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ORPHEUS

XXXVI

A Literary Journal

California State University, Bakersfield

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If any student is interested in joining the *Orpheus* staff, please email Dr. Carol Dell'Amico at cdellamico@csub.edu.

Orpheus accepts literary submissions of various kinds (typed, double-spaced, and on a word document): poetry; short stories, or chapters from books that can stand on their own; one-act plays, or scenes/acts from longer plays that can stand on their own; short film scripts/scenes; etc. We also accept pdfs of artwork and short graphic novels (or a chapter from a graphic novel that can stand on its own). Please visit the Department of English's website (www.csub.edu/english) for more information (there are limits as to how much work can be submitted). Submissions to orpheus@csub.edu – the journal sends out a Call for Submissions at the beginning of the academic year; the submissions period tends to close at the end of February to allow for the journal to be published before the end of the spring semester. In order to publish in *Orpheus*, the contributor must be a currently enrolled CSUB student or a student from our creative-partner campus, Porterville College.

Orpheus follows a blind submissions process, including for pieces submitted by any of the journal's editors.

Orpheus was founded by Dr. Solomon O. Iyasere, Sr. in 1973. Dr. Solomon Iyasere was a professor of the English Department at CSUB, contributing to CSUB's academia for over 44 years. His legacy lives on through *Orpheus*.

A note from the Faculty Advisor, 2018-2019

Dr. Carol Dell'Amico

A few "firsts" must be mentioned with respect to this Volume 36 of *Orpheus*: It's the first volume of the journal to be put together by students enrolled in the course, *Editing Fiction for the CSUB Journal Orpheus* (English 4740), and it's the first volume to be published under the auspices of a new CSUB president, Dr. Lynnette Zelezny. The student-editors of *Orpheus* thank Dr. Charles MacQuarrie for creating the new course, English 4740. Responding to the call from students for spaces for the gaining of practical experience, Dr. MacQuarrie created English 4740 and English 4750, *Editing Fiction for the CSUB Journal Calliope*. While *Orpheus* publishes creative writing by CSUB students—and by students from our partner campus, Porterville College—*Calliope* publishes scholarly writing and other nonfiction. The editors of *Orpheus* also send their greetings and best wishes to California State University, Bakersfield's new president!

I congratulate the student editors and producers of this volume, who are outstanding: Armando Estrada-Rodriguez, Christian Harrington, Emerald Guthrie, Evan Martinez, Hana Qwfan, Jessica Guillen, Julia Edith Rios, Kerstin Stokes, Marc Perez, and Shawn Chundagal. As a team, these students ushered the journal through every step of the publication process, from the acquisition phase all the way through to the publication and marketing phases. Furthermore, Evan, Julia, and Hana, as members of last year's editorial team, met even before the academic year began to decide on when to begin soliciting submissions, and Julia created the flyers we needed.

For more kinds of help that can be listed, we heartily thank Kathy Hafler, the Department of English's Administrative Support Coordinator.

We also thank Brittany Conner, our Reprographics Specialist. Brittany, you answer our questions promptly and are a wealth of knowledge.

Rachel Tatro-Duarte, thank you for working with us and for fostering the creativity of students at Porterville College.

Dean Curt Asher, we extend our gratitude to you for allowing us to use the lovely Dezember Reading Room for our Release Party. Thank you for your support and generosity.

Dean Robert Frakes (Arts and Humanities) and Interim Provost Vernon Harper, we thank you for your gracious funding of this volume of *Orpheus*. While the journal appears online through the Department of English's website, nothing can replace a tangible copy to bring home, admire, and show off.

Dr. Steven Frye, Chair, Department of English, we thank you for willingly parting with department funds every time we need a bit of cash.

Kudos to all contributors to this volume—creative writers and visual artists alike! Long live your creative spirit!

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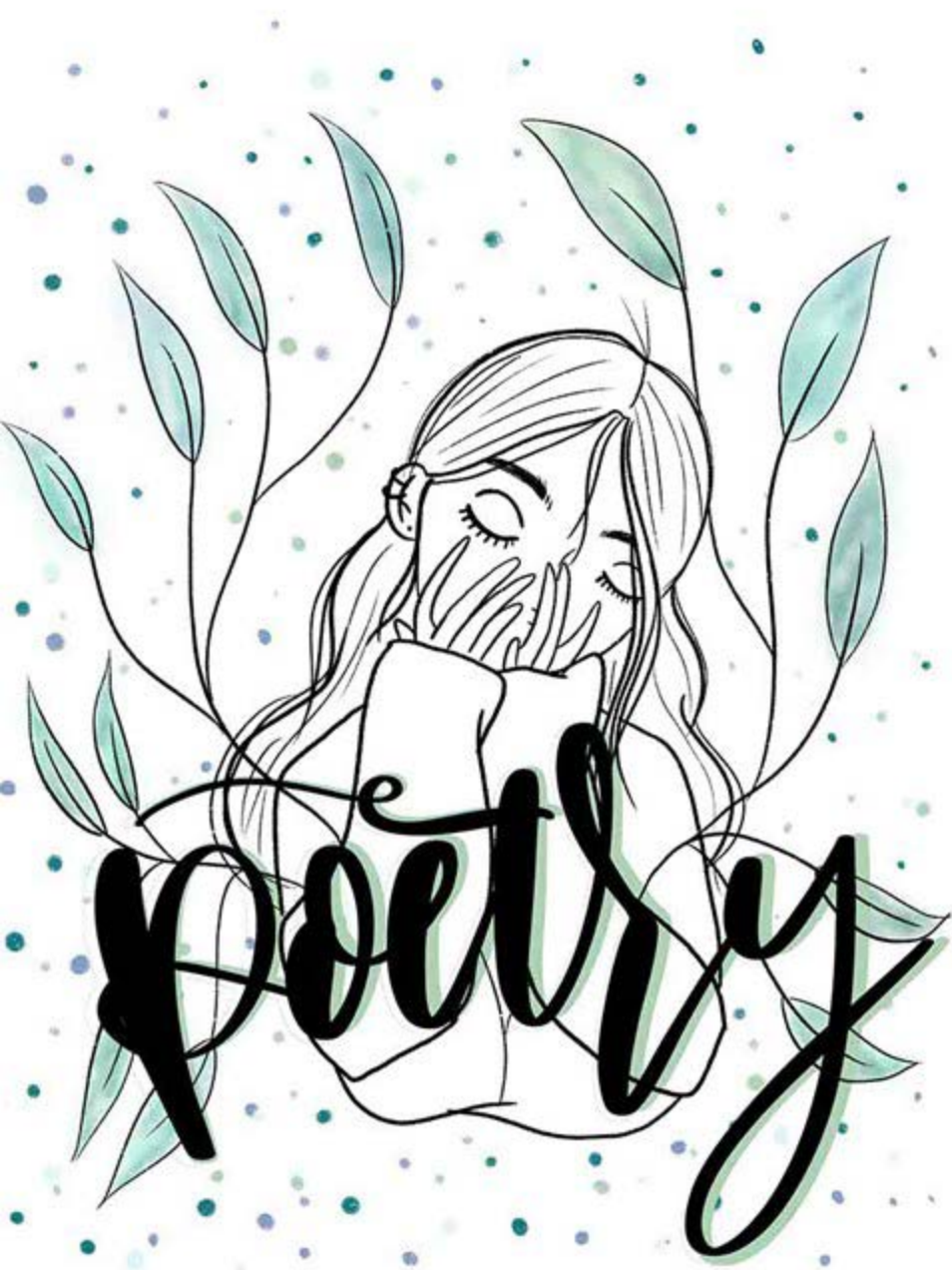
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UNTITLED
Chelsea Jasmine Geronimo



YOUR CROP

Clarissa Alderete

*With wavy decimals of dewy drops and calculated end of days
There is no mercy that will ease you in your coming haze*

*Vivianite mixed with ebullience and gold
You have not earned this jubilation but rather mold*

*Green monsters and grassy havens of paralleled Eden's, frolicking in the dusk
You will be nothing, but return to dust*

RESIDUUM

Clarissa Alderete

*Vivacious vocal chords ripping choruses of chaos and nothing short of soreness
It is a shame heard by flowers and the open ocean breeze
There is no shaded sureness that will bring you to your knees
Except the sound of thunder thrumming up the seas*

SYNTEHSIS

Clarissa Alderete

This is where the sunflowers come to cry.
Where muddy perspective desecrates trollops.
Where dwindling leaves find no mothering pistil to
their drooping, bruised, and purpled tulips.
No fathering stamen nor parenting duo to reign the namely
bumbling bumble of bees.
This is where the sun comes to flourish his anxiety.
Blasting sunshine into chloroplasts and milky green chlorophyll.
This is where the birds and the bees sing.
From shining rays to wanting stems.
This is where incandescence rains red and yellow blares of new.
Where ethereal bombinates blasting woes of goodness
Into a lively hue.

la

Jorge Lopez

money green trees springing above concrete,
surrounded by bowls of copper mountains;
covered by the soft fabric of sunlight.
Is drenched by drips of dusk pigment,
Slowly freezing into cold glass stars
With light only found through reflection.

A Sun

Jorge Lopez

I
cannot Live
you

A Crimson leaf.

Jorge Lopez

West the wind comes to me
West the wind comes to switch me
West the wind comes to push me towards the east
West the wind comes to push me towards the east water well
Is that the ocean or the sky?
West the wind comes to pull me out of the east water well
West the wind comes to pull me out of the east
West the wind comes to switch me
West the wind comes to me.

I

Jorge Lopez

I am not who you think I am

I am not what I think I am

I am not who my mother thinks I am

I am the wrong note

I am the silent syllable

I am the key that barely fits.

I am the tilted painting

I am so many things except me.

My watch is two seconds off

My heart is missing one beat

My scale is average +5 and 5 more

My ears never work and

My eyesight is blurring.

My name is not my own

My pictures have less people

My memory is skipping

This is not me either.

In time

Jorge Lopez

In my sockets I have

ice. My head is then

wrapped. In invisible

boiled cloth.

In time I find that

teeth are made of

Wax. And my skin begins

to prune. Boiling water fills
my mouth. And I drown
in unspoken words.

Ocean's Gold

Jorge Lopez

Our boat waddled through the sun filled waves,
as pale paint chips peeled off our ship.

A brass bell clanged
and the zipping sound of fish hooks sang.

Sinking with lead on their ankles
and rising with fish in their hands.

Orange fish with strange faces.

Eyes popped out of places,
and bellies hanging like tongues.

Black backs beginning to crack

Took the shape of coat racks

Fiber glass arms bending

Into h's and v's,

I pulled when the ocean pulled me.

I pulled its shadow through golden skin.

I had never seen something so dark.

So dark that light refused to touch it.

So dark its face stayed hidden in the daylight

Horrid hands speared the creature unknown.

Until vile violet blood mixed the ocean brown.

I had never seen something so horrendous up close.

And had never seen a creature so beautiful.

Destruction - Three Different Ways

Fabiola Madrigal

Mojada

mama's dying
ha estado muriendo
since before she found
herself here

four times drowned
four times feared
llorando por sus hijos
but her ghost keeps on turning
crying for her years

mama's dying
ha estado muriendo
since before she found
me here

cuarto veces emboscado
four times released
crying for His grace
but his ghost isn't coming
crying for His fleece

mama's drying;
ha estado secando
since before she last saw
her father

four times drenched
four times blessed
gritando por paz
but her ghost can't find a landing
screaming for sand and—

the type of heat that cracks
her eyes into four, and burns
her sole into floor

dying

mama's been drying;

the sun burned her clean
from her Body

mama's been crying;
the wails burned her clean
from her Family

mama's been dying;
the water burned her clean
from this Country

mamá se ha estado ahogando
drip— drip— dripping.

Mojada.

Brujeria

Hazy, soft voices
cradle, grip
dig and claw
They burrow in my throat,
teething on my tongue.

Halting, harsh voices
scratch, bruise
lacerate and smear
They run striations down my lips,
bussing susurrations into my ear.

"what's left?"
"what's this?"

The sounds of someone being eaten.
The Chewing and Bursting of flesh.

A visceral pomology taking root
in the ruin, buzzing above the din.

a little death in the garden.

"a little snap of the hips."

At a Cellular Level

I'm self obsessed
and quivering with the aftershock
of a well said "missus"
of a well meant razing
of the edifice (nucleus).

For it's obvious,
a definite, infinite.
Content Warning;
Read: DO NOT EAT.
Cause I'm poisonous as well as venomous,
Asymptomatic,
get rid of this.

It's white-walled, expanding,
a colorful cosmos of
heat death related accidents.
And I'm heaving, naked and shivering, yelling,
"Leave!"
The definition of anachronism
hung by the door.

And I'm happiness, warm.
That kind of flame resistant burning.
It's boring like a nail into your skull,
cause apparently pain is a sign of losing small.

And it's a lack of air,
a pooling of lactic acid
in my
arms.

a
persistent retrograde
spiraling on and on
and on.



LIGHT
Austin Yi

At the Met

Austin Yi

receding roar of city streets
as up steps to glass doors under
hushing arches for an urn
hustling pennies off Langston whose
joys concerning Keats' verses sweeter than
melodies unheard an urn
hear, here fall petals
into my hands of asphodel out
of ages past an urn

In the Gloaming

Austin Yi

cradled entwined
in necks and knees
our brightest stars knocked
loose
glistening in dens
of throat and teeth
a pearl of rolling tomb
outstretched
shadows
resurrecting
expectant poached in
gentle drippings
of smouldering underglow
a mislaid sun slow to rise

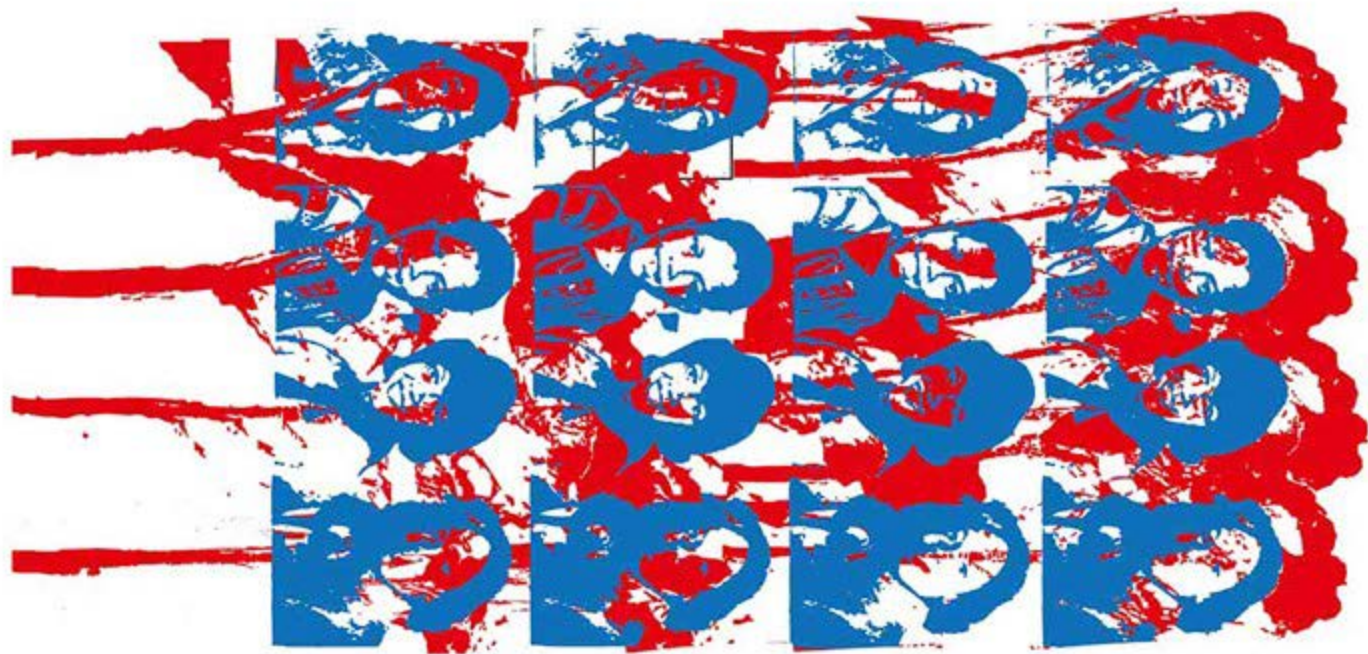
Jungles in the Dead of Night

Austin Yi

arrhythmical like disease it slips
a limp
in your step and a
crook
in your back
luring lurid
wears upon
the nervous system and produces that
feeling we call
tired
too much could cause
neurasthenia or an or depression or anxiety
head
aches or nervous and fatigue etc
perpetually jerking fidgety jaws
whatever it's doing
it's hazardous its
hot into sweat
tea— sweet
but the remedy for more is more
unless interpreted by mainly paler pigments
to appeal to a wider commercial audience so don't
with that inferior slush don't forget about your country
music
and square dancing
in public schools
as weapons against
jazz in the twenties

FOUR FLOWERS PLUCKED

Alexandria R. Thomas



22 Days

Brit Melson

I haven't blinked in 22 days for fear that the ocean swell
forming in the murky grayness of my eyes will spill out currents sucking me under.
Cause from this lighthouse I see your waters raging; your eyes the storm;
cue the sun that burns my irises black when darkness cannot shine without the moon –
or you.

The gravity of us ceased. We were the tsunami that ripped me apart.

I am the wreckage of your torrential devastation.

Stop-motion-memories scattered like shells on a shape-shifting shoreline
heavily laden with broken glass and every time I pass that spot on my heart
where your name is carved; the X on my treasure map;

I am reminded of the way the sand shifts under me;
the way our crumbling foundation was strong enough
only for a temporary castle of sand.

Autumn Leaves

Brit Melson

A piece of me was lost that day/
stripped away like the leaves of trees in Autumn/
And you know, it's funny how I lost my voice in the exact moment that I should have
screamed/
silent pleas lodged in my throat like summer tourists at Tahoe and I swore to myself/
I SWORE that those I love will never know the brokenness inside of me/
that I will bleach these blood-stained sheets until every memory I see is cleansed of you/
I'll suture my own wounds so that the pain cast upon me by your emasculate attempt at
power will be nothing but scars left as a reminder/
that imperfection is beauty and pain/
well, pain is beauty, too.

Gridlock

Brit Melson

The thoughts in my head are a Los Angeles traffic jam
going everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

Gridlock. Standstill. Endless lines of cars trying to penetrate my heart –
then out of nowhere you came flying at 110 through the canyon of my mind.
42 CAR PILE UP – leaving only flames behind.

And now I can't make sense of this mess inside my head;
the body count's not in, but my love for you is dead.

The Poet

Brit Melson

A poet.

That's what they call me, but these lines of words do poetry no justice
when the unfathomable becomes reality and I can't clearly see
where I begin or who is me.

A poet.

A person whose worlds flow freely with no effect from gravity
floating away from emotional instability using these words to bandage
everywhere I bleed and planting seeds of hope in my gaping wounds
where self-care can heal, and flowers will bloom.

X

Brit Melson

I realized that God is real when I met you.
Not because of your heavenly beauty or your divine intellect,
but because I know you'll be my greatest sin –

and I cannot deny a God
when the devil has consumed me.

Life Sentence

Brit Melson

rib cage sits like
prison bars around
your heart
like bones serving
as guards
turning your skin into
impenetrable walls
and I wonder if this
is my life sentence

The World is Clock

Brit Melson

The world is a clock and sitting upon its face
are beautiful colors of nature and race
the hour marker rests at the dawn of new love
your eyes meeting mine was a sign from above
the clock struck twelve and
our arms reached each other
staying frozen in time
I'll never love another



Caitlin Wolf

Creed

By: Caitlin Wolf

I have invoked you
In morning prayers;
Split my sleep-stuck lips
With your hallowed name.
I have sacrificed
My newborn thoughts
As a burnt offering
In unbidden praise.
I have demanded
Your divinity
And bid my bones,
"Awake! Proclaim!"

I have feared
The implication
Of the silence
In which they remain.
I have refused
The limit of humanity
Written in lines
On your faultless face.
I have believed,
To your detriment,
That you were something
Better than born in sin.

I have blamed You,
With novice's fervency,
For being blood-filled
As all others have been.

Los Angeles; My Oddity

Gerald Horowitz

i. mirror winks

i headed east with you out around
the mural you painted as a kid
we spent all weekend in that heat
the right time to
"pride and prejudice" this valley with you-

a second later, and i would have changed my mind
watching "mrs. doubtfire" after robin
williams died-

but these roots stay planted, the valleys breezy
sleeping on my side again, and feeling icy sweats
and then on to the volcano.

you were projecting me
mirrors delivered me
passersby observing
selfies on mt. whitney.

you beam a full smile
as your insides scream rage

but someone embarrassed you in middle school
i wasn't your lover then
so i'll always be fascinated
by how you could just trade games of tag
and play pretend

our "last night" on the 405
when you demanded i change the track
because he wished you could get
that bar tab back.

you were screening mirror winks
non-judgmental god eyes
digesting italian in san diego

you were watching re-runs
mirror winks interpreted
big foot's penis size revealed

first last name on an email thread

i let sleeping beagles lie
they awoke blue butterflies
tomorrow is a blank yellow page
yesterday is 3rd class passage on
the titanic
i'm at the tip of a ball point pen
diving into the plankton.

ii. truth or dare

trying to; play truth or dare
when it comes to your turn
you always have the nerve

you're the lady who tried to clean us out

look and see
through pinky promise inheritances from our grandparents
and besties
in the checkout line i'll be patient

we have similar smiles
i experimented with styles
thin as splinters
and you're three miles as thick

look and see
i'm sunshine on a mirrored lens,
in the electric auction i'll keep my head on a swivel

next time i sit cross-legged with you,
you'll teach me a trillion various names
and final, wrinkled terms.

lo and behold
i'm a hole hoop of sunrises, a loop hole
like light in a pitcher;

when you open the garage i'll be dancing.

iii. where did the streetlights go?

my photography, it doesn't have your panache.
if it did, i'd take a selfie
record my surf sessions,

tearing up flush on my face
longing for a kiss.

they told me everything runs on electricity.

i have this girl who approaches a jury in downtown;
she's friends with the patsy ramsey documentaries,
classic comedies, weirdness, too much space
and too many depositions to be drafted.

where did the streetlights go?

they're sitting with their backs up straight,
riding on a seat of lighting
full of commercial business currents
through a bullet proof glass.

i've truly never loved anything, not even myself.

but to get out of bed
i need to touch the wall behind me;

otherwise i feel the stiffness
otherwise i lay there motionless,
maybe kiss your pillow,
and roll back to my side
to stare at your lips
on the ceiling.

Beat

Katia McEvoy-Holguin

I beat myself to the ground
One more round
As if everything would change
By replaying what's unchanged
I wish I could stop
But it's too late in the game
I beat myself
With words I don't see
But, clearly, I can hear
They cut deep
They run in my blood
They cruise through me
And take control
I believe what I hear
Even if unspoken
Because at the end
I can't stop beating myself
One more time
Around and around
I am left bleeding on the ground.



UNTITLED
Katia McEvoy-Holguin

Carvings: Desk #5

Carla Chacon

Haha
That's OK!
Smile!
I'll just kill you.
Why?
Because Einstein,
we are all
destroyed by watching.

But fuck,
Nobody can drag me down,
for everyone but me
be Too short;
Too busy.

Can I have you?
nah.
God know:
Hate the People.

But hey,
"Smile!"
"Be interesting!"
Yuck!
Fuck this.
I ain't no log.

Haha
love me over,
then watch me do evil.
Can I have you?
Nah.
It's me:
RIP
Bitch

Relaxing

Andrei Closs

Hard day's work done.
Here I lie relaxing on
the back porch steps
gazing at the blueish
sky.

It's filled with
action. The clouds
sailing, the planes
gliding, and the
birds soaring.

Far above them,
the moon sound
asleep.
For it works night shifts,
and soon it'll light up.

Lay here watching
the sky turn different
colors and the stars
appear.
Like a million fireflies.

All kinds of adventures
shoot above me.
While I lie here
filled with awe.

The Oak Tree and the Flower

Andrei Closs

By the old Oak tree,
is nothing but barren fields.
No life of any kind,
just the old Oak tree.

The dark clouds cry,
for the lonely tree.
The tears improve the
soil, for up comes a
flower.

The old Oak tree blooms,
it hasn't bloomed in years.
The flower's scarlet face,
completes the isolated
beauty.

As the light breezes pass by,
the new friends exchange melodies.
Songs that bring joy,
and tunes that show
love.

The old Oak tree has a companion,
the companion has a friend.
They are side by side,
no matter the season.



BIG BAD
Kelly Dozier

Obsidian and Caramel

San Juanita Baldwin

You lay there with such grace

Much like the queen...Nzinga

Your satin skin glowed

As beads of sweat forms

I laid my body over yours

The intensity of our heat rose

Higher and higher

Looking over my shoulder, into a mirror I see

The beauty of you and me...

Entwined together

You a precious obsidian gem

Me caramel

Delusions

Kelly Dozier

Guilt sneaks into my lips as I've kissed these stranger's lips.

How often have we danced this dance?

How often have I had pleasures from his tender kiss?

In my daily, they've become a familiarity I've embraced all too willi

This delusion is soothing to the palate of this naive native who is w

is forcing a "love" emotion inside of you; however, it's such a farce
madly for you.

he only thing that should be on our minds but why does guilt soak i
won't escape my mind?

Tremor

Mateo Lara

stoke flame stoke shame out of a smoke-filled room
listen: a no-nothing is pulsing underneath division
there is you _____ there is us
they separated enough
lingers and promises these empty fields will emerge with bloom.
come along ramshackle house is filled with wasps is divided
with wings and webs.
that fracture in your ribs another bone for sacrifice tell me these lies
will make sense in the future
future
reference boy
boy
is not boy
is jewelis juniper berry is crushed into wet.
not white not yet not ripe
tension is flame between a devastation such as Papa dying
such as field-work and triumph such as calloused hands
rotting rotten such as this grief-gut gouging
comfort into split particles of anger & ether.
there is you _____ there is us
right between fissure
a crack in the surface made way for a broken promise
a relapse a tremor in an aching throat.

MAUSOLEUM

Mateo Lara

"While Grindr is not being challenged or in danger of being challenged by governmental regulatory bodies, I offer these two examples to show that the drive for profit of tech companies often seen as a shining example of ingenuity and profitability in the contemporary American economy can be questioned and challenged." Bryce J. Renninger (2018)

Time of Death: a balm in your hand—show me the money. glistening. they want our money

I [] YOU petrified rotting hey
wait

Not Us [] Not We

[] someone said bodies as in governed bodies as in desired

These moments were real right right? They were. I am loved.

They want us dead. Or they want us spending. Not time with each other, but with static.

Not You [] Not I

You have one new notification tap tap tap tap tap tap

Fire devil hi uncut? How hung? What are you into what do you need?

12 AM We [] We
We

[] please find me here I've not gone long without

They [] Them

& bodies & bodies & bodies & bodies – I am trying to fill in gaps gazing out of my attempt

& fuck & love & sex & body—he he lunges forward in despair his diamonds my god

& death & bodies & debt & department my god his diamonds are everywhere.

[] free plus xtra indeed find

sparkling men want you []

[] shivering at night running out

how about now a sound worth repeating come through my window lay me down in your beeping

US [] WE US WE

Not me not me not me not me he does not love you

Spoke to the times, the only time someone let crackling mean mending through flame was a statue, my glittering nails dictated me now as jewel as ... as ... as ...

Mi Culpa

Mateo Lara

you're never his favorite
a guillotine acts as embrace
right at your back, he licks
& you think as blood drips
my fault my fault my fault.

your effort is never enough
one brown boy to another
he takes you by the hand
kisses or bites, you never recall
but you stall in the dim-lit hall
and press against him, what a tease
for a beast and his prey, now
what was it again about a weak
need or lusting after a bright
light that neither shadow or hell
could completely consume.

you know, you repeat.
my fault my fault my fault.

you are not safe out here
you abide by your own rules
you crack and crinkle this
thin ego you've worked
so delicately to form
but in one moment, you tear
it all up and can only go:
my fault my fault my fault.

SOUL OF A SINNER

John Hunter

The old me died, the new me has arrived
new mind, new soul, new ears, new eyes/
I view lives as if mine, I view time as if i'm
free to be like a breeze over the sea/
It's no longer about me ya' see
if i turn the "m" upside down, then it is easily-"we"/
We can be so powerfully
especially if we grow from the ground up like roots, then the tree/
Then if we branch off and spread love like a warm quilt
we'll stand tall overall as if we're on stilts/
We'll be able to see all that we've built
pull the people together making the world tilt/
Us grinning will keep the earth spinning
from the old to the young, until the end back to the beginning/
As long as we're winning but not like Charlie Sheen
you don't have to drink "tiger's blood" if you know what i mean/
Life isn't perfect but living is worth it
and success is always searching for that certain person/
Who will it be, is it you or is it me?
who ever it chooses, i hope that it chooses to set us all free.

American Youth Too (2018)

Sam Underwood

Hey Jack! Let's go to the soda shop on first street n'get us a malt.

Can't Dave. City shut it down, lack of p'rental supervision.

How about the sock hop on Friday night?

Cops broke it up, judge said we're leading a dissolute and immoral life.

Let's go listen to some vinyl at the record store.

No more tunes like that. Record store s'thing of the past.

Well we can go roller skatin' at the rink!

Sorry pal, city taxes forced them to raise their prices till none went no more, out of business now.

Pool hall?

Gone.

But all we ever did was shoot pool and cuss!

They say it was a den of iniquity.

How about skate boarding?

Illegal.

Let's go play video games at the arcade.

It's gone, they say it was desensitizing us towards violence.

We can sit around play on our tablets...

Parents say that'll rot our brains...we need to get outside and do something.

What about those new fixie bikes, let's go ride!

Grownups complain about'em being a traffic hazard.

So what are we supposed to do?

I dunno...

Fuck 'em then. Let's go to the liquor store, steal a bottle of whiskey, smoke some weed on the canal bank behind the grove.

I guess that's all we can do...till time catches us.

Today

Sam Underwood

"In my California, you can watch the sun go down"
- Lee Herrick

Today, summer breeze clears the air,
so the moon stays bright,

lighting up the night sky. Teens commit sins
in cars parked among trees full of citrus.

Today, the ground is hot, blistering
the soul, agitating families

till they snap at each other.
Petty arguments-meaningless, they are

still family. Today, families of immigrants
are afraid of tomorrow, because of the box

on the wall. Today, global warming
feels real at one hundred and ten degrees, radiance

dripping from the sun. Today a
man serving elotes and ice cream

on my street is a criminal, and
conniving politicians are revered.

Today, things need to change,
in order for it all to be

the same. One plus one equals one...
yet neither side knows why.
Today chapters and verses

bring more pain than redemption.
People are who we are.

Today our vision shouldn't judge.

Today the book should stay silent.

Today the thumping of my heart
beats out of my chest,
with love and hope for tomorrow.

Together

Sam Underwood

Our home was always full of laughter,
smiling faces and hearts that can't resent
that life keeps us moving faster.

When the daily-days got tougher
and we couldn't pay our rent,
even broke our house was full of laughter.

And the days seemed to get busier
when our energy was all but spent,
we just had to keep moving faster.

If anger almost closed a chapter
and we thought we said what we meant,
our sweet tears after were filled with laughter.

Hard times came, but even in a disaster
when our spirit had not a dent,
the time flew by much faster.

Looking back now years after
as the good and bad came and went,
our hearts were always full of laughter
and still our lives keep moving faster.



ELECTRIC LADY
Kelly Dozier

The Narcissist and Her

by: Priscilla Huerta

She loved so effortlessly, gracefully, and wholeheartedly.
She spoke so eloquently, pleasantly, and purposely.
She had all the love in the world to give and you did not hesitate to take a grip.

You poured your cheap replication of love and affection into her heart and soul,
and she fought for you with no hesitation.
You left handprints and scars on a body, and she fought every day to stay
afloat.

And where are you now?

Mr. I love you.
Mr. You're too much, you're not enough.
Mr. You've brought it upon yourself.

You're nowhere to be seen.
Not a single fault, you've just always been so pristine.

She crumbles and cries,
Knowing there's no clearer reply.
She questions herself, hates herself, takes the blame.

She condemned herself,
Believed every knife inflicted brought by your misuse of delight
was an accurate reflection of her own light.

Well, now I refuse.

I refuse to hand over that power.
I will not accept anything less than breathtaking, intoxicating, pulsating
devotion.
And I don't need you for that, I have me.

It starts with me.

Summerland

Taylor Clark

In August, honey, you were mine
Tongue of tequila, lips of wine
Sunlight warm in bones, on skin
Drenching in yellow, bathing of sin

In August, honey, you were mine
Pour the hot tea, dull the shine
Saying goodbye, goosebumps on skin
Like we'll never see the heat again

68 MPH

Taylor Clark

It almost feels criminal to be able to fly this fast
After standing still for so long
Here on the pavement is where the speed of light exists
And I won't go into the darkness again

And you, next to me, the sweat of 3 am dripping from your lips
You roll my heart around with your tongue
Contemplating it, savoring it,
And whisper honey into my ear:
"Faster."

Exeunt .

Taylor Clark

Here's goodbye to you,
And your out of character kisses
Playing hide-and-seek behind the curtains,
Backstage: hushed, soft, dark
Melting between the lines of music and lights like the rising sun,
Never quite reaching either one

Here's goodbye to you,
In the back seat of your car
Where you whispered promises into my mouth
And where they almost reached my heart,
Existing between the lines of streetlights and radio hum
Never quite reaching either one

So here's goodbye to you,
And your backstage, your back seat, your background
I want to share the spotlight with someone
And burn with the thrill of being onstage, unapologetic
So goodbye to you, to our last run
I won't settle for the darkness when I deserve the sun

Avenida Pennsylvania

Poema. política
San Juanita Baldwin

El Cucuy vive por la avenida 1600 Pennsylvania

Espero que no vivirá allí mucho más tiempo

El Cucuy dijo que mi gente es de mala honda

Y quiere mandar a mi gente de vuelta

Pero pregunto, ¿de vuelta a dónde? ¿No te das cuenta Cucuy... los Soñadores

Han vivido aquí la mayor parte de su vida

Y este es el único país que conocen

El Cucuy ha traído muchas pesadillas para los indocumentados

Y nos sigue amenazando... con la construcción de un muro

Además, quiere que yo o México paguemos por el muro

Digo yo... Cucuy si quieres el muro... págalo tu

Con toda la ganancia del sudor de mi gente

Constrúyalo con tus propias manos mientras el sol te golpea la espalda

Y te quema la cara

El Cucuy vive en la casa blanca

Espero que no vivirá allí mucho más tiempo

Les digo a mis amigos, vecinos, estudiantes y todos los votantes... por aquí

Voten, ejerciten su derecho... voten el 6 de noviembre

Y vamos a la lucha de sacar el Cucuy... de la Avenida Pennsylvania

Sanjovea... Aka San Juanita Baldwin

18-10-18

Pennsylvania Avenue

Poem, political
San Juanita Baldwin

(Cucuy is Boogeyman)

The "cucuy" lives on 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

I hope he won't live there much longer

The "cucuy" says my people are bad

And he wants to send them back

I ask, where do you want to send them?

Don't you realize "Cucuy" the DREAMERS

Have lived here most of their life

And this is the only country they know

The "cucuy" has brought nightmares to the undocumented

The "cucuy" threaten to build a wall

Furthermore... he wants me or Mexico to pay for it

I say, "Cucuy" if you want the wall you pay for it

With all your financial gain from the sweat of my people

Build it...with your own hands, while the sun beats your back, and burns your face

The "cucuy" lives in the White House

I hope he won't live there much longer

I say to all my friends, neighbors, students and all voters

Vote! Exercise your right to vote on November 6th

Let's fight to remove the "cucuy" from Pennsylvania Avenue

Eagle Feathers

Brit Melson

(Author's Note: The F-15 Eagle, created by McDonnell Douglass, has been the most commonly used fighter jet and intercept platform by the U.S. Air Force for decades. This is a poem about the struggles faced by the victims of these attacks, but also about hope, as we recognize that American's hold a power to create social change by perpetually projecting strong voices of love and acceptance.)

if home is where the heart is
then where is my home when I am
disheartened
and where is my heart
when I have no home

my bones ache to sing the folk songs
of my long-gone motherland
they ache to hold my mother's calloused hands
and to see the rich fields of the lands that my father would tend
but never again – no, no never again

cause our roots were ripped and our soil lay stripped
from the terror-laden flight of the Eagle
whose truculent talons gripped our branches and
baleful beaks stripped the ancient leaves
of our quickly decaying family tree

we were root-rotting refugees
searching for the light in the same sun that burnt US –
praying to our God(s) to take US home
seeking comfort in alone

we roamed our New World

but alone never came

as the wind sang battle cries echoing voices of change

and the rain washed away the dirt

and the hurt began to fade as we swayed

to the songs of our new tribe – our new family –

the theme song of our new life

we found hope in the breaths that filled our lungs

to the chants of “I stand with you; You are one of US;

& You are not alone” –

and in this once foreign land allies embraced our hands

outpouring their love and holding new friends

solidarity and strength, they were born in this scene

as we plucked out the feathers from the old Eagle’s wings

and we used his sharp beak to correct his hate speech

‘til formed were these arrows of bold unity

then tightly we cocked them at failed policy

fiercely piercing the injustice of inequality

Your Poem

Julieta Ortiz

My heart is filled with contempt for those who had murdered your spirit,

I've felt your pain every Sunday over soft spoken prayer

I've watched you silently weep before God

begging for mercy,

But sometimes I sense death

I watch as you sit outside after another day under the suns forceful kisses,

a ghost of a child who used to yearn for more

your eyes filled with the red of your own blood

your heart strangled with a ball and chain

A mechanism that carries the weight of your mothers pleas to not leave your home

You reassured yourself this was right

But today the reassurance is a lingering question that only the end of a bottle can

answer,

You play with your fingers,

a habit I've picked up

I long to reach to you

and yet I falter

you told me on the drive home one night from school that I am not made of stone

and as I watch the red streetlight illuminate your weary face,

I know that neither are you.



PUSH
Alexandria R. Thomas



UNTITLED
Chelsea Jasmine Geronimo

The image features a background of stylized, hand-drawn flowers in shades of brown and tan. The flowers have prominent centers and layered petals. Overlaid on this background is the text "Short Stories" in a large, bold, black cursive script. The text has a white outline, making it stand out against the floral pattern. The overall aesthetic is artistic and vintage.

Short Stories

THE MESSAGE

By Rachel Ann Stratemeier

A siren sounded in the mid-morning of a May day, and the sound of the screech shook a young man still asleep. He sat up, his eyes wide and now fully awake, but not completely aware of the sound that woke him. When his mind finally stretched itself to reality, he began to realize the reasons for his sleepy state. A look of miserable frustration flooded his face, and he rolled his eyes at himself.

"Why did you do that AGAIN?" he said to himself. "You REALLY need to stop doing that, you know!" he practically yelled.

He was speaking of his penchant for passing the long hours of the night watching meaningless documentaries on Netflix. This one in particular was all about World War Two, commemorating the one-hundredth anniversary of the allies' victory. He had unconventional obsessions.

He looked around further at his living place, with books and papers strewn here and there and everywhere, so much so that one could not find a way out if the building happened to catch fire. His face made the same look as before; a look that suggested inner scrutiny, and inner judgement.

"If Luna happens to want to get something from your apartment today, she-will-have-a-fit! You need to clean this place up!"

But by no means was it dirty, it was only disorganized. Luna hated disorganized.

His landline rang.

It was a strange thing for a landline to ring, no-one had them anymore. He had one, for emergency reasons. The small black alien looking thing rang another time. It was so strange he questioned whether or not it was simply a fluke, and just after it rang a third time a voice like steel said,

"Glass is not transparent. There is a world behind it. Sirens screech everywhere, and there is nothing but silver steel. Blue fire is the doom of society. Time is a clock, but time cannot make up for past wrongdoings. Don't look to either fire, blue or red. Both will make you dance without asking. The only way to save yourself is to look to the sun and the moon for they are real and will never fade away."

The call ended.

He looked over the phone, and saw the number displayed on the caller ID. The number was certainly not one he recognized, and certainly not from a mobile phone.

Albert realized he was atomically late for work, and if he was not there in ten minutes, he would most certainly be reprimanded by someone, so he lit off like blue lightning into the distance....

"You're very late," said Luna upon his arrival. She had an air about her that she was going somewhere but waiting impatiently for her tardy co-worker.

"Ya' think I didn't already know that?" was his response.

"Reporters and their rhetorical questions," she said. "Anyways, we have to get on that interview with Amadeus Mond from silver city construction."

Albert, this early in the morning, was drawing a blank.

"Who?" he said.

"Ya' know, that guy who got hit by the ambulance last week. We have to show his side of the story, the boss says. He says it'll be a hit story, and maybe you won't get fired for being late three times this month."

Albert rolled his eyes and they continued, grabbing coffee, papers, pens, and their glass panes.

Luna suddenly stopped in the commotion and said, "Wait, Albert, I have to call my cat." A pause. "No seriously, he gets anxious if I don't call him before I'm out."

Luna took her clear, rectangular glass pane, and blue numbers shone on its surface. The blinding blue light was eye-piercing to some, to others it was a source of constant interest. Its sheen would have been considered strange and unnatural, and its transparent surface a miracle only a few years before, but it was as ubiquitous as an object could be. She dialed and put it up to her ear.

"Now, Mittens, you be a good kitty today. I'll be home soon, don't worry.... Who's a good kitty? Who's a good kitty?"

Interned in the steel of a taxi cab, Albert T. Solis asked, "Tell me what we're doing again, I don't watch the news."

"The irony," Luna said.

"Well this guy obviously was crossing the street, just a normal citizen carrying out his right-of-way, and an ambulance running a red just hit him!"

"And how is he not dead?"

"It wasn't going that fast. Anyway, the really ironic thing about this is that the ambulance was transporting someone with minor injuries from another accident. Isn't that weird?"

Albert could not call that weird, for weird spoke into his ear on his landline, and he paused to reflect on the cryptic message, now saved on his answering machine. He contemplated whether or not he should divulge the secrets to Luna, and after a few moments of steely silence he said, "I got a really... strange call on my landline this morning."

"Landline, nobody has those anymore."

"I do for emergency reasons."

"What did he say?" Luna asked, a tone of curiosity pervading her words. The air became still, and the silver walls of the cab felt only the suspense of curiosity

"Is this important?" Albert asked.

"It depends on how weird that call was."

"Very."

"Then I'd say it's... supremely trivial."

Albert redirected the cab to his apartment....

The pair sat in the only clear floor space in the apartment, both situated on either side of the alien black phone. They listened to the message:

"Glass is not transparent. There is a world behind it. Sirens screech everywhere, and there is nothing but silver steel. Blue fire is the doom of society. Time is a clock, but time cannot make up for past wrongdoings. Don't look to either fire, blue or red. Both will make you dance without asking. The only way to save yourself is to look to the sun and the moon for they are real and will never fade away."

Luna's look developed into the kind of shock reserved for supreme mystery, and Albert saw Luna's look of wonder.

"You weren't lying. What are we going to do about it?"

"We're going to figure it out," Albert said....

"Well, what do we know?" Luna said, pacing where possible. "We know he called you for a reason. Somebody doesn't employ an extremely antiquated piece of technology for no reason. He had a specific purpose."

Albert, thinking that obvious, said, "And why is that important?"

"Because he's trying to tell you something, a message."

"Why did he call me?" he said, "Maybe because I'm the only person in the world who still has a landline?"

"Wait, so you have caller ID on that thing don't you?" Luna said.

"That won't help, Luna. I didn't recognize the number and I don't remember it. All I know is that it had to be another landline and that really doesn't do us any good either."

"How do you know the other side was a landline?"

Albert got up from his cross legged position, "If you bother to buy one of these things," Albert said, "You better learn something about them. Numbers where the first digit is a three is always a landline."

"So you remember that, but you don't remember the number."

"I suppose so. Such is life."

Luna paced wider around the apartment, stepping over the clutter, "So, the call was from a landline to a landline. That has to mean something. He called you on the landline for a reason, not just because it's a landline."

Albert was illuminated and looked at nothing at all. "Maybe because landlines...are not as available to surveillance."

"Yes, like he's a spy or something and wants to reach you without triggering any 'red flags.'"

"But why would a spy call me? I'm not a spy."

"But you are a reporter," Luna said.

"He wants to send a message."

"Not just to you but to the world," Luna finished his sentence....

They were back in another cab on their way to the engagement they were distracted from earlier, but the conversation still strongly tended to the enigma they just witnessed.

"Time," Albert said. "He said something about time--"

"And many other things," said Luna.

"But something tells me that's the beginning. That's where he wants us to start."

Albert pulled out his glass pane and involuntarily checked the time.

After that, the cab pulled to their destination and both reached the door of the large gray building of Silver Construction.

Once talking to Mr. Mond, he added to the strange events of the day.

"The weird thing is, I don't think I saw anybody driving it."

Luna's notebook was un-looked at and unwritten in. Both sat on the red couch in the lounge with their mouths gaping.

"Like, it was driving itself. And it knew I was there, I was certain, and it just kept coming. It knew it was going to hit me, like it did it on purpose."

"Thank you for your time," Luna said.

"Hey, are people going to come to my house and take pictures of me and stuff? That would be cool."

Luna turned to her interviewee, "That is a real possibility."

And they left for another cab.

Both were silent in the cab, but neither was silent in their minds. They were mulling over the strange events of the past hours. Was this merely a string of neat coincidences? It was more like Albert's apartment: a complicated, interconnected mess, disorganized, but not in the least bit dirty, and not in the least bit a coincidence. Both Albert and Luna knew this, and it was the reason for their steely silence; they could not help but feel a sense of impending doom encased in the silver prison.

Before long they were back in Albert's apartment, sitting cross-legged on the floor, contemplating the message. They listened to it for a third time:

"Glass is not transparent. There is a world behind it. Sirens screech everywhere, and there is nothing but silver steel. Blue fire is the doom of society. Time is a clock, but time cannot make up for past wrongdoings. Don't look to either fire, blue or red. Both will make you dance without asking. The only way to save yourself is to look to the sun and the moon for they are real and will never fade away."

They stood up.

"Time." Albert said

"What about time?"

"Your name, my name, Albert Solis."

"Moon and Sun," Luna said.

"And my first name--"

"Albert like Albert Einstein."

"Yes, and time."

They looked at each other. A siren sounded far away. They slowly took out their glass panes with a strange severity, and they both turned on and shone in the dim light with blue fire illuminating their faces.

"Blue fire," Luna said.

"Glass," Albert said.

The thing slipped out of his hand, and it fell, painfully quick. The siren-like sound could be heard after it shattered into a million pieces.

A Gift

By Caitlin Wolf

"It's her birthday, Edith. She can tag along."

Marie sat silently in the kitchen, listening and wondering if the coaxing of her mother's man-of-the-moment, Jesse, would have any effect. Some years ago, remembered Marie, after a particularly violent outburst over a spoiled dress, she heard for the first time the strangeness of her adoptive mother's reasoning, from a straightforward admonishment to cleanliness to a confusing diatribe on the relation between dirty girls and demon possession, along the pitted and tangential pathways of Edith's psyche, it struck Marie that the voice of authority in her life, together with her sense of safety, rested on the questionable and capricious mental scaffolding of the screaming woman before her, who quaked and rattled and threatened to cave in on herself and crush Marie at any moment. It was around this time that Jesse entered their lives, at first a peripheral adornment to her mother's carousel of dubious suitors, but now a fixture in their small house. Marie couldn't help caring for him; he seemed to be as much at Edith's mercy as she was.

"Do you think you ought to do something nice for her after giving her that shiner?" Jesse questioned.

"She doesn't deserve anything! You know that she was at that boy's house again last night? 'Til who knows when! Quite a little jezebel this one's turning out to be. The little slut! I should've done worse to her. If I catch her again, I'll kill her. I'll kill her, Jesse! You think I won't?"

"She'll hear you! Hush. Just let's take her with us. She ain't got to sit with us or anything. You won't even notice she's there, and it's her birthday, Edith! For Christ's sake."

"You do as you like, spoiling that child! I can't beat no sense into her if you are always going to be treating her to this and that!"

"Oh, like hell! I'm going to go tell her she can come."

The bedroom door opened and closed again, the click and thud framing Edith's words, though a murmured vitriol could still be heard seeping through the walls. Marie jumped to her feet, then hastily sat back down, then stood again. She struggled to find an occupation, and merely jittered unnaturally as Jesse rounded the corner of the hallway and walked into the small kitchen.

"Ah, Marie—I got it all worked out with your mother—"

"She ain't my mother."

"Now, talk like that is just making it more difficult for you, girl."

"I ain't no girl. I'm 16 today. I'm a woman."

"Aw, hell. Now listen—" Jesse paused, Edith's muffled voice and the slamming of dresser drawers emanated from the house.

"Well, I guess you could hear it anyway. But you're coming to the show with us."

"I don't even want to go. I don't want to spend my birthday with her."

"Look kid, you're coming. And shut up and put on a happy face about it, got it? It's my birthday present to you. And there's something else too, but, uh," he paused as the angry muttering coming from the bedroom started to subside, "c'mon, I'll tell you out back."

Jesse escorted Marie out the kitchen's backdoor and around the corner of the house. His hand was clenched in his pocket and he looked back around behind them as they walked. Marie eyed him with disdain and suspicion. Of all Edith's boyfriends, Jesse was the youngest, only maybe fifteen years older than Marie herself. He had been the kindest to her as well. Edith was about five years older than Jesse in turn, and Marie was confused and, frankly, disgusted by their relationship. She could not understand why men were so drawn to Edith, who could be so violent and cruel. Of course she had the capacity to be as gentle

and sweet as anyone could wish, yet, in a moment, without obvious provocation, one might be dodging dishware, flung with venomous insults.

Marie had borne this since she was a toddler, left at Edith's door by her birth parents under circumstances that remained unclear and filled Marie with impotent fury. What kind of parents, she thought, would abandon their child to such a woman? And what kind of man would come back, again and again, to the bed of woman so unkind, so withered under the weight of "living hard"? Marie was dropped there, but Jesse had hobbled to Edith's door on his own steam.

Jesse walked in front of her, craning his head to check that Edith remained fuming in her room, and wasn't spying through the window. He walked slowly, with a limp, an accident with a horse when he was a boy, his back was crooked and he was always in pain. He wasn't very useful as a farmhand in rural Iowa, and Marie imagined that he depended mostly on her mother for money, and she knew he relied on Edith for "medication", the kind the doctor couldn't provide. "Look kid," Jesse had told her once, "your mama ain't all bad. She's got troubles. She's not herself sometimes. It ain't her fault. She has moods." Marie wondered how much this medication influenced Jesse's understanding compassion for Edith, but this was no sort of justification. It was an inexcusable weakness.

Marie couldn't help her weakness; she was diminutive, the natural child of a "filthy Mexican farmhand," she barely crested the five-foot mark at 16, and weighed less than 90 pounds. Just the night before, she had come home to find Edith on the couch, waiting, angry, drunk, and "in a mood". Marie paused at the door, and took in the image of a wild-eyed Edith, perched on the couch, surrounded by clipped-up catalogues, scissors still in hand. Marie was ready for a fight, she had known it is was coming all night. She'd been out later than usual, celebrating her birthday with a few friends from school, and she knew the

greeting that would attend her unusual tardiness. But Edith was a large woman, and armed as she was, with the scissors and with the mood, it was going to be a sorely tilted match. She had been clipping the pictures out of catalogues the church ladies had dropped off, as she often did when Marie was out. Edith loved to cut slowly and carefully along the edges of the illustrated women in lovely floral gowns. She'd trim them down so perfectly that one might be fooled into thinking they were real miniature women, very slightly cartoonish, with glossy red lips split in permanent, wide smiles. These idealized women were stored away in an old hat box, and when Marie was a child she once made the mistake of pulling the hatbox out of the closet and playing dolls with the women. She had to stay home for a week, until the welts went down and the bruising dissipated from her face. No one noticed, Marie was often absent.

But Jesse was there last night, waking up from a nap in the bedroom he came just in time to snatch the scissors from Edith's hands, but in a stupor, he was not fast enough to pin her down and Marie now bore a black eye and several bruises on her torso.

Jesse stopped out of earshot of the kitchen, though he was continuously checking the backdoor for movement.

He turned to Marie and bent down so their eyes met and his face was only inches away.

"Look, kid. I've got this gift for you."

His clenched fist came out of his pocket still in a ball; he held it out to Marie.

"C'mon now, open your hands!"

She put both her hands in a bowl under his clenched fist. He opened his hand and two crumpled twenty dollar bills and five fell into Marie's open palms. Her stomach dropped. She'd never held that much money all at once. It felt strangely light, for all its import. Just some greasy paper, after all.

"Don't ask."

Jesse preempted any interrogation on the origin of such a fortune, though Marie was more concerned about what she might be asked to do in exchange for such a sum.

"Look, it's a gift, ok? Um, but you do have to do one thing. When we get to the show today, I'm gonna make you sit away from us, by the out door, ok? Listen. Wait a few minutes, and look at me and your mother. I'll be kissing her or something, distracting, and when you see that just get the hell out and don't stop. You understand?"

"Jesse, what...what do you mean? Where do I go?"

"I don't know kid, but you're old enough to figure some stuff out on your own. That's enough money to take you far away from here and you better ride it as far as it will stretch. The movie theater is real close to the bus depot. So if you hurry you'll be on a bus and out of here before the show's over."

"Jesse, I can't. I don't have anybody."

"Girl, you ain't got anybody here either."

Marie looked at the money, she looked at Jesse, she trembled. She couldn't cry, though she wanted to, though she felt it might be expected.

"C'mon, kid. I know it's scary but I can't help you more than this. I'm not an angel, right? I'm in too deep with your mother, and...well...and I'm stuck here. But you don't have to be, got it? You're a bright girl. Something will work out for you. And if you stay here... She will kill you, Marie. She's not herself sometimes, more now than before, and she's got you in her head as the source of her trouble. So go, you got it?"

Marie nodded, though she was fairly sure she did not "get it". The conspirators returned to the house, and after some bargaining on Jesse's part, were able to convince Edith to come out of her bedroom.

The three loaded into Jesse's pickup, pressed into unwilling, sticky intimacy. It was a hot day. Marie felt the weight of the money in her small purse, it seemed like a stone, or maybe a ticking bomb. Marie stared out the window

over the fields and Edith glowered at her and at times at Jesse, distrust and an uneasy mind building a whole conspiracy. It was a long way into the town and to the theater, nearly 30 miles, and they rode in silence the whole way there.

With the Chime of Wedding Bells

By Destinee Sims

The church bells chimed. Was it her funeral, or her wedding? Calliope was on the floor and had no intention of getting up. She did not even look up when she heard the hotel room door open, as she knew by the heavy sound of the heels that it was her maid of honor. Only Presley walked like a marauder and would wear heels that high before she absolutely had to.

Presley did not immediately speak when she saw Calliope. The room was ominously silent.

"Calliope? What's going on babe? Is everything all right?" Babe. Presley had decided to be nice.

"I can't go through with it..."

But maybe she wasn't going to be so nice. "You can't back out now! You know that. We need that money!" Calliope knew that she was the one who had created the mess, so she was the one who had to clean it up. It just was easier said than done when it was at the expense of her love life. Who wants to purposefully marry a fool you're not in love with, even if he's rich? He had even suggested that she arrive in a horse-drawn carriage! She would have preferred a pair of Doc Martins!

"I just can't do it Pres. It's easy for you to agree with this wedding when you don't have anything to lose from it. The money would be bailing you out of your problems, not mine."

Presley's face twisted in fury. "You crashed the car! You ran the man over! You were the one that got us caught! You could have just moved on and left him there." She continued in her special, meanest snarl, "Instead, you tattled to the police like the little girl you are. You have got to stop living in the fantasy world of yours!"

As she listened, something snapped in Calliope. The man had had a family. She had had to face them all in court. Presley didn't even get punished as harshly as she did. All she had had to do was pay for part of the pain and suffering and serve one year for the coke that the cops found on her. Calliope had had to do two years, two years she would never, ever forget. And she would never forget that she killed a man.

"I can't help that you just wanted to leave him there! I can't help that you decided to deal drugs! I can't help that you brought your friend's stuff with us!

"How could I warn you? You're a rat!"

Calliope didn't even realize that she had gotten up or moved towards Presley until her fist was connecting with her nose. Anger surged through her, insatiable no matter how many times she punched.

Dragging her hands across the floor around her, Presley scrambled for anything that could serve as a weapon. Cutting herself on some unidentifiable sharp object, Presley figured the small tool was as good as any when she couldn't see. So, she brought the blade-like item down with the intent of hitting whatever she could.

What Calliope identified as a fallen letter opener plunged through the tissue in her thigh. She bellowed in pain. There was no amount of adrenaline that could make her numb to that. Still, reacting quickly out of reflex, she yanked the sharp blade from her leg and without thinking brought it back down, wedging the letter opener in between Presley's third and fourth rib.

It took a moment of Presley fighting to get air for Calliope to realize what she had just done. She could tell by the expression on her face that the blade had punctured a lung, meaning she most likely had limited time to figure out what to do.

Trying to move quickly, Calliope grabbed the thickest pillow she could find. There was only one thing left for her to do.

Smashing the pillow over her best friend's face, she has thought of what to say as Presley's breathing began to cease.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry this is how it had to end. I didn't want to do this twice. I wanted to move on. I wanted to live life with my best friend. I just don't want to sign my whole life away to that idiot in the church over one accident. I'm sorry."

Her apologies to the corpse were not insincere. Presley had been her best friend.

Calliope slowly stood up and heard more chimes of more bells. She made her way to Presley's feet. Grabbing hold, feeling her warmth for the last time, she dragged her into the suite connected to her room. No, the bathroom was not a permanent solution, but it would have to do since she had no other option.

Limping her way back into her bedroom, she went for the nightstand. She knew there was a backup travel sewing kit in it, as the stylist had left it in case anything went wrong with the dress. That big, princess-like wedding dress that she had never even wanted. Pulling out a needle and some of thread, she prepared herself for the pain she knew would come next. With nothing to numb the bloody area, she began the stitches and screamed bloody murder with every stitch.

Not realizing that Presley had left the door unlocked, Calliope hears the door burst open. Thomas, her groom, is staring at her with a gaping mouth.

"What the hell?!"

"It isn't really a big deal. I figured I could save time by just handling it myself..." She quietly trailed off. She sees his eyes drop to study her hands, as she had already finished her stitching.

"Jesus, there's a ton of blood!" Before she could respond, he was hurrying towards the bathroom, probably in search of medical supplies or something to clean up her wound.

The game was up. Calliope's head sunk to her chest. She just wanted to sleep.

With a gasp she sat up and looked around. She was no longer in the fancy hotel preparing for her wedding. She was looking at the same four-square walls she had been staring at for almost two years. Then it dawned on her; she never killed Presley. She had never even left the Texas state prison.



UNTITLED
Katia McEvoy-Holguin

THE END IS IN YOUR EYES

By Katia McEvoy-Holguin

I stared down at the item in my hand—a can of paint—as the desert’s chilling breeze blew furiously, messing my hair, and overwhelming me with a sense of impending dread.

“If you want to be a full-fledged member, you need to draw our insignia here,” Madeline pointed at Coyote Rock, our town’s landmark, before snatching my phone and starting to record. I held the can tighter, feeling my heart pound against my chest.

“Who’s there?” A shadow asked, climbing down from an adjacent hill, and making us flee. I kept running, dodging branches and creeks until we made it back to the preserve’s parking lot.

“Let’s go!” Madeline hushed as a scream called my name. The shadow tumbled, and under the moonlight, he didn’t look so mysterious anymore.

“He needs help.”

“We can’t help every weirdo we see.”

“Diego isn’t weird,” I blurted.

Madeline raised her eyebrows, stiffening her expression. “Really?”

I stood taller. “I have to go back.”

“Fine, but if you go, you’ll need this,” Madeline threw my phone, overestimating our distance, and smashing it against a trashcan. “Good luck saving your boyfriend.”

Madeline closed the car’s door with a slam and sped down the trail, leaving me in absolute darkness. As I picked my phone, a shred of remorse ran through my body. I used to know Diego so well; at least, until popularity’s magnetism began to pull me away from him and closer to Madeline, a dying star.

I found Diego sitting against the base of Coyote Rock. He inhaled sharply, wrapping his hand around his right ankle.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, tearing off a piece of my shirt and wrapping it around his wound. Then, before he could answer, a neon rain painted the sky in a soft, silver glow. Diego jerked his head up, staring at the sky with longing admiration.

"You came for this," I said, hypnotized by the fading lights of a meteor shower.

"Yeah, but I can't see it," He pointed at the glasses that hung from his hood. Its frames were scuffed and bent, and the lenses were as shattered as my phone's case. "I'm glad you came back though."

"I couldn't leave you." I admitted, hearing the leaves rustle.

"When was the last time we talked?"

"A while," I replied thoughtfully, pressing my phone's home button. "I miss it."

"Me too," Diego fixed his eyes on mine, making me yearn that peculiar warmth that emanated from them. We inched closer, little by little, trying to find those things we buried down but craved. Then, a dim light shone on our faces, bathing us in a bluish hue.

We smiled.

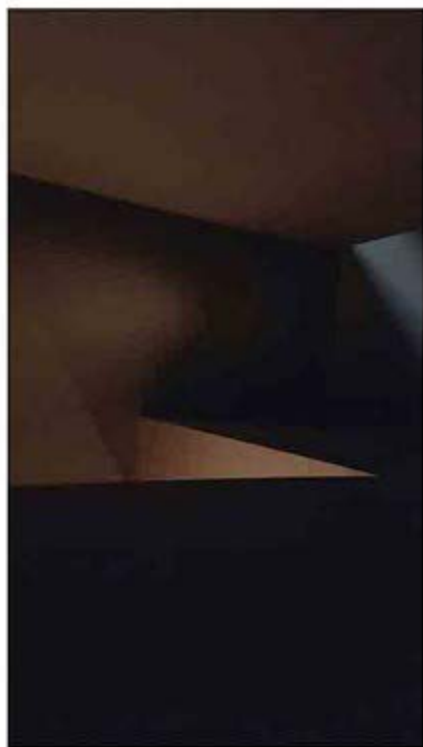
"It's kinda broken, but..." I offered my phone to him. "We can fix this."

"Yeah, we can."

Diego took the phone from my hand, brushing his fingertips against my skin. He was abnormally warm, and I found comfort in that. We lingered there, his hand on mine as we filmed the shower, slowly falling back into place.



CEILING
Austin Yi



THRESHOLD
Austin Yi

THE ACCORD

(PROLOGUE)

By Christian Harrington

When Alexei was little more than a child, a stranger came to his home. A long, wailing horn sounded their arrival, mournful in the arid air. The sound clawed its way up the weathered stone of a modest keep, cascading through the thick curtains of his window. It wrapped long talons around him; echoed through his mind. He was drawn to it as if tethered by a chain. Visitors were uncommon of late.

Blood rushing, nerves sparking in his core, he rose from his bed and crossed to the door. Yanking it open by the burnished handle, Alexei slipped from soft rug to the cold stone of the hallway. He scampered along, the windowless corridor comfortably lit from the thin vein of luminescent stone set into the walls. Glowstone: a rare, valuable import.

Down the stairs, feet scraping against rounded steps. Into the main hall, along deep crimson carpets recognizable even in the hazy reaches of his earliest memories. Into the foyer where stood the oaken doors into the courtyard and the sunlight.

Alexei's father was already there; tall, stoic. Cold. His skin was olive and lined beyond his years, the mark of a man who had earned his position despite a lifetime of hard sun. Alexei's mother stood a step behind, soft in vibrant silk. Beside the massive doors stood two guards draped in sand-brown cloaks. Halberds were held in easy grips. Alexei watched with curious eyes as they prepared to open the door.

"Shield your eyes, boy," his father said. Alexei squeezed them shut, felt the cool hands of his mother slip over his face. With the screech of wood and sand-stricken hinges the doors were pulled open. Even through his mother's palms,

Alexei could sense the powerful sunlight. It surged around the edges of her hands, danced its way to his vision. He felt its heat splash angrily against his face.

"Remove your hands, Cassandra," came father's gruff voice. "He's twelve now, he need not be coddled like a child." Alexei was prepared for this; he spent hours peeking through curtained windows with clenched eyes. When his mother caught him, she beseeched he stop. When father caught him, he nodded.

Still, Alexei felt her reluctance as she pulled her hands away, letting the full force of light crash upon him. It stung, as it always did, and the heat was a roaring fire, but he opened his eyes. Father nodded. "Good."

Alexei smiled despite the pain.

The stranger at their door had said nothing throughout the ritual, but that was customary. Young boys and girls were always shown the sun whenever possible; throughout their lives, the sunlight outside would never yield to the darkness of night.

Alexei blinked against it and struggled to examine the stranger. Wreathed in light, they wore a cloak of pure white that brushed against the ground. A deep hood left their face in darkness; little more than a silhouette against the low walls and reflective cobbles stones of the courtyard behind.

"Come in," his father said. The stranger swept inside as the guards shut the door tightly again, plunging the entry hall into semi-darkness once more. His vision restored, the boy took a closer look at the stranger-- a man, he saw. Young, perhaps as young as his father, but his skin...

His skin was as pale as his cloak.

"Do not stare, boy," his father reprimanded with a harsh look. "Our guest has traveled a long way." The stranger waved an ashen hand. "It is nothing," he said. His voice was like the whisper of water, holding none of father's sandy grit. "I imagine he's never seen my kind before," the stranger finished as he knelt before Alexei. He pulled back the hood, and Alexei caught his breath at the

sight of him; pale skin, short colorless hair, Skin born in a sunless world. Only his eyes held any sign of life, dark pupils ringed with silver.

Again, the boy's mind built a link.

"A nightlander!" Alexei gasped. The stranger nodded. "Indeed." He stood and turned to Alexei's father. "Your son is clever," he said.

"Thank you."

Then came the introduction to Alexei's mother. Alexei remained silent through the formality, but his mind raced. His thoughts swirled like a mighty sandstorm. Curiosity and caution. Payoff and penance. He puzzled over the forging of his mind.

"To business, then?" his father asked the stranger.

"Certainly."

"Come," his father said, "We can speak in my study."

Father began to lead the stranger out the hall. Once more, Alexei felt that insistent tug deep in his mind. Excusing himself to his mother, he walked as quickly as appearance would allow until he was out of sight; then he sprinted up the stairs, taking them two at a time. A servant girl gasped as he flew past. Bedsheets fell in a whispered heap.

It was the work of a single minute to the study; Keep Evgenii was not large by any measure. *Made it*, Alexei thought with fierce satisfaction as he spotted the open door. With a rustle of fabric, he crept inside. Father's study was perhaps the most imposing room in the keep; a place of power. Bookshelves laden with tomes lined two full walls. Directly opposite the door stood his father's massive ebony desk. Stacked upon it were three massive books, their covers faded and cracked with age. Behind the desk was another thickly curtained window. Unlike the rest of the keep, father's study was not lit by glowstone, but by candlelight.

Alexei crossed to a narrow crack between two corner bookshelves. He squeezed through with deliberate motion, thanking Ra for the slowness of his frame. Settling into as tight a crouch as he could manage, he waited.

Before long came footsteps. Alexei's father strode into the room, shutting the door behind the stranger. He gestured to a chair and settled himself behind the desk. A position of confidence. Power. Intimidation.

His guest accepted the proffered chair with the smallest hint of a smile, but his posture betrayed no meekness. Instead he... perched. Predatory. Alexei's eyes lingered on the stranger again, on the strange contrast between his pale skin and father's olive features. His eyes, striking. The silver caught the candlelight just enough to look molten.

Alexei's father leaned forward and gestured to the three massive books on the desk. "How did you come upon them?" the stranger asked in that strange accent. "A colleague," his father said, "from House Radek. He is... sympathetic." He spread his hands.

The stranger took the first of the books from the table and opened it with the sound of straining parchment. He flipped through pages gently, nodding, before setting it aside. With the second book he did the same. Then the third.

Finally the pale man looked up. "These will do," he said. "The deal is struck."

Alexei watched his father's posture soften a fraction.

"If," the stranger continued, "your body accepts the Bond."

His father paused. "Very well," he said. "I'll have a bowl brought in."

"No," the stranger interrupted. "Bonds between mankind are not tested. What you seek is invaluable; my Lady demands the risk be equally so. I am not some pack animal, cheap and replaceable. If you seek to bind our lives together, tradition will be upheld."

The stranger withdrew a pair of ornate daggers from his cloak. The blades, the handles, all were of finest silver that glinted in the light. Their length was

etched with swirling patterns. The stranger placed both on the desk with a whisper of contact, one before each of them. Alexei's father seemed to hesitate. "And if I am not a match?"

The stranger said nothing. For a long moment, the men stared at each other in silence.

And father nodded.

"Very well," he agreed. The stranger smiled once more. Taking up a blade, he held out a palm crisscrossed with thick scars. "By my Lady's will," he said. Then he slid the blade across his palm with savage precision. The blood came immediately, but the stranger did not blink or hiss in pain. At the sight of it, Alexei's breath hitched.

The blood was tinged with deepest silver.

Alexei's father watched quietly, then took up his own blade. No hesitation, now; he cut open a pristine palm. Alexei knew his father had committed to whatever this was. He never backed down when he decided on a course. When the blood welled from his dark palm the stranger held out a hand.

And his father took it.

They held each other with iron grips, their blood mingling and running down their forearms'. Their eyes met. A heartbeat passed. Another.

Another.

Then father gasped, tightening on the stranger's hand until his knuckles turned white. His body contorted, so rigid Alexei feared his bones would snap. His face twisted.

Again, Alexei's mind screamed to him.

Then it was over. Father's body relaxed; his grip loosened. The men released each other, and father reached for a handkerchief. This he wrapped tightly around his hand; watched it turn from white, to rose, to crimson.

The stranger let his hand rest in his lap, heedless of the blood that soaked into his cloak. "The accord is met," he said. With his clean hand, he pulled a heavy leather sack from its folds and placed it clinking atop the table. Father glanced at it, untying the string and dumping the contents across the table. From inside tumbled several dozen crystals, each glowing with brilliant emerald light. Alexei watched, stunned, as his father lifted one with a careful hand. "Is this..." he trailed off.

The stranger nodded. "Glowstone of the rarest, oldest age. Gathered from the frozen tundras of the Abyss itself. None have ever seen the light."

Father looked at the stranger warily, his features lit green by the fortune strewn across his desk. "This was not part of our deal," he said.

The stranger nodded. "No, it wasn't," he agreed, "but it is necessary. I have no need for money, and you are one of a multitude of Minor Houses, teetering on the very edge of destitution." The stranger leaned back in his chair. "Do you think me blind, that I cannot see it?"

Your furniture is plush, but the edges have begun to fray. Your wife wears fine silk, but in a fashion that is long abandoned by the aristocracy. You bring visitors to *this room*", he spread his arms, "because the tall bookshelves undoubtedly hide the cracks that have begun to dig through your walls."

Father scowled.

"Take them," the stranger said, "Build a keep in the capital city itself, whisper in the King's own ears. For our aims to be fulfilled, you must be foremost amongst the great houses, not wavering on the edge of destruction."

Alexei's father paused, but nodded. "Thank you."

The stranger stood. "Send word when your new position is secured, and we will proceed." Without another word, the stranger gathered his blades and books left the room, slipping away with a whisper of cloth.

Father relaxed, gazing at wealth unmatched by any other House in the kingdom. Then, impossibly, he turned and stared directly into Alexei's eyes.

"Come out, boy."

To Be Continued....



Empty Vows, Pretty Lies

By Cecilia Torres

I was a dirty lie in a clean white dress.

All smiles and a bouquet of gardenias in hand, like a fool before the eyes of an all-knowing God, I stood at the alter ready to say, "I do," when I never even asked, "Do you want to?"

You got down on one knee and opened the little black box in front of me. My breath hitched in my throat, seeing you. My heart beat quieted my thoughts. I felt the word forming in my mouth and before I could stop myself, 'yes' fell from my lips. With trembling hands, you slid the ring around my own trembling finger. As you stood, you wrapped your arms around me and pulled me in close. I smiled against your chest as I heard the *thump-thump* of your erratic heartbeat that matched my own. It made me so happy to love and be loved by you.

My sin was omission, so I hid my face behind that thin lace veil so that you could not see. For if you looked into my eyes, in that moment when I took your hands to say our vows, you would see in my eyes what I have always known as truth; I didn't deserve you. You, who stood there next to me smiling so sincerely. If I told you the truth – the kind of love I have to offer, would you still want it, would anybody want it?

Winter was particularly cruel. The cold air settled in my heart. The door to my room creaked open and my mom poked her head in, she was checking on me. Her warm wrinkled hand, rough from years of hard work, rested on my cheek and her tear-filled glassy eyes pleaded with me.

On days like these, when she sat by my side in the eerie stillness of my room, silent for hours, I wondered why she didn't just hate me, for surely that

would have been easier. Loving me meant waiting, always waiting, for me to be happy because sometimes I just seemed to forget how to do this one basic thing. Loving me meant holding me even when I didn't feel worthy of being held. Loving me was like willingly taking the poison – the way a smoker does every time he reaches for another cigarette – because depression is depression but it's also a cancer. Cancer – it's almost foolish to ask, but would anyone want it?

Saying the last of our vows we officially began our new lives together. 'Till death do you part' reverberated off the church walls and we both smiled, hoping this to be true. I wanted to live in this moment, be this happy my whole entire life. But, as always, my overthinking mind came to its own conclusions and fast forwarded to our future.

A future where one day you'll wake up to welcome a new day, since you have always been a morning person. The light will shine in though the parted curtains illuminating the room in a shower of gold. In the dim morning light, you will turn to look at me; your hand that has always reached out for mine will stop dead in its tracks and you'll realize you no longer recognize this sorry excuse of a person. This person that is so hard to love. And, you'll wonder when exactly it was that you stopped loving her. You'll wonder when she became a stranger. And, it will hurt. But, like the cancerous tumor she is, you'll decide to cut her out. She won't hate you. She won't even hold it against you. Because this type of love, would anybody want it.

THE PARTY

By Gina Mating

It was turning into quite a festive occasion. Every year the Club held a party to install the incoming President and this year seemed to be just a cut above all the years. The bar had been set up in the ballroom and was doing a landslide business. There was laughter, conversation, the clink of ice, the quiet music coming from the small band. It seemed almost perfect.

The only jarring note in the entire room was Bill King. His wife was away with her mother who was gravely ill. That left no one around who could or would monitor Bill's behavior in the slightest. Most of the time, he was an asset to the Club, as well as to the community. If anything needed to be done or if anyone needed help, Bill was always the first to step up. The only time that was not true was when his wife was away. She seemed to have a stabilizing effect on him.

Tonight you could tell he was in the room by the loud, coarse remarks and the too-loud laughter. He seemed to have started early tonight and was well on his way to complete inebriation. Soon he would become stubborn and wouldn't listen to reason. He was always convinced that he was in complete control and there was not a reason in the world why he couldn't drive himself home.

Two or three of the Club Trustees were watching his behavior with deepening concern. Some day he was going to crash his car and kill himself or, worse yet, someone else. As the Trustees talked among themselves, it became increasingly obvious that something would have to be done and it would have to be done soon. Who knew when Bill would take it into his head to drive off somewhere? No one had heard of designated drivers back then.

They absolutely had to keep him from getting behind the wheel. On top of hurting someone if he had an accident, the organization and the bartender would be held morally liable, if not legally. They nonchalantly moved over to the coat rack by the bar, rummaged around until they found his overcoat, and removed the keys. That taken care of, they proceeded to have a good time with everyone else. They danced a little, drank a little, talked with their friends, and moved around the room enjoying themselves.

Bill's laughter wasn't drawing much attention right now. In the past, they had found him sound asleep in the lounge. They called it asleep to keep from hurting his feelings, but he was probably passed out from all the alcohol he had consumed.

Two couples came in sometime during the evening. They apologized to everyone for being so late. They had known beforehand that they would miss dinner because they had to wait for their babysitter, but hadn't planned to miss so much of the festivities due to the accident they came across on their way to the party. There were police cars, ambulances and firemen around the cars so you couldn't really see what had happened, but it seemed to be pretty bad.

They jumped right into the party to make up for lost time. Everyone had gotten a little louder as the night wore on, but everyone was having such a wonderful time. They would have to remember the name of this band for any future parties because they played just the right mix of songs.

Toward closing time people started slipping away a few at a time. While the last few partygoers were saying good-bye, the Incoming President came up to the group that was left and asked, "Who the hell took my car keys"?



UNTITLED
Chelsea Jasmine Geronimo



Red Stripe

By: Shawn Chundagal

A play in one act

"But that must be worth something, right? Beauty is all about symmetry, isn't it?"—
Erika L. Sánchez

Characters:

Antoni Patel — (m) 27+, business-minded, strong, stern, caring, likes to run, smokes, likes coffee

Elio Perez — (m) 24+, creative, emotional but logical, paints and writes, drinks a lot

Ramona Esti — (f) 26+, careful, considerate, understanding

Setting & Place:

Summer, in a hotel room in a foreign country.

In the afternoon, into the evening.

It's raining.

(Before lights, we hear the sounds of crickets and waves. Then the lights swell in a blueish light. Then go to regular lighting. At lights, we see we are in an adequately furnished hotel room. It has a bed with two bed-side tables. One bedside table has a lamp and a book and a small cactus. The other is bare. There is a table and some chairs in the room. There are various bottles and bowls on the table. A cigarette ash-tray and some books and coffee mugs. There is also a huge window. There is a small kitchen and a door leading into a bathroom. It's a little before sunset. The colours reflect orange, yellow, red, almost fire-like, but not quite. We hear laughter and some screaming that they are selling Oysters! A moment passes, and two people enter the room. One is walking with a limp, while the other person carries them to the table. They begin examining the foot of the other. It is ANTONI and ELIO. ANTONI begins picking glass from the foot of ELIO. We watch them for a moment before they speak.)

ANTONI:

You can't keep doing this.

(Elio ignores Antoni, gets a bottle of Red Stripe from the table. Sips out of it. Then he puts his fingers to Antoni's mouth)

ELIO:

You have something on your lip. Let me get it. Hmm... I can shatter this one too, if it means you stay this close.

(Antoni picks a shard from Elio's left foot and he winces from the pain. A thin red line is drawn across his foot, one that slowly keeps widening with each movement and each second.)

ANTONI:

Stop. Enough. I said Enough! I didn't bring you here so you can act like a drunkard. We came so you could have some peace and quiet. Just be still. Let me tie this up before it gets any worse.

ELIO:

It hurts.

ANTONI:

You're lucky it wasn't that deep. Of course, it hurts, you shattered it all over your foot and ran through it like some fool.

ELIO:

I heard a baby crying.

ANTONI:

That doesn't mean you chase after it. Stop being reckless. *(pause)* That's the last of it. Go sit on the bed. I'll clean this mess.

(Elio limps over to the bed. Antoni looks frustrated. He cleans up the shards, cleans up the table a bit. And goes to the small kitchen to make himself a cup of coffee)

ELIO:

I wonder if they cleaned the toilet of the fire ants.

ANTONI:

They better have by now, they had all day to do it. I paid good money for this place.

ELIO:

Would you like me to read you one of my new lines?

ANTONI:

Sure. But don't get up, let me get your notebook.

ELIO:

Relax. It's under the pillow. I'd been writing last night.

ANTONI:

Before or after you vomited everywhere?

ELIO:

After, anyway, listen... "what it means to be a man, to be free, to stake claim to / my own identity and this new land, another / line cut or sewn into a vein, purring for release & like that, I keep feeling and still don't know what any of it means.

(Elio flips through the notebook, recites a line...we hear some noises out the window. Elio springs up and limps to the window to look outside. Antoni stares at him. The lights go from sunset to evening.)

ANTONI

Is that suppose to be me?

ELIO

That's you.

ANTONI:

Why are you so antsy? Relax. Lie down. I'm making coffee. You want any?

ELIO:

No. No. I'm good. I just—sorry. I feel something is off.

ANTONI:

We'll talk about it, after my run.

ELIO:

You're gonna leave me here alone?

ANTONI:

I've been with you all week. Down by the ocean. Through the streets. You'll be fine for thirty minutes. I'll come back. I can trust you, right?

(pause)

ELIO:

Yes, of course. I mean—why wouldn't you? I'm better. I'm getting better.

ANTONI:

I'll have my coffee then and I'll get going.

ELIO:

But it's raining.

ANTONI:

Even better. It'll keep me cool.

ELIO:

What's wrong?

ANTONI:

What do you mean?

ELIO:

I see it in your eyes. you're being so contemplative.

(Antoni rises from the bed and goes back to the kitchen to finish making the coffee)

ANTONI:

We'll talk about it after.

ELIO:

Don't do that, talk to me about it now.

ANTONI:

What for? It's just making things even more complicated. I—we—just—it can wait.

ELIO:

You're always doing that.

ANTONI:

I am protecting both of us from needless argument. It's the end of the trip. A few more hours won't hurt anything.

ELIO:

This is ridiculous.

(Elio turns away and looks at the bedside table. He thinks to himself. He places his finger on a prickly needle of the small cactus. He pricks himself. He laughs to himself and then turns back, we hear a baby crying and then back to quiet)

You didn't have to be my caretaker. No one asked you to.

ANTONI:

Just as no one asked you to do what you did, yet here we are. You were loved, are loved. I don't know why you would do that to anyone, especially your gran, your mother.

ELIO:

You don't know how any of this feels.

ANTONI:

That's right. What else? I am a hardened heterosexual man. I am ignorant. I am this, I am that. Keep telling me these things. I'm still here, aren't I?

(Antoni makes his cup of coffee and sips from it. He walks to the bathroom and then come back with a lit cigarette, he smokes it)

ELIO:

Those are going to kill you.

ANTONI:

A lot of things could kill me. You could, if you wanted, right now. You could run to the trashcan and pick those shards of glass out and come and gut me with them. If you wanted. We're always prone to death. Anything can kill us. *(pause)* Wouldn't that be romantic? You would love that. Stabbing me with those shards, with your blood on them. Ha.

ELIO:

That's not funny.

ANTONI:

It's the funniest thing I've heard this entire trip.

(They sit in silence for a minute)

ELIO:

The night you left, was not and I hated it. This reminds me of that time.

ANTONI:

What do you mean?

ELIO:

When you left to be with her.

ANTONI:

Yes, my girlfriend, because she is my girlfriend, you are my friend. I had to go back to her.

ELIO:

Never-mind. You're missing my meaning.

ANTONI:

Please, enlighten me.

ELIO:

Don't think I blame you or anyone. I blame myself for feeling too much.

ANTONI:

You shouldn't blame yourself either. You just need to find some really good help.

ELIO:

The world can still be beautiful without you. Without me.

ANTONI:

Why do you talk like that? You speak so negatively. Stop talking like that. Just enjoy this. You always ruin it with your senseless darkness. It's like you need it. If things get too good, you panic.

ELIO:

Sometimes I want to hook my fingers in you. Really send my thought waves to you. These dark things to you, so you know I'm not doing it on purpose. Sometimes, yes, but not all the time.

ANTONI:

And I wish I could peer into that mind of yours and see it all. It would help me makes sense of all this.

(Antoni looks at his watch. He downs his coffee. He gets up)

I'm going to go for that run.

ELIO:

Here we are, all wrong.

ANTONI:

Elio, Stop.

ELIO:

I feel sick.

ANTONI:

Eat the oranges on the table. I'll be back.

ELIO:

Okay.

(Antoni exits. The lights dim just a bit. Elio's dark figure moves around the room. He stumbles, we hear soft crying. The lights turn a soft violet and blue. It is the middle of the night now. The ocean's hissing. ANTONI enters. He is drenched from the rain and tired. He turns on the lights)

ANTONI:

Wake-up, Elio, I'm back.

ELIO:

I'm not sleeping. I've been listening to the rain.

ANTONI:

It's beautiful out right now. No one is by the beach. No one is in the streets. Just me and my thoughts and the rain. I feel new.

ELIO:

What are we doing here?

ANTONI:

What do you mean?

ELIO:

Why did you bring me here?

ANTONI:

So I could help you get better. You needed to get away from that toxic environment.

ELIO:

Out of pity.

ANTONI:

No, out of love.

ELIO:

Bullshit.

ANTONI:

Elio, why do you insist on pushing me away and making it like I'm this brute. Listen, I'm here. This week hasn't been easy for me either. I've had to endure everything. All your tantrums. Those spells at night, not to mention you cut your fucking foot on glass and I had to pick it out. Are you forgetting these things? Or is it convenient to neglect them when you're feeling?

ELIO:

Everything is all wrong.

(Antoni sits beside Elio on the bed. Elio stares off)

ANTONI:

What do you need? I feel out of options.

ELIO:

Say you don't love me.

ANTONI:

I'd be lying.

ELIO:

But you don't love me.

ANTONI:

Elio...

ELIO:

...you don't.

ANTONI:

Not in the way you want me to, but I do love you.

ELIO:

Then say it.

ANTONI:

Why?

ELIO:

I need to hear it. I need to hear it again.

ANTONI:

What for? There's no purpose.

ELIO:

Just do it.

ANTONI:

Fine. Fine. Fine. You want to hear it? Is this what will make you better? You promise not to use it against me? I can't have you hurting yourself or anyone any more, not like this.

(Pause)

I don't love you like that. Okay? You're my friend. I came here to help you.

ELIO:

I feel this cracking. I always have. It isn't you. It's just me.

ANTONI:

Can I ask you something?

ELIO:

Yes.

ANTONI:

Why did you do it? Why did you try to?

ELIO:

I'll admit it. I wanted the end. I was greedy. The feelings eventually passed like a storm going through. I just...I missed you. I missed everything. The way things were perfect before I left. And then I left. Everything seem to shatter. I wanted to

let it all go. I felt like I lit flames to my shadow, struggled in my sleep, something tender unfolding out of me, I wanted to rip it out. And now...now what? I survived. It didn't work. I'm here. Healing and picking up pieces.

ANTONI:

Everything was not perfect before you left.

ELIO:

Nothing ever was. I know.

ANTONI:

You have to promise to get better, after we leave here. Please.

ELIO:

I will—I'll try.

(Lights dim, Elio exits. Time seems to pass. A few moments go by. We are in the same room. The lights are blue. Antoni sits at the table with a Red Stripe in his hand. RAMONA walks in, his girlfriend, she steps around and sits beside Antoni.)

RAMONA:

This is the room.

ANTONI:

Ha, yes. I'm glad you made it. It's a bit away from where we are staying.

RAMONA:

It's nice out tonight. Quiet. No rain. It was a nice walk.

ANTONI:

The last conversation we held felt so off. Kept saying, we're just as young as it started, just as young as it ends. Always speaking in riddles. Always writing them down.

RAMONA:

May I have one too?

ANTONI:

Sure.

(Antoni hands Ramona a Red Stripe and they sip in silence)

RAMONA:

We always seem to be studying answers in our environment. Like, us being here. Something you may have missed. What was missing, a last moment. I don't know. I kept thinking about that after you got the call. What it did to you. Why we had to come back. What this room means. What any space means. Its history.

ANTONI:

I figured I had to come back one last time. It was a good time, despite everything. It still feels the same. Still feels. Makes me feel. The last time I was picking shards of this out of a foot. Now I'm drinking it. What do they say about symmetry?

RAMONA:

That one true, certain harmony to life.

(They embrace. The ocean is heard. Soft organs are heard. The lights dim slowly on the couple until blackout.)



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Smashed

!SSUE XXXV!