



THE
Mosaic

FALL 2016



THE
Mosaic

(n): a combination of diverse elements forming a more or less coherent whole (Oxford English Dictionary)



*Marist Literary Arts Society
presents the Fall 2016 Mosaic:*

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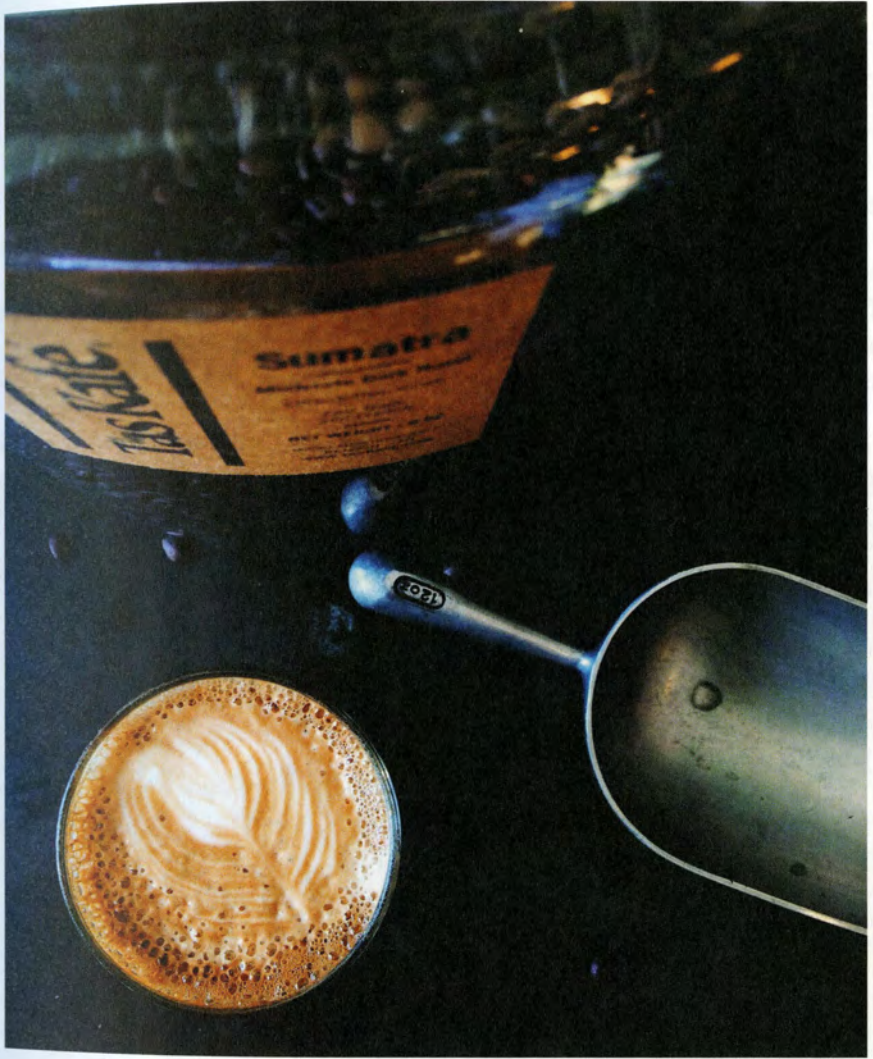
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Lisa Fay

*Front Cover by Brenden Davis
Back Cover by Brenden Davis*

Damaged Goods

By Addison Donati

I need you to know, I find your mind to be incredible. I crave your lips in the most damaging way. There is no reason to love you, every reason not to, actually. Loving someone who cannot love you back is the quickest means to self-destruction. Yet my love for you is sensational while your love for me is convenient. How strongly I desire your soul is exhausting. Do not tell me to sleep, rest is not what I need.

Do not look at me. Do not make me the motivation for your happiness when all else fails. Do not make me a second thought. Make me your first. Let me flood your mind with lust. Lay me down and exist with me, in me, for hours. Taste me for days on the back of your tongue. I want my name slurred out of your mouth while you realize that this is it. I never say these words aloud; wasted breath is all it would be, this, I understand. I'm looking at you and lying through my teeth while I beg for you to choose me. It will never be right but I will always allow it to be. I do not have the strength to rid my life of your presence. Hurt me just please don't leave me.

Understand, my passion for you is involuntary; if I could choose to love another, I'd choose myself. There is not much of me left; you own a good portion. It's rightfully yours, for I had dismantled myself by my own will and handed you those pieces to keep even when I knew you didn't want them. But if you're done with your portion, I'd love to have it back. I breathe to yearn for you and you breathe to live another life. Having one life is stupidly unfair. I need to know, would you love me in another life?

What if...

By Daiki Hirakawa

What if someone turned you on and just left?
You would be turned on 'til you burnt out
And then you would be in the dark forever...
So turn the light off when you leave the room.



Christopher Mitchell

Trois.

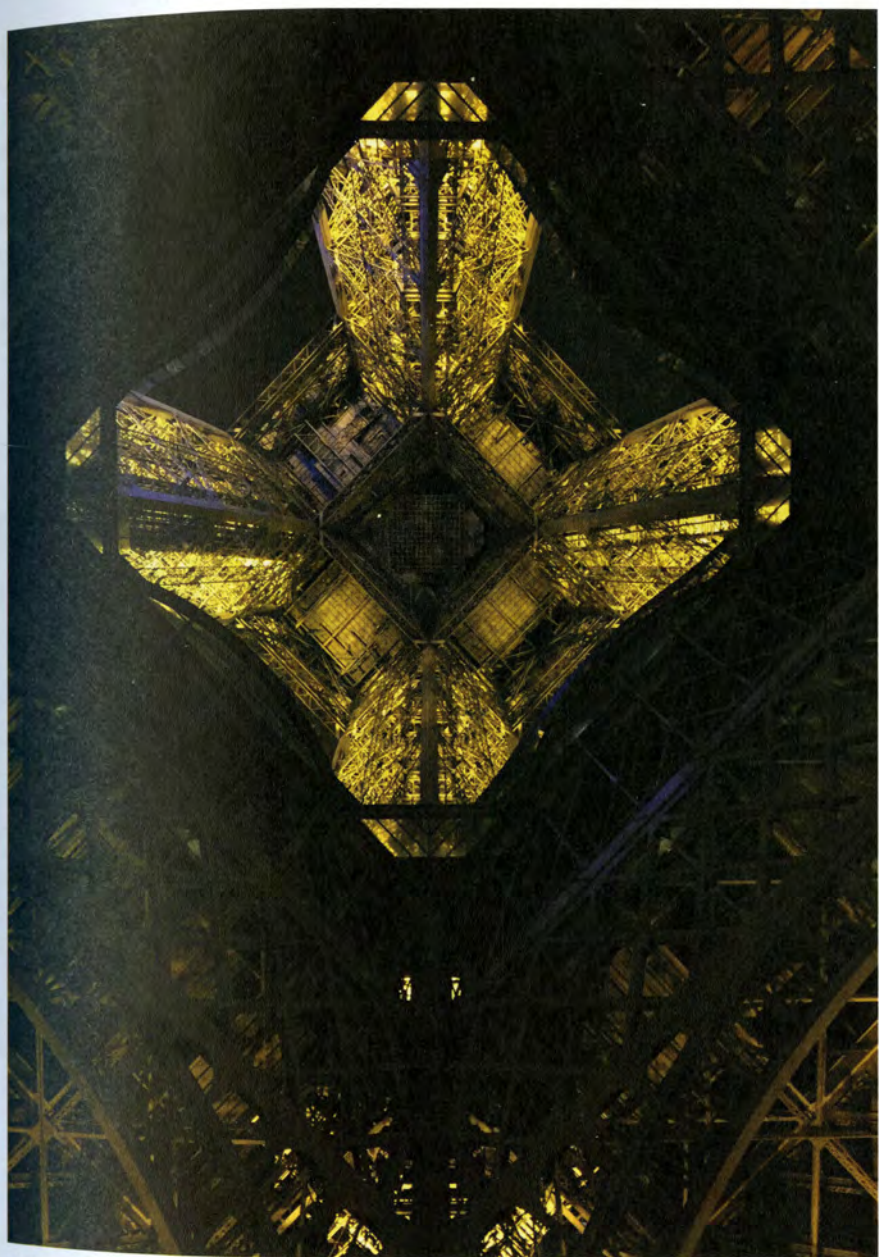
By Naja-Michelle Innis

According to Google, Musee du Louvre takes up 652,000 sq. ft., and holds 35,000 works of art. Logically, one person can't see the entire museum in one day. It would take about 100 days to see the entire museum if they spent about 30 seconds at every piece of art. Even if someone returned every day, the layout of the museum itself makes it difficult to see a different room each visit. Eventually a habit is formed.

Cross Rue Rivoli and enter through the street entrance. Down the escalator. Through the checkpoints. The feet, as if of their own volition, walk towards some entrance named something her American mouth can't wrap itself around. Up some stairs, down some stairs, and suddenly we're in a pure white garden spotted with green trees nearly too perfect to be real. The gods and goddesses look past us, forever trapped in poses symbolic of their power...mostly in proud nudity (or semi-nudity). Some are perched atop magnificent horses, rearing back as if approaching battle. Others sit among rocks with their rods victoriously pointed downward at enemies that we can't see. The goddesses lie among the flowers like kin, wistfully glancing off into the distance at some imagined object of desire.

The sculptures will make the proudest person feel modestly mortal. She found herself hyper-aware of her own softness compared to the cold, polished stone. Bleached with time were the images of people who had the chance to live forever. They were gods in true form. Hard to break, hard to ignore, a marvel to the human eye. And they were there long before her, and her mother, and her grandmother, and her great-grandmother...And they'll continue to be there long after she's in the ground.

No matter how many times she tried to explore other parts of the Louvre, she ended up in the Garden, with her journal in her lap, seated comfortably under some bearded deity that disregarded her presence.



Nina Godfrey

Honey, Please

By Kaliyah Gardner

"Give me honey, baby. I really need it,"

he whispers.

But having been put back on the shelf
and only used when convenient,
I'd prefer
to preserve myself.

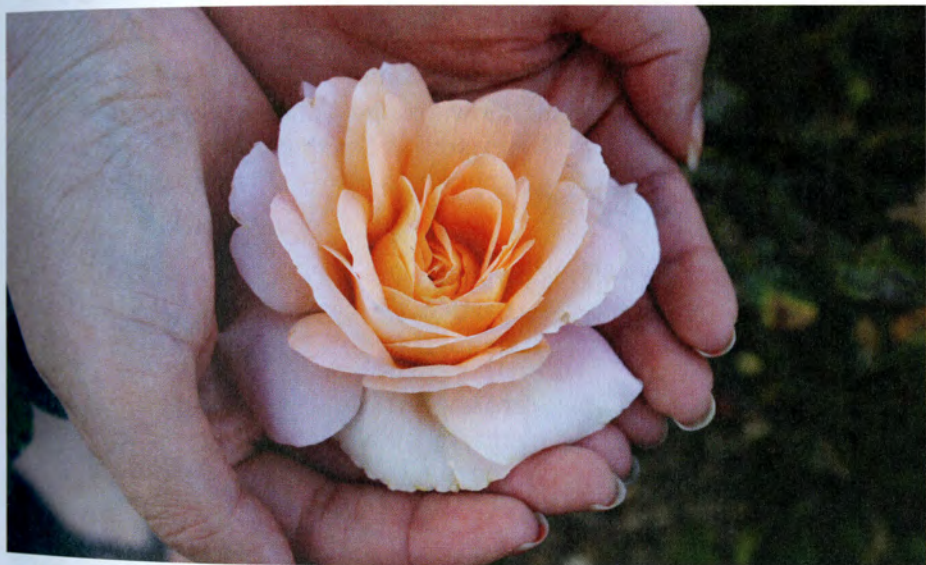
I refuse to open my bottle for you,
because I know for a fact
the moment I turn my back
after giving you a taste
you'll forget how to act,
letting my nectar go to waste,
letting my sweetness drip
until it's almost completely drained.

In the bottle,
you'll leave
just a corner,
of my sticky love,
at the very bottom
for me to reminisce
about your selfishness
disguised by duplicitous decorum.

You'll leave me on your shelf for display,
The furthest thing from full
but not empty enough to throw away;
but used to the point
that I'll be disregarded
by others that will just reach past me
like I'm the first piece of bread,
never eaten,

just patiently rotting
waiting to be discarded.

After what's left of my honey love
has dried, crusted over, and solidified,
you'll open a bottle that's new,
untouched,
completely unused,
and decide to give her a try.



Nina Godfrey

We're Fucked.

By Sean Norman

Look, I don't have a whole lot of time, so I'm going to keep this brief.

We're fucked. Plain and simple, we're fucked. How fucked, you ask? We are completely fucked.

I'll put it another way.

You know that feeling you get sometimes? It is that feeling you get after a long day and you find yourself outside after the sun has gone down and you share the road with nothing but the street lamps. You know how, just for a split second, there's a twinge in your back, or a crick in your neck, or a heaviness of your head? You feel it, you look around, you see nothing, you dismiss it and you move on, right?

Well, while ignoring it seemed to be the best course of action at first, trust me, it is no longer a good idea. You know that local missing person that hasn't been found yet? The one that existed as the side character to everyone else's main character. They were the person that will always coast through life without causing a stir.

Maybe not. Perhaps there was a kid you knew in high school that committed suicide recently. They were never a particularly popular individual and had their quirks, but were overall decent enough, right?

I'm telling you that these people were not random. These people ain't different for no reason. Those that stick to the shadows and come in second have simply discovered a truth that the rest of us are too busy trying to get ahead to see, or at least see clearly.

And because the people I'm talking about, the rejects and the outsiders, saw what we couldn't, they were removed from the equation. The thing, or whatever it should be classified as, that gives us that feeling at night, that is what takes them. The only reason it doesn't take us too is because, as long as we ignore them and move on, we aren't considered a threat. They leave those of us that are ignorant alone.

Well, they did at least. It appears time for them to start taking over.

Have you noticed the crazy way people around the world act now? Every headline seems to be about some new dead person or the next dictator rising to power. How can this world, this civilized, advanced world, face more barbarism and chaos than it ever had before?

Simple. It's them. We are being hunted, taken over, and changed, or even worse, erased. The human race is under attack.

The problem is, if we fight, we are erased, and if we don't, we are either taken over or killed by those who have taken over.

In other words... we're fucked.



Julia Franco



Kaliyah Gardner

Foreign Language

By Carmen Henriquez

Language: mine, not my own, spills
over the edge like dough rising; a crescendo.
I want to own it, to conquer it, to love it
but I am dizzied by her,
unable to unravel the knots in her long mane.
Insatiable, I sink my fingers deep into her roots without success.
Her massive waves drag me under—I am breathless
but in love, always in love.

I lie to myself. She will love me one day;
yield her mysteries to me.
Loving her too much will be my undoing,
the death of me.
I am battered from the longing for her.
Cold from the empty promises she makes,
I have no choice but to concede...again.
As tree bearing the weight of snow,

Her feminine form not unlike my own should be easy—
to conform to me, my desires, but her road
lead me in, closes and traps me;
sunlight dies breathless in her grasps.
She is untamed, inarticulate to my need but
silk smooth music for another lover— not me.
I persist in rampant pursuit,
unwilling to call a truce
I must have an answer.

My heart pounding in anticipation,
I wait, a black smudge inside a white perimeter,
a star in the blackness of the sky not knowing
it has already died; its brightness, a last breath.
I wait, taut and inexplicably patient
for the answers to come.



Brenden Davis

Marrying a Marshmallow

By Amanda Dettmann

I'm sorry bride
but for this day you must switch, wear the dress black
against all tradition of purity
while he stands pale at the alter,
his puffy white tux tugging at chalky stretch-marked lips.

Do not bleach your hair
for it will match his sleeves of sponge, his gelatin figure
of pure naughty confection.
You do not want to be an indulgence to the groomsmen
as he is to the maid of honor.

Hire a caterer
that has no experience with sticky desserts.
This means no s'mores, banana creme pies with fluff,
or blueberry lemon mousse cake with (you know what)
in the middle. You cannot upset your soon-to-be husband
by making him eat himself.

Ensure the lights
are not LEDS. You want a muted kind of brightness
or ten minutes into the first dance
you'll feel a gummy substance dripping
on your arm. A melted man is not pleasant in pictures.

But you knew all this when he proposed.
You are forever the Forgiven to his Sorry.

Remember, the candy ring came with three deals:
 He is not made to be intimate.
 He cannot be touched.
 But he should still feel your heart,
pulsing honey.



Jenna Woulfe

The List Story

By Kinlin O'Brien

"Come on, what's so hard about it?"

"I don't know I just used to do that with my buddies in middle school, I'm an adult now. I'm at a dinner with my girlfriend; I don't know I don't think I should be making a list of the prettiest women in the room. I want it to be a special night."

"Why? They'll never find out. I just want to know what you're interested in."

"You. I'm interested in you."

"Yeah, but all your old girlfriends look so...different."

"Yeah, they all had short hair."

"Yeah, they did, and I don't— What was your first girlfriend's name again?"

"Come on, don't do this."

"Brandy? Brianna? What was it? Brielle?"

"Stop. Maybe that is why it didn't work with those girls, maybe short hair isn't for me?"

"Honestly, really what is the worst that could really happen, a food fight?"

"Yes, exactly a food fight— I don't know, I've had it happen to me and it is a literal mess."

"Ok well, let's start there."

"What."

"You say you're an adult but you can't even follow the bouncing ball. Tell me the story of when you made a list."

"Fine. You asked."

"We'd all been together since the first grade, the twelve of us. In kindergarten"

there were thirteen of us, but poor Scott just couldn't hang. I wish I could tell you that story but Scott's parents had the twelve of us sign a little pink piece of paper promising that we would never discuss it again. So I'll just tell you about the dozen of us. There was Nick, Ryan, Jeff, Jeremy, Johnny, Carol, Carl, Peter, Jessica, Ally, and Barb and well me, Toby. Back then I preferred to spell my name T-O-B-I-E, against my parent's will obviously. Because I felt like Tobie was more of a golden retriever name while Toby was more like a beagle. I'd rather be a golden retriever you know, obviously loyal, man's best friend, you know?"

"Oh, obviously."

"So I guess you noticed that there were mostly boys in the class. Jessica always liked to remind us that "girls go to college to get more knowledge and boys go to Jupiter to get more stupider." Jessica was one of those girls who wore pigtails and glitter nail polish. So you can take a guess at the annoying voice she would say it in— mind you she would say it everyday, like seriously. One of us would sneeze and she would be over at her desk bopping her head back and forth saying that stupid little rhyme. But we used to let it slide because she was the prettiest, but let's be real, the pigtails got old real quick and she is constantly biting her nails, if you get the picture. Plus Barb got a haircut—"

"Baaarrrrrbbb, yes that was her name. Is this *the* Barb?"

"Yeah, yeah blah blah I dated Barb for a short period of time, doesn't matter."

"It was the short hair that gotcha, wasn't it?"

"Jesus, would you just listen?"

"Jesus had shortish hair, would you go for him?"

"No, I'm more of a Bob kinda guy."

"You like my brother Bob?"

"Alright— Are you done?"

She smirks at me.

"Yup."

“So Barb, she was from one of those hippie, flower child family, or at least that is what my mom used to say, so her hair was like down to her butt and there were always little bits of paper in it—but like, when she got a haircut, it was a short with no dead ends, no paper bits, it was beautiful. So all the boys went over Jessica. And like, Carol was pretty too, but she is Carl’s twin sister so she automatically went to the bottom of the list.”

“Hold on.”

“Yes, yes, before you can get ahead of yourself, there was a physical list. I still remember where it’s hidden. In the drop ceiling above the third stall in the boys’ bathroom. Wow. But, um, so post-haircut the list read:

1. Barb
2. Jessica
3. Ally
4. Carol

I know it seems so abstract coming from the minds of middle school boys but there was a science to The List.”

“Oh I got to hear this.”

“You see spots one and two are interchangeable but three and four are pretty concrete. The dynamism—”

“You know what I think if I hear the science behind this I’ll want to dump you right now. I don’t need to know the shallows of your adolescent mind.”

“True. Alright...alright, alright, I’ll keep going.”

“So, know it all Jessica Walters finds the list and marches right up to me and goes, ‘Tobie Oswald Caldwell,’ like she was my mother and she had just found my collection of dirt that I kept in my closet. And I have to be honest, this girl made my heart race and my armpits sweat. God, I couldn’t tell if I was in love with her or just scared of her.

“Is that how you felt when you first saw me?”

"The first time I saw you, you were chugging not one, but two bud lights while dressed as Captain Jack Sparrow, and if I remember correctly, you were yelling about how you lost your parrot."

"Hey. It was Halloween. And like your "sexy" nun costume was any better."

"Was that really the first time we met?"

She smirks at me. "Yup."

"So, Jessica is heated, obviously and gets all up in my face and says, 'This list, explain. Now.' And I'm terrified, you know, like every sensor in my little pre-teen body is going off and I just start rambling, 'Well Barb got a haircut and all the boys agree that we are into short haircuts now and if you want to be number one I can always cut your hair but if you don't that is cool and you know—you know you just can't always be number one,' and oh was that the worst thing to say, for years whenever I saw the color red I'd picture Jessica's face. Man, haha she was so pissed she said something back to me like, 'Oh I can always be number one and I don't have to cut my hair like that bible thumping Barb did, to do it,' and she tossed in a finger wiggle and went on her way."

"Ohh, so you're into short haired Catholic girls? There seems to be a pretty one in the back left corner in the booth, where is she on the list?"

"That girl is in a booster seat, sooo I'd say she is number 3."

She laughs this time.

Now I'm the one smirking.

"So when my body stopped tingling I was like, 'Do you even know what the list is for?' Because we didn't write like 'The Pretty List' on top it just said their names in order, in pencil in case there were any changes. And obviously she didn't know what it was but she had to throw a fit about something so she was like, 'No. But it seems important and I am very important so I should be number one.' And I was like 'Well, frick yeah, it's important, it's The Pretty List.' Because I was an idiot and can't keep my mouth shut."

"Was an idiot? As in past tense?"

Yeah, yeah, you guessed it, now I'm the one smirking and laughing.

"Oh you got me...So essentially, Jessica was having a conniption, and all I could tell her was, 'I told you. Barb got a hair cut.' She threatened to tell my parents and to have Barb switch hairdressers and wanted to start a petition that everyone had to wear hats. You know classic scare tactics. As you know I look terrible in hats, so I swooped in with yet another great line. I told poor little Jessica to 'prove herself' and maybe she could be moved back to number 1. And man oh man did that make her head spin. She started going off, 'Prove myself. Ha, you want me to prove myself, prove myself huh Toby Caldwell wants me to prove, myself. Ok. I can do that.' Like pigtails were going in every which direction and I had the audacity to say, 'Yeah. If you wouldn't mind. And there was a classic like 'Ok meet us girls in the art room after English' comment and I was like 'Ok, I'll bring my best boys.' And I really remember thinking that I was in love with that girl."

Oh God she is just staring at me.

"I know nothing can compare to that but, when did you know you loved me?"

She is staring at me because she thinks I don't remember, but I think about it all the time.

"It was snowing and you, being from the west coast over dressed. You had on purple snow pants that were tucked into pink rain boots and a big puffy jacket and a white hat with a blue pom pom on top. You were standing in the middle of the quad alone, because we were meeting up to build a snowman. And you were standing there alone with no mittens or gloves on with a pile of snow in your hands. I remember because your hands were bright red and you turned and looked at me and said, "My skin has only ever turned red from a sunburn before."

"Wh-why then?"

"Because you changed the color red for me."

She was giving me the most curious look but I've never been so certain.

"Shall I go on with my story?"

"Of course."

"So, the girls were burning holes in my skin with their glares the entire day. Geez, were they fierce little things, you wouldn't believe it. Well you know, all but Carol— she was a nice girl but I think there was a deviant soul deep down there. One time in the first grade I brought in those sugar cookies with the icing on top— you know them, you love them— and she told me she didn't "like" them. I know— crazy. Anyway, from that moment on I never really felt like I could trust her.

The bell rings and the girls head out single file. Clearly so intimidating to all of the boys. Honestly, looking back I just want to know which one of them went into the boys' room and got the list from the ceiling. It was probably that Ally girl. She always gave me the heebie jeebies. Whatever, so as requested all the boys went to meet the girls in the art room and of course the lights were off. Classic scare tactic. And you know all the boys puffed out their chests like the macho men we were, when in reality we all made sure to make a quick pit-stop in the bathroom to relieve ourselves so we wouldn't have any accidents. And we're standing there in this sort of dark room and we can see that all the girls are standing there basically in plain sight. Um, all straight in a row and they were holding something. And we were all just sort of standing there and then Carol scuttled over to the light switch and flicks it on and yeah, she scuttles back because that is just what Carol did, she scuttled around. Carl used to say it had something to do with her under developed kneecaps— I don't know, I really try not to ask. So. So like I said all the girls are standing there. And yeah, you guessed it. They're standing in the exact order of the list.

1. Barb
2. Jessica
3. Ally
4. Carol

With the added factor that they were all standing there with buckets of paint and you won't believe it hahah but all I could think in that moment was 'Geez, Barbs hair sure does look good.' And my buddy, Jeremy, is standing next to me and he nudges me and says, 'We're done for.' And me being the leader still standing tall— I can't believe I said this— but I asked Ryan, this real lanky-ass kid to play Taps in C major on his kazoo to send us out."

"Stop."

"I can't make this stuff up."

"Oh God, the best part was that Ryan let out like a single note and Jessica walked up to him and slapped the kazoo right out of his mouth. She was so scary, wow. Then she ordered us to form a line— like god knows where another faculty member was when this was occurring— but we all formed a line and each girl approached us and made us dip our hands in the paint buckets to ensure we would be the ones who were caught 'red handed.' Well actually never mind, I was the only one who was served the red bucket. Oh my God and Barb was the one who was holding that bucket. I remember trying to make eye contact with her in an attempt to flirt but her bangs were covering one side of her face. What a bold move by me.

But we all just stood there with our hands dripping, hanging at our sides, we musta looked like a gaggle of basset hounds. Defeated, hanging low. I remember my one friend, Jeff, was already wincing at the idea of the girls throwing the paint at him. Man his existence bothered me, I wonder what he is up to...whatever. So the girls count down:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

And when they hit four, all of us boys go chicken crazy like absolute anarchy, completely haywire like it was just crazy. The funny thing was we had established a plan if the girls were ever to flip on us. You know, back in the third grade things started to get a little dicey, I think because Jessica got a pallet expander. So whenever she tried to say stupider she would spit, so we called her 'Jesspitica.' Not our best work but it did make us devise the 'If The Girls Ever Go Crazy Run Around Like Chickens Plan' plan."

"Amazing."

"I know."

"So we are all running around like wild people, it is anarchy in the art room, but for only a matter of five seconds. Let me see, we had, Peter and Ryan clutching each other tightly, Nick was wailing like a ghost from that bad haunted hayride we went to, Carl was under a desk, fricking Jeff was standing in place closing his eyes and stamping his feet singing some hymn from church. Obviously you know me, the hero, I stood strong. I was ready to take my punishment. But we noticed that nothing had happened to us. So I called off 'If The Girls Ever Go Crazy Run Around Like Chickens Plan' plan and we opened our eyes, unclenched our fists, and got out from under desks. The girls were giggling and they were covered in paint."

"What?"

"Oh just keep listening— they had dumped the buckets of paint on themselves. They had framed us."

"So let me get this straight— by dipping all the boys hands in paint and then dumping the paint on themselves, it made it look like you guys threw paint at the girls?"

"You got it."

"I assume it was all Carol's idea."

"What a smart girl you are."

"So that's it, you guys just got in trouble?"

"Oh no, no no no no no, we weren't about to let them win."

"What did you do?"

"We just knew what we had to do. We went full on flag football on these girls. We tackled them at the waist with no mercy whatsoever. The goal was to smear all the paint so no one could get framed. Soon all the bright primary colors turned into a muddled brown. The screaming turned into laughter and we made paint angels on the ground. Needless to say we were banned from the art room, pink slips and all. And that is why I don't make lists of the prettiest girls in the room."

“Why, because you could get banned from the art room?”

“No. Because I learned women are more than just their haircuts or how they walk or if they give you the heebie geebies.”

“Yeah, well, you learned that when you were a kid. What makes a pretty girl to you now?”

“It’s how she makes you feel about the color red.”

She is smiling at me.



Carmen Henriquez

I Believe in Brown

By Kaliyah Gardner

I believe in brown, in all of its shades and hues.
Popular opinion would most likely lead you
to believe it to be
nothing worth looking twice at,
dirty, unclean.
But I believe in its radiance.
Let me tell you
what brown means to me.

Brown,
a color that is my color
nurtured by the Sun,
which caresses me to a copper complexion,
and toasts me to caramel perfection.
I am bronzed in elegance.
Those who hate brown call this arrogance.

Brown,
a color dark enough to hold secrets untold,
of ancient mahogany queens and kings,
all dressed and bejeweled in gold.

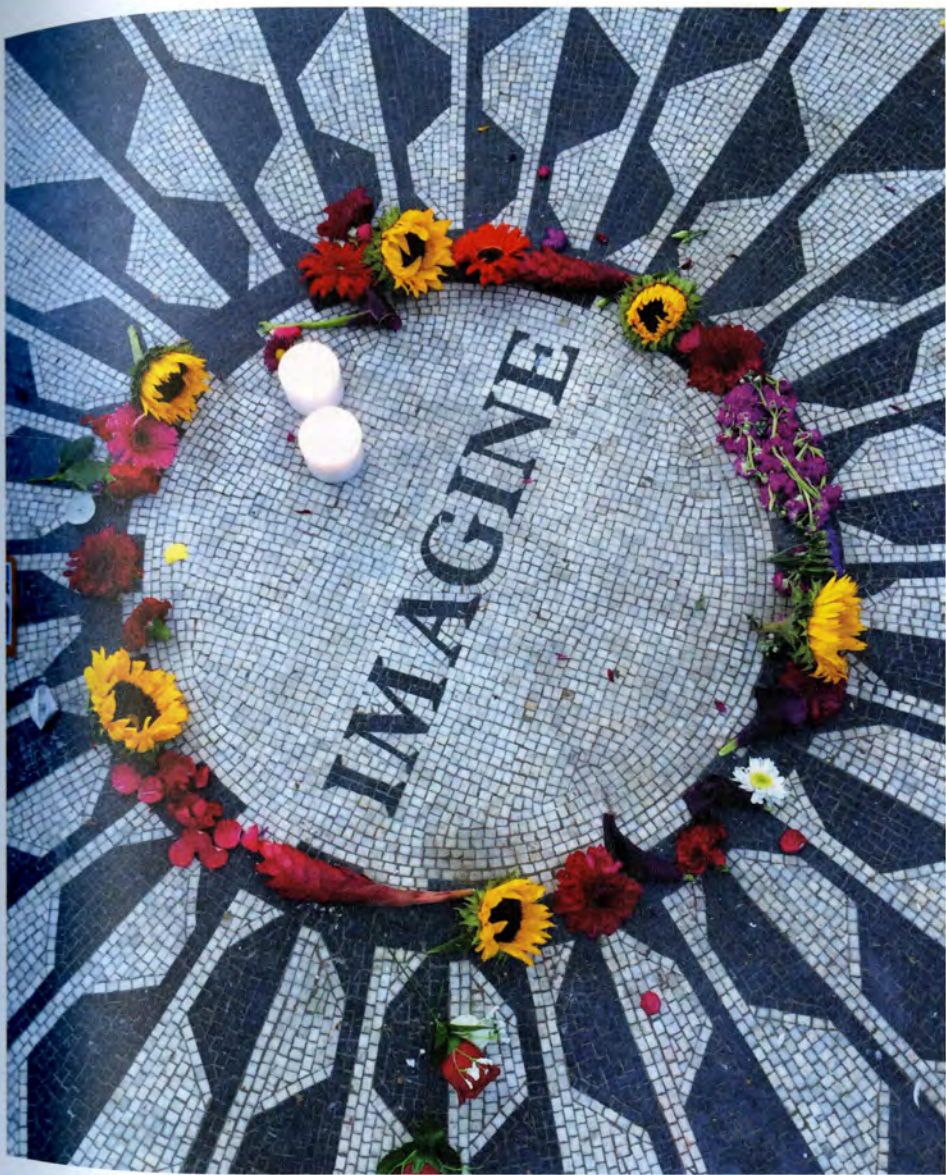
Brown,
a color as old as night.
It is the color of my ancestors,
and the color of their plight.
A color under constant discrimination.
A color that still persists
to break the shackles of oppression
in this "free" nation.

Brown,
symbolizes progress and growth.

The color of soil that is home to roots
that grow wholesome plants
that harvest sugary fruits.

Brown,
eyes
described
as dull and common
by those who do not care to realize
they are caves
adorned with amber and almond.

Brown,
The color of melted chocolate,
hazelnut,
and treats
that kiss my tongue,
so sweet.
Coffee, Honey, Brown Sugar Baby,
you make my life complete.



Lisa Fay

Indigo Child

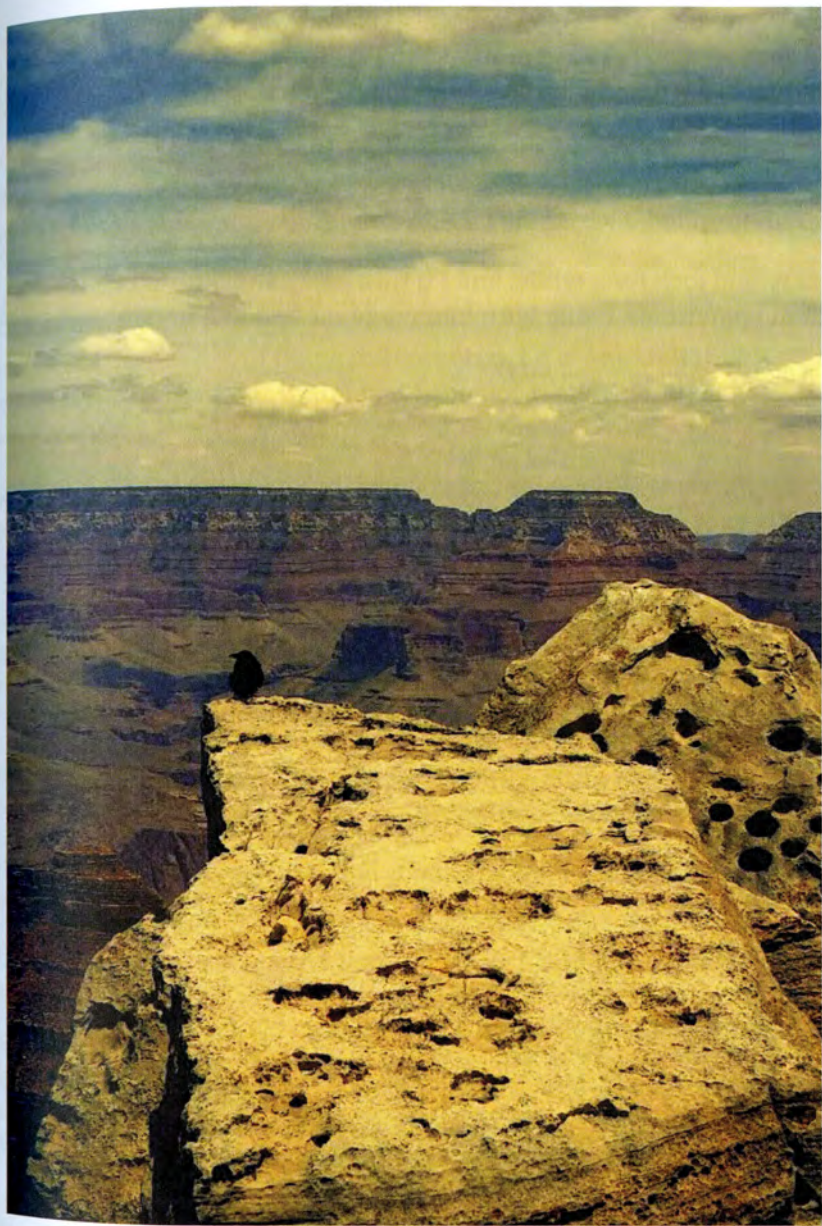
By Darriel McBride

In the Puerto Rican household, you know you're in trouble when your mama threatens you with a flip-flop or worse, sends you to live with your abuela who smells like she's been dumped in a tank of dead flowers and holy water, but Má calls that a baño. It's what you shower with if you've come across an evil spirit that has worked its way into your life like an infectious disease. Or in my case, when you did something absolutely unholy. Like losing your virginity to a guy who probably plays nine hours of Street Fighter, all while eating week old pizza with ketchup, a family size bag of Doritos and everything on the McDonald's dollar menu before he even thinks about picking up a book. But of course, I had done something much worse than that. I had fallen in love with a black boy.

Sanchez was absolutely unconventional. An old soul who wore a musty black denim jacket, black aviators, black cargo pants and black timberlands. He never wore any other color. I remember one burning cold winter day when we smoked by the track field across the street from Yankee Stadium. I had asked him, what's so special about the color black? Admiring his gleaming skin that was as dark and glassy as an obsidian gemstone.

Black is power, elegance, formality and mystery. A mysterious color associated with the unknown. Usually, it has a negative connotation, but in reality, it symbolizes strength. I believe it's a very prestigious color.

He always had an intricate way of explaining his perception of the world, but I loved listening to him speak. The way he broke down words and concepts like poetry. The way he'd rewrite the telling of time, love, space, sex, education and everything we've been taught to believe. He made me question. Everything. Social change, community development, womanhood, individualism, loneliness, making choices based on how others perceive you, gangs and police brutality, the modern day slavery, and the challenges of being a person of color in America. He said *everyone else is at the top, looking down, laughing at those at the bottom of the American social hierarchy*. Sanchez was revolutionary. Our conversations went deeper than rivers and wells. So deep that every emotion I felt was with a vivid and overwhelming



Kaliyah Gardner

intimacy. Partly because every time we spoke we were vibing over a perfectly rolled blunt, but also because pretty soon I realized that we were more alike than I thought. We found ourselves making connections over things we never imagined.

Everything you say sounds like something I would say. I rested my hand on his shoulder and replied, *Everything you say sounds like something I need to hear.*

Our eyes would lock for a while, and I'd turn away and smirk. I know it's cheesy, but sometimes, being with him made me feel like my life was a movie.

You ever heard of an Indigo child?

A what? I laughed.

An indigo child.

I stared at him in confusion. He sighed softly as if to shield his disappointment in my ignorance of the subject.

An indigo child....is an individual who challenges social expectations by not confirming. They see and feel the world much differently. They are a totally a rebel, but in a positive way. More philosophical.

He brought the blunt to his lips and inhaled deeply, letting out a cloud of smoke before he began to explain.

Listen closely...he paused, an indigo child is born feeling and knowing that they are different or special.

Special?

Let me finish, he snapped. Although taken aback, I continued listening.

An indigo child is more confident and has a higher sense of self-worth. Absolute authority, the kind with no choices, negotiation, or input from them does not sit well. Some of the rules we so carefully follow seem silly to an indigo child, so they fight them.

I continued to stare at him, watching as he licked his midnight blue lips in

between sentences. I cleared my throat.

Indigo's feel lost and misunderstood, which causes them to go within. They seem antisocial unless they are with their own kind. If there are no others of similar consciousness around them, they turn inward, feeling like no other human understands them. And suddenly, it all made sense.

So you're an indigo child?

We both are. We're both indigo children.

I pondered the thought of being different too. I'd always felt different, but never had the words for it until I met Sanchez. He always managed to do that to me. Leave me lost for words.

I rolled my eyes jokingly. *You're so different*, I said, while snatching the blunt from him and taking another drag. Marveled by every word that slid its way through his lips.

Sanchez would walk me home most days, and during those walks we talked a lot about family rituals and traditions.

I heard Puerto Rican moms are crazy.

Yup, only their madness can explain how they can manage to send a flip flop flying across the room to hit you right in the head! I laughed. My mom is different though.

How so?

She's very spiritual and superstitious and well, I'm not, so we just clash sometimes. And when I say sometimes, I really mean all the time.

That's the indigo in you. Your mom will probably have a hard time understanding that, he replied, Lots of people do.

Tell me more about indigos.

They get frustrated with religious systems that are ritually oriented. We immediately laughed in unison and I swear, the magic between us felt like

falling out of a plane with no parachute. It was scary as fuck because in that moment, I knew I loved him. And I had no idea how I could possibly continue to love someone who would be so forbidden, so unpleasant, and so disliked by my own mother. But I brought him home to meet her anyway.

Má wouldn't allow me to refer to Sanchez as my boyfriend.

Friend. He is your friend, she repeated. *Amigo*. I rolled my eyes and walked over to the couch. Tío Manuel, who was visiting from San Juan, rose from his seat and gave me a tight squeeze.

Tío, este es mi amigo, I said, introducing him to Sanchez who extended his hand graciously. Tío Manuel gave an apathetic head nod and walked towards the kitchen. He was a man of few words when meeting new people, especially since he never spoke English. I glared at Má, who stood by the kitchen fridge with her arms crossed over her chest. I rolled my eyes and grabbed Sanchez by the hand and we sat down on the couch. We sat there silently, while Má and Tío Manuel began chatting in Spanish. I could really care less. Sanchez was in my house! I reached into my backpack and pulled out my journal.

So I wrote this poem the other day...I think you'd like it. I extended the book for him to grab, yet he seemed so disturbed.

What's wrong? I asked.

I have to go, he uttered. I squinted my eyes in confusion.

What? Why? Without a word, he rose from the couch and headed for the door, walking past Tío Manuel and Má, slamming the door behind him. I darted my eyes over at Má who continued talking to Tío Manuel, unbothered by Sanchez's sudden departure.

Qué pasó con tu amigo? Tío Manuel asked.

What happened? What happened was that he left because neither of you were polite to him! I shouted.

¡Tranquila! No need to get so upset, Má added. I've always hated being told to calm down. When has that ever worked for someone? Don't people understand it only just makes a person angrier?

Calm down? Calm down!...how can I calm down when you both are so rude? I mean, Tío Manuel at least had the decency to say hi, but Má, you wouldn't even acknowledge his existence.

I DON'T LIKE HIM, Má snapped stubbornly, placing her hands on her hips.

You don't even know him!

I don't have to. His face...his body... his color says it all.

His color? What are you talking about? She shook her head impatiently.

He is no good for you. Escuchar a tu madre! Listen to me, I know what i'm talking about.

You wouldn't even give him a chance.

Do you know what mal de ojo is, Crystal?

Yes Má, for the love of God, you've told me a million times already! I shouted.

Do not use the Lord's name in vain! Mal de ojo, or the evil eye, is envious looks from others. Why do you think I make you wear your azabache? It's for protection. Its tradition. It's how our family protects our daughters from the evil eye. Malllll deeeee ojooo, she repeated. I looked down at my ankle; a gold bracelet with black and red coral charms in the form of a fist. I couldn't help but roll my eyes.

Not everyone is out to get me Má and there's no proof that this even wor— but before I could say anything else, I felt a striking slap at my mouth.

Being protected from evil is stupid? That negrito you think you love has got you fucked up, she yelled. Although enraged, I remained silent, holding my throbbing mouth.

Coming into my house dressed in all black like that. The fucking devil he is. The

devil has gotten into you too! ¡Vete a la mierda!

I had never seen her that upset before, even though that wasn't the first time she had told me to go to hell.

You better stay away from him!

Or else what? Suddenly she stormed out of the room and I prepared myself for a traditional asswhopping. You really shouldn't test a Puerto Rican mother, but I didn't care. It was worth it to me, but instead she returned with a maleta from the closet. Within minutes, she had sorted through all my clothes and packed me a suitcase.

What are you doing?

Don't fucking speak to me.

Are you serious?

I want you out of this house.

Where am I supposed to go?

She said nothing.

The following morning, I got a call from mi abuela.

Hola Crystal, ¿cómo estás?

Hi abuela, I'm good? How are you?

Bueno mi amor. Listen, jo mather es really upset.

I know abuela, but I didn't do anything.

Nena, we think it best if ju come stay with me and Tía Blanca.

Abuela! I protested.

Tía Blanca will meet you at the airport in le mañana when ju land.

Furious, I tossed the phone aside and burst into Má's room. She quickly looked up from her bible, but before she could break into one of her ridiculous prayers, I shouted at her until my head throbbed like a sore thumb.

You're sending me away for something so fucking stupid! I yelled. I was shaking and after a certain point all I could hear were my ears ringing while Má's lips were moving. There was so much more I wanted to say, but instead I slammed her door and dashed out of the house, taking only a small duffle bag with me.

Sanchez agreed to link up with me. I needed to talk, badly, but before I could do that I needed to know where we stood.

Why'd you run off like that? I asked. *Was it something I did?* He wouldn't respond. *Sanchez you can tell me, what is it? What's bothering you?*

Your mother. I took a deep breath and exhaled,

Things were better when they were a secret.

She called me a nigga, Crystal. He exclaimed, staring me directly in the eyes.

How did you know that?

I heard her. Confused, I tried to formulate a recollection of the moment where perhaps this was true.

You speak Spanish?

I understand it better than I speak it.

Oh god, Sanchez. . . I'm sorry. For real.

It's all good. You didn't know.

So we remained outside, sitting and talking about what it's like to be a dark-skinned Dominican on the front steps of his building, what it's like to be mistaken for a black boy, what it's like to be stopped by the police for no

reason, up until the sky turned a fiery tomato red.

So what's the move? He asked. I sat there on the edge of his bed, placing my fingertips against my temples.

I don't know. I really don't know, I replied, holding back the tears. I refused to cry in front of him.

Come here, he said, grabbing my face and pressing his forehead against mine. I closed my eyes and let his savory kiss encompass my taste buds. There were no words, just the rhythmic dancing between his tongue and mine. Between our bodies and his sheets. It was like a sweaty hot yoga session and not once did I think about what it all meant because it felt too good to ruin with a question like: what does this mean? What are we? Or worse. . . do you love me? I knew he did.

I had over 40 missed calls from Má and Abuela that week and I ignored each and every one. I was becoming comfortable at Sanchez's place. At least there, we had privacy and freedom. I saw no reason to go back home other than to get more clothes and a change of underwear, but I wasn't ready to do that either.

Is this yours? he asked, handing me a thin ankle bracelet. My azabache.

Yeah, must have broken and fell off my ankle. Then I remembered what that meant. Má always said that when an azabache breaks it means bad luck. Her and her stupid superstitions.

But it wasn't long before I found myself falling asleep alone. It wasn't long before it was 4 am, and I didn't know where Sanchez was. Before he started pushing me away. Before he had consistent love bruises on his neck that I didn't give him. One night, when Sanchez actually was home and fast asleep, I laid next to him in the dark feeling so alone despite his presence. I stared up at the ceiling with parts of me hating myself for being so vulnerable. Maybe I was being dramatic? Sanchez had given me a place to stay and food to eat despite what Má thought of him. Maybe I was expecting too much. And suddenly, I was interrupted by his vibrating phone. I immediately sat up

and snatched the phone from the nightstand and rushed into the bathroom. I stared at the phone to discover who the call was from. Private number. I inhaled deeply and wiped my sweaty hands on my thighs and clicked answer call. The voice of a female broke out in curiosity and forced its way through my ears.

Hello? I said.

Who is this?

I hesitated for a moment, my nerves on edge.

Who...is this?

Don't worry about it. My question is, who is this? She replied in annoyance.

Who are you? I snapped, rolling my eyes.

Is this Crystal? She asked, laughing devilishly. My heart nearly skipped a beat. I sat down on the cold bathroom floor and listened closely.

Who the hell are you? I demanded.

Girl, I pity you. You're a joke, she laughed.

Whoever this is, you're fucking corny and need to stop calling.

Does Sanchez know you been creepin on his phone?

WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU!?

The one he's thinking about when he's with you.

I tossed the phone to the ground and pulled my knees to my chest. Fighting back the urge to wake Sanchez up and tear his head off like a lion whose supper has been long overdue, fighting back the desire to pack my bag and move where no one would ever be able to find me, and evidently, fighting back the urge to cry. I remained on the floor for the next two hours. Sitting in silence. Every now and then whispering to myself repeatedly. I should have listened. I should have listened... I should have listened. She never called back.

That was the first time. The first time I felt pain. Like real pain. Not the pain you think you feel when you're three and your mom slaps you or gives you a cocotaso for throwing candy wrappers behind the couch, but the pain that strikes your heart right in the funny bone until you collapse—wheezing, chest burning, lungs crying out in fractious agony. A week and a half was all it took. That was all it took for him to rip my heart out of my chest without my permission, squash it with his bare hands and let my feelings pour onto the floor with no intention of cleaning up the bloody mess. The betrayal was eating me alive. I stopped eating. I stopped sleeping. I stopped caring about how I looked and he had hardly noticed.

Jesus Christ, Crystal! Where were you? You had me so worried. I called everyone! I had the goddam policía looking for you! I didn't know if you were dead or alive. What the fuck were you thinking? Má shouted frantically. Her hair signified that she was just as stressed as I was. I stood there before her in silence.

Did you hear me!? And suddenly, my eyes began to water.

Calm down. It's gonna be alright, Má whispered, her motherly embrace made me feel like a 5-year-old, but I fought back the tears.

My azabache broke. She looked at me, her eyes filled with worry, yet a promising ray of white light.

There's something we have to do. She went into her bedroom and returned with a small notebook and a silk indigo purple sheet. I stared at her in confusion as she placed the sheet on the floor and ordered me to sit on it. I walked over and sat down, crossing my legs and placing my hands on my lap. Without a word, she kneeled down in front of me, her eyes focused on mine.

Give me your hands, she said. I hesitated and she reached out and clenched my wrists.

I see it, she whispered.

See what?

The evil spirit. I yanked my arms away and stood up quickly.

I don't believe in that.

¡Siéntate! Sit the hell down and listen she yelled, pointing her fingers to the floor. I rolled my eyes and sat back down on the sheet.

Nena, I've never wanted to impose my beliefs on you. I just wanted to protect you.

So why didn't you just tell me?

Tell you what?

That you're a witch! I shouted.

A witch doesn't dress in white, or go to church, or read into the future. Yo soy un psíquica.

A psychic!?

Yes. . .now shut up and let me figure out what that spirit wants. That's when I really started freaking out. All of the things I couldn't quite understand began to hit me at once. I placed my hands in hers and she clenched them tightly as she held her eyes shut. I sat there nervously waiting for a reply, a sound, or some kind of sign, but all I could hear was my heart throbbing in my ears. A heart beat that sounded like being underwater and hearing the waves explode against a rocky shore. She opened her eyes and grabbed the notebook that laid beside her.

What is it?

It was the colors black, green and red.

What does that mean?

Bad vibrations...envy.

What? From who?

You need a cleansing, she said while flipping through the pages of her book.

What kind of cleansing? She looked up at me immediately, her face was grim, yet her voice was filled with genuine concern.

A spiritual one. We have to go. NOW.

Sometimes betrayal is like having a splinter and no tweezers, you'll experience pain, but you won't always have a remedy. That's what being on a crowded plane from New York to Guayama, Puerto Rico felt like. A big ass splinter. And even though I hated him, that's what being away from Sanchez felt like—a big ass splinter that I had no means of removing. Tía Blanca, who I had never met and only spoke to a few times over the phone when Abuela called for the holidays, met us at the arrival gate. Welcome to "La Ciudad de Brujas" (The City of Witches). I blinked my eyes rapidly to make sure I wasn't seeing things, but that's what I saw.

Crystal! Oh my god, look at you! She shouted, startling the sheltered tourists who strolled behind me and má. Latinas have no shame when it comes to family. I smiled helplessly.

Welcome home!

When we arrived at abuela's house we spent less time catching up and more time preparing my baño. Má and Abuela gathered nuts and flowers for the bath. They said it was for reducing tension and increasing mental acuity. Then there were eggs and sea salt to ease physical pain and provide protection.

Blanca, she need to learn, Abuela announced sternly as she mixed the ingredients into a bright blue bowl. *Now more than ever.*

But mamá, Tía Blanca objected.

Shh! Abuela spat, placing her long nailed finger over her mouth.

Levantarse. Without a word, I rose from the couch, standing before Abuela like a canvas waiting to be painted or clay waiting to be molded. I remember

the sweat dripping off the back of my thighs from the wrath of Puerto Rico's August humidity. Abuela strolled over to her santos and placed her fragile hand on La Virgen Maria before removing the white rosary from her own neck. Wrapping it around her left hand she held it to my forehead and grabbed the bowl, and without any warning, I was suddenly drowning. All I could hear was the sound of her soft words of prayer Santa Maria madre Dios. Gasping for air, I tried to scream, but ended up swallowing loads of the liquid into my mouth, eyes and nose. All went black before I felt the vibrations of the ground beneath me. I hurtled to the floor falling to my knees, trembling, as Tía Blanca snatched the bowl away from abuela. Má stood there motionless...

Furiously, Tía Blanca turned towards má and shouted without hesitation, *So this is what you flew my niece out here for?*

What are you talking about? Má replied.

This isn't your life Marisol! Tía Blanca shouted, nearly popping my ear drums. Abuela stared at both of her daughters, her eyes widening with what looked like fear. I couldn't tell. My vision was still a bit blurred allowing me to see only portions of red and white. I glared at Tía Blanca as she hurried over to me, wiping the water out of my eyes with a towel.

What exactly are you two trying to prove?

I told Crystal that I was only trying to protect her, Má spat aggressively.

From what? Evil?

Don't tell me how to be a mother!

You wouldn't know the first thing about motherhood, Marisol! I stood there watching them argue. Abuela had inevitably joined in, standing in between the two of them, cursing in Spanish.

I'm pregnant, I uttered. They all stopped immediately and their eyes and mouths shot open wide like cartoon characters.

What?

What!

Que!? Abuela gasped.

I'm...pregnant, I repeated softly. Má slowly began walking towards me with tears in her eyes.

Are you sure?

Yes. . . and I'm scared. Admitting my fear, hearing myself utter the words aloud, was what did it for me. Suddenly, my walls, the walls that have held me up this whole time just. . . collapsed. Moment by moment, they fell as I sobbed into Má's chest unceasingly, hands clutching at her blouse. Small crystal beads trailed down my cheeks to my neck, lips, and my chest. She held me in silence, rocking me slowly as Tía Blanca and Abuela joined our embrace. The pain came in forceful waves, minutes of sobbing broken apart only by short pauses for recovering my breaths, before hurling me back into the outstretched arms of my grief.

I've seen lots of movies and shows. People never truly cried, yet from what I have seen when someone does it's not pretty. Their eyes swell and turn red. They are unable to speak, unable to breath, nothing. The world around them, becomes a blur of color that melts to gray. With the weight in their chest and locks in their throats, the pain in the back of the mind comes forward by the slightest reminders. I always refused to cry. Hating the thought of being vulnerable, but crying is how I understand myself best. When I cry I know who I really am. It's my strength and my weakness. Strong because it brings about a sense of clarity and weak because who wants to watch salty snot run down my nose? I wish I could turn my tears off, I do. Or perhaps just save it until I'm alone, but I'm not wired like that. Sanchez was right. I am different. My emotions swirl like ocean currents, deep and strong. Sometimes I'm scared to dive in because there's always a chance that I won't make it out alive, but I can't be anyone else. I don't think any of us can, especially not an indigo child.

The Aesthetic of Ruin

By Naja-Michelle Innis

What I wouldn't give
For the picture of my
Self-destruction
To be the epitome of
Cinema and sex.

A fantasy of going
Out
In a haze of Error and
Freedom

My cliff dive off the wagon
Would be streaked in shades
Of black and blue and
Violet too.

Evidence of the nights
When I was grey cool.
Cloaked in the mystery
Of what went south.

Instead my sabotage
Was a blur of beige.
Beige beige beige.
Beige red beige.

How do you ruin yourself
Wrong?



Nina Godfrey



Christopher Mitchell

Carmen Henriquez





Bernadette Hogan



Lisa Fay



Lisa Fay



Christopher Mitchell

A Girl Named Finn

By Erin Taylor

I don't do group therapy. I go, but only because the doctors make me. The doctors and old Barlow make me. I go, but I don't say or do anything at group. People can't change or fix me. Only I can.

What they don't seem to get is that for me, group is pointless. Sure it might do something for the depressed girls or the anxiety boys. But they really don't seem to get that group therapy does nothing for my paranoid personality disorder with a sprinkle of OCD. And yet every single day at 10:30 am, I have to sit in the twelfth plastic chair in Rec Room C, the one closest to the door, and listen to some sociopaths and schizos talk about how much they want to kill each other. It's routine, and I like routine. But I don't like group therapy.

There are thirteen seats. Thirteen, not twelve. One two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve THIRTEEN. There shouldn't be thirteen seats. This is 10:30 group, there are only twelve of us. Two paranoids, five schizos, three sociopaths, a depressed, and an antisocial. But there's a thirteenth seat. I sit in my twelfth seat with the hope that as soon as I do, seat thirteen will disappear and it was only a med-induced hallucination. I sit. Shit, it's still there.

"Good morning, my little lambs," Shauna says in her airy voice as she enters the room. She's wearing that yellow and orange tie-dye get up today. I hate it. She usually wears brighter colors when she wants to remind us that even though we're all stuck here, we still have potential. She begins group the same as usual, with breathing exercises. This is promptly followed by asthmatic Johnson screaming that he can't breathe. Then one of the schizos, Quincey, starts running around the room because she thinks a hornet's nest has fallen on her lap and she's about to be stung to death. It'll be another solid ten minutes before Shauna has calmed everyone down and will ask someone to share their feelings, hoping to cure us all of our mental and emotional ailments.

"What a way to start the day," a voice suddenly says to me. I turn to my right, to seat thirteen —thirteen— and there's someone in it. A thin, gangly thing with the shiniest bald head I've ever seen. Who the fuck is this? I've never seen them before, ever. Who just shows up in a thirteenth seat and tries to make commentary? I don't like them, A) for showing up out of the blue and taking a thirteenth seat, B) for trying to talk to me as if I talk in group, and C) for having no obvious indication of whether they're a guy or a girl. It needs to go.

Lunch is almost as useless as group therapy. Do you know how many crazy people refuse to eat? Whether it's a depressed who doesn't see a point in nourishment or a socio who would rather save their food to choke their roommate with later, only a small percentage of us patients actually eat. But three square meals a day is what's enforced here at Holiday Hills Mental and Emotional Rehabilitation Facility. What a bullshit name, *Holiday Hills*. In here, your only holiday is from a peaceful normality. However, I do enjoy watching old Barlow chase Quincey down who was trying to sneak a fruit cup out to her chinchilla overlord.

"You don't talk in 10:30 group." I turn to my side. It's sitting next to me, not looking at anything, pushing the corn on It's tray with a spoon. No one sits next to me at lunch. But It is, and I don't like that.

"No, I don't."

"You should."

"I'll pass."

"Why?"

"I don't do group therapy."

"Why?" Please learn a different letter, It.

"Other people won't fix me. Only I can fix me."

"Could help you." And then It gets up, throws away the uneaten corn, and even smiles at old Barlow.

8pm- 10pm are leisure hours. I hate everyone here, and trust none of them, but I like to spend it in Rec Room A where people attempt to play cards or listen to music. Being surrounded by so many other nutjobs is oddly comforting. Except when Vain decides to show up. Fucking Vain, with his dumb face and superiority complex. If it weren't for the fact that he was a convicted killer who's avoiding jail time by claiming to be insane, you'd think he was nothing more than an oversized playground bully. When Vain decides to spend leisure hours in Rec Room A, he tries to force everyone to watch reruns of Hogan's Heroes. No one in their right mind would want to watch those reruns, and even the psychos out of their right minds in this looney bin don't either. But Vain threatens to eat you in your sleep if you dare go near the remote, so usually we're stuck.

But Vain isn't here tonight, which means I can watch everyone else civilly fight between *General Hospital* and *The Flintstones*. The only different thing about tonight is that It is here, sitting on a chair towards the back, happily watching Fred and Barney getting ready for their bowling tournament. It's really annoying me, suddenly showing up where I am and being all cavalier about it. What's wrong with It, anyway? What got It stuck in this place?

It looks over at me, like it just heard my thought. It gets up, walks over, and sits in the seat next to me on the other side of the room. It doesn't talk to me and keeps watching the old cartoon on the TV. I look at the TV too, because there's no way I'm going to talk to this thing. Exactly twenty-one seconds pass and I look at It out of the corner of my eye to make sure It's not looking at me. It's not, and I look back at the TV, not paying the least bit of attention. Another nineteen seconds and I look again. Still not looking at me. Back to the TV. Eleven seconds this time. Still not looking at me. Listen, It, if you're going to be hanging around me, which I don't want you to, I at least need to know who you are.

"What's your name?"

"Finn." Fuck, still don't know if they're a guy or a girl. All I can think to reply is "Oh."

"I know what you must be thinking."

I'm pretty sure you have no idea what I'm thinking, It, but go on.

"What kind of a girl's name is Finn? Well, it's not a girl's name, but it's my name."

I'm sorry I asked.

There are an extra three security guards stationed around the mess hall today. Old Barlow must realize he's getting too old for this job. I overhear Johnson tell his roommate that Vain had to get his daily schedule moved around after attacking an antisocial during his 2pm group therapy, and now he's in our lunch shift, hence the beefed up security. I don't like changed schedules, especially when it means fucking Vain has to eat the same time as me. I see him walk down the aisle between tables, trying to decide who to sit with and torture for 40 minutes. For the first time in years I regret sitting alone, since this seems to peak his sinister interest. Just going to stick to the routine and pretend he doesn't even exist.

He lazily drops his plastic tray on my table. It bounces, and juice from his fruit cup splashes onto my arm. But I don't react, I don't even flinch. This piece of shit isn't going to get anything out of me. He



Christopher Mitchell

chuckles like a fucking cartoon villain, like what he did actually hurt me, and sits down. I eat my sandwich. He's not eating, but he's looking at me, I can feel it. He's sizing me up, trying to figure out what my kryptonite is, what he needs to do to set me off. He's shit out of luck though, because the only care I have is how dry this bologna sandwich is.

"You've been here a long time, haven't ya? I've seen ya here for a couple years now. You must be real nuts to be here this long. What's wrong with ya, anyway?"

I wonder if my not answering him is encouraging him or not. "Not gonna talk to me? Come on, I thought we could be pals. We've both been here a while, we could cause some serious damage here, don't ya think? Or are you one of those goodies? You don't start trouble, oh no. Only the fucked up ones like me start anything. You need to be a good boy and get out of here, right? Get back home to Mommy?"

He leans closer to my face. His rank breath smells like a sewage. I keep on chewing. "Well guess what— your mommy doesn't want you. She'd rather you rot in here, in this crazy house. Because that's what you are.

"Crazy."

"Psycho."

"Lunatic."

Keep talking, asshole. Not like I've never hear those before. Go on, keep trying to get a rise out of me. You won't. I'll keep eating this sandwich until you're the crazy psycho that has to be dragged out of the mess hall. Keep trying to break me. You won't. We're all crazy here.

And then he leans right next to my ear, so close I can feel the cracked skin of his lips on the helix of my ear. "Worthless."

Okay, time to die. A moment later, the big oaf is pinned to the ground. My left hand is gripping his struggling wrists together, my right hand doing its best to gnaw his face off. Even though I'm focusing on my nails raking through his skin, I remember to press my weight onto his chest via my knee. He's screaming, trying to fend me off through bites and wads of spit.

I can't hear what he's yelling because everyone around us is too. My fans are cheering for me. His fans are trying to beat up mine. This must be what football is. I wouldn't know, I was never one of those sports-crazed kids. I think it was the first time my dad was disappointed in me.

I can hear old Barlow's voice now, pushing through the hysteria. "Get the fuck off of her! Hey, you, put them *down!* Let me through, I'm ending this now!"

Sorry, officer, but this isn't ending until I've scratched Vain's ugly face off clean. Should be soon, his wrists are struggling less and less.

I'm so proud at all the chaos I've caused. It may not be routine but it's the first exciting thing to happen here for years. The sociopaths are all fighting now too. The schizos are crying in the corner. And there's Finn...sitting there. She's just...*looking* at me. Why does she keep doing that? Why is she just *looking* at me?

And then I feel Barlow's hands around my arm and neck. He yanks me from Vain's body, hollering something about extra therapy and new meds. He's dragging me to the doors with unnecessary force because I'm not struggling, Barlow. I'm watching Finn watch me with that fucking face of hers. The one she makes when we're sitting together at group, not talking, and when we're watching *Flintstones* during leisure, not talking. That face that just...I don't know, *knows*. What does she know?

I'm not worthless. I may be a crazy psycho lunatic, just like Vain says, but I'm not worthless. Maybe she knows.

I'm not allowed to leave my room for leisure hour anymore. Not until the doctors feel certain I won't beat up anyone else. The doctors and old Barlow, that is. I'm staring at the wall, counting how many white dots are in the pale green wallpaper. Four hundred seventy six, four hundred seventy seven. The door opens and Finn walks in. She just waltzes in, like she's allowed to come and go as she pleases, and sits next to me on my bed. I'm not saying anything because I'm not sure what I'm supposed to say. I feel like she's going to tell me what I did to Vain was wrong, and that none of us want to be here and we all wish we were better, wish we were normal.

She finally decides to speak to me, "Why are you here, Pete? Why are you in Holiday Hills?"

And I tell her why I'm here. I tell her about how I was always a worrier as a kid, and oddly organized, but it happened when I was fourteen. I knew my history teacher was actually part of the Mafia, and was planning my death when I wrote a paper about the evils of the Mafia. I knew they were going to get the mob together and get me, I really knew it, and I had to stop it. She only communicated to her mob by snail mail—you know, to be inconspicuous—which is why I had to put the cherry bomb in her mailbox... and the seven mailboxes near her house. And since I was a minor and didn't actually harm anyone, only federal mail, I was sent for evaluation instead of juvie. And that's when they decided I had paranoid personality disorder with a sprinkle of OCD. This is where I've been for the last five years. My parents used to visit all the damn time, but once they realized nothing was changing, they came less and less. It's been exactly 342 days since my mom came to see me. So this is where I'll be until I'm 21. Then the doctors and old Barlow will assess me and see if my progress is up to snuff. If it is I'll be let out. Finn nods, listening to every word of my story, but isn't saying anything.

"You don't talk in 10:30 group either." I decide to point out. I want to ask what's wrong with her, why she's in here, the same thing she asked me. But I don't.

She smiles. "I know."

"Why not?" she just shrugs. I decide to remind her that "it could help you."

She smiles again and stands up. "It could." Then she walks to her room.

It's my first day of group after beating the shit out of Vain. The doctors didn't want me around too many others for a while. We had to wait the standard three days after my incident to make sure I was not a threat to my own life or the life of any other person on the premises. It's like they don't trust me or something.

I'm walking into the room and I notice something's off. Let's see, there are one two three windows on the west wall, one two tables against the back wall, and one two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve chairs

forming a semi-circle. Wait, is that right? One two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve. Twelve. Not thirteen, but twelve.

"Good morning, my little chipmunks." Shauna has arrived wearing the pink and red poncho I've hated for years. I sit in seat number twelve. Shauna starts with our breathing, which I don't do. Usually while I don't do breathing exercises, I think about who I hate the most in group that day (spoiler, it's usually Shauna). But not today. I just wonder where Finn is.

Group just ended and amazingly only one sociopath threatened to kill us all. I hear Shauna tell old Barlow, who's stationed in the main hallway this morning, that that's "progress." Yeah, progress. Keep on dreaming, Shauna.

Just because Finn doesn't talk in group either doesn't mean she wouldn't go. I never talk, but I *still* go. Mostly because they make me and because it's routine and I like routine, but I still go. Maybe she forgot? Or slept in? Or overdosed or was killed by her roommate the depressed or was eaten by Vain in some sick revenge scheme. I get to her room and walk in the door, the same way she always did with mine. She's not there. Her roommate is though, and not too pleased to see me. She spews several curses at me and I ask where Finn is.

"She's gone." Gone? Like...gone, *gone*? "No, she didn't off herself or anything. She was checked out this morning. Apparently they thought she was normal enough to go home. Lucky bitch."

I'm walking down the hall from Finn's room to mine. The hallways here are probably the most stereotypical mental institution halls you could ever imagine. They're big and wide and the lighting alone makes you want to kill yourself. It's that overly bright florescent that gives you a headache and makes you nauseated in an instant. If anyone's ever in the halls, it's either pale people in tattered pajamas and robes trudging to meet their doctors or screamers being dragged by two security members to be sedated. Unlike a hospital, which likes to cover its pastel walls with obscure pieces of art and children's drawings, these walls are barren. Nothing is on them and I hate that. They're so empty and the hall is so quiet and it's all just a deafening wail of agony, of "GET ME OUT OF HERE, I WANT TO GO HOME, I'M NOT CRAZY."

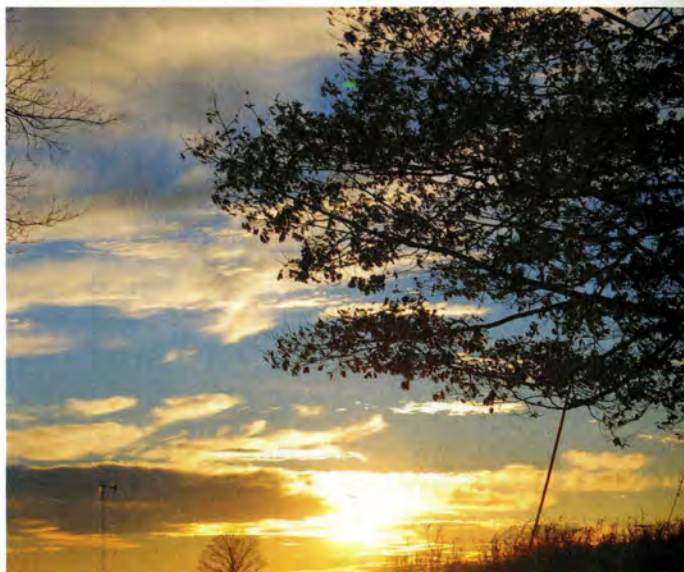
I'm at my door now and go in my room. I don't have a roommate. Not because they don't trust me with one, it's the other way around. I don't trust anyone else. They learned that within my first year here, that it's best for my progress if I have one of the single rooms.

It's quiet in here.

Another day, another 10:30 group therapy session. I take my seat, number twelve, closest to the door. Twelve today. Not thirteen. One two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve. Not thirteen. Shauna comes in wearing the purple and teal shawl. She leads the breathing exercises, Johnson gets taken out because he started hyperventilating, and Quincey starts screaming that a guy has a gun to her forehead. Shauna finally regroups us all.

"So, who wants to share something with us all today? What are you feeling?"

And I raise my hand.



Carmen Henriquez



Carmen Henriquez

The Math of a Grapefruit

By Amanda Dettmann

When I was seven my mother laid a grapefruit
cut in two
in each of my palms.

How many lives has it lived?

I counted each purple-red section in my right hand,
having to start over multiple times
after forgetting the number following eleven.

Twelve! This one's lived twelve lives, Mama!

So put them together. When full, how many?

*Ummm . . . Twenty-four lives, Mama!
This fruit is an old lady.*

She said my math was right,
but the age wasn't.

She told me to lean back my head
while she squeezed the blood
of both grapefruit halves
over my eyes.

*Can you see
how long it's lived?*

I never answered.
I was blinded by and beaming in
the champagne-colored fizz.

For counting lives
is limitless

as our story cannot be sectioned
into twenty-four parts
of a single
grapefruit.



Lisa Fay

Advice From a Stranger

By Bernadette Hogan

The clock read 6:47 a.m. and Chief knew he should probably head out of the office soon.

He etched his number slowly at the bottom of the finished product. He made twenty copies and shuffled down the steps and out of the revolving doors. After three blocks to the subway he took out his duct tape and plastered the first of the makeshift signs to a telephone post:

"WE MET WALKING TO THE BROOKLYN FLEA. MINNESOTA STEPHANIE, YOU'RE A BIKER YOU'RE A PAINTER YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL. CALL ME."

Bleating car horns demanded indifference in the distance, but the forecast promised a clear day ahead.

Chief worked his way through the teeming throng of bodies, stepping up, up, up in concrete fashion like a windup toy soldier. At the top of the landing he halted abruptly, posing, fracturing the rhythmic flow behind.

"YO I'm walkin' here you God-DAMN tourist."

The thing is, I wish you would just do the right thing.

He replayed the worded memory over in his mind.

You'll know what's right, trust me— I know you have the intellectual capacity. It's just disappointing to see you keep choosing the wrong thing.

S. Larsen at 44 MacDougal Street, Apt. 10 on 10th floor.

Folding the address and the flyer and tucking them safely into his jeans' pocket he decided: it was coke weather— definitely coke weather. He fingered the left breast folds of his leather jacket and fished out a cigarette, a mighty slim one, and took to lighting it.

He made a left, another left, and ducked under a low hanging awning right smack into a sometime woman and dyed pink Pomeranian trotting about on a cable wire. A grumbled *Watch it!* and *Oh! Excuse me?* and cell phone buzz-jingle fumigated the almost-awkwardness, as dog and human exited hurriedly outwards through a portal of sunglow.

Chief made towards the grimy soda shelves, paid the \$1.25 and dauntlessly made the crossover back outside, his third footfall treading—unintentionally mind you—on the tail of the little canine. It yelped and cowered, slinking towards his woman bruised-ly, but she was smoking now. Elbow deep inside a brown paper bag, she wasn't even paying attention to Chief's entrance because now, the traffic light had turned green.

"My father's gonna fuckin' kill me Jer— KILL ME if he finds me out here on 3rd drinkin' like I am—"

Chief leaned against a box advertising EXOTIC fruit priced at \$5.15 per pound, and took his first sip, bathing fuzzy teeth with liquid for the first time in what... twelve hours maybe?

A group of fifteen elementary age students shuffled by in uniforms, their young Ms. Thing of a teacher trumpeting:

"Okay kids! Remember, crossing the street looking both ways! And try not to take up all the sidewalk space with your suitcases!"

"Oh I am, I'm fuckin' drinkin' I am— Wha'? A'course you— Well fuck. Missed mass again and you know— you know where I'll be? Hell in a handbasket— Swear to God Jerry."

He swallowed a third swig before leaving the bottle and began to cross downtown.

"Hell in a handbasket like all the other Catholics. And hey— " Chief stopped at the address, but her look of reproach instead landed on the little dog's face. "—You'll be there too."

He walked across the street deliberately as the wind swallowed individuality's very own distinction.

"Name one thing you would honestly be thrilled to pick up at this flea market right now— anything at all. Can be weird, just be honest."

"A new tie. You?"

"Hm. I've been searching for the perfect frame for this tiny painting I did. No larger than my thumb. Everything I've seen just doesn't match the feel. Then again, I've only been looking a week so—"

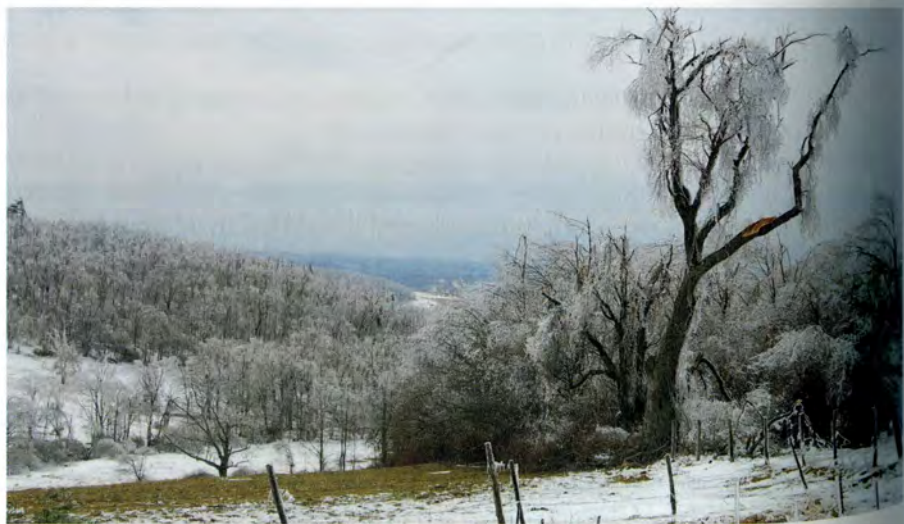
"So—"

"So the quest continues! Tell me, what is it you do?"

"Corporate management. I basically go into the different departments of the company and see what works and what doesn't."

"Ooo. So you must be crazy busy. You're pleased?"

"Yeah it's great. I'm always moving, never stationary at one desk or one office. I'd die."



Carmen Henriquez

"Me too. I think I'd die if I was inside all day. Which is why, initially, I was so nervous to move here. I thought so much was done indoors but, the weather here is amazing and I've biked everywhere!"

"So, Minnesota then?"

"Yep, Minnesota— my family has lived there since the first ones came over from Norway. Cow people. I'm literally the only person to have moved away in something like thirty years."

"Did you know anybody?"

"A college roommate actually— I live with her now. Here wait— answer me this—" The popsicle was stained red. "What falls down but never gets hurt?"

"What—"

"No thinking! Just answer! First thing that comes to mind!"

"Ah—"

"You're thinking again!" She danced beside his side, one hand on bike, other on stick. She swiveled her upper lip and nose, narrowing both eyes while half cocking one, as she pointed in the air like a modern-day female Socrates.

"A—"

"Time's up! Rain. The answer is rain. Rain falls without consequences or fear. So what about you, my new friend? Have you fallen and not been hurt?"

"I'm not one for metaphors I don't think."

"Nope. You're playing wrong I'm not letting you get away that easy. You need to—what's the word—"

Gel tipped fingers snapped.

"—ah! It's like 'have no limits'—but that's not it, no!"

Collapsing in breathless laughter, she was cool and smoky over her bicycle.

"I barely even know dude, but, I can tell you need to—lighten up! You must

carry many thoughts with your head, many worries, no?!"

Chief laughed too, this time grabbing at her arm and naked popsicle stick. She danced sideways and shrieked, bicycle nearly careening into the street as the front rubber tube sagged curbside.

"Jesus!" Chief lunged for the girl and bike in what would be a heroic act, if the oncoming cars weren't stalled by the nearest red light.

"Second time! Not a good start for you hun— you need to work on your game."

In college I received the texts, the screenshots, the phone calls.

Do you see what your father does to your mother? I'm not trying to cause trouble, but your dad is really unfair to your mom.

An ex-girlfriend of mine once asked: *You think your mom and dad would ever get back together?*

Honestly, that'd be pretty sweet if you think about it, but, I think without signing the prenup and all, my mom's pediatrician salary and Tim's government checks he's been cashing in since the four and a half months to the day my mother said *I do*, the benefits wouldn't split too evenly. That's what you get for going along with organized religion. And that's why, if I ever get married, which I'm not as of now, I'll be signing that piece of paper.

How do people just fall out of love like that? I guarantee they still love each other.

Every once in a while when my dad and I go out, he'll get hammered and start talking about her. I don't think he's ever gotten over the fact that four months after their divorce, she started dating my stepfather— still in AA mind you. *You're not even supposed to date while in AA!* He talks this way as he slugs whiskey after whiskey and finally switches up to beer. *I'll find her again. I swear I will, but I mean I haven't been Catholic in years, so, maybe it's a false hope.*

He got two DUI's in a span of two years, and Tim hasn't taken a sip in six. My dad looks better though —by far— because defeat makes a person sharp, makes them always have something to prove. Unearned satisfaction on the other hand, well, makes me think of a woman's ass and thighs when she hasn't worked out in a while—what's it called? My mom says, *She's got saddlebags.*

You don't just lose something, sorry, someone— and expect to find them again unless of course they want to be found. But people are too proud for that. Usually.

There's nothing like a building with no elevators and of course his destination was ten flights up. He buzzed three times before the door's electric barrier lifted, and he began moving up, up, and up.

Outside No. 10 he paused, wishing he had a cigarette. Fifteen seconds passed and he put his hand down. Maybe he wouldn't knock after all. In that moment, a gray haired woman opened the door.

"I'm looking for a Stephanie Larsen."

"Larsen? Honey, I think you've got the wrong address."

Looking again at the address and the flyer, he turned away back toward the stairs. He opened the door and nearly toppled a young woman carrying groceries.

"Oh my—"

But she stopped midsentence and stared.

"Oh my—"

He helped her up.

"How did you—?"

"You sign all your pictures: McDougal. Not with your last name. I didn't realize till I saw in the subway—"

"I really thought you wouldn't find me again."

She smiled. She took a step to the left and he saw the inscription.

They were on floor number 9.

Jesus! You're gonna knock me over dude!!!

He wasn't even finished opening the cab door before a biking girl slammed into the side then tipped off her bicycle as the tire skirted the sidewalk edge and into the street and—

Oh SHIT—I—

He grabbed at her body as she barricaded him in the backseat.

Jesus let GO OF ME!!

Wriggling to be free, the girl on top of him thrashed like a fish in osprey talons. She shoved an elbow and whacked him in the nose—blood instantly gushing.

UGHH! Let— oh my GOD I'm so sorry I didn't mean to—

It's fine no, I'm sorry this is my fault!

No I— ahh shit I—

*Hold on I have tissues! In my back poc— oh shit no, ah damn it, no I don't!
Here— use my shirt—*

The twisted pair spilled halfway outside the cab, her blouse halfway up her torso as she attempted to left the edges to his nose.

Oh geez this is all my fault—

Hey, hey you two out of my car now! You, bleeding boy—you realize how much this gonna cost me? I charge you extra!

She began to laugh now, still on top of him.

Hey, what's so funny there miss!? Miss—

Give him a break— I could sue YOU for making contact with this cab door— I say free rides for all and no time in court!

No, no you can't—

I can and I will. Actually, I'll call my lawyer right now!

No miss I—

Hey, man it's fine I'll pay chill— miss it's okay— here— \$50 cash, that good?

Yes— now get outta my cab!

Chief handed the cabby his money but before he drove off, grabbed Chief's arm and whispered, "Maybe don't say bye-bye to her so quick, man. I could listen to that laugh longer."

She was still laughing as she gave him a hand to get out.

What did you do that for? I had him right where I wanted him.

Nah, better to pay him off.

Anyways, that \$50 should be in my pocket for almost pancaking my body.

I could say the same—do you like crooked noses?

You—alright fair enough Hammurabi—

I'll make it up to you though.

Sure you will...how do you plan on doing that?

Well where are you off to?

The Brooklyn Flea actually. And you?

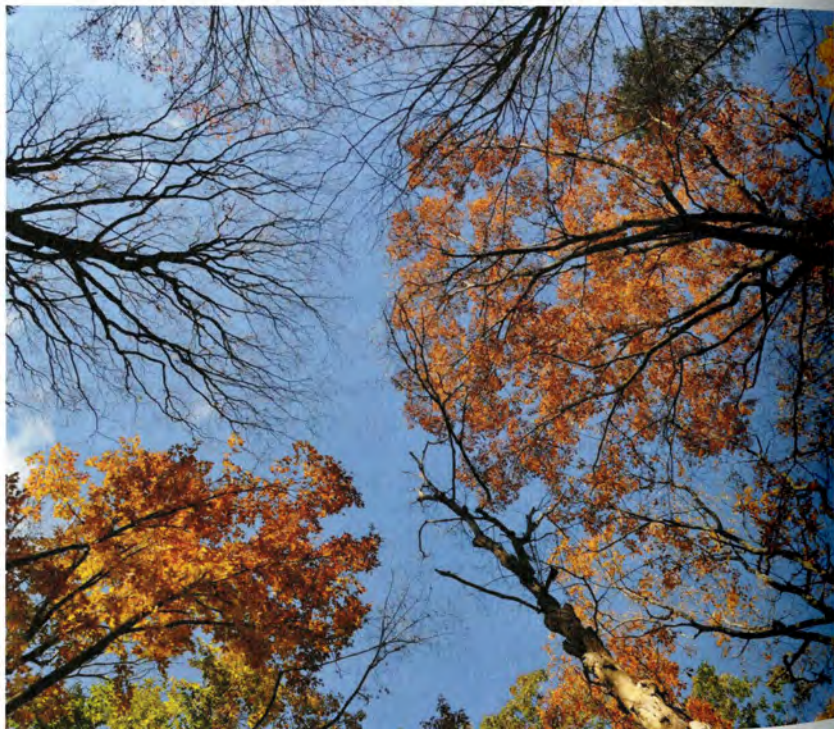
This might be your lucky—or very unlucky—day because, so am I. I'll escort you—if you'd like.

I think I'd like that.

By the way, what's your name?

Stephanie.

It was the first time he ever took advice from a stranger.



Lisa Fay



Lisa Fay

Excerpt from "The Magnificent Mil"

By Brian Spiess

Overshore was a small, quiet little town on the very edge of Rhode Island. A place of small merriments, quiet joys, and a large, expansive beach on the easternmost border of the village. The time was late May, a most exciting month for Overshore, when the sun was just starting to peak out over the clouds of rainy April and people were starting to exchange their cardigans and blue jeans for t-shirts and shorts. After all this time, the beach was once again open for business, the stores were preparing for the ever-popular "Big Summer Blowout," and the children were squirming in their school desks, about to explode from the anticipation for summer. Summer was a magical time for the small town of Overshore, a time when the sun shone all day and the people smiled and danced along the seashore. And judging by the recent nice weather and the reports of a strawberry moon coming soon, this would be a summer the citizens of Overshore would not soon forget.

But this year was different, for in a strange turn of events, summer came early for Overshore.

That specific year, summer came on May 31, at precisely 12:06 in the morning.

At that time, a man by the name of Milton Aberdale was living in Overshore, and had made his living as a struggling stage magician for four years, seven months, and approximately twenty-four days. It was that specific summer that saw him make a significant career change overnight, and learn about a whole new world just under his nose...

In Milton Aberdale's experience, birthday parties always meant good money for magicians. In Overshore, they were usually large affairs, many people showed up, and if you were lucky, you could get a gig at one hosted by a wealthy family. Fortunately for himself, Milton was the only magic-man in town, and his act had a certain positive repute, so whenever a party of this

magnitude rolled around he could expect a somewhat-large pay. The day of the party was a pretty ordinary day for Milton, as when it started he went through it the same way he went through almost every day. In fact, he had a certain checklist which he followed to map out his morning routine:

- 7:00 - Wake up
- 7:15 - Breakfast
- 7:45 - Get dressed, brush teeth, comb hair
- 8:00 - Take inventory of magic kit
- 8:15 - Practice the act
- 8:50 - TBD

Milton would follow this checklist every time a gig rolled around— it was a tradition, after all, and traditions were to be honored on the day of a show. The sacred days were getting rarer and rarer, and therefore all the more valuable for the young prestidigitator. It seemed not many people were in need of a bit of magic in their lives anymore. Nevertheless, Milton continued to soldier on, not knowing in the slightest the wonders he was soon to see.

The celebration itself took place on May 30th, during a sunny afternoon in the West District of Overshore. The district belonged to the mostly wealthy and elite of the small town, and Milton was most excited to entertain their children, bring the beauty of magic and mystery into their young hearts— and a little to dip into the seemingly infinite resources the parents had to offer. Slipping into his magician's getup and starting up his "Magici-Van"— a converted van he had owned for several years decorated with his name and several "magical" illustrations— he started off for the birthday party, hoping he would get there early.

a man once asked/we've been so sad

By Shane Brennan

a man once asked
me (of all people!)
how to make it to
Shangri-la,

so I told him:

- (1) chopped fruit;
- (2) brandy;
- (3) cane sugar, and;
- (4) Spanish red wine;

mix thoroughly, garnish with orange slice (optional)
;and when he complained, I could only say:

"Ay dio[nysu]s mio!"

we've been so sad
so let's just get married,

(screw the priest!) my brother's an ordained minister,
"And you better not ferget it prrfessrr!";

won't invite our parents
neither;

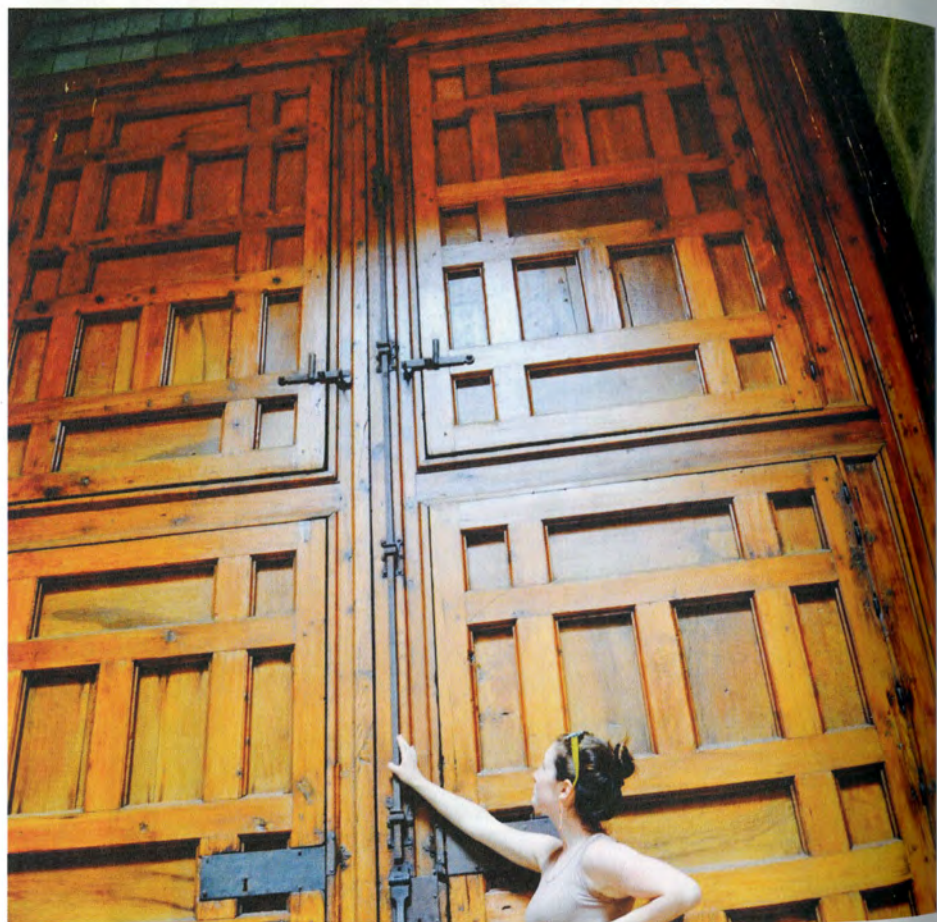
and we can get divorced
when we're bored,
I be trothed.



Nina Godfrey



Lisa Fay



Bernadette Hogan

The King of Castle Hill

By Raquel Medina

There was a song my mom used to sing to me before bed. It went something like: *tu puedes sonar en lo que quieres ser real*. You can dream up what you want to be real. I never got that. I mean, we have everything right here.

I don't mean to brag, but I'm rich as fuck. We live in a mansion— a palace, really. You should see the place all done up for Christmas. Ten times better than those wannabes in Westchester. The tree, man. The tree my brother, Santo, picks up is always the best fuckin' tree of them all. It's mad tall and shit and fluffy. Like it makes you wanna hug it or something, but you can't because all the prickles. It looks great against the hardwood floors in our mansion... I mean, palace.

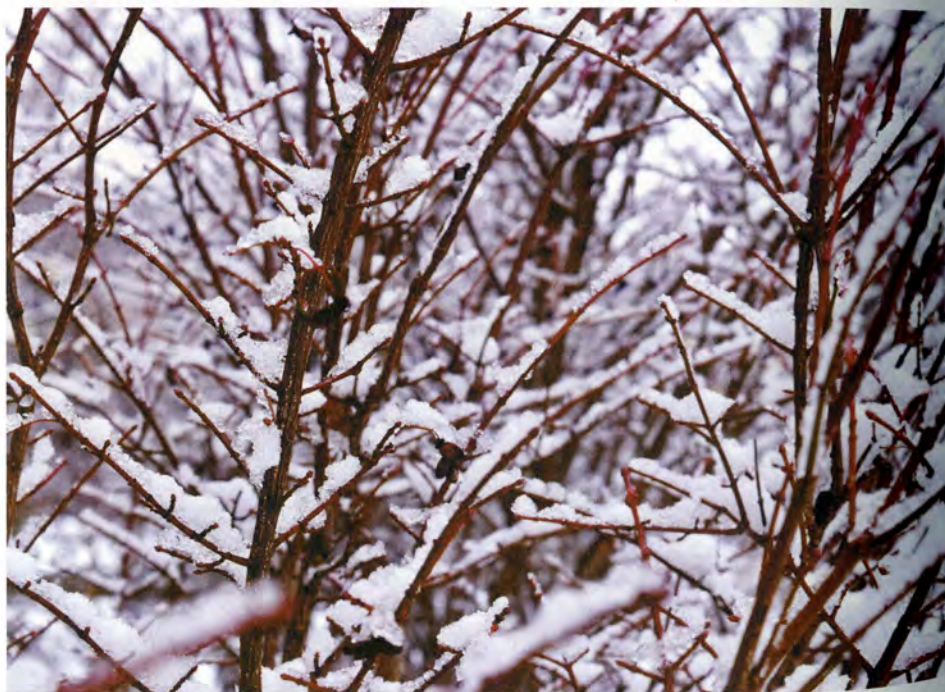
Thing is, people misunderstand where I live. I'm the kid that lives on Castle Hill. I mean, the name fits it because, like I said, we live in a palace. Because we're rich. People tend to think of me as exotic because I got this glowing skin and green eyes. People say I look like something outta Narnia and, hey, I agree. It fits because this is a magical place.

Lemme break it down for you. My mom is the best lady in the whole court. She's as white as it come, so people never guess she's Hispanic. She got green eyes like me. Her flan is amazing and so are her *pastelillos*. Can't choose which is better. She says she has a magic touch when it comes to cooking. That's truth. But she never cook much because she can't trouble her delicate fingers with such nonsense. That's why we always get our food from the outside chefs. They even know we're so important that they only charge us a dollar forty nine for the Fiery Doritos Locos Tacos. Now, that's special treatment, I gotta say.

Then there's Pops. My Pops wasn't like her or like me or Santo. He was black as a chunk of coal. He used to walk home from work, toothpick hanging out of his mouth, and sometimes bring me and Santo "trinkets" from the outskirts of Castle Hill. Santo would be like: "Pops, what's a trinket?" and Pops would be like: "It's a fancy word people in far off lands like Westchester use." And Santo and me would shrug our shoulders and take the magic cubes

in our hands that could tell how many pet dragons we'd own in the future. Pops said these magic cube predictors were called "dice." (Well, that's the common-folk name for it). Santos always lost these magic cube predictors and Pops always had to be buying new ones, which he always reminded us was a hassle.

But like I said, I'm rich. Rich as fuck. And everyone goddamn knows it too. Like, when I walk down the street in my polished Jordans, Lupita, the lady who works at the royal *mercado* at the corner of Castle Hill always be giving me free egg muffins. She's always winking and telling me that she likes my shoes. I tell her I like them too and that they were very expensive and that Pops got them for me last Christmas. And then she always looks up at me with her big-ass eyes and says *pobrecito* as she pats my shoulder the way my mom would do whenever I got a scrape on my knee at the enchanted jungle-gym.



Christopher Mitchell

Actually, everywhere I go in these parts, people be looking at me strange. Some chick in my magic class, you know where you make shit explode and pick apart the insides of toads that belonged to evil wizards, gave me a tray of *tostones* and told me to tell mom that her family offers their condolences. I don't even know what a condolence is, but those *tostones* were mad good!

Thing is, I know why people give me and my brother weird looks. It's because they jealous of us. I mean, who wouldn't be. I would be too. Like, our palace even has a white gate around it and a security camera my mom got some peasant to fix the other day. It's real nice. Like people probably see that and think, wow. That's the castle on Castle Hill. It's true. It is. I think the other reason why people started looking at us weird and sending us trays of *tostones* was because of that day a couple of months ago.

That morning, I got up and brushed my teeth as usual—gotta keep the image fresh, you know. And as I was walking down the street to the school where all young princes gotta go, some chick comes up to me, asking me about the battle. There's a big battle, you know, happening now. There's black knights and white knights. My Pops was the proud black knight of Castle Hill. This chick's dad was part of the Castle Hill black knights, too. My Pops and her dad were friends.

So I tell this chick not to worry, that all is good on the battlefield. And she believes me because I think she had a crush on me. At least that's what my black friend, Sean, said. I would too, if I was her. I mean, who wouldn't want to date a prince? So she smiled this big, dumb smile at me and told me that she'd see me later in magic class. Everything was pretty normal that morning. Castle Hill was looking fine as fuck with its little tree next to the fire hydrant.

Thing is, about the battle, I'd always wanted to fight. My Pops said that I was a fool for wanting to because people die and shit. Well, duh. It's a battle. I wanted to be a black knight so bad, but Pops used to tell me: "Boy, don't be getting mixed up in the battle. You won't fit on either side, so best stay out of it!" Pops would always get real mad when I brought up fighting. He never liked any of that and told me that he was only a black knight because it was obvious. I didn't care. I still wanted to fight.

So this day, I'm feeling very brave. This day, I'm feeling like I could slay a dragon. I could save the chick in my magic class. I could be crowned king of Castle Hill because, this day, I wanted to fight a white knight.

I met my friend, Sean, behind the enchanted-jungle-gym.

"You got the stuff?" I asked him as he poked around his bag.

"Yeah. It's here," he whispered as our magic teacher walked by, not noticing us.

"Good."

"What exactly do you wanna do with all this stuff?" he asked.

"The point is to make a big deal, Sean. The point is to make people see us!"

"Ok, ok!" he shrugged. "When do we do it?"

"Whenever. Right now. I don't care!"

"Ok, I can't do now. I have class upstairs now," Sean said.

"Fine. I have class now too. After lunch we go." I extended my hand for Sean to shake. Real knights do shit like that. Thing is, Sean wasn't exactly sure if he wanted to be knight. He was flakey like that. But he shook my hand anyway.

"So..." he began.

"I'll see you later. After lunch," I said, running up the stairs.

Lunchtime was always a mess. Chicks were always dancing to Drake or Yeezy on the blacktop, I guess for the next ball they were going to be invited to. Chicks loved the balls at Castle Hill. They'd get all dressed up in glittery clip-on diamonds and fancy dresses that exposed as much of their legs and back and chest that their mothers would let them. Their dads never looked happy as their escorts would pick them up at their doors and lead them to the ballroom on the second flood of this here building.

But this lunchtime, I didn't care about paying attention to the dancing chicks on the blacktop. Me and Sean had a mission.

"You got your bag?" I asked Sean.

"Yeah. It's here."

"And the shit's still in there?" I asked.

"Yeah, man. Right here."

"Good."

"What...what now?" he asked.

"Follow me." Lunchtime was almost over and me and Sean had to make our move. We snuck behind the enchanted-jungle-gym again and crouched over his bag.

My Pops always used to tell me not to ever go behind the enchanted jungle-gym. He said it was okay to play in the enchanted jungle, but it was never good to walk too far beyond it because bad things happen. I'd ask him what kind of bad things and he'd say that it wasn't a place for kids because that's where the bad black knights go to do illegal dealings. I found it crazy because there couldn't be no bad black knights, but Pops said there's a little bad in everything, even in things you love. But that day, me and Sean weren't kids and we were ready to face the bad. We were ready to fight the white knights and so we ran through the enchanted jungle-gym to the other side.

"You sure this is a good idea?" Sean asked, a little shaky.

"Damn, *muchacho!* Calm down."

"It's just that I don't want to get in no trouble!" Sean said in a loud whisper.

"We won't. Hand me the stuff."

As Sean was going through his bag to get the stuff, a white knight happened to walk by.

"What are you kids doing?" the white knight asked, coming closer to us.

"No-no-nothing..." Sean stammered.

We never really saw that many white knights because they were usually off busy fighting the black knights and couldn't be bothered by little princes like us.

"I said," the white knight repeated, "what are you doing?" His pale face was turning red and he made circles around us. "What's in the bag, boys?"

"Oh my god!" Sean was crying.

"If you don't tell me now, I'm going to rip the bag open myself!" screamed the white knight, still making circles around us.

"Say something!" Sean whispered to me, half crying like a little bitch.

"Please!"

"Sir..." I began. "It's really nothing."



Julia Franco

"I'll give you until the count of three to open that damn bag all the way!" the white knight was yelling. "One... TWO...TH—"

"What's going on here?" my Pop's voice said from behind me.

"Pops!" I shouted. "What are you doing here?"

"No, Ernesto." Pops was mad, I could tell. "What are you doing here with Sean? Did I not tell you a hundred damn times to stay away..."

"Who are you?" the white knight interrupted.

"This boy's father," Pops said, pointing at me.

The white knight looked at Pops. Then he looked at me. Then he looked back at Pops and laughed.

"You're joking," laughed the white knight. He kept looking at me and back at Pops. I was used to getting looked at and all because I'm the fucking prince of Castle Hill and all, but this white knight was making me feel uneasy.

"What's going on here?" another voice said from behind. It was another white knight.

"Oh, hey. Luke, look," said the first white knight, pointing at me and Pops. "This guy says this kid is his son!"

"Ok, and..."

"He don't even look like him!" The first white knight laughed.

"John, I..."

"HE'S JUST A STUPID N—!"

"Pops, what does n— mean?" I asked. But Pops had lowered his head and I couldn't tell if he was really mad or really sad.

"Not now, son," he whispered through tight teeth.

"Whoa! John. You've had a long day. Maybe you should get back in the car

and..." began the white knight named Luke.

"It's people like you that ruin places like this," white knight John was saying to Pops. "It's people like you who lie and lie and make it hard for the rest of us."

To be honest, I didn't understand what white knight John was saying. We were the rulers of *the* Castle Hill. If I was a prince, Pops was the king. He had no right talking to Pops that way, but Pops wasn't saying anything back. You'd think the king of Castle Hill would have said something or hit the white knight or something! But Pops just stood there with his head down.

"I'll ask it again!" screamed white knight John. "Who's kid is that?" he said, pointing to me.

"John, we'd better go," white knight Luke said, grabbing white knight John's shirt. But white knight John pulled away.

"He's mine. And that's the truth," my Pops said in that low voice that he used whenever mom got mad at him because he knew she'd forgive him.

"Liar!" screamed white knight John. He stopped screaming for a second.

"Where'd the other kid go?" he asked, turning around.

Sean was hiding behind his big bag, knees tucked to his chest. He was shaking and crying like a little bitch.

"Get up, you!" shouted white knight John.

Poor, Sean. He was also a prince, after all, and wasn't used to people yelling at him like that. If only white knight John knew that Sean's dad was Lord of the Electric Appliance Repairs, he would've spoken to him different. As Sean got up, white knight John's face get redder.

"You mean to tell me this boy isn't your son and that one is?" he yelled. "What kind of game are you playing here?"

"I ain't playing no games, sir," Pops said, head still facing down. I wanted to yell at the white knight for Pops. I wanted to tell him that my Pops was the

king and that he needed to bow down to him. I wanted to shout out that Pops was always doing good because he always found enough time to pick up more magic cube predictors for me and Santo. But I felt something in the air that told me the timing was off and that I should stay shut up.

"But I think you are!" laughed the white knight John. "You see, no one like you can have a boy like *that*," he said pointing at me again. He pointed at Sean who's dark skin had turned pale and sweaty. "You tell me that's your kid and I let you go."

"That is not my child," my Pops said softly. "Sir, my wife is..."

"Lies! You see, Luke," white knight John was saying. "This is what young apprentices like you have to learn. These people are liars!"

"John... I really think we should go..."

"You want to lose your job?" white knight John snapped back.

"No, sir."

"Then shut up and learn the ways!" he turned around and placed a foot over Sean's bag. "Is this your bag?" he asked Sean. Sean nodded, covering his face with his hands. White knight John looked back at my Pops.

"This is your son. You should know what's in his bag. If you don't answer me correctly, you're going to be very sorry."

"He is not..."

"What's in the bag?" asked white knight John.

"I dunno," Pops said.

"Liar! Is it drugs? Marijuana?" white knight John asked, wiping dirt on Sean's bag with his dirty boot. "Is it a weapon?"

"I can't say," Pops whispered.

"WHAT'S IN THE BAG?" white knight John yelled.

The words I said next kinda came outta nowhere. I don't know why I said them or why I was even talking, but they just came out because I couldn't let the stupid white knight get to my Pops, the king of Castle Hill. "You stupid white knight! You don't have to scream at my Pops like that. That's my Pops and all that's in the bag are stupid posters that me and Sean made after school yesterday because we wanted to be a part of—"

I don't think I know if the words I said were good. I guess not because white knight John pulled out this shiny, black thing that made three really loud popping noises. It was the noise mom makes when she's grinding *ajo* for the nights she makes dinner at our castle. Except a million times louder. And the noise hurt as it passed over my right leg. But I can't complain much because the noise hit Pops the loudest. It hit him right in the neck.

And the noise was red as it came back out of him and splashed on to me and Sean. Bright red. And as Pops lay there in a puddle of red noise, white knight John pulled out the posters me and Sean had made from his bag.

"The fuck is this..." I heard him say as he threw our posters down on the sidewalk and got into his car and drove away. Red noise started to soak our posters.

"I'm calling an ambulance," I heard white knight Luke say. But his voice sounded like it was coming from a tunnel or a far off land like Westchester. I could feel the burn in my right leg like a thousand fire-breathing dragons had just bitten me and then sprayed their fire on me. Sean's eyes were closed and he was like sleeping on the ground. The next day, he told me that he had passed out and couldn't remember what had happened after the pops came out of white knight John's jacket.

Pops was also on the floor with his eyes closed. He must've passed out too.

The next few days, mom couldn't stop crying. Me and my brother stayed in our room all day. We never got out of our pajamas. I had a big, white cast on my right leg. A lot of people came to our palace on Castle Hill, too. Even Abuela came, dressed in all black. It was nice to see her again. Last time I saw her was when Tio Julio died.

Anyway, that's why people stare, I think. I mean, not every day do you see a young prince like me who's already been in battle. Chicks dig it. Guys get jealous. I tell them Pops passed out, but he'll be better. He gotta be because Castle Hill needs its ruler back.

Sometimes my mom gets mad at me. She's been getting more mad with me every day. "*Ya tienes que parar esta fantasia,*" she tells me. "You're too old for this, Ernesto." I don't know what she's talking about because none of this is a fantasy. It's real. Our palace is real, the outside meals prepared by the chefs are real, the school balls are real, and the Christmas tree that we got here with presents I put under it for Pops is real too. And guess what I got Pops this year? I found some stones shaped just like those magic cube predictors under the enchanted-jungle-gym a couple of weeks ago. So I picked those stones right up and put them in my pocket. In magic class we learned about stones and rocks and how some are as old as dinosaurs! I thought I'd make Pops his own magic cube predictors out of those stones because maybe they'll help him predict when he'll wake up. I wrapped them myself, too.

The other day some white knights were over. They had questions to ask me about that day with Sean and Pops and the other two white knights. One of them, named Mark, asked what Sean and I had written on the signs. I told him that the one I made read: "Imagine a better world." He asked me what that meant and I just told him that I had seen it on TV and I liked the way it sounded. I really liked it. He asked me what channel I had been watching and I said channel 360 where they always show the black knights and the white knights in the street, holding signs and yelling about whose lives matter more. It was all a low-key part of the battle plan. I told this white knight that my Pops never wanted me to fight, but he never said anything about holding up a sign. That was the closest to battle that I could get. Well, I ended up in the middle of a battle, but that was never what I thought would happen. The white knight nodded and wrote what I said down.

When they left, they told us Merry Christmas because tomorrow is Christmas Eve. My mom thanked them for coming and asked me and Santo if we wanted to help her hang up the Christmas lights outside. We were late with putting them up this year.

As we were helping her hang the lit-up lights from our balcony, a few cars went by. They had red and blue lights on the tops of them. They were driving by pretty fast. Maybe they were chasing dragons or something like that. And I wondered if they were black knights or white knights. And I wondered which kind of knight was protecting Castle Hill. And I wondered what kind of knight I was. And I wondered if I would get to choose the knight I'd be. And I wondered if being a knight mattered at all.

But then I remembered that I was a king. The king of Castle Hill.



Carmen Henriquez

To Reminisce

By Kathleen Larkin

I hope you think of me
every time you see a soft
morning sky and a
pair of doe-eyes.

Whenever a constellation
is visible or you hear a
soothing roar of thunder
When you put extra marshmallows
in your hot chocolate
or see a bright umbrella
on a gray afternoon.

I hope you see me in flowy yellow
sundresses, fresh linen
on your bed and the
hearty starter at your
local diner.

Whenever you think about
whether aliens exist or
you see a photo of a rocky beach
in California.

I hope the sound of slot machines
in casinos brings you back to
the days of walking hand-in-hand
with me.

But most of all,
I hope the last light
you turn off in your dark room
before going to sleep
reminds you of
all the epic love stories
we can still write together
if you came around.

Untouched

By Riana Ramirez

Last time you laid in my bed
I washed my sheets to wash away every single remnant of you
And I look at my own body and wonder if there are skin cells that are still un-
touched.

You see I have a lot to lose
I have everything to lose
So I still grasp onto that little bit of dignity I have left
Please don't take that away from me
It's the only thing I have control of me

Last time you touched my hand
I washed them under the sink with hot water
And I hope that the alcohol from the vodka bottles eliminates the germs on my lips
Because that's all you ever were
A bacteria growing from the inside out
And I envy the snake who gets to shed his skin
Because all I ever wanted was to become something new
Something you never knew

Last time you held me
I prayed for the rain to drown my body
So it can create new life in the earth
Because it wasn't creating new life in me
Science says we shed our dead skin
But how do I shed the deadness under my skin; it's layers deep
There's no amount of soap or chemicals to erase the sin from underneath
Sins I had to intention of committing
Intoxicated by the liquor,
But my passion of the flesh
My passion, my yearning

Last time you looked at me
I remembered I was a priceless gem,
Hidden away behind a glass,

Open for all to see
Glistening and shining
With your hands pressed against the glass, hoping for a way in
Tempted to break the rules of not touching the art
But I hope to be a priceless gem,
Remaining behind the glass walls,
Untouched.



Lisa Fay



Bernadette Hogan



Bernadette Hogan

Laughter Lines

By Julia Franco

I remember the note she left behind for me. That ordinary piece of paper ripped out of one of the old notebooks lying in the basement that no one had ever used.

"I'll see you in the future when we're older— when we are full of stories to be told. Cross my heart and hope to die— I'll see you with your laughter lines."

That was years ago but that note remains untouched on my kitchen table in the apartment I shared with her— lingering there like a scent— the moment I touch it is the moment it vanishes into somewhere I can never follow. This is the last piece of her I've got. It's silly— this lined piece of paper with two lines of black pen in her tight curling handwriting— this last scrap of someone who filled every crevice of who I was. You'd think I'd have more— the hair that she shed that got lodged in the couch, the book she left intermingled with mine, the fork she never used, the toaster we brought together— but no. She took every last physical piece of herself and vanished.

I've pondered that note— wondered what she meant by it— both in the words she physically wrote and the meaning behind her leaving of the note itself. We loved each other— or, I thought we did. And if we'd stayed together, we would be full of stories to be told— stories with the other one as the main character. We would see each other with our laughter lines— the ones we gave each other.

Of course, I do have some stories to be told, some of them happy, most of them featuring myself as the star and the strangers as the strangers, and the laughter lines— if you could call them that— from laughing at myself and the circumstances life has wrought for me.

I think back over the days that preceded that dreadful Tuesday— what I could have done to make her leave. I've searched and scanned every line for some kind of sign— but all I've done is come up empty. I've stared into the endless void of the night sky, thinking and wondering for some shred of explanation, but nothing ever makes any sense. We were in love— I with her,

she with me. We didn't care what anyone thought— we knew what we had and I thought we what we wanted— to go forward and face the rest of our years together. We weren't perfect— but who is? I loved every minute— and I thought she did too.

But I think of that note and know that something wasn't what I thought it was— how could it have been? We'd said "I love you. I will love you forever". But now— now I don't trust that. I don't trust her. I don't trust her when I read what she wrote— that she'll see in me in the future.

When she vanished, she took every piece of physical evidence she ever existed— save that note. And she took a piece of my soul— long before she left. And I took a piece of hers— we had traded. So when she left, she took her piece of my soul— but I kept my piece of hers. That and that piece of her soul is all I've got of her and god, I don't want to let her go. After all of this time, I love her. I love her more than life itself and I don't want to let go of that. She left me with half her soul and half of my own. What am I supposed to do with that? Love another woman? With my hodgepodge soul? What could I give her? The half that's mine? The half of the previous girl friend? Half of each piece? God, that would be a train wreck. I can't do that. I don't need my piece back. I need her back.

She cut the picture of our relationship in half— and left a note as if it would fill in the other half. She could have said something, anything, even if it was "You're not the girlfriend I want." But instead she left a note and half her soul. God, I hate her for it. I hate her for making me love her and then she just destroyed me and left a phony note for a band-aid. I would take a long, loud, messy argument where we dig up the five years of shit and fling it all over each others' faces than this.

Now I'm here. It's me and all of my pieces and her note, the only things that matter in this apartment that sits as it was the day she left— feeling half empty. The home we shared is half empty. I'm living with a ghost— no, not a ghost. A ghost would mean there's something left.

I've got to do something with my life— for real. I can't keep going through

the motions, living the shadow of my life with her. I go to the same parks and the same job and eat the same food and pet the same cat— no, that was her cat and she took him too— and every last grain of cat litter. Everything without her feels hollow and empty. I don't want to be hollow and empty anymore. I've been hollow and empty for too many years.

I wonder what she's done with her life— what she's done every day since she left. She's probably happy somewhere with some girl or guy or whoever. Got a new job, a second cat, a house, a couple kids. I mean, she's the one who left. You don't leave if you're going to be the one wallowing in a half empty apartment. She has everything she's ever wanted. I wonder how many people she cast away on the way to the top. I wonder how many people she cast away before she met me. I wonder if whomever she has now knows what's she done. How many promises she broke.

I guess I never knew her. She knew me— probably too well. Knew every flaw I wore on my sleeve. She buried hers. Buried everything. I see that now. At the time, well, I don't know. But she knew that if she said she'd see me again, then god be damned I'd sit here with my stupid optimism and wait for her like a dumb dog. I'm not some dumb bitch. I can't be. Not anymore.

I miss her. I hate her. I love her. I never understood her. I need her.

Determined to take some sort of step towards something undetermined, I stand up from the spot on the couch I always sat. The difference is clear in the very structure of the couch— my side is sinking towards the floor while the other end— her spot— sits untouched, not knowing its occupant is never coming back.

I put on my shoes— the same ones that I've worn every day since I bought them— and that was because they were an exact replication of the ones that fell apart because I'd worn them every day since she bought them for me. And then I stop myself. This is another reminder of her. Something else she'd left. I'm not sure what to do with this realization so I simply find another pair of shoes in the back of a closet that hasn't been opened since long before she left. She left nothing else— of course.

I grip the door handle, taking a deep breath— about to break the pattern I've

lived since she left. I glance back at her note on the table. Forever unchanged.

"I'll see you in the future when we're older— when we are full of stories to be told. Cross my heart and hope to die— I'll see you with your laughter lines."

Maybe some day. But not today. I yank open the door, every fiber of my being telling me to go back— that she'll never come back if I leave. But maybe it was doing the same old thing that did me in. She was bright, spontaneous, fun, and I was the unchanging stick in the mud. I needed her to drag me out of the house of mud. Now I drag myself out and close the door behind me.

I turn a corner and another corner and down stairs and around a landing and down more stairs and around another corner and out into the dazzling sun. I'm not frantically searching every face in the crowd for hers. I'm not worried about her. She's gone. The memory of her face still burns, but a little bit less.

Children laugh, teens provoke pigeons, adults share coffee, I feel the sun on my face. I smile. The first real smile since that horrid Tuesday.

Today is Tuesday.

I laugh and linger. I vow when I get back to rearrange the furniture and buy a new toaster and adopt a cat and make the place feel less like a shadow and more like home. Afternoon fades to evening and dusk and finally when the first sunset I've seen since she left fades into nothing but a memory, I return home. Home. That's a good word.

I unlatch the door and walk inside and flip on the lamp that has sat neglected for years. I move to pick up the note— to banish the last presence of her from this place— but it is gone.

"I'll see you in the future when we're older- when we are full of stories to be told. Cross my heart and hope to die- I'll see you with your laughter lines."

On the other end of the couch, she sits— like she never even left. The cat winds around my legs like he'd never stopped.

I look at her face. She's older. Her face, though, is unchanged.



Nina Godfrey

The Summer I Was 18

By Demi Yoshida

A cover of clouds blanketed the night sky,
The endless grey and black mocked us from above.
There were no stars tonight, they never wanted to show themselves anymore.
However, our pleasure was not limited by the state of the sky.

Shaking water off our naked bodies,
We emerged from an ink black sea as the salt crystalized on our skin.
2am. Breathless, freezing, shaking; we collapse on the shore.
The backs of our heads buried in the sand, our faces gazing at the dark sky.

And just like Genesis,
There was light.
Circuits, lightbulbs, sparks, currents transferring from your fingers on to mine.
Warmth floods me.
I am reminded this is the summer I am 18.

Your lips were on mine
Hot chocolate, fire places, barbecues, sunlight;
The warmth was now a raging fire.

I was lit for you in every way.
I wanted to tell you all my secrets,
I wanted your light to scorch my skin.

But then you stopped.

Now I am left with nothing but sunburnt shoulders.
Tossing a glance through the chain link in a improbable world,
Where all good things come to an end.



Christopher Mitchell



Christopher Mitchell



Lisa Fay

My Best Friend

By Kathleen Larkin

Patient, understanding, complicated
Her mind runs like a faucet that someone
forgot to turn off and
leaks with afterthought splashes
of wisdom and insight

Thoughtful and intuitive
but blindingly brilliant and colorful
Her careful gaze and calculating mind
hide behind flirty long lashes and
a classic red lip

She has the heart of a poet and the
mind of a scientist
drawing conclusions and seeing
connections often unnoticed by
the less observant

Soft and honest like strokes of
acrylic paint on a fresh easel.
She's the look shared between two people
who want to speak to each other but are
both reluctant to start
She's the guiding lighthouse resting on
the rocky coast, reliably guiding lost
sailboats home

A perfectionist who enjoys navigating the
mess of the human mind
Wise beyond her years but has the wide
eyes and idealistic naïvety of a child

Stars in her gaze and head in the clouds but
keeps both feet planted firmly on the ground.

She's a dreamer with a practical
mind that tethers her to logic despite
her desire to be free of it

Sensitive and perceptive, my best friend
can be found in the gray fog that hangs
above the sea and in the delicate purple
shade of wisteria in a Japanese garden.

Her presence is felt in the sound of
wind chimes on a windy day and
under the shadow of night, inside the
curve of a crescent moon



Julia Franco

The Moss Blanket

By Shane Brennan

Paranoia's coffee displaced nearly half of Happiness' intoxicants that filled my head. The brackish liquid mixed itself thoroughly under my bouncing blonde hair as we streaked. If you could somehow peel back my hair, I'm sure you could enjoy a satisfying drink; this type of happiness was a heavy coconut rum, perfect for any coffee lover. If you so pleased, you could remove my brain and fry it up; the marinade would certainly complement the meat. But before you nosh on my cranial-steak, I ask of you one small favor: Leave a bur under the saddle of my head as its replacement. The subject matter matters not, as I am under the impression that what keeps the stream of human consciousness alive is neither a functioning nor efficient brain, but the spur of motivation to prove someone wrong about something that didn't even matter in the first place. That alone will keep the Christmas carolers a-caroling, the rioters a-rioting, and the soothsayers spitting sooth. So, while you fry the frontal lobes and freeze the remaining grey-matter for later consumption, add the brandy of Dionysus,¹ a dollop of Jim Morrison's marmalade, or the palpable stench of Ammit's breath into the cauldron of my head. Churn it. Transform it, as if by miracle,² into a thick vegetable gumbo; a true Witch's brew.

I wondered what concoction brewed between my thighs. My genitalia bounced as gayly as my hair with each stride. My pale skin, protected by angels' kisses, raced her dark flesh, proudly displaying its experiences, across the field; it was, in fact, maintained for the purpose of playings games.

I wondered what games she has planned for me.

When we reached the end of the field, we antagonized the metal fence with our presence. We hung off of it like the strategically placed bulbs of fat that hung off of our bodies and began thrashing about in unsynchronized intervals attempting to tear it down.

¹ No God kept a secret like Dionysus; he presented Zeus with wine but kept the good stuff for himself!

² Or, as if by magic. Most would argue that they are one in the same; however, religious types tend to disagree.

We failed. (Upon hiring a business consultant to analyze our efforts, it would have been concluded that at fault was the combination of poor planning and beyond horrid implementation. However, upon hiring a physicist, it would have been determined that at fault was the lack of force placed upon the fence. To optimize our efforts, he would recommend a day trip to the McDonald's Headquarters. We would surely gain mass quickest by inhaling everything down to the rejected sesame seeds which were just-not-tear-drop-shaped-enough to be befitting of the McDonald's bun.³ Though, perhaps, informative analyses of the situation, I would not have listened to either of them. Business consultants are bloodsuckers and physicists are cowards.)

Pleased with our efforts, we turned, showing the fence, business consultant, and physicist what could either be sweat dripping off our asses or premature morning dew glazing our cheeks and began our naked stretch back across the field. There was an audience greeting us at the other side of the stadium: a sea of sore thumbs, all of which were pointing towards the ground; our game did not please them.

Sadly, they were half-deaf, half-blind, and half-dumb. Each had less than half of their tastebuds left, the majority singed off by the special blend dark roast that they sipped each morning; ignorance made it especially hot for them. They had lost feeling in half of their arms, half of their legs, and half of their fingers.⁴

The crowd of thumbs, all uniquely identified by their fingerprints,⁵ sentenced us to our death. The business consultant and physicist, who were

³ O! but how these little seeds would dance with glee! Rather than being tossed aside never to accomplish their designated purpose in McDonald's patented Sesame Seed Life Cycle System,[™] which starts at the farm and ends at the happy customer, these golden seeds get to fulfill a greater purpose, one which even Mr. Ronald Mc-"Destruction"-Donald would appreciate: the demolition of Private Property (yes, with a capital P-P)! (I mean, the body is also Private Property is it not?)

⁴ A quarter of their fingers if you cared about doing the math correctly.

⁵ Individuality is important to them. In fact, the head thumb, who is the reddest of them all, made sure that I include this. It is imperative to understand that each thumb is special from its creation to its death, most commonly caused by suffocation—sadly, there isn't enough air up God's ass, the thumbs' second favorite vacation spot.

now flirting with the fence, interrupted their lousy attempt of setting up a threesome to blurt out a single collective laugh and then immediately proceeded with their actions.⁶ I have to excuse this outburst, however. Neither could justify this world past a few meaningless numbers; they would never understand our joy.

Why was it that we were so happy with the prosecution's decision? Well, in answering this, I'd typically refer you to Socrates himself; however, due to unforeseen circumstances, I will have to tell you myself: In a grave there exists no confusion, only the soft comforts of rotting wood, the rich smell of dirt, your thoughts, and some moss to retain the moisture.

⁶ It was a waste of an effort anyway. The fence had been out of the game for years. There was no possible way that the business consultant's supposedly 8-inch cock—and the size of his head most definitely justified this statement—could maneuver its way in. Furthermore, at the mention of size, the physicist became anxious. So, as expected, nothing would come of it. In fact, an argument arose instead. Unfortunately, I can only recall a piece of the dialogue and it is indeterminable who exactly said what, but it is of no particular interest to keep it confidential:

"I've never measured it, my ex-girlfriend wanted to!"

"I'm sure."

Rattle-rattle-rattle!

"I never said—!"

Rattle-chatter!

"What? Me? Why? I don't even have a ruler!"

"Doesn't your job entail that you at least have a protractor on you? Anyways, if we can't get a proper measurement then it's not worth it."

Cackle-cackle-rattle.

"And one to you too!"

Fly Away

By Elizabeth Miller

FADE IN:

INT. SIMONS'S HOUSE—HARLEY'S BEDROOM— NIGHT

An LCD, digital clock changes from 2:59 AM to 3:00 AM.

Beside it sits a sculpture of a bird made of scrap metal.

In bed, HARLEY (17) stares at his ceiling fan. He looks out his window as car headlights pass by. This transitions to...

INT. BUS—DAY

Harley watches a car zoom by. He sits alone on a noisy bus, staring out the window. Somewhere on the road, a car's tires screech. His iPhone buzzes and plays a ringtone. He looks down and unlocks the phone to read the text.

CLOSE ON Harley's phone:

The text reads: *AIDEN You could've stayed home.*

A notification pops up: *Ana's 19th Birthday is this week.*

He exits out of Messenger. The screen goes black with it.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL —HOMEROOM— DAY

Harley flips arbitrarily through a metal working text book, not absorbing anything. A STUDENT (17) sits in front of him.

STUDENT: Hey, Lee.

HARLEY: Hi

STUDENT: Uh, how're you?

HARLEY: Fine. I'm fine. You?

STUDENT: 'm alright... Y'know, considering.

Harley nods and goes back to flipping around his text book.

MS. MORGANO (mid-30s), the homeroom teacher, approaches him.

MS. MORGANO: Harley.

He looks up, takes a slip extended to him, and reads it.

CLOSE on the green slip: *Please send Harley Simons to Guidance Office Rm 325 at 11:45 AM. —Ingrid Witler*

Harley rolls his eyes and flips the paper over in his hands.

The bell rings. Everyone scrambles out of the room.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL—HALLWAY— DAY

Harley crumples the slip as he walks. He turns into his classroom and tosses it into the trash. The door shuts.

A clock's hand blurs, going around until it lands on 3:30.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL —METAL WORKSHOP— DAY

Harley sits alone, working on a sculpture.

A bush that's falling apart sits in the corner of the room.

Harley gets up to get a tool, and the bush catches his eye.

This transitions into...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL —METAL WORKSHOP— DAY— FLASHBACK

Flashbacks are denoted by brighter coloring.

Harley (16) has shorter hair. ANA (16), hair dyed in bright colors, sits beside him. They work on making the bush prop.

ANA: (beat) So, not only metal then, huh?

HARLEY: Nope.

ANA: How'd you learn t'make things?

HARLEY: Hobby.

ANA: Nice! I hobbled a lot, but never really stuck with— oh, crap. I have to go. Going to be here tomorrow?

HARLEY: Every day till I get kicked out.

ANA: You'd rather stay here than go home? Kinda dreary, stuffy, and—

HARLEY: Bye, Ana.

ANA: Alright, alright. Later, C3PO.

Ana gets up and leaves, shutting the door.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL —METAL WORKSHOP— DAY— BACK TO SCENE

AIDEN (18) enters and quietly shuts the door. He returns a metal sculpture to one of the shelves.

HARLEY: You doing okay? Have a ride home?

AIDEN: Doing the best I can... And yeah, my parents're picking me up. You?

HARLEY: Late bus.

AIDEN: No, not that. How're you doing?

HARLEY: (while working) I'm fine.

Aiden looks at him. Sensing the stare, Harley looks up.

HARLEY: (beat) What? I eat. I sleep. I look both ways before crossing the street.

AIDEN: C'mon, dude. Seriously. No offense. But weren't you two like... close?

HARLEY: So?

AIDEN: I mean... you sure you're okay?

HARLEY: I'm okay! Okay? Next person who asks is getting punched.

AIDEN: Okay, okay, Spock. (beat) Don't forget to lock up.

Aiden leaves the room and shuts the door behind him.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT— DAY

Harley walks across the parking lot towards his late bus. He looks at a large oak tree across the street.

EXT. PARK —DAY— FLASHBACK

Harley (17) sits underneath the oak tree, reading a metal working text book. A bag drops from above, and Ana (17) jumps out of the tree. She plucks the book from his hands.

HARLEY: Hey!

ANA: Whatcha readin'?

She reads the cover and throws it back to him.

ANA: Nerd. I just finished Math. Let's go get McDonald's in 50 seconds!

HARLEY: That's... oddly specific.

ANA: I'm hungry. C'mon! Then I'll spy on you and your metal works!

HARLEY: Is that why you decided to stick around me? Just to stalk?

ANA: No. For your sparkling personality!

HARLEY: Funny. Hilarious.

ANA: (teasing) Besides, who doesn't like a mysterious hermit who spends all his time in a dungeon?

HARLEY: Sane people!

ANA: No, but seriously. After you get past the entire "I'll kill you with a look" look, it's smooth sailing. Wouldn't hurt a fly, would ya? Besides, watching you work's just a bonus! So, can I?

HARLEY: No food in the metal room.

ANA: Pft. Rules. You can make an exception! I'll be extra careful!

HARLEY: Just like the other... (mockingly tries to count) times?

ANA: C'mon, R2D2! This time's for real! We'll eat in.

HARLEY: You're going to turn me grey, I swear to God.

ANA: See? It's sooo fun messing with ya!

HARLEY: You're impossible. Dork.

ANA: Nerd. Time's up! I'm drivin'!

INT. SIMONS'S HOUSE —CONTINUOUS— EVENING— BACK TO SCENE

Harley enters his house, making sure he's alone. He looks down the hallway: it's littered with beer bottles and cans.

HARLEY: Damn it...

He angrily kicks some of them out of his way as he walks.

INT. SIMONS'S HOUSE —KITCHEN— EVENING

The counter is also a mess. Harley clears a space and starts gathering ingredients, finding bottles in various locations. He puts a formed meatloaf in the oven and then gathers up the cans and bottles. He empties the full ones and then puts all of them in recycling. The oven dings. Harley wraps up his newly made meatloaf and puts it in a box. He snatches keys off the counter and shuts the door.

INT. MR. SIMONS'S CAR— EVENING

Harley drives down the road.

EXT. DANKO'S HOUSE —PORCH— EVENING

Harley rings the doorbell, box in hand. MRS. DANKO (40s) opens the door and smiles slightly.

MRS. DANKO: Harley... Come on in.

Harley enters the house.

INT. DANKO'S HOUSE CONTINUOUS—EVENING

They walk through the house and into the kitchen. There's a picture of Mrs. Danko, Ana, and a man, Mr. Danko, on the fridge. Harley sets the box on the kitchen table.

MRS. DANKO: You're sweet. Thank you, really. Want to share?

HARLEY: I wouldn't want to...

MRS. DANKO: Oh, no, Honey. Not at all. Besides...

She opens the fridge. It's practically bursting with food others have left. They

look at it and share a small laugh.

MRS. DANKO: You bunking over?

HARLEY: He, uh, hasn't been in for a while, so, no... thanks, though.

Harley moves around the kitchen with familiarity to get place settings. This transitions into...

INT. DANKO'S HOUSE —KITCHEN— DAY— FLASHBACK

Ana gets out three table sets.

ANA: —or you can stay, y'know, forever. You're here all the time, anyway. All we'd need to do is turn it into sleepovers every night.

Harley laughs, cutting up a newly made meatloaf. His knuckles on his right hand are noticeably bruised.

ANA: I'm serious, Harley. You can't keep living in your house.

HARLEY: Sure I can.

ANA: (sees his hand, beat) How'd it go last night? Y'know... talking? Your... are you alright?

HARLEY: (long beat) I punched him back, for once.

Ana stares at him, he looks back at her.

HARLEY: But it's okay. I'm okay. Livable conditions. (beat) Besides, I don't want to... y'know... intrude.

ANA: You wouldn't be—

HARLEY: Last night wasn't the best time.

ANA: It's never a good time...

HARLEY: He just needs time to get over it. Two years're more than enough...

ANA: And have you “gotten over it”?

Harley stays quiet.

ANA: Y’know, the time stuff they tell you is BS. It doesn’t heal. It teaches you how to cope, hopefully.

HARLEY: Guess my father doesn’t qualify?

ANA: He doesn’t, and neither do you. You just don’t get over something like a death. Trust me. It’s getting through, not over. In a non-destructive way.

HARLEY: You done, Dr. Phil?

ANA: (goes back to the original conversation) You’re never an intrusion. My mom’s fine with it. She’s wanted to give you the spare—

HARLEY: You told her?

ANA: (beat) Well I, I mean. She’s my mom, Harley! She’s a teacher! Anything you can say to me, you can say to her. (beat) Besides, this is... adult stuff. Have you ever told Ms. Witler?

HARLEY: (scoffs) I don’t do shrinks.

ANA: Counselors!

HARLEY: Same difference! What’d they do anyway? I’m almost legal.

ANA: (teasing) As in you can vote and get tried as an adult. Don’t get too wild, R2.

INT. DANKO’S HOUSE—KITCHEN—NIGHT—BACK TO SCENE

Harley and Mrs. Danko are finishing their meal. There is a third chair and a tangible absence.

MRS. DANKO: The black box results came in.

Harley looks up.

MRS. DANKO: Ana was going at 5 MPH. They think she was just going from a stop.

HARLEY: Oh. (beat) And the other driver?

MRS. DANKO: 80.

HARLEY: (getting increasingly agitated) Did they blow their stop sign?

MRS. DANKO: (beat) He didn't have one. It was the intersection a few streets down. The one with the hill on the left.

HARLEY: Did he get charged?

MRS. DANKO: Ana had the stop sign, Lee.

HARLEY: But he was—

MRS. DANKO: I know. I know... But, they're saying it was mishandled at the scene and inadmissible in court. (beat) Meaning they can't use it.

HARLEY: (trying to keep a lid on it) Right. Okay.

MRS. DANKO: You know, it's okay to be upset...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL —METAL WORKSHOP—DAY—FLASHBACK

Harley works on a nearly completed metal bird. Ana opens the door. Harley covers the bird with a scrap of metal.

ANA: You coming back with me now?

HARLEY: Huh? Yeah. I mean, uh, no. No.

ANA: (laughs) Dork.

HARLEY: Hey, that's my line!

ANA: Yeah, yeah, sure. Want me t'wait for ya, Nerd?

HARLEY: Nah, it's fine. I'll be over later.

ANA: Alrighty. If you're sure.

HARLEY: I'm sure. See you tonight.

ANA: You'd better come. I'll call the cops if you don't.

HARLEY: Drama queen.

ANA: I'm serious, Harley. If he's...

HARLEY: Yeah, yeah. I got it, I got it.

ANA: See you tonight, R2.

Ana shuts the door, snapping the screen to black.

BLACK SCREEN

Harley's buzzer and ringtone go off. There are quiet heart monitor and siren noises in the background. An EKG appears.

HARLEY (V.O.): Hi, Mrs. Danko.

RYLEY (V.O.): Is this Harley?

HARLEY (V.O.): Who's this?

RYLEY (V.O.): My name's Ryley. I'm Ana's uncle. (beat) Harley, I have some bad news. There's been an accident...

There's a sound of screeching car tires. The EKG and heart monitor flatline. The phone line disconnects, discontinuing the noise. There are a few seconds of silence, broken by the sudden sound of something smashing.

INT. MR. SIMONS'S CAR —NIGHT— BACK TO SCENE

Harley drives back to his house and puts on the radio.

“Chasing Cars” by Snow Patrol plays. The song continues to—

INT. HIGH SCHOOL —METAL WORKSHOP—DAY— FLASHBACK

Ana (16) enters and sees the only occupant: Harley (16).

ANA: God. What is this? A funeral parlor? Is it safe to work with sharp objects while tears cascade down your face?

HARLEY: Radio decided.

ANA: Sure it did. (beat) You’re Harley Simons, right?

HARLEY: Who’s asking?

ANA: Name’s Ana Danko. I need help with a set piece. They said to come down here and ask for you.

Harley watches her in silence.

ANA: Y’know, they should advertise this place more. Being in the basement doesn’t do it any favors. (beat) You helping me or not?

Harley just looks at her, silent.

ANA: C’mon, C3PO. Out of the kindness of your heart? Plllllease?

HARLEY: Wasn’t aware robots had hearts.

ANA: ...huh?

HARLEY: Nothing. Fine.

ANA: Great! Oooh!

She picks up one of the open magazines on the table and points at a sculpture of a metal bird.

ANA: D’you guys make this kind’da stuff?

Harley nods.

ANA: Really?! That's so cool!

HARLEY: (beat) So. You going to describe this piece or am I trying to mind read?

ANA: Oh! Right.

She laughs, pulls up a stool beside him, takes out a notebook, and proceeds to explain what she wants...

EXT. PARK —DAY— BACK TO SCENE

Harley approaches the oak tree with a little box.

Quick Cuts of flashbacks around the tree:

*Ana jumps out of the tree.

*Harley and Ana sit under the tree laughing.

*Ana drops her bag onto the ground below her.

*Ana shows Harley a picture of Mr. Danko.

*Ana whacks Harley's arm with his text book while he grins.

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*Harley attempts tree climbing.

*Harley and Anna play frisbee in front of the tree.

*Harley and Ana eat McDonald's under the tree.

*Ana jumps out of the tree.

HARLEY: So... uh. (clears throat) You... You said you liked this...took me a while... but, uh...

He takes the metal bird out of the box and places it in a hidden alcove of the tree. A picture of Mr. Danko resides there as well.

HARLEY: Happy birthday... Dork.

INT. SIMONS'S HOUSE—HARLEY'S BEDROOM—NIGHT

Harley looks at a picture of Mrs. Simons on his nightstand.

HARLEY: (long beat) Think she'll like it? I hope she does... You'll probably like her. You guys had a lot in common.

The door slams downstairs. Harley shuts his eyes.

HARLEY: Damn it...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL —HALLWAY—DAY

Harley pulls out a slightly crumpled green slip from his pocket. He checks the number on the door with the number on the slip. For a moment, he stands there, hesitant.

Then he knocks.

MS. WITLER (V.O.): Come in!

Harley opens the door.

FADE TO BLACK





ANA: And have you “gotten over it”?

Harley stays quiet.

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Burdock
2016