

GREYROCK REVIEW



GREYROCK REVIEW

2021

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Greyrock Review is Colorado State University's journal of undergraduate art and literature. Published annually in the spring through the English Department, *Greyrock Review* is a student-run publication.

Submissions: The journal accepts submissions for art, poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction each year in the fall from undergraduate students of all majors at Colorado State University.

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

I am overjoyed to present to you the 2021 volume of the *Greyrock Review*. Persevering tirelessly, the *Greyrock* team has worked diligently to create a journal that showcases the creative prowess that emerged from the pandemic. After carefully considering each submission, we have assembled pieces that we hope will start conversation. This journal is a compilation of the creative, daring, and exhilarating works of the undergraduate students at CSU. Their ambitions shine bright through their work, and we hope that you enjoy reading their pieces as much as we have.

I would like to thank our diligent graduate student advisor, Carolyn Janecek, who served as the glue for the 2020-2021 *Greyrock* family. Carolyn's passion, dedication, and free spirit has driven us to work hard and to discover our own passions through this project. I would also like to thank Stephanie G'Schwind, who oversaw this whole process and guided us through any challenges we faced. Thank you to our supporters: the Lilla B. Morgan Memorial Endowment Fund and the CSU English Department. Most importantly, I would like to give thanks to the *Greyrock Review* editors. A deeply committed, enthusiastic team worked together to produce this amazing journal. It has been such a pleasure to work with you all, and I will never forget the time spent together on this project.

And, of course, I cannot forget our readers. Thank you: for reading our journal, for helping us pursue our passions, and for inspiring us to spread our love for the arts.

All the best,
Emily Byrne
Managing Editor

Papa

I am five or six
Papa splits the sand dollar, pours out the grainy white birds inside and we wonder
At how the vengeful ocean could shape something so delicate
Foamy fingers pinching earth into tiny alabaster wings

Later papa runs, 800-meter-track-star style, to the bus stop still gripping my hand,
my feet can't keep up
And he drags my baby body along the concrete until my knees drip
blood and loose skin
[And i wonder why he doesn't hear me screaming for him to stop, slow down
And i wonder why this is my only childhood memory of my papa]

I wished to use those alabaster wings,
to lift my body up off of the sidewalk's ripping teeth
But i was porcelain and earthbound, stiff with solid bones and mouselike shrieks

We reach the bus and my mom and grandmother say nothing
They wipe the blood off of my knees, my stained pastel socks
Clean up the mess as the women in my family have taught each other to do
Out of sight damage is internal
Out of sight the damage can be absorbed by the mind body, a lesson i learned
too well

This man is the same man who beat my mother black and blue to the tune of
driftwood and bones knocking on Horsfall Beach
Who made his five kids line up, shoulder the weight of any crime he could think up:
using too much toilet paper / making a mess / talking to him
Learning martyrdom to save their siblings a beating

This man was in the Korean War, struggled to see His God in The Atrocious
This man was abused by his mother, abused my mother, abused

This man believes that wasting food is a sin / illegally dumpster dives for moldy
oranges / ran
marathons into his 80s / asked me to do his taxes / fed his grandkids 3-month-old
cookies from
Starbucks / has never known my name

Now This man has entered my childhood home for the first time in 19 years
nineteen, years
This time with one less [] wife and a newfound desire to die
The difference this time is that this time he is pathetic, pitiable, complacent
And kind, when he forgets where he is

The terrifying figure from my mom's stories smiles a toothless, trusting turtle smile
At the grandchildren he does not remember / sits for hours in front of the tennis
match he can't
hear / flips desperately through the Bible he can no longer decipher
How can i force myself to feel anything but pity for this giant infant

As i was searching for attachment
I peered through the tangled shroud of my mother's stories
A shifting amalgamation of those things repressed, held in the palm like a grainy
white bird
Passed from mother to daughter

I peered into this reflection, past my own moon face to see the gorilla-like shadow
through a veil this man, this man
Always-present-worst-nightmare

But now my knees have scarred over, the birds went back to the ocean
And it is too late

beast

you are awake when the night
stops, when the moon drops
like a dead fish and craters
off the coast

of the yucatán.
you hear when the shutters hiss

*boy-child,
bite the tips
from your
fingers.
eat and
be filled.*

and so you eat
and so are filled
and you learn
to brush your teeth
with your palms.

you take the time to press
your tongue between the pages
of a dictionary, to flatten
your mother's petaled name.

and so, you are awake
when the night stops, when
your eyes drop like dead
moons, when you crater
off the coast
of the yucatán.

go back to bed now.

go back
to bed.

body

you are the
moon
fish

ear the tan
the

*child
bit
from*

palms.

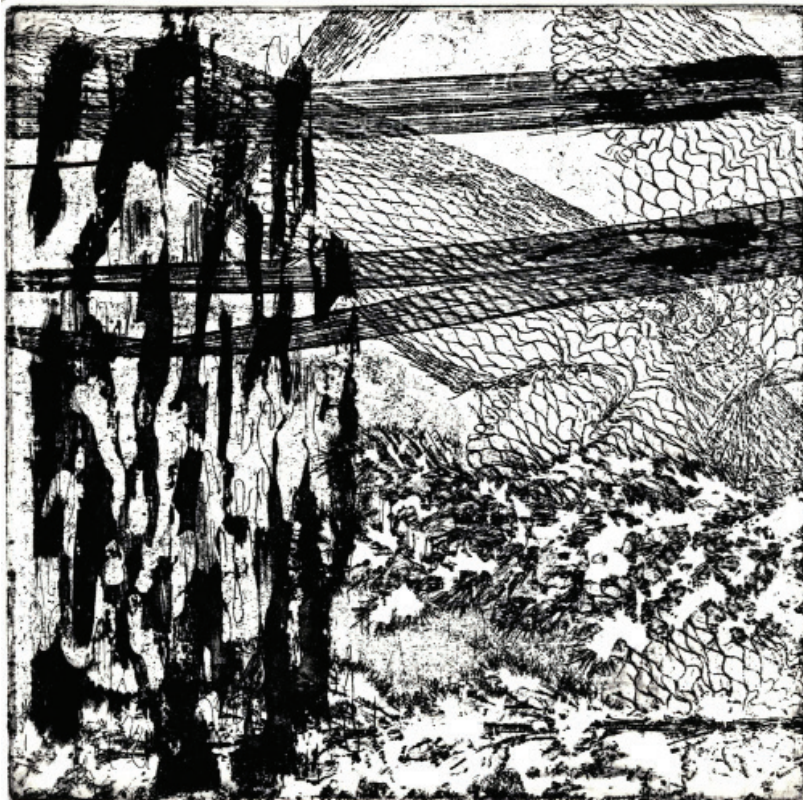
you take
your tongue
of a dictionary,

and you wake
the night

CHARLIE DILLON

Seascape

8x8in, Print



MAIA COEN

City Lights

A snow-white teacup sits on a glass coffee table without a coaster. The woman picks it up and brings it, steaming, to her bloodred lips and drinks. The tea burns her throat for an instant, but she smiles and places the cup back onto the clear glass. Her mother's eyebrow is twitching slightly. She knows her mother wants her to put a coaster down, but she will not ask and so the woman will not do it. She finishes her tea in large gulps.

"Well, Mother, this has been lovely, but I ought to be going now," she says.

Her mother smiles stiffly. "See you next week, Adeline."

Adeline gets up slowly and saunters through the glorious white living room with its cream-colored couches and cashmere-soft carpet with her shoes still on. She made a point not to take them off when she came in, leaving patches of wet from the snow outside. It's December and the sparkling white Christmas tree has been erected by the bay windows looking out upon the New York skyline. When Adeline was a child, she liked to sneak behind the tree and sit on the window bench pressed between the bejeweled tree with its magnificent sparkle and the twinkle of the city lights. She used to imagine she was in a magical land far away from the life she lived. Now she found the tree tacky, too white, too clean.

"Goodbye, Mother," she says, reveling in the thought of how long it will take her mother to get her red lipstick off the teacup.

As she walks down the powder-covered streets in her stilettos, she smokes a cigarette and wonders what David has prepared for dinner this evening. He always liked to cook—a hobby that confused her. Why would you make your own food when you could hire someone to make it better? She didn't think her mother knew how to cook. She remembered Christmas dinners cooked by one nanny or another.

er, always tasting different. Sitting at their ten-person table with the chandelier so high above, just Adeline, the cook, and the nanny. Her mother was undoubtedly at the office every Christmas and her father was off doing God knows what. She hadn't realized until years later that he must have been having an affair, or several, to have the audacity to leave his daughter with the help on Christmas. She always got whatever she wanted though, waiting under that sparkling white Christmas tree.

"Darling, I'm home," she calls out as she kicks her shoes off her sore feet and leaves them in the middle of the foyer. She wants to see if David will pick them up, if he will say something about it.

"Hello, sweetheart," he says, emerging to give her a kiss on the cheek, properly. "Did you smoke?" he asks, eyeing her.

"What's for dinner?" she asks instead of answering him.

He frowns at her. "You know I don't like it when you smoke," he says. "Pork chops and rosemary-roasted potatoes," he answers after a beat. Adeline rolls her eyes, always so fancy, always meat. She would kill for something vegetarian these days. She slips away into the bedroom and begins unraveling herself. She takes a hot washcloth and slowly wipes the foundation from her skin. Then she takes the cotton balls and saturates one with oily makeup remover and rubs the makeup from her eyes, then her lips. She peels off her body-hugging dress, removes her spunks, then her underwear. She steps into the shower and lets the hot water wash away the day. She washes the product from her hair and uses soap on her entire body. When she steps out the bathroom is like a steam room, the mirror fogged over. She slowly rubs it away to reveal her smooth face and her pure body. She feels raw, stripped of herself. She likes it that way.

"Have a nice day at work," Adeline says from her armoire as she carefully draws the finishing touches on her eyeliner.

"Thank you, darling, I'll say hello to your mother for you," he says.

She smirks and says, "Thanks so much." It's an odd feeling to have your husband work for your mother. It felt sometimes like her mother owned him. That was how they met; Adeline's mother handpicked him for her. She believes her mother's exact words about him were, "He's suitable for you. Comes from a good family." Adeline lets out a heavy sigh at the memory and slips into something uncomfortable to

meet her friend Kate for breakfast. She smokes another cigarette on the way and hopes David will smell it later.

"Oh, it is so lovely to see you!" Kate coos as she kisses Adeline on both cheeks. "You look gorgeous, where did you get that dress?" she asks.

"I think Bergdorf's," Adeline answers. They sit down and order espresso and egg white omelets with fruit on the side. Adeline knows they both wish they could order the stuffed French toast with cream cheese and strawberries drenched in syrup.

"So," Kate draws out the word and gives her a knowing look, "are you still seeing Sam?" she asks.

Adeline grins. "I'm going to see him right after this."

Kate squeals. "You're such a slut."

"Am I?" Adeline asks.

"Oh, I didn't really mean it," Kate brushes it away.

"Maybe I am. For wanting love, for not wanting to be with a man my mother picked off the shelf for me, nice and shiny," Adeline says. Kate doesn't seem to know what to say. She focuses on pushing an egg white around her plate. "I'd rather be a slut than be unhappy in my marriage forever," Adeline states.

There is quite a long pause before Kate attempts to lighten the mood. "Oh I just wish I had a steamy affair like that in my life," she says. "I got married off to Daniel and can't find anyone else to love." She sounds sad at the end.

"I don't think we're supposed to hope for this, Kate," Adeline's face hardens. "We shouldn't have to be having affairs."

Kate sighs, "I know." They both pause for a moment, sipping their espresso. Then Kate says, "But then where would all our money come from?" They both laugh, but Adeline is beginning to wonder if it's worth it anymore.

There was always this one moment as Adeline drove into the hotel parking lot when she suddenly felt relief. Maybe it was because she was breaking the rules carefully constructed for her. Maybe it was because she loved Sam. Maybe it was because she couldn't betray her mother in real life, so she wanted to in secret. It was probably a combination of all those things.

She knocks on the door and he answers within seconds.

Sam smiles so wide at the sight of her. "Hello, gorgeous," he says, pulling her into his arms and shutting the door behind them. Her favorite thing about him is the way he smiles. It is always carefree and strong. As if he didn't care that the bigger he smiled the more wrinkles he would have later on, or if he looked ridiculous smiling that wide. He didn't follow the same rules she did, and she liked that. They don't waste much time before he rips her clothes off her and throws her onto the creaky motel mattress. She thinks about how many other people have had sex on this very bed but secretly enjoys that detail.

He offers her a cigarette after and she takes it with a smile.

"How is work going?" she asks him. She is nestled under his shoulder, against his body, and she can feel every tendon. Their skin is slightly dewy, and she likes the way she sticks to him.

"Not so bad, we're just building a vacation house for some rich lady." He chuckles a little. "I think this is gonna be an easy one." Adeline traces circles on his chest. Sam worked construction; he was the contractor. He was in charge of the operation. He wasn't some pawn in anyone's political game. She knew her mother would have never approved of a man like him, so she kept him hidden all these years. She remembers the time she told her mother she didn't want to marry David. The words, "Marry him or you're cut off," still echo through her mind some days.

"Hey." Sam tilts her chin up. "What are you thinking about?"

She closes her eyes and shakes her head. "Old memories."

"You know I love you, right?" he asks.

She smiles up at him. "I love you more."

Sam didn't like her high heels or her organ-crushing dresses. He wished she wouldn't wear all that stuff all the time because he knew she didn't like it either. He reminded her of these things regularly. Adeline would fantasize about leaving the house with bedhead, a face washed of any makeup, and sweatpants. Unfortunately, her mother being the most famous businesswoman in New York City, this would surely end up on the local news and her mother might lock her in her bedroom or something equally demeaning. So, she put on her full face of makeup and wore her too-tight dresses and ate those goddamn egg white omelets so she would fit in those dresses and didn't say a

word. Her rebellions were small, leaving the teacup without a coaster, walking on her mother's white carpet with snow-covered stilettos, and secretly loving a man her world would never approve of.

When Adeline returns home, David sits at their kitchen table with a glass of whiskey clenched in his fist. It must have been a bad day at work. She takes off her shoes and leaves them.

"Pick up your shoes," David says quietly. The hairs on the back of her neck rise and she collects her shoes. She would have happily avoided him, but he follows her to their room and kisses her on the cheek like always, if not a bit begrudgingly this time.

He clenches his jaw. "Did you smoke again?" he spits out.

"I . . ." But she can't get anything else out before he slaps her across the face. She collapses to the ground.

"I told you I don't like it when you smoke!" He towers over her, looking down upon her, the way he likes it. She is shaking and a tear slips from her eye. He crouches down and takes her chin roughly in his hands. "Be careful, Adeline." He walks away, leaving her crying on the carpet.

A week goes by and Adeline stays inside to hide the bruise on her cheek. She spends an hour doctoring her foundation to cover it up before heading to her mother's for Sunday tea. She wears a bright red dress because her mother finds that shade of red to be "the color whores wear," and knee-high boots because boots make her think of "labor." Adeline had never met another woman who conflated boots, especially high-heeled suede ones, with poverty.

The maid opens the door when she arrives, and Adeline smiles at her. She wonders how long this one will last in this house. Her mother is waiting for her in the living room, but there is a man sitting with his back to Adeline. Her mother looks up and instantly furrows her brow. Adeline revels in the judgment in her eyes. The man turns and she stops in her tracks—it's Sam. Her eyes widen but she quickly composes herself.

"Mother, who is this?" she asks.

Her mother crosses her legs. "Oh, this is the contractor for that house we're having built outside the city," she answers. "We were just finishing up."

Sam makes no sign that he recognizes her. "Good to meet you," he

nods at her as he stands to leave. She is impressed with his ability to act so normally in such a startling situation. When he passes her, he brushes her pinky with his and her stomach drops. She doesn't think her mother has noticed anything, but she feels cornered, watched. Was this meeting by design? Does her mother know something? What did David mean when he told her to be careful? She sits across from her mother and they stare at each other without speaking. Adeline can feel sweat collecting on the back of her neck.

"How are you?" her mother asks before sipping her tea.

"Fine, Mother, how are you?" she asks pointedly. This situation makes her agitated.

Her mother narrows her eyes. "Don't take that tone with me."

Adeline says nothing. She crosses and uncrosses her legs and waits for her mother to speak. She never understood why her mother insisted on these meetings when it felt like pulling teeth.

"David says things have been rocky between you two," her mother finally says.

Adeline's jaw clenches. "We're fine." Now David is reporting their relationship to her mother?

"You two need to work through whatever problems you're having, Addy," she says.

Adeline grinds her teeth. "Don't call me Addy."

"Bad marriages are bad for business, dear."

"What do you know about good marriages? Father was fucking the whole city," Adeline spits at her mother. "Couldn't you have separated business from love, if not for yourself, then for me?" She realizes she feels like crying. The vein in her mother's temple pulses; she has hit a nerve.

"There is no distinction between love and business," her mother says bluntly. She stands up to leave, signaling the end of the conversation. "Your bruise is showing," she says. "And you look like a whore in that dress."

"I wish David were dead," Adeline says, nestled in the safety of Sam's arms. He gently kisses her cheek where the bruise is now all but gone.

"Me too," he whispers into her neck. They are at his apartment in Queens, and the city lights filter in through his dark curtains in slivers, only moments of light as headlights pass by. She can hear sirens and barking dogs, maybe a garbage truck. His bed is soft but not silky like

the high thread count of her life, soft like yarn. She imagines for a moment, these sheets on her bed in Manhattan, with this man in them, and thinks that would be a dream.

"So that's your mother then?" Sam asks, shaking his head.

Adeline snorts. "That's the devil herself."

"I see why you hate her so much," he says with a chuckle. "She's a nightmare."

She doesn't want to lose the comfort, the
security, and if she's being honest with herself,
all the money doesn't hurt.

"She is," Adeline says, lost in thought. "I want to leave him, Sam." She begins to choke up. "But I'll lose everything."

He strokes her hair with calloused hands. "Baby, what is it you're so afraid to lose?" He looks at her with so many questions in his eyes, almost asking, *Why am I not enough?*

This question bounces around in Adeline's head the rest of the week. At the time she hadn't answered him. Just shook her head and said she didn't know. But she does know. She doesn't want to lose the comfort, the security, and if she's being honest with herself, all the money doesn't hurt. Christmas Eve comes around and she and David get ready for the annual Christmas party at her mother's house. The one event Adeline is required to attend where her father makes an appearance. Her mother has always been so careful to keep the public out of her life, keep up appearances. No one knows her father is never around. He is in all the important photos for the blogs; her mother pretends everything is perfect all the time.

David thinks the first dress she picks out is too short, so she chooses another. A floor-length dark red one. He will be happy, and her mother will find the darker shade of red more proper. David holds her hand in the taxi. A little too tightly.

When they arrive at the party, she slips away from him as soon as she can. She glides into the kitchen where she knows her mother keeps the good liquor. The bourbon is tucked away behind the crackers. She takes a drink and prays it works its way into her bloodstream before

she runs into her father. From the kitchen the party feels far away. The Christmas music echoes through the house incessantly. All those songs about love during the holidays. She hasn't been in this kitchen in years. It smells like bleach masked by baked goods, certainly made by someone other than her mother. Suddenly she feels like a child again, hiding in the kitchen. Her mother used to throw things when she was angry with her father. She wonders for the first time if her mother had chosen her father or if he too had been chosen for her. Would that knowledge change the way she viewed her mother? Unlikely, at this point. She takes one more sip of bourbon right out of the bottle, pours herself a glass of red wine, and reenters the party.

The night moves forward slowly; Adeline feels like she is moving through Jell-O, and her limbs are getting sore from the exertion. The same people ask her about her life and David and nothing else. She has nothing else to talk about, and the more people who ask her those incessant questions, the angrier she gets with herself. David watches her from across the room. Her cheek is back to normal, but she knows he would not make the mistake of leaving the next bruise so visible. He is a smart man.

"Hello, Addy." His voice gives her chills. She turns to meet her father and is surprised to find he looks older, softer. Before she knows what she is doing, she has wrapped her arms around him. "Hi, Dad." She sinks into him and thinks for a moment she could be safe.

He cups her head with his hand. "You look sad, sweetheart."

Her chest feels like it is going to burst. "I am, Dad." She knew he would see right through her facade. He frowns in distress but says nothing, simply puts a hand on her shoulder and squeezes. He knows why she is sad, why she feels broken. He knows better than anyone what being stuck feels like, with a person you hate. And he knows he cannot do anything to help her. She assumes these things about him, anyway.

"I have to go," she says, pulling away from him. "It's good to see you, Dad." She must get out of this place. Its white walls and white carpet taunt her. They're a lie, projecting purity, when really they reek of decay. This is why she fears seeing her father. She sees his pain and his sadness and sees herself in him, and she can see it so easily in herself. She doesn't want to be reminded of how sad her life looks. She throws open the doors to the balcony and tries to catch her breath. She doesn't notice at first that her mother is on the other end of the balcony. Adeline stares

out at the twinkling city lights. She wonders what all those people are doing inside their little pockets of light within this massive city.

"You always did like to watch the city sparkle." Her mother comes up beside her. Adeline doesn't respond; her pulse is still racing. The city feels very far away from her.

"Mom, did you ever love Dad?" she asks.

Her mother doesn't miss a beat. "For a moment maybe, when we were younger."

Adeline nods slowly. "Why didn't you just let him leave?"

"It is simply not done that way, Adeline." Her voice is thin.

"I want it done, Mother," she says. She already knows this sad plea will be rejected, but a part of her has to ask.

"You will do no such thing," her mother spits out. Adeline will not cry, not here. She pinches the bridge of her nose to stop the tears from slipping out. She has not looked at her mother once during this conversation, her eyes fixed on those city lights, out of reach.

"Yes, Mother," she says, looking her in the eyes for one second. "But I'll keep fucking your contractor, I think." Adeline savors the look of shock in her mother's eyes as she leaves her gawking on the balcony. It feels too warm inside after being in the December chill, and her heart is racing faster than she thought possible. The exhilaration of openly defying her mother rushes through her. She pushes past random guests and moves right past David too. She steps into the hallway and puts her coat on. She makes sure no one is watching and dumps her red wine right on the white carpet before slipping into the night.

When David returns home, he slams the door behind him. Adeline is sitting by the window in her nightdress, waiting. She looks up to find his eyes are dark, stormy. She is not surprised; her mother will have told him by now. She closes her eyes as he screams at her for leaving the party without him. Making a fool of him. For being a "fucking whore." Then she tries not to cry out as he hits her in places no one else will see. He leaves her curled by the window, clinging to its cold chill against her back. There are droplets of blood on the carpet.

Adeline reaches in agony for her phone. "Sam . . ." she whispers.

"Adeline? What's wrong?" Sam answers.

"Let's do it, let's run away from this place," she breathes.

Sam arrives while David is in the office the next day.

"Merry Christmas," he says as he leans in to kiss her softly, careful not to touch her sore body. She laughs; she has forgotten it is Christmas today. Of course, David would have to go in, just like her mother always did. They go to her mother's apartment together and the maid lets them in without question. Adeline goes right to her mother's bedroom and begins stuffing jewelry into her purse. As she stands in her mother's room and looks around, she thinks for the first time how trivial all this stuff is, and how foolish she was for being bound by it for so long. In a moment of spite, she takes the red lipstick from her pocket and writes on her mother's mirror, "Enjoy your money." She knows it is dramatic, but she has to do it, has to show her mother one last time that she is done following her rules. As they go to leave, Adeline looks at the apartment one more time, remembers the echoes of her mother's screams. The way her father never fought back, just took it from her. How he might have been the only one who loved her at least a little bit back then. How she told herself it was okay to be alone on Christmas as long as she got that shiny new toy under the tree. The way David looked at her like she was something he owned and then threw her around like it. Then she looks at Sam and how his eyes sparkle with something so different from this false world. She swipes the bourbon from behind the crackers and they leave.

They hold hands as they drive out of the city in her mother's nicest car. Christmas music plays on the radio and she doesn't mind this time. Merry Christmas indeed. They are thinking they will go somewhere very far away, maybe California. She wonders what David will do when he finds her gone. What will her mother think? Will they feel remorse? Will her mother miss her? Or will there be nothing but rage? They will use Adeline's credit card until her mother realizes what has happened and cancels it. She doesn't think her mother will send the police after them; it would be too big a scandal. No, Adeline thinks her mother will let her go.

As they drive, she looks out the window at the city rushing by. The sun slips below the horizon, and driving below the city line she can see the colorful Christmas lights decorating people's windows. She could never see those lights before, from so high up.

MAIA COEN

Spider's Silk

she said she'd like to know someone
with apple seeds in their *throat*
and paint caked beneath their fingernails
painting pictures in *flesh* soft as canvas

with honeysuckle in their *veins*,
pictures drawn from blood and flowers
she will cut your wrists to see the sap trickle out
and drink it up
like sucking drool back into *stomach*

the solar panels on the roof shine in her *eyes*
full of insects
swarming
crawling
as the sun goes down

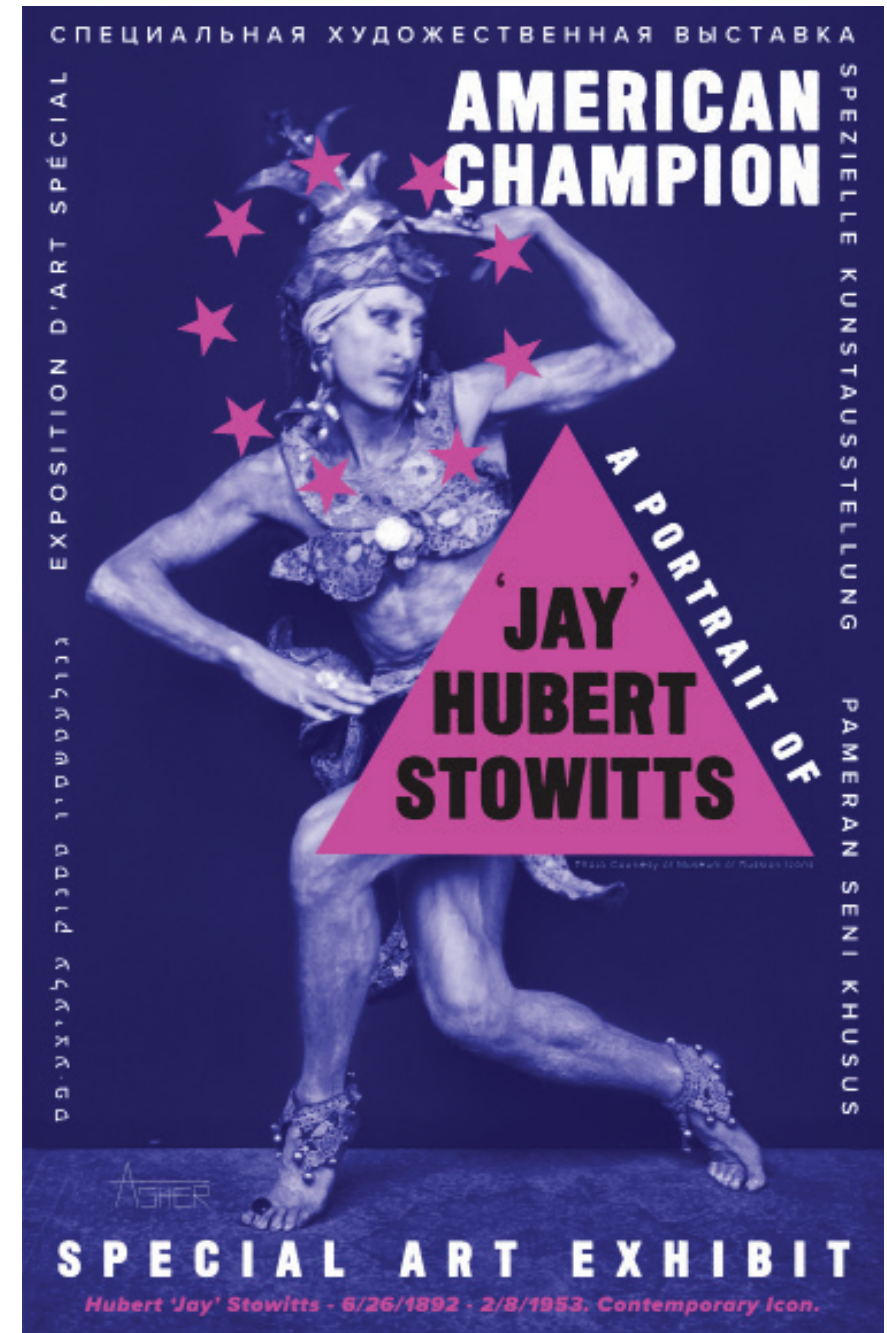
she said she'd like to feel someone
who would fuck her like they could break her
when they surely couldn't break a *body* made from spiders' silk
as thick as steel

ASHER KORN

American Champion: "Jay Hubert Stowitts"

11x17in, Digital Poster

This portrait of Hubert "Jay" Stowitts is a contemporary reimagining of popular 1920s graphic design and inversion of social commentary, blending themes of nationalism with the "queer" identity. The figure pictured is the artist Hubert Jay Stowitts (1892–1953): best known as a ballerina, painter, and a contemporary gay icon, often using strong hypersexual depictions of the male form. In 1936, this caused quite a stir during the "Nazi" Olympics with the gallery "Fifty Portraits of American Athletes" depicting naked men, many of which were Black and Jewish. Korn's poster is a reference to the American Athletes poster, repurposing terms like "American Champion" and "Special Exhibit," which is written in many languages around the border, strongly reminiscent of political posters from the early 20th century. The name "Jay" Hubert Stowitts is placed on a pink triangle, suggesting Stowitts's sexuality. By listing "Jay" first, Korn refers to the complex history of the word "Jay," originally meaning "gay" as in "merry," and later becoming a slur in the early 20th century, meaning "idiot." Later it is coined by the automotive industry referring to "jaywalkers." Eventually, this became a positive word due to the popularity of "The Great Gatsby" in 1925, normalizing "Jay" as meaning "rejoiceful."



How to Fail at Being Straight

1. Like Boys: This step is easier than most and only requires a bit of acting and pretending on your part, but you like drama and theater, so I know you can do it. It won't really feel like pretending, but that's how you'll know you're doing a good job. Make it seem like you're dying to get a boyfriend. Gossip with your friends about who the cutest boy in your grade is. Call dibs on some (even if you think you'll never actually make a move). Stare at them, but don't engage quite yet. This is what everyone else is doing.

2. Be Slightly Homophobic: Yes, the irony is not lost but bear with me, the only time you've ever seen anything labeled "gay" is when you watched the *Legally Blonde* sequel and saw a male dog fall in love with another male dog. You need to be afraid that your only nephew will grow up and be gay—*He won't be able to carry on the family line!* You need to watch Ellen and think, *Oh, that's what a homosexual looks like.* You need to go to an Imagine Dragons concert and stare at two women holding hands the entire time and think, *What the heck?* That in particular really trips you up, and you can't seem to tear your eyes away because they both seem so normal and you never thought being gay was. Internalize this homophobia to make revelations later on in life that hold some pizzazz.

3. Meet Your Stepdad's Sister: She comes to visit, and you're introduced to her, and then you're introduced to her wife. Careful now—this is a lot to take in. Your mind is probably blown because she . . . is a *lesbian*. Besides the Imagine Dragons concert, this is your first real-life experience with anything "gay," and it's crazy, I know. This will be the only thing you can think about anytime you see her: *That's a lesbian with a lesbian wife and a great job who lives in Brooklyn.* Sounds kind of nice, until you remember you're straight.

4. Project on to Your Poor Brother: An important step because statistically, one person in your family has to be some sort of gay, but nobody has come out yet, and it definitely can't be *you*. Theorize to the rest of the family about your youngest brother being gay and ignore his girlfriends. They never stick around for long, and he's always had a great sense of style. Your brother will be offended anytime you insinuate this to his face, but you'll believe he's just acting like that because he's in denial.

5. Obsess Over Middle-aged Actresses: This all started when you were younger and saw Lindsay Lohan in *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen*, and proceeded to love her in ways you can't really remember because you were six, but this type of obsession becomes a natural and routine part of your life. The frantic, find-out-everything-you-can-about-them kind of obsession. You will continue to watch movies with beautiful women and proceed to save countless pictures of them on your phone. You will tell absolutely everyone that will listen about these beautiful ladies you hyperfixate on in the name of talent. You like drama and theater.

6. Date a Boy: All right, time to get serious. Forget about those middle-aged actresses and simply choose a boy—any boy—and like him. (Honestly, just *pick* one.) Think he's cute. Agree with your friends that he's attractive and funny and smart. Tell your mom about him. Text your dad about him. Get his number somehow. Text him and make sure to flirt. He's bound to fall for you—you're prettier than you think. It'll be easy to make him think asking you out was his idea. Smile when you say yes.

7. Tell That Boy You Love Him: You're only going to be dating for about a month or two, but the boy you're dating is going to text you one day and say, "I love you," and you're going to say, "Really?" And then he'll say, "Yeah." That's when you tell him you love him too, which is absolutely vital. You have to make him believe. Mark the milestone with another and have your first kiss in the band hallway bathroom. He'll think it's exciting and adorable. You'll think it's gross and soppy (it comes with the territory). He'll hug you right after. You'll feel like there's something wrong when he hugs you. Don't think too much about it right now though, just keep up pretenses.

8. Start Watching Hannah Hart on YouTube: You're going to get bored with your days towards the end of middle school (like every teenager does), but I have a solution. There's a woman named Hannah Hart who makes YouTube videos. Watch her "Coming Out" video and cry (you'll learn it's okay to cry later), and then watch every single one of her other videos. All one hundred and two. Absolutely spiral about this woman. Rewatch her videos as you get ready for school and before you fall asleep; they will start to feel like the morning news and a nighttime lullaby—something you completely rely on.

9. Feel Funny: Your spiraling will continue and right about now, you're probably feeling a little funny whenever you rewatch one of her videos or when she posts a new picture to Instagram. A tiny fluttering in your stomach. A little warmth. Perfectly normal, but it's essential you don't tell anybody about it right now—that comes later. For now, be curious. Avoid your boyfriend for a few days. Look up what you're feeling on the internet if you're not sure, just . . . *please* be careful with any image searches.

10. Figure Out Why You Feel Funny: If you've reached this step, you probably figured out what that fluttering warmth means, and congratulations! I know it's scary figuring out you're different from everybody else and that your whole life has felt like a sham so far, but you'll reconcile with that later. Just be happy right now. You're beginning to find out who you are as a person. *I'm* happy for you.

11. Break Up with the Boy You're Dating: But now you have to end things with the boy you've roped into dating you. You're going to wimp out and just text him, but you're in middle school, so it doesn't really matter. He's going to be heartbroken, but you have to be true to yourself. You won't always, but you need to be right now. Simply tell him it's not working—because it isn't—and you'll feel better after.

12. Come Out: Yeah, this might be the scariest step of the bunch, but I believe in you. I promise everything will be okay. The first time the words "I'm gay," come out of your mouth will make your stomach swoop and your cheeks blush, but it's going to feel so lovely; it'll be like nothing else you've ever experienced. Feel a little bit guilty about your previous homophobic tendencies, but just be better from here on out (and stop staring whenever your stepdad's sister and her wife hold each

other's hands each time they come to town. You'll get to do that one day, too). You will tell your brother first (not the one you wrongfully projected on to), because he's the most trustworthy, and his unending support will make you feel normal and not at all like an oddity. You'll wait about three months to tell anybody else, and then you'll send a text to your dad, and he's going to say, "Are you joking?" And you'll say, "No." But then he'll tell you, "I love you no matter who you like." Your heart will burst. When you text your mom four months later, she'll say, "I've always known," and you're going to feel like an absolute idiot for not seeing it sooner. But you'll also feel loved, and there's almost nothing better than that. (By the way, these are the only three people you actually come out to; you'll leave the rest of your family to figure it out by making a lot of gay jokes about yourself. They will eventually get it.)

13. Kiss a Girl: Now, this step won't be completed for a few more years, but that's more than all right. Girls are scary. Everybody comes out at their own pace. But this will be the first girl you like, and kissing her will fill you with so much wonder. Not because it's her specifically, but because it's a *her* in general. There's a whole side of life that you've been missing and once you complete this step, you'll feel Sappho in your bones as you're overcome with longing for a girl. Everything will finally make sense, and you're going to feel so good.

14. Get Your Heart Broken by That Girl: Okay, this is your first genuine heartbreak because this is the first time you've ever actually *liked* somebody. For so long you were trying to like boys you weren't even remotely attracted to and now that you've found somebody you think you could actually enjoy being with, she pulls the rug out from underneath your feet. She's going to leave your not-quite-relationship to get back with her ex, and it's going to suck, I won't lie to you. But you're going to feel grateful you weren't actually together because it will make the hurt slightly easier to deal with. The healing will come in time. Think of this as a learning experience—harm that helps.

15. Date a Boy: If you've reached this step, you're probably older and have forgotten about the girl that broke your heart. And I know what you're thinking: *Boys? I thought we were done with them.* Surprise! Not every coming out story is linear. Your heart has had time to heal from its breaking, and that boy in your eighth period class will know all the right ways to flirt. You can't help but fall for anybody who gives you at-

tention, because at this point you're desperate for it. You'll think there's no harm in going along with this; you can still like a boy if you want to. Say *yes* when he asks you to be his girlfriend.

16. Get Broken Up With: You and the boy from your eighth period class will only date for two months because it turns out you don't really like communicating or being vulnerable or hanging out with him. He won't appreciate that. You'll fight about it. He'll break up with you. You won't feel all that sad.

17. Date Another Boy: Turns out another boy is going to tell you he likes you about a month later, and he is *also* in your eighth period class. Tension will run high, so enjoy. Anyway, he's going to ask you out on a date and then ask you to be his girlfriend on that same date. You have to say yes because this boy also happens to be the same one you had a crush on in the fifth grade. Things are supposed to come full circle.

18. And Get Broken Up With Again: All right, this one is actually going to do some damage. Like I said, you had a crush on this boy in fifth grade, and it feels nice finally dating him, so when he springs a breakup on you two months later, it will feel like a slap in the face. He introduced you to *Star Wars*! Leaving behind that pinnacle is hard. You'll drive home from the café where it happened and almost rear-end someone because there were too many tears in your eyes while you listened to Fleetwood Mac's most depressing songs. You will tell your newfound friend in fifth-period AP Psychology about it, and she'll try to comfort you in an adorably awkward way. You'll be perfectly fine with her help and a little time.

19. . . . But Date *Another* Boy: Ha. Right. So, one month after your last break up, you'll start talking to yet another boy. This one is really charming, and you can't help but fall for somebody who can make you laugh. You'll want to make this relationship work because you're really fond of him, and he's actually super cute, in like, a nerdy way. He'll support you as you start watching *The X-Files* and your crush on Dana Scully, and you'll really appreciate that. Your friend from fifth period—who is now your *best* friend—will hate it though, because she and this boy used to be best friends and now they don't talk at all. You met through her during a group hangout one night, and she'll feel cheated somehow, but the two of you eventually move past it. Enjoy this boy, he's nice.

20. Um, Kiss Another Girl: This is not your best moment, but two months into your relationship with the most recent boy, you will start to have . . . feelings. Not for him, but for your best friend—the one that introduced you to your boyfriend. And one night you're going to sleep over at her house like all best friends do, and she's going to ask for a kiss goodnight. You'll plant one on her cheek and as you roll over, she will whisper into the dead of night, "You missed." You'll freeze and then realize why your stomach flutters whenever you think about her or sing along to Taylor Swift loudly (and so badly) in the car together. It's because you've been falling in love with her, and you will realize you would rather kiss her for the rest of your life than spend one more minute with your boyfriend. You will feel absolutely terrible, but it's the truth, and you need to face it.

21. Break Up With Your Current Boyfriend: So you've faced it, and you know what you need to do. You haven't really broken up with somebody since the eighth grade, and it's nothing short of terrifying, so you will text him to break it off. You're not in middle school anymore, so that's pretty messed up, but you hate confrontation so do what you have to do. I can't stop you. However, doing this will make you feel a freedom you haven't felt since you came out three years ago, and I think that's breathtaking. Collateral beauty.

22. Start Dating Your Best Friend: You will drive over to your best friend's house right after you break up with your boyfriend and kiss her until the sun falls in the sky and rises again. She is intoxicating, and her lips will fill you with a warmth you never knew existed outside of Hannah Hart's YouTube videos. You will tell her you love her, and it will be the first time you've ever said those words and actually meant them. You will spend all your time together and ache during the few times you're not. You will plan your future elopement, where you want to settle down, and what you will name your children. You will feel completely and totally glorious.

23. Break Up With Your Best Friend: This is the step I don't like because this is a breakup that takes the form of a knife and kills you with a thousand cuts to your lonely and melancholy heart. Everyone thinks their first love will be their greatest and last, but it doesn't always work out like that. You will no longer be able to envision your future with her in it. Things aren't healthy anymore, and all of that warmth is gone.

Her lips no longer fill you with a taste so sweet. You give and give and give for nothing in return. You fight with her as the sun falls in the sky and rises again. And you will feel so sick of losing, but you don't deserve this, and I want to see you enjoying life again. Cry and feel like it's okay to do so now. Actually take your time to heal from this one; it won't be as easy as before. Just keep searching for the advantage within this heartbreak. You'll be okay. I know you will.

24. Try to Kiss Another Boy: Yeah, I thought we were done with them too, but alas, it seems like every time you get hurt by a girl, you think boys will be the solution. Like I said, girls are scary, and when they break your heart it feels like a piece of your soul leaves with them. I guess boys are easier, less risk of emotional damage. Speaking of, quite a while after you break up with your best friend, you'll finally be living on your own, and you'll meet a new boy. He will ask you to come over to his house one night, and you will both awkwardly sit on his bed. Then he will try to kiss you. You'll go along with it for a little bit, but the moment he tries to take it further you will freeze up and exclaim, "Sorry, I have a class at eight in the morning!" And then you will practically run out of there. When you get home, you will lay frustrated in bed and try to figure out why you stopped him.

25. But Realize Why Kissing Boys Does Nothing for You: Because it will hit you. This entire time—your entire goddamn life—you've never truly liked boys. Any boy. Not a single one. You've felt like you should because of some weird compulsion to abide by societal standards regarding sexuality, but both of us know that's not how you should be choosing who you date. Both of us know it was making you miserable. Both of us know you have tried so hard to like boys, even love them, but it never worked out because that wasn't *you*. And you have realized what *you* are is a lesbian. Like your stepdad's sister. Like her wife. Like Ellen and so many others. They're just people. They're just like *you*. Go on, admit it. Say it out loud because once you do, it will feel like soft contentment as the final piece of your puzzle slots into place. "I'm a lesbian." A quiet *click* as you lie in bed and smile to yourself, the world continuing to turn. There is nothing collateral about this beauty.

KAYLA HENN

tears aren't a woman's only weapon

the proper study of mankind begins with woman—
but I read once
we women should
soothe our wrath
and tame our fury.
we are of a gentle kind,
a softer kind.
gentle the rage
and conceal the ire,
let history consume us
and spit us back out
on a pedestal of things
we have been allowed to like.
man kind
his tory
man ifesto
a type of erasure
that is ingrained
into our very etymology.
so yes—
the study of mankind
does begin with woman,

Anthropogenic

16x20in, Oil Paint



conjecture, surmise, theorize (or: just wondering why)

i speculate why
meiosis created daughter cells
to make a daughter—
she.*
and it is the anguish and
and it is the affliction and
it is the flicker in their eyes every time they look at me¹
one of their progeny
still here
still alive
still
i n h a l i n g a n d e x h a l i n g

1 *half-pragmatic
 half-deranged
half-something-still-not-known.
 tumultuous modes of being
 synthesize
and here is the consequence and:
 five to four
 with a lingering successor *why*.
he is deceased and i am existing?
 motives still unknown
 findings are groundless
 conclusion is insignificant

A Blurring Sense of Home

My house on Mathews Street has the grandfatherly feeling of having been a home to many people for many years. Built in 1908, the outer walls are a Colorado-orange brick that seems more vivid for all their years in the sun, as if they've just soaked it all in. Inside is bright and cheery: white walls, gabled ceilings, warm wooden doors, windows with beautiful molding around the frames, and old, ornate door handles that you have to turn just right to shut. The whole apartment tilts—the kitchen sloping down towards the backyard, and my bedroom sloping down towards the front of the house.

We arrived in the heat of August, our bare feet sticking with dust as we moved in. We scurried about, scuffling boxes around and chattering away, sleeping on top of our sheets late at night. Finally, one hot afternoon the groggy heat broke and we went out on the roof through my bedroom window which was missing its screen. The rain came down and the cool, light drops that landed on our legs felt like a baptism. From then on, I felt as if I lived here.

The other day my friend drove me home late, and we talked about space and place. Space is how we move through the world as though it were a stage: upstage, downstage, east, west. And place—as it exists in our minds, in our memories—is the way we gather memories around a space and it becomes something more, that subtle glimmer of color that only we can see. I stepped out of the car into the cool night air; around the dark corner our wooden steps waited, the porch light on, fluttering with moths at the top. I realized it had already begun to have the familiarity of a place, of a home.

Home is a peculiar concept in and of itself. Even once it's established, how could we put a finger on it? It seems to be a little shadow that flits in and out of nooks and crannies, sometimes settling for a while, sometimes staying only a minute. Building a sense of home, turning a space into a place, seems to be one of those things that must be done almost inadvertently—something you have to look at out of

the corner of your eye, and then one day it will be there. Like looking at stars: if you look directly at it, it will vanish.

Just yesterday as I was walking, it began to smell like fall. Fall, curiously, seems to be a place, not confined to a space, but something in the air that kicks up memories of crisp apples, sweaters, and swirls of steam wafting up from a coffee mug that catch the golden light. Fall, the falling of summer into autumn, seems more like a new year than the darkness of January ever does. The glorious death of summer precipitates a new beginning with splendid carpets of red and gold leaves. What can follow death but a new beginning?

Since I have come back to college this year, something I don't quite understand has begun to occur. What I've been feeling is a strange splitting sort of sensation, the peeling away of layers, the way you might undress as you move about your room, hanging your coat on a hook, draping a shirt across the back of a chair, tossing your pants in a laundry basket in another corner.

The first time I felt it was at a candlelight mass on a tired Thursday evening. In the dark church surrounded by the warmth of flickering candlelight, I felt much closer to home than I had in a long time, and my heart felt lighter.

I feel the fall like the trees in this transitory season, tentatively placing roots as I shed my coat of leaves. Something has to give in order for us to move forward, and I find it in a collapse of these outer layers, dying a brilliant death like the leaves to reveal the textures underneath, all the rough, knotted places coming slowly into light. It is painful at times, to lay bare the facade with which we fight the world. It is simply terrifying. But it is in the shedding of layers that we can put down new roots or make space for home to grow.

Since that Thursday evening, my construct of home has been unraveling, falling apart at the seams and being re sewn in places I never expected. It is a gradual metamorphosis of peeling, splitting, and intertwining. It is the acceptance of home as a multitude of places that can exist simultaneously, no less in one than in the others.

Home is dancing. Home is the Oregon coast on a summer night. Home is at candlelight mass. Driving, singing in the car. In an apartment in Colorado, playing board games until one in the morning. In our laughter. In a phone call with my sister. Home creeps in like a cat, settling itself on your chest with a happy sigh. It is in flower petals tucked between pages of a book. It is in sand between my toes and the smell of a campfire on the beach. It is my sister's voice, and the

sound of her guitar through the bedroom wall. It is in the handwriting, the letters, the recipes written by my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother before her. It is in the perpetual warmth of the kitchen and each new cooking fiasco. In old episodes of *Little House on the Prairie* and movies on Wednesday nights. In coffee shops where the scratching of pens is drowned out by the clinking of cups and the hissing and gurgling of coffee being brewed.

In Oregon, the trees seem to ignite like wildfire,
but the aspens scatter across the hills, shining like
candles across the floor of a church.

I saw Colorado's aspen trees for the first time this year and was astounded by the brilliance of their beauty. I wanted to fill my eyes with their elegant, pale gold and drink in the sight of leaves that seem to bubble like champagne in tall, thin-stemmed glasses. In Oregon, the trees seem to ignite like wildfire, but the aspens scatter across the hills, shining like candles across the floor of a church.

One evening on a golden sunlit walk, my friend and I meandered down the dusty lanes in comfortable conversation. I paused, reaching for the yellow, round leaves. They looked just as bright in my hand, shot with delicate white veins, the stems and edges tinted pink. I slipped them in my pocket, and now they are pressed between the pages of a book, next to flower petals from Oregon.

This fall I feel the closing of the season in hints of sorrow borne along in the briskness of the wind that all of fall's beauty cannot hide. Leaving a place, I mourn not so much the physical, but the memories that have accumulated there—the vivid, fragrant memories that hang about a space like shimmering spiderwebs. In a summer or a season these memories build and then fade as soon as you are gone. I am always sorry to leave a season behind, and writing moments down is the best I can do. No matter what, gold bleeds into sepia on the page. But the memories stay, like flower petals pressed between the pages of a book, tying my life together.

The words, the books, the memories that make my life build a home within my heart, a hearth where a fire burns on. I imagine it like the great glass hurricane lamp we hauled home from a garage sale, some-

times burning lower or higher, but always alight like the sanctuary lamp in a church. I myself am a place, a place constantly being discovered, defined, and defined anew.

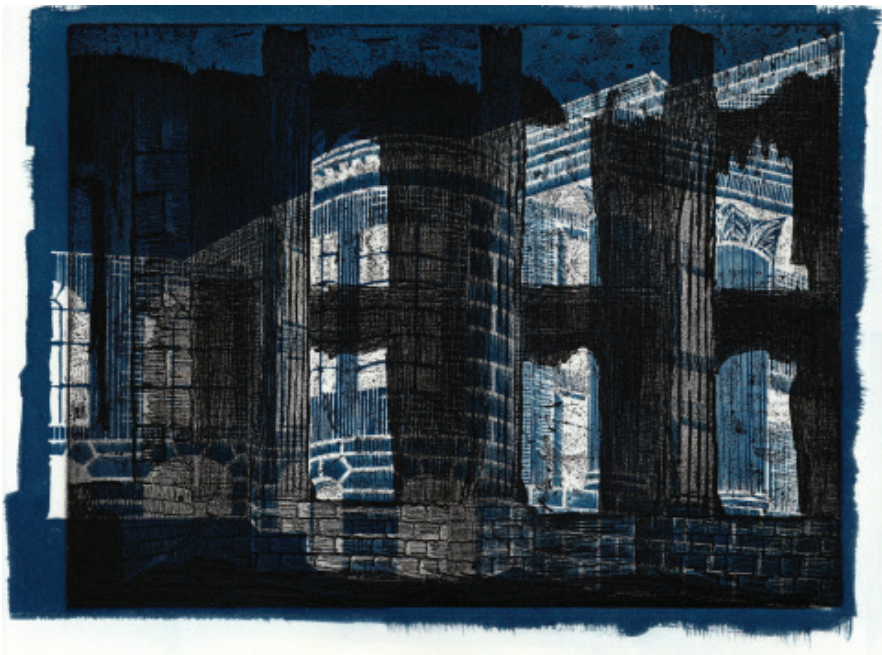
I am discovering that leaving a place means the simultaneous arrival in a new one. When you live in different places, lives, lines, and colors blur exquisitely into a home you never could have imagined. Home and place accumulate over time, the way notes build in a song, resonating against each other. Even as I feel this crumbling of home as I have known it, I am falling breathlessly into it. I feel my arms outstretched, the wind rushing beneath them, blowing back curls of hair as I fall into this glorious season of death and new beginnings.

At Mathews Street I am beginning to know where the floor creaks and how to turn the old doorknobs just so. Home began building slowly, but now feels as if it were tucking itself into even the smallest cracks in my uneven, wooden floor, inserting itself between the pages of the books that overflow my desk. I taste the bittersweetness of it all like black coffee in the early gray morning. It is cold in the mornings now. Sitting at our sloped kitchen table, I watch the threads of steam curl upward off my coffee, disappearing, blurring into the world. I feel like flame—like colors of fall in my heart flickering, blurring my sense of home.

GRACE MORRIS

Belle Grove Plantation in Iberville Parish, Louisiana

13x16in, Cyanotype Print



GRACE COOPER

The Sound of Rain

Oregon is one of the wettest places I've lived. Usually the tepid humidity makes the rich air glide smoothly in and out of my lungs, like how I imagine water slipping in and out of the gills of fish. But that carefree evening, lost somewhere inside of one of my childhood summers, the air was different. It was hot, and pressurized. Humid. Humid enough to stick to the inside of my nostrils and clench between my teeth whenever I opened my mouth to speak. Gray clouds swam across the sky, turning the late day sunbeams into odd, silvery light. My sister and I paid no heed as the first drops of rain beaded on the concrete like sweat. It was Oregon after all; all it does is rain.

My mama stood in the kitchen, cleaning up dinner as we pattered around the backyard, happily absorbed in our games. We retreated to the shelter of the patio as the rain started to fall more determinedly and then BOOM—a thunderclap shook the clouds down lower in the sky and we jumped about a foot in the air, rematerializing in the kitchen doorway like the younger Von Trapp children in Maria's bedroom prior to their beautifully harmonized pillow-fighting pajama party. Mama stood in her white tank top—the angelic, if slightly exasperated, vision of Maria herself—and gathered us up as outside another BOOM cracked the sky open and the rain began to pour down over the hot, languid world.

We sat outside, nestled on the wooden porch swing that hung from chains that squeaked and creaked conversationally as mama rocked us gently back and forth. My legs were sandwiched, the backs of my thighs stuck to the wooden slats of the porch swing and covered by a big, frothy, white comforter that hovered over all of our laps like a long, low cloud bank, making pillowy, billowy, rustle-y noises whenever we moved.

The smell of rain hung thickly in the air, wetly magnifying the smells of sunbaked concrete, dead grass, and our monstrously overgrown rosemary bush. They were the kind of smells I could practically taste when

I opened my mouth, the moisture in the air giving them a sweetness I just wanted to bite into. Her toes kept us swaying, pushing us back ever so slightly, letting us go in rhythm.

In between rumbles of thunder, notes of rain sounded against the patio roof and the sidewalks in a syncopated, ever-shifting rhythm. BOOM! Scanning the sky, we began to count the seconds between thunder and lighting, one Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi, four Miss—look! A shiver broke over the top of my head, worming its way down my spine at the sight of the hot, white lighting, streaking down from the sky.

Mama drew us out from where we cowered under the cover of the comforter, and promptly initiated one of our very own Favorite Things. This particular Favorite Thing was a familiar porch swing ritual featuring a tall tale, spun freshly off the top of our mama's head. The protagonists of these stories were the very daring, delightful, fearlessly brave, and fearsomely lovely adventurers christened Daisy and Diva, representing myself and my sister, respectively.

Daisy and Diva would be living their everyday, humdrum lives when suddenly, a Magical or Mysterious Person or Animal would stumble across their paths (What luck! Why did we never get any of these people stopping by our real front yard?) and present them with some sort of challenge, quest, or adventure. They would promptly accept this charge, whereupon they would trudge on up the Hill to visit their magical, motherly guide Stella who outfitted them for all their adventuring needs with a bibbidi-bobbidi-boo and off they went. There were always all the usual, respectable elements of a good old-fashioned adventure: dragons, princes, secret gardens, sorcerers, talking animals, and, of course, Daisy and Diva's trusty, old donkey.

My mama would whip these stories up like storm clouds brewing over the horizon. They were enthralling on even the most mundane, tranquil afternoons, but sitting on the back porch with lightning shivers creeping up and down your back and the patter of the rain, well, that was a nail-biter indeed. Right when the action hit—BAM—there would go the thunder! A few tense seconds later, *lightning*—snaking silent but deadly across the sky. Our very own mama, the All-Seeing, All-Knowing Storyteller, had that storm wrapped around her little finger and played it like a puppet on a string. Every flash of lightning a spell, every clap of thunder an angry sorcerer—and Daisy and Diva, the heroes of it all, marching triumphantly along against the backdrop of drizzling rain.

Eventually the story wound down. Daisy and Diva returned to Stella, as they always did, and we returned to the porch swing, snuggled beneath the whispery comforter in the strange, silvery shimmer of the fading day. The clouds were empty and light, the air cool and easy to breathe. The heat of the day washed away down the edges of the street along with the rain, puddling in our uneven driveway. The only sounds were the occasional drip drops falling from the lip of the patio roof, or smaller drops plinking down off the leaves of trees. We sat in silence, listening to the clean, wet world from our cozy spot on the porch swing, still swinging back and forth, back and forth ever so gently.

But my sister and I, we know there's more to the storm than watching out the window and waiting for the world to be scrubbed clean.

I loved those afternoons on the porch swing. Thunderstorms may be a rarity in the Willamette Valley, but when they come they sure don't pass by without putting on some kind of show. Looking back, I marvel at my mama's storytelling, the way she catered to (if I may say so myself) the highfalutin expectations my sister and I pranced about with, all our crazy notions of what a good story involved. She knew just how to take deep breaths, savor the sultry, stormy air, and plunge into the depths of our imaginations. I marvel at her ability to take an afternoon storm and make it magical for us.

At the same time, between the stories, our mama taught us how to listen to the rain. We're older now, and the storytelling has fallen away. But she raised us well. On hot summer evenings when the air goes sticky and thick, slowing to a crawl, everyone knows to turn their eyes skyward to look for lightning. But my sister and I, we know there's more to the storm than watching out the window and waiting for the world to be scrubbed clean. She taught us how to enjoy a storm. How to slow down. To sit on the patio for a while, breathe it in, and listen, listen to the thunder and the rain.

A Revolution Poem

I hope your boxes unpack themselves,
 You march down to the basement to no avail
 This holiday season and your
 Halloween decorations are displaced into the box marked Xmas
 Yes, I also hope all your plants overgrow their sills,
 As you return from a trip away
 Find bamboo shoots
 In the pot marked
 Homegrown parsley
 Their fronds making love in the late afternoon sun of your supposedly relaxing
 Sunday
 Y'know what, I hope Home Depot turns out closed every time you have a project
 And your walls slowly mold, until the filaments explode in every light switch
 I hope your Yoga instructor finds a real job,
 And your Doberman dozes off long enough for your cleaning ladies to discover the
real secrets in the bottom of your jewelry box
 That this perfect home,
 Built in a pocket of the cosmos,
 Free from the responsibility of entropy,
 Is actually tearing itself asunder
 Piece by piece,
 And your doorway Yin and Yang
 Its liling smile crookedly
 At the illusion of balance collapsing
 Craps all over the leather-trimmed
 Consignment store sofa.

Real Girl

This is what you've been waiting for your whole life, right? Then why does every step you take down the aisle feel like a lie?

You resist the urge to tug at the hem of the maroon cocktail dress that rubs against your thighs. You take one step, and then another, the feeling like moving through water. Slow and halting. The room feels clammy around you, crowded by your family and a handful of friends lounging about while you practice the biggest decision you'll ever make. Do they notice you dragging your feet as you move closer to the altar?

Another step. Michael has a patient smile on his face. You hate that you have to make yourself return a small one back to him. You wish instead that it was effortless. You falter on your next step, ankle rolling out under you. Michael lurches forward an inch as if to catch you, but you right yourself before he can move farther. You are in front of him now, the man you love. His mouth is smiling but his eyes are studying you. He noticed.

You know your mouth is forming the words that the officiator tells you. The script the bride is given. You want to mean them, fully and with authenticity, but fear ripples through you and you're adrift all over again. You search the room, panicked, wanting anything to latch on to. To make this moment real. The walls of the hotel ballroom are a deep burgundy with gold accents reaching up into the arched rafters above. Next, you hone in on the orchids sitting on the table just beyond Michael's shoulder. Your eyes trace the stem, up around the curve of each delicate white petal blended with pink. Still, your lips mimic the words being fed to you. Your heart beats harder in your chest, and you wish you could look at him.

"Rebecca? Are you okay?" he asks, hand gently sliding into yours. You've been standing there a few moments too long. Michael is trying to maintain his calm, but when you finally talk yourself into looking into his earthy eyes again, they are tinged with worry.

"Yes, I'm all right. Sorry. I think I'm just starting to feel a bit overwhelmed. Can we go sit?" Your voice sounds hollow, even in your own ears. You hate that too. But he doesn't fight you. He leads you to a table where your mother and sister-in-law-to-be are deep in conversation about a last-minute change to the catering for tomorrow night. It's not really something you would like to deal with right now.

"Actually, I'm going to run to the restroom," you whisper to Michael, wanting to take the chance to slip away and collect yourself.

"Alright," he says, cupping your cheek in his palm and placing a soft kiss on your forehead. "We still have a while until the rehearsal dinner starts. Take your time." He knows that you need your space. A small blessing.

Guilt curls in your gut as these retreating steps are much swifter and efficient than the ones that would lead you back to him. It's as if an invisible force is pushing your back as you arc across the lobby towards the restrooms.

You stand at the sink and splash cold water on your face. But when you look up, you don't really see you. There is a girl there, her tall frame and dark strands of hair tiling over the facet. Her petite nose is just a few inches from the glass. The eyes are gray and distant. It can't be you. It is just a thing in the mirror, invisible threads manipulating a life-size marionette doll.

This is what he is marrying, a disgusted voice from the back of your mind tells you. A voice you wish you could forget. You rub your eyes, and the girlish thing in the mirror mimics you. You feel yourself pull away from the bathroom, from yourself. It's a quiet sort of exodus that you've lived a million times, like floating over your body. A shell.

You find yourself back in a memory. When this all really started for you. The art building at the edge of the Werther University campus. You had visited with Lindsey on her last day, when she went to say her goodbyes to Professor Trevors. When they'd mentioned the opening for a figure model, you saw your opportunity. Confidence is key, right? This was your chance to try. What you didn't know was that it was the beginning of the lie.

A sleek black robe inched down the tops of your shoulders as you slipped through the room to the heart of the studio space. You watched them watching you. The men and women shifted in anticipation, tools raised to their easels. Some looked uncomfortable in the way that suggests a quiet desire; others averted their gaze until you were sitting in position at the blood-red armchair on the raised dais. Someone ut-

tered, "Begin," and you heard the monotonous scrape and scribble of charcoal against paper. *You're good at remaining still*, Professor Trevors told you before; it's part of why he kept you coming back. That, and your confidence to display your body in such a way. He liked that you owned it. You didn't bother telling him the stillness was familiar. That it was survival.

You had no way of knowing that those hands, that proud little smirk, would become your world and your undoing.

Your ears locked onto the sound of the wall clock located somewhere in the room. You made sure your gaze was fixed on a chip of dull red paint on the far wall while your senses scanned the artists splayed out in front of you. The ticking was a lifeline as you felt the pinpricks of their eyes on every surface of your bare skin.

One student in particular was attentive, his gaze tracing your every curve. Upon watching him for a bit, you realized you recognized him from one of Lindsey's parties. Peter. His hands moved over his canvas with diligence and purpose. You had no way of knowing that those hands, that proud little smirk, would become your world and your undoing. So you tried to take those piercing eyes and make them belong to you. He may have thought you were the object of study in the room, but you studied him just as closely. You saw what he wanted. What makes a body desirable? Is it the only thing that makes someone worth loving?

Peter had seemed to think so. You didn't want to believe him. You didn't think something like love should be that shallow. But, if you could figure out what drew these people to your prison of skin and sinew, what made them want it, maybe you could find the right lie. Maybe you could make yourself believe it long enough to live the life your mother told you to. The life every girl was eventually expected to have.

The ticking clock becomes a pounding and you are thrown from the moment. You are in the bathroom. Yes, that's right. You shake your head, spooling back into yourself.

“Rebecca! Are you alright in there?” Lindsey shouts through the door. You love her, of course, but you have to resist the urge to strangle her.

“I’m fine, Lins! I just need a minute. I’ll be back soon.” When you reach for the faucet again, you notice your hands shaking.

Lindsey made a surprised huff through the door. “A minute? Becs, you’ve been gone for a couple hours! Come on, your soon-to-be-hubby and everyone else have been waiting.”

What?

You were gone that long this time? You force your eyes closed, rubbing at them with the base of your palms. You take a deep breath, and it rattles in your lungs a bit. You try another. You still feel as if in a haze, the events of the day and your memories all amassing into a thick fog around you. You feel as if you are starting to drown in yourself, lost and alone, in the damp and the dark. It’s all you can do to try and stay at the surface of the moment. You know it’s getting worse. But, for everyone else’s sake, you have to try harder. You look at the thing in the mirror and force it to straighten, willing some strength into your shoulders, setting them back and lifting your head. You even manage a soft smile to Lindsey as you open the bathroom door.

“Sorry.” Your voice is small, but steady enough that you think you can make it through dinner.

“Where did you run off to anyways? Have you been in there the whole time?” Lindsey coos, pulling you back through the lobby. You try and ignore the faces of the hotel staff as you pass, imagining that they know exactly where you’ve been. You wish you could curl into yourself and hide.

“Of course not! I went for a small walk, and just made a pit stop before dinner.” You’ve been friends with Lindsey long enough that you know she doesn’t believe you. She’s just a good enough person that she won’t ever say anything.

When you reenter the ballroom, a few more guests have joined. You are led to the open seat between Michael and your mother. The two seats beside her remain empty.

“Where’s Dad? And Laura?” you ask, voice catching on the words that you already know the answer to.

Your mother rolls her eyes, twirling the wine around her glass. “Oh, you know. They’re always late. Not that he really cares, right? I almost feel bad for Laura, really. Maybe I should’ve warned her who she was marrying.”

You can’t stomach a reply to her, and instead slip into your seat. Mi-

chael reaches for your hand underneath the table. You let him hold it, but you don’t feel the warmth of his fingers. Your attention is fixed on the candles, the orchids, the glimmer of light that reflects off of the silverware into your face. You let yourself remember meeting him for the first time, letting the warmth of the moment long past fill you instead.

“Can I buy you a drink, beautiful?”

It was the first thing Michael ever said to you. It was that bar off Quincy Avenue where you liked to people-watch while you drowned your sorrows for the umpteenth time on any given week. You were fiddling with the corners of a small paper napkin when he’d shown up right next to you, seemingly out of nowhere. Tensing, you nearly choked on the vodka spritzer out of shock. His voice was low and gruff and snapped the memory of sharp words and rough hands into your mind. You can still remember how your legs trembled beneath. The rampant sounds of laughter and television screens blaring from every corner drilled into your skull.

You prepared to tell him off. Under no circumstances would there be another Peter. It wasn’t worth it. But any angry retort you had faltered on your tongue when you saw his eyes. They didn’t match the voice at all. Brown with flecks of gold in the low bar lighting and warm as the earth in the lazy afternoon sun. Kind. Not menacing. Not Peter.

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t mean to bother you,” Michael had said with a tinge of red budding on his cheeks. You must have worn the apparent confusion on your face, causing him to deflate just a fraction. But his eyes had remained locked with yours, hopeful.

You sighed. It drove you mad, that need for companionship. And, despite all that had happened with Peter and with everyone else, you still wanted it. You were always unable to give up, for better or worse.

You scooted over to let him in. “Sit?”

He slid carefully into the booth, and you noticed he just barely missed rubbing elbows with you. He ordered his own drink.

“So, what are you doing here?” You tried to ask casually, eyes fixed on the churning of ice in your depleted glass.

“Practicing my confidence. What about you?”

You let out a weary huff, not quite a laugh. The abrupt nature of his brutally honest response caught you off guard, but it was refreshing. “I guess I’m waiting,” was all you could think to say to him. Waiting for what, you weren’t quite sure. You supposed you wanted it to smack you

in the face and make itself obvious. It was futile, but a girl could wish.

"Was it for me?" Mischievous slipped into his voice, and his head cocked to the side. You couldn't help but let out a small laugh. A real one this time. You looked him over again. A not altogether unpleasant smirk. Relaxed demeanor. A playful softness in those eyes. No, definitely not Peter.

"I don't think you need much practice."

He beamed at that, taking it as a good sign. You let him. After the tension left from the initial moment, everything seemed to fall into place. You talked about art and movies and music. You talked about work and travel and love. You clicked.

It surprised you, and you kept coming back for more. You met at that bar every week after that. Over time, Michael let his pretenses drop, still a massive flirt but not desperate in his motivations anymore. Against your better judgment, you let yourself become lost in it all. The good kind of lost this time.

"Hey, do you maybe wanna come to my place later?" he asked one night. It had snowed earlier than expected that year, and you'd been watching the near-silent snowfall with him.

"Hmm, and what are your intentions, sir?" you tried teasing. He grinned back, a bit sheepish.

"So that's not gonna work?"

"Nope."

You hesitated though. You kind of liked him. But you still knew what he was planning. He was a guy after all. You didn't know how to tell him that you would never want him that way.

"Although," you conceded an inch, "you may drive me home. You may have a drink with me there, but you will not be staying. Understood?"

His smile was brilliant. He gathered the coats and led you both outside to his truck.

"Here you are, m'lady," he said with a flourish, opening the passenger-side door and giving you a boost up. You giggled.

At the same time the car door slams, your aunt Diana is belting laughter at the dinner table. You jolt in your seat, remembering when and where you are.

Michael is chuckling at something she said, eyes sliding to meet yours.

"I don't know. Rebecca can be pretty stubborn when she wants to be."

"And that's why you two are such a good match." His father's joyful bellows echo through the room.

"Honestly, you two are so adorable. It's kinda disgusting." Lindsey sighs.

"Speaking of which, when can we start expecting some adorable grandchildren?" Michael's mother eyes us, the same mischief Michael is famous for smothered across her face.

"I'm just so excited to be a grandma, I can hardly wait!" Your mother chimes in.

Michael's hand squeezes yours again under the table. He doesn't have to look at you for you to understand. You know he wants children someday soon. It was all he could talk about the months before he proposed to you at his family's cabin last winter.

"One thing at a time, Mom. Of course we'll have kids, but let's just take things as they come." You try and keep the excitement going, laughing to disguise the trembling in your voice.

"You know, you won't be a young flower forever, Rebecca. Don't wait too long," Aunt Diana chirps back, indelicate fingers tearing through the meat on her plate.

Your silence is palpable, at least to you. The familiar muffle returns in force, and you let the rest of the conversation fade even as you are still aware of Michael's hand entwined with your own. You can distantly hear your family move on to other topics: how beautiful you'll look in the dress, the expenses for the cake catering, the best honeymoon spots.

As soon as the meal ends, you take your chance to escape again. "I'm going to go get some air. It's a little stuffy in here."

"Want me to come with you?" Michael asks, voice low but with all the patience in the world.

"Oh no, no. It's alright. I'll be right back."

Michael looks skeptical, but still doesn't stop you when you slip through the large patio doors leading to the lush gardens. The darkening sky is becoming overcast, doing nothing to help the fog that won't stop clinging to your mind. It's never been this bad before. You've realized over time that these moments of slipping from reality were your way of dealing with your depersonalization, your lack of interest in existing in a world where your worth is defined by how you look to others.

You trail along the smooth gravel towards the edge of the small

lake that rests down the sloped path behind the hotel. Your hands skim through the tall reeds and branches of various azaleas along the way, the light crunch of the smooth stones under your feet an inviting change to the silence that dwells in your head. The smell of wildflowers and salty wind from the ocean a couple miles west wash over you. You allow the evening mist to envelop you and work its magic, pulling your disheveled threads of yourself back together. Why is it that everything seems clearer under an open sky?

You reach the edge of the short pier and overlook the glossy surface of the water. You lean against a post at the edge of the wooden planks reaching out over the deceptively deep water. Looking down, you watch the miniscule ripples dance across the nearly undisturbed water. It's deep and dark and blue, and clear enough where you see her again. The thing you are beginning to suppose might be you.

You look. Really look this time. She's a pretty little thing, you suppose with an almost hollow disdain. But the eyes are so empty. Your anger flares, hating yourself for making Michael marry those eyes.

Why? Why is this fair?

That voice is taunting, and you try and cover your ears to escape the sound.

"Stop it!" you grit out around your bared teeth. But it doesn't. It asks, over and over.

You begin fiddling with the ring around your finger, the sapphire absorbing the leftover light still lingering in the air. You can hear Peter's voice, your mother's voice, your friends' voices.

Why can't you just be a good girl and do what you're told? It's really not that hard, is it? You just have to find a nice man, settle down, and give him children. That's all there needs to be.

Over. And over.

The moment of peace is fading fast, and you feel the thick fog cover you again, distracting you from anything else. You're angry at your mom for demanding something you weren't ready for. You're angry at Peter, for diminishing your worth so significantly you had to hide in your own mind for fear of making a real, physical connection ever again. You're even angry at Michael, for not knowing that.

But . . . he doesn't know. A smaller voice speaks up.

And whose fault is that?

"No!" Startled by the thought invading the fog, you fumble the ring off of your finger. Time feels slow as you watch it plunge into the

chilled depths of the water below. You can barely breathe and can only stand statue still as it sinks further into the dark.

Before you know what you're doing, you leap over the edge of the pier. The water is ice in your system, moving faster than the unreal fog could ever hope to. It goes right to your heart, pounding like a wild beast in your sternum. Your floating dark curls frame your face. You kick your frantic limbs, moving yourself farther into the murk as you reach for the ring.

The sensation of floating, being adrift in a fathomless sea, is so familiar to you now that it calms the ache.

The water grows ever darker, cutting off your other senses. The sensation of floating, being adrift in a fathomless sea, is so familiar to you now that it calms the ache. Your head clears, shocked from the cold pressure around it. From down here, in the deep and the ice and the black, you can see it all clearly. All of the moments that have been peeling away. You don't want them to. But you have never said anything, so no one knows how you drift each day, further and further away.

It is my fault, isn't it? I never told him, or any of them. And because I never did, I will be trapped forever, just like this. Floating just out of reach. Your lungs begin to burn, and you relish in the effect of feeling something. Anything.

But you don't want to be trapped here. You want to go back. You want to go back to him.

And, as if summoned by your thoughts, you feel strong hands wrap around your waist, straining as you rise at a jagged pace to the surface.

You break through, gasping for the cool night air.

"I got you! I got you!" Michael is panting, one arm secure around you while the other paddles you both to shore. Sand jams its way between your toes as you are hauled onto the water's edge.

"Breathe. Just breathe." Michael is rubbing circles on your back while you remember how your lungs work. He sees you shiver as you hold yourself together, grip like a vise. He gets up and returns a mo-

ment later with his black formal jacket, wrapping it tight around your trembling shoulders. Michael pulls you into his chest, arms fastening themselves around you.

"Are you okay?" His voice drips with a terror he can't quite contain.

"I'm so sorry." You manage between each rattled breath.

He huffs out an empty sort of laugh. "Why on earth are you sorry?"

You sit up and twist to face him at last. It's your fault, right? So change it. Say it. Now. "I'm just feeling so lost and confused. I'm so overwhelmed and I don't know if I'm really ready to deal with all this."

The heartbreak in his now small voice echoes your own. "Do you . . . do you not want to get married?" Tentative, terrified.

"No! No, that's not it. I just—" You struggle to find the words that have been waiting to spill out of you.

He grabs your hand, eyes never leaving yours. "Talk to me."

You force another deep breath, gathering every thread of yourself you can find. And you tell him all of it.

"You know what happened, with Peter, with the others too. Every relationship I've ever been in has only ever been about my looks. My body. They never cared about what I thought or felt. So I bought into the lie. I took what I had and tried to use it to get what I needed to survive. I mean, my whole job back at the university was all about using the only thing people seemed interested in, and to find out why. But it only made things worse. After Peter, I realized that I never wanted anything to do with my body. So I pulled away from it all, and I'm still floating, lost.

"I thought it was just a handful of bad experiences. Then I met you. You were so kind and considerate. You pushed me to get through those challenges and let it be okay to feel like I was worthy of being loved. I almost believed it. I want to believe it."

"But?"

"But then it came to having sex. I really wanted to, with you, you know. That was my way back in, to feel like I physically belonged in this world, in this body, by sharing it with someone else. But even with you, the one person I really wanted, I couldn't feel it. I couldn't make myself do it. I told you so many reasons, using Peter, not being in the mood, or wanting to wait until marriage as an excuse. But it's suffocating me. I am surrounded by people and media and everything telling me it's not okay to be asexual in a world I already felt completely adrift from anyway! Do you have any idea how devastating it is? To want to

be loved and accepted so badly, but the one thing you can't seem to give is what most people want?

"I detached to make myself feel safe, to the point where I don't even feel real. But then I met you, and the only thing I wanted was to feel real enough again to deserve the chance I was given. But now I can't seem to come back, and I am so afraid I'll screw it up. I love you so much, but I'm so afraid that you'll leave too, and it'll be my fault for not being enough."

The words all rush through you, leaving a trail of sobs in their wake. You curl into Michael's chest, your own heaving against the emotions that might just burst in there.

"I'm sorry that I've given you that impression." His voice is lower than a whisper, his hand stiff as death where it's still wrapped around your own. You begin shaking all over again, but no longer from the cold of the now pitch-black lake.

"Michael, I'm—" He cuts you off.

"I just wish you'd told me sooner, because if you had . . ."

This is it. The moment you have prepared the last several years for. The emptiness that would follow. All you can do now is close your eyes and wait for the devastating words to land.

"If you had, I would have made it my mission to remind you more often about how incredible you are and how much I need you." Your eyes shoot open at that, taking in the sorrow etched into his features. And you really see him there, his drenched hair and dress shirt clinging to his pale skin, the water dripping from the scruff outlining his jaw, the careful determination lighting up his eyes.

"I know I'm a pretty happy guy most of the time and don't seem to be fazed by much. But that wasn't always the case, and still isn't. You have saved me, little pieces at a time over the last five years. You gave me the courage to figure out who I was and what I wanted. Yes, you are beautiful. But you are so much more than that, my love. You are so smart, and you are the kindest person I know. Almost to a fault."

He situates you in his lap to face you, arms laced behind you like a safety net. His face softens, and he bows his head to place his forehead on your own.

"You're right though. I can't know what it's like, and I'm sorry. I don't really have any idea about the things you're going through up in here." He nuzzles against your head.

When he continues, his voice is thick with emotion. "You are the

first girl I've ever loved, Rebecca, and I'm honestly still surprised that you've stuck around this long, despite everything you just said. Despite whom I've been in the past. For that, you're the bravest person I know."

Words have abandoned you altogether. Fresh tears spring to your eyes, and he wipes them away with a gentle swipe of his fingers. His lips brush your brow, and he rests his chin on top of your head, pulling you further into the embrace.

He chuckles a bit heartier now. "Though, your timing still needs some work, Becs. I mean, we are getting married tomorrow."

"But how?" You weep, long fingers clinging desperately around his neck. "How can you feel that way about someone who's not ever been real around you? We've been together for so long and I'm just now finding out how to be me. How is that fair?"

"This is the realest I've ever seen you, Rebecca. So please, let me keep learning about you. And while you keep learning about yourself, I'll make sure you don't float away. We can figure out the rest together. One day at a time, okay?"

You can't contain the relief and love that floods through your bones. You let yourself sink into it, and he holds you tighter than you could have hoped. He won't let you go.

"Hey. Wanna dance with me?" he asks, a smile starting to play at his lips.

You smile back at him, heart feeling lighter by the moment. He helps you to your feet. You stagger slightly, but his grasp is firm. You let him hold you up, and you sway with him right there on the frigid shore of the lake. Michael begins to hum under his breath, letting the melody take hold of your movements.

"I love you, Michael," you finally breathe.

And you know that when you walk down that aisle tomorrow, when you finally agree to live and love with honesty and integrity, it won't be a lie.

CHERYL PRAZAK

Strings of Life

1650×1275px, Photography



to all the Selves that i have been: No. 10

you are expected to like boys,
 like you are expected to read, to do math, to be her friend.
 you are taught to enjoy his teasing, taunting, insults even
 under the guise of young love,
 from buzzing televisions and adult voices and the other kids on the playground parroting.

a blue screen in your right hand at night tells you it might be okay
 to think about her her golden laughter and the glint in her bright eyes
 in the way everyone tells you to look at boys.
 but learning to like yourself— yourself, who likes her
 is a middle school DIY project
 and you're shit at crafts.

somewhere between loving her and loving you,
 there is a fracturing, a disconnect that threatens
 to swallow this part of you under
 yet slowly, slowly, a new Self grows, bridges the gap.
 tell me, are you afraid that any pride
 might burn your hands or burn your heart?

To Draw a Face

My paternal grandmother's house feels empty. It smells of lemons and Lysol, and of sweat and dead skin cells in the carpet, the drapes, the places she can't quite get it out. My grandmother's house is full of hidden light, trapped behind dark gray drapes, creeping like fingers just beyond the cream windowsills. The house is spectacularly clean, as if yesterday could be erased with Windex, yet my grandfather's tall red chair remains right beside the kitchen, a chair only he used to sit in. I visited her with my parents in August, before my return to college, and with it, the increased risk of carrying or having COVID-19. It was the first time I'd visited since the pandemic began in March and the last time I've seen her since. In her white-tiled kitchen, she'd set out a plate I haven't seen in half a decade or more. A plate I painted when I was in second grade, when I was young and red-cheeked and when my grandpa was still alive. It has both of us on it, badly glazed in bright colors, even worse in its drawing. I had drawn myself with crayon yellow hair, him with three black hairs poking from an otherwise bald head. I had given him big peach ears, an upside down and sideways "3" for a nose, and a terrifyingly large mouth with eight individual teeth.

It is a representation of my grandpa, but it is not him. No, he was soft, curling smiles and pale wrinkles. His eyes, perhaps, were similar—milky white and blue, as if he could see all, until he could see nothing.

I looked at that plate and it made me want to laugh a little, remembering the absurd comments and appreciation it got. My grandparents had praised it, said it was a spitting image, or something old-fashioned of the same sort. It also made me want to cry, remembering him, remembering how we used to draw horses together when I was the height of the kitchen table, remembering how he'd talked to the chemo doctors about how great of an artist his granddaughter was. Or so I was told, second, thirdhand. I looked at that plate and I wondered

how my child brain saw him, if life was as colorful as I depicted. Was the sky ever that bright blue? Was I ever that cartoonishly happy? Did we both smile that big with horrifyingly large, white teeth? The memory of that time is not neatly preserved like the glazing on the plate, cannot be wiped with an old cloth and made bright and clean again. It is instead foggy and diluted. I cannot remember that feeling of drawn elation standing next to him. And so perhaps the painted smile was always imagined, but I don't think that changes the memory of softness.

I think of him while typing this, my hands on a warm laptop keyboard, the only other seemingly living thing in this apartment with me, fifty-eight miles from their home in Boulder. And I think of him in pictures, I think of him smiling with my grandma in their fiftieth anniversary photos in a lush, green park. I think of this image, perhaps, because my grandma keeps it, enlarged on foam board, above her fireplace in a room just to the right of her front door, visible from the second I enter her house. I wonder how the picture makes her feel. And I wonder if it's her image of him, too, the one she returns to. I am unable to conjure his face in detail, the specifics, without something like that photo to use as a crutch. It terrifies me to think that my remembering is like that plate—simplified, generalized, dreamt up and perhaps false. I can tell you he had a warm smile, but I cannot tell you how wide his nose was, not specifically, not enough to draw it from memory. I cannot remember if his eyes were slightly almond shaped, or if they pointed up or barely down. I am an artist, now, better than I was when he was in chemo, hopefully, and in a way this is my worth: to create, to remember. How can I create if I cannot remember? I am terrified of creating a falsehood in place of a person, naming it as them, distorting and rewriting them as such. Once I create a portrait, it exists outside of my head; it has a sort of power in that existence. If I create a generic, blurred portrait of my grandfather, am I different from my grandmother and her bottle of Lysol? The line between creating and marking over is so thin; the eraser is only ever inches away.

I remember him, and yet I don't. I have smudged his eyes, and I forgot how to look at them directly.

I remember the anecdote about him mentioning me to the chemo nurses because my grandma told me, or my mom, or maybe my dad. I remember that he used to make pasta every Saturday night. I remember it because it was tradition, because my mom told me it was. I remember the type of pizza crust we used when we made pizzas to-

gether—me and my brother and my grandparents—and I remember the smell of cold tomato sauce, the bounciness and softness of mozzarella cheese. It is easier to remember these things because yes, they are him, but they are him mixed with other people, things, mixed with smells and tastes and repeated phrases I know from elsewhere, from current times. I can recreate him—his tall form and shiny head, flannel shirt and baseball shoes—from a distance, like he's in the red, tall-backed chair he used to sit in. I reach out my hand to him but it falls several feet short across the room. The chair is empty now. I can recreate the lemon smell of the kitchen in my nose, the way the air always feels stale and dry as it moves through the house. But I can't draw his face, not in the way I should. Not in the way that justifies the title of artist, the title of maker. Nor in the way that feels like a monument to the love I felt.

The other side of my family is larger, louder, less lemon-smell and more clutter and bright lights. I remember them through the pictures taken by my maternal grandfather each Christmas. A dozen or so people in sweaters and wearing Santa hats, cluttered on a sofa or two at my aunt's house. Over the years, these photos documented the arrival of oxygen tanks for some of the older generation, the appearance of new boyfriends for the younger. My grandfather's pictures would sometimes be sent to us weeks later on glossy photo paper, each of us smiling up at him in tiny print.

I always thought my aunt's house looked magical that time of year. Her living room was as tall as her whole house, making parts of the second story into little balconies above it. Everything was soft and carpeted in creams and light greens. And her tree took full advantage of the height it could reach, glimmering and full of lights even twenty feet above the ground. I had no idea how they decorated it or even got it in there. There was always Christmas music on the TV or radio, and it played softly, overheard sounds I couldn't sing but would hum along to.

It was unlike my own house, unlike the plastic seven-foot tree we'd had for over a decade by my teenage years. It wasn't dusty or toxic-smelling; it came from the outdoors, not the spider-filled basement. So Christmas night it was tradition to stare at their tall tree, looming above us like the form of an ancient, glowing god.

I remember when I was fifteen, I was staring at the tree when my eyes landed on something behind it on a railing of the indoor balcony of the second floor. It was a small black camera perched there, posed downward to face us. My grandpa, who had put it there, was sitting on the couch below, twisting the lens of his DSLR, tilting it up to take photos of us coming in from the cold. He was filming the entire night, the small red light in that balcony corner blinking at us from the time I got there to when he bundled up for the cold and left. My grandpa was healthy at this point, or was, relatively speaking, his Santa-like size and complexion perhaps betraying his age and love for food, and perhaps lending my brother and I to calling him “Grandpa Bear” for so long. What I remember most were his red cheeks and his tuft of white hair, keeping more on his head than I ever remember my other grandpa having. And how he would give big hugs if you went up to him and spread your arms out, but he wouldn’t ask for one himself. Yet, like my paternal grandfather, I couldn’t draw you a picture of him. I remember him even less, despite him living longer into my life, perhaps because he lived in the corner of those busy Christmas living rooms, taking photos upon photos. He was somehow an observer even if he sat on the same couch as his wife and children.

I don’t think you can reanimate a lost childhood through glossy pictures, but I think you can forget part of reality through trying.

And these photos: I wonder if he was like me because of them. If he could not conjure the faces of the family he created, if he forgot what my twenty-something-year-old cousin looked like when she was sixteen. Time like a draining tub, pictures to clog the drain. I wonder if he felt something slipping away, if he’s felt it since childhood, if he felt it in the weight of his wedding ring, the film reels of his small children in the years after. Can you resurrect a childhood through photos? Does it come back gray and flat? Was color film a revelation or just putting pretty hues on half-forgotten memories?

I have imagined him looking through photo reels in the 1980s, back when he rode a bike to work and had brown hair instead of gray. I

imagine him picking out ones to print of my mother’s high school choir concert in Germany, a trip he went on, documented through photos and audio cassettes. I wonder if he decided to print them all, wanting to remember everything. I don’t think you can reanimate a lost childhood through glossy pictures, but I think you can forget part of reality through trying. I remember memories that I have pictures of like a slideshow, bright but flat, unmoving snippets of time. They are visually clearer, but emotionally just as blurry.

My grandfather has passed by now, and my grandmother still lives in the same house, in the diorama of another time. She sleeps, I think, in their same bedroom. She doesn’t have a foam board picture of him in the living room, nor one hanging above the TV when it plays the Hallmark channel to her lonely eyes late at night. And as the eternal photographer, there are many fewer photos of him, a legacy built outside the frame, in the smiles and eyes of us as we look at him. I see these pictures on my mom’s Facebook wall, deep into my cousin’s Instagram, yet I do not know where they are, physically, now that he’s gone. I wonder if my grandma ever pulls them out, looks at them in the yellow, dim light of a lamp in the night. I wonder if it’s like staring at a puzzle with a single missing piece—Christmas photos where he’s behind the camera, the crowd smiling at it or, perhaps, at him. Or if she can conjure him up—without his photos, if she averts her gaze—if she can conjure the curve of his eyes in a way I can never manage. I wonder if in fifty years you can memorize a face. Or if in fifty years she imagines him as blurrily as I do, made fuzzy by time and change and grief, or if she is scratched by the trauma of seeing him in his last few months, a record skipping, only playing his graying lips and the hanging skin and the empty air that his body used to fill. My mother took pictures of him on her phone when he was hospitalized for the last few months of his life, yellowing and fading like an old photograph right before her eyes. I wonder if my grandmother has ever seen her scroll past them quickly, like if her finger moves quick enough she can be unhaunted without deleting them entirely.

Perhaps what I’m trying to say is, I wonder how my grandmother remembers him. If she could draw his face. If that even matters to her. Or if the depression in her bed where he used to lay, the indent of a body, is enough. A year or two after his death, she gave me his old drafting pencils, saying I would use them more than her. She handed them to me in a Ziploc bag, like a sterile transaction, like the plastic could stop

his hand from touching hers through the pencils. Her house looks ever the same in that single moment as it has always looked—the dusty green couch and worn brown leather chair, the shelves of DVDs and handmade recordings from the TV. She hands me a piece of him, a draftsman for decades, like it is nothing. Like they are just pencils. I don't use them, honestly, I couldn't make the lead fit and I hated not having an eraser. I do not hold his hand through these. She could have held it a bit longer.

My mom says all my drawings of people look like me. She says they have my button nose, rounder eyes. I do not see it, but I know I seep myself into my art in ways I cannot see. Only rarely have I been told this by teachers, so perhaps it is my mom, wanting to see me in everything I create, and not the marks on the page. I draw myself often, because it is easier to get the angle and pose I want to use when I take the photo myself, and I live alone. It is also for copyright reasons, because it can be plagiarism to use someone else's photography for a painting or drawing without permission. I tell myself this, this utilitarian view, but perhaps I am also drawing myself to find something within the marks, to find a self I have hidden in the shading of my eyelid, the highlight of my cupid's bow, the place at the corners of my mouth where it gets dark, for just a moment on the page.

I have a sketchbook in front of me, now, on the light wood table in my apartment, that I have drawn in mostly in public. I flip through the thirty or so pages I've drawn in so far. There is none of me, none that I recognize immediately weeks after drawing. There are celebrities and people on Pinterest, people on the news in lazy moments of sketching. Looking at the gap between my eyes seems to be a private reflection, or at least an intentional one, done for art classes, halfway between studio and meditation. If I can paint myself junior year before prom, facing myself in a mirror during a time I was starving myself to appear that way in that dress, perhaps I can look this past self in the eyes. I can tell her sorry for the lost lunches, sorry for the size zero dress that was taken in at the waist. I could forgive her for not running faster or for running somewhere more safe. Perhaps I am drawing her to reprimand her, make her real to scold her for the dark spots in our head, like my parents did.

Through these apologies or admonitions of art, I can draw myself better than I can draw anyone else. Maybe I have never had to forgive

anyone else the way I've tried to learn to forgive myself for self-doubt and self-loathing. I think it is in this act of making up that I focus so deeply into my own eyes, attempting to memorize them as a way of saying sorry. I cannot simply leave myself behind or run into another's arms. Yet, I wish I could remember anyone else that clear-eyed, that precisely, or picture it in the same clarity I can see myself when I turn my laptop off, the shiny black screen showing my tired form in its reflection. Am I moving too quickly to get the picture, or is everyone else?

And I suppose, what I'm thinking about is the people I love. I think about the fine lines under my paternal grandfather's eyes, eyes somewhere between stormy and baby blue, the same blue I look out of today. And I think about the blank spots in my memory, fuzzed out by even a moment in time, the tip of his nose or the placement of the corners of his smile compared to his eyes. I think of the dead and of the living. Compared to anybody outside my own, I am closer to capturing the likeness of my best friend, who has been in my life for over a dozen years, yet has been a thousand miles away for the past two. I have drawn her from photos, from life, drawn her ten feet away and two states away. I have asked her to send me photos of her in her college bathroom, pulling expressions so I can draw them in charcoal in my own dorm. I have not quite memorized the way each of her cowlicks arranges her thick, dark hair around her face, but I am perhaps close. I can, and I have, marked myself up to the elbows in conte and vine charcoal to try to get those eyes perfect, to capture the flatter tip of her nose and her rounder lips.

When I have to erase the lids of her eyes to redraw them, it doesn't feel like destruction. It feels like love. And I'd erase over and over, lay down conte again and again, to capture her how she deserves. If my heart is malleable charcoal and slip, not yet dry ink or stone, I hope I can draw future lovers like I draw her, without a foam board photo or drafting pencils to hold. Let me simply and softly imprint them on the clay.

G MCDONALD

Nothing to See Here

I hope you aren't reading this
Because poetry doesn't live on pages
That's just a swindler's trick
To keep smooth talkers on stages
In fact poetry is only the observation
Of something which was beautiful
Well before we tried to force it into something more muse-able
You see, words often lack the same grace
Of what's alive that's why
We use line breaks
And rhyme
In time you'll find
We are just magicians using sleight of tongue
To convince you that you're among
The few, the lucky, the chosen ones
When in fact behind our backs
We drag papyrus plants to cover up our tracks
We are thieves but we are not thick
We sell you on an olive branch
When in reality it's just a stick
So truly I hope you aren't hearing this
Because that means my work is done
Remember, poetry is in motion
So get out of here, run.

ZOE BAUMANN

Fear

12.5x12.5in, Woodblock Print



Miss A

The hot asphalt burned the soles of my feet as I stood on the sidewalk, gaping in awe. We were all playing outside that day, so we all saw when the police cruiser pulled up silently to Miss A's house. Six of us gathered next to the driveway, barefoot and squinting in the sunlight, chapped lips hanging open to reveal mouths of missing teeth, skinny limbs sticking out of T-shirts and shorts. Miss A walked out with her head up and her arms held behind her back by a police officer. It was inevitable that someone would be arrested by the end of that summer, with the way the summer heat cooks everyone's brains.

It all started with the street we lived on. The asphalt was marked with potholes that we kids had learned to dodge when we chased each other up and down the block like rabbits. There were six of us who were all kids at the same time. Me and my little brother, Clyde, lived at the only house that had a tree in its front yard. Next door lived the twins, Annalise and Jason, at the only house with a basketball hoop. Across the street was Philip Jr., who had nothing much to offer but always did what we dared him to do. Lastly, at the end of the block, was curly-haired, ever-sunburned Sanders Kurt, who, even at age ten, I was certain I was going to marry. I was the oldest girl, and since none of us had mothers who bothered to check if we were in our beds at night, the kids all listened to me for the most part.

No one new had moved onto my street in at least a decade, that I knew for sure. Things hadn't changed in a long time. Each and every house hid some sort of darkness behind its doors. People typically knew the truth or a shadow of the truth about their neighbors, but everyone was too busy protecting their own secrets to expose each other. It was like every neighbor had a loaded gun pointed at another, forming a toxic breed of trust over the years of safety from silence. If one went down, the entire neighborhood would go down with them. That's why no one said anything when Philip Jr.'s front tooth rotted out before all his grown-up teeth were visible, or when Clyde and I would sit

on the curb in front of our house because our parents' fighting made us afraid for ourselves, or when Sanders would show up to school with a busted lip or a black eye or both. Everyone had their own problems to worry about. There should've been a line when it came to the children. The adults should've stopped protecting themselves for once.

Miss A moved in across the street. Rumor was that the person who lived in the house before was reported missing, so the family decided to sell the property. Miss A swooped in the moment the house went on sale. We kids watched from the safety of the oak tree in my front yard as Miss A unloaded her moving truck without any help. Never once did she show signs of strain or irritation. She was the calmest person we had ever witnessed. However, we stayed behind the oak tree. We were wary of adults as our means of survival.

It was Sanders who suggested we go meet her. Logically, I was reluctant to stray too close to a stranger, but I too felt a strange impulse to meet her. The other kids seemed drawn to her as well. For no apparent reason throughout the days after she moved in, each of us kept checking over our shoulder at her house. Every time one kid stopped to look over at it, a wave of heads turned. Our expansive imaginations fueled our ravenous curiosity. Philip Jr. said she must be a witch or an angel. The twins thought she was from a far-off country, because why else would she move into a neighborhood like this except by accident? Sanders thought she seemed harmless. I thought she seemed lonely.

After eight days of sitting around, stealing glances and inventing legends, my curiosity got the best of me. I decided to cross the street. The summer heat pelted me the moment I stepped out from underneath the shade of the oak tree. Sanders crossed with me, bouncing with excitement in each step. He was always the more optimistic one. The four remaining children waited a few seconds before scurrying after us, not wanting to miss any of the action. For a moment, the six of us just stood together on her small cement porch step. The cement was so cool compared to the hot black river of asphalt we had just crossed. Finally, I pressed my pointer finger into the doorbell.

The door flew open like a gust of wind blew through it. Our new neighbor stood before us, wearing a white kimono and no shoes. She held out her arms, not asking for a physical embrace, but merely welcoming us into her presence. We were speechless. Later when the six of us were questioned by the police, after everything, each of us would remember her face differently. As for me, I thought her face was young and soft, like a cool older sister. Sanders said she was very old, like his

grandma. Clyde thought she looked like our mom, which I didn't see at all. Philip Jr. said she looked just like his teacher, who had caramel-colored skin, but the rest of us thought her skin had been as pale as our own. Annalise and Jason both agreed that she looked like me, Janie. However, when we were meeting her, I don't think any of us paid attention to her face.

"Hello, little ones," she said with a voice like a bell. "My name is Miss A. What are your names?"

And because we were not afraid, we told her.

"Would you like to play in my front yard?" she asked. There was one thing we could all agree on about her appearance—her soft gray eyes sparkled every time she spoke.

In the front yard, she brought out buckets of soapy water and strings tied in loops. She bent forward like a swan and showed us how to dip the strings in the buckets so that the circles shimmered, and then she ran with the wind to birth bubbles. I looked at the faces of the little kids—Clyde, Philip Jr., Annalise, and Jason. Their faces were alight with joy. I looked at Sanders. His ocean-blue eyes gazed back at me, filled with hope. Miss A brought out shining brass bells and gave us each one. They were so big that little Philip Jr. needed two hands to hold one as Miss A taught us how to swoop our fists in a low arc to produce a chime. Sanders and I danced in carefree circles as the kids played their bell song and Miss A sang in a high, clear voice. The sky began to spin above my head, so I collapsed onto the soft grass, pushing my chest and stomach to the clouds as I laughed.

All day we frolicked on her front lawn. The sound of our joy attracted the neighbors to their windows. Through the strips between curtains where the sunlight broke into dark houses, adults watched with anxious eyes. The parents especially would remember that day in Miss A's front yard with the bubbles and the bells and the absolute elation of it all. Later, the parents would be sure to tell the police that Miss A dared to feed us sliced peaches and strawberries on her front lawn that first day. The police would use this information to build their case that Miss A was obsessed with the children and was tricking us into trusting her. The sliced peaches and strawberries wouldn't have looked so bad if it wasn't for what started happening afterward.

The following day, when the six of us reported to the oak tree, every child had food in their belly. For the first time in a long time, every kid's parents had made them breakfast that morning. Sanders and I were old enough to make ourselves breakfast, and Annalise and Jason

could work together to get milk and cereal. However, Philip Jr.'s stomach almost always growled so loudly in the morning that the other five of us would split off to hunt down some food for him. This morning, however, Clyde and I woke up to a plate of bacon and eggs for each of us. Our mother sat at the table with us, smoking her cigarette and drinking orange juice. We didn't ask why as we gobbled down the deliciously warm food, but every time I looked up, our mom had a dreamy twinkle in her eye. Before she left for the day, she kissed each of us on the crown of our heads. I focused on the way the spot tingled for as long as I could.

Annalise and Jason reported that their mother made them toasted white bread and jam, complete with a kiss on the cheek. Sanders said his dad gave him a light pat on the back. His eyes shimmered when he said it. What surprised us most was Philip Jr., who not only ate waffles for breakfast but received both a hug and a kiss from his mother. The little kids weren't interested in questioning why this had all happened to us at the same time, but I knew it wasn't a coincidence.

Later, during a game of hide-and-go-seek, Sanders and I hid in a jasmine bush together. The sweet smell of the tiny white flowers filled the summer air.

"I had a dream last night," I whispered to Sanders. He was the only person I ever told my dreams to. I learned very young that my dreams carried meaning and to be careful to whom I told them.

"Me too," he whispered back, smiling with half his mouth. The spotted shadows from the flowers and leaves painted his face.

"It was about Miss A."

"Mine too."

"Did she fly in yours too?"

"Yeah."

"Did she say anything to you?"

"Yeah."

"What did she say?"

"She said it's going to be all right, I think."

"But how could she know that?" I asked. "It's not up to her."

In between the long, hot days and endless evenings, the black asphalt road was off-limits because of all the cars returning to their houses. During this time, my mom and Sanders's mom would stand in front of my house with glasses of white wine balanced between their fingers,

whispering to each other. They were upset about Miss A but didn't have much to be really upset about, so they invented gossip. Sanders and I listened curiously to our mothers as they muttered that Miss A must be hiding something.

"I keep dreaming about that fucking woman," I heard my mom say to Sanders's mom.

"Me too! Literally every night since she moved in," Sanders's mom replied. "Sometimes when I'm alone in my house, I swear to God out of the corner of my eye I'll see her, but it's always my own damn reflection!"

Our mom opened her mouth to scream as she normally did, but no noise came out. The veins in her neck bulged ripe and red . . .

One night, when Clyde accidentally spilled orange juice all over the kitchen floor, our mom opened her mouth to scream as she normally did, but no noise came out. The veins in her neck bulged ripe and red as she strained her throat to no avail. Finally, she gave up and looked down at the juice pooling at her feet. Clyde and I stared at her, unsure what to do. Finally, our mom surrendered and helped us clean up the mess in silence. Her voice returned with the rising sun.

A few days later, Annalise and Jason said that their mom, who sometimes stayed up all night screaming about demons or making them clean the entire house, had been falling into a deep sleep directly after dinner each night. They said they were able to sleep the whole night through undisturbed, a rare event ever since their mother stopped taking her manic bipolar medication.

The next day was as hot as the one before, like the sun wanted to show us her full power. Sanders played basketball with Clyde and Jason in the driveway. I laid in the grass and taught Annalise and Philip Jr. how to make dandelion crowns. By the end of the day, the sun had sufficiently zapped our energy, making us delirious and lethargic. Clyde missed a shot at the hoop, sending the basketball into the black asphalt street. Without thinking, Clyde chased after it, not seeing the SUV barreling around the blind turn. I stood up and screamed as

Clyde crouched down in the middle of the street. The car wasn't stopping, and Clyde wasn't seeing it. I wasn't going to be fast enough. Just as the front bumper came within inches of my little brother's head, the car stopped as if crashing into an invisible wall. The car flipped forward over itself, over my little brother's head, who stared up at it with his mouth wide open. Several yards away, the car rolled three times before landing face up. Without stopping, the battered car sped away so fast it burned black streaks into the road.

I collapsed into the middle of the street and embraced my brother. Sanders was right by my side. Clyde was wailing now, with snot and saliva messing up his face. I squeezed him into my shoulder. Over the top of his head, I saw Miss A standing in her doorway. Her chest was heaving like she was crying too. I hugged Clyde in closer.

My heart pounded for days after the ghost crash. I couldn't stop seeing Clyde's face just before the car didn't hit him. Afterward, Annalise and Jason confirmed that Miss A had been standing there the whole time. Clyde was too young to know that on any other day, he would likely have been killed by a hit-and-run. No one would have ever found the guy who did it. But we were given a miracle, and we six kids were smart enough to keep it to ourselves.

More people started joining my mom and Sanders's mom when they would stand across the street from Miss A's house and mutter to each other. Every night the group doubled in size until almost the whole neighborhood was gathered there. People were irritated and wanted someone to blame. Miss A was the only thing that had changed for any of them in quite some time. Some neighbors simply wanted a scapegoat. One old man accused Miss A of digging through his trash, but it was more likely raccoons. Philip Jr.'s dad, Philip Sr., claimed he had seen Miss A staring at him through his window. He said that every time he ran outside to yell at her, she was nowhere to be found, but when he went inside again, she was back on the sidewalk, staring at him like a ghost. Philip Jr. later confirmed the story as true but claimed he wasn't scared. The rest of the neighbors disregarded the story on the basis that Philip Sr. was a severe alcoholic.

Most of the neighbors didn't have a personal vendetta like the parents did. The confusion was easily channeled into a panic where it all morphed together into one giant monster of fear. The majority of the adults had never even seen Miss A, which only added to their fear of the unknown. Everyone feared what she was capable of, and what she

would do if she discovered any of their secrets. Her goodness threatened their freedom. I watched from the front steps of my house as the group of drunken adults spread rumors among each other like a disease. I wanted to protect Miss A from them, because I knew what these adults could do, especially with the encouragement from each other.

Two days later, everything ended. In the morning, Sanders was the first one at the oak tree. When I asked him if he was okay, he looked up at me sadly to show me the dark purple bruise around his brilliant blue eye. I hugged him tight, like I was trying to hold all the pain in one place.

"This isn't the worst part," Sanders whispered.

We walked over to the worst part, which was Sanders's dad's truck. Every window was completely shattered. Not a single shard of glass remained attached to the car. The glittering pieces spread out around the car like a halo.

"My dad called the police and said he saw Miss A break all his windows with a golf club," Sanders told me.

"What really happened?" I asked.

Sanders sighed.

"Dad came home, drunk or something," Sanders started. "He started yelling at me, pushing me around. I ran to the front room, trying to escape, and that's when he socked me."

I squeezed his hand.

"But the strangest thing," Sanders continued. "With my good eye, I was looking through the front window. Right as he punched me, every window in his car exploded."

I shook my head.

"She's strong," I said.

This was when Annalise and Jason ran down the street, yelling that a police car had pulled up to Miss A's house.

Days later, our mom would hang up the phone with the chief of police and start cussing at the ceiling. Apparently they lost Miss A, somehow. The officer that came and spoke to us the second time said that she disappeared from her cell and asked if we knew where she might have escaped to or who might have helped her. Clyde and I just smiled sweetly and shook our heads, like the good children we were.

DORIE KECK

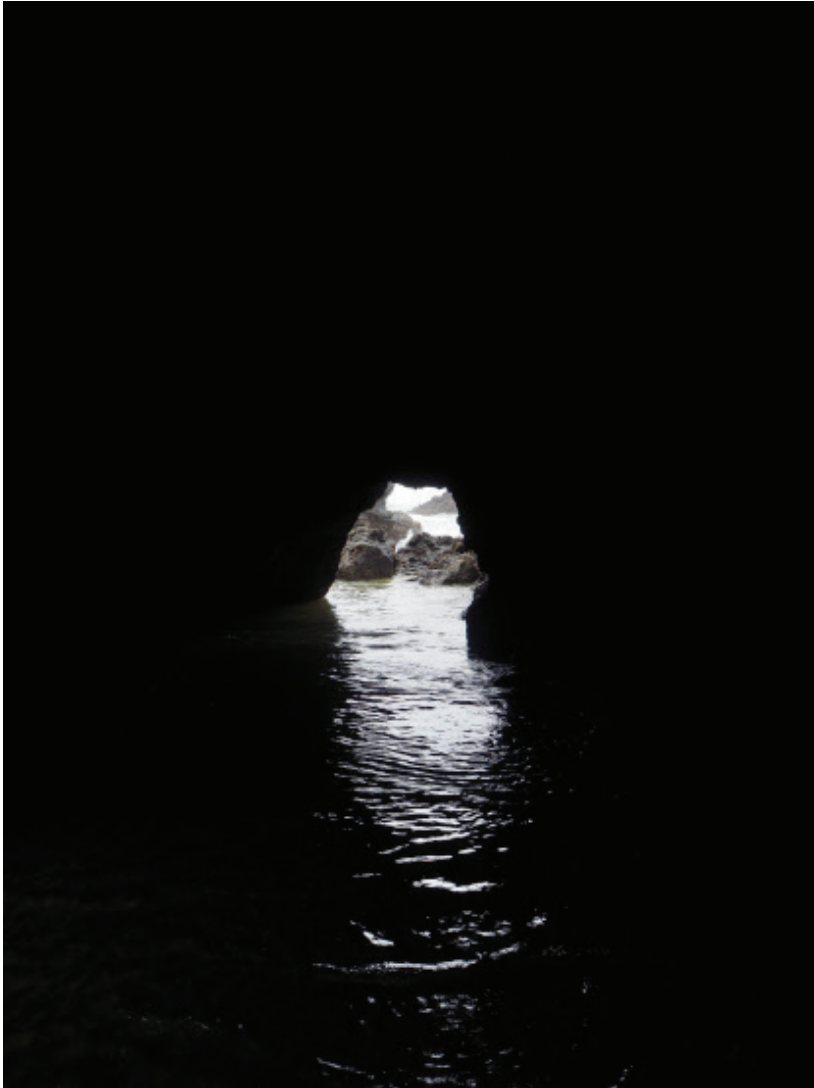
Where Bullets Don't Belong

Bullets in the gutter, washing down the drain.
Flooding the streets with their gunmetal gray.
There are bullets in my shower, pounding at my head.
And bullets fly as I walk to school,
Again.
Again.
Again.
Riddled with holes, there's bullets in the brain.
Bullets on my mind.
It's all the same.
Violence from every corner
Aimed at deer and sheep and children.
Turns a mother to a mourner.
Someone, please give them the reason.
"Keep them out!" they said,
Of the land of the free.
But what evil could arrive that we don't already see?
In this beautiful cage, so lovely and so wrong.
A body is a place where bullets don't belong.

CHERYL PRAZAK

The Light in the Darkness

1275x1650px, Photography



REBECCA WILSON

BUT america

He entered this world on deceit and lie.
His fathers were selfish;
Birthed him out of murder, theft, and war

He slowly grew bigger and bigger
Embodying fruitful lands and soils,
Mountains and deserts,
Rivers and lakes

He was beautiful.
From great roaring plains
To snow-covered mountains
To vast seaports and beaches
To canyons and lakes

He cooked like no other
Because he learned all cultures,
Provided a home for all—
A melting pot.

He rose stronger and stronger
Playing so many sports
Fighting so many wars
Giving to so many souls,

Yet idolized the people who stole his essence.

He was robbed of his morals,
wouldn't care Who was left behind
Who was discriminated
Who was murdered
Who was innocent

He listened to those people

Abused his women
Imprisoned his poor
Choked his Black friends
Deported his brown friends
Coughed on his Asian friends
Terrorized the others

He has no place to act like this
To instill great division,
Drive us away,
Give hopes of a dream that no longer exists,
Hurt the ones who believed in and once loved him

But it's not his fault

He is controlled and puppeted
By those people who take too much pride,

Who want him all to their own
And will hurt the ones who surround him—
Till he looks just like them

“He will marry the opposite
He will own the women
He will be the richest
He will be nothing but white
white
white.”

We still love him
His beauty, diversity, freedom, and strength;
But we won't have pride
we won't have trust
we won't have respect
we won't even stay

Until he becomes new.
No longer he or she
white or Black
money or morality

But AMERICA

The Kindly One

I wake up, feeling a sharp tap on the back of my head. There it is again. I turn and see a small owl perched on the back of my throne. The owl, Athena's familiar, stares at me for a moment, then flies off, growing smaller within the scope of the chamber before disappearing. Athens has not needed me for hundreds of centuries. They administer their own justice now. The gods have left. Mortals have forgotten them. Why does Athena disturb my slumber?

I rise from my throne. Smoothing my black woolen tunic, I look around the torch-lined, circular chamber beneath the Areopagus. On either side of my throne are two identical black marble thrones. While I am only one immortal being, I often confuse mortal minds, appearing as three or more individuals: the Eumenides.

Other than a thin layer of dust on the black-tiled floor, the chamber is as I remember it. The gifts of grateful, or fearful, Athenians—intricately decorated pottery, skillfully wrought weapons, colorful tapestries, and other tributes—array the gray walls of the chamber. I admire them for a moment. The Athenians revered me, as well they should. The torches continue to burn without smoking or being consumed. Well, since I am up . . . my red leather sandals leave footprints in the dust behind me as I walk toward the chamber's only outlet.

I ascend a spiral staircase. At its top, I come to an unfinished wall of native stone, set with a simple, untarnished bronze mirror. A circle of light provides illumination. I look at my reflection. I see a slender, middle-aged woman, fair-skinned, dark-haired. While the ability to alter my appearance at will is one of the many gifts Mother Nyx has bestowed upon me, it's been centuries since I have appeared otherwise. When mortals stopped referring to me as *the Furies*, I decided it was best to maintain a nonthreatening, mortal appearance. Have I lost the ability to change? Changing my appearance now, I look into the glaring eyes of a filthy, mortal-sized bird with black feathers, a haggard-looking woman's face, and sagging breasts. So I can still change. I

recall when, manifesting as a flock of these foul creatures, I tormented a group of men, punishment for their cruelty to a beggar.

"CAAWW!" I screech.

I change my appearance again. Now gracing the mirror is a nubile, olive-skinned woman in soft gray robes, small snakes hissing amidst her black tresses. No, I am not Medusa. Mortals wish that merely being turned to stone was the consequence for their injustice.

I appeared in court as three of these lovely creatures, when Athena cast the deciding vote against my exacting Justice upon Orestes for murdering his mother. I was so angry at having my will thwarted! However, Athena, with her honeyed words and veiled threats, convinced me to accede to her ruling. The Goddess of War is not someone to be trifled with. Who could forget Arachne's suicide after her confrontation with Athena? Still, spiders are skilled weavers in their own right.

Orestes's exoneration marked the end of my dissemination of Justice. How can I expect mortals to deal with each other justly if I am unwilling to honor my own promises? I turn slightly to get a better look at the snakes.

Finally, I return to my original mortal form. Being able to assume many guises or completely blend into my surroundings was useful in my former office. Fear and confusion are powerful tools.

Moving two steps toward the mirror, blocking the light striking its surface, the wall in front of me slowly lowers. When the wall is flush with the floor, I walk through the opening. Passing through a gently upward-sloping tunnel, I weave around fallen boulders, then scramble across smaller stones, before stepping onto a sunlit hilltop.

Gazing about, I can see most of Athens. The Agora is absent, as is the Temple of Ares. Of the Parthenon, only blackened bits of its statue-adorned pediments remain. Broken masonry, twisted metal, and scorched rubble comprise much of the remainder. Walking down the hill, picking my way through the debris, I look for the familiar. A glass Coca-Cola bottle here, a charred doll there. Remnants of vehicles mortals used for transportation after they stopped using animal-drawn carts line the streets in disarray. The inferno instantly incinerated mortals where they stood, leaving naught but their shadows burned onto the occasional clear bits of pavement. I breathe in, tasting ashes. I wander Athens for hours without discovering anything living.

I walk northwest from Athens, considering its fate. What malignant entity visited such misfortune upon the city? I walk for days and nights

without rest or sustenance, which I do not require. Athens was not the entity's only victim. From humble hamlets to once great cities, the destruction seems complete. Only the occasional animal flees my presence. To learn how Justice has gone so far awry, I need to find mortals. Athena would not have contacted me if all mortals had perished. Perhaps if I search further afield. Taking wingless flight, another of Nyx's gifts, I start my search of the world.

I fly west along the North African coast, then pass through the narrow, western outlet of the Mediterranean. Before me, a vast ocean. A large ship, loaded with numerous boxes of uniform size and shape, appears on the horizon. The ship floats motionlessly, the afternoon sun shining down upon it from a cloudless sky. I fly toward the ship. Alighting upon it, I look around. The varicolored metal boxes, the size of small buildings, are stacked up to eight high. In the middle of these stacks is a metal tower. Checking my appearance in a bit of brightwork to ensure nothing about me would disturb a mortal observer, I approach the tower. While climbing the stairs on the tower's exterior, a man comes out of a doorway. He stops and smiles.

"I wondered," he said, "when someone would visit me. Perhaps I should say *if* someone would visit me." Removing his red ball cap, the man extends his hand. "I'm Bob Hernandez, chief engineer of the *Ever Laden* out of Port Miami."

Grasping his hand, I say, "You may call me Emma."

"Did you have any trouble climbing the pilot ladder, Emma?"

"No."

"Good! I deploy it when I'm not underway, in the hope someone will come to visit." Pulling a rag out of the pocket of his blue coveralls, Bob wipes his brow, before returning the ball cap to his head. "May I offer you something to eat or drink? While the food is all canned, I made the water fresh this morning," he says with a grin.

Returning the rag to his pocket, Bob turns and reenters the doorway from which he appeared. I follow. I enter a room with cloth-covered tables and metal chairs. Bob indicates one of the chairs. I sit. He then loads a plate with food from an assortment of cans: green beans, potatoes, corned beef, and peaches. All but the last of these are taken from cans warming in a pan of heated water. Setting the plate before me, Bob pours water from a stainless steel pitcher into a cup, then hands it to me. He serves himself before taking a chair across from me.

As we eat, I tell Bob of the devastation I saw. He speaks of the apocalypse: flashes of light and mushroom clouds on the horizon, radio

reports of nuclear missile strikes in Turkey and the Middle East, their spread to Eastern and Central Europe, North America, Russia, China, and much of the rest of the world, pleas for assistance, then nothing. "It's been almost a year," Bob says, "since I've heard anything other than static on the radio."

I ask, "Who is responsible for this apocalypse? Who cast the first stone?"

"We may never know. Perhaps all of humanity is to blame." He sighs, "We're like school kids who, not being able to play nice, bloody each other's noses on the playground."

Bob relates the crew's decision to keep the *Ever Laden* at sea to use as a base of operations and to protect the cargo from contamination. "Most of the containers on this ship are filled with canned goods. The crew and I won't be able to eat our way through them for decades." Bob shares that the rest of the crew, using the ship's small craft, sailed to shore from five miles out. He then moved the ship farther out to sea. Per their agreement, he brings the ship back to the point from which the crew departed once every three months on the new moon for a week, before returning to the mid-Atlantic. He explains that, by using the stages of the moon as their "clock," the crew can be sure they won't miss a rendezvous even if all of their other forms of timekeeping fail. He also monitors the radio, waiting. "I've been to the debark point three times," Bob looks down at the table, "without seeing any of the crew."

"Why did you decide to stay with your ship?"

"Someone needed to. I have neither family nor desire to see a nuclear-ravaged landscape, so I stay, remembering what the world used to look like. What about you, Emma? What brings you out to the mid-Atlantic?"

I look out of the doorway, considering my reply. The sun touches the sea, ruddy herald of night. "I am an old woman who has had her retirement interrupted to perform a service for a respected colleague. We worked at a sort of school together. My colleague was a teacher. I was the playground monitor."

I tell Bob that I am heading west to check on my colleague's relations. He convinces me to stay for a few days. Before leaving, I confuse his mind, so he does not wonder how I traveled to or departed from his ship.

I continue flying west over the Atlantic, before coming to North America. I explore its coast, searching. If anything, the destruction of

this new land is even worse than that which I have already witnessed. Massive craters dot the northeast and central areas, from the coast to the foot of a rounded mountain range to the west. The southern area, while somewhat more intact, proves to be just as lifeless. Crossing the rounded mountain range, the lands I now see do not seem to have changed as severely as the others. In the distance, another mountain range with sharp peaks appears. Seeing a plume of smoke, I land to the east of the mountain range in some foothills.

What threat do they ward against? Wild animals? I continue watching, day after day of placid village life, hoping to discover the impetus for mindless destruction.

I discover a small, walled village. Blending in with my surroundings, I observe without being seen. I watch the activities of the villagers: tending crops, drawing water, building housing, mending clothing, caring for children, laughter. Villagers also stand watch, bearing knives, clubs, spears. What threat do they ward against? Wild animals? I continue watching, day after day of placid village life, hoping to discover the impetus for mindless destruction.

One night, a celebration takes place within the village. Feasting, music, merriment. A lone villager stands watch. Outside, furtive figures approach. Making a soundless hole in the wall, dark-clad invaders enter the village. Violence erupts. Structures set ablaze, screams, frenzied activity. Villagers are struck down by the invaders. Others are restrained prostrate as invaders force themselves upon them. After a time, the village goes silent, save for the crackling of flames. Invaders, painted crimson in the reflected fire light, exit through the main gate, carrying off food, supplies, and a few struggling villagers into the night.

The next morning, I enter the village. Smoke still rises from some structures. Villagers sit and lie on the ground, some unmoving. A man lying on the ground asks for water. Going to the well, I lower a bucket into its depths, pulling it forth brimful with water. I carry the bucket over to the man and lower it to the ground. Kneeling, I dip my cupped hand into the bucket. Supporting the mortal's head, I trickle the water into his mouth. As I help the man to a second handful of water, I

notice a woman glaring at me. She approaches, hazarding me with a bloody knife.

"Didn't you black-clothed bastards have your fun last night?"

"I mean you no harm," I reply.

The woman, still brandishing her knife, asks, "What do you want?"

I gently rest the man's head on the ground, then rise before replying. "I witnessed last night's violence. Why did those people attack your village? Was it retribution for some crime your village committed against them?"

The woman stares at me. "Are you crazy? We have nothing to do with raiders. They take what they want because they can."

Thinking for a moment, I say, "Who will hold the raiders accountable for their injustice against your village?"

The woman cleans the blood-smeared blade of her knife against her dirt-stained pant leg, then sheaths it. "When might makes right, there is no justice." Wiping her palm down the front of her torn shirt, the woman extends her hand. "I'm Tammy."

"Emma," I say, grasping her hand.

"We got our licks in, but it was a one-sided fight. They were better armed, outnumbered us two to one, and waited until many of us were half-drunk or worse before attacking." A villager calls out. Tammy turns her head to look in the direction of the call, then turns back. "I'm not sure what you want, Emma, beyond answers to your questions, but we could use an extra set of hands."

Reflecting on what I have seen and heard, I do what I can to ease the villagers' suffering. I bind wounds, bring water, prepare food. I directly affect the minds of the most distressed villagers, providing the respite of untroubled sleep. Has Justice failed completely? Surely mortals do not prey upon each other everywhere.

As I continue exploring, I discover other settlements. The largest is a center of trade. It occupies one street of a pre-apocalypse town. Merchants line the center of the street, selling their wares: clothing, canned goods, weapons, fresh meat and vegetables, pre-war technology, medicine, alcohol, homemade soap, preserves, salt, and other items. Citizens run businesses in several of the structures on either side of the street. The north-end of the street is blocked with a makeshift wall, as are the gaps between buildings. The south end has a large gate and a small sally port. Over the course of several days, I watch. The gate guards direct visitors to leave their personal weapons outside or offer to store them. The process is orderly, as is the queue to enter. Inside, trade is

brisk. At night, the gate is closed. Regular residents come and go at will after hours through the sally port. Visitors may exit at any hour or overnight in town, availing themselves of the lodging establishments, taverns, and brothels.

While watching one day, I smell the blood of the raiders at the village. As a hound tracks a hare by its scent, I can track the unjust by the blood they have shed. I look toward the gate. A woman wearing a black scarf about her neck resists surrendering her weapon to the guard initially, then hands it over. She was involved in the raid on the village. After she passes through the gate, the woman walks to the Lucky Squirrel tavern and enters. Unobserved, I take flight, landing inside the town. I head toward the Lucky Squirrel, its sign depicting a squirrel just avoiding being run down by a vehicle.

Inside the smoke-filled tavern, the sounds of mortals eating, drinking, and talking mix with the plinking of off-key music. The woman sits down at a table with a man wearing a black stocking cap. As I approach their table unseen, he fills a glass from a bottle containing a clear, colorless liquid, then sets the glass before her.

Picking up the glass, the woman looks around the room, then drinks. "Is your crew ready, Dutch? We need to hit 'em hard and fast. If we look like we're getting soft, it may give 'em ideas."

"Just before dawn tomorrow, right?" says Dutch. "We'll be there, Maggie."

"Did you find enough gas for the truck?"

"Barely. Not enough to make it back to camp though."

"Eh, after driving through the wall, it probably won't be roadworthy anyway." Maggie and Dutch spend a few more minutes going over the details of the raid on the town. Then, finishing her drink, Maggie nods at Dutch, stands, and exits the tavern.

I follow Maggie out of the tavern and through the gate, before stopping. Maggie reclaims her weapon, a lethal-looking long knife, before walking south, away from town. As I watch her walk away, I think about what I'd heard. The town is organized. The guards seem competent. Perhaps Justice will prevail.

Before dawn the next morning, I hear the high-pitched whine of machinery. A vehicle bursts through the northern wall. It continues for a short distance, before stopping and flaring up into flames. Through the newly created opening, black-garbed raiders pour in. It happens quickly. A group of raiders runs to the gate. After overwhelming the guards, the raiders open the gate, allowing more of their number to en-

ter. Other groups of raiders enter buildings, exiting with valuables. A raider upends a pilfered bottle over his gaping mouth, consuming the last of its contents, then throws the empty bottle through a storefront window. When a citizen tries to stop a pair of raiders from carrying off a young girl, they strike him with clubs. The citizen falls to the ground, blood pooling on the ground beneath his flattened skull.

Not long after sunrise, it is over. I watch the raiders exit through the gate, carrying away their spoils. By midday, the citizens have licked their wounds. It is almost business as usual. The dead man is buried. Guards are posted at the north end of the street, while workers repair the wall. The battering ram is hauled out and partially buried, serving as a barricade north of the wall. Work on the wall stops at dusk. Torches are lit. The guard is doubled. The next day, workers finish repairs to the wall.

I enter town, unobserved. I notice citizens with bandages and blackened eyes, going about their business. I approach an elderly citizen, who is people-watching while taking his ease. I ask about yesterday's raid.

"Yep, we're sheep. The raiders come and fleece us from time to time, and that's the truth," the old man said.

"Is there no one to enforce justice?" I ask.

The old man spits. "Once, a group of citizens decided to teach the raiders a lesson. Twenty went out one morning. The following morning," the old man pauses, eyes closed, before continuing, "two sacks, ten severed heads each, were left at the gate." The old man opens his eyes and looks at me. "Being fleeced is better."

I wish the old man well, before heading off.

As I leave, I reflect upon my experiences with mortals. Prior to my agreement with Athena, my duty would have been clear. An eye for an eye. I suspect that Athena's trust in mortal reason was misplaced. Recent events have confirmed my suspicions. "I gave my word to Athena to allow mortals to determine their own Justice. But now, there is no law. The strong oppress the weak without consequence. In the absence of law, how is Justice served?" While reluctant to break my promise, I decide it is time to resume my former office.

I follow the raiders by the scent of the blood they shed. That evening, I discover their camp. Two groups of them gather to celebrate. More than sixty raiders gorge, guzzle, and gratify themselves.

I listen to a conversation between three raiders sitting at a campfire:

"It's almost too easy," says the first, before taking a bite out of a piece of fire-roasted meat.

"You're right, Dick," says the second, "Good thing we hit 'em when we did. We're almost out of booze."

"Too bad there's none of that booze left we got from that village, Harry," says the third. "It was pre-war. Smooth!"

"Tom, remember how that old girl yelled, 'It's medicinal, please don't take it!'" says Dick, in a falsetto. "I gave her something to yell about." Harry and Tom laugh.

"Say, we oughta pay them another visit, after they heal up. I wouldn't want the ladies to get lonesome," Tom says, elbowing Dick in the belly. They all laugh.

Their laughter trails off when I appear before them. Their surprised silence changes to screams as I use their fears and memories of their own misdeeds to drive them mad.

Dick stands, swatting at the empty air, yelling, "AAAHHHHH! Get away! Stop pecking me!" before running off. However, Dick will never outrun the swarm of frenzied birds I create within his confused mind. The birds peck at his eyes, cling to his ears, nose, and hands, flapping and squawking. Other birds pierce his belly, drawing forth his bowels like fat earthworms.

Harry looks with sightless eyes, his bowels and bladder releasing their contents, as he screams and shakes. I have tormented Harry with visions of large snakes reaching up through the ground, entwining about his limbs, before slowly pulling him down. His screams stop when his dirt-clogged mouth sinks beneath the earth.

Within his maddened mind, Tom sees a mist form over the camp, creating an undulating twilight. I appear from out of the mist dressed in gray robes, holding a torch. My hair writhes with small snakes, hissing and snapping. Larger snakes entwine each of my arms, their tongues lashing. I approach Tom, looking into his eyes. Then I extend my arm, pointing at him. Forming in the mist on either side of me, a group of women—inhabitants of settlements Tom has raided—appear. The women, many of them bearing wounds and other injuries, approach Tom, encircling him. Tom screams as they strike him, using fists, feet, and improvised weapons. He is unable to move, let alone defend himself. Tom's body is buffeted by their blows. His skin is torn and bleeding. Many of his bones are broken. One eye is swollen shut. The women continue to beat Tom, his body a broken, bleeding pile of flesh. His pain is relentless and all-consuming.

Tom cries out, "Kill me!"

"All in good time," I say.

Tom renews his hoarse screams.

I generate fear and confusion within all the raiders' minds: raiders pulling out their hair, tearing at their clothing, throwing themselves into campfires, and otherwise harming themselves. Raiders battling other raiders. Maggie shouts, "Damn townie! I'll learn you to respect your betters," as she repeatedly stabs Dutch. Two raiders pin a third to the ground, as a group of them draw each other's blood, fighting over who gets to violate the prostrate raider next, all to the cacophony of screams. The madness I engender rages like a fire all night. But like all fires, when their fuel is consumed, the madness eventually stops.

As the sun rises over the site of bloody carnage, I review my night's work. The only activity in the silent raider camp is conducted by scavengers, feasting on fly-clouded bodies. Abducted mortals, whom I caused to sleep through the worst of the raiders' madness, start to stir. As they awake, I gather them to me. "Fear not. Bear witness to the vengeance I have wrought for your sake. Until such time as you are able to enforce your own Justice, I will continue to serve. Return now from whence you came."

Several months pass. Raider activity declines. Abducted mortals returning to their settlements report of the fatal madness afflicting raiders. Stylized depictions of flocks of birds and women holding snakes and torches appear in settlements.

I visit the village I first discovered. Outside of its entrance, a three-sided wooden shrine rests on a stone base. Each face of the shrine displays a different scene. One scene portrays a woman in black robes cradling the head of an injured man in her lap as she helps him drink water from her cupped hand. Another scene shows a man covering his ears with his hands as a flock of black birds assaults him. The third image is the face of a dark-haired woman, snakes writhing about her head. Her malevolent eyes seem to follow me.

Several items rest at the foot of the shrine: lit candles, flowers in colorful vases, wood carvings, and notes of gratitude are among the offerings. I admire the shrine for a time. Nodding my head, I fly off.

CLAIRE HOMAN

messenger

the hummingbird knows something is
lost
before I do.

— —
it must smell the
sweet soot
of ashes in my memory where
fragments
of the before are left
like forgotten nectar of a flower fallen.

— —
the hummingbird tastes
the last drops
and tells me
they were beautiful.

DEVANI RUFF

The Carp

8.5x11in, Photo Collage



A Library on Wheels

How one county built a book mobile to spread literacy and hope in Georgia.

Mary Barbee majored in English at college because she loved reading and literature, but in her junior year, her father told her, “You know you have to get a job when this is over, right?”

So, she graduated, got a teaching certificate, and went off to teach high school.

“I think a lot of high school teachers go in to it for a love of the content,” she said, “and then you find out whether you love the kids or not. And if you do, you’re a successful teacher. And if you don’t, you either quit or you become a grumpy teacher. I found that I loved the kids and that I really tapped into the whole literacy thing and how it unlocks a world.”

Decades later, Barbee led the effort to create a book mobile that unlocked the world of reading for thousands of school children.

Forty minutes outside of Atlanta, the small highway leading into the heart of Gwinnett County is smooth and pristine. The Georgia pines and magnolia trees create a corridor of green on either side of the parkway that twists gently like a river. Around each exit road, the grassy hillside displays evenly planted rows of crepe myrtles, fully in bloom in September, branches heavy with hunter green leaves and magenta flower clusters.

The county is home to a diverse population of nearly one million people, a quarter of whom are under eighteen years old. The median household income is \$65,000 per year. Serving the children of this county is the Gwinnett County Public School District, the largest school system in the state. The 180,000 children that attend GCPS have a new opportunity to benefit from—the three-year-old Book Mobile program—thanks to the Media Leadership Council, a team of librarians leading the way to create solutions for their disadvantaged students.

“Literacy is one of our major focuses,” said Mary Barbee, the GCPS Media Services and Technology Training Director. She spearheaded the Book Mobile program, which began after two community meetings with groups of problem-solving stakeholders. “I would love to feed people and give them shelter and all the other needs that we were discussing, but it really came down to what, in our area of the world, can we do to help?”

Her area of the world revolves around books, mostly, but also includes the complex media and technology training that students need in the twenty-first century. She was joined in the Book Mobile project by Jan Wilson, a media specialist for Brookwood High School. Both Jan and Mary were born and raised in Georgia and came from large families. Jan Wilson has a twin sister and three brothers. Mary was one of eight siblings. They both have the compassionate aura of friendly school librarians, as well as medium-length blonde hair, glasses, and calming smiles.

When Mary was teaching high school language arts, she felt that her first few years were about trying to get through teaching every day, figuring out the job.

“Then when I went back to graduate school,” Mary said, “I decided that I would really like to work in a library. I just saw a lot more potential to reach a lot more kids, and it was all about—at that time—the reading. Now, it’s about a whole lot more than just reading, but it doesn’t mean that the reading part is not still very important and very much emphasized.”

Like Mary, Jan also started teaching after she obtained her bachelor’s degree. She began teaching in a middle school and quickly decided to continue her education by getting her master’s degree in library media.

“I don’t think many people realize that media specialists are instructors and that we teach and/or co-teach daily,” Jan said. “We design and create lessons with teachers. We create reading lists. We locate authoritative resources. We create school-wide reading programs. We sponsor clubs. We have the opportunity to interact with every student and staff member in the school.”

Five years ago, Mary Barbee was invited to two transformative meetings of community leaders. First, the public library had invited her to what they called a “vision retreat.” Then, the United Way hosted another brainstorming session that she attended. In both meetings, she and other community stakeholders were presented with a problem:

low-income families lacked the transportation they needed to access Gwinnett County services.

The discussions included medical needs, physical needs, and essentials like food and shelter. Mary had a moment of doubt while sitting around the table at the United Way meeting, thinking, “Why am I even here? I’m a librarian.”

She expressed her uncertainty and one of the other meeting attendees said, “You’re the key to breaking this cycle that the rest of us are dealing with. If you can help those kids succeed in school, that’s how they get out of this.”

“So that kind of gave me a renewed sense of purpose in my current place in this world,” Mary said. She knew that well-established research shows that literacy is a key component to children thriving in school and graduating. And better success in school can be a path out of poverty.

Many Gwinnett County kids didn’t have a way to get to public libraries during the summer months, causing a “summer slide” in language learning and reading practice that affected their return to school every August. The books in the school system sat in the media centers all summer without being used.

Mary recalled her childhood summers growing up in Columbus, Georgia, near the border with Alabama. There was a book mobile that stopped in front of her house in the same spot where the school bus picked her up during the school year.

“I looked forward to it because I was an avid reader,” Mary said. “I was one of eight children. My mother was busy all the time. She didn’t drive us to the public library on a regular basis in the summer. We pretty much just went outside and played. So, if you wanted to read, the book mobile was my connection to new literature.”

Her fond memories of that childhood mobile library inspired her to suggest to the other Gwinnett County stakeholders: “What about a book mobile?”

In the fall of 2016, a year after Mary Barbee’s brainstorming sessions at the public library’s “vision retreat” and the United Way meeting, she brought her book mobile idea to a gathering of the Media Leadership Council for Gwinnett County Public Schools. Twelve media specialists from across the county had been identified as significant leaders for the department and served on the council. One of them was Jan Wilson.

Mary laid out the challenge of preventing the “summer slide” among students, as well as the lack of access to books that some students faced during the summer.

Jan had spent her childhood summers in Tucker, Georgia. Her father owned a business in town. “I would go to work with him so that I could walk to the public library from his business and spend the entire day looking for and reading books.” She listed the ideas that the Media Leadership Council discussed that fall, “Some of the solutions were: opening our media centers on certain days during the summer, building little libraries, allowing summer checkouts, a book mobile, and others. The book mobile was Mary Barbee’s idea and I loved it!”

Mary said, “This [idea] was the one that bubbled up to the top as being the most doable, being able to have the broadest reach, and the greatest impact.”

With Mary and Jan as key leaders, the group formed the GCPS Book Mobile committee to move the project forward.

“The things I thought would be easy, were hard,” Mary Barbee said. “And the things that I thought were going to be hard, were easy.”

Book mobiles have been in use in the United States since 1905 when a horse-drawn buggy at Maryland’s Hagerstown Public Library began traveling around with books to loan.

“We had to go through all the channels,” Mary said. “So, I went up through my boss, and then he went through the CIO and it went to the superintendent.” She presented the idea to the school board and met very little resistance.

“My assumption was: getting a bus would be difficult. I figured lots of red tapes. Well basically, I called Fleet and we had a bus in a week.”

The Fleet Maintenance Department of GCPS is part of the Division of Facilities and Operations. In addition to buying buses, they work to uphold the safety and performance of vehicles within the school district. Every year, they retire school buses. The newly formed Book Mobile committee was looking for a bus that was old enough to retire—with at least ten years behind it—but young enough to still have potential in becoming a functional mobile library. The lifespan of a typical school bus is twenty-five to thirty years. The committee, with Mary as their leader, procured a fifteen-year-old bus at no cost to the project.

Bus #22050 had a classic school bus shape. The curved front of the bus and rounded metal covers for the front and backlights gave it the

look of a 1970s VW Beetle. A giant, big brother of the VW Beetle maybe. When Bus #22050 was started up by the driver, a high-pitched hum wailed for a few seconds until the engine hissed and turned over with a roar. When put into reverse, a steady beep sounded while the bus inched backward. The engine vibrated and rumbled in a non-threatening way until it was cut off and the machine hissed again and wound down with a shaky squeal.

To take the next steps, Mary did a lot of online research.

"The time that was invested, mostly in this office, in figuring out how to convert that bus was pretty phenomenal," Mary said.

Not finding what she needed online, she pulled from the well of knowledge inside her own school district. Gwinnett County has a technical school, Maxwell High School of Technology, which has classes in welding, automotive maintenance, and HVACR (Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning/Refrigeration). Mary consulted with teachers and students from Maxwell to get their expert advice.

"Okay, well, you're going to need air conditioning too," the Maxwell teachers told her. "To have air conditioning, you're going to need a generator because the air conditioner has to run when the bus is off."

It sounded easy to Mary but turned out to be much more difficult than anyone expected. They had to get a custom-designed chassis built to be mounted under the bus to hold the necessary generator. Two air conditioning units were installed in the roof of the school bus. They used a company called RV World, which normally converted buses for traveling or camping or the occasional tiny home enthusiast.

"We didn't have to pay for the bus," Mary said, "but the conversion of the bus was almost \$50,000. The big-ticket item was the generator and the A/C, and all the custom work that goes with that. That was . . . almost two-thirds of the cost of the conversion."

There were a lot of little things that cost money in converting the bus. Mary and her team learned more and more as the project went along. The first step, though, was to gut the inside of the bus.

The Fleet Maintenance Department told Mary, "We have a company we use all the time. They can take the seats out for you."

Mary's thought was, "Isn't there some guy standing around who can just unbolt seats?" But she learned that when you unbolt and remove a seat from a school bus, it leaves holes in the floor, and through those holes comes dangerous carbon dioxide. So they hired the company to remove the seats and seal all the holes in the floor. Starting from the back of the bus, each seat was taken away through the larger rear

exit. All of the pale green vinyl seats—the classic material that covers all school bus seats—were removed except for two small benches behind the driver's seat, turned to face the middle aisle. The inside of Bus #22050 was much larger with the seats gone. There were stenciled black numbers above the windows leftover from its school days: "R1" on the right side, and "L1" on the left. There was a faded "12" stenciled above the last row's window.

There were other things that had to be done in making Bus #22050 not a school bus anymore by removing the characteristics of a vehicle designed to safely carry children. The flip-arm stop sign was taken off, and the eight exits were reduced to two. Most of the windows were sealed shut since they would be covered by bookshelves.

The technical students at Maxwell helped solve potential problems that the media specialists in the Book Mobile committee weren't experts on. They talked about many different kinds of flooring to put in the bus, including vinyl, tile, and wood.

Jan Wilson found a connection through her husband to a company called Millenium Mat. The company donated rubber flooring to the Book Mobile project. Jan and her husband installed the black rubber mats themselves.

"We just had to trace how everything would be on the back of the rubber, and cut it out to flip over," Jan said. "We only messed up once."

The cushioned rubber was applied to the floor with an adhesive, giving the school bus interior a simple foundation that could be easily cleaned.

Next, Mary researched multiple ways that people secured books. "The books have to travel around corners and down hills, and I found a company that sold shelving where the shelving sits at this perfect angle. Less angle and the books tumble off the shelves."

Because the shelves were going to be blocking the windows, the Maxwell students told Mary's team, "You're going to need more lights. And if you're gonna put in lights, then you're going to have to run electricity, so you might as well put in outlets." These were some of the little things that the media specialists weren't thinking about when the Book Mobile project started. Mary wanted to have the students do some of the installation themselves, but because the bus had a very short timeline in which to be completed, she had to get most things done through vendors instead.

The floor-to-ceiling metal bookshelves were installed on each side,

facing the wide aisle down the center of the bus. The top shelf was filled with young adult books, the second shelf was for middle grade books, the third shelf was for the fourth and fifth grades, the next was for the second and third grades, and the bottom shelf just above the floor was kindergarten and first grade books. Fluorescent tube lights kept the interior bright, and two A/C units in the ceiling kept it cool inside.

The Media Leadership team spent a lot of time talking about the exterior design for the Book Mobile. They wanted it to be appealing to kids, and they didn't want to turn away teenagers. Some district high schoolers submitted designs, and a comic book theme rose to the top of the suggestions.

They considered trying to paint the bus but ended up buying a vehicle wrap to make the art really sharp and clear. They spent more money to get the wrap, but Mary has no regrets.

It was expected to take only two days to cover Bus #22050 in the stylized vehicle wrap, but the hundreds of rivets on the exterior proved to be time-consuming. Each one had to be focused on with the heat gun that melted the wrap around every rivet and every other texture on the bus. It took the project down to the wire of their ribbon-cutting ceremony deadline, but the result was an impressive makeover for the plain yellow school bus.

The GCPS Book Mobile was covered from top to bottom and front to back in a friendly and exciting design. Black polka dots jumped out from the light blue and white background. Extra-large yellow letters spelled "Book Mobile" inside a splashy red and blue bubble, the kind that usually contains the words "Pow!" or "Wham!" in a Batman cartoon. On the other side with the entrance door, three more comic book bubbles exclaimed "Mystery!" "Fantasy!" and "Action!" On the back end, there was a large logo for Gwinnett County Public Schools and a message in comic book letters that explained, "Powered by Your School Media Centers."

On its ribbon-cutting ceremony day in May 2017, Bus #22050 drove past the white horse sculpture in front of the P.F. Chang's China Bistro in Buford, Georgia. The bus's new name was "Pow," and it had been transformed into the comic book-themed GCPS Book Mobile.

Mary Barbee, Jan Wilson, and the committee who'd contributed to putting the project together gathered on a Saturday morning to introduce the Pow Book Mobile to the community. Leaders from the school

district were there, including Louise Radloff from the Board of Education and J. Alvin Wilbanks, the GCSPS Superintendent.

Louise Radloff was a woman with so much experience in the district that they'd named a middle school after her. She stood with her hands clasped, watching the bus roll over the red pavers of the Village Stage pavilion. The short curls of her burnt sienna hair framed her pale face, contrasting boldly with her jacket splashed with a bright green leaf pattern. She watched the Book Mobile park next to the steps of the Village Stage. Parents and kids and grandparents from the area had arrived to participate in the bus's launch day. The crowd awaiting its arrival had driven from all over Gwinnett County to gather at the heart of the Mall of Georgia outdoor shopping area, thirty miles northwest of Atlanta.

The Book Mobile stood out like a comic book in a Rembrandt painting. The last bit of morning dew dripped off the colorful sides of the bus, around its rivets and horizontal stripes of metal.

Parked in front of the burgundy brick of the Mall of Georgia's Barnes & Noble store, the Book Mobile stood out like a comic book in a Rembrandt painting. The last bit of morning dew dripped off the colorful sides of the bus, around its rivets and horizontal stripes of metal. The open-air event pavilion was nestled in the middle of the Mall of Georgia, flanked by The Cheesecake Factory, Marlow's Tavern, and Tin Lizzy's Cantina, along with the P.F. Chang's. On other days, crowds brought their lawn chairs or blankets to relax on the stretch of grass inside the pavilion to experience a local musician's concert on the stage. But on that Saturday, the crowd was ready for a different event: a celebration of books.

In her white summer sandals, Mary Barbee walked up the cement steps and placed her speech on the black metal music stand that stood on the stage. From this makeshift podium, she smiled at the silent Book Mobile, resting before a busy day of hosting visitors. Her steady voice projected out through the microphone as she read her speech to the crowd.

"Today is an exciting day for Gwinnett County students. The Book Mobile—that you see here—is the result of a lot of vision and hard work

by a dedicated group of media specialists. This bus will visit thirty-five neighborhoods on a weekly basis over the summer. In that bus, they'll have from over five thousand books to choose. It is our fervent hope that this access to pleasure reading will ignite imaginations, inspire readers, and broaden horizons for thousands of Gwinnett students."

She shifted her weight as the crowd applauded. Her heeled sandals matched her white cardigan hanging on her shoulders over the navy and white knee-length dress she'd chosen with summer just around the corner.

Louise Radloff spoke at the microphone next. Her voice contained a soft, slightly tired quality that comes with age and the wisdom of serving the public school district for more than forty years.

"Please families, take advantage when that bus comes into your community. Bring out your children, your little ones. Read to them." She tapped her notes as she read the lines and made eye contact with the crowd.

Radloff was dwarfed by the next speaker, Superintendent Wilbanks, who towered over the microphone and addressed the crowd without reading from speech notes. His dark suit jacket surrounded a friendly blue shirt and tie. He had white hair and rimless glasses. His laidback Southern tone was energized with a sincere joy in speaking about the Book Mobile program.

"This effort that we are dedicating today is one that we hope will encourage a lot of youngsters, at all different levels of the school district, to really check out books and read them." Wilbanks held a folded paper in one hand, but he never referred to his notes. He gestured as he talked, stretching the words "all" and "really" with his syrupy Georgia accent.

After the speeches, Mr. Wilbanks stood proudly in front of the bus. Nearby was Board Member, Louise Radloff, who had called Wilbanks on the evening that the Board of Education wanted to talk with him about the Superintendent job back in 1996. After many decades working together, she remained impressed.

"He's a kid," Radloff told a newspaper in 2014 when they asked about Wilbanks's age. "As long as he feels he's up to it and has the stamina, he can work as long as he wants."

Standing between Radloff and Wilbanks was a middle school Latino boy holding an oversized pair of scissors with blue handles. More community members surrounded them, with Mary Barbee placed at the edge. The group posed for a picture while in front of them, an eight-inch wide blue ribbon stretched between two gold posts tied

with shiny blue bows that looked like giant first place ribbons. The boy in the middle lifted the comically large scissors—they were over half his height—while cameras clicked away. He closed the blades and each blue half of the ribbon fluttered to the ground. The crowd erupted with clapping and shouts of "Woo!" and "Yay!" Superintendent Wilbanks patted the boy on the back, beaming.

Mary Barbee looked across the group and soaked up the exciting moment. Her concept was brought to life. She'd come full circle from the little girl who stepped onto a book mobile in Columbus, Georgia.

Jan Wilson was also thrilled to see the finished bus. The day of the ribbon-cutting was her first chance to see the Book Mobile completed inside and out. "It was almost surreal," she said. "It was no longer just an idea and drawing on paper—it was parked right in front of me."

While local kids' choir groups performed on the Village Stage, people lined up for a chance to get on the bus. Tables were set up so that shoppers could purchase books from Barnes & Noble to help fill up more of the library.

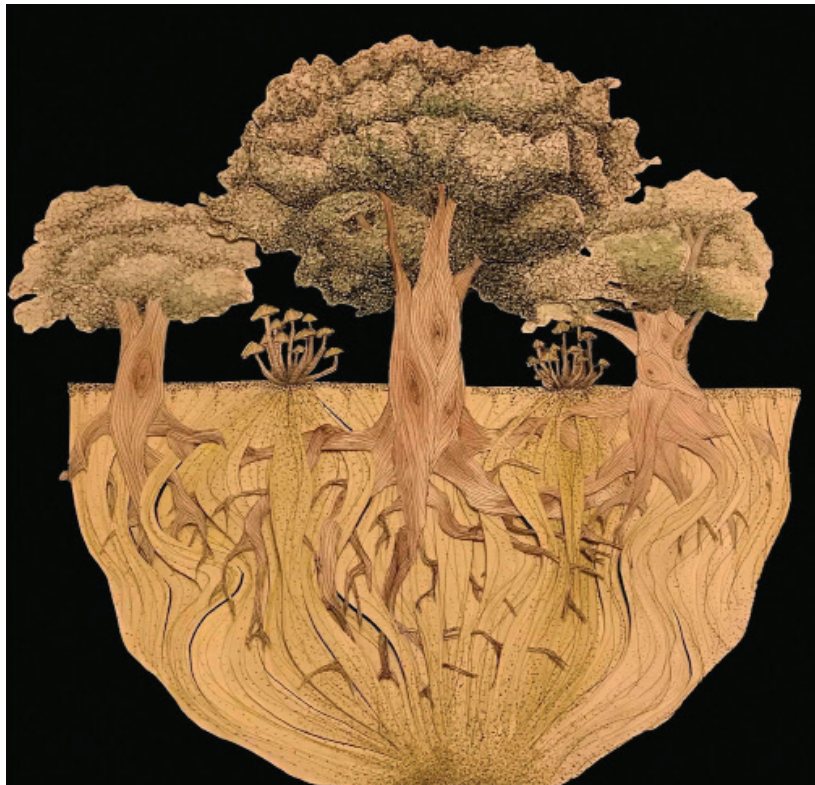
Children and their parents began to board the Book Mobile for a tour inside. The visitors were greeted with a poster hung on the stocked bookshelves that declared: "This Summer! The library comes to you! Great selection of library books! 35 stops in the Meadowcreek Cluster! Same schedule each week!"

On June 1, 2017, Bus #22050 began its new life as the Pow mobile library, visiting neighborhoods in the district that weren't close to public libraries and had a majority of kids enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program. It made hundreds of stops and had thousands of young visitors. Mary and Jan watched the success of their plan to bring the joy of reading to children all summer and improve their academic skills.

In the fall, the project expanded by beginning school visits all over the district, which allowed each student to keep one donated book from the Book Mobile to build their own libraries at home. Mary Barbee procured a second bus from the district, and a new Book Mobile was created for the summer of 2018. The second time around, the conversion of the school bus into a mobile library was much easier with everything that the team had learned the first time. The project has been a great success at bringing literacy and hope to Gwinnett County, Georgia.

Connect

16x14.5in, Ink and Watercolor



Cave Hunters

The jungle crouched in the sticky heat and distant bird calls floated through the morning mists. Amid the frequent slaps at welts rising upon the children's skin, Annie, the oldest and only girl of the three children, went on and on about the massive cave only a short walk from their hotel. Conner and Robbie weren't too keen on following their sister into the secluded jungle, but she had promised her sundae to them for two nights if they complied, and so they did.

Just ahead, drooping fronds parted to reveal a mammoth opening in a rocky wall. As the trio stepped closer, they sensed a cool rush of air flowing from the cavern, buoyed over to them by the pool of water settled at the mouth of the tunnel. Conner shivered.

"Mother said we're not to be away from the hotel alone like this. 'Specially not by a spooky cave."

"So, you're scared," teased Annie. However, her taunt did not have the desired effect and Conner nodded eagerly at her words.

"Yeah, I'm scared!" He turned to leave, but Annie pulled him back and led him to the edge of the pool.

"Come on, it's not so bad. Even the water's warm!" They stepped down, and the water rippled over their toes. It was freezing cold.

"Okay, not warm then. But look how clear!" Annie bent down and splashed her brother. The crystal droplets caught in his hair, and he shivered as they dripped off the golden strands and down his back. Eyes narrowed, he pouted at his sister and crossed his arms over his chest. Annie refused to take no for an answer.

"See? It's fun! If you go in with me, you can prove to everyone in school how brave you are!" This was tempting. Conner finally conceded with a slight nod.

"Okay, fine, but you owe me."

"Of course," Annie replied amiably. "Consider it a done deal." She grinned and reached for the pool floaties they had half dragged, half carried from the hotel. Robbie, the youngest, watched trustingly as she

handed him a floatie smeared with mud, while she kept the clean one for herself.

Annie waded into the pool and pushed off, shrieking gleefully when the frigid water lapped at her calves. She maneuvered the green floatie into the mouth of the cavern. Robbie fumbled with his muddy flamingo floatie, nearly twice his size, but eagerly followed his sister and parroted her laughter. His high-pitched giggles echoed off the cavern's walls as he entered after Annie; they mingled with the rhythmic drip and splash of the water as it moved through the cool chamber.

Annie waited briefly for Conner to enter the pool, shooting him encouraging smiles as anticipation danced in her eyes. Robbie, meanwhile, struggled to keep close to his sister and ended up holding on to her left ankle. Once everyone was accounted for, Annie set off into the cave.

Gliding into the shadowed space, the trio felt they had entered the mouth of a massive sea creature. Darkness engulfed them and jagged formations pierced the silky clutch of the water. Quickly, the temperature dropped, brushing away the sweltering heat of the jungle. Silence filled the gaps between the children's giggles. The black water lapped eerily at the walls; the walls were damp and cold to the touch, like snowmelt.

Annie swam on ahead. The water fanned out behind her and its wake left Robbie bouncing along merrily. Entranced by the ominous arcs of sediment, pillars that reached the ceiling, and the cave spiders as large as Robbie's palm, both of them forgot to check on Conner.

All too soon, the other end of the cavern appeared. Brilliant light spilled into the cave and the water grew clear once again. Annie spilled out of her floatie when the water grew shallow enough for her to reach the pebbled bottom. She helped Robbie to shore and turned to grab Conner's floatie, hoping to do the same, but Conner was gone.

"Conner!" she snapped at the empty cave opening, "Don't play games, come out here."

Silence.

"Conner, I mean it. I'll tell Mom and then we'll all be in trouble."

Silence again.

"Conner!" Annie called his name again, her desperation now apparent. Robbie had caught on to the situation and copied Annie's calls. His sister waded into the mouth of the cavern and continued shouting for Conner, but when the water became too deep, she was forced to

retreat. Robbie checked under the floaties, and when he grew frustrated with the results, began to throw handfuls of sand around the rocky beach.

"Robbie, c'mon, let's go back through the cavern, he must be on the other side . . ." As they entered the water, a chill swept through Annie. The water was deep and cold, and she wondered if Conner had slipped out of his floatie. But then she would have seen the blue inflatable. She kicked angrily at the water and propelled herself forward. Conner was always ruining vacations with his stubborn temperament. Why couldn't he just listen to Annie for once? "Robbie! Hurry up!" Annie continued to fume.

The two reached the other side of the cavern but found no trace of Conner. Annie knew she would be blamed. Robbie chalked it up to the cave spiders. They passed through the cave two more times but found nothing. The mysterious cavern lost more and more of its allure each time they passed through and when the two had finally given up, they marched back to the hotel, exhausted. How would they ever tell their parents?

Eventually, the white-washed gates loomed ahead. Annie fumbled for the keys she had swiped earlier and opened the pool-side door. "Let's get this over with, Robbie," she mumbled, her confidence abandoning her when she saw the gleeful families playing in the pool.

As they trudged back to the room, someone shouted to them from an umbrella-shaded table. Annie looked up and locked eyes with Conner. It took less than a second to rush over and knock him to the ground.

"You filthy rat . . . I hate you!" Annie screamed. They tussled for a while, Annie slapping at him angrily, Conner defending himself, a smear of chocolate on his lip. Robbie looked on calmly, and when the two older siblings at last rose, Annie grumbling off to the room, he embraced Conner.

"Hey buddy," Conner ruffled his little brother's hair and sat down to his smoothie, a reward for blowing the whistle on his sibling's mischievous antics.

They sat together, watching the families splash about in the warm crystal water. Conner passed the chocolate banana swirl to Robbie and they slurped happily away, just two brothers with the sister nowhere in sight.

SAMANTHA HOMAN

Cameron Peak Fire

Acrylic Paint



Cover Artwork

ZOE BAUMANN

"Fear"
"Connect"

Zoe Baumann is an artist whose work is inspired by the complexities and divinity of nature. They enjoy working with many mediums to promote this theme, including drawing, printmaking, digital illustration, and three-dimensional work.

KATE BREDDING

"Miss A"

Kate Bredding graduated from Colorado State University in December 2020 with a degree in English concentrating in creative writing. In her free time, she is an intern for SpeakOut!, a program that brings writing workshops to people living incarcerated in Larimer County.

MAIA COEN

"City Lights"
"Spider's Silk"

Maia is a recent graduate with degrees in creative writing and natural resource tourism. She is currently wondering what to do with her life and being a writer who doesn't write much, but she is sure inspiration will strike again soon. She is also eagerly awaiting the return of travel.

GRACE COOPER

"A Blurring Sense of Home"
"The Sound of Rain"

Grace Cooper is an Oregonian who found her way to Colorado while pursuing her passions of writing and dance. Currently, she is a second-year student at Colorado State University, working towards her bachelor's in English and dance. When she's not at her desk or on the dance floor, she can usually be found thinking big about the next way she can share the arts with the world.

CONTRIBUTORS

CHARLIE DILLON

"Seascape"

"to all the Selves that i have been: No.10"

"To Draw a Face"

Charlie Dillon is a multimedia artist and writer and is currently a third-year BFA student at CSU with concentrations in graphic design and painting and a minor in creative writing. They are interested in exploring personal and collective histories through different genres and mediums. They are a fan of illustration, houseplants, and Hello Kitty.

PJ FARRAR

"The Kindly One"

PJ Farrar is a Colorado State University senior transfer student concentrating on interdisciplinary liberal arts, minoring in creative writing, and adding to 50+ years of life experience. In addition to writing, PJ's interests include: oxymora, flights of fancy, and getting older. "The Kindly One" is PJ Farrar's first published work.

ETHAN HANSON

"A Revolution Poem"

Ethan Hanson is a freshman studying creative writing at Colorado State University. He is interested in religion, mythology, and, most importantly, nature. His favorite authors are Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, and Lao-Tzu.

AUDREY HEFFELFINGER

"Papa"

Audrey Heffelfinger is a third-year at CSU. She is double-majoring in English education and art and hopes to teach both subjects while exploring her own work. Audrey is interested in combining art and poetry, specifically within the genre of ecopoetry, and dreams of writing and illustrating picture books.

KAYLA HENN

"How to Fail at Being Straight"

"tears aren't a woman's only weapon"

"conjecture, surmise, theorize (or: just wondering why)"

Kayla Henn is a recent graduate of CSU with a major in English creative writing and a minor in media studies. No matter what she ends up doing, Kayla will never stop writing about her experiences in the world to give voice to things not always readily talked about. She hopes to teach one day so she can inspire the next generation of writers just like her mentors did for her.

CLAIRE HOMAN

"messenger"

Claire Homan is a fourth-year student majoring in Spanish and English. Her poems embody her fascination with nature and its connection to emotion. She will graduate in May of this year and plans to pursue a law degree—with the full intention of continuing to write poetry in her free time.

SAMANTHA HOMAN

"Cameron Peak Fire"

Samantha Homan is a second-year student working towards a degree in the visual arts. In her free time, Sam can generally be found enjoying the outdoors. She hopes to someday have a career that allows her to explore and capture the essence of nature through sustainable art practices.

SYDNEY JAMES

"Real Girl"

Sydney is a recent graduate with her bachelor's degree in English creative writing and information science. She is a Colorado native who enjoys spending time on her patio plotting her next story. When she isn't writing, she enjoys catching up on the newest Sarah J. Maas book and spending time with her cats.

DORIE KECK

"Where Bullets Don't Belong"

Dorie Keck is a second-year art major concentrating in drawing and graphic design. When she isn't drawing, she is reading as many books as she can get her hands on and because of this, she decided to minor in creative writing. Dorie hopes to someday publish a book as well as help others publish theirs as a cover design artist and illustrator.

ASHER KORN

"American Champion: 'Jay' Hubert Stowitts"

Asher Korn is a graduating senior in the department of art and art history at Colorado State University with a BFA in graphic design and a minor in entrepreneurship and innovation. Asher currently works at 90.5 KCSU-FM as the Station Manager and host of the show "Chromesthesia Landscape" on Wednesdays 5-7 p.m. MST, and as a freelance writer and photographer for (SALT) Magazine. Asher enjoys gardening, local music, collecting graphic T-shirts/posters, and making earrings out of everyday objects.

MEGAN MAULSBY

"A Library on Wheels"

Megan Maulsby recently moved back to her hometown of Fort Collins, Colorado, after living in Atlanta, Georgia, for eleven years. She completed her degree in interdisciplinary liberal arts with a minor in creative writing in December 2020. She lives with far too many stacks of books, as well as her husband, four children, and rescue dog.

BRYNN MCCALL

"beast / body"

Brynn McCall is a first-year student from Denver majoring in English and minoring in entomology and religious studies. Along with writing, she spends her time listening to music, watching animated shows, and playing video games. She would rather be a beast than a goddess.

G MCDONALD

"Nothing to See Here"

G Alexander McDonald is a Fort Collins-based poet who loves his community and his role as a mentor for independent status students at Colorado State University. He hopes you find your poetry and that you remember to reach out when you need to.

GRACE MORRIS

"Bell Grove Plantation in Iberville Parish, Louisiana"

Grace Morris is a fourth-year student majoring in printmaking with a minor in history. She primarily creates with traditional print mediums, with a focus on etchings, lithographs, and cyanotypes. She is interested in architectural forms and their relationship to society and history.

CHERYL PRAZAK

"Strings of Life"
"The Light in the Darkness"

Cher is a third-year watershed science student at CSU with ambitions to study marine sciences after graduating. Along with being a research assistant for fire hydrology, she also leads The Book Was Better Club and is VP of the watershed club at CSU. When not studying, you can find them writing stories, improvising recipes, or outside climbing trees.

AMANDA ROOMS

"Anthropogenic"

Amanda Rooms is a third-year student pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a concentration in painting. Global environmental sustainability is her minor. Her work focuses on bringing attention to environmental issues that her generation is facing now and will face in the future.

DEVANI RUFF

"The Carp"

Devani Ruff is an art major and English minor in their senior year at CSU. They are a multimedia artist who works with fibers, pottery, and collage. Devani uses their art to explore themes of memory and childhood.

REBECCA WILSON

"BUT america"

Rebecca Wilson is a freshman studying theater and interdisciplinary liberal arts. She has many interests including music, photography, poetry, and performance. She has been writing poetry for three years now and would like to thank Alexi Petersen for her support throughout her writing journey.

ABIGAIL WOLSCHON

"Cave Hunters"

Abigail Wolschon is a freshman majoring in human development and family studies. When she isn't studying, her time is spent writing, reading, and creating art in multiple mediums. She enjoys hiking and exploring the outdoors, taking much of her inspiration from national parks and the beautiful scenery found within.

ZOE BAUMANN

KATE BREDDING

MAIA COEN

GRACE COOPER

CHARLIE DILLON

PJ FARRAR

ETHAN HANSON

AUDREY HEFFELFINGER

KAYLA HENN

CLAIRE HOMAN

SAMANTHA HOMAN

SYDNEY JAMES

DORIE KECK

ASHER KORN

MEGAN MAULSBY

BRYNN MCCALL

G MCDONALD

GRACE MORRIS

CHERYL PRAZAK

AMANDA ROOMS

DEVANI RUFF

REBECCA WILSON

ABIGAIL WOLSCHON

COVER ART

Samantha Homan
Crimson Peak Fire



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

