

genesis

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In memory of Jim Powell, former faculty advisor to genesis.

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Letter from the Editors

This issue began its incubation under the promise of a new era. We began to craft it in the energetic atmosphere of our staff room and were forced to complete it from several separate spaces. None of us foresaw the challenges we would face several months into the process.

Fostering artistic community is a role *genesis* has filled for nearly fifty years, sharing student work and hosting events that bring artists, readers, and editors together in their love of art. Disconnected and uncertain times prove the value of tending to our community even more. As we move ahead in these present challenges, we take heart in creating a historical record of art, grounding us in the current moment and providing a foundation for the future.

Several pieces included in this issue such as *The Return, A Hunger Artist, Under My Wing*, and “*Calavera...Calavera...*” see artists pulling inspiration from well-known pieces of art to provide unique contexts for their own realities. These pieces speak to one of the most important functions of art: providing comfort and inspiration for creative minds. In this moment and moving forward, we hope this issue of *genesis* offers solace for readers and artists alike.

Joseph Alcala, Jordan Kalt, and Trenna Soderling
Managing Editors

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(W)hole In the Head

Nathan Maquam

“Daddy, do you think that people have souls?” I asked.

We were folding clothes on his bed. The bed was so tall that I had to scramble up onto it to grab more clothes to fold. My father shrugged.

“That depends on how you define the word ‘soul.’” he said. “Whatever the soul is, it’s made up of cells. Brain cells. Neurons and synapses.”

“But you can’t prove that,” I said.

“I can,” he said. “There was once a man who had a metal spike go all the way through his head. He survived, but his personality changed.”

“How did it change?”

“He was a good man before the accident, and a bad one after,” my father said. “After the accident, he made inappropriate comments to women and swore all the time. Before, he wasn’t like that at all.”

“Did you know this man?”

“No, he lived a long time ago.”

“Did he ever recover?”

“No,” my father said, folding the last shirt in the basket. “He was bad until the day he died.”

*

Phineas Gage was a twenty-five year old railroad foreman. He was well-liked by his peers until the accident happened. Lots of details about the accident are under scrutiny, but here is what we know: in 1848, Phineas was packing blasting powder into holes to prepare the roadbed. Distracted by his men, something caused an explosion with his head right in the line of fire. His tamping iron was shot upward through the left front of his skull and out the back

of his head. The tamping iron was greasy with blood and fatty brain matter. Here is where the details get fuzzy: some accounts say that Phineas passed out briefly and was carried to the wagon so he could be taken into town. Other accounts assert that he never lost consciousness and climbed up into the wagon of his own accord.

He was definitely conscious when the men got him into town. While they waited for the doctor, he sat outside and chatted with passersby. When the first doctor arrived, Phineas greeted him by saying “Here’s enough business for you.” The doctor who would save his life, Dr. John Harlow, would not arrive until 6pm that day—an hour and a half after the accident. Dr. Harlow reached into his skull and pulled out fragments of bone, managing to slow the bleeding. Phineas remained composed and rational throughout this whole process. The next day, Phineas was socializing with visitors under Dr. Harlow’s watchful eye, convinced that he would be back to work in no time. His health began to plummet within the next few days, however, as his brain developed a fungal infection and he lapsed into a coma. A coffin was commissioned for him, but Phineas made a surprising physical recovery except for his left eye, which would stay sewn shut for the rest of his life. He returned home with his family.

Here is where things get really fuzzy, and the mass speculation begins to cloud the few eyewitness details that we have. We know that Phineas’s personality underwent serious changes after the accident. Dr. Harlow wrote that he was “fitful, irreverent, indulging at times in the grossest profanity, which was not previously his custom.” He seemed incapable of long-term planning, or of handling and understanding money. Previous evaluations of him making a ‘full recovery’ only took into consideration his ability to walk and talk—family and friends insisted that he was “no longer

Gage” to them. There are wild and contradictory tales of his demeanor. Some accounts feature him as lewd and inappropriate, propositioning any woman he laid eyes on. Other accounts paint him as being altogether disinterested in sex. Some people even speculated that when his left frontal lobe was destroyed, his soul was as well. People understood him to be a godless creature, a monster with “animalistic tendencies.” Save his closest family, people generally stayed away.

*

It’s evening, and my stepfather is putting his son to bed. My mother and I are in the living room. She’s working on her third glass of wine.

“You remind me of your father sometimes,” she says. “That’s not a bad thing.”

I shrug, noncommittal.

“I loved your father,” she says. “I really did.”

“I loved him too,” I say.

“That wasn’t him in the end, you know,” she says. “Your father never would have said those things to you. So if you are like him, it’s not the end of the world.”

“Ok,” I say.

“He was a brilliant man,” she says. “And all he wanted was to be a father. He was always home by four-thirty to be with you, even if he had to be at work at five a.m. to pull it off.”

“I remember,” I say. “I was there.”

She drains her wine glass and pads sloppily across the kitchen for more.

“I should go,” I say. I hug her goodbye, but my body does not feel it.

On the drive home, I think that something is following me, is in the car with me. My dog sleeps peacefully in the backseat. I tell myself that if the dog feels nothing, then

there really is nothing. Everything is fine. What’s dead is dead.

*

The story of Phineas Gage is one that almost everyone knows, but many people don’t remember his name. They just know him as the man whose personality was changed by a railroad spike (even though it was a tamping iron). Though so many of the details of his case are unclear, people keep coming back to him. Why? Phineas’s case was the first one that showed a definitive connection between personality and the brain, proving what scientists had suspected all along. His case became the measuring stick against which all head injury cases are compared.

Most people only know the basics of his story: much as my father told it, people believe that Phineas was a good person before the accident and a bad one after. However, this is a gross caricature of what he actually went through. Most likely, Phineas’s major shifts in personality—the profanity, the rudeness, etc—lasted only two to three years. Viewed in this light, Phineas’s story becomes one of a man damaged and recovered, not a man made into a monster by a freak accident. But people want to believe that morality works that simply—maybe because if a good man could be made bad by nothing more than a blow through his frontal lobe, then maybe a bad man could also be made good. In an effort to make sense of Phineas’s story, the sensationalist media of the time blurred the vision of those in the future trying to look back.

Since Phineas’s death, scientists have recreated models of his skull and brain in a number of ways, trying to figure out definitively what part of him was destroyed. But I want to know who he was before the accident, and if any of that old spark came back. I want to know if Phineas knew when he was being mean, or if he was merely frustrated and could

no longer control his emotions. I want to know if he cried at night—and if he did, who was there to hold him. If he truly got better, I want to know if he got back the parts of who he was, or if he became someone else entirely. What was it about Phineas that made him survive the unsurvivable? Did he want to keep on living, or was life merely a thing that he was cursed with?

*

My father wasn't admitted into the hospital until 2013, but I knew that something was wrong starting about two years before that, when I was twelve. He got mad when I talked to my friends on the phone instead of talking to him. He made fun of my hobbies, told me that my poetry was nothing more than "words puked across the page." Years before, when I had taken up balloon-twisting, my father had filled his car with all of my creations to show his coworkers. Before he left for work in the morning, at his request, I'd get up early to fill his car with deformed giraffes, monkeys on lopsided palm trees, and balloon dogs with disproportionately long bodies. But when I printed my first Plath-inspired piece for him to put in his cubicle, he didn't even wait until I left the room to throw it away.

When I try to draw a line between Dad and Not-Dad, it gets fuzzy. A week after he threw my poem away, he read the Bukowski book I left on the kitchen table so that we could talk about it. He left CD's on my desk for me to try, always made sure that my computer stayed updated, and took me to Halloween stores. These are the things that I tell myself were definitely my father. But what to make of that Thanksgiving in 2012 when he, in front of everyone, declared that I was an unreasonable, impossible, and shallow child? His mother apologized to me and said, "That's not who I raised him to be. That's not him." Who was it, then?

*

I still don't know if I believe in souls. Whenever I think of the dead, I can feel them watching me. My father always told me that it was in my head. The night my drama teacher died, I curled up next to my father in bed just as I'd done as a much younger child. Pressed tight against his arm, I laid there and listened to his steady breathing, trying to escape the growing chill I felt from the side of the room that faced my back. I fell asleep right before my father left for work. I remember him pulling the blanket across my legs and placing my stuffed animal back under my arm.

I am twenty-one years old now. Still, as I pick through the various eyewitness accounts of Phineas before and after his accident, I feel that same, dull chill. Every article about Phineas uses one of two pictures—there are only two known photographs of him, and even those weren't confirmed until around 2009. With most old pictures, I look at them and see nothing. These photos are different. There's something of Phineas captured there, something proud and unkillable. He looks smart and ruggedly handsome even in his disfigurement. He holds his tamping iron like a knight holds his sword, staring slightly off-camera with his single, fixed eye.

I look directly into his gaze, then shiver. It's all in your head, I remember my father telling me. I shiver again, remembering my father. I try not to think about my father or Phineas Gage or anything else until my roommates are home, but I can't stop. I'll feel better when there are voices and light and real, live people there to remind me what's real and what's in the past.

*

In April of 2013, my father was admitted to the hospital for the first time. We thought he was having heart trouble because he was having a hard time climbing the stairs. It turned out that in addition to his diabetes,

he had developed lupus. The doctors prescribed him new medications and better nutrition to rescue what little kidney function he had left. “You need micronutrients,” the doctors said. My mother bought him a juicer, which he only used twice.

My mother and I kept finding pizza in the fridge, ice cream in the freezer. My father only got sicker. I’d come home from school and hear him in the bathroom vomiting, then see him eating a popart just a few minutes later. At first, it was weird when he was away at the hospital. After a while, it was weird when he was home. I’d automatically reach for three plates instead of four when I set the table.

The health complications seemed to stack on top of each other, the words overlapping: dialysis, kidney failure, labile. One minute, he’d say I was the best kid a father could ask for. The next, I was a coldhearted bitch just like my mother. He caught a staph infection from the dialysis, which went to his heart. The doctors opened him up and put in a graft that would last ten years at most. The day after the surgery, my father was covered in wires, twitching in the hospital bed as my mother pulled the blanket over his thin legs. Though he survived, the chill still followed me home that night. I begged the universe to let him stay, then cried uncontrollably when he came back from the hospital.

The chill was gone when he left for assisted living for six weeks. He never came home again. I walked into the house one night and my mother’s face was so quiet and tired that she almost didn’t have to tell me. She pulled me into her arms, and I stared at his teacup still hanging on the wall. I wanted to throw it into the void at my back, the thing waiting for me to be alone. It’s all in your head, I told myself. I’m still in your head, it became, with his dry, labile laugh to accompany.

Which voice actually belonged to my father? When I tell

people about him, what parts do I include? What parts do I leave out to make a better story?

*

There’s only one film adaptation of Phineas’s story that I can find: a fifteen-minute short film titled *Gage*, released in 2014. Overall, the film consists of hits and misses in equal measure. Phineas doesn’t deliver his iconic line to the first doctor (“Here’s enough business for you!”). He doesn’t remain calm and rational during the surgery, but rather screams in pain and fear. He leers at passing women, often with a beer bottle in his hand. In these moments, I wonder if the film is interested in who Phineas was or in the stories people tell about him. The film is bookended by Phineas making an appearance in a travelling circus. In many ways, it feels as though the film exists to make yet another spectacle of him.

But there’s one moment in the film that for me, redeems almost anything. After months of trying to control Phineas’s erratic behavior, Dr. Harlow places a gun to Phineas’s head in a moment of desperation. Phineas grabs the gun and moves it right over the scar left by the tamping iron, daring him to pull the trigger. Dr. Harlow does not pull the trigger. It cuts to Phineas and Dr. Harlow standing outside, and Phineas explaining to Dr. Harlow how to hold the gun, how to shoot straight. When Phineas takes his turn, the gun does not fire. There is a brief, terrible moment of helplessness that he’s left with before he lumbers away, a beer bottle swinging in his hand. There’s no record of this scene actually happening, but it represents Phineas in a way that makes sense. He had all his old memories—he remembered all his friends and family, and even who he used to be. But whenever he tried to interact with them, the necessary parts of his brain just wouldn’t fire.

*

Phineas lived for twelve years after his accident. He is remembered mainly for his erratic behavior in the immediate few years that followed, not for the rest of those twelve years. For a good portion of those years, he was a stagecoach driver in Chile. Driving a stagecoach requires precise movements, patience, dexterity, and even handling money—certainly not a job for an individual who matches the descriptions of Phineas right after the accident. Yet he did this job successfully. Neuroscientists believe that he was able to hold this job due to a mixture of brain plasticity and the strict, regular routine of his stagecoach job. I'm sure this is probably the correct way to look at it, but I prefer to believe that Phineas survived due at least in part to his tenacity and will to live. Maybe, even in the darkest moments when Phineas allegedly swore at children or propositioned married women, there was some tiny bit of him left, buried so deep inside that even the tamping iron could not scrape it out. Maybe it just took time and patience to get it back.

Maybe he survived thanks to the loving support of his family, who were there through every leg of his illness. This may have been a burden his family was happy to bear, but memories of my father make me think otherwise. I'm sure Phineas's family hated him more than the newspapers ever could, that the juxtaposition of having him and not having him was slowly killing them. Maybe he started working again because he wanted to, or maybe it was because his family made him go back to work just to get him out of the house. How did he learn to manage money again? Did someone teach him, or did he teach himself?

Before the open heart surgery, my father liked to wander around grocery stores. He'd come home with strange, overpriced vegetables that we didn't need, blowing large portions of our already-tight food budget. My mother

finally took his credit cards away, rationing out cash for him instead. He spent all of that money on strange food that he usually threw up anyway. Who taught Phineas to manage his money? Who taught him how to keep on living when all the newspapers said he had no soul, when the only people who wanted him for hire were travelling carnivals? Who taught him how to step forward onto that stage and offer those gawking faces his handsome, fixed stare, daring them to see him as anything less than complete? Who taught him how to survive?

*

A month after my father first went into the hospital, I knew he was going to die. Most people (including my mother) didn't know until after the open-heart surgery, but I knew because he told me. It was the day after he had surgery for his diabetes-induced retinopathy.

"It's too late," he said, turning to look at me with his one-eyed stare.

"It's not!" I said. "Look at that juicer Mom bought you. I'll help you put it together."

"No," he said. "It's too late. I don't want to be here in this stupid old man body that's shaped like a pear, slowly shutting down. No one told me anything until it was too late. It's too late."

Nothing I said could convince him otherwise. My father believed that humans are just clusters of cells that either live or die. There's no in between, no before or after—just life powered by biological supercomputers in our skulls, and death when those cells die.

I can find no mention of what Phineas believed, if he believed in anything other than himself. Maybe he didn't need to. I want to believe that Phineas was a good person, that he apologized to the people he had wronged after the accident. I want to imagine him accompanying the town's

(W)hole In the Head

children to church on Sundays and making small talk with the passengers aboard his coach, learning slowly how to rebuild. I want to know who he was, who he loved, why he decided to keep on living. I want to give Phineas all of the grace and understanding I still cannot give my father.

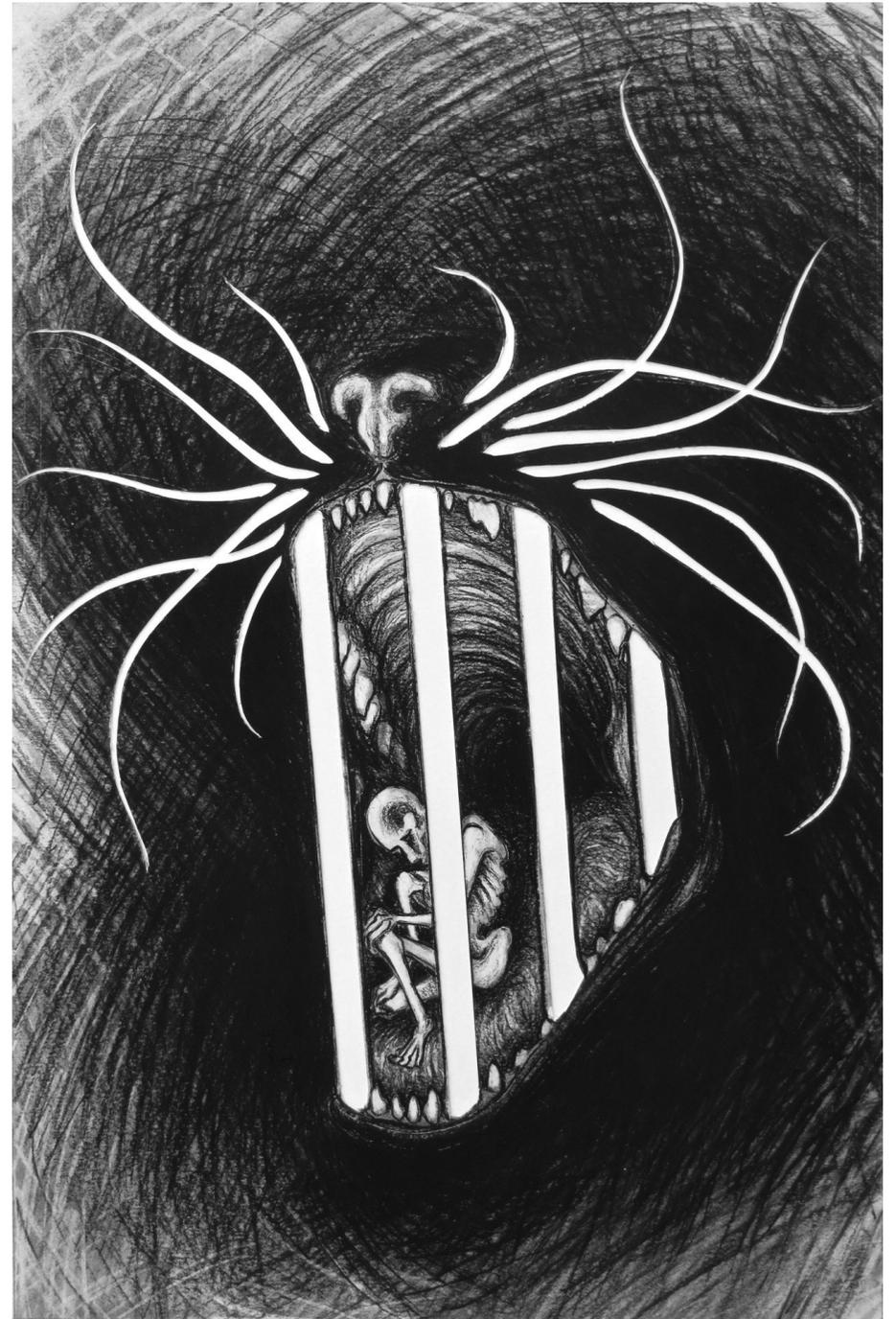
Is there such a thing as a soul? Is there something essentially human about us that transcends the fatty supercomputer of our brains? Scientists look at what happened to Phineas as proof that we are our brains, but the real story of Phineas teaches the exact opposite: Phineas was his tenacity and his kindness. His social reintegration teaches us that the brain will heal itself, forge new connections—that it is possible to survive the unsurvivable. Had my father thought of it like that, maybe things would have been different for him, or maybe they wouldn't have. All I really know is that it's my choice how the story gets told. It changes a little every time—the details are fuzzy around the edges—but I tell his story just the same.



Rough Edge
Olivia Adam
Photography, 2.5." x 19"



The Return
Sara Lansdell
Graphite on paper



A Hunger Artist
Ayla Walter
Charcoal pencil on paper, 11" x 18"

balance.
Michaela White

Tap. Tap. Tap. No, that wasn't even. Tap. No, too long in-between. That doesn't feel even either. Tap. Tap. Tap. Four. Four is even but it's close to five, and multiples of five are better than even numbers. Tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap. Now it's even and a multiple of five. The girl sitting next to me is staring. I lower my hands and fiddle with my pencil, the itching in my face finally gone now that I've restored the balance. She turns away but glances back at me every so often, waiting to see if I'll tap my face again like I'm a child—or losing my mind. I might be losing my mind. I avoid eye contact.

Paint. Asphalt. Paint. Asphalt. A misstep and my shoe lands on the crosswalk paint strip with maybe an inch landing just past it. The balance is thrown off. My other shoe has to do the same; paint strip, an inch on the asphalt. That still doesn't feel right. Fine. Now an inch on the paint strip, the rest on asphalt, one foot and then the other. A car honks at me. The walk sign has long passed. Paint asphalt paint asphalt, I hurry to the sidewalk. Can't step on any cracks. I just want to get home.

Pain in my left hand. I unclench my fist to see four crescents dug into my palm—only on my left. No, I don't want to. I need to stop. My right palm itches. I step on a crack in the sidewalk and stop, just standing there. The balance, it's gone to hell. The itching spreads from my palm to my foot, to my brain, but I've had enough. I don't want to do this anymore. I can't do this anymore. Some days it's barely there, but days like these it stops me every few minutes, interrupting my life until it's taking it over. Balance. I need balance. A bell dings at me and a boy on a bicycle flies past. My right fist clenches tight. I step on another crack, with my other foot this time. Balance is restored. God, I don't want to do this anymore.

To Love Oneself. To Cope.
Hannah Bryson-Price

“I love myself.” The trembling words fall from my lips in whispers only to drown in the mist of my bathroom.

I've just taken a shower—
power-washed my pores, silkened
my skin with sugar scrub—

I'm clean. I trap the sweetness
of the sugar with rose scented lotions.
I rub them in, finding thorns on my legs

the razor missed. My smooth calves ruined
by small, coarse trees scratching my palm.
Damn. A night of self-care gone wrong.

How do I love myself if my legs aren't soft?
If my face doesn't glow? The mirror shakes
its head assuring me the hair isn't noticeable.

Instead, it pulls my pupils to thighs that touch,
a stomach that hangs, paper hair, and a troll nose.
At least the lips look good in red, the mirror admits.

All are visible. The vapors of the mist suffocate
me. I can't escape the sickening sweetness of roses.
I convince myself to go to bed. Maybe

I'll look pretty in the morning. So I lay down,
reeking of “self-care;” the smell stings my eyes.
“I love myself,” I choke, knowing that I'm dirty.



Consecrated Restraint

Emily Lemke

Colored pencil, watercolor paint, watercolor pencil, gold leaf, 12" x 20"

Apology: masculinity Nathan Marquam

it hits my giggle with a shovel & churns the sound
into mud & gravel. it runs a thick hand down
my stomach & turns the mirror away, cracks open
my bones & sucks out the *please & thank you*.

when a man grabs me in the club, it is both
my ready fists
& my silence after. it cracks my tear ducts
like beer bottles,
lets them drip onto the floor. it says that I am
always
the shoulder & never the one embraced,
always the fire

& never the thing burning. it replaces my spine
with a steel rod, yanks back my hairline & burns
the skirts in the back of my closet. it inspects my cologne
for any hint of flower, insists I must only smell of tobacco

& burnt pinewood. it hacks into me like a
tree, makes angles

from what once was body. it scrapes the
birthname from

my tongue with a sawblade, leaves me to
choke on the blood

& I am a wasteland of jagged stumps, worth
more empty.

Insomniatic

Elizabeth Coffman-Mackey

The year I turned twelve, I could count my birthday gifts on one hand. Shelby bought me a hardcover copy of *Breaking Dawn*, and Jessica got me a Team Jacob t-shirt—a combo gift, of sorts. My dad wrote a letter riddled with spelling errors and gave me two hundred dollars. And you, you gave me *Insomniatic*. The CD was two years old, but it was the most recent piece of music released by Aly & AJ. They called themselves twins born three years apart, and we called ourselves sisters, though we were much more and less than that.

Potential Breakup Song

After my dad died, adults got into the habit of buying me ice cream. Aunt Nora bought me ice cream in big pink cups from the Baskin Robbins drive-thru on the way home from therapy sessions. Grandma brought back gallon buckets of vanilla, pressing her gnarled old finger to her lips like we could keep this a secret from the whole house. Marti and I even stopped by Dairy Barn after church, some Sundays. Adults buy kids ice cream when they feel bad for them is what I'm trying to tell you here.

So, in a way, I almost felt worse when your mom asked if I wanted to go to Culvers with her.

We were fourteen that year, the year the Culvers was new in Marquette. In any town with a population under fifty thousand in a tax bracket that thinks twenty is a splurge, the opening of a new fast food joint was a pretty big deal.

We made the nearly thirty-minute drive from their house in the middle of the woods to the tiny strip of downtown that Marquette laid claim to in almost complete silence. You weren't there to blast Justin Bieber, and she wasn't



A Far-off Country

Gabriel Akre

Oil on canvas, 48" x 42"

my mom, though God knows she was trying to be. We got mediums because I was too polite to order large but I felt too goddamn bad for myself to get small.

“How is your relationship with God?” Aunt Leanne asked, the words kind but stilted, like I was a stranger. For the purposes of this story, me the pathetic orphan who was being pitied, I ought to have been small and skinny, barely picking at the melting dairy, but I wasn’t good at playing my part.

“I go to church,” I said. “I struggle with my faith sometimes.”

I was an atheist, of course, but she had just bought me ice cream.

Leanne nodded.

“This is just a phase she’s going through, I think,” she said. “Of course, we knew the day would come when she got boy crazy, but... don’t worry, sweetie. I’ll talk to her.”

“Don’t!” I pleaded. “Really, it’s fine.”

“It’s rude,” Leanne said. “You come all this way, and then...”

“It’s fine, I get it,” I said. “It’s fine, really. I’ve been messaging Shelby back at the house. Besides, we’ll be up all night anyway. We talked about this,” we hadn’t, “and I don’t mind. I really, really don’t mind.”

You don’t need me to tell you I did mind, right?

You got home just before sunset, a shine in your eyes that told me what you did before you said it with your mouth. You told your parents we were going on a walk, and as soon as we were down the driveway, you had whipped out your iPod touch and hit play on “I Just Had Sex,” (The Lonely Island ft. Akon)

You raised your plucked eyebrows at me.

“How did it happen?” I asked, too bored for you.

“We took a beach towel into the woods,” she said. “It was

beautiful.”

Getting fucked by your boyfriend of six months on a beach towel in the woods didn’t sound beautiful to me; it sounded like the ground would hurt your back and that there would be a danger of mosquito bites where a person really wouldn’t want mosquito bites.

We did walk our usual lap. Up East White Bear, then White Bear, all the way to 510, down to the old bridge, and up the hill to the new bridge. Back down 510, past the yellow ragweed that smelled like pollen and the color of sunsets and August, it always smelled like August and Michigan and you. Somewhere back on White Bear drive, you admit that it hurt a little.

“But it was amazing,” you say. “Like, I don’t know, it wasn’t that fun, I guess, but I’ve done it, you know?”

We stayed up late talking, just like I promised my aunt, your mom. By one in the morning, when your parents were still watching Monk in the living room, the glimmer in your eyes was less exhilaration and more fear. After you showered, it was worse.

“It still hurts,” you say. “And now—now I’m, like, bleeding down there? Is that supposed to happen?”

“Let’s Google it—”

“No! Are you insane, what if my parents see?!”

“They won’t see on my iPod—”

“What if you can check, somehow? It’s their WiFi! They can’t know, they can’t! Am I dying?”

“You’re not dying, maybe it was just—I don’t know, too big? Is it your period?”

“Not for two weeks!”

We spoke in whispers, your chest shaking. Years later, someone said you either get scared before or after your first time, but I didn’t think you ever got scared.

“Can you just—can you just get me a bag of frozen peas?”

Go out to the freezer and sneak the peas back here, I just have to put something down there it hurts so bad it hurts.”

“What if your parents see me carrying a bag of frozen peas? What do I say?”

“Please!”

I snuck the peas out of the freezer, hidden under my shirt while your dad asked how my day had been. You clamped them between your thighs, and asked me to sleep with you, just tonight.

We were too big to share a twin bed—or, I was too big to share a twin bed, but you curled up against my side and said I just can’t sleep alone tonight, I can’t be alone, I can’t. And after all the lights were off and the glowing dials of the clock said it was well past four, you whispered what if I go to hell? And I pretended to be asleep.

Bullseye

Illinois farms could grow strawberries, with a lot of dedication and pesticide, but in general, berries grew up North, where you lived. All berries, especially blueberries. I didn’t really like blueberries, but I soon discovered blueberry picking was fun.

Everything that far north in Michigan was rusty, the sun always hugging the horizon and bleeding the sky orange. The commerce there was all about iron, and the landscape was like a mirror of the economy. The scraggly bushes of blueberries, rowed right up to the faded red horizon were black, like twisted metal. The roads were warm too, earth that looked nothing like the brown dirt of the farmland I called home.

The adults were busy, and you pointed off into the hazy sunset, voice low and husky, like we were telling scary stories.

“There’s a big, abandoned house out that way,” you said. “The kids at youth group say it’s haunted, and no one’s been in there for years. They say some teenagers from Ishpeming

went in there last year, and one of them went missing the next week.”

“I didn’t hear that,” Meagan said. Meagan was older, but she looked like me. You were already too cool for her, but we were 12, young enough that older meant something to us.

“It’s true!” you said. “There’s an abandoned house down there.”

“That wasn’t what I said wasn’t true...” Meagan said. I wasn’t listening. I had started walking down the road, blueberry bucket abandoned by the shoulder.

“HEY!”

You were a runner, and you slammed your hand down on my shoulder in a second. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“You said there’s an abandoned house,” I said. “I wanna see it.”

The grownups were long gone, would be for a while.

“That’s dangerous,” you said.

“So?” I asked. “It’s abandoned. The sun’s out. What’s the worst that could happen?”

“I’m not coming.”

“I don’t care.”

I started walking anyway. You grabbed my hand, and I shook it off. I was already angry, but I don’t remember why, not anymore. You grabbed my hand harder, and I pulled away with more force.

“That’s enough!” you shouted. You took my arm and dragged, too strong for me to pull away. I tried to shake you off and fell, and you kept dragging. Rusty, iron-orange dust coated me, and I screamed and thrashed. I was having a tantrum all of a sudden, and you were pulling me back to the buckets, hand on my wrist like metal.

I don’t know how long this went on. I was stubborn, stupid stubborn, maybe even stubborn enough to try again, once or four times, but it ended with me sitting in the

brambles and holding back tears, hands clenched around thorns to feel something, anything.

“You’re not her mom!” Meagan shouted.

You’re not my mom, I thought again, savage.

You started crying before I did.

You said “Well, somebody has to be!”

Closure

The year after you dropped out of college, you didn’t want to take me back to the train station.

“You don’t mind, do you?” you asked, knowing I did, voice all syrupy sweet. You’ve got this tone of voice I only ever heard you use on me, like you’re talking to a kindergartener. It’s okay sweetie everything’s fine.

“It’s just, you know, Zach and I were going to go up to the falls. He got some more stuff, good shit, Girl Scout Cookie, have you ever tried Girl Scout Cookie? Makes you real mellow. And we’ve got work tomorrow, so you understand, right? I mean, we’d just be stuck in a car together for six hours.”

“Yeah, I understand.”

Earlier, when you thought I was still asleep, I heard you and your mom shouting at each other. “Don’t you feel bad for her?” “Of course I feel bad for her!”

Of course, you feel bad for me.

Division

We fell apart during high school. It didn’t happen overnight; we never imploded on ourselves, we just drifted. I thought I cared about it more than you, but now it’s harder to say, so far removed.

I still came over every summer, walking barefoot in the woods and idly picking raspberries off the bushes that grew on the sides of the road, riding right behind you the year you got a four wheeler and reading quietly in your old bedroom while you went out with friends. This year, though, the girl

up on the rotating cast of best friends was nicer, calmer. Still a popular girl, a skinny blond with a secret love of One Direction and a not so secret love of gossip and being a popular girl.

But Hunter didn’t look at me like something that had crawled out of the sewer, and more than that, she went out of her way to include me when you and her hung out. She was sweet.

She wasn’t there that night, though, the night you went out to the backyard and made a fire while I watched, soft, city hands useless in my lap. You dragged the logs over and lit the kindling beneath them and sat on the hammock across from me, knees tucked under your chin.

We didn’t talk about anything with substance anymore. We smiled politely and made believe we were friends the way we used to make believe we were witches, mermaids, superheroes.

Like it or Leave it

You promised you would take me cliff diving, told me over and over how amazing it was. I sort of expected it would be an activity for you and me, not you and me and your boyfriend and his sister, but there we were, an unhappy little family hiking through the beautiful woods. You crumpled up an empty can of Arizona Iced Tea and threw it into the trees.

When we got to the precipice I realized that the water was an awfully long way down. I said I would just go down and swim, check how deep it was first. Zach gave me an odd look, but no one else responded. I asked how deep it was, and was told it was deep enough. Zach took off his shirt, set down his lighter and baggie full of weed, and with a Tarzan-whoop, he threw himself over the edge. Kowa-fuckin-bunga, there was silence at last.

Zach climbed back up the cliff to us again. He was

dripping and smirking, and everything about him disgusted me in that moment.

“You ladies too scared?” he asked.

And oh, I hated him, and were you not in love with him, you would have despised him too. Unfortunately.

“Shut up, Zach!” you said, a whiny, valley girl temporarily possessing you and wringing out her voice through your mouth. You giggled. Zach jumped again. He climbed back up and made fun of us some more and there we were, trapped in limbo, you being such a girl and him being such a boy.

“I’m fine with just going home now,” Zach said, leaning back. He flicked your American Spirits one by one into the water, letting them float on top like so much foul-smelling flotsam. “I’ve jumped twice. I’m good. If you ladies—”

“Shut up, Zach,” I said, and I took a running leap and threw myself over the edge of the cliff.

A glorious fall. A cold crash. At least I couldn’t hear either of you while I was underwater.

Like Whoa

The first time I saw you I was hiding behind a long, low, planter. You flailed out of the car and declared to the big, empty air: “My legs feel like noodles!”

I stepped out from behind the planter, and we fell in step with one another instantly.

Did I like Pokeman? No.

Did you like Harry Potter? Absolutely not.

Did we like Narnia? Oh, yes, we liked Narnia. We liked the Jonas Brothers, and Disney Channel, and Aly & AJ, and mysterious stories about little girls who could do magic. I told your dad where to find my dad, and took your hand in mind. Not clammy, not sweaty, just smooth and perfectly suited to mine.

I know sometimes writing to you feels like a love story,

and that’s because it is one. Some love stories just have nothing to do with romance, nothing to do with sex. And you and I had everything to do with Love.

Insomniatic

We were up together all night, every night. In person, on the phone, I forgot how to sleep around you, because there weren’t enough hours in the day.

Silence

We stayed on the trampoline till well past two in the morning. You and I, we didn’t really believe in normal hours of sleeping and waking. My mom always fought to wake me up in the mornings, and after she died, my dad gave up. So long as I caught the bus to school on weekdays, he didn’t really care. That summer, the best and the worst summer, we stayed up till five every morning and slept till two every afternoon. We jumped on the trampoline, took turns playing Neopets on my dad’s big desktop computer, and watched Teen Titans on my tiny TV in the basement. Aside from this, life was just one big car ride from the hospital to the house to hospice to the house to “please can we go to the mall please” to the house to the hospital to the house.

Dad was dying and I didn’t get to say goodbye to anyone that summer. I gave you lice and you killed my fish and aside from sitting crammed into the same leather computer chair as you, skinny twelve-year-old knees bumping together, it was a four-month blur of misery.

I had a silver and blue CD player-slash-radio and one CD, so when our legs burned from hours of jumping on the trampoline and our eyes burned from hours of staring at the computer, we lay on my scratchy pink bedspread that still smelled like cedar and mothballs, and we listened to *Insomniatic* over and over again. You thought the title track was the best, I liked *Silence*.

I think it was the morning we caught *Death Note* on

Adult Swim. Late night Cartoon Network played grown up cartoons, and we both liked blood and death, you because you were sheltered and I because what was the other choice?

We were the last ones up when the phone rang. And we were twelve, not stupid. Phones don't ring at four in the morning.

I must have said hello, but I don't really remember speaking. The lady on the phone asked for Bill Mackey, and we ran upstairs, bare feet on the concrete of the unfinished basement. You shook Uncle Bill awake, and I handed him the phone.

The summer came in flashes, see, little glimpses. Watching episodes of Teen Titans on YouTube that came in three parts because videos had to be under ten minutes, we watched in the computer room at the hospital down the hall from his room. The lights were always off in there. Joe feeding Dad tomato soup through a straw and crying, saying "Please eat something." Nora with her hands on my shoulders promising I would get to see you all the time, and me saying "He might not die. He could get better." Jumping so high on the trampoline I thought we would clear the safety netting. Playing tag in the Walmart at nine at night, getting told to hush now. Introducing you to my friends at Turtle Run, the local pool where everyone else was spending their summer. Dad talking less and less in increments so slow that I never knew what the very last thing he said was. The heavy, indigo scent of Britney Spears perfume we doused everything in. The overwhelming weight of knowing it was you and me against the world.

We stood shoulder to shoulder, the exact same height, in fuzzy bathrobes, staring at Bill as he nodded, closed his eyes, said "Okay" into the receiver. He hung up and started talking to Joe, like we weren't there.

"Hey," you said. "What is it? What happened?"

He looked at me, and he didn't even look sad.

"I'm sorry, sweetie. He's gone."

Of course, we knew that, but we had to hear it.

"Go to bed now, chickies," your mom said. She was the only one crying, and we walked back down the stairs, one cold step at a time.

I didn't cry. I didn't feel that sad, but I didn't feel tired anymore either. At first I felt nothing, and then I felt relief.

We sat in front of the fuzzy TV until the sun came up, one episode of Teen Titans melting into the next. You didn't say anything, and neither did I. We didn't hug or cry. You didn't try to tell me it was okay and I didn't fall apart. You stayed up all night with me.

If I Could Have You Back

You were, of course, invited to the wedding. You were my sister as far as I was concerned, so of course you were invited.

It would not have been so bad if you hadn't said you would come.

Flattery

We used to talk about what it would be like when we were really sisters. I shouldn't have looked forward to my dad dying, but when we talked about our life sharing a big basement bedroom, living in Marquette, a neverending sleepover, it was hard not to be a little excited.

I spent years feeling bad for staying with a different set of relatives. I hadn't wanted to offend you, but maybe it was for the best.

I'm Here

Sometimes I think it was my fault. I told you it was okay that you didn't want to go away to college, but when I said that, something snapped in you, I watched it.

"I'm going to die here," you said, and you started to cry. We were sitting by the fire, like we always did, because

that was our place. You were fire I was water you were earth and I was air and we found the meeting place of all of them outside by the fire pit. Your eyes glistened with flames.

“I’m going to die here!”

You screamed the second time. You were so afraid of getting stuck, so afraid of never leaving, and I didn’t know what to tell you, because I agreed. You probably were. You probably are.

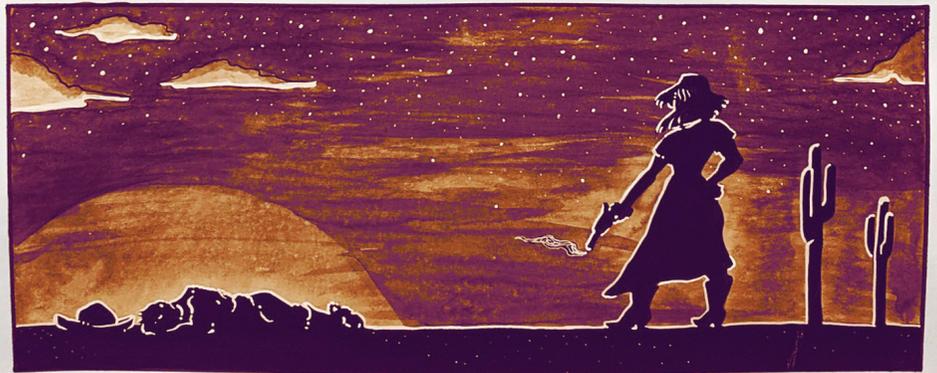
You still live there, and God, I hope you’re happier now than you were then.



Under My Wing

Gillian Webb

Colored pencil on toned grey paper, 7" x 7"



The Final Blow

Emily Lemke

India Ink, Adobe Photoshop, 11" x 14"

- 38 -



Swinging, Leaping, Landing

Sara Lansdell

Charcoal pencil, 14" x 17"

- 39 -



Rusted Geometry

Gabe George

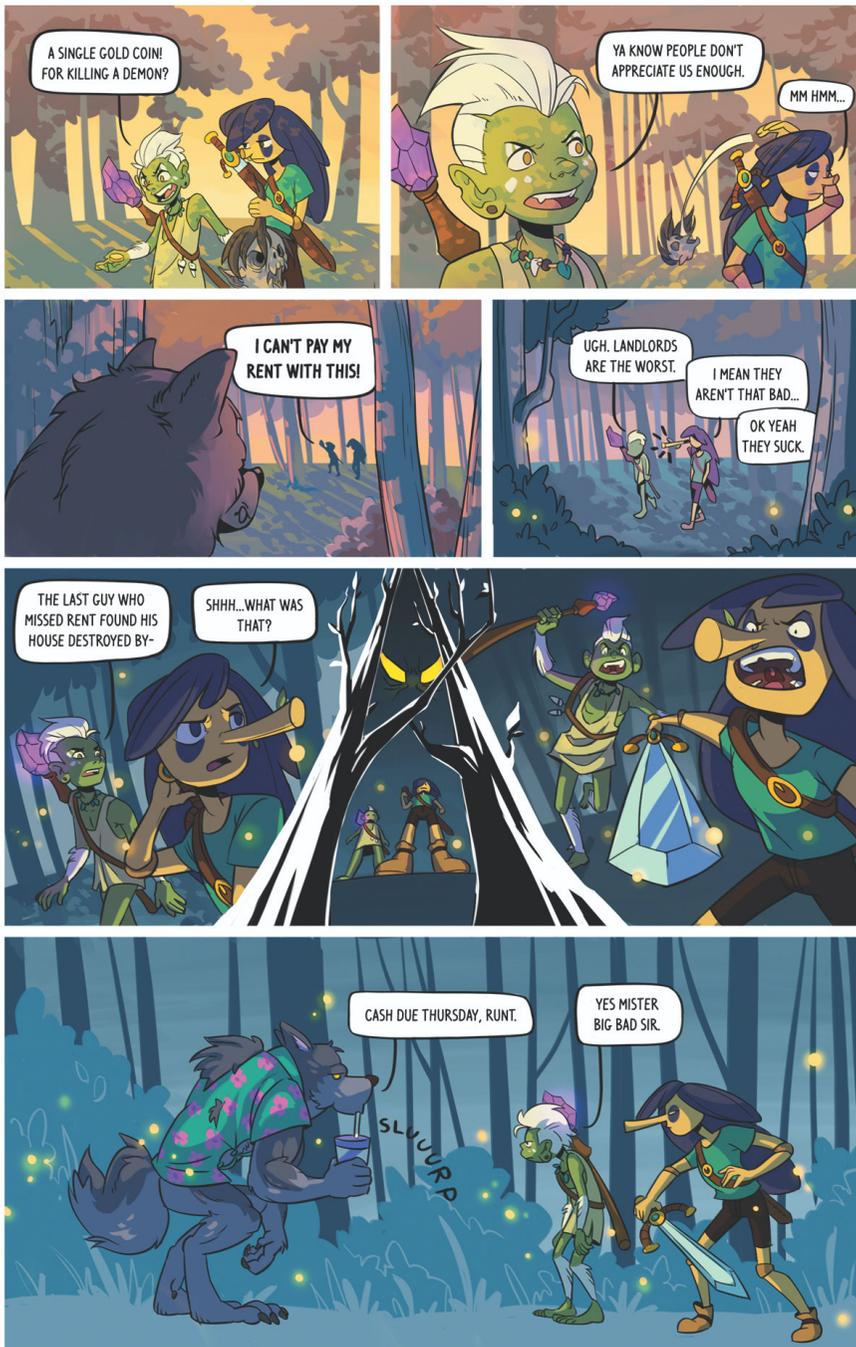
Three 3ft x 2ft rusted steel plates



Unlocked

Gabe George

Five 3ft x 6ft doors



Fantast-ish
Sara Lansdell
Photoshop

The Quantum Mechanist Ayla Walter

The quantum mechanist is underpaid and overworked—overlooked but she will not complain. The quantum mechanist sails on un-lauded coattails, and never forgets a figure. Sees the pattern she is laying but still won't get the grant money—still rides sidesaddle in the parking lot, claws her way to tenure by a fingernail. This is what the quantum mechanist does. Even as if you won't see it—

She spins the story. Charms her way up and down, dances in the dark. Spooky action under a distant office lab in the hours before daybreak.

The quantum mechanist swans into campus bar ten minutes till last call, and orders straight tequila from a Klein bottle. Sits the way women aren't supposed to sit. Then gets up at 5:30 the next morning to apply concealer over the circles under her eyes, drags a brush of sealant through tear tracks and sweat beads, puts her face on with a neutral-tone smile. Not red—not for work.

She has a reputation to uphold on those slight shoulders. She don't shrug off a single question—puts her time in deep gravity wells, punches that clock Doppler style all the way down to deadline.

All the while the Administration considers her... unconventional, too emotional, her dress too something, her hair too big, her weight up for grabs, reaction for every progressive action, mass equal to energy divided by the speed of light squared—

Einstein's woman. She doesn't need a name or Nobel to know this bell curve is skewed by omitted data, by all the witches burned, all the points overruled, all the shades erased with a one-sided one-dimensional white board theory of everything.

The quantum mechanist knows how to classify Schrödinger's cat-shit when she sees it. And she sees it. But she steps over, rises above the valence shell of every atom, she's ionized. Ready to react.

Still, she won't explode, won't let that Markov Chain get ahead of her. The quantum mechanist keeps her feet underneath; she's on her toes all times looking both ways to cross the classroom. She sees in all four dimensions and more—builds a multi-matrix of directions to hand down to her students, plots her pathway to brilliance on Cartesian coordinates. Won't let any budgetary committee tell her what's possible, she knows that nothing for her is impossible. She's high frequency and ultraviolet, shattering glass event horizons. She stays up late and gets up early; she writes her dissertation while asleep and yes! Sometimes, she even takes the trash out.

Because that's the Quantum Mechanist; strange from top to bottom, and she makes it work.

Vex Me Bhri'ona Shoff

Vex me, O Sleep! Drape
your downy blanket
over my aching body.
Shut my bloodshot eyes
and bring the cricket
anthem that lets me know
you're here. Come into
my home. Don't make this
insomniac sleeping beauty
get up to let you in. Kiss me
with your heavy lips and lull
me under your dark, still
slumber. Then sing to me
a symphony of roaring wind
and rustling leaves as you
lay me down in a bed
of poppies and deliver
my dreams. Fill my teeming
mind with wings of warm
stillness. Please, O Sleep
come to me before I wake.

Vagary Lauren Welter

From her desk close to the window, Emili could see the edge of the world.

Not actually the edge of the entire world—there were too many of those to count. No, from her vantage point inside the classroom she could see one edge of the world that bordered her small village. The teacher was drawing a diagram of their planet in sand in the center of the classroom, fingers swirling the silt across the molding floorboards. She had been teaching geography for twenty minutes now, but Emili’s mind had drifted.

She knew what she needed to know about the geography of her planet: it was built like a cake with four tiers. The bottom tier where Emili’s village squatted was home to the lowest class of individuals. Those who sold their wares or service or bodies for meager coin, living dangerously close to the edge of the world. The tier above was a bit more dignified, Emili had heard. Her mother was from that tier. It was home to respectable merchants and traders, those with enough money for bread every week and shoes made of leather or cloth. The tier above was even more affluent. They boasted governors and congressmen, families of high esteem that owned buggies that moved across the planet like magic.

The upper-most tier was the stuff of daydreams. Emili had heard whispers about their lives, though she didn’t know what was true and what was false. She had heard that there were only six families that resided there. Each had a handsome family crest embossed on their doorways. They had spigots of water that shot hundreds of feet in the air in their gardens, though their gardens grew all manner of



Slow as snails

Anna Weeks

Digital (Procreate), 8.5" x 11"

flowers and not tomatoes or zucchini or anything else worth eating or selling. She had heard that they enjoyed the most amount of sunlight on the planet, reveling in their long hours and throwing parties that lasted days, only ceasing to nap in their homes the size of ten of Emili's huts. They didn't have to worry about money or food, didn't have to scrub their faces clean every night from dust that settled thick like a second skin.

Emili would make it there someday. She wasn't sure how or when, but someday she would leave the perpetual stars that dotted her sky for the light of the sun.

The class ended and Emili found herself outside the school, staring once more at the edge of the world. She should be hurrying home to help her father sew vests and trousers for his cart at the market, but she hesitated.

Craggily bushes clawed their way from the cracked soil. The ground near the edge was more split the closer Emili walked to the lip, and soon she was avoiding cracks the length of her forearm, staying on the balls of her feet to avoid stumbling. One thick braid sat heavy on her shoulder, feeling like a stern hand summoning her away from the edge. She tossed her hair over onto the small of her back and lay on her belly, crawling towards the edge of the world.

Stars met her. Not the stars that hung dim and sickly above her, drowned from the light of suns she could gather warmth from. No, these stars were unperturbed, untarnished, untouched. They burst from the fabric of the universe like pinpricks of diamond. Emili's eyes sparkled from their brilliance, and though her eyes began to burn from their heat she could not look away.

This was not what she had expected. She had expected more of the same, a faded universe surrounding her faded world. A universe that moved sluggishly, greenish like a film of mildew over its surface.

This was a universe of possibility, of dreams and promises. Why would anyone sacrifice this view for the sun? Did those at the top know what they missed out on, sitting atop the planet on their gilded pedestal?

Emili reached into the pocket of her trousers and pulled out the small nub of charcoal she used to write her times tables on her desk. She reached her hand over the lip, hand suspended out into empty space.

She released the charcoal.

It dropped like a fallen star, disappearing quickly down the length of the planet. Emili held her breath, straining to hear when it hit the bottom. She listened intently for thirty seconds, one minute, two. At five minutes she was convinced she had missed the sound of impact and looked around for something else to drop. There was cracked slab of dirt nearly separated from the dry ground, and Emily pried it the rest of the way free. She dropped it into the void, this time wriggling forward so her ear was not pressed to the dirt but instead hanging over the planet and into space. She felt a sudden sense of vertigo, of slipping from the ground, but she dug her fingers into the dirt and held steady.

Thirty seconds, one minute, two minutes. Five minutes. Seven.

Finally, Emili scooted back so that her eyes were peering once more over the edge. She could see nothing but the fabric of space and the blooming of stars. Her heart thudding, she shakily scooted away from the edge and sat up.

She hadn't heard a thud because there was no bottom. You could fall forever through space, accompanied by the stars, living in possibility.

Emili ran home on legs renewed of a strength she hadn't known she had. Her dreams of reaching the top of her planet streamed behind her, torn from her shoulders like an old, tattered cape she had no more use of.

She was going to live among the stars. She just had to figure out how.

*

Emili had decided on one thing: she was not a piece of charcoal or rock. She could not simply hurl herself over the edge and hope for the best. The thought of it made her muscles lock, her stomach clench in fear. She didn't have the courage to throw herself into oblivion.

She had to do it against her will, in a way that when fear gripped her at the final second she couldn't stop herself.

Her village was perpetually cold, covered in frost that never seemed to thaw or harden into ice. She had grown up swaddled in layers of cloth and fur, wrapping her feet in it many times to keep her toes from breaking off like those who couldn't afford extra for shoes. She had always considered this a disadvantage, fueled her longing to see the top of her planet and feel the warmth of the sun on her face.

Now, she saw it as an ally. There was a small body of water that was always slick and frozen over on the edges. Children a few years younger than her, those who were too young to be much help at home and were better out of the house and out from underfoot, would gather there with sanded down boards of wood slicked with grease or oil on the underside. They would get a running start and throw themselves atop the plank and go skittering across the ice, whooping and hollering all the way.

Of course, a few of them ended up skittering towards the center of the ice and were lost to the bottom of the lake. While the thought made Emili shiver, that wasn't the part she was fixated on. The fact was that once they flopped onto the board, they were at the mercy of their own momentum. They couldn't stop themselves if they stayed near the edge to safety or if they flung wildly to drown.

That's what Emili needed. A device that would propel her into the stars, her own momentum carrying her past her own fear.

The day after her discovery, she dug up the jar she had buried in her backyard.

The jar was years old, the label on it so faded she had forgotten what pickled vegetable or syrupy fruit it had once held. When she pulled it from its bed, the clinking made her fingers tingle.

She had been saving money for years in order to buy passage to the tier above her own. The plan had been to wait until she was done with her schooling, spend a few years learning a trade or some sort of profitable skill, and then steal away into the middle of night, unable to fathom the look of good-bye in her parents' faces. There were other jars buried in the same vicinity, within them more clinking coin that had been intended to buy her way upward.

A few coins from this jar would buy her a large board of wood from the market and a small tub of grease. She thought of all the extra jobs she had taken, sewing until her thumb bled from the needle and butchering any furry animal that wandered too close to their hut in order to sew rough pairs of slippers or hats or gloves for those who could afford them.

For a moment, she hesitated. But the momentum from her discovery still hurtled through her bones and she untwisted the lid, pulled out a handful of coins, and shoved them in her trouser pocket.

She left the jar beside her parent's cot with a note written in the dirt, letting them know where the other jars were. Maybe her father could take a few days off work to rest his sore hands. Maybe her mother could come home for more than a few weeks at a time, leaving her hunting group for the embrace of her aging husband.

She tried not to think of their faces when they realized she was gone. It was nearly unprecedented for a family on the lowest tier to not have more than eight children to help with collecting coin and managing whatever service the family provided. Her parents had only had one, and she had never asked why and they had never offered. And here she was leaving them. It sat like a lump in her throat, but it didn't stall her stride. Wasn't this what she had been planning to do all along? It was only a few years early. This had always been her end goal: freedom.

That's what she reminded herself when she handed over the coin for the wood and tucked it under her arm. She didn't look the seller in the eye; she knew her father and was prone to chatter.

The grease was slightly harder to come by. Many people couldn't afford their own meat and hunting was a thing that required months of time in groups, like what her mother did. Their many sources of food were whatever grew in the garden and whatever wild plants could be found on a walk to and from wherever you were going. Fire-warmed drink flavored with alcohol and cinnamon kept them warm from young children to the oldest villagers. Emili had a flask tied to her hip and she offered the man who sold her the grease a sip. He was old and stooped, fingers cracked and face splotchy. His hands shook when he took the flask, and his eyes closed as the drink hit his lips. It dribbled down his chin and after a long moment, he handed it back. It was nearly empty now, but Emili realized it didn't matter. She wouldn't need it out in the universe, where her own wonder would fuel her like it had the day before.

Emili set out with the grease slung over her shoulder and the plank jammed under her armpit. She was headed for the school then thought better of it, changing her trajectory to slightly more south where only a few huts squatted a

respectable distance from the edge. She didn't want to risk being found out and spotted from the window of the school. She hadn't gone today, hadn't seen the point. Now, she almost wished she had said farewell to the squat building if only to affirm to herself that she craved more than what those four walls could bring her.

The edge came quickly, and she found herself standing near the lip, even closer than she had ventured to stand yesterday. She took a deep breath and peered over the edge, body tilted forward, heart fluttering in her chest.

The stars stole the breath from her lungs as quickly and violently as they had spirited it away the day before. Somehow, they seemed even more brilliant... and this time she heard a voice.

It was soft at first but grew steadily until she could make out the words. They buried their way into her chest and hooked into her heart.

"Leap true and jump steady," they went. "For only those with wonder in their veins and restless spirit in their hearts can join us."

Emili shakily set down the wood plank a few feet away, fingers hastily rubbing the lard across the bottom in broad strokes. Suddenly, this all felt very urgent. The stars had chosen to speak to her. What if they changed their mind and decided she was not worthy?

She had to act quickly.

And then she was ready.

She set the board down and backed up, sending one last glance around her planet. It didn't call to her, or whisper to her longing. It sat like a thing dead around her, and she would be happy to be rid of its weight.

She was running faster than she ever had, soles of her feet aching where they slapped the ground and thighs burning from exertion.

She pushed off the pads of her feet, leaping onto the wooden plank.

She fell heavily on her bottom, teeth rattling like pebbles in her mouth.

The edge of the world approached her faster, speeding towards her, carried to her by her own momentum, brought to her by her own choice and pure longing.

For a moment, she was suspended between the edge of her world and the rest of the universe, and she could truly feel the gaze of the stars against her cheek.

She closed her eyes and was not afraid.

She joined the stars.



A Forest God
Meghan Wilhelm
Woodcut print, 24" x 18"

"Calavera... Calavera..."

Nathan Marquam

“Hold the dark holiday in your palms,
Bite it, swallow it and survive,
Come out the far black tunnel of el Día de Muerte,
And be glad, ah so glad you are... alive!”
- Ray Bradbury, *The Halloween Tree*

i.

I'll ride the wind like a bicycle
over rocks, through ravines
until I find you. You look strange,
funny strange in this moonlight,
faded as the siren's low wail.
I follow you into a house
of old wood and black marble.
Of course it's haunted. Why else
would you lead me here? Father,
time means nothing. I'll chase you
up Roman cathedrals and down
the streets of Mexico until the earth
opens to give you back. It has to.
We can't have Halloween without you.

ii.

No, you are not gone. You are in pieces,
a split-sugar skull I pull apart like taffy. You
shatter in sharp bursts across my tongue,
live a moment longer. I pluck seconds
and hours from the ends of my years,
spend them missing you. Your face sinks

in my mind like a pumpkin's, curled in
on its own expression. Loving you is a soft
dissection, candlelight spilled across
frozen ground, brought to wreckage.
I scan the treelines for your smile,
comb handfuls of stars for a kitestring,
beg it to take me to you.

iii.

Shimmering, like swimming up
from the bottom of someplace dark,
I see you. You climb a tree
with no leaves, a River Styx tower
that dangles a thousand faces,
but the crowd of lights rejects me.
Blue and translucent, you say
I am too much my skin, the dark
shreds of bark that bite it. Your fingers
encircle my wrist, and I see your smile.
Hear the familiar rasp of your voice.
Kick the bark away. Learn to let go.

As Robins Do Shannon Couch

I found you, in the violet heart of summer,
rust and scoria.
With handfuls of earth and amber,
we made a home, coated in August
and drenched in a fever
called the fear of something new.

As the robin eats the screen and builds a
nest on the pane,
I watch you watch me watch the sun rise
in the east,
and you smile as if you're seeing
light for the first time.

At night, you pretend to cry so I'll
hold your hand when pazuzu
crawls in bed with you,
watching me watching you watch the sun
drag the color from the sky—
I'll never see you again.

The robin left in December,
the natural fear of being frozen in place—
flew south or west or
as far from me as it could get.
My precious home of amber,
now dust.

But dust must settle somewhere,
so I followed where it blew—

seen as guilty, desperate hands of a fool
led over roots, yelling slow down,
until I fell upon a mountain
called something to return to.

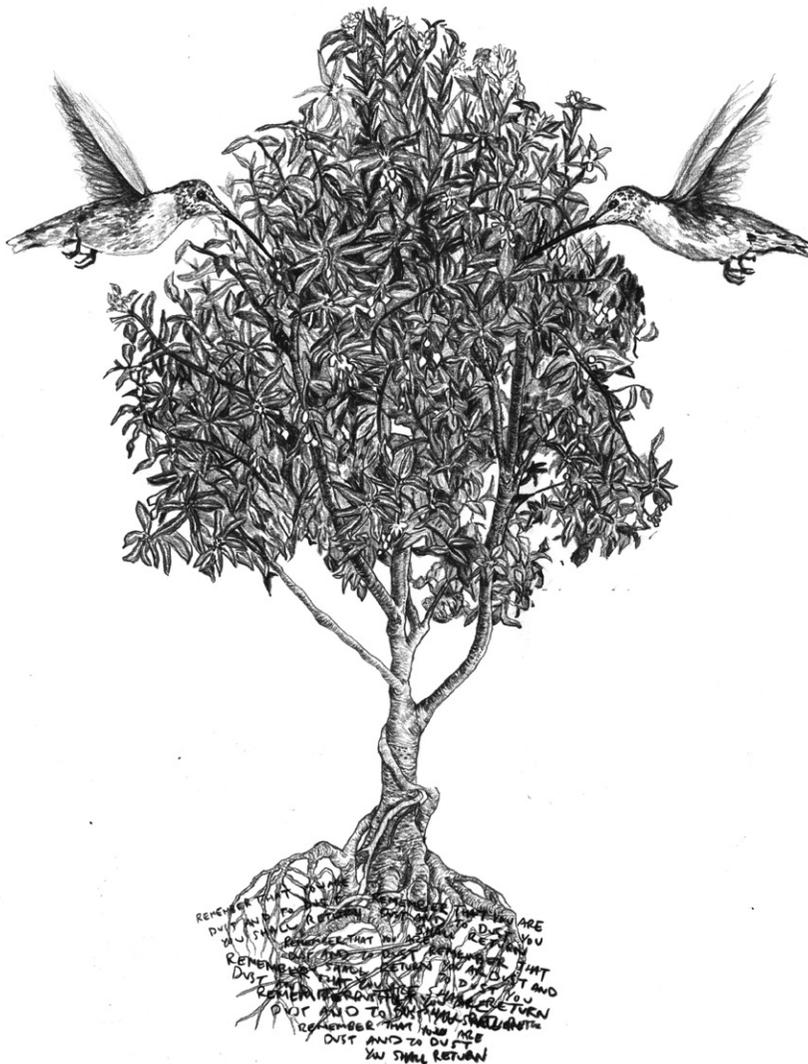
And on its face was a shade of blue
that took the place of you.
A home at the foot of mountain majesty,
and now I'm lost in a hue
that holds me
tighter than the tug of Jupiter.

Bloom

Trent McIntire

Leaves and petals bloom,
hidden in the crack of a burning desert,
outstretched
on the peak of a broken mountain,
digging between boulders
and a ravine wall,
choking on a 5th story balcony,
where no other seed would dare fall,

but where the soil is rich
and black, and invites intrusions,
where worms burrow, bees float
beside birds who sing
and saturate the air with life,
the beauty of a single blossom
drowns in a sea of its kin.



Girdled Roots

Sara Nye

Prismacolor colored pencil, 14" x 17"



How Beautiful it is that We Exist
Gabriel Akre
Oil on canvas, 18" x 24"



Solace
Abigail Mendoza
Oil on canvas, 24" by 36"

Cicada Summers
Ayla Walter

One of my superpowers is that I am completely unafraid of bees; buzzing right up to my neck cause I'm wearing a flower print shirt or dripping some half-melted strawberry slushy all over my hands. A friend once told me I could probably eat poison ivy without issue. Hate the heat but love the bugs summer, on the it's been too long since I climbed a tree team, I miss the burrs in my hair girl—Where can I find someone who belongs to the woods as much as I do?

I guess this is what I get for settling in a city I love.

But the forest is here too, you know, just sublimated, just subtlety growing in behind our ears. Find a magician on the street corner to pull it out into view: shocking, bald-faced. And the cicadas will tell you for free. Look, just ask them: where they cling screaming to your sixth floor window screen.

The coyotes have moved in, downstairs. Invite them over, won't you?

For dinner, notice the dandelions punching through concrete. The crab grass that won't give it up, no matter how much gravel how much acrid asphalt the ants keep coming back. There are lives adapted specifically to inhabit the habitat of humanity.

We are all biomes here.

And if we were afraid of animals in proportion to how likely they are to kill us everyone in the world would be terrified of mosquitos. But instead we kill sharks. Instead we hunted our fellow hunters, the wolves, into obscurity.

Or fed them, into dogs.

A Boy
Briesa Koch

The Niros were always flamboyant. They had a big house, four cars, an in-ground pool and basement arcade to boot. Yet they chose to have their home built in an average income suburban neighborhood. The husband, Bastian, was the president of a hospital in the neighboring city, just eight miles north. The wife Charlotte, a rather large woman in size compared to her husband, ran a home daycare on the weekends. During the weeknights she was often seen out at the local bars and clubs with 'friends.'

It was no surprise that the Niros had money. The rest of the neighborhood, myself included, came up with the idea that Bastian's family came from old money. That Charlotte seduced Bastian and was living off what he could provide for her. It was a baseless assumption really, but the entire neighborhood was full of gossips and the Niro's were easiest to gossip about. Not that anyone was marked off the list. Everyone always had something to say about someone. But the Niros were typically the number one choice in terms of outrageous discussion.

None of us ever really saw them save for when Bastian left for work or we brought our kids over to their house for Charlotte to babysit. So, it was utterly shocking when I opened my mailbox on a Saturday afternoon to find an invitation neatly tucked into my monthly Time Magazine subscription. I ran back inside my house, nearly slipping on the damp grass from the previous evening's rain. The neighborhood Facebook group (which Bastian and Charlotte were left out of, for obvious reasons) was in uproar. The newest group discussion post read in big bold letters: **THE NIROS ARE HAVING A BABY?!**

The comments on the page were a mix of excitement or disbelief. Some had even posted pictures of their invitations. Everyone in the neighborhood was invited to the celebration. It was to be extravagant, as the invitation so opulently

exclaimed, to celebrate the awaited arrival of a new member of the Niro family.

“Impossible,” posted Brenda Bennet who lived just four houses down from me. She was tall and blonde, her skin forcefully darkened. Gregory Hicham Sr., the older man who brought my daughter treats when she was younger wrote: “What a sudden surprise.” While old Ingrid, as the neighborhood had named her, simply asked who was planning to attend the event and what we planned to bring. Not everyone commented and I didn’t blame them. I hated posting on that page but reading what was posted was an entirely different matter.

Gifts for the baby are not required but would be highly appreciated.

I was slightly offended by that sentence when I read the invitation, though I still found myself at Walmart the next morning looking for the most gender-neutral baby clothes I could possibly find. I decided instead on three pairs of animal themed socks, two sippy cups and a grey rattle toy. It was more than I had wanted to buy, but once I started, I couldn’t stop thinking about the faces that the Niros would make at the number of gifts I brought with me. Because they hadn’t asked for them. Not really.

I even bought a gift bag with red polka-dotted tissue paper. It remained stuffed away in the corner of my closet and when my daughter asked me what was in the bag, I dismissed her question and asked about her day at school instead. She rolled her eyes at me, catching my attempted subject change. That night we ate dinner at our small rounded table, talking about the party, discussing this supposed baby. I continued thinking about the Niros into the night, peaking out of my window and looking at the house nestled at the end of the cul-de-sac.

The clouds parted, the moon escaping through and illuminating the Niro’s home. I shivered in my robe and settled into the large expanse of my bed. I felt myself missing the feel of arms around me as I tucked my hands underneath my pillow and turned onto my side. I briefly wondered if Charlotte was trying to fall asleep as well, with

Bastian’s warmth surrounding her. I felt my mind numbing as I fell asleep to the sounds of the night. The whistling of an owl, the rustling of the pine tree just outside my window.

It was to my great disappointment that when I arrived at the Niro’s house on the day of the celebration there were dozens of gifts lined up on a foldable table. All with colored bags and even more colorful paper. There was hardly any room left on the table for mine. I gave the gift to Charlotte when she opened the door to let me and my daughter (who was annoyed that I had dragged her along) inside. I told Charlotte that we both had a hand in picking out the gift. She thanked us, her cheeks bunching up as she smiled.

We drank, laughed, congratulated, though the neighborhood mostly stuck together. The Niros were the ones who had to mingle. The children, young and old, had gone to swim in the pool or play one of the games in the basement. Screaming and laughing, high-pitched cries of utter joy could be heard. I saw Mr. Hicham blowing up party balloons and twisting them into fun little characters. An orange dog, a blue giraffe.

He squeezed the end of it a little too hard and the balloon popped. The child in front of him started to cry. My head throbbed at the sound. He tried to calm her down but she showed no signs of stopping. He eventually turned to the remaining group of kids, blowing up more balloons and twisting them together. More children were running throughout the house. One was thrown into the pool. Another one jumped off the diving board.

I almost didn’t notice Charlotte approach me until she broke into my peripheral view. She was holding her hands over her belly, though because of her weight, I couldn’t see the baby bump. She was watching Bastian as he spoke to a group of three women. The one in the middle, who happened to be Brenda Bennet, was smiling and laughing at each joke Bastian made. She had been the person to start the neighborhood Facebook group. Her oldest kid was a soccer player. Her youngest, a pianist.

“How far along are you?” I asked Charlotte.

Her blonde hair was neatly tied up in a bun, her cheeks were red from exertion. She huffed as she spoke.

“18 weeks.”

“Oh wow,” I marveled, taking a sip of the lemonade in my red solo cup. “How does Bastian feel about it?”

“He’s really excited actually, I told him just last week.”

“Last week? That’s a little long to keep a pregnancy secret don’t you think?”

Charlotte chuckled softly, “He’s always working and I’m busy too. I just never found the time, I guess.”

I nodded in understanding, thinking of my own failed relationship. I felt suddenly out of place next to her. There was still another 45 minutes before we were all to be herded into the yard like cattle. All just to pop the giant green balloon tied to a post to reveal the baby’s gender. It needed to happen sooner; I was ready to go. It was hot and miserable, not to mention awkward. I had no history with this woman. I could have stayed home.

“He’ll be a good dad I’m sure,” I said, mostly to break the silence, less because I thought it was true.

“You think so?”

“Of course, he gives off dad vibes.”

“Dad vibes?”

I nodded again, taking yet another sip. The lemonade was doing absolutely nothing to cool me down. The regret of going for the flavored drink instead of the cold water crossed my mind briefly.

“He just seems like the kind of guy who would be good with kids.”

Charlotte continued to watch Bastian. He was still talking with the same group of women; Brenda was laughing a little too hard. She leaned onto Bastian, looping her arm in his. Bastian in turn wrapped his arm around her waist, using his other hand to wipe tears from his eyes, though his chuckling did not cease.

“Bastian wants a boy,” Charlotte said. It was almost inaudible.

“Not a girl?”

“No. But it makes sense if you think about it. Boys aren’t walked all over like girls are. They can do anything they want to do, act any way they want to act.” She paused to take a breath, “If we ever have a son, Bastian said he’d teach him to play football, to drive a car. He’ll show him how to ask a girl to prom. How to cut his own hair and get a real job. Things like that.”

“Do you want a boy?”

Charlotte shrugged, “It doesn’t really matter what I want, the body is the decider this time around.”

I laughed at her comment, though Charlotte’s lack of response made me go quiet. Her previous words flooded my mind, bringing up memories. Broken glass, a bruised hand, my daughter’s tear-streaked face as she begged us to stop fighting. I rubbed my cheek where the long-faded bruises had once been. I could still smell the coppery taste of blood in my mouth, though it had been years since that time. There was a dull ache in my chest but it faded quickly, my focus floating back down from the clouds.

My mouth opened to formulate a response but Charlotte looked at me before I had a chance, a small smile cracking her serious expression.

“We should have cake before we do the reveal. Don’t you think?”

She was looking at me expectantly, so what else could I do but nod enthusiastically and follow her into the kitchen?

I trailed after her a bit reluctantly. My thoughts flickered to my daughter, wondering when she had left my side. Though the concern I felt for her was second compared to the spike of worry that shot through me as a child bounded in through the open screen door that led into the backyard. He was screaming, another kid was in hot pursuit, a water gun in hand.

“Not in the house ki—” Charlotte started, but before she could finish the child slammed into her stomach. I gripped the cup in my hand feeling it buckle beneath the pressure. Charlotte caught the child in her arms, stopping his pursuer in the process. She bent down rather quickly despite her

condition.

“No water guns in the house boys,” she said, dragging out the “y” in boys. They huffed, running around the corner. I saw one of the boys turn around and stick his tongue out at Charlotte before they disappeared, their laughter continued.

“Are you okay?” I asked almost immediately after.

“Of course, why would I not be?”

“Well it’s just, I thought...” I trailed off, looking down the empty hall where the two boys had gone. “Your baby—”

“Is perfectly fine,” she finished. As if to reinforce her point she rubbed her belly.

When we reached the kitchen, she called for Bastian who appeared in the doorway, a look of mild annoyance on his face which instantly dissipated when he saw me.

“Let’s serve cake,” she said, holding the knife firmly in her hands. He complained the entire way as he approached the counter then turned and regarded me with a blank stare, wrapping his arms around Charlotte’s middle. He kissed Charlotte’s cheek, rubbing the bulk of her stomach. He pressed into it and Charlotte flinched away.

“What are you doing?” she asked him, accusingly.

Bastian shrugged. “I’m trying to feel the baby.”

“Not right now, we have guests,” Charlotte said, her eyes flickering to me. I felt myself begin to sweat even though I was wearing a sleeveless shirt.

Bastian dismissed her comment and began to reach for her again but she pulled away and opened a cabinet, taking paper plates, forks and knives from within it. I turned away from the pair and took a large drink from my cup, unsure of why I had even come with Charlotte in the first place.

“Could you grab the napkins?” Charlotte asked. I only realized that Charlotte had been talking to me when I felt her hand on my shoulder. I nodded enthusiastically, a raspy “Of course,” spilling from my lips.

Then the couple called to the rest of the group, announcing the cutting of the cake. Children swarmed in, brushing past me. Other people from the neighborhood filtered into the large kitchen grabbing paper plates and

plastic forks. Some, though unnecessarily, took photos of the pair as they held the knife together and cut into the spongy dessert, Brenda being one of them. It was like a wedding all over again. Completely over the top, an event soon to be forgotten, tossed aside like most things in life.

There was more mingling and small talk. I meandered around looking at the photos plastered all around the front room. I saw Bastian and Charlotte in Venice, kissing on a gondola. The one next to it showed the two bundled up from head to toe in winter wear as they stood upon a large sheet of ice. Though why anyone would take a photo while ice skating was beyond me. There were many more pictures. All of them featured some expensive place or exotic island. I felt jealous of Charlotte. I wondered what life could have been like had my partner and I been more financially fortunate. If they hadn’t run off, despite my best efforts to keep things together. I shook my head and turned away from the wall, heading out into the blistering summer heat.

I ate my rather small slice of cake and then found my daughter. She was sitting at the edge of the pool with her feet dipped in the water staring across the yard at one of the older boys. He was shirtless and his swim shorts were stuck against him, dripping with water. He was kicking around a battered ball with a girl his age. She laughed and screamed. Her braided pigtails flying as she ran around. Occasionally he would look over at my daughter, flashing a toothy grin. I wanted to stomp over to him and wipe that smile off his face. But I didn’t.

Someone had moved the table of gifts so that it was placed right next to the giant green balloon. Bastian and Charlotte were there, sorting through gifts. People were gathered about, begging the couple to open their gifts first. There were collective ooh’s and aah’s as they revealed multiple articles of clothing, diapers, pacifiers, toys. There were quite a few repetitive gifts.

“It’s alright,” Charlotte had said, “We’ll just give the duplicates to Goodwill.”

Bastian had insisted that they keep them all, saying that

it was poor behavior to give away gifts, though I was sure he was specifically referring to the gift that was bought by Brenda who ended up purchasing the same pair of pajamas as old Ingrid who was housed just across the street from her.

Charlotte temporarily gave up persisting about donating the gifts and instead insisted that it was time for the reveal. My daughter was next to me now, looking down at her phone, completely uninterested. I was still holding my cup, habitually taking another sip only to find that there was no more lemonade left in it. There was chattering and the snap of cameras as the Niros both gripped the string tied to the green balloon. Someone had started a countdown from ten.

Nine

Eight

Seven

Six

Five

Their fingers tightened around the string; Bastian's face was pulled taught in concentration.

Four

Three

Everyone standing around the Niros began to raise their cameras in unison. I passed my empty cup to my daughter who took it absent-mindedly, still scrolling on her phone.

Two

I grabbed my phone from my pocket, opening my camera, my thumb hovering over the red button.

One

They pulled the string and the balloon popped, blue confetti spilling everywhere. It showered over the Niros, pooling at their feet. "It's a boy!" Bastian yelled, taking Charlotte in his arms, though he could not lift her. There was barely any room between them, her belly pushing flat against Bastian's as they embraced.

The crowd cheered, the muted snap of cameras ensued, the neighborhood broke into chatter, descending upon the Niros. Bastian was still hugging Charlotte and crying into her shoulder. I kept my distance and clicked into my gallery

to look at the photo. The angle was jagged and blurry. I cursed my shaky hands and moved to erase the photo but I was stopped dead in my tracks. The picture I took had been just a moment before the balloon had ripped open, small pockets of blue confetti peeking out.

In the picture, Bastian's eyes were focused up. A large smile stretched across his face. Charlotte was not looking at the balloon, instead she stared straight ahead. She wasn't smiling, her mouth downturned in the beginnings of a frown. I used my thumb and index finger to zoom in and get a better look. No one had caught her expression in the chaos of it all. Only the camera. In that picture, Charlotte's face was forever contorted in complete and utter misery. I pressed delete and the photo disappeared. Taking the only tangible evidence of that moment with it.

Artist's Notes

Olivia Adam is a current sophomore majoring in Visual Communication Design. She's a varsity woman rower for the IUPUI Rowing Team. She keeps herself busy with school and sports but also with her job. Olivia is a graphic designer and photographer working on projects for IUPUI events, programs, and more.

Gabriel Akre is an Indianapolis based artist studying painting at the Herron School of Art & Design, and graduating in May 2020. Inspired by the works of the great Impressionists of the 19th-20th century, his work aims to emulate that atmospheric and expressionistic quality, giving attention to the molding of light and color above all else. His website is gabrielakre.com

Hannah Bryson-Price is a creative writing major and ASL minor at IUPUI. This is her second publication in genesis.

Elizabeth Coffman-Mackey is a super-senior at IUPUI. She is a lover of chocolate, women, and all things preternatural. She lives with her wife and cat. You can find her drinking tea and raving about vampires in your local library.

Shannon Couch is a Junior at IUPUI studying Communications with a double minor in Linguistics and Creative Writing. In her writing, she enjoys exploring the world of metaphor and resonant language and is in constant pursuit of new challenges that will grow her as a creative mind.

Gabe George is a 22 year old emerging artist with a special interest in engraving and carving. With a diverse cultural background he primarily focuses on the interaction between culture and symbolism and geometric repetition. Gabe thrives in using wood and steel to capture his creative process. After graduating he plans to continue his artistic career traveling the world to further grasp the relations between culture and art.

Briessa Koch is a sophomore at IUPUI currently studying English and Spanish. She loves languages, culture, reading and writing. Once she graduates, she plans to enter the graduate program here at IUPUI to study library science.

Sara Lansdell is a 2D artist and illustrator currently studying with the goal to work as a concept artist in the video games or movie industries. artstation.com/nohsara

Emily Lemke began her Drawing + Illustration journey at Herron School of Art + Design at the age of 25. She values hard work, dedication, and originality, believing that the process is sometimes more important than the final product. Upon graduation, she plans to enter the commercial art field. Her interests include character design, concept art, and art direction, and she hopes to work collaboratively in a corporate art studio.

Nathan Marquam is a senior English major with focuses in Creative Writing and Writing and Literacy and a minor in Literature. He's also a poet, a Writing Center Consultant, and an aspiring rhetorician. When he isn't writing, he's probably arguing with his coworkers about what is and isn't a sandwich.

Trent McIntire is a freshman studying biology at IUPUI. Though he is a science major, he thoroughly enjoys everything artistic, including writing and playing Dungeons and Dragons campaigns, drawing, and poetry.

Abigail Mendoza is a painter from the suburbs of Chicago, IL whose works focus on Asian-American Identity, particularly that of Filipinx-Americans in the Midwest. She is currently the Vice President Internal of the Midwest Association of Filipinx Americans. Now an undergraduate senior at the Herron School of Art + Design, her work has been shown in galleries in Chicago, Indianapolis, and Los Angeles, and her most recent projects include working with Anakbayan Chicago and a POC-run collective called Commonfolk.

Sara Nye is an artist and illustrator whose work focuses on themes of personal upbringing, domesticity, and nostalgia. Raised in a religious household with a family history tied to agricultural work and horticulture, she draws inspiration from childhood experiences and the Midwestern landscape.

Bhri'ona Shoff is an IUPUI junior studying Creative Writing and Professional and Public Writing. After graduation she plans to work as an editor while working on her writing and poetry. She plans to return to IUPUI to get her Master's in English.

Ayla Walter is a junior Drawing and Illustration major at Herron School of Art and Design. When she's not making visual art she writes poetry and makes zines. You can find her in the wild attending local Indianapolis open mics, zine festivals, and First Friday gallery shows.

Gillian Webb is an Integrative Studio Practice Major at Herron of IUPUI specializing in Drawing and Illustration as well as Sculpture. She hopes to continue after college by getting a prop design job in either the theatrical or cinematic fields.

Anna Weeks is currently a junior at Herron School of Art and Design at IUPUI. She is majoring in drawing and Illustration, and is involved on her campus in Cru as a bible study leader. After graduation, her goal is to become a storyboard artist and comic book artist, and create her own comics with her own characters. She gets a lot of her inspiration from Pixar and Laika studios. Over the years, many books have influenced her as well, such as *Spiderwick Chronicles*, *Giant Days*, *Bone*, *The Lord of the Rings* and countless others have helped her to capture the same feeling of wonder and whimsy in her own work.

Lauren Welter is an English Literature major who works at the University Writing Center. She enjoys sharing green tea with her cat, Tallulah, and playing catch with her fiance on campus. Someday, she hopes to live by the ocean and write from under a palm tree.

Michaela White is a junior at the Herron School of Art and Design where she is studying Visual Communication Design. Writing is her healthiest outlet, and she hopes that maybe her words can help others feel less alone.

Meghan Wilhelm is a Drawing and Illustration senior. Most of her art tends to involve animals of some sort, but she isn't unfamiliar with subjects more fantastical in nature. You can find more of her work at @meghan.chillhelm on Instagram.

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