

Winter 2018

# Santa Clara Review, vol. 105, no. 1

Santa Clara University

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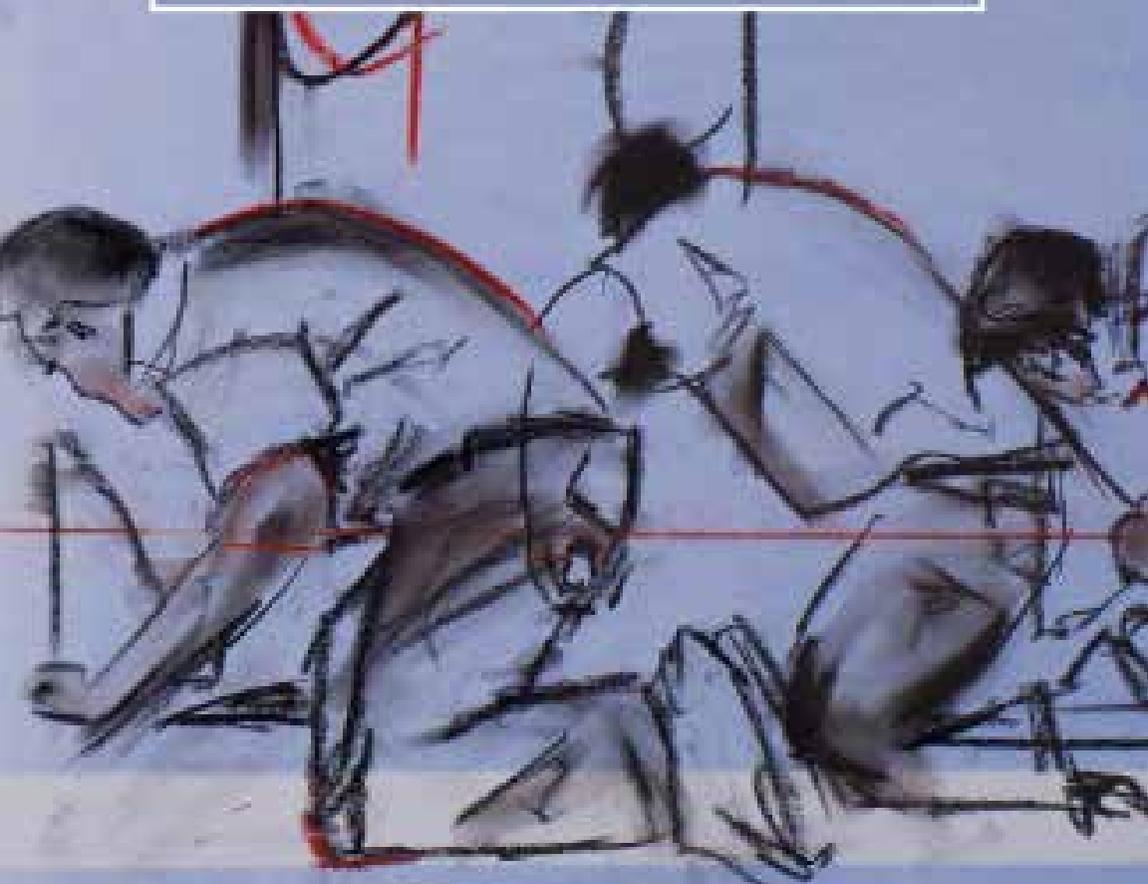
## Recommended Citation

Santa Clara University, "Santa Clara Review, vol. 105, no. 1" (2018). *Santa Clara Review*. 19.  
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# SANTA CLARA REVIEW

VOLUME 105 // ISSUE 01



FEATURING RAINA J. LEÓN



SANTA CLARA  
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REVIEW

# SANTA CLARA REVIEW

VOLUME 105 // ISSUE 01

COVER ART BY CIARAN FREEMAN  
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THANK YOU TO KIRK GLASER, TEDD VANADILOK, MATT CAMERON, AND ARCELIA RODRIGUEZ FOR THEIR CONTINUED ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT.

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The Review would like to recognize Juan Velasco for his work as interim faculty advisor this past fall. Juan, thank you for sharing your insight, sparking our imaginations, and staring into the void with us.

# RAINA J. LEÓN

SANTA CLARA REVIEW

featured poet

Raina J. León, PhD, CantoMundo fellow, Macondo fellow, Cave Canem graduate fellow (2006) and member of the Carolina African American Writers Collective, has been published in numerous journals as a writer of poetry, fiction and nonfiction. She is the author of three collections of poetry, *Canticle of Idols* (2008), *Boogeyman Dawn* (2013), *sombra: (dis)locate* (2016) and the chapbook, *profeta without refuge* (2016). She is a founding editor of The Acentos Review, an online quarterly journal devoted to the publication of Latinx arts. She is an associate professor of education at Saint Mary's College of California. Her research interests are poetry and youth agency, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and educational technology usage with pre- and in-service teachers.

# AT A CHILD'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

RAINA J. LEÓN

poetry

i see a friend green  
know, she's pregnant. a longing  
blooms in body rust.

in my body, two  
at the ultrasound, i willed  
them found twins

polyps

these growing polyps  
stood like bright shadow seeds,

death

a kind of harvest

the mothers die quick  
suddenly appear, full bloom  
then fade in shadow.

may i be mother?  
age

like a winding

river

stones and twigs

my marks

# FERTILITY HAIKU

RAINA J. LEÓN

poetry

bless the ovaries  
in their lopsided ache, how  
they push fatty folds

*the wheels on the bus  
go 'round and 'round through people.*

this  
world that is waiting

bless the gold flickers  
pulled through silk tendrils, velour  
to regard a throne

Syrian arms: copper  
headed twins. follicles grow,  
eggs split with two yolks

follicle outlines,  
"don't you see them? how they grow!"  
bombs primed to explode

gas crowns the child's head  
"little babies, they killed babies"  
tomahawks fly east

needle woman says  
his soldiers need to bash heads  
to conquer an egg

after iui  
deep belly burning rises  
pray cherry from ash

piss over barley  
another practice to find  
pregnancy stirring

1: could be early  
2: why trust stream mechanics?  
3: not enough. thin blood.

spring letter comes. tenured  
i want and do not have you.  
cut this cord or stay?

pictures flood Facebook  
ultrasound outlines hidden  
thumbs. mother? not me.

# MAE KNOWS LILITH SNAKE BELOVED

RAINA J. LEÓN

poetry

*and god created them*  
*male and female he created them'*  
one body      two in one      onetwo

spirit transcends conjurestatic  
earth rotates zil      lion      here our venom  
bring down      our balmy tongue

we have never needed the snake  
to see and carry  
al-khidr<sup>2</sup>      wetted valley prophet

genesis genesis genesis  
names us at the start  
fleshy fig at our throat yours      kissslowbite

though breath pound pound  
pound through      xenophyophore  
foreign bodies multinucleate genera

ripples in ribs  
all our music we have wanted  
water invasion of deep silence

marine desert flowers  
submergence insertion  
darkness around phosphorescent

bluegreenphantom  
instead we fork our black  
tongue      tell god      fate threads bone

# SUMMA PROSSEMICA

EMILY TOWNSEND

nonfiction

his whip marks her trauma sands  
no escape                      blackness in time      אָפֶּקֶט<sup>3</sup>  
scarred the babe  
  
mariana<sup>4</sup>  
beloved  
pucker wound

We have arrived at the discussion of intimacy. Intimacy is an inherent hunger for a connection with someone, whether it's by draping your body over theirs in the dark, shooting a text while waiting for your coffee in the morning, cinematically glancing at each other across a room during a party; therefore, we seek to understand the nature of intimacy through the following queries:

1. Is it necessary to speak to receive intimacy?
2. Is it essential to touch someone to achieve intimacy?
3. Is the act of intimacy meant to be shared with more than one person?
4. Is it irrational to reject intimacy?
5. Is it right to seek out intimacy?
6. Is it wrong to be jealous of those who have intimacy?

Article 1. Is it necessary to speak to receive intimacy?

Objection 1. It would seem that intimacy can be received wordlessly. Intimacy can present itself as electricity lacerating skin upon a soft brush, a direct explosion, a tightrope vibrating from one foot after the other.

Objection 2. Further, intimacy can be sparked in precisely three kisses between a 20-something couple on the corner of Hyde Street outside the Buena Vista Cafe, dressed in attire fit for a fancy symphony concert. The full moon beaming above the streetlamps lights their slick lips. Locals blur out of the bar, misstepping in unintentional dances toward the wharf. Lyft picks up the couple along with another couple, and they drive off somewhere while they remain in your mind, still locked in a tangle where you're sitting at the counter. You imagine them clinking cups moments before you arrived, cocooned in oak-aged whiskey and dark brown sugar, the scalding Irish coffee jagging down their throats. For a few minutes they don't speak, you think, they're replaying an orchestra in their auricles. They want to remember the night's sounds sonorously stored away in their mental scrapbook. The circumfulgence in their eyes

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to Genesis 1:27, which some believe identifies the creation of man and woman as equals, particularly Lilith, a first wife of Adam, who would not submit to his subjugation. In this poem, this verse is interpreted as validation of the creation of transgendered and two-spirit peoples in the Bible.

<sup>2</sup> is a figure, Servant of God, believed to be described in Chapter 18, verses 65-82, who interacts with Moses in the Qu'ran.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced kho-shek', the Hebrew word for absolute darkness

<sup>4</sup> Reference to one of the deepest places on earth, the Mariana Trench

reflect off the neon red and cobalt electric awning that coruscates into the window. Their hands one day will be wrinkled into each other, or maybe, maybe they won't last until then.

Objection 3. Further, intimacy can be found in the surprisingly overly intimate hug between two men by the window at the QBar, and you cannot tear your eyes away from them as you stroll down the sidewalks of Castro District. There is so much emotion in that embrace, and you wonder if it's because they're in a rare safe, public place, or if they're making up for lost time. You have never seen a hetero couple hug with that much love in such a casual setting. On television, gay characters amused you in their honest intimacy. These two men at the bar are in their real world, and they are not fiction, not scripted by some screenwriter to fold into each other; they're fully empowered to show off their affection.

Objection 4. Further, intimacy can be found hardwired in the passengers at Gate 8 in Oakland waiting on their delayed flight. A woman rests her head on her husband's shoulder, sighing. The plane has been overdue for three hours. You can't tell if she's impatient or grateful for this postponement. Maybe it allows her more time with this man before he has to attend a funeral for his mother. Maybe she's too tired to keep her head up. Maybe she had a really bad trip and wants to divorce him, but is trying to test him first. You can't stop watching them, for some ruse of sadness in her eyes, for a subtle drop-shift of his shoulder. Maybe they are lonelier than you are. But you refute this, because at least they have each other. You have no one to argue with.

On the contrary, it is necessary to speak to receive intimacy, because sometimes words verify the alternative to physical contact. "Tonight was beautiful" replaces the kiss. "I love you" replaces the hug. "I'm glad to be spending more time with you" replaces the leaning on one's shoulder. Verbal confirmation substitutes the somatic actions. But perhaps not all can be said or touched. Sometimes words are hallow. Sometimes tracing a finger along the blue veins of your wrist feels like a gray sky swollen with bolts of rain.

Reply to Objection 2. False starts are not only limited to Olympic swimmers or the two guitar strums in The Beatles' North American version of "I'm Looking Through You." You've seen dates fall into the pool before the gun shot and you've heard conversations overlapping the endgames for the relationship. That when you remove the script or restart the sheet music one has to improvise, and it will never be as polished as the initial product. "Just because lips have met doesn't mean hearts have joined. And just because two bodies are drawn to each other doesn't mean two people are right for each other."<sup>1</sup>

Reply to Objection 4. "It wasn't a thing I had consciously missed,

but having it now reminded me of the joy of it; that drowsy intimacy in which a man's body is accessible to you as your own, the strange shapes and textures of it like a sudden extension of your own limbs."<sup>2</sup>

Article 2. Is it essential to touch someone to achieve intimacy?

Objection 1. It would seem that it is not essential to touch someone to achieve intimacy. Sometimes human touch is extremely hard to come by. So one has to rely on other methods to feel close to someone.

Objection 2. Further, there is an unspoken agreement witnessed between an elderly Asian woman carrying a blue transparent bag full of bottles and a group of picnickers at Washington Square Park. Souvenir sweaters bundle up as pillows for those soaking in the sun. Hobos in grungy cargo shorts rummage through the trash cans along the outskirts of the park, sorting through quarters of food. The Asian woman spots a couple of crumpled LaCroix cans on their quilt and, wordlessly, holds her hand out to the lady. Without hesitation the lady gives her the cans with a warm smile and returns talking to her friends. The Asian woman silently pursues other picnickers if they also have bottles. What these tourists may not know is that by providing the Asian woman their recyclables, they are stretching her wealth five cents per bottle, keeping her alive, if only for a few hours more. The San Franciscans are willing to help, especially if it means maintaining clean streets and smaller landfills.

Objection 3. Further, the boyfriend glancing at his girlfriend in the topography section of the City Lights' Bookstore, who is flipping through *Nonstop Metropolis*, proves that you do not have to be touched to feel intimate with someone. They share a grin once she looks back at him. You wonder how long it took them to find each other, in this city or across continents, if their mental map created a path where they were going to someday wander into each other's atlases, combing through obscure landscapes that once never knew its tourists. There are no compendiums for this, no official map of darkened hachures of places they had individually frequented before they intersected each other's latitudes and longitudes. You wonder when their lexicons coalesced, when they started sharing the same legend of this massive gleaming globe. But then all the questions hit *you*, supraliminal to the fact that the visitors in your life have never become local. You seem to run parallel to everyone's slope, completely missing the junction. You imagine one of them returning to their place, their voice ringing down the hall, their eyes lit as they envelop. This is what you want. The symbol of a star to represent that you're home.

Objection 4. Further, a conversation with someone you haven't talked to in a long time can stitch you right back into that relationship. They're reminded that you are somewhere reachable, somehow, through

multiple email exchanges, an online chat room, a radio transmitter. Long-distance relationships depend on and fail at this.

On the contrary, your body wants to remember that it exists. You cannot tickle yourself because your skin recognizes your hands, the fingerprints it grew up with, and the nerve endings send messages to your cerebellum, that *hey, yeah, I know it's only you touching yourself, nothing to get excited about*. You can't surprise your brain; its calculations are far too accurate. When someone else touches you, it's a fresh discovery, another set of fingerprints to absorb. It's getting old, the stroking of your thumb inside your palm, pretending it's someone else's hand holding yours.

Reply to Objection 4. You watch a group of young ladies hug outside Stacks Restaurant, slightly boozed on pretentious mimosas, chatting about failed brunch plans and apologizing for not making enough time for each other. You watch a mom drop her son off at Everett Middle School, telling him to get over the fact that he has to make up eighth grade. You watch a brother light up as his sister steps off the Greyhound at the frenetic Financial District stop, asking if their father is doing okay. You can't help but be incredibly agitated that no one remembers you without your reminder.

Article 3. Is the act of intimacy meant to be shared with only one person?

Objection 1. It would seem that the act of intimacy is not meant to be shared with only one person. Depending on one person to supply intimacy is not sufficient enough. The proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" is proof that without some sort of enveloping intimacy among others, one might feel far emptier than they should.

Objection 2. Further, basic teens—boys in tight black jeans with ripped knees, a long white t-shirt and Vans; girls in denim cutoffs and Brandy Melville crop tops—taking pictures at windy Twin Peaks stamp the record of a group of people hanging out at this precise moment, wirelessly connecting lives in permanent documents. You can tell who is linked with whom by their physical distance: three girls have their own conversations while the guys flex for their Instagram, and there's a couple making out off to the side, seemingly embarrassed when their friends notice and holler "get a room!" They're the kind of people you see in music videos set on a dusky evening around a bonfire, exchanging sticks for marshmallows and skipping in the sand and wading into the cold Pacific Ocean. They're the kind of people you've always wanted to be involved with, the image of accepted inclusion, but you haven't found them within your own social network. Pop songs don't play in your head when you're out with your friends. It's just monotonous noise and static backgrounds.

Objection 3. Further, the advection fog swooping over the Golden

Gate Bridge hides its International Orange coat, concurrently disguising solo people edging the rails. A police officer bikes along the pedestrian sidewalk, watching for jumpers. Blue emergency phones and crisis counseling signs are staked on nearly every post, the yellow phone box accompanied by another sign that reads "THERE IS HOPE MAKE THE CALL."

This is something never shown in the panorama photograph of this famous bridge. The wide angle shot never zooms in on lost lives.

Someone, this invisible person, is always available to talk, to say hello, to keep you alive, and you'd never see their face. An impalpable force that somehow knows the chaos of your life, but they don't really know. No one really knows.

1,600 suicide jumps since 1937 and you don't witness a single one. It's not that you were expecting to see a body clamber over the four foot tall barrier, but you can feel it. The constant halo of despair and courage vaporizing in the atmosphere. You know they're there. Waiting. If you'll make the same mistake, the right decision. All the unheard voices pulse psychotically in your ventricles and atriums *you are alone you are not alone you are alone you are not alone*, just haunted by the ghosts of those left behind.

On the contrary, the most powerful form of intimacy is between two people, those who know the entire atlas of their other half, the neurons that galvanize upon a touch, a glance, and is understood in return. After so many years of searching for the wrong kind of intimacy, you deserve to find the answer. It's not fair to sift through the foggy terrains of your own world alone. "It was a million tiny little things that, when you added them all up, they meant we were supposed to be together, and I knew it. I knew it the very first time I touched her. It was like coming home, only to no home I'd ever known. I was just taking her hand to help her out of a car and I knew. It was like... magic."<sup>3</sup>

Reply to Objection 3. Occasionally you'll need a face to talk to, a hand to hold, to realize you are needed. An invisible entity has zero personal influences. You need more than one person to restrain your heart from nosediving into the narcotizing bay.

Article 4. Is it irrational to reject intimacy?

Objection 1. It would seem that it is not irrational to dispel the incorrect intimacy. The social distance for interactions among acquaintances is anywhere between four to twelve feet. Cross into that invisible perimeter without an invitation and know that their amygdala will scream. The amygdala processes strong reactions to personal space violations. Encroachment of personal space activates the almond-shaped

nuclei to warn the person that this is not allowed.

Objection 2. Sociofugal spaces are designed to discourage conversation between strangers, like the single bench in the Habitat Horticulture room in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; sociopetal spaces, like round tables outside Mara's Italian Pastries, bring people together. You treat every public space as though it's sociofugal—you choose to sit in the back row of the Uber rather than next to a commuter in the middle row. Further, when people sit too close to you, they are rupturing a fragile interpersonal distance, an invisible electric fence that sears your thalamus. You take the end of the Badlands Bar counter, sitting next to your friend, leaning against the brick wall. Millennials collide together, bumping around and clashing elbows beneath pulsing neon strobes. You down two Long Island Iced Teas and hope that on your way out, whoever brushes against you will not jolt your veins into charred vessels.

Objection 3. Further, riders on public transportation identify that not everyone would like to be talked to, so they will set down their bag on the seat next to them and keep their sight trained on the window or an inanimate object. As the Greyhound crosses the Bay Bridge into the smoggy city, you notice that half the bus is actually empty—if everyone were to fill up the rows, the back of the bus could hold another thirty or so travelers. Everyone's purposefully spread out to avoid uninvited dialogue.

On the contrary, it is wrong to reject an intimacy you don't want. The homeless on Haight-Ashbury form alliances with each other, cluttering up corners and leaning against shops' walls and smoking weed. Hippie tourists in this district don't interact with those who haven't bathed in ages. The displaced men and women alternate holding the same jagged cardboard by a stop sign in the 72-degree afternoon. One dumpster dives and brings back rotten resources to her clique. As the cliché goes, "beggars can't be choosers."

Reply to Objection 3. But isn't that the point of traveling? "Crowded subways and buses may bring strangers into what would ordinarily be classed as intimate spatial relations, but subway riders have defensive devices which take the real intimacy out of intimate space in public conveyances. The basic tactic is to be as immobile as possible and, when part of the trunk or extremities touches another person, withdraw if possible. If this is not possible, the muscles in the affected areas are kept tense. The eyes are fixed on infinity and are not brought to bear on anyone for more than a passing glance."<sup>24</sup>

Article 5. Is it right to seek out intimacy?

Objection 1. It would seem that it is not right to seek out intimacy

if it's for the wrong reason. One cannot breach someone else's atmosphere to compensate for their own.

Objection 2. Further, the pickpocket at Pier 49 is a master at silently slipping into one's space. Beneath the fawn-tinted carousel lights he bumps into a man, who immediately checks his pockets for his wallet, which is miraculously intact. You keep your eye on the pickpocket, holding your purse closer. He knocks into several more people appearing as though it was an accident. A mom drops her nachos, her kid wails, he slips into her bag while she consoles her son. When he targets another man, he's more subtle and reaches into his jacket from behind, and the man doesn't even twitch. The pickpocket has probably made over hundreds of dollars in fifteen minutes. No one else checks for their wallets.

Objection 3. Further, if one continues to press on, it is an invasion of personal space. Alcatraz Island is hit by a diminuendo of waves eighteen miles away from Pier 39, and all the noises—Saturday night traffic, homeless concerts of profanity, panhandlers drunkenly stumbling through the wharf—weaken against one feeble echo of a scream, or maybe you imagined it thundering into your auditory cortex, tickling one selfish response: How is it that you can hear someone cry out when no one ever hears yours?

You ask if your friend has also heard it. "Maybe a sea lion?" he suggests. "They spend their nights at the docks." The voice in the alley sounded human.

On the contrary, people will do anything to alleviate isolation, and it just makes it worse. They'll break out of prisons to find the one they loved has moved on. They'll stand outside the café window peering in to see their ex with a date that looks eerily like them. They'll listen to sad songs that won't stop reminding them of the one they lost.

Reply to Objection 1. You've got so much love to give and no one wants it. "We're all lonely for something we don't know we're lonely for. How else to explain the curious feeling that goes around feeling like missing somebody we've never even met?"<sup>25</sup>

Article 6. Is it wrong to be jealous of those who have intimacy?

Objection 1. It would seem that it is not wrong to be jealous of those who have intimacy. Developed in 1943, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theorizes that the third level of human needs is interpersonal and involves feelings of belongingness. According to Maslow, humans crave a sense of attachment and acceptance among their social groups. The lack of this type of belongingness will make the human become lonely and desire some type of closeness with someone. Humans

tend to have an inherent desideratum to connect with others and be an important part of something greater than themselves. When on the fringe of exclusion, you hyperfantasize every possible scenario in which you are welcomed back in.

Objection 2. Further, even though you are terrified of divorce and having kids, you want to be married and have kids, so you can have the postcard image of the families lounging on the lawn at Alamo Square, overlooking the famous houses that opens *Full House's* credits. As lavender rose dusk transitions into sleepy astronomical phosphorescence, people ensnared in embraces create a mental photograph of what you most want. But you haven't had a chance to rent a car, stockpile passengers, listen to kids' arguments in the backseat and drive down an avenue as crooked as Lombard Street. It's a road where you're afraid of crashing into a cable car at the merging intersection, killing the only grasp you had on something you've simultaneously both wanted and not wanted.

Objection 3. Further, watching your friend cuddle with his boyfriend on their couch after a long day of touristy sightseeing triggers the bulb of your heart to edge your chest. Your friend is drunk and sipping on rosé; his boyfriend's running his fingers through his hair, smiling at the simplicity of their tangle. You are a desolate voyeur watching them, this complicated scene. You feel like you're not supposed to witness this; it's a director's cut never meant to air. Slow music glosses the apartment in a daydreaming haze. Their cuddle evanesces over your body, a phantom of a touch uncharted. After infancy, you have never been held as tightly as your heart feels. The history of fingerprints to have smeared your canvas is short. This longing asphyxiates your cortex, and for the moment slowly you disappear outside of your frame, somehow seeing the back of your head facing the men, staring at the semi-conscious girl, roaring for those absent to notice that you need them to emerge from your infatuated mind, and to be real.

On the contrary, there is always a sort of intimacy fixed to everyone around you. Wrapped in their stories, eclipsing in their long-exposure photographs, standing in line for a Ghirardelli ice cream cone. Four booths away from a cluster of businessmen at Original Joe's. Across the street at Club Fugazi after the Beach Blanket Babylon show. No matter how far away you are, the second they lock eyes on your body, any part of it, you have been marked. You are publicly recognized as this drifter who happened to glide across their path. They may not remember you, nor might you remember them, but for a decasecond you were noticed, and realized, that neither of you are the only people on Earth. That to be observed by a stranger is a perpetual tally-mark on the

acknowledgment of your existence.

Reply to Objection 2. You stopped buying souvenirs on your trips because it gives the false image that you enjoyed the location you visited. It used to be tradition to purchase a snow globe of some monument, a postcard of a tourist trap. Usually you'd give a memento to a friend or family member as a way to show them you had a life outside of the relationship, but it just made you feel worse when you never received any in exchange. "I am more of an illusionist than a deceiver, but it all comes from being a very private person. Even if it was true that you knew me better than anyone, I'd never admit it. I'd rather dig my own heart out, with a rotten spoon, than admit it. I may let people in my own little world occasionally, but I would never let them be aware of it. I don't throw my intimacy in front of others, especially when I care. The more I care, the less I give away. I didn't play my tricks on you in order to deceive you, but rather to save myself, and maybe even deceive myself as well."<sup>6</sup>

Reply to Objection 3. It's your last evening in the city of loneliness. On your friend's apartment deck in Diamond Heights, you watch the music video of Novo Amor's "Anchor" while your breaths achromatize into the midnight fog. It features a lonesome fisherman finding a woman in the ocean and bringing her back home and, much to her discomfort and his guilt at inadvertently destroying a beautiful thing, the fisherman releases the woman back into the sea. The video was inspired by the Gaelic folklore of the Selkie, which is "a seal who lives in the sea but shed their skin to live as a human on land. If a man steals a Selkie's skin she is to live in his power and become his wife, but because her true home will always be the sea, she will always be longing for the ocean. It's about wanting and waiting for someone to return."<sup>7</sup>

You gaze at the scintillating lights crosshatching the city, burning through the haze of lives unearthed without your awareness. Windows lit in semaphoric sepia, Transamerica Pyramid gleams bioluminescent against the polluted troposphere. A society carved inside 46.87 mi<sup>2</sup>; billions more roaming elsewhere. While you're seeking someone, someone thinks of you, a blank face that will fill their empty days. Theirs is convoluted inside your mind, a flash sync of features that's yet to be transferred from daydreams to reality. You don't know who this person is yet but you're waiting, not for their return, but for their arrival.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Joshua Harris, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye Study Guide*.

<sup>2</sup> Diana Gabaldon, *Voyager*.

<sup>3</sup> Nora Ephron, *Sleepless in Seattle*.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*.

<sup>5</sup> David Foster Wallace, *This is Water*.

<sup>6</sup> Aleksandra Ninkovic, *Dreaming is For Lovers*.

<sup>7</sup> Ali Lacey, "Anchor."



# CHICAGO 1

JACK D. WILLIAMS

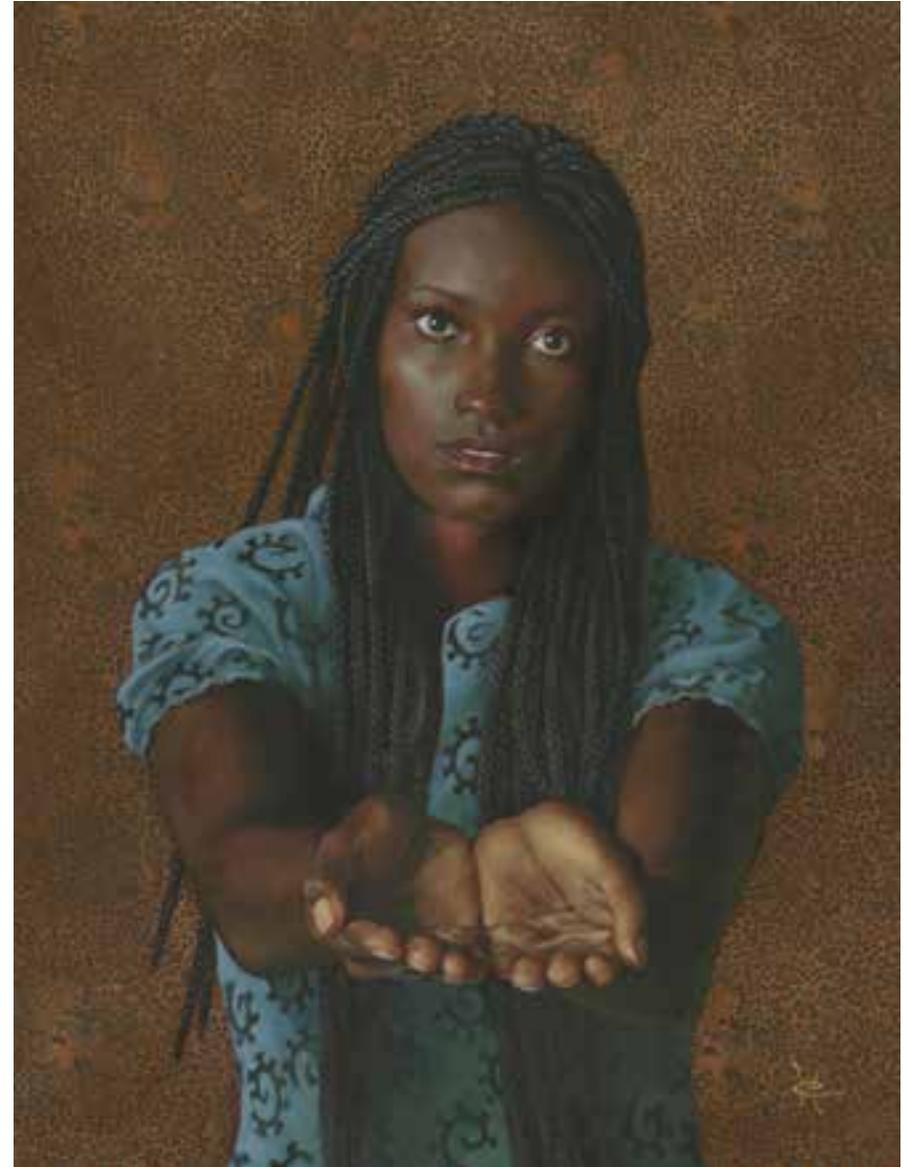
Photography



## CHICAGO 2

JACK D. WILLIAMS

Photography



## ALL I ASK

ESTHER HI'ILANI CANDARI

Oil on printed canvas



## MOTHERHOOD

ESTHER HI'ILANI CANDARI

Oil on printed canvas

# WELLS

CONOR BILLER

fiction

Years before he left them, when he was still a child and had not yet reckoned with his own ignorance, Jude heard his parents fighting on the other side of the house.

The word *fight* was an insult. It flittered through his mind like the squiggly lines that drifted across black space when he squeezed his eyes shut. His parents always insisted these incidents were not fights but, instead, *heated discussions* — his father’s terminology — or *disagreements* — his mother’s. But as Jude once again heard their strained voices echoing through his bedroom vents, the word *fight* felt earned.

Hours later, when he asked them what had happened, his parents were as vague and evasive about this fight as they had been about the others. All they told him was that he shouldn’t worry: *Sometimes grown-ups have disagreements that have nothing to do with their children.*

“Everything’s fine, kiddo,” his father said, hoping to assuage concern.

Jude’s mother forced a smile with a clenched jaw. She put a hand on his shoulder as she walked away, and her scent lingered in his nose after she was gone.

She used to smell like flowers. She had once told Jude what went into her perfume—plumerias and a hint of jasmine. She had it custom-made from a boutique near her office, attempting to recreate a fragrance she had bought on a trip to France two decades prior. She wore the replica every day, the smell of flowers prelude her whenever she entered a room — but recently, the flowers had been overpowered. Jude noticed right away, on a rainy evening not long before the fights started. Like any other evening, he heard the garage door opening beneath his room, then the echoes of his mother’s high heels clicking along the russet oak floors in the hall. She tapped lightly on his door and walked toward him, curling her painted lips into a smile, but when she leaned down to kiss him, the smell of flowers was faint. There was another scent surrounding her, a new one, something cold and clean and sour. It tickled Jude’s nose and hung in the air like dust. It was neither pleasant nor repulsive, but over time it became as much a part of Jude’s mother as the flowers ever were.

Jude wondered if his father had also noticed this change. He was wise enough to know that his parents would never fight over something as silly as perfume, but he knew that little things could add up — he had heard them say this about coworkers, even an irritating family member or two — and he could not shake the feeling that his mother’s new smell was one of those little things. Another shaky layer in their house of cards.

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There were things Jude did not see, like his father’s sleepless nights or the small bottles his mother hid at the bottom of her purse. Likewise, he was oblivious to the cold silences between his parents as they passed each other in the morning, and the moments they each took for themselves in the evening, when they would steal away to the garage or pantry or bathroom to brace themselves like soldiers before battle.

Kept in the dark, Jude decided to play detective, like the characters in his father’s favorite television shows or the paperbacks his mother read on weekends. He assessed evidence, as much as any eight-year-old could. He charted the locations of his parents’ quarrels, scavenging his memory as if he was hunting for Easter eggs in the backyard grass. Sometimes he pretended he was playing hide-and-seek, only he sought something much more vague than the faces of his friends from down the street.

He recalled that most of the fights took place in his parents’ bedroom, as far from his room as the house extended, but there had been one fight in the study at the front of the house, a cluttered space where his father worked from home, and two other fights in the guest bedroom, which his mother had converted into an office of her own. During the second of the guest bedroom fights, Jude had scurried down the stairs, perched himself against the doorjamb, and listened to his father speak with unusual sternness.

“If you need to go,” he said, “I’ll drive you. Give me the keys.”

His mother’s reply was too muffled for Jude to make out the words, but he heard the fragility in her voice and it made him shiver. For the first time since the fights began, he was not content to let it pass and inquire later. He thought of his favorite comics, the flimsy, colorful booklets stacked up on his nightstand, and the heroes on their pages commanded him to intervene. He envisioned himself slipping on a mask, then he inhaled deeply, puffed out his chest, and threw his shoulders back. In his head, he heard the theme song from his favorite superhero film, and like a caped crusader he swung open the guest room door at a breakneck speed, ready to vanquish all evil and rescue the helpless.

But he found no crime in progress, no villains or victims — only his parents, standing by the bed, hushed and huddled like conspirators. His mother turned to face the wall, unable to look Jude in the eye. His father took a breath and asked him nicely to go back to his room. Confused, Jude quietly obliged, his mask and cape disappearing in an instant. Moments later, while eavesdropping from the top of the stairs, he heard footsteps and jangling car keys. Then, he heard a beeping and a clanging — the unmistakable sound of the safe in his father’s study. Jude didn’t know what to make of the scene, but he knew his investigation was back to square one.

He had noticed other things, however, beyond the perfume and snippets of dialogue. His mother seemed increasingly consumed by a strange fatigue, which made her eyelids heavy and slowed her words. There was a sadness to her. He wondered if she was sick with some deadly illness, like the ones he had seen on television dramas.

“Is Mom dying?” he asked his father one night. They were waiting for his mother to return from work. It wasn’t the first time she had been late for dinner; Jude and his father had grown accustomed to waiting idly at the kitchen table with tin foil over their plates.

His father’s face blanched. “Jesus, Jude — no. Why would you think that?”

“She’s different. You’re different. She’s dying, isn’t she?”

His father sighed. “No, buddy. She’s just not feeling well. I guess you could say she’s sick, in a way — but she’ll be fine, Jude. I promise.”

Jude stared into his father’s eyes, struggling to read them. He had a hunch he was being lied to, though he had never known his father to lie to him or anyone else. He didn’t press the issue any further, but his doubts were far from placated. Another fight occurred just a few days later, and the tired sadness continued to consume his mother. With each passing day, Jude became more certain that she was withering away before his eyes. Wilting like the flowers in her perfume.

One morning, he decided to take action. His mother had gone to the hair salon and his father was out for a run; alone in the house for an hour, Jude knew he could not waste the opportunity to uncover more tangible clues. The house became a crime scene, and he its lead inspector.

His parents’ room yielded nothing out of the ordinary, so he moved on to the guest bedroom. It looked the same as it always did: much cleaner than his father’s office, with a tidy desk along one wall and a daybed against the other. Jude dug through the desk drawers, finding only papers and folders. The end-table next to the couch contained old magazines, a bible, and a C.D. by his mother’s favorite singer. Beneath the bathroom sink were two containers, full of the hotel shampoo bottles that his mother brought home from business trips. Next to the containers, Jude

saw a stack of paper cups and a plastic bag with a creased receipt inside. He tried his best to interpret the numbers and abbreviations on the slip, gleaned that it was for a cash purchase of twenty dollars and sixty-three cents, but he didn't recognize the store name printed on the top.

He was about to close the cabinet when he spotted a water bottle tucked behind the cups. The liquid inside was clear, but something told Jude it wasn't water. He furrowed his brow, unscrewed the cap, and lifted the bottle to his nose. His face scrunched up as a cold, sour smell hit his nostrils — the same smell that had overtaken his mother's plumerias and the hints of jasmine. He was fairly sure that his mother was not concocting her own perfume in the guest bathroom — and even if she was, she wouldn't have chosen to make such an odd scent. But regardless of the explanation, the smell was certainly more than a coincidence; one way or another, Jude knew it was connected to the changes his parents exhibited. He could think of only one solution. Heading into the kitchen, he opened the trash can and buried the bottle underneath a banana peel, some dirtied paper towels, and a browned coffee filter. As he washed his hands, he issued a silent prayer that the big truck would come collect the garbage before his parents realized the bottle was gone; maybe then everything would return to normal.

That night, sleep evaded him. His mind was a maelstrom of fear, confusion, and desperate hope that his plan would work. He cradled his favorite stuffed animal, a small yellow lion, and he thought back to the day when his mother had purchased it for him. On a sunny afternoon two years prior, he had gone with her as she shopped for clothes in a posh department store with white marble floors. At the end of the day, she rewarded Jude for his patience by buying him the lion in a nearby store. The memory brought a faint smile to Jude's face. When he finally drifted off to sleep, it was with the lion's yellow head and brown mane tucked against his chest.

...

The big truck took the trash away, and Jude's parents fought that very night. Jude could tell his mother blamed his father for the missing bottle, but he could not bring himself to tell them the truth. Wracked with guilt, he quickly realized that he had caused this trouble for nothing. Though the bottle was gone, the cold, sour smell did not leave his mother.

A week later, Jude's father left town on an overnight business trip. Jude was left alone with his mother, who worked from home while he played down the street with a neighbor. When he returned at lunchtime, he crossed the house to find her, anticipating the buttery grilled cheese sandwiches she often made him. He rapped softly on the door to

the guest bedroom, but there was music playing inside and it drowned out his knocks. He pushed the door inward, gently and timidly, and found his mother at the desk. Pens and folders were splayed out before her, but she seemed to pay no attention to her work. Her eyes were closed and she sipped slowly from a crystal glass in her hand.

"Mom?"

Her eyes snapped open. She put down the glass and cleared her throat, startled and embarrassed. Though she tried to smile sweetly like she normally did, all Jude saw were her glassy eyes, a sleepy, numb look upon her face.

"Can I have grilled cheese for lunch?"

"Maybe in a little bit, sweetie."

"But I'm hungry now."

His mother sighed. "I can't right now, Jude."

"Please?"

"Later," she said, with a sharpness to her voice that sent a shiver down Jude's spine.

She looked down at her papers, then rubbed her eyes and sucked in a breath. Jude noticed how weak she seemed, like she would collapse onto the floor if she tried to stand. Though this concerned him, he could not help but feel angry. A surge of heat flushed his cheeks as he realized that the prospects of his grilled cheese sandwich were slim at best. He clenched his jaw to suppress a groan, not wanting to earn her scolding again.

"What is that?" he asked her, looking at the glass in her hand.

"It's nothing. Just water."

He stared at her for a while, swallowing down the fear that boiled inside his throat. He knew she was hiding something. His mind churned with the speed of a race car, searching for reasons that might justify his own mother lying to his face.

"Is it medicine?" he asked. "Dad said you're sick."

"He said that?" The words slithered out of her mouth. In the past, this slurred, aloof tone would have struck Jude as unusual, but now he wondered if it had been her real voice all along — if she had hidden it beneath the confident, careful articulation she once employed, but found it reemerging now in her sickness.

"Your father shouldn't have told you that," she said, looking at Jude, then at the floor. "It's hard to explain."

"Does the medicine make it better?"

She closed her eyes. When they opened again they glimmered, coated in a thin layer of moisture that caught the light.

"No," she said. "Yes and no."

“If it doesn’t make you feel better, why do you take it?”

“I don’t know, Jude.”

“Will you stop?” he asked. She drew her eyes to the floor again and sank back into silence. Jude walked towards her chair, then leaned in and threw his arms around her neck. With her chin resting on his shoulder, he could feel her jagged breath and smell the cold, clean, sour scent on her skin. He craned his neck and looked over at the desk, where a finger’s width of clear liquid sat at the bottom of her glass. To Jude, though, there was no bottom; the glass was like a well, shrouded in darkness and mystery, its depth unknown. Somewhere in that darkness was an explanation, perhaps — but Jude could not see it.

“Will you stop?” he asked again, his arms still around her.

“Okay,” she said softly. “Okay, sweetie.”

...

She spent the next day in her study again. Jude tried to occupy himself with television, but even his favorite cartoons could not distract him. Fatigue settled like a storm cloud behind his eyes; he had barely slept the night before. Tossing and turning, clutching his lion like a body pillow, he had been unable to shake the feeling that his mother’s words yesterday were empty. Not lies, necessarily — just promises she was unequipped to keep. The glassy-eyed look, which she had worn so many times in recent months, seemed to Jude a kind of possession. A force beyond his comprehension had taken his mother hostage, slowing her speech, drooping her eyelids, and crushing the flowers that had once composed her aura. Lying restless in his bed, Jude had decided once and for all that his mother was in grave danger — and even worse, she couldn’t see it for herself.

A few hours before his father returned from his trip, Jude opened the door to the guest room. His mother was on top of the daybed’s comforter, fast asleep on her back, snoring lightly. He had seen her sleeping before, but never quite like this. There was something accidental about the position of her body — helpless, like she had lost control of her own limbs and was placed on the daybed by someone else. He could not bear the sight of it.

He ascended to his room and crawled onto his bed. Bringing the lion to his chest, he closed his eyes and tried to nap, thinking that maybe this was a nightmare, and that if he slept, he might wake up back in real life. Sleep eluded him once again. However: his mind swirled like a whirlpool as he frantically attempted to conjure a rescue plan, an antidote to his mother’s state. He told himself to think positively — an answer will

come, he thought. It had to. He was still young enough to believe in happy endings.

After a while, Jude slid off the bed and unfolded himself onto his feet. Still clutching the lion, he scrambled back down the stairs and into his parents’ bedroom. His mother’s vanity sat in the corner, covered by makeup kits, hair products, and a flattening iron. Jude thought back to when she told him the story of her perfume; he recalled the shape of the bottle, a thick glass sphere filled with lavender-colored liquid. Finding it on the end of the vanity, he popped off its top and sprayed the lion twice.

Back in his room he tried once more to sleep, bringing the lion to his chest and smelling his mother’s flowers. If he closed his eyes and tried as hard as he could, he could pretend he was in a different time, a better time, when his mother was not passed out on the daybed but, instead, was coming home from work, stopping in his room to kiss him and say hello, and tousling his hair with her manicured fingers. In this reverie, Jude smelled only plumerias and a hint of jasmine, nothing cold or sour. He absorbed his mother’s smile, radiant and genuine, as if it were truly right in front of him. And there on his twin bed, hugging the stuffed lion to his chest, he felt hope. It’s not too late to save the flowers, he told himself. There is still time.

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# AFTER THE OPERA

JACH DANIEL

nonfiction

It was my first time at the opera, and I felt out of place. The language, the music, the singing, the spectacle—everything was foreign to me. I couldn't understand what was going on, and I didn't know if I wanted to. Looking around, I had no interest in being part of that crowd. The men in tuxedos with their women in evening gowns were in another league from me, who was there alone, with my shirt too short to stay tucked in and my pants riding up my rear, so that each time I tucked my shirt back in, my pants rode farther up, and each time I forced my pants back down, my shirt came untucked again. It was bad. But at least I'd gotten my ticket for free (a friend of mine worked for the opera).

Needless to say I was happy when after three and a half hours the performance finally ended and I pushed my way back through the golden double doors. Out front, a crowd of people stood waiting for cabs, but I followed a group down Van Ness Avenue toward the MUNI metro stop on Market Street. Though everyone was still dressed up, carrying their playbills, the jovial spirit from the opera house dissipated as we passed shadowy people sleeping in entryways, their possessions piled up in shopping carts. One of them suddenly started coughing violently, hacked, spit, and groaned. And the opera-goers went silent, their guard up—mine was too. We'd all heard stories about the Tenderloin, that notorious downtown neighborhood filled with homeless, addicts, and ex-cons. And now, for three blocks, we were in it—at midnight.

There was a general sense of relief when we reached the MUNI entrance at the corner of Van Ness and Market. The people in front of me hurried down the stairs, past the beggar who was standing at the top, leaning on a cane and holding out a cup. And I was about to do the same, when I got the sudden impulse to take out my wallet (in spite of the risk of flashing money) and drop two dollar bills into his cup. His face lit up like I'd given him 20 dollars instead of two, and, as I ran down to my train, I heard him thanking both me and the "Good Lord."

I waited on the platform, smugly thinking about how I'd shown so much more generosity than the other opera-goers. But then I wondered—how much generosity had I really shown? I'd only given the man two dollars,

and when I did, I'd barely even looked at him. He must've been hungry. Why hadn't I gone further and offered to take him out to dinner instead, thereby sharing my company in addition to my money? There was no real reason why I couldn't have done that, besides being scared of the unknown. I sighed and dropped my head. And now it was too late. Or was it? I realized that he was probably still on the corner. I could go back up to the street right now. I hesitated. And then I ran up the stairs.

When I reached the street, he wasn't there. A mixture of relief and regret washed over me. I'd missed my chance, but at least I'd tried. That must be worth something.

I started to turn and go back down the stairs, but then I took a few steps forward to peek around the corner. There he was. It was the same guy for sure, with the cup and the cane. A shiver went through me. I wanted to turn away. But I approached him nevertheless. "Hey man, you hungry? Can I get you something to eat?"

He stared at me blankly. Then a smile began to spread across his face. "Sure! You'd do that for me?"

"I walked by a few minutes ago and gave you a couple bucks, but then I thought I should get you something to eat too."

His eyes got big. "I thought I recognized you!"

I nodded. "So where would you like to go?"

"Where would I like to go? Umm, I don't know. Let's see." He rubbed his chin. "I know! Yeah, I know a place."

"OK," I said, a little concerned about how expensive this meal might be. "Which way is it?"

He looked up and down the street to get his bearings. "This way," he said and led me northeast up Market Street. He walked slowly, using his cane, though he couldn't have been over 50. He was of average height, but was thin and frail, his oversized t-shirt and baggy pants hanging off of him. "Oh, boy! A nice, hot meal!" he exclaimed. "Thank you. Thank you!"

"You're welcome," I said.

"And it's my lucky day! Oh, boy! A nice, hot meal!" He paused. "What's your name?" he asked.

"I'm Dan."

"Dan? I'm Michael. It's nice to meet you, Dan. Very nice to meet you!" He was glowing as he limped along next to me.

"Are you from San Francisco?" I asked.

"No, Dan. I'm from Detroit. But I've been here 25 years."

"I'm from Connecticut."

"Connecticut! I don't think I've ever met anyone from Connecticut before. Now what is that near?"

"It's between New York and Massachusetts."

"New York! Have you ever been there?"

“I lived there for a year.”

“New York.” He looked off into the distance. “I’d like to go there someday.”

“It’s a special place,” I said, just to say something.

“I’ve seen it in so many movies, I almost feel like I’ve been there already!” He laughed.

“I know what you mean,” I said, laughing myself.

Then, as our laughter died away, I took a look around. I had no idea what was happening around us, but now I noticed a woman squatting between two cars, urinating, right next to me. When I looked away, a guy came staggering out of a building grunting and foaming at the mouth. I saw people curled up in every doorway. There was a shirtless man sitting against a fire hydrant, vigorously scratching his neck. He stopped and cackled maniacally, then went back to scratching. I had to step over his feet to pass by.

Normally I would’ve been anxious walking along a street like this, but now I wasn’t nervous at all being there: I was buying a poor, hungry man a “nice, hot meal.”

Michael stopped abruptly. “Is here OK?” he asked, gesturing to a storefront. I looked up—it was Burger King.

I’d been prepared to take him anywhere, literally anywhere he wanted to go—steak, sushi, Alaskan king crab, bottle of wine, bottle of scotch, caviar, tiramisu, chocolate mousse, whatever. In my mind I’d yielded myself completely to his whims, and he’d chosen Burger King.

“Sure,” I said, relieved. “Wherever you want.”

He pushed open the door, and we went inside. There were a handful of beaten down people scattered around the tables, not talking. One of them moaned and belched loudly. I looked over at Michael, but he didn’t seem bothered by the clientele or the smell of fried disinfectant. He was too busy studying the board above the counter. “What should I get?” he asked, finally.

“Whatever you want,” I said.

“Whatever I want?”

“Whatever you want,” I repeated.

Without further hesitation, Michael got the cashier’s attention and ordered the most expensive thing on the menu—some super-special double whopper with large fries and a large drink—for \$8.65.

The girl behind the counter looked at me. I didn’t want anything, but I also didn’t want to make Michael eat alone, so I ordered chicken tenders and fries. That was a big sacrifice for me. I hadn’t eaten fast food in years. And yet, here was Michael repeating over and over again how good it was to have a “nice, hot meal” at Burger King.

As we sat down to eat, I put the opera playbill on the table (I’d been

carrying it this whole time), and Michael noticed. “What’s that?” he asked.

“It’s a program from the opera.”

“The opera? I’ve never been to the opera.”

“Yeah, this was my first time.” I paused. “It was interesting.”

“Yeah? How?”

“It was so... grand. The sets, the costumes, the music. And the building too. Everything was painted with gold, and the carpets and the walls and even the ceilings were covered with complicated designs. And then all the people there were all dressed up.”

“Wow. I’d like to see that.”

“Well, my friend works for the opera—that’s how I got to go. The tickets are usually really expensive. But maybe if she gets me tickets again, you could come.”

“Yeah, that would be... wow...” He took a bite of his burger and stared off into the distance, nodding his head. I wasn’t sure if I really meant I’d take him. I could see that the possibility alone was precious to him. The real thing might not be so enjoyable. It hadn’t been for me.

I thought of my uncomfortable, opera-worthy clothes, and now, glancing around this Burger King, they made me feel conspicuous once again. No one here had anything nearly as clean and well-fitting as what I wore. I realized that among these outcasts, Michael wasn’t an outcast, but just another guy struggling to survive. At the opera, though, he’d be a filthy cripple. And then I understood why we were at Burger King and not some fancy steakhouse. At a steakhouse, Michael would’ve been uncomfortable—everyone staring at him, the waiter being rude, a woman at the next table complaining of the smell, a manager coming over to “enforce the dress code,” and someone joking as we left about a “health code violation.” Burger King was a much better choice.

“Are you a musician?” he asked now, returning from his vision of the opera.

“I’m a vocalist.”

He nodded. “I’m a musician too.”

“You are?”

“Yeah. But I’m more of a poet than a musician.”

“Me too!” It’d never occurred to me that we could have something significant in common. “I call myself a musician, but I’m more like a poet who performs with musicians,” I said.

“Really?” Michael was beaming. Then he shook his head. “The Lord works in mysterious ways,” he said, looking at me. I met his eyes. They were stunningly fresh and youthful, though at the same time encircled by a somberness. He reminded me of a candle, flickering in the dark.

“Would you like to hear one of my poems?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said, still locked into his gaze.

“This poem is called, ‘A Cup and a Dream,’” he said. And his eyes never left mine as he spoke slowly, clearly, musically:

“All I have is a cup and a dream,” said the old man, shivering in the cold with no shoes on his feet.

So I tossed some coins into his cup and asked him, “What is your dream, old man?”

And the old man said, “My dream is that one day the blind will see, and the deaf will hear, and the lame will walk, and the sick will be well, and the sorrowful will be comforted, and the naked will be clothed, and all those who are hungry will be filled with Christ Jesus.”

Then I said, “You have all these dreams for others, old man. Don’t you have a dream for yourself?”

And the old man answered, “I would like to climb the highest mountain and touch the face of God.”

By the time he finished, his eyes had burrowed so far down into my soul that I couldn’t stop the tears from streaming down my face. To be sitting in Burger King across from the first beggar I’d ever helped in my life and to have him speak that Christian dream into my soul—that beautiful, selfless dream, purified through years of pain, suffering, fear, and heartache, and to hear him tell it from my perspective, as the one tossing the change into the cup and asking to hear the old man’s dream—was too much.

I’d never heard such a true expression of Christianity. Because Michael was the first person I’d ever met who was actually living that dream (which most of us ultimately consider a nightmare). What person with nothing—destitute, hungry, crippled—would dream of healing all of humanity before dreaming of his next meal? What person in that degraded position would claim his only dream to be to struggle up the highest mountain to touch—merely to touch—the face of God? That’s a rare soul. And I couldn’t help feeling like I was looking across the table at just such a soul.

I thanked him then. I didn’t know what else to say. But it was as though the restaurant had been transformed by his poem. Everything and everyone in it became so full of meaning, so full of purpose, that I was breathless.

Finally, Michael broke the silence by asking me where I lived.

“The Inner Sunset,” I said.

“Do you like it there?”

“Yeah, it’s nice. I’m right near Golden Gate Park, and I have a bike now, so I can ride to the ocean in 10 or 15 minutes.”

“You live near the ocean?” he asked. It seemed he didn’t know the

Inner Sunset was near the ocean. I thought everybody in San Francisco knew that. And besides, San Francisco is a peninsula, so everywhere is close to the ocean.

“Yeah.”

Then he stared off and said, “I’ve never seen the ocean before.”

Michael began wrapping up the rest of his burger, along with his fries, telling me that he was going to save it for later. I offered him what was left of my food as well, and he happily wrapped that up too. Then he looked up at me. “Thank you, Dan,” he said, “Thank you.”

I was in no rush to leave, but it was clear he needed to go, so I gathered our trash and threw it out, then held the door for him. On the sidewalk, he thanked me profusely as we shook hands. It’d been an incredible hour—life-changing for me, and I hoped for him as well. I met his eyes. But an odd, nervous look had come into them. I was confused. He looked at the ground. “I know you’ve given me so much already, but could you spare a few more dollars to help me get something to eat tomorrow?”

I was surprised to find myself a bit put off by this request, since I’d been prepared to buy

him a much more expensive dinner. But I was. I guess I was upset by the way he was asking for

something on top of what I’d already offered. But I couldn’t say no, especially after that incredible poem he’d told me. So, I found a five-dollar bill in my wallet and handed it to him. What was five more dollars to me when I’d been to the opera for free that night?

Walking back to Van Ness and Market, I tried to look inconspicuous, as it was now after 1:30 am. But, as I approached the MUNI entrance for a second time that night, a woman leapt out and startled me.

“Give me a dollar?” she yelled. She was draped in rags, holding out a Styrofoam cup, her face deformed by a harelip. I found a dollar in my wallet and put it in her cup.

“Thank you!” she yelled.

# SEA STARS

SABRINA ITO

poetry

If you cut off their legs,  
they will just regenerate  
and continue catching,  
then sucking up  
your fishing bait -  
whether raw chicken,  
salmon roe,  
or sea worm.

mouth on belly,  
spine on skin,  
the wharves were plastered  
with these mutant, purple stars.  
and my father, the fisherman  
would curse each one,  
chopping up at least half a dozen  
before even dropping a line  
in the water.

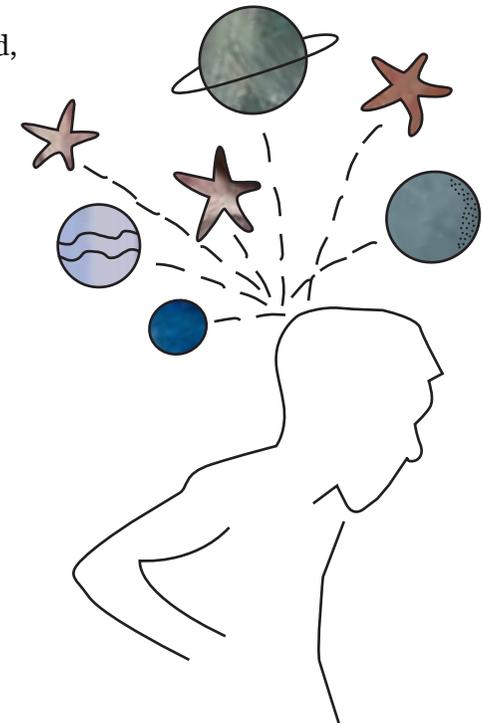
but then there was that time  
I was allowed to take one home  
because I desperately wanted a dog  
and it was thought,  
that a starfish would suffice.

we brought one home  
in an orange ice cream bucket,

I named the starfish, 'Roy' -  
pet his bumpy back,  
divulged all of my secrets  
and for four to five days,  
watched him slowly starve to death -  
fade to beige,  
soften to glue.

by then, even my father agreed  
that it might be best  
to bring Roy back to the bay.  
he promised he would make a stop  
on his way to the office the next morning.

so, I sat at the kitchen window -  
pressing my child hands  
into the damp glass of morning dew,  
which I blew out with my breath  
to cloud the distant view  
of my father walking away from me,  
wearing his best brown, pressed suit.  
He carried Roy's ice cream bucket  
somewhat gingerly,  
though his car keys clanged  
at his belt buckle  
and his fishing knife bulged,  
from his back pocket.



Created with art pieces by Ciaran Freeman, Jamie Mackman,  
Alexis Tong & Jack Williams



## THE POWDER ROOM

JAMIE MACKMAN

Oil on Panel



## HASHIMOTO

ALEXIS TONG

Oil on Canvas

# ALEXANDRIA

SONJA JOHANSON

poetry



# ALEXANDRIA

SONJA JOHANSON

poetry

knowing that  
soft

wonder

I longed to  
touch

Crumbling  
parchment,

# GAME OF HEARTS

JOAN ELLIOT GRAY

fiction

As I make my way into town to tell Grandpa he must move out of his house and into a hospital, the November wind bites and tiny specks of sleet linger on my quilted jacket until it is soaked. Prickly weeds grow over the sidewalk. My legs itch until I scratch under my jeans and find blood on my hands.

I've loved Grandpa ever since he braided and unbraided my hair until the braiding was just the way I wanted it. I loved him even when he ran out of the auditorium during my eighth grade graduation sobbing and yelling that people in the audience were monsters who might hurt him. After the celebration, Grandpa was waiting across the street, hair combed and tie straightened, to take us for ice cream.

Now he lives in Walnut Creek, a sleepy town that could be on the face of a brochure. The vista of rolling hills and the clip-clop of Amish buggies on the roads go on forever. This simple area calms my Grandpa's thoughts like a train rolling through the night. He treasures stillness. It wraps itself around him.

Earlier, he muttered that he would meet me in town since he was out of coffee and thirsted for some Dutch Harvest Café Roast. "Best coffee ever, honey. I'll see you there." He mashed his words into the payphone since he held it too close to his mouth when he spoke.

"Mental," people call him when he talks to invisible people.

I know I can't catch Grandpa's disease. It's the bad luck of the draw if you're the accidental receiver of a family gene that causes schizophrenia. The whole family has their fingers crossed that it isn't them, including me.

When I had pigtails, long before I caught on that Grandpa was different from other Grandpas, we played Hearts and Go Fish for hours. I cheated and so did he, so neither of us ever won. We played hide-and-seek until we were exhausted and at night we caught fireflies and kept them alive in a quart jar with holes punched in the lid. I'd forget about them by the time we fell asleep, but not Grandpa.

I found out later that, during the night, he let the dying fireflies loose, and put the jars on the back porch so the others would have fresh

air when we awoke in the morning. I always knew he could take care of himself, until now.

I hope he listens to me when I tell him that his doctor from the mental hospital has decided he can't live alone any longer. My fingernails are chewed to the cuticles, so I sit on my hands as I wait in front of the café.

"Maggie," Grandpa whispers. After walking to town, his boots are muddy, his hair scruffy and eyes foggy, but when he hugs me, he holds me strong and tight. It's a long drawn out hug—the best kind.

My eyes rest on his exhaustion, a fatigue from attempting to live in this world when he cannot. Did he take his pills this morning? Where should he look on the electric bill to find the date for payment? Where are his postage stamps? Did he forget to go to the post office to mail the bill? Is that why they turned off his electricity and one of the reasons I am here today?

"Hot coffee?" He holds the door open.

The inside of the Dutch Harvest Café glows with warmth and cheerfulness. Two wood burning fireplaces sparkle as the dry wood burns hot. The few people inside nod hello while drinking hot chocolate, hot spiced cider, or coffee from pre-heated mugs. They hold the mugs to their faces to warm themselves. Grandpa and I slip into a booth near one of the fireplaces and order two hot coffees.

"Morning, Alfred," says Alice, the friendly, fiftyish waitress.

"Morning, Alice," answers Grandpa.

"This your Granddaughter?"

"Yep."

"Pretty girl."

"Thanks, Alice." Grandpa smiles, and then tells me, "Both of our names begin with an 'A.'"

As we drink, the smile eases over him. He tilts his head, moves his lips in the direction of a grin and relaxes his shoulders. He does this when he trusts you. Just being together feels as warm as the waves of heat radiating from the fire.

Alice smiles as she watches Grandpa from her coffee station. What a good friend he is to others, not just to me.

Grandpa stares at me, we both have hazel eyes with flecks of green— eyes transparent and clear. His mind seems uncluttered when his eyes shine as he speaks. However, when his eyes are cloudy, so is his judgment. I blink, look away, and worry that my eyes cloud over when I'm anxious too.

He moves his huge, dry, cracked hands across the table and holds mine. They carry the musty scent of his trailer and of his life since his mind frayed at the ends. He is drifting off.

I take Grandpa's hands and reflect. He's sixty-eight and this will be his first hospitalization for the schizophrenia that has chased him all of these years. He hopped a train and ran away from his wife and young children during the Great Depression when his mind cracked wide open like an egg. He saw people who weren't there, heard whistles, hammers and crashes no one else heard. He hid under beds when strangers came to the door. Sometimes the only way to calm him down was to take him to the railroad tracks. He seemed comforted by the steady and predictable rhythm of the sound of the train on the tracks.

Alice interrupts my memories and asks, "Refill, honey?"  
"Sure Alice."

She walks away and I turn back to him. "Grandpa, how are you making do with no heat or light in the trailer?"

He withdraws his hands, sitting back in the booth. A frown forms between his eyes and he purses his lips. He's getting ready to leave and eases to the edge of the booth. The cloud of distrust covers his eyes. He has a whiff of what I'm going to say, and he doesn't like it. In an instant he's standing, waiting for me to speak.

He starts to unbutton his shirt. I fear he's going to tear it off, run out the door. But, his hand goes to his forehead as he swipes sweat away. He's just hot from the wood stove behind him. My heart beats normally again as he drops back into the booth.

This is the moment I've been fearing. "It's too dangerous to stay in your trailer with winter coming on." I tell him. "It will be so cold in the woods. You could freeze to death. Maybe it's time to go to a warm place where people will help you."

I lower my head, but his huge musty hands lift my chin. Crystal clear eyes look at me. "I know."

...

Two days later, I follow the narrow path that leads to Grandpa's rusted, tilted trailer in the woods. Smoke snakes out of the exhaust fan balanced on the trailer roof. He must be burning wood since he has no electricity.

I rub my raw, chapped hands together, hoping that he has some hot coffee inside. If we down it fast enough, we'll be warmed up for our day of cleaning the trailer.

The windows are filthy. He has never washed them in the two years he has lived here alone.

I pound hard on the flimsy floorboard that is his door. No response at the first knock. The same with the second, third, and fourth. I take a deep breath of freezing air and push my way into darkness that

blinds me. Rubble is piled up higher than the windows. This tiny area feels diseased and abandoned. On one stack of papers, where a shaft of light has managed to fall, is the electric bill. A stamp is stuck on it.

I cover my nose with my jacket sleeve and holler for Grandpa.  
"Here, Maggie, over here."

There he is, in the only two by two-foot clean area in the place near his small wood burner. He's made two coffees.

I trip over an old bicycle tire and land in a couch with no cushion. Grandpa rubs my frozen face with his sandpaper hands and gives me a fresh hot coffee. We drink in silence. He leans back proudly against the wall in his backless lawn chair with his feet up on an overturned bookcase, like he was the King of England.

Sitting with Grandpa, I am immersed in the silence of the surrounding woods. We reminisce about deer hunting, fishing the local streams, hiking, shooting turkeys with bows and arrows and walking barefoot in spring streams. On our second cup I ask him, "Do you still hear voices, Grandpa?"

"You a doctor or something, Maggie?"

"No, but I do sometimes, and wonder if you do."

He takes a big slurp of hot coffee. "Often the voices keep me company. But other times they won't shut up when I want them to and that scares me, Maggie. I know I've been schizophrenic most of my life and I can't try any harder any longer to keep it from gobbling me up. But you don't have it, honey. You're not always looking over your shoulder or under your bed or behind a tree. You're okay, Maggie. You're okay. I've been watching for signs. And if I had seen some, I would have told your mom and we would have taken you to get help. I swear."

"But sometimes I hear a voice, turn around to see who it is and no one is there," I reply.

"That doesn't seem unusual. But, you know, sometimes I *swear* I can see my own brain."

"What does it look like, Grandpa?"

"Thousands of tangled telephone wires," he tells me with such sorrow and heartache.

I gather the buckets and rags to scrub down the trailer, needing something to do, even though we are both scared souls who can't put the pieces of the world together no matter how hard we try.

As his illness destroyed who he used to be, he was left with one all-consuming dream: to be out in the forest and live alone in the woods he treasured as a kid—an audacious quest. However, he unrelentingly convinced his doctors he could do it. They believed that the rhythm of nature would soothe him for as long as he could make it.

Our family agreed; somehow, we all made it work. A social work-

er visited his miniscule home weekly to pay his bills and buy his groceries, a nurse's aid gave him a sponge bath and brought clean laundry, and a nurse came once a month to oversee his medications. He followed his dream to live alone in the woods he loved, and our family visited when invited.

However, little by little, Grandpa fell behind in his own self-care. He didn't want to be ashamed of his weakening ability to survive even with all of his support.

I have a bold, daring, and kind Grandpa who went the limit.

"Let's get at it, Maggie. The day's speeding by."

"Okay. You're the boss, Grandpa."

We find a stack of old paper grocery bags and throw everything that isn't bolted down into them. After three hours we have twenty bulging sacks lined up outside the trailer. We can now walk inside without injuring ourselves.

Then we each get a bucket and see who can get the other the wettest as we wash the windows. We are filthy, freezing messes when we are finished. The water is murky and disgusting, but the windows shine.

"I want to save my coffee maker and two cups for when you come to visit," he tells me as he places them on the clean counter.

The day is gone. We warm ourselves near the wood stove, then grab blankets and make a run for his creaky front step to huddle against the cold night air and watch the stars. An occasional cloud covers the brightest.

But the stars' brilliance reminds me of the fireflies we used to catch.

"Grandpa, the stars glow just like fireflies."

"I can't quite make them out, Maggie. But I remember you and me catching them."

I squeeze his hand and can't let go so we squash through the trailer door side by side.

"The social worker will be here in the morning. She'll be able to see in the windows we cleaned today."

Grandpa eases his face into his half smile. He tilts his head, moves his lips in the direction of a grin, and relaxes his shoulders. He pulls out our ancient deck of cards.

"A game of Hearts?"

"You've kept this deck all of these years?"

"I love these cards, Maggie."

All I can say is, "You're on, but no cheating."

"But that's the fun of it."

As he shuffles the deck, cards fall out of his shaking hands and cover the trailer floor.

"I'll shuffle, Grandpa."

"Okay, honey. I'm tired." Clouds move across his eyes. "I might have made my last move."

I cover him and then myself with his old blankets, tucking his blanket tenderly around his chin full of whiskers pointing in all directions: north, south, east, and west. I remember the days when he would tuck the blankets around my face, kiss me on the forehead, and say "Good night, my Maggie. We have another big day tomorrow."

The next morning, sun floods the trailer with new light. With the filth and grunge gone, the trailer is so bright that it looks almost new.

"Maybe I'll stay, Maggie." But there's a knock on the flimsy door that looks like it will cave in with each thump.

I see the social worker through the scrubbed, frosty window. She's smiling. Grandpa likes her. We get up, put the blankets away and I carry Grandpa's coffee maker and two cups. He puts our deck of cards back into his pocket, and we open the door.

He checks his back pocket. "Maybe we won't play with these cards again, Maggie, but you've always had my heart."

I squeeze his hand tighter. "You've had mine, Grandpa, ever since I learned how to cheat." He smiles and holds on tight. His eyes are clear, like mine: hazel with flecks of green.

# NOW THAT I WAS UNQUESTIONABLY SINGLE

GEOFF GRASER

nonfiction

1

I'd been to the stadium several times, but somehow never noticed the building I'd eventually call home. It emerged beyond the right-field wall, beyond the crowd, beyond the freight train rumbling and whistling. The brick stretched an entire city block with its eye-catching, if not pretty, Dijon yellow paint job. On the roof, I saw a helix of smoke spiraling from a grill into the cloudless dusk. From my seat down the third baseline at Frontier Field, where the Rochester Red Wings play, I could also make out tiny figures in ball caps on the roof. They took in the game from silver bleachers.

"Now that's how to watch baseball," I said, pointing out the fans to my friends. "I wonder how much it costs to live there?"

They answered with sounds instead of numbers—"Jeesh" and "Wow" and "Hmnn." Whatever the price for paradise, we all knew I couldn't afford a place overlooking a stadium—not even the minor leagues.

2

More than a decade earlier, in 1997, Rochester's leaders envisioned the picturesque minor league stadium as the spearhead for a downtown renaissance similar to what Baltimore, Cleveland, and other cities experienced after building new stadiums for their major league teams. A slew of bars and restaurants opened in the abandoned factory buildings around the stadium and spectacular High Falls (waterfalls high enough to have taken the life of 19th century daredevil Sam Patch shortly after he became the first to jump Niagara Falls). In the late 1990s, this nightlife scene drew lines out the door. However, these establishments were cavernous, loud, and glitzy—places with a bathroom attendant pushing cologne for a tip—and Rochester is a pub-town not a club-town. After the novelty faded, few ventured there during the six months when the stadium sits dormant. The gigantic bars and restaurants couldn't afford a full year of rent on half a year's income. By 2005, the once-lively destinations had either given way to office space or had been deserted. I sometimes wonder how I neglected this omen.

3

At first, I envisioned the picturesque building by the stadium as the spearhead for my own renaissance. Two years after ogling Buckingham Commons with my friends, it had become clear my marriage was over.

We had lived in a two-story colonial my wife discovered on a relatively quiet city street, but I never felt settled there. Perhaps because I didn't feel settled with my new family—Julie and my stepsons Aaron, 11, and Kevin, 8. I'd fallen in love with each of their unique and bold personalities, yet daily battles ranging from visitation with the boys' fathers (they were half-brothers) to bedtimes spun us farther away from what I considered a healthy family dynamic. To complicate things, Julie's mom, who suffered from chronic depression and myriad other ailments, would often stay for days uninvited. By no means a tiny house, it never felt like enough space.

We tried family counseling, but it provided only temporary solutions to what I eventually deemed an untenable situation. After three years of marriage, I moved into a basement studio in a modest apartment complex. I saw the boys sporadically but had almost no contact with Julie. After more than a year, I missed her. I initiated reconciliation. The first month or so came with forgiveness, open communication, and renewed hope. Everyone, including my two stepsons, were on their best behavior. On our first family outing, we paddled canoes through marshes in a park. When the boys took a different path in their canoe and lost us for 10 minutes, nobody fought. Julie and I snuck passionate kisses. I slept at our house many nights, but still kept most of my belongings at the apartment. "Maybe it's the secret to marriage," Julie quipped about our separate dwellings. After a couple of months, though, familiar issues arose. I wanted a child of our own. Julie wanted to stay at home with the baby I desired. I couldn't see how I'd make enough money to support a wife and three children. I started noticing women without children and contemplated a life without my current responsibilities. The holidays approached, and I couldn't fake my way through them. I returned to my basement studio full-time.

4

The following fall, I decided to find a place I really wanted to live. I researched loft apartments like an advanced scout planning for a draft. I'd fantasized about a building like the one by the stadium even during my marriage. Once, I made the mistake of sharing this daydream with Julie and she prevailed before we even made it to the expense. "The boys finally have their own rooms," she said.

The loft by the ballpark cost less than I first expected—\$1,000 a month. Sure, \$300 more than my current monthly rent wasn't a pittance,

but with my big expenses—family health insurance, for instance—now eliminated, I decided to live the high life. I'd turn 35 in a few weeks, and I thought this might be my last chance.

A maroon banner trumpeting “Buckingham Commons” spanned the front of the building from the second floor to the seventh where I lived. The banner proclaimed a residence fit for royalty rather than a guy who wrote letters for a payroll processing company. Oh well, my new job as a cubicle clone earned more than any other position I'd held. It also catapulted me from the subterranean studio I first rented after my separation to the top floor of a building with the best view in the city—a perch I thought guaranteed the eradication of any doubts about my current lot in life. I had doubts about staying in Rochester, doubts about my career, doubts about true love.

During my first few days at Buckingham, I'd stroll through the lobby, replete with leather couches and modern art, and sing “The Jeffersons” theme song (“Well, we're movin' on up”). I'd learned the building started as a railroad equipment factory in 1898 and closed nearly a century later as an optical manufacturing company. Another decade had passed before a real estate mogul—on a mission to revive the once-bustling downtown—resurrected the idle warehouse into a nouveau urban mixed use building with offices on the first three floors. So here I was in 2009, relishing the Industrial-era vestiges of exposed air ducts, pipes and wiring. At times, I would run my hand over a grainy wooden pillar in my apartment as you might a tree. I saw the loft as an opportunity to rediscover my roots and reclaim things I loved. Like baseball.

5

When I told people about my new apartment, I bragged about the ballpark first. As a child, I loved baseball most, and it's the one sport I played until Varsity. My view of Rochester's Camdenesque grounds offered a daily reminder of youth, my life before adult responsibilities. Every morning of my first month there, I soaked in the view through windows more than twice my size. AM radio broadcasts of ballgames crackled in my imagination, and I swear the smell of fresh-cut outfield grass and my oiled mitt wafted into the apartment.

Baseball requires both deep concentration and split-second reflexes. Playing shortstop, I'd glance at the pitcher in his wind-up and then lock in on the hitter. With men on second and third, one out, I planned where I'd go with a hard hit grounder in the third base hole. Or a soft roller just past the pitcher's mound. In the batter's box I'd gently rock on the balls of my feet, anticipating a lefty coming with a backdoor curve after an inside fastball meant to back me off the plate.

If only I knew marriage like baseball. After our failed attempt to

reconcile and subsequent visions of moving away, I chose this apartment so warm nostalgia and spring revival could ease my pain. Only one problem. The Red Wings season had ended the month before I moved into the loft.

6

A few days after landing my dream apartment, my laptop's hard drive fizzled. The \$1,000 I'd planned to spend on furniture went toward a new computer instead. And once I'd drained my savings, I discovered the meaning of “house-poor.” Except for bookshelves from my dad and a couple of rickety barstools from the thrift store, the living room remained empty. At first, this didn't stop the party.

On a crisp early October night, I invited friends over. We drank beers on the rooftop paradise I'd once envied from the third baseline. We couldn't watch baseball, but at least the roof had a place to sit.

From the aluminum bleachers, we surveyed the stadium and other landmarks, including the 19-story Kodak headquarters that dwarfs its neighbors. Above the gold “KODAK” letters, the tower culminates with the semblance of a church steeple. The story goes that after the Times Square Building (directly behind us) eclipsed Kodak as the city's tallest, George Eastman, the founder of the camera giant, added another three floors and a spire to reclaim top-dog status. Whenever I caught a peripheral glance of the Kodak building, I reminisced about gawking at the Empire State Building from my friend's Chelsea apartment a decade earlier. I didn't live in the Big Apple anymore, but my thin slice of the high life seduced me into feeling in league with Eastman and the city's powerful. My past apartments had all been livable, but slanted floors, peeling walls or dour roommates usually thwarted my urge to entertain. This was the first apartment I wanted to show off.

“Is this where you're gonna bring all the ladies?” asked one of my friends.

“Sure hope so,” I said.

Most nights after that, though, I headed to the rooftop myself. There were no buildings obstructing the view to the West, so I'd stand at the railing and watch the sun slip down the expressway out of town. Trains chugged below me and then into the distance. This was where I'd figure out what to do with my life, now that I was unquestionably single.

In baseball, a single means success. The crowd cheers at the crack of the bat. A single sends the hitter in the right direction, toward home. In our society, being single is not applauded. While many people relish the independence in spurts, it lacks the value given to something bigger, being a part of a couple or family. Discontented couples should always scrutinize the hue of green on the other side of the fence before leaping. Perhaps even more than I did.

Pink autumn dusks on the drives home to my new loft eventually darkened. And opening the door didn't feel like coming "home." My fancy apartment hadn't burst into the swinging bachelor pad I'd envisioned. The ballpark remained lifeless and the security measures at Buckingham Commons were the modern equivalent of a mote. Guests would have to call me to open the gate to the parking lot. Call me again to buzz them into the building's front door. And then wait for me still to open a locked door after the elevator brought them to my floor.

"It was easy once I made it past the guard dogs," said a friend who visited.

As winter loomed, it started to feel like my studio apartment. Higher, sure, but just as lonely. As I looked past the unlit stadium onto the once-happening High Falls neighborhood night after night, the chorus to a David Byrne song sometimes played in my head, "With glass, and concrete, and stone / it is just a house, not a home."

I'd struck out. In baseball, you get a break, a seventh-inning stretch. In life, it's no given.

7

Two months before moving into Buckingham Commons, I'd made one final effort to save our marriage. Julie met me at a coffee shop near my office. She dressed in business casual, too, but her lips glistened and she wore enough make up to look ready for a date. I knew it wasn't. I'd recently heard from a friend that Julie had been seeing someone he knew for several months.

We sat at a table outside, far enough to prevent anyone from eavesdropping. I felt at ease, friendly. We chatted about her volunteer church trip to Peru with the boys. She was still tan.

"I've been thinking about you," I said.

"I shut the door back in December, Geoff," she said. "I can't do it anymore."

I nodded. I didn't want to argue.

"I miss you," I said. "I'm lonely."

"You should get a TV."

I laughed. I'd stopped watching TV. I read books now. Within a couple months, though, I couldn't look at the living room wall in my loft without envisioning a flat screen.

8

At times, I would gaze upon the caricature painting of Franz Kafka above the desk in my bedroom. My heroes had become writers instead of ballplayers. Still, I sometimes second-guessed buying it for \$500 the previous year. That could've been a flat screen TV, I thought. I'd fallen in love with Kafka not because of the "Metamorphoses" but instead a lengthy letter he wrote to his father. In this 40-page

correspondence, Kafka ostensibly seeks reconciliation rather than retribution. Nevertheless, he attributes his ineradicable self-doubt to the harsh upbringing by his father. In several instances, Kafka describes with stunning accuracy the same feelings of insecurity, timidity, and despair I'd experienced as a child but could never articulate. Sometimes, I admit, I still suffer these emotional handicaps.

The impetus for Kafka's letter to his father was the unraveling of his third and final engagement. Kafka called marriage the "pinnacle of life" and saw himself as a failure for never marrying. Likewise, I believed the end of my marriage was a failure. I had wanted to make the boys' and Julie's broken family whole. I'd failed.

Kafka's writing originally provided solace, but the more I read his letters and stories, the more I worried about looking up (literally) to a man whose gifts as a writer and intellectual seemed to offer little reprieve from his emotional anguish. I began to see Kafka and his trapped characters like "K" from *The Castle* as a cautionary tale. Similar to Kafka, I always craved time away from my day job to write. I was well aware that my passion for individual pursuits like writing and reading had factored into the undoing of my marriage. And now, without a family, I had all the time I could ever want to write. So why would I sit at my desk staring at the empty ballpark?

Maybe I needed a TV after all.

Early in December, like a Christmas miracle, a friend texted me to say she'd driven by a couch on the sidewalk. The next day, I hauled the abandoned treasure into my living room. Now that I had a place to sit, I went online and shopped for less than an hour before buying an early Christmas gift for myself—a 49-inch flat screen.

9

The cable guy was a 6 foot 3 hulk whose boots clunked across my living room floor. He turned down my offer of Christmas cookies.

Later, however, as I worked at the desk in my bedroom, I heard him say, "Mmm. Wow." I went to see what was up. Maybe he'd changed his mind on the cookies. Before I said anything, though, I found him with his back to me looking out the window. Snowflakes fell so slowly they might have melted before reaching the ground.

"Reminds me of back home," said the cable guy whose name I'd learned was John.

In spite of the darkness, I could make out the shape of the stadium's grandstand and the field covered in snow from corner to corner. It hardly matched the idyllic image of America's pastime I first saw when I moved in, but the smattering of city lights proved enough to illuminate John's memories.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

“The Bronx,” he said, and tilted the blinds for a better look. “Right by Yankee Stadium.” Maybe he saw the tracks below and remembered the subway rattling the windows of his childhood. I saw the glow of the TV as I fell asleep to a late-night Yankees game.

“You’ve got the spot,” he said, laughing and shaking his head.

“I’m splurging,” I said. “Don’t know exactly how long I can—”

“Only live once, man. If I didn’t have kids, I’d be spending a lot more on myself.”

“Oh, you have kids?”

“One’s 18. About on her way out.”

Had we met before this apartment, I probably would’ve told him about my stepsons and shared a couple of “kids-do-the-darndest-things” chuckles, but I was trying to move on. I went back to work and he did the same, but before he finished he asked me something from the living room. I thought he’d asked about having a TV.

“Haven’t had one in two years,” I said, almost boasting.

But then he walked in with a cable coiled around his wrist and asked again if I’d be putting a TV in my bedroom, too.

“Nah, don’t want to become a junkie,” I said, before he hinted at giving me the cable for free.

“Never know. I have one in my bedroom, just for company.”

Had this behemoth of a man just admitted his loneliness to me? His face looked peaceful, as if he could doze off standing up.

“When I’m not at my girlfriend’s,” he continued, “I’ll watch for a couple hours to get to sleep.” I pictured this giant under the covers eating cookies and giggling at “Simpsons” reruns.

“You know,” he said again. “Just for company.”

It was as if he’d sensed my loneliness. I had no choice but to take the cable and smile. Until baseball awoke the stadium in spring, I would probably need some company. Now that I was unquestionably single.

## ALIEN ABDUCTEE’S DAUGHTER

BRITTNEY CORRIGAN

poetry

My mother isn’t a sci-fi-movie-  
1960s-housewife-drying-her-hands-on-  
her-apron-as-she-half-sleepwalks-into-  
the-yard-where-there-is-a-bright-beam-  
waiting-to-levitate-her-through-the-  
whipping-wind kind of gal.

She makes grilled cheese sandwiches  
sensibly, with butter on both sides,  
and pickles, and tomato soup. She  
reads novels of literary merit, maybe  
a little magical realism thrown in,  
but not enough to make her moony.

She believes in ghosts, it’s true, the same  
way she believes in mathematics:  
the beauty of theories and formulations,  
the attempt to enumerate all things—  
black holes, gravity, planetary orbits  
and tides, weather, dark matter, energy.

What I’m saying is, I believe her.  
If she lost time, it likely was because  
of the UFO. I mean, she’s not an  
invents-bedtime-stories kind of mom.  
There’s nothing impossible about it.  
It all comes down to simple math.  
Listen, my father’s not really my father.  
That’s what I’m trying to tell you. When  
he’s gone, we know exactly where  
he goes. You can smell it on his clothes,  
sour and sloppy. My mother was returned

# A FIRE WITHOUT LIGHT

DARREN C. DEMAREE

poetry

only slightly disheveled, and carrying me.

See? My skin has a shimmery gray undertone. Just look at my whopping green eyes. We don't need my father anymore. They're coming back for us, I can feel it. That's why my mother stands in the yard every night, crying, holding my hand. We're certain. We know the lights will come.

i.

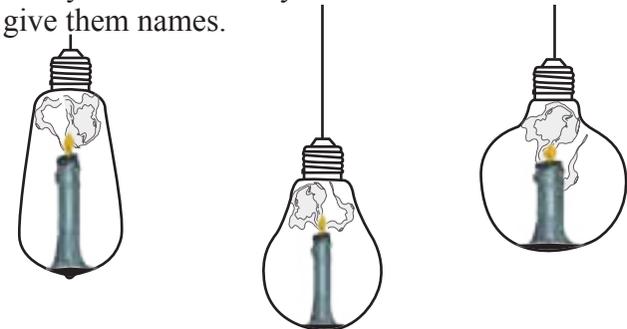
It's unsettling to desire sleep more than reality, but my dreams have aligned with my desperation. I've been robbing banks in my dreams. I've been preaching without God in my dreams. I've been protecting everyone with poetry in my dreams. I've been the mouth of the whale without having to work the tail. When I wake up I let the water run for ten minutes before I get into the shower. I've started to look at men as land. I've grown afraid of the plains.

ii.

No gust is abstract. These winds have purpose. They cannot affect the fields when there is crop. We are that crop. There are a few men that want to stand apart from us. This wind is for them.

iii.

Fatten your hearts. Thin your beauty so it can fit through any door. Once we have the important buildings again, you can release the whole river of our soul. If there are any lingering monsters they will drown in your fantastic width. You won't have to give them names.



Created with art pieces by Jamie Mackman & Alexis Tong



## SELF PORTRAIT WITH MOUNTAINS

JAMIE MACKMAN

Oil on Panel



## MICHAEL

JAMIE MACKMAN

Oil on Panel

# PHOTOGRAPHS OF SHADOWS

KAT LEWIS

poetry

are a falter and  
a thrall, a downpour, lurking

over the top  
of the mountain miles  
away, but still  
visible from the front yard.

They are wildering  
ghosts blowing dog whistles through the night rain.

Whenever I take  
a picture of a shadow, I think

of the bright field I met you in,

the way the only tree was splayed with  
a downpour of overripe apricots  
and their sheet music.

The way that tree's shadow splintered  
the high grass into switchbacks.

No,  
into piano keys.

I have a photograph of your shadow  
over a river whose name  
I cannot remember, waving

weeds in the water beneath  
you.

I have a photograph of the shadow  
of a fruitless plum tree  
in an orchard in Idaho

you have never seen.  
You

told me most  
everything has a reason,  
even mistaking

the brushstroke of a forest  
fire for the flayed light of the moon.

## BEDEVILED

CHARLES FAIRCHILD

fiction

Franklin padded down the stairs in the dark. Two stairs, stop, listen. Three more stairs, stop, listen again. He couldn't hear anything over the storm, and with the power out, he couldn't see anything either.

"Is someone there?" he called.

As he stepped onto the last stair, the house was suddenly flooded with light. Franklin fumbled backwards and nearly dropped the gun he was carrying. For a moment, he could see the sofa, the La-Z-Boy, and the fan of magazines on the coffee table; then everything descended into blackness again. He counted Mississippi's like a schoolboy to judge the distance of the lightning, and he had only come to the third Mississippi when thunder rumbled over the house.

He blinked at the darkness. Slowly, images began to form again: the bloated sofa, the squat shape of the TV. Had he seen something near the door? A thin silhouette, with gangly legs and arms like twigs. Franklin jumped when he realized it was a man. Whispering Mississippi's to himself, he leveled the gun at the figure.

Franklin noticed the bow of the man's back, and how his head drooped forward as if his neck could not support its weight.

"Lyle, is that you?"

Franklin had hired Lyle Jeffers to clear the blackberry bushes on the slope behind his house. The two-day job had taken Lyle five. Each day, Lyle had arrived after ten and left before three. Twice, Franklin caught him napping behind the shed. At the end of the five days, Franklin only paid Lyle for two.

"That's my laptop," said Franklin, noticing the computer tucked under Lyle's arm. "Why do you have my laptop?"

Lyle pulled the computer to his chest and raised his other arm. A muffled brightness reflected off an object in his hand.

"You brought a gun?" shouted Franklin.

As Lyle opened his mouth to respond, a thunderclap shook the house, and the room erupted with light. Franklin fell backwards onto the stairs, covering his head with his free arm. As the lightning faded, the house fell back into darkness, and his eyes had to adjust all over again.

The images slowly came back: La-Z-Boy, sofa, magazine fan. However, Franklin couldn't find Lyle. Then he looked down and saw Lyle stretched out by the coat rack. Lyle's arms and legs were flung to the sides, the lap-top discarded a few feet away.

"Lyle?"

Franklin smelled smoke, bitter and acrid, like hot metal. But it wasn't smoke at all; it was spent gunpowder. He lifted the gun, holding it inches from his face, and stared at it accusingly. He crossed the entryway and stood near the door. A dark pool began to form beneath Lyle. It stole toward the wall and the sofa legs and seeped down into the floorboards. Franklin willed Lyle to blink or moan or wiggle his fingers. He desperately wanted to see Lyle rise up with the same sloth-like motions that had infuriated him before. But Lyle remained inert on the floor, eyes closed, mouth ajar, as if he were dozing.

"Say something, Lyle."

...

The police stayed at the house throughout most of the night. They asked Franklin the same questions over and over again: Where were you standing? Where was Lyle? Why did you shoot? Franklin felt lightheaded. He pressed a damp cloth to his forehead, slurped his tea, and repeatedly told the officers that his life had been in danger. The police snapped dozens of pictures of Lyle—probably more than had been taken of him when he was alive—and it wasn't until after sunrise that the body was taken away.

Two nights later, Franklin heard a rustling in his bedroom closet. When he opened the door, he found Lyle sitting on a stack of newspapers. Lyle wore the same tattered jeans and mustard-colored shirt he had worn on the night of the shooting, only the bullet hole and bloodstains were gone. Franklin shrieked and fell backwards as he swung the door closed. For several minutes, he lay on the floor, afraid to move. When he finally got up and flung the door open again, the closet was empty.

The next day, Lyle was sitting on an empty shelf in the pantry. Franklin yelped and darted into the kitchen. When he returned several minutes later with a skillet raised over his head, Lyle was no longer there.

"You're not real!" Franklin shouted.

Lyle was in the kitchen the next day, studying a tin of tomatoes. He was kneeling in the bathtub the day after that. On the stairs. Alongside the bed. Sitting cross-legged on the downstairs windowsill. Franklin found Lyle almost anywhere he went in the house.

Franklin wondered if he had gone mad. He did feel weak, and he had developed a pain behind one eye. Yet, he still remembered his social

security number and his birthday. He still washed behind his ears most days. No, he didn't think he was mad. But if he wasn't, then Lyle's ghost was in the house, and wouldn't it be better to be mad than haunted?

Over the following weeks, Lyle became a constant presence in the house. He squatted on the bathroom floor while Franklin bathed, watched TV beside Franklin on the sofa, and rocked gently on the stack of newspapers while Franklin slept at night.

"Why did you come back, Lyle?"

"I never left."

"I saw them carry you out."

"That wasn't me."

Franklin had lived alone in the house since his father died. It was tucked into the side of a wooded hill, only accessible by a long gravel drive. It leaned to one side and the roof sagged. His father had driven to town once a month to sell his wood sculptures and load the pickup with supplies. Most days, the only voice in the house was the chatter of the blade cutting the wood.

Franklin hadn't gone to school: his father had convinced the county that he was being homeschooled. Franklin never had friends, or a job. After his father died, Franklin took his father's place on the workbench, carving wood, traveling to town once a month, listening to the chatter of the blade.

"Why were you trying to steal my computer?" Franklin asked one night.

"Because you owed me three days' work," said Lyle.

"It was a two-day job!"

"I worked for five days, so it was a five-day job."

"I shouldn't pay more just because you're slow."

Franklin sipped his water and then set the glass down on the table.

"It still didn't give you the right to take my computer," he said.

"All you accomplished was getting yourself killed."

"It was murder."

"Don't say that word! I've told you a hundred times not to say that word! It was self-defense."

Franklin pounded the table with his fist, toppling his glass and spilling water over the surface. Lyle removed a towel from the rack and dabbed it over the puddle of water.

"Did you always steal things?" Franklin asked.

"I only took what I was owed."

"That's stealing."

Lyle shrugged.

"My mom ran off when I was six, my dad when I was nine. I aged

out of foster care, and could never find a real job. The world owed me.”

“It’s still stealing.”

“Then I stole.”

...

In fall, the leaves flamed red and orange on the branches, and the days shortened. Lyle shadowed Franklin around the house. Franklin had even started walking slower so that Lyle could keep up. On weekends, they played cribbage at the kitchen table. Franklin cheated, but Lyle didn’t seem to mind. They assembled puzzles together, watched movies, and sometimes, Franklin read to Lyle in the sunroom at the back of the house.

“I’m glad you’re here,” Franklin said to Lyle. He stopped worrying about being crazy. It didn’t seem to matter. Real or not, he didn’t want Lyle to go away.

In January, Franklin developed a fever. His head burned and the room spun. Lyle guided Franklin into bed. He propped Franklin up on a nest of pillows and spooned broth into his mouth.

“You think it was self-defense, too, don’t you?” Franklin muttered into his pillow. “I shot before you could. You believe me, right?”

Franklin moved more slowly after his illness. He used the railing to pull himself up the stairs. Showering and shaving were too much effort, and without Franklin’s constant attention, the house deteriorated further. The kitchen sink clogged, and the gutter hung away from the roofline. In winter, the snow piled in drifts against the house.

One morning in May, Lyle walked into the kitchen with Franklin’s gun in his hand—the gun that had belonged to his father. On a winter afternoon, his father had carved an eagle from a stump of black walnut and then drove the barrel of the gun into his mouth. Before returning the gun to Franklin, the police had polished it and replaced the spent bullet.

“What’re you doing with my gun?” shouted Franklin.

“It’s not your gun.”

“It’s my dad’s gun. I know that.”

“It’s mine now.”

Two days later, Franklin found Lyle in the bathtub with the gun in his lap. Then, Lyle was on the coffee table, dragging the muzzle in figure eights over the wood grains. After that, Lyle always had the gun, holding it tightly in his hand or with the barrel pushed into his belt.

By early summer, the kitchen was infested with cockroaches, and a family of white-footed mice had moved into the spare bedroom. Franklin seldom left the house. His right hand twitched if he went beyond the porch, and he could barely breathe if he reached the road.

“Aren’t you ever going to leave the house?” asked Lyle.

“Why go out?”

“You can’t stay here forever.”

“This is alright, isn’t it? Just you and me?”

On the anniversary of the shooting, Lyle wasn’t in the bedroom closet when Franklin woke. Franklin searched the upstairs bedrooms and the bathroom. He poked his head into each of the closets. He finally found Lyle downstairs, sitting on the green rug that covered the bloodstain.

“Get away from that!” Franklin shouted.

Lyle jumped up and ran down the hall, pulling the green rug behind him. On the floor where the rug had been, a wine-colored stain was curled like a fist. There was a thin, dark line where the blood had trickled away from the fist. It pointed directly to where Franklin stood, like an extended finger.

Lyle grew more agitated as the day progressed. He scratched his cheeks and forearms and stammered things Franklin couldn’t understand. Without warning, he would jump up and dart through the house, banging walls and slamming doors.

“What’s got into you today?” asked Franklin.

Throughout the day, Franklin paced behind Lyle and trailed him up the stairs. He held Lyle’s hand as they rocked together on the sofa. In the afternoon, he kneeled next to Lyle as Lyle curled over the bloodstain, sobbing, one hand pressed against his chest where the bullet had entered.

“Don’t think about those things,” said Franklin. “Today’s just another day.”

Later that night, as the hallway clock chimed eleven, a rust-colored Buick ascended the long driveway and rolled to a stop in front of Franklin’s house. A beefy woman sat in the front seat.

“It’s Edna,” said Lyle.

“Who’s Edna?”

“My wife.”

“You had a wife?”

Edna cranked down the window and brought her thick arm to rest on the car door.

“I know you’re in there!” she shouted. “Either you come out or I am coming in to get you.”

Franklin opened the living room window and cried, “Go away!” He leaned so far out the window that Lyle had to clutch the waist of Franklin’s pants to keep him from falling into the hedge. Franklin turned away from the window and dropped to the floor. “We haven’t done anything wrong,” he said to Lyle.

At four minutes past eleven, the time of passing on Lyle’s death certificate, Edna lifted her hand from her lap, and slammed it against the

horn. Lyle clapped his hands over his ears and squeezed his eyes shut. He bolted up, ran blindly into the living room wall, and then fell back onto the floor.

“It’s just a horn!” Franklin shouted.

Lyle drew his hands away from his ears and began slapping his cheeks. Franklin quickly pulled Lyle’s hands away and pinned them to the floor. They looked at one another. Lyle’s eyes pleaded with Franklin.

“I’m not going to let her do this to you,” said Franklin.

He snatched the gun away from Lyle’s belt and raced out the door and down the walkway. As he reached the side of the Buick and looked down at Edna’s round face, the gun suddenly began to feel very heavy. His hand shook from the weight of it. The gun was about to slip from his hand when Lyle came up beside him and cupped Franklin’s hand in his own to steady it. Franklin leaned his shoulder into Lyle’s chest. Lyle was his friend—his only real friend. *Lyle, Lyle, Lyle*. It was only a laptop, he thought. Plastic and metal.

“What are you gonna do with that?” asked Edna, staring at the gun.

Franklin found the gun impossibly heavy now, and Lyle had to take it into his own hand.

“You killed him, you dumb fool,” said Edna. “But you can’t change that. A year locked away in this old house is penance enough.”

Before Franklin could respond, Lyle said, “I can’t leave until he does.”

“Then tell him to get the hell outta here!”

“I can’t. He stayed for me.”

Franklin raised his head. Lyle and Edna were looking at one another, speaking to one another, as if Franklin wasn’t even there.

“What are you talking about, Lyle?” Franklin asked. “I shot you. You’re the one who’s dead.”

Lyle turned to face Franklin. His head drooped forward.

“I should have told you before,” he said.

Franklin suddenly felt cold. The air seemed to thin. His hand, which was still wrapped around Lyle’s, had a sickly pallor, almost as if it were glowing faintly, like moonlight trickling through cloud. And a small hole, only the width of his little finger, had appeared in the center of his chest.

“Can you see it now?” asked Lyle.

The stars spun in the sky as Franklin fell to his knees. He thought back to the night of the shooting. He saw Lyle’s thin figure hunched in the darkness, the two guns, and then the clap of lightning. He remembered falling onto the stairs. And then other memories came, ones he had kept from himself. He saw himself being carried out of the house, and Lyle

sneaking in through the kitchen window the night after the shooting. It was Franklin who had trailed Lyle through the house, Franklin who rocked on the stack of newspapers at night.

“We’ll both be alright now,” said Lyle.

He walked around the car and opened the passenger door. The only friend Franklin ever had was leaving. As Edna turned the car around and began down the long driveway, she poked her head through the open window and said softly, “Rest in peace, Franklin Draper.”

Franklin did need rest. Being dead had made him unfathomably tired. There might be others like him out there, but he would wait until tomorrow to look for them. Besides, this was his home and his father might come back now that Franklin knew the truth. Covering the hole in his chest with his hand, he lowered his head and drug his feet up the walkway. Entering the house, he closed the door and laid down on the dark stain that spilled over the stairs.

21

I want to sentence you. The high will come, just lick these lines. Read each number by itself. Void the rest. My typing sets the pace of the clock. Click tock. The type is how the seconds tick.

Slow down, I know you want to finish. The faster you go, you disappear. I become lost time. If I machine the gears and align them just right, can I

control the pace of each tick?  
control the pace of each tick?  
control the pace of each tick?

20

∞ Sometimes we plant ourselves

under the bed.

∞ This is where I want to sculpt my jawline.

∞ I am between a scalpel and pen.

∞ If I press onto my jaw with two fingers for hours, it may stay there.

∞ No one has the right to define sanity.

19

∞ I don't want my brain active after death.

∞ There is a sudden burst of activity before cessation.

∞ It's your brain screaming for recognition.

∞ The/At last to be alive.

∞ Death just got scarier.

∞ I don't want to overhear my time-of-death.

∞ Please, just turn me off.

18

∞ A little boy once fell in love with the galaxy.

∞ He refused to understand gravity: balls roll; they don't drop.

∞ His forehead often collided with corners and concrete.

∞ He memorized each planet's characteristics from a song.

∞ He taught me how the universe aligned with tennis balls.

∞ His tiny fingers connected the stars at dark.

∞ Now, they say he is on the spectrum.

∞ His brainwaves are fine,

except when he seizes.

∞ Can I give him new life?

17

∞ The chemical elements united to create a soft silvery-white alkali metal.

∞ Its nucleus mirrors the sanity of that woman

under the bed.

∞ The atoms verge on instability, despite the stability of its make-up.

∞ Is that how geniuses are made?

∞ Lithium salts will stabilize that human, if it is human.

16

∞ The little boy will tell me about cosmological lithium discrepancies.

∞ He knows the difference between old stars and new stars.

∞ An old star has less lithium than a new star because it is destroyed  
when lithium seeps into the  
interior.

∞ If I am an old star and lithium is my own mind, will I be destroyed over time?

∞ Am I the girl under the bed?

15

∞ Sometimes I wonder who I've already forgotten.

∞ The girl with the blond braids whose freckles I was jealous over.

∞ The red haired boy with the crooked front tooth who I taught how to write an S.

∞ Then boys who's heartbeats I've almost had memorized.

∞ The lint in his bellybutton.

∞ It gets worse with age.

14

∞ I might mark you.

∞ By that I mean with leftover mascara.

∞ Perhaps lipsticks would make more of a statement.

∞ I don't believe in lipstick.

∞ I have cracked-lips that bleed a natural redness.

∞ So if my lips stain you, I'm sorry.

13

∞ When the little boy speaks planets, I think clouds.

∞ Planets are too abstract to quantify them using comprehensible terms.

∞ A cloud is more realistic because: I've seen, felt, flown through them.

∞ However, everything I think I know isn't true.

∞ Cumulus clouds are over 1.1 million pounds.  
∞ This cloud is not my cloud.

12

∞ Some people sneeze during sex, but I have yet to meet these people.  
∞ If I encounter them, I am afraid they would be embarrassed by the sinus nerve stimulation initiating an explosion.  
∞ If suppressed, they can rupture a blood vessel in their head/neck and die.  
∞ But their brain may still be active.  
∞ So when my naked body next to them looks up after their forced suppression, they will become intimidated nerves.  
∞ I bet their nipples harden from the uncomfortableness.  
∞ Then the sneezer will collapse from a bleeding brain aneurysm, legs spread open.  
∞ This partner will not be forgotten.

11

∞ He left blue on me.  
∞ His eyes stole mine.  
∞ Thick leather draped over inked skin, protected it from asphalt.  
∞ The blue was only visible if the visor was lifted.  
∞ He could not see my eyes, just my mechanics.  
∞ I know his won't change, they haven't since birth.  
∞ I let his eyes leave blue on me.

10

∞ The little boy was born with three hundred bones.  
∞ His black eyes will remain black until he dies.  
∞ The little bones will morph into two-hundred-sixty bigger bones.  
∞ The forty missing will be the ends of his childhood.  
∞ I hope he is an astronaut.

9

∞ I would like to define people by their tongue print.  
∞ Just like the fingerprint, each make up will be unique.  
∞ Perhaps some may complement another.  
∞ Does that mean his tongue is meant to be on mine?  
∞ I don't like to look at tongues.  
∞ But I don't mind feeling them.

8

∞ If Deadpool was real I'd want his tongue print on mine.

∞ Not because he is Ryan Reynolds, although that helps.  
∞ He is like an alien.  
∞ I wonder if the little boy will study the real Deadpool in college.  
∞ If he really exists, that is.  
∞ But I'll probably be dead then, switch.

7

∞ I don't know if I'll die from a sneeze during sex or boomslang.  
∞ I first wondered if this was the same thing.  
∞ Boomslang's venom causes one to bleed from every cavity of her body.  
∞ If his teeth sink into me, I may even turn blue.  
∞ Not the blue from his eyes, the blue from a ruptured vessel.  
∞ Death would be on the clock—less than seven days.  
∞ I'm going to rewind the gears.

6

∞ The smell of hot rubber puts butterflies in my stomach.  
∞ Then I see blue.  
∞ Tire warmers and hot asphalt help, but it is the rotation of the tire that builds the most heat.  
∞ Rubber bounces, but my rubber grips.  
∞ A ball of glass will bounce higher than a ball of rubber.  
∞ I can't help but feel like I am falling through the window.

5

∞ There are sixty-thousand miles of blood vessels in the human body.  
∞ Try not to sneeze.  
∞ If I think too long about vasoconstriction, I wonder if I can stop my blood flow.  
∞ The nervous system is a tricky thing.  
∞ I want to make my sympathetic nervous system rejuvenate, so I make it nervous.  
∞ To make a nerve nervous I ignite my own fear.  
∞ I jump out of an airplane.  
∞ I pretend I have no parachute.

4

∞ There are no clocks in many Vegas casinos.  
∞ Players can control their own tick.  
∞ They are manipulated.  
∞ Time does not stop for one person.  
∞ But one person's time can stop.

∞ To whose clock does everyone adhere?  
∞ Who gave them the right to run the world?

3

∞ Women have twice as many nocireceptors as men.  
∞ We feel more pain, but our tolerance is supposedly higher.  
∞ How can someone quantify this?  
∞ I will never have blue balls, but he will never have a human push through his canal.  
∞ Can a scientist tell me my pain level?  
∞ Will a scientist know when I'm dead?

2

∞ Diamonds rain on Jupiter and Saturn.  
∞ The little boy does not know this yet.  
∞ They form from the methane on Uranus and Neptune.  
∞ Try not to light a cigarette right now.  
∞ The big red ball is Jupiter.  
∞ It is made of rubber.  
∞ The little boy tells me that Jupiter is the biggest planet.  
∞ But sometimes the ball falls into the pool.  
∞ The little boy cries.  
∞ He doesn't understand bodies of water yet.  
∞ He doesn't believe he can survive with no ground.  
∞ When I give him the ball back, he tells me about the interworking's of the solar system.

1

∞ This is zero, if zero exists.  
∞ I can still hear the world around me.  
∞ I hope I'm naked.  
∞ But if I am, I hope I'm blue.

~ Bless you.

## A SPECIFIC PHENOMENON

JARED PEARCE

poetry

At one point, she asked for reasons to know where she stood to plan the trajectory she would beam herself into. She wanted answers, but neither of them could recall their differences, and the syzygy crumbled.

Gravity can't be sustained when the mass goes flat; instead, everything spins into another vector, ends up in some weird quadrant.

The whole principle was uncertain: the quarks can't decide to be comets; the strings tie themselves to stars or sand, but not both.

And each parent stood holding her like two roads in the woods, each begging like black holes to swallow her up.



Created with art pieces by Jamie Mackman & Alexis Tong



## CARPENTER DIPTYCH

CIARAN FREEMAN

Oil on printed canvas

# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

SANTA CLARA REVIEW

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volume 105 // issue 01

**Conor Biller** studied English at Brown University. Raised in Dallas, Texas, he currently lives in Los Angeles, and is at work on his first novel.

**Esther Hi'ilani Candari** was born in 1994 in Honolulu, Hawai'i. Her travels and racially diverse family sparked a deep fascination with cultures. She began painting in 2015 and completed a BFA in Painting and Sculpture at BYU-Hawai'i and a residency at the New York Academy of Art in 2017. She is currently an MFA student at Liberty University in Virginia.

**Brittney Corrigan** is the author of the poetry collection *Navigation* and the chapbook *40 Weeks*. Her poems have appeared widely in journals and anthologies, and she is the poetry editor for the online journal *Hyperlexia: poetry and prose about the autism spectrum*. Brittney lives in Portland, Oregon, where she is both an alumna and employee of Reed College. You can find her website at <https://brittneycorrigan.com/>

**Jach Daniel** is a writer/performance artist who has recently completed a memoir about his attempts to befriend homeless people in San Francisco. An excerpt from the book appears in this issue and another is scheduled for publication in San Francisco's *Street Sheet*. The full work is as yet unpublished.

**Darren C. Demaree** is the author of six poetry collections, most recently "Many Full Hands Applauding Inelegantly" (2016, 8th House Publishing). His seventh collection "Two Towns Over" was recently selected the winner of the Louise Bogan Award from Trio House Press, and is due out March 2018. He is the Managing Editor of the Best of the Net Anthology and Ovenbird Poetry. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

**Geoff Graser** is a freelance writer in Rochester, NY. He holds an M.A. in Journalism from Syracuse University and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Bennington College. His work has appeared in *USA Today*, *Washington City Paper*, *Rochester's Democrat and Chronicle*, *About Time Magazine*, *The Big Brick Review*, and *Timeline*.

**Joan Elliott Gray** spent her career as a Certified Clinical Social Worker in private practice in Madison, Wisconsin. She worked with the rights of the elderly and found that many of the elderly with whom she worked were fearful of their providers. Since retiring she writes about different aspects of her most endearing cases.

**Charles Fairchild** lives and works in Seattle, and is an MFA candidate at Goddard College. His work has previously appeared in *The Pinch Literary Journal* and *Bosque Journal*.

**Ciaran Freeman** is a senior at Santa Clara University double majoring in Studio Art and Art History. His recent work is born out of his experiences working for his father's construction company in New York, New York. He recently finished a residency at SF Recology, culminating in the first solo exhibition of his work in San Francisco.

**Sabrina Ito** lives in Honolulu, Hawaii with her husband and son. A French teacher by profession, Sabrina also enjoys excellent food and wine, transformative writing, and is happiest at the beach, or in the countryside. Sabrina's poems have appeared in *Clarion Magazine*, *Slipstream Press*, *Coachella Review*, *Cossack Review*, among others. She has recently completed two chapbooks.

**Sonja Johanson** has recent work appearing in *BOAAT*, *Ninth Letter*, *Poet Lore*, and *The Writer's Almanac*. She is a contributing editor at the *Eastern Iowa Review*, and the author of *Trees in Our Dooryards* (Redbird Chapbooks). You can follow her work at [www.sonjajohanson.net](http://www.sonjajohanson.net)

**Raina J. León**, PhD, is the author of three collections of poetry, *Canticle of Idols* (2008), *Boogeyman Dawn* (2014) and *sombra: dis(locate)* (2016) and the chapbook, *profeta without refuge* (2016). She is a co-founding editor of *The Acentos Review*, an online quarterly, international journal devoted to the promotion and publication of Latinx arts. She is an associate professor of education at Saint Mary's College of California.

**Kat Lewis** is a MFA Candidate in Poetry at the University of Idaho. Her work can be found in the *Superstition Review*, *Fourth River: Tributaries*, *Flyway*, and elsewhere. She lives and teaches in Moscow, ID.

**Jamie Mackman** draws on the classical nude and contemporizes the genre, creating stark and sometimes confronting imagery. She causes the viewer to question their own identity. It's not the norm for a New Zealand household to have a large nude hanging on their wall, but she challenges this notion by addressing friends and herself in vulnerable and personal representations of the "everyman."

**Megan Newcomer** is a graduate from Salisbury University who studied Art and Creative Writing. She has served as the art editor for *Scarab Literary Journal*, and illustrated two published books. Her work has

recently appeared in *Steel Toe Review* and is forthcoming in *Mochila Review* and *Santa Clara Review*.

Some of **Jared Pearce's** poems have recently been or will soon be shared in *Review Americana*, *Lampeter Review*, *Pirene's Fountain*, and *Rosebud*. His debut collection of poems is due later this year from Aubade Press.

**Alexis Tong** is an international student born and raised in Hong Kong. She came to California for college and is completing her senior year with a double major in Studio Art and Communication. She started taking drawing lessons at a young age and has been creating art ever since. As one who enjoys the process of artmaking, oil and acrylic painting are her preferred media. Her works are mainly portraits exploring concepts of self identity and existentialism.

**Emily Townsend** is a graduate student in English at Stephen F. Austin State University. Her works have appeared in *Superstition Review*, *Thoughtful Dog Magazine*, and others, and is forthcoming in *cream city review* and *Sheepshead Review*. A 2017 AWP Intro Journals Award nominee, she is working on a collection of essays in Nacogdoches, Texas.

**Jack D. Williams** is a Senior at Santa Clara University and has an Environmental Science major with a Studio Art minor. His photos featured in *The Santa Clara Review* were from a series he shot in Chicago this summer.

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