Cover Art
“Night Lights”
by Amanda Gerlach

Trinity Review

2018
Dear Reader,

Our goal for this year’s edition of the Trinity Review was to increase the breadth of creative material within the magazine. Expanding on the poetry, short stories, creative nonfiction, and artwork of previous years, this year’s Review features different media that have not been showcased in a very long time. We’ve brought in short plays written by students interested in Theater. We have liked short stories, which explore the lives of different characters within the same universe. For the first time, we also have a micro fashion collection designed exclusively for the literary magazine.

All of this would not be possible without the boundless support of the Trinity community. Our faculty advisors Kelly Grey Carlisle, Jennifer Browne, and Andrew Porter have provided constant advice and guidance throughout the academic year. Ruby Contreras and Casey Fuller are always available with a unique problem-solving fix or enthusiastic support, and we would have failed many times without their help. We would also like to extend a special thanks to Michael Bacon and the Board of Visitors for their insight and precious wisdom.

While the Co-Editors lead the Trinity Review, we could not operate without our dedicated staff. To the Event Committee who helped put on successful on-campus programming and the Design Committee who both designed advertising and helped lay out this year’s literary magazine, we thank you. We likewise could not have made it to print without the expertise of Elyse Andrews, Abbi Bowen, Grace Holt, and Monica Lampton. We appreciate your contribution to the campus literary community.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks to all of those who have supported the Trinity Review, through attending events, submitting creative content, or donating to help us continue to operate and print the highest-quality edition. Your commitment to the arts inspires us to work harder and strive for higher achievements. We hope you enjoy the fruits of our efforts.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Gilbert and Alex Motter
Co-Editors, 2017-2018
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Night Lights

Amanda Gerlach

Cover Art Competition Winner
The pervasiveness of hype culture is ruining the fashion industry. High fashion developed from the work of couturiers, the likes of Yves Saint Laurent, Oscar de la Renta, and Karl Lagerfeld prized for their advanced craftsmanship and attention to detail. The expertise and quality of couture has deteriorated in favor of fad items. Basic pieces like hoodies are made overseas for less than $10 and sold for over $1000, an almost ten thousand percent markup. Brands like Vetements, Off-white, Supreme, and to a degree Comme des Garçons, sustain themselves on exclusivity rather than quality. They succeed in doing so by intentionally sabotaging their inventory and forcing people to fight for limited supply, creating the false impression the goods they seek are prized or unique.

This series was created by me specifically for this issue of the Trinity Review. Each of pieces in this collection reflect contemporary trends of these so-called “hype brands.” They integrate the fabric of the ubiquitous Off-white industrial belt, which retails for $200 but is made of components that can be easily assembled for under $15. Without the label of Off-white and its attached popularity, these pieces lose merit and the “hype” attached to them. While all the pieces in this collection were bought or created for under $100, they could be sold as originals and net around $2,000 in the current fashion climate.

Special thanks are owed to Nayal Lalani, Kezia Nyarko, and Chelsea Rodriguez for coming to clothing fittings, adding pieces from their wardrobes to their ensembles, and modeling. Kathleen Creedon’s razor-shop photography and keen eye for editing helped take my artistic vision and elevate it beyond the realm of fantasy. Finally, Layna Hayes’s screen printing skills, especially under such tight deadlines, compensated for my own artistic limitations. This collection would not have been possible without all your help.
A six-year-old named David drew the best picture of San Antonio I had ever seen. It was done in a young child’s shaky lines, but it showed the recognizable likenesses of downtown structures—the square windows of the Marriott Rivercenter, the flag at the top of the Tower Life Building, the towering Tower of the Americas, and the four suspensions rising above the Alamodome Stadium.

“Miss Lisa, have you seen David’s drawing of San Antonio?” I asked the more experienced summer camp teacher in my room. I was assigned to Miss Lisa’s younger class today, because the other teachers were gone.

“Oh, yes!” she said, looking up from the band-aid she was putting on a teary four-year-old. “David loves drawing San Antonio. It’s his favorite thing to draw. It’s good, isn’t it?” Her brown ponytail swished back and forth as she kept a keen eye on the goings-on among the kids. The goings-on at the moment included one of our five-year-olds trying to eat a writing utensil. “Louis! Get the marker out of your mouth!” Miss Lisa yelled across the room.

Louis, four years old, didn’t talk, and I didn’t know if he understood what Miss Lisa was telling him. He stood next to his seat, tearing the paper he was supposed to be drawing on, with half of a red marker sticking out of his mouth. He kept chewing until Miss Lisa went over and wrenched the marker out of his mouth.

I turned back to David. I was on my knees, so our heads were about level. I had noticed before that he liked cities because he had wanted to read me a book about New York City a week earlier. David was one of the most advanced kids in his age group, and could read better than most of the six-year-olds. One of the missions of the camp was to help with the education and literacy of kids in the neighborhood. The summer camp gave the kids a place to go when their parents were at work, and the academic curriculum helped them retain and build on what they had learned during the school year. The school district had some of the lowest performing schools in the city, so the camp met a real need in the community. I was volunteering for the summer, partially because I needed something to do over the summer and I had connections to the people who ran the neighborhood center.

My legs hurt. “David, I really like your drawing,” I said. He was in the middle of writing the “I” in his name. “Do you have a favorite building in San Antonio?” Last week he had told me that his favorite buildings in New York were the Twin Towers.

“His glasses broke before the summer started.”

“His glasses broke before the summer started.”

“Oh, okay. Are you saying that he’s having trouble seeing?”

“I think the words in that book are too small. He needs a book with bigger words.” Tommy spoke softly, slowly, and his brother watched him.

“Right. Thanks for telling me that, Tommy.” Now that I looked for it, the book did have small words. I closed it, and asked, “Why doesn’t Lucas get new glasses?”

“His glasses broke before the summer started.”

“His glasses broke before the summer started.”

“Tommy was Lucas’ older brother, who always tried to help Lucas with his assignments, even to the neglect of his own assignments. Miss Martinez and I tried to separate Tommy and Lucas so Lucas would learn independence, but it didn’t always work.

“Miss Grace,” Tommy said, “Lucas’ glasses broke.”

“Oh, they did?” I replied. “I didn’t know he had glasses.” Analisa was the only person in the class who I remembered having glasses.

“His glasses broke before the summer started.”

“His glasses broke before the summer started.”

“Tommy said that his glasses broke before the summer started.”

“Lucas needs new glasses. “Oh, okay. Are you saying that he’s having trouble seeing?”

“His glasses broke before the summer started.”

“His glasses broke before the summer started.”

“Miss Lisa, have you seen David’s drawing of San Antonio?” I asked the more experienced summer camp teacher in my room. I was assigned to Miss Lisa’s younger class today, because the other teachers were gone.

I looked up at me from under his dark lashes. “The Tower of the Americas. I’ve been up it three times out of my mouth!” Miss Lisa yelled across the room.

Louis, four years old, didn’t talk, and I didn’t know if he understood what Miss Lisa was telling him. He stood next to his seat, tearing the paper he was supposed to be drawing on, with half of a red marker sticking out of his mouth. He kept chewing until Miss Lisa went over and wrenched the marker out of his mouth.

My knees were starting to hurt. “David, I really like your drawing,” I said. He was in the middle of writing the “I” in his name. “Do you have a favorite building in San Antonio?” Last week he had told me that his favorite buildings in New York were the Twin Towers. He stood next to his seat, tearing the paper he was supposed to be drawing on, with half of a red marker sticking out of his mouth. He kept chewing until Miss Lisa went over and wrenched the marker out of his mouth.

I looked at the drawing again. I had lived in San Antonio for roughly three years, and I loved looking at the pale scraping figures of the cityscape. I would go to the skyline balcony at Trinity University at night, to be alone and see the image of a world that was bigger than my campus. But something was different here. When I looked at the skyline from Trinity, I saw the Alamodome on the left and the Tower of the Americas on the right; David’s skyline showed the Alamodome on the right and the Tower of the Americas on the left. I hadn’t seen it this way before, because I was used to looking at it from the north. I made a mental note to look closely the next time I could see downtown, now that I was on the west side. I didn’t realize then how much more I could see of San Antonio with just a change of perspective.
After they spent themselves on the playground, the kids would line up on the blacktop outside the cafeteria and take turns receiving the carefully wrapped lunches that the San Antonio Food Bank provided. I tried to keep them in line as they discovered what was on the day’s menu, and then led them back into the classroom. They took their seats and I prepared myself for my next challenge: trying to get them to eat.

Before sitting down, Hope walked up to where I was standing by the counter. “I don’t want these,” she said, handing me her cheese stick, carrots, chicken sandwich, and orange, everything except her chocolate milk. “Is there anything else to eat?”

There were leftover muffins and cereal from breakfast in the drawer. “No,” I said. “Eat what you have.” She sat down at the table in defiance and rested her head in her hand. I put her food on the counter, knowing she would be back to reclaim it. The kids handed me their food, the parts of their lunches that they didn’t want. Piles formed of carrots and chicken sandwiches, and I distributed them to the kids who wanted more. Dominic came up to get more carrots, and I told him that he needed to finish the carrots he had before he could get a fifth serving. When this process ended, I sat down at one of the tables.

Julian sat across from me with his chicken sandwich open, with one small bite taken out. “How’s the chicken sandwich?” I asked him.

“I don’t like it,” he said softly, sipping his chocolate milk. He had eaten the cheese stick, but nothing else.

Dominic, who was sitting next to him, said, “I’ll eat your carrots if you don’t want them!”

“Sure, you can have my carrots,” Dominic,” Julian said, handing his bag of carrots to him. Dominic took them eagerly and added them to his pile of carrots. He continued eating the carrots from the opened bag, dipping them in ranch and crunching them.

“See, Dominic is eating his food. It’s good for you. You must be hungry from running around so hard outside,” I tried to prompt Julian. I disliked having to throw away food at the end of lunch.

“I’m not very hungry,” he said.

“You might be hungry later.” He looked down at the table and repeated, “But I don’t like it.” The white chicken looked bland on top of the soggy bread. I would eat it if I had to, but I couldn’t imagine living on the food from the food bank.

“What do you usually like eating?” I asked.

“I like McDonalds,” he said.

“Is that what you usually have for dinner?” I kept questioning, wanting to know more about my student.

“I usually don’t have dinner,” he answered. “I wake up in the middle of the night hungry and then my dad gives me food.”

“Oh,” I said, caught off guard. “You should eat your food now, when you can.”

I thought about what I knew about Julian’s dad, who didn’t feed him dinner. Whenever Julian opened his lunch box, I would eat it if I had to, but I couldn’t imagine living on the food from the food bank.

Trinity University

Trinity University, situated comfortably next to Brackenridge Park, is home to a couple thousand students who walk past banners every day that say, “Discover. Grow. Become.” During my time at Trinity, I had learned how to read James Joyce and solve differential equations. I had pulled all-nighters, been thrown into the fountain, studied abroad, and had many late night conversations with my friends. I had come to know its bricks and walkways and old red oaks, and they had become written into who I was.

During swim lessons, Miss Martinez, one of the teachers, and I got a bit of a break. We had to get the kids on the bus, make sure they were dressed for swimming, and line them up for the swim coaches, but once they were in the water, they were under someone else’s care. We would sit on a covered bench by the water, and if I had remembered my sunglasses, I would watch while the kids learned how to kick and float and blow bubbles. The kids always had fun with the swim lessons, and emerged from the pool wet, tired, and happy. Sometimes they would run by the pool and have to sit out of practice, but when they were good, the bus driver would reward them by driving over the fun bumps on the way back to the camp.

Haven for Hope

Haven for Hope is an organization that offers care to thousands of homeless people every day, working towards the goals of employment, permanent housing, and healthcare. A mural on the campus illustrates a man lying on the ground with his back turned, with the words, “I thought I would never have to sleep on the outside.” I hadn’t known what to expect from my summer at the camp, but the experience challenged me in ways I wasn’t prepared for. Every day I would grow more attached to these kids because of the goofy things that they did or the ways they were excellent to each other. And every day I would learn new things about their experiences, and a new awful awareness slowly crept up on me. Like when—

On one of our drives home, Jenny told us that Isaac and his brothers, Gabriel and Jeremy, were homeless. “I really wish I could get Jeremy new shoes,” she said. “He only has one pair, and they’re swim shoes.”

And when—

We were outside, and the kids were writing in their journals. The prompt was, “What is your most prized possession?” I walked around, checking the entries for spelling and effort. I stopped at Hope’s, and read, “The teddy bare that CPS gave me.” I started telling her how to spell “bear,” and she looked up at me and put her finger over “CPS,” not taking it off her page until I had left.

And—

A two-year-old, Rose, had to be taken away by an ambulance because she had been lethargic and unresponsive all day. It turned out that she had had a seizure the week before, but was not receiving the proper medication. She had not gone to the hospital because her family could not afford it, and after the incident we never saw her again.

The stories showered down on me like raindrops in a storm, and soon I felt like the water was gathering at my feet, rising above my ankles, and creeping toward my chest, until I was lost at sea. These kids were dealing with stuff that no kids should have to deal with, and my life, by comparison, felt so easy. I watched the rain come down and I couldn’t do anything to stop it.

And—

A week later, Julia walked into the classroom, her hair damp and her eyes bloodshot. I asked her what was wrong, and she said, “I didn’t sleep last night.”

I asked her why not, and she said, “My dad got arrested last night.”

And—

I looked up at her and put my finger over “CPS,” not taking it off her page until I had left.

And—

“Less than twenty percent, Miss Grace.”
Less than twenty percent. This statistic was unfathomable to me. I had gone to an expensive private school, where it was expected of everyone to go to college.

I thought about Julian and Analisa and Lucas and all the rest—what did that mean for them? I would leave the west side and go back to Trinity in the fall, but they would most likely stay here for the rest of their educational careers. This summer, I had belonged to the west side, with its bright colors and Latino culture and spirited kids. In a few weeks I would belong at Trinity, as the phrase “YOU BELONG HERE,” spray painted throughout campus, always reminded me. When I went back to the bricks and walkways of Trinity, how much would these kids’ stories be written into who I was? There, where was my own haven, my own library, my own view of the skyline, I would be far from here. I and most of my college friends were at Trinity not only because of the hard work we had put into high school, but because of our backgrounds. We knew this, and my friends cared immensely about things like kids getting the glasses they needed to read or eating enough healthy food. Now that I had had this experience, I could find ways to tell them these kids’ stories.

On our last day of camp, we had a party. Our boss brought cake for everyone, and I and the other volunteers brought the kids friendship bracelets we had made for them. After they each got a bracelet, they came up to us and asked for more bracelets, and we had enough that some of them got three. They made us cards that they all signed, and at the end of the day I got more hugs than I had ever gotten, including one from Julian. As we walked across the camp to go home for the last time, I saw Liliana leaving with her mom and two-year-old sister, happily holding her sister’s hand and walking to their car. Her mom smiled and listened to Liliana talk about all the things we had done that day, placing her hand on her daughter’s back and leading her through the gate. They all had the same round face and loose brown curls, the same wide, brown eyes. In the parking lot, Liliana saw us and waved at us brightly, and then climbed into her mom’s white Toyota Corolla to go home.
Starstuff
Emily Bourgeois

Have I told you that you make me lose consciousness?
When you get closer the breath--
leaves my lungs until air slips in and out like a blinking vacant sign off Route 66.
Your eyes linger, and I am electricity----hitting the tops of trees and telephone wires
When we're connected--
it's not like we're touchy Wi-Fi that disconnects in dining hall work spaces,
we're the whole damn broadband network.
(But I don't know how to tell this to you.)

In an alternate universe, when I told you I loved you,
we walked on the stars and you told me you didn't think poetry was stupid.
You whispered Byron into my ear while we were starstuff--
-kicking up dust with every rhyme and metric foot. I wanted to share with you my thoughts --but
I couldn't find the words
(So I kissed you next to Jupiter.)

Plausibility isn't a debate— speaking to you is my favorite treat,
like ice cream on a summer's day.
And I thought you didn't care.
But you looked at me when I didn't notice,
when the drum beats loudly in my ear,
sending reverberating sounds to the inside of my skull.
And I didn't know you were there because
I was already too far gone
(made of starstuff in my body alone.)

In an alternate universe, there's an alternate you who tells me what you feel.
(Who isn't made from hardened clay or scribed in a book that I cannot read)
because you are my favorite puzzle, but I am ethereal.

I walk amongst the stars alone.
(if only you would care to join me.)
My formative years have a certain hue to them; a specific shape. Floating to the brim of my mind I find orange paint, shiny brown floors, and my father.

“No, like this,” he instructed, flicking his wrist and causing the wet paint to jump off the wall. I watched him repeat this, in awe of the effect it had on the room. The once barren space was suddenly lively; animated in a way that amused my young mind.

Standing on my tiptoes, I did as he said. We continued in this way until the accent wall in the Salon portion of Jay’s Uptown Barber Studio and Salon was complete. As the paint dried it clumped and jutted out of the wall, giving it a 3D effect.

As a child, I think the building seemed more magical. It was big as a warehouse with its open floor plan and numerous rooms. In the shop, there was a game room for children to occupy themselves, a salon for women’s nail and hair needs, a bar of sorts off to the back area, a room dedicated solely for billiards, a receptionist area, and of course; the barbershop.

The shiny brown floors came next. I watched as my father systematically mopped, bleached, and stained the floors of this magical warehouse studio. I hopped backwards when he sent the mop careening towards me. He added the chemicals and swirled the mop around the floor in an intricate dance, giving the floors a beautiful, polished finish.

As I grew older though, the orange seemed a little duller, the mop didn’t chase me in hot pursuit like it used to, and the idea of yet another round of pool became almost unbearable. I was in my teens and dad’s Uptown Barber Studio and Salon was losing its magic. When I was with him, we spent every waking moment in the studio; him working during the day as I (unsuccessfully) tried to stay busy. I would ask him after every finished cut,

“How many more?”

“No, who?” someone questioned from under the dryer.

“That’s Jay’s little girl!” a hairdresser revealed.

With shock and awe, the women waved me into the room to sit in their company. Sitting in one of the dryer seats, legs dangling and ears open, I listened as the women recounted tales about the men in their lives, talked about shows they were watching, social and political issues they were closely following.

As I grew older though, the orange seemed a little duller, the mop didn’t chase me in hot pursuit like it used to, and the idea of yet another round of pool became almost unbearable. I was in my teens and dad’s Uptown Barber Studio and Salon was losing its magic. When I was with him, we spent every waking moment in the studio; him working during the day as I (unsuccessfully) tried to stay busy. I would ask him after every finished cut,

“How many more?”

“Just a few more clients, pretty girl.”

These darkening sentiments clouded my originally sunny vision of my dad’s beloved Barber Studio and my early memories of spending time with him. I came to resent the shop and the amount of time we spent cooped up in it.
Because of this, I find it strange how fondly I look back upon those early memories, now. Having the opportunity to look back at that time in my life with a certain wistful fondness is unexpected and so, so beautiful. The truth is, I miss that part of my life sorely. I miss the way people would look at me in disbelief, as if my very existence a pleasant surprise. It was a time where there was beauty in the slightest of things; paint textures and the sound of a cue ball breaking a pool set. I suppose though, I miss my father most of all.

The first year, we cried
We lit votives and mourned as the wound was ripped back open again
Revealing pinkish flesh and the nerves that made it hurt
So bad.
We felt empty, numb-stagnant in our healing.
    The first year: we mourned.

On the fifth year, we went to your favorite restaurant
Left the votive burning for three days in the window
I made a black forest cake, your favorite
We ate in silence.
We returned to our separate homes.
I let myself feel, crying those deepracking sobs
The ones that linger inside of me every year waiting to be left out.
My pillow collected these tears.
    The fifth year: we were silent.

On the seventh year, we lay flowers on your headstone.
We lay them alongside pictures of Ale.
This year-- she was here
    She asked me that night why I couldn’t sleep,
    rubbing my back to comfort me.
    She didn’t know about you.
I collapsed into her arms like a child’s origami, folding myself.
Making myself small enough to fit in the palm of her hand
    On the seventh year: we remembered.

The tenth year came and went in relative peace, just the same.
I lit your candle and said the prayer.
I woke in the night
    Wondering if you were going to be there.
The eleventh year.
The twelfth year.
The thirteenth year.
The fourteenth year, I forgot to buy your votive.
I forgot to put flowers by your headstone.
    Forgive me.
    I am sorry.
    I do not know how to mourn.
Impression
Alexis Jarrett

A cab. We were on the way to dinner in New Orleans Louisiana. I stared out of the window at the people walking by the shops down Decatur Street. There was a girl in a bright yellow top and baggy army green pants. She stuck out of the crowd, but no one seemed to notice her. She had a sign in her hands made of a piece of cardboard; there was a joke on it. I stared at her and the sign, and by some crazy random happenstance she looked back at me. She flipped up part of the sign to reveal the punch-line and she winked at me. I watched her disappear as the taxi sped off.

Crying. At one of the only funerals I’ve ever been to. There’s a slide show of a man’s life and a song I’d never heard before. I had met him before, but he was always very sick and I could not understand him. The pews were full of people I knew and some I did not. Our sadness connected us. This man’s life connected us. We all cried together. A family. I still keep his picture in my wallet.

The store. Riding with one of my sisters, and my cousin, when we were children. Our grandmother's nurse drove. There were two small hills on the road to town. As we went up, the three of us in the back seat put our hands in the air saying “arriba”. As we went down, our stomachs would drop giving the feeling of falling; we said “abajo” and giggled. Now I drive this road and my stomach no longer drops. Now the road is different, the church looks strange, the horizon is littered with wind turbines. I don’t remember the changes happening. They were just there one day. Everything is different, but we will always share that feeling.

An elderly woman. She sat alone at a sandwich shop. She looked sad. I too was alone. I asked if she would like company and we sat together. She was a wonderful woman. She told me so much about her life. She welcomed me so freely and trusted me like we were not strangers only moments before. We talked for a couple of hours, longer than either of us had intended to be in the restaurant. We parted ways. I do not remember her name.

Screaming. I remember the yelling and then she was gone. My mother had to wear a brace on her wrist from where she had been kicked. I didn’t see my sister again for a year. That was the first time she ran away. She became very good at running away. Me and my little sister were the only ones around to hear the commotion that day. She was so young; I doubt she remembers, but I was glad I wasn’t alone and sad that she had to be there too.

My grandfather. He was a funny man. Everyone who talks about him says great things about his character and how much he loved his family. The only memory I have of my grandfather is him in a wheelchair asking for a kiss on the cheek in his broken English. I tried to reach him but I was too small. He would laugh and help me up. He called me shorty.

My religion is people and all the wonderful, sad, ugly moments we share as we all try our best to exist.
Sweaty Palms
Kara Killinger

Blue light shines on glossy floor.
I can’t ignore the pulse of the radio.

You know how jazz warps forward and back, a lyric lack? I fall into your arms like that, and swing out.

This one has a lead and a follow, v
pick a side, and ride and ride and ride.

A slow song comes on and we don’t know what to do.

“Want a drink?”
I do, I do, I do.

Warm foamy alcohol, fall back and let the soft light catch you.

Or let the gray wall, or let the strong arms of a stranger.

traffic
Stephen Sumrall-Orsak

City Still Life
Kara Killinger

Dear aimless pigeons, dear too-big skirt and the long walk to work at 6 a.m., dear too-small shoes, let’s just continue on.

At any given moment, there are a thousand reasons not to kill yourself, cheat on your husband, or read the news. Dear homeless man with palms cracked as concrete, you are reason 502.

Dear cubicle rustle, dear children waiting at home, dear glass refraction of sky refraction of real sunlight, let’s please continue working. At any given moment, an incalculable amount of statistics are produced. You don’t want to become one of them.

Dear aimless heart, dear pumping lungs, let’s not take any vacation days. Dear clicking heels on resin floor, tick only forward. Sweaty hands heavy as concrete, do not crack.

At any given moment, I cannot afford to stop.
The ABCs of a Successful Dinner Party

Emily Wood

10-minute Play

Cast of Characters

APRIL ALDERSON  A short woman, stay-at-home mom turned empty-nester, often wears platform shoes to make herself taller

ANTHONY ALDERSON  A tall, slim man wearing a sport coat over a polo, works in finance downtown but mostly seems to play golf

BETH BATEMAN  A slight, nervous-looking woman, but she teaches high school history and can deal with teenager nonsense

BRANDON BATEMAN  A rather large man, looks even bigger in comparison to his wife, works in accounting

CATHERINE CHADWICK  A woman of average build with an extra-large personality, talks a mile a minute, aspiring CEO

CARL CHADWICK  A man of medium height with the slouching stature of a man constantly steamrolled by his wife

DELIVERY BOY  A teenager

Time
Spring

Place
Suburbia
Setting: The living room of April and Anthony's house in the upper middle class suburbs. On stage right, a partial divider marks the location of the front door, and the space at the edge of the stage just outside the door is visible. At stage left, there is another partial divider to create the hallway to the kitchen (offstage). A couch and several chairs are positioned around a coffee table in the center of the room. Upstage, there is a platform on which a long dining room table sits. Most of the furniture, walls, and floors are shades of brown, beige, and off-white, except for a bowl of turquoise decorative spheres in a bowl on the coffee table.

At Rise: April and Anthony prepare to host a dinner party. The dining table is set, and a stocked bar cart sits at the SL side of the couch. Anthony stands front and center with his back to the audience, examining the couch. After a moment, he moves forward and rearranges the throw pillows on the couch, then stands back to examine his work. He changes his mind and returns them to the way they were before just as a door slams loudly offstage.

(ANTHONY jumps and looks toward stage left. APRIL bursts into the living room in a panic.)

APRIL
Anthony! What are we going to do?!

ANTHONY
Back up, darling. What's happened?

APRIL
The cook quit! Just in the middle of making the roast and prepping the potatoes, she walked out! I mean, I might have called her an incompetent nitwit, but then she decided she urgently had somewhere else to be!

ANTHONY (Troubled, sits on the couch)
Oh, my.

APRIL
And I don't know how to cook a roast! I don't have time to prep the potatoes!

ANTHONY (Troubled, sits on the couch)
Oh, my.

APRIL (After a beat)
I know! Quick, Anthony. You go and phone that Italian place down the street to order some food. Then we'll sneak it in and plate it and no one will have to know!

ANTHONY (Shocked)
Italian? Didn’t we do Italian food last time we had people over?

APRIL
Do you have a better idea? Maybe you want to tell our guests that dinner is cancelled.

ANTHONY (Standing)
Yes, yes. Very well. I'll see if they deliver.

ANTHONY exits.)

APRIL
Quickly! They'll be here any—

(The doorbell rings and APRIL shrieks.)

ANTHONY (From offstage)
I'll be right there, darling! (More quietly) Yes, as quickly as possible. Do you deliver?

APRIL
Hello! So good to see you, Beth. Welcome, Brandon.

(She hugs each in turn.)

Come in, come in, and make yourselves at home!

BRANDON
I hope we're not late, April. Beth was at work into the evening again, grading papers or whatever she does.

BETH
Yes, it’s been a busy week.

APRIL
Not at all! You're the first ones here. Would you like anything to drink?

BRANDON
Some scotch if you have it.

BETH
Who else are you expecting?

APRIL
Oh, just the Chadwicks! Scotch for you, Brandon. Some wine, Beth?

BETH (Suddenly uncomfortable)
Oh. Um, yes, please.

(APRIL pours a glass of wine for her, and ANTHONY reenters the room, drawing APRIL's attention. BETH downs her wine.)

ANTHONY
Well, everything’s looking great in the kitchen.

(He aims a conspicuous wink at APRIL)

Hello, Beth! Brandon, good to see you.

(They shake hands.)

How are things at the office?
Accounting is never going to be an exciting gig, but it keeps me comfortable. Helps me afford Beth’s teaching habit!

(BRANDON laughs again, this time forced. BETH’s expression doesn’t change; she has heard this line before.)

ANTHONY
(Turns to BETH, who is fiddling with her now-empty wine glass.)
Yes, Beth, how is the school year going? (Short pause.) Oh, uh...more wine?

BETH
Yes, please. My classes are doing well so far, but around the middle of the semester is always when things start picking up.
(The doorbell rings again.)

APRIL
Oh, and here they are!
(APRIL goes to open the front door.)

CARL
(After shaking hands with BETH) Ah, yes. It’s been a...a good...long while.

BETH
If you say so.

APRIL
Yes, well. I’m going to pop out and check on the food, but unfortunately it’s not quite ready, so I apologize. But my chef promises it’ll be worth the wait.

CATHERINE
No problem at all, April.

APRIL
Oh, Catherine, I’ve been meaning to ask—how is Carter?

CATHERINE
He’s fine.

APRIL
I think he’s taking a break from all the social media these days. He’s finally recognized how poisonous and time-wasting all the Facebook and the, the InstaSnap and the Twitter can be.

CATHERINE
That’s great.

CARL
(Speaking of social media, Anthony, I...wanted to show you one of the new features on LinkedIn.

ANTHONY
Ooh, what have they come up with this time?

CARL
(Carl and Anthony have a hushed conversation in the hall. BETH comes back through the front door, unsteady on her feet.)

APRIL
Oh, Beth, dear. Are you all right?
BETH (Sitting in an armchair)
Sorry, I'm fine. Just got started on my wine a little quickly.

(BRANDON makes an irritated noise.)

CATHERINE (swirling her own glass)
I can see why. It's just exquisite. A merlot, very French, about five to seven years old?

APRIL
Oh, I...don't know.

ANTHONY
YOU WHAT?
(The other four diners turn their heads in the direction of the hall. CARL hushes ANTHONY and leads him offstage. The doorbell rings. The DELIVERY BOY has arrived with the food.)

APRIL (Flustered)
Who could that be? We're certainly not expecting anyone else.

(She walks to the door and opens it. Seeing who is outside, she slams it shut again.)

APRIL (Cont.)
Uhh...must have the wrong address. I'll see if I can point him in the right direction.

(She cracks the door open again and gestures for him to go around to the back.)

How odd. Anyways...I'm just going to run and check the food again.

(APRIL exits in a hurry. CATHERINE moves to closer to BETH.)

CATHERINE
Beth, I know this isn't the time or the place, but I just need someone to talk to for a minute.

BETH (Apprehensive)
Um, okay. What's on your mind?

BETH (Apprehensive)
Carl is cheating on me. I just know it.

CATHERINE
Oh! That's...I'm so...how...what, what makes you think that?

CATHERINE
He's just been gone all the time. Plus the whole situation with Carter. I just know it. I don't know who the other woman is though. Must be someone from work.

BETH
Hmm, must be... (Beat) I'm really sorry, but I'm still feeling a little light-headed from my wine. I think I just need to step outside for a minute.

(She goes back out the front door and fumbles with another cigarette. Inside, APRIL, ANTHONY and CARL return to the living room.)

APRIL
Good news! The food is just being plated up. We'll be ready to sit down any minute now.

CATHERINE (Starting to stand)
Oh, Beth just stepped outside. I can—

CARL
Don't worry about it; I'll check on her.

(CARL steps out the front door, and BETH tries to hide the cigarette.)

BETH
Oh, it's you.

CARL
Dinner's just about ready. They're expecting you back inside.

CATHERINE
Catherine knows. She told me—confided in me—that her husband is cheating on her, Carl. She doesn't know it's me, but Jesus, Carl. Are you going to leave her or not?

CARL
I don't...it's not that... This isn't the time to talk about it. Put that out, and come back inside.

(BETH and CARL re-enter the house. ANTHONY walks over to them.)

ANTHONY (Hushed)
Finally! What were you two doing out there? You're going to attract attention, look suspicious.

BETH
You told Anthony?

ANTHONY
Hey! You should be glad to have me on your side, making sure nobody finds out you're sleeping together.

APRIL (Stopping short just behind ANTHONY)
Who's sleeping together? You're sleeping— Oh no.

BETH
Anthony.

CATHERINE
Excuse me? They're sleeping together?

APRIL
My apologies, didn't hear the whole conversation. Just the end of a joke I missed!

CATHERINE
You are, aren't you?
CARL
Catherine, no, look—

CATHERINE
Of course. It makes complete sense, the two of you. I just...don't understand what happened.

ANTHONY
Now, let's just back up. Let's just take a minute and think. This isn't what it looks—

CARL
What happened? What happened is I needed to get away from you. I needed a distraction from the fact that our son is running around naked in the desert with a bunch of communist hippies. Is that too hard for you to understand?

CATHERINE
Carl!

ANTHONY
Oh, my.

BETH
You what?

APRIL
What happened?

ANTHONY
Everyone just calm down a minute.

CATHERINE
I will not calm down!

ANTHONY
Dinner looks amazing, doesn’t it? Why don’t we all eat?

APRIL
The food is all a sham anyways!

CATHERINE
Don’t you dare try to blame this on Carter.

BETH
It was because of you, Catherine, not Carter.

CARL
Beth, this isn’t your business.

BETH
Excuse me.

Catherine (Turning to BRANDON)
How are you just sitting there? Are you not outraged?

BRANDON (Sipping his drink)
We’re already getting a divorce anyway. And that’s not the reason.
(APRIL looks to be at a loss. CATHERINE is still fuming, opening and closing her mouth like an angry fish. CARL looks at BRANDON, shocked.)

ANTHONY
Can I get anyone some more wine?

CURTAIN

Monarch endangerment
Chelsea Poesch
My Life as an Egg Roll Factory Tenant
Alex Motter

Whenever I have to list a fun fact about myself, I oftentimes tell people I grew up in an egg roll factory. Of course, I didn’t literally grow up in an egg roll factory; my parents had a lovely house less than 15 minutes away from their offices. Every moment I wasn’t at school or sleeping at home, however, I spent at their offices with my younger brother. While my experience growing up in an egg roll factory was certainly unique, my summers there represent some of the happiest years of my life.

One of the many gifts these summers gave me was a love for movies. A small TV with a VCR player was a perk included in the small storage closet that my brother and I were instructed to stay inside of, entertained only by our imagination and the items in our “office.” I still remember watching my dad burn our favorite shows onto blank VCRs so we could watch them at work. I obsessively watched certain films we had tapes for, like Swiss Family Robinson, Sleeping Beauty, and both the animated and the Glenn Close 101 Dalmatians. I would sit and stare, eyes glued to the screen until the credits rolled, and then stand up and rewind it in our fancy VHS reminder my parents bought at Radio Shack for $6.

The magic of my time at the egg roll factory was captured perfectly by the best bildungsroman movie I saw last year. It wasn’t Lady Bird or The Florida Project or Wonderstruck or Okja or any of the films in this genre frequently cited in Best of 2017 lists. Although it is from the cartoon and animation genre, it wasn’t Coco or Boss Baby. No, my favorite bildungsroman story of 2017 was Ma vie de Courgette, also known as My Life as a Zucchini.

Bildungsroman: A German literary genre focusing on the education, development, and maturing of a young protagonist

After the loss of his mother, Courgette is taken the an orphanage where he meets children with similar backgrounds to him: Simon the bully, Alice the quiet girl with the facial scars, Ahmed who still wets the bed sometimes, Béatrice who wears thick rimmed glasses. They become a family, bound together by the shared traumas they experienced at such a young age. When newcomer Camille arrives at the orphanage, Courgette develops a crush on her as children of their age oftentimes do. Instead of leaving the film in the realm of this cliche, however, Courgette and Camille’s relationship evolves into a deeper, more nuanced appreciation.

As a kid, I struggled to identify with films like The Sandlot because this rag tag group of happy go lucky friends creating mischief in their neighborhood shared an experience I never would. However, I found My Life As a Zucchini resonating in many surprising ways. Courgette, for example, grew up in the era of playing arts and crafts with office supplies and the resources around you. He fashioned kites and line to make houses inspired by my mom’s favorite show, House Hunters International. Simon and the others oftentimes were forced to come up with creative games on their own, such as re-creating a Geico caveman commercial whilst unattended, and “initiating” new orphan arrivals with rituals reminiscent of pledging. As the only children in a sea of adults, my brother and I oftentimes had to improvise to keep ourselves entertained. We acted out stories from the Bible, wrote and directed mini plays in the cardboard houses, and would play hide-and-go-seek in the massive warehouse once all the employees had left.

In many ways, Courgette and his friends act just like kids. They love to fly kites, throw water balloons, and jump rope. However, the film masterfully leaves reminders of how weathered and experienced the kids truly are: the only memento of his mother Courgette has is a beer can, a constant reminder of the alcoholism which lead to their separation; Béatrice runs to the door every time a visitor comes, yelling her mother’s name in hope she has returned to retrieve her; Simon’s parents don’t bother to write to him; Alice’s previous trauma at the hands of her father leaves her quiet and obsessive in counting and banging objects.

I often struggle to enjoy the bildungsroman genre because of how childish the issues of the young protagonists are. Filmmakers writing stories of children, it seems, have either forgotten the painful realities of childhood or were born privileged enough not to be exposed to hardship at a young age. When most of your extended family work together, drama and in-fighting can oftentimes carry into the workplace. I still remember sitting at our lunchroom table after a full-scale brawl, loudly picking at individual grains of rice with my metal chopsticks in an attempt to drown out the silence of unresolved tension.

All of the complex emotions these children face are wrapped up into a runtime of less than 70 minutes (an hour without credits), a heroic feat in the same year as Blade Runner 2049’s snooze-inducing three hour runtime. Director Claude Barras uses each second of this film masterfully, allowing the film to zero in on essential details without sacrificing depth or plot. There are several scenes on the children’s’ ski trip that brought tears to my eyes or left me dumbstruck. In fact, the entire film eclipsed performances like Meryl Streep’s August: Osage County, and that balderdash was nominated for a best actress Oscar.

Despite what Hollywood might think, childhood isn’t an impermeable bubble, exempting oneself from the terrors of the real world. The bubbly facade is constantly prodded and disturbed by little crises and melodowns. One day that bubble will burst, and all we are left with is a world that doesn’t care about how we’re feeling or how difficult our day is. Films like My Life as a Zucchini perfectly capture these last, fleeting moments of childhood, just before reality rears its ugly head. It joins groundbreaking films such as Room and Léon: The Professional in removing the derogatory sting of the phrase “child actor.” The children’s desperation and hope do not overbearingly reveal themselves in elongated monologues about how hopeless their situation is, or scenes that exist for the sole purpose of guilting the viewer into feeling bad. I was wiping away tears at the end simply because, in the words of Courgette, “sometimes we cry when we’re happy.”

One of the worst days of my adolescence was the day the office was burglarized. This was earlier in the lifespan of the business, when our offices were some of the only well-decorated and lit facilities in a neighborhood of docks and shipping containers. In the dead of night, an unknown assailant or assailants used a crowbar to force open the front door, kicking through the glass door of the waiting room to enter the main offices. Doing so immediately triggered the alarms and alerted the police, forcing them to act quickly. Their objective was similar to any petty burglary: grab small untraceable valuables and electronics which can be easily resold for cash. They darted towards the first closed door
in sight, which happened to be my grandma’s office where my brother and I were temporarily relo-cated. Instead of striding across the room to the desk, the burglar(s) ran into an unexpected obstacle: the cardboard house I’d spent weeks designing and cutting details into with safety scissors. Unable to anticipate this hurdle in the pitch-black offices, they fell directly into the open top roof, knocking over two of its flimsy walls and collapsing into swaths of blankets. By the time they untangled from the mess of belongings, time was up. They were forced to flee empty handed, only succeeding in breaking a couple doors and my little brown house.

My grandma tried to console me, telling me they would have done much worse damage if it wasn’t for my cardboard house. While I could rationally understand this, it made no difference to me. I came in the next day and only saw the results of my hard work ruined, trampled on and crushed under the heavy weight of industrial boots. I was devastated; my house was not just some booby trap or snare for unsuspecting burglars, it was my home, a home I spent hours designing and decorating to my unique specifications. I couldn’t understand why someone would do this to me, couldn’t see beyond my own experiences to the desperation that causes adults to make bad decisions. But, left with few other options, I did what any kid does when faced with tragedy: cry, whine, calm down (eventually), wipe away my tears, and move on to the next project.

**Boxed Up**

Kerry Madden

Piles and
Piles and
Piles and

*Piles* of Boxes.

Hat boxes shoe boxes unwrapped presents of birthdays past cardboard boxes wooden crates intricately carved boxes blue boxes ribboned boxes Big boxes small boxes round boxes square boxes Piles and Piles. A messy treasure trove.

And to your eye, they pile up? down?, from somewhere beyond the rafters. Stalactites of upside down piles. They’re not empty. All of the lost bobby pins your first principal’s office slip the sun’s warmth on your skin from July 10th 2008 broken pens fireflies Whispers. The whispers come in the smaller boxes usually. You think about opening them and watching their contents fall out.
A silk imported white dress hanging off the
Back end of a pick up truck natural earth on its' sides
Counting seconds, thirds, and fourths, the hourglass seeps
Down crash champagne flutes as hands join in
Eyes dance among the room
Fortune, wished by many to the lovely duo
Grizzly looks recognizable to present day
High collared necklines cut out in just the right (or wrong) places
I for one didn’t believe it when they told me
Jessica, used to be Adam
Kids? you say? “Oh they can adopt.” Thank goodness she won’t get stretch marks
Life givers spread their wings hitting those in the way
Mujereres so graceful so delicate. How can (s)he pull it off?
Nobody knows or has a clue. Negativity isn’t alive yet.
Ometeotl, are the organs the same? Human is Human.
Polvorones on the table and pomegranate juice stain lips as teeth rip in
Quiet whispers arise, “Oh you can hardly tell” “I wonder where she had the work done?” “Imagina cómo se sentarian sus padres. Que raro. Que lastima”
Remember a time when she was just she, and not he? these minds are
Superannuated but still in gear flinging oil when (un)necessary.
Totem poles stand tall somewhere in the world.
Union official as the first dance ends.
Various guests leave as seasons do, routinely out of the flashing red letters
Wide framed dents in the bumper, I hope that’s not indicative of their future
Xipe Totec do you know what their future holds?
You never hear of old men usually men die first, yet before me sits a 94 year old man with heavy wrinkles drinking corona lite at 10 am.
Zygotes float in tepid streams surrounded by wires and mechanical rumpus awaiting artificial daylight
Solomente Pan Dulce

Samantha Lerma

fat plump ridges
escondiendo huevos y levadura
baked in an oven with care
take vitamins they say
allow no harm
¡Por Favor Cuidate!

turn the dial measure the flour
mix ingredients, just enough
un poco de vainilla y canela
teach me how to be
knead the dough, hard but soft
con amor y cariño

niños watch and eat
deditos unable to resist
the urge to touch —to taste
ya no soy niña, soy mujer
we never ate pan dulce together
i heard that siempre tomabas café

solid silver heats, extinguishes demons
high pitch whistle rings
in a house of safety— “Dios cuida este hogar”
spicy smell of chile rellenos
llenó our home and block
todos sabían que era hora de cenar

recuerdo a la panadería cerquita y
del niño que la vida le hizo hombre
nail and hammer instead of hot wheels
late nights returning home
from a crack of dawn day
filthy con pintura y sudor

when i visit your gravesite wishfully i sing,
espero que algún día comemos pan dulce
the kind with los colores bailando allí.

Breakage Point

Elizabeth Broussard

As Martha Dane trudged through the streets of Ottawa, Ontario early in the morning, she adjusted the strap of her faux alligator skin purse and waited for the crosswalk sign to change. Checking her watch, she calculated that she would make it to work just in time. She waited, a sea of honking cars and yelling pedestrians blocking her path. She was at a standstill, not moving forward nor backwards. Martha thought back to the previous day, and the day before that, even the weeks and months that had already passed in an identical manner. Every day she found herself waiting at the intersection of 1st Avenue and 84th Street.

The white walker appeared at last. Clearing her throat, Martha continued her journey to Clearlake Magazine. Her gaze was fixed on her black flats, only looking up a few times to glare at anyone who brushed shoulders with her or offered a flyer to their grand opening. Short, controlled breaths maintained her steady pace as she traveled, the amassed bundle of air trapped in her lungs released only when she reached the mauve entryway of the magazine corporation.

Falling into the chair at her desk with relief, Martha rolled her head from side to side, trying without success to roll the crick from her neck, a discomfort she earned from falling asleep on the couch the night prior. When the tension refused to leave, she leaned back in her chair with a sigh. The thick walls of her cubicle were coated in wallpaper of article clippings and photographs, all of them bearing the signature of M. G. Dane. A framed diploma she received from Sewanee twenty-two years ago hung at the edge of her desk, a plaque celebrating her fifteen years as an editor at Clearlake Magazine just below it. The wooden shelf over her laptop sagged under the weight of her textbooks from college and the framed photos propped in front of the tomes. Many of these pictured her two dogs, both dusty brown and white Shih Tzus, playing in the grass outside her home. There was only one containing individuals: an old photo from Detroit capturing Martha with her parents and two older brothers.

Martha straightened her turquoise blouse and reached for Clearlake’s latest edition awaiting her on the desk. As she flipped through the pages, the smell of newly printed pictures wafted up to her nose. It was fresh, arriving at her desk from the printer the night before. Her eyes flicked over the pictures of models draped in faux animal furs and silks slowly, not hovering over any particulars for long. She did, however, pause over an article titled, “New Trends in Fall Apparel.” A quick scan of the text resulted in a scowl.

The article, bearing her signature in bold at the bottom right hand corner, contained a glaring typo in the first sentence. Scooting up to her computer with a frown, Martha began composing an email to her copy editor. Her teal, shellac nails clicked forcefully against the keyboard as she typed a message to Freddie Johnson, the intern who worked three cubicles down the hall. After finishing the message, a satisfying explanation of his failure, she sent it.

Martha took a long sip of Earl Grey from a mug emblazoned with a picture of her Shih tzus, but the warm tea failed to cool her irritation. The magazine issue was distributed just last night. As she sat at her desk on a Friday morning, she imagined the hundreds of Canadians who had already discovered her humiliation. Martha pictured luncheons with the issue spread across café tables, middle class mothers
guffawing at the extent of typos Clearlake let slip by.

A knock at her cubicle made her right temple throb.

“Martha, do you have a moment?”

Martha turned to see Freddie hovering just outside the wall, his forehead wrinkled. She clasped her hands in her lap, clashing the heavy, gold rings on her fingers, and lifted her chin.

“Yes, of course,” she replied, sending the man a tight lipped smile.

Freddie took a step forward, thought better of it, then retreated back into the safety of the hallway. His hands began to massage one another. “Well, I couldn’t help but notice the email you sent. And Martha... I guess I’m just a little confused.” He paused when Martha arched a thick eyebrow. “I mean, you sent me that magazine entry two weeks ago saying you had already reviewed it. You explicitly told me not to make any changes.”

Martha took a deep breath, releasing the tension through her nostrils. “Freddie dear, you know how I am. It irritates me to no end when you alter my exceptionally crafted phrases and word play.” Her heart rate increased to a gallop, and though she tried her best to remain calm, the pitch of her voice peaked. “But, as my copy editor, your job, your purpose in this establishment, is to check for typos and errant mistakes I cannot possibly catch with all that I have to do.”

Freddie blinked, the usual flush in his cheeks fading to white. Catching herself, Martha cleared her throat and smoothed a strand of thin hair into its proper place behind her head.

“Anything else you wish to discuss, Freddie?” she asked softly, arching her brow.

Freddie shook his head quickly, mumbled an excuse, and darted back to his cubicle. As the sound of his old chair creaked down the hallway, followed shortly by rapid pen clicking, Martha rolled her eyes. She turned back to the unending list of emails glaring from her laptop and rolled her neck. After taking another sip of tea, she set to work combing through them.

Her sour mood failed to lift as the hours ticked by. Freddie’s timid knocks upon the wall of her cubicle went ignored. Her manager, Theodore Thomas, was given a tight-lipped smile when he handed her a letter that was mistakenly sent to him. Even the sight of her mother’s flowing script upon the envelope failed to lift her spirits. Martha pictured Theodore as Charlotte’s face, mostly likely, lost its shimmer and she turned back to her work with a meager dismissal. She pictured his disappointment. The fire in her chest exploded into an inferno.

“Mr. Thomas?” Martha called weakly for the manager.

The reply was buffered by a brief pause. In that moment, Martha felt her skin turn to ice. The fire in her chest fizzled and sank like a dead weight.

“Excuse me?” the voice on the other end snarled. Martha’s eyes squeezed shut as an onslaught of indignation and, Well I neeroy’s, flew like daggers from the phone. The woman had merely called about the font size of page 27 of their latest issue, she made clear to Martha in a ringing voice, but this low standard of customer service was another matter.

The throbbing in Martha’s neck rose to her temples. Hands shaking, she pulled the phone away from her ear and rolled back in her chair.

“Mr. Thomas?” Martha called weakly for the manager.

She gulped as the woman on the phone, still audible to Martha even from her lap, recouped and began a second wave of fury. “Mr. Thomas I need help.” Her calls were met with silence and Freddie’s pen clicking. She heard that damn tinkling laugh from Charlotte a moment later. “Theodore!” she cried a final time, shameful of the way her voice cracked.

At last Theodore ran into her cubicle, momentarily stumbling over his long legs. Unable to explain the mess she created, Martha simply held up the phone. Theodore’s eyes widened as he picked it up, jerking away from the receiver when the woman let loose a line of expletives. Martha’s manager cleared his throat, straightened his tie, and interrupted with apologies.

Martha leaned back in her chair, the sound of Theodore’s groveling merely white noise, and gripped the armrests with white knuckles. Her head was filled with a low throbbing and she felt every wave of blood squeezing through her veins and arteries. Beads of sweat dotted her brow.
“This is too much,” she murmured to herself. “I need to get out of here.”

Theodore began to pace the cubicle, but Martha paid him no mind. In a daze, she retrieved her purse from under her desk. She stood and stared at her manager.

“I’m going on an early lunch, Mr. Thomas,” she said, but did not wait for his acknowledgment or approval before sliding past him and leaving.

She walked past Freddie with his pen clicking and began to walk faster. Past Charlotte who stared out her window in a dream. Past Martin the accountant who punched numbers and figures into a calculator. Her feet raced towards the elevator. Just before the doors of the elevator enveloped her, she heard Theodore call out, “Martha, you forgot your lunch!” Martha did not stop the closing doors.

The first true breath she took in years filled her as she burst through the front doors. She gasped, filling herself with the pure, consuming air. Her hands flew up to her hairline and she teetered on her feet. My I feel dizzy. Pedestrians jostled past her, a few shouting for her to move, but she did not hear them. A blur of yellow before her became apparent. Without thinking, without reasoning, Martha walked towards the taxi and stepped in. Her driver was an old, grizzly man with an unkempt beard and sunken eyes.

“Where’re you off to, Miss?” he asked.

Martha blinked. “Anywhere,” she said in one short breath. “Just get me out of here.”

Her driver narrowed his eyes. “Miss, I’m going to need an address if I’m going to take you anywhere,-?”

“Kingston, Ontario,” Martha interrupted. A small part of her mind screamed in protest, but she merely answered the driver’s questioning that followed. “I’ll pay for the entire two hours it takes, just get me far away from here.”

A cigarette was lit by the driver. He took a deep inhale of smoke, cracked his neck, and pulled on the gearshift. Within seconds, they were off.

The busy streets of Ottawa faded into isolated rice mills and barns. Metal telephone lines became wooden as the road curved through hills and countryside. Brown and white cows dotted the fields, and birds painted bright splashes of color through the air as they darted between trees. Lumbering clouds passed over the taxi, in no hurry to reach their destination. Martha slouched into the headrest and closed her eyes. She took a deep breath, inhaling a mixture of cigarette smoke and mown grass from the open window. Her stomach swirled at each tight turn the driver took, but she refused to let it bother her.

Martha’s face flushed, but she sat up straight. The crick in her neck now a minor ache, she stretched her arms out in front of her. She considered the gold of her phone off and buried it deep within her purse.

Over the next hours, Martha booked a ferry trip to Wolf Island, went on a guided tour through the city, bought mugs speckled with moose for her brothers, and received a grumble in reply, she modified, “Here is perfect.”

She left the taxi without ceremony, paying her taxi driver a nice sum of cash for the long journey and inconvenience. As he tore off in the opposite direction, Martha’s stomach growled. Across the street, a man was selling hotdogs and sausages. Before she could reconsider, a steaming bratwursts lay in her hands. Her mouth watered at the roasted smell.

Munching on her delayed lunch, Martha strolled through the grassy shore of Lake Ontario. A breeze pulled strands of hair from their fastening behind her head. She watched as couples sat against broads tree trunks eating ice cream, girls in swimsuits strutted across boat docks, and a man flew by on roller blades. Martha smiled, the weight in her chest lifting with her spirits.

She found an open spot at the base of an oak tree and sat, not minding the possibility of grass stains on her skirt. Watching the boats arrive and depart from the docks, she let her mind catch sail. Her only leave from this haven was a quick phone call to her neighbor Cathy asking her to watch Martha’s Shih tzu. For once, the vomom was absent from Martha’s voice. After hearing Cathy’s acceptance, Martha clicked her phone off and buried it deep within her purse.

“Can I help you, dear?” the taxi driver asked.

Martha offered a meek smile. “I’m looking for a place to stay. Do you have an opening?”

Her feet carried her to a bed and breakfast whose red bricks were occluded by ivy. A warm light came from the stained glass window at the top of the door. Cognizant of the late hour, Martha gave an antiquated antique sale last hours before. The concrete was now littered with lawn chairs and picnic blankets, the citizens sprinkled upon them fixated on a towering projector screen. Martha stood in the back and watched the black and white images of The Wizard of Oz. She felt her heart stutter when Dorothy was knocked unconscious as her house lifted into the sky. But there was a familiarity there, an understanding she felt with the girl. She left just as Dorothy awoke in Oz.

“Wow,” she whispered, unable to suppress her appreciation.

Though smaller than Ottawa, Kingston was a quaint town on the coast of Lake Ontario. Streets lamps running up and down the road bire banners of maple leaves, and advertisements for local events clung to the sides of public transportation. She saw a group of young men leave a Tim Hortens, laughing as they popped donuts in their mouths. Shops showcasing designer clothing, board games, and gourmet chocolates filled the line of buildings. The taxi passed quaint bed and breakfasts, cottages, Queens University, and gardens decorated with blooming tulips.

“Anywhere you’d like me to drop you off?” the taxi driver asked.

Martha could not pry her eyes from the window. “Anywhere.” When she received a grumble in reply, she modified, “Here is perfect.”

The woman paused, looked Martha over, then chuckled. “On a Friday in October? We’re practically empty. Come inside, I’ll get you a room and a pot of tea.”
Pastel quilts covered Martha’s legs as she sat in bed that night, a book the owner had lent her propped open in her lap. She read with gusto, finding the story leagues better than anything she had read for work in decades. After an hour, she switched off the lamp and tucked herself in bed. Her mind replayed the voicemail she left earlier in the night.

“Hello Mr. Thomas, it’s Martha. You will not get this message until tomorrow, but I wanted to leave this for you to find. You are warranted an explanation for my disappearance this morning, and I promise I will give you one, but I wanted to provide an update first.

“I will not be returning to the office Monday, or anytime next week. Take these absences from my saved vacation days; Heaven knows I have a surplus. My behavior today is not easy to explain, in part because I myself do not quite understand it. Something inside of me snapped. I needed a break. I suppose there’s a reason we’re given vacation days in the first place.

“I hope my leave did not inconvenience you, but I’m exactly where I need to be. Goodnight, Mr. Thomas. I will see you in a week.”

The following Monday morning, Martha strolled into work thirty minutes early with a bounce in her step. She greeted Freddie when he arrived—frightening the timid man—and complemented Charlotte on her polka dotted dress. Even the news that the young girl would soon be promoted to Martha’s position failed to dampen her spirits. And when Theodore handed her the stack of work she had missed the previous week, she smiled. Just before the manager stepped out of her office, she stopped him.

“Mr. Thomas?” Martha paused to lift a pot of flowers she had bought in Kings- ton from under her desk. Theodore’s eyes widened at the array of yellow tulips. “Do me a favor and deliver these to Charlotte? I think she would love them from you.”
Survivor’s Guilt

Malcolm Conner

Pretty much everybody tried to kill themselves in high school. The first time River was in the hospital it was this whole big thing because holy shit, River was in the hospital, but three years later I’d lost track of who’d been in there and who hadn’t. I hadn’t. I mean I had, but only to visit other people, which isn’t the same thing.

I didn’t have a car so I’d always have to put my bike on the bike rack of the 86 and bus two-thirds of the way there and then bike the rest because the mental hospital was too far out of town for the 86. I still have visiting hours memorized, 3-4:30pm, which drove me nuts because school ended at 3:40. I got there too late a couple times, usually because it was snowy out, or once because I’d spent too long trying to flirt with Cora Wiese-Moore. The nurses wouldn’t even let me in to say hey quick. I’m still a little mad about that.

Nobody actually succeeded in dying until senior year, when Amanda jumped off a building downtown. Jumping off a building is a lot more effective than swallowing a handful of Ibuprofen, which was everybody else’s go-to method. I know this because once a social worker asked me how I was planning to kill myself and I told her Ibuprofen, probably, and she said you’d have to swallow a couple bottles’ worth in order to actually die, and even then it would be slow and painful. I never really got past the planning stage.

Once, the social worker asked me how I felt about Amanda’s death and I said relieved and she said Everybody Deals With Grief Differently but then she never gave me a chance to explain.

The whole transgender youth group came to Amanda’s memorial service and we all sat at one table and ate fruit on little plastic plates. All the girls cried and the other two boys cried and the kid who wasn’t really either just kept sticking a toothpick in a piece of cantaloupe, over and over again.

Sometimes other people would stare at us and I wondered if they were wondering which one of us would be next to go. And then I wondered which one of us would be next to go and then I had to step outside to laugh I assume because Everybody Deals With Grief Differently but the second I was alone, I didn’t need to laugh anymore, and all I could think about was what Amanda’s body must have looked like when it hit the ground. So I went back inside.

Two years later, Gabe hung himself in the park by his house. I’d moved away for college by then. Becca killed herself two years after Gabe. I found out on Facebook. But, I ran into River a couple months ago, when I was back for winter break. We stood in the snow and talked a little and hugged goodbye, embarrassed and glad about something.
Grave
Quinn Bender

Mater, I write you
Carl Teegerstrom

Vale, vale mater
I write you a year past your passing
with nothing to say but
with too much that should be said.

Vale, vale mater
I write you a year past your passing
it still feels like a dream, a dream near forgotten, but
it is distant enough to feel more real than surreal.

Vale, vale mater
I write you a year past your passing,
and I’m afraid my memory’s fading
and I’m afraid I do not remember you as I should.

Vale, vale mater
I write you a year past your passing,
I cannot visit your tomb, you have none, because
I scattered your ashes across the world.

Vale, vale mater
I write you a year past your passing
perhaps you faded faster without a tomb but
perhaps you have become the dust beneath my sole.

Vale, vale mater
I write you a year past your passing,
I write you in the Garden of the Gods, in the Alhambra and
I write you on the shores of Silver Lake.

Vale, vale mater
I write you a year past your passing,
it was slow, then quick, but always certain, yes,
it was certain, but never expected, never understood.

Remember? I said, “May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest”?
Remember? I said, “Requiescat In Pace”?
Remember? I said nothing?
Remember I said “Vale, vale cum cara matre.”
Vale, vale mater
The Broken Bird
Hannah Hsu

Inspired Maya Angelou’s Caged bird, and by a quote from Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.: “If you can’t fly, then run. If you can’t run, then walk. If you can’t walk, then crawl--but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.”

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” — 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

This poem symbolizes how we overcome our brokenness.

I know why the bird with the broken leg cries
for she can’t hop around the ground as others do.
But the bird with the broken leg
the bird with the broken leg
she flies, she flies, she flies,
oh see the way she flies...

I know why the bird with the broken wing cries
for she can’t soar through the skies as others do.
But the bird with the broken wing
the bird with the broken wing
she sings, she sings, she sings,
oh hear the way she sings...

I know why the bird with the broken song cries
for she can’t sing her heart’s song as others do.
but the bird with the broken song
the bird with the broken song
she dreams, she dreams, she dreams,
oh feel the way she dreams...

I know why the bird with the broken heart dies,
for she can no longer love as she once did.
so the bird with the broken heart
the bird with the broken heart
she’ll rise, she’ll rise, she’ll rise,
oh as sure as the sun, she’ll rise.

via AllPoetry.com
**Blank Etches**
Miranda Moyle

Within this warmth, seek me in times of frigidity, and I will meet you halfway. For even the cold emits light in its minuscule spaces, and the chill eventually parts.

**Skeleton**
Danielle Freund

**Red Ugly**
Kara Killinger

1. I threw up wine in a hotel room toilet.
2. You held my hair back.
3. The bright backs of my eyelids, like roses, had soft veins and sharp thorns.
4. I talked about the placebo effect.
5. “Being drunk just means I can say whatever I—”
6. Mirror like a starlit sky was just dirty.
7. Bodies chafed against gritty bricks.
8. My lipstick stained your shirt when we slow danced.
9. Get a papercut and the whole world stings.
10. The color red is as indescribable as the taste of —
11. I tapped my heels against each other and bit my tongue.
12. In the morning, we had scrambled eggs with Tabasco.

**Azalea**
Carl Teegerstrom
Adolescence
Courtney Justus

You and Mom were fighting again. Brother and I were eating hot McDonalds and watching the Jonas Brothers hit on girls when we hid ourselves under the glass kitchen table, knowing this was not the end.

Do you remember that night? That time, at twelve, when none of my clothes fit right? Sticks and stones may break my bones, but a new CD won’t fix it.

Will someone please give me back the Jonas Brothers and my former self? I need more than a table with fast food and scared children to teach me what I should have learned a long time ago.

After the divorce, I thought it would be possible to see you twice a year, every year, and that high school would be easy. There they knew that I was ugly, and I decided that maybe they were right.

The lies flew like butterflies against my windshield, making messes of us all. To this day, no amount of makeup will hide the hurt on my face when I call and you say “I can’t see you in July.”

There are moments which can’t be fixed with the words you hide up your business suit sleeves.

May I use YA as a means to understand my strife? I know that, somewhere in every book I read, there is someone who can make me feel understood, even if they don’t exist.

Fiction knows why another year has gone by and for the third time, I pick up the surfer girl novel from eighth grade about rejection and honesty. It is one of those books that makes me feel I am not alone.

But outside it’s stopped raining*
Courtney Justus

Pale hands pressed hard to the skin of my face – I didn’t know it would be so cold – Over and over again we return – To the days that will not come back to us – Travelers’ lost water dries up in the sea of Sahara sand – as my boot soles fray slowly against the concrete walks – They are black like the suit he wore to the classroom – Stuttering his thanks and looking out with blank eyes – Filling the room with hazel – He wore black and nothing else – We didn’t know how to take the darkness off – He wanted to feel cold – Our soles split and the water leaks in – The sky refuses to lend us light blue – The wind covers us in grey – Painting us over like our forefathers – Who were poisoned by the flowers – People laid at their graves – And felt death creep in – When they couldn’t see sky from the ground – Or drink water from the Earth – No more blue for them – It wouldn’t seep in – Not soon enough – And I wanted to be water – I wanted to be let in – I didn’t know I could feel so cold

*The title is a reference to the song “3AM” by Matchbox 20.
Help

Faith Poynor

10-minute Play

Cast of Characters

**Anna Sun:** 6-year-old girl with an adventurous spirit.

**Jae:** 28-year-old woman with short hair and a silver eyepatch. Her clothes are grey, ragged, and several sizes too big. Even a thief wouldn’t steal these clothes. Maybe a desperate one. She keeps looking over her shoulder like she’s being chased.

**Unicorn:** A giant, scary unicorn. She is a sentient being that communicates via telepathy. Mel can be represented by a costumed actor or some other artistic representation. Either way, a silent role. Use your imagination.

**Mother:** Anna’s mother, young and paranoid.

Place

A large forest in a faraway land.

Time

A beautiful morning in late winter.
ACT I
Scene 1

Setting: A large forest with tall, skinny trees. Plenty of light reaches through the leafy canopy. It is a somewhat mountainous region, with lots of rocks and cliffs. Magic pervades the air. Amidst the skinny trees stands a solitary giant ash (Stage Right). To the side of the ash tree is a small, contained fire. A small clearing opens up Stage Left.

At Rise: JAC sits over a dying fire, warming her hands. She leans back against the trunk of the giant ash tree. A twig snaps just offstage (Stage Left), and she spins towards the sound. A young girl named ANNA SUN wanders into the clearing. She doesn’t see JAC, and JAC (who is behind the tree and too afraid to peek out) doesn’t see her.

ANNA spins around slowly, looking at her surroundings, totally lost. JAC raises herself into a crouching position, using the giant tree trunk she had been leaning against as cover. ANNA steps ever closer to JAC’s hiding spot, making a lot of racket. JAC mouths ‘Dammit!’ and pulls a knife from its sheath inside her jacket.

ANNA finally reaches the tree, stepping in front of it just as JAC raises her knife above her head and leaps out from behind the tree to face her would-be attacker. ANNA screams, tripping over a root as she tries to back away. She falls on her butt, JAC, shocked by both the little girl and her scream, also takes a step back. Realizing there’s no danger, she drops her raised arm back to her side, then quickly hides her knife back in her coat. ANNA continues to scream that ear-splitting scream that children do so well, but stops once JAC tells her to calm down.

JAC

Hey! Hey! Calm down! I’m not gonna hurt you. I just thought you were… nevermind. You okay, kid?

JAC takes a step towards ANNA. ANNA scoots backwards on her butt.

ANNA

Ma said never to talk to strangers…

JAC

And where is your Ma now?

ANNA

I… I don’t know. [Frowns]

JAC

What are you doing all alone in The Silver Forest?

ANNA

I’m lost. I saw the smoke from your fire. I thought it might be home.

JAC

Damn! I knew I should’ve been more careful. [Pauses] Oh, uh, sorry, kid.

[Finally standing up] What are you doing here?

JAC

I’m lost. Same as you.

ANNA

Did you run away from home, too?

JAC

[Wry smile] Yeah, you could say that.

ANNA

I didn’t mean to run away, I just wanted to explore! But Da wouldn’t let me, so I had to sneak out. Why did you leave home?

JAC

I… I… That’s a tough question, kid.

ANNA

Quit calling me that! I’m not a kid. My name is Anna.

JAC

[Chuckles] Okay, Anna. I’m Jac.

ANNA

But that’s a boy’s name!

JAC

No it’s not. It’s my name.

ANNA

If you say so… Are you gonna help me get home?

JAC

I dunno, kid. How can I help you if I’m just as lost as you are? Besides, I’m dangerous company. You’d be better off without me.

ANNA begins to cry out of despair.

[Sniffing] Woah, hey, easy. Maybe I can help you. But are you sure you can trust a stranger?

ANNA

Pleeeeeeaaaaaasssssee?
Okay, fine. We can get unlost together. But only because I'm afraid you'll get gobbled up, and I dunno if I can live with that on my conscience.

ANNA

Yay!

ANNA and JAC begin their trek through the forest, slowly walking along among the trees. The actors can walk on and off stage or move about the stage in circular patterns.

BLACKOUT

Scene 2

Setting: Same forest. The campfire is gone, replaced by a cliff edge. Time has passed.

At Rise: Lights fade in. Enter ANNA followed at a distance by JAC.

JAC

Stay close, kid. Who knows what kinds of creatures lurk in these woods.

ANNA

Ooh! I hope it's unicorns! I love unicorns! They're so pretty and strong.

JAC

I hope it's not unicorns… they may be "pretty," but they are deadly. They attack without reason, totally unpredictable.

ANNA

I bet they wouldn't attack me. They can see into your soul and know your true nature. They would know how much I love them, and let me ride them!

JAC

Careful what you wish for, kid. The unicorn may decide to impale you first and go mind-digging later.

ANNA

You really think it would hurt me?

JAC

That horn isn't for show. Besides, would you really want one of those... things to go rooting around in your head? They could do a lot of damage in there – brainwash you or turn you into a vegetable. I don't trust anything that can read my mind. That's the most terrifying part.

ANNA and JAC make their way to the edge of stage or improvised cliff edge. ANNA skips ahead and is about to plunge right over the cliff when JAC grabs her.

JAC

Angry] WOAH! Careful! Quit playin' around. You almost leapt to your death.

ANNA

Pulls away from her, a mix of frightened and ashamed.

Why are you so angry and mean?

JAC

I'm not, you just need to look out for yourself. I was young and reckless like you once, and I don't want to see you end up like me. I –

ANNA

[Peering over the cliff edge] Look!!! I can see my house!

JAC pauses, then looks over the cliff too.

It's the small one with red brick. There! Can you see?

JAC

I see. It's a long way down... At least we know we're headed in the right direction.

ANNA

Then let's go, silly!

JAC and ANNA head Stage Right, but they don't make it far. JAC hears something and freezes in her tracks.

JAC

Wait a minute. Did you hear that?

ANNA

Hear what?

The sounds of thunderous hooves and snapping branches get louder, and the cacophony seems to be heading right towards ANNA and JAC. The two freeze, waiting for the worst.

Suddenly, a giant UNICORN charges onstage!

JAC

Speak of the Devil, and he shall appear. Run for it, Anna!

ANNA

Don't hurt her!

JAC

ANNA doesn't move. But the UNICORN is only interested in JAC anyway, slowly advancing and pushing her towards the cliff edge. JAC pulls out her knife, ready to fight. The UNICORN paws the ground, getting ready to charge again. She points her horn at JAC's heart. JAC lunges out with her knife, but the creature dodges her attack. JAC prepares to strike a second time, but ANNA's shout startles both JAC and the creature.

STOP! Don't hurt her!
Anna, you can’t reason with this beast. Get out of here.

[to Jac] I wasn’t talking to you. [Directs her attention back to the unicorn] We’re both lost and we’re helping each other get home. I need her. [Pause, listening to the unicorn’s thoughts] No, she didn’t hurt me. And she only attacked you because she was afraid.

Another pause. The unicorn snorts.

She’ll say sorry! Right, Jac?

What? No! Anna, what are you –

The unicorn stomps her hooves.

Jac, please! She was only trying to protect me. She’s innocent.

I very much doubt that.

I can hear her thoughts. Can’t you?

Anna, I don’t hear anything.

Lemme show you.

Anna walks up to the unicorn cautiously. She reaches out to pet its mane, but it pulls away at first. Then, finally, it lets her touch it. Anna is gentle and the unicorn seems to relax. Jac remains tense, still holding her knife.

How did you...

Her name is Mel. She says you did a bad thing.

Oh no.

In your past.

[Afraid] Stop! Please. You don’t wanna know.

[Looks at Jac] Is that true?

I… I’m sorry? This feels ridiculous. I was trying to protect Anna too, you know.

The unicorn turns an eye towards Jac and snorts once, seeming to accept her apology. Jac finally, reluctantly, puts her weapon away.

Here, scratch behind the ears. She likes that.

No, this has gone too far. I’m not petting a unicorn.

Anna doesn’t take no for an answer. She grabs Jac’s arm and places her hand on the creature’s neck. Jac tenses, but once she feels the soft fur of the unicorn, she accepts her fate. After a few moments, the unicorn shakes them off and walks upstage. She points her horn towards the way home (SR), then turns and charges off Stage Left. They stare after her for a while in silence.

Jac?

Yeah, kid?

I told you unicorns would like me.
It takes one special kid to understand a unicorn’s thoughts. I’ve never seen anything like that.

They begin on their trek once again. ANNA has more pep in her step.

ANNA
Jac, I’m having a lot of fun, but I still want to go home. I miss my parents.

JAC
Of course. Let’s get out of here before more of those damned things show up. [She shudders at the thought.]

As they walk about the stage, the lights fade in and out, giving the illusion that hours are passing by. They grow wearier, but still they journey on.

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

Setting: The edge of the forest. A quaint little house sits Stage Right, with only an open field separating it from the forest. It is almost sunset.

At Rise: MOTHER sits on a bench outside the house, her head in her hands, silently weeping. She doesn’t notice her daughter until ANNA runs up to her.

ANNA and JAC enter, Stage Left.

ANNA
There it is! We’re home!

JAC

ANNA
You can meet my family now! They’ll love you, Jac. [Tugging at JAC’s sleeve] C’mon, hurry up!

JAC
You go on ahead. Family reunions aren’t really my style. I’ll catch up.

ANNA
[Without further prompting, ANNA runs on to her house and her mother. MOTHER looks up and sees her as she approaches. Shouting her daughter’s name, MOTHER jumps up and catches ANNA in her arms.]

JAC looks on from a distance, a sad smile on her face. She watches them only for a few moments before turning and disappearing back into the woods.

MOTHER
Oh, Anna! I’m so glad you’re alright. What happened to you? Where have you been?!

ANNA
I just wanted to go on an adventure, but I got so lost.

MOTHER
We were so worried! There’s a murderer on the loose! We thought... well, we thought the worst. Your father was nearly blind with tears; I thought he would get lost in the forest too! He’s still out searching for you. Don’t ever do that again!

ANNA
Yes, Ma. I’m sorry. But it was a fun adventure. I even met a unicorn!

You and your imagination.

MOTHER
It’s true! Her name was Mel and she read my mind and I could read hers. I got to pet her! [Giggling] My own Melicorn! She was so soft and fluffy –

MOTHER
[Hugging her daughter tightly again] Oh, nevermind, I’m just glad you’re safe.

ANNA
I wouldn’t have made it home without my friend.

MOTHER
[Releasing her grip] Your friend?

ANNA
Yeah! She’s...

ANNA spins around to point out her friend, but JAC is long gone.

MOTHER
Who, sweetie? You’re beginning to scare me.

ANNA
Jac! The nice lady with the silver eyepatch!

MOTHER
Wait a minute...

A look of horror spreads across MOTHER’s face. She goes over to the bench she was sitting on and picks up a WANTED poster she had been looking at. She holds it out to ANNA (and the audience). It is unmistakably a portrait of JAC.
Is this who you saw?

Yeah, that’s Jac! That’s my friend!

Oh, Goddess! Are you okay? Did she hurt you?

No, Ma. Why would she hurt me?

Sweetie, Jacqueline Naught is the murderer who just escaped prison! The city guard came all the way out here a few days ago to warn us. That’s what this Wanted poster means. She’s an escaped convict, someone who belongs in a jail cell. She would hurt a little girl like you.

But she helped me escape!

You must be confused... A criminal like that, with the things she’s done... she wouldn’t even spare a child.

But she was my friend.

Anna, this is serious! You could have been kidnapped or killed!

No! I know what I saw. She wasn’t like that.

She just needed help too.

Lauren learned to punch from a man who wouldn’t let her hit his chest because his double mastectomy scars still twinged. When she first walked into the small dojo he ran, following a flyer he’d seen posted in the public library, he told her his name was Damen and she nodded, replied with her own name. Damen didn’t ask about the razor bumps on her cheeks, and she didn’t ask why the dojo was so empty. The flyer she’d seen had been covered in scrawled slurs that looked like someone had half-heartedly tried to erase them. Lauren wondered who in the library had written those slurs, and if they thought the same things about her.

She walked into the dojo that first day with no idea of how to throw a punch properly but a lot of experience in throwing punches. She looked around the empty room, its hardwood floors and padded mats and a single wall of mirrors directly across from her that reflected bright fluorescent lights. Damen greeted her quietly from where he sat on the mats by a training dummy. When she approached and asked him to teach her how to fight, he took one look at her knuckles, red and bruised, and nodded, smiling wryly. Her first attempt at making a fist had Damen rolling his eyes and reaching out to pull her thumb from the inside of her fist. His hands were cool on her scraped knuckles.

“Haven’t you seen any karate movies?” he asked. “That’s how you break your fingers.” He guided her fingers into a fist with her thumb on the outside, and Lauren noticed how smoothly her hand clenched.

“Hey, it’s worked for me so far,” Lauren said. Damen tilted his head to the side, grimacing but conceding the point.

That first week, Lauren went back to the dojo as much as her two jobs allowed. During the week, she’d drop in between bussing tables at Applebee’s through the lunch rush and stocking shelves at Michael’s late at night. She’d stay longer on Saturdays, when she only had to work at Michael’s. Every time she walked in, the dojo was empty except for Damen.

Two days after she first walked in, she found him running through some kind of exercise by the training dummy. Lauren could see the tight lines of his jaw in his reflection, and the too-bright fluorescent lights reflecting off the mirror made the empty space feel even bigger. She didn’t let herself think that people were avoiding Damen because he didn’t try to grow a beard to hide the roundness of his face, because of the flyer that she could still see, even though it had been pulled down the day after she walked into the dojo.

She almost asked about the flyer, and why Damen didn’t pull it down himself, three days after she first walked in. She opened her mouth and started, “I don’t understand...”

Damen turned to her, pausing in the motion of showing her how to block a blow from above, his arm braced above his head, hand clenched. “What?” he asked.

Lauren paused. She didn’t know Damen, not really. How could she ask such a personal thing as “Why haven’t you fought back against the people who are smearing your name out there?” How could she ask that, when she didn’t even know who he was?
Instead, she asked, “Why a dojo? Out of all the things you could do, why open a dojo?” She was honestly curious. How did a person even open a dojo?

Damen smiled. He shrugged, and relaxed out of the block, his arms falling back to his sides. “I don’t know,” he said. “I guess I just wanted to follow a dream. You know?”

Lauren knew. She had a whole book of recipes for a bakery that she wanted to open one day that she’d been thinking about for years. “Yeah, I get that,” she answered. “Why Texas though? I mean, the place isn’t known for its…” She wanted to say tolerance, but settled for, “martial arts.”

“I guess not,” she said. “I guess I just wanted to know, but if you don’t want to tell that’s okay too.” Except it wasn’t, because now she was curious.

Damen’s smile widened. “When you’ve know me for more than three days, maybe then I’ll tell you,” he said, like it was some great secret. He settled back into a ready stance, hands braced at his hips. “Now, back to work. I want to see you run through these blocks. They’ll be the basis for every-thing I teach you from here on out.”

Lauren sighed and settled into her own ready stance, her fists resting awkwardly in the pose that seemed second-nature to Damen. She stepped into the first block, sweeping away an imaginary punch, and wondered about the questions Damen wouldn’t yet answer.

The next week, Applebee’s closed early because someone on the kitchen staff had apparently forgotten that aluminum foil couldn’t go in the microwave and had set the kitchen on fire right before the lunch rush. Lauren’s manager had sent everyone home in a huff and Lauren had walked in a haze past the firefighters milling around joking about how Applebee’s doesn’t cook anything fresh, wondering how she’d make up the lost hours of work. She rode the bus to the dojo, almost on autopilot, and saw Damen with a kid half his size who looked like a stiff wind might blow them over. Damen had his back to Lauren as he taught the kid how to make a fist, just like he’d taught her that first day.

“Who’s this?” she asked as she stepped onto the dojo floor after removing her shoes at the door. She was too surprised by finding someone else in the dojo to realize that neither had heard her come in or seen her in the mirrors. Her voice echoed across the space.

Damen jumped and spun around, his shoulders tense until he recognized her. “Lauren!” he said, “I thought you had work.” She watched the kid try to inch away behind him, face blank but eyes too wide to hide the fear.

She didn’t want this kid to be afraid of her, but she knew the feeling. Trying to keep them from bolting, she stopped moving and said, “No, some dumbass set the microwave on fire, so I’m free for a while. Sucks to lose two hours’ work but I can’t say that I’m too torn up about missing the lunch rush.”

Damen nodded. She’d complained about the lunch rush to him at length, when Lauren had to run around her section cleaning tables as soon as people stood up to leave to keep her manager from breathing down her neck. “I’m sure,” he said. He turned to the kid, apparently ignoring the way they’d moved three feet closer to the back door while Damen’s back was turned. “This is Kit, by the way. Their parents apparently want them to learn how to defend themself.” Before Lauren could ask what the kid was doing here at midday on a school day, Damen added, “Their classes got out early today. Some kind of teacher in-service or something.”

Lauren nodded, turning to the kid who still looked skewed. “Hey, Kit,” Lauren said, trying to sound calm and nonthreatening. “Damen’s a great teacher. He’s saved me from breaking my fingers on the faces of assholes who don’t know that asking about a girl’s unmentionables is impolite.” She winced mentally at the quip, but relaxed a little when Kit smiled back weakly. The kid looked like they were one bad move shy of sprinting for the exit, tensed up with fists at their side. Their thumbs were outside of their fists, Lauren noted, and figured Damen had seen it too by the way he smiled.

Damen struggled to smother a laugh and said, “Glad I could help, Lauren. Now, you want in on this lesson? I’m teaching Kit how to fall.”

Lauren stepped forward, keeping her posture relaxed to keep from spooking Kit. “That sounds awesome. I owe you for a lesson, so add this to my tab,” she said. She watched Damen roll his eyes and knew he wouldn’t protest because as much rapport as they’d built in a week, he needed the money, and they both knew it.

She’d pay him for what few lessons she could squeeze in between work, because even though she needed the money, too, she always had some surplus left over after paying the bills. Damen, she figured, might not.

Lauren understood the fear that she’d seen in Kit’s eyes that first time they met. It was a fear that she’d harbored every time a new person appeared in her life, from her first realization that she was trans to the moment she decided that if the world was going to try to bury her she would fight back to the bitter end. She didn’t know how to explain that moment of decision to Kit, because it wasn’t something that she’d consciously thought about. She just woke up the morning after her high school graduation, tossed out the front door with no financial support and no college prospects, sure of one thing: she wasn’t going to go quietly. Back then, she had next to nothing, and now she at least had at least a measurable income that kept her off the streets. Kit, at least, didn’t seem like they’d have to deal with their parents tossing them out, but parents weren’t the only things to beat a person down.

Kit’s parents brought them to the dojo after school right before Lauren got out of her shift at Applebee’s, so she spent a lot of time training alongside them. Kit slowly started warming up to her, and the first time the kid laughed at Lauren poking at Damen, a week after she’d met them, Lauren grinned so widely she felt her cheeks start to hurt.

Damen pinned Lauren to the mat while she was distracted, ending their practice grappling match, and called for a water break. He rolled his eyes as Damen stood up, teasing him about needing to get his breath back. “I get no respect,” he said, throwing a hand over his face and flopping back on the mat.

Lauren was about to tell him that he’d get respect when he earned it when Kit said, quietly but clearly, “It’s because you’re just an old man.” Lauren turned to them, and Kit was hunched around themselves shyly but eyeing Damen and smirking, their eyes bright.

Damen pulled himself up, asking, “Who’re you calling old, kid?” He tilted his head, smiling so widely his eyes crinkled. “I’ll have you know that I could still be in college right now.” Lauren nodded;
Damen squinted at her. She squinted back. She didn’t know what he was doing or why, but she didn’t claim to understand just why she enjoyed them, but something about how the writing always sounded like a Shakespearean bard who got drunk and swallowed an X-rated thesaurus made her giggle away. Lauren worked with Kit to try to keep Damen down, pushing one of Damen’s arms down while Kit got his other arm in an armlock. Damen struggled for a few seconds before yielding, huffing, “Okay, okay, you got me. You got me.” Lauren backed up with Kit, letting Damen sit up and rub his arms. They all still shook with giggles.

“Good teamwork, people,” Damen said, stretching out the arm Kit had locked. He huffed around another laugh. “You’re getting good at this. Ouch, geez.” He rubbed at where Lauren had pressed his shoulder into the mat. Lauren didn’t feel all that guilty about it, but she shrugged when he glanced over. He nodded. “Now let’s have an actual water break, yeah?”

Lauren nodded, and walked over to where she’d left her water. She turned to Kit, handing them their water bottles. “You good, kid?” she asked, both about the impromptu grappling match and life outside of the dojo. She saw Kit hesitate and catch on to the deeper question, and they nodded slowly. Lauren smiled. It felt a little grimmer than her earlier smiles. “Good,” she said, “But even if you weren’t, all you have to do is ask and me and Damen will do anything to help you out. You know that, right?” Damen hummed his agreement around his water bottle.

Kit nodded again, quicker this time, and Lauren nodded back. She knew that she’d do a lot to keep this kid as safe as she could, keep them from having to learn about how hard the world could be the same way she did. The way Damen stared into the mirror with a wry little smile said he would too.

When she wasn’t working or at the dojo with Damen and Kit, Lauren had a certain weakness for trashy novels that had shirtless men with illogically defined physiques draped over the front. She now knew plenty of flips, dodges, and grip breaks, and thing more offensive than throw a punch. She now knew plenty of flips, dodges, and grip breaks, and it felt like when, as a little kid, she interrupted the teacher. She fidgeted, waiting for Damen to answer her perfectly valid question.

“Damen,” she said, three weeks after first walking into the dojo, interrupting him telling her about the best place to grab and get leverage, “Why the hell are you teaching me this defensive shit in the middle of the dojo floor, Damen?” Damen rolled over and said flatly, “No really, Lauren, what the fuck.” A smile tugged at his lips.

Lauren started giggling again and they fell back into laughter. She didn’t learn anything else from Damen that day. Instead, they lay there on the dojo mats, trading stories about themselves with their heads pillowed on their arms. Damen told her he was a New Yorker. Lauren called bullshit because he looked like hell was he a New Yorker when he didn’t have even a twitch of an accent. Then he started going on in the most awful accent she’d ever heard. She didn’t know how New Yorkers sounded but she wasn’t sure that whatever accent Damen was putting on wasn’t it. She didn’t believe him about his hometown until he launched into a detailed retelling of his normal childhood day, up to and including every store he’d pass walking to the bodega to grab a sandwich and the fat ginger cat that always greeted him there with a purr. Then she figured that maybe he really wasn’t pulling her leg.

“If you make fun of my native accent but you accept everything when I talk about a cat?” he asked, rolling over to look at her. “A cat is what convinces you?”

Lauren smiled as she stared up at the air ducts in the rafters of the dojo. Damen huffed as he flopped back down. He said that now that he’d told her a story about where he came from, she had to tell him one. It was only fair. Lauren nodded. Instead of telling him about growing up in suburban North Carolina and realizing that she was trans at fourteen, she told him about her dreams of running a bakery, a place all her own where she could sell little cookies and scones and tarts and wear a pink apron and understated makeup. It would be called something tasteful, like Lauren’s Scones and Pastries, and it would feed people on their weekday rush and Sunday brunch. People would spread the word without it needing big advertising costs because it would be just that good.

She could hear Damen moving by the squeaking of the mats. She looked over when she was talked out, after she’d described the recipes she’d already tried out in small batches, raspberry-mint tarts and cranberry-walnut oatmeal cookies and dozens of different scones. Damen was staring into the rafters of his dojo, and he looked like he was remembering everything he’d thought about when he’d first opened the dojo. She wondered if he’d made elaborate class plans and speeches. She wondered if he’d ever get the chance to use them on people besides strays that wandered in who needed him to teach them how to protect themselves from a world that didn’t accept them.

It took Lauren three weeks to realize that Damen hadn’t once tried to teach her how to do anything more offensive than throw a punch. She now knew plenty of flips, dodges, and grip breaks, and could grapple well enough to pin Damen every so often, but she hadn’t learned how to fight. She stood in the dojo, Damen telling her how best to grab and flip an opponent using their own body weight, and she wondered how she hadn’t noticed. Every drill Damen had her run ended in her backing away, fists up, prepared to flee. Every time he taught her a new move, he told her, “Don’t use this unless you have no other choice. Remember: the best defense is running away.”

“Damen,” she said, three weeks after first walking into the dojo, interrupting him telling her about the best place to grab and get leverage, “Why the hell are you teaching me this defensive shit instead of teaching me how to fight?”

Damen stopped talking and looked at her. Lauren felt the silence drag on and remembered what it felt like when, as a little kid, she interrupted the teacher. She fidgeted, waiting for Damen to answer her perfectly valid question.
Damen sighed. “Lauren,” he said, in the slow way he had when he was explaining something difficult to her, “If I only taught you how to punch people then you would never know how to stop.” Lauren rolled her eyes. “Fight’s over when either the other guy goes down or I can’t fight anymore. It’s not like it’s that complicated.”

“What if you don’t want there to be a fight at all?” Damen asked.

Lauren paused, taken aback. The silence dragged on again. Damen nodded, slowly, then looked down at the floor. He sighed, shoulders slumping for a few seconds before he straightened. “Let’s go back to this throw,” he said. “It’s good for when a person is bigger than you.” He guided Lauren into her ready stance and demonstrated the throw motion. Lauren went through the drill, still thinking about his question. She didn’t have an answer.

Damen never taught Kit how to fight offensively either. But, unlike Lauren, Kit seemed to like it, always looking pleased when they broke Damen’s hold and scooted backwards, fists raised, one foot always turned toward the door. Lauren wondered why she and Kit were so different. Still, she liked that Kit hadn’t yet had to know how to seize a good life by their fingernails and drag it closer, daring people to try to take it away and fighting back when they inevitably did.

She wondered what kind of person she’d be if she hadn’t learned that young, when, at eighteen, her parents told her in no uncertain terms that she could either take back every truth she’d just told them or get out. She wondered when Damen had learned it, and how. He always seemed so centered, even as the dojo stood empty except for her and Kit, that she couldn’t help but wonder if he’d forgotten it as soon as he fulfilled his dream of opening the dojo. If he still wanted to fight for that dream, still believed that there was a fight to be had.

Lauren paused, taken aback. The silence dragged on again. Damen nodded, slowly, then looked down at the floor. He sighed, shoulders slumping for a few seconds before he straightened. “Let’s go back to this throw,” he said. “It’s good for when a person is bigger than you.” He guided Lauren into her ready stance and demonstrated the throw motion. Lauren went through the drill, still thinking about his question. She didn’t have an answer.

Damen was, frankly, amazed that Damen had managed to open his dojo in the first place. Getting any business off the ground took money, more than she’d ever be able to scrape together around even the amount of shit hurled at me.” Damen said, “But you didn’t.” Lauren didn’t comment on the non sequitur. She knew what he was trying to say. Instead, she wondered about his question. She didn’t have an answer.

Lauren paused, taken aback. The silence dragged on again. Damen nodded, slowly, then looked down at the floor. He sighed, shoulders slumping for a few seconds before he straightened. “Let’s go back to this throw,” he said. “It’s good for when a person is bigger than you.” He guided Lauren into her ready stance and demonstrated the throw motion. Lauren went through the drill, still thinking about his question. She didn’t have an answer.
Lauren looked down. Damen’s hands had unclenched. He stared down at them, at the crescents pressed into his palms by his fingernails. Lauren watched him flex his hands in and out, in and out, like he was trying to stretch them back out, or try to get a good grip on something. She wondered if he could feel his dojo, his dream, slipping between his fingers. Didn’t want to consider that the end was approaching. Didn’t want to consider that Damen was trying to say goodbye.

The next day, when she heard the news, or rather, saw the massive “FOR LEASE” sign in the dojo’s window, Lauren blinked before storming inside, fists clenched. She knew it had been coming but she’d never thought that it would happen so soon. She bit into the side of her cheek hard enough to draw blood. She wanted to scream, wanted to cry, wanted to rail at the world until it gave Damen his dojo and let him keep it. Damen watched her come in, watched her bow jerkily at the entrance and toe off her shoes on autopilot. His hands dangled at his sides, open, and his lips were twisted into a smile that looked a second away from falling into a frown. His eyes were red. She wondered if he was even angry or if he’d expended all his anger the night before, if he was as hollow as the empty dojo. Then she realized that she was being a little bit uncharitable, assuming that he couldn’t be angry and sad, all at once. She could.

She stopped in the center of the mats and waited for him to say something, anything, to explain the sign over the door. To explain how sudden this was. To explain how exactly he’d believed that the night before was enough to say goodbye. Damen watched her, watched her fists, her thumbs on the outside, clench and release.

What felt like forever but was probably, she conceded, only thirty seconds later, unable to bear the silence that had fallen over the dojo, broken only by her breath and Damen’s foot squeaking on the mat, Lauren took a deep breath. She found herself shouting, “What the fuck do you mean you’re closing now?”

Right after she’d shouted, she felt like she’d broken something, like she’d shattered the illusion that she’d been living in since she first walked into the dojo with the mutilated flyer in her mind’s eye. She felt like she had more to say but it all got stopped up in her throat behind the broken shards, and all she could do was stand there and breathe through it.

Damen stepped forward. His hands came up between them, still open, reaching out to her but waiting for her to reach out in return. It looked like he tried to smile reassuringly, but all that he managed was a little grimace. This close, Lauren could see that his eyes were bloodshot and puffy. She wondered why he couldn’t cry while she was watching. “Lauren,” Damen said, hands still reaching out, waiting for her, “No matter how much I love this place, you know I can’t run it without clients.”

And no one in this neighborhood will learn to fight from me, she heard. It was the same story as the bakery she knew she’d never start. Lauren realized that her palms stung, looked down to see her aching knuckles white. Damen smoothed his hands, rough with calluses and wear, over her fingers, and one by one they relaxed. Lauren stared as Damen revealed crescent-moon crevasses in her palm and, as each appeared from beneath her fingernails, swept a finger over them. The redness didn’t disappear, like they would have in one of her trashy romance novels. Instead, the skin burst one-twice-three times in pain as Damen swept a careful finger back and forth and back over each crescent.

“You need to let me go,” Damen said. “You already taught yourself how to fight, Lauren. Now you need to learn how to stop.” Lauren looked up at him, and his eyes met hers for a few seconds. Then he looked back down. Lauren looked down, too, and saw that her hands were open.

Good Intentions to Bad Sketches,
A Limmerick
Carl Teegerstrom

I hoped to draw my lady, who’s fine and fair, so we sat together in the cool autumn air ‘til my straying pencil forms a new girl with such skill my lady shouts “With whom are you having an affair!”

Don’t we all, Lauren,” Damen said. He took her hands. Lauren realized that her palms stung,
Olive Trees of Andalusia
Carl Teegerstrom

The olive tree is a hard tree whose split trunk rises from the ground; twisted and wiry.

Its thin, small leaves are green from a distance, but have stark shades, accents of dry, desert-bleached bone, and glisten like silver blades.

The tree’s leafy branches part with their twin trunks, and rustle and swell in the wind like scaled lungs.

They gather into great flocks, shepherded by a red tile and white plaster shed.

They tessellate across the faces of great hills and mountains, both up their peaks and down their ravines.

They march, sunburnt and desperate, toward the horizon, driven to graze in those cool pastures between earth and heaven, pastures hidden by the distant ridges, where the moon and stars rest between the saffron dawn and bleeding dusk.

Such is the beauty of the olive tree; a hard beauty, a fitting beauty.

A beauty born from Andalusia, where the dry sierras and plains stretch so wide that they are only bordered by the earth and sky’s great divide.

Twin Cycle: Amanda
Faith Poynor

I was supposed to be a twin. Fraternal, not identical. The other fetus died early in the pregnancy, before sex could even be determined.

Maybe it’s a good thing. I’m so Type A, I couldn’t stand constantly competing with someone who’s so like me, but not me. What if I were the lesser half? I would’ve hated it. Yet sometimes I like to imagine what life would’ve been like. How it would’ve gone differently.

“Amenda!” calls a voice, followed by pounding on the door.

I look up from my writing towards the front of my studio apartment. There’s a pause, followed by more pounding. Sighing, I stand up from my desk and head towards the door. I don’t feel like seeing anyone today. I check the peephole and see a mousy-haired and impatient young woman waiting on the other side.

“Amenda, I know you’re in there!”

May Rodriquez, my best friend since age 10.

“Amanda, I unlock the latches and pull open the door slowly, half-blinded by the Sun blazing down into my dimly lit room. “Hi, May.”

May pulls me into a brief but crushing bear hug before pulling back and punching me in the arm.

“Ow! Hey—”

“That’s for not answering my calls! I was worried.”

“I’m sorry…” I say, rubbing my left arm.

She looks me over, noticing my baggy clothes and slobby appearance. I self-consciously tuck a lock of violet hair behind my ear. She grimaces. “You shouldn’t be alone today.” May shoves her way past me into the apartment, setting down bags of fast food on the kitchen table.

I follow her, shutting the door behind me and flicking on the bright lights. The world around us bursts into light: Vincent van Gogh prints hanging on dark blue walls, loose papers scattered across every available surface, an entire box full of pill bottles taking up half the small table. I move the box out of our way to help May prepare our meal.

“Still haven’t found an antidepressant that works, huh?” she asks.

“Not really,” I reply. “Some work for a while, then the symptoms come back.” I pull glasses down from the cupboard and grab a bottle of wine from the back of the fridge.

“Today must be especially hard… I know you miss Ellie.”

Four years ago today, my late girlfriend, Ellie, died in a freak motorcycle accident. She was on her way to visit me when she lost control of her bike in an attempt to avoid an 18-wheeler. She never made it home. If not for me, she might still be alive.

“I set my glass down a little too hard, and May jumps. “It’s been four years. It’s not about her anymore.” Sighing, I sink down onto my chair. “Or maybe it is, I don’t know. Don’t get me wrong, I miss her… but I’m over her death.”

An anxious silence falls over the two of us like a smothering blanket. I look down at my frail hands, focusing on a freckle on my right pinky, trying to ignore the guilt twisting my heart. Eventually,
I hear the gurgle and splash of wine being poured into a glass. I look up as May hands me a full glass before filling her own. Our eyes lock across the table. Her gentle brown eyes are creased in concern. She raises her glass and whispers, “To Ellie.”

“To Ellie,” I echo.

We eat our meal in relative quiet, chatting occasionally about lighter subjects. I think about how this is the first lunch I haven’t eaten alone in years. I never made any friends in college, and now I am working on an online degree—not great for meeting people. It’s not like I never tried to make friends; as an undergrad, there were a few classmates I connected with and reached out to, but they never reciprocated the effort, or they moved away, never speaking to me again. And now that we are filling into our adult lives, the couple of friends I have left from high school rarely spend time with me. They are always “too busy.” But who isn’t busy? What a lame excuse.

Even May and I are drifting apart. As she goes on about her latest tripped out bender, I realize how little we have in common anymore. This hangout is an exception to her recent flakiness; where before I could depend on her, she now fails to come through with even the simplest favor I might ask of her.

May speaks up again, interrupting my thoughts. “Anyway, I should get going.Karen wants to go out clubbing with me tonight.”

The little voice of hope inside me sighs. “Do you have to go so soon? We never spend more than an hour at a time together!”

“I know, but I told her I’d go out with her. I don’t wanna ditch a friend.”

“She was so excited!”

“No, she didn’t ditch you the last time you hung out?” I retort, starting to see green.

May hesitates, looks down at the bronze carpet. Finally, she responds, “Yeah, but… I’ll make it up to you, okay?”

As she rises from her seat, the edges of my vision turn white hot as I let the anger take control.

“No,” I say, “You won’t.”

“C’mon, don’t be like that. Of course I will.”

“Have you exactly been reliable lately? Karen is a bad influence on you.”

“I have a right to hang out with my other friends, you know,” May defends.

“I take a deep breath, committed to letting it all out now. “You spend all your time with those druggie friends of yours, so stoned out of your mind that by the time it’s over you don’t remember to ask me.”

“Are you fucking serious right now?” May shouts.

“I’m concerned about your health! You show up high to work, you can’t remember how you get home some nights, and you’ve changed your opinions on things so much it’s dizzying!”

“You’re not my mother, so stop acting like you know what’s best for me,” May says, gritting her teeth.

“I’m not the only one– your recent behavior has been scaring your other friends, too.”

“So you’ve been talking behind my back, huh? I deserve better. I can’t believe you would attack me like this.” Tears spill over onto May’s cheeks in a torrential flood of emotion, smudging her thick mascara.

“I know, I’ve missed you too much,” she says. The corners of her lips turn down a bit. “Do you even care once, or does everything seem so meaningless now?”

“Ellie, you’ve been acting so wildly, I don’t even know you anymore!”

May slaps me as hard as she can across my face. Before I can react, she storms out of the apartment, slamming the door behind her with such force that one of the framed photographs falls off the wall. In a daze, I walk over to where the frame has fallen to the ground. I turn it over slowly, revealing a photo from seven years ago at high school graduation: May and I smiling towards the camera, holding on to each other, looking forward to the future.

My heart sinks, the little flame of hope flickering out once again. I feel ashamed for pushing away my best friend, for letting her down after all this time. I fucked up. This is the hardest part of all: feeling our friendship fail.

In my mind, I walk into Ellie’s bedroom, as I have hundreds of times before. I imagine it all as it used to be. Part memory, part fantasy. The old brown carpet is entirely covered by clothes and shoes. I have only ever seen her floor once, after she had spent an entire day cleaning up. I tread carefully, trying to avoid stepping on most of the items in my path.

Against the wall facing me is the dresser holding up her hot pink parakeet cage. Her two parakeets squawk softly upon hearing me enter. Hope, the green one, sits closest to me at the small water trough on the left. Bird seed, bird feathers, and bird droppings litter the bottom of the cage, as well as the drawer and floor below. White and gray and green feathers occasionally float through the air, tickling my nose or sticking to my clothes. The musty bird smell permeates the room.

One wall is simply a giant window, along the top of which Ellie has strung blue fairy lights. The pastel blue paint of her walls still smells fresh from when we painted her room together. Records from classic rock ‘n’ roll bands like The Beatles and Aerosmith, but also from newer bands who released limited edition vinyl.

Surrounded by shelves full of sheet music stands her keyboard, waiting for her to play. Behind that, a chalkboard wall full of drawings, compositions, and song lyrics. Hung on the walls are band posters from concerts and two dream catchers, one large and one small. The larger pink one I brought back from Arizona as a gift for Ellie.

I look up at the ceiling, and though it’s impossible to see right now, I know that if I turned out the lights I would see glowing yellow stars made from random dots of glow-in-the-dark paint. The pastel blue paint of her walls still smells fresh from when we painted her room together. I sit down on her bed, breathing deeply, letting her apartment’s distinct aroma wash over me. Her comforting scent, a scent like cinnamon.

Ellie strides into the room behind me, cooing at her parakeets. She tucks her long, dark hair behind her ears and walks over to feed the birds. She wears a pair of black shorts that show off her long, muscular legs, and a royal purple tanktop that hugs her curves. I admire the view. She turns to me, smiling a radiant smile that lights up her dark brown eyes. The yellow light of her room illuminates her lightly tanned skin and the birthmark spread across her left cheek. She has always been ashamed of that birthmark, but I think it is beautiful. A stretch of large freckles forming the shape of a crescent moon. A little piece of the sky that she carries with her.

“It’s so good to see you again,” I say.

“I know, I’ve missed you too much,” she says. The corners of her lips turn down a bit. “Do you have to live a thousand miles away?”

“I’m here now. Besides, I’m only gone for university.”

“IT’S so good to see you again,” I say.

“I know, Ellie sighs. She reaches out and wraps her arms around me tightly. Her hair smells sweet like her coconut shampoo. I pull back slightly, enough to cradle her face in my hands before pressing my lips against hers. After a few long moments, we let go of each other.

“How are you?” she asks. From a stranger, a meaningless question. From my girlfriend, an
expression of honest care and concern.

“Honestly... I’ve been pretty lonely and miserable.”

“It’s so hard to tell when you’re depressed because when we’re together, I’m always happy.”

“Ditto,” I reply, a smile creeping its way onto my face.

“You wanna talk about it?”

“No, not really. Not now.”

“Video games it is, then. Come on,” she says, grabbing my arm and leading me out the door to the living room, “let me kick your ass at Mario Kart. Again.” She laughs, the sound both musical and infectious. “Sound good?”

“Sounds perfect,” I say, grinning.

I can’t remember the good times anymore, can hardly believe there were any. I just recreate them in my waking dreams, a fantasy in which to escape. Yet dreams are fleeting, and reality is so, so long. Everything seems to drag on forever, neverending, and I feel trapped. I’ve tried to make it work. But it never gets better, no matter what they say. And I would know; I’ve been waiting for years, and I’ve only gotten worse. It’s not enough. It never is. This is how it goes...

Shutting my journal, I take in my surroundings for the first time since I arrived at the park an hour ago. From where I sit on my favorite red bench, I tilt my head all the way back. Whenever I’m outside at night, the first thing I do is look up at the sky and admire all the stars and the moon. Tonight, at this hour, the moon is positioned just right so that the trees seem to frame it, reaching out with their leafy green branches to touch the bright half-orb as it makes its journey across the sky. The moon is in its Last Quarter phase, preparing to shrink itself to a crescent sliver and disappear before being born again. This of course is only our perspective from Earth given Luna’s relative position to the Earth and Sun. From Luna, Earth is in its First Quarter, preparing to expand itself to a near perfect sphere. Neither orb actually changes size; only our perspectives change.

The cicadas have their phases too. They are born underground and wait up to 17 years before emerging from the soil to the surface where they scream their unholly song every night, all summer long. Tonight is no different. Waves of discordant screaming wash over the park, drown out most other sounds of night, with only occasional breaks in the near constant rhythm. The cicadas, they scream, and, I, listen.

The air here is always so hot and dry that it often makes me wish I were somewhere else. Perhaps the young Asian man across the way wishes this as well, if only to have a better venue to play his violin. Or maybe he is content to stay here under the stars, vainly trying to eclipse the cicada song with a song of his own. For whom does he play? Himself? The stars? Passerby? The cicadas? My presence here is likely just as great a mystery to him. I am, after all, apparently doing nothing, which is arguably strangest of his own. For whom does he play? Himself? The stars? Passerby? The cicadas? My presence here is likely just as great a mystery to him. I am, after all, apparently doing nothing, which is arguably stranger.

I look around at the beautiful green expanse, at the fountain in the park’s center. A bronze horse reaching out with their leafy green branches to touch the bright half-orb as it makes its journey across the sky. The moon is in its Last Quarter phase, preparing to shrink itself to a crescent sliver and disappear before being born again. This of course is only our perspective from Earth given Luna’s relative position to the Earth and Sun. From Luna, Earth is in its First Quarter, preparing to expand itself to a near perfect sphere. Neither orb actually changes size; only our perspectives change.

And I realize – it may be that I could experience serenity in another place, where it is not hot and oppressive, where I am not miserable, where I can feel at home. But I would not be here to experience this moment, this melody, this night sky in all its particular beauty. There is ugliness too, and that is important because it would not be here without it.

Yet it’s not enough. Suddenly, a large drop of water lands on my head. One by one, the drops fall from the sky until it is raining steadily, a hot, gentle rain. I set my journal down on the bench beside me. I stand and make my way over to the park’s edge, to the balcony overlooking the ocean, waves crashing against the jagged cliff.

The rain pours harder now, soaking through my clothes and into my skin. I shiver involuntarily, not from cold, but from some unnamable feeling that has crawled its way into the pit of my stomach. Standing there on the edge of the world, I replay the last words of my suicide note in my head: I am I, I listen.

the air here is always so hot and dry that it often makes me wish I were somewhere else. Perhaps the young Asian man across the way wishes this as well, if only to have a better venue to play his violin. Or maybe he is content to stay here under the stars, vainly trying to eclipse the cicada song with a song of his own. For whom does he play? Himself? The stars? Passerby? The cicadas? My presence here is likely just as great a mystery to him. I am, after all, apparently doing nothing, which is arguably stranger.

I look around at the beautiful green expanse, at the fountain in the park’s center. A bronze horse rising out from the water, surrounded by a bed of freshly mown grass, the only noticeable scent in this night air. The sight of it is oddly comforting and familiar. Hundreds of dragonflies like to flutter around the statue during the day, and I think of them now, despite the fact that they have retired for the night. The memory of long, fragile, flapping wings lingers here, and I half expect to see a swarm of them rise up to resume their aimless flight.

A light breeze brings some relief to my hot, sweaty skin. Leaves scuttle along the pavement, carried along in the wind. The violinist plays a mournful lament, and goosebumps rise along my arms and legs. Music has a powerful effect on me; it can stir deeply buried emotions and register as a physical sensation. I sense the vibrations against my skin, feel the song in my bones.
i’m having one of those nights.
sleep is an elusive creature
and time is being rather annoying.
rolling over to glance at the digital numbers—
and then sighing.
quick mental math:
‘if i went to sleep right now i’d get four hours and forty-seven minutes of
sleep.’
but of course that’s not how it works.

staring at the ceiling.
tungsten-orange light striping the space above my head;
‘stupid streetlight. really need to fix those blinds at some point.’

exhalation of resignation.
reaching for the cell phone . . . no.
standing up instead, staggering to the sill
and pulling down two of the flimsy metal blinds
to peer out into the amber glow.
reflections on the sidewalk stand out harsh in the light.
i grab my shoes and step outside.
the door clicks softly behind me,
the sound swiftly evaporating into the night.

strolling down sidewalks.
sodden trees, sodden air, sodden sky
drip-dripping drops on my hair, my hoodie, my hands.
back home i would be shivering,
cursing my lack of forethought.
but here everything is still warm
despite it being closer to dawn than dusk.
i run my hand along a signpost,
my brief interaction setting it quivering,
then shake off the collected moisture.

---warm rain---
Grant Peterson

4:13

4:14

every surface glistens with wet.
the drip-dripping is all around.
it’s such a strange and peaceful setting, almost surreal,
and nowhere is there another soul to be found.
not a car on the road, though i look both ways.
i skirt the edge of a puddle,
pausing to admire the reflection it has caught
upon the surface.

4:15

eventually i am slipping back inside.
sliding off somewhat soggy sneakers,
tossing my damp hoodie over the back of a chair,
returning to the cozy comfort of my bed.
large shuddering sigh.
i avoid glancing at the numbers.
‘let’s try this again.’
The weight that took me to the bottom
was tied to a steel cord tangled in loneliness.
The weight that brought me under
was sealed in a vault of unacknowledged values.
The weight that sapped my strength
was snared in a web of conflicting expectations.
The weight that shocked my system
was riddled with frozen shards of self-doubt.
The weight that hit the surface
became embedded in the core of my being.
The hands that shoved me from the pier
belonged to my so-called “friends”.

In the dark black, I find clarity.
Nothing matters but the self.
It has taken me far too long to realise
that one simple truth.
So in the dark black,
I take these hundreds of weights that have become my self.
I forge a blade of hopes and dreams and desires long forgotten,
hone it into a scalpel and carve out the negativity that I had thought defined me,
and cast everything into the abyss.

Time passes and I rise.
The water lightens and I rise.
The burdens slip away and I rise.
And when I finally break the surface again,
I gasp in the crystal air and turn away from the pier,
Away from them.
And begin anew.

Setting: Night. Studio apartment. A green couch faces the audience. The apartment door is Stage Right, double bolted. Round kitchen table sits near the door. A small bed is Stage Left, neatly made, looks untouched. Next to the bed is a short bookcase crammed full of books. A digital clock on top of the bookcase reads 3:33 A.M. The floor lamp beside the couch is the only light on in the room.

At Rise: A young woman sits on the couch, clutching her knees to her chest, staring straight ahead, rarely blinking, trapped in memory. A grey pitbull is curled up on a rug by the bed. The dog remains asleep until the woman makes a sound.

A minute goes by, in which all the woman does is stare straight ahead, until... SLAM! A door offstage is slammed: a neighbor coming home late.

WOMAN jerks her head towards her door. She gets up, checks both locks to make sure they are locked, then sits back down on the couch. Pause. She looks again at the door. Gets up again, checks the locks, sits back down.

WOMAN pulls out her cell phone, plays a relaxing mix of atmospheric music/white noise. She closes her eyes and sits in a meditation pose. A minute goes by. The music gradually becomes ominous; screechy violins start subtle, then increase in intensity. The light in the room gradually turns red.

A giant MONSTER appears. It is ghost-like, an amorphous figure that is black at its massive center, radiating blood red tentacles all around it that each come to sharp, piercing points. The music peaks in intensity, strings shrieking unbearably.

WOMAN's eyes snap open; she knows the MONSTER is there. She is transfixed, frozen in place, gazing in terror at the ghost-like figure. Her mouth is agape, a silent scream, like when you are too afraid to make a sound. Above all, she recognizes the MONSTER, knows it intimately. She has seen it many times before, but she remains repulsed and shocked.

WOMAN begins hyperventilating as the MONSTER drifts towards her slowly. As it gets closer, it reaches out its tentacles to grab her. Just as the MONSTER is about to reach her, WOMAN lets out a harrowing sob.

DOG jumps up, sees the MONSTER, gives a single deep, echoing bark. The sound reverberates around the room, chasing away the MONSTER. It drifts away and fades into the darkness. The music stops and the light returns to a pale yellow. WOMAN has returned to her At Rise position, only now her face is wet with tears.
DOG jumps onto the couch, nuzzling WOMAN. She pets him with shaking hands until she is calm again. She looks in the direction the MONSTER came and went, the same direction as the door. WOMAN gets up, checks the locks on the door for a third and final time, returns to the couch.

DOG kisses her in the face. She smiles weakly. WOMAN signs “Good boy. I love you.” to DOG. DOG wags his tail, a gentle thumping against the couch. WOMAN wraps her arms around DOG, burying her face in his fur. She holds on forever.

FIN

Deliasofia Zacarias
Our Contributors...

Bender, Quinn
Quinn is a Sophomore Art major from South Dakota.

Bourgeois, Emily
Emily is a sophomore English and Political Science major from Omaha, NE. She enjoys stories, mediocre coffee, and acoustic covers of 80’s pop hits. When she’s not writing, Emily enjoys organizing and political activism because she believes that all art is political.

Broussard, Elizabeth
Elizabeth is a senior at Trinity University who enjoys storytelling. She grew up reading every book she could get her hands on, and now is taking a hand at writing her own. Though also drawn to the sciences, she hopes to one day publish a book series or a collection of linked stories.

Carroll, Kelly
Kelly spends most of their time reading, and will never turn down a new book. They have been writing for over ten years now, and eventually hope to publish the novel that has been bumping around their head for a while.

Connor, Malcolm
Malcolm is a senior English major from Madison, Wisconsin. He works as a renowned research assistant and theater production assistant.

Corley, Grace
Grace is a senior from Austin, TX, majoring in English. The piece is a nonfiction story about experiences from last summer working in a camp on the west side of San Antonio.

Freund, Danielle
Dani Freund is a senior biology major. Her pastimes include cross stitching and eating pie.

Gerlach, Amanda
Amanda is a 20 year old from Houston, Texas. She runs cross country and track here at Trinity.

Hsu, Hannah
Hannah is a first generation Asian-American from Houston, Texas, who writes poetry, draws, paints, sings and plays piano, acoustic guitar, and drums. She loves biking and running with her dad.

Hayes, Layna
Layna is a sophomore from Memphis, TN. She loves creating art! Her aesthetic can be thought of as “Valentine’s Day.”

Jarrett, Alexis
Alexis is a Junior theater major from Lafayette, Louisiana. While at Trinity she has been in 3 main stage shows, traveled to Italy as a research assistant, and tried her best. She is the social media/marketing chair of PRIDE and the president of Phi Delta Kappa. She loves making art in all forms.

Justus, Courtney
Courtney Justus is a senior English major & Creative Writing minor at Trinity. She currently works at the literary nonprofit Gemini Ink. Her work has been published in Eunoia Review, Tipton Poetry Journal and Ars en Lobster Poetry Journal, among others.

Kenkel, Bonnie
Bonnie's major is Fine Arts but the focus is in photography. She has been photographing for about 11 years now. Her favorite subjects to shoot are night scenes, using long shutter speeds and studio lighting.

Kilinger, Kara
Kara is a sophomore English major, creative writing minor, and the Pulse section editor of the Trinitonian. Like nearly everyone at Trinity, she’s from Houston. Hobbies include: bullet journaling, hand lettering, and buying more books than she will ever have time to read.

Lerma, Samantha
Sam Lerma is currently a junior finishing her degree in English with a minor in Creative Writing. A native of San Antonio, she was born and raised in San Antonio. She aspires to become an educator and a writer.

Madden, Kerry
Kerry is a semi-put-together young woman who has always been creatively inspired by theatre.

Mottet, Alexander
Alex is a sophomore majoring in BAT and minoring in Chinese and English. He is a Trinity Review co-editor and has been published in The Roundup, Trinitonian, & Posture Magazine. He has also displayed art in the Esperanza Center’s “queergrito” and Trinity’s “Mini” exhibitions.

Moyle, Miranda
Miranda is a sophomore English major and a writer (sometimes) from Manitowoc, WI.

Peterson, Grant
Grant is a first-year student from Boulder, Colorado, and a probable comp-sci major. He sometimes writes poetry and short prose for fun. Often, this happens very late at night, in the small hours. Because sleep is hard when one has inspiration.

Poensch, Chelsea
Chelsea Poensch is a freshman from Waverly, Iowa. She uses painting and drawing as a creative outlet to bring peace & enjoyment, attempting to make nature a main focus in her art to help people understand that there are changes within our environment and planet that need to be paid attention to!

Poynor, Faith
Faith Poynor is a writer and musician who will be attending the University of New Orleans in 2018 to attain her MFA in Creative Writing.

Sumerall-Orrsac, Stephen
Stephen is a first year from Johnson City, Texas. He is interested in majoring in Art and minoring in film studies. Recently he has become interested in photography. Prior his attendance of Trinity University his primary mediums were pen, pencil and charcoal.

Teegerstrom, Carl

Warford, Katie
Katie is a sophomore Art major/Psychology minor. She has competed in the San Antonio Rodeo's Student Western Art competition several times and attended the Western Art Academy. Katie's work is inspired by nature and unusual people/environments. She gravitates towards oil, acrylic paint, graphite and charcoal.

Washington, Simone
Simone Washington is a sophomore International Studies major from Austin, Texas.

Wood, Emily
Emily is a senior English major and Creative Writing minor. Outside of schoolwork, she enjoys singing with the Chamber Singers and AcaBellas, as well as knitting and crochet when she has free time. Other interests include chocolate, coffee, and sloths.

Zacarias, Deliasofia
Deliasofia Zacarias is from El Paso, Texas and will receive her B.A. in Studio Art and Business Administration. In 2017, she was the recipient of the Trinity University Mach Research Fellowship and the Trinity University Excellence in Art Award.
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