

# TRILLIUM

MMXXIV



# Trillium

Issue 45, 2024

The *Trillium* is the literary and visual arts publication of the Glenville State University Department of Language & Literature. The *Trillium* welcomes submissions and correspondence from Glenville State University students, alumni, faculty, and staff, and our extended creative community.

Jonathan Minton, Faculty Advisor  
Marjorie Stewart, Faculty Co-Advisor  
Jesse Kargol, Art Editor  
Jordyn Henthorn, Literary Editor  
Madeline Tusing-Knight, Literary Editor  
Sunni Moore, Literary Editor  
Emmalyn Boelter, Literary Editor  
Justin Tusing -Knight, Literary Editor

Page Design by Jordyn Henthorn  
Cover Design by Jesse Kargol

The *Trillium* acquires printing rights for all accepted materials for the annual issue of the *Trillium*. All rights not listed revert to authors and artists: (1) The contents of the *Trillium* will be digitally archived, and (2) the *Trillium* may use published work for promotional materials, including cover designs, flyers, and posters.

The *Trillium* would like to extend a special thank you to Professor Chris Cosner and the Department of Fine Arts for their support for the 2024 *Trillium* Art Show.

*Trillium*  
Department of Language & Literature  
Glenville State University  
200 High Street, Glenville WV 26351  
Trillium@glenville.edu  
www.glenville.edu/departments/trillium



# Contents

---

## Poetry

Nancy Corbitt.....	4
Liz Matory.....	5
Jonathan Minton.....	6
Deron Haught.....	7
Brooke Storm.....	8
Allison Boggs.....	9
Kaylie Hunter.....	10
Michael Lee Johnson.....	13
Porter Wills.....	16
Abby Hudson.....	17
Jacob Bonds.....	18
John C. Priestley II.....	19
Jordyn Henthorn.....	21
Sunni Moore.....	23
Madeline Tusing-Knight.....	24
Jacob Dale Thompson.....	26
Emmalyn Boelter.....	28
Melissa Gish.....	29

## Visual Art

Melissa Gish.....	30
Liz Matory.....	31
Megan Snodgrass.....	32
Angelina Randolph.....	33
KA Wright.....	34
Duane Chapman.....	35
Sarah Normant-West.....	36
Gordon West.....	37
Marjorie Stewart.....	38
Christin Fanelli.....	39
Kaitlyn Warren.....	40
Joshua Carr.....	41

Jonah Rucker.....	42
Mara Jarvis.....	43
Akasha Brown.....	44
Megan Drenk.....	45
Jesse Kargol.....	46
Jeremy Taylor.....	47
Autumn Moyers.....	48
Charlie Bauman.....	49
Michelle McMunn.....	50
Rebecca Walter.....	51
Jennifer Wenner.....	52
Emily Rosales.....	53
Sadie Hill.....	54
Jazzmin White.....	55
Ian Dawson.....	56
Chelsea Adkins.....	57
Claire Atkinson.....	58
Samantha Chambers.....	59
Heather Swaggerty.....	60
Daniel Hinger.....	61
Emily Nesselrotte.....	62
Emily Garrett.....	63
Veronica Rowse.....	64

## Prose

Veronica Rowse.....	65
Rodrigo Haro.....	84
Allison Boggs.....	92
Jacob Bonds.....	95
Mason O'Dell.....	101
Adlai Chapman.....	104
Jordyn Henthorn.....	107
Sunni Moore.....	108
Madeline Tusing-Knight.....	112
Contributors' Notes.....	115

# Nancy Corbitt

## Off to the Forest

---

Off to the forest I go. And what shall I see?

A fairy? A gnome? Or a hobbit home?

The ferns and tall trees? A little pixie?

A mushroom house? Maybe a tiny mouse?

I shall find me a spot with some moss

So I can sit and see,

Whatever comes out to greet me.

A an owl upon high singing “Hoot Hoot,”

A small green leprechaun running to hide his loot,

A talking tree with it’s face in the knot,

A tiny troll scurries under brush so not to get caught.

I shall walk back to my home

As here is where my new friends must stay.

I’ll come back to visit them on another day.

# Liz Matory

## Moments in question

---



---

### DAUGHTER OF THE MOST HIGH

---

**brave** spoiled clear damaged vulnerable **passionate**  
Strong Beautiful meaningless seen  
**loud** invisible cherished damaged  
**Am I?** A slut **powerful** feared **I am**  
wanted Lovable a queen  
respected Attractive misunderstood  
An idiot FAT valued smart  
an accident important heard  
**sensitive** **obnoxious** invisible

---

### DREAM OF MY ANCESTORS

---



© 2024 Elizabeth Matory

# Jonathan Minton

## *Frankenstein* (1931)

---

He was born into a world of Caligari trees,  
their shadows broken over cemetery angels,  
the watchtowers falling  
into ruin. Rituals keep it moving –  
like letters from home, or those tentative  
first steps, the murmur of speech.  
So he held flowers, not the whip, but Maria's death  
was inevitable. He turns to the camera in grief,  
and the camera moves closer. We can see  
the work of his creator, the head flattened  
out of necessity, the bolts  
to receive their spark – as if we could share  
his anger, or name what has never  
been named, as if we could think of it as ours.

\*

If there is anything of value, it isn't to be found  
in his world, with his iron-braced body,  
his strange heart and liver. His mouth is a cave,  
his tongue a dead fish. How can these bones still live?  
There is a fire in the hollow of his skull,  
but the villagers demand blood, and he can't speak  
of anything else, so he passes in silence, stepping  
over each irrelevant fact as if it were ash.

\*

He is not the promise of resurrection –  
he is the familiar compound ghost –  
the machine logic of *yes* or *no* – the body's logic  
of *self* and *object* – as when Prometheus  
shaped the human form with fire – as when Zeus  
stuffed Dionysus into his thigh – or the moment Adam  
finished his naming and turned to another –  
turning from heaven – and claimed her as his own –  
one hand should hold another – Victor will never look  
back to the first idea – gears turn the windmill as it burns.

# Deron Haught

## Algorithm

---

What's your algorithm?  
Is it your new religion?  
Is it something I can receive?  
Is it ethereally free?  
Is it for the easily deceived?

What's your algorithm?  
Can I see it on television?  
I can see behind your eyes  
Decode the X's from the Y's  
And trace the trail of lies

What's your algorithm?  
What's the next big decision?  
What's the next thing I should care about?  
Can you convince me without a doubt?  
Or leave me to do without?

What's your algorithm?



# Brooke Storm

## I Want to Be a Man

---

Today, I'm sad I don't have a dick.

I want to be told that I'm a good dad for babysitting my child.

I want to be able to hand my child to my significant other when I need two hands

- a break -

even if they're cleaning, cooking, or have their own hands full.

I want to be able to walk past a dirty house, ignore the dishes, wait until I'm asked to do them

- thank you -

be told I'm appreciated.

I want to only wake up at night to make sure my significant other calms the baby.

I want my only responsibility to be earning a paycheck.

I want breaks from my duties when I slept on my back wrong.

I want to not feel bad for doing the bare minimum, getting angry, or wanting more.

I want to be a man.

# Allison Boggs

## My Mistress's Façade

---

Immortality, a timeless mistress  
Where Wilde's and Poe's hearts do rest.  
With words so grand and where shadows sing,  
It puts my soul into a trance,  
fixating words piercing my soul like a siren song.  
Each word they wrote caused me to ponder life's eternal hand.  
Wilde's charm brings love, and brightness to life; adds to my fickle thoughts of immortality,  
Poe's sorrow and fear produce a haunting symphony; seeds of doubt grow in my soul.  
As they are tiny spirits of consciousness sitting on my shoulders,  
Trying to fight the truths of her possibilities,  
Her ivory hand caressed my face  
As if I were in a lover's embrace,  
Her silvery voice settled my doubts.  
Wilde, the devil on my shoulder, backs her whispers,  
Saying immortality is like a piece of art, a Grecian statue,  
And it should be embraced fully by mind, heart, and soul.  
Poe distains it and believes that immortality is a curse,  
And that its outcome is grim and tainted with cruelty.  
I ignored Poe's cries and clung to my Mistress.  
now after years of eating her fruit,  
I understand Poe's unheard Lament.  
I regret my choice as I stand over their graves.  
Her ugly face of truth was hidden under porcelain beauty,  
And I the fool who fell for it all.  
So, all that hear my mistress's siren song  
Deafen your ears and hide your soul.  
she reaches out with piercing nails and a starving gaze.  
For she is a cruel hag that feeds off your misery to keep her beautiful facade to trick the next naïve  
soul.

# Kaylie Hunter

## Drug Addiction

---

Losing a parent when you're young is weird.  
As years go on you start to forget  
You forget  
their voice  
their face  
As the memories fade as you grow older  
Soon you will have lived longer without them than with them.  
To make it easier on yourself you blame them for leaving.  
You will always be that person who never really had parents.  
No parents to comfort you.  
No parents at school activities  
No parents at graduation  
No parents on the holidays  
You're still forgetting who they were.  
But you don't want to forget like everyone else.  
I want their memory to live on even though they may not deserve it because  
Losing a parent when you're young is weird.

# Kaylie Hunter

## Apologizing too late

---

You come to me apologizing, saying you're sorry,  
Yet you know not what to be sorry for.  
For what you have done will cause me torment,  
Suffering for the rest of my days, a relentless storm.

Suffering that brought me to a dark place,  
Where shadows dwell and secrets abound.  
In this dark place, I have found solace,  
Embracing shadows, their whispers profound.

These shadows, they leach my joy and happiness,  
Constant companions, forever by my side.  
Watching, lurking, their presence relentless,  
Reminding me of the past where I tried to hide.

You are ignorant, thinking I'll blissfully accept,  
An apology for actions you can't comprehend.  
For I am not angry with you, my friend,  
But the shadows know your deeds, the shadows won't relent.

They were with me in my darkest hour,  
Witnesses to the pain and scars I bear.  
They are spiteful, harboring resentment and power,  
For they know the truth, the weight I must bear.

So, your apology may fall on deaf ears,  
For the shadows speak louder than your words.  
They dance with me through my darkest fear,  
Their presence a reminder of wounds that never heal.

Apologies may hold little meaning in their domain,  
For the shadows, they know the depths of my despair.  
But I'll forgive you, my friend, in my own refrain,  
And hope one day the shadows will no longer be there.

# Kaylie Hunter

## One Life

---

One life, a fleeting moment, we're granted to hold,  
One childhood, a precious gift, so pure and bold.

But alas, I've never known that innocent glee,  
For my chance was stolen, snatched mercilessly.

Like a bird's feathers, clipped ere it learns to soar,  
My childhood was shattered, fragmented to the core.  
Bits of joy, bits of peace, all chipped away,  
Leaving only scars, haunting me day after  
day.

Etched into my spirit, these wounds forever remain,  
A testament to the pain, never to be the same.  
Oh, how I long for the bliss I'll never retrieve,  
For my stolen youth, I grieve.

No more laughter, no more carefree delight,  
Only the echoes of sorrow, lingering through the night.  
Oh, what I'd give to reclaim that stolen time,  
To rewrite the narrative of my youthful prime.

But alas, the scars are etched, deep and profound,  
A lifetime reminder of the innocence unfound.  
I'll never have another chance at that tender age,  
Forever marked by this cruel and unjust stage.

One life, one childhood, dreams forever lost,  
Yet, I'll rise above the pain, no matter the cost.  
For in my journey forward, I'll find strength anew,  
And create a life that's mine, despite what I've been through.

# Michael Lee Johnson

## I Age

---

Arthritis and aging make it hard,  
I walk gingerly, with a cane, and walk  
slow, bent forward, fear threats,  
falls, fear denouement—  
I turn pages, my family albums  
become a task.  
But I can still bake and shake,  
sugar cookies, sweet potato,  
lemon meringue pies.  
Alone, most of my time,  
but never on Sundays,  
friends and communion,  
United Church of Canada.  
I chug a few down,  
love my Blonde Canadian Pale Ale,  
Copenhagen long cut a pinch of snuff.  
I can still dance the Boogie-woogie,  
Lindy Hop in my living room,  
with my nursing care home partner.  
Aging has left me with youthful dimples,  
but few long-term promises.

# Michael Lee Johnson

## Crypt in the Sky

---

Order me up,  
no one knows  
where this crypt in the sky  
like a condo on the 5th floor  
suite don't sell me out  
over the years;  
please don't bury me beneath  
this ground, don't let me decay  
inside my time pine casket.  
Don't let me burn to cremate  
skull last to turn to ashes.  
Treasure me high where no one goes,  
no arms reach, stretch.  
Building for the Centuries  
then just let it fall.  
These few precious dry bones  
preserved for you, sealed in the cloud  
no relocation is necessary,  
no flowers need to be planted,  
no dusting off that dust each year,  
no sinners can reach this high.  
Jesus' heaven, Jesus' sky.

Note: Dedicated to the passing of beloved Katie Balaskas.

# Michael Lee Johnson

## Willow Tree Poem

---

Wind dancers  
dancing to the  
willow wind,  
lance-shaped leaves  
swaying right to left  
all day long.  
I'm depressed.  
Birds hanging on-  
bleaching feathers  
out into  
the sun.



# Porter Wills

## On this day of days long past

---

On this day of days long past,  
This time of auld lang sine,  
I find myself holding to,  
What is newly mine.

Loving that was loved and past,  
Giving and save my life,  
Saved again with love renewed,  
My new found wife.

The hopeful sun rising again,  
Bringing wonderful new days,  
Being loved and loving again,  
In treasured and renewing ways.

# Abby Hudson

## DOD: Day of Death

---

My memory flashes back to that dismal moment. I remember getting the word about the circumstances from someone who failed to be close to me. The text. The one that claimed, "I didn't want to be the one to tell you this but..." The one that could change everything, I read repeatedly. My knees buckled under the weight of my fear—a murder, something so terrible it had to be unreal. I was overcome by my fixated obsession with the message. So, I sped off in my somewhat reliable car. Faster than light, navigating every turn and patch of dark asphalt without regard for whether the vehicle needed a rest. Angry and a doubter of what the truth was. I hurried forward, hoping it was all a farce. I recall driving at such speed that I wasn't even sure whether I had stopped the car when I arrived at my destination. After I practically raced out of the vehicle, my head being in all sorts of places was now centered when I received the response, "I'm sorry." It turned out that I was indeed in that dreadful moment. The moment of knowing that someone is missing from your life, and you can't find them again. Ever. A sense of profound loss and grief. The sensation of darkness taking over a portion of your heart. About twenty people, whose hearts ached as much as mine, were at my destination. Real life had departed. And so, we celebrated. We celebrated the gift of life, knowing that the one who had died would not want us to be consumed by grief. We celebrated for him, for the hero we all knew he was. We all drank to forget, and I embraced remembering how one person's passing can unite an entire group. Everyone was engulfed by alcohol and despair. I drank a lot that day, and my companions attempted to force me to go to sleep, but my restless heart refused to settle. I don't recall much except that the period of intense melancholy was over, and ironically death brought everyone together. I left the celebration at some point and the day ended early for me. I was driven to another location, where I got a full meal, hydration, and a hazy night's sleep. Upon the moment of waking up, I was at a loss of explanations, and then it all soaked in again. The death. The truth. And all I could recall was how I felt at that moment. Nothing but everything.

# Jacob Bonds

## Decay Without Death

---

In the algid caress of moonlight's graceful touch,  
Unveiling the world ever so softly.

    A glint of steel, painted pure as snow for a cenotaph,  
Bathed in a ghostly glow, solitary without an owner.  
    Cocoon of sorrow and dread culminating into a tragedy,  
    The soul eclosing, cruelly decisive and swift.

With absence of reality, my mind evades me,  
    The chariot of nightmares was upon me, many a night it stayed.  
Lack of footprints, tracks for the tires, and any activity,  
A somber sight for sore eyes, torturous in a leisurely manner.  
    A cascade of shadow, obscuring all possibilities,  
    With a heart, pounding away a cacophony of panic.

    Looming, against my better judgement,  
Just to satiate morbid curiosity and set my mind at ease.  
Driver side...  
    Was nothing, nothing at all,  
    Just a remnant of grief, and nothing more.

# John C. Priestley II

## Wayward Wildflowers

---

### I.

Behold! The purple coneflower by the path,  
glistening from a highland springtime bath,  
the goldenrod that blankets the field  
with golden sunshine color sweetly sealed,  
Turk's cap lily lends a spectacular theme  
to an afternoon naturalist's daytime dream,  
the vibrant bee-balm's color blazes bright  
and commands our attention at the sight.

### II.

In the lowlands we find wild bleeding hearts,  
an example of Nature's floral arts,  
rhododendron prefers acidic soil  
to ease its growth and flowering toil,  
flame azalea sets the field on fire  
with beauty that is bound to inspire,  
tiny sundew in the bog is king  
of all the insects that fly on wing.

### III.

Sunflowers aptly earn their name  
and bolster forests alluring fame,  
bird-foot violets inhabit the floor,  
painted with dainty colors galore,  
the wide-ranging Virginia bells blue  
offer sky-blue clusters in delightful view,  
from white, to pink, lavender, purple red,  
the white trillium raises a three-petal head.

#### IV.

Some said to resemble a monkey's face,  
by a river is the monkeyflowers' place,  
wide leaved joe-pye weed a haven for bees,  
they sway and please on an afternoon breeze,  
New England aster is also found here,  
a tall perennial that brings great cheer,  
harperella you may never see,  
because of the construction of you and me.  
Cherish wildflowers while you can,  
subject them not to ways of man.

# Jordyn Henthorn

## grief

---

your face is still etched into my mind, dull and gray as you were hooked to the dozen machines trying to keep you alive

i can still hear the faint beeping of the heart monitor and how it suddenly stopped the moment you found the strength to let go

i remember how my mother swallowed her grief so that she could help me process mine and the eerie calm of my grandmother as my aunts walked her to the waiting room where my family anticipated the news

i remember nights spent crying in my mother's lap, i always hated to think how lonely you must be, separated from the land of the living

there was an emptiness that haunts me even now, maybe part of me was buried with you on that cold november day

a decade has now gone by and still i struggle in grief's endless stronghold.

# Jordyn Henthorn

## Boggs Pizza

---

A group of men gather in the corner to watch the Chiefs play against the 49ers. They jump to their feet at each point earned, shaking the tables and grabbing onto one another. In another corner of the room, an elderly couple watches Fox News at a high volume, arguing about the genocide on the Gaza strip. Their shouts drown out the words “Happy Birthday” being sung across the way, at a table decorated for a sweet 16 party. Pink tablecloths and streamers plaster the corner, as people swarm the table to catch a glimpse of the birthday girl in all her glory. I wonder if they notice her disappointed look as she blows out her candles.

# Sunni Moore

## Paint

---

When the weather is fair and  
I am too drunk to stand, ask me  
why I no longer paint. Through the  
tears and laughter, I'll tell you about  
the death of my childhood all the same.

Scattered paint brushes, scribbled paper, and  
broken canvases, a complete mirror of the  
place that I once called home. It is here that a  
piece of me died, too much like my father to survive.  
The older I get, the more I find myself  
becoming all the things that I've run from.  
Like Van Gogh, I too have my own yellow paint,  
continuing my search for the love I had as a kid.  
So, ask me why I no longer paint.



# Madeline Tusing-Knight

## Green

---

My favorite color is green.  
The color of whispering willow trees  
The color of overgrown grass  
The color of nature and life and love.

My favorite color is green.  
The color of unyielding peace,  
The color of optimism and of hope.

His favorite color is green.  
The color of algae rising to the surface after a storm  
The color of deep, unforgiving forests.  
The color of movement and of pleasure.

His favorite color is green.  
The color of seasickness,  
The color of discomfort, uneasiness,  
And the color of restlessness.

# Madeline Tusing-Knight

## Another Universe

---

in another universe, my mother would be a nurse.  
my father would be a writer.

my mother would never have left home at fifteen and fought with men much stronger than her,  
who wanted more from her than any child could give.

and my father would've said no,  
he would've walked away from the temptations that the world threw at him with his head held high  
and his cap thrown higher.  
and he would've never met my mother.

in another universe, they are both unapologetically free.  
free from us, from each other,  
free, but together.

in another universe, i would not exist.  
and i couldn't be happier.

# Jacob Dale Thompson

## Divine

---

Divine, what do you see when you look at me?

Cascading smoke from my lungs?

Opalescent light in my eyes?

My sense of reality?

Divine, I'm burnt out, just like the cigarette that fell to the floor from your lips.

Would I forget everything?

Even if people knew me, and what I thought, it was nice to know you.

In this fever dream, I'd literally die for you.

What do you see when you look at me, Divine?

# Jacob Dale Thompson

## Photographs of the Same People

---

We are tired, but we are trying. We are just stupid kids. Nothing we say or do makes sense, everything we are trying, fails. We're wasting time. We don't even know where to start, and every time we think we're going to succeed, everything falls beneath our feet. Our faces, covered in pathetic smiles, as we're told countless times "To be thoughtful, productive, engaged, and responsible citizens who contribute to the well-being of their community, state, nation, and world." Our problems aren't being addressed, our concerns can be heard, but only heard. We want what's best, even when everyone is on the same side, but it's like we're fighting in a constant state of exhaustion, and there's nothing for us if we win.

# Emmalyn Boelter

## Winifred's Aria

---

Here I tremble, between life and love.  
Love and Life.  
There can only be one.  
I see no other way  
Than to love and be damned  
Or to live and damn myself!

To live without love?  
Is this not the life of the Devil  
My mother threatens will claim me?  
To love without life?  
Is this not the natural tragedy of romance  
Born from poets?

If I beseech my soul in want of the answer  
It comes simply.  
My love does not need life,  
For life is where my love will die.  
My soul sings, death is where love lies.  
Death is my answer.

I will take part in Olivia's haunt  
As I join the spirits of this house.  
My matrimony with death  
Will become my union with her.  
Now is the time,  
For love to lay claim on my life.

# Melissa Gish

## The Artist on Lac qui Parle

---

He will sit alone sometimes  
for hours and compose

their lives in ink: blue  
sedge and Norway pine,

cattails, pintails, wide-  
winged Canada geese,

and the great blue herons:  
stoic and silent—

sentinels in their towering  
cottonwood turrets,

poised at the remnants  
of branch and mud—while

below them the milkweeds  
have gone to seed: slender

priests bent under October's  
breeze, tufts of white hair

blowing over their hollow  
faces. They bless this place.

# Melissa Gish

Elegance in Blue

---



**Liz Matory**  
Untitled for Now

---





# Megan Snodgrass

Blight

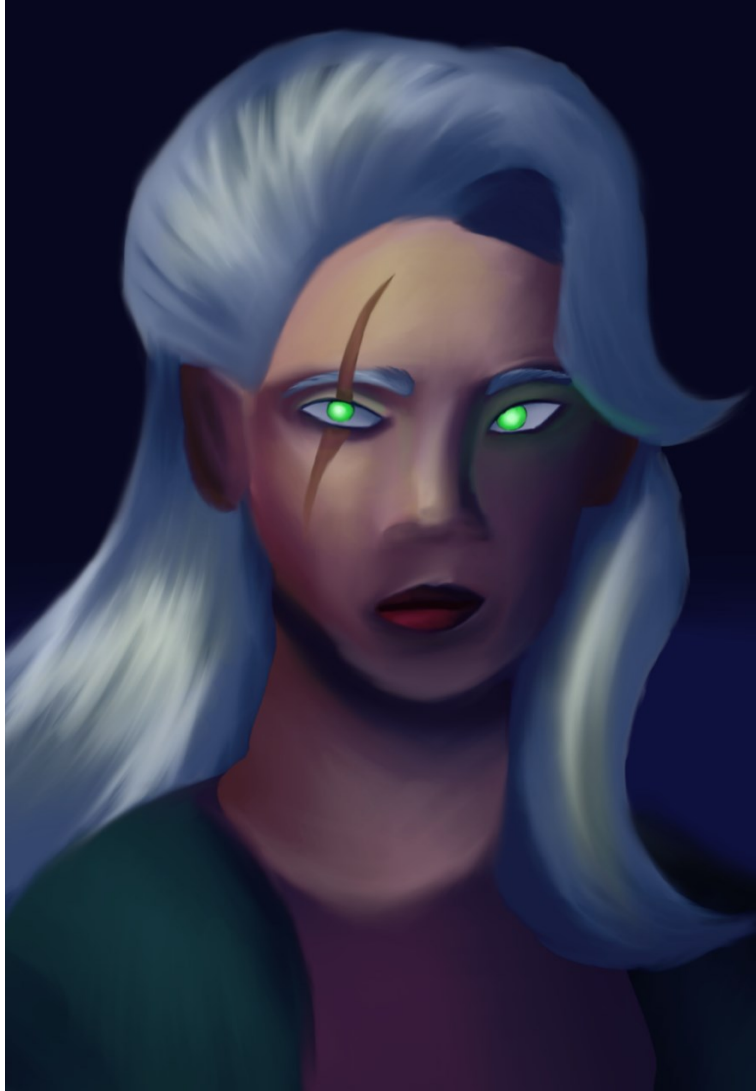
---



# Angelina Randolph

Untitled

---



# KA Wright

Observe

---



# Duane Chapman

## Iron Whiskey

---



# Sarah Normant – West

Cartoonist Eye of the Robey

---



# Gordon West

Dr. Strange in Neon

---



# Marjorie Stewart

## La Tour Eiffel

---



# Christin Fanelli

## Syncope

---





# Kaitlyn Warren

Golden Ichor

---



# Joshua Carr

Scream

---



# Jonah Rucker

Bob's Unto Something

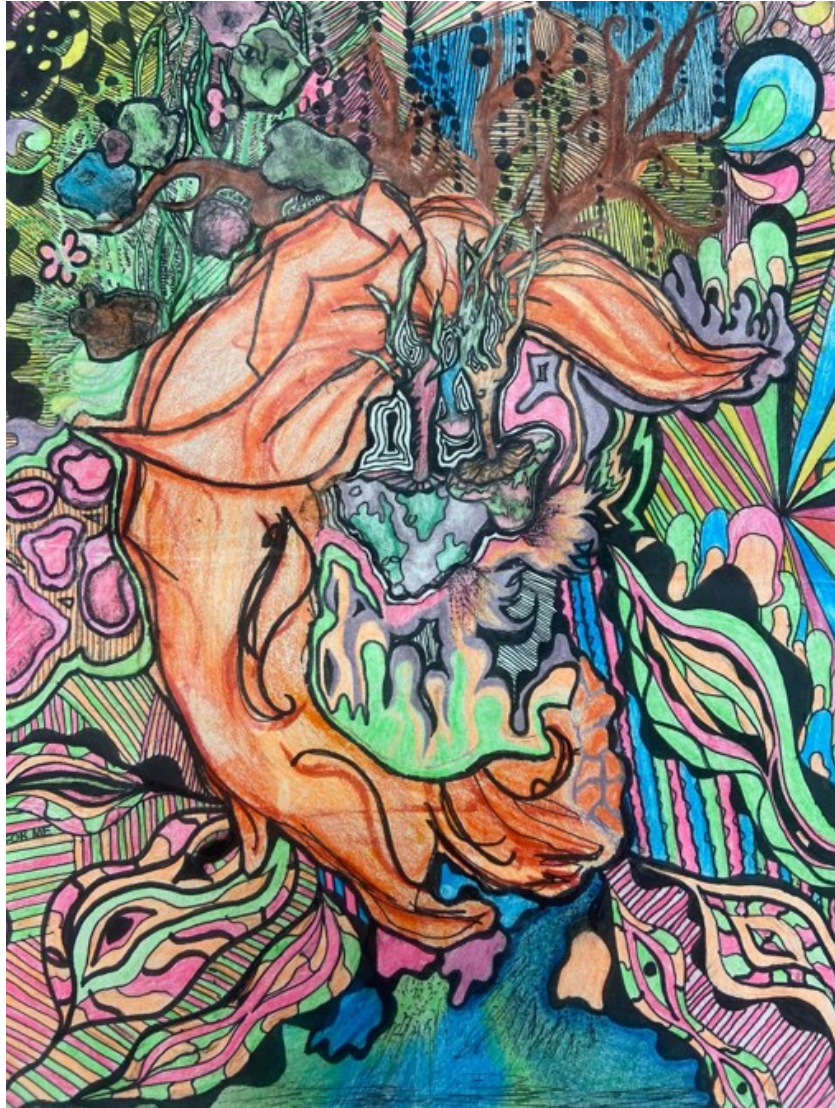
---



**Mara Jarvis**

Untitled Abstract

---



# Akasha Brown

Pop Art Self Portrait

---



# Megan Drenk

## The Fairy Ring

---



# Jesse Kargol

Fabricator

---



Jeremy Taylor

Untitled

---





# Autumn Moyers

What's the Moon Made Of

---



# Charlie Bauman

Untitled

---



**Michelle McMunn**  
Flowing River

---



# Rebecca Walter

Flying

---



# Jennifer Wenner

Jayden's Helm and Gloves

---



# Emily Rosales

De America



# Sadie Hill

## Study of Sunflowers

---



# Jazzmin White

## Scarecrow

---





# Ian Dawson

Nature's Yellow

---



# Chelsea Adkins

## Untitled



# Claire Atkinson

## Seasonal Changes

---



# Samantha Chambers

It's a Boat

---



**Heather Swaggerty**

Kachow Chow

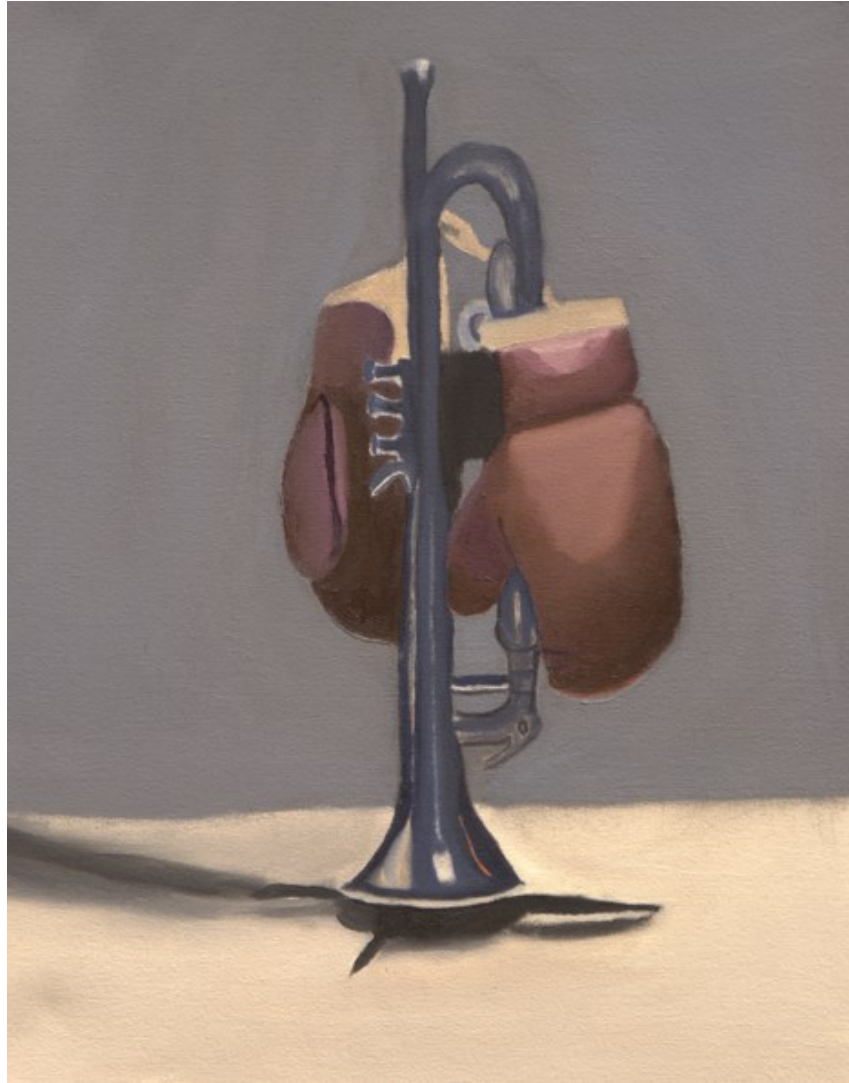
---



# Daniel Hinger

A Man of Many Talents

---



# Emily Nesselrotte

## The Prey

---



**Emily Garrett**

Fox

---





# Veronica Rowse

## Manatee and Calf

---



# Veronica Rowse

## Ichnite

---

When Janelle was seven, visiting her aunt up in New Jersey, she went to the Please Touch Museum in Haddonfield. This was at the height of her dinosaur phase, and she was ecstatic to go and visit the town where they found the first virtually complete dinosaur skeleton, the *Hadrosaurus foulkii*.

Janelle impatiently posed for pictures with her brother and cousins in front of dinosaur models, years later the picture of all of them curled into the tracks would become her favorite. At the end of the presentation, the museum guide tricked them all into touching real coprolite,

When the demonstration was over, Janelle approached the speaker. The little old lady was humming to herself cheerfully and packing her presentation materials into a cart. She looked like she had somewhere else to be, but Janelle tugged her shirt anyway.

“Excuse me ma’am, can I ask you some more questions about dinosaurs?”

The woman turned around, her eyes ridiculously magnified behind her thick lenses.

“Sure dear, but just a couple. My son is picking me up soon.” She started walking towards a storage area, wheeling the cart away.

She walked rapidly for such a tiny, creaky looking woman. Janelle had to run to keep up. “Have you ever touched a real fossil? Not just coprolite,” Janelle asked, wrinkling her nose.

The woman chuckled. “Yes, but only once. They don’t like people touching true old things very often, because our hands are so inherently” - she caught the look on Janelle’s face and tried to find a simpler word - “naturally dirty that we could break down the fossils! All the ones you’ve touched today aren’t very old, or rare, or are just replicas.”

Janelle was a little disappointed but kind of understood. It was like how she wasn’t supposed to use glass dishes yet, because they were fragile and her hands weren’t super steady or strong yet.

She chattered a little longer, and followed the woman to the front door, where they waited for her son to show up. Each question was answered patiently and with detail, and it made Janelle feel very special.

“What’s the best type of fossil?” Was the last thing Janelle asked before her aunt found her, flustered and scared at losing a child.

They left the museum immediately as punishment, though Janelle felt like it wasn't really her fault. She wasn't the one who lost a child, after all.

"Look up ichnites, dear! They're really quite informative!" The old lady called after the group. Janelle didn't answer, because at that second she started bawling in anger, and was grumpy for several days after.

Years later in 6th grade science, Janelle finally found out the spelling (iknitez and other such spellings seven-year-old Janelle had come up with had gotten her nowhere) and scoured the internet for more information. The joy of discovery carried her for days. She had, of course, seen molds of dinosaur tracks before, but finally figuring out what that lady had said put Janelle over the moon. She begged her parents to take her to the Dinosaur Footprints Reservation in Massachusetts. The family went for a week that summer.

The footprints were shallow but humongous. Janelle was fascinated, thinking about paleontologists decades before who had used these prints to prove that dinosaurs lived in herds and packs.

However, like most things that a person loves when they are twelve, her interest in dinosaurs faded to a fondness and a trove of trivia in the back of her mind. Five years later, trying to find a summer job and reviewing precalculus occupied her mind. Junior year had been hard, so Janelle didn't intend to lose momentum.

And then her Nana fell and nearly broke her hip while walking in an environmental protest.

That gave Janelle's dad enough ammunition to finally convince Nana to move in with them. Her parents immediately started the renovation process on their house. It wasn't very accessible yet and Nana had insisted upon having her own room and bathroom. Meanwhile, Janelle was voluntold to go stay with Nana and 'assist' her over the summer.

"Don't know why they think I need a minder. I ain't a spring chicken but that doesn't mean I'm in the cooking pot yet!" Nana harrumphed when Janelle arrived at her door. Still, they hugged. "Doesn't mean I'm unhappy to see you, girl."

"Of course! Who else would help you pack up in August!" They both grinned wryly.

She settled into her dad's old room, exhausted from the 8 hour drive. Baseball posters from the 90s hung faded on the walls, but that seemed to be the last trace of her dad's childhood. Shelves full of books, carefully labeled rocks, bones and other odds and ends Nana found in the woods were the main decoration now. A Swallow-Tailed Kite feather sat in a jar at the top of a shelf illuminated by the sunset coming through the window, in what was clearly supposed to be the pinnacle of the collection. Janelle

reminisced about playing with the rabbit and fox skulls when she was younger, talking through the Briar Rabbit stories she was told from both sets of grandparents. Usually, she would somehow involve a dinosaur. She was always allowed to play with the specimens as long as she was gentle.

So Janelle spent the rest of May with her Nana, quickly finding a job at the local Foodworld for some spending money and the employee discount. She flirted with a coworker, but didn't start anything serious.

On sunny days off, she'd wander the hills, practicing nature sketches, and sometimes Nana would join her. On rainy days, she'd drive Nana to the library for some new books and sketch Nana's collection of specimens.

Soon, the baseball posters were crowded out by her art, and Nana started fussing about sending them into a scientific illustration contests. Janelle hadn't decided on a college major yet, but when she researched scientific illustration, her heart skipped a beat. Maybe her old interests weren't that far back in her mind after all.

Janelle found a couple universities that offered the degree and started applying. Her precalculus studies slipped a bit, but all in all the summer was turning out pretty nice. May turned into June, and the rain stopped. Janelle still often drove Nana to the library.

Around mid-June, Nana was doing Janelle's hair when she asked something strange.

Janelle could put her own hair into cornrows, but she liked it when someone else did it instead. "You all do it neater," she'd say. "I can't see what I'm doing, and sometimes the hairs come loose or the rows are crooked. And besides, you're cheaper than a salon."

The real reason was that she enjoyed the gentle scratchiness of someone she loved playing with her hair. It hurt to have each strand pulled so tight, but being close with her mom or her friends or in this case, Nana, was comforting. They'd put on a movie they knew the ending to and just chitchat.

"Girl, I have a question for you. Are you off the morning after solstice?"

"Depends, what day is it?"

"You don't know?" Nana clicked her tongue, and Janelle couldn't tell if it was because she thought Janelle was silly for not knowing or because she didn't know off the top of her head either. After a moment, Nana said, "The solstice is Tuesday. So are you off Wednesday?"

Normally she wouldn't be, but she switched shifts with Jason so he could go to a concert last week. "Yeah, actually. Why, what's up?"

"It's a surprise!" Janelle saw Nana's eyes crinkle in the mirror on the opposite wall. "That night will be very special, so don't make any plans!"

"Okay, Nana." She pulled out her phone.

If Nana was showing her something at night, it had to be something to do with the sky, right? She googled 'night sky june 21', but all she got were explanations about solstices and the star charts from last year.

Nana abruptly yanked her head back, pulling Janelle out of her thoughts. "Now, now, girl, you won't find anything on the internet about this. It's a local, old thing, and why I was protesting the changes to the bridge in the first place."

Janelle tried to turn her head to look at Nana and then remembered herself. "I thought it was for some ... mollusk's habitat? Isn't the building company contracted to enlarge the bridge known for not being very cautious? More rust in the river and all that?"

"Well, yes," Nana dithered. "But I and a few others had an extra reason. You'll see. Now keep your head still, girl! You aren't a child anymore, you can sit still. I've seen you do it!"

The next couple of days, Janelle snooped around the riverbed beneath the bridge, under the guise of picking up trash. There was a ton of broken glass, which made throwing it into the thin trash bag and touching it with her gloves all the more annoying. Otherwise, she didn't find much, just a couple feral cats, a lost dog (she reunited him with the owners), and one pissy lady who decided Janelle was much too close to her yard and watched her for the rest of the afternoon through her window.

She drew a bunch of sketches in the cool shade of the bridge though, so she considered it a win. Whatever Nana was hiding, Janelle supposed she'd have to wait.

The day of the solstice was stocking day, which meant she woke up at 4:30 am to get to the store at 5 to unload the produce and supply trucks. Waking up that early was disgusting and a crime against humanity, but at least the store was quiet for the two hours before they actually opened. Then, she saw the usual line waiting outside the door at 6:55, and chuckled darkly to herself. The only thing people in this town never seemed to be late for was a good sale. In order to get more produce and products out and have more space on the shelves, they held a discount for seniors and local students for a whopping 5% off on Tuesdays. That of course meant many people waited until Tuesday to shop.

Suffice it to say, Janelle was tired as hell when she got off work around 3, and she crawled into bed when she got home. She woke up briefly and saw Nana had left a glass of water by her bedside and nearly cried. It had been *quite* a day. She downed it in one gulp and conked back out for another couple hours.

Around 11, Nana shook Janelle awake. “Get up, girl. We have to get ready.”

“Mhmm.” Janelle made some noises like she was getting up and Nana left.

Then some time later Nana came and dumped water on her butt. Janelle shrieked and practically bounced off the bed and onto the floor, while Nana barked a laugh. “Wear your boots, the mosquitoes are out.”

Blearily, Janelle threw on some clothes, walked out of the bedroom door, and then rushed back in when she realized that she was wearing two different length socks and her shirt was backwards. Once corrected, she rushed to the mudroom and slipped on her boots.

Nana was waiting huffily on the porch. “You slept enough. Let’s get a move on.” Instead of heading for her car, the old woman made her way down the hill. It hadn’t occurred to Janelle they wouldn’t be driving; it wasn’t a long walk but it was dark and the town had relatively few street lights. Janelle hurried after her, afraid that Nana would slip. The rising moon was a mere crescent, and not very bright amidst the clouds.

They made their way along the sidewalk, and then the street’s shoulder, down to the river. Nana handed Janelle some bug spray, but they otherwise walked in silence. Janelle felt a growing darkness behind her, and when she looked back, the lights in town were all dimming as they went farther towards the bridge.

There were some people under the bridge when they arrived, and they talked quietly amongst themselves. Nana immediately gravitated towards her library friends, and Janelle followed. She recognized a couple of people from town, whom she nodded to, and some who looked tired, like they had driven a distance.

A van pulled up and her coworker Oak, the guy she’d been flirting with, got out. He walked with assistance to the river, and she went and helped his mom carry his wheelchair down the bank, then rejoined her Nana’s little cluster.

She looked down at her phone - it was 11:59 - and Nana nearly slapped it out of her hand.

“Put that away!” She hissed. “It’s about to start!”

At that moment, a light began to stretch across the water. Stuffing her phone back into her jeans pocket, she looked up to see the moon was now full and glowing golden. Confidently, an old man with a walking stick strode across the beam of moonlight shining on the water. While the shifting reflection that constituted his path clearly made it unsteady, he continued. To her shock, the old man vanished when he reached the other side.

Nana must have seen her face, because she said, “Don’t worry, Janelle. We’ll explain once you’re across. I’ll go right behind you.”

Flashing Nana a nervous smile, Janelle turned back to watch as more people crossed and disappeared. A loose sort of line formed - the path didn’t look wide enough for two people.

Oak was in front of Janelle, slowly inching his chair forward. He turned to her and looked excited. “I didn’t know you were coming tonight!”

“I didn’t know either. A few days ago Nana just asked if I was free tonight, and didn’t tell me anything else. Is this ... ” She breathed unsteadily, “Is this magic, or something?”

Oak’s eyes twinkled. “Maybe. I guess you’ll have to see for yourself!” And with that, he rolled onto the path. He moved well, far more steadily than the people just using their feet on the path of light.

Once he was far enough ahead, Janelle gingerly touched the toe of her boot to the light. She immediately felt the motion and chill of the water, but her foot did not sink past the surface. It felt solid. She sidled her way onto the path and still did not sink.

“Go on now!” Nana said, sucking her teeth. “I don’t have all night!”

Oak must’ve heard because he popped a wheelie, spun around, and stuck his tongue out at Janelle. “Come on, slowpoke!” He teased, and then spun back around.

Her face hot, she put both feet onto the path and started going forward. Nana followed closely behind, and smiled; it made Janelle feel better about the woman’s sharp words earlier.

The path shifted under her feet, the currents and underwater objects disrupting the flow. To her alarm, Janelle saw a branch, practically a log really, float towards the path ahead of her - would the light break with the incoming shadow? But it fizzled out of existence the moment it touched the light and fizzled right back once it passed through. She breathed a sigh of relief, and she continued with less hesitance. Still, she didn’t dare to even try to touch the water outside of the light.

When she reached the spot where the others vanished, it felt like passing through a thick mist. Blinking her eyes against an odd wetness, and feeling a slight headache from a sudden change in humidity, she looked up and saw a night sky bursting with stars.

Her heart ached. She had gone stargazing, but she had never seen anything like this. She had never seen the Milky Way.

Oak tapped her arm, bringing her back down to earth. “Well, this is it!” he said. He spread his other hand out to introduce her to the landscape. “What do you think?”

Her eyes were open wide, just absorbing it all. “What is this place?”

“I’ll give you a hint. We didn’t teleport.”

Janelle looked around, taking in the verdant mountainous forest surrounding what appeared to be a large mud flat in the center, right underneath the darkest night sky she had ever seen. When she turned her head, she saw a thin creek behind her. “Is this ... the river?” She asked. Her heart was beating wildly.

He nodded. “We think so. My great uncle buried an engraved stone back there,” he jerked his head to the edge of the forest that was someone’s backyard in her time. “He found it when he traced his steps once he went back to our time. It was a bit eroded but still had some of the carvings visible.”

Some part of her was relieved to hear that they would be heading back at some point, but her wonderment overtook her ability to speak. “This place is incredible! I’ve never seen so many stars! The implications alone are tremendous!”

Oak opened his mouth to reply, but then Nana grabbed Janelle’s arm. “Hush, girl. Mr. Brooks is going to speak.”

Janelle looked to her left and saw the old man again. His long hair was in two braids, the bottoms of which were black and the tops silvery, verging on white. He spoke for a bit in the local language, which Janelle didn’t understand, but about half the people there seemed to be able to follow along. Then he switched to English.

“Welcome all, to this solstice night. To the faces I know and are here, it is wonderful to see you. To the faces I do not see, I hope to see you next year. And to the new faces,” he looked at Janelle and a baby in the crowd, “I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”



He gestured to the ground. “Eons ago, only animals walked these lands. Here they laid their tracks, and not once have they distorted or wasted away.”

Janelle couldn't believe that she had missed it. The mud was filled with tracks of all sizes. Human feet walked in orderly lines across the flat, but criss-crosses of pawprints, bird claws, tire tracks and more littered the ground. Some were tiny and shallow, like sparrows had briefly landed and then taken off. But others were deep and humongous, large enough for a seven year old girl to curl up inside. Her eyes bulging, Janelle forcibly refocused on Mr. Brooks.

“Many years ago, back when the mountains laid lush and full, a hunting party tracked a herd of bison across an unusually dry river bed, and into this time.”

Janelle cut her eyes to Oak. “There used to be bison in Appalachia,” he whispered. She nodded and turned her eyes back to the old man.

“When the party came back, their families had moved and their children had grown several years older. It was the same day, but years later. Through some costly trial and error they discovered a few things. For one, this space only opens up at midnight after the summer solstice. Then, if a body goes back within one hour of leaving, it will be like no time passed at all. Also, every additional hour spent - even if you stay only a minute more! - means a year lost once you go back.”

Hearing this, Janelle shifted nervously, until her Nana sent her a steady glance.

“Years later, we also noticed that the weather never changes in this particular mud flat. Time does seem to pass around it normally. While we have yet to encounter any peoples that inhabit this time in this space, we do know that this land surrounding is only a few millennia back. Just judging by the evidence of Ice Age animals and the occasional bone that we discovered. So it is possible we will meet others here one day. But,” he turned his back to the people and gestured to the flats. “So far, we are the only ones who leave human prints here.”

Mr. Brooks seemed winded after that speech, so a person Janelle assumed was his second in command took over.

“As such,” they said, “We use this place to tell each other and our descendants that we are still here. Our people's sovereignty, identity and culture has been challenged, abused and suppressed, but still we stand. By dint of being alive and well, you demonstrate our power and ability.”

Janelle saw many people smile and nod, and Oak sat up straighter and looked proud.

“And so, each year, all of you will add a new step, to show that we still, and will always, live long and prosper.” The speaker did the Vulcan salute, and Mr. Brooks and a couple others flashed one back with hearty chuckles.

The crowd parted, and a little girl, probably 5 years old, was led by her dad to the edge of the flat. Everyone oohed.

Mr. Brooks spoke up again. “Today, we are proud to watch Miss Mirasol Deerwalker make her first footprint all by herself.” Everyone shouted words of encouragement, or in Janelle’s case, just whooped. It felt right, especially since she didn’t know the Deerwalkers.

The little girl, clearly a ham, bowed a couple of times, and then turned to face the flat. Careful to only step on previous prints, she tiptoed until the last, where she proudly stomped her foot into the mud and scampered back, to much applause and cheers.

Mr. Brooks seemed like he was done talking. He walked away with his helper in tow. Janelle whirled around to her Nana. “Are we-“

“No, Janelle, we are not legally, or by blood, part of the tribe.” Nana grasped Janelle’s shoulder. “Come,” she said. “Let me explain.”

Obeying, Janelle assisted her grandmother across the terrain. Nana was a tough nut, and liked to be independent, but she was also sensible. It would not be prudent to break her hip here.

“To put it simply, girl, my Great-Granddaddy Quincy did someone a favor, back when he was a boy. Took a beating or some such to let the other get away. None of the settlers around here liked the Native people, you know how it was. They soon became good friends.

“This was shortly before the Civil War, mind, so he was not a free man yet. When wartime came and there were threats of being sold down the river, he called upon a favor and they stashed him in here until the war ended.”

Nana took a swig of water and then continued, her eyes cast far away on the wild landscape. “They became closer friends. When there were round-ups for Indian children, for those disgusting residential schools, and it wasn’t the right time for the portal to this place, my great-granddaddy and granddaddy hid the children in a deeper section of our root cellar. I’ll have to show you sometime. We had a couple stay even when I was a young woman.

“In any case, the bond strengthened, and since then our family has been granted access to this place.” She looked down and sighed. “Never told your Daddy though. Love that boy to death, mmh, but he doesn’t know how to keep his mouth shut.”

Janelle laughed. “Mom doesn’t even tell him what she gets me for Christmas anymore. He tells me right away!”

Nana cackled. “Just like his old man. Never could tell him either.” Her eyes grew a little more serious. “But you, girl,” she waggled a finger at Janelle, “I know you can keep a secret.” She gestured out to the other people in the valley. “It’s important to them, and us - we likely wouldn’t be here if Great-Grandaddy Quincy hadn’t hid here - but it’s more to them. Understand?”

Janelle took the old woman’s hand. “Nana, there are some things you should share. And this ain’t one of them.”

Both ladies nodded.

Nana twisted her lips and drew her hand back. “I wish I could have shown you this all earlier, but it never worked out. Still, better late than never! Now, girl, you don’t have forever. I know you want to look around.”

“Thanks, Nana!” Janelle ran back to Oak and his family.

They were talking to the family with the baby. The dad had the baby over his shoulder, and Oak was making silly faces at the infant from behind, in between talking in their language. His tires looked a bit muddy, so she assumed he had already added his prints. When he spotted Janelle coming over, he smiled. “Janelle! Want me to show you around?”

“Hell yeah! Nana told me a bit about my family’s connection to this place, but I figure you know some cool spots?”

He nodded, said a quick goodbye to the family, and grabbed her hand. “Let’s go. You haven’t made a footprint yet, right?”

“I get to? I thought it was just-”

“Nah, nah, your family has a spot over there. Did you know your great-great aunt had six toes on her left foot? I’ll show you. We have a lot of these spots labeled, though obviously the family tree stories for my people have been a little disrupted, so we haven’t been able to identify each print. But yours are all recent, so we have everyone!”

Oak sped along the edges of the mud flat, though at one point a plank crossing over a rocky creek bent a little worryingly under their weight. “I need to remember to bring a new one next time. Looks like this bridge has a bit of rot.”

By the time they reached her family’s plot, it was 12:25 - the speeches had taken a bit. Janelle could see her grandmother taking her sweet time walking over Oak had promised Janelle he’d show her some cool fossils and artifacts some ancestors must have forgotten, so they were in a bit of a hurry. “Sorry you guys were stuck all the way out here. I think they wanted to leave a lot of space for our people.”

Janelle shook her head. “Nah, it’s cool. And for all we know, I might be the last one to know about this place. I’m not sure I want kids, and God knows no one else in my family can keep their mouths shut!” They laughed.

They rolled up to an area encircled by cattails. There were seven sets of prints there. The first barely changed over the years - Great-Great-Great-Grandad Quincy had nearly been an adult when he was stashed there. But all the others started out with cute little baby prints, including a set that really did have six toes.

Janelle could not help but be in a bit of awe. “This has been here since the 1860s?” So few records of her grandmother’s family on either side existed that far back. Nana’s family got sucked into the vicious cycle of sharecropping, and lived very hard lives. No one had any money to waste on photographs.

Then World War II rolled around, and Nana’s dad was drafted. He got paid decently, married, and had Great Uncle Robert, who died of polio when he was 12, and Nana. All of a sudden, there were a lot of pictures, which was wonderful, but didn’t exactly help when it came to finding out what their previous ancestors looked like. “God,” Janelle breathed, tracing one of the baby prints. It didn’t warp or crumble at all under her gentle touch. “Dad would love to see these.”

“Tick tock!” Oak said mercilessly. “Are you going to make one?”

“Oh! Oh, yeah.” Janelle sat down on a rock and tugged off her boot and sock. Trepidation made her break out in a sweat - she was literally going to make a mark on history. She approached the edge of the flat. And then she tripped over the laces of her other shoe.

Janelle didn’t land flat on her face. One hand landed on the bank of the flat, where she gripped tightly onto the grass there. The other smacked wet and deep into the mud. “Oh shit.”

Janelle pulled herself up and out of the mud. She was covered in it halfway to her elbow.

“Nice handprint, Janelle!” Oak sniggered. She shot him a look, but all that did was make him cover up his mouth as he continued to laugh, eyes dancing in the glow of the moon and stars. “You’re going to have to learn to walk on your hands, just so you can match it!”

“Can’t I just squish it with my foot, make it footshaped?” She started roughly scraping the mud from her arm onto a rock.

Oak twisted his mouth. “You can try. I don’t think it’ll look very good if you manage it though.” His voice softened. “We can say you did it on purpose. I really don’t think anyone will mind. There’s some old prints that are only the same side foot everytime. None of our stories say we had an ancestor with only one foot at that tie. It might’ve just been someone showing off their balance.

“And then there’s my good old chair! When I was younger, my parents could help, and then I used my cane sometimes. Since I hit double digits though, it’s just better for me to roll up and use my wheels as the print. Last year coincided with a good pain day though, so I stood up and left a one. Kinda regretted it though, the mud was particularly thick in that spot and I had trouble getting back in my chair. I swear it nearly sucked a toe off.”

Janelle couldn’t help but laugh. “Okay, dork.” She looked down. The mud was dry.

Nana came within hearing distance. “What did you call me?”

“Not you, Nana!”

After a little bit of teasing from Nana about her print, and a promise not to tell, Janelle and Oak were about to go but Nana caught her arm. “Girl, I forgot my hiking stick and don’t feel too steady on my feet now. You think you can help me with mine?”

Janelle nodded immediately, then looked back at Oak.

“It’s cool! I’m going a little further into the woods, I haven’t been this way much. You help your grandmother.”

She looked down at her watch. “It’s 12:34! Don’t be long!”

“*You* don’t be long!” He tossed over his shoulder.

The first steps were hardest. Nana had small feet, and that was especially true when she was a baby. Vaguely, Janelle figured that since her grandmother's birthday was in May, she was basically only a month old the first time she made one .

They stopped briefly at the same spot where Great Uncle Robert's prints stopped. "That was a hard couple years," was all Nana said. Sensing silence was best, Janelle kept quiet.

Eventually, "Dang, Nana. How old are you?" They had reached the fiftieth print and still had a ways to go.

"Hush, now." said Nana, a smile belying her tone. She carefully navigated the prints, stepping high and placing each step into her own print like a heron hunting in a marsh. She didn't seem like a woman who had nearly broken her hip a couple of weeks before. She had purpose in her odd stride.

Meanwhile, Janelle, who usually wore men's shoes, was more than a little teetery. But for Nana's sake, she did her best to 'help' her grandmother. It was probably good practice for when Nana actually needed help.

Finally reaching an area where the the mud was clear, Janelle watched her grandmother delicately place her foot on the surface of the flat. To her surprise, the mud dried right before her eyes.

Nana caught her eye and winked. "It works better if you step lightly. The print stays there either way, and it's a little easier to walk over later."

"Haha. You're very funny."

"Why, thank you. You're so sweet."

They chuckled over one thing or another heading back, right until the footprints started getting small. Then, a scream exploded from the forest, and several birds flew out. Growls echoed out from the trees.

Nearly dropping her grandmother's arm to run, Janelle then stopped herself when she realized that it could throw the old woman off balance.

"Go! I'll be fine." Nana let go.

When Janelle reached the edge of the woods, she saw Oak rolling like his life depended on it, hands pushing his wheels like he was a machine. "Go! Get your grandma! There's a fucking bear!"

Sure enough, another roar resounded from the forest, and Janelle saw more birds fly away, and even a deer in the distance. Her mind was racing. Was it going to come out?

There was no time to think. She whirled around, ran over and nearly pulled Nana off of her feet. The woman was small but solid, and Janelle's height and sheer panic aided her strength.

Another growl. It wasn't quite as loud, but more in the way that there was less forest for the sound to bounce around on. It was closer.

"Nana, come on!" Janelle hauled her grandmother over to where Oak was rolling in circles, nervously waiting for them to catch up.

"Ms. Eudora, hop on my chair. Me and Janelle - yeah, yeah, you can push my chair - will get you moving." Oak tried to smile, but his hands betrayed him, playing nervously over his tires.

Nana hmphed. "This is what happens when you crush on fools, Janelle," she cast her eyes at the teenagers, only to see Janelle and Oak studiously looking away from each other, faces warm.

Maybe it was for the best Nana embarrassed them, because Janelle looked over her shoulder just when the bear broke the tree line.

Janelle had strong feelings about bears. She loved Brother Bear as a kid, loved watching documentaries about them, but two of the scariest horror movies she had ever been able to watch were *Annihilation* and *Cocaine Bear*.

This bear terrified her far more than the Annihilation bear ever could. Standing tall, with legs like stilts and a face like an 80s puppet, it was clear that this animal was meant for running and for killing.

It didn't spot them right away, though, so Janelle hissed, "Shut. Up. Bear. Be.Hind. Din't. See. Us. Yet."

Everyone stopped moving.

Through the corner of her eye, she spotted a smaller shape, probably a cub, scamper out of the trees.

The bear turned around and huffed at it, then went back to sniffing.

The cub yowled indignantly.

The bear turned again and growled. Her cub snorted and trotted into the brush.

“Is it gone?” Oak asked, a bit too loudly in Janelle’s opinion.

“No! Shut up!” She whispered harshly.

The bear turned around to look into the marsh, so that Janelle could only see its butt and its freakishly long back legs.

“Nana, I need you to keep an eye on the bear. I’m going to get us moving.”

Clothes rustled as Nana scooted to the back of the chair, kneeling to peer backwards around Janelle’s shoulder, and Oak moved forward and did his best not to sit too much on the old woman’s legs.

Quickly, Janelle pushed and Oak wheeled towards their entry spot.

When they reached the bridge, Oak got up and crossed first, afraid of the weight making the plank crack. He collapsed onto the other side, more from nerves than pain. “Ladies, it is 12:49. We’re making good time, but be careful.”

“I’m going to push you ahead, Nana,” the young woman said, arranging the chair so it could shoot straight across the plank. Nana hadn’t dared move from her position, too afraid to take her eyes off the bear.

Opening her mouth to say something, Nana’s eyes widened and her mouth clacked shut.

Janelle’s heart skipped a beat.

“What?”

“It’s looking our way. And sniffing. Don’t move.”

All were still. She heard her heart beating rapidly. In that insane, dark, calm that panic sometimes creates, Janelle wondered if it would stop soon.

“It’s turning around again ... okay, it’s back in the treeline.” Nana sighed, relieved.

Janelle realized she had been holding her breath and gasped, loudly, lungs shuddering.

“Girl, hush. We aren’t out of the woods yet.” Nana’s voice was irritated, but quivered a bit. She was still scared too.



“Literally!” Oak was getting back to his feet, sunny smile back to cover up for the fear in his eyes.

“Shuddup!”

He shut up.

Oak and Nana switched spots, and they arrived at the entrance with three minutes to spare. Oak’s family had already gone, and the only person left besides them was Mr. Brooks and the second speaker. They were standing next to a shimmery mist at the edge of the flats.

“Cutting it a little tight, Eudora?” Mr. Brooks teased.

Nana hmped. “Well you know me, Stephen,” she shot back. “I like to live on the edge.”

He chuckled, and passed through the portal.

It hummed slightly, and Janelle could swear she could hear the lap of water on the other side. Idly she realized she had not really looked back once she passed through.

Janelle turned to the second speaker. “Excuse me, can more than one person leave at once?”

They shrugged. “I don’t know. Might want to try, though, seeing as it’s nearly one o’clock. But I suggest giving it half a minute.” At that, the speaker hurried into the shimmer.

“That was helpful,” Oak said. “Well, do y’all mind if I go next? It’s 12:58, and I don’t want my chair to fall into the water or something. These guns are strong,” he kissed an admittedly large bicep, “but I don’t feel like testing them out against the river tonight.”

“Well, you can’t go first, ‘cuz Nana is already gone,” observed Janelle.

“Shoot!” He spun around and rushed through the portal.

The stars were so vivid. Janelle stared up at them, feeling lucky that she managed to come on a year when it was still night here. Light blue limned the mountains to the east, and she supposed that dawn was coming - it was not midnight here.

Janelle gave it another beat, and when she was sure she had waited long enough, she stepped through the portal.

Thankfully, she reached the other side. She stepped upon the lighted path just as the mist suddenly snapped behind her.

Which, of course, was when the clock struck one. The clocktower on top of the church let out an obnoxious *BONG*, and the surface beneath her feet was no longer a path made of waves, but actual waves. There was a moment of weightlessness, a second of pure lack of motion, and then gravity struck and she fell in.

To her great relief, the spot she dropped into was quite shallow. Still, she wasn't prepared, and pain rolled up her ankles. At least her phone, which was in her pocket, didn't get wet.

"Janelle?" Her grandmother called.

"I'm here Nana! Just going to be," she heaved a sigh, "very wet in a moment."

The stretch of river from her spot wasn't going to be as shallow. During the daytime, she remembered seeing that the edges were oddly deeper than the middle. With nothing else to do but grin and bear it, she held her phone above her head and swam with the river to the bank. Nana walked over to where she would land.

"Thanks," she said as Nana helped her up. Her boots were sopping and moving around under her feet, which would have made climbing up the steep, muddy bank without help terrible.

"Girl, if you make me worry like that again, I'm not bringing you next time."

Janelle's face heated up. "Well, I didn't get between a bear and her baby, at least."

Nana's face twisted, then she let it go. "There is that, at least." She patted Janelle's back, then said, "Go say goodbye to your boy-"

"He's not my b-"

"You keep on telling yourself that, girl." Nana sucked her teeth. "You tell that Oak boy we're going, you can see him tomorrow." Nana turned, then twisted sharply. "And give him a good punch for me! Getting between some bears like that ..." Nana wandered off muttering, going over to an older couple, probably to say goodbye.

Face hot, Janelle went over to Oak and his family, who were razzing him for the bear thing and for nearly getting stuck on the other side. He was laughing too.

“Hey Oak-” Janelle realized she was being rude. “Hi, Ms. Robin. Hey Fern, River.”

“Hello, honey. How was your first trip to the Flats? Oak here was just telling me you put your hand down instead of a footprint. How fun!”

Janelle side-eyed Oak, who smiled wide, unrepentant. “Yes, I just felt it made a cool contrast.”

“It really does! Oh Janelle, that kind of artistic mindset can take you so far! I mean, if you think about it, our feet weren't that much different than our hands not that long ago! What a clever comparison, a young woman creating a print much like our ancestors' next to her ancestor's modern footprint. I just might do it myself next year!”

Janelle, sensing an out, nodded enthusiastically and did her best to imitate Ms. Robin's hippy babble before eventually gently extricating herself from the conversation.

Oak caught her eye and motioned her over. “Hey, Janelle, I'm really sorry about the bear thing. I didn't even see the cub, I was just trying to go as straight as possible without hitting tree roots or something. I guess the mother had wandered and I was between her and where she left her baby.”

Janelle rolled her eyes, but then sighed. “I mean, at least we know now that we should watch for some freak-bear next time.” She had a new thing to research, at least.

“Yeah, that thing was kind of weird. A stilt-bear?”

“God, I guess.” They both chuckled for a moment.

Then Oak grabbed her hand. “Hey, but for real, that wasn't cool on my end. How about we go out for ice cream tomorrow.”

Janelle looked into his eyes. “Only if you're paying.”

“I thought that was implied.”

She squinted at him, and he shot her another grin. She couldn't help smiling back. “Sure. See you tomorrow. Pick me up at 6?”

“You bet. See ya!”

Janelle walked away, the smile not leaving her face. She turned around briefly and saw both of Oak's sisters slapping him five. Her grin stayed on.

She checked her phone. True to Mr. Brooks's word, it was only a few minutes after midnight. Time really had not passed. "What a world," she said to the sky.

Turning both all the crazy things that happened in the last hour and her ice cream plans over in her head, she caught up to Nana.

Nana took one look at her face and smirked.

"Don't you-"

"I wasn't going to say anything!" Nana raised her hands up in a surprisingly adolescent gesture and started humming.

Janelle thought that was that - until she realized she was humming the **K-I-S-S-I-N-G** song. "Nana!"

# Rodrigo Haro

## Eastland

---

There were people in a Chicago River boat accident in 1915. There was a boy. On the day of the boat accident, he climbed aboard a boat named *SS Eastland*. He kept climbing into the boat to save people. They were travelling from the Chicago River to the sand dunes in Indiana. They were going to travel Southeast. The boat was full. Nevertheless, it ran down the river. There were people on the river's shores waving and cheering. This was in 1915. People passed away. They got on the boat, and he did not have time to leave. Eight hundred and forty-eight people lost their lives.

One-hundred and eight years later I met a friend in San Francisco. I will tell the story from the end to the beginning. I booked a bed in a hostel. She was living there as well. Five years before we had met. She picked at her face (like before). I told her who I was, my name. The silent H. An H without a sound. She told me her name. She had stolen my car. She told me she was from Pittsburg the first night we met. I told her I was from Chicago. She was making a veggie pizza.

“What do you do?” was the first question I asked.

The girl was my St. Clare. Giovanni, the name later known as St. Francis of Assisi, had a walking partner. Like my friend in San Francisco. She took a walk with me after I took her to a restaurant. It was a (vegan) veggie burger restaurant. We took a taxi there. We walked back. It was a prayer walk. I enjoyed her company when we would accompany each other to stores and spaces. She made her way into her building, her hostel, by taking a fast right. I kept walking straight.

“Okay. I'll see you soon,” she said (without looking).

“Okay. I'll text you,” I said.

“Okay,” she said in a loud voice.

“Do you want to go to your burger place?” I asked through a text.

I entered the tobacco shop. I walked into the shop, bought a pack and lighter and walked to smoke. As soon as I paid for the cigarettes my phone went off.

“Yes. Can we go to this place?” she asked sending me a link to a restaurant.

“Yes. Okay. I'll be there soon,” I texted back.

I put my cigarette out and walked to her hostel. I walked to the Hilton and waited across the street.

“Meet me in front of the Hilton,” I texted.

I saw her waiting by the hotel. She was looking down sad.

“I want to apologize for leaving you in the hotel by yourself. I know I promised to go. But, I have already stayed there,” I explained.

We had given each other a hug. I smelled the cigarette on me.

“Okay,” she said.

“Do you want to go upstairs?” I asked.

“No,” she said shaking her head.

“How do you want to get to the restaurant?” I asked.

“I don’t know. It’s far,” she said.

“Not that far,” I said. I walked to the cab driver’s waiting for travelers. It was a red (bright) SUV with white lettering and numbers.

“Are you available?” I asked the driver. “Yes,” the guy said.

“Come on,” I turned and said hi to Leah surprised at my voice.

She climbed in walking to me. I closed the door behind her. We drove to the restaurant.

We got to the restaurant. I was confused. I was not sure if I wanted a meal. There was a tablet attached to the wall. The restaurant workers were nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be seen. I tapped through the screens for the meal. They were priced. I ordered a meal for her. I ordered a coffee. She ate fast. In grace. She had fries. I watched her eat. I brought her food, and she got her drink. I was full already. I had (already) eaten dinner. “Where do you want to go?” I asked.

“Do you want to take a walk?” she asked.

“Yes. Sure,” I said. She kept looking at her phone. “Okay, this way.”

We walked straight and walked. We talked along the way. We saw friends, woman and mean, walking together.

I remember I first used my voice to read Scripture at Immaculate Conception Church. I was about eleven or twelve. I used a stepstool, and the priest kicked it out of the way to read the Gospel. I had a stepstool because I was young and too short. I had large shoes on (mine were torn at the bottom). My mom was sitting (nervously) silently (looking up at me) in her red suit. I used a pause in the second reading and read the sentence aloud. The whole crowd was looking up at me. I was surprised I had power in my voice. I used to iron my own clothes. My mom used to phone my grandmother (calmly and presently) and tell her. "I had to iron clothes for Rodrigo. Mañana va leer," she used to say.

Before the restaurant (a day before), I asked her if she would accompany me to a guitar shop.

We had a walk from the guitar store. I stood at the entrance of the hostel and said, "you know what, when I was in Calumet City I was living with this girl in a hotel, and she stole my car. I never found her. Are you that girl?" I asked.

"No," she said.

"What were you doing though?" she asked.

"I was just hanging," I said. "She never gave me my car again."

"But what were you doing?" she asked while looking me in the eye.

I had met her through an ad initially.

"I was just hanging out" I said.

"What happened to the car?" she asked.

"The cops found it and impounded it. I could not afford to get it out. There was a daily storage fee, plus a fee to drive it out. Stay here I'll be back," I said.

I handed her my guitar case, and went in to get my duffel bag from the hotel we were staying in. I went in and told the hotel manager what I was going to do. "I'm going to check out and follow her," I said.

"You should not follow her," he said.

I went out and my guitar case was leaning against the building. I gathered my guitar and went back-in. A few hours before we had taken to fourth street (around Mission Bay) and Bryant and entered a guitar shop. I bought the cheapest sunburst acoustic guitar. I eventually bought a Yamaha, and a case. I saw the clouds gather.

“Let go this way,” I said.

We walked all the way back to our hostel around Mission and 9<sup>th</sup>. Before the guitar we had breakfast as a pancake place.

“Do you want to have pancakes?” I asked.

“Yes, I do,” she said.

We had pancakes. She had French toast. We had all the coffee we could get. Before pancakes we had paid for her stay at the hostel.

I met her in front of The Hilton the next day. I apologized.

“Are you that girl?” I asked.

“No,” she said.

“I want to say I am sorry,” I said.

I apologized for leaving her at the hotel alone. I paid for her new hotel a couple of days a hotel I had already stayed in). I had stayed for free at her hotel in Calumet City years five earlier. We went out for coffee. She walked fast.

In Calumet City her hair was cut. She was living with a friend. They both took my car once for a ride (they picked me up and took me to Wal-Mart with them). She (the friend) told me, “Go get her,” or “go with her.” I went in the store and found her. We both went back to the car, my 2005 Dodge Neon. We drove back to the hotel. We stayed at a hotel. They escaped the state after. When she came back to Illinois she told me, “I went out of state.”

“What did you do with my clothes,” I asked.

“I sold them back for money,” she said. “I sold the leather jacket”

“What about my iPhone?”



“I put it in a box that gave me money in the mall” she said.

She stayed behind. She moved close to South San Francisco, and the airport. We went through text messages together. She sent me a picture of her home. I was surprised she was texting me.

I asked her, “What were you doing in Oakland?” through a text.

“I saw you on the train station, on Fruitvale,” I sent.

“I don’t know. I was not there,” she sent.

I saw her walking by the bus stop (outside the station). She was wearing her black, tight spandex pants. She walked away and I recognized it was her. In a low tone, but high voice, I said, “Ale.”

I went home to my new apartment (like a Petrarchan Sonnet I was loving her from afar). I texted her, “Why were you in Oakland on Fruitvale? Why didn’t you say hi?” She of course did not respond until much later.

I saw her on Mission Street when I was waiting for the bus. I was on 9<sup>th</sup> Street.

“I have tryouts today,” she said as she was passing by. She invited me to join her at the gym when we were living together. I woke up to my phone and these messages.

4:29 am. “Hey I think you can come with me.”

4:31 am. “Alright after the gym we can get some coffee.”

She had bought a small coffeemaker for us to use.

“I got you a coffeemaker,” she said as I saw her go down the stairs.

“Oh. Yes,” I said.

She ran up and I saw her again thirty minutes later. I had asked her, “Do you want to smoke?” I had bought a pre-roll. I smoked my cigarette and then saw her on the front porch.

“These are my pants,” she said.

“Hey,” I said.

“I have to go to work,” she said.

She walked away.

I texted her moments later, “Do you want lunch?”

“Yeah. I’ll take the sandwich.”

I responded, “It’s in the fridge.”

I heard her in the kitchen and came out.

“Oh, you found the sandwich,” I said.

“Yeah. Thanks. I went to do laundry. It was free,” she said.

“Oh. Okay.” I said and stayed in my room.

She was upstairs to her room.

Eventually I gave her a coffee from the shop. She put it down. We were walking with our coffees together. I rubbed her back once. I rubbed her back again. Instantly, she did a 180 and walked back to the house. She left her cup on top of the table. She ended up moving out that day, the day of the pancakes, guitar, and fight.

I told this story to her after she left. “I was reading the other day, and I found this story. Listen for a bit.”

“The river was used for tours. The river was still and quiet that day. The *SS Eastland* was scheduled to sail that day, July 24, 1915. The ship almost capsized at the beginning. About 2,500 travelers climbed aboard. They were in downtown on Clark and LaSalle. They were working at *Western Electric*. The boat was unsafe. There were four other boats taking company workers to Michigan City, Indiana for the picnic. When the boat filled it lopsided to one side. The side facing the port was leaned one way. It was 2,500 full. A couple of minutes after taking off the boat completely turned on its side. The boat lost 844 lives that day on the Chicago River on July 24, 1915. The *SS Eastland* could not hold them all. The boat touched the riverbed only twenty feet below. People were rescued. Bodies under the capsized boat were rescued. Many of the workers on the boat were immigrants Polish, Italian, German. Other boats, one other, came close to the *SS Eastland* to join the rescue effort. The boat filled to its capacity (and more). Once the boat was lopsided the crewmen tried to straighten it out by filling the

ballast tanks with water (to no avail). It was too late. There were people underneath. There were people on top. Eight-hundred and forty four people lost their lives”

She stayed silent afterwards. She went back upstairs, and he went back to his room to be alone.

Eight-hundred and forty-four (or maybe more) passed away. Their bodies were on the Chicago River.

\*

I later told her, “A young man dove repeatedly looking for survivors. He was the only one agile, small, and fast enough to dive. He saved people. He must have been exhausted. Rest in Peace,”

We were in the same room eating. She stayed silent.

I had a ring for Ela. I went all the way to the Mission district. I placed it on my shelf. She got me a job at the San Francisco airport. “You going?” she asked.

“Yes, I am. I’ll see you there,” I said.

She had left the job soon after.

She was touched inappropriately. Someone had kissed her by the lockers. She had filed a complaint with the office. The office had re-assigned her to another department.

“This is retaliation,” she had told me at home. “They put me somewhere else and told me to do stuff,” she had told me afterwards. She quit and she texted me the link to apply.

I went in for an in-person interview. The manager asked me, “Who do you know here?”

I waited about five seconds. “No one,” I said.

The manager took me for a spin, a tour of the factory, the premises. When I saw her again, I exulted, “I went to your job.”

“You did?” she asked.

“Yes. Were you there? I saw the whole plant.”

“Yes. I was there,” she said. “When are you starting?” she asked.

“I have orientation in a week,” I said.

I started the job.

A week before she was waiting for me in the kitchen one day after coming from work. She asked me, “Don’t you think it’s better for both people to work and make money?”

“Yes,” I said.

I told my friend after she left,

“The boat leaned to one side then righted. The boat steamed ahead a bit. It leaned again. It righted like the first time. This time it leaned all the way. The boat capsized in the river. There were more boats, but they were gone. One boat got close. The people were trying to get out. The boat sank. The destination-location of their trip was Michigan City, Indiana and the beach, and sands, there.

There were other crashes on the Chicago River. After the accident when they took all the bodies out. There are pictures. There were children, twenty-two families were lost. The boy kept jumping into the boat to save people. The boy jumped and jumped and jumped. They took the bodies out and laid them down on the ground. Some were warehoused to name their names. The river was twenty feet deep with a boat filled with three thousand people. Eight hundred and forty-four people lost their lives.”

I never saw my friend again. There are those who seem to be in view. May they Rest in Peace.

# Allison Boggs

## The Fear in Their Eyes

---

The funeral went perfectly, there were no hiccups or suspicious glances from friends or family in the crowd. It wouldn't be uncalled for since mother passed just a few days before and now my loving wife. With timing like that it would seem strange if people didn't think something of it. Even I think of it strangely sometimes when I think back about how it happened. As I walked to her coffin, there she lay. She looked so peaceful and happy; her skin looked beautifully pale like the sliver glow of the moon. I keep playing along with everyone's grief hoping not to add to their suspicion.

Finally, I was glad to be home at our small estate. I had sent all the staff home for a couple of days to give those who cared time to grieve. So, it was just me, the silence, the shadows from the fireplace, and my never-ending glass of whiskey. The house was quiet, too quiet. I missed it when the house was full for the most part. The hushed voices of the staff, my wife and mother's angelic singing to the gramophone playing the romantic songs my mother grew up listening to; but what has been done can't be taken back. They are gone and I can't bring them back. After my brain was finished loudly roaring its grief and regrets, the house was quiet again and it was like this for hours till the grandfather clock in the parlor struck three. I looked over towards the clock and by the door peeking around the corner; a young dirty-looking boy seemed familiar, but I wasn't sure how. He had twigs and leaves in his hair, his clothes were ripped and dirty. The oddest part about him was his face. He was smiling which was clear and his eyebrows looked as if he was angry but his eyes...his eyes were filled with fear it was like he was traumatized. It was like he couldn't pick one emotion, so he decided to show them all. I stood up and tried to move closer to the boy but before I could get close enough to see him well, he left but the room filled with a choked child's laughter.

Then to put the creepy icing on the cake the gramophone started to play "Run Rabbit Run", but it slowed, and the voices were deepened and darker. I felt as if the whole room was spinning. I couldn't return to my chair by the fire, so I lay on the floor. My eyes were closed but I heard the slapping of the boy's feet running toward me and his choking laughter as he got closer. I opened my eyes and standing over me was the boy. He was now frowning but still had his brows pointed in anger and his eyes filled me with fear. Before I could do anything to get away the boy dropped on my chest and started to strangle me. The boy was stronger than me, he was clearly not human but then struck me; looking into his eyes not being able to get away made me realize how I knew him... it was my younger brother David... I killed him thirty-three years ago. It was a petty fight, but I got out of control, and it caused him to land on a rock and hit the back of his head. I had to hide what I did so I rolled him over the hill and ran back to the house. My father and mother found out what I did and to save me from jail they helped me hide the death of my brother. For years we hid the fact and just said he ran away.

I was finally able to break free from his grasp. Bolting out the door I ran up the stairs and hid in one of the rooms. While catching my breath I heard “I’ll Never Smile Again”. I looked up and saw my mother, she looked just like David. Her eyes had the same traumatized expression, but she had her same soft sad smile. Oh, how I missed her. No matter what I had done she would always be there to comfort me. Even when David died, and my father left because of me she was still there. She understood that I didn’t do it out of hate for him. She moved closer with a frown just like David, but she wasn’t angry, she was sad. She was holding an IV tube with a straw at the end. I jumped and moved back to the door. No not her too. Why is she trying to kill me too? “I did it to protect us. So, the secret wouldn’t get out. I wouldn’t have killed you if you hadn’t gotten Alzheimer’s! You were going to mess up everything we had set up!” I yelled at her. I was getting angry. Wouldn’t she be happy that I saved her reputation and did not let her be known as a criminal hiding her own child’s death? She held out her hand again holding up the IV straw once more. Struggling with the doorknob I finally made it out the door. Before I could run out the door, she grabbed my wrist and made me look at my hands. They were burning and had a feeling of Paresthesia. When I finally gave in to my mother, I noticed my hands were bleeding; I looked at her shocked while pulling my hands away. Breaking away from my mother’s grasp I busted out the door.

I stood in the middle of the hall and in front of the stairs. There behind me down the dark hallway, I heard the humming, it was slow and odd. I looked behind me again and there was my beautiful wife. My wife died by my hand as well. We had gotten into a fight because of the things my mother had said before she had died. She kept questioning me about it for several nights after the funeral. I finally had enough, we were fighting at the top of the stairs, and I didn’t know how close to the edge she was because when she grabbed my arm to stop me from running, I did every time we talked about it. I pushed her and she fell down the stairs to the bottom. I went to help her, and even called an ambulance but by the time I got to her. She was dead. I feel like I am in *The Christmas Carol* but instead of me learning to move away from greed; I’m being haunted by death and guilt. I look away from her for a second to clear my head thinking that this had to be some sort of twisted guilt-ridden nightmare.

I then look back up and see all three of my victims. They all stood before me slowly moving closer and closer all at the same time. The other gramophone in one of the rooms started to play We’ll Meet Again, in the same slower and menacing tone that the other songs heard tonight were played in. I felt strange overbearing heat coming from behind me. I look and see where the stairs once were now looked like hell. I could feel the fire's heat and heard the screams of other unfortunate sinners like me screaming. I jumped back towards my ghostly family half forgetting they were there. I look back at them. My mother looked sad with tears falling from her traumatized eyes, my wife looked away disappointed, and my brother wore a big smile with his crazed eyes. All at the same they pushed me back into the burning hole where the stairs once were. I fell back screaming for their forgiveness and pain until the hole closed.

There were cop cars outside the estate's parking lot. They were all gathered inside with the staff they found the body of their once-living employer now lying dead at the base of the stairs. The cops stood around his body looking in disbelief. "The place must be cursed first his mother, then his wife, and now himself. Three deaths all in one month in the same place," the first cop said.

The chief nodded "I agree. Let's get the statements from the workers and get out of here."

They stood there for a moment they also heard the gramophone play the song We'll Meet Again. The chief looked into the dead man's eyes; they were bigger and bloodshot. He looked as if he had seen something truly terrifying. The chief was getting annoyed with the song and looking into the man's eyes at the same time because it made the whole investigation creepier. "Will someone turn that thing off! Close his eyes too they're freaking me out! How are we supposed to work with all this heebie-jeebie stuff going on?" the chief yelled while giving a shiver. Everyone left the house, and it was never used again.

# Jacob Bonds

## Teaser for Myriad of Delicate Dreams

---

(Chug...clank...chug...clank...chug...clank)

My head...it felt like it was ready to perform mitosis, bifurcation between the right and left hemisphere with the force of a dull axe driving down upon the longitudinal fissure. With the motions going on, my forehead kept cracking against the exceedingly hot leather that I was pressed against. It was when my eyes finally fluttered open to the blurry red texture of leather. My right arm lethargically ascended before my hand fanned out to push myself back into the chair. The back of my head hit against the soft cushioned seat I found myself. It felt like I was hungover, but I have not touched the stuff in years. It hurt to look towards the chandeliers such scintillating light...chandeliers? That is when I jumped up frantic, my heart suddenly pounding with the realization that I was not in my apartment. A relentless battering ram crashed against my sternum as I soaked in the scenery.

Where I found myself was in a train's passenger coach, but the conundrum lies with the certitude that I do not recall getting on. Another consideration, I do not live anywhere close to a trainyard let alone a station. Upon further inspection, there was a multitude of passenger's belongings strewn about or neatly tucked under seats. But there was a distinctive lack of people on here. Normally, people would not leave their luggage unattended or without a worker present to keep constant surveillance on the items. I would surmise that potentially there is some sort of commotion in a different cart. But that seems rather unlikely as I would have been roused from my slumber. No...this is an irrational situation that I found myself in and the peculiarity of my predicament is becoming far more evident.

For instance, I stared out of my window, and I could see down below the oxidized particles of steel connecting with steel. This is not something out of the ordinary by any means, but the sheer number of sparks is rather concerning. The overwhelming vibrations that stir the air in a more swelling manner makes it so hard to breathe. The only conclusion that I could formulate is that the train is going far faster than the schematics can handle. Damaging the wheels and grinding the rails into disrepair. This is a tragedy in the making, as this train clearly has been unattended or being grossly neglected to the detriment of everyone's life aboard this damnable contraption. But looking further out beyond the sparks...it was pitch black with the spark occasionally flying out to show a darkened concrete wall. A tunnel, we were deep underground with an uncontrollable train. I started to squint out into that darkness, just with the logical expectation of seeing some sort of sign that had a clear indication of where I was going. Everything was going far too fast for my eyes to accommodate the motions and was just making my head hurt far more.

(Chug...clank...chug...clank...)



All I could do was let out an exasperated suspire as I leaned back into the seat and stared up at the swaying chandelier. Each fragmented piece of glass stringed together with hardened plastic just in an adroit manner. Resisting the possible collision with the metallic roof or even adeptly maneuvering itself without jeopardizing the center of gravity. All while illuminating the cart in such dazzling fragmented light. My heart ceased pounding as I stared out the window longing for some solution to this dilemma. Most individuals would have leapt into action, trying to exhaust all possible options to prevent what would surely happen soon. There is not necessarily a reason to rush, as impartiality makes the process a little bit smoother in terms of a transition. I proceeded to go through my coat and rummage inside my pockets trying to pull out my phone. When I finally felt it, pulling it out rather swiftly just to turn on the screen. As expected, there was a lack of signal and furthermore I just looked at the message notifications. Compiling into a conglomerate source of extreme irrepressible dissemination of daily avoidance. If I could impose my will upon this phone and banjax the blasted contraption I would without hesitation. I execrate its very existence within my life, it is a terminal for severed connections being reestablished with disregard of my wants.

(Chug...clank...chug...clank, rattle...chug...clank...)

The worst part is that those corporations get inside of your head. It is as if they take a sledgehammer to your cranium, making the very home of your thoughts and sense of self into a smoldering rubbish heap. Your sense of self thoroughly streamlined from a beautiful, convoluted cascade of colors to an overly processed form of posterization. And the paradoxical nature to something that is predictable and inserted into an algorithm created to hold you captive. They take forceps to your frontal lobe and rend your flesh into just a discarded lump of fat it is. Throw it into a biohazard bin and bid you adieu with an expensive bill awaiting your exit. The cost was never money, no...it was time. The time you wasted exploring every avenue thinking you were getting that little bit closer to an answer. Then, suddenly, they pull the rug and start floating in the endless void called "hope" and just hoping for an answer that is not being peddled like some tincture. Just look at the people terminally online, feeling complacent in watching someone live a life that they desire instead of actively doing it themselves. Deriving satisfaction from the act of nothingness. What is the point? I just do not understand it beyond addiction and the compulsory need to connect with others because we feel so god damn lonely.

(Chug, clank, chug, scrap, clank, chug, scrap, rattle, chug, clank!)

The sparks started showering high enough to reach all the windows, my heart fell to the very depths of my stomach as panic started to set in. The train was exponentially soaring in terms of speed, flabbergasting the very creator of this model of train. I turned off my phone and put it back into my pocket knowing deep down that inaction would lead to my very demise. My hands started to cling onto the back of the chair in front of me. Fingernails digging into the expensive luxurious red leather as I hoisted myself onto my feet. Having to utilize the aching muscles that I long neglected into action. My feet acted with their own accordance, not waiting for my brain to usher out correspondences filled with

instructions. No, they tapped into instincts that I never knew I had within the embedded coding screaming the primary directive of “survival of utmost priority”. I started to sidle across my compartment and stepped into the aisle as the sudden translation of extreme acceleration became apparent. There was a force pushing me back, however I utilized every chair as a hold point until I was ready to move forward again. My legs knew when to lock and my arms exerted enough energy to keep myself stable. Steadily, I was acting against what I believed to be true and instead was moving forward. Inching my way towards the next cart hoping that maybe I could reach the conductor.

It was an arduous process, as I was simply lagging behind Newton’s First Law of Motion as the movement of car and air resistance acted upon me. I eventually reached the gangway connection door after considerable amount of effort. That is when my leg extends towards it and my body starts stretching to compensate for the distance. I grasped onto the handle and yanked it the door open as tumultuous tempests funneled into the cart. I was nearly blown back by the sheer force of nature and had to pull back. I truly do not understand how a train like this could be this uncontrollable, going at such breakneck speeds that the air itself now impedes me. But at this point, I may as well try to push through as there is nothing to necessarily to lose. I grabbed onto the metal rods with sheer determination and yanked my body towards the doorway. My coat flapping in the wind and my clothes essentially trying to yank me back. Like a child trying to pull away a parent when they sense danger. I was already here though, so I traversed across the steel walkway carefully and opened the door to the next cart with anticipation. I took a leap of faith and immediately entered the next cart...but there was something perplexing. This cart was going at a stable speed and more importantly did not feel like there were any forces impeding my movement here.

(Chug...chug...chug...chug...clank...chug...chug...)

I looked back at the original cart, and it was now darkened with an eerie pitch-black atmosphere. The chandeliers fell and crashed against the ground resulting in an enumerated amount of glass shards scattered down the aisle. Never have I reveled in such destruction...but the sparks spraying to the windows that felt like infernos were absent now. But the further I looked down the aisle...there was tall figure shuffling down the aisle with such an anomalous stride. Legs dragging, and the right shoulder protracting within a yanking like motion. As it drew closer, I could see the twisted anisodactyl feet twisting inwards as the pelvis was too wide for the aisle itself. Drastically slowing down the movements to a crawl...the arms themselves seemed lanky resembling someone with marfan syndrome. But the forearms were extremely enlarged and muscular...dragging them across many a seat as it approaches. This amalgamation appeared to be inhuman...but it was extremely hard to discern details within the darkness. Only the shifting of movement and the evident footsteps...with something more metallic dragging against the luxurious chairs, leaving an eviscerated mess left behind this figure. The head attached to the body is hunched over, taller than the cart itself! Horns extending straight back and stabbing through the metal. That is all that I could see, truly I was most intrigued by this thing than startled. I finally mustered the courage to call out, “hello?” that is when the figure tilted their head in a

sudden motion. The sudden snapping of bones echoed inside my head...it was quick and like nothing but a step on branches. A firm break, and I believe it stared down towards me...equally as fixated onto me as I was onto it. The silence was deafening and I could not necessarily blink. The darkness continued to grow and distort details of the figure as I became hyper fixated on it. I was both perplexed and intrigued at the same time, harboring a great interest for this “thing”. Not necessarily understanding each other until it gave a clear intensive message.

A smile...I could see the light reflecting on this thing’s teeth...razor sharp, like a set of bear trap teeth and the mouth seemed like an exaggerated case of macrodontia. Up until this moment, I felt a weird connection to this...but the moment that thing smiled. A cold chill vertically undulated up and down my spine like an elevator going haywire. Crashing against the very top of my brain stem having a shockwave so powerful my brain was having a classification seven meltdown. Then to the very depths of my coccyx until my legs felt like mere props connected to my body instead of appendages. Its breathing was erratic, as if taking great pleasure in seeing my fear cultivate into an undeniable paralysis. My arm was finally able to act, and in which slammed the door shut...I started to step backwards without any control of myself. That was the case until I walked past a family in the middle of a meal, I snapped out of it and shook my head in disbelief. I thought the train was abandoned, but here is a family nonchalantly continuing on with their conversation. Despite a monster leisurely approaching this cart with an indeterminate intent! I turned towards the family, they seemed rather dressed up as if going to a special occasion. Talking within a considerate tone with the illusion there was other passengers on this cart. Presumably a mother, father, and a son sat in the booth.

My chest was rising and falling with such depth...I was only inches away from hyperventilating. But I then looked back towards the previous cart and I could see nothing within the small window. This was an impossibility...that Brobdingnagian could escape line of sight that fast? More importantly, where would this ghastly amalgamation be hiding within such a cramped space. Impossible, I reaffirmed to myself until the sickening revelation dawned upon me...if it is not there...where is it? For now, it would be counterproductive to focus on such a detail and instead I should be figuring out this train’s destination. That is when my attention turned towards the family and my mind was wandering. For one, they did not even seem to react to me in the slightest despite my abrupt appearance and bewilderment. That is when I stood before them and started to listen into the conversation. Not even the slightest bit interested in the conversation itself, rather I am trying to find a point to interject. I did not want to be rude by any means, after all I was merely wanting to ask a question and trot along with that.

“Now, I want you to mind your manners. Your grandmother is going to be there and she has not been handling the departure of your grandfather that well. The disposition she has developed is quite concerning considering that it has been three years ago. The cancer took him swiftly, but he was already in his 80’s and survived two world wars. What more could she have been expecting beyond him kicking the bucket at some point...” the mother told her son within a rather cold and matter of fact manner

before looking towards the husband continuing.” ...I suppose bleeding hearts run in the family, your sister is still in the bargaining stage wishing it was her instead despite having two kids that need took care of. Absolutely ridiculous! Why can’t people just move on, right Jared?” The husband looked quite uncomfortable despite his more stoic expression. It was as if she was cutting him open on the table and ripping out his heart just to slap in the face with out. Venomous words that were just meant to hurt the husband and using the talk with the son as the catalyst to do so. “Weak and pathetic, don’t you think they have more to worry about than the dead. Maybe if they actually worked, they would not have all that time to ponder upon frivolous and stupendous waste of energy. But I suppose they always could just rely on the government to pay for their meals and bills,” the mother said with a smile, clearly enjoying this talking opportunity. The other participants were just silent within the discussion, quite clearly accepting this sort of vindictive malice that was spewing out. (Chug...chug...chug...chug...clank...chug...chug...)

The father quietly nods his head and held a calm disposition towards what was just said. But his eyes, they told a different story as they were sniper lens right onto the mother’s lips as she said that to the son. Skin a little flush and masking his emotions the best he could within this situation before licking his lips and asking,” and your sister? Is she going to be there?” The mother rolled her eyes and lifted her right eyebrow up with intrigue, hissing an accusatory question,” so you can gawk at her?” that is when the husband had both of his eye brows raise and his hands started fumbling around with the napkin. “Don’t know where you get that from, Grace. I just wanted to talk to her newest quarterly betrothed about the truck he was offering last time,” he answered in a more matter a fact manner compared to before. He takes a big sniff as if clearing his nose and then started leaning back before the mother replied with just silence at first. It was as if the two were holding each other in contempt, playing a ravenous game of chess to see who slips up first tonight. Regularly occurring without a doubt and sadly I became an audience member to this family matters. I rose my hand and then politely asked,” um, excuse me—” I was interrupted by the mother as she stares the father directly in the eyes saying,” of course, you would love to drive that truck. Envious of the owner?” I took a step back; because the tension severed the violin string as the somewhat peaceful ambience was snuffed with that last comment.

The father was taken aback and then leaned, tilting his head saying,” and what about Nick, eh? Look, if you want to attack my character in front of our boy then be a little bit subtler. I know what you been doing behind my back.” The man before me was poking the inner walling of his cheeks, believing he truly became morally superior within the argument being broadcasted shamelessly. I could never truly understand how relationships get to this point. Both sides seem to have been collecting ammunition for eventual fighting and the worst part is they use it indiscriminately. Marriage after all is two independent individuals that come together to coexist, holding each other strong during whatever violent unforgiving storm comes their way. Here, there is a mutualistic interest in the kid they have with them. But at this point, it is nothing but trying to smear campaign the other parent to seem less bad than the other. Bah! Then again, it is less burdensome to be the judgmental observer instead of being

in their shoes. The mother went silent and I decided to cough trying to be noticed by the family. That is when the mother just side-glance me and then offered a more hostile tone asking, "what do you want? You been standing there a whole time..." I then cleared my throat, now given a moment to finally speak after that ego crucifixion the mother endured. "Hate to disturb your conversation during such a...touchy moment. I woke up in the other cart back there and was just wondering where this train is heading?" I said politely before the father started to smirk in disbelief, rolling his eyes with the answer, "and you got on a train without knowing where it was going?" I then shrugged before shaking my head in a disappointing manner. Just clarifying, "sir, I do not even remember getting on this train. Let alone buying a ticket—" that is when the mother interrupted me just to say, "they just let any booze smelling piece of trash onto the train these days. Look, surely you have a ticket...otherwise you could not be on this train. The conductor came through at the start of the trip to verify all the passengers."

The toxic couple has now entered venomous unification to sink their fangs into me. Of course, if they just answered where then the conversation would have ended decisively. That is when I went into my coat pockets and jumbled around balled up used tissues. Just to feel a ticket...strange...it was right next to my phone and honestly, I would have felt it earlier. I pulled it out and saw a faded blue ticket with golden text. It had my name and shown that I was riding in business class. But the strange part it said that I was going to "Anathema, West Virginia" and for absolute certain I never heard of the place. It had a stamp of a vine covered clock tower with the name around the inner circle. "See? Now will you please stop bothering my family? The mother asked shortly after I had my ticket out, I then placed it back into my pocket and retorted, "with pleasure—" I started walking off down the aisle to the next cart but that is when the father asked, "by the way, do you know why there is not a single soul in this place?" I looked back over my shoulder before turning around completely saying, "your guess is as good as mine, your family is the only one I encountered so far?" The father shifted around nervously in his seat before the mother chimed in saying, "well, you know what they say...those who find themselves going to Anathema must really need it—" That is when the window right by the quarrelling couple's kid start to have sudden cracks, exponentially growing in size and then shattering. I tried to throw my arm out, but the train grinded to a halt as my body is thrown to the ground. The back of my head smashing against the metallic floor as everything faded to darkness. The only thing perceived was the blood curdling screams of a mother and child...but it did not sound like the family I was just interacted with. A mother and her girl...

# Mason O'Dell

## The Fate of a Stranger

---

The void was suffocating. Amidst the clouded ebony was an opening, and within it, I noticed something—a vague image that was quite peculiar. The hazy image was foreign; I had no memory of seeing it in the past. Nevertheless, something about it seemed strangely familiar. The scene depicted a figure in the middle of a beautiful, bright white background. Upon the figure lay deep scarlet cloth wrapped closely around its neck. Suddenly, a piercing noise that sounded like scraping metal echoed around me, and along with it, the vision vanished before I grasped its meaning.

As I emerged from my slumber, my eyes gradually opened, revealing the familiar sight of my bedroom. The dream that had captivated me moments ago vanished from my memory, leaving me to wonder if it ever existed. Doubt crept into my mind, but so did a profound and persistent curiosity. I felt a pang of regret for not being able to remember its message, but along with it, a fear deep within me circulated violently. I looked up at the ceiling and then down at my wrinkled pillow. I reluctantly decided to leave the comfort and warmth of my cozy blanket and set foot on the bland beige carpet that covered the floor. A chill ran through my body as the frigid air enveloped me. I shivered and felt the hairs on my arms stand up. I reached for the window and drew the blinds, exposing the glass pane coated in crystal frost. Through the foggy veil, I watched tiny snowflakes drift to the ground, each adding to the white mantle that covered the city. From the third floor, I made out the faint outlines of cars parked below, buried under the snow. The streets of Manhattan were remarkably busy—surprising for late January.

I turned my attention to my room once again. The volume of the room, once filled with darkness, was flooded with dim white light from the overcast sky above. I stood still and upright for a moment; I pondered what I should make of the day. I had wanted to go outside for a while now, and now that there was snow in the city, it seemed the perfect opportunity to view the beauty of winter. However, a strange notion grasped me; it urged me to go outside and overpowered my simple craving to witness the magnificence painted upon it. Even though my instincts wanted to return to the haven of my bed, I managed to escape from the confines of my apartment and began my way to the foyer below. I was a novelist living in an urban area; I had managed to afford this apartment for a while. I thought of myself as talented at writing, and others agreed. Yet, submerged in a sea of hundreds or even thousands of other writers touched by literature and gifted at writing as much as I, it was challenging to stand out.

As I headed out the door and down the elevator to the lobby, I gazed at the wooden architecture around me. The apartment building was quite extravagant, which surprised me as other similar residences were more expensive. It also contained an elevator that thankfully dismissed the nuisance of trekking up and down flights of stairs on any occasion I inclined to enter or exit. After arriving at the foyer and stepping out of the elevator, I bumped into another resident: my good

“Hey, good morning,” Theo greeted me with a friendly smile. A piece of his thick, dark hair covered a small portion of his eyes. Upon his face, he wore a set of dark-framed glasses that reflected his intellect. Theo was a young man working as a software engineer at a nearby tech company. We often chatted in the foyer and exchanged greetings in the elevator. I found him to be a pleasant, intelligent person, and he always knew what to discuss and consistently brought innovative ideas to life.

“Good morning, Theo,” I replied, returning his smile. “How are you doing today?”

He was putting a large laptop into a bag, printed on its side was the name of where he worked. He replied to me in a cheerful voice, “I’m good, thanks. I’m heading off to work. You?”

I started putting a thick coat on to stay warm while outdoors. “I’m going out for a short walk. I would like to see the frozen city,” I answered, with one arm in the coat.

“Oh, I see. These roads are quite precarious; I wonder if I’ll make it to work,” he warned me.

“Oh yes! Well, I wish you well on your trip. It was nice talking with you,” I told him as I pulled up the zipper to the coat.

“To you also! Farewell, my friend.” He wished me goodbye, picking up his bag.

After heading for the doors a few steps, I considered telling Theo about the mysterious dream I had that night. Nonetheless, I decided to reveal nothing to Theo as I could not recall all that the dream contained. Attempting to explain would only result in an offering of bits and pieces. Maybe taking a short walk outside would aid me in remembering and piecing together the strangely familiar sights of the dream. I continued walking directly towards the glass doors that led outside and pushed them open, exposing the warm inside of the residence to the wintry and frosty air. I stepped outside, feeling the crunch of fresh snow below my boots. As soon as I had closed the doors behind me, snowflakes had already claimed the surface of the winter coat.

New York, painted like a winter canvas, greeted me with bustling streets cloaked in unexpected energy. Large buildings towered in the sky, beautifully swaddled by the snow and ice. Icicles had formed on the canopies of businesses, and roofs had thick layers of snow stacked on them. I glanced towards the streets and noticed the perils lurking beneath the deceptive, serene snowfall as treacherous black ice turned the intersections into hazardous terrain. Thinking little about the danger, I navigated through the urban scenery, marveling at the frozen grandeur encompassing the towering structures and icy canopies.

Ahead, I spotted a pivotal intersection glazed with an icy sheen, and I continued walking until I reached the crosswalk. An instinctual impulse guided me to stand still and observe for a while; I paused and

shifted my sight to the different crosswalks, watching those who crossed. At that moment, the painfully familiar unfolded—my gaze met a girl with a crimson scarf draped against a backdrop of pristine white. Echoes of the dream reverberated as she walked through the crosswalk, and I followed in pursuit, but I was not quick enough. Immediately, a dissonant screech shattered the moment, revealing the impending peril: an automobile, sliding uncontrollably, hurtled towards her, a convergence of fate and vision.

In that harrowing instant, realization struck—the dream transcended the realm of mere imagination and had unveiled a premonition revealing to me the fate of someone I had never met.



# Adlai Chapman

## The Man With No Face

---

The man always walked with his head down, his hat covering his face. That's why they called him the Man with No Face. He preferred the name the Faceless Dude. The former was more supernatural than the latter. Of course people liked it better.

Grits of sand blew against the Faceless Dude's hat. He wondered where the nearest town was. His supplies were growing low, and the sand dunes of the Wyoming territory were harsh.

The horse neighed, and the Faceless Dude looked around. Rippling sand dunes for miles it seemed, save the juts of rock sticking out into the dull gray sky. The Faceless Dude thought about pulling his bandana up, but then decided not to—at least not yet.

In the distance, he could see a vague cloud of sand—maybe a group of cattle being herded, maybe something else. The Faceless Dude pulled the reins slightly and directed the horse to an outcropping of rocks, weathered by wind and sand.

When the horse could go no farther up the steep hill, the Faceless Dude dismounted and walked up himself. The sand blew against him, like billions of stinging insects. The sand filled the creases in his clothes.

When he finally reached the top, he could see the orange of the sun setting in the West, despite the clouds that filled the sky. He looked around, first ahead, further into the desert, further into the sunset, then to his sides, which he took to be North and South, then behind him, to the East, from which he had come. He could nothing yet, but time would tell, and so would the dark.

Thirty minutes later, or so he counted, the sun had disappeared. He looked again. Still no sign of settlement to the West, nor to the South or East. But just barely could he see, in the distance to the North, a faint glow of a presumed township. Or so he hoped. If it was not, he would have to spend unneeded time trying to trace his steps back.

And tracing steps would be hard. The desert erased all.

The Faceless Dude returned to his horse, awoke it from its standing slumber, and took off towards the North. The sand had stopped blowing as strongly. The Faceless Dude relished the cool night air, free of grit and dust. His spurs clattered, the only noise for what he had to assume was miles. Overhead, he saw no stars beyond the clouds.

The horse snorted the sand from its nostrils and kept walking. The Faceless Dude was in not much of a rush. He just needed to get to the town. He did not need to sleep, now.

By the time morning had come, he had seen no life. He wagered that by now he was about halfway between that outcropping to the town. He had begun to wonder if the dust cloud he had seen the previous day was not from cattle, but instead from a party of the Natives. He found it possible, but he had not seen any others for a long time, and he doubted that a party of them would just spring out of the sand unprompted.

A few bushes had begun to dot the landscape. Their color was a bleak green, but still, this solidified the idea that the glow had been a town, and not a wagon train, or a campground. Plants meant moisture and moisture maybe meant civilization or what passed for it out here.

The wind picked up and sounded like the howling of coyotes. The dunes began to get taller, the spaces between them seeming to sink deeper into the Earth. Clouds blackened in the distance, probably a storm. The Faceless Dude told his horse to move faster, and so it did.

The storm seemed to be going the same direction he was, North. He planned to beat it to the settlement. If there was one thing he did not want, it was to be stuck in the desert during a thunderstorm.

The horse galloped up a dune, a tall dune, and the Faceless Dude pulled on its reins to make it stop. In the near distance, he could see the town that he had been approaching. Now he could see the black blobs that were the buildings, rippling in the heat. The spurs whirred on the Faceless Dude's boots.

The Faceless Dude reached the town of Wood Pine at dusk. The orange was more subdued this time, for the nearing storm was blotting it out. The town of Wood Pine was nothing but smoking remains of skeletal wood.

The Faceless Dude stepped from his horse, not caring as the pack fell from the saddle and spilled the ammunition across the dirt. He walked through ash, over to the frame of what once had been a saloon, judging by the group of charred corpses slumped over one table. The Faceless Dude shook his head and pulled a blackened, dusty boot from one. The town may have been burnt to the ground, but his traditions were his traditions. He always took someone from the towns he came to. It was just the way it was. Here there was no one. He would just have to make do. When he returned to the horse, he tied the boot beside the other three that hung from the saddle.

The Faceless Dude died three days later in the middle of the desert. Maybe the idea of him lingered on a little longer, a figure that those in the deserted lands he had wandered told to their children to scare them. The horse, still walking through the whistling landscape, dragged his body into a small

town called Fort Denis an hour after he expired. The Faceless Dude hung from the saddle, just like the boots, and when a ten-year-old child went out to see what the horse was dragging, he saw a face marred by ugly scars that peered out from below the brim of the hat with dry, bloodshot eyes.

The Faceless Dude would not be recognized, for he was not faceless anymore. He was just a man.

# Jordyn Henthorn

## The Mayor of Iuka

---

“He doesn’t have much time left, you should go see him before he goes” my mother gently whispered, trying to coax me into confronting the truth I tried so hard to avoid. I knew in my heart that what she said was true, but I couldn’t find it in me to accept the fact that within a matter of hours, he’d be gone. In my naïve young mind, I thought that maybe, by some miracle, he would recover and have at least a few more years in him, a childish notion, but at that time, I still hoped that somehow he’d pull through.

Timidly, I made my way across the field to the house, and as I climbed the steps my hands shook with anxiety, my mind already accepting the inevitable. Before I could knock, she was at the door, ushering me in with sad eyes and a sympathetic smile. He hadn’t been able to smoke his pipe in weeks, yet the air was reminiscent of his cherry tobacco, something that always brought me great comfort. As we stood in the doorway, she began explaining to me his condition, but her words quickly faded away as my gaze fell over her shoulder and I caught a glimpse of him. Seeing his grey skin and limp figure, a pit grew in my stomach. Reality began to set in.

At that moment, I was plucked from their living room and taken to a place of memory. Legends of “snipe hunting” and “hoop snakes” buzzed in my brain while tears threatened to spill from my eyes. Memories flashed through my head like flipping through old pictures, as I remembered stories of him shooting himself in the foot and other tales of growing up in rural Appalachia.

Feeling a soft hand on my shoulder, I was brought back to my spot next to his hospital bed. “I’m making a pot of coffee, would you like a cup dear?” she said softly, knowing that I was on the verge of shattering into a million pieces. After lingering for a while, I made my way back across the field to my house and sat in my room, processing what had happened. Time didn’t seem real, as what seemed like minutes later, the phone ringing broke the trance I had fallen into and I noticed it was dark outside. Focusing deeply on the conversation in the next room, my mother’s voice told me that the inevitable had come to pass. He was gone.

The week between his death and his funeral seemed to pass in a matter of hours, a haze of helping with the preparations and making sure she was taken care of. I found that preoccupying myself with that didn’t allow my mind to dwell on the sorrow that lurked at the edges of my mind. Though his funeral was a rather happy one, I couldn’t help but feel an emptiness aching in my chest, as people hugged me and offered their condolences while they lowered him into the frozen ground.

# Sunni Moore

November 3, 2020

---

*“Come take my hand and walk through this world with me.”*

George Jones

“You okay, Sunshine?” my grandpa asked, wrapping an arm over my body as he pulled me in for a hug. The smell of old spice and coffee lingered as he pulled away, keeping his arm around my shoulders in an attempt to comfort me. My ten-year-old sister leaned against his other side, staring at me as she waited for an answer. I simply nodded, staring at the entrance of Dorsey’s Funeral Home.

There were several people standing at the entrance, many that I knew and others that I didn’t. *Most of them were family, although I would hardly claim them to be.* While I tried my best not to pay them any attention, I noticed their stares and whispering conversations. Although my body was trembling and my throat ached as I pushed back the emotions swelling up inside me, I took my sister’s hand and stepped through the front door.

Walking into the main room, we were greeted by our mother, my younger brother and younger sister. They were all seated in front of the large flat-screen television, crying as they watched the tribute video that I had put together. I watched as the television projected the words “Roger D. Moore. July 28, 1977 – November 3, 2020.” At this point, the familiar tune of George Jones’ “Walk Through This World With Me” had begun playing with the slideshow of photos. With that one single tune, my heart began fighting against my chest again. *You can’t cry. If you cry, you won’t stop.* My nose stung and my knees wobbled helplessly, trying so hard to keep myself together in front of the people around me.

“It’s time to go see him, Sunshine,” My grandpa said, directing me towards the front of the room. *Please don’t make me go, I don’t want to say goodbye yet.* Nodding once again, I began walking towards the area where he had directed for me to go.

Trailing behind like a row of ducklings, my siblings followed my lead. *Just as usual, they cling to me instead of our mother.* Although I needed to look up, I stared at the floor the entire time that we walked, stopping once my feet met the edge of the table that held the casket. Gathering the courage, I finally raised my head to look at the body in front of me. A knot swelled in my chest as I stared at my father’s lifeless face. *They didn’t lie to me; you really are dead.* They had dressed him in his favorite oil-stained hat and his camouflage hunting shirt. Just as we had requested, knowing he wouldn’t want anything else.

Although I desperately needed to cry and scream, and my body ached for a rest, I remained at the front of the room and let people cry into me as they gave their condolences. Family, friends, and those

---

he worked with on the oil rigs for 20 years lined up through the door. I lost count of how many people showed up, but I know he would have never believed me. Even as they lowered his body into the ground, I remained quiet and collected. Many people had asked what happened, but I didn't have the heart to tell them the exact details. They never believed it anyway, we begged them for help for years, and instead they claimed that my family were to blame.

There were several times where I was told that it was okay to cry, and that I should sit down and let people come to me, but I just couldn't. Simply because I knew that if I had shown any weakness at this point, my entire family would have nothing to lean on.

Afterwards, I went home with my mother and all three of my younger siblings. This had been the first time my mother and I had spoken without fighting in three months. We didn't speak one word to each other this time; there was nothing to say. This was also the first time that I had been back home since moving out on my own. Although the house remained the same on the outside, and the dogs we grew up with greeted us lovingly as they always did, it still felt like we were unwelcome. *I should have never left in the first place.*

Stepping inside the house and looking through the endless pile of dirty clothes, dishes, and my father's empty Jim Beam bottles that were scattered in nearly every room made me nauseated. Each of my siblings and my mother reclused back to their own rooms just as they always did. Less than an hour later, people that my mother called "friends" flooded our house. These were mostly people who I did not know, and those that I did know were never welcome in my father's presence. It seemed as if they were making themselves welcome in our house, and in some way, it felt like they were throwing a party. From that moment on, I lost the bond that I had with my mother.

After attempting to decompress, with no success, I decided to sit in the one place that I could be alone. Sitting in my father's truck, I listened to George Jones and Willie Nelson as I sobbed and screamed until my voice went out and my throat was raw.

It hit me that my father would never get to see any of us grow up. He would never get to see my siblings graduate high school or walk his three girls down the aisle on their wedding day, and he wouldn't get to meet the grandchildren that he always wanted. There would be no more hunting and fishing trips, and there would never be another nightly two-hour phone call after work. I would never get to hear his voice again or feel the warmth of his hug after a long day; and I would never get to see him sober again.

*Why does this hurt so much? Why did you give up on us?* I slept in his truck that night. Although I was home, it was no longer my home. Truthfully, I still don't know where home is after three years.

## Sunni Moore

### The Wreckage of You and Me

---

"Get up, Colter" she pleads, tugging on the vomit-covered denim jacket that held his body, "Let's go home, please." Colter didn't move, instead he groaned and pushed her hands away from his jacket. She stood there hovering over his body, shivering violently from the cold February rain. "Colter..." she sighed in frustration, fighting back the tears that were forming, "It's three in the morning and you're lying on the pavement in a puddle of your own vomit for the fourth time this week. Please, let's go home."

Colter let out a loud groan as he turned his head away from her. "Why are you even here?" He questioned as his voice began to break, "You deserve better. You should leave. Leave me and go find someone good."

"You are good, you just can't see it yet... but I know you're a good man with a good heart. If you weren't, I wouldn't have agreed to be your girlfriend eight months ago" Wrenley reassured, turning his head back to her and gently using her coat sleeve to wipe the vomit that was left on his chin, "I'm not going anywhere, I *promise*."

Four months later, leaning against the doorframe of the kitchen, Colter studies the trail of messes from last night's cycle of beer cans and cigarettes. The throbbing headache and nausea are more than enough to prove that the mess belongs to him, as it typically does. However, he can't shake the confusion that comes from the silence throughout the house. Typically, when he wakes up from his cruel nightly routine of drunkenness, he is welcomed into the kitchen with the sound of music and a talkative brunette woman that he loves. This morning, however, the house is silent.

His eyes fixate on an envelope that rests on the kitchen table, as he picks it up he notices that his name is written on it with a small heart next to it. Looking around once more, hoping that this is just some sort of joke and that she will walk through the door at any moment, he opens it. Inside he finds a piece of paper with the neatest handwriting he had ever seen, confirming that it belongs to her. Taking a deep breath to subdue his shaking hands, he begins to read.

*"Colter, I don't know how to really begin this letter, but I'm sure by now you've figured out what this is about. I just want you to know that I do still love you, and I will forever love you. However, it took me a long time to realize that not everything in life is meant to be good. Not every person we feel something with is meant to make a home within us. Love isn't supposed to always be hard and messy. Sometimes it needs to be calm and nurturing. And I've never loved a soul quite like the way that I love you, but it's no longer as easy as it used to be. Which makes this so much harder than I wish it was. Honestly, I wish I could have saved you, but I know that I must save myself too.*

---

*So, I guess it ends here. We will go our separate ways and hope that we will see each other somewhere in the future. I hope you find whatever it is that you need to be better, and that you can leave behind the wreckage of you and me. Please don't forget about me or the love that we shared. I hope that we meet again one day when the two of us can enjoy it properly. Goodbye, my love. - Wrenley Greene."*

By this point, the anger in Colter's chest boiled into tears. He rips at the paper, throwing out every cursed word he could think of as he sobs into the shredded pieces in his hands. *How could she leave? She promised she wouldn't leave.* He thought to himself as he sunk down against the kitchen cabinets and onto the floor.

The hours ticked by, and darkness flooded into the house, but Colter still sits in the same spot on the kitchen floor. His body is shaking violently from a multitude of emotions, hunger, and the lack of alcohol and nicotine. *It only took a year for her to realize she needed to run from him. If she couldn't stay, how would anyone else?* He knew that being with a broken man wouldn't be easy for her, but he never thought she'd be the type to break a promise. *Truthfully, he didn't blame her, but he did blame himself.* Knowing that he has nothing else to lose, Colter finally stands up from the floor. He grabs his coat and his truck keys, and heads for the closest liquor store.



# Madeline Tusing-Knight

## Untitled

---

I've never really liked hunting, but I've always liked my father. Any chance to go spend the mornings with him in the woods, just the two of us, I considered a golden opportunity and prayed I could volunteer before any of my other siblings could. I like to say I'm selfless, but I'm selfish when it comes to time with him. In this case, selfishness seems to be okay, especially when we sit to eat our gas station breakfast (honey buns and bad coffee of course), and he tells me about how much drywall he hung at work and how much of an asshole his boss is (don't worry, he lets me say asshole). I tell him about my recent struggles with long division. He always says I got my brain from him, so I was sure that he would have the same issues with long division I did, and he let me think that.

It was an early Sunday morning in mid-October. The leaves fell, forming a muted rainbow on the ground, I loved to step on them and hear the crunch. My father had woken me up at the crack of dawn, dressed from top to bottom in camouflage with an orange vest disrupting the flow of green and brown, and I knew that meant it was time to go. In less than five minutes, I was ready and waiting outside our old rusty Ford Bronco that had no heat. We dressed in many layers for the woods that day, but if we are being honest, it was mostly for the drive there. I know my dad would never show how cold he was, he loved being strong. I wish I could tell him he doesn't always have to be that way. Maybe that's why our morning coffee was so essential, to keep him from shivering. We drove for no time at all when we pulled up to our favorite hunting hill. In the spring, we would hunt for mushrooms and in the fall, we would hunt for deer. It's hard to say which one was my favorite.

Today was a good day for deer, I could just feel it. My dad could too. He always took hunting so seriously. For some, it was a sport, but for our family it was dinner. He thinks I don't know why we go so often, or why he hides the opened envelopes with the "OVERDUE" sign flashing like a traffic light on the front. I like to let him think I don't know. I want him to know I'm strong too, so it's our little secret.

We trekked up the mountain with our rifles slung over our backs and our motivations soaring through the treetops. It felt like hours before we came across our first one. A small buck, a four pointer, nothing to write home about. I'd never shot my gun before, but my dad was determined to get me to start. I sat down carefully and slowly propped my gun up on a log that had fallen during a thunderstorm last summer. From the top of my rifle, I focused my energy on the deer, lined up my scope with its head and pulled the trigger. A small part of me hoped it would run away from the shot, but the biggest part of me just wanted to make my dad proud.

Before I knew it, I was on my back, the blow of the gun was too much for my body to handle. I felt the gun fall on top of me. I shook off the confusion and sat up in search of my deer, but it wasn't there.

---

Silently, I went to the spot where the deer stood and saw a small puddle of crimson liquid staining the leaves. I followed the blood for a while, until the sun had risen over the horizon and lunch time neared. I could hear the deer close; it seemed as if it was continuously one step ahead of me. I could hear footsteps across the leaves and faint gasps of breath.

“You hit it in the lung, honey, let’s pack up. The shot scared away the rest, I’m sure,” my dad spoke with such ease, I almost couldn’t hear the disappointment in his voice. But I couldn’t move. I could hear the deer struggling to walk, struggling to breathe, I couldn’t just leave it.

“Just five more minutes, please,” I begged, “I can hear it close; we’ve almost got it.” My dad obliged me and gave me the time I thought I needed. Unfortunately, the closer I got, the further it strayed away from me. It was scared of me. He was scared of me.

My dad had reluctantly given me the time I asked for and eventually, was ready to go home and get some lunch. I left, swearing to the deer I would be back tomorrow to help him. I could save him; I was sure of it.

The next morning felt cold and gloomy. I could hardly sleep last night, thinking of the deer that I had left to suffer. I woke up before my father, got dressed, I shoved my old superhero Band-Aids, peroxide, really anything I could think of in my pockets, and waited for my dad to wake up. When he did, we went back out to our hill. For the first time in forever, our treasured gas station breakfast was stale.

Like every hunting morning, we went up the mountain, found our spot and waited. He was waiting for a shiny new deer, I was waiting to hear a footstep, a wheeze, anything. Eventually, about two hours into our hunt, I heard the faint sound of a raspy breath being let out. My father was distracted by a squirrel climbing up a tree close by, so I snuck off to find the noise.

Close by, in the bushes, I found him. My deer. My four-pointer, nothing special deer. He was lying there, wheezing, trying everything in his power to move as far away from me as he could, only managing to move about an inch before giving up. He looked at me with his eyes nearly glassed over, looking as if he had been crying. I sat beside him and unloaded the first-aid kit I had put together at home. His wound still looked fresh, and I could tell it hurt him when I put peroxide on it, as his breathing had halted. I turned to grab a Band-Aid from my pocket when my dad approached carrying the hunting knife that I had gotten him for his 45th birthday. As swiftly as he approached, he tilted the head of the deer up. I could see the deer squint from the sudden splash of sunlight that greeted his irises, which quickly faded into nothingness as my father sliced the neck of the deer, putting him out of his misery. No light, no curiosity, no fear. I looked up at my father, my heartbeat beating for both the deer and I, and a satisfying grin smeared his usually handsome features. I wouldn’t let my father take him right away. I laid with him and petted him, while my dad grew more and more impatient. With every bump

and with every turn, I heard the body slam around in the back of our bronco; my tears flowed freely, roaming the unfamiliar face of someone who had just taken a life and my love for my father dissipated.

I went to bed hungry that night.

The next morning, I slept in.

## Contributors' Notes

---

**Emmalyn Boelter** is a first-year music student at Glenville State University. She is working to become a professional composer and musician someday. Her submission is a work in progress from her opera and accompanying libretto. If she could meet anyone in history, she would like to have a conversation with Mary Shelley and probably fall in love.

**Adlai Chapman** attends Gilmer County High School.

**Christin Fanelli** received her BFA in Art and Design with a concentration in painting, drawing, and printmaking from Towson University. She then earned an MFA in printmaking from Ohio University. Fanelli's work has been exhibited across the United States, as well as online. She has a special interest in the discourse surrounding disability in education, and higher education reform. She currently teaches Fine Art at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Maryland as well as online for Glenville State University. You can find her work online at [christinfanelli.com](http://christinfanelli.com)

**Melissa Gish** is an Associate Professor of English at GSU. She loves three of the four seasons in her native Minnesota. Her natural history books are found in school libraries across the country.

**Rodrigo Haro** was born in Chicago and has been published in *Cardinal Arts Journal* and three times in *SEEDS: The Literary Arts Journal at NEIU*. He has also independently published five books. The latest book is *South Chicago (novel)* (2023). You can find him at [conejoview.blogspot.com](http://conejoview.blogspot.com). He has a BA in English from Northern Illinois University. He is a student in the MA in English (with a Creative Writing concentration) program at Eastern Illinois University.

**Jordyn Henthorn** is an English major from Tyler County. She enjoys reading, painting, and spending time outside with her German Shepherd. Her biggest fear is waking up as a bug and experiencing an existential crisis.

**Kaylie Hunter** is a Behavioral Science Major at Glenville University, they were inspired as to pursue this degree because they were a former foster kid, and they want to become a social worker to help children.

**Michael Lee Johnson** is an internationally published poet in 46 countries or republics, a song lyricist with several published poetry books, nominated for 7 Pushcart Prize awards, and 6 Best of the Net nominations.

**Liz Matory** is an assistant professor of business at GSU primarily teaching students in the Second Chance Pell program at the prison. A native of Washington DC, she has lived in Glenville since 2020.

**Jonathan Minton** is a professor of English at Glenville State University. His books include *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (forthcoming in September 2024 from Cul-de-sac of Blood), *Letters* (Moria Books, 2022), *Technical Notes for Bird Government* (Telemetry Press, 2018), *In Gesture* (Dyad Press, 2009), and *Lost Languages* (Long Leaf Press, 1999). He edits the literary journal *Word For/Word* (wordforword.info), and curates the Little Kanawha Reading Series. He has been searching for Bigfoot since 1976. Some of the phrasing in “*Frankenstein* (1931)” is adapted from Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, T.S. Eliot’s “Ash Wednesday” and “Little Gidding,” and Jericho Brown’s *The New Testament*.

**Sunni Moore** is from Lumberport, West Virginia and is an English major at Glenville State University. She spends most of her time reading, listening to music, playing video games, and fighting the urge to become a paranormal investigator. Her writing is dedicated to her father, Roger Moore (1977-2020).

**Sarah Normant-West** is a 2013 Glenville State Alum. She enjoys trying new mediums, although acrylic remains her favorite medium. She loves to create black and white artwork, with a splash of color.

**Mason O'Dell** is a GSU student in the dual enrollment program. He is a junior attending Braxton County High School and is from Braxton County, WV.

**John Charles (Chuck) Priestley II** was born and resides in South Charleston, West Virginia. He served honorably for 24 years in the U.S. Navy, during which he discovered a love for reading and writing poetry. His hobbies include cooking, gardening, practicing Tai Chi, and reading literature. He holds a Master of Arts, English degree from Marshall University. He has written over 130 poems in rhymed and free verse. Themes include nature, ecology, human relationships, and social issues.

**Veronica Rowse** is a Math Education Senior who was inspired to write her story after walking her dog by the river at night. She urges everyone to look up short-faced bears.

**Marjorie Stewart** is a professor at Glenville and a confirmed Francophile.

**Brooke Storm** is an Appalachian writer working a dead-end job in a dead-end town where she couldn't be happier.

**Jacob Dale Thompson** is a 3rd year Piano Performance major at GSU.

**Madeline Tusing-Knight** is an English Education major in her third year at Glenville State University. On top of being silly and goofy, she also turns in most of her work on time and is the personality hire for the Glenville State University English Department.

**Gordon West** is a local WV artist. He enjoys painting landscapes, and animals the most. His favorite Medium is Watercolor.

**Porter Wills** apologizes in advance for his sophomoric attempts at verse. He is new to the genus having only just becoming inspired. His muse is newfound love late in life and a treasure he thought he would never find again.

*Trillium* (Issue 45, Spring 2024): Nancy Corbitt, Liz Matory, Jonathan Minton, Deron Haught, Brooke Storm, Allison Boggs, Kaylie Hunter, Michael Lee Johnson, Porter Wills, Abby Hudson, Jacob Bonds, John C. Priestley II, Jordyn Henthorn, Sunni Moore, Emmalyn Boelter, Melissa Gish, Megan Snodgrass, Angelina Randolph, KA Wright, Duane Chapman, Sarah Normant-West, Gordon West, Marjorie Stewart, Christin Fanelli, Kaitlyn Warren, Joshua Carr, Jonah Rucker, Mara Jarvis, Akasha Brown, Megan Drenk, Jesse Kargol, Jeremy Taylor, Autumn Moyers, Charlie Bauman, Michelle McMunn, Rebecca Walter, Jennifer Wenner, Emily Rosales, Sadie Hill, Jazzmin White, Ian Dawson, Chelsea Adkins, Claire Atkinson, Samantha Chambers, Heather Swaggerty, Daniel Hinger, Emily Nesselrotte, Emily Garrett, Veronica Rowse, Madeline Tusing-Knight, Jacob Dale Thompson, Rodrigo Haro, Mason O'Dell, Adlai Chapman, The *Trillium* is the literary and visual arts publication of the Glenville State University Department of Language and Literature.