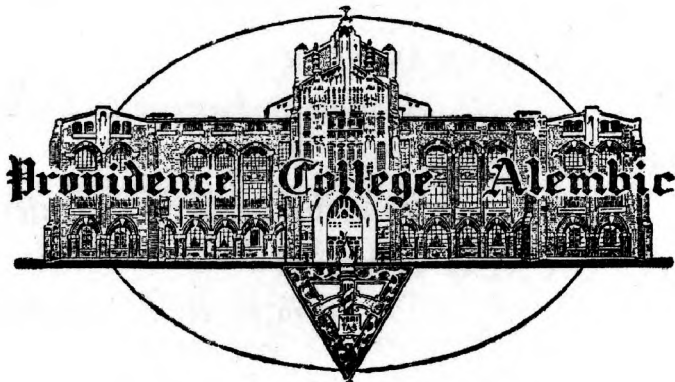


Providence College

The Alembic



2025

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THE ALEMBIC Spring 2025

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Editors' Note

Dear readers,

This year's journal is a diverse mosaic of literary voices, from Providence College students to contributors of an array of backgrounds, ages, and origins. Our goal when crafting *The Alembic 2025* was to showcase student talent alongside writers from across the country. The result is a collection of themes that offers something for everyone: reflections on the natural world, coming-of-age frustrations, meditations on life and loss, and much more. Amidst these poems, short stories, and photographs, it is our hope that you find a piece of yourself.

We want to express our sincere gratitude to everyone that had a role in making the 2025 edition of *The Alembic*. Thank you to the editorial staff, Emily Pittinos, the Department of English, Ana Ramon-Foote, Jessica Rogers-Cerrato, Megan Lessard, Caroline Cooper, Daniel Demmons, and all of the contributors who shared their words and art with us. This journal would not be possible without your support and enthusiasm.

Congratulations to all for your hard work. We hope you enjoy reading this collection as much as we enjoyed putting it together!

Olivia Gleason and Andrew Hilton
Editors-in-Chief

Deathbed Bingo

Jane Lunin Perel

Her body is weighted with stones.

Her calves are invaded by tourniquets of blue eels.

I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine, she whispers into

the Bomb Cyclone. When the power is snapped off, it is only the Bingo Caller pausing

before They read the Winning Number. She's been waiting since the number was reversed:

born premature, she was hauled off into an incubator. Her mother feared she would go blind,
as other neighbors' babies did from too much oxygen. She didn't. If it's not her night,
she'll give more to Guide Dogs for the Blind. Her cough arises like a snake slithering
from a bog. Will she hear the Bingo Caller with roof tiles and chimneys
splaying in the wind? Will the numbers flash in the sky?
As long as she stays in her bed,
there's still a chance
it's Bingo...

The Thief

Ella Bloom

It just doesn't come as easily anymore
Do I sit at the stoop or do I walk through the door
Is it futile to hang onto every last line
How can I be sure that these memories are mine
They unravel gently as I clutch them and run
Who knew that a memory could come undone
Am I meant to feel remorse for these things that I stole
Must I be a thief to make my world seem whole

Often I watched people disappear from view
The places I loved, well, they vanished too
There has to be a method to ensure they all stay
It wasn't enough to know I had today
For what is the present without the past
A meaningless blip that we try to make last
So we swallow some warmth to keep the hunger at bay
We all dip into our pasts when the sun slips away

The thief stands opposing the powers of time
The thief does not believe they have committed any crime
Better to be stolen, or bartered, or lost
A fading memory should not have a cost
I was a thief, but what did I really take
A memory already starting to splinter and break
It is not a trade or a gift or a loan
I steal these memories to make them my own

When the reservoir of memory runs out what can we do
Must we break down all the dams and tear ourselves in two
This is not the way that I choose to hold
Onto the days that are looking more yellow than gold
The thief finds the memories of those they love most

The thief excavates them and holds them so close
What use is a memory to those who seldom care
What use is the windy beach if he cannot remember me there

If time would never allow me to return
I would create my reality from the bridges that I burned
I would start a fire so deep inside
That you could hear it crackling if I opened my mouth wide
And all of the memories stored so neatly in my head
Would be ruined by the smoke of the words I've never said
For the thief that once believed they could make the warmth last
Did nothing more than create kindling for the fire of their past.

Stumbles in the Wind

Maral Sarafian

Stumbling along the path,
Legs trembling as she treads,
Eyes wide and filled with wonder,
The doe keeps moving ahead.

Her hooves find uneven ground,
A raised root, a branch left bare,
But when she falls, without a sound,
She lifts her head, gently, with care.

Each fall a bruise, each step a risk,
Yet she still rises,
Finds her footing, finds her place,
A delicate stumble through shadows,
The doe moves forward, not alone,
Taking with her each lesson, from each she's grown.

Is not the journey all we own—
Each fall, each rise?
Each misstep a lesson, each leap a promise.

With time, she sheds her nervous coat,
Growing taller, wiser, an oak thriving in the quiet woods.

Delicate in her joy,
Finding her path
Through the big world
That is only a small forest.

And though her legs may quiver still,
And doubt may weigh upon her,
She walks, not knowing, yet with will—
The path unfolds beneath her.

Peace Found Here

Charlee O'Hair

Peace,
Like still water
In Silence.

Mountains loom around us
Towering above like a giant,
The water stretches for miles.

Waves lapping quietly against a
Pale blue board,
Rhythmic and cathartic.

Quite cloudy and rainy
Does make today gloomy,
Tranquility makes the day better.

Like helium balloons
Bobbing at a child's birthday party,
The board goes up and down.

I wonder if this peace
Can exist in the busy city,
Far away from mountains.

Any noise could echo for miles here
Yet we sit in awed silence for it, Days
happening here are just perfect.

Groups of three on the lake, My
friends crowd in my heart,
They brave the lake despite their many fears.

At a desk in a dorm
Feeling more alone than I could say, I
Think the peace is too far away.

Can cities have a heart
In the concrete walls, the concrete floors, I
do not feel anything.

Hearts beat within the earth
Telling everyone to commune here,
But a city breathes no life or community

Like a hollow shell, I am alone
In this city, apart from nature,
My loneliness cries out.

Expired

Cindy Tran

That day, my mom and I went to the grocery store. Pick up your feet, she scolded me as I dragged my winter boots through the front entrance. The demand sounded harsher coming from her Vietnamese tongue, but I knew it was just another bad habit I should learn to break.

I stared at the black dotted lines peeking out of my mom's wallet of coupons. I'd been asking for my own pair of scissors, adult scissors. Not the dull kid ones that folded the paper instead of cutting it. I wanted to cut them crisp and proper for her. My mom called the white rectangles "money," even though I knew money was green and had a similar smell to when I scraped my knee.

After my relentless begging, my mom let me sit in the firetruck shopping cart. I drove it tot the pancake mix for breakfast, the beef for dinner, the diapers for my baby sister, and finally to the register.

Did you find everything ok? Said the cashier, an older white woman, her bangles rattling loudly as she moved the items.

Yes. My mom's high cheekbones rose, her eyes nearly closing as she smiled.

It wasn't the smile my mom gives me when I tell her how amazing her food is. Or how pretty she looks in her new dress.

It was the same smile she gave to the man at the post office before she turned to my older sister asking, what did he say?

This coupon is expired, the woman said.

My mom's eyebrows furrowed. The bag of diapers lying on the conveyor belt just doubled in price. Expired? No. It not expired.

The cashier slammed the coupon on the counter, her witchy finger pointing at the date on the "money." Expired, she said.

No, it not expired. I print out yesterday, my mom said.

It was true. I folded that "money" yesterday with my Dora scissors.

Expired.

Expired like my mom's native language in the country she dreamed of raising her family in. Expired like the fierceness I knew my mom had in her, but she didn't want to cause a scene as the "crazy immigrant woman."

Expired.

My mom opened and closed her mouth, like she was searching for the right words which she would have to turn into a language that the woman could understand. And then she would have to speak those words in the language.

I'll throw it out for you, said the woman.

No. My mom hurriedly took back the "money."

It won't work anywhere, the woman shrugged as she bagged the items.

And in response, my mom smiled.

That day, we left the store with an expensive bag of diapers, expired "money" stuffed into the cup holder, and a silent car ride.



In the Mind of a Poet

Sara MacKinnon

In the mind of a poet, a chamber of lexicographers convenes to define love. With great tenderness, they comb through old books and ancient records, famous sonnets and common lullabies. They write down history's most severe cases and pin the pages to the walls. Some cut pictures out from magazines and shape their remains like vision boards, their fingerprints embossed with ink and glue. There's running, skipping, quick-step and slow dance. Whispered confessions and sweet nothings followed by litanies and loud proclamations, belted out ballads and boomboxes. For love buried and unsung, they bear shovels and acoustic guitars, unearth letters from past relationships and notes from their mothers. Sheet music for serenades and odes to joy spill across the table, and the room echoes moonlight sonatas like a concert hall. Some mold love out of clay, use their hands to hold and behold, so sculptures line the room, and the windows are now mosaics, and somehow the ceiling looks like the Sistine Chapel but then, when the light flickers, the roof of your childhood bedroom. You think of your sister, asleep in the bottom bunk, whose soft sighs performed duets with the hum of the ceiling fan. You think of the first time a boy told you they loved you. You think of the first time you said it back and meant it. These are the sorts of things that fill the room when love is etched into every surface, preserved in every nook and cranny. Even when the meeting adjourns, and the prudent retire, the walls sing. The poet listens.

Ode to Old Bay Seasoning

Eleanor Phillips

My mom isn't from Baltimore, but her heart is and so is her crabcake recipe. On Easter and her birthday the kitchen is filled with the familiar smell and she cooks, humming James Taylor. I know if she could she'd follow the trail and the smell and never look back.

We sit out back picking crabs, fingernails and cuts stinging with it. I sit between my father's sister and brother, none of us able to look each other in the eyes longer than grief allows. Beer cans and jokes are speckled red and spiced; the crickets and horses watch from the yard.

The girl I grew up with, once three houses down the street now at a college seven hours south but one I know well; each of our favorite memories sprinkled with it. She cooks me eggs and potatoes, dousing them in my seasoned childhood, one I never imagined she would understand. But she does now, and it pulls our knot to an impossible tightness; it cannot be undone.

My mom's college roommate makes us Bloody Marys along the inlet. The drink is the name of this woman that binds us, as if the whole thing was conspired by the little yellow and blue container with the red pop-off top. I buzz with alcohol and tomato juice as the sun burns my cheeks a matching crimson.

The small side with the holes or the wide opening so you can spoon it out. Whichever I choose depends how much I want the nostalgia and aching for this integral part of me to cake my lungs and blaze my mouth. Smell tortures me with love, grief, times I can recreate but never get back, all without the warning other senses allow.

Resting

Lenore Montanaro

Tonight I'm thinking
that when the moon changes
from a round seashell

to a thin coastline,
it adjusts between
its resting,

and that it's not
fully gone
but only vanished

from sight, a darkness
we may rest in
before we see the new again.

When the Moon Says Hello

Libby Stockton

Every night I gaze upon the radiant moon
I ask Him where you may be, how you are.

A breeze passes by, I feel my heart swoon
Thanks to the moon it's clear you aren't far

As I watch the moon's light pierce through the sky
He makes an unspoken promise that your soul can't die

Your stories and lessons sewn on my heart's seam
Are as infinite and long lasting as the moon's gleam

Clouds pass, yet the moon displays his familiar glow
An angelic aura proving you're here wherever I go.

As the night darkens, and the sky turns to black
The moon doesn't deteriorate in the galaxy
His infinite presence proves our love remains intact
No climate can prevent you watching me gallantly

Death appears to be so everlasting.

An unstoppable fate, hauntingly set in stone
Yet as my sands of time slowly sprinkle down
Every night the moon is above, so I'm never alone
Knowing you're okay lifts my heart from the ground
Forever content, at peace, your soul safe and sound

One day I'll see you again
Together, our happiness shall never end
When future descendants ask where we are
We'll be beside the moon, my dear friend.
Waltzing away beside every bright star

When the Sun Says Goodbye

Libby Stockton

No matter if my day was really bad
Or the suffocating sadness I may feel
There's an antidote that I will always have
To revive my broken heart and allow it to heal

"It's enough for kings and vagabonds to believe the very best"
By simply embracing a beautiful sunset.

She's unapologetically shining in the sky
Kissing her clouds with her golden rays
Causing swirls of pink and red to fly by
And just like that,
I am no longer stuck in my gloomy haze

Through her light I see the ones I've lost
They smile through a light's beam
With a glistening smile waiting to be seen
It's simply impossible not to watch

I thank Mother Nature for this joyous ride
To be blessed with such comfort I happily cry

All my loved ones dance upon the now golden clouds
Until the sun finally goes
And then we are sadly parted yet again
As the dark slowly erodes.

I walk back home and watch the stars
And see their souls take a new form from afar

Once beams of light, have now evolved
Into jewels that light up the dark
Once again, my worries are now resolved

Watching them shine makes life less stark

While they won't ever be in plain sight

How lucky am I

To have the sunset and stars remind me

That they're doing alright

Is This Really You?

Libby Stockton

I walked by the mirror and stared at the girl in my reflection.

Your hair is still dirty blonde,
Your eyes still a rich blue,
Yet, something feels wrong.
My friend, what is wrong with you?

Those immutable features have been the same for years
Except your blue eyes are now drowning in tears

Drops race down her cheek with such ease
Swiftly and elegant, like grass in the breeze
Her defeated gaze starving for a mender,
A silent code, waving a white flag of surrender.

I look at her hand,

I eye her vice-tight grip on that phone.
She was just scrolling for over an hour
Enabling her precious minutes to sour
Starved of attention, stuck scrolling alone

Her newfound dependence to this private little screen
Implements standards beyond tough
Each filtered face and body she has seen
Leaves her to believe she is not enough.

Was this who we were destined to be?
Forever damned by a plague of insecurities,
Addicted to tearing ourselves apart,
Were we destined to become a broken heart?

I imagine my reflection to go back in time
To an age much younger, with a lighter mind

I watch my reflection become fifteen years younger
Her effortless smile resuscitates me like the break of dawn
Not a speck of sadness, I cannot help but wonder...
Where have you been all along?

I watch her jump up and down with joy
And see those tiny hands clap with glee
She seems fascinated as if I were a shiny toy
Almost as if... she's proud of me?

How foolish, as I've grown, I seem to forget
To remember that little girl we once were
Secure with her appearance, not a single regret
Maybe we should just listen to her

So when we look back in the mirror
With the stench of self-hatred lurking nearer,
Our confidence may be under attack
But we revived our light to bring us back

Our inner child, who we unconditionally adore,
can remind us how to think less and live more.

A Beautiful Mess

Libby Stockton

We were all born with a utensil in hand
To paint, or scribble “us” on life’s easel stand

A girl is born, with pen in hand she draws
Years later, those glorious landscapes of achievements
Are now overshadowed by her meadows of alleged flaws

Starving for perfection, so, she denies defeat
Determined to fix her ugly, on this tragic sheet

Her palms ache; trying to revise every mistake
Indefinite revisions, yet her heart still aches

Her smiling became a rarity with the stress this takes

She feels her mural cannot be on display
Until all problems are wiped away

If only she knew

That what makes her mural stand out
Are not the perfect views that shine in the light
What really makes her art worthy, no doubt,
Is every single smudge or crease in sight.

Allow your heart to be light
For the big picture will be alright.

Passenger Seat

Ian Gualtiere

How much longer until we can sleep?
This car ride into the deep,
as the sun hits your hair in the front seat.
Passing trees litter all that moves
yet they stand silent, ever present grooves.
Immortal beings that hold the truths.
How much longer until the beach?
Sand stretching out of our reach
and somehow entering hairs into each.
Impossible to get out, unable to find the one root.
You stand squinting, smiling in a green swimsuit.
The camera captures your cute
forever snapped in that moment.
Your love fills the blue sky so potent,
as the waters rush around with foam and
soaking us to the bone.
With winds whipping like a cyclone,
throwing us away so alone.
How much longer until the color change?
Your beauty knows no range,
even as the leaves fall in exchange
for shorter days and colder nights.
Golden hair such as yours has every right
to flaunt to those passing in the light.

As the sun starts to lose her power,
rays still continue to shower
those who are lost in the hours.
You are my sun, keeping me in the warmth.
Keeping me from wandering north,
back to my cold moon that has formed.
But then I remember that the moon gets his light from the sun,
leaving me and you to be one.
Even far apart they can still help each other to have fun.
Dancing in the sky during night and day,
no one else gets to have a say.
How much longer until the flowers in May?

When the Seasons Change

Ava Spampanato

frost began to melt off the thick icy windows
Crisp droplets of dew trickled down through the gaps
The song of a herring gull echoed through the dawn
As the tiny green sprouts of spring emerged from the melting earth
The bitter wrath of winter had finally passed
And the sun had begun to peek from behind the drab billowing clouds
Stretching out its balmy golden beams painting the sky a shade of
cerulean
A new season had blossomed out of its wintery cocoon
But my heart was left in the crisp breeze of autumn
go find it in the honeycrisp trees that lined the dirt orchard path
Where you once picked me the shiniest apples you could spot
It is hanging amongst the amber colored leaves
That used to fall into our laps with every gust of linen scented wind
Though, the trees had become bare and blossomed again
I am trapped in the warm embrace of fall
Where I watched the sun play off the glow of your strawberry colored
cheeks
And wrapped myself in the warm fabric of your flannel
You came and left with the seasons
But unlike the autumn leaves departing from aged branches of oak
I haven't let you go

Snowy Silence

Ava Spampanato

My friend would tell us stories of her home
Each word painting spectacles
of frosty car windows
and silent snowy mornings that soak up all the sound
She reminisced on the warmth of her breath condensating in the chill
and wind so cold it could take your breath away
She told tales of bustling New York City streets full of silent passer-byers
And fur-lined parkas
She'd laugh about the bad drivers
And rude pedestrians
I'd wonder if she brought a bit of home with her down south
Did the frost from her windows form the ice in her eyes
Or did the snow steal all the words from her lips as well

Just Because You Love

Ava Spampanato

Sea foam caresses your calloused feet like comfort
Your body aching your soul longing
For salty sanctuary subordinate
High tide covers your legs like a sheet
and maternal waves take hold of your torso like a child
Soon your limbs are weightless
Floating in soft pockets of pressure
Salt stings your eyes as you admire spectacles of soft white light
dancing on sea level
Starved for air
your lungs ache with sorrow
But you don't fight back
You can't be drowning
This is what you wanted
As the blackness settles in
and the softness of the sea turns cold
You hear your mother whisper
Just because you love the ocean doesn't mean you have to drown in it

A Sea of Isolation—Inspired by Francis Picabia's *Untitled (Sailboat)*

Nicole Hirt

a lone boat floats
upon the pastel blue ocean,
maroon sail puffed by
an invisible gale.

oars slice into the sea,
their bearer's features indiscernible,
but I like to think
he is no Captain Ahab,
that he is resting,

gazing at the white sun
smothered by smudges of purple clouds
but finding reassurance
that its glow can still bless
his lonely boat.

The Paralian

Nicole Hirt

The old man
lives by the sea
beach grass whisking the boards of his New England cottage

He mans the lighthouse
short, squat, white paint dying
to sickly cream
its bulb flickered out years ago

But he tends to it
ignoring the jeers of teens
and the persistent calls:
“Do you really want to keep this property?”

To all the jibes, prods, and heckles
the old man smiles and climbs
up the stairs
of the lighthouse
guiding the ghosts
of the brumous sea

Anniversary Remembrance for E. and J.

Jennifer Phillips

Your joy was the covenant sun makes with morning
to always be there, scented with honey and rosemary.
Your joy was the white oak on the side of the hill
leaning into a seventh generation, canopy and roots
comprising one cosmic sphere, the golden mean.
Your joy was fresh-pressed oil by the stove and salt on the table
under Saint Euphrosynos with his breath of wild roses.
It rose up and walked through the sudden dark
following limed threads between the stones,
to a harbor throwing back the moon,
its arms out, mountained.
It kept measuring, piecing the colors,
edge needled to edge,
north wind swinging to the west,
a shelter portable, with its devoted angles laid to rights.
It was the woody trunk of the sage-shrub
by the open door and the blue-shuttered window,
ragged, grown split and brittle, but persistent in its wholeness,
casting its last shoot
up from close to the bone, close to the soil.

Turkey Buzzards

Jennifer Phillips

Coming down Monadnock
the whole unmarked sky
a blue ensign of perfect surrender,

and the mountain smaller
than its grand solitude declares,
the journey requires only this:

give attention to where each foot
is placed on the tourist-polished granite scarp.
and the skidding scree.

Low blueberries cosset their clusters of clouded sapphires
under oval leaves like sprays of tears
gold-tipped and bear-ready. These few for me.

I'm always thirsty for the world, ascending
and descending across the giardia-laced streams
pausing to sip the glory of the autumn woods below

and the plain to forever with its small, mortal farms
and bicolor nursery cows nipping the dandelions
and school kids with their unscuffed tablets ready for everything.

Heel and toe, carefully on the gravel,
a butt-slide down a steep stone groove.
Heading downhill is more risky for climbers than we like to think.

Time accelerates and the muscles become less sure,
and impact's a known quantity
we have to keep an eye on.

But when the pair of turkey vultures sweeps by, southward,
those emperors of air, drawn scimitars
cleaving the blue in what must be joy,

stand still and take them in,
your own feet, wherever you are, set in a sure place,
your heart needing to be reminded of flight.

Parents

Richard Dinges, Jr.

Actors without scripts,
they still stalk rooms
I hold in memory,
a small part of their
lives unseen and unheard
in their busy day,
merely another shadow
draped beside cushions
that they notice
as a squeak when
they sit and I leap
into view, now aged
beyond those rooms
they still inhabit
where I keep them,
unable to escape.

Poor Relations

Craig Kurtz

It's that time of year we dread—
when poor relations must be fed;
if only once old Santa Claus
would do something for our in-laws.
It's always a coincidence
they're here when we open presents;
of course they're empty-handed so
their indigence is all on show;
the carriage house that we just built
occasions a new round of guilt;
they notice the new portraits we'd
replaced while theirs have atrophied;
they've cut expenses to the bone
which means they need another loan.
They importune us by the post
to tell us what they need the most;
and if their letters we ignore,
they're sure to show up at the door;
and just in time for dinner, to
regale us tragic tales anew.
Someone from childhood, dimly placed,
who got done wrong, and music faced;
someone who makes the children scared
and makes me sorry I once cared.

They show up in their shabby clothes,
expatiating on their woes;
they objurgate the world and we're
obliged to offer them a beer;
their sad old whingeings never cease
with 'Can I have another piece?';
of course they'd 'hate to be a pill'
but maybe they'll contest the will.
The bathroom sink is full of hairs,
I smell tobacco from upstairs;
of course, 'We never get a break'
and 'One more time for old time's sake';
I'm sure that mother's ring's been hocked—
I want the liquor cabinet locked.
Of course somebody did them wrong,
of course they don't plan to stay long;
we can't have them sleep in the street,
it's just til they get on their feet.
Nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles—
why do they spoil such nice funerals?

The Leisure Class

Craig Kurtz

“Beggars! They are the only people, can boast the benefit of a free state, in the full enjoyment of Liberty, Mirth, and Ease; having all things in common and nothing wanting of Nature’s whole provision within the reach of their desires.” — Richard Brome, *A Jovial Crew*.

We are the leisure class, old chum—
don’t settle to be called a Bum;
a weed by any other name
is nomenclature to reclaim.

The madding bourgeoisie may think
we only live to smoke and drink;
but while they earn their heart attacks,
forsooth, we know how to relax.

The toffs with knickers in a twist
may call us all recidivist;
but ‘tho we’re not so noble-born,
like them, it’s labor that we scorn.

The city sparks abuse us 'tho
to money lenders they all owe;
a bill comes due, they double capes*—
we don't get in those kinds of scrapes.

Our common dolls don't lay on paint
nor do they blush or ever faint;
they don't play coy behind a fan—
they spit out phlegm and shake a can.

Most gentlemen curse the expense
of pulvillio and essence;
equipage always costs a mint—
I'll save my funds to buy a pint.

Gents lose a fortune on Tulips
or bankrupt from Dutch Indies' ships;
but I don't place trust in a bank—
whatever I have owned, I drank.

The cholic and the gout will vex
the Quality of either sex;
we don't need quacks for our problems—
our problems get solved by the Thames.

Come wintertime, a chap may freeze,
come summertime, beware the fleas;
on Sundays, taverns open late—
I can't remember when I ate.

The watch will kick us in our sleep,
we smack our children when they weep;
it ain't for everybody, this—
one dies alone, and scrofulous.

We are the leisure class, old chum—
we idle with refined aplomb;
reformers try to reform us
which shows that they're simply jealous.

Last night was lovely, I dare say,
and in Hyde Park we slept all day;
oh botheration, here's the law—
reproaching us is so bourgeois.
Fie, here we stand in the town square,
in pillories, as townsfolk stare;
we'll prob'ly be here 'til nightfall—
the leisure class for the long haul.

* “In the language of the fast set, doubling a cape meant dodging a creditor, or keeping out of his way.” — Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Illusions*.

Hypochondria

Craig Kurtz

Oh dear, our lady's running late—
it's just like her to make us wait;
I see her right arm's in a sling,
too helpless to do anything;
last week it seemed to me I swore
it was her left arm that was sore.
I see a plaster on her knee
to soothe her latest malady
and crutches, which just goes to show
she suffers from a gouty toe;
here comes the footman to prepare
the proper padding for her chair.

She will inquire how you feel
the better to commence her spiel;
she's read up on the recent cures
to mitigate nervous seizures;
she has a guide to all the spas
which specialize in menopause.

She'll talk to you without reprieve
about ailments you don't believe;
like Madeline Neroni, she's
coquettish despite her disease;*
her vulnerability's designed
to hypnotize the gallant kind.

The menu needs to be replaced
with some fad diet of bean paste;
we'll have to move the furniture—
she's bringing a daybed with her.
Not unlike Mrs. Churchill,** she's
besieged by her infirmities.
Whatever plans we try to make,
she'll quash them with a sick headache;
Her pets are taking boluses
to clear up their bad sinuses;
her servants all have ouchy backs —
like her, they're hypochondriacs.

Our lady had another spell—
somebody fetch the quinine gel;
she wants her doctor on alert
despite the fact that she's not hurt;
does he make house calls late at night?—
it could be a brown recluse bite.
If anyone dares call her out,
she'll do worse than repine or pout;
she'll call for leeches and get bled
to punish us for what we said.
Our lady hopes that her doctor
is dumb enough to marry her.

* Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers*.

** Jane Austen, *Emma*.

Sleeper

Matthew J. Spireng

Over fifty years as I round the curve
where I saw her lying on the shoulder
then—strange place to choose to nap:

first thought—and I see her still
there, as if time were a small thing,
as if today were every day then

and between. With time, she
would be in her sixties now.

The driver of the van? I never

saw him that I recall, though I know
he was there trying to help. He might
still be alive. He might be in his

seventies or eighties. He might still
see her too, just there as he rounded
the curve where she walked, back

to traffic, no chance to swerve. He
did not see her sleeping. He might
still, for a moment, see her alive.

Proud to Call Him a Friend (for Jeff)

Matthew J. Spireng

The friend who abandoned us
when we were walking

in the 2.3-mile race, the friend
who dropped back to walk with

an older man who would have
had to walk the race alone

and would have finished
last if our friend hadn't slowed

at the finish so he instead
would finish last. That friend.

What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

-with apologies to the ghost of Li Po

Jason Ryberg

Yeah, yeah, I know that
it's clearly not one of the
smarter things you could

do with a rowboat
and a body of water
but, at the time, it

just seemed like it was
well within my skillset, my
wheelhouse, my purview,

as some people might
phrase it. I mean, what
could possibly go

wrong with paddling out
to the middle of a lake

with a chilled jug of

unfiltered rice wine

and an old hand-held AM /

FM radio,

tuned to the jazz and

classical station in hopes

that the moon just might

be more easily

persuaded, this time, to come

down and drink with me?

Untied

Jason Ryberg

Waking, once more, in
a rowboat that had somehow
managed to become
untied (yet again) from the
dock, and drifted out to sea.

Carnival Baby

John Grey

Born in a creaking grey hospital bed
overlooking a boisterous carnival,
these contrasts I wear all my life: pale doctor
and laughing clown, snap of umbilical cord
and Ferris wheel spinning a contrail through
the crisp, new Brisbane August winter.

I was gossamer fairy-floss spun on sticks,
pink as the fragile edge of twilight,
yet bright as candied apples.

The barkers cut the howling of infants with
their lush come-on, enticed the crowds into
the sparkling nursery to see the geeks of birth.
And the mob that peered through the window glass
at my raw flesh were a fairground throng,
sisters, aunts, uncles, demanding to be entertained
by a chorus line of miniature life and cuteness.

Those nights I sat inside my mother's bent frame,
I knew noise and explosion of color,
as the sky filled with fireworks,
and I yearned to cry yet soothed on
the sound of soft-spoken words
as I melted into her gentle petals of touch.

And when the taxi came to whisk us
that much further away from the beginning,
the tents were already folding inwards,
rides dismantled, caravans pulling
out of the muddy flats, fortune tellers
flashing me one more smile, each twinkle
of an eye whispering I'd be theirs someday—
just wait.

The Horrors

John Grey

Many years ago,
Saturday night TV—
kids spread across the floor,
old man on the couch,
a curled up lump of liquor snores.

UHF channel
is showing old horror flicks—
a demon, an ogre, a peek
at the pit and pendulum
or Frankenstein fusing disparate
dead parts together making his monster,
or Dracula in transit from Transylvania
to England, dining out on the ship's crew.

Our fidgeting,
our muffled screams,
can't wake the old man.
Same with the growling monsters.
Cackling hags
or blubbering mad scientists
who cuss and threaten
from the television's tiny speakers.

Suitably terrified,
we slip off to bed,
leave the TV to its test patterns.
Yet, next morning, he's the one
who wakes with the shakes.
He sees the devil
and a man-made monster in the mirror.
Fangs are biting
and a blade is swinging near.
There's a troll in his head
and a fiend roiling his stomach.

Oh how we envy him.

Hands

Greg Moglia

Handle brick long enough

your hands grow

the dust embedded

Grandpa's hands

with a coat that clings

cheap labor from Italy

But not his son

his hands blackened

from the newsprint

Night postal clerk

on his ride home

collects newspapers

one generation from dust

to newsprint—father

but less Italian—the hands

Next generation—the sons
schooled and schooled
become professors at N.Y.U.

the sons are Americans
their hands smooth yet
tired from turning pages

the sons will have children
hands almost unseen
only fingers pressing keys

The Last Song

Hanna Boudreau

Nimble, fragile hands work buttons onto the heavy cloth.

The elderly lady rocks carefully back and forth, as the needle pushes in and out.

Her glasses are placed precariously at the tip of her small nose.

Thin lips hum the song “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy.”

Even though it has been decades since last she sang,

Her lungs fill with air,

And she whispers the tune beneath her breath.

Tear drops fall to the beloved cloth, so strong and mighty.

The woman sits back, letting the cushioned rocking chair absorb her feeble body.

Holding the coat of war close to her heart, she smiles oh so sadly.

“I shall see you very soon my love.”

The little woman gracefully rises from her perch, standing on rickety knees.

Shuffling down the short hallway, darkened with nightfall, she hears a voice call for her.

Needle and thread forgotten, limbs creaking with the bed frame,

She climbs into the daisy printed sheets of her bed, holding her husband's jacket ever so tightly.

Her lungs fill with air,

And she closes her eyes, allowing relaxation to overcome her.

“Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy” plays one last time before

The band stops.

Times Tables

Hanna Boudreau

Hatred.

I knew about hatred before I had finished my times tables.

I knew it was a dangerous thing.

A powerful thing.

Something you could not hold.

I knew the word “hate” was very strong and not allowed in the classroom.

We had learned in Math that year; the triangle was the strongest shape.

I knew hate was even stronger though, in all of the many “shapes” it took.

My mother warned me so.

She said the word “hate” is the type of word that if you use too soon,

it will come back to haunt you later.

The type of word with a bite to it, that left your tongue feeling heavy.

I thought it would be best to ignore it entirely.

But it was much harder than I thought.

Nonetheless, I tried not to hate.

Not to hate when my sneakers untied and no one in line would wait for me.

Not to hate when I lost my special, colored pens.

Not to hate when I was so indecisive at recess that I wasted all my play time.

Not to hate the kids who were bullies.

But they shoved the word “hate” down my throat at every chance they got.

By 12 years old I could barely swallow, and it was getting harder to breathe.

I had finished my times tables.

But I hated them.



Turning with the Tides

Lily Spiegel



The Last Adventure

Lily Spiegel



The Silence in Carnival

Lily Spiegel

The Innominate Couple

Lily Spiegel



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fiction poetry photography nonfiction



Dormant as Life Sails By

Devin Sampson



Parting the Tourist Sea

Devin Sampson



Keystone

Devin Sampson

The Absolution on the Mountain Pass

Tyler Donegan

The evening before they saw the fire up on the mountain the patrons of the Red Pine Country Deli sat discussing poor young Joel.

“How about old Joely,” one of them had said, and the drinkers all commenced into a ceremonious lowering and shaking of heads. A fire had been lit against the cold and the snowfall outside and they all held their mugs with gloved hands.

“Somebody ought to do something to help that boy.”

“Why I just did this morning,” Avery Brenn said. “He came in to buy gas. Just to fill up an old can, not the truck, and I said why don’t I buy that gas for you.”

The drinkers nodded their approval.

“I pray for that boy every night,” Miss Anne said. She had stopped wiping the bar. “And the lord knows that to be true.”

“And I helped him dug the grave. Was the least I could’ve done.”

The drinkers raised their mugs to this and drank despite knowing well that digging graves was Henry Eckels’ occupation and that the four-foot plot for Joel’s daughter could not have caused him too much trouble.

A silence gathered as they tasted their beer and cider and set their mugs back on the tabletops. Henry Eckels wiped his upper lip with his jacket sleeve and turned toward Arthur Owens.

“Say, Owens, ain’t you kin to Joel?”

Arthur sat at the bar with the rest of the older folks and turned his head over his shoulder to meet the gleefully accusatory gaze of the

grave digger. He nodded.

“Cousins?” Henry Eckels asked.

“Second cousins.”

“That’s the closest kin old Joely has in town, ain’t it?”

Arthur craned further to survey the room behind him. Everyone was looking, waiting.

“I’m the one gave him my old RV when his old man skipped town way back and they took the cabin from him.”

They still looked, white eyes on dim faces in the firelight.

“It was me gave him that place to sleep when he would’ve had nowhere else. And I told him he was moren welcome to leave the RV there in my yard and come in for a meal when he needed one.”

He wiped his nose and turned back to the bar. When he heard the murmurs of approval he ran the back of his gloved hand over his eyes and forehead and looked into his drink, at the foam swirling, at the reflection in the pale gold and carbonation.

“Course, he ended up taking the RV up to the mountain,” Avery Brenn said.

There were nods, and someone said that’s right, and someone said didn’t he.

“The boy never was too keen on accepting help.”

“It’s true.”

“That’s right.”

Avery Brenn shifted in his seat. “Matter of fact, he didn’t even let me pay for his gas when I offered this morning. I was just trying to be neighborly. He refused.”

A stir was going through the room. “The boy was never too keen on neighbors, either, I suppose,” someone said.

“I wish he’d let us help him. Maybe he’d be alright then.”

“We always told him that girl he’d found was trouble.”

“It really was no shock when she left.”

“Lord knows he was too young to fool around like that, anyway.”

“And lord knows we told him that. I told him myself. You’re still a kid yourself, I said.”

“And he went ahead and had one anyway.”

The room fell into a tangle of speech until Miss Anne concluded, “It’s just one of those things where all you can do is pray.”

Everyone nodded and raised their mugs and some said “Hear hear” and they all drank.

Arthur Owens stood from the bar and walked through the cluster of tipping mugs toward the door. Storm sound swelled when he opened it and the drinkers halted in their celebratory swig to watch it swing closed behind him and after he was surely gone began to discuss the impoliteness of his abrupt departure.

The window lights of the Red Pine were visible from up on the mountain, only distant red flickers on the dark land through the snowfall. Joel walked carefully backwards with the gas can, his boots crunching, and poured a silver line in the fresh snow. He stopped and tipped the can to make one final pool at the end of the trail and set the gas can down beside him and looked at the RV, where the trail led.

He had visited her grave once more after the service, but it

didn't feel like she was there. Now his breath wisped southward out of his mouth with the wind, and he watched it swirl out of the light cast from inside the old RV and into the dark and the snow, down the mountain, toward the Red Pine.

The lighter was in his hand. He had thought about lighting a cigarette and flicking it into the gasoline, but the action felt staged and performative and he felt ashamed for thinking it. He thumbed the lighter open and snapped the flint once, twice, then looked up into the dark sky, the falling snow, and wondered what he was doing and why, wondered what drove his daughter into the world and so swiftly out and why she seemed so much wiser and he could not shake the feeling that she was somewhere, watching, embarrassed and ashamed of her father's outburst. Father, he thought, seemed a strange title. He only exceeded her by seventeen years. Joel struck the flint so the flame caught and dropped it onto the pool of gas at his feet.

Flame leapt from the silver indent in the snow and flashed along the trail into the RV where it bloomed, shattering the windows, glowing the white mountainside orange and illuminating sheets of snowfall in the air. Joel had fallen backward and took his ungloved hand from the snow behind him to block his face from the heat. He shuffled backward and lowered it, slowly, to watch the flame furl about his old home.

He was standing eventually. There was an odd serenity in the destruction. The flame moved calmly, it seemed, and black smoke billowed up into the snowfall above it and metal groaned and leaned as the RV burned and melted and shifted into the ground. His face

glowed orange and there was a red sheen over his eyes. He thought of words, for it seemed fitting to speak now, but when he opened his mouth he had to cover his face with a hand and when he tried to speak again he fell into the snow and couldn't speak or hardly breath for a long time.

When the RV was but glowing metal, he was still lying there in the snow and his breathing had calmed enough for speech. "You were the best thing I ever did," he said, his words still stunted with shaky inhales, and he said it many times until he could say it steadily. Then he rose, and standing there looking at the glowing wreck of his home, with all the ceremony he could muster, said it once more in a flat and serious voice so that it could be heard from heaven.

The snowfall had slowed. When he climbed into his truck and clicked the headlights on the flakes falling through the beams were frail and sparse. The fuel gauge and speedometer put dim orange light on his face in the dark, and he tapped the gauge where the needle teetered near E. He didn't need to go far, he thought. He looked at the smoldering heap in the rearview, then saw his own red eyes and the red rings around them. The truck shifted into gear and rolled away from the remains.

Arthur Owens saw the explosion up on the mountain just after the door to the Red Pine had shut behind him. He stopped halfway across the snowed porch, his hands frozen in the motion of raising his jacket hood. That's where Joel's house is, he thought. The mountain itself was invisible in the dark snowfall, and the fire was a distant orange glow suspended in the sky like the throes of dusk.

The door opened and Arthur Owens turned to see the patrons of the Red Pine stepping out with upturned faces. Some were pressed up against the windows.

“Fire up on the mountain pass,” someone said.

“Say, that’s old Joel’s house.”

They had to speak loudly in the wind and snow. It was cold but they all knew the cold well.

“Ain’t it pretty though.”

Some had gone back in to retrieve their drinks from the tables, and people started wiping snow off the deck chairs and porch railing to sit.

“You all think old Joely’s alright?”

“I pray he is. Ain’t nothing we can do for him at this point.”

A murmur of agreement went through the drinkers. Arthur pulled his hood tight over his hat and stepped off the porch, into the parking lot and out of the light of the Red Pine.

It was slow going up the mountain pass. Joel’s RV was the only house on the road and it was sparsely traveled for it. Arthur Owens’ truck lost traction four times and once sent him gently into the guard rail and each time he considered turning around and leaving. But soon he saw the glow of flame through the trees in the night and kept driving, carefully.

By the time he turned onto the path toward the RV he could see it had been reduced to glowing metal. A pair of headlights clicked on next to the heap. They sat stationary for a moment, and then began rolling toward him. Arthur stopped his own truck and cranked the

window down and leaned out as they approached. The cold stung and he pushed his hood back so his face could be seen and raised a hand when the lights drew just near.

He ain't going to stop, is he, Arthur thought as the lights didn't slow. He was right. They rolled past and Arthur turned to see Joel's blue pickup ambling down the road, the taillights pitching over bumps and illuminating the light snowfall red.

"Cranky bastard," Arthur said. He rolled the window back up. "Hell do I owe him."

He turned the truck back around and drove to the entrance of the path where he stopped with the wheel angled rightward down the mountain pass. He looked left with his foot hovering over the gas and saw the red taillights just for an instant before they turned a corner or were obscured by the snowfall. He sat there for a moment with his hands on the wheel and his breath fogging. He could see the lights of the Red Pine down the mountain.

"Damn," he said, and angled the wheel left.

The mountain pass was long and lonely and led high into the cold of the mountain. It was seldom used nor maintained ever since newer and faster roads had been carved. Joel figured his truck had enough gas to get to the highest point on the road, and once the engine died he figured he could walk the rest of the way to the peak.

His bare hands gripped the cold metal of the steering wheel and the air in his lungs and on his face was cold. The yellow beams from the headlights invigorated him, as if he were intruding on the night of the mountain, as if he were a soldier very far away, and then

he felt embarrassed for the boyish fantasies, reminded that he was young, too young to give a daughter a good life and he felt bad again after the brief excitement. He turned the headlights off and sped up.

Joel didn't end up needing the little gas that was left because he crashed the truck into a guard rail not long after turning the lights off. The truck was going fast enough that it bent the rail and lifted two posts from the ground and the nose hung over the edge of the mountain suspended by the groaning rail and it teetered there like a beast ensnared. Joel had hit his eye on the steering wheel and he wiped it and shook his head and then opened the driver door to see the drop off into the night. I don't really want to die, he thought, and he thought that his eye hurt.

The window separating the cabin from the truck bed could slide open so he opened it and climbed into the bed, the truck shifting with his movements, and then he jumped out of the bed onto the road and turned to look at the red taillights angled upward in the snowfall. He kicked the rear of the truck, but it didn't move. He tried pushing next but that didn't do anything either.

"Have it!" He said.

He pushed again with his shoulder and the cold of the truck stung his hand where it was splayed against the metal and he shoved with his feet slipping against the frozen road but it wouldn't move. Joel didn't stop pushing until he slipped and fell under the truck and he was crying in an angry sort of way, and the tears really hurt his eye and he wanted to stop but couldn't for a long time. It was awfully cold.

Arthur Owens was about to turn around when his headlights fell on the crashed truck up the road.

“Christ,” he said.

He stopped his truck far enough away and started walking towards the crash. The snow was getting high and he had to really lift his feet to walk through the road, and he realized his truck would probably get snowed in if he stayed any longer.

“Joel,” he called up the road.

It’s cold enough to kill up here, he thought. Arthur had stopped walking and he turned to where his truck was stopped in the snow, then back towards the wreck. I’ll just check and then leave, he thought. He knew Joel was probably dead.

There was no one in the truck or near it. The engine was still running and it sat there, tilted and neglected, and it reminded Arthur of an injured horse that had to be shot. He went around the back and saw blood in the snow and a patch of skin on the rear of the truck as if someone had frozen their skin against it and then pulled it free. Footprints and spots of blood led across the road and off it and up the mountainside. Arthur traced the path with his flashlight.

“Damn if it isn’t cold,” he said, and started up the mountain.

The trees were thin and sparse this high up and a swift wind blew through them. It worsened as he went higher, following the footprints, until sheets of snow blew across the ground and made the tracks hard to follow. Arthur’s windward side was soon white, and soon he lost the trail.

“Christ,” he said. It couldn’t even be heard over the wind. “I

am a God-damned fool.”

Arthur noticed his own tracks had begun to blow away behind him, and he tried to scramble after them but fell in the snow. The wind was fast and full of snow that low to the ground and he stood up in a hurry. He hadn't dropped his light and decided that was the last chance God was going to give him to leave Joel behind and get down off the mountain. Before he started walking again he turned up the mountain and shouted, “just know I tried to help you!”

Avery Brenn's weaseled face appeared in his mind.

“Damn it all!” Arthur knelt in the snow with his gloved hands over his tightly hooded head and tried to think rationally, and even though it was rational to stand with the people of the Red Pine, rational to not follow this foolish child down his path of self-destruction, he couldn't change the feeling in his chest and stomach and as he tried to force himself down the mountain that feeling became more torturous than the cold.

“Damn you, Joel!” Arthur rose yelling and striding up the mountain. “Damn you, show yourself! You're a Goddamned fool!” He swept the snowed and howling land with his light and lifted his legs running through the snow up the mountain, and he never stopped shouting.

Arthur didn't see Joel's collapsed and snowblown shape during his mad charge up the mountain and when he tripped over him he thought it was a rock, and stood up to kick it down the mountain in his rage when he saw the brown jacket flap flagging in the wind and a blue bare hand in the snow. He laughed a single, very loud and very

blank laugh as he fell to his knees next to the boy.

“You son of a bitch! You son of a bitch!”

Arthur grabbed the boy under the arms and lifted him and shouted at him to wake the hell up, you miserable son of a bitch. Joel half-consciously moved his legs to stay upright as Arthur dragged him back down the mountain and Arthur was glad for it. He tucked the boy’s bare hands into his jacket and thought: he don’t even got a hat, he don’t even got a hat.

When they came onto the road Arthur was rasping his breaths and his breath tasted like salt and mucus and they were very sharp in his chest. They had come back a little higher up the road than where the truck was and he cursed and began carrying the now completely unconscious Joel over his shoulders like how they taught him in the army. The snow had stopped but Arthur’s truck was snowed in anyway, and it was still running when they reached it and he wrenched the passenger door open and deposited Joel in the seat and then went around the driver’s side. When the door shut, the sound of the wind muted and he could hear each of their breathing.

“By God you’re the most miserable son of a bitch I ever knowed. God I hope you live so I can... Aw, Jesus.” Arthur leaned his head back and clamped a hand over his eyes. “Jesus,” he said.

The engine warmed the car and he put his hat on Joel’s head and put his jacket over him like a blanket. He tried to move the truck but the wheels only spun. The night passed slowly and Arthur never slept and kept listening to Joel’s breathing. When the morning came and Joel seemed warm enough Arthur went out and dug through the

snow on the side of the road for big, flat rocks and when he found one he would wedge it under the front of each tire and hammer it under the tires with a smaller rock.

The wheels caught traction on the rocks and he was able to get the truck moving this way and he turned it back down the road without stopping and whooped and drove through the high snow down the mountain, only getting stuck once more and using the same process to get free. By just before noon he was passing the wreck of Joel's RV and the mountain pass had been plowed up to that point and several cars were parked in the road. People were mulling about the remains and he saw Miss Anne carrying a kettle she had found in the wreckage. Avery Brenn and many others saw his truck coming down the pass and ran up to him. He rolled down the window and looked at them flatly.

"Where you been up there for?" Avery Brenn said.

"By God, that's Joel there, isn't it," someone said.

Miss Anne heard the commotion and hurried over to the window, tucking the kettle under her jacket and saying, "Thank the lord!" when she saw Joel.

Arthur looked at them. "Damn you all," he said, and drove away.

Joel had woken up and was looking at Arthur sideways from the passenger seat. His eye was swollen shut and scabbed red and the other eye was narrowly open, the iris dark and inquisitive. Arthur noticed he was awake and glanced at him before turning back to the road.

“Ain’t you sorry looking,” he said.

Joel turned away to look out the window, leaning his face on the glass. “You can drop me off here,” he said.

Arthur chuckled and Joel looked at him inquisitively.

“You’re coming home with me.”

“Won’t you just let me out.”

Arthur glanced at him again, then adjusted his grip on the wheel.

“You know, when I gave you that RV—”

“I know, I’m an awfully ungrateful son of a bitch, and you’re a real kindred soul for helping me out even that much.”

“No,” Arthur said. He looked serious now. “No. No, that was a cowardly act I did there.”

Joel looked at him with his one questioning eye, still squinted from the swelling.

“When someone been through what you been through. Well. They get a stink to them. And people want away from it. And more than that they want a reason to be away from it. That RV I gave you, that was my reason. I thought it was a good reason. But it wasn’t. And you were right to burn it.”

“That’s not why I burned it,” Joel said.

“It don’t matter why you burned it. I suspect there ain’t much of a concrete reason for it anyway.”

Arthur glanced at Joel, who was looking straight ahead out the windshield at the cold and snowed land.

“What matters is,” Arthur said, and he paused and wiped his

nose with his sleeve. “Well I don’t really know. All I know is that I shouldn’t of gave you that RV and ignored you. And I’m starting to think that following you up into that mountain last night, and dragging you back off it, well I’m starting to think it was the best thing I ever did.”

Joel looked at him with his slitted eye. Arthur didn’t look back. The truck continued down the mountain pass, the road pale and hard in the cold, and somewhere up the road Joel’s truck’s battery died and the headlights went off and it hung there, suspended, until the day Joel and Arthur went back to retrieve it when winter had thawed.

Heaven's Star

Claudia De Luca

Growing up, I always had a cold demeanor. It was funny until it wasn't. My impassive tattooed expression has made an appearance in family photos since the ripe age of four. My driver's license photo looked like a mugshot and my senior photo was a piece of dark twisted art. I had always been comically miserable. I was born into a loving family and was blessed to not struggle with finances. I never had trouble making any friends, I made connections through complaining. Yes, that sounds melancholic, but it really is a great way to bond! Think of how many friendships have blossomed from sentences such as "ugh it is seriously so cold out today," "he's such an ass," "she's a bitch," "he is ridiculous, he just assigns way too much work," "I can never seem to drink enough water," "I'm so bored," and "I'm starving." Seriously, great conversation starters—at least it has always worked for me. Okay, I might be making myself sound too miserable here. Let me describe some of my biggest accomplishments: I drank more than 8 ounces of water today.

I adore animals so much that I made the decision to become a vegetarian in middle school and have never turned back. I have had huskies and Alaskan malamutes my entire life and do not want to live a day without the joyful presence they provide. I am the oldest of three children and the only girl. Double whammy. My younger brothers are angels disguised as devils: they love to act like toughies but are big teddy bears. Although, we have gotten into some serious quarrels. I was a competitive figure skater but quit because I was cast in the shadows of my brother being a hockey prodigy. I also did not have the drive the other girls had. I was very good but did not share the same passion as other girls as they dedicated their lives to the sport.

I've had one solid best friend throughout my entire life, Alaska. She was also always comically miserable. I met Alaska through figure skating. At one of our competitions, the other girls were gossiping about their first kisses while Alaska and I were debating whether *Paper Towns* or *The Fault in Our Stars* was a better novel. We decided they were both better in their own ways. She moved a couple of towns away, but we keep in touch over the phone. I have plenty of friends at my high school, but none are real best friends. It's all a social façade; I'm cool enough to be invited but not cool enough to be

valued as a person. Maybe no one is, high school can be really fucking brutal man. It builds character though; I like to think that all of the mistreatment I have ever endured just makes my jokes even better. Funny people don't outwardly say that they are funny but that is the only reason I have friends. I must be funny if that is my only redeeming quality (this is my way of letting you know that I am hilarious).

What else can I tell you about me? I like to read religiously. Speaking of religion, I am not religious. I envy those who are so hopeful and confident in trusting a being above all. I just cannot get behind the belief that there is a being perched upon all of us who is just watching all the wickedness, death, and cruel suffering from a bird's eye view. I also have seen so many pretentious people use religion as an excuse to discriminate against others and justify poor decisions. I did end up spending some of my time deciding to attack the concepts of faith, hope, and religion. I now understand that sometimes bad things must happen because if they didn't there would be no freewill—this would make God a tyrant and eliminate the gift of human emotions. Obviously, God could never be a tyrant and without the beautifully twisted range of human emotion there would be no art. Human emotion evokes art, we need art, I love art, therefore I must be religious. So basically, without God my senior picture would be merely glanced over rather than admired for the piece of emotionally stirring art it is. Instead of my senior picture being hung on the walls of a museum it will be plastered upon my obituary and funeral program. Obviously, this artwork is going to be studied for years like "At Eternity's Gate" by Van Gogh or "Christinas World" by Andrew Wyeth (if you are unfamiliar with these pieces, you should look them up, they are agonizingly spectacular).

I don't really like watching movies, they are not as mentally stimulating as books. My passion for the arts stems from my experience with profound human emotion. I have always felt everything so deeply despite my stoic demeanor. I make constant comments about complaints and misery, specifically about how exhausting it is to get through the days. Not until now, I wish I could take those comments back. I had always complained about the mundanity of every day. Recently, I found out I have Glioblastoma. The life expectancy of someone with Glioblastoma is around twelve months. I decided not

to undergo chemo, I did not want to be in any further physical pain. The worst pain that I feel is anger, not towards God, not towards my doctors, and not towards my family. My anger is directed towards myself. I had always complained about living and for the first time I had truly wanted to live, my time was cut short. I recently learned the joys of taking the longer way home, appreciating my mother's constant stream of conversation, a stranger's smile, and the precision in each snowflake. Now you should really feel like you have come to know me. Oh, one other major fact about me, I hate birthdays.

January 16th, 2012

At this point, my doctors tell me I have around three weeks left to live. My physical symptoms have increased but I have painkillers and marijuana that seem to be getting me by. I am even moodier than normal, increasingly tired, and cannot eat. My therapist and doctors say it is common for someone with a terminal illness to stop eating, kind of like how dogs go aloof and stop eating when they know their time is about to come. I think my dogs know my time is about to come, I've stopped letting them sleep with me. I don't want them to think I've abandoned them, so I have slowly tried to let them wean off me. Instead, when I wake up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, I find them lying outside my door. Hey, at least I finally lost that weight I've been meaning to lose.

I've learned to appreciate the mundanity I once seethed about daily. Knowing my final days are to come, I have become friendly with my insomnia- not wasting any of my final moments sleeping. However, I would appreciate a little bit of sleep. In these late hours, I take up my newest passion- becoming a pothead. My window is above one of the gables which makes it easy to climb up onto my roof. When it reaches these concerningly late hours, I climb up to my humble abode. I light my bowl, burning the side of my calloused thumb as usual, and admire my surroundings. I sit up and let the haze temporarily numb my physical pain and push my anger aside. I glide my fingers across the shingles, appreciating the ability to feel every groove. Each night I look up into the sky and curiously marvel at the

stars. I yearn for my past self with disappointment. I had never taken an interest in the sky and all it had to provide. It's not like I live in a city where the stars are minuscule and cower in the shadow of pollution. The stars are bold, bright, and strategically scattered. I wonder if I will end up amongst them. God placed them with purpose. The God I once didn't believe in, I now pray to every night. Anger seems to be internally threaded within me nowadays. Of course, I find joy in searching for constellations and observing the stars when I hardly have any time left to do so. Why did I never look at the goddamn stars?

I pull out my bowl and begin to scorch my finger further when suddenly I get the feeling that someone is watching me. I lean forward to poke my head into the window to see if my mom was checking on me.

Nope.

I quickly turn my head behind me and see a boy staring up at me. Wow, being terminally ill must give you a sixth sense. He has dark hair and a mullet. Broad shoulders and, although I am looking down on him, he is very tall. Not that Canadians and Americans are drastically physically different, I can tell he is an American. I assume that he is a hockey player. Not because I am a psychic but from context clues. He is built like one and has the hair for it, but my neighborhood and the surrounding areas are notorious for having American billets live with them during the hockey season. I have had a few stay with my family who were on my brother's teams.

"Looking for me?" I tease.

"What the hell are you doing? It's three in the morning?"

"Showing up to my house then cursing at and questioning ME? Don't curse at me too much or it might turn me on. It's four twenty-two, by the way. What are you doing out this late? Blowing off some steam fueled by your teenage angst?"

I giggle and turn my head back towards the stars.

I hear crunching and labored breathing, as if he is the one dying of cancer, as he is attempting to climb up the roof. Eventually, he makes it, and I pretend not to notice him even when he is right next to me.

I turn over and say to him, “What do you have, athlete’s foot or something?”

Although it is dark, the moon provides enough light for me to see his cheeks flush. “No, I-uh uh left in a hurry.”

“I am not a big fan of socks and shoes either, honestly.”

“Yeah, okay hypocrite.”

I think about taking off my socks and shoes, then realize I am wearing hospital socks with the white rubber X’s. Still, I couldn’t back down. I wiggle my toes to loosen the socks grip from my feet and yank my boots off at full force, each sock successfully attaching to the boot.

“Wow.”

It feels nice to be social, I haven’t had the opportunity to do that in a while. It is refreshing to not be viewed as a symbol of pity. The harsh, brisk, air feels even nicer on my clammy feet. Feelings I will certainly miss.

“Hey, you better not have some sick foot fetish. I’m too tired to fetch my shoes and even more tired to grab a weapon and fend for myself,” I tease.

“I don’t, I just was spacing out, I swear.”

I like that I was making him slightly uncomfortable. At least my inappropriate comedic undertones haven’t deteriorated with the rest of me yet.

“If you had twenty-four hours left to live, what would you do?” I ask.

“I uh I don’t know, twenty-four hours is such short notice.”

“Okay fair. What would you do if you only had two weeks left to live?”

I could tell he was confused but he seemed like he was fighting some demons of his own and would not question my questions.

“Well, I would definitely travel. There are so many places I want to see. I would also spend time with my family and bring my dog with me. Uh... I-uh.. This is hard. I would do as many things as I wanted to, I guess.”

“Like things you have never done before?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“Would you prioritize appearance? What if you lost your luscious flow? What if you got skinny?” I ask.

“I guess it wouldn’t matter. I care about what I look like but if my time was limited, I feel like it would be the least of my worries.”

“Would you have any regrets?” I ask.

No answer.

“Like think about all the mistakes you ever made and all the things you have taken for granted.”

“Thinking about that scares me, I fear so many people live in ignorance of the beauty the world holds around them. I don’t know, this weed has me feeling philosophical.” I say.

I look at him directly, for the first time. He’s handsome, he looks like he could have a painted portrait of him that would hang in a museum. Obviously without his stupid mullet. He has deep green eyes, freckles scattered across his normally sized nose that dance onto his cheeks, and a structured jawline. I can tell I am making him

uncomfortable. His freckles remind me of the stars, so strategically scattered by some inanimate force.

“Why do you think they are spaced apart like that?” I ask. “The stars?” he asks.

“Yeah,” I say.

“Funny enough, I have never really paid much attention to them. Maybe that one to the far left wasn’t invited to the stars on the right-side’s party.” He spoke.

I put my hands up to the sky and try to push the lone star to the others.

“If we try hard enough maybe we can get him invited to the party,” I say.

He laughs and places his hands on top of mine and begins to mimic the motion I made before. His hands are calloused, not from smoking too much weed but from holding a hockey stick I presume, yet soft. I giggle and turn to face him, as I do, he removes his hands from mine and kisses me. Placing one hand in my hair and the other around my waist.

He pauses, “Hey, what would you do if you had twenty-four hours left to live?”

I say something I wouldn’t normally say, “I would invite a strange man with a mullet and foot fetish into my bed.”

Fortune favors the bold right?

He raises an eyebrow but does not think too much of it, as most horny teenage boys wouldn’t after being invited into a girl’s bed.

We crawl through my window and land on my bed. His hand is back in my hair and his other is exploring my body. To my surprise, he is kind and gentle. He may have the best body I’ve ever seen.

“I don’t have a condom.” He spoke.

“That’s okay, I’m on birth control,” I spoke.

I’m not on birth control; a dying girl doesn’t need birth control. My body decided to rapidly kill itself, not even sperm could insert life back into me.

We dance on my comforter, on my sheets, and between my sheets. We stay up for the remainder of the night shooting the shit, not asking each other for personal information but rather philosophical ideologies. I notice the sun peeking in through my window.

“At least now I won’t die a virgin,” I say.

“Oh please, when you get to college guys will be drooling over you. If it wasn’t me, I’m sure there is a long line of guys waiting behind me.”

“I’m sure you want to meet my parents and enjoy breakfast with me, but you have really overstayed your welcome.” I joke.

He smirks and crawls back outside through my window.

The haze from the weed wore off a while ago but the haze from the sex is now wearing off as well.

When you get to college

When you get to college

When you get to college

My first intimate moment was a one-night stand, which I am not even mad about. I’m mad I will only experience intimacy once, not that I should have been fucking people left and right throughout my high school years. But I did want *it* to be special, in a way it was. My first time was also my last time. I was reminiscing before it was even over. I will never get to wear a high school cap and gown, legally become an adult, receive a degree, have a boyfriend, get

legally drunk, experience heartbreak, go to a strip club, get married, watch my parents grow old, or attend a funeral. The only funeral I will attend is my own. What an odd feeling it is to feel nostalgic about something before it even has the chance to happen.

Noel Hope Pierce

Noel Hope Pierce, age 18, of Ottawa Canada passed away on March 1, 2012. She passed away painlessly in Ottawa General Hospital by active euthanasia after courageously battling Glioblastoma.

Noel attended Brookfield High School and had spent a large portion of her life figure skating.

She was a big sister and spent many years on the ice playing pond hockey with her two brothers, she joked she was responsible for their success.

She wanted to become an artist and eventually open her own art studio.

She was an avid reader and occasionally sang at local restaurants.

She was an animal lover and was responsible for continuing the lives of many injured wild animals, rescuing a fox from a raccoon trap once.

She was known for her effortless humor and provided light to many lives.

She leaves behind her mother, Crystal Pierce; her father, Jack Pierce; her brother, Jack Pierce Jr.; her brother, Nicholas Pierce; and her two dogs, Axel and Smokey.

The Last Miller

Eleanor Phillips

The letter lays flat on the table in front of me. My handwriting on it is shaky, reading: “Stephanie Miller 259 South Street, Sydney, Australia.” My mother, her last known address, a country so foreign to me I can’t even imagine why she would choose it. The moth stamp in the corner is my attempt at a real connection, more than the words on the postcard inside. It’s a language she might understand, if it even makes it to her hands.

I pull into Trotter’s to get out of the chill of the afternoon, sun setting over Hillsdale. The crisp, cold air refreshes my lungs despite the ache in my heart. I am desperate for a pint and fries to fix my mood.

It’s dark inside, lit only by candles at each booth, a few at the bar, and the one light dangling over the pool table in the back corner. The muffled conversations and occasional smack of ceramic make for the perfect background noise to my reading. On Wednesdays, the most unfriendly bartender, Tony, is working. His mustache and bushy eyebrows make it hard to read his expression, but I know it’s nothing more than compliance. He reluctantly comes over to the booth I’ve chosen and stands silently. He holds up his pen and notepad, a signal that I can now order.

“A pint and a batch of fries...please,” I say. He raises an eyebrow at the “please” like he didn’t expect it. He shouldn’t, I don’t usually offer him pleasantries. “Just trying to be in the spirit,” I explain, giving him a tight smile. He grunts and retreats behind the bar.

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving. Tony and just about everybody else in this town knows I’ll spend it alone. Little Milly, the youngest girl and now only Miller left in Hillsdale. There always used to be a Miller ranked above me, never leaving me as the one called by our last name. But I find myself the sole bearer, resulting in my fellow townspeople adopting me as the new Miller. Maybe they couldn’t bear to make the change again, having given the nickname to too many before me. So, Milly is close enough

without everyone feeling a mixture of guilt and awkwardness every time they ask me how my garden is doing or if I saw the storm that's supposed to blow in next week. Milly is who I have become ever since Mom fled town five years ago.

Moonlight shines into the pub as the door creaks open, disturbing my thoughts and my reading. I look up to see Opal, the town medium. I quickly slip the letter into my bag before she comes to join me. She loves Trotter's as much as I do, alcohol being the substance that connects her most to the other side, according to her. She slides into my booth, her long skirt flowing against my legs under the table.

"Milly, your aura is dark tonight," she searches deeply into my eyes as she reads me. Her purple nails wave in front of my face, as if she can feel my negative mood like a cloud of cigarette smoke surrounding me. "Is your book disturbing you or did Tony pour you a foamy beer?"

"Hey Opal," I close my book, softening with her presence. "You know my preference for horror novels in no way affects my spiritual energy."

"Oh hush," she teases. "Don't let the winds of the season change the energy you radiate." Her curious and witchy speech no longer fazes me. She waves Tony over and orders herself a beer. We cheers and sip, the bubbles tickling my tongue.

Opal has provided me with advice in all aspects of life, solicited and not, numerous times over the years since my mom left. Who else do you go to when there's no one? My mind drifts to a week after my twenty-third birthday, when I woke up to a note on the counter. It included an address and a few words: *It's time for me to go and you to stay. The moths are calling me.* She had a thing for bugs, catch-

ing them in the yard and around the house, pinning them in volumes that used to line the shelves of our living room. They were about the only things missing when I frantically searched the house that day, trying to find more of an answer to why she would pick up and leave. I've researched moths in Australia, trying to decipher her message. I brought it to Opal once too, and she told me to stop wasting my time on a free spirit that was too lost in the wind to be tied down. I remember my mother wandering in late at night in the few months before she left, avoiding questions about where she had been, neighbors asking me the next day if she was doing alright. I think I've come to understand that she felt like the moths were more like her than I was. The moths are a fluid thing, transforming, willing to spread their wings and move on.

“Let me read your palm dear,” Opal’s voice shakes me back to the table.

“Oh, I don’t know. I’m not sure it has anything good to say,” I reply but she grabs my wrist anyway, turning over my palm to face the wooden ceiling.

“I have a new method I can show you,” she says. She knows she’s done my reading so many times I’m sure to stop believing her soon. My father’s voice echoes in my head: “She may be crazy, but I’d never ignore her readings. She’s got the sense, don’t you forget it.” He was always the kindest to Opal, letting her come over to our house and make predictions on sports games and how quickly spring would come that year, so he knew when to plant his garden. Most people see her as small-town crazy, but my father was friends with her when they were younger, growing up together here in Hillsdale.

Opal picks up the candle on the table and pours the hot wax into my hand. I groan and try to pull away, but she grips me tight so

all I can do is watch the wax harden, flexing my fingers to fight off the pain. Opal changes in these moments when she does readings, as if she really is overcome with the sense. Her eyebrows furrow and her mouth scrunches in a small circle. Her stormy expression draws my attention.

I desperately try to read her face, suddenly itching for whatever she had to say.

“Hmmm, yes, well...oh wow, I guess so yes...” Opal goes on mumbling to herself while I sit anxiously in front of her. I use my left hand to reach awkwardly across myself to take another sip of my beer just to do something.

The beer slides down my throat, tasting flat like I’ve let it sit for too long. I think of my first sip of beer in Trotter’s, when my father took me after dark one night when my mother and brother were out of town. It was empty except for the bartender, and when he went to the back, my father slid the beer across the table. He looked at me and said, “If you want to try, you better sip quick. If he catches you, they’ll never let you here again. And you got a long life of drinking at Trotter’s ahead of you.” Wide eyed and inspired by the risk, I raised the glass to my lips and took a gulp. My first taste of alcohol but not my last. There were countless times after, under the bleachers at football games or around fire pits in the woods with my brother, Miller Jr., and the neighborhood kids. Every crack of a can in those following years brought me to that dangerous and sacred moment, the time my father saw me as a real person.

“When was the last time you thought of your father, Milly?” Opal finally breaks her non-coherence with the question.

“Well, I was thinking of him just now actually. About my first

taste of beer with him here. I was just a kid, but he allowed it. I heard him tell the story to friends afterwards, even though at that moment he made it seem so secret. He always joked that he wanted to be the first guy that bought me a beer,” I smile at the thought. His laugh used to fill every corner of the room he was in.

“I see his smile in the wax. He says there will be a sign,” Opal looks at the cracked puddle in my hand. Whether she really can tell that from the wax or she just knows me well enough to guess I’ve been thinking about family doesn’t matter to me. It’s enough for right now.

“Thank you, Opal,” I assure her as she releases my wrist. She seems far away suddenly, looking out the window to the glow of the streetlight reflecting on the pavement.

“What about your mother, hm?” she says. I look down at my bag sitting next to me. I’m sure she can sense the letter weighing it down.

“You know I can’t help but try to reach out,” I say, removing it and putting it back on the table.

She looks at me for a minute before breaking her silence, asking, “But what has she done to deserve your consideration?” She reaches for the letter and holds it just above the candle between us, letting one edge start to turn black. She doesn’t let the whole thing catch flame, returning it to me with just one charred corner.

“Stop by tomorrow, Milly,” she says as she stands to leave. She taps the table one last time with her shiny nails before creaking open the door and walking into the night.

Junior and I used to sit on Opal’s porch swing in the months after our father’s death, as if being close to the medium could keep

us closer to him. I watch the foam swirl in my glass, trying to translate it like she would do to tea leaves in mugs she brewed for us. Her readings of the leaves might have been guesses in an attempt to cheer us up, saying our father might make it rain tomorrow to show how he missed us. When we woke up the next morning to thunderstorms, we'd splash through the puddles to Opal's house and watch the rain from her porch. That summer I was eleven and Junior was thirteen. But boys grow up fast and it all caught up to him. The second he turned eighteen he left Hillsdale for college and never looked back. The guilt of living outweighed the guilt of leaving, he told me once on the phone. He said he couldn't stand being in a place where every crack in the sidewalk reminded him of the crash he and dad were in, the accident that left one and took the other. I wish I could leave it all behind like Junior, take off like my mother. Yet I stay, tied to Hillsdale, sending postcards to a woman I'm not even sure is still alive, leaving voicemails to my brother who rarely returns the call. I'm the last Miller, the last evidence our family ever made a home out of this small town. The letter still stares back at me from the table. I pick it up, and tear, tear, tear it again until it sits a small pile of shreds in front of me.

A thud at the window shakes me out of my haze and I look up to see three moths dancing in the moonlight. They circle each other and flutter with wide wings, eyes glowing bright. They're so in sync I can't look away, and just as soon as they came, they float away again.

Not Even Past

Michael Washburn

Leaving the arterial road, the Audi pursued a narrower one through a field with dense forests in the distance. The sun was low and the horizon pink. Dietrich's moans had all but ceased by the time the car entered the woods and began to swerve as the road curved right. When the captive on the back seat spoke again, Magda thought Otto might fire the pistol, drenching them all in blood and garb. The captive insisted he was not the person they wanted. The bank had thousands of employees, it was just possible there was a Dietrich Schleier in another division. Or at another bank. They were making a tragic mistake.

Hans, the driver, looked at Magda. He seemed willing to entertain the possibility, however remote, that he, Otto, and Magda had messed up. At this moment Hans looked like a man opening a letter from a lab to find out whether a tumor is malignant.

Once again Magda turned back to gaze at the captive. She studied his dark hair, the bald patch at the crown, the creases of his face. He was in his late sixties but could pass for younger. In her mind she matched the face and hair with those of a fellow she had sat inches from three months before in a sweltering room with the towel that

had hidden her nudity spread out under her. Magda had sat on a row of the staggered bench in the spa's sauna, in a spot that allowed her to take in the banker's features and commit them to memory. Magda did not think Dietrich, who sat with his head down and his eyes shut, sweating off the pounds, even noticed when she entered and took that spot behind him. Ten others were there, six women her age, people came and left all the time. Then three months passed before the "interview" in Dietrich's office in downtown Frankfurt. Just before that encounter, Magda cropped her hair and dyed it blond. Little did the aging man suspect that she was part of a cell studying his moves and routines.

Magda gave Hans a look that could only mean one thing. She saw her boyfriend relax and begin to drive with more confidence.

The trees grew denser and exits from the main road hard to spot unless you knew they were there. At length the Audi made a sharp right, progressed down an even narrower path, and reached its destination. The safehouse was a squat building with a low roof and a padlocked front door. As soon as they got Dietrich inside, the three captors sat him down, still blindfolded, in a wooden chair by a table. Hans drew a wallet from the captive's breast pocket, flipped through

it, and found ID. This was the first thing they should have done, Magda thought. Some revolutionaries.

Otto demanded that he open the briefcase. Dietrich seemed to see the futility of denying who he was. But he claimed that recalling the combination took a sustained mental effort and he was still in shock, his temples throbbing, from Otto's blow to his head on the street before they got him into the car and sped off. The captors looked at one another. A likely story. But Dietrich was not going anywhere. Otto took the briefcase to a spot in the dark interior of the safehouse and set it down. If something valuable was inside, forcing the case open might be unwise.

They were broke, Hans said. Dietrich replied that he could get them cash, but asked to have the briefcase back. Again the captors exchanged looks. There must be something precious in there. Otto laughed bitterly and told Dietrich, no, it doesn't work that way, we do not abduct you and then let you keep your briefcase out of kindness. Open it. Dietrich said he still did not recall the combination but could get them cash and maybe in the meantime it would come to him.

Hans looked at the other two as if to say, let's gut this parasite right here. But he proposed something else. The case would stay

here with Otto while they took Dietrich to get money. Any funny business and Hans would put a hole in Dietrich's forehead. Magda asked whether Hans could be serious. They were going to remove the blindfold and take him around as if he were their uncle. Hans said yes, that was just what he had in mind. The briefcase would be here and Hans would have the gun in his coat. Dietrich would be afraid of never seeing the briefcase again, even more terrified of the Ruger. Magda replied that that was crazy, the briefcase might be just a ruse, Hans must, he simply *must* see how idiotic it was to appear in public with Dietrich.

Bad Homburg was not far. Magda drove while Hans, holding the Ruger in a fold of his jacket, sat on the back seat with Dietrich. She fought to hold back all she wanted to say, that he had endangered the cause, that they should have waited until Dietrich remembered the combination or forced him to recall it and opened the case and then decided what to do.

The Audi arrived in Bad Homburg without incident. It navigated two side roads and pulled up by a cash machine at a gas station. Looking around, Magda realized that one of the thermal spas Dietrich frequented was nearby. It was not the one where she had spied on him,

where her bare flesh had brushed his. She wondered whether Dietrich and his colleagues at the bank had a kidnapping protocol in place. If people abduct you, trick them into bringing you to this cash machine, the police will know what to do. Gazing around again, she saw only a few random pedestrians, a jogger, an elderly woman walking her dog.

Hans rolled down the rear window on his side and ordered Dietrich to go to the cash machine. Magda stared at her boyfriend as if his stupidity defied belief. Dietrich could bolt. He could cry out. He could do a million things. But Hans seemed confident that if Dietrich, near seventy and not in top shape despite frequenting the spas, opted to run, he would not get far.

Magda watched nervously as Dietrich walked up to the cash machine. He spent an unusually long time pressing buttons and re-inserting his card. A young man came out of the gas station, nodded at Dietrich, proceeded to a car at one of the pumps, and got inside. Still Dietrich was not done. Hans muttered under his breath. Magda looked desperately around, knowing any passersby would see her fear.

At last Dietrich ambled back to the car and got inside. Magda turned back to watch as he handed a wad of bills to her boyfriend. Dietrich, calmer now, said he was sorry that took a bit, but he accessed

more than one account so as not to disappoint his captors. As Hans counted the notes, Magda half expected them to blow up in his hands. Finally Hans, looking mildly satisfied, slid the money into a pocket. Hans was happy.

That cash was from his personal savings, Dietrich said. What with his access not just to the bank's money but to offshore accounts, he could get Hans and Magda much more. Just please do not hurt me and let me have the briefcase back, I will get in so much trouble without it, he added. Give it back, take the money, we all walk away.

Hans looked at Magda, perhaps knowing she shared his suspicions, yet expecting her to realize that this plan was sound. That briefcase, whatever it contained, was a bargaining chip. Hans really could not bear to lose it.

You both look famished, Dietrich said. I don't know what revolutionaries eat, if they eat at all, but I'm sure we can do better. Let me take you both out. We will have a nice meal, then bring back something for Otto. That should help morale within your revolutionary unit. Hans accepted the offer. Magda guessed that for all his noisy profession of revolutionary ideals and contempt for bourgeois ways, Hans could consume only so much vegetable stew, stale bread, and

tap water.

The evening was cool and pleasant and the terrace at the best restaurant in town was getting full. All Dietrich had to do was show his face and a young server showed him and his two guests the way to a table. As they sat down, Dietrich ordered a bottle of the most expensive merlot. While pouring the wine for all three of them, he talked of his fondness for the restaurant, which drew people from Frankfurt out to this sleepy town. Hans did not appear to be listening. Magda thought of Otto, back at the safehouse with the briefcase, of Otto's lack of revolutionary awareness. Hans had wanted him in on the plan because, he said, they needed muscle. Most of Otto was sheer muscle and it did not reassure her.

As Magda looked around warily at the other diners, couples and families chatting gaily in the dusk, Dietrich asked in a gentle tone which faction or group was behind his abduction. It was 1992, Baader-Meinhof attacks were rare compared to the 1970s or 1980s.

The captors were to pose the questions and Dietrich to answer them, Hans said. He asked what the banker knew of the suffering, deprivation, and misery of this world. The life of an executive in the continent's financial capital offered zero exposure to any such things.

While Dietrich agreed, he insisted that he had tried, more than Hans and Magda might think, to understand views and perspectives other than this own.

He proceeded to tell them an anecdote. A couple of years earlier he had attended a banking conference in London. It was a tense time. A mob of protestors showed up outside the venue and, when the conference wrapped for the day, trailed some of the attendees to a restaurant much like the one where the three now sat. Dietrich was dining with a Belgian colleague when a youth with a spiked mohawk, wearing a black leather jacket and ripped jeans, came right up to their table and without warning grabbed a hunk of bread off it. The anti-capitalist agitator jammed the bread in his mouth and devoured it, just like an animal, Dietrich said. But this rudeness did not quell Dietrich's curiosity. The executive asked the youth in a polite voice what he disliked about global banking and the actions of Dietrich's bank in particular. Perhaps the youth had views about the sale of securitized assets, or the new technologies streamlining day-to-day banking, or the subject everyone was talking about: the coming unification of Europe and adoption of a single currency. Or maybe it was something else entirely. Dietrich and the Belgian waited politely for the agita-

tor to articulate his position, but the tattooed punk with the mohawk just growled that banks had fucked the world and went off to another table.

Hans asked what was the point of this anecdote, but Magda knew. Dietrich wished to tell them in a gentle way that some critics of capitalism were more eloquent than others. The captive said he really did take an interest in other perspectives, but if Hans and Magna had reasons for not divulging their cause, he understood. Just please do not hurt me or anyone else, Dietrich pled. I can get you more than you've ever dreamed of, just return the briefcase and let me go.

Hans posed an ultimatum. If you even want to think of going on living, tell us what is in that briefcase. We are going to find out, Hans said. I've already told you, Dietrich replied. Now Magda could not suppress an outburst. We're not stupid, she said. If the briefcase really held a bunch of worthless papers, you would be glad to get away with your life and would not keep bringing it up.

Magda felt Hans's hand on her leg. Her boyfriend meant to warn her that she was forgetting herself and was lucky a waiter was not close enough to hear. Dietrich resumed talking, his voice as calm and polite as ever. He said that, with all due respect, Hans and Magda

did not grasp his bank's devotion to social causes or the greater good. Nothing Dietrich had told Magda during that meeting on the fiftieth floor of the tower downtown even slightly exaggerated the institution's efforts to back green energy, fund refugee centers and rehab clinics, promote literacy, offer German lessons and scholarships to at-risk youths, help lay the groundwork for an era of prosperity and cooperation when the terms of the European Union became final next year.

Hans interrupted Dietrich. He asked what Dietrich knew about a young man named Lars Uhland who worked at the bank. Dietrich said of course he knew that name! An analyst in the investment banking division who had turned up dead in a run-down area of Frankfurt near the train station just the year before. What a tragic case. Who were the murderers, Hans wanted to know. A pair of Moroccan immigrants, Dietrich answered. But surely a positive identification would have made the news, and Hans recalled nothing about two Moroccans killing a young banker. Dietrich said the police investigation had not wrapped up.

A waiter came up to the table with their entrées, smiled, left. Then something happened that made Magda's heart stop. A woman

and her thirteen-year-old daughter approached the table and said hello to Dietrich. The executive raised his glass, greeted them by name, and said he had taken two young assistants from the bank out to dinner. If Frieda and Anja found anything odd about the ratty clothes and wary manner of these two putative assistants at the most powerful financial institution on the continent, they did not show it. Then Dietrich, Magda, and Hans were alone again.

Between sips of wine, Dietrich said he thought he was beginning to feel the stirrings of Stockholm syndrome. That's when you form a bond with your abductors. Hans reacted with annoyance. You will not get our guard down, he said with a cold look. Forget it. And your answer about Lars Uhland does not begin to put the matter to rest. He was on to something at the bank, people whispered. Dietrich said maybe that kid was a latent whistleblower. What happened was tragic but the truth would come out sooner or later.

As Dietrich poured more wine all around, Hans said in a firm voice that neither he nor Magda would have another sip. Perhaps Dietrich thought he was clever, trying to get them drunk. Dietrich gave a sad smile and said he was sorry, he thought they were beginning to enjoy themselves, as he was. People at tables all around chattered, it

was a nice evening, and Magda had to admit to herself that she had all but forgotten Hans had a pistol tucked inside his jacket and might need to use it.

Hans felt Dietrich had gotten too cozy and it was time to remind him that he was not a dinner date but a hostage. He gestured at Magda's purse. She opened the zipper and pulled out a snapshot. Though not an original, just a photo of a photo, it offered a crisp image of a younger Dietrich in uniform, striking a martial pose. There was no mistaking the horrific symbol on his armband.

Gazing at the image with distaste, Dietrich said every man of his age had been in the war. But you have denied your past, Magda said. You claim to have worked in a branch of the bank in a town down near the Swiss border. You thought that all records of the building got incinerated in a fire, but we happen to know that a bakery occupied that building during the years in question. You never worked for a bank in the provinces, you were fighting on the Russian front and committing atrocities, your friends in the party got you a job at the bank and hid your past from the journalists and the tribunals. If there were any justice in the world, you would have gotten a death sentence at Nuremberg, Magda said.

Dietrich's air of breezy confidence was gone, yet he retained an air of knowing far more than his abductors. Though they could end his life any moment, he was the adult here. Or so Magda read his attitude. Dietrich said he knew who had the upper hand and he merely asked that they not do anything drastic and irreversible without at least allowing him to share some facts. He told Hans and Magda they were far from drunk. If you do not want a nightcap, at least let me treat you both to dessert, the banker urged.

To Magda's dismay, her boyfriend agreed. Dietrich would share what he wished to share, then they would talk about getting some real money and about a list of twenty-six people whom Hans and Magda wanted sprung from jail.

Dietrich smiled. Certainly, he said. The one thing about this restaurant that falls short is the desserts. Let's go for a short drive. Minutes later they were back in the Audi. Following Dietrich's instructions, Magda drove the car up the street before making a left and driving west, then north again, then further west. The car came to rest in a lot outside a dark and imposing structure. In the darkness it would have been hard to identify without the orange flames in every window. It was a castle.

On entering, Magda saw that the ancient building operated these days as a hotel. On every wall of the first floor hung a portrait Magda could never have afforded. They were mostly rural scenes, of hunting parties or dogs and lakes or fields and windmills or boys and girls carrying baskets. Torches adorned the walls at intervals, adding to the Gothic feel of the place. At the broad bronze desk in the middle of the lobby, a clerk spoke in a patient voice to an elderly couple. Dietrich led Hans and Magda to the lounge off to the right of the desk. A dapper waiter in a scarlet suit appeared, and Dietrich ordered a brandy and a pack of cigarettes. Hans and Magda asked for coffee, because it might have seemed odd not to order something. Magda gazed into the dark depths on either side of the front desk and wondered what you would find down those ways. Ten meters from where they sat, a tall staircase led off to still more mysteries, its upper reaches lost in dark.

With his drink in hand, Dietrich leaned back in his seat, crossed his legs, and resumed something of the air of a toff entertaining guests. He said he had to lie about a few of the details of what happened during the war. It was only for the purpose of finding employment and helping to make everyone's life better at the dawn of the postwar age. And he doubted Hans or Magda would deny that

the prosperity of Germany and most of Europe since the war had no parallels in history. Just look at the surroundings. Here life was so pleasant. His gaze lingered on Magda a bit too long, giving rise to a disturbing sense that the captive fancied her, imagined time alone with her.

On seeing Dietrich, a fiftyish man in an elegant dark suit and crimson tie came over to shake hands. He did not ask about the two young members of the little party, perhaps on the understanding that when people brought guests here, questions were an impertinence. When the stranger had vanished into the nether depths of the vast lobby, Magda opened up again. She said Dietrich did not know the loathing and revulsion he had aroused in her. His lies were pure evil. Dietrich's eyebrows rose a bit at this vituperation. Hans nodded encouragingly.

That photo was not the only thing she had in her purse, Magda said. Dietrich set his drink down and put out his cigarette. He leaned forward. She pulled out what looked, at first glance, like a plain page with a neatly typed list and a few names at the top next to a stamp of that hideous symbol, the swastika. Looking Dietrich in the eye, Magda said he knew exactly what she held in her hand. Dietrich stared,

squinted as if the quality of the light here were the impediment, then shook his head. Hans said Dietrich had lied to them enough for one night, he knew quite well what Magda had presented, it was an execution order he had signed with a view to ridding the world of forty-five residents of a Belarusian town whom Dietrich did not trust not to subvert the occupation.

Dietrich was ready to preempt any such suggestion almost before it left his captors' mouths. He said that the document was forgery, of the kind that people these days produced on the cheap with copy machines and the nascent internet, he could prove it was fake, refute all the other suspicions, if they just gave him a chance.

Hans replied in the same cold voice he had used when the suspicion came that Dietrich meant to get them drunk. Dietrich's answer was what they had expected. He did not want to kill Dietrich here and now and make a huge mess in the lobby of the hotel, he hoped to avoid it, so Dietrich better give them the combination to the briefcase right now. With a look of contempt and condescension, as if he could not believe the stern moralism of these two revolutionaries, Dietrich gave it up.

As he resumed the air of a toff, drinking and smoking in these

refined quarters, Magda could not help thinking of the analyst, Lars Uhland, whose fate Dietrich had barely bothered to try to account for. Placing blame for the murder on a pair of Moroccans was just another racist lie. Magda had a vision of that young investment banker sitting in his office one night, in the grip of a curiosity no one had permission to feel, studying figures on a screen that traced the flow of money on the orders of Goebbels himself from Česká banka Union, a Czech bank absorbed by the German conglomerate during the height of the Reich's expansionism, into the coffers of the larger entity, the movement of funds from the accounts of dozens of small, regional banks in the towns and villages inside the ever-expanding parameters of the racist state, the diversion of all the resources of citizens of every race and creed and religion and spiritual orientation to the bank that Dietrich Schleier would help lead to global prominence under a guise of saving humanity and the world from their basest and most tribal tendencies. Lars Uhland sat in front of his monitor a bit too late into the night, he did a little too much research into the provenance of funds that the bank had acquired and parlayed into ever greater fortunes. Then he turned up dead outside the train station in the seediest part of the ugly, forward-looking city.

Dietrich was oblivious to all her tortured thoughts. He leaned back still further into his comfortable chair, sipped his brandy, and once again gave Magda a look to which she guessed he would subject many women at the bank if he could get away with it. They were having fun on his tab, the night belonged to Dietrich, his status as a captive mattered not a bit. She looked at Hans. He looked at her. They had the combination, Dietrich had wined and dined them enough, the softening up was supposed to go only one way. Or so she assumed.

Around them in the vastness of the lobby, stillness did not prevail. It was hard to see far in the dimness outside the penumbras of the lamps adorning the walls at intervals, but, straining her eyes, Magda thought she made out a figure at the top of the steep staircase off to one side of the front desk. A tall man with a trim figure stood there in the unmistakable uniform of an *Obergruppenführer*, looking down at the lobby and everyone in it. Magda could not hide the disgust and horror that rose inside her as she pointed out the monstrosity to Hans and Dietrich. The latter laughed and said that she must not take the apparition too seriously, this castle for obvious reasons was a popular venue for historical reenactors. People get some drink in them late at night, they dress up and have a little fun, said the banker. On hearing

these words, Magda wished her boyfriend would shoot Dietrich in the head here and now, consequences be damned.

Hans had no more tolerance than Magda for the banker's sick buffoonery. He threatened to end Dietrich's life on the spot if the banker did not get up and precede them out of this hellish place. When Dietrich rose, Magda thought he would call out to the Nazi at the top of the stairs, but he dropped a few bills on the table indifferently. Soon they were back in the Audi, surging down a road that led to one of the arterial routes out of Bad Homburg, into the dark forbidding woods.

As Magda drove, Hans cursed Dietrich and threatened several times to shoot him. But the banker seemed imperturbable now, and that made Magda all the more anxious, she felt sure this was the last drive of her life.

When they got back to the safehouse, Otto was watching a small television and drinking beer. Hans asked Magda what she would like to do and whether she was tired, and she said yes, now that he mentioned it, she felt more exhausted than she ever had in her life. In that case she must lie down, Hans said. He and Otto would take turns watching the captive as he worked on his list of demands to Bonn

and Washington. Luckily for Magda, the safehouse had one mattress, grimy and torn. She lay down, in her clothes, and fell asleep.

A blast befitting the earth's collision with an asteroid awoke her. But the planet had not veered into the course of another hunk of rock. Her boyfriend lay face up on the ground, a red puddle expanding fast from a point in his scalp she could not see from this angle. Directly before her stood Dietrich, his briefcase on the safehouse's one table, the Ruger in his right hand. His sneer was more contemptuous, more feral, than any look she had received in her life. Dietrich said that she and Hans really could have done better than to hire Otto, who was not a revolutionary at all, who was to provide muscle but had proven weak and stupid and cowardly and all too susceptible to the lure of easy money. Watching the banker's grinning visage in horror, Magda knew what had happened. Dietrich had not given Hans all the money he withdrew in Bad Homburg. He had offered a wad of cash to Otto in return for the gun and never seeing him again. Otto had run off. Then the banker had calmly shot her boyfriend.

Now the only question was what he would do with her. She told him he had the briefcase and he could honor the agreement he had proposed. Everyone walks away. Though that idea had not lost all

appeal, Dietrich said, he felt entitled to have a bit of fun with her first.

Magda felt the way she had when eating too much of something made her wonder how she could ever have liked it. The nausea was hot, throbbing, near debilitating. She thought she might pass out, but now as Dietrich gazed at her she noticed something odd in her peripheral vision. A flutter of the fingers on one hand of the prone form.

Hans was alive and communicating a message to her.

Magda decided to offer Dietrich what he craved. With slow moves, artfully fostering anticipation, she removed her shoes and socks, then her blouse, then her undershirt, then her tattered black pants. As she did so, Dietrich leered, leaning closer, forgetting the briefcase, even setting down the Ruger on the table beside it.

Now she reached for her panties and played with the band a bit. Dietrich would have her, would gratify the longings that had kept his gaze on her through the evening. Oh, yes. He reached down and slowly began to touch himself. Just as he did so, Hans sprang up, and to Dietrich's astonishment and horror reached for the Ruger. The banker grabbed the young man's throat with both hands and they began kicking and pushing and screaming. The gun went off, a cannon blast, then Dietrich toppled backward with a crater in his blue design-

er shirt. Hans turned to face her, murmured something she could not hear, fell to his knees, collapsed face down in the blood.

Dietrich still breathed.

Magda walked to the table and flipped open the briefcase. In it lay a stack of loan applications on which Dietrich had signed off not ten hours before, allocating money for operatives scattered throughout every province and region and city and town of what they believed to be a subjugated nation. These Nazi cells would coalesce into full-blown political parties when they had the funds they needed to achieve the maximum appeal, the optimal reach, throughout the length and breadth of this land. The long-dormant force that people glimpsed here and there and attributed to drunken antics would rise, if Dietrich Schleier got his way. Magda grabbed the Ruger.

Beyond the Lens

Riley Londraville

Inspired by “The Stranger in the Photo is Me” by Donald M. Murray

A picture is supposedly worth a thousand words, but how many words is a memory?

There is something magical about finding those angles the sun reaches flawlessly, reflecting crystallized rays of light off of a lake, or transforming a person’s chocolate-brown eyes into an entrancing gold. I flip the camera upside down and bring the lens as close to the dirt as possible, just to get a glimpse of an ant’s perspective. Perspective. That’s what photography is all about. Capturing life’s beautifully unique moments with the click of a button, the sound of a shutter, the blink of an eye.

There’s an image hung on the wall of my home office. The girl in the photograph wears a smile—though small, it’s genuine, directed at the man peering through the lens who had previously placed his scarf loosely around her neck; she felt proud to be wearing something of his. The man was, and still is, her uncle. Just before this, she had woken to the smell of crepes wafting through the air making her feel nostalgic, despite her young age—perhaps a reflection of her old-soul personality the adults in her life always told her she exuded. The windows were cracked inviting the tiniest breeze to send shivers up the young girl’s spine. She craved warmth and, as if he had read her mind, her uncle wrapped her in his scarf. She turned to notice her reflection in the distorted glass door panes behind her; they agreed: she looked adorable. That’s when the camera captured the photo, but he captured her warm glow. He was blessed with an eye for photography, and she looked up to him for his unique perspective.

This photo isn’t his best; however, it’s perfectly imperfect, for sometimes the perfect photo stands as merely a reminder of a memory, a feeling. My uncle made me fall in love with photography, filling my camera roll with thousands upon thousands of moments in time, even giving to me my first—and only—real camera. From him,

I learned to climb high, turn around, and do whatever it takes to find a different view: a perspective most would miss if they didn't care to look.

Images try, but can never compare to beauty as it is seen, with real eyes, in real time: raw. A few days ago I was driving over a bridge, my boyfriend at the wheel. I looked to my left over the railing of the bridge to see the moon larger than I had ever remembered. It was a full moon, in Virgo to be more specific. My eyes never left the moon until it ducked beneath the dense trees. I felt loss, almost grief as though I hadn't appreciated the moment enough; we turned around. Pulled over on the bridge, I observed the way the orange glow reflected over the surface of the water and drops of moonlight danced over the dam. The view was perfect. While the moon was the focus of the photo, I wanted everything: the rippling water, the building sitting afloat, even the soft streetlight competing with that of the moon. However, my camera didn't give the scenery the justice it rightfully deserved. I tried everything: zooming in and out, moving the exposure up and down, changing the contrast brighter and darker. Nothing worked. So I put the lens down and we sat in silence, in awe of the beauty before us, and the moment we created.

It is said that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, and while that may be, I believe it's more common than people think. These photos I take are not ideal, but are unique reminders of a time I lived. Without stopping to take in the scenery through a different perspective, appreciation is lost for the moment itself, the moment that holds the beauty, the moment that may never be appreciated again.

Not Your Average Princess

Madison Hogardt

Headnote:

My biography of Carrie Fisher, titled *Not Your Average Princess*, would cover her life from birth to death. It would start with her childhood, being born into fame, and go into depth regarding her relationship with her famous mother Debbie Reynolds, as well as touch on her lack of a fatherly figure throughout Fisher's early years as her mother went in and out of relationships. After landing her breakout role in *Star Wars* as Princess Leia, the biography would transition to her life post-fame as she continued to film the *Star Wars* franchise, as well as acted in other roles. A topic that would be touched upon during these years is the secret affair Fisher had with her co-star Harrison Ford. The biography would also touch on some darker topics like Fisher's struggle with bipolar disorder and substance abuse, her stints of sobriety and relapses, as well as the topic of being sexualized as a woman in Hollywood at a young age. Fisher was also a well-known author, writing not just a memoir, but other books and plays based on her life that would be brought into the biography for the parts focused on the later years of her life. This specific chapter focuses on the affair mentioned earlier and would be placed towards the beginning of the book, post-childhood, and family life growing up, but before full adulthood. Previous to this chapter, Fisher has auditioned and landed the role in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, directed by George Lucas, and details on this would have been explained.

Chapter 4: An Affair to Remember

Fisher had done it. She had landed the role in a big blockbuster film, one that would define her career for years to come, yet she found herself wondering, why me? Why had she, this naïve and insecure girl, won the role of the brave and witty princess? What did they see in her? All Fisher saw in herself was a 19-year-old girl with a baby face, never having outgrown her young appearance, filled with self-loathing¹. And maybe it was this sense of teenage insecurity and angst that led to Carrie's mindset of going into Star Wars with the goal of having an affair.

The word "affair" for Fisher was a triggering one, as she lost her own father to a woman she refers to as an "adulteress"². This "adulteress" was none other than the beautiful Elizabeth Taylor. At only eighteen months Fisher and her two-month-old brother lost their father to the "good friend" of their mother's. Eddie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds, the couple that was once referred to as "America's Sweethearts", were no more, leaving Reynolds to take care of her two young children on her own. Carrie knew the background around why

1 Simon Hattenstone, "Carrie Fisher on Harrison Ford: 'I Love Him. I'll Always Feel Something for Him,'" *The Guardian*, November 20, 2016.

2 Fisher, Carrie. "Carrison." Essay. In *The Princess Diarist*. New York, New York: Penguin Random House, 2016

she grew up fatherless which is why when she went into Hollywood looking to have a love affair, she knew she was not “going to include married guys”. The last thing Fisher wanted was for another woman to go through what she and her mother had gone through being on the “clueless end of infidelity” (Fisher, 78). Yet how Fisher was going to achieve this goal she did not know since when it came to the opposite sex, Fisher described herself as “extremely insecure, especially around men” (Hattenstone, Fisher on Harrison Ford). The answer was found in her negative mindset. Ever since she was a young girl, fifteen or sixteen, Carrie had decided that she was not going to find success when it came to relationships with men, so why not embrace it? She looked to her mother’s own trouble when it came to her father and past stepfathers, none of which stuck. Fisher felt she knew the future had been set for her and it was up to her to now fulfill the prophecy. So, she faked it until she made it. She went into Hollywood with this aura of confidence, describing herself as a “nonchalant citizen of the weary part of the world” (Fisher, 74). Even though this world was new to her, the almost adult acted like she had been there, done that, not only when it came to the acting world, but also the relationship world. In reality, Carrie was as inexperienced as the common 19-year-

old, if not more. However, this facade of confidence might just be the reason she ended up grabbing the attention of her much older, and married co-star.

At the time of filming in 1977, Harrison Ford was on the up and up. At thirty-three years of age, he had already done some minor film roles and was semi-known in the film industry. He was married to his college sweetheart, Mary Marquardt, a chef who heavily supported her husband in his pursuit of stardom. The couple shared two young boys together, Benjamin and Willard³. Carrie found herself drawn to her handsome co-star but never dared to think about pursuing him. Not only was he married, but he was also almost fifteen years her senior. When writing about Ford in her diaries at the time, she remembers him as “far too old [for her]” and that there were plenty of unmarried, and younger, men she could pick from (Fisher, 78). During an NPR interview back in 2016 Fisher said that she “didn’t even have the nerve to have a crush on [Ford]”⁴. She found him incredibly “intimidating” (Fisher, 79) and wrote in her memoir that “One of the things I knew when Harrison and I met was that nothing of a roman-

³ Celebritydecks, “Mary Marquardt Biography: All about Harrison Ford’s First Wife,” Medium, March 1, 2024.

⁴ Terry Gross, Carrie Fisher Opens Up About “Star Wars,” The Gold Bikini And Her On-Set Affair, other, 2016

tic nature would happen” (Fisher, 78). Or so Fisher thought. Until one fateful night, when things turned for the better, or for the worse, depending on how one chose to look at it.

On one of the first Fridays of filming, nineteen-year-old Carrie finds herself lost in a sea of crew and co-stars at the director, George Lucas’, birthday party. Not only did she feel so out of place because she believed she didn’t deserve the role, but because she was one of the only women in attendance. As one of the only female characters in the movie, this was to be expected, but it still came as quite a shock to the insecure teenager. She remembers drifting through the party, as she “tried to look as unconcerned...adding a smile to the mix in order to make it easier for the people there to like [her] and not wonder why [she], of all people, had been cast in the role of the rather daunting princess” (Fisher, 84). She proceeded to come across crew, pretending to remember the name of these older men who certainly knew who she was, as she nursed her warm coke. While others might have found an alcoholic beverage their saving grace in an awkward situation like this, Carrie hated the way alcohol made her feel, hence the warm coke she sipped on throughout forced conversations. As more and more crew filed in, it wasn’t long before the sea became an ocean and

Carrie was a lone fish surrounded by sharks. Suddenly predator found prey as two of the assistant directors started teasing Fisher, announcing to the rest of the crew that they had found their “little princess without her buns” (Fisher, 87). As they continued to tease her, trying to convince her to grab a drink from the bar, while simultaneously hitting on her, Fisher eventually gave into their little game of what she now refers to as “get Leia legless” (Fisher, 87). As she started to drink, fighting past the disgusting taste of what she could only assume was wine, Carrie found herself fitting in. Suddenly everything she said was funny to these burly, sweaty men, and the talking came so naturally. Her fake confidence had almost become real. However, this innocent game took a turn for the worse when suddenly the men started to usher Fisher out of the party claiming she needed “to get some air” (Fisher, 91). Luckily for Fisher, or unluckily the way it is spun, her on-screen love interest came to her rescue in true cinemaesque fashion. Ford intercepted the men as they tried to drag a wine-drunk Carrie out to what she could only describe as “wherever movie crews take young actresses when they want to establish that the actress belongs to them” (Fisher, 90). After a quick scuffle between the men over the young actress, Fisher found herself in the back of Ford’s studio car

on her way to London. It was in this backseat that the nineteen-year-old began an affair with her married, and significantly older co-star. She remembers that Harrison made the first move, starting the make-out session, something Carrie would have never dreamed of doing. Yet, suddenly there she was, doing exactly what she had sworn she wouldn't do, getting involved with a married man (Fisher, 97). During an interview with the Today show, Carrie recalls the incident saying, "I didn't make the first move, no....I was tipsy and I was surprised"⁵. This brings up the question, while Ford may have rescued her from the crew, how much saving can he truly be accredited with?

The best way to describe what ensured is, as Carrie herself put it, "a three-month one- night stand". What many fans of the Star Wars franchise might have believed to be a dream pairing, was in reality, unrequited love. "It was Han and Leia during the week, and Carrie and Harrison during the weekend", she says (Dawn, I was so Insecure). When thinking back on the scandal forty years later, Fisher considers the whole ordeal as "unreciprocated love" (Hattenstone, Fisher on Harrison Ford). The young star was "infatuated" with Ford and believes she eventually fell in love with him, but claims that on

5 Rande Dawn, "'I Was so Insecure': Carrie Fisher Opens up about Harrison Ford Affair," TODAY.com, November 21, 2016

Ford's list of priorities, she was no higher than number fifteen, while she had always placed him as her number one⁶. She describes her mindset during the whole experience as "obsessive, and self-obsessed, and confused" as she tried to come to terms with becoming famous while concurrently hiding an affair with her equally famous co-star. This one-sided relationship only furthered a sense of insecurity in the young actress. She acknowledges that the whole situation and knowing "that Ford did not really care for her" did not help her insecurity issues. In her diary, she wrote "We have no feeling for one another. We lie buried together during the night and hunt each other by day... How can a thing that doesn't seem to be happening come to an end?" (Gross, *On Set Affair*), hinting that she knew this fantasy was not as perfect as it may have seemed on the surface. In her mind, she said the affair "didn't make [her] feel that much better about [herself]" like she might have thought, yet "in a way it did...Because he'd chosen me" (Hattenstone, *Fisher on Harrison Ford*). In the same way that Carrie had questioned why she had been chosen for the acclaimed role as princess, she found herself wondering why Ford had chosen her to kiss. She was full of "self-doubt"⁷ and could not believe that someone

6 Lia Beck, "Carrie Fisher Called Harrison Ford Affair a 'Three-Month One-Night Stand,'" *Best Life*, April 27, 2023.

7 Randee Dawn, "'I Was so Insecure': Carrie Fisher Opens up about Harrison Ford Affair," [TODAY.com](https://www.today.com/celebrity/i-was-so-insecure-carrie-fisher-opens-up-about-harrison-ford-affair), November 21, 2016

as handsome and mature as Ford had picked her. Carrie claims she was “shocked by the fact that he fancied [her] (Hattenstone, Fisher on Harrison Ford) and often questioned herself wondering how “such a shining specimen of a man [could] be satisfied with the likes of me?” (Beck, Three- Month One-Night Stand). These feelings of doubt and self-hatred only worsened as the affair continued and the guilt weighed on the shoulders of young Carrie. She was acting as the “adulteress” that had stolen her dad, preventing her from the chance of having a picture- perfect family, and she was not raised to do the same (Dawn, I Was so Insecure). Carrie was alone in a new and scary world, the world of Hollywood. She had no one to confide in, no friends to share her secret with and ask for their opinions on. Since Ford was married, Fisher could not bring it up to any other co-stars, so she sat alone in silence using her diaries as an outlet for her secrets (Gross, On Set Affair). And here they would remain, locked up tight, until forty years later when Fisher was finally ready to tell the world.

As the filming of the movie came to an end, so did the two co-stars’ affair. While the secret relationship carried on throughout filming, it became clear that it was never going to be Carrie and Harrison, only Leia and Han. Their characters would be the only ones who

got the happy ending a young Carrie had once fantasized about. When looking back on this moment, Fisher recalls how mentally unwell she was, a young girl, yet to be diagnosed with bipolar disorder, trying to hide immense insecurity by being someone she was not (Hattenstone, Fisher on Harrison Ford). She never found love through this experience, “only obsession”. While Fisher may have regretted the original choice of enlisting in an affair with a married man, her diaries allude to not blaming Harrison for the actions and consequences that came out of this decision. As the affair dwindled down, she wrote within the only object that knew of her secret desires and truths, as if she was speaking the written words to Harrison himself: “Thanks for the good times. Thank you for being so generous with what you have withheld. Thank you for being the snake in my grass, the thorn in my side, the pain in my ass, the knife in my back...My Achilles’ heart” (Fisher, 152).

A Reflection on Growing Up as a Girl

Sydney King

CW: mention of disordered eating, body image issues, and sexual harassment

Sometime between August-December of 2015, Jupiter, South Florida

“Ohmigod you’re so flat?” an unnamed girl with a face I can’t remember says to someone, I think it was one of her close friends, as we’re all changing out of our sweaty gym clothes. I keep my back to everyone and change as fast as possible, trying to beat the threatening allegations of staring at girls *in that way*, while also desperately not wanting anyone to analyze my body. I’m nestled in the corner of the large locker room, forcing eye contact with the blue-gray lockers instead. I learned that it’s only okay to look at another girl’s body as a girl if you’re insulting it.

“No, I’m not, I’m literally a B cup? Look at you?” the other girl retorts at her close friend. She has bright blonde hair, the type that you would think was consistently dyed, if it weren’t for the fact that we were in middle school. I, along with her close friend, contemplated the truth of this information. I know that Blonde has struggled with the truth before, since her eyes are deep brown like mine, but she alleges that they turn green and blue in the sunlight. Some things are just not worth the battle.

“Well, I have like—no ass?” Another girl joins in, she’s exclaiming this statement, despite it putting her down. I like her, she stands out in school, I remember her managing to make our gross gym uniform her own. Most of the girls just folded over the waistband on their shorts a couple of times or tied a hair tie around a bunch of excess t-shirt fabric, this girl knew how to accessorize, with bracelets and earrings. She was really thin and had really long straight hair, which meant a lot in a school full where flat iron damage was the norm. She was a seventh grader, a year older than me, Blonde, and the unnamed close friend. She and the other seventh and eighth graders took a liking to me, the same way a middle-aged, financially secure

woman takes a liking to a designer purse. They thought I was a cute attachment to themselves.

“Shit guys—that was the bell? Like, where is my shirt?”

Blonde is scrambling right now because we have maybe five minutes in between periods to get across the ginormous mostly outdoor school in the scorching heat. I still think there should have been some child endangerment law against having gym classes outside in one of the hottest and most humid states in the country. The girls, which had expanded from a three-person conversation to nearly half of the class, were too busy analyzing their bodies and talking over each other to fully hear the bell.

I left the girls’ locker room that day on time and by myself, replaying the changing conversations over and over in my head. I thought about how those girls had looked at my body before, if they had at all (they probably had). I knew it was a better alternative than the boys at school being aware of my body, as they were chronic body-shamers, both in words and actions.

I did my best not to draw attention to my body, making sure my school-approved shirts always covered my hips, and making sure my skinny jeans (yes, we all wore skinny jeans, or loose-fitting sweats, in the heat) went all the way to my ankles. I thought about the words “flat.” Skinny had always been good in my mind, and I was sure that was the consensus, but moving up into middle school gave new criteria for girls to meet on top of being skinny. The bodies of myself and other eleven- to fourteen-year-olds had to be curvy on top of maintaining thinness, despite most of us not yet going through puberty.

I don’t entirely know if this conversation is from one day, if it happened every time I had gym class, or if it was a combination of conversations that my brain mashed together in one harmonious memory. I cannot place its chronological relation to other memories of conversations I had in this gym class, like discussions about the grossness of not shaving your legs, the movie *Teeth* (if you don’t

know what this is, don't look it up), and the dramatics of what went on underneath the massive gym risers. In some ways, I think I learned the most about being a girl in this class for that semester, than I did for the rest of my life.

Sometime between March and May of 2016, Jupiter, South Florida

“Sometimes I think I was born backwards... the people I'm supposed to hate, I love? And the people I love—*crash*” my computer screen reverbs to me. I'm sitting on my bed in my room that I hate. I hate the decorations, I hate that there's still toys in here from my elementary school days (a year ago), I hate my popcorn ceiling, and my unfashionable bed spread. I don't hate what's in front of me, which is my laptop, opened to Netflix, playing the series *Skins (UK)*. This show is mostly known for being the grimmest but realest representation of teenagers, tackling genuine issues with no censorship, which was refreshing, but I would soon find to be damaging. As embarrassing as it is to admit, most of what I learned about teen issues at this point, I learned about from either *Skins* or from the kids on my bus.

My eyes were glued to my computer screen, hoping that none of my family members would walk into my room, disrupting me from a universe I so desperately wanted to be a part of. Effy Stonem, the show's mysterious and euphoric it-girl consumed my attention. I was mesmerized by her beauty, her actress being only two years older than I was. She barely spoke at the beginning of the series, which to me, was the coolest thing ever. She wore fishnets, combat boots, eye makeup that was both messy and flashy, and cool distressed tops. By contrast, I wore a plain uniform and BB cream that had melted off my face by the end of the school day, accompanied by mascara marks on my eyelids.

More importantly about Effy, I couldn't help myself from staring at her body. It wasn't objectification, it was like my developing

brain was entranced. She was easily a couple of inches taller than me, and it did not seem like it was possible for her thighs to touch. The series had characters that dealt with eating disorders and body image issues—but Effy didn't, she was just effortlessly thin and different from the other characters because of her consistent desirableness. The scenes of her walking in her edgy clothes were burned into my brain because she had the most important accessory worn with those outfits: unquestionable thinness.

Effy had unconsciously pivoted the way my brain was developing. She taught me what it meant to be *pretty*. I often saw bits and pieces of her in the girls at school, complaining about their bodies, while still maintaining absolute thinness and all types of attention. It was everything I could ever want, and everything I was sure was always going to be out of my reach. It was quite an unsettling revelation to have at 12 years old, and it was entirely based in fiction.

Sometime between January and May of 2016, Jupiter, Southern Florida

“Okay so like—I’ll give you my Instagram password and I’ll give you mine? And then we can like—log in and prank people?” Shayla sparked this brilliant idea when we were walking through the food court of our local mall. She was always coming up with ways for us to get closer, at least I think that’s what she was trying to do? As we passed the Chipotle, my stomach got some nervous jitters in it from this suggestion, but I figured they were nerves of excitement. I was never at peace with Shayla.

“I feel like—like we’re definitely going to get catcalled today?” Shayla said this with a certain but light tone, and I found myself wondering how our conversation had gotten here, how it always somehow contained this topic. It almost like she wanted it to happen? But that couldn’t be true, I think? Shayla talked about boys in a way that I couldn’t comprehend. I couldn’t tell what she thought was right or wrong, and maybe she didn’t know either. I didn’t want to get

catcalled, I just wanted to shop. I had strategically picked out what I thought was an appropriate non-attention-seeking outfit, just a T-shirt and jeans with a cardigan over it. I thought I was doing everything I could to avoid any awkward or uncomfortable interactions. I didn't realize she had different ideas in mind.

We didn't get cat-called that day. Most of the catcalling I experienced in middle school happened at the outdoor mall about a mile and a half down the road, where it got dark, and I usually couldn't see the faces of the perpetrators. Actually, come to think of it, most of the catcalling I experienced happened in the hallways of my middle school. In my experience, there was always an immediate insult thrown in after being objectified. Boys would shame or sexualize us to our faces, and girls would do it behind our backs. And there was nothing we could do about it, because bringing more attention to it would've been *so embarrassing*.

I haven't talked to Shayla since a little after that. I still think about her most days. How could I not? She cemented in my brain what it meant to be pretty, to be a girl. She's the one that taught me that drinking in the sixth grade, or doing any substances as young as possible, was a part of the female identity. Around a year after this memory, when we had grown apart, she showed up to the seventh-grade civics final high. She was the first friend, not the last, to have chosen boys over me. Meanwhile, I was so invested in our friendship, I would have never even considered dating. I didn't have to—I got everything I needed out of my female friendships.

It's been 7 years since I spoke to her last. She still likes my TikTok reposts sometimes. Maybe I taught her something, too.

March (I think) or April of 2019, East Greenwich, South Rhode Island

“She literally thinks (unnamed) guy likes her—but he only likes her for her body? Why else would he?” My shockingly quiet friend at the time says. She, and my other friend at the time (now both

removed) sit in the corner of the comfy bed at my friend's house. Unconsciously, there's a gap between me and them. It's got to be sometime between midnight and two in the morning. I am fifteen years old and will regret the lack of sleep the next day, and the choice of friends within the next year.

"Are you guys sure—like why would he do that to her? Like talking all the time?" I inquired. Surely, this can't be the truth. If this was the truth, how could anyone distinguish good intentions from someone just using them? Was this what I—along with every other girl I know—doomed to accept this?

"Sydney, come on—she is like *that*, and he knows it? That's why he's even talking to her in the first place?" The other friend, who's usually louder, retorts this at me, hitting like a Razor scooter to the ankle. The "she" in question was someone I was friends with, someone who my other friends—these two girls—didn't like. Sure, she wasn't perfect, she was a fifteen-year-old girl, but she was kind and she tried. I couldn't understand why they didn't like her, they never seemed to give a real reason.

"Guys like girls who—you know—have stuff?" says loud friend, gesturing to her own body. I guess she, same with my friend who they were complaining about, had developed bodies. My body had gained weight since my younger body, for the first time, but it seemed to hold weight in the wrong places. They were closer to looking like women than I thought I ever would. I tried to not obsess over the state of my body, but it was especially hard when other girls brought up theirs. I couldn't take hearing about them gushing over their attention, even though most of the "attention" I was better off without. It felt like there was some sort of club of misery that I couldn't get admitted into.

I wish I could fully remember this conversation, specifically how it ended, but I know that this memory is just a compounded version of the same conversation I had with these friends repeatedly. We went on to no longer be friends, and I learned later of their hypo-

critical words and actions regarding what was said about other girls at our school. It was a moment of understanding, where my friends had taught me about my two options for growing up: gain acceptance or fade into obscurity.

September 2023, Providence, Northern Rhode Island

Lacy oh Lacy/aren't you the sweetest thing on this side of hell? /Dear Angel Lacy/did I ever tell you that I'm not doing well?

Although this was my first listen of this song, I could already tell that it would be impressed on my brain for a long time. It was unlike any other music Olivia Rodrigo had released before. Yes, she had sung about jealousy before, but this time it felt different. This was layered jealousy, or perhaps, jealousy was just the surface emotion, and something deeper was behind it.

“Lacy” was unlike any other song I heard, and I couldn’t help going over the lyrics throughout the rest of my day, trying to decipher them.

*I care, I care, I care/like ribbons in her hair/my stomach's all in knots/
you got the one thing that I want*

I knew that there were two ways a woman writes or talks about other woman: the first being in a way of love and romantic admiration (rare), and the second being using misogynistic attacks to take other women down, while simultaneously obsessing over them. “Lacy” did both at the same time, and also neither? It seemed to blur the lines between three different questions: do I want to be her? Do I want to hate her? Or do I want to be with her?

*I try, I try, I try to rationalize/people are people/but it's like
you're made of angel dust*

There was a certain level of self-awareness in the narrative that made it feel as though Olivia had plucked my own thoughts from my head. The spiraling jealousy, that leaves me sick with guilt, and eventually turns into self-pity, as I realize this jealousy is coming from

myself, not the woman I'm projecting it on. Could I even call myself a supporter of women if these thoughts erratically cycle through my mind when triggered? How could I consider myself a feminist if on my hierarchy of needs, my proximity to thinness and male attention were dangerously close to the top?

I tried often to associate Olivia's Lacy character with someone in my life. However, every time I did so, I felt an uncomfortableness rise in my stomach. What if my Lacy was myself—or a version of myself that didn't have to deal with these conflicting emotions coming up every time a three-minute song played? What if it was the version of myself that hadn't been so shaped by my past environment—that never internalized what Shayla, or the locker room girls, or loud and quiet friends had to say? Was I dealing with this conflict because of my circumstances, or because of my choices?

And I despise my jealous eyes and how hard they fell for you/yeah, I despise my rotten mind and how much it worships you

I guess I could blame it on my environment, it was easier than blaming myself.

Sometime in the past, all over the place

“Yeah—I'm not eating on Saturday?” This is what my gym class best friend says to me, fall of 2019, our sophomore year of high school. Our homecoming dance was this Saturday, this was apparently a proper form of preparation for the girls in our grade. I remember this homecoming because it was right before the world went to shit chaos, and also because it was my first ever school dance where I had a date. I was going with a boy because my group of friends was involved with his. He was attractive, outgoing, popular, and had already had a girlfriend before.

It was due to these reasons that I, apparently along with my gym class friend, found it harder and harder to stomach food the week before the dance. I remember after the dance ended and we all went

to McDonald's after, and I felt a sense of relief—like I could finally exhale. My stomach unknotted, unfortunately not for the last time. I remember feeling a crash and burn after the dance, as I had put so much pressure on myself for this definitive part of girlhood. All for 2 hours of jumping with our shoes off in a sweaty gym.

What could be better for mentally and physically developing girls?

“Hey—watch it” is what my grandmother says to me in my living room during Christmas of 2017, my eighth-grade year. The “it” in question was referring to a donut that I had taken a few bites out of. My dad had gone to our local renowned donut shop for the five of us to have a treat this morning to celebrate. I remember it was snowing during Christmas, which was a huge deal for me.

Meals stopped feeling like a part of the celebration after this. In fact, every meal with my grandmother and family members outside of my immediate family felt like a chore. I wondered if they were bookmarking my orders at restaurants, waiting to judge me later. I questioned if they were sizing up my appearance every time, noticing flaws that I was not yet aware of.

I remember the donut memory was the driving force behind me eating all my meals, if possible, in my room when my grandmother stayed with us for the summer. I remember my dad caught me and said, “This is your house, you can feel comfortable eating here,” but I had yet to feel comfortable eating at all.

I still can't remember if I finished that donut or not.

Sometime between the fall of 2023 to the spring of 2024, East Greenwich, Southern Rhode Island

“NOPE! Not gonna see it!” I can't tell if my mom genuinely thinks she's whispering in the movie theater when she says this, or if

she wants the people in the neighboring seats to know how she really feels. I don't remember when this started, but recently my mom has been open to expressing how she feels when she's unimpressed by bad movie trailers. We go to the movies often, and this happens every time.

“One word: Rental!” is another one of her famous lines. I love my mom, and despite me telling her to lower her voice every time she does this, I she is my favorite movie-going partner. People tell me I look a lot like her, and I always found that to be the biggest compliment. To me, she is what it meant to be pretty.

My mom always talked badly about herself in terms of her appearance. She was an older mom, but my friends were always surprised when I told them. She would always particularly comment on her body, saying something along the lines of how she let herself go since having kids. I never thought so. I thought she was the epitome of beauty, alongside me just looking up to her in general. My mom was my entire world, and in a lot of ways, she still is.

When I was in eighth grade, I tried on my mom's old pageant dress. She was competing in Miss Iowa, as a part of the Miss America pageant, when she was in college for scholarship money. She was around twenty when she wore the dress, and I was fourteen. I tried it on and immediately felt an immense amount of pressure in my chest and around my waist.

“Have you ever had an eating disorder?” The words left my mouth before I could filter them. She laughed at this, and just said something about how she was “really skinny” due to her diet regimen at the time, as well as her exercise routine. My mom had lived her child-free life as a woman who would never be considered anything other than thin, and perhaps the change to her body after having kids was a long-term shock.

When I was in my sophomore year of high school, I had hit a bit of a breaking point with my relationship with my body image. I remember going online to read about how poor body image develops in

the first place. I read something that stuck out to me, how “Many girls derive their self-esteem from the way their mothers talk about themselves.” I felt a bit of relief at this, like maybe I didn’t have as much responsibility in this as I actually did? Or maybe I wouldn’t have to fix this problem myself?

I told my mom standing in her bedroom after I discovered my findings. She always said that her girls were the better versions of her, and that how we looked had nothing to do with her. But it did. Being told I looked like my mom was the highest form of compliment I could possibly achieve. I said something like, “Studies show that the way a mother speaks about herself will reflect in the way her daughter speaks about herself.” I could tell she wanted to interject that that wasn’t true, because she thought so highly of her girls, but she didn’t. From that day forward, we have always been able to have conversations about how the way we speak about ourselves matters.

I often think about my version of myself from these moments. I know my memory and time has probably distorted them, maybe it wasn’t as bad as I remember it, or maybe it was worse. I know that memories like these are a rite of passage to being a woman, and that how I handle these issues today is based in these experiences. I will never experience their uniqueness again, so instead I memorialize them. I find myself wanting to go back, not out of enjoyment, but of wanting to save myself, and the other girls from the ideas we were internalizing. But I can’t. And I doubt if they reflect on them as much as I do. Maybe they think there’s nothing to reflect on. They think that they have developed properly from girl to woman. I know that a lot of time has passed since these moments, and that because of these experiences, things are better now. I have learned from them, I’m in a different place. But sometimes, my mind can make them feel shockingly recent.

Contributors' Notes

Jane Lunin Perel, poet and professor, was the author of five collections of poetry: *The Lone Ranger and The Neo-American Church*, *The Fishes*, *Blowing Kisses to the Sharks*, *The Sea is Not Full*, and *Red Radio Heart*. After earning an MFA in Poetry from the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 1971, Perel began a four-decade teaching career at Providence College in Creative Writing, Holocaust Studies, and as the founding director of the Women's & Gender Studies Program. She was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts in 2015. Before her death, Perel established the Jane Lunin Perel Poets Fund for Poetry MFA candidates at UMass Amherst.

Ella Bloom is a second-year creative writing student at Providence College. She is originally from San Diego, California, but her love for the seasons and desire for new experiences brought her from one coast to the other. She has found that the weather hasn't been as forgiving as she thought. Ella loves all things literature, from the classics read in her Western Civilization class to the novellas she peruses on Aquinas lawn when the sun finally decides to appear. She is incredibly excited to be published in her college's own literary journal and cannot wait to see what the future holds for her writing.

Maral Sarafian is an Armenian-American from New Jersey studying at Providence College. She is a current junior majoring in Political Science and minoring in both Writing and Business & Innovation with a special focus on Organization & Entrepreneurship.

Charlee O'Hair is a sophomore at Providence College double majoring in Creative Writing and Classics. She comes from a small town in Colorado, with six sisters and one brother, all of whom are cheering her on as a first-generation college student. She dreams of one day getting a PhD and becoming a well-known published author and poet. Her biggest passion has always been to share knowledge through her words.

Cindy Tran is from North Attleboro, Massachusetts. She is the daughter of Vietnamese immigrants and the middle child of three sisters. She is finishing up her last year at Providence College as a Quantitative Finance major and Writing minor. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with friends and family, discovering new coffee shops, and watching movies. Much of her inspiration for writing stems from her family and the memories they've shared. Growing up in a Vietnamese household, she learned the meaning of love, sacrifice, and perseverance every day. She hopes to continue to explore storytelling, finding opportunities to blend her passion for business and writing in both her creative and professional life.

Sara MacKinnon is a junior English Literature Major and Political Science Minor at Providence College. She grew up in Danbury, CT with her parents, sister, and two brothers, who are her biggest inspirations. “In the Mind of a Poet” is her first published piece of more to come. With a keen interest in love, morality, and human consciousness, she continues to write and hopes to become a published novelist.

Eleanor Phillips is a writer from New Jersey who studies English Literature at Providence College. Her work has been recently published in *Up the Staircase Quarterly*.

Lenore Montanaro is a poet, writer, and attorney from North Kingstown, Rhode Island. She teaches animal law at the Roger Williams University School of Law. Her poetry is influenced by Elizabeth Bishop.

Libby Stockton is from Summit, New Jersey and has been an English major since her sophomore year. For as long as she can remember she has had a passion for writing poetry and short stories as a way to add levity for any trials and tribulations in her life, as well as for the sake of creativity and self-expression. She finds solace in weaving words into vivid imagery and compelling narratives, using poetry and storytelling as both an emotional outlet and a means to connect and comfort others with similar struggles. Her work often explores themes of resilience, the art of coping with grief, personal growth, and the idyllic nature of the human soul. As she continues her studies, she hopes to refine her craft and share her writing with a broader audience, inspiring others through the written word.

Ian Gualtiere is a sophomore, double English and Political Science major at Providence College from Briarcliff Manor, New York. Ian currently writes for the Arts & Entertainment section for the student-led newspaper *The Cowl* and has been writing poetry for the last three years. He greatly enjoys spending time with the people he loves, walking through trails in the woods, and taking photographs of his favorite places. Ian’s poetic themes touch on the natural world and landscapes to the relationships everyone holds so dear. His literary influences range from Washington Irving to John Keats, JRR Tolkien to James Joyce, WB Yeats to John McCrae, and William Faulkner to Robert Frost.

Ava Spampanato is a surfer from the Jersey Shore and currently writes from South Florida. Her writing is inspired by the ocean and natural elements around her. Her poems have appeared in *The Bluebird Word*, *Agape Review* and *Living Water’s Review*.

Nicole Hirt is a senior studying English and creative writing at Palm Beach Atlantic University. She is an editor at *Living Waters Review*, her school's literary journal. Her poems and prose have appeared in *Runestone Literary Journal* and *Blue Marble Review*, and are forthcoming in *As Surely as the Sun*. In her free time, she enjoys wandering through cemeteries.

Jennifer M Phillips is a bi-national immigrant, with three poetry chapbooks, *Sitting Safe In the Theatre of Electricity*, *A Song of Ascents*, and *Sailing To the Edges* (forthcoming, Finishing Line, 2025), and a collection *Wrestling With the Angel* (Wipf and Stock, 2025). Phillips' work has appeared in over 100 journals, and has been twice-nominated for a 2024 Pushcart Poetry Prize, and twice as finalist for the Eyelands Poetry Book Prize (Greece).

Richard Dinges, Jr. works on his homestead beside a pond, surrounded by trees and grassland, with his wife, two dogs, two cats, and seventeen chickens. Toasted Cheese, Queen's Review, Green Hills Literary Lantern, North Dakota Quarterly, and Studio One most recently accepted his poems for their publications.

Craig Kurtz led the postpunk Philosophic Collage into cult status in 1981. He has since placed hundreds of 'light verse' lyrics in publications as varied as *Rattle*, *Stand* and *Quadrant*. His novel *Surviving the Dream* is available through the anti-christ of retail.

Matthew J. Spireng's 2019 Sinclair Poetry Prize-winning book *Good Work* was published by Evening Street Press. A 12-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he is the author of two other full-length poetry books, *What Focus Is* and *Out of Body*, winner of the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award, and five chapbooks, *Clear Cut*; *Young Farmer*; *Encounters*; *Inspiration Point*, winner of the 2000 Bright Hill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition; and *Just This*.

Jason Ryberg is the author of eighteen books of poetry, six screenplays, a few short stories, a box full of folders, notebooks and scraps of paper that could one day be (loosely) construed as a novel, and, a couple of angry letters to various magazine and newspaper editors. He is currently an artist-in-residence at both The Prospero Institute of Disquieted P/o/e/t/i/c/s and the Osage Arts Community, and is an editor and designer at Spartan Books. His latest collection of poems is *Fence Post Blues* (River Dog Press, 2023). He lives part-time in Kansas City, MO with a rooster named Little Red and a Billy-goat named Giuseppe and part-time somewhere in the Ozarks, near the Gasconade River, where there are also many strange and wonderful woodland critters.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Sheepshead Review, Stand, Washington Square Review and Floyd County Moonshine. Latest books, “Covert” “Memory Outside The Head” and “Guest Of Myself” are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the McNeese Review, Santa Fe Literary Review and Open Ceilings.

Greg Moglia’s poems have been published in over 400 journals in 10 countries. He is an eleven time winner of an Allan Ginsberg Poetry Award. His third book of poems, *The Lover from Nowhere*, is from Cherry Grove Collections.

Hanna Boudreau is a freshman at Providence College with an English and Psychology double major. She is an avid reader and writer, who often enjoys thrift shopping and listening to music. She is currently writing a book and hopes to publish it before or shortly after graduating from college.

Lily Spiegel is a junior at Providence College studying Political Science and Women’s and Gender Studies. She is Co-Editor of Photography for *The Cowl*, where she photographs campus events, concerts, and sports. Outside of school, she loves to travel and document her trips through her photography.

Madelyn Young is a senior English major and history minor from North Kingstown, Rhode Island. This is her first year as a member of The Alembic, and she has had an incredible experience co-producing the first ever audiobook version of the journal. After graduation, Madelyn hopes to work in editing, publishing, or with children!

Devin Sampson is a Junior at Syracuse University. She finds such satisfying beauty in nature and different landscapes and try to capture it in its simplest form. Photography plays a large part in my life and I’m honored to share my photos with this magazine for another edition.

Tyler Donegan is a member of the class of 2026 at Providence College. He is an English: Creative Writing major with a minor in business and hopes to one day make a living either consuming or producing fiction. When he is not writing, he is engaged in other standard author-bio activities such as reading, exercising, and, of course, spending time with friends and family. He truly leads a unique and fascinating life. You can find more of his fiction at his free newsletter on Substack.

Claudia De Luca is from Middletown, New Jersey. Growing up she had a passion for reading and loved it when she had the chance to do writing assignments in

school. She is majoring in marketing with a minor in writing. She hadn't written a fiction piece until she took the creative writing fiction class at Providence College fall of sophomore year. She thanks Dr. Bennett who taught her how to craft a story and gave her the confidence to declare a writing minor and submit to the creative writing contest. She plans on going into the field of marketing and continue writing stories and write a book someday on the side.

Michael Washburn is a Brooklyn-based writer and journalist. His fiction has appeared recently in *Kestrel*, *Cottonwood*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Rosebud*, *Quagmire*, *Meat for Tea*, *Weird Fiction Review*, *Bryant Literary Review*, and other publications.

Riley Londrville is a sophomore at Providence College, double majoring in Creative Writing and Public and Community Service Studies with a minor in Political Science. She's an avid reader and writer, often drafting stories while a vinyl from her collection spins in the background—today it's Bob Marley. Her favorite books are *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara and *Looking for Alaska* by John Green.

Madison Hogardt is a senior at Providence College studying marketing with a minor in writing. She resides in Medfield, Massachusetts.

Sydney King is a current junior double-majoring in psychology and creative writing. Her favorite pieces to read for the journal are creative nonfiction essays and prose poetry. Her favorite writing class she took at Providence College was creative nonfiction workshop with Professor Emily Pittinos. She is thrilled to be featured in this year's edition of *The Alembic*.

Meet the Editors

Olivia Gleason is a junior English literature major and political science minor at Providence College. She is passionate about reading and writing and plans to pursue a career that involves both, with particular interest in the publishing field. Olivia has enjoyed helping to lead *The Alembic* this year and seeing the journal come to life.

Andrew Hilton is a junior English and Economics double major from Long Island. This is his second year as a member of *The Alembic*, and he has enjoyed his time as Co-Editor-in-Chief. He is an avid reader and wants to write more in the future.

Maddie Aylward is a junior Elementary/Special Education major at Providence College. In her free time, she enjoys coaching boxing, hanging out with her friends and family, reading, and writing. She hopes to become a classroom teacher and publish books for her students.

Ella Bloom is a second-year creative writing student at Providence College. She is originally from San Diego, California, but her love for the seasons and desire for new experiences brought her from one coast to the other. She has found that the weather hasn't been as forgiving as she thought. Ella loves all things literature, from the classics read in her Western Civilization class to the novellas she peruses on Aquinas lawn when the sun finally decides to appear. She is incredibly excited to be published in her college's own literary journal and cannot wait to see what the future holds for her writing.

Seth Chaffee is a sophomore at Providence College. He is an English/creative writing major and minoring in film and communications. He plans to pursue a career in entertainment but has recently found a new appreciation for literature since he is currently writing a novel for an independent study.

Kate Blackwell is a junior English/Creative Writing major at Providence College who has always been passionate about reading. She is grateful for the opportunity to foster her editing skills and is excited to be a part of *The Alembic* team.

Jenna Gomez-Nieto is a junior Psychology and Heath Policy & Management double major at Providence College. She is an active member of the campus community and participates in many different clubs and intramurals, such as Pep Band and Special Olympics. She loves hanging out with her friends and spending time with her family. She has enjoyed her time working with *The Alembic* and looks forward to putting out another great edition next year.

Kristina Spence is a junior Marketing major at Providence College. She appreciates spending time with family and friends, fashion, and dancing. She has enjoyed her time this year as the Social Media Manager and Business Manager of *The Alembic* and is glad she got to spend the year working with this incredible team.

Hanna Boudreau is a freshman at Providence College with an English and Psychology double major. She is an avid reader and writer, who often enjoys thrift shopping and listening to music. She is currently writing a book and hopes to publish it before or shortly after graduating from college.

Tyler Donegan is an English: Creative Writing major and a Business & Innovation minor at Providence College. He loves fiction in all its forms and spends an hour reading and writing every morning. His greatest aspiration is to go to Lauterbrunnen, Switzerland one September to see the cows being led into the mountains from their winter enclosures. He hears it is a fun event.

Sydney King is a current junior double-majoring in psychology and creative writing. Her favorite pieces to read for the journal are creative nonfiction essays and prose poetry. Her favorite writing class she took at Providence College was creative nonfiction workshop with Professor Emily Pittinos. She is thrilled to be featured in this year's edition of *The Alembic*.

Sara MacKinnon is a junior English Literature major and Political Science minor at Providence College. She is passionate about storytelling in print, on screen, and on stage and hopes to publish her own novels after graduation.

Madelyn Young is a senior English major and history minor from North Kingstown, Rhode Island. This is her first year as a member of *The Alembic*, and she has had an incredible experience co-producing the first ever audiobook version of the journal. After graduation, Madelyn hopes to work in editing, publishing, or with children!

Emily Pittinos is an Assistant Professor of English and the Faculty Advisor for *The Alembic* at Providence College. She is the author of *Animal, Roadkill, Ashes, Gone: Essays* (Bull City Press, 2022) and *The Last Unkillable Thing* (U of Iowa Press, 2021), a winner of the Iowa Poetry Prize.