



Wiregrass

2017 LITERARY AND ARTS JOURNAL



Cover art: **Geometric Abstraction** - *Matthew Boyd*

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2017 LITERARY AND ARTS JOURNAL



East Georgia State College, University System of Georgia, Swainsboro, Georgia 30401
www.ega.edu

Wiregrass 2017 Literary and Arts Journal

Featuring the writing and artwork of East Georgia State College students, staff, and faculty.



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Thanks to Val Czerny, Desmal Purcell, and Alan Brasher

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Alembic

What is the essence of a life not young but not yet done?

Is the distillate clear or golden like the sun?

Does the liquid have a pleasant scent?

Or the lees a life misspent?

Does it caress the tongue with promised delight,

or is it sharp and cruel as an adder's bite?

Does it cozen the heart for one more drink,

Or conjure fears of a burning brink?

Are all losses the angels share,
or stolen chances and wanton care?

Is it a vintage of the sweetest fruits,

Or the distillate of lost pursuits?

What will the crush yield:

purgatory, hell or Elysian Field?

The answers dwell within each heart.

To plumb such depths beyond my art.

— *Kenneth Honer*

The Real Reason

Words so soft, we barely even hear
Her alarm of greatness or when danger is near,
Her cry for help or cry for joy,
Then wonder why we can't protect the little girl or boy.
And the beam is so fierce that it pinches our mesh skin
Because this whole time we ignore it until it's within.
Oh, it's too late now. Her cries are the ones who win.
Don't blame it on your Almighty—that's not why you sin.
Or maybe it is, because you made it up.
It's coming back for you, and I guess that's your luck.
So when all of the trees fall, don't ask yourself why.
Just settle with the pain, as you die a little inside.
The breeze grasps your spirit with a plethora of memories.
"I want you to be aware of what's happening to me."
Instead you scream to your habit and brush what she says away,
You ungrateful child, because she gave you yet another immaculate, poisoned day.
You tear her apart and ignore her lessons
Because it doesn't happen to you. I guess that's your blessing.
But remember, one day you'll speak a little too loud,
And she'll move over your head, being your darkest and worst cloud.
Don't cry for help, dear. You're now making your bed.
She softly begged you to stop, but you dismissed her instead.
It's too late now because I can only watch you.
This is what happens, when to life you aren't very true.

— *Shakiyah Jarmon*

Z Soup!

All alone as the letter, “Z,” I dive and swim to find like-minded friends. So many “E”s, so many “C”s, so many “A”s, but just me—the only Z. The spoon looms large in front of me—a pewter barrier to the other side of the bowl. The murky chicken brew is easier to swim through when I can catch an oil slick, but the spoon only assists if I can stick to it, and I’m told that’s dangerous.

I’m not afraid of any large spoon, you should know. Even when it scrapes the bottom and kicks off a cyclone—a monsoon of letters pitching, spinning into syntactically faulty phrases and sentences—barely a word able to organize. “R”s against “M”s, and “Ks” spiraling with “L”s. As a Z, I get caught, helpless, in the cyclone, but I can handle it. I just relax and watch the other letters pass by—like Dorothy in her hurricane dream. All I need is two more “Z”s, if I can find them. Then we can finally rest—together up against the bowl of the spoon—and drowsily dream of the day when we can finally gaze beyond curved, ceramic walls.

— *Val Czerny*



Z Soup - *Val Czerny*



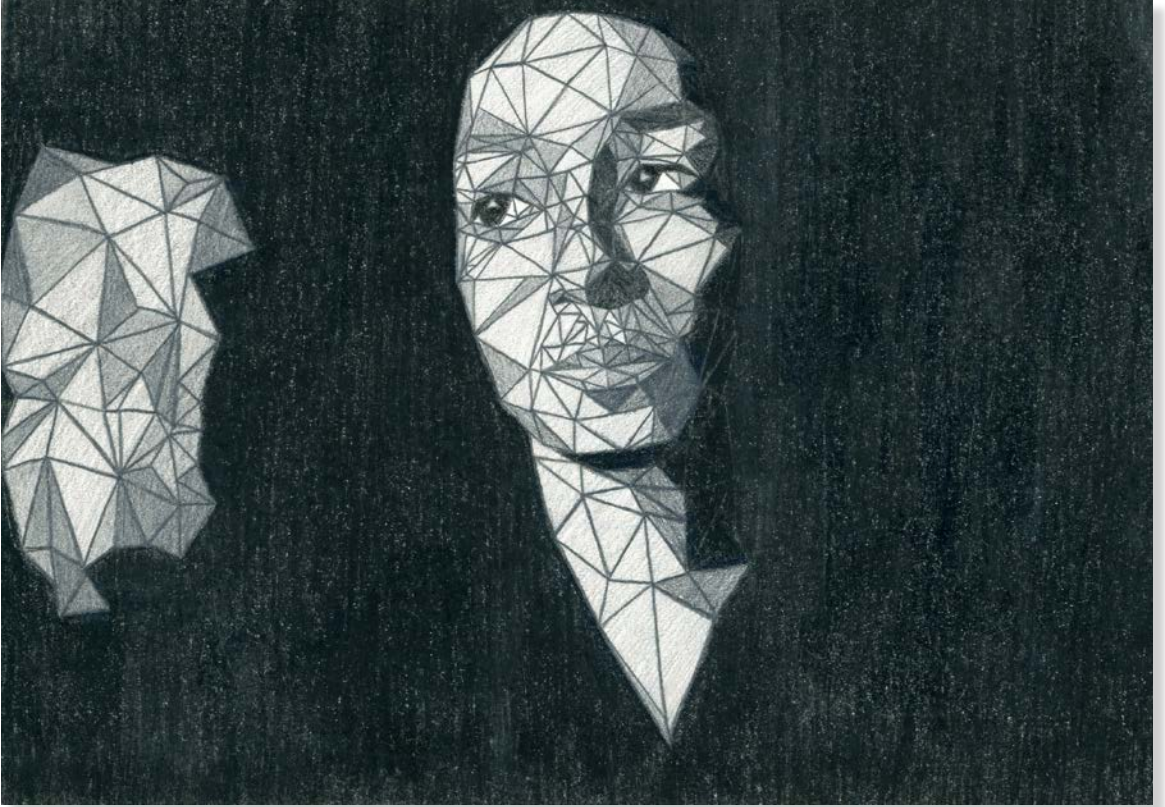
Light Up the Night - *Janet Sanchez*



Geometric Abstraction - Janet Sanchez



La Carreta - *Jessica McVay*



Geometric Abstraction - *Celeste Rodriguez-Teran*

Metamorphosis

Can I go back to the simple days, when the night was young, free of clutter, nothing was disarrayed? I hold on to the past, as I remember when I genuinely laughed. Days seem long and drab as people judge your character over a corrupted story that they hear. The negatives outweigh the positives, even if it's just one. A thousand sunny days seem to be overshadowed by the darkness of one rainstorm. "But you don't even know me," I say. As they say, "I've heard stories about her." Attached to my name as if I'm wearing it as a fur coat. They don't know the truth, they don't know that I was hurting. Suddenly I've become victimized and subject to this metaphorical murder. We all have our demons; we've all paid our dues; we've all worn our scarlet letters, but I wear mine because of you. You broke my heart; you ripped me apart; now I'm getting mocked, and you just flaunt it. Does it make you feel superior to make me feel so small, to tear people down and force them to build up a wall? I thought I knew you, but I guess I was wrong; I know who I am; I know I'm not wrong. You ripped the bandage off when the skin was still raw. But they say you get what you deserve, and I see that now I deserved the hurt. Like a bird searching for its prey, I chose you regardless of the fact that you were with her. Hurtful words that were plastered to my bones-- now looking back, I deserved them all. Through the pain I became numb until I met him and I became young. He revived what had died in me and led me to the sun. He noticed the tint of my blue green eyes, which planted seeds of a new beginning watered by the sky. I love that boy more than words can pronounce; he saved me from drowning and sorrow; through him I learned what love was truly about. But I know the day he leaves is drawing near; I'm preparing for the pain that awaits me there. The memories we've made will forever stain my soul, for he was the one who made me whole. Desperately holding on to his hands grasped to mine as if it's the last time I will ever feel his skin against mine. Oh, but he's going to soar with such a loving heart. He's the wisest person I've ever encountered, even if I will be left inevitably sore. I'll watch his life in pictures; I'll remember his unforgettable laugh; I'll never erase our adventures from the map. As the day draws near when he packs his bags and leaves, I'll remember that I was the one who was supposed to save him, but he was the one who saved me.

— *Amy Connell*

Visions of Libertarian Hades

A libertarian Hades would be a makeshift affair,
A pay-as-you-go place held together with duct tape and spit.
Shades would paddle themselves across that great river,
And Charon would have to find employment elsewhere.

When crossing that other river (I forget the name),
Some would not bring paddles
Since this would be largely a matter of personal choice.
And those unlucky rafts would circle endlessly ----
A new ad hoc torment?

No one would replace that vanishing fruit.
The rock would always stay on top of that great hill,
Never rolling down again,
Never needing to be pushed uphill again.
Could the place be put up for bid?

Prometheus would have a brand new
Set of problems.
Years of chronic liver problems
Have eroded his health,
And he simply can't afford health care.
But his chains have rusted away,
And the eagle departed long ago.
Of course, some lost souls,
Would wish to supply gasoline for that lake of fire.
It would be their freedom to choose.
Other fires would be banked —
Unless contributions were forthcoming,
And the whole place would be colder and darker
— an innovative approach to penology?

Stygian darkness would become the norm in all places
Since paying the electric bill would be purely voluntary.
But somehow the spirit of the place would remain,
The punishment largely ad hoc
But punishment nevertheless.

Damnation would be voluntary,
Perdition dependent upon grassroots support.
And all torments would be donated.

And in this the best of all possible worlds,
Shades would eagerly await
The latest Book of the Dead selection:
Just about anything by Ayn Rand.

— *Kenneth Homer*



Seattle's Great Wheel and Waterfront - Karly McDonald

Dirt Roads

You Can't Breathe Water

Slow
Stifling
Stupifying
Heat

Sweat
Pools and goes
Nowhere

There's nowhere to go

No escape

No relief

The very air sweats

"It's not so much the heat
as it is the humidity."

No

It's the heat.

Fresh

The itch is immobilizing

I've done something
Incredibly stupid
Insanely symptomatic

Of arrogant youth

She told me not to

But
As always
I didn't listen

The cool was too much
The damp too tempting
The green too inviting

No shirt
No pants

I lie back

In the grass

And now

I can't stand myself

Starlight

"Come with me, son."

And we walked

The driveway ruts
Barely visible
At first

"Your eyes will adjust—
you'll get your night vision."

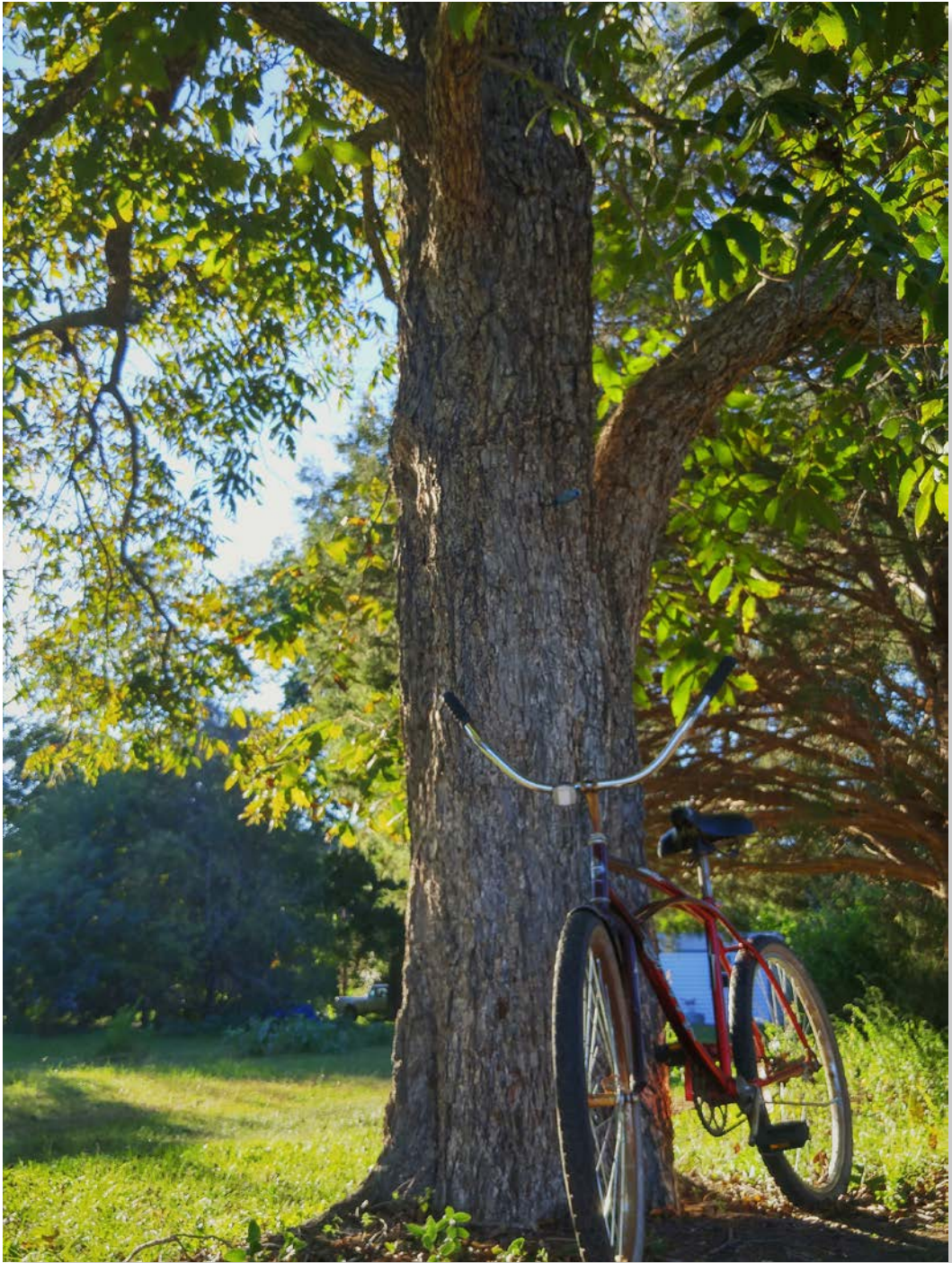
And I did

Moonless dark
Trees arching
Over the road

In places
Where they didn't

The sky was full

— Christian Kraus



Let's Go for a Ride - *Jacqueline Yepe*

Strangers

There is nothing that prepares you for whom you meet;
Nothing that guides you on how to react to change.

Simple words,
One tiny gesture
Could be a large shift in our realities.

At times, our everyday choices are the cause,
While others are inevitable.

Fates woven;
Paths are crossed;
The lives of mortal beings become tied.

In this woodland's blissful silence,
Two pieces are slowly fitting into one.

Destiny awaits.
Our chance is here.
Mere steps lead to what we've both been waiting for.

Let us not ignore this calling;
We must be more than what we are –
Wandering Strangers,
Blind, yet wanting.
So, why do we not take this moment?

— *Samira Pilgreen*

This Part of the Sky

The clouds echo over the horizon,
 Fading behind the trees.
There is very little light behind them,
Like a candle in a tomb.
A soft wind blows by,
 Shifting the trees in its path.
Voices echo throughout the room,
 A cool blend of happiness and chaos in the air.
Many eyes set on the dial,
 Watching and waiting for their relief.
Birds fly freely through the sky,
 An experience many of us wish to feel.
People are gathering at the gate,
 Patiently holding on until this dungeon lets out.
Escape is a pleasure to many,
 But others rely on it for sanity.
To leave this prison though, for all of us,
 Is like a cloud being lifted up from its bonds.
It is dark, this part of the sky,
 And our freedom is near.
The clouds echo over the horizon,
 Fading behind the trees.
There is very little light behind them,
Like a candle in a tomb.

— *James C. Wright*



Gazing Up at the Sky - *Jacqueline Yepe*

Abandoned Child

You left me in the dark,
You even put me out,
Something you said you'll never do,
All I could do was shout.

Then you blame me for being grown,
But that's what you taught me--
How to wash clothes at five,
What else am I supposed to be?

"Call your grandma," were your favorite words.
I didn't want to call her,
I wanted you to handle it first.
Now, I see, you too showed me hurt.

My daddy made it worse,
But let's not talk about him.
This poem is about you,
And plus, I've made enough of them.

All I needed was support,
And you couldn't give me that.
Everyone asks why I moved out,
They don't even know the half.

This pain that I feel,
I would never tell you.
You act just like your mom;
Look what you're putting me through.

But what is a friend
When you can't even call on mom?
But she'll never understand
She was supposed to be the first one.

All I needed was a hug,
But you yelled at me instead.
You threw Bibles at me;
Do you know that's stuck in my head?

And no, I'm not calling you a bad mother;
I would never do that,
But sometimes, I don't know if you knew,
But you just didn't have my back.

I was doing so good in school,
But I couldn't make you proud,
And even if I did,
You didn't dare praise me aloud.

But, I guess those things don't matter,
And you couldn't really see;
I'm pointing fingers at you,
And you're pointing them at me.

— *Shakiyah Jarmon*

First Heartbreak

As a little girl, you were my heart.
No matter what you did to me,
You were the most important part.

My heart grew heavy, as a little girl,
But I ignored the fact...
You were my rock, my world.

Now, you never made time for me,
And I promise it's okay,
But one day, I grew up to realize that it was you who stripped my joy away.

I cried night after night, and sometimes I still do.
I bet you didn't know, and probably never knew.
No worries; I always blamed me; it was never you.

The poison grew to be your blood, and the smoke filled your heart,
I started doing what you taught me; I'm dying,
But I can't blame you for my start.

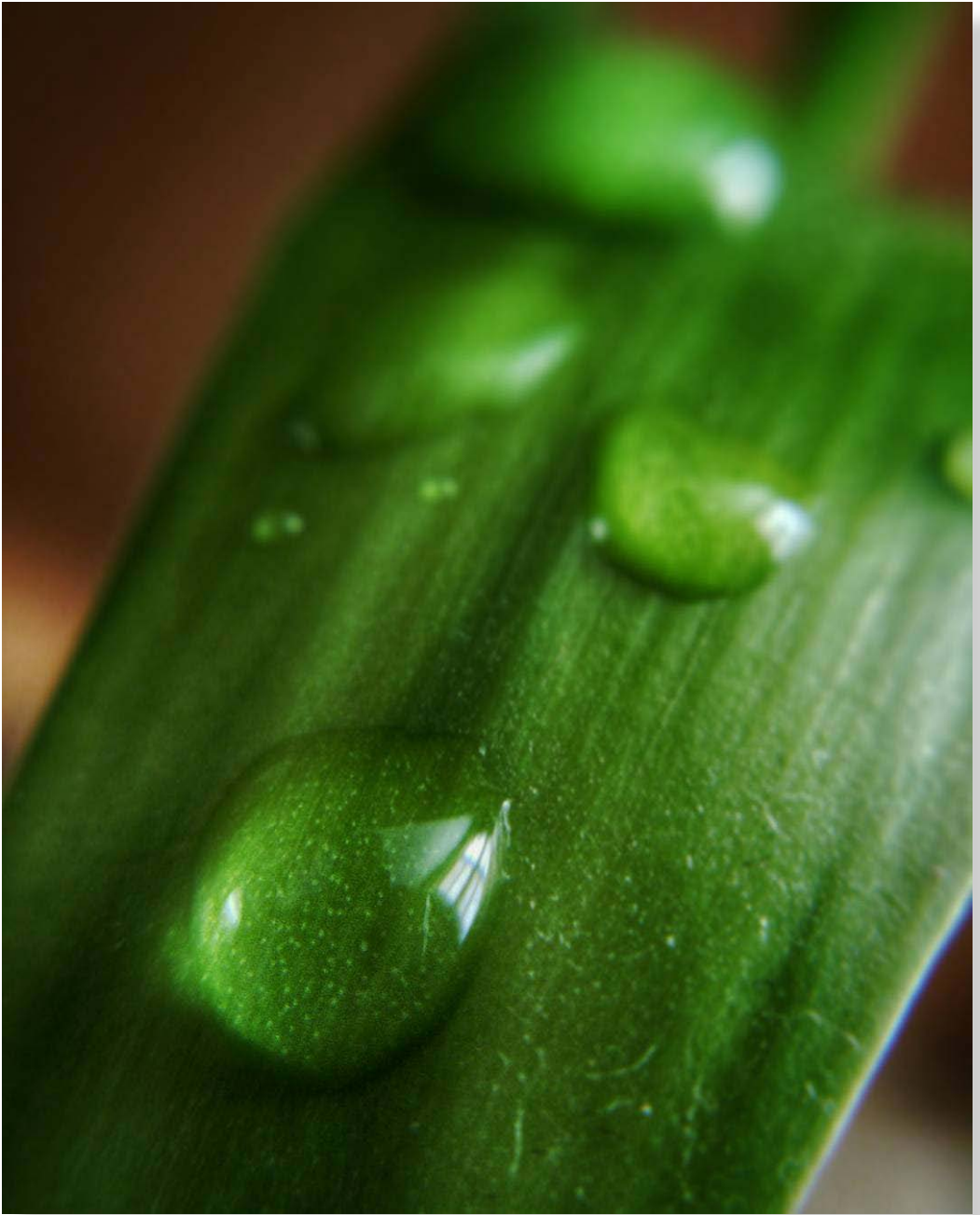
I grew up to learn you forgive to let go,
But see, it's not that easy
I'm still broken because of you.

Trust me, I'm not trying to point fingers.
I don't think you really meant to.
My heart may be more shattered than yours,
But that's all because of you.

If I can't trust you, then how can I anyone else?
I swear this everlasting pain,
Is something I've never felt.

You taught me that honesty doesn't exist,
And how to choose the perfect wife.
But how can I say I've never felt this pain?
I've been feeling it my whole life.

— *Shakiyah Jarmon*



A Jalapeno? Or a leaf? - *Jacqueline Yepe*



Imagination - Rachel Boyette

Home

One red light, right in the middle,
One grocery store, one gas station, one restaurant, five churches,
Dirt roads, hayfields, pecan trees,
Tractors, trucks and four-wheelers,
Busy-body old women and cantankerous old men,
A self-imposed curfew of 9 pm,
No crime, no traffic, no secrets, no strangers,
And not a single thing to do.
It may be small and boring,
And a bit behind the times,
But it's home.

— *Lauren Conner*

Isn't it Funny

Isn't it funny how we used to spend every day together?
We practically lived together.

Isn't it funny how we don't talk anymore?
I see you around once in a while, but pretend not to notice.

Isn't it funny how I still think about you sometimes?
Not about who you are now, but the person you used to be.
Speaking of that...

Isn't it funny how much we both have changed?
You became someone you said you'd never be

Isn't it funny how we laughed when they said
we'd drift apart from our friends after high school?

Maybe it's not so funny after all.

— *Elizabeth Gross*

Dam Truth

Until I stood on the dam
the pond had been there forever,
a natural feature of a world of hills and hollows.

Obscured by thirty years and a few willows,
the dam seemed only a grassy ridge behind cattails
to a boy, alone in an aluminum jon boat,
launching a beetlespin toward snags and weeds,
hoping to draw hungry bass into open water.

The story was familiar to me:
A bulldozer had closed in
the lower end of a one-acre, wet-weather swamp;
the rain had been inevitable.
But some truths are too remote.

I finally wandered up behind it, playing
army with my cousin. We looked up the old drainage ditch
to its abrupt termination, obviously the work
of something larger, stronger than the men who had lived there.

— *Alan Brasher*



San Luis River, Costa Rica - *Jessica McVay*



Painting the Night - *Jessica McVay*

The Monster Anxiety

The teacher turns and looks at me, “Come up to the board and work number three.”

Immediately, I feel the monster latch into me. It takes form as a soul crushing dread that sinks its teeth into my consciousness. Every whisper suddenly seems to be aimed at me; I try to tell myself that isn’t true. My emotions reject any logical reasoning I can throw at them.

I exhale, beginning to shake, and stand up. What if I sat in something!? I tug my shirt down over my jeans as I walk to the board. *Just calm down!* My rationality roars at how stupid I’m being. I know there’s no reason for this, but the monster doesn’t need reasoning. It feeds on this weakness; it causes this fear.

My hands shake more; what if I get this wrong? Why does it feel like everyone is laughing at me? Their eyes bore into me. What is wrong with me? Calm down! Why would they even...?

Halfway done... Someone chuckles, and I tense up. Did I do something wrong? My chest aches; my heart is beating too fast, echoing in my ears. The monster roars its sick laughter in my ears.

Come on, you are stronger than this.

Almost done.

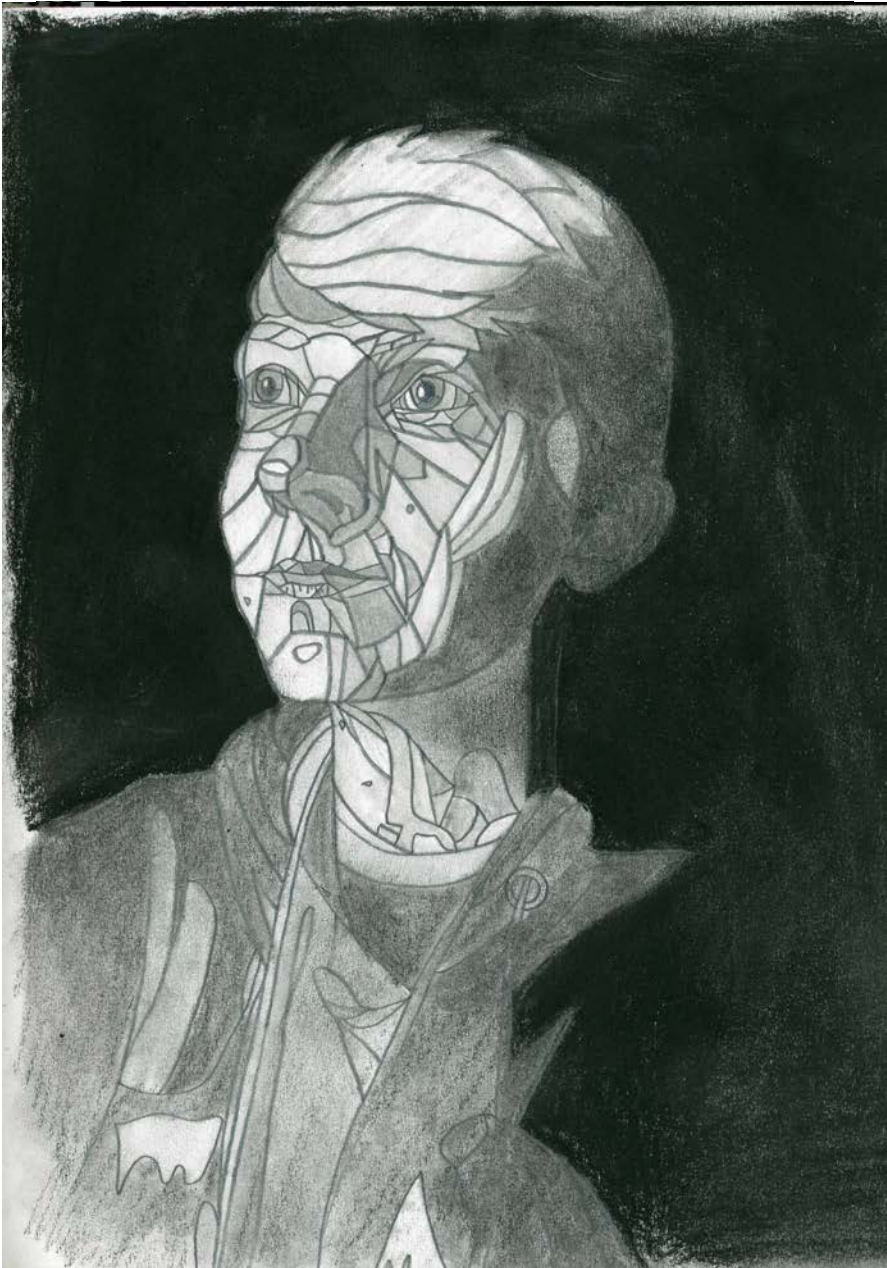
Breathe...

Done! See that wasn’t too bad; my heart slows slightly. I turn away from the board, everyone’s eyes are on me. My still too quick heartbeat quickens. I rush back to my seat, keeping my head down. I clench my fists to hide their shaking.

The whispers gather force, drowning out nearly everything except the monster. I want to scream, “I can hear you.” I don’t, because I can’t. I feel like I’m going to cry, or throw up. Maybe both.

Breathe. No one even notices you. I lay my head on my desk. It’s just another day.

— Macayla Smith



Geometric Abstraction - *Jessica Rathbun*



Denis - *Celeste Rodriguez-Teran*

Mistakes I Made

"How much have you had to drink?" My older brother, Kade demanded when I stumbled into the living room of his white farm house late one Friday night in August.

I grinned as I plopped down onto his sofa, "Just a couple of beers, some bourbon ... and maybe a teeny tiny bit of Jose Cuervo."

Kade sighed and ran his hand across his face, "Please tell me that you didn't drive here."

"Mayyy-beee."

"Do you think this is funny?"

"Shhhhh," I interrupted him, "You don't want to wake your fiancé."

"This isn't a joke. Do you not understand how serious this is? You could have hurt someone."

I smirked, "But, I didn't."

He stared at me in disbelief, "What is wrong with you? Do you want to destroy your entire life? Do you want to die; is that it?"

"Yes, Kade, I replied sarcastically, "that's exactly it. I want to die."

"Well then, what is your problem?"

"You, you're my problem, Mr. Freaking Perfect" I exploded, "You never do anything wrong, and now, to top it all off, you're getting married to Princess Perfect. Meanwhile, I'm the town screw up, and you never let me forget it."

"So now my engagement offends you?"

"I'm just sick of watching you get everything. You've got a good job, a nice house... a girl."

A look of understanding passed across Kade's face, "This isn't about me and my fiancé is it? It's about the fact that my engagement makes you think about Rae."

"Don't bring her into this," I warned him. He knew that the topic of my ex-girlfriend was off limits.

"You don't want to talk about Rae? Fine we won't. Instead, we can discuss your inferiority

complex. Because, I am not the reason you feel like you're worthless. You make yourself feel like that. You make your own choices; I don't make them for you. If you don't like how your life has turned out, it is no one's fault but your own. I get that you're still upset about what happened with Rae, but that is not my problem. I did not cause you to do that, you did. If you're sick of being the town screw up, why don't you get off your butt and do something about it instead of wallowing in your self-pity." And with that, he turned away and went upstairs, leaving me to stand alone in the middle of his living room to ponder over his words.

The following Wednesday I was busy replacing a radiator in a Ford truck, when a ghost from my past appeared in the doorway of the shop. Her name was Emma Alexander, and she was Rae's best friend. Her auburn hair was piled on top of her head in a messy bun, her face was red from the intense Georgia heat, and a little boy, who couldn't have been but a year old, was settled on her hip with his arms wound tightly around her neck.

"McCauley, I'll finish this," My boss, Hank appeared beside me. "Ms. Alexander brought her car in for an oil change, go take care of it." I usually went out of my way to avoid Emma; things were still awkward between us. I mean, what was she supposed to say to the guy who made her best friend get an abortion? But, I knew better than to argue with Hank, so I simply nodded and made my way across the shop to her.

"Hi Em." I offered her a small smile.

"Jace." She tilted her chin in acknowledgement.

"Bye-bye." The blonde haired little boy waved and grinned at me, showing off two tiny teeth.

"We're still working on that," she informed me with a shrug.

"Hey buddy." I ruffled his hair. "What's your name?"

He muttered something that I couldn't quite understand, so I had to look to Emma.

"His name is John."

"Ma!" He poked her cheek to get her attention. He said something else that I couldn't make out.

"Not right now, Sweetie," she responded as she handed him a sippy cup full of milk.

"You can understand all of that? What does he want?" I hadn't been able to make out anything that he had said.

"Chocolate. He always wants chocolate."

"How about a Laffy Taffy?" I asked as I pulled the cherry flavored candy out of the pocket of my coveralls.

John's green eyes widened at the sight of the red wrapper, "Me have?"

I raised an eyebrow at Emma, who nodded her consent. I tore off a piece of the taffy and fed it to him. He looked at me like I was his new best friend. "How old is he?" I asked his mother.

"He's a little over a year old," she proudly informed me.

I felt like the wind had been knocked out of me. He was the same age my child would have been if Rae and I had gone through with the pregnancy. We could have had a little boy like John, or maybe even a little girl who looked exactly like Rae, but we would never know, and it was my fault. The idea of being a father had terrified me. I hadn't been ready to grow up or be responsible, so I threw away my chance of having a child. It was a decision I had regretted daily.

I nodded, acknowledging her response, and asked, "So, how have you been, Em? It's been a while."

"I've been fine; how about you?"

"I've been good. How, uh..." I cleared my throat, "How's Rae been?"

She offered me a sad smile. "She's been alright. I don't really see her much, but I talk to her about once a week."

"Is she still in Alabama?" I asked, and Em nodded. "Is she seeing anyone?" She nodded again. I shouldn't have been surprised, it had been two years, but to hear that she was dating again was like a punch in the gut. I started to ask another question, but Em stopped me.

"Jace, don't do this. It's been a long time; just let it go. It's time to move on."

"Can you tell me where I can find her?"

She shook her head. "I can't do that."

"Please?" I begged. "Look, Em, I know I messed things up with her and you have every

reason to not want to help me. But Em, I want to make things right with her. I miss her, and I want to apologize for everything that I did. Please, tell me where I can find her.”

I stared at the old Walmart receipt lying on the middle console of my truck; on the back of it, written in neat cursive and blue ink, was Rae’s address. At first Emma had refused to help me, she had said that I needed to drop it, that there is no changing the past, but before she left the shop, she gave me a hug and slid the folded paper into my hands. And that’s how I ended up sitting in the parking lot of my favorite bar. I had two choices: go inside and get drunk or drive to Alabama to face my ex.

In that moment, all I wanted to do was get wasted. The thought of seeing Rae again was unnerving. It had been two years since I had last laid eyes on her, and I doubted that she would even want to see me; if anything; she would probably slam the door in my face. She had every right to hate me; I had hurt her in so many ways. I had let her down when she needed me; the least I could do was apologize. Didn’t I owe her that much? After everything I had done, I had a chance to make it right, a chance to make amends for my mistakes, and I didn’t want to waste it. I didn’t want spend another night drowning my sorrows in a bottle of bourbon, so I put the truck into reverse and sped out of the parking lot, leaving a trail of dust behind me.

“You can do this.” I said to myself for the umpteenth time as I paced back and forth on the sidewalk. I had been doing this for fifteen minutes and the neighbors were beginning to stare; they were probably wondering whether they should call the cops. I had driven five hours, 310 miles, and yet I did not have enough courage to walk up the front porch steps.

You did not come all this way for nothing. Just knock on the door and get it over with.

I muttered as I shoved my hands into the pockets of my Levi’s and made my way up the walkway to white house that Rae and Nora Murray called home. I could see into the house; they had the red, wooden door open, allowing the evening breeze to blow in through the screen. With a deep breath, I pressed the doorbell and waited. It was time to finally face her.

“Can I help you?” A man, who didn’t look much older than me, asked as he appeared in front of the door.

"I'm looking for Katie Rae Murray; is she here?"

"She is... and you are?" He raised an eyebrow at me as he pushed the screen door open. He was taller me by a few inches, but he was small and lanky. He didn't look like he did much physical labor; he appeared to more of a corner-office-with-a-view kind of guy.

I offered him my hand, "Jace McCauley."

His blue eyes widened in recognition; obviously my ex (or her family) had mentioned me to him. "Benson Lockwood III. I'm Rae's boyfriend." He shook my hand with a firm grip.

"Ben, who is it?" A woman called from another room, before joining him in the foyer. It had been two years, but I would have recognized that voice and blonde hair anywhere.

"Hello, Rae." I said as her brown eyes landed on me.

She stopped dead in her tracks, and her mouth dropped open in surprise. I was probably the last person she ever expected to show up on her doorstep. After she recovered from her shock, she turned to her boyfriend. "Do you think that you could give me a moment to talk to Jace?"

He hesitated, clearly wondering whether it was a good idea to leave her alone with me, but he finally nodded and said, "Sure, I'll go give Nora a hand with supper." He kissed her cheek, a subtle way of staking his claim, and disappeared out of sight as she joined me on the front porch.

She waited until he was out of earshot before folding her arms across her chest and asking, "What are you doing here?"

"I came to talk."

"Well, you're about two years too late."

"Rae, please," I begged.

"I have nothing to say to you."

"Then listen, that's all I'm asking. You don't have to say a word, just hear me out." After a moment of silence, she finally nodded, "Two years ago, I let you down. I was selfish and stupid, and I know that I can't make up for that. I can't take back what I did, and I don't expect you to ever forgive me. You have every right to hate me, but I need you to know that I am sorry. I'm sorry that I turned my back on you and that I made you get an abortion. I have spent the last few years wishing that I could change what I did. It's something I am going to regret

for the rest of my life.”

“I needed you that day, Jace. I needed you to go with me and to tell me that everything would be alright. I needed you to be there for me.” She swiped a tear off of her cheek.

“I know, Rae.”

“But, I don’t hate you, Jace, and I don’t blame you. I forgive you.”

My eyes widened in disbelief. “You do?”

She nodded. “I forgave you a long time ago, but I do appreciate your apology.”

“Even though I’m two years too late?”

She chuckled. “Better late than never, right?”

“Right. So tell me about him.” I waved my hand toward the house. “How long have y’all been together?”

“His name is Ben,” she reminded me, “and we’ve been dating for six months now. He’s in law school.”

I rolled my eyes. “Your dad must love him.” Eric Murray never thought I was good enough for his only child. He had despised me, so I am sure he had been thrilled when Ben entered the picture.

She ignored my jab and continued talking. “He comes from a good family. His grandfather is a judge, and he’s a really sweet guy. He’s good to me.”

“Does he make you happy?”

She looked out at the road as she answered, “Yes, he does.”

“I’m happy for you Rae. You deserve to be happy.”

She took ahold of my hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. “So do you.”

I offered her a small smile, “Well, I guess it’s time for me to head on back.”

“You drove all the way to Alabama just to tell me that you’re sorry?”

“No,” I shook my head, “I drove here to apologize and to tell you that I want you back. But, for once in my life, I’m going to do the right thing and walk away. I’m not going to be selfish with you any more; I’m not going to ruin your chance at happiness.”

She wrapped her arms around my neck in a tight hug. "Take care of yourself."

I wiped a tear from her cheek, then placed a gentle kiss on her forehead and said for the last time, "I love you, Rae." And then I broke away from her embrace.

"Jace, wait," She grabbed my arm, "Promise me that you'll stop punishing yourself for what happened. I want you to be happy, okay? I want you to give yourself a chance to be happy, so promise me that you're going to try and move on."

I nodded. "I promise, Rae."

She leaned forward and kissed my cheek. "I'll always love you," she whispered as she brushed past me and went back into the house, disappearing from my life yet again. I didn't try to stop her; I knew that she didn't want me to. We couldn't fix things between us; we couldn't go back to the way we were. I had to let her, so I stood there and listened as the screen door closed, as the red door was pushed shut, and the deadbolt clicked into place and then I made my way down the steps and never looked back.

— *Lauren Conner*



Splash - *Jacqueline Yepe*

The Fifteenth Annual Emily Pestana-Mason Memorial Poetry Contest



The judge for this year's contest is Chris Mattingly, who holds an M.F.A. in Poetry from Spalding

University. He teaches interdisciplinary courses on punk rock and gritty American literature at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. His book of poems, Scuffletown, is available for checkout from the East Georgia State College Library. From 2012-2014, Chris served as a Humanities faculty member at ECSC.

SECOND PLACE POEM

“Untitled” is a poem that entangles gospel and blues traditions in attempt to reconcile the physical and the spiritual. The blunt lines writ in plain diction create their own hard-biting music while crisp images pepper the themes: shame, redemption, and the ultimate question: will I be ok?

Untitled

I am not ashamed of the skin I am in,
But the soul that is within
So darkened and cold.

When living in a world so cold you would
Think the sun will bring warmth to the soul,
But instead it brings heart ache and pain then
Eventually the rain.

My soul is ruined from the sin within.
Hopefully it'll see the light again.

As time flies things begin to look
Wicked in my eyes.

My soul is broken like glass in the street.
No one ever realizes it's me.

They walk, stomp and spit all over me.
Not once do they stop to check and see.

Taking it day at a time, wishing that I could rewind.
I replay memories in my mind so much
I seem to lose track of time.

Trying to find the pieces of my broken soul
So darkened and cold even a blanket won't
Help warmth this cold

Only God knows what will be become of me.
Will I be successful and on my feet or
Will I be down in the deepest sea?

I guess I'll have to wait and see
If my soul will ever be like it used to be.

— *Tamara Martin*

THIRD PLACE POEM

"What Time Hath Wrought" is a solid poem written in high-diction quatrains by a tactician that evidences close reading and practice. This poem skips along with internal and half-rhymes while quick, vivid images snare: the result is a wonderful tension that is musical, visceral, and memorable.

What Time Hath Wrought

What time hath wrought did strengthen me,
 But nature's flourish doth open
Then call my heart's rhapsody
 To summon love here and again.

The earth and wind and water, and fire too,
 As key to lock casts without
That even the lark's faith renewed
 Extracts the soul to purge of doubt.

Fresh grass and dew of night's mists
 Conspire to uplift spirits,
As glory and rose are complied thus
 To relieve of cinder, ash, and dust.

While the clouds, same clouds as
 Jesus beheld score centuries past,
Driven by the heat of the sun
 Roam to seek lost hearts in dun.

Now I'm left with memories,
 Shadows in mind, but wondrous ones.
Thus again I seek her charity,
 God aid me should I ever think I'm done!

— *James C. Wright*

A Stream At Night

The moon gleams harshly upon my back,
 Exposing the area to twilight unfurled.
The stars above giving inspiration
 And hope eternally throughout the world.
Trees dancing silently inside
 The heart of a peaceful night,
Presenting succor to the flowers below—
 Which grow harmoniously in the enchanting moonlight.
And the running of this stream,
 Like the melody of a violin,
Plays a sweet-crested tune that
 Seduces all in the range of its hymn.
The tranquil breeze this pool emits,
 As the fresh and moist dew of dawn,
Gives a sensual feeling of bliss
 That, like time, will soon be irretrievably gone.

— *James C. Wright*



Christina - *Celeste Rodriguez-Teran*

I'm 18 Years Old

February 17, 1998

My name is Ebony Watson

I am 18 years old

& I don't understand life yet

3 months ago

I was in high school;

3 months ago

I wanted to be cool;

I wanted to be known;

I wanted my name out;

I wanted to be shown;

I wanted a way out;

Graduation came;

I didn't cry like I imagined;

I didn't have any fame,

Not enough for the Miss EGS Pageant;

I wasn't ready,

Not for this;

I'm still not steady;

My ignorance is still bliss;

I still can't file taxes;

I don't know how to pay bills;

I feel wrong for relaxing;

This is getting too real;

I'm in college! Oh my god!

\$14,000 in debt already.

I mean, at least I got my squad.

They kind of keep me steady.

If I'm still living with my mom
in two years

I'll feel like a failure.

I'm keeping track of my peers.

I have a log of their behavior.

Oh crap, it's almost 2017.

It's coming fast;

It's my time now;

No more playing the outcast;

This poem will be how

I got this box around my confidence;

It's time for it to go away!

I'm done feeling incompetent;

I gotta start on my way;

I don't understand a lot of things;

I was born 18 years late;

Imma get me by any means;

Everyone mark your date;

I'm 18 years old,

But I have dreams

— *Ebony Watson*



Untitled - *Janet Sanchez*

Hands

We use our hands in so many ways,
But never in giving ways.

If you give a hand to those in need,
Then you will feel relieved.

If you believe, your hands will take you a long ways
Like they did the slaves back in the day.

Having open hands will take you a long way,
But keeping them closed will only carry you half the way

We all long for giving hands,
But never be the one to give a hand.

Open them up and be free.
From there you will see

Your hands will guide you
And others that need to be guided.

We fail to understand the real use of our bare hands.
Stop the dealing, killing, and stealing and think about
Giving.

We fail to realize how they actually pave the way
For us to be here today

— *Jasmine Heggs*

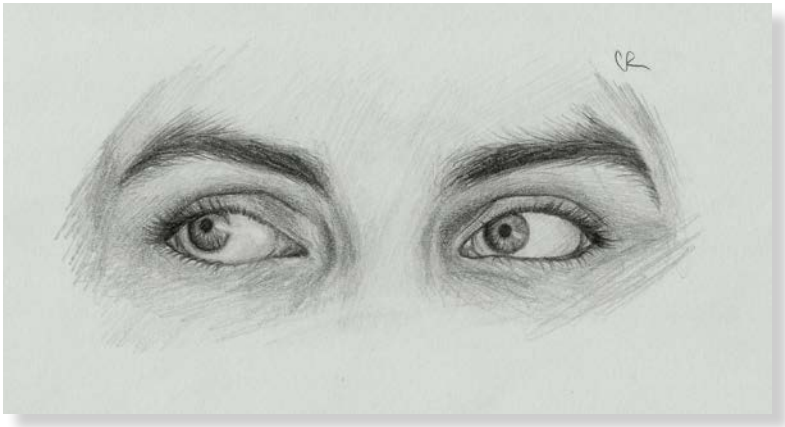


Museum - Mark Hovind

The Narcissist

How can you feel when you are numb?
Do you dare feel others' emotions but lack yours so strong?
He smiles with such beauty...
How could you even see it?
Behind that smile is something so evil...
There is something so welcoming about him, yet so dangerous.
Should you walk towards the mysterious man or run?
Do you listen to your heart or mind?
What do you do?
Make up your mind before you run out of time...

— *Chakita Durden*



Peepers - *Celeste Rodriguez-Teran*

Dramatis Personae

The scenery has been limned for them,
And the characters strut upon the stage,
Adhering to a plot, of course,
But with some room for improvisation,
Each player a role to play—
Some major—some minor.

In these parts
Some come to greatness willingly.
Some are dragged on to it.
Some know only sameness,
Content to plot a middle course.

Others dwell in the unquiet chambers of the heart,
The sturm and drang of any good drama.
Others know only laughter—Punchinellos really.
Some cast the die and win.
Some take the milder part,
Will never win—but lose.

Some few are born under a bright star:
Golden child, enfant terrible, savant, saint.
More are born into a world out of joint,
A lesser but more interesting role.

Some soar to take a noble part
While some sink to become the evil foil.
Some seem to cumber the stage,
Their entrance and exit unnoticed.
Some consumed by a bright flame
Others a faint ember.

Yet the drama unfolds.
The curtain falls on all of them.
The play is all.

—*Kenneth Homer*



Untitled - Tiffany Kokotis



Untitled - *Janet Sanchez*



Geometric Abstraction - *Morgan Nash*



Kinoko - Celeste Rodriguez-Teran

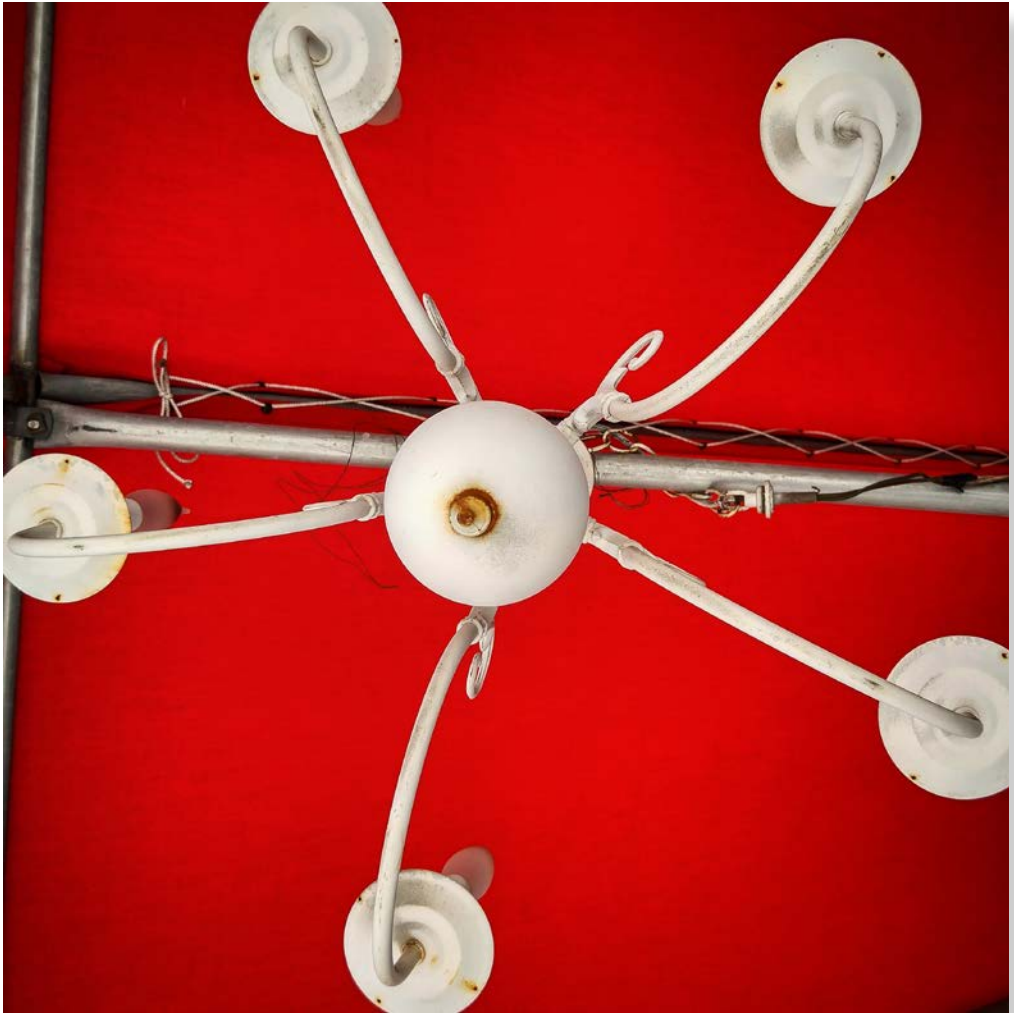
Red Room

Soul full of energy, as you lead the way and take me
To the familiar place, to gain a new golden memory.
Spotting the things similar, I shyly hid my smile,
And that's okay, because our eyes haven't met in a while.

You knew what I needed, you know why I came.
"I'll be here when you're ready and softly call my name."
Vibration so strong, and we never even knew,
And we didn't have to force each other and guide on what to do.

Piece by piece, you came a little closer;
As the worries disappeared, you became a little bolder.
Her soft, warm grasp, you didn't think it was true.
Reason she didn't give in, refusing to hypnotize you.

— *Shakiyah Jarmon*



Old White Chandelier - *Jacqueline Yepe*

TWO TOES

Camile has a busy day ahead of her at Barbara's, a hair salon in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. As the most skilled hairdresser in the salon, she always has the most appointments lined up of all the employees. She has many loyal clients with whom she has developed minor friendships.

Around 12:30 pm, Angela, a long time client, walks in for her scheduled appointment. A dye job and trim. The coloring process takes a couple hours to complete, so Camile and Angela converse for a while. Eventually the conversation turns toward each other's love lives.

"So, there's this guy I've been seeing," Angela says excitedly.

"Tell me about him," Camile says.

"He is such a sweetheart. Very handsome. Also super rich, which is kind of like, really cool because he buys me really nice things."

"Sounds like a catch. Do you think you guys are getting serious?"

"I hope so. Problem is..." Angela sighs, "*he's married.*"

"Oh wow. Are him and the wife separated?"

"No, but I am hoping he will see that I am a better match for him, and he can just trade up."

As a faithful married woman, Camile cringes at Angela's response. They are not close enough for Camile to be really honest with Angela on how she feels about her situation, so she decides to hold her judgments. Ligonier is a pretty small town, so Camile decides to ask Angela her new guy's identity, just in case she may know him or the wife.

"His name is Steve Toe. I know, not the cutest of names, but like, I swear he is actually super cute."

Camile tenses up. That's her husband's name. Then she realizes that very few of her customers know that her last name is Toe. But maybe she is worrying for nothing. Maybe Ligonier has another Steve Toe.

Camile thinks fast.

"Let me see a picture of him."

Angela scrolls through her pictures.

"Wait, let me find a cute one. Here! This one was us on our third date. He took me to Philly and we spent the day there."

Camile holds in her shock, disgust, and tears. That's definitely her husband.

Camile is unsure of how to react for a second. She weighs in the options.

Option One: She freaks out on Angela and demands she never come to her salon again, leaving Angela's hair half blonde half red, looking like Cruella Devil. *Option Two:* She pretends that everything is fine and "accidentally" leaves in the bleach too long in Angela's hair, and soon enough it will fall out in clumps. Although that would be satisfying, she decides its not worth losing her cosmetology license. *Option Three:* Pretend everything is okay, get as much evidence as possible, take Steve to court to get a divorce, and then get half of everything he owns plus a hefty alimony. If she is going to lose Steve and the four years of her life wasted on him, she wants at least some form of compensation.

She goes with *Option Three*.

"Yeah, he is cute," she says.

"Isn't he though? I just wish he would leave his wife. From what he tells me, she just isn't a match for him anymore."

Camile grits her teeth. "Why is that?"

"Well, she is all about work all the time. He wants someone who can make time for him. I mean he's rich; why is she working anyway? Heck, I don't even know what she does. Guess I should ask him sometime."

Camile clenches her fists from behind the salon chair. She looks up to keep the tears from rolling down.

Well, maybe her work is something she takes pride in — a passion of hers! Just because her husband is rich doesn't mean she needs to become some daytime television watching housewife! I mean, Christ, that's no reason to cheat on someone with an ignorant little girl like you.

This is what she wants to say. However she decides to answer to her own advantage.

"I wouldn't worry about the wife and what she does. If you keep his mind away from her, he'll be that much closer to being with you."

"Wow, Camile. You're really smart for a hairdresser."

Camile's eye twitches.

"So how often do you get to see him?"

"I see him pretty often. I have weekends off, so he tells his wife he has golf club on those days to see me. Other than that he will come see me on lunch or while his wife is at work or whenever."

Camile is hurt. Badly. However, she is impressed at how well she is holding her composure. Is it because she has suspected his infidelity for a while now, or is it because of the strength of her character? She figures it's a mix of both, but she knows she is going to make that bastard pay.

After work that day, she hires a private detective named Sam Hawkins to help her get evidence of Steve's affair. Sam is fairly new at this, so he doesn't charge as much as the other P.I's. Also, Camile has a good feeling about him.

It's Saturday at the Toe residence.

"Honey I'm going to golf club," Steve calls to Camile. "See you tonight!"

Yeah, whatever.

"Okay, Babe. See you," she sings back.

Sam is waiting in a car up the street.

Camile receives a text from Sam.

"Has he left?"

"Yes. Pick me up."

She gets into his car and they follow Steve. Sam has put a GPS tracker in Steve's car.

"Again I'm really sorry that this happened to you," Sam said, scratching his stubbled chin. "You are such a nice lady. This guy is some piece of work, huh?"

"I'll be rid of him soon enough, and with your help I'll get a little more than that."

"I think it's really amazing that you have a passion. He's an idiot for not seeing that."

"You know what? You're right. He doesn't deserve me, and I'm honestly not going to miss him. This last year of marriage has been the worst. It's been more like we are roommates than spouses and I thought it was just going to be a phase, but he found someone else, and ahhh... this is way too much for me to handle right now."

Sam pulls over the car and hugs Camile.

"Are you sure you want to do this? I can do this without you," Sam assures her.

"I'm doing this. I need to see what's going on for myself in order to really get over him later. I need to break before I can heal."

Sam and Camile reach the hotel. Sam takes pictures of Steve and Angela's vehicles in the parking lot. He figures out the room they are staying in. Sam dresses like a hotel worker and

Camile hides in a dining cart underneath the table cloth. Sam knocks on the door and Steve opens it, dressed in the baby blue silk pajamas Camille got him for Christmas.

“Hello Mr. Toe,” says Sam. “I’m Gregory, and I am here to give you and your companion a complimentary meal.”

“That’s weird,” says Steve. “I’ve been here many times before, and I’ve never once received a free meal.

“Oh, yes. It’s a part of our frequent guest rewards program.”

“Uh, okay. Just put the food over there on the table and you can go.”

Sam does as he is told and Camile peeks out from underneath the sheet. She sees Angela sitting on the bed watching TV with her hair looking great thanks to Camile. Steve is watching Sam, so Camile is able to take pictures on her phone of the couple.

“Well, I’ll be on my way then!” says Sam. “Just ring the front desk if you need anything.”

He rolls Camile out the door.

“If this wasn’t *my* situation,” Camile muses, “that would have been kind of fun.”

“Oh yeah,” says Sam, “private detective work can be really exhilarating. I was worried you would get caught, but you proved to be a very capable.”

“Luckily Steve is too rich to really care about those ‘rewards points.’ We would be in trouble if he decided to ask about them or go on the hotel website to check it out.”

“Yeah” agrees Sam, “I was kind of riding on that he wouldn’t care about them. Rich people usually don’t bother.”

“This is going to be an interesting week,” says Camile.

The next week Camile spends time with Sam, doing things similar to what they did in the hotel, along with collecting phone and credit card records. They go to Angela’s work during lunch, restaurants, and clubs. While Steve is on his dates with Angela, it is almost like Camile is going on dates with Sam.

One day Camile says, “Well Sam, thank you for all your help. Really.”

She hands him a thousand dollars. Sam pushes her hand away.

“No, Camile. I’m not going to lie, I actually had a great time with you, and I don’t feel right accepting your money. Truth is, I actually have really grown to like you over this week, and I know it’s too soon for you to get into a relationship or anything, but I hope someday in the future you’ll remember me and maybe let me take you out on a real date.”

Camile hugs Sam.

“Thank you,” she tells him.

That evening, Camile and Steve are eating dinner together.

“Can you pass the salad, Camile?” Steve asks.

“Sure. Also I know about your affair.” She hands him the salad.

Steve freezes for a second, face tense, and then laughs, “Camile, Honey, you’re so funny. Like I could ever cheat on a cutie like you.”

“Cut the crap. I know about Angela.”

Camile lays out copies of the pictures and records on the table.

“Don’t bother trying to get rid of these. I have lots of copies.”

She notices that Steve can’t bring himself to look at her.

“Camile, I’m so sorry,” he sobs. “Please forgive me, Baby. It was a mistake. It’s just that you work so much, and I felt like you didn’t have any time for me.”

“Well maybe you should have TOLD ME THAT instead of SLEEPING WITH SOMEONE ELSE!” Camile screeches. “And who do you think took a lot of these photos? ME. While you were with her, you could have just as easily been with me. I work a lot, but I still have days off. Also, I can basically choose when I went to work at Barbara’s, so if you would have just talked to me, I would have made more time for you.”

“Why do you work anyways?” Steve sputtered. “I make more than enough money for the both of us.”

“Steve, I’m not arguing with you right now, and even if you try to blame your infidelity on me, I can tell you right now that it is in no way my fault. You are a scumbag, and I want a divorce. And alimony. It’s the least you can do.”

At the word “alimony” Steve reacts as if he had been slapped across the face.

”Please, just give me one more chance, Babe. I’ll leave Angela. You can just take off more time at work for me and we can be like before. When we were happy. I know I can make you happy. C’mon, this was only the first time. I think I deserve one more chance.”

Camile considers his request. *They really were happy at one time. He sounds like he really doesn’t want to lose her. That must mean that he loves her. Everyone deserves a second chance, right? Maybe they could get some counseling or something. On the other hand, will she be able to trust him again? Will she always think about him and Angela together? Does*

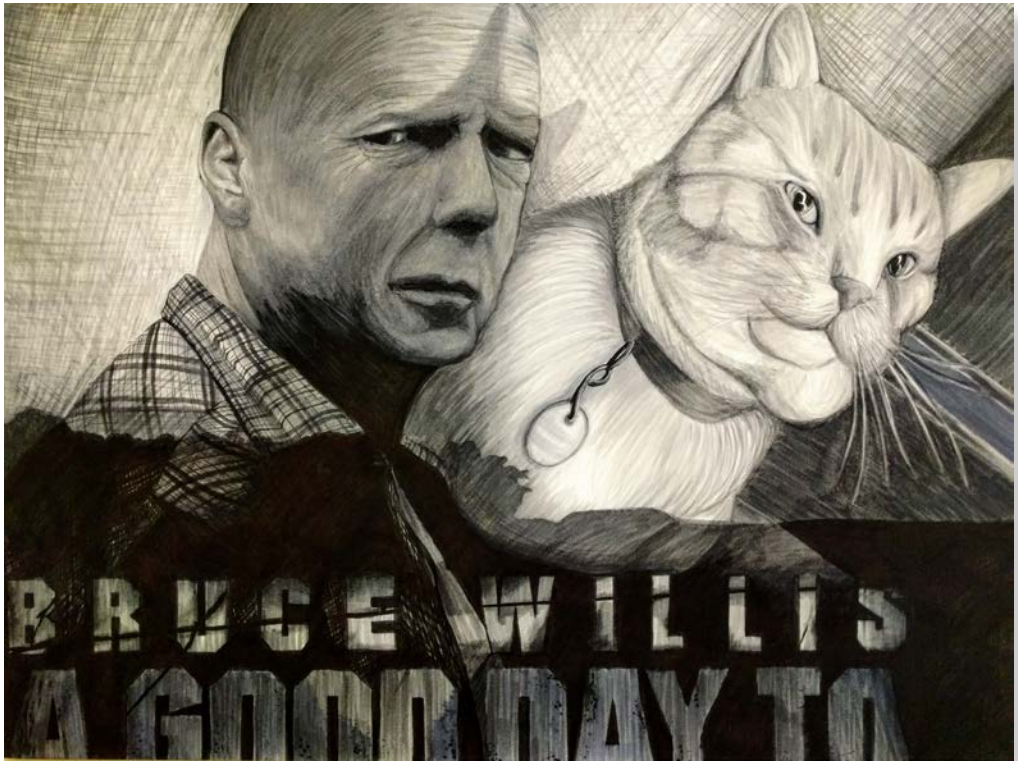
he really love her if he was sleeping with someone else? Can Camile really be happy with Steve again? Is he really sorry? He only apologized because he got caught. He wouldn't have ended it with Angela on his own. No. He doesn't deserve a second chance. She doesn't owe him anything. Really it's the other way around. Also, she has a better option than Steve when she is ready.

“No Steve, you don't deserve anything. Now get out of this house.”

After many hours of Steve begging to the other side of a locked bedroom door, he eventually leaves.

Months later Camile was finally divorced from Steve and thanks to the hefty alimony she received, she was able to buy her own hair salon in Los Angeles. It's called Camile's and she has many celebrity clients. Sam followed her out, and their relationship is going quite well. Camile is very happy with her decision to leave Steve, and she has definitely moved on to better things. Also, thanks to Sam, if she ever suspects he is cheating on her, she knows just how to catch him.

— *Elizabeth Gross*



Untitled - *Celeste Rodriguez-Teran*

Pa-Pa: From Dirt Road Dialogues

Part of what I call my memory is plagued with visions of a man who, part of what I call my mind tells me, I could not possibly remember. I have pictures of him holding me, holding the cat, holding me and the cat; and I suppose that somehow my subconscious mind could have constructed these memories from countless hours spent looking at those pictures. Even now, they stare at me from atop the bookcase in my study, reinforcing memories in my mind as surely as if I made them then.

He died when I was four; so I do not see how these memories could be real. But I have them, nonetheless. After my brother and I grew old enough to venture away from our house at the other end of the dirt road, we would walk the near-mile to the old barn with its farrowing house and medium-sized grain silos, our great-great grandparents' house on the place, and walk the fields, climb the silos, play in the barn, scour the buildings looking for remnants and momentos of the man who, though we didn't understand how at the time, was shaping and molding us from across the infinite ocean of time and space.

Born and raised in the Depression era, he was of that mentality which considered itself lucky and blessed if he had anything at all over and above what was necessary to sustain life—a generation which knew nothing of entitlement or the concept of “getting” anything that you didn't work for. This is also something that, somehow, he passed on to my brother and me, though I do not know how.

My father and mother have, of course, told me stories over the years about him. He was honest-honest to a fault, according to one story my father shared with me about one incident in which he got cheated out of a land purchase that would have allowed him to expand his hog operation so he could make more of a living at it, and possibly stop having to drive the school bus to make ends meet. My grandmother already worked outside the home to help with this; and a man of his generation had to feel that somehow he was not fulfilling his responsibility as a husband because of this.

So, pieces at the time, Pa-Pa's identity, his sense of self, his ability to be a man were chipped away. I have no way of knowing if he actually felt this way. I only have a sense of it. I do know, though, that he was gone from my life before he got a chance to impart to me the lessons of his life. I do know that he had certainly gained a wealth of experience in his lifetime; and that all those experiences are beyond my reach. I will never hear, first-hand, his joys and sorrows, his successes and failures, his hopes and regrets. I only have these fragmented pseudo-memories which, for all I know, are nothing more than figments of my imagination.

I know that I regret not having him in my life longer. I cannot help but feel an incomprehensible sense of lack; like an essential part of my formative years were devoid of something absolutely necessary. I drive to the old barn; and, though it is still the same as Pa-Pa left it, it

is not the same. We have cleaned it up over the years. We use it now, partly as a stable for our horses, and partly as a work shed and tractor shed. And when I am there, I can almost feel him looking over my shoulder, wanting to tell me something.

More than anything else I know about my Pa-Pa, I know that I'd like to know what he had to teach me. I know that, whatever I am as a man, I would be better knowing what he knew. At least, that's what I believe.

Pa-Pa

He sits in his chair, Holding a boy
I do not remember Being.

It was little more than 2000 days before he left, Never to return,
Leaving behind pieces of himself For me to find along the way.

I often wonder

What I might have been, Had he not left me
To figure so many things out

By myself.

But I know that he loved me- For the picture tells me so.

What would he think

Of the man I have become? What would he think
Of the world?

What would he do

When the men with their money Came to the door
Wanting our Land?

What would he expect me to do?

The hot day dies Red and Purple Blood splashing Against the sky.

I stand on the hill, in the upper pasture, Looking out at the land that bore me, Nurtured me,
Sent me on my way,

Yet even now, ten years after I forsook it, It still welcomes me back
Like the Prodigal Son.

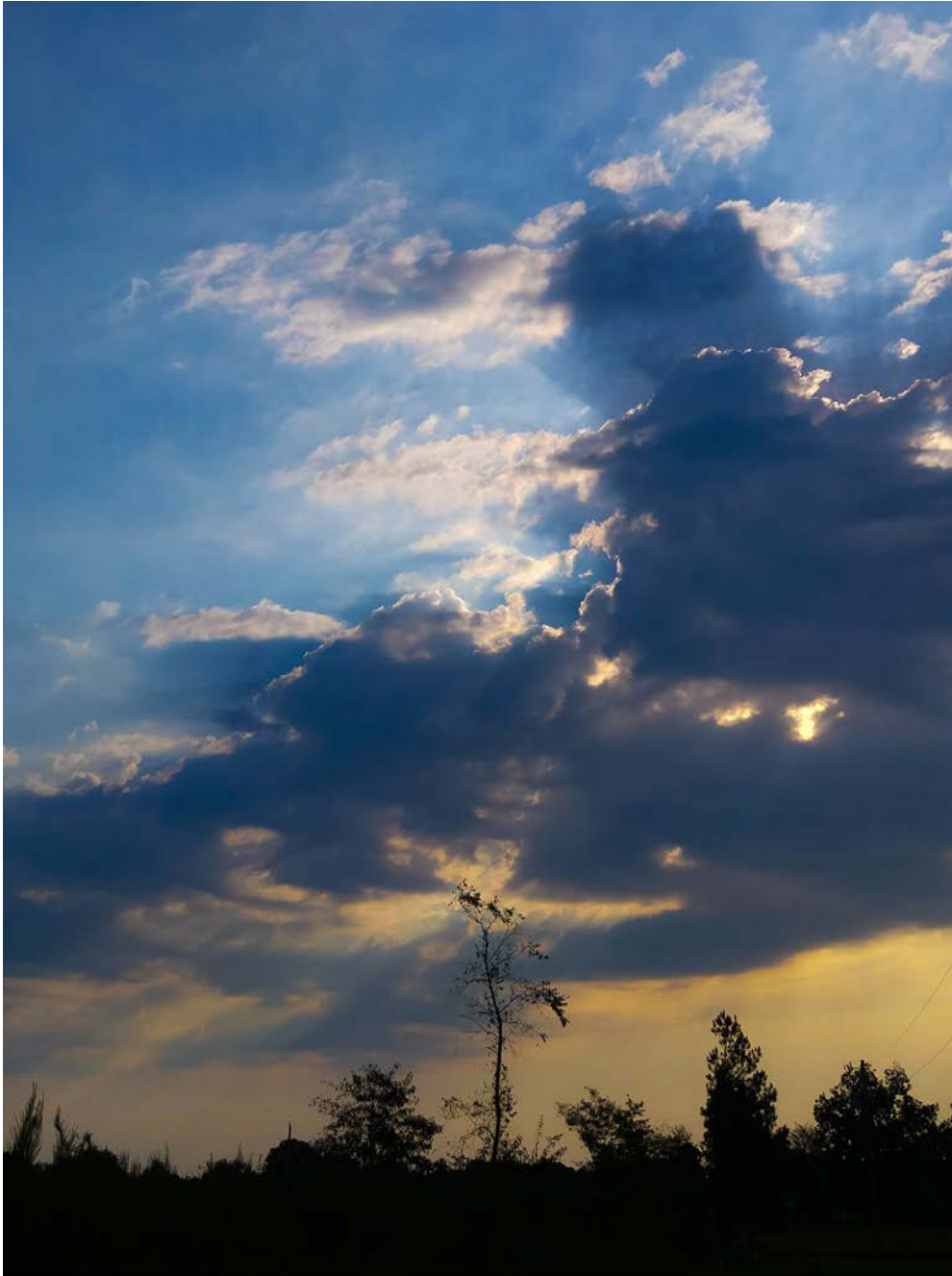
How undeserving am I of such unconditional love.

As I know that he loved me, For the picture tells me so.

— *Christian Kraus*



Red Before the Fall - *Jessica McVay*



Skyscape - *Jacqueline Yepe*

Barbecue Sunday

After church one Sunday early in May
Family and friends came to eat, drink, and play.
Dad had stayed home to get the grill ready--
Not for him, that Mary Baker Eddy.

I ran inside and grabbed my Super Eight
And shot my cousins Bonnie, Jean, and Kate
Doing the Jerk, The Swim, and The Freddy —
Not a thought of Mary Baker Eddy.

We all listened to the Cardinals game
(Without Harry Caray, it's not the same).
After ten beers, Uncle Hank held steady.
His wife favored Mary Baker Eddy.

Frankenstein, Dracula, and The Mummy
All had to wait till I filled my tummy
With baked beans, cole slaw, and steak so bloody.
Even she'd drool, that good Mrs. Eddy.

She says there's no evil, only error,
And our salvation lies in prayer.
That night, sated, snuggled in my beddy,
I still believed Mary Baker Eddy.

— *S.D. Lavender*

The Tree

Precision is inaccurate. There's never going to come a day when every human being on this planet will notice the signs that have been there since the first millennium. They have enough trouble realizing our existence. We've tried to go back and change things, but it gets kind of hard when people fall prey to ignorance. We've decided to let them be and live in harmony this way. Therefore, the Revolution shall continue because of the Hidden Ones.

-The Keepers

THE PLACE OF UNITY

Everything is dark except the glow of the roots coming from the ground and leading to the tree. Everyone's just kind of standing there touching the person in front of them with their right arm. Their eyes are wide open, and it looks as if their feet are rooted to the ground, except they can't be. I can hear this little ticking sound coming from the tree, and at no precise moment, the people shift. Some of them collide with each other, and then I look more intently at the tree. It looks as if the tree were indeed a person, a girl. And then out of nowhere, I see this gate and this sword and guards and these other two people outside the gate looking at everyone else at the tree and now my eyes are open. It all keeps coming to me at once, and then I realize why I'm here.

COLD FIRES

A poison is running through my veins, every inch of my body, at an alarming rate. I can feel the black poison seeping through my mouth and nose. I don't know how to make it stop. They're destroying me. It's a disease and it's the same one that sent those two people outside the gate packing. I didn't do this to myself though; I can just feel everyone else suffering. The fire of my tongue can't utter a single word until it's time. And that predestined time that I will speak, I'm unaware of. I just know that the Keepers call it the Revolution.

DESERT WATER

I've been walking this land for days in search of the Window and the Stairwell. I am beyond exhaustion, but I'm trying to fulfill a mission that must constantly change in order to be perfect. My enemy is on a quest to find me and puncture the skin that leads to my heart. We've both lived several lifetimes and it always ends the same; I win. Right now, I'm looking for the Hidden Ones. They are like me, special, important for the continuation of this world. I have this eerie feeling that we're supposed to unite and put some balance back into this world. That's why I'm out here in the Land of Dry Bones. The numbers led me here. I turn around because I keep hearing this strong wind, and it's whispering something in me, but it's hard to decipher at this moment. So, I listen intently.

"Find the Portal." the wind says to me.

The wind gets stronger, so I turn back around to where I was initially going. Upon turning around, I witness people arising from the ground. Their skin is flaking off, and they have bloodshot eyes like they haven't slept in years. Their clothes are tattered, hair falling out, mouth foaming, and I'm surrounded by them all. I just stand there erect, engulfed with apprehension and staring at the mad-filled face of insanity itself. And then out of nowhere, I'm in the air. I look up and I'm being carried away by some exquisite creature with wings! The people that arose from the ground start running after us maniacally. I don't even know who they are, and it's like they want to kill me. The winged creature doesn't seem to notice that these volatile people are coming and keeps soaring through the air. As we're in the air, he passes over this river and through his muffled voice, I hear him say, "River of Eden." He halts at this mysterious trail and places me on the ground gently, and I catch a glimpse of this creature's face. It's beautiful on one side, but the other side looks evil. I start to wonder why this creature has angelic wings and horns sprouting from its head.

"You know what to do, Michael," the two-faced creature says, and then vanishes evanescently into fire.

As I stand there looking at his ashes, I can hear the trail speaking to me. I hear people screaming, the hissing of a snake, the melody of a waterfall, and the shots of a gun. There are torrential tears falling down my face because the sound that overpowers them all is the ticking of a clock.

The Hidden Ones are unique, and we gave them a special ability, a mystical power. We created them in our image, and we will preserve this world because of them. They don't know who they are, and if they were to discover their identity, they would never admit it.

-The Keepers

THE PORTAL

There are beads of sweat trickling down my face, and my heart is beating out of my chest. Despite my anxiety, I take the first step down the trail, and the ticking of the clock gets louder. I must be getting closer. As I continue with each footstep, I see shadows in the trees that are on either side of me. I see a flame up ahead and double doors and a golden gate. It's a sword, a flaming sword, that keeps turning from left to right. There's a guard there too, with full body armor.

"Stand back," the guard says in a deep, raspy voice.

I hear a rustle in the trees, and these two people walk out, a man and a female. They have twigs and leaves in their hair and are staring at me. The guard stands in between us as if to protect

me from them. I come from behind the guard and walk to the woman. I touch her arm, and the poison from her transfers to me.

"No! What have you done?" The guard yells with fear in his voice, and then everything goes black.

I'm in this wall of glass, and there are people laughing hysterically at me, and then I see this man who has the look of guilt on his face. I get up slowly, and I can feel blood coming from my temples. I look to my left, and I see the Stairwell. I look back to the people, and they're running from this wave of water. I press my hand against the glass, and it shatters into a million pieces. I step out into the open and look around, wondering if this is reality or an illusory image. I see the people from the barren part of the Land of Dry Bones, and they see me. One of them makes this screeching sound, and then they start coming for me, all of them. I start running faster than the speed of lightning, so fast that I feel like I'm floating, and then I fall into this hole of wonderland. Through my blurred vision, I see the faces of the guard, the man, and the woman. I don't know how long I've been in that deep slumber.

"You have to let him in," the woman pleads with the guard. "The Keepers sent him here. We may have been banished, but he's the one who has to make things right. He and the other Hidden Ones have to restore the timeline. The prophecy said that they walk among us, and when they are needed will rise out of their concealment and fulfill their mission. He can put an end to this. Let him do what he was sent here to do."

"I can't do that Eve. All of this was created by the Potter, the first Keeper, and it will never end. You made a mistake, and now poison is here. It's a curse. It ends and it begins again."

Eve whispers, "How can I be the Mother of the Living if I'm carrying a poison in my veins?"

I'm running out of time, but I stand up and walk to the flaming sword. As I get closer, it starts rapidly moving from left to right and the flames rise. *You know what to do Michael*, the two-faced creature had said. I slowly raise my hand to the flame and as soon as my hand touches it, the double doors open.

"He opened the doors to the Tree of Life," the guard says in astonishment.

I see the Hidden Ones and the tree. They're all in a circle around the tree, holding hands, with a blank spot in between two people. The leaves are falling from the tree, and each time they do, we see a dystopian planet where we don't exist, a world driven by anger and violence that is engulfed in flames. I stand in the blank spot, and I look at the tree. I see the girl dying; it's Eve. *You know what to do Michael*.

“Lamed Vovnik,” I whisper, my voice a stranger to my ears.

THE TREE

We have fulfilled our mission by saving the tree. We, the Hidden Ones, will be called again out of our concealment to fulfill yet another mission. Our eyes are wide open, and at no precise moment we shift. Sometimes we collide, but it's only because the story we're writing must touch someone else. The Keepers have made a most wondrous creation.

-Mekenzie Harden



Golden Tree - *Jacqueline Yepe*

Haikus for Life: A Collection

Knowledge

Classes may be hard
But if you give up so soon
You will not succeed

Soup

Chicken noodle soup
On a windy winter night
The taste of childhood

Storms

Thunderstorms outside
Wind that whips the trees about
That lulls me to sleep

A Melody

My heart is locked up
Music is the only key
To unlock my soul

Grandma

The blue hydrangeas
A memory of my youth
Laid down on her grave

Acting

Reciting my lines
In front of these watchful eyes
Being judged by them

Fear

My hands are shaking
My heart pounding in my chest
I struggle to breathe

— *Brittany Brown*



Untitled - *Tiffany Kokotis*

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