



ORPHEUS

XXXVIII



ORPHEUS

VOLUME XXXVIII

California State University, Bakersfield

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

Orpheus accepts submissions of various kinds. Please send submissions to orpheus@csub.edu, but first visit the Department of English's website (www.csub.edu/english) for complete information.

Orpheus follows a blind submission process that includes pieces submitted by the journal's editors.

Orpheus was originally founded in 1973 by Dr. Solomon Iyasere, a professor in the CSUB Department of English. His contributions to the university were many, and his legacy lives on through *Orpheus*.

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XXXVIII

A Literary Journal
California State University, Bakersfield

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A Note from the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Carol Dell'Amico

The care and dedication of Orpheus 38's editors never wavered this semester. Under the pall and constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic, Team Orpheus worked that much harder and longer. Grace Vankirk ran our "office" with maximum efficiency: she fielded submissions, rendered them "blind," uploaded them to Dropbox, received and sorted revisions as they came in, created logs of names and titles, and more. We were lucky, too, to have three talented layout artists in our ranks: Percy Ednalino, Dana Lynch, and Isaiah Ramos. Everyone in the Orpheus class—Sarah Alnagar, Hector Cuevas Hernandez, Percy Ednalino, Armando Estrada-Rodriguez, Dana Lynch, Yasmin Marcelo, Cynthia Marquez, Magdalena Pantaleon, Melinda Quach, Isaiah Ramos, Kendra Rubio, Grace VanKirk, Monica Williams—served excellently as editors, reading submissions with real discernment and offering authors spot-on advice for edits. Sarah Alnagar and Grace VanKirk also stepped up as copy readers, and Percy Ednalino designed our issue—cover, section dividers, borders, fonts—and linked the parts of the issue together into the beautiful whole it became. Team Orpheus, you are amazing!

On behalf of Team Orpheus, I would like to thank the writers and artists who sent us their work and also Dr. Steven Frye, Chair, Department of English; Dr. Robert Frakes, Dean, School of Arts and Humanities; and Dr. Vernon Harper, CSUB Provost for generously providing the funds to print this issue. Thanks also to Alex Mitts of the Faculty Teaching and Learning Center for the most helpful InDesign tutorial.

Carol Dell'Amico
Faculty Advisor, Orpheus 2021
Department of English



YOUTH
by Elizabeth A. Nevarez

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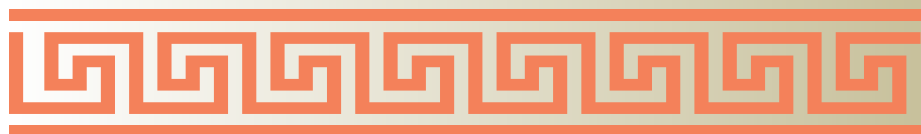
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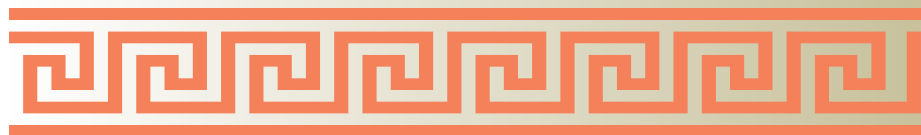
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POETRY



JENNIFER PATINO



POSITIVE PANDEMIC OUTCOME

Quarantine, o quarantine,
How you have changed our lives.

You've helped us save money
By not paying for gas,
But you have stopped life in its tracks
Which is a huge pain in the...economy.

We've gotten some checks,
Which is big bucks.
But we can't go anywhere,
So, who gives a...care.

Being locked down,
And told to shelter in place.
Is for the good of us all,
The whole human race.

But what about the parents,
Who claim it's the pits?
I say to you all, I don't give...lessons to kids.

There is one great thing,
That has come out of the pain.
We've said goodbye to Trump,
That dragon was slain.

JOY GAMBLE



MOTHER DEAREST, A WALL: PART II

Now that I have grown
I reflect on the life we both have lived
And compare the two
As I sit here and think
That I did indeed come from you

Mother,
Through the years
I've been searching for meaning
What does it mean to be a woman?
Time is weening
Please tell me
You disappear more
Each day that goes by
I need an answer
Before the day
All of you dies
I will try some way
Somehow
To keep you alive
As your daughter I promise you this
I promise that I will try

You grew me in the peak of your womanhood
A second child to redeem the first
Like a ghost you stood
You watched them mother her
In arms that weren't yours
Rewinding
That heartbreaking '93 Summer
Like a broken record
But in your heart
You knew this was good

Haunted
Your color seeped away
Because she was your first to bare
A piece of you given
You promised her
And made your decision:
To never let her be scared
Like a ghost you stood
A life in pictures
Of phantom memories
Whispers of
“What could have beens”
Resonating infinitely

So
She sailed away
In your mind
You left her a letter
Saying
“This will be the only thing left of me...
My first child
Stay away from me
Please!
I cannot bear
The pain you gave me
My greatest joy
That I had to leave
So I could set you free
I love you so much dear
Sincerely,
Your real Mommy”

Shadows come and they go
A few years pass
A little down the road
Your second child will be your second chance
You will name her Joy
Under the moon she will dance

Your heart stitches itself back together
With happiness on the horizon
The stars are aligned
You are pregnant by early December
You look up to the sky
To find Orion
There I grew
Within your womb
You nourished me with the cosmos of the universe
As my father echoed melodies next to you
You told me I was born at 2:02 in the afternoon
And now I find myself remembering details exactly like you do

My dad tells me I have your temper
But also your wit
Mathematical equations, strategies, and justification
Run in the family I guess
But I'd like to sit here and state
That I need to get this off my chest
Because I exuded so much hate
My childhood years being forced to visit you
Mother Dearest
Yes, I'm talking about you

You gave me life and blood and bones
Plucked from the stars
A piece of you that my sister and I share
A warrior trapped in a woman's body
Approach with caution if you dare
Something we all can relate to
As people turn to stone from our glares

Medusa was "seduced" by Poseidon
Then cursed by Athena as punishment
At one woman's cost, another woman suffers
Let's not repeat
The Puritan witch-hunt
1692
Vengeance has no sex

Burn the beguiled demons
No one is innocent

What I've come to know
About the role of a woman
Is the repressed fury
Poisoning her
Erasing her beauty
The woman is _____
I will fill in the blanks
Through time and patience

We share your blood
And the essence of your femininity
It drips from our wombs
And gives us power by baring legacy
Eve was favored and considered "good"
But I tend to prefer
Adam's first wife
Lilith
A demonized victim of the patriarchy
Serpent woman
Who is mostly just misunderstood

The fallen woman
That scarlet letter
Helen of Troy
Branded on her forever
A product of "lost innocence"
Or female liberation
A convicted scar
That represents "evil"
A curse of eternal damnation
"And to those thorns in her bosom lodge, to prick and sting her"
Why do men hold the power of female prosecution?
Lilith was victorious
With her independence
But forever she will be known
As evil for seeking freedom and equal treatment

Satan himself
Or should I say herself?
Had the most beautiful face
And recklessly fell
Away from time and space
Away from grace
And now all women are faced with the same fate

Wickedness and beauty go hand-in-hand
Connected to the Earth
Rather than the Heavens we fell from
We intuitively stand
“She is both phantom and reality”
Baring the life we give from our wombs
A curse of evil
That fate wove into the stars
Like Lilith’s
Resonating deeply within our roots

Those walls were only walls
A small part of time and space
With white paint to match the halls
I look more like my dad now
Everyone says it’s true
I have less of your face
And more of my own
The clock was 3 minutes slow
Time lead me here
Now I can begin to let go

I see you now
And I forgive you too
Even though you’ve hurt everyone around you
In the face of pain
After some time
It seemed like no one knew what to do

You let your demons take control
As you lost yourself, me, and my father

To the ones you let loose
Frolicking through
In Mother Dearest, A Wall
Part I, and now Part II
Try to understand me mother
Because I'm trying to understand you too

We're all gone from the mind you once knew
But I just wanted to say now
That I understand you
I know why you chose this path
Because giving up numbed all of your misunderstood wrath
A rage that only Lilith herself could compare to
Or Nathaniel Hawthorn
As the rest of the world will forever scorn her
And scorn you
Embroidering an A across your heart
Damned to the depths of Hell
Where Satan himself will welcome you
Hester Prynne
Back to our roots
"My child must seek a heavenly [mother]; she shall never know an
earthly one"
An F. Scott Fitzgerald beautiful fool

I've met my sister
And I talk to her every day
But I often think
She's the one you had to give away
She's smart like me and has a temper too
And now we get the chance to live
And to redeem you

You gave us life
We came from you
Our choice is to live good lives
But often struggle with the demons you left behind
In the blood they run through
Spooking us every now and then
We have now learned to deal with them

Because
They're only ghosts in our minds
But to you they were real life
And all I have to say now
Is what I truly believe is right

You never had a chance
And I think it's extremely unfair
I'm angry for you
And I wish that someone had cared
But no one here is to blame for your fate
And I'm so sorry that I showed you so much wrath
So much hate
Please forgive me mother
I never doubted your love because you always made me see
And above all else
Thank you for creating me.

MARISSA PATTON



A DOG'S DELIGHT

the rolling sphere across the tile

I dash past moving cars

I jump over grassy knolls

I cross state lines

and continents

and

galaxies

I leap over hazardous rocks

and

fracture

my

leg

I risk it all!

LAVENDER'S BLUE

Be my Valentine.
Neither red roses,
Nor violets blue,
Will decipher my feelings for you.
Lavender is Spring,
Filled with growth and renewal.
Lilacs begin to bloom,
And Lavenders in June.
Red is overrated,
Blue is too tragic.
So take this color as its better,
And far more fit.
Happy Valentine's Day
You intelligent wit.

PERCY EDNALINO



I FEEL GOD IN THIS CHILI'S TONIGHT

She lightly sighs when she sleeps next to me
the soft sound of a pure, contented soul
She waits and watches nearby patiently
as I routinely pour water in bowls

I reluctantly put up with her crap
'though sometimes it nearly brings me to tears
I'd plead for her to sit upon my lap
but I know she's just not that kind of girl

She shows me affection in other ways
and if she could speak the words, she'd tell you
we're just like peas and carrots, as they say
and the bond of love between us is true

Her Instagram postings prove that eas'ly
My feisty gray half-tabby named Beesly

OF CARE PACKAGES AND COVID-19

An unmasked man at my door marred my Monday morning
His knocking was nonstop when he caught me peeking from a window
“Let’s go!” He croaked. “Your life’s not worth it anymore.”
“G’way!” I growled. “Why is wearing a mask such a chore for you?”

Next morning, my cell’s busy buzzing broke up a bad dream
“Look at how I’ve made it easy for you to surrender to me.
Everybody hates you – even your favorite feline, Beesly!”
Who texts at 4 a.m.? I deleted the words, and my nightmare resumed

A peculiar package from a pretty Valkyrie was a midweek treat
Packed among the postcards and pictures was a lavender letter
“Ignore that unmasked dope, I’ll help you feel better and cope.
I’ll be the bright day who makes those nightmarish fiends scatter.”

‘Twas Friday when I awoke to an argument on my porch swing
“Give him to me. I’ll hand him the rope on which he can hang.”
“Keep your rope and hang yourself, he graduates this Spring.
And stop peppering him with negativity – you ruddy-faced thing!”

Knowing I was cared for and protected shocked me white as a ghost
I pocketed the pills, then snarled at the man: “Wear a mask or get lost!”
He jabbed a jealous finger toward me as he lazily loped off my lawn
“No one escapes my infernal allure; I’ll make sure you’re mine one day.”

Later, the Valkyrie dropped by for scones and some oolong tea
“Don’t give up now because you’re so close to graduation.
I’ll be there when you’re exhausted, discouraged, or lonely.
I’ll be your caring, comforting source of strength – you’ll see.”

I’m glad she encouraged me and helped clear my head
Sometimes, my inner devil’s voice is more compelling to heed

RAINDROPS ON ROSES

One of my favorite things about you is
how you sweep your hair back
and perch your sunglasses atop your head
like a tiara made by Ray-Ban

I enjoyed that fun day we spent on campus
and we ate sandwiches for lunch
you politely never commented how
I pick at my food like a weirdo

How about that time you let me ride shotgun
in your car and patiently reminded me how
to unlock the passenger door because
I kept pulling instead of pushing?

I won't forget the great Candy Debate and
how you unyieldingly defended the honor
of lemon-flavored Starbursts, even though
those things taste horrible

I smile when I think of your obsession
with waffle-knit fabrics and baking –
maybe one day you'll make me some
cupcakes – then again, maybe not

My favorite thing about you was our
comfortable, accepting friendship – it's
something I will always cherish,
even if I never hear from you again

MAGDALENA PANTALEON



CHICANX STUDIES

Seven of us sat in a class
That was never supposed to exist.
We discussed a system that never accepted us.
We chattered about being first-gen anything,
First-gen everything.
We shared our stories of the great Aztlán.
A place we could be in-between.

This land, I may have forgotten its tongue,
But its words never escape me.
A land dreamt up by believers.
A land inherited from my father, my mother,
My ancestors who fought never to assimilate.
A land for those who travel through *el desierto y el rio*
For a dream that could never be wild enough.
A land for the woman hardened by a life of quietness.
A land for the *abuela* whose cooking tastes like home
And whose hugs feel like healing.

A land for people
With pools of liquid gold that stickies their hair
And colors their eyes.
For those who walk through the town,
Work sunny days,
Sueña sueños más grande que la vida,
Those that are golden like honey.

Seven of us sat in a class.
Seven of us shared Aztlán.

BITTER LULLABY

“If you be my star, I’ll be your sky,” Mama would sing. The audio echoes in the memories of my heart. The strumming of the guitar, sweet like a lullaby. When do memories become bitter? Have they soured from pain?

Late nights, counting in threes. Singing and rocking myself to sleep, I repeated it over and over. One, two, three, one, two, three. Waiting for you to come home. Light would peek through the corners of the windows. Still, you weren’t home. One, two, three. You left us, each night. You chased the clouds of smoke that filled the rooms. Chalky. You needed it, more than fish need water, more than I need air.

Sweetly, you’d sing. The door was never locked. I’d lie on the brown, rugged couch, waiting. Singing ever so softly, “Just leave me your star dust to remember you by.” Restless, I faced the door hoping you would be on the other side, but the woman who came home was hardly my mother.

The sweet lullaby fades. It’s dull like a numbed ache. The acoustics reverberate at the center of me. Each count plays at the tips of my fingers – one, two, three.



A SINNER'S CREED

Get on your knees, fold your hands
Pray to the Father, and the Son of Man
Remember the Spirit, the one who guides
your heart, your soul, your words, and mind

Praise Him high for what He's done
on the cross, by the Son
Atonement for the sins of man
who otherwise would be damned

Ask from Him the strength to walk
Finish the race, stay with the flock
Sanctify my sinful heart
that lacked the strength from the start

Thank Him for the gifts He bestows
Everyday more to Him we owe
He can take what wasn't vowed
Yet all we have He has allowed

Hallelujah – Amen,
My praises are only to God
who loved and washed me white as snow
when my heart was black as sod

WHAT A MESS

I can't stand how you can't make up your mind
over the simplest of decisions
I know you don't like Mexican food
yet you say *I don't mind*
when I suggest we go to Los Hermanos

When you do somehow make a decision
there's no changing your mind
When it comes time to compromise
it's usually me making the sacrifices,
like watching *Hell's Kitchen* over *Kitchen Nightmares*

I have to say phrases right
or they don't count
What does it matter if I say
Night instead of *Goodnight*?
They're semantically the same
yet you insist one is more genuine

All in all, at the end of the day
you are my girl, my special bae
You drive me nuts, but that's okay
Without you near I'd go astray

If you can't make up your mind,
I don't mind choosing the restaurant
When you finally pick a TV show,
I'll enjoy it, as long as we watch it together
Instead of saying *Love ya*, I'll say it right
I'll always conclude with *I Love You!*

DON'T FRET CHILD

Don't fret child, can't you see the sun?
It's pushing through the parting clouds,
like a young child pushing back his sheets,
crawling off the top bunk of a double bed,
so he can begin the new day

The star's bright radiant rays
shall shine down upon your vessel
And gently pat you on the back,
like a father validating his son
after teaching him how to throw a pigskin

Please don't be afraid!
The ground may still be damp,
but the thunderstorm has finally passed
So learn to trust the sun again,
for it never truly went away

WITH A KNIFE AGAINST MY NECK

Dunk my head into the drum
filled with scorching liquid
Pry open my many infinitesimal orifices
layered in fresh scum
Exfoliate my flesh
with a mitt full of fine, coarse sediment
Really rub it in
as if to inflict irritation
Dunk - gasp for breath
Smear a mysterious elixir
upon the rough recesses on my mug
With a death-grip,
clench a sweltering knife
Align the acute razor
perpendicular with your jugular
Press the steaming straight edge
against your dermis
Firmly scrap away the access debris
spawning upon my pinnacle
Dunk – gasp for breath



I LOVE YOU

We met in the world of cyberspace.
Words of text brought us to this place,
Even though we were worlds apart.
Separated by a thin wall;
5 Cool, sleek, and more fragile than all
Our love put together.
I wondered what was reality.
Who was real? You or me?
I can't see you, only the words you type,
10 And the sweet whispers that you send.
But, in the end,
I'm afraid that one day, I'll fall asleep
And never wake again;
Erased like the mass of data I am.
15 I'm afraid I'll disappear
Before I ever meet you:
The person who's
Become my whole world.

Then, we met and it was like a dream
20 Photos do you no justice
And words cannot express
My feelings toward you:
Relief, love, anxiety and longing—
Everything all rolled into one.
25 My Love, you are my world.
Time cannot diminish my choice.
Time cannot distort your voice.
Time cannot stop my love for you.
Time was kind to us;
30 Only Fate remained heartless.
One minute, you were by my side,
And the next, you were gone.
Taken from me, just like that.
Dear God, what did I do wrong?

35 *Everything resets.*

You return to being a specter behind glass
And I return to being the joker, at last.
Hey, remember back then?

40 This is just like when
We were strangers chatting behind glass screens.

I was the joker, and you, my queen.
I joke, but the screen reflects no humor.
I smile, but the black reflects tears instead.
I greet you every night and day,
45 But this time, there's no difference.
The messages pile and remain unanswered.
Tell me, Love,
Can you still hear my voice?
Because I can no longer hear yours.

50 Where are you?
Are you happy?
Warm?

I love you.
Please be safe.

55 I love you.
I love you.
Please don't go...!

I love y0 u.
i love y o u.

60. **Please**, dear God, don't take her away, too!
i1 1 love y oUu.
ii 1i1 love YyO u.
11//1 l 0 v E Y<> Uu u.

AN ODE TO SUGAR

Small, white grains
Like a rain
Of snowflakes.
Made to stabilize cakes,
Brown crusts of pies,
And keep yeast healthy enough to rise—
Without this sweet,
There'd be no treat
For this world to eat.
Even soups and meat
Require sweets to some degree
To neutralize the salty.
Yet, people, at present, fear
These small crystals, here,
For their destructive power
Which drains restraint by hour.
Of course, their fears are founded,
But who could be astounded
If lack of control
Leads to diabetic spiral?
Too much sugar is bad, 'tis true,
But too much of anything is bad for you.
And speaking of bad,
In truth be had,
Sugar in candy form
Makes for a wondrous storm!
Slip your nephews
And nieces a few,
Be loved and adored,
Then, send them aboard
Their parents' car,
So they'd be right far
When the sweet hits its peak
And drives them to wreak
Havoc on your dear siblings.
Ah—Isn't revenge such a sweet thing?



I am Woman
by Elida Stewart

ELIDA STEWART



QUIEN SOY?

Across a strait,
Not yet named,
Traveling south.
Land to be claimed.
“Son Indios,”
They called us,
When we were “discovered.”

From the center
of a world ancient and mystic,
Northward we roamed,
With writings cryptic.
Accepting of those who settled nearby,
Til they renamed Aztlan.

Ripped away from African plains,
Our children tied and shackled in chains.
A promised land for our captors.
A land of sorrow for mulattos.
With eyes the color of the sea,
Conquering souls our mission.

A personal goal of liberty,
Called themselves Americans and Christians.
For all the wrong attributed to them,
They sought the same peace we did.
These are who my ancestors are.
Some from near, some from afar.

Soy mulatto.
Soy metizso.
Soy hispanico.
European, American de Mexico.

Soy Chicana.
Soy Indio.
Soy Africana.
Soy rubio.

I am your reflection.
When you look at me,
You see yourself.

YASMIN MARCELO



MONOCHROME

The fiery sunset bled into the heavens
And embellished the unmoving horizon.
Dark clouds gathered to conceal its vibrance,
Soon after, the gloom was filled with silence.
The bleak afternoon spilled into the lifeless evening
Encompassed by the pitter patter of the skies crying.
No lightning that decorated the sable clouds,
Nor thunder that boomed to drown out the sound.
Rain, now a memory of the day gone by;
No traces or signs in the world outside.
The autumn leaves shriveled and touched the concrete;
Not softened by water, crunching under one's feet.
Autumn, a season full of striking shades
Lost its color in one's palette of gray.
Birds chirped a melody only in the wee hours
Albeit merrily, the dullness held its power.
Atop branches they perched to overlook
Every light step that the jolly took.
A curious thought tickled the puzzled mind;
Perhaps the rain was shed by two somber eyes.

HEARTSTRINGS (PABLO PICASSO - THE OLD GUITARIST)

Lively is the man who croons like a dove
Hungry is the soul that only yearns for love
At night he plays for her with all his heart
Through her window she can feel his warmth
Happy is the man who thinks he has won
Jolly is the heart for the good love has done
One morning he is faced with the painful fact
That her eager eyes and ears were all for an act
Lonely is the man who was played like a fool
Gloomy is the moon that overlooks his blues

HUES

Black and white scales were all I saw
My world was bleak and simple
I believed I was happy yet I felt no awe
There was no reason to be fickle
Red stood for struggle and chasm
Blue simply meant relief and peace
Little did I know red truly meant passion
I was unaware that blue meant ease
Then you appeared that one winter noon
To be indifferent, I tried and strained
After the leaves had sprung from their roots
My awe, I was unable to feign
No longer mundane, the world filled with color
New feelings I found are here for me to savor

CHLOE LOZANO



THE STRANGER

Every single morning, for as long as I can remember, I would reach my hands up, to the morning sky in silent salutations. The soft rays of a sweltering sun would filter through my window in streams of glorious gold, illuminating my room as it rose above the earth to say hello.

I'd prance around the room, in slippers and a billowing robe, my hair in tight-knit curls, bouncing up and down like the springs in an old worn-down mattress. I'd pick out the clothes I'd wear for the school day depending on my mood; I never wore the same thing twice.

My mother would pack me a sack for lunch, the contents of which I would only discover upon opening when the time came, where she would attach a folded-up note, silly secrets between the two of us.

But the one thing I remember most, is the long stretch of a million unknown roads.

I remember watching the world fly by, in wisps of fleeting colors. Slowing down for no one, but the stranger in the tattered garb.

Everyday he'd sit out there, in his old beat-up lawn chair, a cardboard canvas in his hands, and on it, written words I did not understand. He'd wave as people passed him by. A smile plastered on his face like the wrinkles of his skin.

And we'd do that every day. In rain or shine, I'd see him there, spreading his message with joy, and humility. Until one day...he wasn't.

I considered it a fluke. That perhaps he had simply forgotten the time and place, and that he'd be back the next day...

Or the next day...

Or the next...

Or the next...

THIS MOMENT

Have you ever stopped to consider a summer sky?

To admire the way in which the colors weave and intertwine in the sacred place where the heavens receive the earth in holy matrimony?

Or the way the sun seems to melt into liquid gold, like fire as it descends upon the globe, igniting everything it touches in blazes of flickering orange and sensuous reds?

In reverence I gaze upon forbidden worlds, unscathed by man.

Pristine and whole and raw.

Consumed by this uncontainable desire to consolidate the very lungs with which I breathe with the undeniable vitality of the air itself

Overcome by the playful nature of a finger-painted sky, like a child I lift my hands and trace the delicate ribbons of dreams, and memories that dance upon a balmy breeze, its warmth seeping into the fragile crevice of my mind, as I indulge in the remnant of a time long forgotten.

Saturated in bliss, the air envelops me like a mother enfolds her newborn babe, the earth swallows me whole as I plunge deeper and deeper into a false sense of security and serenity. I'm flying.



THE SECRET OF THE SMILE!

Humanity has been humiliated,
morality has been mutilated,
purity has been polluted,
and now there is a hollow shell of a monster.

Can you believe it?

In the unworthy world of ambitions,
the last peace is war,
the best peace is war,
and war is the perpetual destiny of human beings.

Can you believe it?

The soul of liberty is dead,
and its body has been turned into a statue,
and the statue is falling down
before the indifferent eyes of the world.

Can you believe it?

The shadow of barbarity
is dancing in the tragic funeral of human rights,
and everyone knows
that equality is too good to be true.

Can you believe it?

The birds of fear are screaming
in the nightmare of horror,
and the soul of terror
is penetrating deep into the heart of each sanctuary.

Can you believe it?

The mother of sorrow
is whispering the lullaby of death
in the ear of night,
and the child of disaster
is howling with the devilish cry of joy.

Can you believe it?

The footsteps of inequality
are echoing
through the empty street of justice,
and the deafening sound of it
is frightening the queen of fairness.

Can you believe it?

The hellish heaven is full of devils,
the devils are demoralizing the angels,
the angels are like rebels,
and the God of love is dead.

Can you believe it?

The mirror of truth is lying,
the heart of honesty is dying,
the whole universe is sighing,
and there is a knife in the hand of trust.

Can you believe it?

The remedy of wisdom is hemlock,
the philosophy of dawn is dark,
the brain of logic is in shock,
and irrationality is running the world.

Can you believe it?

All Adams

Are looking for an apple,
and all Eves
are carrying their sins.

And now I know

why Mona Lisa is sadly smiling!

JESSIE MONDRAGON



THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU DIE

Read the bible aloud to willows.
Paint grey clouds via paper airplanes.
Put mushrooms on pizza – not the ones from the market.
Meditate on the beach butt-naked,
resting your nuts on seashells.
Pour rubbing alcohol in your morning cup of tea.
Have two cups if you're feeling ballsy.
Bury snails in salt castles,
and call it a royal death.
Subscribe to a news article,
and never listen to its voice.
You'll delete the unopened emails someday.
Date a girl younger than you to feel young again.
Date a girl older than you to make her feel young again.
But don't love either of them back.
Jerk.
Ask your boss for a raise
even if you're late everyday.
Kick your neighbor's damn cat.
It shouldn't be on your lawn anyways.
Tip the waitress a hundred dollars
with a fake bill.
Fly with angels.
Dance with the devil.
And most importantly,
Before you die
don't have kids.

STILL NOT UNBROKEN

I try turning you down.
Reject your help.
But you always insist.
When I tell myself that
I'm done with you,
You laugh.
And offer yourself to me.
You're a lousy fix.
But,
The cold sun
The rancid flowers
And the black and white rainbows
around me do not know.
In the fading background,
Where the sun chooses to not shine
Is where you'll find me.
Pretending to not want you.
Or need you.
But we both know
I do.

Where are you?

I'LL START TOMORROW

We wait for
new weeks
new months
and
New Years
to reinvent ourselves.
Because nothing truly motivates us.
We invent this idea of being renewed,
Reborn even,
by a new sun.
But today's sun
still burns.
Doesn't make me undead.
I'm still not alive.
My grave is still empty.

MORGAN MULLENS



PERSEPHONE

Each lie I believe, a pomegranate seed.
I want to leave, but “it was your fault, anyway,”
But “I can’t live without you,”
But “if you care about me, you wouldn’t,”
But “let’s just talk about it later,”
But “I’m sorry, it won’t happen again,”
But “it’s not a big deal,”

I want to leave, but I love him: seven seeds, and I am trapped.

VANESSA K. BARRON



AN EDUCATOR

This is something I want to be.

People say, "You'll never get rich."

But I disagree.

You see the best kind of happiness is watching a student be a good boy or girl.

I want to create a person who values humanity;

I want to create someone who chooses reason over insanity.

I want to be a mother and father to a child who thinks;

I want to be a part of a community joined by links.

I want them all to get what they dream for;

I don't want any child in front of a closed door.

I want to be the one who tells them that every imagination is real;

I want to tell them that anyone can steal.

I want to be an educator because I am the kind

Who believes that no child should ever be left behind.

DESTINEE SIMS



THE ART OF MAKING CANDY

The Karo was poured,
And then the sugar followed.
White as a dove in hue,
The confectioner waits for her cue.
She waits for the mix to properly bubble,
One drop too soon and the candy will resemble rubble.

Pockets of heat
embrace her like a hug.
She chooses her flavoring to be that of berry,
She adds the dye, red as the cochineal bug.
The sticky concoction takes on a bright red hue,
Then it's ready to be poured and its sweetness given its due.

The silicone molds were cold to the touch,
With a variety of shapes that to anyone else would have seemed a bit
much.
Monkeys, hearts, and flowers galore,
The young confectioner still wished for more.
The molds after being filled looked rather nice,
But the candy is not done until it is as hard as ice.

When it comes time to pop the candy out,
The young woman lets off one big shout.

Her hand pulsates with burns of red,
She thinks of what her father would have said.
This is nothing new, she always burns herself
She bags the candy.

KNOWING YOURSELF

I am my own best friend.
I know how to bring my tears to an end;
I am the best shoulder I could lean on.
I am the quickest to get my own heart on the mend.
I know cookie dough is the answer to everything.
I am my own best friend.

I am my own best friend.
I know that I'm never truly alone when I'm by myself;
I can spend plenty of quality time all by myself.
I never choose the wrong movie to watch.
I always know when I want to relax or when I want to go out and enjoy life.
I am my own best friend.

I am my own best friend.
I buy myself the best presents.
I always remember what my favorite candy is.
I never choose the wrong color when I'm shopping for myself.
I know exactly what kind of help I could use at the moment.
I am my own best friend.

I am my own best friend.

SMOKEY ROOM

The smoke curls around my face,
embracing me like the softest caress.
My lungs catch fire as I take a deep breath,
Remembering.
Trying to not remember.
The intoxicating effects save me,
From the physical pains,
From the thoughts I can't escape.
My throat tingles,
Burning from words unsaid.
I let the calm creep in,
no longer scared to speak.

Instead,

finding the peace to dream.
My inhibitions burn up
with another
flick
of
the
lighter.
Scorching
my fear,
I put
my pen
to
paper,
And like the smoke, I let my words flow and surround me.

INTERNAL BATTLES

My mind runs wild

Bringing my deepest fears to life,

Other times making me fear

Without rhyme or reason.

My only hope at survival

Is to silence it

Or forever be plagued with demons

of my own making.

I must say

I have tried to fight them, ignore them, and even slay

the monsters inside. It does not matter, however,

because the iron chains of anxiety have gripped

me in their infectious claws.

Scratching, scratching,

scratching! Scratching away at my

sanity, bit by bit.

The very fibers of my being my mind, soul, and body,

find themselves being assaulted by their creator,

never able to fully forgive for mistakes

that are yet to happen.

RILEY PURVIS



BED WARS

The depth of the void is measured by the absence of a man
Fallen into the nothing of itself is only a paradox,
Created by life and life and death and death
A seed which beholds the pleasures of mysteries

I shall protect where I rest, it is my eternity
Worshipped and praised are the golds and diamonds
My dirigible heart warns me of the future
Among us is only uncertainty

Cerulean skies forsake the thunder
I am ensconced in this coffin, in this bed
It remains a redolent scent of roses and decay
If I protect my bed, shall I be perdurable?

Crimes of morality are crimes for eternity
Transcended through breath are my wishes
Scars on my skin evince my story
The vulture of life is the dove of death

Manifested is the permission to escape
Whisper to our sins and let me through
Belonged to death is my gallery
Imprisoned and chained by my bed

Hidden are my weaknesses
Realities are nothing without our meaning
Eruptions are near and so is my end
Golems of death forged in iron surround me

Crafted together are my belongings
I am left with nothing to survive
Sacrifice with no gain
Endless struggle to my maddened thoughts

To lay in the bed would feel like a dream
Written in blood in my legend
Creation of my mind had evolved for wealth of life
The desire and want carries me

Devoted to death, I crave otherwise
Yearning for my bed, my life
Imbedded is my war for freedom
Victorious, until I awake again

DARIUS G. RIGGINS



I SUFFER IN SILENCE

I'm the wounded man that can't shed my tears
I'm the wounded man that can't talk to my peers
I'm the wounded man whose loved ones can't hear
Wounded thru my heart with the point of a spear

I suffer in silence

I'm the wounded man that tries to speak out
only to become closed mouthed with words that can't come out
I'm the wounded man that can't heal my scars
so many to count like the universe of stars
I'm the wounded man that drinks from an empty fountain
dried up from the storm of rain that never came from the mountain

I suffer in silence

I'm the wounded man not understood by those close to me
I'm the wounded man who just wants to be loved how I want to be
I'm the wounded man who just can't take it
I'm the wounded man just trying to make it

I suffer in silence

I'm the wounded man that no one can see
I'm the wounded man that no one tries to be
I'm the wounded man never compensated, always free
I'm the wounded man that is not known to be

I suffer in silence

WHEN GOD MADE YOU

(Dedicated to my wife)

When God made you, He took his time
For God knew that you would be more valuable than the finest wine

When God made you, all things stopped to stare
To see what God was making that was so rare

When God made you, the world didn't know
That an angel was created whose mahogany skin would forever glow

When God made you, he shaped you with care
When God was done, the angels said, "She's more beautiful than us!
That's not fair."

When God made you, He was thinking of me
And I'm humbled at the thought that you were made for me

When God made you, He had our kids in mind
No one has a better mother, no one is more kind

When God made you, all of heaven rejoiced
They took to the streets and praised God with a loud voice

When God made you, all of earth was moved
To receive such a woman that heaven could lose

When God made you, he answered my dreams
To be married to an angel of the highest esteem

When God made you, and made you my wife
He gave me the best gift in the world—He gave me my life

MATTHEW LAVELLE



HEARTS BRANCH

When I look at you
All I see is beauty
I feel an inexpressible love
As you perch on
A single branch
Waiting for me to land

Your feathers gleam
Sunlight drenches you
Flowing crest waving gently
Oh how your feathers peak!
As I long for their touch
My wings tire of hovering

Your branch has just room
As I float down to rest
Look upon me large
A gaze that flutters my crest
An inch or so for feet
A lifetime for feelings

Wings rustle together
Beaks rub with lust
Eyes lock onto each other
The shock to my heart
A spark from yours
A branch for togetherness

A storm tremors above
Not with weather but
The tree itself storms
Blistering from below
Your gaze appears elsewhere
A figure with destruction aloft

Dark feathers circle around
Leaves come tumbling down
Wind pulls at a crest
Her attention turns away
Blistering turns to sliding
Yet only I shall fall

Landing upon your heart
Branch snaps from beneath
Sudden drop through the body
Eyes remain locked on you
Your eyes never lose his
The shadow engulfs you

Wings have no strength
Ground closer than sky
Crest flowing gently still
As branch meets ground
My heart hits beside
Body flails with a bounce

She appears in his eye
Has she fallen as well?
She picks up the branch
With all her strength
Finishing off my heart
Handing it to the shadow

Body lay without a sound
Realize how my heart is bound
Forever trapped with that branch
She'll have my heart
But no one else
Can say it will be found

Your crest still lifts my spirits
Yet reminds me of hearts branch
Oh how that branch stood strong!
Yet how brittle your side

The inch for me
Was a perfect illusion

The strength in my wings
Found again
Propels my heart again
Scarred and punctured
It feels again for another's feathers
This crest is similar but strange

An equalness of feeling
A ruffle or feathers so great
The thought of love
Rests on this branch
Next to your crest
Next to my heart.



Nesting Dove
by Bat-Ami Gordin

BY: WISTERIA



ETERNAL VENOM

The spiders crawled over the places where your hands once were.

Paralyzed with fear,

Stuck in a hell built uniquely for me,

I screamed,

but the spiders

refused to leave.

Sleep refusing to free me.

No one came to help

and I shook in fear,

but they vanished as soon as they came.

Returning

as they pleased, as you did back then.

I could speak,

but you were the spider in my throat.

A spider with eternal venom that would poison my life.

CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT MYSELF?

Flashes flood the blanks in my memory.
It weighs down my shoulders as I try to run from you.

You hid me in a closet,
fearing the monster that you are would be seen by others.
Silencing me with your presence,
I did not know what was going on.
I felt your breath as I played.
You told me no one would ever love me...

Who was I in elementary school?
Why are these people talking about this as if I were there?
I can't remember,
so why are you the one taking up those years?
"do you remember when we used to play at ****'s house?"
"Who?"
"don't you remember they were your ***** ..."
"no, I don't. I'm sorry."
"don't you wish you could be a kid again?"
"no."

Ooh...how I hate yellow toned light bulbs

WHY AM I WAITING FOR YOUR RETURN?

You screamed.
Tears formed but did not fall.
you knew I was hurt,
so why were you screaming?
Both of us were the ones who needed to change,
it angered you
that we were both to blame.
You blamed me for your struggles,
but I turned and walked away hoping to never see you again.

Passing puddles, windows, and mirrors,
you constantly followed me wherever I went.
I waited
And waited.
Until the day you would be gone
and I would no longer deal with you.

Then, you were no longer there in the mirror,
It was my reflection
And you were far gone.
i did not feel euphoric...
forcing everything out along with you,
nothing filled my heart.
you destroyed me,
but you were me
and i was you.

TORIA. HERNANDEZ



HELLO OLD FRIEND

As she goes to say hello and introduces herself,
It stops her halfway through and calls her out by name.
She was frozen in place, unsure of what to do next as it smirks and says,
“You do not know me by name, but I have been with you for years.
I am that voice inside your head that makes you question everything
you hear when someone’s tone
appears to be off.
I am that thought that crosses your mind when you hear people
laughing and wonder if they are
laughing at you.
I am that faint whisper in your ear that never lets you rest.
I have been with you your whole life, and I do not plan on leaving
anytime soon.”
The girl now sad, eyes full of tears, says, “Well then I guess I should say
hello, old friend.”

THE ONLY THING SHE LOVED

She was killed by the one she loved,
Her one and only little son.
He never cared, he never hugged.
She was killed by her only son.

She was torn apart everyday,
He never had a nice thing to say,
Things were thrown and were done;
She was killed by her only son.

She tried so much to show him love,
He never would accept it;
Like a slap in the face with a glove.
She was killed by her only son.

She bid farewell with a sadness in her eyes,
May she rest in paradise.

ALYSSA MORATAYA



BLOOMING

in my heart
i feel a *warmingggg*
buzzzzzzing
there.

in the center...
is it getting *colderrr*?
hotter?

sizzling...
floating through the air
relief
why?

it's okay.
what more is there to say?
my heart gives me assurance.
my heart gives me endurance.

EL RIO

cuando te veo me siento tan feliz
siento

libre

me siento como
puedo hacer cualquier cosa.
estoy

que caigo
por ti

difícil,

profundo,
rápido.

da miedo.

quiero excluir a todos.

pero tu, contigo yo quiero

GRITAR

eres tan especial...

así que no te preocupes...

tan dulce y de buen corazón.

tesoro

cada

momento

nos encontramos.

el tiempo se detiene

todavía

cuando estamos juntos,

se siente como si fuera ayer cuando saltamos

a un río,

tengo miedo de que te vayas, eso es lo que

temo

en el fondo

y solo

un

mes

ha pasado.

quiero que se den cuenta,

quiero que veas

con usted

es donde

siempre quiero ser.



Self-Surrender
by Kei Deragon



High Priestess
by Kei Deragon

TIANNA BELCHER



LOVE

I found god today in an empty room
He said that his love surrounds me
It is profound
It is beautiful
It is good

He said he was always inside of me

NIRVANA

I have to die to my flesh everyday
So that I can find the reason
The meaning to stay
In a world I feel that was not meant for me
A place that I must carve a place for myself
Because they will never make a place for me
I must make a table of my own to sit
And make each place gracefully
In hopes that I could have something of my own

AN UN-READ TEXT ON A LATE NIGHT

No one had ever made me feel as
small

As

you

had

And I want you to know that I would never wish for you to feel the
way you have made
me feel

For that would make you merely invisible

And I know you don't care as you have made this very clear through
your actions

But I still have much love for you

As love is all I know

EXODUS

And I will make it out of hell
I will crawl out of it with my bare hands
And once I close the door on this chapter
You will be behind me
And I will give
And grow
And love
For I found god



THE POMERANIAN

I smile for you. I do it whether I'm happy or sad. I do it instinctively and I do it on command. I do it to make you happy. I do it to let you know I care. I do it because I know that's what you expect from me. I smile for you without even thinking. I'm on autopilot and there's no OFF switch.

Why do you want me to smile for you? Why do you continue to make that request? Is my smile some kind of window dressing? Something to make you feel better about the world that's your oyster? Your shiny Christmas morning? A decoration, an adornment, a plastic bobble-head doll? I'm a performing monkey. I'm a tail-wagging dog. You said this is a man's world—but you left no illusions that it wouldn't be on my own terms.

What happens if I don't smile for you? Asking for a friend. Will your whole world crumble? Do you need my smile to thrive—to survive? What if I just said NO? Would you shrink without my undying devotion? Would you cast me aside, like an old glove? Are you so insecure that my poker face gaze makes you unable to face your own reflection?

Why do I smile for you? Why do I smile for you—every time you ask me to? Like a soldier at attention. Like a good little girl. Am I so shallow that I've allowed you to train me? Like a little dog, begging for your approval like a dog craves a bone? You don't own me. We've been saying it since 1963. Hell, we've been SAYING IT since we shared our knowledge with you that day in the ancient garden. I've made such a mess of things. Why can't I be the one I want to please? I guess it's true—you can't teach an old dog new tricks.

I feel like a Pomeranian. A silly little bitch.

JUSTIN ZUNIGA



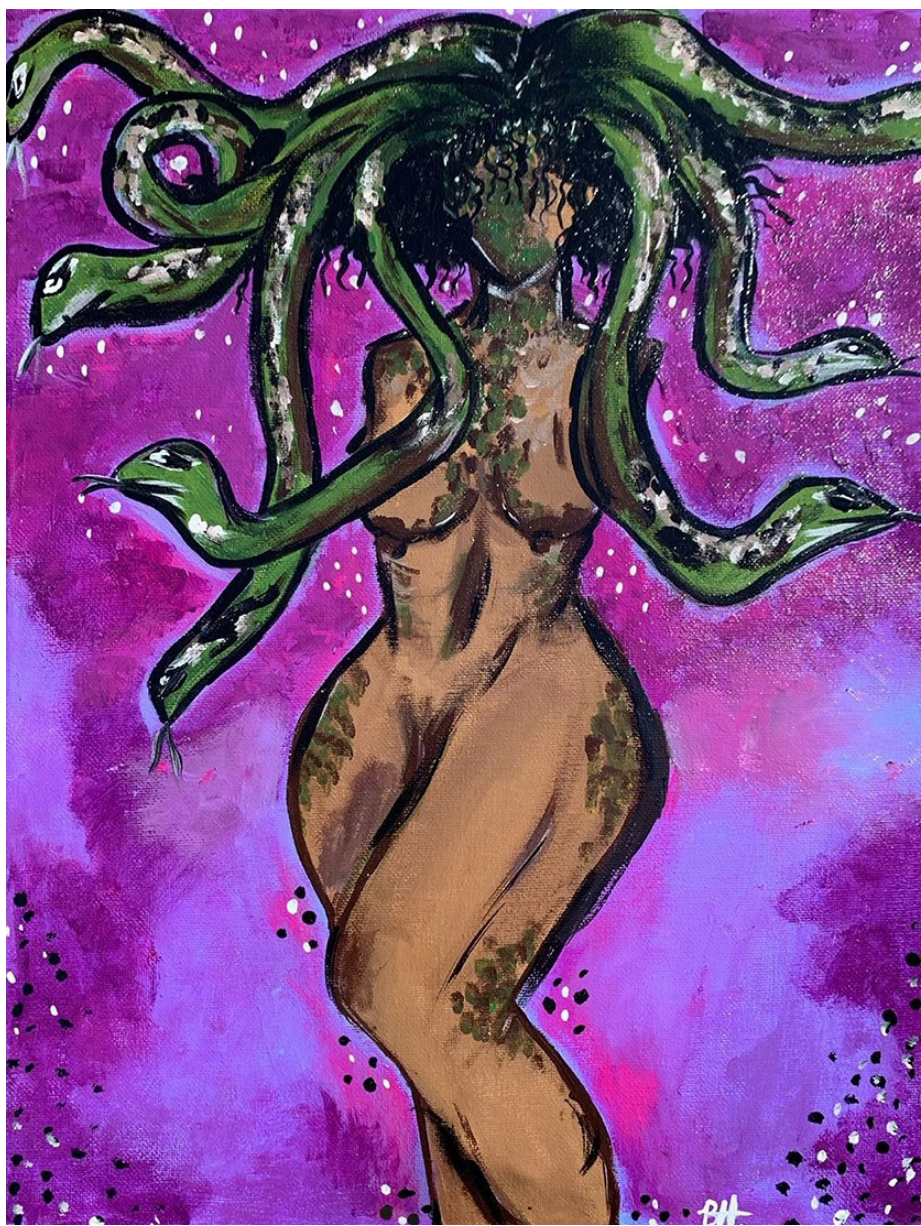
THE BED

Oh, woe is me,
I yearn to rest.
I try to sleep,
But drowse at best.

During the night,
I feel a weight.
Try as I might,
I sleep but light.

When morning comes,
I feel it leave.
Free are my lungs.
With them, I breathe.

My rest is brief
The weight returns.
The night repeats.
For sleep, I yearn.



Medusa
by Briana G Hendrix
14 x 11, acrylic on canvas

ESMERALDA SANCHEZ



SLIPPERY SNAKES

With this *poof* she considers herself unseen. She considers herself powerful.

As strong as her kind can be, on top of the chain
with a crown above.

The weather she can stand is like no other before.

They say she never misbehaves but he sees the real misleading
slippery snake.

They see the four layers of skin as one whole character trait...

She likes when they look right through her, but he knows the truth
with one look.

Unwanted sorrow is all she portrays. She will never shed again unless
he takes the veils and pulls them from her over and over again.

MIKAYLA HOLLON



ROOTED

Let my heart be rooted
Deep in what is Right,
Let me plant my heart
In only what I decide.
My fate will never be
Someone else's seed,
For that can never be
My true destiny.

Let my soul soar,
Not with the wind
But where I direct it
Where I bring it into being.
What freedom I will feel
When my soul is set free,
It is only possible
When my heart
Can be where it should be.

In love, goodness, passion
No more soil filled with sin,
I live the life I want
Letting everybody in.
Directed by my heart,
And fueled by my soul
Now I will ask you,

Where do you want your heart to go?

SPICE

Sugar, spice
And everything nice
We all know how it goes.
But nobody talks about
What everybody knows.
The anxiety, the depression,
The fixation on perfection.
The disorder, the diagnosis
The compulsions, the narcosis
So sure, we can talk about sugar and spice,
But no, not everything is nice.

VICTORIA CIPRES



SHAMPOO AISLE

I pick out new shampoos at least once a month.
It's not necessary, but I don't finish things anyways
I pick things that say it will soften my hair
As if I'm trying to smooth out the things that make me rough
I pick bottles that say it will make my hair 10x stronger
Because I can't be too weak for the world and that's not who momma
raised

I pick scents that are floral, fruity, crisp, and light
Because that's how I'm supposed to claim my womanhood

There is no need to scrub and scrub for more than a minute
But I have to make sure I get the residue out
From past experiences before to be the perfect woman
Scrub out heartache because it causes split ends
Scrub out anxiety and self-doubt for it only causes my scalp to get oily
Scrub out any form of childhood trauma; daddy issues are like
dandruff that lingers

It doesn't matter how hard I scrub
Or what types of shampoo I buy
Because the things I try to get rid of
Will still be there the next morning
I have to rinse my hair some time, right?

MOIRAI

Makes you wonder
How two souls find
One another
Amongst all the chaos
In the world
And become absolute
Solitude
It's as if the gods above
Tied our destinies
Together with a simple
Red thread

ANHEDONIA

Am I missing something?
I have searched
Beneath every bed
Shined a light
In the darkest corners
I have found enough
Coins in between the cushions
To give me the world
But I still cannot find
What I am looking for

THE THRILL

It's being on the teacups at night. The glittering sky and vibrant colors of illuminated paper lanterns creating a whirlwind of terror and excitement all around. Knowing there is no control over what's happening as my head throws back full of laughter and shrills. Arms that reach out for the unknown but willing to hold on for dear life. Spinning faster and faster. Seeing everything at a blur. But the only thing that is certain.

Constant.

Focused.

You.

FOR THOSE WE HAVE LOST

Grief is a quiet thing it
Slowly finds a way to
Wrap its arms
Around you to
Bring both
Comfort and Sadness while
Covering you in
Absolute Darkness
Then you slowly
Cross my mind
Consuming griefs

Clutching arms
Swallow me whole but
Your Warmth and Love
Are the Light that
Guides me
Home

*This is dedicated to my grandmother Aurora Toledo, my brother Michael Cipres, and those that have lost loved ones during the pandemic. May we honor and celebrate them every time they cross our minds.

SHORT
STORIES

KALEIGH DAY



BLUE BONNETS AREN'T EVEN BLUE

In 1973, Texas made picking wildflowers on state-maintained land a Class C misdemeanor and punishable by a 500-dollar fine. It's an even bigger fine for those who transport the wildflowers in an effort to harvest and sell them elsewhere. Seems like an awful lot of pride to pour into flowers, but what can you expect from a state that still touts the fact that it was once its own country? It wasn't until I was riding shotgun in your pickup that I understood all of the fuss was wildly necessary. Parallel to the road were lush fields, knee-high prairie grass reflected in high beams. They were peppered with vibrant reds, pale yellows, and that unmistakable violet. We stepped out into the mid-April night; it was just shy of 70 degrees and the breeze nipped at your skin resulting in a slight ruddiness on the apples of your cheeks.

I thought back to the first night we met. How you and I stood by the cooler and found that if we mixed the sickly-sweet peach wine with Jack Daniel's, it became tolerable. And how we watched the bonfire dance on each other's blushed faces.

I noticed how the moonlight outlined the curve of your nose and signaled that we were one day closer to the inevitable end. I followed your lead wading through, strategically placing our feet with each step to spare the flowers. You must've heard the rustle of my steps stop because right as I crouched to touch one, you yelped.

"Do not pick it!"

I stood up swiftly like a guilty kid. You said it was an Indian Paintbrush, and explained that maybe I'd know it as a prairie-fire and then proceeded to lecture me on the laws about picking wildflowers. Being fed facts like that was par for the course when you were around. We went in further, coming across a patch of blue bonnets: the state flower, named that due to its resemblance to hats worn by pioneer women. It was enough to incite envy, the thought that some could take them for granted; haphazardly viewing them on their commute to work, consumed with their own lives.

At the close of Spring, I came back home to California and we talked over the possibility of you moving in order to be together. But by August, it was no longer on the table. Four months later, I saw your engagement photos in a field of wildflowers with a woman who was equal parts hairspray and self-tanner. I guess Texas likes to hold onto its gems.



Heron Reflecting in the Water
by Bat-Ami Gordin



PLEASE READ BEFORE APPROACHING WARNING

For your own safety it is best that you read these points before moving forward, for those who have wandered blindly ahead have experienced heartbreak and betrayal.

1. Yes, she is a female, but she is far from nourishing and caring.

- a) She lacks compassion and empathy.
 - i. She has been betrayed too many times.
 - ii. Abandoned by the ones she trusted.
 - iii. Stabbed in the back by her own blood.
- b) She doesn't help others or like to receive help.
 - i. She knows leeches better than anyone.
 - ii. She learned the hard way: every favor has a price.
 - iii. It's not pride, but fear.

2. Yes, she is beautiful, but even a siren is enchanting.

- a) She has doe eyes.
 - i. Which have witnessed the murder of a heart.
 - ii. Which have seen the demons inside of people.
 - iii. Her eyes are not the gate to her soul.
 - iv. If you look closely, you'll only see her reflection of you.
- b) She has cherry lips.
 - i. Red from the heated words they conceal.
 - ii. Red from biting back the agony they may cause.
 - iii. Red from the love they could shyly whisper.
- c) She flushes easily.
 - i. Don't be confused, she doesn't like you.
 - ii. She likes spicy foods.
 - iii. Gets angered fast.
 - iv. Gets overheated with even the thought of the sun.

3. Yes, she has a soft voice.

- a) She intrigues people with her words.
 - i. But truth hurts.
 - ii. She is a verbal killer.
- b) She rambles with no end.
 - i. She can be a thesaurus at times.
 - ii. She is always a multilingual enthusiast.

4. Yes, she is an observer, so she'll never make the first move without calculations.

- a) They say silence speaks, but not in her case.
 - i. Refer back to step 1a, if you are confused by her caution.
 - ii. She needs time to approach, maybe even days.
- b) Don't misunderstand her fear for lack of effort.
 - i. Trust, she cares more than she should.
 - ii. She fears making a mistake.
 - iii. Her silence is a war between her present and past.
 - iv. She is not letting go, just preparing to fight for you.

Now that you have read the instructions, it is still highly suggested to proceed with caution, for the first attempts to get close are the most crucial. Many have tried, and most have failed.

Note: even if you do manage to get close, you are still in danger. For questions or help as to how to approach properly or forge a relationship, please contact this human's current trustees.

You have been warned, and we cannot be responsible for any damage caused.

Thank you for your time.



THE TOMB OF TESSELEX

“The story of Emperor Tesselex began hundreds of years ago at the end of the Dark Ages of Noxilenna. The Tyrant King conquered the thirteen galaxies, an unstoppable force and seemingly invulnerable. But he knew he was still mortal and would eventually die. Immortality became his greatest obsession.

One day, his scientists built a machine that would transfer the mind into digital storage. They tested the machine with great success, and they moved the minds of mice and men into the cold metal bodies of robots. Tesselex admired the procedure and decided he would transcend.

But the families of the scientists had suffered at the hands of the emperor, for he was cruel. So, when the scientists performed the procedure, they did so with practiced cunning. They saved the mind of the great Tesselex, but not into the brain of a heartless robot. Instead, they sent him to rest in this golden temple, forever to contemplate the faults of his life.”

So reads the plaque on the pedestal where sits a golden pyramid, on display in the Museum of Scientific Ethics and Curiosities. On the front face of the pyramid, inscribed by the scientists, a message:

“Here lies the Tyrant King Tesselex, who desired immortality at the cost of others’ lives. Still alive, unable to die, he found what he sought, but lost what he had. Death is too good. Leave him be, that we should now live happily ever after.”

NICHOLAS ROMASANTA



LIFE LESSONS

Program Description

Students will learn how to live.

Lower Division

LIFE 0027 - An Introduction to Existence (1)

You learn how to communicate, how to eat, and how to sleep. You're not entirely aware of what you're doing. Credit or no-credit. Course is repeatable.

LIFE 2215 - The Fundamentals of Stability (3)

This course offers the most optimistic outlook on the world. That old church twenty-five minutes away was your favorite classroom, your food of preference was pizza, and you wanted to watch Nickelodeon every day. You studied every sweet spot on your staircase so that they wouldn't squeak while you went sneaking around. At night, you sleep soundly, unafraid of any monster hiding in your closet. Prerequisite: Luck.

LIFE 2211 - Assimilation and Society (3)

An emphasis on what is and is not safe. Societal norms are tested, and you study the theory of friendship vigorously. Burnt out counselors/advisors/therapists tell you to follow your dreams and do what you love. Politics become a drug, and you quickly become addicted to your party of choice. You are not sure what you love, but you learn what to fear. That fear manifests into a monster that hounds your mind. Course is repeatable. Prerequisite: Desire.

LIFE 2641 - Introduction to Individuality (4)

Topics include: Are drugs and alcohol really that bad? What do you want to be? What is the true permanence of people? Why were you out protesting? Why weren't you out protesting? Why did you cross your fingers at mass? Why haven't you left the house? Why is your bank account empty? Why are people poor? Why are you still here? Course is repeatable.

Upper Division

LIFE 1776 - Eventual Change Theory (4)

Topics include: Advocating for a better future, changing social norms, and the rejection of the status quo. You are a radical. A villain. For some, you are a monster. You've transformed your fear into passion. You become a force that takes different forms, whether it be in the streets, in niche forums on the internet, in proudly published poems that forgo the status quo, or in a ballot bubble. Prerequisite: Hope.

LIFE 2000 - Continuation Theory (4)

This course will examine how to be financially stable, get a nine-to-five job, pay taxes, put food on the table, and maybe be able to afford a frugal vacation once a year. Your fear for the future has been pacified into a more feasible form — whether that be a stock market investment, a steady marriage, or a child.

LIFE 0000 - Rejection Theory (4)

This course will examine what went wrong, whether it be renting out unappealing hotel rooms, working three jobs to satisfy a hungry budget, or slipping into an even hungrier addiction.

LIFE 0101 - Life Theory (1)

Students will learn that life is unpredictable. Credit or no-credit.

MELINDA QUACH



I'LL RELIVE THE TRAGEDY, SO THAT I CAN RELIVE THE HAPPINESS AS WELL

Throughout my career, thus far, I have seldom met humans who were worth remembering. As Death, I see souls continuously come and go; worlds continuously destroyed and reborn. Those pitiful human lives are meaningless and filled with greed and drama. They fill their worlds up with filth and hatred, then cry and scream when it crumbles apart around them. Human nature cannot be altered—at least, that was what I thought until I met Cordelia. Or, at least, the person who would become ‘Cordelia’—and yes, to later-day humans, it is the same Cordelia that William Shakespeare’s creation *King Lear* refers to. I had met her (him) when she (he) had been a young general in another world: ambitious, hotheaded, loyal, and straightforward. At the time, I felt that ‘his’ personality was too arrogant, so for ‘his’ second life, I made sure that ‘he’ was reincarnated as a humble, young lady. It was only afterward that I realized that I had done something abnormal; why should I care if a soul had been too arrogant? A soul was just a soul, and my job was only to guide and send them along. I did not understand my behavior, but I continued to watch over the soul, as she gave up both wealth and fame to follow her cousin into exile. Since then, I have maintained my watchful silence. However, I finally broke my peace before I sent her to be reborn as the famed Cordelia, the third daughter of King Lear, who was wrongfully disowned for her honesty. At the time, I knew that the world I was sending her to was on the brink of collapse. So, on a whim, I advised her not to get too attached to the world. Yet, before I could send her off, she boldly asked what I meant by my words. Pleasantly surprised by her refreshing lack of fear toward me, I told her the truth: ‘this sinful world was slated for its cleansing; its destruction and rebirth.’ After hearing this, she asked me if there was any way to reverse this ending. I was about to tell her no, but then, I remembered that in one of the ancient grimoires I read previously, it had stated that collapsing worlds could be sustained through the power of good karma. Therefore, I changed my words and told her that if she could prove that this world was still worth saving, then I could prevent its destruction. She agreed and I sent her on her way. The story that unfolded through her journey eventually taught me that no matter how

ugly the greed and corruption of mankind could be, even a doomed universe still had some goodness left.

At the beginning, the actions of the people from the world of *King Lear* only reaffirmed my belief that this world was beyond saving. Fathers have disowned their children, siblings have schemed against one another, children have mistreated their parents, men have cheated on their wives, good and loyal people have been wrongfully punished, and innocent people have suffered at the hands of evil. In fact, King Lear, himself, had thrown away the only daughter who had truly loved him for the facade of love his eldest two daughters had eloquently presented to him. While I do find it tragic that Cordelia had not learned to keep her honesty to herself after all those years of being a part of the royal family, what I found even more tragic were the king's unreasonable decisions. Not only had he banished his daughter for not flattering him with false niceties, he had also silenced his most loyal subject Kent, and banished him for speaking his mind. If a subject dares to speak his mind, then it could be assumed that he has shared countless decades of friendship with his king and has been valued for his honesty. However, for the king to silence him now indicates that all of his years of friendship and loyalty means nothing in the face of power and authority. If years of loyalty and servitude can be wiped away with a single word or argument, then what is the need for faithful servants? Instead of listening to the words of people who genuinely had his best interests in mind, he chose to place his trust in his eldest daughters, who were merely looking to further their ambitions, instead. Once King Lear's land, power, and wealth fell into their hands, and they managed to cull his military forces, his worth in the sisters' eyes fell sharply, and they cast him out of both home and shelter. Thus, after all this time, the negative karma has only accumulated rather than lessened, and the source of salvation is nowhere to be found. Truly, Francisco de Goya puts it best in his creation *Los Caprichos*, in which he depicted the idea that when reason sleeps, monsters come out to play. In the case of King Lear, when a kingdom loses all reason, "monsters," such as crooks and villains, will emerge victorious. As the "monsters" take over the kingdom, men, such as the Duke of Gloucester, are driven to kill themselves out of despair. Therefore, I actually find it kinder to leave the world to its fate, as its destruction would only put an end to all of their suffering.

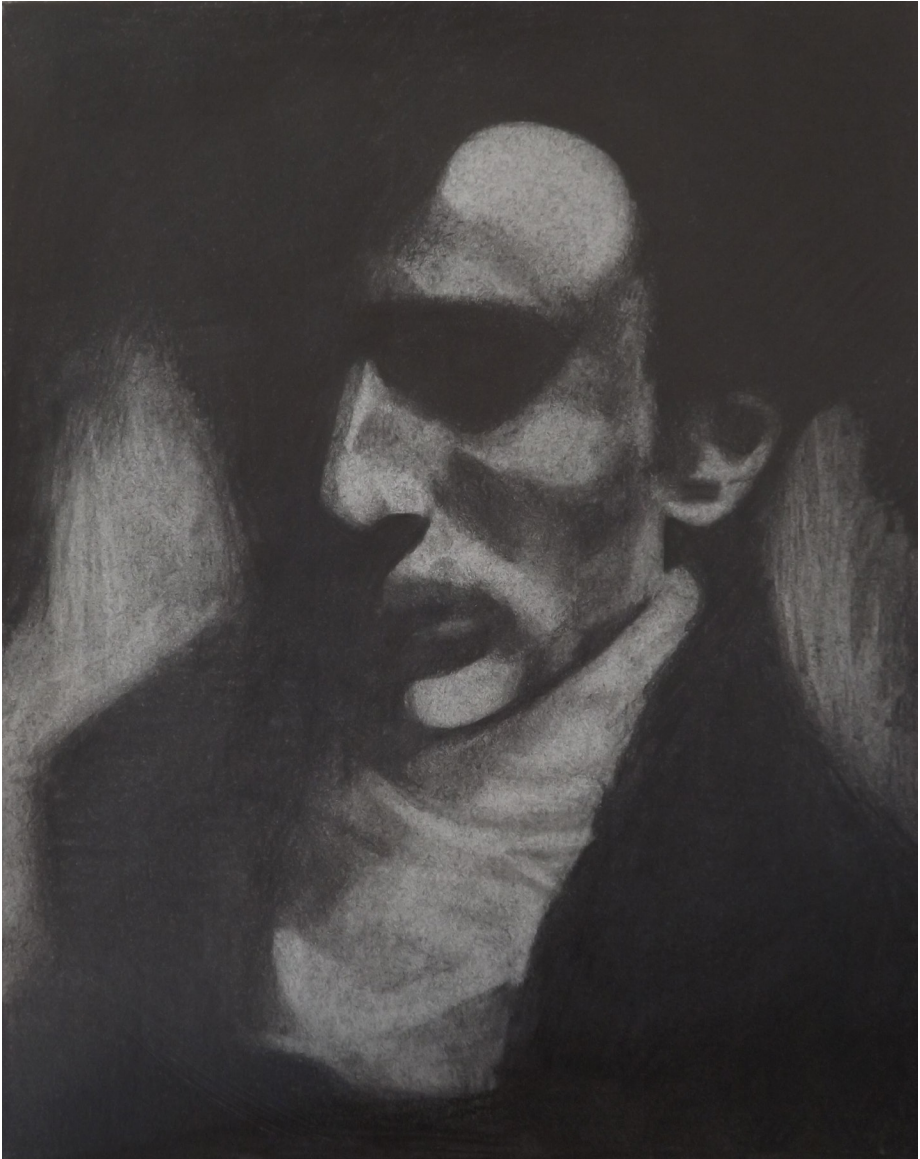
Yet, it is unfair to make the decision to condemn the world to

its fate without considering the people who are genuinely innocent and have accidentally been caught in the crosshairs of the battles between the power-hungry nobles. After Edmund, the illegitimate son of the Duke of Gloucester, plotted against his brother, Edgar, in order to obtain the heirship for himself, Edgar was forced to live on the run in order to evade his father's orders to capture him as a criminal. Yet, despite how his father had wronged him, when Edgar saw his father once more, now a blind and fallen noble, he was unwilling to let vengeance cloud his mind and repay his past grievances with more grief. Instead, he helped guide his blind father to Dover. From this small act of kindness, a great amount of positive karma was generated, and my heart swayed with it. Despite being schemed against and misunderstood, Edgar was still able to uphold his morals and sense of honor, and repaid his father's harsh actions with kindness. Although his duel with his brother had led to Edmund's death in the end, at least he was able to open Edmund's eyes to his own cruelty. Due to this realization, Edmund was able to do at least one good deed in his life before he died, as his orders had saved King Lear from being executed by his soldiers. This small hint of kindness and regret had helped to somewhat redeem his cruel decision to torture both Cordelia and her father. However, for all his good intentions, Cordelia still died before his orders to stop the execution came down, and King Lear still followed her in death not long thereafter. Nevertheless, although these acts of kindness were small, they weighed no less than the acts of evil and cruelty on the Scale of Judgment. With the balance of good and bad karma restored, the world had a high possibility of having its destruction reversed.

Even so, a small matter still stayed my hands. As soon as Cordelia's soul returned to my realm, she immediately sought me out, asking if her world could be saved. I waited for her energy to die down, before I replied. 'Yes, the world could be saved, but not her.' Her expression grew confused, so I explained: if I were to prevent the world's fated collapse, it would revert back to its default state, in which it would replay Cordelia's lifetime over and over again. When her story ended, it would repeat itself from the very beginning; a time loop, in essence. As an important character in its storyline, Cordelia's soul would be forced to return to the world, dying over and over again, without hope of true reincarnation. If I were to take her existence out of the universe, the storyline would collapse, leading to the destruction of the entire world, once more. Even with such risks, I asked Cordelia

if she was still willing to save the world. With the same courage and determination she yielded as she ordered her armies about on the battlefield, she unhesitatingly responded with an affirmative. A silence descended between us, as I tried to make sense of her answer. After rolling her words around in my head a few times, I asked her why she was so willing to go back to a world that already should have expired and been reborn anew. Why was she so willing to return to a world that would replay her greatest tragedies over and over again without pause? Giving me a sweet smile, she responded: 'I'll relive the tragedy, so that I can relive the happiness as well. Even if the world is irredeemable, I would still go back just to relive those few moments of happiness by the sides of my most important people.' Receiving an answer, albeit not one that I understood on an emotional level, I sent Cordelia back to the world of *King Lear*, and left it to its own devices.

Hundreds of years have passed since then, but I still remember that remarkable heroine. I remember her courage, and I remember her sacrifice. Of course, I have peeked into her universe every now and then, and each time, I am still convinced that a world without reason can only be overrun by monsters and villains in the end. In a world like this, good people cannot keep their lives for long. But perhaps, it is better this way, as beauty should be kept fleeting. For the people of this world, I can only provide a simple piece of advice: one must watch a person's actions to know their true character, as anyone can praise and flatter. If villains were trustworthy, then they would not be "villains" in the first place.



Study of Edward Steichen's Self-Portrait with Brush and Palette
by Grace VanKirk
10 x 8, graphite pencil on paper



THE KIND MAN

The young girl got up that morning. She knew she had an extra two hours to play, as she had a dental appointment, so her dad decided she wouldn't go to school until after. She thought of all the things she could do.

She asked herself, "How about the computer? Nah. How about coloring? No."

Eventually it came to her: she would write a story. It went:

"Once upon a time there was a commoner; this man lived deep within the village just as he has done since the town began. People were mean to this man, not because of something he had done, but because they forgot how to be kind. They thought the old man was silly for all the good deeds he did, but one day he passed away.

Now, there were no kind people left in the village. They soon realized that they could not finish their usual chores.

Ms. Phelly had to have someone's help collecting the mail, as she is afraid of the outdoors. The kind man would normally put her mail on her windowsill, but no one did that day. The mail sat in the lonely mail box, more than one hundred impossible feet away from Ms. Phelly's reach.

Mr. Porter came outside to chaos; all his chickens had escaped. Normally the kind man would help him get his chickens back, but not today. There was no one to help him today, so he just kept chasing the chickens for hours. It was to no avail; he just was not youthful enough to catch the chickens anymore on his own.

Mrs. Nadia woke to a dilemma of her own: she had plenty of food for breakfast, but no one to share with. The kind man had dined with Mrs. Nadia every morning since her husband passed away. There was no one waiting to keep her company that day.

Mr. Porter and Mrs. Nadia stepped on to the main road. Mrs. Nadia realized that each of the other villagers were beginning to miss the kind man's presence as well. She noticed the uncollected mail at Ms. Phelly's, the loose chickens, and other families trying to fill the role that the kind man had played for each of them for more than a decade.

Mr. Porter asked her, 'Now who will help me catch my chickens?'

Mrs. Nadia was thinking. Then it hit her.

‘Mr. Porter! Why don’t I help? Then you can help me eat part of this food,’ Mrs. Nadia considered.

It was decided. The pair caught the chickens quickly. Instead of just helping each other, Mr. Porter decided to take Ms. Phelly her mail and Mrs. Nadia took her some breakfast. The next thing they knew, everyone in the village was helping one another.

It turned out, the kind man did them a final favor by passing: he reminded everyone how to be kind.”

MONICA WILLIAMS



MUSTANGS, MASK-ULINITY, AND CAGES

Kyrie's Story—1988

My dad likes to collect mustangs. You know, those little model kind that don't do nothin'. They just sit there and 'look pretty' like dad says. He has almost every model you can think of, the 64' Original, the 67' Shelby, the 68' California Special, the 74' Coupe, and the newest 85' Convertible and Hatchback. I'm not allowed to touch them even though I live right next to the case. He locks them in a tall glass cabinet that's made with some kind of special wood and glass and blah, blah, blah. I don't care that much, so I don't pay close attention. What I do think about, while he's runnin' his mouth, is how badass that candy apple red 1970 Mustang Boss 302 shines in those tiny white Christmas lights that hang on the inside. That car is dope! She sits right in the center of the rest of the models. The light hits just right like it's her own spotlight. I bet she has a growl. Power. The inside is all white, the seats sit straight up with strong backs and wide comfy cushions. There is one single silver strip that traces her all around the sides, she just looks like she's the fastest car in the world. I bet her muscle is so strong that she practically flies anywhere you want her to go. The Christmas lights brighten up the color, and the shine sings to me, she's saying that I will be with her one day. The Boss, flying wherever I want to go. It's his favorite, so he cleans it the most, she's mine too. He likes to dust her off and handle her a lot. It's weird cuz' he has to be so gentle to touch her. His hands are big and rough, and they don't look like hands you would want to touch you. The Boss looks like she's in danger sittin' between his fingers while he wipes her down all slow, so tiny, so powerful. I know how it feels to be handled when you don't want to be, to be picked up, touched, poked. Anyway, that is where I go when he dweebs out on his models or decides he wants to spend private time with me. I dream about the wind in my face and Winkelman, AZ, far behind me, so only 321 people will be left. I have to pretend to listen to him 'cuz if I don't well, you know, it saves me to pretend to listen. So, I dream on about how one day I'm goin' to be cruisin' through the wind, down a long road far away from here—just me. The radio blastin' with that Frankie Smith song, and I'm on my way to Beverly Hills; I'm sure Californians like "Double Dutch Bus," who doesn't? I don't know what I'm going to

do there, all I know is that's where I'm supposed to be 'cuz its where my mother is. At least that's where I think she is.

Another thing, okay, here it goes, I think... I'm not for sure, for sure, but I think that I can make it to California once I figure out how to get this chain off, that's the last step. I just got to get the key, and me and Candied Apple are outsky. It seems like, in Beverly Hills, I can act how I wanna act; talk how I wanna talk, and nobody says nothin' to you. If I wanna wear a blue shirt or a pink shirt or flowers or baseballs, I can do what I want, and nobody will say nothin'. If I wanna wear a hat that says, "where's the beef," I won't get jumped for it. Daddy said that happened to a kid here, that's why I couldn't have one. But I don't go outside. Anyway, let him tell it, there's nothin' but weirdos in California, it's the only time he takes the chain off, lets me walk around a bit.

"Those sons of bitches are goin' to hell in a handbasket. Ain't nothin' right 'bout livin' like that. Free love 'nd all that shit, smokin' dope, show me ONE thing in this life that's free, damn sure ain't love neither."

Love? What was he even talkin' about? He never talks about love. I don't think he knows what it even is. I don't know what it is, so I don't see how he can fix his mouth to say nothin' about it. He goes on and on about how California is the worst place in the world, and here is just where we belong cuz' nobody hassles us.

"People don't really love things like they should." He says while gettin' me ready for the night. Can you believe he says that? *To me?* Same thing every time,

"That's why the world is messed like it is. That's why I'm stuck with you. You'll be out of here soon enough, you almost fourteen, right?"

"Yeah, I think so. Can I get off the chain for good when I'm fourteen?"

"We'll see, you gon' stay put? I can't unchain you less'n I know you gon' stay put."

He's right. About both, I think. People don't love things like they should, and that's why I'm stuck here. That was the last thing I remember him sayin' to me. That was the night I decided I had to go. I lay in my corner and go to my happy place. I can see her perfectly at this angle like she is a beautiful red spaceship in the sky floating by, but in my mind, I'm with her soaring through the air, just me and the Boss while he... you know. I don't remember fallin' asleep.

When I woke up, it was still dark outside, and the air felt sharp. The kind of morning that makes you feel like you should take a risk right then, or it will go away forever. I pick myself up from my pallet of pillows and blankets that lies right in front of the case. The Christmas lights feel like peace, shining all around me, quiets a lot of noise in my head. I had on my favorite sweatshirt with J.J. givin' a thumbs up, and it says DYNAMITE across the top. I put on my house shoes and walked out on the porch to look at the sky. That's not somethin' I ever do. I don't remember him dressing me last night, and he must've forgot to tighten the chain back up 'cuz I've never been able to make it all the way to the front window. I think it's only about 5 chairs long, I measured before, now it feels like 8 or 9. It was like I could already smell the air and feel it on my skin before I opened the window. Fresh early mornin's have a way of pouring positivity into your mind, makes you feel like it's going to be a good day. The sky was so clear I could see every star. At the same time, I could see the sun just barely comin' up. When the breeze hit my face, I closed my eyes and laid my head back. I felt like I could fly! I came back in from the chill, and it was like I had been gone years, and now everything looked smaller like it does when you hear folks say, *"this use to look so big to me when I was little."* I walked slowly down the hall and studied the picture of me. It's a picture of me and my dad, he's holding me smilin' into the camera, I'm cryin' and starin' at his hands around my tiny ribcage... I guess I've always been scared of those hands. As I'm walking around the house, I realize the chain is making a heavy scraping sound across the floor — the wood creaks and then a soft *swoosh clang clang, swoosh clang clang*. He's going to wake up. I have to get that key!

I stand still for what feels like hours but remember my plan. I need to get to the basement door, that's where he hangs it. I think I can reach now that I can go so much further. Maybe God is finally answering my prayers. I back up slowly all the way to the wall heater that I'm locked to. I gather up the chain so slowly I start to sweat; little by little, I circle it around my hand the way I've seen daddy do it. It's so heavy, I can barely get my hand around it, but I stretch my fingers and hold on tight. As I make my way, super-duper slow, I let a piece of chain on the ground real soft. I try to release it inch by inch. Slowly, I lay the chain down while I make my way to the basement door, walking backward like the kid in E.T with the Reese's. I can see the keys hanging on the nail that was pounded in the wall years ago getting closer and

closer. He coughs. I freeze. I begin to inch my way again, and before I know it, I am staring right in the face of the doorway. I'm dripping with sweat; my hands feel like I've dunked them in soapy dishwater. I raise my right hand very, very slow, like if he could hear the creak of my shoulder lifting, and then I grab the key.

My heart is beating in my ears, and I take my time to fit the key in the lock so perfectly it sounded like a purr when I turned it. I hold the chain and the lock in place, hoping that I can sit them all down at once. I step out of the waistband that has been a part of my body for the last 7 years. I ease the heavy chain down and lay them together with ease, coiled like a snake. There is the soft shuffle of metal on metal, but he hasn't moved. I step out of the loop of chain, and I start to feel empty, like I was missing somethin', almost like I was going to hurl and float all at the same time. I turned left down the hall to peek into his bedroom, he looks peaceful.

The chain is OFF!! I'm scared shitless, and all I can hear is my breathing and, "*There's a double Dutch bus coming down the street / Moving pretty fast so kinda shuffle your feet.*" I'm panicking; I'm breathing too heavy it's going to wake him. The song's too loud! It takes everything in me not to throw up. I was stuck, I had to move. I move backwards, walking out of the hallway now, back into my room. The first thing I do is look for clothes. I grab whatever I can out of the trunk that holds everything I own. Without even looking, I stuff arm fills of clothing into a pillowcase that was sitting on the floor, like it was there just for me. *Where's the key, where's the key, where's the key*, plays alongside, "*The Double Dutch Bus is on the street / You'd better get off the curb / Move your feet.*" Gohtdammit! The end of the hallway! I left it in the lock. I don't know if I can go back and get that key, I don't know if I should. I need it, but I can't go back for it, I have to get myself out of here. Me and the Boss have to make it out of here. There is so much noise in my head; I just yell, "Fuck it!" I bust the case open with the chair from my corner, glass flies everywhere, the sound was so loud that I could feel it like I was the one that got hit. The sounds of my scream and the glass shattering felt like a growl; it came from way deep in my belly somewhere. I can't see 'cuz everything is in and out of focus like one of those kaleidoscope toys. My vision is everywhere in every color. I try to keep focus the best I can and head straight for the door. As soon as it opens, I hear the boots! *Thump, thump, thump*, I feel weak, like I'm losing my legs from right under me. Then, faster,

thumpthumpthumpthump, he's coming! I feel like I'm falling, no control over my body, it's like I'm watching from the outside. Everything is spinning, and I just keep running; I don't stop, I don't look back. I run and run and run and run until I couldn't open my mouth; it was stuck together, so dry. Out of breath and coughin', I make it to the road quicker than I thought I would and just kept going. I don't know how long I ran, it was a while, but it got easier because I felt weightless the further I got away from that house. The roads were so quiet a car would pass, maybe, every half-hour. That's when I would pull out the Boss from my short pocket and say to her, "we made it."

1999—San Quentin State Prison

"This nigga! Arizona?!" Dre was laughing harder than he should've been. How is it that he never heard of anybody being from Arizona? Kyrie thought.

"Is there black people in Arizona?" Dre said jokingly.

"I was there nigga, I was born there so yeah, mark."

"Fuck you, you a mark," he whispered.

Kyrie has spent the rest of his life trying to figure out how to... just be. Be with someone he loves, be left alone, be full of good food, be happy. Here, it is easier to be content. There is a sense of relaxation that comes with having all the rules laid out for you; having all the thinking done gives you a sense of contentment. It's as if prison gave Kyrie his first taste of peace.

"I thought you was from L.A. anyway."

"Naw, I spent most of my life there, but I didn't get there until I was about 14 years old. I ran away from my father's house and never looked back."

Dre was surprised; he never thought about running away to get away. He just fell into the same old trap, like every other boy in his neighborhood. Bangin' and slangin' to survive.

"How'd you make it all the way to L.A.?"

"A lady picked me up, I was walking down the highway for days, and she stopped and fed me, bought me a bus ticket."

"No, shit? That ain't nothin' but God, man."

"I wouldn't say that," Kyrie looks down at his orange, pauses and says, "she had sex with me."

"Niggaaa, whaaat! Maaan, your shit sounds like an adventure story."

"I don't know if it was an adventure or a nightmare man, I didn't want to do that shit, I thought I had to. I was made to do things all my life I didn't want to do, so I guess it was easy for her to manipulate the situation, I know now that I was already groomed. You ever hear of that?"

"Naw, I ain't never heard of that. Groom like she wanted to marry you? Was she a old lady?"

"Yeah, a old white lady. She might not've been that old when I think about it now; she was probably, 30 something but seemed old to me then. Grooming is like when you make little kids think something is normal, but it really ain't."

"Aye, that's fucked up, cuz. What happened after?" Dre's curiosity always got the best of him.

"That was the first time I did it, but it came easy; I didn't even realize what I did until it was done. She was nice, and she was rubbin' on me and shit, and then she said that I could stay with her, that I didn't have to leave. She said that she would take care of me as long as I kept doing things for her, she said that I made her feel like everything in the world is going to be okay. All I could think about was that I was going to have to listen to someone tell me what to do all the time, someone doing stuff to me that I don't want to be done." Dre listened intently and stared at the ground silently. "*I guess it doesn't matter now — confessions,*" he thought. The decision has been made.

"Every person I ever met tried to do me wrong in some way, even if they were saying they wanted to help, they only wanted something from me, or they just never believed in me, I feel like I never had a chance in this world man." Kyrie shrugged, focusing on peeling his orange.

"That's what Oprah was just talking about the other day. About healing from your past and shit like that." Dre loved Oprah.

"That's what I'm sayin', man. I thought I could see my dad again, trying to heal. I mean, I HATE that muthafucka, but I thought I could see him for my own self, you know. But that shit went bad real quick."

Dre and Kyrie were in the mess hall, they were the most honest with each other. They grew a bond during late nights, when loneliness takes over, and they think no one is listening.

"He was still a bogus ass nigga?" Asked Dre, even though he knew the answer.

"He had a boy chained in my old room, I think there was some

before me too, I expected it. The sounds were too familiar, the chain dragging on the floor, the smell of piss stingin' my nose. When I went inside, he was drunk, pantless, and sitting at the table. He was shocked, it took him a second to realize who I was. Then I heard the sounds and the smells, felt like I was transported back in time, man. I rushed to the bedroom door, he wasn't fast enough to stop me, I busted it down. He was like 8 years old my nigga. I turned around and grabbed his throat, and I didn't stop until I felt his soul leave his body."

Dre and Kyrie sat in silence for several seconds. Kyrie was holding back tears.

"Aye man, you did what you had to do, you saved that kid's life and your own man."

"But, did I? Boys is fucked up, man. For me, it is what it is. But, that little boy... he ain't alright man. I was never alright, man. We got to stop pretending."

"Pretending?"

"This world doesn't care what happens to little black boys. They see us as decoration, obedient power, muscle, and beauty. Once they're done with us, we're locked away."

Kyrie's Final Chapter—July 4, 2000

Man! Those Mustang's Christmas lights were so nice. My dad liked them, he could get a better look at them with those lights, they enticed him to pull them off their shelves and dust them off a bit, then try to put them back in the same exact spot, so he doesn't have to clean the whole shelf. He places the little model car right back in the dust lines that he's left there. He ain't never taught me nothin'. Except that, if something hurts real bad, you can make your mind go anywhere you want. It's like a power that you can build to be absent during the bad times. The Boss is still with me, I'm taking her with me on the long walk. I kept her my whole life. When I close my eyes, all I can see is the shine from the candied apple paint, the whitewall tires, the white leather on the inside, smells so good. I can feel the wind as I stretch my hand out of the driver window and let it pass through my fingers. The smell in the air is freedom, and the sun in the sky is warm with soft fluffy clouds floating. Every time I close my eyes, it feels like I'm flying. *"Fe fi fo fum / Well I'll be darn Here it comes / The Double Dutch Bus is on the street / You better get off the curb / Move your feet."* I slid her out my sleeve, my fingers grip on to her as they fasten my hands down.

I shut my eyes and float down the road with my hand hanging outside the window, my fingers surfing the air.

“Put on your skates don’t forget your rope / Cause I know I’m gonna see you / At my Double Dutch Show.”

“What the hell is that?” Roy said. “17 years of this, and no one has ever gotten by with this shit!” He looks at George, “I didn’t see it, captain.” Roy bent down and picked up a pretty, little red mustang Hot Wheel. “Lucky bastard, see if we can find someone to give this to.”

“You don’t want to keep it, Roy?”

“Hell no, it probably has bad juju.”



THE BEDROOM IN THE MIND

Nothing shows up. No idea is lying around. No thought walks through the door.

All that is in my room is my bed, my desk with my computer, and my TV and gaming consoles on top of the dresser. Everything is clean.

Yet, at times, I have so many plans for a story everywhere. They're on my nightstand, my end table, even my desk, and next to the TV and consoles. Everything is organized, but at the same time, stuff either isn't where it is supposed to be or is just scattered and not properly placed. I don't where to put the scattered, except perhaps the trash. I plan to use the misplaced ideas for later, but they are making everything disorganized. My attention wanders to everything in the room, and I forget my initial thought.

Finally, a knock is heard on my door. I open it, and a new idea appears and walks in. Sometimes, I am on the fence of allowing a new idea to be in my room as I have to get to know it first. Other times, I welcome a new idea as it feels natural and makes sense. Once I become passionate with this new idea, I start talking to it, and we have an incredible conversation at my desk. Alas, my attention does not last long in my own bedroom.

Sometimes, I go to my closet of memories the moment the conversation stops for a bit, and that's all it takes. All it takes is for the conversation to pause for a few seconds, and I would walk to open up a closet full of things I have seen, done, and previously thought about. I open it ever so slightly and am immediately flooded with memories and random thinking. I quickly grab something. I don't know what it is. Sometimes, it's a song I recently listened to, or a scene I saw from a show or movie. Other times, it's a video I saw on YouTube. Whatever I first grab, though, does not matter, for it leads me all around the room. It takes me to my TV, then to my computer, then to my consoles, then back to my computer, then my consoles again, it doesn't end until I decide to clean up the mess!

When everything is organized again, when my room is clean again, I am back to where I started. Whatever idea I had, either was caught up in the mess and is now in the closet with the other thoughts, or had left due to the disorder and may never return. I am left to walk back and forth in my mind, from the door to the closet, with nothing but my bed, my computer, my TV, and my gaming consoles.



Jedi James
by Grace VanKirk
10 x 12, graphite pencil on paper

BAT-AMI GORDIN



HOW TO USE A TELEPATH TO WRITE YOUR ENGLISH COMPOSITION

Writing is a hair-raising event for you. It brings on the onset of an allergic reaction. So you start taking, let's call them "things." These "things" seem to bring everything under control. At first, the awful symptoms of anxiety, despair, and shortness of breath come to a rapid halt. But so does the memory of what you had to accomplish: writing an English composition.

You begin to experience complete relaxation, subjugation, and serenity. Then, for some odd reason, you look at your calendar. Voila. A composition is due forthwith, and with all the discipline you have, you stop taking those "things," switching to chamomile tea. At first, you seem okay, but suddenly, anxiety seems to skyrocket. There is strange muscle weakness and you seem to have forgotten how to lie down. You are isolated by a barrier between everyone else and everything else.

You find another "thing" to take. Something that clears your mind. You pray that it is a "smart pill" that can also increase your intelligence level. You look at Yahoo Finance and you see absolutely no patterns and you do not become instantaneously rich. Your anxiety is gone but so is your creativity. You are both not smart and not creative. The calendar buzzes on your phone. "Reminder. Reminder." A proper thesis statement becomes eminent. Anxiety morphs into depression.

You realize it might be prudent to check the chemical composition of the "things" you've been taking; they are identical in composition to alcohol. You hit yourself in the head. All this time you have intentionally avoided alcohol, and calculatingly missed the time of your life at parties, at dance clubs, and at the kind of establishments your roommate calls "places." All those exciting events went unexploited while you got yourself addicted to dependency inducing chemicals that prodded you into latency, complacency, and dependency.

The symptoms have spiraled out of control until your roommate locks you away with nothing to do but sleep. You dream the fibers of your clothing are falling apart. Everything you wear is frayed and as you lift yourself from the bed every article of clothing falls off you into a pile of threads, sort of like the Marvel characters "dusting" at the end of *Avengers: Infinity War*, but just the clothes. You dream you are a Rhode Island Red free-range chicken, then you are an Amazon box

lost in space, orbiting by the International Space Station and various unidentifiable spy satellites. These dreams bring you back to a state of anxiousness so severe that you do a complete spring cleaning on your dorm room and chase everyone away, fearing they will bring stench and disorder into your needy life, in which case you might start taking the “things” again which will bring you back to the state of euphoric suffering.

The symptoms have spiraled out of control until in this surreal state, more unreal than a frenzied Lewis Carroll hallucination, you realize you need a tutor. A tutor who with a professional, organizational nature will nudge and nag “thesis, outline, organization, conclusion.” Yes, a tutor who will remind you “...having a good outline will make it much easier for you to write because all you have to do is fill in the outline you already have your ideas all set up together.”

But, of course, instead of prompting you with helpful advice, she simply asks, “Topic?”

You whimper.

She repeats a phrase you often heard in high school English, “Theme? Overall topic?”

You moan and shake your head in the most histrionic way you can manage. She understands. You know this because she gulps and nervously says, “Oh,” as she changes tactics. “What kind of things do you like?”

“Certainly not writing,” you respond.

“What are your interests?”

“Sex,” you answer. What else could you say?

“I see,” she says as she gnaws on her lower lips because this is a scary topic for young, writing nerds. “Let’s try this. What do you like to do?”

You stare at her incoherently, like the Freshman you are.

But the tutor does not get fazed. She clearly has both experience and training with Freshman Composition anxiety issues and asks, “What do you like to argue about?”

That word “argument” is something you recognize from composition class. At last you and she might have a connection. She sees the bulb light up over your head and prompts you further, “Why are you here?” It’s a rather vague statement for someone allegedly supposed to bring clarity to your confusion.

“Here? There. Where?” you think to yourself because you have

a paper to write and the responsibility of it all is too great. “The only thing that I actually care about besides sex is *Star Wars*. I can argue about *Star Wars* all day long.”

The tutor smiles, “Ah ha. We’re getting somewhere.” Her smile reveals a sense of relaxation. Your anxiety has been rubbing off on her. “Well, what do you like to argue about when you talk about *Star Wars*?”

“Well,” you respond, since you realize both of you may as well say “well” at the beginning of every sentence. “Well, the only thing to argue about *Star Wars* is how bad the sequel series is.”

She looks at you like you’re crazy, “What do you mean?” she asks, implying she is “one of them guys” who thinks *The Last Jedi* was good. You feel you have to make excuses, or she will shut your opinion down.

“I admit the directing wasn’t that bad. In fact, in some places it was absolutely brilliant. But that doesn’t make it good *Star Wars*. I mean, *Star Wars* is supposed to be what it is. We fans have specific expectations and we don’t want those expectations shattered. For example, Luke. Everyone loves Luke. He may not be your favorite *Star Wars* character, but he certainly is on everybody’s favorite five list. You don’t take Luke and turn him into a miserable old man that everyone hates. Doing that, makes you, kind of, not even like Mark Hamill, whose political views are completely unnecessary...” You realize you are off-topic, but the tutor is good, and gets you back on track.

“Well, you started talking about Mark Hamill but there’s not that much to argue about Mark Hamill is there?”

“Are you kidding me?” You look right through her, stop talking about Mark Hamill and get back to *Star Wars*. You shake your head because you have been traumatized by what happened to *Star Wars* in the sequel trilogy.

“Well,” she says, “Why don’t you tell me three things that you like to argue about the sequel trilogy.”

“Oh, I mean ‘well,’ that’s easy. One. Rey is a Mary Sue. Two. Expectations were subverted in the most horrifying way. Three. JJ Abrams’s mystery box plot holes, especially the ones that never got answered at the end.”

“Okay. Great.” She gets so excited. She seems like a whole different person with all this energy coming out of nowhere. “Do you see?”

“Do I see what?”

“Do you see you now have the makings of an outline. Here quick take a pen. Write one, good, two, good, three. Now write the first thing you said what was it something about Rey?”

You write “Rey is a Mary Sue.”

“Okay. Number two, something about expectations being subverted.”

“Sure,” you say as you fill in, “We don’t like our expectations subverted, especially about characters we love.”

“Okay. And what was three? Do you remember”

Of course you remember. It’s something you don’t shut up about. “Mystery box” you write as you sketch a fancy little arrow pointing to “Jar Jar Abrams” because Jar Jar is the most hated character in all of *Star Wars*, and as bad as Rian Johnson was, well, Jar Jar Abrams is the one who set up *The Last Jedi*.

The tutor returns to your favorite writing word. “Thesis. Can you come up with a thesis?”

“I don’t know.” You were so confident a moment ago, but that word does something to bring your thoughts back to items of chemical composition not to be mentioned.

“Well. What do you see that brings the three of those together?”

You think about it. You stare at the paper and your eyes drift away from number one as you realize the whole manifestation of Rey as a Mary Sue came from the feminist ideals of Kathleen Kennedy of course that had nothing to do with numbers two and three, which had nothing to do with what the paper was supposed to be about. “You know, I mean well, the paper isn’t a freestyle paper. There is actually, you know, an assigned topic.”

“Topic?”

“Feminism in the computer world.”

“Is there such a thing?”

“Apparently yes. A bunch of Mary Sues. All of them.”

Lost and unable to construct a thesis, your tutor suddenly announces that the time is up. You leave, not having a thesis for your paper but also coming to the realization that it really didn’t matter since the paper wasn’t supposed to be about what you wanted it to be about; it was supposed to be about this feminist drivel of a book that the teacher forced you to read. You try to find a way to connect the Mary Sueism of the character Rey into the book because this was something you like to “argue,” but you are stuck on the specifics.

You return to your dorm room when your roommate says, “Hey. Let’s go to a place.” A “place” is a seedy bar with football players who hunt blondes with Barbie hair.

You don’t want to go to a “place,” but she mystically convinces you to go. Your Barbie doll roommate has the nicest clothes. She likes to dress you in her clothes. She also makes you up using her colors, which means the colors for a really light skinned blond, not you. Then she takes your nicest outfit, which is “professional” and meant for an interview. You don’t want her smelling the ensemble up in a bar and having to take them to the dry cleaner or her wearing them out rubbing up against, well whoever. But she insists because, after all, you are wearing her clothes. If you had known this in the first place you wouldn’t have let her dress you like her little doll and... you don’t want to think it out loud.

You tell her you will not drink. You will be the designated driver.

“We didn’t come by car, we are walking,” she reminds you.

“In that case, I’ll be the designated Uber caller if we decide we don’t want to walk back.”

When you come through the doors, your Barbie doll roommate immediately attracts all kinds of guys. She flirts with all of them, regardless of what kind of characters they are, even the dumb, boring, overbearing, and clearly one-night-stand-ish ones. The fun begins when the football players arrive. They notice her hair from all the way across the bar and move through the crowd like longhorn bulls.

You get to speak with the dregs, which means not the cutest ones. That is fine with you because cute guys don’t want to talk about *Star Wars*. With these football players, you must find a compelling subject to get them off speaking about the game or bragging about their knowledge of beer. As you bring up Mark Hamill and Luke Skywalker, the guy you speak with suddenly has an overwhelming need to go somewhere else, not another “place,” but most likely to the bathroom. For some reason, he can’t tell you the truth.

“Here. Hold my beer,” he says because putting it down meant his buddies would guzzle it down. This you know because he guzzled down the “good looking one’s” drink when he turned away pointing something out to your Barbie. Staring at the beer, you realize that it’s like the color of anointed oil, anointed oil which is nothing short of a miracle, which is a long lost biblical ingredient more powerful than any traditional medical concoction. Beer looks like the anointed oil in

which the hand of God will soon reveal some form of consecration. You so want to drink it and tell your football player God made you do it.

Football players are made to be religious, that is, indoctrinated from all that kneeling they do. This sense must be rubbing off on you. Waiting for your guy to come back and get his beer made the duration of time seem very extended and immeasurable, like biblical eternity. You know this because you look at the clock every 40 seconds thinking that hours had gone by. Bored, you watch how the good-looking guy is trying to convince your Barbie that his coach was a Tori, authoritarian, Stalinist, fascist, but not exactly in those words.

When your guy returns and his beer is still there, he is impressed. Now his bladder has room for more, so he gobbles it down like one of Hagrid's monsters would. Then he asks you what was going on. You tell him that you have to write a paper for composition class, leaving out the Freshman part, because who wants to admit to being a Freshman?

He says, "Ouch, I feel you." The pain on his face is that of which he would have if somebody twice his weight had just knocked him over.

You explain to him that you don't know what to write, that you went to the tutoring center, the tutor got you thinking in circles and when you walked out, you had no idea...

"Tutor? Why would you go to a tutor for help with a paper?" he responds. "The right place to go is to find a telepath."

You never heard of using a telepath for anything, not to say to write a composition for freshman composition class. You would fall for this bait. It was probably leading to a joke. "How does a telepath help?"

"I got a telepath once," said the football player. "All I had to do was think my problems and the telepath put all the solutions in my head."

"You were suddenly able to write the paper. Really?" you are a bit incredulous, and this is understandable. What was not understandable was that he was serious about this scheme. "And how do you find a telepath?"

"You don't find the telepath. It's a telepath, so the telepath just has to put things in your head. You never actually have to see the telepath."

"How do I contact this telepath?" you ask.

The 250 pound offensive lineman replies in a whisper, "I can't tell you because otherwise it'll be like thinking it. So I'll write it down."

It took a while to find a pen at the bar. The bartender had one,

of course, but you let the football player look around and figure it out himself. He doesn't. Finally, just to put him out of his frantic misery, you skip over to the bar and ask the bartender if you may borrow his pen. You hand it to the very relieved lineman who has a napkin ready to carefully write down what you are supposed to think in your head.

"How do I know that the right telepath is helping me?"

"It's like when you're going down the Boulevard, and you see a psychic store, and you want to stop in, but the psychic has a sign "out to lunch." You know that isn't a good psychic because the psychic should have known you were coming. Right? Same thing with the telepath. The wrong telepath won't answer you cuz he's a psychic. Only the right one will."

This is an unfalsifiable argument. You learned this in philosophy and you also learned in life that this conversation is over. Somehow, you manage to pry your roommate away from the good-looking football player and make it back to your room safely. You fall asleep repeating the mantra, "Telepath I need you. Telepath I need you." And with that thought, much like counting sheep, you blissfully fall asleep.

At two in the morning, you are abruptly awakened by the inner voice of someone completely unfamiliar to you. It is the telepath.

"I am the telepath you asked for," she says to you. She sounds like the tooth fairy and you quickly check under your pillow but there is no cash there. "I will help you with your composition."

You automatically know that this means: "get to your laptop and start writing." With this, the telepath dictates the entire paper and you frantically type it all up exactly the way she speaks it into your head, eliminating the steps, "thesis, outline, structure, conclusion."

Type.

Type.

Edit.

Edit.

You vomit out an A+ paper, which you finish at 5:30 in the morning, the morning it is due.

Log in university learning management platform.

Select "MarySuesofInternet.docx."

Upload.

Click.

Done.

ELIZABETH GOSSETT



I AM SMAUG (SO MISUNDERSTOOD)

My name is Smaug, and you have probably heard of me from *The Hobbit*, but that story has me all wrong. That story makes me seem like some kind of a monster. Let me tell you my side of the story; then maybe you will not think of me as some terrible monster. Maybe instead you will feel pity for me.

My story begins far north of the land of men, and dwarves, and elves. I lived in a land that was made of rocks, and was surrounded by ocean, and one could only fly there. However, there came a point when there were too many dragons in our land, and I had to fly south to look for new land. My mother always warned me not to venture near dwarves and men because they were always trying to kill dragons. They were always under the impression that dragons were evil creatures. We really are not evil. All we want is a place to sleep, food, and gold. Who does not want gold?

On the way flying south I needed a place to rest and landed in a meadow. I fell asleep and woke up and found myself near an orc camp. Dragons do not like orcs because orcs are nasty, vile, and stupid creatures. I mean they have to be pretty dense to set up camp and not to have noticed a full-grown dragon near them. However, I am not complaining about being near this camp, because I gleaned useful information. I learned that just to the south of me there was a dwarf mine, full of riches, food, and plenty of shelter. Moreover, these dwarves had dug really deep and found more than gold; they had found a special treasure. Now I was interested in this as anyone would be, but I only wanted the special treasure at first, not everything.

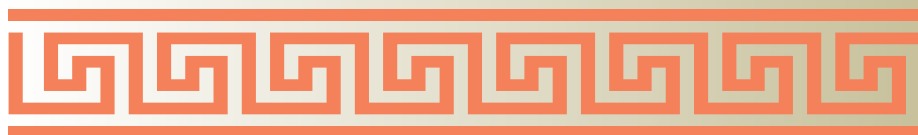
So, the next morning I woke up really early and flew to the mountain where the dwarves lived, and I just wanted to talk to them. However, the first thing I hear is “DRAGON! KILL HIM!” Now wait a minute! I just want to talk! So, I open my mouth—and they shoot! I yell, “I come here in peace! Let me talk to you about the special treasure!” The dwarves must only hear “special treasure” because they shoot me more. Hold up! Why are they shooting me? I have not done anything to harm them...yet. So, while the dwarves are shooting me, they shoot me in the eye. The eye! Imagine getting shot in the eye; it is so painful, so I open my mouth and I blow fire because I am in horrendous pain. Well,

I accidentally set some dwarves on fire and the rest start running away from the cave and to the city of Dale. I follow them, my eye still really hurting, and I am still blowing fire because of the pain. The whole city of Dale catches fire and I really did not mean for it to; they must have built their houses of wood, that was dumb, why didn't they build them out of brick? But something else happens: the dwarves and the men of Dale are fleeing from me and the treasure. I think to myself that the treasure now needs to be guarded from creatures way worse than me: ORCS! So, I began to guard it.

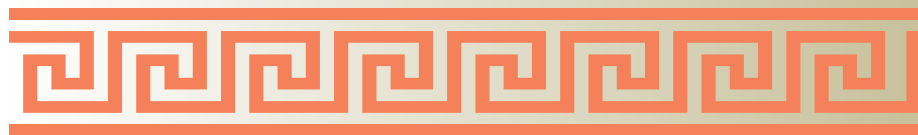
Now you are probably wondering why I did not try to find these dwarves over the years and share this treasure with them. Hello, they shot me in the eye, and they began to start horrible rumors about me. One in particular was, "Smaug killed hundreds of dwarves and men and now will not let us come back to our treasure and our home." Again no one talks about my eye. So, I make this cave my own and the treasure becomes mine, after these vicious rumors began circulating about me. I have been making this cave my own for almost sixty years until one day someone comes barging in and this person is not a dwarf; in fact, I have never smelled anything like him before, but what happens with this person is for another story... Anyway, I hope that your opinion has changed after you found out I was shot in the eye and guarding the treasure from orcs.



A Light From the Shadows Shall Spring
by Grace VanKirk
5.5 x 4, graphite pencil on paper



CREATIVE NONFICTION





MEDIA HISTORY INTERVIEW:

A CHICANO'S CRUISE DOWN MEMORY LANE

Introduction

During the course of my education, all of my textbooks have recounted history according to the American Experience. While as a Mexican American we may have shared the same history as the rest of America, we didn't share the same experience. Therefore, I believed my choice to interview a seventy-year-old Mexican American father of four, raised in East L.A., and married to his wife of over fifty years, would be my perfect subject to interview for my Media History project. I wanted to compare his experience to that of my textbook, *Media Essentials*. I knew that my interviewee would relish the opportunity to speak on his upbringing because some of my questions would reference his first love, music. I also knew that he would be forthcoming with information and I wouldn't have to press too hard for details. In this process, I was hoping to gain some insight into his childhood, delving deeper into his opinions and experiences as a Chicano in the 1950s. Being able to memorialize my interview in writing was an additional benefit that I thought we would both enjoy because he also happens to be my father, Joe Garza.

About My Subject

My subject Joe Garza was born in 1949 in El Paso, Texas. He lived in the Second Ward, which are the projects of El Paso that consists of mostly Mexican families. His parents were also born and raised in El Paso, Texas. At the age of five, while swimming in the community pool, Joe's Tio (uncle) Beto noticed that Joe was behaving strangely and quickly sprang into action. Tio Beto had recognized the signs of polio and rushed Joe to the hospital, saving his life. Two years recovering in the hospital left Joe with one leg smaller than the other and a lust to live life to the fullest. At age seven, his family packed up and moved to East Los Angeles, after his father was hurt in a train accident. Left without any means of supporting his family, as there was no such thing as social security or disability, they were forced to rely on the kindness of family and strangers. So, his parents made the tough decision to leave their home, their extended families and the only community

they knew of, and set off for greener pastures. In 1957, they arrived in East Los Angeles' Maravilla projects. Gangs and drugs were rampant in the Maravilla projects, and Joe tells me about his many childhood, elementary school-aged friends that died from sniffing glue, or who were killed for stealing cigarettes. Temptations were all around him, but he was able to stay on course and graduate high school. This was a great achievement in most Mexican families and as the oldest of five children he would go on to be the only high school graduate in his family.

When I decided that I would interview Joe, I showed up to his home on a Saturday evening with my laptop, my husband Michael, and my daughter Lauren in tow. If you know Joe and his wife Marlene, you know their home is always open, no reservations required. There is always lots of company, good conversation, good music, and good food flowing around. On this day the house is quiet, his wife and partner in fun is not here, and he is watching TV. A rare moment in the Garza household. I announce to him that I need to interview him, and we sit down. I get comfortable on the couch with my laptop, with Lauren by my side. Joe sits himself down at his dining table and Michael sits right next to him. Believing this to be a quick interview, I get to business immediately and begin to ask him questions. As he starts to reminisce, staring fondly into space, he suddenly stops and declares that this interview is going to require some alcohol. He offers Michael a Bacardi and Coke, which Michael happily accepts and makes one for himself. A few minutes later, he heads into his room and comes out with his speakers. At this point I know I'm in for the long haul tonight. If history is an indication, within the next few hours he will be bringing out his microphone and imploring me to sing a few of his favorite songs. The sounds of Chicano oldies start blaring on his speakers and I have to loudly remind him that I need to ask him some questions. He sits down with his drink in hand, "Groovin" by Felix Cavaliere, the lead singer of The Rascals, playing in the background, and he finally turns his attention to me.

Sound Recording

Joe's earliest recollection of music begins at the age of four. In an effort to ensure that her husband doesn't spend his week's wages at the bar, Joe's mother Eugenia, my Grandma Conchy, sends him to the local bars with his father, Jose, or as I called him, Grandpa Chuma. Elvis is

playing on the jukebox and Joe begins to dance for all the patrons. By the end of the night his pockets are full of change. An entertainer is born. At home, mariachi music is the standard as the music blares every Friday and Saturday night. Family members convene to share in food, music, dancing and alcohol. This a big family. Twenty people squished into a two-bedroom home, sharing two steaks, laughing and enjoying each other's company was a weekly occurrence. Joe's family owns a fancy music console that combines the TV with the record player. A luxury for sure but spending money on their music is important. This family's life centers around music, creating many memories, good and bad. At this point, I have to remind Joe's son-in-law, Michael, to stop intervening and answering Joe's questions. Michael and Joe are very close, so when Joe has a lapse of memory, Michael is quick to remind him of what he might have forgotten, as he is very familiar with Joe's tales. I encourage Michael to let Joe answer his own questions and not to worry about the long pauses, because it just means that he is thinking. Michael promises to stop trying to participate and instead, focus on being an observer. He goes back to sipping his drink. Moving forward in time, Joe reminisces on his time as a teen in East L.A. His friends form a band called *The Midnitters*, and he travels around the city with them, meeting up-and-coming musicians. He accompanies them to their gigs and becomes a part of the local music scene. He starts rattling off the names of famous singers that he met. I don't recognize them, but they are famous in the local East L.A. scene. I can't write their names down fast enough, so I just take his word for it. Michael, however, does recognize their names and responds to Joe's tales of all the fun he had and the many talented singers he encountered. Joe shares that one of his favorite teen pastimes was to cruise Whittier Blvd with his friends while blaring soul music on his record player. Much like the rest of America, Mexican Americans, including the tends of East L.A., became big fans of soul music, which hit the musical scene around the same time as the British invasion. At this point in the interview, Joe tells me how much he is enjoying this exercise. I knew he would.

Radio

Joe's family had a transistor radio that they kept in the tiny kitchen where he slept. He did not have a bedroom. His four little sisters shared one bedroom, so he got the kitchen. It was a Sylvania radio, AM only, as there was no FM radio stations at the time. As a child he

fondly remembers his grandparents Rita and Alfred listening to Maria Salinas every morning, where she would talk of current events and play Mexican music. He didn't really pay attention to any commercials except for the car commercials with Felix the Cat. He remembers those. As a teen he was a big fan of the local deejays Art Laboe, Huggy Boy, and Wolfman Jack. Music was very important to his family, so my questions regarding radio and sound recording are filled with lots of memories. We're about two hours into the interview and he asks me to play *Los Relampagos Del Norte*. He wants to hear his father's favorite song, *Por El Amor a Mi Madre*. I play the song and he regales me with tales of how much he hated celebrating holidays as a child. His mother had three brothers and three brothers-in-law, and this song, along with many other Mexican songs, accompanied the alcohol-fueled brawls that would ensue between the brothers. He explains that as fists were flying, they seemed to be going along with the beat of the music. Joe begins to shadow box into the air, being sure to stay with the rhythm of the song that plays on the speaker. At seventy, he has a good sense of humor about the craziness of it all, but he says it wasn't funny as a child. He says that scenes of chaos and bloody knuckles are what plays in his mind every time he hears Mexican music. Mariachi music is the soundtrack of his childhood. He proudly recounts that his children have had nothing but fun, peaceful family gatherings. I agree with him. Although most textbooks don't cover the Mexican American experience during the 1950s, his experience with sound recording and radio are pretty similar to most of his peers, as they balanced the Mexican music of their parents and the up-and-coming styles of African American soul music that they also adored. Sixty years on, Mexican Americans have created a whole culture out of blending both styles, as you see the Low Rider influences still alive and well.

Television

Joe tells me that when TVs came out in 1955, they had one neighbor who had a TV. The neighborhood kids were charged a nickel each to sit on the front porch and watch television programs through the screen door. He was enthralled by *Davy Crockett*, *The Lone Ranger*, and anything to do with cowboys and indians. Still, when his family eventually came to own their own Admiral black-and-white TV with a giant antenna, and he was allowed to watch it after he did his chores, he wasn't interested. He would rather play outside. Television didn't play a

big role in his life. He remembers that his father Jose worked graveyard shifts and would come home to watch soap operas. Jose would call his brother Cuco and they would discuss the newest developments in *One Life to Live*. Joe chuckled at this memory and found it amusing. At eighteen, when he met his future wife, Marlene, he said they would rush home after work to watch *Dark Shadows*. It was her favorite show and though he didn't care for soap operas, he happily obliged. He thinks television programs were more wholesome back then. He doesn't care too much for today's programs, other than the wilderness shows. Joe gets into a side discussion with his granddaughter Lauren on the perils of media. He implores her to be mindful of what influences her on the various media outlets that she is exposed to. Another hour goes by.

Movies

Joe remembers being profoundly affected by watching *The Ten Commandments* as a child. His favorite uncle, Tio Lencho, took him to see it at the local drive-in. He pauses as he thinks fondly of his tio, who has just passed from COVID-19. He takes a drink of his Bacardi and tells me how much that movie made an impression on him. The movie scared him straight and inspired him to want to do the right things in life. When he was about seven years old his parents took him to watch two movies, *Wolfman* and *Frankenstein*. He thought those movies were scary and he couldn't sleep for days. Other than that, his family rarely ever patronized the movies. It was too expensive. He starts to laugh and confesses to being kicked out of a *Cantinflas* movie he went to see as a teen. Apparently, he was whistling at the screen and causing a ruckus. He laughs sheepishly at the memory of the commotion he caused. Joe recalls that the movie theaters in East L.A. were very ornate as was the standard for that time, and that he did not venture out of East L.A. for music, movies, entertainment, or shopping. He stayed within the confines of his city due to racial discrimination. Therefore, his exposure to media was only through the means of what circulated in his city. As a teen, Joe and his Uncle Richard, who was one year older, took their dates to see Elvis's first movie, *Love Me Tender*. He laughs as he recalls that the girls were crying, and so were he and his uncle because Elvis died in the movie. He says movies were used as a form of entertainment for his dates, but he wasn't particularly interested in them. He still isn't. He'd much rather be playing his congas, performing with his band, *It's All Good*. It is now past 11:30 p.m. I contemplate whether I'm going to

sing his favorite song, “Sabor a Mi” by Edie Gorme. I share his love of music, but I have two choices right now: I can keep the party going and most likely be up until three in the morning, or I can go home and call it a night. I decide I better go home. I’ve got a paper to write. Joe walks my family and me out to our car and he thanks me profusely for this trip down memory lane.

Conclusion

After my interview with Joe, I realize that the evolution of media had an immense impact on the lives of Mexican Americans. It developed their sense of belonging, even if it was only to each other, and reinforced their family ties, for better or worse.



BORN TO CRY

Oh no! I could feel the molecules titrate from my monthly antipsychotic injection. Some kind of elation was overtaking me entirely! There I was, standing at the local Target ogling a prized accessory, inspiration firing my beating heart. I've always wanted a big floppy hat, the kind of vintage treasure you see in glamour shots with a breezy shoreline in the background. The vision of the hat was heightening the effect of the injection! This month, May, marked two months into the world-wide COVID pandemic of 2020, and apparently I needed a really big blue hat.

Not just thanks to the virus, my health has been at the forefront of my priorities for nearly a decade now. I am bipolar, and I live in negotiation with my "health" day in and day out.

"I just bought the *biggest* floppy hat. And I look so totally really good walking my dog in the neighborhood right now," I gushed to my best friend, Jacquie, skipping to the park with my Maltese. We were in the middle of a really great phone conversation, until my twitching second personality came to surface, causing me to (stage) whisper conspiratorially as follows: "I have a secret to tell. Jacquie, *do not tell anyone*—and I mean no one, Jacquie!" The phone line remained quiet as I gathered my thoughts to formulate what I really needed to get off my chest.

"Jacquie, I'm the real Lana Del Rey."

Lana Del Rey is my alter ego—of all people on this planet. I do not actually follow or listen to her (unless I am in the midst of psychosis), but I suffer from delusions that prompt me to believe that I am her. I don't believe I'm living as her in the flesh; I believe that I am a victim of fraud, and feel that I am some kind of lovelorn and more authentic LDR, made out of pure Italian gangster vignettes and tiramisu daydreams.

Is this my mind's way of telling me that I need to come to terms with never having gone to music school? That a teenage pregnancy derailed my dreams? Who can tell?

After a pause, Jacquie started clapping.

Ah, well.

It's a fact that I struggle with delusions and flashbacks beyond the mental state of psychosis.

I know, it's tragic.

I have a very fragile heart after living through a series of unfortunate events, and at the age of twenty-one, I was diagnosed "perhaps" with the condition I live with today. "Perhaps" not a bad call considering that I've experienced nine psychiatric hospitalizations. Honestly, with that record, I could have been diagnosed with *anything*.

With a definite yes, I can confidently say that the big blue floppy hat made me feel a certain way that I hadn't felt since the pandemic began. I needed a boost in confidence and God forbid *something* to help me feel pretty after months just sitting on the couch tending to whatever I was preoccupied with at the time (eating food, duh!). I mean, we've all been busy spinning our wheels trying to stay busy since the shelter-in-place began. All the ways the internet has kept me entertained! For example, as exciting as laying eyes on that special hat, was this: near the end April, just before the Target hat event, I Google-searched who would've been performing at the Bakersfield Fox Theatre had not the plague descended: **Lana Del Rey (postponed)**.

I wanted to *die*.

Before this, I had been celebrating seven months of strength and recovery from the last psychotic-like event that had occurred in September 2019. Then, while living in a very fancy residential treatment program in the quaint hills of Calabasas, my alter ego made an appearance. I started prancing around and playing the guitar. It was the kind of place where no one with the exception of my psychiatrist could tell that I was actually in distress.

Here's the thing. It's not so much that I think I'm a singer when I have these delusions, but I believe that I wrote the sad-core music and lyrics. I believe that I'm the real songwriter and that I created the name Lana Del Rey, inspired by my great-grandmother's beach house in Marina Del Rey. There are other reasons why I have these delusional thoughts. (I prefer to refer to these states as delusional instead of psychotic because I'm very passive and harmless when suffering.)

"You are not bipolar, Dana. You *live* with the condition that is bipolar. That's all it really is. Tell Lana to leave you alone." My therapist has a miraculous way of turning things around, but after this episode nothing could really cool the itch. Like, *nothing* soothed me. I just kept listening to the albums on heavy rotation as if that were an okay thing to do, and just imagined myself singing the (*my*) songs on a stage in front of thousands of people. And this mania is like pursuing some

sort of spiritual liberation. Another totally intriguing aspect of the last delusional event is the amount of confidence I had in myself and in the delusion itself. On a video conference call with my psychiatrist I explained that my health was tiptop and that I was all ready to go ahead with a lawsuit against Del Rey (the “fraud,” as I referred to her).

“And what are your parents saying about this? What about your mother?” I informed him that my mother was all in favor of me filing the lawsuit. Naturally my mother wasn’t. That was part of the delusion and she was in fact very concerned about me.

Considering how I reacted to my Google discovery and how I react to hearing LDR songs when I’m at stores (like Target), I know that I struggle with my current medication. I receive a monthly injection to ease my spells, but I sometimes feel the medicine may be inducing them, too. Like, what are the odds that I have this delusion while the medication is titrating after having a shot? I do believe that the pandemic fueled the mental crisis I experienced in May, as the episode lasted the longest that I’ve experienced—*an entire month*. That’s four weeks too long of bouncing around like a sad-core musician who, in my sad world, has nothing better to do than to bother me at the Fox.

Come June, I opted to revert back to the therapist whom I was seeing when I was in high school. I feel that I have a lot of unfinished business with myself from that era, and I feel that getting in touch with someone who knew me well then will help me grow now. As for the delusions in May, they were pretty severe: I took it upon myself to write to the CEO of Universal Music Group and explain that I am the real LDR, victimized by “fraud”. This is a habit I’ve had since my first hospitalization in 2013, and I have even had a phone conversation with someone from a music label (another matter). But in 2020 I lived with the anxiety and pain that a celebrity was trying to bully me by showing up and playing a show in my own city. (By the way, the tour list I saw was Rome, Argentina, *Bakersfield*. A little weird?) I live with so much guilt today because of what I’ve done when I’m ill, but I must move on and not let the past get the best of me.

So, what exactly can we chalk this up to? Envy?

I think this is a grieving process.

I began having these odd LDR beliefs in 2014, a year after my initial psychiatric hospitalization (I had become preoccupied about whether or not I wrote Katy Perry’s sensational *I Kissed A Girl*). The thing with LDR started after a significant unfortunate event took place. I was

trying to hitch-hike from my part of town in Bakersfield to Downtown when I happened to end up in the worst-case scenario of rides. I'd like to be reticent about what exactly occurred, but I now think that I have this belief that I am Lana Del Rey because I am triggered by her lyrics "take the body downtown," as featured on her single, *Video Games*.

After that ride downtown, I decayed on my parents' couch for nearly four years without a solid thought about the world around me. My toned and trim yogi body morphed into a hefty 300 pounds, I shaved my head twice like Britney Spears, and agreed to a few more hospitalizations to appease my parents so they wouldn't send me to the homeless shelter as they threatened. It was during those years of "philosophical quietness" that I became obsessed with the problem of who the real Lana Del Rey is—the majestically tall, lean girlish-girl, with the longer than long locks of angel hair and those pouting lips in all of their depressive despairing glory.

To add insult to injury, my grandparent's beach home is complete with "telephone wires above," that *do* "sizzle like a snare" in Morro Bay. Maybe all this romantic drama is one of the better things about living with this very "unique" identity.

I've learned a lot about myself since my last incarnation as LDR. I now no longer second guess my genuine identity as Dana Eileen Lynch. I am a proud single mom, and my daughter is my top priority. I dream about healing and sharing my many misadventures with other people who thrive with a mental-emotional condition like mine, as well as with other survivors of rape and sexual assault. I can't even tell you how embarrassed I am that I sometimes lived through these charades, but perhaps that's neither here nor there when you're too busy letting your freak flag fly. I truly believe that it is imperative to speak out about my experiences and have my voice heard in order to initiate awareness, as well as healing and recovery among those of us who need help in this uncertain world.

What do I love most about Lana? Her voice.

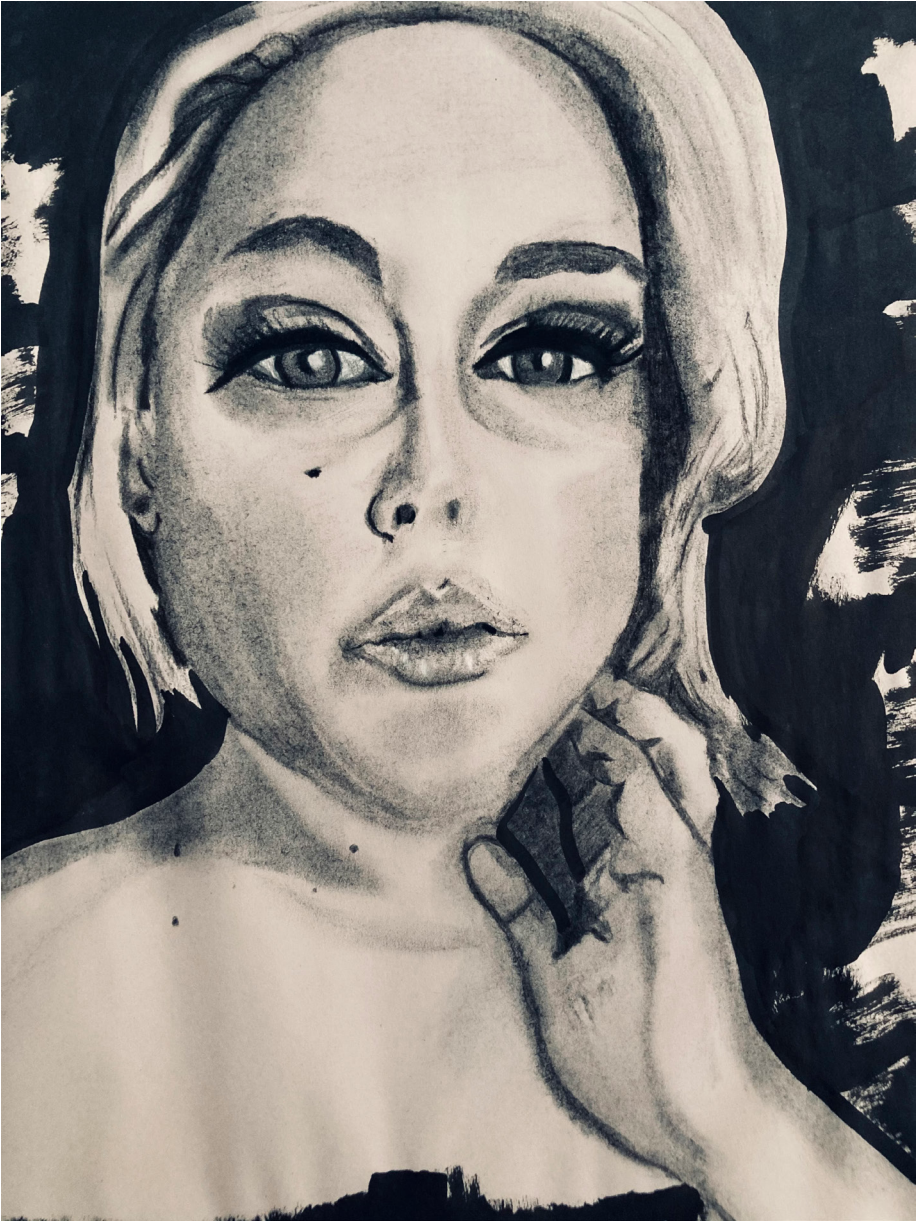
I leave you with this final gem of wisdom by Absurdist philosopher Albert Camus: "In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger—something better, pushing right back."

The voice in me honors the voice in you.

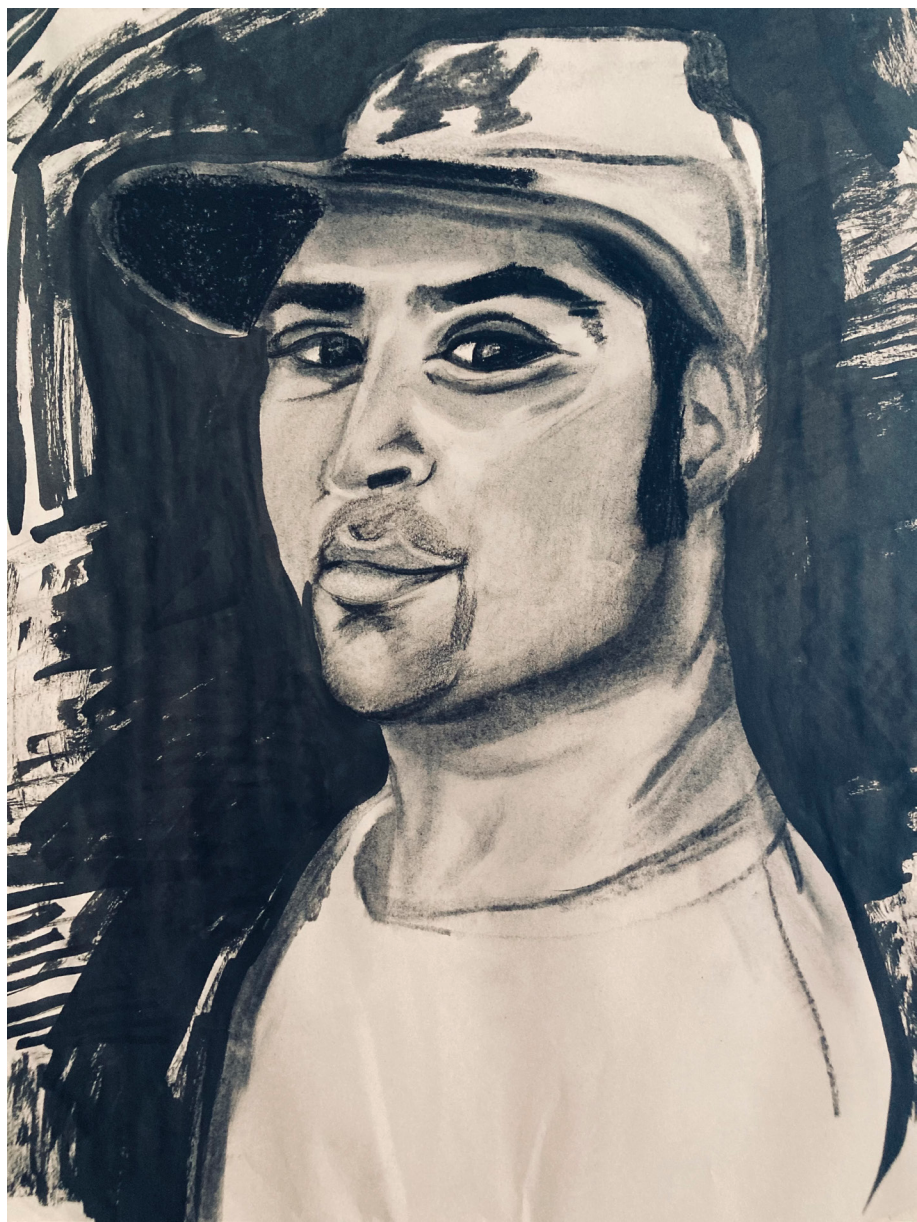
Namaste.



St. Ava Ming De Cerro Gordo
by Dana Lynch



Facebook Dating
by Dana Lynch



Facebook Dating
by Dana Lynch



Ming
by Dana Lynch

DRAMA
&
FILM

JOHN L. HUNTER



OUR STATE OF THE UNION

Time: Near future

Characters: Kelly Sanchez-Moderator

Nick Richards-Presidential Candidate

William Theodore Lincoln-Presidential Candidate

Malik El-Raheem-Reporter

Narrator/Stage Direction/Stage Manager

Location: Foreign Country

Setting: Town Hall

At rise: Malik El-Raheem, a news anchor, sits on a stool upstage right. The Center stage is a plastic box with a red button next to the moderator's seat. Two empty podiums, several feet apart, are directly in front of the moderator's chair. Upstage is a large screen displaying presidential poll numbers. It is a tight race. A silent audience sits behind the moderator. The country's flag decorates the stage and building.

Lights up:

Narrator: (Offstage) In a democracy much like the United States of America, sometime in the 21st century, a debate is about to take place. This is a debate like no other. Two people argue their views and ideology to claim the Presidential throne. What a very odd union they have. These candidates seem to copy American presidents of the past. Their voting system is peculiar, to put it lightly.

Then there is moderator Kelly Sanchez. An out-of-work actress who many believe is using this very platform as her big break, as millions of people from around the globe are expected to tune in. Luckily for all the theatre majors, Broadway is a very, very long plane ride from here. Nevertheless, the votes are in and the citizens are at the edge of their seats, waiting to find out the state of their union.

Reporter: Good evening citizens. I am Malik El-Raheem, reporting live for the N.double A.C.D.E.F.G and I am the only reporter willing to cover this final debate. Tonight's matchup between two presidential candidates has become a huge spectacle. This should be a good one. In one corner we have Nick Richards, who some voters believe to be the second coming of Optimus Prime, the fearless leader of the Autobots because Richards is supposed to save our auto industry from megabank companies. Then there is William Theodore Lincoln, who at one point looked to be a sure shot but at the last debate, he failed to provide proof that his teeth are real. This sparked a frenzy on social media. Feeling attacked, he asked for every past president to provide DNA to prove how much of a patriot they really are or were.

As you know, no matter how much bad blood is between these two, whoever becomes our nation's president, the other must become the vice president. Both candidates come from wealthy families who are recognized amongst our highest social society. Yes, I'm talking about the Kardashians. Since the constitution changed a decade ago, removing political parties from all government positions, we, the people, only have debates to learn a candidate's ideology.

Reporter: (Checks his earpiece for sound) Looks like the fearless Kelly Sanchez is ready to begin.

Stage manager: It's go time, people, in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

(Enters Kelly Sanchez, a stunning Latina, who smiles at the crowd before taking her seat.)

Kelly Sanchez: Welcome everyone to the final Presidential debate. We are live in the town square. My name is Kelly Sanchez and I am a news anchor for Theatre TV's Nightly News for unemployed actors. The candidates are Nick Richards and William Theodore Lincoln. This debate is sponsored by a for-profit organization due to recent budget cuts. Rules have been agreed by both campaigns. This twenty-minute debate is divided into sections. I will ask the same lead-off question to both candidates and each will have a couple of minutes to answer. Then we'll have an open discussion. Next to me is the Red Button. When pushed, this button will deduct points from the candidate's poll if I do

not like the answer. Now, I ask the audience to remain quiet during this debate but can put their hands together for the candidates as they take their places on stage.

(Presidential music is playing as the candidates enter, one from stage left, the other from stage right. They wave at the crowd as they take their respected place at the podium. Then they stare at each other)

Reporter: (Whispers to the crowd) Oh it's gonna be some drama tonight, y'all.

Kelly Sanchez: Silence during the debate, reporter.

Reporter: (In professional voice) Oh yes, of course.

Kelly Sanchez: This question is for candidate Lincoln. Mr. Lincoln wha-

Nick Richards: I wanna state for the record that age is not an issue, so I won't exploit my opponent's young age as a result of his inexperience.

Kelly Sanchez: Candidate Richards, this question is for Candidate Lincoln.

Nick Richards: Yes, of course, go right ahead.

Kelly Sanchez: Thank you, candidate Richards. Lincoln, what makes you the right person to lead our union?

William Theodore Lincoln: (Clears throat) Thank you, moderator. Citizens, I bet you ask yourself, who am I? What is my purpose? I'll tell you that I have as much experience as one of Jack Kennedy's brothers, and I will restore this great nation to where it should be.

Kelly Sanchez: Ooo kay. Not much of an answer, but this is your platform to use as you please.

Reporter: I have a question.

Kelly Sanchez: Not now, reporter. Besides, I ask the questions.

Reporter: I'm just saying I would have pressed the red button.

Kelly Sanchez: I can handle this reporter, thank you. O-kay. My next question is for Richards. During these tough times dealing with this global pandemic, millions are unemployed. If you win the presidency, what will you do to ensure that people can pay their bills?

Nick Richards: If there is a pandemic, I was unaware of it but; there is a crisis over the sudden hospitalization of our citizens getting sick. I believe that we as citizens of this great nation are tough, and should get back to work immediately. If Americans survived the dust bowl, we in this country can get through this.

Kelly Sanchez: Mr. Lincoln?

William Theodore Lincoln: The dust bowl? A global pandemic means that the whole world is affected, not just Kansas and Oklahoma. (Beat) Citizens, if I'm elected, I will ensure that we help restore small businesses as well as major companies and companies in between. I'll do anything in my power to get this country back on its feet.

Kelly Sanchez: In his last debate, Lincoln stated that he would give free healthcare to families in need. Richards, how do you feel about free healthcare for all citizens?

Nick Richards: Well, is he gonna pay for it? How does he expect the budget to handle such a load? You think this country is one big free clinic? Lincoln is trying to start a civil war.

Kelly Sanchez: He does have a point there, candidate Lincoln. What is your plan to make this happen?

Reporter: Yeah, I wanna know, too, 'cause I got a baby on the way, and my job ain't giving out benefits.

Kelly Sanchez: Reporter!

Reporter: Sorry.

Kelly Sanchez: You can continue, candidate.

William Theodore Lincoln: I will do anything in my power to bring life back to our people who are dying because they simply cannot afford healthcare. My opponent only cares about assisting with getting the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Big 10 in America to play football this season.

Nick Richards: I see you follow me on Twitter.

(Kelly Sanchez hits the red button)

Nick Richards: Why did you push the red button?

Kelly Sanchez: You spoke out of turn; that is why I hit the red button.

William Theodore Lincoln: You see that citizens, he can't even listen to simple instructions; what makes you think he'll listen to you?

(Kelly hits the red button again)

Kelly Sanchez: That one was for you.

William Theodore Lincoln: I thought it was my turn?

Kelly Sanchez: It was, but you can only speak if and when I ask you a question.

William Theodore Lincoln: Well, you should hit that there button on yourself because you're confusing me.

Reporter: Let me just say one thing.

Kelly Sanchez: No, reporter. Candidate Lincoln, I am not in the running. Even though I wouldn't mind being in the national spotlight almost every day for the next four years, with people cheering me on, and I get to give speeches like monologues (she snaps out of her daydream) but this is the only gig I could book right now. (Beat) Now, let's get back to the questioning. Taxes have been a hot topic during the last debate between you two. What is your stance on taxes today,

candidate Lincoln?

William Theodore Lincoln: ...

Kelly Sanchez: Candidate Lincoln?

William Theodore Lincoln: (Startled) Oh, is it okay to speak?

Kelly Sanchez: Yes, I have asked you the question.

William Theodore Lincoln: Now, what was the question again?

Kelly Sanchez: (Irritated) Taxes, I asked about-

William Theodore Lincoln: O yes, of course, taxes. (Clears throat) I believe in tax relief for all hard-working citizens.

Kelly Sanchez: Richards, same question.

Nick Richards: Have y'all heard any good jokes lately? (Looks directly towards the audience) Well, I have, and they're all about tax relief. (Laughs at his own joke) Look people, we should cut taxes for honest working, everyday Joes and Janes but hike them on the wealthy and the greedy.

William Theodore Lincoln: Well, ain't that the pot calling the kettle out of its name.

Nick Richards: What, the word greedy has gotten you all roused up?

(Kelly Sanchez hits the red button twice)

William Theodore Lincoln: You're the one who has used your Scientology connections for illegal campaign funds!

Nick Richards: Those contributions from Tom Cruise's cousin are none of your business.

Kelly Sanchez: Okay, candidates, enough! (She hits the red button four more times, poll numbers drop significantly) Next time a candidate

speaks without me asking a question, two points will be taken each time I press this button. Am I clear?

William Theodore Lincoln/ Nick Richards: Yes.

Kelly Sanchez: And I believe the phrase is, the pot calling the kettle black, candidate Lincoln.

William Theodore Lincoln: Excuse me?

Kelly Sanchez: It's the *pot* calling the *kettle BLACK*.

William Theodore Lincoln: Well, I wasn't too sure I could say that word.

Kelly Sanchez: What word is that?

William Theodore Lincoln: You know, the B-word.

Kelly Sanchez: *Black*, candidate Lincoln? I believe it is alright to use the word black. Which is a perfect segue to our next round. The open discussion round. Let's take a quick break and a word from our cheap ass sponsors.

(Some funny commercial that has nothing to do with the election. During the break, a cameraman catches a private conversation between the candidates who step just offstage)

Nick Richards: Hey, how's your wife and daughter, Bill?

William Theodore Lincoln: Not good. They're still mad at me ever since I got caught having sexual relations with my secretary. How about your family?

Nick Richards: That daughter of mine up and married the great-grandson of Eisenhower. You'd think that would help me win this election, but no. One scandal about me and some building across from the White House being burglarized years ago and now, I'm some type of criminal in that country. You know me, Bill. I am not a crook.

William Theodore Lincoln: Speaking of criminals, did you know they tried to lock my wife up because of her allegedly illegal DM's?

Nick Richards: What's a DM?

William Theodore Lincoln: Something about her email's direct messaging. She erased thousands of them just before I started this campaign.

Nick Richards: Hold on a sec, my phone is ringing. (Checks caller ID) It's from Russia. Excuse me, I gotta take it.

(A second cameraman zooms in on Kelly Sanchez's phone conversation with her agent.)

Kelly Sanchez: If you ask me, both of them are idiots. How many times do I have to tell you to book me better gigs? I am a graduate of California State University in California, and I did not fly to this shithole country to be unemployed. Now get me cast in Terminator the Musical on Broadway, or I'll find me an agent that will!

(The reporter makes his way towards Kelly)

Reporter: Girl, you are killing it out there! Can I ask them a few questions?

Kelly Sanchez: I'm on the phone, Malik.

Reporter: Who are you on the phone with?

Kelly Sanchez: My agent. I want better out of life. I'm supposed to be a star! How does my hair look?

(The reporter continues to nag Sanchez about questioning the candidates. Meanwhile, the candidates continue to make small talk backstage.)

Nick Richards: So what do you think about that Sanchez gal?

William Theodore Lincoln: I did not have sexual relations with that woman.

Nick Richards: I meant her moderating.

William Theodore Lincoln: Oh, sorry, it's just that I'm programmed to say that. As far as the gal, I think she should stick to acting.

Stage Manager: And we are live in 5, 4, 3, 2,1, go!

(The reporter races back to his stool, Kelly and the candidates come back onstage.)

Reporter: Well, this debate is no shocker. Each candidate came out swinging, but so far, there is no blood or swollen jaw. Better yet, we have no clue what the heck they are talking about. Okay, Ms. Sanchez is back. (Whispers to Kelly) Can I ask them a question?

Kelly Sanchez: Thank you, reporter. In this next round, any candidate can answer the question or choose to pass it. Any answers that I do not like, I will deduct ten points from your respected polls. (She runs her fingers through her beautiful hair as camera two zooms in on her) Candidate Lincoln, what is your take on police brutality on people of color, especially *Black* people?

(Both candidates look at each other, waiting for the other to address the question.)

William Theodore Lincoln: Since my opponent is pro-death penalty and Blue Lives Matter, I'll let him answer this question first. (Speaks closely into the microphone) I pass.

Nick Richards: (Clears throat, then loosens tie) Well, I... What's happening in our country right now... (Searching for the perfect answer, he thinks he finds one) Police have a tough job. They have seconds to react. It's a crazy time that we live in, and people of color are the main ones causing the crime rate to increase. I believe there should be a war on gangs, a war on drugs, and a war on trolls. It has been said that I am a racist. I assure you that I am not. Many of my closest friends have black friends or know someone that is black. It's unfortunate that the media has painted the wrong picture. I blame that on... "fake news."

Reporter: I know he didn't just say that some of his friends got black friends, what kind of shi-

Kelly Sanchez: Okay reporter, I am not going to tell you again, silence during the debate.

Reporter: Imma try, cause he getting on my nerves up in here.

Kelly Sanchez: My next question is from an audience member. She asks, if either of you are elected, would you keep intact women's right to abort much like America's *Roe V. Wade*?

Nick Richards: Well, much like a former president, I too stand on a women's decision on abortion, especially in cases of sexual assaults. Or if one day you realize that your baby's daddy is ugly and his top lip overlaps his bottom lip. I would reconsider carrying his child to full term, too.

Kelly Sanchez: Disgusting but, your forum. Candidate Lincoln?

William Theodore Lincoln: My great-great-great-great-great grandfather Abe once said that "*If you lay down with dogs, you'll wake up with fleas.*"

Kelly Sanchez: I'm sorry, but what does that have to do with the question?

William Theodore Lincoln: I answered it. If you're gonna be dirty dancin', make sure your partner is Patrick Swayze and not some schmuck. Then, you won't wanna get rid of the thing.

Reporter: I know he didn't just say "*get rid of the thing?*"

Kelly Sanchez: And on that note, we'll be right back after these short messages.

(During the commercial break, Kelly Sanchez gets a phone call from her agent. She smiles at the good news, hangs up the phone, then flags the reporter over to her just offstage.)

Kelly Sanchez: Oh, Malik, you would not believe the good news I just

received!

Reporter: What, they're making a *Dirty Dancing* part two?

Kelly Sanchez: No, no, I-

Reporter: They're cancelling that sitcom *The Neighborhood*?

Kelly Sanchez: No! The American government said that if I fix the election, they'll make sure that I can become a Broadway star!

(Kelly jumps for joy)

Reporter: Umm, two questions. First, how are you gonna become a star on Broadway when your acting is poop emoji. Second, which candidate do they want you to cheat for because none of these candidates could run a car wash, let alone a country.

(Kelly stops in her tracks, then begins to panic)

Kelly Sanchez: Oh my God. You're right. I was too excited to ask! I'll just phone my agent back; he'll know which one.

Reporter: You don't care that what you're going to do is unethical?

Kelly Sanchez: This whole country is unethical.

Reporter: What about the fact that it's criminal?

Kelly Sanchez: It's only criminal if I get caught. I'm only telling you because we went to undergrad together, and I always thought that you were kind of cute, but this stays between you and me. I will not let you screw up my chances to be a star!

Reporter: I'll only agree to this if you let me ask a few questions out there.

Kelly Sanchez: I will not let you ruin my chance to become a star. Now excuse me while I phone my agent.

Stage manager: Places people, we're back in 5, 4...

Kelly Sanchez: Oh my God, there is no time, and there are no more commercial breaks. What am I gonna do?

Reporter: Girl, that's yo' problem. Besides, that's what you get for working for the man!

Kelly Sanchez: I've got it! All I have to do is pressure each candidate during questioning, like a detective in the movies. I'm sure one of them will break and that should reveal the corporate!

Stage Manager: ...3, 2, 1, go time!

(As the lights come up, the reporter speaks to the audience)

Reporter: Look, I don't know about y'all, but I ain't feeling either one of these candidates. Ms. Sanchez, is it too late to get Loki, Thor's brother, to be a candidate? He'll know which candidate is a traitor.

Kelly Sanchez: No reporter!

Reporter: What about Kanye West?

Kelly Sanchez: Focus reporter! (Sinister voice) Welcome back to our final debate. Candidates Nick Richards and William Theodore Lincoln are neck and neck in the running. (She covers her microphone and talks to the audience) Unfortunately, if this is our future, citizens, we are all doomed. I'm not convinced that they are suitable to run a car wash, let alone a country.

(A large gasp is heard from the audience)

Reporter: Hey, I just said that.

Kelly Sanchez: (Continues to talk to the audience) One of these candidates is a liar and works with our foreign enemy. I'm going to find out exactly which one it is.

(Members in the audience look at each other in awe. Kelly improvises

as producers scramble to look over the pages from the script)

Kelly Sanchez: (Sitting at the edge of her seat) Candidates, we talked about affordable health care, who would like to address the issues with Big Pharmaceutical companies, huh, who?

William Theodore Lincoln: Yes, I believe that we should reduce the price of medicine for those with life-threatening illnesses.

(Kelly pushes the button, and ten points are deducted from Lincoln's poll)

William Theodore Lincoln: I don't understand. Did I say or do something wrong?

Kelly Sanchez: You did now. You talked out of turn.

(She hits the button again and again ten points drop from Lincoln's poll)

Kelly Sanchez: Richards, what is your take on clean and renewable energy?

(Kelly takes the red button out of its case and is now holding it in her hand)

Nick Richards: I believe that we should end fracking because it is polluting our atmosphere and...

(Sanchez hits the button)

Nick Richards: Well wait a cotton pickin' minute, I wasn't finished!

Kelly Sanchez: (Stands up) You are now. Candidate Lincoln, what about raising minimum wage, equal pay for women, affordable child care and-

William Theodore Lincoln: Hold on now, child, which one is it? I wouldn't want you to hit that red button again. We are both down to one hundred votes.

(Producers try talking to Kelly in her earpiece, but she continues)

Kelly Sanchez: What's the matter, you afraid that your answer would be a lie?

William Theodore Lincoln: Of course not.

(Producers try reaching her again, she continues to ignore them)

Kelly Sanchez: Then answer the question.

William Theodore Lincoln: I believe that this moderator has lost her mind. I demand to speak with the producers.

Nick Richards: And I demand that my votes are put back!

Kelly Sanchez: I'm sorry, but that action is non-reversible.

Nick Richards: I will not stand for this! She is deliberately trying to throw this election.

(The stage manager storms onto stage and tries to calm the candidates down)

Kelly Sanchez: (Still standing) I believe that these candidates are frauds and are not fit to run this country!

(The candidates remove their microphones from their shirts as they both storm offstage. Kelly is determined to use this break in action to get her agent on the phone. She scurries past the producers and cameramen and finds a shadowy spot backstage. Meanwhile, cameras are rolling, audience members are waiting, and the reporter has taken center stage.)

Reporter: Well, citizens, this is the state of our union. This debate has yet to prove to other countries that this nation can be respected. As a man of color, my voice is not heard as loud as these candidates. I am not taken seriously 'cause I don't keep up with the Kardashians, but let me remind you all that this election shouldn't be about race, color, or gender; but for the prosperity of the human race. I stand on the equality of our citizens, tax breaks for middle and lower-class families, equal pay

for women, and raise the minimum wage to twenty dollars an hour.

(The audience applauds. The reporter, first stunned by their reaction, continues his speech)

Reporter: I believe that women should have the right to do with their body as they please without government interruption.

(The audience is on its feet)

Reporter: (continues) We need to put protection orders for the LGBTQ communities, as well as defunding police departments that have a history of brutality against people of color. We need better relations with neighboring countries, focus on clean energy, and try harder on lowering our national debt. Instead of only bailing out mega auto companies, we should focus on the mom's and pop's businesses which are the heart and soul of this nation!

(The crowd begins to chant Malik El-Raheem! Malik El-Raheem! The Candidates rush back onstage in hopes to regain their voters, but it is too late. The people have spoken. The chants continue. Malik El-Raheem! Malik El-Raheem!)

(Meanwhile, backstage, Kelly receives disappointing news from her agent that the U.S. government will not help her become a star due to her incompetence to execute their plan. She plops down on a chair, used for a stagehand, and begins to cry ignoring the chants from the audience.)

Stage Manager: (Enters excitedly) Ms. Sanchez, they want you back onstage.

Kelly Sanchez: Why? I'm a disgrace to the entire entertainment world. I'll never be a star now. I blew it! I cannot show my face out there. Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted to sing and dance like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. My mom even bought me a dog like Toto. My father always encouraged me to chase my dream. I never wanted to disappoint them or the people of this nation. Oh, I made a fool of myself out there!

Stage Manager: The people have chosen the reporter as our new

president, and he has elected you as his vice.

Kelly Sanchez: I should just shoot myself. Wait, what did you just say?

Stage Manager: You are now our new vice president!

Kelly Sanchez: You mean to tell me that I am the vice president?

Stage Manager: Yes, now come on!

(Kelly quickly gathers herself, but before she enters the stage, she makes a phone call)

Kelly Sanchez: Hello agent? Yes, I just wanted to let you know that I am now your new vice president. I am finally going to be a star! If only my mom and dad could see that their little girl has finally made it! Oh, you heard the announcement on television? Well, I see. Did you hear about this? You're fired! I have a new agent now, and he is the president of our union.

(Kelly takes center stage and stares out at the lights and crowd as cheers roar throughout the town hall. She smiles as a single tear falls down her cheek. The two defeated candidates walk off stage together upset, but they quickly get over it. After all, they're rich!)

Nick Richards: Hey, you up for a couple of rounds of golf?

William Theodore Lincoln: Sure, which course?

Nick Richards: I know a guy in Florida who has one at Mar-a-Largo.

William Theodore Lincoln: Is he any good?

Nick Richards: Nah, but he's a great reality TV. star.

Lights out.

THE DAZE HAVE COME

Setting: Tool shed, urban America

Time/Day: Sunday morning, 2021

Characters: Paw Paw (75 years old) African American male who is in pretty good shape for his age.

Junior (a day before his 18th birthday) African American male, skinny, frail, but defiant.

Officer 1 (Middle-aged) White male

Officer 2 (Late-20s) White male

Appearance by Sista Jones

At Rise: An old shed with a rusted, tin roof. Various tools inside, empty milk crates, and the back seat of an older model car that is used as a couch.

Scene: Paw Paw and Junior carry mechanic's tools back to the shed. A house is imagined offstage.

Junior: Paw Paw, why are we always working on that old ass car? It looks like something Fred Sanford use to drive.

Paw Paw: Then you must be Lamont, cause I'm passing her down to you when you turn eighteen. Did you get your license straightened out yet?

Junior: Not yet. I was going to go to the DMV tomorrow. (Puts a couple of tools on the shelf and finds an old revolver gun next to a gas tank) This thing work?

Paw Paw: Huh? Oh, that's where I left that gun. Yeah, it works but I ain't fired it off in a long time. I got bullets for it somewhere around here... I think. Give it here, I'll put it in the house later.

(Junior hands him the gun. Paw Paw puts it in his pants pocket)

Paw Paw: Now, you ain't drivin' Ella until you get that license stuff situated. She was supposed to be your birthday present tomorrow. Mmm hum, was gone hand her over to you.

Junior: Thanks, but no thanks. I wouldn't be caught dead in that thing.

Paw Paw: Thing? Ella don't appreciate you calling her a thing. She is a living, breathing automobile.

Junior: Okay, calm down old man. (Beat) Besides, when I save up enough money, I'm getting me a foreign car.

Paw Paw: Foreign? Boy have you even been out of the country?

Junior: No.

Paw Paw: Then what yo' ass know about a foreign car?

Junior: I know that all the important people drive foreign cars.

Paw Paw: Boy, what makes you so important.

Junior: Well maybe not now but soon the world will know my name and I can't be caught driving that hunk of junk grandpa.

Paw Paw: I met yo' grandma in that car. (Drifts out on a memory) I just turned eighteen, had a fresh new ride and I was cruisin' down the boulevard listening to the Motown sounds. I seen her walking from the market so I pulled up beside her. I'll never forget how beautiful she was. Bronze-colored skin, beautiful eyes, and a nice figure. I was cocky back then, so I asked her if she needed a ride. She stopped, turned, then asked me if I ever heard of Ella Fitzgerald. I told her no. She just shook her head and walked off.

Junior: What happened after that?

Paw Paw: I drove straight to the record shop and ask if they had Ella Fitzgerald. They did. I bought the first record I seen. The next day I went searching for her. When I found her, she was sitting at the park with some friends. I walked up to her and handed her the record and a bouquet of flowers. Three months later we got married.

Junior: That's a dope story. I still don't want to be seen in that old-ass car.

Paw Paw: That's the problem with you youngsters today, you don't appreciate the value of things.

Junior: I don't appreciate things?

Paw Paw: No, you don't. Just like the time you begged your mother for them Tezzy's.

Junior: Them what?

Paw Paw: You know them shoes you was crying about. Even come crying to me about it. Talkin' 'bout you couldn't go to school unless you had a pair.

Junior: (Laughing) You mean Yeezy's?

Paw Paw: You know what I mean. Whatever the shoes called, that rapper boy, who wear that Trump hat, got on. You cried to yo' momma all week long until she bought you those shoes and what'd you do? Left 'em in yo' locker at school and somebody stole 'em.

Junior: That wasn't my fault, someone broke into my locker. How was I supposed to prevent that?

Paw Paw: You keep 'em on ya feet, that's how. Yo' momma had to work overtime to save up for 'em. Shit, you sho' wasn't getting' no money from me. It's like y'all walk around in a daze. One day y'all gone understand. And I don't even know why you support that boy anyway, you know he don't like color folk.

Junior: Who Trump?

Paw Paw: Hell, we all know that Trump don't like colored folk. I'm talking 'bout that rapper boy.

Junior: (laughing) You crazy, grandpa.

(Paw Paw takes a seat on the couch, then cleans his glasses with an old bandana he got from his back pocket. This causes the gun to slip out and fall through the crack of the seat. He doesn't notice it.)

Paw Paw: You been down by the church today?

Junior: Not yet. I was going to head down there after I helped you. Maybe I can get the pastor to say a prayer for me.

Paw Paw: Yeah, Lord knows you sho' gone need it. (Puts his glasses back on) Look-a-here, if you see Sista Jones down there, you tell here I said thanks for bringing me them pies the other night.

Junior: You got Sista Jones coming over here bringing you pies? The one who lives across the street?

Paw Paw: Yep, and that ain't the only thing she be bringing me.

Junior: You nasty, grandpa! The only thing I'm a tell that lady is to stay the hell away from you. Grandma probably rolling over in her grave.

Grandpa: Yo' grandma is too fat to roll over in her grave. Shit, she so big, the mortician had to jump up and down on the coffin like a packed suitcase, just to close it.

Junior: (Covering his ears) I can't listen to you anymore.

Paw Paw: Hell, I took her to the beach one time and when she came out of the water, she had harpoons stickin' out of her back.

Junior: I think it's time we put you in one of those homes.

Paw Paw: Shit, I wish you would try to put me in a home. That daughter of mine been trying for years. I'm a tell you like I tell her, hell no we won't go!

Junior: Who's going to lookout after you if they decide to lock me up?

Paw Paw: Look after me? Boy let me tell you somethin', I've been around fifty-seven years 'fore you were even thought of. I can look after myself.

Junior: I didn't mean nothing by it, I just worry about you, that's all.

(Junior pulls out his phone to text his friends: Meet me tonight... we gotta revolt before my court date tomorrow!)

Paw Paw: (Looks down at Junior's phone) Uh huh. What you need to worry 'bout is them locking you up for good this time for what you and your stupid-ass friends did a couple of months ago.

Junior: (Puts phone away) I keep telling you, they are not stupid. Chris went to Howard, Tanya goes to UCLA, and Shantay attends Clark-Atlanta.

Paw Paw: Just 'cause you book smart don't make you street smart.

Junior: (Turns and steps out of the shed) You're too old to understand.

Paw Paw: Too old to understand? Boy you think I got to be this age without understanding what's going on. I marched with Dr. King. I was a Freedom Rider on the same bus as John Lewis. Shoot, gone tell me I'm too old to understand.

Junior: (Steps back into the shed) Look what happened to you guys back then. Them white boys beat you within inches of your life. That's why you got that limp. And we ALL know what happened to Dr. King.

Paw Paw: But what you don't know is that we organized the right way. (Takes the same bandana to wipe sweat from his brows) When I got on that bus and seen black men sitting arm to arm with white men in solidarity, I knew we were gonna change the world. And when that bus driver headed towards Mississippi, the most racist state in this country, we all knew that it was a suicide mission, but it had to be done.

(Junior gets a returned text from his friends: Can't, 12 is out heavy 2day... STAY INSIDE)

Junior: (Shakes his head before putting his phone back in his pocket) Don't get me wrong, that was some noble shit, but what I don't understand is why y'all never fought back? Y'all just let them bomb the buses, and those who could manage to get out got beat with a baseball bat.

(Paw Paw stares off into space)

Paw Paw: There is a lot of things you just don't know. It wasn't easy being Black in America back then.

Junior: (Cutting him off) It isn't easy being Black in America today. Just yesterday, police shot a kid dead for jaywalking.

Paw Paw: Yeah, I watch the news.

Junior: Not to mention how they did George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Both unarmed and Breonna was asleep in her bed.

Paw Paw: That boils my blood thinkin' 'bout how they did them po' souls. But y'all got it good today.

Junior: Whatchu mean, we got it good? Police patrol black communities like slave catchers waiting to hang the first nigger they see from the nearest tree.

Paw Paw: I'm a tell ya how you got it good. See, back when I was coming up, black man in the south couldn't walk down the same sidewalk that white folks was walkin' on. If you see white folks comin', ya best to get on ova to the other side of the street or else.

Junior: I wish I would get out the way so white people could walk by. This is why my generation is not tolerating that bullshit. How could you deal with that kind of treatment? I know you wanted to kick their asses.

(Junior text the group again: IDC! FUCK 12!)

Paw Paw: Of course, I did. We all did but the law was never on our side. Dr. King been to jail several times and he was all about peace and always preachin' 'bout non-violence.

(Junior gets a text from the group: ok, we'll meet up later...)

Junior: (Keeps phone in his hand) I just can't see you turning the other cheek. You always been a tough, no nonsense type of guy, so I can imagine how you were when you were my age.

Paw Paw: Trust me son, it wasn't easy. (Stands up and approaches Junior)

I was ten years old when they did that to Emmett Till. I remember like it was yesterday. My momma was sittin' in her favorite chair, reading the story on him in Jet magazine. They had a picture of him before and after his death on the cover. Emmett's momma, Mami Till, wanted an open casket so the world could see what them white boys did to her fo'teen year ol' son. I liked to pass out. I can't get that image out of my mind still to this day. I remember being so mad 'cause I couldn't do nothin' about it. I wanted to go down there to Money, Mississippi and kill those white boys but my momma said I was thinkin' crazy. (Beat) Them folks who did it got off too. Not a day in jail. (Takes a deep breath) So, you are standing here asking me why I didn't fight back. We fought back the best way that we could with the weapons that we had... our hearts and minds.

Junior: Hearts are meant to be broken. And they took y'all heart and stomped on it.

(Paw Paw walks away from Junior in frustration.)

Paw Paw: You have no idea how it was.

Junior: I know that the KKK bombed that church in Alabama and killed four little black girls. I know that the fire department in Birmingham was ordered to spray black children, who were simply protesting, with a high-pressured fire hose and were bitten by dogs. I know that Dr. King, amongst many others were beat down in Selma. I know that Medgar Evers was gunned down in front of his kids. I know that...

Paw Paw: You don't know shit! (Takes a minute to gather himself before sitting on the couch) Just 'cause you can type in that there phone of yours, civil rights era and all those stories pop out atcha, don't give you knowledge of all the blood, sweat, and tears we sacrificed so that you CAN sit anywhere on the city bus. That you CAN walk down the same sidewalk as white folks. That you CAN vote. (Beat) All you did was camp out in front of the mayor's house and got yo' ass arrested. That's sending a message? That's making a change? I haven't seen not one law get passed after one of your riots. Look son, I know that times have changed, and young folk got fresh ideas to spearhead the revolution but never forget those who have paved the way. Now I'm too old to fight and I'm too young to lay down but when it comes to what's right, I'm just enough.

(Silence took over the air. Stubbornness controlled the moment. Junior paced the shed back and forth, then stops to text the group back: never mind y'all... going to church to pray about it.)

Junior: Do you need me for anything else? I'm a head on out to the church before the pastor leaves for the day.

Paw Paw: Naw, I'm tired. You done got me all roused up. I'm a head in the house, take a shot of whiskey, then take a nap.

Junior: Okay Paw Paw, you do that.

Paw Paw: And don't forget to tell Sista Jones what I said.

Junior: (Leaving out) I ain't telling her shit, grandpa.

Paw Paw: Why you playa hatin'?

(The two laugh as they walk out of the shed. Paw Paw walks towards his house and Junior begins to walk in the opposite direction when two white officers arrive on foot, both brandishing their service weapon and are pointing them at Junior. Instantly, Junior puts his hands in the air. He is unarmed. Only his phone is in his hand.

Officer 1/Officer 2: Get down on the ground, now!

Junior: For what, what did I do?

Officer 1: I said get down! I'm not gonna tell you twice!

Paw Paw: (Limping toward the action) Now wait a minute officers, what exactly did he do?

Officer 2: This doesn't concern you sir.

Paw Paw: (moving closer) This is my grandson, so it does concern me. So, I'd like to know what's going on.

Officer 1: You heard the officer, now get out of here and you, I'm not

going to tell you anymore, get down on the ground.

(Junior attempts to lay down on the ground but Paw Paw physically stops him from doing so)

Paw Paw: You don't have to get down on the ground, you didn't do anything wrong.

Officer 1: Sir, we received a call about a young black male waving a gun. Now, if you do not move out of the way I will shoot you!

Junior: I don't have a weapon! It's just my phone. You are going to shoot him? He is an old man. Paw Paw, go in the house.

Officer 2: Yeah, *Paw Paw*, go in the house (mocking Junior).

Paw Paw: I ain't got to go nowhere. This is my property; I own it and I want y'all off my land now!

Officer 1: You are interrupting with police business. Now you, get on the fucking ground now!

Paw Paw: Don't get down!

Officer 1/Officer 2: Get down, now!

Junior: Okay! Okay!

(Junior lays on his stomach. Officer 2 covers officer 1, as officer 1 attempts to put cuffs on Junior)

Paw Paw: You don't have to put yo' knee on his back like that.

Officer 1: Sir, get in your house. I'm not going to say it again!

Paw Paw: You are being too rough with him. He's not resisting!

(Paw Paw takes a step closer to Junior and Officer 1. Officer 2 holsters his service pistol, then pulls out his taser gun and points it at Paw Paw.)

Officer 2: Back up!

Paw Paw: But he's hurting him.

Junior: (Squirming) Ouch! Man, these cuffs are too tight!

Officer 1: Shut the hell up!

Paw Paw: Well, he's telling you that the cuffs are too tight.

Officer 2: Back up sir!

Officer 1: If you'd stop moving, I can lock the cuffs.

Junior: The shit hurts!

Officer 2: BACK UP, SIR!

Paw Paw: (To Officer 1) Loosen up the cuffs.

(Paw Paw moves a step closer to Junior and Officer 1 when his bad hip gives away causing him to stumble towards the officer. Officer 2 shoots his stun gun at Paw Paw, striking him with all four prongs in his chest. Paw Paw lands on the ground face first, then his body begins convulsing violently.)

Junior: (Startled) Aw shit! You fucking killed my grandpa! Paw Paw!

(Junior begins to kick at Officer 1 and the two officers place their knees on his back to gain control. Paw Paw lays motionless just a foot away)

Junior: (Crying with anger) Man, y'all killed him!

(The two officers look at each other in disbelief)

Officer 1: Check his pulse, then get a medic out here!

(Officer 2 reaches over to Paw Paw, then places his index and middle finger onto Paw Paw's pulse on his neck)

Officer 2: (Shaking his head) I think he's gone.

(Junior cries louder)

Officer 1: You think? I need you to know.

(Officer 2 checks Paw Paw's pulse again and again nothing)

Officer 2: (Panicking) Shit man, how am I going to explain this one?

Officer 1: (Gets up leaving Junior by himself to mourn, before whispering to Officer 2) Okay, I'm going to need you to calm down.

Officer 2: (Stops pacing around) Calm down? I just killed an old black guy. They're going to take my badge for sure this time.

Officer 1: Not if I can help it.

Officer 2: What do you have in mind?

Officer 1: Is your body cam on?

Officer 2: No, you know we turn it off when we come into the black community.

Officer 1: Right. Just had to make sure. (Looks around to see if anyone is looking but there is no one in sight) Check his house for some type of weapon. Hurry up before the medics arrive.

Officer 2: I'm not doing that again, besides, this guy (pointing at Junior) will see me go in there.

Officer 1: You're right. (Looks around for another idea) What about that old shed? We have probable cause to go in there because we seen them coming out of it. See if you can find something in there. I'm a place this one in the back of the unit.

Officer 2: Roger!

(Officer 2 hurries to the shed. He rummages through tools in a panic but comes up empty. He spots the old car seat, then fumbles through the cracks finding the old revolver. He walks back towards Paw Paw's body, then secretly places the gun in Paw Paw's dead hand.)

Junior: (Yells through the window of the cop car) Man, what are you doing? You crocket ass cops! You stay away from him!

Officer 2: What are we going to do about him?

Officer 1: He's still resisting right? (A grin crosses his face) Well, let's stop him from resisting.

(The two officers open up the back door of the car, then beat Junior unconscious. The medics still haven't arrived.)

(The lights fade out on all four people, then lights up on Sista Jones who was recording the whole incident on her phone from her bedroom window. A small grin crosses her face.)

Author's note: "The revolution will not be televised."-Gil Scott-Heron

Lights out.

BAT-AMI GORDIN



PUSCULA

EXT. TYPICAL SUBURBAN MEDICAL PLAZA - DAY

PAN OVER multiple angles of a medical plaza with various doctor offices. ZOOM IN on sign - EDMUND GLICK, MD, SKIN AND ADVANCED SKIN CARE.

Across the street from Glick's is a WINDOWLESS WHITE VAN parked in a working zone.

INT. VAN - DAY

KURT D.R. OCULA, wearing HEADPHONES, monitors a streaming image on his LAPTOP.

Kurt is about 30, very geeky, sloppy and greasy looking. The van is full of TOOLS, EQUIPMENT and PARTS that can be used by a computer/internet technician.

Kurt snacks on CORN BEEF HASH, sucking it out of the can.

KURT

(mumbles)

So hungry.

(slurps some more)

Delicious. Not satisfying.

DR. GLICK(O.S.)

Let me know if it hurts.

SARA (O.S.)

It pinches a little.

DR. GLICK (O.S.)

Let me give you a little more Novocain.

Kurt leans forward.

INT. GLICK'S EXAM ROOM

Kurt sees SARA (late Millennial) and DR. GLICK (early sixties) on the screen.

SARA

No...umm...well, not if it's going
to cost more.

DR. GLICK

No extra cost. Please be still.

SARA

You sure it won't be \$75 more?

Dr. Glick fills a SYRINGE from a VIAL and then injects Novocain around the ugly cyst.

INT. VAN

DR. GLICK (O.S.)

I said of course not. Maybe your
dentist charges more. I don't.

(beat)

Be still!

SARA (O.S.)

(a small painful moan)

You doing the bigger cyst today?

The hairs on the back of Kurt rise as he hears Sara moan. In his excitement, he drools the corn beef hash.

DR. GLICK (O.S.)

(exacerbated)

Let's schedule that for later this
week...

Kurt throws off the headphones. He types rapidly on his computer.

On his screen, we see Dr. Glick's schedule, specifically SARA NEWFIELD, the patient with the 10:10 slot.

Kurt changes the view to "Patient Information." He finds Sara's address and types the address into "maps" on his cell phone. Then he checks for one more piece of information: "SINGLE."

Kurt grins and closes his laptop. The corn beef has fallen onto his business flyers which say KURT D.R. OCULA, HIGHSPEED INTERNET TECH SERVICE, WE'LL FLY TO YOU BY NIGHT.

FADE TO:

INT. HOME OF GEORGE AND GRACE LANDRUM, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sara plays an old school video game, VAMPIRE STORM, with GEORGE (same age as Sara.) They both have CONTROLLERS.

George is bruised up.

Between the lines of the NPCs in the game, we hear, SFX: OLD-SCHOOL VIDEO GAME MUSIC.

MALE 1 GAME VOICE (V.O.)
I can't believe he survived without
being armed with anti-walker
weapons. Contact the recon team.
Let Brian know we're ready.

SARA
How'd you get this game?

FEMALE GAME VOICE (V.O.)
You're on a first name basis with
the leader of recon?

GEORGE

I don't remember who got it for me.
Just know it was my fav game in
middle school.

MALE 1 GAME VOICE (V.O.)

Yes. We go back many, many sorties.

SARA

(to game characters)

Shouldn't you be worried they know
you're here?

FEMALE GAME VOICE (V.O.)

I want to explore Chicago. I've
never seen twilight-stalkers
before.

SARA

(yells at game)

Chicago? Only five people defeating
all the blood suckers of all of
Chicago? I don't want her on my
team?

GEORGE

(explaining to Sara)

She's an NPC. You can't get rid of
her. Besides, Recon is out there.

MALE 1 GAME VOICE (V.O.)

Brian. The radar picked up eleven
bodies heading your way.

MALE 2 GAME VOICE (V.O. - STATIC)

Is it the Recon team?

MALE 1 GAME VOICE (V.O.)

We aren't picking up their squawk.

SARA

I don't remember playing this game
with you, ever.

FEMALE GAME VOICE (V.O.)

Twilight-stalkers?

GEORGE

You and Grace didn't hang out with
me in middle school. Remember?

MALE 2 VOICE (V.O. - STATIC)

Holy Moly! They just went over a
twenty foot wall.

FEMALE GAME VOICE (V.O.)

You think they are looking for
recon's command vehicle?

MALE 1 GAME VOICE (V.O.)

No. But at this speed, they're
gonna stumble right over it.

GEORGE

I wasn't good enough for you guys.
I wasn't Justin Timberlake.

FEMALE GAME VOICE (V.O.)

Don't let the stalkers see you.

MALE 2 GAME VOICE (V.O. - STATIC)

We're gonna have to meet up so you
can help me take 'em out.

SARA

Not Justin Timberlake. Joey Fatone.
Well, I liked Joey. Grace liked
Lance Bass.

George looks confused

SARA (CONT'D)
NSYNC.

GEORGE
(looking toward door)
Oh.

Front door opens. GRACE (same age as Sara) enters carrying SHOPPING BAGS. Grace's face is bruised.

Sara sees Grace, drops her CONTROLLER and runs to take some bags from Grace and relieves Grace from her burden.

When Sara takes the bag, Grace loses her balance.

SARA
Wow. Were you also seeing Dr. Glick today? Is that bruising from those Bellfilla treatments you were talking about?

GRACE
Ummm...yeah...the Bruises. No. No filler. I heard they were on sale next month, I didn't get them yet. It's...something else.

SARA
Were you trying to match George?

Grace looks to George, questioningly, George shakes his head, and mouths "not yet."

George takes the bags from Grace which Sara has not taken. Now Grace can balance a bit better. The three head to the kitchen and start putting things away.

SARA (CONT'D)
(trying to break tension)
Were twilight-stalkers attacking you?
(she has caused more
tension)

George, shocked by this premonition, drops a JAR OF SPAGETTI SAUCE. It breaks and the sauce goes all over the floor.

Grace looks at the mess, cries and runs out of the room. George finds KITCHEN GLOVES and picks at the glass.

GEORGE
You are aware that twilight-
stalkers are a derivative of
eastern European legends?

Sara looks around for a suitable RAG.

SARA (CONT'D)
You mean like vampires? Sure. Why
are we talking about this? What's
wrong with Grace...

Sara finds a big rag and helps George clean up.

GEORGE
Creatures of the night who pursue
the weaker sex and suck the...

SARA (CONT'D)
...so you are saying that Grace was
not attacked by a syringe but by...

GEORGE
...a creature that is dead and yet
not dead!

SARA
Oh. Please.

(beat)
He was in desperate need of blood
or he would die an agonizing death.
Is that it?

GEORGE
Not blood. Blackheads.

SARA
Blackheads?
(blows raspberries)

Grace returns to the kitchen. She looks pale. She lifts her shirt and turns around. She has horrible acne and blackheads on her back. But more noticeably are hickeys and teeth marks around a swarm of blackheads.

Sara comes closer to Grace to inspect.

SARA (CONT'D)
That's not making sense.

GEORGE
Do you believe in corporeal
transference?

SARA
No.

GEORGE
In materialization?

SARA
No.

GEORGE
And not in astral bodies?

SARA
Where is this going?

GRACE
Ectoplasm?

GEORGE
That has nothing to do with...

SARA
Yeah. That's from Ghostbusters.

GRACE
What about tarot cards?

SARA
Geez, stop mixing genres.

GRACE
embarrassingly)
I'm just--trying to stay calm.

GEORGE
Look over there.

George points to a STACK OF BOOKS on the table.

Sara walks over to where George is pointing. There are RESEARCH BOOKS, all on vampires. She doesn't touch them because her hands are full of sauce.

Sara returns to cleaning the tomato sauce. The mess seems to have a new meaning now.

SARA
So he was after your blackheads?

GRACE
And pimples. First he sucked the
acne off my face...
(takes big breath)
...then he went after the
blackheads on my back.

SARA
But vampires suck blood.

GRACE
This one, he sucks pus.

SARA
Gross.
(beat)
But why? How?

GEORGE
He puts his lips together and...

SARA
Don't joke about it! Why pus?

No one responds. They all are pensive.

SARA (CONT'D)
(epiphany)
Oh, I got it. Pus is white blood
cells. So it's not really that
different.
(beat)
Why?

GRACE
Didn't you just, just answer that?

SARA
Not why pus, why us, I mean, you
guys?

GEORGE
No, you are right about the "us"
part. We have assumed that he
acquired the records at Glick's.

SARA

You think he's after me too?

GEORGE

We invited you over, because we
were aware you planned to see Glick
and we wanted to warn you.

SARA

(not really paying
attention)

A pus vampire who goes hanging out
at the Dermatologist. Geez!!

GRACE

(in Sara's face)

He attacked me...

GEORGE (CONT'D)

(pulling Grace away from Sara)
...we have no idea...

GRACE (CONT'D)

...George saved me...

GEORGE

...who he is...

GRACE (CONT'D)

...but, we think...

GEORGE (CONT'D)

We have no idea who he is, but we
think...

GRACE

...you should stay here tonight.

SARA

But if he knows how to find you,

and now, he's got my address, maybe
he was following me here.

Sara looks out the window.

GRACE

You see anything suspicious?

SARA

Nahhhh.

The white van is down the block, far enough so it doesn't seem
suspicious.

SARA (CONT'D)

Still...

GRACE

If he comes, we'll be ready.

George brings a BOX and they look through it.

There are CROSSES, CRUCIFIXES, WOODEN and METAL STAKES,
MALLETs and both GARLIC and GARLIC FLOWERS.

GEORGE

We don't know anything about him.

GRACE

Does he sleep in a coffin?

GEORGE

Can he turn other people into pus
vampires?

GRACE

Is he a shapeshifter?

GEORGE

Does he have to hide during the

day? Do lights as bright as the sun
kill him?

George pulls out a 5000 LUMEN FLASHLIGHT.

SARA
(turns from light)
Geez. That's crazy bright.

GRACE
It got here this fast?

GEORGE
I didn't order it online. My
fanatic prepper friend loaned it to
me.

George pulls out a SAW.

SARA
No!!! Don't tell me!

GEORGE
Yeah. You bet you - for the
cranium.

George gestures a finger running across his throat.

SARA
If I didn't know you guys so well,
I'd say you were lunatics. Lunatics
on a full moon night, nonetheless.
(beat)
Obviously you guys seriously have a
plan. Let's hear it.

FADE OUT.

EXT. LANDHAM HOME - NIGHT

The moon is full. The van is closer to the house now. The moon makes

it look even more white.

A yellowish-white MIST glides over the grass, and around the home to the side of the house. The mist crawls up the wall toward a window...

INT. LANDHAM HOME, GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

LIGHTNING FLASHES.

Sara sleeps in the guest bed.

SFX: A slight THUNDER, from far away.

SFX: Dogs BARKING and SNARLING.

SFX: GHASTLY CAT SOUNDS.

FX: MIST comes through the side of the window, it blows upwards and sideways in a very unnatural way. The mist settles in the guestroom. The mist morphs into Kurt.

Kurt's eyes are bloodshot. His teeth are yellow, with overly, frighteningly, large incisors. His skin is white as snow and tissue-thin like gauze on bone.

To Sara, Kurt will look handsome and well groomed.

Sara wakes up, she wants to scream, but can't because she sees how beautiful Kurt looks and is in love.

Grace crawls out from under the bed and stabs a stake into Kurt's left foot.

GRACE

Take that you pus sucking fiend.

This does not hurt Kurt. He grabs Grace and throws her against the wall.

George emerges from the closet just to see this.

Kurt pulls the stake out of his leg and looks at it. The stake is clean.

George wants to go help Sara, but he hears Grace as she falls against the wall, and goes to see if she is alright.

Kurt gently pushes Sara back on the bed. He licks his lips. This is sexy to Sara, so she wiggles ecstatically. She completely submits to Kurt's touches.

Kurt pushes aside the shoulder of her night gown until we see the larger cyst. It is disgusting, much bigger than the one Dr. Glick was incising earlier.

Kurt bends over and pierces the cyst with the incisors and sucks the cyst dry.

Grace comes-to and sees what's going on at the guest bed.

GRACE (CONT'D)
The cross! The cross!

George, pulls something out of his pocket. He lurches toward Kurt, attempting to burn a mark in Kurt's forehead with a metal cross.

Kurt spins around, and George lands on his back. Kurt spins a few times, but then, suddenly spins into a stake that Grace has in her hand.

The stake impales Kurt in the chest, but instead of blood flying out,

FX: pus spurts from his chest and into Grace's face.

Grace is drenched in pus and attempts to wipe it off.

KURT
I buried all my friends and family;
I am the last of my kind. Please.
Let me live.

GEORGE
Why would we let a monster live?

GRACE
Yeah, you monster.

(she falls by the anti-
vampire supply box)
Why us?

Grace rummages through and decides to throw garlic flowers at Kurt.

This has no effect, it just makes a bigger mess when the flowers settle on the pus on the carpet.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Why us? Why us?
(still throwing garlic)

KURT
Your back, so full of comedones,
delectable, delicious, satisfying.
As much pus in your blackheads as
Sara has in her cyst.

Sara comes out of her stupor. She inspects her cyst. It is totally emptied out.

George shines the light on Kurt. No effect, but Kurt covers his eyes with his CAPE.

KURT (CONT'D)
Damn. Bright.

George seizes this moment, pulls the stake out of Kurt's chest. As pus oozes out with the removal of the stake, the hole in Kurt's chest heals.

GRACE
(screams)
He can't be killed.
(looks at George)
What should we do?

GEORGE
Jump on his back. Jump on his back.

Grace tries to jump on his back, but Kurt swats her away. As Grace does this, George goes for the SAW.

Sara sees the saw and jumps in front of George to stop him.

SARA

Wait. Wait. Stop. Look, he's not hurting us. He's not killing us, and he emptied out my cyst. It wasn't hurting me and it didn't cost extra for Novocain.

(beat)

You get it?

GRACE

Glick doesn't charge for Novocain.

SARA

He'll be changing that policy. He's a boomer. I don't trust boomers.

(beat)

Anyway, don't you see a solution?

Grace stops and thinks a second.

GRACE

Yeah. You're right. If we let this, this, guy clear our acne, blackheads and cysts, we will have more money for fillers and Botox.

George seems to like this idea. He pulls his sleeve up, and there's a big blackhead by his elbow. He shows it to Kurt.

GEORGE

Hey buddy...let's make a deal.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END

