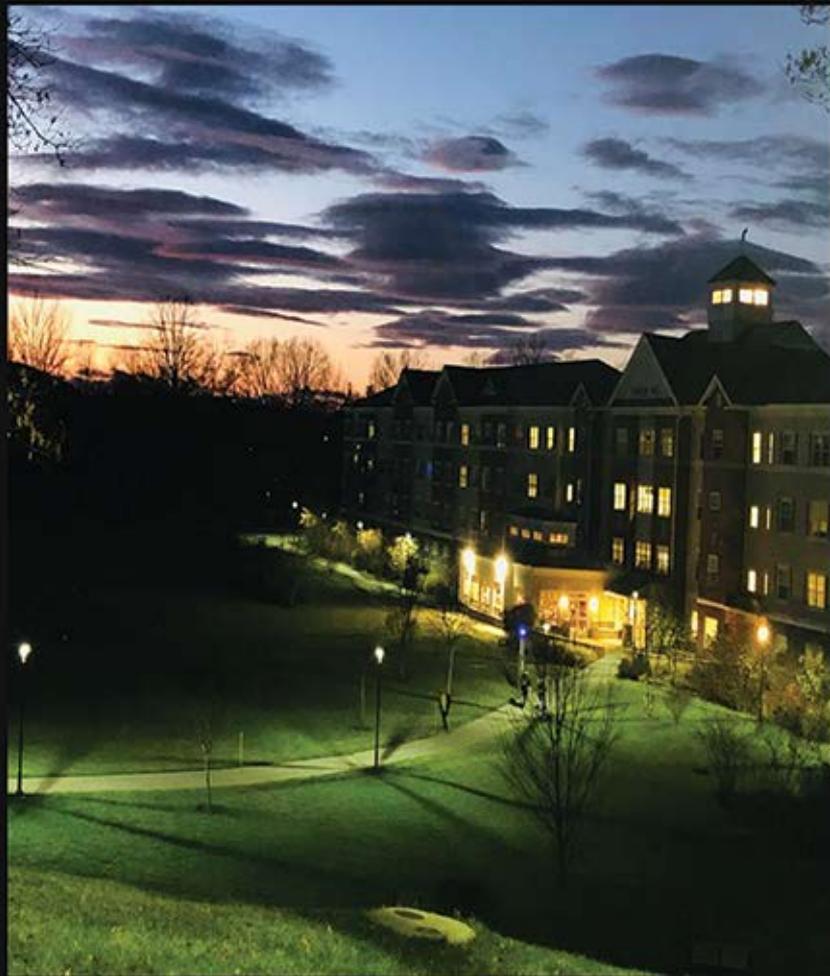


# *The Community*



*THE COMMUNITY 2020*

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Front Cover by Erin Fedigan

Back Cover by Shannon Clark

# *The Community*

DUTCHESS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

POUGHKEEPSIE

NEW YORK



2020

## ADVISOR'S • NOTE

DCC's Literary and Arts magazine is funded by the Student Government Association and consists of work by anyone who has paid student fees at Dutchess in the last calendar year. Students on the Editorial Committee review all works submitted. I'm happy to report that this year, while not all submissions were accepted, every single person who submitted had at least one work included. As the incoming advisor, I was impressed by the variety and quality of creativity that our students exhibit. This year's issue is especially poignant, as it was produced amidst the chaos of the Covid-19 pandemic. It serves as a reminder that even in uncertain times, when fear and loss seem to rule us, art matters, and we must continue to celebrate our accomplishments and to engage in the creation and exploration of the arts. Many thanks to all the students who submitted their works, and special thanks to the people listed below who helped to edit this book. As always, thanks as well to the Student Activities Office and the SGA for their support in this publication.

—Shinelle L. Espailat, *faculty advisory*

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*Color insert includes artwork by Shannon Clark, Erin Fedigan, Sean McGinley, David Romero, Orville Blair Scott*

# Untitled

Eileen Reilly

I want my body burned  
Its ashes scattered to the air over a view of the setting sun  
The kind of sunset that just turns purple and red  
The one that tastes like alcohol in cold soda  
The somber kind of sunset that breathes night into the dull day air  
I want you to be there  
There to watch me dance in the wind,  
Ascending closer and closer to the sun  
Thrashing violently at every curve and peek in the wind  
I want the void to speak to you  
Whispering sweet nothings in your ear  
Telling you all my dirty little secrets  
As the tears roll down your cheeks  
Painted and stained  
I want this infernal tight air to force me upwards  
Further and further  
Until I hit the sun and burn again  
Until there's nothing that can be burned anymore  
Until your tears won't fall  
Until the love hurts so much it boils into hate  
To anger  
Resentment  
I want you to call me weak.  
Pathetic.  
Useless.  
I want you to see my failure as I dance  
As the dust cascades like hair falling  
I want to be free of breath

To be rid of the cinch in my back  
I don't want this body.  
I want to dance

# Shrike's Prey

Kaylla Wimberly

Unsteady, I am flimsy,  
A thin pelt in wait of being toppled over.  
Destined to be caught within her talon tipped words.  
Already drawn in,  
a song crooned by a golden Delilah.

In offering,  
I halt, here I idle.  
Anticipating each swoop for my chest.  
Arms spread with a giving attitude,  
Eager to be spiked.  
Muscle, sinew, bone, hers.  
Believe me to be infatuated; Samson.

She grasps me in her painted shrike claws,  
Tears open my chest, allows my spilled love to flush her face.  
Drifting away in the bright white sea of love.  
Do not deny being hers, you are.

When she asks for your heart, you nod.  
You were made for this.

# Snow Angel

Kyle Bredberg

You lay beneath the concrete sky, buried underneath the heavy weight of dense clouds. The snow flutters down onto you slowly, carefully, yet also carelessly. One of the white particles makes its way down through the air and on to your skin, where it burns for a split second then melts; disappearing from existence after its gusty ride from the concrete ceiling down onto your fleshy, rosy red face.

You look up into the sky and imagine the journey that that snowflake must have undergone. Somewhere up there, hidden within those imposing clouds, that exact snowflake was torn away from its cloud family, possibly millions of miles from here, and rode the winds at just the right angle, time, and momentum to land gracefully on your cheek, give you a kiss, and then disappear forever.

You watch as more snowflakes flutter down around you, some of which land on your face and are terminated by the warmth emanating from your pale skin that now has turned the same color as the snow you are sunken into. Countless others land on your navy blue snow coat, your black oversized snow pants that were hand me downs of your brother who doesn't play in the snow anymore, and your snow boots with a dinosaur stitched onto the side.

You look up stretching your neck, thrusting your chin into the air and exposing your face to the sky. More snowflakes burn you. You are drenched with snow water, and so cold that you stopped feeling all over. Your body is sprawled out fully open to the little flakes of destiny that float down around you.

Like a person they are each different, each meticulously crafted from the same sky ingredients yet at their core, each endlessly different. All made from flesh yet so fundamentally different. You stick out your tongue and watch, holding still as to not scare it away,

a snowflake drift down and land on its pink rough surface. You examine it, then watch as another floats down and comes to a controlled landing right near the last one. You think you can see the difference between the two, something different about their microscopic crystalline formations, but you know you can't.

You continue to sink into the snow, watching the white walls on either side of your body grow higher and higher around you. You continue to sink, so fast it seems like you're falling now. In fact you're not moving at all but like a deep meditation your mind is tricking you, making it seem like you're sinking when you're not. You wonder if this is what dying feels like.

The sun starts to shine through the concrete ceiling making the impenetrable surface now look like frail glass. The rays hit your face and warm you. You're uncomfortable but there is something comforting about it, letting the warmth, heat up your cold body, numb and lifeless in the snow. You try to move your arms but can't, you are stuck in the shallow snow angel you made.

You are sure your mom is home now, she wasn't when you left. She is probably wondering where you are, you ponder if your big brother told her you went out to play. Maybe he isn't home, maybe he left to go be with that girl you don't like again. Probably, she always takes up all of your play time with him. He hasn't wanted to play in the snow since she came around.

Your blue eyes glisten in the diluted sunlight, twinkling as snowflakes land in them. It makes them wet and dreamy, eyes that are pure, eyes anyone would be envious of. You stopped feeling your feet a long time ago, and you don't think you would be able to move them now. More destiny flakes fall on your face, they don't burn anymore. You don't feel them. They don't melt either, the intricate white ball just sits on your cold cheek and you watch it, this time truly seeing the complexities of its design.

The rays of light get warmer, it melts the snowflake on your cheek. But you, you stay cold. You try to move your feet in those

green dinosaur boots and in the black oversized snow pants but you can't. You don't feel the cold anymore, just heaviness in your chest that spreads and takes over your body.

You try to yell for help, for your mom or big brother, but those beautiful snowflakes have coated your mouth and have sealed it shut. Your eyelids start to close, attempting to seal themselves off against the intense warmth and cold snowflakes. The sun shines one last beam of light into your beautiful blue eyes before they close and you see darkness.

You can still feel the warmth, it's getting stronger and you are no longer cold. Like walking nearer to a lit fire the warmth seems to be getting closer to you; but the temperature isn't changing.

The warmth gets so close, and then closer still. Spreading into you and through you, filling you up and wiping out the cold, you still don't feel your body, those cold crystals have locked that away forever, all you feel is the warmth that envelopes you, cradles you and comforts you.

You smile up at the concrete sky one last time before the warmth leaves. Then it is gone and all that's left is a snow angel and some dinosaur boots.

# On Plasmicadian Galactoids and their Life from Ununbirth to Unundeath

Theodore E. Secor

□. The End at the Other Beginning

And it just sat there

Like a lump on the cosmic log.

It waited – the now [dead? sleeping?] universe – for something to happen

But nothing came for a while out of the cosmic fog.

Blackwhitecoloredrainbowedanythingatall? Nope.

No light to call anything any color we would know [see: awareness of

an absence and comprehension of the same [[or so I hope]]].

Anyway, the now dead whateververse sat around for an inconceivable

unit [or units, or no units at all, or ... ] and then

The door to some type of somefuckingverse swung open

[we call this [[until further examination or rectification]] the BIG

BANG [[because of the girth of the *sturm and drang* it brings with it]]]!

The damn thing blew across the nothingversebutIdon'treallyknow like lasagna on a fallen Italian

Dinner platter.

The Quarks were formed – so we are to think – and fought the grandest war *panhistoria* and

*Panchronologia*.

It started with a grand general who flew forth, knocked enemies leftrightdirectionedly and

proceeded entropense.

Fast forward past the dark age of the birthdeath of the universe and we start to gain a little

coherence.

Nothing is in blobs beyond this point.

Nothing will ever again, until the death of the stars *en masse*, be a blob of any one major

conjunct.

☐ . The Middleish

If you're confused about where we are right now, there is no need to retrace.

We are exactly now and everything ahead is everything ahead.

We are about millions of years from ago and trending forward based on

if your planet leaves little or no impression in the thread of space.

Ψ. The True(ish\*) Middle

In this space-time continuum we are past our mortal problems.

Soon we are to approach chaos.

It is foretold in the fabric of momentums.

ㄩ. Past Middleish

Things will start to slow down.

Cold will rule the aether.

We will slow down.

Gelidalgid and gastropodous.

What can you do?

Atoms don't rip apart, but rather they decompose.

Molecules don't explode away, but rather they break their bonds  
off with the others around

them.

Just as we have done long ago.

The stars, the plasmicadians, will wither away down to a  
singularity of a cell.

Until then

we wait

for the

great darkdrown...

五. The Beginning at the Other End

Dark

darken

darker

darkest

darkestly

darkenerestness...

We keep going until we arrive at the end of the chain.

The stars are gone

and so are the places

so is the time

but even now there is hope for

a future drawn

with reborn graces

and moral rhyme

of the people's lore

and the return of the

experience of pleasure and pain.

# My Best Friend's a Time Traveler

Alyssa Murphy

*Boy, I hate English class.* Something about the way the language is arranged just irks me. Oh, and let's not forget the really fast-talking Spanish lady teaching it. I'm pretty sure she has it out for me. As I walk out of the lecture hall and start walking toward the exit, I get excited because the thing I love about this school is that no one knows me. Well, there is one person that knows me. That's my best friend since 1<sup>st</sup> grade, Adelina Ross. Lina for short. She has short brown hair and wears big glasses. She's kind of shy but when you get to know her, she's really smart and kind of funny. And she plays the piano really well. I'm talking like Beethoven well. That might be a bit of an exaggeration but hey she's my best friend. I have also had a small crush on her since the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. There was this big kid from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade that would always steal my lunch and tease me. One time, Wendall went to steal my lunch like a normal day. But that day was different. Apparently, Lina had been taking karate lessons and when Wendell's hand went out to take the lunch bag, Lina's foot went out and kicked his hand. I have never heard a boy, let alone anyone scream so loud in my life. And Lina just picked up my lunch and handed it to me. Needless to say, that is when I developed my small (but getting bigger) crush on Adelina Ross. But now we were in college and starting our adult lives. I've felt like I'd have to tell her about it sooner or later and probably sooner rather than later. I walk to the cafeteria and spot Lina at our usual table.

"Hey Colin. How was class?"

I put my bag down and start digging in it for my lunchbox. "It was the usual English class."

She laughs. "That good eh?" She starts eating her salad. I start eating my tuna-and-jelly sandwich. Lina stops eating and looks at

me. “What were you thinking about when you came in? You looked like you were having a stroke, you were thinking so hard.”

I laugh. “Oh yeah, I was just remembering that day in grade school when you were my hero and saved my lunch.”

She snorts. “I’m nothing like a hero.”

I laugh and then get serious. “No really, that’s when you introduced yourself to me and then we became best friends.” She nods and smiles. We finish our lunch in silence. Then when it’s time to leave, I walk her to the end of the cafeteria. “Hey, um, can I tell you something?”

Lina looks at me weirdly. “You’re not going to tell me who you love, or something are you?”

I laugh nervously. “ha-ha, well, there might be someone.” I don’t really know where this sudden burst of courage comes from but I kind of like it. *Come on you fool*, my brain says to me, *tell her you love her*. “Lina, I love—”

She cuts me off with a wave of her hand and a slap to the wrist. “oh gosh, I’m late. I got to run, see you later!” And with that she takes off in direction of her next class. My sudden courage is dead inside me. Then I look at my watch. Lina wasn’t going to be late. In fact, she was going to be like 10 minutes early. I shrug it off and then realize she might’ve guessed my secret. And maybe she was delaying the inevitable. I walk to my class in a bit of a daze. Did Lina leave so soon because she didn’t like me back or.... did she?

After all my classes are over that day, I go find Lina. I finally track her down in one of the music practice rooms. I walk in on her playing my favorite song that she knows. Something about Bach calms me every time. She finishes and looks up when I start clapping.

“Still got it.” I say as she packs up her things. “And I still have to tell you something.” She shoves her books into her bag and tries to push past me.

“I got to go, Colin. I’ll talk to you later.” But my courage from 3 hours ago comes back.

“I love you.” She stops in the doorway. She turns back to me and drops her bag. I start walking toward her. “I love you. I have tried to like other girls or just to stop thinking about how your hair looks perfect when you put it into a bun or how your smile makes me feel all buttery on the inside or how I steal your glasses when we walk just so you can hold my hand but I love you Adelina Ross and I won’t deny it anymore.” After my speech the courage leaves again, and I stand there, fully thinking I’m about to puke because of the adrenaline coursing through me. I look at Adelina for a response. I expect her to be happy or at least amused but instead I see tears in her eyes. “Lina, I’m sorry if I hurt you, but I had to say it. It would’ve eaten me up inside anyway.”

She holds her hand out to stop me. “Don’t. Don’t say another word.” And with that and what seems like a sob, Adelina runs out into the hall.

“Hey, wait!” I run after her a catch up to her and swing her around to me. “Please don’t leave without saying anything.”

She cries some more and says, “I can’t say it back, if that’s what you want.” Her words hit me like a ton of bricks.

“But I always thought...”

She breaks free from my grip. “I can’t tell you everything... but if you come over tonight, I’ll be able to tell more.” She runs to her car and drives away, leaving me looking like I’d just ran through a wall. *Her house? What could she tell me there that she couldn’t tell me here?*

I make my way to Lina's house right after 7. I brought some candy cause, you know, trying to soften the blow a little. I knock on the door. Lina immediately answers.

"Come in. Now" She pulls me into door. Seriously, she pulled me into the doorframe. "Oh gosh, sorry. Come on let's go to my room." We go further into the house and I hurriedly say hi to Lina's parents in the living room. Lina rushes me into her room and closes the door. "Ok. Here we go. You're sure you ready for this?"

I put the candy on the bed and sit down. "I thinks so, if you're going to say what I think you're going to say."

She sits down next to me. "Well, you better buckle up cause it's about to get really interesting. So, let's start at the beginning. I was born in 1850. Yes, I said that right, and you can't interrupt." She obviously saw my face of, *oh my lord, when did this girl say she was born???????????*

"No, please continue..."

"Okay so, yeah, I was born right before something Civil War. and the War started, and my older brother went to fight, and then he died, and the fighting got closer to our house and I did something stupid. I went to get the milk a little early and got shot. And I died. At least I think I died. I'm still not sure about that. Anyway, I woke up in 1910, the same age but in different clothes and in a different family. So, this cycle went on and on until today. To sum it up, I think I'm a time traveler. And the one rule about time travel is whenever I fall in love, I get carried to the next time period. So, um, yeah, now you know." She finishes her speech and I just sit there with a very dumb look on my face. I don't talk for at least 3 minutes trying to process what she just told me.

"So, you're a time traveler and if you fall in love you get ripped out of this time and, HEY, did you say you love me?"

She laughs and says, "If I say those words, I'll be gone forever."

I think for another moment. “Well, what if I go with you? I mean if you love me and I love you, then what’s to stop us?” She sits there with her mouth open. “What? Why are you looking at me like that?”

Adelina slowly smiles and says, “That’s the first time anyone has asked to come with me. But do you think it’ll work? I mean what if you don’t remember me?”

I take her head in my hands and kiss her. “You are the first girl I have ever loved. How could I forget that?”

She smiles and nods. “Ok, let’s try it.” She gears up to say the 3 words I’ve been waiting to hear for so long. “Colin James, I love you with every fiber of my being.” As soon as the words are out of her mouth, I hear what sounds like a hurricane from the other side of the bedroom.

“IS THAT WHAT I THINK IT IS?”

She laughs and shouts, “IF YOU MEAN IT’S A WORMHOLE TO TAKE US TO ANOTHER TIME, THEN YES!” We look around one more time and then I take her hand. And together we walk straight through the portal to a whole new world.

# Hallucination

Lisa DeLeon

I hear sounds from the window near the shelf,  
I'm looking around in horrible fear, Because  
the door just opened by itself. Hope it's just a hallucination I hear. I  
hope that it's not real, or  
is it the wind? I'm crying, panicking, I need a  
deep breath. I hear it way more when the rain has thinned.

I still fear of loud sounds in the window,  
The window is not even in my room. I  
will not scream, I'll keep my profile low,  
Has to be just a hallucination, tomb. My  
mind is playing nasty tricks on me,  
Hoping my mind will go back to  
normal. I want to stop panicking, hurt  
my knee, Trying to stop being  
abnormal.

I closed the window, but the sounds continue. Maybe I lied to him,  
said, "let me be." Regret talking to him 'bout obsessing, Should've  
talked about what I hear and see.

# I Think You're Cute

Lisa DeLeon

I think you're cute with your curly brown hair, Never mentioned it  
'cause I never dared.

Not really one to date females very often,

Because of you, my heart has softened.

I met you and you seemed so damn nice,

Not quite naive, but still soft with some spice.

Still feel bad we didn't talk to each other,

Only when I wanted to talk about others.

Talked about things I shouldn't have talked about,

I stopped a little later, thought you had doubt.

Didn't want to lose you, you seemed my type,

Got your number but in black and red stripes.

Still you'd be way too sweet and good for me,

Even if that's the type I'd like to see.

# The Last

Lisa DeLeon

The last time I spoke to you, you looked good  
And I know it never will be for me  
And if it was, I'd be scared if I could,  
The smart, writing type are sexy as can be  
Not that I do love you or anything,  
I'm not looking, gotta start it off right.  
What I said was just a mere thing,  
Ignore the things in this poem I write.  
With your glowing, long, smooth dirty blonde hair Maybe I  
committed a minor crime,  
I just want to eat you up, take your flair  
It's my crazy mind, this is the last time.  
It's weird, I know, I don't know what to do,  
Didn't think I'd fall when I first saw you.

# The Reality

Lisa DeLeon

Hey handsome dude, why don't we just swap souls?  
Maybe then you can see the shit I see  
I've wished everyone the best in this world  
But Devil on my shoulder makes me fall.  
I deserve a hard punishment from God  
I wish I could take all of my life back.

What is reality? Will it come back?  
We all have a burning flame in our souls  
Wish I could drive, for the love of God,  
Or try to talk to everyone I see  
Living in fear, you could hear a needle drop.  
I wish I could show myself to the world.

I see the shadows, I see the whole world  
Didn't mean to have black toxic tears fall  
Parents do nothing, mourn behind your back.  
I wonder if life is real, what are souls?  
Forgiving is hard with everything I see  
Lust and sex is a sin, forgive me God.

My stuffed red bear is a holy gift from God,  
I wish it had my answer to the world.  
Learned how to dance from the people I see  
Love music, wish I could take those days back.  
A fun career is art, it shakes your souls  
I'm fat, I don't eat, watch the numbers fall.

Family relationships quickly fall,

Money saves, but greed is a sin to God.  
Tan skin, you hear the remarks of white souls.  
Wish I was accepted in this white world.  
Orange Man and racism, don't bring back.  
No breasts, I wish I could wake up and see

Wish my gender was the same way, see,  
Bisexuality, watch your friends fall.  
If I had a choice, I'd take "female" back.  
If I was only sane, forgive me God.  
Flexibility is peace in this world.  
Healthy lifestyles for good, happy souls.

I hope he will never see, help me, God,  
I started to fall, its known to the whole world  
I won't take it back, I thank his kind souls.

# Fire

Lisa DeLeon

Promised him long ago that I'd be better. Wish I could write him  
an apology letter, 'Cause I feel  
the fire burning inside. Nope, I could never do anything right. My  
motivation to continue here died, Sometimes I ask, why can't my  
words just glide? I love my poems, but they really bite,  
And most are about the concupiscent night. I can feel the fire  
burning inside, I could feel it so  
much, my insides cried, Writing sex, monsters, gore, eternal love. I  
never could be as pure as a dove, Even if I so truly wanted to be.  
But I guess  
it's "To be or not to be."

# Short Hair Don't Care

Beck Jungen

To the person that told me, “Good luck finding a man with short hair...”

To the person that said, “It’s just the way it is, men are visual....”

To this person I say, “I cut my hair shorter.”

Because I am not a painting on the wall; I am not just something to look at.

If the length of my hair is going to be the factor that defines if I find a man or not, I will be content being single the rest of my life. My physical appearance is practically 1% of who I am. My outer appearance is what you can see at first glance, but there is a heart hidden between my rib cage, there is a brain in my skull, there is depth and passion and dreams forming and souring and infinities more that you will never know by looking at me once.

To this person, the small-minded person, the person that has settled with *men are visual* as something that I must accept as a normality between the male gender. To this person I say, I’m not buying it. We all have two eyes, men and women alike, hence we are all *visual* creatures with different *preferences*. To this person I say, “You can keep your own personal preferences to yourself.”

To the other person, the one that told me, “You’re taking this comment too *personally*”, I say, “I have all the right to take this personally!” Because I have feelings and no one should talk to anyone else in this manner. I will take this personally because I do not want other women to be spoken to in this way. I don’t want other women walking away from church, after talking to someone

in a leadership position, feeling less than what they are; feeling judged and misunderstood; feeling completely detoured from their true identity -which has nothing to do with who you marry or what you look like.

Women struggle enough with self-esteem and self-image issues as is. We need men to be partners and fathers and brothers and champion us to our true identities as individuals and human beings. And comments like the above are doing the complete opposite. Words are powerful and once spoken they cannot be erased.

To these two people I say, “Who says I need to find a man?” As if this is the only thing I should be doing. I have been single for 2 years and fully independent for the last 5 years, and it has been the most amazing time of my life. I have nothing against men (I am against this shallow, man-driven mentality) but I’m not opposed to a relationship. Yet I am fully capable alone. I am not looking for a man to complete me, I am complete as is. I have learned to love myself, with all the hard edges and all the quirky sides and do not need anyone to come along to *save* me. I am proud of who I am, with my Tom-boyish ways, my outspokenness, my always-searching-for-more heart and my short hair. I don’t need a man’s approval and I will not settle for less than a man. And if you’re telling me that I will not find a man with short hair, you’re right, I will not find a man. Because only boys think that way.

# The Gates of Hell

William L. Ruff

*The Intersection of Broadway and Warren  
New York, New York  
December 1971*

The southwest corner at the intersection of Broadway and Warren sat right across the street from City Hall. Tucked away in the basement of the building, away from the honking, the footsteps, and the shouts from the streets, there was a lost piece of history.

The spot used to be Devlin's Clothing Shop. Around 1871, the owners rented out their basement to a local man who lived down the street. His name was Alfred Beach. Under the cover of night he would build the first Subway stop in America for the sake of proving that the future of transportation in New York City was underground.

Today was December 1st, 1971, 100 years later, and in the basement of what used to be that proof of concept Subway, there was a man holding a jade disc wrapped in wax paper. He studiously explored its imperfections with his eyes and his fingertips. The disc was small, circular, tan, rough around the edges, not six inches in diameter, and it had a crack running from the edge to the center. Along its face it had worn characters carved into it whose inscription once read, "Having received the Mandate from Heaven, may the emperor lead a long and prosperous life." Its story was bigger than anything in history.

It was known as the He Shi Bi. It had been around before, during, and after the rise of the first Chinese Emperor, and it served as the proof of their righteousness.

The man, once known as Henry, held it, trying to fathom the power it represented. It was small, and worn, like a family heirloom you keep buried in a box under a pile of other boxes. Henry wrapped the disc tightly in the wax paper and tucked it into a foam case, locking each latch, and then taking a step back to distance himself. He stood silently in the ruins of the old subway stop.

Like the disc itself, Henry didn't exist anymore—not in any meaningful sense. Not to the world. His full name was Henry Theodore Culper, but that was a lifetime ago. He had a family once, but they had already mourned his passing. Henry sacrificed everything to be a part of this story, to handle a piece of history nobody he ever loved had heard about. All for the promise of an enduring future.

Henry awaited instructions on where to deliver the disc in his newly acquired and underutilized corner of history. The legend said the relic was valued at multiple cities. And if history had gone differently, the disc could have gone undiscovered, or maybe forgotten to the world. If not for the man who discovered it and his pious devotion to the stone, the warring states may never have given rise to a distinctly Chinese identity. The man who discovered the jade, Bian He, lost his feet in his attempts to showcase the stone as one of the finest ever discovered and upon hearing his cries, the officials mocked him. Severed feet were a common penalty for criminals at the time, but Bian He insisted his tears were drawn appropriately, not for his own two feet, but for the stone that the world denied was the most beautiful on Earth.

Direct orders from President Nixon suggested that even the United States had faith in the occult - that he could use the thing to open a relationship with China and to facilitate the decline of the Soviet Union. That was the bigger piece at play here. It was the only thing that would drive President Nixon to open a relationship with Communist China. Nixon had spent his entire career denouncing

them, the Communists, through various means of intimidation and legal prosecution. He wanted those Communist sympathizers purged from his own government, but now he had sent a message through Pakistan that the United States was ready to talk to China. It was a monumental shift in American foreign policy.

The Nixon of the early 1960s may have even called this rapprochement from the Nixon of 1971 an act of treason against the United States. Maybe. Or maybe he had toyed with what conditions needed to be in place to facilitate it. That was likely too. Nixon would fall on either side of history that won.

Henry took in a breath of stale air. He was in his late twenties, wore a three piece suit, a black overcoat, and a fedora. He looked like he worked in the financial district, like any other man on the streets of New York at 7:30am. Like he was on his way to the trading floor.

The basement under Broadway and Warren street was a musky and unkempt wooden and concrete interior with ornate lighting and furniture. And this was the site of an incredible but oft overlooked moment in history. There was dust and a rotting wooden platform on an old track sitting inside an elevated pneumatic tube. Several feet beneath it, the original shield that Alfred Beach used to dig the tunnel sat covered in tarp. It was the site of Beach's Pneumatic Transit Company's first Subway stop. First conceived by Beach in 1849 in an article, the idea was mocked. People thought digging underground was digging into the gates of hell. But he soldiered on. He built it secretly in the night beneath the streets of New York City and right across the City Hall of New York who denied him the legal right to attempt such a thing.

Over 100 years later, the site sat in disrepair, forgotten by people who ride the thing from the Bronx to Manhattan to Brooklyn and to Queens. The man walked back from the briefcase and looked at the end of the stop. A giant lever sat at the end of the track next to a

telephone that had been installed shortly after he had purchased this space. He put both his hands on the lever and gave it a hard pull. It moved but the only thing that happened was a loud screech. The blades of the fan didn't even move an inch.

It was ironic, he thought. How could this place not be a protected historical landmark in the city? There were bullets and dust and rotting wood and the facade of a great project whose inventor never got to reap the benefits of his vision.

Alfred Beach was a true pioneer.

The man returned to his card table and sat down as he waited for the phone to ring. On the tabletop he left blueprints for his planned revisions. One of which required the total demolition of the spot in its current state. The thought of destroying the site bothered him. It would be unthinkable. A second plan called for a walled off entrance and restoring what it was originally thought to look like. It would remain hidden from the public, with no chance of an accidental entry from the street. The final plan he considered would turn it into a deadly catacombs, not unlike a maze. And going down the wrong path, which would be all but one, would result in certain confinement. There were several pits in the floor with trapped doors, which could not be opened from underneath. And there would be several doors of entry that would lead to chambers with no exit. It was a death trap. The final option would preserve the bulk of the original stop, and it would close it off from interactions with the outside world.

The man seriously considered all three options before him. Though he didn't exist, he was granted the license and the paperwork to purchase this property as part of his mission. Still, being human, the thought of a deadly crypt bothered him. What if someone mistakenly wandered in? He rolled up two of the plans, and returned them to their tubes. The plans for the third were left out. He signed the paperwork with an illegible squiggly line.

The man walked over to the platform and climbed atop the rotting wood. The weight of his foot came down on the boards, cracking the splintered ends. The sound of the creaking wood echoed throughout the chamber but then all went silent as the telephone rang. The man climbed down and walked over to the receiver. He picked it up off the hook as the last ring of the bell persisted.

Breaths came through the speaker as he placed it to his ear.

“Go to the City Hall Station,” the voice said. “Enter the Subway toward uptown, and leave the package on the far side of the closest bench. Walk away, tip your hat to the conductor as you get on, and ride it North to 110th street. Go to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Light a candle and put it in the back right position. Walk to the back office and down the hidden passage. You’ll find a man in a suit. Neutralize him and return to your current position.”

The voice stopped as the disconnect tone droned on. The man held the phone at his ear. He repeated the words back to himself. The Subway stop for the drop-off was right across the street. The Church was about thirty five minutes away.

He thought about that.

Leave the package in the subway.

Leave the package. Drop it and leave it. Leave a lost piece of history in a crowd.

There was a clock hanging on the wall right next to him. It was dead. He grabbed the briefcase and walked twenty steps toward the service elevator. There was no time to think. He pulled down the door and then turned the lever manually. This was autopilot. The door made a small screech and he started his ascent toward the street.

There was one mission. All systems go. There was nothing before this, and nothing after. He checked his holster and confirmed his gun was loaded. It was a service revolver his father used to carry before he was killed in the line of duty. The Cylinder was loaded with six rounds. The gun was his only connection to his past in this world.

The floor shook as the elevator came to an abrupt halt. The man lifted the door and walked out onto the sidewalk of Warren Street, his briefcase in hand, his Fedora on, and his black overcoat lapel flipped up. He kept his head down as he crossed Broadway toward City Hall.

The entrance was flooded with people entering and exiting the stop. He descended the stairs and walked toward the ticket window. Behind him, a mother got on the line with her young son who stepped on the back of his shoes. The boy touched the briefcase.

“I’m sorry!” she said. “Kevin, be careful. Don’t step on the man’s shoes.” The man waved his hand and shook his head as he approached the counter. “Just one token?” the station agent asked. “A roll please.”

The agent collected the fare and slid a roll under the glass.

“Thank you, next...”

The man picked up his briefcase and walked to the turnstile. He dropped in his token and pushed through the arm. The subway car came to a screeching halt in front of him as a rush of air blew through the platform. He didn’t have time to think. He walked briskly over to the first bench on the far side and then put down the briefcase without looking down. He let out a single breath and looked around the platform. His fingers and his toes surged with electricity as he stepped forward onto the train car.

As he grabbed onto the bar above him, the family approached the bench. He watched them settle right next to the briefcase. The little boy pointed at it and rushed over to it. The man lurched forward toward the exit but the doors closed. He looked around to the platform and saw a man approaching the scene from the turnstile. The car began to move forward. Before he knew it, the platform, the family, and the case all disappeared from view. It was out of his hands.

The windows went dark as the car darted forward down the tunnel. The man backed away from the glass and sat down in an open seat. Nobody watched him. Nobody cared. He blended in with everything and everyone else. He found a newspaper sitting on the seat next to him and began to read today's headlines.

There were stories about Vietnam protests and Richard Nixon's upcoming trip to China. Speculation ensued. Nobody knew what was going on. The radio played a new song today, Happy Xmas (War is Over) by John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

Henry shook his head as he read the title.

Other passengers were just like him. They wore black coats and fedoras, or tweed jackets and baker boy hats. They were construction workers, and office professionals, government workers, advertising men, or maybe musicians and artists, school teachers, and some of them students. They were every American. And they were kept blissfully ignorant of the world outside their homeland. It was a conscious choice on the part of the government to act behind closed doors, without the knowledge of the people, and under the cover of night.

The train rumbled on the track and all sat still, their heads up, looking forward, waiting patiently for their stops. The train twisted so violently at some corners it nearly knocked some passengers onto

their feet. Some looked rich, some of them looked poor. The man kept his head down and looked at the floor, ignoring the subtle motions and hand gestures of people readjusting their bags or their coats, or the page turns of their newspapers. It came to the first stop and a few people got off, then a few people got on. It was like that for the whole ride. And he blended right in with them.

The Subway car slowed to a stop at 110th street station. The man reached for his gun for comfort and stood from his seat to walk out the door. It was an incredible thing riding the Subway. You could get from City Hall to Harlem in the span of 35 minutes, a thing that was unthinkable before Alfred Beach, and for decades after too. And not a single person knew this or appreciated it. The Subway was just a part of the system now. It was just another thing that when it was one minute later than expected

it added to the daily stresses of the people of New York. It was a given that the Subway was mediocre, that it was uncomfortable, that it was overpriced, and that it could be better if the City of New York would just do its damn job.

Henry walked off the car and toward the exit looking at the map on the wall as he passed. He'd never really been to Harlem. He ascended the steps of the Subway stop to the street and walked North on Broadway to 112th street. There was a breeze and a rush of air as he reached the surface again. He turned right onto 112th street and the Cathedral came into view. Its power and its symbolism was overwhelming.

The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine first broke ground in 1892, the same year that Ellis Island opened, but the Cathedral would not open until a week before Pearl Harbor was bombed. It was the biggest Cathedral on Earth.

He came to the corner of 112th street and Amsterdam Avenue and absorbed its Romanesque and Gothic architecture. It was

advertised as a holy house that welcomed all—an Episcopalian Church by affiliation. The Episcopalian Church was founded at the same time the Nation was birthed and it was part of the founders push to permanently separate from their Anglican patronage. Like the Anglican Church it considered itself to be a fusion, or at least a product, of both Catholicism and Protestantism.

It was breathtaking from the outside. Smaller in stature than the skyscrapers of the New York City skyline and yet infinitely larger in presence. The doors at the front stood 18 feet in height, 6 feet in width, and weighed a total of 3 tons of Bronze each. They were cast for this building by the same people who cast the Statue of Liberty, and they bore the stories of the Bible on their surface.

The man pressed his hands to the bronze. He didn't recognize any of the figures. Not the people, not the events, not the locations. It was a history he knew very little about. In an alternate life he would have read these stories and been able to identify them. He placed his hands into his pocket and walked around to the entrance. The inside was dark. His eyes adjusted as he walked in and looked up at the towering ceiling. There were beautiful stained glass windows scattered throughout the structure with vivid colors in each one of them.

In front of him sat an information desk and next to it a table with votive candles. The man asked the desk clerk for a candle and went to light it. He placed it in the back right slot and pulled a burnt stick from the sand. He put the tip of the stick in the flame and let it catch. He slowly brought it to the wick of his candle and watched it light.

Henry took a step back and a deep breath. There was one mission. There was right now. There was no past. Whatever happened on the Subway before he entered this building was irrelevant. This was his only moment in this life. He turned toward the entrance and nodded at the desk as he began to approach the Nave. There was a sign at the gate as he walked by the candles.

It read:

### The Cathedral as a Democratic Church

“OUR democratic age,” said Bishop Henry C. Potter, “demands a place of worship that will not disregard the teachings of the Founder of Christianity. In this Cathedral there will be no pews, no locked doors, no prepayment for sittings, no reserved rights of caste or rank, but one and the same welcome for all.” The charter of the Cathedral requires that “the seats for worshippers in said Cathedral

Church shall always be free;” and the Cathedral welcomes everybody to its services, irrespective of denominational affiliations, nationality or worldly estate.

The rich and poor meet in the Cathedral without distinction or respect of persons.

People of every class and group come because the Cathedral is not associated in their minds with privilege and discrimination. There are no “strangers’ pews” in the Cathedral; and nobody feels any timidity or hesitation about attending. The large proportion of men in the Cathedral congregations is particularly noticeable.

The Cathedral is the people’s church—great, democratic, welcoming and free.

Behind him and above the Great Bronze Doors was the Great Rose window depicting Jesus. The man looked down at the floor. There was a seal beneath his feet. The footsteps of visitors echoed as they walked toward the door. Henry walked slowly toward the back, through the Nave, and the many displays setup in each corner. One of the stained glass windows depicted an early prototype television. He continued back toward the crossing and the Choir and the Altar to the Chapels of the Tongues and he spun around.

It was a heavy moment. If humanity were to disappear in an instant, right now, the halls and the details hidden in this Cathedral would be the most approachable guide to the history of humanity. It gave him pause. If somehow life ceased to exist, but not by violent means, and this structure were to stand and be buried by deposits of soil and the passing of time, this Cathedral would tell approximately two thousand years of history, and the deviation of mankind's most intimate beliefs, their technological prowess, their philosophical views, their attitude toward one another, better than any book, any film, or any tablet ever found.

It's an odd thing to take for granted, he thought.

Henry took one last look at the Great Rose Window and then walked into the Baptistry. There a small rug was flipped upward revealing a door in the floor. It was made of old warped wood. The man locked the door to the Baptistry. He wandered over to the rug and lifted it, throwing it off to the side. He turned the handle and pulled up the panel. There was a wooden ladder that went down about twelve feet to a dark platform below.

As he descended the rungs, he struck a match. The light was limited around him. When he could he closed the door, and then he continued his descent until he reached the bottom. Next to the landing sat a table with an old oil lamp. Lighting the wick, he discovered a man sitting at a desk flipping through some old books. The man at the desk appeared to be caught off guard as he turned to see someone standing before him with an oil lamp and a gun.

The man at the desk said, "Did they tell you I'm hard of hearing?"

Henry put the oil lamp down on the table and gestured for the man at the other end of the barrel to sit down.

“Why are you doing this,” he asked, as he moved to sit.

Henry answered, “For my country.”

The man pointed his revolver at the target’s gut. In his experience, pointing the gun at people’s hearts and heads generally made them panic. The room was musty. There was some moisture build up on the stone walls and a drain beneath the desk. It looked like an old map room.

“The history of the world is pretty straight forward,” he said, as he rested his hands on his lap. “We build weapons, we use them to kill. It may be hard to see this from your position and I’m sure you believe you’re doing the right thing. But you’re just another person willing to kill for power. And it’s not even yours. Men kill to get it. Men kill to keep it. All but one.”

Henry said, “That should be on these walls.”

The target smiled, “Do you know what happened to the child on the train platform?”

Henry paused and saw the fleeting image of the child running toward his briefcase and the darkness of the tunnel, the uncertainty of what had happened. He pointed the barrel at his target’s chest and pulled back the hammer on his father’s revolver. From above the stairs the sound of a record began to play loudly.

So this is Christmas

And what have you done

Another year over

And a new one just begun

The percussion kicked in and the sound of a bell...

And so this is Christmas

I hope you have fun

The near and the dear one

The old and the young

The target's breathing became labored and his chest started to thump.

Henry said, "Tell me what happened."

His target said, "The official story will be that his mother dropped her purse onto the tracks, and the kid wanted so desperately to help her he jumped down to get it for her. His mother jumped down instinctively, and put him back up on the track. But she didn't make it in time. They'll have witnesses too. At least a dozen."

Henry shook his head, "You're a liar."

"The people who took that item were not the people your leadership told you. They told you to kill me, didn't they?" He paused, but the man didn't respond. "I guess they didn't bother to tell you who I am?"

The man held his gun straight forward, his arm fully extended. This was psychological warfare. He was trained for this. When men in his line of work have no weapons they're trained to attack the will of the person holding the gun. Get them to crack under pressure. Their weapon is your weapon. Henry took a steady breath and then grinned.

He said, "They never told me who would pick it up."

The man stirred in his seat, “Well I suppose you know you did the right thing. Turning your back on your own country and your own leadership would be treason against the United States, wouldn’t it? It doesn’t bother you that only a few years ago that man in the White House hunted his own people

for impurities trying to expel Communists from within our ranks, and now he’s preparing to go meet them on their own soil?”

The man shook his head, “No. There must be a good reason for it.”

The target laughed. “Are you sure you’re not about to commit treason by undermining the President’s trip to Beijing?”

He drew in a deep breath and said, “Treason is what the President says it is.”

Henry squeezed the trigger, the shot rang out, and the bullet did its job. The man collapsed to the floor as blood poured into a drain in the middle of the room. He put the gun back into his holster and walked over to the table where a rotary phone rang.

He answered it.

“Good job. You made your country safer for another day. Now get out of there and disappear for a while.”

Henry hung up the phone and carefully stepped over the corpse avoiding the pools of blood. He put the oil lamp out and ascended the rungs to the room above where the song continued.

A very Merry Christmas

And a happy new year

Let's hope it's a good one

Without any fear

War is over, if you want it

War is over now

The man looked over at a record player in the corner and stopped at the door. The rug needed to be replaced. He walked back, replaced it, and then left the Baptistery with the record still playing. There was nobody nearby. He walked back out into the Nave and down toward the entrance. There was a stoup he didn't notice before. He dipped his fingers in the water and said a Hail Mary as he continued to walk back out.

There was a torrent of emotions inside of him as he stopped by the Votive candles one more time to light a candle for the boy and his mother. He grabbed one for each and put them in the front, saying a prayer in his head that they were well.

The man wandered out the Cathedral and down the steps onto the sidewalk of Amsterdam Avenue. He put his hands in his pockets and walked toward the Subway again to head toward the Staten Island Ferry. It appeared there was a large crowd waiting for the next car as he descended the stairs. The train had stopped running momentarily.

# From World to World

Timothy Divelbiss

“That’ll be \$4.99,” the lady behind the counter said, her voice practically monotone.

Ethan silently nodded, fished out a wad of dollars and quarters from his pocket, and placed it on the counter. The lady took it, there was the ka-ching of the cash register, and she handed back a couple of coins. He put the coins in his pocket, picked up the lunch tray holding the burger, fries, and bottled water he’d ordered, and gave a simple “Thank you” as he left, making yet another mental note to himself to find out the lady’s name some day.

As he stepped out of the lunch line into the main cafeteria of the college campus, he eyed the far wall of the room, lined from waist-level to ceiling with windows. It was around four on a February evening, and the sky was already a deep, dark blue. Outside the windows, the ground sloped down to a hill, at the bottom of which was a stretch of road, and a small forest beyond that.

Ethan liked to sit at the windowed end of the room because that was where all the electrical outlets were, and he liked to have a space to plug in his laptop’s charging cord if he could possibly help it. But snagging an “outlet table”, as he liked to call them in his head, wasn’t always easy. Everyone wanted one, and if you couldn’t get one of your own before it was claimed by someone else, you were out of luck.

Fortunately, fate seemed to be kind to him that night. There were quite a few spots available, and all he needed to do was pick one. He chose a table around the middle of the row, set the tray down, and

then took his laptop from his backpack and plugged it into the outlet behind his chair.

He took a quick bite out of his burger—the cafeterias were actually pretty good, he thought—before opening the laptop. He did a quick scan of the news section on the homepage. He’d either seen it all before or it didn’t particularly interest him; yet another article about the current presidential administration, some local news about some kind of test being done at a nearby nuclear power plant, a coronavirus update, etcetera etcetera. He only gave it a cursory glance before immediately going to YouTube.

The cafeteria had a pleasant lack of bustle at this time of day; aside from him, there were only seven or eight people in the room, eating their own dinners or playing on their phones. It was practically silent.

And that was just the way Ethan liked it. He figured he’d just kill time here watching gaming videos or something until he had to go to his next class in an hour or so. Creative Writing. He loved that class, and writing in general. He could spend all day coming up with fantastical worlds in his head, let alone the stories that could happen in them.

But for now, he’d kick back and relax until he actually had to get down there.

At least, that was his plan before the lights suddenly cut out.

Ethan didn’t even notice it for the first second or so, until the surprised and concerned chatting of the other people in the room reached his ears.

“Wait, did the power go out?”

“Aw, man! I just plugged in my charger!”

“Hey, I’m not getting any Wi-Fi...”

Ethan took a look at the top corner of his own computer screen when he heard that. Sure enough, the computer was now looking for a signal, and it didn't look like it was having much success.

It was then that Ethan realized that there was another sound in addition to the concerned voices; a rapid, repeated tapping on the windows. He turned around in his chair and saw that a light drizzle had begun to fall outside, streaking the windows with rainwater. Between the already dark sky and the precipitation, it made it very difficult for him to see the road beyond.

“Were we supposed to get rain tonight?” he said aloud.

At this, the rest of the cafeteria fell silent. They turned to look and, sure enough, beheld the light rain now coming down outside. A few stepped up to the windows for a better look.

“Yeah, I don't think we were supposed to,” said one, a guy with curly red hair and looking like he was trying to hold back whatever nervousness he was keeping down. “I mean, I didn't check the weather, so...”

“But that doesn't make sense,” a girl at the far end of the row said. “It's not even coming down hard enough to—”

And then suddenly the scene went almost blindingly bright, and Ethan stepped away from the window, blinking. He heard the cafeteria suddenly erupt into a flurry of panicked yelling.

“Holy—!”

“What happened?!”

“Dude, where's the road?!”

As Ethan's vision cleared, he looked back up at the windows, and suddenly understood everyone else's horror.

The road that could once be seen from the windows was gone. There was still a hill there, but it was a lot less steep. There was another forest, but it was a lot more sparse. Ethan thought he could see some houses in the distance. Or at least they looked like houses. They were artificial structures of some sort, anyway. And the whole landscape was lit up in broad daylight.

“Where did it go?!” That was the curly-haired kid again. “Where did it all go?! Where are we?!”

“Hey hey, Martin, calm down,” somebody next to him said.

“What do you mean calm down?!” Martin shot back. “That’s not what should be outside!”

Ethan couldn’t really say that he blamed the guy for his terror, all things considered thus far. He was just about to make a comment of his own when suddenly—right when he blinked, it was that fast—the scene outside changed.

Now instead of a forest, there was a vast, sprawling plane of sand-colored rock and earth stretching out as far as the eye could see. A little ways off, right where the road would have been if it was still there, as what looked like a small stream or brook coursing its way through a trench in the ground. A few scattered trees, vaguely resembling palm trees, grew alongside it. Ethan thought he could see some kind of small, scurrying animal in the shade, but it ducked behind one of the tree trunks before he could get a good look at it. In the sky above there were three bright, white orbs.

“What’s it doing now?” somebody asked. “Why are there three suns?!” “Wait…” said the girl at the far end. “Are…does this mean that we’re on another planet?”

“What’s going on?!” Martin shouted.

But before anybody could add anything further, it all changed again. Now they were staring out at what looked like another forest at first glance, but it wasn’t like anything Ethan had ever seen

before. The sky was a deep, deep red, lit by a distant orange sun. The trees—or whatever kind of vegetation this was—were tall and bare, with thin, skeletal branches that pointed straight up into the air, and gnarly roots that curved and twisted and groped through dark, almost black colored soil. The whole place looked spooky, like something out of a Halloween picture.

“Hang on a minute,” a boy standing just behind Ethan said. “Is it just this building that’s...that’s moving around, or is it, like, the whole campus that’s moving?”

There was a moment of silence, and then the whole loose group seemed to peel away from the windows and head for the doors of the cafeteria, and Ethan found himself falling in behind them. In the back of his mind he didn’t like the idea of stepping outside; what if it was just their building, and somebody got left behind when they moved again? Regardless of his concerns, though, he followed the others out into the hallway and then down to the front entrance of the cafeteria building.

Much to Ethan’s surprise, the pathway that went down the center of the campus property was still there, as well as the several huge buildings that lined it; the business building, the library wing, the science hall, the administration offices, it was all still there, bathed in the red light from this particular world. The parking lot at the near end of the pathway was gone, replaced by the dark soil and dead-looking trees.

The cafeteria students weren’t the only ones out on the pathway. From all of the buildings, people were pouring out; students, faculty, janitorial staff, all looking around with wide, staring eyes, and murmuring to each other in frightened tones of voice. There was the occasional sound of someone wailing in panic, and one or two people lifting their phones for a picture, apparently unconcerned with whether or not they’d return home to actually share those pictures.

And it was then that the full impact of what was going on really hit Ethan; the whole college campus and all of its inhabitants were inexplicably shifting to different areas in space or time or universes or who knew where they were really going. Nobody knew why. Nobody knew how. And nobody knew if they were ever going to stop.

They might wind up doing this forever without end.

Ethan felt his legs beginning to wobble from fear, and he collapsed onto a nearby bench along the path, gripping the sides tightly in his hands as he tried to calm himself.

He almost felt like he was getting there when the world changed again to the sound of screaming.

Ethan jumped up from the bench and looked around to see where they had wound up next. It was only the smallest of comforts, but at this new place seemed a lot less unsettling than the last. It looked to Ethan like some sort of jungle, with huge trees that curled and twisted around each other, going for several dozens of feet above the tops of the campus buildings, all overhung with vines. The unearthly sounds of whatever wildlife lived here echoed through the jungle. The sky overhead had a greenish tint to it, and a large, cratered moon could be seen directly above the campus.

There was a sudden woosh from over Ethan's head, and he heard a fresh flurry of screaming and shouting erupt from the crowd. He looked up and saw a huge bird coming to perch on top of a lamppost alongside the pathway about a yard away from him. Wing-to-wing, it had to have been at least 15 feet across. It was a deep, intense blue color, with the very tips of its wings a mixture of aqua green and white. It had a set of long, trailing tail feathers, like a peacock, and a long neck that ended in a long, thin head and beak. The eyes were a blank white color, looking simultaneously mystic and creepy. When it set down on the lamppost, it didn't stand upright and fold its wings. Instead, it sort of crouched on both its legs and the folded joints of its wings, like some kind of dragon.

The bird didn't do anything. It just sat there on the lamppost, looking around at all the people. Then it spread its wings again and took off into the air, apparently having decided that it had better things to do than look at these strange visitors in its home.

As Ethan watched it go, he heard somebody coming up next to him. He looked and saw Martin standing next to the bench

“Is this how it's gonna be?” They said. It was Martin again. “Are we just gonna keep on doing this?”

Ethan just kind of shook his head. He wasn't even sure if Martin had noticed.

And then the world went black.

Literally.

The entirety of the new landscape was completely black, and darkness fell upon the campus. There was a new round of cries, and Ethan jumped off of the back in sudden, newfound fear. He heard Martin give a shout of terror next to him.

The whole world had become dark.

But not quite. As Ethan looked around, he realized that there was still at least some visibility left. He could make out the outlines of the people and buildings. Little white lights started to flick on, one by one; the lights of people's phones.

Ethan looked down at his feet. A black mist had begun to seep in over the pathway up to his ankles. His legs were starting to feel cold. He bent down and stuck a finger into the black mist, and it too began to cool.

“What is it?” He heard Martin say.

Ethan was about to say he didn't know when he suddenly heard a low rumbling sound that echoed through the darkness. He felt like

his bones were actually shaking from the sound. The panicked conversing of the others fell suddenly silent.

It was then that Ethan suddenly realized that he could see something moving out in the darkness. He couldn't make out what it was exactly, but it was tall and gaunt and—

Without warning a long, black appendage shot forth from the blackness into the pathway. Without even thinking, Ethan turned and bolted, faster than he'd ever moved before in his life. He heard Martin scream, and when he looked over his shoulder he saw the arm pulling back at breakneck speed into the blackness.

And now whatever order had been left was completely lost. Everyone was screaming and running, some towards back towards the buildings, some without any direction whatsoever. Somebody bumped into Ethan very hard, and he fell to the hard pavement below with a thud.

He was just starting to push himself back up when the world changed again with the sound of thunder. Ethan rolled over to look and saw a sky heavy with gray clouds. White flashes and bolts of lightning sparked between cracks in the cloud cover. And then one bolt struck the roof of the cafeteria building. There was an explosion, and pieces of debris began to rain down onto the pathway.

Ethan mustered the strength to pick himself up off the ground, and began to run to the building across the path. He had just made it to the door when the corner of his vision went blindingly white, and he felt himself blasted into the air, and he felt himself hit something very hard—

—and then darkness.

Ethan's vision was blurry when it began to return to him. He could see shapes moving against a black backdrop, lit up by flashes of red and blue. There was a flash of white light that moved behind the shapes and then disappeared. And he couldn't hear anything. His head was throbbing like crazy.

But then his vision and hearing started to clear. He heard voices, sirens, the rotors of a helicopter. Actually it sounded like multiple helicopters, flying in circles overhead.

And he saw that the blurry shapes were actually people. Most of them were doctors and nurses, it looked like, but he saw police officers and men in suits there as well. The medics were leading people to ambulances in the parking lot—it was only slowly that Ethan realized that it was back—and loading others on stretchers. The police officers were talking to people who didn't look too injured, asking them questions. The men in suits seemed to be looking at the property itself. It looked like it was night again.

“How are you feeling?” a female voice said from above him. Ethan saw that it was one of the medics.

Ethan groaned. “My head hurts,” he said. He put a hand to his temple, and felt a bandage. “They said you took a nasty hit back there. Nothing fatal, but it kept you out for the next couple of jumps before the campus came back.”

Ethan suddenly registered what she was saying. “What, we're...we're back? How...how did we...”

“We're not sure. They're still trying to figure out what happened in the first place. It wasn't just the college. Other places are disappearing too. It's still happening, all over the world.”

A male voice behind him said “C'mon, let's get him to the ambulance.” The woman nodded, and then asked Ethan “Can you walk.”

Ethan nodded, and the woman and her partner lifted him up to his feet and began to lead him to one of the many ambulances in the parking lot. He saw a host of other emergency vehicles in the lot too, as well as a few black cars (he wondered if they were from the government) and some news vans, with reporters and cameramen standing nearby. The spotlights of helicopters cast circular beams over all.

Ethan wasn't sure what to feel. He felt overwhelmed by the whole experience. He wasn't sure if he should be happy that he was home, or still reminiscing upon the fright that he and his peers had been through.

He figured he'd sort it all out later. Right now, he just wanted to be anywhere but the campus.

Ethan and the medics were just about to enter the back doors of the ambulance when suddenly there was the all-too familiar sound of panicked yelling. Ethan looked over his shoulder and saw that where the college had been a few seconds before there was now a stark, empty space.

# The Collegiate Agenda

Sean McGinley

The wonderful thing about knowledge  
Is how much you lose in college

The kids they say this is the way  
Casting their money and dreams away

No more good sleep  
Or counting sheep

I go to earn that sheet that reads how im so smart for knowing  
about  
A specific topic beyond a doubt

Forget your well being remember that money rules the scene.

much you'll learn inside this box  
Captured in lockers fastened with locks

## Young

Sean McGinley

Youngins are not concerned, they have nary a worry in the world. Days are long and the nights are short. With excitement and joy energy spurt. Although sometimes sad, the young outlook always changes to glad. Innocent, heartfelt, speak their minds. Children never keep up with the times. So perhaps the issue is still in effect...our childlike demeanor much more should reflect.

# Beyond Tears

David Ditto

Today, as ever, it remains a mystery how the boy made it home. That is understandable. Be that as it may, what confounds people whenever it is told, pondered, referenced, or thought about, is as to the reason it also remains a family secret. Of coarse friends who ask are temporarily intrigued by the incident's relation to the 1989 water shortage but it seems to stick with them as another strange coincidence rather than a miraculous family bedrock, which is okay. Whether or not it becomes legend is not of great importance, so here is the story as the boy remembered it.

Thirty years ago, twelve-year-old Drake was hiking Mt Marcy in the Adirondacks. He was accompanied by his cousin who was the renowned mountaineer of the family, and his father. Drake was not exhausted so far but he was far from unburdened. They had been hiking uphill since dawn with the goal of reaching the summit when his dad began thundering the forest with rants of pain. The sudden ferocity of the episode had convinced his cousin to aim for a lower target. Drake reluctantly agreed.

His father nearly crumbled the mountain down to his level but Drake was then fighting to contain his own forest fire within. The spell was broken and he no longer saw the trees. It didn't matter anymore, now that his movie had cut to someone else's. He didn't say a word of it despite his father's shouting, "**Are we there yet!**" which threatened to end the journey at every trail bend.

Drake was last to notice the slope abruptly flatten when it appeared to him first. A small clearwater lake cradled in the conifer mountainside held a stillness of solid glass. His father let out a sigh of relief but not his tense voice. "Lake Tear of the Clouds: Source of the Hudson River as surveyed by Verplank Colvin 1872." a placard read. "The Hudson River? Where? Is this really the end of it?" Drake thought, confused. A dry slope of boulders seemed to mark the lake's outlet. He could not tell if the arid dryness was his

imagination or if it was really as bad here way up in the mountains as it was back at home. “Well, it only made sense of the horrid drought,” he thought, “New York City does get its water from the mountains.” He thought of Sierra in her apartment. How much would she be refreshed to feel the myst of such pure cool water if it still poured between these rocks?

Drake asked if he could walk the lake's edge. Some exploration was the least he could want to do now that the summit was out of the question. His cousin agreed to let him go for a little bit so he and his father would be relaxed enough hear a lakeside history about Teddy Roosevelt. He would not be out of sight on such a small lake, they all thought as he lazily circled to the deep green embrace of the Marcy side shore.

The air was quiet, the water undisturbed. The only movement in Drake's awareness beyond his footsteps were a handful of fleeing tadpoles. *Trickle...Trickle*. His view snapped into focus like a camera lens. There was water feeding this lake from somewhere. “That Vuh-Plank guy was wrong.” Drake thought. “This is not the end of my journey.” The sound was buried under mossy rocks but clearly it was running down a steep gully. The movie in his mind was running again. It was not the same as before but it was his again. “The ever indomitable Drake Indigo is about to make a discovery that's alluded the best explorers to date!”

He scrambled up the boulders of the narrow ravine, letting himself into its stony jaws. The climb was of little difficulty for him, having regularly walked miles of city blocks, though the rough terrain was a delightful challenge. *Trickle...Trickle*. He could see the flow dampening the boulders. At times he had to get on his hands and knees to keep himself from slipping on the wet moss. It never occurred to him that he was leaving behind a sheer cliff, or that the conifers had been shrinking into bush thickets, or that he was alone. He was not alone. The stream was whispering to him the entire way and against all his expectations, it was not getting any quieter.

Drake was beginning to feel drowsy when he realized that everything had gone dimmer. He turned around for the first time to

see the sun, setting between neighboring peaks. The view was wider than from any skyscraper, free any trees on Marcy's alpine granite facade. He had made it to the summit after all. Now, before the thought arose that he had abandoned his family hours ago on a reckless quest, he looked back at the stream and saw exactly what he had been searching for. The true final source of the great Hudson River appeared as translucent spring no wider than a bird bath. It shimmered with all the luster of a picturesque diorama cupped between lichen coated slabs of rock and decorated with exotic wildflowers of white and violet. The sight of them again changed his train of thought away from self appraisal of the find. "Sierra would be overjoyed to see these in her roof garden." Drake imagined. "All your pretty flowers wilted in the drought." The thought made him realize his thirst. It convinced him to reward his surely historic efforts of discovery with a kneel and a sip of the heavenly waters.

Suddenly, Drake felt a jet of cool pureness saturate his veins. His body transformed. The sun's rays shot translucent golden ripples through his body. He could see through himself. All at once, he felt every drop of his being surge in tears down the mountain. Lying down, he let gravity lengthen his height many miles amongst water snakes. Nothing stood in his way. He squeezed through dams, locks, and bridges. He let his fingers be carried into the pipes of thirsty cities; Glens Falls, Albany, and Poughkeepsie. He could feel the smallest bird take a sip of his lifeblood, for he was everywhere, in all wet things. He was the Hudson River. *He was the mighty Hudson River.*

"*EEAAHH!*" Sierra screamed in confusion at the sight of Drake cramped into the kitchen sink. The faucet was running and he was unconscious. When he woke up to the police investigators, he could not explain what happened. It made so little sense in his own mind, how could he expect his parents to believe any of it, let alone the authorities? They left him alone on the conclusion that he had been kidnapped and they would do everything in their power to locate the criminal responsible. Despite having already returned the morning after going missing, his gift was still giving. That same

day, Mayor Koch announced New York City would be lifting the water rations on account of rain refilling the mountain reservoirs. Still, thirty years on and the only person who has thanked him for the miracle has been Sierra. Perhaps the entire incident will remain as mysterious as the young love that made it happen.

# Burden - a Haiku

Trishan Smith

White is wintertime  
with a fighting chance to drown  
despite the savior.

# Absence

Alicia Gannon

Absence  
Does not  
Make the heart  
Grow fonder.

Absence sits in the dark corners of your  
closet,  
That you stare at in the middle of the night,  
And hope to God there's nothing waiting for  
you to fall asleep.  
But it's there.

Absence makes the heart harden.  
Absence is the fire that burns passionately  
Until you get burned and your skin starts to boil.

Absence  
Does not  
Make the heart  
Grow fonder

Absence  
Does not  
Make the heart  
Grow fonder.

Absence is the monster we fight and hope  
Our children never have to face.  
But we all have to face it.  
We face it with alcohol  
And drugs,  
And late nights,  
And strangers.  
We face it.

Absence dries the soil and kills the flowers.  
Absence consumes the sky and strikes down  
Anyone who thinks that love is worth the  
fight.

Absence  
Does not  
Make the heart  
Grow fonder.

Absence  
Does not  
Make the heart  
Grow fonder.

# Body

Alicia Gannon

It's nice sometimes  
To forget what you look like.  
To take a day,  
A week,

A year,  
And not look in the mirror.

But one day you walk past it and  
Stop.  
Taking a look at the curves and roughness,  
The bumps and scratches and scars,  
Blemishes drawn into your pale and ghost-like matter.  
The red patches and pores,  
The redness in your eyes,  
And the wild hairs sticking up  
All over the place.  
Streaks and stretch marks  
From lightyears of transformations

But do not forget the beauty.  
The red splotches like painted sunsets,  
Rays of the universe dancing on your skin.  
The collection of memories,  
Cracks and crevices like canyons and mountains,  
Curls that wrap around you like the breeze,  
Fresh air and windburn,  
Grains of sand and dirt  
That shaped your skin  
Like a rounded rock in the river  
That washed up on the bank,  
For wild and sweet summer children  
To find and cherish.  
The rounded edges built upon your body  
Are sent to you with love  
From the vibrational clashes  
That surround your ever-changing  
All knowing  
All loving form.

# Flickering

Alicia Gannon

You are like a lightning bug;  
Lighting up  
And shutting down,  
Just when I think I'm getting close,  
You are invisible  
And I can no longer find you  
Floating in the air.  
I feel like a child in the summer,  
Chasing after you with a glass jar.  
But this time,  
I don't want to trap you.

# Getting Ugly

Alicia Gannon

Writing is  
Getting ugly;  
Ripping your lungs out;  
Screaming  
At the moon,  
At the sky.  
Howling with the pain  
From deep within  
Your dark angry heart.

Writing is  
Breaking the bone  
That you had to pick with someone.  
Maybe yourself,  
Maybe God,  
Maybe a stranger.  
Writing is anger

Writing is  
The truth.  
The filthy,  
Cruel,  
Truth.

Writing is  
Ripping your hair out  
At three AM.  
Burning yourself out.  
Headaches.

Writing is  
Ugly.  
Getting down  
With the ugliness,  
And waking up  
The next day  
Hungover on bitterness  
And still outraged.

# Rebirth

Alicia Gannon

I've got a free spirit  
Begging to be free.  
She reads like a Dharma Bum.  
She sings like Bob Dylan.  
She cries like the wind.  
She writes like hell,  
And falls in love like no other.  
She dances like a dandelion seed,  
Soft and bold on the breeze of summer.  
She breathes like feathers,  
Wind going through her,  
She is a love junky,  
Giving all of herself  
So all she can do is gain.

# Just A Dream

Sabrina Alvino

WARNING: This story contains graphic depictions of death!

Have you ever woken up from a nightmare and thought, “Thank god, it was just a dream!”?

Well, I wish I could say the same.

Everything started about a year ago, after the accident. The day was like any other, my brother and I were on our way to have some lunch, and that intoxicated piece of shit ruined everything. On top of a blood alcohol level almost triple the safe amount, he had cocaine and about 3 other types of prescription narcotics in his system to top it off. The officers suspected he was trying to kill himself, but that didn't mean he had to take my brother with him. The memories from that day never got hazy, like some people tell you happens during traumatic experiences. No, they didn't fade at all, in fact, they're the most vivid memories I have to this day. The sound of metal crushing and glass shattering as we were smashed against the guard rail, the sheer force of that monstrous truck sending us whirling over the barrier and tumbling once, twice, three times before coming to a stop at the tree line which rest at the bottom of the small hill to the side

of the road. Though my head was spinning I was hyperaware of the situation, probably more so than any 19-year-old would be when trapped in a destroyed car that was now on fire. The heat had been immediately overwhelming, the searing pain to the right side of my face and in my left leg shook me from any small stupor I may have found myself in, awakening me to the terrifying reality I had been thrown into. My immediate thought was on my brother who had been driving, and I still wish I hadn't looked over there to see what had happened to him. If I could try to describe what nightmares are made of, it would be the sight of my brother, his upper body crushed and mangled against his seat, his head limp to one side and barely held to his neck as sharp glass had pierced the flesh and bone that kept it in place. Part of his head was smashed in, blood and brain matter oozing out and onto the destroyed upholstery as his lifeless eyes seemed to peer into me.

The thing I did manage to forget was if I screamed. I'm not even sure how long I was staring at him, almost able to hear his voice begging me to help him as I sat there in some kind of sick awe at how he looked. Who knew the body could contort and twist in such grotesque ways? When I began to feel as if the fire was on me, my skin almost beginning to bubble from the heat, that's when the panic really kicked in. By some twisted stroke of luck, the wreckage had ripped apart my seatbelt, allowing my upper body some kind of movement as I began to thrash against the door in an attempt to get

it open. We had landed back on all four wheels when we finished flipping so there wasn't anything in the way of the door, but it was crushed inward and wasn't going to budge, so in my desperation I focused on the obliterated window. It was merely a frame now, all the glass was either strewn through the grass outside, on the floor of the car, or somewhere imbedded in my skin. I could hear the faint sound of sirens now as emergency services got close to our location, my mind racing as I threw my arms out of the window, flattening them against the side of the car in an effort to use it as leverage to pull my body up and out. The only problem was, my left leg was almost completely pinned between the dashboard and middle console, as they had both folded inwards, basically enveloping my leg between them. I still wasn't sure what had happened to my face, only that I couldn't see out of my right eye and the smell of blood was overwhelming. Blood, gasoline, and fire. They are smells I won't forget until the day I die.

The sirens were on top of us now, my struggle still tremendously real as the heat continued to increase, the flames visible as they crept around from the front of the car and neared my upper body that was dangling from the window. I thought that maybe the responders would see the wreck, assume the worst, and take their time with things, so for that, I do remember screaming. My throat felt like someone had stuck an iron rod that had been sitting under blue flames straight into it, but I didn't stop. I don't even know if I was

saying words, I just know I needed them to get to me and to get me out of there; and they did. It was around the point they all but tore my leg from my body, leaving it trapped in the smoldering wreck that I finally lost consciousness, only opening my eyes again about a week later in the hospital. The immediate rush of memories brought me right back to the accident, and I remember needing to be restrained by about four hospital staff and shot up with some kind of tranquilizer in order for me to calm down. It happened another two times before I began to settle with the memory and the fact that my brother was dead, I now had a prosthetic leg, and my parents were trying their hardest to support me despite their immense misery at the death of my brother. I won't get into specifics about our home life or how my parents treated us, we were both pretty equal in their eyes and I don't have any pity deserving back story aside from the crash; so, everything before that isn't important. The importance lies in what's going on now.

According to the doctor, it was a miracle I was alive. I had a gash down the right side of my face from the middle of my head down to my nose, the amount of blood I lost that day was the most he had ever seen someone lose and live to tell about it. I had a fractured skull and a hemorrhage in the front portion of my brain, but there were no lasting effects once they took care of it; another miracle. By his words, I should have either been in a casket alongside my brother or a vegetable for the rest of my life. Since that wasn't the case and

I was able to function almost as perfectly as a normal person, I spent several weeks in physical therapy getting used to my new leg before returning home with some psychotropic drugs to stop the nightmares, and that was it. The drugs didn't help, though. The nightmares I had since waking up from the accident, and still have currently, they're not normal nightmares. There are no monsters, ghosts, zombies, or anything supernatural like in many imagined nightmares. No, these are more real, so much more real. I see places I'm familiar with in many of them. The park toward the edge of town, the grocery store and the parking lot of the mall late at night. When I'm sleeping, it's almost as if I'm not sleeping at all. The dreams I have are as if *I'm* at these places, but they always shift. This person that I am in these nightmares finds someone, maybe someone they've been watching for a while, maybe someone random, and they take them. Each dream is almost like an episode to a show, and I'm currently at the part I've been dreading the most. It's been maybe a week since I really began to concentrate on the nightmares, most nights since I've been home I would wake up in a cold sweat without trying to figure out what's been happening, until I realized how abnormal this all was, and that maybe I should pay more attention. It started with 'me' finding the person 'I've' been looking for, then it moved on to 'me' taking them, hitting them with a brick and dragging their slack body to 'my' car, and driving off to some warehouse; one of the only places in the dreams I don't know

the location of. It's almost as if I lose the ability to see during the trip to this warehouse, and when my vision comes back, we're already there. It's always too dark to get the license plate of the car, or even to tell what kind of car it is. I do know that there isn't a CD player, only a cassette player, so I know it has to be an older model, but the logo that would normally rest in the center of the steering wheel seems to be blurry every time, like there's fog in the car but it's only in that spot.

As I said, we're at the part that I don't really want to think about. Remembering vaguely how the last three ended, I only hope that my small hunch that these weren't just nightmares and actually something quite real, was completely and utterly wrong. You see, the last three times I went through this, each woman that was taken to that warehouse, they were tortured for days before being brutally murdered. This was number four. Another odd thing about these nightmares is that, while they're repetitive in nature, they're not at all the same dream. The methods of torture were usually the same, but the victims were different. It's what stood out the most when I thought about it. If I was just having the same nightmare over and over, I would be a bit calmer about the situation, but the people dying weren't the same, and the ways they were picked weren't the same; it left such a sour taste in the back of my mouth, thinking on it now. If these were actually visions, like I was beginning to think

they were, then I let three innocent women become victims of a serial killer.

The coffee I had ordered fifteen minutes prior was tepid, the chatter of the small diner nearly non-existent as I lost myself to my thoughts on the matter. It wasn't until a large hand waved in front of my face that I blinked, the man before me slowly coming into focus. Freckles lining the bridge of his nose, hazelnut colored eyes with bags just below to emphasize the tireless work of a police office, his unruly dark hair was tied back, some dangling loosely along his sun kissed cheeks. He was the man who saved my life.

“Hey there, you still with me?”

His eyes smiled with his lips but there was obvious concern behind it, his tone dropping slightly when he spoke. I straightened my posture, my spine clicking into place as I felt it crack here and there with my sudden movement. Sighing, I nodded and reached for the cup in front me, lifting it to my lips and taking a small sip before placing it back onto the table but not letting it out of my grip, my thumbs running along the pattern of the mug as I tried to concentrate.

“Listen, Matteo, I've been thinking of how to say this for a while, so you can't think I'm crazy when I say it, you got me?”

“I mean, I can't promise anything. You've told me some wild stories before, Cora.”

I had wanted to glare at him, but I knew he was right. He was always right. I felt the air rush from my lungs as I sighed again for

what felt like the hundredth time in only about twenty minutes. If I didn't come out and say it now, I'd have to work up all that strength again, and who knows how long that would take. More women could die if I didn't hurry up and spit it out.

“Well you know, I've mentioned the dreams I've been having to you before, and the more I've been thinking about them, the more I don't feel like they're 'just' dreams.”

Now, I could see the questions forming in his eyes. The hand he had used to snap me out of my daze moved to provide a rest for his chin, the corner of his lips still slightly lifted as he watched me to ensure I was being serious, and he didn't have to speak to tell me to continue; it was all said just by how he looked at me. I continued on, my gaze shifting from his curious stare down to my cold coffee, the liquid becoming cloudy as it sat untouched. What were the right words for this?

“I...” I started and stopped, my teeth squeezing my bottom lip between them as I breathed through my nose, slowly lifting my eyes to his once more. It was now or never. Would I let yet another woman die? Could I? Would he even believe me? Shaking the creeping doubt away, I steadied myself and let the words tumble out of me.

“I see places in town. Places I know, places that probably everyone knows. I see it like I'm the one doing everything, like I'm the...murderer.”

The word clung to the tip of my tongue as it left my mouth, quick flashes of lifeless faces suddenly rushing into my mind. They weren't from a third person perspective, no, they were looking at me, their mouth's hanging open in silent screams, begging me to help them. Just like my brother. Quickly shutting my eyes and shaking my head, I sucked in as much air as I could before letting it rush out after the words I continued to speak; I couldn't stop now.

“I think they're visions, Matteo. I think what I'm seeing is...somehow what that sick fuck is seeing. I've missed them the last three times, I didn't pay attention. Now I'm paying attention, and I have to do something if this is what it is. If I don't do something soon, she's going to die. It's been almost four days, and he usually kills them on the fifth.”

Now as I opened my eyes, expecting some kind of incredulousness to welcome me, I was surprised to see him in thought, his eyes on me but his stare far off somewhere as he pondered my words. Then, his hand lowering back down to the table, he snapped out of his concentration and began to speak in a soft tone, one I had heard before. When I first told him of hearing the voices of the dead begging for help, he sounded the same; like he was speaking to something that might shatter if he spoke too loudly at it. Something fragile, unstable.

“Alright, so let's say this is true, that you're seeing these visions, what can we do? Do you have any control in the dreams? Are there

any leads you can give me about where he has this woman? Have you seen what he looks like, sounds like? I'll need a lot more if I'm going to try to help you with this, Cora, not to mention if I bring this up at the station, they'll think I'm batshit."

"That's why we're not bringing it to the station."

I watched his eyebrow raise as his arms moved to cross over his chest, his body leaning back against the torn upholstery of the diner booth. I knew he thought I still needed help; they all did. My parents, him, the people in town that occasionally glance at me for a little longer than a few seconds when I walk by, they all think I need to be in a ward somewhere getting evaluated every week to ensure I'm not nuts. After all, who comes home after such a traumatic experience and just...moves on? It was maybe a week and a half after being home that I went back to work, continuing on with life *almost* like nothing happened, and everyone around me just couldn't comprehend such a thing; so, I must be mental! My parents still tried to get me to see a psychologist, but I refused every time. I didn't need a shrink to tell me I had PTSD, depression, anxiety, insomnia, among a growing list of other things; I was well aware of my own defects by this point.

Matching his posture, I leaned myself back and stared deeply into those earnest yet judging eyes, I decided in that moment that I couldn't back down. Not only for the woman whose life was

currently on the line, but for my own. I may have issues, but I'm crazy, and I refuse to be forced into the role.

"I don't need you to go to the station with this, and you don't even need to help me. I just need you to know that I'm not letting him kill her, and I'm going to find a way to stop him. You can help me or not, it doesn't matter to me."

Then a thought crossed my mind as I watched him sigh, hands lifting to the loosening hair tie in an effort to adjust it, but he ended up just pulling it from his hair, loose curls falling alongside his cheeks and framing his nearly perfectly symmetrical face. Sometimes I really hated how good looking he was, it made it so hard to stay frustrated with him. Before he could speak in an attempt to stop my near suicide mission, though, I continued to speak my sudden thought to life, realizing that I had never asked him if he knew about any abandoned warehouses in the area.

"Wait! Do you happen to know any warehouses in the area or anywhere close to here? Ones that are abandoned, lots of graffiti, broken windows, the whole nine."

At first it didn't seem to register, and then it was as if I could see the gears in his head turning, his posture shifting again as he leaned slightly onto the table, a sudden shine to his eyes now as he spoke.

"Actually, yeah, yeah I do. There's an old abandoned factory in the town over, kinda on the border of this town and that one."

As I heard the words, it suddenly hit me; that's why I couldn't see the location of the warehouse. I was seeing places I was familiar with, places I had actively been to and seen with my own eyes, and it could explain why the warehouse was always kind of hazy every time I saw it in my dreams, because my brain couldn't fill in what it hadn't seen for itself. With a sudden rush of adrenaline, I shot up, wobbling slightly as I didn't give my mecha-leg time to adjust to the abrupt movement. As usual, Matteo's swift reflexes beat my own, his hand grasping firmly, yet gently, onto my forearm to balance me. As I was steadied myself, I looked up at him and for once it seemed like he agreed with what I was thinking.

There was only one way to know if I was actually crazy.

The drive there was tense, but the tension wasn't between the two of us, it had more or less filled the area around us with the anticipation and anxiety that this situation was causing, as it had all happened so suddenly. Who knew that one second two people could be sharing coffee and talking like normal, and the next be on the hunt for a serial killer? In a twisted kind of a way, this scenario was almost exciting. Something you'd see in a film somewhere, but this wasn't a film, this was completely and utterly real. As we grew nearer to the edge of town and to the abandoned factory, the blood in my veins began to feel kind of sharp, like it was crystalizing under my skin; an irritating itch that a normal scratch couldn't fix. A picture reel of images scrolled into my mind, all of the faces of the

dead pleading for my help, the final being my brother before the scene gradually burned away, red flames dancing behind my eyelids as I closed my eyes and focused on my breathing. As I concentrated on keeping myself grounded, I could hear Matteo making a call over the radio, advising that back up meet him at the factory, that he had come into a hunch on a possible kidnapping/murder. When I opened my eyes, we were parking, pulling up to a decrepit building that was falling in on itself. The entire back half seemed to have collapsed, but the front looked relatively normal for a factory that had been left to rot for years. There was graffiti from top to bottom, glass trailing from our car tires through the grass and back to the broken windows, and bricks missing in patches from the sides of the building. I couldn't place if this was what I had seen in my dreams, but we would find out soon enough.

“Back up should be here in ten, you stay here while I go check it out.”

But as he spoke, I was getting out of the car, moving around the front to meet him as he stepped out, closing the door behind him and grunting at my presence.

“You know I'm not doing that. Let's go.”

I acted as if the words I spoke didn't tremble as they came out, my body moving on its own, I turned and walked toward what I assumed was the front entrance only to be tugged back by Matteo, who placed himself next to me, but slightly in front of me.

“If you’re insisting on this, you need to stay right next to me. No arguing.”

I didn’t reply, simply following as closely to him as I could get without becoming a hindrance.

“Do you know where he would have her? Is there a basement or something?”

I didn’t know, I still couldn’t tell if this was even the right place. That was until something caught my eye; a piece of graffiti on one of the far walls. I drifted from his side at that point, slowly approaching the word that seemed so familiar, the image tugging at the recesses of my consciousness.

### *Carnage*

I think it stood out in my dreams because the word seemed so odd to be written randomly in graffiti; so misplaced, and I didn’t seem to be the only one that thought so, as he had looked at it often as well, though I’m sure to different reasons. By this point Matteo’s keen sense had told him I wasn’t next to him anymore and he had rushed to my side, looking between me and the single word that was just barely visible behind a collage of other profanities that had come after it.

“This is the place. She’s here, I just don’t know where.”

By this point there were three other patrol cars pulling up, men in uniforms with hands on their holsters making their way in after us as Matteo turned to meet them, explaining the situation. He didn’t

go into any detail on where he heard the hunch, just that it was reliable and he was now certain there was a woman somewhere in the factory that needed saving. With no luck after thirty minutes, doubt began to creep from one officer to the next, my brain still trying to piece together why we couldn't find her. Could he have moved her? No, it wasn't part of his rhythm, so she had to be somewhere, but where? I tried to think back to my dreams, to the moments after I saw that word on the wall, I closed my eyes to concentrate. I could hear the muffled screams as by this point the women had awoken to their fate, his gaze shifting from the word to his prey who he had bound by rope around the wrists, duct tape over their mouths as he dragged them along.

My eyes shot open and again my body moved with minimal thought to the process, taking me away from Matteo and the group of officers to an area of the factory which had collapsed. There, before me, sat a door; nearly pristine in comparison to the chaos around it. Rubble was everywhere, but in this specific area, there seemed to be a room that was spared from the crushing force of the collapse. That's when I heard it, very faint sobbing. At first I thought I had been thrown back into a memory but as I neared the door the sound grew more defined and my fingers twitched as realization dawned on me.

“MATTEO! MATTEO OVER HERE!”

I didn't wait in my urgency, rushing to the door and forcing it open with my entire body. It was dark and dust from the ground had created a thick fog throughout the tiny, empty room. I was greeted by panicked muffled squeals as Matteo and some officers rushed in behind me, his hands pulling me back from my shoulders, some medics that had showed up with the responding officers took the front line in assisting the terrified woman. She was dirty and bloody, gashes and cuts lining her body, her hair matted as she whimpered; her reddened eyes reflecting the gradual relief that flooded her as she realized she was no longer in danger. They were the first pair of frightened eyes I had seen that looked thankful, a look I hoped would follow into my dreams from this point on.

# Broken

Vanessa Wade

What does it feel like to be someone broken?  
To hear but not feel the words that are spoken  
To close your eyes to retreat inside,  
You close all the doors and try to just hide.

Darkness consumes, fear and loneliness too  
But you really don't feel much, isn't that true?  
Your body is broken, your heart becomes numb.  
Everything you do feels pointless and dumb.

Your heart aches for things that you just cannot get or give.  
For those who came before had stabbed it with shiv.  
So You've bled out enough and decided to not care  
Because the alternative could become something you could not  
bear.

You keep yourself guarded, removed and closed  
You keep to yourself, never wish to impose  
The person you are deep down in the depths  
You smother it well, lest it breath its foul breaths

There it remains until such a day,  
When you remember you aren't bad as they say.

# I Lost Our Baby

Haoua Senoussi

“Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit, oh fuck. *Fuck.*” Nick paced back and forth in the upstairs hallway oh his home, fingers tugging through his hair, sweat soaking into his shirt. “She’s gonna fucking kill me, oh god.”

Each room of the house had been torn through: blankets shaken out, laundry rummaged through, closet doors and kitchen cabinets thrown open with a bang, shower curtains pulled back so hastily they’d fallen with their rods, couch cushions and pillows tossed onto the floor haphazardly. Though he was still a little bleary-eyed from his nap, he was certain he did not see his infant daughter anywhere he searched.

When he first awoke from the nap they were taking together, he was pleased not to hear her crying, assuming she was still asleep. That feeling didn’t last very long, however, as he quickly realized she wasn’t in her crib, or the bedroom at all, for that matter.

This wasn’t his first time staying home alone with his nine-month-old daughter, honest, but it felt like one of the worst-case scenarios of that situation was unfolding. Nick was more than qualified to look after her, but he was also more sleep deprived than usual today; she had been up 3 times the night before. He tended to her each time, giving Nadiyah a break since she had an early start ahead of her and he would be home all day.

The second time Samira woke up was half past 2 am, which she’d established as playtime two nights earlier. Nick tried to get her to settle down right away—he really did—but he couldn’t resist her bright eyes, dimpled grin, and lively, drool-gurgling squeals, so he decided to entertain her for a while first. He was already Soft, but that little girl made him melt.

When she went down for her afternoon nap 12 hours later, he happily welcomed the opportunity to catch up on sleep himself, but he was deeply regretting both decisions now.

*How the hell did this happen?* He asked himself. “Samiiiiiraaaa,” his voice cracked from the anxiety as he called out again to the empty house, hoping he would hear a burble in reply, but he never did. “Come on baby girl, daddy doesn’t wanna play hide-and-seek anymore.” They had recently started playing the game with Samira beginning to crawl faster.

He put a hand to his chest, feeling his heart beating fiercely against his ribs as if trying to escape—he could hear it in his ears too—then he put it over his mouth, trying to calm down enough to regroup. *‘Deep breath.’ That’s what Nadiyah would say. ‘You’re useless if you’re panicked.’* He inhaled through his nose, held it for a few seconds, then exhaled slowly. *Okay. It’s okay, I got this. She’s okay.*

He stood silently for a moment, trying to make sense of it all, then dropped his head into his hands, shaking it in disbelief. “Oh, who am I kidding? I’m fucked. *I lost our baby.* My wife is never going to let me watch my own child by myself ever again.” Nick was spinning out and he needed to pull it together, fast. A glance at the wall clock told him Nadiyah would be home in half an hour. He couldn’t face her if he didn’t succeed in finding the baby.

*Water. I need some water.* He found his way to the bathroom again on shaky legs. He took in his appearance while he let the water run until it was cool enough to snap him out of this. His reflection showed that he very much looked just as distressed as he felt: hair disheveled from the nap and his stress-induced pulling at it, eyes glossy with tears that were dangerously close to spilling over, face pale and flushed at the same time, splotches of pink coloring his cheeks and nose. The t-shirt he wore was wrinkled from wringing it in his hands, and the hairs on his arms all stood straight up.

Nick cupped his hands under the stream from the faucet and splashed his face, then smacked it a few times, not caring about the pain of the action or the mess it made. His chest heaved and stomach

was in knots as he stood frozen in front of the mirror for some time. “I have to call her,” he spoke aloud when he caught his breath.

He walked back into the bedroom as if cement blocks were tied to his legs, each step bringing him closer to his phone, but also to collapse. Taking survey of the state of the room as he walked through the doorway, he swore to himself. “How the hell am I gonna find my phone in this mess?” He asked helplessly. It could be anywhere in the house with the speed at which he conducted his search for his daughter.

Just as he was about to break down in tears of defeat, he heard a car engine in the driveway, two doors opening and closing, then the beep of his wife’s car being locked. He sprinted down the stairs with his heart in his throat, juggling relief and despair until the front door opened and in walked Nadiyah, holding his sweet baby girl who cooed and eagerly reached her pudgy hands to him.

“Oh, thank *god*, he cried, rushing forward to envelope Samira in his arms. His shoulders shook as silent sobs of relief and joy washed over him, and he fell to his knees cradling her. She happily babbled ‘dada’ at first, but then she felt his melancholy and furrowed her brow, smacking his face until he pulled back and looked at her. She rested her soft little hand against his cheek and peered into his eyes, the green mirroring her own.

That simple action helped slow his racing pulse and he was able to take a full, steady breath for the first time in over 30 minutes. “Baby,” he sighed, exhausted. “You’re okay.”

All this time Nadiyah watched dumbfounded. Her gaze darted from him to the state of the living area and what she could see of the kitchen and back. “Of course, she’s okay,” she spoke after he appeared to calm down some. “Nicky... What happened? You look awful.” She knelt and wrapped her arms around him and the baby, soothingly rubbing his back.

He looked up at her, remembering that she was in the room too. “I-I woke up and she wasn’t there. I thought something happened to her. I thought she was gone.” He croaked, feeling the panic start to well up all over again.

“Oh, baby, no,” she cooed, placing a hand on his neck. “I came home early today; I missed her too much. She looked like she had just woken up when I got home and you were still wiped out, so I decided to let you sleep and took her to the park for a little while,” she explained. “I left a note on the nightstand.”

“You did?” He sniffled and swallowed the lump in his throat. Despite his thorough inquest, he missed it.

“Yeah, I did. But I should’ve woken you. Oh god, I knew how tired you were being up with her three nights in a row, how could I expect you to be okay waking to her not being home? I am so, so sorry, love.” She squeezed him tightly and kissed his temple.

He leaned into her, welcoming her consolation. “It’s alright. We’re all safe and here now.” He said it to convince himself more than her.

“No, it’s not. I feel awful putting you through that,” Nadiyah frowned, heart sinking. “I’ll make it up to you, promise. Here, come sit with her, I’ll clean up.”

Nick nodded soberly, carrying Samira to the stripped-down couch and settling into what was left of the cushions. He accepted another sweet, apologetic kiss from his wife, then turned his attention back to his daughter, who was smiling again. “I love you so much, sweet pea,” he told her earnestly. “If you and your mother ever scare daddy like that again I’ll... I’ll...” He couldn’t think of anything, so he simply sighed and repeated his first words. “I love you.”

# To the Woman in The Mirror....

Ashley Thompson

I see you for all you are worth

You are an extraordinary woman inside and out.

I know some days you do not see your worth

All the long hours of work to the hours of studying

From all the late-night shifts to coming home to cook.

But not so much as a thank you in return.

I am here to tell you

**I SEE YOU!**

All those ouches and booboos you kissed to all those PTA meetings you never missed.

Finding time to do school projects but not finding strength to take care of yourself.

To the woman in the mirror who questions if she is loved,

Her curves and stretch marks coming out from nature and time,

Every mole that has developed from bearing a child.

To the woman in the mirror

**YOU MATTER TO ME!**

You are the woman who holds the empire and the foundation to her family

Yet, you choose to see your flaws, mistakes, and put yourself down.

You make sure your children have the latest shoes

but won't make sure to have something for yourself.

To the woman in the mirror I see your constant struggles

Trying to balance being a mother, wife, and friend

Often wondering if you are a good mother because of shows you had to miss.

Can I please tell you...?

**I ADMIRE YOU!**

You are the rock that is strong enough to hold the foundation,  
You are the iron that protects and holds it together,  
And you are the calm when chaos is around.  
To the woman in the mirror,  
Please remember to spend some time on you.  
Without self-love none of this would survive and be concrete  
without you.

# Workday Blues (Dedicated to those in retail)

Ashley Thompson

Oh, the joy you bring to others but the pain you bring to me

Customers getting frustrated

Because they decided to make their drinks extremely picky

Working here from 9-5

Reminds me of doing hardcore jail time

Don't get me wrong I almost always love doing my job

But dreaming of working while I sleep is just simply where I draw the line

Staring at 4 walls full of green

While I'm counting the time, I have left until I am free

Assigned breaks or phone calls and you must make it quick

How is it possible to get my lunch on a 30-minute break?

By the time I take a bite I must rush and take my place

In the workplace we're all doing time

9-5 in this work field.....

Shoot you might as well call it 20 years to life

# Wasn't Enough for You

Ashley Thompson

We weren't enough for you to stay  
Birthdays, Christmas, and your grandchildren births is something you missed  
We reached out for your love, but you showed no remorse.

We begged you for your attention we were your first after all  
But you preferred your new life rather than fixing the damaged you caused  
We weren't enough for you to stay.

Happy moments faded; birthdays were missed  
As you steered into the distance and felt comfort in a family you didn't create  
Resentment soon followed along with depression as we suffered from identity  
issues

They say you're supposed to find love like your fathers  
But how can you if the man who gave your life didn't even bother  
We weren't enough for you to stay.

Wedding vows and happily ever after were never a reality in my eyes  
You gave us the impression you didn't want us you rather them  
We reached for your love, but you showed no remorse.

Grandchildren entering the world unaware of the fact that you exist  
As your children must pick up the pieces as they carry on  
We weren't enough for you to stay  
We reached for your love, but you showed no remorse.

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