



HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

# Apogee Magazine

*Winter Two Thousand and Eighteen*



Nora Bauso  
*Got me on the run*



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*Winter Two Thousand and Eighteen*

Now and Then: The Alumni Issue

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Include a cover letter

with a brief 2-3 sentence biography.

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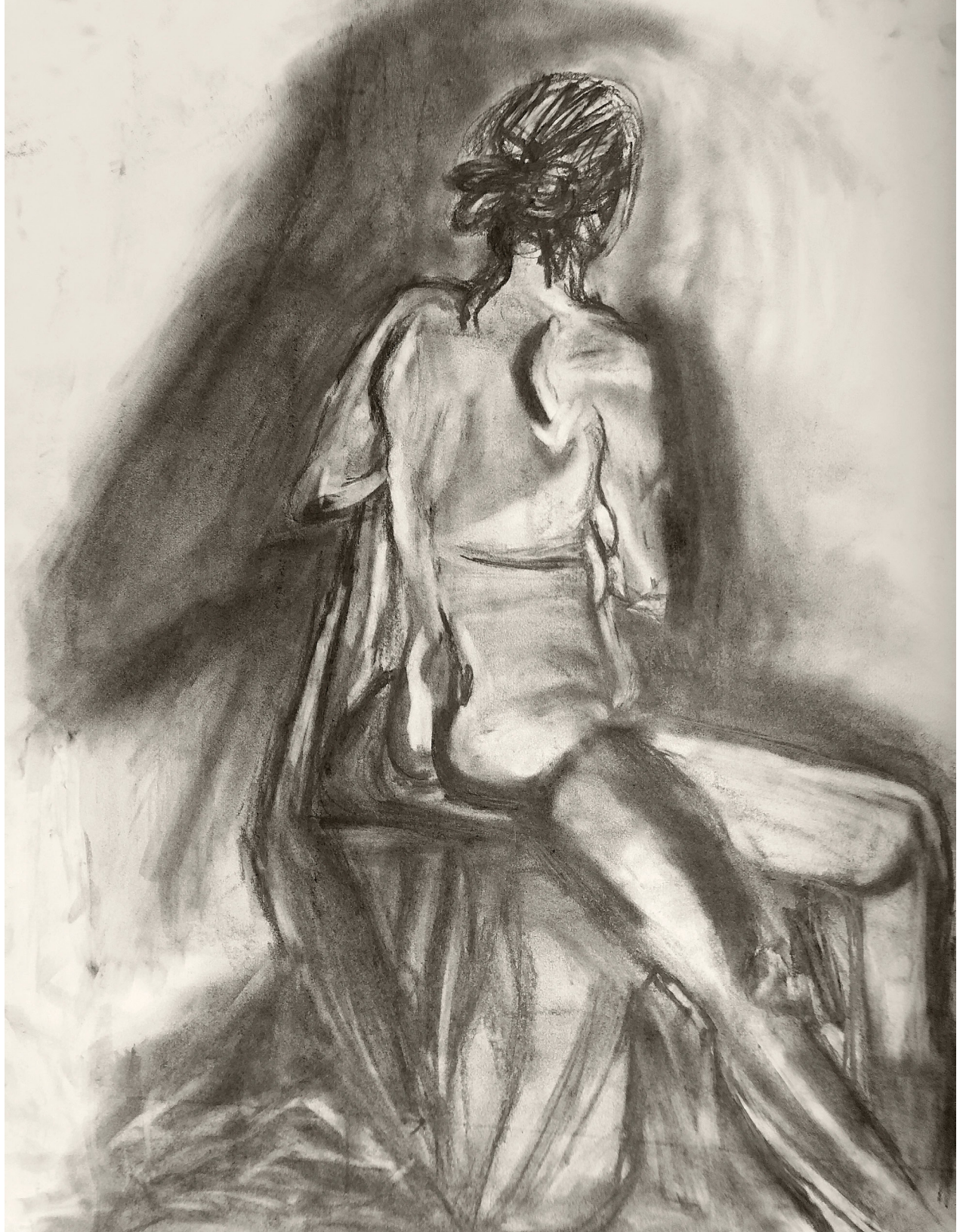
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Candyce Sturgeon  
*Seated Figure*





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# Migratory Patterns

*Words by*  
Cara Sinicropi

The long slow drawl of Tallahassee  
tumbled from my mouth—  
the vowels catching

somewhere between my second bicuspid  
and my lateral incisor. You stood—  
sweating in the sun, cursing

the way only southerners can, our throats  
thick with heat. “You’re a transplant  
anyway,” and I nodded in agreement.

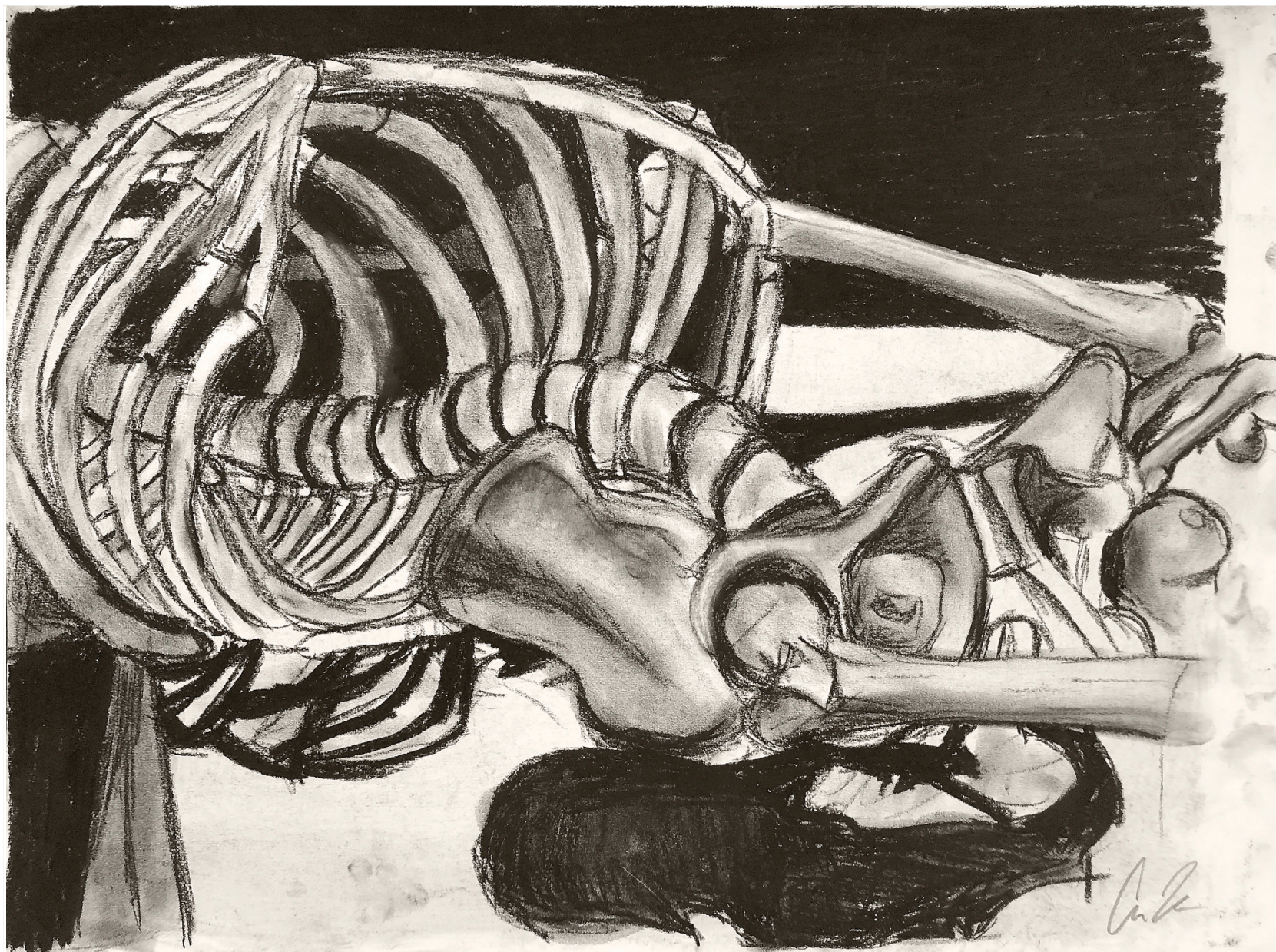
Understanding did not lessen  
the burden of disappearance,  
yours or mine. Our relationship

never called for formalities.  
Expiring—our own tectonic fault.





Gina Figliozi  
*Skeleton*



Cassie King, *Ribcage*

# All the Sons I Am Not

He comes from a line of strong fathers.  
Fathers who taught him the traditions of being  
a man. Fathers who were proud to raise fathers,  
to carry on their names. Legacies. Hard work.

Like his father, and the father before  
him, he became one. One to three children:  
one boy. Two girls. Two girls who were born first.  
One boy who was born too early—  
and still he was late.

Truthfully, my father did not become  
a father until his job of passing patrilineal identity  
was done. Until a boy was brought  
into this world. Until he could cradle  
that child and say, “My boy. My boy. My boy.”

My father, like his father, was exceptional.  
He bore us on his back, played monster.  
He told tales of pirates and gunslingers.  
Football stars and war heroes. His tales  
were of brave, brave men.

My father loved us like daughters.  
Cooed to us softly, and sweet. But first  
born does not equate to first place.  
Not when work, or a son, or the work of a son  
would call him away.

As I grew my father became like the fathers  
of sitcoms. Fathers who work hard to provide  
for the people they love. Who provide  
love by providing. Even if provision means absence.

Now I am grown and with a man who will become  
a father. We discuss children in hushed whispers.  
Because times are tough, and children are difficult.  
And as we lie on our backs, mediating on lineage  
I wonder—will the conception of fatherhood  
be different this time around.

*Words by*  
Cara Sinicropi

# MAMA KNOW

*Words by*  
Leeann Setliff

Three hundred and twenty. The number swirls in my head as I pour the formula in the bottle and shake. Three hundred and twenty. “I want more cereal please mama.” There are three hundred and twenty children in foster care in the county we live in. Two of them live with me. Sometimes, two out of three hundred and twenty feels like a drop in the ocean, insignificant and small.

Small. His small, puggy hand grabs for the floor as he learns to crawl. Her small eyes light up with laughter as my husband tosses her up in the air. I do not know the three hundred and twenty. I know the two. I know what day his cheek muscles parted into his first toothless grin. I know the day she came to us, too scared to sleep so we rode around in the car until the crying gave into exhaustion. I know the softness of his baby skin after a bath and the way he smells after he is milk drunk on a bottle. I know the day she conquered her fear and went down the slide at the pool. I know.

I drink from my “mom” coffee mug. “No Morning Sickness, Just Papercuts” it reads on the side. This has become my battle cry—a way of normalizing this journey we find ourselves on. Every journey—at least ones worth anything—come with hardship. This journey is no different. We have given up the luxury of sharing DNA and a last name to know two of the three hundred and twenty.

Their days are pieced together from court date to court date as their permanency is decided. I sit in court and hear her life story, the story I know. This life story which has taken three years to live is recounted in two minutes. The words spoken are not the story of the dimples on her face when she laughs or the look of fear in her eyes when she thinks she is being left. The words spoken are the short version of the moments that have defined her life in her short three years. I know the timeline and dates better than the social worker telling the story. I know her story—someone has to.

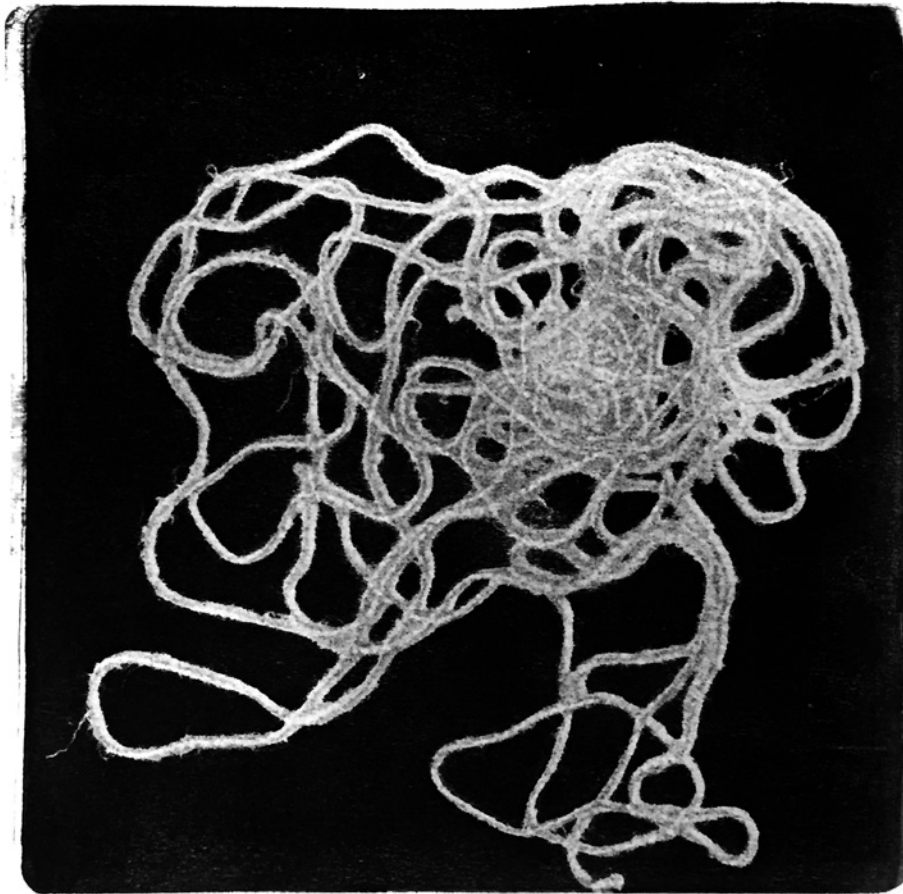
Three hundred and twenty. Most people do not want to dive into the uncertainty of foster care. But somebody has to dive to know. To know the three hundred and twenty. I know the two. When she cries my name in the middle of the night to come hold her; when he squeals when I walk in the room, I know. I know, they know, they are known.



Travis Thorne  
*Impact*

# You could be

*Words by Sally Ashburn*



Today is too hard for you,  
or maybe calm, or confusing,  
and I can only make the bed  
so many ways.  
I can only wash dishes so many times  
before they are clean.

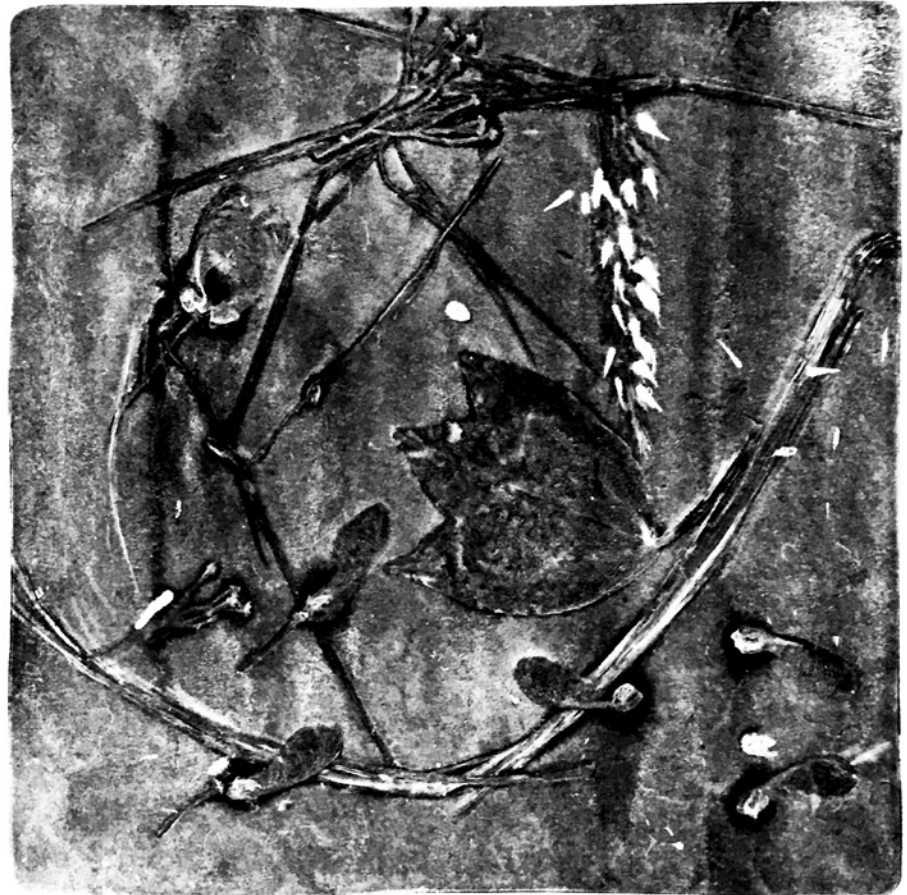
Nothing really moves but silence  
drops around me;  
me wanting it  
me hating it.  
you could be anywhere,  
you could be anyone,  
you could be here.

# Self-improvement

*Words by Sally Ashburn*

Perfect is a myth  
for me and you,  
you leaning into  
the next wave.  
Every moment here  
is preparing you for the next.

We play the long game,  
five  
four  
three  
two  
you  
are more than you have become.





# Peace about it

*Words by* Sally Ashburn



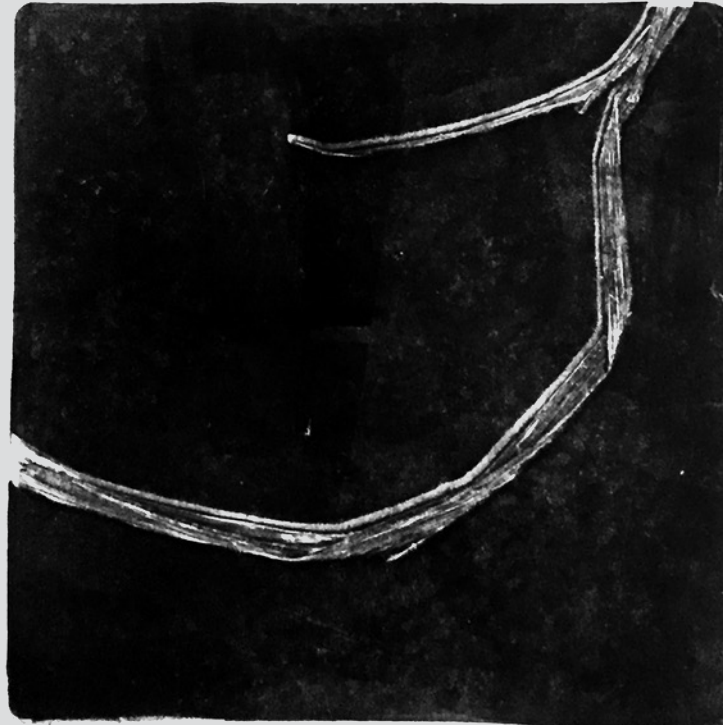
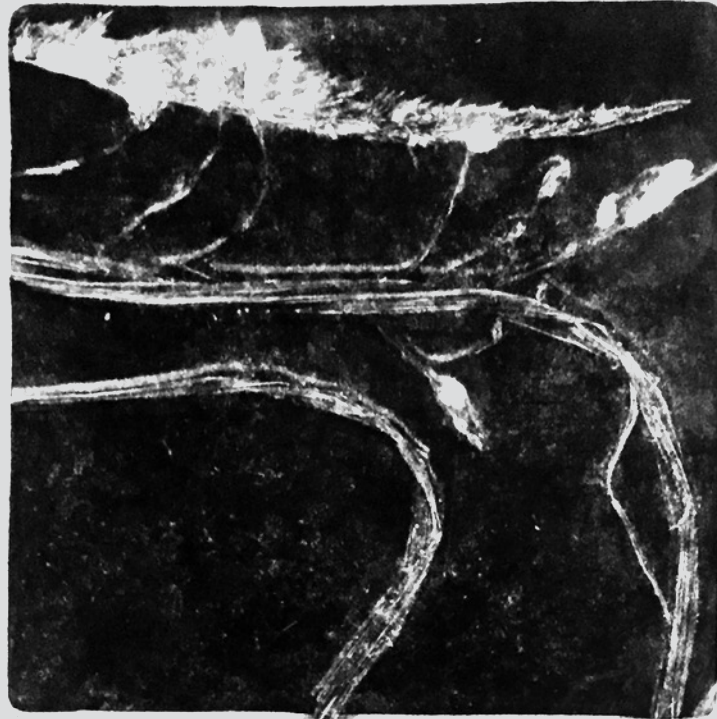
emotions are indicatives,  
every skipped beat  
a tiny report of how we're doing,  
how we're clueless,  
how wisdom fleets.

“you'll have peace about it.”

“it surpasses understanding.”

how do you separate peace from hurt,  
hurt from conviction,  
faith from fear,  
danger from dissolution?  
where is right  
among good and faithful?  
you aspire to peace,  
but slippery fingers just miss it,  
holding on to warmth like water.

peace is not warm; peace is  
shaking in boots to  
hold onto something worthy, to  
hold out a hand to grab a cold one, just  
because it needs you, just  
because fear doesn't matter  
but faith does.





B I R

“Look. I know it’s unorthodox, but he’s perfect.” I stared down the edgy back-alley tattoo artist my neighbor had told me about. “Six feet, blonde, smart—we’ll make beautiful children. You just have to fill in these three swirls. Then we’ll match and live happily ever after.”

*It’s her. I recognized it right away, there on her shoulder. I only saw a flash of it as she shut the door behind herself, but I recognized the swirls and flowing floral pattern.*

The artist frowned and shook his head. “That’s ridiculous. Why not wait for the person who is really the one for you?”

T W M A R K S

Words by  
Rebecca Irons

*She was insistent that I 'fix' her mark. Her stubborn stare burned me right to the core.*

“Who knows when he’ll show up?! I have a PLAN. I have to meet him by 25, get married by 28, have three kids by 32, then we can grow old together,” I insisted. This has been the timeline since I turned 12. I even knew what my wedding dress had to look like to show off the birthmark on my left shoulder. The tattooist crossed his arms, still not convinced. “Look, I’m desperate. I need this. He is absolutely perfect. What if my actual match is some slob? Some abusive jerk? I can’t risk my future on something like that.” I attempted to summon some fake tears but he held up a hand.

*And when she started to explain her 'Life Plan' I had to cross my arms to hide the way my chest quivered as I tried to stifle laughter. She was absurd and ridiculous and beautiful. And those puppy dog eyes and fake tears. I was in trouble with this girl.*

“Oh, don’t even.” Unimpressed with my performance, he sighed. “This man, you think he’ll provide for you? He’ll be good to you for the rest of your life? You’re sure he’ll love you? He’ll be better for you than your actual mark match?” I hesitated. These were not guarantees I could make.

*“I don’t know when that man will come along. I need this now.” He held my gaze.*

I knew. I knew she was supposed to be mine. How could I guarantee to her that I could be all that she wanted? I’m not Mr. Tall-Blonde-and-Perfect.

*“If you’re sure you want this guy over your real match, lay down on the table. I’ll prep everything.” I sighed and moved to prepare my machine. I heard her slide onto the cold metal table and I turned. Her shoulder mark was fully visible now and it made my knees weak. She was really the one, she was my match.*

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath as I heard the electric buzzing of the needle in the machine. He took off his jacket and gently leaned on my back. Just as the needle stung my skin for the first time, I looked up to the mirror hanging on the wall.

*As I put the needle into her skin for the first time I heard her gasp. I turned my glance into the mirror to see her staring at me with a hand touching her neck.*

Right there, on his neck, was my matching birthmark.

MAN

IN

THE

*Words by Rebecca Irons*

WOODS

While I was away for my senior year of college, my parents decided to downsize. They were so excited. A sweet little house, half the size of the home they previously owned, situated on three acres of land. I won't deny it; the pictures were adorable. The detached barn showed extreme promise as a separate guest house (or an apartment for a beloved daughter, looking to land at home for a little while after college to save some money). The yard was huge. The first acre was cleared and fenced in; the dogs would love it. The back half was densely wooded. This caused me anxiety. I'm an avid runner, hiker, and hater of snakes and spiders and things that go bump in the night. I've read enough scary stories about the crazy stuff that happens in the woods to know dense trees are bad news and the only thing that separated my family and our new tiny house from these terrifying trees was a split rail fence and an old, creaky metal gate.

My first official night in the house was over winter break. I had been given one of the two rooms on the second floor, both of which had windows facing the barn and woods. I fell asleep with relative ease, considering I don't sleep well in new places, but unsurprisingly woke up at 3:13 a.m. What did surprise me was the brilliant light shining through my closed plantation shutters, totally disorienting me. The bright light and my half-asleep brain caused



Patrick Boppel  
*Lying Down*

Boppel 8-30



a bizarre paralysis so I couldn't move out of my bed. The paralysis only lasted the few heart-stopping moments that the light flooded into my room then subsided when darkness swallowed my room again. In the complete dark, I remembered the industrial floodlights that the previous owner had installed on the front of the barn. They were motion activated, so it must have just been a raccoon, or deer, or bat, or something.

When I explained the incident to my parents the next morning, my dad shrugged it off as an animal or the wind. My mom, who saw my terror, suggested that perhaps it was just more of the vivid nightmares I used to have as a child.

The light woke me around 3 o'clock every morning for the rest of the week. By the following Monday, I slept peacefully.

The last weekend of winter break, my brother stayed up late with me to help me pack for school. We were watching a movie and throwing some more odds and ends into my duffel when the barn light came on. I had told him all about the light and the gate, and he, being

braver than I, bolted to the window and pulled open the shutters.


"There's nothing there," he laughed, relieved. But even from my perch atop my bed, I could see him. The man. There was a man standing by the back gate.

The light went out.

He came back every night until I left. I mentioned it to my parents, who once again brushed it off as my overactive imagination. Without evidence, or support from my brother, no one took any action to safeguard the house. I could only hope my dogs were better protectors than I expected them to be. I didn't have the guts to ask my parents or brother about it while I was away at school, and they didn't mention noticing anything odd, so I buried my fears away.

Now that I've graduated and I'm home for a little while, things have gotten worse. He's come every night since I moved back. On my second day home during the bright hours of mid-day, I took a heavy chain and padlocked the back gate shut. Not that a silly locked gate





on a split rail fence would stop someone determined to get into the yard, but I needed some sort of peace of mind.

The next day I found the lock and broken chain lying in the grass in the middle of the yard.

I was still awake when the light came on last night. My shutters were open and with the light from the barn, I could easily see right out into the yard. The man was there, and he was closer to the house than he had ever been before. I don't know why, I can't tell you what made me do it, I walked closer to my window to try and get a better look at him. He looked up. His wide-brimmed hat cast a shadow over the majority of his face, except for one corner of a thin-lipped mouth, which was quirked up as if in a smile. Panicking, I shut the shutters, turned out my bedroom light, and held my breath until I heard the gate clang and the barn lights went out.

I woke up this morning to an empty house, parents at work, brother at a friend's house. I opened the shutters and he was standing there. In the middle of the yard. At noon. His wide-brimmed fisherman's

hat and plaid jacket look brittle and dusty. His face was no longer hidden in shadow, and his wide eyes found my window with ease. Cracked pale lips lifted at the corners for a smile that didn't seem to travel all the way across his mouth.

I'm sure I've forgotten details, left things out, but I have to get something down so that someone else also has this story. Someone else has to know because even I know how crazy it sounds. The kitchen table feels so firm and rough under my jelly arms. It's like my laptop keys jump to my fingers, helping me get this down, like they know time is running out. The warm smell of my mom's coffee is a comforting contrast to the sticky, acrid nervous sweat seeping from my pores. I hope that the small window above the sink is small enough to escape his notice.

My heart sits high in my chest, suffocating me and I'm pretending I don't hear the three quiet taps on the glass. I don't want to look, I don't want to turn my head but I can't seem to help myself.

He's there. Smiling at me.

Cassie King  
*Reclining Contour*







*Words by Rebecca Irons*

Did you know they tear  
climbing ivy off  
the sides of old buildings  
to avoid structural damage?

Those lovely floating hearts  
pushing their love  
deep into existing cracks, crevices,

damage. My facade is weathered,  
roughened. Healed as best as  
possible. Your vines are strong,

roots viable. And when I  
wake in the morning,  
your hand still intertwined with mine—  
I will gladly accept the risk of your damage.



# DIVERSITY

*Words by*  
Rebecca Irons

I believe  
people pick their lovers  
like they pick their wines.

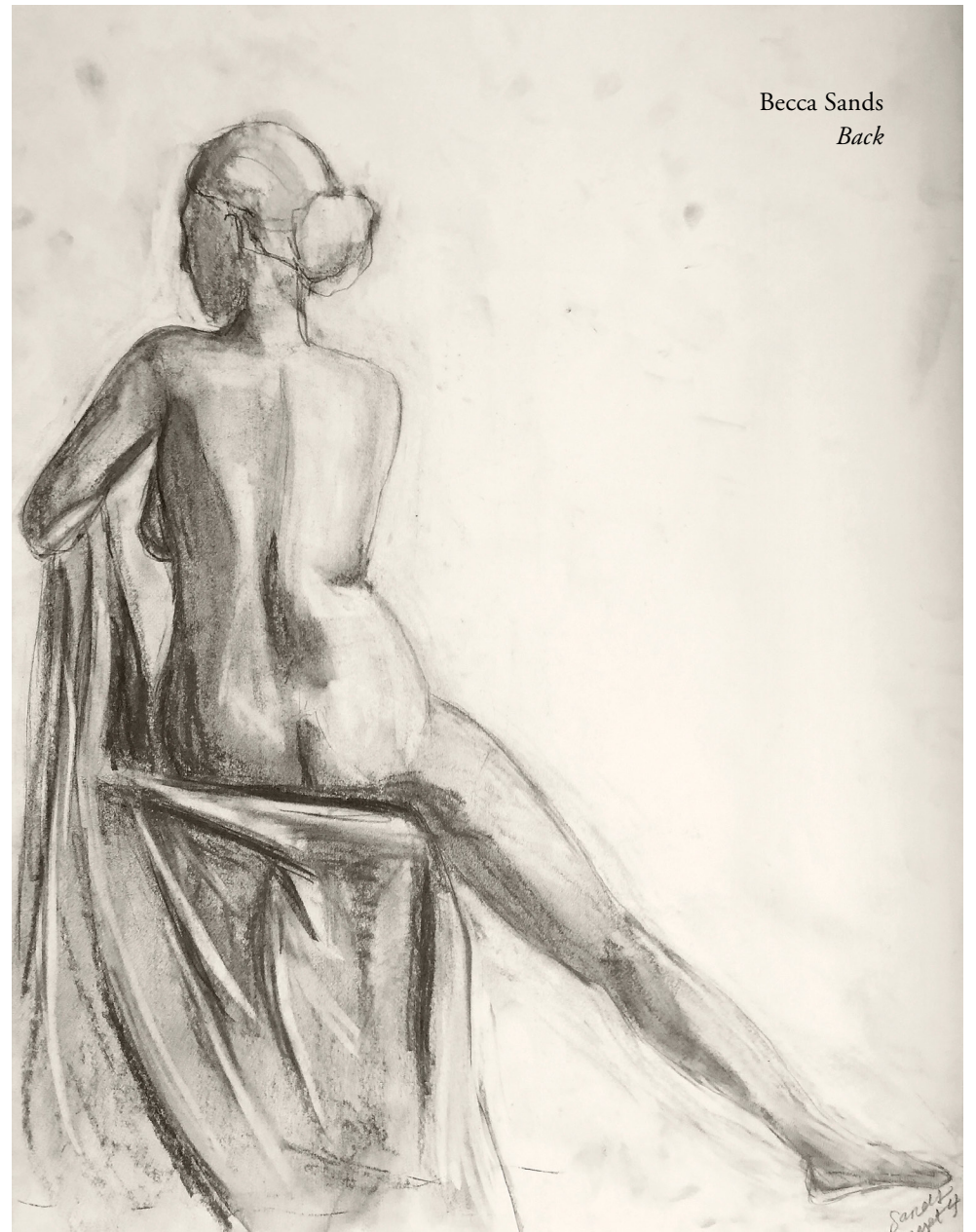
I pick my wine  
by the label.  
It could be the promise of  
humor, vibrancy, purity,  
anything.  
As long as it speaks to me.

I believe  
people pick their lovers  
like they pick their wines.

You pick your wine  
by the words.  
The facts matter.  
You know what flavors  
you can expect,  
the taste of that first swallow.

And I believe  
people pick their lovers  
much like we pick our wines,

gambling on what's opened  
up with that very first kiss.



Becca Sands  
*Back*



# Mementos from a Catholic Wedding

*Words by Holly Gambrell*

They're going to say  
I will, instead of I do  
Wonder if that's a Catholic thing  
Off, pale shade  
She didn't want to "lie" about it  
Down again, up again  
Pain from the knees &  
The culpability  
For Christ's sake  
Amen



I've been there!

*Words by Holly Gambrell*

# The ramblings of a 20-something

The clichés. Emails stacked—the bills are digital now. AC set slightly higher than comfortable. Barilla cheaper than greens. How do you start a retirement plan? Student loans. \$20 for gas. Don't we need a full tank to get there? 10-hour days. The dog's almost out of food. We're almost out of food. Get paid Thursday. Only every other week. Can we transfer money from savings to checking? Never touch savings, except for crises. Is paying rent an emergency? Twisted pennies shape it out.



# Thoughts & Prayers

*Words by Holly Gambrell*

Furrowed brows  
Lock downs  
*Pow!*

Ears ring  
Children scream  
*Pow!*

Red spills  
Adrenaline chills  
*Pow!*

Victims PTSD  
“Now they’ll see.”  
*Pow!*

March on the Hill  
Death... still

*Pow, pow, pow*





# Report Card

*Words by* Holly Gambrell

Cadaver, 19

White male

Weighted down

Height developing

Toxicology Ciroc

Psychology ESFP

Graded a

Few C's, mostly B's

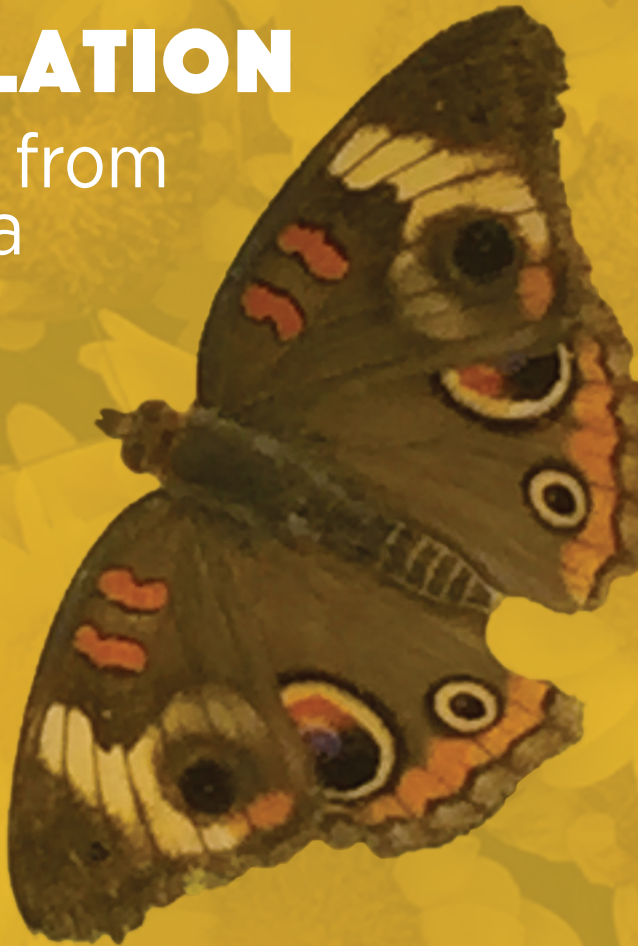
Cause of death recognized

words by  
Savanna Champagne

# FOUND

## IN TRANSLATION

Tales from  
Korea



My third Saturday morning in Korea. I wake up, roll around in bed for a while, clinging to those last precious sleepy tendrils, before finally admitting defeat and descending from my loft bedroom. I enjoy a simple breakfast and coffee, attempt some yoga (which always turns into a one girl Zumba dance instead), do the dishes in my undies (perks to living alone?), and finally shower and get ready to venture out.

I plan for another solitary day: grade papers and read my book at the park, shop for a few things I need at Emart, maybe catch a movie?

But as it happened, the universe had other things in store for me.

I meander around the park until I find a decent spot on some flat rocks in the sunshine, away from the throngs of bike riders and Korean couples with their dogs and toddlers. Before I can reach inside my backpack though, I hear a bright and loud “Helloooo!” from behind me. I turn to see an older Korean woman in a white bucket hat waving at me like we were besties, a small 5-year-old boy ambling behind her.

When you live in a city of almost one million and hardly anyone speaks your language, you are truly a foreigner. A waegook. A Westerner. It is lonely, to not be able to connect on even the smallest of daily interactions. My first day I was giggled out of a coffee shop after they seemingly refused to take my order, shaking their heads and laughing. I’ve been pretty much pointing and nodding ever since.

So I guess that can explain why, my first response to this waving ajumma was to jump up with a stupid grin on my face.

“Hi!” I reply and (God bless her) she comes over to sit with me. We get to talking because her English is decent and whatever miscommunications we have we just giggle and shrug. She has kind brown eyes, a smooth face and a short crop of black hair under her hat. I find out that she’s been to America a dozen times for business-- she sells guitars and banjos.

She sits and chats with me for over an hour. My headphones lay idly on the grass.

I briefly meet her grandson who is rather unimpressed and resumes playing with rocks and sticks and such.

After a while I notice another Korean woman nearby taking pictures of the little boy. Micaela (as I now know her) explains that it’s her sister. We are introduced, but her sister doesn’t speak any English at all.

Micaela asks me, “She has daughter, she is 13, that could maybe English lessons. You have time?” I tell them yes and they get excited. “She will call her.” The sister speaks with her daughter on the phone and both of the woman start chuckling.

“What happened?” I ask.

Micaela translates: “Her daughter say, “No! Mom, I don’t want to learn! How could you? Asking some stranger on the street!”

And now we are all laughing together. Sounds like a normal 13 year old to me.

After the laughter subsides, Micaela translates again, “My sister. She has sweet heart. She is feeling sorry. You are here 3 weeks. You are lonely. We will want to give you food.”

I wonder what she saw before she waved to me. I wonder how she knew.

And so that’s how I find myself in a small Korean diner on a Saturday afternoon, eating every kind of rice and noodle imaginable with this kind little family.

“I have cottage” Micaela tells me as I stuff seaweed wraps of flavored sticky rice in my mouth (They provided the five-year-old and me with forks).

“Cottage?” I repeat.

“Cottage”

“You have a cottage?”

“C o t t i g e ?”

“Cottige?”

“Like small house”

“Cottage!”

“Yes cottage. In the country. We will go one weekend together”

My heart squeezes as I am reminded of why I came here. For people. For adventure. For connections in a new part of the world.

“I would love that,” I say, smiling ear to ear at my new ajumma.

She insists on paying for the whole meal. And as we walk back to the park together, I smile into the sunshine at the happy turn of events. Before we part, she sticks out her hand and I go to shake it. She holds it, looks me in the eye and tells me, “So we should meet many times.”

Count me in, lady. Count me in.



# YOU CAN'T ASK FOR DIRECTIONS WHEN NOBODY'S AROUND

*Words by* Lauryn Polo



I was isolated by land and space and trees and paths and mountains and not a single heart heard my own cry out. The sun was starting to go down. Blowing the whistle on my backpack in earnest for the first time, hoping against hope that someone would hear it. Someone would find me and bring me to safety.

Laying on the comfort of my bed, in an apartment complex full of people, in a town full of people my age, on Tinder, swiping through hundreds of men— isolated to my room. The time added up, I hadn't touched another person in months. Not a handshake. Not a hug. No kisses on cheeks or lips. No dancing on strangers. No cuddles in the dark. The weight of that time clung to me. I felt its weight as I walked alone through this mountain town.

## HELLOOOOOO

I called into the fullness of the trees. I tried calling the ranger station but it went to voicemail. I called the police and the service cut out.

*Hey, how's it going?*

I typed into my phone more times than I care to count, to men that answered or didn't, that were kind or not. There were answers. But they seemed empty.

The sun was going down. I had four ounces of water left. A bag of pretzels. A lighter. Clothes soaked in sweat. I could sleep out here tonight, I thought. It won't be pretty, but if I need to I can.

I went on dates with men that were nice. No other adjective. Just nice. They didn't harass me online. They didn't make me feel like shit, they didn't make me feel anything. In college, I was constantly surrounded by people. It was like a bombardment of attention at all times. People could hear you through the walls. Could tell if you were crying or fucking the guy from the bar. That wasn't the case here. There were fewer than a handful of friends. A couple knew me in a deep way, but none heard how lonely I truly was. How I longed to be held. How I felt the pressure to try to find someone to love. How I missed the bombardment I once tried to escape.

No one knew where I was. I didn't tell anyone I was hiking today or where. There was no one waiting for me to come home for dinner, or even to call and say goodnight. If I died out here, or even injured myself and couldn't make it back through the trail, no one would know where to look for me. This wasn't necessarily a new thought. It was something that popped up often while on solo hikes in this town. Being anonymous was one of the things I liked about being here. The chances of running into people at the store or in bars were slim to none. But in this case, out in the woods, alone, the sun going down, lost—was probably the first time I didn't enjoy it.

There was one time I thought maybe this wouldn't be a lonely period. One time I thought that maybe I had found a person who saw into my heart in a way no one else had. I imagined taking my walls down for him, him meeting my parents, and seeing the exposition first hand of my life. But that didn't happen.



The trees were below me, as I sat on the edge of the mountain, the parkway was barely visible. Alone. But there were just people walking the path not long ago. It was the first nice day of Spring— why weren't more people out here? The past year and a half could be described as my "Cheryl Strayed phase," meaning I took to the woods alone on a regular basis, not necessarily with the intention of getting lost or even getting found, but just to feel centered in a way I didn't while sitting at a desk writing away my very soul. Before reading *Wild* the very idea of going out into the woods alone would have filled me with a silent but strong terror. I hated being alone with my thoughts. But here, in this town, at that desk, in these woods-- that's all I had. By going out there, I was trying to get used to myself in a way I hadn't before. In the woods, there was no distractions or stressors or calls or social media or forced nostalgia-- there was just the path. By the end of these two years of graduate school— I would be empty. Empty of words, of feeling, of caring, of friends, of love, of hope. Maybe that's what it was supposed to do. Empty me of everything so I could start new.

In the beginning, I looked into people and tried to search for something that wasn't there. Looking for similarities that my old friends had had or something familiar I could cling to. Wishing for what I knew. Wishing for someone to understand me again. There were people. There were friends. But it wasn't the same. These people saw certain things, not always everything, not the good or the bad. Maybe two really knew me. But there were those that did and manipulated, those who left without a call, others who simply didn't give me what I needed. But then again— I didn't try.

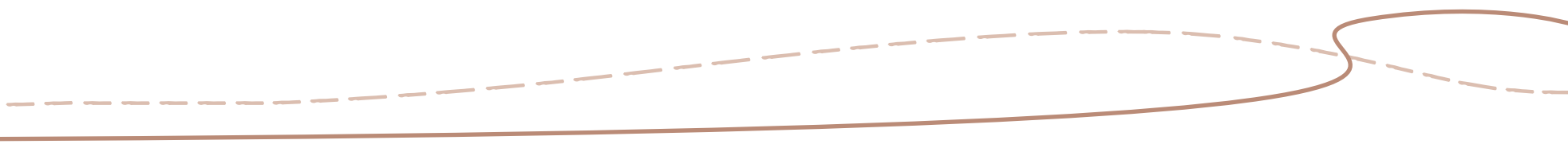
I tried. There was no stopping to pee or eat or rest or to check if my ankle had swollen. Just forward movement on the path.

There wasn't a forward movement in my personal life. My days were spent isolated, writing in the computer center at school, or folding shirts at work. There was no free time. No time spent with friends being reckless or drunk or wandering the way I had in the past. I justified not going out and meeting new people because I was so tired and the very idea of showing people my best-self was the last thing I wanted to do. It has been years since I had to meet new people this way. Every day left me drained.

There were trees down on the path, it looked as if no one had cleared the trail for the season yet. I went over them, or under, there was no around. When it turned 5 o'clock and I still wasn't back to my car, I knew that I must have made a wrong turn. There were two options. Turn back and hope for the best. Or take this trail till it ends. And that's what I did.

There wasn't a single night during those two years that I didn't wonder if I made a mistake. Should I have been traveling or living in another country rather than getting another degree? There were options. I could turn back the way I came, went back to New Jersey, and started fresh. Or I could stay on this path until it ends, and get that degree. And that's what I did.

There was a curve in the trail, what looked like a campsite, and the trail ended into a rock path which looked like it hadn't been used in years. I checked for service. Making calls to the police to try and get found. But they couldn't locate me. So they transported me to a different county. Four times. By the last time, tears almost filled my eyes. Why couldn't they find me? I was lost in the woods and the sun was down. The fear and anxiety I had been running from on the path finally caught up.



I was starting to learn the true depths of my anxiety and depression. Was it amplified because of the loneliness? Was it just that after years of running from it, it finally caught me? There were dark days, days when my world was so tiny, only the size of my room, my legs immobile until they were restless when all feeling left my body, my body ached to be touched—not always in a sexual way, even in a friendly way would do at this point. Could others feel it too? In this city not only was I anonymous, but invisible, no one saw me for who I was, no one saw everything as they had before. I just wanted to feel something—even something I shouldn't, I knew wouldn't give me what I needed, but it didn't feel like there were other options, so I went back into a cycle that repeatedly had shown me it didn't work. But there I was. Back in it.

My flesh started to prick up. While trying to be found on the fourth transfer, there was a sound. It was a car coming up the path. It was either the best thing to happen to me or the worst. There was no in between.

There was a day when I scared myself. I knew if I stayed in that room, I would do something I would regret doing. Somehow I made it to one of the overlooks on the Blue Ridge Parkway, on the phone with Kristen, crying. It was the first time I talked about self-harm in the present tense, not the past tense.

The car stopped in front of me.

“Are you okay sweetie?” Pat asked from the passenger seat.

“I'm lost,” I said, with the phone still to my ear, still a little unnerved.

Pat and Tom were on their 31st first date anniversary in the Mills River Campground, about 12 miles away from the overlook my car was parked at off the Parkway. They offered me a ride, snacks, water, and their company. It took almost an hour to get back to my car.

When I left Asheville later that year, it felt final; even though I would be back in a month for a wedding. A 13-hour drive back to New Jersey lay before me. There was no job waiting for me, not many friends, not much to look forward to. But there was my family. There were hugs that didn't need explanation. There would be kisses on cheeks for hellos and goodbyes. There would be I love yous told more times a day for the first time in years. I would be in a house of affection, of love. It wasn't perfect. But it was the best place to start healing and start filling myself up again.

There are no lights on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Just a few headlights, but not many—most people don't drive it at night. But up there, in the winding road, in the mountains, the stars are incredible. More than just visible. More than beautiful. They give you something. Maybe hope. I thanked Pat and Tom as I got into the comfort of my car and took a moment. I was here. After being lost for hours. After accidentally hiking 12 miles off a mountain. After not knowing if I would make it home tonight. I was on my way back home.





# The sky is dusk

*Words by Taylor Tedford*

And I am dark

I feel something  
clinging to me

This half grown moon

---

He shakes his head  
Looks at the sky  
He shrugs

It is all he has

---

Almost doesn't count

Windexing glass  
Well loved & well left

---

When you moan  
in your sleep  
I'm scared  
it's not me  
in your dreams

I wake angry,  
murderous  
hunting dream girls  
that I do not know

I'm embarrassed  
I can say it only here

---

If bliss is just  
oblivious,  
if it really matters  
I think I'd take either  
They sound about the same

---

Freefalling  
Like snowflakes

---

It always frustrated me  
that you couldn't take a picture of the stars  
"Just enjoy them"

I have a problem with letting  
go, with the passing  
of time, with the change of the tides

I need something that stays  
still, that doesn't  
leave, that I can  
place

A single  
moment  
that's mine.

---

My bones are empty



# WILD FLOWER

Words by Nicole Tarangelo

*“Do you suppose she’s a wildflower?”*

*Aunt Edie and I sat,*

*an afternoon in wonderland.*

I asked her what garden I was from.

She smiled, blowing smoke.

She said my heart was beautiful,

and my spirit was free.

Silly girl, you belong to the wildflowers.

What does it mean to be a wildflower?

What does a wildflower mean to be?

*“Do you have any idea why a raven is like a writing desk?”*

*What’s the matter with the hatter?*

Have you ever wondered,

What a wildfire does to a wildflower?

Is a raven like a writing desk?

Have you any idea?  
My heart no longer feels beautiful,  
have I gone mad?  
Where have my roots gone?

Slip back to afternoons with the smoking caterpillar.  
What does a wildflower need to be?

*“You used to be much more muchier. You’ve lost your muchness.”*

This all in my head,  
Who are you?  
Absolem?  
No, stupid girl, a wildflower.  
And a wildflower doesn't need to be.



The Straw  
That Broke the  
Camel's Back...

Or the Pencil That Finally Broke Me

I always thought a reverse commute would be a good thing. I'm going into the city as everyone else is leaving it. That's gotta be a good thing. What could the downside be? Less people on the train? The horror. Always finding a place to sit? Perish the thought. I figured I'd have to deal with game day traffic every once in a while, but that's no where near as bad being crammed in tighter than pickles in a jar, desperately trying to make it out of the city to my suburban, two-story, one-family plus dog house. That's the true horror. My trek from work to city isn't bad at all. Or it wasn't supposed to be.

I got permission to leave work early twice a week to head into the city to take classes. And bonus! My work was paying for my degree. No downside! Now four-hour classes on top of eight hour days isn't a walk in the park, but I could handle it. It's only five semesters. Two and a half years. I knew I'd survive. I was young and naïve—four months younger is still young comparatively—I thought I could take on the world while learning Danish and knitting a sweater. That was before I lost feeling in my toes.

So here's the thing about performing a reverse commute...no one cares about you. It's a two-edged sword in many ways. I've gotten a lot of free train rides from conductors who couldn't give two shits. They never checked if I had a ticket or not. And, once I made friends with some of them, they didn't check on purpose. Apparently basic human decency isn't something they experience often, so my little conversations like "it's raining cats and dogs" and "cool tattoo" comments were greatly appreciated.

On the other hand, my train has never been on time once. Five minutes late is on time for them. I try not to complain too much, shit happens after all. I would be lying if I said twenty-minute delays were unheard of. Maybe one out of every five or six rides is like that. When the trains are that late, I just make it to class on time. Which is a real shame because I am in desperate need for some caffeine at that point, and the chocolate from the vending machine just doesn't cut it. Then there's days like today. And they always fall on the worst possible day.

My 4:47 train into the city was cancelled. Something happened. Equipment failure, medical emergency, who knows. I sure didn't and the train line certainly wasn't giving a straight answer. The first time my train was cancelled, it was the day I had a pitch slam. Four editors from magazines were coming in to hear everyone's ideas. There was the possibility they were going to use some of us as freelancers if they liked our work. So I wore a business dress and a blazer. At least I was smart enough to pop my stilettos into my bag and wear walking shoes. I was twenty-nine-and-a-half minutes late. I smelled like train exhaust, sweat, and desperation. And my idea didn't get picked up by one of the editors. Not one of my best moments.

Then of course the train stalled on the tracks on the day of one of my midterms. They couldn't get the damn thing running again so we had to wait for the train that came forty-five minutes after us to push us to the station. Yeah, that's right, push us. I was making jokes for a week about

being in a train collision. That and my very high passing grade made the day not horrible. It wasn't that great of an accomplishment. I was stuck on that train for a while. I had nothing to do but study and mumble "I've been working on the railroad" for nearly an hour. Of course I did well. Once I finally made it to class, I was in and out in half an hour. My professor gave me a cookie when I walked in the door. Probably the only reason I didn't cry from frustration, or exhaustion, or both.

And now there's this. Same deal. Something happened. Equipment failure or medical emergency or random act of God or nature. I didn't know. And I no longer care. The next train came at 5:30. I would have been late, but not tragically so. And in following with the pattern of train cancellations on the worst possible day, I had a test. Not just any test. A big one, one that required me to lug five huge reference books in—open notes, thank God for small mercies. It was the final, obviously. I couldn't make this shit up if I tried.

As if that weren't enough, it started snowing. And I don't mean cute little flakes drifting gently through the air snow. I mean several inches accumulating in an hour snow. And yeah, class wasn't cancelled. Why would it be? We can tough it out. We've seen worse. This was nothing compared to that blizzard when I was a child. 4 feet in 6 hours. And then it froze over. We were actually ice skating on the snow. So a few inches an hour, please.

So there I was, standing there with an aching back, frozen toes, a test, a cancelled train, and a replacement train that was...30 minutes late. I was out there for over an hour. And the tiny train house that would have at least sheltered me from the storm if not the cold, it was closed. I faced my death that day. I almost turned into a frozen corpse desperately searching down the tracks clutching a ticket. Except the ticket is my phone because technology and saving the planet and all that jazz. But that bone chilling hour was the straw that almost broke the camel's back.

That straw finally came after I made it to the station and trudged the blustery mile to class. I made it to class with an hour and a half left to take the test. I mean, it wasn't ideal, but at least I was finally inside and my toes might defrost before I had to go back outside. I unloaded my bag while my professor placed hot chocolate and a cookie in front of me. That was really thoughtful. He had brought snacks for the class. That nearly broke me too, the sheer kindness. But no, what finally broke me, made me cry tears of exhaustion and frustration and anger—is it really so impossible for the train to be on time during a freakin' storm!—and severely dampen my test, was my pencil. Or my lack thereof. This test had to be taken in pencil. Pens were unacceptable. I needed to be able to erase. And all I pulled out of my bag were a handful of pens. Because that's the only way this could have gone.



Brady McGettigan  
*Turned Figure*



I have tried to write this essay a thousand times, though if you counted my pages you would come up short. In my head, words lay stacked, thought up and smashed by interruption.

Even now my oldest son walks from naptime and opens the door to my sunroom retreat. He sits with his “Brainy Book for Boys” activity book and glimpses.

“Why did the cookie go to the hospital?” he says.

“Because it felt crumby,” I reply.

“Because HE felt crumby,” my son corrects.

He asks another joke. This one is about a ghost in a fog. It is one I have not heard before, and I answer him that I do not know. We laugh together and then he asks to go play with the neighbor boy. I say yes. I am already penning again.

My work. My play. They overlap. They swirl between blessing and burden. I make lists. I forge ahead with new schedules.



# CHARCOALING

*Words by Sara Dutilly*

I stay at home with my children. I try to homeschool, to figure out curriculum, but these kids have taught themselves. They are readers, independent hand washers, egg-crackers, and Go Fish enthusiasts. Thanks to Velcro sandals, my children could make breakfast and carry on without me. But they want me here too much. I give hugs and band-aids. I make bread and set out Play-Doh.

A few weeks ago, I came across some charcoal sticks in an old pencil case. I took one in my fingers and placed its tip to my bedside journal. I doodled an abstract. Oh, how the sound stretched as the charcoal softly, quickly let go of its form to make another. How it made its mark without effort, a line unmistakable and hard to erase.

It's this dance of my arms that I am given back, the pace of a fifteen-second sketch on a three-foot newsprint rectangle at the start of every one of my college drawing classes. "Big strokes," the teacher would say. "Big movements. Just get the form down."

We used the charcoal stick because it forgives, even begs, for mistakes. Its line is thick and bold, rugged and tromping. Turn it on its side and let it cover the whole in five tiny seconds.

...

I drag my portfolio from my bedroom closet. There is a self-portrait, some texture studies, some practice with perspective. Then—my proudest!—a charcoal sketch of an art studio. The picture is not clean or careful. Instead, like the room itself, it is a testament to hurried practice and endless answers. Easels stand scattered in inconsistent zigzags, a curtain hangs from the ceiling, a ladder leans against one wall. All of these items bring a title to my fingers. I think this is *Waiting for Use*.

I sway through homemaking, prompted by nothing but my own desires. I want my family to eat homemade meals. I want us to sit at a table wiped clean, to walk through hallways unimpeded by toy trucks and dirty socks. I want my kids to stop arguing, to always choose love and kindness.

But mostly I want to hold a piece of charcoal and stand at an easel, raking out form. I am no great artist but I love the action. As a writer, as a mom/teacher, form is never wasted.

On the back of one old charcoal sketch, these words remind: "2 minute gesture. 15 minutes sustained." Two minutes to get the form of a still life and fifteen more to show the details. Two minutes to scribble the thought and fifteen more to capture depth.

Charcoal smears and leaves imprints, yet in the hand it feels weightless, a tool so great yet so unnoticeable. It is freeing to hold that tool again.

*Words by*

Dylan Audun Golden

# A Fate He Will Not Follow

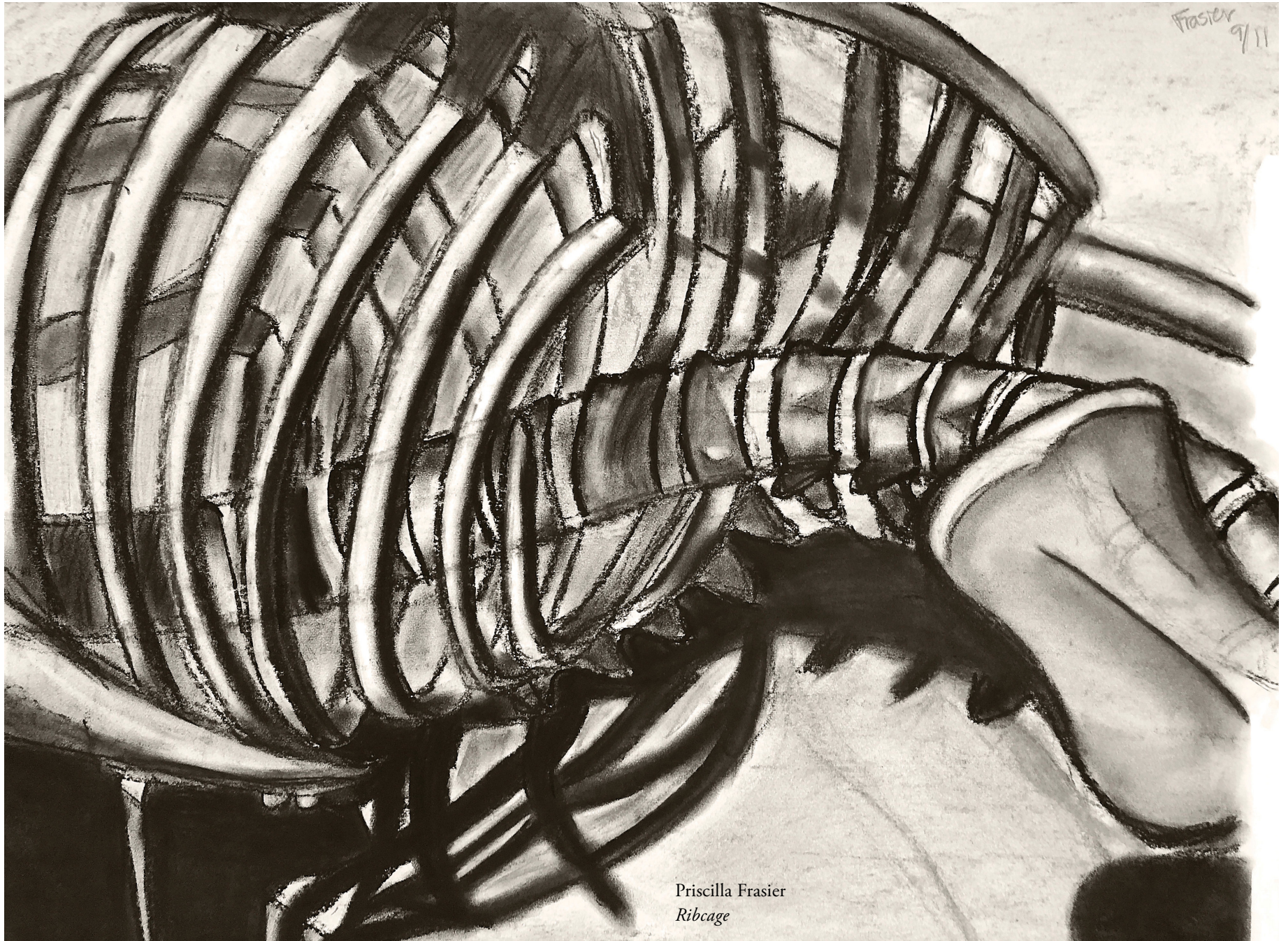
the days are approaching  
when he will leave his wonderland,

majestic.  
time has croaked  
yet again...

what waits is a fate he cannot fathom  
there is no escape he can imagine  
society dependent on  
material substance  
driven by the dirty green  
the world engulfed in flames  
is there nothing else that they see?  
any penetration of status quo  
leaves them stumbling

How can  
old souls and change  
be their foes?

I'd advise him not to convert  
to this ignorant *conformity*.  
a fate he will not follow  
he found who he wanted to be  
*seldom* does anyone follow their dreams



Priscilla Frasier  
*Ribcage*



THE MIRROR

# DIRTY

*Words by Bailey Sabin*

There is poetry in their brutality.

The monsters anyway. Their cyclic lives possess such a simplistic, animalistic beauty. I'm sure Thoreau would've applauded their individualistic, by-natural-law ways. They shamble within and without the city, walking corpses whose only goal is to devour anything in their way. They fight each other for the smallest scraps of food, the tiniest mouthful of water. Dirty rags cling to their frames, expressions always gaunt, grime in their ragged hair. It's been this way for what feels like forever now.

It all started with the bombs. The government needed to wipe out the plague. "It was a necessary evil," they said. There was some backlash, but soon even our city of millions was forgotten. A stain on the sterling reputation. The drop of red in the ledger, hastily scribbled over. The plague *was* bad. It spread fast, the cure was taking too long, and with over 2 million people living in such a confined space...The call had to be made. Then they left, washing their hands of us. They left us to die.

But it wasn't the plague that made the monsters. Not entirely. The bombs made them. They destroyed almost everything, and the plague just kept going. Now it's just the monsters and us. We fight for survival constantly, every day is a struggle. Sometimes, though, there are treasures to be found.

Today I was exploring an old department store. I remember coming here as a child with my father to buy gifts for my mother's birthday. Or was it mother for my father's birthday? I can't remember those days. Only hunger. Thirst.

The store was forgetting what it was, too. Streams of thin sunlight came through the cracks in the ceiling, and the smell of old clothes assaulted my nose. Fifteen years of dust lingered on every surface. Long ago these clothes would have been considered high quality, meant for the wealthier folks. But now they could best serve as kindling for a fire. If fire was safe here.

But I am no monster I think to myself as I cautiously move through the store. They left everything here in their haste to get out. Jewels still lie in the glass displays, perfumes and makeups still waiting for someone to pick them up. The children's section makes me the saddest. All the tiny clothes for babies who never got a chance to be born. A hospital was hit by the main blast. There was nothing left but rubble and ash. I hope it was painless for them. It has to be, compared to this life. I continue my creeping, hoping that no one else was here. As I peruse the second floor, all the homegoods and décor, I came across what once was an ornate mirror. In it I see something I've only seen from afar: a monster.

The monster's face was gaunt, skin clammy and covered in sores and bruises. Tears in the flesh exposed grayish muscle, and its black hair clung in oily strands to a small head. Bloodshot eyes stared with intense emptiness, brown irises so deep that they're almost black. The body of this creature had gaping wounds from bullet shots, mangled by some other beasts, pink organs peeking through. Barely any clothes covered its hideous form, and barely any teeth remained in its mouth.

I quickly turned around to see if something was there. There wasn't.

No one but me.

It was a sad sight to see; the diseased creature staring at itself in the old, tarnished mirror.

“What is it doing?” I wondered to myself. In the 15 years I've been living, no, surviving, in this hellish world, I have never seen one of the Changed express anything close to self awareness. They were normally shambling corpses, husks that used to be human. That was the part that truly bothered me; the “used to be human” part.

I was only 17 when the bombs dropped. Not nuclear, but they should have been. The plague continued among the survivors even faster with the hospitals gone, the scientists gone. The Changed only really started appearing after the government vanished. I doubt they know that they're even here. Or that we survivors are here.

Staring at this small, pitiful creature, my rifle pointed at it, breath holding the dusty air of this old building...

I couldn't do it. For once I couldn't shoot. I was tired. Other survivors have become monsters themselves, they revel in the chaos. "Dog eat dog world" was an understatement. I survived. But what have I become to do so? I was supposed to go to college, get a degree, become a veterinarian. I always loved animals, always wanted to help them. And here I was, clutching this old rifle I scavenged from the remains of a department store not too unlike this one 9 years ago, debating whether or not to kill a creature that wouldn't hesitate to kill me in turn. Because I was tired of killing.

The Changed was touching its face in the mirror. Something like horror dawned on its mangled face. Could it understand what it was?

No, that was impossible... Right? A noise of despair rose from its throat, and it fell to its knees, hands grasping at the once golden edges of the mirror. Pity swelled in my chest for it.

The Changed scrambled up and away from the mirror, its choking sobs echoing through this concrete shell of a building. It was gone within minutes. I had no idea that the Changed could even make those sounds anymore, that they could shed tears. Once it was safe for me to move, I picked my rifle up off the ground, and crept over to stare into that mirror. It was a tarnished thing, once a beautiful, ornate decoration to go in a living room or dining room. Its glass was cracked and blackened, and the golden frame lusterless. A lively entity made sullen over time. Just like the rest of us. What would it show for me?

A man who's seen too much stared back at me. Brown eyes that carry too much sadness, gaunt cheeks that show that he's gone too many times without food. Scars, some dull, some pink, criss cross over his face and neck, down his arms. Skin so dark from birth and then more from being in the sun for so long. Face grim by default, almost scary in its intensity.

"When was the last time I looked in a mirror?" I muttered to myself, inspecting my face. I couldn't remember. I looked nothing like what I thought I would when I was a boy. Nothing that has happened has happened the way I dreamed when I was a boy.

I continued to stare into the mirror, feeling no doubt the same horror, same sadness the Changed had felt. They never saw me. They'll never know that there was a witness. But in that moment, for them, for me *everything* had changed.



# strings in

I set out for my long journey, weary and dragging.

Dragging the boat in back and forth, pushing it in the surf.

The grains of sand scrape its rough, ragged wooden hull.

I feel like someone is putting their finger on a clock, in front of the minute hand, stopping it from moving forward.

I fall forward into the water, my knees sink into the sand; only ankle deep, but already my trousers are soaked with the salty, unforgiving waters.

I look to the sky—a flat blanket of grey falls towards me—there are places in the blanket that are so worn.

One can see through the fibers and the threads flashes of the glowing hands throwing down the blanket onto the water.

My empty eyes burn when I stare at the thinning parts of the blanket, so barren.

Too searchingly—too watchfully.

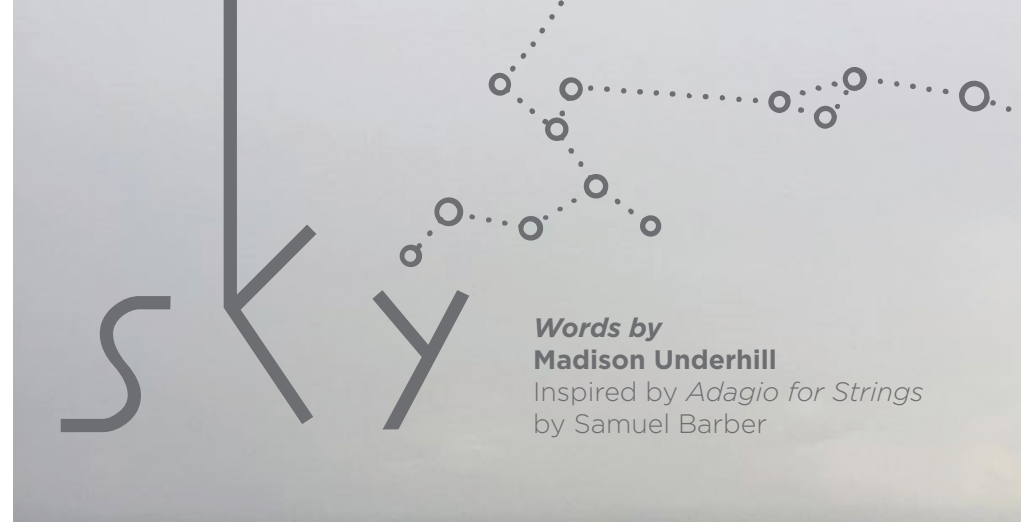
I look down at my hands, calluses cover them, changing these once tender hands.

Hands once used for embracing and loving and holding and caring.

Hands used for nothing.

I let my heavy head rest in these hands, sorrowfully.





*I see my wife, I see her, her beautiful silhouette is a ribbon of silky, glowing moonlight against the darkness behind her. Each step I get closer yet she feels further and further away, finally I am only inches from her, but she seems as far as Diana herself, she flinches at my touch and turns, her body evaporating into the pure darkness.*

Drifting away from the shore, one would think I'd feel something, some sort of self-congratulatory thought for finishing the seemingly Sisyphean task of pulling my boat to be fully submerged in the waters, but I feel nothing.

That wasn't even the beginning.

Only seeing a thread of horizon separating the clouds from the waters I am now on.

A seamstress has come through and sewn up the threadbare parts of the blanket—no more holes.

I sit at the stern of my boat, crouched down, my hands on either side of me, grasping the sides, hopelessly.

My body, my boat, my bitterness bobbing along with the weary waves, endlessly.

---

I feel gleaming, glowing warmth hit my bearded cheeks as I lay on my back.  
I get up and go back to my place at the stern of the boat—bewilderment, everything is glimmering, the water and the waves,  
the white caps now golden.

I sit and look, letting my eyes and skin be blessed by this, every movement of the water looks like sheer fabric placed atop the water  
by the gods, golden flakes and diamond dustings.

The wind has stopped and all I feel is warmth, a warmth I've never felt before as I sit in my boat.

I look to the once grey sky and see the threads of the grey blanket being torn apart. A gash down the center, loose fibers frayed.

And above me the most bright, beautiful light I have ever seen shines through the breaking strands. It's almost too bright to bear, but  
golden arms are reaching for me, stretching and expanding, elongating to reach me and my boat.

*I see my wedding day, I see my beloved.*

I reach back, I am ready to be taken up by them, longing for them, praying.

*She reaches for me to take her hand in marriage.*

*I walk towards her, five violinists on either side of her playing the notes of heaven, a sound so lovely only angels should be blessed  
enough to hear it.*

Our fingers touching.

*Our fingers touch.*

The hands of the creators are reaching for me, they have me, they are pulling.

Our heads move towards each other, trying to prepare our lips to kiss but so overcome by joy our lips can't help themselves but smile.  
I'm at the golden gates, then all stops.

*We pull ourselves apart, the violinists' bows disappear in this air, the heavenly melody has ceased.*

The hands are gone, the golden light is gone.

The waters are still and dark blue just as before, the blanket that had been ripped apart by the light has been restored.

*My wife is gone.*

I'm rowing myself to shore. Back and forth on either side of the boat, using the same movements as the violinists.

Pulling my boat into the grainy sand, I hear it scraping and tearing the bottom.

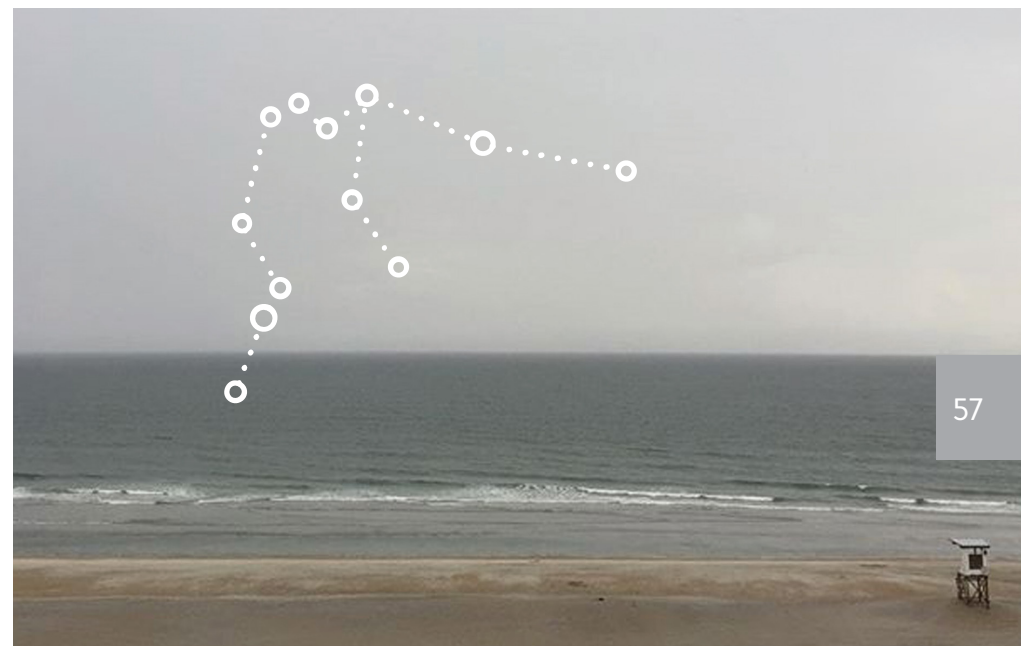
My hands are even more torn up than they were before.

I see my wife.

I'm flooded with relief, she runs to me, I fall as I reach her, fall to her feet.

She lays a blanket around my shoulders and lets me rest my face in her soft soothing hands.

We leave my boat and watch it fall back into the current, leaving us.



Words by Madison Underhill

# White Bed Sheets



58

Celdice Mouny  
*Reclining*

I don't know what it is, but she looks the most beautiful with our white bed sheets wrapped around her, doing nothing more than methodically pulling the sheets in between her fingers back and forth. Maybe because it's when she looks her most peaceful, sleeping soundly or reading her books next to the dim light of the bedside lamp.

That's where she is now, tracing her fingers with her eyes. I lay next to her and follow her stare to nothing in particular, just our blue bedroom door. She looks up at me with a nervous smile—daring, paired with vulnerability as it curls on her lips.

A rosy lower lip slowly turning pale as she bites down on it, then a release, and all the blood rushes back. A sentence forms in her eyes as she parts her lips and knits her brows.

“I don't believe... you. Ya know, when you say it,” she said.

In an instant she has a fist full of white bed sheets and quickly flips on her other side, facing away. They flow after her, like a veil does a bride.

“Oh, but you must, my darling.”

My body comes up behind hers, cradling her frame with my own. Only the thin, white bed sheets keep my chest from touching her back. My fingers slowly roll back the sheet, exposing her pale neck. I lay my lips as softly as I possibly can against the sweet nape of her neck.

“But *how* do I know?” I hear a tinge of fear in her voice.

I see ourselves reflected in the mirror of her dressing table. Her gaze is glossed over, reminding me of our first meeting.

In the mirror I see her body eclipsing mine. Mine looming behind hers.

“My dear,” another kiss on the neck,  
“I will do anything I must,” a kiss behind the ear,  
“to prove just how much I love you.” As I say this last phrase my lips gently caress the back of her ear.

She looks at us both in the mirror then quickly turns back to face me. The white sheets are now tightly wrapped around us—encompassing our bodies. I feel her warm skin against mine. Warm skin.

She lays a small hand on my chest and her bottom lip trembles.

“Darling?” I ask. Her doubt is slightly worrying me now.  
“Tell me what's wrong.”

“Just promise you'll never let me go.”

“I promise.”

And my arms tightly wrap around her. As the white bed sheets are tightly wrapped around us.

...

“Will you make dinner?” Her voice rings through the house with a slight whine. Like a child asking her parents for new ribbon for her doll.

“I will only make dinner on one condition.”

“And whatever might that be, my love?”

“You play while I cook.”

A playful eye roll.

“Fine,” she sings.

I look through the kitchen door into the sunroom at her old music teacher’s grand piano, passed down to us. She takes her usual position.

“Thank you, my darling,” I sing back, stopping to see her methodically lay her fingers on the keys, a couple light drums over the keys—then she begins.

Sometimes her beauty catches me off guard; I see her face for hours a day, but when she does things like this, when I see her doing what she loves, I just have to sit for a moment and admire her.

As I cut carrots and place them in the steamer, I sway to the melody. I can’t quite name the tune... what is it... Bach? Maybe?

I realize the hum of the oven is the only sound I hear... The song has cut off.

“Honey?”

I hear this horrible thump on the piano keys; multiple ones sound at once, like a typewriter has been dropped on them.

Then, it is just silence.

“Darling? Want something to drink, water or maybe some of that wine your sister brought the other day?” The only response I hear is violent coughing. I run to the sink, wash off food residue, and fill a glass at the sink. I call for her again as I do.

“Don’t come in here.”

“Hmm? One sec, I’m getting water.”

“No really,” she sounds more frantic, “please, my love, don’t come in here. Just call an ambulance.” Her demand followed by more uncontrollable coughing.

I run into where she was playing and stop, stunned, stiff, my body won’t move an inch forward when I see her.

Blood.  
*Her* blood.

Then I look down and my feet are wet and the glass is shattered. I follow the pool of water and see it starting to flow into her pool of blood.

My eyes flick up to where the blood is coming from and it is pouring from her mouth, down her chest and onto her skirt—it looks like someone painted poppy flowers on the trim.

The pool is growing, like it is alive and it is crawling toward my feet and swallowing the shards of glass. The deep red of her blood is smeared and splattered across the black and white keys. Beads of blood roll down the tilted top of the piano. The sheet music looks sprinkled with red—it was Bach.

I’m transfixed, mesmerized. I see my own reflection, shiny and dark red, staring up at me, wide eyed and open mouthed. I look up to her doubling over and covering her mouth, as if she is trying to catch all the blood and put it back inside her body.... She deliriously tries swallowing the blood just to choke and cough it up again. Her crying and wailing, mixed with distressed screams pull me out of my trance and I rush to the wall and yank the phone from its holder. I stretch the cord across the room, rushing so I can sit next to her as I phone an ambulance—falling to my knees and dialing.

“Darling, darling please tell me what to do.” I sweep her up in my arms, hurry to the bedroom, and lay her down. I crawl up next to her and pull her almost on top of me, her back laying against my chest.

My frame cradling hers. Her body eclipsing mine on the white bed sheets.

“Shhh, shhh. Shhh.” Tears roll down my face. I try to comb her hair out of her face and my blood-coated hands just matt down her hair.

“Please don’t leave me, please don’t leave me,” I repeat over and over again “please, my darling. You can’t leave me.”

I don’t know when or how but as I am begging her not to leave me I look up and the medics are staring at us, void of emotion. How long had they been here? I look at her and realize she hadn’t taken a breath in a long time. No no no no god please no. I try to flip her body over to face me but it’s so limp and heavy now. I grab under her chin and try to bring her face up to mine.

“Darling? Darling?” I press my lips against hers and they have lost their warmth. They have lost their rosy tint. “Come on, my love, come on, wake up.”

I lose my grip and she drops onto my chest, and I look in her dressing table mirror.  
An empty stare—glossed over.

My head falls back and I let out a cry of agony.

I feel the white bed sheets, coated and soaked with her blood being peeled off our skin. And I open my eyes to a young medic trying to remove her from me.

“Please,” I tried to plead with him. “Please, you can’t take her from me. You don’t understand. I can’t let her go, I promised her I wouldn’t let her go, you can’t take her away from me.” I begin to cry, or continue to cry harder. They are pulling back my arms. “No!” yanking my arms forward, “you’re hurting her,” I scream as they try to unwrap her from our bed, the sheets hardened against her skin, and they must be peeled off, like wallpaper.

“Shh, shh, shh.” I console her, petting her hair back again, dried and crusted with blood.

“Sir, we have to take her.”

“Please not yet.” They leave and give us some time together. They know she is dead.

“Darling, remember when we first bought this house? And we didn’t have any furniture yet? So we just laid down some white bed sheets on the kitchen floor and fell asleep there? Or when we tied up the sheets and propped up the couch cushions and made the most magnificent white castle? And we stayed under there all day? Do you remember?” My voice cracks. The medics came back in and said they had to go now.

They slowly remove her body from mine; it felt like we had melted together.


They carry her out.

Our once white bed sheets are wrapped around her and dragging after her.

*Words by Sara Pelletier*

# A Moment in the Park





It was a stunning spring day in New York City. The air wasn't humid yet, there was just a balletic breeze, and the magnificent blue of the sky stood absent of any sort of blemish from the snowball clouds. Butterflies flitted their delicate wings.

Three small children chased each other with grins around their parents. The mother leaned back on her hands as she openly grinned and giggled along with her children. The father was staring solely at the mother, with a look of love and admiration. His arm was spread around her as she turned inwards to offer a kiss on his cheek. The family captured her attention in a way that Lisa could not quite comprehend. Not wanting to be caught gazing quietly into the lives of this content family, Lisa rotated her body back to the transcendence of Central Park. Central Park was really the only place to be on a spring day like this.

She was perched privately on their bench. The bench, delicately aged, was covered in digs and cuts. The beauty of this day was beginning to infect her mood- something she had hoped to avoid. Lisa had to remain serious and morose, which was difficult on spring days like this. She lightly flicked her curling red hair behind her ear. The gray dress she had on did not make her as happy as it should have.

“Hello, Lisa.” His voice made her flinch as she nervously wrung her hands and wrists. Lisa forced a smile. Her fiancé, James, loomed above her with his dazzlingly green eyes. Today, they matched the green of the leaves in the oak tree just above them. His face was drawn in a gravely tormented expression, with his black hair shining in the deceptively joyful sun.

“Hello, James.” Her voice shook more than she had hoped it would. She noted the small twinge of concern broadcasted rapidly across her fiancé's brow. He silently slouched beside her on the bench, leaving a distinct six inches between them. Lisa twisted off the ring perched on her hand.

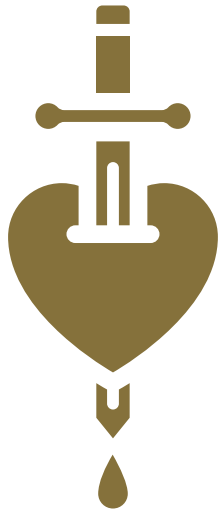
“It's a beautiful day, isn't it?” He attempted to extend their interaction, Lisa knew. James was never stupid. He knew that this would not remain that way. Beauty never remained permanently in this world.

“It is, isn't it?” Lisa offered a small turning up of her mouth as she followed a delicately winged violet and navy butterfly flap a few feet away from her face. The butterfly slowly climbed further and further towards the sunlight, towards the ecstatic sky.

“It was a beautiful day, anyway.” James gravely chuckled as he held his hand out towards Lisa. She held back the tears developing in her Atlantic blue eyes as she carefully placed the diamond band into his palm. This was the purpose of their meeting. Lisa did not deserve to keep the ring. She squeezed his palm, and didn't look back as she strolled into Central Park, feeling her clipped wings metamorphosize into butterfly wings as she soared towards the sunlight.

*Words by Sara Pelletier*

# TRAPPA



“It was because of her boobs. They were huge. Don’t give me that face, you knew her. You know it is true, hon.”

He erupted in a fit of chuckles. It seemed to slide its way out from deep in his stomach. Leaning back on the polished wooden chair at the homemade kitchen table, Richard Edward Schwab allowed himself to truly laugh. The red and black flannel that rested on his broad shoulders shook with him. The skin by his dark eyes wrinkled with each bellow. His whole body seemed engaged in the act of laughing. He only laughed like this for me now.

“Papa! Why would I want to know that part? Don’t ruin the romance for me.” I groaned through giggles, attempting to keep a straight face. Papa wiped tears from his eyes as he let out a few stray chuckles. He rubbed his hands gently along his ancient paint stained khakis, as his face calmed from the angry red that the laughter had brought on. His hands were one of the only pieces of him that showed his age- wrinkled, cut up from constant work, and painfully arthritic. Yet, they were always present to offer a moment of muted comfort. I remember he wrung his wrists whenever he was suppressing a negative emotion. They were too small for a man, he always thought.

“I was not going to lie about it! You asked, so I’m explaining.” My grandfather’s mock anger was proven false with his wide smile. In fact, it was so wide that the gold covering his left front tooth shined in the warm lighting of the kitchen. These were special smiles, reserved for his two grandchildren. “Let me finish my story. You always interrupt me.” More mock anger and giggles exited the two of us as I held up arms up in surrender. Papa took a long sip from the beer that he had deemed too strong a glass and a half ago.

“Where was I? Oh, her boobs! I noticed those first. I was fresh out of the navy then. I had just gotten off a sub inching around Russian ports for months--with all men. So, of course I noticed her boobs first!” Another intermission of laughter and hushing sounds appeared, and I had to hold in my giggles to make him continue. “She was not the one who was supposed to be my date. Her friend was, the other nurse. But I pretended to be her date. She was beautiful, hon, just beautiful. You didn’t know



her then, but trust me, she was. So, I pretended to be her date so that I got a chance to talk to her. My friend did not get to talk to this beautiful nurse. He didn't deserve her. She was beautiful. She is beautiful." His voice became muted and mournful, a quality that accompanied any mention of her. I gingerly reached my hand across the table to his. I squeezed gently for a moment. He allowed the comfort for a few precious seconds. Tears began to form behind our eyes as we sat in a moment of silence. Papa chuckled to himself before returning back to Earth.

"You better be glad I saw her boobs. Otherwise you would not exist. You are welcome, hon." A laugh burst through our silent tears as I took my hand back. "Every minute after that was happiness. I'm glad I stole his date. It was worth it. Even when...you know. When she was sick."

When she was sick.

He never could say the actual word. It forever eluded him. He would never admit what was going on. Not for lack of asking-- both of his children attempted to pry out the word whenever they spoke. My mom felt it was out of a sense of obligation. They were married. Marriage: a promise to stand beside each other, for better or worse. Hence, he felt no one else should take care of his wife. Maybe that's true.

Alzheimer's.

"A common form of dementia, believed to be caused by changes in the brain, usually beginning in late middle age, characterized by memory lapses, confusion, emotional instability, and progressive loss of mental ability."

An irreversible, progressive brain disorder that slowly destroys memory, thinking skills, and eventually the ability to carry out the simplest tasks. – National Institute of Aging

A disease that robs people of their memories. – WebMD

I first noticed the word when I was seven years old. Until age fifteen, it loomed in the back of my mind whenever my grandparents were around. Their visits came in two forms. One resulted



in Sorry games, and the other resulted in tucked away tears. My grandfather, an avid sailor, thought of them as smooth sailing days or rocky sea days.

My grandmother had moments of lucidity. In those rare times, it was hard not to throw conversation at her. She was lucid when she appeared sorrowful. She couldn't seem to believe it. Lucy Page Schwab was a top nurse for years. She raised three children and lost one of them. She had been married for over forty-eight years. She traveled the world. Why was this happening to her?

To take her mind off of the impending darkness, Lucy loved to play Disney's version of Sorry.

The game followed the traditional rules but included Disney characters instead of boring colored pawns. My favorite team to play for was the Disney princesses, but my all-time favorite Disney character was Peter Pan. He was on the hero team. My grandmother would always let me be him. No one else let me do that. My father always offered my grandfather a distraction, normally with building something. Papa would ultimately annoy each of my parents enough that they let him do as he chose. Papa normally chose to spend time with me or my little brother.

He seemed to sense the moments of clarity. Whenever they came, he would say nothing. Papa would only stare and soak in the precious minutes he had with his wife. They would not say the word. They would observe each other, offering weighted smiles. It was the kind of smile that only a couple that had been together over forty years could exchange. Inside it was sorrow, pain, grief, loss, apologies. Most of all, there was love. After brief episodes like that, Papa would watch a movie of with me. It was a reward for not interrupting that moment. On these days, the wind was blowing directly into the sail and the sea was so calm it reflected the sky above it. These were treasured days.

A disease that robs people of their memories. – Web MD

Then, there were the rough sea days.

A disease that robs people of their memories. – Web MD

There were days where the wind simply blew too much, while the sly sea sought to slice the boat from all sides. On days like this, my grandmother became a child again.

She threw tantrums, pouted, insisted on purchasing meaningless items, hoarded, screamed, demanded attention, repeated herself over and over again, and even more. She forgot that I existed. She forgot that her daughter existed. She forgot that Papa existed.

A disease that robs people of their memories. -Web MD

Papa grew belligerent and exhausted. Hopeful and lost. Desperate and private. Papa kept all his despair to himself. His main goal was to prevent anyone from forcing him to send his wife away. On these horrible days, Papa ran to his grandchildren.

When she died, Papa could barely exist in the world. An aneurysm, according to the coroner's report. My mom described her as white enough to blend into the hospital sheets. Papa couldn't believe what had happened right in front of him. There was nothing he could have done to prevent it. He could believe in insane theories he read on conspiracy websites or in his beloved Dan Brown books. He could believe that some real estate guy was running for president. He could believe spying on Russian ports during the Cold War had a purpose. He could not believe that the woman he had dedicated his life to had died. Papa explained it privately once to me.

“She was my wife.” Papa leaned back in his wooden chair at that homemade kitchen table in New Hampshire. He didn’t glance away from my eyes. “I feel...I feel...like there’s a part of me that is just gone. I can’t take off my ring in Florida. I’m excited to get up to Maine, less cougars there. The women in Florida would swarm me with casseroles and questions about my will.”

Maine.

Grand Lake Stream knew the Schwab family better than we knew each other. We had been going there every summer for over five generations. With no internet connection, one was forced to focus on the gorgeous and serene beauty of the lake. Papa had never gone there alone. My mom hid her anxiety, allowing him to enjoy his peaceful solitude. He went up to Maine for the spring, after spending both Christmas and Thanksgiving with us. Papa returned to see a doctor at the end of spring. He said he didn’t feel quite right.

The panic I felt at seeing Papa attached to looming tubes in the stiff hospital bed is an emotion that I hope never to feel again. His face was transparent, but his smile still revealed the same gold tooth. He wanted to comfort me. My mom encouraged me to enter the room with a gentle squeeze of my hand as she zoomed past me and carefully sat down in a chair. I nervously fiddled with the yellow flowers I had brought to brighten the overwhelmingly white room.

“My favorite color!” He bent his arms to grab the flowers from my shaking hands. Papa’s strikingly white beard looked disheveled, not at all like its normally ram rod straightness. The purple circles under his eyes didn’t match the warmth he exuded from his eyes. A sudden high-pitched beeping made me leap in the air.

“For shit’s sake. This machine goes off whenever my arm isn’t straight. It’s annoying as all hell. Not nearly as annoying as sleeping with my feet on the bombs in the sub, though.” I offered an enlightened smile, watching my hero hold his arms out comically straight. He handed the flowers to me and asked that I place them in the sun, so they can continue to grow. Mom began asking for medical updates from him and searching for his doctors. Papa kept turning to me to laugh and joke. I had the sense that no one had joked with my grandfather in quite a few days. Mom left for a moment to go to the bathroom and discover what room they were moving Papa to in the afternoon. A rare moment of silence fell upon my grandfather and me.

“Papa...can...can you promise me something?” I was so hesitant to ask, afraid that he would fail in my request. His gold tooth flashed at me as he nodded. “Can...can you try to make it to my graduation? Please? I know it’s selfish, but...but...I don’t know if I can do it without you.” Devious tears escaped my eyes as I rotated my eyes away from Papa. I felt the aged hand squeeze my own, as I swiped at the enemies propelling down my cheeks.

“Hon, I’m going to see you graduate from High Point. I’ll be the loudest one there.”

The rest of the visit was spent with my head pressed against the bars on his hospital bed, making goofy faces whenever he seemed to grow too depressed. Always pessimistic, it was even more important now to make him see the brighter side of his situation. At the end of the day, as I was about to leave, Papa stopped me with his arm.

“Take the flowers with you, hon. I want you to plant them for me at home. That way, I can see them when I get out of the hospital and smile.” I acquiesced, and gingerly took the golden yellow flowers with me as I walked out the door.

Papa's gold tooth peeking through his smile as I turned to wave was the last image I held of my grandfather.

My hero had been battling cancer for months but had ordered his doctors not to disclose that information with his family. He didn't want us to worry. It was the reason he attended both Thanksgiving and Christmas, the reason he called me every few days, and the reason he was suddenly much nicer to his grandson (with whom he normally held a tough-love mindset). The cancer started in his colon and sailed its way smoothly throughout his body. It became the pirate in the stolen sailboat, hijacking the healthy cells along the way. He gave in to the pirates and paid their ransom. My mom and her brother were there sharing fond memories when he died. The most villainous pirate I have ever encountered killed him a week before my high school graduation.

A few days after the loss of my hero, I went to listen to a voicemail my doctor had left me. I froze when I read that Papa had left me a voicemail. My finger hovered over it. Internally, I was debating with myself over what to do. I didn't consciously choose. My finger slipped, and the message commenced playing. To this day, the voicemail remains on my phone. His buttery and scratchy New England accent offers comfort during times of stress or despair. For a moment, I can pretend that my hero is still on this plane of existence.

Voicemail: December 30, 2016

"Hi, this is Papa. Just hoping you are feeling better at this time. I was upset that you were sick, but I hope you are much better. I'm sure you are getting better, slowly, but better, better, better. Okay. Just checking in. I don't know how much snow you got. But, yeah, it's better there than here. Ha! Talk to you later, love you honey. Bye bye."

Bye, Papa.







## CONTRIBUTORS

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**SARA DUTILLY** lives in High Point, NC with her husband and four children. She stays at home and homeschools, and can often be found scribbling in her journal at the kitchen counter. Her writing has been featured in Feminine Collective, MUTHA, r.k.v.r.y. Quarterly Journal, and others. She is a contributor for PopSugar and maintains a blog about daily mothering at [www.haikuthedayaway.com](http://www.haikuthedayaway.com).

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**NICOLE TARANGELO** is a recent graduate of High Point University. Most days, she's a teacher and a waitress, but sometimes when she's lucky enough she strings words together well enough to tell a story or write a poem. She wrote "Wildflower" in the spring of 2017, the first poem she was ever proud of. It sparked a creative burst that has yet to slow down.

**TAYLOR TEDFORD** is a marketing guru and closet poet with a passion for Pinot and unpopular opinions. Prone to feeling too hard and thinking too much, she finds solace in unfiltered writing and censored exposition. As she's pro real books, pro trees, and poor, she's likely to be found meandering through a library or scrimmaging through garage sale cast offs, and leaving with a mishmash which may include, but is not limited to: Levy, Love, Vonnegut, Bukowski, Sparks and Child.

**MADISON UNDERHILL** is a second year at High Point University, originally from Tulsa, Oklahoma. Coming into HPU as a Psychology major, she added English Literature as a double major, and a Creative Writing minor.



Maggie Andrulic, *Patriot Rovers*



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