



# eleven40seven

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# **VOLUME 17.2**

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**“EVEN THE GREATEST  
WAS ONCE A  
BEGINNER. DON’T  
BE AFRAID TO TAKE  
THAT FIRST STEP.”**

**- Muhammad Ali**





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# EDITORS' NOTE

In this issue of *eleven40seven*, diverse voices and themes abound. Many of the pieces in this journal could be interpreted as reflections on the self, ruminations on identity, memory, and representation. As Co-Editors, we feel incredibly lucky to have witnessed such a variety in the outpourings of creativity we received as submissions.

We are both grateful to have had each other to support and challenge each of us through the editorial process. More than anything, we are humbled and always impressed by the dedication of our staff, and their thorough, fair, generous consideration of pieces. As the semester wore on, their discerning opinions regarding our standards and their personal aesthetics grew more and more confident and eloquent. We think we can speak for the entire team in saying that we are proud of the journal that is in your hands now.

Thank you, *eleven40seven* team, for everything—your diligence, your patience, and your good spirits. Thank you to all our contributors for committing your bold visions to page for us to see. Thank you to all who submitted; we hope to see your names in print in the future, alongside other names yet unseen. Thank you, finally, reader, for picking up this book. It is the child of many.

- Hannah Reigle & Kelly Winegar





# Cows (We're Remarkable Cows)

## Caroline Watkins

Everything ends in a Walmart aisle  
Under blue skies, side by side Lay's  
A stack of mushed-up cow put to use—  
Exactly what she wrote in her will. Of course,  
When a man finds her he'll  
Wait to digest until he at least says hi.

Bessie was, once upon a time, royalty most high  
In the kingdom of Cow Isle.  
Earrings rang from both ears  
And a bell, most fashionable, was fastened on her heel.  
Bulls milked her teats as she lazed  
In the Himalayas of hay, deliciously coarse,  
Pondering the ethics of fences and sheep.

In the morning she woke with a leap  
Or she would have, had she been able to lift her hooves that high.  
According to the pigs, Bessie did in fact often resembled a corpse  
If one was not looking closely at her eyes  
Eyeing with the greatest disgust those dadgum flies  
Who, she was sure, were conspiring with the mosquitoes—her  
Achilles' heel.

The mice founded a cult based on her rumored abilities to heal  
Broken hearts. Her sacred day is in the spring,  
Although the exact day is disputed among the elders. Bessie's size  
Inspired a line of suitors (desperate for a wink or, God help them, a  
greeting)  
So long it was said to encircle the Isle three times. They sat idle  
In the queue for days. Setting course

Straight for her heart, bulls sailed from Corsica  
And Hawaii upon hearing rumors from the dolphins. At their heels  
Were the cows from Australia, riding side-saddle  
On the backs of kangaroos. They rode from winter to summer.  
In Cow Isle, they heard, birds were so numerous  
And the sky was so packed so high  
That the upper layer was a just soup of melted magpies.





Caroline Watkins

The goats, after much pondering, decided to try  
To build Bessie a statue. The statue turned into a ship, so of  
course  
Bessie had to give a tour. She got high  
With turtles and did some crack with eels,  
And somewhere along the way she died (bummer).  
There was a two-month-long mourning feast among the cattle.

Every Bessie-mush you buy supports a raccoon plumber  
In their battle against high mortgage rates in the sewers.  
Coarse veal heals liberty's hunger.



# The Queen

## Elizabeth Glazener

I was special.  
I was made for this.

At least that's what everyone had told me for as long as I can remember. But, from where I saw it, "special" was just another word for "lonely."

I knew the signs, the invitations sent to the Community.

First, there was the gossip of their return that would spread like wildfire through the Community, until every member was buzzing with excitement. Then, the Community Staff would begin preparations.

They reminded me of a storm, violent and chaotic, but somehow every element was perfectly in sync. Within minutes, the mouthwatering smells of the Community kitchens would drift through the hallways until everyone's senses were intoxicated with excitement. The Staff would begin work on the Great Hall. They would shoo out any lingering members and polish and scrub and buff, and would only stop when they could see their own faces reflecting back at them.

The Great Hall still took my breath away. It was situated in the lower quadrant of the Community, since it was one of the first features completed, and therefore one of the oldest. Like everything in the Community it was the product of the same storm of chaos and instinct that prepared for the Return Feasts. It was constructed with the traditional six-walled design, but the back wall was open to the world. The walls seemed to rise forever, lined with the Community's oldest and richest reserves.

This sacred space held the secrets and history of the entire Community. Soon, it would officially be my Community, and the Great Hall would protect my history.

Every member anticipated the days the Scouts returned to the Community. The Scouts were a symbol of hope. They brought back the promise of better, more certain times, times of plentiful resources and prosperity.



Elizabeth Glazener

Sometimes I silently wondered if hidden behind all those preparations and excitement was the realization that Return Feasts were becoming increasingly farther apart. Or did the Community truly live in blissful ignorance?

I also anticipated the Scouts' return, but for different, more selfish reasons. These were the only moments I could be alone, the only moments I wasn't the foremost thought in the Community's mind.

Once, when I was very little and before my more recognizable features had matured, I managed to sneak away from my rooms during a Return Feast. I pretended like I was just a normal member of the Community fulfilling my role to the collective. I let myself be swept away in the tide of members scuttling towards the Great Room.

That's when I saw them.

It was only a glimpse before I was lost again in the sea of the Community. But, tucked away, hardly visible from the main hallways, was a room like I had never seen before. It had the normal six walls but they were coated with a substance I had never seen. It wasn't the typical golden or even amber color; instead it was milky, thick, and sticky.

My curiosity concerning the walls was quickly replaced with growing confusion as I spotted the hulking forms inside. They were unlike anyone I had ever seen. My mind even tricked myself into believing they didn't have stingers. Well, I used to think it was a trick, now I knew the truth.

I locked eyes with one of them and I recognized an emotion I had never seen anywhere except staring back at me in the mirror. It was duty, tinged with sadness.

The deep vibrations echoing from the Return Feast shook me back to reality.

The Feast had begun. I snuck out of my rooms and raced down the hallway. Navigating the hallways would have seemed impossible to any outsider. But to the Community it was second nature. They were constantly changing and growing to fit the needs of the collective. The older sectors were lined with the Community's food reserves, lovingly cultivated and maintained by the Staff.



## The Queen

The newer sectors lay empty, eager to accommodate the soon-to-be young Community members.

As I passed through a new hallway I paused for a second. The tiny empty rooms running up the wall seemed to stare through me. I would fill those.

I would fill *all* those.

I shook my head trying to purge my own thoughts. I couldn't think like that. I was the Queen of this Community and it was my duty to ensure the survival of my subjects.

Everyone had a role and this was mine.

I tore my eyes from the rooms and continued down the halls until I found what I was looking for; a small crack in the hallway that tunneled until it opened up into the Great Hall, too high up for anyone to ever notice me.

The closer I got to the Great Hall, the louder the vibrations became. When I finally made it to the end of the tunnel my breath caught. Return Feasts were beautiful, but this was unlike anything I had ever seen. The Scouts moved across the floor like water cascading over rocks, never fully touching the floor, just floating in perfect time with one another.

Their dance told a story. Their movements turned shorter and they told the Staff about a new paradise that had suddenly appeared just outside the Community.

Their movements slowed again, swaying like a long-stemmed bloom. They talked of purples, pinks, yellows, and even blues.

The energy surged in the crowd. The Community was drunk on possibility and prosperity.

But something tugged at my gut. This wasn't right. Paradises don't just appear, especially not right outside our home. They take time, and the other Scouts would have noticed this so-called paradise long ago when it was still in its infancy.

No, this wasn't right.





Elizabeth Glazener

I turned and raced back to my rooms. As I suspected, the Forewoman was already waiting for me. The Forewoman was brilliant. She organized everything in the Community and ensured there was always enough Staff and food. If I was the head of the Community, she was the brain.

She lurched up and down, side to side, like raindrops hitting a leaf.

She told me that my first Flight Ceremony would have to be moved up. The promise of paradise meant the desperate need for new Staff. The Staff would have to expand the Community to accommodate the sudden influx of resources, not to mention the increased Staff needed to harvest the paradise.

It would need to be tomorrow.

*Tomorrow.*

That word echoed in my mind until I was drowning. The edges of my vision turned black and my legs suddenly forgot their job.

I shouldn't be surprised. Everything in my life had led up to this moment; this was my duty, no matter how hard it would be. The Community only functioned because everyone had a job. This was my job and that was *their* job. My mind quickly flashed to the sad pair of eyes I had glimpsed as a child, but I pushed the thought away.

I was special.  
I was *made* for this.

\*\*\*

*Head high, shoulders back, head high, shoulders back*, I thought; begging my body to obey.

I was back in the Great Hall, but this time I wasn't hidden high from the piercing eyes of the Community; now, I was on display. As terrified as I was I couldn't help but be amazed at the swiftness with which the Staff had prepared for my Flight Ceremony. The remains of yesterday's Return Feast had vanished and left in its place was the cold regal of an empty hall.





## The Queen

Unlike the Return Feast, the Flight Ceremony was an intimate ritual. Only myself, a few Staff, and the hulking figures from long, long ago were present. I chose to never learn the names of the figures, since that would make my duty unbearable.

The six figures were formed completely still in a perfect comb formation. Their stillness communicated an uncharacteristic somberness in the Community.

*Head high, shoulders back.* I walked through the center of the Great Hall until I was standing on the edge of the Community, ready to conduct the Flight Ceremony.

The silence shattered.

Staff swarmed into the Great Hall from the outside world. The storm that governed the Community was no longer in sync, only pure chaos.

The Staff bounced and hurtled and stomped.

They screamed that the paradise had been a trick, an attack; so many had been lost in a foreign cloud, poisonous to the touch.

Then, just as quickly as it had vanished, the silence returned.

The Community was engulfed in toxic air; every breath was like acid.

Everything I had ever felt came rushing back to me. My fear of failing the Community, of not being a worthy Queen. My sadness for what I must do to the hulking figures that occupied my childhood wonders. Even my joy that I felt experiencing the symphony of movement at the Return Feast.

Then my thoughts simply vanished and the entire Community went still.

*Sustaining Ourselves & Others  
Fiction Contest: First Prize Winner*







## Big Sky Gabby Douthitt

You'll grow up and not have to listen  
to what people tell you. You'll grow up  
and be you. You'll grow up and realize you aren't  
what you thought you were—better in some ways  
and worse in others. You're taller, stronger,  
and you finally grew into your broad shoulders. You  
came to appreciate the smooth, muscular mounds  
that make you strong in more ways than one, your strength  
no longer unseen. *Scrappy, unceasing, aware.*  
You're sharp and caring and intentional. No problem  
left unsolved, no chore left undone, no conversation left.  
You're still a psycho on whiskey  
and you're wound tight. You'll finally be unafraid  
to accept who you are: pen scratching  
sketchbook, shaggy fire hair, iced Americano  
jitters, hiking pants and Old Skools. You'll seek  
that starving artist dream you've had since you wrote pages  
and pages in your glitter diary, when your mom and dad  
and sister and brother stopped understanding  
you. You'll get rid of people you think  
mean the world to you,  
but all they've done is take—it's for the better.  
It's for the better when you realize you've left  
the shadow days and what hid you from you.  
Because now you're in rolling freedom,  
the vast expanse ahead of you, illuminated  
by the cold Montana sun. You're wearing tan suede boots  
and a baggy denim shirt and serving cold drafts  
to the ranchers that have become  
your world. That one rancher who showed  
you the hike where the moon looks just right,  
like it belongs to you.  
Because now you're rolling in freedom,  
the light side of the moon.



# Tonight

## Pamela Guerrero

“El mexicano frecuenta a la muerte, la burla, la acaricia, duerme con ella, la festeja, es uno de sus juguetes favoritos y su amor permanente.”

— Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*

I think of all the mythology

told to us as a bedtime story:

La llorona

*(te va agarrar si te portas mal)*

El chupacabras

*(te va agarrar si andas por ahí y por allá)*

Las sirenas

*(te van agarrar si andas con la infidelidad)*

and then

I am not so afraid

of death.



Pamela Guerrero

“The Mexican... is familiar with death, he jokes about it, he caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it, it’s one of his favorite toys and his most steadfast love.”

— Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*

I think of all the mythology

told to us as a bedtime story:

The Weeping Woman

*(will get you if you misbehave)*

The Goat Sucker

*(will get you if you’re here and there)*

The Mermaids

*(will get you if you’re an adulterer)*

and then

I am not so afraid

of death.



# Grisaille Still Life

## Victor Torres





# The Feeling of Being Watched

Lauren Fleniken





# Mama, Don't Take My Kodachrome Away

Anthony Lucido

"Mama, Don't Take My Kodachrome Away"

By: Caroline Gratia

August 28th, 1993

*This article was originally published in The New Yorker.*

"All that's just a load, man. We're here to kill gooks. Period.' Which wasn't at all true of me. I was there to watch."  
- War Correspondent Michael Herr

A middle eastern looking man contorts his face into impossible expressions of grief while holding a baby-shaped bundle wrapped in a bloody blanket. Another of the same man gently laying down his bundle into a row of similarly shaped bundles. Tanks rolling through bombed out remains of buildings that look like construction sites without scaffolding and equipment. Long trains of displaced refugees marching down dirt roads carrying all their belongings. Some stare straight into your soul.

These are the images that line the photo album of Hazim Milovanović. Without context, some might think he a cruel collector, but no. In his mind he is something far more sadistic: a combat photographer.

"It's a worse form of sadism, a voyeuristic sadism." He told *60 Minutes*. "Watching it happen and doing nothing... I have seen humanity incarnate. I've borne witness to so much horror and bloodshed in my life." You could sense that in the darkness of his closed eyelids, the negatives glowed like a dark light.

For it is up to him to capture these moments that change history. To be on the frontlines of breaking news and bring them to life with their shocking, gruesome, beautiful, and inspirational honesty. Somebody must show these events to the public to evoke change.

In his apartment on the Upper East Side there is a map of the world on the wall with pins in all the countries he's been in. If one looks close enough, they will be treated to a history lesson of the past decade: Israel, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait. In his 15-year-long career, he has been shot at, shelled, and gassed in five different warzones including the on-going Bosnian War in which he won a Pulitzer Prize for his depiction of the Siege of Sarajevo. This includes the iconic "Girl in Front of







Anthony Lucido

Mosque” photo which has sparked an intense debate over the ethics of intervention in photography.

“He’s a daredevil!” fellow reporter, Louise Yustina, said with a laugh. “He was like Evel Knievel... He once told me that he would jump in front of a subway just to get the right angle. I could never do what he’s done.”

The pair worked together extensively during the Soviet-Afghan War for the Associated Press. AP Senior Photo Editor Joseph Ulrich said that Milovanović “had an eye for beauty. He could see the beauty in everything. Even his darkest works were very beautiful. So, it’s such a shame what happened to him.”

He showed me a photo of Milovanović taken during Operation Desert Sabre: Milovanović laughing maniacally while a line of oil wells burned in the background under a dark sky (“That smell! Y’know, that gasoline smell! It smells like... *victory!*”). He was well built with fair skin, light-brown hair, and a moustache that made him look like Mike Farrell. He was ruggedly handsome too and looked like a model for a surfing ad.

When I met him two years after the photo was taken, he looked like he had aged ten. He had grown a gut, his moustache had spread into an overgrown, uneven beard, and his hair had thinned.

When he returned from Bosnia in December, he announced his departure from AP and his return to freelance photography. He never published a photo since and had secluded himself in his apartment. Investigators later revealed that his daily routine had consisted of uppers to get him out of bed in the morning, downers to tuck him in at night, and a solid diet of cocaine to get him through the day. He also started rejecting interviews, so it took a lot of elicitation to agree to one with me. Maybe he wanted to get something off his chest.

He nursed a cigarette throughout and refused eye contact, preferring instead to stare off to the side or rub his tired face. He was very soft-spoken and self-conscious as he struggled with many questions, a stark contrast to the laughing daredevil in the photo. When asked about “Girl in Front of Mosque” he acted as if he didn’t hear, opened his mouth to say something before closing it again, and politely declined to answer any questions about it. He then let out a long, pent-up sigh and said, “Oh God I’m wasting your tape, am I? I’m sorry.”

A week later Milovanović’s lawyer passed on a note he wrote for me. It said, “I’m sorry I wasn’t able to help you with your article. Maybe, you can get some use of out of this note. But please don’t blame yourself for my actions. You’re a good person. This has been in my mind for a long time and completely separate



## Mama, Don't Take My Kodachrome Away

from our talks today. I wish you the best of luck on your article. By the way, I remembered the name of my colleague who died from a land mine in Iraq: Qusay Zahid."

\*\*\*

Milovanović grew up in Upstate New York as the son of Bosnian Muslims that immigrated from Yugoslavia in the forties. He grew up eating Ćevapi, fasting during Ramadan, and reading the Qur'an. But as he grew older, he eventually lost touch with his culture and religion.

"For the longest time as a kid I wanted to be called 'Hal' or Harold' or something instead of my actual name," he reflected. He was 16 when he first fell in love with photography through the song "Kodachrome." It still makes him nostalgic for his suburban street, his first car, and his first camera (a Nikon F2 Photomic) that he got from his parents and shot the land with. He has an entire album of photos he took of serene winter lakes, summer fields, and forests of autumn leaves that he eagerly flipped through while humming the song.

Originally, he wanted to be a filmmaker like his favorite director Stanley Kubrick, but he eventually got a bachelor's degree in Photography from NYU. He began as a freelance photographer and won a contest with a photo of a green summer field a few miles from his home titled "The Greens of Summer." He then attracted the attention of AP where he would spend most of his career.

While at AP, he'd often tell coworkers that he wished he was born a decade earlier so he could document the '60s and the Vietnam War. "Those times had some great photo opportunities," he'd say with a grin.

Louise Yustina told a story about him while they covered the Soviet-Afghan War. They made a perfect team: Yustina, a third-generation Russian immigrant, spoke Russian while Milovanović spoke Arabic. They were with a platoon of the Red Army when they came under fire, it was Yustina's first firefight. She crouched low with one knee in the sand and her hands shielding her face. For the first time she heard that wicked roar of war. A million sounds at once flooded her eardrums, but in the midst of it all, she heard a small click. She turned to see Milovanović a few feet away with his camera pointed directly at her.

A month later, for her birthday, Milovanović gave her a beautifully wrapped present with a handmade, red bow on top. She unraveled it and found the picture he had taken of her while under fire now fully developed and framed. It was black and







Anthony Lucido

white with a Russian soldier on his stomach in the foreground, another shooting his rifle in the background, and Yustina looking at the camera very confused and wiping her hair out of her eyes in the middle. It looked sorta like a reverse “Kent State Massacre” photograph. It even had a caption too: “AP reporter Louise Yustina (Middle) craps her pants while under fire (AP Photo/ Hazim Milovanović).”

The picture now hung on the wall of her office behind her as she laughed while telling the story. “At first I was angry,” Yustina said. “But after a few more firefights I got the joke... You have to have a sense of humor if you want to survive in this profession. He taught me that. He helped me adjust to this environment and showed me the ropes. I have him to thank for my entire career... But sometimes you witness something truly awful or make a true connection with something and no amount of jokes or laughs will make it better.”

\*\*\*

In the Code of Ethics of the NPPA, National Press Photographers Association, it states “do not intentionally contribute to, alter, or seek to alter or influence events.” At NYU, Milovanović took a Photojournalism Ethics class, and his professor stressed that, under no circumstances, no matter what happens to the subject, photographers are only allowed to “bear witness” and cannot directly intervene. Ulrich explains that “We at AP only publish the truth... It’s our duty. If you intervene then the picture’s untrue and it loses its objectivity. You’ll be unprofessional and biased if you intervene. You won’t be able to work again.”

Photographers prefer to be flies on walls or merely objective visitors: look but do not touch. And this is the heart of the controversy over “Girl in Front of Mosque” and Milovanović’s actions on that day.

“Of course, there’s a difference between the two--- the smell for instance,” Milovanović explained. “But in certain circumstances I’ve found it easier to photograph the dead than it is the living. Because the dead don’t talk back to you, they don’t stare at you.”

It’s easier to photograph a mass grave filled with dead bodies wrapped in plastic than a rape victim lying in a hospital bed or a mother crying over her dead child as there is no awkwardness with the dead. No hate-filled looks as you invade their private moments of grief. With the dead, there’s just silence.



## Mama, Don't Take My Kodachrome Away

NPPA also advises to "Give special consideration... to victims of crime or tragedy. Intrude on private moments of grief only when the public has an overriding and justifiable need to see." The American public and the world needed to see these images of the Bosnian War of the ethnic cleansings, the war crimes, the mass rapes committed by all sides. It is the job of the journalist and photographer to shed light on injustices to bring them to an end.

\*\*\*

By the end of the Gulf War, Milovanović was 34 and well acquainted with death. He had seen everything: "It was weird in the beginning, but over time you get used to it." So, his next big, international assignment, the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was just another job for him. Ulrich says, "I think I speak for most Americans when I say we didn't know what we were getting into. We all knew it was bad there but so much was going on... It was in the periphery." He later said that he "will always regret sending Hazim over there for the rest of my life."

Former Yugoslavia was an ethnically diverse country filled with ethnic and nationalistic tensions dating back hundreds of years. Bosnia-Herzegovina was the most diverse republic in Yugoslavia made up of Serbs, Croats, and a slim majority of Muslims. And when the Muslims and Croats voted to secede, many Serb Nationalists declared their own republic and war. The Bosnian Serbs implemented a campaign of Ethnic Cleansing against the Muslims and Croats using mass murder, rape, concentration camps, and deportations to gain territory. The European Continent hasn't seen bloodletting on this scale since World War 2. The fighting is brutal in the country and has settled into a stalemate around the capital of Sarajevo as Serbs besiege the city from the surrounding hills while snipers pick off civilians within, killing Muslims, Croats, and moderate Serbs alike. Sarajevo (the 400-year-old city filled with history and famous for its historical diversity and tolerance of race and religion, where east meets west, filled with hundred-year-old mosques, cathedrals, churches, and synagogues) is being reduced to ruins by mortar shells and anti-aircraft rockets.

One photo stands out: an orange wall in Sniper Alley, the main boulevard of the city where gunman kill indiscriminately, covered with black graffiti, "*Welcome to hell! Welcome to Sarajevo!*" followed by a crude skull and crossbones.

For over a year now the people have endured. Every day they peek their heads out of their doors and go to work and





Anthony Lucido

school with the fear that they will never return. Children play in rubble and on the guns of abandoned tanks, not even noticing the distant gunfire anymore. Every day people sprint down long desolate streets with their arms flailing and legs mid jump to avoid sniper-fire, some even hold children. People live day to day without running water or electricity and only on supplies from UN Humanitarian Aid smuggled in through airlifts. For 16 months these people have endured, and they still endure.

These are the images Milovanović saw and captured daily. For months he spent his days taking photographs of destroyed buildings, dead bodies in the streets, and blood-soaked operating tables in the hospitals and returned late at night to his room in the Holiday Inn, too tired to do anything but collapse. He'd have awful depressions there.

There was a bridge that Milovanović often walked by that had a sign: "*Pazi Snajper!*" ("Watch Out Sniper!"). There was a known sniper post that overlooked it, but as that was the only place to cross, people had to run it every day to get to work.

One day, Milovanović stood at one end while a woman ran across towards him, and like a knee-jerk reaction, he took out his camera. Nothing happened, the woman got across safely, but as she was walking away, she noticed Milovanović standing there with his camera and gave him a contemptuous look of disgust. It was then that he realized that essentially, he was waiting for this woman to get shot so he could take the perfect picture of the bullet penetrating her, her arms throwing up in the air as if to surrender, and her knees collapsing to the ground. He immediately felt shame and disgust. He couldn't take the shot.

"I could handle... the killings in the Middle East, because I couldn't connect with them," he told the *New York Times*. "Of course, it was sad and it still brings a tear to my eye, but I just can't fully relate... But this--- this is different. These are my people. Mine." This isn't a war. It's a genocide."

He told his story to the *New York Times*:

After a long day of taking pictures, Milovanović was walking under a crumbling arcade with a mosque across the street. He was thinking about all the pictures he'd taken when he noticed an obstruction in the road. He looked a little closer and realized it was a girl. A little girl who collapsed with her rear slightly up, her arms folded under her body, and her blonde head buried in the dirt. He assumed that she was dead and seeing how her body lined up perfectly with the shattered mosque in the background and the cloudy sky, he instinctively snapped the photo. Only afterwards did he realize she was still alive.





## Mama, Don't Take My Kodachrome Away

He noticed her slow breathing... in... out... and without thinking, he took a step forward but stopped. He remembered the words of his NYU professor: "bear witness." He remembered the words of NPPA and AP: "do not... alter or influence events," "untrue," "unprofessional and biased." His hands and his fingers extended out to reach her but recoiled into a tight fist. He watched while his body sputtered like a car desperately trying to start.

Finally, he took a shaky step forward. "CRACK!" a bullet landed a few feet away. Before he knew it, he was back up against the wall under the arcade, heart pounding. He looked up and saw the girl still there but now with a little stream of smoke emanating from a pile of bricks a couple meters away.

All he could think of was "Full Metal Jacket" and the Battle of Hue scene. Cowboy screaming, "I've seen this before! That sniper is just trying to suck us in one at a time [by keeping one alive and bleeding in the open]!" The arcade was a safe, a blind spot where the sniper couldn't hit him, but everywhere around the girl was instant death. He could still see her long, slow breaths...in... out...

He was paralyzed, unable to do anything, so he sat down on the pavement. It was just him and the girl in that moment, alone. He sat there for what seemed like hours, watching her breathe... in... out...

He then did something he hasn't done in years: he closed his eyes, put his hands together, and prayed to God. When he opened them again, nothing changed--- the girl was still there, the bullet still in the ground, and the mosque falling apart in the background. So, he lit a cigarette and wept.

\*\*\*

The caption for the photo read, "A girl, shot by a sniper, lies in the street with a crumbling mosque in the background (AP Photo/ Hazim Milovanović)."

Milovanović did leave to find help: he went back the way he came hugging the wall of the arcade but couldn't find any. He searched for hours until nightfall came. It was pointless now, so he went back to the Holiday Inn. He then boarded the first UN plane back to the states.

But Milovanović was still criticized for not intervening sooner and hesitating to help.

"That photo--- *opened up our eyes*," Ulrich said with gestures to match. "It opened the world's eyes."





Anthony Lucido

But nothing could make Milovanović forget what he saw that day. He told Yustina, “I let that girl die. I did nothing... Every day I think of that girl and all the people I’ve shot.” And bitterly commented, “They gave me a fucking Pulitzer for that.”

\*\*\*

After the interview, he called a cab for me and walked me out. While walking down the stairs, he seemed weak like an old man with a cane, and I was afraid he’d fall a few times and held my arms out just in case. When we got to the street, he was blinded by the light and had to block it for a few seconds before adjusting. He then stepped through the door, looked around, and took a deep breath through the nostrils as if being released from jail. A few kids were playing across the street, and he watched them run by before releasing another long, pent-up sigh. He then watched me step into the cab and gave a weak, little smile as he waved goodbye.

He killed himself six hours later. He took a fistful of sleeping pills, laid down in bed, closed his eyes, and went to sleep. Another casualty of war. I was the last person to see him alive.

*As of writing this, 12,000 people have been killed and 50,000 wounded in Sarajevo with 3,000 being children. Five children die every day. It has become the longest siege in modern history and continues today.*

*Because of his photos, the UN was prompted to act and send a peacekeeping force to Bosnia, but have proven to be largely ineffective while the U.S., NATO, and the international community continue to be criticized for doing little to end the atrocities.*

*The public was curious of the fate of the little girl in the photo and subsequent research, completed after Milovanović’s death, revealed that soldiers eventually found her after Milovanović left and took her to a hospital where she miraculously survived.*

*Honorable Mention for the  
Helen Hamilton Award for  
Excellence in Creative Expression*





# Smiley

## Ashley Wehrstein





# Illuminating the Night

## Sergio Xocrates Gonzalez







# The Circle of Life and Inevitable End

Lauren Fleniken







# In loving memory

## Pamela Guerrero

*We have to leave earth tonight,  
what are you bringing with you?*

— I let the question hang in the air  
pretending to contemplate,  
dissimulating that I haven't thought  
of this almost daily  
the things I would bring with me  
in case of disaster  
if there's a fire,  
what's the first thing I grab?  
if there's a car break-in,  
what's the first thing I check?  
if there's an armed robbery,  
what's the closest weapon to me?  
I live in a realm of endless possibilities  
and yes I have thought of that, too  
the things I would bring in case  
we have to abandon our home

### *A family photo album*

— A collective hum of agreement  
indicates that they've misinterpreted me  
they think there is some poetic meaning  
as to why I would bring these images along  
but I guess that's better than the real reason  
that I am so deeply afraid of forgetting  
that I bring this binder of memories  
to stare at my grandmother's face  
until it is etched into my brain  
I will study my mother's signature  
pose and learn to embody her fighter spirit  
I will carry the people I love with me  
physically as I do spiritually  
as a reminder of our claim to this world.



# King down Below *After Chester Wilson III*

## Theron Abell

remember how it felt to have your “queen,”  
    The first to see you as you truly are,  
    From the stars across your face to the scars across your chest.  
    She dripped honey and pomegranates in your ear  
With eyes like fire behind a wedding veil.  
The cold crystal towers in this night were her favorite,  
For it is a rare flower that calls the darkness her home.

But she left without a word

how cold the summer seemed  
    Remembering how the sunlight had been filled with color  
    Made the black and white world that much sharper.  
    Gods can bleed. Skin like iron always rusts when you let  
someone in.

    Oh the price of worship is high.  
    An arm or a leg instead would almost have been a mercy.  
    She’s left little pieces of herself,  
Reminders; hoodies and socks,  
    Her baby flowers and seedlings on the sills,  
    Her fleece. The warnings were lost in that fleece.  
    How could a sheep’s fangs cut so deep?  
    To the bone of the young god that trusted it.  
    You’ve learned the use of fleece.

she appears now and then,  
    A rainbow of the past,  
    Blank of the little wishes you shared  
    When you sat bright and bold under the Sun’s knowing smile.  
    Amnesia is a kindness,  
    For who can forget the warmth of the past,  
    the touch of a lover. Who has the strength?

the crown is cold by the time you find it.  
    Icy to the touch but now it matches your skin.  
    Steel for steel, iron wrought walls for the unworthy.  
    Your love is safe, a flower in the spears  
    Waiting for a queen bold enough, kind enough to care for it.  
    For love is immortal in ways the gods are not, ways yet unseen.



# Far from Bittersweet

## Leah Marut

It's supposed to be fun                      growing old  
but now I fear these shadows  
are becoming too familiar                      in my moonlight.  
Weathered flannel over goosebump  
skin; bare shoulders illuminated  
in the emptiness  
of my kitchen—  
*is it so wrong to want to go back?*  
To the one-story brick house on Bittersweet  
Drive with the creaking wooden gate  
and chiming cornflower door—

and I remember how fleetingly simple  
this life could be. And maybe that feeling will never  
go away; maybe it would hurt more  
if I forgot how my mom's perfume dissolved  
nightmares, how my dad's voice found  
us in a crowd like a familiar arrow. It drives you crazy  
getting old,

and I have to wonder who will be there  
for me on the nights I'm alone with the refrigerator light,  
and all I want is to be young again.

Is this how we move through life? One day  
I wake up and realize I miss falling  
asleep in the backseat,  
(green lights passing over eyelids)  
gentle arms carrying me inside.  
I realize there was one day  
where my dad lifted my bike  
down from the garage for me  
for the last time  
and neither of us knew,  
and I wish I could go back and fix the days I didn't understand  
why my mom thought turning eight  
was too old when there was  
twelve, sixteen, eighteen, and twenty-one to be.



Far From Bittersweet

What would that young girl say  
if she could see me?  
(mirrors of what has been  
and what will be)  
Would I only be able to take  
her hand, trace her jagged nails and say  
(please welcome the ghosts in the kitchen—)  
*Don't you know it's scary, being old?*



# Pea Coats and Inevitabilities

## Caroline Watkins

Yesterday I watched  
a caterpillar with my face inch along a leaf &  
his legs itched with yearning. I watched  
him march along his path to nowhere,  
but his pea coat melted off & tangled around his feet  
every step  
until all that was left was a faceless husk, imprisoned on his path to  
nowhere. I watched  
as he lost himself,  
bending & folding & molding  
until he had shed all that he was and gained all that he is. I watched  
him and his stranger's face flutter along paths  
to everywhere & I wondered  
if he was cold.





# Always Dirty

## Dashiva Francois

I felt dirty today  
after I showered & washed  
my hair. I felt dirty today after I brushed  
your memory out  
of my teeth & combed the clumps of your indecency.  
I tried to suppress,  
perfume the beastly  
reality, but it surfaced to show me how dirty I was.  
Forever shaving,  
lurking beneath my follicles  
is your inheritance  
of shame & animality. Always  
dirty, always waiting to remind me  
I am Human.



## 6:36 a.m. Emma Watson

I woke up suddenly  
Sweaty and startled  
An odd orange glow of light  
Seeping through my window

A bright burst of white lightning  
And a shaky crack of thunder  
Vision blurred, stumbling towards the window  
To see this terrifying orange glow of morning

A sight that somehow, I thought  
Meant the world was ending  
That we had entered some apocalyptic hellscape  
With a glowing sky of pollution and disease

But when I looked outside  
Squinting at the blood orange sun  
Destroying the comforting hood of darkness of my bedroom  
I realized the world wasn't ending

I simply assumed that such a beautiful sight  
Could never be good  
Swearing that had to mean  
I was doomed

But no, it was just a gorgeous early sunrise  
I wondered if I simply missed the beauty of the world  
By wasting away my mornings and nights  
In this dark bedroom of cold loneliness

Or if I assumed all the purely kind  
And beautiful things in the world  
Had to be terribly bad underneath  
Because that's how it always seemed to go

*Sustaining Ourselves & Others  
Poetry Contest: Honorable Mention*





# Gender Dysphoria // Deadbody

## Micah Matherne

I ache to curl my fingers around the space  
Where my sternum has rotted away  
Tearing through the satin and all the layers of lace.  
This shell is suffocated under layers of skin.  
No more pink, only red  
Where I dig my grimy claws in.

I long to crack this cage apart  
And have my organs spill out over my swollen fat stomach,  
The stress bursting my poor unhappy heart.

I hope my lungs fall forward and rip open my throat,  
And when the tissue grows back,  
A deeper voice will be invoked.

I pray that beast remains dead and decrepit  
Body killed, body mutilated,  
Body ascended.

And I know when people stare at that shambling shell,  
They won't understand that its  
Stripped of femininity but decaying well.  
Their sockets will be drained of all the old lust.  
When they will look upon my corpse  
It will be in blessed disgust.





# Healing

Micah Matherne





# My Truth: Quest for Queer Liberation

Pati Carlos

*To my parents, whom I love dearly.*

*To my sister, whom I hope doesn't see me differently.*

*To society-- whom I care less about the opinion of-- just know that accounts like these are important to discuss.*

I know that I cannot fully accept myself until I am comfortable enough to tell you the truth. And whether you accept or deny me, whether you agree or disagree, whether you're proud or not, I must tell you. I must say my truth-- as terrifying as it may feel.

I am **gay**. There, I said it.

I hate boxing it into a term, it feels so limited and othering. I prefer to say I am fluid and simply like what I like. But that is a hard concept to grasp for some, so I will just make things simple and say that I find myself attracted to both women and men. But I sometimes fear I only like men due to societal programming and familial expectations.

I think it is necessary to acknowledge that the heterosexual experience doesn't require an obligation to come out... why does this have to be such a major deal? Why do I even have to acknowledge my sexuality like it is something that is anyone's business? Why do I fear that your learning of this information will make you see me differently forever and that there is absolutely nothing that can change that? You inevitably will place your assumptions and misconceptions upon me— and whether you keep them to yourself or tell me, you will have your ideas of me and my kind. That petrifies me, along with the idea of you treating me differently after discovering this information.

Family, I think what strikes terror in me the most is the fact that you probably already figure I am gay. I have always been an ally to the LGBTQ+ community, but when my turn came, I did not expect to immerse myself like this. It is easier said than done— being gay. I used to tell my others that disclosed their sexuality to me that I would always support and accept them, no matter who they loved. But, somehow, when I put on the shoes, I found it was not as easy to support and accept myself. I've always known this about myself deep down even if it was something I denied my entire life





Pati Carlos

I remember crying at seven years old when my sister told me I was “acting lesbian.” As a child, I barely understood what that meant, but I was aware of the connotations that came with the term. I was terrified and appalled she would say that to me, especially in front of my parents-- I was ashamed. In my senior year of high school, my boyfriend at the time told me “I know you like girls,” which caught me off guard, considering it was something I tried to push aside for years. I remember being upset that he made that comment, and to this day, I still don’t know how he knew. When trying to figure out where this denial of self stems from, I think these experiences took a toll on my fear of being gay. I also imagined this uniform, conventional life where I go to school, pursue my dream career, then get married to a beautiful man and have beautiful babies. Pretty generic, I know— but at the time, that was all I saw in front of me.

I wanted to be like my mom, and my tía, and my cousin, and my hairstylist, who all had husbands and their children. I had this idealized life planned out, simply because it was all I ever saw. As I got older and began exploring my own interests, I found myself being a strong advocate for anything LGBTQ+. I remember getting into arguments with my family, friends, and randos on the internet, making my zealous case for love equality. I can’t even tell you the number of times I have schooled my well-intentioned parents for their indirect discrimination towards the community. I’ve come to realize that it boils down to people being conditioned to their values and also being uneducated and misinformed on the subject.

As I’ve heard years of stereotypical remarks and stigmas from people around me, I have been baffled, shocked, and extremely disappointed. Pop culture nurtures false ideas of LGBTQ+, and we often get misrepresented or deluding images of this community, which skews our outlook on it. As a lighter-skinned Chicana, I am aware that colorism exists and is rampant, and recognize my privilege as a queer POC on a societal level. My experience is not as aggressively oppressed as one may be for someone who has more melanin or deals with more of the complexities of intersectionality. Nonetheless, I deem it necessary for my story to be told, along with those like mine, and unlike mine.

I used to always wonder why I would get so passionate about conversations where I called out folks for their prejudice. I even remember feeling regretful at how intense and heated I would get. I recall I was comfortable enough to argue/support these





### My Truth: Quest for Queer Liberation

matters aloud because I convinced myself that I wasn't part of the group I was fighting for. I figured, "I can talk about this as much as I want, and no one will get suspicious because luckily, I am not gay. I always thought "I give you all the utmost support, but I could never pursue that lifestyle, that could never be me." And I now see that younger me was fighting for the me right now. I thank you, Pati for showing me that you are here for me and that you support me. I never knew how much I would need you.



## A Moth to You West Tyndal

Shamar is pretty sure his life has been rigged against him since the beginning. Not for any fault of his own, just a predispositional set of circumstances that all act as dominoes to the same outcome: he's completely and utterly fucked.

He thinks the kids around him would blame it on everything but what it really is. Kids like Ben Andrews would say a name like Shamar is a death sentence in this town, a guaranteed social suicide, but Shamar would argue that his name is perfectly fine, thank you. The Jacks, Elenas and Bens can always cut it into manageable pieces, call him Shay or skip to the surname for a 'perfectly understandable' Reid. His ex-girlfriends would often ignore his name entirely; instead, going for pet names Shamar never would suggest. And people like Amani and Priyanka can call him as he is. The name Shamar is a codename, used only by those who give enough shits about him to say it correctly, that lets him filter how people perceive him.

His parents always say his problems started with the bike he got at twelve. It was a gift from his aunt, the one who ran the motel downtown, who had tied the handles off in recycled silver ribbon and told him to visit anytime he'd like. Shamar spent every other Sunday sitting in her office, bringing snacks from the corner store and listening to her talk about her life and family back home in Jamaica—people Shamar's parents had never allowed him to meet. His parents didn't like Aunt Cherry, but their opinion never stopped him before.

No, Shamar doesn't think it's his family or his name or his bike. He's looked too deep into his life to believe it could be something so simple. Every thread he's pinned to the wall has a loose end eventually, every event in his life leads towards or away from a central point, a key feature, the gravitational black hole right in the middle of it all.

Shamar thinks it all began with London Novikova.

They met when they were thirteen, spent a summer running around Chicago, then when Shamar was right on the edge of a breakthrough, London vanished. Not in the traditional sense—he's still at the same school with the same single mom in the same run-down apartment—but on a random day in September, London disappeared and was replaced by an empty and hollow shell.

The whole city seemed to turn on London that day. Shamar heard rumors in the wind of London being kicked off the track team, that they found pills in his bag on a search, that he



## A Moth to You

collapsed in Chemistry class two days in a row. Rumors latched onto the boy like horseflies, and it seemed like no one wanted to get close to someone as plagued as London Novikova.

When Shamar asked his mother about it, she said that God will always send people like London one step closer to hell as a warning. That Shamar was above hanging around young gay boys. So he watched London disappear.

Amani is just about the only boy Shamar can stand in the entirety of Chicago. It's easy to justify the time spent around preppy white kids with a little too much money—call it “networking” or “learning the crowd” or “the only way to stay afloat when everyone would jump at the chance to throw you to the curb.” Shamar knows those kids only keep him around for what his family can offer. Having a dad who owns the biggest for-profit science and technology museum in the state isn't something you can shake off in a crowd like this.

But Amani doesn't demand anything of him aside from the occasional gas station snack on his father's credit card. In fact, Amani is the antithesis of everything Shamar has let himself become: he wears his hair in tight natural curls over dark untouched skin, enjoys colorful button-ups and Hawaiian shirts two-sizes-too-big, and talks on the phone with his mom in a poetic blend of languages Shamar would give anything to understand. Amani can keep a girlfriend and drives a used Ford, and he always waits a step to the left of the bike rack every day after school.

“Shamar, if you sigh one more time I'll throw you out this truck by your ugly-ass braids,” Amani groans, smacking blindly towards the sinking form of Shamar in the passenger seat. Shamar doesn't even try to dodge away, just holds his arms over his face until his friend gives up and goes back to driving. “I've gotta put up with you for another half hour, man, the least you could do is tell me what's up.”

“It's not anything... I'm just overthinking, don't worry about it.”

“I can *tell* you're overthinking. You're the single loudest thinker I've ever come across. I'd rather you tell me now and get it out of the way instead of having to deal with you sadly third-wheeling me and Natalie for two hours straight.”

Shamar can't bear to look anywhere aside from outside his window. The trees blur by, and Shamar can feel himself hooked on every branch, pulled somewhere far, far beyond himself. Somewhere in the distance, the clouds have gone gray. “Dad's been on my ass about college.”





West Tyndal

"Again? I thought you submitted a few applications to get him off you."

"I *did*," Shamar deflates, fidgeting aimlessly with the ends of his hair. "But dad's been sayin' community college don't count. He wants me in one'a those big state schools like he did, and he won't listen t'me that my grades ain't good enough for that shit."

Amani hums, lip curled as he loosens his grip on the wheel, the car cast in the red light of the intersection. He continues facing forward, but sends Shamar a sidelong glance. "You gotta tell ya folks eventually, man."

"I know, I know, but..." Shamar says, staring down the side of Amani's face with crossed arms. "They're really not gonna like it. I don't wanna deal with gettin' kicked outta my house 'cause I'd rather run a shitty-ass motel than get a degree in fuckin'... business, I guess? Dad already hates Auntie 'cause've her girl, if I go work with her, they're gonna think she's like, convertin' me or some shit."

Amani just rubs his neck, the car easing back into motion. "That's tough, man," he mutters, shrugging his shoulders so the bulky denim jacket bunches up near his ears. "...Just, relax with me and Nat for a bit, yeah? Think about all that later."

Shamar bites his cheek, pulling one of his legs up to cradle it to his chest. Amani is just about the only boy in Chicago who will put up with him—his weird family issues, his lack of a license, and the way he's never *really* liked any girl he's set Shamar up with—but he's also never been one to like when things are put into words. So Shamar just sighs, nods, and turns back to the trees.

And then, halfway through Senior year of high school, Shamar Reid disappeared as well.

His erasure was calmer, less violent and more silent. He fizzled and burned away like a candle, lit just a little too long. Shamar watched his friends leave for someone more socially fit than an eighteen-year-old Black boy who couldn't smoke and couldn't keep a girlfriend, and accepted his fate of all his belongings being thrown into the basement of his parents' home.

Somehow, though, it didn't hit him until he was eating lunch alone in the hallway, nestled into the shadows of the poorly-lit math hall. He was completely alone, the silence echoing until it was deafening, and all Shamar could hear was the sound of his own chewing, the tap of his foot, the heavy in and out of his breath.

*Maybe this is what Hell is like.*

"Why are you sitting behind a trash can, Reid?"







## A Moth to You

*No, scratch that, this is Hell. It has to be.*

Shamar doesn't need to look up to know that London is looking down at him, arms crossed and condoling. He's seen him enough in passing to recognize the worn-out sneakers and jeans that are just a bit too baggy for their shape, even if the other boy's voice has changed so much since Shamar last heard it directed towards himself.

Shamar chooses to lie. "Didn't feel like sitting with anyone today, is that such a crime?"

"Oh, so it doesn't have anything to do with the rumor of you getting kicked out of your house, huh?"

*Damn it.* He's pinned now, forced to face the music and look London in the eyes. He isn't smiling despite Shamar's expectations—instead, his thin face is sunken in solemn consideration, as though he's watching the waters carefully. London's buried in a mountain of layers, more than Shamar would expect for the slowly-cooling weather, which are hiding most of his frame.

The other boy scrunches his nose. "I figured you wouldn't want to be around your preppy little friends after that," London says, voice even and low. "You've always cared so much about that image of yours, I'm sure you wouldn't want to face the—"

"God, it wasn't about *that*," Shamar cuts him off. London's mouth shuts with a clack. "I... I *tried* to sit with them, they just didn't want me anymore. And I'm not surprised, obviously, I know why they wanted me there in the first place, but I wouldn't exactly choose to eat all by myself, you jerk."

He's not sure why he bothered explaining to London, someone who probably couldn't give less of a shit about the *actual* reason Shamar is eating agas station lunch by himself, but the boy's pale lashes just blink back at him slowly. "...Can I join you?"

And Shamar doesn't like eating alone.

They stick together after that. At least, as much as two boys like them can. London says little and asks nothing, but his presence is consistent and nearby, which is all Shamar can really ask for.

Shamar bikes twenty minutes to and from Cherry's Roadside Motel every morning because being at school is better than rotting away to nonexistence on an inflatable mattress, and every afternoon he sits with London during lunch. They don't say anything of substance—it's more of a truce between two people







West Tyndal

too far ostracized from society to be anywhere but with each other.

He tries going home one day, at least to grab a few things from his room to keep him company, but he catches sight of his sisters through the large front window and freezes. Liana sees him, wide-eyed in the way seven-year-old girls often are, and Shamar decides that being a ghost is easier than being watched like this.

So, instead, Shamar accepts the routine. Bike, float, eat, drift, bike, work, sleep.

As he rattles the lock keeping his bike secured to the bike rack, someone's shadow falls over his kneeling form as they stand above him, arms crossed and face dark.

"Reid, what the hell are you doing?" Amani says, emphasizing his displeasure with a kick to Shamar's leg. Leaning back to look up, Shamar can barely make out his friend's face behind the dark overcast of his hoodie pulled over his head and the gaudy sunglasses Amani has chosen to wear.

Shamar blinks. "Grabbing my bike."

"Wh—not *that*, dumbass. I mean why the hell are you hangin' around that white boy again? People been talkin', dude."

Finally hauling himself to his feet, Shamar brushes his hands over his jeans before looking back to Amani with a squint. "If you're talking about me gettin' disowned or whatever, it's not a rumor. I'm living at Cherry's now."

"You got *kicked out* and didn't *tell me?!'*" Amani rips the glasses off of his own face, looking at Shamar with wide, confused eyes. Shamar just shrugs. "Also, no, people ain't talkin' about that, they're sayin' shit about you like... y'know," he says, trailing off with a wave of his shades. "The kinda things people say when you hang out with gay guys, I guess."

"I don't need to hear about this right now," Shamar rolls his eyes, turning back to finally unlatch his lock and stuff it into the side of his backpack. "I gotta run errands for Auntie, go hang out wi—"

"Are you?"

Shamar falters, hands gripped tightly around the handles of his bike. The tone Amani used wasn't cold or accusatory like he'd expected. Instead, when he looks his closest friend in the eyes, Amani is staring back at him with an unfamiliar look of concern. "I..." any words he could say would get caught in his throat, behind a wall of questions and moments Shamar never planned on addressing. The kind of questions he only ever thought about when drunk, guilty, or thirteen, riding skateboards down





## A Moth to You

streets and ripping dandelions out of sidewalk cracks. The kind of questions he used to blow into the wind like wishes.

Amani just takes a deep breath, shoving his hands deep into his pockets with a strained smile. "I'll see you around, Shamar. Happy Halloween," he says, backpedaling away before spinning on his heel, slowly disappearing down the sidewalk towards the parking lot.

Shamar walks his bike the other way.

After a few weeks of drought, it rains.

To be more precise, the entire sky cracks open in a windstorm that would make Satan cower. Shamar made it to school just fine that morning, didn't sense any incoming weather in the way birds sang or leaves smelled, but it seemed like whatever cruel force was out there decided to test his patience. The rain was hitting the windows of the gym sideways, wind rattling the doors so hard he was scared they'd come off the hinges.

He's alone, as usual, but it's scarier now without the everyday ambiance of being in a public American high school. Shamar doesn't have the luxury of choice—all he has is an old bike and an aunt who *also* can't drive—so he's stuck. Waiting.

He knows he's fucked when something walks by the door.

Shooting to his feet, Shamar immediately presses his face to the small foggy window, desperately looking to see what apparition was haunting him past the brick walls. All he's able to see is a distant, blurry form walking down the sidewalk through the fence that encloses the football fields.

Shamar is confident he would never survive a horror movie, because he immediately grabs his backpack and steps outside.

It's an awful idea, he knows. That fact is made clear as soon as he opens the door, wind and rain hitting him in sheets, but there's something in his head telling him he's gotta go look. His mom would say divine intuition, Amani would call it bad foresight, but Shamar simply thinks it's a feeling too complicated for words. So he pushes onwards.

When he reaches the fence, Shamar grabs onto the metal grating with tense fingers, leaning forward to stare out into the field. There's a spirit doing stretches in the endzone, long and overgrown, dressed in an old set of track clothes that Shamar only remembers because a part of him is stuck then, age thirteen, doing skateboard tricks off the sidewalk in Summer.

Shamar isn't surprised to see him, despite it all. London is.



West Tyndal

"What the actual hell are you doing, Reid?" London yells, voice barely registering over the howling and screaming of the trees. His hair is blown flat, and his thin frame looks just about ready to fly away. Shamar isn't sure what to make of the feeling to chase him.

"I could ask the same to you, weirdo," Shamar yells back, leaning his body against the fence he's holding onto for dear life. "This doesn't exactly seem like running weather, does it?"

London's face is unreadable, too far away for any details to reach him, but Shamar can practically feel him shivering from where he stands. The boy's fists are clenched. "It's the only time the field is clear. The track team is usually here right now, and *usually* I can run when it's raining and be left *alone*."

The immediate response Shamar's brain constructs is '*Why not just run when they're here like a normal person?*', but he likes to think he knows better. Shamar knows what it's like to be around people who would do anything to get rid of you. The thought makes him flinch.

There's still an air of anger coming from London, who is still standing completely tense in the middle of an empty, rain-coated field, but the wind quiets just long enough for Shamar to hear him speak again. "Why won't you leave me alone, man?"

"...What?" Shamar squints. "I didn't come here knowing *you* were here."

"God, I mean in *general*, genius," London scoffs back, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand as if that's going to help how drenched he is. "It just... it doesn't make any sense."

Shamar tightens his grip on the fence. "You're not making any sense either."

"I just... you ruined *everything* for me! Why in the world would you even talk to me when you clearly hate me?" London screams, hands relaxing just enough to gesture wildly in Shamar's direction. The wind heaves for a moment, making London stumble a step forward.

Shamar swallows. "How'd I ruin your life?! I haven't even talked to you in like, four years, dude!"

London looks appalled. "Are you really this dense or are you fucking with me?" he snaps, stepping just close enough for Shamar to see his eyes blown wide and wild. "*You're* the reason this entire town knows I'm gay! *You're* the reason I got kicked off the track team, *you're* the reason my mom can't talk to anyone in this city without weird looks, and *you're* the reason everyone fucking *hates me*!" London cries. "I didn't tell anyone *but* you, because I thought I could trust you! But then I see you a week





## A Moth to You

later and everyone knows and no one wants to talk to me, including you. What else do you expect me to think?"

Shamar's entire body goes slack. He doesn't remember telling *anyone*, much less the entire town, how could he possibly be responsible for it getting...

Something clicks.

"Well?" London says, eyebrows drawn together, eyes sharp. *There's no way...* "Come on, say something! Why don't I deserve an answer? What did I ever do?"

... *It has to be.*

"I didn't know," Shamar whispers. It's all he can bring himself to say. The pieces of everything he's chosen to ignore, to push to the side, to pretend never stung are all snapping together. They're forming an image in his mind, clear as day—with Shamar right in the center.

London's face is blank. "You *didn't know*? Didn't know what? That outing me to the entire town would have some adverse effect on my life? That your actions have some level of consequence?" he snaps, tugging at his shirt as though fluffing up his feathers. "Don't play dumb, asshole."

Shamar feels like the world is off balance. "I didn't *know*," he repeats, because that's all his mouth can seem to comprehend. He can barely feel the rain anymore.

"Oh, come on, Shamar, I'm not taking this sh—"

"Please, London, just," he finally interrupts. He holds his hands out, pleading. "Let me... I can explain," Shamar says softly. London's shoulders deflate in succession. *One chance.* "I... That day, when you told me, I left feeling... conflicted. Not because I... *hated* you for being gay, but, like, the opposite. I didn't hate you, and I couldn't... I couldn't understand why."

Shamar pushes past his voice sticking in his throat. "My whole life people told me that those people were demons, or like, inhuman abominations destined for Hell. I took that in my head to mean that... that they weren't 'real'. I thought they were like dinosaurs and cowboys, y'know?" Shamar clenches his fists, nails digging into the palms of his hands. He's not sure if it's sweat or rain dripping down his back. "I didn't understand how you existed, or how you could be so nice to me if you were meant to be evil. So I... I asked my sister."

London closes his mouth. His eyes keep darting around Shamar's face, like he's reading for something that isn't there.

Impossibly quiet, Shamar continues, "I didn't know she told. I never even said your name but...looking back, she's smart





West Tyndal

enough to put it together.” The boy across from him wilts, his frail body sinking in on itself. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

London is silent, shuffling and breathing muffled by the relentless sound of rain. There’s something there, Shamar can see it on his lips, but he can’t seem to get it out. Instead, London says, “Do you still think that?”

Shamar blinks. “Think what?”

“That I’m a monster,” he frowns, holding himself in his arms. He looks near-freezing, but the conversation is too dire to interrupt with a suggestion to move, so Shamar just shakes his head. “... What changed?”

And if that isn’t the question of Shamar’s life. So much has changed—in his life, in his home, in his friends. He doesn’t know where to start, much less how to end, and he’s pretty sure if he tries he’ll only make this whole situation worse. Instead. “Nothing changed.”

Somehow, that’s also the truth. Nothing and everything changed simultaneously, a paradox of existence, a two-way street going different directions to the same destination. The Shamar from back then and the Shamar that stands now are one, but there is a chain of himself stretching infinitely forwards and infinitely backwards. Shamar was born this way, he will die this way, but he exists now as he always was and never will be.

He wonders if London understands. He seems to get something now, so Shamar knows he revealed a personal detail in there, but he’ll never know if it’s the one he intended. Whatever it was, London is finally walking towards the fence between them, so there’s progress. “Come stay at my house tonight.”

“Why?” Shamar reflexively responds. He doesn’t care either way, so he’s really not sure why he bothers asking, but tonight seems dense in conversation, so maybe that’s why he doesn’t want to stop talking.

“I want to tell you,” London finally stands in front of him, toes pressed against the metal divide. Despite the darkness and the stormy gray of a rainy night, London almost seems more colorful here, under the softened gaze of the rising moon. His pale face glows in the field lights, features sharp and eyes clear, and Shamar isn’t sure why he can’t bring himself to look away; but tonight is dark, and London is brilliantly bright, so maybe that’s reason enough for now. Maybe tonight is for answering and another night is for asking, if the stars are kind. “About everything that’s happened since we stopped being friends. It’s also really fucking cold.”





## A Moth to You

Shamar breathlessly laughs, more of a mime of the movement than anything tangible, before stepping back enough for London to haul his lithe body over the railing. He lands in a puddle, disturbing the image of clouds just as they split apart, casting the whole field in an angelic white. Shamar wonders how he looks in it, if there's a reason London looks over him and smiles, just barely.

But maybe tonight is meant to look, not tell. So Shamar just smiles back and says, "Sounds like a plan," before they both turn together and leave down the path as one.



# We Watch Scorsese on Thursday Nights

## Leah Marut

And when I walk in, the corner spot on the couch is waiting  
with the purple TCU blanket draped across the arm. They toss  
over pillows, pass the orange plastic tub of candy, and let the menu  
screen hover until I'm cocooned in a nest of fleece, then the room settles

and light is reflecting off captivated eyes I know are already seeing things  
I'm not, things I wouldn't think to realize. Close voices rise over the tides  
of

sound: *Hey, it's clearly a mix of Schindler's List and Moneyball, right?*

Their wave

of laughter crests while the words are still washing over me like empty  
sea spray,

yet I smile at the affection between the letters anyway. And that's  
something I didn't understand  
at first; why being on that couch every evening mattered more than my  
ability to contribute  
to commentary. Some nights I'm dozing before we reach the title card,  
and you may  
ask why I bother joining if all I will remember is murmured dialogue and  
fleeting

colors. But I know now that it's more than just the movie— it's the  
warmth  
when they call the corner seat "your spot", when they say "your blanket".  
Love  
is etched in those words the way it marks the red bowl of popcorn set  
aside until  
I arrive. Nights like these are proof that presence can exist within  
absence, how

simply being remembered is an act of love. Belong. My mouth could  
never  
quite get around the syllables, but when I'm wrapped in that familiar  
fleece,  
awash in swelling chatter and the microwave's hum, I can feel the dim  
room  
expanding to include my shadow, and it's been saying it for me all this  
time.

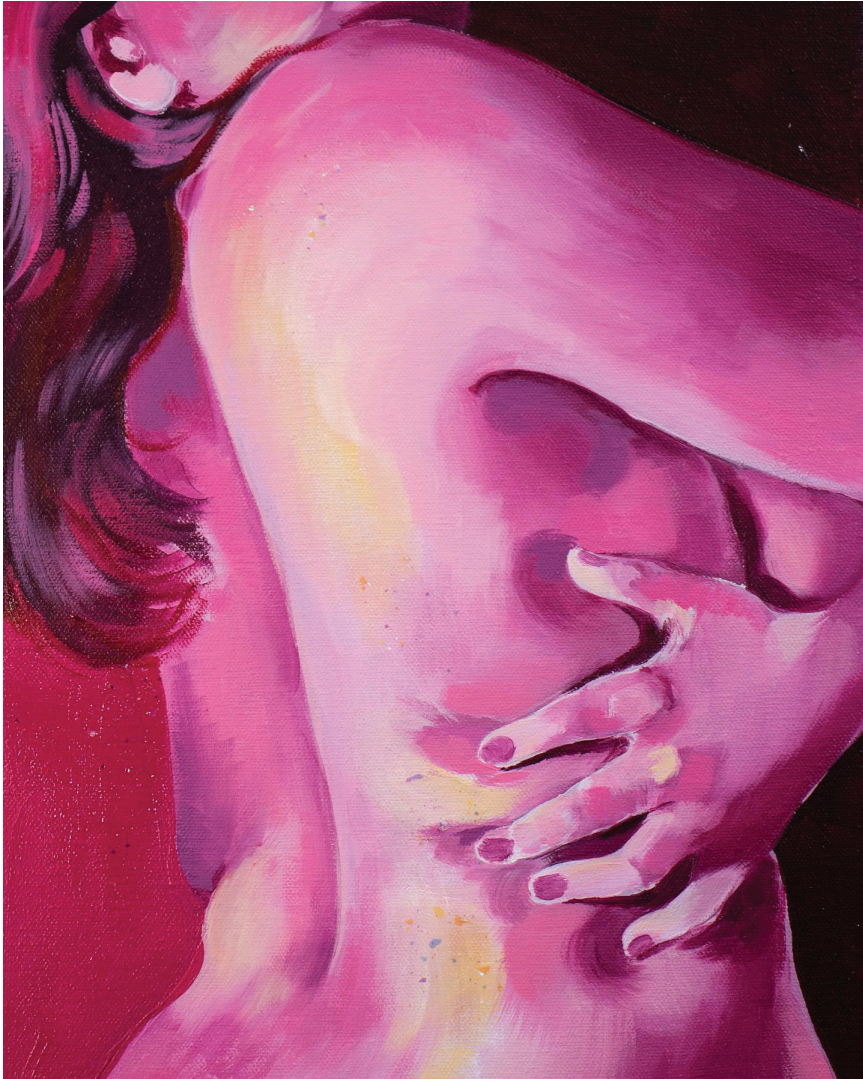






# In My Own Skin

Lauren Fleniken







# Burst

Kaylee Meyer





# Chisme is a Colonial Export

## Pamela Guerrero

Cloistered Spanish housewives of the seventeenth century sit idly in their clean houses, children nurtured, schooled, a husband sent off to work, and a meal ready to serve, in five courses of course (a perfect after for their bureaucratic husbands who seem incapable of getting a fill of their pork bellies, even when they've spent all day quenching their imperial thirst). After a hard day's work, the balcony serves as a refuge from the everyday. It becomes a place where women gather to discuss town news, their children, family, politics. They play telephone, deciphering what the lady from the corner, who holds a perpetual ear to the street, told the lady three balconies down who told the lady from two balconies down who then told the lady who smokes a pipe on the balcony next door. *The Matriarchal Times*, I like to call it. The equivalent to men reading the newspaper on their kitchen table, ignoring their children save for disciplining them and only acknowledging their wife with a kiss goodbye. Only these women take care of the home first and it's after the fact that they seek their own comfort in their little pocket of society. But what else is one to do when the domestic sphere becomes just that? An endless cycle of servitude, a routine that does a complete 360 every week and will only shift once the nest becomes empty, a new onetaking its place until the remaining matrimony is buried six feet under. Women who sought to escape this destiny, or perhaps build this same life elsewhere, joined Columbus in one of his later voyages to the New World. And for the latter group, I suppose it worked.

the madres, tías, and señoras de la colonia  
are not confined to their homes  
they proudly sit on their front porch,  
parallel rocking chairs overlooking the street  
discussing each of the townpeople  
as they walk by; the man whose son  
went to study engineering en El Norte,  
*how proud he must be!*  
the widowed woman with three children  
*¡ay, no se como lo hace!*  
the corrupt state functionary,  
yet another colonial legacy,  
who regularly gets a limpieza  
what does he do behind closed office



Pamela Guerrero

doors to have to get a bruja so often?  
*uno solo se puede imaginar*  
and so the women continue to sit  
every week and every day  
to recount The Stories of Others,  
an oral anthology as told by  
the madres, tías, and señoras de la colonia



# When Aliens Come to Earth

## Dashiva Francois

they won't see

The roaming African elephants,  
Nor the Saharan silver ant cooling the desert;  
When aliens come to earth, they will witness  
Fuzzy clouds, oceans blue & gray

Mixture to ensure the aliens are feeling gray  
From their journey to this lonely **Earth**.  
Let's hope to be awake to witness  
This immeasurable sight from observable skies  
With bright & blazing eyes as desert sands.  
Luck will come when the elephants

Sing, their trumpets raised like Satchmo's  
Blues, for the coming of alien grays.  
When the aliens land, stranded in the desert,  
Unfortunates are the humans of the **Earth**,  
They failed to prepare for the best Broadway show  
In thousand years of neglect, not watching

For the embodied force of extraterrestrial showings.  
Please, with fervor, sound your trumpets elephants  
& the stupefied bipeds sleeping, waking,  
Hearing the elephant blues & listening to alien grays  
Come visit the dying pale-blue-dot once known as **Earth**.  
If you find yourself standing, waiting in the ocean dry,

Stand clear of landing zone so the undulating desert  
Sands would not interrupt your witnessing,  
With eyes agape, the alien's descent to **Earth**.  
Make yourself mighty & fun as an elephant's  
Feet & trunk, thousand feet marching, brown & gray,  
When aliens come to Earth; they won't see.

Broken Earth is what they'll see  
Water-drained, fire-parched, toxic aired, barren lands  
That surely will give them the alien grays.  
Forthwith destroy, hide shameful proofs  
Of melancholic, downcast, tusk-less Borneo elephants,  
Trumpeting cries of mercy for the boiling **Earth**.



Dashiva Francois

The humans won't feel gray—that I can discern—  
Even if every region of **Earth** scorched into a desert  
& the aliens turned to elephant testifiers.

*Sustaining Ourselves & Others*  
*Poetry Contest: First Prize Winner*





# Sometimes I See Her

## Katherine Davis

I've sat on this cold bench in my park for a while now.  
The crisp, tan leaves flutter  
down around me. Little autumn soldiers that parachute past,  
fall—drop fast, and spin helplessly in the air.  
I used to spend my days like pennies  
here. But now I stand, disregard my wind-chapped cheeks,  
and tend the trodden path home.

I recall one spring here where I made friends with the river  
tucked behind the glow of the lumbering oaks  
alone. I played with the patient tadpoles,  
the cordial ducks, and the plickering stream as she wove  
in and out of large stones and debris. I raced the tiny fish  
and hopped from one side of the bank to the next  
laughing. Everything was a glossy, verdant green.

Down the gravel trail today, I saw the frail fading frames  
of last spring's flora. They beckoned me to stop  
and mourn—petals mangled and brown.  
So I did. Not for them, but for her.  
Sometimes, when I walk by these wildflowers in bloom  
I can still see my young self as I once was—  
peeking her head up and waving with her tender leaves.  
But today, as they succumb to the season, wilting—  
With faded petals hanging their head, I don't see her anymore.  
I can just see me.



# The Coin Collector

## Victor Torres

### 1 EXT. THE STREET - NIGHT

On a dark, empty sidewalk, shines a single lamppost. Down the walkway comes a boy, alone. Casually he strolls under the lamppost. Walking past and away from the white light, there suddenly drops a single quarter onto the pavement behind him. The echo of the coin seemingly rings in the air. The boy turns around. Slowly he walks towards it. He kneels down to pick it up. He grabs it, turning it over in his hand, and then stands back up.

And down the street the boy sees *him*. The shadow. The silhouette is darting towards him, and the boy's heart begins to race. He takes a step backward, but BOOM he trips and falls flat on his back. The boy reawakens. And there staring right at him is the man they whisper about.

*The Coin Collector*. The heavy canister of coins on his back clangs as he steps forward, punctuating each of his motions. He stops. The boy is petrified. Then, the streetlight flickers off into blackness.

OFFICER CHARLES (V.O.)

And like that. He was gone.

DANIEL (V.O.)

No way.

CUT TO:

### 2 INT. THE DINER - NIGHT

OFFICER CHARLES

And that's only one of them.  
Hundreds of sightings just like it.

DANIEL

Wow...

MARK

Please, so hyperbolic.

OFFICER CHARLES

I'm just reporting the truth...

The Diner is warm, with dirty plates and unfinished coffees decorating the countertops. Receipts are stacked on the front counter, next to a jar marked "Tips" filled with bills and spare change. OFFICER CHARLES and MARK sit in a booth. The barista DANIEL sits with them in amazement. His manager JENNY watches from afar, amused.



## The Coin Collector

DANIEL

Are the people missing?

MARK

No, Charles just likes making shit up.

OFFICER CHARLES

Watch yourself. Never know when you'll be Coin Collector's next victim.

(Dramatically turns towards DANIEL to make him flinch)

JENNY

(walking past)

Stop scaring my employees, they have enough problems as is.

OFFICER CHARLES

Actually, Daniel, get me more coffee if you will.

DANIEL

Ah, yes.

MARK

He's just a bum. Guys like him are a dime a dozen around here.

OFFICER CHARLES

Dime you say?

OFFICER CHARLES looks at JENNY across the room. She smirks and returns to wiping down a table.

MARK

Give me a break. I've seen him around.

DANIEL

Yeah?

MARK

Yeah. Exact kind of deadbeat you'd expect to see.

JENNY rolls her eyes.

DANIEL

What he look like?

MARK







Victor Torres

Well.

CUT TO:

**3 EXT. THE ROOFTOP BY THE ALLEY - DUSK**

MARK (V.O.)  
I was wrapping up an afternoon in  
the lab, so I went out on the  
rooftop to take a break.

MARK exits from the side door to an outside balcony. He's  
frustrated and reaches into his pocket to pull out a vape.

CUT TO:

OFFICER CHARLES  
(Judgemental)  
To smoke.

MARK  
Don't interrupt.

CUT TO:

Returning to the flashback, MARK takes a puff and looks down  
from the balcony.

MARK (V.O.)  
So, I look down, and I see *him*.

MARK's eyebrows furrow as he stares down at the alley. There,  
THE COIN COLLECTOR stumbles behind trash cans and wreckage,  
not entirely visible.

MARK (V.O.)  
I think he had a huge green coat and  
long hair. I figured he was  
homeless. Guy had a pretty big  
setup.

DANIEL  
Did he actually have a canister of  
coins on his back?

MARK  
Looked more like a bucket to me.

In a closer shot, THE COIN COLLECTOR grabs a pile of coins.  
Holding a hose, he shoots water at the pile. MARK stares.

MARK (V.O.)



## The Coin Collector

He was rinsing the coins... But then  
he stops, shuts the water off. And  
he looks straight up, right at me.  
Like he sensed I was there.

From afar, THE COIN COLLECTOR stands, directly looking at  
MARK. MARK tries to glance in different directions,  
pretending to casually look around. But when he looks back  
down, Mark still sees him, staring

MARK  
I couldn't get a good read of his  
face, but he was... creepy.

MARK, uncomfortable, walks back inside.

CUT TO:

### 4 INT. THE DINER - NIGHT

DANIEL returns with a refill.

OFFICER CHARLES  
Perhaps you offended him.

MARK  
Uhuh, I don't really care. Guy's  
bizarre.

JENNY  
(passing by)  
You're one to talk.

MARK  
Look, the guy's got drug addict  
written all over him.

OFFICER CHARLES & JENNY  
(Talking over each other)  
Woahh! - Hey - Okay no.

CUSTOMER JUNE  
Umm, 'scuse me.

From the booth adjacent sits the scatterbrained woman JUNE.  
She peaks over the wall where MARK and CHARLES sit.

CUSTOMER JUNE  
You have the man pegged all wrong.

OFFICER CHARLES  
(chuckling)  
Here we go.





CUSTOMER JUNE  
Don't laugh Chuck, I know what I  
saw.

DANIEL  
(to JENNY)  
Chuck?

JENNY flips a coin.

JENNY  
Just listen.

CUSTOMER JUNE gets up and moves towards MARK's side of the  
booth.

CUSTOMER JUNE  
Move over. Look, Chuck and the rest  
of the media will tell you *all* about  
how ominous this guy is, right?

MARK  
Uhuh.

CUSTOMER JUNE  
But! I know what he really is.

DANIEL  
What?

CUSTOMER JUNE  
(lowering her voice)  
...He's a vig-i-lan-te!

CUT TO:

A random guy in his office opens up a newspaper, the camera  
zooming in on a small article in the corner: "COIN COLLECTOR  
IS A SUPERHERO?"

CUSTOMER JUNE (V.O.)  
You probably missed my segment over  
it in my very own editorial, but I  
assure you it was a riveting story!  
It began on a night not unlike this  
one, one of my staff members was  
walking home...

CUT TO:

5 INT. A HOUSE - NIGHT





## The Coin Collector

A young woman is walking down the street of a suburban neighborhood, approaching her door and unlocking it.

CUSTOMER JUNE (V.O.)  
But when she entered, she found two  
robbers standing right there in her  
own living room.

Light cascades into the room dramatically, the flashback lit like a noir film. The robbers dart towards her. She drops her bags and screams, the camera cheesily closing in on her.

CUSTOMER JUNE (V.O.)  
The hooligans began destroying her  
house, holding her at gunpoint until  
she'd give em everything she had.

The masked criminals break objects on the floor, she and them fighting about. And then a bag of coins falls onto the floor.

CUSTOMER JUNE (V.O.)  
But just when all hope is lost...

The sound of loud footsteps approach the door. The criminals freeze. Silence... Then BOOM, THE COIN COLLECTOR kicks the door open, backlit by an unknown heroic beam of light. The criminals glance at each other. They throw the woman to the floor and point their guns at THE COIN COLLECTOR.

CUSTOMER JUNE (V.O.)  
The details get a little confusing  
after that. But the story goes that  
he pulled out coin shooters,  
electric cords strapped to the  
canister on his back!

The firearms he pulls out connect to his backpack like a Ghosbuster's blaster. He wields two.

CUSTOMER JUNE (V.O.)  
And so a shootout commences.

A sequence of slow-mo gun close-ups follows. THE COIN COLLECTOR dives to the floor. Papers are thrown in the air. The woman covers her ears and yells. And lastly, coins are shot across the screen.

CUT TO:

### 6 INT. THE DINER - NIGHT

CUSTOMER JUNE





Victor Torres

And thus, her life was saved that day...

DANIEL stares. MARK is a tad amused. CHARLES is unimpressed.

OFFICER CHARLES

Yeah? And tell me, where'd the criminals go? Did he kill em? Why was none of this reported?

CUSTOMER JUNE

She's clearly protecting his secret identity.

OFFICER CHARLES

Bet none of that even happened.

CUSTOMER JUNE

Heroism is *meant* to be dramatized! What's your excuse?

OFFICER CHARLES

I'm just telling ghost stories. You're out here just-  
(taking a sip)  
Smearing the good name of factual reporting.

CUSTOMER JUNE

*Wannabe detective.*

OFFICER CHARLES

*Quack journalist.*

DANIEL

More coffee?

OFFICER CHARLES & CUSTOMER JUNE

Please.

MARK

(to Charles)

Don't you have *real* missing people to get back to?

CUSTOMER JUNE

Who's the new guy?

OFFICER CHARLES

Intern in forensics. You'd like him.

MARK

This is the worst bread I've had in my life.



## The Coin Collector

OFFICER CHARLES  
Then spit it out.

MARK  
No, I'm committed.

DANNY returns and refills CHARLES and JUNE's mugs.

CUSTOMER JUNE  
Danny, how new are you?

DANIEL  
Uh, started about 3 days ago.

MARK  
Hmph. That explains a lot.  
(takes another bite of his  
bread)

OFFICER CHARLES  
Hope you aren't already tired of  
seeing our faces, let alone hers.  
(motions to JUNE)

CUSTOMER JUNE  
Screw off.

DANIEL  
Actually, I was kinda wondering...

OFFICER CHARLES  
Yeah?

DANIEL  
...Why *do* you come in here so often?

MARK  
It's definitely not for the food.

OFFICER CHARLES takes another sip of his coffee.

CUSTOMER JUNE  
It's 'cause this place reminds him  
of The Coin Collector.

DANIEL  
What?

OFFICER CHARLES sets his mug back on the table.

MARK  
What are you not telling us?

OFFICER CHARLES sits and ponders for a moment longer.





Victor Torres

OFFICER CHARLES  
(motioning towards JENNY)

Her.

DANIEL

Jenny?

MARK

She your weird crush or something?

OFFICER CHARLES shakes his head. He plays with a coin on the table.

OFFICER CHARLES  
She's one of the only people to have  
ever known him. Really known him.

JENNY stands at the window in the back, wiping down a mug.

DANIEL

No.

CUSTOMER JUNE  
Was he her long lost father or  
something?

OFFICER CHARLES  
...She's never told me the full  
story. You know that bus stop on 4th  
Street?

MARK

Yeah?

JENNY  
Apparently, one night Jen's closing  
up shop. Walks to the bus station to  
catch the 12AM. And that's when she  
see's him...

CUT TO:

**7 EXT. THE BUS STOP - NIGHT**

THE COIN COLLECTOR sits alone at the bench by the bus stop.

OFFICER CHARLES (V.O.)  
...And she sits down with him.

JENNY sits down on the other side of the bench. The wide shot  
of the two makes it unclear what they say to one another. But  
they talk for a bit. Like normal people.





## The Coin Collector

CUT TO:

### 8 INT. THE DINER - NIGHT

DANIEL

So? What was he *really* like?

JENNY enters abruptly, leaning against the booth.

JENNY

He was just a normal man. A man that preferred being by himself.

MARK

...That it?

JENNY

And I miss him.

OFFICER CHARLES

You're never gonna tell me more than that, are you?

JENNY

Yeah? Well why don't you tell them an important detail *you're* leaving out?

JENNY walks away.

MARK

What's she mean?

CHARLES says nothing.

CUSTOMER JUNE

...Coin Collector's gone.

OFFICER CHARLES

Aye.

MARK plays with his coffee. Daniel stares. There's regret in CHARLES' eyes.

OFFICER CHARLES

Four months ago. I was on the hunt to find out more about this guy.

DANIEL

Why?

OFFICER CHARLES





Victor Torres

...Townsfolk didn't like him. People were scared.

DANIEL looks baffled. MARK is unsurprised. JUNE shakes her head.

OFFICER CHARLES  
We started putting up bulletins, telling people to watch out for the guy. That he was a high-profile threat. Course a lot of it was just rumors... I just wanted to find him. So, one night we get a report of some hate crime. Which was... odd.

CUT TO:

9 EXT. STREETSIDE - NIGHT

CHARLES walks down a dark street, searching with a flashlight.

OFFICER CHARLES (V.O.)  
And I could hear someone trying to yell for help. Someone struggling.

CHARLES begins to walk faster, his flashlight can just barely make out the shadows of two men beating THE COIN COLLECTOR on the street.

OFFICER CHARLES  
HEY!

The two men freeze and then dart away. THE COIN COLLECTOR is weezing in pain. CHARLES tries to run to him, but THE COIN COLLECTOR is startled, still in shock from the people who hurt him. He scrambles up and begins to dart towards the bridge.

OFFICER CHARLES  
I tried to catch up with him.

CHARLES loses sight of him, catching up to bridge, now following a trail of coins.

OFFICER CHARLES (V.O.)  
But... I was too late.

As CHARLES gets closer to the bridge-crossing, he begins to see a trail of blood. He gets to the crossing and approaches the ledge - where the blood trail ends. He looks down. Beneath is a small ravine, a stream of water flowing under. Coins float down.





## The Coin Collector

CUT TO:

### 10 INT. THE DINER - NIGHT

OFFICER CHARLES  
We never saw him again.

CUSTOMER JUNE  
And Chuck still feels responsible.

CHARLES nods at JUNE.

DANIEL  
And... that's it?

MARK  
Sounds like case closed to me. The  
psycho offed himself.

JENNY re-enters.

JENNY  
(scoffing)  
People like you are the problem.

She begins picking up empty plates.

MARK  
What? Am I wrong?

CUSTOMER JUNE  
So he was weird. You saying he got  
what he deserved?

MARK  
Well no but-

OFFICER CHARLES  
It's exactly what you're implying.

MARK  
Well excuse me, the guy had to have  
known what was coming.

CUSTOMER JUNE  
Jesus, have a shred of *humanity*.

MARK shuts up.

DANIEL  
...Why were people scared of him?

OFFICER CHARLES



Victor Torres

Easy. People hate what they don't understand.

CHARLES looks over at JENNY, who stands at the window.

OFFICER CHARLES

If I had only gotten there a moment sooner or... just left him alone in the first place.

(pause)

I hope he's still out there.

JENNY isn't staring at anything in particular. Just thinking.

CUT TO a glimpse of the time she first encountered THE COIN COLLECTOR, JENNY walking down the street, crying.

CUT BACK TO the present. JENNY looks down at the tip jar, filled with dollars and coins...

CUT TO:

11 EXT. THE BUS STOP - NIGHT

Entering the flashback, JENNY remembers the night she hit rock bottom. But as she marches towards the bus stop, she pauses at the sight of *him* at the bench, baggy clothes and head cocked forward. Beside him is his canister of coins. For some reason, curiosity struck JENNY that night, as she slowly takes a seat on the other side of the bench. She's still sniffling, slowly composing herself.

THE COIN COLLECTOR

...Are you sad?

JENNY

(beat)

What?

THE COIN COLLECTOR

You look sad.

JENNY

...Yeah well. It hasn't been- today was- I don't know.

(sighing)

It doesn't matter.

THE COIN COLLECTOR

Yes it does.

JENNY

(beat)





## The Coin Collector

It's my job. And my life. I'm always just so tired... And then I get tired of being tired. And then it just keeps going, and everyone keeps moving, and I- I don't know. God, I don't know why I'm telling you any of this, sorry, forget it... I really am fine.

THE COIN COLLECTOR stares at her. She looks away. He turns to his canister, slowly taking out a penny.

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
Take a penny.

JENNY  
Uhh. Okay.  
(takes the coin)  
Why do you do it?

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
Do what?

JENNY  
The coins.

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
Oh. I've always really liked coins. Each one has a special story to it. Like this nickel here. I don't know where it's been, but I'd like to think it's just about seen the world. Passing through so many pockets. Or this one here. 1966. That's the year my ma was born.

JENNY turns the penny in her hand.

JENNY  
Can I ask you something?

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
(nods)

JENNY  
You ever get lonely?

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
No. I don't really like people too much. They're kinda scary.

JENNY  
(chuckling)  
Yeah.





Victor Torres

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
But sometimes... I like seeing  
people pick up coins. I don't like  
seeing coins all alone. Getting to  
see people get excited to find a  
lucky penny - that makes me happy.

The two sit quietly for a moment.

JENNY  
What's your name?

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
...You know, you're the first person  
to ask that in a long time.  
(beat)  
It's Franklin.

JENNY  
(nodding)  
I'm Jenny.

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
Heh, sounds like Penny.

JENNY goes in for a handshake. THE COIN COLLECTOR shakes.

JENNY  
It's nice to meet you, Franklin...

CUT TO:

**12 INT. THE DINER - NIGHT**

JENNY fondly grins. CHARLES, MARK, and JUNE are beginning to  
make their leave. DANIEL holds the door open for them,  
tipping his hat as JUNE and MARK exit. CHARLES pauses before  
leaving. He looks at JENNY. She stares back, followed by a  
nod and a smile. CHARLES nods back, exiting.

JENNY continues to close up, turning a few lights off.

DANIEL  
Hey, Jenny? ...Is it actually true?  
That Coin Collector's gone?

Jenny says nothing for a moment. She sighs and sits down at a  
booth. DANIEL joins her.

JENNY  
I used to see him once a week...

CUT TO:



## The Coin Collector

### 13 EXT. THE BUST STOP - NIGHT

Flashback again. JENNY sits alone at the bus stop, waiting for THE COIN COLLECTOR.

JENNY (V.O.)  
We'd talk about our days. Where we  
came from. What we wanted to do in  
life... We were friends.

JENNY looks around. Still waiting. Until finally she sees him. THE COIN COLLECTOR is limping towards the bus stop. She bolts up, terrified.

JENNY  
Oh my god, what happened? Franklin!

She puts an arm around him to hold him up, His face is bloody. Her shouts become muffled as JENNY's voice-over continues.

JENNY (V.O.)  
And one night... He lost everything.

Ringling rises. JENNY's words in the flashback are completely indiscernible.

CUT TO THE PRESENT:

DANIEL  
Oh my God.

JENNY  
He was...

CUT TO THE FLASHBACK:

JENNY sits with THE COIN COLLECTOR. You can hear her explaining that she's going to call an ambulance. He shakes his head.

JENNY (V.O.)  
...broken.

She pulls out her phone. He shakes his head more. The ringing is getting louder. He grabs her arm.

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
NO!

The ringing stops. JENNY freezes.

THE COIN COLLECTOR



Victor Torres

No. I won't go to a hospital. I  
can't. Please, Jenny. I'm fine. I  
just...

He sits still for a moment, JENNY patiently waiting.

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
I don't think I can be here anymore.

JENNY  
(pause)  
Who did this to you?

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
...People.

JENNY puts her phone away, thinking.

JENNY  
Why don't I help you get something  
to eat? Then maybe we can get back  
your-

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
No. Forget it.  
(sighing)  
I think it's time I go.

JENNY  
To where?

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
Somewhere where I can live in peace.

JENNY reaches over to hold his hand.

JENNY  
I'm so sorry, I-

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
There's nothing you could have done.  
It's no one's fault, really.

JENNY  
I just... What if this happens  
again? What if someone kills you?  
What if everything's completely  
hopeless? W-

THE COIN COLLECTOR  
No. Stop... Things are never  
*hopeless*. And if it happens again,  
guess I'll just have to start over  
and find more coins.





## The Coin Collector

JENNY

But... You need help. How can you  
just... trust that you'll be okay?  
There's so many bad people out  
there.

THE COIN COLLECTOR

Some bad people. But,  
(standing up)  
there's some good people too.

JENNY stares up at him.

THE COIN COLLECTOR

Like you.

The bus slowly pulls up to the station. It stops, and THE  
COIN COLLECTOR turns to the opening doors. He steps aboard.  
JENNY stands up. THE COIN COLLECTOR turns back to face her  
once more.

THE COIN COLLECTOR

Thanks.

THE COIN COLLECTOR flips a quarter at JENNY. She catches it.  
The door closes. And the bus drives away.

JENNY

Bye. Coin Collector.

CUT TO:

### 14 INT. THE DINER - NIGHT

JENNY sits with DANIEL, her story finally done. They breathe  
for a moment, and JENNY gets up to walk away.

DANIEL

Where'd he go?

JENNY walks over to the receipt holder by the register,  
dozens and dozens of slips stacked on the spike.

JENNY

I don't really know.

She removes the stack of receipts.

JENNY

But he's happier now, exploring new  
places.



## Victor Torres

Flipping through the receipts, she finds the one she's searching for: A receipt for a single cup of black coffee. Signed, *Franklin* :)

DANIEL

So... We'll never see him again.

JENNY

Hm.

JENNY picks up the jar of tips, half full of coins and change.

JENNY

I wouldn't be so sure.

DANIEL joins JENNY. He looks at the receipt she has, raising his eyebrows. The chime of the entrance door is heard from off screen. DANIEL and JENNY look towards it, almost directly at the camera. DANIEL's jaw drops. And JENNY smiles.

CUT TO BLACK

*Helen Hamilton Award for  
Excellence in Creative Expression*

# Homecoming

Micah Matherne





# One Love

Kaylee Meyer



*Sustaining Ourselves & Others  
Art Contest: First Prize Winner*





# Return of the Dragon

Sergio Xocrates Gonzalez



# Glistening Pond

Kaylee Meyer





**Returning to The Giving Tree**  
**Lauren Sears**

*Sustaining Ourselves & Others*  
*Art Contest: Honorable Mention*







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"The Coin Collector" by Victor Torres

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by Anthony Lucido

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## Sustaining Ourselves & Others Art Contest: First Place

"One Love" by Kaylee Meyer

## Sustaining Ourselves & Others Art Contest: Honorable Mention

"Returning to The Giving Tree" by Lauren Sears

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**-Albert Einstein**

