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HELEN MASER

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Healing
 By: Emily Anderson

Something about the past year really opened up a whole new world to me. I realized something that I'd been in the dark about for basically my whole entire life.

The world is a rather terrible place.

Terrible might be too strong of a word to convey exactly what I'm trying to talk about, but it definitely fits.

Now I'm not just saying that because people fight wars, and people kill people, and just do terrible unspeakable things. I'm saying that because it's finally come to me that I'm not invincible. I'm never going to be invincible. I can watch the news and feel bad about the families you see being torn apart by murder. I can feel upset with celebrities and their drug addictions due to media stress. But I never really felt the pain of personal loss until my friend Katelin died.

That was when I realized that *no one* is invincible. Katelin died in a car crash. She wasn't a terrible person. She was a wonderful person. She didn't do anything wrong. She had her whole life ahead of her. She was going to turn nineteen in a month. But a car crash took that away from her.

What bothered me the most about it was that it wasn't that she was put out of her suffering in any way because of an illness or anything like that; she was just killed by another human being.

Now I don't know the whole story of the crash, but either way, it wasn't a controllable thing. When she crashed, it could have been anyone. It didn't have to be her. But by some unlucky twist of fate, it was *her*. And from what I know, I could be wrong, but she died on impact.

I spent the next few days in a complete funk. I sat around feeling upset and just wondering why it had to be her. And that's when I finally realized that those stories you hear aren't just fantasy. It can happen to you. It can happen to me. It can happen to a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, or a best friend. Anything could happen to anyone. But there was something extraordinary that helped me.

That extraordinary thing is music. Music is a beautiful, breathtaking thing. It can get you through any situation and any circumstance in your life where you need a hand that can't be given by a real person. There was a song on my iPod that came on the other day, and as I was listening to it, I realized it was a song about someone whose friend had passed away at a young age. Listening to it and connecting it to my own situation may have upset me just a little, but it also gave me a sense of closure I didn't have before. The song was called "Everything's An Illusion" by Mayday Parade, and the chorus went like this:

*Sleep well my friend.
 There will be another moment we'll meet again.
 Just let it go.
 Sleep well, good night.
 You're something to remember.
 I wish that you were here by my side.*

I've had countless situations where I can honestly say that music has saved my life. I'm not trying to be completely cliché here, either. Music is a lifeline. Without music, I don't know what kind of person I'd be right now. I don't even know if I'd be here. There's something completely magical about the way a well-written song can make you feel, and how connected and completely happy you are at a concert with everyone else in the room there for the same reason—to share the same love of your very favorite thing.

One of my role models, John O'Callaghan, once said that "Music is what makes the whole thing less painful." And it's one of the most truthful things I think I've ever heard, because music can help people in ways that nothing else can. You can have a long, helpful talk with a friend, but nothing can ever compare to listening to a piece of art that conveys exactly what you're feeling or what you're thinking. And the best part of it all is that it doesn't even have to have that message. A song is like one of those books we all read in our English classes. Half the time, the author wasn't trying to say what you're taking a half hour to analyze, but just the fact that you can analyze it and interpret it in your own way is simply awesome.

Whether your situation is common or uncommon, I promise you that you can find a song out there that can help you deal with it. You can connect to it in ways you can't ever imagine. That song becomes a part of you.



ALYSSA CASSANDRO

4 I know that when I get older, I’m going to do something that can help people. I want to work in the field of psychology. Maybe I’ll work with music therapy. I want to do something that will help others escape themselves. Because I know how helpful a therapist is for someone struggling with his or her issues. If I can save at least one person from whatever’s going on in their mind, I will have achieved what I wanted to do in the first place.

I’d like to help people in ways that music has helped me, but I don’t have the desire to follow my dreams as a musician—mostly because I don’t have the skill to write poetry, to be honest. I know the words to say, but I don’t know how to put them together and make them sound beautiful and presentable.

I guess all I’m trying to say here is that life is short, and you’re not invincible. And one thing that can help you ‘make the whole thing less painful’ is music. I’m not one to preach on personal happiness, but I know that with the help of music, things are going to get much better.

MAGAN METCALF



saving the kingdom from his enemies. He had a stick that he used as a sword, and he was so dirty and covered in rubble from the great battle he just had with a branch on the tree. That branch was no match for his twig sword and 9 year old muscles. Gemma, the youngest of the four siblings, began to talk to the tree. I watched her as she went on and on asking so many innocent questions about simple things. She would ask the tree why the sky was so blue in the summer, but gray and dark in the winter. She wanted to know why her brother, Jacob, could not do the things she or other kids could. The tree was her best friend, and she talked to it like she had known it for years. Gemma trusted the tree with all her secrets and believed it could understand her worries. Jacob, the king of the castle, was 12. He sat peacefully next to me in his wheelchair; I was sure he was dreaming about taking a walk with Zaria, talking about boys and telling her to stay away. I knew he was wishing he could help Zachary fight the bad guys in the “kingdom” and in real life. Gemma would be so happy if Jake could talk back to her and answer all her silly questions, but he couldn’t and he would never be able to. Jacob was born with Phiffers Syndrome, making it impossible for him to walk, talk, or see. Like the tree, Jacob was strong and grounded, letting life run its course without any worries. He could only hear, and I knew today under the tree, he heard innocence and happiness. Jacob and I sat in silence and thought about things deeply, simply because we could. Normally, people do not have moments like this to just think about life, and moments that make us feel so refreshed. I wished that Zaria would one day find her own prince charming that treated her like the princess she thought she was. I wished that Zachary would grow up strong and believe in himself, not letting the peer pressures of the world make him feel weak. I wanted Zachary to be a tough warrior, like he was today under the tree. And I hoped that Gemma would one day find a friend who was loyal, like the tree. As for Jacob, I wished him the world, I wanted him to be able to walk, talk, and see what I saw today. I wanted him to witness simple things that make a huge difference in life. Watching his siblings play and grow up would mean a lot if he could only see it, but he can’t. These things would not happen in reality and life would have to take its own course. As humans, we all search for moments to escape reality and harsh times in our lives, whether it be during an encore of a concert, or driving in a car with the windows down, listening to your favorite song as the summer wind blows in your face. We all do it; we try to find moments were we can stop, think, and be innocent for as long as possible.

For me, it was that day under the cherry blossom tree. There were no worries; my cousins and I all went on different journeys to places we may never go again. Moments that make us feel powerful and innocent won’t be experienced until we come back again to enjoy a warm breezy day, under the cherry blossom tree.

I Remember

By: Brea Bolden

I remember that day by the tree, the day where I discovered innocence. It was a Saturday afternoon, the weather was breezy and warm; I was out in the country side sitting on a park bench in front of a giant cherry blossom tree, watching my cousins play.

My one cousin was a young girl named Zaria who was 8 years old, and I watched as she dreamed about being a princess and how the pink blossoms from the tree were very expensive jewels to her crown. Her prince was Zachary, her brother; but that was okay with her, because she ruled the kingdom anyway; Zachary would have no say in anything. Zachary didn’t care about marriage or princesses; he was too worried about

I Share A Father With My Mother

By: Anthony Princeton

If the title did not catch your attention... in today’s world, fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce. My mom’s marriage to my biological father added to this statistic. Four months after I was born, my parents split up after some poor decision making on my father’s part. To most, this would be a horrifying event, but for me it was the best thing that ever could have happened. I traded in one parent and got two more in return, Grammy and Pappy.

After I was born, my mother made the decision to move back home with my grandparents. My mom, Alyse, worked as an accountant for Metals USA, which is in Greentree, through most of my childhood. As much as she wanted to be there to raise me, it was physically impossible to work a nine to five with a good two hour commute both ways and raise a son. On the weekends, my mom and I would spend as much time as possible together but through the week I was watched by Grammy and Pappy, after he got home from work. Their house was a child’s dream. It featured three bedrooms, three bathrooms, a living room, dining room, a newly remodeled kitchen, and a 70s style game room with tons of nooks and crannies for hiding and seeking purposes, of course. The yard around the house was just as spectacular as the inside. The house was trimmed in huge bushes, perfect for hiding. The yard itself featured the best sled riding hill in the neighborhood, as well as a brand new swing set built just for me. It was a regular wonderland for six year old me, and that is where my story begins.

When I was six, I got my first bike for Christmas. The bike was a blue, black, and silver Mongoose. It was the coolest bike ever made. The only problems with this present were that I had no clue how to ride it and I had to wait till March to learn.

Finally, March rolled around and I was ready to learn how to ride. I was padded from head to toe in safety equipment, at the request of my very sweet and very overprotective Grammy. At first, I attempted to teach myself, but the only thing I learned was how to fall without getting hurt too badly. This was when Pappy took over my bike riding training.

Everyday after he returned home from work Pappy would check to see if my homework was done (being that I was six this was rarely an issue), and if it was, we would have a lesson to prepare for my “Biking License Test”. According to Pappy, the Biking License Test was a test that every six year old in Pennsylvania had to successfully pass before they were allowed to ride their bikes on streets with their friends. I did not realize this but my Pappy, all grey haired and clean shaven would prove to be the best fibber in the world, still able to spin a tale and make you believe every word of it. And at six years old, I did.

Everyday was a new skill. First was peddling, followed by coasting, breaking, turning (this one hurt the most), peddling up hill, and lastly, dodging obstacles. After about two weeks of preparation I was told I would have my riding exam which would encompass all of the skills I had learned.

Finally the day had come, the day I had been waiting for, the fabled riding exam. That day when he got home from work Pappy skipped checking to see if my small amounts of homework was finished and only said, “The examination will begin in 10 minutes!” I hurried up and put on my padding, again at the request of Grammy, ran down stairs and got my bike out of the garage and ready to go. The test was simple, or so I thought: Go up and down the street and come back safely. I had never rode the entire way down the street on my own but I felt confident in my skills.

I started my way down the road. At first I was fine, intentionally swerving back and forth to show just how comfortable I was, but after awhile I began to swerve not of my own accord, but that of the bike. It seemingly turned on me not wanting me to get my biking license. But still I pushed on, for what seemed like forever (two minutes) then I finally reached my turn around point. From here on out it was a race to the finish the only thing separating me from that license was a less than quarter mile stretch of pavement that had scraped my knees many times before. I was determined to finish, and that I did, keeping my eyes straight ahead and peddling my little legs as fast as I could. When I reached the finish Pappy said, “I’ll take your scores to the Biking Commission tomorrow and we shall see if you get your license.”

The next day was the longest day of my short life, waiting in excitement to hear the results. When Pappy got home that evening, he went about his normal routine of checking my homework, changing out of his work clothes, and sitting in his chair. That night at dinner he pulled a small business card sized piece of poster paper out of his pocket, handing it to me and saying, “Congratulations, you passed!” The license had my school picture on it as well as all my information and in big bold letters: PENNSYLVANIA BIKING LICENSE.

I would not come to realize this license was unofficial till I was around ten or so, but the memory still sticks out in my mind as a great one. Pappy provided excitement and wonder in a life that could have been sad and bleak. He and I still share a special father son-like relationship that is incredibly important to me. Pappy was, and still is, my greatest role model teacher and father figure and for that, I cannot thank him enough.

A Peaceful Reflection

By: Maggie Stasko

You're in your house, glancing down at a thriving green peace plant that has been happily surviving next to your couch for about six years. It seems to have much significance to your family, since it has been a part of your home décor for so long. It is much more than just a plant, though.

You appear to be frozen, as you begin to think back to the first time you saw this plant... It was summertime, six years ago. August to be exact. It was inside a little family-owned funeral home. That's when you remember that god awful pain in your stomach, the huge knot in your throat that just won't go away, and the painful pounding in your head; it was the funeral for your grandfather or as you liked to call him, "Pap." Peace plants, or peace lilies, are common at funerals, because of what they symbolize: peace and their colors, which are green and white, are lively and very peaceful.

Going to that funeral could have been the most difficult thing you have ever done. You fought it every second, mostly because you knew as soon as you made it through the door; you would have to actually admit that he was gone. Not just like gone on vacation or moved away; he was gone. Forever. You knew this would do some major damage to your emotions and in all honesty, were you really prepared to say goodbye?

Driving to the funeral home was not a pleasant ride. You sat in the backseat of your family vehicle in silence. The weather was not cooperating either. The rain was constantly streaming down the window, just as you felt your tears stream down your face. A dreary day could make this saddening event even harder to get through, so you closed your eyes for the rest of the car ride, secretly hoping it was long so you could gather yourself. Unfortunately, it wasn't. You were there, in front of a little cottage-like building. It was almost cute, but not today, not with these circumstances. A man wearing a green suit with white gloves opened the door for you.

He politely and almost cheerfully said, "Welcome!"

You did not respond; you were so mad that someone seemed happy today. Did he forget why you were there or did he simply not care? Either way, it made your day a little worse. But you still walked in. There was an open doorway leading to the viewing room. You had to take a second to prepare yourself.

You knew that being in the viewing room was going to be tough, so you tried to remember all the good childhood moments you shared with your pap, like the time he taught you how to paint, all the times he sang to you especially when you two were swinging. You'll never forget that song. Or the fact that you two always fought over the television remote. And even when you were a little out of control, he always calmed you down. "Simmer down," he would repeat. And you could especially remember the dark navy Norwin hat with the gold "N" that he never took off, or the smell of wood shavings in the garage because he was always working on a project. Okay. With these happy times in mind, it seems to be easier for you to slowly walk into the viewing room.

Pace by pace, you make it in. It was a plainly decorated small room, with dark carpeting and white walls. You see small crowds of adults gathered, some that seem to be family, and some that seem to be your pap's companions. Although you do recognize some of your younger family members, you are still quite shaken by the whole experience. You feel pretty out of place here. A funeral home isn't somewhere you go every day so how could you possibly feel comfortable there? You obviously knew that death was apparent for some of your older family members, but did you really ever think it would be this soon?

You walk around the room, avoiding the casket. You talk to your relatives, and fake smiles, and hold tissues, and give hugs for the majority of your time. But then, it really hit you hard as your grandma walks towards you; you see her poise and her calmness. How could she be this peaceful? You really respect the way she's holding herself.

"How're you feeling, Gram?"

She looked directly into your eyes and took your hand ever so gracefully.

"He wasn't himself being hooked up to all those machines; he wasn't comfortable, and now he's peaceful and safe. It was his time," she replied.

"I know you're right, but that doesn't make this easy," you said. She hugged you and then walked away to thank others for coming.

This inspires you. You take a deep breath and a few strides until you make your way to the casket. After all, if this is goodbye, you better make it good. But what do you say? Do you pray? Or talk to God? Or just be silent and truly take the time to honor your pap? You weren't sure at this point, but you were determined to do something.

So you kneel down, and you quietly study him. His dark suit, which was a little weird for you since your pap really didn't dress up much, and his serene facial expression; your grandma was right. You look to the left of the casket, and you focus your teary eyes on the liveliest plant. Your mom had gotten it specially arranged for the funeral. The plant brought a sense of life to the viewing room; it was glowing and flourishing, while everything and everyone around it was melancholy and numb. It was a much needed breath of fresh air in this depressing location.

Which is exactly what I did; I breathed, slowly. In through my nose, and out through my mouth. I stopped

thinking about how I was losing him because I wasn't. I closed my eyes and got an optimistic view on this situation. Yes, my pap passed away, but more importantly, he was safe and peaceful and no longer in pain. In some ways, this should make me content.

And that's when I finally cracked a slight smile, not the kind with teeth, or the kind when I'm even happy; this was more of an "everything's going to be okay" smile. I realized that I now had a guardian angel in heaven.

Going to a funeral is never really a happy event. After all, someone has passed away and their family misses them. When I look back on that funeral for my pap, or I glance over at our peace plant, I watch it in my head as an out of body experience. I see as if it's happened to someone else, and I'm just an observer. Maybe it is a strange way to recall it, but this way I almost force myself to focus on better times my pap and I shared. It's not that I haven't coped with the fact that he's gone. In my mind, he's not gone; he's with me every day of my life, just in a different way.



AARON LA VERDE

A Fire Burns

By: Patsy Kowalski

We've done this so many times that we've damned near got it down to a science. With surgical precision, we pack our bags: industrial flashlights, cold and textured like reptilian ice in our shaking palms; first aid kits we'd never allowed ourselves to be careless enough to need; gas masks--mine a civilian issue Czech model from the thrift shop, and yours a military model from the surplus store--just in case; more cameras than we'd need--my faithful Nikon, your beat-up Canon, my flashbulb relic, your rusting 8mm-- for the pictures only we'd ever see. All we'd ever need is stuffed into canvas bags and carelessly chucked into your gas guzzler, including ourselves. We don't make a habit of inventory anymore. We've done this before, after all.

You wordlessly hand me a tattered road map, marked in your messy scrawl and considerably coffee-stained. It crinkles in the comfortable silence, like the crush of autumn leaves or the hushed whispers of guilty children. In red pen, you've made a sloppy loop around one town: Centralia.

"It's been burning down there for nearly half a century," you say, but I blindly flail a dismissive hand at you until one single, outstretched finger finds your lips. You smile beneath it, a crooked, braille promise etched in flesh. 'I'll be quiet,' it implies, 'until you've finished. I'm sorry. I forgot.'

I scan the familiar roadways with my eyes like a spider navigating her own web. In the corner, my twitching fly, Centralia, squirms, and I pick up on its vibrations. I find our way. The other towns have long since grown cold, Taurence hospital's moth wings ground to dust and the glass factory's spindly legs curled useless and desperate around itself. But Centralia is warm, and the path comes easy.

My finger slips from your mouth, but you hardly breathe until the map's eternal creases are restored and doe-brown is locked with storm cloud grey.

"The entire place is condemned," you say, smirking. "There are a few residents still, but they don't mind much. I don't think we'll be in any trouble."

"Yeah, I've heard that one before." I roll my eyes, and playfully shove you.

"I just don't get it. I mean, I know why *we're* going, but to actually live there? Who could put up with that? The smells, the heat, the danger. . . I mean, all of their industry is gone. The coal won't go out for centuries--maybe longer. And they still live there, right above it all."

8 You’re mostly talking to yourself now, and I let you go. I play audience to your soliloquy. You do the same for me.

“Maybe they all have some sort of fatalist precarious situations fetish,” you continue, as though I wasn’t even there. Your eyes are vacant and expectant in one conflicting instance, two acts fighting for space on the same stage, the stormy grey writhing around its calm, obsidian center. You’re quiet for much too long before whispering, “How can they live with the fire?”

I ask myself the same thing every day.

How *do* we live with the fire? How do we keep the hollow houses pretty and clean, while smoke pours from every crack in the streets? How do we maintain pristine lawns and pretty facades while the embers slosh and swirl, constantly threatening to collapse our precious, little fabrications?

I do it every day, and I’ve never bothered to ask why. I carefully line sleep-deprived eyes and flush otherwise pallid skin. I make a fragile barrier. I maintain my lawns, and keep shop open while smoke seethes through every scar. I meticulously forge a functioning suburb, because I’ve lived here all my life. There isn’t a way out that seems reasonable. There are no alternatives with this sort of thing, and while my blaze has only raged for seventeen years to Centralia’s fifty, it still scorches. I still blister.

There’s a fire beneath my bookstore, that will never be fulfilled. It wants to consume every word. It wants to put Bradbury’s firefighters to shame. But time is like a tempest, and so it smoulders in secret. There’s a fire beneath my schoolyard, that feeds on lonely children whose bruises are never-quite-covered by their stockings. It wants to engulf them entirely. It wants them to know it’s okay to be angry. But guilt could fill an ocean, and so it it hardly sizzles. There’s a fire beneath my hospital, that furiously swells and meekly ebbs. It wants to make me better. It wants to keep me sick. But silence floods and memories thrash, and so nothing is scathed.

There’s a fire trapped beneath my skin, and in the space between inhale and exhale, it comes alive. It wants to destroy everything. It wants to consume the lie. But ashes obscure, and make everything dirty, and so it finds its place. It burns beneath to keep things clean. It calms itself as best it can.

And so I live with the fire.

And I can’t help but wonder if you’ve got your own fire, too; if somewhere, beneath the disheveled charm and careless brilliance, a chaos swells. How close are your streets to collapsing, my dear? Am I the only one so precarious? Am I--

“Are you okay?” you ask, and your hand is warm in mine. “You kind of spaced out there.”

“Yeah, I’m okay. . . I’m just tired.” Your thumb traces lazy circles against my skin, and I relax a bit. The fire subsides.

“You’re also a bad liar. Are you sure you’re up for it tonight?”

“Yeah! Of course! Why wouldn’t I be?” I force a smile.

“We could always go tomorrow,” you say, and you squeeze a little tighter. “If you’re nervous, I’ll be right there. I always am.”

Maybe that’s it. Maybe that’s how we live with the fire. We bring others into the subterranean mess with us. We pack our bags. We fold our maps. We find routine in the chaos. We find someone who’s got a fire, too, and we take their hand.

And here in the darkness, I know that I couldn’t ask for a better person to walk into Hell with. You make the fire livable. You make it an adventure. If that isn’t what it means to love someone, I’ve been grossly misinformed.

Naked

By: Ciana Morris

I’m running, passing blurred faces and unable to read the labels on the doors. I see eyes and similar bags as I make turns, knowing why I’m so cold, I am so cold. I stop when they all go away. I focus and regain conscience as I notice there are no more eyes. I can’t find my clothes, so I hide. I’ve found a closet in a teacher’s room. I remember where I am now, clueless as to where my clothes have gone. They’re all laughing, I can hear them all laughing from the other side of the door. They laugh and make fun of my boyish prepubescent figure. “I know you’re in there!” I hear them scream but I won’t open this door. I won’t let them see what a monster I am again. I’m sweating and so nervous. I can feel my body begin to tremble as I notice my tears are accumulating. I close my eyes and say, “The pain will go away... They will go away...” I open them once more and I’m home again, lying down soaked in tears and sweat. I chuckle, “It was only a dream,” remembering that it is the same one as yesterday, the day before, and the weeks before that. Only I know it’s not time for me to get up; it is too early in the day. The sun is hardly shining through my window but I don’t dare look out. I get up anyways, throw on an old tee-shirt hoping for a good day and open my door. Only, this is not my house. All I can see is a long hallway. As I scan this hallway, everyone I’ve ever been angry with or that has made fun of me is

lined up covering each wall. All with murder weapons, one or two carrying spiked bats in the front. I see make-shift whips with a razor blade on each end hanging in the distance, swinging in the arms of who I’ve forgotten waiting to make their mark. At the far end, all I can see is an outlined shadow of a hooded figure holding up a hangman’s noose in torch light guarded by what appear to be men in studded armor. Only their faces are exposed, all with a sadistic smirk waiting for me to take a chance and run. They know that eventually I will, I can only run. Run to hide, to avoid facing the incinerated hopes and dreams I’ve caused to crumble. The ones I’ve let crumble before me... To hide from the monsters I’ve created for my own amusement and the ones who’ve created the monster I am for their own enjoyment. To hide from reality and the idea that we are all monsters who have been created by many or only one to find meaning in life for ourselves. So, I run, is the end. This is where they all wait their turns to it or not. By the time I of misery and mystery shame and guilt following, look up to find the figure as I wait for conviction. of confusion waiting for say nothing, mouths closed whether or not I should Drenched only in fear by yet again close my eyes them but something bad pain but I try feeling for the gone. I am trembling once once had the option to but is left of them, covering beautiful to me. When hooded figure once again no recognition of who this eyes same as mine and skin I wait for something like him. I try to speak but is laugh...”You are a guilt or emotion. Still full my neck, squeezes tightly Losing strength and will. I blow I attempt my arm fades away appearing to be back by and the world around me goes black. Nothing, as if I’m the only form of life left. I can hear a faint cry, as if it were myself but I am here, alone and cold with nothing but darkness surrounding me. The shaking begins again and I’m unable to control it this time. I want someone to help me but I have nobody to call out for. The shaking continues, as I’m beginning to seizure the tears and sweat start to pour. Only this time, it’s coming from beneath me. I can finally watch as it rises above my head and all imagination and before I can see where it lands I’m gone, dead, staring below at my limp and once again cold body. I float away, I’m trying to get closer but soon it fades to ash. Still rising I can hear water running quite heavily. As I become closer to the sounds approaching what appears to be sunlight, I fall. Fall to the heavy blows of water crashing all around me. Soon I run out of air. I close my eyes once again, once again before I’m finally dead. I think to myself that nothing worse could possibly happen to me. I open them once more to see what will happen next. And here I am, lying in my own bed for once aware of my surroundings. It seems as though even in my dreams, I can’t and will never escape that the world will always flip from underneath me. It will take those I thought I knew or once loved and suck the life out of them without the help of my actions. I will never know why people are so judgmental or how they can be so selfless. I would rather remain alone because in a room full of people I am still alone. They all want to be the same and call themselves unique. They are selfless because they do and act what they feel is in the best interest of their peers. Here I am for once, not pretending anymore and not being who or what they want me to be. If they judge me, I can judge them in my own mind. Most of them wouldn’t understand where I’m coming from or what logic I use to insult them as they throw those childish remarks. I am alone, by myself and only I’m ready to fight. To be attacked by those who are narrow minded and embrace each other’s ignorance as if it were something they should win a medal for.

No matter how many times I am insulted, broken down, judged, even if they kill me I will never be like them. I would rather be unknown and die alone for my own cause than to live with a closed mouth and follow blindly.



BIANCA STIFFEY

I think to myself that this... This it all stops. As I pass each person, break me down whether I deserve reach the end of this long hallway covered in my own blood, the the men don’t hit me. And when I he is gone. Words are unspoken I tell them I’m not evil, only full some sort of understanding. They as if sewn shut. I’m still unsure of pass; I am still cold, still trembling. now, I have no other option but to and melt away. I am trying to open has happened. My eyes... I feel no place they used to be and they’re again, unable to see the light I never took action on it. I close what the holes of that which used to be I open them once more I see the but once he reveals himself I have man is. His face worn with green of leather. He says nothing to me as that of an introduction. I approach the words don’t come. All he does mistake,” he says to me without of laughter he puts his hands around as I gradually lose complexion; try to defend myself but with each my side. I’ve finally run out of air

Scarlett Reimagined

By: John E. Murray

Daringly she dances through the black, plodding lightly across the rock and the rubble that form the shattered ground. The darkness surrounds her, invites her to slip into its unforgiving expanse that soon fills every crack and crevice of the world she once knew. The world is falling at her feet, crumbling and thunderously quaking the nearby ground, as if God grasped the Earth and shook it violently in his hand. The sight does not surprise her, or intimidate her in the least.

She’s seen it all before.

She’s watched mountains tumble and skies crack. She’s seen the dying oak and heard the shrieks of creatures.

She’s seen it *all* before.

Untouched by the toil of destructive distraction she walks firmly with hopeless disregard.

“All is not lost when all falls together.” She hears her voice echo from within.

“All must struggle and all must lose, it’s simply the nature of things.”

She does not waiver nor question a thing, she keeps walking without hesitation. She walks through the cities where skyscrapers collapse; from marvel to mayhem but an instant in between. To the rolling hills and the thick of a forest she makes her way. The forest burns before her. From root to highest branch the trees are consumed, from precious life to ashes. She glances up to see the ash drizzling endlessly from the darkening sky. The homes of animals are nothing but soot, they run around helplessly now. They crowd around her feet for warmth but comfort she does not provide. She feels their faithless grief. From within, the walls of her heart cave under the crushing sensations of sympathy. How could their world end so quickly? The brevity of their life is pitiful! What contrived purpose do these creatures serve when they grace Earth for merely a moment? In the grand length of time’s endless endurance, where does a lifetime fit in?

Almost instantly and unnoticeably at first, the questions that filled her head subsided and settled into the bones in her feet, now tormenting her both mentally and physically. It’s a stark stinging sensation that cripples her as it begins to rise up the distinct curves of her figure. Once again, darkness chokes the verve from her surrounding world, but she does not see it. The black rests softly on her closed eyelids, like a blanket that locks in her fear. Suddenly, she can feel her soul being thrust from the fragile organic structure of her body. Just before she fades entirely, she sees her limp body from above, and stares blankly as it crashes to the ground and flops about; almost like a puppeteer has cut the wires from a most unfortunate marionette. The darkness engulfs it. The darkness drowns it, and paints her once fair skin a glossy black.

“Scarlett... Scarlett...” A whisper barely breaks the overbearing presence of a curse that froze her body, head to toe. She is still - She is sullen - She is silent.

“Scarlett! Scarlett!” Once again the forceful chanting continues, growing louder and louder now.

All at once, the girl breaks free of the bonds that sent her into such a cursed dream. Upon her shoulder she feels her mother’s warm fingers, still trembling in a nervous hysteria. Her eyes refocus from their fixed gaze upon the snow globe sitting before her. A mere child’s toy—or so she thought. The last thing she remembers is sitting down that night and staring into the hypnotic swirl of the particles and light, swimming about the invisible liquid within the globe. She can barely recall the moment when she peeked into the mysterious orb that her grandmother gave her long ago—the moment when the slender metal hand of the clock trudged to a gear grinding halt, the moment when the world suddenly stopped spinning and she was torn from her conflicted and emotionally distraught reality, and transported her into the SARAJANE MEYERS miniature world of the snow globe, where she was cast as the sole actor in a play of tragic



means. She experienced grief, destruction, and death within the globe, as if her imagination had projected these images as a product of the harsh truth of loss she was facing in her life. The despair she felt for her recently departed grandmother was overwhelming; it was life-altering, and for an individual with a soaring soul and an even bigger heart, it was as if her world was falling before her.

She had lost loved ones before. She had dealt with the trials of anguish, and has learned how to escape from the gloom of desperation. She walks away from the devastation a stronger figure, a taller woman. She emerges from the black a rejuvenated individual.

She gazes back into the snow globe. She sees the minute replica of a grand city, the thriving forest, the winding roads, the creatures, the snow-like dust, all within the glass confines of the Globe. She sees the tiny girl, a plastic figurine, standing at the very end of the longest road, with her back to the world, her eyes gleaming with a sprightly joy, and a subtle smile that cracks the gentle glow of her everlasting beauty.

We all have our own snow globe. We all have small replications of our worlds that reflect our lives and represent them in a greater symbolic fashion. We go to them in our head, when we imagine our dreams, when we plot out the course of our next day, or when we seek a place to relieve the maddening fury of emotional frenzy. Our snow globes secure the tiny fragments of our lives we try hard to forget, and hold the tremendous successes that make-up who we’ve come to be. When the snow settles for the final time, what will you see? Will you be proud of the expression on your face, and everything and everyone you stand for, between, and among? When you’re ready to discover what your life has truly been: take a look. When you’re ready to see how you’ve fared amid the complications and complexities, go ahead and look. When you’re ready to see your life before you, your snow globe has it all there for you.

Give it a shake.

The Artist

By: Mitchell R. Straub

The Artist is more than a painter, writer or musician. The Artist embodies all the arts and unifies them to fashion a living, breathing creature; one which is greater than its creator. The Artist spends countless hours crafting *David*, *American Gothic*, *Moonlight Sonata*, and *Romeo & Juliet*. Art is the only place in the universe where perfection can be felt. The Artist is ultimately not a master, but an apprentice to the constant perfection of their craft. It becomes more than studying with someone, or performing repetitions of fundamentals; rather, a dedication to scrutinizing the most diminutive details. Becoming an Artist can bring eternal fame. However; fortune and glory often come at a dangerous price. The life of the Artist is the most ironic tragedy in history.

What makes the life of the Artist such an enigma is the inability to find true love. Whereas the engineer or the farmer can construct or fabricate an idea of how they see love, the Artist sees and understands more. What the Artist comprehends could never be visualized in a human form because the Artist sees a creature that is too ambitious to be real. What the Artist sees in true love is an enchanting glow in subtle eyes, the fair skin of sunset, eyes you could lose yourself in, and ultimately; The Artist sees someone who is as passionate about the arts as they are. While everyone can fantasize about someone they could spend the rest of their lives with, only the Artist can describe and depict with such vivid and creative desire that the love they most desperately seek *does not exist*. In essence, it is not the Artist’s fault for failing to find love, but rather their gifts that cause their unhappiness. Because the Artist can write and feel with such a degree of sensitivity, it is a double edged sword to feel the pain of being alone. The Artist would rather feel the shattering pieces of their heart hit their soul rather than feel eternal numbness. The journey of love ultimately ends in dismay.

While the true Artist can never find a love that is up to their standard, a glimmer of hope shines through the darkness of their tragedy. The Artist will not die with sorrow and pain because the Artist has placed a part of themselves into each piece that they have created. Each note sounded or every word typed has meaning because the Artist places it there. The Artist will eventually die because of the lack of will to carry on suffering from heartbreak after heartbreak; but will live forever because the Artist has placed parts of his soul into his work.

Vicarious

By: Alyssa Fry

His hand guides mine. Each stroke of the brush, each cut of the letters, all mixed with tears and ink, swirls down the drain to emerge from my fingertips. Blue eyes, not mine, find, identify, flee. I feel like I’m drowning, until the last stroke of a period, like a clock tolling midnight in some fairytale, and I’m out. He is just a character, but I will love his inexistence like something made from flesh and blood. Perhaps it’s a cruel desire of mine, like a child that traps lightning bugs in a water bottle so that their pretty light can never leave them. I will always know what he does, and he could never be out of my reach. Death itself couldn’t keep us apart. He dies his final death when I do, forced into an insane suicide, his light snuffed out when it likely would be at its brightest by my fingers. And I understand him –I shape when he’s okay and when he’s not. Every trial and tribulation is ours, and I could carry him out of anything. At the same time, I can live through him. He’s gorgeous and could charm his way out of a paper bag. Words are his humble servants, encasing him and everything he does ever so tenderly. They never sound as good from my lips. I could never make someone cry the way he has. Raising someone up, or letting them fall... I can’t bear to try to breach it, to leave the medium of “we’re okay” that I’ve grown used to. I shy away from change, whereas he flings himself to the dogs for a chance at happiness. I have lived sixteen, almost seventeen years. He has barely lived a few months, and arguably, he is the part of me with the most life. It flows through him like blood, whereas mine is sluggish. I put all of me in him. He is all of what I wish I could be. He is physically strong, and open, loving everyone and anyone that does him well. He is still a child; a nostalgic symbol for all things wonderful. He is the magic in my world, my loving belief that warm summer nights are the best blankets and that you don’t need air conditioning or the Internet to live. Ironically, it was the Internet that spilled him out of the recesses of my mind, to take physical form. The net gives him life, but he shuns it. It’s the opposite for me. He rides horses because I cannot. Through the web, I live. Through him, I find the things I lack. He is something that you couldn’t expect to take existence in this modern day world. He is a dream, a fairytale come to life.

His job was easy. Sit at a desk and let the money flow in. He didn’t care where it came from, all of that money. He only knew what he had to do after he got it. Keep his mouth shut and keep it clean. Clean? That was a joke, and he *knew* it. His whole life was a joke, he was a parasite. At least he was a parasite with a clean conscience, sometimes. He smiled to himself as he typed away his guilt, or, at least, his accountability.

He was laundering the money while his maid laundered his clothes. The same clothes (and maid) that were paid for with said money. Oh well, he was happy enough. He didn’t have to do the hard work, the gritty, cruel, despicable work like the rest of them. He could sit on his throne, away from the sweat and the tears. Away from the blood.

“Luisa!” he called. “Bring me some more coffee!”

Normally, the maid would come rushing in to do what he asked. Bumbling about and mumbling to herself in Spanish. However, Luisa had left hours ago. He had lost track of the time; he was so very, very busy.

“I’ll fire that lazy piece of trash tomorrow,” he murmured to himself.

He knew it was going to be a long night; the latest shipment had arrived. He got up out of his leather chair with a groan and walked through the cold, dark penthouse. He strolled into the kitchen, flicked on the bright white light, and whistled to himself softly. He gazed out at the window. The rain blurred the bright lights of the city. He shivered, even though he was wearing a luxurious robe. The cold from outside seemed to be seeping in.

After he’d gotten his coffee he carried it back to his office. The constant pounding of the rain on his window echoed the constant pounding of his fingers on the keyboard. It was the modern day drumming of an execution. Only, he didn’t have to watch the head roll. Just collect the money in the basket.

His phone rang shrilly in the quiet penthouse. It sounded like a scream. Might as well have been a scream.

“*Hello?*” he answered nonchalantly. Getting late-night phone calls was a part of the job.

He listened to the other line intently, considering losses in his head, thinking of ways to make it all much more lucrative, and painless. For himself.

“*Just take care of it. Now.*”

He slammed the phone back down. He wasn’t worried, he never was. He lived his life in a cold and calculating manner. Like some type of predatory reptile; only bigger, meaner, and better- dressed.

He resumed his work. He made the dirty clean and the innocent dirty. Money makes the world go ‘round, and around, and around, and around. His head was spinning. He had headaches all the time. Nothing new. Not his fault. It couldn’t be his fault. Could it?

There was no time to second guess when there was money to be made. He could feel it. He could envision himself snatching it out of their hands. The hands of the world. Snatching it out of their mouths. The food of the world. He wanted it all and at the same time he wanted nothing. None of it. He just wanted to sit here, typing away, making things right.

You’re alone. The voice in his head whispered. *Was it worth it?*

He rubbed his eyes hard, trying to erase what they’d seen. They hadn’t seen any bodies. No blood, no death. But they had seen the statistics. In his world they were all that mattered. Every number, he knew, was his fault. His sin. He didn’t pull the trigger but he doled out all the guns. One by one they fell. And when that stopped he paid for those same guns to be reloaded. Over and over.

He didn’t scream then, like any rational person would have. He just calmly took another sip of his expensive coffee. His throat burned but he still felt cold inside. He smiled at it. He was proud of himself. Proud of his disconnection. It had taken a while to sever and the raw and exposed nerve endings constantly caused him pain. He could almost feel that phantom limb on nights like these. That semblance of caring. He hates it, loves that he hates it. Loves it. Loves everything at once.

Click. Another payoff. *Click.* Another heist. *Click.* Another body. *Click.* More guilt.

He was the one with the money. He was the one with the power. The one without a conscience,



SARAJANE MEYERS

or so he told himself. Everything, yet nothing.

His name was in the paper today. Someone found his body on the floor. They ruled it a homicide, then a suicide, then back to a homicide. They couldn’t be sure. He was so despised that they thought someone must have done him in. Pulled the trigger and basked in the glow of his tainted blood. They knew him. The awful man, the evil man. Who can say what finger pulled that trigger. Or what it felt like to die alone on the kitchen floor of your penthouse while getting that sixth cup of coffee. Who could see his blood? Who could see his soul?

Was he a bad man? Who’s to say?

I Only Have Eyes for You

By Amber Menchio

Salvatore Abandando was not a strikingly beautiful man, but he wasn’t lacking in good looks. He had thick dark eyebrows, almost black, to match his short hair. His eyes were dark brown and he was dressed in the finest suits with a matching fedora placed on his head. His face was sculpted in a fine way. He wasn’t very tall either; only about five and a half feet.

He always had his eye on somebody, focusing on his most important target, but he wasn’t stupid. He knew what everyone else was doing if he needed to. His main target these past few days had been a man he’d known all his life, Vincenzo Lombardo, a man he’d grown up with as a child in Palermo, Sicily. Salvatore heard about what Vincenzo had done, and now he was setting out to fix it. It was no laughing matter, and Salvatore planned on closing this open wound.

Waiting for Vincenzo to arrive at his home, Salvatore Abandando was sitting in his living room, relaxed, patient, waiting. When Vincenzo arrived, he was invited inside and followed his friend down the familiar hallway and into the living room. Salvatore shut the door of the living room behind him and poured a drink for Vincenzo, as well as for himself.

They both seated themselves, Vincenzo on the couch and Salvatore in the chair opposite it. He raised the cup to his lips, drank, and observed Vincenzo’s calm and satisfied look. No tenseness in the room, no hatred, only brotherly love.

Salvatore was the first to speak. “Now Vincenzo, the past few days I’ve only had eyes for you. I got a heart for ya, too. But for the time being I only have a heart for my faithful members of the family.” He was looking Vincenzo in the eyes and before giving him a chance to speak, he said, “Now explain to me. Why’d you do it?” He lit a cigarette and offered one to Vincenzo. He refused it.

He looked at Salvatore, didn’t speak for a moment, and just listened to the music playing. *Brucia la Terra*, an old Sicilian ballad, was equally their favorite song. After that quiet moment passed, he spoke up.

“Salvatore Abandando! How could you accuse me of committing such betrayal? Especially to the man who you consider to be your own brother.”

Salvatore said, “I’ve known you my entire life Vincenzo, and I’ve loved you through it all, too. I know you better than you know yourself. You think you can look me in the eyes and lie to me, and tell me that you did not break the law of Omerta? I know your every flaw, and I know you’re lying to me, whether it’s written on your face or not.” He remained speaking in this calm manner. He reached forward and flicked the ashes off his cigarette into the ashtray and then sat back in his chair again.

“But Salvatore, he promised me...”

“How much? How much money did that cop promise you?”

“A couple million.” He would not look Salvatore in the eyes.

“Hah! A couple million! Vincenzo... I know that you know that you can come to me anytime you need money! I can give you twice as much!” He laughed shortly.

“I know that, Sal, but...” He looked down. Salvatore wondered if his friend began to feel the betrayal he himself felt. “I don’t know. I did a very stupid thing.”

Salvatore felt very pleased with himself and his intelligence. He knew his friend’s emotions were false. He put out his cigarette in the ashtray and folded his hands in his lap.

“Alright,” Salvatore said. “I understand. Let’s just forget about the whole mess. Alright?” He smiled at his friend, a warm and friendly smile.

“Ya really mean it Sal?” Vincenzo rose from the couch and embraced his dear friend.

14 Only two nights later, Vincenzo Lombardo was killed by Salvatore Abandando in the back of a small pizza shop owned by Genco Andolini, a good friend of Salvatore’s. Genco brought a bag to the back for Salvatore to put his friend’s body in, that friend that was just like a brother. “Dang it Genco! It doesn’t fit in the bag!” A car pulled into the parking lot and Genco went around to the front to take care of the man to tell him the shop was closed.

Salvatore remained on his knees, set the bag next to him, and picked up a big knife. He began hacking away the arms and legs of Vincenzo Lombardo. The radio was on in the front of the shop and he could hear it faintly. *Brucia la Terra* was the song. He mutilated the body of his friend to make it easier to fit in the bag.

It was a hot night and it was even hotter in the pizza shop. The faint smell of decay had already begun to fill the air in the shop, at least Salvatore thought it did, but it was a familiar smell that he could handle. His hands were covered in blood. There was blood splattered in his hair. It speckled his face and stained the white cuffs of his shirt.

He hacked at the body with the knife and snapped a few bones; Genco could hear the splintering sound of the breaking bones from around the corner. He stuffed the body into the bag, stacked the parts like a child’s wooden building blocks.

When Salvatore took his last look at his friend’s face, he saw the bullet hole between the eyes. He saw the look in those dead eyes. The eyes held a look of fear and sorrow, but also a look of acceptance. Vincenzo probably knew his actions of being an informer wouldn’t be forgiven at the moment he arrived at the pizza shop. Pieces of flesh hung and dangled from the bones, both the whole bones and the broken ones.

“Genco! Get me the lime!” Genco came from the front of the store and brought the lime. They mopped up the tiled floor and scrubbed the wall that Vincenzo had been standing in front of. Salvatore took the body away to bury it under the bocce ball court. They body of his friend, that friend that was just like a brother.

* * * * *

At home Salvatore Abandando sat back in his big leather arm chair; the window behind his desk was revealing the city.

He sat there satisfied as he looked out the window, his chair turned with its back to the office door, a glass of wine in his right hand and a cigarette in his mouth. He smiled, knowing he’d get away with it, even if he had to kill the cop.

Catharsis

By: Patsy Kowalski

The endless, swirling inkpool of a sky coils around its glittering hostages, inhaling their shimmering porcelain and exhaling its putrid midnight. The exchange glows in a halo of vibrant dust, a pearlescent grey that writhes about each circumference.

Slithering. Pulsating. Alive. “Pretty, isn’t it?” she coos into his ear. Her breath curls around him, settling in the hollows of his collarbones and creeping through the notches in his spine. She speaks in too many voices, none of which are hers. She speaks in silk moths, and crumbling, yellowed love letters. She speaks like a choir of forgotten things. *This is all wrong*, he thinks.

Thin. Vacant. Fabricated. Her fingertip gently grazes his jawline, and he can feel her skin oozing onto him. A thin trail of vanilla-colored wax runs down his neck, and the vomit rises in his throat, a biological thermometer that works in reverse, bubbling for the velveteen ice of her nauseating affection.

“Perhaps ‘pretty’ is the wrong word,” she says, and then he does vomit. His nostrils are flooded with the sickly, spicy smell of the spectacularly long-dead. Ancient. Pungent. Decaying.

“Oh, my,” she whispers, and she has far too many teeth when she smiles. “Goodness, would you look at that. . .” But he doesn’t want to look. He squeezes his eyes tighter, and doubles over. His mouth tastes of bitter rainwater and rusted coins, and when he coughs, drops of iridescent oil plop out and scurry away on their spindly, willow-branch legs.

“Darling. . .Look.” Her voice is like honey and needles, and the word cuts across his eyelids. When he looks down, a wet, fetal creature gasps in its amniotic rot. He’s too scared to scream, and his mind washes over in a crashing, wordless sea of dread. But beyond the waves, he can hear her singing some sort of lullaby, and her voice somehow clashes

with the still air. “What have you done?” he says, his voice raspy and panicked. “What on Earth is that *thing*?” She ignores his question, and reaches into the ebony pool to retrieve the squirming creature. “Don’t you know where you are, my love?” she says. She runs her hands lovingly across what he can only assume is the thing’s head. “Have you any idea at all?” “I’m. . . I’m here. Right here. I’ve always been here.” And that much is true. He has been here all of his life, in this eternal December, with this nameless woman. He has never fit anywhere else.

“Think, dear. Really think about where you are.” “I’m. . .” he starts to speak, but the fetal thing mews weakly, and she has begun to lick the obsidian slime from its flesh. He feels sick again. She blinks slowly, and swallows. “My name,” she states simply. “What is my name?” But he doesn’t know. Nothing has its own name here. Everything just is.

“I’ve no idea,” he croaks. “None at all?” “None whatsoever.” “Underwood,” she tells him, and he has no idea why that would be of any significance. Click. Clack. Click. Clack. The creature is not black at all. Not even close. As she laps at its skin, more and more of the inscribed alabaster is revealed.

“It’s made of paper? How? It was so. . . so damp before. It ought to be wrecked.” “Oh, gosh, no,” she says, and her laugh comes easy. Whatever she had been is gone, and she is beautiful. “That isn’t how it works at all.” “What is it?”

“It’s an idea, silly! They’re really quite charming, once you get past the mess. The problem is, all of the ones worth cleaning up are just positively drenched.” “Drenched in what?” “Why, feelings, of course.”

“That black stuff was--” he starts to ask, but she cuts him off abruptly. “Resentment, melancholy, fear, anxiety, love. . . Feelings. Your feelings. I really wish you’d cheer up, you know. Ideas mired in sullen nonsense taste rather bitter. Perhaps a love story next time.”

“Can I. . . Can I hold it?” he asks, but she hugs it close to her chest when he reaches out. “Heavens, no! Silly boy, you’ll rip the poor thing apart!” “What will it do?” he asks, fascinated and terrified.

“Ideas have marvelous instincts,” she begins, and it flaps its paper wings for the first time. “From the very moment they’re born, they know that they’ve got to go somewhere. It’s a different somewhere for each and every one. You never can tell. You’ve just got to let them go.” She caresses it softly, palms toward the sky, and the Idea flutters with more confidence now. “You’ve just got to have faith.”

* * * * *

In the darkness, his withered hands rip the final page from the typewriter, and he lays it face-down with the others. Outside of his window, the sky is simply the same light-polluted sky that has always hung over Toronto.

The paper is dry and familiar to his touch. He grabs a red pen from the coffee mug on his desk, (“*Silly boy, you’ll rip the poor thing apart!*”) but immediately puts it back.

After all, he knows better by now. He knows that if the wretched thing you’ve vomited up is smart enough, and if you go through the trouble of washing away the doubt, and if it really wants to live. . . it will find its way.

You’ve just got to have faith. He slips the pages into an envelope, and places it on the scratched mahogany of his desk. He’ll mail it out tomorrow.

He flicks the lightswitch down, and the keys of his Underwood No. 3 gleam faintly in the moonlight, like a smile with too many teeth.

CODY SABOL



Fou-Roux (Crazy Red-Head)

By: Maddi Budd

I felt the steady swirling of my breaths circulate through my lungs and chest as I began to regain consciousness. I opened my bleary eyes and thought of the dreams that I just had. I had dreamed of churning amber skies, melancholy blue reflections, and the most beautiful, mysterious night.

I have reoccurring dreams of the night and because of these, I have grown to love it. I often think that the night is more alive and richly colored than the day. How couldn't it be? The artists are alive during the night! The poets go to the quiet Cafes to concentrate and create. The diligent painter works through the night to milk their inspiration for everything it is worth. I am a little different with my painting; I dream of painting, and then, I paint my dream.

I open my eyes to my simple room, which is being filled with the bright, honey colored sunlight. I stand up, stretch and move over to my worn window seat. This window holds the best view in the whole old fashioned farm house. I look over to the seemingly endless acres of my father's land. The wispy hay stacks are placed perfectly amongst the tawny rolling hills and patches of impossibly tall sunflowers.

I have painted these gorgeous things many times, but never to the extent to which I can convey their true beauty, to convey their scent, touch, movement. Yet I feel as if these first crude paintings will help me on the road to prominence. Great things are done by a series of small things brought together, and I believe in that whole heatedly.

If you hear a voice within you saying, "You cannot paint", then by all means paint, and that voice within will be silenced. In my case, the voice within is actually the voices of my parents on exterior. My mother and father have always thought my art was a waste of time and I don't think they ever have or ever will fully understand it. I wish they could just take me as I am, as their son, as an artist.

The beautiful sapphire skies turned a sickly shade of gray and the clouds began to roll violently. The wind picked up and the sweet smell of rain gusted into my room filling my lungs with this silky aroma. I closed my eyes to fully appreciate this magnificent scent. The sight of a beautiful ancient church sitting in a field with angry tumbling clouds behind it popped in my head.

I opened my eyes. "A new dream," I said to myself quietly. Without hesitation, I set up my canvas in front of my window and begin to paint what I had just envisioned. I filled my pallet with every single shade of blue and grey that is in the skies at this very moment. My colors are bold and striking; they weave through and around each other, mimicking the heavens in my own unique way.

I worked hard for several hours and so did the furious storm. My window panes rattled and shook with each booming crack of thunder, the wind wisped through my wavy red hair, and my face was dewy with the calm mist of the rain. I looked at my canvas and it was coming along well. The wavy emerald grass was bending around everything like water seeping through the cracks of a roof. Each painted stone of the path seemed as if I had plucked it from the earth and set it on my canvas.

I took my brush back to my pallet, about to place another stroke upon my canvas when I heard heavy footsteps coming up the creaky stairs outside of my room.

"Vincent!" a voice that belonged to my brother Theo, shouted.

The footsteps grew louder until Theo was bursting through my door with a flustered look on his face.

"Why aren't you getting ready?!" Theo exclaimed.

"I will in a moment, Theo, I just have to finis-..."

"There isn't any time, Vincent! The train is departing shortly! Get your things and get dressed!" he said as he threw my charcoal coat and worn black boots at me.

He briskly walked out my door and down the steps, anxious to leave. I placed my painting against the wall with the countless others. I got ready and as I began to walk out of my bedroom door, I turned and looked back at my many unappreciated pieces.

They were misfits; complete rejects, but I loved them. I put my heart and my soul into my work, and perhaps I have lost my mind in the process; maybe that's why they looked so fantastic to me, but repelled others.

I boarded the train almost an hour later and a thought had just come to my mind: one may have a blazing hearth in one's soul and yet no one ever came to sit by it. Passersby see only a wisp of smoke from the chimney and continue on



ALYSSA CASSANDRO

their way. I need to make people see my blazing fire- somehow I must make them see the beauty that I see. Maybe one day someone will understand, but for now I will just live the utterly forgettable life of Vincent Van Gogh.

Only Tuesday

By: Angie Mayhue

Beep, beep, beep, beep.

I roll over and smack my alarm. I begin to close my eyes again. It *has* to be later in the week, it just *has* to be. I just don't want to face the truth. I know it is only Tuesday; I am just denying it. But that's the first step right? Admitting you have a problem?

I pull myself out of bed and stumble into the brightly lit kitchen. God, it's like looking into the sun. I open the drawer and pull out the box of off-brand pop-tarts that seem to never have enough frosting. Looks like it's going to be a strawberry-flavored day, ladies and gentleman.

On my way out of the door, I take a swig from the water bottle in my refrigerator, wipe my mouth, and step into the cold morning that reminds me of sadness.

6:34 a.m.

What seems like hours pass and finally the oversized bus steams to a stop in front of me and causes me to breathe in that beautiful cloud of fuel exhaust. Thank God the inside is warm.

The bus.

I step on, half asleep, and say hi to my bus driver who, don't you worry, is in a great mood at 6 o'clock in the morning, like always. But, who wouldn't be? School is awesome.

The hallways.

Ahh, the smell of Ugg boots in the morning. How I enjoy the ignorant, indecisive, ridiculous conversations of my fellow peers that clearly bring out their inner stupidity. I chuckle as they discuss how early they woke up to do their hair, how Bobby wouldn't call them back last night, and, of course, how the Poptarts they ate this morning were "totes delish." Translation for all you kids like me out there, totally delicious.

Ugh, just get me to second period.

Dying from the never ending physics lesson I seem to be the only one not understanding, I enter a state of daydreaming. I wonder how long it took to make that girl's hair look that way, and how much her Ugg boots cost. If I drop two off-brand Poptarts from the top of a building, which one would hit the ground first?

Ahh, lunch.

Now the only thing to worry about in this magical place is the devastating decision of getting PB&J or a chicken patty.

Wow, could math get any more boring?

Life is funny sometimes, how routine just runs my whole day. My math teacher will talk until the bells rings like she does every day. Does anything ever change? I wonder if they'll come up with a school flavored Poptart...I would not eat that.

Home Sweet Home.

Of course I need my daily nap after a rough day like this. I yawn and close my eyes for what seems like twenty seconds, and bam, it's 6:30 pm, homework time.

"Hey," says the text message at 7:24pm. It's my friend that I've never really warmed up to but he continually tries to spark an exhilarating discussion. As you probably guessed, it usually doesn't work. Why should I expect anything different? Oh, how I love these conversations that commence at the most random hours of the evening.

"Hey," I respond.

"What's up?"

Oh, this is a conversation starter.

"Nothing much, how about you?" I answered.

"Nothing really, how was your day?" he asked again.

Do you really care?

"Eh, okay," I said.

"Why just okay?" he said, still interrogating my day.

Must I explain?

"I mean, there definitely wasn't enough frosting on my Poptart if that's what you mean," I typed.

"Ouch, lol, hate that," he responded, attempting to relate.

I'm sure you do.

"I guess there's always tomorrow's package," I said, ending the conversation. But I bet you he will text me tomorrow.

False Longing
By: Rachael Bindas

HELEN MASER



I stood by the window, watching snowflakes float to the ground. As pretty as it was, I longed for summer. I missed stepping out onto the deck, wearing only shorts and a t-shirt, and feeling the warmth immediately flood my body. I yearned for the warm summer breeze tickling my cheeks and tousling my hair. But mostly, I longed for him, and the way his dark eyes pierced me, and seemed to look past my exterior, staring straight into my soul.

* * * * *

It was early summer, almost two years ago, and we had just met. The start of the summer always seemed to bring new beginnings. Everything was new and exciting. The thrill of it all caused butterflies to swarm in my stomach and cloud my thoughts. I felt so alive.

We were at a mutual friend’s bonfire when we went on a walk by the creek in the woods. Away from the light of the fire, we were submerged in near total darkness, and the darkness somehow made him look even more attractive. We were talking about nothing, and everything. We talked about past relationships, home lives, impossible dreams, everything. He slipped his arm around my waist as we walked, and my heart started to race at the excitement of his touch. Suddenly, he stopped walking, stopping me as well.

“Look at the moonlight shining on the water,” he whispered softly, staring at the creek. “Nothing’s constant in life. Not even the moon. It starts as a crescent, just a sliver of light. Then as time passes, it grows. The light becomes fuller and fuller, until it transforms into something beautiful and amazing. Then the light begins to fade, and it’s gone, just like everything else.”

Wow, I thought. I’d never seen that side of him before. It was so deep, so poetic. I loved that. A cool breeze picked up just then, making me shiver. He put his arms around me, using the breeze as an excuse. My hair was escaping the confines of my ponytail, and he tucked a few strands behind my ear. His dark eyes locked mine, and time stopped. My heart instantly sped up. He slowly leaned in, and my heart was about to burst. My eyes closed instinctively. My lips slightly parted, and I felt his meet mine, ever so softly...

* * * * *

That summer seemed to last forever. I thought it would never end. We spent so many nights lying on the cool grass staring up at the stars and the moon. It was so beautiful, and it should have been peaceful. I found it unsettling though. Every time I saw the moon, I got an explainable nervous sensation in the pit of my stomach. I tried my best to shake it off, not wanting to ruin the moment.

I couldn’t completely rid myself of that strange feeling though. I almost knew something was about to happen; nothing could be that perfect, nor does anything last forever. He went off to college that fall, halfway across the country. I had high hopes of college, too. I had dreams, aspirations. But he left me so broken inside. I felt stupid, used, hardly alive at all. There was only one small crescent moon left in my life.

I had not found out until after he had already left me. He made no attempt to contact me, so he didn’t have even the slightest clue about the one thing that was able to shift my hopes and pause my dreams.

My one year old son, our son, began to cry, snapping me out of my reverie.

Dirt
By: Marisa Herrington

I clench the hard, wooden shovel in my hands. The rough motion of digging allows calluses to form on my palms. I continue digging, digging, to create deep holes in the corpse soiled dirt, and I dig to keep him.

As I dig and dig, visions and memories of when I first met him flow through my otherwise empty mind. He was a friend of a friend. I knew he was the one for me, immediately, and no matter what, I’d be with him. Even after I found out about what he did for a living, that he was into a messy business, and had a lot of blood on his hands, I couldn’t help but love him. It’s hard to find someone who you can trust enough to help with a business like this, but I guess that is what drew him to me. He knew I’d never tell.

The deeper the holes, the happier he’ll be. If it’s deep enough, there is less of a chance that the...disposals will be found. The digging becomes harder, but the cool dewy midnight mist keeps my body temperature regulated.

1 foot...
2 feet down...
3 feet down...
4 feet down...

Only 2 more to go, only 2. I need to continue on, I need him to be happy.

“What happened to me? I used to be able to dig 3 holes in half this time...” I ask myself.

“Perhaps it’s the old age getting to you.” He appeared from the distance. Though it was dark, I could see his black and white pin striped suit, his Rolex watch and sleek slicked back hair. He looked wonderful, as usual.

“I’m only 25. You know that,” I reply nervously.

A woman appeared by his side. I could see her beautiful dark hair, sleek and long, her crimson lips and matching dress. She looked good next to him. I shudder, and look down at my own clothes...dirty, ripped...disgusting.

“This is Ruby...” he gestures towards her.

“Hello,” she replies. She has a very captivating voice.

“What is she doing here?” I ask angrily. I climb up out of the hole I had been digging.

“Answer me, what is she doing here?” I ask again.

“Darling, Ruby is going to be digging the holes now; she is much younger and stronger.” He smiles and reaches for the shovel.

“W-what? No, I want to dig the holes. I want to. I’d do anything for you,” I reply.

“I know you would, darling, but I needed 3 new holes to be dug tonight, you barely got through two, and you’re useless now,” he sighs.

“I thought you only had 2 victims tonight?” I ask, scared.

He glances over at Ruby and sighs, then focuses his eyes on me.

“Like I said before, you’re useless.”

Useless? I feel weak, and shaky.

He smiles at me one more time, and then Ruby grabs my shovel, and pushes me backwards, back into the hole I had dug. All I could see was dirt, raining from the sky.

Nothing but dirt.

Sensation and Perception
By: Mikayla Wobrak

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| i. sensation | ii. perception |
| the bird inside | you are the candle, |
| my ribcage | the feathering flame |
| sings, | that i look to |
| his wings beating | when the |
| out a life-rhythm, | ephemeral pools |
| first soft, but growing | of stardust |
| ever louder | have dried up |
| with each | among the skies |
| brush of your | above, |
| fingertips | when my tired eyes |
| upon my hand, | no longer |
| my skin. | want to see. |

Your Day

By: John E. Murray

Here's to this day
 A day we call yours
 A day rid of sadness
 A day without chores
 A day full of family
 Friends and confetti
 A day of big casseroles
 & meaty spaghetti.
 On this day we call birthday
 You can do what you like,
 You can ask for a donkey
 Or a five-seated bike.
 No wish is too foolish
 Because this day is for you,
 Don't forget to be merry
 & crack a smile or two.
 There'll be balloons and lights
 & music all around,
 People all shouting
 "You're the best guy around!"
 This is all for you
 It's your day after all,
 Set fire to a tree
 Or tear down a wall!
 Whatever you choose
 Let it bring you great joy,
 For true happiness lies
 In the company of friends,
 Not a toy.

You are
 Another year wiser
 & another year bright,
 A whole year older
 With a new candle to light.
 Let them hear you shout:
 I'm 4 or 56,
 Youth is the fever only time can fix.
 From here to the next block your party will roar,
 But the people will know what the commotion is for.

Why just one day a year do we giggle
 & sing?
 What has today that tomorrow
 won't bring?
 The future is blind and
 The present is fleeting,
 Live while you can.
 If it's joy you're seeking
 When you're old & worn

You'll understand the source
 Of the excitement I hold
 To cover the remorse
 From all the missed opportunity
 & laughter...

But don't mind my tears,
 Party till daylight,
 Your smile dries my eyes
 In hopes that you may write
 A better story for yourself,
 There's no hope for me
 All has been said
 & All has been seen

It's your day
 & do with it what you will,
 For such special treatment all the people would kill.
 You're not a fool to be happy,
 For happiness I pray
 Yet all this time I've been dying to say:

Live everyday like it's your birthday



Glass Cup

By: Marisa Herrington

I don't think my physical being and mind will ever exist in
 freedom together
 I don't think my heart will ever be able to consume every
 star in the night sky without reaping the consequence
 My soul is simply liquid
 Waiting to be created, waiting to be formed
 Poured into glass cups
 But I don't belong in glass cups
 Pour me into the ocean
 where I can steal the reflection of stars without caution
 Pour me into the sea
 so even if I can't breathe in the sky at least I can mimic it
 That would be closer to freedom than I am now
 now I remain trapped in a clear, cylindrical prison
 A glass cup

And Trenton

By: Anna Golczewski

It had rained for nine days.
 He stood on a bridge somewhere
 Between self-hate
 And Trenton.

I know you feel
 Weightless, but this could be
 the aftermath
 Of those cheap cigarettes
 And the steel knife of altitude
 That carves places where
 Past scars once existed
 And the daybreak may shine through.

Your stomach, once a mandala
 Of monsters living on the inside,
 Is now a map to the city. All these
 Places you've ever been. And you
 Plead to the morning winds,
 Take me somewhere else.

And then you met a girl whose body
 was made of Braille and her face was a
 Birthday cake. With lips of a chimney whose voice
 Reminded you of a time when you could
 Drink rainwater and wash away guilt with snow.
 You'll want to meet her.

You'll ache to know her.
 But she speaks in limericks that
 Sound like bloodied noses.
 And only in mirrors.
 Her convex ribcage resembles the ruins of
 A war-torn Iraqi village. She's been working her
 way into your sweat-shop subconscious

As you sit on a rocky mountain top
 And flirt with demons. She knew
 You had demons. As the skies are blinking
 Their whiskey eyes I have been calling to you from
 the concrete, echoing against the deaf ears
 Of every city wall
 Like the hollow of a skinless drum
 The syllables falling like ice in an empty cup,
 As you tongue the metal mouth
 Of a gun barrel in a gas station bathroom
 And wait for the scarlet plumage of the Sun.

Float

By: Nikki George

We feel it at night,
 explosions of emotion that occur
 when we least expect it
 the loneliness, clawing at our minds,
 filling them with hate.

Our brains turn to slush
 as everything we thought we knew
 vanishes before our eyes,
 like a rainbow in the skies,
 or a school of fish in the sea.
 Our hearts turn to stone –
 gates that allow no trespassers
 for we've become accustomed to that voice
 inside us that says
 "You're alone."



JESSICA WEISENSEE

We fit the molded stereotype
 of typical teenagers
 with feelings that change like northeastern weather,
 because we don't know what we're looking for,
 but we strive to find it anyways.

We all float on.
 like snorkelers inspecting the ocean's endless organisms,
 and for a while
 we'll just observe life around us
 before it's safe to return to land.

But eventually we'll find
 that pearl we've been searching for
 on this entire journey,
 and it will make us believe
 that we were never, in fact,
 Alone.



MAGAN METCALF



JESSICA WEISENSEE



AARON LA VERDE



CODY SABOL



HELEN MASER

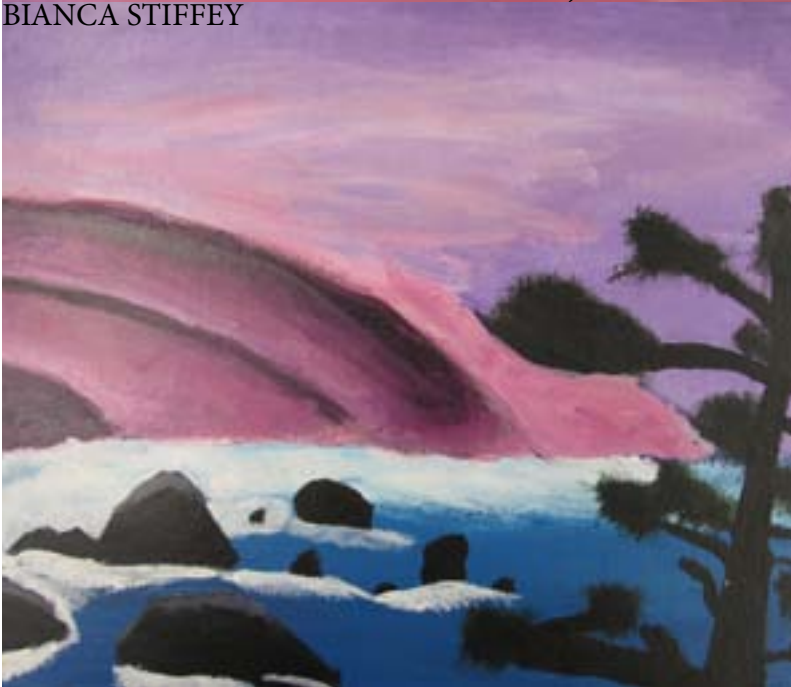


EMILY TROMM



BIANCA STIFFEY

SARAJANE MEYERS



ALYSSA CASSANDRO



Simon Says
By: Ciana Morris

Do not let the anxiety attack

The phrase running through the empty spaces
deep inside the mind of a mad woman
The mind of a malevolent monster,
she who does not see first the good in others
But the pain, oh the pain they feel
Projecting onto her as if she is a goddess
The silent one who walks among the clods
They don't want you.
Telling the voice which feeds the addiction
to fear, pain and manipulation to stop
You mean nothing, you are nothing.
Stop judging and poking and prodding
to create the nightmares.
The things she sees in others who don't care
Those living in fear since conceived,
told who and what and how to believe
If you just agree, you'll have friends
If you just listen you'll have a "life"
Just follow me
Should I die,
as a follower?
Or alone...
It's freedom... It's the way
Wearing a costume to appease while calling it unique?
Believing that beauty is a representation of a Holocaust victim,
the women starving themselves to look like the ones America 'feeds'?
Thinking it appeals to show some skin,
when the ones who look either need a bucket or napkin?
Putting the idea in your head that substance is survival,
Telling you not to do drugs while the doctor writes the prescription
Given your own rights,
a bar code with a smile on the side to define who you are
Who... are ... you?
Declare me a young David Koresh,
creating a prolonged disaster
It's not fair...
It's not fair for one so young
to know why her peers are inarticulate
And it's not fair...
It's not fair for a heart so big to build a wall
of all the things, people, places and dreams that once stood so tall
So ask yourself...
Am I the butcher? Or am I the meat?
Should I hate the Shepard, if I am the sheep?
It's not fair...
It's not fair to live in a world so small
after all the years of shame and pain,
still unable to find somewhere to belong.
So ask yourself, outside of all the pain
them all telling you to forgive, forget
In the final look, does the deer forgive the wolf?

CODY SABOL



Ode to Cat Naps
By: Maddi Budd

Oh, to be a cat would be a marvelous thing;
I could sleep all day and eat like a king.

They sleep in the sun looking so content,
While I'm trying to figure out how to pay my rent.

Overjoyed with the simplest little scratch,
Being a human is absolutely no match.

Kittens spend the day drinking milk and chasing mice,
I deal with guilt and the vice of life.

In the dark I am bumbling, clumsy and completely
blind,

But they have whiskers and night vision goggles built
in their heads to be their guide!

They jump from high, keeping their amazing poise,
Their resounding purrs displaying their joys.

A god like balance is kept by their tail,
I pretty much have the agility of a snail.

But maybe being a cat isn't all it's cracked up to be;
I know I definitely wouldn't want any fleas.

Well thumbs are pretty cool too,
I also love being able to see the stunning color blue.

Perhaps cats wish they could be like us,
Maybe in ourselves we must trust.

You know, that might be the key,
To just be happy, and to just be me.

Ok I admit it, being a human is kind of neat,
But between us, being a cat would still be pretty
sweet.

Permanence

By: Stephanie McDonald

They always told us that lightning never strikes twice in the
same place,
Which has always been wrong in my life;
Our backyards had charred spaces where electricity would
repeatedly shock the solid earth,
And the grass would take months to grow back.

They always told us that decisions aren't as difficult as they
may seem.
That surely isn't true at all.
Our parents would argue most of the time,
And it would take years for one of them to build the
courage to actually leave, until finally, they did.

They always told us that there are permanent things in this
world.
We know too well that isn't completely realistic;
They even label markers, to give us false hope for short
love letters or tiny sketches on the arms and other limbs of
loved ones that would remain etched into their skin for a
lifetime,
And yet, we still watch, silently, as these memories would
wash off our skin and spiral down the drain.

They always told us that we had to decide and we must
pick a side
But whether we are children, or adults, we all are aware
that some things are easier said than done.
When we were young, we 'ran away' when we did
something we knew we would get in trouble for;
And we tucked ourselves away under the safety of the
swing set in the backyard and said we would never go back
inside, even if we eventually did.

They always told us that time would heal the pain,
But that couldn't be more false.
Time and bandages would heal the wounds we had from
riding a bike or climbing a tree
Yet, it somehow still hurts after your first love takes your
heart from your chest because no amount of bandages or
time will make you ever forget the good memories.

They always told us that we needed to grow up,
Again, we disagreed.
We tried to never grow up because we were aware that it's
more than growing pains from getting taller or fuller.
There are broken hearts, bills to pay, and we thought it
could never happen to us, but it does.

We always told them that we could make it on our own,
But they told us we were wrong.

They tried to take the hope from us, as if taking the
wings from a butterfly.
But we pulled through, we came out *stronger*, we stand
together.

We stand in love.

An Ode to My Ex
By: Jamie Sabol

You taught me how to love,
But showed me what love's not.
Thanks for calling me pretty
While telling other girls they're hot.

You spent your nights partying
While I sat home alone.
I adored being your servant
While you sat there on your throne.

I always wrote you love notes
But never got a reply.
I guess that shows how much you cared.
Our relationship was all a lie.
You're as cheap as they get
And as sly as a fox.
Where'd you get that necklace you gave me—
Your little sister's jewelry box?

Thanks for liking that other girl;
You really showed me what I'm worth.
You'll probably break her heart, too,
Just like you broke mine first.

So thank you for pretending to love me
Like nobody else could.
And thanks so much for breaking my heart
Like nobody ever should.

JESSICA WEISENSEE



26

Duality

By: Katy Maczuzak

ALYSSA CASSANDRO

How dare you talk to me in that voice.
Telling me I’m ugly and imperfect.

Go away and let me be.
Don’t you dare continue to talk.

Yelling. Why are you yelling?
You tempt me towards the darker side of things.
The
Darker
Side
Of
Me...
Time to be Jekyll.
That smile.
This laugh.
Fake.
Hyde, stay quiet.
Stay hidden.
You come out in the dead of night.
You tear me to shreds,
No one knows the two sides.
The two sides of me.
I am Jekyll
Hello.

You’re Fat. Flawed. Unloved.

It’s true! You’re worthless!

They all fall for it.

I am Hyde.

Manifesto

By: Emily Anderson

You once were my ocean and I was your sea, one in the same, essentially.	comfortably floating deliciously numb contentedly mellow, and overall dumb.	and rhythm and time and comfort and break—	in my heart and in my mind will cease,
running in circles again and again everywhere you are, and everywhere you’ve been.	something that’s stirring one day will soon s t o p all movement	the connection between <i>Me</i> and <i>You</i> .	<i>has</i> ceased, and I finally can find sanity, clarity, serenity,
		and all of the fluidity	within.

Color War

By: Katie Lasswell

Characters:

BLACK – evil dictator

BROWN – Gollum-like minion

BLUE – smart minion

GREEN – hero

RED – overly dramatic side kick

PURPLE – optimist

YELLOW – pessimist

ORANGE – ditsy

VOICE - ominous

PARENT

CHILD

Setting: BLACK, BROWN, and BLUE are taking over the world.

RED: Brace yourselves! The BBB is coming!!

YELLOW: We need to just give up already...

RED: Give up?! I don’t know the meaning!

PURPLE: Yeah, guys! We can do this!

ORANGE: Woooo!

GREEN: (looks at ORANGE) Dude... Never mind. Every-color, hide – we’re trying a surprise attack.

(All hide quickly except for YELLOW)

YELLOW: (mumbling and wandering to hide) This is so stupid... They’re just going to win anyways, so there’s no point to this crap...

ORANGE: (peeks out) They’re gonna getcha!!!!!!

YELLOW: Oh just shut up already! (hides)

(Enter BLACK, BROWN, and BLUE)

BLACK: Beautiful day to rule the world...

BROWN: Yes, Master! What’s your plan, Master?

[Aside] RED: Yes! Get him monologue-ing!

BLACK: Well, first, we’re going to capture the whole damn rainbow, then we’ll get rid of that pesky Green – he’s the reason this is taking so long – and then we’ll hang out beside the pool for a while!

BLUE: Really? That’s how you’re going to spend your first day as dictator? By the pool?

BLACK: Well, duh. What else am I going to do?

BLUE: Oh, I don’t know... Make some laws?

BLACK: But... That’s work...

BROWN: (sneering) Master doesn’t have to work. He just makes everything perfect by being Master! Right, Master?

BLACK: Exactly!

BLUE: You seriously need to set your priorities straight...

(BLACK rolls eyes and turns away)

BROWN: Master, do you know where all the other colors are...?

BLACK: (looks around) They should be right around here...

GREEN: Get them!!

(All COLORS grab BLACK and BROWN; ORANGE misses and falls into the wing; BLUE follows)

BLACK: Noooo! Brown! Help me!!

BROWN: I’m stuck! Master!! Master!!!

PURPLE: We got ’em!

YELLOW: Wow... We did it...

RED: We saved the world!!

GREEN: Black!! How could you do this? I’m so disappointed in you... And who is that Brown fellow...

BLACK: Shut up, Dad!

GREEN: Black, I am your father –

BLACK: BLUE PUT ME UP TO IT!

GREEN: Blue... He was banished... He wasn’t involved in this mess...

BLUE: (choking ORANGE) Oh, yes I was.

GREEN: What?!

BLUE: Oh Father, you’re much too naïve. Did you really think that Black could do all this by himself? Really?

GREEN: I –

BLUE: Never mind. I’ve got Orange and you’re going to do exactly what I say or else I’ll white him. (Collective gasp)

That’s right!

GREEN: What happened to you...?

BLUE: What happened? You made every-color hate me and leave me to waste away and you ask what happened to me?!

GREEN: You betrayed your twin... Indigo can never come back from that...

BLUE: I don’t care! You’re all going to pay! (Releases ORANGE and lunges for GREEN)

(All COLORS freeze)

VOICE: In one final battle between Blue and Green, who will take their final breath?

(All COLORS fall over)

(Black out, then lights up on a small CHILD laying on the floor; enter PARENT; news broadcast from war zone plays softly in the background)

PARENT: What are you doing, sweetie?

CHILD: Coloring what’s happening on the TV.

28

Whatever.

By: Alexa Sikora

Characters:
GIRL 1
GIRL 2

Setting:
A bench.

(**GIRL 2** looking down at her phone, periodically texting, completely absorbed, doesn't look up at **GIRL 1**. **GIRL 1** is just sitting beside her.)

GIRL 1: I have a problem...

GIRL 2: Okay.

GIRL 1: I think there's something wrong with me...

GIRL 2: Mmhmm...

GIRL 1: I'm sad...

GIRL 2: Okay, whatever.

GIRL 1: I'm sad *all the time*.

GIRL 2: Yeah, I agree.

GIRL 1: My parents don't love me...

GIRL 2: Sure.

GIRL 1: I feel like I'm dying. Like-

GIRL 2: Totally!

GIRL 1: Like my heart is broken.

GIRL 2: Yup.

GIRL 1: I just don't have a purpose...

GIRL 2: Okay, whatever.

GIRL 1: What's the point?

GIRL 2: Sure.

GIRL 1: Am I ugly?

GIRL 2: Uh huh.

GIRL 1: Do you hate me?

GIRL 2: Yeah, whatever.

GIRL 1: I feel like people hate me.

GIRL 2: Cool...

GIRL 1: I *know* they hate me.

GIRL 2: Sweet.

GIRL 1: I don't want to go home.

GIRL 2: Sure.

GIRL 1: I'm scared to go home...

GIRL 2: Yeah, cool.

GIRL 1: It's getting worse...

GIRL 2: Okay.

GIRL 1: I just feel like giving up...

GIRL 2: You totally should.

GIRL 1: My life is meaningless...

GIRL 2: Mmhmm...

GIRL 1: I should just end it.

GIRL 2: Nice, whatever.

GIRL 1: I like your hair.

GIRL 2: Thanks. It's about time you noticed. I mean, you never pay attention to me. Is it too much to ask for someone to notice how I look? I mean people nowadays are so self-absorbed. They like, don't care about anyone but themselves. (Continues incomprehensibly)

(As **GIRL 2** is carrying on, **GIRL 1** gets up and walks away.)

GIRL 2: (Shouting after **GIRL 1**) Hey wait! Where are you going? We were having so much fun!

The Hair Fairy

By: Alyssa Fry

Characters:

AMANDA - typical teenage girl, if a *bit* prone to dramatics

HAIR FAIRY - a grumpy older, balding man

AMANDA'S MOTHER - typical mother

Setting:

A bathroom with a mirror overtop of a sink that is big enough to see things behind the person standing in front of it.

(**AMANDA** is standing in front of the mirror, playing with her hair, as she contemplates a box of hair dye sitting on the sink in front of her. Finally, it looks like she comes to a decision, and reaches for it. Enter the **HAIR FAIRY** and have him stand so he is visible in the mirror).

HAIR FAIRY: (flatly) What are you doing?

AMANDA: (jumps and wheels around) Who are you?!

What are you doing in my house?!

HAIR FAIRY: Be calm, my child, for you know not what you almost did. I am the Hair Fairy. (eyes box distastefully) And you'd look like a skunk if you attempted that color at this point.

AMANDA: (backs up against the sink, leaning back over it, eyes wide. Then she freezes) Wait. What?

HAIR FAIRY: (snaps his fingers) You heard me! That! Your hair! Skunk!

AMANDA: (frowns, relaxes, and crosses arms) Excuse me, what would you know?

HAIR FAIRY: Excuse me, what?

AMANDA: You! You're bald!

(The **HAIR FAIRY** gasps dramatically and clutches at his chest like she wounded him, then he staggers back a bit toward the door. He recovers a long moment later after this dramatic spectacle.)

HAIR FAIRY: You impudent harpy! (points at her accusingly) How dare you mention my shame!

AMANDA: I'm just saying, you have no right-

HAIR FAIRY: (interrupts) No right? She says I have

no right! (moves up into her face, wagging his finger)

Listen here, missy, I've been saving the likes of stupid teenagers for the better part of fifty years! My wings can't even flap anymore, with the excessive use of hairspray, and my hair burnt off from all of the curling and crimping and straightening. Ohhh I used to be a sight to see! I used to get all of the ladies! But I gave up **everything** for this job! (waits expectantly for her to say something. When she doesn't, he huffs indignantly) You know what? Fine. I'm leaving. (He storms out.)

(**AMANDA** stares after him, shocked, unsure what to do with herself, though ultimately, she turns back around and eyes up her box of hair dye once more.)

AMANDA: Maybe...Maybe he's right. Maybe I should bleach it fir-

(**HAIR FAIRY** runs back into room, and snatches the box off of her.)

HAIR FAIRY: (yells as he runs back out) Your hair would be like straw! (he exits)

(**AMANDA** stares after him, frustrated, then stomps her foot and starts huffing angrily under her breath. After glancing around a bit, to make sure she was alone, she leaves and her mom enters after a pause with her own box of hair dye. **AMANDA'S MOM** is humming softly to herself, and inspecting the box right where her daughter just had been standing. The **HAIR FAIRY** reappears, brandishing a curling iron threatening.)

HAIR FAIRY: Drop. That. Box.

AMANDA'S MOM: (screams and drops the box, wheeling around) Who are you?! How did you get into my house?! (**AMANDA** enters again, brandishing a can of hairspray.)

AMANDA: I knew you'd be back again, you freak. (she

starts to spray him with the hairspray)

HAIR FAIRY: (falls to floor, wreathing in agony) Not this cheap stuff! It's like glue! **Glue!!!!**

(**AMANDA** continues to spray him, a vicious look on her face, while **AMANDA'S MOTHER** cowers in the corner. Finally, the can runs out, and he coughs feebly.)

HAIR FAIRY: Just remember... (reaches for her) to shampoo and condition regularly. (coughs one final time and collapses)

AMANDA: (twirls can of hairspray triumphantly) Sorry to cut this short, but this might have been the *highlight* of my day.

AMANDA'S MOM: (staring at her daughter, who hasn't seemed to notice her yet) What...was...that?

AMANDA: Oh, that was the Hair Fairy. (eyes up her mom's box of hair dye) But he might have had a point. We probably would screw up our own hair. Can we just go to the salon tomorrow?

AMANDA'S MOM: ...Yeah. Sure. What do we do about him? (lightly kicks his body)

AMANDA: Oh don't worry about him. Dyeing is never permanent for guys like him.

Blackout



MAGAN METCALF

The Vacancy
By: Mikayla Wobrak

Characters:
ARTHUR - A young man from somewhere out West. Very much impatient, always focused on the destination.
NORA - A young woman from New England. Arthur is the love of her life. Compassionate and curious.
GABRIEL - A young Spanish man, dressed in a classic Bellhop uniform. Very amiable and welcoming.
MARINA - A young woman of Greek descent. Works at the check-in desk; kind, but easily becomes frazzled.
PAUL - A Southern White man in his sixties. Constantly happy, always smiling.
MARTY - An African American man, also in his sixties. Wise and thoughtful.

Setting:
The stage is set as a small, dusty motel in Arizona. Everything about it is reminiscent of the 1950s. The lobby boasts a somewhat tacky muted turquoise-and-salmon color scheme and twinkle lights are strung about the tops of the walls. In the center back of the stage stands the check-in desk, complete with a thick guest book on its surface and many wooden mail slots on the wall behind it. There is a record player in the corner, and lo-fi music can be heard softly in the background. Stage left, a sofa and two chairs are arranged around a coffee table that is covered with pamphlets for things to do in the area. A young man in a bellhop uniform is chatting with the young woman behind the Check-In desk, flirtatiously. A large black dog sits beside her. Two older gentlemen are sitting in the chairs talking and playing chess. The sofa is left unoccupied.

SARAJANE MEYERS



Scene One

(**NORA** and **ARTHUR**, a young couple, enter the motel lobby through the front door carrying their suitcases. They seem somewhat shaken. Everyone glances up from what they are doing, smiles, and then returns their attention to their previous activities, save for **GABRIEL**, the bellhop, and **MARINA**, the check-in girl. **GABRIEL** and **MARINA** are watching **NORA** and **ARTHUR**.)
ARTHUR: (*Whispers to NORA*) This place looks like it’s straight from an episode of the Twilight Zone or something.
NORA: I know, but we just got run off the road by a truck. We’re lost. Our car is in a ditch right now, and I’m just glad we’re not.
ARTHUR: True. We’re lucky we’re alive and we’re lucky this place was nearby when it happened. Look, Nora. (*Pulls NORA over to a map on the wall and stares at it. He is trying to figure out where on Earth they are. He points to a pushpin.*) We’re not too terribly far from Sedona. We’ll ask around for a mechanic tomorrow. There’s got to be someone around who can help. I hate that we even have to stop. We’re wasting time.
NORA: (*She joins ARTHUR in staring at the map on the wall.*) Don’t worry, dear. We’ll make it back to the valley soon. This is just a small pit stop on the way home. (*Rests her head on his shoulder.*)
GABRIEL: (*Runs over to the couple animatedly when he sees an opening in their conversation. He speaks in lightly accented English.*) Welcome, friends! I apologize for the large map on the wall; we have been planning to take it down for awhile. We need more space for beautiful things. Marina’s redecorating. I presume you’ll be staying here awhile.
ARTHUR: Not too long, we’re hoping.
GABRIEL: We’ll take it one day at a time, do not worry! What are your names? (*He takes the bags from ARTHUR and*

NORA’s hands.)
ARTHUR: I’m Arthur Holmes, and this is the love of my life, Nora.
(**MARINA** begins scribbling their names down in the guestbook.)
ARTHUR: We will just need lodging for the night. We were on a long road trip home from her parents’ house in Vermont and we managed to get lost along the way. Then we ended up getting in an accident a little down the road.
GABRIEL: Oh my!
ARTHUR: It was nothing too bad—we’re both okay.
PAUL: (*Clears his throat, interrupting the conversation*) Ain’t that the point of a road trip, though?
ARTHUR: (*Moves his gaze to PAUL*) Excuse me, sir? What is?
PAUL: Getting lost. (*Turns to MARTY*) Marty, don’ you remember the road trips we used to go on? Oh, we made great memories then. Perhaps the best. We been so long together, and I believe gettin’ lost on our way to California is one of my favorite memories.
(*Grinning widely, GABRIEL motions to ARTHUR that he is going to take their bags to their room. ARTHUR nods, and GABRIEL leaves the lobby quietly through the front door.*)
MARTY: The memory persists to this day. (*Smiles reminiscently*) Got lost forty years ago on our way to San Francisco when we were just young things. Lost in the same way you two’re. We were jazzed to experience the Beat scene. (**PAUL** is smiling deeply at him, listening to the story he’s heard a million times before.) Left from Alabama, and Alabama during the fifties was as close to the flames of Hell as I ever felt myself, for more reasons than one. They told me I was worthless because of the color of my skin and then damned me to Hell for lovin’ the one I loved. (*Pauses for a moment, but comes back to the conversation after catching the loving gaze of PAUL. He smiles back at him.*) Our road trip brought us here and we been here ever since.
PAUL: Nope, we never really felt the need to move on anywhere else! We’d just be wanderin’ anyhow, and we did enough of that before.
ARTHUR: That’s a wonderful story. I really appreciate you sharing it, sir. We should be trying to find a mechanic, though. We need to get on the road as soon as possible.
MARINA: (*Leaning on the check-in desk*) I think the purpose of a road trip is less to get lost and more to get found, you know? Even like you said, Marty, you may have gotten lost here, but you also *found* yourselves here.
MARTY: (*Smiles at MARINA*) You’re a very bright girl, Marina.
MARINA: Thank you, sir. I really think that’s the purpose of any journey, though. To find yourself. That’s the optimal ending, right? It’s in all the literature and it’s in real life, too. I’ve seen it. (*Grins proudly*) My mother found herself when her family journeyed to the United States from Greece.
NORA: (*Looks up from the map interestedly*) Your mother came here all the way from Greece? Have you ever been there?
MARINA: (*Regretfully*) Unfortunately not. Money is tight right now, but I’m saving up to go visit once I graduate from college. I’ll get there soon enough. I’m not too concerned about leaving right now. I like it here. We’ve got quite an eclectic collection of souls here in town. I enjoy their company.
NORA: Ah, I see. (*She pauses while MARINA is busy writing things down*) So what brought your family Stateside?
MARTY: Check-mate, Paul.
PAUL: Dammit, Marty! (*laughs*) You can’t even let me win once, can you?
MARTY: Not a chance.
MARINA: (*Smiles and laughs at PAUL and MARTY*) It wouldn’t be much *fun* for him then, would it, Paul? (*Turns back to NORA*) What brings any immigrant here? It’s the Land of Opportunity. That’s what my mother’s family was looking for. Fortune, beauty, and the American Dream.
(**GABRIEL** quietly slips into the room again, bag-free.)

32 **NORA:** And did they ever find it?

MARINA: We’re currently living in small town Arizona; my mother owns something of an old-time apothecary and my father, a not-so-learned—that is to say, amateur—astronomer, works days as a gardener. I work here full-time in the motel with my dog, Cerberus at my side. *(Pats her dog on the head)* I suppose that’s for you to decide.

GABRIEL: Your room is ready! Room three. It’s the third door down on the left. *(Dangles a very old-looking key in front of ARTHUR.)*

ARTHUR: Ah! Thank you so much. *(Takes the key from GABRIEL.)*

GABRIEL: You’re very welcome!

MARINA: Gabriel, you should tell them about yourself, too. I love getting to know our guests and it’s probably nice for them to hear a little bit about us, as well.

GABRIEL: *(Laughs)* Are you sure they want to hear about me? You seem to be the only person that finds me the least bit interesting.

MARINA: Don’t sell yourself short. Let them hear about how you got here! Your story is much cuter than mine. *(Rests her elbows on the desk and her chin in her hands and looks happily at GABRIEL)*

GABRIEL: Well, I lived pretty close by here for my whole life, and I would always see people wandering in here, lost—You two sure as the sky is blue aren’t the only people to ever get lost around here—I think it has something to do with the way the signs on the Interstate are a bit misleading and everything. Well, from the time I was nine, I spent a lot of my free time here, listening to the stories that everyone had. Every single soul always had the most interesting story to tell. I think I collected stories. So, of course, I wanted to work here when I got older.

MARINA: He’s right, you know. Everyone who comes through here’s got some story to tell.

NORA: It really sounds like it! Marina, would you mind if we came in here during breakfast in the morning? I’d love to hear more.

MARINA: Not at all! Breakfast is at eight; feel free to come down.

(MARINA bites her lip immediately after speaking. She watches ARTHUR and NORA leave the motel lobby with a regretful look on her face. Something is clearly troubling her. The lights fade to black.)

Scene Two

(The stage is now arranged like any old motel bedroom. The tacky color scheme is the same. A Queen-sized bed is located in the center of the stage and a desk and chair is set up stage right. NORA is sitting in bed while ARTHUR is sitting at the desk facing her.)

NORA: The people here are all so lovely, aren’t they?

ARTHUR: Strangely enough, they are. I don’t think I’ve ever met any motel staff so kind and no guests so willing to talk openly and honestly to complete strangers. Everyone seems to keep to themselves nowadays.

NORA: Yeah, you’re right. *(There is a short silence while neither knows exactly what to say.)* I genuinely do want to talk to Marina in the morning.

ARTHUR: *(Gets up and climbs into bed next to NORA, putting his arm around her shoulders)* Of course! She was very kind. I can’t get the story those gentlemen told out of my head. I wish we would take the time to enjoy our trip like they said they did. Maybe we do need to let ourselves get a little more lost and found sometimes. I’m sure we’ll be here at least a few days because of the car repairs, if we even end up finding a mechanic, so we’ll have more time to talk to them and maybe meet some more of the guests.

NORA: *(Smiles)* Yeah, I’d like that. Did you see how long the list of names in the check-in book is? I just glanced at it and it seems like every room must be booked.

ARTHUR: Yeah, I did see that! This is a nice little place.

NORA: It really is. Maybe when we get our car fixed we can do the typical tourist thing for a few days, as well. I don’t think I want to hurry home anymore.

ARTHUR: Yeah. It’s been a long day though, we should get some sleep. Goodnight, my dear.

NORA: Goodnight.

(They turn out the lights, roll over, and sleep.)

Scene Three

(The stage is set up again as the motel lobby. The lobby is totally deserted. A large breakfast tray is set up on the table that MARTY and PAUL had been playing chess on the night before. ARTHUR and NORA walk in, with confounded expressions on their faces.)

ARTHUR: I tell you, it’s the strangest thing. I didn’t notice last night but there is literally *nothing* else out there. Like, this motel is the only thing around for as far as I see.

NORA: I guess we really are in the middle of nowhere...

(MARINA walks into the room from a door that leads to the kitchen. Something is bothering her, clearly.)

MARINA: Oh, good morning, you two! *(She seems to be averting her gaze, trying not to make eye contact and busying herself with other things like straightening their breakfast tray and fluffing up the leaves on a plant that’s placed on the check-in desk.)*

NORA: What’s up, Marina? You look anxious.

MARINA: *(After a moment of thought, with a resigned expression and a sigh)* Sorry, I’m not good at this. This is my first time. *(Breathes in sharply, eyes closed, and then exhales)* Okay. I should tell you this isn’t any normal motel... People don’t just get lost and then come here. They... die, and then come here. Which I guess can be kind of like getting lost -or getting found- but yeah. You didn’t just get lost... *(She sees that NORA and ARTHUR are staring in disbelief, and NORA is starting to get emotional with realization.)* Hey, hey, don’t worry. It’s okay. We’re going to take care of you here. I wanted to get you a little bit more comfortable here before I told you but last night Gabriel told me I needed to do it now. I’m sorry but you didn’t make it after the accident.

NORA: *(Through her tears)* You’re kidding, right?

ARTHUR: *(Angrily)* This is some kind of cruel joke and we don’t appreciate it.

MARINA: Hey, hey. Please don’t shoot the messenger. I wouldn’t lie to you about this. Think about everything that was said last night. Marty and Paul. Please. Just think about it.

ARTHUR: *(After a long pause)* What about you? Are you...?

MARINA: Not exactly. Gabriel isn’t either. We’re here to help you. So... will you please sit, and let us help you? It’s okay, I promise. It’s not a miserable existence. You saw Marty and Paul. Happy as two clams.

ARTHUR: *(Turns to NORA and grasps her hands tightly in his own and holds them to his chest. He presses his forehead to hers.)* I suppose we don’t have much choice, do we?

MARINA: You do, actually. You could always wander. Some prefer it, but others enjoy the company here. *(She extends her hand towards NORA and ARTHUR.)*

(Still embracing, ARTHUR and NORA look toward MARINA for a long moment. After the moment passes, NORA removes herself from ARTHUR’s arms but holds onto his hand. With the other she reaches for MARINA’s hand.)

(Lights fade to black.)

The Infinite Love of Flora and Vern
By: Alyssa Cassandro

Characters:

VERN FLOWERS- Prisoner

FLORA FLOWERS- Vern’s deceased wife represented as The Fly

Setting: A weathered jail cell, terrible conditions. Vern has long, heavy chains around his ankles and his wrists. He can walk in small steps. Dirt and bricks lay everywhere. His living space is clearly neglected.

VERN: *(while shuffling around his cell, he quietly and hurriedly whispers)* So simple is the enigma that shrouds our poor creator’s eyes. Does he not know the monsters? He’s molded them with his own dirty hands... hasn’t he? *(babbling)* He’s created such darkness... I feel so dark... So dark. I am just a mere spider. *(laughs)*

FLY: *(Interrupts his gibberish with a frenzied buzzing)* buzz buzz buzz buzz

VERN: Shh... shh... shush my little one...

FLY: Buzzzzzz buzz buzz buzz.

VERN: Oh darling, I know you’re hungry. Hunger is natural... We are all starving.

FLY: buzz buzz

VERN: Please! Flora! Hush! Now! I can’t take your incessant whining. *(Throws a pebble at the **FLY**, buzzing stops, he then proceeds to continue his rant.)* Doesn’t our good Lord know how to silence such a gluttonous mouth...? Surely, surely he must know how hard I’ve worked to provide for you, Flora. Look! He knows I’ve worked to put a roof over your head and food in your pretty little mouth. You need to stop complaining. *(pause)* We are all starving.

FLY: Buzz

VERN: He’s made such monsters...

FLY: Buzz

VERN: Flora! How could you say that?

FLY: Buzz

VERN: How dare you accuse me of such things!!

FLY: Buzz Buzz

VERN: I’m not like you Flora... you mask your demons. But I know. I know your sick little mind. I’m not the monster, Flora, you are.

FLY: Buzz buzz

VERN: How dare you. You’re the one whose smiles attempted to send daggers into my skin as I slept. You taunted me. You’re the monster.

FLY: Buzz buzz buzz.

VERN: You killed me, Flora! You’re a tyrant to my cold, still heart.

FLY: Buuuuuuzzzz buzz buzz buzz buzz

VERN: Oh, I suppose... yes... yes I do love you.

FLY: Buzz *(continues buzzing)*

VERN: What? No... no! NO! NO! You’re a fool!! You never loved me Flora! You’re a fool to cross me you piece of trash! How could you kill me in my silent slumber beneath the eyes of The Almighty!

FLY: *(still buzzing, flies toward him)*

VERN: Don’t touch me! Don’t touch me! I can’t bear to have that slimy whore skin attempt to comfort my broken heart!! I can’t bear to have your hands hold me and caress my skin, all while you’re lying smile softly slumbers. Although your eyes were closed I knew they lied. Those Demons in your eyes that only I could see... DIE! *(He whips another rock at*

FLY.)

FLY: *(Dodges rock)* buuuuuuuuzzzzzz buuuuuuzz buzzzzz

VERN: I don’t care if you’re hungry! Starve! Die! ... *(pause)*... Oh! I see... You’re hungry for oxygen... are your bones still lonely, Flora?

FLY: buzz buzz

VERN: I don’t care if you’re lonely Flora, I don’t care if you SAY you need me, because I know you *don’t*. You didn’t need me while I held your cold body, years and years ago... You’re buried now... You didn’t deserve oxygen! You still don’t!!! DIE! DIE AGAIN! *(Throws a huge rock)* You slimy little...

FLY: buzz

VERN: I hated you! I hated you! I’m proud of what I did!

FLY: buzz

VERN: I’m going to...

FLY: buzzing *(lands on his shoulder)*

VERN: *(Screaming, shrieking)* Don’t touch me! *(picks up a rock, bashes it into his shoulder)* Cheater!!

FLY: Buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz buuuzzz *(louder, lands on his arm)*

VERN: *(Whacks arm off the wall)* LYING *(whack)* SMILES *(whack)* LEAVE ME YOU MONSTER! WHY DO YOU FOLLOW ME! *(whack)* You deserved to die! You wretched ghost...

FLY: *(lands on his head)* Buzz.

VERN: YAAAH!! *(Smacks head off the wall with incredible force, he then dies.)*

FLY: Buzz Buzz Buzz Buzz.

EMILY TROMM



Rumor Has It
By: Brea Bolden

Characters:

JANE - 17, High School senior

JIMMY - 18, High School senior

AMY - 16, High School junior

LISA - 18, High School senior

RANDOM STUDENT

(JANE, JIMMY, AMY, and LISA are a very close group of friends.)

Setting: High School hallway in between classes, alternating between each character’s lockers.

*****BELL RINGS*****

*(JANE goes up to **JIMMY** at his locker.)*

Poor Girl
By: Jamie Sabol

Characters:

BELLA - Leo’s wife, sad, misses her husband
LEO - Bella’s husband, in the army
ELLIE - Bella’s friend
SAVANNAH - Bella’s friend
PASTOR

Setting: Sitting in church; service is almost over.

PASTOR: “... and I thank you, Father, for our soldiers who risk their lives for us each and every day. I pray specifically for our friend, Leo Parker. It has been one year today since he left his family and friends here in Oklahoma. Please keep him safe in Your arms, and protect him as he protected us. Amen.” (Everyone exits the church sanctuary and gathers in the main lobby to talk to one another.)
SAVANNAH: (to BELLA) I can’t believe he’s been gone for a whole year. It seems like just yesterday he was headed for the airport and...(SAVANNAH cuts off when she notices BELLA staring into space not paying attention.)
BELLA: I wish he could just come home already. I miss him so much. He’s been gone so long...
ELLIE: You’ll see each other one day, sweetie. Just stay patient and positive.
SAVANNAH: I’m sorry, Bell. Just focus on being you and live the life you’ve always wanted. Leo isn’t here anymore, so you only have to worry about your young, beautiful self!
ELLIE: Yeah, like what Savannah said. You have your whole life ahead of you. I know you miss him, but you’ll be able to see each other again someday. Just go out and live your life like you normally would.
BELLA: Thanks, guys. I really appreciate it. (exits quickly)
SAVANNAH: Poor girl...

* * * * *

(BELLA sits down in her car; puts her head on the steering wheel, and cries. When she recovers, she follows her normal Sunday routine and drives to the coffee shop down the road.)
BELLA: One medium caramel latte please. (pause) Thanks.
(She starts to walk over toward her usual seat by the window when she notices that someone has taken it. She walks to the table and puts her hand on the seat across from the man.)
BELLA: Excuse me, is this seat taken?
(The man looks up at BELLA.)
BELLA: Oh, gosh! Leo! Leo, what are you doing here? (Hugs him frantically with tears streaming down her face.)
LEO: (Laughs lightheartedly) Well, I’m here to see you, of course. I knew I could find you here. 2 o’clock sharp at your favorite place in town, just like every Sunday. (smiles)
BELLA: (still in shock) Oh Leo... (pause) Why are you back so soon?
LEO: Well I can’t stay for long. Sergeant needs me stationed back up north as soon as possible. But I could tell that you needed a little “Leo Time”.
BELLA: (giggles) Yeah, I definitely needed to see you...
LEO: You know, Bell... Just because I can’t be here with you doesn’t mean that I’m not here with you. I always will be.

36 JANE: Jimmy I know you know!
JIMMY: You know I know what?
JANE: I know, you know, what I don’t know!
JIMMY: (shaking his head in confusion) What don’t you know!?
JANE: Who started the rumor Jimmy?
JIMMY: Rumor? About you? What rumor?
(JANE whispers the rumor into his ear.)
JIMMY: Wow Jane, I don’t know. Ask Lisa.
BELL RINGS
(JANE runs up to LISA’S locker.)
JANE: OHHH Lisa?
LISA: Yesss?
JANE: Who did it?
LISA: The rumor?
JANE: YES!
LISA: Well it’s not that bad, I just heard you...(whispers rumor to JANE)
JANE: WHAT!?! That’s not what I heard.
LISA: That’s what Amy told me.
JANE: And you believe Amy? Seriously Lisa!
LISA: Hey calm down. I didn’t spread it anymore!
JANE: Well gee, thanks!
BELL RINGS
(JANE walks up to AMY’S locker with a nasty look on her face.)
JANE: Hey Amy!
AMY: (scared by the tone in JANE’S voice) What?
JANE: Oh, you know WHAT!
AMY: Listen, Jimmy told!
JANE: Jimmy? (whispers to herself) What a liar, a good one too.
AMY: Look, he just told me you... (whispers rumor into her ear)
JANE: Are you serious? This is unbelievable!
BELL RINGS
(JANE storms up to JIMMY at his locker.)
JANE: JIMMY! You liar.
JIMMY: Look I didn’t want you to freak out.
JANE: FREAK OUT!?! I’ve heard three different rumors about me. Not one of them has been even remotely the same! (gets in JIMMY’S face) Listen up JIMBO, you tell me who started this whole thing and maybe, just MAYBE, I’ll keep that video of you singing “Every Time We Touch,”

which don’t deny, is your favorite song from getting put on the school news. Unless you want it on ...
JIMMY: (throws his hands up and surrenders) It was Lisa! Lisa told me.
BELL RINGS
(Everyone meets at JANE’S locker.)
JANE: Lisa I know you told Jimmy. Told him I was pregnant!
LISA: Well, when we were talking yesterday you told me how you keep getting sick in the morning and throwing up. You’ve also gained a little weight.
JANE: What? Wow thank you! First, for starting a rumor. And second, for calling me fat!
LISA: I just assumed ok! And to really make sure I was right about the whole thing, I decided to ask you randomly what you would name your kid, if you “ever” had one. And you said Doug without hesitation so I just knew!
JANE: Oh my gosh, Lisa, I WAS KIDDING. Why would I name my kid Doug? Out of all the names. Doug?
AMY: (chuckles and smacks herself in the head) Ohhhh, now I get it. You said Doug not drugs!
JIMMY: What did you think I said?
AMY: I thought you said “Jane is selling drugs.”
JIMMY: Umm I said she was having a baby, named Doug.
AMY: Well all I heard was drugs, so I assumed she was selling them.
JIMMY: (laughs at AMY) She is going to have to sell some drugs to pay for the baby. They are EXPENSIVE, ya know? Got to get the money somewhere.
LISA: That’s true; babies are expensive...
JANE: (laughing to herself about this whole situation) STOP! Is this really happening right now? Everyone shut up! I’m NOT having a baby, I HATE the name Doug, and I DO NOT sell drugs!
JIMMY: Ok, my bad.
LISA: Sorry.
AMY: Won’t happen again.
JANE: (sighs in relief) Thank you!
RANDOM STUDENT: (walks past and sees Jane) Hey Jane! I heard about your new husband Doug. You should probably tell him to stop selling drugs. He is going to end up in jail. Geez! With a baby on the way, you don’t need that girl!
BELL RINGS

38 Right here. *(points to his heart)*
BELLA: Always?
LEO: And forever.

BELLA: *(smiles with tears in her eyes)* I don’t want you to go back…
LEO: Me either, Bell. But my Sergeant needs me. I gotta do my job. And that’s protecting my nation, my people… you.
BELLA: I know, I know… You’ve always been there to protect me. You’re my angel.
LEO: I’ll always be watching over you. Don’t you forget that.
BELLA: I won’t. *(pause)* It was nice seeing you, Leo.
LEO: You too, Bella. I’ll see you again as soon as possible. I love you. *(gets up and starts walking out)*
BELLA: I love you too.

* * * * *

(The next day at yoga)
ELLIE: Bella! You’re here!
BELLA: Yeah…?
SAVANNAH: Well, we didn’t expect you to be here because of, you know, yesterday… I mean, it being the anniversary of--
BELLA: *(cuts SAVANNAH off)* Oh, that. No, no. Leo came back to visit me yesterday! He surprised me at the coffee shop after church! Wasn’t that sweet? *(sighs gently)* I’ve missed him so much.
(ELLIE and SAVANNAH look at each other)
BELLA: What?
ELLIE: *(without emotion)* We’re happy for you, darling.
SAVANNAH: Yeah, that’s great for you, girl.
BELLA: Thanks, guys! I really appreciate it! *(walks out happily)*
ELLIE: It’s been a whole year and she’s still “seeing” him? I wonder how hard it’ll hit her when she finally accepts his death…
SAVANNAH: Yeah, I know… Poor girl…



BIANCA STIFFEY

Characters:
ATTICUS (Scarecrow) - Fragile, confused, and longing for happiness
VOICE 1 (Male) - Aggressive, angry and controversial antagonist to Atticus
VOICE 2 (Female) - Quiet, delicate, and comforting friend to Atticus
ROSALYN (Human) - Fair, blind, and searching for happiness

Setting: Deep in the recesses of a cornfield, during the middle of the afternoon. **ATTICUS** is resting upon the stake that holds him up, thinking alone. **BOTH VOICES** are off stage. They are not seen, but heard.

VOICE 2: Why are you asking me what to do?
ATTICUS: All I’m asking is for some help, a little advice you know? Maybe so someone can tell me what the hell I should do?
VOICE 2: Don’t get snippy with me. Remember you’re the one with the problem here, not me! So unless you’re prepared to get information from another source, you better think about this with a clear head, and not an empty one!
ATTICUS: Well there IS actually someone else I could go to for help... and they are much more straight forward than you are!
VOICE 2: I know who you are talking about and trust me, you go searching for answers from him and you’ll be lead down the wrong path. You’ve done everything the right way so far..
ATTICUS: *(cuts off, with a mocking tone)* Enough! I know I’ve done everything the right way.
VOICE 2: Then you know what happens when you let lust and desire protrude your mind? Enough with you! *(breath)* I would just hate for you to lose everything when you’re so close.
ATTICUS: So close to what? It’s crazy to think I feel like I haven’t made any damn progress since the beginning, and sometimes, when the sliver of hope appears through the fogged clouds, it’s like 3 steps forward and ten THOUSAND steps in the opposite direction. Do you have any idea what that is like?
VOICE 2: Of course I don’t. You act like I can read your mind and predict the future!
ATTICUS: I’m not asking you to predict the future. Predicting the future with blind eyes is rather meaningless. All I want to know is whether it will all work out in the end.
VOICE 1: *(enter)* Of course it will; everything will be okay in the end. If it’s not okay, then it’s not the end.
ATTICUS: I was beginning to wonder when you would show up, then I remembered that someone like you can never really leave my mind. I assume you’ve been listening on our conversation?
VOICE 1: I have indeed, and frankly, I’m shocked.
ATTICUS: Why?
VOICE1: That it’s taken this long for you to finally talk about this with us. Now tell us, enough with this abstract masquerade; what is really going on?
ATTICUS: I really like this girl and I’m not sure how to proceed.
VOICE 1: *(mockingly)* I really, really like this girl.... and I’m not sure what to do because I’m insecure with myself... I mean, how to proceed.
VOICE 2: I told you this would happen. But no, nobody ever listens to me.
VOICE 1: Well seeing as your solution to most problems is to avoid them or take the long route, it’s no wonder Atticus rarely follows your guidance. Me on the other hand..
ATTICUS: *(cutting off)* Are you going to let me finally explain myself or will I have to listen to you two give me a head ache? *(small pause)* Thank you. Now onto the problem at hand. I really like this girl and I have very little proof she likes

40 me back. Occasionally, I feel like a fool for thinking someone like Rosalyn would ever have reciprocal feelings for me...

VOICE 1: Well that’s your first problem! You have no confidence and there’s no reason you shouldn’t. You have a future, a bright mind, and a caring heart. If anything, this girl should feel foolish for not capitalizing on this wonderful opportunity she’s been handed.

VOICE 2: There is far more to “reciprocating” emotions than just having the tools. You have to be able to use them correctly in order to maximize their effects. There is no “fool” in this situation Atticus, no matter how you may feel.

VOICE 1: Of course you would defend the girl!

VOICE 2: I’m not defending anyone, rather I’m suggesting that instead of acting on rage and instinct, that one should be rational and have hope.

ATTICUS: You know what I’ve always wondered?

BOTH VOICES: What?

ATTICUS: What is the difference between logic and love? Because whenever I’ve tried using one to justify the other, it never works. It’s almost like walking on a tight rope high above the world. One small step to either side and you fall.

VOICE 1: You’re so damn sentimental, it almost kills me.

ATTICUS: My deepest sympathies for being able to feel for another. Knowing you never could care for another must drive you insane.

VOICE 1: *(cuts off)* The only thing “driving me insane” is trying to understand why you care so much about her. She’s playing your heart like a marionette! And I’d love to know what makes her different from all the other damn women that have passed through your miserable, pathetic life!

ATTICUS: *(Gaining life)* I think she’s beautiful. She’s beautiful in every sense of the word. It would be trivial to compare her to the sun because she shines brighter than ours on even the hottest of summer days. She has a smile that sparkles like Orion and skin as fair as the Autumn air. She’s not just different because of the way she looks, but of how she carries herself. Such grace and poise, similar to Helen of Troy. But more than anything, I change when I’m around her. She brings life into my hollow interior and makes me think of life beyond scaring birds. That’s why she’s different; not because of who she is but who I am when around her.

VOICE 2: I’m lost for words. Never give up on something you really want, Atticus; it’s difficult to wait, but worse to regret.

VOICE 1: Very touching, Atticus. Your ability to convey the intricacies of emotion never ceases to amaze me. Your connection to Helen is rather amusing but let us not forget that she’s merely a story, like those books you read.

ATTICUS: I guess the beauty in life is that you don’t always get what you want or deserve. And what is so wrong with reading books? Its a true art to be able to move people with pen and paper.

VOICE 1: You seriously can’t see it? You’re more blind and lost then I ever thought possible, Atticus. Enough with your preaching of books! A good bed time story is all a book is ever good for. You’re trying to tell me that you identify with these characters? Words on a page are all they’ll ever be. I suppose you want to live inside a book, is that right?

ATTICUS: I guess I’ve tricked myself into believing true love exists like it does in books. Books provide the escape from the static loveless life I live. Maybe that’s why I want to create books; to create a better reality to fill the void in my own life. Of course I would want to live life inside a book! Because the good guy ALWAYS wins, the guy gets the girl of his dreams, and I would live the life of a real person instead of a pathetic scarecrow! Nothing bad ever happens and if something goes wrong, something positive will occur that reverses the bad. I never have to waste time doing superficial things like eating or sleeping; in a book I’ll always be doing something worthwhile. *(Trailing off)* In a book; I’ll be happy.

ROSALYN: *(Enter)* Atticus. Atticus! Where are you?

ATTICUS: Over here by the bushes! Say, what are you doing here? You know I come here to think.

ROSALYN: I have some news I need to share with you and it couldn’t wait!

ATTICUS: What is it? I need to tell you something as well.

TOGETHER: *(ATTICUS)* I love you *(ROSALYN)* I’m moving

ATTICUS: What? To where?

ROSALYN: I’m moving to the city. I need to explore more of this world.

ATTICUS: And what about me?

ROSALYN: What about you?

(As ROSALYN turns to walk away, she throws a lit match onto ATTICUS causing him to catch fire. All that was left the following morning was a single straw.)

Over the Counter

By: Hayley Pontia

Characters:
ASHVIN PATEL - Indian male drug representative (assumed drug dealer)
JESSICA MADISON - Caucasian drug representative (assumed drug maker)
MOLLY YOUNG - Blonde onlooker riding the Subway home from her new office job. Young and trying to adjust to the city
MARY JANE - Famous drug supplier company
ASIAN GIRL WITH GLASSES - You know who I mean
OLD HOMELESS MAN - Exactly like it sounds
PEOPLE OF THE SUBWAY

Setting: Subway going to undetermined destination in NYC. Two main characters walk onto the subway in the middle of the night. Molly has just been introduced to the city and is unaware of all that it encompasses. She is gullible in believing all the stereotypes the city holds. She overhears a conversation of two coworkers who just so happen to sound a little suspicious.

(MOLLY sits uncomfortably trying to adjust her black work skirt and fumbles with her folders in the process. It’s her first day riding home from her new job that requires late work hours. While riding she listens to a pair that hop on the subway. They sit directly across from her.)

ASHVIN: I knew he wouldn’t like the idea of us bringing the new shipment in.

JESSICA: It’s all about how you approach those kinds of people.

ASHVIN: Yeah I heard that they sold all of the stock from that warehouse in Brooklyn.

JESSICA: Don’t you mean in Queens?

ASHVIN: Oh yeah that’s where Mary Jane lives if you know what I mean.

JESSICA: If you mean your really really good friend, then yes I do.

MOLLY: *(directed towards the OLD HOMELESS MAN)* Do you hear any of this? Does a conversation like this normally happen?

(The OLD HOMELESS MAN just stares and winks at Molly and grabs for the young girl’s purse.)

MOLLY: WHO DOES THAT?! *(Eyes-widened and shock apparent.)* She looks around and no one really is aware.

ASHVIN: *(slightly concerned)* Are you okay...? *(Searching for eye-contact in order to obtain her name.)*

MOLLY: Yeah and it’s Molly.

ASHVIN: JUST LIKE THAT DOPE NEW SONG RIGHT? *(Directed towards her.)*

MOLLY: Ohh I guess. *(Not knowing how to respond.)*

ASHVIN: With the robot going “molly, molly, molly”

MOLLY: Yeah, I can tell you like that song. *(Awkwardly smiling.)*

ASHVIN: Here, listen. *(Plays music on his iPhone, waves **MOLLY** over, and offers the other headphone. Almost screaming he interjects)* **BASS DROP.** *(And continues verbally vomiting strange instrumental noises.)*

MOLLY: K. Bye now. I'm just going to sit back down. *(Completely weirded out by his creepy man child behavior.)*
*(**ASHVIN** is slightly offended, but used to the grumpy subway commuters. He ignores **MOLLY** and instead focuses his attention on **JESS**.)*

ASHVIN: Jess, tell me again about this new drug.

JESSICA: It's some kind of synthetic thing. It's going to be a big hit with those guys behind the Sunoco.

*(**MOLLY** looks around the subway train. No one notices **MOLLY**'s shock along with her nervous hand waving.)*

ASHVIN: Agreed. They are always our number one customers aren't they? I just hope they don't get too worked up this time. Last time was pretty serious. *(Jokingly)* We might have to call the cops. *(He nudges **JESS** in the side.)*

JESSICA: L-O-L, but seriously Mary Jane is still our go-to girl. They love her. She makes all of them feel so happy and invincible.

ASHVIN: The officials won't even suspect it. *(With a smirk on his face.)*

MOLLY: *(deciding to take matters in her own hands.)* Is everyone just going to sit here and listen to this?! *(hysterically straining herself)*

(Literally everyone stares at her, even the old homeless man and his stuffed animal pet.)

MOLLY: I know I may be new to the "Big Apple", but I am not a complete fool. *(Slightly hyped up on excessive amounts of coffee that got her through the day.)* I am going to be on CNN or ABC news tonight you just watch out. Get out your phones and take pictures with your very large iPads like my mom and record this good stuff. This is real. *(Now mentally preparing for her monologue **MOLLY** clears her throat and firmly stands on the moving subway.)* People of the Subway to Bleeker Street, I now will make a citizen's arrest involving these two hoodlums. *(She gestures towards **ASHVIN** and **JESSICA**.)* They are the people you fear when you pass a creepy alley on your way to Central Park. They are the ones who suspiciously have connections everywhere and say "Yeah, I got the hookup" to their creepy friends that say "man" every five seconds. *(The pair try to interrupt her, but **MOLLY** is unstoppable.)* They are the ones I tell you. I heard them this whole time and I will not let this subway keep me from helping the city stay clean. Well...as clean as it could be. *(Losing her train of thought.)* Ohh umm, and yes I am here today to spread my heroism so it can become an online sensation. On that note, I would also like to tell you all that I am single and I am new in this town so follow me on Twitter or instagram a cute picture of me right now with #outfitoftheday or something clever and trending. Thank you all and have a great day.

(Everyone on the subway stares in shock with their recording devices in their hands. No one says anything or moves. Some people even stay on through their stops to see what happens.)

ASIAN GIRL WITH GLASSES: What the hell?

JESSICA: Ohhhh myyyyy. *(She hits her palm to her forehead.)*

ASHVIN: Did that just happen? *(Looking at each other with wide eyes.)*

JESSICA & ASHVIN: *(in unison)* We're just drug reps!



EMILY TROMM

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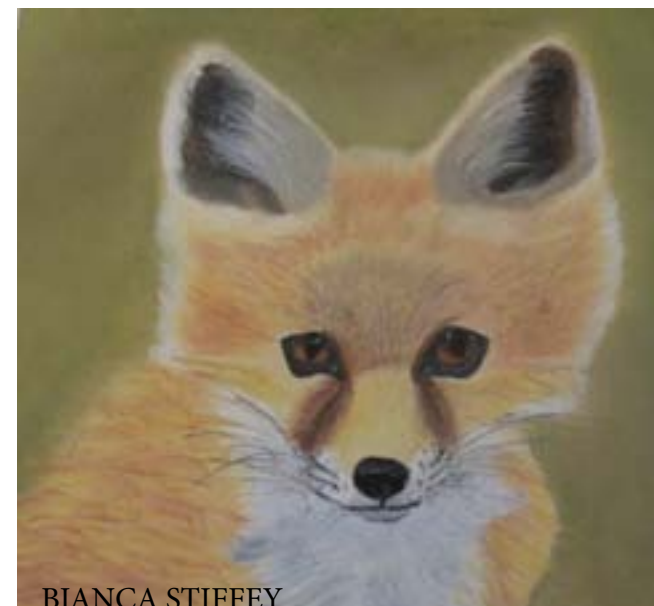
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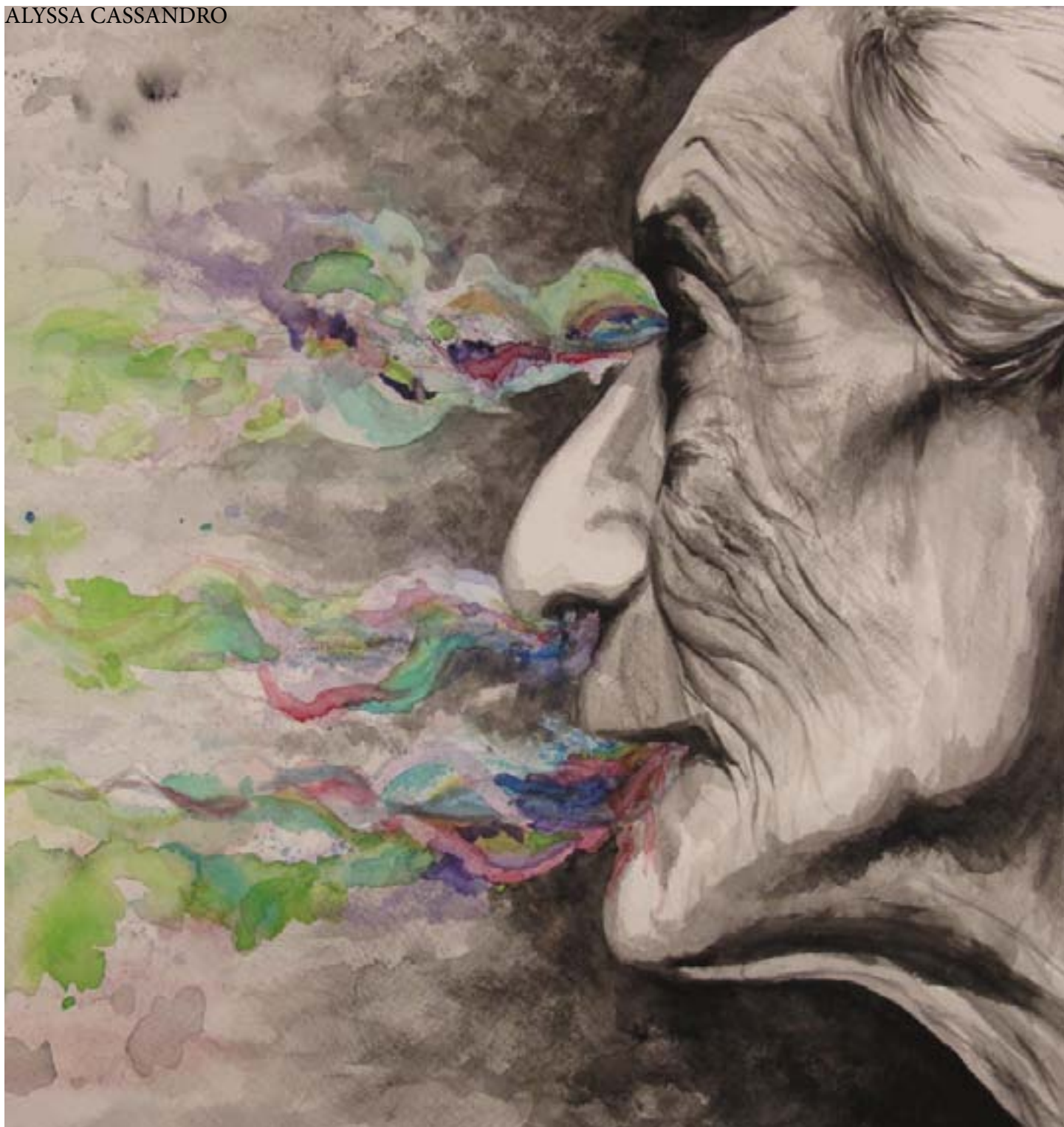
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