

Legacy 2016 XV

Sonder

Reading Area Community College

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Acknowledgments

The staff at *Legacy* is excited to bring you this year's edition. The amount of talent at RACC is truly amazing, and we are honored to be able to put that on display for you. First and foremost, we would like to thank our contributing writers and artists. Their outstanding visuals and stimulating literature helped make *Legacy XV* possible. We would also like to thank their teachers and everyone in their lives who fostered their creativity.

Special thanks to our fellow students, Rachel Dodson, Esteban Hernandez, Ninoshka Martinez-Hernandez, Jeremy Wolf, and Zainab Young, for their friendship and help at the initial stages of our project, and especially to Rachel Chlebowski for the original suggestion of this year's theme, *sonder*. And we would like to thank our faculty advisor, Dr. Bahar Diken, for another year of service to our publication. We also wish to express our appreciation to Dr. Anna Weitz, our President, and RACC's administration for their commitment to creating student success stories.

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To the Reader

This volume of *Legacy* has been created with the idea that a single person's road is never traveled alone. Along our own paths, we meet strangers who become close friends and peripheral acquaintances; and we encounter many others that we generalize from a glance—as if we knew what sort of story theirs is, and many more that we do not even notice—as though they were invisible. We are so wrapped up in our own little worlds, our own worries, struggles, and ambitions, that we become oblivious to the lives of those passersby and comfortably distanced from their realities. They play into our lives only tangentially until we realize that each person we come upon has a life as complex and intense as our own. Every one of them experiences their own unique existence, only running across our own at a few intersections.

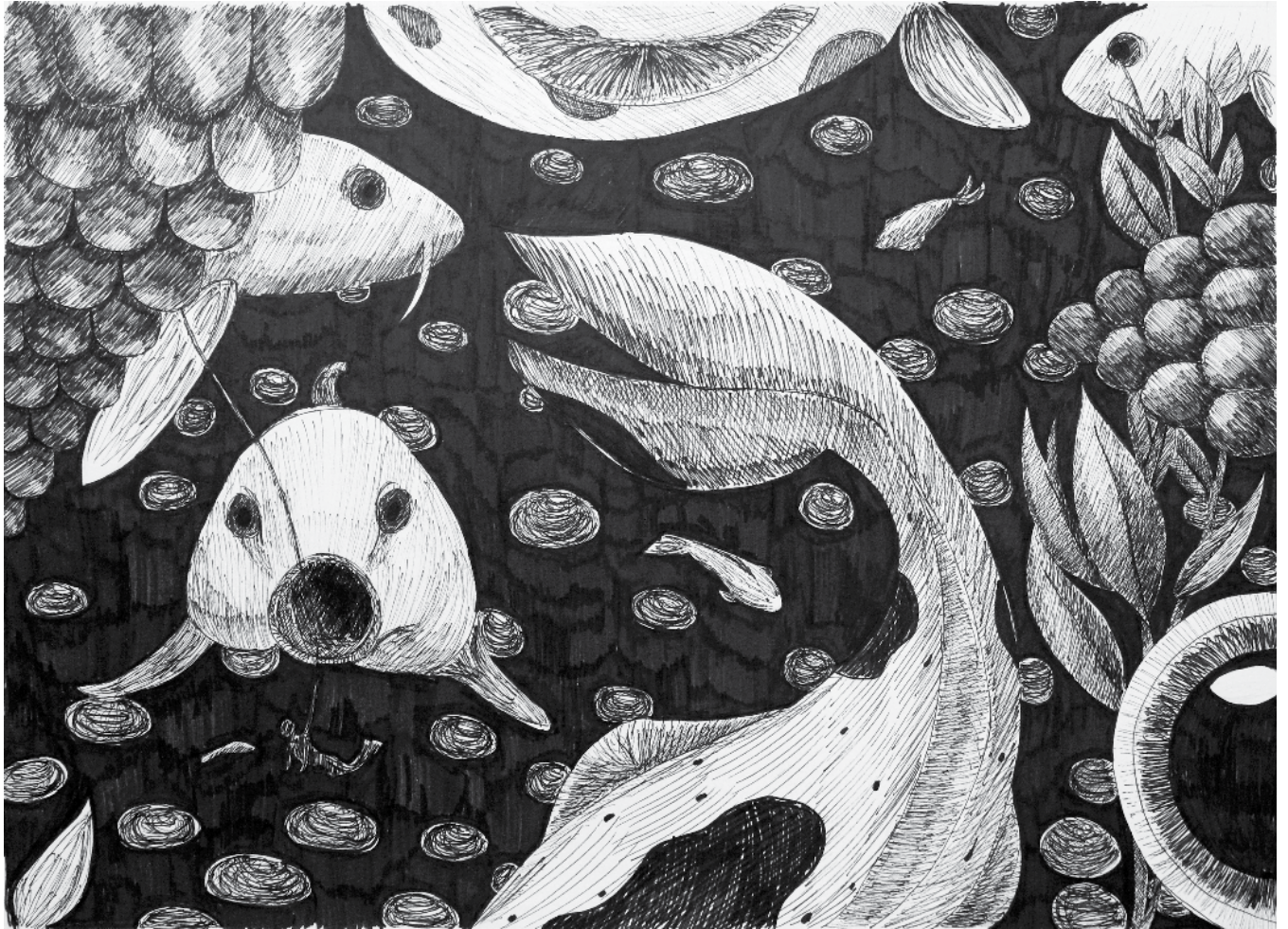
We have chosen the pieces in this volume as a group of eclectic experiences in the hope that they will inspire more intersections in life—more thought about the people we pass on the street, in the grocery store, or see out our window. Our contributors were not aware of this year's theme beforehand, but their pieces, earning a name and gaining a space in our journal, all serve to forward it in their own way, contributing to what *sonder* is all about.

We are thrilled with the pieces that make up this year's *Legacy*, a complexly layered journal with “Aftermath” standing next to “Dirty Harriet,” “Slumber Machine” right across from “Anchored by Time,” and many more. They create the best sort of extracurricular conversation among the student writers, poets, and artists, who will try to pull you in different directions, and a larger conversation among their works. We hope you become part of the dialog that these pieces start, and experience the spirit—the delight, surprise, and sometimes dismay—that the juxtaposition of these works produce in *Legacy XV*.

—*The Legacy Staff*

Sonder (son-der)

(n.) The realization that outside of our own there are others living lives in which we are only an extra—a lit window in a building, a passerby in a busy street, a suit in an elevator—a silent stranger.



Dream Swim

Ellen Wise

Stories

Sam Charowsky

So I have this idea for a story. See, a loving husband loses his wife in a tragic accident and can't cope with the loss. She was all he had and, without her, life is meaningless. Soon, everything falls apart and he retreats into isolation. His friends leave him. His family leaves him. All he has left is a brother who for some reason won't give up, but even he's growing tired. They get in a fight. The brother wants him to move on, but the man refuses to even try. He's stuck, because if he accepts that there might be someone else out there, she stops being special.

I'm on the bus when I see them. A couple, no older than nineteen or twenty. It's the middle of February and the weather is freezing. The heater is broken. Everyone riding is miserable, wrapped up in more layers of clothing than that kid in *A Christmas Story*. Everyone except them. They're wearing light coats and sweaters. She has a hat with a puff ball on top, and he's got the collar of his jacket popped to protect his neck. But in this weather, this arctic weather, this unimaginable weather, they're smiling. Laughing.

I can hear what they're saying. None of it matters. It's gossip. It's what they did today. It's what they plan to do once they get home. He'll prepare dinner while she works on the laundry. Maybe they'll watch a movie on Netflix. Oh wait,

it's Wednesday. Their favorite show is on; they can't miss it. And as I listen to them, as I watch them, I feel something, but I don't know what.

So I have this idea for a story. See, a man has given into despair. He's lost his wife in a tragic accident and now there's nothing left. Life just isn't worth it without her. He wishes he were dead, but he's too much of a coward to pull the trigger. And despite it all, no one understands. They want him to move on. They want him to forget. They want him to overwrite her memory with something new. And finally, he relents. He goes out with friends and, for the first time since she died, he feels alive. It's addicting. He wants to do it again, and his friends, encouraged by the change in his demeanor, agree. He wants to do it again. He wants to do it again. He wants to do it again. Soon it stops being fun for them.

"Paul," they say, "I'm broke. Next week."

"Paul," they say, "I can't find a babysitter."

"Paul," they say, "I want to spend time with my girlfriend."

So he goes without them. And he goes without them. And he drinks. And he drinks. And eventually, someone offers him something more. It'll make everything feel wonderful, he tells him.

But it doesn't matter what he drinks or what pills he takes or what he shoots into his arm,

in the morning it all wears off, and he's reminded that her side of the bed is still, and from now on always will be, cold.

I'm at the bar when I see them. A couple of guys, who look to be in their early thirties. Two of them are loud, exuberant. The third is sipping on a beer. They're trying to cheer him up, but he won't have any of it.

"C'mon, John, she's not worth it."

"Yea, she was a cheating whore. Fuck her."

John just tells the bartender he wants another beer.

Soon one of the guys brings over a girl. Young. Pretty. She tries to talk to the beer sipper, but his answers are terse, vapid. Soon she gives up. The guy who brought her over is far more interesting. They leave together not long after. The second guy is sitting on a stool now. They're talking too quietly for me to hear, but that's ok. I know what they're saying. I've seen it a million times.

At 1:30 the second guy puts his arm around his friend and gives him a shake. "Things are going to be ok," he says. "There are other, better girls out there." He gets up and leaves, jacket around his arm. John orders another beer, and I still don't know what I feel.

So I have this idea for a story. There's a man who loses his wife unexpectedly, a tragic accident.

At first, he's lost; he doesn't know what to do. But then, after the funeral, everything changes. He redecorates their house. He gives away her stuff. He destroys all his photos of her. Suddenly he becomes cold. Distant. Rude. People get confused. He'd always loved her. That was clear. They never fought; the neighbors would have known. Why would he change like that?

Some people think he never loved her. Rumors spread of another woman. Baseless rumors. Others think worse. They think he killed her. They think he's a monster.

Soon someone confronts him. What *really* happened? Why did he do it? The man just walks away. Who is the other woman? He just walks. He's a monster! The truth will come out! He just walks.

They're all wrong. They don't understand. They will never understand. Before she died he made her a promise. She made him swear it on her soul. He'd live on. He wouldn't take his own life. A world without her is unbearable to live in, though. So he has to do the unthinkable. He has to destroy her. He has to forget her. Because he promised he'd live without her and the only way he can do that is to live in a world where she never existed.

I'm at a diner when I see him. An elderly man by himself. The waitress doesn't ask him what he wants; she just brings him coffee. He drinks it black. Soon, too soon, she brings him his meal. Chicken parmesan. Without asking, she refills his coffee.

I've finished my meal, and my waitress asks if I'd like any desert. Normally I'd say no, but not today. "Just bring me something good," I tell her. "I'll let you pick." She chooses a chocolate fudge cake. It's good, but I quickly grow bored with it.

Two hours have gone by. I can see the waitress and hostess glaring at me through the corner of my eye. He finished his meal a long time ago. The chef comes out and sits at the man's booth, his back to me. I pick up pieces of their conversation. It turns out it's his son.

"...your mother..."

"...miss her..."

"...sell the house... love you..."

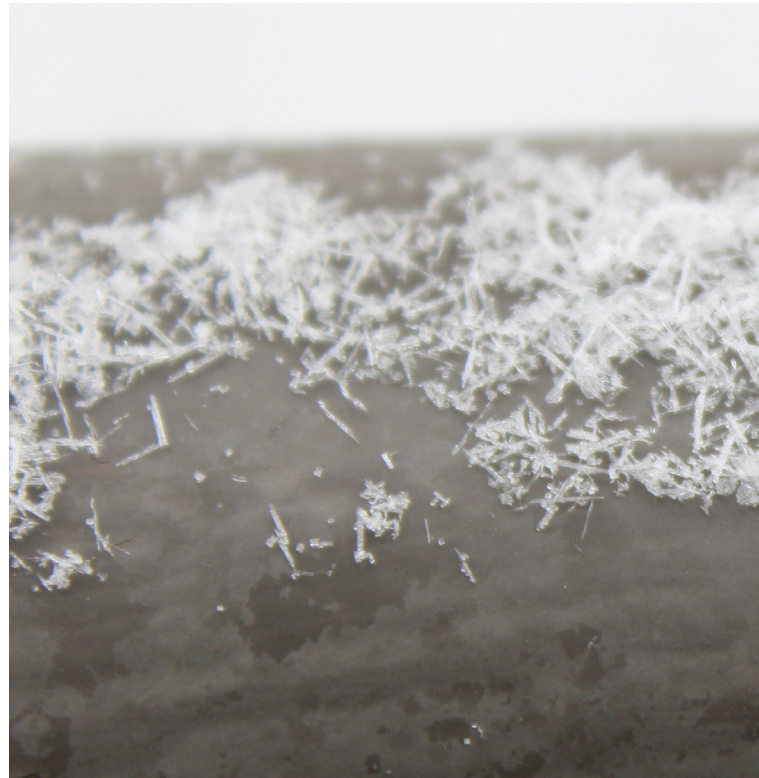
"...live with us..."

I pay my bill and leave. I give a healthy tip; the waitress deserves it.

When I get home, I stare into the mirror. I stare into the mirror. I stare into the mirror. Something rushes over me and without thinking I slam my fist into the reflection. It shatters. And as I gaze into a hundred faces looking back at my bleeding hand, I start to cry, because now I know

what I'm feeling.

So I have this idea for a story. It's about grief....



One of a Kind

Sabrina Readinger



Slumber Machine

Sarah Belles

Please stop these thoughts and start up the sheep

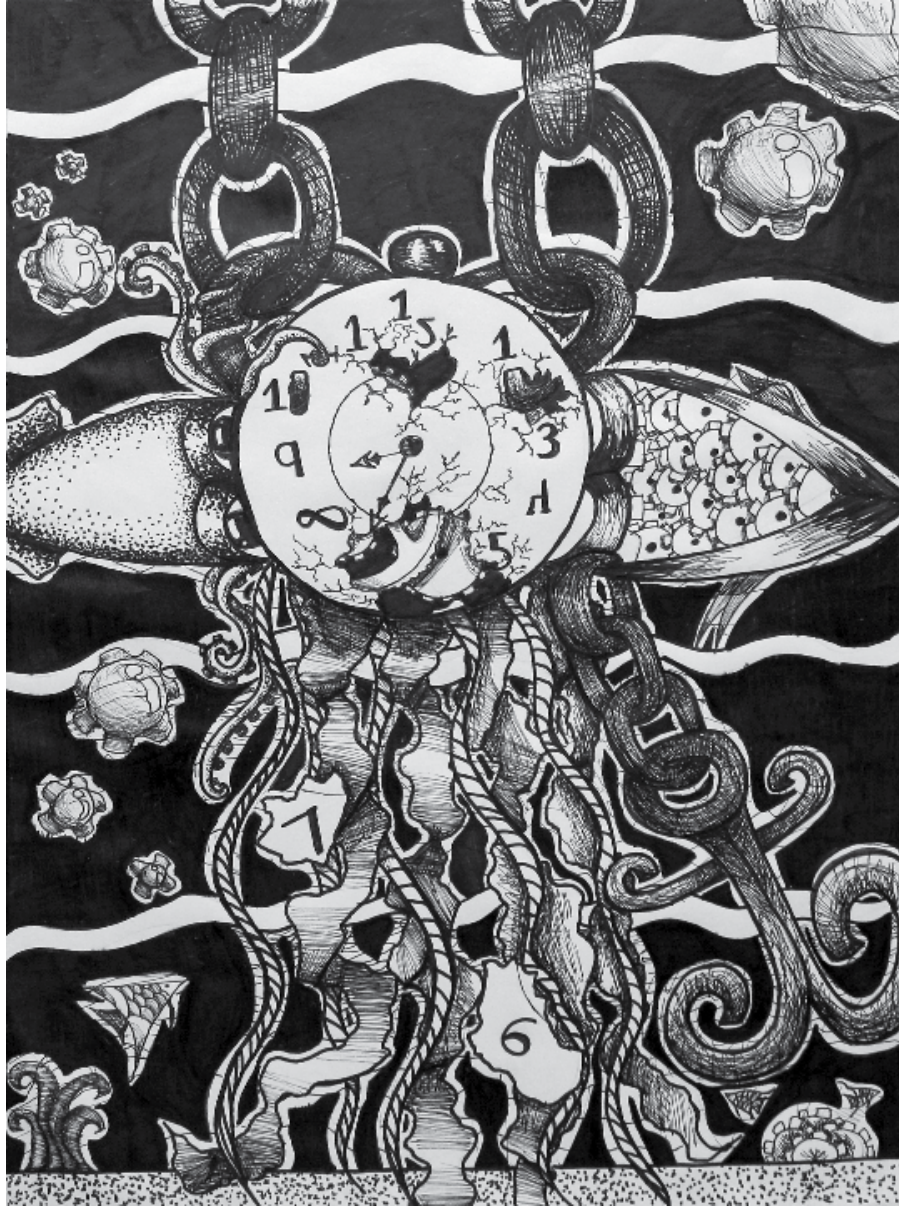
They're going too fast and I can't get to sleep

I'm trying to rest while my heart wants to beat

My mind won't let go of a popular scene

And the little I know is the little I dream

After sticking my head in the slumber machine



Anchored by Time

Nikki Hagginbotham

Dance with the Divine

David Meyer

The snake awakes from Her helical slumber.

Unfolding the mysteries of creation.

Dissolving the impressions of past life aggressions.

Path-ways become light-waves invisible to the eye.

At the root where She rested, remaining loyal to Her cause.

It's a dance with the Divine.

A place that is free of time.

The final frontier is near.

She is whispering in your ear.

It's in the silence that you will hear.

She is waiting, but you fear.

On her face is the sacred tear.

Take a breath, release, and clear.



The Fox

Abigail Chen

Cotton-Eyed Joe

Francheska Liz Guzman

It was Dr. Woolf's last week as our group psychologist. He had scheduled his retirement around a year ago, and the room was a mess after designing things for his retirement party this upcoming week. I went in, hoping to clean up a bit, and immediately saw a metallic pink boom box placed at the front of the desk in the crafts area. A sound I can only describe as hillbilly techno pulsed along in the background.

"Where'd ya come from? Where'd ya go? Where's my friend with the old Jewfro!?"

Cheesy G-rated party music was something that I hoped would not follow me in here, but apparently the banjo has no limits. Motioning for me to join in with her on the second verse, Suzie began to sing even louder. I almost did not want to interrupt her, eyes closed with one hand on her chest and the other straight upright stretching as if attempting to reach something that only she could see. She was taking Cotton-Eyed Joe straight to church, and for the first time ever I realized I was witnessing someone have a spiritual connection to this song.

"Suzie, you know those aren't the lyrics, right?"

Six. This was the total number of teeth that shone through whenever Suzie proudly exhibited her goofy grin. She paused for a second, as if pondering the possibility of switching the lyrics

so that they would create a less offensive tone, and then glanced up. "Mine are better, Lamb-chop."

It had been three months since I began working at the Howard Davidson's Hospital and I was high on accomplishment: halfway through completing my required hours to move on to an actual institution, and there had been no major individual episodes from my group of patients.

"Suzie, you look about as fine as this fine autumn day."

"What do you want, Robert?"

"Can't a man compliment a beautiful woman without having an ulterior motive?"

"A man can, Robert, but seeing as you can't even spell 'man,' I don't think that applies to you."

"You know what, Suzie, chivalry is dead, alright, and it's because you killed it!"

Broken from my train of thought, I stepped away from the boom box and raced over before their interaction could become any worse. But when I arrived, I realized there was no need for my haste. I watched as Suzie turned and started away from Robert, making her closing statement:

"Yeah, and that ain't the first thing I ever killed, neither. So you better watch it."

Her bright blue moo-moo seemed to sway

to the rhythm of her laughter as she made her way to the cafeteria. Suzie, a faded Southern Belle, was one of our oldest patients. She was the kind of woman who drank more sugar than tea and never wore pants, because she was a lady and that was improper. I had never had a three minute conversation with her that was not about her children, and although she had enough photos of the two of them to fill three albums, not once did any one of her daughters come in on Visitor's Day.

"Let's go, then. Taco Tuesday waits for no one! You know how Miss Moo-Moo loves to hog all the soft-shells."

Robert's smile, although more complete, had exactly the same amount of charm. His facial hair was grey and patchy and just looking at it made me itchy. He had been in this ward since it began, entering in at the age of just twenty years old, before he was even a full-blown adult. When I first met Robert, I thought entering at such a young age might make him feel like he had not quite lived life yet. His several gold teeth, tattoo-covered neck and arms, and various war stories assured you that he had lived more freely than most of us would ever dare.

I followed behind Robert and stopped at the doorway, watching him join Joe and Audrey in line. Because I was new, my group was one of

the smaller ones, consisting only of four members and a group psychologist that catered specifically to their needs. We had an uncanny chemistry and I was slowly growing attached to them. It sort of worried me that a new doctor would be coming in to replace the group's psychologist so late in our time with one another, but they had proven to be highly adaptable, and I had faith that they would do just fine. I pushed away the thoughts that I knew were about to resurface. I was not going to think about having to leave. Today was Taco Tuesday, and damn it, I deserved those soft-shells.

My friends keep telling me I am too attached to my career. I have not gone out with them since I began prepping to take on the job at the ward.

I read over the group message that had taken my phone hostage and ignored the invitation. Tonight's plans had already been decided, and they did not include changing out of my Netflix sweats. Surfing through my queue, I was interrupted by a phone call.

"Yeah?"

"C'mon, Soph, you said you'd make time."

"Listen, I just have a lot of work to get done tonight. Maybe next week?"

"I swear, if I open this door and you're in

your Netflix pants....?”

“Open, what? Where are—”

My front door burst open and three girls in skin-tight dresses ambushed me.

“It’s been three months already. Trust me, you’ve proven your worth over there. Listen, Soph, I’m worried about you. So, I talked to your

some time with people who were not my patients.

“Where exactly are we going?” I questioned, glancing in Ashton’s direction.

“Duh, Ledge, the grand opening’s tonight. It’s all over Twitter,” Anonymous One responded in a nasally voice. Her dark hair was cut in an asymmetrical pixie that matched the darkness of

“The rules of time were something that did not apply to us.”

mom and she sent me a copy of your key, nbd.”

Dammit, Mom. It was good to see Ash, though. I felt like it had been ages since we talked or were even in the same room together. Maybe she would settle for a Netflix night and the terrible twosome in tow could just go out on their own. I did not want them in my house: friend of Ash’s did not mean friend of mine.

“Hello? You listening to me, space head? Get dressed. We’re going out and no is not an acceptable answer.”

I learned early on in my friendship with Ashton that complying with what she wanted would be way simpler than attempting to get out of it. Besides, maybe it would be fun to spend

her mini-dress. Seeming to notice my disinterest in them, Ashton introduced us.

“This is Zoë and her sister Dawn. You’ll like them; they’re a lot of fun.”

Half-way between a grimace and a smile, I glanced towards Anonymous One and Two. Tonight would be interesting.

The music was so loud I felt the vibrations jostle the pink liquid in my glass. Ledge was packed, and it was hard to find enough room to stand, let alone sit.

“Let’s go dance!” Anonymous Two shouted over the music, using both hands to grab hold of her sister and Ashton. Ashton reached

for mine, but I signaled back to the bar. I knew she understood that if I was going to dance to this music I needed at least two more shots of something stronger than the group cosmos Anonymous One had ordered upon entry.

Brightly colored blue flashes danced along the silver walls while I wove my way through a sea of sweaty bodies towards what seemed like the only empty seat near the bar. Drink in hand, I sat there, beginning to wish I had fought Ashton instead of simply agreeing to come. Maybe she had changed after all these years and would have said “yes” to a movie night. Instead, I was stuck here, just as alone as I would have been at home.

Suddenly, I heard a voice speak in frustration. “They look ridiculous, flailing their bodies around like that. What kind of hipster shit is this song anyway?”

Okay, definite bonus points for originality. His opening line could have been way worse. I turned towards him. “I love this song actually.”

His face froze for a second before he began to realize my sarcasm. I was proud of him. It was hard to make out the satirical connotations in my voice through the volume of the music: intelligence points noted.

He smirked. “I’m Matt. Let me buy you a drink.” He really did have nice eyes, golden undertones of hazel contrasting with the metallic

theme of the club. He was different and I liked that.

“Just one. I have to get back to my friends, okay?”

“Yeah, sure, I bet you’re just dying to get out on that dance floor.” God, there was that smirk again.

The rules of time were something that did not apply to us. We talked for what seemed like an eternity; even the music became silenced when he opened his mouth to reply to my questions. I did not know where the girls had gone, but at this point I did not care. I felt like this was the reason I had come; the reason I was meant to be here was to run into him. I silently said a prayer of thanks to Ashton and the trolls under my breath.

Then everything went black.

There was a ringing in my ear that would not go away. *Where am I?* My head felt empty but panicked. *This is not my body; it belongs to someone else. What happened? Where am I?* I was naked. *Where are my clothes?* I wanted to scream, to cry, but upon opening my mouth I could only muster a faint whimper. I looked down and saw bits of dried blood stuck on the inside of my thighs, and there seemed to be dark-colored spots forming on my arms where it felt as if someone had laid an anvil on them overnight. Dirty, disgusted, and used, I lay there crying; this foreign body swallowed up

in this stranger's bed sheets for three hours, until the ringing finally stopped.

"Sophie, dear, come along. It's getting late. We've got to say goodbye."

"I'm coming, Robert."

"Dr. Woolf, you've got to let me pet it. Let me pet it just one more time. Get that fro over here. I love a good Jew, don't you know? I'm gonna miss you and that crazy thing to talk to. Don't you cut it once you get out there in that scary real world, you hear?"

Dr. Woolf smiled. "Yes, Suzie, I know. I won't. It has been a pleasure working with you as well. You be good now, you hear. Mind Robert while I'm gone."

Audrey motioned towards Dr. Woolf as her eyes filled with tears. "Promise you'll write, okay? Don't be like the other stuck-ups who never look back."

"Yeah, you were one of the suits around here that we actually liked," Joe said, his smile filled with sadness.

Dr. Woolf turned towards me and nodded. We had an understood professional relationship. He motioned for an embrace, but I stepped back. Embracing another human being right now, especially a man, was something I could not see myself doing again. Maybe ever.

"Before I go, I'd like to introduce you all to your new group psychologist. I hope you will treat him with as much respect as you have shown me. Doctor Stevens?"

"This can't be real." I allowed the words to escape from under my breath. I had spoken myself into existence and he recognized me immediately. His brown muddy eyes seemed heavy, and for a second I wondered if his soul felt the same weight mine did. I felt my stomach start to bubble, and I sprinted outside the room as fast as I could. I heaved into the toilet and felt my legs start to give out from under me. I wanted to get up, to run back in there and scream. I wanted to roll up my sleeves and expose my bruises, and to tell them about the ones that they could not see. I needed to make a scene and show everyone what he truly was, to tell everyone that we should not allow such a monster to work in our established facility. As I lay in the bathroom stall, all that escaped was a faint whimper.

"Lamb-chop, are you okay? You're looking a little pale." I could hear the concern in her voice but pushed it aside. I was drained: emotionally, physically, mentally. This was supposed to be the career of my dreams.

"I know Suzie sounds prying, but I promise she doesn't mean to sound as annoying

as she does. She's just worried about you. We all are. Listen, all four of us have been talking and, well, we need to know."

"My body seemed to completely disobey and turned to enter the lion's den."

"I'm fine, guys."

Joe slammed his fist on the table. "Dammit Sophia, no, you are not!"

The slam took me out of my emotionless trance and I looked up to meet their eyes. These four people in front of me here and now were showing more concern and love for me than I had ever felt in my entire life. I did not want to involve them in this. I couldn't.

"Roll up your sleeves. Audrey told us she saw some bruises when you were washing dishes in the break room the other day."

I felt a shiver go through my body as I

caught a glimpse of Stevens walking down to his new office over in the next hallway.

"You guys should get ready; you start evaluations with the new Doctor in a couple of minutes."

Exiting the room and lowering my gaze to the ground, I walked as quickly as my legs would allow. I reached his office, a couple more steps and I would make it—

"Sophie, would you come in here, please?"

No—no, I will not, I thought. My body seemed to completely disobey and turned to enter the lion's den.

"You okay? You seem a little shaky. Your patients tell me they're a bit worried about you, and I couldn't help but notice the little powwow you just had. You didn't say anything foolish, now, did you?"

I hated him. I hated him and the way he spoke and the way he carried himself. I hated the way that just by looking at me he could silence me, and I could do nothing but remain powerless.

"I-I don't r-really kn—"

"You sound like a blubbering idiot. Pull yourself together, Sophia. You can't even string together a complete sentence. God, grow up and get over it. And while you're on it, get the hell out of my office. Oh, and just in case you were wondering, you don't have to worry about it

happening again. It wasn't any good."

He turned to his computer and dismissed me completely. I ran out, shoving past a figure in the doorway. My eyes were so full of tears that I had not realized exactly who it was that was standing there.

I took a week off work. I could not handle walking in and seeing his face every day. Having to act like nothing had occurred was a façade that I could not keep up. Today would be my last day. I would say goodbye—and they would understand.

Upon entering the East wing of the ward, I heard a song that I knew could only be coming from one woman. I followed the noise and entered the craft room to see a metallic pink boom box playing the same awful tune:

"Where'd ya come from? Where'd ya go?
Buried ya down six feet below. Where'd ya come
from, where'd ya go? No one 'cept us will ever
know."

Suzie was singing with such emotion that it would have been frightening had she not been smiling the entire time, her goofy grin stretching from ear to ear exhibiting all five of her pearly whites.

"Changing the words again, are we, Suzie?"

"Just making it better, as usual, dear."

"Excuse me. Is this Suzette Myers?"

I turned around to see two stern-faced men suited in black with their arms outstretched, a shiny badge in each hand.

"Suzie, wha—"

"Suzette Myers, you're under arrest for the murder of Matthew Stevens."

"Murder? What are they talking about, Su—"

"Tell Robert I'll miss him, will ya, Soph? For me?"

She rose smiling, the biggest grin I had ever seen plastered across her face, and exited the room escorted by the detectives. Later that evening, the report was all over the news. The piece of evidence that made the case: one shiny white tooth lodged in the middle of his face, where it appeared his nose had been bitten off.



On the Way Home

Sarah Belles

Sonnet for a Funeral

Austin Graczyk

The open, cold embrace of new cut pine
And velvet lining laid to ease the blow
With six strong servants lifting in a line
To take you where at last you get to go.
A golden cross emblazoned on your roof
And weeping angels carved into the stone.
Estranged ex-lovers only here for proof
That soon there will be little left but bone.
Three children, grown, look on with empty eyes.
Five little ones among them talking near.
A tyrant's showcase after its demise
Elicits from them not a single tear.
All watch with apathy when gathered 'round
Your fresh and final home within the ground.



Rust

John Kane

The Veranda

J. David Roslin

It is 2 am, and moon shines through the open doors to the veranda as the waves gently crash along the shore. The ocean breeze flows gently into my room. Through the darkness, I can see the wicker chairs and table arranged on the balcony. They sit like sentinels guarding the entrance to my bedroom door. I swing my body off the bed so my feet can touch the warmth of the floor. I have been awake for the last ten minutes and finally given into the fact that I am not going to return to the deep sleep that covered me for the last two hours. The only cure is to take myself out of the thoughts that rambled in my head and replace them with something new. The bathroom light stabs my eyes into awareness. I stumble to the toilet to relieve myself, feeling the rest of the grogginess disappear. I walk out the door and turn off the light as I pass. The darkness surrounds me again as I shuffle toward the open door into the moonlight.

I am twenty-five, and after all my training and instruction, I should be on my second novel. Instead I have published only a few short stories and one lousy essay in the last two years.

The hotel is a former hosanna built before California became part of America. At one time, it was the home of some rich Spanish Don. He made it larger than it needed to be just to show the peons how a real Caballero should use the

wealth of their position. It was acquired by some early film mogul as an attempt to escape from the stresses of Hollywood's rat race that, even then, was taking control of the movie industry. With a large bankroll and financial connections, he was able to return it to the glory of the life it had known. As the years passed and the tides changed, it became a hotel, a place to spend a weekend away from the lies one must indulge in during the week. Remote and secure, its charm is now known only by those who wish to remain in seclusion and keep their privacy.

The salt spray from the ocean moves only slightly through the air and mixes with the smell of jasmine and honeysuckle. It gives me my best high in weeks. I plop myself down on one of the chaise lounges, and I lean my head back to take in even more of the drug. Looking over at the table, I see an open pack of cigarettes and swipe one. The light from the match sends a quick glow into the darkness. I settle myself into the cushioned seat and watch the moon. The terracotta tiles that cover the floor are only slightly damp. They seem to melt away the way into the darkness, a pathway that will lead me into some never land. I hear the voice arise from the darkness of the tiled deck.

"It's a bitch sleeping alone, isn't it?"

Startled, I look into the darkness but see nothing. Did I dream this? Is there someone

there? Am I expected to respond? I wait to hear the voice speak again, but the crashing of the waves along the sand is all that responds.

Until I hear the darkness speak again.

“There is nothing like a warm summer’s night to bring your troubles to their knees.”

By this time, my mind is awake, and my response is quick but subdued. “I have always been a lover of the night breeze and the smell that comes with it. The moon is just a special effect that enhances the experience.” There is no immediate reply.

It is at that moment the moon disappears behind a large dark cloud. Only the thinnest beams of moonlight shine around the edge of the dark fingers that now holds it in its grasp.

“It appears that the moon has decided to cover its face and drag us deeper into the darkness.” The voice is that of a woman—soft, gentle, flowing, sort of singing the words. The source, however, remains hidden in the deep shadows.

I rise and walk towards the voice.

“Stop. Don’t come any closer. Sit back down.” I am not given a choice in the matter.

“Let’s share the darkness and enjoy our little mystery just a bit longer. Are you single, married, divorced, or gay? Pick one and tell me about it.”

“Single.”

“Why?”

“I found that some women had nothing to offer me. In most cases, except for my bed, there was nothing I could offer them. How about you?”

“Does it matter?”

“Not as long as whoever you’re with lets me live through the weekend.” I return to the chaise lounge and once more settle myself in.

“Share a secret with me,” says the voice. “What brought you here?”

I feel compelled to answer. “I’m a writer. My publisher thought that I needed to find something to stimulate me in a new direction or give me more insight into the things I have already written.”

“Has it worked?”

“Not yet. Maybe it’s the unconscious thought that woke me up in the first place.” I reach over, draw another cigarette from the pack, and light it. “My turn to ask a question. Are you young or are you a mature woman with vast experience in the world?”

“Couldn’t I be a young woman with vast experience in the world, or a mature woman with no experience at all? Which would you prefer?”

“I would prefer to find out. Perhaps we can get to know each other better?” I feel the

“If I should disappear into the night, you could spend the rest of your life wondering if this conversation ever took place.”

cliché catch in my teeth.

The reply comes slowly. “For now, let the mystery play itself out. Let your imagination linger in the darkness.”

“You still have not given me an answer to my question. That only places another barrier between us.”

“I have all the advantage; I have seen you by the light of the match. You have not seen me. If I should disappear into the night, you could spend the rest of your life wondering if this conversation ever took place.”

“That would be cruel. Would you like that?”

“No. I like being held and whispered to, being told for a moment that there has never been another woman like me, one who can and will give someone all the pleasure they seek.”

“And if it’s a lie?”

“Then it’s a lie. For me it will be the truth for the time shared and it will be true until it is over. When the light of morning again shows us, the real world will let the lie fade with the night. For me, it will live on only as a pleasant memory.”

“That is a sentiment I didn’t expect. The women I’ve known may have thought it, but none would have said it.”

“Perhaps you haven’t met the right woman, yet.”

“It could be that the right woman sits on the other side of the veranda in the darkness. Does she?”

As the moon once more comes into the sky, the smells around seem to double, the late night drug taking full effect. I hear soft movements in the darkness and she is there before me. Naked in the moonlight, her skin takes on a blue hue as the shadows cover the parts of her that for now need remain a mystery. Her long hair flows over her shoulders; the strands cover the fullness of the breast and cascade around her nipples. A shadow falls across her eyes, but the lips cannot be hidden.

I stand, encircle her, and pull her close.

I can feel the passion of youth within her. She pulls back and takes me by the hand. The smell of her passion mixes with the other smells of the night. She leads me towards the open door that will take us into my bed.

“I told you, it’s a bitch sleeping alone,” she whispers as her head tilts upwards. She smiles at me in the moonlight.

The clapping of thunder awakens me. She left me alone sometime before the dawn broke into my room. In the hours spent with her, the rain washed over the veranda. I sit there for a long time looking out onto the veranda as the rain washes every other thought from my mind.

Peacock

Nikki Hagginbotham



Brown Eyes

Rachel Chlebowski

Rich, dark soil after rain,
fresh-brewed coffee with just a drop of cream,
they want sky blue, aquamarine,
or deep forest green,
but all I can give is brown.

Smooth, chocolate truffles,
hot cocoa on a bitter, snowy day,
a ten-year-old boy's mudslide onto home plate,
a freshly washed teddy bear:

The world tells me these are not beautiful.
Instead, they want a polluted, grey sky,
or littered grass.

My eyes are strong bark
and sturdy oak;
they are ancient roots reaching into fertile soil,
out of which sprouts life.

Brown is all I can give to you.



Android Storm

Robert Jason Slay

Moonrise

Austin Graczyk

The silver feels heavy in your hand. You don't think it should weigh this much. You glance out the dining room window at the black night, the moon blocked by the storm clouds.

You look up at the doorway as your wife walks in.

"He's asleep," she says.

"Good. How long do we have?"

"About twenty minutes. We can hold off a little past that."

You nod and tighten your grip on the cold metal. Having a physical weight to focus on is nice. It takes some of the pressure off the weight in your mind—helps you distance yourself.

You hadn't even known where to get one until the hunter told you, after he had arrived just too late to stop the attack. It took almost two hours of backwoods driving to get to the shop.

You pulled up right at closing time and saw a woman getting ready to lock a door with a sign above it that read "Mary's."

You grabbed your cash, shoved it in your pocket, and ran out to meet her. "You Mary?"

She nodded. "You need something? I was about to go home."

"Some ammo."

"Don't sell it. Go down to the Wal-Mart."

You took a step closer. "Please. A man named John O'Malley told me you sell bullets for

emergencies." You widened your eyes to drive home your point.

She looked at you hard as though she thought you were lying. Then she said, "Alright. Come inside."

You now lean against the window and try to make out the shape of the far-off city, dark since the power got knocked out earlier. You hear your wife walk up behind you.

The two of you wait a minute in silence. "How do you want to decide?" you ask.

"I don't know." She backs up and your whole side of the room goes dark when she passes in front of the candelabra on the table, the only light in the room.

You put the silver on the windowsill and turn your back to it. Your eyes prick at its loss, but you control yourself. "Whoever does it, we've only got one go. That thing was expensive."

"I figured."

You both flinch when the wind knocks a tree branch against the house.

"Are you sure you still wanna go through with this?" you ask.

She nods.

You squeeze her shoulders and then drift around the table. You end up at one of the bookcases around the edge of the room, staring

at a block of paperbacks.

You hear her pull out a chair behind you and sit down.

When you turn around, you watch her watching the candle flames. “We could wait.”

After a second, she shakes her head. “I don’t want to have this conversation again. Since he got attacked—”

You walk forward and take the seat opposite her. “Even the hunter said it might not be set in stone. He killed the other one; maybe there wasn’t a transfer.”

She blinks at you. “Have you been paying attention? He’s so different now. The marks are gone; there aren’t even scars. No twenty-year-old heals that well, not naturally.”

“I know.” You shake your head. “I just don’t want...” You trail off, not quite sure how to articulate what you’re thinking.

She takes your hand. “I know. He’s my son, too.” She manages a weak smile that you return.

“We have to do what’s best for him, right?” you ask.

“Right.” After a breath, she says, “And this is Alaska. People die out here all the time. The doctors will verify the animal attack. We’ll cremate the body.”

You nod and glance at the windowsill. “How long?”

She looks at her watch and then says, “Twelve minutes.”

“You think the clouds will slow it down at all?”

“Not that I can tell. I double-checked all the books—the real ones, the occult ones—and they all say that once the moon’s totally over the horizon, it’s endgame.”

You rub the back of your neck. “Okay.” The silence weighs heavy on you. You know in your head that this is the right thing to do. That’s what the books said, what the hunter told you right after—there’s no cure, not for this.

And it’s what he wants.

“We should probably decide,” she says.

You nod. “How? Draw straws?”

“Coin flip sounds better, I think.”

“Alright.” You fish a quarter out of your pocket and get ready. “Call it in the air. Loser has to do it.” You flick it with your thumb and follow the arc with your eyes.

She whispers, “Tails.”

The coin hits your palm, and you slap it down on your other hand. You peek at it and then glance up at her. The half second you look into her eyes changes the word on your lips, and for the first time in twenty-three years together, you lie to your wife. “Tails.”

You slip the coin back into your pocket

without letting her see it and barely catch the flash of relief that shoots across her face before it gets replaced by guilt and worry.

You reach out and grab her hand. “It’s okay. This is what he wants. Right?”

She nods and brushes away a tear. “Right. I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

You stand up and walk back over to the window. You look out for a second as rain starts to patter down on the roof, and then you pick the silver bullet back up from the windowsill. You take it down the hall to your bedroom and load it into the pistol in your nightstand.

You think about what Mary told you after you followed her into the shop.

As she walked behind the counter, she asked, “What caliber you need?”

“Thirty-eight special.”

She nodded. “How many?”

“Just one.”

She hesitated but jingled her keys and unlocked something under the counter. “You’re

not from around here,” she said.

You kept silent.

After the sound of something shutting and the jingling again, she stood up. “You know how to use it?”

You nodded. “In the heart.”

“Right.”

“You step into your son’s room and see a patch of the moon out the window through a break in the clouds.”

You reached into your pocket and took out the roll of money, and then passed it to her.

As she counted it out, she said, “It’s really none of my business, but I’ve been at this a long time, and there’s only one reason people buy a single silver bullet.”

“Oh?”

She folded the money and tucked it away. “Yeah. Is it your wife?”

You opened and shut your mouth, then

said, “My son.”

“I’m sorry. Piece of advice: Wait until the change starts. That way, you’re killing the animal, not the person you love.”

You nodded. “Thank you.”

She passed you the bullet and caught your hand for a second. “But don’t hold out too long. It will attack you, and you’ll end up dead or infected yourself.”

“I know.”

She nodded and let go of you.

You turned to leave, the bullet safe in your breast pocket.

Your wife’s voice brings you back to reality. “It’s almost time.” She walks over and wraps her arms around your shoulders.

You go to stand up and she backs off a half step. “You alright?” you ask her.

“No. But he doesn’t want to be a monster.”

You nod. “I know. I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

You walk out and down the hall toward your son’s room, stopping for a second as her watch alarm goes off behind you. You take a deep breath and keep going.

You step into your son’s room and see a patch of the moon out the window through a break in the clouds. You look at him, lying in bed, already convulsing, coarse hair breaking out

everywhere, face elongating into a muzzle. His mouth opens when the lower jaw dislocates, and you catch a glimpse of teeth built to tear through flesh and bone.

You raise the gun and take another step closer. The handcuffs he’d insisted on wearing twinkle in the light. In another second, you think they’ll probably snap from the force of the change, his muscles thickening into ropes.

You wait just long enough to see him open his eyes, now the yellow of the wolf, before you press the barrel to his chest plate and pull the trigger.

Silence. Silence so palpable you feel it pressing in on your ears.

You drop the gun and turn your back on the body—carcass, you correct yourself; it’s just a thing, not a person—caught forever in a painful half-wolf, half-human stage. A monster, you tell yourself one more time, as if it matters.

Your wife meets you back in the dining room and holds your hand. “Are you okay?”

Your mouth opens, but no sound comes out. After a long look back at the moon, you manage, “No.”



Sakura Trees

Amie Vandzura

Modern-Day Slaves

James Moran

Inside screams the voice of a manic boy,

Eager to elevate his life's vantage point

But realizing the obstacles; how easy it is

To end up like those people on the streets he saw as a kid

And never for a second did he think that could be him,

For the lenses of our ego make us blind to the truth

Dreaming of the "C-Notes," and the fine females too

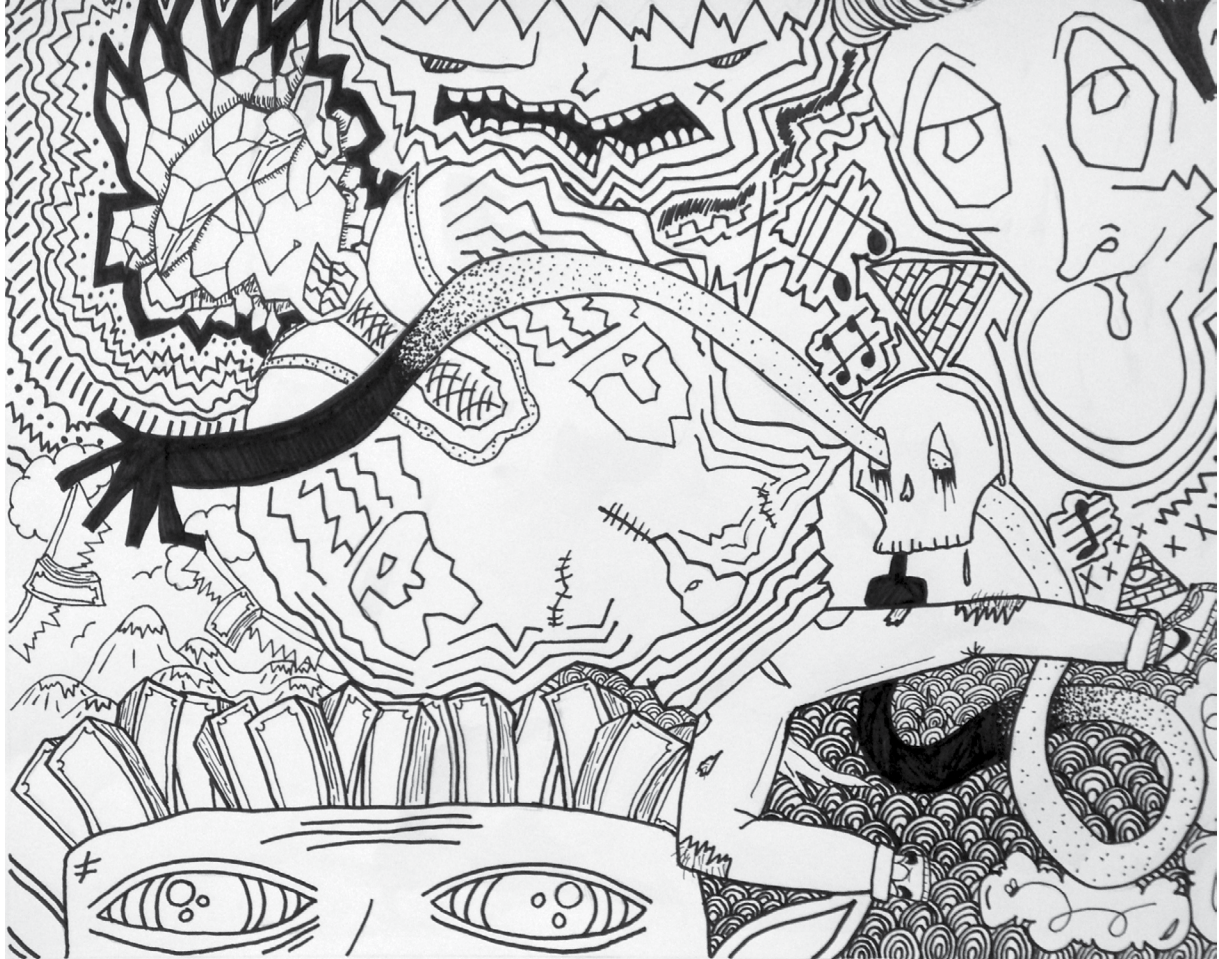
As they quickly turn to nightmares on the streets, with Freddy Krueg

Or there's common scenario number 2,

Another unhappy soul, in the 9-5 loop

Justified by compensating us, but don't be fooled

We are modern-day slaves, shackled by a suit



Mondey

Lucas Mercado

Moving on

Kelsie Knabb

Today I saw the sun rise	What does it mean?
Clouds spill out of the dark abyss	I want to know the sun
I feel uneasy	The shadow will pass
I retreat into my shell	Push forward
Clouds spill out of the dark abyss	I want to know the sun
What does it mean?	I feel uneasy
I retreat into my shell	Push forward
The shadow will pass	Today I saw the sun rise



All Tied Up

Alex Keefe

The Photo

Stephanie Coriolan

Frozen forever in warm embrace

He plants a kiss

As a smile stretches her face.

You see the love this picture holds

A relic now, left in the cold.

The sun illuminates their adoration

As he touches her head, lovely

For all to see, this was the one he chose

To share a life framed in gold

You see the love this picture holds.

Regardless, if the photo is old

Yellowed and faded, forgotten

Seated in a broken frame to rot

In the ground like a headstone

For what they once had,

Shown clearly here to see,

Love came here once



Control

Rory R. Parodeo

Mental Illness: Stop the Stigma

Mallory Staub

Mental illness affects individuals across the globe in a wide range of forms and severities. From minor cases of anxiety to major cases of schizophrenia, mental illness of all kinds exists within the minds of various people no matter what their race, age, or gender. While mental illness does not discriminate when choosing its victim, society does so in regards to the way it treats those with these debilitating mental diseases. There is a stigma surrounding mental illness that those who suffer must cope with in addition to the symptoms of a given diagnosis; it causes sufferers to feel ostracized or dismissed from society. Feeling unsupported or separated from society often times leads to feeling hopeless and reluctant to receiving treatment. Although society's perception of mental illness has greatly improved as of late, increasing the level of education and exposure to groups with various kinds of mental illness can aid in removing this stigma altogether.

Nayley Trujillo, a fourteen-year-old girl who struggled through a deep and difficult state of depression, tells the story of how her mental illness plagued her after the passing of her great-grandmother in "Breaking through the Stigma: Young People with Mental Illness Feel Ostracized, Dismissed." The loss of Trujillo's great-grandmother and "primary caregiver"

left her feeling "angry, confused, and isolated." Nayley's parents wondered how their once lively and happy daughter became what they described as a "problem child." Nayley became isolated from her group of friends and began to fight with her parents, and her mother mistook this behavior as "teen angst" rather than depression stemming from grief (Tayler). Nayley is not alone in being perceived as problematic or being accused of creating the negative feelings herself. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, research reveals that "more than half of people living with mental disorders felt embarrassed about their health problems and believed they had experienced discrimination" and that "slightly fewer than half of Canadians surveyed thought a mental disorder was just an excuse for poor behavior" (Tayler). Where does this common belief among Canadians come from? Robbie Babins-Wagner, chief executive at Calgary Counseling Centre, blames the media in part for portraying those with mental illness in a negative light or stereotype (qtd. in Tayler). The media causes society to view people suffering from mental disorders as violent, out of control, or unable to function "normally" in everyday life. The negative way in which the media depicts sufferers of mental illness is just one of the many causations of mental illness stigma.

In “Dimensions of Mental Stigma: What about Mental Illness Causes Social Rejection,” David Feldman and Christian Crandall set out to delineate the dimensions of stigma surrounding mental illness. They explain that those who suffer from mental illness and are subjected to stigmatization are marked as “deviant, flawed, limited, spoiled, or generally undesirable” (138). Labels such as these cause individuals that have mental illnesses to experience social rejection in several areas of their lives. Feldman and Crandall state that the stigma may lead to “strained familial relationships, employment discrimination, and general social rejection” (138). Whether an individual experiences only one or a few of these social hindrances, it tends to lower his or her self-esteem. This often times leads to feelings of discouragement and reluctance to follow through with a treatment process.

Identifying and understanding the social rejections that people with mental illness experience and the resulting complications of those rejections is an important first step in lessening or eliminating the stigma that surrounds it. However, delving further to question why mental illness causes social rejection is imperative. Feldman and Crandall do exactly this in a study in which they compare mental disorders that “represent a large range of symptoms, severity,

and prognoses” (138). They enter the study with the preconceived idea that social rejection results from “divergence” from what society considers and widely accepts to be “normal.” Human beings differ in a plethora of ways – height, eye color, handedness, etc. – but these differences cause little to no social discomfort compared to mental illness. In the study conducted by Feldman and Crandall, they outline six dimensions that identify which characteristics of mental illness are stigmatizing. These dimensions include “concealability (can it be kept a secret?), course (is it stable?), disruptiveness (does it strain relationships?), origin (what caused it?), aesthetics (is it displeasing to the sense?), and peril (is it dangerous?)” (139). Some dimensions, however, carry more significance than others in terms of willingness of society to discriminate.

Peril is a dimension of particular interest in the literature discussing mental illness stigma. It has been found that “the more people believe that mental illness is associated with dangerous or aggressive behavior, the more willing they are to discriminate” (139-40). Origin is another important dimension in the mental illness stigma literature. It is a common belief among mental health professionals that “if biological causes of mental illness are emphasized above psychosocial ones, mental illness stigma could be

reduced.” The final dimension that researchers Feldman and Crandall pay particular attention to during the study is personal responsibility or onset controllability. When a disease is perceived as onset-controllable, it leads to greater discrimination and social rejection (140). With these three specific dimensions of mental illness in mind, Feldman and Crandall conducted a survey study to determine which dimensions relate to increased stigma surrounding mental illness.

In their survey study, 270 undergraduate student participants read vignettes that represent typical case histories for a total of 40 mental disorders. The disorders were chosen to present a broad range of mental illnesses typically seen in mental health clinics (140). Each vignette consisted of two paragraphs; the first was a brief description of the individual and symptom presentation, and the second was a diagnosis, brief definition of the disorder, and probable cause(s), description of the treatment, and immediate and long-term effects of therapy. Feldman and Crandall also added “treatable with psychotherapy” and “treatable with medication” depending on which method is typically used to treat one mental disorder or another (143). Below each vignette, participants rated each of the 40 individuals’ illnesses on 17 dimensions, using a

7-point semantic scale. Rating an individual with a “1” indicates that the participant might be close friends with him or her, while rating an individual with a “7” indicates that he or she is the type of person the participant would tend to avoid (144). Feldman and Crandall analyzed the findings from this survey study by assessing “the relative amount of social rejection associated with each of the 40 mental illnesses,” identifying “which dimensions of mental illness are associated with social rejection,” and developing “a simple but powerful list of three dimensions that are essential in accounting for social rejection” (146). They find that those with mental illness face stigmatization and discrimination on the basis of 7 of the 17 total dimensions: “dangerousness, disruptiveness, being out of touch with reality, personal responsibility, rarity, not being treatable with medication, and degree of avoidability” (147). These seven dimensions are further narrowed down to identify which are essential to predicting social rejection due to mental illness. Three dimensions including “personal responsibility, dangerousness, and rarity” are the most significant in determining the severity of discrimination that will likely arise from society in response to individuals with mental illness.

Responsibility refers to the extent that people perceive an individual is at fault for the

mental illness. When society believes that one is responsible for his or her mental illness, it evokes negative emotions, apathy and resistance to helping, and high levels of avoidance and punishment. Dangerousness is the degree to which people “believe that a person with mental illness poses a threat to them” (147). The more dangerous an individual is thought to be, the more discrimination he or she will experience. As stated in “Mental Illness Stigma, Help Seeking and Public Health Programs,” “Psychotic disorders are highly stigmatizing, and people with psychosis are more likely to be perceived as violent and unpredictable relative to people with other mental health problems” (Henderson, Evans-Lacko, and Thornicroft 777). Rarity is the extent to which people “believe that a mental disorder is uncommon” (Feldman and Crandall 147). Society tends to perceive rare mental illnesses as more severe than common ones. Mental disorders that are high in one or a combination of the three of these dimensions lead to greater social rejection by society.

As Feldman and Crandall state, “Public perceptions of mental illness are often greatly different from reality” and “efforts to alter such perceptions can play a significant role in reducing stigma” (149). They propose a three-pronged approach to change society’s perception of

mental illness. “Therapist behavior, self-concept of the target, and mass education of society” are all important in altering the way the public views those with mental disorders (150). Therapists have very little training in mental illness stigma, so they cannot properly prepare their clients to cope with social rejection. Additionally, they may do little to dispel negative perceptions of mental disorders. Feldman and Crandall propose providing therapists with guidelines to help in minimizing mental illness stigma. The target or the client suffering from mental illness is the next alteration to be made. Feldman and Crandall advise addressing internalized stigma in therapy to investigate its effects on the individual (150). Lastly, society should be educated on various mental disorders in an effort to increase knowledge of and comfortableness around those suffering from mental illness. According to Feldman and Crandall, the reduction of mental illness stigma can be achieved if these three alterations are made to the therapist, the target or client, and the public.

Patrick W. Corrigan proposes another solution to eliminating mental illness stigma in “How Clinical Diagnosis Might Exacerbate the Stigma of Mental Illness.” Sharing the beliefs of researchers Feldman and Crandall, Corrigan states that “the social opprobrium that results

from stigma can rob people of a variety of work, housing, and other life opportunities commonly enjoyed by adults in the United States” (31). He hypothesizes that clinical diagnosis could strengthen the stereotypes that lead to stigma because it creates “groupness” and “differentness” among people with mental disorders. Corrigan explains that research shows that “many people choose not to pursue mental health services because they do not want to be labeled a ‘mental patient’ or suffer the prejudice and discrimination that the label entails” (31). Three processes influence this stigma on mental illness that sufferers try to avoid: groupness, homogeneity, and stability.

Groupness separates a collection of people from the general population. It highlights the differences the group possesses and leads the public to stigmatize the group as a whole, as it assumes all members exhibit the same aberrant behavior. Similar to groupness, homogeneity is a resulting issue of clinical diagnosis. Homogeneity leads to overgeneralization that all members of a group will “manifest the characteristics attributed to that group” (34). For example, it may be

“It causes societal segregation, missed life opportunities, and discouragement to seek treatment and recover.”

assumed that all individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia will hallucinate and those suffering from depression inflict self-harm. Stability refers to the notion that the traits that describe a certain group remain “static and unchanged” over time, suggesting that members of a group cannot improve their behavior or overcome their mental illness to one degree or another (35). Corrigan suggests that rather than assigning an individual with a diagnostic label, the person’s profile should be described on a continuum, the individual should be stressed over the group, and assumptions of poor prognosis should be replaced with models of recovery. Making these adjustments to clinical evaluation of mental illness would emphasize that each patient experiences the mental disorder differently than the next and that recovery is possible, which is an important message for both patients and society.

Feldman, Crandall, and Corrigan

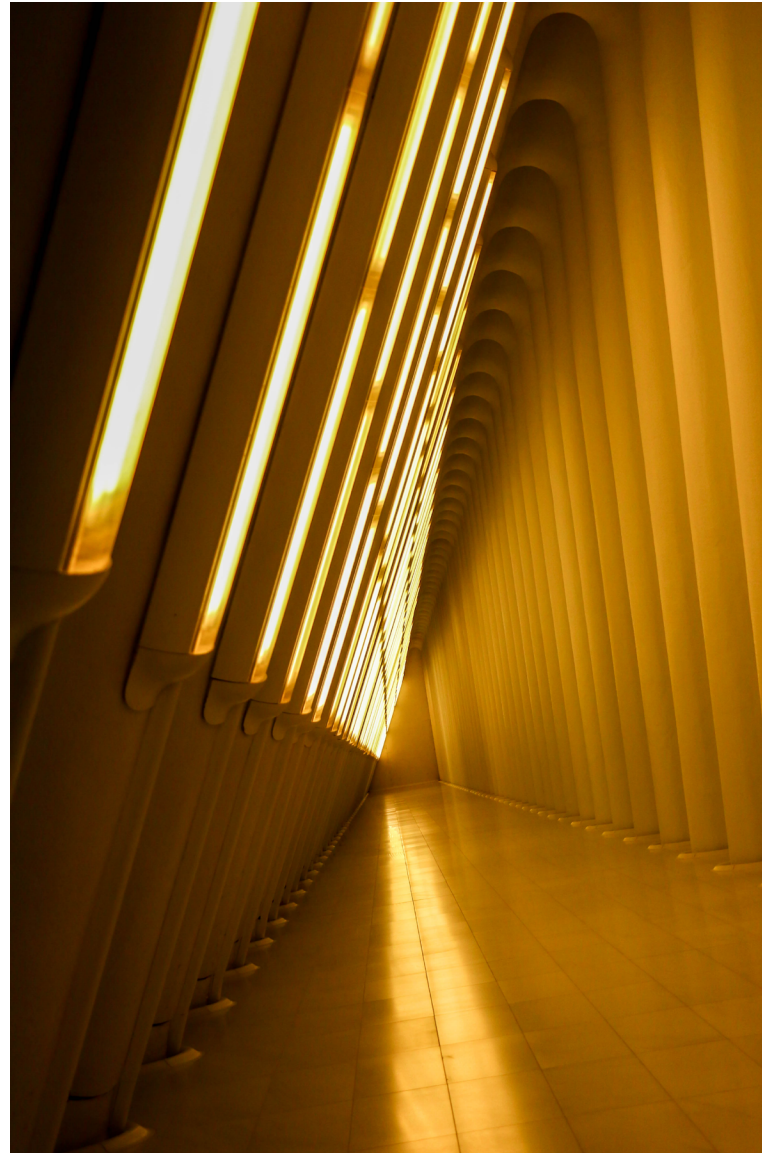
collectively suggest combating mental illness stigma by educating the therapist, the target or patient, and the public, as well as changing the method of mental illness diagnosis. Patrick W. Corrigan and Amy C. Watson propose calling mental disorders “brain diseases” to eliminate stigma in “At Issue: Stop the Stigma: Call Mental Illness a Brain Disease.” The effort is to reduce the placing of blame on the individual with the psychiatric disorder by emphasizing the biological roots of mental illness. Research on the effects of calling a mental illness a “brain disease” has had two outcomes. Corrigan and Watson reveal that “framing mental illness as a brain disorder may resolve onset questions but exacerbate offset issues” (477). Essentially, this means that it could diminish the notion that mental illness is caused by weakness or poor character, but could strengthen the idea that the individual will not recover and regain a productive life. The biological explanation for mental illness may also exacerbate stereotypes of being less human and more dangerous associated with psychiatric disorders (478). It could reduce the blame of victims of mental illness, but could cause society to view those victims as unable to function among the general public or unable to control violent behavior. In contrast, referring to mental disorders as a “brain disease” has proved

to reduce fear and improve images of people with mental illness (478). This method, outlined by Corrigan and Watson, improves some dimensions of mental illness stigma and worsens others.

Mental illness stigma is a stressor that those who suffer from psychiatric disorders must cope with in addition to the symptoms and complications of their illnesses. It causes societal segregation, missed life opportunities, and discouragement to seek treatment and recover. While it still remains a significant issue in the mental health field, there are several research-supported propositions that can be employed in an attempt to minimize or eliminate the stigma surrounding mental illness. Educating therapists, patients, and the public, altering the process of clinical diagnosis, and changing the terminology from “mental illness” to “brain disease” may help to improve the image of those who suffer from mental disorders. No one approach can fix the stigma completely, but rather a multidimensional approach should be taken. The collective suggestions of psychological researchers Feldman, Crandall, Corrigan, and Watson should be implemented to improve society’s overall negative perception of mental illness and its victims.

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Golden Peak

Wilben Suriel

'94 Thunderbird

Tana Acosta

It was black upon black like his heart,
Running on rusted rims.
No mirrors, no reasoning.
Scarred upholstery, internal rips,
A glove box full of baggage and plastic with pip.
Misaligned wheels on his highway of love.
Windows begrimed, his views
Cracked and shattered.
His paint's dull hue chips in the speed and the wind.
Feeble fender, taped together, a last-ditch try to stay whole.
But the engine still runs, the only thing moving him forward.

And it leads him to his mistakes.
And it leads him to his infidelities.
And it leads us who remain, to misery.
He jimmys the trunk with a flat-head,
Throws two bags and his faults inside,
And tosses his guilt in the driveway.
Tires, bald as his head, destroy it
As he backs out of more than just gravel.
I watch from the window with desert eyes.
One thing's for sure with that '94...
He worked just enough to leave us behind.



Vengeance Will be Mine

Jasmin Rosado

Innocence Lost Sestina

Austin Graczyk

When we were young	The breeze brought with it thick ash
And dandelions blew on the wind	Of thoughts morbid enough to engrave
We spread life like ash	Their deadened presence on the flowers
And began under the sun to flower.	Of ones like us, so young
In loving light we would lie	To still be bowed and swayed by the wind.
Unplagued by thought of the far-off grave	We learned to live and lie
It happened first by the grave	In that moment, as the dusts lie
Of one taken too young.	Around us. The breath of burned ash
We slipped away in a field to lie	And the sorrow of the wind
Among calming caresses of warm wind	In that place changed us, made us grave.
And think of fragile flowers	We were no longer as young
Under a sheltering ash.	As once before, the dew-drop flower

Encompassing Verdant

Amanda Mullen

Rotting on the stem. The flower
Did not come to underneath us lie
For the stem, still strong and young
As to keep it there 'til rot turn us to ash,
Too, to blow upon a new grave.
Carried by a younger wind,

Our charred memories would wind
Their way onto a fresh-faced flower
By a field, near a grave.
We change them, and like us, they lie
In the wake of adult ashes,
Too heavy to be borne by petals so young.

| Forty Eight





The Universal Sign of Victory

David Meyer

With the hypodermic horizontally clenched between his teeth and the tourniquet strapped around his bicep, he slapped his forearm persuading a vein to rise to the surface. As he gazed at me, his green eyes filled with pride, mixed with a little bit of fear, similar to a child jumping off a diving board into the deep end for the first time. As his vein protruded to the surface, his right hand grabbed the syringe from his teeth. With the needle in place, he pulled back on the plunger. “I’m in!” Erich said as his blood entered the syringe.

Erich and I had many “firsts” together. We had been friends since childhood, both of us from broken families. Before either of us touched a drug, we spent years riding bikes, catching snakes, and exploring abandoned houses together. This was now a time that felt too distant from those years. I was still too scared to stick a needle in my arm, but Erich surely wasn’t. The smile that appeared on his face through his long blond hair, instantaneously, as the heroin filled his veins, was similar to the Cheshire cat, the same smile and long blond hair that got him the nickname of “golden child” as a kid, as well as the same smile and long blond hair that made him succeed with the ladies.

The next morning I gave Erich a ride. I was worried about him. I thought he may have taken

it a little too far. The cunning power of addiction has a way of making the other guy always look worse. Addicts have a way of justifying their own habits by comparing themselves out with other addicts. Since I hadn’t stuck a needle in my arm yet, Erich was obviously worse off than me—and I was under the illusion that I’d be able to help him.

“Erich man, you should come out to California with me; you can live with me Man. Me and Ness bought land up in the mountains. We’re growing medical bro. You could get your shit together man! I even opened up that crystal shop like we always wanted to; you could even work there if you want Bro.”

“Nah Man, I need to stay here with the kid,” mumbled Erich.

“If you don’t get your shit together Man, you won’t be able to be there for your kid anyway, Bro.”

“I’m getting my shit together, Man! I need to get back with the wife and everything is going to be cool.” Erich insisted as he made his body smaller in the seat.

“I love you, Bro!”

“Love you too, Man”

The door slams. Erich walks away from the car. I drive away.

The last time I saw Erich, he had on an

inhuman amount of cover up, a suit jacket that was larger than the frame that occupied it, obviously stuffed to fill the empty space. His father, mother, and two sisters would be at the foot end of the casket receiving condolences for their son's and brother's life lost to the needle. Erich's son, only four years old, would be too young to attend.

When the news came of Erich's death, I was lying on a futon in the living room of my cottage. I was so strung-out on heroin that I never wanted to stray far from the source for fear of getting sick. After being persuaded by friends and family that I had to attend the funeral, somehow, I mustered the courage to leave the isolated safe haven, which I had created for myself. I had enough benzodiazepine to take the flight cross country without the discomfort of being crammed next to people I didn't know. As I stumbled to my seat, the sedatives began to kick in. After a couple of sips of a vodka and cranberry, it was lights out. "Hello, Sir! Sir, can you please wake up? The plane has landed in Philadelphia!"

I showed up to the funeral wearing a Hawaiian shirt and a pair of sunglasses. Immediately, it was like a high school reunion—with friends I hadn't seen in forever, faces full of grief, yet not surprise. It appeared that I

was in shambles, grieving over the death of my best friend. The reality was I was full of anxiety and shame of myself. The cigarette smoke that loitered at the front entrance of the funeral home, created a barrier between fresh air and dead air. As I walked past the open casket, Erich's dad grabbed my hand and said, "Let this be a lesson Dave."

Three Years Later

It must be the middle of the day. I can tell because the sun is out. The mornings have been overcast for several weeks now and the sun doesn't like to show its face till late afternoon. I only know this because it's starting to get hot inside the RV; otherwise it is dark—except for a few beams of sunlight leaking through the gaps in the blinds. I pick up my phone: ten missed calls. Paula is lying next to me asleep. *Where the hell did she park last night?* I think to myself.

Paula is a Eureka, California native. She was once a very pretty girl; however, life has been rough on her and you can see it in the weathered look on her face. She is about ten years older than me, with long red hair and one breast that's larger than the other. Some little kid at a party hit her in the chest with a chair one day. The saline solution from her fake breast has been slowly leaking into her body ever since, rather harmless compared to the amount of crystal meth she puts into her

system daily. I promise her that, if I ever get back on my feet, I'll get it fixed. I joke around with her sometimes and tell her she needs to get "Fix a Flat" or something, so she doesn't look so lopsided. The reality is everyone is a little screwed up around here. The south side of Eureka is like the melting pot for "Faces of Meth." I throw the phone back on the table next to the bed. It slides across the surface plowing its way through dirty needles and carbon coated spoons.

I managed to put away a "wake up" last night for the morning, but I can't remember where I put it.

"Paula, Paula, get up!" I shake her shoulder.

"Leave me alone!" she cries as she takes the covers and pulls them over her head.

"Did you see where I put my shit last night?" I beg.

Paula doesn't care because she doesn't like heroin; she thinks I'd be better off if I just did

meth. I am starting to panic, because now I feel sick. I grab my sneaker that's on the floor. In the tongue is a secret pocket. I slide my pointer finger down into the pocket and feel what I am looking for. Instantaneously, my panic subsides. Wrapped inside a little piece of plastic bag is a little brown ball, the size of a BB. I bring it to my nose and smell the familiar vinegary smell. Today is a good day; it's not always this easy.

Outside of the RV, I hear the sound of squeaky wheels from shopping carts wheeling across the macadam. I hear the voice of a little girl asking her mother if she can have some candy when they go into the store. *See, everybody needs their fix*, I tell myself. Sugar, heroin, crystal meth, what's the difference anyway? I flick on one of the lights, but nothing comes on. The battery must be dead again. I can't open the blinds for what I'm about to do, so I position myself under the window so that the light reflecting through

the crack at the bottom of the blind illuminates my arm. The tracks on my arm reveal that yesterday must have been a feast. One looks like a siphon, or rather a black hole where everything disappears. And it has: the store is gone, the land is gone, and everything I own at this point is packed inside this filthy RV.

"I slide my pointer finger down into the pocket and feel what I am looking for."

I'm well. It's time to answer my missed calls. Paula is still crashed on the bed and I'm still sitting on the floor next to the window. *This place is fucking disgusting*, I think to myself. There are random splatters of blood on the nicotine stained walls from haphazardly rinsed syringes. I once again tune into the sounds outside of the RV. I hear the sound of cars starting up and pulling away. People getting on with their day bring home food to their families. *Will it ever be that simple again?* I ask myself. No time to dwell over what I can't do anything about right now. What I can do is answer those missed calls, so I don't get sick.

The afternoon sun is heating the overflowing sewage tanks strapped to the bottom of the RV. Lying on the floor here, I could smell the putrid aroma of the sewage tanks escaping from the crack at the bottom of the bathroom door. The messages left on my phone reveals that I have two people that need to cop. I pull the hood over my head, kiss Paula on the cheek, and slam the RV door shut behind me. *Why the hell did she park in the middle of this parking lot?* I think to myself. We're so far down at the bottom of town; it's going to be a long walk back.

I often think back to the first time Erich and I got high together. It was August in the

summer of 1992; Erich and I went to the Philadelphia Folk Fest accompanied by his Dad, an avid Folk Fest goer. There was a lot to see, hear, and taste at the Folk Fest. We heard that there were drugs there and decided that it was going to be our goal to get high together for the first time. Purchasing marijuana came with great ease and by the time the sun set on the first night, we had achieved our goal.

Huddled in a tent with Erich and three others, we smoked out of a 2 L Coca-Cola bottle made into a bong. The bag that we had purchased was for \$10 and I had split it with the gentleman whose bong we were smoking from. I wasn't sure how many we smoked before he handed me the cellophane, from the bottom of a pack of cigarettes, full of what was left of the bag we had split. I can still remember the power I felt when he handed me the bag. My mouth had become very dry. Exiting the tent was a lot more difficult than entering.

Earlier that afternoon Erich and I had been making out with two hippie girls and I allowed one of the girls to give me a hair tie with a bell attached to the end of it. The hair tie fell down over my right eye and the bell hit right above my lip, on the side of my right nostril. I'd forgotten that the braid was in my hair and each time the bell hit my face, the sound echoed

in my ears. *What the hell is that?* I thought. As I continued walking, the hair tie split the vision of my right eye creating the effect of having three eyes or triple vision.

The campground was alive. Each campsite embodied its own theme. There was Camelot, a Western saloon, the laser light tent, and the Psychedelic dreamers, a clown on stilts, and a parade of Mediterranean belly dancers. As the hair tie became a metronome attached to my scalp, my heart quickly exceeded the tempo—but I couldn't figure out where the sound was coming from. With each step forward, the braid would catch air, swing back and smack me in the face. "Oh, shit, it's just the braid," I told myself. I needed to find the tent.

I was having a sensory overload, with 10,000 people scattered over a couple of square miles, and I began to think I might panic. Erich seemed calm and collected. He showed me where the tent was and then went off with the girls we were hanging out with earlier that day. I told them I wasn't feeling good. In the tent I prayed one of my first foxhole prayers. I started with the Lord's Prayer, because it was the only one I knew. I remembered it from church as a child. Then I asked God to please take the fear from me.

The next morning, I woke up and went down to the food stand to satisfy my hunger.

One of the guys that was in the tent with us the night before smiled at me saying, in a Cheech Marin like voice, "Wow, Bro, you were stoned last night." That was it right there. That was all I needed. In my head it symbolized acceptance. I was part of what was going on. The way he accentuated the "wow" led me to believe that something I did was memorable. If he only knew that I had spent the rest of the night saying the Lord's Prayer and asking for forgiveness, his smile may not have offered such acceptance. The eggs and cheese smashed between two pieces of white bread never tasted so good.

An egg and cheese would be good right now, or even the eggs and hotdogs my father made for me when I was a kid. Besides all the drugs, my diet has consisted of ice-cream, gummy worms, and doughnuts. As I think back, I can imagine the smell of melting butter filling the air as my father chopped all beef franks and mixed them into a bowl of raw eggs. My sister and I were on a visit to see my father at my grandmother's house. As his culinary creation sizzled in the frying pan, time stood still. This moment in time would be forever imprinted in my head.

My father was wearing his usual attire: black boots, dirty Levi jeans, and a white t-shirt with a pack of Marbo rolled up in the sleeve. There was



Puzzled

Sabrina Readinger

not an ounce of domestication in his finesse as his rough hands spooned his concoction into the bowls in front of me and my sister. He topped each of us off with ketchup and we began to eat. As I watched my sister eat, I wondered if she was having as hard of a time as I was, choking the stuff down. I wasn't fond of it then and I'm still not today. Yet, on several occasions throughout my life, I've made my father's eggs and hotdogs. Not because I was hungry and not because I liked it, but because I can shut my eyes and be brought back to that moment in time with my father.

It was also at my grandmother's house I got first glimpse of what addiction could do to a person. The basement had white walls and red carpet, illuminated by dim light. I remember a pleather couch and garish décor. There was a mini fridge that my father had me grabbing beers for him from. I received a sip for obeying the order. Perhaps in an attempt to get me out of the room and give me something to do, he told me to go and check out the shed in the backyard. Walking up from the basement into the dining room was the dining room table with its see-through, yellowing, polyester snug fit protector, encapsulating a large doily laid out on the top of its surface, a basket of fake fruit marking the center. On the china hutch sat a bust of the

thorn crowned Messiah gazing upward; back dropping him was a large mirror. The reflection that appeared on the mirror's surface, as I walked through the room, was that of a six-year-old boy, blonde hair and blue eyes, a skinny frame with a head a little larger than the proportionate size.

Outside was Rocky, named after one of my father's favorite movies. A somewhat vicious German shepherd was chained to the pole of an unused basketball hoop. His nose was scratched, displaying dry blood, the work of a cat who also occupied the yard. In the back left corner was a white aluminum shed. Inside the shed were old tools and motorcycle parts. What I was sent to see was on the walls. Torn from magazines like *Easy Rider*, *Penthouse*, and *Playboy* were pictures of naked women, arranged in no particular way. Most of the women were on motorcycles. Unattended, I marveled over the pictures for a while, got as excited as a six-year-old boy could, and then wandered back into the house and into the basement where my father was passed out drunk on the floor. In an attempt to wake him up, his blonde-haired girlfriend poured beer over his head and laughed.

It was during first grade my mom received the phone call. The ring of the phone that day would resonate into the future, along with the message she received. Soon after Mom hung

up the phone, her boyfriend took me and my sister to Kiddie City to go shopping. After the little spree was up, instead of going back home, we ended up at my grandparents' house on my mom's side. I walked through my grandparents' door with my new Arnold Schwarzenegger action figure in hand. Combining the new toys from my Mom's boyfriend with the number of people in the room, you would've thought it was Christmas, but unfortunately it was October. It was there I received the news that my Dad was dead as a result of a drug overdose. I did not cry. I tried to remain strong until the end of the evening.

It has been several years since Erich's death, almost two decades since the first time we got high together, and another life since my father cooked me and my sister scrambled eggs and hotdogs. Today is not a good day and I'm sick again. Addiction to heroin is like waking up every day with the flu. Being sick from heroin elevates the senses in a way that could have only been bestowed by Satan himself. Lying next to Paula, whose touch would normally comfort and warm me under any other circumstance, now feels cold, making me cringe as her slightest brush against my bare skin causing hairs to raise, as my face wrinkles in disgust. Decibels of sound

elevate into obnoxious cries, and the pillow over my head is not capable of drowning out the sounds of traffic on the road outside of the RV. Hopefully nobody knocks on the door. To my tethered mind, a knock at the door is certainly the police. The smell of food from nearby restaurants reminds my empty gut that it is not hungry. My bony knees fold into my birdlike chest, my shoulders convex as I use my hands to cover my face. The taste in my mouth is that of an ashtray with the essence of gingivitis. If I had any intuition, it would be to get help, not more heroin, but I don't.

It was undoubtedly time for me to throw in the towel and get help, but I was not ready to give up the fight. As a kid, my fighting career was cut short before it ever actuated. My father, on the other hand, was a champion—more like the fighter I had always wanted to be. I can imagine what it must have been like to be at one of his fights: Meyer, with his solid left jab and iron jaw slugs away as the crowd goes wild. His steady stance maintains his position. Each fighter glistens with sweat as the ref circles around. Left right, left right, Meyer hammers his way into the third round. His opponent drops to his knees; Meyer lifts his gloves overhead, the universal sign of victory.



Sunset

Sallie Moyer

The image of my father in the ring brings me back to the time when the only thing iron about my jaw was the metal wire that was stuck in my lip. During gym one day, I got into a confrontation with a boy that turned into a pushing match. Later that day, I was informed that the boy wanted to meet me in the field behind the school, to finish up what we had started earlier in the gym. I let it be known that I would be there and considered it a possibility for me to shine. “What is this kid thinking?” I thought to myself. The boy was about a foot shorter than me. I wasn’t really expecting anything more than another pushing match that would probably get broken up.

The buzz about the fight got louder around school providing me a temporary moment of fame. When the end of the day bell rang, a group of about twenty guys became my corner, certain they were on the winning side. I was escorted by my entourage to the field behind school. Intoxicated by my new found fame, I clumsily walked right onto the field about a foot in front of my opponent without even raising my fists. Crack! The momentum of his jump and speed of his right arm, complemented by his impeccable aim, landed a powerful right hook on the left side of my face. My mouth instantly filled with blood. A lump the size of a golf ball protruded from

“I can hear the officers laughing at me. The sound of an uncoiled wheel fills the air.”

my cheek and my lips stuck to the braces on my teeth, bringing me the closest to an “iron jaw.”

This sort of defeat was a common theme in my life. My career on the wrestling team was also short lived. The other boys seemed a lot more aggressive. In the match that I almost won, I gave the other boy a bloody nose accidentally. This could have given me the advantage to win the match. The problem was I felt bad; the sensitivity that the other boys seemed to lack was a dominant quality in me. Instead of exploiting my advantage, I would lie down on my back like a puppy dog that just got yelled at and let the bloody nosed boy pin me.

Paula and I are trying to come up with a scheme that will get us back on our feet; I’m

pacing back and forth in the RV and rubbing my freshly shaved head.

“Paula, my mom said she would buy me a plane ticket if I come home for my birthday.” I continue to pace back and forth.

Paula takes a hit, holds it, and begins her rant. “Yeah fine! Go head and leave me, you fucking asshole! You won’t come back.” Smoke escapes from her lungs as she speaks; the last bit of smoke escapes with a sigh.

“No, serious Paula, I have a plan.” I sit on the bed next to Paula.

“What the hell are you going to do now? Sell your fucking testicles?” Paula laughs and takes another hit. Two black marks appear on her face as she uses her soot covered fingers to get the red hair out of her eyes, the marks of a street warrior.

“I’m leaving tomorrow,” I respond in a sheepish voice. It is clear who the dominant one in this relationship is.

“Go right ahead, you selfish bastard!”

“You need to trust me, Paula.”

“Why the hell should I trust you? You’ll probably fuck some fucking whore and bring back Aids and fuck my life up worse than you already have.”

“You got to listen to me. Paula,” I urge. “I need you to do something for me. You need

to mail a package when I get there,” in my most serious voice possible.

The package arrives. I call Paula to inform her that everything went smoothly and I would be back in two weeks. The first package went so smoothly that we decided it would be a good idea to send another and I should stay a little longer. My birthday came and went, and I began staying with an ex-girlfriend. Paula didn’t really ask questions because when the packages came, I sent money. It was almost too easy. The packages were full of weed and pretty much the same day they came, they would be gone. I went from waking up every day for the past two years, broke and sick in a filthy RV, to a pocket full of money, next to an ex-girlfriend that expected I was the same person from ten years ago. This dichotomy created a recipe for disaster.

I was not the same person. I was a full blown addict; it was going to take an act of providence to stop me now. All my life, the lesson presented itself at different times; yet, I was too stubborn and needed to learn the hard way.

I’m lying in my ex-girlfriend’s bed and I hear a knock on the door. It’s my dealers and perfect timing, because I’m starting to feel sick. I quickly jump up and get the door. They give me the shit; I get high. They ask me to come for a

ride and check out some weed they wanted to buy. Being the pot expert from California I thought I was, I considered the offer a compliment.

“Oh shit! We’re getting pulled over,” yelled the driver. Red, blue, red, blue, red. They say God speaks to us through people; sometimes those people wear uniforms and perhaps the light’s not always white.

I’m coming in and out of consciousness. When we got pulled over, I ate a handful of assorted pills that my dealer handed me so he didn’t get busted with them. The room is cold; I am sitting in a chair doing my best to keep my neck engaged. I can hear the officers laughing at me. The sound of an uncoiled wheel fills the air. A cart with an outdated TV strapped to the top of it, is wheeled in front of me. The picture on the screen is blurry. I rub my eyes to hopefully bring the picture into focus. After another failed attempt at trying to bring the screen into focus, I begin to get frustrated. There is an officer on my right and an officer on my left. The officer on the right smacks me on the back of the head and says, “Show the judge some fucking respect!” My head feels like a cinderblock; gravity is my nemesis. The judge is talking at me through the TV and I can’t make out what he is saying. I finally make out a couple of words—“\$50,000

bail.” They must have found the weed. I give up fighting the gravitation pull and allow my head to collapse into my chest.

“Trays zup!” comes from a deep and hollow voice, followed by the sound of keys rattling, doors slamming, and more uncoiled wheels on a squeaky food cart stacked with trays of food. The walls are brown; cinderblock stacked upon cinderblock creates the four by nine cell that now occupies me. I find myself on the top bunk. The florescent light above me flickers arduously. I gaze down through the bars in front of me and see bodies in blue scrubs; they are feasting on unidentifiable shapes. My body is swaying on the top bunk as I make an attempt to sit up.

I come into some semblance of awareness and feel half of my body hanging from the top of the bunk. All of a sudden, the bodies in blue scrubs get louder and louder. One of them is banging on the window for the guard. “C.O White boy is seizin!” yells one of the bodies in blue scrubs. For a split second, I realize what is going on and allow my body to exacerbate the symptoms of a seizure with my tongue flapping like a dog. The guards rush in, grab my limp body from the top bunk, strap me into a wheelchair, and take me to the medical ward.

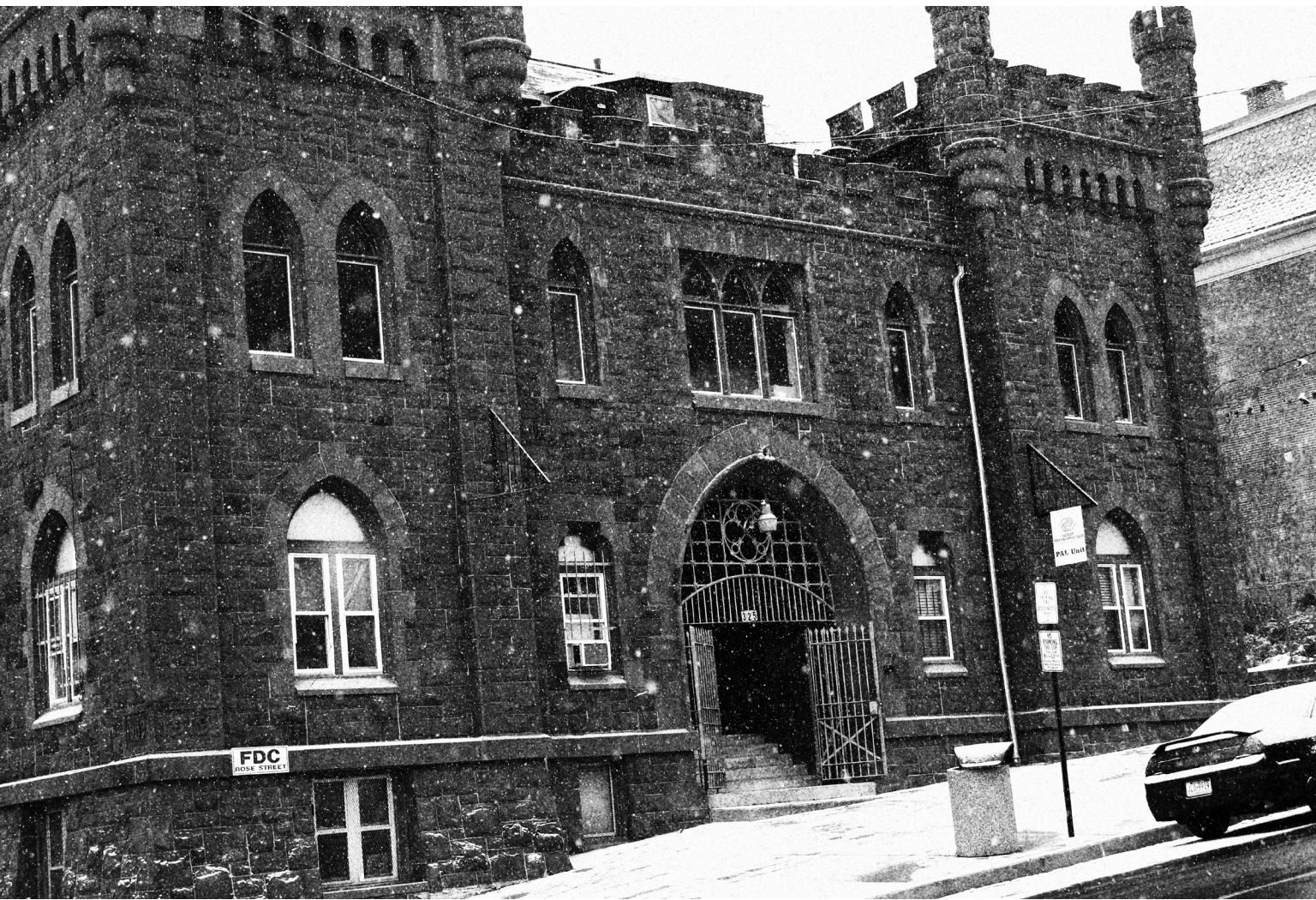
They take my blood, they check my heart, and they ask me questions. I tell them about the

handful of unidentified pills I ate. They tell me it's been several days since the arrest and they will be keeping me in the medical ward. The next day I wake up in full blown detox. Scabs form on my hips from rocking back and forth on an inch thick ragged nylon sleeping mat lying on top of a metal frame. Everything is hard and cold. Outside of the cell, I can hear cries of pain and discomfort. I'm tangled in white sheets with the smell of the strongest artificial detergent one could imagine. I bite into the pillow like a pit bull with lock jaw, in hopes of transferring my pain. Dried nocturnal emission in the front of my pants, shit is in the back.

They say sometimes it takes humiliation to get humble; I was certainly humiliated. One would think, after all this, I must have realized I was fighting a losing battle. Three months later I was out, 40 pounds heavier, eager to show the world how resiliently I could bounce back. Within two months, I was strung-out again.

One year later, on June 28th 2011, I checked myself into rehab with the encouragement of my probation officer who said my other option was jail. I was mentally, spiritually, physically, and financially bankrupt. I was finally beaten up enough that I had no other option, but to surrender.

I'm sitting at my desk writing this story. It's almost four years since I walked into rehab totally defeated. There is not a day that goes by that I am not aware that I could have ended up just like Erich and my father. The struggle continues. Each night when I go to bed, I thank God for another day sober. I still have days that I long to be woken up by the smell of eggs and hotdogs frying in a pan. I can imagine Erich looking down, from above, with his blue eyes smiling through his long blond hair. As I sit here, I'm now struggling to end a story that doesn't end. Each day, I must surrender in the same way I did the day before, the same way I did the day I walked into rehab. I push the chair back from my desk. I close my laptop and stand up straight. I ball my hands into fists and raise them high over my head.



Modern Castle

Sabrina Readinger

The Debate over Tissue Rights and Ownership

Margaret McGinnis

Mary stood beside [the medical examiner], waiting as he sewed Henrietta's abdomen closed. She wanted to run out of the morgue and back to the lab, but instead she stared at Henrietta's arms and legs – anything to avoid looking into her lifeless eyes. Then Mary's gaze fell on Henrietta's feet, and she gasped: Henrietta's toenails were covered in chipped bright red polish. "When I saw those toenails," Mary told me years later, "I nearly fainted. I thought, Oh, jeez, she's a real person. I started imagining her sitting in her bathroom painting those toenails, and it hit me for the first time that those cells we'd been working with all this time and sending all over the world, they came from a live woman. I'd never thought of it that way."

—Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

When Henrietta Lacks went to Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1951 to have a cancerous tumor removed, she had no idea that hospital researchers would keep pieces of the excised tumor for research. They did and it gave rise to an immortal cell line. Her cells have been used almost ubiquitously, and to this very day, in biomedical research. Though Henrietta succumbed to her cancer the same year her biopsy was done, her family did not know her cells were still alive and being used in laboratories worldwide until 25 years later (Skloot 3-4).

Henrietta's story sounds far-fetched. Unfortunately, it is quite the opposite. While it is unusual for an individual's tissues to be so medically significant, it is, in fact, commonplace for doctors to use "leftover" tissues and blood drawn from medical procedures in biomedical research even today. Most patients are unaware

that their tissues are kept for this purpose. This seems to be because physicians, researchers, and institutions do not need to ask patients' permission to keep their samples for biomedical research. It is debatable whether this lack of consent is appropriate. Should patients know about what happens to their tissues after they are removed from their bodies?

Some guidelines for tissue collection do exist. The Common Rule, also known as the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, is a set of guidelines overseen by the United States Health and Human Services Department regarding biomedical testing on human subjects ("Federal Policy"). In an article published in *Clinical Chemistry*, a team of pathologists and lawyers from Washington State University, headed by Monica Allen, explain, "the Common Rule applies only to human research

participants, termed ‘human subjects,’ defined as living individuals with whom the investigator interacts or about whom the investigator obtains identifiable private information” (Allen et al. 1676). Herein lies a loophole: it is legal for researchers to keep excised tissue without patients’ consent, if the tissue was taken for an otherwise necessary medical procedure, as opposed to voluntarily donated for research purposes, and as long as the researchers do not have contact with, or knowledge of the identity of, the patient. Furthermore, the tissue sample must be labeled in a way that it cannot be traced back to the patient. In the past, these conditions have sufficiently protected patients, physicians, and researchers (though perhaps not the fiduciary relationship). In 1985, scientists made a discovery that drastically changed this issue: tissues, including blood, contain the individual’s entire genetic sequence (Saad 130). That is, regardless of how a sample is labeled, a patient can be individually identified by that sample by isolating the patient’s DNA.

This complicates the question of consent in an incredible way: does the ability to identify a patient from the tissue sample repudiate the Common Rule loophole? It is very difficult to find a straight answer to this question. In fact, almost all of the published information on this

issue revolves around literal ownership, the commercial and financial rights that patients have to the knowledge gained from research conducted on their tissues. Little, if any, attention is paid to the possibility that researchers could potentially identify a “donor” from the tissue itself. Under ideal conditions of ethics and altruism, the question of identification is negligible. In order to make such an identification, the unknown sample must be compared to a sample of known origin. It is unlikely that biomedical researchers would be interested in taking this step. However, it cannot be said that all researchers, facilities, and/or parent companies are so focused on the purity of research. Is it so much of a stretch to think that insurance companies might pay large sums to research organizations to cross-reference life insurance applicants in order to determine whether they have genetic predispositions to certain conditions, thus providing justification for denial of policies? Would it be possible for large-scale employers to do the same? Though this may be a pessimistic or fanciful prediction, surely such deceptions are possible.

Another area of concern is the privacy of children. Most individuals would not object to their own tissues being used to further medical technology, but the knowledge that their children’s tissues are being stored somewhere out

“Opening the door of legality to include consent might open other doors that best remain closed.”

there is a more disturbing thought. And indeed their tissues are somewhere out there: in 2009, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) built a \$13.5 million building solely to be used for the banking of newborn blood samples (Skloot 316). Though there is little difference between an adult’s right to informed consent and a child’s, it does seem to feel less ethical to store an infant’s tissues if he or she is potentially identifiable from them. And there is no quicker way to lose the trust of the general public than to threaten their children. As stated in a Pediatrics article, “The lack of transparency on the part of states in retaining [newborn blood samples] may undermine public trust in state newborn screening programs and the research enterprise” (Lewis et al. 703).

Alternatively, there are many people who do not think that keeping tissues for research is problematic. Not only would they agree to provide consent if asked, but they do not

even feel that consent is necessary. Furthermore, they probably have no interest in the commercial outcomes of testing done on their tissue. In these cases, it would seem logical to assume that asking them to provide consent would not change their opinion. However, if informing another patient who did have a problem with these procedures would cause that patient to deny consent, then isn’t asking for consent the appropriate action? Those who already agree would agree and those who do not agree would have the opportunity to refuse.

So then why not provide informed consent? It can be argued that scientists are expected to conduct their research according to ethical guidelines and hence the issue of identity is less relevant. Yet, again, the vast majority of available information regarding this issue revolves around legal ownership. Researchers worry that providing full disclosure about what could happen with a patient’s tissues could lead to the patient withholding the tissues with proprietary (or financial) interests in mind. If this happened on a large enough scale, the consequences to biomedical research would be devastating. As R. Alta Charo, professor of law and bioethics at the University of Wisconsin Law School

points out, the field of biotechnology relies on these “leftover” samples for the majority of its research (703). It is even debatable that attention be brought to this issue, lest the general public forces a decision out of emotion or greed.

In a way, the focus on literal ownership is indeed the most relevant one. There is no solution to the question of consent if it is unclear whether or not the patient still owns their tissues. However, as Charo states, there are some severe consequences to naming patients the “owners” of their excised tissues: “If this pattern were extended to tissues, then selling organs might become a matter of right. And cadaveric tissue could become the property of heirs” (703). Opening the door of legality to include consent might open other doors that best remain closed. The Supreme Court of California agrees: in 1990, they ruled against John Moore, who sued the Regents of the University of California (among them his physician, Dr. David Golde) for developing a cell line from his excised spleen. At the time, the cell line was estimated to be worth \$3 billion. The Court asserted that the removed tissue was abandoned as medical waste, and therefore Moore had no claim to the developed cell line or its monetary worth. Further, the Court stated that their decision to rule against Moore was rooted in fear that patients owning

their excised tissues might “hinder research by restricting access to the necessary raw materials” (Skloot 201-205). This ruling remains the legal precedent regarding tissue ownership.

The discussion on tissue rights is still evolving. Several questions still need to be answered before the concept of genetic privacy can be addressed. Though there is legal precedent regarding the ownership of excised tissue, there is still much unrest surrounding tissue ownership and informed consent. Perhaps Charo best articulates this severely complicated situation:

Because the meaning of “property” is unclear. Because the question must be asked about our relationships both to our bodies and to our excised body tissue . . . No brief article or single court opinion could address all the complexities of the legal notion of “property.” But simple or not, the question of whether we “own” our bodies must be answered soon. (1517)

It is important that biomedical research continues until these issues are resolved. But the longer our tissues sit in storage, on scientific workbenches, or as evidence in medical journals, Charo has the right idea. The sooner the better.

Coming Storm

Vivian Azar

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Memory

Ana Ramos

Strange the way one comes to remember
I, for one,
Only seem to revisit
Experiences as if now something different
Once a beautiful occurrence, now a bitter recollection
Though Memory remembers correctly
Just as did occur
But is it really something different—
Different from what I once thought was

In *that* moment?
My perception, perhaps then tainted,
Blurry—foggy even
Like those cold eerie mornings
When taking a walk along the beach,
Just before spring begins to peak
The wind violent as if angry at my perhaps disfigured recollection
The thundering waves smashing along the shore
As if haunting me in reassurance.



Endlessly

Wilben Suriel

Little Things

Sarah Belles

Fickle, fettered, little things	Pretty, fawning, little things
I watch them dance without their wings	Not knowing what the future brings
And sing their praises high	Keeping in their fragile hearts
From pinkish dusk to darkened sky	The ever-changing tides of March
Coveting what they hold cheap	But as the rule and time dictates
While I lie sweating in my sleep	Those women who are called the fates
Clutching closely to my chest	Limit not in number three
The nothing that I do detest	Which I myself am apt to see
Yet, seldom look on as a friend	Issue edicts on the form
A thought which makes the bad times end	To make it frail, or make it worn
	And those who do not pass the test
	The gift they get is loneliness

Oh, precious, lovely, little things
They hold the fingers with the rings
For my hand, gold will not fit
A fact that I must now admit
Accepting what comes with the day
That green is red, and blue is gray
Thinking of what times I've missed
And yet I can't help but resist
Though change I have, and change I will
Until my beating heart grows still
They cannot see what hurt they bring
Those cherished, chiding, little things

The Tiger

Abigail Chen



Karma

Kelsie Knabb

I keep digging a hole.

Grabbing a shovel and digging.

Deeper

Deeper

Into the ground

I can feel myself being pushed

Down

Down

Down into the hole

I don't ask for help as I

Slowly

Slowly

Disappear.



Hell Train

Robert Jason Slay

Aftermath

Austin Graczyk

You roll off the first floor roof and manage to land on your feet. By the time you get to the end of the alley, you hear sirens on your left and make the decision to go right.

The side street you've turned onto is a dead end, so you have to improvise. One of the apartment buildings has a fire escape, but you need to jump up onto the dumpster to use it. The ladders prove more tiring than the rest of your sprint combined.

You push yourself until you get to the top. Only after you're hidden on the roof do you let yourself stop, and breathe, and reevaluate. You've never seen a bank job go so sour so fast before. You could've worked around one getaway car breaking down, but both? No chance. And that guard must've been on steroids.

Three shots sound in the air a few streets over, and you hope to God it's Wraith's blank gun and not a trigger-happy cop.

You hear the sirens heading for the noise and you get ready to climb down the opposite side fire escape. No time to worry. Wraith is the best runner you've ever worked with. She knows how to handle herself.

Bones is the one you're really worried about. He'd been a little shaky ever since Dixie nearly blew his head off at First National. It was an accident, but still.

You glance down the fire escape and almost puke from the sudden urge to jump. This side has stairs instead of ladders, thankfully enough.

Once you cross the highway, you're far enough gone for the sirens to fade and the scenery to change from cityscape to business suburbia. Your phone rings just as you get into the lot of a mostly empty strip mall.

"Hey. I'm almost there."

"Almost doesn't count for shit."

You pass by some sort of sporting goods store with a couple of bikes propped up outside. "Gimme three minutes. And pull out the ramp on the U-Haul."

Dixie sighs on the other end but relents. "Three minutes."

You both hang up and you grab one of the bikes. What's a little Grand Theft Cycle compared to a full-blown bank robbery, really?

You glance over your shoulder once as you round the exit; it looks like the workers are just starting to notice that they're a bike down. By the time the U-Haul comes into sight, you're legitimately worried about them leaving without you: even with your new ride, you're getting closer to five minutes than three.

Dixie's standing next to the truck, shaking like a heroin addict. When she sees you, she

throws up the back door, and you roll up the ramp and inside. “You’re late,” she calls after you before she folds up the ramp and pulls the door back down.

You dismount from the bike, and Bones and Diamond both give you a quick embrace. “We good?” you ask as the truck starts and pulls away from the curb.

Diamond nods. “Yep. Wraith got to the safe house and we’re looking at ten grand each.”

Relief floods your system and you slide down against the wall of the truck to the floor. “Holy *shit*, we’re good.”



Dirty Harriet

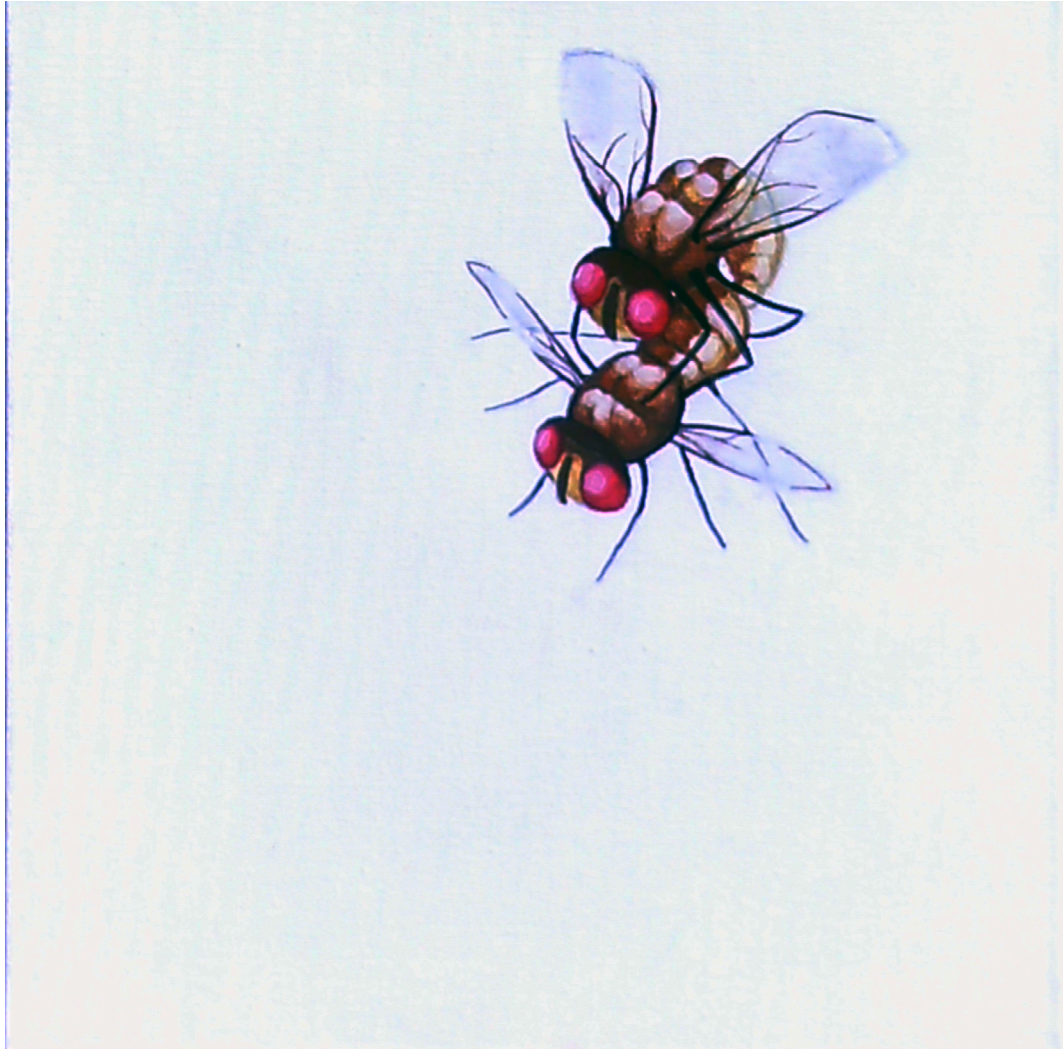
Sarah Belles

Patience

Rachel Chlebowski

His hair is a sea breeze, his lips, salt. I stare into the vast ocean. Boston skyline lies behind us, as the ferry floats on.	His waves rudely smack the side of the ferry, reminding me of my hunger: constant, never fulfilled. My satisfaction runs as dry as the concrete city behind us.
For the moment, I am as calm as the sea. When I thirst, he naively offers me water, poisonous, burning, salty. I spit it out.	More. I always need more. As he gives me every gilled creature and ounce of water that he has.

Sarah Belles |



Dissipation in progress



My First Date

“The things that are supposed to be little hearts with missing teeth and infected eyeballs—they are my version of cute, mostly because everyone I show them to is so off-put by them.”

“Who needs love more than those who’ve been hurt?”

Flint’s Folly





“I get out a piece of paper and just start sketching sloppy little drawings in boxes that represent the canvas. Some things wind up not meaning anything—little images that I think look nice.”

City-Scape

“I’ve had one painting class in my lifetime. I’m still feeling my way around the medium; I’m still learning.”



Motherboard



Trip to the Dentist

“I don’t overthink the shapes or the shadows;
my hands just do what they remember
learning in *Color Theory* and *Painting I*.”



Chain Smoking Fetuses

A Hip-Hop Response to “The New Colossus”

Nicholas Galiano

Lady liberty stands with her hands in salute
Beaconing weakening children and fools to reduce to new recruits,
“Here you can all be free to be as the lady in the green mantle,
Wearing shackles and sandals and bearing the torch handle for the man in the suit,
Keeping the lanterns lit and the candles ample so all man and beast
on land and sea can crabbily ever after see
‘till she be knee deep in burial reef that liberty
Had never been and never will be free.

I’ve been wearin’ a lot of black this past week;
Brothers’ been wearin’ a lot of red white and blue too,
The promise of freedom ringing like Bluetooth from ear to primal fear to try to imbue clues.
With star-spangled swastikas stamped on their master cards,
The American Dream Men unaware of who their masters are
Bow to the authority of what Majority Quarterly reports they were born to be:

According to their cardio charts, they has to be martyrs for hard-earned heart-hurt

While their spending habits says they has to be adamant masochists.

Stranded in the balance of good deals and ideals do

Procreationist creationists abuse booze to mute truths they have within

And massacre blastocysts so the next generation of activists can't live to have sinned, and

No one has to ask them shit, and the pacifists pass the fist to the adlibists, who

Jabber, "The end is neigh" and random shit from mcAdam battlements as

Average pricks rattle past in cataclysm catalysts.

I've been seeing a lot of red this past year;

Omnicolor's been fillin' a lot of orders for in-between greens as

Brothers flash their untrue colors on TV screens teaching young teens to practice the vanity the academy

ads to the dream.

Then it's like Yahweh or the highway so you practically have to believe.

And you can't think to question belief if you can't think;

Can't seem to read between the lines if you can't read;

Can't ask the police to stop beating if you can't breathe;

Can't speak peace if you can't have dreams; can't dream if you can't sleep; can't sleep if you can't clean the caffeine out o' your canteen; can't clean if you can't keep your hands free of the pantry; you're devolving to an insomnia zombie in Abercrombie jammies but the candy's just that sweet.

Lady liberty stands with a torch in her hand shining over the land tinting everything yellow.

Is greed not a sin or is green just the in-color of late? I'm up late on a Sunday night tryin'a'cide what to wear to church on a Monday to honor the new colossus, standing tall, is she an idol before the gods or a god

Before the idle? Is the gown a bridal don or final rite before the fall? Is her pulse vital or suicidal? Does her rightful title roll on tidal waves or cover flows, when the trade-wind blows the showboat over and everything goes

Overboard?

Is she warrior or a whore? Is she a curator for the poor?

Is she an orator for the cure; the panacea for panicking passengers apt for to pass through her aperture.

She says,

“Give me your Estevan and your Josefina and your cocaine and we’ll call it even, Steven;

“Give me your Achmed and I’ll send my ‘God-bless-you’s’;

“Give me your weak and I’ll take what I need and leave the rest at sea;

“Give me your sweetest niece and your strongest nephews and I’ll

“Send a few whom I’d let through back to the dunes with the rest of you;

“Give me your refugees; I’ll give you my refuse.

Unlike her dechained predates of Greek fame that she may berate, Liberty’s barely teenage and she’s already wearing green-face.



Gianna

Martin DeValle

Charlie

Sarah Belles

In the sticky heat of a southern afternoon there is a boy standing behind an old auto body shop, surrounded by dirt and gravel and steel. He is alone, a dangerous scenario, because when he's alone his mind tends to go places he doesn't want it to. His brain, as a separate entity, likes to think about the things that hurt the most—like being held back twice in school or being the tallest kid in the second grade. It's bad enough when kids his own age make fun of him, but when those kids are smaller than him, it's so much worse. But now is not the time to dwell on those sorts of things; it is time to wake up.

Letting himself out of the confines of his own thoughts, he rejoins the secular world, a place where senses exist and there is no room for anything other than what is physical. Charlie is standing there, quiet, motionless in the heat, in the damn musky heat—the kind that penetrates you to the bone and makes you want to pull off your own skin. It's the type of weather that gives birth to the flies that swarm around your head and drink your sweat before eventually eating you alive.

He is busy there, his eyes open, absorbing the sights all around him, which is the first step towards waking up the rest of his senses. There are trees growing a small distance from him, though not many—just a pathetic little cluster

of pines planted behind the shop to give the boys of the auto body a feeling of rustic privacy, whatever that means. But that was obviously done some time ago. The shop itself is in disrepair, as Charlie's wandering eyes rediscover. The roof is a rusted tin mess, the walls a cascade of peeling red paint over rotted wood, and above it all is a black sign with white letters that read, "Jim's Auto Repair." The J and the O are partially obscured due to exactly five bullet holes, three over the first letter and two over the second. Charlie stops for a moment to count them. He has to do this or he won't be able to move on. He does the same with the cars sitting about the yard.

1...2...3

Just as it had been last week

4...5...6

And a month before that

7...8...

All these motorized beasts of burden were dead, their bodies decaying and dissolving into the ground beneath them. Charlie felt a small pang of sympathy for them. It hurt just to know that these four-wheeled creatures who once guzzled oil and belched smoke would never again feel what it was like to have a mechanical heart burning away inside of them, giving them speed, giving them purpose.

This idea hit home with Charlie, since he

too had no purpose, at least none that he was sure of. On the other hand, he was sure his mother didn't have one. She never did anything, not dishes, not laundry. Grandma was the one who did all that. The only thing his mother actually did manage to do was her makeup; he'd watched her put it on enough times to know.

Silent and hidden, he'd often stand in her doorway with his eyes transfixed and fascinated, staring at her as she placed the lipstick on the bottom left corner of her lower lip. He'd lick his own lips in anticipation as she gently pressed the tube down and moved it right. Then she pushed it up to the middle of her top lip, stopped, and put it back in practically in the same place again before moving it left. Though her lips were already very red, she'd always repeat this, two or three times.

Charlie blinks and tries not to think about it anymore, annoyed that he slipped away for a moment. He was in the real world now and thoughts were not allowed in the real world. He takes a moment or two to compose himself, pulling in a deep breath and tasting a mix of dust and the salt from his upper lip. He holds this in for a while, like someone readying himself for baptism. He counts to ten and let all the air out in one long gust from his nose and mouth. Finally, he is able to begin.

His body has been numb, but as it moves forward he can feel it come alive with delicious little shots of electricity. He tingles as if there are lovely little bugs crawling up his legs. Half-listening, he can hear his shoes make scraping noises as they walk across the yard, one foot continuously leading the other in a strange parade, kicking up gravel and sending it to places he couldn't see. Soon, his feet bring him before a body even more motionless than his was just a few minutes ago.

Charlie looks at it, squinting his eyes against the bright sunlight. The body lying there is that of a dog, or at least it was at one time. Do things remain the same when they're dead? Or do they just become meat? Or nothing at all? In any case, this animal was clearly male, its un-spayed sex organ leaning apologetically against its inner thigh—that is, if dog parts can be described the same as human parts. He was a big dog, an old one as well, but that's not what Charlie was really looking at. What held his interest so completely was the pink folds of intestine pushing their way out of a gash in the dog's bloated and exposed tummy.

Charlie draws closer and studies the opening, running from the chest down to the belly button. Do dogs have belly buttons? He doesn't know for sure. The flesh of its stomach is

jagged and rough, sloppy. It must have been cut by someone in a hurry, maybe afraid, or maybe just eager to get the job done. His gaze wanders up from the gruesome spot and stops just over the dog's face. Its mouth is hanging open, with a pink tongue sticking out to one side, just like pink entrails. It's almost as if it had been killed while panting. But for what? For its killer or the heat?

Focusing just beyond the features of this animal, Charlie sees that there is a considerable amount of blood pooled around the head. He spotted it on the way over but didn't pay it much attention. He chose to ignore it since it wasn't the most interesting thing there. Hooking a finger in the collar, he lifts the dog's head and sees that the throat has been slit deeply, cleanly, quite unlike the stomach. Charlie sighs and lets the head drop; it looks like he stayed still for it, like it trusted its killer.

At that moment a black fly buzzes down and lands right smack on the dog's eye, which is glazed over and turning white. Charlie shoos the nasty little thing away in a small act of kindness, wanting to preserve a tiny bit of dignity for the dog, as he was in such a compromising position. He figures that the dog deserves a stay from the squirming progeny of insects for at least a little while longer. An honorable intention, certainly, but in the passing of a mere three seconds, young

Charlie is making a hypocrite of himself, pointing a finger at the deceased and saying, "Play dead..." A smile follows, but it doesn't take long for him to realize that his joke was made in bad taste. "Sorry," he says in all sincerity. "I didn't mean it." Then he waits for what he doesn't know. It wasn't as if he actually expected the dog to answer back, to say, "Oh, that's alright," and wag its tail at him. Though it would have been a nice gesture.

After that brief but awkward moment passes, Charlie scuttles ten or so feet over to a pile of scrap metal in search of a tool to begin working. He finds an iron rod, colored red with rust. He picks it up and looks it over in his hands, not knowing what it was or what it might have been used for. He only knows or cares that it will be useful to him. Walking back, his grip on the metal tightens in anticipation, rubbing the rust off with his sweaty little hands. This is the part he has been waiting for.

Using his instrument of choice, Charlie opens the gash in the dog even wider, giving him the opportunity to see inside, the chance to view everything as it was supposed to be, all fit together in perfect natural order. As was his intent from the start, Charlie ruins this order, this divine arrangement of organic machinery, by hooking the lower intestine with the end of the rod and pulling it out into the daylight. A froth



Preserve Your Food

Kelsie Knabb

“He barely waits for the cloud to settle before taking off on his own.”

of blood comes seeping out as he pulls, some of it sticking to the bowels as they slither out of hiding, the rest seeping into the dry, thirsty earth. Charlie keeps pulling until the whole twisted mess is laid out before him.

Next is the stomach, and then liver, though they can't be brought out very far, only separated from each other. Then he exposes the kidneys from their fatty capsules and digs the bladder up from the pelvis. Things stop there, however, because his tool of choice is unable to get through the elastic barrier of the diaphragm. After a few goes at trying to poke his way through, he quickly concedes that there is no way he is going to get a better view of the heart or lungs without a sharper tool. Even so, cutting the diaphragm would mean that he would have to reach inside the dog to do it, and he can't risk getting any blood on his hands. Limited, he tries to satisfy himself with what he can examine.

With this macabre display spread out before him, he pokes and prods the innards with one end of the rod, studying their shape, color, size, everything, hoping in some way to understand why form follows function. In the end, this exercise leaves him without answers. No matter how long he looks at a kidney, he still

can't figure out how it works or why it looks the way it does. Or why God gave kidneys to dogs in the first place and not to worms. He had wondered these sorts of things before when his cat used to bring home dead birds, leaving their half masticated little bodies on the front porch for him to find. He had studied them too, and their insides were the same as dogs. Well, nearly the same, but the why is what he really wanted to know.

Aggravated, Charlie takes the rod and painstakingly shovels the organs back into their cavity. He barely finishes this task when he hears two bubbly little voices chatting and giggling incoherently. This sends him into a panic, afraid that if someone were to see him and the dog, then they would think he had killed it. And then he'd be in trouble, and everyone would talk about it and say nasty things about him. They'd hate him more than they hate him now! That can't happen; Charlie won't let it happen. He is a good boy and good boys don't get into trouble. Thinking quickly, he grabs the dog by the collar and begins dragging it across the yard to the nearest car. He stashes it behind one of the front wheels, then turns, and tries to make a run for it.

The little boy makes it about half way

across the yard before stumbling over something. He looks down briefly and sees that it's a knife. Its handle is clean but the blade is covered with blood and dirt. Now the voices are close, and if he runs they'll see him, and when they find the dog, they'll know for sure that he did something wrong. Picking the knife up, he sticks the handle in his back pocket and hides the rest under his shirt.

Charlie is standing perfectly still again, watching as two little girls ride their bikes past Jim's Auto Repair. He knows them from school and hopes beyond hope they won't notice him, though it's already too late. One of the girls, Amber, decides to turn her handle bars and pedal her white rubber tires up to him. Her friend, Christine, does the same, like an ant following its queen. Girls always seem to do that. One of the secrets which all boys know is that girls share a collective brain and move according to the thoughts and whims of one another. And that's not what he thinks; it is what he knows.

"You're not s'posed to be here!" shouts Amber, angrily biking her way over. "There's a sign out front, no trespassing, can't you read?"

Charlie doesn't say a thing, just grinds his teeth and returns her glare. He always thinks she is a pretty girl—unfairly perfect with big blue eyes, freckles, and shiny blond hair held back

from her face by two big plastic barrettes. Her friend is a brunette with a grayish complexion and a wide nose. He doesn't like those types of noses.

"You're gonna be in trouble, ya know. Your mama's gonna whup you good when she finds out you're here," says Amber.

"You gonna tell?" says Charlie, almost as a challenge.

Amber takes a moment to consider, her blue eyes narrowing, surprised that some little nothing in the school's social strata didn't go straight to begging or at least tearing up a little.

"Nah, I ain't gonna tell," she finally decides.

"What about her?" He motions with his chin, pointing out the other girl.

"She won't say nothing either, will ya, Christine?"

There comes no answer, as her friend is busy looking over her shoulder at something in the background. Amber gears up and strikes Christine in the ribs with her elbow.

"Well, are ya?"

"Ow! What?" says Christine.

"I said you ain't gonna tell, right!"

"Okay, I won't tell, geeze!" whines Christine, rubbing the sore spot on her chest.

"See, we ain't gonna tell..."

And just as Charlie is feeling a sense of relief, she adds, “But you gotta gives us a dollar each, ok?”

He feels his stomach drop down to his knees. Now his voice is meek and pleading like Amber expected it to be.

“But I...I ain’t got any money!”

“So,” she says, crinkling her nose up in contempt, “ask your ma or something. You can pay us Monday at lunch.”

She turns her wheel, ready to speed away from weirdo Charlie when unexpectedly:

“Hey, kid,” says Christine, breaking free of toady protocol, daring to speak without first being spoken to. “What’s that puddle over there?”

“Oil,” says Charlie, a little too quickly. Why not? It’s certainly dark enough to be.

“Don’t look like it to me,” returns Christine with an attitude.

That’s it, they have him. He’s sure of it. He’ll be in so much trouble. What is he going to do? Unknowingly, his hand goes under his shirt and grips the blade handle.

Amber rolls her eyes. “Whatever, it don’t matter anyhow,” she says, dismissing Christine’s skepticism. “Let’s just go back to my house.”

“But you said you wanted to show me something?” says Christine, puzzled.

“Shut up, will ya! I don’t want him knowing

“Satisfied that only
pure, hot water is
running, she sticks
Charlie’s hands under
the tap.”

what we’re doing! Now c’mon!” She barks this last order before speeding off on her bike.

Afraid of being left behind, Christine scurries to turn her bike around and get her feet on the pedals. With everything in place, she rides off, leaving Charlie in a cloud of dust. He barely waits for the cloud to settle before taking off on his own.

Returning home that evening, ten minutes after supper began, Charlie knows he’s in trouble. He does his best to enter through the front door without making any noise. The hinges always creak, though, no matter how much he wants them not to. And they do this time as well, sounding the alarm.

“Charles, is that you, boy?” says the gruff voice of his grandfather from the living room.



Malignant Allure

Wilben Suriel

The old man is sitting in his recliner, pants undone in front of the TV while eating a plate of fried chicken. Only he is allowed to eat his meals like this, in the living room. Everyone else has to sit at the table.

“You’re late.” He looks at Charlie over the rim of his glasses and wags a finger, motioning for him to come over. “You know how your Gram is,” he says in a grave tone. “Now, my suggestion to you is to go in that dining room with your head real low, and when she says anything to you, the first thing outta your mouth better be an apology. Don’t make no excuses, just say you’re sorry and that aught ta see you through. Good luck.” He uses his fork to wave Charlie away and returns his attention to the seven o’ clock news, buzzing its broadcast across an aging Zenith.

Charlie does as he’s been told, feeling nervous and apprehensive as he walks through the kitchen and into the dining room. His mother and grandmother are both there, and his mom looks up at him for an instant but goes right back to eating. Grandma, on the other hand, is sitting stiffly in her chair, her plate lying before her, full but untouched. She isn’t someone who believes in eating without everyone present. She turns, finally acknowledging his presence with a nod and a look of displeasure.

“Seven o’clock, Charles, that is when we

sit down to eat in this house. Not five minutes after, not ten minutes after, at seven.”

“Sorry, Grandma,” he says, taking his grandpa’s advice.

“My dinner is almost cold, and so is yours. If they got cold, I’d have to throw them out.”

“Sorry, Grandma,” he says again.

“I don’t enjoy wasting money, much less making a dinner for someone who doesn’t have the sense or courtesy to be on time.”

“Sorry, Grandma.”

“Please stop saying that!” she snaps, throwing her napkin on the table.

Charlie takes a few steps back and almost apologizes again, but catches himself just before he does and bites his lips together. His grandmother stares down at him with a narrowed glare, her mouth pinching into a thin line of red.

“I suppose you’ve been playing in the dirt, like a little pig,” she says. “Go on, show me your hands.”

Reluctantly, Charlie approaches and brings his hands up, presenting them to her, palms outward. She grabs them and pulls him violently towards her. It takes only a few seconds for her to throw them down in disgust.

“You’re not eating until you wash your hands,” she says. Grabbing him by the shirt, she drags him over to the kitchen sink. Turning

only the hot tap on, she lets it run for a moment so that the bad water runs out first and all that comes out afterward is clean. Satisfied that only pure, hot water is running, she sticks Charlie's hands under the tap. His face turns red as he holds back a scream. Screaming would only make it worse, and he knows that everything will be over soon anyway. Once his hands are thoroughly scrubbed, he is allowed to sit down and eat. However, he is under strict orders to go right upstairs to bed when he is finished. But Charlie has trouble eating, with the thought of the dog's corpse just lying behind the wheel of that car. He feels like it is waiting for him, as if it were lonely without him.

"What's the matter? Don't you like it?" says his grandmother, snapping him out of his world of thought. "You've taken maybe two bites. You dislike my cooking that much?"

"No, Grandma. It's good, it's good," he assures her, suddenly shoveling spoonfuls of mashed potatoes into his mouth with a raw, red little hand.

She looks on, disgusted. "You eat like a pig, you come home dirty like a pig, you're a dirty pig, you hear!" She shakes her head. "Might as well have just raised a little porker."

Something like a grimace comes across his mother's face then, but she says nothing. She

just looks at Charlie for a moment with large eyes that seem to have something sad about them. She gets up and quietly leaves the table.

"Where are you off to?" asks Grandma, putting her fork down.

Still on her way to the door, his mother doesn't answer; she just keeps moving. When she is gone, Charlie's grandmother shakes her head and dabs the corners of her mouth with the crisp edge of her napkin.

"Now, if you want a pig, there's a pig for you," she says. "She's going out, most likely trying to find you a new daddy, but she'll probably only bring home a new brother."

This confuses Charlie, and he begins to imagine a large store with babies and men set atop long racks, all wrapped up and boxed and marked with a red sticker that says 'SALE' in bold letters. If they sold people, maybe they sold hearts and lungs and skeletons too, and maybe a book about how to put them all together. He wishes.

His dinner finished and the dishes done, Charlie is rushed upstairs for bed time. There, up in his room, his grandma reads to him in the last minutes of remaining daylight. She reads in a soft voice, using one hand to hold the book open and the other to stroke his hair. When the story is done, she kisses him on the forehead and says a

prayer to the angels, asking them to protect and watch over him while he sleeps.

“You’re a good boy, Charlie,” she says.

“I know,” he says with a smile, and it makes his grandma chuckle.

“Don’t let it get to your head, now. Love you, baby boy,” she says just before turning out the lights and closing the door.

For some time, Charlie just lies there in the darkness, feeling warm, feeling like he actually matters. And in this moment of soft serenity, a small, slick figure hops up on the bed and climbs on top of his stomach.

“Maisy,” he says in recognition, stroking his cat along its back and down its tail. The motion itself winds up sending him to sleep. That, and the feeling of soft fur between his fingers, is one of the best feelings in the world, though far from his first favorite. Before his eyes close for the last time that night, he thinks of the dog. It’ll be spoiled tomorrow. By daylight, every crawling thing in creation will have had its turn at it, and what will he be left with? Clearly, something else has to be found.

The next morning, Charlie wakes up early and rides his bike back down to Jim’s Auto Repair. Along the way he passes by one of his neighbors who is out in his robe. He’s whistling

and calling the name “Pawley” over and over again. This is a man that Charlie knows well and likes well. He has a good number of pets and always lets young Charles play with them as often as he likes. He knows, and is often astounded, that this man has in his possession: four cats, seven hermit crabs, two birds, a turtle, a rabbit, and... something else. Charlie pretends not to remember what the last animal was; there were sixteen animals, sixteen and no more. He speeds past the man, partially in fear, partially just to get where he’s going.

Once again Charlie is standing in the middle of the yard behind the old auto body shop and, though the sun is still low in the sky, the morning affords him no coolness—no brief gust of wind to soothe his body from the heat of early September. Charlie looks over at the car where he placed the dog’s body. He wonders what it looks like now that the bugs and rats and all other sorts of critters had the time to do what they did naturally. Not to worry, he’ll find out later. Right now he has work to do, and the very thought of it makes his hands clench in anticipation. One hand around a small hacksaw, which he took from his Grandfather’s tool box, and the other around a burlap sack. He keeps a firm hold on it as the sack shuffles about, whining and meowing ever so slightly.



Apple in a Jar

Nicholas Galiano

Violet Bliss

David Meyer

A breath that touches the Earth
She is baptized in waters
The fluidity necessary for growth
Like a ball of fire
The sun rises in the East
Over a sea of transformation
Becomes airborne again
Encapsulated in aurora
The eye that looks inward
Cascades into the fragrance of violet bliss



Buzz

Sabrina Readinger

Bullet Hole

Austin Graczyk

Canopy of trees

Sodden, soil-tangled hair

Face-up in the night

Floating in the sky

Death's massive silver sickle

Quiet overhead

Spatter on the ground

Crimson life from under ribs

Returned to the Earth

Black and blurry thoughts

Central cold and bated breath

Final resting place



Lion Heart

Melissa Marshall

The Power of Poetry

Ashlee Scott

While tears run down my face and bruises tattoo my body, I pick up a pen and paper and begin to write:

As I look to the ceiling,
I envision your eyes.
They were once filled with love,
Now they force me to hide.
You told me you would never hurt me again;
That was another empty promise.
Now every time we try to keep a clean slate,
You add another item into our dirty closet.

This is a short excerpt from a poem that had once summed up my life. I began writing this poem, “Cold Changes,” as a way to cope with an abusive relationship that I was dealing with in the winter of 2009. The traumatic experience ignited my passion for poetry, which caused a powerful ripple effect on my life. Generally, poetry is noted as a form of writing that typically involves colorful language to describe and provoke emotion. The essential aspect of poetry is creativity, whether in the use of imagery or the structure of the writing. It is, however, more than colorful words on a piece of paper. Poetry can significantly impact both the reader and the writer by allowing them to find comfort in expressing themselves, unleashing creativity and a new perspective, and being therapeutic for distressing experiences or

feelings.

In order to effectively be expressive, one needs to feel comfortable. While some find comfort in forming relationships, others find it through poetry. Poetry draws in many people due to its ability to be open to those from all walks of life. It does not exclude anyone from participating, nor does it look down upon anybody based upon individual style. American poet and author of *The Poetry Home Repair Manual: Practical Advice for Beginning Poets*, Ted Kooser notes, “Every poet learns to write by imitation, just as every painter learns to paint by looking at paintings” (9). He further notes that poets incorporate their personality, their persona, and their experience into their work, developing an individual style and a “uniqueness born of hands-on work with reading and writing” (9). Even though imitation takes place, much of what poetry has to offer is unique.

This idea of individuality helps poets feel comfortable with themselves. As Kooser emphasizes, “Every successful poem is unique and personal. It abides by its own rules of order” (39)—allowing for individuality without the fear of being ridiculed for not fitting the standard that many have to live up to in today’s society. Hence, poetry can be that friend who does not judge, but in return, respects and appreciates differences.

Kathy A. Perfect, author of “Rhyme and Reason: Poetry for the Heart and Head,” writes that poetry can make a person feel comfortable and also accepted. She explains how poetry values the diversity and power of language, allowing people to see each other from a different perspective, as well as stimulating a personal connection amongst the writers and readers (728). Poetry brings not only powerful words together but also creates a bond between those involved.

Creativity, or rather the use of eccentric and unconventional ways of thinking about things, is fundamental in writing poetry. Indeed, that is true. Creativity forms from a person’s mind and experience. Kooser, though, writes that poetry does not derive from ideas: “Ideas are orderly, rational, and to some degree logical . . . Instead, poems are triggered by catchy twists of language or little glimpses of life” (14). In essence, poetry is the playground for creativity and thoughts to roam free. It exercises creative thoughts so they can sweat into the words. American poet and author of *Reflexions on Poetry & Poetics*, Howard Nemerov acknowledges that poetry can break down barriers: “The subject of poetry is the relation of soul and body, mind and world” (103). Poetry makes an individual more aware of everything taking place around them and within them, making it easier to think and

communicate. Not only can it be an influence into the thinking and communicative process, but poetry can also lead into a new perspective. It opens our eyes to see the clouds surveying the world beneath them, the birds singing in a choir before dawn, and the trees dancing to the rhythm of the wind. It evokes a new way of looking at the world. Kooser notes, “Your poems will be the records of the discoveries you make while writing in that place” (13). Given these points, poetry guides a poet into a new world, and helps document the journeys made and the roads taken.

The power of comfort and creativity, and the freedom to explore—which is often repressed by our experience of reality—lead us to write poetry. Above all, though, it is the way in which poetry can be therapeutic for internalized issues that plague individual lives. Similar to providing comfort, poetry gives its writers a platform to express their thoughts and feelings that were once suppressed. Poet, psychoanalyst, and author of “Trauma and Poetry: A Psychoanalyst’s View on the Healing Power of the Arts,” Frederick Feirstein suggests, “The mind/brain has a natural propensity to use metaphors and dramatic techniques for self-healing after trauma” (255). He further states that language and the use of metaphors open the door to repressed memories

(255). Contrary to therapy visits, writing or reading poetry comes at no expense and does not have to involve talking to a complete stranger—which some feel uncomfortable doing.

In fact, writing poetry is like talking to an invisible audience—which in most cases is the self. Poetry can be written for the public eye—and it often is—but it is often meant for the poet to clear her thoughts and release built-up emotions. As Kooser points out, poetry makes the poet feel at ease, because it allows expression and “a way of assembling a little bit of order amid chaos” (55). Poetry is therapeutic since it gives a voice to those who believe they are voiceless—those

who believe their feelings or thoughts do not have value. Nemerov writes that poetry appeals to human suffering in the “richest and loveliest” way (149). The poet’s words extend beyond the self, expressing feelings—sadness, happiness, anger, and frustration—and convey experiences that may otherwise left unavailable.

As an illustration, Maya Angelou began writing poetry as an escape from her troubled life. Periodically, Angelou’s mother left her behind and she was forced to live in a chaotic environment. As a child, she endured being raped by her mother’s boyfriend and being involved in a traumatic crime. These experiences left

her speechless for years. Her only escape became writing, specifically poetry. Poetry gave her a voice, allowed her to express her turmoil, and displayed her unique creativity. Similar to Angelou, Edgar Allan Poe used poetry as an escape from his sorrowful life. Poe was known as an unusual man, and eventually became ostracized due to his presumed insanity. Living a depressing life, Poe resorted to writing and wrote the poem “Annabel Lee” after the death of his true love. Even though most of his work came from sadness,

“The poet’s words extend beyond the self, expressing feelings—sadness, happiness, anger, and frustration—and convey experiences that may otherwise left unavailable.”

he wrote in a way that highlighted his creativity through the use of beautiful and haunting words. Poetry made him feel comfortable enough to express himself and his grief; it gave him a voice. Feirstein agrees, “Creativity has a healing power” (255). Equally, though quite different from one another, these poets sought a way to seek solace through their experiences and the power of poetry truly impacted them.

The power of poetry even impacts the lives of everyday poets. Kooser began writing poetry in his teenage years to alleviate the loneliness and despair that took over his life (3). Since then, he has found solace in releasing his troubles through poetry to heal and bring healing to others. Similar to Kooser, World Slam Poet Laureate, Crystal Valentine began writing as a teenager due to her struggles of being an outcast and a victim of bullying in middle school. She did not realize the power of poetry until she began writing and eventually reading her poems to those around her (qtd. in Shire 1). Valentine talks about the magic that occurs when people hear her poems: “I think poetry is extremely effective. When they hear my poetry, they can hear the emotion behind it. They really understand the circumstances and what’s at stake” (2). Poetry leads her to discover and heal herself through her struggles, as well as give healing to her readers. Dr. Rafael

Campo, a closeted gay Cuban doctor explains that poetry helped him throughout his struggles: “Writing was the one place I could occupy my emotional life without risk, where I could feel connected” (qtd. in Ingalls B8). He had to endure hiding his true identity to conform to society’s expectations, which made him feel miserable. Campo details, “Poetry can dramatize healing or communicate what it is to be healed” (B9). Although a bit different, Feirstein used poetry to heal open wounds from his parents’ sudden deaths. Writing the lyric sequence “The Unholy Dark,” he came to terms with and rediscovered the origin of his pain (256). All in all, poetry has led these individuals to overcome barriers and traumatic experiences within their lives. Poetry is, as Kooser notes, “the record of a moment at that window, but for once the author—not time nor weather—gets to control the amount of light outside” (31). Despite their different situations, these poets were able to control the order in the midst of their chaos through writing.

Poetry not only holds a power over the writers, but it also impacts the readers. Nemerov comments, “The poise of poetry was to sustain that illusion between the highest truth and the crummy nature of everyday life” (150). When reading a poem, readers are often able to travel into the world that the poet describes; the imagery

guides them into a different scene. For example, in the poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” William Wordsworth sets readers in the field of daffodils as they gleefully dance in the breeze. His use of colorful words enables readers to drift into the scene as he describes the thoughts occurring in his creative mind. As poetry snatches readers from their current realities, it provides a therapeutic way of coping with their distressing situations and feelings. Perfect suggests that poetry can “grant us a place of beauty and temporary escape” (729). For instance, a person who lives in an abusive home can read poems like “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” to drift into a tranquil environment. “No poem,” as Kooser notes, “has ever entered a reader’s life without an invitation; no poem has the power to force the door open” (22). We generally choose poems because they reflect our lives. When reading a poem that describes an experience similar to our current troubles, we are able to relate to and develop a connection with what we are reading. Such poetry would put us at ease and could provide feedback on what to do or even on how to look at the situation taking place. Kooser explains that “every poem has a presence” (31) and, within that presence, although different for each reader, it could provide a powerful impact on those that it comes across.

Speaking on the power of poetry, Jennifer Gittings-Dalton, poet and academic advisor at Reading Area Community College, explains the impact that poetry has had on her life. Growing up, Gittings-Dalton remembered poetry playing a role in her life as early as ten years old, which sparked her creativity and led to her poetic style—metaphoric lyrics about nature. She continued to write poems to deal with the pressures of life. However, it was not until her late thirties that she started to take it more seriously. Devastated, heartbroken, and lost, Gittings-Dalton secluded herself from the world after the death of her father. Japanese Death Poetry, on the other hand, later provided her with an escape from her pain. “It helped, because it was realistic and provided wisdom to the readers,” explains Gittings-Dalton. Inspired, she published a collection of poems dedicated to the pain she endured after the death of her father—*Bird in the Overhang*. She notes that nothing expresses emotion quite like poetry, because it can capture meaning more than the logical explanation. Poetry led her out of a dark place, as well as guided her in a new artistic direction. With emphasis, she states, “Poetry leads a person to where she needs to go.” As a poet, her destined place was the Berks Bards, a poetry group at the GoggleWorks, a close-knit community that connects people and has them

learn by stepping into the shoes of one another.

Similar to Gittings-Dalton, poetry has affected me in a tremendous way throughout my life. Prior to 2009, I had no idea what poetry was, much less, what was incorporated in this mysterious form of writing. It was some foreign language that held no importance to my life. However, that changed dramatically in the winter of 2009. Starting off as a freshman in high school, I struggled with being accepted and dealing with an abusive relationship, for which I lost many friends. I felt as if I had no one—so I began to write. I thought that since I did not have anyone to listen to me, then I would have to talk and listen to myself. Every day, I wrote seven poems about how I was feeling—positive and negative. The way I wrote words, so descriptively and so effortlessly, lifted a weight off my shoulders. I felt that I could put thoughts I had a hard time expressing into colorful words. Poetry became my friend, poetry became my space, and most importantly, poetry became my escape. Over time, writing poems made everything clearer and helped me to cope with difficult situations—suicide of a close friend, depression, bullies, unhealthy relationships, and lost opportunities. It also helped me expand my mind to conjure up ways to write and develop my own style. Without a doubt, the power of poetry

has had a great impact on my sense of self by making me feel comfortable, helping to expand my creativity, showing me a new perspective, and providing me an escape from the trouble that was around and within me.

The power of poetry seeps through the lines of a piece of paper and the ink at the tip of a pen—and it impacts the lives of ours that it contacts in various ways: by giving us comfort, unleashing our creativity, helping us develop a new outlook on life, and being therapeutic for traumatic experiences. The power of poetry is a force that opens the door to the center of our true identity, looking into who we truly are. Not only does it unleash the unknown or the embedded, but it also breaks down the wall that is a barrier between the mind and the pathway to communication. It unravels the unexpected and brings about an enormous power. In all, poetry provides the voice, the strength, and the courage to be free.

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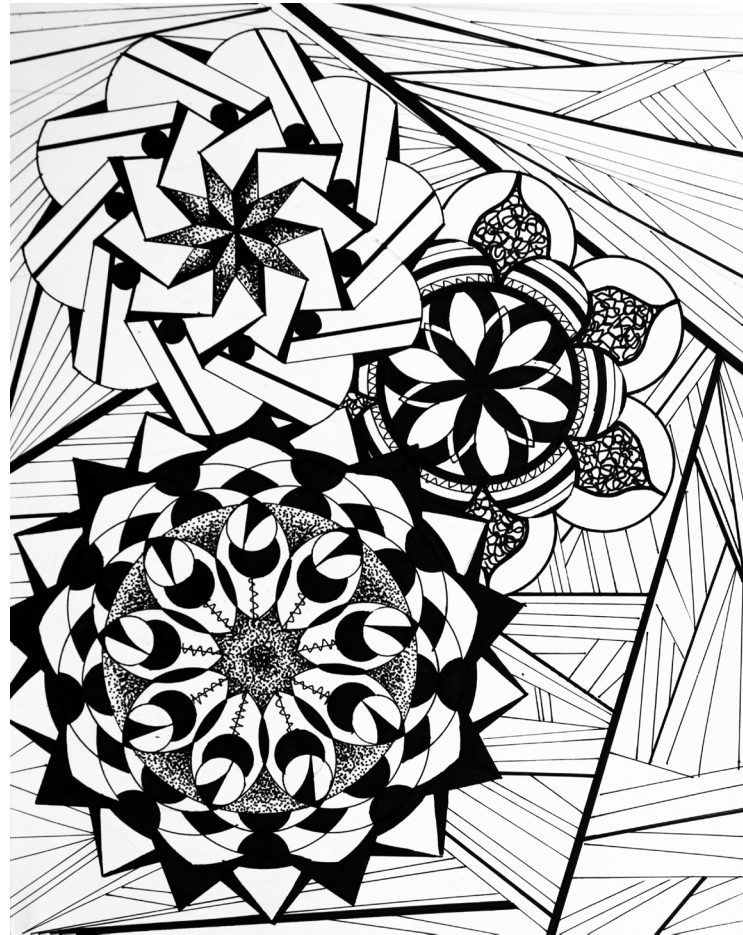
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Death of Peace

Anna Makdissi

A Thousand

Stephanie Coriolan

There were moments I asked

What was the point of writing words?

Words that may not be read

Words that may not be given a chance;

Do you hear me?

The swift movement of my pen

As I conjure into being

A long unpaved road littered with little stones

Ideas, half-thoughts, uncompleted bits and pieces

If these stones were to disappear

Would you go out to find them?

Some place where the truth was free?

Many times I found myself

Putting away the pen,

Only to be here again

Much doubt in my heart

And a thousand more words to say



Viking Warrior

Robert Jason Slay

Brutus: A Man Felled by His Own Fault

Kaylee Weaver

All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.

—*Edmund Burke, Irish statesman and philosopher, 1770*

These celebrated words explain so much of the history of the struggle between good and evil; they also bring to mind a story, perhaps just as familiar, penned 500 years ago by one of the greatest minds of English literature, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Shakespeare's story offers a new perspective of the same concept captured by Burke's observation: that is, freedom is not free and sacrifices, willing or unwilling, must be made to maintain freedom.

Shakespeare introduces a group of "freedom fighters" in *Julius Caesar* at the moment Caesar himself is returning from battle. The people of the Roman republic have turned from mere respect to pure adoration, showering Caesar with praise. Although Caesar appears to be turning down his worshiping admirers, certain observers begin to take fault in the existence of the worship at all. However, most of these self-proclaimed defenders of the republic's freedom have one singular goal in mind -- their own ascent to the level of Caesar. These men, the leader of whom was named Cassius, realize that if they are to overthrow Caesar, then their cause will need validation. This validation arrives in the form of

the honorable Brutus -- a man who, although at first needs persuading, eventually becomes the leader of this group of conspirators. Brutus consistently claims that his ultimate goal is the maintenance of all men's freedom in the republic, and he proclaims his openness, however unwilling, to carry out this plan at the cost of all else.

Brutus' idealism is the central concept in Shakespeare's play and this idealism is the origin of all good men who act in order to avoid tyranny. However, the existence of another trait of Brutus calls much of his behavior into question. This trait, his overwhelmingly intense naïveté, allows him to abandon all morals and change his mind based on very flimsy arguments. Shakespeare encourages the reader to see Brutus' naïveté and his idealism as both elements of the reality of our world (Pierce 268). No one is perfect, and nothing is black and white. What if, however, these two traits did not coexist? What if one was the direct result of another? Perhaps Brutus was not simply a good man taking action to prevent tyranny. Instead, what if Brutus was simply a poor fool, reacting to the opinions of others who

used him for their own advancement? Although this premise may not be readily seen upon first glance, it can be proven by examining both Brutus' actions and the words of Shakespeare.

If Brutus' idealism is a result of his naïveté, then all of his honor and integrity is for naught. Therefore, no matter how many individuals laud a leader's honor, that leader is only as strong as his weakest trait. For Brutus, this chink in his armor rests in his inability to recognize the capacity for human error. He is incapable of realizing how inherently self-promoting and vicious men can be, due to his fascination with the concepts of higher purposes (Simmons 68). Shakespeare endeavors to embrace the reality of Brutus' faults while still holding him up as an example of nobility (Pierce 268). This method, however, fails to recognize that all of Brutus' nobility simply turns to hypocrisy in the face of his great fault—leaving in his legacy a republic certainly no freer, if anything, a republic closer to enslavement of both the mind and body by chaos and the next rising Caesar in Octavius. If Brutus' honor truly held the power that all attributed that it did, he would have left behind a shred of order for others, rather than just respect for a man who was described as “the noblest Roman of them all,” as Antony declared (5.5.74).

Nobility and Honor

To first understand the extent of Brutus' gullibility, the extent of his honor and integrity that Shakespeare intends to convey must be understood. Throughout the play, Shakespeare continuously reiterates through Brutus' own speech, other characters' assertions, and the themes of the general plot that Brutus is a man who should be admired. In his essay “Shakespeare's Brutus: A Man Torn by Conflicting Values,” Joseph L. Simmons comments on the play that Plutarch, who provided the basis for Shakespeare's play with his previously written commentary on the event, had taken a different approach to the character of Brutus. Plutarch's Brutus had a clear division in his personality, while Shakespeare wrote a Brutus much more in touch with the reality that humans are a blend of all traits, good and bad. No one is inherently evil or good (62). The first evidence that Shakespeare provides of Brutus' goodness is the overwhelming witness of his friends and enemies alike. Antony, famous for providing the eulogy of Brutus, instructs his servant to claim that Brutus is “noble, wise, valiant, and honest” (3.1.141). Such a list seems to be in excess, especially while remembering that Antony is the dear friend of Caesar, the object of the conspirator's assassination plot. Brutus becomes

“Brutus is not blameless or immoral;
rather, he is naïve to a fault.”

the leader of this assassination plot, thanks to the observation of another conspirator, Casca, who declares, “Oh he sits high in all the people’s hearts: and that which would appear offence in us his countenance, like richest alchemy, will change to virtue and to worthiness” (1.3.163-165). Brutus’ integrity was of strong enough nature that it was recognized even by selfish men to withhold the power to validate a murder plot.

Commentators on *Julius Caesar* possess wildly varying assessments of Brutus and Shakespeare’s intentions, but Brutus does not need to be divided into one extreme or the other as they often do. On one hand, in her essay Alice Shalvi describes Brutus as a “wholly unselfish” victim of a noble crime that simply goes wrong, and that he is indeed the hero of the play who is failed by his own superior level of passion for the good (63). Donald Wehrs agrees with Shalvi in the sense that Brutus speaks to a common theme in Shakespeare—noble heroes who fail to break from social idealisms in order to utilize common sense (75-76). On the other hand, Dorsch’s argument in his introduction to the play lies on the opposite side of opinion on Brutus:

“I cannot help feeling that the majority of past critics have been misled by Brutus’s estimate of himself

into regarding him as a more wholly admirable person than Shakespeare intended him to be” (xxxix). Each author recognizes the existence of Brutus’ capacity for good and evil; however, if his evil is equated to his naïveté, all idealism—which is what readers typically recognize as his “good”—flows directly from his own gullibility. Brutus is not blameless or immoral; rather, he is naïve to a fault.

Brutus himself endeavors to be the foremost witness on his own behalf. He comments repeatedly on his own good nature, his intentions for Rome, and the absence of his fault in the murder. If Brutus’ mind represents his supposed evil side, and his heart—his supposed good side, a question arises: If Brutus truly loved Caesar as well as he claims, then how can his proclaimed brilliant cognizance allow that love to be negated? (Simmons 63). One of Brutus’ great natures must be weaker than the other. This struggle between weak and strong is evidenced in Brutus’ own justification of his actions, while also affirming his conflict. Describing himself as being “with himself at war,” Brutus assures the

people of Rome that “not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more” (1.2.52), and he begs them to not accept the slavery that Caesar offered. Caesar’s ambition, according to Brutus, is the reason he had to die (3.2.23-30). Despite the fact that Brutus seems assured in this justification, he continues to struggle, even having nightmares and visions of Caesar’s ghost. Significantly, Brutus makes a point to refer to the conspirators as “purgers” rather than the murderers that they technically are (2.1.193). The ultimate ironic justification that Brutus attempts is his statement concerning importance: “The abuse of greatness is when it disjoins remorse from power” (2.1.19-20). Although he was speaking on the possibility of Caesar’s ascension to a monarchy, this is, in reality, what Brutus’ actions result in for himself. By endeavoring to separate remorse from the power he achieves in leading Caesar’s murder plot, Brutus allows an inside look into the certainty that his supposed nobility is weaker than the wiles of his mind.

Naïveté

In Scene 1 of Act 2, Brutus receives a mysterious letter—in actuality penned by Cassius—that appears to be composed by concerned citizens of Rome who would see Caesar’s power brought into check. This

occurrence seems to be a clear example of Brutus’ naïveté: not only does it illustrate his gullibility, it also exemplifies how his idealism flows out of his naïveté. How can he not realize how far-fetched this scheme of Cassius is? Rather than questioning the obvious, this letter fully convinces Brutus to join the conspirators. Why does this specific act push him over the edge? Public opinion apparently matters a great deal to Brutus, and the reason for this is stated by Brutus again and again. His actions, he claims, are all for the good of Rome (1.2.92). This belief is perpetuated when the letter arrives, petitioning Brutus for help. If Brutus was not so intensely gullible to believe that the letter was actually genuine, then his passion for the people’s freedom would not be fueled. It is his gullibility that allows his idealism to flourish into the realm of impossibility.

Brutus’ naïveté continues to drive his actions throughout the entirety of the play, and his idealism grows exponentially in response. Immediately following the murder, Brutus declares that “Ambition’s debt is paid” (3.1.91). He has come a far cry from his previous declarations of true love for Caesar. From the moment that Cassius begins to successfully convince him—and Cassius himself describes Brutus as noble but “honorable metal ... [that] may be wrought”

(1.2.320-321)—Brutus depends on his idealism to rationalize. Soon before reading the letter that sealed his decision, Brutus refers to his beloved Caesar as a snake who should be killed in his egg stage (2.1.33-36). His idealism has reached the level of pure symbolism. Simmons points out that “Brutus can’t seem to grasp that the people of Rome innately want a one man ruler” (68). This blindness to the reality in which he lived allowed Brutus to react to his notions as if they were indeed facts.

Another example of Brutus’ penchant for twisting reality to suit his own understanding of the situation, which is often guided by whatever he sees and hears on the surface, is demonstrated in his reaction to Cassius’ suicide. So encompassed is Brutus by his own gullibility, he is unable to react to the truth of his situation. Brutus speaks to his great sorrow and debt to Cassius, personifying Cassius as a man who would never again have an equal in Rome (5.4.113-115). Such an avowal as this is comparable to statements made by others of Brutus himself. Even after witnessing the ineffectiveness of Cassius’s plot and the resulting possibility of more tyranny than before, Brutus is unable to see that Cassius has used him; moreover, he is unable to see the kind of man that Cassius was. He elevates Cassius’ moral uprightness to the same level that his own

integrity is said to reside, and honors Cassius with the claim that he owes him a great debt. If it had not been for Cassius exploiting Brutus’ foolishness, he would not be at war and certainly would not have killed his friend. The fact that Brutus does not understand any of these facts cements that he is not a victim to Cassius or any of the other conspirators. Brutus’ naïveté is not a result, rather, it is the arche of his actions and passionate ignorance of actuality.

Legacy

Brutus’ life in *Julius Caesar* ends on a dramatic note not without its own implications into Brutus’ mentality. Similar to the sacrifice of his friend Caesar’s life, Brutus becomes the victim of his own mindset. Persuaded by Cassius and the others, Brutus finds himself in the midst of a battlefield, at war with Antony and Octavius. Cassius has already committed suicide based on his own false information, and Brutus is forced to reconcile himself to a declaration he made earlier: although he does not in principle agree with suicide, he will not allow himself to be taken into Rome as captive (5.1.121-122). He foresees the inevitable soon-coming defeat and instructs his underling Strato to grasp a sword and he drives himself onto the blade. His final words urge Caesar to finally be at rest: “I killed not

thee with half so good a will” (5.5.57). Perhaps in this final moment, Brutus realizes that he has been severely misguided. Does Brutus ever truly comprehend the gravity of his undiscerning mind? The only evidence that Shakespeare gives lies in Brutus’ decision to commit suicide. In itself, that act may point to further evidence of his naïveté. If Brutus had allowed himself to live

“Once again, idealism fueled by naïveté pushes Brutus to act out irrational decisions, this time at the cost of his own life.”

until surrender, his two opponents, Antony and Octavius, may not have harmed him, especially considering the power that the Romans attributed to Brutus’ integrity. Wise leaders would not want to incite an already riotous public with the killing of a beloved noble man. Brutus, however, focuses on one possibility, being led captive back into Rome, and because of this fear he commits suicide. Once again, idealism fueled by naïveté pushes Brutus to act out irrational decisions, this

time at the cost of his own life.

Shakespeare does not conceal how he wants Brutus remembered in the minds of his readers. The tributes and eulogies delivered by the triumphant remaining characters speak to the theme of the entire play: Brutus remains an honorable man in the hearts of Rome despite his great error in judgment. The facts, however,

provide a different account of the legacy that Brutus leaves behind. The remaining victors, Antony and Octavius, have already begun using the title of Caesar to refer to Octavius (5.1.25), indicating that Brutus’ actions have resulted in a political situation very similar to the one present during Caesar’s life. Interestingly, one author

adds that Brutus actually came from a genealogy of activists. His ancestor Lucius Junius Brutus “led an uprising in 510 B.C. that drove the reigning dynasty from Rome, abolished kingship itself, and established the Roman Republic” (Kahn 215). The idealism may have been present in Brutus’ blood from the start, but without the urging of ambitious men who recognized his penchant for susceptibleness, Brutus would not have taken such drastic actions in the name of

his passion for the republic. However, if Brutus' penchant for susceptibleness did not have such control over his entire mindset, all of their urging would have been for naught. Good men failing to act may be the origin of evil, but in the case of Brutus, a good man's naïveté powered an unreasonable idealism from which he would not survive and neither would the republic for which he sacrificed it all.

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The Survivors

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Colophon

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