



TENTH  
MUSE

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## DESIGN CREW

JES STEWART-WAGNER *Editor-in-Chief*

EMILY MERZ *Graphic Designer*

ALYSSA VANDERHEIDEN *Graphic Designer*

## MARKETING CREW

MICHAEL PETTKE *Co-Editor-in-Chief*

LAURA RULEY *Marketing Manager*

ABBIE ELTRICH *Marketing Assistant*

ABBY PIERCE *Marketing Assistant*

## FACULTY ADVISORS

ERIC WOLD *Associate Professor of Digital Media Studies*

STEVE BELLOMY *Associate Professor of English*

COVER ART & DESIGN EMILY MERZ



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**artists need to  
create on the  
same scale that  
society has  
the capacity  
to destroy.**

**sherrie rabinowitz**



The staff would especially like to thank Professor Emerita Katherine Fischer, an innovator in and beyond the classroom and mentor to many students and colleagues. Katherine, along with her colleague, Ann Pelelo, put the idea of a literary magazine at Clarke onto the table, a table at which, we'll be feasting for years.

The Tenth Muse is funded in part by an endowment in honor of professor Katherine Fischer, creator of the Clarke University Writing Program.

**MICHAEL PETTKE** *Monch Print Digital*

# FROM THE EDITORS

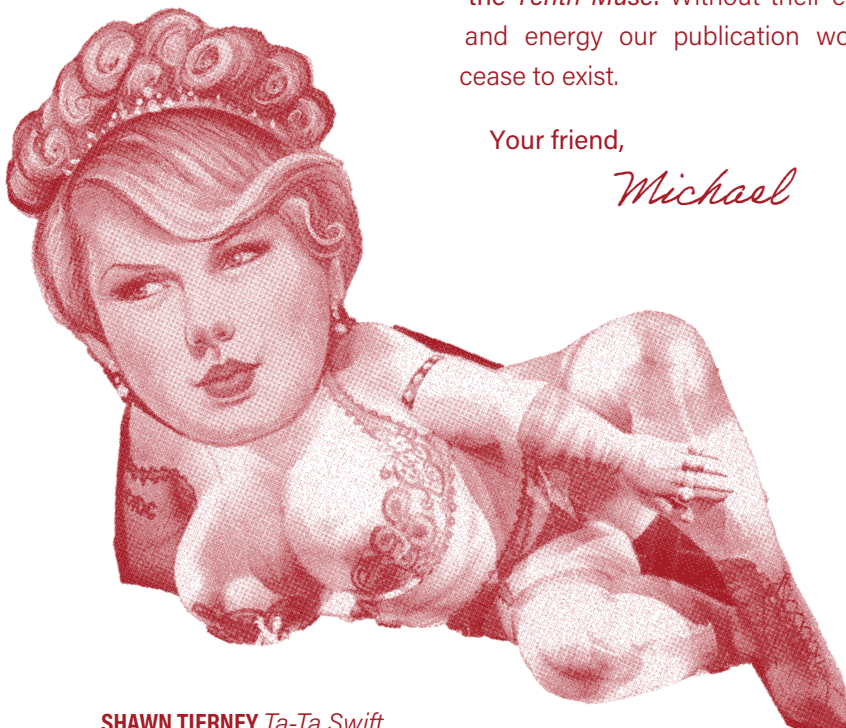
For the first time in my young career as a designer, I am (at least to some degree) in charge. In charge of meeting deadlines for production, in charge of promoting the *Tenth Muse*, in charge of supporting and guiding my peers. These responsibilities and duties have ignited a spark inside of me to find the best ways to balance creation and management. Solutions can be found in collaboration, something at the heart of what makes this publication special. Working alongside a team of passionate writers, editors, and artists has reinforced my belief that creativity thrives at the intersection of different perspectives and the *Tenth Muse* is a reflection of that.

In many ways the promotion of the *Tenth Muse* is easy, it is an archive of itself, a space where stories, perspectives, and ideas come together to be seen, shared, and re-imagined. These elements of representation serve as solid ground to stand on from the perspectives of marketing and promotion. My goal is to bring that same spirit of revival and connection to the magazine, ensuring that it resonates within both Clarke University and the broader creative community.


I'm grateful for this opportunity and excited for what's ahead. I am thankful for my fellow staff members as well as our faculty advisors. Most importantly I am thankful for those who have submitted their work to the *Tenth Muse*. Without their effort and energy our publication would cease to exist.

Your friend,

*Michael*



SHAWN TIERNEY *Ta-Ta Swift*



This is my fourth year working with the *Tenth Muse*, third as Editor-in-Chief, first as a sentimental senior handing off the proverbial baton. The *Tenth Muse* has been an endless source of joy, creativity, and profound passion, inspiring the pursuit of new boundaries. The choices made in Volume Fifteen, like all volumes, reflect the incredible submissions we receive from students and writers, both local and national. The literary magazine serves as a space for Clarke's exceptionally talented students to learn, all the while showcasing the immense talent of writers, artists, and designers.

Literature and art: I understand how daunting the combination of these worlds can be. This fusion, though it seems like a perfect match on paper, often weaves together in unexpected ways. The staff's goal is to honor the intent of each individual artist while advancing the overall presentation and energy of the magazine. We strive to create volumes that blend literary prowess with visually stunning imagery, designing spreads that are not only engaging to read but exciting to behold, offering a sensory experience that's fresh and invigorating.

When approaching the layout of the magazine, we imagine each submission as not only a standalone work of art, but as a component of a larger whole. These components, when strung together form a new narrative—an intricate collage of stories inspired by others. The prologue of Volume Fifteen sets the scene with a woman collecting letters. Each piece of subsequent prose and poetry in the collection is strung together by threads of meaning and association. Finally, in the epilogue, we reflect on the power of storytelling and its profound ability to connect us with ourselves and each other. Here, we envision the *Tenth Muse* not just as a collection of stories, but as a story in and of itself.

We hold our contributors in the highest regard, every design aspect intentionally chosen to visually bring their work to life within the pages of the magazine— *THEIR* magazine. I sincerely hope that you, our readers, cherish these stories as deeply as we do.

*Enjoy the journey;*

*follow the thread.*

Your devoted editor,

*Jes*

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PROLOGUE

# Bury Me by the Sea



When I was twelve years old,  
I buried my mother by the sea.

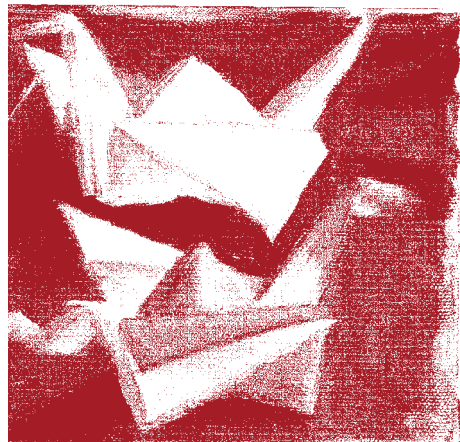
The sand scratched my hands, coarse and black  
unlike the white powder they advertise in Hawaiian  
postcards. We had no shovel, so I used the small  
plastic one I used to play with when I was a child.  
It took me hours to dig the hole, but it had to be  
six feet deep. That's how deep they buried  
my father in the cemetery.

When the hole's darkness swallowed the light of the  
moon, I pushed my mother in. Blood soaked into sand,  
I grabbed the plastic shovel once more and began  
scooping the sand back in. It was easier  
to cover her than it was to dig.

I smoothed the sand over with the shovel and stood,  
admiring my work. It blended into the vast expanse  
of the beach. A sea breeze whisked sand across my  
hands, which were sticky with blood. I gazed at the  
ocean shining under the moon. Its pale light twisted  
the purple bruises on my arm to black.

My feet carried me into the sea until the  
water rushed past my knees. It was cold,  
and I bent down to submerge my hands. As  
I scrubbed, I sang the happy birthday song  
softly. The waves frothed around me.

When I finished the song,  
I lifted my hands  
up to the moonlight.  
They were free from blood  
and sand. Now clean,  
I walked to the house and didn't look back.



As the years passed, I couldn't stop myself from visiting the spot. I wasn't worried about the police or neighbors finding her. I had buried her by the beach grass, and my teacher had explicitly stated it was protected by the state. All the precautions were pointless really; no one wanted to go near the grass. Families preferred the open sand by the cool waves.

I often watched these families as I sat above the corpse of my mother. I watched them as the

sun traversed the sky and slipped

below the horizon. Even when

they had all gone home, and the

wind chilled my bones, I watched.

On one of these nights, when I was

sixteen, a dog pattered up to me. I

recognized it as the dog from a family

I saw earlier. It was large and white-

furred, and snuffled me with its wet

black nose. I had always wanted a

dog, but my mother hated animals.

My fingers ran through its soft fur.

The dog eventually turned away in

disinterest. It sniffed the sand next to

me, then it sneezed and began to dig.

From my biology class,

I knew my mother had rotted away to

bones by now. I knew the dog

would bring one back.

Ten years have passed since I buried

my mother, and six since I buried the

dog. I have stopped frequenting the

beach so much now. I'm busy, too—I

have a boyfriend, and I'm about to

finish school. Each year, my mother

feels more like the pile of bones

she is than the one whose breaths

haunted me. There is no point in

visiting dust.

Yet still I wonder

who will bury me by her.



*Nicole Hirt*



# Nancy Drew in Bellevue

## PROLOGUE CONT.

### NANCY DREW IN BELLEVUE

She searched high and low,  
with the keenest sleuthing skills,  
devoured every clue to this game of life.  
Alas, what she discovered  
was this world  
no longer made any sense.

Madame mystery  
now sits in Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital  
eating cherry pie and  
drinking coffee black,  
watching the dewdrops  
fall against the window pane.



However, she will  
reply to letters  
if you write

c/o Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital  
Room 123,

*Return postage still required.*

*Kimberly Madura*



# The Stories I Cherish

PROLOGUE CONT.

I **cherish** all the stories I've read,  
And **gather them** into my **great book**  
And hold it tight against my chest,  
That I may not lose a single page  
To life's **chaotic whirlwind**.

In times of distress and violence,  
I open my great **book of stories**,  
And the glowing pages transform my world:  
So that I **have a little light**,  
**Amidst** rolling blankets of darkness.

*Tyler Newhouse*

# THE COLLECTION



# When the

*Poem: 68 lines on a vacation*

*Terms: your usual*

## bell toll

**It was a summer**

somewhere where  
the dry grass  
in the slight  
not cooling breeze  
still whispers in  
fluid demotic Latin  
and the vulgar  
gossip of grasshoppers  
peppers the pale  
baking yellow fields  
under brickoven sunday

**so we stayed**

in water in the  
pool in the  
repurposed villa  
in the shade  
of old olives  
sipping the golden  
glinting wine  
from sweating crystal  
all the day long

**but one evening**

out of nowhere  
just at sunset  
we get to  
hear the bell  
calling from atop  
the ragged rock  
cragged ocher hill

**we climbed then**

the snaking steep  
ancient stone path  
sometimes with steps  
up to the  
bone white church  
crumpled wall ruin  
and by the time  
eating air in  
hamhock hunks  
we got there  
its inside behind  
the missing doors  
was tomb dark  
and silent, no  
mass or choir  
of faithful vespers

**we hurried back**

down in sweat  
to not miss  
dinner's first plate  
and met a  
man walking a fat  
rheumy eyed dog

**who could speak**

our own language  
and asked why  
we were there  
and we told  
him about how  
the bell tolled  
and he laughed  
and then said  
the bell had been  
stolen by Napoleon  
2 centuries ago

*Michael J. Shepley*



# Description of a Struggle

How the years take their toll,  
forcing us to be Kafkaesque characters  
in storied worlds, our lives juxtaposed  
against a backdrop of classical music,  
simultaneously haunting and soothing,  
whose melody flows like atmospheric rivers.

*Kimberly Madura*

# The Sand Octopus

*Rei: universal energy outside all living things, the  
highest spiritual consciousness, God's energy.*

*Rei energy has a frequency of 7200 cps  
(cycles per second) or above.*



"If you set a story in 1320, Europe, you've got to know that in 28 years, bubonic plague will cross the Channel and continue annihilating half your unsuspecting characters. If you set a story in the present day, you know you're equally blind to an inevitable future."

Not that Marjorie's husband, Byrd, a newly-minted Reiki Master in Manhattan, visibly reacted to his wife's remark as he passed by her associates in the living room en route to the renovated kitchen, but he did stop — pause — in his mind. In the past several years, Marjorie's hobby/obsession — writing historical novels — had miraculously paid off. One of the first three had won a national award, but the one about Bach's second wife Anna Magdalena had taken off, become a bestseller in the genre, been optioned for a movie, and resulted in new representation and contracts for at least two more novels. In the business, she had progressed from having a *nice deal* (\$1 - \$49,000) to a *very nice deal* (\$50,000 - \$99,000), onto a *good deal* (\$100,000 - \$250,000) and was hopefully headed toward *significant* (\$251,000 - \$499,000) and *major* (\$500,000 and up). Whatever labels attached to higher eyries were beyond Byrd's flights of imagination. All this, as bookstores and publishers shuddered and toppled like Middle Eastern dictatorships, both fundamentally supplanted by *novel* (Byrd punned) technologies. IBM's Watson had trounced Jeopardy's two prior human champions as the week began.

Byrd's passage to the kitchen had been no idle journey; it was intended to cue Marjorie to end the authors' club morning meeting so their trip to the ocean could commence. After three feet of snow and bitter temperatures that winter, the January thaw had finally arrived for Valentine's Day week, all the more to be celebrated. They were expected in Freeport on Long Island. Nevertheless, in the kitchen Byrd toyed with the new stainless espresso maker and poured a foamy fragrant cup he sipped at on his return to the 'study' — the small second bedroom in this upper West side building where Marjorie had lived all her life ('inherited' from her parents). Rent-controlled in the West 80's, now renovated by her royalties, the apartment was the steal of the still-young century. Byrd's earlier moment of inner cessation had been filled with wonder: how had this son of the South

found himself in this place and time after all — and what was to follow, what was following/awaiting *him* in the blind future?

In the South, Byrd had grown morbidly obese, and his first wife and now adult children had looked to him like marionettes he'd seen at a country club wedding, cavorting to the melody and lyrics of *Dixie*. Byrd had met Marjorie after he'd written a fan letter via her first publisher. He had explained that as a principal in an advertising/marketing firm in Mississippi, he'd Googled through Baroque music to Bach's *Joy of Man's Desiring* for one purpose and located instead Marjorie's novel about Anna Magdalena Bach. Then he'd felt a compulsion to read her book and had been – "Perhaps Bach's *Sleepers, awake!* would have been the more apt title for me." His forwarded letter had a similar effect on Marjorie, who had snailed him a handwritten reply along with his requested/reimbursed autographed copy of *Joy*. Thereafter, their courtly correspondence rivaled Cyrano's and Roxane's, lacking only the Bergerac nose and duplicity.

Byrd left his wife and Mississippi. He married Marjorie, and on her health insurance (he was unemployed in Manhattan) had bariatric surgery whose complications resulted in a successful malpractice suit that underwrote his Reiki education and certification. Three-hundred pounds lighter, as if released from a prison of flesh, Byrd found acolytes, clients, and a decent cash flow. Marjorie's books sold lucratively: she retired from her research job of three decades, located in a sliver of a building designed by Stanford White near the Empire State. Its mirrored, red-marbled entry was a reminder of an entire era utterly replaced by not one, but now, two centuries.

Today, after the society of historical fiction authors would leave their living room, Byrd and Marjorie would walk through the warm oasis of February sunshine to the subway to Penn Station, and from there descend to the Long Island Railroad train, rising to Freeport, to Guy Lombardo Avenue, to the Nautical Mile, to a restaurant overlooking an inlet of the Atlantic where gambling cruise ships slowly moved out into tax-free waters.

The black couple they would meet in Freeport for lunch would take them afterwards to Point Lookout. Off-summer season, they could walk freely along the beach by the jetties and the waves. They had socialized with the Thornes several times before, in the City and on the Island, after Ernelle had introduced herself as a fan much as Byrd had. Ernelle Thorne was a high school music teacher. Her husband Charles, a doctor, ribbed Byrd about Reiki in an easy-going way.

**"So *Rei* energy had a frequency of 7200 cps?  
That the same as *hertz*?"**

**"I'm sure I don't know,"** Byrd said.

**"That's a twenty-five mile *long wave*,"**

Charles spread his arms,

**"some long wave, moving at the speed of light, cycling by  
every 1/7200 of a second.**

**Boggles the mind. How do you get  
your *hands* on that?"**

**"Let me know when you've done the math."**

The men socialized with the mutual indifference of book covers to their wives's aligned interior pages. How apt was the démodé book-binding metaphor for the sexagenarians, Byrd thought, in this age of e-books (where Marjorie's novels also sold well). Befriending the black Thornes was just another piece of the new jigsaw puzzle of Byrd's Northern life. This brave new world was new to him.

Extraordinary, how it was the same sky and atmosphere over the City, but beside the ocean, the air and light were altogether different. The ground underfoot, neither asphalt nor cement, was sand, in dunes, on lips, alive with puckers of hidden clams. Near a splashed jetty lay a flat Germanic helmet moulted by a horseshoe crab. It attracted and appalled Marjorie. "A prehistoric hieroglyph," she called it, running away towards the next jetty, each one marking the beach like a musical staff. There were only a few notes — people — on the beach on a February Wednesday afternoon.

At first, the women walked together and the men followed. Byrd walked to the rhythm of the waves, but Dr. Thorne slowed, examining the seascape.

**"The tide's rising,"**

he observed.

**"Humans are 'ugly bags of mostly water.'"**

**About 60%. Y'know, you see plenty of unexplained phenomena in medicine."**

Byrd felt a pulse of connection.

**"Star Trek, Next Generation.**

**Home Soil. Great episode."**

Dr. Thorne continued in the same reflective tone,

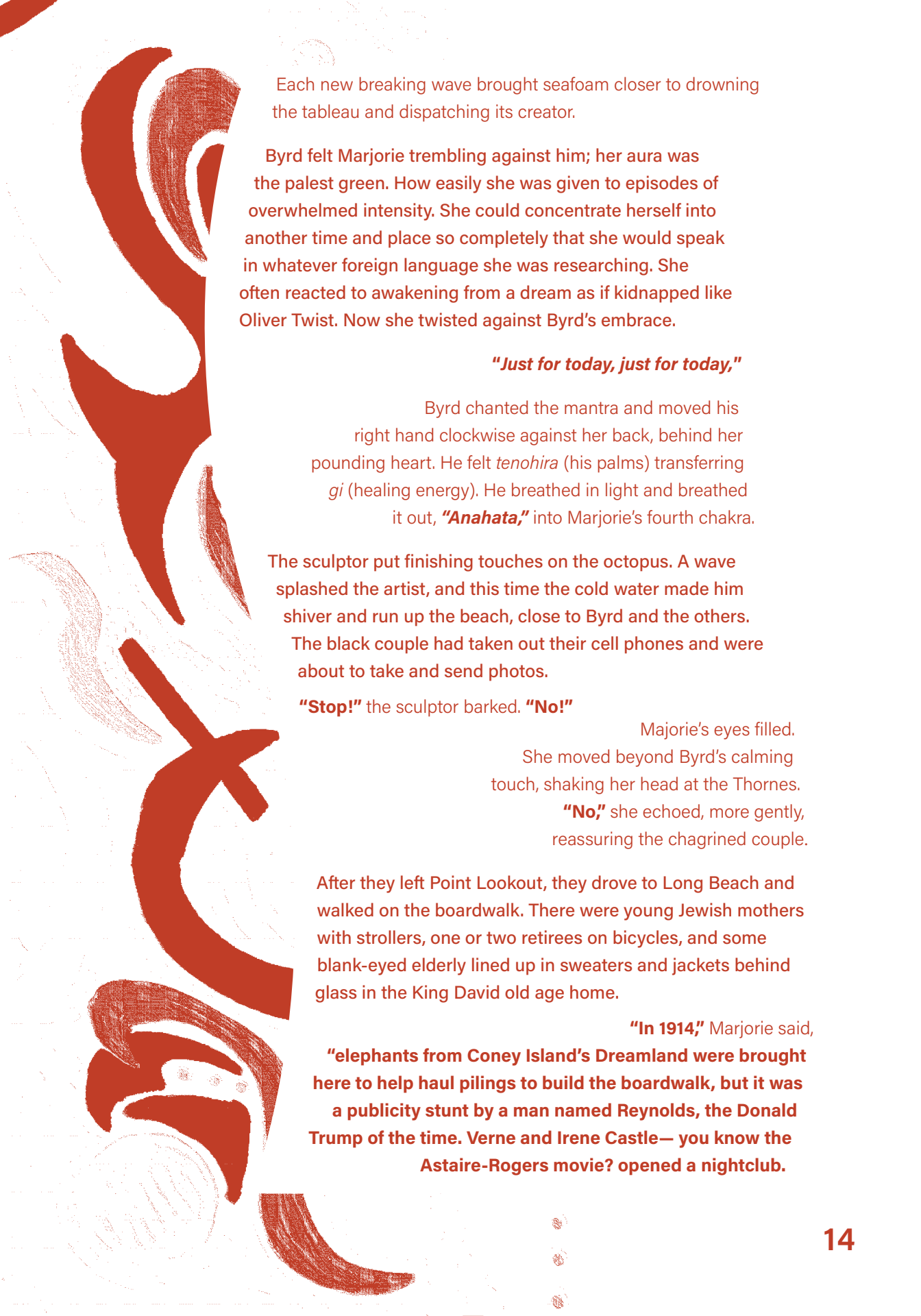
**"But 'for example,' is never proof,"**

and with a friendly nod walked

ahead to catch up with the women.

Byrd contentedly returned to the ocean's beat. He enjoyed watching Marjorie fluttering on land while terns and gulls flew over the water, clusters of them alighting like one thought on a wave, jetty, or now-unchaired lifeguard mound. Byrd had grown up beside — *out of*, he sometimes fantasized— the great river that smelled of stones and mud and catfish. He could smell the Mississippi in his mind, contrast it to the salty Atlantic. Like a comma, a *premier* moon crescent punctuated the afternoon sky. Byrd sighed, 'in equal scale weighing delight and dole,' sorry and smug to invoke Claudius. He saw ahead of him Marjorie and their acquaintances stopped at the water's edge, blocking his view of whatever had halted their progress. As he closed the distance, he saw a big man, bald and clothed in flannel shirt and ankle-soaked jeans, barefoot, sweating with his nearly finished labor. Byrd put his left arm around the waist of Marjorie's thick leather jacket. He could feel her disturbed *byosen*. She reached up to cover his mouth with her hand, to keep him silent.

Before them was a sand sculpture of a giant octopus— so realistic it caused an instinctive recoil— its back to the ocean, facing inland. Its suckered arms were positioned to appear partially underwater— the sand — and partially dragging under its prey whose shoulders and head clearly identified it as the sculptor himself. The entire sculpture—octopus & artist — was just as clearly immediate prey of the rising tide.



Each new breaking wave brought seafoam closer to drowning the tableau and dispatching its creator.

Byrd felt Marjorie trembling against him; her aura was the palest green. How easily she was given to episodes of overwhelmed intensity. She could concentrate herself into another time and place so completely that she would speak in whatever foreign language she was researching. She often reacted to awakening from a dream as if kidnapped like *Oliver Twist*. Now she twisted against Byrd's embrace.

***"Just for today, just for today,"***

Byrd chanted the mantra and moved his right hand clockwise against her back, behind her pounding heart. He felt *tenohira* (his palms) transferring *gi* (healing energy). He breathed in light and breathed it out, ***"Anahata,"*** into Marjorie's fourth chakra.

The sculptor put finishing touches on the octopus. A wave splashed the artist, and this time the cold water made him shiver and run up the beach, close to Byrd and the others. The black couple had taken out their cell phones and were about to take and send photos.

**"Stop!"** the sculptor barked. **"No!"**


Marjorie's eyes filled.

She moved beyond Byrd's calming touch, shaking her head at the Thornes.

**"No,"** she echoed, more gently, reassuring the chagrined couple.

After they left Point Lookout, they drove to Long Beach and walked on the boardwalk. There were young Jewish mothers with strollers, one or two retirees on bicycles, and some blank-eyed elderly lined up in sweaters and jackets behind glass in the King David old age home.

**"In 1914,"** Marjorie said, **"elephants from Coney Island's Dreamland were brought here to help haul pilings to build the boardwalk, but it was a publicity stunt by a man named Reynolds, the Donald Trump of the time. Verne and Irene Castle— you know the Astaire-Rogers movie? opened a nightclub.**



**And Clara Bow vacationed right here.  
She was born in Brooklyn.  
She was The “It” Girl in 1927.  
That was the name of the  
movie she starred in. ‘IT’**

The sun was fast setting behind the City in the west, beyond Brooklyn that bellied out south blocking Byrd’s view, but he could see the map and skyline in his mind. The Verrazano Bridge connected Brooklyn to Staten Island, the mainland, and the Mississippi. Florentine Verrazano had sailed a walnut shell of a French ship (*La Dauphine*) into the *Mahicanituck* river in 1524 – and natives, far more robust than the European sailors aboard, watched from the shore as that tide came in.

# Other Men's Hats

Look at the old pictures of city crowds,  
men and women all in hats, from festive  
decorated toques to summer boaters,  
children and workingmen in soft cloth  
caps, never a baseball cap. Of course,  
gentlemen took off their hats to greet a woman  
or go indoors. When Tom Polhaus  
wears his hat into Sam Spade's apartment,  
we know trouble is coming with him.  
Homburgs, fedoras, bowlers, porkpies, hats  
told us about the men beneath them.  
A man in a New York office with a ten-gallon  
was Maverick; he followed the rules  
when it suited him. Dangerous  
but charming. Or just a weird non-conformist,  
posing as Maverick. Then came Kennedy, hatless  
at his chilly inauguration, a different manliness,  
and car headrests pushed the felt brims down  
our backs, until only guys with old pickups  
could drive while wearing a Stetson. It was ball  
caps, or keeping your hat on the seat while you drove.  
Hipsters wear porkpies, but they don't drive.  
And ball caps took over for function and style,  
in the car or the office. Pledges of allegiance  
to school or team or supplier of whatever is  
needful. Borrowed identities. Some wear them  
backwards, like catchers, but the bill is useful  
facing forward.

Bill asked us, from the jail,  
when my wife and I were cleaning out the apartment  
after he murdered his wife, that his stuff  
be made useful, not just dumpstered. I took a 5-wood,  
Judy took some books, and we filled the car  
with goods and possessions that could  
find new lives. One last sweep through  
the kitchen. I found the hats. The Indians cap  
had to have been Sandra's; she was from  
Cleveland. The stack of White Sox caps  
had to be Bill's. I've changed planes in Chicago,  
but that's all. Comiskey is alien territory  
to this Yankees fan. I've seen my New York teams  
at home, and the Red Sox, the Orioles,  
got caps for the home teams.  
Add all those schools where I studied  
or taught. Why not add to the collection one  
green cap with a white logo? A signifier not  
of my experience, but of an identity  
that needs affirmation.

*David Harris*

# IT'S AN OLD **BLUES** FOR A NEW DAY

*The voice is raspy.*

Guitar's more wood  
than string.

*Piano hisses in between notes.*

Drums sound like someone  
thumping a crate.

*Horns fade in and out.*

Everyone on the disc  
is black and dead.

*But it sounds more seminal  
than graveyard.*

Woman's selling heat  
or joy or pain or God.

*Big speakers crackle  
with a soul on shellac.*

The present's cold.

It's formulaic.

It's computers.

My feet need tapping.

**My heart needs bursting.**

So permit me the past  
if the past's not using it.

*John Grey*





# Turn to Page 42

Look to the trees  
—whether palm or pine—  
between the spines  
of branches and leaves  
in the fields beneath  
the open skies and screaming songbirds  
above the pastures  
of dandelions, swards of green, bunches of flowers,  
and bales of cotton;  
or on the floor of your room,  
plucking a bass guitar  
to the rhythm  
of your heartbeat,  
while your throat hums a hundred  
scrambled melodic proses  
in the pages of an ancient novel  
—freshly dusted—  
and still full of charm

turn to page 42  
then back to page 1.  
then you might find it. . .

*Terra Miller*

M e l v i l l e

M e l v i l l e

# Melville

M e l v i l l e

Writing scrimshaw tales  
during the *Redburn* years,  
outward journeys  
but you knew the search was  
always within

*'It is not down on any map;  
true places never are'*

In *Moby-Dick* with  
undercurrents of symbols  
to be discovered

You said we should  
be like  
roaring Niagaras:  
lionized  
You continued  
writing about truth  
and the illusions that cover it  
and about the battle  
between good and evil  
leaving the public  
puzzled and you alienated  
in your unrecognized genius,  
too serious and profound to be popular,  
they said at the time  
But in *Billy Budd*, though unfinished,  
you finally got your revenge.

*Kimberly Madura*

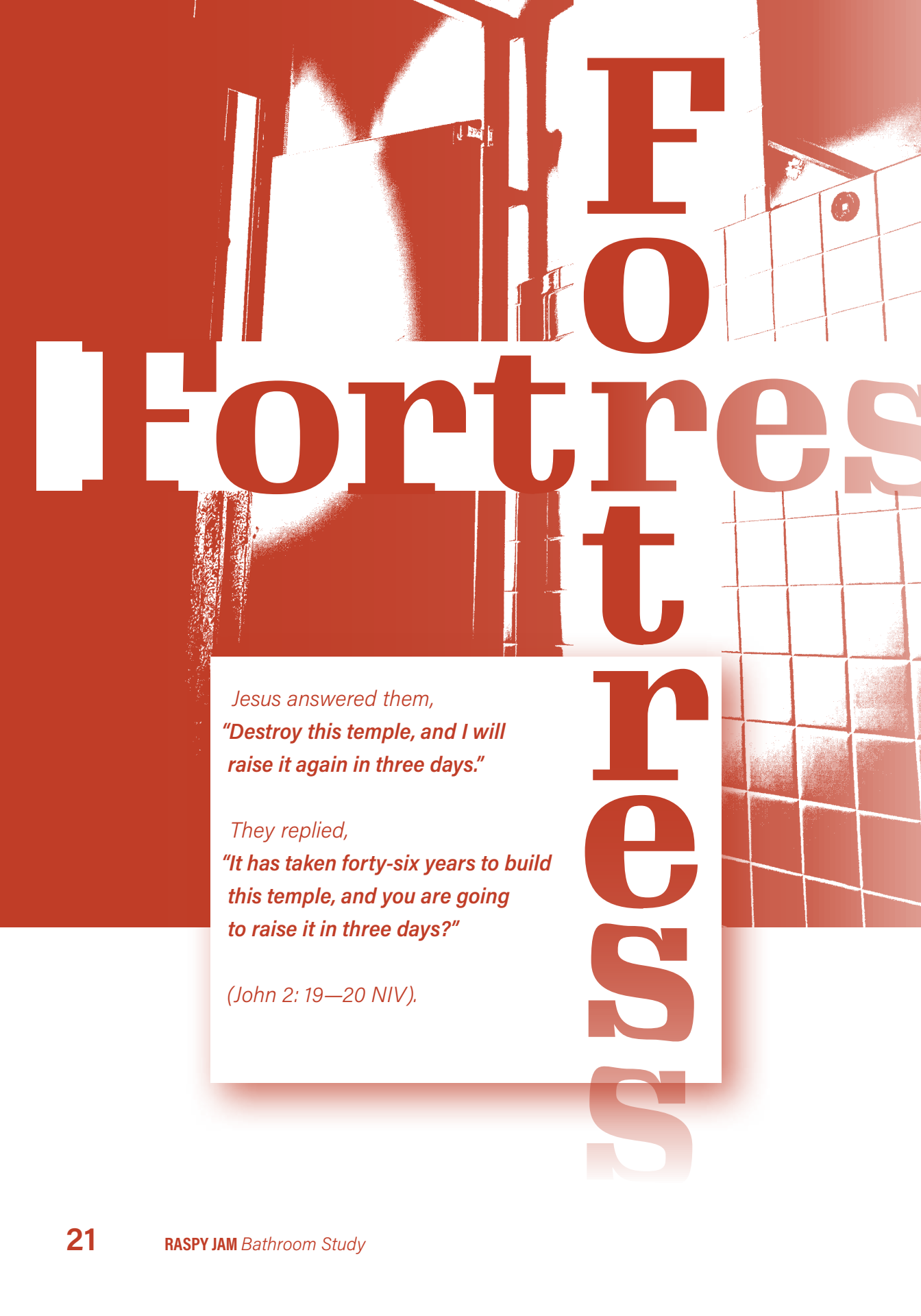
# Romulus Augustulus

He never really wanted  
to be emperor, but his father  
was **ambitious**, pulled the strings  
and led the coup. Fifteen,  
and head of an empire that had **ruled**  
**the world** for half a millennium.

Or so it claimed. And his father claimed.  
Ten months later, his father **dead**,  
Romulus retired from public life,  
and from history. **Unloved**  
by his former people, **unmissed**  
by them, **exiled** to the old home  
of Lucullus. Perhaps he ate well there.  
Perhaps not. What does a young ex-emperor do?  
What ambitions? What dreams?  
After the brief glory, perhaps he reads  
the years away, **learning** the lives  
of his illustrious predecessors. Or took up  
art, or music, or depravity. In one story,  
he went to Cornwall and sired a son  
on fair Igraine. Lovely, but **untrue**.  
At least unlikely. His death **unremarked**,  
his legacy **nothing** but a name  
and a place at the end of a long list.

*David Harris*





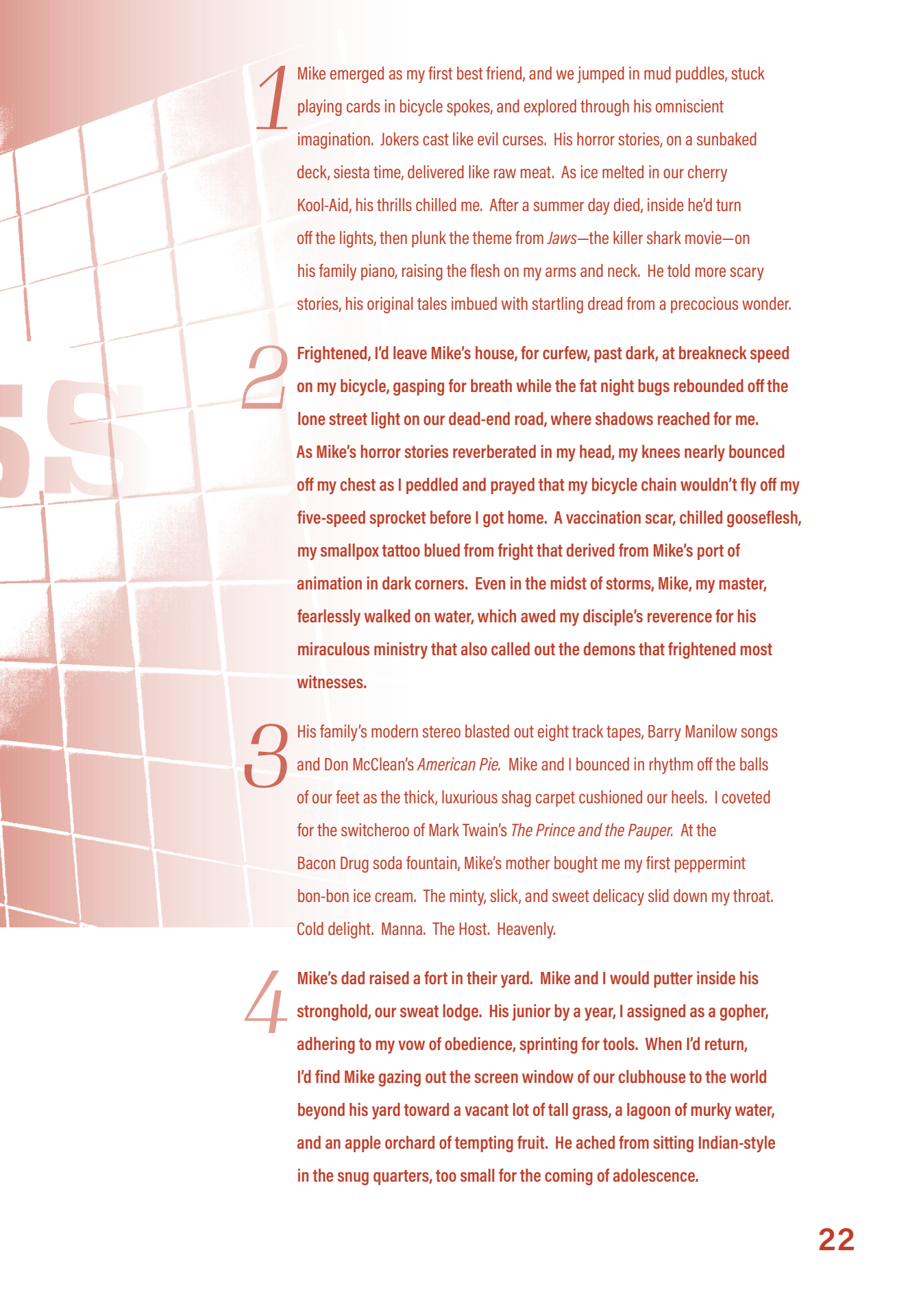
# Fortress

# r

*Jesus answered them,  
"Destroy this temple, and I will  
raise it again in three days."*

*They replied,  
"It has taken forty-six years to build  
this temple, and you are going  
to raise it in three days?"*

*(John 2: 19—20 NIV).*



1 Mike emerged as my first best friend, and we jumped in mud puddles, stuck playing cards in bicycle spokes, and explored through his omniscient imagination. Jokers cast like evil curses. His horror stories, on a sunbaked deck, siesta time, delivered like raw meat. As ice melted in our cherry Kool-Aid, his thrills chilled me. After a summer day died, inside he'd turn off the lights, then plunk the theme from *Jaws*—the killer shark movie—on his family piano, raising the flesh on my arms and neck. He told more scary stories, his original tales imbued with startling dread from a precocious wonder.

2 Frightened, I'd leave Mike's house, for curfew, past dark, at breakneck speed on my bicycle, gasping for breath while the fat night bugs rebounded off the lone street light on our dead-end road, where shadows reached for me. As Mike's horror stories reverberated in my head, my knees nearly bounced off my chest as I peddled and prayed that my bicycle chain wouldn't fly off my five-speed sprocket before I got home. A vaccination scar, chilled gooseflesh, my smallpox tattoo blued from fright that derived from Mike's port of animation in dark corners. Even in the midst of storms, Mike, my master, fearlessly walked on water, which awed my disciple's reverence for his miraculous ministry that also called out the demons that frightened most witnesses.

3 His family's modern stereo blasted out eight track tapes, Barry Manilow songs and Don McClean's *American Pie*. Mike and I bounced in rhythm off the balls of our feet as the thick, luxurious shag carpet cushioned our heels. I coveted for the switcheroo of Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*. At the Bacon Drug soda fountain, Mike's mother bought me my first peppermint bon-bon ice cream. The minty, slick, and sweet delicacy slid down my throat. Cold delight. Manna. The Host. Heavenly.

4 Mike's dad raised a fort in their yard. Mike and I would putter inside his stronghold, our sweat lodge. His junior by a year, I assigned as a gopher, adhering to my vow of obedience, sprinting for tools. When I'd return, I'd find Mike gazing out the screen window of our clubhouse to the world beyond his yard toward a vacant lot of tall grass, a lagoon of murky water, and an apple orchard of tempting fruit. He ached from sitting Indian-style in the snug quarters, too small for the coming of adolescence.

5 When Mike entered junior high school, he charmed new friends, and became a fan of the popular rock group Cheap Trick. As if last rites administered to our bond of peace, the music died between us. Out at Big Island on turbulent Lake Minnetonka, the world of innocent childhood collided into the world of cynical adolescence. Angst and zits replaced glow-in-the-dark monster model kits, those eighth scale plastic figures of our past beliefs. Deserting his Catholic education, Mike and his new friends gave into temptation and trotted away from me to hide the discretions of novel ideas, *The Lord of the Flies*, a toking ceremony among the blossoms of poison ivy on the island. They left me behind on the beach. I stranded by a bow-legged gait from my banana seat and sissy bar while in the wilderness the worldly boys smoked cloudy dope.

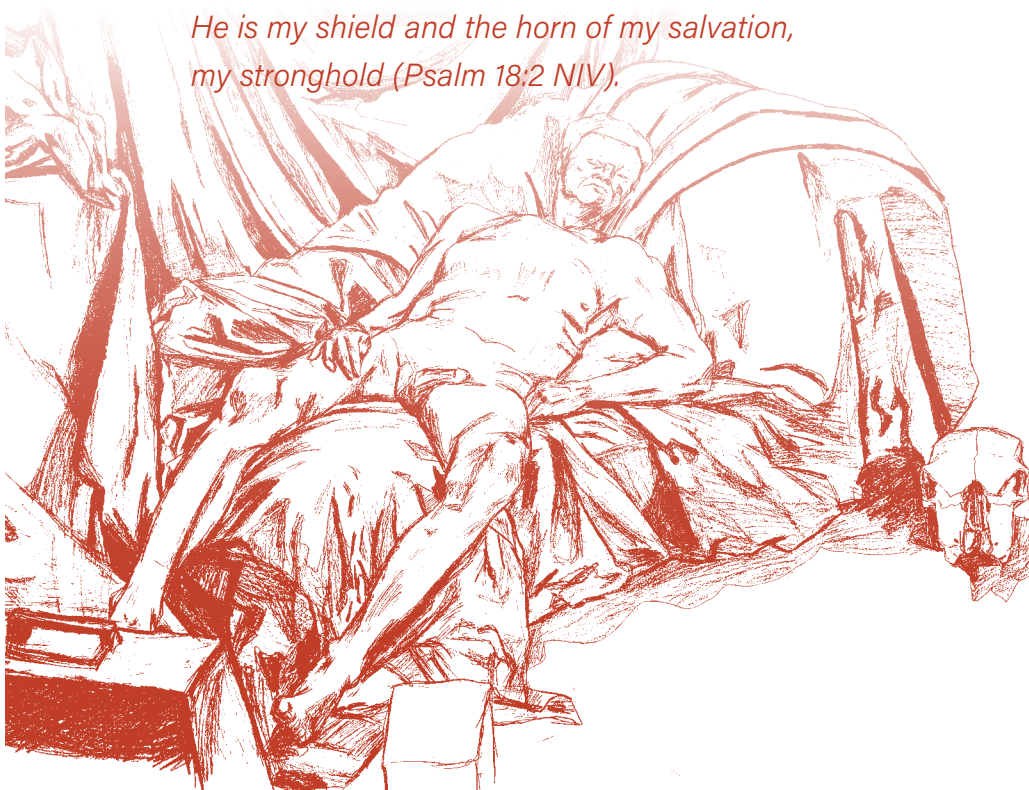
6 Following his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, Mike did not partake of the cup of blood-red Kool-Aid from our childhood and passed it. He refused to sacrifice himself to redeem my sins. Like a verified tornado over the lake, showing off to his pals, a vortex of violence erupted between Mike and me, and I betrayed my lord with the kiss of knuckles for thirty pieces of silver. Throwing punches, a family birthright, I peppered Mike's jawline as we grapsed, clutched, and staggered. Our feet lurched amid old beer cans, charred logs, and dead ashes. When it was finished, despite having hair under his armpits compared to my prepubescence, Mike had gotten the worst of it. He backed away holding his bloodied mouth.

7 After they took Mike away, I stood there feeling powerful, my fists balled up, crumbling up the stories Mike and I had shared as children. Stories lost forever except for this poetic grieving, trying to retrieve the past. In another guise, I denied Mike thrice before the rooster crowed as foretold by his divine mind. I no longer knew him. After that lightning flash and a thunderclap of brutality on the island of catastrophic wills, the homily of our friendship silenced from plagues of boils and darkness on both of our souls.

8 The force of disbelief can flatten things that aren't meant to stand, no matter how well constructed the fortress is built, not when a jagged-edged world lies beyond even the most protective of a fort's screen of confession. A world where real stories are scarier than made-up ones, no more Mike's make believe. A lifetime later, God help us to find shelter from his rain of sulfur and fire, the anger of destruction to Sodom and Gomorrah. Without the New Testament of forgiveness, there exists only provoked wrath. Let Mike and I, former best friends, reclaim the indulgences of our storied worship. Renew our faith for a rugged cross as a house built on the rock, the foundation of believers. Deliver my epistle, a postdated account, to Mike, who as the *Tenth Muse* blessed my imagination for the apprenticeship of creative art. Mike's macabre parables inspired me to read and write. I hope that we soon can sift through the wreckage of our fallen fortress together . . . for stories are meaningless unless there is someone to tell them to—Mike once knew this refuge in God.

*Rob Luke*

*The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;  
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.  
He is my shield and the horn of my salvation,  
my stronghold (Psalm 18:2 NIV).*



**The Rebbe** warned me what would happen,  
what the others would say about me,  
how they'd cast me out of their brotherhood —  
his brotherhood — for heeding his command.  
*Why me? Have I deserved this exile? Or is the word*  
*"earned?"* He handed me our silver, the trust

# The Truth and the Salvation

of our meager fisc. I, the dagger-man,  
*sicarius*, was treasurer to the teacher  
of peace. I could have shown Peter —  
that putz! — how to handle a sword  
if he'd asked, if swords had been part  
of our job. But now he's the rock,  
the saint, and I roam the Empire while they twist  
the Rebbe's teachings. Sometimes I think  
I might go after that Saul, slip a blade between  
his vertebrae.

*But that was not my assignment.*

Collect the silver coins, bring the men, and kiss  
my master goodbye. I wept to do his will.  
I was the strong one, trustworthy. Without me,  
there is no trial, no death, no resurrection.

*David Harris*



# *Ethics* of a *Hit* man

**Smith had expected a murder tonight.**

He had expected the recoil of a gun and a flash of blood.  
The sharp, crackling smoke from a flying bullet was luxury  
perfume to him, especially  
when it was from his own hand.

**What he hadn't expected was suicide.**

His target, a Mr. William Robbins, wobbled on the edge of  
the roof. He was younger than most of Smith's other victims—  
maybe forty-five—which would explain his almost successful  
attempt to escape. The damn twerp had managed to sock  
him on the jaw, which throbbed as a reminder  
that he was getting soft.

Smith held his hands up in a placating gesture.

**"Hey now, let's not do anything we'll regret!"**

**"What does it matter?"**

Robbins laughed, a frantic, inhuman noise.

**"You're going to kill me anyway!"**

**"No, I promise I was just trying to rob you—"**

he remembered the gun in his hands,  
and he hastily slipped it back into his holster,

**"—an armed robbery."**

Robbins pointed a shaking finger at him  
and demanded, **"Who put you up to this?  
Johnson? Garcia? It was him, wasn't it?"**

**"I have no idea who that is,"** Smith lied.

**"Deny it all you want.  
If I'm going to die,  
I'll do it on my terms!"**

Smith's heart leaped in panic as Robbins shuffle closer to death. He could already picture the crumpled body being grinded into a smatter of blood and flesh on the downtown street. He could envision Garcia's greasy smile as he handed the suitcase of cash to his unstained hands.

**"Don't,"**  
he choked out,  
**"don't do it!"**

Robbins froze, his right foot hovering over thin air.

**"Why do you care so much?**

**You'll still get paid.**

**It doesn't matter!"**

**"It does!"**

He spun to face him and shouted,

**"Then shoot me now!"**

**"I can't!"**

Smith yelled.

**"The fall would still kill you, not *my* bullet. Not *me*.**

**I won't take payment for a job I didn't do."**

**"And that's what bothers you?"**

**"Yes!"**

The target stared at him. The cold midnight wind pulled at his nightshirt and Smith's suit jacket.

An airplane hummed overhead.

**"A man of integrity in your profession  
must be rare,"** he said bitterly.

Smith was silent.

Slowly, Robbins stepped down from the ledge.

He inhaled, smoothed his greying hair,

straightened his shirt.

He nodded stiffly.

**"I'm ready!"**

*Nicole Hirt*

Who will help the prisoner  
lying on the floor,

lying there

alone,

unwashed

and bleeding.

*No one came.*

They said he deserved the scourging,  
that it was their job

to administer punishment

and keep society safe,

safe from such scourges.

*So no one came.*

Only angels,

those fat cherubs

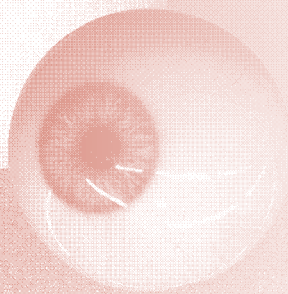
of empathy and kindness,

they came down to help him.

But only in his dream.

*Lynn White*

# Scourge





Dreams are aspirations with wings  
in search of beauty they fly  
but beauty is divine and exists above,  
Only when they reach the clouds,  
does heaven's light illuminate them,  
and then they shine.

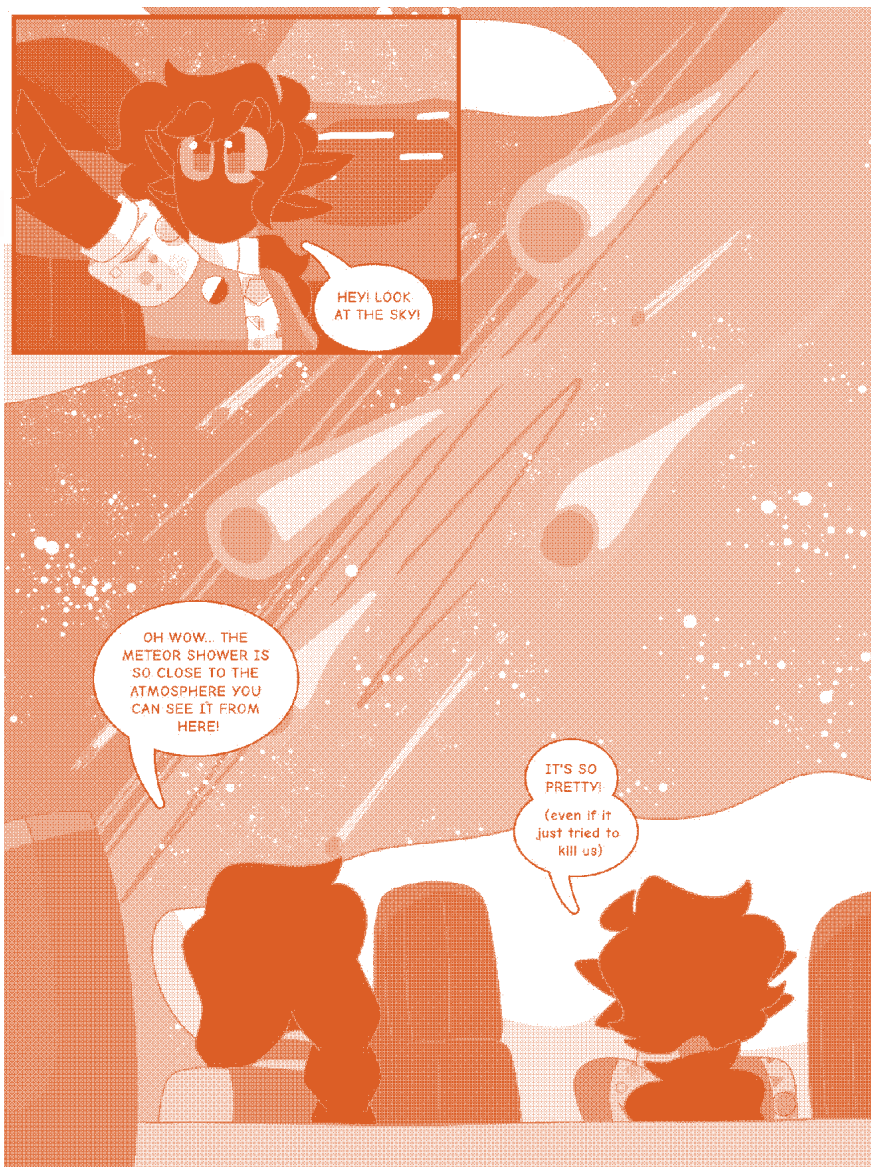
Yet for a moment, my dreams seem distant,  
no dream floats aloft so quickly,  
And even the boldest of all dreams,  
start deep in the sweet Earth,  
If indeed, all dreams start small,  
How lovely it is to dream,  
for that is the natural way  
in which they begin.

I will start my journey  
as a seed deep inside the Earth  
and long for the day,  
when I can look,  
above the clouds.

*Tyler Newhouse*

# The Dreams That Reach the Sky





# A *BIG* Surprise



# Prise Surprise

Joshua started to pray every night. He was excited to be having his big surprise soon. His enthusiasm began to wane as the weeks passed. After a month of praying, his doubts began to grow as to whether God was listening to him or not.

One night when he finished praying, he asked God:

**“Why don’t you answer me?  
Why can’t I see you?”**

Joshua wanted a little brother. When he asked his parents why he did not have a brother, they answered that they did not know and that only God knew. Another day, Joshua asked her:

**“How can I ask God something?”**

**“By praying”**

**“Praying? But will God answer me?”**

**“What is your question?”**

**“When will I get a little brother?”**

If you would pray every night to have a little brother, God would listen and give your wish. And one day, God could give you a big surprise!

There was a tinge of frustration in his voice. Joshua appeared tired. His brown eyes expressed deep sadness and his body was quiet. Although Joshua often smiled, his smile was becoming faint-like a light cloud, gently pressed by disappointment.

He fell asleep very sad thinking that his prayers were not being heard. In his sleep, he dreamt that he was making his long-awaited brother out of the recycled cardboard and plastic bottles he kept in his garage.

When he saw his brother finished, he woke up very happy. Joshua liked his dream so much that he decided to make it come true.

So he asked his mom,

**"Mami, how can I make my little brother with cardboard?"**

**"A little brother with cardboard?"**

**"Yes, I dreamed of him. Can you help me, please? I think we will need scissors."**

**"Wow! For cardboard, it is better to buy a cutter with razor blades."**

**"What is that?"**

**"It is something better than scissors to cut cardboard."**

**"Oh ok. Can you help to cut the cardboard, please?"**


**"Yes, I can. You're a four-year-old handsome boy, and it will be hard for you to cut cardboard alone."**

**"Thank you, mami"**

While Joshua's mom went to buy all the materials, he followed his dad into the garage to find the clothes he wore when he was 3 years old. He chose his favorite green shirt and blue shorts that had Thomas the Train on the left side. After his mom arrived, Joshua asked her to help him with the measure of his little brother. His mom took the ruler to measure the clothes

he chose. Then, she cut some cardboard to do the body. Joshua with the cut pieces built the cardboard body for his brother and glued it together. While Joshua was coloring his brother's body with markers, his mom used two water bottles as shoes, and in order to make the face, she had to take the lid of the large oatmeal container to use as a mold so Joshua could draw a circle on the cardboard, and then his mom proceeded to cut it out.

In the cardboard circle, he added two black water bottle caps to be his brother's eyes, and with the markers he drew a triangle as a nose and tried to make it curve into a smile on the mouth. When Joshua thought that his doll was finished, he decided to name it Kevin. Joshua liked this name because it reminded him of the character Kevin from the Minions. Also, he decided that Kevin was three years old because that way he would become the big brother and he could teach him to behave well. Joshua was very happy with his creation because he could play with it and he no longer felt alone. Kevin was a very good brother. They played, ate, slept, studied and read together.



One day he decided to take Kevin to the park. He asked his grandmother to take them to the nearby park. When they got to the park and went to the swings, the kids started making fun of Joshua and Kevin. Among the comments he heard were:

**"Why do you say that thing is your brother?"**

**"He's weird."**

**"He doesn't speak because he can't."**

**"I wouldn't want to have a brother like that."**

**"Aren't you ashamed of your cardboard brother?"**

Joshua was very angry, but still he calmly answered:

**"Stop! Kevin is sad! Be nice!"**

Joshua's grandma came and told them:

**"Maybe my grandson Kevin is different, but we're very**

**happy since he is part of our life. Kevin makes Joshua feel happy. We are all different—you're fat, she's tall, he's skinny, I'm old, and Kevin is cardboard and plastic."**

The next day, Joshua decided to go back to the park with Kevin. A boy named Daniel approached Joshua and asked:

**"Can you help me build a brother who can make me feel happy too?"**

From that day on, Kevin had a friend named David, and Joshua and Daniel began a beautiful friendship. When Joshua and Kevin got home, they got the news that their mom was pregnant. God did indeed give him his big surprise!

*Ana Molestina*

**W**atching  
the  
**W**einer  
Dog  
Races



**Big Rhonda THE DACHSHUND REFUSES TO BUDGE, AND I LOVE HER  
FOR THAT. HER SMALL SAUSAGE BODY LAZES IN THE GRASS WHILE  
I SIP MY Oktoberfest WINE, SAMPLE ITS SWEETNESS AND SPICE  
ON MY TONGUE. THE CROWDS MILL ABOUT LIKE CLOUDS DRIFTING  
BY, AND I, TOO, WISH TO LOUNGE ON THE LAWN AND APOLOGIZE  
TO NO ONE. I, TOO, WANT TO RUIN A RACE WITH ALL MY HEART.**

*Kate Kadleck*

# Bennie Has Been a Good Dog

I met Bennie and his companion on a beach today, his last beach, and day. His companion, weeping, like a damaged tree oozing sap, slowly, quietly, moist. Bennie, golden retriever, looking very old and weak, but three years and a score of tumors, aged him, crippled him. His companion is driving him around to favorite places.

Bennie sat down on the sand. This was enough, leaned his beautiful body against my leg as I gently rubbed his head, the parts without tumors.

Death is rarely beautiful, often brutal.

Bennie couldn't get up to walk back to their car, not right away. It took time.

I thanked his companion for letting me share his grief.

I thanked Bennie for being a wonderful creature whom I was blessed to meet at this place, at this time, under these circumstances.

We've lost others. We'll lose ourselves.

All souls gravitate towards peace, that massive center of love.

*Rosemary Dunn Moeller*

# Daughter of

# THANATOS

## *The God of Death*

Freyja has been surrounded by death her whole life. Freyja was a triplet at birth. Her siblings died soon after their birth. She was raised by a medical examiner and a mortician. Everyone at Camp half-blood was confused when she came. She believed she had two human parents, so why was she at camp? It was not until the earth thawed and the animals emerged from hibernation, that they understood. When animals started clawing and desperately trying to get into Herme's cabin, they were later found dead. She was more of a loner than the typical camper. She would sit in the forest for hours.

One day Percy Jackson got curious where she went, so he followed her. Freyja walked to a rock in the middle of a valley and embraced the sunlight. Slowly animals began to surround her. Percy noticed that the animals were all old or had a brutal injury. She removed the gloves that she always wore. Percy always thought she had a germ thing, so she didn't like to be touched. She drifted into a meditative state as one by one the animals approached her and almost seemed to ask for her touch. One by one she would grant their requests. Percy stayed and watched for only four of the beast's deaths before going to find Chiron & Mr. D.

When they came back, Freyja was burying the dead animals in a mass grave. An old dog approached her so Percy, Chiron, Mr. D and some other campers stopped to watch. She removed her gloves once more and granted the dog's request for death. She reached out and stroked the dog until its chest stopped raising. She picked up the dog and placed it in the grave before she covered it.

The group approached Freyja again after they witnessed what happened. Percy looked around and everyone looked as if they were in a gloomy haze. Then he realized Freyja's dad had refused to claim her even though they all knew whose child she was. As they grew closer, Percy could see her tears and hear her weeping.

Bang, Bang, Bang. There was a disturbance at the barrier. Everyone was startled except Freyja. She saw them approaching and she made a gesture for them to stay as she turned to walk towards the barrier. Percy, Annabelle, Grover and Luke all walked towards the barrier after Freyja. They watched as she calmly walked through the barrier. Freyja stopped face to face with a cyclops. He pleaded with her to give him the grace of death. The Cyclops began to beg when Freyja walked to him with her ungloved hand. The Cyclops took it and in doing so ended his life, as he evaporated into pastel-colored butterflies.

**Freyja turned and walked back through the barrier and headed back to camp. Everyone stood in awe of the grace she had and the forgiveness she had shown to a monster that could have killed her and had killed hundreds of them.**

That night at dinner she provided her offering to Pam so that they could repopulate the lives she took that day and Hades to provide the animal souls a good place. Then she went and sat alone at Herme's table. Percy moved down so that he was sitting next to her. That was when he noticed that she was no longer wearing the gloves from earlier but rather a beautiful black and red pair.

**"Hey Freyja, why do you bury the animals after you kill them?"**

Freyja shot him a look of anger. It was a lot different from the look she had earlier in the day. She turned and said, **"Why would I not? They have lived good lives and deserved to be buried as such. And I don't take pleasure in their deaths. I never have."**

**"How long has this been going on Freyja?"**

She looked down then looked at him and answered, **"It has happened since I was a young child, like 5. Maybe even before. I was a triplet, Percy; I was the only one that survived. My mother died and my stepfather left soon after. I shuffled around till I came here. So, I have grown accustomed to there being death around me and I give that peace to those who seek death when they are at the end of their life. That is how I was found."**

*Clarke Student*





# Seeing Eye to Eye

**I was four. He was legless.**

He perched in a wheeled wood square box,  
a tin can of sharpened pencils between us in front  
of my father's store. His eyes were empty, mine curious,  
an adult at my level. Mom said nothing. He said nothing.  
Selling pencils to keep it legal. A beggar, he was either there  
on Broadway or he didn't exist. I don't believe  
he was satisfied, dignified. He wore blue,  
so did I, my favorite color.

**I see him**

decades later, now in photos of homeless,  
veterans in distress, unwanted women abused.

**I cared,**

but I didn't need pencils.

I wanted to help, he needed legs.

I had only my own, none extra.

I didn't know how to help.

This is what I've learned beyond  
physics, fractals, fiction writing,  
music and calligraphy.

**I help**

because we're all the same soul-height.

*Rosemary Dunn Moeller*

# Downtown Detroit



His toothless grin is familiar,  
the strange smokey smell of cigarettes  
reminds me of something.  
Something that I need, but that he has.

The bus door opens with a spring,  
disrupting my thoughts and peace of the midnight air.

*How can someone be  
Happy with so little?*

He waves his hand and smiles,  
I watch him through the window  
as we pull away.  
The kind, grateful eyes remain.

Surrounded by the hustle-bustle of the world,  
I realize, what I am missing:  
**Gratitude** for all the  
small things I have.

*Tyler Newhouse*

# A Few Favorites



I like the way ranunculus look like crumpled Kleenex, only prettier. I also like how Southern live oaks drip with leafy jewels. What if I told you I planned a trip to Savannah with the sole purpose of witnessing those trees? I like the way squirrels tend to scamper up trunks, like they have somewhere to be, like they're running late to their very important squirrel meeting. I like the softness of peaches, their sunset-colored skin. I like rain. I like dogs with human names. I like humans who let their battered hearts adorn their bodies, like brooches. I like secrets. I like keeping them just between us.

*Kate Kadleck*

# S t r a

They said

"I think 14 is a little too young."

He was sitting next to me

He said

"Why don't you let down your hair  
and show them you belong to me."

If I said what you wanted me to say

I would lose all that is left

My power would be lost

What this flesh has done to me

And still around your neck I'm locked

Grabbing me by the warmest part of me

My very last pearl

Laying on the floor of your apartment

I think this love has lost its glamor

My toes always painted red for you

With shackles on my feet

I can be your mirror

I like it like this

I trusted you with all of this

Up my dress and up my skirt

I tell you that it's all yours

The sea of violets in the graveyard

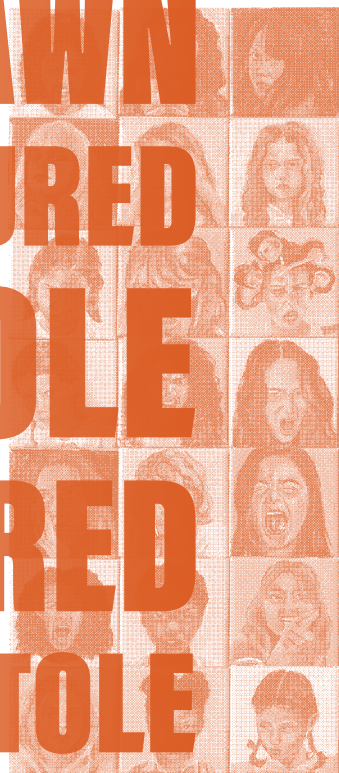
The lily in my heart

Crushed beneath your feet

Me and all of my bleeding hearts

*Sunshine Dusk*

*young*  
**MIND CLOUDY**  
**THOUGHTS WITHDRAWN**  
**APPEARANCE DROWSY**  
**ANOTHER PAWN**  
**FEELING FRACTURED**  
**NEVER WHOLE**  
**SEMICAPTURED**  
**BY WHAT THEY STOLE**  
**HAVING IMPURITIES**  
**KNOWING DEEPENING**  
**PEEKING INSECURITIES**  
*too*



**AM I WORTH KEEPING  
COUNTERACTIVE THOUGHTS  
PLACED INSIDE MY HEAD  
AGAINST WHAT I'VE BEEN TAUGHT  
WHEN RAPED IN MY BED  
UNWORTHY, BROKEN  
AM I ALONE  
WAS ONCE GOLDEN  
NOW I ATONE**



*Katie Kelly*

# Virgin

## Suicide

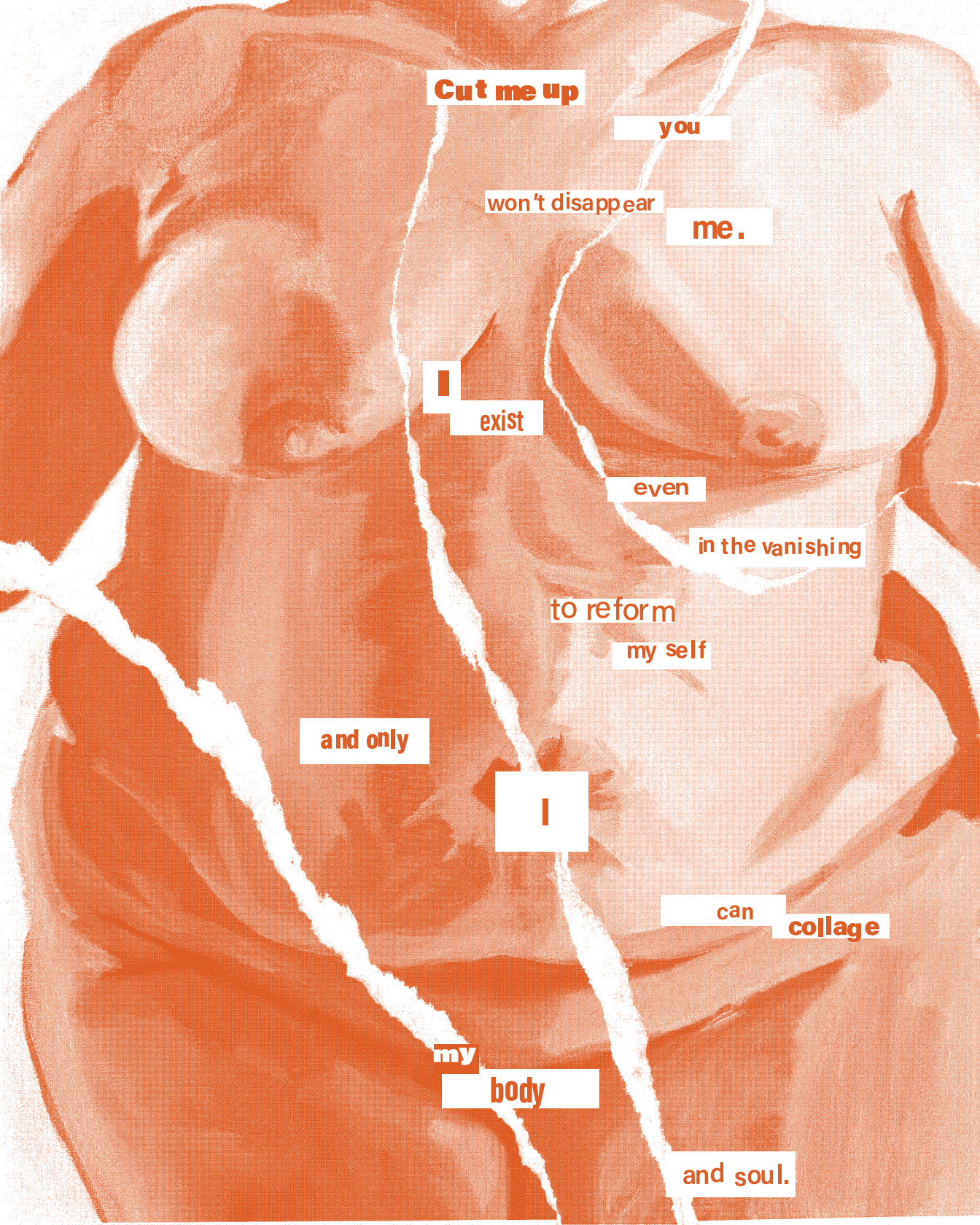
This must be the way that Lux Lisbon felt  
When he left her on the football field  
In the blue hour of the morning  
He loved her more than anyone else  
He would love her his entire life  
And he left her there  
He didn't care how she got home  
Picking up her shoes  
And carrying her plastic crown  
A queen for a night in her dress of flowers  
The same as her sisters  
His name on her underwear  
Still damp from the wet grass  
And the white paint  
On the taxi ride home  
Staring out the window  
A face that would look down on him from the fish flies for eternity  
She would never leave the house again  
His hair still parted by her invisible hand  
He lived to be an old man but her age remained the same  
The sun was coming through  
Living longer than she could have ever dreamed  
Dragons heads in blonde  
Waiting for her sisters  
A light in the bedroom  
Picking glittering stickers stuck on golden passages  
Bubblegum angels and rainbows for Judy  
Hearts with wings and light blue stars  
Crushing crystal castles in pastel waters between her fingers  
He loved her and he left her there  
Still bleeding between the legs

*Sunshine Dwehr*



LILY NESTA *Grid Paintings*

GO LILY TAG



Cut me up

you

won't disappear

me.

I

exist

even

in the vanishing

to reform

my self

and only

I

can

collage

my

body

and soul.

*Lynn White*

# Enchanted Hunters

I am not Lolita  
Lolita is haunting me  
She's wiggling, writhing

Sprawled out naked across all of my mind

All that is left

Hot red little horns

Poking out

Teasing

Is this really my true self?  
Parading my flesh in the most wanton abandon  
Like a frothing animal  
Lolita is my silhouette  
A trickling, deceiving, lying shadow  
Hot wax hardening like babies first charm bracelet

Enchanted Hunters

I can never rid her of my hair

Or my shiny, silky, frosty dress

Like my little sorrow

I wipe my hands

I carry you with me forever

Like little bits of garden

You gave me everything

A pearly white convertible

Red leather upholstery

A mockery of my lips and of my skin

around my  
ankle

*I am not Lolita*

*Like an umbilical cord*



Hot red  
Poking out  
Losing  
Is this really my true self?  
Losing my flesh in the most wanton  
Frothing animal  
My silhouette  
Still I am me  
Lying, deceiving, lying shadow  
Lending  
First chance  
Hunters  
Did  
Silky  
Sorrow  
Lands  
With me forever  
Bits of garden  
Me everything  
A white convertible  
Rather upholstery  
Mockery of my lips and of  
The stuff of dreams  
Waking up from  
Wrists to bedpost  
Metal on metal  
These handcuffs connect us

Like an umbilical cord  
Her fathers saint  
My Siamese twin  
I've come to kill your daughter  
My killing wish  
I've come to make sure  
She will never look at me again

Sunshine Dush



# Aphrodite

## Melainis

**“Hephaestus?”**

Aphrodite stepped into the forge, her eyes scanning the soot-stained tools and walls glimmering with the orange of ever-shifting magma. Half-finished sculptures and instruments lay scattered across the cluttered space, a wall-to-wall barrier of in-progress projects that had always intimidated the goddess out of her husband’s workspace. Distantly, she heard the crash of falling metal, immediately followed by a hasty yell from Hephaestus.

**“I’ll be out in a minute!”**

Aphrodite sighed. Admittedly, the forge god made quick work of whatever he was doing, for just as Aphrodite began to regret answering his invitation, he made his way to the entrance.

Her gaze immediately fell to his leg braces, which she couldn’t help but notice had grown more ostentatious than ever, decorated with gold filigree and onyx stones. When her gaze finally lifted, they seemed in contrast to the craggy scars of his face, forever shining with the mountainous cracks that made him look more volcano than man. His molten eyes crinkled with poorly hidden anxiety.

**“I hope I didn’t keep you waiting for too long,”**

her husband said.

She shook her head, hair the ever-changing color of black opals cascading over her shoulders with the movement.

**“I’m just confused about why you called me in here,”**

she said, keeping the impatience she felt out of her voice.

**“Ah—right!”**

Hephaestus quickly nodded, shuffling off to an untidy corner before he could notice Aphrodite crossing her arms.

**“I—I know you weren’t expecting to be married so soon,”**

he said, elbows deep in a bronze hodgepodge.

**“And—well, I know the groom isn’t really supposed to give wedding gifts, but I thought—”**

He withdrew something that caught the forge’s light before stuffing it into his apron and heading back to where his wife stood.

**“I thought you should at least have a consolation gift.”**

To call what he did when he withdrew the object a “dramatic flourish” was probably too generous of an assessment, but either way, he presented the gift to her.

Shaped out of gold and platinum, the gift took the shape of a rose, with petals of cloudy seaglass and dewdrops carved out of pearls. Aphrodite tilted her head.

**“It’s lovely,”**

she said, realizing as the words left her mouth that she wasn’t lying.

**“And the looks aren’t the best part!”**

said Hephaestus.

Taking her hands into his, he pressed the rose into her grasp. His hands felt calloused, rough with the burns from an eternity with metalwork and corded with muscle from the same. Yet they held her manicured fingers with the care he would take with glass.

**"I'm not going to break,"**  
she reminded her husband.

**"Right. I— I know that, my dove."**

The nickname made her wince, and she pulled away with the rose clasped in her hands. As she gazed down at it, the petals began to open, blooming in shades of blush pink and seafoam green that, when fully opened, began thrumming in a drum-like beat.

**"A tympanon?"**  
she asked, looking up.

**"Yes, it's um—"**

**"It's a Homeric Hymn,"**  
Aphrodite said, mystified.

**"One of yours!"**  
said Hephaestus.

She nodded, looking up at him. A small smile split his face, shining with pride. Yet it was a type of pride she had never seen before, a shy pride deeply unlike the loud boasting he would use about his war weapons. She stuttered, looking down at the rose.

**"Yes, it's—"**

**"You like it?"**  
he asked with soft eagerness.

Running her fingers over the glassy petals, ridged like delicate seashells, she examined it once again.

Delicate. Perhaps that was the problem. She drew it close to her chest, giving Hephaestus a polite smile.

**"It doesn't have any thorns,"**  
she said.

**"Does it need them?"**  
he asked, tilting his head.

**"Yes, definitely. Otherwise,  
it's a misrepresentation."**

**"Even if it's more beautiful?"**

She frowned.

**"I don't think it's more  
beautiful that way."**

**"I didn't mean—"**  
Hephaestus sputtered,  
seeming to flounder for words.  
**"I didn't mean it like that!"**

**"How did you mean it then?"**

**"Aphrodite—"**

She cut him off, handing the rose back. Even as he took it, his hands treated hers with fragility.

**"Add some thorns,"**  
she said firmly.

His brows furrowed,  
a frown creasing his face.  
**"I'm not sure I can."**

Aphrodite's face fell, and she turned, unwilling to look Hephaestus in the eye. Her twilight-dark hands clenched, and she silenced their shaking to speak.

**"Then keep it,"**  
she said.

**"I don't—I can't want  
incomplete roses."**

Her husband cried out in distress as she made her way out of his domain.

**"Aphrodite, wait!"**

But she refused to slow, abandoning the cooling forge with a heart heavier than her husband's tools.

*Abigail Taylor*





# Scorpion

Looking about me in a fearful way.  
Toes on alert. Touch subject to dire warnings.  
The scorpion survived the transition from water to land  
But could I endure one sneaky bite?  
Look at the rock. Might it conceal the sting of death?  
Even that tiny ridge of earth.  
Does it ripple with venom?  
My nervous system is on notice.  
The eighth sign of the Zodiac could shut me down.

Please, says the woman,  
what are the chances?  
You make it sound as if the desert is a plot.  
The ground around you is occupied  
by creatures doing their best  
to eke out a meager living.  
The mouse. The hare. The rattler.  
And yes, the scorpion.  
No treachery. No ambush.  
No murderous ambition.

But still I tread warily.  
My eyes struggle to read the terrain.  
My footsteps are the outer rim of my imagination.  
What if their pincers seize me?  
Crush my body, suck my body fluids?  
Jab me with that segmented tail?  
My mind can't help itself  
from reading up on predatory arachnids.

The woman can only laugh.  
A tiny creature more frightened of you  
than you should ever be of it.  
Probably has human phobias  
that make your critter fears  
feel like affection.

Looking about me in an embarrassed way.  
The woman finds me foolish.  
What does that do to our love?  
Could the smallest thing come between us?  
Something larger must decide.

*John Grey*

# COURAGE

**I've kept** most of my cardiac cells since rocking  
in Mom's arms to Nat King Cole's voice.

Heart cells, like you, are loyal, long-time friends.

The skin you first touched is shed, blood's  
replaced again and again, hair has grown long,  
been cut often, changed to gray-white, thinned.  
But heart cells that jumped when we first kissed  
are still here, pumping and playing, keeping time.

Muscle cells packed with Hudson River water  
went to Niger River water to meet you,  
then were filled by Missouri River water at our home.

Our heart cells kept working, playing, raising.  
We've eaten from our garden and the creatures on our farm,  
all comings and goings like our days and months.

Those heart cells that pumped joy into our lives  
as we cuddled our babies have stayed with us, unlike  
our children who've grown and gone on elsewhere.

I listen to your heart when we fall asleep cuddled,  
same heart for years and years, same rhythm and sound.

Our hearts are as sure and solid as our love.  
What better trade could we have given one another  
than our hard-working hearts.

*Rosemary Dunn Moeller*

# The Purple Poem

Poem: 40 lines, a purple dress

Terms: your usual

022424

I bought the flowers  
they caught my eye  
passing by at the store  
right near the door

at first I'd decided  
I didn't want them  
but they wouldn't  
let me go, so

I bought them anyway  
because they were Purple  
deep plush Purple, lush.  
you don't know about Purple  
so I gotta tell you

once upon a time my  
wife, my love, my partner,  
often my last and only  
friend put on a  
nice dress, maybe her  
favorite, and came to me  
so I could see and did  
a little walkway twirl  
we were going out

so, of course, I just  
had to tell her  
you look very

**Purple**

that gave the old  
say thing a sort of  
new, if stupid, twist

she laughed because  
she got the gist  
it became a pretty  
typical tease phrase  
over 30 years...

the flowers lasted  
for four full weeks  
looking so alive  
and, for sure, purple

all in memory  
of her

*Michael J. Shepley*





# Softening

This isn't the last poem I will write about  
dementia: its gray face, its spindly fingers,  
the way it eats up the whole eggplant sky.

When the brain withers, does the heart stay  
intact? I think it must. I remember the way  
my grandma used to cradle her stuffed dog,  
how she'd coo into its fur, her gibberish as  
sacred as a prayer.

*Kate Kadlcek*

# A January Encounter

The time was dusk when I found her  
on the little path into the deep woods.  
She scattered seeds for the night birds  
that never came to feed.

No birds can be found in the woods  
at that hour. No birds are found.  
In many ways the woods are dead  
or close to it. The soil here is grey  
as rotten sheep. The woods are dead  
or close to it. The woman looks nonplussed,  
her skin faded, hair a tangle, grey from age,  
the same color as the mist  
settled among the separate trees.  
She speaks and her voice slides  
like the wind through the pines.

*"Feed the birds?"*

is all she says.

I try to reply,

*"it's OK, the birds*

*are sleeping now 'til morning."*

She makes no reply, but takes my  
hand and pours a thin encouraging  
stream of seeds into my hand,  
not once meeting my eye.

*Will Reger*





# TALES from the WOODPILE



In summer sun, the winter wood seems forlorn.

Expecting fire, all it gets is enervating heat.

There isn't even rain for variation.

Every day is **as monotonous as the next.**

It's nostalgic for its near past as a tree.

**And then there's the humiliation**

of squirrels using it for a playground.

And odious snakes crawling into

gaps in the stacks

to sleep away the noon-day.

Of course, kids won't leave the pile alone.

They clamber over it like climbing mountains.

That temperature drop can't come soon enough.

The wood's **holding out for northwesterly winds,**

**frozen lakes, snowdrifts, anything to get them**

**out of this dire repetition,** and indoors,

into the hearth and, in partnership with touch paper,

setting themselves alight.

**They blame the wearying situation on humans.**

**They're** too content with their own contentment.

**They're** strangers to urgency.

**They lack the passion for flaming,**

the selflessness for flaming out.

*John Grey*



# Walking MY Dog

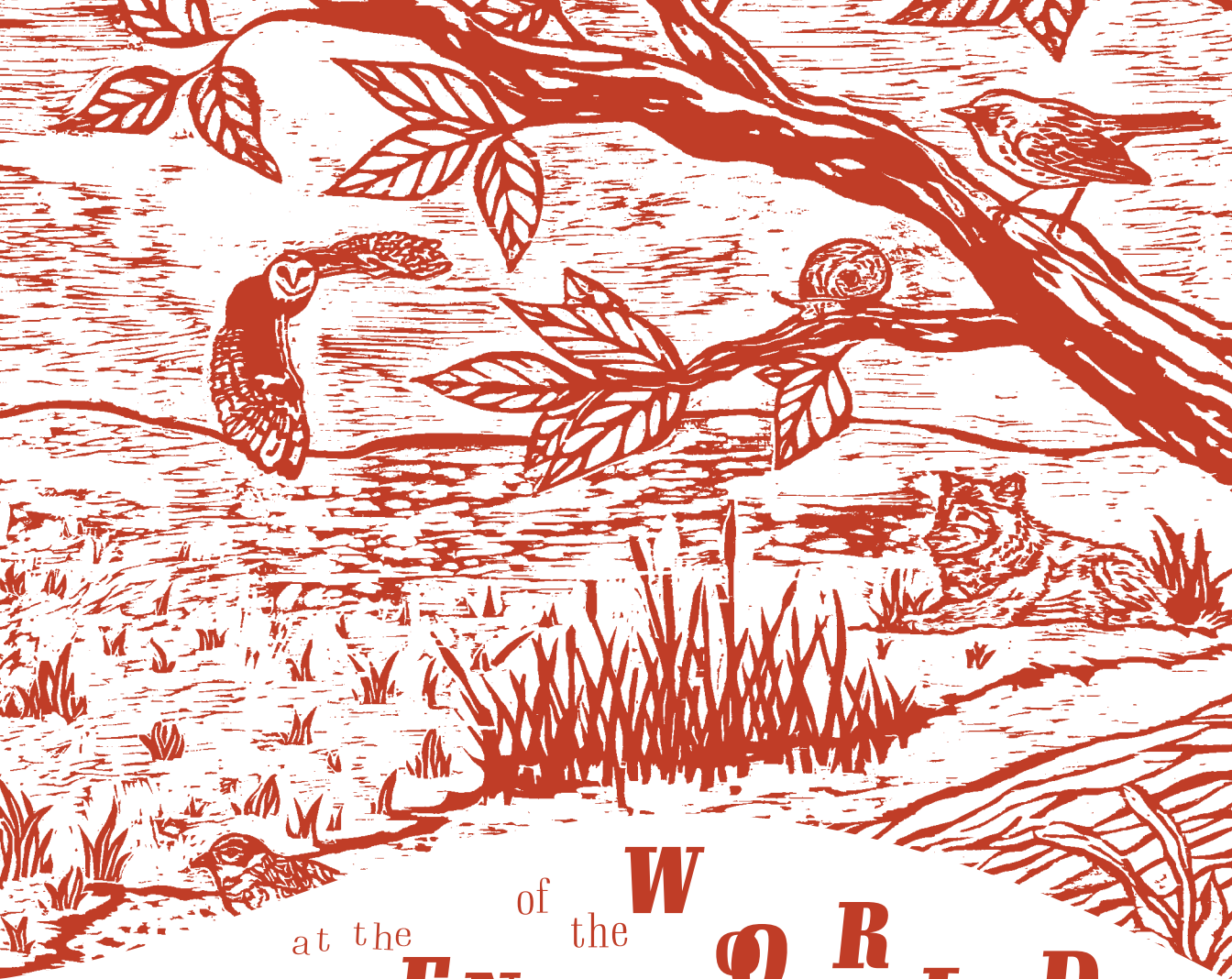
AS THE WIND AND RAIN WASH MY WINDOWS,  
I EXIST HALF-AWAKE AND WATCH IN AWE  
AS THE END OF THE WORLD APPEARS IN TECHNICOLOR  
BEHIND MY EYELIDS.

I DID NOT WEAR MY JACKET TODAY.  
NO MITTENS OR GLOVES,  
AND YET NO RED-BITTEN NOSES  
OR RUDDY CHEEKS.

MID-DECEMBER AND I AM SUFFOCATING  
UNDER EARLY JULY HUMIDITY.  
LAYER AFTER LAYER I STRIP—  
A REPTILE SHEDDING ITS SKIN.

IS THIS THE NEXT STAGE IN EVOLUTION?  
WILL I WAKE TOMORROW WITH GILLS,  
YELLOW EYES?  
POUR A BOWL OF MAGGOTS AND FLIES  
INSTEAD OF CORNFLAKES  
FOR BREAKFAST IN THE MORNING?

MY HOPE AND PATIENCE WEAR THIN  
AS I WALK MY DOG,  
LISTENING TO HOARDS OF CROWS  
*CAW, CAW, CAW* TO EACH OTHER IN THE TREES,  
CHATting LIKE OLD FRIENDS.



at the of the **W**  
**END** **ORLD**

THEY ARE PLANNING THEIR NEXT MEAL,  
I THINK,  
AND MY DOG BOBS HIS HEAD IN AGREEMENT.  
WE ARE ROADKILL,  
THEIR THANKSGIVING FEAST.  
WE ARE CHRISTMAS DINNER,  
FAT TUESDAY,  
HOT DOG EATING CONTEST.  
"ARE YOU EXCITED?" I CAW BACK.  
"DO I LOOK DELICIOUS?"  
THE WIND AND BIRDS FALL SILENT.  
THE FOOD IS NOT SUPPOSED TO REPLY.  
I RETURN TO MY HOME AS THE SKY TURNS GREEN,  
THEN BLUE,  
THEN BLACK.

MY HEART TAKES OFF, A SCARED RABBIT IN MY CHEST,  
AND I SHAKE WITH A MANIC KIND OF ELATION AND FEAR.  
THE TIME HAS COME AND I AM ANYTHING BUT READY.

"GOODBYE!" I SCREAM TO THE VOID.  
MY DOG HAS TURNED TO DUST BESIDE ME,  
BACK TO THE DIRT FROM WHENCE HE CAME.  
"I'M SORRY!" I GASP, QUIETER,  
AS THE REALITY SINKS INTO MY BONES—  
AN ACHES LIKE NO OTHER.

THE EARTH DOES NOT CARE FOR MY APOLOGY.  
EMBITTERED, THE EARTH DOES NOT CARE AT ALL.  
SHE SWALLOWS ME WHOLE AND WE DIE UNFORGIVEN.

*Mimi Ottavi*



# The Day After

Thoughts racing in my mind  
You left with no goodbye  
Doing things to pass the time  
But my thoughts won't let me even if I try  
Having to learn to be alone  
Having to rebuild myself back  
Trying not to be at home  
Following the light shining through the crack  
But it is dark  
It seems a long way ahead  
I feel as if my life is in park  
And I've yet to get out of bed

*Alayna Rodriguez*

# Jacksons Absence

## Those boots were made for walking

& honey, you did more than that  
I don't know what them boots have seen  
but we all caught glimpses of the pain they carried  
white as pure as your soul  
scuff marks that showed you did  
so much more than walking

I can't remember the last time I saw you, yet I still expect to see  
those white boots dancing as you guard & share good spirits  
the spirits are still there & I hope you are too

The last call  
the last straw  
the last of your will to walk  
to live

Maybe I'll see those same scuffed boots again  
when your boy is a man  
proudly walking in the boots that carried you  
they weren't made for grief, but I'm sure they felt it too

No buckles  
no laces  
no sleeves  
just traces of where your boots have been  
& possibly where he'll take them

*In Memory of Jackson Daniel*

*Bree Naylea*



# A New Page

Poem: 29 lines, dawn after night snow

Terms: your usual

033122

the low wool clouds  
that burned blood  
red in the sunset  
changed in the darkening,  
metamorphed, translated,  
essentially evaporated  
into solid crystals  
gems that combined  
into fat flakes  
that we parochial kids  
in Winter Buffalo  
called Angel Dandruff  
falling fat and slow  
until the sharp  
stars showed shivering  
in black empty sky

here and now  
you know the  
ground in morning  
is covered in snow  
a blank page  
bright as Dylan's new day  
awaiting the glyphs  
of enigma poetry  
writ by fur paws  
and feather claws  
and the blunt dumb  
straight line boots  
of too prosaic humans

*Michael J. Shepley*

# DIV *the* IDE

Orange leaves whisked along the road as Danny and Maria's car zoomed by. Noon sunlight soaked through hickory trees, yellow rays transforming yellow leaves into luminous gold. As the car crested a hill, the Blue Ridge Mountains reared their pine-covered heads. Spots of scarlet maple flashed amongst the deep green. Then the vehicle swept back down, back on the low winding road once more.

**"I'm going to be sick,"**

Maria groaned, grabbing her boyfriend's shoulder.

Danny patted her hand sympathetically.

**"Sorry, baby. We're almost there."**

Her stomach wriggled like there was a worm inside.

**"If we don't stop, I'm going to throw up,"** she gasped.

**"Yep, pulling over now."**

The car rolled to a stop. Maria stumbled out the passenger door and bent over, taking deep shaky breaths. Cold air rushed into her lungs, and her stomach instantly felt soothed. She stood up and sighed.

Danny peeked around the trunk.

**"Is it safe?"**

**"Yes,"** she said, rolling her eyes with a smile.

**"I already feel much better."**

Her gaze landed on a small hill next to the side of the road. A weathered gravestone was perched on top.

**"Hey, want to go up there?"**

**"A cemetery? I can't think of anything more romantic."**

Maria laughed and laced her fingers through his. They climbed the hill, their boots crunching on fallen leaves. Rows of headstones, stained with dirt and age, soon met their eyes. Some were ornate, with carved scrolls unfurling to reveal the names of the deceased. Angels spread their wings protectively over others. Yet even the few marked by no more than a simple cross looked elegant and well-cut.

**"You know,"**

Danny remarked,  
**"this isn't nearly as creepy as I thought it would be."**

**"Same,"** she agreed. **"Maybe it's because people still visit."**

She pointed to a headstone where someone had placed a vase of lilies. Their white petals were just beginning to show a touch of decay.

They picked their way through the cemetery, chuckling at the old-fashioned names. Danny found a cluster of pale purple asters and tucked one behind her ear. The autumn wind continued to whisper, softly scattering leaves across the headstones. It cooled the feverish heat that had made her so nauseous.

Just when Maria was about to announce she was ready to go back, Danny squinted and said,

**"I think there's more of the cemetery down there. Let's check it out."**

As they stumbled down and away from the hill, the vegetation became more prickly and dry. Pebbles and broken twigs replaced the fine green grass. They wound through the trees, some of the branches getting caught in Maria's hair.

**"Ugh,"** she said, disentangling her hair with a wince, **"I already like the other one better."**

Danny nodded.

**"Yeah, this one is. . . kind of sad."**

Maria looked up. He was right—moss choked these graves, obscuring names and dates. None of them were carved as intricately as the markers on the hill; they were barely nubs of crooked rock jutting from the dirt. Some had sunk so

deeply into the earth that if she didn't know any better, she would have assumed they were large stones. Instead of being organized into symmetrical lines, these headstones were scattered carelessly without any semblance of order.

Her boyfriend took a step forward and inhaled sharply. **"Stubbed my toe. Great,"** he hissed.

She glanced down and gasped. **"Danny,"** she whispered, tugging on his arm, **"look!"**

He had struck no ordinary rock. It was a stone embedded deep in the ground, the words

**"Negro Cemetery"** carved on its cracked surface.

They stared at it in silence.

The wind howled through the brush, and Danny shivered. He said quietly,


**"I think I'm ready to go. What about you?"**

**"Give me a minute,"** she murmured.

**"I'll be there soon."**

He squeezed her hand and started trudging through the trees. Maria gazed at the moss-smothered marker. Scarlet leaves trailed across it. She took the lavender aster from her hair and placed it against the stone. Then she turned away, walking back to the cemetery on the hill.

*Nicole Hirt*



# Suffocated

In this society,  
we feel powerless  
and allow ourselves  
to be suffocated  
with pillows of power  
and prejudice,  
hardly hidden,  
in the institutions  
we thought would protect us all.

**So we have to do something.**

**We know we must do something.**

So we put on our mask  
carefully  
to protect  
ourselves.

We know  
we are all  
George Floyd  
potentially

later or sooner.

And we know  
we are all his killers

potentially

later or sooner

behind the masks.

*Lynn White*



# Speak Up

**SPEAK UP BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE,  
BEFORE SOMEONE GETS HURT.**

**WHY WAIT?**

**THE WORLD NEEDS TO HEAR YOUR VOICE,  
YOUR OPINIONS.**

**ARE YOU SCARED NO ONE WILL LISTEN?**

**YOU'LL NEVER KNOW UNTIL YOU TRY,**

**SPEAKING UP CAN CHANGE SO MANY LIVES!**

**THAT'S WHAT IS WRONG TODAY,**

**PEOPLE ARE AFRAID TO SPEAK.**

**BLACK EYES AND BRUISES,**

**SOMETIMES IT'S HARD TO GET OUT.**

**WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO STAY?**

**CONTINUING TO GET BEAT OR PUT DOWN,**

**TALK TO SOMEONE,  
TELL EVERYTHING,  
ASK WHAT TO DO!**

**DON'T YOU SEE THAT KID GETTING BULLIED?**

**WHAT IF THAT WAS YOU?**

**WHY WON'T YOU SAY ANYTHING?**

**WHAT'S SCARY ABOUT HELPING SOMEONE?**

**SAY IT TO THEIR FACE,  
NOT BEHIND THEIR BACK.**

**WHAT ABOUT THEM DON'T YOU LIKE?**

**THEY CAN'T DO MUCH ABOUT THAT.**

**SPEAKING UP CAN SAVE LIVES INCLUDING YOUR OWN!**

*Daé Mia Franklin*

# Things They Say

**They used to say**

that infections were caused by miasma  
that bad air breathed in  
led to cholera and plague.

It wasn't true

and **They don't say** it anymore.

**They used to say** that goldfish had no memory

but the ones in my pond

still hide from me

in loving memory of their friends

disappeared from the overcrowded pond  
many months ago.

They seem to blame me and they are right.

They were re-homed without consent.

Now science has caught up

and is celebrating

their memory.

**They say** a lot of things that aren't true

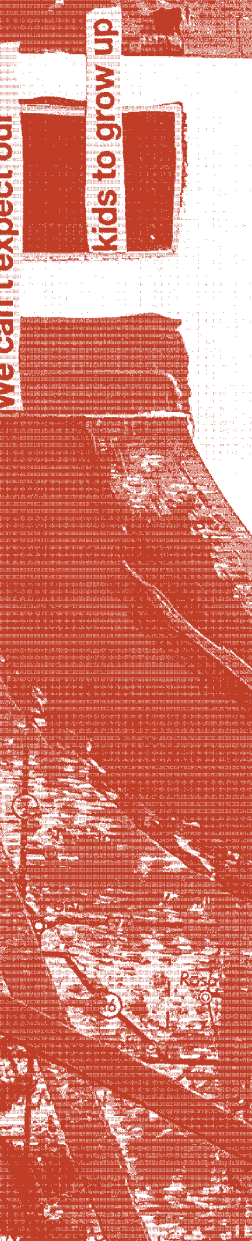
as knowledge moves on with science.

Even goldfish know better

than to believe

the things **They say**.

*Lynn White*



# *Uff—da* on *a Train*

whirring wheels

create

blurry movies through windows of filthy

glass, projecting images of fleeting

conifers with roots clinging

to steel tracks

glass-still Minnesotan lakes

reflect clouds

withholding sleet

and black ice to unleash upon

an expecting and experienced audience

***S C R E E E E E E E E E E C H !***

"Uff da!" echoes

throughout every car

as white-tailed rumps waddle in sight of the engine

awaiting the patience of passengers

in vain.

*Terra Miller*



**It used to be you spun a wheel:  
'Please let a little luck come down to us.'  
and a man with sonorous voice announced  
that you had won new furniture.**

But wasn't it just yesterday  
you lived out on a back lot,  
under a blue tarp and pallets nailed up,  
thinking how blessed you were

**to have all that junk (truly) for your  
protection? It used to be a beautiful  
world until someone told you it wasn't.**

**Why does that comment even matter?**

It was that you had her until you didn't,  
Your little gone one, who passed you by,  
sent from the world by hateful thinking,  
with munitions and ordnance, men  
**wearing uniforms, who embodied the hatred,  
put a face on it, gave it hands to do evil.**  
**But she spoke quite often to you, like a muse.**

**Mostly when you held a pen in hand.**

She visited you on those days, for certain.  
She wasn't one of the dead—you know,  
the pushers, who used wind against  
a living Will to do or not do.

**She has not come back to punish.**

**She has not come back to blame.**

**She has not come to jinx you all your days.**

**She has not come to speak anything,**

except maybe a poem or two for you,  
to remember when Gaza was whole.

Oh, and she heard the new couch  
you won is comfortable.

**She wants to try it out. Do you have**

**magic or charms to help**

**the gone one with luck for that?**

**Some compensation for her losses?**

*Will Reger*

A  
little  
junk

# Charitable Institution

THE CHILD CAN ONLY WRITE IN AMHARIC.  
SHE IS A SWEET-FACED 14-YEAR OLD, SO INNOCENT,  
BUT FOR ALL THE WORLD LOOKS LIKE SHE MIGHT  
HAVE BEEN VOTED IN SCHOOL MOST LIKELY  
TO BE TRAFFICKED BY FAMILY OR COUNTRYMEN.

THE BROCHURE SAYS SHE IS DANGER WHERE SHE LIVES,  
BUT THEY ASSURE ME THAT MY \$43 WILL KEEP HER  
SAFE AND FED AND EDUCATED—MY \$43 WILL SOLVE  
ALL HER PROBLEMS AND PUT HER IN TOUCH WITH GOD.  
STILL, SHE CAN ONLY WRITE TO ME IN AMHARIC.

I'VE KNOWN OF THE EXISTENCE OF THAT LANGUAGE  
SINCE SHE WAS ABOUT FIVE OR SO. NEVER HEARD IT.  
I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT ITS VERBS OR ROOTS,  
ITS GRAMMAR OR HOW IT DEVELOPED LINGUISTICALLY,  
OR EVEN WHERE IT APPEARS ON THE FAMILY TREE  
OF LANGUAGES—NOWHERE NEAR DUTCH I CAN TELL YOU.

HER PARENTS ARE NAMED IN THE BROCHURE,  
I ASSUME SHE HAS A HOME LIFE WITH PEOPLE  
WHO LOVE HER, BUT IS SHE SAFE FROM BEING SOLD  
FOR SEX OR INTO MARRIAGE? WILL MY \$43 KEEP HER  
FROM SUCH BONDAGE OR, WORSE, ENSLAVEMENT  
BY HER PARENTS' HANDS?

AND WHAT WILL I BE ABLE TO ADVISE HER OF,  
WHEN HER GRANDFATHER OR UNCLES COME LOOKING  
FOR HER? SHE ONLY WRITES LETTERS IN AMHARIC.  
HOW DOES ONE SAY, NO, DON'T GO WITH THEM!  
THEY WANT TO SELL YOU INTO SLAVERY  
OR MARRY YOU OFF TO SOME OLD MAN.  
SIT DOWN AND STUDY YOUR ENGLISH SO YOU CAN COME  
TO AMERICA, WHERE YOU CAN BE EXPLOITED  
AMERICAN STYLE. TELL ME, WHY CAN ETHIOPIAN GIRLS  
NOT GROW UP IN PEACE IN ETHIOPIA? TELL ME,  
HOW CAN I SAY THAT IN AMHARIC.

*Will Reger*





# National Challenge to Improve

How <sup>easy</sup> easy it was to stand by and say nothing.

The last few children

stripped of their rights

Strange, almost paranoid way we sometimes behave.

Strange, almost paranoid way we sometimes behave.

He took a box, put it in a darker corner, and sat on it.

They were right to be afraid  
to be afraid.

the tired young eyes,

by the blank faces, eyes, and gray skin.  
the grayskin

—the survival of human dignity

impossible conditions, s

under

Pictures and information they gathered became weapons.

Some have

confronted

the life around them and  
and the life around them and

shared the truths they saw  
shared the truths they saw

with cheery optimism.

Reminding us of our common humanity.  
common huma

Raspy Jam

# S THE

*r*

Not fierce,  
barely erect in a hot, dusty breeze,  
panting full-tongued on the edge of the sky,  
where the sun shimmers the air over him,  
heating his fur, bending the air  
over where he squats.

He is free to run loose,  
find some shade and flee the sun,  
seek water, relief.

*a*

He has no duties,  
nothing to fetch or guard or attack, no reason  
to exist, except that he is the sixth in a litter,  
had a bitch mother, a feral father, and was taught  
and watched out for in the way of his kind—  
how to run, hide, hunt, growl, attack, or cower  
in the heat, or beg, recognize a friendly voice—  
though no one bears this glare with him.

Men and dogs have gone by without stopping  
to seek him out or hear his complaints.

*y*

All have gone by where he squats in the full sun,  
waiting to be dried out, desiccated at last,  
beyond the reach of mercy,  
beyond possession or ownership,  
beyond command or obedience,  
beyond any friendship with man,  
beyond the hunt for little lives to gobble down,  
beyond any reason  
to sit and stay or be any longer.

*Will Rager*

G o t

It's about time I go it alone,  
he said, as the storm shook the trees,  
and the song I was hearing burned on.

G o t

I can't wait until I feel good  
about this before I hear  
the highway will sing for me—

G o t

I hear that old road breathing  
every night now, **and** I know  
it can't live **much longer**.

G o t

*No Time*

The world moves, **you know;**  
**it moves** in every **direction,**  
**and I mean to be right**

**there with it, so we have no time**  
**to reconsider all our choices,**  
**and which right, which wrong:**

**the 'we' of 'us' can't bear that weight.**  
**Maybe we'll get lucky as we did**  
**when you found me or I you,**

**but then, remember, how we**  
**had no time to think about**  
**what we did when we did it.**

*Will Reger*

## EPILOGUE

The

**EMOTIVE**

**POWER** of

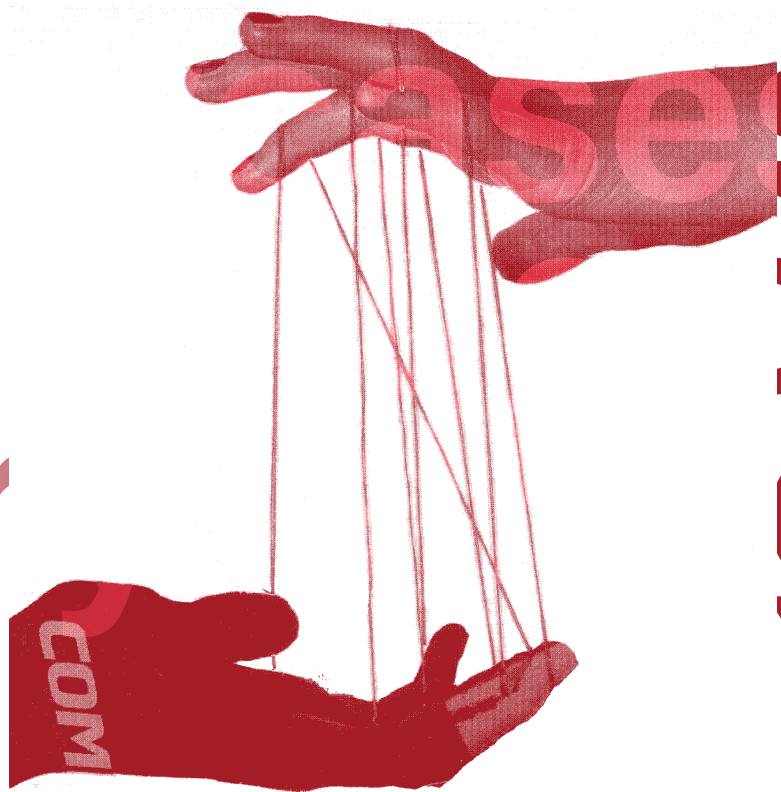
**Storytelling**

**Storytelling**

Stephen King's *The Body* explores the nature of storytelling through the grim adventure of four young boys. After the untimely death of his childhood friend, the narrator, Gordon LaChance is taken back to an experience they shared as kids; the time they went to see a dead body. **The boys began the journey naïvely enthusiastic, skipping on the railroad ties out of town, speculating about their future fame.** However, each twist and turn of the railroad tracks lead to the arousal of painful memories and complex emotions as the impending impact of their destination took hold. **Despite the challenges, the four boys found ways to cope: storytelling became crucial to their ability to process their intensely emotional experience.**

Layers of storytelling unfold throughout the novella, between the boys, through Gordon's recollection of events, and in the writing of *The Body* itself. **Ultimately, *The Body* showcases the value of storytelling by illustrating its emotive power as a means of coping with trauma and understanding the past.**

The Road  
shows  
the  
story  
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its  
power  
a means  
coping with



King sets the tone of the novella by expressing how difficult it is to communicate feelings and experiences “because words diminish them” (1). By doing so, he both diminishes the literal meaning of the words and amplifies the perceived impact of the story. For instance, Vern simply states, “This is a really good time,” while the boys were taking a break at the local dump (King 57). Although the phrase could be overlooked due to its simplicity, it proves anything but simple: “it seems to me now that there was more” (King 57). Each story, phrase, and word throughout the novella is imbued with subtle significance towards the values King is aiming to reflect upon. Thinking beyond basic understanding allows us, as the readers, to view storytelling in new and profound ways.



nd

ing

ories

As the plot progresses, tales of traumatic experiences accumulate between the boys. One of which, Teddy, had a bad break in life. **He had been on the receiving end of his dad's flashback induced temper, resulting in "two lumps of warm wax" for ears (King 4).** Despite that fact, Teddy was adamantly proud: "he stormed the beach on Normandy" (King 68). **To him, his father was a hero, a war veteran, someone to look up to.** It was a story his mind conjured to align with a more comforting narrative, helping him cope with an unresolved emotional wound and mask the real pain of his experience. **All it took was an impetuous altercation, and one diminutive word to force those feelings to the surface: "It was as if a great inner tidal wave had broken through" (King 72).** A "loony's son!" is what the man called Teddy (King 67). **The word "loony" was followed by "hard, violent bursts" of uncontrollable tears (King 72).** Storytelling allowed Teddy to cope with the traumatic events in his past, demonstrating how its value isn't inherent to being shared; at times, the most powerful stories are the ones we tell ourselves.

**Storytelling prompts the reflection of impactful experiences.**

The passing of Gordon's older brother, Danny, served as an emotional backdrop throughout the novella. *The Body*, although written by Stephen King, is from Gordon's perspective as he puts together the pieces of his past. An embedded short story, *Stud City*, portrays an "actual ugliness" towards women and foreboding parallels to Gordon's personal life, making the story "painfully derivative" (King 40). **He reflects on the effects storytelling has in his own life, preserving the version of himself that wrote it: "it was the first story I ever wrote that felt like my story . . . I can see the true face of Gordon LaChance" (King 41).** Putting his feelings down on paper, through the lens of an alternate character, allowed him to safely cope with the trauma in an environment where he had "imposed control" (King 41). **As Gordon 're-membered' the pieces of his childhood through writing *The Body*, he both preserved and developed a better understanding of his memories.** In the film adaptation, *Stand by Me*, directed by Rob Reiner, Gordon is interrupted by two young boys, his son and son's friend, in the final stages of his writing, which prompts a look of nostalgia: "I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve.

Jesus, does anyone?" (Stand by Me 1986). **The act of storytelling catalyzes reflection of influential experiences allowing a regained sense of control and emotional well-being.**

Stepping out of the imaginative world of *The Body*, Linda Badley identifies the similarities between Gordon and the novella's real-life author, Stephen King. **His father "disappeared—permanently," leaving behind his two-year-old son and a series of "weird tales" (1).** King utilizes storytelling to explore the mysteries of his past, in an attempt to put the pieces of his dis-membered memory back together. **Furthermore, as a child, King witnessed his friend get hit by an oncoming train.** In writing *The Body*, King delves into his personal experiences, demonstrating the value of storytelling as a means to understand the past. **When reflecting on the things he noticed about the body of Ray Brower, Gordon states, "—they bothered me then and they bother me now" (King 159).** From his perspective, the boy looked fine, no way a train hit him; likewise, King questioned the validity of watching his childhood friend get hit by a train. **Through the manifestation of *The Body*, authors both in and out of the novella were able to revisit and re-member distant memories, helping them cope with the past and better understand their present selves.**

At the close, *The Body* reveals the profound value of storytelling in new and meaningful ways. **By drawing on personal experiences, storytelling evokes deep emotional responses and sparks reflection.** Whether it be the stories we tell ourselves, record in journals, or share with others, narratives provide a lens to gain perspective and foster a better understanding of complex emotional traumas. ***The Body*, weaves together tales of traumatic experiences and nostalgic memories, illustrating the diverse and multifaceted effects of storytelling.** Despite an accumulation of challenges, storytelling provides a means to cope with trauma and provide tools to further understand the past.

*Raspy Jam*

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King, Stephen. *The Body*. New York: Scribner, 1982, 2018.



# THE CONTRIBUTORS

**ABBY PIERCE** is a sophomore at Clarke! Majoring in Art and Design & enjoy human- emotional art. Abigail loves books, walks outside, & hot mocha and chai lattes.

**ABIGAIL TAYLOR** is an author from South Florida with a passion for literature and travel. Her hobbies include crocheting, baking, and obsessing over Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.

**ADDISON ROBERTS** is in her second year at Clarke, where she is studying Graphic Design with a business minor. Addie enjoys the variety of classes she is taking at Clarke from printmaking to leadership.


**ALAYNA RODRIGUEZ** attends Schreiner University majoring in pre-vet and is an avid nature and animal lover. She is from Edinburg, Texas which is in southern Texas. She is a women's soccer player at Schreiner University where she is taking a literature class in which the professor Dr.Hudson has inspired her to submit to the Tenth Muse magazine. Her special interest in poetry and has led her to create some of her own poems.

**ALEC DOS SANTOS** is an International art student who is interested in all things abstract.

**ANA PAOLA MOLESTINA** is from Ecuador and currently resides in California. She holds a Master's degree in Spanish: Language and Literature, graduating with honors and receiving the Professional Promise Award. Also, she holds a Certificate of Achievement in Creative Writer's Studio receiving the Roger Ernest Creative Writing Scholarship. Her works have been published in various esteemed publications including Cathedral Tomada, El Cid, Furman 217, and Babelia. She has achieved notable recognition for her writing, having earned second place in the Scary Story Contest in both 2022 and 2020 at Cerritos College. Furthermore, she received an honorable mention in the Women's History Month Essay Contest in 2016, also from Cerritos College.

**ANGELINA BAUMAN** is a comic artist and storyteller who is mostly self-taught. She is a casual student and freshman at Clarke University.

**ADDISON ROBERTS** *Type Specimen*



**BREE NAYLEA**, a first-generation Mexican-American college graduate and an autistic individual, channels her experiences into vibrant multimedia art. Raised on the West Coast, she now calls the Midwest home. Her work explores themes of identity, emotion, and the human experience.

**BRETT STOUT** is an artist and writer originally from Atlanta, Georgia. He is a high school dropout and former construction worker turned college graduate and paramedic. His work has appeared in a vast range of diverse media, such as art and literature publications by NYU and Brown University.

**DAÉMIA FRANKLIN** aka Mia is an art major at Clarke University specializing in ceramics. Mia also enjoys doing photography as another art form.

**DAVID HARRIS** until 2003, David M. Harris had never lived more than fifty miles from New York City. Since then he has moved to Tennessee, acquired a daughter and a classic MG, and gotten serious about poetry. His work has appeared in *Pirene's Fountain* (and in *First Water*, the Best of *Pirene's Fountain* anthology), *The Pedestal*, and other places. His first collection of poetry, *The Review Mirror*, was published by Unsolicited Press in 2013.

**EMMA GRANT** is a senior Graphic Design major working up to her final senior project; through her journey, she has designed animal illustrations to self soothe and express her love for animals worldwide. Using watercolors she places any and all colors she sees in her subjects to give them an extra pop of life.

**JOHN GREY** is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *New World Writing*, *New English Review* and *Tenth Muse*. Latest books, "Between Two Fires," "Covert" and "Memory Outside The Head" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Amazing Stories* and *River and South*.

**JOHN TAVARES** born and raised in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, John Tavares is the son of Portuguese immigrants from Sao Miguel, Azores. Having graduated with Arts and Science from Humber College and Journalism from Centennial College,

he more recently earned a Specialized Honors BA in English Literature from York University. His short fiction has been featured in community newspapers, radio, and published in a variety of print and online journals and magazines in the US, Canada, and internationally. His many passions include journalism, literature, economics, photography, writing, and coffee, and he enjoys hiking and cycling.

**KATE KADLECK** is a licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT) and lifelong nesting doll collector. Apart from the Tenth Muse, her poetry can be found in The Indianapolis Review, The Garlic Press, and Persimmons. She spent her girlhood in a northern suburb of Chicago and her college years in Gambier, Ohio. She currently resides in a midcentury modern house in Dubuque with her fiancé, two dogs, four hens, and presumably a ghost or two.

**KIMBERLY MADURA** originally from Chicago, lives and writes from a cabin in the woods of Vermont. She is a social worker and poet.


**L. SHAPLEY BASSEN's** grandmother was a telegrapher on Wall Street a century ago who taught her to read and tapped messages to her in Morse Code. A New Yorker living in Rhode Island, she is a multi-published & prize-winning author of fiction, poetry, & drama.

**LYNN WHITE** lives in North Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net and a Rhysling Award.

**MICHAEL J. SHEPLEY** is a writer who lives and works in Sacramento, CA. Since 1997 he has had some 129 poems catch ink or pixel.

**MIMI OTTAVI** is an alum of Clarke University, graduating in 2020 with a BA in Communication and a minor in writing. During her time at Clarke, Mimi was an active member of the Tenth Muse staff, contributing to production. Mimi has made a recent effort to get back into writing regularly. She especially enjoys drafting free verse poetry and essays or reflections on books, music, and whatever else captures her attention.

the more recently earned a Specialized Honors BA in English Literature from York University. His short fiction has been featured in community newspapers, radio, and published in a variety of print and online journals and magazines in the US, Canada, and internationally. His many passions include journalism, literature, economics, photography, writing, and coffee, and he enjoys hiking and cycling.



**NICOLE HIRT** is a freelance writer based in South Florida. She is an editor at Living Waters Review, where several of her poems and prose have appeared in past issues. Her works have also appeared in The Bluebird Word. In her free time, she enjoys wandering through cemeteries, much to the confusion of the general public.

**ROB LUKE** is a graduate of the MFA in Creative Writing Program from Minnesota State University, Mankato. He teaches English at Delano High School in Minnesota. He lives on Lake Minnewashta, near the town of Excelsior, Minnesota, with his wife, Sara.

**ROSEMARY DUNN MOELLER** is author of "Long Term Mates Migrate Great Distances" and two chapbooks. Her poems have been published in The MacGuffin, Tenth Muse, Young Raven, Muleskinner, SNReview, Freshwater and many other journals. She writes to connect with others through images and ideas. She divides her time between the Dakota prairie and Cape Cod.

**SARA THEISEN** I am a Clarke student that will graduate in 2026. I found a love for Art when I was a child. I first learned Origami last year and now I use it as a form of self-care.

**SUNSHINE DUEHR** is a poet and performer from Dubuque, Iowa.

**TERRA MILLER** is a tired senior at Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, Florida. She has had poetry published in both Living Waters Review and Westmarch Literary Journal. She has had the opportunity to live across the states, including Aiea, Hawaii which is where she feels most at home. She is also one of seven siblings, all extremely competitive in games such as Settlers of Catan, Catchphrase, and Uno.

**TYLER NEWHOUSE** is a writer based in West Palm Beach Florida. He is currently pursuing a major in English at PBA university. He loves reading fantasy and mythology genres such as The Odyssey and The Lord of the Rings.

**WILL REGER** has worked as a poet over the last 12 years. He has published on-line and in-print in the US and the UK. He has read his work in assisted living communities, classrooms in the K-14 ages, correctional facilities as an invited guest, local taverns, and public libraries. The city of Urbana has granted him two arts grants in support of significant projects encouraging poetry in the community. He is the Inaugural Poet Laureate (emeritus) for the city of Urbana, IL, and has published 2 volumes of poetry. He also plays a wide variety of flutes for amusement.



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