

Men's Gymnasium,
San Jose State College,
4th and San Carlos Streets,
San Jose, California.

Such permits will only be granted for the purpose of uniting members of a family, or in cases of grave emergency. The Civil Control Station is equipped to receive the Japanese population affected by this evacuation in the following ways:

1. Give advice and instructions on the evacuation.
2. Provide services with respect to the management of property, such as real estate, business and professional equipment, household goods, automobiles and livestock.
3. Provide temporary residence elsewhere for all Japanese families.
4. Transport persons and a limited amount of clothing and equipment to their new residence.

The Following Instructions Must Be Observed:

1. A responsible member of each family, preferably the head of the family, or the person whose name is on the property is held, and each individual living alone, must report to the Civil Control Station to receive further instructions. This must be done between 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M. on Monday, May 25, 1942.
2. Evacuees must carry with them on departure for the assembly center the following property:
 - (a) Bedding and linens (no mattress) for each member of the family;
 - (b) Toilet articles for each member of the family;
 - (c) Extra clothing for each member of the family;
 - (d) Essential personal effects for each member of the family.

All items carried will be securely packaged, tied and plainly marked with the name of the owner, and in accordance with instructions obtained at the Civil Control Station. The number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group.

3. No pets of any kind will be permitted.
4. No personal items and no household goods will be shipped to the Assembly Center.
5. The United States Government through its agencies will provide for the storage, at the sole responsibility of the owner, of the more substantial household items, such as iceboxes, washing machines, pianos and other furniture. Cooking utensils and other small items will be accepted for storage if crated, packed and plainly marked with the name and address of the owner. Only one name and address will be used by a given family.
6. Each family, and individual living alone, will be furnished transportation to the Assembly Center. Private means of transportation will not be utilized. All interagency transportation to the movement will be obtained at the

THE PRESENCE OF FUTURE, THE POWER OF PAST

A PEN IN THE COMMUNITY ANTHOLOGY

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A PEN IN THE COMMUNITY ANTHOLOGY

FAIRFAX HIGH SCHOOL
&
WRITERS GUILD FOUNDATION VETERANS
DOROTHY RANDALL GRAY, INSTRUCTOR
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
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FORWARD

All throughout the country voices are being raised and passions inflamed by injustice, senseless violence, and the necessity for change. In these times voices are also raised in other powerful ways—through story, the telling of lives lived, reflections of human history, and visions of the future.

These pages are manifestations of an alternate universe where high school students and veterans share their words, worlds, and wisdoms. Their imaginations and insights, personal poetry, and fierce fictions journey from the mythical to the magical to memoir and beyond.

They made me laugh. They made me cry. They touched my heart in countless ways.

For eight weeks it was my privilege to witness these writings from eight valiant veterans and thirty-five Fairfax H.S. students. To my high school students I ask that you keep using the power of your words and know that you are in charge of my future. I'm trusting you with it.

To my valiant veterans Daphne, Katie, Melanie, Emily, Sheila, Caylee, Nic, and Matt—you had the courage to push past boundaries and lay your truths on paper. I salute you, I am honored to have served you, and I thank you.

Sharing the same sky,

Dorothy Randall Gray
Teaching Artist, Spring 2018

FAIRFAX HIGH SCHOOL

MY WEIRD PLANES

Codi Go

I WALK TOWARDS MY ROOM. I twist the golden knob of the white door and the first thing I see inside is my long black desk sitting on top of two drawers. My big silver Mac desktop on top of the desk is waiting for me to type my essay, which is also accompanied by unorganized stacks of books surrounding it. My small pots containing cacti decorate the sides of my desk. I glance around the room, inspecting my huge map of the world and papers about airplane parts plastered all over my walls. The papers served as a motivation to pursue my dreams of building planes.

My light brown wooden bed is resting on the opposite corner, covered with pink blankets matching with my bright red pillows. Right next to it is my low, black coffee table where I usually set my alarm clock and leave my books that I read before I sleep. I breathe in the aroma of the fresh air coming in from my open window. I turn around to organize my books but then I realize my airplane models, decorating my bookshelf are making some unusual noises—sounds very similar to an engine coming alive. I walk over to my three airplane models and I couldn't believe my eyes. They seemed to be just slightly bigger than normal. I thought that I was just seeing things and hearing things wrong. I accused my head injury from getting hit by a soccer ball for this madness. I ignore it as best I could and go back to organizing my books. I turn on music from my phone and started to type up my essay on the computer.

Over the bass heavy music, I could hear a slight shrieking noise. I turned down the music and strained my ears toward the sound. It was the airplane models again. The models were really getting bigger! I picked them up to feel their weight. They were significantly heavier than when I first bought them. I didn't

understand. I brought it over to my father, who was preparing dinner in the kitchen. He replied that it was nonsense. I left the models on the kitchen table to show that it was indeed growing bigger and bigger. As every minute passed, the noise was just getting louder and slowly getting larger. My dad couldn't believe it. Half an hour passed and the plane models were went from a pencil case size to printer size. My dad and I had to bring a quick solution. Not only was the airplane situation weird, my house was also slightly vibrating. I heard the rattles of my couch, television, and the plates inside the cupboards. My dad and I brought the growing models into the car and drove all the way to a vast and empty airfield, six miles away from our house. We left it there, in fear of its uncontrollable growth.

The next morning, we drove to the abandoned airfield where we left our planes. My dad and I kept worrying about what might have happened. We hoped that it had stop growing overnight. From a distance, I saw three glimmering white commercial planes resting on the field. I thought that there was no way my metal models turned into the actual planes. I approached the planes. It was indeed the same planes my models were made to replicate. My Delta Boeing 777 was here. My Korean Air Boeing 747 was in between the Delta and my Asiana Airlines Airbus A380. I was just starting to wonder what to do with these billion dollar planes, until I heard doors pop open from above.

A pilot stuck his head out, twenty feet above me. "Oye, captain. What are you waiting for? Get on!"

"Me?" I asked, obviously in lost for words.

A pretty flight attendant appeared next to the pilot.

"Of course, you! You're the owner of this plane! C'mon, we'll explain to you later."

With my jaw hanging wide open, I nodded and ran up the stairs leading to the aircraft.

THE GOLDEN ITEM

Codi Go

THE BANK WAS BUSTLING on a Thursday afternoon. It was cool in there and everybody was in line. A mysterious man wearing a black fedora hat asked the lady to be taken to his safe. The lady opened the thick safe door and let him in. The man pressed a button in his watch and the air started to vibrate. Everybody in the bank dropped to their knees and covered their ears. For some reason, the air was shrieking and burning their ears.

The man smirked and proceeded to attach tape across various safes. He lit the tape with his cigarette lighter. The tape burned and revealed the insides of the safe without damaging the goods. He hurriedly pulled out his duffel bag he had hid inside his leather jacket and started to throw all the cash and gold into it. His eyes scanned the opened safes for a specific item he was looking for. Then he saw a glitter of gold deep inside one of them. He reached in and inspected it. It was a gold figure, shaped like a hybrid of a bird and a human. This was the sacred artifact every robber in the nation was looking for. He put it in his pocket and zipped up his bag.

He ran out of the safe room and took his Glock G19 semi-automatic pistol from his jacket's pocket, aimed at the security cameras and blasted each and one of them. He ignored the sirens and ran to his getaway car, a black Benz sedan parked outside of the bank. The people on the floor were still covering their ears in pain.

“Hurry, boss!” said the driver. The robber hopped into the car and the driver gunned the engine. The car weaved through the traffic. When they believed they were safe, the man took the gold figure out of his pocket and smiled. He already felt his body getting stronger. The back of the gold figure had a message. It read, “Bad

things will accompany with the good.” The robber snorted and shook his head. Nothing was going to happen to him. He was unstoppable now. He and the golden item would rule the world very soon. The driver turned around when they stopped at the red light.

“Boss,” said the driver.

“Yes, Rafael?” He looked up from his phone and saw a pistol aimed at him.

“Sorry, boss. I’m going to have to take that from you,” said Rafael. He pointed his pistol at the gold medal and back at the man’s head.

“Say your prayers,” said Rafael. He pulled the trigger and shot the man in the head. The back seats were splattered with hot blood and the man slumped against the seats. Rafael pulled out a towel from the passenger seat and cleaned his pistol. The traffic light turned green and he put the pedal to the metal. The sedan roared down the street. Rafael couldn’t help but admire the golden item. He felt himself getting wiser and stronger already. He was so distracted by the golden item that he drove past the red traffic light. At that moment an old SUV ran right into the sedan. The Benz’s windshield was destroyed and airbags popped out. The sedan was hit hard and the force caused it to obliterate everyone in the driver and passenger seat. Rafael lay there in Benz’s driver’s seat dead with his hands holding the golden figure.

REFLECTIONS ON GEORGE TAKEI'S TED TALK "WHY I LOVE THE COUNTRY THAT BETRAYED ME"

Dana (Dohyun) Lee

GEORGE TAKEI IS A JAPANESE AMERICAN who lived through the World War II, through the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, and the horrible concentration camps that came after the bombing. Japanese Americans were innocent, and had nothing to do with the actual bombing, but they were put in concentration camps regardless. At that time, they were seen as a threat to the country because of their ethnicity. Takei recalls seeing tears streaming down his mother's eyes as they are forced to pack their bags and leave their home immediately. They are treated harshly in very poor living conditions, and forced to relocate multiple times.

Takei recalls that this had happened when he was just five years old. When they were released after a few years, their family had to start over once again, having no money or resources after the years in the concentration camps. Later, he asks his father why he didn't hate the country that had turned its back on them. His father explains to him that the judicial system of this country was made to be dependent on "good people who cherish the ideals of our system and actively engage in the process of making our democracy work."

This shows that even though the Japanese citizens had their rights taken away from them and were betrayed by their country, they still didn't loathe their government. They understood their current situation and they fought against the prejudice, overcoming it. If I was put in that kind of situation, I would've certainly gotten mad at the government. I can tell by this TED Talk that the Japanese American people who have lived through these times are very strong to be able to get back up with no money and work their way back into their normal lives again, step by step.

IF I CHANGED MY NAME, WHO ELSE COULD I BE?

Dana (Dohyun) Lee

IF I CHANGED MY NAME, there are so many people I could be. If I wanted to, I could be the most famous celebrity on Earth. I could be the President. I could be the CEO of a billionaire company. I could quite literally be the most successful and richest person out in the whole world. But would I want that? Well that, I'm not so sure of.

I guess it would be thrilling to live the dramatic life of a celebrity. It would be quite pressuring, but satisfying to know that I was doing something good for my country as a president. I could enjoy the most luxurious life as a billionaire CEO of a company. I probably wouldn't have any financial worries as a successful and rich person. But I'm not sure if having comfort or money would be the equivalent of happiness. I doubt I will be able to smile brightly at such small things like getting my test back to see that I aced the test, or if I will feel that heartwarming feeling I always get when I enter my home to the smell of my mother's cooking. I'm not sure if I'll genuinely be happy without all my closest friends and family supporting me. I don't know if becoming some of the most successful people of the world would relieve me of all my problems.

I don't want to be someone else. I've come to realize that changing your identity is something close to impossible, unless of course, you've come straight out of a *Mission Impossible* movie. I know I can't be perfect, and that there are some things about myself that I'm just stuck with for life. And whether I like that or not, I decided to just accept myself for who I am, and to work every day on becoming a better version of myself, instead of wishing I could have the life of someone far away from my reality. *This is me.*

A BROWN STYROFOAM BALL - IMAGINING WHAT ELSE IT COULD BE

Grace Kim

THIS OBJECT IS A FOOD SUPPLEMENT that was given to Japanese Americans when they were put into internment camps. Instead of being given three meals a day, they were given this food supplement instead every morning, and had to suffice with just one for the whole day. This food supplement contained nutrients that a person would need to barely live. Even if they were hungry after being given the food supplement, they would have to contain their hunger until the next day, when they were given another food supplement. The Japanese-Americans would never be given any other food, and would eat this same food supplement every day of the year. If they complained about it, they weren't given the food supplement the next day, and would have to starve.

GEORGE TAKEI'S TED TALK - MY REFLECTIONS

Grace Kim

THE TED TALK gave me a deeper understanding of what happened when the Japanese were put into internment camps. It made me feel more empathetic towards the people that had to go through that tough time in history. I also tried putting myself in his position. If I had been in his position, I wouldn't have been able to live in the United States after the discrimination I had gone through. I would have been angry at this country for putting me into an internment camp, and I would've left the country immediately. This made me realize how mature he must've been to be able to forgive the United States, and how hard it must've been for him to forgive and live in the country that had discriminated and hurt him. The TED Talk helped me understand how brave and mature he and many others had been during that time.

EVERY GIRL HAS THAT, “HIM.”

Mithi Padney

AS SOON AS I GET IN, I feel the fresh air coming from the window right in front of me. The sweet chirping of the cute little sparrows is heard all through the room. Colorful paintings of quotes and gestures decorate the white wooden walls. As I walk to the other side, I see my neatly made bed on the right. A white nightstand stands next to it with my pug shaped lamp on it. Then, I walk to the window and look outside, “It’s beautiful,” I tell myself. I could see the whole city of Los Angeles from there. I also see the mountain with the “HOLLYWOOD” sign on it. Tall buildings look so small and cars are just like moving ants. Trees look like rose bushes and the sun feels right next to me. I feel like I’m living in the sky, and I’m flying.

As I turned around to have a look at my closet I see that it’s closed and then move forward to open it. I push the sliding mirrored doors open and to my surprise, I see it shining and nothing but a lot of light instead my clothes. I freak out not because I see light and shine but because I wonder where my beautiful precious clothes would be. I get inside to look for them and suddenly the closet doors close. I’m tremble and suddenly I see bright lights taking the shape of a door on the dark wall of the closet. After the beautiful magic is gone I walk forward in amazement and try to open the magical door with shaking hands.

But before I could open the door the sparkles of magic fall on me and the door opens on its own. I move forward. Everything is as bright as the moon and I can’t open my eyes. I keep moving and open my closed eyes. The world standing still in front of me is amazing I can’t believe my eyes. It’s a magical world with some flowers as, as big as trees and some, as small as ants. The place has fairy butterflies flying high up in the air and mermaids that

swim in the crystal-clear water wearing beautiful shiny pearls. The unicorns have rainbow colored hair and a cute powerful horn on their head. The buildings along with the palace of the magical city are way up in the sky and I have to fly to reach them. Everyone has bright beautiful wings so that they can fly. Everyone has a special magical ability fit for them, because it's a place where everyone is special. It's a place where the words like sadness and misery were never heard. And it's a place perfect for everyone, maybe like everyone's dreamland.

As I look around I hear someone walking towards me. The wind is blowing so fast, my hair just flies into my eyes. As soon as I push them off my face, with that gentle stroke, I see him. I'm taken aback. It's him, it's really him. My heart is just beating like drums and I can feel it. I can't talk or walk or do anything, I think to myself. And he is walking towards me slowly...and slowly. And I don't know what to do... And now he's right in front of me. I'm shaking and he knows I'm scared and confused but he just keeps looking at me kindly and gives me a gentle smile and immediately holds my hands. I'm just standing there astonished, staring at him, and then I just blink my eyes like a several times, to make sure it's him. And he just says that, "Yes, I'm real! SERENDIPITY HAPPENS!" and I'm just nothing but extremely overwhelmed. I have no words but suddenly the world around me just feels complete. All my tension is gone. And then I realize that he could even hear my heart beating and I hear his...He looks right into my eyes and suddenly it just begins to rain. In shock I open my eyes to my teacher with a water bottle in her hand yelling, "Sleeping in my class is against the rules..."

OBJECT: A BEAD - IMAGINING WHAT ELSE IT COULD BE

Emily Lee

THE BEAD that once belonged to a young little girl who was living inside the Japanese concentration camps. Used as a lucky charm, it was originally from one of her friends who died inside the camp from starvation and malnutrition. The bead once belonged to the girl's grandma who believed brought luck and patience to those who owned it. The mysterious object has been passed from generations to generations. No one really knew where the bead originated from or what the actual use of it was. But now, it was in the hands of the little girl. She was now alone in the camps without anyone to talk to, her parents were deceased and so the bead was her only friend at the concentration camp. The bead is the only object that made her feel somewhat connected to them.

IN MY HEAD

Ricardo Aguilar

I CLOSE MY EYES, I see my living room, it was bright and brown. The only people in the room were my mom and me, and she was cooking what looked like scrambled eggs, bacon, and sausage. The temperature in the room was warm but humid so it felt like a normal day. Then out of nowhere the TV turns on and a plane comes out of it. Then I look in the kitchen and my mom was gone but the food she was cooking turned into big cars that exploded into smaller cars that didn't stop exploding. But all of a sudden I look around and see nothing exploding, nothing moving, and there was no sound heard. I get up to check and there was a mini earthquake and I feel and my head hit the table. I woke up a few minutes later to see my mom cooking and nothing exploding. So I guess everything was in my head.

FANTASIES IN MY OWN BEDROOM

Karen Lee

IT WAS A NORMAL DAY in my small, crowded bedroom. I do my usual routine of going on my laptop and working on either homework or just browsing the web. However, today the mood was a bit different. I didn't feel as comfortable because I had a creepy feeling someone was watching me from behind my back. I turn but nothing is there. I shrug off the thought of someone being in my bedroom with me and continue working on my laptop. Again, I get the same feeling a few minutes later. A shiver comes down my spine. I turned around and saw a demon looking over me with its long, black body. It has no legs and is floating above the wooden floor. This demon has long charcoal hair that fell right over my shoulders. Its mouth is open, blood dripping on the floor creating tiny red splatters all over. It is ready to swallow me up. The demon screams, "KAREN, KAREN, KAREN WAKE UP!"

"AAHHH HELP ME!" I yell in fright and in a moment, I realize I am sitting up on my bed. My mom is standing next to me saying, "KAREN, YOU'RE GOING TO BE LATE TO SCHOOL, HURRY UP!"

I sigh, realizing this was all just a terrible nightmare. But as I got out of bed, I noticed red splatters on the floor near my desk, and my face turned white.

GUILTY OR NOT

Jada Fraser

Do you feel guilty,
For what you did,
Taking away the happiness from such a kid,
How does it feel to know,
That you broke the heart of the child,
You didn't have time to know,
I want you to know I don't know grudges,
That's why I'm writing out my feelings like a poet

DON'T TELL ME TO REMEMBER

Jada Fraser

Don't come to me talking 'bout,
Do you remember the day he,
No I don't remember the day,
No I don't remember nothing about him,
Instead of asking me what I remember go ask him what he
remembers,
But then again you probably don't have to cause he hasn't been here
for anything,
Just remember I needed you, and you weren't here when I cared for
you,
So don't think there's anything left between me and you because it
all died a long time ago

ROOM IN HOUSE

Junwoo Kim

WHEN I WALKED into the dark chilly living room, I saw nothing but darkness. Darkness was all over me and I couldn't see anything. Darkness started to vanish as the sun arose and shined through the crystal clear windows. As I opened up the windows, fresh air hit me like a truck and the fragrance of the breeze was refreshing. The colors of the morning sky was shining down on me with bright yellow, sky blue, and white. While my mom was cooking, I heard the sounds of eggs cracking and sizzling on the frying pan and that made me hungry like a bear.

SUDDEN EXTRAORDINARY EVENT

Junwoo Kim

THE MORNING SKY suddenly turned pitch black and the cooking eggs that were sizzling, suddenly became a dinosaur and it destroyed my house because it was too big. The dinosaur apologized to me after and it became my new friend. The dinosaur started to talk so we talked about life. The dinosaur backfired on me and spat fire, but I couldn't get burned or hurt because I'm too strong, so I killed that ugly dinosaur.

FRIENDSHIP WAR

Harry Kim

THERE WAS A SMALL TOWN IN SEOUL, South Korea, and it was named “Penike.” A few people lived there and they were all friendly. They were all close to each other, it was like a family in a small town. There was a boy named Jo and he loved to go around the small town to give out food. Mostly everyone loved him and would gladly appreciate every little thing from him. Jo didn’t go home everyday, but instead went to his friend’s house and slept there. Jo’s best friend was named Bart and they loved to play around the town. They spent everyday going around town doing good deeds.

One night, Jo and Bart were playing around a lake that had strong currents. They were playing the “pushing game” where they have to push each other until one falls down. Jo and Bart was getting closer and closer to the river where they reached to the point to almost falling. While they were playing, Jo accidentally pushed Bart into the river and the current swept him away. Jo didn’t realize it until he heard a scream going down the river. Jo started freaking out and didn’t know what to do at the point because it was his first time experiencing it. Jo was too scared to tell anyone that Bart was swept away and kept it a secret.

The next day, everyone was questioning where Bart was and started to look for him. Jo knew what had happened and he was scared to go outside so, he stayed inside of his house. A few days later, they couldn’t find Bart so they gave up on looking for him. Everyone was depressed that Bart was missing and the whole town was a disaster.

Later that night, a group of people came to visit Jo and came in front of his house. Jo came outside and his face was dead like a flower but the group of people started asking him about Bart.

Jo was frightened that he would get caught so he said that he didn't know anything.

After that night, no one talked about him ever, that night. A few years passed by and Jo forgot about what happened to Bart and enjoyed his life with the town. Every night, Jo had a nightmare and it was about Bart. He dreamed about how Bart was still alive and was looking for Jo. Jo suffered everyday because of the nightmare and couldn't handle it.

One day, Jo was hunting for fishes at the same lake where Bart was swept away. While he was catching fishes he saw a view of a group of man behind the lake. He wondered who they were but minded his own business. He looked at them once again and saw someone familiar. IT WAS BART! He couldn't believe his eyes! He started freaking out and ran back to his house. Bart was actually rescued by a tribe named NIKE.

A few days later, the same group of the same people came to the small town. They declared war to them and wanted to take over the town. Jo heard about the news and started to freak out. Later, Jo and Bart met and Bart was surprised that Jo just left him behind. They started fighting with weapons and the whole town was a disaster. They fought for two days straight and they were all tired. The third and last night, Bart gave up and surrendered to Jo. Jo and Bart were glad that the war was finally over and became friends again. For years and years, they build a bigger town which became the capital city of South Korea.

FUTURE

Harry Kim

THE FUTURE IS HERE, the year 3017, and the world has changed by a lot. The robots have taken over the world and the world is full of new technologies. There is a boy named Sul and he loves playing with machines. He is curious and has interest in technology and wants to make robots that helps the world. He wants to make robots that helps people have a easier life and can help their daily duty. When he grows up, he wants to be a engineer that makes the finest robots in the world.

Sixteen years later, he graduated from college and he wanted to achieve his dreams. So, he got a degree and worked hard to become an engineer. Sul was all alone his whole life and he wanted to make robots because he didn't want to be alone. So, he began to work on his big project, with his friend Bart. Sul met Bart when they had to work together in a project to build a prototype robot. They got closer and closer to each other every time they talked about their future. Bart wanted to be a master hacker and help people that had problem with their technology. They both helped each other achieve their dreams.

Sul started to work on his new project called Youngs. That project was to build a assistant robot to help them assist them. It took Sul twenty-five tries to complete the final product. Sul named his first robot YSS and started to talk to it. YSS helped Sul when he had problems with anything. YSS did everything that Sul wanted it to do and Sul was pleased. Six years went by and the world was filled with robots. Basically, everything got replaced by robots and robots did mostly everything. One of the most intelligent robots predicted that there will be aliens that will invade Earth. Everyone was worried about it but they felt secured because they had robots to protect them. But still, they were very concerned about the aliens

invading Earth. Just in case, they made the robots build a forcefield around Earth to protect it. It didn't take long for the robots to build it because they were all connected and it took one snap to build it. Days and months went by, and there still was no sign of aliens on earth.

Suddenly, an alien invasion attacked Earth with no signals. The aliens somehow controlled all of the robots on earth to attack the people on Earth. The people didn't know what was going on to the robots. They all suddenly left their houses and went to the middle of the fountain in downtown. The city was out of control and no one knew what to do except Sul. He found a way to stop this disaster and the only way was to reprogram the robots to their normal state. He found a way to turn them back to normal and the only way was the hack into them and switch them back to human mode. Sul found a perfect solution and that solution was to ask Bart for help. Bart became a master hacker and he can hack mostly everything around the world. So he went to work. Bart went on to his computer and hacked all of the robots so they can come back to normal. After a few hours, the robots came back to normal and the aliens ran away back to their homeland. Sul and the whole world was thankful and happy that they were saved. After that day, Bart became a hero to the world and was given a "Life Saver" award. Later, Sul found a way that robots cannot be hacked so they wouldn't be able to fight back to humans. Sul taught other people about robots and the world lived happily ever after with robots.

IF I HAD TO MOVE OUT OF MY HOME

Harry Kim

IF I SUDDENLY WAS FORCED OUT OF MY HOME, I would first of all, feel really sad, angry, and scared. I would be sad because I would be leaving back so many memories of the house that I come back to everyday to eat, sleep, work, and whatever else I do at my home. I would feel angry at the people that are making me move out of my home for no reason just because I was a Japanese American. I would also feel scared because I would be going to some place random out in the middle of the desert with people that have weapons ready to fire at someone who doesn't follow their rules. If I also had to pack everything in one suitcase, I would bring my clothes, phone, charger, tooth brush, tooth paste, water, food, shampoo, body wash, flashlight, first aid, toilet paper, pillow, and blanket. This would help me on the journey to the long and narrow places I would be living in from now on with hundreds of other families in my situation.

THE LITTLE VASE

Harry Kim

THE LITTLE VASE was made by potters during the nineteenth century. It may look small on the outside, but it actually has a big holding space. It can hold almost anything in that short amount of space. It took potters a very long time to polish and make. They used some sort of technology that was only found by the tribe that made these kinds of clay vases. The tribe's name was the Ewsau Tribe. Inside, you can put items such as food and water without it getting full. Because of this, you can carry even all the items in your house and it would still be as light as a little vase. This makes it very useful for moving things and traveling. It can also sometimes be used as a weapon. You can actually just throw it at them and they get dizzy. This is what the little vase made in the nineteenth century can do. The Ewsau Tribe used this usually to get advantages in battles and wars by carrying loads of stuff without any problem. They would bring out hundreds of swords and guns out of one tiny little vase and that would bear them no weight on their shoulders. This was a very important invention for the Ewsau Tribe.

DREAM WORLD

Diego Martinez

I IMAGINE A ROOM assorted with small trinkets, laying around the floor and desk. I see my bed covered with pillows and blankets, as well as a couple of books or magazines laying on the floor. There is also my desk, with a desktop and a few oddities piling up on it. I imagine myself taking off a jacket and tossing myself into bed, plugging my phone in to charge while I'm at it. Maybe one of my cats would also be on the pillow, waiting for me while I go back downstairs to eat something. As I walk back into my bedroom, I notice my cat glaring at me with its dark green eyes in a rather disturbing manner. All of a sudden, the feline morphs into a goliath, erecting pillars of fire across the room. The floor is splitting in half, with volcanic ash showering the room. The walls become sights of terror, and I'm running around like a lunatic not knowing what to do. As my own cat is about to devour me and shred my body into a thousand pieces, I kick it right in the nose, leaving me with a chance to escape. Right before I run away, I wake up. I notice that nothing has changed: the ceiling is no longer a phantasm of aughts and ashes shooting from the sky, the bedroom walls are nothing more than painted spots of plaster and the floor is just a dull layer of wood. Just for a moment, everything seemed to be fine, until I turn my head, noticing my cat peering out the window. A quick glimpse of the dreams I just had frighten me for a moment, eventually residing in the abyss of memories that have built up in the figments of my imagination. The cat's reflection can be seen across the room, its contour reflecting off the glass pane. Its eyes were laying on something outside, although I couldn't seem to figure out what it was. As I look outside for a moment to observe whatever was so captivating to the cat, my cat suddenly hissed at me: something that it wasn't very fond of. I quickly leap away, not

accustomed to my feline companion being aggressive at me. I knew this kind of nature was not normal for a cat like this, as it always spent its time bathing itself and napping in the soothing breezes of the afternoon wind. I decide to get some water. As I go downstairs to fetch myself some water, I suddenly notice the crevice in the wall that was never patched release a monsoon of cockroaches. Being neutrally afraid of the critters, I run with every ounce of energy that I can possibly muster. Not bothering to look back at the rapidly increasing swarm of insects that was chasing me throughout the hallway, I quickly run into my bedroom and lock the door shut, stuffing piles of clothes onto the slim opening at the bottom of the door to prevent roaches from infesting the one place that I felt safe in at the moment. I approach my cat, deciding that it was the best way to cope with the situation. I spot a roach breaking through the mountain of clothing. Sure enough, I see dozens of cockroaches devouring the few articles of clothing that were left to shield as from the roaches. An entire infestation is set upon the building. As I make one last attempt to clad myself (and the cat) with my bedsheets, I feel myself spiraling through a spasm of colors, followed by a brief dash of white light, almost as if I ascending into Purgatory. I wake up again. It was all just a dream.

THE SACRED VASE

Diego Martinez

ACROSS THE LAND, the little boy pondered in the small lake with his small dirty feet. As he slowly moved forward, he glanced at his gleaming reflection, made by the shimmering strokes of water that he ran his feet across. He decided to get up and have lunch. There he was, standing in front of his straw home, staring at the shining vase that stood in front of him. He hasn't seen it before, leading him to assume that his parents had brought it from somewhere else. As he looked inside to see what contents were inside the vase, the vase suddenly started shaking. It began to gleam with radiant colors that caused the little boy to panic. All of a sudden there was a pause, a brief moment of silence, leaving the boy confused as to what was going on. Suddenly, a faint tinted cloud rose up from the vase, this time with a little troll popping out of the work of art. The troll glances at the boy, as the boy mirrors his actions. With both of them stunned at each other's presence, the little troll decides to say something.

“Greetings. My name is Tobias, and I come in peace”

“Hello. My name is Anthony. I come in peace as well”

“I see that you and your family live off in the rural parts of the woods. Tell ya what kiddo: I come from a land that promises the finest jewels and pearls. You can have these riches by simply accompanying me on my way back. Waddya say?”

“I appreciate the offer, but I really should be goi—”

“Nonsense! I noticed that your parents aren't even home. There's no reason why you can't tag along, right?”

“I suppose so”

The two humorously hop into the vase together, not knowing what else to expect. They are suddenly warped to a realm of dark and gloomy clouds, with rain and thunder seeping throughout the

atmosphere.

“What is this place? I thought you said that there was fine riches where we were going!”

“Yes, yes, but you should know not to trust a silly little goblin so quickly young one.”

“Get me out of here!”

“Never!” said the troll as he wrapped his hand around the boy’s mouth, pulling him to a small wooden shack that seemed to be locked. Just as the troll manages to pull him into the clutches of whoever was waiting for them inside the building, Anthony manages to escape and run for his life, searching for anything that could possibly bring him back home. He spots a vase nearby, realizing that that must be his portal home. He immediately jumps inside, managing to escape the trap that he had almost been caught in.

EGYPT TREASURES

Karen Lee

THE GOLDEN ARTIFACT is in a shape of a half eagle and half human. It was stolen from the underground chamber under the pyramid of Egypt. In this chamber, there are stacks and piles of gold treasures. This specific piece was once a part of a shiny golden crown. This crown was only to be touched worn by the king of Egypt. Anyone who laid a finger on this crown was directly sent to be killed and burned up in flames. However, if one did manage to get their hands on this crown or a piece of it, the king himself would appear as a ghost and grant you any one wish. This, however, was only a myth and no one really went far as to steal it and see if the myth was true. But one day, a courageous man came to this underground chamber and stole this piece. That day, after bragging to the townspeople about this artifact, he disappeared without leaving a trace of anything behind. He was gone forever. Due to this incident people believed this myth as a dreadful curse.

A PLACE IN MY HOME

Ashley Chang

TYPICALLY, most households have a dedicated place for people's needs, which is known as the bathroom. To me, I believe the bathroom is a place that is absolutely necessary in anybody's home. It allows people to take care of their own needs, such as brushing their teeth or taking a shower. It's a place where you have your own privacy, so you can even cry inside if you want! Simply ball up on the floor and cry, then wash your face and nobody will realize that you have just went through a self-crisis. But most importantly, the bathroom is a place where you mostly have to go to, every day. You can live without going into your room, kitchen, or living room. But the bathroom—you have to take care of your hygiene and other personal business, which is why I think the bathroom is such a necessary place.

How does your own bathroom look like?

My bathroom is relatively small. It's mostly furnished with white, such as the bathtub and the toilet, as well as the sink. Bits of gray, or a steel-like color, are submerged within, such as the faucet or the toilet lever to flush. The floors are laid out in grid like squares, with a tinted color of muted green. It's not the most beautiful color, but it manages to blend in with its surrounding color friend, white. When I enter through the door, the toilet lays right in front of me, while the right of the toilet's side has the sink. And also, to its right, is the bathtub, covered with a shower curtain that seems to add a slight decorative feel to the restroom with its geometric patterns and shapes. The smell of this particular place isn't irritable in odor—it's relatively clean and often times, there really isn't any smell besides the occasional cleaning product odor, or the smell of faucet water. The sounds you hear are the water running, or even water being flushed. In the mornings, you may

hear your own toothbrush scratching against your teeth. Those are the typical sounds of the bathroom in most of everyday life. As for smell—I have not tried licking the walls. But I have tasted toothbrush every day while I brush my teeth, and it's quite minty and fresh.

A MOTHER'S GIFT

Ashley Chang

“GRANDMOTHER, what is that green pot next to your desk?” Ten-year-old me asked her a simple question out of my own curiosity, but I was never able to forget her pained expression.

To an eighty-four-year-old, a prized possession from their childhood means a lot to their own self. For Grandmother, her beloved item was a simple pottery which was miniscule in size. It was olive green in color, with scale-like patterns enveloping the pot as a whole. Rounded on its sides, while tough as a dragon's skin, Grandmother had always carried it around with her in a pouch. I remember the moment I asked that question, and her eyes shimmered.

“Young one, it is a gift from my mother. She gave this to me as a good luck charm when I was five years old, but she also told me a cursed tale. One's pottery is a representation of their own life. If broken, the shards represent a broken life, shattered to pieces. And so, I keep it safe.” Grandmother had looked down at the pottery and caressed it slowly. Her face seemed to make a pained expression.

To a ten-year-old, Grandmother's words did not make much sense. But as I witnessed the funeral of Grandmother, I caught a glimpse of the pottery, blurred out by the tears forming within my eyes. At that moment, it had shattered to pieces out of its own will.

Perhaps, Grandmother had gotten the story backwards. Maybe the pottery was represented by Grandmother's own life, but it had shown me a valuable insight. Grandmother had valued her own life, and thus, I was able to let her leave the world peacefully within my heart.

WHERE DID...

The dark wings, the blue sky, the vast ocean
Where did it all come to?

The blossoming flowers and the chirping birds
Where did it all go to?

The relaxing rain and the warm sunshine
Where has it gone to?

The kids singing and the couples dancing
Where did they go to?

Darkness and pain
Is this what it has come to?

UNTITLED

THE WIND BLEW through the delicate cherry blossom petals, her hair moved along with the breeze. She was standing outside her school. It was the first day and she was new to the place, the sky was clear from any clouds the sun shining just perfectly, warm but not hot, the perfect spring day. She tried to press and shake up to sides of a backpack and marched up the steps, looking around she felt small—everyone seemed to know each other. She continued walking, not paying attention. She felt herself run into someone, immediately the blood rushed to her cheeks. She apologized quickly and tried to walk away, however she felt someone grab her wrist. “Hey, you dropped this,” the person said smiling kindly. “Are you new here?” She nodded her head. “Ah I see, what is your first class?” “Art,” she responded as she grabbed her stuff back. “Oh, well it is the first room to your left as you walk in.” She responded with a quick thanks and was about to leave when the guy told her, “Hey, I’ll see you around, ‘kay?” She nodded and watching him walk away. “My name is Xander,” he shouted back at her, “nice to meet you,” She smiled. The wind blew the petals away her hair moved along with it as she walked towards class she thought, *maybe it won’t be so bad.*

A NEW LIFE

Jaden Bhang

IT WAS SEPTEMBER 21, 1942, 6:21 a.m. when it happened. I was awakened by the sound of loud pounding on the front door. I rushed down the stairs with my dog Meito following right behind me. When I got to my parent's room, I found them awake too, obviously in shock. Who could be knocking at this time of the day? They told me to stay under the bed as they ran to the door. As I hid under their bed, I heard shouting and soon my parents returned both in tears. They told me that we had thirty minutes to pack what we can and leave the house. They hadn't explained why, but by the tone of their voices, it seemed that this was the real deal. It didn't take me long to pack because my parents told me to stuff what they gave me into my bag. They were running back and forth shouting what to pack while I sat there in awe. What was going on? When time was up, two U.S. soldiers marched in and told us to get out in ten seconds. We ran out as fast as we could only to see a truck carrying other Japanese American folks. As they commanded us to put our bags in the truck, I picked up Meito to sit with me, but a soldier quickly grabbed Meito out of my hands and threw him on the ground. He said we weren't allowed to bring any pets to the camp. Camp? I knew from that moment on that my life was going to change forever.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SUNSET

Jaden Bhang

“GRANDPA, can you tell me what happened at the Japanese camps?”

“I mean sure, but you won’t like what you hear, it was a tough time there.”

“Please?”

“All right then, but only because you asked. The truck bumped up and down the road as I grasped onto my mother’s hand. I only saw the faces of horror on the other Japanese people around me as we were all driven to our new home. When we finally arrived, my parents and I got off the truck and in a flash soldiers were shouting orders and grabbing people, ordering them to move to the designated areas. I was separated from my parents as soldiers handed tags to people with numbers on it. They said it was our new name and that we were going to be living here for a while. I shouted for my parents, but no reply. I searched and searched and yet there was no sign of them, I just couldn’t imagine living alone in this desert. I looked out into the distance only to see flat dirt all around us for acres and acres. I knew this wasn’t anywhere near home and that there was no way to run out back home. Hey, at least that was the most beautiful sunset I had even seen.”

WHO ARE YOU

Ariana Lopez

Living in fear

Living in a free country

But not being free

Living under a fake identity

Breathing under a false name

After a while you get used to lies

They spit out easily

Like a bunch of word vomit

The lies keep coming and coming

Until it's all you know

A lie

A VERY SPECIAL DELIVERY

Marianne Gutierrez

THE CLOCK TICKED SLOWLY, time eating away at her bones. Amber has not been able to sleep for days. Every time she closes her eyes, she could hear the voices, laughing and yelling simultaneously. Amber has been hearing these voices for several nights. It all began ever since her sister, Esther, passed away. All the voices sounded like her sister and a man. Amber could not pinpoint where she heard the man's voice before, so his identity remained unknown. As she closes her eyes, she can hear a man laughing and her sister screaming in pain. Sometimes Amber would be able to make out certain words or phrases, such as "Stop!" and "Please help!" If Amber didn't know any better, she would think that the ghost of her sister is trying to communicate with her in one way or another. However, she knew that would be impossible; the supernatural are not real.

Esther had been brutally murdered in her respective home, which was in the same neighborhood as Amber's, around one week ago. The murderer is suspected to be the neighborhood killer that has been going around town. The mysterious killer has killed several of Amber's neighbors and yet the police are still unable to arrest him. Amber wouldn't understand how the killer was able to enter Esther's house since the police investigation detected no signs of break in. Was the killer someone Esther personally knew? As Amber pondered her sister's death and thought of possible suspects, the doorbell rang. Amber stood from where she was lying down on her bed and walked to the door. She checked the peephole and saw Bill, the mailman.

"What is he doing here at 9 p.m. on a Sunday evening? Do I have some sort of package arriving today?" Amber muttered to herself as she opened the door.

“Special delivery for Amber Mendell!” The mailman said as soon as the door was open.

“I don’t remember ordering anything though,” said Amber as she tried to recall any recent purchases she had made.

“Oh, Amber. You’re so forgetful!” The mailman replied as he laughed.

Amber completely froze. The mailman’s laughter sounded just like the man’s voice she’s been hearing in her head. She saw a menacing glint in Bill’s green eyes and her body became paralyzed.

“You’re just like your sister...” Bill trailed off as he began to charge at Amber. She tried to run but it was already too late.

“I should have listened to what Esther’s spirit was trying to tell me. I’m sorry, Esther. I’ll see you soon,” Amber thought as she took her last breath as the mailman began to stab her repeatedly.

IF I HAD TO LEAVE MY HOME. . .

Marianne Gutierrez

IF I WERE to be forcefully taken away from my home like the Japanese-Americans were when they were taken to the concentration camps, I would be very selective with what I choose to bring. Back when this event occurred, the Japanese Americans were only allowed to bring one suitcase worth of items. Thus, I have to be wise about my decisions. Considering the circumstances the Japanese-Americans were put in, I knew I would be provided little to no resources if I were put in such circumstances.

The things I would make sure to bring would be the basic necessities, which would include appropriate clothing, hygienic products (toothpaste, toothbrush, soap, etc.), and important valuables. I would also bring the largest supply of women's sanitary products and napkins as possible since these would be helpful monthly. If I were the only one being forced to leave my home and enter the camp, I would not bring any friends or family with me for the sole purpose of not wanting them to experience such suffering. From what I have observed, many of the camps were located in deserted areas with hot weather so I would bring clothes that would suit this weather, as well as blankets for the cold evenings. Another important item I would bring with me would be money; I would try to bring as much money as possible to aid me in my stay at the concentration camp.

If someone knocked on my door and presented me with this situation, attempting to evict me from my home immediately and that I was only allowed to bring a limited amount of supplies and valuables, I would obviously be confused and angry. I would wonder why this was happening to me and/or my family members. Depending on the situation, I would attempt to rebel but I am almost always positive this would be close to impossible. If I were

to be separated from my family, I would feel sadness and longing; no one should have to go through such experiences. If my only choice would be to follow what was being instructed, I would follow but I feel like I would have a vengeance inside me that would want to go against the government. Overall, I would just be angry.

With me, I would also take allergy pills (antihistamine) and most importantly, a decent amount of rope. To be blunt, I would use the rope as a noose to possibly commit suicide like some had done in the past. Some may think that this decision would be unreasonable but I believe that life is meant to be lived happily. Those who were forced to go to the concentration camps were stripped from everything they loved and were forced to stay there for an unknown amount of time. The people I spend my life with and the belongings I am blessed to have are what make my life worth living. Thus, why would I want to continue a life where everything that makes me feel joy is being taken away? In this situation, I am presented two choices: 1) Live on and persevere through this difficult time although the possibility of it getting better is unsure. 2) End your life now knowing that you had lived a happy, although short, life. With all honesty, I would choose the latter in a heartbeat.

LITTLE KITCHEN

Aaliyah Chardea Almonte

SUNLIGHT FLOODED THE KITCHEN through a small, open window and it was nearly too bright to see. Minuscule dust particles danced in the air. Light bounced off the sterling silver pans and they created shapeless figures on the walls. A faint mechanical whir came from the old, yellowed refrigerator in the corner of the kitchen.

The window shut suddenly and the kitchen became dark. The low buzz from the refrigerator became a loud clattering. The pots and pans began to rattle as if there was an earthquake. The largest pan sprouted an eye, and then another. One by one, the pots and pans grew eyes. Some only had one eye but others had up to four. They varied in color, from the darkest brown to the lightest blue. They began to blink rapidly as their pupils darted back and forth.

The refrigerator began to rock back and forth. A small mouth grew in the middle and it slowly became larger. The mouth opened as if it was about to speak. The refrigerator took a deep breath before a deep voice began to speak, “Can you stop staring, it makes me uncomfortable.”

DARK

Taeyoung Kim

IT IS LATE, 10:30 p.m., and I walk in to the house. The lights in the whole house are turned off and I do not hear anything coming from any of the rooms. I can sense the chill of the house down my spine. It is pitch black and no one is in the house. I decided to go to the kitchen and grab something to eat. I washed and got ready for bed and turned my television on. I was in my fuzzy socks and pants and had some snacks with me on the couch. It was one tiring day and it feels nice to be on the couch doing nothing. I can feel the warm air from the heaters and the windows are all tightly closed. I fall asleep watching television in my cozy socks and pants.

IN MY HOUSE

Lawrence Lopez

I WALKED INTO THE KITCHEN. I looked out the window, and smiled as I saw the sun setting. The white stove was on, with all the delicious smell of spaghetti flowing out of the pot. I looked toward the brown table, and saw the plates and utensils set up for us to eat. The smell of steamed vegetables flew to my nose, and my mouth began watering. Then my family sat down to eat.

All of a sudden a stone came in flying through the window. It had a little note in a strange language I couldn't recognize. It was written in a weird green ink. It also had a photo of some creature with two heads and one eye of each, and it was holding a weapon of some kind.

Suddenly a spaceship the size of a basketball came in crashing through the ceiling. Five tiny aliens stepped out, their guns pointed at me.

“What do you want” I ask.

They talk in a strange alien language. The one who looks like the leader comes up to me. He says something that I can't comprehend, so he shows me a signal on the ship that reads 'Low Fuel.' I shrugged. Then they showed me a AA battery, and again pointed to the low fuel signal. I went to find one, and gave it to them. They put it into the spaceship's engine, and flew off. I wondered if that one battery was enough to bring them back home, but then I remembered it was Duracell.

STORY OF A MYSTERY OBJECT

Lawrence Lopez

THE SMALL VASE was found buried in the sand of a Japanese concentration camp. A small boy found the vase and took it home to his mom. She thanked him, and said it was beautiful, though it didn't look too nice to her. She used it to hide valuable things, like the little money they had and a beautiful silver necklace that's been in the family for generations. One day, while the family was working two men came in and stole everything, except the vase, which they thought was ugly. When the little boy came home, he was sad, and cried to sleep. He dreamt of lots of money came out when he sang his favorite song. When he woke up, he sang the song while holding the vase, and all of a sudden two necklaces appeared in the vase. It turns out that the vase was magic, and it duplicated what was put in it, if only activated by a kid pure in heart.

Soon they had lots of money, and they used it to buy their freedom.

MAMA

Lorie Martinez

THE COLD AIR WHIPPED around the small cabin, swirling around the girl lying on the floor with a blanket wrapped around her. The draft that blew in from the harsh winds outside nipped at her face, slowly waking her up. She sat up, looking around before picking herself off the mattress with her blanket tightly curled around her. She padded her way to the little stove, her blanket trailing behind her. As she got closer, she felt the warmth and smelled the sweet smell that the stove emitted, encompassing her in a gentle caress. It had been used recently, she noted as she plucked the small notes hanging from the wall beside the stove.

It was from Mama!

She quickly skimmed over the note and nodded to herself before scurrying around to follow all instructions given by Mama. She quickly grabbed her red coat and pulled on her boots. She looked to the door where there was a basket of steaming bread. She had to go and deliver this to the market, so she grabbed the basket and braced herself for the viciousness she was about to face. As she swung open the door, she was greeted with violent slaps of air. She struggled to get the door close, since the wind kept pushing against her. At last, she managed to close it and fought against the wind, trudging in the direction of the market. She tightened her grip on the basket as the wind whipped, violently trying to snatch the basket from her grasp. The wind molded her hair into an unruly mess, making it fly all over her face.

The wind howled, the sound echoing through the trees as she grumbled back in response. As she kept walking to the market, she heard the familiar jingles that brought a smile to her face. She turned to see her cheery neighbor, taking down her beautifully intricate chimes.

“Hi, Ms. Nancy!” Ruby hollered over the piercing wind and insane jingles coming from the chimes being blown strongly by the wind.

Ms. Nancy turned her head to Rosie, shock evident in her face. “Ruby, darlin’! What’re you doin’ walking ‘round out and about in this weather?” Ms. Nancy exclaimed while trying to wrangle her chimes.

Ruby stopped, adjusting her grip on her baskets and brushing away her hair before answering her. “I’m going to the market to drop off this bread to Mama!” The wind picked up in speed making Rosie stumble backwards from the force.

“Alright, sweetie! Hurry along before the tornado hits! It’s coming soon!” Ms. Nancy shooed Ruby away.

“Bye, Ms. Nancy!” Ruby grinned as she began her journey to the market again. As she kept walking, she heard Ms. Nancy saying, “Be careful!” In the distance, echoing. Ruby began huffing as the wind pushed her small body harder, like a bully picking on the weaker person. She had begun to grow tired until she saw the village. A spark of energy went through her as she realized she is almost at her destination. She quickly weaves her way through the people bustling through the streets trying to get to safety from the upcoming storm.

Ring!

The warning had gone off. The tornado was about to hit. Ruby’s eyes widened, before she picked up her pace trying to go into a building to find shelter in. She tried opening multiple doors but they were locked shut. Tears pricked in eyes as the wind started to swirl dead leaves that lay helpless on the ground. She stood in the middle of the abandoned village, spinning around to find any door open to provide her refuge.

“Ruby!” A feminine voice called out, the voice being carried by the wind, echoing as if it is in an endless loop. “Ruby! Over here! Quickly!”

Ruby spun to a door being held open by a lady who looked familiar. Ruby squinted her eyes, trying to get a better look.

It was Mama!

Ruby's mother was beckoning Ruby over, as the door thrashed in her hold. Ruby smiled about to take a step toward her direction, but was interrupted.

Ring!

The tornado is coming. Ruby turned around, dropping her bread in shock, a gasp escaping from her mouth. Her body was stuck in place as she took in the once little swirls of wind turn into a full-blown disaster. It was coming towards her with such speed, ripping and destroying things along the way.

"Ruby! *Please!* Hurry!" Ruby's mom pleaded, "Ruby!"

Ruby turned to her mom, eyes wide with fear. The tornado approaching her, waiting to get Ruby into its claws.

"Ruby!" Ruby's mother screamed one last time, pretending that her daughter actually had a chance of escaping the beast.

Before Ruby was completely swept into the tornado, completely devoured by the raging winds, she whispered, "*Mama?*"

UNTITLED #1

Tanibeth Garcia Lopez

Friends are like diamonds
Precious and rare
Some can be fake
Some can be real
Some can give you joy to know that it's real
Some may break you down knowing that it's fake
Fake friends are like dead leaves
You can find them anywhere
They may not look harmful
Just like fake friends lies

UNTITLED #2

Tanibeth Garcia Lopez

WHEN ONE'S NEW to somethings they are scared. I was scared when I came to a new place. I didn't know anyone and I didn't trust anyone but one person—my uncle—not even did I trust my mom because when I was small she came to a new country not to leave me but to help me and at that time I didn't know what was going on, all I knew is that I can trust one person. Just like when you do something new you're scared but if you have someone to guide you and that you put your trust on everything will be alright in this world there's no being alone. If you say you can live being alone than you're hurting and lying to yourself. Surround yourself with good people because good will benefit you.

BEDROOM

Jenny Kim

THE FIRST THING you notice as soon as you walk into my bedroom is a white, twin-sized bed with a cozy blanket just right for a cold night. The theme of my bedroom is pink and white, so mainly all the furniture in my room is either pink or white. Next to the bed, there is a white piano and a white desk with two drawers holding the to tables acting as the table legs. As you look towards the left of those drawers, you will see a pink bookshelf, not full of books, but full of dolls. A colorful, small rug is placed on the left over space of my room and on top of that, there is a huge teddy bear sitting calmly. Towards the end of the room, there is a restroom that I always keep closed and a walk-in closet that has a pile of clothes waiting to be folded after laundry. Unlike the other restrooms, my restroom sink is outside of the restroom door. It is surrounded by three mirrors. Through the mirror of the restroom sink, you can see the reflection of the opened curtains blowing from the wind coming in of the balcony. There is a great view from the fourth floor of a small portion of Koreatown, Los Angeles.

A RANDOM OBJECT

Anthony Funes

WE WERE GIVE A RANDOM OBJECT. But this wasn't some random object it was an ancient necklace worn by the kings for good luck holding powers that only gods could access and grant. Yet the kings would wear it for goodluck. It was thought back then that anyone that can wear it would get magical powers. It has been passed on and on and on time and time again until eventually it was lost. Lost, nowhere to be seen.

Years and years later it was found, but it was just thought to be some ancient necklace that was pointless. It was sold. Not known for its true power. What it can really do. It was then that it would get sold, lost, found, and forgotten time and time again. This powerful necklace, powers that people could only imagine of having, would just be ignored, left, and forgotten. It was then, there, where someone actually found it and kept it. The wore it everyday and did a little more research about the necklace and with a lot of digging up she could make the connection that it was a necklace from the past that kings used it as goodluck and that it yields many powers. She tried to replicate what the kings and queens did in the past so that maybe she could be a powerful person herself. But no luck. She tried to advertise it to people around the world but people would not buy it and thought she was crazy. There was one buyer. But it was only sold for so little. The buyer eventually had to go to a school and was thinking of ideas to make the kids there think and have good thoughts of things. She picked up the necklace and a few other things and went there. A student wrote a story about it. His name was Anthony Funes.

POEM 1

Anissa Acosta

Just be yourself.

Life is too short to be someone else.

POEM 2

Anissa Acosta

Don't dwell on the times you've failed.
You're not a failure unless you quit.
Move forward with your life.

**WRITERS GUILD
FOUNDATION
VETERANS**

HERO?

Caylee So

I stood there
head tilted
M-16 slung over my body armor
Straight and erect except
I tilted my burning neck
backwards
and aimed my stare
up towards the heavens
I swear I saw it part
The clouds dissolved
until I could finally see stars
The ones we spent nights admiring
Five hours
I waited
Eyes moist
My vest hung heavy on my chest
Emotions launched from my stomach
stuck in my throat
The girl standing next to me cried loud
Bellowing
Tears
I saw six men carrying you down the path
which led to the open bay of the aircraft
I imagined how still you must've laid in that
plain

silver
box
Adorned
with only a red
white and blue flag
You were going home in thirty days
I recalled you
saying with a smile
But now only pieces of you will make it back
Early
To Arizona
They will tell the ones who gave you life
that yours was lived with pride and honor
They will give you medals you cannot wear
and speak words you cannot hear
And they will blow the trumpets and fire the rifles
as they lay you down in the ground
And years from now I will forget what Fourth of July
looks like on broken streets
But I will still remember
the sadness
in the voice
that sang “The Star Spangle Banner”
And I will still remember
Your silver
Coffin.

A REFUGEE'S BEDTIME STORY

Caylee So

THE WOODEN RECTANGULAR SLAB beneath her body creaks as she turns to the sleeping newborn wedged between her underarm and the shaggy towel wrapped around its tiny body. She places her index finger underneath the baby's nose to feel the slight touch of air. She sighs in relief, almost half expecting a different outcome. She looks around the room, half dark, half lit by several lamps. All around her, heavy and soft breathing, some of aches and pain and some of deep sleep. She's grown accustomed to thirty or more people in the same cramped, splintered room, but she's also grown accustomed to watching so many of those sick being carried off to be buried somewhere beneath the hard earth. She shakes her head at that thought. She's safe now. No more living under the shadow of a pointed gun at your back. No more war. She looks down at her baby, the unnamed child, the one who was never supposed to be born, but whose life was detected too late and whose birth refused to be stopped.

It was twenty-two hours of frightening hard-fought pushes, so intense, she felt herself leaving her body. A few seconds before the baby separated from her, she thought for sure she herself no longer existed; she thought she was watching the scene of her own bloody death. She remembered thinking in those still hollow moments how sad she was for the child to be born with no mother—and how sad it was for her other three children and husband. They had all survived four years of a wretched nightmare, only to lose her at the gates of a new life. But she felt at ease at the thought as well. Her fight was finally done. She was free. Now she feels a tinge of guilt for thinking how easy it would be to just slip away.

“What’s your name?” She whispers to the baby. “What’s your name little girl?” She places her nose at the tip of the baby’s earlobe.

“Est-ce que ça va?” The soft voice of a young nurse interrupts. Looking at the nurse, the woman postulates that she is maybe twenty-five or twenty-six. Her fine yellow hair tucked in a neat bun, her white uniform clean and embroidered with that big RED CROSS, the one everyone now sees as a symbol of hope in this time of *too much sickness and death*. The nurse stands over her holding a clipboard and a comforting, yet somehow forced, smile. *It’s been a long time since she’s seen skin so light, so foreign*, the woman couldn’t help thinking. She wanted to reply back in French, but she could no longer conjure up the words, so she just nods. *I’m okay*.

“Ella est belle,” the nurse turns to look at the sleeping child.

“Au Kun.” Thank you, the woman replies in her native Khmer. Of course the woman disagrees with the nurse; the child is not beautiful. She is skeletal, red, and does not look like it belongs in this world. The nurse quietly slips away to the next bed, where the NO-ARMED man lies pitifully trying to sleep.

“You’re lucky.” The woman says to the baby. “You have two arms, two legs, and all of your fingers and toes. Who could ask for more?” She shudders at this thought. Why would she teach her child this? To be happy at a bare existence. Once upon a time, not long ago, she was a girl who turned seeds into roses, and roses into gardens. The world used to be filled with colors and songs and big dances. Now all she can recollect are the haunting cries of all the brothers and sisters she has lost and all the neighbors whose eyes cried uselessly out for help. The country she escaped is now just a rotting forest of gravestones. She had no choice but to say goodbye to it. She will probably never see it again...

“You are born with no home and no name...” The tears are now rushing down the woman’s face, as unstoppable as her

loneliness. She wonders what kind of future their family will have and if this sorrow will follow them wherever they go. Will this baby inherit the last mourning thoughts of her mother or the long lost laughter of her father? How to explain to her the burden of such bedtime stories. The baby stirs; her round narrow eyes delicately opens as she stares up at the woman.

“You’re alive.” The woman gazes at the child for a long moment. “We’ll name you Chamrong. Lucky... lucky to be alive.” The woman smiles for the first time in years.

HOME IS A MEMORY

Caylee So

THE BUS COMES TO A JOLTING STOP as Boran's head smashes into the seat in front of him. The stir of over one hundred people crammed into that small space causes loud repetitive echoes of "Are we here?" Boran looks out the window, and for a split second he can't help but admire the rosy beautiful dawn that snuck up on them. The admiration quickly spirals into a small panic when he realizes where they were. "No..." Boran shakes his head and mumbles beneath his tired, confused breath.

"What's wrong?" asked the seventy-year-old lady sitting next to him. Boran likes to refer to her as Grandma Chan. Named after the Monday she was born on, she always likes to remind him. Grandma Chan was four decades older than him and always bore this silly toothless smile. She and her seven-year-old granddaughter, Tida, (who is now peacefully asleep in her lap) are the closest thing he has to surviving relatives.

They had all met each other while making the long trek from Cambodia to the Thai border. Grandma Chan and her weakening heart, and Tida and her short legs had trailed further and further behind their first original escapees. They were both sitting on the side of the dirt path when Boran discovered them. Their faces were so sad and hopeless that he couldn't help but ask if they needed any help. He could hear Grandma Chan's loud, instant sigh of relief as she grinned and nodded "Yes, we do. Thank you, child." So he reached out his arm for her to use, and from that moment on, he became her walking stick.

So of course, when they finally arrived at the Thai refugee camp, Grandma Chan repaid his generosity by making sure he always had sufficient food and water. They became an unconventional family; they were all orphans in their own way. For

months now, they had lived together quietly in the camp—their heads hung low, always following as many instructions as they can understand. Some days, though, Boran felt they had traded one prison for another... one kind of fear for another... one danger for a lesser, bearable one. Grandma Chan, always the optimist, was still praying to Buddha regularly, asking him to deliver them to a safer place, one they could finally call home. Every night since their first night together, she would prompt Boran to join her in her prayers, but he couldn't. He had lost his God a long time ago, somewhere in middle of the third year of what some are now calling *the genocide*, or to Boran: stupid brainwashed cold-hearted Cambodians killing other Cambodians.

“Everyone loses their God at one time or another. You’ll find him again. You’ll see. Just like I did when he brought me you.” She would say, smiling comfortingly. “How about I pray for all of us?” She would ask.

“Sure,” he always relented. He wasn’t going to be the one to murder her God.

Then of course, earlier the day before, it had seemed her prayers were being answered. The Thai soldiers rounded up everyone shouting “You are all going to America! We have busses waiting to take all of you to America!” Everyone broke out into cheers of excitement, and for the first time, Boran and all of his fellow Cambodian refugees felt a tinge of gratitude towards the Thai soldiers, who for two months, had treated all of them like cockroaches encroaching on their country’s forced goodwill. The Thai soldiers wanted the refugees gone, and the refugees wanted to *be* someplace that they were wanted.

By the time the day was over, tens and thousands of his smiling neighbors climbed onto vehicles they thought would take them to the promised land. It was something they had all dreamed hopelessly about for five years: *freedom*. No more Khmer Rouge soldiers, no more Thai soldiers, no more Vietnamese soldiers, no

more guns, no more landmines, no more hot sun and work-torn hands. Maybe a soft bed, a warm meal, a hot bath. Everyone felt lucky as they sat on that bus, their future was bright, and they were all heading towards it. Boran also got lost in the same dream as he slipped away into sleep. He was smiling, so thankful to be one of the fortunate ones who were able to load the bus.

“What’s wrong?!” Grandma Chan asked again, more worried by Boran’s silence.

“Everyone get off the bus!” A loud, angry shout from the bus driver, now standing tall and stiff with his rifle raised in the air. Boran can’t make out the Thai words, but from the driver’s constant motion towards the open door, he knows this is their last stop. Fear and panic devour the air as they all hold tightly to one another.

The driver yanks hard on Tida’s arm, pulling and pushing her and Grandma Chan off the bus, nearly sending Tida’s face towards the ground. But Boran, quick on his feet, lunges forward to catch her. Her eyes now wide open and teary, she’s confused, scared. She wants to ask what is happening, but all she can hear is the moan of the thousands of people who are now offloading their busses.

“You okay?” Boran asks, pulling her up to his back as he moves his arms for Grandma Chan to clutch. “Uh huh...” Tida responds, burying her face into Boran’s neck, trying as always to brave whatever comes next. She’s thankful for him. She doesn’t remember what a father’s touch was like, but she imagines it to be just like this: safe.

Boran throws himself, Grandma Chan and Tida to the ground as stampedes of people begin moving towards the edges of the cliff. They have all come to understand what is happening. There is no America here. No America anywhere. America is a lie. They are being forced back into *no man’s land*, the dangerous Dangrek Mountains. The one that separated Thailand from

Cambodia. The one most of them had fought so hard to cross... And now they are being sent back... back there.

Boran recalls these familiar mountains, mountains everyone once saw as a source of beauty and tranquility, but not anymore. Years of war have polluted its once generous nature, burying into its skin millions of impulsively tempered landmines. It is the literal mouth of hell. His heart starts beating erratically at these thoughts.

“There is your Country! Go! Go back to your home!” The Thai soldiers begin pushing the reluctant Cambodian refugees off the cliffs, firing their rifles into the air and then down at the tumbling frightened bodies of people screaming: “Please we can’t go down there!”

Backstabbing murderers!!! Boran wants to scream as he watches this scene unfold.

“Cambodia is dead; what’s left to go back to?” He hears a middle-aged Monk lying next to them say. At that very moment, Boran is no longer angry, just sad, grievous. How do you mourn the loss of a country, and will there be a future in which they can be happy again?

“Get up! All of you, get up!” Boran feels the barrel of a rifle being stabbed into his back.

“Okay. Okay.” Boran puts his hands up into the air, signaling his cooperation and surrender. They all stand up. Grandma Chan, Tida, and the Monk begin walking towards the edge of the cliff. From where they are now standing, his fellow refugees look like small rolling rocks bouncing off brown earth.

“Bang! Bang! BOOM! Bang! BOOM!” The sound of bullets and explosions reverberate in the air. Boran wonders if any of the wretched soldiers believe in Karma, and if so, how many negative Karma points you would get for slaughtering old ladies, children, and monks?

“Death up. Death down.” Grandma Chan frowns as they

slowly climb their way down, their backs facing the grey mourning sky. The early morning colors have left them.

“Watch your step...” Boran warns Grandma Chan. He notices how hard she is fighting to keep her balance as her thinly worn flip flops heavily dig into the slippery mud. *Why did it have to be the rainy season?* He groaned as he tugged on Tida, motioning for her to reposition herself on his back. He wonders how much longer he can carry her. And as this thought enters his mind, he feels the click beneath his feet. He freezes.

“STOP! STOP!” Boran holds out his hand and screams at Grandma Chan, the Monk, and all the people close in radius to him. He can hear his heart heave and feel the sweat running down his face, over his eyes, and into his mouth. Salty. He never contemplated it before, but the taste of blood and the taste of sweat are so similar. “Don’t move, okay?” He whispers calmly to Tida, who is the oldest and most obedient seven-year-old in existence. “Could you please come take her?” Boran pleads with the Monk.

The Monk stares down at Boran’s feet. For a moment his fears are yelling at him to move around the man, to leave them. That helping is a risky idea. He has seen way too many dismembered bodies to think the outcome will go in his favor.

“Please... please...” Grandma Chan places both her palms together and raises them to her face, gently beseeching the Monk’s help. The Monk, now looking at Tida, then down at his orange robe, feels the shameful sting of his earlier selfish thoughts. *Who has this war turned him into?*

Okay. The Monk nods at Grandma Chan.

“Just follow my other footsteps here.” Boran tells the Monk. The Monk begins to inch towards him. “Go slower...” Boran watches as the Monk glides closer and closer to him. “Okay, stop there.” He motions to the Monk.

“Are you ready?” Boran taps on Tida’s hand. Tida nods. “Okay. I’m going to swing you around, and I’ll try not to drop you,

and you try not to fall. Do you hear?"

"Yes. Don't fall..." Tida fights the urge to hold on tighter to Boran's neck as he slowly swings her to the front of his waist.

"Okay, ready?" Boran asks the Monk. The Monk stretches out his arms as far as he can reach. Boran takes Tida by her underarms and holds her out towards the Monk, his whole upper body shaking as he tries to remain still.

"Got her!" The Monk pulls Tida towards his body than instantly backs away from Boran.

Boran looks down at his feet. He can barely see them anymore. The mud has buried them. Everything around him has changed, slower, mute. He can see the tears that are now running down Tida's face as she looks at him. The Monk is telling Grandma Chan something, probably that they have to keep moving. Grandma Chan is reluctant, a painful frown appearing on her once hopeful cheeks.

All around him people are still making their way down the mountain. Above him the the Thai soldiers are still standing, firing bullets into the air. Three hundred yards away from him, a little boy is climbing over the body of man who fell to his death; the man's head is still bleeding. Behind him, the Monk rips off a portion of his robe, grabs the branch off a little bush, and ties the piece of cloth around it. When he's done, the Monk pushes the bottom of the stick into the dirt as the orange cloth is seen waving at the top. Boran has seen this often, a warning sign that a landmine exploded up ahead. The Monk closes his eyes and says a little prayer. He then looks at Boran, and with his eyes, the Monk asks for permission to leave him. To abandon him.

Most people don't see their death coming; it is often a surprise. But standing there, Boran realizes, this is his last stop. He starts laughing. Hard. The Monk and Grandma Chan looks at him. They think he's gone nuts. He remembers when the Khmer Rouge were winning the civil war, and everyone wondered if they should

leave Cambodia. He scoffed at them, “I was born in Cambodia. I will die in Cambodia. No Khmer Rouge will ever make me leave my own country.” He laughs again, that stupid foolish child was right. He looked around, down, and out. He’s never leaving Cambodia.

“You have to go!” He waves at Grandma Chan. “I will wait as long as my legs can hold me up!” The Monk picks Tida back up off the ground and places her on his back. Grandma Chan breaks into tiny sobs as she follows behind the monk, clinging to his robe. As they pass by Boran, she pauses for a moment. Boran could tell she wants to reach out and comfort him.

He nods. *It’s okay. I’ll be fine.* He looks away, no longer able to bear the sight of being left behind. He aims his eyes at the ground. He will join his family soon. He wonders if there will be anyone left to remember them after he’s gone. He laughs again. This time recalling the ocean breeze, and him and his brother fighting over the last coconut drink. His brother wrestling him to the ground. His mother racing over to peel them apart. His father pushing all three of them into the water. They all giggle like kids. Over the years, he keeps returning to that moment. Because to him... that is home.

ANGELS AND HEROES

Nic Nauset

WE HAD JUST REACHED THE END of the opposite sidewalk when we heard the telltale “pop pop” of nine-millimeter gun shots from across the street. The sound echoed from the mouth of the alley we had just left.

Before I knew what I was saying I hear myself say, “Get behind that dumpster and don’t move,” as I charged back across the street toward where the gunfire had originated. I took myself by surprise. It was a defining moment. I realized that I was a person who walks towards gunfire instead of away from it, or in the words of the trainee on patrol with me that night, I was “fucking crazy.”

He had only been on patrol with us once before. I was leading that patrol, too. We were walking past a local bodega where a large fight was in progress. Three drunk Navy dudes were busting the chops on a couple of Iraqi store clerks, so I walked in and physically threw them all out of the store, one at a time, into the side of a van parked outside where the rest of the patrol wrestled them to the ground and held them until the police arrived.

“You’re fucking crazy,” he said at the time.

He came out the night after the Iraqi storekeeper incident. It was just the two of us. We happened across a local pusher trying to force a woman to purchase his wares. It was a pretty common occurrence in the neighborhood. Pushers would be pressed to bring in more money or face consequences, so they would strongarm the locals into buying dope under the threat of facing consequences, just more shit rolling downhill.

The woman at the bottom of the hill on that night wasn’t having any of it. She was one of the new breed in the neighborhood, a professional, well-heeled, white woman in her thirties. She wasn’t accustomed to anyone telling her what to do, especially not a poorly

dressed, scraggly, middle-aged, black man, in a dark alley behind the condo she recently purchased. She had the conquering tribal attitude of her forefathers. This was her turf, she had claimed it, and she wasn't taking any shit. The pusher wasn't taking any shit either. This was his alley, and you bought his dope when he told you to.

As the arbiters of peace and justice in the neighborhood, I stepped in to keep it from blowing up into something even more stupid. The pusher knew our reputation, and he knew better than to start any trouble. We weren't cops, but the local police commander loved us and had our backs. It was a far cry from the 1990s when that same police department tried to set me up to take the blame for an assault that they had committed. The cops hadn't become any kinder, or gentler over the decades, in fact I recently overheard them tell a man I had arrested to get up and run just so that they had an excuse to shoot him, but she didn't know this. All she knew is what she saw on TV where people like her are always the good guys, and always get their way. She wore her suburban naivete like body armor and fired shots from her mouth like a cannon.

It was going to get her shot.

She seemed less pleased than the pusher. No wealthy, liberal, white, college-educated, female, landowner needs two blue collar patriarchal men in red berets to protect her. After all, she was strong, empowered, and knew her rights, so she was invincible. The pusher ran his mouth then went upstairs into his apartment. He knew the routine. Don't get my attention and you'll stay out of jail, and potentially out of the hospital. He didn't like it, but he knew the hierarchy. He seemed more put off by her vicious verbiage and refusal to obey his commands than anything else. She spewed some vitriol at us and then went her own way. We left the alley, crossed the street, and then "pop pop pop".

Apparently the hierarchy was crumbling. Small, light-skinned women weren't taking orders from large black men and

pushers weren't respecting the urban ecosystem of remaining under the radar of the Guardian Angels.

That's not heroism.

We never used the word "hero," or "heroism," amongst ourselves. We wrestled with hookers, beat on dope dealers, scared off junkies, and saved a few lives. We were very flawed people who shared a very strange hobby. Once you get into the habit of stalking human prey through snow covered alleys, it becomes addictive. Predatory nature is what it is, and we were fortunate to have an outlet that was just socially acceptable enough to prevent us from going to jail or living as outlaws. Understanding that caused me a lot of confusion. Was I a sociopath? A psychopath? Whatever I was, I wasn't a hero.

I was sixteen the first time I saw a man die. He laid on his back in the middle of the street twitching with his eyes rolled back as grey matter, mucus, and blood oozed out of his ears. I froze. I didn't know what to do.

Not very heroic.

I was twenty-seven when I found man bleeding to death under a bridge. His neck was slit from ear to ear. I stopped the blood, held his head between my knees and kept his attention as a friend called 911. We found out later that someone beat him up and slit his throat so they could steal his backpack. He only had a loaf of bread in that backpack. He had just picked it up from a food distribution site and was on his way back to sleep on the couch of a Franciscan priest when he wandered through that needle and blood littered aqueduct. It's probably hard to eat with a slit throat, so I doubt he was too upset about the bread.

He lived. They called us heroes. The city council even issued a proclamation declaring us such.

Was that it? Was that heroism?

I don't think so. Heroism isn't doing what needs to be

done. Heroism is going against the grain and being extraordinary. A hero goes back into Plato's cave to expose the shadows despite the fact that those still subject to the cave's illusion think he is just "fucking crazy."

Maybe I am just fucking crazy after all...

FAMILY

Nic Nauset

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 4, 2018

I've never been sad like this about leaving another city besides Hollywood/LA. Venice was hard. By this morning my body was done. It is not an easy city by any estimation. Water buses take hours, water taxis cost hundreds a day, the winding alleys are chaotic, the canals annoying, mosquitos buzz around even in the snow, there are no trees or grass, and of course no cars or bikes. I wasn't lost in the romance and art of the cathedrals and museums, or the food and history. The canals weren't really anything special TBH. It's like anything that looks good in pictures, it's fun for a few minutes and then... that's it.

I didn't get the feeling that I was "home," or that I had visited a place I knew in dreams, or anything like that... it was a deeper connection. As hard as Venice was, it was easy. I knew my way around town instantly. Winding alleys and dead ends were as natural as the rain. Venice itself just felt natural, like lounging on the couch with someone you've spent forty years of your life with, and who you believe you'll spend the next forty with. They have their quirks and bad habits, but they're a part of you and you know them inside and out. They're easy and natural in spite of their apparent difficulties.

I spent the week trying to understand "family" and "home". Mostly as part of a writing assignment, but also because I have some big decisions to make. My home in Denver was where we planned to live one day, but we don't want to live in Denver so we must sell. Denver is the hardest city in the world. The weather, the people, the government, all difficult and painful to deal with. Denver is the abusive partner who you spend forty years trying to be good enough for even though they beat you up and put you down

every day. You stay because you have nowhere else to go.

I still don't understand family. There was a bust of my ancient family member in the Egyptian part of the museum. The palaces had relics from some of my royal European and Assyrian great grandfathers... but none of it felt like anything that *I* would call family. The Purim celebration in the ghetto felt like family. The film festival also felt like real family. It was like a family reunion with kin you've known forever but never met.

My last day in Venice I spent most of my time in and around the basilica of San Marco. On my way out I stopped by the gift shop. I love trinkets.

"We have a special sale today!" said the holy relic salesman at the basilica. "Very special Virgin Mary blessed by Pope Francis on sale today for the Saint's feast. Virgin Mary with child is for protection of home and family. Protection of home and family is very important." He repeated that last part as he looked me in the eye as if I needed to hear it.

I walked away, then walked back. "Very important. Protection of home and family." He said again.

I left with an icon of the Holy Family. Not sure what I'll do with it, but it seemed like an appropriate talisman for the week's meditations.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 4, 2018

[editor's note – Cat is Nic's wife and Wolf is his son]

WOLF IS MISSING! POLICE ARE SEARCHING FOR HIM AND CAT. CAT IS SUICIDAL AND ABANDONED ME AND CAR AT AIRPORT. NO SIGN OF BABY. CALL 911 IF YOU HEAR ANYTHING.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 4, 2018

Police located Cat and Wolf. Not sure what is going on. Her last message was scary and she has been under a lot of stress lately.

I still don't know where they are or if I will see them again, but police believe they are both safe right now.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 5, 2018

Still no sign of Wolf or Cat. She left with the cash and the passports, left the car at the airport, and left no note or explanation. Hasn't replied to a single text or call. I need to see my son. I need to know where he is.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 7, 2018

I just want to sit down to dinner with my wife and son so we can laugh and share food and stories like we used to do every night. It seems like such an easy thing to do and brought so much joy to all of us. This is all so unnecessary.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 8, 2018

A week ago I was braving the snow to get gifts for my family on the other side of the planet. I've still not been able to give them those gifts. Now I am researching child custody laws and preparing for the worst in an apartment that has never appeared so big, or sounded so silent. It doesn't have to be this way. It could be talked through and worked through.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 9, 2018

About to go on stage in a pretty full house thanks to a last minute invite from a friend. It's a song I first learned and posted a video of with my little buddy... So many conflicting emotions.

Soon, little guy, soon. They can't keep us apart forever.

"Let's see if I can make it through this Roky Erickson cover without crying," said nobody ever but me.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 11, 2018

It's been a week. It feels like ten years.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 13, 2018

I should not be at peace right now. By all accounts this should have been the worst day of my life. Lies, thefts, secret lives, my son is being held out of state, my access to him is at the whim of people who will not speak or negotiate with me, my wife has no interest in ever speaking to me again...

But I have found a very strange sense of peace. I can see how tragedy after tragedy changed me over the years. I do not like what I became. Perma—crisis mode causes fear based reactions, which become fear based lifestyles.

In this brief moment, I cannot be angry because I have found empathy. We are scared for what we love so we react in ways that cause fear in those who we think threaten what we love. They, in turn, react to us out of fear. That's the terrible way of "thinking" that got us here to begin with. Why perpetuate it if it only takes you where you don't want to be? Why not find common ground and focus on creating more good for everyone involved?

I may change my tune as things go forward, but now that I have seen the way that fear turns the greatest lovers into the most bitter foes, I'd like to avoid fear as much as possible.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 15, 2018

The things that I am learning... every day someone new comes forward with yet another secret about the one I trusted the most. None of us had any idea, and that was the point. Turns out that some people become actors for strange reasons...

This is heavy stuff. Really heavy stuff. And somehow my fault? No. Now that I see the whole picture, and the entire timeline, I know that isn't true.

There are still a few frames missing, but I feel that all will be revealed in time as more kind hearted souls privately share their truths.

My future isn't going to be fun, or pretty, but it is certain, and I can take some comfort in knowing that I can clearly see the path ahead and the obstacles that will be presented. This is a much better position to be in than the one of total ignorance that I was unwittingly and unknowingly forced into for so long...

In spite of it all, my only wish for her is that she heals sooner, rather than later. Nobody wins, and everybody suffers so long as open wounds fester.

Peace, and good night to all. Much love to mi amigos y amigas.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 16, 2018

I asked him to take a video of my performance. He stood there for 15 minutes and this is all I got. I guess you can just look at it and imagine that you are hearing the most intense possible acoustic cover of Nine Inch Nail's "Terrible Lie" as I relive the information uncovered over the last 11 days.

Strangely, this was my best unplanned sets ever. No missed notes, body on autopilot...

I have no clue what's come over me lately. My mind and body feel as if they've recovered from literal poisoning. I used to describe it that way, as though I felt poisoned from the inside out. Not so much these days.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 18, 2018

Two weeks since she took him away. The things I have learned between then and now are mind blowing. I pray that the pain is alleviated soon, but I see only storms on the horizon. I've done more than any man could be expected to under these shocking and nightmarish circumstances and I have continued to seek calmer seas for us all, but I'm not the captain of this ship. The captain seems determined to steer us into the storm, and I fear the reasons why.

FACEBOOK POST: MARCH 20, 2018

I haven't seen my son or held him in three weeks.

Last night I had a dream that he and I were staying in an old house in the desert. We went outside to watch the sun set. Two cowboys raced by on horses that didn't need to gallop in order to soar across the land. We saw lights in the distance and ran towards them.

Strange beings with spiraling neon limbs grew out of the desert floor and from the side of a nearby mountain. Music chimed from the air itself. Wolf squealed with glee and we all danced. I woke a bit, stirred in the bed, and felt as though Cat was in the other room preparing something in the kitchen, then fell back asleep.

In my dream Cat had come home. It was night. We embraced in the living room and held each other tight. The apartment felt full and whole.

I didn't want to wake up from those dreams...

POLICE REPORT: VICTIM STATEMENT

Catherine Trammell, DOB 08/19/1982, has committed malicious child abduction pursuant to California Penal Code PC 278.5

On Sunday, March 1st, while I was on a flight into LAX, Catherine abducted our son Wolf Ramsey Trammell, DOB 07/15/2016, without my knowledge, or permission, and fled the state. She did so maliciously and selfishly in order to escape possible criminal prosecution for stealing from Wolf's social security account, to avoid responsibility for stealing the last six months of our rent money, to avoid responsibility for filing a false police report for theft, and to avoid thousands of dollars in secret debt that was past due.

She has not disclosed Wolf's location. After pleading with her father, he told me that she and the child are (or were) with him in Colorado. He has not since answered any other questions about Wolf's location, movements, or health. I have repeatedly asked Catherine where the child is, requested to see and speak with him, asked about his diet, health, and routine, asked her to return him, and asked when he is returning. All of my questions and requests have been met with silence. She will not answer any questions about his whereabouts, health, diet, or routine, and will not allow me to see him.

Every few days she will send a message that says something like "video chat, five minutes." I wait by the phone and get a video chat call on Facebook Messenger. The phone is pointed at the baby for an undetermined time, then it shuts off. There is no dialogue, no comment, and no questions are answered. If I do not plead and beg for another video session, I do not have the opportunity to see my son for even these few brief moments. Her intent is clearly malicious.

Catherine has a history of physical and emotional abuse

Twice in our relationship Catherine has put hands on me in anger and violence. Once we were in the living room and I pointed at her. She slapped my hand and I told her that physical aggression is uncalled for and unnecessary. She later apologized and admitted that she was out of control.

A second time, we were in the kitchen and she started to shove me in the chest. I hugged her to keep her from hurting me. As soon as I let her go she started striking me again. I hugged her again and told her that "We don't fight like this. This isn't us." and she stopped attacking.

In a series of handwritten notes that I found, Catherine writes; "I cheat, I steal, I lie."

"Those who are in a position to see this true nature are the ones closest to me and they are the most hurt by my actions and the

most victimized by my anger.”

“I usually build lies upon lies when trapped.”

“I know that my actions, the emotions controlled by my actions, have caused him harm. I have lashed out at him severely.”

“Instead of feeling guilty for my crimes, I reveled in my cunning. Over years of decisions, I felt pride in deception.”

“I am a controlling person.”

“I have been cruel to him, blaming him for acting in the same way I’ve treated him.”

“I saw the attention given to others when victimized, I began to play the victim. I am far from proud of this, but I did. I sought the attention and sympathy. I played the victim in big ways and small even embellishing or flat out lying to do it.”

“I subconsciously choose relationships in which I would most certainly be hurt, be victimized. Again, not openly. Always in subtle ways that would allow me to suffer just enough to garner the the sympathies of others.”

Catherine willfully and without notice abandoned an at-risk person and sick pets

I am a 100% disabled veteran. Catherine has referred to herself as my “primary caretaker”. I relied upon her for many things. We also have two sick cats and a dog that needs to be walked several times a day. She abandoned us with no notice or explanation and has refused to answer questions about the health, welfare, and maintenance of the pets.

Catherine has a history of stealing.

A few days after Catherine left I learned that she had been stealing our rent money and had not paid rent in six months. This placed our one-year-old son, sick pets, and the adults in our household all at risk of eviction. Other people came forward and said that they gave her money that was owed to me and she never gave me the money. One person gave her over \$2,000 for me, and I was never made aware of it because she stole the money.

Catherine also stole thousands of dollars from our one-year-old son's social security account.

Catherine has a history of lying to police and family. Several years ago Catherine filed a police report claiming that over \$7,000 was taken from her secret hiding place in our apartment. There was no sign of forced entry, and nothing else was disturbed. I had a \$50 bill laying near her hiding place, and a couple of vintage guitars. Her money was allegedly hidden in a sewing box on the top shelf of a closet behind some other objects. She claimed that someone entered with a key, went straight to the hiding place, took the money, replaced the sewing box in its hiding place, and then left everything else undisturbed. She filed a police report to that effect, convinced me of its truth, had me change the locks, put up an alarm, then collected money via a gofundme account from her friends and family. She never filed a claim against the building managers, or followed up with the police on the report.

Catherine may take Wolf out of the country and I may never see him again

When she abducted Wolf, Catherine took both of their passports and all of the cash in the house. We have an apartment in Mexico, and I am afraid that she is making arrangements to move him there in order to flee her debts and to punish me further for not giving her more money.

I served my country as a counterintelligence special agent, and I am a disabled U.S. Army veteran. I also participate in the FBI's infragard program and receive Law Enforcement Sensitive material, held a Top Secret clearance with the Department of Defense, and hold a favorable PSI with the Department of Homeland Security through the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. I uphold the law, and I am honest in my dealings. Everything that is written here is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

I am sincerely afraid for Wolf's well being, since Catherine is dishonest, cruel, and is using him to cause harm. I have been

deprived of my rights and responsibilities as a father.

Wolf Ramsey Trammell, my one-year-old son, is being held and concealed, without my consent. My parental rights are being infringed maliciously and with cruelty. For his safety, I request that the laws pertaining to PC 278.5 be enforced in this case.

A LONG JOURNEY BACK

Shelia Christian

FEBRUARY 2018

How to start a trip, not of a lifetime. I just want to infuse life back into me. What type of trip that is perfect for me? A spa trip like Ojo Caliente Hot Springs. Yes, I will drive to New Mexico. I think the road trip would be part of it, it would be better than a flight. I don't care if I get there faster. I want to slow it down. The road trip would be at my pace. I would stop and pick up beef jerky and dried veggie chips at David's. I will taste the different types of honey that is there. Strong Buckwheat with its dark hue. Soft Orange Blossom with its beautiful scent. I will pick them up on my way back. As I leave California desert and hit the quiet desert roads of Arizona, I must decide to have windows up with air conditioner on as I pass Phoenix or should I let the intense heat burn off the stressful anxiety of the world's touch. Window down. The hum of invisible life pulsates. I breathe in in a different way. As if with Earth's ebb and flow. In deeply, out slowly. I shiver as if I just threw away something. The smells are invitation back to the wild. The animal kingdom we humans pretend we don't belong to. The tumble weed walking across in front of me, alone remnants keeping time. A hawk flying in the air making sure all is as it should be. A few small creatures crossing the road as I drive by trying to make it home safe from their daily errands and back to their families. I hit New Mexico. I can feel the drum of the native songs, calling me to let go. No worries my child, there is no such things as would of, should of or could of. I dissolve and become one with all that is around me. I smell hatch chilies and my hunger to struggle to get what I think will get me peace and contentment subsides. I drive through Santa Fe, the jewels of turquoise and multi-colors of artist dreams shining in the sun. I am enchanted. How could they

say there is no such thing as magic? I drive pass the sacred spot of forgotten crutches and photos of people who have been healed. The legend of the buried cross remind me of miracles. I did wake up this morning? Thank you for that one blessing of millions I have not counted. Ojo Caliente. I rush to the waters. The heat touched me to the bone. I go get a wrap in wool blankets. I sweat out toxins and life lived ahead of time. I leave the hot springs like I left the amniotic fluid to a new world once. I have fingers and toes. I notice my surroundings. What is that, I wonder? I have wonder again. Food taste good. The world is filled with possibilities.

DEAR DIARY

Shelia Christian

TODAY IS JULY 4, 2015.

Dear Diary...

It has been forty-five years in this body. Happy birthday to me. The kids made me breakfast. There is a big party for me and everyone will be there. I got a nice watch from Melinda. We have been married sixteen years. She tries so hard. I'm tried as well. The marriage counselor suggested we start journaling to say what we can't say. I can't keep doing this. I can't be with her anymore. I don't feel whole. I thought she would divorce me right away after she found women's clothing and makeup.

She wanted to make it work. It will not work. I know it will hurt my family. That they will be embarrassed. I didn't know how to tell them. That is why I have decided to show them. Sitting on the toilet with this \$200 black sequin dress writing this. I realize I need to do this for me. I am a woman born in a man's body. It feels good to express this.

I will tell them my new name is Miriam. My dad will freak. I tried to tell him as a kid. You don't get to be different where I come from. A man is supposed to provide for his family. The Bible says there is only a man and a woman. Men don't cry. I meet every weekend with the boys on the golf course. How will they deal with this? I am senior management at work, people look up to me. I'm starting to freaking out. Am I really doing this. People at my job will be here tonight. Everyone will know after tonight. At least I will be free. It will be hard at first. I can make it work. I will let them say what they will. I will tell them I already gotten an apartment. That I have already talked to doctors who specialize in this. They have explained the process. I will start taking hormone pills first. I will have my Adam's apple shaved

off. I will wear women's clothing to get used to it throughout this process. Then I will have the surgery to finalize it. I will let Melinda know that this is not coming out of our savings, I have been putting money aside for a while for this. I'm will not be stuck in this body forever. This is my rebirth. Well goodbye Samuel Wayne Patterson.

THE PHASE

Shelia Christian

SOMETIME AROUND HAVING A KID and a second mortgage, time speeds up. You look up and you're slightly overweight. You have been in time at a job you can't leave. You're married to someone you sometimes don't like.

Audrey came out of her life fog when she started sweating at night. Then during the day. She couldn't sleep. She thought it was something serious. She prepared herself. She was scared for herself, but also her surprise baby. She already had two sons who were teenagers when she got pregnant at thirty-six. It is a thing now to have children late, but she thought that part of her life was over.

She loves Bella. She wants to be there for her now that she is a teenager. This is a crucial time for her daughter. She is becoming a woman. There are things in the world that she did not tell her about—not life-threatening, just life-altering. She was going through menopause. Audrey would like to be happy about it, but her emotions were not taking instructions from her.

It is strange. Aunt Flow came when she was eleven years old. Her menstrual cycle was a constant companion. Sometimes cruel, showing up at the wrong times and leaving behind a trail. Sometimes it was hurtful and made Audrey lash out and cry. Sometimes it made Audrey stop everything and want to be alone.

Audrey started looking at Bella in her tight shirts and perky breasts. Then she would look at herself and think about when she used to have a beautiful body. How she could play a guy with a look. She smiled at the thought then got depressed as years of a lack of care and the delusion of immortality stared back at her. Audrey had had an enviable figure women wished for. Her lips were so full and supple she used to paint them like they were a canvas. Now she

is lucky to have Chapstick around and sometimes she doesn't. Her hair was shiny and long. It blew in the wind. She used to use a rinse so that its fragrance would call to anyone that was near. Her long legs are dotted now with cellulite and sagging skin. She doesn't even feel like herself.

She started to pay more attention to Bella. She would watch her put on makeup and primp. Audrey started to criticize more. It was a mixture of warning and jealous. Bella was coming into her own. She is smart. She knows what she wants to do. Her future is expansive. She sees the attention she is getting. Bella is a mini Audrey. Audrey feels replaced.

Audrey started to get depressed when a young man said, "Yes, ma'am" to her. She thought she was no longer desirable. She wanted more time or a do over. Her friend told her of hormone therapy. She felt better and made some changes. She remembered the hard-earned experience her age has given her. She started to have dreams for the future again.

HATE

Shelia Christian

SADIQA CHOSE THIS. This day she will do something. She chose what she was going to wear, blue jeans loose. She respected the woman with the flowing dress defiantly in front of the police, but she was self-conscious. This was her first protest. For so long she wanted to join in the fight. She would watch. She was proud of others who showed up and took a stand. She would watch. People saying and feeling what she thought. She watched when the car didn't stop, the bodies in the air. The lone bloody shoe waiting for its owner on the side of the street. The screams that ring over in her ears. Tears streaming down faces. The memorial for the ones who have died. She couldn't watch anymore. This is worth getting up for. This was worth the risk, whatever the risk was.

She prepared herself for the fight. The yelling of names to degrade. The torches and sea of white faces angry at her existence. Look them in the eye, stare them down, she told herself. Don't turn away at the anger in another human's eyes. She put on her protest shirt. It had that manufactured smell. She thought to wash it, but she didn't want the color to fade. The white letters to lose it vividness.

Sadiqa had to admit she was scared. Death is an option. Only time Sadiqa has seen a dead body was her grandmother's funeral. Her father let go of her hand to take care of her mother. She walked up to see Nanna. She looked different. Sadiqa either wanted to wake her or wanted to know what death felt like. She poked her cheek. She was cold. Sadiqa felt a tightness in her stomach, tears came down her face. She knew something without words.

Sadiqa carried her signs to the rally point. Her group was made up of Lidia, who told her to keep busy to calm the nerves. James who gave her Chai tea and said she will do fine. The tea was

hot and the spices tasted good on her tongue. Julia made her laugh. She was ready for this.

As the shouting started, Sadiqa clasped hands with others. Walls don't keep people out, they close people in. As the words flowed in a rhythmic cadence. Sadiqa saw something in the enemy's group. It must be a mistake. Was that really a baby. There was a baby on a woman's hip. He must be around fifteen months old. Sadiqa couldn't help but stare. Who would bring a baby to a rally? Sadiqa could not look away. He had black hair and big smile. His chubby cheeks were flushed and his hands waving like the adults around him. Sadiqa didn't realize she was still at the rally. His eyes told her his name is Lucas Daniel. When he learns to talk, he will say white power. His grand father will be proud, as a Grand Wizard he sees him walking in his footsteps. He will be saturated in this world. By the time he is a teenager the programming will be complete. He would never have a choice.

Sadiqa trance broke as she realized she has been spit on from a guy who is yelling go back home. She couldn't say her comeback. Sadiqa felt for this child. She had that tight feeling in her stomach that she did not have words to describe, but she just knew. As the shouting match continued. Sadiqa realized only love is going to heal this. We have to find a way to come together. She must find a way to break this cycle. Sadiqa started shouting I love you over and over. This will be her message, so no child will have to carry the weight of hate.

LOVE AND LIGHT

Shelia Christian

I REMEMBER THE '80S as a rough decade. Sex education doesn't prepare you for your period to just start out of the blue. People staring, the jokes. Being a teenager wasn't easy. The growth spurt. One day you playing with dolls, the next you staring at boy's crotch area. My emotions were out of whack. As a child I just wanted to play, have my chicken nuggets and watch cartoons. That was a beautiful life. Another growth spurt—my breast became huge overnight. I swayed when I walked. Men would stop their cars and ask if I needed a ride. It was weird.

My mother and father were in the early stages of divorce though they didn't know it yet. Then my Uncle Ryan came. He was hilarious in his bright kimono and flip flops. We lived in a place where we all wore cowboy boots or sneakers. He would say "to thine own self be true." He would tell me all sorts of things. He talked to me not at me. He was my mother's younger brother. She said he was worthless and couldn't keep a job. He would argue with my mother and win. No one did that.

He'd say don't you worry about her. I know all her secrets He told me sometimes people are born different from others. Instead of them being accepted as they are some people try to force them to be like everyone else so they wouldn't be judged. He'd say if one person loved you in this world you can do and be anything. He said he would be that one person for me. He told me to take my time and what I wanted to do when I grew up. He would help me. After that I spent all my time with him.

We went to the theater where men dress up as famous female singers. We would walk down the street singing, just for ourselves. He would do my hair and we would shop for clothes. I got brighter and bolder just like my clothes. He was with me when my

parents finally divorced. He was happy for me when I got my first kiss. He was there when I got dumped because I wouldn't put out.

This went on for about a year, then the black spots showed up on him. He was in the hospital for a long time. My mother told me he was infected and to stay away from him. I would sneak to see him. Bring him magazines and a Tab.

Once he was released from the hospital we would secretly hang out. One day he told me that we are all made up of light. That our light will never go out, even if the person goes away. We went to seances to talk to the dead. He told me I should walk barefoot to connect to Mother Earth. He began a cycle of going in and out of the hospital. I told him I would take care of him. He told me to remember to look for his light if anything should happen. He said he would find me again.

I was on a field trip when he died. It was as if I knew he was gone. I was looking at the bones of a dinosaur and thought of him. I wondered for a long time if that was his way of saying goodbye to me.

The family had his body cremated and scattered his ashes in the backyard. They said now that he was finally at peace finally. I realized that they didn't know him at all. I realized I never told him I loved him. I wanted to tell him that I am his one person. After that I looked in every eye to find him. Once I thought a stray cat I found was him once. Even though my mother said that couldn't happen, she let me keep him. She became very close to Uncle Ryan the cat. She didn't stop crying for two weeks after he got hit by a car.

I long since stopped looking for Uncle Ryan, when a test stick turned blue. From the food I craved and the things I cried over I felt a familiarity with the child growing in my belly. He has come back to me. I tell Uncle Ryan every day I love him, even if it turns out to be a girl. I say you can do and be anything you want to be. I will still love you.

SIMPLE

Shelia Christian

MOST PEOPLE have never seen a field of sunflowers or wildflowers. Just endless rows of color. Waving back in forth in the wind. The soft sun on your skin. To watch a bee hover in air, picking his next destination. These were all new to me. I grew up “Up North” as they would say here. I thought I loved the city until one day. I felt closed in. I started to sweat. My hands shook. My heart pounded. My doctor said it was a panic attack. It got worse and I got more pills. My husband wanted to move back home. He said it is only an hour and a half away from a big city. I’m a blogger. I could move anywhere. I needed a change. It may be close to the city, but it is far from city life.

We sold our small house and got a lot of land. We still had money left over. I love it here. I take pictures of sunsets and the farm. Well, not a farm yet, more of a garden. It will be a farm one day. I have these chicks that run around. My husband told me not to get attached. I don’t like that part of farming.

It may be a small town, but it has big personality. The town square will be celebrating its two-hundredth anniversary next year. The old firehouse has now been turned into a bar. The mix of old and new are perfectly paired here. The 1910 fire that almost wiped out the town was like God’s control fire. Made way for new growth. They say things were drying up. People left for the city and opportunity. Now they’re coming back to nature. They want the simple life. I see why.

This place has similar problems as a big city. Nora, my new best friend comes over with pie and gossip. CNN has nothing on her breaking news. Seems like Karen found out her husband has been cheating. Apparently everyone knew. Some say even Karen knew. It is just now she has to face it. She has three kids. Nora says

it will be difficult, she loves him. What do you do with the love you still carry?

No more pills and no more anxiety. I sit here smelling the wind and looking out unto the world. I can see my children here, running around laughing. I can see my farm growing. I can see my life.

QUAD 206 - HOW DID I GET HERE?

Dee Wright

(WHISPER) KABOOM! Have you ever been in complete darkness? It's quiet. I lay in the dark. I can hear the drops of rain falling on the windowsill. Darkness surrounds me. My mind won't settle. I can't sleep. It's hard to remember details. I don't want to remember the details. It's all a blur. Like when a windshield wiper swipes the rain off a car window. You know, it gets clear for a moment, then it's blurry again. Days run into nights and nights into days. I stare into the darkness. How did I get here?

I joined the Navy at seventeen with a two-year-old daughter on my hip. I was recruited into Cryptology in boot camp. I graduated Cryptology School with honors and I became a Cryptologic Technician Operator responsible for the encryption and decryption of classified information for the safeguarding of National Security. Wow! At my first command, during the first Gulf War, I was stationed in Rota, Spain. One of my main jobs was to track ships as they came into the Mediterranean Sea. At my second command, I was stationed at a Pentagon detachment, the Naval Security Station in Washington D.C. and I worked as a Chief Watch Officer. Usually white male Petty Officers in their thirties held those positions, but there I was a black female and only twenty-three and in this position. I loved my job and I was good at it, so I re-enlisted for six more years. So, how did I get here?

QUAD 206! U.S. Vets homeless shelter in Inglewood, California. It's nice for a homeless shelter. Four stories high filled with homeless vets, mostly men. There's a Dell computer lab, a Gold's Gym and a cafeteria where a chef cooks the vets breakfast special order! There is one quad for women. Quad 206! I shared the suite

with spitting Donna “aaaaggg” who likes to walk on the treadmill fully dressed in a turtleneck and high heels, and crying Renisha who sits on the couch crying, “I needs a joint to relax,” and screaming Constance who keeps yelling: “you know you can’t have a joint—this is a sober living house!!” Even though these women are around me, all I can see is darkness. All I can feel is pain.

KABOOM! I hate driving in all this rain. I’m couriering intelligence from Virginia to DC. I hate driving in the rain especially with a briefcase handcuffed to my wrist. I was authorized by the Officer of the Day to drive my own car rather than the government vehicle. You see, if I was driving the government vehicle—they’d have a special pouch where I could put this briefcase that’s attached to my wrist. I’m in my car waiting in the turn lane. I see the traffic slowing. I hear the click of my turn signal. I see Marine opening the gate. I see the rain. I hear the thunder. And suddenly **KABOOM!**—a quick flash of light... then darkness.

QUAD 206 – In the darkness I can hear Renisha crying. I never found out why she cried at night but somehow I understood her tears. As I lay in the dark I wonder: How did I go from eating Spinach and avocado salads at the Pentagon cafeteria to eating a PB&J out of a brown bag in Quad 206?

KABOOM! The glare from oncoming traffic shines directly in my eyes almost blinding me. The flash of light, that’s the last thing I remember before the wet rain came pouring in on my head. And then the ripping sounds of the Jaws of Life as it pried the car door open. I could see people in the distance. I could not make out what they were saying. I want to hear. What? I tell them that I need to get this briefcase to the Naval Security Station. Wait don’t pass out! Darkness.

(whisper Kaboom) I lay in the darkness. I can hear the steady increase of the raindrops falling. It reminds me of the buzzing of the MRI machine. Bum. Bum. Bum. I can hear the thunder and see the brightness of the lighting. I have been out the military six years. It feels like ten. I finished college. I have three degrees yet I feel as though I have accomplished nothing. What am I doing in a homeless shelter? Everything is like a blur. I can hardly remember yesterday. I'm angry. Days run into nights and night into days. I feel like I am going nuts sitting in this homeless shelter for vets.

KABOOM!! Hold on! Why are you guys putting me in this tunnel? Darkness. Wait. Where is the briefcase? I'm scared. I'm in pain. Where is the briefcase? Why I am I handcuffed to the bed? I heard a voice say, "Petty Officer, you're being detained. As soon as the doctor clears you someone will come in and speak with you." The doctor and nurse come in. "Ma'am do you know where you are?" I was at the gate of the Naval Security Station returning from a courier pickup. It was raining. Where is the briefcase?

"A drunk driver crashed into you. You have three compression fractures in your back, a cracked sternum and bruising to the frontal lobe that causing some swelling and bleeding on the brain." They tell me I was at Georgetown University Hospital for one day but the Navy airlifted me to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda because I can't be interrogated at a civilian hospital.
WAIT

"How long have I been here? Three days? Where is my daughter? Where is my daughter?" The pain was too much so they sedate me and I go into Darkness. Total Darkness.

(whisper) Kaboom! I'm confused all the time. Why does my head hurt so much? Why does nothing make sense? I'm new to Los

Angeles. have no place to live...no money...I tried to work. Honestly I did. When I applied for disability I was denied assistance from the VA. I was too embarrassed to ask for help...from my family...from friends...I couldn't even take help from the government. So, I ended up here at U.S. Vets in Quad 206.

I used to wonder how veterans became homeless. I thought maybe drugs, alcohol, mental illness or maybe people who had no coping skills. Seven years after the injury in 1993, I was given the correct diagnosis: I have a traumatic brain injury to the frontal lobe from the accident that causes with migraines and peripheral neuropathy. Wait, the frontal lobe? That's the area of the brain that controls logic, reasoning and critical thinking. (laughing) Now it all makes sense. Small fragments of light started to shine through. And the rain finally stopped.

In 2000, I had major brain surgery. I have full benefits from the VA. I even competed with the US Paralympic Military team. I won two American records, one in the javelin and one in the shot put as an athlete with a traumatic brain injury.

Today, I work at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Los Angeles. I help other vets get the assistance they need. We don't always know why we're going through something—why we're asked to endure such pain—I can honestly say, even though I didn't understand why I was at U.S. Vets, Quad 206, I'm grateful it was there for me during my darkest days.

THE FAMILY OF YOU

Dee Wright

Who Am I

I am stuck in the middle

I guess it not a bad place to be

You see, daddy's got nine girls in this world

Four on top 1, 2, 3, 4

And four on the bottom 6, 7, 8, 9

I am stuck in the middle number five

I guess that's not the problem 'cause I'm alive

Raised by mama who's got five mouths to fed

Two older girls with hand me down a plenty

And a younger girl stuck to mama's hip and always a grinnin'

The knee baby that what they call her

Eight years later a little man made his appearance

That's when I decided to run a bit of interference

I may be stuck in the middle

I may get ignored and overlooked

But I found my joy in these little books.

Guess what?

I can be anything and anybody I want to be!

I guess I will just be a family of me!

WHO IS A HERO?

Dee Wright

Who is a hero?

Is the soldier at the front of the line?

Or is it the father that stays behind?

Is it the soldier that sacrifices and gives up a life?

Or is it the person that simply does what right?

Is it the soldier that makes us proud?

Or is it the mother that fades in a crowd?

Is it the soldier that answers our country's call?

Or is it the one who refuses to fall?

Who is a hero?

Hard.

Earned.

Recognition

DON'T WANNA TALK

Dee Wright

Constance sits in a chair across from Dr. Anita Wilson
(*Constance laughs*)

CONSTANCE

You finally get it. I'm only here cause the Director makes us come twice a month. That's right. I don't wanna be here and only reason I am here is because I have to... and I sure the hell don't wanna talk to you.

Damn right I'm angry. I have a right to be angry. You would be angry too if you went through what I went through. Just a small fragment of my life would knock you off your high horse. I fucked up my life and that's my problem. You wanna help the poor, homeless "cracked out" veteran!

Talking about it will make me feel better? Yeah whatever. What do you want me to talk about? Should I talk about how my father walked out of us or how my mom slept with men to support us or you want me to talk about how I'm psychotic and crazy and how I want to kill myself or maybe I'll talk out how I got kicked out of the military cause I couldn't follow the rules or maybe you want me to talk about how I found my own drug and how every day I want to get high to forget!

Once upon a time there was a happy little girl who had a mother and father that loved her. She would help take care

of her sisters and brother. She would help stir the cornbread and make cherry kool-aid. She always put in a little extra sugar and cut the cornbread too big. She would say her prayers at night. A little girls who seen way too much and grew up way too fast. A little girl who swore she'd never have children.

You know, when I am getting high I don't have to think about life...the pain or the joy. I don't have to face the real world and people like you who judge me. Like that military doctor, what was his name? Lieutenant Bradshaw, Doctor Feel-Good. Well, that's what everyone on Fort Bragg called him. You could get just about any drug you want from him. Hell, he could even loose you up! Anyway, he diagnosed me as bipolar and manic depressive. Can you believe that? He prescribed me Prozac. It wasn't my fault I felt weak and dizziness and the world faded away...and later when I was found at work passed out, they thought I tried to kill myself. (laughs) And when I refused to take the medication or see that doctor again, I was disobeying a direct order and refusing necessary medical treatment. And when I slapped the shit of out that nurse for trying to inject me. I was strapped in a restraining jacket for three days.

Have you ever been in a straight jacket? I didn't think so. Your hands are crossed and they tighten the buckles behind your back. And I didn't give in easy. I made them all work. It took three nurses and two doctor to restrain me. You know later, I found out Dr. Bradshaw wasn't even a psychiatrist, general medicine. With each injection my hopes and dreams and desires faded. The military walked out on me just like my father. I was on my own. No more four-thirty runs with the squadron, no more chow calls at

6 a,m,, no more uniforms, no more me.

I found my own cure. My own relief. My escape. A three minute high. Crack cocaine took me so high I could forget this life and all the pain. I could be that little girl sang “Little Sally Walker sat in a saucer, rise Sally, rise.”

You know, I haven’t escaped for a while. I haven’t got high for thirty days.

Now you know my story. How much time do I have left here? I really don’t wanna talk to you.

Others.

You are a hero.

BROKEN LOVE

Emily Suhr

SHE FEELS BROKEN. She pushes and pushes. She is the worst. She feels the worst. It comes out in dramatics and days-long crying on the couch. She feels so alone, and yet she pushes everyone who tries to come near. She never tells herself, “don’t love.” She craves love. She tells herself she deserves it. The past doesn’t matter. She dreams of it. Imagines it. It’s her turn, right? No, she doesn’t proudly own her inability to be loved. That was a short phase she was quick to see for what it was. A shitty defense mechanism. No, she told herself over and over again. She did want love and she would embrace it and reward it and do all the things you’re supposed to do with love.

But every time something like love presented, it hurt her. Sometimes the hurt was surface deep. The other times it was brutal. After a while the pain took hold. Grabbing at her and pulling down. Twisting her earlier sense of entitlement into a curse. Yes, you do deserve this. You deserve to be unloved. You deserve the hurt, the pain. The exquisite pain. Did the love presented really hurt her? Or did she seek out broken love. The pain gripped her so tightly, she never stopped to ask.

DETOUR'S END

Emily Suhr

I GREW UP in a kind of controlled chaos where uncertainty reigned, but there was always food. Houses and schools changed, friendships were uprooted, and a parade of men stopped by to play the role of disappointing dad. Regardless of the year's particular circumstance, however, every summer belonged to Detour's End. It was the place I learned to swim and ride a bike. It is home to my first bee sting, first sip of beer, and first driving lesson. When nothing else made sense, Detour's End was always there.

It was the home of my grandparents and a home worthy of a name. Visiting Detour's End was like visiting another country. It was miles from the nearest town, which itself was barely populated. The house was made of dark wood and sat isolated on a cliff overlooking the lake. Steep, winding stairs led to the water's edge and a private beach where we spent our summers roasting hotdogs and marshmallows over family lore and ghost stories. The lake was forever cold, but that never deterred us from hours of diving for the prettiest stones and floating carefree while fish nibbled our toes.

Thick forest enveloped the house in every other direction, making it always smell of pine and dampness. My cousins and I spent entire days losing ourselves in those woods, pretending we were great explorers discovering new lands or adventurers on a quest. Only one road led to Detour's End and it continued past the large home, cutting through the forest for about a mile. We raced our four-wheeler up and down that road helmetless and without fear of cars. We were regularly injured, but never dissuaded from going again. At the end of the mile sat a run-down, long-abandoned barn surrounded by nothing. My cousins and I knew every inch of that dilapidated barn and continued using it as our playground long after it collapsed into a defeated pile of debris.

After dinner each night, everyone in the house—cousins, aunts, uncles, friends—would walk to the barn and back, talking endlessly as the summer nights set in.

To this day I have never seen sky like the sky that settled over Detour's End. It stretched to the farthest ends of the earth, unencumbered by human touch. During the day, the sun delivered long rays that warmed us in the frigid lake and at night, the stars dazzled against a perfect blackness that wrapped around us like a thick blanket.

The house itself was large but inviting. It was built to accommodate the many relatives who flocked to it each summer and it accommodated well. The ceilings were high and vaulted, leaving room for a loft accessible only by ladder that my grandparents filled with beds for the children. Growing out of the loft and into a bedroom marked the end of childhood and I held onto my bed in the loft as long as I could. The back of the home was covered in large windows so there was always a view of the lake, while a large wrap-around deck made up the front of the home. That deck was the home to so many summer barbeques and watermelon seed spitting contests, which I never lost.

What I loved most about Detour's End though was how it got its name. A story told and retold so often, it had become something of legend. Grandma and Grandpa met young and married quickly. Their love was deep and their dreams big. Grandma wanted to be a writer, Grandpa a musician. They pooled all their money, purchased the land where Detour's End sits, and began plans for their dream house. A house they intended on filling with children, but the children came sooner and in higher numbers than anticipated. By the seventh one, it became clear that all their dreams would have to wait. With each child came more bills and responsibilities. Grandpa settled into a comfortable, if not dull, life of selling insurance and Grandma stayed home to raise their brood. But they never sold the land and never lost their faith.

After the last child had successfully left their home and Grandpa's retirement appeared on the horizon, they began building. The building, of course, took longer than expected and Grandpa was two years into retirement by the time it finally came to be. But it did finally come to fruition and it was perfect. Their detour through life had come to an end and they were home. Until their last days in that house, Grandma wrote and Grandpa made music surrounded by the large and loving family they created.

Detour's End is gone now. Sold to another family who will make their own memories without ever knowing the home's history. The kids sold it because the place it had once been died alongside my grandparents. The barn debris that once made up our jungle gym was cleared away and a modern home built in its place. The forest was thinned and the once empty road filled with new homes and cars. The quietness that belonged to only us was gone and the sky was no longer untouched. There is no more room for reckless four-wheeling and big family walks. No more room for careless swimming in a lake that is no longer just ours. No more room for Detour's End.

But in the safest corner of my mind—away from the chaos and routine drudgery of life—Detour's End lives on in its most perfect state. There, safe from decay and takeover, I still visit it often.

FREE

Emily Suhr

OONLA WAS BORN on a warm summer day to the sound of birds chirping and wind rustling. She was wide eyed and curious from the very start. When the other young calves would frolic and race between their mothers' legs in an endless game of catch me if you can, Oonla would stare off at the distant forest and wonder. What lay beyond? Oonla's mother, a tired cow who had lost much in her life, cautioned Oonla. "Don't dream big, my love. There is nothing out there. This is your home. Your life is here. And it's a good life."

The farm where Oonla was born was indeed a good farm. Its pastures stretched far and the humans mostly let them be. Days were spent grazing and gossiping and watching the young calves play. There were some farms, Oonla's mother would explain, that were not so nice. Farms where the pastures were so overcrowded, there wasn't enough to eat. Where the humans mistreated the cows. Where the very young were ripped from their mothers and placed in small cages where they screamed and cried until taken to slaughter before their time. "Be happy here," she would tell her bright-eyed girl. "It is the best we can hope for. There is nothing out there for you. This is home."

But Oonla still stared out toward the forest, wondering. She had understood her lot in life early. When her time came, the humans would corral her into a truck and take her away to slaughter. "This is the life of a cow," her mother had told her. Some cows remained on the farm longer to breed, like her mother, but eventually all cows left in that truck. "Enjoy the life you have," her mother would say. "It is the only one you get."

Oonla looked around her at the other young cows and wondered how they could be so content. The boys with their horns

sawed off bouncing around the fenced pasture without any cares. The girls who would never be mothers tending so sweetly to the newly born. There had to be more.

One day, as Oonla stood alone staring out at the far-off forest, an older cow named Umi came and stood beside her. “I have birthed seven children,” she said, staring out at the forest alongside Oonla. “I have watched all seven be loaded onto that truck. And every time it broke it my heart. But every time I did nothing. Because, what could I do?” Her voice trailed and Oonla turned to look at her. Her eyes were large and sad. They never quite looked at Oonla and Oonla imagined they never quite looked at anyone.

“Is there more out there?” Oonla asked the weathered cow. “I think there is,” said Umi. “My sister was like you. She used to stand just where you are and dream. She wasn’t a breeder, so she knew her time was short.” Umi turned and looked toward the gate where the truck would park each week to collect the cows for slaughter. “They came one week and pointed to her. She let them guide her toward the truck and my heart broke. She had more spirit than all of us, but her fate was the same. I buried my head into the shoulder of my brother and cried. My mother looked away.” Oonla could see tears falling as Umi continued.

“But then I heard it.” Umi’s eyes lit up. “I heard her scream. Not a fearful scream, not one of sorrow, not even an angry scream. It was a triumphant scream. I looked back toward the truck and I saw her – Essel was her name – I saw Essel throw off the men and charge past the truck. With long, heavy strides, she ran toward the forest. The men yelled and chased after her. One got in the truck and swung it around, but they were too late. Essel reached the forest. And then she was gone.”

Oonla turned to Umi with full attention, “What happened to her?”

Umi finally looked at Oonla, matching the intensity of Oonla’s eyes with her own. “She became free. They never found

her. For weeks they searched and searched, each day returning angry and without her. She was just gone. I like to imagine she's out there, still free. Free and happy."

Oonla thought about Essel every day after that. Was she really free? Did she really make it somewhere she could survive? What did that look like? What did it feel like? What did free even mean for a cow? As the days wore on, Oonla became more convinced Umi was right. Essel had made it. She was out there somewhere. She was free.

"I am going to escape," Oonla told her mother. Oonla's mother sighed and looked at her daughter. "Escape to where?" She asked. "To beyond the forest," said Oonla, matter of factly. "There is nothing beyond the forest, Oonla. You will just die. Please, please stop dreaming such foolish things. If you do, I will only lose you before your time." Oonla nuzzled her mother's nose. "You won't lose me."

For the next few weeks, Oonla abandoned her dreams of escape and tried to frolic with the other young cows. She could not make her heart believe she was happy, but she could make her mother believe such things. Her mother deserved that, didn't she?

On a rainy Friday, the truck came to collect the cows for slaughter. The farmers stood at the edge of the pen and pointed to the handful of cows that would be taken that day. The picks were usually easy to guess. They took the ones who had grown big and strong, but not yet old. On this occasion though, the farmers pointed to Oonla's mother. Clearly startled, but always stoic, Oonla's mother began walking toward the edge of the pen where the truck sat idling.

"No," screamed Oonla, running in front of her mother and blocking her path. "No, they can't take you! You're a breeder!" "I'm an old breeder," she said. "You were my last baby. My time has come." Oonla's mother gently pushed past the now-sobbing Oonla. "Don't be sad, my love. This is the life we live and mine has

been good because of you.” Oonla trotted beside her mother, her vision blurry with unyielding tears. “Please, mama. Please don’t let them take you.” Oonla’s mother stopped briefly and kissed her daughter on the head, “I love you Oonla,” she said before resuming her way toward the truck that would be her end.

Oonla felt panicked. Her thoughts jumbled in a sea of fear and sadness and anger and feelings she could not yet identify. In that moment, as she watched her mother, brave and resigned, Oonla again thought of Essel. She threw her head back and searched the pasture for Umi as she kept pace with her mother. She found her. Umi stood at the edge of the pasture staring at the forest. She stood in the place Oonla had stood so many times and where Essel had stood before her. She never looked at Oonla or the scene unfolding as Oonla’s mother was led to slaughter. She just continued to stare. And Oonla knew.

As the farmers opened the gate to lead Oonla’s mother onto the truck, Oonla turned quickly. “I love you mama,” she whispered, “And I will be free, I promise you.”

With all her might, Oonla burst through the gate and trampled the farmer directing her mother. She kicked out her legs and barreled past the stunned workmen. And then she ran. The rain splashed off her and beneath her feet. She could hear the men yelling behind her and the sound of the engine roaring to life as it accelerated in her direction. Her heart pounded and she narrowed her vision to an opening at the forest’s edge. She ran faster. The men were gaining on her. She wondered where they had left her mother. She heard the desperate cries of the men and a lone cow wail. Just a little further, she told herself. The ground was slick and the forest dark. She heaved herself forward, through the small opening, and into the forest. The truck slammed to a stop and Oonla leapt over fallen logs and through tight walls of trees as the men shouted behind her. She kept running until the only sound she could hear was the rain and her own breath. She collapsed.

When Oonla awoke, the rain had stopped and a light fog had settled over the forest. She was all alone. She stood and stretched her legs and back out. Now what? Oonla spun around slowly in the dense forest and decided on north. She created a path and followed it in the only way that felt right. After many hours, her path led her to a lake. Oonla went to the water's edge and drank. The cool water lapped against her legs, just above the hooves. She stepped further into the blue lake. To her thighs and then to her belly. The water rushed over her and she felt it lift her hooves from the mud below. And then, for the first time in her life, Oonla went swimming. She kicked her legs wildly and then more rhythmically as she began to understand her own buoyancy. She swam to the middle of the lake, marveling the whole way at her new-found ability. Enchanted, Oonla swam in increasingly large circles, first clockwise, then counter clockwise, giggling the whole way. She threw her head back and attempted a back stroke, quite unsuccessfully. She laughed a big, out loud laugh and tried again. She had never felt so free.

“What are you doing?”

Oonla froze in the water, her body sinking as she stopped kicking her legs. Panic spread over her and she sank below the surface of the lake. The voice was male and unfamiliar. Who had found her? What would he do to her? She sank further.

Oonla heard a distant splash and felt her body being pushed toward the edge of the lake. And then she was on the shore, coughing and spitting out lake water. She shook her head and blinked the water from her eyes. In front of her, crouched down on the shore beside her and just as wet as she, was a creature she had never seen before. He had features like a cow, but was covered in thick, dark fur that curled up around his eyes and in-tact horns. His hulking frame dwarfed Oonla's healthy one, but his eyes were warm and sincere.

“Were you trying to do a backstroke?”

“Perhaps,” said Oonla, suddenly embarrassed. “I’ve never seen so much water. I didn’t know it could be like that.”

“The first time is pretty amazing,” agreed the creature with a smile. “You know cows can’t do the backstroke though. You aren’t built for it. Don’t worry about it, bison can’t either.”

“Bison?” asked Oonla, turning the new word around in her mind. “Is that what you are?”

“My whole life. Name’s Gax. You’re pretty far out to be lost. I’m guessing you’re an escapee. Let me take you back to the herd.”

Oonla staggered to her feet and backed away from the large bison. “No,” she screamed, “I won’t be penned again. I’d rather die in this lake than give up my freedom.”

Gax let out a rumbling laugh and stopped Oonla from racing back into the lake. “There are no fences out here. No humans. We are all free. You are free. I thought you came here looking for us? Essel told us there were more like her.”

“Essel!?” Oonla’s heart jumped. “Essel is here, with you?”

“For many years she was,” said Gax, turning his eyes to a spot past the lake. “She was a bright spot in our herd, always making us laugh and reminding us that freedom is something to covet, something to cherish. I’ve never met anyone like her. She was like a sister to me and a surrogate mother to my calves. She died last fall, elderly, happy, and surrounded by the herd who loved her. Did you know her?”

“No,” said Oonla softly. “I didn’t. But I would like to hear more about her.”

Gax looked back at her and smiled. “Well then, let’s get you home.”

I HATE THE RAIN

Emily Suhr

I KNOW there is nothing inherently evil or bad about the weather. It isn't sentient. It doesn't choose to be or not be. It can't predict its moods any more than I can. And yet, I hate it. I hate its inability to cooperate when needed or listen when I beg for mercy.

Today it is the rain. The immutable and unending rain. My husband loves it and for that I want it to continue on forever. But for my sake, it must go. It drains my soul. The rain swirls me back to my darkness. I hate it. Its coldness and dampness. Its dreary soundtrack. Its constant rhythm. It makes my whole body tense. My hair re-grow in a pathetic, last ditch attempt to warm me. My mood sours.

I love the ocean and every lake. I love the streams and ponds. I love lazing on the water's edge and diving into its deepest ends. I love riding on it and sinking into. I love the water, but I hate the rain.

The rain floods and frustrates and causes destruction. It causes mud to slide and lives to change. Its relentless and cold. Miserable and bleak. It casts a dark shadow over the world and reminds us how vulnerable we are.

I hate its sound. Not because it's not pleasant, but because it is. I hate its trickery. Lulling you in with its drippity drops formed into poetic notes. But it obscures the truth. Distracts you from the awfulness that it represents. Cold, wet rain.

How I hate the rain.

UNFINISHED

Emily Suhr

ADDIE COULD SEE the social worker from her second-floor window. She was wearing a rumpled suit that did little to flatter her unfortunate shape and was carrying a small stack of papers. Addie watched as the woman practiced looks of empathy in her car's side mirror before making her way toward the cozy house Addie had called home the last three months. At fifteen, Addie could no longer count how many times she had been placed and replaced in various homes around the city. This one hadn't been great, but at least she had her own room and a little foster sister to pay with.

She could hear the muffled conversation at the home's front door and knew they would come to get her soon. She sat on the end of her bed and stared at her worn suitcase. Why had she even unpacked it? When the door to her room creaked open, Addie didn't wait. She was tired of being placed. She stood up and ran from the room. Then she ran past the startled social worker and out the front door.

Addie ran and ran and ran. She ran without direction or tiredness. She ran until she no longer saw the alleyways or garbage cans left on the curb. She ran until the buildings and trees that lined the street became a sea of blurry colors. Until she no longer heard honking horns and laughing children. Addie ran, unencumbered by obstacles or fatigue, and then she ran some more.

As she ran, the world began to grow dark and night fell. Addie ran faster, blindly pushing forward without fear. She ran until all the sound in the world was gone. Until she could hear only the beat of her heart and nothing more. And there, in the silent darkness, she finally stopped. She collapsed into the dark nothing and slept for a very long time.

“Hurry, hurry! We must get going!”

Addie blinked open her eyes and saw a squat man with fiery eyes staring down at her. He wore tall black boots, ragged pants, and a billowing shirt tied at the waist with a large red sash. He looked like a pirate, but the type you’d find at Disneyland rather than the high seas. He reached out his hands to help her up.

“The ship is ready to go. We’ve been waiting for you!”

Addie took the pirate’s hands and sat up. The sky was bright pink with cascades of green and purple ribbon stretching across its vastness. Addie was sitting in a large field made up of a kind of orange and blue plant she had never seen before. She reached her hand out to one. The plant cooed and moved toward Addie, leaning its leafy top into her chest like a hug. Addie was taken aback and jumped a little. The plant pressed into her harder and nuzzled its top against her. She looked up at the pirate, who was impatiently tapping his foot.

“Needy little pests,” he said. “They’ll be demanding hugs all day if you give into them. Now, please, we must go!” The pirate pointed his thick hand and Addie followed with her eyes. Beyond the field was a great sea. “How far did I run,” thought Addie. Waves of turquoise splashed onto the shores, painting the sand each time it did. Just past the painted beach, a large ship covered in glowing flags rocked back and forth in the water.

“Let’s go,” said the pirate, helping Addie to her feet. Addie stood and looked to see where she had come from. Behind her, the field of blue and orange plants stretched as far and wide as the pink sky above them. “Where are we?” she asked the pirate as he pushed her gently toward the sea. “The parsnuffle fields, obviously. Just where we were supposed to be then, but now we must go there.” The pirate’s pace quickened toward the shore. As they walked through the parsnuffle field, the plants reached out to Addie cooing quietly. She reached down and ran her hand across the leafy tops, causing the plants to stretch and press into her hand.

At the shore, the pirate stepped into the water without so much as a pause. The water retreated, permitting the pirate to walk on the turquoise sand without getting wet. With each step he took, which left no footprints, the water retreated further, giving him a path to the ship. Addie stepped cautiously into his path and saw that she too left no footprints. She dug her barefoot toe into the wet sand and saw that it was yellow beneath the surface. And dry. She reached down and scooped a handful of dry yellow sand topped with the wet turquoise sand and brought it to her face. It smelled like cotton candy.

“Finally. Please, please come aboard,” a voice called from above Addie just as a rope ladder was dropped from the edge of the ship. Addie followed the pirate up the ladder and onto the deck of the ship, which was entirely covered in glitter. A woman stood before them wearing the biggest dress Addie had ever seen. Tiers of brightly colored ruffles and bows cascaded out around the petite woman, who wore a shimmery tiara over her black pirate’s hat. A long sword dangled from a jewel-encrusted belt slung loosely over the remarkably clean and well-maintained dress.

“I am Princess Pirate Penny Gertrude,” said the woman, reaching out a hand to Addie. “We have been waiting for you.” A set of wide, curious eyes appeared from under a tier of ruffles in the princess pirate’s dress and stared at Addie.

“Waiting for me for what?” asked Addie, leaving the princess pirate’s hand hanging in the air.

“To lead us, of course,” replied the princess pirate, returning her hand to her side without much thought.

“Lead you where?”

“To the In-Between, of course.” The creature hidden among the princess pirate’s dress poked its head out further, revealing a white furry head with two noses. The princess pirate stroked its head gently.

“What is the In-Between?” asked Addie, watching the

princess pirate's creature scurry from one set of ruffles to another around the enormous dress.

The princess pirate's smile faded for the first time since Addie climbed on board. "What is the In-Between? Are you kidding me? Are you not Adeline Mayberry Pinksmith? The famed adventurer who bested the Wiley Wizards of Westtown and slayed Oseekus, the Great Annoyer? Haven't you come here to lead us?"

"How do you know my name? Where am I?" Addie looked around her, suddenly feeling fear for the first time since she awoke. "That's my name, but I am no great adventurer. I'm no one."

"Silly girl, how could you be no one?" asked the princess pirate, smiling again. "You wouldn't be here if you were no one. Perhaps you've just hit your head or something. Here, take a seat."

A chair appeared on the glittery deck and the princess pirate gestured for Addie to sit, which she did. "The In-Between is a place between this world and all the other worlds. It contains every world's secrets."

Addie shook her head trying to absorb the information before her. "How many worlds are there?" She asked.

"You really must have hit your head hard," said the princess pirate, placing a hand on Addie's shoulder. "There are infinite worlds. But ours is dying." She held up her hand and directed Addie to look. Beyond the turquoise sea, Addie could see a patch of black. She squinted, trying to make out what it was. "It's the beginning of decay," offered the princess pirate.

"Why is it dying?" asked Addie.

"Because sometimes worlds die," said the princess pirate with a slight shrug. "But we've grown quite attached to this one and so, instead of moving on, we are going to try to save it. The secret to how must be in the In-Between. But no one has ever been there. No one but you. That's why we need you. That's why you're here."

Addie felt a pang of panic. “But I don’t know how to get there,” she said. “I don’t even know what it is. How can I lead when I don’t know what you’re talking about?”

“Because you are Adeline Mayberry Pinksmith, the greatest adventurer any world has ever known. Also, you have been there before, you just need to remember. Maybe some food will help.”

A table appeared beside Addie covered in food. The smell of roast turkey and cranberry sauce enveloped her briefly, reminding her of a Thanksgiving long ago. Addie closed her eyes and breathed in the other smells—spaghetti and meatballs, chocolate cake, tuna sandwiches. Each smell was unique and untouched by the other smells wafting from the table. She had a vague tinge of familiarity, but she could not quite place it. She opened her eyes and reached for a lone cookie in the center of the table. It was one of those pink wafer cookies Addie would sometimes eat on class field trips when she was young. The pirate princess’s creature scurried around the giant dress and stopped in front of Addie. It tilted its small furry head and twitched both noses at Addie. Addie broke the wafer cookie and gave half to the creature, who ate it in a single bite.

“Ok,” said Addie, uncertain where the words were coming from. “I will lead you there.” She popped the other half of the cookie into her mouth and stood.

The princess pirate’s face brightened and she squealed in delight. “Ok then, which way?”

Addie searched her mind for any clues, but there were none. She had no idea what she was doing, yet she knew she needed to do it. Something deep inside, but so far away told her so. She closed her eyes again and listened to the sound of the breeze cut across the water’s surface. “That way,” she said, pointing her arm in a random direction. “I think we go that way.”

“Toward the jagged reef of death and despair?” confirmed

the princess pirate, still smiling.

“I guess so,” said Addie, opening her eyes.

The princess pirate shouted out some orders and her crew began singing in harmony as they hoisted sails and pulled up the anchor. After several hours on the open sea, a pirate yelled from the crow’s nest that the reef was dead ahead. Addie braced herself as she made her way to the bow to catch glimpse.

“That’s the jagged reef of death and despair?” She asked the princess pirate, who joined her at the bow. Before them lay three islands overflowing with lush foliage of all colors. A rainbow weaved in and around the islands and Addie could see people walking on them as if they were bridges. A set of winged horses were playing with each other on one of the beaches while children giggled and fished nearby. A great fish leapt in front of the boat and Addie could swear the thing smiled at her. “Not really what I was expecting,” she said.

“You were expecting a bit more death and despair?” asked the princess pirate with a wink. “A common mistake. Come, let’s get off this ship for a bit. Shall we?”

The ship anchored and the turquoise water opened a path for Addie and the pirates. Addie dug her toes into the sand and found the same dry yellow sand beneath. She placed a handful of it in her pocket. The islanders rushed out to meet them. They gave the pirates fruit and jewelry made from seashells. The small children climbed through the ruffles of the pirate’s princess’ enormous dress while their mothers clamored after them and the princess pirate laughed.

A tall man approached Addie. “So, you have come. You are here to save our world. You are the great adventurer who knows how to get to the In-Between.” Addie nodded her head. “Thank you,” he said. “You are always welcome at the jagged reef of death and despair.”

After gifts had been exchanged and supplies restocked,

Addie and the pirates said goodbye to the islanders and returned to their ship. “Now where?” asked the princess pirate.

“That way,” said Addie, pointing directly at the black decay. “We need to go there.” The princess pirate’s smile faded. “Why there?” “Because,” said Addie, finally understanding, “that’s how we get to the In-Between.”

The ship veered uneasily in the direction of the decay, which was spreading. As they approached the decay, Addie could see more clearly that it was not black, but rather an ever-changing darkness that bubbled and spit. The air near the decay was so cold, Addie could see her breath. She shivered and leaned forward.

“Closer,” she said.

The ship steered into the decay until it could no longer move forward. Addie took a deep breath and climbed over the side of the ship down into the decay.

To be completed...

UNTITLED

Mathew David Suhr

I LET YOU WIN. Mostly because I feel sorry for you I guess I've always sort of been like that. I see a wounded little creature and I just can't help myself. You know it's the damndest thing. I can't get out of my own way to find success and happiness for myself. But when I see a sad boy sitting in the corner at the dance I just have to jump on that grenade. I don't even know what I could possibly get from it. It just makes me more anxious plus it adds guilt on top. You seem so happy holding my hand in the hallway. I'm actually dreading the moment you try to kiss me. I had better end this soon.

THE HOUSE

Mathew David Suhr

HE STOOD ALONE in a cold basement the air still and quiet. Listening to the distinct hum that typically exists in all still quiet rooms. It was unfamiliar to him. Stretching back as far as his fading memories would allow he couldn't remember a time when it had ever been this quiet. As he leaned back against the support beam in the center of the room he was stricken with the memory of his father screaming at him for swinging on it as a boy. "You're fucking up boy! You want to cave the whole house in?" He could still feel the sting on the left side of his head where his father had brought down his open hand like a brick. He bent over and grabbed a bottle of beer from a nearly empty six-pack next to his feet. The sound of the cap twisting off the top filled the room for a small moment then the sound of the cap dropping into the empty slot in the cardboard carrier and then it was quiet again. He brought the bottle to his lips aggressively and tilted it upside down pouring it into his stomach as fast as he could get it there. At first it was cold and refreshing but soon after the carbonation began to burn, and his stomach filled with gas. He bent over quickly bottle still attached to his lips as suds poured out the sides of his mouth. He took his mouth off of the bottle and brought up his cupped left hand to slurp the small amount he could save. As tears formed in his eyes he stood up off beam to take a stroll around the dark empty space. Directly behind him sat the furnace. The new furnace that burned natural gas instead of six foot logs. Logs that had to be brought in from the wood pile just outside through the old sliding glass doors frosted from years of moisture leaking through their dried cracked seals. He reached up and yanked a dangling string and a single bulb lit the room just enough to see on the adjacent wall a burn mark that had been made when his brother threw a

small can of gasoline into the furnace and nearly burned his face off. He felt another sting on his head.

The sound of children running up and down the stairs filled his head. He could hear the sound they made before the stairs were carpeted. He could see them in his minds chasing one another through the basement screaming gleefully. He slammed the rest of his beer grabbed another from the six-pack and walked toward the back where the two bedrooms were. At different times he had resided in both. On the left was the room he once shared with his two brothers. He slept on the top bunk above his younger brother and use to stack basketball cards along the top of the wall that didn't quite reach the ceiling. Even now all these years later the basement had never been finished completely. The dark two by six boards that supported the flooring up stairs had always been visible to him. He would stare them at night as he fell asleep and pray that the spiders that built their webs there didn't come down in the night to bite him.

The room on the right for one year had been his alone. In there he smoked pot and drank beer with his friends and made out with his girlfriend. He took big swigs from his beer. His tears turned to laughter and then back into tears again. His upper body would convulse as he tried to gain control. "Strange huh?" A voice came from behind him. He turned to find his sister standing at the door. "I don't think I remember it ever being this quiet", He laughed as he nodded in agreement. She walked over to give him a hug and they stood there crying on each other's shoulder. "Are you guys down there?" Another voice came from the top of the stairs. They broke their embrace and wiping the tears from their eyes walked out of the room toward the stairs. Their brother and her husband both met them there brandishing fresh six-packs. "You look like you could use a refill" his brother said offering him another beer. He choked down the warm contents of his current bottle and traded it for a fresh one. Beers popped, cheers were made and stories were

told. The reminisced all of the crazy things that happen in a house occupied by a family of six children in the rural south. He told the story of his stoned friends and the bag of Skittles they burst all over the floor while he was trying to convince his parents they hadn't been out all night smoking pot. "That explains why kept finding Skittles everywhere after you moved out" his sister said. His brother showed off the slight scarring that remained from the incident with the furnace. They laughed and cried until there were no more tears to be cried, no more laughs to be had and no more beer to drink. "I suppose we should get going, the auction is tomorrow morning and they want us to clear out" His sister said. They all nodded in agreement and started to gather all the empty bottles up. As his sister and her husband started up the stairs his brother bent down and picked up a crow bar that had been lying next to the support beam. "Is this ours, did someone bring this down here?" He stopped in his tracks and turned to his brother. "I almost forgot why I came down here in the first place." He grabbed the crow bar as he moved swiftly passed his brother and into the left bedroom. He turned to the space where his bunk bed once sat, hooked the crowbar in between the wall and the wood paneling and began pulling it off. He pulled it halfway off the wall before he stopped bent down and there in the middle of two boards sat a near pristine basketball card with a slight coating of fine dust. He carefully picked it up and blew off the dust revealing the silvery sheen of the card that he remembered from the day it came into his possession 38 years ago. He turned to his brother and said "my set has been incomplete since the sixth grade," His brother laughed and he joined in. They walked out of the room turned out the lights and laughed their way up the soft-carpeted staircase and the basement was quiet once more.

SHANE

Mathew David Suhr

“I’M SORRY.”

The words sat alone on the page as tears splashed down soaking the paper. Shane ripped it out angrily and started with a fresh piece as he had done at least a dozen times before. He had never been a writer. There wasn’t much need for that in football and there had never been room for much more in Shane’s mind. He wrote the words again stopping in the same spot as his previous attempts. He seized up in a fit of frustration clenching the notebook in his hand he rose with intensity and ripped it apart. Screaming out loud he shook the small farmhouse in which he now took refuge. Shane caught himself in that moment and stopped. He stood there in the dining room as still as a tree on a windless day. Stricken with the fear that bubbled up from his gut and shot straight to the top of his throat. He listened to the deafening silence that had fallen on the valley when a thick and unyielding fog had rolled in just the day before. He hoped his outburst had not carried. Tears welled up in his eyes and his face scrunched like he’d been sucking on a lemon. He slumped down onto the floor desperate to contain himself. Something had greatly affected Shane over the course of the last few days. He found himself feeling things he had never known. Suddenly he felt great guilt and sadness. There were things he had done long before this new power came into his possession. Before he made his discovery in the woods on the edge of his grandfather’s property. He thought of all the people he had treated so horribly. All of the perks he received for being Brumly High School’s star football player. All of the times he never had to answer for his actions. The past few days had been particularly hard on Shane and would no doubt be remembered as some of the worst in his life. But he had a short lifetime of wickedness to

lament and no time for it. He needed to think but he could only cry. So he lay there and cried for what seemed like hours. He cried so hard he wore himself out and he fell asleep right there on the floor. His dreams took him back to that day. The day it all began.

The air was frigid and a fresh snow had fallen the night before. Shane's steps crunched along as he walked the fence line. He had gone to visit his grandfather's farm two counties over. He was missing cattle and had asked Shane to come out and go for a hike along the 300-acre property line. Naturally he was not thrilled about the idea. Football season was off to a great start the Brumly Tigers were still undefeated. Shane was already being heavily scouted. The last thing he needed was to be wasting time hunting for stray cows in between game night and Sunday practice. He was supposed to be resting. He might have even said no if it were not for the fact that Shane's father was not only physically bigger but also twice the bully Shane was. So there he was out in the middle of nowhere on a particularly cold fall day after a heavy snowfall. He had started out on a four-wheeler following the fence line but once he hit the edge of the woods he was forced to dismount. He walked for what felt like days through dense forest and thick brush armed with his grandfathers Winchester. At one point he wondered to himself how a cow might even get back in here. It felt so tight. He kept on though, cursing the names of his kin. He burrowed deeper and deeper into the forest his body growing colder by the moment. He could feel it seeping in through his gloves chilling his fingers as they held tightly to his grandfather's rifle. His steps grew short along with his breath and finally he'd had enough. He would go no further. He was tired and freezing and pretty certain "those stupid cows weren't all the way back here in the brush anyway." He decided he would simply turn around and head back. When he got home he would tell his grandfather that he had conducted a thorough search of the property and the missing cows were nowhere to be found. That's when he saw it, a patch fog off in the

distance, isolated and localized. It was a strange thing to see in the middle of the woods as well as inconvenient. Shane now found himself torn between curiosity and warmth. He peered ahead to see what he could and looked back forlorn on the path to the four-wheeler and home. With an exasperated outward breath Shane turned and went forward. As he approached the body of moist air Shane could feel the heat radiating from it. It was warm, summer time in Miami warm. Shane's family had taken a vacation there one summer and spent the majority of the time marveling at the humidity. On a day like today the heat was welcome. Shane basked in it as he moved through the thick fog. He removed his cap and jacket along the way. When he got to the other side he was stunned. In a clearing not too much more than a few hundred feet squared was a lush green patch of forest with a small crater in the middle. Scattered around it were the remnants of what Shane was certain were the two missing cows. The smell was potent, decomposing flesh in ninety degrees and equal humidity. Shane struggled to breathe. He covered his mouth and nose with his t-shirt. In the center of the crater was, what appeared to be, a very sleek but oversized metallic coffin. Without thinking for very long on the matter he walked towards it with some purpose. When he reached the coffin he dropped his coat and jacket then placed his hand on it in much the same manner a child innocently attempts to pet a friendly looking dog just before having their hand bitten. The coffin began to emit a low hum as if it had come to life somehow. This startled Shane for only the briefest of moments. His curiosity was much too powerful and so he stood there in awe of his discovery. He looked on frozen in amazement as the top half of the coffin detached slightly. He could hear the squeal of the air as it depressurized. The top half then slid straight down the length of the coffin revealing the interior that unsurprisingly to Shane looked just like the inside of an empty coffin. "It actually looks kind of comfortable," He thought to himself. Feeling like he had done due diligence and

that there was nothing that seemed too dangerous about the coffin. Shane decided he would go back and get his truck and haul it back to his grandpa's barn. But when Shane bent down to pick up his coat and gloves he found that he was unable to stand back up. He couldn't move his arms or legs or any other part of his body. The only thing he could feel was a sort of numbed sting at the base of his skull. What he could not see was that a single metallic tentacle reaching out from within the coffin had penetrated his body rendering him motionless. Shane was now panicked. His heart pounded and his breathing became rapid. Then his consciousness began to fade as a half a dozen more tentacles emerged from within the coffin and began to take a hold of him. They picked him up stripped him of the remainder of his clothing and wrapped him in a thick gooey bandage from head toe. The last thing Shane remembered was the feeling of desperation and the darkness creeping in as he tried to grab one last breath before he was completely covered and inserted in to the coffin. Shane awoke to the sound of a wooden dining chair shattering against the opposite wall from where he lay. He must have kicked it in his sleep. He cursed himself for causing such a racket and he cursed the day he found that "damned coffin". He quietly stood up and made his way back to the bathroom. He needed to relieve himself urgently. He hastily undid his belt and trousers and just before he was about to release the pressure, he stopped himself. He thought on it for a quick moment then pulled his pants down to his ankles sat down on the toilet and took the quietest pee he had ever taken. In that moment he was suddenly stricken by the memory of the time he had teased Jimmy Gathers, a smaller and much less athletic boy in his school. "I bet you sit down to pee just like a girl" he said to Jimmy as he and two of his football cronies cornered and taunted him in the men's locker room of the school auditorium. Shane had been particularly awful to him over the years. Jimmy was one of the smartest kids to ever walk the halls of Brumly High School. If he

were there right now he might have some kind of clue as to what he was going through. He might even be able to help. And there it was, finally, a moment of clarity amongst all the tears. Maybe Jimmy could help. If anyone in the town could it would be him. He reads all those science fiction books and real science books. Shane's first apology would be Jimmy Gathers. Now all he needed to do was find him. Which could prove to be difficult considering the panic that Shane had already caused throughout the town. "Well he's not going to find me here" Shane muttered to himself. He waited until sundown and slipped out through the back of the house under cover of darkness hoping all the while that he had not alerted anyone to his presence.

UNTITLED

Mathew David Suhr

MICHAEL STOOD at the helm of a great ship in the middle of a stormy ocean. Giant waves were crashing up against the sides of the ship and spilling over onto the deck moving the vessel back and forth up and down mountains of water in a horrific harmony. There was no crew. He was alone. As he desperately struggled with the immense power of the oceans assaults he was able to make out in the distance, up ahead towards the bow, a piece of parchment nailed to the forward mast. No matter how hard the waves collided up against the large wooden pole the parchment did not move. “What a strange occurrence” Michael thought to himself. Certainly it should have been washed out into the abyss by now. The waves began to recede and the ship leveled out. Through an over-powering curiosity Michael broke his grip on the helm and ventured forward clinging to the outer railing as he moved toward the bow. He came to a point where he was forced to let go of the safety of the railing and went forward on his own. A heavy rain picked up blurring his vision and making the parchment more and more difficult to make out. Finally he reached the foremast and pulled the paper from its secured position. The rain increased in intensity and the ship began to sway back and forth over the resurging mounds of saltwater. As he attempted to make out the words Michael felt the ship tilt violently to the starboard side. It threw him across the deck and into the railing. As his back struck the hard solid wood his head flung up and aft, and Michael saw on the port an enormous wall of water before it clapped down on the deck and washed him out to sea.

Michael awoke in frenzy. His was racing and his shirt was soaked with sweat. He took stock of his surroundings. It was a warm

spring day in late May. Outside birds were singing their mating calls over the gentle hum of the hyperloop vacuum tubes in the distance. He had fallen asleep waiting for the day's mail to come like he had done for the past week. He was anxious for the postman's delivery. Primary Education had concluded two weeks previous and a new class of future citizens awaited the results of their Citizens Competency Examination. The examination was to determine the course of the next five to ten years for young men and women like Michael. Most would not achieve a satisfactory score and thus would be assigned to menial labor positions most of which existed on various colonized worlds across the Earth's vast empire of planets. Few of them would ever see home again. Even fewer would ever earn the right to vote. Their lives would be lived at the mercy of those who had excelled in their education and proven their ability to live as informed competent citizens. Among those who scored well enough on the test would be the empires future professionals, doctors and lawyers, scientists, engineers, even artists and celebrities. For those few of more than exceptional talent and genius would be reserved the highest positions and honors in the galaxy. They would be Bankers and Corporate Owners. They would be Ministers and Governors. They would rule over all.

For a young man of only twenty-two this was all a bit much to process. But Michael was especially nervous. His fate had been sealed several weeks ago, before he could even complete the exam. He could have opted for military service like most in his family had done. Both his parents were retired and granted citizenship for their service, a twenty-year commitment, and his older brother was currently serving in a security element on an agricultural colony just a few light years from Earth. He had excelled in his training and was likely to be one of a fortunate few who would be reexamined for an officer's position, a post that came with

instant citizens' rights, with the exception of the vote. No military personnel were allowed to vote until their service was complete. Michael's parents had expressed grave concern over his decision to take examination. Their family had a long history military service. So long in fact they were recipients of a legacy award from the Office of the Minister of Defense. Michael found their concerns to be somewhat judgmental and expectant, which only caused him more stress as the days passed by turning into weeks of waiting. At night he would lie awake ponder his future. He was by no means a slouch when it came to his studies and most likely had little reason to fear the labor positions. Though the thought of serving in one of them didn't do much to help him sleep. What really kept Michael awake were the hopes of being sent to a creative arts university. He had longed as a child to be on the stage. He was a performer at heart and his marks in Primary Education as well as his exam scores would surely demonstrate this to the Board.

Michael sat on the couch his head full of voices and his heart full of anticipation. Outside he could hear the joyful screams of a young woman. He jumped up and ran to the door. Through the screen he could see his neighbor, Candice, out by the street giddy with excitement hugging her parents, jumping up and down with a letter in her hand. He could barely make out one of them saying something about the Languages Academy. The Postman must have come while he was dozed off. Michael felt his heart beat in his throat. His mouth became dry. It took all he had to unlatch the screen door and walk out in to the world. He slowly crept down the pavement and up to the mailbox. He reached with his sweaty hands and opened the box to find among a few bills a letter from the Minister's Board of Primary Education. His assignment had finally come. Now was the moment of truth. Michael's heart sank to his gut as he tore open the letter. He struggled to breathe normally for just a few moments while he unfolded the papers inside. The

first paper was relieving. His pulse normalized. It congratulated him on achieving the path to citizenship. He had passed the test. The second paper reviewed his scores and explained that he had especially excelled in the areas of arts and creativity with an emphasis on performance. Michael's heart nearly jumped out of his chest. The third piece of paper brought tears to his eyes. Michael's heart broke in the instant after reading the words. "Unfortunately, due to a large number of qualifying candidates for placement in an arts university coupled with a reduction in available performance positions we are unable to offer you a position in this field. Instead you will be placed in the next class to convene at the University of Geology and placed in a Mining Operations Management training program." Michael could no longer feel anything save the rivers of tears rolling down his cheeks. He quickly made his way back into the house closing the door behind him. His parents would be home in a few hours and they would discuss this new development. Until then Michael would sit on the couch and wait.

PIGS

Mathew David Suhr

I'M SORRY I couldn't just shoot the fucking pigs. I know you only chose me because my older brother wasn't around when you made the decision. And it was a rushed decision wasn't it? We found that out later though. After you grew impatient with me and put on your ultimate display of manhood and childishness. Showing me how it was done. The screams that first one made as it ran in circles around the pen haunted me for years. I thought you should know that. And when you kicked it out of pure frustration and lack of restraint sending it flying over the muddy earth and into the fence. I felt so bad for it. Just like I felt bad for the rabbits, and the chickens and the mutt's farmer John couldn't afford to feed. Perhaps I'll get to those later. I know we needed to eat. I know we had to survive and our species sits on top of the food chain. And maybe I could have grown to understand and respect all of those ideals one day had you shown me one ounce of patience. But you didn't. Instead you aggressively tried to jam life's lessons into my brain with your Drill Sergeant persona. And when that didn't work you got physical. Just like you did with that poor little pig. It deserved a clean death. Not the batched execution we provided. The image of you standing over it with your pistol in hand as it squirmed and squealed, desperate, fearing for its life and the life that grew inside it, is still with me. We didn't know that last part at the time though did we. We might have if you had been patient. I watched the Punisher do the same to the men who came to kill him in that TV show and I thought of you. I remember turning to see the other nine pigs huddled in the corner hoping to be spared the same fate, just before you snatched the rifle from my hands and yelled at me to go get ready to skin and gut the fearful animals. I cringed with every shot as I walked away from the scene. I watched

in horror as you carried their dead bodies over and dropped them at my feet like they or I had committed some slight against you. It felt like you hated me that day. It was a familiar feeling. But I cleaned them and gutted them just like you told me to. I could always do that part. But that wasn't enough for you. I was so mad at you that when I discovered the eight sows with bellies full of piglets. The ones we were going to sell as pets, another one of your hair-brained money making schemes. I couldn't help but feel a quiet sense of satisfaction upon delivering the news. They were developed, they had hooves, and I'll bet they were due real soon. I'll bet they would have fetched a nice price as popular as potbellied pigs were at the time. But I guess we'll never know. I suppose they tasted all right, I don't actually remember eating them. Though, I know I did. Heaven forbid I object to what was provided for me at the all too sacred dinner table. I just remember the time you tried to make me do something that wasn't in me to do. Just like you had done so many times before and would continue to do many times again, forced, mean, and Impatient.

AMY

Mathew David Suhr

AMY GASPED for air and reached out in desperation for her window as Shane quickly hit the master lock from the driver's side. "Son of a bitch"! She began to panic as her last heaving breath began to slowly run out. Her survival wasn't certain in this moment. She felt a fear that she had never felt before in her life. "This isn't how this was supposed to go", she thought to herself. This was her first date with the captain of the Brumly High School basketball squad. She had planned and fantasized about this day all through middle school and now finally as a sophomore in high school the Shane Bohannon, Captain of the basketball team, cutest guy in his class and a senior asked her on a date. She remembered the sheer joy of telling her giddy but jealous friends, the ride home from school that day as she gushed to her older sister Holly. She remembered her mother's father's advice on premarital relations. She thought she knew what she was getting into. As Amy finally came to the realization that she was likely going to die here in this old truck on a deserted highway she felt herself slowly fading away. She took one last look at Shane who was beaming. He couldn't have looked more satisfied and accomplished if he tried. If she had the energy she would slap that shit-eating grin right off his face. But Amy had no energy because she had no oxygen and now she was unconscious.

Amy felt herself coming to as she heaved in a gargantuan breath. It was raw and terrifying and it smelled absolutely rotten. It was bittersweet that the breath that brought her back from the brink of death was also the worst breath she could ever remember taking in. "What did you eat!" she exclaimed. Shane giggled out loud and said "I don't know steak and taters, had eggs for breakfast and I

drank a lot of beer last night.” “For the love of all that is holy will you please roll the windows down my nostrils are burning.” Shane reluctantly and without apology unlocked the windows and Amy rolled hers down like she was trying escape an internment camp. She forcefully stuck her head out the window and breathed deep. She told herself the date could be saved. She told herself he was just being a boy and that he would sweeten up now that he had had his fun. But that’s not what happened. Shane would turn out to be a massive disappointment and a scar on Amy’s heart. Throughout the night he would commit every cliché one might find in a book on dating that had been published in the 1950’s. He ordered for her at the restaurant and dominated the conversation with his hopes for the team this year as well as his grand ambitions to one day inherit the family business from dad. Then there was the long silent ride home down the lonely rural highway as Shane enjoyed his after dinner dip.

Amy leapt from Shane’s truck as soon as it stopped and just before he could try to grab a kiss with a chunk of Skoal in his cheek. He too exited the vehicle quickly and attempted to escort Amy to the door but she reared back with her fist and told him to “get back in your truck and leave before I make you swallow that chewing tobacco in your mouth”. Shane responded with all the motivation of a newly trained Marine Corps Private. He hopped back in his truck and drove off into the night. Leaving Amy there in her parent’s driveway with make-up caught in her tears rolling down her face. She waited there for a moment. She cleaned herself up and went into the house hoping to avoid her parents or anyone else until she could learn to cope with all that had just happened.

Monday came around and that meant another day of school. Amy was anxious. She didn’t know what she was going to say to her friends. She had spent the rest of the weekend trying to avoid her parents and only giving truncated responses to them when backed into a corner.

YEARNING AFFLICTION

Katherine Robinson

You are constantly on my mind.
Haunting my dreams.
Like a dream catcher caught on a whim,
You are the only images I see.
It's painful.
Every morning is a reminder that the fantasy was imagined—A
figment of longing—
As I wake alone in an empty embrace
Yearning for that simple touch that once graced me.
Pain seeps in from the reality.
The knowledge that dreams can never be real, forever intangible.
My chest tightens in angst
As blood surges out of torn heartstrings, straining to be free.
Why does this happen to me?
Why must I get tortured?
In these questions there is another conundrum:
Would I give up these dreams if able?
You have become part of my heartbeat
Part of my cerebrum.
Giving you up would be giving up a piece of myself
Without you I am no longer whole
I'm not asking you to give up a part of yourself
I would never take away any of the perfection that is you
I'm not even asking for a chance
Though if the fates allow, I hope you'll lend me one.
In Truth is isolation and vulnerability, so I live in lies.

But your serum loosens my lips and I have no guardian.
You penetrate my battlement, leaving an imprint on my being.
I am defenseless.
It was not the first time we met when you stepped out of the mist
and into my life
You've danced with me before among the stars.
I remember you, for your smile brightens the darkness in the world
And your endless eyes carry the warmth of the sun.
I get lost easily in those eyes.
The world shifts, revealing a place that can only be described as
Neverland:
A paradise of endless possibilities and adventure.
The magic in you gleams as I see you flying there.
It is said that dreams are not reality
That "to live in a dream is to be a fool."
Everyday I miss you as you conquer my thoughts
But every night you are with me, so I gladly remain court jester.
The answers to my questions are simple:
My dreams happen because you make me feel whole when I'm with
you
I get tortured because you're not real and I ache for your essence.
The figment of you taunts me.
As for giving up the dreams...
If closing my eyes is all it takes to see you,
I'd gladly walk the earth blind.
For people travel oceans to seek the kind of beauty that is simply
you.
I once met you Over the Rainbow...
And there I wish to stay.

IT'S ALWAYS SUNNY ON A RAINY DAY

Katherine Robinson

When I was younger
My mother used to say,
“It’s always sunny
On a rainy day.”
When I broke my arm
And I sat and cried,
My mother came over
And sat right by my side.
She wiped away
My teary eyes
And wore a big smile
To my surprise.
She said “My love, I have a lesson
I want you to learn,
My father told me
And now it’s your turn.
He told me, when the clouds are heavy
And the sky looks bad
The birds don’t fly home
And they don’t get sad
Because way above
The tree tops high
It’s always sunny
With a bright blue sky.
So no matter what you’re feeling

On a dreary day,
Remember it's always sunny
On a rainy day."
Though I didn't seem
To understand it then
It's now my turn
To set the trend.
I know you are now
Just a tiny lad,
But one day soon
You'll learn just like I had
That when the world seems troubled
And the news is grave
I try to think of
How many lives I saved.
I've fought for freedom
And know sacrifice
So now I bestow upon you
My best advice.
When you feel alone
And I'm far away,
Look up at the sky
For a shining ray.
Because way above
The tree tops high
It's always sunny
Where the birds all fly.
And although we may
Be miles apart

I'll always be with you
Right here in your heart.
So no matter what your feeling
On a dreary day,
Remember it's always sunny
On a rainy day.

ROOFTOP RENDEZVOUS

Katherine Robinson

Come out baby let me see you in the moonlight
Take my hand and let's dance under the stars tonight,
Twirl you around to the music on your laptop
No one else, it's just us on your rooftop.

You pull me closer—I feel higher
My heart is running like a rabbit moving down a wire
You lick your lips, your eyes show thunder
Please tell me what's this spell you put me under

Come on baby please kiss me in the moonlight
Take my hand and let's make shooting stars tonight,
I'll show you baby there is so much more for you to see
Come on baby just say—you're into me

If nothing else I'll remember this night with you
Under the stars on our rooftop rendezvous.
I hear the train coming
I feel my heart thumping
You look me right in the eyes, oh
That look was all it took
You've got me by the hook
How can you say you're shy?

There goes the train, you pick up a bottle
And throw it at it saying it keeps you up at night, oh
You have me join, and when we're done
You pull me close again and tell me that you think I'm fun.

Come out baby please kiss me in the moonlight
Take my hand and let's dance under the stars tonight,

I'll show you baby there is so much more for you to see
Come on baby just say—you're into me

Don't need words to tell me—you're into me,
Just take my hand and please dance tonight with me

If nothing else I'll remember this night with you
Under the stars on our rooftop rendezvous

I took a chance and had asked to dance with you
That summer night on our rooftop rendezvous.

CRUSHER RUN

Melanie Brown

I OFTEN FORGET that Maggie was the first to know that you died. She was the first to cry. The first to try and get help, to see if there was hope. I envision her running back and forth between you and the road. Fighting with knowing that if she left you, you would die alone.

And so you did, I imagine.

The ball bearings in the wheel you were working on never got greased and replaced. They liquefied in the summer sun, dribbling onto the gravel. The grease and blood outlining your body on the driveway. I wonder how the cold chalky rocks felt against your face as you slumped over. Did they feel cool and soothing or were they digging into your face like the heart attack was digging into your chest? Were you scared?

Maggie must have been terrified. I can see her yellow legs sprinting through the summer green grasses trying to hunt for help and then back to you. Not able to do anything but shriek and pant. She was a mess when the neighbors found you both. They said she was inconsolable and wouldn't eat for two days. Labs ALWAYS eat. Her bewilderment and bereavement must have filled her and still, left her empty and hollow.

Maggie knowing first, was fitting. In so many ways, you always saw your hunting dogs more as family, than your own kids.

Eventually, we did get the call. You were gone. We packed up to go fix it as best as we could and retrieve Maggie. I remember the hop skipping of airplane tires as the piper plane landed. We taxied to the gate of the small town airport and I felt my world get smaller.

I'm not sure what bothered me more. That you had died and we hadn't spoken in twelve years, or that I was going to your house,

and your life that I wasn't a part of. All of this I'd never been to. None of this was ours. Mine. You never understood how 1,624 miles still wasn't enough space to keep us from fighting. You used every bridge, rock, wall, wire and word that you could, to get to me.

I was never coming "home." I was driving the GPS coordinates of a life I'd never recognize, but was expected to embrace when I arrived. I didn't know your place, but I knew THIS place. Rolling lush grasslands, purple-yellow coneflower fields, birds and insects advertising, as cars whizzed by. The lakes popped up like gophers in hillsides, as they dotted and disappeared from view. Familiar and foreign at the same time.

I'd grown up here, in Missouri. The first five years of my life, I was blissfully ignorant of the colors of history. I got to run through ditches and up over gullies not thinking of who or what had been dragged or died there. To me, it was a playground built of clipped lawns and cardboard castles to conquer. With names like "Battlefield Drive" and Bushwhacker Boulevard, they were merely silly sing-song names to me. I was oblivious.

From my birth, you and I were born Blue and Gray. Your last name of Lee went all the way back to Robert E., but mine, was drawn in blue, and any other color of freedom. This was the beginning of our not so civil wars. We shared the same house, but not the same views. We could not have been more different, or more the same, if we tried. Missouri, just like we were, was split down the middle during the war.

Befittingly, the house that you built for yourself, is only a few miles from the first major civil war battle ever fought in Missouri. That fight led to The Battle for Wilson's Creek, which divided the state into Blue and Gray. For some reason, I consider my coming to get your ashes, the third major battle in our family's history.

Driving through the "Population 285" towns to the "big city" of Bolivar (pop. 10,795) I felt like I was going back in time, not

because of the quaint and cute factor. It felt like the progress fought for slipped out of each building and body, as I passed.

I saw signs for the “Pinkneyville Coon Club”—so much racism still in Missouri. So much pain coated these streets and streaked this dirt. How can anyone call this place a home? Yet, you did. And you loved it. You fit right in and never looked back. You never thought race was an issue, only a privilege that you were lucky enough to have.

You never had to go to “into town” and be called anything but “Sir.” But, that wasn’t MY experience. It had been so long, since I had been called out in hatred. I thought they were yelling at someone else. These local kids were trying to pick me apart because I obviously wasn’t from around here. Even Maggie got madder than I did. She stared them down and challenged them to repeat their one and two syllable slurs. They didn’t dare, like most bullies, they simply ran away and laughed.

Later, in line, we crossed paths again. Only, this time, they were trapped between the checkout lanes, my glaring gaze and the dog’s grumbly growl. With my eyes, I dared them to say it again. At that point, the girl got nervous. She began twirling her hair and fears around her boyfriend, hoping to squirm away behind him. I caught her eye and said sympathetically, “I feel sorry for you, if he’s the best you can do here.” And she stared at him like she wanted to be driven straight to the bus station after checkout, and never look back.

And that’s what we did. We loaded up our cart and our judgments and wheeled them out to the truck. I tried to distract myself as we drove out of the “big town” to your “little town.” We passed Humansville, with its 1, 208 people, ranking twelfth on “the most racist towns in Missouri.” The irony wasn’t lost on Maggie and me. We passed Liberal, Missouri, rated #7 on the list. With only 744 people, but two registered KKK groups, I tried to liberate myself from liberal as soon as humanly possible.

I felt like I was running a racist gauntlet to get to you and your past judgment. With each passing fence post and pasture, I wondered what these pastoral plains had seen. Did they feel as powerless as I did here? We were only sixty-two miles from the #1 racist town in the state. And only eighty-one years from the last public hanging. Were the grasses and limbs as tired as I was of the inaction and silence? Did they creak and groan louder than the townspeople did when all this occurred? In 1909, the 128 black citizens of Bolivar were beaten, badgered, and driven out of town. They were robbed of their property, their dignity, and their rights. They had to witness their family swinging from trees and posts at public hangings. Bolivar tore down those gallows and made rings from the hangman's post nails and sold them for souvenirs. The gallows were gone, but not the glares. I wondered what souvenirs you left for me. Driving you to your place, it's hard to see the beauty now. How much blood has watered these meadows? How many lives furrowed these fields for freedom? Almost in protest, the car was kicking up red clay and dust riots on the gravel path. The final stones popped and pinged, announcing the end of my day's progress. At the edge of the driveway, was what was left of our relationship. All in one big pile of bricks, and glue, aluminum, glass, steel and tacks. Anything warm and inviting had been burned out in the fire. Nothing resembling Home was left.

Maggie and I shared a beer and a sandwich as I began going through what had survived the flames. Reading through papers describing every detail of the house, I found a description of the driveway gravel you bought:

“Congratulations on your selection of Crusher Run! Crusher Run is a careful blend of crushed stone, fines, and stone dust. The jagged edges of stone help to adhere and bond to each other over time as they are forced together. The dust settles and

fills in the spaces between the gravel and reduces the void content, eventually filling in the gaps and becoming more solid. After being compacted, this will create a very stable and unyielding surface for driving on.”

That could have been a description of our relationship, if someone had ordered it sight unseen. Even the product sort of looked like us. It was mostly white, with alternating blue flecks and gray speckles rendered together. I would always be Blue, you would always be Gray.

We suspected it was meth heads that accidentally burned the place down. This area was unlucky enough to have racism ribboned with meth. Abandoned houses were used all the time here and accidentally blown up. Strewn about the yard in some sort of hillbilly Easter egg hunt was a motley assortment from the house. Black trash bags in puddled piles were waiting to be found in the tall grasses.

Of anything they could have taken, they chose: a rubber banded group of ash covered Q-tips, a faded blue comb with two missing teeth, a hair dryer with a chipped handle, four, quarter rolls of toilet paper, (still soggy from the fire hose), nose hair trimmers, and two pairs of socks that looked like they were pulled from the dirty hamper.

If they had taken more, I could have almost followed them to their lair. Most of items were jettisoned as the black plastic stretched to its limits at the same time their arms did. They chucked out whatever seemed less appealing and stumbled off to the old RV Dad had, and tired it steal that too.

Only, she outsmarted you. Ethel the RV had a secret starting mechanism. It wasn't hard, you just had to push a button, and turn the key. However, that wasn't crystal clear in your crystal meth mind, so Ethel stayed back to greet me as I arrived. We were

happy to finally meet each other. She was the only family I had left out of this final familial meltdown. I shoveled, boxed, and buried what needed to leave or to stay, and together, Ethel, Maggie, and I headed home to California.

3 YEARS GONE

Melanie Brown

Dedicated to the kidnapped Nigerian girls

Amber high beams streaming
limelight leaves gleaming
she froze
sides heaving
bronze grubs and shrubs
outline the seizing
with dewy dusted pants
and flashlight-flecked rants
earthen clay framing
the gray eaves claiming
the colors of chaos
red-yellow-beige aiming
at blue, black and maiming
her chest heaved tightly
from these attacks nightly
same soundtrack playing
ch-ch-ch baying
the rifles hiss and bite
girls fight or flight
scuffles under branches
snuffles under palms
fingers over lips
ssshhhhhh stay calm

hurry scurry
from black guns glowing muzzles
brown boys as they guzzle
these bright minds
turned dim futures
blood mixed with scraped knees
scarves lost to the trees
feathered ferns waving these
goodbyes
276
gone
close knit
undone
stitch by stitch
shot by shot
girl by girl
they bleed

Since 1995, PEN In The Community (PITC) has proudly published the written work of thousands of talented youth and adults. PITC sends professional writers into classrooms and community centers to teach generative creative writing workshops. The resulting PITC anthologies are windows into participants' lives—their struggles, hopes, and experiences. At the intersection of literature and human rights, PEN America champions the freedom to write, recognizing the power of the word to transform the world.



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**WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY
WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION**

**Presidio of San Francisco, California
May 23, 1942**

**TO ALL PERSONS OF
JAPANESE
ANCESTRY**

Living in the Following Area:

All of that portion of the County of Santa Clara, State of California, lying generally north and northwest of the following boundary: Beginning at the point on the Santa Cruz-Santa Clara County line, due west of a line drawn through the peak of Loma Prieta; thence due east along said line through said peak to its intersection with Llagas Creek; thence downstream along said creek toward Madrone to the point where it is crossed by Llagas Avenue; thence northeasterly on Llagas Avenue to U. S. Highway No. 101; thence northerly on said Highway No. 101 to Cochran Road; thence northeasterly on Cochran Road to its junction with Steeley Road; thence easterly on Steeley Road to Madrone Springs; thence along a line projected due east from Madrone Springs to its intersection with the Santa Clara-Stanislaus County line; together with all portions of Santa Clara County not previously covered by Exclusion Orders of this Headquarters.

Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 96, this Headquarters, dated May 23, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Saturday, May 30, 1942.

No Japanese person will be permitted to move into, or out of, the above area after 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Saturday, May 23, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the representative of the Commanding Gen-

