

The Carson McCullers
Literary Awards
2023
Anthology



COLUMBUS STATE
UNIVERSITY

CSU Carson McCullers Literary Awards Winners

Sara Ayres Jordan Prize for Poetry

Sailing Away Three Pieces From An Anthology by Ana Dinis Perez

In Love by Jonathan Stringfellow

the Beauty [and] the Beast by Youbin Park [Student]

Sara Ayres Jordan Prize for Fiction

Yearly traditions by Dallas Curry

The Obelisk Without a Story At the Bottom of the Crimson Manor by Theodore

Pound

HONEY by Youbin Park

Sara Ayres Jordan Prize for Creative Nonfiction

Might as Well by Melanie Miller

Coffee Pot by Youbin Park

Control by Les Anderson

Dr. Daniel William Ross Prize for Expository Essay

Ophelia A Secret Feminist by Melanie Miller

The Black Girl as a Vehicle of Poetry by Cynthia Short

The Good, The Bad, and the Storytellers by Theodore Pound

Anbessita Productions, Inc., Prize for Screenwriting

Ammonia by Dallas Curry

Fall from Grace by Les Anderson

CoffeeHouse by Alexis Barron

Dr. Barbara J. Hunt Prize for Playwriting

The Infinite Coffee Thereom by Dallas Curry

Jackpot by Les Anderson

Jerry Farber by Theodore Pound

High School Carson McCullers Literary Awards Winners

Brick Road Greear Prize for Poetry

coin flip by Sujana Vangala

Oh Mama by Oluwatumilara Owolabi

The Choir by Mark Harris

Dr. Joseph Francavilla Prize for Fiction

Adoring and Ignoring-Inspire by Sucker by Ivie Kirby

Your Mother Was a Girl Once by Sujana Vangala

Mirum-The Volcano by Eva Hammonds

Dr. Jim Owen Prize for Creative Nonfiction

Brothers by Benjamin Badgett

This is my Neighborhood by Peyton Mcrae

Writing Autobiography by Allie Boyd

Susan Schley Gristina Prize for Expository Essay

Black English Essay by Gene Yoon

Interracial Relationships in 19th-20th Century South by Princess Graham

The Need For Increased LGBTQ Support In School by Mark Harris

High School Prize for Screenwriting

Jimmy origin story by Mariella Cerda

Bigger Than The Whole Sky by Kady Moore

The Future is a Terrible Place by Lily Laola Choy

Andrew Ruhs Prize for Playwriting

hesperia by Kady Moore

Untitled Ghost Monologue CW Assignment by Mariella Cerda

Script for Sock-Puppet Slasher by Ella Jervis

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Sailing Away, mother

by Ana Dinis Perez

Let me sail away,
 to the land of unconsciousness,
 cadence in that home key
 away from dull consciousness

Let me wash away all your worries and dismay
 rush them into light, rush them in moonlight,
 for our country will at last be free,
 for our people will at last unite

Let me remind you of the farm's peacock
 Tall, proud, making his grand entrance
 Pretty blues, greens, and browns

Let us rest here,
 say our goodbyes,

Fly without regret
 And fall asleep in its gentle sway

In your eyes,
 ashy blues is what I see
 Ashy blues in tears,
 For there is no greater separation
 Than our minds frontiers~

Upside Down

by Ana Dinis Perez

What is a soul without religion?
 Is it a cloud? A memory?
 Orphic music?

Open casket,
 Lips in red geranium number 07
 Atlas XL in White Rosegold
 "The perfect choice to honor a loved one"

In the event of premature death;
¼ cup butter
⅔ cup packed brown sugar
9 slices of pineapple in juice (from a 20-oz can),
drained!
9 maraschino cherries without stems
1 ⅓ cups of all-purpose flour
1 cup granulated sugar
1 ½ teaspoon of baking powder
½ teaspoon of salt
¾ cup of milk
1 egg
Happiness, does one ever know that?
Prep time: 15 min Servings: 9

To Elena.

Ponce De Leon

by Ana Dinis Perez

The pink house

out on Ponce de Leon,

the burnt tree trunk

en la entrada

my dreams,

the bodiless reality

undertow

take me back to the windmill

watch the herd,

I see Pedro at the gate

I see him content

Don Julio, at the Bodega

praising famous man

buried in peace~

11.20.2018

In Love

by Jon Stringfellow

Steeped Amber –

Quiet and low the Sun rises,
parting and running soft, over
this wasted, tired, and breathless
land of mine.

I set out –

Shifting, beneath the breadth of heat,
in dead-spent boots and slouching hat,
put together
in: worn, out-reaching, noiseless threads
dreaming to catch and entangle
and return.

Standing fixed –

In hopeful delay, below your
embracing, brimming azure wake;
To arrest
These promising hands, ever faithful,
to your sultry, rhapsodic release
of soft rain.

Remain here –

In throws – down to the swell and heave
of a torrid, sully field. Revolve:
the raining
running on
the louping –
rising and
diving peel –
in the thick
full rolling,
blistered wheat
repeating
through crowded
rippling,
dimming crease.
Return, find reprieve, in lasting –
And I, my yield, my holding,
will open as yours.
November, 2022

the Beauty [and] the Beast

by Youbin Park

the Beauty

his beady eyes.
the slit of blackness which stares
back,
the twitching of his snout—
must be looking for flesh—
the claws wrapped between muscle,
the sharpness
of his teeth—it has pierced skin
without question—shines
even in hiding.

he broods
like a dog; after mauling
a beloved house cat,
after many finger-pointing and
shoutings of bad-boy this and calling
on God for help—oh
my god he—he must know,
that he is bad.

how can anyone—how, no, why
should I—love
a wolf with a thirst
for blood?
why am I burdened
with the skin of a rehabilitator?
how am I, the tamer of the wild?

I cannot, yet I must.
I do not wish to, yet I must oblige.

[and] the Beast

when she looks into my eyes,
the outer corners of her eyes droop
like a pathetic attempt to mimic
sadness,
perhaps pity,
though she sees nothing but the hyde
of an animal.

she is only a perfect display without
movement.
yet she stretches her hands,
her pale, thin, brittle fingers—
to tame me. she must know that
she cannot tame what she does not
understand.

what she does not understand, is
anger; no, guilt, perhaps regret, or
no, she does not understand the
guttural fear of being seen without
being known. how can I be
loved without being seen, when to be
seen
means to be feared? but I hope for a
day
that a pair of eyes will pierce beneath
skin, and see that I am not to be
repaired.

I am what I am,
I do not wish to change.

Yearly Traditions

by Dallas Curry

It was that time of year again. The snow was falling from the heavens above leaving a soft white blanket on the ground below. Families were decorating their houses with strings of colorful lights and throwing blowups of different arctic animals on their front yard. The smell of fresh baked cookies and eggnog began to fill the air accompanied by a small scent of peppermint. Wherever she turned Beth saw billboards and flyers shouting BLACK FRIDAY and CYBER MONDAY. Working at the mall became the biggest pain in the ass with the thousands of cars and traffic making her late everyday unless she'd like to get up a half hour earlier which she saw as an impossible option. Beth didn't hate Christmas, in fact a lot of her fondest memories came from this time of year, but when you get older you start to see the holiday as more of a chore than a season of laughter and cheer. Her once in a blue moon holiday bonus either went to gifts she'd send to relatives or plane tickets to travel the country just to enjoy the tradition of wearing matching pajamas and watching Home Alone with her family. She had to work overtime damn near every day because of parents making sure their snot nosed children received every item on their list to Santa. The icing on top of the cake was that after working her ass off everyday was that by the end of the holidays she'd be rewarded with a pair of socks, a book and the occasional amazon gift card. She did have one gift she knew she could expect every year though.

“Bethany Anne Hayes, will you marry me?” Lucas asked her, down on one knee with a ring in hand.

Beth hadn't gotten the chance to hang her coat up in the closet before she was greeted. She dusted her boots to get all the snow out of its crevices before closing the door behind her. She went about her typical dress down routine by unraveling her scarf and pulling her hair out of her beanie. She walked past Lucas who was still awaiting his answer like a dog waiting for the “Go” command.

“Most people are greeted with a ‘how was work’ or even a stereotypical ‘Honey I’m home’ Beth gets greeted with this,” Beth said.

“You’re doing that weird thing where you talk in third person,” Lucas noted, “So is that a no?”

“Yes,” Beth answered.

“Yes it’s a yes or yes it’s a no?”

“Yes it’s a no,” Beth said.

Lucas slid the ring back into his pocket before letting out a prolonged sigh, “Maybe next year.”

“You said that last year and the year before that... and for the past four years.”

Beth began making a cup of hot chocolate reminiscing on the numerous proposals that Lucas has done for her. The first one was at a

festival, the two of them were on a date trying out foods from many different countries. Beth had grown a fondness for curry there. They sat down to enjoy their food and on a whim Lucas pulled out the ring and proposed. Luckily for her the loud music prevented anyone from hearing and seeing what was going on. She remembered quickly grabbing his hand and rushing to the car. She explained to him that she did love him, but wasn't ready for marriage yet. She also gave him a fair warning never to propose in public because it would make for awkward situations and worse case scenario a viral Youtube video. The second time Lucas learned from his mistakes, they were roller skating at an arcade "80's themed night". Beth was wearing a very bright leotard and tutu followed by knee high socks. Her denim jacket was patched up with random patches she'd find at thrift stores. Lucas decided to go full afro that night and sport his old college varsity jacket along with some short shorts. At the end of their date they ended up in the photo booth taking candid and Lucas's plandid. In the last photo Lucas had uncomfortably kneeled in the too small booth and pulled the ring out of his pocket. They still had the photos from that night and laughed at Beth's shocked expression on rough days. The third time Lucas proposed the two of them took a vacation to the Bahamas for the holidays. They were sipping martinis on the beach when the alcohol hit Lucas a little too hard. He took the ring out and proposed on the beach at sunset. The answer remained the same, but Beth remembered the view like it was yesterday. The orange star kissing the horizon makes everything golden. Lucas looked especially handsome with his unbuttoned floral shirt. The fourth proposal was during one of their "relaxation sessions" the two of them effectively hotboxed their bedroom. It took a few weeks to rid the house of the smell, but during it the two of them laughed and reminisced on the times they had in high school before life started kicking them in the ass. After an emotional and confusing time trying to explain to one another how their first date went Lucas pulled the ring out of his night stand and proposed once more. Beth declined the offer. The fifth time was what Beth had just walked into, her boyfriend kneeling on the floor waiting for her to come home from work. It had become somewhat of a tradition at this point though she never mentioned the idea because it might break Lucas's heart. Beth knew though without fail she would be getting a proposal around Christmas time.

"How was work?" Lucas asked.

"Same old same old, a whole lot of parents waiting until the last minute to buy gifts," Beth said.

"Is it really last minute if they have two weeks?"

"It's last minute if it's happening in December."

Lucas began to unload the dishwasher and every so often he'd toss a dish in the sink that still had crud on it. They asked the plumber numerous times if he could fix the water system in the dishwasher so it'd actually work, but their response has always been "you need a new dishwasher." As Lucas continued to put away and eventually wash dishes Beth searched the fridge for ingredients for dinner. They had leftover thanksgiving food that they both had neglected to throw out, a tupperware bowl full of mystery stew and a half eaten sub that smelled like buffalo chicken.

Beth figured it'd be another door dash day which meant an endless amount of fees that she'd have to pay upcharging her simple five dollar meal to twenty.

"What are you in the mood for?" She asked Lucas.

"I could go for some pizza," Lucas answered, "A nice large supreme."

"I can pick it up if you want to go ahead and order it?" Beth said.

"Sounds good. You want anything else?" Lucas asked.

Beth hated confrontation. She knew the question was going to pop up later while they were munching on pizza and watching a movie so she'd rather get it over with now.

"Lucas," Beth began "If you know the answers no then why do you keep proposing?"

It was a heavy question, but Lucas didn't treat it that way. He let out a laugh that was almost contagious like Beth had just asked a childish question.

"Why wouldn't I?" Lucas asked, "Because I love you. Why wouldn't you want to be with the person you love?"

"Are you not with me? I mean we live together don't we. The lease has both our names, our mail comes to this mailbox and we sleep in the same bed. Is sharing a last name really changing it."

"No not really, but it's really just the principle of it. You know, making it official?"

"Funny, you said the same thing in high school about making it official. Is it less official now that we're older?" Beth asked.

"It may seem that way, but I don't know, maybe it's just that when you get older you want bigger things than that. I'd love to have a wedding, have kids and grow old."

"I'm more than happy to have kids with you and have a family."

"-but marriage is off the table?"

"I didn't say that. I just."

The phone rang and Lucas went to pick it up. He was silent for a bit before saying his thank you's and goodbyes.

"Pizzas ready."

Crap. Beth wanted to finish this before pizza so they could have a nice movie night.

Lucas walked up to her and kissed her on the forehead. He then wrapped the scarf around her neck and through her beanie on her head.

"Don't keep me waiting too long."

"And if I do?"

"Well," Lucas smiled and kissed her, "I guess you're worth the wait."

Beth threw her coat on and prepared herself for the cold weather. She looked back at Lucas who was happily searching through their dvd book as well as prepping the couch for his annual pillow fort. Beth smiled softly before leaving the house.

The cold weather instantly went to her nose. It was uncovered and she could feel it going numb and she had no doubt that she looked like a human rudolph. She got into her car and turned the seat warmers on. She just sat in her car for a good fifteen minutes before putting it into drive. She hoped the pizza hadn't gotten too cold.

Beth went into autopilot when she began to drive. It was dangerous, but she had done it so many times before she knew she'd make it to location B in a matter of seconds. She

just couldn't get her mind off the proposal. It normally didn't bother her as much, it's happened so many times she should've felt numb to it. Yet Lucas somehow made it feel so genuine and unique each time. She could never understand that man. His love knew no limits and he seemed to have no shame when it came to proposing year after year. Beth was scared after the first rejection he'd leave her. She was terrified the second time and time after that. No matter how many times he did it though he'd carry on with his life and their relationship like nothing had ever happened.

Does it mean anything to him anymore or is it just tradition?

Lucas seemed content with being with her despite her many rejections. It's not like she didn't want to marry him. She wasn't going to waste his time, that'd be an awful thing to do. Lucas and her had been together for eight years. All the way through high school and college. They've seen the best and worst of each other. Through the good and bad they've always stood by each other's side. Lucas was the man Beth loved. Which is why she was so scared to lose him.

What are you doing?

Beth rested her head on the steering wheel as she parked into the Papa John's lot. Working at the mall she'd seen time and time again couples hanging out, proposed (good and bad) and people ring shop. The thought of all of that couple stuff made the teenager in her feel all giddy. She was ecstatic when Lucas asked her out for the first time freshman year. They were working on a science project and he confessed his feelings to her. She admired his bravery because that was something she could never do. Putting yourself in such a vulnerable position had to be horrifying. Beth recalled the numerous promposals she'd been given over their high school years, each getting wilder. They started pretty tame with a posterboard waiting in the cafeteria and drastically went up to decorating her room with fairy lights and balloons as he played their song on a ukulele. Anything Lucas did was so meaningful and he never skipped a beat when it came to letting her know how he felt. Lucas was the perfect man. Lucas was the only man. Lucas was Beth's first and only boyfriend.

Beth couldn't recall any boy liking her until Lucas. In grade school all the boys ran from her shouting about her cooties. Middle school was no better. Beth was a late bloomer which led to a lot of self image issues that she'd eat away at which only led to obsessive weight gain. Then when she was bullied for it she practically starved herself. In the span of 3 years (6th to 8th) she had gone from weighing 170 lbs to 90 lbs. When she reached ninth grade her self image was completely ruined. She hid behind her hoodie and when she couldn't her hair. She didn't bother making friends because every friend in middle school had dropped her to become "popular" and as much as she was glad for it, her bullies even forgot she existed. Beth was a nobody, she felt invisible until Lucas made her feel seen.

Lucas went to a nearby school for his early years, but transferred to her high school for their arts program. The kid was loud and obnoxious, the worst part was that he had no shame. He walked up to any and everyone introducing himself, talking and telling jokes. It didn't matter if you were a band kid, jock or preppy girl: everyone loved Lucas. Which is why it stunned Beth when he chose her as his science partner. They hadn't spoken a word to each other, but when it was time to pick partners he brushed by everyone and went to her desk. Beth didn't forget the words he said.

"Tsuki ni itte modoru," He said.

It was a reference to the shirt she was wearing. It was an old anime she'd watch in middle school about aliens. It meant "to the moon and back"

Tap tap tap.

A Papa John's worker was knocking on her window. Beth rolled the window down, he let her know that the store was closing soon and she let him know she was picking a pizza up.

The inside of the Papa Johns was warm and smelled like burnt bread. She hoped that was a poor unfortunate soul's food and not their own. The teenage worker handed her the box labeled "Lokas Supreme" and told her to have a nice night.

Beth still couldn't understand the feeling she was feeling, but she knew she didn't want to go home until she understood it. She hadn't been gone for home that long, but any longer and Lucas would grow worried. The temperature would keep dropping the longer she stayed out and not only that the pizza would grow cold. Beth looked down at her phone, its blue luminescent light illuminated the car. The image of her and Lucas in the Bahamas was blocked by a few unread emails and a notification from her Starbucks app. She cleared them before calling someone who could maybe understand how she was feeling.

"Yo," the voice answered.

Beth's younger sister didn't hesitate to bombard her with questions about what she was doing for the holidays and if she and Lucas would stop by home at some point. Tessa was 17 years old and very outgoing. The complete opposite of Beth.

"Tess," Beth whispered, afraid someone would hear her, "I need to talk to you."

"What's up?"

"I'm having... boy trouble"

The phone went quiet for what felt like an eternity to Beth before Tess laughed.

"Boy trouble? You've been with Lucas for what? A decade and you're having boy trouble?" Tessa said, "oh no you didn't break up did you?"

"No," Beth replied.

"Good," Tessa sighed, "Thought I'd have to give him a piece of my mind. So what is it then?"

"Marriage."

"You finally said yes?"

"No, but-" Beth stopped herself.

What was she trying to say? What did she want help with?

"I don't know if I can marry Lucas."

"What do you mean?" Tessa asked, "Hasn't he been proposing for the past few years?"

"Yes and- you haven't told mom about it have you?"

"No, I've wanted to but I guess after the first few rejections she'd be hounding you about breaking that poor boys heart-"

"I'm not breaking his heart. I just- I don't know," Beth said, "Why... Why is it me of all people? Why does it have to be me? I'm honored every time, but each time I just have to say no because Lucas needs better."

Tessa took a pause before speaking again.

"Look Beth, Lucas doesn't need anything. Lucas doesn't deserve better because there is no better. He has you and that's all he's ever cared about. I've always looked at you and Lucas as my example of love more so than I did for mom and dad. I was in grade school when you first brought Lucas over and the first thing he did was ruffle my hair and call me his kid sister. He was sweet and gentle and always brought gifts for mom and me. He always helped dad when he needed something- that man is a gem. But so are you. Yeah you probably don't think so, but you were the one who helped me learn my dance routine for the talent show. The amount of hours we spent together

on my last minute projects is uncountable. You were the one who turned me into who I am today... you're basically my role model. The way you see Lucas is how I see you and I know he sees you just the same," Tess said.

Beth thought about what Tessa had told her. As she continued to drive home she felt the steam come up from the pizza and warm her car. The smell of melted cheese and cooked vegetables made her stomach growl.

"Beth? You still there?" Tessa asked.

"I guess I'm just scared of it," Beth admitted.

"Scared of marriage?"

"Yes, it's like with this relationship you have to keep taking steps up stairs. The next step is always bigger and takes you up higher until the top. Marriage is a big step; all we do is share a last name, nothing else really changes, but the moment we take that step, we take another step and a bigger one."

"You're scared of taking those steps?"

"I'm scared of taking the fall," Beth said, "It's one thing to date someone for a month and break up. Sure you'll be upset but you'll move on. What if it doesn't work out? We'd be divorced. I'd fall down all those steps. It would've been eight years gone. I haven't dated anyone else and I don't want to. You know how redundant that must feel? I would've been married to someone and had a future then if it fails in asking someone their favorite color again. No, I don't want that... I like Lucas's favorite color. He likes green because of his grandparents pasture and the summers he spent there. His favorite food is pizza, his go to movie is Die Hard, he hates celery and his biggest fear is clowns. All the special things I know would be gone if it doesn't work out."

"Are you saying you'd be less upset if he left you now? As opposed to say a year later?"

"I don't know," Beth admitted, "Maybe."

"Word of advice... Don't set yourself up for failure. I know you two and it'll work out, but even if it doesn't, don't waste the time you have with him. Talk to him about how you feel. I believe in you."

Perfect timing

Beth pulled into the driveway and said her goodbyes to Tessa. She grabbed the pizza and headed inside. Lucas was hidden within his fortress of comfort.

"Oh there you are. I was starting to worry."

"Sorry, I-" Beth started, "I got held up."

She placed the pizza on the table and Lucas joined her. They ate in silence, but in the background she could hear the tv.

"Is that Die Hard?" Beth asked.

"Yeah, it's a Christmas movie," Lucas laughed.

Beth smiled and looked at Lucas. She loved her over the top goofball. She thought about the times they spent together and all the things she knew she'd never do unless Lucas was there. Sing Karaoke at a bar, volunteer at a magic show and anything else that required her to have a bit of confidence. Lucas brought out the best in her and she always wanted him to. It was her turn to be confident.

Beth pushed her chair out, the wheels scraped the floor and a loud squeak echoed in their home. She walked over to Lucas and stared at him in the eyes.

"What-"

She shushed him. She'd seen him do it numerous times so she just mimicked it. She got down on one knee and proposed.

"Lucas Alexander Cruz... Will you marry me?"

Lucas smiled and jokingly put the ring on his pinkie.

"Yes."

The Obelisk Without a Story at the Bottom of the Crimson Manor

by Taylor Aspinwall

The following partial-translation was found in a monastery in north eastern Europe. Its contents were dated to pre-twelfth century. Records state its origins are to an abandoned "courthouse" belonging to a once thought fictional secret society. The three most readable portions:

"They made us do things. Unspeakable things. Ungodly things. To my family, to my friends. They used our blood in their rituals and now our skin is peeling off and we are going blind. No one has died in sixty years. No one remembers their names.'

'Help us.'

'Kill me.'

"The obelisk without a story, beneath the crimson manor, beckons you to the bottom.'

'Shut up, Shut up. There is nothing beneath the manor. We have looked and looked and looked.'

'We need a priest, not a chinamen.'

'We tried a priest. They are all dead.'

'They are dead because you killed them all.'

'No, you killed them.'

'Stop fighting. Is this man going to save us or not?'

'He is some sort of samurai. Look at his head and his funny uniform.'

'Where are his weapons?'

The ghouls are very persistent. 'I am not a samurai. What is the nature of this evil?'

"The worst, the worst of evils. When they built that house on the hill, the children disappeared. A few at first, then all at once. All gone. Can you find them? Will you help us? Please.'

2

"The mother killed her three children but the husband got away. He came screaming to town center. He asked for our help. We killed him too because we wanted revenge. Will you help us?'

'He can't help us, he does not have weapons.'

Readable portion number two:

I approach the crimson manor. It has no windows. Dried blood stains the porch. The double doors are heavy and brown and creak as they open.

I take droplets of the glowing green juice.
 The inside is soulless but unlooted. Cobwebs have conquered the corners.
 Weeping emits
 from the basement.
 The basement is small and supported by a single stone column. The floor is crowded by
 weeping rotten ones scraping the floor digging for their children.
 'Boy.'
 'Girl.'

They do not remember their children's names, only that they are gone.
 Stairs covered in thick blood. Mushroom scabs moldy wood.
 Upstairs in the children's bedroom are three dry corpses. Two little ones on two little
 beds. Mother's skeleton hand still clutches the butcher cleaver. The stench claws into my nose.
 Master bedroom is still covered in blood. I hear an animal in the wall and soon discover a
 large hole underneath the bathtub in the bathroom adjacent. I take two more droplets of the
 glowing green juice before going further.

3

I crawl underneath into the floor recess. I discover a staircase beneath the king's bed. As I
 crawl down I trigger a mechanism and the bed swings upward.
 The spiraling tunnel below the bed lights up, torch-mechanism. I descend.
 I encounter a legless boy ghoul.
 'Who is there? How did you find me? Please, I just want to be left alone.
 Please leave me alone.'

I ask the child what he is doing beneath the floor. He lives there, he says. One of the three
 children.
 'My mother cut my legs off for wetting the bed. Then mother and father ran away, and now
 strange ugly people keep coming into our home and living in our basement. Have you seen my
 parents? Are they still mad at me?'

'No. You seem stressed. Have you tried meditating?'

He has not so I explain meditating to him. He begins to try as I head deeper down. He
 calls after me, 'Wait. Not that way. There are dead people.'

I tell him to keep meditating, and that I am from the Royal Courthouse.
 'It gets worse. Stay with me. I do not know how to meditate.'

A door full of locks stands wide open. Inside is a small room with a table splitting down
 the middle. The table is covered in rusty chains. One small skeleton lies crumpled against and
 attached to the table. The wall is covered in rusty chains. They are all filled,

except one, with
 little skeletons who sag to the floor, their arms floating above them. Dark
 puddles of filth
 accumulate beneath the bones like sitting pillows. It no longer smells bad.
 There is another door
 across the room. Beyond is a ladder downward.

4
 Beneath the dungeon is a cove with a flowing river that falls into the crashing
 ocean. The
 sun is setting. Facing the opening is a moldy loveseat. The walls of the cave
 are decorated with
 paintings of bison and hunters and hands. There is another opening deeper
 in the cave. It is
 smaller yet. I take two more droplets of the glowing green juice and then I
 crawl.
 The cave drawings continue. On my left is a fishing village. Corpses float
 beneath the
 houses along with dead fish. A mob marches down the tunnel, but are lost in
 a storm of spiraling
 stars and twinkling clouds. The odd cosmos becomes a garden to a crimson
 house, without any
 windows, which floats on the ceiling of the tunnel. A bald man in a red and
 black uniform crawls
 out of a hole underneath the crimson house, down the tunnel across the
 ceiling, past people
 begging for help, past a scared man, past a room full of beautiful women, past
 food and water,
 past the past, past the present, past the future, past silver and gold, past
 crystals of all shapes and
 sizes that overwhelm the mural. Further, the monk turns into two men
 talking to a giant obelisk.
 The obelisk spans from the bottom of the right wall to the bottom of the left.
 Its tip points
 downwards as it crawls across the ceiling, surrounding me with layers of
 nonsensical carvings of
 sentences of swirls and spirals and squiggles and something that looks like a
 squirrel or an elf.
 The tunnel grows smaller and the cave paintings turn into nuggets of silver
 buried in the
 rock. They come loose at the slightest nudge to reveal yet another, larger vein.
 I keep crawling.
 The silver turns to gold and the veins grow thicker and thicker. The gold
 turns into a massive
 cave filled with glowing crystals and I can stand up. As I go deeper, the
 crystals become softer,
 waving as I walk past. Deeper still are diamonds so soft I could make clothing
 out of them.

And then I see it, the obelisk without a story, at the bottom of the crimson
 manor.

5

And he leaned over to me without moving, without bending or stretching his
 faces of
 incomprehensible, and asked, 'what do you want?'
 To which I mutter, 'well, nothing.'
 To which he responded, 'very well,' and then stood back up.
 So I turn around and leave.
 Below is the final portion we were able to recover:
 'Did you find our children? Did you break our curse?'
 'Did you save us from eternal damnation?'
 'Did you save our souls, did you solve all our problems, did you see an obelisk
 without a story
 below the crimson manor?'
 After I return to the surface, they would not stop following me and
 screaming.

'There is nothing beneath the crimson manor. Your problems are your own.'
 6 A few hours later, I went to check on her again, but this time when
 I put my ear to the door to listen, she was awake and talking to Spot. Faintly
 through the door, I heard, "It's all going to be okay. My daddy will come find
 me. I lost him one time in the store, and he found me in that really big store.
 If he could find me then, I know he can find me now. I just know it. I know
 my daddy isn't home all the time, but he will be able to tell that I'm gone, and
 he will come for me." I opened the door, and she stopped talking. She stared
 at the bedspread.

"Hey, beautiful. It is 2 o'clock, which means you have an hour
 to explore your new house. Do you have to go to the bathroom? Are you
 hungry?" She shook her head yes, but still refused to make eye contact with
 me. She also didn't move. I walked over to the bed, and I sat down next to
 her, taking her in a bear hug. "I know this is different, but believe me, you are
 going to love being here. I promise." I kissed the top of her head and got up.
 I started walking towards the door. "You can sit there all you want, but you
 only have an hour to be outside of this room, so suit yourself." After a few
 minutes, she got up off the bed and walked to the door. "Good girl. See, we
 are making progress already." I smiled at her, but she stared at the ground.

"The bathroom is across the hall, but you will need to tell me when
 you have to tell me when you need to go to the bathroom, so I can unlock the
 locks. You can't lock the door from the inside, just so you know. Go on ahead,
 don't be shy." She walked into the bathroom, and I shut the door, standing
 outside of it. Spot had made his way out of Haley's room and stared up at me.
 "What do you want, dog?" I heard the sound of running water, and I opened
 the door. "Now, what can I make you for lunch?" I ran my hand through
 one of her pigtails. Her hair was as yellow as golden thread. It was the most
 blonde I had ever seen hair. Any girl would have been lucky to have that hair.

"Grilled cheese, I guess" She looked at her feet, as if they were the
 most interesting thing on the planet.

“Excellent! Come into the kitchen, and have a seat.” She followed me into the kitchen, and she sat down at the far end of the table. “Did you sleep well earlier? I hoped you would. You did a lot of crying earlier.”

“I want to go home.” Her voice was weak and powerless, repeating a phrase that she knew wouldn’t accomplish anything.

“That didn’t answer my question, beautiful. I asked about how you slept.” I was warming up the stove and putting butter in the frying pan.

“I want to go home. I want to see my mom.” My anger was rising. She wasn’t going to get to go home. She was already home. Why didn’t she get that? She started to cry again as I was finishing her grilled cheese. I put the plate in front of her, and I took a seat across from her. I watched as she took tiny bites, biting off the edges of the grilled cheese before eating the middle part. When she finished, I took the plate from her and started to do the dishes. I heard her behind me, “You can let me go, you know. I promise I won’t tell anyone. I just want to go home. Please let me go home.” There were tears streaming down her face and cheeks.

I slammed my hand down on the counter. “Damnit, Addie! How many times do I have to tell you?! This is your home!”

“Addie? Who is Addie?”

“I mean Haley. Addie is no one. This is your home now, Haley, and that’s final. Now, go to your room.” I was shaking with anger, shaking with rage. How could have I been so stupid to mix up the names? They did look a lot alike, Addie and Haley. They had the same golden hair, the same toothless smile. I walked down the hallway and locked Haley in her room. I continued on to my bedroom, laying down on the bed, like I had done earlier. I picked up the picture frame off of the bedside table. Addie. She had been so young when the picture was taken. She would always be young. Young and beautiful. She would never be like her mother. She would never be like me, and that was because of me. It was all my fault. I placed the picture frame back on the bedside table, and I closed my eyes.

When I woke up, there was barely enough daylight left to even call it day. I got out of the bed, and I went to Haley’s room. When I walked in, she was holding her stuffed dog and drawing pictures on her white board. Her face was still red from all the tears. Spot sat dutifully at her side and only briefly looked up at me before returning his head to her thigh. “I’m really sorry that I yelled at you earlier, baby girl. I shouldn’t have done that, and I’m sorry. Are you hungry for some dinner? I can make waffles. You like waffles.” She shook her head, refusing to speak to me, but she followed me into the kitchen. I took two waffles out of the freezer, and I put them in the toaster.

“You know that my mom and daddy are going to find me, right? They always do whenever I’m lost. They are looking for me right now, I bet. You’ll get in trouble because you are a bad man.” My anger flared up so fast that I didn’t know what was happening until it had already happened. I had taken the coffee mug from this morning, and I had thrown it in her direction, not to hurt her, not to scare her, but to get her to shut up about her stupid parents. I was her dad now. She just didn’t seem to get it. The mug had been heavy enough, and she didn’t see it coming since she was always looking down at

the damn table. I heard the thud, and I heard the mug shatter on the floor.

I ran over to my beautiful, blue eyed girl. She was bleeding from her head, and she wasn’t breathing. I never meant to hurt her! She was supposed to be the one, but she had just made me so angry. Spot came over to her, licking her head. Tears poured out of me, as I pushed him away. I tried to make her breathe again; I tried chest compressions, and I tried breathing into her mouth. I looked at the clock. 8:04. I hadn’t even had her 12 hours before I had screwed up. I messed up again. I picked up her lifeless body and took her to her room. I wrapped her in her Frozen bedspread. I put her plush dog in her arms, and I closed her eyelids. I walked to the back door, and I carried her outside. I found the third tree behind the shed. I laid her body next to the three other graves that were back there. I went to the shed, and I grabbed a shovel. I dug Haley a grave, right next to Addie’s, since they looked so much alike. They could have been twins, except Addie had been three. If her mother would have been alive to know what I had done, she would have killed me.

I returned the shovel to the shed, and I walked slowly back to the house. I had lost my beautiful girl. Again.

In the weeks to come, I burned Haley’s lunchbox and her bookbag. She had been such a spitting image of Addie when I found her. I just knew that she was going to be the one. I returned the decals to the store. The worker asked if my daughter liked the color, and I lied saying that she loved it, just didn’t want the decals.

Rosie. Her name is Rosie, and she loves the color red. Her bookbag is a bright red, so are her fingernails. Rosie lives two neighborhoods away from where Haley lived, and three away from where Rebecca lived. Rosie has the curliest blonde hair, and she is missing her two front teeth. Rosie waits on her bus at 8:10 every morning. She is beautiful and perfect. I have to have her; I have to make her mine.

Honey

by Youbin Park

Until this moment, it seemed like the words he used were pure honey—smooth and sweet—when swallowed, the bitter taste of words that never made past her throat retreated along with her desire to leave; the overwhelming sweetness cured the aches of her throat from the hidden episodes of screams and cries demanding her freedom. It poured into her ear like golden poison, turning her brain into an amalgamation of tissues and muscles, deteriorating her thoughts into a sugary pool of nothing. It almost seemed essential to her now, to hear him speak—to be fascinated by those words, to be convinced once again, and to drown in his love—she always thought she could not live without it.

But honey, although sweet, was not vital for her survival. Honey, although liquid, was not water. Honey, although dense like the atmosphere around them, was nothing compared to oxygen. By the time she realized such details, she no longer desired honey; she desired freedom.

It had to be done now, or at least that is what her mind demanded. Without a second thought, she began fumbling toward the exit. He questioned her as she got closer to the bedroom door, but this time she provided an eloquent excuse fitting for his taste. His eyes rolled back and forth as if he was scanning her face for a sign. She froze, her hands clammy and her feet anxiously pointing toward the exit. When he finally redirected his eyes to his beloved novel, she fled.

She did not put much thought about packing her belongings—the thought of leaving, once a minuscule spark, had fanned into a flame, now unable to be extinguished. Her first attempt at mindlessly packing a suitcase proved to be rather disastrous—so with nothing but a white bathrobe on her body, she rushed to the doorway.

At the end of her run stood not the exit, but him. He stood in front of the door like a guard—with his hands behind his back and his feet shoulder width apart.

He begged her not to leave, and without looking at him, she might have thought him sincere. But she knew the look on his face without laying eyes on him: hollow eyes and a straight mouth pursed just enough to convey frustration, yet no true signs of desperation.

Without turning around, she reached for the knob, and with a satisfying click the outside world awaited.

However, before her first step—before the howling winds could sweep her off and the starlight could guide her path—she felt a spreading pain in her back. The pain became unbearable, and before she could comprehend the situation, she was sprawled on the floor. She laid on the ground, her white robe now bearing scarlet blooms from her wound, oddly resembling a flower.

The last thing she heard was the sweet sound of honey.

Might as Well

by Melanie Miller

“The emotion is Janus-faced; we are torn between nostalgia for the familiar and an urge for the foreign. As often as not, we are homesick most for the places we have never known.”

—Carson McCullers, “Look Homeward, Americans.” Vogue.

Backwater

The leather stung the bottom of my thighs, bouncing in place as I reached my arm behind me. The crevice between the bench and back panel was a mess of jumper cables, tools, and coke cans. I waded through the litter as the truck pulled onto the road, eventually discovering an oil-stained t-shirt to set beneath me. Desperately, I cranked down the passenger side window to an influx of not-much-cooler air and humidity. Red, white, and blue threads fluttered on the rearview, becoming caught and tangled on the gold-colored “19” that gleamed at the top.

Trees, creeks, and final reminders of spring shot for miles in all directions. Cigarette ash danced along the rims of cupholders as the mileage increased. I unhooked the visor, positioning it over the passenger window in a failed attempt to block out the white sunshine pulsating from beyond the woods. A canopy of leaves and Spanish moss shielded each creek we crossed, briefly cooling the air before the heat infiltrated the cabin, trapping us in its perpetual swelter. Notes of magnolia and honeysuckle popped in from the windows, the final adieu of spring. Underneath the façade, bottom notes of wet earth and decay lingered: the introduction to southern summertime.

The city tried to change, but always remained familiar. Outlines of spray paint cracked through fresh enamel, corporations traded buildings, and lined along the sidewalks were orange cones that reminded me of the past and suggested what was to come. As much change that was occurring, the city remained asleep, hardly mapped. The only reliable constant, untouched by time or force, was the river. Patches of yellow and orange peered through the trees onto the trail as we followed the current. We followed it southbound as the crow flies before reaching the old boat dock. A slab of concrete suspended at least 25 feet in the air above the water, supported by a series of vertical pipes from a cliff. Digging through the brush, we ventured until the pipes were in reach, using them for leverage.

It didn't move. It stood as lifeless as the crane that loomed over Broadway for months, like a backwater. Rubber soles scratched against the pavement as he kicked off his shoes. Our toes dangled over the edge as the sun sank behind the river. Looking down, I estimated that the fall would be roughly 6 seconds, 6 irreversible seconds. The leading moments never phased me, though. Regardless of what was bound to happen, those three words on 2nd Avenue, collapsed now, were ingrained into my mind. The cicadas began to whine as he counted down. One: a damp breeze washed over us, briefly calming the cicadas' shrill before rising to a crescendo. Two:

The sky darkened, showing the true murkiness of the water and impenetrable by light. I wondered what it was like underneath, if it was as still as it was from above. The most seemingly innocent things always held the most jeopardy, a modern Pandora's box. Before three, he turned to me with a grin and let out a sigh. His hand brushed against mine, fingers interlocking into a pact that pulled us in.

Georgia Fireflies

Heavenward, the cotton candy sky stirred and fused together into a purple smog of chemtrail scrawls. Just like sand in the desert, the concrete's retention of the November heat fell with the sun. She rolled towards me and grinned, her eyes like half-moons reflecting the flicker of the streetlight overhead. Beams of white raced from below the hill towards us before our conversation carried to the curb. She told me she wanted to leave, that nothing could get worse from here. Debt-ridden before high school, couch surfing throughout the city, friends dropping like flies each year before we could graduate high school, the endless trials and tribulations of putting down roots for them to be weeded. Her eyes trickled without diverting gaze, staring out at the twists and turns of the neighborhood as if they were transparent. I reached for the pack in my back pocket and lighted the lucky for her.

They drifted around the corners haphazardly, the cool November air rushing through all four windows as the 808s reverberated throughout the city and my spine. The solemn neighborhood released into a road just outside of the main parkway that stretched through the entire city. On the corner, a small convenience shop stood with white LEDs, bright enough to illuminate the junkyards surrounding it. They parked in the center of the small lot as I received the order. A case of Bud Light, Copenhagen Wintergreen, and two packs of Camel Crush. I collected the equal distribution of change, split four ways. She and I hopped out as they stayed behind and waited. The lights buzzed hard in the night, harmonizing with the melody of frogs and crickets. Opening the barred door, my eyes dilated to the fluorescent fixtures that hung overhead.

She talked up the owner at the counter as I beelined for the back. I repeated the list in my head as I scanned over the cases in the fridge, eventually discovering it at the bottom. The cool air seeped out as I dragged the case out, heaving it towards the counter like a pirate with treasure. She already had the cigarettes and dip in hand as he rung up the case. He gave us our total as I sprawled the change onto the counter, an abundance of coins and ones. I counted it out and paid the amount, no ID ever necessary with him. He smiled at us as we made for the door, telling us to have fun. Waving goodbye, we lugged our treasure into the night.

Back in the front yard, they broke open the case on the porch. Bits of cardboard and cigarette butts hid in the grass to be discovered in the morning. We sat in the driveway, flipping the boxes and packing them on the back of our left wrist in a symphony of triplets. The tear of the foil sent a call for the rest to form a semicircle on the lawn. Everyone stood

around us, talking and laughing. Amber burned bright as they dragged, temporarily shielding their faces from recognition. I flipped a lucky in the pack meticulously and picked another to smoke before realizing I lost the light. One of the guys leaned his face into mine, lighting my smoke with the cherry of his. He cupped his hands around our mouths while I dragged, waiting for the crackle of the paper to sound, its bitter chemicals coating my mouth. Loose tendrils of smoke and ash lifted from our faces, distorting our surroundings in a haze that staggered between familiarity and the foreign. I glanced to my left where I saw her same, blank stare from earlier. Only this time, a grin escaped the corner of her mouth, slightly parted as the white filter dangled.

“Y’all ever seen a Georgia firefly?” one of the guys asked the group aloud. The answer was trivial. Balancing the burning butt between his index and thumb, he flicked it at us. The rest of the night was filled with red-hot cherries soaring through the sky.

Tea Leaves

Doodles, profanities, and signatures covered the blackboard wall. At the end of the love seat, past the feet of a homeless man who was escaping the elements of the weather, I grabbed a piece of chalk from an old paint bucket. Following suit, I etched my name into the center in my best penmanship, pink dust coated my hands. I saw him at the counter chatting up the only barista on duty. They leaned into each other intently, only diverting gaze to let a smirk or laugh greet the mahogany floor. The stronger the aroma of coffee grounds and tea leaves grew, the more their conversation dwindled before I finally made it to the counter. The hour hand of a clock behind the counter climbed north. I asked if it was alright if I took a quick walk outside to clear my mind. He dismissed the interaction and continued with the barista as I headed for the door. Before the chimes could clank against the glass he warned me from the back of the café that if I wasn’t back in an hour, I was on my own for a ride.

Winter air bit my skin as the door closed behind me, an unusual cold front for the south. I wasn’t sure where to go as I was unfamiliar with downtown, so I decided to walk in a single direction. I was playing it safe; I always had to play it safe. The streetlamps glided on the right half of my face as the torn awnings roared in the wind on the opposite side. Almost every other lot of the buildings downtown were vacant, exposed brick weathered and adorned in graffiti. I tiptoed through paths of glass shards that were never too far away from a shattered shop window. Occasionally, the buzz of fluorescent lights would echo chamber through a barred window of a bistro, a reminder of where I am.

A perpetual loop is what the city felt like, one where the faster I ran, the further away I strayed from the beginning and end. It wasn’t supposed to be like this, I thought. Dad always had the best memories from his youth, traveling to Spain for his senior trip, accompanying his professor at a bar to pass his finals, selling Levi’s over the Berlin Wall. At the corner of 11th and

Broadway, I approached the first crosswalk. The street was lonely, absent from the low hum of an engine. Without waiting for the orange hand to switch, I picked up my pace when a cat pranced across the road. It fled west, disappearing behind an alley as quick as it had appeared.

On the next strip, metal clinked between my feet as I kicked up the street. Up until that point, my life felt trivial, passing me by as I stood as a passive bystander. I tried to reassure myself, that I was only 13, that there were years to come, to no avail. An unshakable feeling of hopelessness engulfed me, saying that this city was as good as it gets for me. Strip after strip, I walked through darkness, guided solely by the amber glow of streetlamps. On the next strip of buildings on Broadway, pass the intersection of 12th, I stumbled in front of a parking lot when the metallic object chimed after a final kick. Picking up the sole of my converse, orange reflections of a streetlamp bounced off several exposed syringes.

My stomach pitted and I tracked the tea leaves and coffee beans back to the café. My ignorance resisted fear, forcing me to rely on instinct. Back at the café, I found him waiting by the door cupping his hands to his mouth as his breath became visible. He asked if I felt better, to which I had no answer. Did I feel better? I didn’t know. The car ride was silent, passing through the sleepy town as I resided still in my mind. I wondered if Dad and I were different. Slumping against the window, I closed my eyes. I think Dad made the most of what he was given, taking life in his grasp, or lifting the needle off a vinyl to sing his own tune. Driving over a pothole, my head thud against the glass. I lifted my eyelids slowly and fixed my gaze out the window on the words “MIGHT AS WELL” flying past us.

She rushes in. She screeches.

JOE: Well don’t just stand there, DOUG!

DOUG goes to the threshold, still filming. He is shocked by what he sees in the dark room.

Coffee Pot

by Youbin Park

When I was younger, I read everyday. I did not understand the wall of text; I only picked up common words on the page like “is” and “I” and “good,” but I followed these glittering letters in hopes that if I just kept going, one day it would all make sense. Or maybe I was gathering, hunting, hoping to pick off the right words to store, hoping it would fill the void underneath my mother tongue. With these parts, I began writing, switching one word after another with a stolen template, different authors, rotating voices depending on the book I read. Until there were so many words that everything melded together, soldered into a clean sentence.

Then I stopped reading, because I had everything instead, to write. But now, I started reading again. I suspect there is something within me, brewing like days-old-coffee, miserable and lukewarm no matter how long you microwave it, having missed its prime time of consumption. Its signature scent now evaporated as it waits in the pot, hoping that someone so tired will one day pour a cup regardless of what it has become. It’s been sitting for so long, heated then cooled, shaken but never poured, staining the edge of the pot with dark rings. Yet, I still do not have enough words.

So I continue to read. There are no more glittering syllabus on the page; the page, though dense with ink, overlaid with my current words, glows. The thrill of chasing now gone, I am filled with desperation to find the right words. There are so many combinations you can create with just twenty-seven letters, adding the possibility of stringing those sounds into words and words into sentences makes me sick.

I used to believe that I had so much to say with so little words, that once I harvested enough English, that words would grow out of me—spill out of me from every pore of my body—but I am still harvesting. I am still harvesting syllabus and hunting new words because to say I am ready for these words to take over and my story to be told would mean I would have to face the void, the emptiness of what it could have been.

Perhaps if I never had to hunt English and collect it limb by limb, I would have told my story by now. Written a novel, a memoir, whatever it may be as long as I could lay my words down properly. But now, maybe the years of me wrestling, my mother tongue by my side and dictionary in hand, I may have captured English, but not its soul.

So the coffee slowly evaporates. It rots. It stains. The black liquid now sticky like tar, refusing to leave the rounded bottom of the pot. But there is not much I can do, besides collecting my words and hoping there will be something left in the pot when the time comes.

Control

by Les Anderson

In October 2021, I got an email from my honors advisor looking for students interested in doing service abroad. By the end of that week, I’d signed up to take a travel writing course in the Spring and fly to Guatemala for a week of service.

A few days before the trip, I had decided to buy a small floral notebook to write things down with. I was excited and had no idea what the trip was going to look like as I’d never studied abroad before. Was it going to be extremely intellectually stimulating? Would we all gather around every night to read and study? How were things going to be structured? I’m a person who craves order and routine, otherwise I begin to crumble. Therefore, I was preoccupied with making sure I could control those aspects of the trip. Soon I would find out that I couldn’t, and that control is just an illusion in this world. It’s scary and uncomfortable, but it’s true. The moment that we truly begin to accept things without trying to change them is the moment we’re finally free to just simply enjoy our existence. Only through discomfort and the willingness to push through it does real change and acceptance ever occur.

The morning we arrived at the Atlanta airport was painfully cold. I could feel the wind piercing through my clothes and my mask while I waited to grab my bags. When we landed in Guatemala City, my first meal was a homemade veggie sandwich. I ate it in the back of a minivan posturing as a shuttle on the way to Antigua. My classmates and I chatted and pointed outside the window as the minivan rattled over every bump along the dirt road. Everything felt much more familiar once I saw a few Texacos and Taco Bells. I practiced my toddler-level Spanish as much as I could and tried to stay open-minded on the way to Antigua. All of the windows we passed were secured with bars. I had also seen the most barbed wire I’d ever seen in my life in Guatemala City. It was a strange observation to me. Even back home in Atlanta, I knew that crime was an issue, but the windows weren’t usually barred or boarded like that. People still strolled on the sidewalks and appeared to be enjoying themselves. In Guatemala City, armed guards stood outside of most of the doors. Casual pedestrians were very uncommon, and most of the people I saw on the freeway were trying to sell something in the middle of the street. Our driver flew down the road and it made me very uneasy. He was so comfortable accelerating and braking harshly and randomly, and the traffic system there felt like a free-for-all. We would zoom past women wearing baskets on their heads and boys trying to sell candy bars. I felt a deep urge to tell them to get off the road and that it was dangerous, but instead I stayed quiet.

We had a few hours of free time after we got to the hotel in Antigua. My friend and I decided to walk past a crowded square surrounding a beautiful cathedral. As we got closer to the

crowd, we realized that it was a crowd of Guatemalans that were protesting for their right to abortion. I was only able to pick out a few words in Spanish, but I eventually found a woman who spoke English and was comfortable explaining everything to me. I had done minimal research on Guatemala before the trip, but I had no idea that they had the right to protest the same way we did in the US. It was empowering to see, but I knew I should have probably stayed out of it. I had read to tread very carefully in a foreign country's politics, lest I get in a situation similar to that of Otto Warmbier. Looking back on the trip, that may seem like a bit of an exaggeration, but I had no idea what the status quo was there, and I didn't want to risk it. It was better to be safe than sorry.

Just a little over an hour before my group was going to head into the mountains of Vuelta Grande, I got lost while looking for SIM cards. I was tired of being charged \$10 a day for half a gigabyte of data, and I'd figured I could get a deal on a prepaid SIM card while I was there.

However, I've always been intimidated by the brainier things in life like math and spatial awareness. Even when I'm driving to the grocery store in Columbus, I'll use Google Maps just to be sure because I have little confidence in my navigation abilities. In this case, all I needed was the confusion of being in a foreign country, and it created the perfect storm to get hopelessly lost in Antigua. For the most part, I stayed calm.

Seven years ago I learned the "Threes Rule" of survival at 4-H camp. You'll only survive three weeks without food, three days without water, and three minutes without your common sense. I knew I was definitely going to survive, but it's the first tip that popped into my head. As long as I could stay calm and not get paranoid, everything was going to be fine. In a strange chain of events, I ended up further and further away from the hotel and the rest of the group.

English speakers grew harder and harder to come by, and I started to rely on my weathered Spanish dictionary to guide me back to the hotel. Eventually, I heard music and followed that all the way back to the square. I managed to make it back to the hotel just in time to board the shuttles without throwing us all way off schedule.

We headed into the mountains. On the way up, my ears began to pop as we drove higher and higher and the city below us turned into a scene out of a landscape painting. Once we got to the foundation, I felt a sense of unfamiliarity because the layout and the architecture looked different from what I had seen before in the pictures from class. We were immediately greeted by a group of young Guatemalan women and a few dogs, including one named Bovi and one named Osa. Once they told us the dogs were friendly, I felt much more comfortable and relaxed. The dogs were so sweet and seemed to welcome us personally. We trekked up the mountain to our cabins and I immediately felt a difference in the air quality. The air was so fresh, clean, and thin that it almost felt nonexistent. I had to stop to catch my breath several times on the way up there, but I tried not to let it discourage me. I took in the marvelous view and all of my surroundings. I felt completely engulfed in nature. We had this beautiful

view of two volcanos and several villages below that were all framed with luscious trees and beautiful flowers planted by the foundation's founder, Ingrid.

We all got to our cabins and I realized I was definitely going to need to adapt. They were built with wood and poorly insulated, but the fuzzy, handmade quilts folded on each bed gave everything a nice, home-y feel. They served their purpose and I ended up using all of them during the cold, windy nights on the mountain. The shared bathrooms also had an open concept, so the windows faced out to show the view. That definitely took me some time to get used to. At first I was worried about it, but I understood the appeal when I got to huddle under the freezing water in the mornings and admire the gorgeous view.

The first day at FUNCOLI was interesting. I was suddenly hyper aware of all of the power structures at play while I was there. Firstly, there was the obvious phenomenon of American Exceptionalism to take into account. I grappled with this a lot throughout the trip, but I figured that at least instead of sitting at home and griping about everything on the news, I was actually there creating real, tangible change that would improve those people's lives for years to come. During our time there, we helped assemble stoves and teach elementary Spanish to the kids.

The stoves were easier for me because I was able to stay in "control" during that process. A day prior to starting, we watched the man who engineered the stoves assemble one in real time. I felt relieved that it wasn't as complicated as it sounded in the syllabus. Really, most of the work was already done for us because the main part of the stove was already complete. We just had to stack everything up and add sand and spare cooking ashes from the homes. My favorite part of assembling the stoves was watching the families' faces light up and hearing the women enthuse about them with their neighbors in what little Spanish I could pick up.

Teaching the kids was the root of most of my anxiety during the trip, but I tried my best. I finally let go of control and just did the best I could. I learned that perfect was the enemy of good, and the fact that I was even there and willing to try was enough. Although my Spanish was not the strongest, I relied heavily on big facial expressions, speaking clearly, and singing and dancing. Even during the breaks, I acted out with stuffed toys and hand puppets and tried to speak as much Spanish as I could with the kids. I even practiced the night before because I didn't want to be remembered as the big scary American girl who didn't try to connect with them. I felt so accomplished inside when one of the boys, Edwin, played with legos and rested his head on my leg. I didn't speak much, but we still managed to play together. And most importantly, I learned that it's not just American kids who love Peppa Pig and Baby Shark. On the last day with the kids, we danced and spun around and played fun relay games. The kids and staff made us a cute card and it still hangs on my fridge as of today.

Another thing I struggled with was getting used to the different cuisine. This was another thing I was excited about before the trip. Portion sizes were much smaller there, and I wasn't fully prepared for that. I also

don't eat pork for religious reasons, so I tried my hardest to not burden the kitchen staff. For a few days, I stuck mainly to the side dishes which were often tortillas, rice, and vegetables. One of my friends graciously made sure that I had something to eat, and that improved my overall mood and disposition.

I was warned several times by my professor that we would be witnessing a level of poverty that might make us uncomfortable, but it never struck me that way. I'd seen similar lifestyles in documentaries and public television growing up, so it didn't phase me as much as I thought. Those people may have been living under different circumstances, but at the same time we were all still human. The mothers still raised their children to be polite and pattered around while we worked on their stoves. One mother lit up while she talked about cooking with the new stove and the things she liked to do. I think it's easy to turn someone into a caricature when you only interact with them through a filter like social media or tv, but those people were still people with desires and hopes and dreams. The hardest part of all of this was the realization that they were only a few miles away from all of the luxury and wining and dining down in Antigua. It felt disheartening and strange.

In fear of sounding cliché, this service trip changed my life. I've been bitten by the travel bug. Nowadays, I want to experience that complete shock again. The feeling of seeing new customs and struggling to understand a new language are so emboldening and yet so humbling. I see life under a new lens because the trip broke me out of my American comfort zone. I had no idea how sheltered I was, and it wasn't because of the condition of the people's homes. It would be lazy and ineffective to simply say that seeing poverty made me a better person. What made me a person was stepping outside of my comfort zone even when it felt like I was falling apart. I learned how to let go of control. I learned about the strong, educated women who worked for peanuts and fought their way into a spot at FUNCOLI. I helped little kids learn how to wash their hands, and most importantly, I filled a role that was larger than life. Most likely, those kids won't remember a word of what I said, but they will remember how I made them feel. They will remember that there are Americans who want to unite with them and work together to improve their lives.

Ophelia: A Secret Feminist

by Melanie Miller

Ophelia's character in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been at the forefront of a larger debate among feminist critics for years. Many critics reject Ophelia for exuding the *femme fragile* trope, a trope that projects fragility, submission, and incompetence upon women. This trope, many argue, reduces women to an object that is meant to be malleable and in control of by men, hindering women of modern ideas of female independence and autonomy. In rejecting this trope, feminist critics turn towards 21st century adaptations of Ophelia. These adaptations paint Ophelia as a more autonomous, independent, and defiant women by modern standards. By rejecting Shakespeare's Ophelia however, feminist critics often overlook the signs of Ophelia's independence and autonomy displayed in the drama. Shakespeare intentionally implements the element of negative capability into his works which, in turn, shows that Ophelia is a more complex character than she appears to be on the surface. While critics favor Ophelia's contemporary counterparts for displaying explicit characteristics of modern liberation and autonomy, they consequently fail to look beyond the modern lens to further identify the original Ophelia's independence. Ophelia's independence and autonomy are hidden in Shakespeare's tragedy because she was written in an era of male-dominance. Shakespeare's ambiguities in Ophelia's character are a result of his intentional implementation of negative capability, which gives depth to characters and leaves the work open to audience interpretation.

In order to understand Ophelia's independence, we must first look at how she is commonly viewed. In their analysis, Mohammed Safei and Ruzy Suliza Hashim characterize Shakespeare's Ophelia as being "traditionally regarded as the *femme fragile*" (311). Although the term is new, the concept has existed for centuries, with Angelica Frey explaining it as "feminine weakness [conveying] Godliness and mental purity." The *femme fragile* isn't exclusive to Shakespeare's Ophelia. The trope has been popularized by male artists such as Edgar Allan Poe who said, "the death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetic topic in the world," and has even been seen as recently as the 1947 Black Dahlia case that resulted in the morbid societal fascination with the corpse of an unknown woman. However, the most popular example of Ophelia as the *femme fragile* is seen in John Everett Millais' painting *Ophelia* which depicts the scene of her death. In the painting, Ophelia lies in a body of water surrounded by thick, green foliage as she faces heavenward. Her hair is spread out delicately in the water while the petals from the flowers she holds float downstream. What should be an unsettling and disturbing scene, Millais depicts Ophelia's death as mysterious, enticing, and beautiful. This "eroticization of Ophelia's corpse," as Safei and Hashim describe it, is debilitating for women, reducing them to an object to be viewed by men (311). Instead of valuing the woman

in her life or depicting her death as a tragedy, the *femme fragile* becomes more alluring and beautiful in her death. While Shakespeare is vague in his characterization of Ophelia, certain aspects of the *femme fragile* are seen in Hamlet, such as Ophelia replying, “I think nothing, my lord,” to Hamlet’s inappropriate remarks (3.2 124). For these reasons, it comes as no surprise that many feminist critics trade this Ophelia in favor of her contemporary counterparts.

Safei and Hashim note three novels from 21st century authors that have changed the narrative of Ophelia, giving her the qualities of modern empowerment that many feminists seek in strong female characters. Graham Holderness’ *The Prince of Denmark* is set in the 11th century and shows a strong-willed Ophelia who speaks “out of her own volition,” and conveys her independence blatantly, refusing orders from the men around her (Safei and Hashim 312). Matt Haig’s *The Dead Fathers Club* takes place in 21st century England. Haig’s novel represents Ophelia through the character Leah, a young girl who is well beyond Hamlet in “intellect, social experience, understanding, and determination” (Safei and Hashim 312). Lisa Klein’s Ophelia takes a different approach. Set in the late 16th century, the novel follows Shakespeare’s play through the perspective of Ophelia but differs in how Ophelia expresses her thoughts and beliefs such as refusing to read Christian texts because of their encouragement for women to remain obedient and silent (Safei and Hashim 312). It is obvious that Ophelia has gone through some major changes in these texts, being more witty, free-spirited, and supporting a rebellious streak despite what era she is written in. Due to my lack of access to the first two texts mentioned, I will focus on Claire McCarthy’s film *Ophelia* which took direct inspiration from Klein’s novel *Ophelia*.

McCarthy’s film follows Shakespeare’s telling of Hamlet closely, only differing slightly in continuity. The main difference between McCarthy’s Ophelia and Shakespeare’s Hamlet, however, is the perspective in which it is told. Ophelia follows the perspective of Ophelia, revealing the character’s ambiguities that exist in the original drama. A major example of this exists within the baiting scene, where Ophelia is forced to return Hamlet his letters as Claudius and Polonius spy to see if Hamlet has gone mad from Ophelia rejecting his love (3.1 32-40). In the dialogue between Hamlet and Ophelia, Hamlet affirms that he “loved [Ophelia] not,” to which Ophelia replies that she “was the more deceived” (3.1 129-130). While many critics claim this to be another fake madness trick of Hamlet’s, McCarthy paints this scene in an entirely different light. In the film, Hamlet and Ophelia enact a similar version of the conversation that exists in Shakespeare’s play. However, the two can be seen exchanging whispers while their backs are turned towards Claudius and Polonius (Ophelia 01:01:15 - 01:01:48). In the scene, Ophelia displays body language and cues to Hamlet that they are being spied on and whispers to Hamlet the truth about Claudius murdering his father (Ophelia 01:01:10 – 01:01:20). This is just one out of many scenes in McCarthy’s film that explicitly express Ophelia’s modern-like autonomy and independence, validating Safei and Hashim’s argument. However, Safei and Hashim use

this to dismiss Shakespeare’s Ophelia entirely, due to McCarthy’s Ophelia being explicitly independent and autonomous by modern standards. I don’t believe this is the end-all-be-all conclusion, though. Instead of dismissing the original Ophelia, Klein’s novel and McCarthy’s movie open the door to interpreting the character differently by pointing out the subtleties and ambiguities written within her, which Shakespeare purposefully implements.

Many people have identified Shakespeare’s intentional vagueness he leaves in his work. We see this explored by John Keats, defining it as negative capability which is “when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Honan). Shakespeare is a master at effectively utilizing this ability to make his characters or texts vague, but why implement this at all? Fredson Bowers believes that this negative capability and vagueness advances Shakespeare’s works by “[refusing] to attempt to manipulate the audience’s point of view” (483). Ambiguities make mysteries more difficult to solve while simultaneously encouraging deeper thinking. Once the mystery is solved, few people come back to a text and diving deeper into meanings proves pointless. Bowers explains it perfectly, saying that “When curiosity is satiated, the mystery appears to be solved and the matter can be dismissed from one’s mind” (483). Ambiguities not only encourage audiences to pick apart the hidden meanings and motives of characters, but also add complexities to them that shift them to the three-dimensional plane. The characters become more human, more confusing, making audiences more interested in solving the problems. We see this clearly with Shakespeare’s Ophelia. Taking Klein and McCarthy’s contributions into perspective, Ophelia’s ambiguities come to light and make her the feminist character that critics often overlook.

Ophelia’s vagueness is often undermined in feminist criticism, reducing her to the *femme fragile* trope that has been historically placed on her. However, many critics fails to acknowledge Shakespeare’s negative capability and the historical context Ophelia is written in. If we look past a modern lens, Ophelia shows to be subtly independent by needing to navigate her male-dominated world cautiously. Towards the end of McCarthy’s film, we see the happy Ophelia living her days at the nunnery after giving birth to her and Hamlet’s child (Ophelia 01:39:15 – 01:39:46). While this doesn’t align with Shakespeare’s original drama, many of his ambiguities lead me to believe it’s not as much of a stretch as it appears to be. That is, there are many signs of Ophelia’s defiance, independence, and autonomy through her inexplicitly revealing to be pregnant. In one of his mad fits, Hamlet tells Polonius “Your daughter may conceive, / friend, look to ‘t” (2.2 202-203). In Ophelia’s flower scene she gives rue to Gertrude, a symbol of adultery. Yet, Ophelia also takes some for herself but explains that Gertrude “wear / [hers] with a difference” (4.5 206-207). This difference that Ophelia talks about is decoded in the flower language, rue being a symbol of adultery as well as a natural contraceptive that aids in inducing abortion. One of the most explicit of all evidence that Ophelia is pregnant exists in her songs where she sings “Before you tumbled me / You promised me to wed” (4.5 67-68). This alone proves that Ophelia acts out of her own autonomy

because it is learned early on that she promised Polonius and Laertes that she would refuse Hamlet's advances (1.3 145). The most compelling evidence of all that Ophelia acts on her own accord and knows more than what she leads on exists within scene one of act two where Ophelia reveals that her and Hamlet were alone in her room together (87-88). Ophelia assures Polonius that Hamlet had only come in acting mad and nothing more, but the audience never sees this scene for their own eyes (2.1 99-112). However, as McCarthy and Klein's work suggest, this may have been one of Ophelia's many secretive tactics. Once again, Ophelia's flower scene shows that she knows more than she leads on by giving columbines to Claudius, a symbol for faithlessness as well as deceived lovers (4.5 204). How would Ophelia know that Claudius killed the late King Hamlet if only Claudius, Horatio, and Hamlet are confirmed by the text to know this information? The closet scene is one of the only things that bridge both Ophelia's pregnancy and knowledge, showing through the knowledge of Shakespeare's negative capability that Ophelia is much more capable and knowing than what she is written as verbatim.

Ophelia is a strong feminist character in Hamlet that too often gets reduced to the trope of her femme fragile adaptations. Critics argue that Ophelia displays little to no signs of independence and autonomy that modern feminists look for in women characters. However, once the lenses of modernity are removed, we can see Shakespeare's Ophelia for who she really is. Though not explicitly independent, Shakespeare uses negative capability to allow audiences to find hidden details that point to Ophelia being the feminist character that modern readers value. Shakespeare's vagueness also leaves the complexities of characters up to audience interpretation. In turn, McCarthy's film *Ophelia* provides an excellent example of many key details missed upon surface-level reading of the original tragedy. Ophelia is defiant, going against her father and brother's demands to dismiss contact with Hamlet. Ophelia is autonomous, being alone with Hamlet in her room and, at some point, having intercourse with him. Ophelia is secretive, only revealing to know of King Hamlet's murder at the end in her madness. All these small details are for a reason, that reason being that Ophelia had to be secretive to be an independent and autonomous feminist figure in her era. It is an absolute understatement and surface-level reading to reduce Ophelia to the femme-fragile trope when she shows this hidden independence through her ability to cautiously navigate her male-dominant era and society.

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The Black Girl as a Vehicle of Poetry

by Cynthia Short

The concept of depicting children in literature and poetry is hardly new. The Romantics were notably fond of such usage, as children were considered symbols of innocence, nature and therefore wisdom. They were considered to be closer to the truth of how the world was and a more informed, if not more accurate, representation of how we should seek said truth. However, it stands to reason that children from different races, religions and other identities would represent and experience different things. The depiction of black children in poetry has centered on the black experience, serving to highlight how that experience differs from that of white audiences. This is done for an assortment of reasons, including to draw a more raw and visceral picture of what life is like as a black person. Portraying the black youth, specifically the female black youth, is perhaps the most perhaps the most effective method to raise awareness regarding such things as the innocence of youth is the perfect vehicle for showing the murkiness of intersectional existence, the need for guidance from one's elders to navigate such an existence, and the inherent wrongness of the hypersexualization of black girls and women. Thus, I argue that this is the most profitable way to read the below collection.

As childhood is a very unsure and vulnerable time, it is easy to empathize with. Thus, representing the black female youth experience highlights the added burden of navigating life as both a black person and a female in a way that forces the audience to care about it. Additionally, as childhood can't be separated from the stress endured during such a hormonal time, no matter how smart the individual child is, neither can race and gender's impact be separated from the individual person's experience, no matter their age. As Flynn states, childhood was a big subject in the 40s and 50s for poets such as Robert Lowell and Randall Jarrell. However, for most, it was "steeped in nostalgia, indicative of the growing trend toward introspection among White intellectuals" (). Flynn identifies Gwenedolyn Brooks as a poet whose poetry emphasizes that "the imaginative potential and radical innocence" seen in the "Romantic child" had to be updated for the current times as well as the conditions of African American life. The article mentions Brooks' poem "We Real Cool," which follows the haunting fates of many black youth. In startlingly short and parallel syntax, she outlines "We left school. We/lurk late...We sing sin/We thin gin," creating something of a sequence that leads to the final sentence of "We/Die soon." This poem by Brooks makes it clear that black children are, more often than not marked for death. Juxtaposing the image of school with gin, sin and death, she creates a rather morbid image that strikes the heart of all who imagine it.. This poem focuses more on the racial side rather than the gender. However, it is worth mentioning that black girls endure violence as well, just with

different or added dimension as shown in Porsha Olayiwola's "A Southside Apocalypse." In it, she speaks of teen boys who are looking to be initiated in the GDs or Gangster Disciples, the street and prison gang founded in the South Side of Chicago. With this, we discover that there are multiple potential hazards to the black body, from police brutality to gang violence and the like. The language the speaker uses is noteworthy. She speaks of how the boys "ravished the blocks between 79th and 87th, scrounging for food or teen girls/ a body to be sacrificed." Her use of the phrase "And that is where I came in" tells us that the speaker is likely a teen girl. The use of the word "ravish" in the same sentence as "teen girls" brings to mind a particular kind of violence, one that a poem centered on the black male youth's experience would be less likely to outline. The speaker continues, stating that initiation into such a gang meant proving you weren't human and that she is a "ritualistic offering. Skin so black/I'm blue, belly so full I'm gag/.....Girl convenient with holes, a meal to fill/the boys until the next moon." Although the sexual aspect is far more obvious, it worth mentioning that where there are gangs, there are guns, and that the line may also speak to the boys' intentions to fill her with bullet wounds after the fact. Thus, these two poems outline that black girls experience sexual harm due to their gender, as well as the risk of non-sexual violence due to their race. They allow us access to the plight of black people in the form of black children, allowing us to question why such things are allowed to occur. After all, one would hope that the image of a teen girl, whose potential has yet to be realized and whose only crime is existing in her specific body at that place and time would wring sympathy from even the most indifferent.

Another important aspect of portraying the Black female as a child is that it calls into question the hypersexualization of Black girls. Researchers have discovered that adults tend to view Black girls as more adult-like, and "less innocent" than their white counterparts at nearly every single stage of childhood (Thompson, 973). Connected to stereotypes from times of slavery, including the Jezebel (or the stereotype of Black women as hypersexual), there is a verified bias against black girls that causes the assumption that they are more knowledgeable about sex and adult topics and are generally sexual beings. Monique Morris, quoted in the article, defines it as a type of "age compression," a illustration of biases that have "stripped Black girls of their childhood freedoms," and is born of a society that "makes Black girlhood interchangeable with Black womanhood." This thinking has far reaching consequences for black girls, from the justice system and beyond. It has resulted in black girls being thought to be complicit- and even being criminalized for their own victimization. We see this at play in the home as well, in poems such as "a song in the front yard." In it, the speaker would like to go with the "charity children" who she believes have a lot of fun. Her mother "sneers," showing her disapproval and speaking of how "Johnnie Mae/Will grow up to be a bad woman./That George'll be taken to Jail soon or late." Here again, we see both the racial and gender sides. The speaker is likely getting a specific type of restriction due to her existence as a female.

Johnnie Mae, likely one of the charity children, is already being profiled as a future “bad woman,” which almost certainly has to do with sex or promiscuity. George, a male youth, is stated to be destined for imprisonment. There’s no mention of his sexual exploits because male youths, regardless of color, are hardly ever held to the same standards. The speaker shows her own innocence and, in doing so, questions these stereotypes and the people who hold them—even in her own community: “But I say it’s fine. Honest, I do. And I’d like to be a bad woman, too/And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace/ And strut down the streets with paint on my face.” It’s obvious that the young girl does not know what a “bad woman is” and the audience has to ask themselves if they know what one is either. A reader can assume it’s not considered good to be one but can’t be sure of how accurate the assessment is. It can’t be known if a bad woman is a sex worker, a so-called “loose” woman or simply a woman who likes to dress in a way that her elders disapprove of. By depicting this dilemma through the eyes of a young black girl, the speaker creates a spike of protectiveness and horror from the audience. There’s this desire to keep her from being a “bad woman” and, hopefully, a niggling of doubt. Again, the reader is not sure exactly why Johnnie Mae would be a bad woman or what makes a bad woman so bad. They would not know what is so inherently wrong about a black girl wanting to wear black stockings and wear make-up. There is hopefully a question of what could a young black girl do that would make us want to sneer at her the way the speaker’s mom does, to speak so harshly on a young lady’s future like she does, especially when we aren’t told about any of Johnnie Mae’s actions. Is it out of mere desire to protect them from what racism and sexism does to those who look like the speaker and Johnnie Mae or is it because the audience has internalized these values and thus left black girls for dead in their own way? This is a question that the speaker can’t answer for us and she should not be expected to. She is, after all, a mere child.

As being at the crossroads of femininity and blackness—hypersexualization and general violence—can be a draining, horrid experience, it stands to reason that the guidance of supportive, communicative elders is most invaluable. However, some poems communicate that such guidance is not always a given. Through this, the poems offer something of a warning or even a call to action. Brooks’ “a song in the front yard” gives us a mother who restricts instead of teaches, sneers vile predictions instead of trying to help. This and Kara Jackson’s “On Beating your Ass” tells us of how the discipline given to “save” female children is arguably another form of violence. Such is shown in the juxtaposition of lines such as “if you drink soda in the dark/if you grab in the refrigerator without permission” and “if you drop your teddy bear/if you burn the doll house-” and “if you wear eyeshadow/you can see through.....” If you wear your hair long enough/ To get lost in.” In between the normal expectations of children is the idea that it is the female child’s job to desexualize herself and the promise of punishment if she fails. It is fitting that it is only at the end of the poem that the speaker states that if the person

they are addressing does these things, they will “need a bigger belt” to “save” the child. It perfectly outlines the tragedy of it all. The goal is protection but that is not what is communicated. What is communicated is restrictions and bruises and blame. This is not the only instance of miscommunication in this collection. In Nikki Givovanni’s “Legacies”, the speaker narrates an interaction between a little girl who refuses her grandmother’s offer to teach her how to make rolls because she doesn’t want to become “less dependent on her spirit” once she dies. As she is a child, however, she doesn’t know how to express this desire for their continued relationship.. She simply states “I don’t want to know how to make no rolls” and pouts. Her grandmother responds “lord these children,” greeting her with exasperation and distance. The poem goes on with, “and neither of them ever/said what they meant/and i guess nobody ever does,” emphasizing a larger pattern of disconnect between little black girls and their female elders. In Audre Lorde’s “Hanging Fire,” we see a fourteen year old female speaker in crisis, shown with the words”... my skin has betrayed me” and “what if I die before morning.” Her isolation is shown with the consistent repetition of her mother’s bedroom door being closed. The raw depiction of little black girls finding closed doors and belt marks where they need love and support strikes many nerves. “Hanging Fire” perfectly illustrates the plight of the fourteen year old black girl, caught between not only race and gender concerns, but the strife of someone at the crossroads of adulthood and childhood, the quintessential messenger of the black female youth’s experience. Her concerns go from ashy knees to imminent death, from learning how to dance at a party, to the question of whether she will live long enough to grow up. Kara Jackson’s *Lost and Found*’s speaker speaks of having thought “thought her black pulled on me/ an umbilical cord” as she pondered how, despite her attempts to lose i ,her white neighbors find her blackness (and the slur to bash it) so easily, but as the speaker of “Hanging Fire” goes through her own sort of rebirth, her own reconciliation of black and woman, there is no doctor or warm embrace of a mother. There is only a closed door of the question of who closed it and if it will ever open.

In conclusion, children are a very powerful literary tool. They give innocence to groups that are rarely allowed it. They give the audience the opportunity to interrogate societal expectations that they otherwise wouldn’t think about. Embracing the black female child experience in poetry and figurative language and giving that experience the voice of a child allows one to counteract the adultification of real black children and gives the hope of saving them as well. Whether tackling intersectionality, hypersexualization or the enhanced sense of isolation from their female elders due to those two factors, poetry and the image of innocence allow for a type of learning and healing that might fall on deaf ears without such methods.

Referenced Poems
Legacies
Nikki Giovanni

her grandmother called her from the playground
 “yes, ma’am”
 “i want chu to learn how to make rolls” said the old
 woman proudly
 but the little girl didn’t want
 to learn how because she knew
 even if she couldn’t say it that
 that would mean when the old one died she would be less
 dependent on her spirit so
 she said
 “i don’t want to know how to make no rolls”
 with her lips poked out
 and the old woman wiped her hands on
 her apron saying “lord
 these children”
 and neither of them ever
 said what they meant
 and i guess nobody ever does

Hanging Fire
Audre Lorde

I am fourteen
 and my skin has betrayed me
 the boy I cannot live without
 still sucks his thumb
 in secret
 how come my knees are
 always so ashy
 what if I die
 before morning
 and momma’s in the bedroom
 with the door closed.

I have to learn how to dance
 in time for the next party
 my room is too small for me
 suppose I die before graduation
 they will sing sad melodies
 but finally
 tell the truth about me
 There is nothing I want to do

and too much
 that has to be done
 and momma’s in the bedroom
 with the door closed.

Nobody even stops to think
 about my side of it
 I should have been on Math Team
 my marks were better than his
 why do I have to be
 the one
 wearing braces
 I have nothing to wear tomorrow
 will I live long enough
 to grow up
 and momma’s in the bedroom
 with the door closed.

a song in the front yard
Gwendolyn Brooks

I’ve stayed in the front yard all my life.
 I want a peek at the back
 Where it’s rough and untended and hungry weed grows.
 A girl gets sick of a rose.

I want to go in the back yard now
 And maybe down the alley,
 To where the charity children play.
 I want a good time today.

They do some wonderful things.
 They have some wonderful fun.
 My mother sneers, but I say it’s fine
 How they don’t have to go in at quarter to nine.
 My mother, she tells me that Johnnie Mae
 Will grow up to be a bad woman.
 That George’ll be taken to Jail soon or late
 (On account of last winter he sold our back gate).

But I say it’s fine. Honest, I do.
 And I’d like to be a bad woman, too,
 And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace
 And strut down the streets with paint on my face.

Who Said It Was Simple
Audre Lorde

There are so many roots to the tree of anger
that sometimes the branches shatter
before they bear.

Sitting in Nedicks
the women rally before they march
discussing the problematic girls
they hire to make them free.
An almost white counterman passes
a waiting brother to serve them first
and the ladies neither notice nor reject
the slighter pleasures of their slavery.
But I who am bound by my mirror
as well as my bed
see causes in colour
as well as sex

and sit here wondering
which me will survive
all these liberations.

On Beating Your Ass
Kara Jackson

If you expect god to take you
Quietly if you do the dishes and try to

Drown if you wear pants that make a man want to wear you
If you drink soda in the dark if you grab in the refrigerator without
Permission if you wear eyeshadow

You can see through if you bring a boy
In here who we can't see

If you wear your hair long enough
To get lost in if you drink without looking
First to see the colors mix if your keys aren't out
And sharp if you wear too much

Oil (men can't resist slick) if you scratch
What itches if he hits

And you don't leave him if he kiss and you

Cry if you say he's fine

If you drop your teddy bear if you burn the
Doll house if you break

The doll and vie her to me to fix if you run
Out the house without shoes

Or your brother if you walk with headphones
In. if you walk with a switch

If you get kidnapped and they bring you
Back if you say a prayer to me

After i'm good and dead if you bleed your
blood and don't scab

If you bite your nails if you unfold your
Clothes if you sleep

Naked in your romm if you shave
And distribute your smooth

If you think god can handle your loud
If you don't take your body with you

I'm going to need a bigger belt to save you

Love poem with a knife
Kara Jackson

in talking about loving you, i consider murder.
consider your pistol of a mouth, jaw long and smoking

when i ask how to be pretty for you, you suggest murder.
defend it, call a dead woman the least vain. In taking
About loving men, my mother suggests loving a knife

First. learn if sharpness can be a good father, if a blade can make
kissy faces. every woman wants a man. Few want a good knife
i name my kitchen a love war, look for you in the cutting drawer,

Look for you in my razor. Make a romance
out of nicking. I have no secrets for first dates,
just keeping chopping. Put his edge to your neck.

He will let you bleed first (no, after you). And this is why I leave
and come back. I know I'm a woman by the way I take
war, by the way i let weapons give me children, even sliced and undone,

By the way our love is pressing the wound

Lost & found
Kara Jackson

I thought i left my black in a safe
place i thought my black pulled on me,
An umbilical cord, thought my black was cut
For safekeeping. I thought my black was floating
In a jar, or maybe my black is a button
i'm supposed to rush to in case of emergency.
i take my black off of my shoulders and hangi t up
My father only mentions his black if he's drunk.
My black is something we claim
on our taxes, the very high ones, my friends
They come to visit and ask me how i've gotten on
Without it, ask do i miss my black
Like a childhood pet? I tell them it's around
Here somewhere, dust assigned to some crevice,
Sock in the lost & found. I ask my neighbors
If they've seen my black and they call me
A nigger
How did they find it so quickly?
Like a bird heard and recognized.

What It's Like To Be A Black Girl (for those of you that aren't)
Patricia Smith

First of all, it's being 9 years old and
feeling like you're not finished, like your
edges are wild, like there's something,
everything, wrong. it's dropping food
coloring in your eyes to make them blue and suffering
their burn in silence. it's popping a bleached
white mophead over the kinks of your hair and
priming in front of the mirrors that deny your
reflection. it's finding a space between your
legs, a disturbance in your chest, and not knowing
what to do with the whistles. it's jumping
double dutch until your legs pop, it's sweat
and vaseline and bullets, it's growing tall and
wearing a lot of white, it's smelling blood in

your breakfast, it's learning to say fuck with
grace but learning to fuck without it, it's
flame and fists and life according to motown,
it's finally have a man reach out for you
then caving in
around his fingers.

Southside Apocalypse
Porsha Olayiwola

I don't remember when it started, perhaps
Around the same time the homes grew
Into shadows boarded and decorned
Wooden with brown grass grown over.

Or perhaps it was when the butter-burnt pit bulls
Took the streets, guarded teh avenues like militia,
Teeth razored enough to devour a toddler as snack.
The gunshots rang a riddled soundtrack

A drowned train peppering us, and mikneah
And i knew we were poor black, not dead yet.
I didn't mind the crouching if it meant chalked
Hopscotch tomorrow, or the penny candy store

Before school, or church friday night. I recall the day
Foggy. We on the other side of pavement at tiffany's
And the boys would come, armored in shirts draping
To their knees, reminiscent of their mamas in house

Dresses. The boys ravished the blocks between 79th
And 87th, scrounging for food or teen girls, a body
To sacrifice, kin to belong to, love or blood,
And that is where I came in. intiitaion into the GDs

Required proof you wre inhuman
And i am a ritualistic offering. Skin so black
I'm blue, belly so full i'm gag
Girl convenient with holes, a meal to fill

The boys until the next moon. Mikneah's words
Chased after each other, her voice more plea
Than warning. There they go, and i heed, scurry
Down basement steps of a vacant building. Watch
With my eyes peering over the ledge, hands clasping
concrete , body-compressed stiff, breath—

We Real Cool
Gwendolyn Brooks

The Pool Players.
Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

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The Good, The bad, and The Storytellers

by Theodore Pound

“If I can’t write about the theory of everything, I might as well not write at all.”

—Albert Einstein, probably.

“Heroes and villains...”

—The Beach Boys

“I know. It’s all wrong. By rights we shouldn’t even be here. But we are. It’s like in the great stories Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were, and sometimes you didn’t want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy. How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad happened. But in the end, it’s only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something. Even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back only they didn’t. Because they were holding on to something.”

—Samwise Gamgee, The Two Towers

Patterns of Stories

In this essay, I would like to note an important quality of story telling in order to showcase a certain systematic procedure of reality. This quality is a pattern that can be interpreted numerous ways, but I would like to deconstruct the units of the pattern and explore them in terms of story, rather than abstracting first and then analyzing the abstraction, like Campbell does in *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. And because a plethora of other philosophies have pointed to the importance of stories, at least using them to help explain their perspective, I position that story telling is the premier, uber philosophy that can totally encompass all previous theory and debate.

The antithesis of this essay is Einstein’s theory of everything, in regards to its use of numbers at all. A theory of everything must be based on the principle unit of the universe and reality, which is stories. There are things besides numbers, but everything is a story.

Once, upon a time, there was a boy named Hamlet who was tasked by the ghost of his father to kill his murderous and usurper uncle. This expedient results in the death of eight more people. The only person who doesn’t die is

Hamlet’s best friend, Horatio, who tells the story of the pile of dead bodies to the invader Fortinbras. Fortinbras replies to “Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,” and let “The soldier’s music and the rite of war/ Speak loudly for him.” The end.

Once, upon a time, there was a man named Gatsby, who challenged a cruel man for his wife, because he was in love, but he failed. Not because he didn’t truly love her, but because the world is a nasty place. “If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the “creative temperament.”— it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. No — Gatsby turned out all right at the end.” Which is why I, Nick Caraway, his only true friend, have written this book about him. The end.

Once, upon a time, there were forged Great Rings. Three were given to the Elves, immortal, wisest and fairest of all beings. Seven to the Dwarf-Lords, great miners and craftsmen of the mountain halls. And nine, nine rings were gifted to the race of Men, who above all else desire power. For within these rings was bound the strength and the will to govern each race. But they were all of them deceived, for another ring was made. Deep in the land of Mordor, in the Fires of Mount Doom, the Dark Lord Sauron forged a master ring, and into this ring he poured his cruelty, his malice and his will to dominate all life. One ring to rule them all... which he lost... which was then found by a hobbit... which was then found by another hobbit, who wrote a book about it... and then that hobbit’s nephew found it, destroyed it, and then wrote a book about it, and the book was about friendship. But the hobbit’s nephew was so sad about everything that happened, so he moved to the Undying Lands. The end.

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away... several leaders of a rebellion were captured by the little furry natives of the planet they were fighting on. Before they could eat them, they confused one of the rebel droids for their god. The droid then tells these creatures the story of the rebels, about the hero Luke Skywalker who fought against his own father to save his friends. The aliens decided to help the rebels, and their aid is the tipping point in the battle of that planet.

Because of their help, the rebels manage to shut down the force field generator of the orbiting space station and blow it up before it can destroy any more planets. Luke Skywalker also manages to redeem his father, though his father dies shortly after. The end.

Once, upon a time, there was a guy who could do everything, so he tried to help everyone by telling them stories. Everyone liked the stories, even though nobody really understood them, because there wasn't any public education back then. But the people who did understand them understood that what he was saying was, I'm better than you because I'm better at telling stories than you, so they killed him. Then, the story teller's eleven best friends went around telling his stories and founded the leading world religion. Amen.

In most of the great stories, the stories that focus on the sublimity of storytelling, there is a good guy who challenges a bad guy. The good guy loses, the bad guy conquers the world, and the only person left is the good guy's best friend, who writes a story about the who debacle. It is as though there are certain laws of physics for story telling that make all stories the same.

Here's my version of the story.

There once was this guy who thought he was good. He challenged a man who knew he was evil. The evil man killed him, and then he conquered the world. But the other guy, who thought he was good, had a friend, who was a story teller. And the story teller was so sad about his friend's death, he turned the whole ordeal into a poem, and then a play. And when it was staged, the evil king came to see it, because he thought it was about him. And when he realized it wasn't about him, the evil king had a heart attack and died. Everyone knew it was the story that killed him, so they made the playwright their king. The end.

This has already been explored thoroughly in Campbell's Hero with a Thousand Faces.

However, instead of categorizing stories into plot phenomenon, I will define stories with storytelling units, which looks like this:

1. The Story Teller (the author, Bilbo, Nick, Leia asking Obi-Wan for help, God, etc.)
2. The Story (this part is pretty self explanatory, changes depending on the laws you choose to follow, i.e. bad guy always wins, good guy always win, comedy, tragedy, musical, etc.)
3. The guy who realizes he's in a Story (deconstruction of the idea of a "plot twist", i.e. the simplest plot twist is realizing you're in a story. Includes Frodo writing the Lord of the Rings, C-3PO telling the Ewoks the plot of the past two movies, and Horatio telling Fortinbras the story of Hamlet)
4. What happens after the Story ends (Does the world return to its stasis? Is the world changed?)

Also pretty self explanatory)

Here's how I analyze Hamlet with my theorem.

Certain characters are story tellers, and their role in the story usually relates to the power of stories. At the beginning of the play, Claudius is king because of a lie, a story he not only told, but orchestrated, like a director, or a story teller. This not only shows Claudius as a story teller, but showcases the power of story telling and stories. The ghost of Hamlet's father tells Hamlet the true story, which inspires the rest of the plot. Hamlet then creates a story of his own, that he has gone crazy, to spy in subterfuge. Hamlet also employs the use specifically of story tellers to reveal the conscience of the king in the form of a play.

The Story deals with analyzing how the stories within the story are structured. In Hamlet, one of the most important plot points is Hamlet's use of a play and actors to raise a reaction out of Claudius, and it works. I believe this shows Shakespeare's belief in the power of story telling as well. This section can also be used to analyze magic systems, or the rules of world. Most tragedies have the rule of "good guy always lose." Hamlet's rules are that everyone dies at the end, which is evident by the fact that everyone dies at the end, which is also one of the most apparent truths of reality. Or it could be analyzed as, the closer we get to our polar absolutes, the closer we come to the end of our stories, death, like a ticking time bomb, but that only the most passionate can attain. Gandhi, Fred Hampton, Jesus: when you get them to kill you because you're too passionate, too committed to your story. Hamlet was passionate about finding the true story. Twas' story killed beast.

The guy who realizes he's in a story analyzes the "plot twist" of a work. Hamlet's plot twist would be, for example, that everyone dies at the end. Its other use is analyzing a specific moment I've recognized in several famous stories where the characters turn the story into a story at the end of the story, as if the finally understand what it was all for. Horatio does so at the end of Hamlet, when he tells Fortinbras about everything. Another popular example is Frodo writing the Lord of the Rings. My favorite example is how C-3PO uses a story to turn the tide of the war in Return of the Jedi. Rather than being a metaphor of the power of stories, it shows the literal power of realizing you're inside a story, and using that to your advantage, like discovering the rules of magic. Neo flying is also a good example of how the plot twist is about "breaking the rules."

What happens after the story ends is pretty self explanatory. Fortinbras conquers Denmark, buries Hamlet. Pretty simple status change. Other works would probably be more interesting, like Frodo going to the Undying Lands. I once wrote a paper for dr. Wilkerson about portraying Hamlet's father as a bedsheet ghost, and at the end of the play, the ghost comes on and takes off his bedsheet and it's Hamlet, and then the dead Hamlet gets up and puts the bedsheet on, and the other Hamlet lies back down. Then,

the play goes backwards through the three ghost scenes, and that's why he doesn't say anything in the bedchamber scene, because it's the first time he's doing anything as the bedsheet. It also creates a paradox, because Hamlet says something about the ghost not telling him whether or not his mother was complicit, and so when he goes back to the next scene, he tells himself not to hurt his mother because he never actually found out, as that is one of the great ice bergs of literature. The play ends with the guards being chased around by a bedsheet ghost, screaming. And so the play is actually a big paradox, and that's what's so interesting about it.

Of course, we then must analyze the physics of these patterns, why opposites lead to interesting stories, why the bad guy always wins and conquers the world, and the good guy always dies, but his best friend is always a story teller.

Physics of Patterns of Stories

I recently wrote a paper about the structure of Hamlet based of Kurt Vonnegut's original Master's thesis. One thing I specifically disagreed with mr. Vonnegut about was his classification of the y-axis as "good" versus "ill" fortune— I consider it a logical fallacy to moralize phenomenon. As I Lay Dying has afforded me a good example of my counter thesis to Vonnegut.

My theory follows along the lines of Nietzsche's philosophy in "the Birth of Tragedy," where he theorizes that the natural duality of the universe is that of "tragedy" and "music".

Things were never good nor bad in Nietzsche's eyes, but they still tended towards being interpreted thusly. Nietzsche, in his genius, suggested that the duality must therefore be something that cannot be moralized, but can exist on a polarity. So he suggested "tragedy" and "music", which seems to be all encompassing: nothing that happens is good or bad, it just is, but it can be defined as "musical" or "tragic". I would like to take this logic a step further by comparing the duality of inner thoughts to a duality of the outer world.

In story telling, there is a simple technique to give you story depth. It is known as "yes, but" and "no, and". "Yes, but" works thusly: something good happens to your character, but they have to sacrifice something. Luke Skywalker saves his friends from Darth Vader, but he loses his hand in the process. "No, and" works thusly: your character does something wrong, and then things get worse. Gatsby doesn't get Daisy, and he takes the fall for Myrtle's vehicular homicide. These rules work as a way to heighten tension in stories, but can also be used for analysis.

However, in regards to As I Lay Dying, specifically "Bundren Logic", the logic follows these rules: "yes, and" and "no, but". "Yes, and" is a big rule in improvisation about always agreeing with your partner so that you don't end

up in a boring argumentative scene. If you partner says you're at the beach, you wouldn't say, "no, actually we're at the red lobster." The audience might think it's funny, but you've killed the scene. That's a form of "no, and"ing. You do something bad, and it makes it worse. "No, but"ing is when you disagree but keep going. And it is these two rules, "yes, and" and "no, but" that govern the universe.

"Yes, and" is how math works. One plus one is two. Chemicals combine and react. If you're an alchemist trying to create a sorcerer's stone, you get "no, but." "No, and" would have the lead you're trying to transmuted turn into an evil baby dragon that kills you for breaking the rules. Whereas, no, your transmutation doesn't work, but this tradition will eventually evolve into chemistry and the scientific method.

It is also for this reason I believe the Bundrens succeeded in getting the saw from the river. After retrieving a few of the other tools, Vernon and Jewel devise a plan to find the saw:

"It's heavier than the saw," Vernon says. Jewel is tying the end of the chalk-line about the hammer shaft.

"Hammer's got the most wood in it," Jewel says. He and Vernon face one another, watching Jewel's hands.

"And flatter, too," Vernon says. 'It'd float three to one, almost. Try the plane."

Jewel looks at Vernon. Vernon is tall, too; long and lean, eye to eye they stand in their close wet clothes. Lon Quick could look even at a cloudy sky and tell the time to ten minutes. Big Lon I mean, not little Lon.

"Why dont you get out of the water?" I say. "It wont float like a saw," Jewel says.

"It'll float nigher to a saw than a hammer will," Vernon says. "Bet you," Jewel says.

"I wont bet," Vernon says.

They stand there, watching Jewel's still hands. "Hell," Jewel says. "Get the plane, then."

So they get the plane and tie it to the chalk-line and enter the water again. Pa comes back along the bank. He stops for a while and looks at us, hunched, mournful, like a failing steer or an old tall bird.

Vernon and Jewel return, leaning against the current. "Get out of the way," Jewel says to Dewey Dell. "Get out of the water."

She crowds against me a little so they can pass, Jewel holding the plane high

as though it were perishable, the blue string trailing back over his shoulder. They pass us and stop; they fall to arguing quietly about just where the wagon went over.

“Darl ought to know,” Vernon says. They look at me. “I dont know,” I says. “I wasn’t there that long”

“Hell,” Jewel says. They move on, gingerly, leaning against the current, reading the ford with their feet.

“Have you got a holt of the rope?” Vernon says. Jewel does not answer. He glances back at the shore, calculant, then at the water. He flings the plane outward, letting the string run through his fingers, his fingers turning blue where it runs over them. When the line stops, he hands it back to Vernon.

“Better let me go this time,” Vernon says. Again Jewel does not answer; we watch him duck beneath the surface.

“Jewel,” Dewey Dell whimpers.

“It aint so deep there,” Vernon says. He does not look back. He is watching the water where Jewel went under.

When Jewel comes up he has the saw.

Jewel ties all of the tools together because the saw is heavier than the hammer, if the hammer float more because of the wood. He also ties the plane to it, which makes it flatter and heavier, like the saw. It is because of this astute observation that the event is allowed to play out like a science experiment rather than another folley of the Bundrens. Elsewhere, Faulker subjects the Bundrens to acts of “yes, but”s and “no, and”s (No, Dewey Dell doesn’t get an abortion, and she gets taken advantage of; yes, the Bundrens finally bury their mother, but now they have another mother, etc.). However, because of the reversal of logic, with the Bundrens finally persevering through something, finally being right about something, is why we find this scene so interesting. Here’s how it would have played out with the other logic:

Yes, but: they find the tools, but they’re broken and unusable.

No, and: they don’t find the saw, and they lose the hammer, chalkline, and plane again. No, but: they don’t find the saw, but they don’t lose the other tools.

Yes, and: the tools act like the saw, and the Bundrens find it with the rope.

I would say the universe operates on a “yes, and” and “no, but” basis. On the other hand, humans operate on a “yes, but” and “no, and” logic. “Will you

help me?” “Yes, but what’s in it for me?” Whereas the universe falls along the path of least resistance. If it makes sense, it will happen. If it doesn’t make sense, it will not happen, but something else will happen. As oppose to, if something happens, something bad else must happen conversely (with “yes, but” logic). People who think bad things happen because something good happened end up in mental institutions. The only instance of “yes, but” logic in reality would be Newton’s third law of action and reaction. However, much like my disagreement with Vonnegut, Newton’s law is also without moralization.

And so stories are built with yes, no, and, but— like dominoes, or genes, or atoms and quarks, or shapes and sides and lines and points.

Another example of no, but logic is when Dorothy pours a bucket of water on the wicked witch of the west. Dorothy is a noble character who follows the “I’ll never join the dark side!” And then their goodness is what kills the bad guy, not her literally. The hero won’t kill the villain, but the villain dies anyway. Another example is how Arthur Dent learns to fly in the Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy— he “no, but”ed gravity.

For the most part, the rule goes that you can “yes, and” a “no, but,” but you can’t “no, but” a “yes, and.” That’s why evil people win: their “yes, and” defeats a good person’s “no, but.” “Yes, and” is literally how gravity works. And nobody knows how gravity works, so you’re welcome, science.

Don’t thank me, thank the Bundrens.

Similarly, — or oppositely, I guess— in story logic, “no, and” and “yes, but” go opposite directions. They repel each other. They cause the story to go up and down and around itself, and are imbued with polarity. This mirrors how reality works. So telling stories is basically examining the polarity that causes the universe.

However, the hero’s “no, but” that saves everything is: the hero dies, but his best friend is a story teller.

If you deconstruct further, you can turn this logic into a mathematical equation.

Circles

There’s a reason why water is spherical in zero gravity. It’s the same reason planets and stars are round, why atoms are round, and why stories are circular.

The physics of stories, what “yes, no, and, but” are an abstraction of, is the concept of polarity— that things can be opposites, and also attracted by opposing meanings. Polarity is the opposite of gravity, and why gravity exists in the first place: gravity is the tending toward of meaning, and polarity is the tending away from of meaning. So yes is the opposite of no, and and is the opposite of butt. Everything is polar. We live between the north and south pole, but we can never live on the north or south pole, unless under extreme circumstances. We quite literally live in polarity. Polarity causes everything to exist.

So if I were trying to turn this theory into an equation, I would be able to fill one aspect of the equation: the energy, the force, the logic behind how reality works, through polar force. I now have the plus and the equal sign. Now, I just need to solve for x, y, and z. We have our energy, now we need to find our integers and our solution.

$$x/y=z$$

This is where you can make your own philosophy. Whatever you put on the “good”, “ideal” side of the polar force (if you dare you partake in moral parley), you also have to overcome the polar opposite of it. So if you think the meaning of life is strength, then you’re

going to have to overcome weakness. If you believe in money, you’re going to have to fight against poverty. If you believe in God, you’re probably going to spend a lot of time trying to justify your faith. But if you don’t care about strength, you don’t have to workout, if you don’t care about money, you can live in your mom’s basement, if you don’t believe in God, you probably don’t think about it as much.

So if we want to find what the meaning of everything is, we have to find the opposite of the meaning of everything first. We can’t simply put in the word everything, because the opposite of everything is nothing. However, we could put “nothing” into the equation, the opposite of nothing could give us the meaning to everything. So what’s the opposite of nothing?

Is it strength? No, the opposite of strength is weakness. Is it money? No, the opposite of money is no money. Is it goodness? No, the opposite of goodness is evilness. Is it God? Well what the hell does God even mean

The opposite of nothing is love. There’s love, there’s everything else, and there’s nothing else. Love is what make circles round. Circles have a center, a defined meaning, a signified, and then there is the shape, the signifier, the mathematical equation, the proof; and then there’s everything outside the shape. A circle has a heart, has a story that looks like its heart, and is surrounded by nothing else. Beginning, middle, and end.

Stories aren’t circles. Circles are stories. Stories are a fifth dimensional thread, the string of string theory (they don’t know what the string in string theory is either— you’re welcome science), tying everything together with love at the center. When you look at the shape of stories, you’re looking at a cross-section of that thread. A single beat in the space-time-story continuum.

I recently wrote a play, and in one of the ending monologues, a character asks the other, “do you know what love is?” And the other character literally doesn’t, he’s never heard the word before. The other character continues, “nobody really knows what it means, not even God. But that’s the meaning of the word, love, that nobody knows what it means, not even God. But if nobody knows what it means, maybe that’s the point of everything. It’s like how interesting works. It’s the simplest word that makes up the simplest story. Love! What’s love? And then you have to tell a story to explain it! This is that story.”

The play was secretly about love, as every story is.

I’ll leave you with one last secret of the universe, for free. The right way to interpret the Bible is to indulge in the really, utterly cheesy Adam West 1960s Batman! style it is written in. The bible is super cheesy, cheesier than an extra cheesy extra pepperony extra warm and toasty pizza. Yum... it’s cheesy in order to keep the cynical people away.

Ammonia

by Dallas Curry

ScreenWriters Notes

Logline- After saving the life of his past love, A man must decide if it's better to let the past remain there or search for a future within it.

Role of H- Each and every character gets a name except "H" but he remains nameless because "H" can be anyone of us just like "Q", "S", "Z", "D", "L" and "J" can be anyone of us.

INT. CHURCH (ROOM) - DAY

H is sitting alone in a room wearing his tuxedo, the bowtie is loosened. He's leaning in his chair with a pile of index cards surrounding him. He's holding his arm out towards the window like he's trying to reach for something-- something far out of his grasp.

H (V.O)

Has it really already been 3 years? God it feels like yesterday- the two of us on that stupid bridge. What is it I said to you back then?

A short and serious woman knocks on the door rapidly.

WEDDING COORDINATOR

Sir, the bride would like to see you before we begin the ceremony.

H

A bit late for that isn't it?

WEDDING COORDINATOR

Then you might want to hurry. She says it's urgent.

INT. CHURCH (ROOM) - MOMENTS LATER

H, with a purpose, walks through the church hallway.

H (V.O)

Oh that's right... I remember now.

TITLE CARD- AMMONIA

INT. CAFE DE RESULTAT - DAY (3 YEARS AGO)

H, TRISTAN and NAOMI are standing in line at CAFE DE RESULTAT. They each sport a similar outfit, a flannel over a dark colored shirt accompanied by

a matching beanie. Their outfits are close, but not identical.

TRISTAN

Cafe con leche... hot- turkey panini. And that should be it.

DEVIN

I'll bring that right out, and what about you?

NAOMI

Are you guys still having your smoothie specials?

DEVIN

Today's smoothie is- Mango Mania-

NAOMI

I'll have one of those, a piece of cake and-

(To H)

You wanna split it?

H is staring off in the distance as he sees NATALIE walk into the cafe with her boyfriend LOGAN. NATALIE appears timid near the man. As she enters the cafe we see her wearing a trench coat accompanied by sunglasses.

H

I'll grab a table. You know what I get-

NAOMI

That doesn't answer-

TRISTAN

He'll take the same drink. He'll split it Neme.

INT. CAFE DE RESULTAT (ROOM) - MOMENTS LATER

H is sitting in a private room in the cafe. He finds himself nose deep in random tabloids.

TRISTAN and NAOMI walk into the room with him.

TRISTAN

This one of those things? Nothing Happened right?

NAOMI

What?

H

Nothing, look at this. Angelina Jolie and Billy Bob Thorton divorced.

NAOMI

You gotta stop reading those- they're gonna mess with that beautiful head of yours.

H
I doubt it- Colby and Bree can't get enough of them.

TRISTAN
Speaking of- what'd you get him for christmas?

H
Oh shit! Is that this weekend... Finals have me stressed.

NAOMI
There's still time. We can go to the mall tomorrow if you'd like.

H
No thank you. Our mall's sketch... Never know who's there.

NAOMI
You used to love it-

H
Yea when I was one of the knuckleheads downing cans of coke and smashing a cinnabon. Now-

TRISTAN
(Snobby accent)
Now you're a scholar. I don't have time for fun Neme, I must attend to my studies.

H
Haha- that almost borderlines middle school humor.

TRISTAN
Thanks I do improv on the weekend- you should come.

H
I can't tell if you're joking or not so I'll make sure I'm busy that day.

DEVIN brings in the group's food and as he is NATALIE and LOGAN can be seen heading to another room in the back.

H CONTD
Who'd you get for Secret Santa?

NAOMI

Wouldn't be much of a secret if I told you...

H
Well it can't be me or you wouldn't have asked to go shopping- so my guess is Tristan.

TRISTAN
Sophie's got me- she was very excited to call me one night asking me about my hobbies, likes and dislikes... Bless that girl- her heart is big, but so is her mouth.

H
Fair enough.

Muffled shouting can be heard from the other room.
The group and cafe ignore it.

TRISTAN
It's going to be fun seeing everyone again. It's been awhile-

NOAMI
We saw them thanksgiving-

TRISTAN
Not everyone though. It's hard to bring the whole group together for gatherings.

LOGAN walks past their door and leaves the cafe.

NOAMI
Yea I'm just stoked to be on break. Finally some time to chillax and not worry about loans and books and-

TRISTAN
Those fees don't magically disappear on break. You know that right?

NOAMI
SHHH, I like to pretend they do.

NATALIE walks by the door silently crying. She's in a rush, but tries to hold herself together.

TRISTAN
H.

H
What?

TRISTAN

You're zoning out.

H

Sorry I was trying to figure out this gift thing.

NAOMI

I can give Bree a call if-

H

I'll catch you guys in a bit.

H walks out of the room. TRISTAN watches as he leaves, NAOMI stares at her cake.

NAOMI

I can't finish all this...

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY

H leaves the cafe and watches NATALIE argue with LOGAN outside the car. LOGAN is shouting as she tries to apologize.

H (V.O)

Not your problem.

LOGAN opens his door and it shoves NATALIE to the floor. LOGAN drives off as NATALIE watches hopelessly.

NATALIE looks around, H dodges her gaze, pretending to read the cafe's chalkboard menu, NATALIE walks off.

H follows.

NATALIE passes several stores and restaurants and H stays a few yards behind her.

H (V.O)

Where the hell are you going?

NATALIE runs through traffic avoiding cars. Several Honks and shouts are directed her way.

H (V.O)

Damnit.

H waits at the crosswalk. He keeps looking between the red light and NATALIE walking away.

The light changes and he rushes across the street.

H searches the other side looking for NATALIE, but can't find her.

H continues to walk in the general direction before making his way to the

edge of Downtown.

H

Shit.

H turns back before hearing another assortment of honks.

He turns towards the bridge leaving Downtown and spots NATALIE.

She walks, close to traffic, on the side of the road.

H walks towards her and watches as she looks out towards the river.

NATALIE starts to climb the edge. H breaks into a sprint.

Before NATALIE can jump H grabs her hand.

H

(To Natalie)

You're an idiot.

Fall From Grace

by Les Anderson

FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

The sun is shining into a disheveled apartment in the city. DR. GRACE WYNNFIELD (white, early-30's) sleeps in wrinkled professional attire. Her body is tangled up in her sheets and she snores loudly. Her phone blares and wakes her up from her deep slumber.

GRACE
Shut up...

She fumbles for her phone as she tries to answer it.

GRACE (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

Hello?

(beat)

Really? You said I was off today.

Her eyes widen in disbelief.

GRACE (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

Shit, that's today?!

Grace springs out of bed, now fully awake. MONTAGE

Grace hurries to get ready for work. She has a disheveled air about her.

Several items are knocked to the floor as she gets ready.

She sniffs loose articles of clothing until she finally selects one.

She brushes her teeth vigorously. END MONTAGE

Grace practices her speech nervously as she irons a new lab coat.

GRACE (CONT'D)

...And with this new medication we hope to remedy the--

Grace burns her hand on the iron.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Ugh!

She runs cold water over her hand and stares at her reflection in the bathroom mirror. She braces herself against the sink and tries again.

GRACE (CONT'D)

We hope to remedy the ongoing--

She slams her hands on the sink.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Fuck!

INT. HOSPITAL BOARDROOM - DAY

A GROUP OF MULTICULTURAL BUSINESSMEN and MR. ARBUCKLE are seated around a meeting table. DR. BRIAN PETERSON (Early 40s, slender, white), Grace's boss, stands at the head of the meeting table, clearly agitated.

BRIAN

...She should be here any minute now, and we can get started.

Grace enters. She's frazzled and searches for her flash drive anxiously. The businessmen look at her-- all puzzled.

BUSINESS MAN 1

...And this is your assistant?

He rudely acknowledges Grace.

BRIAN

Yes.

Grace quietly shuffles over to the computer and fumbles as she starts the projector.

GRACE

Excuse me, everyone. Sorry I'm late. I'm just gonna--

She plugs in a USB drive and the presentation whirs to life. Brian squeezes her shoulder firmly and leans into her ear.

BRIAN

Screw this up, and it's your ass on the line.

Grace sighs, then straightens up.

GRACE

(to Brian) Bite me.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Good morning, everyone. Before we get started, I'd like to welcome you all to the Branson University school of medicine. I'm Dr.

Wynnfield, an assistant professor of biology under Dr. Peterson.

Grace glares at Brian. He dims the lights and moves to the corner of the room.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Today I'm going to be introducing some drug research we'd appreciate your assistance with.

The businessmen obnoxiously ad-lib their disapproval as Grace prepares the slideshow. The slideshow begins with the image of a young, blonde woman smiling with a puppy.

GRACE (CONT'D)

This is Stacy Greene, a former honors student at Branson.

The slide changes to an unsettling image of Stacy in a hospital bed surrounded by wires and medical equipment.

GRACE (CONT'D)

At nineteen years old, she nearly died in a head-on collision with a semi-trailer. Thankfully, she survived and managed to heal beautifully.

Grace changes slides again. There is a side-by-side image of Stacy's marred face contrasted to her healed face with only a few inconspicuous scars.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Stacy's doctors worked hard to manage her pain without introducing her to opioids. However, she was in pain for months following her surgeries. When Ibuprofen didn't cut it anymore--

Grace changes the slide to an image of Stacy hunched over a hospital bed. She is pale and emaciated.

GRACE (CONT'D)

--she got hooked on Vicodin.

The businessmen chatter in discomfort. Grace and Brian wait for them to settle.

Stacy's case isn't unique either. The opioid crisis is getting worse the longer we do nothing.

GRACE

Stacy was too young to be hooked on opioids, and maybe if she had been offered an alternative, she would still be here today.

The businessmen stare at the picture of addict Stacy.

BRIAN

--Which is why we're here.

Grace ends the presentation. She unveils a pill bottle full of small, pink pills.

She opens the bottle and pinches a pill between her fingers.

GRACE

This is Proxifan. And with it, we hope to remedy the ongoing opioid crisis and save lives.

GRACE (CONT'D)

It's just as effective as Vicodin, but without the addictive properties. That means less dependency and faster recovery for people like Stacy.

The businessmen lean in.

GRACE (CONT'D)

We've already conducted some initial research with mice, but we would love to start paid trials on humans.

BUSINESSMAN 1

Why are you doing this? Wouldn't it be more convenient to advocate for Narcan?

Grace grips the edge of the table.

GRACE

You mean the nasal spray for addicts? Clearly that's not enough, so we need to get Proxifan on the market as fast as possible to minimize deaths.

But Branson is already strapped enough as it is, so we've had to resort to outside donors like you all.

BUSINESSMAN 2

How much are we talking?

The room falls silent.

GRACE

...About twelve grand from each of you to start.

The businessmen seem reluctant.

BUSINESSMAN 2

Twelve grand? What the hell do you need that much for?

GRACE

Sir, drug research is extremely expensive. We've been pulling funding from other projects to prioritize this one.

MR. ARBUCKLE

We haven't seen any trials or studies, so you just want us to blindly trust you?

GRACE & BRIAN

Yes.

The businessmen murmur in disapproval.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Wait-- we could give you a cut of any profits.

MR. ARBUCKLE

I'll believe it when I see it.

The Businessmen exit. Grace follows behind Mr. Arbuckle and firmly grips the doorknob.

GRACE

But with your help we can do it.

Mr. Arbuckle stares at Grace then slams the door as he exits. Brian braces himself against the meeting table.

...Jesus. You should've let me do it. And you should've worn something else. Grace tugs at the hem of her skirt.

GRACE

...We can figure it out. We'll just pull more funding from that rosacea study and put it toward this and maybe--

BRIAN

--Calm down. I'm not saying we have to give up, but we need some tangible evidence that it actually works. I don't know where we're going to get the funding but until then we're gonna have to put it to the side.

GRACE

Dr. Peterson, I believe in this study. I know we can do it. Just give me a chance.

Brian doesn't budge. Grace becomes more desperate.

GRACE (CONT'D)

We can call more donors. I could even pull a grad student or something.

Brian heads for the exit.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Please. For Stacy.

Brian reluctantly turns to Grace.

BRIAN

Fine. You have access to the lab and the rest of the budget. But until I see some progress, you're on your own.

GRACE

Thank you.

BRIAN

And don't do anything stupid. Call some more donors, submit to some journals, but don't cut corners.

GRACE

Of course.

Brian exits. Grace pumps her fist to her chest in accomplishment.

INT. BAR - DAY

A nearly empty bar. There's a pathetic ambience of day drinking and failure. VERONICA CHO (late 20's, asian) downs shots at the bar while her boyfriend, ISAAC (late 20's, black) watches in disapproval. A BARTENDER is nearby.

VERONICA

(to Bartender) Give me another one.

Isaac shakes his head at the Bartender. The Bartender walks away.

ISAAC

Babe, you should give it a rest.

Veronica reaches for another glass. He slides it away from her hand.

VERONICA

Fuck you.

She drinks it anyway.

ISAAC

This isn't gonna solve your problems.

Veronica sighs dramatically.

VERONICA

What do you suggest, Isaac?

ISAAC

Going to therapy, or anything else.

VERONICA

(mockingly)

"Going to therapy." Good one. Very original.

Veronica pulls a crumpled booklet out of her schoolbag. There's a large, red "F" in the corner. She leafs through each page reflectively.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

...I'm never gonna get in like this. I just wish I wasn't so stupid. I'd die if I

could go.

ISAAC

You got drunk before the exam.

VERONICA

I was buzzed. Don't act like you've never done it.

ISAAC

I haven't. And I'm sure Branson doesn't want some half-drunk asshole on their staff.

There's silence as Veronica slurps loudly. Then, Isaac grabs his keys and aggressively pulls Veronica off of the barstool.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

No, we're not doing this right now. Come on.

Veronica whines and pulls away. They both exit.

Coffee House

by Alexis Barron

INT. Coffeeshop- Day Afternoon, Cloudy skies.

BRAN is dressed in expensive clothes, and JANET is dressed in an office uniform with a name tag that says, JANET AMERY, and in bold blue letters, Bio-tech time.

BRAN trying to talk to JANET, while JANET is staring at her coffee.

BRAN

(muffled) Janet...

A whisper that only JANET can hear calls her name. BRAN bangs on the table.

BRAN

(Yelling) JANET...

JANET shoots up from her coffee.

JANET

Yes.

JANET (CONT'D)

Sorry, I've been out of it lately.

BRAN

(annoyed)

You know that I hate when you do that.

BRAN (CONT'D)

Did you reorder my drink?

JANET

Yes.

BRAN

What was the number?

JANET looks down at the RECEIPT.

JANET

(pause)

34.

A BARISTA yells 34.

JANET (CONT'D)

Oh, that is it, I'll get it.

JANET gets up and goes get the COFFEE. Then come back and sits down with the COFFEE. Scooting the coffee to BRAN

JANET (CONT'D)

I hope you like it.

JANET (CONT'D)

(smiling)

I made sure that it was perfect.

BRAN takes a sip. His face is visually disgusted. Making JANET's smile fades.

BRAN

(spitting the coffee into the cup)

I hate it.

JANET get up

JANET

I'll---

BRAN interrupts JANET

BRAN

(cold)

--Sit down.

JANET sits back down and changes the topic.

JANET

Why did you call me here for?

JANET (CONT'D)

Do you need more money?

JANET (CONT'D)

(Fidgeting)

I know that you'll need more clothes for your audition.

JANET pulls out her wallet and pulls out \$100.

JANET (CONT'D)

(Giving it to BRAN) Here.

BRAN takes the MONEY with disgust in his pocket.

JANET (CONT'D)

(Begging)

What do you need, Baby?

JANET try's to hold BRANS, but he snatches away.

BRAN

(angrily)

What I need you to do is shut the fuck up?

JANET's lips tighten.

BRAN (CONT'D)

I need you to understand that this relationship is fun. We met at a coffee shop just like this. Your body was smoken'----

JANET

(Interrupted)

---Thank you

BRAN shoots JANET a stern look. JANET looks numb.

BRAN

(Annoyed)

Like I was saying this relationship was fun. You spoiled the fuck out of me

like, look--

BRAN points at a high-end car. JANET turns to look.

BRAN (CONT'D)

You got me that car, and with your salary--

JANET takes a sip of her lukewarm coffee. While still staring at the car.

BRAN (CONT'D)

(False thankfulness)

--and I am very thankful for all you have done, but I think for me to evolve as a man. I think that we should see other people.

JANET shoots back to look at BRAN with a shocked look. She scoffs in disbelief.

JANET

(in disbelief)

Why? Haven't I done everything that you ever asked? I gave you new clothes for your auditions that you always failed. For fuck sake, I got you a whole new car for your first- ever gig you got.

BRAN grabs and squeezes JANET's shoulder and leans into her ear.

BRAN

(whispering in the ear) Shut up. Now.

BRAN let's go of JANET.

JANET is starting to hear inaudible whispering. BRAN is speaking, but it is inaudible. The screen is starting to shift, Then nothing. It's quiet except for a ringing sound.

BRAN has been banging on the table trying to get JANET's attention, But the last and the loudest brought back to normal.

BRAN (CONT'D)

(Through his teeth)

I told you to stop doing that.

JANET is scarily calm.

JANET

(With a smile)

I am sorry, my love. I think you should come to my house. I think that is what you can do for me. (Cocking her head slightly) Since we are broken up, now.

BRAN

(Understanding)

I guess I could come over. I have a lot of stor-- I mean stuff there.

What time do you want me to come? I can do it tomorrow at like 12.

JANET

(Withdrawn)

That sounds fine to me.

BRAN looks annoyed.

BRAN

(Angry)

Since you're doing that thing again, I'm leaving---

BRAN gets up.

BRAN (CONT'D)

(under his breath)

Thank God. I don't have to deal with this anymore.

BRAN walks out. And JANET sees him walking out to his car. She waves at him bye from the window. BRAN gets in the car and drives off. Once he is gone he. JANET starts laughing out loud getting PEOPLE's attention, they look concerned. A BARISTA walks up with concern on her face.

BARISTA

(tapping JANET's shoulder.)

Mam, Are you ok?

JANET stops laughing and turns the BARISTA.

JANET

(calmly)

I am fine. Everything is just fine.

JANET gets up from the table and walks the EXIST.

CUT TO:

EXT- JANET'S HOUSE- NIGHT

A high-end car pulls into the red-and-white trimmed, two- story house with double garage doors. The car park is on the right side. The car door on the right side opens up and BRAN walks out.

BRAN adjusts his clothes and then his phone.

BRAN

(smiling)

Hey, baby how are you doing?

BRAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, I booked the tickets. I just need to get the stuff that I had left in the Storage.

BRAN is walking to the front door, still on the phone giggly. Before he knocks on the door, JANET opens the door. Which makes BRAN hang the phones immediately.

BRAN (CONT'D)

(Startled)

Shit, Jan you scared the hell out of me.

INT. JANET'S HOUSE-CONT'D

BRAN walks in passing JANET.

BRAN

Where is my stuff?

JANET

(Gesturing to the coach)

My don't you sit down and I'll go get it. Do you want some tea or something to drink?

BRAN walks towards the couch and plops onto it.

BRAN

(with a smile)

How about some tea? You know how I like it.

JANET

I knew that I have the kettle on already. It'll only take me 5 minutes.

Five minutes later.

JANET walks in with two different mugs one white, and one black. She gives the white one to BRAN, and the other one is sitting on the coffee table.

JANET sits across from BRAN.

JANET (CONT'D)

Before if get your stuff. Let's talk.

BRAN takes a sip. He doesn't like it.

BRAN

(scoffs)

Why? There is nothing to talk about.

JANET takes a sip of her tea.

JANET

I think that there is a lot to talk about.

BRAN starts to cough and starts to struggle to breathe.

JANET (CONT'D)

Like you can't stand it when I can it when I'm dazed.--

JANET (CONT'D)

-- Or when you hate it when I talk about (in air quotes) my science thing.

BRAN drops to the floor choking. JANET walks over to where BRAN is laying and sits down next to him.

JANET holds his head in his lap.

JANET (CONT'D)

(smiling)

I know everything about you. Like

JANET (CONT'D)

Like you're allergic to peanuts.---

BRAN starts to grasp for breath. JANET starts caressing BRAN'S face.

JANET (CONT'D)

(starting to tear up) Oh...shhh. It'll be over quickly. Well, I think so.

JANET checks her watch. BRAN starts turning purple and still struggles to breathe. JANET starts to caress BRAN'S cheek.

BRAN starts hyperventilating and then stops with his eyes open. JANET closes his eyes.

JANET lifts her head to the ceiling and closes her eyes. A BOOM, BOOM, BOOM,-
--

BRAN (V.O.)
(Muffled)
Janet... (clearer) Janet!

CUT TO BLACK.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEESHOP-DAY
JANET is staring at her coffee. And BRAN is trying to get JANET's attention.
END OF ACT

The Infinite Coffee Theorem

by Dallas Curry

PLAYWRIGHTS NOTES:

*refers to SEAN'S Voice Over that should be played overhead.

Both "Sarah's" can be played by the same actress to portray themes.

Act 1

Scene 1

SETTING: CAFE DU RESULTAT (Present Day)

CAFE DU RESULTAT should be a cozy coffee shop with books and soft music playing. It should be the ideal hang out spot for people to read, study or hangout for a chill get together.

Stage set with a few tables and the counter in the back a level higher than the rest of the cafe for visual purposes. In a back corner should be a sofa

The barista (DEVIN) should begin the show in the cafe
Two boys (JAIME and SEAN) already sat and served at the
Beginning of the play.

NTR BRIANA (in a rush) in uniform.

BRIANA (or Bree) is rushing towards the counter where DEVIN is currently covering for her.

BRIANA

I'm sorry I'm late. It was morning rush- and the buses were off schedule.

DEVIN

Don't worry about it... The two guys have already been served, I have a lot I have to do- Just make sure you're ready for the morning rush.

Scene 2

SEAN and JAIME are playing pokemon at one of the tables. From across the cafe sits a girl reading a book on a sofa in the corner. SEAN is completely infatuated with her while JAIME is too focused on the game to notice

JAIME

Dude, It's your turn.

(SEAN ignores him continuing to stare at SELINA)

JAIME
(follows his gaze)
You should talk to her.

SEAN
What?! Oh her- No man... I was just uh... Daydreaming that's all.

JAIME
Daydreaming sure does look a lot like staring at her *Ahem* assets.

SEAN
I wasn't staring at her "Assets"

JAIME
But you do admit to staring.

SEAN
Fine so what if I was. It's nothing she just happens to be pretty.

JAIME
Okay? So go talk to her. Woo her, Reel her in, Get jiggy with her.

SEAN
Please stop all of "That"

JAIME
Look if you're not going to talk to her you can at least play your turn. We're already this deep into a game and we don't have that much time until we gotta head back home.

SEAN
Yeah sure...
(SEAN plays the game incorrectly)

JAIME
Dude you're not even paying attention. Look, talk to her, it's easy. SELINA!
(SELINA stares in their direction, but not before SEAN can push JAIME's head onto the table)

SEAN
Dude! What the hell?!

JAIME

What? She's not gonna fall in love with you from across the cafe. You actually you know... Have to talk to her.

SEAN
I don't want to talk to her

JAIME
Then stop staring and play the game

SEAN
I did and you screamed her name!?

JAIME
A) You should be the one screaming her name and B) You played the wrong card... you can't put a trainer down right now...

SEAN
Is she reading her book again?

JAIME
Yes... So you can take your hand off my face.
(SEAN lets go of JAIME's head and JAIME stretched his neck)

JAIME
You have sausage fingers you know.

SEAN
Shut up and let's just go back to playing the game okay?

JAIME
Okay
(The two of them continue to play the game)

JAIME
So why won't you talk to her?

SEAN
Seriously? You're still on this?

JAIME
Well yeah? I'm your best friend and I'm supposed to be your wingman.

SEAN
I don't need a wingman.

JAIME

I mean yeah from the looks of it you need an energy card to evolve your Dewott.

SEAN

I know, but I don't have control over the deck.

JAIME

You do have control over your legs though, so walk over to her.

SEAN

I don't want to

JAIME

You do

SEAN

I can't

JAIME

You can

SEAN

I won't

JAIME

Why not

SEAN

Because I don't do that. I don't talk to people- it's too hard.

JAIME

You talk to me just fine. When we game, you talk to strangers every night.

SEAN

It's a lot easier to say Hey I need medium bullets or they're pushing the dining room than saying hey I stalk your insta and think you're the girl of my dreams.

JAIME

I wouldn't advise you to say that.

SEAN

I just don't talk to people, that's more of a you thing. It's why we work well together.

JAIME

Because I'm an extrovert and you're an introvert?

SEAN

Exactly. You're the ladies man and I'm not. It's the dynamic duo of friendships. Nerd and jock, smart and dumb, tall and short and the list goes on.

JAIME

Are we going to ignore the fact that I'm also here playing pokemon with you?

SEAN

You're missing the point. It's not me- I don't walk up to girls and leave with their snapchats and a new sneaky link.

JAIME

You could

SEAN

No, I couldn't, I mean look. You're like Han Solo and I'm-

JAIME

C3PO

SEAN

I was gonna say Chewbacca, dick.

JAIME

You could be Luke

SEAN

Han got the girl

JAIME

You can be Anakin

SEAN

He choked his wife

JAIME

Some girls like that

SEAN

Dude!?

JAIME

What? Look, all I'm saying is you're a catch. You just need a little confidence.

SEAN

Let's just play the game...

JAIME
Alright... Alright-

XAVIER enters with confidence

JAIME CONTD
You should be more like him...

SEAN
Are you kidding me? That's Xavier Norwood... He's a freaking millionaire!

JAIME
Then what's he doing in a coffee shop?

Jackpot
by Les Anderson

ACT 1, SCENE 1

SETTING:

The outside of a bodega in Brooklyn, New York. The awning of the store buckles under a large blanket of snow, and the entire block is decorated with light-up candy canes and silver bells. As the sun sets, streetlights begin to flicker on and illuminate a hunched, shivering woman in a tattered coat.

A young woman, JADE, huddles under the awning and counts the change in the palm of her hand. She's running short.

JADE
Dammit.

(She stuffs the change back into her pocket, and pulls out a black beanie. She puts on a pair of sunglasses and walks into the bodega. The scene changes into the inside of the bodega. There's fluorescent lighting and loud Christmas music blaring over the speaker. At the front desk, a fatigued STORE CLERK straightens up his display.)

CLERK
Merry Christmas.

(JADE nods clandestinely and makes a beeline for the medicine aisle. She scans through the shelves quickly and pulls a bottle of prenatal vitamins. The CLERK clears his throat and startles JADE - who bumps her head on the shelf and drops the vitamins.)

CLERK (CONT'D)
You alright back there?

(He tilts for a better view of JADE, who has just finished shoving the vitamin bottle into her hoodie.)

JADE
All good.
(She approaches the checkout lane, then hesitates.)
JADE (CONT'D)
(fidgety)
And uh... gimme a pack of Reds.

(The CLERK turns to grab the cigarettes. As he searches the display, an ad for the New York lottery plays on the overhead TV. JADE is enthralled by it. The CLERK slides the carton across the counter.)

CLERK
That'll be \$12.85

(He looks down at the change in her hand solemnly, then looks up at the advertisement as well.)

CLERK (CONT'D)
(in disbelief)
Three. Million. Dollars. Could you imagine?

(JADE takes the sunglasses off and softens her gaze.)
JADE
(growing increasingly excited)

I know, right? Like what would you even do with all that? I'd probably buy a car, or a yacht or--

(The CLERK rests his head in his hands on the counter. He fantasizes and appears to be elsewhere.)

CLERK
I'd finally get my wife that ring I promised. I'd get the girls matching bikes and-- No. I'd finally sell this place.
(beat) Screw it.

(The two pause and stare at the TV forlornly. The CLERK grabs two tickets from behind the counter and hands one to JADE.)

CLERK (CONT'D)
Wanna play?

(JADE nods at breakneck speed and writes the numbers 1 -11-19 on her ticket. She admires it, then shoves it into her pocket.)

JADE
Good luck.

(She puts the change on the counter and shakes his hand.)

CLERK
Good luck.

LIGHTS GO DOWN.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

SCENE:

A dingy shelter under a bridge in the outskirts of Brooklyn. It's late at night, and the only source of light is a small fire in a trash bin. At the camp, there are several worn-out tents and makeshift beds made out of clothes. A small collection of canned goods sits in the corner.

A pregnant young woman, RUTH, shivers and tries to warm her hands in front of the fire. JADE enters wielding the bottle of prenatal vitamins.

JADE
Score!
(She tosses the bottle over to Ruth.)
RUTH
Jade! You didn't!

(JADE settles down next to RUTH and gives her a kiss as she drapes her jacket over Ruth's shoulder.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(still in disbelief) You took these?

(JADE grabs a cigarette. She lights it and takes a long, dramatic inhale.)

JADE
...Maybe I did, maybe I didn't.
(She blows the smoke haughtily towards the sky.)
RUTH
Stop it!
(She fans the smoke away from her face and scowls at JADE.)
JADE
Go ahead, take some.
(Ruth surrenders and pops a few vitamins into her mouth.)

RUTH
You can't just keep taking things, Jade. You're gonna get caught again!

JADE
I won't get caught. Besides, you need it.

(She rubs RUTH's stomach and sighs.)
JADE (CONT'D)
And stop worrying so much. It's not good for the baby.

RUTH

(pointedly)
Is that all you took?
(JADE looks away shamefully.)
RUTH (CONT'D)
Seriously?

(RUTH digs into JADE's pocket and discovers the lottery ticket. She holds it in the air and reads the numbers.)

You are so selfish! What if Tyler finds out?

JADE
Listen. I know you're upset, but just think about it. If I win, we can finally ditch him and get the hell out of here. We could get a place, I could finally get a job, and--

(beat)

RUTH
---I'm so tired of your stupid schemes! You still owe him for the last stunt you pulled, and now we're gonna be stuck with him forever!

You know what? You better get real lucky this time. Or I'm done. You better hope someone's feeling generous tonight.

(RUTH grabs a cardboard sign and a cup, and heads for the exit. On the way, a stocky and unkempt man, TYLER, stumbles in with a bottle of beer. RUTH dodges him and grows timid as she exits.)

JADE

Didn't expect you back so soon.

(She scrambles to her feet and shoves the ticket in her pocket.) 5.

TYLER
Where the hell have you been?

JADE
Just out.

(TYLER thrusts his hand out in expectance. JADE drops some change into his palm.)

TYLER
You're short. Again.

(He takes a menacing whiff of JADE's coat.)

TYLER (CONT'D)
...But you bought smokes?
JADE
(barely audible) What smokes?

(He chuckles unnervingly and snatches the carton of cigarettes from her pocket. JADE winces.)

TYLER
Thanks. I'll add that to your tab.
(TYLER slaps JADE then revels in her pain before he exits.)
TYLER (CONT'D)

And Jade?

Yes?

JADE TYLER

Don't ever lie to me again, alright?
(JADE nods meekly.) LIGHTS GO DOWN. ACT 1, SCENE 3
SETTING:

The same camp site the next morning.

JADE washes up inside her tent while TYLER drinks and carves a tree branch. TYLER pauses to listen to JADE.

When the coast is clear he begins pilfering through her things. He finds the lottery ticket and scowls.

Moments later, JADE emerges from her tent and gets dressed. Once she's done, she searches her pants and freezes. She searches again, then confirms the ticket is actually missing.

TYLER
Looking for something?

JADE
Give it back.

TYLER
Nope. You lied to me. Again. Too busy buying lotto tickets to feed us?

(JADE freezes like a deer in headlights as TYLER saunters over to her. He pulls a knife and holds it up to her throat.)

TYLER (CONT'D)

Now you're gonna owe me double.
(He presses the blade further into her skin.)

JADE

You're a coward.

(JADE head butts TYLER and slides out of his grip. The lottery ticket flutters to the ground. The two of them look at it, then lunge for it. TYLER grabs it and holds it in the air.)

JADE (CONT'D)

No!

(TYLER contemplates. He then rips the ticket in half and squashes it with his shoe. He cracks an evil grin, and begins to limp away. JADE kneels and cries in defeat.)

TYLER

Good luck turning that thing in.

(As he limps away, JADE musters the strength to chuck a rock at his head. He crumples to his knees instantly and a pool of blood slowly seeps under him. JADE freezes in shock, then begins CPR.)

ACT 1, SCENE 4

SETTING:

A few moments later. RUTH enters jangling a cup full of change happily. Out of RUTH's view, JADE calls 9-1-1 and pumps TYLER's chest maniacally.

RUTH

(gleefully)

I was so wrong. You will not believe what happened! Some old guy just walked by and went "Merry Christmas!" and handed me like two- hundred bucks! We can finally pay Tyler back and--

(She catches sight of Tyler's body and freezes.)

RUTH (CONT'D)

Oh God...

(JADE continues CPR silently. Her hands are covered in TYLER's blood. RUTH wails.)

RUTH (CONT'D)

Is he dead?!

JADE

(dissociated)

No, I feel a pulse. But he's not breathing. There's an ambulance on the way.

RUTH

What happened?! He's dead! What did y--

(RUTH clutches her stomach and drops to her knees. Her water has broken. JADE springs up in concern.)

JADE

No. No no no no no. It's way too soon. We've got to get you out of here.

(She puts RUTH around her arm and guides her to the street. They exit. An ambulance is heard in the distance.)

LIGHTS GO DOWN. ACT 1, SCENE 5 SETTING:

A hospital room at night. The TV plays quietly in the background. JADE soothes an exhausted RUTH. Her clothes are still covered in blood.

Once RUTH is asleep, JADE switches the channel to the lottery drawings.

RUTH

(cracking an eye open) Jade.

(JADE's stares intently at the screen. The announcer spins the giant ball and begins to pull numbers. Both of the women's eyes are glued to the screen. JADE clutches the torn pieces of the ticket in her hand. With each matching number, she squeezes tighter. Just before the last number, JADE spots the police in the hallway. She panics and pulls RUTH's face close to hers.)

JADE

Listen to me.

(RUTH nods hurriedly.)

JADE (CONT'D)

They're gonna find me any minute. So you don't know me, okay? You didn't see a thing.

(She shoves the ticket into RUTH's hand.)

JADE (CONT'D)

When you get out of here, you go down to that office and you tell them this is your ticket, okay?

(RUTH begins to cry. JADE wipes the tears away and pulls her close.)

RUTH
I'll wait for you.
(Jade hesitates.)

JADE
Don't.

(JADE pulls herself together and exits. The last number is called, and the ticket is a winner. RUTH clutches the ticket and stares longingly at the door.)

The End

The Death of Jerry Farber or The Jerry Farber Story
by Theodore Pound

This is a true story.

Production Notes for The Death of Jerry Farber:

The set is minimalist and consists of easily available pieces: chairs, tables, a piano, a christmas tree, and a phone booth. A car is mentioned at one point but is not necessary.

Whenever a set piece is brought on stage for the play within the play, it must remain on stage. This follows the thematic principle of “scribble over, don't erase.” After the death of Jerry Farber, sweep the set clear.

Another thematic set piece are the gigantic quilts present in each act. In this act, one side of the quilt has the night sky and constellations, while the reverse side depicts a magical winding blue forest.

Each character should have a hat.

The show can be chopped into a two or one person show. Just cut everything except Jerry and Farber's lines.

The other actors onstage remember Jerry's life as a party. They may join in with Jerry and Farber as they play the Ink Spots.

House open: Work lights. Bare stage. Piano, upstage center, dusty, out of the way. Lights dim at start of show.

[one two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve thirteen actors in pitch black enter the empty stage, dance into their places. From down stage right to left, one strikes a ballerina pose, two form the letter O, three form an upside down V, and four swirl like the letter e. While dancing, they chant their line to the tune of Bizet: Carmen L'amour est un ouseau rebelle: habanera — act one:]

Word Machines: Attend the tale! Attend the tale! Attend the tale! Attend the Tale!

[...in various pitches, dialects, and characters, pretending to be different shapes and sizes. Once they are frozen into their tablo, a wizard in a blue pointy felt hat and grey beard, large yellow rain coat, star shoe'd, shoddles downstage center.]

Wizard: Attend the tale! Pay close attention! Listen! What is... the secret meaning... of every story?

[A beat. The wizard looks into the eyes of the audience. Suddenly, the dancers jump up toes on apron leaning out, whispering loudly, whip out words:]

Word machines: Love!

[Blackout. Spot on: wizard. He braces: word machines tear off coat, cap, beard, blackout.

Lights up: a large BODYGUARD drags two people tied to chairs center stage. He pulls out a pack of cigarettes as he exits. The two people wear hats: the younger one wears a red felt pointy wizard cap, the older one is wearing a yarmulke. The one in the red felt cap begins scraping off the duct tape off his mouth using his shoulder; his cap falls off. He realizes he can still reach his mouth, even though he's all tied up. THE WIZARD looks at JERRY FARBER.]

Wizard: Well, this is dramatic.

[Enter through house: SATAN, trailed by several more stoic sunglassesed bodyguards.]

Satan: No I said two-hundred. Not four-hundred. Two-hundred. No, not four-hundred. Not four-hundred. Two-hundred. Two-hundred. Two-hundred. Two-hundred. No, we don't need Wisconsin, we have Georgia. But don't tell anyone in Wisconsin I said that. But tell everyone in Georgia I did. Alright. Love you too mom, bye. (click.) Jesus. That's not my real mother, that's my mother in law. Actually, soon to be ex mother in law... She's running my campaign. She makes me call her mom, too. Still. Weird lady, but nice. Makes a mean cup of coffee. Erm, what am I doing here?

Bodyguard: This guy owes you his soul. Er... Jerry Farber, sir.

Satan: Oh, goody. Another one of these... look, what is it you want? Eternal life? Boundless wisdom? A wife who likes football? (No response.) Is he deaf?

Bodyguard: No, sir, he, uh, has duct-tape on his mouth, sir.

Satan: What? Then... somebody, take it off!

Bodyguard: Yes, sir.

[A bodyguard runs onstage and peels off Jerry Farber's duct-tape.]

Satan: Who's this other guy?

Wizard: We've met before.

Satan: I've met a lot of people. Now, Jerry, what do you want from me?

Jerry: I want to tell you a story.

Satan: You what?

Jerry: I want to tell you... a story.

Satan: Is this some sort of prank? Which one of you pulled this? Was it all of you? Aw, guys. You got me! Haha. Consider me pranked. You know, this actually means a lot to me. I've been really stressed out, running for president and all... what I needed was a good prank. And voila!

Jerry: This isn't a prank.

Satan: It's not?

Jerry: No.

Satan: You're actually here to tell me a story?

Jerry: Yes.

Satan: Well, color me surprised. Ya know, funny you should mention it. I actually used to eat people's souls in return for unearthly power. I'm the devil, I tempt people. That sort of thing used to be pretty effective... until people just started wishing to become glass canons. (He shivers.) Kids these days... Anyway, what I found to be more effective is making people tell me their stories. Reflection as a form of punishment. It increased productivity seven-fold. I always found it ironic that listening to people tell their stories was equivalent to eating their soul. Oh... maybe that's what God meant in the first place... He can be a bit overly poetic, the cheeky buggard. Which is to say, I've never had someone come to me whose purpose it was to tell me a story.

Jerry: I know.

Satan: You do? How?

Jerry: He told me. (Nods to the wizard.)

Satan: Who's he?

Wizard: I'm the wizard.

Satan: You what?

Wizard: The wizard. We met before, at Peachpit. Satan: The wizard! By God! Where's your hat? Wizard: It's there on the ground. It fell off.

Satan: No wonder I didn't recognize you. Say, are you still crazy? Wizard: Yes.

Satan: Fantastic! This might not be a prank, but it sure is fun. Are you also here to tell me a story?

Wizard: Actually, I'm here to help Jerry tell you a story. I told him that you liked telling stories, and he wanted to come tell you his. So we purposely lost all our money in your casino and bet our souls so you'd have to come meet us.

Satan: You do realize there are easier ways to get my attention?

Wizard: Yes.

Satan: What's so important about this story?

Jerry: I have a question for you about something in it, but it only makes sense

if I tell you the whole thing.

Satan: Well, let's hear the story! I'm all ears, but I've also got to get back to the campaign trail, so let us make it choppy. But not too choppy, I hate running for president.

Jerry: Well, actually, mister Satan, the wizard here wrote a play about my story, and we're here to do it for you. It's a two man show.

Satan: How marvelous! Oh I do love a good night "trodding the planks." And it's so convenient that we're here in the basement theatre of my casino!

Wizard: That was part of the plan.

Satan: Do you need anything before we start?

Jerry: You could untie us.

Satan: Oh, right. Boys...

Wizard: And a dressing room.

Satan: Goliath, show the wizard the dressing.

Goliath: Uh-huh.

[Goliath drags the still tied wizard offstage to the dressing rooms. Another bodyguard unties Jerry. Close grand.]

Satan: After you untie... he's a bit linearly challenged. Makes him unpredictable in a bar fight, though. Begin when you're ready, Jerry.

Jerry: Uh, well, okay— I'll give a curtain speech. Gentle, please, take your seats.

Coin Flip

by Sujana Vangala

Kaleidoscope swirls in pooled darkness,
 Oil and water separated on parking lot gravel,
 Vaporized rain blowing steam as it falls,
 Molasses spilling over lips, sticky and hot,
 Humidity latching to fingers and hair and skin,
 Flipping a coin and watching copper flash in the sun,
 Heads

Tails

Heads

Tails

Heads

It was the kind of summer that left you breathless,
 Gasping, trying to hold onto every second before
 It slipped through your fingers and shattered on the ground,
 Before you picked it up and blood came sticky and hot,
 And you're still praying for the coin to flip your way
 Tails
 Heads

Tails

Heads

Tails

And she washed over you in all the ways you never asked her to,
 In the head underwater, lungs filled with salt, breath of brine,
 Coughing up seaglass kind of way. You thought
 She was a puddle, the kind that steamed in parking lots and
 Separated from motor oil on pavement, but she was an ocean
 She swallowed you entirely, and all you could think about was
 How sticky it all was.

The coin lands; you can't remember ever guessing a side,
 You trust that you've fallen the right way.

Oh Mama

by Oluwatumilara Owolabi

Oh mama, how you love me
 To carry me in your womb for nine months
 To birth me under unimaginable circumstances
 To provide for me before yourself

Oh mama, how you care for me
 Wake me to living and loving every morning
 Prepare food for me to eat despite me being full
 Apply ointments to my aching wounds
 Read me stories till my eyes fall in the nighttime

Oh mama, how you pray for me
 You pray that no harm shall come my way
 You pray for safe journeys as I go from place to place
 You pray that I learn God's will for myself
 You pray that I overcome the troubles that may come my way
 You pray that I will be the woman that you dream of

Oh mama, Oh mama, Oh mama

Note:

"Wake me to living and loving"

Line from Margaret Walker's, Mother of Brown-Ness

The Choir

by Ana Dinis Perez

Oh, how sweetly the music dances through the air.
Gently the organ, the giant, hulking mass of pipe, sings.
Harmonious, though it seems, against the choir.

The chords ringing through the room,
The tiny little drops of grief rolling down their faces Oh, how sweetly the
music dances through the air.

The black cherry pews lined so delicately with cushions, The discolored light
filtering through the misty veil of loss Harmonious, though it seems, against
the choir.

The warm light of the waxen candle's illuminating glow Dimmed as though it
is against the tangible darkness, Oh, how sweetly the music dances through
the air.

Death grasping onto mourner's souls Whispering sweet-nothings of what if's
and why's,
Harmonious, though it seems, against the choir.

The chorus, roaring, raging in sound and in Joyous songs of passing giving
way to strident cries, Oh, how sweetly the music dances through the air

Soaring in intensity as the choir ascends to their climax.
One final send off for a long-beloved soul, Harmonious, though it seems,
against the choir.

The sweet glow of candlelight disappearing as Death bids it loss. The grand
pane of luminescent glass shattering as Death bids it grief.
Oh, how sweetly the music dances through the air. Harmonious, though it
seems, against the choir

Oh, how sweetly the music dances into the dark.
Ever so gently, the tears of mourners fall.
Harmonious, though it seems, against Death's dissonant voice.

And all is quiet.

Adoring and Ignoring-Inspired by Sucker

Ivie Kirby

Loretta James owned sixteen different Louis Vuitton bags. Loretta James
smelled like Marc Jacobs Daisy perfume. Loretta James wore red lipstick
to school every day. Loretta James made all As in school. Loretta James
was rich, popular, beautiful, and smart. Above all, though, Loretta James
was mean. Loretta James would never smile. Loretta James was stuck up,
irritable, judgy, and short tempered. Loretta James would chew Bubble Yum
bubblegum and smack her mouth loudly while looking you up and down if
she didn't like your outfit. Loretta James never faced any consequences, and
she never received any criticism from her classmates because she was rich,
popular, beautiful, and smart.

I was infatuated with Loretta James. I adored and admired her more than any
other girl in my grade. In fact, I adored and admired her more than any other
girl in the entire school. I knew a lot about Loretta; I knew a lot of things that
could hurt her image as the most sought-after girl in school. Loretta James
was addicted to cigarettes. She smoked them in the girls bathroom every
lunch period. I would smell the smoke while I puked up my lunch. Loretta
James was a lesbian. She denied every boy who asked her on a date and had
pictures of Megan Fox taped in her locker. No girl taped pictures of Megan
Fox in their locker unless they were a lesbian or anorexic. I also knew Loretta
James was a lesbian because one night, at one of the senior quarterback's
house parties, Loretta James kissed me. She was drunk; I could taste the
beer in her mouth, but she kissed me and I loved it. I so desperately wanted
Loretta to love me the way I loved her. I adored Loretta James, but Loretta
James did not care for me.

Lucille Samson wore red nail polish. Lucille Samson lived in a large Victorian
house with orange trees littered across the front lawn. Lucille Samson ate
the same meal for lunch everyday in Ms. Judd's room: six California rolls
with two oranges and a Diet Coke. Lucille Samson had done ballet since she
was three years old. Lucille Samson had glossy lips from slathering Dior lip
oil on them every three minutes. Lucille Samson would dress in Chanel skirt
suits from the 90's but only the kind that the models wore; you'd never catch
Lucille Samson in a non-advertised skirt suit. Lucille Samson was pretty,
petty, pleasant, and picky.

I hated Lucille Samson. I bitched about her and I ignored her. I despised her
so much more than anyone I knew (and I knew everyone).

Lucille was annoying and frustrating and airheaded and ditzy and my best friend. Lucille was my best friend and I hated her. We had been best friends since we both met in a production of Swan Lake her ballet company put on. Ever since then, Lucille has stuck by my side, even after I quit ballet. Lucille had many other “best friends”, but she and I had been friends the longest. I used to love Lucille as a sister. She used to be just like me, judgy and mean and cynical. After our sophomore year, though, Lucille became another carbon copy of every other girl at our school. She started to befriend girls like Samantha and Sara and Brittany and Bethany and Adelaide and Amelia. She prioritized their emotions over her own. Lucille paid too much attention to what other people thought of her, especially me. She always looked to me for approval, but I never gave her what she wanted. I didn’t like Lucille. I didn’t respect her, or approve of her, or enjoy her constant desperation. I did not care for Lucille Samson, but Lucille Samson adored me nonetheless.

Loretta, Lucille, and I were all seniors at Lemonbush High School. Loretta, Lucille, and I had every class together. Loretta, Lucille and I made the same grades. Loretta, Lucille, and I were all friends, and Loretta, Lucille, and I all hated each other. Loretta, Lucille, and I have been this way ever since high school began.

Loretta and I were not very close after the party. Lucille was not invited but she arrived nonetheless, but I never spoke to her about the kiss. I wanted to keep it Loretta and I’s little secret. Loretta wanted to keep it a secret as well, but she kept it so hidden that I assumed she denied herself the pleasure of knowing how special the secret was. I loved Loretta so much. Sometimes I would pray to God that Loretta would realize she loved me too, even though I was an atheist and also my mother always told me God hates gays. I guess in a way, I was prioritizing Loretta’s opinions over mine. I valued her perception of me more than anything else. I wanted so desperately to be with Loretta and to love Loretta publicly and to show the whole world that Loretta loves me. In a way, having Loretta as a girlfriend would prove to the world that yes, Loretta is capable of loving someone, but yes, I am the only person she loves. I never told Lucille about this, though. Lucille is such a pain to talk to about feelings and thoughts and literally anything. Lucille is always asking me about how she looks, about how pretty I think she is, about how I feel about her. She’s so invested in how other people view her. I hate that she worries so much about how other people perceive her, especially how I perceive her. She is so stupid! Lucille has a tendency to laugh super loud, but it’s such a fake laugh. She wants to fit in so bad. Those stupid Chanel skirt suits that she always wears? Everyone wears them. She’s just rich enough that she can wear the vintage kinds from the magazine ads.

A lot of people have compared the three of us girls to each other. My mom used to tell me that Loretta’s relationship with me is very similar to my relationship with Lucille. I was so angry with her that I didn’t talk to her

directly for three weeks straight. Loretta and I have something special. At least, I had something special with Loretta. She did not care for me. I hated Lucille. I felt that deep down, Lucille hated me too. She probably just stuck around to make me feel better about myself, and to be honest, it worked. I still hated her, but I guess deep down I appreciated her presence. I would never tell her that, though. She doesn’t mean that much to me.

Loretta told me she hated me. She said she never wanted to kiss me, she was drunk so how could I have taken advantage of her like that, why was I still chasing after her because she clearly hated me, why can’t you take a hint, Lana, you’re disgusting and I’m not a fag like you, leave me alone! I was so confused after this. Loretta and I were friends, I thought, so why couldn’t we have stayed that way? Could we move past my infatuation with her? I know I could’ve gotten over her. I know I could’ve put my feelings aside for her.

Loretta’s harsh words broke me. I lost my cynical mind and grew sappy and emotional and timid. I lost myself. I cried to Lucille for the first time since Swan Lake when I sprained my ankle and couldn’t dance for a month. Lucille started to change. She became quiet around me, and would ignore my cries for help. She became judgy of others, and when she wasn’t scolding me for crying, she was complaining to me about Samantha and Sara and Brittany and Bethany and Adelaide and Amelia.

Eventually, Lucille and I grew distant. The only time I’d see her outside of school was when I ran into her at the farmer’s market on Sundays. These confrontations at the farmer’s market were limited, and soon, she stopped bringing her home-grown oranges to sell to our neighbors. Lucille and I never spoke anymore.

I saw Loretta and Lucille holding hands and laughing. It’s funny to me that Loretta only liked Lucille once Lucille became a different version of me. But I’m not hurt anymore. If anything, I’m glad they’re together. Bitches of a feather flock together, or however the saying goes. I wish the best for them. I hope they both die together, holding hands and giggling about whatever poor girl they decided to torment.

Your Mother Was a Girl Once

by Sujana Vangala

Your mother's eyes cradle something shattered and forgotten in their pooled darkness. She draws you in with slow, still whispers, and sometimes you wonder if she breathes at all. Her rib cage swells and caves, but you've never heard her gasp, sigh, heave earth shaking sobs. Your mother stands at the windowsill and, for a second, you're sure she's going to take flight. Instead, she fixes a flower box of wilted orchids and lets sunshine sear her retinas.

Your mother pinches color into your cheeks before your first school dance. She takes a tie pin from between her lips and presses it to the satin. Before you leave, awkwardly skirting around your date, she cocoons you in her arms. You smell spearmint on her breath, jasmine in her hair, vanilla on her hands. When you leave her arms, you take a little bit of her scent with you.

When you take family pictures, your mother always sits in a chair at the center. Sometimes your father stands behind her; other times, you take his place. Before you learned all your numbers, your mother clutched your plump body close, shifting so her sequined dress never skimmed your skin. Your mother sits in the center, and every head leans toward her smile.

You are planets in her solar system.

On nights when the thermometer's mercury tumbles from its peak, your mother drapes another blanket over your sleeping form. A ghost's touch on your body. The brush of an angel's wing. On particularly frigid mornings, you'll catch her on the phone, twirling the cord between her fingers.

"Oh yes, he's terribly sick," she says, winking at you. She calls before you think to ask.

On those days, when an artist's hand stretches time long and thin, you and your mother fold yourselves into blankets on the sofa and listen to the static of the television. You whisper secrets you'd never share with your father or your friends, and your mother confesses she wanted to be a singer. She brings you a cup of cocoa topped with a mountain of cream and dustings of icing sugar. The whine of the kettle signals her tea is ready, but you both remain in the blankets, huddled around the mug like a hearth. The kettle wails, but neither of you moves.

Your father returns home to find a full cup of cocoa, untouched. Your mother and you flee the cardboard box you call home to find refuge in the park. Here, the snow melts and bleeds and blends together from the marks of use: footprints and tire tracks and softened newspapers. Your mother wraps her

scarf around your throat just a little too tight, but you say nothing. She presses pink fingertips to her lips and lets her breath wash away the frost.

The city stills with indolence; a refusal to leave the house because a trip calls for hats, gloves, coats, boots, socks. Wind whistles through the park, a solo in the normal symphony of the town. Your mother walks in the footprints of the people before her, and you follow her path.

When you were four, you begged your mother for a swing set. Back then, creases never framed her eyes. Except when she laughed, which was often. Then, she burned with determination, petitioning the city council for a playground. With the pace of government, the swing set didn't arrive until you abandoned childhood in favor of girls, hormones, and other middle school terrors.

Now, the seats of the swings sway idly in the wind, never touched by the cause they were born from. Your mother smiles, as if she recalls the same memories. As if she remembers this time when you were both younger, wilder, and sheltered a piece of each other in ungloved hands.

The plastic seat burns icy, and the metal chains prove impossible to brush without gloves. Still, your mother clutches onto them as if they hold her to the earth. Her knuckles scream white, and the swings creak from age, from rot, from the weight of her body.

Your mother swings higher and higher, the watery winter sun forming a halo over the crown of her head. She laughs as she passes you by, and this startles you most. The laugh echoes the same way as when you were four years old, when your mother was your only friend, and blood tethered you together. She laughs, and the birds listen. She laughs, and the air stills. She laughs, and you remember that your mother was not always your mother.

In another life, your mother becomes a singer. She claims a stage, a lover, a home, a daughter this time, instead of a son. Your mother dreams and catches the vision in between fingers before breathing it to life. She never meets you, never pinches your cheeks or makes you cocoa, and she is still happy.

"Ready to go?" she asks. Her cheeks flush, maybe from the cold, maybe from exhilaration. When you realize how unlikely this moment is, your presence, your mother's soft smile, all taste sweeter on your tongue.

"I am," you say, taking her arm. When you feel around the edges of time and know the exact places it may shatter, you become all the more determined to keep it whole.

Mirum - The Volcano

by Eva Hammonds

Mirum: the Volcano was originally a part of a collection of connected stories set in the Mirum Universe, written (Currently unpublished) by Eva Hammonds. This Story has been modified so that it can stand alone as a single adventure.

The night was quiet, the constellations reflecting off the sea of clouds below and making silvery light trails all over the otherworldly landscape. High in the sky, the crescent moon peered down at the great, unbroken expanse of mist, the great cloud sea of Mirum, like the drooping eye of a sleepy traveler.

Suspended in the mist, the only shape breaking the unending expanse of white and gray was a hovering rock, dark, forested hills adorning the top and huge, jagged stalactites miles long jutting down into the clouds below. A safe place to land. A floating island, bathed in moonlight.

But the sky wasn't the only source of light in the wild, beautiful nightscape. Breaking the eerie nothingness was bands of gold firelight and the faraway sound of singing.

Casting a glow into the night were the hearty bonfires lit inside a great Voyager outpost, perched on the edge of the floating island, on a cliff that jutted out over the cloud sea.

Outposts were marketplaces and inns for Voyagers- those brave travelers who dared to fly out over the great empty expanses from island to island, risking falling into the great void below the sky at any moment, seeking adventure and fortune and freedom. People of every race, species, island and tongue, heroes and merchants and even, in some cases, villains.

"FORTY!" hollered the voice of a spry young woman with mousy brown hair over the sound of the feasting voyagers nearby.

The huge building was home to a multi-level marketplace that sold every sort of equipment and provision a Voyager might need, brought from every corner of Mirum. In the center, when night fell, Voyagers would often gather around the bonfire in the center of the outpost and feast and celebrate making it back alive from another daring adventure.

"Sixty," retorted the merchant on the other side of the booth, whom the young woman was speaking to.

"Fifty," amended the girl. Out of all the people milling around the outpost, she wasn't by far the strangest, but she was still quite odd- she wore a suit made of a dark sort of leather which extended along her arm and off her hands, sturdy metal rods propping up huge leather wings which extended from her fingers. She could pull her arms out of these wing extensions so that she could use her hands, and when she did, the great flaps of material fell around her like a cloak. A Sky rider wingsuit.

"Fifty-five," sniffed the merchant. "Take it or leave it.

"Fifty-two," she smiled.

"Fifty-four."

"Fifty-THREE."

"Really?" The merchant asked, rubbing the bridge of his nose. Finally, he looked up with a scowl. "Fine. Done."

The girl gave a whoop of triumph and held out her hand for her goods, three small metal devices that glowed warm amber, a sort of battery.

"The money?" the merchant asked, raising an eyebrow expectantly. "Fifty-three aurum."

With a huff, the girl dropped five shiny red crystals and three milky-clear crystals onto the desktop and grabbed the batteries.

The merchant grumbled, but rolled his eyes and smiled as she walked away. "You always have to have the last word, Elinor Sky rider."

Groping around the back of her suit to drop the batteries into the little built-in pack tied between her shoulders, she made her way through the marketplace to find her friends so that they could move out and find a place to set up camp.

The outpost sold everything: shiny things, gadgets, treasures, junk, flying devices such as jetpacks and Hermes sneakers. Despite the calls of the merchants and the flash of the items, Elinor turned a blind eye to the displays. She had what she needed, and giving in to their advertisements would only waste her aurum. She'd learned the hard way that few merchants could be trusted not to try to scam you or rip you off.

Elinor was stopped short by a commotion off to her right. She looked down the next hivelike row of booths in the direction, and spotted a scule near the north entrance to the outpost.

Ratlings. She furrowed her brow as she saw a gang of them swarm out of the outpost and into the night. Nasty scavengers. They looked like oversized rats who had learned how to stand on their hind legs, and could speak and use their clever little hands like people. Unfortunately, they were usually raiders and troublemakers, and while one alone was weak, in a pack, they could be dangerous.

Picking up her pace, Elinor pushed through the crowd, through the throng of shopping, laughing voyagers. Ratlings meant trouble.

She paused at the north entrance, listening to the wind howling past the tower. She could hear the sound of the flag that flew from the top of the outpost, white with a vibrant green voyager symbol in the center, flapping in the wind. Despite the noise of the weather and cacophony inside, however, she heard something.

She took off down the path, and just a little ways from the outpost, she found the source of the noise.

A frightened girl with poofy, raven-black hair and vivid green eyes peered around fearfully, her back pressed against a tree. Clutched to her chest as if her life depended on it was a rusty, slightly dented bronze jetpack. Surrounding her, not surprisingly, was a gang of snarling ratlings.

“Give it up, girlie,” grinned the leader smugly. He was a particularly ugly fellow, with a slightly silly battered-looking pirate hat perched on his head full of greasy black fur. He waved a short dagger at the girl, who flinched. “Hand it over. We don’t bite.” The others seemed to find this funny, as they hissed in amusement and bared their teeth.

Her foot crushed a stick on the path as Elinor approached, a resounding crack ringing out above the gale. However, the mob barely had time to turn towards the source of the noise before a slicing blade, like a giant arrowhead but wider and sharper, shot out from under her wing and buried itself in the ground an inch from the pirate ratling’s paw.

“Leave her alone,” Elinor growled, and in the darkness, shrouded in her wings, she looked properly terrifying.

“Who says?” snarled the leader, stepping cautiously backward, clearly aware how close he had come to losing a foot. His gang shrunk backward.

“Elinor Skyrider,” she replied coldly. “I said, leave her alone. Are you voyagers or raiders?”

“We practice true freedom,” the ratling leader sniffed. “Of course we follow the noble code- when it’s convenient.” He sniggered. Reaching down, he yanked

the hefty blade out of the ground, which was pretty impressive, seeing as it was just a little smaller than his entire body.

Elinor gestured with one wing, and the blade glowed gold, magically yanking itself out of the ratling’s filthy paws and shooting back to tuck itself under Elinor’s wing.

“I think you’ll find following the code a lot more convenient now,” Elinor said, raising her wings to display twin wingblades tucked underneath.

The ratlings, getting the message, slowly started to scamper away.

“No,” the leader cried, frustrated. “We can take her, you lazy cowards! GET BACK HERE!” he disappeared into the forest, chasing his fleeing followers.

“Are you-” Elinor began, and was startled when the girl lurched forward to hug her around the waist. She looked down at the fluffy mass of the child’s hair, like a miniature stormcloud, unsure what to do.

“Sorry,” the girl grunted, wiping her face and stepping back. Elinor smiled with embarrassment when she saw the girl had been crying. Poor thing. “I just thought...well, thank you.”

“It’s alright,” Elinor said, looking curiously down at the girl’s jetpack. It was an old model, and clearly battered, but it looked like it could work, if it had some juice. “What’s that?”

“This is my Thorne 2000,” the girl said proudly, holding up the jetpack for Elinor to see better. Sure enough, Elinor spotted the words etched dimly on the side of one of the twin engines. “I...I thought someone here could fix it.”

Elinor peered at the girl closer. Dark hair, green eyes...around ten or eleven, with a simple brown tunic...

“You’re a native,” she said with a knowing smile. “Native” was the term for people who lived their whole lives on one island, instead of traveling around like voyagers. “Looking for a life of adventure away from the island?”

“I want to be a voyager,” the girl agreed, her eyes glowing. “My name is Clairen. Clairen Maysa.”

“Why come at night?” Elinor asked, suddenly worried. “Do your parents know you’re out here?”

“No.” Clairen looked at the ground. “Well, yes. I mean, they know I want to be a voyager. They gave me this jetpack. But they never let me go this far from the village.” she frowned at Elinor. “Please don’t send me back.”

“I’ll have to,” Elinor said with a sigh. Clairen looked at her feet. “Buuuut, let’s see what we can do for your Thorne first.” The girl looked up with her with a grin like a sunrise, and Elinor gestured toward the outpost.

“That was really scary,” the girl mumbled, looking back at the tree where she’d been trapped as they walked away. “Is all of Mirum dangerous?”

“Yes,” Elinor said with a sigh. “But a good voyager can handle anything that comes at them. I’ve been in a scary fix more than once, but as long as you keep a good head on your shoulders, the open sky is just about the best place in the world to be.”

“Let me tell you a story. I promise you, there isn’t anything better to be in Mirum than a voyager.”

BROTHERS.

by Benjamin Badgett

Everything has changed since that day. Despite both of our efforts, we cannot go back to what was before. The change that has overtaken us is almost beyond description, but it will always be a constant reminder of what is true in this world...

Mariokart. Basically how any fun day started– filled with semi-friendly competition. And what can I say? I was pretty good at winning, and despite all that Buddy tried, he could do frighteningly little to pass me. The time passes quickly when one is having fun, but while I was focused on the task at hand– winning– we were not growing closer to each other by playing this game. And as we continued for several hours, while Buddy got progressively better at our games, the games also steadily became more competitive. Soon he was placing third and even second in our races.

Will had never been known to be a very lighthearted person– quite the opposite, in fact. He would occasionally outburst at the dinner table about why one of us needed a more strict punishment or why he deserved a greater reward for washing Mom’s car. Buddy was almost my height even at 10 years old, with blond hair and blue eyes slightly brighter than mine. He was exceptionally talented in everything he did, and I always admired his persistence. As a 15-year-old, I might have said at the time that we had few things in common, but that was a downright lie– we enjoyed winning and... winning. We did certainly enjoy music, but while I enjoy movie soundtracks, he loves 70s rock. If I tried to be an inspiration for our sister Laurelen, who was age 12, Buddy always looked up to our older sister Madison, who mildly enjoyed looking down on us all. I miss Madison. Buddy frequently fought over the seat next to Madison, who couldn’t care less; Dad tried to simply get through with whatever caused the least violence. Occasionally, Will would be sent to his room for hitting me or calling Laurelen names. I don’t think he ever thought that someone would hit back.

The war raged on. I grinned appreciatively as I contemplated my many victories. As I proudly displayed my skills to my furious adversary, he continued to grow closer and closer to beating me at my own game. At one point he received The Rocket and proceeded to blow past me at intense speeds while we were halfway through the last lap of the final race in a grand prix. He was nearing the finish line when fate struck yet again– as he missed an upgrade, I was bestowed with the coveted three red shells. He yelled in outrage while I mercilessly threw each one at him in slow, painful succession. I finished first, and Buddy placed fourth. But this digital victory, won out of blood, had a flaw– while he yelled and screamed that I simply was the worst at Mariokart and that my triumph was entirely a result of luck, I began to notice something wrong in my brother’s

attitude. It had taken a while, but I finally looked at him and realized that he was yelling and screaming at me over a video game. It was only a video game! Why couldn't he accept that he'll never beat me? I glanced at the clock behind him- it read 3:30 PM, but we had started playing at 10:00 AM.

"Why don't we take a break, Buddy?" I suggested. Everyone tended to call him Buddy, although Will never seemed to appreciate it a ton.

"I don't WANT to stop playing, Ben! I want to WIN!" I was reminded how he never failed to speak my name with complete disrespect. Didn't I deserve to be treated like his brother? Shouldn't I be the one he looked up to?

"Guess what Bud. I don't care! We've played a long time. Maybe if you decided that you wanted to beat me at this game, you'll start playing it more often. I need to go tell Lauren to turn off the other TV."

He opened his mouth to oppose me, or point out something that was wrong with my grammar, but it was too late. I pushed the power button, and there would be no turning it back on. Smirking slightly as I left the game behind, I stepped back into the real world and marched to the living room, ready to further demonstrate my power as the oldest in the room. Will, livid with the prospect of not being able to beat me for the rest of the day, walked slowly into the room, where I lectured a defiant Lauren about how important it is that we go outside to enjoy the sun.

"I don't need to go outside! Mom said that I could watch TV until 4 o'clock!"

"Well right now I'm telling you that you should go outside. We've all been on devices for a long time." I picked up the TV remote.

Lauren urged, "Can't I at least finish this—" But I turned off the TV.

"You guys should get your swim suits on," I continued. "It's a nice day, and I don't think you were outside yesterday either." I pranced upstairs.

I came downstairs ready to jump in the pool, but the TV was on. Lauren and Buddy reclined lazily on the couches, completely content. Buddy eyed me confidently as my eyes narrowed, my lips pursed. They had persisted beyond my commands.

My tone was dangerously low as I scanned the room for the remote. "Didn't I tell you to turn the TV off? Why did you both go against what I said?" Will spoke up first, taking care to lace his voice with a maddening, false innocence. "Because we didn't care what you had to say! Mom told Lauren that she could watch TV until 4, and so that's what she's gonna do. I'm just here to make sure she does turn off at 4."

I continued searching for wherever the remote was. Will did not stop taunting me; he knew that his words were getting under my skin.

"What did you think we were gonna do? Listen to you?" The atmosphere continued to thicken. "You don't have any authority over us just because you're older! Mom, Dad, and Madison aren't here right now, so we'll just have to decide together. Lauren and I decided that we're gonna watch TV!"

As I stood at the edge of a choice that would forever change our relationship, I looked him in the eyes with simple fury. Only then did I realize what he was sitting on.

"Give me the remote, Buddy!" I spoke his name with as much contempt as I could muster. I was sick of this kid. Despite all that we had done together, he still refused to listen to me. "You're going to give it to me, Buddy."

"Why don't you make me!? You can't do anything to me!"

I took an unstable step toward him, breathing shallowly. My mind's vision had clouded before, but I couldn't even hear Lauren telling me to stop. I loomed over Will with another imposing step. It would be so easy to simply throw him off the couch and take the remote.

As he sat up a little to protect the remote behind his back, he kicked out at me, missing narrowly. I lost all reason as I shouted, "Give me the remote, Will! I don't want to hurt you." That was a lie.

"You can't do anything to me, Ben!" My ears were ringing. "What's the matter, scared of turning the TV off?"

I never regretted taking karate lessons for several years, but I will always remember the few choices that I made to use the skill.

As he threw his fist, I quickly side-stepped, grabbing his arm and pulling slightly. I threw myself at him. I jabbed hard towards his rib cage, putting one knee next to his on the couch. Now I was on top of him, losing all consciousness of every caring about him, simply wanting to hurt him. He was no longer confident that I would hold back; he was scared. My fists continued to fall like lightning, each one meeting a vulnerable target. Will continued to struggle, but doing less than what was needed to get me away. This was not about the remote, nor the TV; this was about something far more ancient and important, which had struck history across all times ever since Cain and Abel.

But then I heard Lauren. She was crying, pleading as loud as she could, "Stop Ben, please stop!"

Like an electric shock, I saw what I was doing, what I had become, and screamed so that the heavens would hear me, "I'M SORRY!!" I got off of Will. "I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry!! Forgive me, brother!" I paced back and forth in the room, shaking violently. When Will didn't answer, I looked at him. Tears were streaming down his face and he looked at me with horror that I will never forget. Now I realized that I was crying too.

I collapsed to my knees and bowed deeply before him, all the while pleading desperately, "I'm so sorry, please forgive me brother! Forgive me." But when I looked at him, I saw Death staring me in the eyes.

"I don't want to."

He got up and stormed upstairs, while I realized how hopeless my situation was. Lauren had left, either out of frustration or fear, and I finally comprehended how isolated I made myself. So I pursued my brother. As I threw myself to my feet, I heard the door to our room slam loudly and quickly lock. I bounded up the stairs two at a time while my mind raced through what had happened. How could I have fallen so far and been so careless? Would this turmoil in my heart ever end?

I knocked tenderly on the barrier. There was no reply but slow, muffled sobbing.

"Please, Will. Forgive me. I know I've hurt you and I don't deserve it, but please do! I'm begging you." I implore to him for a long time, losing hope as each second dragged on at snail's pace. Finally, I collapsed and gave my heart up for him. "I love you, Will. I do not hate you. I will always love you until the ends of the Earth. But you don't have to say anything back."

Eons later, I heard the door click as it was unlocked, and I watched the border dissipate slowly.

I threw myself at him. We hugged.

Everything has changed since that day. Despite both of our efforts, we cannot go back to what was before. The change that has overtaken us is almost beyond description, but it will always be a constant reminder of what is true in this world.

This is my Neighborhood

by Peyton Mcrae

This is my neighborhood. "Victory heights." I have yet to see victory, and I live on the bottom of the lower part of a hill. The evil twin of cookie cutter neighborhoods, every trait and aspect of each house is unique and shares its own quirks to the world, standing tall. There is a house overrun with cats, one that shoots a cannon every time their football team gets a touchdown, one that constantly grills, and one that has a guy that lives in a truck. There is a house that is two stories and nice. One that is short and tall. One that is tearing at the seams, yet still lived in. Every house has details I observe and know. But the tragedy of mine is one that is filled with distance. I see them and know them, but do they know who I am?

They will never know that I view and admire their uniqueness, and value the fact that them being themselves out loud and proud gives me strength to be myself. There is tremendous beauty in the ordinary, and my neighbor helps me realize that. The television shows and movies we watch often present neighborhoods that are vibrant and truly filled with community. The ideal neighborhoods. Kids playing in the cul de sacs, their camaraderie will never break. Parents helping each other out in conflicts and troubles, the neighborhood knowing that it's stronger together. This sensationalism in the media is far from the truth, detached.

Throughout my childhood, I wanted a next-door neighbor friend. One I could spend time with, one whose house I could walk over to and play till I had to go home. Sadly, this wish never came true. There is still solitude in my neighborhood. There is loneliness that will never end anytime soon. There is terrible, unforgiving loneliness. Yet, there are times where light shines through, as nothing is ever truly hopeless.

The cop that lives next door once paid for our replacement retaining wall. A fire once tried to burn my frontward neighbors, but everyone came together to put it out. While there is always going to be a form of cold, desolate separation from one another, I will truly never forget the kindness that was shown that day, and will forever and always treasure it as something that displayed to me how even through solitude, people can transform from one thing to another to assist those truly in need. Everyone has their traits that make them unique, make them feel separated, or not accepted. But when the time is right, everyone can come together to kill the treacherous solitude and show the truth: We may never truly know each other, but we pay attention, and deep down, the threshold can be broken to unite. These moments are the greatest in the world to me.

This is my neighborhood.

Journey Paved with Imagination

by Allie Boyd

Imagination was the fabric of my childhood. It kept me tremendously busy when others would be drowning in boredom. It was the foundation of my creative playground. My room wasn't a room, it was a cave. My dolls weren't just dolls. They were real people with hopes and dreams. Dogs could talk. Mermaids weren't a fairytale. Magic was a familiar friend. And it was this imagination that built a bridge to story-telling. I grew up loving worlds that weren't this one. Stories could take my mind to a place that was different. A place that held possibilities to do anything, to be anything. It was a place where imagination could become real. Harry Potter transformed me into a wizard. Marvel gave me superpowers. Pirates of the Caribbean revealed secrets of the sea. H2O: Just Add Water made me a mermaid. The Hobbit opened the door to adventure. And I dreamt of creating my own world.

I was in fourth grade whenever my best friend and I decided to write a story. It wasn't good by any means, but the imagination was definitely there. We wrote the entire thing on paper and treated those sheets like our baby. It was called "Attacks at the Creek," named and based around our school, Tiger Creek. I remember that we were so proud of our work that we read the full piece to our teacher. She said it was fantastic, which, looking back on it, had to have been a lie. But her encouraging words meant volumes. I began writing on my own, as ideas flooded my mind. However, I was in elementary school. I didn't know how to write. Pages were filled with childish dialogue, flat characters, vague descriptions, and other attributes you would expect from a 9-year-old. Oh and most importantly, no stories started were ever finished. But I had the spirit.

Time progressed. I wrote, but barely. The imagination was draining away, and I could feel it. It was devastating. I would stare at a blank page and become frustrated. No thoughts were waiting to jump on the page. Sentences would be typed out and immediately deleted. I began to feel myself slowly giving up. It felt as if a part of me was starting to disappear into thin air. It was terrifying. I trembled with extreme fear of losing my imagination. Imagination that made me me. Imagination was what I knew myself for. If I didn't have that, then who was I? But I knew all I needed was a small push of inspiration to bring the imagination back, so I searched. And searched. And searched.

I remember it vividly, the moment when a brilliant idea finally developed in my mind. I was stationed on my grandparents' couch, watching The Hobbit. I had seen the movie many times before, but that day I was watching with an intent to be influenced. I wished to create something fantasy-oriented with multiple films to build off my original concept. As each scene passed and each character appeared, I gleaned inside of myself. A train of thoughts sped on the

tracks that circled my once imaginative mind. Each thought, a boxcar, and one of those boxcars held a key inside. A key to unlock my imagination again. And then, the key appeared in the hundredth boxcar. And I could feel that lightbulb truly turn on over my head. The idea had struck: Collided Realms.

This story would consume my time the following year after this event. A total of 54 pages, the most I have ever written on a story, would emerge from this thought. It followed two perspectives, one being a teenage girl from a realm of elves and the other being a teenage boy from the realm of stars. There are ten realms, each carefully constructed by me, which are at war with each other. I'm aware that it sounds stupid, but I swear it was a solid idea. If done correctly, I still very well believe this could work. I spent countless days writing just one page. I would not mess up the imaginative masterpiece that was Collided Realms. I made character boards, desperate to conjure up individuals who others could love and relate to. I took aspects of my own favorite characters along with traits from people in my own life to build a fabricated being. And every chapter, every page, every sentence, had to be thoroughly thought about and analyzed.

Even after all the time I spent and the numerous conversations I had with myself, saying I will finish this ... I did not. Collided Realms--the story that I worshiped and respected and saw as the highest point of my imagination--now, still, to this day, sits in my Google Docs, untouched. I look back at it from time to time, considering whether I should continue writing it, rewrite the entire thing, or trash it. It upsets me more than anything else that I did not finish what was once my cherished idea. I tossed it to the side, became too busy with my present to focus on my developing future.

Nonetheless, the creation of Collided Realms did not fully disappoint because it reopened my creative playground. I had an abundance of story ideas yet again. My Google docs began to stack up with half-written, not even half written, novels. My writing ability increased. Description flowed out of my fingers easier. Characters were well structured. But just like always, I could never EVER finish a story. When an idea hit, it would hit like a truck. I would rush to put my thoughts on the page. I would obsess over the fresh novel from anywhere between a week to a month, and then that dreaded writer's block smacked me in the face. So, I would close my chromebook and lose complete interest, just like I did with Collided Realms.

I feel defeated, disappointed, doomed to live in this constant cycle of abandonment of my imaginative concoctions. I'm ashamed that I do this. I do not wish to lose passion for my writing, but, almost like it's inevitable at this point, I do. I now find myself just trying to find the strength, the want, the ultimate drive. I know I am capable. It's just a matter of actually doing it. I'm at the point now where I'm just waiting. Waiting for the imagination I've built up over the years to finally burst outward, finally create something truly

incredible, and finally save me from this tremendously painful writers-block. It's a weird feeling when you want something but you are the one keeping it from yourself. I have hope that one day, I will finish a story. I will make a difference through creativity. I will find my full potential in writing. I will be proud of the words I put on the pages. But for now, until that happens, I'll do what I do best and use my imagination.

The Ann Arbor Black English Case Revisited

by Gene Yoon

Imagine what the scene must have been like: The courtroom of the District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan is filled with the hot, anxious breath of dozens upon dozens of people. Lawyers and witnesses, onlookers and jury. Then there's a collective catch of breath as the foreman rises, announcing that the jury has reached a decision. It's one that could change the lives of local school children forever, as well as those across the country. As Judge Joiner prepares to issue the verdict, African American elementary student Betty Davis and her fellow Black classmates get on their feet, as well as their lawyer Gabe Kaimowitz, peering through his distinctive wide-rimmed glasses. On the other side of the aisle, Ann Arbor Public Schools' Superintendent Harry Howard straightens his tie and the collar of his suit, while Attorney John B. Weaver stops anxiously clicking his pen. The tables shake. The squeaking of chairs falls onto a silent courtroom.

This scene concluded the end of what is today known as the Ann Arbor Black English Case, which spanned two years until Judge Joiner's decision on July 12, 1979. For decades, the case has fueled debates among linguists and educators. But this wasn't just a legal matter about whether or not Black English was a separate language. The case opened up a new precedent for institutional acceptance of a vital part of African American culture, and established a standard for the education of Black students. Ultimately, the case was the culmination of persistent, heated discourse among parents, teachers, and administrators, which brought equal educational opportunities to Black children in the 1970s. Indeed, the implications of the legal decision and surrounding drama that took place in the Ann Arbor courtroom are still controversial and discussed to this day. So what exactly happened in this case? Is Black English a dialect or a language? And why does it matter?

The term "Ebonics," which is now recognized as Black English or African American Vernacular English, was created in the 1970s by African-American psychologist Robert Williams who defined the term as "black sounds." The historical origin of Black English is somewhat controversial with most linguists agreeing that it began as a pidgin, or a form of communication between people who do not share the same language – in this case, between slaves and West African slave traders. What is interesting about Black English is that it transcends regions and displays similar structural patterns in almost every U.S. state. This vernacular, however, continues to create challenges for students and teachers because of the grammatical and phonological differences between Standard American English and Black English. But it was the legal debates about Black English in the late 1970s and the District Court's decision that would recognize it as a legitimate language in its own right in an educational setting.

The Ann Arbor Black English Case originated from the suburban town of Ann Arbor, in southeastern Michigan. It all began when fifteen African American children reported being discriminated against in their largely upper class, white elementary school, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary. Raised in a lower income, public housing project called Green Road, these children stuck out like a sore thumb in school, not just because of their culture and appearance but also because of the way they spoke. Students from Green Road frequented special education classes. And according to the Ann Arbor Student Advocacy Center, a regional nonprofit organization that stands up for youth rights by investigating cases of mistreatment, even today children from Green Road are 30 times more likely to be put into special education. Those children, like Betty Davis, spoke Black English, making them outsiders at their school. Teachers would tell them that their tongue was not a language but a collection of linguistic mistakes that needed to be corrected. As a result, these children were placed in special education classes not so much to teach them how to speak Standard English, but to “fix” their English and assimilate them into a standard dialect.

Parents were outraged at this treatment, and sued the Michigan Board of Education for \$280,000 in damages. The attorney for the parents and kids, Gabe Kaimowitz would go on to publicly state, “These children are on the way to becoming functional illiterates. We’re saying to the schools either you can educate them or you cannot. Put up or shut up educationally” (Driscoll 24). There was a context for his words. Just a few years before the beginning of the case, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 had been passed, prohibiting discrimination of race, social class, gender, or nationality in terms of education. According to Kaimowitz and the plaintiffs, the school’s actions weren’t just wrong but illegal, a form of language discrimination that denied the children the right to quality education.

On July 28, 1977, Attorneys Gabe Kaimowitz and Kenneth Lewis filed a federal lawsuit. Their suit was later joined by African American linguist Dr. Geneva Smitherman and Ruth Zweifler, the coordinator of the Student Advocacy Center. The plaintiffs demanded changes in the way the children were labeled and taught. They argued that the children spoke a form of Black English that prevented learning in regular classes because teaching was done in standard English, thus hindering their equal participation in the school. The Ann Arbor school board, however, denied that there was a language barrier. Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary’s psychiatrist Dr. Marguerite Krebs, among other witnesses brought by the defendants, would testify that her and the children had no problems communicating with one another.

The defendants later presented a settlement in court on January 17, 1978. It included speech therapy for any kid who spoke Black English. However, the plaintiffs quickly rejected the reading plan as it ignored the suggestion a language barrier existed between Black children and teachers at the school.

The plaintiffs publicly stated that this reading plan was nothing but a “lack of good faith toward solving the problems raised in this litigation” (Hulik 19). A month later, the plaintiffs presented an alternative plan to Judge Joiner which called for an instructional strategy to eliminate the alleged language barriers. The plaintiffs also requested an instructional program in Black English with a similar format to what was used in classes that taught other foreign languages, including instructors who respected the students’ way of speaking and would teach both Black English and standard English.

To settle this debate, the court had to collect evidence and expert testimonies to see if there was a language barrier, and if this language barrier was an obstacle for Black students’ equal participation in school. Several distinguished researchers and professionals such as linguist William Labov testified in agreement with the plaintiffs, arguing for the existence of a separate language system or a part of the English language different from standard English in significant ways. In his final decision, Judge Joiner would later identify many distinct linguistic characteristics of Black English, such as the deletion of final consonants (gold is pronounced as gol’, fast as fas’, last as las’, etc.). Linguists like Geneva Smitherman also testified that because Black English does not differentiate among some sounds which are distinguished in standard English, without appropriate instruction, teachers would experience difficulty in getting the students to use standard pronunciation. For this reason, speakers of Black English have been inappropriately classified as uneducated, because most IQ and standardized tests are written in standard English.

The experts further testified that efforts to instruct the children in standard English by teachers who discouraged the children’s way of speaking, which was accepted in their home, could result in the children feeling ashamed of their language, hindering the learning process. In this respect, teaching Black English was different from the usual instruction of foreign languages, which were taught without condemning the students’ native language. In response to the plaintiffs, John B. Weaver, an attorney for the school system, reacted by saying “the research of the ten outside expert witnesses who testified are not relevant since they have done research outside Ann Arbor” (Green 8).

This debate was settled by Judge Joiner’s final ruling: a language barrier existed, because in the process of attempting to teach the students how to speak standard English, the students were made to feel inferior, thereby treated as unequal in the school’s mission to offer equal learning opportunities. The consequences of the judge’s ruling included multiple actions that had to be met by the school. Ultimately, the court ordered the Board of Education to act on a plan directed at assisting teachers to better adapt toward students of different dialects and languages, like Black English. Even after the case ended, the debate continued about whether Black English

is a dialect or a separate language on its own. This controversy has not been resolved and is still discussed among educators and linguists. Even though the Ann Arbor Black English Case recognized it as a legitimate language with significant differences, creating a language barrier, some linguists disagree. For instance, linguists use the criterion of mutual intelligibility in determining whether a spoken tongue is a dialect or a language. During the trial, one linguist commenting on the case said, “If we are able to understand each other speaking it, we are speaking dialects of one language” (Labov 175), implying that Black and Standard English are mutually intelligible.

Interracial Relationships in 19th-20th Century South

by Princess Graham

America has seen a lot of changes and variety when it comes to interracial relationships. Marriage during the 19th and 20th century was regulated to make socially “adequate” families and furthermore, a socially “adequate” state (Lindsay, 555). In most areas, especially in the south, interracial relationships were not seen as socially adequate, so preventing them was a major focus when regulating marriage laws. In Alabama, the issue was rooted in white superiority, whereas in Mississippi, the issue was similar, but dealt a bit more with mixed races. Arkansas was a bit different, starting as impartial to miscegenation laws, but overtime growing less lenient. Overall, each of these states had different ways of regulating interracial relationships, but it shows to have been an important factor in the south.

In Alabama, the issue with interracial relationships had ties with white superiority. “Under slavery, while such transgressions violated the established systems of racial subordination and patriarchy, they didn’t ultimately threaten the systems themselves (Novkov, 229).” The concept of white superiority had always existed, as with the illegality of interracial couples. However, slavery helped draw the lines of who could and could not marry more. No slavery meant black people had more freedom to freely marry, and interracial marriage became a more pressing issue. By regulating interracial marriages, lawmakers “sent a signal that even if the national government were intent upon imposing civil and political equality, so-called social equality would not result from emancipation or constitutional reform (Novkov, 226).” There was a model of a perfect white family, and miscegenation challenged it. The government did not like that, so in return, interracial relationships were prohibited. White people feared that black blood would ruin their race and make them impure. However, in 1907, Judge Thomas M. Norwood stated that the blame for miscegenation went equally to white men who had sex with black women while married to white women and preaching the issues with miscegenation (Novkov, 248).

Alabama changed their laws on interracial marriage quite frequently. The first statute of 1852, made before slavery ended, stated that interracial marriage was illegal, and the officiator could be fined \$1,000. There were no criminal penalties for the people attempting to marry, and interracial sex was not prohibited. By the end of the Civil War, a new statute in 1970 stated that the definition of black was expanded to be anyone with a black ancestor to the third generation, and interracial marriage or sexual relations came with imprisonment for 2-7 years. Officiators could be fined \$100-\$1,000, and could be imprisoned or sentenced to labor for up to 6 months. Initially, when dealing with interracial marriages, courts focused on evidence. Later, they focused on defining race, specifically black. Initially, one was considered black if one of their great-grandparents was black. White did not have a definition. After the

Reed case of 1920, the Wilson case of 1921, and the Milstead case of 1927, it was established that association with blacks could prove blackness as well (and vice-versa, though not as often). The appearance of a black person was also further described, and siblings of those convicted could also be analyzed to identify a black person (Novkov, 264).

Mississippi's intermarriage laws were also enforced by white supremacy. One case in Mississippi, concerning Davis Knight in 1948, focused specifically on mixed races. Africans, Europeans, and Native Americans already shared blood, but white supremacists ignored this, labeling mixed races as Indian, colored, or black, but rarely white, no matter how much white was in that person (Bynum, 255). The Knight case was very complex, with many different stories being told about his ancestry. In summary, the Knights were extremely looked down upon, and were infamous for intermarriage. Davis Knight's white great-grandfather likely had relations with a black slave named Rachel, and he also arranged a marriage between his daughter and Rachel's son (Bynum, 265). Further down the line, this led to a lot of marriage between the two families, which caused outside (and even inside) people to be very confused about who would be considered black and who would be considered white. There were some instances where one family member would be considered white, and a very close family member would be considered black. In the end of it all, Davis Knight was granted legal status as a white man (Bynum, 249). This confusion had an impact on the civil rights movement, even if it was a small one. "Although it did not directly advance the cause of black civil rights, the trial of Davis Knight exposed the paradoxes of racial categorization in the South (Bynum, 276)."

Arkansas handled interracial relationships a bit differently than Alabama and Mississippi. Initially, the state was very lenient towards them. In 1929, Mitchell (black) and Wilson (white) were accused of having interracial sex, but their case was excused, and they were considered to not be violating the law because they weren't married, nor did they live together. "Despite the presence of antimiscegenation laws, interracial sex often took place in Arkansas with little legal interference (Robinson, 266)." It was never accepted, but also often ignored. Interracial sex was also pretty common pre-Civil War, with slave masters or white men having kids with slaves. There were few freed black slaves, and since blacks couldn't marry, intermarriage laws weren't that necessary. The first antimiscegenation law in Arkansas was in 1827, simply stating that whites and blacks or mixed people couldn't marry, with no defined punishment. This was extremely mild in comparison to the punishments for 1) bigamy: at least a year in prison and to be considered infamous afterwards; 2) rape: death; and 3) attempted rape: a fine and imprisonment for whites, and death for blacks. In 1911, a bill made interracial cohabitation or concubine illegal. The punishment was 1 month-1 year in prison. Convictions were also commonly reversed. Two cases in 1924 and 1960 were excused since there was no cohabitation, only sex. The consistent reversals of convictions caused people to not take the laws too seriously.

Change was also being made by black people in politics. Eight black people were delegates in a constitutional convention, and while their voices were small, they made a difference. "Between 1874 and 1890, at least 47 black men served in the legislative assembly (Robinson, 272)." Blacks were gaining more rights, and interracial marriage was suddenly seen as legal (as seen in 3 interracial marriages that occurred between the years of 1868 and 1873). Interracial marriage and even unmarried interracial couples were pretty common, not only between blacks and whites, but between blacks, whites, Chinese, and Native Americans. However, in the 1870's-1880's, things went downhill for these couples. Political fears caused conservative democrats to create new rules for voting: 1) one had to choose a candidate not a party; 2) voting had to take less than 5 minutes; and 3) a poll tax. "Collectively, these changes were designed to confuse and humiliate blacks and discourage them from participating in the political process (Robinson, 274)." "The number of married interracial couples living in [Pulaski] County had fallen from twenty-five in 1880 to only fourteen in 1900 (Robinson, 275)."

Some blacks were against interracial relationships as well, such as Hooper, who refused to let a white man marry his daughter, despite numerous attempts. Many blacks did not desire relationships with whites, nor did they see it as beneficial for their race. "Whites opposed intermarriage because it suggested... that blacks could become their social equals by way of marriage. Blacks disapproved intermarriage because it intimated that blacks were not satisfied with partners of their own race and did not regard them as the social equals of whites (Robinson, 282)."

While the three states discussed in this essay vary in their approaches to interracial relationships, there are commonalities to be seen. Alabama and Mississippi were more strict on their policies as opposed to Arkansas, but Arkansas did tighten the restrictions as time passed. Missouri also focused much more on mixed races than the other 2 states. Alabama focused heavily on white superiority, having that influence many changes to their intermarriage policies.

The Need For Increased LGBTQ Support In School

by Mark Harris

Visibility of LGBTQ(lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) people and topics has increased greatly over the past few decades, and the fight for their rights continues into the modern day. After all, it was only seven years ago when same-sex couples earned the right to marry in the US. While the rights of LGBTQ adults continue to increase into today, the rights of LGBTQ youth are falling farther and farther behind with little to no protection in the eyes of the law, and in a school environment this can lead to increased struggles for LGBTQ youth when compared to their straight peers. It is in situations such as these where these students must rely on their school for support, but many find unwelcoming environments, verbal harassment, or even assault in some cases. LGBTQ students are simply not receiving the support they need from school to thrive, much less survive, their education.

The statistics behind the struggles of LGBTQ students are frankly staggering. The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) reported the following: 32 percent of lesbian, gay, or bisexual students reported experiencing bullying on school grounds. Compare this to the reported 17.1 percent of their straight peers that experience the same thing. Even those who are uncertain of their sexual orientation face higher rates of on-campus bullying compared to their straight peers at 26.9 percent (ASPA). All of this leads to an environment where LGBTQ students feel concentered, stressed, and even afraid for their physical safety. This compounds even further to increased dropout rates, higher rates of depression, lowered self esteem, and lowered rates of seeking postsecondary education (“Schools”). This graphic from the Trevor Project demonstrates the grim reality of current school environments for LGBTQ youth.

Even if these students sought out support from their school, they were often ignored. In a large biannual survey conducted by the American Psychological Association a reported 60 percent of LGBTQ students who reported harassment or assault received no response from school personnel. Over half of LGBTQ students received no support, not even a response, after coming to their school for support in a moment when they needed that support the most (Singh 1). How can schools expect any student to succeed when they turn them away in a moment where they need that support the most? In situations like that it’s important for LGBTQ students to have a place to be able to support each other; However, many students face issues in establishing LGBTQ-affirming clubs, such as Gay-Straight Alliances, in their school despite research suggesting that the presence of such clubs improves the school environment for all students, not just those which are LGBTQ (Singh 1). Schools, more often than not, fail to provide significant support for LGBTQ students, fail to provide an environment in which they can support each other, and fail to even recognize the struggles they face.

Schools can play another major role, yet still hesitate to do so. Schools can act as a medium in which parents and their LGBTQ kids can come to understand and accept one another. Much more than anything else, parental acceptance plays a key role in the mental well being of LGBTQ youth. The American Psychological Association reports the following: among LGBTQ youth who experience high amounts of parental rejection, the rates of attempted suicide skyrocket. Without parental support LGBTQ youth were found to be 8.4 times more likely to attempt suicide, 5.9 times more likely to experience extreme depression, and 3.4 times more likely to abuse drugs or practice unsafe sex. Research towards transgender youth is too limited to draw meaningful conclusions, although similar results seem to be emerging (Singh 2). The barrier between parents and their LGBTQ children is one that is far from easy to overcome, but schools can play a major role in assisting both the parents and their children through educating parents on how important it is to accept their child’s identity and how to be supportive of who their child is. Without making use of the unique chance to act as a mediator for mutual understanding between parent and child, LGBTQ kids can feel helpless to make their parents understand them, and it makes it easy to see why the rates of suicide become so much higher under situations like this (Singh 2-3). This is simply one way of many that schools can begin supporting their LGBTQ students.

Schools are capable of providing support for their LGBTQ students, and it’s imperative that they begin doing so. In light of the struggles LGBTQ students face, it’s clear that more needs to be done, both from the school’s end as well as from the parents. It is clear that LGBTQ students can succeed in school, they just need a little extra support. It has been shown that students who receive the support they need are capable of thriving, or at the very least surviving, school (Singh 5-6). One of the key factors in providing an environment in which LGBTQ students can thrive is by ensuring that they can feel safe on school grounds. School policies that combat discrimination, violence, and bullying targeted towards LGBTQ students is one such way the school can achieve this. It is also important to note that these policies have been proven effective in schools where they were implemented, reducing the rates of discriminatory remarks, harassment, and attempted suicides (“Schools”). These initiatives also decreased the amount of fear, anxiety, and stress that all students, not just LGBTQ students, reported on average. The inclusion of LGBTQ-affirming clubs have been proven to provide similar benefits as well. The presence of a Gay-Straight Alliance has been shown to improve all students’ school experience, so the need for one is clear (ASPA). It is worth restating the role schools can play in bridging the gap between LGBTQ students and their parents due to the severity in which parental acceptance affects LGBTQ youth. It should be considered a priority to provide adequate resources to parents in order to allow them to better understand their LGBTQ children (Singh 2).

Still though, some parents hesitate about LGBTQ topics in school. The need for parental rights is an important one, and some parents worry that the more schools provide for LGBTQ students, the less that they will be able to

decide about their own children's education regarding such topics. However, a lot of that hesitation comes from the fear and general misunderstanding of LGBTQ topics, and with how important parental acceptance is, these misunderstandings need to be cleared. One such misunderstanding is very common. Parents wonder whether or not exposure to LGBTQ topics will make their children become LGBTQ. However there is virtually no research to support this. In fact it seems as though exposure to such topics have no change in the child's gender identity or sexual orientation whatsoever ("Just The Facts"). Furthermore, gender identity has shown to have a particular resistance to change from outside factors ("Therapy Supporting LGBTQ Youth"). This is all information that schools can help provide parents of LGBTQ students in order to bridge the gap between LGBTQ youth and their parents.

The severity of the situation is more than clear, and action must be taken. The statistics have shown the effects of those struggles as well as the grim reality of what happens when those struggles are allowed to persist. It is simply unacceptable to allow LGBTQ youth to face the struggles that they do without providing any amount of adequate support for them. I implore educators, school staff, and parents to look around at the LGBTQ youth of today and understand the struggles they face. It won't take you long to find one either, as one wrote this essay. I've experienced most of these struggles to some degree, I've watched my friends go through worse, and I've seen how little our schools even attempted to provide any meaningful support to us. All we can do is sit and watch as nothing begins to improve. And so once again I implore educators, school staff, and parents; speak up about this, make it known, make it unacceptable, make it change.

Jimmy Origin Story

by Mariella Cerda

1 INT. JERSEY MIKE'S IN DOWNTOWN CHARLESTON IL - NIGHT

Open with various low-angle mid shots of PAST JEREMY walking around cleaning the Jersey Mike's. It is 1979, PAST JEREMY is humming a tune whilst getting ready to clean the Jersey Mike's Kiln. As of now, he is the only one in the store.

PRESENT JEREMY (VOICEOVER NARRATION)

The day I found him wasn't any different from any other. I was cleaning after hours and it happened to be time to clean the kiln.

Note: PRESENT JEREMY is entirely voice-over narration. This narration happens during the mid shots of PAST JEREMY cleaning.

PAST JEREMY

Alrighty then, Let's see what trash has been left in here.

PAST JEREMY puts on gloves and grabs a large scraper, as he scrapes he hits an oddly large object.

PRESENT JEREMY

Little did I know...

PAST JEREMY

What the...

PAST JEREMY reaches inside and pulls out a baby covered in soot.

PAST JEREMY

Oh my god!

The owner of the Jersey mikes, DUKE BUCKETS, walks in

DUKE

Jeremy, you better not be slacking on that- Oh my god.

PAST JEREMY (NERVOUS)

It was inside the kiln! I just fished it out.

The baby snores lightly.

DUKE

Well, I think it's alive.

PAST JEREMY
Should we call a doctor?

DUKE
And have to deal with them asking us why a baby was left in an active kiln for 4 weeks. I'd rather not.

PAST JEREMY
Then what do we do with it?

DUKE
Wash it off and put it up for adoption.

PAST JEREMY
Is it even human?

DUKE
That's for them to decide.

PRESENT JEREMY
I ended up keeping the little guy. I managed to convince Duke that we could have him work for us later on. And boy can he work. He's the best kiln cleaner since he's immune to fire. Prefers it actually. I decided to name him Jimmy. Jimmy wasn't really like other kids. He waddled around and stuff sure, but...

INTERCUT
PAST JEREMY tries to feed JIMMY baby food and fails. Note: It should be obvious that PAST JEREMY has no idea how to care for a child.

PRESENT JEREMY
he'd never eaten,

PAST JEREMY checks JIMMYS' diaper and finds nothing.

PRESENT JEREMY
went to the bathroom,

PAST JEREMY has a staring contest with JIMMY and fails.

PRESENT JEREMY
or blinked.

PAST JEREMY runs JIMMY a bath.

PRESENT JEREMY
He was a great kid though. He only cried when he was put in cold climates.

JIMMY lets out a shriek.

PRESENT JEREMY
Yeah, he was a little odd, but I liked him enough.

PAST JEREMY is putting JIMMY to bed. Note: It should be obvious that both JEREMYS love JIMMY.

2 INT. JERSEY MIKE'S - DAY

The year is 1983, JIMMY is now five years old, and he is bringing out subs to customers.

CUSTOMER 1
Oh, thank you, young man.

CUSTOMER 2
Dear, I have a surprise for you.

CUSTOMER 2 brings out a diamond necklace for CUSTOMER 1. JIMMY watches from behind a counter.

CUSTOMER 1
Oh my goodness! Is this for me?

CUSTOMER 2
Of course, to celebrate our anniversary.

CUSTOMER 1
Oh, Jeffrey, it's perfect! I love you so much!

CUSTOMER 2
I Love you too Jenifer.

Cut to Jimmy looking confused. Duke Past Jeremy enters. The two are arguing.

I'm not spying on another sandwich shop for you!

DUKE
We need to see what we're up against!

PAST JEREMY

And do what? Suddenly serve people good food?

DUKE

You go to that Jimmy Johns or you're fired!

JIMMY walks over at the sound of his name

PAST JEREMY

Fine. But I'm taking Jimmy with me.

DUKE

Fine.

PAST JEREMY

Come on Jimmy we're going out.

PAST JEREMY takes JIMMYs' hand and starts to leave

PRESENT JEREMY

Little did I know of the fire I would start in that kid.

3 INT. JIMMY JOHNS CHARLESTON IL - DAY

JIMMY and PAST JEREMY are waiting for PAST JEREMYS' food at a small table. The store is packed with people.

JIMMY

Jeremy, what is love?

PAST JEREMY

Huh? Oh well, um love is... Love is when... I don't know how to explain that one.

JIMMY

Jimmy heard it when he did his job. What is it?

Well, kid love is kind of hard to explain. It's a feeling. A really good feeling. Your heart kind of swells and you get all tingly inside. All this emotion kinda just comes down on you.

JIMMY

Jimmy doesn't get it.

PAST JEREMY

Love isn't really something you get Jim. It's just... something you know. You'll

know it when you feel it, kid.

JIMMY JOHNS WORKER

Order 67!

PAST JEREMY

Oh, that's us. Jimmy, can you go grab that? Thanks.

JIMMY grabs the sub and returns to the table.

PAST JEREMY

Hmm, they're smaller than ours.

PAST JEREMY opens up the sub and takes a bite. JIMMY stares at it intensely.

PAST JEREMY (EATING)

Hey, kid what's up?

JIMMY

Jimmy wants to try.

PAST JEREMY chokes a little.

PAST JEREMY

You want to try this. Like, eat it?

JIMMY sticks out his hands and nods.

PAST JEREMY

Okay, but if you don't like it you can just give it back.

PAST JEREMY hands JIMMY the sandwich. JIMMY moves it around, examining it. Then JIMMY proceeds to stick the entire sandwich

in his mouth. It goes down easily. JIMMY and JEREMY look awestruck.

PAST JEREMY

Oh my god, Jimmy are you ok?

JIMMY (AMAZED)

Jimmy loves it.

PAST JEREMY

Huh?

JIMMY

Jimmy loves Jimmy Johns' sub sandwich.

PAST JEREMY

Really? Honestly, I thought they were ok.

JIMMY

May Jimmy have another?

PAST JEREMY

Ah, sorry kid. I had enough money for one. Maybe tomorrow.

JIMMY looks slightly disappointed. PAST JEREMY and JIMMY leave.

PRESENT JEREMY

I didn't end up getting him another sub till the next week, but Jimmy was still hooked. We decided to sneak out every week to get Jimmy Johns. It's the only thing I've ever seen him eat.

Little did I know that this little sandwich would cause Jimmy to save the world.

END

Bigger Than The Whole Sky

by Kady Moore

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - NIGHT

MUSIC begins to play and continues until specified.

A POSITIVE PREGNANCY TEST is shown. A young couple, JULIA and PETER, can be seen embracing.

INT. PARENT HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

MOM and DAD yell at Julia. There is no sound from them. You cannot see Julia's face.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, BABY ROOM - AFTERNOON

From the hall into the room, Julia and Peter are seen decorating the room. Julia is sitting in the floor. You cannot see her face clearly. Peter is smiling and laughing.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, DOORWAY - NIGHT

Peter leaves for a night shift at work.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Julia is at work in a typical office building as a secretary/receptionist. She brings coffee around to older people in the office and answers several phone calls. She is overlooked by her coworkers.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Music stops.

There is a ringing sound as a nurse is talking to Julia. We only see the back of Julia's head. It is clear that the nurse is delivering bad news. Silence.

Julia is shown for the first time. She is still. Emotionless.

NURSE

Julia?

Julia looks up at the nurse.

What?

JULIA

2.

NURSE

He doesn't have a heart beat, miss. I am so very sorry.

A tear silently streams down Julia's face. She closes her eyes.

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN - DAY

Julia is sitting alone on the train. "DENIAL" appears on the screen. She is

silent and emotionless. There are families around her. She watches them.

INT. STORE - DAY

Julia shops for various items. She grabs an odd collection of baby odds and ends to purchase. She buys blonde hair dye.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, BABY ROOM - AFTERNOON

Julia continues decorating the baby room. The shots are very similar to scene 3, but this time Julia is alone. Scene is more eerie this time. She is creepily happy. It seems unreal.

After some time has passed, Peter appears in the doorway of the room. Julia gets up to greet him lovingly.

PETER

Whatcha up to?

JULIA

Just trying to get some of these decorations done.

PETER

(sarcastic, joking)

Oh yes, because we don't have 8 months left to finish them.

JULIA

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. I was just excited.

PETER

Want me to help?

JULIA

No, it's okay. You go on to bed, I'm gonna stay up for a while longer.

3.

PETER

Okay. I love you. Goodnight. ht!

Goodnig JULIA

Peter leaves, and Julia sits back down to continue her decorations. When she hears Peter shut the bedroom door, she sits back down and begins to silently sob, lying on the floor.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, BABY ROOM - DAY

Julia wakes up on the floor with a blanket over her and a note laid in front of her. She begins to read it.

PETER (V.O.)

Julia, Didn't want to wake you up. Got called in for the truck route at 3 this morning. Sorry I couldn't spend the day with you like we planned. Love you, Peter.

Julia sighs, disappointed. She sits the paper down. She is exhausted.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Julia pours a bowl of cereal and sits by herself at a small table. She scrolls through her phone. We cannot see the screen. Her face becomes annoyed, and she begins to scroll faster. She slams her phone down on the table, face-down. She continues to eat.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia is sitting on her bed silently. A door slams off screen. There is indistinct clattering from another room. "ANGER" appears on the screen.

JULIA

(annoyed) Peter?

What? PETER

(O.S.) JULIA

What are you doing?

Peter enters the bedroom looking mad.

4.

PETER

I just had the worst day of my life at work.

JULIA

Tell me about it.

PETER

What do you know, you barely even have a job anyway.

JULIA

(getting mad) What?

PETER

Well, I mean, all you do is answer phone calls. What's hard about that?

JULIA

I have a job, the same as you do. Sorry if it's not enough that I don't do the heavy lifting.

PETER

Well I'm just saying you don't have anything to complain about!

JULIA

I have PLENTY to complain about! Everyone at work hates me, you're NEVER home

PETER

I'm never home! How hilarious is that! It's not like I'm, y'know,

working two jobs to pay for YOU and this house.

JULIA (CONT'D)

We just lost the

PETER (CONT'D)

Well maybe you should then!

JULIA

Maybe I should!

JULIA

Fine!

PETER

Fine then! You can get out! Go stay with your parents! You were always Mr. Daddy's Money anyways!

5.

PETER

God! You are so impossible sometimes. I cannot believe you! out.

Get

JULIA

Peter grabs a bag and some of his things. Julia stands and watches, furious. Peter leaves in a rush. Julia sits on her bed, defeated.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Julia's hair is wet. She tears open the box of BLONDE HAIR DYE, and begins applying it to her hair.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, BABY ROOM - DAY

"BARGAINING" appears on the screen.

Julia sits in the floor with a dusty Bible sitting closed in front of her. She lightly dusts it off. She leans back, looking at the ceiling.

JULIA

(whispers)

Did some force take you because I didn't pray? You were bigger than the whole sky. You were more than just a short time.

Julia begins to cry. It is not messy. It is calm. Tears stream down the sides of her face.

JULIA (CONT'D)

God, please help me. I'm so tired.

She cries more, not opening her eyes. She lies for a long time.

The Future is a Terrible Place

by Lily laola

CLASSICAL MUSIC PLAYS, SYMPHONY #6 IN B MINOR

CIRCE IS SHOWN IN HER ROOM, BRUSHING HER HAIR AND HUMMING TO THE MUSIC PLAYING. THERE'S THUMPING IN THE BACKGROUND AND THE SOUND OF HER YOUNGER SIBLING, DAISY,

DAISY RUNS DOWN THE STAIRS, PULLING ON A PLAID FLANNEL OVER ONE ARM AND RETRIEVING A PIECE OF TOAST FROM THE TOASTER. THE BABYSITTER IS STANDING NEAR THE DOOR AND SWINGING THE KEYS IN HER HAND, CIRCE RIGHT NEXT TO HER READY FOR SCHOOL.

CIRCE:

Daisy, good morning! I heard you making a lot of noise after waking up and just wanted to make sure that you're okay!

DAISY:

(nods while eating toast. motions to door and wrist, making wristwatch motion).

OLIVE:

Does everyone have their things?

CIRCE NODS AND OLIVE OPENS THE DOOR, EVERYONE LEAVES THE HOUSE AND DAISY LOCKS THE DOOR BEHIND THEM AND IS THE LAST ONE OUT.

They drop off daisy first in middle school, she leaves without a word.

CIRCE:

Do you ever worry about her?

OLIVE:

Daisy, you mean?

OLIVE pauses and comes to a stop light on the way to CIRCE's high school.

OLIVE:

I try not to. But I feel like she gets picked on for not talking, you know? And to be so determined to win the competition next week... it sounds really stressful. I dunno.

CIRCE:

Yeah, I really hope she knows that we're here for her regardless if she wins or not. I mean- she's my sister, you know? I don't want her to lose and give up on all her dreams. No one on her team has ambitions like her, and it might be a lot of pressure for a little kid to take on.

OLIVE:

You're not much older, you know.

CIRCE:

I know, I know. I just worry for her.

THEY ARRIVE AT THE SCHOOL AND CIRCE GOES INSIDE. OLIVE GOES BACK TO THEIR HOUSE TO CLEAN UP WHATEVER MESS DAISY LEFT BEHIND AND PREPARE BREAKFAST.

A PHONE ON THE KITCHEN COUNTER RINGS, BUZZING AND PLAYING A DEFAULT TONE ON REPEAT.

OLIVE hums along with the tune and walks over slowly, picking up the phone and answering.

OLIVE:

Hello? It's the Beckford residence, Olive speaking!

SPEAKER:

Hi, Olive. It's Flynn, I'm calling you on my break. I can't make it off work next week to attend the cheer competition, and Daisy isn't answering my texts. I didn't want you to be surprised when she came home in a bad mood. Good luck, later!

OLIVE:

Ms. Flynn, will I be taking the siblings on the trip up to LA?

FLYNN:

If you don't mind too much, yes. I can pay for a different driver if you'd like, but I trust your driving skills. You are from New York and spent a few years in Atlanta as well, right?

OLIVE:

I did, yes. I can take them, don't worry about it miss!

FLYNN:

I trust you to take good care of my kids for a little bit longer Olive.

THE PHONE CUTS AND OLIVE SETS IT BACK DOWN, PUTTING ON A PLAYLIST OF 90S GRUNGE MUSIC

THE SCENE CUTS TO OLIVE STARTING UP HER CAR AND DRIVING TO DAISY'S SCHOOL TO PICK HER UP.

DAISY leaves school alone, walking up to Olive seemingly disappointed.

OLIVE:

Was school okay kiddo?

DAISY sighs.

OLIVE:

Is this about your mother? She told me to take you to the competition, and you can bring a friend if you'd like!

DAISY shakes her head.

OLIVE:

It isn't about your mother?

DAISY shakes her head no.

OLIVE:

DO you want to write about it?

DAISY shakes her head.

OLIVE:

That's okay! I'm sure she'll show up anyway, you know how she operates.

DAISY nods in teenage angst.

OLIVE:

Do you want to get some ice cream or something? Isn't that what kids like these days?

DAISY takes out a notebook from her jacket pocket, writing

something down on it. She shows OLIVE from the passenger seat, letting her read it at a red light.

OLIVE: (READING)

Ice cream sounds good.. Okay kiddo! Busters sound good?

DAISY nods and shows OLIVE a thumbs up to show agreement.

OLIVE and DAISY are shown getting ice cream, then going to the high school.

CIRCE:

Oh, today was exhausting! Algebra dragged on forever and I miss morning coffee. Is there any chance we could get some tomorrow? Oh, and I have club tomorrow!

OLIVE (LAUGHING):

Good to see you too dear, we'll need to leave earlier in order for you to have iced coffee from somewhere. How did your other classes go? How was Psychology?

CIRCE:

Psych was great as always! You know how much I love the teacher, he's one of my favorite people at school and I'd legitimately just fall over and die if he left I think (laughs)

DAISY writes on a new page of the notebook, turning in the front seat and showing the words to CIRCE to read them.

CIRCE (READING, SLOWLY):

You.. Are such a sap. Okay, well, you know what?

OLIVE (INTERRUPTING):

OKAYYYY kiddos that's enough! Circe, did you hear the news?

CIRCE:

Oh, that Mom isn't coming to the thingy? I did, yes. They don't admit it, but Daisy told me over text when she found out. Said something about-

DAISY throws the notebook at CIRCE and makes a throat cutting

motion, shaking their head and turning back to face the road with OLIVE. CIRCE appears puzzled and gives the notebook back, not continuing her statement.

CIRCE:

Yeah... anyways, Daisy said it's fine and she kind of expected it. We all know how busy Mom is after all, I doubt she could take off work for this. Brains need to be saved- and all that.

OLIVE:

But you girls know you're important to Flynn, and she loves you dearly, right?

CIRCE:

Yes, we do. Personally I just wish she'd show it in different ways. It feels like her work is more important most of the time and- I mean- it seems like it! She hired you to raise us, for hell's sake!

DAISY nods along with CIRCE and writes in the notebook, showing it to CIRCE to read the words for her.

CIRCE (READING):

She could do more to show that she loves us as much as you say.

CIRCE:

Pretty much.

CIRCE slumps down in her seat and DAISY looks out the window, putting an earbud in her right ear and messing with her phone. OLIVE sighs and pulls into a Wendy's Drive-Thru.

OLIVE:

Do you two want a frosty? I know you like them.

CIRCE and DAISY visibly perk up, CIRCE sits forward in her seat and smiles. DAISY nods and writes down 'Medium Vanilla' in her notebook, showing it to OLIVE with a thumbs up.

CIRCE:

That would be great! Medium vanilla for me as well!

OLIVE:

Well alright then.

OLIVE orders their frosties, a third vanilla for herself, and two large plain fries, one baconator fry.

OLIVE:

Is there anything else you'd like?

CIRCE and DAISY shake their heads and go back to messing with their phones.

OLIVE goes through the drive-thru and pays, passing the girls their frosties and humming along to the music playing on the radio.

CIRCE:

Thank you!

DAISY gives a thumbs up.

OLIVE:

Oh it's no problem girls, just enjoy and relax a little bit. We're about to be heading to LA after all!

OLIVE laughs and CIRCE giggles nervously, DAISY fiddles with her thumbs silently.

AUDIO CUTS AND EVERYONE IS SHOWN ON SCREEN DRIVING HOME, OLIVE BEHIND THE WHEEL AND CIRCE TALKING WITH HER HANDS. DAISY STAYS SOLEMN AND DRAWS ON HER ARM WITH THE PEN SHE USES TO WRITE IN HER NOTEBOOK WITH, CAMERA ANGLE ZOOMS IN ON HER LEANING ON THE GLASS WINDOW.

Hesperia

by Kady Moore

SCENE 1

Lights fade in on HESPERIA, a princess, and HANNAH, a maid. Hannah is styling Hesperia's hair.

HANNAH

Tilt your head up just a bit dear, now what was it you were saying?

HESPERIA

I am just so tired of my father making me do this for him! My looks can't be the only way we can get alliances. Going on constant dates with foreign diplomats isn't getting us anywhere except for posing me as the country's biggest hooker. It's awful.

HANNAH

Oh honey, no one thinks that. These are all confidential, you know it.

HESPERIA

People talk. Plus, the country is unsettled. They need someone to point a finger at, and I appear to be the easiest target.

HANNAH

It's just the recession. Funds will go back up soon enough and everything will be fine again.

Don't worry so much.

HESPERIA

Still, I can't deal with another one of these strange guys coming into my home and trying to court me. Most of them don't even speak the same languages as me! I spent all those years learning 3 languages and I can't even converse with our business partners. And it gets boring. They're hardly ever the slightest bit interesting.

HANNAH

Maybe you'll get lucky today. Some handsome, charming fellow may waltz right through that door and sweep you off your feet.

HESPERIA

That's highly unlikely, but make sure to keep your fingers crossed for my sake.

HANNAH

(Holds up crossed fingers.)

I wouldn't have it any other way. Now off you go! Don't keep your father waiting.

HESPERIA
Bye Hannah! Thank you so much, see you!

Exits. Blackout. SCENE 2
An office. KING LEON is seated at a desk reading a newspaper. HESPERIA enters.

HESPERIA
Good morning, sir.

KING LEON
And to you, Hesperia. Are you prepared for today?

HESPERIA
Yes, sir. I will do what you need me to.

KING LEON
Good, because today is more important than all the others. (Lays down newspaper for Hesperia to see.) You see this? More unrest in the states. We need a boost, something to bring us out of this recession. The diplomat you are meeting with is a very important member of the Ascanan royal family. Very rich. All we need is to give them a reason to help us. We need it. Badly. I don't know how else we can get out of this. I suspect riots will begin soon. We can't hold out much longer.

HESPERIA
I understand.

KING LEON
Perfect. He will be here around dinner time. You will have dinner alone in one of the private dining rooms. Dress appropriately. I have had one of my maids speak with your head maid about the importance of tonight, and I suspect that she will style you ever so precisely. I need you to be reasonable, but, more importantly, I need you to be agreeable. Understand?

HESPERIA
I do, sir.

Fade to black. SCENE 3
Lights fade in on HESPERIA and HANNAH. Hesperia is seen wearing a tight, strapless black evening gown.

HESPERIA

God, this is worse than I thought it would be. I'm not even going to be able to eat in this thing!
Are you sure this is what they want me to wear?

HANNAH
They said "suggestive but regal," miss. I can't help but follow the orders.

HESPERIA
"Suggestive but regal." Suggestive but regal my a-

HANNAH
Hesperia! What would your father say!

HESPERIA
He would say to keep my opinions to myself and be as "agreeable" as possible. I wonder if he hears himself when he says things like that, it's ridiculous.

HANNAH
It's only a matter of time, dear. Soon he won't be able to tell you what to do. It'll be okay.

HESPERIA
I'd rather die than follow another one of someone's stupid commands, but thanks, Hannah.
Alright. How do I look?

HANNAH
Beautiful as always.

HESPERIA
Perfect. I'll go meet him then. Thank you!!! Quickly exits. End of scene.
SCENE 4

HESPERIA is pacing alone on stage, looking nervous. She keeps glancing at a clock somewhere present. A handsome young man enters quickly. He is not very put together, but it is clear that he WAS put together before now.

JAMES
Princess Hesperia? Bows. I beg for your apology. I got caught up and I hurried to meet you, I am terribly sorry.

HESPERIA
Taken aback.

Oh! Well, um, that's alright... What's your name?

JAMES

Oh, I'm so sorry, I'm James. From Ascana.

HESPERIA

Well, James from Ascana, it is very nice to meet you. Don't worry about the punctuality. Late people tend to make things more interesting. Shall we?

Gestures towards table.

JAMES

Of course. Thank you for your kindness.

HESPERIA

So, please tell me about yourself. Meeting new people is so rare here, and I find you to be of the more interesting sort.

JAMES

Well, I grew up in a castle, same as you, but when I turned 18 I convinced my parents to let me go abroad, travel the world. It's been really good for me. I am certainly more aware of the struggles of different kinds of people. I have now devoted my journey to helping them.

HESPERIA

Wow! That is so cool! I rarely get to leave these grounds, and if I do it's typically for some sort of speech or organized charity event with absolutely no charity present. The fake stuff.

JAMES

Believe me, I understand. Before I got to travel I was stuck in the castle pretty much all of the time. You should try and get out, at least for a little while.

HESPERIA

Now?

JAMES

What?

HESPERIA

What about now? No one's on my tail right now, because I'm with you. I know a few ways out and I can find us a car. Can you drive?

JAMES

Yeah of course, but are you sure? It's not entirely safe, and what if we get caught?

HESPERIA

Oh please, we can change real quick so we don't stand out, and if we get caught,

so what?

I'm the princess. I'll just pardon us both.

JAMES

...fine.

HESPERIA

Let's go!

HESPERIA grabs his hand and they run offstage. SCENE 5

HESPERIA and JAMES enter, wearing casual clothes and smiles. They are in a town/market.

HESPERIA

This is so cool! I never go out into the city without a whole pack of guards surrounding me. I never even get the chance to see it.

JAMES

Well, it's not all nice like this. There are some rough parts around here. Plenty of people wanting to put your head on a stick.

HESPERIA

Oh believe me, I know. I am quite the target of the newspapers these days. I can't imagine what the press would say if they saw me now.

JAMES

I think they would like you better, honestly.

HESPERIA

Oh?

JAMES

The people want to see someone down to earth. Someone they can relate to.

HESPERIA

I've never really thought of it that way. I've always been taught to present myself as a step up

from everyone else, to remind them that I am.

JAMES

We're all just people, Hesperia. No one is better than anyone else just because they have power.

HESPERIA

No, but the powerful people get the most stuff done.

JAMES

Well, you may be right about that for now. But I remind you that you could be the one to change that. Would you like to meet some of my friends? They live not too far from here. It wouldn't be a bad walk.

HESPERIA

Are you sure we should leave the car? I don't want it to get stolen or vandalized or anything...

JAMES

It's not like it has the royal crest on it or anything. It'll be fine. We should walk.

HESPERIA

Okay...-

JAMES

Come on, let's go. 5 miles. I'll race ya?

HESPERIA

Snapping out of daze. Oh, you are so on!

JAMES and HESPERIA race off stage. SCENE 6

JAMES and HESPERIA enter. The stage appears abandoned, sheet covered objects scatter the stage.

HESPERIA

What is this place?

JAMES

A headquarters of sorts. I've visited here quite a few times during my years abroad.

HESPERIA

It seems abandoned.

JAMES

Yeah, its supposed to be like that.

Tears sheet off of one of the objects, revealing a door to no where. He knocks. Silence.

HESPERIA

Wow. Cool trick.

PEOPLE begin to fill the stage from unexpected places. About 5 of them.

Woah! Even cooler trick!

JAMES

Hesperia, meet my friends. Friends, meet your sacrifice.

HESPERIA backs away, but two people stop her.

HESPERIA

Sacrifice? What on earth are you talking about?

JAMES

I told you, you'll be the one to change the royal family. If you die for everyone to see, the revolution will be easy. And everyone already hates you. An assassination was inevitable.

HESPERIA

We talked about this, you know I want change!

JAMES

But what are you willing to do to get it! Daddy's little slave isn't getting us anywhere. Maybe if you had a spine we could use you. But we don't have time to wait around for you to decide whose side you're on. If you die publicly, the revolution starts now. Are you willing to do this for your people?

JAMES approaches HESPERIA calmly.

Or will you die like the selfish thing you were raised to be?

A pause. There is tension. HESPERIA looks around warily at all of her captors.

HESPERIA

If the crown fits, I wear it. Selfish isn't a half bad thing to be.

HESPERIA frees her hand, disarming one of her guards and taking his knife. She stabs herself, falling to the floor.

JAMES

No!

HESPERIA

I won't be made into something I'm not. I die on my own terms.

She twists the knife, falling completely down. Blackout.

Untitled Ghost Monologue

by Mariella Cerda

Hey, [pause] hey, Mr. Schmidt? Woah jeez you look like you've seen a g-g-ghost haha. [long pause] Ok the screaming thing is getting old. I need you to listen to me because I've got some

unused Bish tickets that have to get to my sister capeesh?

Alrighty then I guess I should introduce myself. Hi my name is Kaiyo Kutsuki, and yes I'm the dead kid you accidently knocked into a tub of lye. I know you did it by accident Mr. Schmidt, even though I was still in extreme pain and agony for a solid two minutes, and I've spent about a week crying to myself in the dark empty space of purgatory [brief pause]. Anyways, because of ghost law since you did kill me, I can have you do a task for me or you'll be cursed for all of eternity. And trust me, usually I wouldn't set a curse on someone that ends with their skin melting off in a tub of lye, but I realized you could do me a little favor. So, I want you to go over to my dad's place, trust me he won't mind, go into my room, get those dang concert tickets, and take them to my sister. [pause] Yes concert tickets! Do you know how much those cost? Two hundred dollars!

Each! And I bought TWO! My little sister loves Bish, and this was a surprise for her sixth birthday. Of course, instead of that, she got to see my dead body at my funeral. Look I know that it seems morally incorrect to snoop around in a dead person's room for some concert tickets, but I give you full permission to! Just make sure my dad doesn't see you because he will be pissed. Kind of like you ha. Look, this isn't a personal attack on you, but your actions have consequences. You murdered me, and whether or not you feel guilty or sad you took away a majority of my life. I'm never gonna see my sister graduate or help her into college. Heck I'm never gonna graduate or go to college, [pause] or live. [pause] God, you're so lucky. So lucky. You've lived a good life, no you're living a good life.

Don't you dare forget it. I've gotta go. I can't stay out in the sun you know, it's not good for my pores. Bye Mr. Schmidt.

Script for Sock-Puppet Slasher

by Ella Jervis

ACT II

Scene 1

JOHN and MARSHALL sit beneath an old window with shutters that threaten to fall on their heads. They hold each other tightly. One of MARSHALL's arms is hanging loosely, transformed into a stuffed puppet hand with a stick to puppeteer it.

What on earth do you mean, you saw her? I thought you were dead! Jesus, what happened to your arm? She got to you, didn't she?

MARSHALL

I'm not sure what happened, it's just...

JOHN

Just?

MARSHALL

The killer. She's actually a doll. It isn't just a costume like you said. She looks... Like what she's been doing to people. But the difference is that she's moving on her own, not just some kind of crazy puppet effigy. She did something to me, my arm is weird and numb but it's also not? And-

JOHN

Are you sure she's not a zombie puppet come to life? It wouldn't be any crazier than people getting brutally unstuffed to death.

MARSHALL

What? No, I'm sure. She's... Almost... I don't know. I don't know. I think I recognize her? God, this is so fucked up...

JOHN

Honey...

JOHN gently cups the sides of MARSHALL's face.

JOHN

It's okay. We can take this slow.

MARSHALL

(interrupting, moving away from JOHN) No! We

can't take this slow! Nebula is- is- I want to make her better and I- I think that this murderer is my childhood doll? And I don't know if this is actually secretly my fault or something and-

JOHN

How could a murderer that tried to kill you be your fault? Even if she was your old childhood doll come to haunt you, what did you do to control that?

MARSHALL

That's just it. I don't think she was trying to kill me. It was like she was letting me off with a warning. As if I had something to do with this.

There's a long pause.

MARSHALL

I don't blame you for leaving me behind, by the way... I asked you to save yourself. To run before she got to the room. To save Nebula.

JOHN nods solemnly and takes out a sock puppet, fully intact, with a doglike appearance. A sewed-on collar reads 'NEBULA'.

JOHN

I just hope it isn't too late for her. The others were ripped to shreds, but at least she's kind of okay?

MARSHALL

It might not mean anything, but my arm? I know I said it's kind of numb, but honestly, it's definitely not... Dead. As opposed to the puppets that had exposed blood, and organs, and entrails, and-

JOHN

That's enough of that.

JOHN grabs MARSHALL's functional hand, then after a moment of hesitation takes MARSHALL's puppet hand. Somewhere before this time, he also put NEBULA away.

JOHN

Whatever happens, we're in this together. You, me, and Nebula. We're going to figure out the killer, we're going to figure out why you think you know her, we're going to figure out why she's a doll, why she's turning us into dolls... We're going to make it out of here. Alive and well.

MARSHALL

Antoinette.

JOHN

What?

MARSHALL

I named her Antoinette. The doll, I mean. I really think it's her. She was a stuffed bear, and we threw her out after her eye popped off, and it was a button, and the killer was just like her but bigger and- and evil. And why else would she let me off easy? She could have killed me. You saw me, I was just trying to get you out of there. I didn't have any time to react when she got to me.

JOHN

I don't know... I still feel like that's a leap...

MARSHALL

Are you saying you don't believe me?

JOHN

No! It's just... It's convenient, right? It isn't like we're her only target, she's killed up and down the block! There are only four houses nobody's died in! Her only calling card is turning people into puppets, which only affects us because she puppet-ed our dog. I believe you, I just don't-

MARSHALL

Want to? Because it's better to feel like this is some big accident? Just terrible happenstance striking our cul-de-sac because isn't it just our luck that the month we move in together, everything we know is uprooted, and no police take us seriously enough to help us? So it's up to us all over again, us against the world?

JOHN says nothing, but seems to be in agreement. MARSHALL looks broken.

JOHN

...Do you want me to puppeteer your hand?

MARSHALL tries to remain solemn, but in spite of himself cannot help but to burst out laughing.

JOHN follows suit, as if he didn't realize what he said was funny.