

# Talking Leaves

2022

Volume 25



**Talking Leaves 2022****Volume 25****Editor-in-Chief**

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## **From the Editor-in-Chief**

The greatest experience and privilege I have had during my time at IUPUC has been working for this magazine. It has been an honor to work with student-produced works, watching some students jump out the gate with incredible talent and watching others grow into their form. It has also been a great escape for me, whether it was editing works during the height of the pandemic, putting an issue together as we all returned to campus, or working on this current edition as the world seems more uncertain than ever. As you look through the pieces that went into this year's edition of *Talking Leaves*, it is my sincere hope that you, the reader, can get lost in these works, just as I have, and find yourself a little escape. There are works here that will make you cry, others that will make you laugh, some that will make you gasp, and still more that will simply make you think. They show the effort put into the craft of writing and creating works of art, the skills students develop, and the passion creation instills. Like me, I want you to enjoy their effort, growth, and creativity, and just as it was a healthy happy escape for me, I hope you too can get lost in the unique works that are included in this edition. The voices of our contributors are the most valued part of this magazine, and as they spoke to me, they can speak to you. Our world can be a trying, breaking environment, with reprieve often difficult to locate, but, through art, I feel that we can find reprieve. Thank you to all the contributors who added to this work and to our readers for taking it in.

Editor-in-Chief,  
Christian Litsey

## From the Faculty Sponsor

Welcome to this milestone edition of *Talking Leaves*. Twenty-five literary magazines is a significant body of work!

Crimson pride surges in this landmark volume — you can feel the pages pulse with the lifeblood of student energies, emotions, experiments, and aesthetics.

On behalf of the Division of Liberal Arts, I remind readers that *Talking Leaves* is a student literary magazine which encourages IUPUC students to find empowerment through self-expression. As such, we have kept copyediting to a minimum in order to preserve unique voices, personae, and ideas.

I cannot begin to thank everyone who has influenced the progression of the magazine over more than a quarter of a century and who has supported the development of this volume even as the COVID-19 pandemic has entered its third year. Matt Rothrock helps manage and mentor editors, Vicki Kruse maintains the anonymity of submissions in the selection process, Jay Lesandrini revamped the *Talking Leaves* landing page on our IUPUC website, and faculty in every division encourage students to submit. Special thanks go to Dr. Kate Wills and Dr. Terry Dibble for nurturing poets and memoirists in their creative writing classes.

Most of all, we thank our IUPUC leaders, Division of Liberal Arts Head Dr. George Towers, who emphasizes congratulations to students on their creative achievements, and Vice Chancellor and Dean Dr. Reinhold Hill, who champions IUPUC's commitment to supporting student voices by generously funding this publication in both digital and print forms.



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**Cover Cachet:**

**“Dragon Fly on a First Day Cover” by Cynthia Scott**



## **A Box of Memories**

Tucked in a corner  
Forgotten by the years  
An old, pine rocking chair waits  
To be loved once more

Quilts of heritage made with  
Fabric of memories and meanings  
Drape over the rocking chair's arms,  
Spilling onto the vast, cherry shiplap floor

The walls of faded floral fancies,  
From the owner's last  
Remodel phase in the 70s  
Spill not-so-secrets of a battle won in marriage

While the curtains tell of that compromise in crisp blue  
As they hang from a bronze rod too ornate  
For the simple cloak of ocean  
That paid for its flowery box

Broken only by the large glass pane  
To the outside world of chaos  
And uncontrollable expression  
Of happiness

But this box was contained  
Perfectly, immaculately  
Nothing unexpected could occur

Without express permission of its owner

And its owner never expressed anything anymore,  
So, all was subdued and  
The heirs of the box deemed it  
Useless

Leaving nothing left to be done  
But a sale of the estate —  
A separation of memories  
That will never be reborn.

**Zoe Lawless**

## **A Generation**

A generation born  
A generation breathing  
A generation learning to walk  
With a sense of future being

A generation living  
Trying the best with all their might  
Following their path to the future  
A belief coming in time

A generation thriving  
A generation alive  
A generation crafting their future  
Not afraid of time

A generation aging  
Their memories not as long  
The future is now changing  
And the criticism has come

A generation questioned  
A generation frowned upon  
The future they made is not perfection  
They are blamed for all that is wrong

A generation dying  
A generation losing breath  
With frail gestures to a past future  
But now is their time, their death

A generation no more  
Their night never turned into dawn  
Their future now in history books  
A generation gone

The cycle will go on  
And no one will bat an eye  
History repeats  
And all generations become a part of time

A new generation beginning  
The plans for their future are drawn  
And though they believe it'll never happen  
Soon, time will make them a generation gone.

**Clare Hauersperger**

## Care

I wonder if the winds blow the same as when  
Those who respected the land lived here.

Were the currents more gracious?  
Did they kiss Native cheeks in gentle appreciation?

The breeze whips my hair in violent gusts and  
Disarrays the outdoor furniture, and I feel there's a message in that.

*You weren't supposed to be here  
You dishonored my purpose and the people who loved me*

I can't undo what my ancestors did. Damage has made its home.  
But I can vow to protect what's left.

And if the gales let me, I will traverse the globe in search  
Of how to care for the once-sweet nature, and

Convince this beautiful planet  
That she is loved.

**Zoe Lawless**

## The Art of Letting Go

The burning fumes were no surprise. It was almost a biweekly occurrence in my old silver Grand Am. If I drove her more than ten minutes, it was guaranteed she would overheat. Countless containers of empty antifreeze filled my trunk. I always prepared ahead of time. If I knew my mom wanted me over at her house at 6, then I would leave at 4:30 so I could stop every ten minutes to let her cool down. I always carried water jugs and antifreeze. I avoided major highways and took the backroads. That's where I was then. I was pulled over on the side of the road, surrounded by cornfields on the left and trees on the right. Plenty had pulled up and ask if I needed help, I reassured them I had it under control. They hesitated, then they moved on. I wafted away the sickly-sweet smell as I popped her hood. I sighed and added water this time.

When I pulled up to my mom's house for dinner, she was sitting on the porch smoking a cigarette. Her face scrunched up as she said, "You really don't need to be driving that death trap around. One day it's gonna get you killed, y'know it?"

I rolled my eyes and moved to open the front door, "Yeah, well, I don't really have the money to be replacing her, and I have to get to work somehow. Maybe Greg can give her a look and see if there's something he can do?"

She hesitated. "You know that's between you and him."

My silver beauty didn't start off this way. I got her right before I turned eighteen as an early combination present for graduation, my birthday, and Christmas. I was ecstatic to have my own car. No more asking Dad to take me to the mall. No more asking Mom to pick me up from Dad's house. No more wondering how I would talk one of them into taking me to meet my friends. I could go where I wanted when I wanted. I got a part time job at a local fast-

food restaurant so I could pay for my insurance and gas. I would take my friends out with me on the weekends, even when they didn't have any money. Slowly, they each started being too busy to hang out. They were working on college applications and got their own jobs, some even started having children. I found new friends who were up late at night like me. We would explore haunted cemeteries, drive fast, and get high.

Around this time is when my Grand Am began to overheat. The craziest part is that she did not overheat every time I drove her. It was almost like she waited until everything else was going wrong. I did not have the money or skills to fix her myself. I did my best to work around it. I found out what worked and what didn't. Eventually, it just didn't bother me anymore. It was just a normal part of my week. I'm not much of a mechanic, but I knew the day my brake lights came on and I could no longer stop my car, it was going to be a much bigger deal than overheating.

So, I took a Saturday to drive her all the way to AutoZone, I relied on my emergency brake to get me there alive. With my dad's help we jacked her up, and underneath I saw one of the brake lines completely rusted through. My heart stopped and tears welled up in my eyes. How could I have not known? All the time I spent driving around I swore I would have felt something. The rust looked like it had been developing for years. The next three hours, I watched YouTube tutorials on how to fix my new problem. It wasn't easy, and it took the whole weekend, but I had no choice. I worked on her until my hands were chapped and red from the cold winds. I cussed and cried. I even blamed my parents for giving me such a bad car.

Over the next two years, more problems arose. I got jumper cables for Christmas. I spent more time trying to fix her than I did driving her. I could never get enough money together to fix her; and, even if I did, some new problem would follow. I was angry at her,

my parents, my job, and my boyfriend. Everyone said I should just junk her and get myself a new car. I was stuck in this cycle, and I didn't want to let her go.

Letting her go meant letting go of my first piece of freedom. Her headlights knew every gravel road I had driven down. Her speakers knew every beat to my sad-song playlist. Her passenger seat knew people that I will never see again. Her windows knew the evening summer breeze. Her backseat knew my suitcases, with a dream of a different city. She had been there for everything, but she was tired. She was ready.

I thought about how I'd leave her running overnight, just so her battery wouldn't die. I thought about how I pushed her too hard around all those curves that had warned me to slow down. I thought about all the times she was telling me to stop, but I wouldn't let her. I was convinced we had to keep going for my own sanity. All the while, she was telling me it was time. Time to go our separate ways, for me to move on. I trusted her for all that time. I still did, so I listened, and I let her go.

I have a new car now. I named her Black Betty. She has her own problems, but she's reliable. She hasn't been on many late-night drives, but she is great for hauling my groceries home. She can even fit some pieces of furniture in the back when you lay the seats down. I learned that when I moved into my new apartment with my boyfriend. She takes me to state parks I've never seen before and on trips to visit my grandma. I no longer have to keep a million tools in my trunk, but I do it anyway, just in case.

I slide into her seat to head to my classes and adjust the rearview mirror, I see the old cemetery on an unnamed road for a moment. I back out of my parking space and continue forward.

**Natalie Medsker**



**Morning Light**



**Bailey Nordenbrock**

## **The Great Journey**

My road to success

is not paved with beauty.

It is lined with roses and thorns,

so appealing and painful.

It twists and it turns like a snake.

It is rough and quick

like the rapids in the Rockies,

Yet slow and steady

when my heart is heavy.

I have learned some of its games.

The distractions like waves

and memories made to drown me.

I will not slip under again.

I have become a goat with sure footing,

With large horns and strong mind

I continue my fight.

My road to success  
is not paved with beauty.

Goats cannot hunt  
the same path as the wolf.

The birds cannot swim  
like the fish in the sea.

Nor can the rabbit reach  
the mountain goat's peaks.

My road to success  
was not paved with beauty,  
But it was paved for me.

**Natalie Medsker**

## **The White Rabbit's Universe**

I can't remember where I was when Psychology Club sent their message to members or why exactly I didn't read it until Monday morning when they sent it Sunday night. I was nervous about meeting new people and worried about how I would control that social anxiety while maintaining a more authentic version of myself. Maybe text messages just give me anxiety and require too much mental energy? I just remember that I read it in my car after my 9 a.m. chemistry class and I was wearing my black winter coat with the big pockets that about reaches my knees. I can't remember what music was playing, but there had to have been music playing; I always have music playing. It was probably "White Rabbit" by Jefferson Airplane; I'd been listening to it a lot for a project for ASL class, and I think I remember hearing those familiar bass strums and marching drums. I know I made myself read the club's message. I was also excited about the prospect of meeting people who are passionate about the same things I am passionate about and for the possibility of not being starved for human contact. I had been waiting patiently to hear when we were supposed to start meeting on a regular basis. They had sent out a survey for members' availability to meet the week before and I was sure, no matter what, I was going to be able to go because I was available for all the times but one. I told them in person I was available any day but Mondays. That had to have been why emotion flooded when I read that message. I read that the majority is only available to meet on Mondays, that they're sorry for all that can't come, that they'll reevaluate next semester, that they will have a meet and greet today, and that their meeting time is smack dab in the middle of my ASL class.

*One pill makes you larger —*

I know it shouldn't have bothered me as much as it did, it shouldn't have hurt, it shouldn't have triggered those over-dramatic demons that whisper sinister lies to me. The ones that blame me for things outside myself not working out and turn innocent messages into personal attacks and encourage self-criticism. I heard that part of myself that anxiety loves to taunt, that speaks in the right ear, asking in her prepubescent voice, "What did I do wrong?" "What do they mean we'll reevaluate next semester?" "What if this happens again?" "Why does meeting people have to be so hard?" "Why does nothing I do ever feel like enough?" and "Is the universe playing some kind of joke on me?" I felt my frustration tighten my jaw, anxiety fasten heavy armor on my achy back, and sadness weigh down my eyes until it trickled down my hot cheeks. What had started as disappointment for a missed opportunity was growing into something it was not. Until the universe had become my enemy and it seemed to grow bigger and angrier while I got smaller and drifted into oblivion.

*And one pill makes you small —*

Then I heard in the left ear that other part of myself that sounds my age and speaks logically, with the voice I crafted and curated to be kind to me and strong against those that burden the right ear's soul. She lovingly asserted, "My feelings are just hurt," "I did nothing wrong," "No one did this on purpose," "These things happen," and "This has nothing to do with me." I know in the past that something like this would have led to longer and more excruciating rumination, back before the left ear was able to shrink the world back down.

*And if you go chasing rabbits —*

Despite logic's presence, which most of the time is enough to strong-arm anxiety's influence off that youthful version of me, this day, anxiety stayed to argue its points. It heard and agreed with logic, but it crept and crawled on my skin, waiting to tell its side of the argument, wanting to feel heard. Part of me wanted to follow it down that hole we had been down before, to try to understand where these thoughts were coming from, and admittedly out of curiosity, about where they were trying to go.

*And you know you're going to fall —*

But I know that all that could lead to is me being dropped into a world that doesn't make sense and can't give me straight answers about who I am, where I have been, or where I am trying to go. It will just continue to tell me that I am the one that is wrong and tell me that I need to change until even I can't recognize myself.

*And your mind is moving low —*

Each side kept arguing about my feelings of rejection and isolation and hunger for connection and belonging. It was exhausting trying to keep all this in for the rest of the day. I just wanted to go home and sleep it off like a hangover, but I still had classes to go to and studying to do. When I got to my next class, I had to use all my brain cells to keep myself present and participating. My mind was still murky with the strong emotions which sometimes clog my vocab.

*Go ask Alice, I think she'll know —*

What did I do next? Did I clean up those pop cans in my room that day? Did I fold those T-shirts? No. I think I tried to study. I just remember trying to distract myself because my thoughts were crowding the room and I still had one more class I needed to go to.

*When logic and proportion have fallen sloppy dead —*

I didn't and still don't understand why one little message triggered this pollution in my head. Or why I could see and understand the logic and agree that my feelings were just hurt and I was just disappointed, but emotion trumped logic. Everything I was feeling needed to cook and marinate onto my skin and every problem I ever had needed to overcrowd me and expand my world past the horizon. I know I was trying to keep myself present, grounded, here. I wasn't this upset about a club; it was something more that is hard to put into words, and my mind wasn't at a place where I could dig into that.

*And the White Knight is talking backwards —*

No matter how I spun it, there was a stubborn child who was stomping her little foot, telling me that I can't tell her what to do or how to feel. She wanted to follow that rabbit down the hole no matter how out of proportion the world would become and how she'd get nowhere if she did. That wiser version of myself, that speaks in the left ear, remained assertive. She was tired of arguing with a tantruming child, but she kept her from jumping in headfirst; she just had little energy for much else.

*And the Red Queen's off with her head —*

By the time I was going to my ASL class, I felt spent. At one point, I was struggling to breathe under my mask. My teacher wanted us to sign questions to each other, which would have made me a little on edge on a good day. I wanted to withdraw into myself because my skin felt sensitive, my joints ached, and I just felt emotionally sunburnt. As much as I was upset about not having the opportunity to meet people, and deep down still had the desire to sink my teeth into connection and conversation, it felt like too much

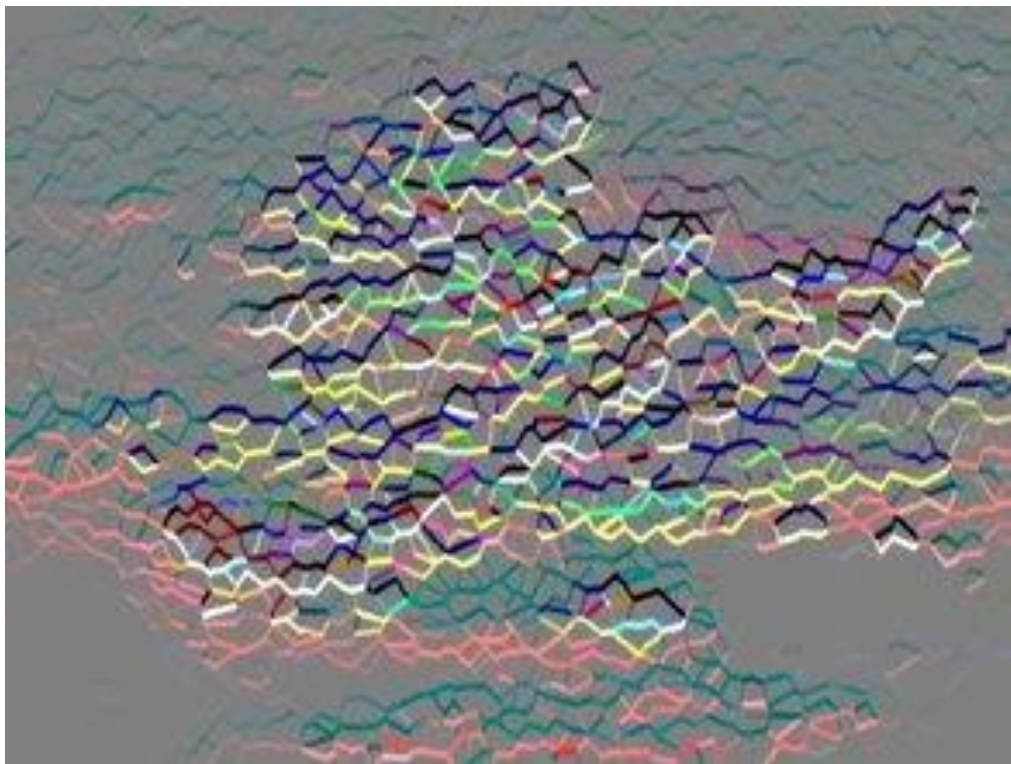
at this moment. I had no energy to spare on small talk. I had been listening to me talk to myself pretty much all day. I just wanted to go home and distract myself until my brain turned off. If the universe is involved in such trivial matters, it sure likes to keep things ironic.

*Remember what the Dormouse said —*

*Feed your head.* I can't remember what I did when I got home: I probably picked up some Burger King. *Feed your head.* I think I tried to declutter my room for a while or maybe just watched TV while I played *The Sims*. *Feed your head.* I definitely tried to reassure myself that I would start feeling better tomorrow and told myself to rest. "Let the world become four walls that I can breathe into, so my body can release its tense muscles. Let me be here and now and not stuck between my ears."

**Kaleigh Goode**



**Bird****David Walby**

## Liquid Ceilings

Change,  
Signaled by a dull roar in the ears,  
And a suddenly parched mouth; smacking lips echo.

Overtaken,  
Cast into unknown depths,  
Drifting farther from the sunny shores of reason.

The weather inside:  
A constant volatile variable to consider,  
Unbalanced between dripping sweat and desperate chills.

Aches slowly soothed away;  
Hunger becomes a famished memory;  
Sleep morphs itself into an insomniac burden.

Images race, blurring in kaleidoscope fragments.  
Words become dissected along every fragile syllable.  
The very origin of concept and thought is up for question.

The world shifts, slamming to the side.  
Reality, now viscous sand, floods into itself,  
Overlapping and distorting like a pool of rippling starlight.

Perceptions and beliefs grow wild, hungry,  
And rapidly shoot around with electric speed,  
Making discernment a trial for unfocused tools in ergot clutches.

The bed feels like an endless fault,

Bones feel like the only solid structure,  
Beneath a melted ocean of roaring waves, submerging white peaks.

Morning shatters illusions,  
The curs'd sun burning the fragmentation;  
Lost time is sticking to window filtered rays.

Restless night takes the ultimate toll.  
The aches and pains return, along with new friends.  
New self-doubts, left in the wake of dead ones, desperately cry out.

Something else too:  
On the back of those splintered memories,  
A place of deep reflection and understanding of self.

In lost thought, there comes a siren song of return.  
Shattered realities have a certain charm: a blank slate.  
Dreams with eyes wide open are the best for a learn'd existence.

**Christian Litsey**

## **No Right**

He paced and stormed, thundered and whispered. He commanded the stage, commanded the audience, commanded — she jerked her opera glasses away from teary eyes. Don't think like that! She had never allowed herself to think like that, to admit the truth to herself. She couldn't afford to now, not when she was almost gone. The tickets that she clutched in gloved hands were opportunities! Opportunities that she had to take. It didn't matter what emotion was in his eyes when he looked at her, didn't matter that he laughed and smiled more during their conversations than he did with others. It didn't matter that she understood his needs and ached to meet them. He was her superior. She had no right to raise her eyes to him. Ten years her senior, an entire social class above her in rank, a beloved actor — he could never belong to her. Not to the lowly extra who came on stage from time to time to portray a member of a crowd. She knew who he should belong to, who should hold his heart. It wasn't her. She left the opera glasses on her seat, where he would find them. She always sat in the same worn chair, far from the stage. And he always came to see her, inviting her to come backstage with the rest of the crew, laughing and looking at her with something unspoken in his eyes.

So she slipped a ticket under the opera glasses. When he came to see her, he wouldn't find her — but now he would know where to look. Onstage, his voice rose again, and she turned. She could have sworn their eyes met — a tear slipped — just before she fled the theater — fled to the train station — praying he would follow.

**Kaitlyn Conrad**

## Summer Storm

Heat lightning in the middle of July,  
Never knew I could be this alive.  
Summer season coming to an end,  
But I'll never be the same again.

Drowning in thoughts of you,  
My own siren in a sea of blue.  
I let you guide me to the shore,  
Wanted this to be forever more.

Something extraordinary, we were on the edge,  
But then you turned and drove a wedge.  
Storm raging and I felt so brave,  
As you held me under the waves.

Didn't know it at the time,  
That you would ruin my life.  
Made me feel like I could fly,  
Never dreamed I'd get too high.

You were the heat lightning in July,  
And even though I felt alive,  
Summer season had to come to an end,  
I never was the same again.

**Julia Colson**

**Raindrop Leaf**



**Bailey Nordenbrock**

## The Run

Run to class, run to work, run on home, run through studies, run through the mind, and repeat. That is life right now. I scarf down food from time to time. I toss clothes all about and heave my things all around. Trying to stay caught up in my textbooks, caught up with family matters, caught up with what my peers are accomplishing, caught up with the goals I have set, and caught up with everything in-between. I run from place to place, from task to task, but still seem to fall way behind.

Need to pay for this and pay for that. I should look into insurance, I should apply for this scholarship, I should look for a new job, I should look for affordable apartments, I should — I should try to do everything else an adult is expected to do. But all of this is just improv and mimicry of what I've seen grown-ups do. I pass out cuddled next to greasy to-go bags and start each day tired and spaced out. My mind scampers off without my consent until my nerves screech it is time to run once more. Uh oh, I think I'm late. How long will this take? Now clean this room. Where's my pen? Pay this bill. What do these lights on the dash mean? Gotta read that book. What did so-and-so say or do? Please don't call on me. What time is work? Wait. How is it dark now?

Stress exudes through each room and oozes through each bone, and I can't escape that thought: "Did I do enough?" even when my body tries to scream at me that I have done far too much. I hate the ache of this run in both body and mind. My eyes drag and I feel my mind nag. I catch myself from time to time nodding along and smiling while looking right through you, not hearing you, not being truly with you. Not out of cruelty but out of spent reserves. In this moment, there is nothing left in me to give you.

But I can't help but feel alive with the high that only the run supplies. I can't tell you why. I just wanna slurp it all up. Absorb all my chaos maybe even devour some of yours. Maybe it is truly just retched pride that drives me to continue this ludicrous chase. To use my sharp teeth and big pawed claws to drag down my pursuit like a lioness, to make chaos mine now. Embrace the Leo that I am and ingest this, overwhelm and roar out loud and feel my strength and power as I bear down, biting into absolute chaos. So that the sun that rules over me will rain down its deliciously warm rays and applaud how I never relented to submission, but instead made it my unexpected prey. And soon, maybe my sun will reward me by letting me sleep in the mighty jungle until it is time to hunt once more.

Or maybe there is just a thrill that brings that chill to my spine, wanting me to endure this run to earn my warmth so I may survive. Running through the pandemonium is maddening but allowing myself to stand idle will only leave me frozen and cold. It would be like standing on an icy lake that cracks beneath my feet. I gotta move, or I will drown and be consumed by this frost and sink on down into the dark abyss. So, I try to run and feel that ice breaking and that water trying to yank me down, but my heart is still pumping, and my body radiates heat and I just keep hoping I can carry myself to the other side. And yet, I can't help feeling exhilarated that in this moment, I can run on this water.

Perhaps I just like to twirl and swirl like some kind of Looney Tune trying to run past life's booby traps. Distracting this week's adversary with my shenanigans until I can make a break for it. Or maybe I am attempting to emulate that cat with that hat that can hold up fish, rakes, and birthday cakes, while also balancing on a ball, who can be at home in chaos and madness while being able to bring back order and even some redemption with a tip of a hat, who



can somehow take this overwhelming mess and put everything back just right before frolicking off in delight.

Or possibly, I just like to keep myself busy. If I am busy with this run, then I must for sure live some kind of life that has some kind of sense to it. Right? If I ache and let myself burn out then I have fulfilled my obligation, my purpose in this world. Or perhaps if I keep myself too busy, if I just keep running and focus on jumping over hurdles, I don't have to wonder where I am running or if I even want to go there. I want to be decisive, but sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between running toward what I want, running away from what frightens me, and running to please someone else.

There are days where I do in fact fall behind or just timber way down. I lie there scrapped up and exhausted, almost comfortable with lying right there until I decompose into my mud. My abdomen feels stabbed and pinched as if covered in stitches, my lungs try to expand past my rib cage to breathe new life back into this body, and my throat tries to gulp up the world's air. I have to fight against gravity to prop myself back up and dust myself off. My legs wiggle just as a new fawn's would, my feet try to become part of the ground, my hands shake and tremble while trying to balance me back upright, and I am still not sure if I can make one foot go in front of the other or if it even is worth it if I could. But then that important question pops up on my face: "Well, what else am I supposed to do?" So, I make that choice to keep myself running.

All I really know is that I still have a long way to go on this run. There will be days when I will hear the sun's applause and that mighty Leo's roar rumbling in my belly. There will days when I feel the abyss reaching for my feet and I don't know if my next step will be my last. There will be days where, defying all logic, I narrowly escape anvils ready to crush my head, and yet I somehow feel balanced while standing on a ball. There will be days where I don't

know why I am running but I'm gonna do it anyhow. And yes, there will for sure be those pesky days where I fall right down and just wanna burrow straight into the ground and just let my chaos swallow me up whole and no one can tell me that it isn't the easier thing to do. But instead, even when it feels like too much to even just stand up, I'll make that insane decision to just run. No matter what day it happens to be, I will feel my bitter sweat glazed on my face and the hustle and bustle within my breath. My flat feet and buckled knees are gonna squawk stop. While my heart thumps with my stress and pounds out with this busy high. Run to class, run to work, run on home, run through studies, run through the mind, and repeat.

**Kaleigh Goode**

## Heartbreak in the Midwest

Gray skies hang,  
Casting the world below in somber shades.  
Misty air paints my face,  
Adding to the gathering of tears.  
Both serve to mask my misery,  
Obfuscating,  
So that others might not see.  
To them, I'm another Hoosier,  
Brought down by bland winter.  
It is all well that it is dreary.  
I'd rather not share that knowledge is despair.  
The weather covers the pieces of my heart.

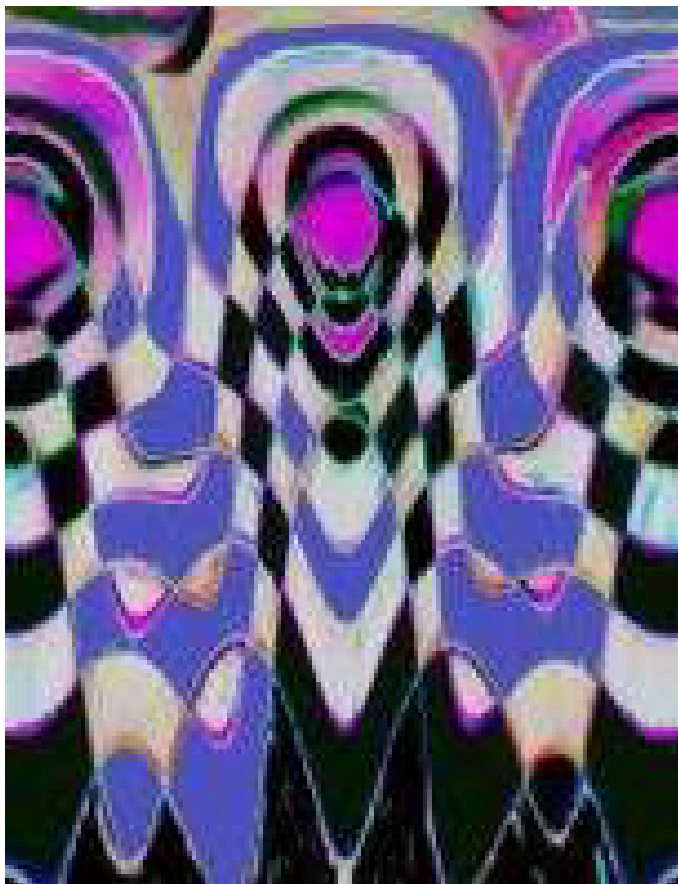
I stare out onto plains, vast and lifeless,  
Dead stalks of harvest like a forest of knives,  
Save for gray, stalking birds,  
Picking at the ground,  
As if it were a swampy corpse.  
I empathize with the ground.  
My body, void and lifeless,  
Feels over picked:  
Teachers,  
Bosses,  
Family,  
So-called friends,  
Tearing at whatever is left of me.  
Leaving me behind in snowfall.

The Midwest: such an empty space,

Flat and desolate come December.  
No matter how much we try to fill it in,  
Desperate horizons hang on the perimeter.  
So, I am heartbroken in the Midwest,  
Lost and shattered.  
Left in this blue-collar Hel  
While other, deeper levels of inferno burn within.  
Which will I fall in?  
Will pain land me in The Forest of Suicides,  
Nailed to oaks, pines, and other beings of twig,  
My body laid bare,  
Killing myself a little more with each slice, hit, or swig?  
Will I freeze in the betrayal of all my principles?  
I cannot tell from these bleak surroundings,  
Where my soul slips out in little white gasps.

**Christian Litsey**

## Dark Maidens



David Walby

## **Goodbye, My Friend**

### Message 1:

Today is Sunday,  
Last we held a conversation  
Was Wednesday, Thursday, maybe?  
All I know is that I miss you and  
This is the longest we've gone without talking.  
Let's fix that.

### Message 2:

It's Tuesday, you haven't read my messages  
Yet from Sunday, have you? That's ok,  
It happens. Maybe you've been busy?

Anyways, I had my first appointment today.  
Not much happened in it besides the basics.  
Introductions and reasons for the appointments.  
You know, simple things.

"What type of appointment?" you'd  
Probably be asking that right about now,  
Wouldn't you?

### Message 3:

Hiya, it's Sunday again, and  
Surprise, surprise, you haven't  
Answered yet. When are you  
Going to pick up the phone again???

I know it must be hard to do so,

You've always struggled with this, actually,  
But that can change, we can make it better.  
You just need to work with me.  
Please.

Message 4:

Hey. Another Sunday,  
Another week you haven't said  
Anything.  
You've likely had a tough time  
Recently, that's the only explanation  
I can come up with for the radio silence.  
I know it's been rough for me these past few weeks.

Had more appointments since the last message,  
Told them I was messaging you and they upped  
The number of days I need to go. It's not  
Bad, necessarily, but I hate the questions they ask.

Most of them being about you,  
Surprisingly. Maybe, that's  
Why I hate them. I don't wanna  
Talk to them about you.

I just wanna talk to you,  
But you won't answer me.  
Not now. Not yet.

Message 5:

Hey, what the hell?

It's been weeks now,  
And you've said nothing.  
Nada.  
Zilch.  
Absolutely  
Fucking nothing.

I get, okay?  
I don't respond to your calls once  
And now I pay the price.  
But this has gone on for too long,  
Hasn't it?

If you could just, please answer me,  
We could talk and move past this.

Your deadly silence,  
The badgering doctors,  
My ignorant parents,  
My stupid ass missing your calls.

I get it,  
Why this bothered you so much.  
I don't like that I do,  
But I get it.

No response really kills you.

Message 6:

Please answer me. Please.



Just one sentence, a few words strung together, it doesn't have to be coherent.

Anything will do. Hell, just a character, a simple **K** will do for me. I just wanna hear from you one more time.

Please, the lack of answer, the days that keep running together to turn into weeks,

It's driving me crazy. The appointments aren't helping, they keep saying I'm not coping well, but there's nothing to cope.

There's nothing wrong and I can prove it.

You just need to answer me. I love you and I miss you, I know I never confessed, but I do, I love you so much that my heart, my head, my body aches to be close with yours one more time.

I love you. I love you. I love you.

You don't have to love me back, not in the way that I do. But please,

Please answer me one more time.

Message 7:

Hi, it's been years since I last messaged you, huh?

I was kinda desperate during my last message, wasn't I?

Not flattering. 0 out of 10, do not want to repeat again.

What I said was true though,

I did, I do, love you.

I hate that I never said anything until it was too late.

I'll never get to know your answer,

But at least I know you're not suffering anymore.  
The appointments, the powder-blue Zoloft,  
have been my new friends for a while now.

They can't live up to you,  
But they live on while you couldn't.  
I won't message you again, will be deleting your contact soon.  
And the messages.  
Doctor's advice to finally achieve acceptance.

I'll miss you,  
Always have, always will.  
I love you.  
Goodbye, my friend.

*Delete Messages?*

**Elizabeth Pike**

## Patch on my Sleeve

I was sitting across from a guy I barely know at an Applebee's, fiddling with my sleeves under the table. My palms were so warm and wet, my skin caught onto my thick clothes, ones that were apparently too fancy for the occasion, especially compared to the basketball-short-wearing boy in front of me. He wasn't someone I knew particularly well. I only knew him through our visits at the nurse's office back in our middle and high school years, but the relationship never went past that. But this guy I hardly knew started working at the same retail store I did and said *hi* to me. That *hi* turned into *can I have your number?* And *can I have your number?* turned into this. I didn't even want this but felt obligated to go anyway. I've never done this before and fumbled my way through the uncomfortable texts and drive to the restaurant. But, hey, I made it here alive: my first date.

Although it was my first date at the ripe age of twenty, that didn't mean I was desperate. I was perfectly fine with "dying alone," which was never a fear of mine in the first place. The conversation was stale with Asher. Anything I brought to the table was interrupted by something I'd rather not talk about. Poking me about my faith, assuming my sexuality, and the most dreaded one of all: diabetes. First date as it was, I was pretty sure discussing Humalog dosages, the times we decided to take our Lantus shots, and our methods of bringing our low blood sugars up wasn't a normal first-date topic. It was like I scheduled a date with my endocrinologist. Asher, with his freckly face and ginger hair, leaned back in the booth, an oddly confident smile touching his lips. "So, what're you getting?"

"Nothing sugary." The doctor tapped his pen to his chin. "Just stay away from foods with a high sugar count." Sitting and kicking

my legs on the exam chair, I stared down at my finger wrapped in a polka-dotted Band-Aid. I squeezed my wrist. They pricked my finger so fast to give me an even faster and simpler response. Even though I didn't know what was being discussed, I understood that whatever this guy said made no sense. My mother's clenched jaw spoke for itself, but our family doctor wasn't telling her anything more. Questions that were begging to be answered were covered by the advice a bad dietician would give to a fat person. No extra advice. No follow-ups. No secondary steps. That was the last time we saw him.

My mom knew moms with kids with issues like I had. Apparently, I was too thin. Bathing suits we thought would fit threatened to fall off with one dip in the pool and bedwetting up until the age of nine, another embarrassing little problem I was experiencing, wasn't normal either. But it was normal for me. I was just the type of kid that didn't want to go to the pool. I was the type of kid to have those embarrassing little problems.

"Probably just their chicken tenders," Asher responded, "since they're so low carb, I don't really have to worry about taking anything."

I sighed, twisting it into a fake laugh. "Yeah." I didn't want to be so obviously not into the date, but I'd always been told I wasn't a good liar.

It was the middle of the night. I was curled up in my bunk bed, face buried in a pillow. Then, the lights flicked on, and my mother nudged me awake. "We're leaving. Right now." What about my little sister? My sick dog? It was what I imagined the eye of the storm was. So much was happening around me, but the storm didn't quite hit me. Sunlight was funneled down upon me, pinpointed. Spotlight. Piercing, blinding. I was pulled along into my mom's car,

lying in the back, hoping to fall asleep. My bent neck cramped and the bumps in the road gave me a headache.

We arrived at the hospital a few minutes later. They couldn't help me, whatever that meant. I didn't think I needed help anyway. In a haze, they managed to jab an IV into my sickly pale arm. Scary as it was, sleepiness confused me enough to turn the process into a jumbled blur. I was never good with my flu shots, so it was for the best they got me in my weary state. If they got me on a bright sunny morning, they might've been arm wrestling a nine-year-old. Rather than giving me the news that I could return to my bedroom, my parents were told to drive me to Riley Children's Hospital. With the thing in my arm, however, I was forced to slouch in the backseat with my arm straight as a board, stiffly sticking out from my side. I wanted to curl back up in my bed with a sketchbook and crayons. I promised myself I would get out, play with my sister and dog outside, throwing a ball around like in the movies. I could convince myself to love swimming in the summer and try harder in my gym class every week. I was sure I could convince everyone to take me back home. My eyelids fluttered as I watched the world pass by out my window, imagining a person running beside me, keeping up. Like he was trying to catch me. I pressed my fingertips to the cool glass, watching the window fog up around my smooth fingertips, and I let the weight of my eyelids lull me back to sleep.

"So, what do you do for fun?" I asked as we waited for our waiter to return. There had to be something he hadn't already said.

"Well, I like going outside."

"Outside?" my head lulled to the side. "Oh, like hiking? Or gardening?" My mind jumped to excited conclusions. In no way was I an outdoorsy person, but I saw a way to talk about something more nuanced. Sure, I enjoyed the comfort of four walls

surrounding me, but I had windows and the windows cradled my beloved succulents that I cared for. I still got as much sun as they did, at least.

“No, I just like being outside,” Asher said.

How was I supposed to respond to something so meaningless? What the hell *did* he even mean? What was the point?

“Oh. Yeah, I don’t go out too much.” I couldn’t decide whether his comment was stupider or mine. Interlocking my fingers, I squeezed them tighter. I wasn’t disappointed that this was going terribly, I rather expected it to. I didn’t need to date. But, if I was promised free food, I was willing to put my pride on the line.

Before long, I went from being a patient to a resident of Riley for one week. I got consistent meals, a bed, and a Wii to simulate the feeling of playing ping pong. Nurses came in to check on me and make sure I got said meals and pushed me to use the bathroom for urine samples. That was always annoying, forcing me out of the bed I never wished to leave.

Riley was a sad place, wrapping wounds with bubble wrap and drying tears with cotton balls. Children were limping and wheeled down the halls whenever I left my room, reminding me that I belonged in a place like this, but I was one of the lucky ones. Even at the tender age of nine, I could see through the façade. Overly smiley faces greeting me didn’t make me happier. Stabbing a teddy bear with a syringe to learn about using needles didn’t make the shots softer. Wearing a pink rubber bracelet labeled *I Have Type One Diabetes* didn’t make me feel more understood.

“You don’t use a pump?” Asher motioned toward me, my insulin pen case sitting on the edge of our table. He stuffed a chicken tender in his cheek.

“No,” I turned the dial on the tool between my fingers. “I don’t like them.” To tell the truth, the thought of having a device hooked to me made my skin crawl. I never could picture using one, unless I became too old to keep track of it all. I wanted to feel like me; a person with silly dreams about becoming a sorta-well-known artist that’s getting by, dreading the realistic future. When someone sees me, I don’t want them to assume my medical history. I wanted to be the teddy bear with stitches, not patches.

“I would’ve thought you’d get one, not gonna lie,” he said. I stabbed my fork through the noodles on my large plate, brought it to my lips, and bit down hard.

I was sitting in my big, uncomfortable hospital bed. My muscles were tight from my lack of movement, propped up with the stiffness in my neck my new normal. It was dark in my room, and, for the moment, it was just me, staring at the TV screen, watching the way the images warped on the old television set. The door opened, letting in a beam of light. Both my parents walked in, more somber than they had been all day. The way they carried themselves meant bad news. I watched with tired eyes. What was it this time? Was I stuck here for another week? Did something get worse? Was I dying?

Mom sat on the bed. Dad stood beside her. I felt a tingle prick at my fingertips, clenching the bedsheet. A lump caught in my throat when I looked at their faces. They finally came out with it.

“Sophie’s dead.”

What was I left to do but cry? Sophie-Belle, Sophie for short, was our bulldog. She died the night we left for the hospital. Sophie was in our garage, sharing her last look of this world in my father’s eyes before a drop of blood rolled down from her nostril and

dripped onto her pink blanket. When Sophie died, they buried my innocence with her.

The date was coming to its unsatisfying close. I've never liked the notion of the man always paying, but at this point, I did feel like I needed to be financially compensated for the hour I spent with him. As we left the Applebee's and got into the car, he asked, "So, should I take you home or — ?"

This baffled me. How could he have expected anything else to come of this date? To me, the answer was obvious, but I played it dumb, just for him. "Yeah, I think that'd be for the best. I mean, there's not a lot going on around town, is there?"

"I guess not." He started the car and drove out of the parking lot.

"We're leaving, honey," my mom called. "Are you ready?"

I was more than ready. I was going to leave this whole week behind me. I knew that I wasn't coming home to my dog, but I knew I was coming home. I desperately missed being in my bed, looking over the edge and into the depth my room gained in the darkness. It was an oddly soothing memory despite my fear of the dark. But at least I had a nightlight to kill the unknown.

I was finally home after my first and hopefully last date. Staring at my phone, I knew I had to tell him the date sucked, at least in a softer way.

ME: Hey Asher. After our date, I was thinking that I'd be best for us to stay friends (I never wanted to see him again.) I just don't see us really being together (Which is true, but I really didn't like



him.) Thank you for taking me out anyway! Have a great day

Five hours passed.

ASHER: Yeah i agree. we just dont have a lot in common (Kind of ironic.) and w your thoughts on religion n stuff (We literally only talked about it once.) i don't see it working. sorry. have a good one

I told some classmates on the playground that I was diabetic when I came home. I sat under the playground with my best friend and told her I was diabetic and that my dog died. I cried like I never had in front of her. In front of anyone.

ASHER (texting me a few days later): Hey what do you do when your blood sugar drops cuz i was thinking about using the tablets but idk

Upgraded from syringes to the pen. Boy, you would not believe how much nicer the pen was. I was told I could start giving myself my shots. I sat at the kitchen table, staring down at my soft stomach bulging up at me. I held my breath and stabbed the needle through. Tears welled and spilled over my waterline, but a laugh broke out. I laughed and then the tears finished falling.

ME (confused, staring at the new message): I have gummies I carry around. Never used the glucose tablets, heard they taste bad

I missed Sophie. I stopped in my tracks every time I found one of her white-brown hairs on my clothes. I plucked one out and stuck it to a piece of Scotch tape. I pressed the tape to the wall beside my pillow. I told her goodnight when I missed her. And when I thought I lost the hair, I would always find it by the light reflected off the tape. I was also allowed to keep the dog tag which I created into a bracelet. Well, a bracelet on my wrist. On the stuffed bulldog I bought at the Riley gift shop was a collar. A gift shop felt wrong in a children's hospital.

ASHER (the next day): Do u ever just want to yell at your doctor? like cmon stop giving me the worst advice

I already hated summer, but diabetes made it worse. I always felt sick when we went swimming in late elementary school and if my blood sugar dropped, I wasn't allowed to cool off by swimming. So, I sat under the beating sun, pulling gooey Starbursts off their wrappers, and hurting my jaw chewing four of them at once. Whatever I could do to get my number up faster. Adults and teachers saw me as a nuisance for something I couldn't control. A school nurse got fed up with seventh-grade me for not taking insulin half an hour before I ate so she could leave school early.

ME (annoyed): Yeah I guess so

I was on the bottom bunk, doodling. My mom came in to talk to me about my day, just the standard parent-child talk. She asked me about how diabetes was going and told me about my next appointment. My eyebrows drew close, my face tight and uncertain. "I'm — gonna have this forever?"

Scrolling through our texts, revisiting how much of a not-person I was to this guy. Like I was a half-time therapist. The embodiment of diabetes. My thumb hovered over his imageless contact. Although he hadn't sent anything in a few days, I wanted to make sure he wouldn't get the chance to. I blocked his number and deleted our texting history.

I cradled my stuffed Sophie in my lap. Maybe I wasn't a patchwork teddy bear. I wasn't damaged or weird or misplaced. There was something different, but everyone had that different something about them. I was a teddy bear with a few small patches. Then, I stopped needing to take Sophie with me to school. I still miss her, and some days are worse than others, but it's *my* something different.

**Cheyenne Smith**

## Cybonic Disharmonia



**David Walby**

## Invisible Chains

*Day 1:*

Fifteen dollars a day for two weeks by participating in a social experiment sounded like heaven to the ears of a college boy, or at least it was easy money. That was something anyone in my position would foam at the mouth to get. I signed up for that right away, it was just some kind of prison roleplay, right? At the time, that sounded more like dumb fun than anything else. I was given some interviews to ascertain my mental state and got sent out on my merry way, being told that I would know if I were chosen to participate in the study in a few days. Little did I know that those few days would be last time I would feel free for a long time. The last time I would feel like myself.

It was on a Sunday morning that I heard the faintest sounds of police sirens a few blocks away from my suburban home. I was in the bathroom, freshening up and getting dressed in my church clothes. When I heard the sirens in the distance getting closer after a few seconds, I felt curious if something was wrong near my neighborhood but shrugged it off as I put on my blue polo. It wasn't until I finished brushing my teeth that I realized the sirens were zeroing in on this street specifically.

I made my way to the living room and pulled aside my curtains to see what was going on. I watched as the police car made its way down my road, quickly at first, but gradually slowing down as it approached my home.

I stepped away from the window and thought frantically about what I might have done in the past few days to warrant a visit from the law, but there was not much time to ponder before a harsh knocking came from the front door. I opened the door and began to prepare the customary "How can I help you today, officer?" talk, but

before I could utter a word, the officer grabbed me by the shoulders and yanked me outside, getting behind me and shoving me onto the police car.

“Sir, you are under arrest for one case of burglary and one case of armed robbery...”

As he began to list my Miranda rights, I was unable to protest out of sheer confusion. There was simply no logical reason I would be accused of these things, no reason I should be getting humiliated and stripped down by a police officer in broad daylight for all my neighbors to see.

Well, there might actually be one reason.

I almost smirked clear as day for that officer to see because the idea was so ridiculously silly. The goddamned social experiment? I knew it had something to do with prisons, but there was surely no way they would take it this seriously.

The police officer put my hands in cuffs and tossed me in the back of the car. This really was feeling like the immersive “committing a crime” experience, although there was one thing that I would not have expected to happen in a typical arrest. When the officer got into the driver's seat, he reached back to me and tied a blindfold around my head, leaving me unable to see anything but a veil of brown in front of me. I instinctively tried to scratch at the collar of my polo when I remembered my arms were tied behind my back. It was only then I realized I wouldn't be going to church that Sunday morning.

I could only assume we were going to the Stanford County Jail, and so thought to myself how unnecessary this blindfold was, but I wasn't about to tell this officer that. I hear the car door open beside me and feel a hand pull me out and begin guiding me. After another minute or two of walking pseudo-aimlessly, I was turned

around and pushed down into an uncomfortable chair. Once I was seated, I felt something cool and metallic grasp my right ankle.

It was at this point that the blindfold was finally removed from my eyes and I was able to see my surroundings for the first time in what felt like an eternity. While what I saw was not at all appealing to the eye, but not too far off from what I was expecting. A small, gray room with doors that were entirely solid save for a small barred window in the middle. I looked down to see I was wearing a chain on my right ankle. In the doorway stood a man in a guard uniform. He was also wearing sunglasses, which made him look like a bit of an ass for wearing them indoors, but again, was I really in a position to be telling him that?

“Welcome to prison life, number 7415. Time to meet your inmates, and your warden. Take this outfit and get dressed, then meet me outside.”

He tossed me my prison garb and closed the cell door. I briefly examine the shirt before putting it on. It was white, though slightly stained, the only notable feature was the number “7415” on the chest. My prison number. I guess I shouldn’t use my actual name in this roleplay.

I was escorted out of the cell and down a bland hallway, the rattling of my chains recorded every other footstep. This went on until I saw a line of prisoners along the walls, which I was promptly shoved to the end of. I loosely recognized a few of the other prisoners as students I occasionally walked by on my way to classes, but here I can only identify them by the number on their outfits. 4451, 9123, 8612. I couldn’t imagine those would be easy to remember.

In front of us stood a man who was not dressed as either a guard or a prisoner, I could only assume that was the warden. This was quickly confirmed when he shouted for our attention.

“Quite an ugly bunch we’ve rounded up today! Every last one of you have been brought in for cases of burglary and aggravated assault. Not at all minor offenses, and we are going to make sure you realize that.”

I was refraining from grinning at how serious this guy was with playing his role. It was unlikely a single student in this lineup actually did anything wrong, but he could’ve fooled me with his tone. The warden continued.

“I am going to lay down the rules. First, you will abandon the name you came here with. Instead, you will be addressed and address others by their inmate identification number on the front of your shirts. Second, you will only be released from your cells for meals and showers unless a guard orders you out of your cell. Third, you will listen to your guards and obey their orders no matter what. They are authorized to do anything in their power to maintain order in these halls.”

The line of prisoners was silent in acknowledgement.

“I appear to have made myself clear, you will be stripped down and cleaned for germs and lice before being sent back to your cells. Guards, I will leave that to you.”

The warden walked away as the guards started turning prisoners around and pressing them against the wall. One guard had a smile on his face as he brought out a hose from a nearby room. I was surprised they were going this far. Looks like even without knowing their names, I was going to know more than I wanted to about my fellow inmates.

*Day 2:*

I woke up to the clang of a baton against my door, announcing it was time to eat. There were no clocks or windows here, so I had no real way to gauge how much time passed besides



the fact I slept like shit. I stepped out of my cell as the guard opened the door and began to walk to the makeshift cafeteria area when I heard some commotion a few cells away. A guard shouted, the voice echoing through the halls.

“Get your ass out here and eat! Don’t make me come in there and beat you out!”

It was a prisoner refusing to leave his cell, an act of protest. As the noise spread to the rest of the cells, it sounded like others were joining in. Prisoners were insulting the guards, a few even ripped off their number tags and threw them. Guards were rallying in front of multiple cells, dragging a couple inmates out. It did not look pleasant, and I had no intention of joining in, that was too real for me. I no longer even had an appetite, I just watched as the riot was slowly being lost by the other prisoners. Eventually one guard pulled out a fire extinguisher and doused the crowd into submission, and the rebellion was snuffed out.

The guards grouped up and huddled together, speaking among themselves, until it appeared they had a new plan.

“Group up NOW, prisoners.”

This call included me, even though I did not participate in the rebellion. I walked over and stood beside my foamy inmates. Once we were in line, the guards moved to one prisoner at a time and stripped them. Some tried to resist, but the guards quickly pinned them and finished the job. When they reached me, I wanted to mention I did not rebel, but I didn’t want to out myself as a coward to the other prisoners. I was humiliated anyways, as I was stripped completely nude, like all the other prisoners.

When the guards were finished, they stepped back and laughed at us. These dicks thought they were all tough in those outfits, but they were the same as us a couple days ago.

*Day 4:*

There was never a point of true rest down here. Besides the guards making it their personal duty to eradicate any semblance of a sleep schedule we once had, the privileges to use the bathroom were revoked from those who played larger roles in the previous riots. Instead, they were given a bucket and were told to make the most of it. Though I was fortunate to not participate, and thus keep my rights to use a toilet, this did not prevent the stench of open shit from reaching my cell.

That was another thing. In the process of the guards dividing the rioters and non-rioters physically, they divided us mentally as well. Since me and a couple others did not cause the guards much trouble, we were treated somewhat better than the rest, which stirred up spite. We were split between the “rebels” and “angels.”

I tried to stay out of it all, which may have been the worst route to take because not even the angels liked me very much. I was alone in a hostile world. The only retreat I had left was into my own thoughts, and even those seemed ready to betray me. I thought about the crimes I committed to get locked up in here, burglary and aggravated assault. I tried to picture the memories of doing them, but I couldn't remember any details, aside that I did both on my way to church. Was I becoming mentally ill? Why the hell did I decide to do those crimes?

I heard a wail from a few cells down. A couple guards walked past my cell, and a few seconds later I heard the creaking of a cell door opening.

“I can't take this anymore! I have to get the hell out of this place! I'm done with this, please, no more!”

I heard the jeers and laughter of other inmates while he was escorted down the hall, but I was confused. Does he really think he

can leave by just asking? This was a prison, not a classroom. We were all there to pay the price for our crimes.

Later that day (or night), a guard called down the hall for our attention. As he scanned his head across the hall to see if everyone listened, I stared holes into his shades, no longer sure if there were any actual eyes behind those black voids. When the guard was satisfied with the attendance, he began to speak.

“As you all saw and heard, prisoner 819 has requested to be released. While I would personally see to it that he continues to rot in here like the rest of you, the warden was somehow moved enough by his sob story to actually grant him his freedom.”

The prisoners broke out into an uproar over this news, me included. Could I simply ask to be released too? Why is prisoner 819 getting special treatment? These kinds of questions were being hurled at the guard until he had enough.

“SILENCE! I am aware of how unfair this is to you. While you are all lowlifes, I at least respect your endurance, unlike prisoner 819. He is sitting in a room at the end of the hall, waiting for his parents to pick him up. He will be leaving soon, but we are going to let him know what we think of prisoners who quit. Say it loud with me so he can hear it: ‘819 is a bad prisoner!’”

As the guard chanted, more and more inmates were joining in. I thought about 819, how he cried to be released. No sense of dignity whatsoever. 819 was one of the angels. He didn’t even fight for his freedom, it was just given to him.

The more I thought about it, the more I hated 819. Enough that I felt compelled to join in with my fellow prisoners, the first time in forever that we were united in solidarity.

“819 is a bad prisoner!”

“819 is a bad prisoner!”

“819 is a bad prisoner!”

*Day 5: From Christina Maslach*

It had been a few days since I last saw Philip, and I figured he was still down in that campus basement with his science project. He had been anticipating it when he told me about it, but I was still surprised by how dedicated he was to it. I was not sure he had left that place since the project began.

After I was directed to the basement, I made my way down those dimly lit steps. The descent was unsettling, it felt as if each step made the surrounding atmosphere a little different, a little more decrepit. When I reached the bottom, what lay before me was a door with two men wearing sunglasses. Frankly it was ridiculous, we were indoors and it was not bright, it was a miracle they could see at all. One of them spoke up as I approached.

“Are you lost, or did you schedule a visitation, ma’am?”

I did not like his tone. It felt like he was talking down to me, like standing in a dark room guarding a basement was somehow more important than anything I could have done.

“I don’t need to schedule anything here! I’m here to see Zimbardo, I’m his girlfriend.”

The guards stood motionless for a moment or two until they snapped back, like they had just escaped a sort of trance. One of the guards quickly opened the door.

“Our apologies, go right on in, warden’s office is three doors to the left.”

When I stepped in, it was like I’d just entered a portal to a parallel universe. The lighting went from dim to bright, although sterile, and the walls and doors looked like they had been built recently. I heard some kind of ruckus going on past a door on the other side of the hall. Before I could investigate it, Philip came out of one of the side doors.

“Hey there! I wasn’t expecting to see you today, you get here alright?”

“Mostly, those men at the front door were rude. And a bit strange too.”

“They were? I’ll have to give them a talking to later, but we don’t get a lot of visitors here, so you’ll have to forgive them.”

Something about Philip was indescribably different. He had bags under his eyes, and it felt like he was putting a different inflection in his voice. I was starting to grow concerned.

“Are you doing okay down here? You look tired, maybe you should take a break.”

“Break? No way, I can’t take a break. The prison isn’t going to watch over itself, y’know.”

“I’m starting to think you’re taking this prison project a bit too far –”

I was interrupted by another bang from down the hallway, which reminded me of what I was going to check on.

“What was that?”

Philip responded casually.

“Oh, it’s the guards keeping the prisoners in line. Those rascals never know when to quit.”

I went over to the door at the end of the hall and peered through the window. What I saw may remain fresh in my mind for the rest of my life. I witnessed a couple of guards pushing around a naked man with a bag over his head. They laughed and pushed him, then tripped him to the ground. This was not keeping prisoners in line, it was just humiliation.

I turned back to Philip, furious.

“That! That is what you are doing in there? You think that is normal prison behavior?”

Philip seemed confused.

“That is results, Christina. Results way more vivid than anything I could have imagined going into this.”

“Listen to yourself, Philip! What’s beyond that door is more than just data, those are all real people.”

I stormed passed him to the front door, ignoring his attempts to coax me back in. As I opened the door, I turned back to him, staring at his now soulless eyes.

“The Philip I know is not the same one I’m looking at right now. This place has changed you, and not for the better. If there is still some sense left in you, you’ll know what you should do. Until then, don’t speak to me.”

*Day 6: From Prisoner 7415*

We were all told to gather for the Parole Board. Likely another ruse by the guards to give us false hope that we could be free. After what we did, who would possibly want to release us?

I was among the last prisoners to enter the room, and to my surprise, the warden stood in front of us. What had we done now?

“Attention everyone, I have gathered you all here to inform you that you are being released. I...apologize for what has happened here, I became so invested in this that I lost myself. Even though it has only been six days, I will be paying you for the full planned two weeks.”

This was an overload of information that left me baffled. It had only been six days? I was being paid to do this? Everything the warden said confused me, and yet it felt like I was already partially aware of it, like the information was just dormant in my mind.

“We will ask you to return in a few days if you wish to speak about the experience. Until then, think on it and enjoy your freedom. You are dismissed, not as prisoners, but as people.”

A few of the prisoners celebrated as we walked out of that room. I followed in a daze, still trying to piece together everything I heard. We exited the front doors single file. I was hesitant to step outside the prison until I remembered that it was okay to leave. As I walked up each step, I came to more and more realizations. I was being paid because this was a social experiment, it wasn't actually a prison. From the very start, even from the actual arrest, they had done everything to make it as immersive as possible. Unbelievable. This shit wasn't worth the money they paid me. In fact, it was probably going to cost *me* money to get enough therapy to get over this.

Even if I got over it, I would probably never forget the atrocity of that experiment.

**Ethan Montgomery**

**Her: The Girl, The Woman, The Lady**

Sometimes my mind

Wanders

Drifts

And fades into memory

And before I know what is happening

I see her

The girl

The woman

The lady

Her image is so clear

Crystal clear

Like the lake on the day

Her mother forever fell through the ice

The girl's emotions

So vivid

Dark and destroyed

All due to a slippery accident

The woman's entrance into the world

As she had no choice but

To step up and fill

The void

The lady's flubbering confusion

At how she was supposed to be

So different from how freely her mother

Taught her



But now her mother was           gone           so what did those  
Lessons matter

The girl who misses her mother  
    The woman who knows her responsibility  
        The lady who must be poised and stiff  
Her

It seems like only yesterday a mirror showed  
Me  
The girl before  
The woman before

The lady I didn't want to be  
                            But now all I see is a shadow  
    Of her. The girl.  
Holding her mother's hand by the frozen lake, one last time.

**Zoe Lawless**

## **My Mom, the General: A Daughter's Memories**

1930

While her older sister Nancy plays with dolls, five-year-old Alice wanders off the front stoop of their bungalow-style house in Berkley, California, to visit her father in his carpentry workshop around back. Her father enjoys two hobbies when he comes home from his executive office job at Standard Oil: raising wire-haired terriers and crafting bookshelves, tables, and chairs from wood. Alice is the only one of his three daughters he encourages to share those hobbies. Perhaps he is tired of waiting for a son to be born. Alice does not care about gender roles; she is simply eager to mimic the fascinating things her father does.

Thanks to her father, Alice later can hammer nails, handsaw two-by-fours and plywood, measure with a folding carpenter's rule, and test corners with a square. She knows to draw a plan for any project before cutting the pieces to assemble. Her grandpa Chester teaches her some of these skills also; he is famous in several states for manufacturing and donating doll furniture to children in Shriners' Hospitals. During visits to her grandfather's home, 240 miles south in Pismo Beach, she learns how to operate a scroll saw and make small wooden items that have curved shapes.

1938

Alice is composing a school paper at the dining room table as familiar supper-preparation music broadcasts from the adjoining kitchen, her mother's orchestra featuring one cooking instrument at a time. A chopping knife cubes onions, carrots, and potatoes on a wooden board. The gurgle-splash of water into a pot and the pop-hiss of a gas flame igniting under a burner both signal where those vegetables will go next. Browning beef sizzles in a cast-iron frying

pan. A wire whisk blending flour and milk for thickening makes a percussive rhythm against the sides of a pottery bowl. Soon, the kitchen symphony finale, a rich brown stew, will be served to an appreciative audience of six family members.

Alice's carefully inked handwritten composition is nearing completion when a sharp explosive bang makes her flinch. Her six-year-old brother Phil slams open the back door, and dashes through the kitchen, narrowly missing a collision with his mother, bumping the dining table on his way to the bathroom just beyond. "Look out, look out — I have to go!" he warns.

"Philip," Alice yells, "why can't you be more careful?" She would say something more critical, but her mother is there. "Mom, he ruined my paper; look at this big mark. Now I'll have to start over. This wouldn't have happened if I didn't have to do my homework in the dining room."

*My imagined 1938 scene supposes that thirteen-year-old Alice (my mother) wished her family could live in a different house, one with a better-designed floor plan and traffic patterns to rooms that would allow everyone the spaces they needed. Thinking about one's living space is a common human activity; who among us has not wished a certain room had a different window placement or that a chilly room faced the morning sun? Today, these desires can lead a person to a career in drafting, engineering, construction, or architecture; but in the decades before 1970, those careers were not normally available for women.*

*Mom dreamed of designing and building houses with features most middle-class homemakers would appreciate. It was a "someday in the future" dream always at the back of her mind, a seed that was planted at a very young age.*

*That same scroll saw later inhabited our garage while I was growing up. At first, it was too high up for me to reach. My kindergarten eyes could see only sawdust on the legs and view the motor, pulley, drive belt, and electric cord mounted underneath the table surface. Later, when I was tall enough to see and hear the wicked narrow blade vibrating and whining against the pressure of wood turning in its path, a deeper respect for my mother's skill began to grow. Other kids' moms had sewing machines, but my mom was special; she operated a dangerous scroll saw.*

1947 to 1959

In addition to her mastery of the scroll saw, Alice learns other carpentry skills as needed. If she wants something built, she assembles it herself. She is a big fan of built-in shelves and cabinets. Every bathroom sink must be encased in a cabinet with drawers and doors to make full use of the space under the sink. *We take this for granted now, but houses in the nineteen-thirties, forties, and even some in the fifties left pipes exposed under their sinks. We lived in a few of those older houses, which is probably why Mom's dream of designing a better home persisted.*

In the backyard of every place she lives, Alice designs and erects open-weave lattice roofing to provide partial shade for her outdoor garden plants. This meant digging holes, using a manual post-hole digger to sink the supporting posts in hard clay soil, and then mixing concrete in a wheelbarrow to pour around the base of those posts. She constructs the framing and nails crisscrossed strips of lath to it, trimming the surplus afterward. Then she brushes on the stain, wearing a white bandana tied over her hair and an old, too-large, man's dress shirt for protection against spatters. This is sweaty work, always done in the summertime, but that doesn't bother Alice. She loves the hot weather.

For other home improvement projects, Alice finishes with stain or paint, or even wallpaper. The garage always contains large canvas drop cloths, wooden stirring sticks, cans of turpentine or paint thinner, well-cared-for paintbrushes, putty knives, sandpaper, sanding blocks, a spattered step ladder, five-gallon buckets, fuzzy rollers, wallpaper smoothing brushes, and masking tape. Those things compete for space with the carpentry mix of nails, brads and tacks, hammers, special saws for every purpose, short and long bubble levels, sawhorses, and scrap lumber. Although sometimes full of dark shadows, populated with spiders, and littered with saw-dust, the garage nevertheless inspires Alice's children to become do-it-yourselfers.

### 1959 to 1963

Alice designs her first dream house in the Cape Cod style, which seems odd because even though living three miles from an ocean, it isn't the Atlantic Ocean, and it is not sitting on a cape. The house is in California. She just likes the way those early colonial saltbox houses look and she wants the energy efficiency gained from stacking two-floor levels. The Cape Cod stands out from the single-story ranch-style homes up and down the rest of the street.

Instead of placing the chimney and fireplace in the center of the house like a traditional saltbox, Alice moves them against an outside wall in the living room. Next to the fireplace and beneath a window looking toward the back lot and creek, she constructs a hinged window seat that also serves as a box for firewood. The practical aspect of that firewood box is the small cupboard-like door on the exterior wall. There is no trekking through the house with messy armloads of wood; one just loads the box from outside.

*Firewood handling was not the main attraction for us kids though. In the summer, when the box was empty, we could twist and*

*squeeze ourselves into the house through that little opening. This was important if we forgot our key to the front door and found ourselves locked out after school before Mom came home from work.*

Alice's Cape Cod design keeps the extra-steep slope on the back half of the roof characteristic of saltbox houses. This means the second floor lacks some ceiling height; the vertical surface of the back hallway is shorter than normal, and the ceiling slants toward the center of the house.

*For the first two years after we moved in, that unfinished wall held a special attraction for me because I was allowed to write and draw on the cardboard temporarily covering the framing. Later, when we had money to finish construction, properly painted sheetrock replaced my special "canvas" of large cartoon figures.*

### Alice's Uniform

When not forced to don a dress or skirt and blouse for work, Alice has a consistent casual "uniform" for her leisure activities. She creates her favorite tops by cutting the sleeves off floral cotton blouses. She neatly hems the shoulder seams and presses the wrinkles out after laundering. She wears her shirts buttoned but untucked, "hanging at hip" as the clothing catalogs describe, over loosely fitted blue jeans without a belt. She slips her crew-socked feet into beaded Minnetonka moccasins, always white. While the shirts and jeans are fresh and new, Alice wears them to picnics, casual parties, bowling, grocery shopping, and other going-out-in-public events. She dresses up the outfit by adding accessories: a necklace or bracelet, and a nice sweater for wearing inside air-conditioned buildings. After the fabrics fray and fade, and when the moccasins are beyond help from shoe polish, she recycles those outfits for dirty-job duty. When on the job, she always has a red

handkerchief hanging from one back pocket and a pair of work gloves stuffed in the other.

*My memory of Mom in her project “uniform” is not complete unless it shows her with a tool in her hand. Photographs show her with a saw, hammer, or paintbrush, bending over a project across sawhorses. If not building something from wood, she was wielding a shovel to dig holes for planting shrubs, spreading gravel, or mixing fertilizer and mulch in a wheelbarrow.*

1963 to 1981

Divorce, remarriage, relocation, different jobs, more houses to remodel or fix up, and a near-death battle with pneumonia; life marches on for Alice without an opportunity to design and build another house after the Cape Cod. When at age forty-two, it finally seems like a good time to reach for the dream again, her second husband (an electrician named Bill) encourages her to attend contractor school. She studies textbooks for the whole month of November to confirm what she already knows from experience and to learn seldom-encountered building code details. She then drives to Sacramento to take the California contractor’s exam. She doesn’t have to wait anxiously for results too long. Her license arrives in the mail on December 14, 1977. With little fanfare but a lot of excitement, Alice (of A & B Builders) becomes a General Contractor.

*In 1977, I proudly began referring to my mom as “the General.” It’s a great conversation headline and invites a chance to reminisce.*

Just before earning her license, Alice and Bill move from San Jose to Amador County in the Sierra-Nevada range where they begin building houses “designed for the homemaker by a homemaker.” Between 1977 and 1981, Alice designs six small homes she advertises as “planned for comfortable retirement living.” She is finally living her dream.

Memories of her growing-up years, the experience of raising her own family, and the homes she remodeled influence her designs. For example, she considers how to place a house in relation to the sun to maximize passive solar heating. She observes casual clothing trends and designs wardrobes to accommodate them. She moves bedroom windows from the common center-over-the-bed position to either side of the bed space, thereby eliminating a draft above the heads of sleepers. She provides a place for the clothes hamper in the bathroom. Also in the bathroom, she installs inwall electric heaters for damp bathers on cold mornings. From these details, one might see that her goal is to fix every irritating arrangement she has ever encountered in other homes. (One might also guess that she is always chilly and seeks warmth.)

Like many homemakers, Alice gives a lot of thought to the kitchen. Advertising notes from her “Country Kitchen Series” feature these practical details not yet common in other new homes:

- *Working area is out of the path of traffic*
- *Has convenient workflow from the refrigerator to sink to range*
- *Three windows provide a scenic view from the table*
- *Wall space for buffet, hutch, or desk*
- *Cabinets include corner unit, drawer unit, and tray unit*

Did you notice the very first item in the features list? Remembering her brother’s mad dashes into their Berkley home on Curtis Street, Alice makes sure none of her floor plans have an exterior door opening into the kitchen. All the details in her designs represent the attainment of her life-long dream. *My Mom “the General” designs a building her way.*

**Cynthia Scott**



## Green Layers



**Bailey Nordenbrock**

**God's Account**

I hear them calling;  
from the skies, they call my name,  
from the ground, they call my name,  
from the pit, they call my name.  
Unbound by Destiny though to greatness ushered,  
The world in my fingertips, moist clay under my thumb.

Shall I be a benevolent maker, or a brutal taskmaster instead?  
World's largest account, giving me the power of GOD.  
Though more to the Devil I am akin,  
And more powerful than he.

They can't take my powers from me,  
Corrupt all their countrymen,  
And control their policy.

Smiling from my throne of gold,  
I look down upon the wretched Earth,  
And I marvel at the stupidity of the dirty man.

**David Walby**

**Pygmalion's Folly**

An ivory-skinned vixen,  
grand statue, and crown jewel of the collection.  
Pygmalion's masterwork yet rejected by man.  
Imbued with life through will of Venus,  
though expected to be still.  
Stand there, be pretty,  
nod when I say,  
and don't question.  
Ironic to sculpt a woman,  
Bring her to life,  
Yet expect a statue.

**David Walby**

## **The Fate of the Gods?**

Does God fear Man as Man fears him?

Does he wonder that he will fall out of fashion and become yet another of Man's abandoned gods?

What will happen when he loses the power of belief?

Will he still be a deity, or will he become a mortal like his creations?

What of the other gods?

Did they never exist, just as ours might not in another millennium?

Were they false gods? Devils as ours may eventually become.

He is already to those who worship other gods.

Man is a fickle race,  
believing and denying as we see fit.

Zeus, once such a feared figure,  
now denounced and rejected,  
as he rightly should.

Now he has no power, for none believe  
in his thunderbolts any longer.

He lies on Olympus now,  
as helpless as his victims once were.

Osiris and Ra,  
both longer dead still.

Dried and decrepit under the desert sands,  
dedicated by massive monuments only recently rediscovered.

What was once a homage to their power and grace  
is now only a rocky testament of what once was.

For all that power and command over humanity,  
it still could not save them.

Man is a fickle race,  
believing and denying as we see fit.  
Casting the gods out into the same sand they saved us from.

Odin retains his power, as some still believe  
and still follow the old ways and the old gods.  
Though his power is much reduced, he holds onto Yggdrasil,  
watching with one eye, the tides of fate,  
hoping for a chance of his return.  
Perhaps Hugin and Munin will return with  
believers in their arms to return their master to his former glory.

For every dead god bound in a book upon your shelf,  
another thousand lie completely forgotten,  
with names that only may be mentioned by far-gone ancestors  
once a century.

Even our current infatuation,  
old Jesus Christ himself,  
is weakening.  
Our God, *my* God, is losing his grip,  
Slowly, over the centuries, decades, and years.  
Or do I side with another?  
Fewer believe; fewer still convert.

What is a god and what is a devil?  
They both command monuments,  
they both demand rites and rituals,  
they both command our lives,  
and they both command our souls.

One is wrong because the other said they are right;  
how are we supposed to know?  
In one nation, what we commend as God,  
is condemned as Satan by another.

You can't threaten us with Hell if you have no power to send us  
there.

You can't reward us with Heaven if it was foreclosed upon.  
You cannot demand rites and rituals if we've no incentive to do  
them.

You only have as much power as we say you do,  
and we are taking it away.

Man is a fickle race,  
believing and denying as we see fit.  
Yet we still feel a need to believe in something.  
So, we give birth to a new god to sculpt us from the cosmos.  
We let them have control of our fates, our lives, and our souls,  
if only for a time. And when we are done, we toss them out with all  
the rest.

With all of the gods, living and dead, treasure and trash,  
they all have one thing in common.  
The only command they have over the human race is one of fear.  
I don't dare speak out against Christ for fear of eternal torment.  
I don't dare speak out against Zeus for fear of his thunder.  
I don't dare speak out against Odin for fear of the Valkyries.

We give them idols of gold and silver,  
wood and bone,  
blood and steel,

and call them the most merciful of all beings.  
But it all comes down to the same course.  
The fruitless plight to gain the favor of a nonexistent god to avoid  
nonexistent punishment.  
Or am I just a heathen?

For what is science under the lens of religion?  
Has it not given us more answers than all of our religions,  
living or dead?  
Is the method our new god?  
Or perhaps for the first time,  
do we not need one?  
Are we our own gods?  
Is that blasphemy?

But forgive me, LORD — almighty GOD, creator of the heavens,  
and smiter of the unholy,  
for I have spoken out of turn.

Man is a fickle race,  
believing and denying as we see fit,  
and infinitely sticking our nose where it does not belong.  
I am your humble servant as always,  
at least for the moment.

**David Walby**

**Fang of Maldictus**



**David Walby**



## **Wolf in Priest's Clothes**

Corruption writhes in its wretched host,  
Burrowing deep into once hallowed bowls.  
It was a sacred union now defiled  
upon the ungodly nature of man.

Lycanthropic men inside pastoral garb,  
Steal righteousness of the christened cause  
And deform God's good name.  
Drain his blood and consume the flesh of Christ.  
Bare your fangs, wolverine man,  
And show the world  
Your skin.

**David Walby**

## Socially Distant

### Characters

(Names are unimportant in this story)

**Man:** A man in his late fifties. Seems set in his ways.

**Woman:** Younger, makes her space smaller, even though she is frustrated. Just wants to read her damn book.

**Young Man:** Inconsequential. We'll get to him.

*(Before the stage lights come on, a man can be heard talking loudly.)*

### Man

And you know what else is wrong with young folks today, on top of bein' buried in phones, bein' out and out commies, protesting and complaining all the damn time, and acting like they know everything 'cuz of a few college courses?

*(The lights come up, revealing the inside of a bus station. There is a wall, against which is a worn metal bench with two people sitting on it. The two are sitting as far apart as possible without falling onto the floor. Behind them, on the wall, a large, faded poster reads "PLEASE MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING GUIDELINES: REMAIN SIX FEET APART" Stage right, sits **Woman**. She is trying to read a book and she has a cloth mask over her face. She looks annoyed. Stage left sits **Man**.*

*He too wears a mask, a worn single-use one, around his neck, not covering his face. He is staring at the woman, expecting a response.*

*He sits silently, arms spread wide, leaning toward her, clearly awaiting a reply to his question, an excuse to continue his ranting. Finally, after several beats of silence, she turns a page in her book.)*

None of 'em wanna work? All these places are hiring.

All of 'em got help wanted signs posted up. Offering

hundreds of dollars just to come flip some burgers.  
 Hell, I saw one McDonald's offerin' five. Hundred.  
 Dollars. For a sign-on bonus. Can you believe that? Still,  
 no one wants to work, 'specially not these kids.

*(The woman sits, reading, still not looking at the man. For a couple of  
 beats, the two remain silent.)*

They can just sit at home and play video games and get  
 checks from the government forever. Meanwhile,  
*meanwhile*, folks like you and me, we gotta really keep  
 goin' at it to work hard and pay the taxes for these bums  
 to sit at home freeloadin' off us responsible citizens.

**Woman**

Sir, I just wan—

**Man**

I know, I know. Damn frustrating, ain't it? Why, the  
 other day, I was at a restaurant, took me almost an  
 hour and a half to get my food. Two waitresses, both  
 probably my age, women who should be considering  
 retiring not too long in the future, and one cook.

*(The woman sets her book on her lap, looking frustrated.)*

**Woman, calmly**

Sir, I'm —

**Man**

For a whole restaurant, durin' the middle of a dinner rush. I.  
 Was. Fumin'. I demanded I get my food for free, and I did. Still,  
 wasn't their faults though, but that ain't right. And it's all  
 because these kids don't wanna work anymore. Everywhere is  
 short on staff right now, all 'cuz they would rather be lazy.

*(A few beats. The woman picks her book back up and starts reading.)*

They're all too concerned with "global warming" and  
 gettin' free food and health care and school from the

government, not concerned enough with provin'  
they've earned stuff like that. I didn't have stuff like  
that growin' up, and I turned out just fine, ya know?

*(Beat)*

When I was growin' up, work meant something. It was  
something you were supposed to be proud of. You wanted to  
work. Wanted to contribute. Wanted to be a good American.  
Feels like all the kids these days are so un-American. It's like I  
don't even recognize this country anymore.

*(The woman sighs between every sentence now, louder and louder.)*

And, *and*, this pandemic. This awful, stupid pandemic.

None of this would be happenin' if we didn't have this  
pandemic going on. All 'cuz some Chinese idiot ate a bat.  
And now, me and you gotta sit here, wear these masks —

*(The man tugs lightly at the mask on his neck with a finger.)*

and act like complete strangers to each other. It just ain't  
natural, ya know? How can we be good Americans to each  
other when we can't even show our faces to each other?  
Feels like everyone now is hidin'. That ain't the American

Way I grew up with. No, ma'am. Not at all.

**Woman**

Look, I get you're frustrated by all this, bu—

**Man**

Damn right I'm frustrated! Why should we, the  
greatest country in the world, be hiding behind masks  
all the time? For that matter, why should we worry  
about some dumb virus that isn't even that bad?

**Woman**

Sir, listen, I —

**Man**

It's like people in this country forgot what it's like to be American, ya know? How to be proud, brave, and strong.

*(The woman grows angrier and more outraged.)*

And that's what we need to be as Americans. But no, we lost our backbone. That's why China is blowin' past us. Because we lost what it means to be American. No one in the world respects us anymore, ya know? Everyone wants ta laugh at America. They think we're some kinda joke.

**Woman, annoyed**

Yeah, sure.

**Man**

And this new guy they've got runnin' things, oh boy, he isn't gonna help with that either. He's a quitter, that's what he is. Look at the increase in cases of this supposedly "deadly disease." Look at what he's havin' our troops do, tuckin' tail and running, that's all he seems to be doin'. Now the last guy we had, he knew exactly what he was doin'.

*(Woman shakes her head frantically.)*

**Man**

That guy had a plan for everything. Never would have disgraced our troops like the new guy is doin'. Never would have had prices skyrocket like they have been.

We should've had four more years, but the new guy had to steal it from 'em. Why I —

*(The woman slams her book shut and tucks it under her arm.)*

**Woman, angrily**

Sir, can you really, *really* not notice that I do not give a fuck about anything it is you have to say? Are you really so short-sighted, so unaware, and self-centered, that you can't see when someone clearly does *not* want

to be talking to you? Do you not understand that my world doesn't revolve around your moronic opinions?

**Man**

But I —

**Woman**

No, no dude. I let you ramble, and rant and you could clearly see that I was trying to read. So, you're just going to have to shut up and listen for just a minute to someone who isn't the self-serving voice in that thick skull of yours.

**Man**

Look lady, I —

**Woman**

First of all, do you really think I give a damn about whether or not you got good service at a restaurant? Yeah, I get it. No one wants to work right now. No one wants to pay right now either. If I could get paid more to stay at home, with my family, than to work in some god-awful fast-food joint, don't you think I would? You would too.

**Man, defensively**

I wouldn't sit at home and get paid for nothing.

**Woman**

Then you're loud and dumb. If you would honestly go to work somewhere that treated you like trash for pennies, then you're just plain dumb.

**Man**

Now hold on. I —

**Woman**

And another thing! Maybe you shouldn't be a jerk to wait staff but still expect good service, which I'm sure you still got despite the fact you were probably as careless and delusional as you are right now.

**Man**

Wait, I —

**Woman**

*And another thing!* Stop acting like you're some geopolitical expert. You're not. You're a guy at a bus stop with bad grammar. But you're going to complain that the president can't figure out something that you think your stupid ass can? What's the best pull-out strategy, genius? What's the good one? Do you think there is one?

**Man, angrily**

Well, I could probably come up with somethin' better than the joke of a president we got now.

**Woman, sarcastically**

Oh, I bet you could. And I bet you voted for the last guy. And that you think you and him are stable geniuses.

Am I right?

**Man**

Yeah, well —

**Woman, laughing mockingly**

Yeah, yeah, I thought so. And it's always people like you, the dense ones, who wonder why the world is always laughing at us. We are a country full of pushovers and bootlickers, like you. People who expect us to bend over backward to greedy politicians and greedier corporations.

**Man**

No, they're laughin' at us 'cuz we've become weak, complacent. We'll let anyone walk all over us.

**Woman**

Did it ever occur to you that they laugh at us because people like you willingly embrace ignorance? Like voting a guy with no political experience to the highest political office. Or ignoring basic science. Or who won't wear a mask to prevent an *airborne* illness.

**Man**

Are you calling me —

**Woman**

And do not say another word about the troops again.

Have you served?

**Man**

No, bu—

**Woman**

Well, my brother did. He served this supposedly great country of yours. And he got a bullet in the back for it.

**Man, with shame in his voice**

I — I'm sorry. Where did he die?

**Woman**

Does it matter?

**Man**

No. I suppose it don't.

*(A few beats)*

**Woman**

Somewhere outside of Kabul. Back in '06. I've had people try to tell me how to pronounce it. Still can't.

Don't really want to, you know?

**Man**

Yeah, I know.

**Woman**

So, I hope you understand why I get a little frustrated when people like you mouth off about how Americans



should act. When people like you try to tell me how to  
be American.

**Man**

All I was saying was —

**Woman, crying angrily**

Shut up! My brother was proud of this country! He tried his  
damnedest to be brave and strong for it! Where did that get  
him, huh? What did believing in this country get him? What's  
it gotten anyone else? Trust me, I'm not fucking happy about  
how we're leaving. But I don't have the answers, and neither  
do you. Sometimes, things this screwed up just can't be fixed.

*(A few beats)*

My family sacrificed everything for his country. Yet  
we've got people like you whining about the good ol'  
days when America was great. Well let me tell you  
something, pal. This country has always used people  
like my brother to get ahead.

**Man**

Now, that's not fair to America.

**Woman**

Oh, so now you're defending the government. Which is  
it? I have to go around, day after day, listening to  
blowhards like you, people who don't even know where  
they stand, but want to call other people spineless.

**Man**

Hey now!

**Woman, dismissively**

You all run your mouths to anyone unfortunate enough  
to be near you, like you know anything about anything,  
acting like the world owes you something for existing.

**Man**

Now listen up, miss. I —

**Woman**

Don't call me miss! You don't know me, what I've been through; the hell my family and I have crawled through for your supposed great country. You wonder why kids might not want to be invested in this system, why they might be disillusioned and think everything is broken. Well, look around. This country hasn't exactly given us anything to invest in, to believe in truly, for a long time.

*(A few beats)*

I sat there, while president after president botched everything, screwed our troops, and made this country a worse place to live. From both sides, they screwed up everything.

**Man**

Hey now, it's not fair to blame the last president. He tried his best with a bad situation. He —

**Woman**

I can blame anyone I want for this mess if they had a hand in it. You don't get to tell me how to feel about my brother and who I think is responsible for his death. Now, nobody wants to do anything to make anything matter, they just want to be like you, complaining that things won't get better. Or they want to ignore things and act like abandoning our troops, abandoning our people, is perfectly fine. "Sorry guys. Yeah, things got messed up. Our bad. Can't be helped."

**Man**

Well, hey, that ain't fair. I support our troops, fully. I think everything bad that's happened to them is awful.

**Woman**

Yeah? That so? What are you doing about it? Did you vote for someone who would do something different?

**Man**

Well, I voted for —

**Woman, sarcastically**

The last guy, I know. Things *really* got better for America under him, didn't they? He sure made things great again.

*(The woman vaguely gestures around her.)*

**Man**

Well, why don't you tell me how things get better? 'Cuz I don't see how anything is gonna get better with things bein' the way they are right now!

**Woman**

With that attitude, no, they won't. You can keep complaining that shit isn't how you want it, or you can do something about it. But I'm tired of having to figure it out for people like you when I don't even know myself.

*(A few beats)*

Or you can just shut the fuck up and let a woman read her book. Jesus Christ, dude, seriously. Read the damn room.  
*(The drawn-out hiss of brakes from a bus can be heard. The woman stands up and turns to look at the enraged man.)*

This is my bus. I hope you actually listened to me. I hope you'll start thinking before you speak. I hope, above all, sir, that you'll give these kids today a chance. They didn't exactly inherit the best country, did they?

**Man**

Hey!

*(Woman exits stage right. A few beats pass. The man sits, arms crossed, scowl fixed on his face, muttering. Then, he sighs, and the*

*man pulls his mask over his face. He looks stage left. A few more beats pass. Suddenly, a young man enters stage right and sits on the far end of the bench: no mask. He stretches and rolls his neck and shoulders and gives out a content sigh. He closes his eyes and lays his head back. A few more beats pass. The older man looks over at the new arrival, nods a few times, and then slowly raises his arms up before throwing them down on his lap, palms slapping his pants.)*

You know what's wrong with kids these days!

*(The young man jumps up in fright and glares over at the older man, still in his ramble. The curtain begins to lower.)*

They don't take the world seriously enough. Like even a guy like me has bit the bullet and kept to my mask.

They're always on their damn phones. They never wanna talk to a person. Too many Facebooks, and 'grams, and Bumbles, and —

The End

**Christian Litsey**

### Snap Dragon on a First Day Cover



Cynthia Scott

## The Forgotten Family

On March 17, 2022, I met with my mother, Laura Moorman, to interview her about her father, William “Bill” Paul Moorman. We were supposed to meet at a midpoint, in Nashville, Indiana, but moments before I left, my mom called, asking if I wanted to visit a house Laura acquired through a good friend of hers before they passed, and that she wanted to go through some things she had for me. I thought it was a ruse and said no but inevitably ventured to the house after she claimed her car broke down and thus couldn’t meet in Nashville anymore.

The house seemed unlivable with the amount of items Laura gained over the years, which is why I hate going to it. Several drawers filled with jewelry were stacked under the TV stand along with a baby carrier on top of a gray tote filled with clothes bought at Goodwill. The only furniture in the living room was a gray couch, a black recliner, and a brown wooden chair, all of which were either already in the house, found on the side of the road, or found dumpster diving. Laura sat on the black recliner, and I sat across from her in the wooden chair. Laura’s hazel brown eyes kept glancing over me while her hands grabbed an assortment of necklaces, rings, and bracelets. Laura stalled talking about her father by offering jewelry, drinks, and food. She only stopped after hearing the first question.

“What was his birthday and death day?”

“I don’t know,” was Laura’s knee-jerk response.

“You don’t know your father’s birthday?”

“Look, I’m going to, I’m going to be perfectly honestly with you in that, while this is fun for me, because I enjoy talking and remembering my father, it is painful, okay?”

“I understand this —”

*L: My father was born on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, I think he was born in '48 or '46, not sure, and he died May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1988. 1987. 1989. Now, how old was I?*

*Q: Why don't you think about Lacey, your oldest child? Weren't you about to have her?*

*L: I already had her by time he died. I had flown out here from California, and I thought to myself that I was going to be here for about a week, and I wanted to visit some friends and I wanted to see Faye [Laura's mother] and see my grandma. I thought that I wanted to get that stuff out of the way and then I will be able to visit my dad. So, I put him off. I had baby Lacey with me the whole time, and on the third day [of the week-long visit] I got home, but when I saw him, he told me to call 911.*

Laura's father was an alcoholic. She knew that fact for years now and claimed the big reason for his drinking is because he spent time being a part of the Vietnam War. Laura's father was considered a functioning alcoholic; and, while he tried very hard not to drink, Laura remembered all the times he had her go to great lengths to get a bottle of alcohol to sate his desire to drink. Which is why, when it came to the very moment her father needed her to call 911, needed his daughter to do something for him yet again, Laura hesitated. She thought that he was having withdrawal symptoms, nothing too serious and in need of 911, but when it became clear it's more than that, Laura made the 911 call.

*L: I beat myself up for it, not calling right away. The ambulance did arrive, and I even got ahold of Faye in that time too so that she could watch over baby Lacey while I ride in the ambulance with Dad.*

When she climbed into the ambulance, Laura didn't think this is the last time she'll get to be with her father. Instead, she climbed in, took ahold of his hand, and reassured him that everything will be okay. Fully believing that the visit to the hospital will just affirm all

that Laura already knew about her father and not a visit that is going to confirm the passing of his life.

“Everything’s going to be okay, Dad. There are angels all around us, so don’t worry, everything’s going to be okay.”

As soon as Laura and her father arrived at the hospital, Bill went into full cardiac arrest. When he was declared dead, the death certificate labelled the cause of death “acute alcoholism” with the left and right chambers, not specified if they were the upper or the lower ones, of the heart having blockage. Bill Moorman died when Laura was nineteen years old and in the middle of a divorce with her first husband, Tony, while also planning to move back to Indiana.

*L: My dad hated Tony and hated that I moved all the way to California to live with Tony and raise Lacey there. He felt that I needed to move back to Indiana and stay with him instead of living with Tony anymore. My dad was the reason I was even there in Indiana at the time of his death, since he’s the one who paid my ticket and had me fly out there. Dad was hoping that in him doing that [in flying her back to Indiana], I would stay.*

*Q: When it comes to his death, is there anything you wish you had said before he died?*

*L: No. No, I said all that I needed to say. I wished he had said something to me. I wasn’t, wasn’t ready for him leave me. I was nineteen years old with a baby and getting divorced. I had to set up his funeral all by myself, was going back and forth from California with baby Lacey trying to finalize the divorce while picking out the flowers, the casket, suit, and headstone for my dad. I wasn’t ready.*

Seeing my mother cry was something I couldn’t fully bring myself to sympathize with. Her tears and yearning for a dead parent made old memories resurface from all the nights I would lie in my own bed and cry for my own parents — nights I cried out for her —



but no one appeared. I found myself angry that she was shedding tears.

Unlike her, who had her parents by her side even while they weren't always sober, my parents spent several years in prison. Unlike her, she had fond memories of growing up of getting handwritten notes from her father with the phrase "My Dearest Darling," with money always tucked underneath, while my fondest memories were stilted conversations and brief exchanges of toys during Child-Protective-Services-watched visits when my mother was out prison.

My mother got to do track meets, bowling tournaments, and softball games knowing the fact that at least one — if not both — of her parents were watching and cheering her on. My mother only ever came to one track meet back in middle school, and she didn't even watch my race, just gave out candy to my teammates and me, and then left.

It doesn't help that, in a recent interview with my grandmother, Georgia "Faye" Groves, she claimed that the two played softball together.

*F: Most of the time we spent together was through sports. I was the coach for her elementary school basketball team, went bowling together, and we even played softball together with her, my sister Ann, and my sister Tina.*

Though moving past the relationship my grandmother and my mother had, I inquired more on the overall relationship with Bill, since my mother claimed that they didn't have the best marriage.

*Q: How did you meet him? Bill, I mean.*

*F: We met back in high school; we both went to Columbus North.*

*Q: Did you date him back in high school?*

*F: No, I was dating a friend of his before I was with him.*

*Q: What happened to his friend? The one you were dating.*

*F: He got killed in a car wreck.*

While Faye gave limited information concerning the car wreck and how it led to the relationship with Bill, Laura presented what she knew. Laura claimed that after the passing of Bill's friend and Faye's boyfriend, the two were grieving and decided to make each other feel better by having sex. Laura claimed that the two weren't together for long before Faye got pregnant with Laura and thus was practically forced into marriage. Faye confirmed that they were together for only about six months before they got married.

*Q: Did you want to marry him?*

*F: Well, I have to say yes.*

*Q: Well, if the two of you had met in different circumstances, do you think it's likely you would have married him?*

*F: Doubtful.*

Faye, while she claimed she would be honest and "give my side to the story," kept her answers brief and refused to go into detail about negative parts of Bill. The most I could get was that she held a high distaste for Bill's drinking and his language, both of which were what led Faye to divorce him when Laura was around thirteen. Faye also claimed that it wasn't the Vietnam War that caused his drinking, since, apparently, while he was a radio operator during the War, he was stationed in Germany and never saw action. Instead, she blamed Bill's friends always wanting to go for drinks after work and him joining them to drink until nighttime.

*F: He'd get off work, at like 3:00 or 3:30 p.m., and they'd go to the bar, he and his buddies. They would stay there and drink. And, you know, I'd get off work and pick up Laura from the sitter, or wherever she was, then I'd go home to fix something to eat, and he wouldn't show up.*

Faye claimed they always had issues. Faye complaining about Bill's drinking problem or Bill complaining about Faye's parenting style with Laura, but they tried to make it work. Faye tried to help Bill change his ways and kept the marriage going, and even pointed out that her initial claims of wanting a divorce made Bill go to treatment for a while.

But Bill didn't stick with the treatment and Faye didn't stick to loving Bill. Laura claimed a year or so before the divorce, Faye met her current husband, David, and had an affair with him while still with Bill. When they finally got divorced, Faye was given over \$20,000 and settled in the middle of Columbus, an amount of money that would be well over \$100,000 now. The money and the divorce seemed to make Bill spiral deeper into alcohol. While Faye and Laura both said Faye and Bill's relationship was never good, and Laura stated that there many fights between the two while she was child, there were decent parts to the relationship.

But those decent parts only kept the Moorman family a family for about thirteen years before it became part of history.

I knew for many years that my grandmother was no saint. As a child, it was because I felt she was depriving me of my parents, the two people I wanted in my life but were being kept away from me for reasons I couldn't understand, but, as an adult, it's more complicated. There were many instances in my life – in my time with living with my mother's mother – that I wanted to leave my grandma's house and never look back. My biggest reason for this was the fact that my grandmother didn't get me. The only explanation I could come up with as to why she couldn't understand me as a person is because she never wanted to in the first place.

I already had suspicions growing up that my grandma was never the motherly figure I wanted or needed as a child, but the interview with my mother and grandmother confirmed those

thoughts. Laura swore up and down that Faye would've "thrown me against a wall if she could" simply because she didn't want kids. When I asked Faye about why she had only one child, she stated that "having the one child was enough work as it is, having any more was never in the cards."

Such news wasn't surprising since Faye made it very clear that she only took me and my siblings in because we were going to be separated from one another, not because she wanted to care of us. She felt it was morally wrong for us to be separated and couldn't live with the idea of committing such a sin. I've known this fact for years now, but it still hurts to know that the parental figure I had growing up didn't want me out of love but just moral obligation.

Which is why I think the reason my relationship with my mother is filled with such bitterness, not because she failed being a mother, but because I mirror the relationship she had with her mother. For years, Laura attempted to gain the motherly love she craved from Faye but failed to do so, just like, for years, I craved the motherly love from Laura but couldn't get it since she was in prison, and I got adopted by Faye. Now we both are cynical and refuse to open up to such a relationship for fear of disappointment.

The scars of the Moorman family were so deep that they etched themselves into the next generation. I hope that the scars will fade with time, and, if I ever have children, that I will be able to keep such scars from growing. I want the troubles involving the Moorman family remembered but not repeated, a part of history and not the future.

**Elizabeth Pike**

## **Highest Price to Pay at a Cheap Motel**

Checking into the Tearman Motel,  
crooked blinds hiding shady people.  
Broken-down SUV sits in handicapped  
while grandma sweeps the shifting steps.

A couple in arms, guns strapped to waists,  
spray-on grass covers balding spots.  
Dumpster overfilled, garbage twitching,  
a dog burying bones in the back.

Ran out of gas and settled for the  
Tearman Motel's flickering aura.  
Greeted with the rancid odor of  
tomorrow's temperate breakfast.

Reception gave me a trick:  
push up on the doorknob when unlocking.  
Tripped over multi-colored carpeting,  
unrecognizable stains in the dimness.

Falling on the unmoving mattress,  
pulling lukewarm sheets over my clenched jaw.  
Waiting for exhaustion to overtake me,  
disturbed by a knock at the door.

**Cheyenne Smith**

## **Stirring the Bedsheets**

Bedsheets and scissors:  
turn me into a ghost.  
Sheer skin with glazed eyeballs  
watching over this haunted house.

Brushing my frayed ends against the cabinets,  
leaving my transparent scent.  
Floating across wilted grass,  
absorbing its lingering, translucent life.

This house stole souls,  
the Grimm Reaper enjoys his cup of tea inside.  
The graveyard stretches beyond the flowerbeds,  
pretending to honor the dead.

Staring at my own name,  
addressed as dearest,  
I kick up the dry soil,  
but only stir it.

**Cheyenne Smith**

**Vigil**

I can't sleep at night.

I mean maybe I could

If I really tried.

Or maybe I don't want to yet.

There is too much to think about

Too much to say.

And no one to listen.

I remember when I was small

I would crawl out of bed

In the darkness

I would stare at the walls

And think until dawn.

I would sneak back into bed

Before anyone saw.

I've always had a lot of thoughts

Some people have said I think too much

Others have asked how I got so wise

I think they haven't thought enough

And the truth doesn't really matter

To any of them at all.

**Natalie Medsker**



**Honey, I Love You**

Drip, drip.

Drip onto the pages of this Holy book

Clutched in my hand, you stupid bitch.

Have no care in the world like usual.

Drip onto the floor, while you're at it!

Make a puddle beneath your head!

Splatter that scarlet liquid at the cream-colored walls.

Stain them ruddy, ruin them, like our relationship

Because of your careless words.

Don't get back up.

Stay, on the floor,

Where you're at home.

Pathetic. Weak.

Making a mess of my oak floors.

I should be used to your failures, but

For once, I had hoped you knew better.

Cannot do a single thing right.

Why did you ruin our good night?

We were happy, I was happy.

Then you opened your damn mouth.

How has my work been?

Why is boss keeping me at the office so late?

You heard I have a new co-worker,

What's she like?

Question after question after question.

God, it's like you don't know how to shut up.

Should've grabbed me another cold one

Instead of yapping your maw.

Why did I ever marry you?

Oh, right. It's because I love you,

That's the right answer, right?

The one you want to hear

Ring inside your vanilla-smelling hair.

Stupid, stupid woman. Of course

I love you. But. Sometimes,

Not all the time darling, but sometimes,

You just need a reminder of your place, yeah?

I did what I did just now to

Help you, see? Aren't I a loving husband?

Giving the help you always ask for when  
It's needed? So, we're good now, right?

No more stupid questions about work?  
Or where I am when I'm out so late?  
Or about my new co-worker?

I love you.

Now, get up, sweetheart.

I still need dinner and you  
Need clean up the mess you made,  
Okay, honey?

Honey?

**Fragile Thoughts**



**Elizabeth Pike**

## **How to Take Care of Your Succulent**

It's pretty simple.  
Stick me in a pot  
with succulent soil or the normal stuff.  
Wet me with filtered water  
or maybe just the tap.  
I enjoy a nice spot by the window,  
surveying the world, rose-tipped and rested,  
but I know it's easier setting me on a shelf.

Just promise you won't forget me  
sitting on that shelf,  
soaking in the artificial light before you sleep  
and tasting aluminum and arsenic in my pot.  
I begin to rot, my sickly-green flesh  
wrinkles and mushes, poisoned from the root.

You'll remember someday when the cat knocks me off  
and you have to buy a new one again.

**Cheyenne Smith**

**Lyrics**

You're the words to my favorite song.  
Even though it's been so long.  
I could never forget you.  
Even if I wanted to.

**Julia Colson**

## **Going Under: The Trying Times of a Teenage Open-Heart Patient**

*I'm gonna fucking die. Oh my god, I'm gonna fucking die, something's gonna go wrong and my heart isn't gonna start beating again.*

My chest tightened as it became difficult to breathe. I found myself clutching at my covers with one hand and muffling my whimpers with the other. My mom and dad had moved my bed into theirs since I had been having nightmares. I never had nightmares before my first surgery. A heart cath, one I remember vividly. The goal was to patch the hole with a simple tube. I had an Atrial Septal Defect on the left side of my heart. This hole caused my deoxygenated blood to mix with my oxygenated blood. Blood wasn't flowing correctly, and therefore not reaching the parts of my body as it should have been. They ran two different processes up the arteries of my thighs; one carried a camera so that the surgeon could see the hole, and the other contained a tube that would seal the opening if it were small enough. The doctors assured me that this was foolproof.

"This will be a quick and easy fix, we looked at the images, no way we won't be able to patch the hole."

The first thing I remember after waking up from anesthesia was asking my mom if the procedure worked. I knew the answer by the look on her face. My heart sunk. This meant I had to get open-heart surgery. Images of bypass machines and masked surgeons wiping sweat from their furrowed brows to the ring of a flatlining heart monitor plagued my brain. My eyes closed, still groggy from the surgery. When I came to, I was in a hospital bed, my mother and father sitting at the foot watching television. My mom looked at me smiling, it was a nervous smile. She told me the doctor had said the



ASD was the size of a quarter, and that if I didn't get the surgery, I wouldn't live past twenty-one.

*Twenty-one, Twenty-one! More like sixteen. I don't wanna die.*

I was shaking, my pillow drenched in sweat. I quietly got up from my bed and tiptoed to the door, so I didn't wake my sleeping parents. I didn't want them to see this, I had never been this emotional before and I didn't know what was happening. I couldn't think straight, hell I couldn't even see straight. Nothing made sense. It was as if I was floating, looking down at my body as I stumbled through the dark house, fumbling for the light. Even when I was being threatened with my impending death, what lurked in the shadows still seemed much more terrifying. I could hear myself muttering something, but my brain couldn't quite make it out. I found the door to my old room. It was decorated with my trophies and playbills from all the plays my parents have ever taken me to. I sat on the floor and squeezed my eyes shut. I was still muttering. *What am I saying? Why can't I understand myself? Why can't I focus on anything?*

Suddenly, I stopped. My body stopped trembling, I stopped muttering, and my brain went silent. The only thing moving was the tear running down my cheek. Then suddenly, from the deepest reaches of my heart, I let out a scream. It wasn't even a scream, it was a wail. I started rocking back and forth. I could finally make out what I was trying to say.

"I don't want to die."

I just kept screaming and repeating those words. I heard the loud turn of the doorknob as my mom burst inside with a frightened look on her face. Her hair was a mess, all knotted from sleep, her eyes puffy from just waking up.

"What's wrong?"

I looked up at her, sputtering, spit spewing from my mouth and snot draining from my nose. I curled back into a ball as my mom wrapped her arms around me. I looked up at her, she'd never seen me this upset, I'd never seen myself this upset.

"What's wrong, honey?"

"I don't wanna die, Mommy."

\*\*\*

The bright lights blinded me. Masked doctors hovered above me. Wrapping tight black bands around my arms and tapping IV tubes with their fingers. I watched them, my mind racing. The pill was starting to kick in. My body started to feel limp. Not to the point where I couldn't move my limbs without the constraints, but almost as if my body was sleeping while my mind was awake.

A dark-haired woman in a blue mask appeared above my head. She had kind dark eyes. Her lashes were full and her skin clear. I noticed that with nurses. They all had extremely clear skin, almost as if it were painted on. Her voice was soft and soothing, like my mother's. It calmed me only briefly.

"Hey there, how're ya doing?"

The pill had made me disoriented. I could barely form a sentence.

"Good," I replied sleepily.

"Good. Do you know what we're gonna do here?"

I shook my head.

"Well, I'm gonna put this mask on ya, and then you're gonna go to sleep, okay?"

I felt my eyes widen. My heart began to race again. It seemed like all the progress that little white pill had made was for nothing. This is where it happens. They give you too much, and you don't wake up. Or they give you too little and you feel every little incision.

I thought this would be the easiest part of the procedure until I got to the hospital.

\*\*\*

I sat in a hard uncomfortable chair as I waited to be called back for my heart cath. Various nurses had come in to ask me questions and prep me for the procedure. Each time, they eagerly turned me into a game of Where's Waldo, asking to listen to my heart to see if they could hear the hole. The hole that went undetected for sixteen years. The hole that could have killed me during every soccer game or cross-country race. The final nurse that came in was old. She had a cold demeanor, what I would consider a perpetual frown. She came in and explained the anesthetic, how it worked, what it did, and what it would feel like. I don't remember if I heard anything she said. I blurted out the only question swirling around in my mind.

"It's not gonna kill me, right?"

The nurse sat up straight, a shocked look on her face. *Was that not something people usually ask? Wouldn't that be something you'd want to know?*

"I'm gonna be okay right?"

The nurse awkwardly moved in her chair and avoided eye contact with me.

"Well, with any procedure affecting a major organ of the body, there's always a risk of death. But we have come very far with anesthetic technology and the resulting casualties are very low."

I gulped. *That was comforting.*

\*\*\*

The kind dark eyes grabbed a clear mask and began prepping it. I watched her wipe it down with some sort of cloth, probably to sanitize it. I looked around for my mom or dad, hoping they could somehow get me out of this.

*You know, who needs to live past twenty-one? I'm sixteen, I've lived a good life, maybe none of this is necessary.*

The nurse looked at me and must have noticed the nervous look on my face. I don't know how, I felt like drool was about to come pouring out of my mouth.

"You okay sweetie?"

"I don't want to do this."

"Aw, it will be okay I promise."

"You won't let me die right?"

"No, I'm not gonna let you die, I'll be watching the entire time on my monitor right here."

"She's very good at what she does," a deep booming voice said.

"Trust me, you're gonna close your eyes, and it won't even feel like a minute. It will feel just like taking a nap."

I nodded my head. The nurse turned and grabbed three small tubes and spread-fanned them out in her hands.

"Now this mask gets a little stinky, but this ChapStick should make it smell better. I have mint, coconut, and watermelon, what kind would ya like?"

*I hate coconut, and what would watermelon even smell like? I'll go with mint, mint's always good, right?*

"Mint."

"Okay I'll just rub this on here."

I could feel my chest grow tighter as the room seemed to grow smaller and smaller.

"This is gonna be a little tight, okay?"

The nurse began strapping the clear rubbery mechanism around my neck. She was right, it did stink. The peppermint wasn't really enough to mask it, so I was stuck with the scent of chemicals and spearmint gum.

“Okay, you’re gonna count down from ten for me, alright?”

*Count down from ten, okay, I can do that.*

“We’ll do it together. Ten... nine... eight... seven...”

*Okay, this isn't so bad. Wait... what's happening? Why can't I see anything? Why is everything blurry? Nurse, I think there's something wrong. Why can't I move, please help!*

\*\*\*

Nobody knew this was happening, not a single soul. I had chosen not to tell anyone, how stupid was that? What was gonna happen? Who was gonna tell Keegyn that his girlfriend died on the operating table?

Keegyn was my first real boyfriend. The first guy I ever tried to have a relationship with. At that point in my life, I wasn’t really concerned about dating. I was a sophomore in high school and didn’t even know if I would live to see second semester. My best friend at the time pressured me into that relationship. She introduced me to a friend of her boyfriend’s and, although I was in a relationship with someone I didn’t really like, me and him hit it off. At the time, it seemed wonderful, but eventually it would turn into the worst decision of my life.

God, but really who’s gonna explain this? We just got back together; I gave him a second chance after he claimed to have a burning crush on my best friend. Maybe my parents would. God no, they hated the kid, him being out of their lives would probably be the only upside of my death. What about Alyna? Even though we hadn’t talked much since Keegyn’s revelation, she was still my best friend, and I was keeping this huge secret from her.

“Should you really be worried about things like this right now?”

“AH! What are you? Who are you? How are you talking to me?”

"I'm that little voice inside your head. What? You think I disappear into thin air when you're unconscious? Hell no, this is my turf, my playground. You're in my territory now, kid."

"Well, this is extremely unsettling. Maybe it's a side effect, Nurse? I think you need to dial the sleepy juice back a bit!"

"Geez, calm down you're gonna be fine."

"How do you know what I'm thinking?"

"Because I'm you. I'm in your head. I've been in your head listening to your incessant whining for three months now. Which by the way, when are ya gonna ditch that Keegyn kid? He's a real piece of work."

"You really want to talk about that now?"

"Alright, alright I'm just saying."

Maybe I'm dead. I have to be, that's the only logical explanation for this. I must be in hell because this is a nightmare.

"Who're you callin' a nightmare?"

"Can't you just leave me alone?"

"You know, you should really be nicer to yourself. I'm all you have at the end of the day."

If I could move any part of my body at this point, my eyes would look like records on a turntable. All I saw was black, and I felt cold, colder than I ever thought I could feel.

"You, know I think this is the calmest we've been in our entire lives."

"What are you blabbing about now?"

"I'm just saying typically we're pretty high strung. We don't really know how to go with the flow."

"Pfft, I know how to go with the flow."

"Are you really gonna argue with me on this?"

"If you're me, then what do you know that I don't?"

"I know everything that you don't. I'm your subconscious. I know all your inner thoughts. I know all your hopes, your dreams, your fears, your triggers, what you really think of Alyna and that sleazeball you're dating."

I ignored the voice, tried to block it out, waiting for my seemingly sealed eyes to fly open.

"You should really trust me more, I'm kinda like your guide."

"Guide to what?"

"Uh, getting through the world, how to navigate your life. You know when you feel like something's off, or just not quite adding up? That's me."

"So, you're like my gut?"

"Exactly, been here and at your service since circa 2000."

"Well then you aren't that good at your job."

I felt the voice swirl around me like it was hovering over me. Like it had now become its own separate physical entity.

"Excuse me? Did you just question my competence in my work? You got a lotta nerve kid, comin' in here, acting like you know everything about everything."

"Sounds like somebody I know."

"If I wasn't a part of you, I swear to God ..."

"I'm just saying that if you hate Keegyn so much, then why in the world would I still want to be with him?"

"Because that's not my area, kid. Believe me, there's a lot of issues with that department."

"What are you talking about."

"I'm your head not your heart."

"My heart?"

"Yeah, the little red guy that's getting worked on up there, ain't got his head on straight, that's for sure. See I'm the sensible

one, but no, he has to have it his way. I see the red flag; I send the message, and what does he do, whatever the hell he wants!"

"Then why don't you stop him?"

"Because it doesn't work like that?"

"What? How? You're my "brain" right? Don't you control everything?"

"I'm your head. Your head can't control your heart, but your heart can warp your mind."

**Lexi York**



## **Village of Ants**

Playing in the grass, weaving flower wreaths  
to crown our young heads and silk hairs.  
Scraped knees dig into the dirt,  
surrounded by rock and stick houses for insects.

Cloud-watching puffy hands blinding the sun,  
God's sobs shake the earth under our soles.  
Grabbing our plastic dinosaurs and people,  
running under the bountiful downpour.

Tripping over our scrappy shacks,  
smacking into a mud puddle of pebbles and splinters.  
Rain and tears flood the village we built,  
my puny hands grip onto what's left.

Your shadow casts over me, fingers reaching for mine.  
I let go to grab onto you, trembling,  
feeling the dirt embedded under my fingernails.

**Cheyenne Smith**

**Lily-of-the-Valley**

Curled hair to look like hers.  
Enchanted pins begin to wound,  
Pieces falling down pale, angelically white  
-Even in low light.

Came to the ball in a carriage of green,  
Ivy wrapped around me.  
Dressed in incandescent pink  
-I thought it would make you think.

You said you wanted to dance the night away,  
And I was going to be the one to make you sway.  
But she got to me first,  
-And cast a nasty curse.

Sweet fragrance turned sour,  
Light nodes charmed to devour.  
Surrounded in courtier's laughs,  
-My shame etched like an epigraph.

Charged from the castle weeping,  
Shook terribly, I'm convulsing.  
Wanted to be yours so badly  
-But I'm just a lily-of-the-valley.

**Julia Colson**

## Twigs Frozen in Time



**Bailey Nordenbrock**

## Sunset

On one side of the world shines warmth  
the other holds the cool:  
With orange and red and yellow opposite  
the chill of violet and pastel magenta.

My father's breath is heavy  
My mother's sigh is light  
I alone in the back seat  
am aware of the ever-darkening night.

The train tracks are empty.  
No life to be sought.  
The forests hold the bugs  
with their zipping and buzzing.

The distant clouds rest on the tree-tops  
painted the colors of the sky.  
The colors, separated by wisps of white, must never touch,  
or the darkness would win.

This game of tag, with life ever-known  
in-between in the form of empty train tracks and bug-full trees  
Must always continue,  
if life should be

But alas, the darkness will win.  
Now, but not forever  
for the Painter will wake and reset  
His masterpiece.

This sunset may be put to bed  
and the battle may be decided,  
but the war has only begun,  
and vengeance will be had by

The Almighty artist and  
His ethereal paintbrush  
that never truly sleep,  
but allow for an intermission.

**Zoe Lawless**



## Contributor Notes

**Julia Colson** is in the Secondary Transition to Teaching Journalism Education Program (T2T).

**Kaitlyn Conrad** is an elementary education major.

### **Kaleigh Goode**

“I was planning on majoring in English for a long time before realizing my passion for psychology and desire to become a therapist. I still enjoy reading and writing when I have the time to indulge in them. I normally don't share what I write beyond a teacher grading a paper or one of my parents now and then, but I thought it would be a good personal challenge to submit.”

### **“The Run” Artist Statement:**

“The first draft was an exercise for a writing class. After class, I felt that there was still something more that could be said and so I wrote more during spring break. It sometimes feels like I keep myself compulsively busy even when it causes me stress and anxiety. This piece explores that distress and my need and desire to be busy. Busyness feels chaotic to me but there is a certain joy or relief that I get when I'm running around, and here I'm describing that and asking why.”

### **Clare Hauersperger**

“I am currently twenty, unsure of my future career, and most importantly, Catholic. My Catholic faith is the base for all I do in life, and I hope and pray that all I do in life may bring glory to God. I may still be discerning what my life is to be but as long as it involves my Catholic faith, I need not worry.”

**“A Generation” Artist Statement:**

“If you take anything away from this ridiculous poem, let it be *Memento Mori.*”

**Zoe Lawless**

“I am an English major minoring in psychology, and I plan to go into ministry. I love cats, knitting, reading, dancing, writing poems, hiking, camping, and worshipping God. I hope my works connect with you. God bless!”

**Christian Litsey**

Editor, writer, father, and collector of records, books, Pokémon everything, and knowledge. The works submitted by him include ones written in classes at IUPUC and in his own free time, and he sincerely hopes you enjoy them.

**Natalie Medsker**

“I’m a freshman psychology major minoring in criminal justice. I have been exploring my passion for writing since elementary school and intend to continue to do so in the future. I enjoy creating conversation, art, and meaning whenever possible. If I’m not at home, then I’m probably on an adventure.”

**“The Great Journey” Artist Statement:**

“It’s not the destination that matters or how long it takes to get there, it’s what happens along the way. I wrote this poem when I felt like I was falling behind and life and not where I was ‘supposed’ to be.”



**Ethan Montgomery** is majoring in English and minoring in psychology; he wants to create his own worlds for others to explore through his writing.

**Editor's Note: "Invisible Chains"** is about the Stanford Prison Experiment in the field of psychology.

**Bailey Nordenbrock** is a student at Ivy Tech.  
"I love photography, film, and creative design in general. But overall, I love to see things from a different viewpoint."

**Elizabeth Pike** is an English major concentrating in creative writing with a communication studies minor.  
"I enjoy writing, jewelry making, and glass etching. One of my biggest goals is to explore and visit as many countries as I can."

**"Goodbye, My Friend" Artist Statement:**

The intent is to show how people cope in ways that may appear odd but is helpful when it needs to be.

**"Fragile Thoughts" Artist Statement:**

"I created this piece with the intent of showing a scene in the short story 'The Shawl,' by Cynthia Ozick, in which the mother, Rosa, screams into a shawl after witnessing the death of her daughter, Magda. I chose glass as my medium, not only because I enjoy glass etching, but also because I felt it depicted how this tragedy will chip away at her and make her fragile like glass."

**Cynthia Scott**

"I moved to Indiana after retiring from the US Air Force in 2007 and then used the VA education benefit to complete a BGS in 2011. I love

being a student so much that I have now nearly finished a second undergraduate degree, this one a BA in English. Writing and literature courses have helped me move closer to publishing articles in stamp collecting journals.”

**“Dragon Fly on a First Day Cover” and**

**“Snap Dragon on a First Day Cover” Artist Statement:**

“The design of these cachets relates to the new Dragon stamps issued on August 9, 2018, in Columbus, Ohio. The entire envelope is called a First Day Cover. I created each cachet (art on left side) in the Windows Paint app. The colors match those on the stamps, but my dragon fly is small and will eat no maidens for breakfast, and my (snap)dragon has no scales or fiery breath.”

**Cheyenne Smith** is an English major with a concentration in creative writing. She is interested in writing, drawing, and all forms of art. In her free time, she makes costumes and works on a future webcomic.

**David Walby** is an English major. He has been writing and producing art since a young child and hopes to make a career out of it. He is dedicated to perfecting his craft and hopes to bring others enjoyment while he is at it.

**Lexi York**

“I am beginning my senior year in fall 2022. I am majoring in communication studies and minoring in creative writing. My plan for after graduation is to pursue a degree in education with a minor in theatre at IUPUI.”



