting for me
Staring with the hint of a smile
A familiar face I'm displeased to see
But she stays here all the while
She stands before me here
Bitten nails, cracked lips, bags under eyes
I take a deep breath and get out of bed
With her, I can't cut ties
These days she's my only friend
I'm not welcomed in society
So with her I'm stuck and with her, I'll go
She's my... anxiety.

There's a dream I've had for the past ten years. I'm lying in bed back home and I hear a clock slowly tick away the hours. I lie there for a bit, but I know that I need to get up, even though it's still dark outside. When I get up, I go to the window sill. It's strange; I have no need to go there, and I can't think of anyone who I should expect to be waiting outside. But I go there anyway, and when I look outside I see her standing below on the front lawn. She stands there, looking about her for a moment, surrounded by a white mist, and I think I can catch the faint glow of small lights like fireflies all about her, the light reflecting off of her white nightgown. She seems to move about, as if in wonder at the sight before she turns to me, with her sweet, innocent smile, and waves excitedly, as if to say "Come out! Come outside to play big brother!" Then she runs off gleefully into the mist, though I dare not follow her into that dark place where she has gone.

Then, before I wake up, I feel an unspeakable dread wash over me. No matter how hard I try, when I am awake I cannot remember why I was so afraid. I know she cannot be alive, and I cannot follow her into the mist. She's been dead these past ten years, lying in a small coffin six feet in the ground.

I was in the town's bar with my older brother when I confessed the dream to him, a dream I had kept secret for many years now.

"Dark dream, little bro," said Matthew. "Maybe you should see a shrink."

"I already saw a shrink after the incident ten years ago, and I ain't going back!" I said angrily. I knew he was joking. I wasn't in a joking mood.

"Alright. Sorry I pushed your buttons there."

We sat in silence for a moment. Business was slow tonight, though I could spot a few regulars. Old Jim and Burt were watching the T.V. in the corner as usual, discussing politics over gin, and the pool table was populated with several middle-aged men, some who had once been

friends of the family. Then there was my brother and I, sitting alone at the bar; I with my beer and my brother with his second vodka. He always drank it straight these days, without tonic or orange juice like one would usually do.

"How do you cope with it?" I asked.

"What do you mean, little bro?" was his response.

"How do you cope? I mean, with what happened ten years ago."

"I don't, John. I try to forget, which is why I almost didn't come. Probably why Luke hasn't come; trying to forget it all."

Luke was the second oldest, and the only other person besides our father involved in the events of ten years ago.

"Whatever happened to him, anyway?" I asked absentmindedly.

"Last I heard, he picked up and went on a road trip out west somewhere. That was eighteen months ago and haven't heard from him since." Matthew absentmindedly responded.

"Ever connect with dad?"

"No. I tried calling once, but he doesn't answer. Don't even know exactly where he lives; must be pretty far out there. I'm guessing that heartless bitch is still getting the support checks, though."

"Please, don't speak about mother like that. It's been difficult for her too, especially since she never knew the full details of what happened. So you can't expect her to understand the situation he was in...the situation we were all in. And yes, he sends them regularly."

"A little understanding from her would have been nice. Does she truly understand what we went through? No. She assumes father was crazy and made us crazy too. So what does she do? File for divorce and claim custody over us without knowing an inkling of the truth of the matter."

"At least she didn't bring forward any charges."

"She took us from the only other person who could understand what we went through! Do you know what it was like those ten years without a father? No, you spent that time seeing your stupid therapist trying to convince yourself we were all delusional!" Matthew then drained his alcohol and demanded a refill.

"You tried to convince yourself it wasn't real," Matthew continues, "but Luke and I never forgot. We pretended to get better, but we never forgot." A tear was slowly making its way down Matthew's cheek.

"You may think badly of me, but I never forgot either. You may have been closest to father, but I was closest to our sister. And when you left, I had no one, not even mother. She just withdrew when you two left."

Matthew was silent for a moment. He seemed to be thinking it over.

"Sorry bro. I truly am sorry, but I'm trying to be here now. How's college going?"

"I dropped out, just this last week."

"Why?" Matthew was genuinely shocked at this.

"Not enough money."

"Do you need a place to stay?"

"Nah. I'm staying with mother."

"Why?" More anger than surprise.

"She needs someone to look after her. She barely works, barely leaves the house. So, I was going to get a job and try and support us for a while."

"Bro, you go back to that place, and that dark shadow will haunt you till the day you die. It killed our sister, its already killing mother. Don't let it kill you too."

"I can take care of myself. Besides, I don't think the dark shadow has left any of us."

That ended the conversation. At that point the bar was beginning to fill up with more customers as the night grew late. The topic of our conversation changed, then Matthew went through his usual bar phases as his conscience was consumed more and more by the alcohol. He laughed hysterically, he shouted hysterically, he cried hysterically, then we got the entire bar to sing along to some old Irish drinking ditties. Dad always loved the Irish songs as he was half Irish, and taught several of them to us when he was still around. Singing one every once in a while made it feel like he was still with us.

Emily, Matthew's wife, came to pick us up at about eleven. By that time, Matthew had to be helped into the front passenger seat of the mini-van she drove.

"You sure you don't want a ride home?" she asked. I wasn't in as bad a state as Matthew, and I thought a walk through the backwoods to my house might help clear my mind.

"I should be fine. Hey Matthew, you coming to the grave tomorrow?"

"Sure I'll be there," is what I think he said.

"I'll make sure he's there," is what I know Emily said.

I waved good-bye as Emily drove out of the bar parking lot, then began the trek through the old backwoods.

I walked down an old dirt road, the light of the full moon guiding my way. Though regretting declining the car ride in my slightly intoxicated state, it felt good to breathe the fresh night air. I swayed back and forth a bit as I continued on, and once or twice threw up in the underbrush. I suppose I chuckled once or twice, and I felt a dizziness in my head so that I began to wonder if I was more drunk than I thought at first. Despite this, I could still see the path ahead of me.

Then I thought, "Is the path blurry, or is that just the mist surrounding me?"

The mist seemed to slowly flood the area around me then stretched out before slowly creeping up the trees and covering the sight of the path before me. Twinkling lights like fireflies began to hover about me and within the mist. Unconcerned, I continued walking forward, slowly now so as not to lose the way. Yet, something had made me wary as I continued on, a presence that seemed to be watching me, causing my impulses to insist I make a run for home as fast as I could.

I stopped, as a shadow slowly revealed itself before my eyes, dancing and swaying like a marionette dangling from its strings. My hand went instinctively to my pocket to grasp what was inside, and I held it ready to pull it out if need be. I began to make out the figure of a young woman, but as I looked closer she seemed no older than sixteen. Her long, thin dress was white, her hair long and auburn, her eyes were

playful and seemed to shine, and her smile was innocent. Then I saw her teeth, those long and pointed teeth. Then, I recognized who it was.

"No. No, no, no, no, no! I killed you! I killed you! We killed you ten years ago. We dug you up and killed you! Why are you here?"

She just looked at me with those playful eyes, yet I thought I could see hunger, like that of a ravenous animal in the light of her eyes. I backed away a step, and she lunged forward. At that instant, I pulled out what I had in my pocket and waved it in front of me like a torch. She backed away like a startled animal, and I brandished the cross my father left me ten years ago like a knife. She continued to back away, and when she had fallen back into the brush, I ran full sprint towards home. I could hear her footsteps as she ran after me, and I could almost feel her breathe down the back of my neck, almost feel the fangs bite into me.

I ran all the way to my neighborhood, escaping out of the woods, running through the neighbor's yards, and up to my front porch. I threw open the door and almost fell inside. As I turned to close it, I looked across the street and saw, not the girl, but the nightmarish silhouette of a tall, dark figure, one I remember all too well. It seemed to stare back at me before it turned and vanished into the mist. Then I closed the door.

My mother was asleep on the couch, and the T.V. was still on, turned to the channel of her favorite soap-opera. I knew she didn't really like it, but she didn't have much else to do anymore. I picked her up, and carried her up to her room. My mind went back to a time when I once fell asleep on the couch when I was four. I can't remember if I was watching a show on T.V. or reading a book, but when I was in the state between being half asleep and half awake, my mother picked me up and tucked me into bed while humming a soft lullaby to me. Now here I was, barely twenty-two, tucking in a woman more than twenty years my elder after she passed out on the couch.

I heard her murmur softly in her sleep, "...Benny...", which was the pet name she gave my dad when they were still together. I turned to look at her, and I wept to see her fall to such a state. Silently, I left the

room, and closed the door behind her, whispering, "Good night mother" as I left the room.

Before I went to bed, I sealed tightly all the doors and windows. Then I went down to the basement where my dad had stored bottles of holy water. It was still here, untouched even after my father left, as if a final grace for my brothers and I should we ever need it. I took some bottles and began to sprinkle water over every entranceway, every crack and vent, anywhere I thought some malevolent entity could enter. Then, I sprinkled some down the hallways, splashed some on the walls, anointed surfaces and other items with it, making sure to cover as much surface area as I thought necessary. Then, I went up to my room, taking a box of holy water with me and placing it under my bed where I could reach it. Then, I hung the cross over my bed, and went into a fitful sleep. And as I lay there, an unsettling thought came to me. If my sister died ten years ago when she was six, why did it seem she was still aging?

There is something I never told anyone in my family, not even after the incident ten years ago. The vision of it haunts me, sometimes in my dreams, sometimes when I'm awake. It happened about two months before my sister died. In the forest next to the park, there was an old road that led to a rundown farmhouse that had long been overrun by local vegetation. It was rumored by the kids at school to be haunted by the ghosts of the last family to live there, and rumors circulated of horrible acts that may have been committed in that place. On a dare, I set out one night for the farmhouse to prove my bravery by staying there till morning.

It was dark; there was no moon, no noise. The silent darkness was chilling, unnatural. Never before had the forest been so devoid of anything so that even a shadow would have been comforting, yet comfort comes not often when committing forbidden acts. What compelled me to keep going I give little thought to, even today, for I stood before the house before I knew completely where I was. The barn that had been there was rotted away to its foundation, yet the house remained standing. I entered, as if drawn by a force which compelled me to come in. It led me into the empty foyer, up the rotting stairwell, and

across a creaky hallway. I came to a large, closed door, yet even before I entered it, I knew something was there, waiting for me.

I opened the door, and there was nothing but the remains of an empty bed a couple once shared, now nothing but a broken frame. I entered, and the door closed behind me, slowly. And I stood there, in silence, waiting, and I knew something else was there with me in the darkness. Then a cold, skeletal hand set itself on my shoulder. I turned my head around, and I saw a tall figure, robed from head to toe in black standing next to me. I could not make out a face, it was so obscured by the shadows, yet I could see clearly its eyes; two red slits directed at me, unfeeling and inhuman. Then, I thought I could make out a mouth, as its lips curled into a smile, and I remember thinking to myself, "Is it common for people to have fangs?"

Then it all went black.



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

The next morning, I stood with my brother Matthew before a small grave engraved with the words: "Here lies Lucy Moore. Beloved daughter and sister, tragically taken by an unknown disease." Two bouquets of flowers rested on the ground where the coffin was buried, undisturbed these past ten years. I knew this because I checked the ground when I arrived.

"Did mother refuse to come?" Matthew asked.

"She wasn't up yet, so I decided to let her sleep," I responded.

Matthew grunted, as if indicating his understanding, without approval or disapproval. He took out a cigarette from his pocket and lit it. He offered one to me but I declined; I wasn't in the mood just then.

"It wasn't your fault, you know," said Matthew.

It was meant to be comforting. I just stood there silent for a moment, and all I could feel was guilt.

"Do you know what she said to me before she left that night? Before we found her in the woods? Before she got sick the next day? She said, 'Don't worry big brother, I'm going to make it better for you.' She left with a god-damn smile on her face. Do you understand that? She didn't even know what-" I couldn't finish my sentence because I was starting to sob.

"I think she knew just as well as any of us."

"Don't bullshit me Matthew! You never saw him. I saw him every night, standing outside my window. And she just went to him, because she knew I was so terrified. Because she thought, maybe there was something she could do to make it go away."

Matthew stomped out the cigarette. "We all saw her after she died, except mother of course. We all came here and dug her up. We all..." his sentence trailed off. "Besides, dad knew about it long before you did. It was following dad long before it got to you."

"But I was the one that let it in. I never should've taken the dare. I never should've gone to that house. If I hadn't done any of that, she would still be alive today."

"You don't know that. Have you seen him lately?"

"No," I lied. Matthew caught the lie, I think.

"I told you, go back to that house, and that shadow will only follow you. Leave it behind; move on."

"No. He follows me, wherever I go. The dreams still haunt me. I see him, staring down at me, even now his eyes are on me. I'll never be free of him."

"I wish I could help. I won't go back to the house, but maybe if you stay at my place, he will go away."

"I told you, no thanks. You might hate mother, but someone still has to look after her."

"I know. And I don't hate her. But understand, it's hard to forgive someone who acted in the way she did without a bit of sympathy."

"You still don't get it Matthew. I do understand."

Matthew left after a while. I stood at the grave for a little while longer before leaving.

Now, I am lying in my bed, tossing and turning. I anticipate the dream to come to me again, but I cannot fall asleep for the life of me. Maybe I'm afraid of the dream, yet even that would be a relief from my reality. I look to my window, and I know she is out there, waiting for me. I walk to the window, and I see her outside, dancing in the mist like some limp puppet. I open my window, and lean out.

"Go away! Leave me alone! Why won't you just let me be?"

She laughs at me, and seems to motion me down. I close the window and slump to the floor, and weep.

"Father, why did you leave me? I can't do this alone. I can't do this alone. Won't you help me?"

I've had enough. I go to my desk and pull out a few items. The first is a journal I've kept for the past ten years, cataloging everything that's happened to me since the incident. Then there's a letter addressed to my family to be opened if anything should happen to me, and a hunting knife my father left me. I leave the letter and the journal on my desk after writing one final entry. I take the hunting knife and grab the cross from my wall. I go downstairs and out the door, till I'm facing the specter that looks like my sister.

She looks at me, and smiles. "Big brother, come out and play."

"You're not my sister. My sister is dead."

Her face contorts, but whether in resentment or sadness I cannot tell.

Then she turns and runs into the mist, making for the backwoods. I run after her. As I go deeper in, the darkness of the forest grows thicker.

The sounds of the night cease altogether, though a feeling tells me there was never any sound to begin with. I stumble in the dark, then I glance about and I see many small lights, as of eyes peering at me from the foliage. I look more closely, and I see the faces of many people, eyes aglow and teeth bared and gleaming. Then a figure breaks away from the rest, and stands before me. The figure is dark, about seven feet tall, and stares down at me with its beady red eyes. It's him.

"What do you want from me? Just leave me alone."

The creature that has taken the form of my sister peers from around the figure, and smiles.

"That's not my sister. She's been buried and undisturbed for ten years."

None escape me. It spoke, yet it did not seem like speech. Yet what it meant was made clear to me.

"Is that it then? Is that why you keep following me? It's because I escaped, right? I got away from you, so you've been following me."

Come, join your sister.

"That's not my sister!"

You cannot deny it. Your sister has always been with us. She surrendered.

It pierces like a knife, what he said.

Surrender, John. Join your family.

I fall to my knees. I'm tired. I don't want to run. I don't want to do this anymore. It's too strong for me to handle now. But I won't do this lying down.

I rise, and look the creature straight in his eyes.

"You want me that bad? Come and get me, bastard!"

He, no, it, steps back.

"What's the matter? Come on, let's have at it."

I'm waving the knife around, and preparing myself to fight. The figures from behind the brush tense up.

"Come on! Finish it!"

The figures rush me. I'm surrounded by clawing, biting creatures. I can't fight them, so instead I flail about. I go down, sharp pain seething through my entire body as I am torn apart. Everything begins to go dark, but before I pass, I see my sister, looking down at me.

Matthew entered the town's bar, and his mind went to the night he and his brother shared drinks there before he died. The detective was sitting at a booth in the corner, just as he said he would. Raymond had been the lead detective in the case of John's unusual death, as well as Lucy's over ten years earlier. He was an older man, and had the hard look of one who had seen many years of service, yet a softness that denoted a certain amount of understanding. Matthew took a seat near the detective at the booth.

"Good to see you, Matthew. Glad you could come today," said Detective Raymond.

"No problem detective," replied Matthew. "Any new developments in the case?"

"Nothing for the past ten months. I decided that it's time to let the case go cold. That okay with you?"

"Yeah. We already know what happened anyways."

"Of course. Just a crazed animal attack, and that was all."

"Of course. That's all it was."

The two ordered their drinks. The detective asked for scotch while Matthew decided to go with a beer.

"Detective, can I ask a favor of you?"

"Shoot, kid."

"I want you to exhume John's body to examine it."

"Why?"

"Just to make sure there was nothing we missed. And to be sure he's stayed in his grave. I've been there every day for the past year to be sure, and I've seen nothing to suggest he's come out. But it would put my mind at ease to make sure he's dead."

"Making sure there's no repeat with what happened with your sister, then? Alright, I'll see what I can do, even if I have to dig him out myself."

"Thank you detective."

"It's a good spot, where you buried him. Right next to your sister. At least they won't be alone now."

"Yeah."

The drinks were delivered to the two, and they began to drink leisurely.

"I've been meaning to give this back to you." The detective handed over John's journal. "It provided good insight into what happened, even if it won't help in the police investigation."

Matthew declined the journal. "You hold on to it for now. After you exhume John's body, would you bury it with him? This is one testimony that should be taken to the grave."

"And the journal your father kept?"

"We decided the same for him."

"You aren't afraid it will come after you too, are you?"

"John was the only one to ever see it; in a way, it was his shadow. Whatever it was, it died with him, because I haven't seen it at all. That's my hope, at least."

They drank silently for a moment.

"So you're moving down where your parents are now?"

"Yeah. Luke's moving there too. Family reunited after the funeral. Funny how the death of someone close to you can right old wrongs, isn't it?"

The detective just sipped his scotch.

"There was one thing that bothered me when I saw your brother, aside from the fact that only his face was left intact."

"What was that?"

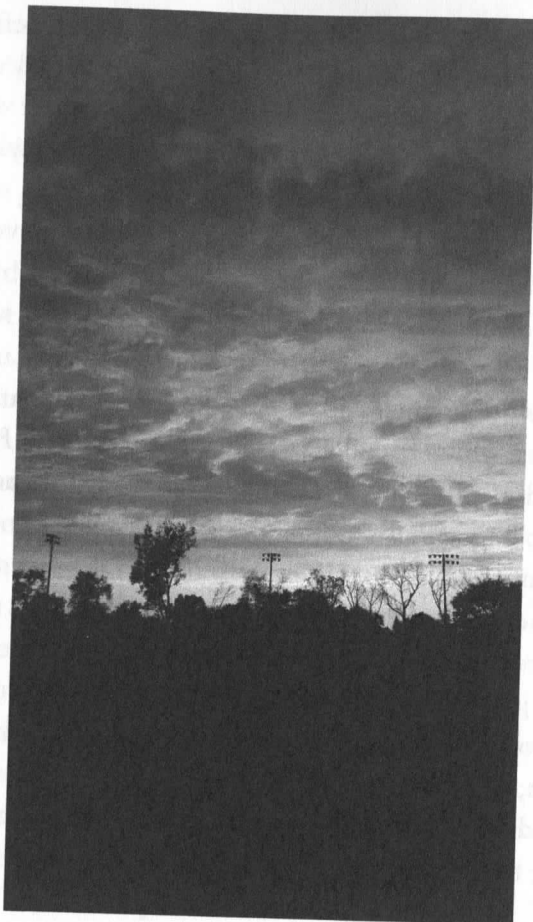
"Well, just that I can't say I've ever seen a victim smiling so peacefully after being torn to pieces."

Matthew left the bar soon after the conversation was finished and Detective Raymond again swore to keep the peculiar details of

John's case, as well as the details of Lucy's case, secret. Before he did, though, the detective handed something to Matthew, only saying, "Just something left from the crime scene I thought you might want back." Matthew put the item in his pocket. Then they parted ways for the last time.

Matthew decided to make one last visit to the graves of John and Lucy. It would be the last chance he had to say his good-byes before he moved on with his family. When he got there, the graves seemed as undisturbed as when they were first buried. He went to Lucy's grave first and laid flowers at her grave. They were a pretty combination of red and white geraniums, which had always been Lucy's favorite. He began to talk to the header, as if he were talking to Lucy. He told her about mom and dad reconciling with each other, how Luke was on good terms with the family again, and his plans to move closer to the rest of them.

Then he went over to the grave next to Lucy's. It read: "Here lies John Moore, beloved son and brother." Matthew stood there for a long moment, just looking at the grave. Matthew could not think of much to say, so he hummed an Irish ditty they both used to sing together. Then, Matthew knelt down, and laid John's old cross he used to carry around with him at the grave. After a time, Matthew rose and made the long trek home on foot.



Photography by Sarah Storm

Shadowed Shame ~ Carolyn Swartz

Collarless, he was lost.
Roaming distantly down the sidewalk
Perhaps the single streetlight held peace.
Too obvious was that conclusion.

By his force, the switch fell downward
Pointing to his worn out fabric check.
Check yes to darkness,
Check no to sanity.

Under-hugged, under-loved, invisible.
Deaf ears behind closed doors,
A broken toy at a shiny new day care,
Another test score on a desk.

Avenge the love murdered in the kitchen.
Knife through the breath of hope.
No, bullet through the head for disappointment
Bullet through the heart for shattered promises.

Release the strength within his walls.
Bandage the cuts from yesterday.
Broken boy, dear broken lover
Stop pushing out and start letting in.

I skipped another stone on the pond. 12...13...14...15.

"But what makes you think the world's like that?" I asked.

She hesitated for a moment, looking for a rock that might get a few more skips than me. It was always a competition with her. I liked that, she always kept me guessing, and it was a constant competition for who could be better at something that didn't matter anywhere but in the moment. It made our time together mean something. Honing a skill that, if you told somebody about it, they would shrug and not see why anybody would invest any time in something so useless.

"It's just the way everybody is, we get up, we eat, we go to work, eat again, then go back to bed all to start the same cycle over again."

I thought about what she said. "But nobody wants to do that." I answered her as I picked up another stone and prepared to toss it across the pond, this time aiming for a log that was ever so slightly protruding out of the water.

"It doesn't matter, we all do. Nobody can escape it." She sat down on the log by the fire again. It was that time of the day where the sun was just barely peeking over trees and shone a gorgeous pallet of all the colors of the rainbow on the pond; so beautiful I was hesitant on throwing another rock, but I did anyway.

"Or at least escape it with any sanity," she said. She began to look around for a stick to pierce a marshmallow and stick it in the fire.

"It can be done." I replied.

"What makes you so sure? You have to do it to live."

"I don't mean escape society."

"Well then what are you talking about?"

I sat down across from her, using the stick I'd found earlier to do what she was doing.

"It's just the way that everybody looks at life, society has become so forward minded that we've forgotten how to live in the moment."

She panicked as she stared into the fire a little too long and didn't see that her marshmallow had caught on fire.

As she finally put it out by blowing on the now charred lump of sugar, she said, "Do you want this? I hate it when they're burned."

I sighed sarcastically, "I guess I can." At this point I'd gotten the marshmallow right where I knew she liked it; this happened too often for me not to be prepared for this.

I took the blackened marshmallow and gave her mine.

"But we do, people have fun with friends, they see movies, they read books. It looks like these people are pretty in the moment."

"From the surface it might seem like that, but have you noticed that really society as a whole just seems to be searching for something? A semblance of purpose that we constantly try to achieve with all of those things you just mentioned."

"You're not making any sense," she had gotten the graham crackers and chocolate out of the backpack to finish making s'mores. "Do you want me to make yours? You know, since I kind of gave you a shitty one."

"If you don't mind that'd be great. What doesn't make sense?" I handed her the stick that I'd been holding the

whole time, with a lack of motivation to turn it into anything more than a burnt marshmallow.

"Just that you said we need to live in the moment, but at the same time we need to have purpose. It just seems like an oxymoron."

"That's what it is," I waited somewhat eagerly as she finished making the campfire delicacy, another skill that somebody else would think is moronic to get good at, but is so rewarding when you can do it well. She did this thing where she would get two sticks and hold the piece of chocolate about two feet above the fire and kept it there for about ten seconds to make sure it was as soft as it could be without becoming a liquid or stick to the sticks.

"Then what the hell are you talking about?"

"You know when we skip rocks?"

"Yeah,"

"Is it a useful skill?"

"The opposite."

"Then why do you do it?"

"Mostly because you want to."

"Is it fun?"

"I mean yeah; I can't say it hasn't grown on me."

"Why is that?"

"Because it's with you, and I like beating you at something whenever I can."

"Would you do it by yourself?"

"I might; what are you getting at?"

"Just roll with it for a second."

She glared at me in a way that I felt I saw almost every day. It was a look that said she was tired of this, but she was still interested in what I had to say.

"What would you say your purpose in life is?"

She looked into the fire for a second, having made the s'mores and returning to her seat across from me.

"Probably to make money, and to make the people around me happy."

"Why?"

"Because I want to live comfortably, and I don't like seeing people unhappy."

"What do you do to make others happy?"

"I guess just do nice things for people. The little things in life are what I think are the most moving and mood changing."

"Does that make you happy?"

"I would say it does. Whenever I see a smile on somebody's face because I brought them coffee without them asking at work always makes my day."

"But like permanently, is it something that makes you love life more than anything?"

"Well no, that'd be silly if my entire life was fulfilled just by getting people coffee."

"Well that is your purpose isn't it? Isn't that one thing supposed to make you happy and make your life feel full? How about money? Does anything you've ever bought given you a lasting feeling of euphoria that lasted more than a few days?"

"I mean I've got my house, my car, other necessities that make life easier."

"But isn't that just an instinct that we have?"

"What do you mean?"

"To provide for ourselves, to live comfortably, to make sure that the elements don't get the best of us?"

"I guess it is,"

"What in your life has made you happy?"

"Well, I like skipping rocks I guess."

"That makes you happy?"

"I mean now that I think about it, more than anything else if we're talking about a lingering feeling. In the sense that it's something I can look back on and actually have a good memory of what I was doing."

"Well I think that's what it's about."

"Skipping rocks? Are you high?" she chuckled, partly joking.

"Not necessarily skipping rocks, but more being ourselves, being honest about what we want. We're humans; and humans have a responsibility to ourselves that no other animal can really claim. It's to be truly ourselves; and a little bit, but it's wearing off now."

She laughed, "I knew it."

"I'm serious though, don't take that to mean I don't have a hold of my senses."

"I don't, I just think it's funny."

"Maybe a little bit, do you want a hit? I forgot to offer it to you earlier,"

"I'm ok right now, I have to work in the morning, but thank you."

"No problem. I am being serious though, most people are disillusioned by the idea that they need to be something they're not. To dress like other people, to look up to a certain standard, to have the right role models. None of that matters though. None of it. We aren't connecting with the right things. We're all jealous of money, power, personality, but we aren't ever looking up to somebody because of the fact that they appreciate a rock garden, or because they actually enjoy being outside on a rainy day for the smell."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there are things that we all enjoy, but it's vain to advertise the shallower of them. If we flaunt our

money, we're only showing an insecurity with some other flaw that we might have. If we objectify our brains and bodies for somebody else, it's not usually because we're actually comfortable with them, it's more that others find enjoyment in what we have to offer because we don't think that we're worth anything in other aspects. We don't recognize our weakness in a healthy way. I know I suck at sports, I'm not going to try to get better at it because it's never something that I've enjoyed."

"Well what do you think we all enjoy?"

"Being ourselves. Being free to show who we really are and not afraid to learn more about life because it might change what we think of ourselves. What we think of ourselves should be constant. That we're all people. Are there superficial differences? Absolutely. Should they change the way that we think because of them? It's not healthy to. The beauty of the true individual is something that isn't achieved easily, I'm still working on it and I'll keep trying until the day I die to be as unique as possible in a way that suits me. If we're truly ourselves, then nothing can make life uninteresting or not worth living."

We both stared into the fire again. This time until the sun went down and the only light was the stars.

"We should go, I've got to work early," she said.

"You're right, could you get the car warmed up? I'll be there in a minute; I just want to get the s'mores stuff cleaned up."

"Okay." I tossed her the keys and she walked over to the car.



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

It's the Leaf on the Tree that Falls ~ Joey Radcliffe

It's the leaf on the tree that falls,
It's my high school science teacher,
It's the third-floor window, library tier, sports hall rooftop

life in a vacuum.

Henry the hoover, smiling always,
Drowning in the fountain of screaming bitches -
Canines, puppies, pooches, pups: the job I left
and the life I found.

The solitary wood-bench painted green,
(the lonely souls with washed up dreams
and visions of Jesus, yes I'm guilty! - Hallelujah! -
The curse is lifted!)

The amphitheater that once was filled
with beautiful women and joyful hymns.

The silent stereo,

Empty park,

The creak of a swing as it sways in the dark,

The fat kid in the photo,

Times they are a changin',

Jesus is coming.

I think I'm falling.

I think I'm rambling.

I think I know

what I'm trying to say.

Jesus, please come and take the guns off Americans so
they stop shooting kids.

In the event that the moon should explode and the stars go out like candles as if some unseen hand has dampened its finger and thumb to snuff out the tiny flames, or if the Earth should somehow deflate like a giant balloon and go tumbling out of the Milky Way, or if the sun has a breakdown and decides that it can no longer perform its responsibilities, in short: if the universe goes “kaput” as those with especially delicate language would say, I bequeath to you my eternal love and hamper of laundry – the rest can go to charity.

The line for the customer service desk looked miles long. Norm heaved a heavy sigh and looked up at the series of signs which loomed over the queue.

"FOR FASTER SERVICE, CONSIDER USING OUR HOTLINE OR OUR APP!"

Looking down with a hint of desperation at his smartphone, he noted that there was no signal. Of course Hell would have Sprint...He began the long plod towards the back of the line. More signs and billboards could be seen across the flame-filled chasms, welcoming Norm to the Sixth Circle. His Dante was a little rusty, but he was pretty sure that he'd always spoken respectfully about religion. It had to be a mistake, and Norm knew that he didn't belong here. Surely mistakes got made occasionally, what with all the people dying every day, right? The end of the line was close. Norm could hear people in line complaining to one another -

"I'm telling you, it's a shame! McDonald's three times a day for fifteen years - that's gluttony, not heresy."

"Uh.... I think that's Ted Bundy over there. He's a murderer! He belongs in the Ninth Circle for sure."

At the end of the line, a well-dressed woman tapped her foot and checked her phone every five seconds. Her expression was the very picture of righteous anger. Every so often, she would roll her eyes and groan. Norm took his place behind her and she immediately rounded on him.

"How long is the line? Could you see? They ought to have some demons out here taking people's information ahead of time! I've been here thirty minutes already and haven't moved a step! This is ridiculous!"

Her voice was loud and grating, even over the din of other complainers. With a terrible sinking feeling, Norm realized that it was going to be a long, long wait.

Out of earshot of the people in line, two demons leaned on the wall and observed the queue with amusement.

"I guess they didn't hear about the restructuring, huh?"

"Guess not. I'm just glad we got assigned here. It's easy-peasy. All we have to do is watch, they do all the torturing themselves."

"Yeah, who knew we'd have to make a whole new circle for these guys? Being rude to people in the service sector must be a way bigger problem than it used to be...."



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

he walked along the seldom traveled path
the way which only the animals knew
where he could escape
to be at peace with himself
this sanctuary so transparent yet mysterious
but in the world which he was forced to live
he never felt the same

his world was a dangerous place
the demons of success
those who perpetuated this ideal
seemed to be content with themselves
at least to others
he had experienced this before
it brought him no solace

those who opposed these demons
the angels of this city
turned by others into demons
keeping their content to themselves
being criticized for their happiness
“they don’t care”
“they want us to love everything but what matters”

this apathy, focused through a lens of ignorance
seen as anarchy incarnate
in a way it is
an anarchy that refuses to worship what is not God
seeing the other as focusing on progress, but to what end?
“they don’t care”

“they want us to love everything but what matters”

this forest gave him solace
a sanctuary where life is all that matters
where only the needs are observed
he asked the squirrel, “what do you want?”
“what is want?” it asked confused
for it had never wanted anything
fully content in its ignorance



Photograph by: Hannah Sobhie

A Walk in the Woods ~ Connor Zink

My father told me to never walk in the woods. I obeyed him both out of fear and respect, and never thought to go against his wishes. Yet as I grew, a deep, forbidden desire set itself within my heart to wander into that mysterious place that my father so feared and avoided. It came about one evening that I heard the rambunctious shouts of laughter and gay voices singing. I saw the village youths, dancing and shouting, clothed in white and wearing in their hair bright ribbons and leaves of holly, as they went down the paths of the woods. Desire overwhelmed me, and I looked about to make sure that my father was not looking. Thus, I went after them at a distance, thinking to myself "Only once will I do this."

I followed them down the paths, staying close behind those white clothed and handsome youths. Their voices seemed to beckon me, as if they already knew of my presence. So desirable was the melodious sound of the music that came from their voices. I so wanted to run into their presence, to laugh and sing with them, yet some feeling, whether of dread or guilt I do not know, held me at bay.

I looked back, and thought I saw a shadow, pursuing in the darkness. Then I thought, "Could some creature in the woods be stalking me? What awful intention does it have for me?" I wondered at this, and I remembered my father's warning. Could whatever monster this was have been the reason of my father's warnings? I dwelt not long on this thought and fled from it.

In my haste, I came upon the youths and stumbled into their presence. I felt great shame at trespassing upon their private circle and feared their scorn, yet they welcomed me with great joy into their company. They clothed me in white and carried me along with them. And I joined in the songs and the gleeful dance as we joyously went deeper into the woods.

We came to a clearing where a great bonfire burned, and many white-clad people danced around it; faces of both strangers and those I knew well were among the throng. They danced a wild dance, and ate and drank to their hearts' contentment. In the middle stood a tall man, finely dressed and handsome, the master of this gathering. He turned to see our merry band and beckoned us into the wild throng. The youths went down and danced that wild dance, though I stood a behind, unsure. Yet as I looked upon the gleeful faces and the master's

welcoming hand, I smiled with that same wild glee and laughed a rowdy, uncontrollable laugh.

I stepped into the clearing, and the sky went black. The red of the fire seemed to darken, and it threw awful, mangled shadows all about the clearing. Clothes, once white became stained with disgusting and putrid colors. The faces once jolly turned wicked and gleeful, like so many devils in hell. The master, no longer dressed so finely, wore a dark and tattered robe, and his face no longer welcoming but now sadistic and cruel. And it seemed to me the merry throng of gay sprites turned into a gathering of corpses.

Their hands reached out to me, to grasp and pull me down to them. I wanted to flee, but was rooted down, transfixed by this awful sight. I pleaded that someone would come for me, and I cried out to my father, long left behind, for his forgiveness. Then, a shadow came behind me, my dark pursuer from before. It grabbed me, and took me from that place of damnation. When it had set me down, I looked up to see the face of my savior. I had never left my father behind, for the moment I had stepped into the woods, he had always been close behind me. Never again have I disobeyed him, nor have I gone into that wood and walked its paths. Never have I sought to join the poor souls in that field of the damned, for now I know what the face of evil is.

Youth. To Children Everywhere ~ John
Smyth

The smiles that come like
the sun is rising after
many days asleep.



Picture by: Clare Stephens

Marian University's writing community is diverse and talented. The Fioretti is an annually-issued student-led literary journal showcasing the range and scope of expression on our beautiful, Midwestern campus.



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