







# Letters from the Editors

Dear readers,

Our editorial staff is grateful to all who generously submitted their work this year. It has been our honor to work with you during this process as companions in a community that dearly values the profound creative and academic accomplishments of its many and diverse voices. We hope you enjoy these volumes as you travel through their landscapes of truths, myths, and vampires (literally, so many vampires). May you travel not only with an open mind but also with a capacious heart.

Laura Spiegle  
Editor-in-Chief

# Letters from the Editors

Dear readers,

William Nicholson once said “We read to know we are not alone.” I do not know William Nicholson, but I found that quote on the internet and I feel the warm embraces of the faceless ethernet masses. I wholeheartedly hope that you feel a similar disembodied warmth from the plethora of amazing writers that have come together to make this journal whole. Not too warm, though, because your dear editor had several submissions rejected so tread confidently knowing the bar is high and rightfully so. Enjoy, my friends.

Kylie Lung  
Editor-in-Chief

# Letters from the Editors

Dear readers,

Many of my favorite moments this semester occurred in a Mac lab in Carroll Hall while eagerly reading our journal's submissions, the silence broken only by gasps or exclamations. It was the kind of environment in which open hearts and open minds thrive, as the spaces that these works put us in permeated the very space we sat in, making us all feel connected to one another and the Regis community as a whole. This journal is a compilation of the pieces that made us laugh, gave us goosebumps, and made us reread because we couldn't get enough the first time. So I thank you from the bottom of my heart for joining us in creating a space where we celebrate who we are at our cores and where we can learn from one another. If you ask me, it's the only kind of space I want to exist in. I hope you feel equally in awe when reading or viewing works by someone who may be your friend, or by someone you've never met before. I hope you find community and sameness within your individualities, and that that essence of humanity comes through in what we've given back to you here. Happy reading.

Sincerely,

Alexis Jas

Loophole Assistant Editor

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# Moving House

*Alexis Jas*

Christian education never corrected me  
When I thought Islam was a country's name.

They must have thought it didn't matter.  
That it wasn't worth the red ink.

But what would they think now?  
Eight years and a de-conversion later.

Now that I know Islam is not a country.  
It is my home.



# Teeth

*Ali Meehan*

Teeth are the only piece of you that people will see while you are alive and while you're dead. Smiles are forever.

-

I was sitting in my grade school cafeteria eating a piece of fried chicken, the flaky skin crunching between my teeth, grease coating my lips. I bit down once more and clamped down on a tendon. Pulling the leg away from my mouth my gaze locks on that tendon, tracing the connective tissue to where it met the thigh bone. Suddenly, I felt overwhelmingly nauseous. I would be vegetarian for the next three years.

-

I heard a story once about an eighth grader, one of the big kids in the upstairs hallway, who was playing in a basketball game against John Bosco. He was dribbling up the court, dodging and darting, prepping his shot ten steps out. He was running so fast that when one of the other players tripped him, sending him sliding across the freshly waxed hard wood floor and slamming full-speed into the forest green bleachers against the wall, his shin snapped in half. The whole damn thing, in half. Jagged edges of his tibia and fibula popping through his skin at awkward angles.

-

It was dry and smooth, curving softly in the middle, and somehow both lighter and heavier than I expected. Unlike the bones found in a rack of ribs or a KFC bucket, this femur had been fleshless for years, maybe even decades. When they first put the crate on our table we hesitated. Should we just dig in like a box of Legos and start building our Deathstar, as it were? But by the time twenty minutes had passed phrases like "Can you pass me that vertebra?" and "No, that's the left scapula. It goes over there" are being tossed willy-nilly. I suppose it's a bit of an odd concept, a group of teenagers assembling the skeleton of a Jane Doe like a Ravensburger, but oddness is circumstantial at best.

-

Tambone was nice in the way high school boys tend to be. When I was nervous about having my first kiss be in a one act play directed by my love interest's girlfriend, he heroically stepped up with a

gallantly passive, “Well...I’d kiss you.” Two months later we were once again in his basement bedroom, Jonah Hill ranting voicelessly on the muted television, Muse’s “Madness” playing softly from the dresser. His silky basketball shorts grazed my hip, and it was unclear whether triumph or discomfort was the dominant emotion.

-

My head barely reached the countertop so I had to drag the step-stool over to get a good look in the plastic Fortell’s Pizza Den cup on the counter. It had been a week. It should be done today. My tiny arm reaches across the grey laminate and carefully pulls the vinegar filled cup toward the edge of the counter. The smell burns my eyes, but pulling out the newly rubbery wishbone is totally worth it. My brother and I each pull a side, but rubber bones simply bend without breaking.

-

I’m on my second glass of ice water and the smell of fresh mint, bean sprouts, and jalapenos is causing me to watch the swinging kitchen door rather than one of the five televisions visible from my seat. We haven’t spoken in several minutes, content in our observations away from the table. Camille’s low gasp draws my attention back to my dining partner. “Oh wow,” she says.

“What?”

She pauses, her eyes glued to the screen behind my head. “Do you ever just see someone and wonder what their skeleton looks like?”

“Yes,” I say, twisting my spine to glance at whoever she has seen, “all the time.”

The meteorologist on the screen is lightly tanned and strawberry blonde. Her dress has a wrapped silhouette and is in a flattering salmon shade. But what stands out first are her clavicles. They jut out almost startlingly from the V of her dress, drawing a flat line across her chest from shoulder to shoulder. She has an almost bird-like wispieness to her frame, as though any of her bones could snap with the slightest of pressure. Is that what mannequin skeletons look like?

-

Loco’s cast was red. It looked like a tiny plaster peg leg sticking out from her silky black and white body. After the first couple hours she was already awkwardly clunking her way up and down the hall, her other three legs easily making up the difference. Her foot never healed and so to keep her from using the stump, the vet had to amputate near the shoulder. Loco galumphed from that point on, but I’m not sure if she ever actually understood she would never be able to catch the feather-birdie with the pointy shoulder bone she moved, trapped under her skin like a sentient unborn twin.

-

Crab legs are hard to crack. I realized this for the first time last week attempting to eat one from the

Teeth

Caf's attempt at a New Orleans Mardi Gras seafood fest. When I was really little, I used to get crab legs every year on my birthday. My parents would take me to Lee's Buffet. My brother would eat the rice, I would get "hot tea, please" and my dad would crack a whole platter of crab legs with a nut-cracker, putting the big chunks of pink meat on my plate. Only the best for the birthday girl.

"Geez!" I complained to Anne, the spiky bumps of the crab leg digging sharply into my palms.

"This is such a pain!"

I suppose it makes sense though, assumedly nature should be making it difficult to snap through bones, be they inside or out.

-

Giraffes fight for dominance by head-banging, or at least that's what it looks like they're doing. If humans tried to smack their seven neck vertebrae together, like giraffes do their seven, they'd probably just look like they were necking at Lookout Mountain.

-

Have you ever been washing your hair and then realize you're holding your skull in your hands? Me neither.

-

When I was 16, my godmother took me to see a Second City showing of Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind in Chicago. Maybe I would have remembered more if Tina Fey or Amy Poehler were still in the troupe, but only two of the sketches stand out in my memory. In one entitled "The Hundred Acre Wood" or something of that nature, a fully grown man ran around on the stage chasing a fake butterfly on a string wearing a cropped red t-shirt and nothing else. In the other, a cast member narrated a scientific monologue about the life cycle of a hermit crab.

Four cast members lined up from tallest to shortest, each standing in a box apropos to their size with an extra huge box next to the tallest man. When it hit the point in the narrative when the hermit crab sheds its shell and moves to a larger one, all the cast members stripped to their underwear, moved to the next larger box and put on the clothes left in that box by its previous occupant. They wore those clothes for the remainder of the show.

One time my mom let me get a hermit crab at the hippie store at the mall. I got the smallest one. Its shell was painted hot pink. I realized it was dead about ten minutes after I got it home.

-

Jazmine just notified me that Marilyn Manson has not come forward to refute the claim that he had his bottom two ribs removed so he could suck his own dick.

-

I've never broken a bone.

Actually, that's a lie. I cracked a molar in half once, but it wasn't in my head at the time. It had just come out and I was rinsing it under the faucet to get the blood of it when it split right down the middle. From that point on, dreams about my teeth crumbling out of my skull were no longer an easy psychoanalytic write off.

-

According to HealthStatus.com, the average skeleton should account for approximately 15% of your body mass. According to her scale, my mother's skeleton weighs only four pounds. Since my mother (I don't think she'll mind me telling you this) weighs more than 40 pounds, I hope her scale is lying to her, as that would mean the slightest gust of wind could shatter her bones.

Then again, my grandmother who suffers from chronic osteoporosis and has shrunk at least four inches so far, has been known to break ribs by sneezing. She also once broke her foot by tucking it under her and sitting on it. A few weeks ago, she got caught in the covers trying to get out of bed, tripped over the dog, and broke her pelvis.

-

12 Mrs. Slenker was my grade school gym teacher. She liked to read gym teacher blogs and test out new games like "corn chucking" where you laid flat on the scalding asphalt of the parking lot with an ear of cork balanced across your feet and then, using only the momentum of your legs, threw the corn as far back over your head as you could.

Every Halloween she would hide four Flat Stanley-esque skeletons worth on bones throughout the gym and we would have a relay race to see which team could find all their bones and assemble their skeleton the fastest. Way better than Pac-Man tag in my opinion.

-

There are no muscles in your fingers, just bones and tendons. If you sit in a silent room and slowly clench your hands into T-Rex claws you can hear your fingers creak.

-

I once had the opportunity to assemble a human spinal column riddled with arthritis. It was beautiful. And, I'm sure excruciating. When the individual vertebrae were stacked and threaded with the long red string we had been given they resembled the spine candles Professor Lupin used to light his office in Prisoner of Azkaban. Arthritis, like bone spurs, alters the shape of bones. It looks like wax, dripping slowly toward your coccyx. When your flesh has dissipated, the wax assumes its final hardened form. The drippy vertebrae notch together like a springbok.

-

Teeth

Earthworms don't have any bones. They do have five hearts though. This is why sometimes, if you accidently segment a worm, two new shorter worms creep back into the mud.

-  
My cousin's skeleton is fucked. He has a severe form of Cleidocranial dysplasia, the same congenital disease Dustin from Stranger Things has. CCD's symptoms, according to the National Institute of Health, include dental abnormalities, underdeveloped collarbones (or, like my cousin who can reach his arms back over his head and touch his tailbone, no clavicles at all), delayed fusing of the skull bones, hearing loss, and much much more. Adam also has two different forms of scoliosis where his spine forms an S from front to back, curving in at his stomach and out again near his shoulders, but also twists around the other way like a Twizzler. He's twenty-four and maybe four foot two.

-  
My mom, dad, and brother all have Hitchhiker's thumbs. I do not. When I give a thumbs up, my thumb stands up straight and proud, like a Victorian debutante at her first ball. My brother's thumb on the other hand (both of his hands, actually) looks like it's constantly winning the limbo competition at a luau.

-  
Twice a year during grade school they would line us all up and take us to the weird carpeted room off the back side of the cafeteria. The first time we would be led inside one by one and offered a black plastic comb for final touchups before our picture was taken. The second time, we were also led inside one by one, but instead of fixing our hair, we were asked to bend over and touch our toes while strange, disembodied hands lifted our shirts and slid slowly down our spines in search of abnormalities.

-  
In Prague, there's a Roman Catholic chapel that is estimated to contain the skeletons of 40,000 to 70,000 persons. The Seclec Ossuary, as it is called in English, is located under the Cemetery Church of All Saints. Bones are placed around decoratively, forming haunting columns and chandeliers. More than 200,000 people visit annually. It's good of them to come pay their respects, the dead are so often objectified or forgotten.

-  
In March of 2015, the Diversity & Inclusion Ad Council released a short film called "Love Has No Labels." In the three minute video, various couples kiss behind a large x-ray screen, and are then revealed to be couples of diverse sexualities, ethnicities, and ages. The intended message of the film is that that humans are all the same on the inside, so our exteriors shouldn't matter.

But we aren't all the same on the inside. Even if we ignore the fact that no one person's bones will look exactly like any other person's, humans often don't even have the same amount of bones. Babies are generally born with nearly three hundred bones. By the time we reach adulthood, many of those bones have fused and shifted, leaving us with what should theoretically amount to 206 bones. But even that can't be trusted. Of the two people sitting in this room with me, Shaunna knows she has an extra bone in her foot, and Jazmine has an extra vertebra, but would willingly accept Shaunna's donation of her foot bone to make up for the one she's missing.

-  
teeth.

# Edible Flowers

*Maggie Ramseur*



# Gums

*Isaiah Pramuke*

Gums

Thumb up your lip to show your fleshy pink gums  
Push in with force and feel the bone beneath the tissue  
You have fangs buried beneath blunted incisors,  
Twin points capped by a fear of your overpowering soul

Thumb up your lip to expose your soft pink disguise  
Your smile is goofy. You look dopey. Be serious.  
Soft gummy exterior, no corners, no edges.  
There is a tiger's low rumble lost in the depths of your chords

16  
∞

Thumb up your lip and run a pink pad over filed down daggers  
Remember the danger of a mouthful of weapons, of a belly full of soul  
Remember the corners and edges of a being unsheathed  
Feel again the love inherent in living with fangs

Thumb up your lip and find pink-red poetry ingrained in swooping lines on your fingertip  
Blood is in your identity; too long has it been ignored  
Let your swollen gums bleed fat drops onto your tongue  
Swallow the iron poetry and smile a tiger's smile

Thumb up your lip and be careful not to	Cut	
Take pride in your fangs	Slice	
And the predator soul clawing at your diaphragm	Cleave	
Let the others take care of themselves		Sunder
No more worrying about		Soft Tissue

Gums



# Biology

*Alexis Jas*

Seventy percent of the earth  
Is a salty pool for blind and slimy things  
And seventy percent of my body  
Is made up of equally foreign  
And sometimes slimy things  
So if you look at me with disgust  
Or treat me as inhuman  
You are right to do so  
I am only a microcosm of the earth  
With jellyfish stingers for hair  
And starfish in my eyes  
I am unapologetic  
For the dirt on my knee  
And the fish swimming around me  
If I am anything other than a woman  
I am the sea herself

# Blue Line

*Laura Spigle*

18  
∞



Blue Line

# Iridescent

*Morgan Stevens*

Talking to you reminded me of a children's coloring book,  
Ones of space with overly simplified planets,  
Suns,

Every page in the book of my life was empty,  
Uncolored,  
I was too nervous to start in fear of messing up,  
Picking the wrong color to define every single one of my planets,  
My stars,  
My asteroids.  
Though when I talked to you,  
None of that seemed to matter,

With every word,  
You picked color for me,  
Made me think in muted oranges,  
Elegant shades of ocean blue,  
The bruised purple of a sunrise,  
And the endless red of your favorite wine,

You colored my sun red with blue stripes,  
My moon pink with orange dots littered across it,  
The image you colored for me,  
The page about my uncertainty of the meaning of existence,  
Grew more and more colorful every word you spoke,

I felt like a child again,  
Where expectations didn't matter,

Where my sun could be any shade of creativity it wanted to be,  
My stars didn't have to hide behind the effervescent white of the paper any longer,

Our conversation,  
Our debate about the meaning of life,  
Who god was if it even exists to begin with,  
Was messy,  
Even disgusting,  
An endless wreck of human emotions splashed between two people,

The colors didn't match their images,  
It didn't match what society told me they should be,  
But every time I look back,  
Look at you,  
Look at the conversation we made together,  
I can't say that it isn't art.

# Assignment 1

*Karissa Freese*



# A Biography in Four Parts

*Jazmine Rodriguez*

## Part 1

I'm twelve years old. My hair is big and curly, my skin is extra dark from the days spent outside with my friends. I'm with the best people I know, my best boy friend Marco, my best girl friend Alexis, on our way to the corner store to buy a baconeggncheese before doing whatever hoodrat shit the day has in store for us. The Arab man behind the counter nods his head at us. Wraps the pressed sandwiches in deli paper and holds out his hand for payment. I'm 75¢ short. The turbaned man waves me off, says bring him his money tomorrow or no more sandwiches.

We're all chowing down on our delicacy, taking turns pulling sips of Sunny D. It's a beautiful day. The sun is shining high in the sky but the heat isn't oppressive yet. There's a slight breeze carrying in the smells of low tide. For a moment I forget where I am. I'm in paradise.

"We're getting out of here one day," Alexis says

22  
∞

"Fuck outta here. My momma lived here her whole life, my daddy lived here his whole life. I'm stuck here for life man," Marco spits back

"Nah man, that don't mean shit. You can get out the hood. We have to promise to. We're better than this life," I say

"Hear that Marco, we're better than this," Alexis echoes.

Marco rolls his eyes and pushes a burp out. "That's how I feel about that."

"Come on, we can so leave the hood. We hustle in high school, get them good grades, apply to college. Let Affirmative Action get us as far up the good schools list as it can, get our shit paid for and it's a one way ticket outta here," I say.

"Man, I'm a boy. Only way I make it out of here is in a body bag, in hand cuffs, or on a sports scholarship," he retorts.

"Shut the fuck up. You're smarter than that Marco, you know it," Alexis says unamused.

"Promise, let's promise right now we'll make it out. We'll do better than this hood," I say.

"I hear that," Alexis says.

Marco is reluctant but he breaks, either because my logic has tickled his brain or because of peer pressure.

"Yeah, yeah I hear that," he says.

We keep walking the maze of the neighborhood to find some weed to smoke or a beer to sip. We're young, it's summer, and life is for the living. We walk through life for years, never forgetting the promise we made that day.

I'm 21 in a creative writing class, my hair is big and curly, my skin is extra dark when compared to most of the people around me. I'm about to finish an English degree.

Alexis is 21, she works a job, an internship and goes to school full time. She's getting a degree in psychology and social work to follow the dreams her mom never got to complete.

Marco is 22 years old. He's on a wrestling scholarship, getting a degree in computer science. None of us have stepped foot back in the old hood. All of us have survivor's guilt.

## Part 2

I felt the distortion of pressure in the air as the first bullet flew less than an inch past my thigh. Fuck. I gotta zig zag and hit the feet harder. I'm not going out like Ricky. I cut down an alley to my left. Bums drop and cover—they're not dumb enough to take stray bullets meant for me. My legs keep pumpin'. On my left there's a backyard, no gate. I run through their yard out to the front yard. I keep running, I jump a fence, then another and another. I'm back in another alley. I think I'm good. These dudes don't know my hood.

I decide to cool it, walk around like nothing's popping off. I'm strolling down the alley taking in all the art around me. Nobody outside of here appreciates graffiti. I take in the bright colors against the dismal grey of the hood. Look at these for long enough and you may just forget you're not supposed to survive this place. I hear the screeching of tires trying to find traction. Fuck. I've got to keep running. I zig zag back in the direction I'd come from. Flying over fences, dodging the clamp of many an angry Pitbull as I run for my mama.

I can see my house. It's just two blocks down. I see the only place I've ever felt safe. I push myself harder. Run faster. You got a whole scholarship for how quick these feet move on a football field, I can make them go faster for my life. I feel my muscles cramping up under the intense stress. I can do it though. I've gotta tell Mama I got her. Slangin that rock made it easy to pay for her medication. I've got a sack of cash buried at the 20 yard line of the abandoned football field at Jefferson High. I bet if she went to dig it up she could find the distorted dirt. She'd find the money meant to move her away from this ghetto. Let her leave the place that slowly has choked the life out of her while poisoning her lungs.

Mama is on the porch. I can see her on the porch beating the dust out of her rugs. I know as I get closer I'll hear old Jibaro music bumpin' through the barred windows of my childhood home. So fucking close, do it Hector, tell her you're sorry but her life is going to be better. There's a big



smile on her face when she sees me, but it falls quickly when she sees the fear on my face. I tackle her into a hug. I tell her I'm sorry. I tell her she should've had better kids, ones who could resist being a hoodrat dope slinga. She's crying now. I taste the salt from her tears on my lips as I crush her into me. She asks me to speak clearer.

I hear the engine revving. I try to duck in the house, why didn't I do that in the first place? Stupid, stupid, hug your mom and hide inside not stay on the porch with a target on your back. Why'd I come here anyway? Nobody outruns bullets.

Pop Pop

I can see the blood pooling on my shirt, feel the rush of blood gurgling up my throat, hear the cries of my mother before I feel any pain. Darkness is closing in on my vision. I can see blood splatter all over my mama before I collapse into her arms.

"My boy. My son," she cries holding her only son, dead, in her arms.

### Part 3

It's cold as fuck and I just missed my bus home. I check my phone to see when the next 84 will roll by. An hour, long, cold hour. I sit on the freezing bench knowing that the shock of cold from the metal would soon subside. I rub my hands together willing that the friction will be enough heat production to keep the chill off me.

Looking up I see the 12. They're trying to roll by like I don't recognize them in the unmarked cars. Tuh, who they think they're foolin'? I call my best friend, make it look like there's somebody waiting for me to come home to.

"Hey, what's up," she asks.

"I'm just calling in case anything pops off. I'm sittin' at my bus stop and the one time keep cruising by," I say, smiling.

Look less intimidating. Apologize for your melanin. Overcompensate with kindness. I hear my mother's words echo through my head.

"Alright, what are they doing?" She asks, the carefree tone of a college student enjoying downtown Boston gone from her voice.

"They just keep rollin' by right now. It's like the fourth time they've circled the block."

"Okay, you're good right? Do you have anything on you?" she asks.

I take a mental inventory of the possessions on my person. A handful of coins for my bus fair, my student ID, a dab pen, my house keys, and headphones.

"Nah, nah I'm good," I answer.

"Nothing they'll mistake as a weapon right?"



“Yes mom,” I chuckle.

“I’m just checkin you know, can’t be too careful out here”

The unmarked car aims their spotlight at me. The light is blinding. I go to cover my eyes from the burn of the brightness but think it better not to move too hastily. If they’ve got the spotlight they think I’m suspicious.

“Bitch, you gotta answer me, what’s going on?” I hear the exasperation in her voice.

“They’ve got the spotlight on me. They’re still across the street, creepin’ down the road.”

“Fuck. Keep it calm, man. No sudden movement, alright? Stay on the phone, okay? Make sure I can hear everything.”

As if they could hear our fear, smell our suspicion, and taste the anger in our words, the police turn off their spotlight and speed off down the road. I feel the weight of hundreds of thousands of bodies killed by police lift off my chest. My eyes well up, a frog tried to wriggle its way up my throat.

“Lex, it’s all good. They drove off.” I say choking back tears.

“Bet. You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m good. Listen, my phone is dying. I’ll just call if they pop back up or when I’m home alright? I love you.”

“I love you too. You be safe out there, okay? I can’t lose you.” I hear her resistance to hanging up as clearly as a Texan twang.

I hang up the phone and return to warming my hands, rubbing them together and forcing my breath to heat them. The streetlight to my left is flickering on and off. I open the book I had sitting on my lap. The light is erratic enough that I can piecemeal the words into sentences, despite my weak vision one second, and am completely blind the next. I decide to give up on the whole reading to hide the fear thing. I’m opening my backpack to put the book away when everything is suddenly, painfully, clearly detailed.

*Do whatever they say. They say jump you say how high, you do whatever it takes to come home to me you understand?*

“Show me some ID,” a faceless, nameless officer spits.

I turn slowly, hold out my empty hands and announce that I’m reaching into my backpack for my ID.

Fuck.

Why’d I insist on hangin’ up?

Fuck.

Ain’t no way I can call Lex back without them getting suspicious. I announce that I’m getting up

to hand over my ID. A chuckle escapes the lips of a second nameless, faceless cop. You ever think about how cruel it is that cops can blind you with their spotlight? How you're left completely in the dark about who they are, their license plate number, badge numbers, name tags all hidden in the depths of the shadows directly contrasting your raw exposed figure.

"Hurry the fuck up spic."

*I know you're hot tempered. You'll want to say something smart but bite that tongue. Bite that tongue or bite a bullet baby.*

I announce that I'm walking towards the officers to comply with their demands. My hands quiver as I hand over my state issued ID.

"Where you coming from"

"Class. I'm a student at that university," I say, pointing to the welcome sign across the street.

"Prove it!"

Without thinking, I reach inside my pocket to pull out the student ID so this sordid affair can just be over with.

Not my smartest move.

"She's reaching for a weapon. I got your six," one officer yells.

I pull my hands from my pockets. I say I was just complying, I'm sorry. I was doing what I was told. They don't hear my words. They treat my pleas as if they were spoken in a foreign tongue.

"Officer please, I'm just trying to get home. I have homework. I have a family. Please. Please don't do this. Please don't do this," I cry.

5 MISSED CALLS from Mac Daddy Lex

5 NEW VOICE MAILS from Mac Daddy Lex

Text from Mac Daddy Lex "Hey, is everything okay, you never called me back. I'm worried dude."

Text from Bae "I just got home and you aren't here. Just figured I'd see if you need me to pick you up. But I bet your phone just died. See you when you get home."

Text from Yaya "Hey honey, just calling for our usual phone date. I guess you're busy. Give me a call honey. I love you."

## Part 4

Have you ever gone to school hungry as fuck but your bus pulled up too late so you miss the free breakfast? You ever sit in class where the grumbles of stomachs are louder than the teacher

A Biography in Four Parts

could ever speak? You ever teach yourself the material because the permanent sub provided also had a family emergency and the administration failed to realize your class fell through the cracks? You ever see kids your age dropping out because selling drugs or their own bodies is more gratifying than sitting in the hollow shell of an educational facility? Did active duty cops pat you down after waiting in line for almost an hour, going through the metal detectors and get in trouble for being late (when that raggedy ass teacher knows damn well security makes everyone late for first period)? You ever been told ain't no way in hell anyone would let your ghetto ass get into college? Were there military recruiters with permanent offices set up in your high school, preying on black and brown bodies to feed to the system? You ever witness a riot break out in the halls of your school because your homie got killed just the night before and you don't know any better way of handling that hurt, that pain? You ever join a club for community service because it meant you'd get more free bus tokens and a couple meals guaranteed per week? Did you memorize a code so you could get "nutritious, well balanced lunches" that look like prison slop paid for by the state? (Mine was 09005422 by the way). You ever wonder why the state makes you compete against your fellow hood siblings via standardized tests to get some extra funding?

You ever been to a white school? You know, ones with teachers in every class, a computer lab, a library, art clubs and shit? Ones where every girl is named Brittany and the boys are all named Johnny? One that has the option to buy tasty food at a "good price" that makes up your weekly grocery budget? Where the parking lot is full of cars purchased as birthday or graduation gifts? A school where the kids complain about one leaky spot in the ceiling and get a few days off so the repair can be made? You ever think about how fucked it is that that got fixed while your school hasn't had heat in half of it for years because the funding just doesn't exist?

You ever wonder about how hard it was for me to get here? You ever think about why I'm so damn mad? You ever wonder why I can't go a day without feeling I have something to prove?

You ever wonder why my life is seen as less worthy than yours?

# Queer Dating in the Age of Tinder

*Jazmine Rodriguez*

Pansexual

Polyamorous

Gender-Nonconforming.

If any of that scares you swipe left.

**IMG\_6405**

*Karissa Freese*



# Genesis

*Alexis Jas*

I belonged to the Seventh-Day Adventist church. As such, I had attended Adventist schools my entire life. Their schooling strived to raise children who would become endlessly devoted to God; who could spread His Word throughout all mediums, all areas of discipline, and all careers. In other words, no chewing gum, no cellphones, no earrings, no nail polish, no hair ties around your wrist, no hoodies, no headphones, no bad words, no makeup, no distracting hair styles, and no activities on the Sabbath.

Thirteen years ago, a student's father created Holy Salvation Academy. It took him six years to get the funding, but he had the support of our whole church and the families contained within it. The student's father chose a vast field as its location, which was nothing until our school was built to give it purpose.

30 ∞ At first, our teachers were parents of students. The same parents taught Sabbath School at church. There was almost no difference between going to school and going to church, except for at church I wore dresses that my grandmother picked out and at school I wore a uniform that the principal picked out. I had the same classmates from first through eighth grade, and we did everything together. We knew each other's families and home lives and secrets. We followed the rules with astounding obedience; they were, after all, created for our benefit and protection.

These rules were enforced at school before classes even started. Every morning for thirty minutes we were required to sit in the cafeteria while teachers stood guard at the hallway entrances. Their arms folded together across their chests, eyes scanning our bodies, checking names off a clipboard when they saw us walk in the front doors and join our classmates. This was the time when the vice-principal, Mrs. Dodd, trotted around with a small trash can, holding it under the mouths of students who she thought were chewing gum. "Spit," she'd say and smile without blinking. This was the time when the principal, Ms. Ryder, counted the undone buttons on our collared shirts and made the boys wear suspenders if their pants were below their hips. This was the time when we met with the Bible teacher, Mr. Force, if he caught us saying words like "hell" or "stupid." This was our quality control inspection.

The night before our field trip to the planetarium, I had painted my fingernails red. Mrs.

Dodd stared at my hands as I walked into school that morning, and she wasted no time in grabbing my arm and dragging me through Ms. Ryder's open office door.

"Good morning, Deborah."

"Morning, Lisa. Miss Aly." Ms. Ryder nodded in my direction, then noticed my fingernails. "Need the nail polish remover?"

"Yes ma'am," I replied, staring at a chipped spot on her mahogany desk.

"Thanks, Deborah. Oh hey, wait, did you get Pastor Mark's email? About speech classes? I'm all for it if you can find the time in your lessons." She leaned back in her chair and a smile stretched her cheeks, making her face look even more round than it already was.

"Yeah you know I think I can find the time, it sounds like a great idea and Pastor Mark is just great with kids."

"Oh yeah. Okay, well I'll take care of Miss Aly here. We'll talk later. See you." Mrs. Dodd left the office with a nod, and Ms. Ryder's grin left her face. Her eyes hardened as she looked at my fingers, then took in the rest of my body, trying to find anything else to correct.

I sat alone in front of Ms. Ryder's desk, piled high with stacks of papers and envelopes and certificates. The bookshelves covering the wall behind her desk held different versions of the Bible, with books like *Delta of Venus*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and *The Well of Loneliness* scattered throughout.

"That's some bright nail polish, little one. It's against dress code. You know that right?"

"Yeah." I stared at my feet, toes tapping the floor. "I know."

"Well, here." She placed a bottle of pink nail polish remover and a half-empty bag of cotton balls on the desk in front of me. "Go on and take it off for me please."

Ms. Ryder's office was across from the receptionist's desk, which was next to the bathroom. The receptionist, Mrs. Wright, had the students' bathroom key, and she stared at my fingernails above her glasses when I reached to get it from her chubby hand. Her computer screen revealed celebrity gossip, although I didn't recognize the names or faces. Her eyes followed me into the bathroom.

The acetone took off the nail polish easily enough, but it left the skin around my fingernails stained red and sticky, even after washing them and scrubbing with a paper towel.

I put the remover back on Ms. Ryder's desk where she sat, hands folded, watching me from the moment I reopened the bathroom door with bloody-looking fingers. Her mouth hung open a bit and her eyes drooped as she put the remover and cotton balls back in the drawer. "It's better to be modest, sweetie. All good little girls are modest."

I asked her what modest meant and she snapped, "Don't talk back." The red tint on my skin

turned rusty the more I rubbed them together.

A single-file line of my classmates snaked past Ms. Ryder’s office door, followed by Mrs. Dodd who said, “Aly, we’re about to board the bus, sweetie. Come on.” She let me walk out in front of her, then addressed Ms. Ryder. “Alright, well, we’ll see you this afternoon! Thanks Deb.”

I fell in line behind my classmates and we shuffled up the steps of the bus, sat in our assigned seats, and buckled our seatbelts. Mr. Force was sitting in the driver’s seat, but he got up to double-check that our seatbelts were appropriately tightened. He grabbed each of the belts, which sat low across our waist, and tugged. He moved slowly, and he had to bend over so his head wouldn’t touch the ceiling. Meanwhile, Mrs. Dodd reminded us to be on our best behavior and not to wear headphones on the bus.

When Mr. Force made his way to the driver’s seat again, he turned on the Christian radio station and my body grew lightweight and comfortable. I watched the cars passing underneath my window.

For a while there were only tan fields of grass, scattered hay bales, Holy Salvation growing smaller in the distance. The sights got more interesting once we left the rural part of town. People sang songs in the car by themselves and smoked out the window and let their dogs drink the air. Downtown was even better. Downtown meant homeless people and graffiti. Sidewalks speckled with black stains, cardboard signs and grocery carts hidden in corners or alleys. I opened my window and breathed in something I did not recognize.

Only when Mr. Force turned off the Christian music did I realize we had arrived.

“Okay everyone, single file line please,” Mrs. Dodd began counting our heads as Mr. Force drove off to park the bus. She led us through the field trip entrance of the museum, where a lady stood, smiling at us while we filed in.

“Are you the students from Holy Salvation Academy?”

“Yes, we are,” Mrs. Dodd responded.

“Perfect. Well, welcome to the museum. I’ll give these to you,” the woman dragged out the word ‘you’ while handing Mrs. Dodd a stack of red wristbands. “And you students can go ahead and hang your backpacks on these hooks behind me.” She smiled at us while we lined up underneath the shelf labeled “Holy Salvation Academy.”

“Left wrists, please.” Mrs. Dodd said, and we held out our hands. She put my wristband on too tight because the sticky part stuck to my skin and pulled when I moved.

Mr. Force joined us inside while the woman directed us to the museum entrance. Mrs. Dodd thanked her as we walked through the museum lobby and into the space exhibit.



We heard audio of space ships taking off and saw pictures of moons, planets, and comets framed on the walls around us. The inside of the exhibit was dimly lit and intimate, yet crowded with young kids running around, without their parents, touching screens or playing in a box of artificial moon sand. I wanted to join in on the fun, to explore the interactive displays. We hadn't learned about space all that much in school so most of it was completely unknown to me. Intrigue began in my mind and spread throughout the rest of my body, igniting an interest I didn't know I had.

Mr. Force and Mrs. Dodd didn't want us to linger, and they ushered us to the back of the exhibit, where the entrance to the planetarium was located. After about three minutes of waiting behind a red rope, a man walked out of the door in front of us.

"Hey kids, ready for the show? The solar system is one of my favorites." He winked at us.

We responded, "Yeah!" in varying degrees of enthusiasm.

"The show will start in about fifteen minutes. Feel free to come on in and get comfortable. You can sit wherever you'd like." He smiled as he held open the door for us. Mrs. Dodd reminded us to sit together in the two rows in the back, and not to be too loud or rowdy or disrespectful or disobedient. Mr. Force and Mrs. Dodd sat at the end of the row next to me. They made small talk while I stared at my red fingers.

When the lights dimmed, classmates behind me whispered "oohs" and "aahs" and a booming voice around us began the show.

"Look up in the sky at night. You'll see lots of stars, the moon, or maybe a shooting star if you're quick." The ceiling turned into a giant screen, displaying a replication of night. A shooting star darted across; the first time I had ever seen one, even if it was only on a screen. "There are so many things in space that we don't see. We know we're on planet Earth, and that we're part of the solar system. But what is the solar system, exactly?"

"It's a group of planets, moons, asteroids, and space particles in orbit around the sun..." The voice continued on and I listened, enthralled.

I heard words and ideas that I had no idea existed. The voice said that Venus is the nearest planet to Earth, yet it's still 25 million miles away. I didn't know what a million looked like. I didn't know how to think about that. Then he began talking about explosions and things called nebulae, that the sun and all the stars were born from them. He said that humans evolved from leftover carbon and space dust that came from those nebulae. He said that the Earth is 4.5 billion years old. But the earth wasn't billions of years old, it was thousands. My chair creaked as Mr. Force gripped the armrest. His knuckles turned white in the darkness.

I began thinking harder than I ever had to. We learned in Sabbath School, in Bible class, in

science class, in history class, that God created the Earth and the sun. Exploding nebulas had nothing to do with it, yet the narrator didn't mention the Bible at all. Not even God.

No longer captivated by interest, but by fear, my mouth hung open and my eyes were glued to the screen above us. As my brain processed this new information, and the more I repeated years of Adventist education to myself, the more Creation became something separate from fact. The voice's narrative was backed by scientific evidence, but to my knowledge the Bible had no such proof.

The voice said that there was a big bang and that it's just a theory right now but that it's probably true, and that's how life was created. He said something about electrons, protons, neutrons, atoms, and light, but I missed it because Mr. Force cleared his throat and Mrs. Dodd shuffled her feet on the floor.

Something in me connected to the ceiling of the planetarium. The camera zoomed in from the Milky Way galaxy, to the solar system, to Earth, to a human walking down the sidewalk. We are related to the solar system and everything around us and we evolved from space dust and the Earth is billions of years old and –

Before I was ready, the voice thanked us for watching the show, the lights came back on, and other audience members stood up to leave the theater. Mr. Force's face was pale, and when he stood up his hands were shaking. Mrs. Dodd told us all to get in line and follow her and Mr. Force to get our lunch bags from our backpacks. She and Mr. Force were whispering to each other; Mr. Force was moving his hands a lot and speaking fast. Mrs. Dodd pursed her lips. Her two-inch heels clacked on the tile louder than before. Neither she nor Mr. Force acknowledged us until they told us to sit together in the back of the cafeteria.

“That show was so cool, especially the part where he said the stars exploded,” Jacob said.

“Yeah! I wonder if it's loud?” Matthew asked. Then, teasingly, “Aly you don't like loud noises. You could probably never be an astronaut. I could totally go to space.”

“Yeah right.” My body was mechanical as we ate.

Matthew asked Mrs. Dodd if we could go see the dinosaur exhibit next, but she curtly said no and continued talking to Mr. Force under her breath.

I ate in silence without tasting my food, until Jacob said, “Whoa you ate that apple so fast.” I excused myself to go wash my hands, but the bathroom was out of soap. My fingers were sticky again, this time with apple juice.

After telling Matthew for the last time that we are absolutely not going to the dinosaur exhibit because we just didn't have time, Mr. Force drove the bus back around to the front of the

museum, where we boarded. Once again, he trudged down the center aisle, making sure there was no space between the seatbelts and our hips. My face turned red and I cringed while he checked mine.

When he turned on the Christian radio station again, my head swelled. I wanted my headphones, I wanted to listen to something different. My feet started tapping and my hands grew sweaty. The singers all sounded the same; their words and voices yearning for something that seemed out of reach. The ride back to Holy Salvation took much longer than the ride to the museum and despite my looking out the window the entire time, I found nothing interesting to watch.

As the bus pulled into the parking lot, Mrs. Dodd said over the speaker, “When you get off the bus go directly to Mr. Force’s classroom, alright?” Her voice cracked.

None of us said anything. The bus had barely stopped before she was out the door and speed walking into Holy Salvation. Mr. Force said, “Alright kiddos, I’ll see you inside. Just gotta park this around in the back. Sit tight.”

We filed off the bus and into the school. I heard Mrs. Dodd’s voice in Ms. Ryder’s office as we passed. “Deborah, are you busy right now?”

Without realizing it, I floated down the hallway and into my assigned seat in the center of Mr. Force’s Bible classroom.

After a while, Mr. Force’s footsteps sounded on the tile floor, the door shut, and he sat down at the stool behind his podium. He folded his hands and looked out of the window. Then his eyes caught each of our faces. We sat in silence, none of us knowing what to say, but also not wanting to speak first.

“So. We have just seen a show at the planetarium about the solar system. We learned some interesting things about space, but we also learned some things that... well they aren’t what we believe in. As Adventists, we teach and believe in creation. Creation was not mentioned in the show this morning.”

Another long silence.

“I want you all to take out your Bibles, and turn to Genesis verse one, chapter one, please.”

He stared out the window while a chorus of opening backpacks and flipping Bible pages filled the room. The apple juice on my fingers had dried, yet my fingers still stuck to the pages and made them curl up at the corner where I touched them. The pages became covered in yellow-orange smudges.

“Now, as a class, we are going to read the story of creation as told in Genesis.” He grinned, but it looked more like someone was pulling up the corners of his mouth with great effort. “I want you all to understand that what is written here, in the Word of God,” he held his Bible above his

head, “is the Truth. Capital-T Truth. His Truth.”

After a pause, Mr. Force began reading. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...”<sup>1</sup> As he read, he nodded his head in time with each day formed. I looked at my classmates, whose eyes were stuck to the pages of the Bibles, hands folded in their lap. Mr. Force closed his eyes and began reciting from memory. My desk vibrated slightly as I drummed it with my fingers and tapped the floor with my feet and stared at the page in front of me. Fifteen minutes passed with the only sound being Mr. Force’s voice.

“And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.”<sup>2</sup> Mr. Force finished and reopened his eyes. He looked out the window for some time before saying, “You all know that what we have just read is the True story of creation. You, each and every one of you, was formed in the likeness of God from the dirt on His earth. I hope you guard this in your hearts, live it every day of your life, and preach it to everyone you meet. I have faith that you will. Let us pray.”

He bowed his head, folded his hands, and closed his eyes; my classmates obediently followed his example.

“Dear Lord, our Heavenly Father—” Mr. Force began. He droned on about forgiveness and truth and understanding. Mercy and faith and resilience and His Word and maturity and all-knowing, all-powerful Lord our God please guide them away from false prophets and sin.

My classmates became statues, with their heads bowed at the same angle and their hands folded near their chest. My muscle memory craved the familiarity of prayer, yet a stronger part of me rejected it.

Someone’s voice had just told me that I came from star dust, and that meant far more to me than coming from dirt.

<sup>1</sup>Genesis 1:1, KJV

<sup>2</sup>Genesis 1:31, KJV

# Awendende þrag

*Naomi Sellers*

Ic eom āmētende of blācum blēoe  
Begēotan from þæs bryttan bunum mid cræft,  
Beswyllende of bryne æthrinende  
Ægþer eorðan ond heofon,  
Āspryttende of sang ond sice.  
On thære eorðan se sweoloð cymb  
Ond þa bellan singað;  
Ic drife þone fealu getwin  
ofer þære heofone.  
Forsuwung ac for slæpiga āstyrunga.  
Þonne ic āfyllle, ic ācýþe.  
Ic eom āwendende æfre ond āwa fæstræd,  
Dægeweorcum gēlice ond se āwendendum of þræg.  
Saga hwæt ic hatte.

I am painted of pastel colors  
Poured out from the Author's cup with craft,  
A drenching fire touching  
Both earth and sky,  
Bringer of songs and groans.  
On the earth the glow comes  
And the bells sing;  
I drive my grey twin  
Over the heavens.  
Silence but for sleepy-shifts.  
When I fell, I reveal.  
I am ever changing and always constant,  
Like the day break and the change of time.  
Say what I am

# The Empty Seats Between Us

*Maggie Ramseur*

38



The Empty Seats Between Us

# Sacrament

*Isaiah Pramuk*

At the limit of my language, I find God.

And perhaps that is why I do not believe. Because She is outside of any and all tools for grasping and making sense of the universe around us.

I place my trust in a system of syllables and characters put in place to order experience,  
But when that system fails me, when it cannot reconcile the infinite with my perception,  
Whom do I abandon?

God or language?

I cannot reconcile the finite and infinite, imperfect sign and perfect signified.  
I cannot reconcile my yearning for meaning with the answers presupposed,  
And at the crux of my question I must decide how I will define my perception

39  
∞

Every time I will let go of the signified in favor of the sign.  
I tell myself I can arrive at the conclusions, so long as I have the proper clues.

I wish I could trust that the signified is enough to go on,  
A foundation for a happy life free from entanglement with the arbitrary.  
It would be so easy to drop the finite questions in favor of one infinite answer.

And it is this thought that scares me the most.

I never want to let go of my questions.

I never want to relinquish my tenuous grip on the spiraling chaos of the overfull night sky.  
Every star a question I will never answer, every star a question I must ask.

I walk in the precarity of a lived bodily question;

Dust or star?

I spring from the taught drumskin of experience;  
With my feet I beat a tattoo of orphaned answers on this paved earth.  
The rhythm of steady footfalls maps itself beneath eyelids closed  
And I slip through the unbroken pavement into a dream of my own birth.

In the anteriority at the beginning of time I am whole;  
A question of untapped potentiality answered by familiar walls;  
Mud and red magma ichor—  
A question unasked.

Unbidden, in the silence under the subdued earth, the question rises out of me.

Unwilling, crying to remain in the womb of the world, I am spit up,  
Exhumed.

40  
∞

And again the answers slip through my stiff fingers,  
I am made and unmade in the falling through, in the crush of dirt and ore  
And concrete as my maker pushes me up out of the colonized earth.

Here there is no communion left to me.  
The soles of my shoes and this paved earth are too alike,  
And both are too foreign to my questing carbon (as it tangles with transcendence).

I look to starstuff, the perceived patterns in the milky way as it swings low;  
I catch a passing star and hold tight with untrustworthy fingers;  
I pray that an answer may emerge from the cosmos,  
a sacrament of fire and wind and carbon—

Reconciliation of star and dust.

Sacrament



# We Couldn't Be Astronauts

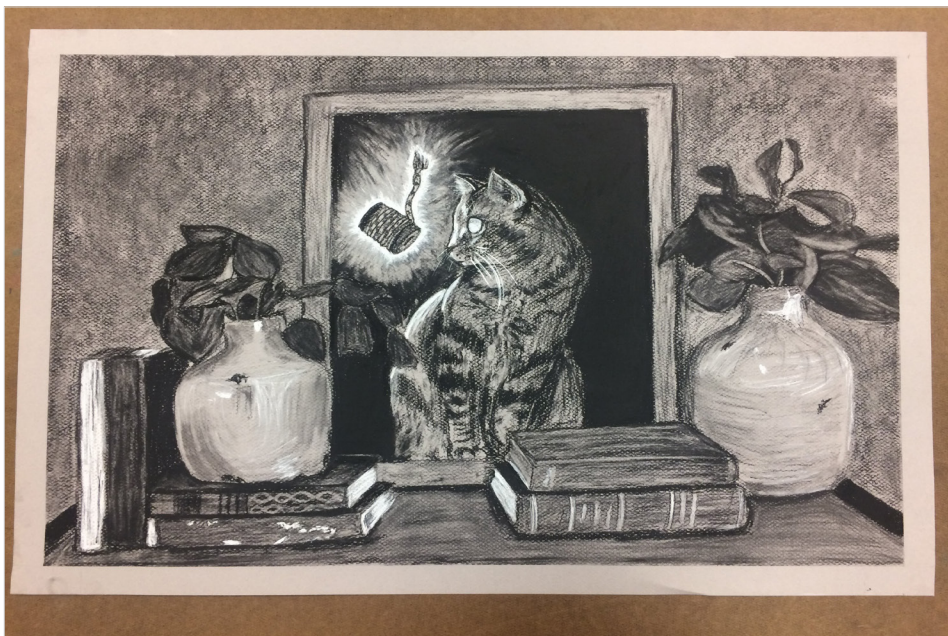
*Violet Mitchell*

Every human has died on Earth except for three. Every drink I've ever had only makes me more thirsty. I wish you had the golden pleasure of waking up on a hiking trail you governed all on your own. I wish tee-shirts fit after the first wash and that babies didn't scream so loud. I wish first dates weren't so scary and bananas didn't bruise easily. Maybe if I could touch the nothing black sky, I'd worry more about how big a breath to take or how to land the ship safely.

# RIP Nebula

*Jake Snow*

42



RIP Nebula

# Behemoth/American Kitsch

*Isaiah Pramuk*

Everyone wants a piece  
everyone wants their take-home doggy-bag snapshot of the falls  
to bleed out on over-saturated screens  
to help remember the fleeting feeling of awe—it only grabs us  
and shakes our stunted roots one maybe two times a life anymore  
because we leached all the magic out of the world  
to keep our plasma screens pulsing through the night  
(because we are afraid to be alone with our dreams).

--the Niagara River rushes out over empty space and becomes seconds spilling out of our fruitfly lives--

Limp your way through the jungle of tourists wrapped in blue yellow condoms  
and overgrown gift shops lined with snow globes emblazoned with your name  
(see if you can find your true face fisheyed among the Johns and Sharons)  
and old-school racist headdresses and toy rifles for your kids to cut their vicious instincts on.

Pull your molars to pay in pain but remember that kitsch demands tribute  
in sweat-soggied bills fished out of back pockets and  
bazaar-like bottomless purses lined with the refuse of loving four children  
but the devil's in the details—  
the true cost is the weight you will lug with you in paperweights and novelty bottle openers  
and half assembled dinosaur models sticky with rubber-cement.

--you can hear the cry of the behemoth calling you softly over the roar of an assembled humanity  
intent on their food and their young and finding their perfect memory for thirteen-ninety-nine to  
take home  
and dust off in a few years—

Find wax drenched flowers to give your balding fathers but don't linger long;  
if you hurry you might be able to beat the rush for the boats—sardine packed  
(but still enough room to brandish your phone at an unsuspecting world).

--Hear it calling to you in the thunder in the crush in the decibels of foamy sound  
bouncing off the rocks beyond the edge of the world--

Shore these fragments in the ruins of the behemoth  
'till you're compelled to take your proof of purchase  
and post it online to prove to yourself you were here

# Porn Kills

*Laura Spigle*



# Another Day at School

*John Malone*

CHORUS:

Bangs and running then silence  
Fire alarm but nobody moves  
What do we do with this violence?  
What's going on, oh God what do I do?  
Tears and wailings of sirens,  
My heart can't take more, I don't know about you

46 ∞

The country erupted over Columbine and rightfully so, now a shootings so common two weeks go by and we think everything's fine – no really that's how it goes, after the shocks and the shouts and the prayers and the thoughts and the stories and woes – politicians talk, twitter explodes, everyone fighting while safe in their homes. Speeches are given, pieces are written, specials about both the shooter and victims, that is until something juicer happens – policy stays the same, hi what's your name? My name is John I was in a school shooting in 2013 – nice to meet you, me too, in fact it's not that rare I mean, there's been a lot of shootings since 2013 – some of em you've never heard of or seen, but are you surprised? I mean nothing is changing, how many kids you think it'll take to open our eyes? How many innocent lives? Why am I sitting here snapping this pen – probably cause I know it'll happen again – it's just a matter of time, it's just a matter of when, how can a loss of lives be put on a spectrum of political sides?! Pro-guns or no-guns I don't I don't give a shit! Children are dying, why are we fighting?! Something needs to be done about this!

CHORUS:

Bangs and running then silence  
Fire alarm but nobody moves  
What do we do with all of this violence?  
What's going on, oh God, what should I do?  
Tears and blaring of sirens,  
My heart can't take more, I don't know about you

Another Day at School

It's just fucked up isn't it – and it's not just schools is it no, it's theatres and concerts and nightclubs – really anywhere - I guess politicians simply don't care or I guess they aren't paid enough to – just imagine this was your kid at school, what would you do? Bullet holes in the masses for the full pockets of the few – tell me if you lost your kid what would you do? How many lives will it take to prove it – how many times do we need to do this – I'll be honest I just don't know what to say, a piece of me will always be in that day, and it sickens me to see how many kids will probably feel the same way. This is not how it's supposed to be, so many kids shouldn't need post traumatic therapy – and we blast the news reels over and over- what was he like? Here's the last drink that he had on his coaster, here's the bike that he stole from his neighbors, how did you not know this would happen? Look what he put on his papers! We put the blame on the people involved, how they did this, why they did that, ignoring the real problems that need to be solved, as a matter of fact – here's the logistics, shooting happens everyone yells at the gun lobbyists, everyone yells at the democrats for just being too damn sensitive – blood pressure rises, names are called, meanwhile there's still blood in the halls – 'course everyone only gets involved after bodies fall – so once you get done arguing faults please clean the blood in our halls. Please clean the blood in our halls.

#### CHORUS:

Bangs and running then silence  
Fire alarm but nobody moves  
What do we do with all of this violence?  
What's going on, oh God, what should we do?  
My heart can't take more and I'm just sick of it, aren't you?

Look I get it, guns are important, what if we need to grab our torches and save the nation, what if burglars step on our porches, little snowflake, please check your sources – my guns protected by the declaration – this is America! Proud to have the most guns per capita! Guns don't kill people, people kill people don't you understand? Well shit, it'd probably be a lot harder without a gun in their hands! Why don't you lose some classmates, see utter loss on your kids face, then tell me you're still such a big fan! What the fuck you need an assault rifle for?! The whole army comin to knock down your door? GahhhhhD! I must be crazy, I must be insane! I guess it's just okay to be haunted by one Friday the 13th, I guess it's fine to need headphones when I try to sleep, I guess it's okay to sit and just randomly weep, I guess it's fine to just live with this grief, have doors slamming and banging make me

white as a sheep – goosebumps under my sleeves – shooting goes by nother day nother week, shoot-  
ing goes by nother day nother week, shooting goes by just another day of the week! Maybe one day  
you'll hear when we speak! Yes gun control in America is the dream of the fool, so make sure to hug  
your children tight before they go to school, make sure they know you care more about an outdated  
right than even their life, be sure to send your thoughts and prayers as you kiss your rifle goodnight.



NOTE: Please use this QR code to see the great video by John that accompanies these lyrics.



# Affirmative Action

*Anonymous*

While you were complaining about  
Not getting accepted into nursing school,  
I was remembering the first time I saw snow,  
When I learned the meaning of awestruck.

While you were talking about  
How you knew it wasn't because of your grades,  
I was reading about my country in the news;  
How your president actively hinders their progress.

While you were screaming about  
How much you hated minority groups,  
I was whispering back,  
Yeah? What do you think I am?

While you were shouting, red-faced, about  
The hypocrisy of equality,  
My heritage was pumping through my veins,  
Igniting some crucial part of me.

Something born in a different country,  
That fled to seek refuge,  
To find safety  
But did not arrive.

# Walled Perspective

*Naomi Sellers*

50  
∞



Walled Perspective

# The Modern Wolf

*Violet Mitchell*

Melon shoes stomping all over the cup  
crinkled oak, we are invincible dancers.  
We order only waters from the bar and  
wear pants instead of dresses, and I love

the feeling of hair on your back. Statistically,  
of course random colognes would pounce  
on real-life lesbians. Who are you here with?  
under the clouds and static, he tries to kiss

us both. Slobber always results in threes:  
stitched quickly to my turning cheek; the beat  
of the song where I braid Emma to my fingers;  
pulling her away as hard as I fucking can.

Counting to eleven, we order water  
and try to get our hearing back.

# Death's Grip

*Laura Spiegle*

52



# Tomorrow

*John Malone*

## CHORUS:

I am so lost right now. Out in the dark hear the monsters howl, see the torchlights coming from the town – I am the monster in you won't you let me out....

## VERSE 1:

Forget about the notion of being effortlessly perfect, everybody's got a monster just waiting to break surface (won't you let it just break surface) I talk a lot about the purpose but what about the outcome? Here's some inner demons (everybody has some) I never really used to be this way – used to hate the way I acted say back in 6th grade – used to beat my arms black and blue so trust me, I know exactly what you're going through, know exactly what that head can do, know exactly how it feels when your own mind turns against you. (Let's dig a little more) fine let's take this to its core – let's talk about depression, how it fits its name perfectly 'cause it feels like somethings always pressin' on you hurtfully – your brain is the source of this horror so I used to take a shirt and cut the oxygen till I fell to the floor or what's more I used to isolate myself (why do you hate yourself? Why can't you shrug these thoughts off like everybody else?) Please take these locks off and share with someone, anybody else – so simple in the outcome but God this voice is loud! (Look what's left John just turn the volume down)...

## CHORUS:

I am so lost right now. Out in the woods hear the monster howl, see the torchlights coming from the town – I hear the monster in you, why can't you keep it down?

## VERSE 2:

I'm not trying to make you worried about me, I just want you to know you're not alone in this journey you see – not alone in this hurting 'cause I've been there and I'm still here so surely you can take this pain and stand tall! Take it from the kid who used to eat alone in the bathroom stall, don't you dare give up, you got so many years left to be – give your pain to me, I would take it if I could I would bear it all 'cause I can't sit and stare while you crumble, while you fall, this shit was never easy,

life is fucking hard! But I know your smile and I've seen your beating heart, it's too big to collapse like some dying star – push for yourself, push for me, push for your family, you get to choose if this story ends happily. I know everyone's gotta solve this somehow on their own but I can't know that you're bleeding if your scars aren't shown – don't feel like you have to do this work all alone! Here's your shoulder to cry on, here's your ears to shout at til your voice is gone, here take my smile to borrow – whatever it fucking takes to make sure you're still here tomorrow! Let your monster out, show me its fangs, beat it down till it's tamed, mental health is nothing to be ashamed – here's the scars from my own, listen to me, I promise you you're not alone.

#### CHORUS:

I feel kinda lost right now, but can you come and help me out? You are not alone right now, take my hand if you fall down, you are not alone right now, we're gonna make it through this somehow, you are not alone right now.

#### FINAL VERSE:

You are not alone right now, not as long as I exist, and I admit, I'm getting sick of all the piece of shits who chalk it up to being sensitive – too many suicides in my lifetime to prove against this – honestly I'm running out of patience, treat us like human beings not like ignorant patients. We know how this world works all too well, quit trying to ignore the truths in mental health – it's no wonder so many people are scared to ask for help. And to all those suffering take care of yourself please, if you ever feel alone in this world know you matter to me. Just take a step back and breathe, 'cause you are not alone right now, you're gonna make it through this somehow.



NOTE: Please use this QR code to see the great video by John that accompanies these lyrics.

# Growing Dancer

*Laura Spiegle*





# Corners I Can't Afford to Stare At

*Alexis Jas*

56  
∞



Corners I Can't Afford to Stare At



# Under Him

*Laura Spiegle*

Ceiling. TV. Ceiling. TV.  
Don't look at him, girl  
Don't look at me  
Ceiling. TV. Ceiling. TV.

Ceiling. Wall. Ceiling. Wall.  
Time to take a breath now  
Do it quick, girl  
Not too loud at all  
Ceiling. Wall. Ceiling. Wall.

TV. Wall. TV. Wall.  
Not time to give-up  
Open your eyes. Come on  
look at the –  
TV. Wall. TV. Wall.

Ceiling. TV. Ceiling. TV.  
He's looking at you now  
He can feel you breathe.

# My “One Story”

*Jazmine Rodriguez*

Racial identity and I have had a long journey with one another. When I was a kid, I knew to be fiercely proud of my Puerto Rican heritage. My family went to the Puerto Rican Day parade in NYC and in Bridgeport every year. We hung mini flags in our cars, had big ones off the back porches in our homes, wore t-shirts, got tattoos— because that flag was a badge of honor. I also knew that Puerto Rico was a modern day colony, without the full freedoms of citizenship but all the requirements of taxation. I knew that we came in all colors, from the whitest of skin with blue eyes and blonde hair (like the neighbor boy David Garcia) to the densest melanin with kinky hair like my Madrina, and everyone in between. People like me.

58 But that didn’t make filling out the endless standardized tests and school lottery paperwork any easier. I knew I was Hispanic, but was I non-white Hispanic? I mean, I’m pretty light, so is my mom so maybe I was white Hispanic. But then again, my dad and uncles are all pretty dark so was that option null and void to me? In the past five years I’ve come to realize what bullshit that question is. To be Puerto Rican is to be Taíno, Spaniard, and African. We cannot tease out the individual elements, unless you are completely native, but that’s not the case for most people. We all know how colonization works.

I didn’t learn what my race “said” about me to others until I was in high school. Until then, I fit in with the kids at school being the we were all black or latine. I didn’t have my first white classmate until 6th grade. She complained about how dumpy our school was compared to her old one. She explained they had computers, art classes, music classes, a huge playground and their lunch was always fresh made. I didn’t realize school could be any different than what I experienced. I have to take a moment to thank my mother for that, for making sure she got me the best education she could. But this feeling of lack stuck with me ever since then.

When I got to high school is when I knew for sure that my race made people have knee jerk reactions or immediate judgements. I was “exotic” to boys who loved my curly hair and olive skin. I was a “beaner” to the dumbass white men at the bus stop who assumed all latin people were Mexican. I was dangerous when in large groups to cops. I was a great landscaper for the rich families one town over. I was a translator for the woman in the grocery store, in the DMV, in the public assistance office, or wherever I could be recognized as a Spanish speaker. I hated these assumptions about me.

I hate them all the more today.

I love my heritage. I love rice and beans, flan, coquito, Vick's "vaporu" as my mom would say. I love merengue and salsa music. I love the Puerto Rican Day Parade even though I haven't been to one in 5 years. I still say "WEPA!!!!" for anything really cool, or badass, just a happy exclamation really. My race is a history that I cannot be anything but proud of. My people survived horrible birth control experiments, decades of the Jones Act and current bankruptcy.

Then there was Hurricane Maria. Most still don't have power, even more have no clean water or access to food. But my people are resilient. We are stubborn. We are passionate. There's footage of my people making makeshift pipelines to move river water to their pueblos. They're picking themselves up because FEMA left too early. They're too busy to be concerned with the number of people who don't even realize they're citizens. They've got a country to rebuild.

This is who I am, this heritage of survival despite colonization in 2018. I used to wish that I could be white. My "one story" of whiteness was that they knew no hardships, they had the perfect lives that I could only dream up. I know that isn't the case 100%, but every once in a while I do imagine what it'd be like to have thousands of years of white privilege on my side. But that would make me weak. I wouldn't be a quarter of the person I am today if it wasn't for all the crazy Puerto Ricans in my life.

## Color Study. Bottle Green.

*Maggie Ramsaur*

60  
∞



Color Study. Bottle Green.

# Sappho Made Hot Cocoa

*Violet Mitchell*

Magic always happens at Sam's house. People sing and dance poorly and play D&D and get drunk and have magnet poetry competitions. I judged a round where one used Shakespearean slang to talk about butts, and another was a yo mamma joke. The last had blurry grammar and mentioned grass and a girl named Ann. I picked that one, but the others chose Victorian ass. The boys scattered to play beer pong. I stared at the Ann poem more with my spiked hot chocolate in hand. A college version of Anna Kendrick with ocean hair in a messy bun said, it really should have won. I told her grass is very beautiful in the right lighting. She laughed and said something I don't remember. I didn't see her again, but I sat down and wondered why it never occurred to me how soft girls' lips must be.

Untitled

*Karissa Freese*



# To Be Radical With You

*Jasmine Rodriguez*

Waking up to your foul morning breath  
Making eggs in a nest for breakfast while your face hides beneath your tangled hair  
Walking our dog  
Shopping for dresses  
Or maybe just color coordinating our looks  
Riding the bus  
Picking up take-out  
Buying weed  
Paying our rent  
Hanging our pride flag in the window  
Matching Ask my Pronouns buttons  
Holding your hand  
Resting your head on my shoulder after a long day  
Looking for new apartments  
Visiting home

They're everyday acts that for most might be mundane  
But when I, a gender non conforming person step out with my trans girlfriend, they are acts of  
Resistance.  
Being in love with you  
Publicly  
Shamelessly  
Unafraid (okay maybe a little afraid sometimes)  
Is an act of  
Revolution.  
I love to be radical with you.

But I can't wait until,  
You know,  
We're not  
Radical  
Anymore.



# My Monsters

*Morgan Stevens*

There are times in our lives when the monsters reflect our very actions, when the creatures that we deemed so improbable, so grotesque that they can't possibly be any type of real. They are too disgusting to exist in our world, with their pale skin, their eyes dark with malicious intent, their mouths wide and gaping with row upon rows of teeth gnashing to swallow us at any moment. Those monsters are the ones that don't exist, that's what we tell ourselves.

We look to one another, look at the endless array of human expression. The way our lips no matter what color curl up in a smile or down to show disbelief. The way our eyes reflect one another's so easily, my brown in your blue, your blue in your father's green. It's easier to think that because I am a reflection of you and you of me that we cannot be the monsters, that we cannot be the ones at fault. Everything we were afraid of, everything we ever have feared from the birth to fall of man isn't real. It didn't come from me. That's what we think.

We used to tell our children that there was a monster that would come and eat them, gobble them up in a nice roast dinner if they refused to listen. The monster with iridescent moonlit skin, the eyes so similar to our own they matched more human expression than the people I've come to know. It was the same monster that would consume them and leave their shoes for their mothers to find in the morning, placed in a heady pile next to the bed with disheveled sheets.

My mother cried when she found my brother's shoes, the tiny leather ones with the skid mark from the concrete on the toe of the left, and the tiny initials he attempted to carve in with my father's hunting knife on the heel. The shoes were found in a pile of other forgotten ones next to a truck filled with ash. Each pair, we knew, taken off a child's freezing feet as they were promised they would be warm again soon.

My monsters spoke German, a tongue I learned to survive the bitter nights. My monsters had hair darker than the chocolate my brother smeared all over his face when he ate. Their eyes were every color under the sun; from the bright blue of the sky that hangs over my grandmother's radish garden, to the endless sea of marred dirt and mud from battle. Those eyes reflected everything I was. The fear. The guilt. The anger I carried in my heart like a stone I so desperately wanted to throw back at them.

My mother told me the monsters would come and eat me if I didn't listen when I was little,

and then I grew up. I believed those monsters weren't a part of our world anymore. There were no monsters that would take me in the middle of my peaceful night sleep. Those monsters were only bedtime stories, figments of my imagination, images I couldn't even conjure no matter how many storybooks my grandfather read me. The monsters I stopped believing became the very people I was running from and towards the end of my life, I could no longer tell if it was the people who imitated monsters, or monsters who imitated people.

# Autumn in Warsaw

*Alexis Jas*



# The House that Reflected my Abyss

*Matthew Wiles*

The seemingly endless expanse of the sea doesn't scare me  
The massive waves don't scare me  
My own mortality doesn't scare me  
The gentle passage of time is my only fear

The sea air stung, whipping along his face, waves cresting and dying, slamming into the side of the city, which had landed to grab more water to convert into something drinkable. The city swayed slightly, dancing back and forth, rocking, its massive weight creating its own buoyancy.

Nathan leaned on the rail, chest elongated over, hanging right over the water, hands gripping the top of the railing; he thought about how easy it would be to push down, lifting his body slight up, and bending further forward until his feet lost the feeling of the city's ground and he fell straight into the water. He would let the sea engulf him and sink straight into the depths of nothingness. He wanted someone to hit him so hard they knocked the consciousness out the back of his head the way of a gunshot, splattering the walls in it like Pollock. He wondered what color consciousness had when it was expelled from the body.

Nathan was sure that something, somewhere inside him was fundamentally broken, shattered the way glass does when a baseball bat is swung, scattering it inwards. Was it broken beyond repair? Where even was the break? He could never find the catalyst, only the destruction caused by it. It was like trying to pull a weed, but he just kept missing the roots so that weed kept growing back stronger.

The endless cycles of joy and sadness, spinning with no control and no end, cutting deep, dissuading an interest in either, shredding through will and wants, decreasing the meaning and the joy and the sadness that was found, turning everything into the same thing, and that was the worst feeling in the world. The second joy and sadness and emotions lost color and lost meaning; death is the only option the ends the circle of numbness, where it's like Nathan was feeling everything through a dozen other Nathans so that by the time it reaches him it was so diluted that he can no longer feel it. Yet he can't seem to break through, to conquer the disillusion, until that same disillusion overtakes him and prevents him from ever going anywhere. He was on a moving walkway going the other way, trying to walk against the tide, but ultimately going nowhere.

Nathan lifted his chest off the cold metal of the bar and turned around, heading back to-

wards the green but wind-beaten cliff side that lead up to a dust colored wall, where massive houses sat along terraces elevated on plateau like structures, climbing up like a staircase. At the bottom sat a road and in front of that sat more houses, ones that stood right on the edge of the cliff, towering over the sea, elevated by the platform. Nathan looked up at these houses before stepping into a staircase, leading up from the makeshift beach. He turned down the sidewalk and paced himself towards the front entrance, where a gate blocked entrance to everyone not welcome in the Heights. From there he went up towards the very end where his house was, a large conglomerate mess of styles looking like a blend of many centuries with no understanding of what made those styles distinct. He wasn't going to try to explain it outside beyond the show of wealth that it was meant to be. In this way, Nathan felt that the house was nothing more than a house, especially without his mom there anymore.

He barely remembered the night, as if the event had never happened to begin with. He only could comprehend how dark it was when the gunshot reverberated through the house, shooting through the silences and breaking the restful state he found himself in. He tried to force his way through the gelatin of sleep but kept being bounced off like a trampoline. Eyes slogged back into themselves, as if they knew what was going on before his mind did. Yet he still forced himself up, rushing through the dark that gripped him tightly and never let him go. It felt as if there were hands around him, grabbing him, forcing him back. Fumbling straight through, touching the wall right outside of his room, he used it to guide him towards where he thought the sound came from, but more than anything what drew him was the screaming. It sounded like a dying animal, its roar too hoarse, the sound popping in and out like a balloon peaking before reaching pinnacle and falling back down, the voice losing itself and never regaining as if the source of the voice had finally died. Nathan wondered if he ever had heard something so disheartening, in all of his life. Nathan had never felt the wind kick of him more than that sound did. It felt like a thump right on his diaphragm as if the voice was hitting him with a punch.

He ran, that's all he knew, ran through the dark, towards the voice. Nathan pumped his legs back and forth, back and forth, symphonically, rhythmically until all he could hear was the whooshing of his legs. From there Nathan couldn't remember anything, his memory totally blank. Pulling the key that hung around his neck, Nathan slipped the metal between the hole and twisted his wrist until the lock clicked. Pushing the handle down and entering the room, he realized it was really dark. The dark echoed the emptiness of the house, shouting out that no one had been there today. Marissa was at school and wouldn't be home until after band, and his dad never showed up home anymore. Nathan thought that he was too ashamed, or desperate, or something that Nathan didn't even

understand, so he avoided the home like the plague. He spent an innumerable number of hours at work, coming home drunk and wasted early in the morning only to grab a few more hours of sleep and then head back to work again. What his dad was even working on, Nathan didn't know. Maybe he wasn't working on anything, maybe he was just trying to keep himself busy. Nathan was glad that his dad could; Nathan wasn't even sure what he enjoyed to do anymore, so he never did anything. Without even turning the lights on, Nathan went and sat on his couch, waiting for someone to come and give him something to believe in.

# Harbor Boats

*Naomi Sellers*



# An Intersection

*Jazmine Rodriguez*

I'm disabled. You don't see a wheel chair though so I must be fine right? You don't know about absence seizures, when I stare off and my eyes flutter a million miles a minute or all you can see is the whites of my eyes cause my irises are too busy dancing to the beat of my dysfunctional neurons.

You don't remember I exist until I'm on the floor convulsing cause that's the only kind of epilepsy right? Don't know about how I've hit my head so many times that I'm actively concerned about subdural hematomas using my own blood to drown myself within my skull.

You don't see the struggle to commute, the job discrimination that no one acknowledges still exists. You don't see my medications that made my depression so bad I had to be institutionalized. You don't see a service dog, you see a cute pet.

72  
∞

You forgot I was raised on gunshots and cop lights. You forgot the projects when my Timbs became Sorels (cause the snow is realer here than at home). You forgot my food stamps and my section 8 housing. You forgot the '64 Impala, the 'sclades with spinners, dreamin bout sittin on 22s. You forgot that I don't fear walking through the hood cause they're all still different versions of home to me.

I'm just educated now. Like James Baldwin said "This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish."

I was supposed to perish there. I wasn't supposed to escape let alone go back, and bring more hood kids to safety with me.

You forgot I'm a hood bitch cause I turned in my AAEEV for "proper syntax" but I'm here. When you forget next time, I can throw hands to remind you, or take you to the graves of every kid I buried (because they were all just kids).

You forgot about my hood survivor's guilt.



You forgot the two connect. That my hoodness is due to my poorness. That my poorness meant sometimes my medical needs weren't met. Cause the rents gotta get paid and sometimes that's at the cost of a prescription.

The hood in me exacerbated the disability.  
Nah, the poverty did that.

But you don't see any of that so, who cares?

# To the Metamour

*Jazmine Rodriguez*

Alan,

I thank you. I never fear that she will come home crying, because you were another “tranny chaser”. You don’t reduce her womanness to genitalia. Don’t gawk at her size 10 feet. Don’t flinch at the deep sleepy voice. Instead you call her baby girl. Talk art with her. Acknowledge her dysphoria and try your damndest to fight it

I thank you for making her happy.

Alan, you are the best metamour I could ask for.

Alan, I love you.

# Green

*Noelle Norris*



# The Tomb of Desire

*Kylie Lung*

He pulled back his hand from the rose he held, a droplet of blood ran down his palm. Sucking on the cut, he ignored the strange passing glances of the travelers in Liverpool Street Station. He licked the iron taste of his teeth. Grace probably wouldn't appreciate a blood-splattered smile. David straightened his shirt for the third time in five minutes. The white buttons felt taut against his skin. He worried he may have gained weight since the last time he saw her. It couldn't be that noticeable. He could too easily envision Grace's face falling as she walked towards him in the station. His phone buzzed announcing her arrival. He straightened his back in reflex, sucking in his stomach. She could be watching him right now.

He scanned the crowd, but without his glasses all the people looked like fuzzy-edged, businessman. She'd recognize him right? It had only been a week since they met, but they had spent hours together in that Prague nightclub. They definitely had become acquainted with each other's faces among the sweaty crowds, stealing away into corners to kiss against the pulsating black walls.

"I'm going to be in London next week, we should meet up." He had said to her at the end of their night. If he didn't ask direct questions, he couldn't be hurt by the answer.

She had smiled broadly at the proposition. David thought he could count almost all of her big white teeth if she kept her face still. They had texted all day for the past week and his casual night club lust had morphed into a bigger infatuation. His palms sweat at the thought of grasping her waist again. He had done it over many hours a week ago, but it was different now. She was no longer another girl in a club, but someone much more three dimensional, a woman made of flesh and blood who would actually take a train from her university to meet up with him. That whole night in Prague held an alcohol-soaked haze, but he vividly remembered half yelling in her ear how beautiful she was. She had smiled down at her feet, brushing strawberry blonde hair behind her ear. Eventually she stopped rolling her eyes and danced with him.

A light tap on his shoulder brought him out of the memory. He spun around, coming to stare into her light blue eyes. She had long black tights that tapered into suede ankle boots, looking delectably British in her knee length gray coat. David yearned to see what was under it. She kissed him lightly on the lips, taking his hand in her own. In her other she received the rose, instantly breaking it's stem so it would fit into her overnight bag. David flinched as the green

sinew cracked.

Her lips were in a permanent half-smile, the apples of her cheeks suspended above deep dimples. Her heeled boots clacked rhythmically on the hard concrete, he couldn't help but notice the way men's heads snapped towards her at the noise, like Pavlov's dog.

"How was your train ride?" He stared up at her from the lower step on the escalator as they descended into the ultraviolet cave of the London underground.

"Not bad at all," She flicked her head back slightly, the silvery blonde strands of hair followed her direction,, "I was very excited to see you again. You look incredibly dapper."

David smiled down at the sharp teeth of the escalator. She was too pretty to look at and he wasn't programmed to receive compliments of that caliber. Never once had he met a girl whose eyes shone like two identical Sapphire rings. He wondered briefly if they were the same color as Princess Diana's wedding ring. His vision had been overloaded the last few days with those cheap facsimiles from every tourist shop on Oxford street.

She gave him a soft punch in his lapel, "You're shy." Her accent elongated the word, which only made his face flare further with embarrassed heat. Her eyes trailed off to the descending posters along the sloping wall, and he took the opportunity to scan her over for any welcome signs of nervousness. Her fingers twitched around the leather strap of her overnight bag. He couldn't decide if it was a sign of impatience or urgency. Maybe he was just transposing his own feelings onto the lithe figure in front of him. David noticed the red rose peeking out the top of her bag was now barely visible beneath its fogged cellophane.

An hour later the sun hung behind a beautiful row of luxury flats in Earl's Court. Grace giggled into her chest as they both stopped on another identical corner. She continued to look down at her phone, doing an adorable slow spin as she tried to align herself with the Google Maps arrow.

"I think it's this way," David said tentatively, pointing down the road in front of them. He was hesitant to tell her that he had been in this neighborhood before and knew this area of London. He was enjoying her confused spins too much. Following her around forever didn't sound too bad. That sounded like the much better alternative to catching a flight back to Canada in two days. David had only come to Europe to pick up his UK working visa and had to tie up the loose ends in Alberta before he could start his new cosmopolitan life in London. A small part of him hoped he'd have more than a new engineering job waiting for him in the English capital when he came back. Too early, Dave, he thought to himself, you're going to scare this girl.

"Ah yes," she stomped confidently where he pointed, never looking up. He grasped her by the elbow and pulled her away from the lip of the sidewalk as she almost collided with a trash bin.

She laughed again and thanked him. He was relieved to hear the sharp nervous pitch to this brand of giggles.

Upon finding the cramped St. Joseph's Inn, David couldn't help but count each narrow step that lead to their room, it seemed like an eternity had condensed into the peeling wallpaper of the cramped hallway. Grace kept apologizing, saying it looked nicer on Expedia, but he couldn't care less. He was just glad she took the initiative to book a room, he had suggested they stay at his hostel, his bed did have a curtain after all. Surprisingly, she had quickly poo-pooed that idea. He considered buying a dozen roses to make up for that stupid suggestion, but thought that would be overkill. During their previous week of non-stop texting, Grace had said he needed to distinguish himself at the train station with a rose or possibly a top hat. He went with the rose.

Grace paced around the small space once they got to their room, frowning at the piled bed-spread, "I think this bed is just two twins pushed together," she said, "Very Lucy and Ricky." She looked over at him with a smile, waiting for a reaction.

"That's an 'I Love Lucy' reference right?"

"Good job, David." She patted his back as she brushed past him to grab her bag. He smiled, watching her shuffle through it for her toothbrush. She looked up as he sat beside her bag on the bed. He leaned towards her, slipping his hand behind the silken curtain of her hair. Her lips were startlingly cold and she tasted like vanilla and those mini mints that rattled around purses everywhere.

She pushed her bag off the bed, allowing David to lay her back onto the mattress. On a personal dare to himself, he opened his eyes and was startled to find hers wide open. Her gums were a dark irony red and he wondered if they were receding slightly. He chastised himself for letting his mind wander when he literally had his hands on the most beautiful girl who had ever bothered to talk to him. Unable to take the eye contact any longer, he changed the direction of his caress, leading his lips along her jaw and down her porcelain neck. Her neck was completely void of peach fuzz hair or the dappling of moles. Grazing his mouth over spindly threads of throbbing blue veins, he thought he could almost feel their circulation under his lips. He moved downward to her collarbone, at which Grace pushed him back with a surprisingly forceful hand.

"I have a plan." She said finitely.

He raised his eyebrows. He did to, but he had a feeling it differed from what she was about to propose. She said she wanted to get dinner and some drinks and then head back to the bed bug paradise they'd be inhabiting until morning. David agreed with as much vehemence as he could muster. Grace bounced off the mattress to the bathroom to touch up her face.

A loud knock emanated from the thin hotel room door. David stood up quickly, straighten-

ing his shirt. It was probably the pinched looking old crone who raked his eyes over David when he thought he wasn't looking. It reminded him of the look his prom date's mother had given him when he arrived to pick her up. His hands had rattled around the plastic corsage box, making him feel guilty for things he hadn't done. In two steps, he reached the door but before he could grab the handle Grace slipped out of the bathroom, intercepting him completely.

"I've got it, love," she said quickly.

"Are you sure?"

She nodded up at him, "The room is under my name after all."

He raised up his hands and stood back. Instead of opening the door entirely she cracked it a few inches then slipped out. He stood awkwardly in the middle of the room, re-checking his unchanged phone screen. His eyes caught the flayed open handles of her bag, landing on a small jar filled with spherical white shapes. He crouched to look closer, finding it hard to believe that a woman in 2017 had a jar full of extra-large jawbreakers in her bag. As the voices grew louder he straightened up quickly. David crept closer to the door, trying to decipher Grace's posh cadence over the grunting cockney of the hotel manager.

"Like I said, they're ready," the old woman hissed, "you're falling behind."

"I know, I know," Grace said after a pregnant pause, "I know I can't keep them waiting much longer."

The rest of the conversation was muffled out fully as if they must have moved farther down the hallway. Another minute passed and Grace traipsed back into the room, her smile looked a little more plastic and counterfeit than when she left a few minutes ago.

"Want to grab a bite?" she asked cheerily before he could ask any questions.

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Grace wrapped her arm around David's waist as they hobbled past the Houses of Parliament. They had spent the last few hours bouncing from pub to pub, sampling fish and chip platters and endless pints of ciders for Grace, Guinness for David. One more drink would take him somewhere completely different, but for now he felt pleasantly buzzed. He tried to refuse the last Captain & Coke Grace bought him, but her smile was so saccharine, he would feel like a monster denying anything from her. He couldn't be sure if it was the booze or what, but he was sure as the night progressed she looked more and more like a woodland fairy straight out of some pastoral poem. Her eyes appeared to be growing larger and glassy, becoming bottomless pools of impenetrable navy. Grace's lips looked larger to him too. They had remained remarkably red throughout the night and

he didn't remember her touching them up at dinner or going to the bathroom, for that matter. He supposed she was one of those lucky girls with a sleeve full of biological magic tricks.

Grace was navigating them around the darkened streets, dimly lit by foggy yellow streetlamps. She was trying to find the co-op near their hotel, hoping for a jug of orange juice and some cheap vodka for a night cap to have in the room. Fruit juice made David's throat tight and his mouth itchy, but he'd drink ten screwdrivers if she was offering. The night was going well and not even fruit juice could ruin it. She had laughed rapturously at his favorite story about the time he sent men's thong underwear from a cheap Chinese shipping site to his friend continuously for six weeks. He thought Grace was going to shoot cider bubbles out of her nose when he told her his friend had hid the boxes of low quality nylon underwear under his bed, unsure if the panty hell would ever stop.

Now with the light of day long behind them, Grace broke away from David, jumping in an attempt to click her heels. She nailed the execution. David golf-clapped, joined back up with her to grab her waist for a ballroom dip. The tinkle of music from the bistro down the street was too good to resist. They both straightened to stand and Grace planted a dry kiss on his cheek.

"The gallery is quite magical at night," Grace said, snuggling against his shoulder, "But don't go during a Dali exhibition, those ones play tricks on your eyes in the dark." Her shoulders shuddered with a remembered bout of heebie jeebies.

"You were in there at night?" David looked behind him at the National Gallery they just passed, not even a flicker of light could be seen in its stone depths, "Was it like a special night entry thing? Or a Ben Stiller Night at the Museum scenario?"

She gave a tiny snort, "Maybe a combination of both."

"Maybe? Care to elaborate?"

Grace broke from his shoulder and ran to the lamppost further down the street. She wrapped her ankle around the base, twirling around the painted post until the momentum brought her dancing shadow to a stop in a pool of yellow light. As David approached he could hear her whistling "Singin' in the Rain" just like his Grandmother used to when she made pancakes on Christmas morning.

"It's not even raining," he laughed, taking a swing on the lamppost himself.

"Isn't it?" She raised her furrowed brow to the sky, holding her palms upward, "I thought I may have felt something this time."

"Tonight let's just pretend," She grabbed his hand, leading him in a jog down the empty sidewalk.

He couldn't help but smile as they ran past the rows of posh homes. His exposed gums



stung in the passing cold air, but he was enjoying the view of Grace's moonlight whitened hair streaming behind her. David could not remember the last time he had felt this good; hand in hand with a pretty girl, his senses happily bubbly with alcohol.

"We need to find shelter!" Grace laughed, "I'm melting!"

They continued their drunken jog through the humming London streets until Grace stopped them abruptly in front of an ivy entangled gate.

"This is one of my favorite spots in London," She said breathlessly.

David attempted to focus his eyes. Before him was a rusty gate with a new chain, the tips of old tombstones just visible in his eye line.

"I didn't know people had favorite cemeteries."

"The British can be quite morbid," she cackled into his shoulder, "Do you want to check it out?"

David felt a little soberer than he had thirty seconds ago.

"I don't think we can get in" was his passive protest.

She led him by the hand further down the sidewalk to a more eroded piece of fence. She kicked it swiftly with her boot, collapsing a two foot wide hole. Her purse jerked with the motion, freeing the small jar he had eyed earlier. It clattered to the concrete, but Grace had already ducked through the hole onto the darkened grass within. David knelt to pick it up wondering if he was more messed up than he thought. The jawbreakers looked squishier than he remembered, the centers were daubed with blue and brown circles. He pocketed the jar before Grace could see. David felt he had no option but to follow her, he couldn't leave her in a dark city graveyard even if it was her favorite. His shoulder grazed the rusted metal, scraping his arm. Now if he was caught they would have clothe fiber evidence of his delinquency and the UK would revoke his visa and he would have to go back to Alberta and work in the oil fields 800 miles from the nearest hospital like all his other engineer friends.

"Come on," she hissed.

He jogged toward her, his heart rate calmed slightly once he realized no one could see inside the cemetery from the street; the ivy was too thick.

Grace weaved in and out of the rows of granite and crumbling slate. The place had obviously not been tended to for years. David wondered how the city of London had let such a thing happen, he wasn't sure if he found it beautiful. Things always looked much more sinister and pernicious with a thick cover of shadows. He stole a glance at Grace, her brow was creased and her eyes were closed as she took a deep inhale in front of a large mausoleum.

“Wanna look inside?” she said. It seemed more like an order than a question. The whites of her eyes looked almost entirely occluded by the sapphire pools. David scolded himself for wondering when was the last time he saw her blink. He pushed open the creaky door, taking a tentative step inside. Batting away the spider webs that tickled his shoulder, he gave a feeble smile to Grace. He hoped it exuded a false sense of manliness he couldn’t quite conjure at the moment.

“There’s not much in here,” he said, hoping he could stop this necro-fantasy.

“Keep looking,” Grace replied, her voice coming closer to the door.

Once his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he found the tomb wasn’t small and compact, but extended outward several feet. He felt all breath leave his lungs as he saw that the rest of the tomb housed a gaping hole. The air was thick with freshly shoveled dirt.

“This is crazy,” David said shakily, “I wonder if this is going to be someone’s new home in the morning.”

He felt Grace enter the tomb behind him. David jumped slightly as she forcefully pulled the tomb door shut. The crunch of gravel and dust beneath the metal door rang in his ears. Her skin looked almost translucent in the darkness; she lit the whole room with her otherworldly glow.

“You’re really into this graveyard stuff aren’t you?” he laughed uneasily, “You should have told me that earlier.”

He felt all the blood leave his face as the corner of her smile appeared to crack, opening up into red fissures beneath her cheeks. It was a grotesque clown smile, one that could only be inflicted by Jack the Ripper or scarred upon the bloodless visage of the Black Dahlia. The skin above and below the cuts folded over, revealing rows of serrated white teeth. David stumbled back, his feet fumbling over the piles of dirt and accumulated dead foliage. His mouth couldn’t form words, but he was positive that his eyes didn’t bely him. She hadn’t slipped anything into his drink, yet his date’s face had opened into a chasm of knives ready to engulf him.

David’s retreat ended as his shoe caught the edge of the hole, sending him flailing backwards into the dirt, his head hit a protruding rock upon impact and filled his vision with stars. What was left of Grace was above him now, the light of her thousand teeth refracted painfully off his eyes. The stagnant pools of sapphire were as motionless as her body. He felt wisps of acrid smelling air tickle his pant legs and creep under his wool sweater. He looked to his side quickly to find the source and came to face to face with a cavity within the grave, large enough to accommodate a human head. David frantically looked towards his feet realizing that these holes were along the entire perimeter of the grave. He couldn’t see, but he heard a heavy animalistic breathing from the hole beside his face. There was something in there, waiting.

“What is this?” David screamed, “Why are you doing this?”

“I’m sorry Davey,” the words coming out of the cavernous maw sounded garbled, like a woman’s voice if it had been run through an industrial blender, “We’re all so hungry.”

The Thing floated down upon David, straddling his writhing body within the grave. He could feel droplets of spit flecked upon his cheeks as the mouths in the darkness around him grew more impatient. Summoning the last bit of courage he had, David looked up into the creature above him. The teeth seemed to be multiplying with each passing second, the edges of where the mouth used to be dripped with blood, falling like red raindrops onto David’s forehead.

“You don’t have to do this,” David cried. He wasn’t even sure if the Thing even had ears to hear anymore, but he had to try. He knew he would probably never be found. All that was going through his head was the image of his mom at the airport, ready to hear about his adventures in London. This would kill her, David was sure of it, she had raised him to be smarter than this. He wondered if apologies could be transmitted telepathically.

In a last ditch attempt at freedom he remembered the jar in his pocket. He chucked it with all its might into the monster in front of him. The gelatinous explosion against the teeth rattled the tomb with the echo of shattered glass.

The creature flinched at the impact but remained in position, only the dripping of blood and the raspy breaths around him could be heard. He didn’t think death would be this drawn out, once the rows of teeth came out in movies it was all over. Escaping wasn’t an option, the creature now had his arms pinned and he was worried one quick movement would make the serrated teeth above him rip into his jugular.

The thud of blood in his ears quieted as if his body was preparing for the eternal peace that was soon to come. At that moment a light sniffle became barely audible, but as he strained to listen it grew into a shuddering wail emanating from the dark hole in the center of the rows of teeth. The hands on his shoulders slipped as the body convulsed in a rolling sob. The creature let go of David, shuffling backward out of grave to curl up in the corner. David lifted his head to view the same white curtain of hair as the Thing wept. It hugged its legs, rocking back and forth in the corner of the tomb. The breathing from the subterranean holes in the grave was suddenly stifled.

“I can’t do this anymore,” the voice from the corner sounded much more like Grace.

David couldn’t find it within himself to engage in a heart to heart with a woman who had almost eaten him so he jumped up from the grave and grasped for the door. In a supernaturally quick motion, Grace caught his ankle. He looked down at the creature and almost fainted when he saw that her face had reconstructed itself for the most part. Her eyes were still preternaturally

large and red with crying and the fissures where her true face emerged were now deep bloody lines beneath her cheeks.

“If you go out that way, they’ll kill you.”

David said he didn’t feel his chances within the tomb were very good either, so he’d hedge his bets.

“No, we must leave through there,” she said with a sudden urgency, pointing to one of the larger holes that dotted the grave.

“Why in the ever-loving Christ would I go with you?” His hair was messed, standing up at all angles around his reddened face. He looked like a man that had just escaped a straitjacket.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” she looked down quickly at her feet, “I’m supposed to, but I can’t this time. I’ll explain, you have to follow me. We only have a few minutes. I can get you out alive.”

David took a deep breath, running a hand over his face, “Ladies first.”

Grace instantly jumped back into the grave and began to dig with the efficiency of a CAT claw digger, widening a hole in the side of the grave large enough to accommodate them. Grace slipped in first, a disembodied glowing white hand soon emerged, beckoning David to follow. He cursed under his breath and shimmied his body down into God knows where.

His eyes didn’t have time to adjust before Grace took his hand and began leading him along the tight corridor. Fire torches soon began to appear along the pact dirt tunnel. If someone – or some creature constituent of Grace – were to come at them from in front or behind there was nowhere for them to hide.

“What is this place?” He chest suddenly felt tight, but Grace’s grip only tightened.

“The London Hoard,” she said quickly, her head was on a constant swivel, forwards and backwards, up and down.

“It’s more intricate than the others,” Grace continued, “It’s the oldest hoard in Europe and these tunnels are stacked upon each other. They connect all the graveyards in the city.”

“Holy shit,” David’s voice cracked.

“Come on,” Grace hissed, “We’re almost there.”

She led them in a never-ending twist of turns and corners. Each corridor looked exactly the same and every second he became more and more aware that his life was in the hands of the woman in front of him. His legs felt like they were about to give out when a door became visible before them. Grace flung it open and climbed up the small ladder, pushing aside the manhole that lead them back to civilization. David scrambled up after her to find himself in the middle of a road, a black cab zoomed past his elbow. Grace pulled him to the sidewalk and instantly slowed her gait and smoothed

her hair.

“We’re okay,” she said more to herself than anyone else, “It’s okay.”

David stared blankly in front of him, if he focused on the squares of concrete at his feet maybe his thoughts would gather into a coherent thought one day.

“I’ve never done this before, I’ve got to leave as soon as possible,” she said under her breath. David noticed absently that this was the first time he had seen her twitchy with nerves. She steered him down the road, the red brick spires of King’s Cross became visible in front of them.

“I’m sorry you had to see that,” Grace said, her voice thick with tears, “This is all I’ve ever known, but I couldn’t do it you, I saw your mum and I couldn’t.”

“My mom? You saw my mom?” He said, jogging to keep with her.

She nodded, wiping a red painted hand under her nose, “We’re mind readers that’s how we know who to choose.”

His mind cycled back to the packed darkness of the seedy club where they met.

“So you only get people at clubs?”

“Of course,” she said sharply like he was a child, “and it’s not people we’re after, it’s men and there’s never a shortage to choose from, believe you me.”

David’s face felt hot as he conjured back to his memory the first few things he thought when he laid his eyes on Grace among the sweaty crowd. Grace said that David was her choice of the night for no other reason than she thought he was cute and awkward.

“But that usually doesn’t matter,” she sniffled, “You’re all the same, all the same thoughts. That’s why I’m one of the chosen to go out in public. You monsters always want me. It’s like shooting fish in a barrel, as the Americans say. I’ve kept my hoard fed for centuries.”

David found the nearest chair as they entered King’s Cross. The dawn’s early light streaked the sky orange in the distance. The station would be bustling within an hour.

“But you didn’t kill me?” he looked up at her face, Grace’s eyes were almost back to a normal human size and the cheek fissures were slowly fading into puckered pink scars. She stayed standing over him, arms crossed tightly over her chest.

“I saw your mum,” her eyes welled up again, “And I realized I can’t do this anymore. All you wanted to say was sorry to her... all I’ve wanted to do for the last 200 years is apologize to my own mum. I just want to tell her that it wasn’t her fault that I ended up here,” she gestured to her ripped tights and dirt covered shoes, “I couldn’t do it to another human. No one deserves to live or die with that guilt. I don’t need another set of eyes for my collection.”

She collapsed in the chair next to him blubbing into her hands. Despite his better judge-

ment, he put a tentative arm around her shaking shoulders.

“It’s okay,” were the words that escaped out of his mouth. Nothing was okay, he was still alive, but it appeared like nothing would ever be okay again.

Several minutes passed as the two sat entwined on the hard metal chairs. The few passerbys that trickled in shot concerned glares at the dirt smeared couple, but, in typical British fashion, never broke their stride to investigate further.

Grace finally sat up, wiping the rest of the tears from her cheeks.

“You’re not a bad guy, David,” she said earnestly, placing his hand back by his side.

He wasn’t so sure of that anymore, but he nodded. The giant screen of train times flashed to life and bathed them both in an orange glow.

He caught her big navy eyes. They somehow retained their sapphire glow even after the events of the night.

“I want to thank you for not killing me.”

Her loud laugh made him flinch in his seat. She reached over to caress his stubbly cheek and leaned close to his ear, “We can see every thought in your eyes, Davey Boy. Don’t forget it.” She kissed his cheek and stood up. Her eyes flicked over the board deciding on which train would take her farthest away.

“Where are you going?” David asked.

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” she smirked, smoothing her skirt, “I’ve a train to catch.”

She began to walk away, the click of her boots echoing on the shiny gray concrete. David jumped from his seat; There’s no way she could just disappear on him. What was he to do now? Grace looked over her shoulder, the scars of her cheeks now fully disappeared.

“The rose was a good touch,” she said, “And by the way, you don’t look fat in that shirt.”

Her coattails disappeared around the corner as the sun rose over King’s Cross station.

# Stratus

*Maggie Ramseur*







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