



TCU Journal of the Arts

eleven4oseven

Fall 2019 Volume 15.1

# eleven4oseven

*tcu journal of the arts*





# eleven40seven

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# **VOLUME 15.1**

## **FALL 2019**





“PAINT THE FLYING  
SPIRIT OF THE BIRD  
RATHER THAN ITS  
FEATHERS.”

- Robert Henri







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# EDITORS' NOTE

Sharing one's work with the world and opening the door for constructive criticism is one of the bravest things a creative individual can do. This issue of *eleven40seven* shares the voices and artistry of some of TCU's most aspirational students.

We stepped into this role as Co-Editors-in-Chief excited to collaborate with an ambitious group of peers. From the first day of introductions to the day before the final layout was sent to the printers, we both watched as the journal came to life with one submission at a time. Our goal was to showcase unique works of all mediums in this journal. We received so many submissions this semester that it was difficult to choose the best works for the print journal, but we want to commend the students who submitted their work this semester, whether featured in the journal or online, and we encourage them to submit again next semester.

We look forward to seeing where *eleven40seven* goes next. It has grown every semester, and we can't wait to see all the creative pieces that TCU allows to flourish. Working as Co-Editors-in-Chief has been a whirlwind of stress and relief, but we could not be prouder of the journal our staff has produced. We hope that you will enjoy exploring the minds of students from all walks of life in this semester's journal of the arts just as much as we did.

Sincerely,

Jack Moraglia and Lauren Truong

Co-Editors-in-Chief, Fall 2019





# Ode to Wild Curls

## Paulette Watson

Wild curls, cavorting on my head  
as I devour my latest novel of naughty delight.  
A heroine of old, with riotous curls of her own,  
seeking to ensnare a knight.  
A knight to accompany in a dance of lusty pleasure.

Wild curls, gleefully tumbling from your bindings to escape between illicit pages.  
You boldly land a curl on your cavalier knight's shoulder.  
Sending a subtle signal, quietly coaxing seduction.  
Your exotic scent wafts, wrapping around as you spin your web.  
Compelling fascination as you insist shame hide its face.

Wild curls, your silky persuasion, only slightly marred by your  
frizzy struggle, fighting for even a whiff of your  
exquisitely coiled, bouncing superiority.  
You provoke inquisitions where'er you roam.

Wild curls cascading divinely in a dark wave of enchantment,  
taunting my battalion of taming products.  
Products courageously returning order to your knotted brambles.  
As they gently coax your curls to smooth and shine,  
reaching for our shining knight, to cross swords with.

Wild curls, enticing me to join your sultry tango!  
Encouraging liberation from my lofty standards.  
Turning my prudish behaviour to wanton ways.  
Command my sheltered soul and release my wild curls!



# Misty Copeland Meredith Stringfellow



*You Go Girl (Uh-huh-honey) collection featured online*  
Visit <http://1147.tcu.edu>





# An Ode to Feigning Nightfall

*After "Ode to the Clothesline"*

**Gabby Douthitt**

Not so much the clatter of the blinds to silence orange  
but the whoosh and cover and cool,

the click, the exit of ambient light,  
another clack, the exit of bustling outside,

the return to a day before Edison,  
before a productive kind of excess was praised.

Do we toil harder, or just longer?

The writhing around, the friction of cotton,  
finding somewhere new to brush with icy toes,

the prying open of eyes,  
the reentry of orange,  
of murmuring motor,  
of a strident clanging.

The dependable routine of dawn feels well-deserved,  
the shuffle of word-filled pages,

the scratch of pen on paper on comforter,  
the buzz of espresso, the burn of Grandma's pottery.

What did my slumber conceal from me?

Slip under the covers well  
before time tells you to.

Evade midnight, and the  
morning bows to your greeting.





# Winding walk

*looking down on the way from Reed to Sid Richardson*

**Mariah Gomez**

down the path Wind races,  
tailing the loose leaves as they trip over umbers uneven,  
bashing and pushing their peers on the chalk,  
trampling over others, readying leap across the pale sizzling stirring void,  
to reach their end. they leap,  
only miles, yards, feet, inches away,  
when Wind faints.  
the leaves mid-leap keel.  
a moment      then two.  
Heat   replaces   Wind,  
embrace                chase.  
Warmth to the air clings, piling onto itself, onto the olivine clique,  
hints of gasoline and rubber mixed,  
until itching to move, to struggle, to drag on, the petrified barely breathe,  
with the Heat, without the Breeze.  
teeming with gasoline, a rush of Heated Gust swoops to the marooned greenhorns,  
shooting them down the path ahead,  
leaves shuffling, shoving, throwing, thrashing other fresh fellows,  
pushed by Heat as Cousin Gust, a second, a third  
inches, feet, yards, miles away  
past the void, the oaks, and the Wind sluggish,  
soon settling down among other bright, verdant pupils.

amidst   the soundless   remnants   of movement  
Wind wakes   alone      leafen bodies rustling, now a whisper.  
Wind sways      a moment      sighs,  
then swoops under and over the brush, dancing through the oaks,  
skimming over the shimmering near-shadows from the canopies,  
meandering simultaneous through countless chalken paths that ghosts of former travelers,  
decayed,      crunchy,      soft,      fresh,  
carved long and right before.



# Post-Apocalyptic Aubade for a Grand New Beginning

Joshua Borders

Lavender sun hopscotches outside  
the window as these tone-deaf birds  
and the grout from the cracking

bathroom tiles beckon – we  
kiss while milky sludge shimmies  
through the shower head. Silence

jerry-rigged and right.  
Restoration is the pain we seek.  
Puff, deflate, puff. It never grows

tired. Can all the mutes say Amen?  
Some days are so beautiful  
that I can't stop weeping.

This morning, a three-headed badger  
muzzled earthworms from my hand,  
ate one, then let one go. Eat, release,

eat, release. Each badger mouth rife with  
mercy, majestic with restraint. And the worms?  
They just burrowed back into the ground, ready

to do the whole thing again tomorrow.  
Love, I want  
to drink you, then watch you fill

back up. Take nothing, then everything,  
our mouths puckered ablaze  
with the world's first and final song.

Sing after me –  
*the heart the glory the wonder*

*the heart the glory the wonder*



# You Hate It When I'm Here/Gone

## Joshua Borders

The mother who carried her dead  
orca calf seventeen days through  
ocean deep is strong enough  
and we can leave it at that once  
I was cutting artichoke hearts  
the dull blade slipped and nicked  
my index finger above a knuckle sprouting  
silky hairs like blonde dust and I cried  
for help while you walked away  
mother orca is hungry after all this time denied  
the pleasure of chase she knows that to let go  
is tickling blasphemy but salmon are near and the strong  
hunt the weak leave behind forever the weak our hearts  
fainting for hunger and for strength





# Self Portrait with a Home as a Hospital Room

Catherine Forte

Don't remind me of the beds  
that rise and fall  
responding to commands

For IVs

For Blood

For MRIs

For CT Scans

Don't remind me of the hospital rooms  
with its drone of disease and holler of home  
where home cooked meals no longer exist  
just cafeteria packaged PB & J with a side of Jell-O.

My mind stops feeding itself

memories – I don't know what sun & salt

feels like on my skin or carpet burns

burning my knees playing hide & seek.

Why do I feel like an experiment?

I'm not a control variable, a statistic,

they don't get to slap me with a cruelty-free

stamp of approval because they don't understand,

they don't understand.

But cheers to hand sanitizer

To warm blankets

And warmer smiles

To the parents who

argue with hospital staff to move me from

Rm 122 to 124 so they have an in-room bathroom.

Cheers to the RN who draws my blood & draws

the curtains after long days and restless nights awake

waiting

on news, any news.

Cheers to the friends who

hang Hallmark cards on the door

tiptoeing through the halls, eyes

fixed on pasty white walls, ear drums

*hiss, buzz, whoosh* to the roar of the ocean

*continued, line break*



*Self Portrait with a Home as a Hospital Room*

or  
is it the murmur of death?  
Praise the car ride home  
to a bed that doesn't rise and fall  
to remembering what it felt like to be a kid.  
I was the little girl who liked the smell of mud mixed  
with sweat after a night jog alongside the river,  
the sharp sting on my skin during a cold shower  
stargazing, not at stars, but at clouds that remind  
me why I believe in the gift of imagination.  
I think that was joy.  
I thought there were  
only bad days, not bad weeks, that the  
pursuit of an achievement was better  
than the achievement itself.  
I wish  
that was the only thing I had  
to worry about.  
Now I live to wonder when  
I can just  
Sleep.  
No tubes,  
No nurses,  
I want to go back to the clutter  
of a messy  
room, and a mess  
that welcomes me  
back home.



# Incoming

## Annie Ogren



# Alaska Bound

Annie Ogren





## Category 5

### Ian Townsend

Iron bands tighten, locked  
across your chest, constricting  
your breath coming in short  
gasps, heart hammering,  
thundering inside your head

Your muscles freeze, held  
in a rictus grip while your eyes  
are manic, everywhere at once  
searching for a way out

Your skin is like hot paper,  
combustible,  
but you feel the cold  
sweat searching for relief  
but there is no fire to sate

You bottle everything up, a storm  
brewing inside, reaching  
its breaking point, waiting  
to come crashing out

The levies crack, the rock  
crumbles, and your pain comes  
tumbling out in tidal waves  
that splits your heart wide open  
leaving you without dignity

Like an exposed nerve, bared  
to the world like a picked  
scab, your wound is fresh  
but you will heal again

The damage is past, this time  
you survive, riding the torrent,  
the fear, the anger, but you will  
have new scars to show,  
and protect you for next time

*continued, stanza break*





*Category 5*

You build up your defenses  
again, hoping it will help, because  
the hurricane will come again and you  
are never prepared for the cost.





# Thinspiration

*A found poem from posts on Tumblr*

## Annie Brenkus

Can someone give me advice  
on getting my legs smaller? I'm scared  
I'll miss this generation's moments of fashion  
because I'll be too big to pull it off.  
Sad. I wish

I was just as casually perfect  
as them. I don't

fucking know what to do.  
I'm sorry to say these sad things  
but this is my only safe space.

I don't like my body.  
And I don't just mean shape.  
It feels so wrong it makes me a little  
sick. I just want to be wasted  
and look stunning. I'm disgusting.

The fact that people  
can see me makes me a little  
uncomfortable, not gonna lie.

I feel like I'm supposed to be a puddle  
on the ground.

Forgive me if I die.

*You were not meant to be a freeze-frame,  
you were meant to fly.*

*I'm proud of you.  
I'm so glad you're alive.*





# Acid Wash

## Annie Brenkus

Thick spit and drunk thirsty, all cried out on Molly, at a pizza place somewhere in the Rusty State, me and you and all these people she brought along, so I can't eat anyway, not pizza, in front of half-strangers. What I'm really craving is lip balm, holistic, rosy, the kind I keep in my bag, but today, it won't soak up the dry, and the slimy pink goo will probably fluster me, oozing into the cracks in my lips, like water in the rocks, like the behemoth snake of smoke drifting over the sky is slipping between clouds. I kept one of the rocks that I found that day, in a state park in Colorado, the color of that tremendous column of smoke and the coppery boulders we rolled on. I remember a day drenched in red, which didn't seem so remarkably wicked before, on salty crystalline, before we did Lucy, too, before the fire and the non-evacuation, before the strangers stole my watch and I finally told you how devastated I was, so sick that I lost two days sometime in May. The souvenir rock is in an unlocked cabinet drawer with my last tab, where I never mean to find them. But I know it's in there, searing the velvet and wood, and the thing is, I didn't know I was devastated until that day.



# Microverse

## Romane Mays





# An Elegy for the Last Slice

## Charles Baggarly

Eyes wander towards the center of the table,  
A slice of greasy goodness glistens in the moonlight.  
Hands rush towards the plate, hoping to steal  
Gold before the mine is dry. Bellies roar  
Songs of war as time slows to a halt.

The battle starts and fingers sprint to the finish line  
As the last pie waits patiently to be claimed.  
I move swiftly and strategically through the swarm.  
The warmth emanates from the crispy crust as I grasp it,  
And move to return the precious cargo to home base.

As my hand slips away, the enemy finesses the last slice from under me!  
My mission has failed and the man in the mirror is flabbergasted.  
The victor rejoices as he consumes the triangular trophy,  
As the defeated sulk in sauceless sadness. The Dominoes have fallen,  
the door to the Hut has closed, and Caesar has left his palace.

The war has concluded, as there is nothing left to fight for,  
The chasm inside of me will never be filled, the longing never satisfied,  
My insides quake as I sob over the missed chance at salvation.  
The face of the delivery man, as well as the aroma, is long forgotten.  
The friends around the table weep, unsure if they will taste sweet victory again.



# A Character to Life

## John Young

A few scribbles, a swish of a pen and she appears. The lines of ink stretch into rivers of black, flowing across the page in a rush of words. The writer ebbs the current, unable to tame it, unwilling to halt its rapids. Sentences careen inside the pale blue parallels of lined paper, spilling onto the shore in the writer's panic to not let a single thimble of inspiration leak out of his mind. He fills the page with the word, and as the apostle said, the word became flesh.

She stands in front of him, his own creation, a transparent ghost swaying in the wind. A few more lines on the writer's page and the wind begins to color in her image. Her hair is honey with flecks of gold; it glitters molten in the pale moonlight. Her skin is fair and pale, a likeness that hails from the North. Her eyes grow green then blue, unable to decide, the writer leaves them mixed, vexing any character that would try to define her.

And then for the details: her hair remains down, spread out in loose curls beneath a black winter cap. It perches light atop her head, allowing her hair to sway freely in the breeze. A dark sweatshirt hangs open with a darker tee beneath. Slim jeans drape over white sneakers, practical, effective, and ready.

She stands before him, his only companion, completed and waiting for the words that would become her recited lines.

"Hello," he says, unsure how to begin, unsure how she would react.

"Hello," she replies, and he immediately makes a note. The voice is not quite right; too high, too shy, too timid. He scribbles something down and the ink within her throat thickens and twirls. He takes her words, her voice and crafts it new, dipping its edges in confidence and sarcasm. The slight adjustment takes hold, the rest of her character molding to the change. Her stance loosens and she leans against a wall that appears, a comfortingly sly smile tugging at her lips.

"Hey," and her voice is stronger, at ease, and familiar. He nods in satisfaction.

"Do you know who *you* are?"

"I'm a part of you, isn't it obvious?" Her smile grows wider, a welcome sight. "You might as well ask who you are."

"I guess you could say I'm still figuring that out." Her smile prompts his own, though it is small and rueful at that. "But do you know?"

She tilts her head slightly. "You named me Meg, after your favorite Disney princess."

"Well I wouldn't say that-."



*A Character to Life*

"Names always seem to trace back to childhood, your character names at least, and she was your favorite. If I recall, most of your female character names go back to the girls that would chase you around on the playground-,"

"Please stop before I die of embarrassment." He shakes his head and makes a note to find different names for characters. "It's astounding that you can perceive that though."

"I'm a part of you, remember? This whole conversation is technically taking place in your own head." A chair materializes, and she spins it around in front of her to plop down in it, the knowing smile never quite leaving her face. "Your knowledge is my knowledge."

The writer taps a pen to his mouth. "You're rather coy, which is strange because I don't remember that being there."

The character shrugs her shoulders slightly. "Does a writer trace out every single detail of their character? Or does the story itself fill in some of the lines? You can try and take it out, but I doubt it would disappear completely. You seem to like it too much."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean...that is I'm not trying to..."

She shakes her head. "You don't need to explain yourself to me, or make excuses. I understand."

The writer fumbles with his words.

She laughs slightly.

"I just don't want you to think that..." He trails off.

"That you're trying to create the perfect woman for yourself?" Her tone is slightly teasing.

"Something like that, yeah. I'm just..."

"You're lonely." She looks as if she's known the feeling. "There's no shame in that."

"What about talking to myself, any shame in that?" He half-jokes.

"Shame? No. Although if someone catches you at it, they might worry." She winks and he inexplicably feels lighter somehow. "And anyways, you're not talking to yourself, you're talking to me."

"But you just said that this is all in my head."

"But if you're conversing with an entity that is of your consciousness, but not something you identify as fully *you*, then can you really call it talking to yourself?"

"Am I really discussing talking to myself with myself?"

"Kinda trippy isn't it?"

He shakes his head as if to rid it of stray thoughts. "Okay, I've officially become lost."

"Good, if you're lost then you have a clear path."



John Young

"That seems contrary to what being lost entails."

"Indeed," her feet drag against the floor as she leans back in her chair. "Where were we, again?"

"I believe this conversation started with me asking if you know who you are." He returns to the page he had been writing her on and scribbles in a little bit of backstory, a tidbit here and a detail there. "Do you? Besides your namesake that is."

"I know my story if that's what you're really getting at, even the bits you haven't jotted down quite yet."

"What about the bits I haven't thought up yet?" He leans forward disguising his eagerness as simple curiousness.

"Now, that would be cheating," she chides, a gleam of mischief in her eye.

"Such a tease."

"Why I never!"

"Just a hint is all I'm asking!" He scribes their conversation as he talks with her, laughing all the while.

"You're not getting out of writing my story, so give it up. If I gave you all the answers, it would be no fun." She rocks back and forth in the chair, a habit that he hadn't created for her.

"Come on, all the greats had muses. Just think of yourself as my muse."

"Yes I am sure that would *amuse* you."

"And a poor sense of humor to boot."

"It's based off yours. And anyways, a muse is a source of inspiration, not a get-out-of-jail-free card for writer's block," she chides him, actually wagging her finger in an antiquated gesture of mocking disapproval.

"I feel like this is getting nowhere," he shakes his head ruefully, dropping his pen for a moment so he can rub his face with both hands.

"And therein lies your problem. You give up too easily."

"So you're saying there's a chance you'll tell me your story?" He perks up.

"No, of course not." She responds immediately, crushing his hopes.

"And I'm back to where I started," he runs a hand through his hair with a sigh, rocking back and forth in his chair.

"What do you think your problem is?" Her tone is curious and she leans her chair forward to catch his eye.

"I don't know. I can't seem to maintain a longer story. Either I always fall through on writing, or the stories' plots fall through," he shakes his head.





*A Character to Life*

He doodles on the page he had been writing on, his frustration causing shafts of inky grass to burst from the floorboards in the fictional room he had written the two of them into. With every scratch another stalk of ink shoots upward, splattering the floor with drops of wasted potential.

"I asked you what your problem is, not the source of your writer's block."

"I thought writer's block *was* my problem."

"Then you're more lost than we had previously figured," she notes.

"Care to elaborate on that at all?"

"The problem is with your characters."

"What about them?"

"They're not truly original."

"How do you figure?" His curiosity piqued, a slight coil of apprehension curling in his stomach.

"I see a lot of you in them. Each and every one," she twirls her hair with a finger as the writer writes her that tick.

He sighs and resumes rocking back and forth in his chair, quietly lamenting the lack of inspiration he found himself confronted with. The blank pages stacked high on his desk greatly outnumber the inked sheets he has marked with her characteristics, and the disparity-

"Awakened despair, clinging to him like a wet shirt, one he fruitlessly attempts to peel off," she picks up his line of thought.

"Whoa there," he drops his pen as if it burned him, hoping to sever the connection between them.

"I know, a tad too dramatic if you ask me, although I do enjoy the simile, despair like a wet shirt," she muses, oblivious to his discomfort.

"Don't read off my thoughts like that, it's disturbing," he rubs his empty fingers together, already missing the feeling of his pen.

"Well, they're my thoughts too. Both of our thoughts are written together on this page, melding through lifelines of ink and parchment. Character, writer, tell me the difference. What's yours is mine, and what's mine is yours," her eyes bore into his, and yet he can't tell what color they are. How vexing.

The writer ponders her recent statements, resting his hands flat on his desk. "Our thoughts are the same?"

"No, they just stem from the same source," she glances at the pen on the desk between them, the papers on his desk that rustle like leaves in the wind. "Like I said, too much of you in me."





John Young

“Well, how can I fix that?” He asks, glancing at the pen as well. He wonders if he should reach for it, chancing to try again but it appears so far away, just out of his reach.

“I don’t know if you can,” she finally stands from her chair, moving closer to the desk, letting her fingers brush against the pages that detail her, letting bladed fingertips press into her written soul.

He reaches out as well, wishing to feel. Feel the inspiration, feel the imprints of her fingers, feel the details that had created her, feel the lingering warmth she had left behind, he does not know. Yet as he stretches out his hand, hoping to press against something tangible, it all begins to slip away, just outside of his reach. His pen, his lifeline, drips ink onto a new page, an empty page of snow, and though he casts out his empty hand he grasps nothing but the blank white expanse.

She picks up his pen, letting it rest in the cradle of her slender hand. “What if I were to write your story?” Her voice is breathless and devoid of malice.

She presses the pen to the page.

His limbs rustle like rumpled paper as he stands, his desk and pen and her now miles away, locked behind parchment walls. His hand remains aloft, reaching out to her.





# An Elegy for Academic Innocence

## Gabby Douthitt

Raveled skeins of pink squish tend to  
Ravel even more or unravel  
If you would call it that  
As black and red and blue ink  
Fills the lines or boxes in the  
Sacred book the scrambling student carries  
Tongue against bottom lip  
Scratching out "email whomever" or  
"Study whatever" with the first cousin of  
Feather quill found in the kitchen drawer  
Backpack pocket filled to the brim  
But I mumble "I'm busy" or justify  
"I don't have time" when the sacred book  
Jumps open in front of my eyes  
But to me this loss of life as the mountain  
Stream before us began as we woke up  
On a sticky August morning only a few  
Feet tall as our moms tied our little white  
Sneakers and we ran with our lunchboxes to  
Kindergarten reading and math and science  
But I stab the paper with pen as if to release  
Tangles and knots in my cranial yarn

# Placid

## Trang Nguyen





# Traction

## Emma St. Clair





# To the Speed Demon Old Ladies of the Neighborhood

## Ally Ameel

Sunsets do not satiate my desire  
to feel as if I am on fire  
flames licking the inside of my head  
something like passion.  
As much as I try  
to light a match on the roof of my mouth,  
there is too much glue there  
preventing me from saying too much  
when I shouldn't  
keeping people from getting angry  
at the words that might tip over their own candle  
in a room with billowing curtains.

I could use a lighter instead  
and hold it up and let the chemicals bleed into my veins  
but I think I would like to light my own fire.

I feel a tiny, miniscule craving to be reckless.  
One I've snuffed out with my bare fingers my whole life  
until I became afraid of my own shadow

until I made those things I wanted so undesirable  
forbidden  
capable of leaving scars.

Some part of me wants to be in the spotlight  
to stand on the moon.  
Everyone will buy a telescope just to see me  
leaping, soaring  
dancing on that shining orb  
and they won't be able to take their eyes off of me.

Because only then  
on the moon  
will I have found something  
bright enough  
big enough  
and striking enough  
to light the spark inside.





# Sobriety

## Ally Ameel

What is it like to be drunk?

I wonder. The thought sits briefly on a teeter-totter seesaw in my head, and I wonder what I would be like if I were drunk. Maybe I would be funny, for once, even though people keep failing to convince me that I am, in fact, funny sometimes. Perhaps I would like to dance even more than I regularly do, which is quite a lot, and I could lose myself more easily in a room stuffed with people. Maybe, if I were to get drunk, I wouldn't worry so much about the way I look. Maybe my alter ego drunk self likes to dance on tables and flirt with strangers. Maybe, my drunk self would cry a lot. I already cry much more than the average person. I would probably contemplate my mortality and think about the chances of my mother dying before me and cry myself into a drunken slumber. Maybe, the intoxication would make me want to run onto the rooftops and scream for all the times I hid in my room or just sat there when I really wanted to speak up for myself one fucking time.

But maybe, the conclusion that I see myself coming to every time, I would like it. I would like the way the liquor went to my brain and made me forget all of the sadness. I would like the way I felt fearless and the daily anxieties that haunted me would drift away. Maybe I would like the power I felt, and the possibility of kissing that stranger or dancing on that table. Maybe I would be daring and bold and all the things that I struggle to be every single day.

And that scares me. So I stay away from alcohol the same way that girls keep mace on their lanyards and guys carry condoms in their wallets. As a precaution. Just in case. As a warning to myself that if I can easily eat away my sorrows or stay up until 2 am just to be able to fall asleep at night then maybe I won't be able to stop. Maybe I'll drink and drink and drink until I fill myself up and there's no more room for the scary thoughts anymore. I'll laugh and I'll dance and I'll sway and I'll drift and I'll drown in the flow of liquid down my throat. Never enough. I'll drink and drink and drink until I'm gone.



# Sun

## Liam Evans

"This is a weird question, but have you ever been electrocuted?"

"Um."

"I only ask because I have been."

-

The barista makes conversation with each person in line. She is sweet and her face reminds me of sunlight. Possibly also because she mentions that she's glad that it's sunny today, and not rainy, as it has been in the past week.

I didn't agree with this sentiment until she said it.

I still don't know if I totally agree with it, but hearing her say it makes it make sense.

-

A couple sits to the front of me, a canvas in front of each person. They are painting each other's faces. The man holds a small baby, very small, and pats her gently.

The woman holds up the canvas and shows it to the man. He nods, and she sets it down and continues to paint.

It looks really accurate to me.

-

The electrocution couple are still talking. I can't hear them; I am listening to music privately in my earbuds.

I pause the music to change the song.

"For me, it was when I was like cleaning out my power outlet—on my wall. I like felt this small shock. It was really weird. I didn't know what to do."

I press my finger over another song, and I can no longer hear them.

I wonder if they're dating, and if so, what date number this is. Was there a specific moment in time when she felt she was ready to talk about her experiences with being electrocuted? Maybe a certain milestone that had to be passed?

I hope that she hasn't been electrocuted since. I also think about

*continued, line break*





## *Sun*

how I have never felt the need to clean out a power outlet. But it sounds like something that made a lot of sense to her. I hope that her power outlet is clean.

-

The painting couple continues to paint. The man is working hard to capture the intricacies of the woman's nose. He's spent quite some time on this.

Maybe that's what love is—never being satisfied with trying to capture the intricacies of your partner's nose.

He doesn't look up much.

Maybe that is also love—knowing your partner's nose well enough to paint it mostly by memory.

-

I go up to the counter to ask for the Wi-Fi password. The sunshine barista is helping a customer, so I ask the other one.

"Yeah, it's *iloveyou*."

-

The man holds up his painting to the woman this time. They both laugh.

It looks really accurate to me.

-

I get up to leave, placing my belongings back into my bag. I initially leave both earbuds in, but I take one out to say thank you to the sunshine barista.

"Have the best day ever!"

That's what the neon words on the wall say, too. But for some reason, it doesn't make her saying it any less significant.

I smile, and then walk up the stairs and out into the sunshine.





# Mrs. Clara Jackson Brandon Kurtz

**5 June 1853**

*Mrs. Clara Jackson was found in the study, clinging lifelessly to her husband's corpse. It appeared that he had been brought there from his resting place at Brookwood Cemetery. In a chaotic sprawl around them was an assortment of candles, dead animals, and the body of a servant girl who had gone missing several days before. Mrs. Clara Jackson's journal was on the desk beside the horrid scene, along with an assortment of occult books and recent scientific publications. Her last entries, detailing her final days after the death of her husband, explained what had happened in chilling detail.*

\*\*\* \*\*

**23 May 1853**

Lewis's funeral is tomorrow. I miss him dearly. Since the servants found him in his study, clutching his chest with a face as white as cotton, I cannot help but mourn the life we lived together. My mother taught me the value of women and the men from which it comes. That is why my mother was such a great woman; she had married a great man. So too, did Lewis elevate me to a great worth. He was a generous and wealthy man who cared deeply for those around him. And through him, I was a generous and wealthy woman who cared deeply for those around her.

But now he is gone. And I find myself despairing to think of my life without him. There is no value in a husbandless woman. I will have to heed my parents' wishes for a quick mourning period and that Heaven helps me find a new husband soon.

I must retire now, for it is late and I must take what little sleep I can tonight. How I dread tomorrow.

**24 May 1853**

The service was as I had expected. I do not wish to dwell on it, even in my diary. But I believe my worries are to be solved with a most complex answer.

I met a woman after Lewis's service. Everyone had gone, and my driver waited for me in the street when I saw her creeping through the cemetery. She was hunched over from age, and her feeble feet struggled to keep her standing. With wide, sweeping circles, she looked like a vulture circling an old headstone.

Shamefully, I admit that I stared for quite a while until the crone caught my gaze. She did not scorn me as I had expected but invited me over to her husband's grave as she continued her



*Mrs. Clara Jackson*

vulture-circles and explained the magic she was emulating. It wasn't witchcraft, which used to earn one a stake in a pyre; this was the occult magic that men and science followed.

I am not superstitious. But thoughts of having Lewis back, thoughts of him sitting in his reading chair with that grin of his as he told me how well of a job I had done, thoughts of being whole and worthy of society again flooded my mind. The notions settled and took root, and my mind was made up. I asked her so many questions as if it were some amateur interrogation. But the old woman happily answered every question I had and directed me to a library in which some of the books she read are kept.

I stopped by the library for one of the books she mentioned and found there an entire collection on the occult. I checked them all out and will give them a read over the next few days. My husband's butler, Irving, thinks me mad. But there is nothing a wife should not do for her husband. Without a husband, a woman is nothing.

### **27 May 1853**

The library's books on the occult were too introductory for my desires. They spoke frivolously on the history of the occult and the great minds that make up its societies. The chapters were pockmarked with semi-useful information, but that was all. I finished two on the first evening, and while I worked through the rest, I sent the servants to London and Oxford to find more. Those proved much more useful, and I have learned so much so fast.

Many of these books border heretical in their words. Some speak of eating flesh or washing one's self in the blood of animals to take on the power of their essence. I detest these ideas, but I must search the texts if I wish for Lewis to return home. If I continue without a husband, what will people think of me?

I have spent my days in my husband's study with these books, where I can find privacy and quiet to work. Some of these texts overlap, so their meaning is clear, but for others, I must connect the dots. There is so much to learn, so much to do. I have even heard tell of an Italian man who raised a man from the dead with electricity.

### **29 May 1853**

I cannot trust the servants. Even Irving's loyalty has been called to question. I've let some of the staff go over the last few days. I caught them hesitating by the door or craning their neck to see my work. Others whispered while they worked, privately plotting against me in my own home. I could not allow this, so





Brandon Kurtz

I fired them where they stood. I only had to continue this for a day or two before the remaining servants shut up and left my work alone. I reveled in the silence, setting about my task with no disturbances. But the servants are never tamed, merely satisfied momentarily of their curiosity and jealousy.

This morning Irving stopped by the door with a tray of hotcakes, sausages, and fried potatoes, but he lingered at the entrance to the study. I know he could see the books that were strewn upon my husband's desk, the words of powerful occult, and the brilliant findings of men like Luigi Galvani. He was jealous, I could tell. Irving was a servant. He was not privy to the great minds like I was. I guarded the desk like a hound and barked orders at him until he and his tray had disappeared back down the hall.

I would let Irving go, but he has been with my husband since before we wed. He would be cross with me if I were to do that. When my research was again safe from the prying eyes of those who would steal it, I continued. But I cannot trust Irving or the rest of the staff. I will have to keep a much closer eye on them.

### 30 May 1853

It came to my attention today that many of the servants are unwed. It was a sad realization, the matter being we have so many more women servants than male means our servants overwhelmingly mean nothing unless the women find husbands. To remedy this, I shall have them wed one another. Perhaps this will keep their prying eyes away from my work. I already spoke to them about the financial incentives of doing so; my husband always gives a wedding dowry to newlywed servants. Winnie is the only servant girl to resist saving. She cites her youth, having never bled, as her reason to be unwed. She is too young to realize her need for a husband outweighs these things.

I am going to kill her tonight, in her bedchamber, while she sleeps. If she does not wish to take a husband, then there is only one use for her. And after Lewis is back and I have learned so much more from my books, I can bring her back, too. It will be tricky to set up the trinkets without waking her - and slitting her throat will be messy. When it is done, I will undress and run my hands through her blood as if it were a crystal stream and cover my skin with it. There was a book that demanded I 'bathe' in the girl's blood, but it has a demonic air to it. I will probably burn it in the morning. I do not abide by the Devil's words.

Then I will lay beside her, wearing not but her blood over my skin until the servants have all gone to sleep before slipping





*Mrs. Clara Jackson*

away to my chambers so I may clean and redress. This way, I may take her power, as the tomes have said. And I have found the most genius excuse – in the morning, I will tell them that I found Winnie stealing from my jewelry box and had the police escort her away quietly. I shall leave her door locked so that none may enter, and those that try may be pawned as co-conspirators. Lewis will be so proud to know what I am doing to get him back.

I did not sleep that night, nor have I these past two since. The servants bought my little lie, so I shall count this successful. They know by now my knowledge of higher powers, and what else can you trust but the words they write in their books. I read the books and study their words and ways, so they must believe me.

#### **4 June 1853**

I slept last night, the whole night through. This time there were none of those treacherous servants to wake me from my thoughts, and I had the most incredible dream. Lewis was home, and I had brought him there. Oh, he was so grateful that he didn't even mind the mess in his office! I know what I must do now to bring my dear home.

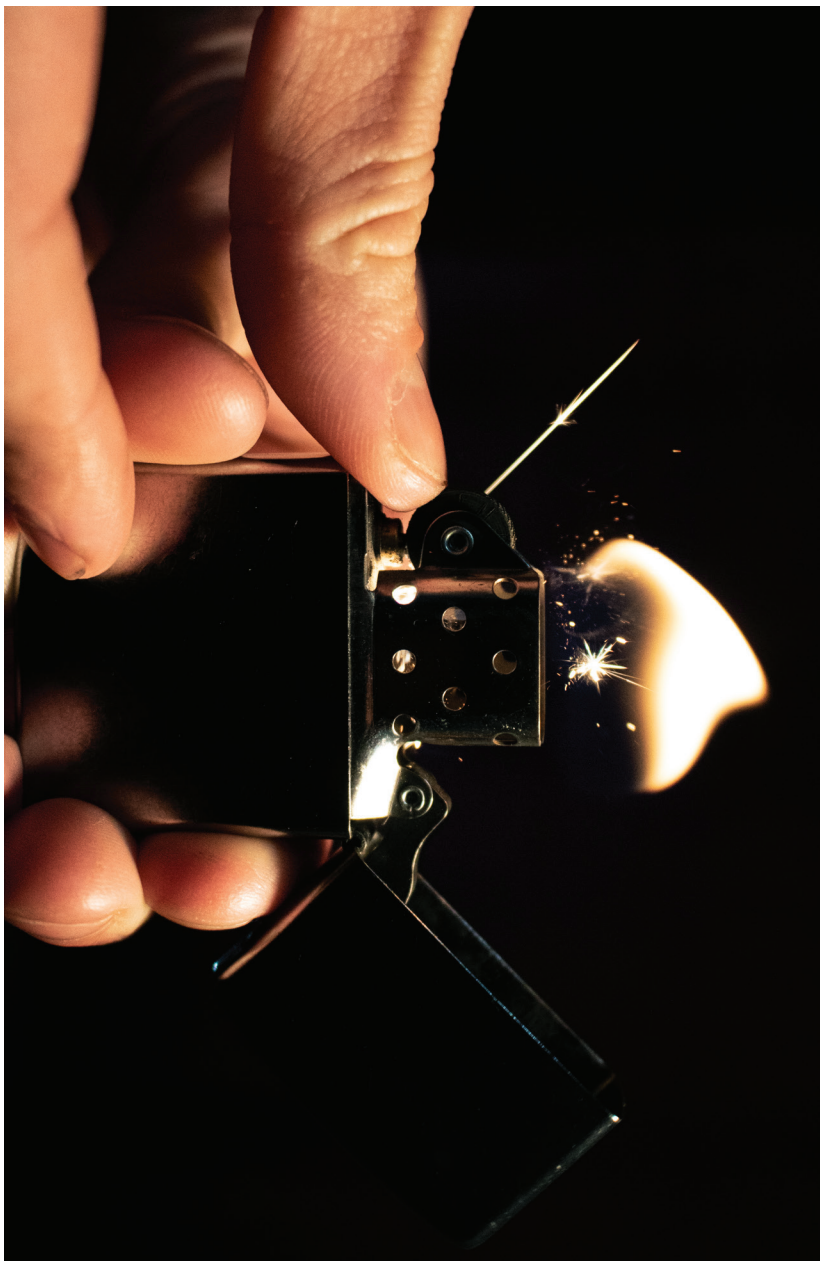
I will head to the graveyard and visit him one last time with shovel and cart in hand. Nobody will suspect it was me – there are always bodies being taken for one experiment or the next. If they do, then I will show them my husband, alive, and everything will be alright.

The ritual will be in Lewis's office. It's the only place Irving won't go for fear of me firing him as I did the others. For further measure, I have dismissed the staff not essential to maintaining the household. Lewis will forgive me for this. We'll require all the privacy we can afford tonight. I will bring Winnie's body, too, so that I can use all the power she possesses. She still sleeps in her chamber on those red sheets. If she proves too weak – and she very well might. She was never too healthy, the poor thing – then I shall use my own blood and my own body. Why should I not?

A woman is nothing without her husband.

# Starts with a Spark

Heather Payne



**Sunrise in the Outback**  
**Matthew Bolding**







# Your Apologetic Wife

## Gabrielle Wilkinson

*Helen Hamilton Award Winner*

I'm sorry that you'll love me.

I'm sorry that on our first date

I'll move  
(and shift)  
uncomfortably in my seat  
(the entire time).  
And you'll assume it's because I'm bored  
(but I won't be)  
and want to leave  
(but I won't want to).

I'll just be desperately trying to hide  
what I'm not ready for you  
to see.

I'm sorry that the first time I meet your family  
I'll wear long sleeves and pants in the middle of July  
(but really cute long sleeves and pants)  
and I'll pick at my food  
(but won't actually eat it)  
and I'll laugh noticeably louder and smile noticeably bigger  
(but only noticeable to you).

Because I'll need them to not  
look at my skin  
and to not  
think I look bloated  
and to not  
know how perpetually preoccupied my mind  
really is.

I'm sorry that the first time you tell me you love me  
I won't say "I love you too"  
(even though I would mean it).  
Instead I'll say "are you sure?"  
(and I will mean that).

Because how could you?  
How could you love someone who gets seduced  
by sharp ends and  
colorful handles?

*continued, line break*





*Your Apologetic Wife*

I'm sorry that the instant you bend down on one knee  
with sweat on your brow  
(dripping)  
and that big, beautifully stupid smile on your face  
(beaming)

I'll be thinking  
"how do my scars look from down there?"  
"how sharp are the edges on  
that diamond?"

I'm sorry that on our wedding day  
as you promise me a forever  
("Till death do us part...")

I'll stand there  
ridden  
with guilt  
seeing  
no such thing.  
Because there is no forever  
with someone  
who loves blades more  
than people.

I'm sorry that the first time we make love  
when you kiss every inch of my body  
(not missing even one)  
and your lips brush on the parts of me that are mutilated  
(not by accident)

I'll flinch  
and stiffen up  
and you'll wonder  
if you did something wrong.  
But it's not you.  
It's me.

I promise.

I'm sorry that our daughters  
will look at my body and ask  
(without hesitation)  
"mommy where did those scars come from?"  
(with blunt adolescents)

*continued, line break*





Gabrielle Wilkinson

and that I'll look at you  
because I won't know what to say  
and for some reason  
I need you to bear my  
cross too.

I'm sorry that sometimes you'll come home to  
a locked bathroom door  
(our locked bathroom door)  
And you'll want to  
(so badly)  
knock  
(loudly)  
call out my name  
(desperately)  
break the door down  
(forcefully).  
But you won't  
(thankfully).

Because you will know  
that when the devil  
speaks to me  
just a little too loud  
there's nothing for you  
to do.

I'm sorry about the nights when you'll wake up  
and won't see my body lying next to yours  
("no").  
But you will see the scissors missing  
("please no")  
and hear the shower running  
("please God no").

You'll walk to the bathroom  
and see  
the scissors on the floor  
followed by  
a trail of stained tissues.  
And you'll walk right up to my  
shuddering body  
on the floor of our shower.  
And you will hug me.

*continued, line break*



*Your Apologetic Wife*

And I will cry.  
And I will say  
"it hurts"  
and you will say  
"shh"  
as the water rushes over both  
of us.

I'm sorry that when we're old  
and you lay in your hospital bed  
(sound asleep)  
and I hold your hand  
(wide awake)  
I will weep  
(quietly).

My heart  
will sink  
and my mind  
will be consumed with the realization  
that you wasted your life  
falling in love with a woman  
who turned out to be  
just a bunch of broken pieces  
that loves  
to think about scissors  
and hates  
to talk about food  
and is  
always overthinking  
and shared  
the bed with more than just you.  
I will weep because  
you deserve better.  
You

deserved better.

But today more than anything

I'm sorry that you'll love someone who loves to  
hurt themselves.

I'm sorry that the twisted reality of our circumstances will land you in my lap,  
making you fall in love  
with me.

*continued, line break*





Gabrielle Wilkinson

And I'm sorry because at some point, I'll wish  
you hadn't.  
And I'm sorry because I'll know that there is nothing I could've done  
about it  
and I'm sorry because there's nothing you could've done  
about it.  
And I'm sorry that you'll just have to be here  
with me.

You'll have to look at my scars  
(kiss them goodnight)  
rub your thumb over them  
(until you don't feel anything anymore)

and look me in the eyes  
and say  
"baby I love you."  
And I'll look you right back in the eyes  
and say  
"I know, and

I'm sorry."  
**your apologetic wife**



# Visiting Monet: The Late Years

## Shawna Dyer

Standing there, I couldn't help  
but cry. Everything was on fire.  
The reds and yellows swallowing  
up blues and greens and purples  
I had known for so long.

Disorienting to be engulfed by tens  
of massive canvases all looking  
different but named "Water Lilies"  
or "Japanese Bridge." A varying life  
breeds the same things. The last time

I saw Monet's paintings, he wasn't  
at the end life's container, squeezing  
out whatever was left inside with great  
force. I could see how he'd grown,  
with fire. I knew I was different too.





# Jardin des Plantes (Garden of Plants) in early Autumn

**Sarah Jennings**

*Honorable Mention for the Helen Hamilton Award*





## After Berry-Picking

### Caroline Langston

It is the summer of 2003 and I am small and far away from the world, tucked in the rural heartland of Missouri. The sun has barely risen on the swath of land my family owns, turning acres of wild grasses and scraggly trees from gray to gold as its light chases away the last of the shadows. It's not hot yet, but already warmth is beginning to gather in the air.

This morning I am wide awake and barefoot, tromping through the unmown grass with two dogs close at my heels, one yellow and one black. Dry things let out muffled crackles underneath my feet and stretching stalks of switchgrass reach up to brush against my arms, their feathery fingers leaving seeds clinging to my shirt. With each step, great waves of grasshoppers go flying out of my way, disturbed out of whatever secret lives they live underneath the brush. I like to imagine that to them I am a giant, all 4 feet 3 inches of me.

My brother walks some yards in front of me, accompanied by his own cloud of fleeing grasshoppers. Every so often he kicks out his leg with purpose, smiling to himself as even more of them go flying. He's bigger than me and walking faster, with hair so blond that it seems almost translucent in the sunlight, creating a halo around his face as he turns to look back at me.

"Come on, slowpoke," he calls, brows furrowing as he sees how far behind I've lagged. I can't help it – my legs are too small and the world is too distracting. Was I expected not to stop and watch the last shades of red and orange fade from the sky? Still, I pick my feet up and bound over to him, and our dogs bound with me, tails wagging wildly as they crash through the grass.

I even out next to him, though the leader of our caravan is still far in front of us, marked by a familiar red ballcap – our father. It is a great treat for him to be here; it's Friday, and usually he would be minutes away from leaving for work, but today he's decided to stay home. I've never seen him take a day off, and that makes this pilgrimage seem a little bit more special, as if he has decided to be here just for me. The thought makes me smile, and I can't help but bounce on the tips of my toes for a few steps.

One glance back tells me that our house is far behind us and one glance forward, around my dad's tall frame, tells me that we're almost to our destination. Suddenly I, like the grasshoppers, am jumping with excitement. I can't stay still – giving my brother a playful shove, I break into a run again.

"Last one there's a rotten egg!" I shout, hearing a groan







Caroline Langston

and then the great rustle of pursuit in reply. In a fair match, he'd beat me easily, but this time I have a head start.

Our target is easy to spot in the field of brown and yellow – three bright green bushes rise above everything else, taller than me and clinging to a barbed wire fence. It is the only fence on our property, red from years of rust and faithfully cutting off one empty field from another. I have squirmed underneath it too many times to count, and soon I will cross it again. I pump my legs faster, faster, eager to be there and all too aware that over my own pants I can hear my brother growing closer.

Past our dad and the many waves of grasshoppers, we race. Cicadas cheer us on, their voices mixing together into a great chorus of indiscernible noise, though in my mind they are shouting my name. Long strands of yellow hair fall across my face as I go, unbrushed and wild like the grass, but I don't pause to push it out of my eyes. There's too much at stake – bragging rights, of course, and perhaps the admiration of the cicadas, but most importantly first pick of the dark berries I can see nestled between the three bushes' emerald leaves. They are blackberries, soft and sweet and finally, after weeks and weeks of watching them turn slowly from crimson to black, perfect for the picking.

In the end, it's hunger that pushes me forward for the last few feet, and though our dogs beat us both, I beat my brother – by a nose, but I do. He denies it until our dad arrives, slow and unbothered, and then we both go silent with anticipation. Eyeing us both, my dad takes hold of the fence and pulls up on one wire while pushing his boot down on another until a hole big enough for us to slip through forms. The rusting metal creaks as he forces it to open, and I'm moving to dive through in an instant, but I don't take more than one step before I'm being yanked backwards by my collar. It's my brother, staring down at me with squinted eyes.

"I'm the oldest – *me first*," he insists, and though I want to protest and say that I was the one who won the race, I hold my tongue, giving my dad an exasperated look instead – *can you believe this guy?* Smiling, he winks at me.

When my brother bends to duck through the hole, pleased at my lack of argument, he is smug for all of five seconds before his shorts snag on the wire and he's caught. As he fumbles, I snicker and he hears it, and with a loud huff he unceremoniously yanks his shorts free. They come away with a jagged tear down the left pantleg, which makes me snicker again. That's karma – at least, I *think* it's karma. The first time I heard that word was a few



### *After Berry-Picking*

days ago when my mom said it to my dad after he came home from work in a worse mood than usual.

"I tell you, you've got some *bad* karma going on," she'd said to him, shaking her head. He'd only sighed and pulled his thick glasses off so he could rub the bridge of his nose. The reason for his mood was lost on me, so I'd rolled the funny word around in my mouth for a minute before piping up to ask what it meant, drawing him out of whatever thoughts were creasing his brow.

"Well, I guess it's like...the things you do always have consequences," he'd replied, followed by another sigh. So, there it was – my brother had pulled my collar, and now the fence pulled his shorts. Karma.

I wiggle through the fence next, small enough not to get snagged, and our dogs follow behind me. There is less grass across the divide and the earth is drier, as if the blackberries have taken all the water for themselves. I turn and examine the dazzling green of their leaves as my dad lets the fence fall back into shape and then steps over it entirely, legs longer than mine ever will be. His boots stir up yellow dust as they fall against the ground, and then we are all there, standing in front of the prize, the wild treasure.

Picking blackberries is an art, though not a hard one to master. It's a balancing act between what can be eaten now, what should be saved for later, and what should be left for the birds and insects and earth to have. I was first taught to touch the berries gently instead of squeezing them to death in my small hands; now I hold them delicately between thumb and forefinger, testing their ripeness before I pull them from their stems. Some are too ripe (too soft and already leaking their juices) while others are not ripe enough, unyielding and meant to be picked on another day. The ones in between are why we're here – they're perfect, sweeter than what's found inside stores and tasting like freedom.

This morning, as always, I crouch low next to the biggest of the three bushes and eat far too many berries before I slow, and my attention turns to the joy of the moment. Picking from the high tops of the bushes, my dad pauses to give me a bright smile and send a too-ripe berry sailing through the air for a dog to leap and catch. I laugh heartily at that and then throw one of my own, but at my brother, who lurches to catch it in his mouth before it bounces off his nose and onto the ground. Another dog laps it up, and then we take turns trying, and failing, to catch berry after berry in our mouths. The dogs feast, and we laugh ourselves silly.

When the game is done, we all sit in a loose circle, legs stretched out and sun warming our faces. My dad runs his eyes



Caroline Langston

over the three bushes, a small smile still tugging at his lips. In just the few minutes we've been here, he's smiling more than he has in the past few weeks.

"You see the little bush on the end?" he says at length, motioning with his chin towards the smallest of the three. "It'll be twice as big next year. Wait and see."

I grin at the idea – that's more berries for me. There is no thought in my mind, small and hopeful as it is, that *next year* may not come for me and that little blackberry bush, though that future is looming. The truth I know now is this: this will be my last year to pick blackberries, warmed by the summer air and cushioned between my father and brother. My last year living in the big house at my back, with its long porch and the five stray cats that like to sleep underneath it. My last year here, until something bad at my dad's work will make it so that we have to leave because he's not a blackberry picker in real life – he's a professor at a college with a denomination for a name, and the truth is that in this small Missouri town, not all kinds of bravery are rewarded. Sometimes, as my father will learn, religion runs thicker than blood, and the church wants you to hold your tongue rather than use it.

Of course, I don't understand any of that, and I won't for many years. To the me who can still count my age on one hand, "religion" is little more than the reason I get to watch Veggie Tales with my friends on Sunday. I won't understand that it has chewed me up and spit me out along with my father, though perhaps that idea will follow me into my adult life – all I will know is that my horrible, awful parents will force me to move away from all of my friends, and I won't know that all of those friends' parents decided together that I would no longer be invited over to play. Neither will I know that in my new home, there will be no wild blackberries to pick.

If, by some clairvoyant act, I *had* known, I surely would've stayed longer, sprawled out in that field with a full belly and my family around me – stayed all day and into the night and long past that, until I grew into the ground and became a blackberry bush myself. Instead, I picked for no more than half an hour and listened to my dad reminisce on his childhood for even less than that, and then began to complain, like a child, that already it was too hot. In the end, I blew away like a leaf in the wind, back through the fence and across the field and up the stairs to my childhood home, certain that there would be more seasons of harvest.



*After Berry-Picking*

When the berry-picking was done for that final time, so went with it my last moment of sheltered youth when the world was nothing but kind and gave me gifts of sweet fruit. That world now lies beyond what I can reach in anything but memory. Would that I could go back – but, as with everything where time is involved, I can't.



# Notes on my iPhone

## Shawna Dyer

June 6, 2019

When I look over and see  
the speed limit sign, I press  
my foot on the gas a little harder  
knowing I'm getting farther away  
from you.

Sometimes I fantasize  
about closing my eyes,  
smashing into cement.  
At least it could finally  
be over then.

June 22, 2019

Missing you follows me  
everywhere as a shadow.

Wraps its arms around me  
as I fall asleep.

Visits me there too,  
in my world of dreams.

July 19, 2019

I want to know happiness.  
Stroke it in my trembling hand.  
Feel it brush up against my thumb.

August 15, 2019

You told me I'd be  
just a memory  
while I was lying  
in your arms.

I didn't know truth  
to be that sharp.



## An End

### Shawna Dyer

I forgot to turn off the ceiling fan  
before I got in the shower. My skin  
tingling, wishing it was a thousand layers  
thicker as the water stops running.  
The last time I felt like this,  
I was in your arms. I could sense  
there wouldn't be a time to follow.  
It feels like the world  
is falling apart all over again.  
Even when I'm just trying to find  
a coupon for that clothing store  
I like, I'm overwhelmed by *Rolling Stone*  
Breaking News emails. I have an inbox  
full of obituaries. Death keeps getting in the way.



# We Are Magic

## Jaya Armstead

To my sisters that rock cornrows, afro puffs, and pixie cuts  
Whether you're slanging that 30 inches or rip the tides with your waves  
No matter the color or texture, hair is expression to my black queens  
Deep conditioned with love and combed by those who are brave

This message is for you to love your beauty, soul, and brains

From vibrant expression to every shade of melanated complexion  
Our skin goes beyond the limitations of basic brand foundations  
They can't handle our reds and golds with cool and warm tones  
Constant division by our skin to the point where shades stand alone

Look to your left and right you, I, WE are not somebody's fetish

We, together, are strong, powerful, free, and magical beings  
Forerunners of history securing bags and making money moves  
Admonished for independence because folks lack to see how it's freeing  
But where would we be if we worried about someone's approval

These next words are for my black queens that are hurting

The snake of depression is lying to you as he wraps you in anxiety  
He wants to silence your voice but homegirl do not let him  
In the eyes that others see as empty, I see the hope of a sparkling entity  
There is an illuminated glow around you that should never go dim

You have love, you have power, you have magic!

Embrace the powerful you the Everlasting God bless you to be  
As sisters we must stand together side by side supporting another

So at the top of your lungs shout that yaass queen or that gooo bestieeee  
Cause as one we are stronger and better when we're together

You are, I am, We are magic!





# 3048

## Marcus Cazares





# Icarus

## Adrienne Stallings

we fancy ourselves Icarus:  
the children of geniuses inventors artists  
who yearn for freedom  
from the prisons in which *almighty* kings have us caged.

then we're given wings and we fly, soar,  
over kingdoms mountains oceans  
reaching for the sky  
because we've been told  
*the sky's the limit.*

we swoop through the clouds,  
crowing  
*we rule the world.*

then we set our sights on the light  
that illuminates our horizon  
and we reach out and-

falling plummeting crashing

the warning  
*fly not too close to the sun*  
comes to us too late

as our wings molt away  
and we're cast out,  
banished from the sky,  
and we remember

Icarus did not fly.

Icarus fell.

they blame Icarus for his demise  
*a warning against youthful arrogance*  
*you should be quiet and listen to your elders*  
*your elders know best*

*continued, line break*



*Icarus*

*it was not us who crashed into the sea*  
never mentioning  
that Daedalus knew.

that Daedalus knew the dangers,  
having crafted the wings.

that Daedalus could have intervened  
and saved his son from falling.

one word  
*stop*  
is all he had to say.

but no.

silence reigned  
as Daedalus soared  
and Icarus fell.  
is it too much to ask  
for success for us as well?

it was only after  
his son had died  
that Daedalus had cried  
*I shall pray for you*

a farce, a show,  
for if he had cared,  
he wouldn't have held his words  
until Icarus had already burned.



# Road Kings

## Mike Tran

"It's different for people like us," said Chris as he silently stared out the passenger window. Dusk had fallen, and we were already far from home. Beneath us, the once vast roadway had narrowed into a two-lane interstate. There are hardly any traffic lights on the 400 mile stretch of road between Fort Worth and Lafayette, and as a driver you can barely see the distant red glow of taillights bleeding through the darkness. Sometimes they rise like airplanes departing a runway, and you can tell that there's a steep hill ahead. Some sections of the interstate are lined with tall rows of pine trees. In these parts, the world is two-dimensional, and you can't help but let your mind wander. Many people would suggest that hell is a hot place, but it's not. Hell was here, in my Toyota Camry, with the air conditioner blasting at a cool sixty-eight degrees Fahrenheit.

As Chris reclined lowly into his seat, he pulled over a pale gray cotton blanket and buried his face in the wedge of his shoulder. Beneath the curls of his dark hair, I could see deep impressions around his eyes – battle scars from a long, sleepless weekend at a robotics competition at the DoubleTree in Lafayette. We had lost badly. A year's long work of planning, departmental conflicts, and political work went down the drain in forty-eight hours due to a poorly soldered connection. I, too, was exhausted. I was supposed to be at a party in the GrandMarc, but instead I was sulking in the countryside of Louisiana. Of all the moments the rain could have come, I wished that it hadn't then. Soft taps on the windshield turned to violent torrents in an instant. The visibility became worse with the reflection of my headlights mixing with the downpour. Mother nature had a funny way of speaking. The pine rows grew taller and I began to reflect.

I met Chris two years earlier when I was doing the dirty work on the suspension system for a race car that the upperclassmen in the engineering school were building. He, an upperclassman himself, had a sincere way of looking at things. The fact that we were building something as captivating as a race car wasn't the interesting part of the project, but instead it was the fact that we were doing it against the department's wishes. The following year, when that project understandably failed, he found a hobby in doing industrious things such as running high-budget research projects and working with expensive microcontrollers. I had just been promoted as head of the electrical engineering club when he proposed to me a grand plan to jumpstart a robotics program at TCU. I had grown to distrust his type: the people who



## *Road Kings*

worshipped the likes of Steve Jobs and emulated them by wearing expensive black sweaters. As he spoke to me, he patted down his curls and pushed his square rimmed glasses up the ridge of his nose. He sounded dull when he ran through how we would establish an organization, get funding, and cut through all the red tape and whatnot. Yet in this haze, he pulled me closer and said, “Look, the university isn’t going to do squat for the kids in our department. You saw how they turned down the other guys for funding. If you want change, then you’ve got make it yourself. You’ve got to make them respect you.” And thus, we began our campaign into the dark, into the offices and lecture halls of the engineering department, and on the road that took us to Louisiana as a well-funded and established robotics team.

The rain eventually let up, but it was still difficult to see with the road mist in the way. I looked over to see Chris awake and slumped over while tapping away at a dimly lit cellphone screen. His once well-fitting and dark attire was replaced with a wardrobe of baggy autumn-colored sweatshirts and pants. He let his glasses droop low with his curls, and at that moment he really did look like someone who could change the world. His dark complexion made people take him seriously, but it also deluded others into thinking that he was a foreigner. We once joked about how amusing it was when people asked us about which country we were from – unaware of the fact that we were both born and raised in Fort Worth. Our fathers were foreigners; his father came from Nepal and mine from Vietnam. They landed in this city to pursue the American dream and to afford lives for their children that they didn’t have themselves. Yet in the traditional sense, we didn’t have the luxury of going to baseball games or holding barbeques in the front yard. Instead, Chris and I lived very private and quiet lives tucked away from the very Americana that our families sought. Chris looked up from his phone and began to speak.

“I see you around campus a lot Mike, but I’ve never seen you hang around the same people. Think about it. Do you routinely hang around white people? What about the Vietnamese community?” he pressed me for an answer.

I was startled by how direct his question was, but it didn’t take me long to understand where he was coming from. It was true. I didn’t really have a routine social circle, and who I hung out with had always been a day-to-day ordeal. There was never a time in my life where I could recall that I felt like I fit in. The common experiences, the uniting stories and rituals that glued friends together, were simply not in my world. I didn’t have a grasp of



Mike Tran

what life was truly like from the American perspective, and neither did I know what it was like to live a culturally rich Vietnamese life. I remained silent, but he continued.

“You see what I mean? We’re the same. It’s different for people like us. I’m a brown boy, but I won’t fit in with the other brown guys here. I can talk to white people, but it’s not like I can ever really be one of them.”

It was out of his character to be concerned about things like this. An awkward and deep silence filled the cabin of the car. Our conversations never ventured far from the comfort of inside jokes and hooliganism, yet here we sat in realization that we had just skirted past the norm. I could lie and tell you that we had a profound dialogue following this. But instead, I only uttered a mess of incoherent speech while trying to process the connotation of what he had said. It was clear that this was discomforting for both of us, and we searched for an excuse to stop speaking. Chris eventually lifted his legs up and placed them on the dashboard. He fiddled with the knob on the radio until he found some electronic music that he liked and snuck away into his slumber.

In the distance, I began to see the familiar highway lamps of the greater metroplex. Each lamp that passed would shine a ray of amber light on the steering wheel. The light would bleach the cabin and recede. You could only receive brief glimpses of things that weren’t evident in the dark: the KitKat wrappers on the floor, the pennies in the cupholders, and the frayed stitching of the tan leathered seats. As I drove, it became clearer to me that what Chris had said was something he had been stewing over for a long time. It was a frustration that had developed from many years of trying to craft and anchor a sense of belonging in the world. I too, though not in the exact form, have felt a similar sentiment. Whether it be in the backseat of a lecture hall or at the table of a rowdy bar, in private recesses of a bedroom or in the front row of a concert, in a walled cubicle or in a room of familiar faces, there’s an inescapable sense of estrangement for people like us. It’s a shared and unspoken feeling fragmented in the daily lives of people who keep busy to forget about it. Chris was a giant, or so he believed himself to be. I also believed that I was mighty. Perhaps our troubles were more deeply rooted beyond the competition and the engineering department at TCU.

When we arrived at the front of Chris’s home, I helped him carry a plastic tub of broken robot parts to his room. The room was dimly lit by one fluorescent lightbulb, and the wooden floor was littered with the remains of what appeared to be three years of math homework. Chris plopped himself on his bed and sighed





### *Road Kings*

from exhaustion. His night was over, but I still had a celebration to attend. We shook hands and I gave him a quick pat on the back. As I walked out his bedroom door, I could not help but feel an overwhelming sense of empathy. "Do you want to come to the party with me?" I asked. But when my eyes met his, I already knew the answer. Alone, I headed off in the night.

The interstate highway system of the US is a modern marvel. It carried Chris and I far from home, and it safely guided us back towards it. Though some stretches thin out and are hazardous at night, a well-composed driver can get from point A to point B without much hassle. Some may disagree, but it is a truly fascinating experience to drive it. It contains a microcosm of peoples from all types of places and backgrounds. Chris has graduated now, and I have been left to handle the remains of our efforts. We don't talk often. When I am driving, I often think back to that conversation and wonder if we are better off keeping busy. Perhaps we are, or maybe not. One thing is certain though. I am brazened on the road. "Be courteous!" Chris would scream out as I passed people on the shoulder. "What do you think I'm doing?" I would shout back at him.



# Eggs

Rae McColum



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“THE WORST ENEMY  
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SELF-DOUBT.”  
- Sylvia Plath