



ARROW♦ROCK



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Fiction



Worker’s Trophy, *Zac Farmer*



Cooking in Stride

Bret Lundstrom

Had my steak a little rare today. Maybe too rare, but you can hardly blame a novice chef, home alone, just trying to cook a meal that isn't a Hot Pocket. One steak. That's it. Internet by my side the whole way. Never led me wrong before, but I guess I'm not very good at following all the time. "Oh you can cook that frozen steak," it promised, and "and I'm going to show you just how to do it." All you need is a pan, stove, oil and an oven. Not too bad. Two things that can start a fire and one thing that fuels a fire. At least the pan's just a pan. Heat up the oil. Simple enough. Well, how much? No comment? Ballpark is probably good enough. Shit, why didn't you tell me it was going to spit molten fire so much? Now I have to endure 90 seconds on each side of this hell? Well, I can take it, but I bet the cavemen cooking woolly mammoth didn't have to deal with this crap, just the cold, diseases, and stuff. Now to flip it. Just a quick trip through the searing hot droplets of pure pain. Hot Pocket would have been better. At least I would have just burnt my tongue. Now into the oven to heat and kill all the worms. Now I have to guess how long that should take. What's that in the back of the drawer? Food thermometer? How fancy. Never used this before. Now I can know the temperature, but I have no idea what it's supposed to be. Wait. Internet. Okay, 145. Let me open up the oven and just get a better view. Better prop it up. JESUS, that's hot. Ah, oven. I'm an idiot. Perfect time for oven mitts. Wait, why didn't I use them throughout the entire process? Too late now. Well, Mr. Steak, you're sitting at a pleasant 145 degrees and prime for my belly. Let me just put you on a plate, salt you up a bit, and sit down to enjoy you. Supposed to be this red? Well, I'm eating you just the same. Not going to let my six bucks go to waste.



Creating a Monster

Taylor Johnson

There is something delightful in creating a monster. Delving into back-closet fears and twisting reality into a nightmare. Exploring paranoid curiosities not as a victim but as a mad scientist. Having control over the readers as you find what entrances them and strings them along. Going where common sense never would just to see the reaction. Laughing as the lightning strikes and the audience gasps. For when you create a monster you have no need to fear. Neither does the reader, of course; but in their moment of fear, they suddenly become your audience as you see if your monster works.

The reader moves on and the experiment is done. The lightning bolt has passed and the thunder has long since faded away. Onto another story the mind roves and abandons the lab, the windows banging in the wind.

But the monster is not dead.

It was never real to begin with, so all it can do is fade into a nightmare and return to the shadows in the back closets of your mind. As much as you think you were scaring the reader, all you ever did was show your own cards. The experiment was not with them but with your own brain on the dissecting table. How stupid to believe yourself immune to your own weaknesses. How careless to think a resurrected nightmare would simply return to sleep.

Lurking for years forgotten. Biding its time until you are defenseless. Waiting as you fall asleep watching Netflix so it has no chance to attack. Knowing one night you will eventually be alone with your own thoughts and the closet door will slowly swing open. You toyed with fear; now what will you do when your nightmares come for you?



Funerals are for the Living

Taylor Martin

I don't know what I expected. Can you really have expectations for a funeral? That just sounds absurd. I guess, really, I just didn't expect this. Have you ever been to a funeral? You'll probably know what I'm referring to, if you have.

I walk in and all my family members are crowding together. Some are sobbing, some are stone-faced. There are people here that shouldn't be. It's my opinion that if you didn't truly know the deceased while she was alive, you probably shouldn't attend the ritual of close family and friends saying goodbye to this person forever right before they burn the body or enclose it in a dirt tomb forever. Just a personal opinion.

Her. Him. Her, too. Both of those two standing by the front-row pews. Should not be here. They have absolutely no relation with the person lying in the coffin. I move my way towards the coffin, ignoring the myriad of people with no business here. I can see people looking in—open casket, disgusting. Now, I'm not saying that the deceased isn't presentable. She wasn't in some horrific car accident, she isn't blue and puffy from water retention (she didn't jump off the bridge, even though she thought about it). She didn't shove a bullet through her brain. She didn't slide that smooth metal across her pale, blue-veined wrists. She went peacefully. I mean... as peacefully as taking your own life can be. You know, in some countries it's virtuous to take your own life. Yeah, maybe she wasn't doing it to defend her country, or whatever, but still.

"Charlotte was such a strong girl!"

"She was so sweet! And **so** beautiful—it's a shame."

I roll my eyes. People always want to say such kind things to each other about those who have passed. Where were these people when she was alive? I'm so irritated. I push past them, but they don't notice me. I bogart the coffin for myself. I turn my head and lean over the coffin. I want to see what she looks like now. My hair flows in waves over the side of the coffin, blocking out those silly people with their silly stories about how great she was. As I look into her face, I think of how silly, how pointless it is for them to say such things—this body can't hear them. Her skin is paler than usual. Her soft brown hair is dull; it lost all its radiance and shine (just how I imagine her green eyes did behind those thin lids). All I can think about are those eyes. They were so beautiful—my favorite quality. Now, I'm sure they lack all color—gray as this soul. Void of all life.

I continue my inspection, half expecting to see the pill bottle and a few miscellaneous candy-colored pills spilled around her frail fingers. They're not there, so I continue on. Ugh, the dress that was picked out is horrible. Clearly, Martha picked that out. Why actually think of what she might **want** to wear? No, I'll just dress her in an acceptable way for her to be presented to all these people. I hate that. Even in death, everyone else's needs and opinions are more important.

"I'll miss seeing her in English class. She was the best writer in our whole class."

"I know. Charlie tutored me because I was failing. It was so nice of her..."

"We had P.E. together. She was always so smiley."

"Her death was tragic. She was taken too early. Does anyone know what happened?"

"Her parents say that it was some kind of freak accident. They haven't said any more."

"Wow. That's crazy. I heard..."

I walk past them, ignoring what he heard. This whole thing is wrong. Why has no one taken into account what Charlie would want? Why is she dressed like she's going to church when that's the exact opposite of her personality? She should be in ripped jeans and a band tee, Chucks on, dark eyeliner. Instead she looks like a proper, wholesome bible-thumper here to eradicate sin. How ironic. Furthermore, why is it that everyone is digging out all these nice things to say about her? She was all of those things—beautiful, smart, sweet, strong. But no one saw that when she was alive. Have they not stopped to think that maybe if they talked to her like this when she was alive that, maybe, she might still be here? But no. Everyone is just worried about presenting themselves as something so vital to the life she had, talking her up like she was someone really important.

I'm so glad that I have the ability to move through these crowds of liars to hear the bull that they're spitting. Some of this stuff isn't even true! I just smirk and move along.

"We were like best friends. We talked all the time. I'm gonna miss her."

Umm, no. What a lie. If she had friends **she wouldn't have killed herself**. How many people here are going to claim that they were so close to her? I don't recall these people being there when tears were shed, when she spilled her own blood, when she screamed at the top of her lungs due to frustration. I don't remember them caring when she walked through the halls alone, being tussled around as people ran into



her, not even acknowledging that her body was occupying the space that they just bulldozed through.

I can't handle this any longer. It's too frustrating. I walk back to the coffin. I take one last look. It's so strange to see your own body. You know how they say that you never truly see yourself, just reflections? Well, imagine seeing yourself, **truly seeing** your body for the first time when it's devoid of life. It's so eerie and disturbing. I truly was beautiful, though. I see that now. I guess at this point I would be tempted to ask myself if I should have made a different choice. Should I have stuck it out? But what's the point in that? I'm already dead. Nothing is bringing me back. Charlie is gone forever. I no longer want to be here. This funeral wasn't about me. Its sole purpose is to make those that I knew feel better about my passing. It doesn't make me feel better at all. I take one last glance at my body, take in the view of my "friends and family," look over at my parents (who I'm sure are touting their love for me). It's all so revolting.

Never attend your own funeral. It's a sham. Funerals are only for the living—the deceased have no business there.



Stairs to the Uranium Deposit, *Rachel Schuldt*



A Trudge in the Snow

Bret Lundstrom

The wind whistled across some snow banks in the middle of the highway, sculpting them however it pleased. It was eerie, matched with the pines brushing up against each other. I've been walking just long enough to notice all these things. A few miles of walking in the snow will do that to you, and all I can think of is: people do this for fun? My toes were numb, but the sting of the cold was present throughout my body. I could barely distinguish one toe from another. But my body was covered in sweat. Four miles of trudging in a foot of snow will do that. Thank God I had my boots in the trunk. My dad always scolded: "What if you break down, what then?" Three years of lackadaisical compliance and one day it finally happened. I guess probability plays a big role in weather, car engines, and advice. One day all three are going to coordinate a date, which is something I can't even pull off with other people. Just a cold truth of circumstances. The lack of filling stations, though, is just a matter of bad luck, and AAA telling you they can't help on this particular day is even more messed up; roadside assistance my ass. Guess a little snow is all the inconvenience it takes. Good thing a little hatred can keep my feet moving, but it doesn't do anything for the cold.



Ice River, Jaymie-Rae Martin



Kowalski Lives

Jaymie-Rae Martin

There was a husband and a wife. They were happy. They were able to make their living through selling oil and sunflower oil. Then the husband was suddenly taken after the old oil pump collapsed on him, and he died an excruciatingly painful death.

The wife had a secret. She was pregnant, but that wasn't the secret. She was a witch, and the pain of losing her love was far greater than her labor pains. She was unfit to be a mother due to her grief, but no one would help take in her son, fearing that he, too, was a witch.

No one would see the mother or her child. One night, there was a flash of light coming from their house. No one would go near it. They stayed far away, and if they were quiet enough, they would hear the glass shattering from the windows and the sounds of a baby crying. No one would go near that house after that. Not for the oil in the ground and not for the sunflower oil.

Years would pass, and everyone would ignore that house. People assumed the witch committed some ancient dark spell that destroyed her and her child to try and bring back her husband. They called the house cursed and would tell dark stories so their own children would not go near it. Those who did, those who went past the old oil pump that killed the witch's husband, had disappeared.

Fifty years passed, and a stranger came to town. He was tall, he was young, he was handsome, and those who were very old and were still haunted by the memories of the witch would swear to God and the Devil that he looked familiar. He was friendly. He would smile. Girls would swoon over him from the little words he spoke and the rapturous feel of his deep voice. But his eyes, they never smiled. They were too dark. Too empty. They were inhuman, and he smelled of sunflowers.

"What's your name, son?" an old woman asked, unable to hold herself back anymore.

The young man would smile, but his eyes wouldn't, and he would reply, "My name is Kowalski, named after my father."

Kowalski was the name of the husband who died under the old broken oil pump.

A hundred years had passed and there wasn't a town anymore. All the people had disappeared. There were no more children to laugh and play

on the streets, there were no more teenagers who dared each other to go to the old house, there were no more young ladies to court, there were no more men to court them, and there were no more old people to reminisce about their stupid mistakes in their youth. The buildings were gone as well, as if the town had never existed.

The witch's house was still there. The sunflower fields still growing, the collapsed old oil pump still in front, the shattered glass outside the windows, and the Store sign still standing. It was empty, and if people passed the old pump, they wouldn't disappear. But someone managed to spray-paint the house and the old pump: "Vanishing point" on the old pump for all the naughty children who dare went passed it, and "Kowalski lives" to remind the world that the witch's spell had worked.



The Ones Who Disappeared

Kristine Wagner

The size of the entryway astounded Noelle as she stepped through the door. She gripped her little brother's hand as she stepped from the threshold, sinking deeply into the Persian rug. So this was the house they were going to tour, although no one seemed to have arrived yet. She looked up at the vaulted ceiling then around her. To her left, almost a bit behind her, was a sitting area for visitors. Everything seemed to be made of dark, walnut wood and upholstered in a deep blood red fabric.

But up a little further on her left was a narrow hallway, much too small in comparison with the rest of the entryway. Lining the hallway was a row of white doors with frosted glass panels, not unlike something you would find in a doctor's office. Sunlight streamed through the door windows despite the hallway being too far into the house to have any windows to the outside for those rooms. Before she could ponder the impossible physics of sunlight in the middle of the house and the oddity of something so utilitarian and sanitized in a mansion of such obvious grandeur, her little brother suddenly let go of her hand and ran off down the hallway.

Why do I always have to be chasing after a five-year-old? Noelle wondered to herself as she ran after him. He ducked behind one of the frosted glass doors, and it swung shut just before she could reach him. She yanked the door back open immediately only to find an empty room about the size of a cubicle. Surely this was the room he went in; she had pulled the door back open only a nanosecond after it swung shut, and she had seen his shadow through the frosted glass. Noelle turned around frantically, but there was nothing but white walls, a plain desk, and herself. *Wait, what?* She whipped her head back around and stared at herself. There was a full length mirror hung on the back of the door she had gone through. Suddenly, a small figure darted across the view in the mirror. She jerked her head over her shoulder; she was still the only one in the room. She lifted the mirror off the hook it had been hanging on and used it to look over her shoulder. There was her brother, sitting on the edge of the desk, smiling and swinging his legs. She lowered the mirror and quickly looked around the room for herself: nothing. She lifted the mirror back up to see behind her, and there he was. He seemed fine, but he clearly could not see her in return.

Filled with a sense of horror, she ran out of the room and back down the hallway to the foyer. *What was this place? What happened to my*

brother? Before she could collect her thoughts fully, the rest of the group came in through the door. *Oh yes, she remembered, the group we were going to tour the house with.* She scanned the crowd, looking for someone who could help. Her eyes immediately fell on Andy, a boy from school. He strode through the entrance at the head of the group and turned left into the sitting area by the door.

"Dang," he said, "This place is nice." He walked to take a seat, but as he did, his head began to disappear. Noelle ran to grab his arm and jerked him back. He was still there; he hadn't disappeared like her brother. Noelle was about to sigh with relief when she looked up into his face. It wasn't there. His whole head was nothing but a dark blue blur, the insubstantial shadow of what had begun to disappear.

"Andy?" she called fearfully. *Was he dead or worse?*

"What just happened?" Andy's voice came from the indefinable void which hovered over his shoulders.

"Where is everyone?" another voice asked. Noelle turned around; it was Martha, one of Noelle's friends who must have been at the back of the group. But now the rest of the group was nowhere to be seen. In her panic over Andy, Noelle hadn't noticed the loud chatter of the crowd suddenly silencing. The group had disappeared just like her brother had.

"They're right over there," Andy said, pointing up the staircase to the right of the door. Noelle looked up. It was empty.

"What is going on?" Martha demanded. "What happened to Andy?"

"What is up with you guys?" Andy asked. "I'm fine—we should probably join the group."

"There's no one there! Your head is missing!" Martha shrieked at him.

"You're off your head," Andy retorted.

"No, Andy," Noelle said, leading him to a mirror hanging on the wall. "Your head is gone." But as she looked into the mirror with him, there was Andy, head and all, and the last of the group could be seen walking up the stairs in the background. "Martha! Come see this." Noelle yanked Martha over to the mirror. Martha gasped and whipped her head around to look at the staircase herself. There was no one there.

"Noelle, what's going on?" Martha asked.

"My brother disappeared. I don't know how it happened, but I can only see him in mirrors. Andy was about to disappear when I pulled him back, and now the group is gone, too."

"Disappeared? You can't see them? You can see me, right?" Andy seemed confused. "Why can you see me and not them and I can see



everyone?”

“I don’t know,” Noelle replied. “Only part of you started disappearing: your head. Maybe your eyes are in the other dimension or something. I don’t know. But we need to find a way to get them back. I need to find my brother.”

“Well, I saw him go that way with the group,” Andy said, pointing to the stairs. “Let’s go.” They went up the staircase. “They’re going through that door,” Andy gestured. Martha went to open it, and Andy screamed. Martha froze and stared at him.

“You just walked through Mrs. McCarthy,” he whispered, horrified. Martha cringed.

“Is she alright?”

“Oh yeah. She didn’t seem to notice. Are you okay, Mrs. McCarthy?” Andy called. “Mrs. McCarthy? Mrs. McCarthy??” He started towards the door, but Noelle held him back.

“You’re still in our world,” Noelle explained. “She can’t see or hear you.”

“How are we going to get them back then?” Martha asked. Noelle shook her head, sunk to the floor, and began to cry. Andy sat down next to her.

“We’ll figure this out, don’t worry,” he reassured her. “At least they all seem safe.”

“But how are we going to be able to see them again?” Noelle sobbed.

“We disappear, too.” Noelle and Andy looked up at Martha in shock.

“What?” Martha said. “They are all safe, we can’t seem to get them back, so we’ll have to go in with them.”

“But we need to get them back out!” Noelle insisted.

“Perhaps we’ll have to go in to get them out,” Andy suggested. “Let’s try to catch up with them at least.”

Andy stepped through the door and vanished. Martha followed, disappearing as well. Noelle stood there with a lump rising in her throat. She just wanted everyone to reappear so she could hold her brother and go back home. What would happen once she disappeared? *I can’t do it*, she thought. But then she thought of her brother, and she knew she had to. Shaking violently, she held her breath and did a mad rush at the door like she was about to jump into freezing water.

She was in a sunlit hallway lined with white doors. Martha and Andy stood next to her.

“Where did you guys disappear to?” a boy snickered as he walked

past with the rest of the group. Noelle started to protest, but Andy stopped her.

“No, don’t you see? This is the real world,” Noelle stared at him, confused.

“But we saw those people disappear; we have to get them back.”

“We were the ones who disappeared!” Andy insisted. “Don’t you see? We were on a tour of the medical institute near school. Your little brother was thrilled he was allowed to come along with us. Don’t you remember?”

“But,” Noelle stammered, “the mansion...”

“Made no sense. It was physically impossible.”

“That was because of the portals! The mansion was real! The moment I walked through the door I was amazed!”

“Once you stepped through the door,” Martha said. “I was amazed, too. But if we had seen the outside, why would we have been surprised at how big the inside was? Can you remember the door? Or the drive there? Think, Noelle.” Noelle thought, but she could remember neither, and as her memories of the trip to the medical institute grew stronger, her memories of the mansion faded until she was convinced. They were the ones who had disappeared.



The Politics of Salutations

Bret Lundstrom

The gavel clamored against the hard, wooden desk at the head of the room, but attempts at attention fell on deaf ears. No one was listening, and everyone was quarreling. Men of prestige and power filled the many desks that faced each other in a semicircle around the desk at the head of the room. As prestigious as they were, they were at each other's throats with opinions of their own. Finally, the man with the gavel was able to start calming down the mob of legislators.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" he shouted accompanied by his gavel. "We need a decision on this. I know speed isn't our thing, but we're going to be left at the altar on this one."

"How the hell are we supposed to decide on something like this? This has just been dropped on us. We can't just flip a coin on this one," a man from the right logically pointed out.

"It doesn't matter how quickly it's been dropped on us. We gotta act now if we want it though. There's no halfway on this," a man across the room stated. "It's a beautiful option, there's no denying that, it's just I'm not sure of our capacities. Can we really handle this?"

The man at the head of the room was slumped in his chair, legs crossed, head in hand, leaning on the side of his nice leather chair slowly massaging his brow. "All valid points, all valid points." He dropped his hand and casually swayed his gaze to the side and looked at a man in circular spectacles. "What are the numbers looking like?"

The man hesitated briefly as he picked up a couple of notes and lifted up a couple of pages to see something underneath as if they were going to reveal some miracle answer to the problem at hand. "I gotta say not good. Not good at all. We are looking at a big gap here, and I don't think we can cover the difference."

"Men," a man's voice surely and stoutly addressed the room from somewhere in the back. "This could be a new day for us. We are on the brink of possibility. Numbers can't put this situation into perspective. We cannot allow fear of rejection to hinder our efforts. We must have the confidence to make a move here. Now I know we're all scared here. I'm scared too. But, I'm excited as well. Excited about what could be. We have no idea what could become of this. Rejection is completely inconsequential. So we take a hit to our pride. We can handle that. We've dealt with way worse than that and come out on top. We need to climb the

mountain of our own pride here, and there might just be a meadow on the other side."

"And what if there isn't?" a voice from the mob exclaimed with a bit of distress. "What if we fail?"

"Then we simply climb another mountain," the man responded.

The man at the head of the room sat slumped over, elbows on his knees, his left arm folded across his lap while he made a fist on his bottom lip, and gave a nod of slight approval. "Thank you for your words," he said half-genuinely, half-pessimistically. He'd been here before; he'd seen the same situation. "Well, I think we've heard enough," he said taking on his studious duties. "Which leads us to a vote. All in favor?" A response of ayes scattered the room. "All those opposed?" A nearly equal response of nays. "What's the tally?" he asked the clerk to his right.

"Forty-three for, fifty-seven against. Motion denied."

The man at the head of the room slowly dipped his head backwards, lying his head on top of the back of his seat and slowly rotated back and forth in it. He whispered to himself, "Yet another girl slips our greeting."





Candy, *Mai Urai*

Him.

Brenden M. Kleiboeker

He stepped into her room, slowly shutting the door behind him, careful not to wake her as she lay so peacefully. He crept to the end of her bed. The only light given into the darkness came from her small butterfly night light next to the dresser, casting his shadow over her. He moved to the side so the light would illuminate her soft face. The floor creaked as he moved closer. He froze so as not to disturb her slumber. With no sign of stirring, he took another step towards her, softly brushing her hair and cheek with the back of his hand. His dark eyes burned as he stared, his heart beginning to race and the adrenaline surging through his body. His hand began to tremble as he rested it on her hip, gripping ever so tightly to steady his hand, but it was only to cause the trembling to move elsewhere, tightening his pants. A small moan escaped her lips, and although it excited him, he knew he was waking her. He tore himself away from her, disappearing out of sight.

Savana opened her eyes without a fight to escape her sleep. She glanced around her empty room and pulled her stuffed moose close to her as she began to cry.

“Daddy!”

It was just after four a.m. Sam knew the familiar sound and was on his feet and down the hall before she could call for him again. He knew it was the dreams. The same ones she’d been having for weeks now. The night light he and his wife had decided to leave on in there helped very little. Savana only made it two nights without being woken from the horror.

Sam entered her room and turned on the purple shaded bedside lamp. “Hey sweetheart,” he smoothed her hair, letting her know she was safe. “Same dream again?”

“This time he touched me, Daddy,” she fell forward into his chest for the moose was not supplying enough security. “He’s never gotten close enough to do that before.”

Sam’s heart sunk. *It’s getting worse*, he thought to himself as he rubbed her back. “It was only a dream Angel,” he kissed her forehead, trying to sound unworried.

“What does he want from me?”

He winced, knowing his little girl couldn’t escape these night terrors. Sam leaned back, resting himself in an upright position against her headboard, holding her quietly. She couldn’t take much more of these



nights; he could see her defeat. That broke his heart for he had no idea where to even begin to help her sleep through the night and rid her of these dreams.

Just as five a.m. approached, Sam was able to slip his arm out from under his again asleep daughter and return to his room. His restlessness set in, and he knew going back to sleep was not an option. Once back in his bed, Sam found his place next to his wife Kate. Feeling his presence, she rolled over to face him, resting her head on his chest, never even attempting to open her eyes. "How's Savana?"

Sam kissed her cheek lightly and closed his eyes, "She's sound asleep. We can talk about the rest in the morning."

Not even an hour later, Sam rolled over and decided to get up. It was pointless to try and sleep any longer when it obviously wasn't working. He took the extra time before the rest of the household was awake to make everyone breakfast before school and work. He busied in the kitchen making pancakes, eggs, bacon, sausage, hash browns, and a small special plate of waffles for Savana because she said last Easter Breakfast "the pancakes taste like clouds." *That made her sad thinking she was taking them out of the sky when they were so beautiful*, Sam thought to himself and laughed as he turned over the flapjacks.

Just after sliding every plate into position at the table, he heard the house beginning to wake; a toilet flush, the running water of the bathroom sink, his wife's blow dryer echoing down the hall. Soon the house was in full swing, and the table filled with his hungry family.

"Hmm, these pancakes are so fluffy, just like a cloud, Savana," Tristen, her 14-year-old brother said to her as he mockingly shoved a fork full of the syrupy breakfast cuisine into his mouth.

Savana's face scrunched as though she might cry. "Tristen, knock it off. Why do you have to act like that and ruin a perfectly good breakfast?" Sam scolded him as he filled his hash browns with ketchup. Tristen shrugged and went back to his food. Sam shook his head before turning to Savana. "Were you able to sleep okay, Sweetie?"

Savana didn't look up from her waffle. "Yeah, I did," he could tell she was uncomfortable discussing her shadow watcher.

Sam glanced at Kate, who shared the same concerned look on her face as him. He lightly squeezed her hand, giving her a small reassuring smile, and turned his attention back to the table. "Alright kids, go get ready for school; you're going to miss the bus." Tristen shoveled as much in his mouth as he could before following his sister down the hall to their rooms. Once they were out of earshot, Sam grabbed their plates and

moved to the sink. "It's getting worse, Kate."

She came up behind him with the other two plates, "What happened?" she opened the dishwasher.

He sighed, setting the dishes down and turning towards his wife. "He touched her last night," her eyes widened and she looked fearful. He put his hands up to signal for her to not get hysterical. "It's just dreams, Kate. It isn't real. However, I am concerned as to why they are repetitive dreams, and now growing worse."

"We need to do something, Sam," Kate crossed her arms to comfort herself.

Sam set down the washcloth, softly holding the backs of her elbows, bending down to look her in the eyes. "Katherine, Sweetheart, it's going to be figured out, I promise. I will not let something like this distress our daughter any longer. Keep yourself calm and relaxed. It's nothing I can't handle," Sam gave a light smile. "I'll look into what it may be; hopefully we can get a starting point; obviously the night light is doing no good." Kate looked up just as Sam leaned in to kiss his wife, moving his hands from her elbows to her waist.

"Ew. That can stop at any moment," Tristen grabbed two more bacon strips on his way out the door.

"Don't forget to wait for your sister!" Sam yelled after his son. He pulled away from Kate and felt a small relief in the smile that came across her once worried look. As the words left his mouth he heard Savana trample down the hallway after Tristen, backpack bouncing behind her, restraining her from running in a straight line.

Savana quickly caught up to Tristen at the end of the driveway, reaching for his hand to cross the street. It was like her hand sent a shockwave through his body, and he jerked away from her, looking at her in disgust.

"Tristen!" she whined. "Please! I'm too scared to cross the street by myself."

"Oh please, Savana, the street is empty, it's not a highway. Besides, you're scared of everything. You're in the second grade now. Time to toughen up," he started into the empty street without her, holding his head high, full of his superiority.

Savana didn't move from the end of the driveway, watching her brother make his way without her. Halfway into the street he turned around. "Oh, come on, Savana, it's not like the big scary man in your room is out in the middle of the day, in the wide open, with so many people to spot him," he smirked at his cleverness. Terror swept her face and she ran to him,



grabbing his hand, squeezing for him to not let go. Tristen sighed, "You know he can smell fear Savana, the dark man. The more you fear him the stronger he gets."

"Tristen, stop!" she begged, fighting back the tears. "You don't know what you're talking about."

Tristen smirked lightly, looking down at his scared little sister, "Oh, sweet, sweet Savana. You have no idea what I know," a small chuckle broke from his smirk before sending a wink in her direction. Letting go of her hand, he moved forward to his friends, leaving Savana frozen, traumatized.

About 20 minutes after the bus had made its way to the schools, Sam stood in the driveway fiddling through his briefcase for his keys.

"Hopkins, how's it going?" Sam looked up at the voice of his neighbor Clyde, a single guy who moved in just after Savana was born. He was standing at the fence that separated their yards. Sam took a deep breath, knowing he didn't have time for him before work.

"Hey, Clyde, enjoying your morning?" Sam said nodding his head in his direction. Clyde looked down, completely ignoring Sam's question.

"Savana doing okay? She seemed a little upset at the bus stop this morning." Sam crinkled his brow, knowing Clyde question was odd. "I was out watering my flowers this morning and saw her with Tristen, is all. They seemed to be fighting."

Slightly hesitant, Sam answered, "she's... she's doing just fine. Just had a bad dream last night, so she didn't sleep too well."

Clyde shook his head. "Those are the worst, especially for a child. After my wife and little girl died, those nightmares became so real to me. I felt like I was actually living it over and over again," Clyde shook his head once more. Sam could see in his eyes the ghosts of his family he lost after they were run off a bridge once the driver of an eighteen-wheeler had fallen asleep. "Well, it looks like you need to be gettin' to work, Hopkins, don't wanna keep ya waitin'," Clyde gave a quick wave and turned back to his landscaping. Without so much as a goodbye wave, Sam climbed into his truck and left the driveway, trying to shake the uneasy feeling of Clyde's words that filled his body.

It wasn't long for him to return to her room. He couldn't resist something so sweet. He took a seat at the end of her bed, lowering himself ever so slowly so as to not disturb her. His heart raced and his fingers trembled. He needed to touch her, to feel her. He knew it was

wrong but he needed it. He stood after a while, finally letting his urge take over. She lay on her back, holding tight to her moose. He reached across, placing his fingertips on her thigh, quickly retracting them after she started to rustle, only to see her smile and let out a faint giggle. It tickled her. Hesitantly, he placed his fingers back on her thigh, this time with a little more pressure, taking his hand up her side and across her waistline. Her stomach rose with each deep breath she took. His adrenaline surged as he felt the realness of her. He moved forward, taking his hand up her side, passing the princesses that danced around her chest. He allowed his fingers to linger there, like they were the princes the princesses had been longing to dance with. Moving forward he brushed her hair, leaning towards her forehead, he pressed his lips just above her right eyebrow ever so gently.

"Daddy, Mommy, help!" Savana screamed as she sprang up in her bed, tears rolling before she could even take in her empty room.

Seconds later her bedroom door was opened, Kate right on the tails of her husband. Savana's light was thrown on, and each parent took a side of their daughter's bed. Savana quickly collapsed into her father while her mother held her hand and smoothed her hair. Savana couldn't catch her breath to speak. Tristen appeared in the doorway, crossing his arms and leaning against the frame, as he watched. As he surveyed the scene in front him, no emotion came to view. His mother looked at him, trying to signal with her eyes to come help comfort his sister, but he refused. He let out a scoff to insinuate he couldn't believe her whole facade and turned back for his room.

Kate brought herself back to Savana; her face wore a mask of sheer terror as she held back tears while looking at her husband. "It's okay, Darling, just another dream. We're here now. Nothing can happen to you," Sam comforted as best as he could. Worry permanently found its home on his face. These were not any normal childhood nightmares. Something was seriously wrong, and he needed to fix it.

Savana's tears finally subsided. Kate and Sam knew they didn't want to press anymore on their little girl tonight. Her father scooped her up and headed back to their bedroom, Kate and the moose following soon after. He laid her in between the two of them and took his place in the right side of the bed. Wide awake, he didn't move. Listening to his girls sleep ever so softly he watched the clock tick by: 5:17 a.m., 5:18 a.m., 5:19 a.m... His mind swirled with options and different courses to take. He kept coming back to the same option, the one option he didn't want to move forward with.



Right before his clock turned 6:30 a.m., he reached over and shut off his alarm before it could sound, tiptoeing out of the room and down to his office. Once there, he awakened his computer and then pulled some old documents out of the back of his filing cabinet. He reached for the file he kept hidden in the back for a reason. *Dr. Laurie Newcomb: Child Psychologist*, read across the off-yellow flap. He opened it up, spreading the papers across his desk to get a better view of things. Quickly, he pulled out Dr. Newcomb's contact information.

Taking a deep breath he dialed her number. He closed his eyes as he lifted the phone to his ear, praying his call would go to voicemail. The line clicked, and he cleared his throat.

"Hi, yes, Dr. Newcomb. This is Samuel Tyler Hopkins," he waited.

"Yes, it has been a long time. Listen, the reason I was calling is..." he stopped to let her speak.

"I am doing well, yes."

"No, I haven't had any mishaps."

"No, it is not acting up again... Listen, Dr. Newcomb, I am not calling about myself. It's about my daughter, Savana," his patience wore thinner with her than he planned. Taking a moment to calm himself, he continued. "No, no, she isn't showing the same signs I was. It's nothing compared to that."

He nodded as Dr. Newcomb rambled on the other end. "I'm not saying it is anything like mine, Doctor, but it's getting worse. Her dreams are getting stronger, and I am worried something is going to happen to her," he rested his elbows on his desk, using his palm to hold up his head.

"Dr. Newcomb." She was pushing his patience again. "I am coming to you because I know you worked with me and have my blood samples and tests all filed, do you not?" There was a small pause. "That's what I thought. I am just hoping that my wife can bring my daughter in, and you can run some tests to see if some of it may be mental illness or something psychological that I may have passed on," he listened. He started to fidget and was soon pacing the office's hardwood floor. "Late this afternoon would be perfect."

"One o'clock it is. Thank you, Doctor," Sam didn't even wait for her to respond before he ended the call. By this point, the kids were up—Savana slowly moving. These nightmares were really weighing down on her. Kate joined Sam in the office. The bags under her eyes spoke for her.

"Morning, Babe," he walked across the room to give her a kiss. She didn't respond or even so much as uncross her arms. Sam ran his hand through her hair and pulled her in close. "Call Savana out of school; I

have an appointment for her with Dr. Newcomb." Kate looked at him in surprise after hearing her name. "I know, I know. I am surprised I contacted her, too. It does bring up a lot of tough memories, but this is for Savana, Katherine. My main priority is to make her happy. I can't let these dreams get any worse." Kate stroked his cheek, leaving her hand to hover.

"But she didn't ever find what had been going on with you?"

"She wasn't able to diagnose it. But she knew how to handle it, because everything stopped. You know that, Babe." Kate still didn't like the idea. Sam could see it in her face.

"I want you to see what you can find out as far as night terrors go. What causes them, how they work, and what can be done to minimize them, okay?" Sam nodded before Kate kissed his cheek.

He wrapped his arms around her, burying his nose into her hair. "I think I'm going to set up a nanny cam in her room, too."

"What for?" Kate asked with a panicked look, pulling out of his arms.

"Don't worry, I just want to make sure she is staying in her bed and not sleepwalking. I also want to make sure Tristen isn't doing anything to provoke her. You know how he is always picking on her." Kate nodded, but he could tell she wasn't comfortable with it.

"Tristen wouldn't go that far," Kate defended her son.

"I don't think so either, but I would feel much better if we were able to rule it out." Still hesitant, she agreed. "It is more of a tactic to ease our minds. We don't know much about anything that is going on with her, but I think this will help us go down the right path."

Kate looked up then back down at her crossed arms. She sighed, walking around Sam to his desk. "I'm going to call her out of school, but since you are doing this nanny cam thing that I am not a fan of, I'll need you to make me a cup of coffee and a bagel." Kate smiled with her eyes but her mouth was a flat line.

Sam huffed and shook his head, not even trying to hide his delight. "Yes, your majesty," he bowed and backed out of the room. With that, she couldn't fight her lips from curling up in amusement.

Just after lunch, Sam walked his girls out to the driveway. "It'll be okay, Savana. I'm sorry I can't come along, but be brave for me alright?" She shook her head, holding her moose close. Sam leaned through the window and kissed her goodbye.

"It'll be just fine, I promise. This is a step in the right direction," Kate said as Sam leaned into her window.



“Hopefully this direction ends with a full night’s sleep,” Sam winked, kissing her goodbye as well. She laughed before putting the car in reverse. He waved as they backed out of the driveway and drove down the street.

“No school for Savana today?” Clyde stood on the Hopkins’ side of the fence, leaning against his rake.

“She wasn’t feeling well this morning,” Sam answered, not wanting to entertain him.

“Yeah, I’m sure them nightmares really can tear down a kid’s immune system. After being deployed for the Marines, my nightmares made me feel like I was going batshit crazy,” he shrugged his shoulders and turned to head back to his yard. “Good day, Hopkins.”

Sam didn’t move, but instead squinted in suspicion and watched Clyde walk back to his house. He knew Clyde had always had a liking for Savana, but he was way too into her nightmare issues. Or was Sam just overthinking?

Sam convinced himself to let it be and go back inside. He knew he could be doing something more productive to help the situation. Passing off his paranoid suspicion of his creepy neighbor, he retreated to his office for research.

“She wasn’t any help at all, Samuel,” Kate pulled the pillows off the bed. Tristen and Savana had already been asleep for a little over an hour. “They ran tests and said everything seemed to be just fine—nothing out of the ordinary. We didn’t make any progress.”

“While you were gone I tried researching different symbols and causes for dreams,” he responded, almost dismissing what his wife had just said. “I looked further into night terrors, but all it said was that they are caused by something traumatic happening in a child’s life, like a move, or a death of some sort. None of that has happened to her recently,” Sam slipped out of his jeans and under the covers.

“So, where do we go from here?” Kate set her glasses on the end table before joining her husband. A small sigh escaped his lips, and he looked directly forward, riding the silence.

“I was able to get the cams installed after my research. They are linked to my laptop and are said to record up to 24 hours at a time. It’s a starting point. Hopefully it will help eliminate certain suspicions and show that I’m just being paranoid.” He could tell that Kate hated even thinking those things were considered an option by the way her face scrunched up in worry. Sam gave her a sweet, heartwarming smile to ease her. “Try to get

some sleep, My Love,” he kissed her hair before turning off the bedside lamp.

Not even an hour after laying down, Sam knew sleep was not in his future. His mind ran from one thing to the next, refusing to settle. Accepting defeat, which he seemed to be doing so much of lately, he made his way to his office once again. There, he pulled up the camera feed to watch his daughter sleep so peacefully, laying there like nothing had ever happened. She looked so innocent and sweet. He couldn’t fathom why any such nightmare would want to come into such a beautiful girl’s mind and ruin her angelic slumber.

For hours, he scanned her room, waiting for a rustle in the curtains, or her door to open exposing Tristen on the other side. He kept his ears open to hear another cry for help, yet nothing came. Silence crept through the house only making his anticipation worse. She stayed asleep, the house stayed quiet, his monitor stayed undisturbed.

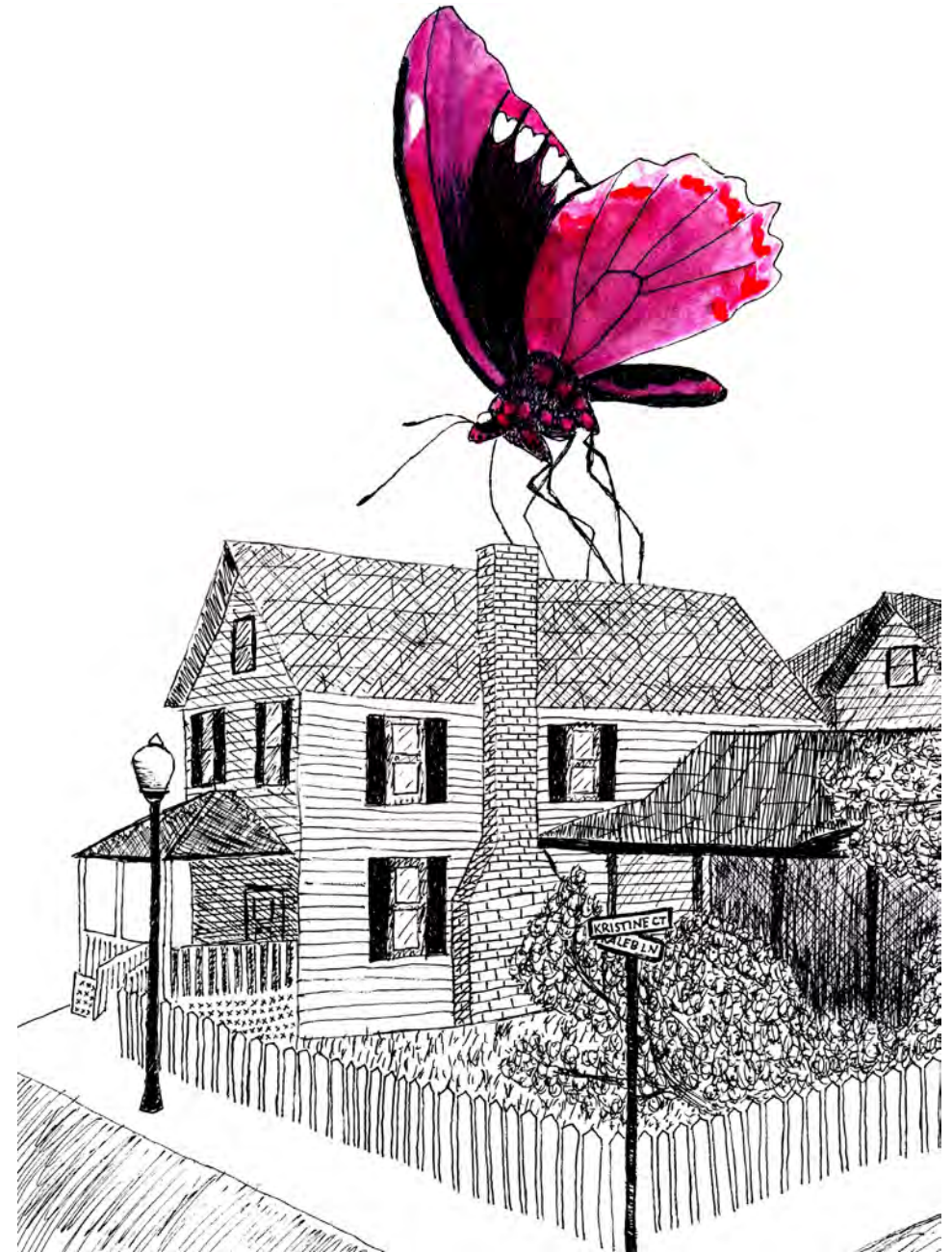
He was prepared for tonight. He had prepped himself all day to be ready to take it to the next level with her. But first, the lights needed to be dimmed. He slowly unscrewed the bulb to the wall butterfly until it went out. He didn’t need to see where he was going; he had been there enough that he knew this room like the back of his hand. Slowly, he made his way towards her. He didn’t waste his time sitting at the end of the bed to watch her. She lay on her side, her nightgown raised a little higher than normal. He waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkness a little more so he could take in the beautiful view in fullness. Soon, he rolled her on her back, careful not to wake this angel that slept oh so softly. He needed to test what she could sleep through before moving forward. Placing both hands on her upper thighs, he slowly added pressure through his fingertips, leaning into her as though to pin her to her bed. She began to rustle like she knew something was happening. He pulled away, waiting for her to settle. He grew impatient; he knew what he wanted, and he couldn’t keep himself away any longer. As he took a step forward he saw the hall light shine through the bottom crack of her door. Cursing all things holy and unholy, he slid away, knowing it was too dangerous to try at her again tonight.

Sam shot awake not knowing where he was. Allowing himself to get used to the darkness of the room, he realized he was still in his office. He must have dozed off during his stakeout. He glanced at the digital clock on his desk: 5:42 a.m. Close to three hours, he had been asleep.



There was no noise from down the hall so he assumed Savana had been sleeping okay. Without hesitation he rewound the nanny cam back to where he had fallen asleep. For the first twenty minutes, there was nothing. The screen was unmoved, like the rest of the night, but then the bedroom door opened, and a figure stepped into his daughter's room. It stood in the shadows, and Sam was unable to make out the face. Sam's heart began to race, and his breaths came short and fast. He leaned closer to the monitor, hoping to see it better. The figure moved with its back to the cam. Sam's eyes widened while his brow furrowed in confusion. *Is that?* he thought. *It couldn't be.* He didn't understand. There was no way that could be possible.

His eyes focused in on the screen as he watched his own face turn to the nanny cam and smile, holding his finger to his lips, before slowly unscrewing the light bulb to Savana's butterfly nightlight.



Butterfly Eating House, *Kristine Wagner*



Soulmates

Taylor Johnson

She looked in the mirror and saw an old man staring back; she blinked and he was gone. Perhaps she had only imagined. Perhaps it was the 6 a.m. sleep in her eyes. Perhaps she was going crazy. That was probably it. Yawning, she finished putting on cover stick to hide the dark circles under her eyes, grabbed her backpack, and headed out the door.

It was good to be back on campus, good to be starting another year of school. The freshmen wandered about looking slightly lost, but also excited. The first year of college was always exciting because then they might meet The One.

Everyone had a special someone whether they liked it or not. Call it fate or some weird quirk of nature, but everyone had a soulmate. Some found out early in life, their tiny chests glowing with light as they were placed next to their soulmate in the nursery. Some found out in school or at the swim park. The unlucky ones may not find out until they were in their 40's or 50's, but this was unusual. Soulmates tended to be born in the same area and gravitate towards each other unintentionally. What with the modern ease of travel, most people had found their someone by the age of 20. Except her. She sighed as she looked at them wandering down the sidewalk together, chests glowing. Sisters, best friends, even lovers might be soulmates. But it was dangerous to have romantic interest in your soulmate. The bond which connected the two began at birth and lasted until death, which was far greater than the span of the strongest marriage and totally uninfluenced by emotions. To be separated from a soulmate because of fighting was terrible. No, it was much safer to have a special someone be a friend. That's all she really wanted. Just a friend.

She had hoped maybe travelling to a college would get her to meet new people, and maybe that special someone. The first year she entered all of her classes with eagerness, wishing that her chest would glow. The second year there she enrolled in completely different types of classes in an effort to meet a new bunch of possibilities, but to no avail. This third year, she had given up. It was a small campus; she had walked past almost everyone there without the faintest flicker of a sign. She kept an eye on the new freshmen, but not with any real expectation. She had fallen into despair recently, and she felt weaker. Maybe the new job would help; it was certainly an unexpected opportunity, almost like fate. She might meet her someone there, if only she had the energy to go.

After her classes, she dragged herself to her car. It was the second week working at the nursing home, and she was beginning to feel comfortable. There had been no soulmates yet, but the nurses worked on varied shifts; there might be one she still hadn't met. Many of them were close to her age, having chosen to do CNA training instead of college. But she couldn't just stand around looking for nurses. Today she had someone to visit, an elderly gentleman named Ed, who had no living relatives to be with him in his last hours. She signed in, clipped on her nametag, washed her hands and went. Room 203A, room 203A, *ah, here it was*. She entered and waited for her eyes to adjust to the darkness. The curtains were drawn shut to block out the afternoon sun as he lay in his bed. As she approached the bedside, dreading the prospect of a dying man, Ed suddenly turned towards her; his face lit up with surprise. But no, it couldn't be, the light was coming from his chest; she looked down and saw her own glowing. She squeaked with surprise and fell back against his dresser, barely holding herself up.

"What, how?" she stammered, looking down at her chest.

"It's you," she heard him whisper. She looked up, and his cheeks were wet with tears. "I thought I'd never find you. I've grown so weak; my time is almost done. I had given up on you. But you're so young! How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"Are you married?"

"No."

"That's the age I was married. I had traveled the world because of the war, and by the time I got back, I figured if I hadn't met my soulmate yet, I probably never would. The girl I met had always dreamed of marrying her soulmate if she ever met him, but because of the war she thought he had probably died, and we consoled ourselves with each other. Turns out, he hadn't. We met him on our 30th wedding anniversary in Italy. She left me for him, those 40 years ago. I've been alone since then—always alone." "I'm so sorry. But how is this even possible?"

"I don't know. I thought I was alone. I thought you weren't real. I went my whole life thinking I was a failure—a freak. I didn't have a soulmate, my own wife didn't want me, and I couldn't have children to comfort me in my old age." Ed began to weep again.

"But you aren't a failure, your wife sounds terrible, and the other things weren't your fault! And you do have a...a soulmate." She could barely get those last couple of words out. Surely she wasn't linked to an old man? What would happen when he died?



"I didn't for 70 years though," Ed countered. "But you are right. And I'm glad I have finally met you, now before I die." Ed looked up at her, tears still running down his cheeks, but a smile stretched across his face.

"But you can't die!" she said in a slight panic. "How am I supposed to go my whole life without a soulmate?"

"You are to do it better than I did. You must go and live the life I always should've, knowing that you do indeed have a soulmate, and that I will be watching over you." His eyes drifted shut and she began to cry. His breathing came slowly, and then he murmured, "What is your name?"

"Amy," she whispered back.

"Amy," he sighed, his chest falling. It did not rise again.

Welcome to the Show

Jaymie-Rae Martin

*In a place where she can hear him, her master speaks to her. **"You hate her, don't you? It's okay to hate her. It's okay to kill her. Do it. Do it!"***

And in a world where she can see her and barely hear her, her sister pleads with her. "No... No, please don't do this! Stay with me, sister!"

"Give in. Give into the darkness of your own heart and strike!"

"Kristie, look at me. Look at me! I'm right here. Come back to me, please!"

His voice is getting louder and louder in her head, and her voice is getting softer and softer. No matter how desperate her sister looks or how many tears that are shed, the Ringmaster's voice is stronger and more persuasive.

"Kill her! KILL HER!!"

"KRISTIE!!"

—Spluch—

Then all but the sound of splatters becomes silenced. No words are spoken, and there are no sounds in reaction to what just happened. Just absolute silence. For one caring sister, her eyes are wide —enormously wide. Her dark brown pupils look like tiny pencil dots in the whites of her eyes. The ghastly look is frozen on her face, and all of her pain is expressed in the eyes. Her fair skin becomes paler, her small mouth slightly open, and no breath enters or escapes her.

For the longest moment of her life, she does not move. She is completely still.

Reflecting in her eyes are the bright golden ones that belong to her killer. Vertical eyes staring right into hers as they stand face to face. Those monstrous eyes that had first narrowed in determination, desire, and bloodlust have now widened in victory, satisfaction, and pleasure. A toothy grin extends to reveal huge razor-sharp teeth.

—Drip, drip, drip—

Her sister looks down to what disturbs this absolutely silent and breathless space. Right through her chest is an arm where the hand has pierced right where her heart should be. Unseen to her sister, her heart is held up high like a trophy in a cage of sharp talons. It's still beating, and the veins are still attached, but it won't take long till it ceases. For now, that hand holds her life in its firm grip with the claws just slightly pressed



against the flesh without causing any more damage. There are skinny streams of blood traveling from the hand to the girl's back and bigger rivers flowing down her body or just gushing out from her chest onto the floor—creating a deep red pool at the monster's feet. Not too far away are blood splatters in a curved pattern from where she struck. Droplets of all sizes decorate the floor in beautiful red that glisten in the dim light so very nicely.

Unable to hold it back, her sister coughs and gags out the blood that rises up to her throat. She vomits blood past her lips to the floor as her long, messy, sweaty hair dangles past her shoulders and shields her face like brown curtains. More tears flow from her eyes as they drip or roll down her face like the blood.

Her life is draining away. Her shock intensifies when she sees the cause of her pain—a pain so great it numbs her entire body. With every bit of strength she has left, she moves. Her hand rises up slowly and shakily to reach for something. What she wishes she could touch is so far away from her. She tries desperately to touch her sister just one more time before the final breath escapes her.

Just once more... please...

“Kri...stie—”

Right at that exact moment, Kristie's eyes open wide, and her mouth inhales a great big breath. Her heart races, her skin damp with sweat, and her entire body is tense from the realistic and vivid emotions created by the nightmare. Under the warmth of her comforter, shielded from the cool temperatures of the autumn night, Kristie lies on her twin sized bed and waits to realize she is no longer in her dream. As seconds tick by on the grandfather clock in her shared bedroom, she's assured that she's safe in this familiar darkness.

“Sister?”

Sharply turning her head to the side, the fifteen-year-old brunette would be lying if she said she wasn't surprised to sense her twin sister lying in bed beside her. From the moonlight peeking through the curtain barriers of the room, Kristie can see the small glare of light reflecting in Catherin's eyes staring at her.

“Did you have a bad dream again?” Catherin asks in that annoyingly concerned, perfect voice of hers. It really makes Kristie sick just from hearing it. She acts like she gives a damn when she's only pretending to make herself feel better and retain the image of the loving, responsible, favorite child.

That's the one thing Kristie never understood. They're identical twins, yet they're treated differently just because of a few minor variations. Catherin likes to stay indoors and read books all day, while Kristie enjoys running around feeling the grass under her bare feet. Catherin can sit up straight with her head held high as she drinks tea, while Kristie can barely breathe in a corset. And today, Catherin had been proposed to by the most eligible bachelor in town while Kristie was lectured by their parents to start behaving like a lady, or she'll be doomed to become an old maid. Catherin is always praised and adored as Kristie is lectured and criticized—and she has the gall to plead with Kristie not to leave her in that nightmare when she is about to do the same in reality?

Trying to calm her nerves first, the older twin asks, “Catherin, what are you doing in my bed?” But the bitterness of the earlier day is still obvious in her voice.

“You looked like you were having a nightmare so I came to comfort you,” says the younger twin, probably choosing not to hear it. “Do you remember how you always used to crawl into my bed when you were scared? We would stay up all night just talking about the silliest things, too.” She lets out a lighthearted laugh. “They feel so long ago, now. I miss those days.”

Reminiscing about the past is not helping Kristie's mood. She remembers those days as well, but they're gone and they're never coming back. Releasing an exhausted sigh, Kristie groans, “Go back to sleep in your own bed. We're not little kids anymore, and I can scare away the Boogeyman myself, thanks.” She turns her back to her sister and prays that she'll drop it.

Unfortunately, no.

“Kristie, please talk to me. We used to be so close when we were little, but now— now you won't even talk to me outside this room. Was there something I did wrong, perhaps? Sister, why do you hate me so much?”

“You wouldn't understand. How could you? Just leave me alone already.”

“But—”

“I said leave me alone!” *Just shut up already! Don't make me tell you,* she thinks.

Kristie can still see her dream so vividly in her head. She can still hear that man's voice talking in her head and easily bending her will to make her do what he commands. She can still smell that strong metallic scent of Catherin's blood. It's like a huge speck of dust that snuck up her nose and won't get out no matter how hard she blows: like a bad memory that



won't leave and will nag her for as long as it exists.

After a while, Kristie feels the weight of her bed shift, indicating that Catherin is going to her own bed on the opposite side of the counter between them. Kristie knew she would, eventually. But Catherin only sits up.

"Did you dream about my death again, Kristie?"

Feeling the weight shift again, Catherin looms over her sister's body to reach for the lamp on the counter. Kristie holds her breath at the question, wondering how her sister could know that; she has never told her about her dream.

When the light turns on, one of the first things Kristie notices is the untouched bed beside the counter. There should be no confusion since her sister is in bed beside her, but she remembers clearly that Catherin got into her own bed before they slept, and there is a strange layer of dust on that bed—as if it hasn't been touched in a very long time. The other things that catch Kristie's eye are two really old tickets on top of the counter. Like how she knew her sister got into bed, those tickets were not there before. Both are a faded midnight purple color with one saying in neon green letters, "Red Moon Circus" and the other in neon blue letters, "Backstage Pass." If Kristie weren't already concerned with Catherin, she would investigate those tickets more—questioning where they'd come from or how they got into the room.

Instead, Kristie dares to look up, and staring her in the face are the wide rotten eyes of a corpse.

Kristie screams as loud as her lungs allow and hastily moves as far away as she can from her sister. Her back presses against the wall, and her legs kick away the comforter and the sheets that kept her warm and safe. *This isn't real! I'm still dreaming. I'm still dreaming!* She denies what she's seeing for there is no way this is her twin sister. Skin as white as death, dull hair dirtied and tangled with specks of dirt and dead leaves, dark circles under yellow pale eyes, bloodied lips crusted and chapped, body and clothes drenched in red, and an obvious hole in Catherin's chest where her heart is meant to be – she is the very image of a body that crawled out of a grave and she crawls closer to her retreating sister.

Kristie just barely squeaks, "N-No..." *Stay away! STAY AWAY!!*

"My poor, frightened sister..." Catherin reaches her hand towards Kristie's face and the living twin barely lets out a cry from how cold the hand feels on her cheek, like ice caressing her skin. "You still have my heart."

Then her hand points down, and Kristie could only look down as if on

command. True to her sister's words, there is a slow-beating organ with its veins still attached to Catherin's body in Kristie's hand. Immediately, she wants to drop it. Throw it away and still declare that this isn't real, but she finds herself unable to move. She can't move, and she can barely breathe.

Catherin still moves closer. Despite her sister's obviously shaking form, she points her finger against Kristie's racing heart and says to her face, "They're coming for you. No one escapes us."

"W....w-who...?"

"Don't you remember, silly Kristie? The people you ran away from home for and then left me instead to take your place."

A rush of memories come flooding to Kristie's mind; she thought she was going mad. A young girl as adorable and beautiful as a life-sized porcelain doll who approached her with free tickets to a show, the creepy but wonderful performance the Ringmaster presented under the top tent of his unusual festival, and then the backstage tour of acrobats, clowns, beasts, and the like for others who received the free backstage passes—all a trap staged by the Three Masters who choose them and her. Another memory also comes to mind. The one where Catherin had followed her sister into that nightmare and did everything she could to help Kristie escape—and it resulted in her death.

"Kri...stie...r...run...away!" And then her heart was crushed right after that.

Leaning to her sister's ear, Catherin whispers through bloodstained lips, "The Circus, sister. The Circus is coming."



Creative Nonfiction



Fisherman, *Sergio A. Poveda*



Ram's Gondola, *Zac Farmer*



Two Personas

Taylor Martin

Let me set this out on the table—I have two personalities. Before you start spouting information on multiple personality disorder or bipolar tendencies, just listen. I am two people, two defined characters residing within one body: the person I was before “the break” and the person who formed from the ashes of who I once was. The part of me that was beaten down and destroyed, the soul of that person ripped apart, is now only a memory. I remember the sweet, innocent person I used to be. But that part of me was melted down to a liquid hatred and reformed—cooled by my bitter heart and forged into an armor. You see...this is the only part of me I believed still existed. The armor. The cold-hearted bitch without emotions or empathy.

Usually, I’m fine with that. This persona is much more successful at getting what she wants. She is much better at not caring when it hurts someone else. She goes for it without hesitation, regardless of what “it” is. And she wins. She always wins. I like her. She is empowered and confident. She is intimidating and courageous. Threatening. My life has flourished because of her.

But every so often, the old me peeks through that hardened exterior, and it surprises me. I thought she no longer existed. Just a memory to fade. But there she stands in all her mystic glory. She flashes that joyous smile, releases that spark from behind her eyes and (inevitably) welcomes in those who hurt and diminish her spirit. But she does receive some benefit from opening up her bleeding heart. Letting **someone** in feels...good, sometimes. It makes her feel human again, not so mechanical and unfeeling. She feels alive again.

The unfortunate part is that there is no happy medium. It’s a power switch, either on or off. Now that I know that it is possible to access both parts of my personality, it is up to you to flip the switch. You want the bitch? Force her to come out, breathing fire. You want the sweet and innocent girl? Give her a reason to show herself. I want so badly to live as that sweet and innocent little girl, but you fucks make it impossible. So, until that glorious moment when Utopia is released and my fragile persona can live free, you’re stuck with me, bitches.



Calculating the Future

Kristine Wagner

I’ve done more planning of my future with my calculator than with anyone else.

Future planning seems so much more tangible when you have numbers to work with.

How much will I have made by the end of college if I stick with my current job?

Would I be able to live on my own if I went full-time with my current job after college?

What are other jobs I could get with an English degree, and how much would they pay?

I return to my calculator, rechecking my numbers, adding in new factors for what may happen.

I return to my calculator to add up the hours I work so I can feel justified in my self-pity.

At the end of college, what will I have to show for it?

A good job with an English degree? That’s likely.

Friends I’d made in the spare time I didn’t have?

Anything could happen, which isn’t necessarily reassuring.

The future is so unpredictable.

But numbers, numbers are safe.

Numbers are constant.

If numbers change, we have a system to recalculate.

I’ve probably done more planning of my future with my calculator than with anyone else.

And perhaps that is part of the issue.





Fields Around the Radiation, *Rachel Schuldt*

I Got A Name

Denny Dennison

I believe in observing traditions. My most favored tradition would have to be my family nickname, Denny. Jim Croce once sang, “I got a name, and I carry it with me like my daddy did.” I relish moments when I hear that old nickname uttered aloud, and I feel waves of pride lapping against the shore of my soul. I have come to the realization that the sins of the former always befall the latter and that history does indeed repeat itself. With that thought in mind, I continually strive to bypass the inadequacies of my lineage simply by educating myself through their tales of trials and tribulations.

In my persistent search for guidance, I ran across a long forgotten 300-word article from my childhood; it was my great-grandfather’s obituary. Eighty-eight years of life had been condensed onto a single piece of paper, and for a moment his life seemed rather insignificant. However, he had left a very personal and powerful gift behind for those that followed: an autobiography. He had left all of us the option to heed his wisdom and see life the way he saw it should we ever get tired of making mistakes or of that stagnant, stale taste bad experiences leave. His personality is captured by both his prose and his tone, yet it is the passion conveyed within which hits home hardest. His “lust for life” can be ascertained by his quote, “I determined at an early age that I would not be the weak link in this proud lineage.” My greatest fear is to be that weak link in my lineage—to accidentally blind myself with ambition and plummet back to reality. For the first eight years of my life, conflicts arose and trouble brewed, but never once did I see him fret or worry or budge for anyone or anything, not even on that fateful January afternoon when he was unable to wake, and the Lord had another soul ready to take. With the conclusion of each page, each chapter of his life, my grasp on the true nature of living is enriched by the non-revolutionary idea that life simply goes on. Each of us wakes in the morning with a completely clean slate. I suggest finding some time to figure out what it is you want to get out of this life, for that inevitable day when we don’t wake is fast approaching.



Insecurity

Brigita Martin

Like monstrous tentacles, they wind around my body, constricting my throat, trapping my limbs, crushing my brain. There's quicksand inside, and the more I struggle against it, the faster I sink. There is neediness, fear, weakness, stupidity, paranoia, irritability, the powerful desire to run and hide, and envy—an overwhelming amount of each. It's a whirl of sick thoughts, culminating in the sticky, choking words: "I'm worthless."

It feels as though I have nothing to contribute to anything, that all of my thoughts and feelings are cheap cop-outs or part of some sappy sentimentality. They have little-to-no substance or they're shadows of the things I've stolen or copied from others, no matter how many I've heard or told myself that no one is truly original or can develop alone. Wasn't it Sir Isaac Newton who said that he stood on the shoulders of giants? Well, that was Newton—he was a giant himself, wasn't he? No one could tell him that he didn't have a right to study, a right to publish, a right to change the world.

I don't need to change the world, but I need to change myself. I'm not good enough to fund an independent life or to feel satisfied with the way I live my life. Too often I procrastinate until just hours before an assignment is due. I have blocks of time that I blow off because "I just don't care enough" to do something that I'm required to; I figure I'll get it done later, and too often I do, all the same wishing that I'd started earlier and had time to actually enjoy what I was doing. These aren't the habits of success.

I mean, where is the independence? The brave willingness to try something scary—like being yourself in front of people who intimidate you or to tackle that seemingly impossible math assignment—repeatedly until you're not scared anymore? Where is the hard-working hero that no one can stop, no matter how many times they get screwed over? All I see is the desire to be impressive, to have something meaningful to say—even though there is nothing to say, to have approval for even meager efforts, to have things to come easily, and a tendency to give up too easily. Those aren't any traits I admire. They're shallow and dependent on others.

What fuels these crippling doubts anyway? Is there flaming bigotry waiting to spring out of my head? Cruelty? A closet full of sadistic desires? No, but a person is more than the absence of things that cause them or others to recoil.

And what about the people who *have* had others beat and grind them down until they're all but destroyed? How could I be so self-centered as to feel depressed about myself when there are others who've been through too much and never deserved it? Those who never had anyone to remind them that they are human beings with their own worth and rights to live and to pursue their own happiness?

I don't know. Do the relatively tiny struggles I've had make me worthless in comparison? No. I still have a voice and a choice on how to use it. I can't reverse the horrors that anyone has been through. No one can. Regardless of what I or anyone else has been through, we're all here, surviving, trying to live, and however we got here is part of who we are. It does not invalidate any of us.

It's hard to convince myself that I am okay and that my mind is not a cheap knockoff of the real thing, but staying stuck isn't an option. Sometimes sleep helps, sometimes doing something, however small it might be, and sometimes just admitting that these horrible feelings exist help me breathe again. I heard that voicing a problem, a seemingly embarrassing desire, or anything that sits uncomfortably inside is the first step in dealing with it. I hope it's true. At the least, getting out of my head feels good, so thanks for listening.



The Tale of a Strong Family

Jaymie-Rae Martin

Back home in Hawai'i, just about everyone knows about the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor. Of course we would. It happened on one of our islands. It's a part of our personal history so we should know about it. On the North American continent, however, it's a known event that could be looked up in a history book, if desired. It's not something that mainlanders know off the top of their head. I suppose it's not that surprising. I should be satisfied with the fact that mainlanders know it's what hurled the United States into World War II.

At the time, Hawai'i was not a state of the US. It wasn't declared a state until 1959, but the US Pacific fleet was there, and it was an easy target for the Japanese. The US knew of Japan's imminent attack and did nothing to increase the security. When a large group of aircraft were spotted flying towards the island, the naval base thought it was their men as they were expecting such a group to arrive. Thus, they sounded no alarm to warn people before the attack started. The barrage lasted for two hours and resulted in nearly 20 American vessels plus 200 airplanes being destroyed. More than 2,000 American soldiers and sailors died, and over 1,000 were wounded. After the attack, President Franklin Roosevelt declared war on the Japanese, and thus, the US became involved with WWII. However, that day, it wasn't just American soldiers whose lives were lost or ruined. Local civilians were also hurt and killed, and the Americans discriminated against and distrusted the Japanese-American families. One of those families was my grandmother's.

My great-grandmother Toyo Nitani, whom I call *Baban*, was born and raised in Yamaguchi, Japan. She was 19 years old when she was given a picture of a Japanese man living in Hawai'i, and she was then told that he would be her husband. At the beginning of the 20th century, photography modernized the tradition of arranged marriages in Asia. In place of face-to-face meetings, families, and matchmakers used photographs to introduce prospective couples living in different parts of the country or even across the ocean. Between 1907 and 1924, more than 20,000 young Japanese, Okinawan, and Korean women journeyed to Hawai'i to become the wives of men they knew only through photographs and letters. They were called "picture brides." Perhaps it was love at first sight, or perhaps my *Baban* believed in the tradition of parents choosing a suitable life-partner for her, but she was one of just a handful of women



The Crew is Still Up There, *Sergio A. Poveda*



who came to the island of Oahu in 1928. She married her husband the very day they officially met.

The husband she married that day was her first husband. My *Baban* married twice, and her first husband was not my great-grandfather. He was a construction worker at Punch Bowl, a volcanic crater which is known today for its Memorial Cemetery, and one day, he got hurt in a work accident and unfortunately died from his injuries. My *Baban* was pregnant with her first child—a son—when he passed. It is unknown for certain if my *Baban* was in the middle of her pregnancy or if she had just given birth to her son when a friend of her first husband married her for honor soon afterwards. That friend was my great-grandfather. The Japanese interpretation of honor can be confusing at times, but my great-grandfather was friends with *Baban*'s first husband, and she would have been raising a child all on her own. So he married her, and then they had six girls together—one of them being my grandmother.

Unlike my *Baban*, my great-grandfather was born and raised in Hawai'i. Like *Baban*, his mother came to Japan as a picture bride in the beginning of the 20th century, and his parents worked in the plantation fields. It was a common occupation for Asians, including the Chinese and the Filipino immigrants, but the jobs varied from working in the cane fields to working in the pineapple fields. Both husband and wife would work long hours of hard labor for 65 cents a day, every day, and there were extractions from the pay when they bought necessary things from the shops such as food and/or clothing. A month's worth of labor could be only \$10 instead of \$19 if the workers didn't properly save their money. Then, if a couple had children, the women would bring them to the plantation fields and had them wait together while the parents worked. My great-grandfather was a worker in the Ewa plantation fields. Since technology was introduced to help with the labor, my great-grandfather was a mechanic in the machine shop fixing trucks and other equipment.

When my *Baban* married her second husband, she did not have to transfer jobs. It was the time of the Depression when she came to Hawai'i, and she was able to find work at the rice fields in Waipahu. In those times, what was good about working in the rice fields was *Baban* could earn her own food for her family instead of spending a lot of money in the plantation shop to buy it. Rice is a big part of Japanese culture, and in many cases, it is the lifeblood of their diet despite its lack of nutritional value.

Another way my great-grandparents were able to afford food without spending a lot was fishing. In the Waipahu area, there was a fishing

village near Chocolate Beach. It was called that because instead of sand, there was red dirt that made the water look like chocolate. In the present time, Chocolate Beach is called West Loch. My great-grandparents would send their children, once they were old enough, to go and do the fishing. Then, when my great-grandparents saved enough money, they were able to afford their own house and start their own business. My *Baban* became a vegetable planter and would sell vegetables and fruits in the store they opened in front of their house. It was like a little grocery store. While she was busy gardening, she would have her children watch the store. Later, they expanded their business to selling vegetables in trucks—like an ice cream truck for produce instead.

In a sense, it almost sounded like my great-grandparents were doing well for themselves to raise their children. They were smart with their food, *Baban* had her own business, and they were getting by. Then in 1940, my great-grandfather passed away from a heart attack. According to my grandmother, the day before he died he had to donate blood. In those times, blood transfusion was not perfected, and she still believes that an air bubble must have gotten into his veins, or it was an infection that led to his death. Whichever the reason, he died the next day of a heart attack. My *Baban* was then left to raise seven children by herself (or six, rather, since by that time her son was 17 years old).

Then a year later, December 7, 1941, the Japanese nation bombed Pearl Harbor and life became that much harder for *Baban* and her family.

On December 7, 1941, my grandmother and a few of her sisters were at Lower Village. It was just a normal Sunday morning for them. They were getting ready to go to church at the Honganji temple in Ewa when they all heard the faint sounds of bombs. Everyone in the neighborhood ran outside of their homes to see, but all they saw were funnels of smoke emitting from the Pearl Harbor naval base. No one understood what was happening at first. They had heard news on the radio that the US and Japan were not on good terms and that Japan threatened to bomb the US. The Americans obviously didn't take them seriously.

One of the pilots in the Japanese planes saw my grandmother and her family at the park looking over Chocolate Beach. According to my grandmother's perspective, a pilot saw young Japanese children and took the risk of flying down close enough to motion them to hide. At that time, the Americans fought back. Guns and bombs were going off, and when *Baban* saw that their house was being shot at, she knew that they were at war.



My great-grandmother and the other elders told everyone to run for the hospital that was down the hill. They believed it was safe for no enemy or ally would dare to bomb a hospital. However, they were like running cattle. My grandmother got separated from her family as all of her siblings and her mother scattered in the crowd. My grandmother remembers the children and women who were running beside her died before her eyes from either being shot at or from getting caught in the explosion of the bombs. They weren't hit by the Japanese war planes, but by the American fire. Since the Japanese planes were flying so close to the running civilians, urging them to hurry and hide, my grandmother and her family were just caught in the middle of the crossfire as the Americans aimed for their enemy.

My grandmother did not survive that day unscratched. Some of the pieces of the bomb had cut her knee and pierced through her flesh. Her wound wasn't serious and was easily treatable. However, she was alone. She arrived at the hospital with no idea of the whereabouts of her mother or her siblings. She was a scared eight-year-old little girl on her own. The battle outside was still going on, and all she could do was huddle against the hallway wall of the hospital with other scared people who came for shelter, waiting for the horrifying nightmare to be over.

When the barrage had ended and the Japanese left after their successful attack, the hospital told everyone that unless they had serious injuries that needed dire attention they needed to leave. My grandmother hadn't gotten her knee treated at the time, but in the midst of her confusion and fear, her brother finally found her. She was so happy to see someone of her family alive and broke down crying by the time he reached her. He had looked everywhere for her, and he told her that their mother and the other girls were safe and alive, although one of my grandmother's sisters suffered a serious injury to her arm. Similar to how my grandmother was wounded, pieces of a bomb penetrated her sister's arm which resulted in her staying overnight in the hospital. However, my grandmother got her knee treated and returned home that day.

The next day, it was declared that the US was at war with Japan.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the US army anticipated that the Japanese would land in Hawai'i. Troops took positions around the perimeter of all main Hawaiian Islands, and barriers were placed on beaches in order to prevent aircraft landings. All airports were taken over by the army, and private planes were grounded. Government buildings, like the Iolani Palace for example, were turned into military offices. Military courts replaced civil courts, and military law was the law of the land for

both civilians and military personnel. The Hawaiian Islands practically turned into one huge military base. Japanese-owned businesses were shut down, and many who were considered dangerous were arrested by the local police, FBI, and the army.

For weeks, my grandmother's life had gone from hard work to a living hell. No one would trust a Japanese person, even when they declared themselves Japanese-Americans. Families of other races would tell their children not to associate with them, and fliers were posted everywhere of how to distinguish a Japanese from a Chinese by analyzing the shape of the eyes. Japanese churches were being burnt down, and *Baban* and her family heard of families in the mainland who were immediately evicted from their homes and transported to one of the ten "relocation centers" in California, Idaho, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, and Arkansas—where conditions of the internment camps were poor and extremely overcrowded. Even Japanese families in Hawai'i were being taken away from their homes into detention centers if there was even a slight suspicion of them being spies for their home country.

It wasn't until mid-January when the FBI came to my grandmother's house and searched their home. There was news of these searches happening to other Japanese families before, so my *Baban* gathered every item she possessed from her homeland and any pictures of her family in Japan and buried them under the house. That way when the FBI arrived, they wouldn't be able to take them away from their home under suspicion of being Japanese spies. They were safe from the concentration camps. However, the radios and any sort of communication were taken away in precaution. My grandmother's brother, being 18 years old, enlisted in the American army. He was the man of the house after my great-grandfather passed away, and after the war broke out, it was either enlist or go to jail for the Japanese-American males.

My *Baban* was a very strong woman. For years, she took care of her girls on her own and she never gave up no matter how hard things had gotten. She still grew her produce and tried to sell it to the workers in the plantation fields to pay for the bills of the house. My grandmother remembers the days when *Baban* wouldn't come home till really late at night. My grandmother wasn't the eldest, but she also played her part in being strong for the family. While her two elder sisters were old enough to work in the sugarcane fields or the pineapple fields, my grandmother would watch over the produce shop after school, take care of her younger siblings, cook and do other multiple chores around the house while their mother was away. School was almost unbearable for her at times: she was called a

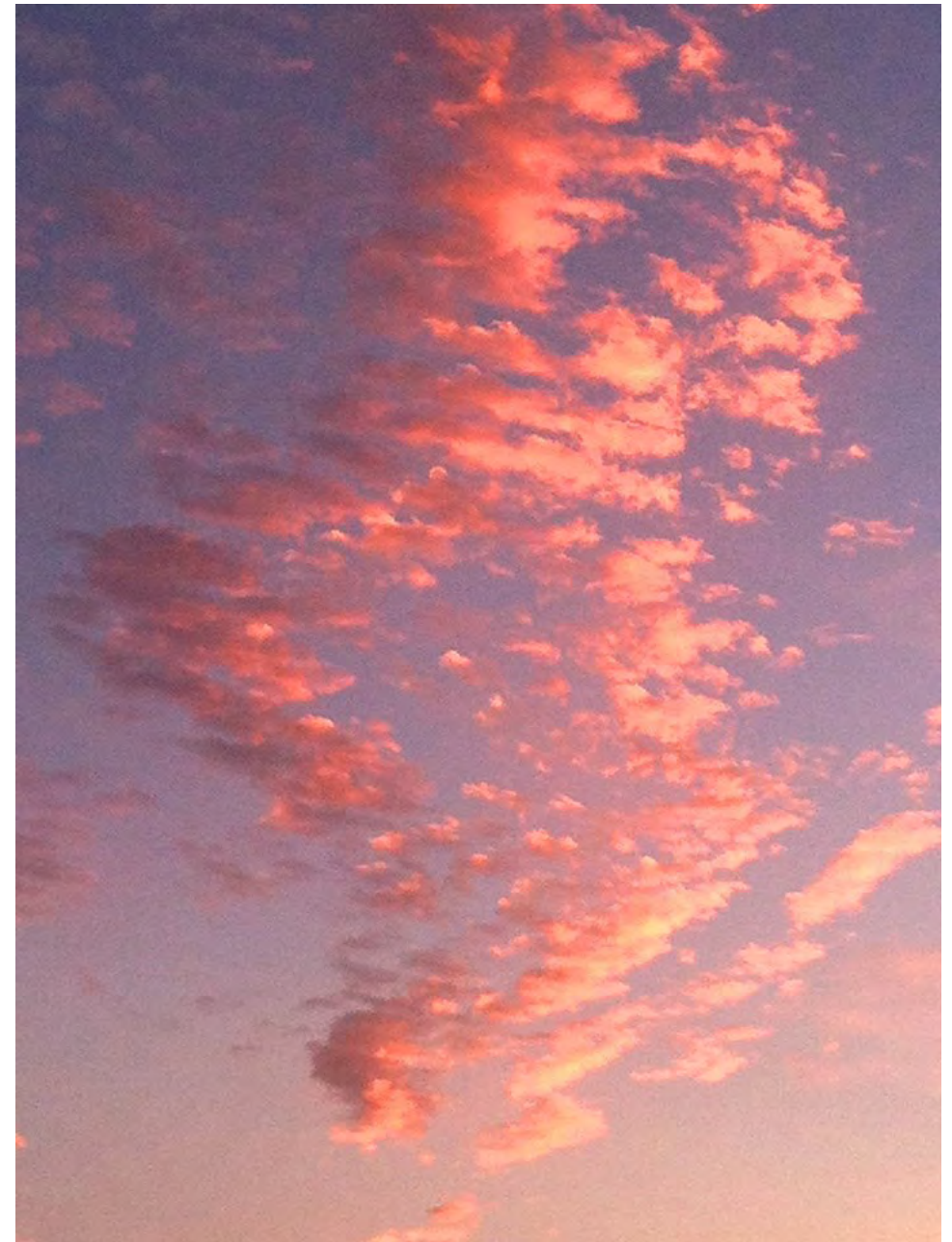


“filthy Jap” and she had stones thrown at her. Every year for three years, until the war was over, the FBI would come to their house to search, and every year, they would find nothing. My grandmother called it lucky that the detention centers were so packed that they could not hold everyone—otherwise, how could her family fit?

Then, after the war, after the atomic bomb in 1945, things had not immediately gone back to normal for my grandmother or her family. Her brother had survived the war and returned home, but he was never the same. My grandmother may have been too young to realize right away the difference, but the more she thought about it when she was older, she was able to recognize how quickly her brother moved out of their home for a place of his own and for solitude. War tends to have that effect on people. The things you see and experience are not so easily forgotten. For my grandmother, it was the same for her at home. No children of other races still wanted to be friends with a Jap, and business was still very hard for *Baban* to sell to people outside of the plantation. Eventually, she started doing laundry for the Filipino men of the plantation who had no wives to do it for them. Then some of my grandmother’s siblings became sick and nearly died when they were really young. My grandmother was grateful that it wasn’t the atomic poisoning from the bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki that was slowly killing other people whom she knew. By the end of 1945, all of the internment camps were closed down as if they never existed—trying to erase the shame of how the US treated their people. It wasn’t until 1968 when the US government tried to pay compensation to the Japanese-American citizens for the property they had lost. Approximately 60,000 people who were able to survive received it.

The damage had been done, and it cannot be so easily erased. But life continues to move on. The only thing my grandmother and her family could do was move forward or forever be trapped in the dark shadows of that past. You may not forgive, and it’ll be much harder to forget, but it is the events of our past that shape us, and reveal the roads that’ll lead us to our future.

My middle name is Toyomi—named after my *Baban*. I have never met her for she died years before I was born, but listening to her story and the trials she overcame with my grandmother, I am more than proud and honored to be named after a strong woman. And for my grandmother who told me the story, I could tell that she felt the same way about her mother.



Red Dragon, Sergio A. Poveda



Your Love

Taylor Martin

Happiness has always eluded me. It has been dangled right above my nose. I could smell its delicious fruits; I could stretch my tongue and just taste the nectar. I've lived in a world where I believe that to be how life worked. That's **just how it was**.

Because of you that has changed. After receiving my first juicy bite, I realized the extent of my hunger. I've been famished! I will never starve myself again! I will fill myself up with your smile, your laugh, that look in your eyes as they look back at mine. I will drink in your smell. Gorge on the connection between your heart and mine. Never to be full.

Others have come before you. They have taken my spirit and soul; I am a willing victim of the soul-suck. Never knowing that True Love happens when you're also being filled, not just pouring yourself out onto the floor at someone's undeserving boots. Why give anyone the opportunity to walk their filthy boots across your exposed soul? I know now. That was never love; that was selfishness.

This? Us? **Selflessness**. Extravagant giving of souls. Not only seeking to fill each other's emotional tank, but seeking to cause an overflow. Giving in excess due to a deep desire to contribute to the happiness of the other. My happiness seeps out of my pores, flows like a soft glow from my skin, leaking into the surrounding world.

Your giving brings joy to my spirit, spills out, and seeks to alleviate the sorrows of this world.

Your love is powerful. It stands, in all its glory, unsheathed. Fearless. Unashamed.

A heavenly gift that I could work forever for and never come close to deserving. For that I am eternally indebted to the powers-that-be while simultaneously feeling a sense of debilitating anxiety at the thought of losing this. I'd do anything to keep this. Forever.

You, me, and our overflowing sea of happiness.

Poetry



Lion's Feet, Zac Farmer



Blanketed Mind

Bret Lundstrom

My bed doesn't feel anything
My dreams have abandoned me
Sleep is so far off in the depths
Deaf to my every silent plea

The sheep sheared and sold off
Snow blankets these sheets
As truth slowly numbs the mind
Nothing enlightened save the streets

The quiet ring of the day's work
Still echoes back and forth in my ears
My mind races to tomorrow
Filling me with regret and fears

Trapped on this slab of predicaments
The seeds of possible problems grow
Nourished by the waters of loneliness
Waiting for more troubled seeds to sow

Simple sorrows to quintessential quarrels
Tossing and turning across my mind
Answers are nowhere among the stars
They must be here in this vacuum to find

There must be a way to fix all of this
A lost light somewhere along the cave walls
Some bright light waiting to be crossed into
A quiet wait for the morning's calls

Days of amusement and light broken by
A chain of thoughts brought along by night
Nothingness will save me from my torment
Finally a rift and a glimpse of the light

Light saves the slave of the frozen night
Thawing the contempt that slowly crept in
Being bound by the fears of time and self
Slowly and surely unraveling from within



Christmas Traditions

Jeffrey Yates

Snow crunches happily under his feet
As Santa Claus strolls down North Pole Street.

The toys are all ready, for the ride of the year,
“Tonight’s the night!” whisper all the reindeer.

They hear a jingle, the old merry bells.
In all of their hearts, joy and merriment dwells.

Rudolph paces at the head of the line,
And as he gets excited his red nose starts to shine.

He misses Clarice and their young reindeer child,
But right now he must focus for tonight will be wild!

The little kids will awaken, in the reflection of snow.
With feet moving swiftly, to the Christmas tree they’ll go.

They’ll see all the presents, wrapped in reds and greens.
They’ll never be this happy again it seems!

They’ll pull their parents out of bed into the soft morning light,
Yelling, “You were right! Santa Claus came last night!!”

The parents will smile and share a secret wink,
For that’s exactly what they hoped the children would think.

They’ll rise up out of bed and follow the kids down the hall,
“Hurry, you guys!” the kids will call.

Rudolph grins as the scene plays in his mind.
It never gets old, even after hundreds of times.

But now it’s time to fly, through the cold winter night.
For St. Nick has arrived, a face of pure delight!



Space, *Mai Urai*



“Merry Christmas!” he bellows, out into the wind.
As he takes off in his sleigh, millions of presents to send.

A Cornered Shadow

Bret Lundstrom

That particular corner seemed a bit darker
Tragedy traced its roots from the corner
Slowly growing outward like a vicious vine
Planted there by a cold clouded mind
Two eyes taking in dark like oil through a drain
The dark swirls outward from that corner
Seeping into the many facets of the room
Staying there and waiting until morning
Light calls out the darkness from its place
Yet the corner still remains steadfast
Light can't seem to cross into that point
Those boards and drywall meet with intentions of folly
A ritual of construction to thief off grief
The sun wasn't built into this picture
No life could ever spring from that corner
It preys upon what participates in life
Knowing full well it will never do so
It will reside in its cavernous corner
Slowly seeping outwards
To be beaten back
One ray at a time





Flooding, *Kristine Wagner*

Crying

Kristine Wagner

Every parent who knows anything
Expects crying after their baby is born

But not like this.

Not as the baby lies still,
Swaddled in blankets
Which can never make him warm
Not while standing next to a tiny blue coffin
Which matches their son's tiny blue socks

They expected crying
But not from themselves
As their relatives sat in rows of pews
And wiped their eyes

Not as the father tried his best
To be strong for his wife at the funeral
But once he went home
Cried like a baby.



Taking Time to Remember

Bret Lundstrom

Fallout radiated through the room
Fighting apparent with the gloom
Screams echoed through the hall
Slowly dying against each wall

Tears flowing and hands in head
Much remorse shown for the dead
No comprehension as to why
Her poor husband had to die

Hands on shoulders and hands in hands
Guess it's a matter of glass and sands
Oh how it's scary to feel so numb
Just sitting here in my own glum

Father taken and I feel nothing
Isn't this supposed to be crushing
My best mate and dad all in one
Oh how now I remember all the fun

It may feel fleeting, but they're still there
All the memories that we got to share
Stuck in time like stars against the sky
They take me up and won't let me cry

He knows my thoughts and feels my soul
He knows all about how he made my heart whole
No tears here coming from my eyes
No matter how hard my mind tries

He was taken, he just had to leave
It's not Death's fault, so I don't grieve
At least not with tears and sorrows
For he won't be there for the tomorrows

I'll miss all of the yesterdays no doubt
It's just I find no reason to pout
Because I had the number one dad
And today is the day I realize I'm glad



Ed

Hanna Hollis

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,
you deemed me Ed.
When we met I was sturdy and new;
you were all but two.

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,
you came to me when you were full of dread.
I was named commander of the host
to guard you from that nighttime ghost.

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,
I listened as you read.
I heard of wizards and green eggs and ham,
but you also read of the Great I Am.

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,
creativity blossomed within your head.
I watched as you scribbled works of prose,
but you never finished any of those.

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,
you shared with me your dream of a thoroughbred.
I was no longer sturdy and new,
when that dream of yours came true.

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,
what a wonderful life you've led!
I watched as high school came
and you climbed your way to a kind of fame.

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,
senior, Drum Major, a plumed helmet upon your head.
I watched your pattern become precise.
You found that each practice was worth the price.

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,

"1..2..3..4..dit..dit" you metrically said.
Then they began, that proud Anna Coyote Band!
For eight minutes they marched and

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,
you recounted how the band nearly came out ahead.
Then to robotics your attentions turned
and the state championship your team earned.

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,
through high school, it seems, you've sped.
I can tell you're ready to turn to the next page
but already you've crossed the stage.

Nestled tightly in the corner of the bed,
nineteen years have passed since you named me Ed.
We have moved ten hours away from our home town
to master your skills and finally write those stories down.



A Lovely Still Life

Bret Lundstrom

Gentle gazes and French hedge mazes
Masking paths of recreation
Primrose paths and grassy growth
Pleasant on the noble eyes
Listening to whispering leaves
The glee of trees to look at a garden
Watching on flowers of love
Catching rays on green hills
Sprouting drama and dreams
Lasting relationships across the grass
To be trimmed in unison
To trap people in peace
Along lakeside shade
Shores nipped at by waves
Pushed along by gentle breezes
That tug and play with blouses and hair
As pretty girls try to caress
Their hair behind curious ears
As a man of such wonder
Just happens to stop by
To watch life in its setting
Of vivid parks in the spring



Cat, Haruka Kawata



A Letter

Taylor Johnson

Dear friend,

It seems like forever since I've seen you
It's been months since I even heard from you
Glad to know you still care.

I was a bit worried last year
When you would reply in single words
Hours after I had texted you.

I thought our friendship may be slipping away
But when you stopped replying at all
That finally put my doubts to rest.

I guess all our fun times didn't mean as much as I thought they did
I guess all the secrets we shared were not signs of trust after all
And the declarations of friendship were just social obligation.

I guess you were just putting up with me there at the end
I guess you thought letting me hang until I finally figured it out
Was easier than you breaking it to me yourself.

Don't try to protest
I've seen your Twitter feed
I know the truth.

You were "so bored" and "needed someone to hang out with"
But you never found time for me in your life
I'm not sure what happened, but I have come to accept that it did.

So this is me moving on, coming out of my denial of hope
Letting you live your life since you've already moved on
And not sending this letter.



There's No Way You Can Avoid Taking Sides, *Sergio A. Poveda*



Mrs. Snow

Bret Lundstrom

She had a flirtatious frost about her
Something cold and lonely flaked
Beautiful and bitter
Just a bit of frozen glitter
Unforgiving and fatal
One day she shows up
And blankets with inconvenience
Frolicking with the kids
While you spin in frustration
With your lack of traction
Still she falls for you
Despite your lack of interest
All you want to do
Is to just get over this hill
But she's everywhere
And she's going nowhere
Which is where you're headed
So best dress up
Just for the occasion
Because she's showing up
Without a reservation



Lady Mary of the Lake, *Jaymie-Rae Martin*



Never Mind

Brigita Martin

Hey, how's it going?

Fine.

What are you working on?

Just stuff. Why do you ask?

Never mind.

Do you want to watch a movie with me?

Okay.

What are you sitting over there for? How about we sit on the couch?

Why? I can see it.

Never mind.

Do you want to go to dinner?

No, I have a headache.

But it's our anniversary...

I just can't deal with it tonight. Not now.

Okay... never mind.

Why don't you ever talk to me?

You didn't ask.

Do I have to ask for everything? Why can't you be more sensitive?

But I ask you how you're doing, and you turn me away. Do you think that that invites me to open up?

What?! I don't do that! How could you say that?

Never mind.

A Simple Question

Bret Lundstrom

How humbling is a question

To put truth into suspension

To doubt a dogmatic state

To break an unwavering fate

Where to start on this clever ball

Questions are what grant freedom

They are what undermine power

Anyone can question anything

Something that needs an answer

They free and connect it all

What is living without a question

Living and being are not one

Seeing and thinking are not one

Knowledge isn't safe from inspection

Funny, it's why we took a fall



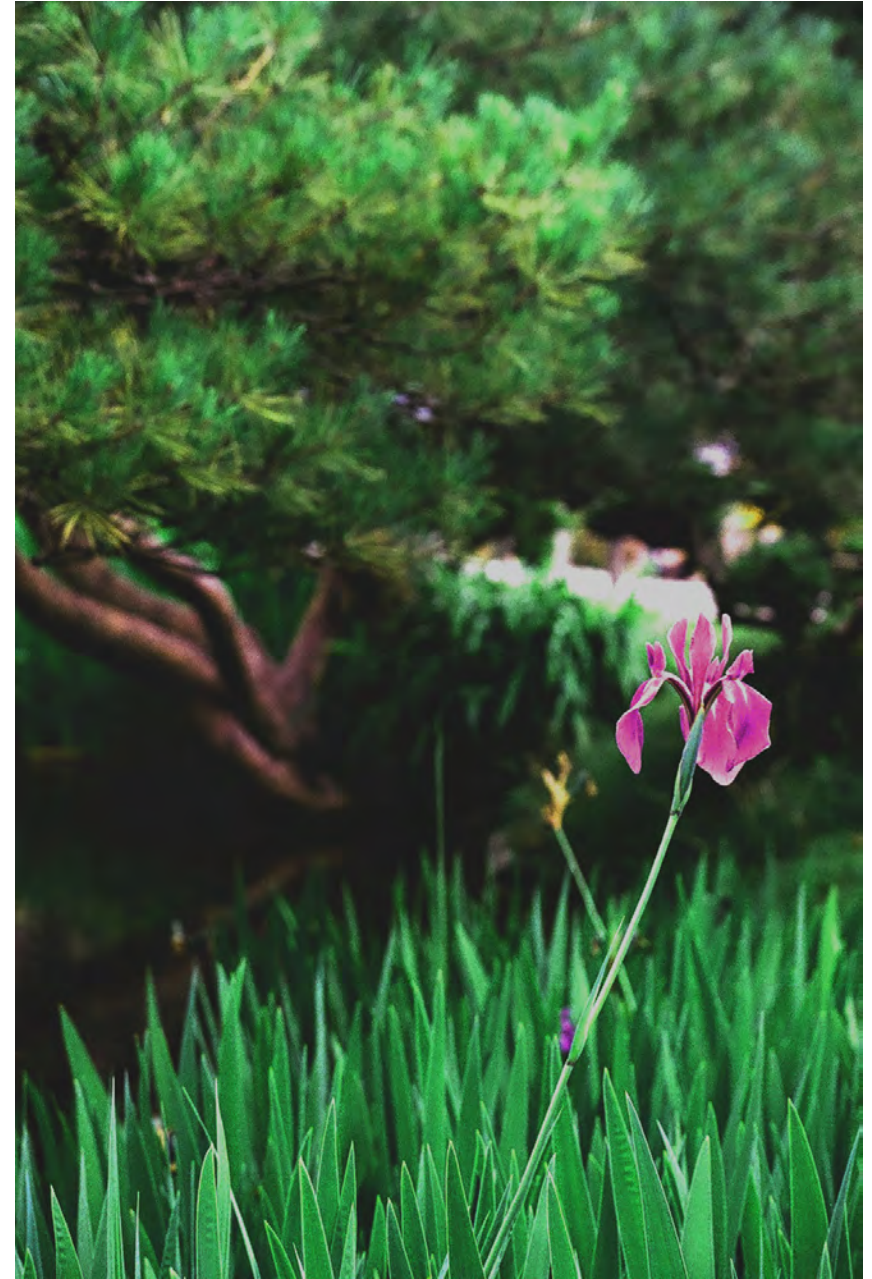
Perfection in Nature

Jeffrey Yates

A pure, clear droplet of skywater true
On a lofty flower petal, velvety blue.

Both smooth and soft, human touch would destroy
Sleeps in perfect creation, the meaning of joy.
Dropped on this leaf, surrounded by color;
Born out of harshness, now the world's lover.
Magnifying the canvas of God's greatest painting,
Just a piece of the puzzle, beauty sustaining.
The menace of the storm rumbles far away,
Left behind a present, for the young new day.
Created from sorrow, a cloud's demise;
Her simple perfection, never despised.
Fireball surging, warm in the distance,
As dazzling beauty reflects in an instance.

Sparkling, shining, evaporation sets in
Leaving us wishing for perfection again.



A Fleeting Moment, Mai Urai



Successful Contemplation

Bret Lundstrom

Blissfully bankrupt of thought
As if it were taken from me
Debts of doubt long overdue
All confidence confiscated
Taken by broken ventures
Maybe not even real attempts
But the failure feels very real
Failure to venture out
Due to paupered self-prejudice
And pointless undue pride
Which I probably haven't earned
So I have fallen to ground zero
So that must make me ground zero
What a perfect place to start
How beautiful is the beginning
So why not try to start here
Credit completely destroyed
But someone will risk the investment
I'll earn my return
Properly show that success
Is much more than a spreadsheet

Today, Everything Was Grey

Faith Schallert

Today,
Everything was grey,
The wind was malleable
Bent into whistles
Of wished nostalgia
Hammered memories of middle school
Just beneath the clouds,
She thought I wouldn't notice
If her sneaky Impressionism
Outlined a little girl in the stars
Like an acute constellation
But I did.
She was only 9
The first time she realized
Blade and friendship were synonymous.
They taped signs to her back
Like lost and found stickers
Reminding kids of how short she really was.
To them she was midget girl,
And to herself she was somewhere
Between the black and blue
Bruises looked like tire stains
And the bus driver knew her by first name,
Her and them,
The other girls who stoned her with callous
Diction
Needle-like they jabbed her with snide remarks
And ripped her of her humanity,
There
Is a classroom full of kids who also know what it's like to be small,
Bullies know little of love,
And mountains of heartache,
They tell me that everyone is a bully,
We're all meant to be bullies,
Bullied,
Buried...



Deep into the spongy gusto of hierarchy,
Resurrection knows of no reversion.
They cannot simply seek forgiveness of their sins,
Their hands are still tape-stained with her sorrows
These kids try to brush off their pain
But it is the suicide hotline poster
Hanging on the cafeteria wall
That reminds her that death is
A leech stuck to her heart.
On the good days the bus driver won't let them
Shave her head bald with their whispers
She is anorexic,
A side effect: hair loss
They call her little piggy,
They call her retard,
They call her dyke,
They call her Oreo
They call her nerd because she'd rather
Live in the climax of a novel
Than the sidelines of her life,
"Go kill yourself" and "I wish you were dead"
Are captionized on her Instagram photos
She wonders if death will make her beautiful
So she bottles up her courage
And swallows a bottle of pain killers
She found in her parents' medicine cabinet.
Her mouth was the eulogy to her parents,
A self-hate letter
Why did they not make her more beautiful?
How could they not know?
A child does not simply place themselves in a position
To be picked out and bruised up,
They are not spoiled fruit,
They are casually waiting
For their parched lungs
To be filled with more than
Tainted water and self-help pills.
19.6 percent of students reported being bullied
In the last school year,
7 percent of those students

Escaped a life that called them worthless,
They were worth more than italicized font.
Today,
Everything was grey,
I put on my little black dress
And crossed a bare road,
Searched for hope
In the constellations
And lay flowers on her grave.





Flower of Fire, Sergio A. Poveda

A Drink and a Thought

Bret Lundstrom

A gratifying grasp filled the hand
Satisfying the intent to reach for
With purpose and dignity
It had a sense of both
Knowing exactly what was wanted
Grieving and celebrating
Thinking and amusing
Growing with time
And dying with time
We're all in understanding
A simple grasp of a glass
Grains of sand finely fired
For a purpose of destination
To get to a place of peace
Trying to convince us
We're not just dust
A few sips of sedation
With intent and moderation
Acknowledging how perverse
Slipping overboard can drown
A celestial canvas of clarity
The basic principles of thought
Though numbing and filtering
Simply saving the everlasting flow
Of the drying nature of thinking
Dumping grain after grain of sand
Into a wavering ocean of ambiguity
Until it is a desert
Of seeming certainty
Fear firing the landscape
With heat and contempt
Just a bit of fluid
Can cradle the questions
Of barren beliefs
Bring a bit of bliss
To the otherwise hopeless



Fear of addiction in sight
Just not the intention
A bit of glee
With a touch of free
Making a wayward walk
With a faint forceful gulp
Brisk endings
And just a touch of gin

Contributors



Sunrise at Fisherman's Bastion, *Kristine Wagner*



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Contributors

Buster Baxter may or may not be Kristine Wagner's spirit animal. Kristine has survived being a student at Lindenwood for two years thus far, and has great aspirations of avoiding death a little longer. Kristine's works have been displayed in prestigious venues such as *Arrow Rock* and her parents' refrigerator.

Zachary "Denny" Dennison is a senior at Lindenwood University pursuing his degree in Criminal Justice/Legal Studies with a Marketing minor. His original essay, "I Got a Name" is dedicated to his late great-grandfather, Ernest Howard "Denny" Dennison, Jr. He gives thanks every day for the honor & vigilance he instilled in him.

Zac Farmer went to study abroad in Italy in the summer of 2015. He was asked to illustrate one important concept he experienced. Zac noticed that of all the beautiful, ornate architecture, the lampposts were by far the most brilliant. He uses a pen to experience the same delicate craftsmanship of a metalsmith.

Hanna Hollis is a senior at Lindenwood University and is studying Literature and Creative Writing. She hopes that *Arrow Rock* is just the beginning of her published career and looks forward to the future works she will write.

Taylor Johnson is a pen name. Because the only thing more angsty than writing angsty poetry is writing angsty poetry and submitting it under a pen name. The angst is real.

Haruka Kawata is a junior at Lindenwood University. She is originally from Osaka, Japan. She is a Studio Art major and a Psychology minor and has taken a digital photography class in 2014. She loves drawing, painting, cooking, dancing, listening to music, playing the piano, singing, swimming, playing sports, and photography.

Brenden M. Kleiboeker is a senior at Lindenwood University with hopes of graduating in the current century. However, like most, the university is just so selfishly in love with him as a person that it continues to change the graduation requirements to keep him here forever. He's perfect.

Bret Lundstrom is current, up-to-date, and happening. Recent polling has shown slight slips in creativity and work ethic, but these are simply numbers, and numbers cannot comprehend the simplicity of this individual. He is like the mysterious, endless, and wonderful vacuum of space: empty.

Brigita Martin is a senior in Computer Science who dabbles in sketching and stringing words together. She likes werewolves, superheroes, games, and building catlike creatures out of paper mache and things left around the house.... Thanks for reading!

Jaymie-Rae Martin, born in Oahu, Hawai'i, was conceived from the ashes and raised by the culture and life-stories of the ghosts of her ancestors. She embraces the beauty of darkness and the innocence of the misunderstood. She considers her taste creepy and isn't afraid to admit it.

Taylor Martin is an aspiring author. She spends a good portion of her time bartending locally or attending class at Lindenwood University. In her free time she loves to read and write. She has the heart of a vagabond and the determination to share her stories with the world!

Sergio A. Poveda is known as "Gato" & has a notable Ecuadorian accent. After several ankle injuries, he switched shooting soccer balls for shooting photos. He holds a degree in International Relations, and his chief mantra is "better to create than praying for luck." Like the Energizer Bunny, he is building his first photography book. He manages nothinghereismotionless.wordpress.com and [@adir_sach](https://www.instagram.com/adir_sach).

Faith Schallert was born and raised in Saint Louis. She is an English major. She has been writing poetry since the age of eight but started doing spoken word poetry three years ago. She has been very successful with spoken word and has won many awards. You can check out her spoken word on Facebook by searching "faithschallertpoetry".

Rachel Schuldt's roommate Kristine said she would allow her to continue living if she submitted to *Arrow Rock*. And so she did. Now her immortality is assured and world domination is in sight.



Mai Urai is currently a sophomore studying mathematics, pre-engineering, and music. She works as a photographer at *The Legacy*. She feels lots of joy when she takes pictures. Also, she has been volunteering for TedxGatewayarch as a photographer. There is no end to her curiosity.

Jeffrey Yates transferred to Lindenwood in the fall of 2015 to study both English and Secondary Education while being a member of the Olympic Weightlifting team. His hometown is Potosi, Missouri, and he is the fourth of eight children.

Arrow Rock is currently accepting submissions for Issue VIII. Please email your poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, plays, photography or artwork to

ArrowRock@Lindenwood.edu

To view previous issues of the *Arrow Rock* literary magazine visit

www.lindenwood.edu/ArrowRock.



Acknowledgments

Arrow Rock would like to thank Dr. Mike Whaley for his support of this project.

Arrow Rock would also like to express our gratitude to this issue's contributors for their fearlessness and honesty.

Finally, we'd like to thank our readers. *Arrow Rock* now belongs to you.

We hope you've enjoyed issue VII.

***Arrow Rock* Literary Journal Mission Statement**

Arrow Rock is committed to promoting and providing a mature environment for Lindenwood University students to publish quality fiction, nonfiction, poetry, essays, plays, and artwork, while showcasing the integrity and the individual talents of each writer or artist.

The staff and contributors of *Arrow Rock* strive to produce a literary journal that interests and inspires.



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