euphony

EUPHONY

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 2

SPRING 2020

Euphony is a nonprofit literary journal produced biannually at the University of Chicago. We are dedicated to publishing the finest work by writers and artists both accomplished and aspiring. We publish a variety of works including poetry, fiction, drama, essays, criticism, and translations.

Founded Spring 2000 by
Stephen Barbara and Matthew Deming

euphonyjournal.org

Euphony is a registered member of the
Council of Literary Magazines and Presses
www.clmp.org

STAFF

Managing Editor
Orliana Morag

Poetry Editor
Annabella Archacki

Prose Editor
Aazer Siddiqui

Reviews Editor
Rory Nevins

Editors-at-large
Benjamin Shafer
Juan Xavier Villacreces

Outreach Chairs
Ellie L. Frank
Brandon Zang

Staff
Isabella Cisneros
Stephanie Curtiss
Julia Dillman
Sophia Ellinas
Athena Hallberg
Michael Han
Schila Labitsch
Irene Li
Anna Lu
Ojaswi Malik
Elijah Rain Smith
Brinda Rao
Laura Ribeiro
Louise Siskel

Design
Brandon Zang

Cover Art
Megan Garvey

Managing Editor Emeritus
Jake Scott

CONTENTS

Poems

Prose

Addenda

WELCOME TO THE SPRING 2020 ISSUE OF EUPHONY

Twenty years ago, University of Chicago undergraduates Stephen Barbara and Matthew Deming saw the need for a literary journal that would "achieve a harmony of different traditions and generations, a sleek and elegant publication that the university community can be proud of." That goal of harmony gave the publication its name, and, under the guidance of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mark Strand, Euphony Journal was born.

The first issue of Euphony featured the work of a dozen undergraduates, but Barbara and Deming envisioned a more global reach from the start. As copies of Euphony began to exchange hands outside of Hyde Park, the journal found itself harmonizing a wider and wider range of authorial voices, from unpublished high schoolers to award-winning wordsmiths.

Today, Euphony is the University of Chicago's oldest literary journal. We've sent our little journals all over the world, from Alaska to Australia. We've earned a place at the Chicago Book Expo. We've held countless contests, many in support of causes we believe in, like our climate fiction contest this past spring. We've eaten a lot of Oreos.

We're proud that no reading fee prevents any writer from sharing their work with us. We're proud that no selective application process blocks any student from joining our staff. Inclusivity will always be our policy.

I am deeply grateful to those who have made this journal—and me—what we are today. To Maya, for taking a chance on me. To Mahathi and Miles, for paving the way with spirit. To Ellie and Juan, for keeping that spirit alive. To Annabella and Ben, for making my job easy. To Aazer, Brandon, and Rory, for taking us to new heights. To Orli, who now leads the way forward with compassion, thoughtfulness, and grace.

Turbulent times bookend my term as Managing Editor. Two years ago, I assumed the position the same day my father passed away. Today, I leave during a global pandemic. But the written word has a magical way of giving rhythm to rhythmless times—our contributors, staff, and readers taught me that. Their euphony will forever cut through the cacophony of my uncertainties.

So here's to the next page—and another twenty more.

Yours,

Jake Scott
Managing Editor, 2018-2020

Dear Reader,

The past few months at Euphony have been unlike any other in the twenty years since our founding. Our members were forced to transition to online meetings, all while worrying about school, our now uncertain futures, and the health of our families and friends.

Then, we began a process that we should have started at our inception: we met to grapple with the ways in which Euphony contributes to and enables the systemic oppression of people of color. As we all know, the arts are by no means immune to discrimination, and all too often the voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are silenced or coopted. Euphony's review process is a blind one—we do not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, or sexual orientation for the simple reason that we do not know who the authors are when we choose to publish their work. The members of Euphony, however, have decided that this is not enough. We recognize that as a literary magazine funded by the University of Chicago, it is our responsibility to use our many resources to amplify the voices of BIPOC.

Beginning in September, when we start reviewing work for our Winter 2021 Issue, we will actively encourage writers of color to submit to Euphony through social media campaigns and more direct engagement with writers living and working on the South Side of Chicago, where we are based. It is our hope that by increasing awareness of our own existence, we will receive more submissions from writers of color and therefore, our future issues will present a more diverse collection of poetry and prose.

I would like to thank all of our members, past and present, for making Euphony what it is today: a space that is welcoming and fun, but that also demonstrates the continued willingness to grow, change, and better itself and its community. I'd like to thank Jake Scott in particular, who prepared me for my new role with all the support and kindness of an older brother. He has shown me what it means to lead, and I cannot hope to fill the enormous shoes he has left behind. I'd also like to thank all the rest of our graduating seniors—Annabella, Ellie, Juan, Ben, and Sophia—who have enriched our meetings more than I could possibly describe in a single letter. To all of you, good luck, and we hope you visit us soon!

Despite all the hardships and difficult conversations, and without even the promise of Oreos at our weekly meetings, the board and staff of Euphony have rallied together to produce what has become one of my favorite issues. I am amazed by my fellow students' commitment to Euphony in this time of crisis, and I promise to them and to you, our beloved reader, that our little magazine will continue to share beautiful, meaningful work.

Yours,

Orliana Morag
Managing Editor

POEMS

POETRY EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Reader,

Like much of the rest of the class of 2020, I graduated under an unexpected set of stars. Figuratively, obviously, since the future that seemed so near and self-evident has gone dark. I am about as willing to guess what will happen in the world five years from now as I am to locate the position of Polaris from Alpha Centauri. But I also mean that my stars, and those of many of my peers, changed literally. My move from Chicago to quarantine in Texas mandated a precipitous drop in latitude. The stars here are clearer than they were in Chicago, but disorienting, with constellations pinned up at moments and places that disobeyed convention, some stars slipping under the horizon, lost.

This slippage is probably why I chose the errant stars to open and close this season's poetry section, the final issue of Euphony that I have the privilege to edit. "Absence" spikes a nerve of horror through the mundanities of nocturnal suburbia, a horror that sublimates through reflected light. The glare of headlights on "shine-eyed deer" catches on the turn of a "bone gleaming in the dark," and is in due course beamed up to the "swallowing stars." The poem ends with a mantra made familiar by the confinement of the past few months: "We are waiting." I hope the wait has ended by the final poem in this issue, "Perseids," which returns the light of the stars back to the ground via meteor shower.

A lot happens in between. Like "Absence," Dean Furbish's pensive translations deal in stillness and natural vignettes, but they transform fixity into a source of poignancy rather than horror. The self-critical fatalism of "Hominy" and "Mitochondria" cedes the passivity of reflection to the furious ignition of "To Lay it Down as She Does." "The Snapdragon Said" and "Butterfly" continue to accelerate: they are clever, quick, and charismatic. The collection only recedes back to static moments of vignette starting with "Seen" and continuing through "The Lamp."

The ubiquity of stillness means that hope, or lack thereof, is also a major focus. This issue's poets struggle to decide whether standing still is a trap or a chance to reflect enough to find a way out. In "Holiday Inn," escape is not yet certain. An attempt to evade an abuser ends with "windows mirroring sunrise." The hope implicit in a "window," a passage to a beyond, and a "sunrise," a new dawn, might yet deceive us: the sunrise is only a reflection—an illusion—and the window becomes a mirror, trapping light back in instead of letting it out. The penultimate poem, "Emily," finds a promise in decay, affirmatively answering the questions posed by its counterpart, the second poem, "Eternity." In "Eternity," the rot of death is ambiguous, but "Emily" tips the scales, rendering it more hopeful than hopeless.

Stillness is hope and horror. It is paranoia and privilege. The stars change, and the world turns, but we turn with it. My generation is young, but we watch the stars with our feet on the ground. Congratulations to my fellow graduates Jake, Ellie, Ben, and Juan, who are witty and dedicated and whom I am lucky to know. Thank you Mahathi, Miles, and Maya, for lighting the way. Thank you Orli, in whose hands Euphony belongs. I would say good luck, but you don't need it.

Best,
Annabella Archacki

Absence

Carina Silvermoon

Yellow lines slipping under the headlights
and turning tires, gravestones
drifting like anchors in the dusk.

Wheat fields rustling like yellowed paper and
long, black roads with shine-eyed deer
standing over them like sentinels.

Smoke sailing upward like
my mind sailing upward like
leaves flung in a seething summer storm.

Half-hidden road signs grinning,
and branches creaking like sun bleached
bone gleaming in the dark.

Empty pastures calling haunted mist,
hollow words lingering
in shadows thick as velvet.

I listen to the trees, the dark winding woods,
the deer, the swallowing stars:
we are waiting.

Eternity

Dean Furbish
original by Kamil Tangalychev

Eternity

When the earth becomes me,
I should like to know at least:
Do flowers sprout from me
And am I full of wheat?

Do poems still rustle in the foliage?
Are there tender blades of grass?
Do horses lying in the pasture
Still recognize me as always?

Вечность

Когда станет мною Земля,
То я захочу убедиться:
Растут ли цветы из меня,
И мною полна ли пшеница?

Стихи шелестят ли в листве?
Взошла ли трава молодая?
Валяются ль кони в траве,
Меня, как всегда, узнавая?

“The river drifts…”

Dean Furbish
original by *Kamil Tangalychev*

“The river drifts . . .”

The river drifts, a reflection of trees,
Green water, lightsome on its way.
And I, imitating bygone poets,
Search for hidden meaning.

I will not find it. In mid line,
Humility besets me,
And I’m able to see only water
Coursing green from leaves.

«Течет река . . .»

Течет река, деревья отражая,
Зеленая вода светла в пути.
Но я, поэтам бывшим подражая,
Пытаюсь в этом тайный смысл найти.

Не нахожу. В грядущий час смиренья
Смогу я посреди своей строки
В зеленом от листвы речном теченье
Увидеть лишь течени

Hominy

S. L. Bryant

It was on the shelves at the Tucson grocery where it belongs. Not on the breakfast plate in front of a truant runaway of fourteen in Hoosierville juvie. Eat it or mop the floor again. Bland and slimy hominy, corn carbs soaked in limewater. Baby chick yellow. Not yellow like the sunny-side eggs my mother squashed into the plate with her fork. I ate smashed eggs into womanhood, and sopped the mass with salty buttered toast into suburbia. I think of Valisa's glistened calves, her bare legs the summer night she was picked up after curfew when she was seventeen and strolled into the day room as we slapped spades on the table, her pleated, toffee circle skirt, tight at the waist, sheltering stripped thighs and her high heels like a woman and how she captivated us with buoyant tales about her pimp Ducky, as if he was her hero. And, at the Tucson grocery, I think of my perplexed, fallen-faced father on visiting day with nickel and dime coin rolls for candy bars, chips, and pop. And I think of Valisa and Ducky, and the patrons of bare-legged, teenage girls in honeyed heels like a woman.

Mitochondria

Leisha Douglas

I am the period
at the end of a long sentence of mothers.

If perpetuation is success,
I failed.

Dead grandmothers,
I hope you understand.

I steeped in your regrets
and this congested, fragile world.

Our epic needed closure.
This heroine too skeptical to advance the story.

To Lay it Down as She Does

Kelly Anderson

I am not sure if she penned her fires in layers or if she used a new stage each time. Or, were her thoughts more like a funnel—the contents falling through onto hungry paper that cradled her granite columns? Her tiny ideas—the fresh crumbs—gritty and raw, she devoutly stacked higher than I can see from here. But, I can hear her hands signing golden sand, the kind you flick from yourself, sharp and hot. They bled centuries of agile thoughts that scaffold over me. And, this is what I seek——to lay it down as she does, coalescing the humble night into a morning that burns. This toxin asks to run its course through my veins.

The Snapdragon Said

Eric Rawson

I pulled off the snapdragon head
    and made it start talking, squeezing
        the sides of its soft purple jaws

so its little pollen-coated
    tongue popped out. She was amused

briefly. Then the snapdragon said,

See, there was nothing after all
    to get upset about. Your fears

are like—the snapdragon paused for
    the right words—koi in the pond of
            your mind. Be with them for a while.

He thought of more: See if you can
    embrace the ragged trunk of your

anxiety and make it your
    landmark. Your go-to position.

Let's have some tea, the snapdragon
    said, his purple jowls wearing out.
        You see. It always helps to talk.

Butterfly

Vincent Green

A point becomes a line becomes a square,
but then, grown restless as this kind of shape,
becomes a cube and finds its ending there,
unriddled and precluded from escape.

To be of any service I went blind,
in part to thus behold the majesty
of a world that sighted I couldn't find,
despite having mastered geometry.

Can you recall when light passed through the rain?
The heavy clouds broken like a cypher...
So what comes first: the damage or the pain?
The dream or the day before? Or neither?

Trauma takes the wings off a butterfly,
To use as bookmarks for your memory.

Seen

Mary Ann Dimand

A bone, a latticed
leaf, still—skeletons
of a world once fleshed
now stripped.

Remember when the earth was sweet, yet, under the hanging tree?

Cloud Formations

Mark Belair

A kitchen worker in white
hoses down the sidewalk

outside his restaurant
in the early morning light

and the mist
rising from the spray

drifts into steam
billowing from a manhole cover

in the street
empty of traffic,

so early is it;
empty of pedestrians

but for me,
so quiet is it;

empty of me too,
I imagine

with unsettlingly
eerie ease

as, crossing over, I
enter the cloud.

*

It must be
some kind of wind inversion

but a cloud of black
smoke

lowers
down a brick chimney

as if yearning
to return

to wood or coal:
to the solid

it was
before the stacking,

the lit match,
the burn.

Holiday Inn

Caroline Maun

We are walking toward the hotel,
neon green, yellow, and orange sign
still lit, its giant invitational arrow,
each room with its own iron-railed
balcony. We had a box of Krispy Kreme;
I'm so small I'm being carried.
It's not night, there was no road trip,
we are approaching the local hotel.
My mother loaded her children
into the station wagon and drove.
Next steps have not been decided,
but anything seems possible.

We did go back,
as we always would. When sober,
he was a silent man; when not,
it was like a collapse in pressure
and a column of thunderclouds
exploding over everything. I remember
traversing the parking lot, my feet
dangling against my mother's hip,
our fingers scaly from the doughnuts
and all those balconies lined up,
windows mirroring sunrise.

The Lamp

Mark Belair

Tarnished green
in its recessed creases,

a polished copper
lamp casts light

sharp as eyesight
on books read beneath it;

books—its calm beam
seems to signal—read by

the lamp itself, so
accounting—

after years
spent absorbing

reverse
illumination—

for its intricate
corrosion

and subtle
gleam.

Emily

Susan Flynn

1

life opened twice
when first we met

birth remembered
a veil twice rent

a well so deep
it seemed we wed
flowers fade
yet are not dead

2

as Spring returns
and death recedes

the body jolts
away from grief

tizzy of thought
flash of feeling

the worm turns
toward the sun

for Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (1830-1886)
and my mother Emily Elizabeth Flynn (1920-2003)

Perseids

Sam Cherubin

The Perseids are falling, falling, squaring the sky
    with tiny squibs
saying, *Heaven has its painters.*

    I did not come to fast upon the land,
but to greet three loves—
    the sky, the stars, the ground.

PROSE

PROSE EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Reader,

This is a grim time. It is also a crucial time for those interested in change. The role of police and prisons in society is now seriously questioned. Police abolition—and to a lesser extent, prison abolition—are issues many Americans must now confront at the dinner table. America's race problem has been promoted from "a conversation that we must have," to the direct action of millions across the country. Although there is an enormous amount of work yet to be done, the promise of national self-examination seems headed towards fulfillment.

So, what can literature do for us now? This seems like a ridiculous non-sequitur on first examination, and in one way, it is. We cannot expect literature to do the heavy lifting of large-scale political change. Nevertheless, art is necessary to politics. Beyond mere propaganda, art has an ability to draw out individual perspectives and synthesize them over a group. Once that is accomplished, the artwork can "dwell undivided in several minds," as Merleau-Ponty said.

But literature goes further than most art. Literature serves as a middle ground between the reader and the author, and in this middle ground live characters. Literary characters do not simply "dwell undivided" in our minds. They glisten with a familiar personhood, the ability to grow and change over time, to make choices good and bad, to both love and hate.

Furthermore, good literature does not instruct us what to do with it. For this reason, literature alone cannot suffice if we are to change our political reality. That requires individual and collective praxis. But for the same reason, literature contains within it the possibilities of better worlds towards which we must strive.

In this special twentieth-anniversary issue of Euphony, we have prose that is explicitly political: "The Drowned City," and "The Four Brothers," from our inaugural climate fiction contest, for example. We also have a few pieces from our 20 for 20 contest, celebrating our twentieth birthday with a selection of works under 20 words. But overall, the prose pieces in this issue of Euphony may take you in many directions. The characters in these works make bad choices. Of course, I hope that "Evaporating" doesn't encourage you to listen to overeager psychoanalysts. I hope that after "Broad Daylight Weeping" and "Bridges," you will still respect the dead and those about to die. I hope that you do not smash Cadillacs or priceless Spanish sculptures, as they do in "Violets For Your Furs" or "Deseo."

However, those same characters are flecked with good throughout. And so I hope you choose the freedom of the second-person narrator of "Deseo," and I hope you seek out the firm values of Helen from "Violets For Your Furs." I hope you are as filial a child as Jade in "Bridges," and I hope you are as sensitive and self-aware as the daughter is in "Broad Daylight Weeping." I hope you are as resilient as the narrator of "Evaporating." The choice, as always, is up to you.

Yours,
Aazer Siddiqui

Competition: 20 For 20

The Art of Brevity

"Euphony says that this is supposed to be twenty words."
"Who cares? It's not like they're counting or anything."

- by Michael Han

Inquisitive Worlds

The child curiously admired the dew drops on his grass.
"They look like tiny oceans!"
The drops shimmered in agreement.

- by Kayla Jessup

Contagious

When I got strep and we couldn't kiss we still slept with our foreheads pressed together in the hot night.

- by Mike Wiley

Parable #4

Seagulls congregate outside my apartment—studies say they sense disaster. Is it a blessing or an omen flocking above me?

- by Alex Maquiera

A Mother in Argos

In sleep, the sweet-smelling smoke of the funeral pyre chokes her throat. In sunlight, she bites red through her lip.

- by Reema Saleh

how it stings, in hindsight

not coincidence and not fate—meeting you was a punch to the gut

- by Annabelle Perng

Letters to Danbury

Whoever – if any – planned it,
The sunset may be obscured
By the steeple and skyscraper alike.

- by Ridgely Knapp

WINNER:

Untitled

She sails towards the endless horizon. On windless days, sailors still see her ship chasing dolphins against the setting sun.

- by Iris Jacobs

The Four Brothers and the Second Sun: A Retelling of the Koch Brothers' American Legacy

Hannah Wilson-Black

My child, you have asked me many times why the sky hangs choked with gray and brown and yet it doesn't rain. Why the old giants are gone from the forests of their birth. Why the sea looks so angry. The answer, or rather the story, is long, and woven with so many threads it may be impossible to see their paths in the tapestry. But I can grab hold of one thread at a time and tell you about it as best I can.

I have already told you the stories of the world's creation. Almost as numerous as these are the stories of its destruction, though they don't have an end yet, just a long, elastic middle. But if you'll bear with me, I will tell you one.

Before you were here and before I was here, from a field of golden wheat bordered by four long dirt roads, grew four brothers. They were born of the Sun itself. All were pale as a bird's egg and with temperaments as different as the four cardinal winds. Four always means trouble, sometimes good trouble and sometimes bad.

The oldest, Frederick, liked to read, as well as imagine his own stories. Most days he could be found contemplating the drama of the sunset or building figures of sticks and stone with which to act out the great battles of his imagination. Perhaps he was always different from his brothers, always destined to leave the place of his birth. In any case, the weather of the wheat plains was not kind to him—the wind stung his eyes and, in winter, sleet bit his ankles. The Sun gradually became, in his eyes, less brilliant and more oppressive. Sometimes its heat was so unbearable on his shining forehead that Frederick felt as if he alone was being punished. Unlike his brothers, he knew early that the plains of their birth were not for him. He felt out of place, like a rejected stepchild, and had no need for the greatness for which his brothers felt themselves destined, being children of the Sun itself. In the Sun, Frederick's brothers saw brilliance and warm attention where Frederick saw only oppressive heat and a harsh glare. Earth had not rounded the Sun thirteen times before he rode a passing storm traveling east to a shining city built by those long dead and escaped the memory of the world, which can be very harsh indeed, or very forgiving. It is best not to gamble with the world's memory, better to be forgotten than lauded or loathed, he decided, and left his three brothers to themselves.

The next oldest brother, Charles, was wild, like something was

chasing its tail inside him. He was smart but reckless, and caused all sorts of mischief to his fellow creatures until the Sun itself decided enough was enough, and punished him by following him relentlessly and burning his skin. Charles was strong and spirited, as well as clever, and at first he attempted to hide from the burning light. But beams of its fire seemed to creep into every hole, every cave, every dark place he might have thought to shelter himself. And so eventually Charles lay still, defeated and blistering—until, after ten days and ten nights, the sun relented. Finally his blisters and burns could heal, but they became white scars. He was different now, walked quietly and slowly like a kicked dog, but a playful, trapped spirit still roamed the passages of his body like a whining wolf. Then there were the twins, David and William, and though they were made of the very same grassland soil, they were different as night and day. David carried himself with confidence and a level head as he strode across the wide golden plains. He had a great loud laugh that shook the pebbles on the side of the four dirt roads, but it was amiable and not intimidating. If the elder brother, Charles, could behave like a bully at times, David was his milder shadow, though no less fun-loving. Like Charles, he also had the strength of a great oak. David and Charles amused one another, tackling each other in the wheat fields from the time they were small and racing each other farther and farther until they thought they could see the glittering teeth of the city to which Frederick had disappeared years before.

The other twin, William, wished fiercely to be considered a playmate by Charles as well, but he moved awkwardly and lost every game he played with Charles and David. He was stubborn, a sore loser. He hung on Charles' every word and action with the loyalty of a hunting dog to a hunter, but he could never quite catch his older brother's eye the way David did. William was curious and would spend days quietly observing the movements of a deer or studying the delicate underside of a flower's petals, but he was not always so gentle. When he was angry, with his brothers or with himself, the tornados themselves took shelter. The cries of his rage at being excluded by Charles and David would shake the heads of the wheat and cause the ground to rumble and crack. During William's fits of emotion, his brothers went indifferently about their business, perhaps exchanging looks of amusement or concern. Meanwhile, William's angry tears hit the cool earth with a hiss and his attachment to Charles only grew stronger for want of its reciprocation.

With the exception of Frederick, perhaps, the brothers of the golden plains wanted nothing more than to feel the Sun's warmth and its love for them. It was beautiful and radiant, so astonishing that when you looked directly at it you could not bear it. I know you do not see the sun often because of the constant haze, but I can tell you that when I was young, I saw it myself. So brilliant up against the blue of the sky

that its light seemed to have no beginning nor end. But this story is not about me.

The brothers feared and loved their creator the Sun so profoundly that for each of their first nights on Earth they wept for loss of it. They hated the cold, feeble, sterile light of the moon, which seemed a poor, mocking substitute. To the brothers of the golden plains, the night was a sign of the Sun's disapproval. But by the time they were young men, all of whom had both bathed in the Sun's arms and been burned by its temper, the brothers had learned, if not accepted, that the night was inevitable. They could never be beautiful or strong or impressive enough for the Sun, and yet they each harbored a fierce desire for an eternal day. For the Sun's praise. It is the worst feeling to know that something is impossible yet feel inexplicably that if only you had some secret key and if only you devoted your life to finding that key, it might be achievable. And the brothers felt that nagging attachment to the Sun's attention, if not every day, then every month or every year, and they never could get rid of it, not a single one of them. It seems some things live forever.

When the four brothers had all become men, tall like the heads of wheat and their skin just as golden, the Sun decided to give them each a gift with which to begin their lives. Each brother received a droplet of sun in an acorn shell, a piece of liquid light that could act as a lantern to illuminate any patch of darkness. Frederick, who had received his gift while walking down a city sidewalk on a rainy afternoon, put the sun-filled acorn on a table full of knick-knacks in his cellar and tried to forget about this reminder of the past. Charles and David, however, upon receiving their pieces of sun wondered how they might stand to gain, and fast, from their new possessions. One cold and moonless night in the grassland they hit upon an idea. The brothers had always wanted a way to feel the Sun's presence constantly, an eternal day. Though it seemed the Sun would always leave them alone and cold at day's end, they suddenly had the power to permanently secure the feeling of warmth, of care and attention, that they wanted from the fickle Sun. They had in their hands, they realized, the seeds of a new sun, a second sun that could illuminate the sky when the first sun left on whatever mysterious business occupied it during the nighttime. But how do you grow a sun? Watering it like a plant would extinguish it altogether, and it had no mouth to eat meat or drink milk like a child. Perhaps, Charles and David reasoned, they could join their drops of sun and feed it like a fire with everything on Earth that could burn.

At first they fed their second sun with the long prairie grasses and the ball of molten fire and ever-fusing energy began to grow in tiny increments. It was still no bigger than a small stone. Charles and David hid it in a cave, nestled away from prying eyes in the safe underground darkness, and continued to grow their precious possession. Day by day

they tossed handfuls of wheat, grasses, berries, and animal bones into the fiery and brilliant glowing mass, but it reached only the size of a plum after many, many weeks and the brothers were growing frustrated.

Thinking perhaps lumber would fuel the second sun's growth much faster, the two brothers painstakingly fashioned tools of stone and began hacking away at nearby saplings—sycamores, sugar maples, and oaks. As they fed these small trees into their second sun, they saw it growing faster indeed. So they worked quicker and longer, forging larger and larger axes for cutting larger and larger trees until they were clearing whole forests. Still their stubborn sun was smaller than they'd hoped, the size of a small boulder and not nearly large enough to raise into the sky. They thought long and hard, looking out onto the barren grasslands around them, cleared of trees for miles around. It seemed they had nothing else to turn to. They would have to keep swinging away at the forests for years.

But one evening, as David came back from the forests dragging his axe and a sled full of timber and wiping the sweat from his brow, he noticed a crack in the ground not far from the cave where the second sun was kept. From the jagged crack in the dusty earth of the plains leaked a thick, dark brown liquid which shone even in the dim light of dusk. He called Charles over to see the new substance. It smelled sickly sweet, like it was made of all the dead and dying things of the world. The brothers had never seen anything like it, but because they were desperate and because it smelled like death and the brothers had been feeding their sun dead things, they decided to bring some of it back to their cave in a wooden bucket.

Much to the brothers' great joy and astonishment, their sun drank up the dark sludge like a hungry child and expanded before their very eyes. They had hit upon something marvelous indeed.

All this time, William had been busy investigating the properties of his drop of sun, studying it as he had studied many things as a child. It was warm from a few feet away, but burned the skin if you drew too close. It illuminated any room into which it was placed. But beyond these discoveries William had not considered what he might do with his drop of sun. When he finally heard of his brothers' plan to create an eternal day, he was intrigued—and angry at having been left out. Perhaps by joining Charles and David he could finally create the bond that had never manifested between himself and his brothers in earlier years. He offered his help and his piece of the sun, and the three brothers hatched a plan, though William could not help but hear every time Charles laughed at a joke David made, every whisper between the two of them. As the dark shining sludge brewed deep in the earth, a resentment began brewing in William's breast.

In the meantime, David and William dug in the earth around the

crack from which they'd first drawn the death-smelling liquid and a well of the stuff formed. Charles took the bucket and fed the sun for days and then weeks on end while his brothers continued digging. The new sun had started to produce a thick trail of smog with every bucket of the death-smelling liquid that Charles poured onto its broiling surface. It puffed out dark currents of soot into the air, but the brothers paid that no mind. Their thoughts were elsewhere—their sun was growing, but not fast enough.

So the three brothers designed another plan. Through a cow's horn they boomed a message to every far-away town: anyone who was willing to help them transport the dark liquid and lumber to their second sun could have a piece of this sun themselves at the end of their work. A drop of sun would eliminate a lifetime's need for candles and in some instances, firewood as well. Many people flocked to the brothers and offered their help in exchange for a precious drop of sun. Tens, then hundreds, then thousands and tens of thousands of people.

The workers brought axes and struck down trees, first to make buckets for the ones carrying the death-smelling liquid back and forth to the second sun, then to make sun-fuel itself in the form of logs piled high on wooden sleds. They walked for miles and miles, swinging their axes. They took down young saplings and old giants alike. After all, what did one hundred years of wooden growth mean to them in the grand scheme of things? They lived for themselves and their families. What was before or after their lifetimes paled in the face of the pains and joys they were met with from day to day. Survival was now, and they had before them a chance to gain a piece of ever-living sun. No more candle wax to be bought, no more wolves pacing outside the dark windows of their children's rooms. Months passed quickly and years slowly. The wood-choppers swarmed over the Earth.

The workers who dredged up the death-smelling liquid, too, had expanded their reach. The two brothers had instructed them to find other sources of the earth-born fuel, so they walked for miles and miles, swinging their shovels and seeking out places where the Earth had come apart. Where they found the dark liquid, they dug, despite protestations from people living in these places, both people who had lived on the land since human time began and newcomers alike. These deep-rooted people pleaded especially with the shovel-swingers to leave the land undisturbed. They were angry. The dark shining liquid had leaked into their streams and rivers since the shovel-swingers had arrived. *We are sorry,* the strangers said as they plunged their buckets into the earth, *but our orders come from three strange men, born of the Sun itself and tall as the wheat stalks on the plains. They have promised us a piece of a second sun in exchange for our work, and when they become angry the tornadoes themselves hide.* And so they continued to dig.

After several years, the second sun grew so large that no one could see the top of it. It was several times bigger than the largest house for miles around, and had long since been dragged out of its cave to sit in the very field where the brothers had emerged at the beginning of their lives. The field was now barren, as its wheat had been fed to the second sun years before. The brothers looked much older now, older even than the passing years themselves would suggest. Their skin had grown leathery, their hair thinned and bleached to a pale yellow color by the original Sun overhead. The three of them oversaw the feeding of the second sun by the hurrying workers but themselves sat in fine wooden chairs and ate roasted venison. From their decaying lungs, poisoned by the vapors of the dark shining liquid, they coughed out reassurances that the workers would each get their promised piece of sun if they worked hard and diligently.

One afternoon David, Charles, and William were greeted by a large gray owl carrying on its leg an acorn with a tattered note attached. The brothers knew what it was even before looking inside the acorn shell.

I have heard of your plan, read the note. *I cannot for my life understand its worth, but I have long since stopped trying. Here is my piece of the sun. It is dazzling, to be sure, but it reminds me of how lonely I once thought the night to be, how harsh the prairie winds are, and how I hated to see you fight. And so it has brought me only pain. - F*

Silently, the brothers carried Frederick's drop of sun to their yowling, churning creation and poured it in. They had not been speaking much of Frederick before, but now they omitted his name from their conversations entirely. He had momentarily cast doubt on their pursuit of an eternal day, and this was unforgivable.

For decades the three brothers' operation went on this way, with the lumber and the buckets and the death-smelling liquid. Of course their activities caused concern all the land over, and many people came shaking fists or brandishing weapons at the brothers, vowing revenge for a destroyed forest, the new, browner color of the sky, or a river whose fish had been turned belly-up by the death-smelling liquid's leakage. In some cases, they came weeping for the loss of a family member or friend who had drunk brown water or breathed brown air and became very ill or died. In each case they returned home silently, placated, with their very own drop of sun, their eyes only dry from a shortage of tears. There would be more tomorrows.

By now, William's frustration with his brothers had bubbled to the surface. He accused them of excluding him from their talks, laughing at him when his back was turned, and treating those who came seeking answers for the damage the brothers had done to their lives too cruelly. In truth, Charles and David, despite their seeming nonchalance about the impact they were having on those with whom they shared the land,

were at times also caught off-guard by the effects of their own work, like a growing child recoiling in confusion at her new strength. The long fingers of their wide-reaching operation were often out of sight and out of mind, after all. However much this disturbed David and Charles at first, they only had to catch sight of their beautiful, radiant, warm new sun to forget these concerns. For William, however, a mix of jealousy and concern overshadowed the comfort that seemed to radiate from the second sun. One day, his anger finally boiled over.

As if he was pantomiming the tantrums of his younger days, William raged at his brothers with the kind of acidic yet childlike fury wielded by the excluded sibling. He demanded that he be given more authority over the brothers' operation. Charles and David, he should have known, would never give him that. And rather than walking away and ignoring his admonitions, this time they fought back. They told William he was childish, neurotic, too focused on details, not to mention hopelessly emotional. If he wanted to play with the real men, they told him, he would need to take direction from them. If not, he would be forced out of their project. And if he tried to gain power by force, they would take him, two on one, and win. And they swore to turn the workers on him. This threat was impossible to ignore. William knew the axe- and shovel-swingers feared Charles and David more than him. They would follow orders, and he would be beaten to a pulp and rejected by everyone within miles of his birthplace.

So he left. *Good luck*, he said to his brothers with a sneer. *You can have my piece of the sun.*

Charles and David watched him walk across the dusty, cracked ground that had once been the wheat fields and out of their sight. Perhaps he was walking to the city which Frederick left for all those years ago. It had always seemed like more of a mirage on the horizon than a real place.

Charles sighed. *Let's get back to work.*

Day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year the second sun grew, fueled by logs from the forests of the world and the death-smelling liquid. Until, one day, the second sun was so massive its weight began to split the ground beneath it. Then Charles and David knew it was time to send it into the sky. As each of their employees delivered their last bucket of the death-smelling liquid, they received their promised golden droplet, hardly significant enough to make the second sun smaller. The workers looked up at Charles and David and took what was owed to them, though the hollowness in their eyes must have betrayed their hunger for more.

Then, with a heave, the brothers catapulted their newly minted sun into the great hazy sky. It stuck, lodged right in the place where Orion's Belt sits during the peak of summer. It smiled down at the brothers,

and they smiled up at it. This sun would never abandon them. There would be no more distinction between night and day. They would always be warm, they would always be paid attention to, they would always be loved. The night no longer stopped them from harvesting crops or hunting. They could always see and they could move as they pleased without fearing anything lurking in the darkness with hungry, hollow eyes.

Then, almost as if they were waking from a dream, the brothers looked around and jumped a little in surprise at the stark barrenness of the treeless, grassless land and the choked yellow-brown sky. The only thing that moved on the prairie was the swirling dust eddies which hovered over the cracked and displaced earth. Every green thing as far as the eye could see was gone, and the people who had swarmed around the brothers and their small empire were nowhere to be seen. In their attempt to destroy the loneliness of the long night they had perhaps created a new kind of loneliness. To their surprise, the brothers found that they were ancient. They stared with unfamiliarity at their sagging skin, their bodies grown soft and pale with the luxury of being attended to by servants in the shade of their cave.

But in a matter of days the new world became familiar and the unsettling emptiness of the landscape faded into the background of the brothers' lives. They marveled aloud to each other about their great accomplishment, the eternal day. It was undeniably hotter now, sometimes uncomfortably so, since their second sun had entered the sky. But even through their sweat they smiled magnificently. They would not acknowledge to each other the dry sadness of the land nor the streams that ran muddy and smelled like death nor the unusual heat. Never under any circumstances would they ask the question *and for what?* To do so would be to nullify the work of their lives.

I can see the question in your eyes—you're wondering how it is that we only have one sun today. Well, the brothers' second sun had developed quite the appetite in its time on Earth and old habits are hard to kill. Like the brothers themselves, the second sun had a hunger, a void in the bottom of its being that had never been satisfied and needed to be bigger, better, faster, and brighter. So over the course of several months, the second sun made its way across the sky with one aim. As the brothers watched below in confusion and distress, their creation began to engulf the first sun, the Sun which had frustrated them with its sudden callousness at night and burned them for their misbehavior. Even given the longing and pain the original sun had cultivated in them, the brothers found themselves strangely horrified at seeing it swallowed by their own work. They watched, awestruck, as the two suns became one bright behemoth in a burst of wild energy. Blindingly bright, the new massive sun would prove loyal—much to the brothers'

delight, it remained in the sky at all hours. Charles and David were rattled, and still they walked around sweating like rain clouds because of the new heat. But they continued to find comfort in the knowledge that this newly fortified sun would never leave them. They still had what they wanted, and that was the point of all this, was it not?

But, as you may have guessed, they were wrong about the permanence of their eternal day. The overgrown sun left them too, decided it would like to see the other side of the world for a change when the brothers were in the last years of their lives. And as the emptiness and coldness of the night overtook them, they found themselves just as hurt as they had been when they were boys. And only in this moment did they realize, Charles and David, and William and Frederick too, as they watched the sun fade beyond the horizon for the first time in years, that they had never once turned to each other for the remedy to the ache within them. If they ever did act on this epiphany, no one knows.

Within a few years they had all left this world. They took much from you, my child, and you must try to take it back. But begin with this lesson from their story, consider it a gift we wrenched from their hands, you and I together: do not build a second sun. Sometimes we are left with a hole in our gut from childhood or a time of change, a hole where something used to be or never was. What comes to fit in that space later is never made of the stuff that was once there. It is never a child's papier-mâché construction of what we think we ought to have had. It is never wrested from the universe with sheer force. The lasting remedy for such a hole is often made of ourselves or other people, whose hands we grasp as we walk through the night. And it almost never smells like death. Promise—*promise me*—you will remember that.

Winner of the Climate Fiction Competition

The Drowned City

Sara Davis

The first blush of twilight was blooming in the Old Quarter as Stella led her guests into Jackson Square. Magic hour: against the violet-streaked sky, the soaring white spires of St. Louis Cathedral glowed with soft pink tones like the inside of a seashell. Guests strolled along the walkways in twos and threes, stopping to watch one of the gold-painted human statues or browse the canvases leaning against wrought iron park fences. The tall gates were open so that guests could walk among the hedges leading toward the fountain, where buskers were strategically positioned so that one's merry strains of accordion didn't compete with another's melancholy horn. Some guests were eating beignets in a cafe across from the square, and the smell of hot sugar clouded over the brackish humidity and acrid undercurrents of citronella.

"Welcome to Jackson Square," said Stella warmly, walking backwards for a few steps in order to face her group: fifteen guests from all around the country with little in common aside from a checked box labelled Ghost and Voodoo Tour. "This is the perfect place to begin our journey into the unknown. Fortune tellers and palm readers from the bayou and beyond have been drawn to the heart of the Old Quarter to practice their mystical arts for hundreds of years." She paused for a beat as the tour guests absorbed the gaslit square, dotted with wrought-iron benches and tables. "Who's ready for a glimpse into the future?"

An upbeat chatter rose from the guests as Stella led her group directly to the table where her housemate Jared was seated, wearing harem pants and a great deal of silver jewelry. Jared grew up in the multicultural melting pot of Houston, more "beyond" than "bayou," but his grandparents were from Opelousas and he played up the regional accent. Stella herself grew up in a landlocked town in Tennessee, and admired Jared's insouciant intimacy with Louisiana folkways, as well as his expansive knowledge of the Old Quarter, where she still felt like a novice after four months. *New New Orleans*, Jared and the other workers called it. That was a joke: the point of the Old Quarter is that it is exactly the same as the old New Orleans, or part of it anyway.

"Good evening, *mes amis*," says Jared. "My name is Jerrick, and I am here to initiate you into the arts of chiromancy—that is to say, how the shape of your hand can tell me who you are and who you might become. May I have a volunteer?"

About half the group raised a hand: a gaggle of boyish tech bros from Nevada, some Generation Alpha finance guys from Albany, two distinguished couples wearing fine linen and expensive-looking watches, and a quiet, solitary woman who might be in her late sixties. Jared chose one of the linen-clad wives, and held her hand gallantly as he interpreted the lines of her palm for the group. The tech bros elbowed one another and snickered, but even they grew quiet and attentive as Jared read the woman's palm. Stella always enjoyed watching the transformation; she had trained in fortune-telling herself, and it was probably her favorite Tour and Transport rotation after the ghost and voodoo tours. In her short time in the Old Quarter, Stella had also spent a rotation on one of the pedicabs, and in a pinch she could fill on a shift as hostess or dishwasher—although Corporate preferred those roles to be staffed by workers in the Hospitality division.

Not workers, Stella reminded herself; that's what the employees called themselves in their own bunkhouses off the clock. Corporate called them *characters*, as was the convention in their flagship amusement parks. Visitors to the floating city were called guests, because no one wanted to be a tourist. In front of guests, workers called one another by their given names, or *mon ami* if they couldn't remember the name they had been given. Stella had gotten to keep her own name; the Tour and Transport agents had chuckled when she introduced herself at open auditions.

Jared concluded his demonstration by asking everyone in her group to hold up their hands so that he could read the angle of their thumbs. There was good-natured laughter from the group as he pointed and called them out by turns: cooperative, codependent, cantankerous. Stella made a mental note to try this on her next fortune-telling rotation; exit reports have shown that personalized attention can substantially improve guest experience. Walking backward to lead her guests onward, she observed her guests talking among themselves in a low hum of excitement. The solitary older woman was the last to follow her out of the square; perhaps she would return to "Jerrick" for an extended reading after Stella's ghost and voodoo tour.

Stella led her tour guests down a narrow, cobblestoned alley alongside the cathedral that opened onto Royal Street, which glowed amber and gold from string lights and glittering shop windows. Stella stopped in front of an art gallery and waited a moment for her guests to pool around her. "Look up," she told them, and lifted her own gaze past the shuttered dormer windows as an example. "On a cold, dark night—colder and darker than this—you might see the ghost of the octoroon mistress pacing back and forth on the roof." Of course there hadn't been a cold night since Stella arrived in the Old Quarter, but that wasn't the

point.

The ghost stories were fun, Stella thought, but it was the architecture and history that inspired her to audition for a tenancy in cultural preservation. When Stella told her parents she wanted to take the tenancy, they had been worried—about the hurricanes, about the mosquitos, about her living and working full-time in the floating city. "We just want you to be happy, honey," said Dad. Papa sighed, and told her that if it didn't work out she could come home anytime. But it is working out, Stella said to herself as she led her tour group away from the octoroon mistress's fateful rooftop. Few of her peers had landed tenancies as fulfilling as Stella's, where she could put her art history education to use interpreting a site of great cultural importance—even if only for the benefit of a few thousand wealthy guests each year.

So as Stella marched her guests through the Old Quarter these last few months, she taught them the terms for the wide galleries and narrow cantilevered balconies that shade the walkways, wreathed in ornate ironwork and hanging plants. When her groups crossed Orleans Street, she asked them to turn slowly in a circle and feel themselves in the very center of the Old Quarter, and she stood with her arms out to show that the street was wide enough to allow two lanes of carriage traffic. There were no carriages in the Old Quarter now, of course. The experiment of ferrying mules into the floating city was deemed a failure; their upkeep was negligible compared to the dry goods and perishables shipped into the Old Quarter every day, but the mules didn't poll well with guests in the early days of the Old Quarter rebrand.

Since this group responded well to their introduction to the mystical arts, Stella decided to follow Orleans Street lakeward for a few blocks. The old directional terms—lakeward, riverward—don't mean much anymore, but the Tour and Transport workers still use them to orient themselves in the Old Quarter. Beyond Royal and Bourbon Streets there is less activity and architectural beauty to dazzle her guests—but they signed up for a supernatural experience, Stella reasoned, and the residential blocks grow eerily quiet as you walk further from the Hospitality and Entertainment hubs. She can show them Marie Laveau's house and transplanted crypt, still marked up with red X's all over. She can point to one of the many houses which may have been a House of the Rising Sun.

Periodically walking backward, Stella pointed out the shuttered stately homes of the central Quarter and explained the Spanish style of architecture: the outer windows are blocked by wooden shutters and shaded by galleries, while the inner windows open onto a cool courtyard where tropical trees spread their broad leaves over fountains and keep the house cool. Some of the guests nod; most of them are staying in old hotels of precisely this structure, albeit ones that blast cold air during

the endless summers. As the group got closer to the lakeward banks, Stella called attention to the changing surroundings; the palatial homes gave way to narrow pastel shotgun houses. Historically, Stella said to the group, this is where the less well-off residents lived in the Old Quarter. This is a private joke: while a few of the central shotgun houses were converted into luxury single-bedroom suites for certain eccentric guests, most others serve as storerooms or bunkhouses for the divisions, or both. Stella herself is staying in a pale green shotgun house during this rotation, along with five other workers in the Tour and Transport division. They share a kitchen and a bath, and there are two light-filled bedrooms that sleep three each. Of all the far-flung tenancies that took her college friends after graduation, Stella privately thinks that hers is the most glamorous.

The quiet woman in her sixties seemed to stumble over the uneven sidewalk, and one of the finance guys caught her arm to steady her.

"I'm all right," she said.

"It's a shame, really," said one of the linen-clad guests, casting a critical eye on the cracked concrete. "Why don't they fix things up over here?"

"The Old Quarter is designed to preserve the city's unique history and vibrant culture," Stella recited, and explained that most of the neighborhood's buildings and infrastructure were maintained in the state of repair they had been in when Corporate, well, incorporated the city. "Otherwise, how would you choose what to preserve?" asked Stella, sensing a teachable moment. "How would you commit to one particular moment in time, knowing that would erase everything that came after?" And every moment in time has its dark side, Stella thought to herself. If you restore the neighborhood Marie Laveau knew, you get slave quarters and no indoor plumbing. If you restore the era of glamorous cotillions, you also get the octoroon ball and restless spectral mistresses.

"I would have thought the sidewalk would be in worse shape," said another guest. "Why isn't it more damaged?"

Stella took a moment to consider what the guest might mean by that. "Why isn't it more what?" she asked.

"Damaged," said the guest. "I thought this part of the city was damaged by the storm surge."

"Oh, no," said Stella, and explained what she knew about topography: that New Orleans was shaped like a basin, hence the Basin Street Blues, and that the oldest parts of the city were built at the riverward lip. When the levees broke, the water flooded the deepest part of the basin. The Old Quarter escaped the worst of it.

Stella realized belatedly that what the guest meant was, "I thought you said this is where the poor lived, and we all know how the poor fared in Katrina and Maria and Betsy II." But as she opened her mouth

to explain, one of the tech bros cleared his throat. "Where do we go to see the worst of it?"

Stella suppressed a physical cringe—the gracelessness of it—and forced herself to speak calmly. The floating city preserved everything exactly as it was for posterity, and hired divisions to manage Hospitality, Tour and Transport, Entertainment, and every other foreseeable need that guests might have. As it happened, it was completely foreseeable that some guests would feel the need to look upon the ravages of nature and despair, or stare back at the void or experience the Romantic sublime or whatever—Stella hadn't quite figured out the motive. Nor had she been able to find out where Corporate took guests who wanted to see the drowned city, since the whole point of the Old Quarter was to protect New Orleans history and culture from the rising sea and increasingly chaotic hurricane season. But she did know the phone number for the Disaster Tourism division, which she gave to the Nevada man without further comment.

"Now, who here is familiar with 'The House of the Rising Sun?'" she asked, and as the more inebriated guests launched readily into a rousing chorus, she picked a pale blue house at random for them to address their tuneless jubilee.

***

The ghost and voodoo tour always ends at a bar, although not always the same one every night. Tonight, Stella had been instructed to take her guests to a hotel where the bar counter is installed inside a full-size carousel; some of the guests gasped with delight as they entered and lifted their arms to take wristwatch photos. Stella regathered her group for a quick wrap-up—a pleasant ghost story about a childish spirit who manifests mostly by giggling and slamming doors in the carousel hotel—and bade them good night. "It has been a pleasure to share this remarkable city with you," she said to the group. "I hope you have a wonderful stay in the Old Quarter. I will be here if you have any questions about reaching your next destination."

As the group dispersed, the solitary older woman who had stumbled on the sidewalk lingered and looked as though she had something to say. This often happened; after spending an hour hearing Stella talk about the Old Quarter and ghosts, many guests find that they want to confide in her about supernatural experiences or ask her for restaurant recommendations. Sometimes both. Stella didn't have a read on what the older woman would ask, though; she didn't look like the Old Quarter's usual guests. She was not dressed like the grand dames and pampered wives whom Stella usually encountered on her pedicab shifts, nor did she exhibit the entitled langor of someone who has never had to punch the clock. This woman had kept pace throughout the walk and had seemed engaged with Stella's stories, although she kept to herself.

She actually seemed to have come alone, which was unusual. Airlifting to the floating city is expensive, and most of Stella's tour guests were wealthy couples and families with the means to purchase a unique cultural experience, privileged young people who wanted to party, or groups arranged by conferences for employees in the few industries that still had money to burn.

Stella's face hurt a little from smiling, but she composed herself to look friendly until the solitary woman approached her.

"That was very well done, dear. Lovely stories," said the woman. She gestured to the carousel bar. "May I get you something?"

"No, thank you," said Stella, who had cause to establish a personal rule never to accept drinks from guests. But she did feel a little worried about the older woman being on her own, and decided to offer her a little personalized attention. "What brings you to the Old Quarter?" she asked warmly.

"I've been meaning to come back to New Orleans for years," said the solitary woman with a slight smile.

"Did you grow up here?" Stella asked with great interest. Asking for cultural research, she told herself, but the truth is that there was a whiff of the forbidden in talking to displaced New Orleanians, like looking up photos of the floods.

"I lived here when I was your age," said the older woman. "A long time ago, before Katrina."

"How old are you?" asked Stella—thoughtlessly, she realized immediately, although the guest didn't seem perturbed. Hurricane Katrina happened long before Stella was born—possibly before Stella's own parents were born. When they quizzed her with the flashcards she'd made to prepare for her Tour and Transport exam, she discovered that Papa hadn't even heard of Hurricane Katrina. "There have been so many hurricanes!" he said defensively when Dad teased him for being oblivious. Dad had grown up in Memphis and known children whose families had relocated after Katrina. "It's my root," he had joked; he was a sociology professor and studied the cultural traditions of displaced populations, although not specifically climate refugees. It's Stella's root, too: she had grown up with the devout faith that cultural traditions were to be stewarded and preserved.

The guest was taking her question at face value. "Sixty-nine," she said.

"Nice," said Stella, again without thinking. She must be tired. The older woman pursed her lips, or maybe dimpled with a smile. Stella wasn't sure. "Have you been back to visit since then?" she asked quickly.

"Oh yes, many times," said the woman. "For hurricane relief now and again. For Mardi Gras once or twice, when that was still going on. It was supposed to help, we thought. Stimulating the economy with our

tourist dollars." She pursed or dimpled her face again. "I flew down with all my girlfriends for my 39th birthday. It was supposed to be for my 40th, but the seas were already rising and so were airfares, so it didn't make sense to wait."

Stella's parents are in their late forties now, and she can't imagine them arranging a destination birthday party for their staid professorial friends, let alone parting with the cash it would take to charter a flight south from Tennessee these days. "That must have been wild," she said.

Now the older woman was smiling genuinely, her papery cheeks rounded with muted mirth, and when Stella smiled back it didn't hurt.

"I shouldn't linger," said the woman. "I hope to walk to the lakeward bank and meditate awhile before I turn in."

"I could walk with you," Stella offered. "My bunkhouse isn't far from the lakeward bank." That was true, although not why she offered. Whether out of courtesy toward a senior guest or penitence for her conversational stumbles, Stella felt responsible for the quiet woman's happiness in this, one of the happiest places on earth. Her guest nodded, and the two exited the carousel bar into the breezeless night.

Stella expected to take her guest along the same streets as the tour to keep her from losing her way, but soon found that she was not directing their path at all. The older woman moved with surety and familiarity along the streets. When Stella pointed out landmarks of historical interest, her guest already knew them well. She even drew Stella's attention to a few architectural details that weren't on the Tour and Transport exam, like the thickets of thorny iron spikes that crowned certain gallery supports and were once intended to fend off burglars and aspiring Romeos.

"Did you live in the Old Quarter when you lived here?" asked Stella.

"No, in Riverbend. All the way at the other end of the streetcar line."

Stella had seen a streetcar—not on the rails, obviously—but her mental map of old New Orleans got fuzzy past the banks. In her defense, some of the neighborhoods outside of the Old Quarter changed drastically over the years. Once, a leering tour guest asked her if she could take him to Storyville, but she recalled enough from her flashcards to primly inform him that the old red light district had been razed to the ground one hundred years before the sea rose, and in any case adult entertainment would fall sensibly under the Entertainment division and not Tours.

"Did you lose your house?" asked Stella, trying to sound more sympathetic than curious.

"I didn't own a house," said the older woman, "and I moved out of the city one month before Katrina made landfall."

"Wow," said Stella. "You were lucky."

"I was." The woman wasn't looking at her. "Others weren't."

"Corporate doesn't teach us about those times," said Stella after a moment of respectful silence. It's true, although of course she knows all about it. Workers look up video footage and aftermath photos on the internet, share them, try to scare one another with the most abhorrent and unearthly. Houses sitting inside other houses as if dropped by a tornado into Oz. Walls sheared clean off, interior rooms sliced open like a dollhouse: clutter on the hall table, shoes still lined up on the stairs. The entire drowning city seen from above: wheat square rooftops floating improbably in a bowl of brown water. When Stella drinks too many sugary cocktails with the guests, she dreams that the shoe-lined stairs and sandwiched houses still lay under the salt-laced currents that cover that land now.

They were getting close to the lakeward bank, Stella realized at that moment, and she started to wonder how to peel off and veer toward her bunkhouse. It made her uneasy to be so near the end of the Old Quarter and the ragged edge of the sea—especially at night, when the dark water met the blank face of the sky to form a fathomless void. It was worse on the riverward bank, which was usually oriented toward the unimaginable expanse of the Gulf without any faint pinpricks of light from ships or rigs. But the lakeward bank faced all the rest of what had been New Orleans. What had been Treme, Riverbend, Algiers, and other neighborhoods Stella had only read about. What had been the lake, too, before it and the river became undercurrents of the rising sea. Or, depending on where the floating city had steered, what had been Galveston, Houma, Biloxi, Pensacola. Stella felt something like vertigo when she looked into the moving water, knowing that the Old Quarter sailed over a sunken coastline crisscrossed with ruined highways.

"There was a cemetery here once," mused the older woman. "The oldest cemetery standing, full of wonderful old stories."

"They moved some of it," volunteered Stella. "We didn't get to Marie Laveau's house on your tour but her crypt is there. And Bernard de Marigny and Homer Plessy were moved into the Cabildo."

"I see," said the woman. She didn't sound as impressed as Stella hoped. "I'm sure they enjoy each other's company."

They had reached the low guardrail at the end of the Old Quarter. On the other side of the rail, rubber-treaded steps descended to a catwalk that permitted the Maintenance division access to the Old Quarter's bulkheads and engines. Beyond the catwalk, darkness. The low susurrus of waves brushing the hull. A disquieting smell like moss, burnt rubber, and salt.

"I moved here to teach high school English," the quiet woman said suddenly, and Stella felt guilty for failing to ask her. "For two years, at Mac."

"At where?"

"A high school," said the woman. "It was on Esplanade Avenue, but not near the Old Quarter." She pointed across the water and to the right, where the east bank of the Old Quarter might meet the shore, if they could see the shore. Her pointer finger looked oddly bent, arthritic; Stella briefly wondered whether fingers could be read, like a palm. "Mac was up past the Degas House," the older woman continued, "if you know where that was."

"I know where the Degas House is now," said Stella. "It's in France." She had watched archival footage of the relocation in her college conservation course, marvelling that the entire historical edifice could be deconstructed into thousands of neatly labelled boxes and then reconstructed as far inland as you can get in France.

"That's one way to do it," said her guest.

"Maybe not the most cost-effective way," admitted Stella.

"That's just the problem, isn't it," said the woman. "The cost-effective way would have been to keep the seas from rising. When it was too late for that, what were you supposed to choose?" Her voice sounded rough. "How would you commit to one fraction of the city to preserve, knowing that everything else would be erased?"

Stella felt defensive. She heard the echo of her own words but she had studied this, too. The question made for lively debate team arguments in high school and dreamy late night philosophizing in college. What would you save, and how would you save it? When the United States officially recognized the rising sea level, the public answered in the form of enormous political pressure to preserve the folkways and cultural touchstones of its coastal cities. Alaskan fishing villages. Wild pony colonies in the barrier islands. New York City, in all its majesty and hubris. Countless other histories, traditions. But there was limited federal funding and little time to act, so the government was compelled to work with foreign powers and private investors who were willing to sink money into cultural preservation and protection. Some national treasures were purchased outright and moved to landlocked regions around the world, like the Degas House and many little pieces of the New Jersey boardwalk. Other investors engineered elaborate structures to prevent coastal erosion and flooding. The floating city had been a compromise, the brainchild of a Corporate partnership with the Dutch research centers that had spent decades perfecting floating farm acreage and entire neighborhoods that would rise with the tide. Now, a crescent-shaped sliver of a mobile island dodging storms across the Gulf, New New Orleans remained afloat.

Stella considered carefully how to modulate her tone, mindful of her responsibility to maximize her guest's exposure to positive Old Quarter experiences. "At least New Orleans still exists," she said finally.

"You can still go to Preservation Hall and hear jazz. You can dance in a second line through the Old Quarter and walk among real old historic homes on a beautiful moonlit night." The moonlight tonight was negligible, actually, but Stella pressed on. Feeling a surge of protectiveness for the city she had spent months studying and serving, she added, "I guess it would have been more cost-effective to let the sea swallow everything up, but they didn't."

The woman turned her gaze away from the brackish black waves and fixed Stella with a watery stare. "They did," she said. "You don't see any schoolchildren here, do you?"

Stella didn't know what to say. She felt that the conversation had gotten away from her and wasn't sure how to steer it back. It didn't seem right to go, but the older woman didn't seem to want her to stay. "Why did you come back?" she asked, finally.

The solitary woman had turned her faded face back toward the water. She looked at old New Orleans, or wherever they were facing, for a long time before she spoke.

"Because I can't forget," she said.

***

Stella slept fitfully that night, and dreamed that the floating city sailed over a web of crumbling streets and decaying neighborhoods that lay along the seafloor. Houses sagging open like wounds, table legs and chair rails spilling out and suspended in the silty depths. On the lakeside bank of the floating city, a solitary figure gazed into the water. The figure stood as still as a human statue for a long time, then stepped from the bank into the water without a splash. In the dream, it seemed that the figure glided toward the drowned city as though descending a flight of stairs. Helicopters crossed the black sky like whales in the open sea, and the relentless thump of spinning blades roared over the cry of crashing waves.

Stella awoke with a start. She could still hear a helicopter, and also someone was knocking on her door—not softly, but the sound was nearly drowned out by the pounding blades. "Stella! Are you awake?" called Jared in a stage whisper. Stella squinted in the dark bedroom and saw her roommates stirring; one put a pillow over her head. Stella threw off her bedsheet and fumbled for something to cover the worn shirt she slept in. She pulled on the filmy vest she wore for her fortune teller shifts and went to the door.

"Man overboard," said Jared. "Or person, whatever. Let's get outside and watch where the choppers go."

Stella followed him numbly to the porch and down their front steps. They stood barefoot on the sidewalk and looked up into the sky. It was just one helicopter, heading away from the floating city. Stella wasn't sure which direction that was, or where the nearest coast would

be. “Why wouldn’t they just bring the person back to the Old Quarter?” she asked. There was a medical center converted from one of the less illustrious hotels on Canal Street. The staff there mostly dealt with alcohol poisoning and minor injuries, but surely they were prepared to administer first aid.

“Protocol,” said Jared knowingly. “Corporate doesn’t want word getting around that someone took a swan dive off of our pleasure cruise, and it’s protocol to wing them off to the mainland.”

“Someone *jumped*?” cried Stella. “Why?”

Jared shrugged. “Drunk. Depressed. Survivor’s guilt. Financial ruin. It happens more often than you’d think. Hence the protocol.”

Stella thought of the solitary woman—she hadn’t gotten her name.

“Is there a way to find out who?” she asked Jared.

“Absolutely not,” he said affably. “Confidentiality, waivers, bad press, angry guests, you get the idea.” He glanced down at Stella, who had clenched the hem of her flimsy fortune teller’s vest with a white-knuckled grip. “Hey, are you okay? Let’s go back inside.”

***

The watery chartreuse hues of daybreak were lighting the eastern banks when the Maintenance division arrived to open the floating dock. Stella was already there, seated on a bench with her backpack on her knees. She watched as the first supply boat of the day docked and the boatmen unloaded ice chests packed with crustaceans, foam crates filled with fruits, and case after case of liquor. She waited until they took their Corporate-mandated five minute break to ask for passage. As the supply boat backed out of the floating city and chugged across the Gulf, Stella stood at its starboard rail and looked into the water as if she could see all the way down.

Deseo

Luca Silver

You're inches from the priceless marble statue *Deseo*, and the only thing on your mind is the incredibly intense desire to knock it over and watch it shatter into a thousand pieces.

You'd be a part of history. On the Wikipedia page for *Deseo*, right after "Commission Under Fascist Spain" and "Later Years," would be "You." Textbooks would be rewritten. Scholars would weep. This museum—this room—would be infamous as the spot in which *you did it*. Think about it. This statue has been on a journey for five-hundred years, touched by crumbling empires and gentle hands; chiseled hard and dusted gently, naive to the fact that it was all leading to this, five-hundred years to this moment, sitting on a small podium in the Art Institute of Chicago helpless to the gentle push of your finger.

But none of that really matters. What matters is that that's all it would take—the push of a finger. You have that power. It's really up to you to decide the fate of arguably the most treasured work of art in modern times. You could move on to the next room—the whole world would probably rather you did. Or you could lift your hand...

And you *really* want to. Just to see what it would look like. Just to see the faces of all of those people in there, the faces of tourists and classmates and couples and lost children all turning to see something they'd never seen before, and never would again. Just to give yourself a thrill. Just to *live*. Just to actually do it.

You think about this shit all the time. Why do you think about this shit all the time? When you stand at a crosswalk and the wind sways you and the roar of the car grows louder and louder and nearer and nearer you think what if I just stepped out in front of them right now what if I really did it what if I actually did it this time and when you were 12 and you went hiking with your parents to those sheer cliff sides and you looked down and saw the jagged rock below you thought to yourself what if I just slipped right now not even a jump just a little slip it doesn't even have to be on purpose what if I just slipped by accident right now what if I did it.

And for what? And for what, if you never actually do it. Think about the people in your life. Your mother, who has consistently since fourth grade reminded you that her life took a turn after you were born,

or your father, who you could take anything from if you wanted—do they ever feel this way? Would they ever jump, or slip, or step, or push? It doesn't have to be death every time. Sometimes you see a puddle and you think, "Oh! I want to run, leap into it, and make the biggest splash I can!" and then you walk right by it. As you grow further apart you think, "It's not too late to turn back. It's not too late to turn back!" and as you round the corner you think "Who would I have been hurting if I had just *done it*?" Or remember that time in the winter when you saw that van on the street with the frosted windows, and as you came out of the warm lobby you saw it and thought, "I want to draw a heart in the frost on the window, so that whoever drives the van will come back and see that and smile." And this thought was enough to make you stop dead in your tracks on the sidewalk. You should do it, you should do it, you should do it. You stared at the van for what seemed like 15 minutes before you realized you had been, and the awkward need to exit the scene usurped your previous desire.

That's what you think living is. Living means no regrets, and you've got tons. You regret not drawing that heart, you regret not jumping in that puddle. In a funny way, you regret not jumping off that cliff or stepping into traffic. What would that be like? If you pushed *Deseo*, you'd probably go to jail. What would *that* be like? Do you really want to die without knowing what the rough iron bars feel like pressed against your face? Or how it feels to be let to aching freedom? And do you really want to die knowing that you had the power in your finger to alter history and lives and monuments and hearts and you actually just looked, did what the sign told you, and walked away? Stop thinking.

Your hand moves quicker than you thought it would. In an instant, it's back at your side. Before you hear any sound. The statue slowly tips away, head over heels, like the crest of a roller coaster, and in a relief and satisfaction that can only be described as orgasmic, *Deseo* shatters into a million pieces. Scattering across the shiny floors, lodging under people's shoes as a gift, evidence of your work. You have a second to feel the euphoria. Holy fucking shit. *This is what it's like.* You gasp, it's so great.

And in the next instant, you're tackled to the ground by four security guards, dogpiling on top of you, knocking the wind out of your lungs. Kind of unnecessary, but they don't know how to react either. A smile slowly breaks over your face. Pieces of marble surround you, cutting into your back and haloing around your head, as they lift you up and drag you away. You never see the faces of the other people.

You're alive. And *Deseo* is not.

Evaporating

Kathleen Zamboni McCormick

When they forget you exist and you don't yet have words to remind them

When one of your parents throws a favorite glass—no, not directly at you but brutally against the floor, guaranteeing it will break—and its shattering instigates hateful words and threats that if he doesn't stop, she'll find more to hurl at him—never-used wedding-present crystal, handmade Italian plates, Nana's bone china teacups, utensils grabbed from drawers hanging open—or, worse still, when the intimations begin of each walking out on the other, no one seems to remember that you, crouched on the floor, half hidden by the big wing chair, even exist. No one worries you could get cut on the broken glass, let alone that you're being slashed by every pointed word. That you'd be abandoned if one of them deserted the other. It is then you feel yourself evaporating because your young consciousness depends on acknowledgment by those who love you most, and right now, in this maelstrom, they've forgotten you, revealing that you are not the center of their universe, despite the constant declarations that you are. And, no, you will not get to speak in the first person.

* * *

When later you appear to find words but they aren't really your own

Now, a bit older, you begin to intuit earthquake weather before the tremors begin. It is there, at the epicenter, that your real, quiet, and very much alone self gradually gives birth to a different person, one with remarkable torrents of words that distract and, usually, miraculously subdue your parents. Is your unexpected doubleness an improvement? You aren't sure. This other self certainly comes at a cost: you feel blurred when "she" emerges, even if it's to successfully avert a crisis. To your parents you look the same. It still is, after all, your body, though they seem to like "her" better than "you." Who is this she—who must surely be part of you—but who makes you dissolve in her presence?

She's a goony, self-deprecating (though neither of you is aware of this term yet) girl your age who takes control of the situation by making funny comments or telling bizarre stories, all the while maintaining—the real key to her power—a seeming indifference to the household

tension. Of course she must recognize it. That's why she's here. Her cool affect, the reverse of yours, makes her attractive. Her unwitting humor diverts them. It's important she's manifested herself, really, since you're so timid and can't utter a word when anxious. You're actually pretty useless. Because her rather ridiculous manner usually engages them, whole disturbances pass with barely a shiver. Not always but often.

It's amazing how relaxed and in control she makes your little self seem, though her humor negates how you actually feel. Example: A mosquito gets into the house during an almost-argument. You can't make out what they're erupting about now, yet you're already running for cover. Not her. She's debating the distraction potential of the stories of Noah and his Ark and the Three Wise Men, neither of which you find particularly amusing. Face it, you're not in this game. It's hers.

"Why did Noah bring so many annoying insects on board that Ark?" she asks. They don't hear her, your wimpy throat constricting her voice. They probably can't detect the mosquito either with their own decibel level on the rise. But since the mosquito's crucial for the joke, and your mother borders on the hysterical about insects of all kinds, she makes it clear you need to pull yourself together and become the mosquito.

She grabs a cape from your toy box, realism not being crucial. Then she puts on that long, pointy nose, securing its elastic band around the back of your head. She makes you run at top speed through the house, arms out wide, screaming, "BZZZZ! ZZZZZ! ZZZZZ!"—tilting left, then right until someone notices. They stop. You stop. Then your mother hears the actual mosquito. The row goes on hold while she chases it. She (not Mother, other self) has successfully stopped the quarreling, at least momentarily. But can she make them stop for longer? And can she make them actually notice you (yes, you, real you) during fight time when you're evaporated to them as well as to yourself?

"How did Noah manage to let so many irritating insects get on that Ark?" she repeats at full volume in an I-don't-have-a-care-in-the-world voice. They look at you, shocked you're actually there, and you (singular) fade away a little more, confirming your worst suspicions that during quarrels, they forget about you. She gives you a mental kick in the head to snap out of it since they're noticing you now. "I think he went a little insane from all that sleep deprivation, don't you?" she says. They smile. (Smile?) She seems to comprehend intuitively how effective odd juxtapositions can be. Another word neither of you is familiar with then.

"Those forty days and forty sleepless nights had to make him go crrraayzee!" she calls out, rolling your eyes to emphasize the exaggeration. They listen. She pulls at you to resume running and buzzing around to maintain momentum and the basic slapstick, not that either

of you knows those words either. As you look back, you have to face it: she was just such a natural.

"So he opened a special 'annoying insect chest' he'd built during his last ten days of complete insanity, snatched out two fleas, and stuck them into the lions' thick fur." And she gently pokes their sides with your hand, automatically understood to be flea-infested. She makes them laugh. She makes you laugh.

And she doesn't stop there, her exaggeration and general over-the-top-ness being symptomatic of your dread that the fighting could resume in an instant. "He nestled a single fly in the pigs' ears," and she stabs your sweaty pointer finger into their ears.

Just for good measure, she adds with extra animation and buzzing, "And he—bzzz—put mosquito eggs—bzzz—in the two—bzzz—elephants' drinking bowls," and she forces you—now trembling from the exertion and inanity of it all—to stand on tiptoes to gently jab your fake nose against their noses. How does she realize that repetition, in addition to a hint of a tickle, is a key aspect of humor? I repeat, she was such a natural.

"Eww," says Father, getting into the spirit of it and, astonishingly, breaking off his disagreement with Mother. She's sometimes the harder nut to crack. It varies. "Imagine if Noah did actually lose his mind," she says thoughtfully. Clearly not the direction either of you wants.

"Don't be ridiculous," says Father, "those damn insects came in of their own accord, sneaky little buggers, though they don't tell you that in the Bible." He grins at the rarity of his saying anything mildly irreverent. And Mother gets into it in her own idiom by spritzing a little Raid in the living room where the mosquito was last seen.

You (more plural) all laugh, unaware of the toxicity of what you're breathing in, although you (less plural) are very aware of the toxicity she, your funny self, just dissipated. You're grudgingly thankful to her, yet shattered by the performance and the pretense. Not the pretending to be a bug, the pretending to be funny. You both continue smiling.

And you (singular) learn way too young that joking and even hilarity don't necessarily arise from pleasure. They're often a product of fear and sadness. Your fear. Your sadness. And the more successful she is, the more you evaporate, feeling fragmented by her every comical word, her every exaggerated gesture of your body. Underneath her effervescence, which only ever masks problems, never purges them—a new explosion comes tomorrow or the next day—is such damage and confusion and loss of your true, serious little self that well into adulthood, even as you function apparently highly, something remains not quite right.

* * *

When you scream uncontrollably and it takes thirty years to find a shrink who explains why

You aren't a child who makes a lot of noise, particularly unpleasant sounds and most particularly screams. You acquire a strong sense of decorum early on, so your uncharacteristic "potty chair meltdown" is perhaps your first conscious memory of hearing yourself evaporate. That's what the shrink thinks anyway.

One day when they're creating a seismic disturbance, you recall Mother had promised your old potty chair to a neighbor, and there it is in the kitchen, waiting to be picked up. Your parents' yelling, more thunderous than usual, induces you to rush to the chair, sit on it, and rock, your hands over your ears. When their voices remain just as loud, you scream and scream and scream.

Your shrink smiles and poses his most familiar rhetorical question: "You realize what you were doing, don't you?" Of course you don't. If you knew the symbolism behind your actions—childhood or otherwise—you wouldn't be seeing him in the first place, especially since he's a neo-Freudian, and we're all aware of your position on Freud. But the doctors agreed you "had to go back" before you could "go forward." You sigh inwardly, waiting for him to illuminate you.

You didn't, then or now, stop to think that potty chairs—of course it's apparent once he says it—are among the first places children learn self-discipline. According to him, you return to the chair trying to regulate your own distress while symbolically begging your parents to rein themselves in.

Your revisiting this location of self-restraint does not, however, influence your parents to exercise any restraint of their own. Hence your screaming. Which provides evidence of, the shrink notes: first, recurring and overwhelming dejection that you're erased from your parents' minds during their conflagrations; second, frustration that they refuse to be constrained by your (unconscious) symbolic gesture; third, despair that the only resource you can devise in the moment to stop the yelling is (also at least mostly unconsciously) baby-like, resulting in a further diminution of your self-esteem; fourth (and a stretch, even for him), anger (obviously unconscious since he notes it exists in the future) that the painful occurrence will have to be remembered compulsively as it waits for decades to be interpreted correctly (presumably in his office). You do wonder, at such moments of excessive verbiage, whether the shrink isn't further obliterating you.

And so you counter by reminding him that you two haven't yet discussed Mother. Upon entering the kitchen and finding you sitting "there," Mother gasps, assuming that you—now "a big girl"—have actually been trying to use the chair for its original purpose. She shrieks when she discovers your tights still pulled up, an egregious toiletry error whether committed on the pot or "the throne," as Father calls it whenever he wants to use it, emphasizing the divine right of fatherly kingship

and a sign of his fixation at the anal stage (accounting for his extreme rigidity) and his inappropriate (though unconscious) calling attention to his (and possibly your) sexual pleasure derived from the regulation of bladder and bowel movements. (Though, at that moment, Father is surprisingly irrelevant since he figures little in the potty chair incident.)

Mother more than makes up for his absence because far from recognizing your return to the chair as a desire for control (your own and theirs), she imagines exactly the opposite: that the pot is a site of your regression. She thus demonstrates a lack of faith in your self-discipline, devalues your ego, and causes further evaporation.

When she discovers that you haven't peed or pooped yourself, Mother asks you what the screaming is all about, assuming you could only be distressed on the chair if you'd defecated in your tights, the pot, or possibly the floor, had the pot become loosened from the chair. Lacking any attunement to the unconscious, she cannot conceive that a child could be affected by her parents' violent disputes, even when breakable items are thrown, shirts torn, and threats of leaving continually heaved across the room.

Then you start screaming again, only now you also pull your hair. Such an expression of trichotillomania is a classic example of suppressing an unconscious psychological conflict. The suppression here being caused both by your lack of an appropriate lexicon to explain the conflict and your worry that Mother, one of the prime sources of said conflict, wouldn't understand even if you had the right words. Their decision at dinner that your screams are either a sign you're coming down with something or you're upset that the potty chair's being given away makes you evaporate just that much more.

Mother begins to cry in an act of erroneous sentimentality. Your grandfather made the chair, and she herself elaborately stenciled it (we won't get into the topic of her over-investment in the locus of your potty training). Tearfully she realizes she can't let go of that lovely little chair because, since his stroke, her father is no longer capable of woodworking, not to mention she'd done some of her best stenciling, which surely won't be appreciated by the neighbor.

Her refusal to give away an object you've already conquered—and from which your ego has greatly grown—weakens your psychosexual development and produces in you a disdain for the object. Back then the only explanation you can offer your parents of your increasingly phobic and tearful reaction to the chair is that you feel sorry for the neighborhood boy who is left without a pot. And they, once again totally missing the mark (and causing you to further fade), think what a lovely little altruistic child they're raising.

The shrink's grand crescendo ending the potty-chair episode of your analysis goes something like this. You do not and of course cannot,

at this point in your life, articulate that your tears are not for the neighbor, that, quite the contrary, "it is Margaret you mourn for." (Gerard Manley Hopkins, you think cynically, wondering if he expects you to ask who Margaret is.) Your parents' misunderstanding of the entire incident, coupled with your already existing loss of control—manifested in, but hardly limited to, that initial scream—creates multiple unconscious sites of personal fragility. Now he promises you an immeasurable sense of relief (which you have yet to experience) that finally, in the role of the analysand, you will understand the traumatic spectacle and its memory be put to rest.

Despite your analysis, you believe, rather than because of it, you can, in good moments, become the life of the party, the most enthusiastic person in the room (whatever room), the first to laugh, the last to leave, extremely supportive, highly "present," ever cheerful, the epitome of self-confidence. You revel in helping your partner make light of something bothering him simply by exaggerating in rather epic proportions. And you're so relieved when you feel "at one with yourself," though that particular amalgam of selves never lasts.

Too much childhood earthquake weather eroded you. You still (even if with a cheery facade) run for cover whenever conflicts arise. You also sometimes imagine that (like your parents) other people don't see you at all. "You" and "she" do frequently fuse, but it's an uneasy compromise as she unpredictably flits in and out of your psyche, preferring public scenes and an audience to appreciate her to your more ruminative private state. It is then, when you are by yourself—even now, today, years after the analysis ended and many more since she made her first appearance—that you can, all too easily, still feel incomplete, only partly there because partly evaporated. While you (plural) charm and entertain, you (singular) will always mourn.

Violets for Your Furs

K. Lorraine Kiidumae

You brought me violets for my furs
And it was spring for a while, remember?
You brought me violets for my furs
And there was april in that december
The snow drifted on the flowers and melted where it lay
The snow looked like dew on the blossoms
As on a summer day – Tom Adair (adapted)

Nathan stood atop the rock hilltop he knew so well, looking out across at Lottit Lake. Why hadn't she told him sooner? Why hadn't his father told him?

Down the hill and to the left were two rows of whitewashed stones that led the way up either side of the steps to the veranda where an old driftwood sign hung above the door that had the name of the Dew Drop Inn carved into it. There Nathan, his mother, and younger brother Joel had spent every childhood summer for as long as he could remember. Nathan pictured their old collie, Rags, who was always lying outside in the shade by the front door. His mother had kept his dish filled with fresh, clean water. And now, coming back, the memories washed over him, and it seemed his mother was everywhere. In the trees, in the shoreline, in the whitewashed stones she'd painted fresh every May long weekend when the Dew Drop Inn was opened up again for the season. His mother had chosen the name for their cottage, which, although a little kitschy, to Nathan epitomized his mother's open hearted, generous, and warm spirit.

Nathan had always marveled at his mother, Helen, *Helen of Troy,* as he thought of her. Not because she was a great beauty, for she was not, but because of her strength of character, a strength that, like *Helen of Troy,* surrendered her to vulnerability in the face of love.

For a moment, he thought he had just seen his mother again, bent over, there, on the stairs, in the cream-coloured cardigan she always wore while she dipped and *swish swished* the paintbrush across the large boulders.

Nathan looked back at the lake and thought of how much his mother had loved it here. The sun shone through the trees, lighting the

leaves with a sort of iridescence. Ripples of water winked up at him from below, and he was reminded of when he had come back from a swim on a day just like today. There, standing on the sandy shore, his mother waited for him with a towel. When he emerged from the water his back was littered with leeches. His mother didn't flinch as she plucked the blood suckers off one by one and tossed them back into the lake, while Nathan stood with his arms wrapped around himself, shivering. Then she enfolded him in the towel, gave him a hug, and they headed up the hill to the cottage where a pot of hot tea was steeping on the wood stove.

As Nathan watched his mother pour the tea, he studied her face and thought about what had just happened. He'd always felt she was more of a handsome woman than a beautiful, or even a pretty one, with a wide back and muscular arms and shoulders. And with her thick blend of reddish, salty hair, her strong, almost manly facial features and high cheekbones, large dark and soulful eyes, no make-up or jewelry; she was no nonsense. She was a true Amazon Woman. Although she had a husband, necessity had made her a warrior of life.

Nathan's father, Ira Gershwin, was a furrier and all summer, or, at least, whenever he was there, he hunted on the family property at Lottit Lake, near the tip of Lake Superior. Ira trapped and killed raccoon, mink, rabbit, and highly treasured lynx—all animals, native to North-Western Ontario. Then he dried the fur pelts for Helen to cut and sew into jackets, coats, and wraps that were sold during the winter months.

The Dew Drop Inn donned fur pelts everywhere, on the floors, instead of mats or rugs, on the beds instead of comforters. They were soft and Nathan especially loved the white bear skin rug that lay in front of the hearth where he would sip freshly brewed tea, on the boil all day long, served in his mother's Blue Willow cups she'd brought over from England. The old black wood stove smoked away, burning a yellowy glow of amber morning to night to keep out the dampness.

Inside were wicker rockers, quilted throws, a stack of books—Hans Brinker and Tom Sawyer—old bridge game scores, magazines that smelled of age, an old high school notebook where Nathan once discovered a small drawn heart with his parents' initials in it.

There were lots of berries around Lottit Lake and he and his mother went daily to find and pick them by the pail-full to make pies with and boil up with sugar and water to make jars of jam for the winter.

"Come on Mom, hurry up! Let's go!" Nathan could hear himself say, calling to her through the birch trees.

"Get the life jackets and berry buckets ready and we can leave as soon as I finish chopping this wood," his mother's echo seemed to answer in return.

Nathan glanced out across to the other side of the lake where the

best spot for picking berries was, at the rockery over at Frog Point, a paddle along the south shore, from Daisy Farm in Rock Harbour over to Washington Harbour.

To get there, you had to go out across open water, so you needed to have the right equipment. And there was a strong undercurrent in the middle of Lottit Lake so the outings to the other side had to be timed just right. He thought of that day when they had stayed too long, lingering on, enjoying the feel of the sun on their backs, not able to bring themselves to leave the harvest of berries surrounding them.

"Look Mom, look at all the strawberry bushes!" Nathan remembered his excitement that day, as he'd hung out over the edge of the cliff, picking through to find the plumpest, ripe berries.

"And look over there, up that hill—there's a small bush of raspberries! You hardly ever find those. And guess what else I just found—blackberries, my favourite!"

They filled their pails to the brim until the sun started coming down and the sky suddenly clouded over. They made for the rowboat, cracks of lightning sounding overhead, reverberating against the walls of Mount McKay, known as Thunder Mountain by the Ojibwe, off to the east. The Sleeping Giant Mountain thundered in unison off to the other side, to the south-east.

"Lay down!" his mother commanded once they got in the boat. Nathan curled up on the floor, the metal of the old tub cool against his face, as it rocked through the churning waves. He trembled, fearing he might wet his pants, but he looked up at his mother and she seemed stalwart—her broad back in front of him as he lay helplessly in the boat watching her row, her large strong arms flexing back and forth with the *whoosh, whoosh* of the oars. Nathan was starting to feel calmer when suddenly the boat lurched and for a moment Helen lost control of the paddles. Instinctively, he sat bolt up and began reaching for the oars to help his mother.

"Stay down!" she bellowed, undaunted by the sight of him, as he lay on the icy cold metal. He saw one of the pails had been knocked over. Pulped berries stained the tin of the boat and blended in with the water, splashing in over the side. He looked at his mother. She wasn't angry as he'd thought she would be. She smiled and simply rowed on, oblivious to his fears. He had never felt more loved than he did at that moment.

And now, he hadn't even been able to properly say goodbye.

***

Back home in Port Arthur during the spring months, Helen would sit in the fur shop at the back of their small three-room house sewing together the pelts she and Ira had collected and harvested over the wintertime. The fur shop was not untidy but then it was not tidy either. Black satin

liners, stacks of pelts, strands of loose thread and patterns were piled on a big table at the back of the shop. On the desk close to the sewing machine there was a glow of amber burning in the glass of a coal oil lamp that Nathan often feared would overheat and shatter. But it did not.

A grateful customer had given Helen an old Victrola, and often playing softly in the background were John Coltrane or Ella Fitzgerald records. Violets grew wild around their property and in the spring months on the corner of her desk a pewter mug would be filled with a bunch that Ira or one of her boys had picked for her.

The fur shop glowed in the dim light of the oil lanterns that hung around the perimeter of the room, and it smelled of burning oil and fur pelts and dirt from underneath the fir plank floorboards, the lingering scent of Ira's tobacco. The lighting was better in the middle of the room, up against the window where the sewing machine sat and one electric light, sparingly used, was installed for the best visibility. The old black singer with a treadle was an industrial one, heavy—it had to be to stitch through the thick dried skin on the pelts.

A slot of light shone in from the window above his mother's sewing machine—black with gold letters. Her foot moved deftly up and down on the pedal with a hushed whir that was the only sound Nathan heard when she wasn't playing her music. The pelts smelt dank, a distinctive odour he could still conjure up if he tried—of the dried animal skins he liked to sew the eyelets on for buttons, sitting in the corner on an old wooden chair under the light of the window, so close he could hear his mother's breath, puffing quietly with the up/down of her treadle.

The coats were mostly for local women, the kind of women only glimpsed through panes of frosty glass, as Nathan and his brother strolled through town, down Cumberland Street, looking in the windows of the shops.

When Nathan stood at the shop door, he would see his mother poring over seams and silky lining, the thread bobbing in and out through the old Singer, her foot pumping steadily on the treadle, laboring to bring out the beauty in other men's wives.

While Helen worked on her coats, Nathan and Joel stoked the fire in the wood stove in the front room and, out back, skinned rabbits for Helen to sell to the neighbours or stew up for dinner. It was hard for one person to sew fast enough to make enough coats, so Helen raised rabbits to sell as well.

Sometimes Nathan and Joel would spend the afternoon chopping a new pile of logs and kindling. Eventually Helen would come back out the door, her hands smelling faintly of dehydrated flesh and moulting fur, and then she would wash up and they would all head into the kitchen to brew a pot of tea. Helen would sit, rubbing the small of her back, massaging out the pain, tears clouding over as she winced with

each movement, flipping through her magazines, her only chance for a break. After a while she'd clap her hands and say, "clear off, time to get back to work," and disappear with a fresh cup of tea behind the door to sew until dinner time, while Nathan and Joel went hunting or skiing.

Ira wasn't usually around much. When he was, he spent his time sitting quietly at the kitchen table with his cigarette machine and a tin of tobacco, making roll-your-owns, until he went down to the coffee shops in town, socializing—playing chess and Chinese checkers with the other men. "Everything in moderation," he would say—"a couple of beers a day, a couple of cigarettes..." That was his motto.

When the coats were ready for delivery, he insisted on taking them himself. In the fur shop, there were a lot of beautiful women and Ira sometimes had to give them a ride home. He often showed an extra interest in this part of his day and Helen usually got jealous, throwing a fit and yelling at him, bringing things up from the past. Meanwhile, behind Helen's back, the beautiful customers in the fur shop referred to Helen's clothes as strealish—she worked too hard and had no time or money to buy herself nice dresses.

While he was at home and at the coffee shop, Ira wore a plain shirt and pants, but he wore a suit and tie for the customers. He would dress in his finest suit and put on cologne and be gone for hours. When he returned, some of the money he'd been paid would already be spent. The rest was stuffed into a piggy bank on the dresser, and under the mattress of their bed, where their life savings were hidden. After the Great Depression, Ira no longer had trust in the banks.

At times, he didn't come back for a few days or a week—or longer.

Once, Joel came into the kitchen and motioned for Nathan to follow. Ira had left to deliver a coat four hours ago, and hadn't returned. The door to the fur shop was slightly ajar and light was streaming in through the room from the coal oil lamp sitting in the corner of the Singer. Joel put his index finger to his lips and motioned for Nathan to shush and stay quiet. He peered through the crack in the door.

"Mom's wearing one of the coats, and she's crying," he whispered.

It hadn't occurred to them that their mother might be unhappy, because she never complained. They knew she sometimes teared up from the pain in her lower back, near the end of the long days spent in the shop. But this was different.

Nathan knew deep down that Ira loved Helen, but he depended on her too much. Helen would get angry when Ira sat passively in the corner, while she did all the work, and they would often fight about it. But in the end Helen always let him get away with it, "because," she said, "he's a little fragile." At the age of twelve he'd been put on a ship in Kiev, in the Ukraine, and shipped off to Montreal by himself, his parents desperate to save him from the Russian Revolution. Helen always made

allowances for Ira because of his traumatic childhood, never expecting him to do many of the chores. And so, in the end, she never had the privilege of having a husband who helped her out much.

Ira took the bus everywhere, to save money, except when delivering coats to the customers in the shop. For a while, they had an account with the newspaper and ran ads for the business, but business fell off and it went under after Helen got sick and couldn't work.

It was on April 9, 1965, that it started, Nathan's mother later told him. Helen had sat up and reached for the calendar she kept on the little table next to her bed. She flipped back through January, February, and then March. The number of check marks were definitely increasing. They were the days she spotted blood when she went to the bathroom in the morning. She said she felt a tightening in her throat and swallowed hard to make the nausea in her stomach recede. A tingling sensation rippled through her body to the tip of her scalp as her day of reckoning arrived.

She knew then, she said. She knew in that instant she was likely going to die. But Helen hadn't said anything to anyone yet about the calendar. She hadn't wanted to go back there, back to the hospital right afterwards for the operation.

"Why did I care so much about Christmas? What possible difference did one more Christmas, one bad Christmas, make in the grand scheme of life anyway?" Helen asked Nathan afterwards.

And then, almost to the day right after New Year's, the spotting had started. The calendar had started. She had focused on the calendar—on the number of tick marks on the calendar. She convinced herself it could be something else, she said later, some other reason—"they say a woman weeps from her womb when under duress."

Afterwards, Ira charged his cigarette machine in Helen's name—he didn't pay their bills on time and couldn't get any credit on his own at the cigarette/tobacco store. All the shopkeepers knew Helen, and when she needed medication and went to the drug store to pay, the pharmacist handed her prescription over with a note on the bag that said, "mark it paid in full."

His mother didn't escape with an easy life, Nathan thought sadly to himself. Her relationship with Ira had begun as an infidelity in Montreal—she was a nursing student boarding with him and his first wife, who was Ira's cousin he'd come over on the ship with, and their three children. She never did finish school.

"It was during the era of free love," his mother explained airily to Nathan when he was old enough to understand.

Later, after the scandal died down, Ira and Helen married, had two children of their own, and settled in Jumbo Gardens, the poor district of town on the outskirts of Port Arthur, Ontario. Living in their little

three-room house, next door to the old John Deere used-auto-lot where tractors, tow trucks, sand shovels and cement mixers were their scenery, it was a far cry from the upper-crust neighbourhood his mother grew up in.

Their house was loaned to them by Helen's Uncle Roy, but his mother had the deed to the property. Ira was always wanting to sell it out from under him, to ease their money worries, but Helen would rather have starved than give up her house, and she kept the deed hidden so Ira couldn't get it.

Helen soldiered on, raising rabbits, sewing coats and taking in foster children to earn money to feed the family. Meanwhile, Ira (dubbed by Nathan later as "the world's first hippie") took trips to visit his first family in Montreal, panned for gold in Mexico, and came home whenever he was ready—forbidden love had cast its tempestuous curse

As the story now notoriously goes, Ira drove unannounced up the long winding dirt road into their driveway in Jumbo Gardens one day after about a year's absence, proudly perched at the wheel of a brand-new burgundy Cadillac. Helen, who was chopping wood for the little stove that heated the house, looked up and became enraged. Gripping the axe she held in her hands, she continued chopping for a few minutes and then, suddenly and without warning, still wielding the axe, began smashing the windows out of the brand-new Cadillac one by one. Ira cowered behind the wheel with his hands held over his head to protect himself from the shattering glass.

Despite all this, "a poor father is better than no father," was all Helen said whenever anyone asked her why she stayed. She believed in arranging and living the pieces of one's life the way they fell, and in the best way possible.

Two weeks before he'd gone to the cottage, Nathan went to visit his father one afternoon, only to find the house and fur shop ablaze. The new oil furnace had burst into flames. Nathan stood at the top of the hill in Jumbo Gardens, in stunned silence, looking down at the little house his family had shared for the past twenty-five years. The heat of the fire roared and then surged, engulfing the property.

Right before Helen went into the hospital the first time, Ira had started renovating the house. It was his twenty-fifth wedding anniversary present to her. It was what kept him going and, he felt sure, kept Helen's spirit alive.

As Nathan looked on, Ira bolted up to the house and pulled Rags, their old calico Collie, from the porch, where he was lying in the shade by the front door, and then ran back down the driveway towards Nathan, yanking Rags by the collar to hurry him up. Ira's eyes flooded with tears.

"Your mother must not be told about the fire!" Ira shouted fearfully to Nathan as he approached with the dog. "This must not destroy her

strength to fight, her will to live!"

***

"It breaks me to have to be the one to tell you this," Dr. Montemeuller said to Nathan's mother one day. "Oh, Helen—well, it's a shame really—it's a wasted life is what it is. If only you had gone back right after Christmas and had the surgery as you promised," Dr. Montemeuller scolded her sympathetically, shaking his head slowly back and forth. Nathan held her hand while she was delivered this news. "You have a strong heart, Helen, that would have seen you through to a hundred years."

As she lay dying in the hospital, she kept the calendar with her, in the little night table drawer next to her bed where no one else could see it, but Nathan spotted it one day when he arrived for a visit and she'd gone to the bathroom. As the check marks worked their way up to a daily ritual, the cancer spread into her cervix, then into her spine, her liver, into her lungs, and, finally, through to her bones. The smell of sickness—the scent of dying—in her hospital room made Nathan gag the last couple of times he'd been there. It was the last time he went to see her that she'd begged him to help her end her life. After that Nathan couldn't bring himself to return. Each day he tried—each day for the next seventeen days.

Helen wavered in and out of consciousness those last days, with a surreal feeling she said made her woozy; she was having a hard time keeping her eyes open. Her eyelids felt heavy, heavy, she murmured, as they opened and closed, and she said she saw a kaleidoscope of colour flowing in her head.

She said she wasn't sure if she was dreaming or whether it was just the effects of the morphine, but a flashback to so many years ago, in the rowboat, at Lottit Lake, and her beloved Dew Drop Inn was suddenly there. The kaleidoscope began to look like berries, round red raspberries, ripe blackberries, plump strawberries, rolling, rolling, rolling. She smiled at Nathan.

"You were so afraid that day, but all I had thought in that moment was that there are so many ways to love."

"No," Helen murmured dreamily to herself, "it has not been a wasted life at all...and now, I just want so desperately to sleep."

***

Nathan awoke at the cottage in the morning, still thinking about that day in the rowboat at Lottit Lake. The air in the Dew Drop Inn was heavy and clammy with a blanket of morning dew. It was dark inside because of the tiny windows and the thick forest of birch trees that surrounded the small wooden tumble-down cottage. Streaming through the trees were rays of hot sun, rising from the east, cheering on the day. His mother would have already been up by then, down at the lake in her thick one-piece bathing suit, tied in a knot at the neck. She would have

been readying the oars for a morning row across Lottit Lake, over to Frog Point, where no one ever went, where the blackberries and strawberries weighed down on their branches, and they could swim in the cool, clear, "blood sucker free" water.

Nathan stepped outside, without stopping to brush his teeth or change out of his pyjamas, and walked quickly down the dock, past the rows of whitewashed stones that lined the path leading the way from the cottage. Blue violets were sprinkled amongst the rockery, growing wild in the places dotted by the sun, and he stopped to pick a few. He breathed in the familiar scent of the birch trees, and listened for the tinkle of chimes on the veranda, the tremolo calling of the loons.

His mother did not open up her arms to him or say good morning, at the lake, when he imagined her there, still somehow, magically alive, but he saw her stoic mouth involuntarily shift into a slight smile, and she did enquire after whether he'd had anything to eat. Life vests, dirtied from years of use, were thrown into the row boat as his mother led the way up the path back to the cottage, where she would feed him tea and blueberries and homemade bread and jam. She didn't put her arm around him or take his hand, but he felt the comfort in her movements, in her solid body, her confident stance.

As Nathan stood there, looking out at Lottit Lake, the memory of that day in the rowboat brought on the tears now, the tears Nathan hadn't yet been able to let happen. He heard a rustling behind him as the wind fanned through the leaves of the birch trees—a whispered fear of a wasted life. Nathan thought he felt his mother's presence but was too frightened to turn and look. Trembling, he swiveled around and there she stood, in the same sweater and tweed skirt and loafers she always wore when she whitewashed the stones. His eyes met his mother's and, once more, he had that same feeling he'd had in the rowboat—a rush of joy washed through his body. He was looking straight into the sun, blinking and closing his eyes to make sure of what he was seeing. And when he turned his head back around, she was gone.

Bridges

Rosalia Scalia

They left Baltimore before dawn, before the sun rose and while the moon and stars of the night sky still bathed the city in a diminishing, speckled light. The dappled light cast shadows along the roofs of the city's rowhomes, and those shadows clung to the homes and the street lamps as the first delicate rays of sunlight appeared in the east, bouncing off the Middle Branch segment of the Patapso River, dancing across the river as if it had been draped in crystals, mesmerizing Jade as she and her mother crossed the Hanover Street Bridge. Jade drove, her first long trip since she got her driver's license, the weight of the responsibility pressing her assuaged only by the calm voice on her phone's GPS wayfinder. She would not get lost. She glanced at her mother in the passenger seat, staring out the windshield with focus that Jade knew came from the fact that she sat behind the steering wheel and not her mother.

"You don't have to white-knuckle the chicken handle all the way to OC," Jade said.

Her mother nodded but continued squeezing the grab handle, her face resting on the bicep of her raised arm, her red lipstick the brightest thing on her face under her Jackie O sunglasses. Jade noticed that her mother's hair had just begun to grow back, returning as gray curls, now barely hidden under the brunette, bobbed-style wig she wore only outside the house. The wig, crooked on her mother's head, looked nothing like her mother's real hair. Her hair had cascaded around her shoulders like an unruly mass of thick, tangled chestnut curls, like Jade's. The wig's chin-length, straight bob cut looked as if her mother embraced a new and different persona when she wore it. Her father had teased Jade's mother the first time she modeled it, saying it made her look sexy, but Jade knew he said it to cheer her up.

"Not too bad," her mother said, frowning as she inspected herself in the mirror, trying to adjust how it sat on her head. *Not too bad*, her mother said on the mornings she made it to work before putting on the face mask her doctor required her to wear on the thirty-minute metro ride to downtown Baltimore, where she worked as a graduate-level university administrator helping foreign doctors get their paperwork and credentials in order to matriculate into specialty

programs. The face mask protected her while her immune system was under assault, the doctor explained. Self-conscious in it at first, she announced that she'd wear it after cancer because everyone on the train left her alone. "If I'd known the power of a little face mask, I'd have started wearing one ages ago!"

Her mother's co-workers outdid themselves, pooling funds and gifting her mom with a special car service to transport her to chemo, after which either Jade or her father brought home.

"She's a fighter," her father said one day when her mother, sick from chemo, was puking in the bathroom. Despite the chemo, despite the cancer, Jade's mother still looked like a youngish forty-seven with a wide smile and bright eyes. Except for the kerchiefs and hats, she hardly looked sick, Jade thought. Jade drove because of "chemo brain," and when she glanced at her mother, she sighed, glad her parents trusted her to drive.

Orange, pink, and violet streaked the dawn sky as the sun struggled to wake the still-sleeping city, blanketed in silence. Sparse traffic made it seem as if Jade and her mother comprised the handful of people on the road at dawn; the fast food restaurants, tire stores, electronics stores, big box stores, and car dealerships along both sides of the highway remained shuttered to the hustle and bustle that awaited them. They appeared unremarkable and Jade marveled how everything unremarkable now felt remarkable and new, as if she was seeing them for the first time: everything changed since her mother became sick and forced Jade to assume a different role in the family. Jade, no longer carefree, skipped meeting up with friends. Instead she picked up more chores, straightened and cleaned the house when her mother's nausea and fatigue prevented her from doing so. She made grocery lists and stepped up the supermarket trips and prepped dinners her parents could no longer manage. She kept her younger brothers on track, picked them up from school, helped them with homework, ensured that everything ran smoothly so her mother needed only to focus on getting well. Jade delegated chores like a boss, taught her brothers to do the laundry and to vacuum, saying that they now all belonged on the same team.

What Jade hated was mopping the floor and her mother asking for a glass of water, and she always had to have a straw. She refrained from voicing complaints, though guilt overcame her for having them. How could she get mad at her mom for being sick? Yet sometimes the simplest request enraged her, though, after, she'd make up for being angry by being extra responsible. She hated losing friends who didn't know how to treat her since her mother's diagnosis. They treated her differently, as if cancer was contagious, and then, not knowing what to say, said stupid things like "I'm sorry," as if they caused the cancer, or

her mother died, before ghosting her. *Idiots*, she thought.

Jade spent her friend-free time researching anti-cancer foods, slowly substituting everything in the pantry and in the fridge to adhere to the anti-cancer diet she put the family on without their notice. She tossed white flour and replaced it with whole wheat, almond, or chickpea flour. She tossed sugar and sugar substitutes and used dates and raisins to sweeten desserts. She bought less chicken, no beef, and more fish. She added fresh greens into every meal, made gigantic salads and hearty soups. No one complained about her new foods, least of all her mother, who sometimes ate and sometimes didn't. In fact, for this trip, Jade filled the back seat with all the anti-cancer foods possibly unavailable at the beach: the almond and chickpea flours, jars of spices, a box of steel-cut oats, low-salt vegetable broth, and an array of items to keep her mother on track so her cancer would diminish, fade, and never return.

"How are your grades?" her mother asked, shaking the sleep from her face, though she continued to clutch the chicken handle.

Jade shrugged. "Nonexistent. Summer vacation," she said, holding back that she barely passed the previous year by the slimmest margin, that she was lucky to now be a senior. Before, her mom would have inspected her homework and report cards, met with teachers, helicoptering in Jade's and her brothers' lives with strict precision. Now she couldn't keep track of something as simple as the beginning and end of the school year, or things Jade considered important, like missing the junior prom. What pulled Jade through junior year was realizing that focusing on school allowed her to put her mother's cancer out of her mind for a few hours. She knew she'd have to focus better as a senior to get into a decent college.

"Oh, that's right. I'm sorry, honey. I forgot," her mother said. "This is temporary," she added. "I **am** healthy, I **am** healthy. I am cancer-free," she repeated aloud, sending her intentions into the universe, she explained, firm in her faith that positive affirmations and a positive attitude would absolutely heal her, would vanquish the cancer. Then her mother punched the radio buttons, turning it on, the volume already blasting from the last time Jade drove.

"We'll listen to your favorite. Which one?"

"It's already on," Jade said, happy the music would break the silence.

Her mother decreased the volume and surprised Jade by humming along with the tunes.

"They played the radio on the oncology unit," her mother said. "This station too. I like it." She smiled at Jade.

Jade wasn't sure about the usefulness of her mother's affirmations, but they seemed to propel both of them into a happier mood, a

victorious mood that comforted Jade. They rode with the windows up, the air conditioner blasting, though ineffective against her mother's hot flashes, a side effect of chemo-induced menopause. Blasting the air conditioner did nothing to evaporate the beads of sweat that periodically formed on her mother's forehead and streaked down her face before her mother blotted them with a cloth that she kept handy. She also kept a penguin pillow handy, but the heat of her mother's body turned it into a heating instead of a cooling pad. Jade wondered if the Jackie O sunglasses and red lipstick masked the war being waged inside her.

Once the sun rose, chicken hawks circled the cerulean ocean of the sky dotted by billowy white clouds edged in gold by sunlight. It took three to four hours to drive to Ocean City, depending on the traffic, especially in summer, and at least forty-five minutes to reach the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. They sped toward their week-long, girls-only vacation near the healing, salty sea waters, happy to leave her brothers and father behind; Jade worried about taking care of her mother, worried about what to do if she suddenly took a turn for the worse, despite all those positive affirmations her mother believed and daily sent into the universe.

Summertime traffic approaching the Bay Bridge usually slowed to a stop-and-go pace—mostly stop—miles ahead of the toll booth. But the early morning hours translated into the absence of parking-lot traffic, the main reason for their predawn departure. With traffic slow but manageable, they paid the toll and reached the first set of the bridge's gray towers. Neither had yet eaten breakfast, and Jade could hear her stomach growl. Jade's mother pointed at the almost invisible snowy owl sitting above the safety rail of the second tower, far from its Arctic home and unusual this far south in Maryland. Jade could only glance at the giant bird because she concentrated on driving across the spans, her stomach an anxious knot due to the bridge's breathtaking height above the choppy bay waters, where Jade feared nurse and bull sharks would attack and eat them if she made a single driving error, afraid an accident would hurl them both to certain death. She kept her eyes on the road, her hands at four and eight o'clock on the steering wheel. But she remembered the TV newscasts reporting the owl's rare presence, so she couldn't help glancing at the bird. Stark against the gray tower with its white feathers and black speckles, the bird appeared smaller than Jade imagined it, although she realized the distance of the tower's cap made it look smaller. In a glance at the bay below, she saw white sailboats dwarfed by commercial cargo ships with large red or green stacked bins. Sunlight danced along the whitecaps. Far above the owl, a colony of seagulls soared and dipped in large arcs, their keow *ha-ha-ha-ha*'s faintly audible in the car. Jade wondered if

the owl—perched like a watcher—considered them prey.

Her mother suggested they could stop, use the restrooms, and eat breakfast someplace on Kent Island. Jade nodded, wanting to be sure that her mother ate properly, chose the right anti-cancer foods. She worried about the weight her mother had lost over the past year. Although the trip was her mother's idea, Jade welcomed it. Next summer would be different with her parents driving her to college in August, the hope that this cancer war would be over. Her mother sifted through her purse for her phone and began fiddling with it.

"Let's stop at a place called Bridges. It claims to have great views," she said. "Pause your GPS so that we can follow mine," she said, tapping the restaurant address into her device. "I'll call ahead so they'll be expecting us."

Jade worried about eating at a restaurant, worried that her mother would be seduced by foods other than the anti-cancer ones, but she obeyed. In the restaurant parking lot, her mother straightened her wig and reapplied lipstick.

"How do I look?" she asked.

Ridiculous in that wig, Jade thought but instead said, "You look great," because, in fact, her mother did look great under the stupid wig. She looked healthy and younger due to her new, slender figure. Her mother's deceptive appearance, her clear complexion and bright-green eyes, gave Jade great hope her father's prediction would come to pass: that they'd look back on this time with relief.

"I'll look even better when I get my new boobs," her mother said, laughing. "No more awful drains or skin extenders, or these horrible hospital-wear tops. I'll be sexy again! Woohoo!"

Jade's face flushed, embarrassed by her mother's desire to look sexy.

Sitting on a bluff just before the Kent Narrows Bridge, three walls of the restaurant's dining room consisted of ceiling-to-floor windows overlooking the bay, which resembled an ocean with seagulls flying around the outside deck and pink herons swooping in to land someplace nearby. Her mother gazed at the windows, openly awestruck by the beauty of the view.

"How magnificent! Aren't you glad we stopped here?" she asked. "I'm starved."

Jade nodded. The hypnotic swirl of the waves, the sun sparkling on the surface, the keowing of the gulls produced a calming effect on her. Much to her surprise, her mother ordered a large breakfast—eggs, bacon, pancakes, sausages, orange juice, coffee, toast.

Jade winced. Her mother could skip the cancer-causing bacon and sausages. "Maybe we should stick to oatmeal," Jade said. "It's healthier."

"No way! I'm going to eat a decent breakfast for a change."

How was Jade going to keep her mother on track with the anti-cancer diet if she began eating recklessly? A long battle lay ahead with the radiation treatments forthcoming. Jade ordered oatmeal and fresh fruit. When the waiter served their food, it smelled delicious. The waiter forgot the toast. Jade's mother took a bite first from the eggs, then moved to the bacon and sausage, one bite of each item she ordered before setting her fork down.

"I still can't taste anything," she said. "Everything tastes tinny. Where's that toast?"

Her mother unsuccessfully tried to flag the waiter's attention. "Do you mind switching? I don't want all this to go to waste. The toast and the oatmeal will be fine for me."

Relieved, Jade agreed, resolving to cook her mother flavorful and spicy foods, smoothies sweetened with raisins or dates, brown rice, and fresh vegetables when they were at the beach, things that could break through the tinny taste.

"Live on to battle another day," Jade said as she pushed the oatmeal toward her mother.

"Battle? I'm not at war," her mother said.

"What about the cancer?"

"Not a battle, not a war, Jade It's an unexpected situation that I'm handling. I'm going to keep handling it like everything else, and soon I'm going to wear my high heels and short skirts again."

"It looks like a battle to me," Jade said. "It feels like one too."

"If I die from this, will you hold it against me, believing I didn't fight hard enough to beat it, Jade? Will you be mad at me for losing the battle?"

Jade didn't respond. She believed if she made everything at home operate smoothly, her mother wouldn't have to worry about mundane tasks; if she was good at home and at school, then she'd do her part of the battle. She believed her mother would regain her health. Jade wanted everything to return to normal.

"We cannot control anything," her mother said. "Except how we react to what life throws at us. It's always a choice, Jade. Remember that."

They ate in silence, watching the bay swirl toward the island's marshes and shores. They listened to the keowing of the gulls, saw pink herons swoop toward the marshes on the other side of the restaurant's structure and the sun paint everything with a golden light.

Her mother tried again to flag the waiter's attention. Then, without warning, she banged her hand, palm open, on the table.

"What do I have to do around here to get my fucking toast?" her mother shouted. "Do I have to stand on the table and dance a jig to

get anyone's attention? Does it take an act of God to serve the toast we ordered forty minutes ago? What the fuck is wrong with this place?"

The angry woman, screaming at everyone and no one, beating the table with both fists to punctuate every word, shocked and terrified Jade, so unlike the woman she'd known her whole life. Other diners stared at them. Jade wanted to shrink into the size of her thumb and disappear from their gaze. She didn't know her mother at that moment. Their waiter appeared with a plate of toast, apologizing for the oversight. Jade's mother stood, her wig askew, and fled, leaving behind her purse, her Jackie O sunglasses, and Jade. Her stomach in a knot, clutching the car keys in her pocket, Jade remained at the table as the restaurant door shut behind her mother, knowing her mother couldn't go anywhere.

Ten minutes later her mother returned, crying with a puffy face. She apologized to the wait staff, to the other diners, saying she'd been under a lot of stress lately. She paid the bill and hugged the waiter, still apologizing. She reapplied her red lipstick and her Jackie O sunglasses.

"My turn," her mother said, getting into the driver's seat.

Jade shook her head, afraid the confusing incident inside the restaurant indicated that chemo brain kicked into a higher level.

"Give them to me," Jade's mother said, holding out her hand.

"No."

Jade's mother drove for an hour before pulling into the parking lot of a box store.

"Time to switch," she said.

She turned off the car. "Sometimes I'm mad at God. At cancer. At the world. It leaked out when I least expected it. I shocked myself. I'm sorry."

"So much for choosing your reactions," Jade said, her voice monotone.

They glanced at each other and burst into laughter. Jade drove the rest of the way to Ocean City, through all the small towns, noticing the verdant woods, the extensive corn and soy fields. They chased the top-40 radio stations, singing hits as loud as they could. Her mother suggested they take a break, and Jade stopped at a farmer's market, where they bought a fresh cantaloupe, a small watermelon, and some fresh peaches that looked juicy and sweet. Jade's mother poured some bottled water over a pair of peaches and handed one to Jade. They leaned against the car on the side of the road and ate them.

"Is it sweet?" her mother asked. "I still can't taste anything."

Jade shook her head. "Sweetest one all summer."

"I'm going to pretend to taste it," Jade's mother said, closing her eyes, biting into the fruit and looking as if she savored each morsel.

"I can't think of anything else I'd rather be doing now than eating this delicious peach with you on the side of this road, surrounded by farmers' fields, trees, and blue sky."

Jade knew her mother couldn't taste the peach.

"I'm happy being a traveler on this road with you, Jade."

Back on the road, Jade's mother removed the wig and flung it into the back seat. "Scraggly-assed wig," she said. "It's too freaking hot for it."

Jade laughed, preferring the curly, gray, fluffy down covering her mother's head.

* * *

Eighteen months later, as Jade's freshman college year closed, newscasts reported that the snowy owl left its perch on the bridge tower and had not returned. And her mother died. Jade wondered if her mother, like the snowy owl, simply traveled someplace else where Jade couldn't see her. Whenever Jade was alone, she recalled their week-long trip to the beach. She remembered walking along the surf with her mom, her mother's positive affirmations for good health, the universe deaf to them, her joy, gratitude, and appreciation for all that she saw and experienced in the moment: the various bird species, the cottony clouds, the fragrance of the salty sea, the sound of crashing waves, colorful stones and the rare, bluish sea glass they found, even noxious odors and annoying people.

"When I was little, your granddad once told me that I could catch a bird by sprinkling salt on its tail. I spent many hours running around the yard with a salt shaker, trying to catch a bird," her mother said when they were eating one of Jade's eggless vegetable quiches that looked pitifully unformed on the plate and tasted terrible.

Jade laughed. "He probably wanted to nap."

"I believed him," her mother said. "I still believe in miracles, the power of Light and Love."

For many years Jade raged at God, at the universe, and at cancer for robbing her of her mother until she finally realized the gifts her mother had given her that week.

Broad Daylight Weeping

Olivia Baume

Funerals—I think—are rushed affairs.

Quick! The mourners say. Quick! They're dead! Actually dead! Gone, poof, off with the fairies. Never to sleep, or eat, or breathe again! Dead. Never to dance, or fuck, or smoke again! Dead. Phone the florist! Book the piano player. Write the obituary! Beg the priest down the road to hold the service even though he was Jewish once, and died an atheist. Dead! Trawl through the photos, the objects, the underpants. Find all the secrets—pocket all the cigarettes. Quickly now—sort it all! There's no time, no time, no time. Hurry! The grave, the inscription, the second cheapest casket. Dead! Play "Funeral DJ" and make a killer playlist—think dark, think gloomy, think Coldplay. Dead! Buy a new funeral outfit—a little bit sad, a little bit slimming. Dead! And, bite the dreaded bullet, phone all of them—each and every one of the bastards. The long lost high-school friends, the ex-colleagues, the neighbours from three houses back. Tell them all—and quickly now! No time, no time, no time. Tell them the hour has come to hop up and out of the woodwork. Tell them it's time, you see, because he's a goner, he's carked it, he's cashed in his last stinking chip and we've got a damn show to put on.

(Sorry, did I say "show"—Freudian slip...)

I can only imagine what the Ancient Egyptians would say.

Hasty, uncouth, damned to an eternity in the underworld—we all are. No proper send-off. Nothing special—not for us modern folk. Just lock 'em in the coffin and shove 'em in the ground because we all like to play a sadistic game of "If you can't see it, it doesn't exist!" No time spent casting the spells, mummifying the body, building a tomb with a few secret compartments that historians will marvel over in the future. (Bless 'em). There's no art in funerals anymore. Rushed, uncivilised affairs. You're given—what?—two weeks? Fourteen days to celebrate, and grieve a life publicly—give them the farewell they deserve? It's vulgar behaviour. And, you end up—as I did—running around like a headless fucking chicken, begging the Church down the road to hold the service even though he was a staunch atheist and told everyone so.

We have relatives, you see, I told the priest earnestly.

(I looked chic. Black sunglasses, black turtleneck, think Audrey

Hepburn in her peak).

Relatives that still believe in the bearded man in the sky. Old-fashioned, I know, but I get the impression you can relate.

(I point at the crucifix hanging on the wall).

But, did he believe in God?

(He seemed to think this an important point).

Would a Christian service be appropriate for him?

No, and no. But, according to his beliefs, he's becoming nothing but dust and food for the wormies down in old St John's Cemetery. His decomposing mess of a corpse won't exactly be attending the service, will it now, father?

(I get a kick out of saying "father").

But—

He simply won't be there. Not even in the nose-dive seats, I'm afraid. You know—the one's nearest to the ex-girlfriends, the accountant, the fruit shop owner who never much liked him but saw an excuse for free food and a day off. Anyway, you priests—you know this gig well. You've even got costumes for your little show.

(I point at the sumptuous, purple robes draped over him).

From performer-to-performer, I ask you this. What kind of theatre director puts on a show that's only intended to please one person? And, in this case, a dead one. It's senseless, it's futile, it's just plain *silly*. We've no way to tell if he'll even bother to show up. He's not RSVP'd, like the rest of us have. Not even through an Ouija Board, or some other spooky means—rude bastard. But, we've got a list of living, breathing human beings who've done the courteous thing, and replied within the first week of his death. *They* are our audience.

And, they—(I pulled my sunglasses down to my nose for dramatic effect)—happen to believe in God.

A funeral service will be held at St Thomas' Church
at 12pm on Saturday, 14th April 2021.
Minister: Rev. Jonathon Letterman.

***

The problem I found was this.

Once all the silly, trifling errands were completed—busy, busy, busy!—everything went eerily quiet.

I was forced to stop.

Sit down.

Grab a snack.

And, write the fucking speech.

I did not consent to the dreaded job—it was merely expected of me.

Daughter of dead dad does speech. Apparently, this is some sacred rule that must be abided by for fear the funeral Gods will reign down

their wrath and fury if the social conventions are not properly adhered to. Though the word "No" *was* tempting; and I revelled in thinking about all the ways I could say it. Scream it. Sing it. Sign it. Speak it in five languages (non, nie, nae, ne, na). Tattoo it across my forehead—perhaps. Blow all my savings on one of those dramatic, sky-writers that expel smoke into a sky. I felt the word set up camp on the edge of my tongue, poking its little head out, peaking around the corner, crawling back in like a coward every time someone tried to manipulate me with the same, wicked words,

"He'd be so proud of you, you know."

Proud—would he be? Of a daughter with nothing to say—or nothing interesting to say, at least—save for the same, tired clichés you hear in every single Jodi Picoult book about death or loss or whatever. A daughter that googled "How to write a funeral speech", and attempted—for hours at a time—to recite a W.H. Auden poem into the mirror in the hope that it'll sound sincere, and not merely performative. (Unsuccessful). And, though, I laboured—hand on heart—it was all but a fruitless, vain endeavour.

Proud—he would not be—of how I sat, every night, willing inspiration to strike, pen in hand, trying to channel my inner Sylvia Plath by re-reading her "Daddy" poem over and over and over. Moody, existential music playing the background. (The Smiths, the theme from Jurassic Park). Hours, I'd spend. Not writing the speech—obviously. Just thinking about it. And, writing down some memories—pretending like it counted as productivity. Hoping one might present itself as special and worthy enough to represent it all, condense a life into one, little anecdote. His life, my life, our lives together. Who he was then, who he was a few years later, who he was when he died. I searched and searched—really, I tried! I wrote them all down. Every memory I could think of—I wrote them down. Not in a literary way—more factual, to-the-point. Every detail, every word spoken, the colour of the sleeve of his cheap, unethical shirt if my brain would permit. Tears—of course—would form and fall. So predictable, so human. Droplets on my writing, smudging the outlines of the letter as I watched how a happy memory—one with my dad pushing me up! and up! and up! on the swings—turned sour. How fourteen days prior that memory would have been a mere passing thought—perhaps, making me smile if I was feeling good and sprightly that day. If I was in the mood to be nostalgic about childhood and all times past. Probably nothing more, though. But, now, I wrote it all down, and it was changing—it was all changing. It tasted bitter in my mouth. Now nothing was bright. Nothing could make me smile. No memory—nothing with his stupid face in it—would ever be just a passing thought from that moment onwards.

But, I needed milk.

It was a perfectly justifiable excuse to stop sitting at the desk, thinking about writing the speech. It seemed an ordinary, simple task; buying milk. A tedious one—perhaps. One that required little planning, little brainpower, little application of serious thought. It was a Sunday afternoon, though, and that was usually the day I tried to avoid the supermarket. Crowds—chaos—middle-aged women fighting over the last roll of toilet paper. The usual circus. No one seemed to remember how to walk properly on the weekend. They'd spent all week-long following the rules. Keep to the left. Walk at a good pace—but by God, don't sprint!—and keep an eye out for rogue toddlers and grumpy elderly folk. On the weekend, it was anarchy. Banging into one another left and right—forgetting the rules of common decency and decorum they taught us in Kindergarten. Everyone had somewhere to be. Precious minutes outside work were tick, tick, ticking away in the long line to get a free sample of whatever lamb and herb sausage they had cooking today. Every man for himself, on a Sunday, in the supermarket. Never, I thought, had Darwin's theory of natural selection felt more relevant.

I opened the curtains.

It was sunny outside. Blue skies, cloudless day, almost beautiful. But, I'd forgotten to do everything that morning. Moisturise, skin-care, brush my hair, brush my teeth, I was almost ugly. Hand in the sink. Half-hearted scrub of the dishes I'd left there yesterday. Remembering—as I picked a piece of old broccoli from under my fingernails—how I'd been as a child. Spick and span. Everything had an order. Everything had a place. Every object treated as though it had the same rights as the rest of us—freedom from dirt, and dust, and cockroaches, and other creepy crawlies. Have I let her down? I wondered. Picturing that little girl. Two braids. Not a single hair out-of-place. Neat uniform. Shoelaces tied. Arms folded. Staring at the boys on the playground with disgust, mud up their arms and legs—no respect. Would she fold her arms at me—I wonder? Or, let me off the hook?

Dad's just died, I told her in my mind.

Surely you can let me off the hook for lowering my standards of personal hygiene. Off the hook? I imagined her wagging her fingers at me, sniggering. No—on the hook you go, she'd say—staring me down as if I were a War criminal or some brainless, 20-something journalist who works for the Daily Mail. *On the hook she goes*, she'd sing—in a merry, jovial voice—as she watched me walk the plank without a morsel of pity. You deserve this! She would say, braids blowing in the wind. You deserve it. You've spent far too long off the damn hook, wiping your eyes in therapy, reaping the benefits of playing the victim, and listening to your "Sad Beatles Songs" playlist on repeat. *Pathetic*. Avoiding it all. All the tough, uncomfortable, spooky parts of life that everyone else goes through without leaving the dirty dishes to decay in the sink. *Tragic*.

Avoiding all the paper cuts, and the bee stings, or any form of suffering outside your own head. Why are you acting surprised, anyway? Death is no secret. This isn't a clever trick—no one's pulling a fast one on you. You knew this was coming, now—then—at some point. No one is buying your feigned disbelief.

I held onto the milk carton a second too long.

People were behind me, queueing up, their frustration brewing. The fluorescent supermarket light glaring at me—why was it so *fucking* bright in there, anyway? Everything was irritating. The top-40 bullshit on the speaker—the phoney customer service at the deli—the hordes of middle-aged people with their khaki pants, and their overhanging bellies, and their expectation that *you* have to move out of *their way*. My hand wouldn't let go of the milk, my head paralysed in the supermarket fridge. I was distracted—of course—by the conversation I was having with my past self in my head. One of those nasty conversations where you argue, and spit, and bicker to your heart's content and you find yourself standing there—milk in hand—*fuming*, knowing you'd worked yourself up over a fictional fight. How dare she? I thought over and over, the words making me angrier and angrier every time I said them. How dare she? Each time a punch in the gut. How dare she? And, I imagined my fictional fight with as much force as I could muster. I'll throw this milk across the supermarket. (Yeah! Let her rip!) And, I'll watch it—like a sadist—smash, and slide, and leave a huge puddle of white mess for some unsuspecting old woman to slip on and break a hip. (Who cares! Fuck old people! Death is coming for them anyway!) And, I'd put on the face. The 'upset' face I'd been practising since I came out of the womb. And, I'd convince a nice-looking stranger—preferably, a woman with a pram—that the man behind me threatened me and *made me throw the milk across the room*. (Deceiving people! Woo!) She'd nod sympathetically, and hand me another litre of milk. And—I'd wait until she was a metre or two away—and then, I'd throw that one at her back before she—

I didn't realise I was weeping until they'd escorted me out.

Told me—milk in hand—hat I was upsetting the other customers.

"Yes, you're probably right," I mumbled, my face burning from their irritation seeping in like the most abrasive form of acid. I'm sorry! I said with a flash of my eyes. I'm not a mad woman I swear, snot dripping down my chin, and I'm not usually one for public displays of emotion. It's all very attention-seeking, and narcissistic, and "oh-woe-is-me!", right? If I cry, it's usually just an odd tear or two, really, and I'll wipe it away—quickly now!—before anyone has a chance to see. Friends, strangers, therapists alike. I'm sorry! I said with my eyes again, hoping at least one of the shoppers was telepathic. I'm not a mad woman, I swear, though perhaps only a mad woman would feel the need to ex-

plain the fact. Ah—but no! I'm quite sane. I don't lament, I'm not a wailer, you won't hear me howling into my pillow at night.

I've never been a night-time weeper—let alone a broad daylight weeper.

Everyone knows that's the stuff of shame.

***

Funerals—I now know—are rushed, wretched affairs.

I'd been asked to walk in last.

Everyone was seated. Miserable faces, dab-dab of the tissues, looking chic in their all-black ensemble. The piano player wearing his best suit and tie. I'd made a valiant effort to book an attractive piano player because—*by God*—we all need some eye-candy to gawk at when the speeches start verging on novel-length territory. Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" blasted from the speaker on a loop. I suppose I hadn't factored in how long it would take for everyone to sit down and settle. And, now, we'd all heard there was a secret chord, that David played, and it pleased the Lord about five million fucking times.

Disaster.

Nothing was going according to plan—of course.

It all felt wrong. All of it. The weather wasn't right for starters. It was one of those in-between sorts of days. Nothing special, nothing even the most boring conversationalist could remark upon. It was cloudy. I remember thinking that my dad was not a "cloudy with a chance of nothing" kind of guy. It was all going wrong—frankly—nothing was going right. There needed to be a thunderstorm, a roaring from the underworld, some sign that the Earth understood—even if these people didn't. He was gone, he was gone, he was gone. Never to return—not even for a quick, frivolous chat over toast and tea. Dead! Tears—how predictable?—formed and fell. So cliché, so human. Dead! And, I prayed for the type of thunder and lightning that sets people on edge. That makes people jump up and quiver. Dead! That sends the power chords on a downward spiral. That brings people to their knees. Dead! That makes everyone jolt, that makes everything black, that reminds us all of what has happened here today.

My dad is dead.

CONTRIBUTORS

Kelly Anderson is an avid reader and writer, and lover of all things literature. She was shortlisted for the William Faulkner-William Wisdom Creative Writing Prize in 2019 and is a two-time finalist of the Words and Music Writing Competition. Her work appears in *The Peauxdunque Review*. She enjoys her career as a full-time paralegal for the State of Louisiana and lives in the New Orleans area with her husband and two children.

Olivia Baume is a current media and gender studies student at the University of Sydney. This is her second time being published, and her work has previously appeared in *The Opiate*. She wishes that she had the capacity to write a story that isn't depressing. Kindly follow her Instagram, oliviabaumewriter, if you enjoy any of the following: writing, books, feminism and 70s bops.

Mark Belair's poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Alabama Literary Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Poetry East* and *The South Carolina Review*. He is the author of seven collections of poems, most recently the companion volumes *Taking Our Time* and *Running Late* (Kelsay Books, 2019) He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize multiple times, as well as for a Best of the Net Award. Please visit www.markbelair.com

S. L. Bryant holds an MFA from Lindenwood University, where she was an editorial assistant for *The Lindenwood Review*. She is a docent at the University of Arizona Poetry Center in Tucson, Arizona, where she lives. Bryant is originally from the Great Lakes region and has a doctorate in education.

Sam Cherubin's poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Packingtown Review*, *Old Crow*, *Wallace Stevens Journal, Del Sol Review* and *Palo Alto Review*. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He works as a director of digital strategy. He enjoys blending humor, empathy and curiosity to roll out human-centered AI, Virtual, and Augmented Reality technologies.

Sara Davis (@LiterarySara) is a recovering academic and marketing writer who lives in Philadelphia with two elderly cats. Her PhD in American literature is from Temple University. She has previously published essays on food history and culture, and currently blogs about books and climate anxiety at scribaltattoo.wordpress.com.

Mary Ann Dimand lives in Colorado, where she is converting a small horse property into a mini-farm, and studying the inwardness of hockey.

As a psychotherapist for over thirty years, **Leisha Douglas** enjoys her work especially since it affords her the time to pursue her addiction to writing. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in *The Alembic*, *Corium Magazine*, *The Cortland Review*, *HitchLit*, *The Minetta Review* and *Upstreet* as well as other journals and been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in Poetry. In 2017, her collaborative book, *To Be Lost In Nature Is To Be Found*, was showcased at the Desta Gallery in Marin County, CA.

Susan Flynn has been published in *Voices de la Luna*; *Late Peaches*, *An Anthology of Sacramento Poets*; *No Achilles*, *An Anthology of War Poetry*; Tule Review; *East Jasmine Review*; *Oberon Poetry Magazine*; *WomenArts Quarterly*; *Adirondack Review*; *SLAB*; and *Cosumnes River Journal*. Her poem "Ode to My Mistakes" has been nominated for the 2018 Sundress Best of the Net award. She has also attended several writing workshops and studied with Mark Doty, Fenton Johnson, Marie Howe, Ellen Bass, Carl Phillips, Susan Kelly-DeWitt, Kate Asche, and Pat Schneider. Susan has her BA in American Literature and her PhD in Clinical Psychology, and currently works as a private practice clinical psychologist, a university professor, and a training and supervising psychoanalyst. She lives in Sacramento and enjoys fly fishing, writing, photography, and playing the piano.

Dean Furbish lives in Raleigh. Nominated for a Pushcart Prize, his translations have appeared in *Chiron Review*, *Conduit*, *International Poetry Review*, *Metamorphosis*, *Poetry East*, *Poetry New York*, *Ponder Review*, *Quarterly West*, *RE: Arts & Letters*, *Two Thirds North*, *Xavier Review*, and elsewhere, while forthcoming in *Finger Literary Journal*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Heron Clan*, *Raintown Review*, and *Reunion*.

Megan Garvey is a fourth year Biology and Visual Arts double major. Her art practice focuses on the incorporation of found materials and accessibility of art-making at all levels. She is looking forward to (hopefully) participating in the collective art major senior thesis show this fall.

Vincent Green was published in the *Journal of Poetry Therapy* (December 2018) and is forthcoming in *Packingtown Review* and *Nixes Mate Review*.

Michael Han is a first-year student at the University of Chicago from Houston, Texas. He loves a good soundtrack, imagining clouds to be spaceships, and trees.

Iris Jacobs just graduated with BAs in Anthropology and HIPS and a minor in visual arts. She is currently driving across the country so she can work as an "artist" in her parent's garage in LA for the foreseeable future. She also just got a job as an archaeological field technician, so keep your fingers crossed that things work out for her.

Though **Kayla Jessup** majored in Political Science and minored in Spanish, she likes to pursue creative outlets as well, including writing (occasionally). She strongly believes that there are no limits to a wandering imagination except the limits we imagine!

K. Lorraine Kiidumae is a graduate of the Humber School for Writers. Her work has been published in the anthology "Emails From India" and in various literary journals including *Bandit Fiction* (UK), *The Nashwaak Review*, the *Maple Tree Literary Supplement*, *Montreal Writes*, *The Bombay Review* (New York/Mumbai), the *Spadina Literary Review* and elsewhere. She works from her home in Nanoose Bay, B.C. on Vancouver Island, where she recently completed her first novel and is working on a book of short stories.

Ridgley Knapp is a recent graduate of the College, where he majored in Public Policy with a minor in Religious Studies. Next year, he plans to continue his policy studies at the Harris School, where he will pursue a Masters in Public Policy.

Alex Maqueira is an unemployed graduate and an occasional writer. He is living in Florida with his family and his dog until a job or an MFA program comes along.

Caroline Maun is an associate professor and Chair of English at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. She teaches creative writing and American literature. Her poetry publications include the volumes *The Sleeping* (Marick Press, 2006), *What Remains* (Main Street Rag, 2013), and three chapbooks, *Cures and Poisons* and *Greatest Hits*, both published by Puddinghouse Press, and *Accident*, published by Alice Greene & Co. Her poetry has appeared in *The Bear River Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Third Wednesday*, *Peninsula Poets*, and *Eleven Eleven*, among other places.

Annabelle Perng is a first year Computer Science major and English/Creative Writing minor at the University of Chicago. She enjoys writing realistic fiction, writing music, and discovering new ways to be happy.

Eric Rawson lives and works in Los Angeles. His work has appeared in numerous periodicals, including *Slate*, *Agni*, *Ploughshares*, and *Iowa Review*. He is the author of *Banana Republic* and *The Hummingbird Hour*.

Reema Saleh is a recent graduate from the University of Chicago. Her writing has appeared in *Memoryhouse Magazine*, *Blacklight Magazine*, and *MURAL Magazine*. She loves speculative fiction and losing herself in someone else's stories.

Rosalia Scalia's fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Oklahoma Review*, *North Atlantic Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Portland Review*, and *Quercus Review*, among many others. She holds an MA in writing from Johns Hopkins University and is a Maryland State Arts Council Independent Artist's Award recipient. She won the Editor's Select award from *Willow Review* and her short story in *Pebble Lake* was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is the author of the forthcoming story collection, *Stumbling Toward Grace* (Unsolicited Press).

Luca Silver is a filmmaker. He wants to be a writer, director, actor, editor, photographer, fashion designer, graphic artist, musician, poet, adventurer, multi-linguist and lover, but so far, he's 19. He'll do it all someday, but only if it makes him happy.

Carina Silvermoon is a writer and graduate of Villanova University's English program. She has been published twice before: once in *protoTYPE*, an e-newsletter from Villanova's College of Engineering, and once in the *American Journal of Poetry*. She lives in Pennsylvania and can be most often found roaming old hiking trails.

Kamil Tangalychev (Камиль Тангалычев) is an award-winning poet, living in Saransk, Russia. The People's Poet of Mordovia, Tangalychev has published eight books of poetry, including *Verb Flicker* (Мерцание Глагола), 2019. Tangalychev is a Laureate of and a regular contributor to *Literary Russia* (Литературная Россия https://litrossia.ru/). An ethnic Tatar, Tangalychev derives inspiration from the natural world of his homeland steppe and Eurasian traditions.

Mike Wiley is a recent graduate of the University of Chicago. He will graduate from the Harris School of Public Policy in 2022.

Hannah Wilson-Black is a first-year in the College (majoring in Environmental Studies and Creative Writing) who devotes her spare and not-so-spare time to writing poetry, creative non-fiction, and fiction. When she's not in class you can find her talking about religion and binge-watching BBC's *Planet Earth* with David Attenborough. She recently won UChicago's *Sliced Bread*'s summer short story contest and is currently seeking publication for a novel.

Kathleen Zamboni McCormick is Professor of Literature and Writing at Purchase College, SUNY. Her creative work has been published in *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Witness*, *South Carolina Review*, *phoebe*, *Italian Americana*, *Zone 3*, *CAYLX*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Superstition*

Review, *Kestrel*, *Sweet Tree Review*, *armarolla*, and many others. Her novel, *Dodging Satan: My Irish/Italian Sometimes Awesome but Mostly Creepy Childhood* (Sand Hill Review Press, 2016) won the 2017 Foreword Reviews Gold Medal in Humor and is currently shortlisted for the 2020 Rubery Award.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Euphony welcomes submissions of unpublished poetry, fiction, essays, reviews, creative nonfiction, and plays. We publish work from members of the University of Chicago community and from authors around the country, accomplished and aspiring. Please read the following guidelines before submitting your work:

Our review period is from October to June, though submissions may be sent year-round. We aim to respond to submissions within three months of receiving them (for submissions not sent during the reading period, this means three months pending the start of our review). Depending on the volume of submissions we receive, response time may occasionally take longer. We appreciate your patience, and we take care to thoroughly consider each piece through a rigorous three-stage selection process.

All manuscripts should be sent to *euphonyjournal@gmail.com.*

In the subject heading of your email, clearly state the genre of the work (poetry, fiction, etc.). Attach your submission in a file compatible with Microsoft Word or a basic text editor—not in the body of the email—so the formatting of your work is preserved. Please type your work and number the pages. There are no strict length or genre requirements, but past issues will offer some perspective on the type of work we publish. You may include a brief biographical note in your submission (no more than 4 or 5 lines) if you would like one to appear in the journal. These notes may be slightly edited for formatting reasons.

We accept simultaneous submissions. If your work is published elsewhere, please notify us immediately so that we can remove your submission from our queue.

Your piece may be selected to appear exclusively on our website; in this case, we will notify you for your permission. The print issue is permanently archived online. Both print and online rights revert to authors upon publication.

Please visit our website, **euphonyjournal.org**, for more information.

Publication of *Euphony* is made possible in part through donations and grants generously provided by our readership. Without their advice and financial support, *Euphony* would not have been possible.

Euphony welcomes financial support in the form of donations, planned gifts, and grants. For further information, please email **euphonyjournal@gmail.com.**

EUPHONY
5706 S. University Avenue, Room 001
Chicago, IL 60637

PRINTING
Grace Printing
8130 N. St. Louis Ave.
Skokie, IL 60076

euphonyjournal.org