



Cardinal Sins

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Produced by the students and staff of Saginaw Valley State University and published on campus by the Graphics Center, *Cardinal Sins* features art, photography, poetry, and prose by members of the SVSU community, including alumni and faculty, and other featured writers and artists from across the world. All submissions are considered for publication. Selection is made by blind voting by the committee staff. Staff members are excluded from receiving an award in any category.

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Cardinal Sins Staff

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Digital Editor	Gabby Bourgeois
Logo Designer	Taylor Hart
Faculty Advisor	Dr. Kim Lacey
Editing Committee	Annaleese Armstrong Gabby Bourgeois Olivia Bruzewski Chrissy M. Hansen Zach Vance Katherine Weber
Reading Committee	Annaleese Armstrong Gabby Bourgeois Megan Cassidy Chrissy Hansen Zach Vance Katherine Weber

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Editors' Note

Neither of us knew completely what we were getting into when we became the editors of *Cardinal Sins*, but this experience has been incredibly fulfilling.

Coming into this semester, we had only one returning staff member, but new students made our reading and editing committees bigger than they've been in years. For the first time in over four semesters, we were able to meet in-person as a group. It feels like we've been able to build this publication into something truly great with the insight, enthusiasm, and passion of our staff. There has never been a shortage of people who love literature, and we are so excited to have found so many who want to translate their passion into action.

These positions have made us more discerning editors; through our work on this issue, we have honed our critical eyes. Additionally, we've experienced a lot of personal growth between communicating professionally, developing leadership skills, and growing our community.

This issue was a big learning curve, but we are so proud of the result. We're looking forward to all of the issues we have yet to create and all of the connections we have yet to make.

Thank you for reading,

Megan Draper, Editor-in-Chief
Gabby Bourgeois, Digital Editor



Poetry

First Place Winner

How to Live Beside a Cemetery by Neil Carpathios

How to Live Beside a Cemetery

Neil Carpathios

You might as well embrace
the daily reminder. Some days the stones

look like teeth, some days like crooked fingers
poking through earth. Watch how

a lone mourner gulps the air's milk.
Laugh or sob, it's up to you.

Don't scold two brothers playing tag
dodging behind the stones

as their mother arranges a wreath.
Tell yourself the dead don't mind this,

or the drunk passed out on a grave
still gripping his bottle, or two teens

behind a bush making out, or even
when people steal their flowers.

Tell yourself they remember what
it was like. They enjoy the show,

especially when a little boy asks his mother,
"Is this where dead people live?"

Notice how graves look like bellies
under covers, mourners like

scavengers collecting shells
on a beach. Study sculptures

of angels twitching stiff wings,
how they come alive in thought.

Do they pity the one missing
a head some hooligan must have

knocked off? Are they amused when
the girl and her friend stand behind it,

put their heads where the head
used to be, take selfies, giggling?

Keep a list of all the objects
left at graves, your new hobby:

teddy bear, baseball glove,
unsmoked cigar,

Hot Wheels car,
American flag, small green Bible,

Mickey Mouse coloring book,
a syringe. Once, at a girl

named Sarah's grave,
a birthday cake.

Lavender Dreams

Audra Burwell

Tumbling through cotton candy clouds,
I thread my fingers between gossamer
Strands of pale pink and baby blue
Soft as spider's silk, wrapping around
My pinky, an ethereal ribbon of light.
Body flailing, caught in free-fall,
I surrender to gravity's demands,
Letting moisture pool upon my lashes
Lavender crystals nestled above my eyes,
I inhale invisible capsules of air,
Feeling bubbles of oxygen caress
The lining of my slender throat.
Imaginary lines guide me through
The marmalade horizon beneath
Clouds of taffeta and velvet,
Draped across the sky like a grand
Curtain obscuring the celestial ball
Materializing high in the heavens.
My fingers numbed from the wintry
Kiss of lingering nimbus shadows,
Tangle themselves in the tether,
Fixed to my harness of deliverance.
A gentle tug, easing the lever open,
And I am hurtled against the sky
Arms outstretched like wings of
Smoke and shadow, blackening
The fiery glow of the setting sun.
Ballooning above my head, patches
Of lilac and indigo flutter as my
Parachute unfurls the shell of its
Mushroom canopy, nylon cords,
Connecting me like a marionette.
Gliding effortlessly through the,
Diminishing atmosphere, I breathe
In rays of pale blue, feeling them
Tickle the oscillating membrane

Of my lungs, like a pale feather,
Trapped by the cyclone of a storm.
Ridges of land unfold rapidly below,
Canyons carved from the bones of
Buried ancestors sleeping beneath
Rocks painted red and gold.
Squeezing my frozen eyelids shut,
I steel myself for Earth's fatal impact
Only to feel the embrace of sun-baked
Soil licking my trembling toes, as
They sink into sand as gold as dawn.
Flashes of lilac and lavender tease
My peripheral view, as my parachute
Pools behind me, a deflated carcass
Retired from the liberation of the sky.

Out Of the Womb and into the Mud

Korinne Ellert



They took my fingers when I was learning how to write.

I have not settled since the doctor
Grabbed the softness
And yanked me from my mother
Fluid covered and scalped.

I came careening from her womb.
They took me too soon from her breast
And I never learned how to speak.

Cartilage and tendons developed in place of my bones.
When I press my foot to the ground
I wait every time for my sinews to snap.

I want to lose my feet in the mud
Soak my socks in the sanguine
I was never taught to cut my fingernails.
They cut my skin while I sleep.

I am covered in hair
Hair that catches sticky crusting lumps
That press against my throat

Raised on carrion
My teeth formed sharper
My eyes
Wider.

I was never taught how to walk like a lady
From my mother
I was taught how to pull my body
With my bare crude hands.

I crawled with my fingers gouging the ground
Slithering these hips behind.
With a veracity
Virility.

Still Life with Cat

Emma Johnson-Rivard



I have made no promises to the cat
greater than a bowl, sweet kibble,
and the charms of my
human company.
Yet again she chooses my arms
over the divine comfort
of her blanket, held
ever so carefully
in the sun.

I Wish I Were a Painter

Ronan Kok



Sometimes, I wish a moment could last
Stand still, and stop time
Capture the colors, shapes
Create something I can take

That's why I wish I were a painter

I wish I could look longer into her eyes
Get lost in a body so different from mine
I wish I could appreciate her for hours
As if it's the most normal thing in the world

I want to sit in nature,
Parse every bend and leaf of every tree
Then build it up again, as something
That is part of me

But maybe I just want to appreciate life
Not let every moment slip through my fingers
Maybe I just want to stay still for a few minutes
With no need to justify

Heart vs. Mind

Lexi LaJoice



I play with two hearts
One is new, untouched
I observe him from a distance
And one weathered old
he is weary of my familiar gaze

I want you, new untouched heart.
You excite me.
Bring life to dry pages,
moisture to cracked hands.
You tip happiness on its side,
hold it over your head like a book in the rain.
It absorbs each drop and it bleeds through the ink
like a stream
of new feelings that I didn't know I had.
You yourself are an adventure,
a new story everyday.
You take me with you
and hold my hand dearly,
brushing it across new surfaces,
Rough sandy beaches,
Smooth pavement paths,
Soft feathered grasses,
And your constant beating heart.
You are new
and you are different,
A different I waver to welcome.

I want you weathered old heart,
my constant everlasting.
Existing worlds away,
yet tied by a string to my ring finger.
You float so happily in the sky
Through the clouds,
the breeze,
chasing those same dreams you started with.

And while you chase dreams,
I chase you.
And I wait,
for our eyes to meet once more.
For our hearts to beat to the same song.
For our hands to hold each other remembering
each curve, and softness
a pillow, so comfortable.
You are comfortable.
Forever I dreamed for us, weathered old.
I've been holding onto you forever like a kite on a string
and I just can't find the scissors.

Fried oysters. Yesterday's noodles.

D.S. Maolalai

eating a little
of everything left.
fried oysters. yesterday's
noodles. curry sauce
out of a tupperware,
bits of old bread.
we are having lunch
in the kitchen
together – both working
from home. inserting our forks
into dark oily microwaved
texture and recipe,
like a man digging peat
from a bog. we sweat
and taste flavor
and eat it and really
enjoy it. no – not
like a peatbog – like we're
prospectors.
sieve and strike shellfish
in pockets and bite.

The Smell

Cameron Morse

I am the smell that draws the nostril, the limp
that signals to the wolf haunting the outskirts
of the internet: There are hurt cells
in my bone marrow, I confess, chemo
is not kind, but I already know about Jesus,
who empties me of myself. I am a ghost now
of what I once was. Still, I would frankly
rather die than join your cancer support group

or exchange one more word with your Neo-
Nazi son on Messenger. He can preserve
himself whitely in society hell for all I care.
Please respectfully remove your fangs
from my neck. Release me, lady church.
You should start speaking to your son again.

Double, Double

Claire Scott

No clichéd eye of newt for me
no toe of frog
passé spells expired long ago
worthless in today's wired world
no abracadabras
with wobbling memories
of childhood, hands waving,
wanting to believe we could
float a quarter in the air
or turn the teacher into a toad

No, not me, bank account bleeding
email stuffed with spam, no hits on
Silver Singles or Zoosk
matching millions, find your soulmate
time to get serious
straighten out my limping life
a Zoom call with Madame Charcot
who promises money back success
pair of air pods, tail of cyclone
lisp of liars, hum of drone
bullets on a bed of moss
shale gas in a socket of loss

Several thousand dollars later
magic is not on my side
Madame Charcot disappeared
website taken down
I am applying to be a fulfillment angel
at Amazon, a wizard at Trader Joe's
sweating and lifting for eight
strung out hours, all the while
chanting *wool of bat and tongue of dog*
hoping stale spells still have a few sparks left

Attempting to Pry Open the Lips of the Popul Vuh

Stuart Jay Silverman

First, I run the thin edge of the knife along the line between them
entering the mystery and press down and press up making the metal
a wedge and they open are opening open enough but grudgingly

being, as they are, only lines scribed or scratched or scraped from
stone at an ancient site of Mesoamerica a long time ago, maybe a
millennium, and only found in transcription in the 18th century,

so I can see into the vast spaces of the ancient, a vast brown plane
where a pulse of little people moves in a dark light, moves between
stone-terraced houses carrying baskets of maize from fields being

burnt into earth by the sun-god throwing his wrath into the world
he made he is making he with his brother, moon, who look down
upon fields and watch them crinkle and the green wither, and time

blows its bad breath into a passing world, the lips of the river turning
to foam, the breath of time stagnant, corrupt as a hillside of slag;
people are moving into and out of spaces, baskets of fish slung on

shoulders; the banks of the river throbs in rhythm with the hearts of
men, of women, torn out, flaps of flesh whetting stone, priest-eyed,
drugged-lidded, skin torn open, edges agape, lips puffed with pain;

here, pyramids squat, risen out of the brown and green, bowels of the
small world reaching up towards white hooked onto blue; it claws
at the mystery that stretches over the world, its claws red with

the blood of those who plod back and forth forever; and the soil
between river and pyramid, cries out through the long time, a
pouring out of stone lips opening, closing, impatient of mystery.

Images

Dan Wagner

Dust on a horse that lays dead in their old backyard
Trees that sit in the wind, too dried to make a noise
Distant wailing, melded into the sound of the burst pipes in the street
Scrapped metal, in a black tin box, crashing onto cement
A letter X, painted in green, on a rusted, wheelless tractor
A hand-carved door, splintered out beyond operation
Dirt pits, aside grey building shells, where they once huddled near fires by
night
A pin-prick star, speeding slow across the sky, a lonely remainder satellite
Their clothes and toilets stacked in piles burned in the dirt alleyways

And I am there
I look forward, and there is a man-made flash
But it's replaced by a cloud
I feel it on my cheek, a man-blown wind

Our sky, yellow-pale



Cardinal Sins

Artwork

First Place Winner

Snowfall
by Holly Morningstar

Snowfall

Holly Morningstar



Watercolor

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No woman, no cry

Guliz Mutlu



Drawing-design-portrait-photography

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Venus + Adonis

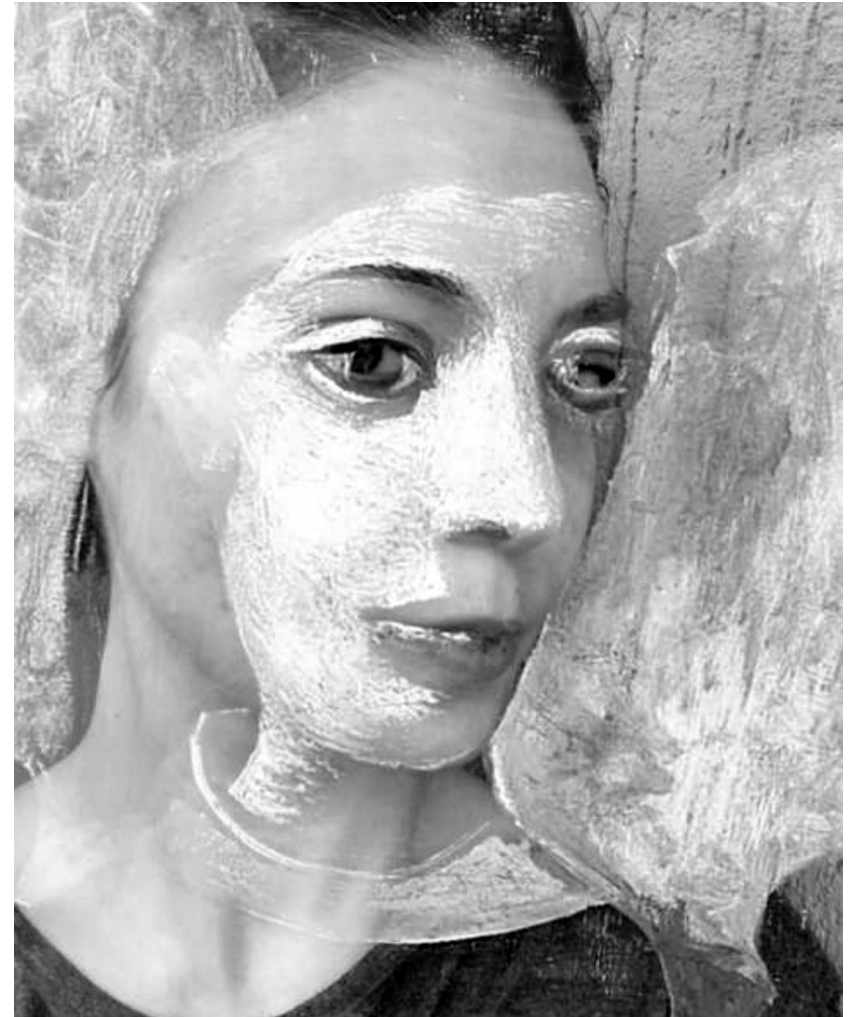
Guliz Mutlu



Painting-design-textile art-photography

Waiting for Pablo

Guliz Mutlu



Drawing on Photography

Fool's Errand

Edward Supranowicz



Digital Painting

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Cardinal Sins

Fiction

First Place Winner

The Worst Gas Station
by Christopher Hadin

The Worst Gas Station

Christopher Hadin

In the dim blue light of a November morning, William Charles pulled his car into the worst gas station he had ever seen. It was a dirty, white enamel-sided building on the edge of a vast cornfield. An overhead light flickered, illuminating the one pump that did not have a weathered sign reading *out of order*. A plastic cup, half full of red liquid and dead insects, was stuck to it, resisting a damp breeze out of the east. The pump was off.

He waved at the slumped shape of an attendant sitting inside. There was no response, so he reached inside the car and blew the horn. It caused a flicker of movement from the shape, but the pump stayed off. Someone had altered a sign that told customers to pay first. "Please pay *Tony* before pumping *Crystal*."

William made his way to the door. In the distance, across a field of cornstalk stubble, the lights of a soybean processing plant glowed orange. He stopped, remembering how it had been looking out across the water. *The lights that night meant nothing. He couldn't pick out green from red amid the glow of the mansions on the beach. "Hey buddy!" he called down into the boat's cabin. "Roy!" There was no answer. "Roy, goddammit, get up here." The boat was starting to pitch in waves that moments before had not been there. "Roy! Put that shit down! I don't know what I'm doing up here." Still no response from below. "I don't want to die on this fucking boat! ROY!"*

The lights of the soybean plant went off. Dark shapes of crows flew overhead. He walked up to the door of the station with a twenty dollar bill in hand, ready to throw it on the counter, no eye-contact, no chit-chat. Make a quick retreat.

The door was locked.

He knocked and peered in. The attendant was hunched over a phone, flicking the screen with his thumb. William knocked again and at last, the scrawny kid stirred, sliding one bony ass cheek off the stool at a time. He shuffled around the counter, head down, his face hidden beneath the visor of a baseball cap. William waited as he covered the short distance without

ever taking his eyes off his phone. Almost to the door, he stopped to flick the screen a few more times. William knocked again, harder, and the attendant slowly looked up.

He was older than he had seemed at first, with a thin face, scraggly beard, and moist eyes that followed his hand as it reached up to turn the dead-bolt. The eyes passed over William and a flicker of recognition brightened the careworn expression. He smiled as he opened the door.

"Hey! You're that guy. I mean you are, right? The guy?"

"Can I have twenty on the pump, please?"

"But I mean, you *are* the..."

"Yeah," William said, with a nod that acknowledged nothing. "Twenty please."

"That *boat!* You crashed that boat and punched that fuckin' cop. Dude that *was* you! Right?"

William held out the bill. "Just twenty of regular today."

The attendant took off his hat, revealing greasy, thinning hair. "No, seriously dude." He replaced the hat and thumped his fist on his heart, kissed his index and middle fingers, lifting them up above his head. "Respect!"

William nodded.

"Major respect for punching that cop the way you did." He opened his eyes wide and wildly drew back his fist. "*Yaa!*" he yelled, imitating the blow that had been replayed again and again on TV. "It was like that! *Yaa!*"

"Yes, well...that was a couple years ago. And it was a huge mistake," William said with reluctance. "I would advise against it."

"But it was *rea!* It wasn't a mistake. You did what you had to do!"

"Can I buy some gas please?"

The man's eyes swept across the pumps. "No, man."

“Why not?”

“Waitin’ on the truck. He should be here any minute.”

“You don’t have any gas?”

“Nope. But the truck’s coming and you can get some then.”

William looked out across the cornfields that had now lost their blue, pre-dawn look. “How long?”

“Soon.”

“Really soon, or like in a few hours soon?”

“No. Soon. Like, any minute.”

“Well can I wait inside?”

“Oh, fer sher dude,” He stepped back and opened the door wide. “Come in, man. Be my guest.”

William stepped into the bright white glare and looked around for something to buy. “You don’t have much here.” He stared at rows of empty shelves under plastic blue letters that read SNACK SHOP.

“Naw, man, we used to have all that but the owner stopped ordering stuff because his kid freakin’ *OD’d*—”

“God. That’s horrible.”

“Yeah. Dude’s barely holding on. When my shift’s over I gotta go check on him. It’s totally sad.” They stared at the floor and didn’t speak, then he looked up. “You want a beer? I got Millers if you want one. Got them Genuine Drafts.”

William stared off for a second. “Uh, sure. Okay.” The attendant produced two cans of beer from under the counter.

“Yeah man. Have at it. This delivery comes, then I go at seven. Been here

since nine last night.”

William took the beer, wondering if this was really how he wanted to start the day. He cracked it open and took a deep swig. “My name is William. William Charles.”

“Hey man, I’m Colt.”

“Colt? Like a horse?”

“Yep. Colt.”

“Hi Colt. Thanks for the beer.”

Colt resumed sitting and leaned against the backrest of the stool. “Yeah, man. Probably about fifteen minutes on that truck. He’s usually on time.”

William nodded and once more looked out past the pumps, across the fields to a stand of hardwoods a quarter mile away. The trees formed a soft break to the more distant line of the horizon.

Colt finally noticed William’s car. “What is that out there?” he said, laughing. “I never seen anything like that.”

“1978 AMC Pacer.”

“Dude, who even made that?”

“American Motors. They aren’t around anymore.”

“That’s an American car?”

“Yep. I had it restored a while back. Picked it up a few days ago in Chicago.” Colt nodded and shrugged, then turned back to William.

“So dude... you’re *famous*.”

“Am I?”

“Yeah, I mean, I know you crashed that boat, but I didn’t know your name.

On TV they just kept calling you the ‘*Yacht Crasher*.’”

William tried to smile. “I may have heard that once or twice.”
He shivered under a U-Haul blanket that someone had draped over his shoulders. “That’s him!” a woman called out. “He’s the one who came off the boat. I saw him!” A flashlight shined in his face. “See? He’s all wet!”

The yacht lay on its side in the surf, lurching with each wave. A policeman walked up past the knot of other officials. “This your boat?”

“No.”

“Whose?”

“My friend’s. His father’s actually.”

“Just you two aboard?”

“Yes.”

An ambulance pulled away slowly. “Your friend had no ID. What was his name?”

“His name is Roy Carroll and he lives over by—“

“Name WAS Roy Carroll.”

“What?”

The policeman looked up, letting out a held breath then looked back down. “Sorry to be the bearer.” William stared at him. “He was flat lined when they got to him. Coast Guard inspector’s on the way. He’s going to want a full statement. Medical examiner is going to want to talk to you too. You’re a pretty popular guy right now.” His flashlight went to William’s forehead. “And you got a nice red egg up there.”

“So dude, what happened with that... boat or yacht or whatever?” Colt grinned, showing a set of misshapen yellow teeth.

William’s hand went up to touch his head where the bump had been. “I

don’t know. My friend wasn’t too good of a skipper.”

“I guess not. Musta sucked.” William didn’t reply, and they each took a sip of their beer. Outside, a large tanker truck pulled into the gas station. “Hey. Keno’s here. You’ll get the first pump off the tank.” He drained his beer. “Is that good? William asked.

Colt wiped his mouth on the back of his sleeve. “Naw man, it don’t make a difference. It’s all shit gas. Poisonin’ the planet.”

Outside, Keno swung his compact, stocky frame down from the cab of the tanker truck and nodded almost imperceptibly at Colt.

“He’s crazy,” Colt said. “You can’t talk to him. Like we’re talkin’ now? Can’t do it.” Colt popped open another beer and watched Keno hook up the hose to the underground tank. “He won’t look at ya straight in the face. Just sideways. See? He’s doin’ it right now.” Keno bustled back and forth between the truck and the fill pipe, inspecting the hose while casting side-long glances inside the building.

“What’s his story?” William asked, hoping the story would be short.

“Who knows, man? One time I asked how his weekend was and he says he and a friend rode their hogs all night to Chicago and scored some kilos from a dude who flies it in from Columbia on his private jet.”

“Wow. That’s some serious business.”

“Naw man, it’s total bullshit.”

“You think so?”

“Dude...” Colt squinted while shaking his head. “He lives with his mom over by the middle school.”

Keno went to the cab of his truck and came out with a clipboard. He walked toward the door of the station while staring at the ground through dark eyes, hidden behind thin slits. Fleshy, scowling lips protruded from a scruff of black beard. As he walked into the station, Keno indirectly eyed William, looking him up and down. “Hey Colt.” Keno’s voice was nasal and

raspy.

“Keno, my man! What’s up? This here is Will.” Colt tipped his head in William’s direction. “He’s famous from that yacht thing. Remember? How was your weekend? Beer?”

Without answering, Keno held out the clipboard with a pen for Colt to sign. “Cops get a hold’a that pen, you’d be fucked.”

“This *pen*? Why?”

“Used it to do a few grams already. Got *res-i-due*.”

“Wow man, you got an early start,” Colt said, throwing a smirk over Keno’s head toward William.

“Fuckin’ prolly do an eight ball before lunch.” Keno glanced again at William while Colt signed the delivery form. He went out the door, past the pumps, and climbed into the cab of his truck. Rattling the diesel to life, Keno lurched it out onto the road.

“Welcome to Keno’s world. You wanna fill up now, go ahead.” Colt drained his second beer, threw the can in the trash, and then walked back around the counter. He sat on the stool and resumed staring at his phone. William put the twenty on the counter. “Oh yeah,” Colt said. “Twenty on pump four. Good luck man.”

William walked out with his unfinished beer and set it in the trash. He twisted open the gas cap and put twenty dollars of regular in the car. When he was done, he looked up toward Colt who was slumped over on the stool. The station was as he had found it, except that now it was open and in full daylight. He got in the car and pulled the door shut. It made a heavy thump.

“Dude, you’re all wet,” the kid said.

William looked back at the flashing lights of police cars and emergency vehicles. “I’m sorry, but I need you to please keep driving. Slowly.” They hadn’t noticed him slipping away through the crowd to the line of cars that were backed up along the shore road. Police stood around talking. They

would figure it out soon enough.

“Are you in some kind of trouble, man? ‘Cause I’m on probation and I can’t—”

“No. It’s fine. Just drive and let me out downtown by Shank’s.” The kid’s old Buick rumbled along until the traffic let up. “This is a nice LeSabre. What year?”

The kid kept his eyes straight ahead and both hands on the wheel. “Seventy-five. It was my grandma’s.” They drove on in silence for a mile. “Man, you freaked me out when you jumped in back.” His voice was strained, almost to tears. “I thought it was my friend Raj. Why are you all wet?”

“Look, I am really sorry I scared you, but I needed a ride. Here—” William pulled a wad of bills from his pocket, peeled off two soggy twenties and handed them over the seat to the young man. “Sorry they’re damp.”

Through the windshield, William looked out at the expansive cornfields and drainage ditches full of water. A gray sky pressed down on the landscape. With no desire to go forward and nowhere to go back to, he drove along the two-lane road until he reached a sign that read *Welcome to Indiana, Birthplace of Lincoln*.

“Hoosier daddy?” he called out, feeling clever and wishing someone was there with him, but also a little glad to be alone.

I Who Gave Nothing

Jennifer Benningfield

I took a nap. One of those sun-shift beauties. Eyelids droop as the super star hangs over the tallest treetop like an ornament. Eyelids lift, and it's bisected by the last house on the block visible from my casement windows.

My stomach growled. My armpits stank. Sup, then shower? Reverse? (Don't skip.) Eating feels like wage-worthy work if prep time exceeds five minutes, and after all that knob-twisting, sauce-stirring, meat-searing and veggie-tossing, stepping underneath a sizzling stream of water is no longer an indulgence.

Flipside, time spent soaping and scrubbing and rubbing and rinsing opens the body up, weakens its defenses. The only recourse is a pile of protein.

There's a right way, and a wrong way. That's the problem.

I took a walk. A mile a day keeps the demons at bay.

No sidewalks on this stretch of the development, but the roads are wide enough so sensible, focused pedestrians need not fear impact.

I envy every home I pass by. I wonder if anyone envies mine. Built in 1945, one each of bed and bath, last renovated 'round the Kennedy presidency. It's an old basset hound surrounded by spry terriers, is the way I view things. Elsewhere the porches are wider, the lawns are prettier, and the sides are sturdier. The pick of the litter is a rancher a third of a mile away, built in 2008. Furnished basement, comfy couches and chairs, hardwood flooring, bathroom I could jump a jack in. *The modern amenities.*

Across the rancher sits the oldest house in the development, a 1918 Colonial currently unoccupied. The listing on realtor.com promotes potential: LIVE ON ONE FLOOR AND RENT OUT THE OTHER. OR TAKE ALL THE SPACE FOR YOURSELF!

I do not envy the homeowners. Burgeoning families and bitter retirees. The people across the street are decent enough. Without them I'd not have a rose garden.

Mind, I never asked for a rose garden.

I took a trip to Dollar General. (Money is no object.) A chubby man wearing a Carhartt beanie watched approvingly as I compared cereals. Cheerios, yes, but which Cheerios? Regular, Honey Nut, or some fruity simulation?

"Morning."

Sounded like he pours lag bolts into his a.m. bowl. No milk, no utensils. Dry guy, handy man.

"Morning."

Sounded wary of cutting up strawberries. Wary of the knife, specifically. Strawberries are innocent. Sweet and innocent.

A man, simply, neither benefactor nor malefactor. Whatever unsavoriness lurks in his soul kicks in its sleep.

I haven't made a new friend in three years. The need now exceeds the want. The sight of the shore causes sickness.

I took a look at my work desk and confirmed I'm the only closer who can work without pictures. A spouse, a mouse, posed inside a house.

"What's new?"

Shelly is my only senior—supervisor included—and sole confidant. She is a pest and a sage. The Friday I gave in and showed up in a pair of jeans, she *hooted*.

"New days, old ways." I tapped the stack of folders on my picture-less

desk. New names, new properties, old process. I daydreamed about the rancher. I want inside. A guided tour would change my life. (Don't question my certainty. Birds craft nests without consulting a manual.) During lunch, a time of rest and sugar, when the red haze settles in and ensures any fissures, contusions, and stains go unseen--"Mrs. Sharp wants to see you."

I took time to visit a friend. Her father passed recently, so now both causes are gone, leaving behind one effect.

"It could be worse. You still have a job."

Of course I didn't say that. I always let someone live out their moment. It's never about me, unless someone else insists otherwise. I am a narcissist on a frozen pond.

"A toast. To Dad."

"To Dad."

Tears pushed at my eyeballs like a clutch of drunks pushing at a mud-stuck truck. Another drink, another hug, another ride home. I binge-watch my daydreams. A never-ending season, episode length ranging from five seconds to fifty minutes.

Her apartment is nicer than my house. Stainless steel appliances, floor lamps, couch soft as a pudding pillow. The walls howled for blood. Bare feet squeaked out a freedom dirge. (Think "Born To Be Wild," "Born To Run," "Born This Way.") People who hate-watch the world just live in the wrong places. I don't mean cities, states, or countries, I mean the actual structures they pay to play inside. Houses last touched when Mitch Miller was popular are unfit for the perceptive and heartfelt. The sound-bodied, the furious-minded, we require updated outrageousness in order to stay focused and productive.

My house is stillborn.

I took personal inventory and discarded forty percent of my wardrobe. Four hundred bucks worth of accountability. "A size too big" is a second too late.

Take your time, tiger. That carcass isn't going anywhere.

Never take advice from a lion.

I took time out and called Mom.

"I have a job interview tomorrow. Yeah, it's an office position. If I uh, if I get the job, I'll let you know. The way I see it, if I get it, you can send another check but then after that, I'll be fine."

I took a candle the color of a snot-slathered marshmallow and broke it in two.

Bet if I tore up a corner of carpet in the living room I'd see GERMANY SURRENDERS.

I've really been feeling like a forgotten mushroom lately.

I took a rain check on a lunch date. Celebrated with an IPA and a roast beef sandwich. Mayo over top bun, BBQ sauce over bottom bun. My mouth is the site of every decadent party I'll never throw, the stand-in for every childhood dream I'll never catch.

I took a chance and tried cheffing up a marvelous meatloaf. Missing ingredients almost kiboshed the whole shebang, but I just threw on my cotton coat, wool hat and leather shoulder bag and hoofed it to Dollar General.

Five feet from the store, the abrupt wail of a nearby car horn ripped through my body like a spiked sword swinging in the gnarled hands of a

mutant antihero. A woman in a silver Chrysler 300 called out, her voice ashamed of the heights it reached.

“Excuse me, I’m so sorry. Can I ask a favor?”

Inside, it took three aisles before I spied the reason the woman in the car reached out. Mid-thirties, a gold-sleeved Steelers jacket stretched over a barrel chest.

“He said if I left he’d kill himself. I left. He didn’t kill himself.”

FROZEN PANCAKES. TWO-LITER 7-UP. A woman of simple pleasures. Complex people typically are.

“He hasn’t made any more threats. He hasn’t contacted me at all. But I’m still worried.”

Outside, the wind and the traffic acted up in the time-honored tradition of ornery siblings. The woman sat in the Chrysler, now a quarter mile away. Recalling the quiver of her words, how they clashed with the bouncing light of her eyes, I quickened my steps. The plastic bag hung faithfully from my right hand, the grip commensurate with the sting in my lungs.

“I...really? Thank you, thank you so much. Your house looks cute.”

I’ll take manufactured compliments over manufactured complaints all days, always. Her ponytail wasn’t quite as high up as before, in the parking lot. Poor kid. I took a whiff of gas and sunlight as I examined her necklace, the dove dangled over the hull of the boat cut.

She will soon forget the rides to and from my house. She will soon forget this day altogether. My memory is too good, too devoted to detail, and this incident—wherein I saved a stranger from an awkward public confrontation—will hang from the ceiling of my cave until neurological disaster forces it elsewhere.

I took a bath, the weariness converging in my ears, whining like a brat who doesn’t wanna spend the day with grandma.

The shampoo oozed onto my palm cold and grotesque, broccoli blood. An eruption of (something possibly identifiable as) happiness spread over my chest as I smoothed, swiped and squeezed at my hair.

I took a punch at work.

Come noon, the women around me rise, keys jangling, chair wheels creaking. What’s on the menu, ladies? Chick-Fil-A, Sonic, Burger King? (Only Grace ever invites me, her patience for refusal evidently infinite. She shouldn’t eat out so much. Butt looks like she stores wet noodles in her panties.)

“Good morning.”

“See you tomorrow.”

My colleagues cannot advance my cause. They can, however, arrest my cause. Politely, I proceed. Pleasantries, uttered. Smiles, plastered. Demur, don’t reject. Acknowledge, don’t avoid. Pass, collect, pass.

Red is the color of my true love’s daydream. Hundreds become thousands become tens of thousands become hundreds of thousands and this is how I become the woman in red.

The second-floor kitchen area is always crammed, whether in use or not. A deliberate design, utilizing white sheet metal and periwinkle paint. Space equals comfort and divided concentration, and productivity duly dips.

And still, my fantasies prevail!

The kitchen area was reliably deserted as I made my way to the vending machine. Not feeling especially confident, I kept my dollar bills folded in my pocket and entered.

Sparse pickings in the fridge. Wrapped sandwiches, soda cans, greens trapped in plastic. A stout plastic bottle sticks out, protecting a mutant red liquid yet-untasted.

Hawaiian Punch is one of those drinks from my childhood I can’t believe is

here for me to enjoy as an adult. (RC Cola, Slice, gone. Tab...was Tab ever really here?) Name fits, too. A fistful of fake fruitiness, straight on.

I took a minute extra in the bathroom. I've lost an inch, maybe two. Celebrate the first month of new paychecks with prescription sunglasses or a bathing suit?

I'd just switched the light off when a rude knocking on the front door filled the house. My instinct: *ignore*.

I leaned against the sink and pressed a palm against my bangs.

"Hello? Is anyone home?"

The voice escaped identification. Through two inches of painted wood and twenty feet of musty air, all I heard were the pathetic cries of an unfed child. Too bad, kid. I'm a hard potato to heat up. Try across the street. The mailman and his wife. Blessed people bless people.

I moved to the kitchen. There's three other doors to use in case of a true emergency. Braced for more bone on wood, the sound of a slamming car door rattled my throat. An engine revved, and I shot out of the kitchen and across the living room, to the front door I'd so mulishly avoided. On tiptoes, I peered through the glass octagon and watched a silver Chrysler 300 zoom off.

It took a few days, but I'm fine with my decision.

The scenarios tumbled about my mind like amateur skiers. Ex-boyfriend trouble. Loneliness. Delusion of debt. Were she in actual danger, better options than I existed. Family, friends. Cops, I guess. Not me. Not someone who only answers the call when convenient.

Flattening a blanket over the couch cushions (butter on a brick), my certainty solidified. Fragile loner woman invites strange young woman into her home, such a gesture incites gossip, encourages compromise.

I pressed my body over the blanket in sync with the rumblings of the furnace and the undulations of my throat. My karma's real terrible, but my aura is all right.

Sugar Pain

Levi Dodd

Note from the Editors: This piece contains suicidal ideation, planning of a suicide, and graphic depictions of suicide and attempted suicides. Help is available. Please dial 988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Biting cold slowly moves up my fingers as they hover just above the doorknob, not close enough to touch it but close enough to feel the cold radiating from the shiny silver metal. How long have I stood here, rooted in place? Opening that door, the very idea fills me with dread. It exhausts me to even consider turning that handle.

A familiar sensation on my thigh distracts from the looming dread of reality and I gladly reach into my pocket to indulge. I unlock my phone and open the messaging app I received the notification from.

Sender: Cherry. "I'm not sure if I should do it. Won't it trouble my husband?"

Unable to come up with a reply right away, I start to walk away from the door to think. The three stairs leading to the porch are covered in snow. As the steps creak from my weight, I wonder pointlessly if the old, rotting wood will last much longer before we have to replace it. I'm sure my mother will handle that, so it's not really my problem yet I find my mind wandering to it regardless.

Crunching the snow under my steps I make my way to the mailbox and start pushing powder off the curb with my shoe. Around thirty seconds later I feel like I've cleared enough space and sit down on the cold concrete. I look at the freezing landscape all around me. Why is it that they call it a blanket of snow when everything gets so cold?

That's no good, I've got to focus. Cherry is expecting a response.

Sender: Black. "If he avoids you as much as you say he does, then I'm sure he will be fine without you. Besides, it's your life. You get to make the decisions, not him."

After sending the message, I sigh and watch the air leave me as steam. Cherry's reply will certainly come soon so I don't bother putting my phone to sleep. I opt to sacrifice the battery for the convenience of not having to press a button and enter my combination into the screen. What pointless calculations. As expected, it's only a matter of seconds before the gentle shaking of a notification draws my attention away from my mind's pointless wanderings back to the vibrant screen.

Sender: Cherry. "He's usually home by now. I think he's avoiding me. I'm doing some work around the house and had a fantasy about taking this fork I'm washing and just jamming it in the socket."

Sender: Chery. "It would hurt but the release would just be so wonderful."

Two messages back-to-back. Probably a sign that she's excited. She tends to get herself excited when she talks about ending it all. I often find myself wishing I could feel that enthusiasm towards something.

Sender: Black. "I envy your bravery. I don't think I would be brave enough to do something flashy like that. I'm scared of anything that seems like it would hurt."

Sender: Cherry. "I used to be afraid of the pain too. But after a while I just stopped caring. Nothing could hurt as badly as my heart does every day."

Despite myself, I felt a smile creep onto my face. Cherry always uses these cliches to communicate her feelings and I think it is kind of charming in a way. I like the freedom of expression we share between us. The two of us can share things I could never say to anyone else. So, when she tells me how bad she's hurting, I know that she can say that because she trusts me.

Sender: Black. "I've read before that people usually fall unconscious before they die doing stuff like that though. If you're gonna do it, then you should find a more surefire way."

The last thing I want is for Cherry to try killing herself and fail. My grandfather, who had served as a volunteer firefighter when he was younger, told me a story once of a call he had received about a suicide gone wrong. Apparently, the man had tried to kill himself with a gun in his mouth but had managed to miss anything that would kill him, how I could never know. As

he described it, the man's jaw had been entirely separated from the rest of him but he was still conscious when they walked into the room.

I don't know if that story has any truth to it, but it did the trick: I've never once considered a gun as the way to get myself out of this hell hole we call life. I would hang myself in the town square naked before I would do anything violent to kill myself. If I go, I want it to be peaceful and easy.

While waiting for Cherry's next message (it feels like she's taking a while, maybe she's fact checking what I said about the fork thing?) my mind wanders again. I think I heard once that men usually use violent ways of killing themselves. Does that make me feminine? Maybe that's why Cherry is the only person I can really get along with. Although it doesn't explain why I can't even hold a conversation with my own mother, so perhaps I'm just overthinking it.

The vibration in my hand brought my attention back to the real world once again. Sender: Cherry. "I just read an article about that exact type of thing happening. I don't think I'm going to fantasize about that one anymore."

A satisfied feeling warms me up amidst the chilling weather. Deciding there's no real point to sitting in front of my house if I'm not going in, I stand up and start walking down the street. Cherry sends me another message before I can even think of how to reply to her first.

Sender: Cherry. "How are you and your wife doing? Have you decided to break things off finally?"

An uncomfortable metal spike made of guilt lodges itself into my throat. Thankfully, Cherry and I never speak over the phone because I have no idea what my voice would sound like if I was to try and force it out right now.

On the forum where Cherry and I first met I pretended to be older than I am. A lot of people don't take a high schooler's problems seriously. If I went onto a forum and said I was a high schooler dealing with a controlling mother, they would ask me if she beats me. The moment I say no, they would never take me seriously ever again. So instead, I pretended I was a thirty-five-year-old married man. If anyone asked me about my job, I used my memories of dad's stories about the time he worked in a publishing house to get by somehow.

But does my being in high school mean my problems aren't real or aren't valid? Every step of my entire life is dictated by my mother. I told her I want to go into writing, and she told me it's not a real career. Every time I bring it up, she says that being a writer is why dad left us. According to her, the low sales and the debt is what drove dad to run away from it all. But I think she's just upset that she got stuck with the debt and the kid. It's not my problem. If I'm successful, then I won't have those problems.

Why should she get to decide how I live my life?

Shit, I'm getting distracted.

Sender: Black. "Not well. I'm trying to find any excuse to avoid the house again today. One day I'll find the courage to just leave this damn place, one way or another."

Of course, in reality, I don't have a wife. Hell, I've never even had a girlfriend. But there was one day when I wanted to tell Cherry about a fight I had with my mother, I was just so frustrated and needed to tell someone, anyone. Deciding I couldn't tell her that a grown adult who was married was still living with his mother, I just said that the fight was with my wife. Since then, all of my complaints about my mother I've passed on to Cherry by claiming they are about my make-believe wife.

Without noticing, I've walked all the way to the end of the street I live on. The apple tree in the yard to my right has completely frosted over and only a bare husk remains. Nature is incredible. Look at this tree and someone who didn't know any better would think that the tree was entirely dead. But give it time and this frost will clear, spring will come again and life with it.

I like to think that we work that way too. Even if we die, life just must go on somehow. Maybe it's the afterlife or maybe we just get reborn as someone new so we can try again. Whatever there is after this *must* be better than what I have to deal with now anyways. Sometimes thinking like that is all that gets me through the day.

A sigh slips out of me and becomes steam before my eyes. There's nothing past this point, just a forest I really don't want to go into right now. No longer can I pretend there's any point in walking in this direction, in walking

away from my house. I guess I have to stop putting it off and just go home. Even after reaching my conclusion, it takes a full minute to force my leaden feet off the frozen ground and towards that house.

Another excuse to stop moving appears on my phone.

Sender: Cherry. "Remember that promise we made before? Maybe we should just do it. I don't know how much longer I can wait."

That promise again. Since we had made it last summer Cherry had been bringing it up with increasing frequency. It was a conversation that started when I was hiding in the bathroom after my mom shouted at me for a bad grade I got on a test. I mentioned hiding in the bathroom to get away from it all and that had eventually led to the conversation about a singer who, at the time, had only recently died in a hotel bathroom.

Sender: Black. "I remember. You thought it was romantic how that singer and her boyfriend both killed themselves after writing half a poem in blood on their mirrors? You said that we should do that if we were both still unhappy in a year."

The singer and her boyfriend had died in separate areas. One died at home and the other in a hotel half the country away. But each killed themselves in the bathroom. The woman wrote the first half of a famous poem, I can't remember which, on her mirror with her own blood and the man wrote the second half on his.

After she told me about the story Cherry suggested we promise to do the same in a year's time. She had told me that we should use the promise as motivation to get out of our miserable lives, but in the half of a year since then, neither of us had made even a single improvement. We made big claims about how much better things would be for us in a year. I remember promising that I would start submitting my writing to get published. But I didn't even know the first step to doing something like that. How pathetic am I, that I can't even start fixing my miserable situation?

No, I know it's not that simple. That's nothing but a lie I tell myself. I could try if I really wanted to. I could ask someone for help, I could try to put myself out there. But I don't. And I know why.

I'm terrified of trying.

Escape from misery isn't so easy. The misery I've lived in for so long is like a lukewarm soup that I can stew in. Always just enough to be unpleasant but never enough to completely break me. If I were to step out from this misery stew, what would be waiting for me? If I see those words that I fear so much, the rejections my mother tells me await me in return for my labours, will I be able to stand it? Or will it break me like it did my father? If I remain here, if I satisfy myself with warm, comfortable misery, then I won't have to step outside. I don't have to push myself or risk the outside world.

I won't break, but just remain.

A vibration shocks me into dropping my phone. Panic shoots through me and I rush to grab the phone out of the icy slush. My phone is my most important possession, if I were to lose it I would lose the one thing connecting me to Cherry.

Sender: Cherry. "Yes, that one. I'm so happy you remembered. I think if it was right now, I could do it, I could end it all. I'll cut my wrists before he comes back, and I'll write the first half of the chorus to our favorite song on the mirror."

Sender: Cherry. "If you do it too then people will know our connection. We'll be remembered. It'll be beautiful."

Two messages again, she's serious about this.

Normally this is where I would tell her to calm down and think this through. While I'm unhappy stewing in my misery like this and I'm too terrified to take a step outside into the cold, I am also afraid of drowning myself within those warm waters and never coming back up for air. I'd like to believe that beyond death, something better is waiting for me, but I can't be as confident in that as Cherry can. Forward is frightening but back is equally terrifying so I end up rooted in place, like that hibernating tree, simply waiting for a spring that may never come.

But I've started losing confidence that the spring I pray for will ever come. Recently I've been too afraid to even put pen to paper. Every time I try to write, a part of me whispers that I'll never end up doing anything with what I'm writing, it just overwhelms me with a feeling of helplessness. But if I know I'll never bother trying to help myself, then why am I even

pretending that things might get better? Plus, the longer I wait the more Cherry is hurt by her own toxic relationship with her husband. I don't know too much about the guy, but he seems like a real piece of work. He always hides from her and won't ever tell her about what he's thinking. The few conversations they have usually just turn into fights and screaming. But just like I'm too afraid to write something new, she's too afraid to try and leave him. She says she's too old to try and redo her life now, but I can tell there's more to it than that. She's afraid that even after she leaves him she'd still be unhappy.

And then she wouldn't have anyone to blame for her own unhappiness.

Sender: Black. "Yeah, maybe you're right. I'm pretty sick of all this."

I promised Cherry that we would go together. Every time she mentioned a night where her husband didn't speak to her even once I would feel a little guilty knowing that if I had let her she might have already escaped her pain. I can't hold her back anymore. But killing myself by bleeding out like that, I don't know if I can do it.

Maybe I'll just write the song in my mom's lipstick. There should be some in the bathroom I can use. I still have the pills I've been slipping from the medicine cabinet. They should be more than enough to kill myself and I won't have to hurt that way. I'll feel a little bad for Cherry but at least the message should still get across.

Sender: Cherry. "Alright, I'm going to do it. I can't remember the last time I felt this nervous."

Sender: Cherry. "It's like I'm a kid on prom night again."

Prom night huh? I never got to go to my prom now that I think about it.

Sender: Cherry. "I've got the knife in my hands. Oh God, I'm so nervous. Promise me you'll do it, right Black? I'll write the first line and a half; you finish it for me. Then we'll meet up again in the afterlife."

Sender: Black. "I promise. I'm on my way home now. As soon as I get there I'll follow you. I'll see you on the other side, Cherry."

After closing my phone, I break out into a run. When was the last time I even ran? It was probably for gym class I guess, but that doesn't count. Unlike class, I'm running because I want to. I have something to do, a purpose. It will be my last purpose, sure, but it's mine. Nobody can take this from me, this is my choice and no one else's.

As I get to the base of the steps, I pause to catch my breath. I guess not running for a long time really catches up to you huh? Oh well, it won't matter for much longer anyway. But before I start up the steps my phone shakes in my hand again. I didn't expect another message but maybe it's a final goodbye.

Sender: Cherry. "I've done it. The blood is on the mirror. I don't know how much longer I'll be able to stay conscious. This is goodbye Black. I think I may have loved you."

Attached was a picture, she probably sent it so I could know exactly where to pick up the song when I go to write it. While the picture downloads I consider how to slip past my mom so I can make my way to the bathroom. Should I swing by my room to put my jacket and school bag in my room so it's not suspicious?

As my hand reaches for the silver metal of the doorknob, I find myself hesitating again. Why is the simple act of entering my own house so terrifying? I imagine the pain Cherry put herself through to end it all and in comparison this is nothing. I can do it. I can face her one last time.

My hand touches the cold metal of the handle.

Four steps past the doorway, and the kitchen is on my right side. The stove is on and a few pots and pans sit on the various burners, something is even coming to a boil. Is that rice? Where is Mom if she isn't here?

On my phone, the picture finally loads, and I see the bloody mirror. Clearly Cherry's hands were shaking as she wrote it, but I can still make out the first line and a half to the chorus on the mirror. A giddy tension bubbles up inside me. Is this what a high feels like?

Disregarding everything else I run into my room and throw my jacket and bag onto the bed. I quickly reach into my clothes drawer and grab out the

pill bottle I had stashed under my underwear before running out of the room for the bathroom down the hall.

The door is closed when I get there. Oh, is this where Mom was? Well, that's a pain. We only have one bathroom in this little house, so I'd have to wait for her to get done. Feeling impatient I decide to knock on the door, just to be sure she's actually in there.

No response. I knock again, still nothing. I guess she isn't there?

With a shrug I open the door. It isn't locked. I guess she really must be somewhere else.

The first thing I see upon entering is the bathroom mirror on the right wall and the poorly drawn red letters that line it. It's only then that I remember when I first heard that song.

My mom used to sing it to me as a lullaby when I was sick.

A weak voice from the floor calls my name. My mind can't keep up with what is happening. When I look at my mom on the floor, a knife from our kitchen sits by her side gleaming under the bright lights of the bathroom. The contrast between the shiny steel and the dark blood on the blade is surreal. Is that what blood looks like? Oh God, there's so much of it. Slowly my mouth cracks open and I force a sound out from my tight throat. The single word I can force out is the name that has been on my mind the entire day.

Sender: Black. "Cherry?"

Sender: Cherry. "...Black?"

Her eyes start to close, I think the color is already leaving her face. It might already be too late, but I drop to my knees and try to cover the open wound on her wrist with a towel as my other hand desperately dials 911. A passing thought crosses my mind, I guess I really hadn't been speaking to my mother very much recently. The last time we spoke I yelled at her and blamed her for dad leaving.

I hate myself.

Dust

sid sibo



i. Across the road from Chillum, Maryland's cemetery, national bicentennial buntings woke Corinne at odd hours. She worried that her mother's remains would also fail to find peace here. Her half-sister, at Corinne's special request, had shipped a small urn to the states. Half of their mother's ashes. A divided heart. Though Jamaica was home since 1901, Matilda had been American-born. Corinne, raised Jamaican, born in the States, understood. She was a teen when her father, Manny, brought her to Maryland.

Manny kissed the family Bible where he penned in Matilda's death date. Above Manny and Mattie, only one set of grandparents was listed. It was tough keeping track of black-skinned bloodlines in America. Her father's tradition-rich, rum-scented breath and bereavement kept her from making sense of his jumbled sentences.

Tonight was the Ninth Night since Mattie's death. Though Manny was unhappy about the cremation, they tried to celebrate their memories. Though Star Apple slices attracted nocturnal insects, they tried to wait until midnight to eat. Matilda's duppy needed to have its fill from their loaded table before leaving for the afterlife. Above them, red Mars rode the hazy sky.

ii. The fecal occult blood test worked fast. Corinne applied Manny's stool sample to paper coated with guaiac tree resin, then a drop of hydrogen peroxide to the back. A bright blue—indicating invisible blood—emerged in just minutes. Manny's colon cancer worked almost as quickly. On the Ninth Night, Corinne celebrated his life with neighbors and friends, listening to stories, drinking white rum. She lost herself in the painting on his living room wall: brilliant blue flowers of Jamaica's guaiac tree with pollen-covered anthers, dark plum where ovaries ripened. *Lignum vitae*, tree of life. Corinne leaned over her bedroom desk to write his death date in the Bible: March 20, 1982. Though he'd been younger than Mattie when they were together, Manny had lived to be older than her.

A single ocean-wet drop landed on the page. As Corinne blinked back more, the ink under it resolved into a Chinese character, quick strokes

emerging right to left. Her breath stopped in her throat.

iii. The animal shelter's adoption counselor paused at Corinne's application form. Her age wasn't stopping her, so it better not stop him. The tow-headed man at the desk, faded hospital smock stained with nut brown smudges, gave her a tired smile and signed the bottom line. A lean gray cat pushed his cheeks against the wire door of the borrowed carrier.

"That hardly counts as taking someone with you." Manny's neighbor shook her head at the cat when she saw Corinne packing for the airport. The neighbor knew what little she had figured out. "Whether your Chinese word means murder or massacre, why you'd want to learn more is beyond me."

Corinne always pushed through confusion by learning more. She invested hours of the past week in the university library, obsessed by a family history Manny's silences had encouraged her to consider irrelevant.

Born on Wyoming's Idaho border in 1900, Corinne discovered she'd been one of sixty Black people in the whole Territory. Records from Tincup Town didn't mention the Black community her mother told her about, though a third of the gold miners there were listed as Chinese. Now less than one percent of people in the state were Chinese.

Wyoming was so far beyond comprehension she had to go there. Her Chinese character surfaced on the line between Manny and Matilda. Wyoming was where they came together. Where something else must have fallen apart.

iv. A tremble rose in the long bones of her legs. The snow could grow tall as houses at Tincup Town, Matilda had told her, though now spring melts through. Admittedly, her parents left in a hurry. Was it her mother's leaving that her legs remembered, or her grandmother's arrival? The uncertain excitement of finding that speck of gold. As she stretched out the door of her rented car and slowly shook her knees loose, she wondered.

The gray cat with his stubby tail yawned and leapt over her lap without effort or fear. The shining mountain ahead contrasted painfully with the greening rushes behind her. She thumbed through her plant guide to identify the limey glow of budding aspens, their strange milk-colored bark.

New trunks rise from shared root systems, which can be thousands of years old. The cat crouched by a tiny, ice-lined creek to ease his thirst.

Corinne welcomed cold air into her lungs and warmed it there before letting it loose into the fabled freedom of the West. The welcome sign for Wyoming just preceded the sparkling marker for the town of Dust. Everyone in Maryland thought this quest was crazy, but at her age, delay equated to Not Doing. So, when the idea arrived, Corinne left. To face the unaccountable.

v. A brisk knock woke her from her nap, bleach from the hotel pillow burning her nose. The skinny young woman who bustled in flashed her blue eyes wide. She stopped so fast one foot didn't even return to the floor. A glossy brochure on the room's cheap cabinet featured a tall grey bird in the exact same pose. Corinne smiled, though she was well beyond reassuring white people.

She waved the girl and her extra blanket forward. A gold plastic nametag hung off-kilter from her polyester shirt. "Sorrel, is it?" Corinne couldn't help the cock of her eyebrow.

"Yes, ma'am. Mrs. Clarke, right? You needed a quilt?"

"Old bones, honey. It's Dr. Clarke, actually." Her eyes noted the quilt's handiwork. "That looks warmer than what's in here."

"Our blankets are at the laundromat up in Callisto. The season's not started yet." Sorrel put her hand out, palm up, for the cat to sniff. "You caught us flat-footed, I'm afraid."

"Don't be afraid." Distracted, Corinne rubbed her cheek. "Dolphin's very well-mannered." The cat moved his tail-end under the girl's hand.

Sorrel shook the quilt over the top of wrinkled chenille. "So where're you from, Mrs. Clarke?"

"Not from around here, you're thinking." Dolphin rubbed the underside of his chin against Sorrel's raw pink hands. "Didn't expect black skin on your white bedspread?" On Corinne's lap, Dolphin settled himself into a warm circle and gave her a look.

Sorrel stammered and stepped backward, stretching her hand behind her for the doorknob. “Oh, no, I meant your voice, ma’am.”

Outside of medical school, the Salt Lake airport was the whitest place Corinne had ever seen. Until, she supposed, glancing past Sorrel through the unwashed window, she arrived in Dust.

She rubbed her thumb over the even stitches in the quilt. Faceless miners under broad-brimmed black hats squatted next to frothing creeks. She looked at the girl. “Are you from here, then?”

“Oh, yeah, like everyone else. Fourth generation. Two of the fifth generation stay with my mother while I work.”

Corinne stared at her, wondering. “My family lived in the old town.”

“Before the reservoir?”

Corinne had compared a 1962 Freedom Ranger District map with her fresh highway atlas and realized that a dam, alarmingly called Calamity, obliterated the original town. She nodded.

“What? No way.”

“Because Black people don’t live here?” Corinne pushed thick glasses up her wide nose.

This time, Sorrel’s hand found the doorknob.

vi. At dinner, Kellan was not watching the TV, but he didn’t register Sorrel’s news from the Wayfaring Crane either. He talked to himself, but he did it loud enough to fool a person. “Not much time to finish the log units at Bitter Peak before melt out. Even with tracks, the feller-buncher’s too heavy to operate over mud without getting stuck.”

“I think Mrs. Clarke’s gonna try taking her little car to Tincup Town. Still too much snow?”

“If this shit hadn’t broken down last fall I’d be done already. Can’t get enough profit from pines to cover the loan on a knuckle-boom.”

A semi’s headlights flashed from the weigh station outside. Sorrel flinched. “The log truck parades your father lived through couldn’t last.”

“Hell if I know why not.” He sighed and stood up. “What happened to the curtains?”

Sorrel fiddled with a fork on the TV tray. “In Callisto with the Crane’s bedspreads. They smelled like pipe tobacco.”

He paused. “Spaghetti’s great, hon.”

“Think I should bring some to Mrs. Clarke tomorrow? Restaurants haven’t reopened yet.”

“If she got here from wherever, I’m sure she can afford something at the Cutthroat. It’s open.”

vii. Morning sun poured solace into Corinne’s stiff neck muscles as she stood outside the grocery store, knotted rope bag in one hand, a package of cat kibble in the other. She plopped her lunch on the passenger-side floor and nudged Dolphin off the driver’s seat. He re-settled and licked a paw, one eye watching as she double-checked the map. His tail flicked against the Bible’s cracked black cover.

After miles of winding single-lane—gravel roads forbidden in the rental contract’s fine print, but after all, it was snow, not dirt—Corinne saw a crooked sign for Tincup Town. Just another ghost town. She heard her mother’s rough voice, the comforting sigh of warm ocean repeating behind it. When she was a kid, Tincup tales were many blue-green waves away, and she listened to sounds more than words.

Wind, busy through needled trees, resurrected memories. “*Your grandmother cooked for the Green House, and middays, I carried meals to the white miners. ‘What did Missus Olive make today?’ I never talked to them, though they all wanted to talk to me. Not many women around—and none of ‘em white. My mother kept our wages well-hidden, and we soon had more than the miners. Whiskey money was all they earned, most of ‘em.*”

Sagging snow clung even to the lower reaches of the mountain, but the roadway was hardpacked. Odd, for a ghost town, but Corinne was grateful.

Her car was two-wheel drive.

“When it was time to haul supplies to Chinatown, my father’d holler for me.” Corrine remembered Mattie’s straight back before the gleaming wooden table in their island kitchen, her hands assembling meals. *“He was scared of the Chinamen, though he’d never admit it. White men were too. But everyone needed supplies.”*

Dolphin stood up to protest the bucking car, back arched. Corrine’s hands clamped on the wheel. On one side of the creek, sun sparked a meadow of small yellow flowers, heads bowed to the ground, while on the other side, shadowed snowbanks dripped and shrunk. The car didn’t have enough enthusiasm to continue. In a soundless slick of melt, clods of mire spun skyward as she pressed the accelerator. The car slid sideways. More clay flew, though the car stopped moving. Fine, then. They would walk. Despite her well-cut clothes, she’d always been a woman who wore sensible shoes. And she carried a stalwart walking stick.

Into the cries of returning sandhill cranes, she climbed, her father’s long reticence echoing. Only Mattie’s stories throbbed, in the rhythm of her steps, against her skull. *“Trout—oh, a mountain-fresh fish could water my mouth now, but back then I longed for bacon. Every morning I cleaned a kitchen reeking of greasy hog, but we ate none. Drippings in our bread, sure, but no chewy flesh.”* Her mother’s laughter lifted through the present’s sighing winds. Somewhere, shovels scraped stone into the past. *“When I complained, my father shamed me, saying the Celestials slept on rocks, ate no more’n a cup of rice a week.”*

Lively warbles interrupted her memories. Darting after insects, electric blue birds accompanied Corinne and her cat up the hill. Dolphin leapt with them, exuberant in the sun, though he’d never managed to touch a feather. Below, the main creek crashed toward distant Dust and Calamity’s blank surface.

The sun lifted a vegetal scent soft around her face. Her stomach began to insist on food to fuel her ascent, but she’d left her spinach salad in its plastic clamshell on the floor of the car.

“On the mountain, Chinese eased their hunger with a fingernail’s worth of opium, your grandfather said, that they smoked in their underground

room. Eased their tired bodies after digging ditches to carry water for giant hoses that tore gravels off slopes. Hoses poured rocks through sluices and rocker boxes and long-toms, into the stamp mills to crush everything and set the yellow flour-dust free.”

viii. Corinne smelled diesel. She paused, breath coming hard. As soon as she stopped moving, though, her glasses steamed up. She wiped the lenses with the edge of an embroidered handkerchief while she waited for her heart to settle. She couldn’t see Dolphin. She touched soft cloth to watery eyes.

The smell of exhaust overpowered the fresh iron scent of snow, and an industrial growl pulled her eyes up the still-empty road. A present fear pushed out past bitterness. Dolphin leaned two dirty paws on her otherwise impeccable tan slacks, then left the melting roadway and cantered, stumpy tail held high, through the buttery flowers toward a grove of aspens with sea-green buds. Cats may have many lives, but they also have a strong sense of self-preservation. Corinne followed him. Her sensible feet sank toward the ground, below a broken icy crust.

A huge yellow and black machine filled the roadway with heavy metal noise. From their hiding place behind the sugar-scented trees, the rental car looked tiny. A man in a backward-facing baseball cap climbed out of the equipment and peered through the car’s windows. Despite the machine’s racket, she heard him cuss. Then, he crawled back behind the wheel.

He slammed his cab door and maneuvered the machine’s bucket. Her library research had revealed men here meaner than alligators. Men who turned the giant hoses on other miners, darker ones. She stopped herself from calling out to stop him.

She hid her face in pale palms, pushing hard against her eyes. A conflagration patterned the insides of her eyelids. Blanched trees flailed like hands against a filthy window of unlived memories. Her stomach knotted. Under the aspens, panic consumed her.

Knowing her need, Dolphin climbed onto her lap. Metal clanged on metal, the sound like a gunshot. The cat pressed against her hip bones, her soft stomach, arched his back into her rigid elbows. She felt him purring

against her chest.

When the machine's growls faded, and again birds called, she dared peer out through spread fingers. The car—who knew how scratched up?—faced down the road. Gravity would take them back to Dust.

ix. A Chinook wind blew in a heavy gray dawn. The still-echoing chorus of friends and neighbors who opposed this trip pressed her down. The cat, unworried, held her to their course. Behind the hotel, he investigated gray grass above the Yotay River and chased winter-soggy leaves behind humid gusts.

Returning to their small room, she sat with the desk light on in front of the windows. Her hand paused over a piece of white paper, holding one of the four calligraphy brushes from the travel set she had purchased.

Her fingers were unsteady, and another attempt at the single Chinese word failed. Learning a new language, she happened to know, was a great preventative for dementia. She stood up, moved to the window. Corinne believed in movement. When she turned sixty she started doing Tai Chi with a group of other seniors. To improve balance. She parted the wild horse's mane. Repulsed the monkey. Her heart tripped, unbalanced. She pushed out a long breath and returned to her papers.

She dipped her brush toward the blankness. One stroke, one glance at the Bible's page for a template. The ten right-side strokes included woven overlaps, and careful spaces between black movements. The final three strokes belonged to a maddeningly simple arrangement on the left side of the character.

Her work gave off a tiny scratching sound, a noise softer than the rasping in her head. One small note in her research had revealed a gasping fire that burned out Tincup Town's Chinese camp. In the ink wash, she smelled the opium dug-out's mineral earth. Her fingers ached. She knew where the Chinese miners hid from the fire. Her face burned from the heat of rocks that collapsed the den's entrance. Somehow, she knew they never came back out.

x. A knuckle-noise on the hotel's hollow-core door startled her. Corinne's hands faltered, and she dropped the brush.

"Dr. Clarke? I brought some journals you might want." Preceded by a handful of bound papers, Sorrel poked her head into the room.

"Where'd you get these?" Gentle, Corinne spread the first one open. Handwritten pages on one side stood opposite a typewritten version that included old black-and-white photos. "My mom's attic. I thought I remembered them from when we used to play up there."

"Who wrote these?"

"Great uncles, or great grandfathers maybe. My mom wasn't home to ask."

The morning wore on, but Corinne was in a place out of time. A mountain place where two Black children played with their pet rockchuck. The photo listed the critter as Rocky and the kids as "Mattie and little brother Manny." The writer's accuracy came into question. He wrote about a slave called Polly—though slavery was outlawed in 1865. Polly was "won by a Scotsman off a Chinaman in a game of cards." A photo showed the Scotsman lifting a glass, an arm circled around Polly. Corinne was sure the young woman's name would not have sounded so British. The law overlooked some colors of slave.

She wondered what the journal keeper had been drinking. What had Manny said about Matilda when he was drinking the white rum? Something about her mother being buried in Wyoming—but then, rum fogged her memory too.

xi. The cat poked at holes in the dirt as Corinne trudged up the same hill they'd been on before, everything in her heavier than the darkly pregnant clouds. Without sun, the birds lost their blossom-blue, and Dolphin crouched when they dove toward him. The wind spoke, but she didn't recognize its language.

The trees' lime-colored buds had begun to unfold. Every time she picked up her brushes, she heard a different story in that single word. She walked. Aspen leaves, like truth, grew imperceptibly. Like words with two meanings, people could have two mothers.

Her feet, again, sank beneath the grove of trees, below the snow, its crystal

structure weak and eager to crumble. She sat, again, on a fallen trunk, and waited. In the dripping and disintegrating around her, the scratch of paint-brushes echoed. The snow seemed hollow, as if it sheltered sleeping bears with cubs in secret dens. Dolphin slipped onto her lap, curled in a circle. She touched her fingers to his gray fur, the blue-gray of thunderclouds. Black strokes on the aspen's white bark wrote themselves into Chinese characters, into stories. Each tree lined up an alternative history until her eyes blurred.

A young Chinese woman shimmered through the aspens. Even though slaves weren't allowed into the opium den, Polly—who could understand hatred and outrun a mob—had tried to save the Chinese miners from approaching fire.

Under history's shifting shadows, Dolphin stared at small black and white birds in the branches. They descended the trees headfirst and teased him in a nasal northern twang.

Corinne felt her heart steady into the unfamiliar sounds around her, under trees whose roots remained unknown to her. She asked questions of her bones, as their ache permeated her lungs, filled her limbs. She asked questions of her blood as it pulsed under breastbone, drummed on ribs. Air blew warm across miniature leaves, stretching to sunlight hidden behind clouds.

xii. The flickering leaves relayed a mechanical grumble, and Corinne stirred. She and the cat watched, mesmerized. Soft pines between the upper road and their grove of aspens were falling. The big machine stretched its arms to grasp four trees in a single embrace while its basal saw sliced them away from their roots as easily as sugar cane. The cab spun, the boom dropped the trees, now just logs, into a pile behind it. The tracks rolled forward, toward them.

Dolphin climbed into deep sky, on branches the birds already abandoned. Corinne was powerless to stop him, though the equipment had their grove in its sights. She knew his tail was a sponge in a sink, swollen. His eyes as big and green as baby tortoises. But he did not leave.

They would defend this place. Her mother's ashes nourished these roots. Corinne stood and moved toward the machine, her walking stick thump-

ing a cadence she felt in her veins. Like the logging machine, she would wrap her arms around a bare trunk. She would lay her black cheek against its ghostly white and press her strong old heart into its living bark.

Horizontal

sid sibo

Quite unexpected, isn't it, this place reserved for waterfowl. This place of refuge. Within many mountains, you experience the varied vertical by what mountains are not. This place is horizontal. Its surface is resting water, and though that names it Lake, the lake's water is, in most places, not visible behind the green stems of reeds and rushes that form its wide upper boundary. This lake doesn't reflect the mountains surrounding it, though it contains dissolved minerals from all of them. In this early morning's faded, waning moonlight, the sun not yet above the high ridges behind you, colors—like meanings—are muted.

With the clouded sky so gray, not pewter but slate, it's hard to see through the water's interrupted darkness the dusky and diminutive coot, *Fulica americana*, even though it floats right there—see?—through bulrushes to open pools of deeper water, and even though it almost never appears alone. See now the social group of seal-colored, stubby forms, no visible difference from male to female. Like the surprise of this vast flatness, what draws your eye to twilight coot is its contrasting snowdrift bill, a shield of ice between chokecherry-red eyes.

No, no hurry—we can always rest. Watch the dabbler paddling through. That burnished bit of setting sun is known as cinnamon teal, *Anas cyanoptera*. There's the photo page in my guidebook. Back here is the range map. Their migration is complete. The teal could make a nest here, hidden in the quiet tangle. Where this splash of rust parts the green, you can see water resting, even while busy feathered bodies scoop miniature crustaceans, or toothlessly chew submerged plants.

Climb the little rise here around the edge so your feet don't get mucky. Watch your head! Dive-bomber. You'll never guess his name: yellow-headed blackbird. *Xanthocephalus* squared. Clearly no other name would do.

Don't you think it's biological, our developing childhood selves looked up to taller people, so our adult selves look up to verticality, mountain aspirations, and build our achievements toward pinnacles? But before our infant eyes learned to focus and our limbs began to bend with volition, we knew horizontality in a visceral way. It envelops the history of human minds like a cloud fills and flattens valleys, like fog enlarges the sporophytes of moss-

es and mists itself onto the warty isidia of lichens. Something universal about being horizontal.

Toddlers, so proud of their new upright stance, still had to look for someone taller to block the sun's glaring light. Always someone more important, something higher, right? You've had enough of that.

All around now, arriving gulls sharpen sound—this too, is unexpected, don't you think? In the middle of mid-continent mountains, birds of the sea. The black-headed white ones swarming, narrow beam of heatless sun sharpening the high bright of tilting wings, they're Franklin's Gulls, *Larus pipixcan*. It's reassuring, on a day like this, to hear names, to imagine we know these birds in our language. To twist our tongues around a strange language, though, may be either exciting or frightening. Maybe both. How many names they must have, in places unknown to us.

Let's keep going, we'll find you someplace quieter soon.

Wait, stop, check out that color. Silent, the Northern Shoveler wears loud clothes: green, brown, white, blue, black, with that yellow eye, and orange legs. *Spatula clypeata*. Their flattened bills strain water out of submerged grasses that fill their bellies. In spite of the gulls' clamor, though, that voiceless sound can be heard.

This sound? Like fingers strumming on a comb? Chorus of boreal frogs, *Pseudacris maculata*, in their call and response, lamenting their lost tails and celebrating their previously unimagined lungs and legs, singing praises to the morning, to the spring, to their anonymous offspring and to the great blue heron who eats them, its sharp scything beak the gateway to flight.

But now your eye follows the boat-rower's sudden wingbeats skyward, doesn't it? Larger birds are attractive to our older eyes, I think. And eagles are big, even immature ones like that, all mottled browns and messy, not bold enough to shine white heads or tails yet, they wait six years for that. Watch that Canada goose take after him. He's a boat, yes, but more agile than she is, and willing to play oblivious. A stoop toward the reeds and a clutching grab. Goslings already in the nest, I'd say. Hard not to flinch. But have you seen the size of goose families? Like an armada later in the season, when they're all paddling out in a line. We eat of each other, always.

Death isn't a foreign place; it lives in us all.

Hear that splash break the lake's surface quiet? Tail flat as the water, a beaver's movement widened by its wake, ripples arc away. Can you hear its webbed feet stroking under water? From its castor glands, can you smell the castoreum, base for wolf bait and Parisian perfumes? Tough to imagine. *Castor canadensis*...strange worlds we have made, near and far.

You're tired—no shame. Sit on that dry rock, limey lichen rings tight against its pink-flecked feldspar skin. We're all either glandular or granular. Rock smells irreducible, mineral elements we never knew we knew. But breathe below the surface. At the base of the grass lifts musk of badger, unashamed by limited legbones, an earlier horizontal wave across the earth, a force not often seen. The stink of winter-buried moose ribs drifts past, dried blood pattern over creamy bone, cached by mountain lion, etched by mouse teeth.

Oh, but always another dance—out there on the soggy meadow. Sandhill cranes sound off in primordial voice, native bone flute, flying low with hinged wingbeats. Watch them drop to level earth, carry the rhythm on their mosquito legs, hop and bop and all suggestive about the future. The clouds are getting thicker, darkening to match the crane feathers. Some old people become like clouds again, like the minds of infants, letting loose of pointless ambition, jealousy, regret. Minds sprawl out, wide edges indistinct enough to encompass histories and possibilities and the lake's fifteen different species of square-stemmed sedges, seeds favored by graceful-necked pintail ducks.

Light teardrops pattern your cheeks, slide and turn. But volition is yours.

We can hide under the aspens. Their leaves aren't big enough to shelter a snail yet, but this network of branches and buds casts a Koolaid-scented kind of charm. Your peacoat will keep you warm. Go ahead and lie down, wrap up. No better pillow than that hummock of bottle moss, *Amphibium laponicum*, there with its tiny twisted leaves. We can remember our amphibious selves, swimming in womb-water, but have you ever dreamed of Lapland? If your eyes are still open, you can probably see the urn-shaped spore capsules on their erect stems. Flatlanders are entranced by the changed perspective of mountains, but if you live in the mountains, this low lake perspective mesmerizes. How much less distraction here. How

much easier to pull loose of the death grip that to-do list has on you.

Yes, let your eyes close. You can inhale the deep green, this soft brown. Feel the woolly under-leaf of strange mugwort along your neck and ear, frightening, exciting. Some things inspire imagination. The sigh of bug-hunting swallows as they swing over the marsh is something to hear. You will hear so much, in the many unknown places wings might bring you. Life experienced by what we think it is not. Death our universal home.

Fog cradles in the curves of buttercups, sings a mineral raindrop through my eyelashes. I wait. I listen to ducks and frogs, and to mountains eroding, settling, nourishing. I leave you to rest.



Color Photography

First Place Winner

Visceral and Delicate
by Jury S. Judge

Visceral and Delicate
Jury S. Judge



Digital Photography

Cardinal Sins 70

A Paper Portrait

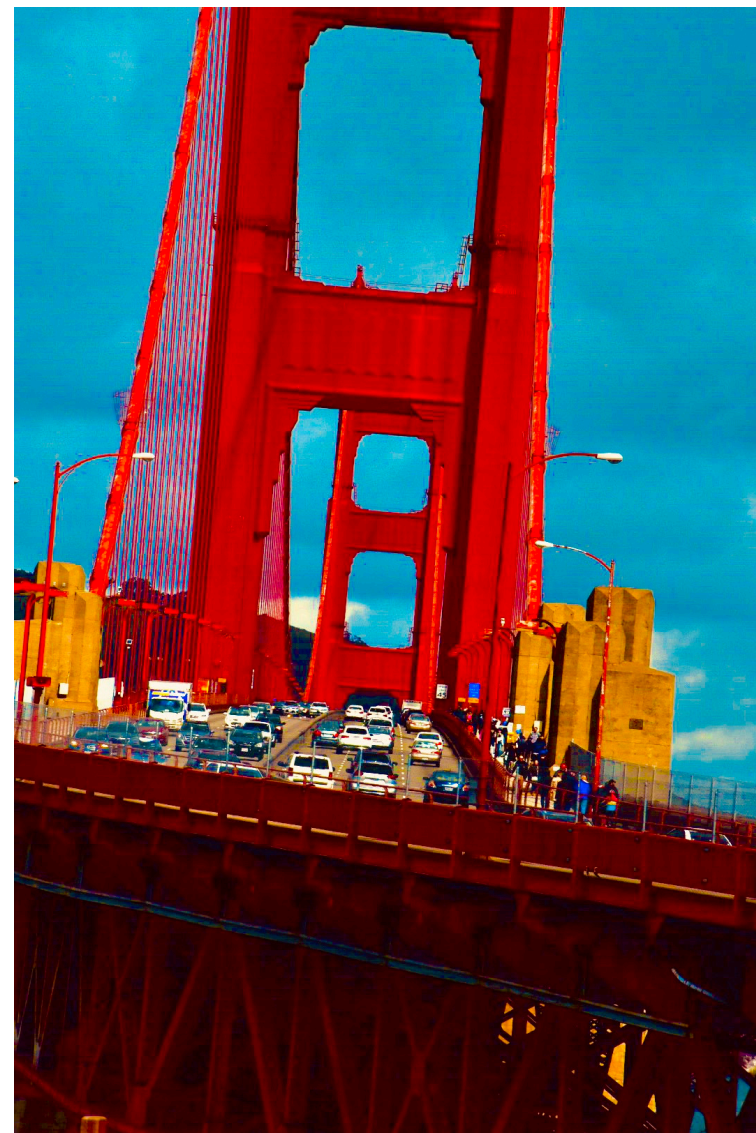
William Crawford



Digital Photography

Rush Hour on the Red Lady

William Crawford



Digital Photography

Don't Let Anyone Crush Your Fun

Jury Judge



Digital Photography

73 *Cardinal Sins*



Flash Fiction

The Ruler of the Universe

Elena Botts



I keep thinking about the ruler of the universe, you know the one who controls the aquatic symphonies, the tides. He has a cat, a gingery thing that will leave his side and often but somehow remains like a piece of his face only you wouldn't think of his face you'll never remember his face quite even after you've met him and maybe it's this way for a lot of people but for some reason. His face makes you remember a lot of things but these are as unspeakable as the planet in its slow revolutions of the sun and nothing ready to the mind, you cannot speak.

He lives in a small house. Here there is a table and a cat, a gingery thing that eludes him somehow more or less than all the ether that he cannot convince himself is real. He doesn't believe in anything, he says. Most especially not himself and that is why I recall him so fondly, perhaps he is a generation of my own eroding. Maybe it is fond to know little or nothing or perhaps it is endearing to us who know mostly of failings and less of things that stick and stick and stick like stars or even the constellations of skin, so fixed is my vision on impermanence, so broken my bones by merely the thought of it and breath just another thing to carry me out of this world. Had I known myself enough here to know this place.

He lives by the sea, but we all do in our minds, anyway, ourselves forever wading or cresting. It depends on whether we are in it or of it, whether we could know it, or even the moon. He has a face like the moon and he breathes a cosmic wind that floats down and flutters me, my bones, my terrible unshakeable heart that I do anything and everything to annihilate. As oblivion was
my first true love.

When you embrace the ruler of the universe, he only shivers and admits that he doesn't know if he exists, let alone if there is a universe. The others often aim at convincing him, that yes, there is great care in the cosmos, even rabid desire and the minds of animals, even the salivating human animal, and that the spinning suns burning out implode for something after all, even the

nethers of us. But he is. The cat has lost itself in the wave but pads out

again, slim flank and a trim fish in mouth or maybe an imaginary fish, a scintillating thing that the felid devours madly, streaking the bones and ravening. They comfort the body of the ruler, hold him tight though he is unmoved, moves little. His body doesn't speak fathoms and his eyes are forgettable to each of us. We hold him like nobody until we are released. He smiles at us and says he will soon

return to his little shack on the rim of the great ocean on this planet that is smaller than most but on which he is lonesome, that is if one can be alone, that is if he is what he is and there is a shack crumbling and an ocean also and a rim of all things, though he says, and skuffles a foot into a dune, I cannot suppose that is so. I do not know.

My Queen

Zary Fekete

The mercury has hit 100° every day this week, and I have done everything that I can for my bees... my queen. Every afternoon I sit in the backyard, close enough to the hive to hear the soft murmur of their wings. They speak this quiet language to one another every day.

Yesterday, while I was driving past the school on my way home, I saw my daughter waiting for the school bus. She was laughing. I noticed this, because she doesn't laugh often. She laughed and threw her head back. Then she laid her head on the shoulder of the girl next to her... a girl with black hair. They were holding hands.

All of the books say that bees don't do well with weather over the mid 90s. I thought about trying to move them today, but the books also recommend not doing that. This one is the third hive I've attempted. The first two died. Hives require a lot of work, and often the bees can't seem to make a go of it. They are expensive, and people grow frustrated quickly.

The rest of the drive home I kept picturing my daughter with her head on the other girl's shoulder... so different from how I usually see her at home... head down, eyes down. The only time I saw her raise her head in the past few days was when she overheard me talking on the phone with our neighbor from up the street. My daughter's eyes were hard, like glittering rocks.

This hive, this third one, however, crackles like a fire. My neighbor from up the street told me yesterday that her son had been stung three times in the past week. This means that my queen has reached adult maturity and is now commanding her drones, through pheromones, to venture beyond the borders of my yard.

My neighbor's son used to ride on the school bus with my daughter... until last month. Last month the school called me to ask whether I wanted to press charges. Because this is such a small community, the word had gotten around quickly, and I think the school was hoping to quench any fires. I said no. My daughter has known him since grade school.

My neighbor was so angry. I still remember her harsh words, "The audacity! That you should keep that hive! That you could pretend to control so many thousand!" And then my neighbor left me. I closed my front door. And I returned to sit near to my hive, near to my queen.

When my daughter arrived home, I told her that I had seen her at the bus stop. She was on her way to her room, but then she stopped, realizing what that meant. She looked at me.

I said, "Pretty girl." I smiled at her. There was a soft look on my daughter's face.

She said, "She is."

She hadn't meant wrong, my queen. On hot days bees are commanded by their queen to stop focusing on nectar and to start bringing water back to the hive. To cool it, you see. The bees probably felt threatened by my neighbor's son. Bees become more defensive when it's hot, and they want to protect their queen. I understand. That's what I'd want.

Opossum

Zach Murphy



Pete and Richard's orange safety vests glowed a blinding light under the scorching sun, and their sweat dripped onto the pavement as they stood in the middle of the right lane on Highway 61, staring at an opossum lying stiffly on its side.

Richard handed Pete a dirty shovel. "Scoop it up," he said.

Everything made Pete queasy. He once fainted at the sight of a moldy loaf of bread. Even so, he decided to take on a thankless summer job as a road-kill cleaner. At least he didn't have to deal with many people.

Richard nudged Pete. "What are you waiting for?" he asked.

Pete squinted at the creature. "It's not dead," he said. "It's just sleeping."

"Are you sure?" Richard asked as he scratched his beard. He had one of those beards that looked like it would give a chainsaw a difficult time.

"Yes," Pete said. "I just saw it twitch."

Richard walked back toward the shoulder of the road and popped open the driver's side door of a rusty pickup truck. "Alright, let's go."

Pete shook his head. "We can't just leave it here."

"It's not our problem," Richard said. "They tell us to do with the dead ones, but not the ones that are still alive."

Pete crouched down and took a closer look. "We need to get it to safety," he said.

Richard sighed and walked back toward the possum. "What if it wakes up and attacks us?" he asked. "That thing could have rabies."

"I don't think anything could wake it up right now," Pete said.

Richard belched, "It's an ugly son of a gun, isn't it?"

"I think it's so ugly that it's cute," Pete said.

"No one ever says that about me," Richard said with a chuckle. "I guess I just haven't crossed into that territory."

Just then, a car sped by and swerved over into the next lane. Pete and Richard dashed out of the way.

"Hey!" Richard yelled. "Watch where you're going!"

Pete shook his head.

"People drive like animals!" Richard said. "Anyway, we'd better get going."

Pete took a deep breath and shakily slipped his gloves on. He crouched down, gently picked up the opossum, held the creature away from him, and carried it into the woods, his knees on the verge of buckling.

"What are you doing?" Richard asked. "Are you crazy?"

After nestling the possum into a bush, Pete smelled the scent of burning wood. He gazed out into the clearing and noticed a plume of black smoke billowing into the sky. The sparrows scattered away, and the trees stood with their limbs spread, as if they were about to be crucified.

"Jesus Christ," Pete whispered under his breath.

Pete picked up the opossum and turned back around.

Cutting Plant

Erik Peters

My grandmother's roots ran deep in rich soil: the songs she sang us and the poems she recited; the stories whose narrative beauty might be excited only by those who have not traded their classical education for modern conveniences or "job training"; the plain yet mysteriously satisfying highland diet.

It was grandmama who taught us to see the faerie folk under toadstools and in dense foliage. She taught us the joy of feeling the lakeshore mud between our toes. Her conviction that a cast die should never be overturned taught us to lose gracefully. She showed us the solemn dignity in the death of a much-loved pet.

Grandmama's roots ran deep in rich soil, buried in the dimness of the past. Where the roots secretly neared the surface, they issued new sprigs brighter than any domestic flower.

"You are descended from Finn MacCool, the Irish Giant. Your great-grandfather was 6'6": the shortest son of a shortest son! And with a last name like McCullough, he must have been related to Finn."

"A sailor from the Armada found his way into the family. That's why you, your mother and I tan so well."

"Your ancestors took ship with the Jacobites! When they bore Bonnie Prince Charlie over the sea to Skye it was the valiant blood in your veins that safeguarded the rightful king."

On my birthday shortly before she died, Grandmama gave me a cutting from the gnarled vine that grew up the side of her house.

"This is a cutting from a vine which was, itself, a cutting from the old faerie-bush that climbed the house I grew up in. And that plant was also a

cutting. My father took it from an even older vine in Ulster; said that it grew up the Church wall and that near the spire's top it twined a lover's knot with a briar."

I loved Grandmama's stories and when she died and her house was bulldozed, I kept the cutting-plant on my bedside table. But teenagers are incredulous, and I doubted that such a thriving vine could have grown from mere cuttings and recuttings.

One day, as I transferred the cutting-plant to a larger pot, I shook the dirt from its base and tried to follow the roots back to the stem. Some broke as strong but imprecise fingers twisted them. Others had their hair-thin radicals knocked off. All of them withered in the bright, desiccating aboveground world.

I nearly lost my cutting-plant that day. When it was back in the dirt, the sprigs and sprays issued by the roots shrivelled and died. The leaves drooped. It seemed that the pot-constrained roots did not run deep enough for it to recover.

Years later I balance my son on my knee. His wide eyes drink in the world even before he has learnt to make sense of it. Like his father, he is tall, fair, and strong-willed. I tell him of Finn MacCool and the Armada and Bonnie Prince Charlie and Ulster Church walls.

As I sing and speak, he runs sausage-link fingers through the bright leaves that grow up the side of our house. He gazes wonderingly into the new sprigs issuing from unseen roots. My family's roots run deep in rich soil.



Black & White Photography

Cover Art

Lone Hiker. The Crater.
Death Valley.
by William Crawford

Lone Hiker. The Crater. Death Valley.
William Crawford



Digital Photography

Pre Game. Yankee Stadium.

William Crawford



Digital Photography

Relic Façade. El Paso Barrio.

William Crawford



Digital Photography



Cardinal Sins

Creative Nonfiction

Budapest Balazs

Zary Fekete

“I must have you meet my father.”

Balazs says this and looks at me very intently with just a hint of a smile. I agree to drive him, and in moments we are moving across the Danube towards the 13th district. The city flashes by with the neon and shadow inflected bursts of downtown life that color Eastern Europe: porn shops, cell phone repair boutiques, apartment rental offices, liquor stores.

Early that evening I had met Balazs for the first time because he came to the coffeeshop where we host evenings for troubled teens. Balazs came because a friend had invited him. After I met him, I kept an eye on him, partly for safety reasons and partly to see whether he was enjoying himself. I quickly got the sense that Balazs didn’t often enjoy himself, yet tonight, with its laughter and easy friendships, had been a welcome, different experience.

As we drive he shares about himself in the disjointed, stream-of-consciousness way that only a 16-year-old can. I am putting together snatches of his experiences that have involved, in no particular order: parental infidelity, terrible high school grades, anti-Roma prejudice and absolutely countless hookups with a wide variety of girls, both young and old...Balazs seems to have an affinity for the 30 somethings and somehow convinced them of his prowess.

We arrive to Balazs’s neighborhood after about 20 minutes of driving. It has quite standard 13th district Hungarian dwellings: towering 70’s and 80’s era communist bloc housing, patchwork quilts of lives stacked on top of one another in prefabricated concrete patterns. I park the car. There’s an awkward pause. I’m expecting him to get out, but he reminds me that I need to meet his father. This was the part of the conversation from earlier that I hadn’t quite understood.

“Why do I need to meet him?”

For the first time that night, Balazs pauses. He says, “You see. If you meet

my father then he will know who you are and then he will allow me to visit again on another Friday night.”

This makes complete sense to me, and a moment later we are in a cramped metal elevator slowly creaking its way up to Balazs’s apartment on the 6th floor. The elevator clanks to a halt, Balazs produces a key, and then I’m inside his home.

The apartment is filthy. The entryway is stacked with bricks and cement from Balazs’s father’s work as a mason here is a dark hallway that leads off to the left. The kitchen is on the right, dimly lit with a single bulb. His father stands in the kitchen, making porkchops on an ancient skillet and filling the kitchen with smoke. Every surface is covered with unwashed plates, sticky forks, and buzzing flies.

Balazs steps forward and introduces me to his father. I tentatively reach out my hand, and his father shakes it with the instant comradery that comes from living shoulder to shoulder with ones’ neighbors in the 13th district of Budapest.

Balazs turns back to me with a smile and says, “So, here it is. Do you think it will do?”

I’m uncertain. “What do you mean?”

Balazs’s grin doesn’t fade. Next Friday. Could we invite everybody over here after the coffeeshop closes? I’d like to host an after-party.” I can’t stop thinking about the flies. I want to think of a way out, to save face for him and to avoid embarrassment for me.

“Balazs, this could be great. But it’s a little small. Often, we have more than 50 people on Friday nights.” I glance down the hallway where we entered a moment ago. “Is there a bigger room? Somewhere with more space?”

“There are three other rooms. But the other three families live there. Won’t this do?”

He says this matter-of-factly, but with a hint of a shy confession. I suddenly see the two dirty mattresses that are stacked in the corner of the kitchen...or rather I should say, the kitchen and bedroom. The only room

that Balazs and his father have.

Balazs is offering me everything that he has...and I realize that next Friday we absolutely must come here with all 50 plus people from the coffeeshop to celebrate an after-party with Balazs and his father.

I nod. “This will do.”

The Friend Who Ghosted Everyone— Mourning the Loss of a Friendship When You Don't Know the 'Why'

Eleni Stephanides

“Relationships in life don't really end, even if you never see the person again. Every person you've been close to lives on somewhere inside you. Sometimes you have con-versations with them in your head; sometimes they speak to you in your sleep.” -Lori Gottlieb

You can tell that it's winter from a glance at the people on BART—Bay Area Rapid Transportation—today. In the seat to my right, a woman in a red pea coat holds a black purse like it's her child.

Across from me, a furry-jacketed teenage girl alternates between her school report and Tinder swiping. Next to her, an antsy hipster leans forward like he's ready to spring up at any moment, channeling simultaneous apathy, and intensity.

My focus is on the other side of the train though, where a woman stands by the door next to her purple bike.

It's a bike I know. The distinct scratch on its front rims gives it away. As my eyes trace its contours, it's unmistakable.

I'd ridden next to it countless times; had experienced the frustration of its owner every time she returned to where she'd parked it only to find a wheel stolen. At the end of the day, I'd know whether she'd come home by whether or not the bike was parked in front of our house.

The woman standing next to it—I know her too. Or did, years before. She wears a ma-genta-colored sweater, her green eyes shining beneath brown-red bangs.

Eight years had passed since I'd last seen Sarah. Her final words to me, before I'd em-barked on a year-long move to South America, had been, “If

life ever gets too rough down there, you'll always have friends waiting for you when you come back.”

A few months later, she disappeared from the lives of everyone who'd once known her.

Memories resurface as a nonlinear tangle of images, individual moments all bound to-gether.

The year was 2008, and we were freshmen in college.

I noticed her from across the cafeteria one day—the girl seated alone, hacking away at a plate of eggs. She lived in the same hall as me, three doors down. Earlier in the year we'd gone to parties with our floor-mates; had walked down frat row in tank tops and shorts on warm September nights; played beer pong in the backyards of frat houses, all while basking in the exhilaration of our newfound freedom.

We'd never hung out one-on-one though. At least not until now.

“Okay if I sit here?” I asked after approaching her table.

Sarah looked up from her plate—recognized me, then smiled.

“Please!” she responded welcomingly.

“I love a mid-day omelet,” I commented as I sat down.

“Oh, I could eat these any time of day,” she replied, forking another bite into her mouth.

We discovered we were in the same sociology class—a lively course taught by a quirky professor who organized creative and engaging activities that included spending twenty minutes with a tree, then writing about the experience.

I found out that like me, Sarah also had family back in the Bay Area (this was common for Davis folks, with only a one-to-two-hour drive separating the two areas).

We spent more time together from then on. Over the summer, we met each other's parents; brought sushi takeout to the local hiking trails; saw Green Day in concert after Sharpee-ing their song lyrics onto white tank tops.

By sophomore year, our friend groups had merged. Junior year, we lived in the same house, along with four other girl friends.

I found myself appreciating how adventurous and open-minded Sarah was. She seemed always down for anything and everything: strenuous hikes to the top of a steep hill overlooking Lake Berryessa; days spent reading on hay bales and petting baby farm animals; a spontaneous mid-day feast at an off-the-highway-Indian buffet in the neighboring farm town of Dixon.

I also loved how she overflowed with passion and enthusiasm so much of the time. Our shared zeal extended to food. We partook in feasts often—from sushi buffets to Indian banquets to heaping burgers to frozen yogurt overflowing with a menagerie of colorful toppings. Both of us enjoyed studying in cafes, apt environments as they are for ruminators (which Sarah and I both were)—escorting us, as they did, from the nebulous tangles of inside our heads out into the tangible world.

When in her presence, it felt so easy to empty my brain of all the random thoughts that scurried through—both the trivial and more existential. Whether that was sprawled across either of our bedroom floors or bundled in sweaters eating oatmeal in my car some nights (Davis winters are cold, and it was the only place with heating).

Like I did too at times (depending on who was around), Sarah often concealed her pain. It betrayed itself in the distant looks, or the occasional silences at the breakfast table when others were laughing; in the extra shot of vodka she'd pour; or in the prolonged time spent outside the house, in attempt to reclaim some shreds of whichever person who'd hurt her had run off with.

"I feel like I wasted a lot of time last year on people who didn't care about me," I remember her saying to me, on one of those nights. "But I'm just really grateful to have you in my life."

After we graduated, half of our friend group stayed in Davis. The other half moved to the Bay Area—some back in with our parents, others to places of their own. No longer conveniently located in the same house or even town, our friendships underwent an adjustment.

I began noticing one of the downsides to this free-spirited, adventurous quality I'd admired about Sarah back in our college town. It became harder to make plans with her; she'd cancel at the last minute quite often. When we did hang out, her mind often seemed far off.

This friendship is feeling disconnected, I thought when driving home after hanging out one day. It was the first time my mind had found words for what I'd been feeling. Verbalizing it brought some guilt, but mostly sadness—I could feel the loss of something beginning to set in. The loss was of our friendship as I'd once known it, accompanied by the recognition that it just didn't fit seamlessly into either of our post-college lives.

Still, we continued plugging along. She began dating her coworker, and they soon became official (it was her first committed relationship). I made plans to move to South America to teach English for a year.

I remember that crisp winter day—the last time I saw Sarah, a few days before leaving for Uruguay—so clearly. Outside a cafe in Oakland's Rockridge neighborhood, I waited for her to BART in from San Francisco. The sun hung low in the sky. The trees had shaken off the majority of their leaves, leaving bare branches and sidewalks caked with the colors of fall.

BART rode past in the perimeter of my eyesight, depositing old passengers and scoop-ing up new ones as I sipped from my ceramic coffee mug. "1/3/13" read the date at the top right corner of Page One of my travel journal.

Looking up from it, I saw Sarah's train had arrived, and she was running across the street to meet me. Once she made it over, we hugged.

Sarah ordered her drink, then updated me on her job, her family, and Darren, her co-worker. The ease with which we conversed and laughed bore traces of old times. When she apologized at one point for spilling a drop of coffee onto my black flip-flop, it reminded me of the time she'd accidentally dropped a duck during our annual trip to the pumpkin patch

petting zoo. After landing on the hay-covered ground in a feathered heap, the creature let loose a barrage of startled and accusatory quacks. That she apologized to it didn't surprise me; sheepish, endearingly clumsy, and perpetually apologetic, Sarah dropped "I'm sorry" about as often as she did belongings and baby animals.

"I'll miss you!" she said as we hugged goodbye. Gesturing to my notebook: "Fill that up while you're gone!"

She then handed me a postcard she'd written me—the one that said, "If life ever gets too rough down in South America, you'll always have friends waiting for you when you come back."

I re-read it on the plane, and the words comforted me.

That year I learned to sand-board. I often swam in the Rio de la Plata. I taught English to students ranging from kid brothers at their home on a dusty cul-de-sac to businesswomen at their offices to an 80-year-old erudite *señor* who resided within a castle-like abode in one of Montevideo's richest coastal neighborhoods. I directed Yoga en Español groups at the local river beach and dated an Uruguayan girl, with whom I spent Christmas at her family's home in the countryside.

Even amidst all the adventures and novelty, I missed the womb-like comfort of the college town utopia. I missed my and Sarah's adventures. I longed for the feelings of inter-connectedness, not just with her but everyone in that community (of which she was an integral part).

She and I would exchange messages from time to time. Other friends also checked in. They said they'd been spending time with Sarah and Darren, and that some of Darren's behaviors had made them uncomfortable. They'd notice how Sarah would tense up after receiving a text from him, as well as how quickly he seemed to turn jealous any time she so much as mentioned another guy in the most benign of contexts.

At the end of August 2013, Sarah sent me the following message:

I'm sorry I can't write a longer post...I'm about to head to work. First of all,

I want to apologize for being so elusive lately. I've felt really guilty for being such a bad friend towards those far away lately.

The last three months have been relatively consistent for me, work, job hunting, still with Darren. I'll tell you more when I talk to you on Skype.

Love you and miss you.

A few days later, she de-activated her Facebook. I thought little of it, reasoning that she was probably trying to focus on nursing school without the distraction of social media, and that we'd re-connect once I'd returned home.

I didn't realize this would be the last I'd ever hear from her.

A week or two after returning home from Uruguay in March of 2014, I messaged Sarah.

"Missed you so much! How are you doing?" I wrote.

Crickets greeted me in response.

It caught me off guard. Though I hadn't necessarily envisioned the two of us becoming besties again, I also never imagined that she'd cut off contact entirely, and without any explanation.

I talked to other friends, many of whom hadn't had any communication with her either.

"I've reached out several times but got nothing," said her friend from elementary school.

"She replied to one of my texts, but that was over a month ago," shared another.

Six years after her initial disappearance, nearly every person who'd once been a part of Sarah's life—friends from middle school, co-workers, even people with whom she'd never had any outward conflict—had stopped

hearing from her. Her complete and utter withdrawal from everyone she'd once known seemed to have been indiscriminating.

First, I was in denial. The Sarah I knew wouldn't flat-out ghost a friend—especially not one to whom she had confessed a deep fear of being discarded. From our many conversations, I knew that loss in itself was painful to her, but even more so the sudden, senseless, and inexplicable variety. She knew I felt the same way about it. That I too felt unsettled and at times even hopeless at the realization that you can let people into your life and share so many moments, and the next day they can just be...gone.

I did think about how Sarah was often spread so thin. Constantly saying yes to things. How whenever she accepted a social invitation, her eyes would grow to the size of tennis balls. They'd glow with light. It was like you'd just invited her on an all-expense paid trip to Europe ("Can we go?" she'd exclaim). She was a friend of constant emphatic "yes's, the consistency and enthusiasm of which made the discomfort with saying no that rode just beneath them harder to spot.

The eager-to-please Sarah who lives on in my memory never wanted to let anyone down. She hated to disappoint. And with time it seems understandable, or only natural, that the person who lets in everything will at some point begin to feel depleted. Maybe Sarah felt the overwhelm for a while before deciding she didn't want to hold it anymore. Part of that decision involved shutting everything and everyone out. *Narrow the focus. Switch off the static. Vacuum out the fluff.*

Maybe disappearing from everyone's lives was her way of re-gaining control over her own—the polar opposite approach to before. Maybe it was her way of putting herself first. A radical act of self-prioritization. Maybe it was the decision she felt she had to make to be happy and start anew.

I can't fault her for that. Because maybe she feels infinitely free now.

Or maybe the guy she was dating played some role. I know it isn't my place to speculate much more beyond that.

Burying her memory in the back of my consciousness, I went on with my life—though I would still think of her from time to time.

She still shows up in my dreams every now and again. My mind will, occasionally, continue trying to make sense of what happened. I'm not sure I'll ever really know what did. Maybe the answer is simple—Sarah outgrew her old life, and everything that had once been a part of it. Or maybe it's too complex to put into words, and even she herself won't ever fully know.

What I do know is that letting go is one of life's uncomfortable but inevitable requirements. I believe in every person doing what ultimately feels right for them; and that each of us should be free to populate our worlds with those who most align with our current embodiments—not with the sterile remains or detritus of whoever we once were.

This doesn't mean I don't still miss Sarah sometimes. Very little literature exists on healing from a friend breakup. And yet the abrupt loss of any close relationship cuts deep.

Back to that day on BART eight years later. At moments, I'm convinced the woman is Sarah; at others I'm sure I'm imagining it.

I envision how an interaction between the two of us might play out.

The train stops and we exit. Both of us are transferring to a different train. She sits down on a bench twenty feet away.

As I walk in that direction she looks up from her phone, eyes meeting mine. I look back, registering the recognition in her face as my old friend, to my surprise, doesn't avert eye contact, doesn't evade, doesn't hide—but rather, continues to look my way.

When she waves, I wave back with slight apprehension. Apprehension because she is basically a stranger now, regardless of the past.

I say hi; she says hi back, even using my name.

Questions flood my mind, each competing to be chosen.

Questions like *do you still eat Quaker Oats late at night in bed while watching Bob's Burgers?*

Those thoughts about how everything in this life is passing so therefore what does any-thing mean and who can I trust to be there when my mind finally collapses beneath the weight of that pressing reminder—do they still keep you awake at night?

Do you carry them with you into the morning, cart them through the day, and attempt to empty them from your mind when night descends by filling giant cups (or troughs, more aptly) of wine like the ones you used to pour for all of us on Monday nights? Or has Darren's presence temporarily swept them—and their accompanying negative feel-ings—away?

Does your new partner, your first boyfriend, first long-term relationship, the guy you described as “sort of douche” in your first conversation about him with me, the one who didn't like any of your friends—is he why you no longer need any of us?

Or is the explanation far simpler, and free from dark undertones? Your life took a turn and our presence felt clunky and superfluous in its reincarnation...

There's so much I want to know. Rather than ask these questions though, instead I only comment on her new bangs— to which Sarah smiles in response. I tell her what I'm up to. She says she's been working at a hospital for several years. That she's still with Darren. She briefly asks about my family.

Bart whooshes past. Pigeons disperse from their positions on the tracks below, flying their way up to safety on the platform. A stream of riders exits the train, thrumming be-neath the lofty ceilings as if they're on a high-speed conveyor belt.

Sarah concludes our interaction with, “It was good to see you”— tone somewhat distant, but not altogether cold.

And then we part ways. The train car swallows Sarah up into its metallic belly, and the doors close behind her. BART whooshes off to the sound of ghostly clattering, taking with it the ghost of a soul I once knew so well.

Acknowledgments

There are so many people who put work into this journal behind the scenes, and we are so grateful to them. This page is only a small representation of our gratitude for your time, support, and skills.

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Thank you to Dr. Kim Lacey, our advisor whose title doesn't match all that she does for *Cardinal Sins*. Thank you for fighting for us, for answering dozens of emailed questions, and most importantly, for the chocolate cookies at our celebration. In all seriousness, we are so grateful for your kindness, dedication, and expertise.

Thank you to all of our talented contributors. We hope you're as proud of this journal as we are.

Thank you to our staff. Most of you didn't even know what you were getting into, but you absolutely killed it. We love your passion for the arts and your thoughtfulness. This whole process would have sucked without you.

To everyone we forgot to mention, thank you.

Thank you for reading this the Fall 2022 issue of *Cardinal Sins*. We are so glad to share it with you.

All the best,

Megan Draper, Editor-in-Chief

Gabby Bourgeois, Digital Editor

Biographies

Winners

Neil Carpathios is the author of seven full-length poetry collections. Forthcoming in 2023 are two new books: *Lifeaholics Anonymous* (full-length poetry collection from Kelsay Books), and *The Lost Fragments of Heraclitus* (original aphorisms from Wipf and Stock). Currently, he is Writer-in-Residence at Malone University in Canton, Ohio. He recently lived for one year a few feet from a cemetery, which prompted his poem.

Christopher Hadin is a writer, naturalist, and educator. His work has appeared in *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *The Headlight Review*, *Loud Coffee Press*, *Ponder Review*, *Temenos*, *The Night Picnic*, *Sortes Magazine*, *Sky Island Journal*, and several others. He lives in Ferndale, Michigan in an apartment building once occupied by Jack Kevorkian.

Jury S. Judge is an artist and writer. She was raised in Texas, but somehow lacks an accent. Her metabolism is fast, but her wit is faster. Her art was featured in over 140 literary magazines. She knows too much trivia about classic and exotic cars. Visit her Instagram, @jurysjudge

Holly Morningstar is a freelance occult and fantasy illustrator who still plays paint water or coffee roulette a bit too recklessly. Queer, left of liberal, vaccinated, pro-choice and equal rights believing Feminist nightmare.

Contributors

Jennifer Benningfield is a lifelong Marylander who has been in the (mostly) benevolent thrall of words since receiving “Green Eggs and Ham” as a birthday present.

Elena Botts has lived many places in the northeast and abroad. Elena’s poems have been published in over a hundred literary magazines. Elena is the winner of four poetry contests and has had many books published. Elena’s visual artwork has won numerous awards and has been exhibited in various galleries. Elena has also collaborated on, released and installed sound and moving image artwork, as well as multimedia and conceptual art, and formed a multimedia collective for this purpose, while pursuing

graduate school, human rights, and arts projects. <https://sites.google.com/view/elenabotts/work>

Audra Burwell is a creative writing major with a strong emphasis on fantasy-themed poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction that covers universal subject matter. She studies at California State University Fresno where she is an undergraduate, eventually aiming for a Master of Fine Arts degree.

William C. Crawford is a prolific itinerant photographer based in Winston Salem, NC. See more of his images at bcraw44 on Instagram.

Levi Dodd is an aspiring teacher and avid reader from the Pacific Northwest. Or a machine desperately trying to pretend it’s human. The jury’s still out.

Korinne Ellert currently writes focusing on grieving the loss of her father to suicide and her mother to a drunk-driving accident. She has been published by magazines such as *The Adirondack Review*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Blaze Vox*, *Blue Windows Review*, and *The Blue Lake Review*.

Zary Fekete has worked as a teacher in Hungary, Moldova, Romania, China, and Cambodia. They currently live and work as a writer in Minnesota. They know where papa’s going with that ax...and why a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife... and how Christmas won’t be Christmas without any presents. Twitter: @ZaryFekete

Emma Johnson-Rivard lives in Maryland. Her work has appeared in *Fear-some Critters*, *Coffin Bell*, *Moon City Review*, and others.

Ronan Kok is a 20-year-old student at the University of Amsterdam. Through chronic pains and fluctuating emotions, he found writing as the perfect outlet. And even though his surname might sound unfortunate in English, he is more than happy to find it back, published, in a journal.

Lexi LaJoice is a junior English Education student that wishes she decided to do something else in school because she just can’t get enough of Shakespeare and that one guy who’s obsessed with ravens. She does, however, enjoy her creative writing classes, as they draw out the psychotic satirist in her.

D. S. Maolalai has been described variously by editors as “a cosmopolitan poet” and “prolific, bordering on incontinent.” His poetry has been released in three collections: *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016), *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019) and *Noble Rot* (Turas Press, 2022).

Cameron Morse (he/him) is Senior Reviews editor at *Harbor Review* and the author of eight collections of poetry. His first collection, *Fall Risk*, won *Glass Lyre Press's* 2018 Best Book Award. His book of unrhymed sonnets, *Sonnetizer*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books. He holds an MFA from the University of Kansas City-Missouri and lives in Independence, Missouri, with his wife and three children. For more information, check out his Facebook page.

Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. He enjoys watching movies, petting cats, and thinking about dinosaurs — sometimes all at once. He lives with his wonderful wife, Kelly, in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Guliz Mutlu stated, “I am navigating life with art without any separation, I am in love with art, since I have been drawing. I draw on the newspaper or a book page, listening to the kitchen radio, the rainfall, when sitting with friends, at work even if for a few seconds, solving puzzle... I also write some verses. I draw to love, I draw to do and I draw to hope for. I keep my imagination close to my heart. The real art in life is between hanging on and letting go. I hang on art in life and this is my gratitude. I believe in life and art is at its core.”

Erik Peters is a teacher and avid mediaevalist from Vancouver, Canada. Erik's work and study has profoundly influenced his writing which has been published in numerous magazines including *Coffin Bell*, *Showbear Family Circus*, *Prospectus*, *The Louisville Review*, and *The Dead Mule School*. Check out all of Erik's publications at www.erikpeters.ca or @erikpeters-writes.

Claire Scott is a recently retired psychotherapist who is enjoying having more time to write, take long walks and try to stay ahead of the weeds. She is excited to be spending more time with her five grandchildren who are scattered over the country.

sid sibo has published stories, won an award and an Artist in Residence fellowship, and has been critiqued by noteworthy eyes during workshops. Still, writing earns a person the identity of writer--and the donkeys approve the results included here.

An east coast expatriate retired from college/university teaching, Stuart **Jay Silverman** divides his domestic life between Chicago, IL, and Hot Springs, AR. He sees poetry as a creative art, an attempt to add to a reader's experience of being whether by real or imagined poems. He has 700+ poems in print in 100+ journals here and abroad. His fourth book of poetry, *PORTALS*, debuted on December 6, 2022.

Eleni Stephanides (she/her) is a Spanish interpreter and freelance writer living in Oakland, CA. She has been published in *LGBTQ Nation*, *Them*, *Elephant Journal*, *Tiny Buddha*, *Introvert Dear*, *Peaceful Dumpling*, and *The Mindful Word* among others. In her spare time she enjoys wandering through nature, reading fiction and mental health content, speaking Spanish, and petting cats. You can follow her on IG @eleni_steph_writer and read more of her writing on Medium <https://medium.com/@esteph42190>

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in *Fish Food*, *Streetlight*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Door Is A Jar*, *The Phoenix*, and *The Harvard Advocate*. Edward is also a published poet who has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times.

Dan Wagner is a poet born, raised, and based in Burlington, Vermont. The themes of Wagner's poetry unpack the natural world and its relation to our collective human memory. Wagner has been writing poetry for 10 months and is shocked anything is being published, so it's super cool being here.

Staff

Megan Draper is probably gushing about *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, petting a cat, or planning her next trip abroad. Learn more about her writing at www.authormeganriann.com.

Gabby Bourgeois is a double creative writing and PTW major, as well as a tutor in the SVSU Writing Center. When they aren't talking about writing, or thinking about writing, or daydreaming about a career built on writing, they are ignoring their writing projects in favor of reading, watching D&D campaigns, and playing roguelites.

Taylor Hart is currently a senior studying in PTW and graphic design. She loves reading and writing. Her passion is astronomy, and she is hoping to join NASA someday. Her shared space fact: There are more stars in the universe than grains of sand on Earth.

Kim Lacey is still wondering, like twenty years later, if she remembered to drop off the refill to table 62.

Annaleese Armstrong is a first year PTW major, and a reader and editor for Cardinal Sins! She's also a member of the pom team and the honor program! Like an old granny, her hobbies also include reading, crocheting, and playing scrabble.

Olivia Bruzewski is a fourth year Communications major who runs on coffee and delusion. When not freaking out over homework assignments, she can be found reading a poorly written fantasy novel or hanging out with her sorority sisters.

Megan Cassiday is in the last year of her creative writing degree. She enjoys reading the absurd, the sacrilegious, and everything in between. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *Versification*, *CLOVES*, *Roi Fainéant*, *Bullshit Lit*, and others. You can find her on Twitter @MeganLyn_

Chrissy M. Hansen is an undergraduate student majoring in Creative Writing at SVSU. She has published on a wide variety of issues in academia, from historical Jesus studies to Tolkien studies to Ethics. She has always loved fiction and poetry, particularly epic fantasy writing and surrealistic poetry. She graduates in December 2022 and plans to work as a writer and editor in the future. Outside of academia, she is an activist for LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights, and is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America.

Zach Vance is a Creative Writing major and Religious Studies minor who formerly wanted to go into Psychology but determined it was too much

work. He is currently in his third year as a student at Saginaw Valley State University and his billionth year as a college student in general. In addition to being a reader/editor for Cardinal Sins he is also president of the Episcopal Church at SVSU student organization. He has a cat who he loves very much, and has never kicked a puppy, despite what Editor-in-Chief Megan Draper might say about him.

Katherine Weber is a creative writing major/Spanish minor in her fourth and final year at SVSU. She is a reader and editor for Cardinal Sins. She reads anything fantasy and especially recommends Mary E. Pearson's *Remnant Chronicles* trilogy and Tahereh Mafi's *Shatter Me* series. At any given time, you can find her with at least two half-written novel drafts floating around; maybe someday she will finish one of them.

Submission Guidelines



All general submissions must:

- be submitted through (<http://cardinalsins.submittable.com/submit>)
- include multiple submissions for a single category in one document
- not contain any contact information within the attached document

Text submissions should:

- be in 12-pt. Times New Roman font, single spaced, with 1" margins
- include the title at the top of the piece
- be attached in .rtf, .docx or .doc format

- Poetry should be no longer than 70 lines
- Flash fiction should be no longer than 1,000 words
- Fiction should be no longer than 3,750 words

Artwork/Photography submissions should:

- be 300 dpi or greater
- have high contrast and sharp definition
- be attached in email in .jpeg or .png format
- be saved as their title

Note: photos that have been manipulated with a computer program should be submitted as artwork, not photography

Maximum number of entries:

- Submit up to 3 poems, 3 flash fiction pieces, 2 pieces of fiction, and 2 pieces of creative nonfiction
- Submit up to 5 artwork and photography pieces in each category
- You may submit to as many categories as you would like

Prizes and Judging

Prizes may be awarded to SVSU students, faculty or alumni in each of the 8 categories we publish: poetry, fiction, flash fiction, creative non-fiction, black & white photography, color photography, black & white artwork, and color artwork.

Outside SVSU artists and writers are free to submit and are eligible for publication; however, they will not receive compensation for a general submission category prize.

Staff reserves the right not to award a winner in a particular category if no submissions are judged worthy of the award.

The SVSU-affiliated winner in each category will receive \$100 and recognition within the publication. All submissions will be entered into their respective category's contest unless otherwise requested.

Judging is done through blind, anonymous voting by the editorial staff. Members of the editorial staff are permitted to submit entries for publication but cannot receive prize money for winning a category.

By submitting to *Cardinal Sins* you affirm that the work attached is solely your own. You agree to abide by *Cardinal Sins's* requirements governing submissions. If your work is accepted for publication, *Cardinal Sins* has the right to publish and distribute your work, in print, on the *Cardinal Sins* website, and, on occasion, in an audio format.

You retain all subsequent rights to your work.

Please visit cardinalsins.submittable.com/submit for deadline dates.

Thank you for submitting to *Cardinal Sins*.

These guidelines are subject to change; please visit our website for the most current guidelines.

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