

The Walrus

Volume 15 | Spring 2018-2019

**The Creative Arts Journal of the Languages, Arts, and Social Sciences
Division**
Woodbridge Campus, Northern Virginia Community College

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"The Walrus and the Carpenter" (from *Through the Looking Glass*)

by Lewis Carroll

...

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Walked on a mile or so,
And then they rested on a rock
Conveniently low:
And all the little Oysters stood
And waited in a row.

"The time has come," the Walrus said,
"To talk of many things:
Of shoes -- and ships -- and sealing-wax --
Of cabbages -- and kings --
And why the sea is boiling hot --
And whether pigs have wings."

...

Cover art by Grace Benjamin

Double Vision

Digital Painting

First Place, 2019 Festival of the Arts

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Forward to the Volume

Editor

Welcome to the 2018-2019 Spring issue of *The Walrus*, the creative arts journal of Woodbridge Campus at Northern Virginia Community College. This year, we present the winners from across four categories of writing and between two years of visual arts contests held during the annual Festival of the Arts celebration at the Woodbridge Campus. In addition, we are featuring a selection of sculpture pieces from "Sculptures in the City." This is an ongoing partnership with the City of Manassas arts group and Assistant Professor Zachary Jackson's students. More information and an interactive map of the pieces can be found by visiting the Manassas City website or by searching #ManassasArt online.

It is appropriate to mention the online component of the works displayed in this volume. *The Walrus* is beginning a transition into a fully online publication. Over the next few years, we will print fewer copies of the publication while simultaneously publishing online. Environmental concerns and budget are factors, but the nature of education is evolving in digital space. That is where the future of these media exists, even as print continues to demonstrate its enduring value. We are excited to be in the early phases of that transition. With that in mind, looking ahead to Volume 16, *The Walrus* will open a new online-only category as an experiment: graphical fiction. Audiovisual material that complements a particular piece will also be considered for online publication alongside the textual work in upcoming digital volumes.

I would like to thank several contributors to this volume, as publication would not be possible without their help and support. Julie Quinn was integral in helping shepherd this volume through production, and Zac Jackson was equally integral in supplying the visual art. There could be no weeklong events without the hard work put forth by our Festival of the Arts committee, led this year by Indigo Eriksen, and that also included the efforts of Chris Arra, Denny Bausch, Kerry Cotter, Erin Devine, Jenny Lopez, and Lawrence Nightingale, among others. In addition, we rely on the voluntary contribution of judges in the writing categories, so I would like to thank Denny Bausch, Bryan Brown, Kelly Cochran-Yzquierdo, Steph Dupal, Jo Houston, Brenda Meisel, Julie Quinn, Jennifer Richardson, Chris Stallings, and LeeAnn Thomas. Finally, this undertaking would not be possible without material and mental support from within our division: Dean David Epstein, Associate Dean Stephanie Harm, and staff Maddie Coradin and Georgette Harris; and from without our division: Student Success and Student Life coordinators Tykesha Myrick and Sara Clifton, respectively. Of course, such a large undertaking also depends on continual support from our Provost, Dr. Sam Hill. Thank you all. The effort does not go unappreciated.

As a final note, this year's Festival of the Arts included a special dedication and selected readings from the work of our colleague, Robert Bausch, who unexpectedly passed early in the academic year. In his writing and as a professor, Bob encouraged all of us to examine closely that which makes us most human: our relationships with one another. It is a testament to his relationship with all of us at this campus, and the greater institution of NOVA, that we dedicated our library reading room to his memory. Among his many great pieces of advice, perhaps the one that most resonates for a publication like *The Walrus* is to "write through to the end." Please enjoy the 2018 and 2019 showcase of our students' work as they now have written us to the end of another cycle.

—Dac Nelson

Short Fiction

First Place

Urchin

Caitlin Bennett

I

Harry stood on a concrete median, three lanes of traffic on either side, a cardboard sign in his hands. He was now at the end of the median nearest the intersection, but the lights were changing, and a new flood of cars were rolling to a stop in the turn lane. He wet his chapped lips and made his slow, heavy way down the concrete.

Harry, Harry. How had it come to this? Grandma Wallace had lived in a beach house in Nova Scotia. Here he was on the edge of the tide pools, living things teeming beyond his reach. Don't touch the sea urchins—they stick like pins.

His hands were rough from the cold. He knew they were looking—he knew they always did, even if it was only to judge, even if it was to look pointedly away—and he knew they didn't like what they saw.

STAGE 4 BRAIN CANCER PLEASE HELP

He didn't make eye contact. That was confrontational. Better to look away humbly.

I'm sorry, I have no cash—Who are you to beg in the street? —Get a job, faggot

II

When Harry was a small child, he was stuck by a sea urchin just below his right knee. Grandma Wallace removed the culprit and set it in an applesauce cup to dry up. Once he'd gotten past the tears, Harry had been intrigued by the peculiar creature. He'd seen them in the tide pools but had never given them much thought. They were silent, didn't move much.

They were spiky and off-putting, but he was fascinated. And maybe it had chosen him, because he never stopped being fascinated. Leaning away from the adults' hands on the rocky shoals, he pointed to them below the water, hanging out, unassuming but unabashed. They were hardcore. Grandma Wallace laughed and laughed.

Grandma Wallace died of a stroke two months before they found the first tumor.

III

There was a high school down the street. Harry wasn't much older than the students there, and occasionally he'd see them walk past and yearn for days when he pored over biology and chemistry textbooks. He couldn't stop himself, even when people called him a teacher's pet.

Chemistry was ceremonious and exacting—things put together came together or fell apart, all governed by indisputable protocols. Biology was messy—operating by haphazard logic that baffled and inspired. The two danced gracefully in every cell of his being, and when he understood the processes which brought about his every movement, known or unknown, he felt as vast as the ocean, a sea of countless living things.

A girl went to that high school who walked home on one side of the road across from the median where he stood most days. She tied her hair up in a messy bun, and white cords of earbuds hung down from her ears and into the pocket of her jacket.

He wanted to talk to her. He never talked to anyone these days outside work—*welcome to Y-Burger, can I take your order?* Occasionally his mom called, or his doctors, and he put off answering as long as he possibly could. He never talked to anyone about sea urchins, or the ocean, or Grandma Wallace.

He wanted to ask that girl questions that he had stopped asking people.

What grade are you in? What science classes are you taking? Do you like them? Do you know anything about sea urchins?

He was going to write a book about sea urchins. He would fill it with things he wanted to say to that girl, just to *say them*, to anyone.

He was also going to die soon, and the two ideas were as gridlocked in his mind as the cells in the meningioma growing beneath his skull.

IV

Harry wasn't homeless, and some people couldn't get past that fact. He had a crummy little apartment, two saucepans, some thick second- or thirdhand books, a pillow, a flip-cellphone, and a part-time, minimum-wage income. That was about it. Some hobos he'd met had more than he did.

And yet people didn't understand why he had to beg in the street. The truth was so obvious that it eluded them entirely. He had nothing, and he had cancer.

So, they didn't give anything. He was lucky to get more than \$40 after six hours standing in the cold. Then he'd get on the bus and go home.

At one point, so long ago that it felt like a different life, he had started college and had wanted to pursue his Ph.D. in marine biology. But then Grandma Wallace died. And then he'd gotten the diagnosis. And then no one would hire him. And then the money ran out, like waves tearing sand from the shore out into the ocean, where he'd never see it again.

Now he had nothing.

V

The girl pushed the button on the crosswalk sign. Harry stood at the top of the median again, pretending to look at the sports fields behind her, and watching her in his peripheral vision. Maybe it was stupid. No, it *was* stupid.

But he wanted to step off the median and walk over to her.

He turned to face her; she was looking away. There was no crosswalk on this side of the intersection. He looked either way—the traffic wasn't coming his way—and stepped off the concrete ledge. The lights turned yellow.

The girl didn't see him. By the time he had crossed two lanes, she was stepping off the corner, about to cross the street. He'd walk after her. *Stupid*, he thought, *stupid, stupid... she'll knee me in the crotch...*

A car came racing around the corner and didn't stop.

VI

Sea urchins, Harry had learned sometime in his adolescence, were considered excellent model species for understanding biological longevity. They had low levels of cell turnover and could often regenerate tissue as needed. If Harry had ever gotten to pursue a Ph.D., he'd want to do research to probe the genetic causes and implications of those abilities.

It had probably been a pipe dream anyway—science could only get so far so quickly—but he'd wanted to study the applications of sea urchins' genetic makeup to human medicine.

He so often thought about Grandma Wallace, and he so often thought about standing on the edge of tidepools peering into the comparatively microscopic world contained within that crevice of the Earth. He knew that he was standing at the edge of something immense, beyond the scope of his own knowledge or imagination, and that if he had time to pick apart the pieces of the lowly sea urchin, that maybe he could be just a little closer to understanding it.

He knew that somewhere in the distant future, his own future, he *could* find an answer to the question aggregating on his own brain. He could feel it. But he would never have that future, and *that* was a question, too.

VII

The girl rolled over the hood of the car and slammed onto the pavement.

Harry's throat constricted around any scream, and sound, he could've made.

The car slowed for seconds—to Harry everything was in slow motion, but it was still too short a time—and then sped off, passing the other cars. It was white. That's all he knew, and he barely knew it.

Harry ran to the girl, who was bleeding from a crack near her right eye. Cars around him had stopped. People were coming. Harry barely noticed.

He knelt by the girl but didn't touch her. He was weeping, he was helpless, he was so profoundly empty. He had no way to call for help—no way *to* help—nothing to offer to her or even to himself except some dying, fading idea that she would open her eyes, sit up, and then he could have a conversation with her.

Here she was, dying, and he'd wanted just to talk to her about sea urchins.

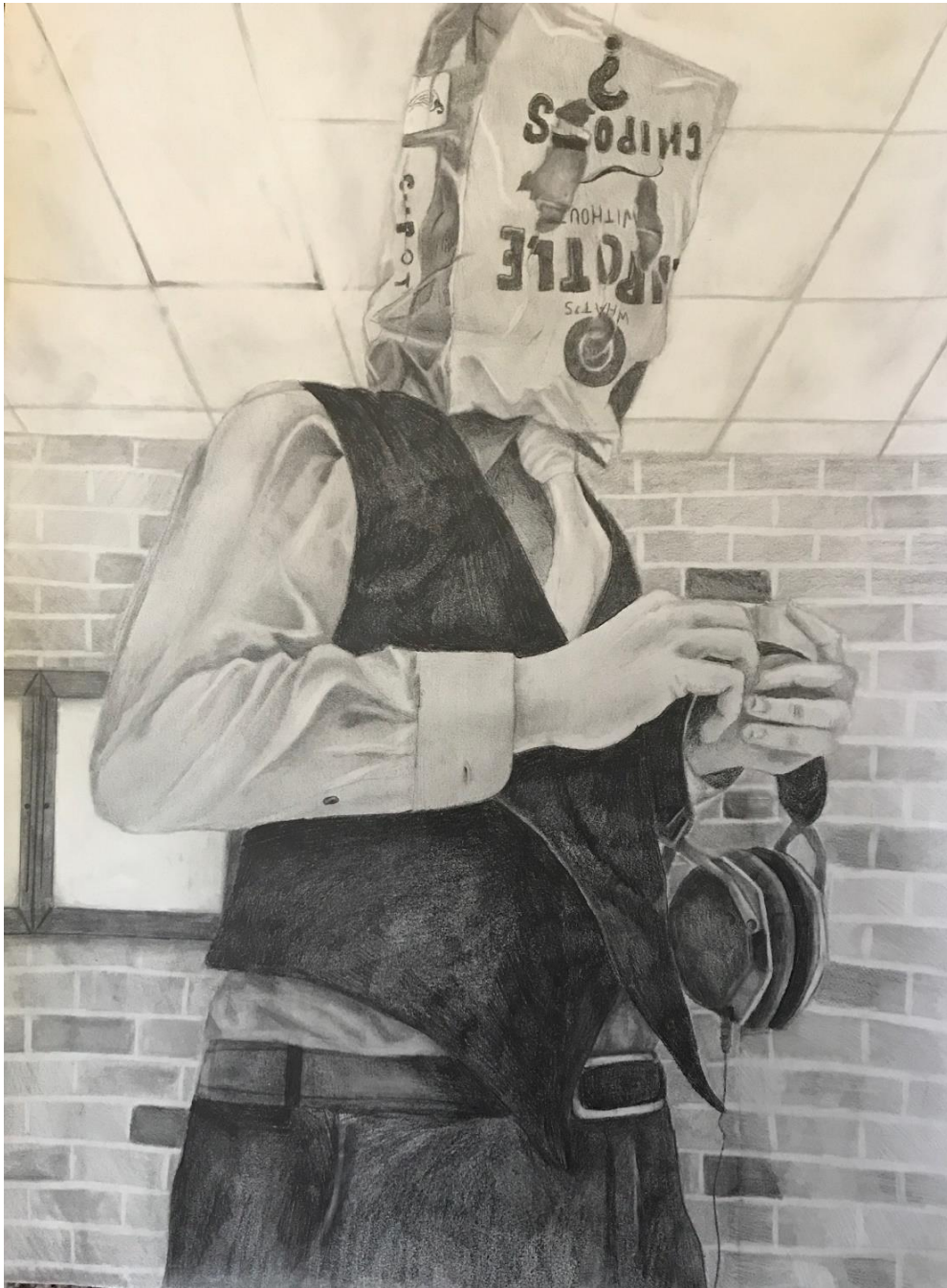
What would he say now?

You could have died—I'm going to die soon—I'm glad that you're ok, at least—I'm glad that the world isn't as empty as all that.

The Walrus

Visual
2019 Festival of the Arts

Second Place



Lunch Meat
China Smith
Graphite on Paper

Short Fiction
Second Place

Missed Opportunities and Bullets Dodged

Sam Evans

It comes again.

Otis stares at the culprit with intensity he tries to mask. He tries to turn, to leave it, to let go. He cannot.

He stares harder, giving up on concealment. It requires too much. If he is to walk away, he will need every valuable ounce of focus and willpower. Even then, it will be close—as long as the *thoughts* do not come. As long as the thoughts do not come, maybe he has a chance.

The thoughts come.

His mother arrives in his mind: smile bending her many wrinkles. She tells him she would rather have given birth to a cripple. At least then—

Otis takes a deep breath, sucking the end of her sentence up. Vaguely he senses the crowded mall around him.

No, he thinks.

No, echoes his mother, *you're just fine the way you are*.

Yes, he thinks.

His momentary triumph slips as his mother continues. She laughs—cackles.

Gets you every time! she says, *Not just crazy—dumb, too*.

Otis knows his mother would never say this—never *think it*. Otis's mother loves him, and Otis knows this. He takes a deep breath and sucks the image of his mother up.

He leaves—tries to try. Otis knows it will not happen; he goes through the motions.

A new image fills the space his mother left. It is a scene of Otis himself getting fucked in the ass by his three-hundred pound high-school bully, Big Chris. Big Chris is spanking Otis and telling Otis to tell him he likes it. Much to Otis's displeasure, Otis is enthusiastically complying.

Otis shakes his head, attempting to rid it of the scene. He cannot hold out much longer but is determined to try.

Another smiling face forms in his mind. Female, not his mother—not his mother at all. She is younger than his mother, closer to Otis's own age.

Otis does not wait to see what she has to say; he does not wait to see what she is doing. Otis only relents. He steps to where the culprit of his trouble lies.

Otis straightens the folding metal sign advertising the nearby coffee shop. It had been at an unacceptable angle. He spends roughly a minute making sure it is right. He moves it further from the door—so it matches the other sign on the other side. He considers continuing but decides not to when he begins to feel the gentle pressure of watchful eyes. Someone inside the store has spotted him.

Otis sighs, half exasperated, half satisfied. He does not know which half is from what. He scurries away, trying not to think about how long the eyes have probably been on him for.

It is a full half hour later.

The sign has not been moved.

The mall is still busy—busier even. It nears lunch time. A mother carrying a fat child old enough to walk, approaches. Nearer, nearer—she trips. The sign snags her foot. It would not

have, had it not been moved. The mother spills her fat child. No one is severely injured. This is due in part to significant built-in padding on the part of the two year old. The mother collects the now whaling bundle. She readies to be on her way, then catches sight of another woman approaching.

The mother rarely appreciates strangers, but this one looks the type the mother does. The new woman is tall, well dressed, like someone who might, say, conduct an interview. She has blonde hair flowing and glimmering like the mother tells people her own used to before popping out her child and no longer having the time to do it every morning—any morning.

The new woman is holding a lollipop and smiling. Her teeth are white and straight. The lollipop is orange, and orange lollipops are just about the only thing that the mother has found that constantly gets her dear little bundle to shut up—hence the weight of said bundle.

After administering the treat to the sobbing mouth, the two women chat for a time—maybe, *fifteen minutes*. Listening to the blonde woman reminds the mother of when she had the time to do her hair, and listening to the mother reminds the blonde woman why she had that abortion. They get along. The blonde woman, however, eventually realizes she has lost track of time. The two hurriedly exchange numbers and go their separate ways.

Otis is sitting. He has been for a while—say, *fourteen minutes*. He is sitting in the office of—judging by the plethora of pictures on the desk—a blonde woman. She strikes Otis as either narcissistic or not a blonde woman, but as someone who cares very much about a blonde woman. Either way, she is late, and it effects Otis greatly.

If she does not walk through the door to this room in the next sixty seconds, then I am not getting the job, Otis thinks.

Oh no, he thinks immediately after.

But Otis cannot help what he thinks.

The clock ticks, so much louder.

People think Diane does coke.

If not coke, meth—sometimes something more vague by those less versed in substances illicit.

But people generally agree: Diane does *something*.

Diane does not do something. Diane does *nothing*. She tried coke—a few times. Adderall once, which is basically meth as far as she sees it. However, when one possesses naturally the qualities those who frequent the substances Diane does not, those substances do not usually lessen said qualities.

She doesn't do heroin; she doesn't smoke weed; she dislikes drinking.

Diane is thin and tallish with messy hair. Her hair isn't cute messy; it's a mess, messy. Diane showers sometimes. She is a waitress at a local coffee shop, and usually smells strongly. If not for the coffee shop's own hefty aroma, this would be an issue. As it is, it rarely comes up.

Diane is working, and about an hour ago, she served a blonde woman.

"Anything to drink?" Diane's left eye twitches a little.

"Well, this is a coffee shop, so I certainly hope so!" The blonde woman laughs like she wasn't just a bitch. Diane does as well.

"What can I get you?"

"I'll take a coffee, dear."

"Great!" says Diane, a little too loudly, writing the order a little too quickly, maybe like she didn't write down *coffee*, but only added a big pair of ears to the less-than-flattering cartoon

representation of the blonde woman—the one she'd been working on. "So," Diane says, leaning over her, pointing at her menu. "As you can see *here*... We have quite the selection! Which would you like?"

The blonde woman scowls. Diane usually agrees that her place of employment's choice of cryptic names for what usually amounts to varying combinations of caffeine, cream, and sweet is a little *fucking retarded*. Today however, with this woman who Diane has decided she despises, Diane relishes such opportunities to annoy; she longs to hear the woman (who now possesses quite the honker on Diane's penned representation) say one of the more stupidly named drinks.

"I'll take ..." the blonde woman says, "A ... medium black coffee, please."

"You mean a Petite Java Juice?" Diane asks through an increasingly cracked smile.

"No," says the blonde woman through a more composed smirk. "Medium, please."

"Fine."

"Thank you."

"Anything to eat?"

"Three-egg omelet, please. Ham, cheddar and green peppers."

"Oh—so sorry. We only have—" Diane's jaw twitches before returning to proper order, "—*these* options for omelets. No build your own."

"Ah." The blonde woman looks to where Diane points at her menu. She developed a small frown upon seeing Diane's tic, but nothing worse than the normal reaction. "In that case, I'd like a ..." The woman's frown deepens. "A '*Big Bad Porker*,' hold the mushrooms, add green peppers."

Diane grins. "So sorry, but we don't have green peppers, ma'am."

"I see—"

"Only red ones."

"Well, I'd like some of those, then."

"That's called '*Turning Up the Heat*,' ma'am."

"They're spicy?"

"No ma'am."

"Well, then why—"

"Not sure, ma'am. Just how it is."

"That's ridiculous."

Diane nods, knowing full well. Not only do they *have* green peppers, but the red ones are running low. You only '*Turn Up the Heat*' when adding chipotle peppers. Diane has no intention of telling the woman—who has developed a gap between her doodled front teeth and an unsightly pimple.

Diane forgot her name tag, giving her more gal than usual.

"So?" Diane asks.

"So?" echoes the woman.

"Would you like to?"

"Would I like to what?" There is no mistaking the edge in woman's voice. Diane wonders if what she had taken for mockery earlier, may only have been a friendly joke. There is no turning back, however. Diane points to the spot on the menu that, in flowery red cursive, reads:

Turn Up the Heat?

Be Sure to Ask Your Server!

"Yes," answers the woman.

"How many degrees?" Diane slides her finger to a cartoon thermometer ringed by faces with increasingly steaming ears.

The woman sighs, finally seeing—seeing her only route of escape. She relents, intoning sotto voce: “I’d like to turn up the heat one degree, please.” She rolls her eyes. “Happy?”

“Always happy to serve here at Chris’s Coffee.”

“Wonderful.”

“Anything else today, ma’am?”

“No.”

“Wonderful!”

It is the worst-case scenario for Otis. The clock has struck exactly sixty-two seconds past. The blonde woman enters her offices as it strikes sixty-three.

Why is this the *worst case*? Would it not be worse had she entered fifteen minutes and *four* seconds after her run in with the sign-tripped mother? Maybe *sixteen* minutes! It hardly seemed out of the question, and undoubtedly would have been *worse* than fifteen and *three*.

Right?

Wrong—and here is why:

Despite being nearly within the bounds Otis gambles on this uncontrollable variable, as *sixty-three* seconds is undeniably *not* within said bounds, unlike, say, *sixty-one* or even *sixty-two*. Otis cannot not, in good faith, smudge this number. It is a single digit too large. To make matters worse, *sixty-three* is *not sixty-four*. This is problematic for a few additional reasons, conveniently listed here:

Sixty-four seconds was long enough for Otis to thoroughly relinquish his hopes. During the *sixty-third* second, Otis’s hopes were still very much alive and felt crushed. He is unable to let them down gently.

Otis has issues with *threes*. He does not trust them—finds them ghastly, *devious*. Three is a crowd—as far as Otis is concerned. There is always an odd one out in a three. Otis mourns for the excluded second, whichever it may have been. The other two are likely talking behind its back this very moment.

Anything past *sixty-three* would be enough for Otis to produce a contingency contingency. *If the woman enters in the next minute, I still have a chance—for example.*

The narcissistic woman rounds her desk and sits across from Otis, smiling. Otis contains too much anxiety to do more than grimace sheepishly—feeling somewhat like a sick dog with a guilty smile after vomiting on the floor. She extends her hand, presumably to shake. Otis knows he must return this gesture but is struck by the sudden knowledge that if he does, he may be at risk for catching her narcissism—just as he believes he has caught his plethora of other mental quirks. Extending his own grasp with exaggerated, but (he hopes) unnotable slowness, he begins to concoct a contingency.

As long as I—Otis Canterbury Dirk—do not laugh during the first minute of this interview, politely or genuinely, I will not catch this woman’s narcissism and will not develop urges to decorate personal spaces with flattering pictures of myself.

Otis hates having his picture taken. Although he knows—as he does for all his feelings—it is only a feeling, and has no real ground in reality, he still feels as though cameras steal pieces of his soul upon usage. It is, in a roundabout way, how his second romantic relationship ended. He knows full well how disastrous the spontaneous acquisition of contradictory compulsions can be. It is how his other romantic relationship ended, two weeks in, marking it as his longest.

Otis shakes her hand, searching her face for clues to if she noticed and thinks his sluggish, stalling, movements odd. He finds none. His is not comforted. He can never be sure with a narcissist. They might be a *sociopath*.

Otis's fear grows; he wipes his hand on his pants. He hopes she doesn't notice. Otis's fear redoubles.

"Nice to meet you," the blonde sociopath says, peeking at a paper in front of her, "Otis!"

"You as well," Otis replies politely.

Her friendly gaze returns to his. Otis matches it admirably, spending a great deal of practiced effort holding his thoughts within his head—as to avoid sending any subconscious suspicions her way, as he firmly understands is not possible, yet even more firmly feels is a certainty if he fails to clench the muscles behind his eyes just right.

"Late enough for ya?" she asks, grinning.

Otis's heart plummets. He suddenly knows the true meaning of, *worst-case scenario for Otis*.

A joke. She made a *joke*. Otis sneaks a peak at the clock, mind racing.

Maybe he can pretend he failed to realize. It is a desk job; social skills are not required. If he is polite, then *maybe...*

She cuts short his train of thought. "Don't go getting any ideas now," she says, smiling even wider. "I promise this isn't company policy!" She laughs widely, as one does upon the making of a joke one wishes to proclaim as such, lest anyone misunderstand due to its intrinsic lack of humor.

Oh no, thinks Otis.

The clock ticks loudly. She has stopped laughing, now looking to Otis with a somewhat expectant expression containing a mouth whose edges fall ever so faintly towards the beginnings of a frown. It is too quiet; Otis swears the ticking echoes.

Maybe if I wait, he thinks desperately, looking to the twenty seconds the clock still says he must.

I will try.

One may not realize how long a second can feel until one experiences twenty as Otis does now. He moves not a muscle. He does not even smile. Unless he wishes to descend into one of his dark moods, he knows there can be no gray area; there can be no misinterpretation. *He must not laugh*, and there must be no argument as to whether what he did might may be under some stretched definition be able to be considered as such.

The absolute petrification of all motion is not quite so required—but the mass of fear and anxiety in Otis's gut has grown to encumbering levels, leaving him little willpower to spend. So Otis sits stark still.

For twenty seconds.

Maybe she will not notice.

But the look she wears only ten in says different—says she very much *is* noticing, this very second, and finds Otis's behavior very strange, finds *Otis* very strange.

And Otis is very strange. Otis knows it. So, ten ticks later, when Otis completes his Minute of Motionlessness, thus ensuring himself at no risk of catching this woman's possible personality disorder and is again able to move and speak and function somewhat like a functional adult, Otis only stands, apologizes for any inconveniences he may have caused, and vacates the premises with all rapidity and without pausing for a handshake.

On her way to send the order the kitchen's way, Diane is interrupted. She spots someone outside the store window. He is tall enough, well dressed, well-kempt. His hair is dark enough, combed. Diane finds him handsome. He is in the process of straightening the handwritten sign outside the coffee shop, advertising the sorts of silly-named specials they have that day. He appears focused.

Diane is stricken by a sudden visage. Her apartment fills her mind's eye, spreading like perfectly spilled paint, falling accidentally into a portrait—or, in this case, a landscape.

A desiccated landscape.

Diane's apartment appears as it is: clothes strewn, food plastered, dusty, moldering. It would be to have someone like the handsome enough someone straightening the sign outside the store window around—to help clean up for her, to help clean up *her*. Diane can see that he isn't all there. Diane has been staring for a while, and the individual shows no signs of slowing his straightening; he gives the impression he has been at it for a while.

But then again, neither is Diane altogether collected in a traditional sense. Diane thinks she can manage his quirks—maybe even help *him* manage his quirks. A small smile twitches the corners of her lips. She almost rips off her apron, throws her server book (doodle book) aside, and sets off in way of the individual outside who is, of course, none other than Otis himself.

Almost. She almost does. She doesn't though. She might have, but in the moment that mattered most, Otis looks from where he stands, straightening, and meets her eyes. He scurries away before Diane has a chance to even feel bad about it. He looked embarrassed. Diane's smile feels suddenly profane, mocking. She frowns but tells herself it was a bullet dodged—what had she been thinking? The man was clearly bonkers.

But so was Diane.

She has been around enough to feel she would have been able to put up with a someone like that...

But what is the point? He is gone. She sighs, tossing a strand of dislodged ponytail off her face like she does with the rest of her scattered wistfulness. She continues on her way to send the order (which, really, is nothing more than a very insulting doodle) out to the kitchen.

Otis cannot believe it.

Again.

He had a *good feeling* about this one.

"Fuck!"

A disgruntled soccer mom covers the ears of her over-large toddler and shoots Otis a dirty look. Otis holds back tears. He feels as crazy as he feels people see him; he feels as crazy as his only two romantic partners left him telling him he was. Otis leans against a wall and breathes deeply. In through the nose, out through the mouth—five counts each. He closes his eyes. He tries to quiet his mind.

An image of the same nameless girl from earlier enters Otis's mind. She is Otis's dream girl—his third romantic partner, the one yet to come, but who, he is sure, will accept Otis for who he is. She is messy, relaxed, and fun, impulsive: Otis's antithesis. She opens her mouth. Otis panics. He is sure she will say something horrible. If she does not, he is sure she is opening up for the dick of another, probably Big Chris—maybe both. Maybe she is opening up to suck Big Chris's dick and tell Otis how much better he is, how she would never love Otis, how Otis was *crazy*.

Otis opens up, determined to save himself from witnessing the horror—the perversion.

Or, Otis *tries* to open up. He cannot. His eyes are stuck closed, the girl—*his* girl—is stuck in his mind. Now she is in a crowded mall. Otis does not look forward to what she plans to do in said crowd—*with* said crowd. She approaches Otis. Otis furiously tries to speak. He cannot—
or...

Otis realizes.

His eyes *are* open. This is not an intrusive thought. This is real. The girl is real. She is headed his way.

Otis's heart pounds against his ribcage, trying to get out, leap for her, pull her in. He refrains. Otis realizes she is *not* headed his way. She is headed *near* to his way, but no—not his way. Instead, she is headed to where he left—where he ruined his chances at working.

A thought intrudes on Otis's mind.

Otis sees the girl—beautiful, comfortable in her own skin, with *Otis's* skin—talking inside Otis's almost-place-of-employment. He sees her talking with the blonde woman. He hears the blonde woman telling her of the crazy man she almost interviewed. He sees the girl laughing—laughing at *him*, at *Otis*.

Otis scurries away, feeling even worse about himself than before. He takes out of his pocket the last of his folded stack of cut-out classifieds.

One more shot, he thinks.

Diane can't believe it. She can't remember the last time she couldn't remember an order. It was *that man*. Seeing him threw her off. She knows the woman ordered something small, simple. That much she knows, but the rest is gone. She stands before the computer; her mouth hangs open. There's no way she's going back, admitting her mistake, risking being asked what it was she wrote down, then. She just needs to *remember*.

It's not happening. She needs to guess—to guess *right*.

Eggs.

It was something to do with *eggs*.

She opens the breakfast tab on the computer, for orders containing eggs ... but which one? *If only they didn't have such stupid names!*

A presence appears behind her. Diane's breath catches. She looks over her shoulder.

Chris, her manager, stands, arms crossed, looking cross, tapping his foot. "You're taking a while, D."

"Sorry."

"Why you taking so long, D?"

"No reason," Diane says, quickly selecting an option from the breakfast menu in front of her.

"Y'sure?" asks Chris, towering above her.

"Yeah," says Diane, "Look I said I was sorry, Chris. What's the—"

"Y'sure you didn't neglect to write down an order again?"

Diane's heart sinks. "You know I always remember them, Chris. What's the—"

"It doesn't look like you remember, D."

Diane quickly selects a drink from the drink menu. She knows the woman wanted *something* ... but *what*? She wanted cream, right? Something with cream? Had to be.

"I do," she says.

"We'll see," says Chris.

Then, as Diane sends what she is increasingly less confident is the correct order out to the kitchen, she begins to hope Chris is done harassing her, he speaks again. "What I really want to know, D," he says, "is what you *were* writing down?"

"Excuse me?" Diane asks. Two tics tweak her nose, then left eyebrow.

"I saw you writing down that patron's order, D. I thought that was sorta weird, since you never write down orders."

"Oh."

"So, I was wondering if I could see what it was you *did* write down."

"No."

"No?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful." Chris grabs her notebook out of her apron, despite Diane meaning *yes, I meant no*, and not the change of heart she highly doubted Chris thought she meant.

A deep laugh comes from the big-bodied man behind her. "Oh, that's great, D. Really great." Diane doesn't feel great. "Thanks," she says.

"So great, in fact, I'm gonna keep it—and show it to the lady if her order comes out wrong. After that, if *she* wants me to fire you, I will!"

"Great," says Diane.

"Oh yeah." Chris reaches over and grabs one from a bundle of complementary lollipops, meant to cheer up kids or angry customers with a sweet tooth. "Gonna just grab one of these now," says Chris, picking an orange one, Diane absently notices.

Otis stands outside Chris's Coffee, building his courage.

He has a change of heart. The girl he spotted was *too* much like the girl of his dreams. He *must* meet her. Nevertheless, he cannot simply walk back in his almost place of employment, not after what happened. He will work across the way, then, he decides. Maybe the girl of his dreams works there, maybe she frequents the establishment—maybe neither, maybe he will never see her again.

But Otis knows he must try and thinks he has a better chance while working across the way than wherever the hell else he might end up. Otis cavalierly tosses the last of his cut-out classifieds to the ground. He stands outside Chris's Coffee and steels himself to enter.

After being viciously fired, crying in the bathroom, being told she must leave, and storming out cursing, Diane finds herself in front of Otis's almost-place-of-employment.

She does not notice him nearby, nor does she notice when he once again scurries away. She is too focused on a singular thought:

I will not let this get me down.

So, she stands outside this building, the next nearest building, and thinks to herself:

An office job doesn't sound so bad.

Maybe they'll care a little less about her generally disheveled appearance. Here, she wouldn't have to hit on customers to avoid Chris's rage. Yeah, she thinks to herself. This seems nice.

She is about to enter, ready to apply, when she spots the blonde woman inside.

No.

But it is, undeniable. The woman works here. Diane cannot bear to face her again. She turns and leaves the mall entirely.

Something stops her. She bends to pick it up. It is a cut-out from a local newspaper—the classifieds. Who even uses these anymore?

But no—there is no denying it. That is what it is.

If a wind-blown, cut-out job offer sliding to her feet a half-hour after getting fired isn't a sign from above, Diane figures she doesn't know what is. She reads the address. It's a little bit of a drive—nice and far from Chris's Coffee.

Perfect, she thinks, setting out with all due haste.

Otis cannot believe it: Big Chris—here, in the flesh, offering him a job. Otis had yet to even ask if they were hiring. When inquiring about this odd detail, Big Chris, who had called out to Otis and rushed over, tells Otis they had just lost an employee in an unfortunate misunderstanding and

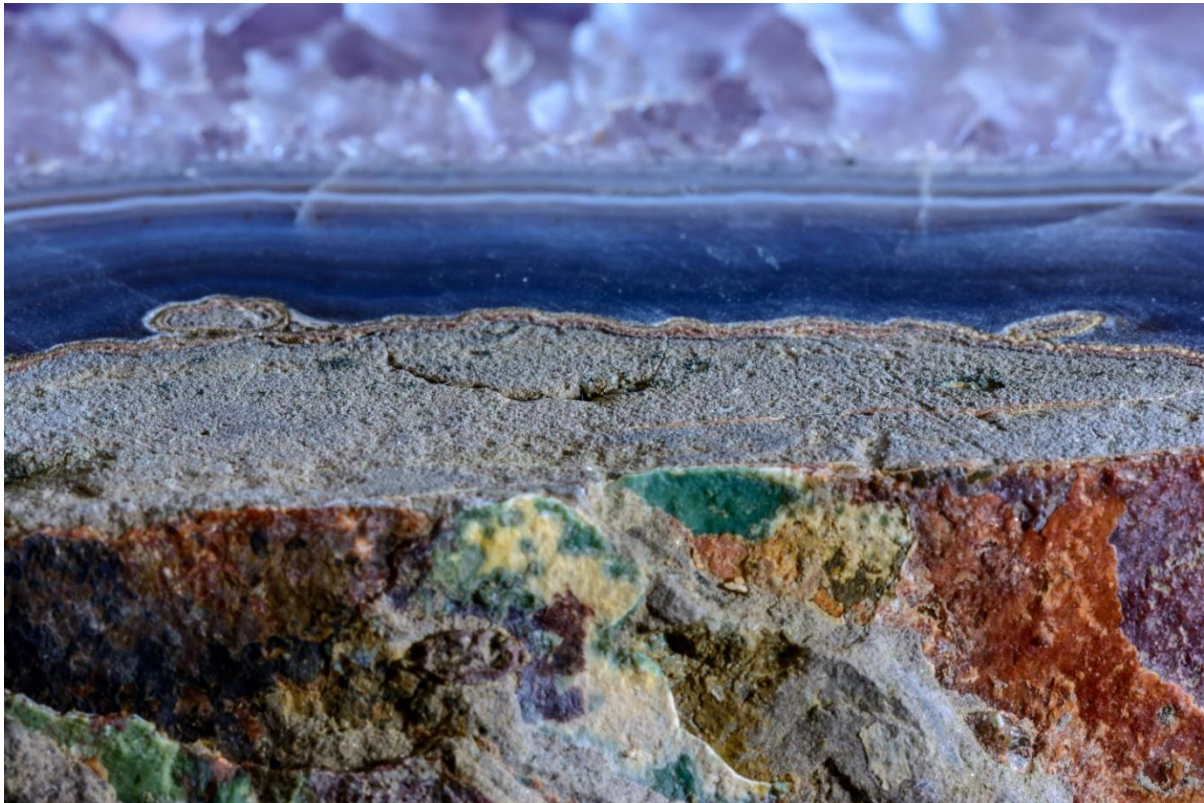
were looking for someone more detail oriented. From what Chris remembered, Otis fit that bill perfectly. Big Chris laughed and punched Otis's arm hard enough to hurt.

"It'll be my way of making all those times in high school up to ya," Big Chris tells Otis, who, thinking back on the girl of his dreams now headed far in the opposite direction, realizes he has no choice but to accept.

The Walrus

**Visual
2019 Festival of the Arts**

Third Place



Crystal Beach
Cheryl King
Ink Jet Print

Short Fiction

Thousands of Names

Jaleea Bragg

I was around the age of eight when I was ripped from my mother's arms. The man that took me didn't say anything to me, just carried me away. I remember crying out for my mother, but she watched me leave without even the smallest hint of trying to stop the men.

I passed out.

When I came to I was in a room; there were bars and a door that was always locked. There was a little bit of light coming from a hole that was in the ceiling, but I couldn't make out where I was. I sat on a small bed in one of the corners of the cell. In the other corner there were two mops and a bucket. There was something about that corner didn't make me feel too good.

I'm scared.

I got up to yell for help; I screamed at the top of my lungs, my throat burning and my eyes stinging as hot tears ran down my cheeks.

No one came.

I can't tell how long it has been since I've been in this room, there is no night or day. Every now and then people will come near. Sometimes they came into the room; at first I would try and tell them that "I'll be good, I won't be bad, I promise I'll be good!"

But it all falls on deaf ears. The only responses that I could get from the strangers would be physical ones.

They hit me.

Sometimes, though, I can see a lady out of the corner of my eye standing in the darkness, just beyond the bars. She brings me great relief and a great sadness.

I wonder who she is?

I had a food bowl and a jug for water that they filled, if they ever remembered to. When they did remember, most of the time the food bowl is filled with scraps of moldy bread that I doubt even animals would want.

Quickly I grew out of the clothes that I was in. My body was riddled with sores, old yellow bruises, a mixture of pink lines from fresh cuts and white scars from old ones.

One day someone came to the room I now call home and started to talk to me. Hiding in the corner of my room I covered my ears and squeezed my eyes shut; their voice was so foreign and strange that it scared me to the point of insanity. After some time, the man grew angry, realizing that I wasn't listening to him. He opened the door and began to beat me. My body grew numb as I accepted the punishment.

His voice was gravelly as he loomed over me, "Listen, kid. You're trapped here for everyone else's happiness. You'll have no joy in your life, and you will live solely to suffer for all."

I couldn't do anything but lay there, fading in and out of consciousness, his words bouncing around in my mind.

Every so often a man comes in and tell me more things, some about me, some about what's happening outside. I still pressed myself into the corner, of course, but I forced myself to listen more. This time he told me my age.

I'm 12.

The next time that he came he told me that I was under the city. I began to enjoy the times when that man came every day. Slowly as he explained more things to me, I believe he started to pity me. But, his visits were bringing some sort joy to my life.

The last time the man came and visited me he wasn't alone. I could tell that it was the lady that caused relief, but something about this time made me feel fear. I tried to tell the man that someone was there, but when I opened my mouth no noise came out. There was no point; even if I wanted to talk to him he had shushed me anyway.

The man didn't show up again for a long time. Not until another man showed up. He carried a bag. Opening up the door, he went over to where the mops were and set the bag on the floor. Out of curiosity I looked up from behind my knees. The man grabbed something out of the bag and mounted it on the mop. When he turned around he wore a smirk on his face, very clearly pleased with what he had done.

When I finally had the courage to look up from behind my knees again I was greeted by the slackened face of the man that told me stories.

His head was mounted on the end of the mop handle.

I screamed and kept screaming. My screams eventually grew breathless, I finally stopped when my throat was raw and my vocal cords gave out. That corner haunts me to this day. His mouth hangs open, in a silent cry, what I imagine close to the face he made when his head was chopped off. It stinks in my room, but I can't tell if it was the Man with The Stories, or myself that stinks more.

Sometimes people would come and see me, but they never said anything. Rarely I can see a change in them, almost like a light switch, as if they knew what they had to do after seeing me. Often going into a zombie like state.

They never came back.

I can feel myself slipping away. They haven't fed me in so long that I often run my thin fingers over my sides, counting my own ribs. It's sort of funny, in some way, that some of them have little divots and dips in them, like pieces might be missing.

I use the last bit of my strength to lift myself off the bed. There were thousands of names on the floor. I tried to count them once but realized I could never go higher than ten. Using my own blood from still-open wounds, I shakily wrote my own name. When I lay back on my bed, I felt myself drifting off to a never-ending slumber.

Short Fiction

A Night That Changed Everything

Syeda Umaima Ebad

You could have saved him, the words on the wall in front of him read.

"You could have saved him," he read the words aloud. "You could have..." His mind was going insane by now. As if he was not feeling guilty already, these words haunted him even more. The evocative words took him back to the terrible memories of that night, the night that changed everything, the night when that wretched accident took place that took his best friend away from him, forever. Not a day had passed when he had not felt the pain his best friend went through. *But wait, how could I possibly feel that pain? After all, I was the one who let Jacob die that mysterious night.*

He woke up, huffing and puffing. *A nightmare? Again? Ah, not again! Do I deserve this? But then again, did Jacob deserve that?* Beads of sweat glistened on his radiant forehead. Silky brown hair covered the top of his forehead, and his slightly parched lips demanded some water. His breathing was rapid at 3:30 a.m., and the clock ticked constantly. An awful, pin-drop silence surrounded his bedroom. It was drizzling outside, and, occasionally, he would hear the groaning of stray canines. He reached out for the glass of water that he always placed on his bedside table each night. He felt better, but the previous uneasiness had once again stepped inside his bedroom to ruin the aura of peace.

After breakfast the next morning, his dad had already left for work when his mom asked him to go grocery shopping.

"Sam, honey, my legs hurt. Do you mind buying some groceries for dinner tonight?" He just stared into space, not hearing her. "Sam?" No response. "Samuel, what is wrong with you?"

"Uh, wh-what?" He was out of his trance.

"Look, I know you were driving the car that night, but that does not mean it was your fault that Jacob didn't survive that accident. Don't get me wrong: I am very sorry for what happened, but you have to understand that life does not stop when someone dies. You have to get normal. Your dad and I just want to see you happy." Sadness spilled out of her eyes. She wiped her tears with the back of her hand before taking Samuel's hands into her own. "Come on now. Take my car and go to the store. No whining; come on!" Sam murmured something before grabbing the car keys from the kitchen counter and heading towards the garage.

He was stuck in traffic for half an hour. However, he was upset more than he was annoyed. Apparently, a terrible accident had occurred across the road, and no one was allowed nearby. The word "accident" had the audacity to bring back the horrible memories of that night. A film started playing in his head, and he and Jacob were the stars. Time stopped. His mind had already taken him back to National Highway, where the accident took place that night, the night that changed everything.

Elk Valley High School had arranged a farewell party for seniors that evening. It was not technically the last school day for the graduating students; it was only meant to divert their attention from the precollege anxiety that empowered many. Their graduation ceremony was supposed to be held a few days after the farewell party. Sam wore a white dress shirt, navy blue vest and suit, with black shoes. Jacob, on the other hand, opted out for black that evening. From his dress shirt to suit to shoes,

everything was black, except for the red bowtie. "Dressed to kill," he winked at Sam with a visible smirk forming on his face. The party was nice and smooth. They spent time socializing with other students, chatting with friends, and dancing to their hearts' content.

It was already decided beforehand that Sam would be dropping Jacob home, since Jacob's car was at the mechanic's. They said goodbye and left before everyone else because one of Sam's inexplicable headaches cropped up. But, Jacob knew how to lighten up the atmosphere in the car. He cracked random jokes. The jokes were not even that funny; it was Jacob's heaving cartoon-like laughter that helped lighten up the situation a little bit. He would always laugh at his own jokes and brag about how interesting and humorous he was. Sam liked Jacob's good sense of humor, but he would never acknowledge that in front of him.

Sam broke one of the headlights of the car a few days before by hitting a pole while driving. His dad was angry; he would always tell him not to drive too fast. Sam was too lazy to have had the car repaired, but he knew he would definitely get it repaired before his graduation ceremony.

Now, speeding down the lane with his broken headlight, Sam approached the steep slope that he and Jacob had ridden together over countless times since they were kids—throwing their hands up as if they were on a roller coaster when one of their mothers went over it at a responsible, motherly speed. Only this time, Sam's foot was a bit too heavy on the accelerator, and a bit too many tears from laughter blurred his vision as he hit the curve. He crashed into a tree so badly that the windshield was completely shattered, except for a few fragments of glass that were dangling and hanging on to the car for dear life.

"Come on, let's get out!" Sam was quick to assess the smoke coming out of his car.

"Quickly, Jacob!" He yelled as soon as he was at a safe distance from the car.

"My hands ... I can't unfasten my seatbelt." Panic was clear in Jacob's voice. Pieces of broken glass had injured his palms and fingers during the crash while he was trying to shield his face from the impact.

"Wait, I'm ..." Before Sam could finish his sentence and go help Jacob, the car burst into flames.

The car behind him honked. The driver of that red Jeep looked irritated, so much so his face resembled the color of his car. The honking of the horns brought Sam out of his daze. The police were clearing the area after the accident; a few people were injured, but luckily, everyone had survived. *Jacob could've survived, too, if...* His mind was about to overpower his senses once again. He let go of his thoughts before driving down the lane to OK Supermart.

He grabbed a shopping cart before heading towards the produce section. The supermarket smelled of fresh fruits and vegetables, and the place was awfully clean. He stood in front of the potatoes, scrutinizing their quality as well as the price. He looked up, ever so slightly, while putting the potatoes in his cart. However, that moment was enough to make him feel unwell. In the aisle in front of him stood Mrs. Spencer, Jacob's mom. Sam remembered her as an elegant, pretty, slim, tall, and a young woman with sharp features and brown hair that would easily reach her waist. However, her appearance in this moment was contradicting the image that Sam had of her from when she would make him and Jacob lunch at their house when he was a kid. She looked feeble and weaker than ever, with her hair tied loosely in a messy bun. It seemed as if her long and slender legs were struggling to support her. Jacob's parents had forgiven him, since they did not want to inflict pain on Sam's. If times were different, Sam would have greeted her, and she would have greeted him equally warmly. But times had changed. He did not have the courage to even look at her. *After all, he had snatched her one and only son away from her and her husband.*

Sam was unable to stay in the market for long, so he decided to pay for the items in the cart before rushing home. Even during the car ride, he could not stop thinking about Mrs. Spencer. *What he did to her was terrible, and something that no mother should ever have to go through. How could he redeem himself? How could he get rid of the pain surrounding him?* It was getting harder for him every day. He wanted to get rid of everything—the nightmares, haunting memories, and Jacob’s image in his head—every single thing. There was only one way to put an end to everything, and he knew how to deal with it.

As soon as he reached home, he dropped the bag of groceries on the kitchen counter.

“No hi, nothing?”

“Mom, I need some rest.”

“Aw, my baby is tired!”

He headed upstairs without saying anything else; his mom did not protest. He closed his bedroom door before approaching the brown study table in one of the corners. He reached out to a nicely framed photograph of him and Jacob. Sam was trying not to laugh at a joke Jacob had made in that picture, while Jacob was looking cheerfully at his best friend’s face. Sam smiled sadly before walking up to his bed, still holding the frame tightly against his chest. He sat down and opened one of the drawers of his bedside table. He dug through the papers and took out a shiny, black, dangerous piece of metal. Nobody even had the slightest idea that he owned a gun. It was time to put an end to everything. He looked at that piece of metal and that photograph, simultaneously. “You are avenged, Jacob.”

He pulled the trigger.

Visual
2019 Sculptures in the City



Heat Map
Philippe Demartin
Wood, Paint

Short Fiction

Profit

Carlton B. Reid III

Two angels stood with their swords in their scabbards, and in the expanse between Heaven and Earth they readied for battle. The expanse was a void. Nothing went in or out of the void, not the light from heaven nor the sin from earth or the fire from hell. Now, they were about to do battle—Angel X with black wings, and Angel Y with white wings.

Angel X said "Wait! I beseech thee to wait, for I have an argument to make with you!"

"Cease this trickery at once," Angel Y said, "I will not fall for it, Angel X!"

Angel X smirked and said, "Why? I will not trick you as much as you have tricked yourself many millennia ago. The circumstances led you to make a faulty error in our battle on Earth, but before we conduct our battle in this expanse for our respective masters, we must have a moral inquiry about which side is in the wrong: God's or Satan's."

"For one instance?" Angel Y said.

"No ... for every instance," Angel X said.

The second angel thought for a while and assumed there was nothing to lose in this moral inquiry, so he nodded his head in approval.

"Here are the rules," Angel X said, "We will simulate the orders we both received in a pocket dimension to decide which one of us is truly the evil one, which one of us truly deserves to rot in Hell in the future."

"I quite agree with that proposal," said Angel Y, "But how will we truly know whether we do not hold bias towards one another or ourselves in this matter? We can't conduct a moral inquiry without proper parameters."

"You are quite right, Angel Y, you are quite right," Angel X said, "Which brings me to my next conclusion: we cannot refer to ourselves by our first names or the first person when referring to the scenario, the reenactment of the past we're about to study. Do you agree? That way, both sides must evaluate the previous battle on Earth objectively."

"Why yes, I do very much so agree," said Angel Y.

So, they warped space to create a pocket dimension where they could reenact and simulate the tragedy that occurred to the bobcat, the golden eagle, and the brush rabbit:

A fire raged in the forest. In Yosemite park, flames sent pillars of smoke into the sky, while each tendril of fire encroached towards a brush rabbit bounding amid the chaos toward her young. The night pushed onward, while the fire aged and grew with time. Amid thick, leafy brush, the 6-inch opening of her rabbit hole attempted to allow the rabbit to retreat home one last time—to the rest of her children, the rest of the litter that she left alone in the forest during the day. The deerbrush near the black oak died in seconds. The moist grass with residual dew withered beneath the dry grip of the flames, and the green area surrounding the hole diminished—died in a single scorch.

The rabbit ran between the flames and falling woods that burned the tips of her brown fur coat upon touch, while the synapses in her brain fired signals to the legs that said: "Escape! Escape! It's not too late! Don't contemplate. Just run!"

Angel X said, "Don't you see! The rabbit, the fire, the babies! They could all die if an angel doesn't do something! And guess what ... God seldom orders them to do anything. Not a thing!"

Angel Y furrowed his brow and said, "Now, would it not be in the nature of a just God to punish sin, the after-effects of evil? He would not be righteous at all if He did not allow sin to take its proper course, if He did not allow sin to wreak its natural havoc."

Angel X smirked, "That is precisely my point. God could taint Himself with sin for our sake to save everyone, don't you agree?"

Angel Y flashed with anger, "To wantonly pardon a being stained with sin would stain Him with sin, and then no one could truly be saved. We'd all, including God, just be rolling around in our filthy sins for all eternity! And think about Him! How awful would it be for Him to live for eternity with sin!? He's *eternal*. If there's no one righteous to save us, we're better off just not existing at all!"

Angel X stroked his goatee and said, "Calm down, my dear Angel Y. Calm down. We both know this isn't the end of the story, so please, calm down."

"You're very right," Angel Y said, "Why don't we inquire into the nature even deeper than either of us have ever thought possible—to truly settle once and for all who is right and who is wrong?"

"Why, I cannot help but agree," Angel X said sarcastically, "But what do you mean by 'if there's no one righteous to save us?'"

Angel Y said, "Well, I can only mean one thing really: disregarding life after death, a world where injustice runs rampant without any true solution does not constitute a manageable problem without someone that is perfect and holy."

"But what is the logic behind this my *dear* Angel Y?" asked Angel X.

"Well. What I mean is this," said Angel Y, "How can anyone—even the righteous—put the sin back into Hell without paying the necessary price?"

Angel X said, "I don't follow."

Angel Y said, "To put it simply... Jesus paid the price by living a perfect, godly, righteous life while in the body of a sinful human. Only a human that has done no wrong while on this earth can enter the kingdom of heaven. God the holy killed His son the unblemished to pay for everyone. Don't you agree?"

"I don't," said Angel X, "And here's why."

The thick flames burned both the evergreens and the deciduous trees, especially the black oak, which blocked the entrance to the rabbit hole with an extension of its mighty trunk the size of a log that killed every chance of survival: the wood fell from a height of seven feet. The moment reminded the rabbit of ice-cold rain, the kind she felt that night.

Faster, faster, faster. She ran into the black of her subconscious. The little synapses in her tiny rabbit brain remembered the same fear, the same dead aura bounding faster and faster and faster towards her soul. A bobcat chased her through the forest. The chase started in mere seconds, much like the fire that enclosed her habitat. ... The chase destroyed her sanity. She slid under the large root of the black oak inches away from her hole, when the bobcat caught his leg for a moment in that very same root. Lightning flashed, startling both animals. The lightning struck one of the large, lower branches. The lightning broke one of the edges, one of the oldest branches, and the wood chopped the back of the bobcat with tremendous force. The bobcat lay their paralyzed, and the bunny thought she saw a dark-winged angel that day come to save her with its great wooden sword of lightning.

"We both know which angel saved the rabbit, now don't we?" said Angel X with his grin triumphant.

"Why yes. ... We know which angel indeed," said Angel Y: "We know that the black oaks have a stable population for a *reason*. ... We know that the Riparian Brush Rabbit is endangered due to sin. Humans killed their habitat. Sin entered the world and wrought havoc. All must submit to the proper authority. Such is the wage of sin: death. No one can escape its consequences, not even God should he taint himself."

Angel X said, "No! Everyone desires to live! Even the insignificant Riparian Brush Rabbit! Each of these creatures is selfish—especially predators like the bobcat or the human, but I plead with you to reconsider your position in this world. We have *power*. We can stop unjust profit! Do you not agree?"

"No, I do not. A contract is a contract—especially the one made before the beginning of time itself. Angels fought angels, and angels fought God. The ones who fought God instigated the destruction of all that is good. They broke the first contract with God, and they led humans to break their own contract with God as well. The wages of such sin are death. I hope that you can agree," said Angel Y.

"I know that to be true," said Angel X, "But can you not see that I plead with your better nature, to see that the method I propose could possibly save everyone. Can you not see it?"

But, lightning started the forest fire this time. ... She wondered why it came for her after saving her from the bobcat... She thought of all these things within the millisecond she had to leap beneath the falling oak wood and into the rabbit hole. The branch of the black oak stopped the rabbit's movement with searing flames that danced in front her on the log, reflecting hopelessness in her black eyes.

"See, my ill-natured Angel Y," Angel X said, "See the possibilities that lie in having God taint himself for the sake of others. There is no need for Jesus. All He must do is what He knows He has the ability to do: risk everything for the whole that erred! Don't you see?"

"Even so," Angel Y said, "I will not fall for your trickery. ... I will not risk the guaranteed salvation and eternal life of those who trust in Jesus. I won't risk everything on low probability."

The golden eagle watched the struggle. His eyes pierced through the billowing smoke and flames to the figure of the brush rabbit—a portrait of helplessness. He watched the surroundings choke her to death with fire. He felt compassion. But, he could hear it now: the crackling music that fire played on wood.

"I do not see your point," said Angel X.

"Look closer" said Angel Y.

Even so, the golden eagle decided to risk everything with a single moment of desire.

He knew.

He knew his own eaglets needed him to provide food for the first two weeks of their development.

He knew the risks involved with diving through destruction for the sake of a single rabbit, a single morsel of food.

He knew his eaglets needed the energy, he knew the forest fire limited his options for prey.

They needed him to push them off the edge of the world.

They needed nothing but their wings and feathers that the food he brings would help grow.

He knew the rabbit—the invasive tool of a species—could serve as food.

The Walrus

He knew other birds would fight with him for the remaining resources after the forest fire finished its rampage.

But was it worth the risk?

Should he take the life of a rabbit?

Still, he considered it a mercy for the rabbit to die nourishing his young, instead of burning to ashes, going to waste ...

He flew down under the falling trees and burning leaves and dangerous woods.

He flew beneath the wooden sword of his white winged Angel Y, who said to the eagle, "One wrong step and I'll kill you."

He flew with rigid wings and lightweight bones that never ever failed him, and in the process of swooping down from the highest sky that an eagle can fly in peace, to the lowest point for one on an earth filled with chaos, the white-winged angel clipped his wings with a flaming slab of wood as the golden eagle killed the rabbit for profit.

Creative Nonfiction First Place

Believe Half of What You See

Darrell Anderson

My friends, Billy Poulson and Joshua Wold, lost their legs, and I wanted to kill the men who took them. Their truck was launched into the air by an improvised explosive device. I can still remember the smell of their burnt flesh and clothes, like melted yarn and salty ground chuck. I had to tie the separated bottom half of Billy's leg to the one that was intact. I was surprised by how light it felt. We were all mortified for the two young men. Sergeant Hyman, the largest most masculine man I can think of, was weeping and kissing Billy on the forehead and telling him that everything would be alright. This is my worst memory. This was the worst experience I've ever had. During my time in Iraq, I was taught to hate the citizens of a country I helped invade, watched as my friends were needlessly disfigured, and learned that it could've all been avoided by practicing healthy skepticism.

Six months before the explosion, I was a skinny, naive, intellectually pliable, twenty-year-old combat medic. The most important thing to me, at the time, was whether I was attractive enough to the opposite sex. Still, my deployment was inevitable, and I wanted to survive. I knew that comradeship would be paramount to my survival. I needed someone to watch out for me.

My first week in Iraq felt sweltering. There was no shade, and the wind made me feel like I was standing behind an airplane engine. Our initial briefings about the local culture were a welcome refuge because they were held in an air-conditioned tent. I found a seat in the front of the tent near my future roommates, Billy and Josh. The chaplain arrived and played a series of videos on the projector. "These are Al Qaeda recruiting videos," he said. "This is how they sell people on terrorism." The videos were poorly edited. They were grainy and pixelated. The background music was blaring so loud that I couldn't tell if I was hearing strings or chants. They showed images of suicide bombings, explosive testing, vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attacks, and marksmen shooting Americans from hiding spots. Every time an American was harmed in these videos, the attackers could be heard rejoicing. They would chant "Allah Khwagbar" (God is great).

I am an American. The victims in these videos were like me. Watching them filled me with rage. I concluded that terrorists were just bad people, and, because they had no uniform, all Muslims were potentially bad people. I was afraid of them. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. I used that hate to justify some terrible things. I destroyed people's property, separated fathers from their families, and robbed some of their autonomy. I felt justified in all of this because the ones I wounded were "bad people."

After many missions, I bonded with my roommates Billy and Josh. They looked out for me. They taught me about infantry culture. We worked out together. We ate together. We spoke to each other's families over the phone. Virtually everything we did was synergistic. I took care of them medically, and they protected me through vigilance. We had an emotional stake in each other's well-being.

Six months into the deployment, my platoon received a strange mission. We were to go outside the wire and sweep for explosives. This mission was absurd from its conception because my platoon had neither the resources nor the training for securing explosives. I kept waiting for someone to tell Command how reckless the mission was. It never happened. We went on the

mission, and five minutes in, I felt a percussive vibration beat through my body. A millisecond later I heard a thundering explosion. Our lead truck had been hit. The truck flew so high in the air that I couldn't see it from inside my truck. Billy and Josh were in that truck. They were just like the soldiers in the chaplain's videos, and, just as quickly as the explosion happened, my commanders lost my unquestioning belief. Why were we this expendable to them? Why didn't anyone speak up or refuse the mission? How could I trust anything they said?

Four years later, I came across an investigative report by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism. The report detailed the government's recruiting of a multimedia company in England. According to the report, the U.S. government paid the company over \$500 million to produce propaganda videos. I followed a link to said videos. They were the same videos I watched in that tent my first week in Iraq. I can't say that the article was absolutely true, but it didn't have to be for everything to change. I was out of Plato's cave now, and all it took was the tiny seed of doubt the article planted. All of a sudden, the entire year I spent in Iraq had a new meaning. The things I did went from being acts of heroism to acts of malevolence. The limbs my friends sacrificed were no longer tributes to a just crusade, but forfeitures for the affluent. I had been used and needed a new creed.

It is never OK to hate anyone. Most people know this on some level. Ironically, nearly anyone can be pressured to conform to bigoted ideals. It is important to keep an open mind. If ever you find yourself hating an any group of people, ask yourself which of your beliefs allows that hate? What atrocities could that hate lead you to commit? Question what you're told, especially if it generalizes and dehumanizes a group of people. Base your will in knowledge, not belief.

Creative Nonfiction Second Place

It Happened Anyway

Thomasina Ramos

"She's gone," my sister whimpered on the other side of the phone. I broke down into uncontrollable tears and started shaking vigorously. I dropped my savvy flip phone and watched as it spun around in continuous circles on the ground. It was May 2005, and, at the age of twenty, I lost my mother. I felt as if I had been orphaned in adulthood. A sensation of being submerged in a nightmare and trying to wake from an alternate reality took hold of me. My purpose in life just took her last breath, and a plethora of memories (along with remorse) flooded my mind. I never had the chance to find her better help or take care of her; self-condemnation, frustration, pain, and emptiness coursed through my body. The more my mind circled around the situation, the more sorrow pierced my heart, and there was nothing I could do now except grieve. The only solace I had at this moment was both being able to say goodbye and the extra ten years we had together. It should have felt like a gift, as people would often remind me, that ten years was more than I should have expected. I felt like it was not enough, and I selfishly still wanted her here with me. After all she had been through, how could I choose to want her to stay in this world? The pain she endured, the daily deterioration, and nearly giving her life so I could exist; how could I ask her to do more? Her journey ended, and she left this world with her imprint on me. But none of these things mattered now: she was gone, and I was a lost empty shell of a person. I reverted to my childhood.

"Cenie, will you go down to the counselor's office please? She would like to have a word with you," my fifth-grade teacher said with a smile on her face. She was trying to reassure me that I was not in trouble. *Not again*, I thought to myself. Of course, I knew I was not in trouble; I never had been a difficult child in school. In fact, most of my years, I was too quiet, which is why the counselor wanted to speak with me. She assumed I was depressed. I walked out of the room and down the newly remodeled staircase, thinking of the fastest way I could end this session.

As I proceeded to the door of the counselor's office, I knocked lightly. She opened the door with an expression on her face that I had become accustomed to; it was one of pity, but somehow it displayed kindness at the same time. I knew right away what this conversation was going to be about, just as the time before this and the time before that: my mother. I looked around the room and could see various pictures that were drawn by the different students in the school. One of my peers drew a picture of a family with a mother, father, a little girl, and a boy. Another picture was of a house with a little girl and pets playing in the grass. The last picture I took notice of was a simple rainbow; nothing else, just an ordinary rainbow. As I observed it, I wondered what the illustrator wanted at the end of the rainbow. I could think of quite a few things I would want in my little world. I turned my face from the drawings and immediately hardened. I put my game face on and braced myself because I was aware of what was to come next from this "spontaneous" visit.

"Good morning, Cenie. How are you feeling this morning?" she asked me with a smile on her face, probably believing this was the day she was going to break me.

As usual, I played along. "I'm fine, thank you. How are you today?"

"I'm well and glad to see you this morning," she said. I smiled politely, but I refused to say the same as it would have been a lie. "Do you know why I called you down here today?"

I started to roll my eyes, but abruptly stopped myself as I knew it was disrespectful. *Of course, I know why you are calling me down here, lady. You want to ask me the same questions over and over about my mom, her multiple sclerosis, how it makes me feel, do I feel safe, would I like to live elsewhere? ... blah blah blah.* I decided to play coy. "No ma'am I don't. Am I in some sort of trouble?"

"Of course not, dear. I just wanted to check on you and see how things were going with your schooling, friends, and your mom?"

I had to hand it to her; she always had a way of trying to make it seem as if these visits were about anything but my home life, but we both knew the sole purpose of these talks. "I got a B on my math test. I studied hard for it. I can't wait for our upcoming field trip to the museum. I'm excited about it. I also ran pretty well in the mile run. I got a decent time; it wasn't what I wanted, but I'll have a chance to run it again if I wish."

As I answered her, my eyes were big and bright, and, for some reason, it seemed as if she was drawn in, reading right through me. But I knew she had no clue about my thoughts. I quickly averted my eyes and began to change the subject. After these frequent visits, I started to catch on to what she was trying to do. At first, I was naive to the entire situation, and I thought she just wanted to see how I was doing. I was ten years old and already learning how to act. Whether they believed me, I still am unsure of to this very day. I was still with my mom, then, so that told me it was working.

"And your mom, sweetheart, how are things going with her?" And there it was, the real reason for my visit. Forget everything else I just said. She drove on into what she considered was the heart of our conversation.

"She's great. Yesterday evening, we had pizza and breadsticks for dinner; we talked about the bible and watched the Golden Girls," which was all true.

"That seems like it was a good evening. Sounds like fun. What about her health? You didn't mention anything about that."

I pictured my mom in her hospital bed in the living room, having trouble trying to feed herself, and the frequent muscle spasms she endured in her legs because of the multiple sclerosis. Her feet were starting to lean over, and her hands were starting to fail her just as her legs had. She was a strong woman, strong in her faith in God, and did not complain. She just tried to make the most of the life that she had. "She's good. She has good and bad days just like the rest of us, but she's great. I cannot imagine what I would do without her."

The counselor looked at me with her brow furrowed, as if I just spoke in a foreign language. "I hear that her health has been declining, and I thought we could maybe discuss how that makes you feel."

How do you think it makes me feel? I thought with exasperation. I am 10 years old, and, at that age, most mothers can tuck their children in bed at night, do their laundry, pick them up from school, and cook them dinner. But my mom could not. She never could do those things for me, and it was a raging pain that only consumed me when I allowed it to. This moment definitely would not be used for that. I straightened my face and said, "she's the only mother I have ever known. I don't like that she is in the bed, but what the two of us have is an incredible bond. And I would not trade it for anything. I love my mom, and I know she loves me."

The counselor looked at me intently, started to speak, but then stopped abruptly and pursed her lips. "I'm sure you do, and she's very lucky to have you for a daughter."

"Thanks. Can I go now?" I said, feeling tears starting to well up behind my eyes and a large knot filling the back of my throat.

"Of course, you can. I'm always here if you need me." She smiled. I believed her when she said it, but I would never take her up on her offer because I knew if I gave the verity of my feelings, they would take me away from my mom.

I casually strolled out of her office, before I had a meltdown, and ran straight to the bathroom. I went into a stall and started to cry. I allowed the flood of emotion I repressed during the session to drain out of me before I went back to the classroom. When I finished, I wiped my tears, looked into the mirror, and saw my overlarge, round eyes looking back at me—anguished, scared, bright, but strong—and waited for the redness to leave my face. I walked mechanically out of the bathroom and down to class, ashamed and angry for crying, and curious if anyone knew my situation. The rest of the day, I daydreamed and allowed my mind to circle around my circumstances. I thought of my biggest fear—someone taking me away from my mother—and I prayed that everything I just told the counselor sufficed, that it would allow me another day with a mother who was my life. How much longer would this continue before my little world came crashing in and all that I knew was lost? All I could do was wait.

Mom was in her hospital bed, surrounded by the family she adored: her mother, two brothers and their wives, two of her sisters, and two daughters. I, being only ten and terribly shy, was not very familiar with my uncles and their wives, so I stayed in my bedroom listening to bits and pieces of a very intense conversation that seemed to have continued over the course of several days.

They were gathered around in our cramped, but beautifully decorated, living room. Mom had a way of transforming a plain room into something of grandeur. The draperies were of a hunter green color, beautifully placed in the window with a cream valence that dipped perfectly in the center. The balance of the two colors was perfectly paired just enough to bring out the oriental rug that lay in the center of the carpeted floor. Several golden pictures and sconces graced the walls, giving the room a look of elegance, and making it fit for the woman I considered a queen. She often thought of different ways to pass the days of her confinement, one of them being her creativity in remodeling the room with different decorations that were of a modern style. As the family continued to talk, I carefully moved closer to the bedroom door to hear more clearly; I tried not to give the indication of eavesdropping.

"It has to be done. Your health is important, and you're not improving. You need round-the-clock care, and she needs to be somewhere to be a kid; not to bear the burden. You brought her this far. Let one of us take her the rest of the way," my uncle Jesse said to her in a calm voice, trying to get his point across without seeming exasperated.

I waited for an answer from my mom, but I could not hear a response. I assumed she nodded her head solemnly because, after a brief pause, I heard my aunt Jane say, "then it's settled, she will go to Philadelphia to live, and get situated just before her new term begins."

My heart sank, and I knew we were now defeated. All the years of my attempts to keep my mom and I together failed. It was two weeks before I was to start middle school, and the pure joy I felt for leaving elementary behind with the constant annoyance of the counselor was short lived. I thought for sure we prevailed and that all the of the negative thoughts and being on edge about my mother's multiple sclerosis was behind us. My knees buckled, and I slid down the wall silently crying careful to muffle my moans. I had never been so hurt and scared. Why can't they ask me how I feel, ask me if I feel burdened or if I want to stay or go? Then a pang of a different fear seared through me, maybe mommy is tired and doesn't want to deal with me anymore; perhaps I've become too much, and she is unable to continue on. I may be a burden to her and she wants to let go.

"Cenie, come here please." My aunt Jane called from the living room.

I stiffened, instantly caught off guard, "Be right there!" I responded. I got up from the floor and wiped my face excessively, trying to leave no indication I had been weeping. I waited another moment, checked my face in the mirror, and tried to make myself look tired, instead of hurt. I tried to show no indication of what I just overheard. I walked to the door and opened it. I braced myself for all the eyes that would be on me within seconds.

"Come here dear," aunt Jane said, as I scooted across the floor. I hesitated with each step I took. I rubbed my eyes as if I had been awakened from a deep sleep, feigning fatigue. I looked over at my mom, seeing the hurt in her eyes, and knew this was a devastating decision for her. I couldn't grasp her reason for succumbing to their plan. She turned her gaze as my uncle reached for my hand.

"Do you want to come live with me and be my little girl? We will take good care of you and get you situated in school. We'd love to have you." I looked at him and smiled but did not answer directly because the answer was emphatically *no*. I looked around and saw all eyes on me, burning my flesh making me incredibly uneasy.

Without hesitation, I took my hand from his and walked into the kitchen to get a glass of water. As I drank it, I stared out of the window. I thought to myself that I would have never guessed that their first-time visit to our home would be to take me away from my mother. Feeling suffocated, I placed the glass into the sink, walked out to the living room, and asked if I could go outside. My mother shook her head yes. I went into my room, put my sneakers on, and cringed at the thought of having to walk back out there in front of everyone. I wished we had a back door I could escape from. I sped past and mumbled, "see you later," as I went out the front door. I ran to my friend Noelia's house and knocked on her door. When she finally opened, with tears in my eyes I blurted, "I'm going to Philadelphia to live. They all made the decision for me. No one cares what I think. I never imagined this was what their visit was for!"

"Come in, tell me everything that happened," she said and closed the door. I gave her every detail, spewed out everything I heard over the past hour, and then fell silent, feeling resigned. My friend took my hand and sat with me in silence as tears flowed down my face. She consoled me in the only way she knew I would accept. I stayed as long as I possibly could, waiting for the house to clear out, watching for the last guest to leave our home.

I walked into the house that my mother made so beautiful for both of us and said goodnight to her. "Cenie?" she called out, and I stopped to look at her. With tears in her eyes in a quiet tone, she said goodnight to me as if it was a final farewell. I looked at her woundedly and gave a grimace of a smile. I walked hesitantly into my room and cried myself to sleep.

A few days later, I was packed for my departure. I looked at my room, which was moments away from being a memory of my life with mom and me. My pink floral comforter was neatly splayed across my bed with my peppermint kitty sitting in the middle as it always had. I looked at my favorite picture on the wall, which was of the Precious Moments angels and a loving poem entitled, "Sleep Sweetly." My mother ordered it for me a few years prior to this day. With a jolt, I heard my aunt Jane call "Come say goodbye to your Mom Cenie, it's time to go." With a heavy heart, I walked out of what was no longer my room and into the living room, toward my mother's hospital bed.

"Bye, mommy," I said with a giant lump in my throat. She could barely utter a word and said goodbye in a whisper, trying to hold back emotion to make this farewell as painless as possible for us both. I hugged and kissed her and left out of the apartment door as if I was walking the plank. I could see his family was seated, already having said goodbye to everyone, and there stood my oldest sister with a gift for me. I opened it reluctantly, remembering all the years of

presents she gave me. It was a Minnie Mouse watch with a black wrist band and Minnie in a pink dress. I smiled and timidly gave her a kiss, which was never the type of affection we showed one another. She opened the car door for me. I got in, strapped on my seatbelt, and we started on the road to Philadelphia. I refused to look back as we were pulling out of the parking lot, and then closed my eyes, trying not to cry. I had no idea what was going to happen in this new journey I was embarking on. The day was muggy and gloomy, just the same as my mood. I rode in silence, looking out of the window, wondering if the weather was a precursor for my next destination. I was leaving the one person who would always love me no matter what.

Visual
2019 Sculptures in the City



Civil Chaos
Cassie Jacobs
Ceramics, Wood, Wire

Creative Nonfiction

Entitled

Hailey Lanford

My name is Leilani.

Hawaiian for “heavenly flower” and “child of God.” In another universe, I am a star that shines brightly above the sea. I am a siren in the waves on thick, white sand, and I have no sense of time aside from the tide. I am the hibiscus flower that sways in the sweet wind and the Big Island, half-dipped chocolate shortbread cookies that are scented within it. I am born from the sea and eroded on land, like a pearl in an oyster; and yet here I stand, beautiful and curvy and stronger than any pearl I had known before. I am Lani, short and sweet, sharp and silent. A passing wind, a gentle hand.

My name is Ciera.

A version of the Irish, Gaelic, Ciara, with a Spanish origin and meaning of “black” or “dark.” And I am forever black, with skin the color of upturned earth and the quickness to cut through thick words. I am of Irish descent through the travesty that is America, and I am unforgiving in the way that my feet move on solid floors, in a swishing pattern—front, side, front, back, left step, back, front. Hands behind backs, locked together in a solid embrace, held tightly by the whip of a short woman with a stern glare. The melodic metronome keeping up with me as I keep my legs straight. It is in my blood that my legs are straight, the rhythm holding me tight, coursing through me as I step. Strips of red hair peek through every now and again, a passing note of who is within me, and what I am capable of.

My name is Nana.

A Hawaiian name, versed after the name of a star that is held in the sky by the grace of the Universe. I was born under a comet, with one of my many names, and under a star on a night when they were both at their peaks. And some would yell “coincidence!” but I cannot shake that these names, that came before or after I knew how to form words, were meant to be a guide for me, to understand how I am placed in this world—where I am placed in this world. This name came to me before I can remember and yet has stuck with me ever since. And every time I hear it, I am reminded that I am a star, I am more than a woman on this earth. I am more than I can perceive with the naked eye. I am a place so far away that only the imagination and a telescope could draw up the likeness of me.

My name is Hail.

Like standing to catch a cab on a busy city street, I will those who I need into my space, pulling them close with the immanent power I possess. Tantamount to a heavy storm, I am strongest when I break through dark clouds and release the tension that has been stored within me. I am golf-ball sized pieces of ice that pings against window panes and rooftops with ferocity and longing. Composed of alternating layers of opaque ice, intricately designed in cumulonimbus clouds, patterned the same way that snowflakes are, beautiful and each its own. I leave a trace of myself along city streets, by invisible cracks on the windshield, and in fallen leaves and branches in front lawns. I leave a thickness in the air, intense and strained, unlike the

The Walrus

softness of rain or the lightness of snow. I am a mix of both, a storm unlike any other, a force to reckon with.

My name is Hailey.

A field of hay, originating in the vast lands of Oxfordshire; linked to the Old English word *hæp*, meaning "hero" or "warrior." I blend in with the scenery around me, a part of something bigger than myself. I am used as a cushioned rest place for the teenagers sneaking out in the middle of the night. I listen to your secrets and keep you warm into the chilly mornings when you creep back into your bed with dirty feet and pieces of me in your hair, a reminder of whispers and growth. I am human; I feel pain, cry, and am not always strong enough to withstand the circumscribed pressure. And yet, like hay, I am bendable, adaptable; strong when all pieces of myself are bound into a barrel and held together by the shear string of sanity. Warrior blood runs through my vein, unseen but pushing me on and leading me on my own mission. It is mixed blood of those who withstood the cracks of a whip and those who held them. The bloodline of warriors runs further down than I can imagine, dotted with those I have never met and set in a place I have never known, lost through primitive words and time.

Creative Nonfiction

A Cup of Coffee

Jemeric Thomas

Green. That was the first thing that came to mind as I walked through the door. I had never actually been inside a coffee shop, so I wasn't exactly sure what it was supposed to look like. Because I had no expectations, to say I was surprised by the interior wouldn't make sense. The place had a style of Asian mysticism, with a miniature stone garden and plants on tables that I assumed to be bonsai trees. The walls were a shimmering lime green, with bright blue lights on the ceiling illuminating the tops of the walls as if the very sky was shining down on the place. The art on the walls was really not much to look at—just pictures of fruits, some type of coffee blend, and an esoteric square with black and white blobs. It felt like a full minute before I realized that I had been staring. I could see a woman monotonously sweeping the bar counter across the shop. I navigated through the randomly placed tables and chairs, then leaned over the counter to look at a menu near the desserts. A few seconds passed before the barista noticed my presence. (Granted, I was silent and barely made any sound opening the door.)

"Oh, let me get that for you." She had an accent that was either Welsh or British, I could not tell. She handed me a menu that looked a lot bigger than I had anticipated. "Take as much time as you like to look it over. You can also sit where you like," she said with a brimming and inviting smile.

I gave a curt nod and turned to a nearby table. It wasn't as though I didn't have many options; the place was empty except for a middle-aged man in the back who was profusely tapping away on his laptop. I stared at the menu, reading the different type of "exotic" blends they had, each ranging from different trees found in one specific mountain or another. My indecisiveness started kicking in. I kept thinking about getting one item, but before I could call her over to place my order, I would consider how great it would be to get "X" type of coffee or "Y" type of tea blend because it would be good for my health or something. I decided to put the menu down and look at my phone to pass the time, hoping I would come to a subconscious decision. A peek at the battery level revealed that wouldn't be a choice.

So, I was stuck in a place I didn't know with just the distant clicking of a keyboard, the monotone hum of several machines ready to spew scalding water, and the echoes of my own thoughts. Looking around, I once again saw the lifeless area, and the emptiness bothered me. There was something about not anyone seeing around me that gave me a bit of discomfort. It was this moment that made me think about other times I felt that way: when I was invited to a place and no one showed up; when I check my phone, continuously bare of messages; or when I am in my room, able to say goodnight only to the crickets outside.

I ruminate on that feeling of emptiness for a passage of time, averting my gaze to the menu but, truthfully, staring at nothing. I barely moved, or if I did, it was the simplest movement of a finger in the air or a stretch of my leg. It wasn't until someone pulled the chair next to me and sat down that I awoke from my haze.

"When I said take your time, I didn't actually mean it. Sooner or later, you need to order something." It was the barista who was working on the counter. Given that this was also the moment I paid attention, I noticed the light ceilings turned from a sky blue to a moody yellow. I had come in the middle of the afternoon, and to think that I had stayed until the lights changed

color baffled me. Even more baffling was that the man with the laptop had completely disappeared.

"Oh sorry." This was the first time I spoke to her since I entered the building.

"No sweat, but, seriously, are you going to get something?"

I meekly replied "yes," and asked for a recommendation.

"Well, we do have our Dark Ocean Mocha that has a bit more milk than usual. Then there's our—" and she prattled on about types of coffee using words like "roast" and "texture," although to me she might as well have spoken another language. I took this moment to actually look at her. She looked to be about my age, almond colored with light brown eyes; there was a slight hint of makeup around her eyes, but that seemed to be the only signs of any touch-up, as her cheeks showed marks of fading acne. She had short, frizzy hair that was tied into a minute bun. When she finished talking, she could tell I wasn't paying attention and pantomimed the act of rewinding herself. "Let's start from the beginning. What type of coffee would you like?"

"I don't know," I told her. "I have never had coffee before." If she had been able to raise her eyebrow above her forehead she might have.

"So, you walked into a coffee shop and never even drank *coffee*? Did you come here looking for a glass of water?"

"I just wanted to try something new," I explained.

"Fair enough," she shrugged and got up from the seat. "I'll come up with something that might do you good." She got behind the counter and started to boil water. I was beginning to revert back into a trance when she started to make small talk at the counter. "So, sir, are you from around here?" Her voice carried a peppy vibe of curiosity that was pleasant to hear.

"I'm not from this area. I'm just looking for a job."

"Oh, nice. Nice, what type of job?" This small talk between us continued. She would ask a simple question, maybe add a little joke or comment, and I would watch as she jumped between ten different machines. When she finished, she placed a steaming Styrofoam cup next to me. I tried to reach for it, but she pointed a finger at me with an exaggerated warning. "Actually, that cup is mine. I like to have mine cool down before I take a sip. Yours is coming up next."

She darted back behind the counter, and, before she could say anything, I struck the next question. "Is this place always like this?" She looked around, seemingly not sure what I meant.

"You mean the 'Feng Shui' thing we have going on? Pretty much."

"I meant, is the place always so—" I almost used the word "empty" but considered it too harsh "... quiet?" She pursed her lips as she thought for a second.

"Well, beside a few days when entire hordes of people jump through the windows screaming for a latte, yeah. I usually close shop early." She spoke nonchalantly about it, and, yet, it didn't sit right with me.

"Does it bother you?"

"I don't need hundreds of people every day. So long as I have just one person, I'll be open for business."

I asked, "what if you don't have even one person?"

"Then, I'll keep my doors open until I get one person."

"But, what if nobody ever comes—" I stopped, as that question seemed too aggressive.

To my surprise, her retort was, "then, I'll change the shop to make them come in. Just because the place is 'quiet' now," she did small air quotes with her fingers, "it doesn't mean I can't get more people. Having my doors open is the first step to getting anyone, and if I need to change something, then I'll change something. It's not bad if I don't get someone now, so long as

I keep trying. Someone will walk in and order a cup of coffee. ... Even if it's by accident." She held out her hands to me as though presenting some shiny prize and shouted, "Exhibit A!"

When she finished talking, she had another Styrofoam cup in her hand. She came over, and this time, she gently placed it in mine. "I would explain what it is, but it would probably fly over your head."

I could tell she was still joking around, and it continued to keep the mood light. I don't know for how long we talked, but by the time she handed me my coffee the sun was almost setting.

"Alright, closing time. Come on, out you go." She grabbed her coat and waited for me to follow her to the glass doors.

As she opened the exit for me, I stated "I haven't paid for the cup yet."

She lazily swatted that statement away. "Consider it on the house. You seemed like you just needed one." She began to walk to her car before she turned back around and said to me, "if you need to talk about anything, I'm always here."

She smiled as warm as my Styrofoam cup felt, and, with a quick "goodbye," we walked in different directions. As I headed toward my car, I took my first ever sip of whatever roast the coffee was called. I immediately gagged at the unexpectedly bad taste, yet I continued to take small sips. I could say without a doubt the drink was pretty awful. When I come back, I'll be sure to tell her.

Visual
2019 Sculptures in the City



Morbid Entertainment

Ariana Monterrosa

Pipe, Spheres, Paint, Concrete, Mirror

Creative Nonfiction

For Benjamin

Lorelee Vetter

Many people seem to recall terrifying events with perfect clarity. I have heard my dad detail the events of September 11, 2001, many times, to the point that, in my mind's eye, it plays as a movie. I hear the booming impact of the plane bouncing off the pavement into the Pentagon, I see my dad sprinting along its smoke-filled corridors with his coworkers, and I feel the crowd outside go numb as they watch the building collapse.

Unfortunately, I do not have his detailed military mind. I remember emotions and sensations more than actions; however, when I think of one evening in 2005, I can see a timeline begin, a generalized sort of map. To give some context, and perhaps an excuse, I was only five years old. My siblings Beth, Jake, and Anna were eleven, seven, and three, respectively, and my brother Benjamin was about six months old.

It was a summer evening, just as the sun was beginning to set. Mom sat on the couch keeping an eye on Ben, who was propped up with a pillow on the floor. Anna watched cartoons in the corner. Beth did homework at the island, while dad tutored Jake at the table. I do not remember what I was doing, but I remember walking past the table when I heard a thud. I turned around to see Ben, lying on his back, shaking and thrashing his arms. Mom yelled for dad; he looked up, then jumped out of his chair and ran to the living room. I followed him.

Ben was violently shivering and gasping for breath. His baby blue eyes were open, but they were unfocused and appeared confused. Dad started talking to him, "Benjamin, Benjamin, wake up, what are you doing, come on, Benjamin." A steady stream of nothing to disguise his panic. In the corner, Anna started to cry. Dad was always unshakeable. If he was worried, what horrible thing was happening? I felt sick.

Mom was turning in circles next to the table, looking for the phone, yelling, "Call 911! Call 911!" over and over. The phone was only a few feet away, but it was as if she could not see it.

Beth grabbed it, dialed the number, and immediately started crying, "What do I say?"

Dad shouted, "Tell them he's shaking, he won't stop, tell them I don't think he's breathing, tell them our address!"

Beth obeyed, but she was breathing so fast as she said our address that I wondered if they could understand her.

Jake ran to the front door to keep watch for the firefighters. Anna climbed on the couches, trying to determine what she was supposed to be crying about. I tried to keep her out of everyone's way, but I could not look away from Ben. His lips were turning purple.

Dad began to give him mouth to mouth.

I felt so helpless and I hated it. In my head, I was praying with all I had, offering my entire world if only Ben would stop shaking and breathe.

I did not hear the sirens until they were pulling into the neighborhood. I ran to the front door, but Jake was already there, holding the door open for two men and a woman in dark uniforms, wearing radios and carrying a large bag. After them came the firefighters in their gear, but without masks. I followed them back to the living room.

A firefighter was trying to talk to mom, but she was too distraught to answer. The dark-clothed people kneeled over Ben while barraging dad with questions. He answered them, but

never let go of Ben's hand. One of them strapped a mask to Ben's face and plugged it in to a green tank. He was black and had a tattoo that disappeared up his sleeve. His badge had three letters: EMT.

After a few minutes, Ben's fitful breaths deepened. I watched his blue lips regain their color as the man explained to dad that Ben should go to the hospital.

In an instant, the EMTs picked Ben up and carried him out the door, taking my parents with them. We followed them in silence. The entire neighborhood was flooded with flashing red lights. The scene was garish and hurt my eyes. They loaded Ben into the ambulance and drove away, leaving the echo of the sirens behind.

Somewhere in the confusion, a babysitter, whom I do not remember anything about except that I did not like her, arrived. She tried to send us to bed, but we struggled and stalled until dad called to say Ben was stable, but they would be staying the night just to be sure. We went to bed then, each of us conscious of how quiet the boys' room was. Anna and I fell asleep holding hands across the gap between our beds, taking comfort in nothing more than knowing we were together.

I have heard war described as ninety-five-percent boredom punctuated by five-percent sheer terror. This, I believe, aptly describes the next few years of my life. There might be a few weeks of nothing, followed by seizure upon seizure and a hospital visit. From 2005 to 2008, I have very few memories that do not involve Ben seizing or his medical tests.

We learned that he was epileptic, meaning he seized regularly, and suffered from Grand Mal seizures. These are characterized by weakness or unconsciousness, so he would fall, as well, as have muscle contractions, normally in the limbs. We never learned the cause of his epilepsy, but, as life went on, we learned to function with his condition, although we hoped that he would one day outgrow it. We had an oxygen tank for each floor and a small one for the car. Dad developed a plan for when Ben seized, drilling us until we could get Ben on oxygen, call 911, clear the floor of obstacles or hazards, and lead the EMTs inside in under two minutes from anywhere on our property. The plan worked best when he was home, his military efficiency and unbreakable calm grounding us until help arrived.

For Ben, though, life was perfectly normal. He grew to be one of the sweetest, most curious, and forgiving children I have known. Talking was hard for him, so he would communicate with a few words as well as baby sign language. The signs he used most were more, *airplane*, *cheese*, *thank you*, and *sorry*.

He would apologize whenever anyone cried. He knew people cried for him, but all he wanted was for them to be happy. He would smile through his chubby, dimpled cheeks, squinting his blue eyes until they disappeared. He loved making people laugh. When he sang his favorite song, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," he would sing, "Whee, Ohhh," instead of, "Swing Low," smiling as he said, "Whee," and making a grumpy face and growling, "Ohhh," as low as he could. It was comical, to say the least, and the best part of the song.

But as time went on, the seizures occurred more often, the hospital visits lasted longer, and the medication became stronger.

One day in February of 2008, we came home from school to find mom there. She had been with Ben in the hospital for over a week, so we were elated. We were noisy and asking questions: "Mom, you're back! Where's Ben, how's he doing? Will you be here tonight?"

She just stared at the wall. Dad sat us down and, with his voice thick and unsteady, told us that Ben had gone to Heaven.

There was silence for a solid five seconds. It was like the moment after the plane hit, after the explosion, and after the building had crashed to the ground. The sound is so loud you cannot hear it, but your ears are ringing.

I broke it. I started wailing, shocking myself and everybody. All my siblings had questions. Not me.

I have always been very logical and a bit nosy. By eavesdropping, I knew that if Ben made it to adulthood he might outgrow his seizures, but his chances were slim. I knew that he was getting worse; we had hardly seen him that month because he was in the hospital so often.

It was as if I had been prepared for his death since his first seizure. I accepted it without questions, and I hated myself for that.

The next thing I remember is that I went to school the next day. I knew it was selfish, but it felt wrong to see mom so inconsolable, surrounded by Ben's things set up like a shrine on his bed.

I must clarify: Ben's death destroyed my world, and I felt it keenly. There are no words to describe the sheer weight of grief, that thick, smothering blanket with the label of "Indefinite" that dragged itself into my life. I have carried it into my adulthood in many forms; I was distraught and hurt and depressed by turns. I simply was not shocked by his death. All of us hoped he would not die, but I was always aware that every seizure might be his last.

The next few months were, again, blurry. My clearest memories from that time are of the viewing and the funeral.

The viewing room was dimly lit and stank of roses. It lasted forever. At one point, I gathered enough courage to peek inside the casket. Ben lay in a teddy-bear shirt with his hands folded on his stomach. I carefully touched his cheek; it was cold and ceramic; everything about him looked like a Dutch-boy doll. His feathery hair was neat, and his hands were clean and still, like they had never been, and never should have been. He looked dead. For a minute, I imagined what would happen if he sat up as if he had never been sick. It hurt to think about it.

The funeral was the next day; however, it is separate from the memorial, in my mind, like two puzzle pieces that look like they should go together but do not quite fit. I remember:

The limousine ride to the cemetery.

Everyone walking up the hill, footsteps muted by carefully manicured grass.

Wind and cold, and hundreds of clanging wind chimes hanging from every tree.

Someone handing out yellow roses, which everyone accepted silently.

A flutist playing an ill-fitting song.

Sitting in the front row.

During the ceremony, mom was inconsolable, but she did try to muffle her shuddering sobs. We took turns holding her hands.

As the pastor finished, my family and I stood and placed our roses on top of the small, brown casket. Dad held me in front of him, his hands warm on my shoulders and his heartbeat on my back. His tears dripped onto my head. I tried to stay as still as possible, hoping that I could somehow comfort him just by being there.

Hope is such a strange concept. I hoped against hope to find hope to share with my family. I just wanted something, anything, to remind us that things would be all right.

Mom surprised me by finding it first. Somehow, bedridden and grief-stricken as she was, she found hope and hid it in our house for us to find. It was Noah and the Ark storybooks and bible verses taped to doors. But it started as music. One song, in particular, called "I Can Only Imagine" by MercyMe, was the first song I remembered her singing after the funeral, although it seemed like it was years later, at least it happened.

The Walrus

Dad was our rock, always steady, but mom was our rainbow. Her return was a sign that we could be OK again. It would be a process, and our family would always have a hole in it, but someday we would be able to be OK.

And we are. It has been ten years this February, and we remember Ben with tears, but also with hope. We pray that one day we will be with him again, but until then, Teddijoy, the latest addition to our family as of 2010, is growing up with stories of the brave little boy who adventured through the gates of Heaven and is waiting for us there.

Creative Nonfiction

Tyler

Kayla White

A decade ago, I listened to a close friend rewrite how they discovered peace as a child. The story now returns to me in a series of flashbacks. There is a lesson to be learned here. My job is not to transcribe the what, but rather the when. Names of people and have been altered to protect the innocent.

Tyler lived in the cardboard box at the end of twenty-seventh, under the streetlamp beside Old Dan's Antiques. Three days have passed since we've seen him. We asked Old Dan's shop keeper, Miss Anabella, if she knows where Tyler had gone; she sells us a giggle and a few pops. We drink the pops, return the giggles, and leave the shop empty handed. We ask Mama if she knows where Tyler has gone; with her fangs drawn to her jaw, she says we shouldn't be chasing street rats. Tyler was missing. We search up and down the block looking for that box; asking anyone who comes too close, but nobody would believe us. Everybody over the age of twenty-three shakes us off like ticks. And everybody under the age of twelve swings from our arms like tree tires. So, we decide to search the naked side of Magnolia; where the shops all went bankrupt because no one cares too much on that side of town.

Tyler really lives in East Magnolia in a house we've never seen with a family he never talks about. We all just assume fatigue broke them down, like every other breathing body on the wrong side of the block. Once, I asked Miss Anabella if she knew the Washingtons, but she just sucked her teeth and sold me yellow pop I never asked for.

"What if he's—" I hear Aaron think aloud. The sun is beginning to set, and the sky is dancing with purple light. I shake my head, even though I am walking four paces behind him and know he won't catch the gesture.

Sami places her hand on my shoulder. No words. Most days we don't need to speak to trade points across the table. She reads my mind, I think. She just knows how to hear me when the world goes quiet. Mama says it's because we're twins. Sometimes I believe her. But most days I believe in science.

"Ay-o guys, what's over there?" Jay calls as we pass the display on seventy-third. We collect around him like a puddle. The Pigs-Mart has a large window that reflects every shadow across the street without letting the world know you're looking. A plastic pig with cut-out coins hanging from the ceiling shows us the chubby woman at the register. I am glancing at the pig, wondering why no one paints dollar signs in the little black orbs. And then I see it. The chubby woman with grey hair is wearing the flower dress from Old Dan's. The one with the little white roses against the pink fabric. The one that hung in Tyler's doorway like a little curtain; always flying in the wind.

"Where did she get that?" Aaron yells in sync with Sami's, "We have to speak to her!"

I shake my head. We could burst into Pigs-Mart, hang her by the teeth, force truth from her pores. But I knew Tyler. And that dress. The chubby woman with grey hair, with ruby nails, is wearing a dress that had never met the wind. The colors are too bright. The flowers are too clean. But somewhere behind that money-monger pig rests a clue to the mystery. And so there

we are, marching knees first into the store like an army of ants. A little bell sings above our heads.

"Hello, hello! Welcome to—"

We can't hear the woman over the drumming of our heartbeats. We pretend to not notice the way our knees begin to wobble with every step that brings us closer. Six steps from the register, my legs sink into the floorboards. Everyone collapses into my spine, but we don't break concentration. We don't break concentration until Aaron molds my shoulder into a question mark with his index finger. The woman at the front, in a familiar dress, wears a familiar face. The pink dress, the white flowers. We should have seen it before. We should have seen the sag in her shoulders. The grey eyes swollen against the brown skin. Like rainclouds hovering above the sleeping garden.

"Tyler?" I heard Sami sigh.

"Can I ... help ... y'all?" the woman asks, but her eyes are telling another story.

Everyone looks to me to speak. Their tongues are flopping around the ground looking around for new mouths to call home. But Tyler was missing. And his face is watching us behind a set of thick glasses, tapping the counter with rubies. Tyler was missing. No one would find him unless we pick ourselves off the ground, put our Big Kid Attitude on, and find the clues to bring him home.

"We're looking for our friend," I politely yell to the woman because I am too far away to speak calmly. My limbs have not let the floorboards breathe; so, six steps from the register, I describe Tyler. Only, I realize I am describing the woman behind the register in smaller details. This is where we find the boy. Crouching behind the counter; his introduction is slow and careful. His hands are filled with small cardboard boxes. The kind that hold gum packets or candy. These boxes are too small to house boys named Tyler at the end of twenty-seventh. Under the streetlight, of course. And so I ask the boy, too, "We're looking for our friend." And I can tell he understands who we are. And I can tell he has become tangled in a lie. The others don't know it yet; maybe because they are still searching the ground for their flopping tongues. We need to leave before anyone begins to understand too much.

"I'm sorry to bother. We will be headed on now."

And the boy thanks me with his eyes. Maybe he is my twin, too. The world is growing incredibly loud with every standing second. Yet I hear him say, *Thank you*. Yet I hear him say, *None of you should be here*. Yet there we were. A couple of "richies," as the other kids call us, playing with the "rats," as the other kids call them.

The boy bows his head. And the woman asks one more question. Aaron, Sami, Jay, and I already have our feet out the door before she can finish that question. The display pig watches our descent. As we pass Mister Money-Bags, and I whisper a simple request. *Please bring Tyler back to us*.

The bell above us sings in the doorway.

Poetry
First Place

Where I'm From

Mya S. Kenton

I am from pineapples,
from water and warheads.
I am from the big brick house
(red, hard, it feels rough).
I am from the sunflower seeds,
the green apples, sour and hard.
I'm from Christmas Dinners and brown eyes,
from Lisa and Odis.
I'm from consistency and hard work,
from "don't take that apart" and "don't touch that."
I'm from the Christian faith,
where Jesus is Lord.
I'm from Fairfax, Virginia, and Charleston, South Carolina,
from rice and seafood,
from the story of how my father left home to fight in a war to protect my freedom.
In our family room, there are pictures positioned all over.
I am from a place where you can always expect to find something you love.
It is a place for love.

Visual
2019 Sculptures in the City



Botanical Hand

Mario Torres

Burnt Wood

Poetry
Second Place

Quicksand

Lorelee Vetter

I am in quicksand
But it is not quick
That would cheapen the experience
I am
Slowly sinking into the mire of my mind
A thought creates a bubble
Which rises to the surface and
Pops
Dragging me lower
It is frightening, yes, but
It is pleasant
And here you come, to this place
My thinking space
And scatter ripples across the waveform of
My thoughts and
Disturb my moorings
Like a lisp in arsenic
You appear
So please go away;
I'm sinking.

The Walrus

Visual
2019 Sculptures in the City



Yesterday
Susan Warren
Steel, Bike Parts, Tassels

Poetry

First Deceptions

Nabeeha Ahmad

Clinking glass
Muted conversations
Occasionally, a rare laugh, before it is quickly stifled
She sits quietly, primly folded satin pressed firm against her soft hands
Round cheeks dusted, naive eyes tarred with mascara
Speaks not a word.

Just front of her, on the stage, sit the bride and groom
Eyes glimmering, cheeks flushed with happiness
She wonders if she would ever find someone
To make her as content
But knows she is right for none.

Behind her, a group of men cackling at a crude joke
Their shattering, mocking laughter
Echoing into the past
She adjusts the loose folds of her dress
Re-covering an insistent tear.

To one side, a table of teenaged boys
Enter a heated discussion
It seemed everyone fought over such trivial matters
These days
Yet
Such impassioned countenances
She tugs at the velvety material of her dress around her midsection
The rigid cloth disturbing her breathing.

She turns her attention to her other side
Banal discussions between her tablemates
She interjects with her opinion
Her comment warring with the crackling roar of the table candles
They pause, their vacuous gazes flickering slightly
Before returning to their conversation
And she returns to her ever-slipping dress.

Murmurs, lost conversations, whispered thoughts
Swirled remotely
Her attention was caught by the sparkling diamond, hanging
From the chandelier above the closest table

The Walrus

Its many facets catching every imagined color
Different perceptions from different angles.

She adjusts yet again her satin
The loose folds of her sleeves
Which had slid furtively down her arm
Wondering how they had come to be
When they had been stretched ever so stiffly across her shoulders.

Poetry

My Adventure

Ivan Fuentes

Within you there are many miles of adventure that I wish to travel
I want to be able to reach your deepest oceans
Your highest skies
Relax in your sandy beaches
And get lost into your city lights late at night.

The Walrus

Visual
2018 Festival of the Arts

First Place



Taste of Rain
Meghan Oney
Tile, Grout, Acrylic

Poetry

The Anzaldúa State

Autumn Frazer Merritt

I don't feel comfortable in my own skin like I am wearing clothes that don't fit making my skin itch.

I feel trapped within a boundary, where I am continually pushing on the walls trying to expand the perimeter hoping to create just enough room for my escape.

I have misgivings about myself, my family, my culture, and my traditions. I don't know which way to turn do I go left; do I go right? I am in a maze of the unknown.

I clear my conscious mind blocking out all I have learned. Letting my feet settle into the Earth like roots of a tree absorbing the history of Ancestors of times long past, feeding my malnourished soul.

The Walrus

Visual
2018 Festival of the Arts

Second Place



Washington's Monument
Sharon Stewart
Archival Digital Print

Scripts
First Place

Lettera a Mio Padre (Letter to My Father)

Malcolm V. Tatman, IV

FADE IN:

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

CRISTOFOR DE LUCA, 16, Italian-Romanian teenager with an average height and skinny build, waits for his bag at the baggage claim area. As he listens to classical music, he notices the “No Service” at the top of his phone screen. He closes his eyes and exhales a deep SIGH of anger. Cristofor opens his eyes from a startling pat on the shoulder by PETER, 23, dressed in all-black, dark shades, slicked-back hair, and incessantly chewing gum. Cristofor takes an earbud out and turns to Peter as he points to the conveyor belt. Cristofor looks at the conveyor belt noticing their bags coming up.

CRISTOFOR

(in Italian)

Yes, sir.

Pausing the music, Cristofor takes the other earbud out, wraps the headphones around his phone, and puts it in his pocket. He grabs one of the bags and looks at the tag. The tag reads, “MANUEL RICCI.” Cristofor turns in Peter’s direction.

CRISTOFOR

Manni!

MANNI, 21, and similar in attire to Peter emerges from behind him and walks toward Cristofor with an unlit cigar in between his teeth.

MANNI

For me, buddy?

Cristofor hands Manni the bag.

CRISTOFOR

(in Italian)

Yes, sir.

Cristofor grabs the tag of the next bag looking at the name “PETER RICCI.” He pulls that bag off of the conveyor belt and grabs the tag of the next bag that reads “CRISTOFOR DE LUCA.”

CRISTOFOR

Peter! I’ve got both of our bags.

Peter walks over to Cristofor and grabs his bag.

PETER

(in Italian)

Thank you, buddy.

EXT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

NOTE: In this scene, the characters speak in Italian with subtitles, unless otherwise indicated.

Cristofor, Manni, and Peter walk through the exit of the airport terminal to the pick-up/taxi area and are greeted by Cristofor’s aunt, MARTINA DE LUCA, 42, beautifully youthful for her age in a shabby dress and his uncle, ANTONIO DE LUCA, 50, gray in the beard and scalp, dressed in raggedy clothes, and mildly hunched in the back. They both wait by two parked cars.

MARTINA

My God, Cristofor!

Martina runs cheerfully at the sight of Cristofor who, now caught off guard, is subjected to hugs and kisses on the head from her. Feeling like a baby, Cristofor cringes through.

Martina takes a hold of Cristofor's face and looks at him gleefully while Manni and Peter poke fun and laugh as they look on from behind him.

MARTINA

My handsome, handsome nephew! The only thing I've seen of you is your baby pictures from your mother.

Martina realizes that Cristofor might not understand anything that she is saying and pulls his head toward her bosom as she looks to Manni and Peter.

MARTINA

How is his Italian? Good or no?

Manni begins to answer Martina until Cristofor cuts him off and answers himself. Martina looks back down to him as he answers.

MANNI

His native tongue is—

CRISTOFOR

—Perfect, Aunt Martina! My Italian is perfect.

Manni gestures his hand in agreement with Cristofor.

MANNI

Just like his father, ma'am.

Martina smiling in appreciation, embraces Cristofor with an even larger hug this time and one last kiss on his head.

MARTINA

Perfect! Because Italian is all me and your uncle know.

Manni, Peter, and, Martina laugh at her last statement, but the party is quickly interrupted by Antonio, who now walks up to the group.

ANTONIO

That's quite enough, darling.

Antonio places his hand on Martina's lower back once he reaches the group. He looks down on Cristofor with a face of disappointment.

ANTONIO

He's not here for that, nor is he here for a vacation. No sense in acting otherwise.

Martina puts her hands upon Antonio's face in an emotional manner. Antonio looks her in the eyes.

MARTINA

My love, this is our first time meeting --

Antonio, not giving in to her sentiment, grabs both of Martina's hands and kisses them.

ANTONIO

—His father wants him here to work and nothing else! He's here to learn how to be a man and his father seems to think that cutting wood will do it. So, let's get on with it.

Martina, upset with Antonio's remarks, grabs Cristofor's bag of luggage and heads toward the first car.

Antonio tosses a set of keys to Peter who catches them.

ANTONIO

You and your friend can take the second car.

Antonio walks over to assist Martina while Manni walks up to Cristofor putting one hand on his shoulder and one hand out.

MANNI

(in English)

C'mon, big guy.

Cristofor SIGHS in disappointment and takes his phone out of his pocket.

CRISTOFOR

(in English)

I can't just keep it for my music. I mean my father already turned the service off.

MANNI

(in English)

Your father said no electronics after we landed. He's already furious, man. Let's not make it worse.

Cristofor pulls an enveloped letter from the back pocket of his jeans and gives his phone to Manni.

CRISTOFOR

(in English)

Can we at least stop by the post office, so I can send this?

Manni takes a quick glance at the letter and sees that it is to JIMMY DE LUCA, Cristofor's father and stands up.

MANNI

(yelling)

Hey, sir. Is there a post office nearby?

ANTONIO (O.S.)

Yeah, we can stop there on the way to the house.

On hearing Antonio's response, Manni ushers Cristofor over into Antonio and Martina's car. Antonio gets into the driver seat and Martina in the passenger seat.

Manni and Peter put their bags in the trunk of the other car and then get in with Peter in the driver seat and Manni in the passenger seat. Peter HONKS the horn twice and both cars take off.
END OF SUBTITLES.

INT. BACKSEAT OF CAR #1 (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

Cristofor fiddles with the letter he is about to send off to his father in the States. He rolls the window down and looks out noticing that San Luca, Italy, is not the prettiest of places. The city is quite shabby and stricken with poverty.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Both cars pull up in front of the local post office.

INT. FRONT SEAT OF CAR #1 - CONTINUOUS

Antonio looks into the mirror at Cristofor.

ANTONIO

(in Italian; subtitled)

Alright, boy. Go and do your thing.

Cristofor does not look up or respond. He appears hesitant.

ANTONIO

(in Italian; subtitled)

You wanted to come here right?!

Cristofor, feeling rushed, opens the door and gets out.

EXT. POST OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Cristofor closes the car door and walks up to the mail collection box. He is again hesitant. He pulls up his sleeve and looks at his arm as there is a huge bruise on it.

INT. FRONT SEAT OF CAR #2 - CONTINUOUS

Manni pats his hand on the side of the door and becomes impatient with Cristofor's hesitance.

MANNI

Cris! C'mon man, hurry up!

EXT. POST OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Cristofor pulls the sleeve back down and is now sure about why he is sending this letter off. He opens the hatch of the collection box and puts the letter in. He exhales a SIGH of relief. He walks back to the car and gets in. Peter HONKS the horn twice and they are off once again.

INT. BACKSEAT OF CAR #1 (MOVING) - DAY

Both cars pull up to an old brick structure with doors about every eight feet from each other. In front of one of the doors sits two children who play a hand game and LAUGH with each other. Next to them sits an old man who supervises them as he smokes a cigar. Cristofor sits anxiously as he looks out the window.

Antonio and Martina get out of the car. Antonio walks over to Peter and Manni's car while Martina tends to Cristofor's bag in the trunk.

ANTONIO (O.S.)

(in Italian; subtitled)

Are you guys staying nearby?

INT. FRONT SEAT OF CAR #2 - CONTINUOUS

NOTE: In this scene, the characters speak in Italian with subtitles.

Peter continues conversing with Antonio. Martina is seen through the windshield as she takes Cristofor's bag out of the trunk. Smoke from Manni's cigar lingers throughout the scene.

PETER

Yes, sir. We're here on business for Jimmy. We'll be a few roads down and Manni will check in on you guys throughout the days.

ANTONIO

(looking between Manni and Peter)

Why'd he send two of you? If you don't mind me asking.

PETER

Jimmy knows he's highly respected in San Luca, but the news here hasn't been good lately. So, just as a, uh, what's the word Jimmy called it Manni?

MANNI

(puffing the cigar)

Precaution?

PETER

(snapping his finger)

Precaution! Yes! So, just a precaution, he sent Jimmy along. Gotta make sure no one touches his son or you guys.

END OF SUBTITLES.

INT. BACKSEAT OF CAR #1 - CONTINUOUS

Martina opens Cristofor's door and leans down to look at him.

MARTINA

(in Italian; subtitled)

C'mon, nephew. In the house we go.

Cristofor gets out of the car, closes the door, and grabs one of his bags from Martina. They both head toward the one of the doors.

EXT./INT. BEDROOM - DAY

NOTE: In this scene, the characters speak in Italian with subtitles, unless otherwise indicated.

Martina accompanies Cristofor into a room that is lifeless with just a dresser, closet, and a bed. She sits the bag she is carrying at the foot of the bed while Cristofor lays the bag he is carrying on the bed. Martina puts her arm around Cristofor's shoulder.

MARTINA

Do you need help unpacking nephew?

CRISTOFOR

No, ma'am. I've got this. Thank you, though.

Martina kisses Cristofor on the head.

MARTINA

Okay, I'm going to get started on dinner and I want you to make yourself comfortable.

Martina walks over to the door, grabs the doorknob, and turns around looking at Cristofor in a remorseful manner.

MARTINA

I don't know all the details of why your father sent you here, but I have told Antonio that you are to be treated with respect.

Martina leaves the room and closes the door. Cristofor, sitting on the bed and pulls out an iPod. He puts the headphones in his ears and walks to the door to lock it. He presses a button on the iPod and classical music PLAYS.

Cristofor kicks his shoes off and positions his feet and arms into the first position of ballet. He continues into the second, third, fourth, and fifth positions.

On completion of the fifth, Cristofor forms his body back into the first position and looks at the opposite side of the room. He does a slow and methodical chaîné across. Smiling at his success, he does an elegant waltz maneuver back toward the door. Now, in a fit of excitement, he unsuccessfully does a faster chaîné hitting his knee on the bed frame and CRASHES to the floor. Upset with his overconfidence, he bangs the floor once with his fist.

There is a JIGGLING of the door knob and three KNOCKS on the door.

ANTONIO

(yelling)

Hey! What's going on in there? Open up!

Cristofor quickly yanks the headphones out of his ear and slides the iPod under the bed. He has a mild limp as he walks to the door and opens it.

ANTONIO

What's all that noise for, boy?

Cristofor raises his knee up to show Antonio.

CRISTOFOR

My apologies, uncle. I slipped and hit my knee on the floor.

Antonio looks at Cristofor's knee and pokes his head into the room.

ANTONIO

Is the floor wet?

CRISTOFOR

No, sir. I think it's just my socks.

Antonio looks at Cristofor with a look of disbelief.

ANTONIO

Dinner should be done soon. I'll have Martina look at it before we eat.

CRISTOFOR

Yes, sir.

Antonio walks away and Cristofor closes the door behind him and locks it. He grabs the iPod from under the bed and belly-flops onto the bed. He grabs a journal with a pen in its binding from his bag. He puts the headphones back into his ear and begins to write.

CRISTOFOR (V.O.)

(in English)

Twenty-fourth of May, year 2018. It is now two days after my sixteenth birthday and it should go without saying that my being here at the toe of Italy's boot, San Luca, Calabria, was not the gift I was expecting nor is it a gift at all.

END OF SUBTITLES.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Cristofor, Antonio, and Martina eat at the dining room table in silence.

CRISTOFOR (V.O.)

It would be dishonest of me if I said I hated it here. I mean, I've only just landed hours ago, but from the States to here, the mood has not changed. It's honestly making the air stuffy and we're all suffering.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Antonio, with eyeglasses sitting on the bridge of his nose, sits on the couch as he reads a book and smoke's a cigar.

CRISTOFOR (V.O.)

Uncle Antonio knows how to put on a front, but he's easy to read.

Antonio looks up as Cristofor walks up to him.

CRISTOFOR

(in Italian; subtitled)

Would you like me to take your wine glass, Uncle?

ANTONIO

(in Italian; subtitled)

No, son. I'll tend to it myself. Now, make yourself useful and help your aunt in the kitchen.

CRISTOFOR

Yes, sir.

Cristofor walks away toward the kitchen.

CRISTOFOR (V.O.)

As much as his body language doesn't want to admit it,
he's being a hard-ass against his will.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

At the kitchen sink, Cristofor dries and puts away dishes as Martina hands them to him.

CRISTOFOR (V.O.)

Easier to read is Aunt Martina and she is obviously not
okay with any of this. She feels bad for me, but I mostly
feel bad for her.

Cristofor bounces back and forth as he needs to urinate.

MARTINA

(in Italian; subtitled)

You have to pee, nephew?

Cristofor nods his head continuously and Martina chuckles.

MARTINA

(in Italian; subtitled)

Go, go, go!

Cristofor hurries out of the kitchen to the bathroom.

MARTINA

(in Italian; subtitled)

No more wine for you, mister.

Martina continues to laugh under her breath and then suddenly stops slamming the dish towel
into the sink. She begins to weep.

CRISTOFOR (V.O.)

With such a soft heart and positive persona, she simply
cannot take my uncle doing my father's bidding.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Cristofor stands in the hallway next to a room with an ajar door. His father, JIMMY DE LUCA, 46,
tall, well-dressed, and big-in-the-stomach, stands beside him and greets a line of men as they
enter the room. In the room, Cristofor sees a man as he sits at a table with tape around his
mouth and a bloodied nose. Jimmy closes the door and kneels down to Cristofor's height.

JIMMY

Crissy! My boy gets to be a man today. Look at all these
people that came out to see you. Sixteen years old. You
ready?!

Cristofor looks at the now closed door and looks down at the floor and shakes his head.

JIMMY

What do you mean, no? What's wrong? We've been
talking about this for months now, Cris.

Cristofor now looks at Jimmy with anger on his face.

CRISTOFOR

Yes, dad. We've talked about this for months, years even,
but I never said I wanted to do THIS!

Cristofor angles his hands toward the closed door.

CRISTOFOR

Or be a part of THIS!

Cristofor gestures his hand back and forth between him and Jimmy.

JIMMY

What the hell are you trying to say? Huh?

Jimmy slaps Cristofor and points his finger in his face angrily.

JIMMY

What the hell are you tryna say?!

CRISTOFOR

All the guys turn sixteen and have to beat the crap outta somebody, Dad. For what? Dip their toes in the family business? To hell with it. I want absolutely no part in this shit, I'm sorry.

Jimmy looks at Cristofor for a few seconds and SLAPS him even harder this time. He grabs Cristofor's shirt and pulls him in.

JIMMY

(in a low voice)

Don't you ever fucking talk to me like that again. You hear me? I'll fucking kill you.

Jimmy pushes Cristofor out of his face and stands up.

JIMMY

(fixing his suit)

Now, go to your fucking room. I ain't done with you, yet.

Cristofor gets up as Jimmy enters the room and closes the door.

CRISTOFOR (V.O.)

In comparison to back home in Vegas, I'm not sure of the crime and gangster activity in San Luca has anything on the temper of my father.

Cristofor walks to his room as he hears PUNCHES, BANGS, and MOANS coming from the room and quinces at each sound.

INT. CRISTOFOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cristofor sits on his bed and waits for Jimmy to come to his room.

CRISTOFOR (V.O.)

He's not a guy of giving people options. If it wasn't a "Yes" or "Yes, sir," he'd put his hands on you and that went for everybody. No one ever dared saying anything along the lines of "No" to him.

Jimmy arrives to Cristofor's room with a towel and wipes the blood off his hands with it. He takes off his wedding ring off and puts it on top of the towel and stands in the doorway.

JIMMY

You know I try to do all I can for you, but look at where we are. You embarrass me in front of company and talk down the family name. Why?

CRISTOFOR

(under his breath after Jimmy)

I don't want to be a criminal.

JIMMY

(rolling his sleeves up and walking toward
Cristofor)

I didn't catch that. Now stand up and be a man. Look at
me!

Cristofor stands up and looks at Jimmy infuriated.

CRISTOFOR

I said I don't want to be a fucking criminal, Dad. You and
Ma came to the States sixteen years ago for you to do
what? Have people killed, collect drug money, police at
the door every other day? It's time well-spent, but not on
being productive, I'm sorry.

Jimmy grabs Cristofor by the shirt and slams him against the wall.

JIMMY

You calling me a fucking deadbeat, you little shit?

MARIE DE LUCA, 33, big eyes with a head full of hair, runs into the room and sees the scuffle. She
grabs Jimmy by the arm and tries to pull him off Cristofor.

MARIE

(screaming)

Oh, my god, Jimmy! What are you doing? He's just a kid,
baby.

Jimmy pushes Marie off with his shoulder and she falls to the floor.

JIMMY

(yelling)

Get the hell outta here before I hurt you next!

Marie scoots across the floor into the hallway as she sobs. Jimmy throws Cristofor into the
wooden doors of his closet and breaks them. Jimmy stands over Cristofor and notices a pair of
ballet shoes in the debris. Cristofor tries to grab them as Jimmy picks them up.

CRISTOFOR

(yelling)

Dad, no!

Jimmy takes a good look at the shoes and turns to look at Cristofor with a face of disgust.

JIMMY

What the hell is this? You a fucking fag now? You want to
be a QUEER?!

CRISTOFOR

(crying)

It's just ballet shoes, Dad. I want to dance. I just, I just
want to dance.

Jimmy keeps a tight grip on the shoes with one in each hand and walks out of the room in a
hurry. Cristofor regains his composure and scurries after his Jimmy.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jimmy walks with heavy steps toward the fireplace. Cristofor stops keeping his distance from
Jimmy.

JIMMY

(yelling)

You want to fucking DANCE?!

CRISTOFOR

(crying)

Dad, no. Please.

Jimmy throws the ballet shoes into the fire and turns to Cristofor. He walks toward him pointing his finger.

JIMMY

I ain't raising no fags in this house. I'm raising men!

Jimmy walks past Cristofor and storms down the hallway.

JIMMY (O.S.)

But, do I have something for you! Gonna go stay with your fucking uncle, so you can cut wood all day like I did when I was 16! I can't fucking believe this kid. Wants to be a fucking princess.

A door SLAMS in the background that startles Cristofor.

CRISTOFOR (V.O.)

I could've hurt the guy in that room and stopped all of this, but every part of me told me to say "no" to tradition and do something that was meaningful to me. It just sucks that saying no to tradition—

Heartbroken with red and watery eyes, Cristofor looks into the fireplace as it CRACKLES from the shoes burning. He stares deeply into the fire and exudes a face of anger.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

NOTE: In this scene, the characters speak in Italian with subtitles, unless otherwise indicated.

Cristofor lunges forward to chop an upright log of wood in half and discharges a loud GRUNT as he splits it into two. He stands back up and again, exudes a face of anger.

CRISTOFOR (V.O.)

(in English)

—Meant saying no to him.

Nearby, Antonio bundles pieces of wood together and ties them up with rope next to a car with one of the rear doors open. He puts the bundles of wood in the backseat and notices the anger in Cristofor's body language.

ANTONIO

That's enough, son. Take it easy. The wood ain't done nothing to you.

Antonio grabs a beer and a bottle of water from a cooler in the backseat and closes the door. Cristofor turns to him and Antonio tosses him the bottle of water.

ANTONIO

Take a break.

Cristofor and Antonio both sit in lawn chairs and a long silence ensues. Antonio stares at an angry Cristofor who has yet to drink his water and is staring at the ground. Antonio CRACKS open the beer and begins to drink it.

ANTONIO

You have every right to be upset with your father.

Antonio captures Cristofor's attention who now looks at him.

ANTONIO

I, too, am upset with him. We lost Mother sometime before we lost Father, and when he passed, Jimmy took a

turn for the worse and got in business with the wrong people.

Cristofor opens the bottle of water and begins to drink as he continues to listen to Antonio.

ANTONIO

He took the inheritance money that mother and father saved for me and him and left with a pregnant woman, your mother, and went to America. Took that dirty business with him, too.

Cristofor puts the water bottle on the ground and sits cross-legged in the chair.

CRISTOFOR

You said he took the inheritance money. Behind your back?

ANTONIO

Sure did. Told me that I was meant to cut wood and him to make a name for himself in the States.

CRISTOFOR

I'm so sorry, uncle. I never knew.

Antonio chugs what little is left in the can of beer.

ANTONIO

It's fine. I mean, granted, your father keeps the lights on for me and Marie considering woodcutting isn't the best paying profession. Here, at least.

Antonio squeezes crushing a now empty beer can and places it on the ground.

ANTONIO

But that also means that I depend greatly on the man, even if I don't like it. For example, your father sent you here for me to discipline you and pay me for it. I hate being okay with that. I'm not okay with that, but what choice do I have?

Cristofor looks at the ground as his heart begins to feel for Antonio. The moment is interrupted by the HONKS of a speeding car, which catch the attention of both him and Antonio. They stand up to see who it might be.

END OF SUBTITLES.

INT./EXT. FRONT SEAT OF CAR #2 - DAY

NOTE: In this scene, the characters speak in Italian with subtitles, unless otherwise indicated. The car skids to a halt with its side facing Antonio and Cristofor. The car is carrying Peter and Manni. Antonio and Cristofor run over to Manni's passenger seat door.

MANNI

(in English)

Cris, c'mon! We gotta go man, it's your father.

ANTONIO

What happened?

MANNI

Jimmy had a heart attack. Marie just called us, and we're headed to the airport.

Antonio lowers his head and SIGHS in disappointment. Cristofor hurries into the backseat of the car and fastens his seat belt. Antonio brings his head back up to eye level and Manni puts his hand on Antonio's shoulder.

MANNI

I know you can't come and it's such short notice, but—

ANTONIO

(putting a finger up)

—Yeah, yeah, yeah. One second.

Antonio goes over to his car and grabs a shoebox out of the trunk. He walks back to Cristofor's door and points his finger down, signaling Cristofor to roll down his window. Cristofor rolls down his window.

ANTONIO

(handing Cristofor the shoe box)

Here. From me and Martina.

Cristofor tries to open the shoe box, but Antonio stops him.

CRISTOFOR

(smiling)

Thank you so much—

ANTONIO

—Don't open it now. Later.

Antonio turns his head to Manni.

ANTONIO

Please keep me updated.

MANNI

Of course, sir.

The car pulls off in a hurry. Cristofor rolls up his window and rests his head against it with a saddened face.

END OF SUBTITLES.

INT./EXT. CRISTOFOR'S BEDROOM - DAY

Cristofor sits on his bed in a black suit with his head down. Marie, in a black dress and veil, delivers a last few thanks to people offering condolences. She enters his room and closes his door. She walks toward him holding a letter and sits next to him. A short silence ensues.

MARIE

Your father got this a week ago.

Marie uncovers the black veil from her face and hands Cristofor the letter. He sees that it is the letter he sent while he was back in Italy.

MARIE

He sat down to read it and that's when it happened.

Cristofor feels bad about this and sheds tears as he puts his head on Marie's shoulder. Marie grabs his face and wipes his tears.

MARIE

There is nothing to feel bad about, my love. He needed to read it. Every word of it.

Cristofor feeling slightly better fixes his composure and Marie rubs his back.

MARIE

And I needed to read it too.

Marie grabs a BROCHURE off Cristofor's dresser and hands it to him. It is a brochure to a local ballet training school.

MARIE

He was wrong to expect you to want to be the person he wanted you to be, and I was wrong to let him think that way and even more so to have him treat you that way.

Cristofor opens the brochure and looks at the pictures within it. He stops at one picture of a group of boys smiling with the words, "BEGINNERS WELCOME" printed above it.

Marie kisses Cristofor on his head and leaves the room. Cristofor grabs the shoebox from his bag and opens it to find a pair of new ballet shoes accompanied by a note written in Italian.

ANTONIO (V.O.)

(in Italian; subtitled)

Do what makes you happy, Uncle Antonio.

Cristofor smiles as he feels that everything is working out for him now.

FADE OUT.

The Walrus

**Visual
2018 Festival of the Arts**

Third Place



Toilet
Jamie Brewer
Wire

Scripts
Second Place

Young Love
Skylar Vasicek

FADE IN:

EXT. APOLLO UNIVERSITY - DAY

The picturesque campus of Apollo University is buzzing with excitement on the first day of class of the school year. Sprinkled around campus are sign in tables as well as tables with snacks and flyers. There are party balloons and streamers everywhere. New and returning students are taking their luggage to their dorms. Friends hug and reunite after a summer of being apart. Two of these friends are CLARA VEGA, a 20-year-old girl with long, dark hair and dazzling, green eyes, and JUNE SULLIVAN, also 20, with blonde hair and blue eyes. Both girls are sophomores at Apollo University.

JUNE

Clara! Over here!

Clara sees her friend June bolt over to her and they embrace.

CLARA

June! I missed you this summer! How was the Caribbean?

JUNE

It was great! I pet a dolphin, and I think I actually got a tan and I missed you lots! What about you? How was your summer?

CLARA

It was good! Besides visiting family in Guatemala for a month, I mostly just dog-sat for my neighbors.

JUNE

Sounds like a good summer! Hey, would you want to get pizza for lunch?

CLARA

Good idea!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PIZZA PALOOZA - DAY

Clara and June are sitting in a corner booth of Pizza Palooza, a typical pizza shop. There are the remnants of a veggie pizza in front of the girls.

JUNE

So, Clara, I've blabbed enough about my boyfriend. How is your love life?

CLARA

You know, the usual. Nonexistent.

JUNE

Come on, there's got to be at least one guy that's good enough for you! What about that guy?

June motions towards a group of seven cross-country runners, all in Apollo University jackets. The group is sitting on the other side of the pizza shop.

CLARA

Um ... which one?

JUNE

The one with the curly brown hair and brown eyes.

Clara looks over to the guy that June describes. He has the build of a runner: lean and tall. He is also talking with most of the people in the group, like he was friends with everyone.

CLARA

Well, I mean, I've never met him before. But I guess he is pretty cute.

JUNE

See? I know your type enough. Why don't you go talk to him?

CLARA

What? No! I'd be too nervous! Plus, it'd be in front of his friends!

JUNE

OK fine, don't talk to him. Your loss, sister.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COLLEGE LECTURE HALL - DAY

Clara and June take a seat in the second row of seats, toward the middle. They are 10 minutes early to a 9:00 AM criminology class. There are already a decent number of students in the hall, about 20-30. June points out one in particular.

JUNE

Hey, look to your left, in the front row.

Clara gazes over to see the guy from Pizza Palooza. This time, he's not talking to anyone. He seems like he's expectedly waiting for the professor to start the class. Clara looks at June.

CLARA

Is that the guy from...?

JUNE

Yup.

Clara pauses and looks back over at the guy.

CLARA

Maybe I have a chance with him now...

JUNE

Trust me, you have a chance.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE

Over the next month or so, Clara seems to see the guy from Pizza Palooza everywhere she goes. She sees him in the cafeteria, in the halls between classes, and of course, in the criminology class.

CUT TO:

INT. CRIMINOLOGY LECTURE HALL - DAY

Right before the criminology class is supposed to start, June has had enough of the romantic tension. She walks up to the guy, sitting in the front row, rather than going to her usual spot in the second row.

JUNE

Hi! My name is June.

MILO

I'm Milo. It's nice to meet you!

Milo extends his hand and June shakes it briefly.

JUNE

So, funny story, Milo. You see that girl behind you looking at her book?

They both look over to Clara, who is reading the end of the chapter for the week in the Criminology textbook. Milo looks back at June.

MILO

Yeah, what about her?

JUNE

Her name is Clara, and she may or may not like you. The thing is, she is kind of shy. So, if you could please go and talk to her, I would greatly appreciate it.

MILO

Um ... sure, but what do I say? "So I heard you like me?" "Want to go on a date?" I don't know.

JUNE

Just introduce yourself. Trust me.

MILO

Um, ok. ...

Milo makes his way over to Clara and sits next to her. Clara's eyes widen a little, surprised to see her crush sitting next to her.

MILO

Hi, I'm Milo.

Milo extends his hand to Clara.

CLARA

My name is Clara.

MILO

It's nice to meet you.

As the professor walks in, June sits on the other side of Clara.

JUNE

So, what did I miss?

CUT TO:

MONTAGE

Now, for the next two months, any time Clara and Milo see each other, they at least wave to each other, but most of the time they talk for at least a few minutes.

DISSOLVE TO:

It is around midterm time, so June and Clara are studying in the library for their Criminology class. Milo enters the library and sees Clara. He walks up to her.

MILO

Hey Clara, there's a question that I've been meaning to ask you. But can I ask you over there?

Milo motions towards an area that would be out of earshot of June but where June could still see them.

CLARA

Sure.

The Walrus

Milo leads Clara to the spot.

CLARA

What's up?

MILO

I was just ... you know ...

CLARA

What?

Milo looks down.

MILO

I was wondering if you wanted to go on a date with me.

Clara pauses for a moment.

MILO

Please?

CLARA

Sorry! Yes, I'd love to go on a date with you. But just letting you know, sooner or later you're going to have to meet my dad.

MILO

So? Meeting the parents is kind of something couples have to get past at some point.

CLARA

Yeah, but he's a police officer, and he's pretty skeptical of any guys that I try to date.

MILO

I see. So, meeting your dad might be harder than I originally thought?

CLARA

Yes?

MILO

OK. The situation might be a little nerve wracking, but I think I can handle it.

Clara smiles.

CLARA

Thank you.

MILO

For what?

CLARA

For being generally alright with meeting my dad.

MILO

Of course! I just hope he likes me.

CLARA

Maybe you could meet him over winter break, before you go home to your family. He's normally more relaxed about things near holidays anyway.

MILO

Good idea! Especially if he'd be more relaxed to meet me. But I do have one question.

CLARA

Yes?

MILO

Since winter break is about a month away, am I still allowed to date you before then?

CLARA

Of course!

MILO

Good. Can I pick you up tomorrow, then? We could catch the bus and go bowling or something.

CLARA

Sure! I'll be ready by 5:30.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE

Clara and Milo go on a few dates over the next few weeks. These dates are things like going bowling, eating ice cream, and going to the local mall to try on different styles of clothing (ex. Hipster or goth). They study together in the library and eat meals together in the cafeteria. Finally, the week before Christmas break arrives.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MILO'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Milo frantically paces back and forth across his dorm room, with Clara sitting on his bed.

CLARA

Just remember, my dad only replies to "Officer Vega," and "sir," and he likes hiking and coffee. That's all he likes people to know about him before they meet him. You'll be fine, I promise.

MILO

If I die tomorrow night, you get all my stuff.

CLARA

Don't worry, Milo. I promise it won't come to that.

MILO

But what if your dad doesn't like me?

CLARA

He will. The thing is, my dad knows I like you, so he wants to like you, too. But he also wants to make sure that you're good for me, which is why he might be a little harsh on you at first.

CUT TO:

INT. CLARA'S FOYER - EVENING

OFFICER VEGA, a man in his mid-40s dressed in his police uniform, hears the doorbell and opens the door to Milo, wearing a button-up and slacks, and Clara, wearing a turtleneck and a corduroy skirt that reaches her knees. Milo has a cup of coffee in his hand. Officer Vega steps onto the porch briefly to greet them.

OFFICER VEGA

Hello, my dear Clara, how are you this evening?

Officer Vega kisses Clara on the forehead.

CLARA

Wonderful, father. How are you? I missed you!

OFFICER VEGA

I've missed you, too, dear.

Officer Vega's attention goes from Clara onto Milo.

OFFICER VEGA

So, this is Milo McCoy ...

MILO

Yes, sir. It's a pleasure to meet you, Officer Vega. I brought you coffee. It's decaf, I promise.

OFFICER VEGA

I appreciate it. Come on in. Dinner's cooling off.

CUT TO:

INT. CLARA'S DINING ROOM - EVENING

Milo and Clara follow Officer Vega into a set dinner table with empanadas, rice, and beans. There are glasses of water at every seat.

MILO

It all looks so good.

OFFICER VEGA

Thank you, it's all from my grandmother's recipes.

MILO

It's all homemade?

CLARA

My family likes to cook. Most recipes that we have are at least three or four generations old.

MILO

That's ... impressive!

CLARA

I'm glad you think so!

Clara, Officer Vega, and Milo sit down at the table.

OFFICER VEGA

Clara, would you like to bless the food?

CLARA

Sure.

The trio holds hands.

CLARA (CONT.)

Heavenly Father, thank you for our dinner. Thank you for bringing us together tonight, with a roof over our heads with a meal to share. Please bless our food, and our conversations, and our relationships. Amen.

MILO AND OFFICER VEGA

Amen.

OFFICER VEGA

That was a beautiful prayer, my dear.

CLARA

Thank you!

As the trio let go of each other's hands, Milo accidentally knocks his glass of water onto Clara. She jumps in her seat a little.

MILO

Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry! Are you ok?

CLARA

Yeah, I'm fine, accidents happen.

Officer Vega heads to the kitchen, grabs a couple of paper towels, comes back to the table, and hands the towels to Clara.

OFFICER VEGA

Are you sure you're ok, dear?

CLARA

Yes, I promise.

MILO

Again, I'm really sor—

CLARA

No need to apologize!

OFFICER VEGA

Yes, there is.

CLARA

Why?

OFFICER VEGA

I know it was an accident, but spilling something does call for an apology.

MILO

Like I said, I'm sorry Clara. I didn't mean to spill the drink on you. Would you like me to get you more water?

CLARA

I forgive you. And that would be nice, actually. Thank you.

Milo walks into the kitchen and fills up Clara's glass with water. For the minute or two that Milo is in the kitchen, Officer Vega whispers to Clara.

OFFICER VEGA

Are you sure about him?

CLARA

Yes, Dad. He's just nervous meeting you.

Milo walks back into the dining room with the glass of water. There is not as much water in it compared to when Officer Vega filled it. Milo sits back in his seat to see Officer Vega staring at him; Clara is looking back and forth between her dad and him.

OFFICER VEGA

So, Milo. I have a question for you.

MILO

OK?

OFFICER VEGA

Why do you want to date my daughter?

CLARA

Dad, is this necessary?

MILO

It's ok, Clara. I don't mind answering. Officer Vega, sir, I know I haven't known your daughter for very long. But I

know that the first time I met her, she had a kind soul. I want to date Clara so that I can not only get to know her soul, but also protect it and love it with my whole heart. I hope that's a good enough answer.

Officer Vega stares at Milo, and then looks over at Clara. Then he looks down at the table for a minute as he thinks about his decision.

OFFICER VEGA

Ok, so here's what I'm thinking you two. You're only allowed to go on dates in public settings or on group dates. While you two are at college, neither of you are allowed in the other's room unless one or both of your roommates are in the room with you. Do I make myself clear?

MILO

Yes, sir!

CLARA

Yes, thank you!

Officer Vega, Clara, and Milo enjoy the rest of their dinner, their conversation, and laughter becoming white noise.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CLARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Milo is on the porch, about to leave, and Clara is with him, saying goodbye. Officer Vega is watching inside from afar, of course.

CLARA

Congrats, that was the fastest my dad has ever liked one of my love interests.

MILO

I'm honored! But just out of curiosity, how many other love interests has he met?

CLARA

Only one, besides you. Not a lot of guys are as ok with meeting the parents.

MILO

I guess I'm one of the lucky ones, then. Anyway, I better head out. Goodnight, my dear.

CLARA

Goodnight, darling.

Milo kisses Clara on the forehead, squeezes her hand, and departs.

FADE OUT.

Scripts

The Wall

Mya S. Kenton

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

A group of three teenagers, HARPER MILLER (14), JACKIE SMITH (14), and RYAN THOMPSON (15), rush by, nearly tripping over each other, to escape a large group of men and women who are armed to the teeth with handmade spears, bows, arrows, and clubs. HARPER takes a sharp left turn, falling into a hole in the ground and out of sight. Being the followers that they are, the other two teens also fall down in the hole with her.

HARPER

Do you think that we lost them?

RYAN peeks above ground, looks right then left and right again. Then goes back down into the hole.

RYAN

(breathing heavily)

I think so, but maybe we should stay down here for a bit later. You know so you girls can ... COUGHS ... your breath.

JACKIE rubs the tears out of her eyes and tries to speak.

JACKIE

This is all so messed up! Why are they trying to kill us?

RYAN

It's probably because they ran out of food and are looking for a midnight snack.

Jackie tears up again.

JACKIE

(panicked)

I don't want to die. It's not fair. Why is this happening to us? What did we ever do wrong?

Harper hits Ryan on his arm and then whimpers.

HARPER

Why would you say something like that to her? You know very well how easily she can be overwhelmed,

RYAN

Sorry, but she should know what's going on.

Harper turns to Jackie.

HARPER

It'll be alright. We just have to stay calm and think.

HARPER (V.O)

Huh, you know it's funny a couple of months ago if you would've asked me "is too much freedom a bad thing?" I would have looked you dead in the eye; smile and said:

"of course not freedom is everything." But of course, I would've been completely wrong. Listen up, I don't know who's watching this, where you are or when, but, whoever you are, you need to thank God that or your government for the fact that you have rules and laws that keep you safe because some people just aren't that lucky. I know that I wasn't first to let's turn back the clock to four months ago.

EXT. UNKNOWN TOWN - MORNING

FLASHBACK

Harper, Jackie, and Ryan are walking around the city trying to sell honey jars. Harper rolls her eyes.

HARPER

I can't believe that old witch has us standing out here trying to sell her honey jars to these poor people. And what's worse, she uses the money that the government gives her to spend on us on these fancy looking jars, so she can charge twice as much as it's originally worth.

Ryan wipes the sweat off his forehead.

RYAN

(annoyed)

You know, complaining like that isn't going to help us sell this crap so you might as well shut up and try harder.

HARPER

But you know that this isn't right. She stole a hive full of bees while the owners weren't home just to have us kids sell the honey for fifteen dollars a jar. And she knows that honey is super hard to come by these days, so people have no choice but to buy it.

RYAN

Come on, she's our foster mother. You know the woman who takes care of us? We can't just bite the hand that feeds us. You know the rules the more we sell the more privileges we receive.

HARPER

Sleeping in a bed, taking a hot bath, and getting to eat human food are not privilege; they're *rights*.

RYAN

Whatever. Just get back to work.

Harper sticks out her tongue at him and walks toward Jackie.

HARPER

What a jerk!

JACKIE

Come on, know he's going through a hard time right now. Can't you be a little bit nicer to him?

Harper folds her arms in disapproval.

JACKIE

Please? For me.

HARPER

Fine.

Harper turns to look at Ryan.

HARPER (V.O)

Jackie was right. He was going through a hard time. Unlike the rest of us unwanted kids, Ryan's parent dropped him off at the foster home about a year and a half ago.

EXT. AN OLD HOUSE - FLASHBACK

A younger looking Ryan with two adults.

HARPER (V.O)

His parents promised to come back for him, but ...

INT. TOWN SQUARE DAY - FLASHBACK

Harper, Jackie, and Ryan walk up to a wall with many different fliers. A big crowd is at the wall reading the newest fliers.

HARPER (V.O)

About two weeks ago on the news wall, we all saw that his parents were really ex-criminals and that they were wanted for multiple murders all over the county.

TWO OF THE FILERS WITH RYAN'S PARENT'S FACES ON THEM

Ryan looks shocked.

HARPER (V.O)

He knew right then and there that they were never coming back for him.

EXT. LONG DIRT PATH EVENING - BACK TO CURRENT TIME

Harper, Jackie, and Ryan are walking around a huge stone wall that stands about thirty stores high.

JACKIE

I wonder what they're building here?

HARPER

I don't know but, whatever it is they've been working on it for the past ten years.

Ryan looks confused.

RYAN

Really? We've passed this thing almost every day and I've never known how long it's been there.

INT. THE OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

The teens walk in the front door.

HARPER

We're back.

Two young twins TOMMY (8) and SAM (8) come out from the back to greet them. One of the twin boys runs up to Harper and jumps into her arms. The other boy jumps into Jackie's arm.

TOMMY

You guys were gone for so long today we were starting to think that you would never come back.

The Walrus

Harper puts the boy on the ground and knees down in front of him.

HARPER

You two know that we would never do that to you.

Sam, the boy in Jackie's arms, turns his head to her.

SAM

Never?

JACKIE

Never. We will always come back to you two, I promise.

Ryan rolls his eyes.

RYAN

You shouldn't make promises you can't keep

Harper stands up and turns to face him.

HARPER

Just because your parents left you behind doesn't mean
we're going to leave them.

Ryan's face twists with anger. He stomps outside. Harper notices Jackie giving her a disapproving look.

HARPER

What?

JACKIE

That was kind of taking it too far don't you think.

Harper shrugs.

HARPER

Whatever. He started it.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Still angry, Ryan fast walks through the wood. He sees a tree and starts to hit and kick it. Breathing heavy, he turns and slides his back up against the tree and sits on the ground. After a few seconds, he begins to cry.

INT. THE OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

Jackie looks out the window with a worried look on her face. Harper walks in.

HARPER

The twins are down for the night.

JACKIE

Ryan's been gone for a long time, don't you think?

HARPER

Who?

JACKIE

(annoyed)

Ryan, of course.

HARPER

Oh yeah, him. He's fine wherever he is.

JACKIE

You know, I hate to say it, but he was right.

Harper looks shocked.

JACKIE

I mean, we don't know what's going to happen to us. We shouldn't make promises.

HARPER

Don't let him get to you.

Harper walks over to Jackie and takes her by the hand.

HARPER

We're fine. Nothing's going to change. I'll make sure that we get by, okay?

So, don't you worry your pretty little head. Okay?

Jackie smiles at Harper.

JACKIE

Okay.

EXT. STONE WALL - NIGHT

HARPER (V.O)

Well, needless to say, I was dead wrong. Apparently, that great wall of stone that took up more than half of our small little country was one giant conspiracy. Formed together by the richest people in our country and six others that surrounded it.

EXT. A BIG FANCY MANSION - NIGHT

People in very fancy clothes shaking hands, drinking wine, and laughing.

HARPER (V.O)

Once that giant wall was finished, those rich people moved in and shut everybody else out. They convinced most of the farmers to move into the wall with them. So, they have the best crops and animals with them.

EXT. BOTTOM OF THE WALL NEAR GATE - NIGHT

Farmers moving through the gate, bringing crops and livestock with them.

EXT. AERIAL VIEW INSIDE THE WALL - NIGHT

HARPER (V.O)

There is also a large lake with fresh water in it. So those people are set for life.

EXT. FRONT GATES - NIGHT

The gates are closing. As they close ...

HARPER (V.O)

All the richest people in the country permanently sealed the gate and left the rest of us out there to die.

INT. OLD HOUSE - TEENS ROOM - DAY

Harper wakes up to the sun in her eyes. She gets out of bed, washes her face, and then heads downstairs.

INT. KITCHEN

Sam and Tommy are running around the small kitchen trying to tag each other. Ryan is sitting at the table peeling potatoes. Jackie is at the stove stirring a pot.

JACKIE (ANGRY)

Hey, you two, if you're not going to help, then at least play outside so that you don't get in the way.

Sam and Tommy pause, turn to each other and laugh. Then they run outside, knocking over a basket full of clean clothes.

JACKIE

The Walrus

Just look at what you've done!

Harper walks over to pick up the clothes.

JACKIE

Well, this is just great. We'll have to clean these all over again.

HARPER

It's fine. Boys will be boys after all.

Ryan smirks.

RYAN

You sound like an old lady when you say things like that.

Harper smiles back.

HARPER

Yeah, well, I guess I just have an old soul.

All three teens utter little laugh. Harper turns to face Ryan.

HARPER

Hey, listen, I'm sorry about yesterday.

Ryan meets her eyes.

RYAN

Yeah, me too.

They both smile.

JACKIE

Well, I'm glad that you two have made up and all, but we have a basket of dirty clothes and we ran out of soap two nights ago.

RYAN

Well, with the extra money we made yesterday, we can pick up some in town today.

HARPER

The old witch is not going to like that we spend some of her money.

RYAN

Well, what she doesn't know won't hurt her.

HARPER

Wow. When did you become such a rebel?

RYAN

Well, this is a worthy cause. If I have to smell one more day if your stink, I think that I'm going to be sick.

Ryan and Jackie burst out laughing. At first, Harper isn't amused, but then she, too, joins in on the joke.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Harper, Jackie, and Ryan walk into town.

JACKIE

Alright, you guys I'll go and buy the soap and some things for dinner. Could you two go and get me a loaf of bread at the bakers?

HARPER

But that's on the other side of town!

JACKIE

So, we need some for lunch and dinner.

HARPER

But—

RYAN

—Don't worry we'll go get the bread.

JACKIE

Thank you.

Jackie walks off into the crowd.

RYAN

Can't you do anything without complaining?

Harper rolls her eyes.

HARPER

Whatever. The only reason you want to go is to see Amber.

RYAN

That's so not true. She's just a friend.

HARPER

No way, you so have a crush on the baker's daughter.

RYAN

Let's just go and get the stupid bread already.

HARPER

Fine.

INT. THE BAKER'S SHOP - DAY

Harper and Ryan walk in the door.

RYAN

Hello?

Harper walks into the back of the shop.

HARPER

Hello? Anyone back here?

Ryan walks to the back, too.

HARPER

Where is everybody?

RYAN

No idea?

AMBER (16) walks in the door with a sack of flour.

AMBER

Oh, hey, you two.

Harper and Ryan walk back up to the front.

RYAN

Hey, let me help you with that.

Ryan takes the sack from Amber.

AMBER

Thanks. That was killing my back.

HARPER

So, Amber, where's your father?

AMBER

Oh, yeah, right. Sorry, he and some of the friends went down to the fort to see what's happening.

HARPER

What do you mean?

AMBER

That's right, you guys live so far that you must not have heard

RYAN

Heard what?

AMBER

Well, every Tuesday, Mr. Johnson, the farmer who lives on top of the hill, always delivers milk and eggs to our shop. But, for some reason, this morning he didn't show up. So, my father went to see if he was okay.

RYAN

And was he?

AMBER

That's the thing he and his wife weren't there. My father checked all over the farm, but they weren't there.

HARPER

So, what happened to them?

AMBER

We have no clue. What's worse is that they're not the only ones missing.

RYAN

That's really weird.

HARPER

Maybe we should go find Jackie and go home?

RYAN

That's a good idea.

AMBER

Okay, well here.

Amber walks behind the counter and takes out a loaf of bread.

AMBER

Fresh from the oven.

HARPER

Wow. Thanks.

RYAN

How much?

AMBER

It's on the house. Just don't tell my father.

Ryan smiles.

RYAN

Thank you.

AMBER

No problem.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A crowd of townspeople stands in front of the main gate of the wall. Harper and Ryan walk into the crowd to find out what's going on.

MERCHANT 1

Did you hear the rumor going around?

MERCHANT 2

No, what?

MERCHANT 1

Apparently, late last night. a bunch of rich folks, cooks, maids, and the best farmers in town went into the fort and never came back out.

MERCHANT 2

What? That's crazy.

BLACKSMITH

I heard they even took the town doctor in there.

MERCHANT 2

Well, it doesn't matter. They all have to come out eventually, right?

Merchant 1 shrugs his shoulders.

MERCHANT 1

I don't know. They bought food with them and with the lake in there they could stay in there for a while.

POOR FARMER

Plus, all the best farmland is inside.

Merchant 1 and 2, Blacksmith, Harper, and Ryan look to the poor farmer with shock.

BLACKSMITH

Really?

POOR FARMER

Yeah.

MERCHANT 2

This isn't good for us is it?

POOR FARMER

No, it's not.

Harper pulls Ryan's arm and walks out of the crowd.

HARPER

We need to go now!

RYAN

What? Why?

HARPER

Think about it. With farmland, water, livestock and raw minerals the rich people can stay in there for years.

RYAN

So?

HARPER

So, if we can't farm enough food, we won't be able to eat.

RYAN

Can't we just go to another country for food?

HARPER

No, the nearest country is two months away by boat. There won't be enough food to get people there. Plus, the way our country works, the noblemen buy all the crops and anything we need. Then they sell it back to us at a higher price. So, with all the rich people inside the fort ...

RYAN

There's no one to pay for the crop in the first place.

HARPER

Exactly.

RYAN

This is really bad.

HARPER

Yeah, we need to find Jackie and go home, so we can figure out what we're going to do.

RYAN

Because with the food the towns have now, and the small farming area we have left, how long do you think we have before things get bad?

HARPER

I don't know. Maybe three weeks?

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A woman holding a baby looking for food in the stands.

HARPER (V.O)

But we didn't even have that. People started to buy up as much food as possible as soon as they could.

People standing in long lines to buy stuff. Boarded up and empty stores.

But with so many people on the island, we ran out of food in ten days.

People walk around aimlessly.

HARPER (V.O)

After we ran out of food, people started to get desperate.

People eating dogs, cats, and rats.

HARPER (V.O)

Some people just could not do it anymore.

A man with his family holding his wife with one hand and holding a gun in the other.

HARPER (V.O)

And some people lost their minds altogether. A group of monsters started to hunt down and eat other people around town.

A woman eating an arm with blood in her mouth.

HARPER (V.O)

So, for the most part, we just stay inside the house.

Tommy and Sam look out the window.

INT. THE OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

Smoke comes through under the door. Harper sleeping in her bed.

JACKIE

Harper! Harper, wake up we need to go now!

HARPER

What? Why? What's going on?

JACKIE

The house is on fire!

Ryan pushes open the door.

RYAN

(COUGHING)

Are you two okay?

JACKIE

(COUGHING)

Yeah, we're fine. Where are the boys?

RYAN

(COUGHING)

I already got them out.

HARPER

(COUGHING)

Good, let's get out of here.

EXT. OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

Harper, Jackie, and Ryan rush out the back door.

RYAN

(COUGHING)

Is everyone okay?

JACKIE

(COUGHING)

Yeah.

HARPER

(COUGHING)

Same here.

RYAN

Good.

Mysterious and scary looking strangers come out from out the woods. Leading them is the island's number one murder, TYLER DRAKE (27).

TYLER

Well, well, well gang. What do we have here? Don't you all just love it when your food comes to you?

The group laughs with excitement.

Harper, Jackie, and Ryan all look at each other with fear.

JACKIE

Please don't hurt us. We don't have any food!

TYLER

No, no, doll face. We don't want your food. *We want you.*

RYAN

Why?

TYLER

That's for us to know and for you to find out.

The Walrus

Harper, Jackie, and Ryan start to back away slowly.

TYLER

Wait are you thinking about running? Well, then, go on. I
have all night.

Harper, Jackie, and Ryan run into the woods.

TYLER

After them!

The large group takes off after them.

HENCHMEN 1

Why didn't just get them?

TYLER

Because this is way more fun.

To be continued...

FADE OUT.

Scripts

On Deaf Ears

Eugene Rose

FADE IN:

INT. CARROLL'S LOFT - DAY

Red, blues, pinks, yellows, and purples fill canvases checkered over every crevasse of space. Sculptures are alive and inquisitive, almost like a child that can't help but ask questions. Light is pouring in from above, massaging the dust floating in the air. Everything in the loft is about art, everything alive. JANET CARROLL examining her new art piece. She graces each edge, dried brush stroke, and texture with a look that can make presidents blush. Love has been poured into this piece. She smirks with an infectious love that knows no cage. Janet Carroll is the living embodiment of imagination, her cloths, no matter for art or for a night out, are just an extension of her voice. She blows a kiss at her work, and her smirk grows into a smile.

INT. ART GALLERY - NIGH

That same smile is bestowed upon the piece surrounded by admirers. Janet's lips are red, hair is pristine, and her dress is projecting only one thing: UNIVERSAL LOVE. She turns around to receive everyone, who are in their sharpest nightly outfit. A light commotion is given birth throughout the crowd, only one trenched coated figure slouches on the wall in the back giving nothing back from the multiple displays of beauty. Some whispers gain an identity.

FEMALE ONLOOKER #1

Love lost. My heart aches when looking at this. What do you think?

MALE ONLOOKER #1

Anger. Feels like frustration unleashed. I don't understand how you missed it. Ms. Carroll is beating you over the head with this narrative.

Janet zeroes in on the whispers.

JANET

Interesting takes. Love and anger are always intertwined so neither of your interpretations are wrong. For me, it describes an intense emotion, really any emotion, that is misinterpreted between two partners.

MALE ONLOOKER #1

A lover's quarrel, interesting but not ground breaking.

JANET

I never said they were lovers.

(beat)

Just two individuals struggling to become one but failing. Some get past this, others part ways never truly understanding each other.

The crowd audibly digesting the statement, some grown from the statement not being a part of their narrative, others accept this deduction.

JANET

Alas, this is just my truth and I'd hate to infringe on your right to consume this piece and arrive to whatever conclusion you want.

A few people get closer to her talking a mile a minute happy, others staying back, more unsure.

INT. ART GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

People are laissez-faire with the real-estate in the room. Public discourse, good and bad, running smoothly. Janet clears her throat.

JANET

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for coming to my exhibition. The time has come for me to bid you all farewell. Keep a lookout for my winter collection in six months.

The herd claps thunderously as she motions towards the door. Some time passes as the last few people shake her hand and walk out the door. Janet locks the door, not noticing the figure still hanging onto that same slab of wall he was on earlier. She motions a few paces and lets out a small gasp.

JANET

Pardon me sir but the gallery is closed. If you have any questions for me—

AGENT JAMES RIOT, reaches in his pocket and pulls out a form.

AGENT RIOT

Janet Carroll, my name is Agent James Riot, working for FBI and you need to come with me for questioning.

Janet's words slightly muffled.

JANET

For what charge?

AGENT RIOT

Janet, we are to protect this nation's most valued commodity.

JANET

And that is?

AGENT RIOT

Democracy.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

CLIP, CLAP, CLIP, CLAP, CLIP, CLAP, sounds of quick footsteps can be heard over a wall devoid of any personality. BWAM, BWAM, BWAM, the lights turn off and off with each sound of the horn. Janet and Agent Riot sitting across from each other at a steel table. A water container is full, and one cup is on Janet's side. Agent Riot jotting notes down on a pad.

AGENT RIOT

State your name for the record.

Agent Riot has slick back hair, gun in his holster, eyes that look through a subject to imprint whatever thoughts he has on the person's identity. Janet's voice even quieter than before.

JANET

I don't understand Agent Riot, what am I being held for?

AGENT RIOT

State your name for the record.

JANET

Excuse me, sir, I'd like to know what I'm here for. You forcibly apprehended me at the end on an important night for me.

AGENT RIOT

State your name for the record.

JANET

I don't even see a microphone. You people probably have this room bugged.

She sees him just writing, all she sees is the top of his gelled hair; she knows where this is going.

JANET

Janet Carroll, born April 26th, 1920, in Jamestown, New York.

AGENT RIOT

Janet, like I said before, my team and I apprehended you because you are presenting the single most danger to our way of life.

JANET

Riot, you think I support the Soviets?

AGENT RIOT

You do, your art is proof enough of that.

JANET

Riot, that wasn't my intention. I wanted to examine—

AGENT RIOT

Please, let me finish. You are in support of the Communist Party movement in this country, praying on high society to shield your work as just introspective.

Janet can barely be heard.

JANET

(almost as a whisper)

My work invokes emotions. Sometimes good sometimes bad, but the goal of the work is to let people realize we all are capable of the same emotions.

AGENT RIOT

If you insist on this rude behavior, I'll be forced to hold you here until you tell the truth.

Janet's voice nonexistent.

JANET

(mouths)

I think this is a poor use of time, money, and your career. We may converse about many things, but I will not entertain this delusion.

Agent Riot getting his things together and standing.

AGENT RIOT

Well, get comfortable. You'll be here for a while.

LIGHTS GO OUT.

MONTAGE BEGINS -

BWAM, BWAM, BWAM, the lights turn off and off with each sound of the horn.

Hours have past, Janet's lipstick has fade, her makeup stale, hair up but needing upkeep. The water is half full. Her cup is gone.

AGENT RIOT

You are in support of the Communist Party movement in this country, praying on high society to shield your work as just introspective. Give up your co-conspirators, along with any contacts you have in the USSR.

Janet, squinting at the light, cannot be heard.

JANET

(mouths)

Riot, this situation is a bit extreme. There is no way I could be a—

AGENT RIOT

If you insist on this rude behavior, I'll be forced to hold you here until you tell the truth.

LIGHTS GO OUT.

BWAM, BWAM, BWAM, THE LIGHTS TURN ON AND OFF WITH EACH SOUND OF THE HORN.

The water is absent from the container. Her face bare, beauty still intact but weathering, her elegant clothes are replaced with sweats.

AGENT RIOT

You are in support of the Communist Party movement in this country, praying on high society to shield your work as just introspective. Give up your co-conspirators, along with any contacts you have in the USSR.

Janet shaking her head no, as calmly and as peacefully as possible.

BWAM, BWAM, BWAM, the lights turn off and off with each sound of the horn.

Agent Riot points his finger at Janet.

AGENT RIOT

You are in support of the Communist Party.

BWAM, BWAM, BWAM, the lights turn off and off with each sound of the horn.

Agent Riot pointing his finger at Janet.

AGENT RIOT

Ms. Carroll, you are in support of the Communist Party.

Her sweatpants are gone. She is just sitting on the cold metal seat, her legs to one side, crossed, covering her genitalia.

BWAM, BWAM, BWAM, the lights turn off and off with each sound of the horn.

END OF MONTAGE

LIGHTS ON.

AGENT RIOT

Sorry about the lights Ms. Carroll, we run drills all the time to stay sharp. Just a small inconvenience.

Janet naked, confidently covering herself with her hands.

AGENT RIOT

We've been here a long time Ms. Carroll. I just want to go home. I need you to give me names, numbers, just anything you can think of.

He looks towards one of the corners and motions them to stop listening.

AGENT RIOT

It's just you and me. I need this to be over.

LIGHTS GO OFF.

AGENT RIOT

Another drill.

LIGHTS COME BACK ON.

Janet, returns to her outfit she wore on the night of the exhibit.

Elegant purple and aquamarine lights on her. Her painting that she completed right before the art exhibition hanging behind her.

Riot, draped in prison garb, behind bars of yellow and orange light.

JANET

Riot, I don't feel like you're listening to me when I speak.

AGENT RIOT

Of course, I hear you, Ms. Carroll. A person in my outfit needs results. I don't care who you give up, they could be dead, I just need names.

JANET

To do that would be to sully a reputation that has no ability to refute the claims. I shall not sink so low.

AGENT RIOT

Ms. Carroll, they'll put you in jail. I don't want that. And I know that you don't want that.

JANET

You really have no idea what I want. I just really want you to listen.

Riot in the same color scheme as Ms. Carroll.

JANET

My pieces are just a way for me to express an idea to countless individuals that I cannot meet face to face. Feelings of love, compassion, and rage are things we all feel, and I want my art to tell people it's okay to feel such things.

AGENT RIOT

In any other circumstance, we would probably debate about many things, but today this cannot be one of them.

JANET

It must be tiring.

(beat)

Condemning people just to meet some quota.

Riot in his original prison of yellow and orange.

AGENT RIOT

If you do not give me a name, you'll be facing jail time.

JANET

So be it.

LIGHTS FLASH OFF AND ON.

The healthy splash of color evaporated, both of their uniforms back to normal.

The Walrus

AGENT RIOT

Lord have mercy.

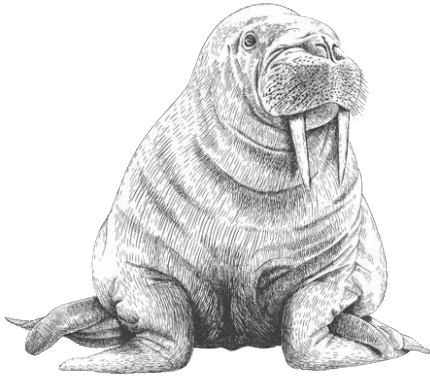
(beat)

Good day Ms. Carroll.

Riot leaves. Door closes.

Carroll sees her painting across from her. And smiles.

FADE OUT.



Interested in publishing in *The Walrus*?

Submit to the 2020 Festival of the Arts
Student Writing Contest

Submissions open Monday, July 15, 2019 and close on Friday, March 6, 2020

Eligibility: All students at the NVCC Woodbridge Campus

Categories: Short Fiction; Poetry; Creative Nonfiction; Script (drama or screenplay); Graphical Fiction (experimental)

Multiple Entries: Students may enter in each of the four categories, but no more than 3 poems, 1 short fiction piece, 1 creative nonfiction piece, 1 graphical piece, and 1 script; entries beyond these parameters will not be considered

Prizes: Announcement of prize availability will appear online at *The Walrus*

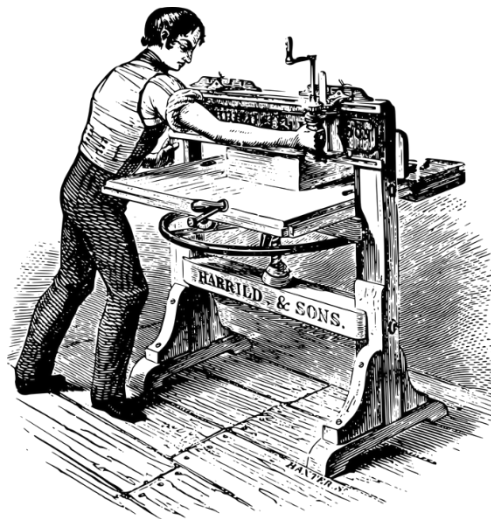
Publication: Selected works will be published in *The Walrus*; students whose work is selected for publication will be notified by email

Announcement of Publication: Prize-winners will be announced and give a reading during the 2020 Festival of the Arts

Submission Deadline: All submissions must be received no later than midnight, Friday, March 6, 2020

The Walrus can be found online at:

blogs.nvcc.edu/walrus



Visit the
Bob Bausch Reading Room
at the
Woodbridge Campus
Library

230 in the Arts and Science Building

