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“
**ALL GREAT
ARTISTS DRAW
FROM THE SAME
RESOURCE: THE
HUMAN HEART,
WHICH TELLS
US THAT WE ARE
ALL MORE ALIKE
THAN WE ARE
UNALIKE.**”

- Maya Angelou

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EDITOR'S NOTE

In the age of Artificial Intelligence and current reign of ChatGPT, human creativity is sacred. At a time where the faster, easier, less-involved way of doing things is cheered on by the world around us, our *eleven40seven* meetings have been a safe haven. Each individual has been unrelentingly intent on protecting and celebrating all that is beautiful about human creativity. From the messy emotions to the feel-good ones, each person on this team has been committed to the celebration of the full scope of the human experience.

It has been my great joy to work alongside a team of people so dedicated to honoring and preserving the human creativity present on this campus. I am continuously in awe of the talent, depth, and imagination that flourishes here at Texas Christian University. I want to extend a huge 'thank you' to everyone who took the bold step of submitting their work to our Fall 2023 edition of the journal. Reviewing each of these submissions has personally inspired and encouraged me in my own artistic endeavors. I count this as my great joy from my time as Editor-in-Chief of the journal.

This entire process has been a true testament to what it is to be human. I'm grateful for the laughs, smiles, and passionate discussions shared amongst the staff throughout the semester. I want to extend a huge 'thank you' to each member on staff for the dedication they brought to the project. I especially want to thank my Managing Editor, Elena Butterfield, for all of the hard work she put into seeing this through. I couldn't have done this without her. I also want to thank both Dr. Carlson and Dr. Wenzel for their wisdom throughout the course of the semester. I am especially going to miss both of their kind smiles and passion for the arts.

As this is my final semester, I could not have imagined a better way to end my time at TCU than to have spent it with this group of people honoring the creativity of our fellow peers. I hope every reader finds inspiration in this book and is reminded of the cherished thing it is to be human.

Sincerely,

Kennedy Bigham

Editor-in-Chief, Fall 2023

Rainwater Woman

Christina Phillips

It came to him dripping off his lover in the rain.
It came to him cold, wet, and bright.
Lightning set it wholly ablaze,
And the thunder roared it from the clouds:
Need, need, need.

It was in her mouth, a single word coming to bloom.
It was foreign to him, untouched and untasted.
It was red and ripe and tantalizing,
And, starved, he plucked it from her lips:
Need, need, need.

Into warmth, then, and into light;
He led it up the stairwell. It left puddles on the landings,
Soaked its scent into his sheets.
And she left with the rainclouds, chased off by the dawn,
But the *need, need, need* lingered at his threshold long after.

Bee or Bear

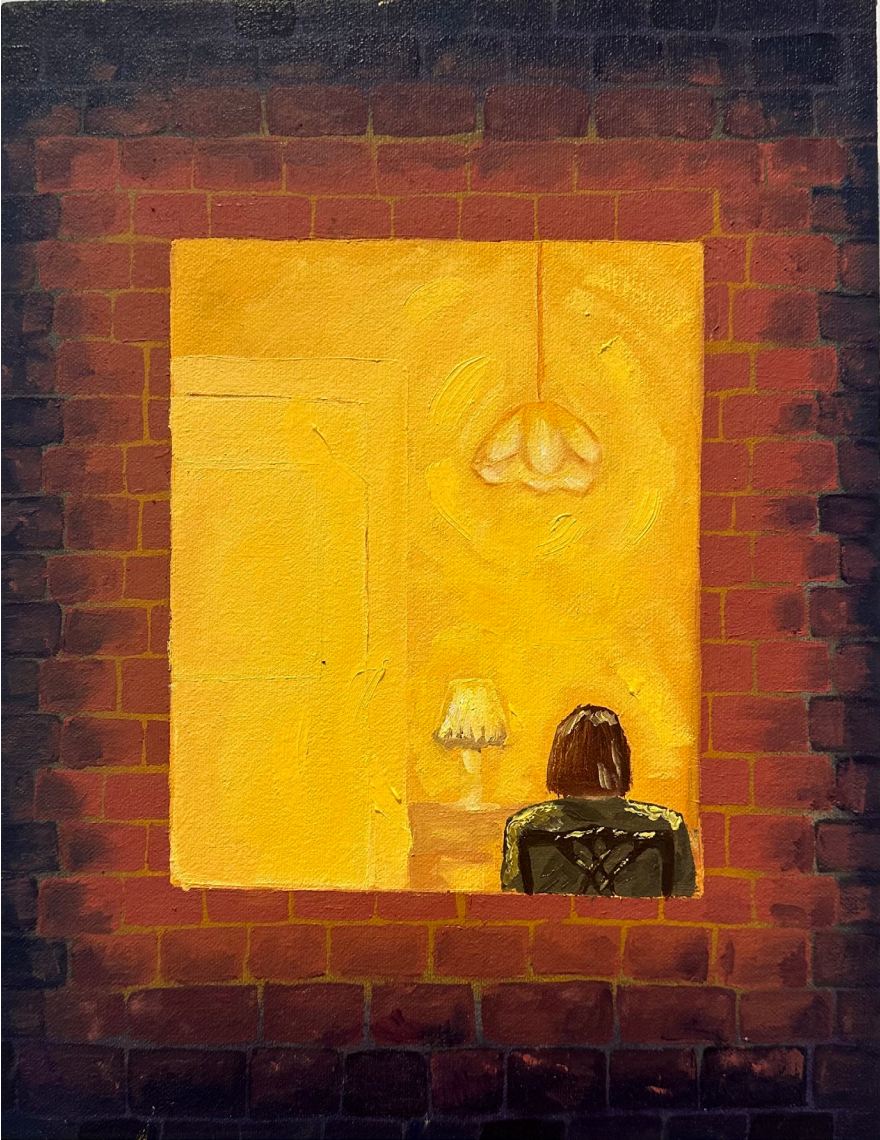
Angelina Leonardi

He called me honey
and did he mean to say
that I was healthy for his body?
In the way you put honey in your tea
and it seems to soothe the insides
of a coughing heart.
Or did he mean to say
that I was sticky to his mind?
In the way you wake up in the morning
and there's a face that sticks in your mind
the rest of the day.

He called me honey
and did he mean to say
that he would rather deny his hive
then buzz even one second
without my sweet flavor.
Or did he mean to say
that he would swallow me whole
greedy paws eager to take my sweetness
only to satisfy his taste.

I wonder if
when he called me honey
did he name himself bee or bear in his craving?

Window No. 1
Lydia Welling



Phasmophobia

Anaya White

Like a flickering light in an abandoned home,
I'm a cycle of gaining and losing the "glow",
and when the lantern goes out, the phantoms will roam
to remind me that I'm never completely alone.

I Will Remember

Mia Vu

“Do you have an ace?”

“Go fish.” My grandma smirked from behind her remaining card. “Do you have a seven?”

“Yep, just got it.” I said under my breath.

She placed her final pair down on her thick stack.

“Guess that makes us 5-4 now, what game’s next?”

“Let’s go with Speed.” I smiled with full confidence I would win.

I don’t think I’ll ever be able to play cards with her like that again. Not after her stroke, one then two. Each of them deteriorating the person I knew. Card games were our love language. Five-year-old me would sit across from her on our white carpet in criss-cross apple-sauce fashion. Her bony hands would act on their own from her years of experience. She would cut the deck in two and then overlap the two halves against each other to shuffle them without ever having to look. I loved the ruffling cascade of a perfect shuffle as the cards slid in between each other. Although she seemed fragile on the outside, my grandma always had a lively spirit when playing with me. She taught me everything I know: Go Fish, Speed, Stealing Casino, Memory, War, Spoons, and BS. Even to this day I love playing card games with friends and family because of her.

When my grandma laughed, she poured her whole body and heart into it. She drew everyone in like moths to a flame. It was so contagious we couldn't help but join in with her. My favorite memories with her are when we would be sitting around our circular, glass dining table eating my mom's cooking and she would laugh at the silly stories my sisters and I would tell her. Her snorting laugh seemed to echo off the walls and fill up our house. We couldn't help but giggle along. She doesn't laugh like that anymore. It breaks my heart that I won't be able to hear it again.

When my dad immigrated from Vietnam at the age of sixteen, my grandma was a patron at a church in San Antonio and took him in. Even though he was a stranger, she accepted him with open arms. She was an English teacher and sat down every night to teach him English so he could graduate high school on time. Her hands spiraled across the page to draw out the words still foreign on his tongue. Because of her, my dad was able to learn English in one and a half years and go to college at A&M.

With no children of her own, my dad and his siblings became her family. Many holidays and vacations later, she's someone I could not imagine my life without. My Vietnamese grandparents also immigrated to America, but it was hard to connect with them because of the

language barrier. Instead, we found our own middle ground with lots of smiles and head nodding. While I love and appreciate them so much, my grandma was able to understand me on a different level. I never had to try to “be something” when I was with her.

In a full circle moment, she also ignited my love for reading. I was six years old when she made me read *The Magic Tree House* aloud to her. We sat on the threaded white couch in our gameroom as I painstakingly read one chapter a day. I remember hearing my mom cooking in the kitchen below us: pans clattering, knives chopping, water boiling. Every time, my grandma would ask me if I wanted to keep reading, but I would make an excuse that I was too tired and bolt out of there. Slowly, I noticed myself wanting to read more and find out what happened next. I was engrossed in the story of Jack and Annie. The characters became familiar friends. Ever since then, I would devour books in a day or two. They became my solace when the world was too much to bear.

I can feel her slipping away from me. Her eyes frantically searching for answers on my face as they glaze over. She is wondering who I am, where she is. I don't know how to reach out to her and let her know she is safe. How do I remind her I'm her granddaughter without falling apart? How do I watch her forget? She's a shadow of who she once was, but I love her all the same.

Our brains need oxygen to survive. There was a blood clot that prevented blood flow from entering my grandmother's brain. She was having an ischaemic stroke. 800,000 people get a stroke in the U.S. every year, and each one you have increases your risk of getting another. There is a golden window of opportunity to act. One hour. The faster the patient receives treatment like a tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), the better. Time is brain. Every minute lost is equivalent to 2 million brain cells dying.

After her first stroke, she wasn't given a tPA, so her road to recovery was long. She would often just stare off into the distance, as if fog had washed over her brain. No one knows where she would go. She was like an astronaut floating in space without gravity, until she remembered she was tethered and heard us calling her.

I always knew my grandparents were getting old, but this was the first time it really sunk in how fragile life is. It only took one second for my grandmother's health to plummet. We often feel hopeless in our race against time, feeling it breathe down our necks, taunting us. But the only thing we can do is remember and keep going in place of those who cannot. Even if she does not remember playing cards or reading together, I will remember.

Sisters Born of Adolescent Awakenings

Anna Wilcox

We met lingering through a forgotten space,
dancing among shadowed roses, wilting
in a veil of silver haze.

Beneath a weeping willow, we whispered
our bitter blue breaths and called

East-

for the return of dusty sun rays.

This was the beginning of a Revolution
to that absent starred night.

In rebellion we spoke of life's lies.

Our incensed truths rising from our lungs
like smoke in a brush fire, spreading
sweetened aromas.

We burned emotion to ember on
soft grass of shaded grays,
until the ground caved under our weight.

Together, we dove
into the caverns of the Earth.

Where dark diamonds liquidate, we floated,
rippling on a River of Perception.

Fading Bonds

Angelina Leonardi

Is this how you prefer me?

a casual talk, a sometimes friend,
a see each other only in class kind of way.

Is this how you wanted me all this time?

a passing glance, an unknown face,
a barely means anything, kind of acquaintance.

Is this what I've been reduced to?

a never has been, a never will be,
a nothing ever again kind of stranger.

How do you just forget?

that familiar talk, that “remember when”,
that “how’s your mom been” kind of knowing.

How do you just walk away?

that always laughing, that never leaving,
that stay by your side forever kind of trust.

How should I get over it?

that breath taking, that soul bonding,
that be with you until my last days kind of love.

Moon Night
Ellie Evans



Portrait with Purple

Reagann Zimmermann



Home

Michael C. Ogbuagu

This is the house I was punished in
Where memories seem to flutter
through the floorboards the tears swim
and all one can do is shiver.

Remembrance accosted me and
the knowledge of old is once again
new to me.

So I collapse
in wonder and awe
At what age has passed
what pain is raw
For now I relive them
As I once did.

This is the room I was punished in
Where the knee grew dark and rough
With wear and tear
And the back grew strong from force
I am familiar with
The dark quiet
The creak of wood

Home

And the hiss of air from
Beneath the door.

I had made this place home
Till it was home no more
The rings of wood have
Marked the soles of my feet
And my skin shines from tears.

This is the house I was punished in
The place I call home.

Exhausted
Madilyn Kopec



Her, Undone

Gabriel Macias

The blue wallpaper in the living room is peeling. She doesn't know how she didn't realize it before. It's right there, on the wall in the corner of the room, curling in on itself like the wrinkled petal of the forget-me-nots which sit dry on the nearby windowsill. The ones she swears she had watered a day ago.

She looks around and a sick feeling begins to settle into her stomach. Everything here seems just a little unfamiliar. Has the coffee table always been that far back? The phantom imprints in the off-white carpeting in front of it bring doubt into her mind. And something else. She takes a sharp breath; her pride and joy, the fifteen-year-old doctorate diploma which hangs above a small wooden drawer next to her bookshelf, is tilted a bit to the left. Behind the frame are light, yellowish scratches in an arc.

Her heart beats a bit faster. She steps forward to the diploma frame and centers it, a soft dragging noise sounding as she sets it in place; the strand of thread that holds it up has thinned a bit after all this time. She looks to the bare wall in the dimly-lit corner, spotted yellow and brown, which had been hidden behind that blue for years. Had it all slipped her mind? It's hard to imagine that she, of all people, could miss that. Her mother, sure, but not her. She opens the drawer and pulls out

a set of bright yellow sticky notes. **REMEMBER THE WALL**, she writes with a thick Sharpie, and she sticks the note to her finger, ticking back the previous moments in her mind: last, she looked around. Before, she saw the wallpaper. Before that, she

feels hungry. With a turn, she struts through the nearby door into the kitchen-dining room mix, a cramped locale, where she pulls out a pan. She craves the scent of eggs and bacon. When she sets the pan on the stove and turns on the burner, though, she notices something. Residue, charred black in the center of the pan. There are even some vegetables still sitting there, bottoms blackened and stuck to the base, but their brightly colored skins glistening with moisture. She'd never burned food before.

She takes a few moments to look around the room, inside cabinets and drawers, through the walk-in pantry, then through the windows, glaring out and about suspiciously before shutting the blinds with three consecutive snaps. A few strands of hair tug at her head, having gotten caught in the string, but a firm pull frees the roots from her scalp and she goes back to wipe the pan clean and put the bacon in to cook.

The sizzling and popping of the bacon comforts her with

something familiar. As she takes in the soft, savory-sweet smell of pig belly, a picture on the fridge catches her eye. A photo of her, her mother, a surprisingly muscular woman with a grey pixie cut, and her son, a gangling, freckled boy with hair a vibrant red. *What a kind, caring young man he's growing into*, she thinks. A lightbulb flickers off, then on, then off, then on again. Still staring at the photo, she grabs the landline off its pedestal and dials a number. She likes this number. The bacon flips and the dialtone sputters out its crackle a few times before she hears a breathy voice on the other end.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Ma. It’s good to hear you. How’ve you been?”

After a second, there’s a sigh. “I’ve been fine, hun, happy to hear from you too. Have you been keeping safe?”

“Of course I have, Ma, I should be asking you that question.”

She flips the bacon again. “Just doing some cooking right now. The bacon’s squealing.”

“On the stove?” her mother responds.

“Mmhm.”

The crackle of the grease fills the silence of the call for a moment and a half.

“Well, I should probably go then, so I don’t distract you—”

Her silicon spatula suddenly slips from her hand into the pan. “No, wait, you don’t—ow!—you don’t have to leave—ouch!— Let’s talk a bit at least, I don’t hear from you much.”

Her mother scoffs. “You call me twice a day.”

She puts the phone between her head and shoulder to fuss with the spatula and speaks in jest. “Well maybe I need to call you three times a day to make sure I remember! How’s that sound?” Her mother chuckles on the other end.

“I’m sure you would, hun. Hope you’ll also be doing something else that’s more productive than just talking to me.”

“Ah, I want to rewatch *The Thing* again, but the DVD’s been skipping a lot recently.”

Her mother groans. “Good thing too, that movie hardly helps your head at all. You’d think you’d have gotten sick of it after all the time you spent with it writing your dissertation. Now, is Dr. Brecker doing well? I know you had your appointment two days ago.”

She groans as she cleans off her hand with a paper towel. “Oh, I dunno. I don’t like him very much, he’s always making me feel self-conscious about how I look. I’m a doctor too, you know! Treat me with some respect, huh?”

“He’s worth what we pay him for, hun. Just be happy he’s filling out your prescriptions.”

“For what? Brain rot? I’m only forty-two and all I’m doing is taking pills for some made-up disease. I almost ditched him altogether. Thanks for the great recommendation, Ma.”

“At least you don’t have to sort fifty million different pills in an organizer like I do.” Her mother pauses. “Well, I guess you *do* have your cream.”

“That’s silly.” She snorts and flips the bacon one more time. “I don’t use cream, never have.”

“Yes, you do, it’s the stuff for your head—Oh! How’s your hair, by the way?”

Her eyebrows furrow together. “My hair?”

“*Yes*, your hair. I just wanted to make sure that—”

She drops the spatula and walks into the nearby bathroom.

“What would be wrong with it? I couldn’t imagine what you...”

Standing there now, on the soft striped rug in front of her sink, she sees it in the mirror, a nasty caricature. Teeth yellowing, face covered in oil and pores and blackheads, the creature in front of her glares at her with a wicked scowl, its green eyes piercing bright through the

darkness of the bathroom. She is rooted in place, rooted by a familiar feeling, a feeling teetering on the edge of familiarity; that face is almost recognizable. On the counter, an open bottle lay on its side, pills spilling out onto the surface.

Slowly, she lifts her gaze, up, to the top of its head, and its eyes follow too. A moment passes. Then, suddenly, it opens its mouth. The room's walls reverberate with a long, beastly howl, and she's screaming in unison. She clasps her hands tight over her ears and ducks down, chin touching the floor, and she shakes in absolute terror. Her mother's confused voice is muffled from where the phone now lays on the rug.

“What? What's going... God, not again...”

She grabs it and begins to creep out of the room on her knees, moving quietly so the creature might not notice. As she leaves, she sees a bottle of cream hiding in a dark corner, nearly out of sight. Her voice is a piercing hiss as she finally responds.

“What the hell? What was that?”

Her mother's voice speaks in a rehearsed manner. “Hun, hun, stay strong. I know you can stay strong.”

She speaks in frantic bursts. “There was something! It looked at me and it... *stared* at me and it was awful...”

“I know seeing yourself in the mirror nowadays can be a bit disquieting for you, but—”

“But it was *there*, Ma!” she says, now pressing herself against the wall outside the bathroom door. “It was disgusting and... and horrifying, and when I looked up, its head was just... patches of hair! God, I think I need to call an exterminator...”

“That’s just...” her mother’s words seem to get caught up, and she pauses for a few moments. Eventually she speaks again, more firm this time. “You need rest. You know, I’ve read that...” Her voice hesitates. “...that sleeping it off helps reset your brain a little bit. How long have you been awake?”

“I don’t know, Ma, I don’t—”

“Well then. If you’re not going to listen to your doctor, at least listen to me. You know me, right? Go sit yourself down in that armchair of yours and get some shut-eye.”

“Ma, I—”

“Just go, hun.”

She lets out a snort of air and slowly pushes herself back onto her feet. Slowly, she takes a few steps towards the door to the living room.

“There you go. You know I love you, right, honeybug?”

A sigh escapes her lips as the kitchen door closes behind her, her mouth forming a weak smile.

“Yeah. I love you too. Thanks for calling me.”

“...I didn’t call you.”

She stops in place. “Huh, really? Hm... I guess I must’ve thought that— YEOW!”

As soon as she takes her next step, a sharp tug from the hair at the back of her head yanks her body back and left, and she howls as she falls to the floor, her temple hitting the wooden divider which separates linoleum from carpet. Her head is held slightly aloft again by the thick strands which are caught in the door, and as she writhes and moans in pain, the voice of her mother pierces the air, now frenzied and frantic.

“What happened? *What happened?* Are you alright?! Please tell me— Oh god, oh god... I’m calling Rowan, I’m call—” Her mother cuts out abruptly, leaving her softening whimpers to fill the room, anguished whines, coos as she cradles herself on the floor.

The light through the windows shifts to a slight yellowish hue before she thinks again. The skin atop her head prickles, she notices. She scratches. She feels the pull of her hair on her scalp, and she decides

to free it. The prick hurts for just a moment, but once it's out, it feels so strangely satisfying. One thin strand, however, isn't liberated. It's still pulling at her. She grunts and tries again. It hurts more than it should and it's not coming out. She reaches with her other hand; all of her senses seem to point to this one spot. One more time, she grasps and tugs the hardest she ever has through all her years.

Pop.

A slick, moist sound accompanies the prick of pain, and a wave of satisfaction rushes through her body, from head to foot. *Freedom... freedom at last...* She closes her eyes, smiling as she holds that devil strand in her hand, feeling its rough texture; it's a lengthy piece of hair. She continues to shift it down her fingers, bit by bit, taking it all in. That is, until she feels something else.

It's a strange feeling, an unnatural one. The roughness between her fingers slowly gives way to something slippery, slimy, squishy. She glances down at what should be hair, but now, she's not so sure. A thin thread of a wet, grey-white material sits there, warm in her palm. She can feel it subtly pulse as she breathes, her heart beats in time with it. Her hand easily follows its length up to the side of her head, where the strand ends. She gives a slight tug, and a bit more slides out, carrying

with it a peculiar pleasure which she can't help but indulge just a little more. Her temple throbs; her thoughts feel as if they are slowly seeping out, floating into the open air. *Something might be wrong*, she thinks, *but I'm no doctor*.

She looks up and around. *What time is it?* The walls of the living room are covered in furniture, but no one seemed to think about installing a grandfather clock. She glances to her left at a glimmer of light reflecting off the black screen of her TV. It entices her.

She gets up and glides to the armchair in front of it, the feeling of that strand sliding from her head leaving her near-euphoric. The TV is on now, opened to the channel guide as she flips through it absentmindedly, twirling the strand between her fingers. She clicks down through news channels and afternoon soap operas before she recalls something that strikes a certain, inexplicable joy in her. Her DVD of *The Thing* was still in the player from some time ago. She pulls a bit on the strand again, turns it on, and soon enough, the spaceship crash-lands into the Antarctic.

The armchair is warm and inviting; it breathes as she does, pulsing at the same pace as the thing between her fingers. As the Norwegians chase the husky dog through the snow, her eyes are locked in, and almost involuntarily, she slowly lifts the strand up, places it in

her teeth, and begins to gnaw. She feels her eye twitch. The sensation has her uncomfortable, but she gnaws one more time. It feels as if she's squeezing a pimple. She feels like she hasn't eaten in a day. Looking around again, she spots something tasty-looking on the windowsill. The blue dry petals look like sugar in the light. She rises and grabs one, placing it in her mouth; it's not as tasty as she'd expected, but it would do.

The clacking of an old keyboard grabs her attention and she looks back to the TV in delight, expectantly. Kurt Russell, in his prime and handsome for all time, sips his drink while playing chess against an AI. This scene was always funny. She looks away to take another snack, but it doesn't matter; she can see the scene in her mind, and she awaits his soft, gravelly voice to reach her ears. Here it comes, right on time: "Poor baby, you're starting to lose it, aren't you?" She laughs as she waits for the AI's counterattack, rook to knight six, checkmate, checkmate! But the only thing she hears is the subtle crackle of the TV, and unexpectedly, the typing begins again. Chewing on another petal, she turns to look at the screen. The camera cuts to Kurt Russell's face as he takes the same sip, and he speaks.

"Poor baby, you're starting to lose it, aren't you?"

Her eyebrows furrow together again. "What?"

Another crackle, and the film resets. “Poor baby, you’re starting to lose it, aren’t you?”

She shakes her head at the TV. “No, I’m—”

It resets once more. It begins to feel as if he’s talking to her through the screen now, asking the question again, then again, and again, and every time, she feels that sick feeling in her stomach grow, little by little. It’s getting warmer.

“Poor baby, you’re starting to lose it, aren’t you?”

“No! Stop it, Kurt, there’s nothing wrong with me.”

“Poor baby, you’re starting to lose it, aren’t you?”

“You know me, Kurt, I’m not... You don’t... You don’t know me! Shut up!”

She violently clasps her hands over her ears and stops away from the TV set and towards the corner of the room, banging her head on the wall. Frantically, she starts pulling and pulling at the strand which freely slides from her head with a quiet squelch, coiling into a pile onto the floor. The carpet soaks up some of the moisture and tints a faint red. The pulling isn’t enough to drown out Kurt’s accusations, however, which seem to get louder and louder in her ears. *He can’t be right*, she knows, *he wouldn’t act like this to me. Someone must’ve put him up to this, someone must have...*

A tickle on the bare skin on top of her head makes her look up. The wallpaper above her is peeling, curling in on itself, almost reaching down at her. Its beautiful deep blue reveals a yellowing, hideous base, and she almost vomits. She would have noticed this before. She would have fixed this before now, wouldn't she? As Kurt continues to mock her in the other corner, she desperately pulls down on the wallpaper, feeling at the wall behind, pressing it, hitting it in search of something, anything, to prove him wrong.

“Shut up!” she finally screams at him, tearing up and tearing more hairs from her head, running at the TV. “There’s something here! Something in the walls! I’ve seen it, seen it in the mirror, and it’s like me, but it isn’t! A doppelganger... A *thing*! That’s it! You understand that, don’t you? There’s a thing in my walls, it’s been toying with me, moving my things around in little ways to make me think I’m going nuts. But I’m not! There’s proof here, see—” She snaps her head from place to place, then she zeroes in on the coffee table and points to the floor. “Look! Look closely! There’s imprints in the rug. Something moved this, I know I’d never do something like that. Something’s been here! Sneaking in while I’m asleep. But it’s getting more reckless now, so reckless that it’s showed its face! And how that I’ve seen it, I’ll—”

A faint sound catches her ear through the noise. It's metallic. Her stomach drops and she stands still as she hears the turn and click of the unlocking of her front door. The door opens slowly, creaking, followed by violent coughing from the kitchen and a voice, a male voice. "Oh my god!"

She rushes through the kitchen door to an obscured, darkened room filled with black smoke. The acrid smell of burning meat assaults her nose and she immediately falls to the floor, hacking out coughs of her own. She feels the side of her head and tugs; the strand is caught in the door and pulled taut. Laying under the layers of smoke she can see shoes, brand new, bolt out the door, and after a few moments, they peek back in, toes first. She screams at them.

"Who are you?" Her voice is hoarse, and the smoke makes her dry swallows even more painful. "How did you get the key?"

"It's Rowan!" the voice responds. "It's your son! Where are you? What happened?"

"I... I..." The foul smell of the room matches the growing feeling in her mind. She tries to think but all her thoughts disappear too quickly; only one stays, a soft voice which sounds out a single word.

Thing. Thing. Thing.

She shakes her head and speaks through wheezes and coughs. “No! Don’t you dare lie to me. Something’s going on and... and I want to know if you’re a part of it.”

“What do you mean?! You’re in danger, Mom! We need to put out this fire!” Its voice is deep, almost like her ex-husband’s. “Come here! Take my hand.”

She slowly gets up and attempts to peer through the fumes. It hurts to try and see anything, the smoke stings her eyes and they water as she coughs even more.

“You need to come with me! Now!”

She can see a vague figure in the smoke. She looks closer. A pair of eyes peer at her through the black. Piercing green eyes. They lean in quickly and she yelps, reaching blindly around the corner and to the right where she grasps a handle of some kind and yanks it in front of her. An intense heat washes over her face and body, accompanied by the smell of burning flesh. She wields fire in a pan.

“Stay back, you hear me?” she threatens, her burning throat tearing itself apart. “Don’t come closer!”

“What—Let go of that! Put that thing down!”

The figure takes another quick step forward and she can feel

the door at her back. She thrusts the pan in the voice's direction, and something launches from it, into the smoke; a moment later, it screams in shocked agony.

"What the fuck?!"

"Stay back!"

"I'm your son! Mom, it's your son!"

"You're a freak!"

She backs through the door into the living room, taking a breath of clean air before her lungs fill with smoke once again. The figure has wiped off the projectile and begins moving toward her with haste. It reaches out. Two muscular, pale hands thrust from the smoke of the kitchen. She swings but the hands pull back and some of the burning residue is launched to her left on the floor. She takes a look at the squinting green eyes which blink rapidly in the smoke.

"Go... away. You'll... n-never trick me." For a second, the two of them sit still. Suddenly, the sound of engulfing flames draws her attention to her left. The rug has just caught fire. The voice sounds panicked.

"Jesus! Mom, we need to get you out of here! This isn't safe!"

It moves in once more. She shrieks and her body surges with adrenaline. **"I don't know what you are!"**

She swings and the blow connects with a thick, resonant thud. A man's body exits the smoke and hits the ground face-down in front of her. The color of his hair matches the flames. He's twitching. She hesitates for three, four, five seconds. Then with held breath she hits him one more time, violently, to the head. No more movement.

She tries to breathe but it's difficult. She leans the burning pan up against the side of the man's head and stumbles to the coffee table, putting her own head in her hands as heat slowly fills the room. Kurt has stopped mocking her; the DVD has ejected itself, and the TV, its screen now blue, displays only two words: *READ ERROR*. She stares at the man again, and now she can hear three words in her head, repeating on their own, independent of the two others: *him, was, it*.

She gently grasps the strand again, darkened from the smoke, darkened red. *Him was it*. She pulls. *Him it was*. It hurts so much but she growls and keeps tugging. *It him was*. Tug after tug after tug, and nothing's happening. It was him. But her mind is set. With a howl, she tugs the hardest tug she's ever done through her years.

Was it him?

Pop.

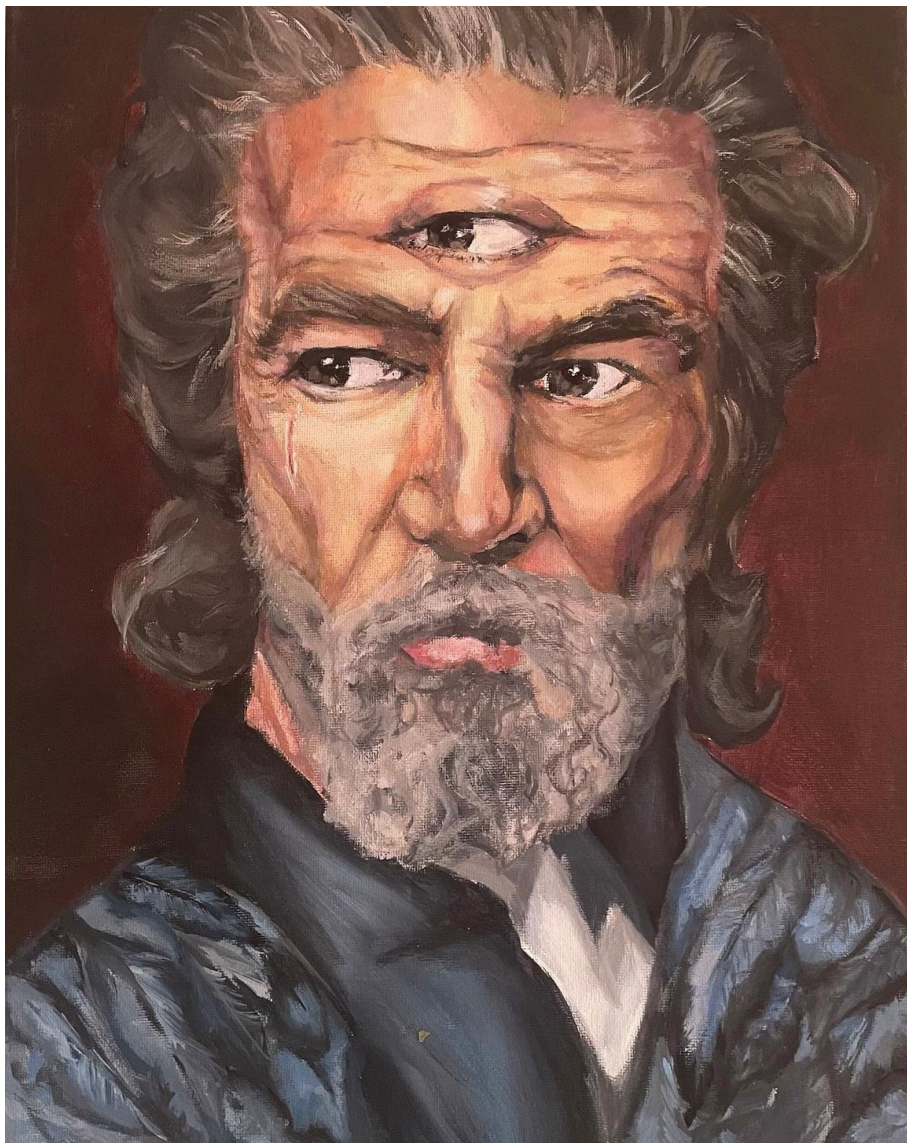
Everything's gone. Her limp body falls back and she lands hard

on the surface of the table. It all hurts. She wants to cradle her head, cover up the hole, but when she tries she finds she can't move a single muscle, not to run, to scream, to cry, or to close her eyes. She feels the blood trickling, thick, down the side of her head. She smells the smell of burning hair and flesh from across the room. She tastes the last bit of dead petal on her tongue. She hears the landline, ringing again as it lays on the ground at the door. And through blurred and darkening vision, she sees something monstrous, with blue scales rotted yellow and brown, lunge out at her from the corner of the room with its arms splayed wide, breathing fire.

*Helen Hamilton Award for
Excellence in Creative Expression*

The three eyed man

Reagann Zimmermann



A Different Kind of Loud

Raegan Lane

Seagulls sound like
Sirens taken straight
I can see the zombies
They curse each other anger
The cars scream around turns
Cheers graze over the cobblestone
Backfires and explosions in the sky
The noise of Rome is deafening,
but nothing compared to Home.

dying children.
out of a movie.
running ready to kill.
in America you'd be dead.
trapping me in infected road.
alone into the dark of the night.
pierce the air as empty gunshots.

Don't Touch

Lydia Welling



Hunter-Gatherer

Anaya White

They say desperate times call for
desperate measures, so I
stalk wretchedly in the night.

My skin tears and scrapes against
brambles and branches as I
grab the best thing I can find.

I've tried to search for edibility.
I've tried to wait around like I'm prey.
I've tried to pray; tried to do it God's way,
but every time I'm back in this same place.

So,
I learned to love the taste of strange berries.
Yes, I'm aware that they're poisonous to eat,
but unless you are a person that has ever truly starved,
There's no use in you rebuking poor me

I am hungry, I am nauseous, I am dizzied by my needs,
and I'm addicted to the chase.
I'm a lover. I'm a fiend.

Walking Sin

Raegan Lane

knees back breast midriff
hidden
sunglass removed
so your head
is closer to God.

Basilica of Santi Apostoli

she does a strange lunge
then enters the pew
can I sit?

up
down
left
right

right left?
no, left right.

“Isn’t it wonderful?”
“Can’t you feel Him?”

feel who?

The Touch

Sarah Fritch



the boy was pretty like a candle

Deanna Chukes

I.

soft, silky, smooth to the touch, when you grazed his skin
pleasant like a spring day, captured and made eternal
nestled in the home, like safety, like a companion
placed neatly, when you look, you might smile

II.

he smelled like art and garden flowers in bloom,
a dream where a butterfly might land on something petal-soft,
in search of sustenance, and a place to sleep
delicate

III.

his light was soft, faint, consistent
the kind that stands vigil in the darkness
when you close your eyes, you're not alone
there's a light in the hallway

IV.

standing tall, shining silently
in his presence there's warmth, a hug in a lonely room
he's beautiful; light caught, wax dripping, gentle glow
it is cold, it is dark. you don't look elsewhere

V.

caught in your quiet
frozen and in need
you tragically forget
the boy burns like a boy

Dear Mom,

Mia Vu

It pains me, the way you look at yourself
Staring at the mirror unsatisfied
Hands pulling skin taut to shrink the swells,
But you are what happens when stars collide.

The body you pick apart once made me
You love me wholly but yourself in parts.
Your stretch marks and wrinkles tell your story
With scattered age spots Hipparchus would chart.

Getting old is a gift to be treasured.
Society will whisper in your ear
Sweet nothings to get you to surrender
But when my kids are born I need you here.

They need to know the woman I adore
Your flaws, mistakes, I'll always love and more.

A Proud Vietnamese Heart

Hayden Nguyen

From humble roots, my heritage springs,
Where parents toiled 'neath the sun's hot wings.
In rice fields, they labored, day and night,
For our basic needs, they fought the fight.

Through hardships deep, they never complained,
Their love and sacrifice, forever ingrained.
In a land where dreams were not always free,
They nurtured in me a love for the learning tree.

From a place where education's the prize,
Though means were limited, dreams reached the skies.
Work ethic and knowledge, their precious bequest,
They knew it was the key to a future blessed.

In a close-knit community, I was raised,
Where bonds were strong and kindness blazed.
Though we lacked riches, our hearts were rich,
In the true meaning of neighborhood, we found our niche.

My country, though small, stands tall and bold,
In solidarity, our spirits never grow old.
In times of strife and moments of grace,
We unite as one, a harmonious embrace.

Proudly I stand, where I come to be,
In a world where family and community decree.
For in this land, where love's the glue,
I am honored to say, I'm Vietnamese, through and through.

With pride, I declare, for all to see,
I am who I am, because of my ancestry.

When the Sun Won't Go Down

Madeline McCormack

Some days it seems like the sun won't go down
until every last bit of water has been
lifted up out of the soil, into the sky.
Until the cracks in the earth are large
enough for you to fall down deep,
deep through the dark.

The grass is long gone;
the cactus in the yard struggles
to outlive the trees.
You would think it could stand the heat,
but the ground threatens
to swallow it with the rest of us.

They say one day the sky will open and
release decades worth of her tears on the land,
filling the cracks in the earth until they overflow,
the waters rushing across the barren ground,
seeping into our homes.

We will rebuild, this time
remembering how the children used
to love lifting rocks to play with rollie pollies
in the damp soil under the shade of the trees.
How we had even forgotten that trees had leaves,
and how beautiful flowers are
when they bloom.
Pink, violet, red, yellow.

When we are gone,
do you think the rollie pollies
will find peace in watching
the blossoming of the earth?

Green Glass Door

Ellie Evans



One Print Source

Rylee Sweeney

FADE IN:

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

An old public library. The lighting is dim, the colors are deep reds and browns. Long wooden tables are located in the middle of the room, with golden lamps atop, lit and spaced out across them. Shelves, covered with books and dust, frame the tables. At the front of the room is a check-out desk with an OLD LIBRARIAN, reading glasses perched on her nose and reading a thick, old-looking book. Large floor-to-ceiling windows cover the back wall, sunlight shining in.

PEOPLE are bustling around the library, sparsely sitting at the tables. BOY 1, early 20s, is sitting in one of the middle chairs at a table, a computer, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and notebook open in front of him. He is hard at work. At the opposite end of the table sits BOY 2, also in his early 20s, with a textbook and computer. He glances over at Boy 1 for a moment, then back down at his work.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - EARLY EVENING

The same library, though now hours have passed. The sun can be seen setting through the windows.

Only a handful of people remain. The librarian is still sitting in the front, reading a different book. A YOUNG WOMAN is sitting in an armchair by the windows in the back of the room, typing on a computer. Boy 1 is still hard at work. Boy 2 stares blankly at his computer screen, then turns his gaze toward Boy 1. He stares at him for a few moments.

Boy 1 pauses in his work, feeling a pair of eyes on him. He looks up, eyes searching the library, until they fall onto the other boy. They lock gazes, Boy 1 furrowing his brows a bit, and Boy 2 flushing. Boy 2 snaps his wide eyes away, lowering his head toward his schoolwork.

The two resume their work.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Still in the same library, but now moonlight shines through the windows. Most of the patrons are gone. Four remain; the librarian, the young woman, and the two boys.

Boy 2 looks over to Boy 1. He watches as Boy 1 writes something down in his notebook. Boy 2 bites his lip nervously, tearing his eyes away and focusing back to his work.

Boy 1 puts his pen down, and stands. He walks over to Boy 2, watches anxiously. Instead of stopping in front of Boy 2, he stands at the bookshelf directly across from him, eyes racking the different titles.

Boy 2 filters between looking at his computer screen and the boy in front of him.

Boy 1 doesn't move from his spot. He keeps looking at the books. Boy 2 presses his lips together in a thin line.

BOY 2

Do you need help?

Boy 1 doesn't make any gesture or noise that implies he heard Boy 2. His cheeks burn in embarrassment and Boy 2 stares ahead, slightly confused and unsure what to do next.

He tries to return to his work, but Boy 1's presence is too distracting. He looks up again, noticing that Boy 1 is in the same spot as before. He hasn't moved, and he clearly hasn't found what he is looking for. Why was he still there?

Boy 2 makes up his mind and gets up from his chair. He slowly makes his way over to the bookshelf in front of him, standing next to Boy 1. He keeps a bit of distance between them.

BOY 2 (CONT'D)
What're you looking for?

Boy 1 brings his hand up to his lips, chewing on his thumbnail.

BOY 1
Oh, uh. I'm not sure.

He turns to face Boy 1, a sheepish smile fluttering across his delicate features. Boy 2 grins awkwardly back at him, staring.

BOY 2
Well, what're you working on?

Boy 1 stiffens slightly, shoulders tensing before relaxing robotically. As if he's feigning a laid-back nature.

BOY 1
(flapping his hand loosely)
Eh, just some paper for my literature class.

BOY 2
Oh, uh, cool. I don't know much about,
um, literature and books and stuff...

He trails off, laughing awkwardly.

BOY 1
It's fine. We need outside sources, and my
professor is requiring at least one print source...

Boy 1 shrugs. He turns back to the shelf.

BOY 1 (CONT'D)
Thought I could bullshit my way through
the whole thing and then just work a
source I find here into the paper.

BOY 2

Yeah. I get that.

BOY 1

I have all the other sources. Online. God, it's so annoying.
And inconvenient. Like, I get it. I love physical books.
I mean, I'm an English major. But for research, it's just so...

He clenches his fists in front of him, looking down, then up at the ceiling.

BOY 1 (CONT'D)

Like I would've just driven to my school's library,
but this one is so much closer to my apartment.
I can walk here.

Boy 1 glances over to his newfound companion. Embarrassment covers his features.

BOY 1 (CONT'D)

Sorry. I dunno what I'm even talking about right now.

BOY 2

No, you're good.

Boy 2 looks over at the books. He bites the inside of his cheek, and gestures at the shelf.

BOY 2 (CONT'D)

Um, I'm not entirely sure what your assignment is,
but these are about biochemistry.

Boy 1 blinks at the bookshelf as if seeing it for the first time.

BOY 1

Oh shit, really?

BOY 2
(holding back a smile)
Uh, yeah. See?

He points to a specific book.

BOY 2 (CONT'D)
Principles of Medical Biochemistry.

He points to another.

BOY 2 (CONT'D)
(laughing)
Clinical Biochemistry. Metabolic and Clinical-

Boy 1 cuts him off, laughing as well.

BOY 1
Okay, okay! I get it! I'm an idiot.

BOY 2
I wouldn't go that far.

BOY 1
Man, how do you know? We've never met before,
for all you know I could be.

BOY 2
Okay, fair. But something tells me you're not.
You're an English major.

BOY 1
If anything that just proves how stupid I am.

BOY 2
No, you read books and can, like, analyze shit that's happening in
them and you can write and... y'know. Scholarly shit.

BOY 1
(hiding a smile)
All right. What about you?

BOY 2
What about me?

BOY 1
What do you do? “Scholarly shit” as well?

BOY 2
(rolling his eyes)
I’m not scholarly at all. Trust me.

BOY 1
How can I trust you if you don’t even tell me what you do?

Boy 2 heaves a sigh, a look of disdain on his face.

BOY 2
I’m a Bio major. PreMed.

Boy 1 barks a laugh, then quickly covers his mouth at the dirty look the Young Woman shoots at them.

BOY 2 (CONT’D)
What?

BOY 1
Nothing, nothing. Just. C’mon, man. PreMed?
And you don’t think you’re smart?

BOY 2
I didn’t say “smart,” I said “scholarly.”

Boy 2 runs a hand through his hair, shoulders dropping a bit.

BOY 2 (CONT'D)

But honestly who cares, I mean,
I'm not doing too hot in any of my classes anyways.
Why do you think I've been here all day?

BOY 1

You seemed very dedicated to your craft.

Boy 2 snorts softly.

BOY 2

C'mon let's get out of the science-y books, and
more into what you're used to, Scholar.

They begin to walk to the other side of the library.

BOY 1

Did you just call me "Scholar"? Like a name?

BOY 2

Shut up, dude.

Boy 1 just laughs in response.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY, LITERARY ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM AISLE -
MOMENTS LATER

The two boys wander down an aisle, bookshelves surrounding them.
Boy 1 looks at the sign posted on the end of the shelf that reads,
Literary Analysis and Criticism.

BOY 1

Oh, *Literary Criticism*. Perfect, that's useful.

They scour the shelves. Boy 2 turns to Boy 1.

BOY 2

What exactly are we looking for? You never said
what your paper is about.

BOY 1

Oh, right. Uh, just anything on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,
I guess. Or, like, Gothic stories.

BOY 2

Oh. I've never read it. Is it good?

Boy 1 keeps his gaze on the bookshelf, not making eye contact.

BOY 1

(not making eye contact)
Yeah, I love it. Big fan of Gothic literature.

Boy 2 hums, nodding. He looks back at the books in front of him,
then turns back to the other boy.

BOY 2

Uh, you want me to look for anything
specific regarding *Dracula*?

BOY 1

You can sit back down, if you want.
I can take it from here.

A flash of hurt crosses Boy 2's face, but he quickly recovers.

BOY 2

Oh, uh. Okay. Yeah, right. You sure?

BOY 1

Yeah, it's fine. I've distracted you from studying long enough.

BOY 2

I mean, I'd rather do this than keep killing myself
over *Molecular Basis of Human Disease*.

Boy 1 is silent for a beat. Then, he turns to face Boy 2.

BOY 1

Okay. See if you can find anything related to
gender, homosexuality, or queerness in *Dracula*.
Or Gothic literature in general.

Boy 2 looks surprised for a second, before he schools his features into
something more neutral.

BOY 2

Oh, okay. Yeah, I can do that.

BOY 1

Thanks.

They look around the shelves. Boy 2 walks down the aisle a bit, before
stopping in front of a particular section.

BOY 2

Hey, you think this'll work?

Boy 1 turns around, and apprehensively approaches Boy 2.

BOY 1

What?

Boy 2 gestures to the shelf in front of them.

BOY 2

There's a bunch of stuff about gender and sexuality here.

Boy 1 turns his gaze to the shelf, eyes slowly roaming the plastic-

covered book spines. He pulls out a black book with deep red lettering. It's titled: Sex and Gender within the Gothic Story. He flips through the pages, then to the back cover of the book.

BOY 1

Huh. This is... actually perfect. Thanks.

He keeps his gaze at the book in his hands. Boy 2 picks at the chapped skin of his lips.

BOY 2

It seems interesting.

Boy 1's head shoots up.

BOY 1

What?

BOY 2

The, uh, topic of your paper.

BOY 1

I never said my thesis.

BOY 2

Yeah, but. I can infer.

Boy 2 gestures to the book in the other's hands. Boy 1 grins weakly.

BOY 1

Scientific method, and all that.

BOY 2

I guess.

They both laugh softly.

BOY 1

I'm, uh... My paper is on homoerotic desire in *Dracula*
and how Dracula as a character
is an example of liberated queerness.

BOY 2

Wow, that's... super cool. And sounds super smart.

Boy 1 huffs, his lips in a feeble grin. Boy 2 scratches the back of his head, glancing off to the side.

BOY 2 (CONT'D)

I've never read it, like I said, so I don't really,
uh, know about, like... gay... stuff...in it,
but clearly you know what you're talking about, so...

Boy 1 looks back at the book in his hands.

BOY 1

Yeah. Uh.

Boy 1 laughs to himself, as if in disbelief. He brings one hand up to his face, covering his mouth with his fingers.

BOY 1 (CONT'D)

I've literally never talked about stuff like this with anybody
who isn't a close friend or professor.

BOY 2

What? Gay stuff?

Boy 1 snorts, and covers more of his face.

BOY 1
(muttering to himself)
“Gay stuff.”
(louder)

Yeah. Let alone to a STEM person.

BOY 2
Hey! I’m biology, not business!

Boy 1 laughs even harder, bringing his other hand up to cover his whole face. It doesn’t have the same effect as he’d like due to the book in his hand. He grasps the book in both hands so he can use it as a shield.

BOY 1
Whatever!

BOY 2
I’ll have you know we have plenty of gay people in Bio.

Boy 1 keeps on laughing. He moves the book so that it’s resting on top of his curls. His face is flushed pink. Boy 2 stares.

BOY 1
Oh, wow. Yeah, so many gay people in biology, now I know you’re not a complete homophobe.

BOY 2
Yeah, that would be pretty hypocritical of me.

Boy 1’s laughter dies off. He stares at Boy 2, who is grinning somewhat shyly. Boy 2 wrings his fingers together.

BOY 1
Wait, what?

BOY 2
What?

Boy 1 narrows his eyes at Boy 2. He gapes. Lowers the books from his head.

Boy 2 watches, amused.

BOY 2 (CONT'D)
You good? Cause you look like you've
never met a gay person before.

BOY 1
I—shut up! I have! You just—I don't—

He gestures around them wildly, then covers his face with the book again.

BOY 1 (CONT'D)
Me too.

Boy 2 does a double take.

BOY 2
You too, what?

BOY 1
Me too, I'm gay.

They are silent for a beat, then both begin to laugh, harder than they've laughed all night.

BOY 2
Did you just say, "me too, I'm gay"?

BOY 1
Shut up, man, what am I supposed to say back to you?

BOY 2

I dunno, maybe, “oh, sweet, here’s my number”?

Boy 1’s mouth drops in shock. They stare at each other for a beat, before Boy 1 giggles in disbelief. He lightly hits the book across Boy 2’s arm, causing the other boy to snort.

BOY 1

(breathless)

Oh my God, I feel like I’ve lived seven lives in one night.

Boy 2 grabs Boy 1’s shoulders and turns him back to the aisle exit. He pushes him to walk forward.

BOY 2

Let’s sit back down. Wouldn’t wanna keep you
from finishing your gay paper.

BOY 1

Please, stop talking.

Boy 2 grins at him from over Boy 1’s shoulder. Boy 1 turns his head, meeting Boy 2’s gaze, and smiles back.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - MOMENTS LATER

They return to their respective tables. The Young Woman who was there earlier is now gone.

Boy 1 opens his book, but doesn’t make an effort to read the pages. Boy 2 watches him, then gathers his things, and goes over to sit down in the chair across from Boy 1.

Rylee Sweeney

BOY 2
You mind?

BOY 1
(smiling)
No, go ahead.

Boy 2 smiles back, then wakes his computer up.

BOY 1 (CONT'D)
Thanks for helping me.

BOY 2
It's no big deal.

Boy 1 hums, looking back down at the book. A beat. Then,

BOY 1
Maybe... one day... I can help you with
something from one of your classes?

Boy 2 furrows his eyebrows.

BOY 2
No offense, but how would you help in any of my classes?

Boy 1 glares at him. Boy 2 finally gets it. He blushes.

BOY 2 (CONT'D)
Oh! Y-Yeah. I'd like that.

Boy 1 chuckles abashedly. They just stare at each other for a moment, tiptoeing between the tension in the air. Then, Boy 1 realizes—

One Print Source

BOY 1

Oh, my God. You never told me your name.

BOY 2

You never told me yours.

Boy 1 bites his lip, a smile breaking over his face.

BOY 1

I guess I didn't.

FADE TO BLACK.

Venus Wept

Christina Phillips

She remembers his breath in her hair,
Fair and fragile like dew strung on cobwebs.
She recalls his skin on her skin,
A field of wildflowers at her back,
A sweet sunbeam on her front.
His hands—God, his hands
Could have shaped suns and moons and stars,
Could have molded the Milky Way,
And instead they wandered her body
And made of her a Venus.

She grasps at these memories
The way she is grasping the knife—
Desperately and with grief that screams.
His breath is still caught
In her honeycomb curls,
And his body is still a hot,
Hedonistic thing wrapped about her.
And his hands—God, his hands
Are still so avid, still so hungry.
One holds her own fast to the blade
While the other slides under her skirt.

He holds her, hostage,
In the embrace of lovers past.
Her head wrenches back against his shoulder
And as the knife severs her
Summertime freckles and love-bite bruises,
Pomegranate lips part and catch on a sob.
His hands—God, his hands
Tighten at that sound. The blade saws deeper
And his fingers leave tattoos upon her thigh.
Tart summer wine bubbles up
In beads from under her skin,
And he tells her in murmurs and sighs
How deeply he loves her for it,
The way she bleeds at his behest.

Enigmatic Eyes

Brooke Budde



CONTRIBUTORS

Brooke Budde

Junior, Graphic Design, San Diego, CA

Deanna Chukes

Senior, Film, Television, & Digital Media, Fort Worth, TX

Ellie Evans

Junior, Studio Art, Atlanta, GA

Sarah Fritch

Senior, Political Science, Lakewood, CA

Madilyn Kopec

Sophomore, Journalism, Ennis, TX

Raegan Lane

Senior, Crimminal Justice, Mansfield, TX

Angelina Leonardi

Junior, Entrepreneurship & Innovation, San Diego, CA

Gabriel Macias

Senior, Film, Television, and Digital Media, Belton, TX

Madeline McCormack

Sophomore, English and Women & Gender Studies, El Paso, TX

Hayden Nguyen

Senior, Youth Advocacy Educational Studies and Comparative Race & Ethnic Studies, Houston, TX/ Kien Giang, Vietnam

Michael C. Ogbuagu

First-year, Biology, Arlington, TX

Christina Phillips

Senior, English, Clark, WY

Rylee Sweeney

Senior, Writing and Film, Television, & Digital Media, The Woodlands, TX

Julie Vu

Junior, Nursing, Vietnam

Mia Vu

Sophomore, Economics and English, Rockwall, TX

Lydia Welling

Junior, Studio Art, Grand Junction, CO

Anaya White

Junior, Business Information Systems and Creative Writing, Fort Worth, TX

Anna Wilcox

Senior, Writing and Social Work, Orange, CA

Reagann Zimmermann

Junior, Psychology, Bakersfield, CA

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Editor-in-Chief

Kennedy Bigham

Creative Director

Lexie Woodall

Staff

Elena Butterfield | Sylvia Cheney-Irgens
Alyssa Gutierrez | Lucas Judd | Skylar Mavar
Jesse Risch | Corrigan Smiley

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Department of English
Women and Gender Studies

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Department of English
Women and Gender Studies

Dr. Curt Rode

Department of English
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Department of English

Dr. Sonja Watson

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AND EXAMINED,
NOT SIMPLY
EXPLOITED.**”

- Ada Limón

