



# The Nemadji Review

2018

# The Nemadji Review

Volume 7  
2018

# The Nemadji Review

## Volume 7

Editor-in-Chief  
**Sydney Kloster**

Design Editor  
**Uzman Qaisar**

Faculty Advisor  
**Jayson Iwen**

Editorial Staff

**Sophia Johnson**  
**Aaron Knickrehm**  
**Ben Lockwood**  
**Melissa France**  
**Kiana Pfingsten**

All correspondence should be addressed to [thenemadjireview@gmail.com](mailto:thenemadjireview@gmail.com)  
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## Editorial Note

Dear Reader,

It is a great pleasure to introduce the seventh volume of *The Nemadji Review*. On behalf of the Editorial Staff, I would like to thank all the contributors for submitting their work this year.

The year of 2018 has been one of great change for both UW-Superior and the world at large, and the works in this collection seem to reflect that in every way. The quality and quantity of works submitted has continued to rise each year, allowing for our Editorial Board to select the best possible work to publish in this year's literary anthology.

Thank you, editors, for volunteering your time to make this edition possible. Thank you, contributors, for allowing us to showcase your tremendous talent. Finally, thank you, readers, for your continued support and interest in the literary works published in *The Nemadji Review*.

Therefore, I gratefully present the seventh volume of *The Nemadji Review* for the enjoyment of all.

Sincerely,  
Sydney Kloster  
Editor-In-Chief

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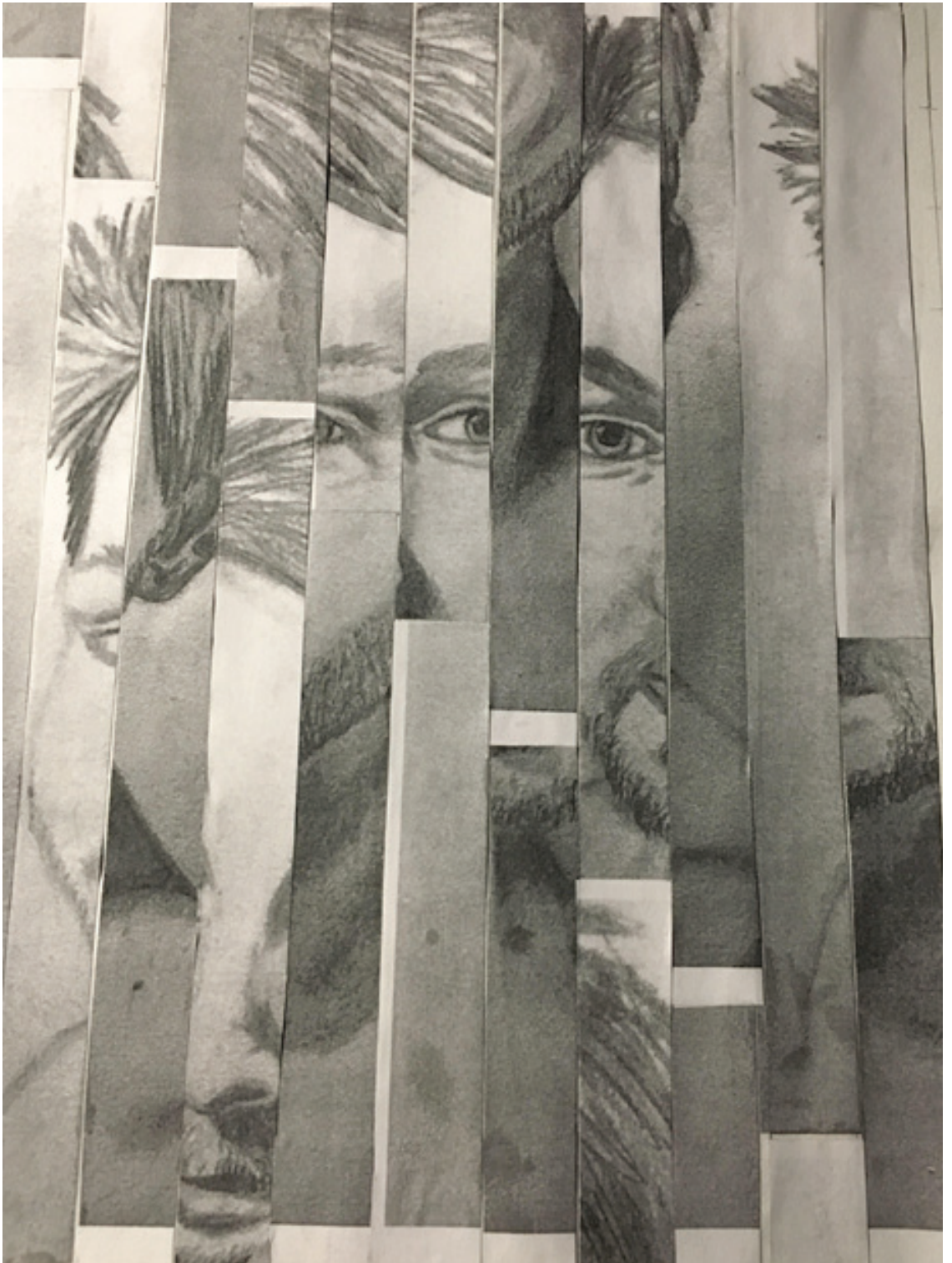
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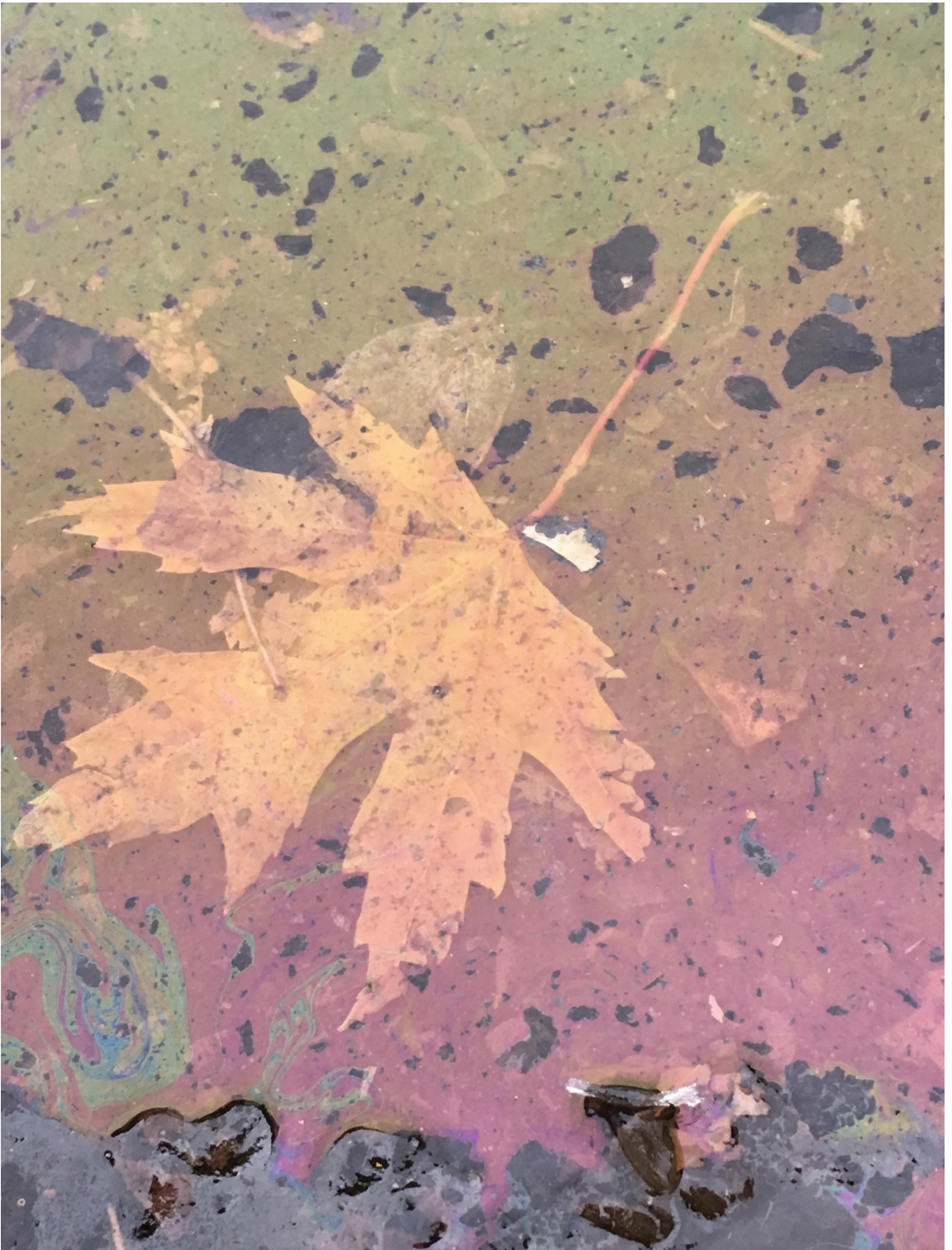
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# POETRY

# “Come folks, and look down, there is Train Lake City!”

There is another town  
across the Rubicon off into the East, where  
history's bullets  
have shattered harbor's mists and ships.

We, in Superior City are not  
your suburb,  
Duluth.

In Duluth's volcanic shadow,  
from our Town, we see you,  
we see you what you are doing  
every night, all night  
your crystal fire bivouacs give us clues.

Your Aerial Bridge honk,  
all violent staccato  
into our ear drums.

Under rusting trees, from our Wisconsin Point, we see the storms you create.

And ruminate over them, 10 high stacked in gray towels exploding and  
laughing towards our train and lake city.

For you going over the bridge is just an abhorrent errand  
into the arch-the metal jaws up into the light.

Here, in Superior, we control the horizon,  
and we control the sight.

Hopefully, you will remember this warning ringing in your ears,  
when you look down from rocky wart heights.

Lucas Dietsche

## Our Iron Ozymandias

that is our Superior trumpet noise  
of unleashed kracken call.  
It is our dinosaur wanting love.  
A strummed monster bass thump.  
My heart booms and breaks  
as stairs were pounded upon  
echoing on life's wilderness.  
An enger-clff below my eyelids,  
the iron legs on either shore is our Ozymandias.  
Duluth's aerial abridged version sutured,  
keeps contact with canal of  
the other side of more Minnesota Point.

Lucas Dietsche

# Flicker

A life  
is not  
unlike  
the flame  
of a  
candle...  
blowing  
in the wind  
and bowing  
to its force,  
at best  
providing  
a flicker  
of light  
onto  
a world  
filled  
with darkness.

**Bud Brand**

# Captured

His childhood was a playground of battlefields,  
Interrupted only by treats of ice cream and blueberry cobbler.

He laughed whenever he could  
And he cried when he couldn't help it,  
And he tried to be a big boy...

And he dreamed of doing great things  
And serving his country with honor,  
So he became an american soldier  
And he went off to fight the war...  
Thinking to return a hero.

But he saw poverty, hunger, and sickness  
As he stood in the steps of destruction,  
Where death was welcomed with weakened arms...

And he was ordered to shoot  
And commanded to kill  
Until he became mute  
And went over the hill.

He laughed whenever he could  
And he cried when he couldn't help it,  
And he tried to be a good soldier.

"To be a hero you must pay the price:  
Sleep with snakes and live with lice...  
Kill a man, destroy a town..."

Hold your head up while your soul crawls down...  
Bite your lip, hold your tongue...  
Never say 'die' 'til the battle's won..."

"Not all men can lead that life --  
There's more to being than a butcher knife  
And a pair of hands stained with blood,

Uselessly wasted in a swamp of mud.”  
Those were the words of an american soldier,  
Court Martialed from one prison to another.

He laughed whenever he could  
And cried when he couldn't help it,  
And he tried to be a sane being.

Written in 1960as protest against the war in Vietnam  
Bud Brand

# Growing Older

the older i get  
the slower i move  
and time passes faster  
while i disapprove

i cannot keep pace  
with unending time  
and thus all too soon  
i am out of my prime

before i know it  
my days here will end  
as my earthly life  
i cannot extend

i search for guidance  
as a faith endeavor  
and seek out heaven  
to dwell forever

Bud Brand

# The Sound of Freedom

Let freedom ring, throughout my 6-year-old being,  
I feel the sound, reverberating  
-such force. I remember how it rippled over my skin.  
A capriccio perhaps.  
Let freedom ring, see it flash through the air?  
Sitting in tiny classrooms, growing older each day.  
Let freedom ring, I learned the stories of those who rang freedom.  
You know, the greats like Kennedy, the dreamers like Martin;  
Let freedom ring, and even the revolutionaries-  
like Nat Turner and John Brown.  
Let freedom ring, I did not really notice the color of my skin.  
Nor theirs- Freedom rings in red, white, and blue  
not black or white, right?

Let freedom ring, inside my 16 year old being,  
the sound is still there, but it has faded somehow.  
-still reverberating. Just not as loud...shhhh,  
a placid adagio section?  
Let freedom ring, trickle down to who?  
I am so confused. Maybe I should have noticed my hue.  
Let freedom ring, I must go back and re-read and re-discover.  
So I can retrace its sound. Required reading? Not to me.  
Let freedom ring, excuse me? Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry?  
To Kill a Mockingbird? Black Boy?  
A Raisin in the Sun? The Negro Speaks of Rivers?  
Let freedom ring, Go Tell It On the Mountain,  
the sound is exploding now.  
It almost hurts. My ears are bleeding  
strings of red and blue...  
Let freedom ring, its sound is deafening now.  
Take these asymmetric shards of truth-  
I want to feel freedom. Not pain-  
but stars that spangle on that banner.  
Let freedom ring, beside my 26 year old being,  
its sound is a melancholy tune  
an intensely stringed scordatura-

...drip...drap...drip...drap...  
Patterned plays of water across a pitted surface.  
Let freedom ring, the acoustic...  
it is difficult to explain. The transmission is muffled,  
as if I have been swimming underwater all day.  
Let freedom ring, is it ringing...or has it rung?  
freedom of education, trapped by loans;  
freedom of religion, judged by others;  
freedom of choice, halted by opinion;  
freedom of speech, fighting forked tongues.  
Let freedom ring, psychoacoustic vibrations  
flow in and out range.  
I feel myself grasping for pieces I can hold,  
I pull them to my ear like a great conch shell.  
But, I hear nothing, intangibly so.

Let freedom ring, outside my 36 year old being,  
loosened fingers play keys, yes,  
the sound...it is uniquely familiar.  
Let freedom ring, I can see it more vividly-  
more than ever before. A cotton candy  
klangfarbenmelodie kaleidoscope.  
Unhinging uncertainty in faith and belief.  
When I share my prayers, is there an open ear,  
or a heart that listens, and cares?  
Let freedom ring, yes we can. The bitter push  
and pull, it is shifting...s- l- i -d -i -n -g  
into a heightened crescendo.  
Let freedom ring, not my President? That's a...choice?  
I cannot believe what should unite,  
has opened old wounds.  
Let freedom ring, it is a screeching, deafening sound  
its pitch protecting the Dreamers, expanding health care to all,  
defining marriage equality, strengthening climate control...  
Let freedom ring, its ringing in the protest and  
forgotten racist tones...  
over the masses, settling inside my home.  
Let freedom ring, I look at my children, it's time for "the talk",

as much as I have seen change, it echoes the same.  
Let freedom ring, hands over hearts have not lost their place.  
Did the music ever pause, or thicken?  
I cannot remember...I am lost in this melody, let freedom ring.  
Let freedom ring, behind my 46 year old being,  
the one yet to be, desperately trying to identify the tone.  
Forty years later, harmonizing in its rhythm.  
Let freedom...ring  
A simple serenade?  
A test of democracy...  
good will towards men?  
Let freedom ring...whose side are you on?  
Are you a "R" or a "D"?  
Are you an American or an Immigrant?  
Let freedom ring, do you stand or do you kneel?  
Is it Black Lives Matter or All Lives Matter?  
Do you know why Kaepernick took his knee...do you care?  
Let freedom ring, in the land of the free and  
home of the brave. Hundreds of times  
in a tiny lifetime,  
words recited by...me.  
Let freedom ring, I believe, in an old Negro spiritual-  
mostly forgotten today. Let freedom ring,  
my ancestors were not born free  
they became free...Lift every voice and sing  
til earth and heaven ring.  
I believe that we are not defined by titles or shaped by silos  
...we are meant to share and shift physically, spiritually  
by experience, in culture, and  
through our differences.

Let freedom ring, the sound of freedom  
cannot fall on deaf ears. I believe in this freedom.  
Let freedom ring, even in chaos, its chime is clear.  
It is not a bell at all, but a metronome.  
Let freedom ring, I can internalize it now.  
My senses are clear, in line with timing and tempo.  
Let freedom ring, ring with harmonies of liberty.  
As loud as the rolling sea, let freedom ring.

Yes, freedom, you are still ringing.  
Let...freedom...ring.

Erika D. White

# Flowers

As a child, a garden was planted in my mind,  
and I began to sow my thoughts with gentle care.  
Little seeds for little hands;  
digging up the earth.

The garden grew bigger inside me.  
I watered it with books,  
by Tolkien, Plath, and Lee.  
Enriched the soil with famous lines.

Ideas began to sprout,  
words came to full bloom.  
Yet for all their beauty,  
their worth I could not see.

I kept them hidden away,  
guarded, protected, so no strange eye could see.  
For I knew, only ridicule would come,  
if my garden of thoughts was found.

One day the strength will come,  
for me to pick a bouquet of words.  
I will string them together,  
and lay them on the world's table.

However, for now I will keep it to myself.  
Behind a brick wall, adorned by an iron gate.  
Quietly it will continue to grow,  
the garden in my mind.

Melissa France



# THE DYING TREE

by Access Pipeline



## Where Are You From?

where are you from?  
continues to divide me  
in attempt to make me fit.  
i uttered my first cry in san francisco and have since  
a last name passed down from my 中国人 father, and  
a dual langu-edged tongue gifted from my mestiza mother.  
you can't be both, they argued, because i  
didn't adopt the 普通话 of the 大陆 nor the 大陆 of 香港 and  
didn't inherit the looks of those taga-ilog from the perlas ng silanganan.  
where did you grow up then? because it's still unclear though  
i insist that my parents coexist, and therefore made me exist.  
i grew up away from the Golden Gate Bridge,  
sweating street kids and sticky-sweet tofu adorned with a thousand islands  
of sago, then  
grew up with the عروس الخليج and the شجرة الحياة, sweltering sands  
where fridays are wecnescdays, and mondays are saturdays, then  
grew up on the fragrant harbor with wet markets under manmade lit skies.  
where did you live the longest then? because that should  
dissolve their unresolved confusion to a condensed version of me.  
i lived the longest here  
where mound builders reside by the greatest of lakes,  
on tucked blankets of white and glass glacier sculptures,  
but winter separated me from the sun that nurtured me,  
so long that my skin looked like i had been raised by the moon,  
where family holidays are spent without family, and  
childhood is in the neighborhood it no longer stood.  
they can't make me.  
but i do not come in fragments.  
this is where i am from. all of it.  
that's not fair, they say adamantly,  
you can't be all of that.  
means,  
you can't be, because  
you can't possibly fit.  
but no matter:  
they can't make me.

Deb Yam

# The Path

The path that I've taken is covered in moss  
Thick ivy green,  
Speckled across the ground,  
It moves slowly, maneuvering with critical intent.  
It looks to me for guidance.  
I move ahead,  
It follows.  
Branches beginning to sway, chanting out to me for help  
Calling for me to ease their worries.  
I walk on.  
A blue feathered Krane descends before me.  
He too calls for my assistance,  
I shrug him off.  
The river turns to ice  
Cackling and cracking in heinous laughter.  
The world is gray  
The once ivy green moss is blackened coal dust disappearing in the  
breeze,  
The branches melt around me, molten and hot.  
The Krane calls to me one last time.  
I run to it, grasping at his wings to keep it with me on the path,  
But I'm too late.  
He has already ascended,  
Bursting into fiery embers he meets the sun one last time.  
I am alone.  
With only wolves tracking my path.  
They snarl at my heels and snap at my fingertips.  
I move ahead.

Megan McGarvey

# Composing

The prolonged note of a baritone as he finishes off his last chord echoes  
within the cathedral of my heart.

It's purity rings

Reverberating through the core of my body.

He breathes in as the orchestra joins,

The sweetness of the violins pulse through my finger tips rising and falling  
in a beautiful glissando.

The trumpet sets my attention forward and drives my pulse,

As the French horn sets

my feet into a waltz.

The choir joins in one harmony,

one soul setting my body into motion.

Leaping forth and resting in a plie,

The acoustics of my body react bursting forth onto my pen

My brain swims with polyrhythms.

Crescendos and dissonant harmonies build into a score of notes,

Trumpets,

Horns,

Flutes,

Violins,

and our Baritone.

He Smiles.

Releasing one final sigh

of his solo line,

It melts into a sweet memory on my tongue then disappears with the hum-  
ming of my furnace.

Megan McGarvey

# Warped

The world changed  
The clouds became shades of pink and blue, green and orange  
Waves lap and people wash up on shore only to return to the sea and  
repeat  
Silence follows and a chant is heard from across the sea  
Thousands of horns emerge from the water  
From the other side sound begins to deafen all  
This is where I want to be

I paint a green slash across my face, and walk into the abyss

Joey Hedman

## American Baby

They say don't go outside; it's dangerous.  
The cold has arrived. The snow comes. I'm stuck inside.  
Eight by ten, I stumble again.

Someone once pointed a knife at me.  
I laughed and said, "Sweetie, don't you know where I come from?"  
It's not quiet. I'm used to a gunshot.  
"This little knife you got pointed at me—isn't scary.  
"I'm American, baby."

I wasn't rebellious, and I grew up just fine.  
Stepped out of a car with a German, and a gun popped twice.  
I said, "Honey, it's fine."

I didn't go to the funeral of the boy shot.  
In our hometown, he was shot by his friends.  
They always said guns are so much fun.  
He was shot for some drugs, but he had it coming.  
Some say he was nice, but they never got on his bad side.

American baby born in war in the streets,  
Where we used to play and that one boy used to sing,  
Where I took that German home, where I leave.

Sophia Johnson

# Toy Gun

We play with our toy guns.  
Pop pop pop.  
A rather bad day for humanity, lost in the insanity.  
Can you tell me their names?  
Can you name one?  
We are no longer the young.  
They scream, "Run. Run. Run!"  
We thought not.  
Another month of pain, before we forget.  
We'll always hope it doesn't happen again.  
They scream, "Run. Run. Run!"  
They cry, "Not him!"  
We play with our toy guns.  
Pop pop pop

Sophia Johnson

# War

The time came, and he slept through the reign. The other one stood and accepted his fate. "Take me now," he said. "Take me for the dead. You may take my head, but you'll never have the life I led." He walked down to the courtyard. The sun shined down. He would be welcomed home. And he knew this wasn't the end.

The one who slept would stand again.

He said, "Don't miss me. No regrets."

They tried to take the music and song, but it lives within every heart. We sing the words that'll never be forgot. Names are gone, but the story stays strong. They come again, new something to be at war with. They'll never know the power of love.

He held his head high. He said, "I lived my life. I've fought and will die, but I don't regret. I do this for love, and I hope you feel it too. Or else you'll regret how stupid the war is."

And like that, he was dead. And the other awoke, to the blazing sun, to see what had been done. And he cried as they released him. The body still there hanging in the tree. But the other one was free.

Sophia Johnson

# Nature of Humanity

A veil of absurd desire casts half the world in a bludgeon light; the other bathed in gentle starlight; the air bends in pain; A man stands before me, body broken and serene, between realities; flesh of life and rot dance for supremacy over his form; shifting; voice gentle and full of menace calls my name, *Who are you* came my fearful cadence; beetles gnaw and crawl over his flesh, and with a smile just as grotesque he spoke, *I am peace and I am destruction; I am good and I am evil; I am heaven and I am hell*, His gentle voice grew heavy, a voice resonating outside of time; *I come to pull back the veil that humanity has absurdly created to hide my face*; before I could speak, I fell into the darkness of the world.

Brittany Hewitt

## Sound of the Mountains

To return to the mountains, where my heart longs to be.  
The smells, sights and sounds are so familiar,  
to me.

The scent of the sage and pine and wild rose  
are delightful, always,  
to my nose..

The fresh baled hay, stacked up so... high...  
does not tire me,  
as we ride on by.

You see billowing clouds dust the sapphire skies,  
promising rain  
over every next rise.

There are sweeping waves of pale meadow grass  
and rocky trails to lead us,  
up over the pass.

Those soaring peaks with ice and snow  
feed crystal blue lakes..  
hanging below.

Where, the trout rest, in a deep and glittering pool  
and I, can find wading  
a way to keep cool.

I do love the creeks and their endless soft chatter,  
going along... on their way..  
as if nothing else mattered.

Hear the brushing of wind through the cottonwood tops?  
And shodden hoof beats,  
as they clip at the rocks?

Insects will buzz at you, from every direction,  
while frogs in small ponds  
sing their favorite selection.

There's the chorus of birds, all hidden from view  
that blend notes together, to make a song,  
new.

Best at times, are the sounds of the night  
when deprived things are,  
of color and light.

The world is quite different at night when in bed,

when there's wind in the trees  
and the moon's overhead.  
Shadowy mountain peaks glow yellow to white,  
and the calling of critters may give some  
a fright.  
But, I'm ever older now, like the hills,  
and there's less of those sounds,  
they're muffled and still.  
I just can't make out much sense of the sound,  
and I have to walk carefully now,  
over this ground.  
But, oh, to remember the call of cow and her calf,  
an eagle on high,  
or a magpie's sharp laugh,  
brings to me a smile...  
and often yet... a tear.  
Just remember to cherish, all the beauty you hear.

Susan Gardner

# My Chest

My chest...  
My chest is the cage  
Created by stardust  
To contain the cosmic  
Storm that is my heart...

My heart...  
My heart is bursting  
Raining fire of my passions  
Igniting everything in its path.  
It is burning!  
Burning from the agony inside my soul...

My soul...  
My soul is an orphan.  
Abandoned and questioning its existence.  
Where did I come from?  
Why wasn't I wanted?  
Left wandering, going door to door,  
Searching for a home.

A home...  
A home where I can lock the door behind me and not have to check it  
twice before I allow myself to go to sleep.  
Where the touch of my lover does not make me want to hide, and crawl  
into the darkest corner of my mind...

My mind...  
My mind is a liar;  
Yet the loudest at speaking the truth that never passes the barrier of my  
teeth.  
Biting back the ever growing urge to scream...

Carsen Wetzel

# Ars Poetica

A poem should be small and quiet  
Like the purring of a kitten curled up asleep on your lap

A poem should be big and loud  
As a powerful lion roaring out its dominance to the Pride

Tasty  
Like plump, juicy plums falling from a tree

Unsavory  
As you bite into your apple to be greeted by rot and worms

A poem should calm and soothe you  
Like the warm rays of the morning sun singing down on you from the heavens

A poem should anger and rile you  
As a swarm of threatened hornets attack a bear destroying their hive

Happiness  
Like when you come home from work to be embraced by the one you love most

Grief  
As freshly fallen tears drip from your eyes onto the picture of your deceased spouse

To touch hearts, demand emotion, and show a new world  
A poem should convey you

Jenifer Reiten

## Somewhere Between Longing and Adventure

The house we lived in  
was not yet a house,  
certainly not a home.

It was hot when we moved,  
so fucking hot.  
I was used to Minnesota,  
bundled-up September through June.  
Not here-  
the heat was suffocating.

Outside the unfinished concrete hallway,  
6:00 a.m.  
Construction workers on break already,  
dripping sweat.  
Wiping foreheads with napkins from the taco stands.

I walk to the front office for coffee-  
my beloved French press gone.  
Everything I own in a storage unit back home.  
Collecting dust,  
while I collect experiences.

An activity once comforting, ritualistic-  
now sterilized.  
Stale.

Everything new.

It's a strange battle each day.  
Seeing if the absence of everything-  
everything I had ever known and possessed-  
would make me cry,  
or make me high.

The uneven scale.  
Tipping  
back-  
and-  
forth.  
Somewhere between longing and adventure.

I had always longed to live in the city.

New construction.  
Cranes.  
Cutting edge.  
Technology.  
Culture.

I never felt so uninspired.

It was too new.  
There were no old spirits around.  
No history or memories-  
good or otherwise.  
No carvings in the wood of a single-family home built in 1910.

It felt surgical,  
tasted metallic.

I longed for the lake,  
the old,  
and the cold.

Martyann E. Birman



@cody14anderson



# FICTION

## North of Nowhere

It was a bit of a drive back to town over the dusty, rocky, and rutted narrow road. A road that sticks out in your mind, but one I could not find all these years later if I had to. With the sun setting over the low sage covered hills, the heat of the long day was softening into a mellow, orange-lit evening, complete with endless stars, a crescent moon and pink shadows of clouds in the purple expanse of sky. The road wound around blind curves, washboards and potholes. Jack rabbits darted under the sagebrush, sagging fences and cattle guards in fear or bewilderment of the boxy vehicle I drove. Far off there stood pronghorns watching me, but unconcerned at my presence, they turned their white rumps my direction and continued to graze. Birds of prey were soaring on the few thermals remaining over the stony outcrops, scouting for their last meal of the day.

I too, was feeling the fresh coolness of dusk, and hunger was creeping into my core. Lunch was hours ago, dinner would be good right about now, and only an hour left to get back to town. All that lay between me and a hot meal was the quiet high desert for miles to see. Could I have flown like the vultures, it would only have taken minutes to get back, the road was slow going. I put a cassette tape in my boom box and tossed the yellow hard hat onto the bench seat beside me. My short legs required me to keep adjusting the square cushion behind my back so I could more easily reach the clutch, brake and gas pedals.

The C-60 bounded and rattled, squeaking and shuddering at the road we had to take. Not exceeding 30 mph, the four speed truck lurched and shimmied along a road that saw no more than six vehicles a day at most. The coiled two-way radio cord swayed and slapped at the windshield in the cab while the box behind, that contained my technical equipment, let the dust roll of its sides in great clouds of yellow grit that soiled the twilight air. All the others had gone home before me; we loggers were generally the last to leave the drill site. To be sure, the site geologist was responsible to see everyone got out, but not always. This test hole was so far off the beaten path that even now, GPS could not find it. First the drillers would leave, and then the geologist would say, "You can get me the logs in the morning, g 'night'" and then I was alone.... in my truck... north of nowhere.

Creeping shadows were making it harder to see as I drove on and getting hungrier by the mile, I hoped there would be some place still open by the time I got into town. My mind bounced along with the truck and the music on the tape, as if I could really have heard it over all the road noise. Then, there was no noise. The truck sputtered and stopped.

“Crap, I really don’t need this!” I muttered to myself.

Shuffling through my red tool box for the best triage instruments, I climbed up inside the hood and started to check off the usual culprits. There was so much room in the engine cavity, I could sit on the wheel well and work on this beast. Over a year at this job and I had experienced a wide variety of what could go wrong with the Chevy six banger. Let’s see now, fuel line, electrical, fuel pump, air filter, throttle linkage, carburetor, out of gas, solenoid, water in the oil, nothing made sense. I got the first round of troubleshooting done and had run out of options and creative ideas, then according to company policy I tried to radio the shop for help. The truck had stopped on a long, flat curve alongside a dry creek draw, and as it would happen there was no radio signal. It was going to be a long night.

The box of the truck contained the computer rack, printers, probes and equipment we used in this geophysical field service company. We would run our probes on a cable down the test hole and create an electrical log of data for our clients in mineral exploration. The truck was also equipped with a radioactive source stored in a lead “pig”, used in our quest for coal and uranium. It always got a lot of attention when people saw the yellow and black placards emblazoned with “RADIOACTIVE” on the back and sides of the truck. There was a long padded bench in the box that one could sleep on, but there was no way to lock the back from the inside. It was far safer to sleep in the cab, where I could see what was going on. We were told to be prepared for this type of situation. Dinner was canceled, unless you call the granola bar, apple and water I had left over from my lunch, dinner. I got my sleeping bag out of the back, set the flashlight on the dash, my trusty rock hammer for defense, locked the doors and settled down. Not ten minutes went by when gunshots pierced the quiet, dry air.

“Geez, they could have come from anywhere.” To my immediate right there was a hill, if someone were there, they would have to be coming from above. Scanning the little valley around to the left there came a flash of light, a spot light from behind my stalled truck. The light swept across the

arroyo stopping and darting quickly from place to place like a grasshopper, brushing the tops of pale sage and rocks with an eerie white light. I put my hard hat on and gripped the rock hammer, clearly no match for guns, but what else could I do, abandon my truck and run into the hills to hide with snakes and coyotes? I waited. In the large side mirrors I watched a dark, dust covered pickup come around the bend and pull up behind me. I took a deep breath; made sure my hair was up under my hat and rolled down my window. My heart was racing wildly. Two rough looking men in grubby work clothes approached and seemed to be more interested in my odd looking truck, than me. I squeezed the Estwing hammer even tighter at my side, staying just out of view of the two strangers.

“We was shine’n badgers, you OK in there?” they hollered.

“Truck just shut down, piece of shit.” I growled at them.

Perhaps if I sounded ill tempered, it would give them cause to see that I was not to be tangled with. It worked for now. The two startled strangers quickly offered up their jumper cables and poked and prodded under the hood of the baby blue truck. They were a crude looking pair, but oddly enough I felt no imminent threat from them and their efforts to help. Any fears I may have entertained had to be covered as not to show uneasiness. I had nowhere to hide if things turned ugly. Be cool, be cool. Ten minutes of tinkering and to my great relief, the truck finally turned over.

“Follow us on into to town and you’ll be good then. Don’t want to leave you out here.” they assured me. They hopped back into their truck and took the lead down the road. I was then clearly able to see the rifles with scopes hanging in the gun rack in their rear window. Within five minutes time the engine stopped and again my rescuers were busy under the hood for round two. This time I was able to make radio contact with the “shop” two hundred miles away and bring them up to speed on my situation. Thankfully, there was someone there to answer my call.

“K-J-D, 6-8-3, 7-7-0-2 to base” .....

“No, I did not blow the engine” .....

“Yes, it has gas” .....

This went on while the supervisors tried to pinpoint the problem over the radio. “Just get me another truck”, I pleaded. They said they would try.

The Badger Boys worked their magic and shortly we were on the road again with the lights of Rock Springs coming into view, sparkling on

the horizon. No getting lost, the road only went one way. Once you were in town is where a body could get really lost. It was mostly dark when we got to my motel at the edge of town. We stopped there, parked my truck and they invited me to dine with them. It was well after nine o'clock by now and I took them up on their offer. I could not trust my truck to get me anywhere, and in a public place I would feel safer than somewhere without witnesses. I still was wary of my situation. Boom towns are interesting bits of business and history. Every few years they grow and are vibrant, then they cycle into despair and debauchery. Sometimes this is reversed. Rock Springs was on the rise, trying to attract upstanding citizens yet, still in operation for the needs of the transient and seasonal workforce that populated its low rent and temporary housing. It was hard to wear off the jagged edges for the small city in those unstable and fast paced days.

There was a Chinese place across the large parking lot from the motel and I joined them for chow mein and a beer. It was good to be around people and have a nice dinner after that long grueling day. I do not remember what we talked about for the next hour, or what their names even were. It didn't matter, they were alright guys and I was glad that they came along when they did. Finishing up my Michelob after dinner, the evening began to feel like an awkward date, an odd tension started to build. I wanted to get to the safety of the motel. But what did these two have in mind? How could I politely shake them off? They took me back to the motel where I was overjoyed to see a second truck (which was already in the area), had arrived and was parked next to mine. I had backup. I wasn't alone. I was safe. My feet couldn't get me out of that pick-up fast enough. I cheerily proclaimed, as I hopped out, "Well, thanks for dinner and all your help. Your girlfriends are surrrrrre lucky."

I didn't know if they had girlfriends or not, but it didn't hurt to pump up their egos at this point. I stopped in the doorway of the replacement truck and chatted to the co-worker who had brought it. Then I turned and waved to the dark pick-up as they hit the gas, spewing gravel across the parking lot as if the cops were hot on their tail. The boys made a bee-line back to the restaurant in the next block we had just left. It was now closed and dark. That was just it, the main entrance was dark, it was closed but, at the side door there were a half dozen pick-ups. A row of bright red lights lit the eaves above three single doors, where the Ladies awaited their customers. Finally, I put it together; the sordid stories of Rock Springs were true. Yes, it was a rough town and had I been unfortunate or stupid, could have

been a body found along the roadside. It had been known to happen every so often in that part of Wyoming. Truly, I think the angels were looking out for me, and of course, not everyone is evil. Over time, jobs change as life continues with adventures like these to be experienced, remembered and savored. As often as I tell this story, the co-worker who brought me the second truck does not remember any of it. Impressions change too and three years later, I married him anyway.

~~ Susan Gardner ~~

## Haircut

"I'm gonna get the paper," Teddy said. He closed the back door, pulling it hard as he stepped outside. He could tell how cold it was by the amount of white rime around the door. He crunched down the driveway to the mailbox in his ratty old bathrobe and swayback Sorrel boots, the sun a suggestion on the eastern horizon. Jessie had his cup of Folger's ready when he walked in the door.

"Thanks," he said, and sat down at the kitchen table under the buzzing fluorescent light.

"So what's the news?" she asked.

"Same old, same old. Looks like Morningside and Northern Township are still in a pissing contest over who's responsible for County B. They're talking lawsuits now. All that'll do is raise the damn taxes."

"What do you want for breakfast?" she asked.

"Oatmeal is good, thanks." He continued turning pages, reading their horoscopes aloud, and after he glanced at the obituaries said. "I'll be damned. Jimmy Jacobs died!"

"That's too bad hon, you're gonna miss him."

"Yes I am," he paused. "Looks like the funeral is set for Monday at 10 at St. Michael's. The wake's Saturday."

Jessie gave him his oatmeal with a large dollop of brown sugar in the middle. He reached for the milk carton as she refilled his coffee cup.

"Might be time for haircuts today," he said.

She smiled and placed her hand lightly on his shoulder. "Yes it might."

He finished his cereal, got dressed, and pulled on his boots, heavy wool jacket and watch cap. "I'll be out in the shed."

The sun had worked its way up the sky, peeking over the spruces by the edge of the road like a curious child, the day crisp and windless at thirty below. Smoke spiraled up from his neighbor's chimneys.

He shuffled across the yard to the lean-to attached to the garage, a ten by twelve room with windows and a low ceiling, tools were scattered all over the workbench under the windows. An old kitchen stool stood next to the bench, chairs scattered around the room. In the center was a barrel stove.

Teddy found some old copies of the Morningside "Sunrise" under the bench, crumpled them into a loose ball and tossed them into the stove. He stacked kindling on top of the newspaper and laid heavier pieces of

wood on top. He struck a match and lit the paper. After ten minutes, the larger pieces caught fire, popping and snapping. The stove started to throw heat; a good thing, he was getting cold.

He made a pot of coffee in an old aluminum electric percolator. A shelf of stained ceramic mugs were behind the pot. Carl Juncker made his way through the door.

“Morning Teddy. Man, it’s still cold in here!”

“Yeah, yeah. Thought you’d be the first one in the door, bitching about the cold. Sit down. The coffee’ll be ready in a few minutes.”

Carl settled in the chair near the stove and crossed his arms, resting them on his ample middle.

“They say this cold is supposed to hang around all week. Seems a little early don’t it?”

The coffee stopped perking. Teddy reached for Carl’s cup, hesitated for a split second as his hand brushed Jimmy’s cup. “One of these years I gotta wash these mugs.”

The door opened. In stepped Tommy Roller. He beat his arms against his chest and stomped his feet after swinging the door shut. “Gettin nice in here Teddy. When I saw the smoke, I figured it was time for a hot cup of java. Too early for beer I guess,” he smiled.

Teddy replied. “Yep, I figured by the time I got the case out here from the house, the bottles would freeze. If we start too early, any barbering I’d want to do would get worse and the customers’d get surly.”

“Hee, Hee,” Tommy laughed. “We sure don’t want that,” he said, slapping Curt on his knee as he sat down on the chair next to him. Teddy poured a cup for Tommy.

Foot stomping and muffled conversation could be heard outside. Bud Niemi and Albine Formanek, came in with a cold draft. More coffee was poured

The door creaked opened again, and Billy Jacobs stepped in. “I figured you guys would be here!”

They all greeted Billy, a tall, thin man they’d watched grow from a little runt who delivered their papers, into a chemist for 3M in the Cities. He was Jimmy Jacob’s son. An awkward silence followed.

Teddy spoke. “We’re sorry ‘bout your dad, Billy.”

They all nodded.

“Thanks. It was quick. Didn’t see it coming. Doc said he stroked. Not a lot they could do.” He leaned against the workbench and accepted a cup of coffee. “Mom’s not doing well. I don’t know how she’s gonna manage. It’s an awful big house and yard,” he said grim-faced.

“Well, you know we’ll pitch in until she gets a bead on what she wants to do,” said Tommy. The others assented.

While the others chatted, Teddy started a fresh pot of coffee. It would be a long morning.

“Well, before I go, I’ve gotta ask a favor of you guys,” said Billy, draining his cup. He hesitated. “Two favors actually.”

“Shoot. We’re game,” said Bud.

“We’re gonna need pall bearers and I was wondering if you guys would do it?”

They all nodded, Teddy saying, “We’d be honored. Your dad was a good man.”

“Thanks. Then the other thing Ted is . . . Would you cut dad’s hair?”

. . . Ted mumbled, “Geez, I don’t know.” He squirmed. “Don’t the funeral home people have a barber for that? I’d be afraid I’d mess it up.”

“Yeah they do, but any haircut he got from the barber in town wouldn’t be as good as the ones you gave him. It’s bad enough they’ll dress him up in his old suit, put a tie on him and cover him with makeup.”

Teddy scratched his head and frowned.

Billy finally rescued him. “Tell you what. Why don’t I get back to you later in the day.”

“I don’t know. Never been asked to do this before.”

“I know, but both mom and I would be grateful if you did.” He paused. and turned to the others, “Thanks for the coffee and being pallbearers.” He went around shaking their hands. “I’ll give you a call later Teddy.”

It was quiet for a few minutes, the stove moaned in the background. Bud Niemi lit his pipe and Seth Goodnough replenished his chew as sun flooded the room.

Albine leaned back in his chair, tucked his hands under his suspenders and said, “So what you gonna do about giving a haircut to a stiff, Teddy?”

“I dunno,” he replied.

“Guess we’ll all need a haircut,” said Seth, “especially Carl over there,” Carl grinned and scratched his three-day-old beard. “Everyone got a suit for Chrissake?” Seth continued.

“Weddings and funerals only,” replied Carl. “Thing smells like moth-balls. I’ll have to air it out and see if it fits. Got really wide lapels and wide stripes. Wore it at my wedding. I looked like some Mafia guy,” he chuckled.

“So who’s gonna be first?” said Teddy.

“I might as well be me. Gotta get to the office,” said Albine.

Teddy reached into an old wooden cigar box on the workbench.

He carefully uncovered the Oster nickel-plated clippers, scissors, and combs from underneath their green velvet cover. He'd thought about getting a newer electric clipper, but had a hard time giving up the feel of the tool handed down to him from his father. He liked the precision and intimacy of the appliance.

He spread an old bed sheet around Albine and secured it with a safety pin. He worked quickly, using techniques he'd learned from his dad. Each head of hair was different, some more forgiving than others. Albine still had a full head of curls. If you screwed up on his, you could usually fix it so it blended in with the rest.

Albine looked at himself in the old cracked mirror hanging on the door next to the main garage. "My God, you're a handsome devil," he said.

Carl said, "Someone get the shovel from the corner and open the door."

Ignoring the comment, Albine threw on his coat, said good-bye and left.

"So who's next?" said Teddy.

"Might as well be me," said Carl

Carl raised his bulk from the chair. It sighed in gratitude.

"Trim or the works?"

"Might as well give me the works."

Carl's hair was a challenge, chronically thin.

Teddy worked cautiously on Carl's neck, alternating between clippers and scissors, doing quick passes with the comb as he snipped. He finished with what remained of Carl's hair on by combing it straight up and using his fingers to gauge the cut. He combed out the sides and top again, stepped back and called it good.

The haircuts continued. Bud, the last customer, crawled onto the stool.

"So, you gonna cut Jimmy's hair?"

"Yeah. What you gonna do about that Teddy? "Carl said refilling his coffee cup.

"That's a tough one. I been thinking about that ever since Billy left. What do you guys think?"

"Well if it were me, I'd tell him no," said Carl. "I mean that's what you got barbers for."

"Yeah, but this is a family thing. We all know the family and Jimmy was a good friend. Don't you think I kinda owe him something?" said Teddy.

"I dunno. Just the whole thing about working on a stiff. That's not Jimmy," said Carl.

“No it ain’t,” Seth pitched in. “He was a lot more than a cold hunk of meat. All the stories we have about him. He was a legend.”

Bud laughed. “Remember that time we got tuned up our senior year and took Jimmy’s old Packard out deer hunting . . . without guns?” “Yep. We had some big flashlights and went shining deer in a field out by the old saw-mill. Teddy, you spotted one down this forest road and we chased it,” Seth said.

Teddy laughed. “I’ve never seen a spike buck move so fast. When we came to a curve in the road, that deer took the turn, but we kept going straight, got airborne like the Dukes of Hazzard and ended up in a slough up to the axles. Jimmy’s dad was REALLY pissed about that! It took two four wheel drives and chains to get that old bathtub out of the swamp.”

“Then there was the time,” Carl leaned over, shaking his head chuckling, “when he got caught peeing on the ceiling in grade school. We were having this contest and no one was even coming close until Jimmy took aim and hit the light bulb over the sink. I think he shorted the damn thing out and blew a fuse.”

They all were leaning over laughing so hard they cried. When they finally calmed down, Tommy said, looking at Teddy, “But this ain’t helping you answer your question. Jimmy never liked to be touched. Seems odd we’d be doing that after he’s dead,”

“I wonder if that comes from all the whuppings he got from his old man?” said Teddy.

The sun creeped toward midday now, the light cold and weak. Carl stood. “Well, I better get home. The old lady’ll have something for me to do. Thanks for the haircut, Teddy.”

They put on their coats and filtered out the door. Teddy stood alone in the room. He cleaned up, swept the hair off the floor and dumped coffee grounds into the trash can. He opened the door and trudged toward the house.

Jessie was working at her sewing machine in the dining room adjacent to the kitchen.

“Hi Hon. How are the boys?”

“Full of crap like they always are. We had some good laughs telling Jimmy stories.”

“Did I see Billy Jacobs come and go while you were out there?”

He sat down on one of the dining room table chairs facing her. “Yeah, we’re all gonna be pall bearers. Everyone got a haircut. Could you give me one later?”

“Of course.”

“Billy wants me to cut his father’s hair.”

“That’d be nice. He always had you cut it didn’t he? He never liked going to Zeke downtown after they got into that argument about welfare people. Jimmy was glad they had welfare after his dad died in the mining accident.”

“I know Jess, but touching a dead body, especially Jimmy, and cutting his hair?”

She stopped stitching and looked at him over her cheater glasses. “Men have such a hard time touching one another.”

Teddy shrugged. “Way we were raised.”

Jessie hesitated. “Did you like Jimmy?”

“You bet. He was my best friend.”

“Would you even say you loved him?”

“What?” he said, sitting up straight in the chair. He looked out the window through the lace curtains toward the front yard. The same yard he played ball on during hot summer days and the lawn he walked across to get into Jimmy’s old Packard to drive to church when he got married to Jessie forty-five years ago. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

Jessie leaned over and put her hand on his arm. “This is gonna be hard isn’t it?”

“Yep,” he said snuffling and wiped his nose with an old red handkerchief. He sighed. “But I owe him.” . . . They were ten years-old when they had gone out to the Washington River to catch Smelt during the spring run. The day was warm and the boys wore “Wellies”, lifted from Teddy’s father’s supply at the hardware store. They carried old galvanized pails and a couple of fine-meshed nets.

The boys set up on a stretch of the river farther upstream from where most fished. While skipping from rock to rock to get to a deeper part of the stream, Teddy slipped and fell into the fast moving water. As he struggled to stay afloat, Jimmy raced down the bank crashing through brush slicing his head on a branch, until he reached an overhanging tree where he grabbed Teddy as he floated by. The tree swayed under their weight, but Jimmy hung on to him until Teddy regained enough strength to pull himself up onto the branch. Exhausted, he hung there until the two of them could shimmied back to shore.

Teddy stood, stretched, and said, “I better call Billy and let him know I’ll cut Jimmy’s hair.”

Jessie stood and embraced Teddy. She kissed him lightly on the cheek and said, “You’re a sweetie. One of the finest men I know.” He returned the kiss and went to make the call.

Don Renaldo, the mortician, greeted him in a reserved, dignified manner. They small-talked for a few minutes. “Well, should we go downstairs and you can get to work?” said Don.

The room was white with ceramic tile walls and fluorescent bulbs that hummed overhead. It smelled of embalming fluid. Around the periphery were an assortment of cabinets, counter tops and sinks. Jimmy’s body was on a stainless steel table, draped with a cloth that left his head exposed.

The mortician went to the top of the table and raised Jimmy’s head with an adjustable head positioner.

“He’s ready,” the mortician said.

Teddy walked to the head of the table, the pulse in his neck throbbed. He grit his teeth as he opened the wooden case with the barbering tools. He took them out and placed them in a row on the counter top adjacent to Jimmy’s head.

Jimmy had thick, bristly, salt and pepper hair. Teddy worked quickly, cutting gently, not sure how to approach the job. With a “normal” cut, the person made adjustments with their head to accommodate the clipping. He hesitated on a couple of occasions, took a deep breath and continued.

He finished the first passes with the clippers and began the trim work with the scissors. As he worked toward the front of Jimmy’s head, he saw the scar left over from his rescue, by his right temple. He stopped, the scissors poised. He put them down on and stroked the side of Jimmy’s head. He wept.

Don came around and placed his hand on Teddy’s arm. “If this is too hard, we can have the barber finish.”

Teddy took in a shuddering breath and said, “No. This is my job – for a good friend.” He picked up the scissors. He finished, stepped back, and called it good.

Don lowered Jimmy’s head and covered it with the cloth.

“Thanks for letting me do this, Don.”

“You bet.”

Teddy gathered his tools, placed them in the wooden box and covered them with the velvet cloth. He turned and looked at Jimmy’s body one more time and walked up the stairs.

He drove west out of town. The overcast sky spat sleet that pinged dully off the windshield. Intermittent bursts of heavier snow washed the landscape and engulfed the car as he drove.

His driving, aimless at first, evolved into a pattern. He returned to places where he and Jimmy spent time over the years: Willow Lake with its abundant crappies, the old rock quarry where they swam in a deep pool of

crystal clear water, now frozen, the white pine stand at the state park and the football field by the high school. He lowered the window there and listened to the wind whistle through the wires hanging from the big lights around the field. He drove back to the park.

He got out of the car by the stand of white pines and walked on the narrow trail to the overlook on the lake. The path had blown clear of snow in the past week. When he got to the deck above the lake, he drew his jacket around him tightly, jamming his hands deep into its pockets. The cold wind off the lake seared and stung his eyes, opened a wound, cauterized it, and blew on. He would find peace, somehow, and Jimmy would be there.

He stood there for a few minutes before the cold was too much. He returned to the car and drove home.

As he came in the door, Jessie rose from her chair in the living room and walked toward him. "Hi. I was beginning to worry about you."

"No need, just driving and thinking."

Jessie put her arm around him and they walked to the kitchen.

~~ Doug Lewandowski ~~

## His Sofa

I'm in my room, typing in my computer while listening to My Chemical Romance. I need loudness, I need voices other than my own in my head or I might go back to old habits. I might go back to...

His sofa. The room is dark and there's a movie playing. I really want to see this movie. He said it was his favorite, and we planned this so we could talk about films, but why is he..?

I'm in the classroom. Someone is talking about the reading, did I read it? I think I did, but I can't focus on the words. The rhythm of sounds washes over me, hypnotizing me. I can't tell if the sounds made me go into my head, or I was already there, and I'm only now just noticing I'm still around other people. Oh. People are packing their bags. I should do that. I don't

I'm outside his house. My mom just dropped me off, but he just texted me his parents won't be home. I'm not sure what to do, so I tell my mom to wait a bit. They won't be there at all? Why? I text him. Mom's working and my brother's at school. Dad's here, but he's working in his office, so he won't come out at all. He texts back. I tell my mom it's ok, his dad is home.

It's graduation and I'm with my friends, tearfully hugging and saying goodbye. I see his brother. I can't breathe. I can't think. His brother sees me and starts walking towards me, but he turns to the guy I'm dating now, smiles and says hi. My new boyfriend has some friendly banter with him, but his brother keeps looking at me. Maybe he remembers me? He leaves without talking to me. I can breathe again.

I'm in his sofa. The room is dark and there's a movie playing. He said it was his favorite.

I see him with his new girlfriend; all I can do is pity her a bit, but also. A deep chasm of worthlessness opens in my chest, because I should have seen the signs. He never liked me, he only talked to me when he got drunk at that party. I guess I can see it, she's prettier. Maybe my boobs were too small for him, hers are bigger. Maybe I'm not fun, she's kinda loud. Maybe, maybe, maybe. There's too much wrong with me.

I'm in his sofa. The room is dark. I was wearing a red sweater, tight

jeans and black, high heeled boots. I even used some lipstick. He was wearing his long hair loose, and that ring I used to play with when I held his hand. I wanted to see the movie, but I thought he got bored, since he's seen it before. Maybe that's why he kept kissing me even when I said I wanted to pay attention.

I see his name on facebook. I never had reason to delete him after we broke up. I never knew. My heart skips a beat every time.

I'm in his sofa. All I can think is that I don't want to do this. I want to call my mom, ask her to pick me up, but there's no signal in his room, buried at the basement of the house. My phone battery is dying and I don't know what to do, I'm panicking, and I don't want to make him mad. Since when was I so scared of him?

I'm in his sofa. I'm in his sofa, lying on my back. His hand is underneath my bra and all I can think is... do people really enjoy this? This, it doesn't feel good. He asks me if I'm ok. He says we can stop, but then he kisses me so I say nothing. I don't know what he means when he says we can stop. Can we? I want to stop, but somehow I'm scared. He wants to take my clothes off. I kiss him because that's safer than taking off my clothes. His mom is home. I'm safe. I go to the bathroom, fix myself up. I make pleasant talk with his brother, mother. They invite me to dinner. I ask about his dad, and " isn't he coming downstairs for dinner?" "He's on a business trip, his mom says to me, you didn't tell her?" "Oh. Well, I should be getting home", I say. He holds me sweetly and kisses me at the door. The next day he says his mother loved me, she's looking forward to seeing more of me in his house since we live close by. I never want to step inside that house again.

I break up with him a month later. I can't tell him why. He spreads rumors about me. I lose a few friends in the process. I start dating again.

I'm in my bed. I can almost feel his hands on me. I can almost smell him on me. I can't breathe. I stop eating, because maybe I'm broken and I starve myself for two weeks trying to disappear.

I'm in his sofa, in my head, all the time.

~~ Tania Murillo ~~

## Coffee and Pick-Up Lines

Peter stared at the pouring rain outside as he mindlessly wiped down the counter. The inside of the coffee shop reflected the dismal atmosphere outside. Few people went out in that kind of weather, especially to something as frivolous as an out-of-the-way coffee shop. He sighed, putting the rag away.

There were only so many times he could clean without becoming bored of the same monotonous task.

He leaned down, resting his elbows on the counter and his head on his hands, to stare instead at the muffins and cookies below him.

A bell jingled just as Peter was about to close his eyes. Groaning, he stood up and glanced at the person who would risk getting drenched just for some coffee. It was a girl he noticed. She had long, brown-ish hair that was down and covering her face that was looking in her bag at her side. He rolled his eyes and started to set up for the ridiculously complicated drink she was probably going to order.

As she approached the counter with her head still down, he asked, "What can I get for you?"

Peter tapped the countertop impatiently as he waited for her to respond. "Well? Are you going to order?" he snapped when she still hadn't answered.

Frowning, the girl looked up. "Aren't you supposed to be nice to your customers?"

Finally face to face with her, Peter gaped. He didn't expect her to be so beautiful. Her hair gleamed copper under the lights in the shop and her eyes were stormy under furrowed brows.

"Well? Aren't you supposed to answer my question?" she snarked, causing Peter to blush.

"Uh, well, you see here," he stammered, enamored even as she frowned.

"That was a rhetorical question," she interrupted. "A medium hot chocolate with a shot of Caramel."

Peter just stared for a moment before jolting into action. He fumbled grabbing a cup, causing several others to fall to the floor. Clutching the cup to his chest, Peter turned back towards her. "The name for the cup?"

The girl raised an eyebrow and looked obviously around the empty shop. "Addi," she finally said.

"A-D- D-I."

Peter breathed a sigh of relief that Addi hadn't called him out on his bullshit for her name. Slightly pathetic he knew, but he couldn't help but want, no need, to know the name of the beautiful girl.

Peter hurried his way through making the cocoa, and attempted to make art in the foam of the drink. He stared proudly at the lopsided heart he drew until he realized he had to put a lid over it, so Addi wouldn't even see it. Pouting, he carried it carefully back to the register. "One medium hot cocoa with a shot of caramel for Addi," he smiled brightly as he presented the drink.

Addi did not look impressed at his theatrics, instead silently taking the cup and sliding a five on the counter. "Keep the change," she said, already turning away and moving to sit at one of the two-seater tables by a window.

Peter looked longingly at the empty chair opposite and wished he could sit and talk to her. He sighed, propping his chin on his hand as he leaned against the Formica and watched as Addi pulled out a book and begin to read. Addi glanced back a few times, as if feeling the weight of his stare on her.

Peter looked guiltily away when she did that and tried to keep his gaze off her, but eventually he caved and the cycle would repeat itself.

Addi stood up a little over an hour later, stretching and put her book gently away in her bag. Walking to the door, she waved as she threw away her cup. Peter beamed, waving obnoxiously back. As she stepped into the downpour, which seemed to just get worse, someone darted in wearing a black raincoat. Lightening streaked across the sky, causing the lights to flicker and cast a dark shadow where Addi stood outside. A second flash and Addi was gone. Peter stared at the place where her shadow just was before shaking his head and smiling at the raincoated person.

"Hey, what can I get for you?" Peter asked, attempting to grab a cup from the stack and failing. He glanced over to see the holder empty and realized that he never picked up the cups that fell. He groaned internally as he turned back to the customer.

"Dude, it's me, John," John said, pushing back his hood. "Your best friend who came to keep you company at work even when it's like God decided to recreate the floods of Noah's Arc out there."

Peter laughed and grinned at John. "Hey, did you see the girl who left as you came in?"

"Nah. I was looking at the ground so my face was protected from the rain. Why? She hot?"

"Unbelievably," Peter gushed, leaning closer. "I swear, she's the

prettiest girl I've seen. If she comes back, I'm totally making a move." John held his hand out for a high-five. "Yeah, dude! Get it!"

Peter frowned after hitting John's hand. "It's not just like that, dude."

"Sorry." John held his hands up in surrender.

For the next few days, Peter eagerly watched the door, waiting for Addi to come in. His co-workers shook their heads at his enthusiasm, telling him not to get his hopes up. Especially if it's the girl they thought she was.

"Just let it go," one insisted. "Find another pretty girl and take her out instead." Peter ignored them. He practiced what he'd say if, when, he saw her again.

Finally, almost a week later, Addi stepped in. Peter froze in shock at seeing her. After close to a week went by, he started to lose hope, even if he only admitted it to himself. To his co-workers, he had unshakeable faith. Peter was standing confidently at the register as Addi approached, rummaging through her bag like last time.

"Peter? Can I borrow you for a minute?" a voice asked behind him. Peter turned to see his manager.

"Can it wait after I help her?" He gestured to Addi.

His manager shook her head. "Sorry. I need you to grab the case of flour off the top rack in the kitchen. I'll help her." Peter nodded and walked to the back room where the kitchen was, but internally he groaned.

"What can I get for ya?" he heard his manager ask in a chipper voice before the door closed and he was cut off from the front. Grabbing the short step ladder, he dragged it to the flour case and stood to grab it. Hauling it forward, he understood why his manager was making him do this. At 5'3", his manager would be too short to get a good grip on the flour. Peter heaved it over his shoulder and stepped down, setting it on the counter before rushing out the front, hoping he would make it for the tail end of the transaction. The doors banged when he barged through, slightly panting from the exertion.

He looked to the register only to be disappointed when he saw no one besides his manager.

"Thanks Peter, I appreciate it." His manager smiled and patted his arm as she walked by.

"No problem," he replied faintly. Dejected, he shuffled to the counter and sighed at his bad luck. He moped for a solid minute before remembering that she sat at a table the last time she was here. Perking up, he glanced around the store before his eyes fell on her. She sat in the same spot as last time. This time however, instead of reading a book, she appeared to

be doing homework. Perfect, he thought and began to watch the clock. A half hour later, he brought a steaming cup of hot chocolate with a shot of caramel to her table. He grinned to himself as he approached her table. Nothing could go wrong with this plan.

“I lost my number, can I have yours?” Peter asked confidently. Addi looked up, ignoring what he said, and focused on the cup in his hand.

“I didn’t order that,” she said plainly, going back to her textbook, pencil between her teeth.

Peter’s face fell and the cocoa drooped dangerously close to spilling. He took a fortifying breath and then righted itself. “I know,” he said, bringing it a little closer, trying to tempt her.

Looking back up, she squinted at him. “Then why are you and it here?” she asked.

Peter shrugged and attempted casual. “You’ve been here awhile and I thought you could use a pick me up. I’m Peter, by the way.” Nice touch, introducing yourself, he thought smugly.

“Why?” Such a simple word, yet Peter was thrown. Why else would anyone bring cocoa to a stranger? he thought. To get invited to sit, which would lead to date invitation, which in turn, would lead to dating. He regrouped quickly, however. “What do you mean why? I saw you, thought you were cute, so I got you a cocoa to flirt with you. Nothing more to it than that.” He smiled at her again, hoping she’d get the hint.

“Oh. Well, thanks for the cocoa, but no to the date,” Addi took the cocoa from him and sipped it.

Peter stared at his empty hand for a second before replying, “You’re welcome.” Peter berated himself as he walked back. Obviously she thought he was just trying to get in her pants. Which, admittedly, he was, but he also wanted to date her. Wine and dine her, as they say.

It was an hour later when Addi finally packed her bag and stood up to leave. She walked to the door, giving a short wave as she exited. Peter beamed at her back as she strolled away. So it didn’t fail as abysmally as he thought. A wave was one step closer than he was last time.

The next day found Addi in the same spot, working on more homework. Peter walked in after she had gotten settled and he grinned when he saw her sitting there. He threw himself behind the counter and whipped up a hot chocolate for her. Taking the Sharpie used for names, he wrote on the cup before practically vaulting over the display to give it to her.

“Do you have an inhaler? ‘Cause you just took my breath away,” Addi read out loud when Peter handed her the drink. He smiled widely, proud of that one.

“Did you get these off the internet? They’re terrible,” she remarked, taking a swallow from the cup.

Not losing his smile, Peter nodded. “The internet hasn’t steered me wrong yet,” he assured.

You’ll fall for them eventually, I just know it, he thought.

Addi snorted. “It did this time. Thanks for the cocoa though.” She brought her book closer to read, a clear sign of dismissal. Peter frowned as he walked slowly back to his station. He’d have to get better lines for tomorrow.

“Your lips look lonely; would they like to meet mine?” was on the next cup. Addi raised her eyebrows as she took the cup from him. “Are you really this desperate?”

Peter shrugged and smiled at her, but as she turned to sit down at what now was known as her table, the smile fell into a frown. That one was clever, he thought. He thought it’d get a laugh out of her at the very least, but that’s not even close to what happened. He tapped a pen against the counter as he thought. He’d just have to step up his game. Time to bring it to the next level.

Peter was determined the following day at work. It was sunny and welcoming, a perfect background, unlike the day they met. He had the best line yet and even if that didn’t work, he was going to flat out ask her on a date. He nodded to himself, going over the plan in his head. This one has to work.

Just then, the bell jangled and Peter’s head shot up, conditioned to the sound. Peter smiled when he saw that it was Addi, holding the door open for the girl behind her. And she’s nice, Peter thought dreamily.

The two girls approached the counter together and Peter frowned slightly. He hoped Addi would order after this new girl, otherwise his master plan would be ruined.

“Hello ladies,” he said smoothly, internally panicking as they stood together at the register.

“What can I get for you?”

“Peter,” Addi nodded at him. He jumped for joy inside; that was the first time she used his name!

“Danni, this is the guy I was telling you about.” Addi gestured from Peter to the girl next to her and back again. Peter could’ve cried out of happiness.

She talked about him to her friends! That had to mean something.

“Peter, this is Danni, my girlfriend,” Addi finished. Peter immediately felt like weeping in sadness. What? How? he thought. “Uh, nice to meet you,” he said numbly, taking Danni’s hand when she extended it.

Danni beamed at him. “Thanks for being so nice to Addi. I was gone this week and usually she’s so abrasive, she never makes acquaintances, let alone friends, and especially not when I’m not there to keep her in check.” Danni whispered the last part, winking at a dazed Peter. Addi hit Danni’s arm. “Hey,” she protested. Danni rolled her eyes and smiled at Peter again. Peter watched them interact through a haze. They smiled softly at each other and linked hands, whispering quietly. Trying to come back to himself, Peter shook his head and cleared his throat. “So, uh, do you guys want any cocoa or anything?”

Addi looked up sharply and shook her head. “This was just a social visit for the benefit of Danni. See you later.” Addi tugged on Danni’s hand, edging towards the door.

“Thanks again, Peter,” Danni called from the door, waving and smiling as she exited. Peter stared unseeing at the place they just vacated.

“What just happened?” he asked out loud, mindlessly going through the motions of cleaning the counter.

A co-worker happened to pass by and clapped him on the back. “Looks like you’ve been duped, man. We told you to stay away.”

Peter nodded, still dazed and confused. “I guess you were right.” The co-worker moved on, leaving Peter to wonder how he missed it.

As Addi and Danni left the shop and walked down the street in the sunlight, Danni burst into laughter. “That poor boy! He really thought he had a chance with you. Why did you give him hope?”

Addi shrugged and tugged Danni closer. “It was mostly for the free cocoa.” Danni raised an eyebrow at her girlfriend, who sighed. “He was nice. It was nice,” she admitted, looking down.

Danni leaned in and kissed Addi’s cheek. “Okay. Why didn’t you tell him you were at least dating someone though?”

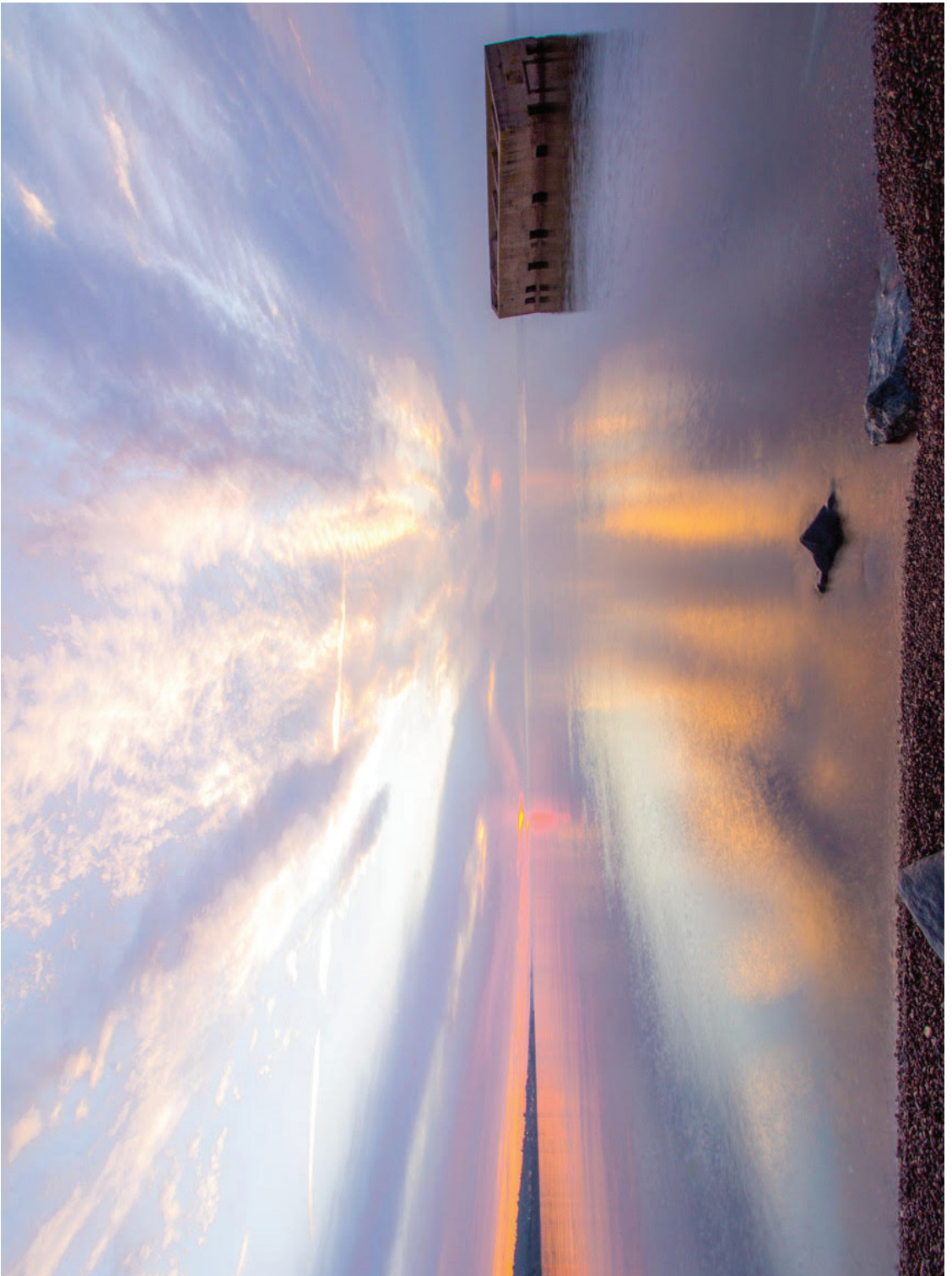
Addi shrugged, blushing from Danni’s kiss. “I thought he would stop if he knew.”

“You were lonely,” Danni cooed, grinning madly. “You missed me, didn’t you?” Addi rolled her eyes and pushed her gently. “Only your cocoa.”

~~ Rylan Fields ~~



@cody14anderson



# The Science of Change

I sat there entranced, singing along to the hymns I had heard since I was a little kid. As the piano played along with the chorus of voices, I barely had to glance at the words. When the music died down, the assigned speakers went up and read the selected verses for the day. Today was about being humble and kind. When it was time for the pastor to read his sermon, I listened intently. The story was about a man who helped out another, bringing him into his home for a drink, out of the hot, dry, desert wind. The stranger then thanked the man for showing him this kindness, and in exchange, enchanted a jar of his so he would have everlasting water. The pastor then explained that we should act like this man in our own lives. That if we were kind and help others, we were raising ourselves up to God.

After service, the congregation was invited downstairs for a potluck lunch. As usual, my mom brought macaroni and cheese, which was set out with the myriad other dishes. When I reached the bottom of the stairs, a stream of delectable smells hooked my nostrils, drawing me to the table of food. After navigating through the different dishes carefully—I was a bit of a picky eater—I finally found enough food to satisfy my growing hunger. My mom and I sat down next to my classmate from school and friend Emma Blom and her family. Then, our choir teacher Mrs. Neuman—Emma’s and my choir teacher at school—came over to sit by us with an excited look on her face.

“I’m glad both of you are here today! I have a proposition for you both,” she sat down across the table from us, sliding us two copies of some music.

“What is this for?” I asked, my curiosity piqued now, and I looked over at Emma, who shrugged but appeared just as intrigued.

“Since you’re both a lot more interested in actually singing in class at school, I thought you two might want to join Honors choir. We’ll be learning some more traditional songs, some are even partly in Latin, but I think you guys are up for the challenge,” she sat there with a large grin, like she already knew what we were going to say.

“This is awesome! I’d love to do it!” Emma chirped, a glow on her face.

“Same here! I’ve been wanting to do more traditional songs like these. To be honest, all the pop songs we’ve been doing have been getting a little boring,” I said, chuckling a little.

“Great! If you both can do it, we’ll most likely be meeting for Hon-

ors choir directly after your regular choir class. If that doesn't work, we can figure out a separate time. But I look forward to you two joining."

I walked into the choir room, sunlight streaming through the upper windows, lighting up the chairs with warmth as I take a seat with my other classmates. As class started up, I pulled out my black folder with my music and took out my music, and we began vocal warm-ups. As we sang, I feel a slight tickle on my inner thigh, and I look down to see what was causing it. I saw a hand, following it up the arm until I came face-to-face with Kole. Try as I might, I couldn't help but feel my cheeks beginning to flush, and I slapped his hand away.

"I told you to stop doing that," I mumbled, tired of his repeated attempts to mess with me.

"Aww, come on Joe, you know you enjoy it," he smirked mirthfully, and continued trying to reach for my leg. Having enough, I got up after we finished our next song, moving across the room. I gazed back over, worried he might start following me, but he just sat there, grinning. After class, I waited until everyone else was gone before talking to Mrs. Neuman.

"Hey Mrs. Neuman, do you think you could assign me another seat away from Kole? He keeps messing with me, and it's really starting to distract me from class." I stood there, a little uncomfortable and stops there, not wanting to mention exactly what he was doing.

"Of course you can, feel free to just sit over where you moved to today. I'll have a little talk with Kole."

I nodded and left, sighing with some relief, and ran to my locker, just wanting to forget what happened.



I had just finished my last class for the day, band. Having been able to shake off what had happened yesterday, I looked forward to this class immensely. I brought my triangle with that day; the one I had to buy myself since the ones the school provided had such poor-quality sticks with which to ring the triangles. We might as well have not played them at all, they were so quiet. The ringing of my new one was so clean compared the dull thud of the others that the band teacher had to ask me to not play it so loudly!

At any rate, I went to the newspaper club after classes got out and it was there that I met Jana. I sat down at my computer and the teacher, Mrs. Olson, had us designing our own simple websites. This was my first time making one, so I was looking over at other people's screens to see what in the world they were doing. I glanced over to my left and there was this rather tall girl with brown hair that went all the way down her back in two strong

braids, and she happened to be looking at my screen as well.

“You wouldn’t happen to know how to add another box here, would you?” she asked me, looking rather giddy and confused.

“Mmm, that’s something I was having trouble with as well,” I said, chuckling, and we asked Mrs. Olson how to add the box.

Over the next few weeks, we got to know each other a lot better, meeting each other at the newspaper club every Tuesday and Thursday, and even started hanging out during our lunch break. The next month, we both decided to join the theatre club being put on by one of our English teachers, Ms. Castellini. But it was really just a time during the week where we got to have fun doing things like watching movies, and doing arts and crafts. Jana and I even began to design our own board game. After this first meeting, Jana asked me if I’d ever seen Star Trek or Doctor Who. I shook my head in confusion.

“I’ve never even heard of them before, what are they about?”

“Ohhh boy! You’re in for a wild ride, old pal of mine!” she exclaimed, a smirk across her face. And that’s when I was introduced to two shows that completely changed my outlook on life. Growing up in the country and going to a small-town school, I had barely been exposed to the kind of ideas presented in them before. And it was also over these shows that Jana and I developed the strongest bond of friendship that I’ve ever had.



I walked into the locker room, sweating from a long game of dodgeball for gym class. God, I hate those guys, always having to cheat to win games. I slumped down onto the bench next to my gym locker, pulling out deodorant to cover up the activities of the day. Don’t look at them, don’t loo...I said to myself as I pulled out my dry clothes from earlier, wanting to leave as quickly as possible, feeling extremely uncomfortable and afraid of what might happen in the shower. As I turned the corner to the door, I happened to catch a glimpse of Walker as he was about to step into the shower. With no shirt on, I couldn’t help but look at his smooth chest and abdomen. As I tried to pull my eyes away, it was already too late, Walker having seen my gaze.

“Trying to sneak a peek eh? Well, the goods aren’t for you,” as he stepped into the shower.

My cheeks were on the verge of boiling at that point. I was thankful that I was wearing my jeans now instead of my gym shorts, and I tore down the hall.



Over the next couple of years, I learned how to control my outward feelings to others, trying my best to smile and make everyone happy. Thankfully, I at least had my friend Jana who I could be open with about my own feelings. At times, though, there were a few things that I felt best I kept to myself. Such as one time overhearing a couple of my uncles, both strict Catholics, talking about how atheists and homosexuals were ruining this country. In time, I would find out just how much those words really stung.

Jana and I continued to hang out, sharing stories, discussing various topics that ranged from science to magic to growing plants. We grew to know each other very well and I even met her brother Lloyd. He and I were in percussion together, and we played multiple games of chess in the back of the band room. That was mainly because the band teacher just had to keep picking music that had long stretches where there was barely any need for percussion. We eventually got to a point where all three of us were hanging out on quite a regular basis. I even started hanging out at their house.

I decided to bring with a bunch of my original Star Trek VHS tapes—when I had mentioned I was interested in Star Trek, my uncle Rex decided to gift me with his entire collection of tapes of the original series—along with a player to their house to watch with them. I was riding along with my mom until we reached their road. This was the first time I was actually going to be able to sleep over at Jana’s house, and I was very excited. We turned down the road, and I noticed a couple large fields and some deer running through, as well as a farmstead and a dilapidated old shack across the road. It was rather beautiful down there. The leaves were a deep emerald green, long stalks of wheat swaying in the breeze in open fields nestled between the trees. We kept heading down the road until we reached a T and took a right, their house hidden in a little alcove of trees. My mom dropped me off and I hugged her.

“Don’t get in too much trouble now,” My mom said with a be careful face. I chuckled and took my stuff out of the van.

“Don’t worry, Mom, we’ll be too busy watching Star Trek.”

I hurried up the steps, eager to hang out and as I knocked, I could hear barking from inside. When I stepped in, two large dogs bounded to the door and started licking my hand. I grinned and Jana’s mom Katherine came up, giving me a big hug.

“Ahhh! Jana, it’s Joe!” she said with a big grin.

“Would you like something to eat or drink? I could make some pop in the SodaStream, or there’s water. And maybe a Nutella schmear?”

“What’s that?” I asked, looking slightly confused.

“Oh! That’s the German word for spread. Like putting Nutella on toast.”

“Then I’d love one! And some pop too, please,” I said excitedly. As I headed over to the living room and Jana stood up, hugging me gleefully.

“You’re here! Well, you’ve met my mom and Lloyd. Here’s my dad, Chris!” She pointed over to the couch by the TV.

“Hey Joe, nice to meet you.” Chris said as he held out a hand, then eyed the VCR I brought.

“Ahh, I’ll help you set that up.” He helped me hook it up to their TV, then Jana, Lloyd and I skimmed through the myriad tapes, looking for one to start me off. “Mmm...Not this one, we don’t want him seeing Spock show emotion TOO early.” Jana remarked, chuckling. Lloyd rummaged through and came across Space Seed.

“Here we go. We’ll start him off by meeting Khan.”

That’s how the formally introduced me to the marvel that is Star Trek and is what drove my fascination for the stars. Star Trek inspired me to pursue astronomy, and I was eager to get my hands on any information I could while in school and began looking for Science Fiction books to read. That’s when Jana recommended the book Brave New World. She had just finished reading it on her own, not able to complete it in class.

“How come you weren’t able to finish it in class?” I asked Jana puzzled, having read an overview of the book, which I found fascinating.

“Ughhh...because apparently it’s offensive to Rhiannon’s religion, and she brought it up with her parents, who agreed. Now none of us are able to read the book in class,” she exclaimed, annoyed.

“What the hell?!” I looked to her and could feel her frustration. “Can’t Rhiannon just...request to read something different?”

“Apparently Ms. Castellini doesn’t want to cause a ruckus with the school.”

“That’s just messed up.”

“We really need to do something about this. But what can we do?”

“I’m sure we’ll think of something, we always do.”



I had been doing homework the night before and decided to peek ahead to see what chapter we were reading next in life science. I flipped through and my eyes lit up as I saw that it was going to be about evolution.

“Yesss! Finally!” I yelled happily. The next day I got to school eagerly anticipating Life Science and opened my book up to that chapter, giving

my attention to Mrs. Lester.

“Hello class. Today, we would be studying the next chapter. But personally, the idea that humans evolved from monkeys is offensive to my beliefs, so we’re just going to skip to the next chapter.”

My heart sank. I had really been looking forward to this chapter. After class ended, I didn’t really feel sad anymore. It had started turning into a dull anger. Was that even legal? Can she skip a chapter as important to life science as evolution? It was at that moment I really began to question the religion I had grown up with. Is religion really as honest and good as people say? Why is it pushing its way into things it has nothing to do with?

I headed home steaming, my day now completely ruined.

I slowly shuffled into school the next day with my usual cheery attitude, pulling my books out of my locker, knowing this was going to be a longer day than most. As expected, the day dragged on through my first few morning classes, with me finding myself gazing out the classroom windows constantly. Luckily, there wasn’t much for homework today, so I was able to slip by, my behavior largely unnoticed by anyone.

Finally, lunch time rolls around and my spirit was lifted a bit as I saw the school was offering one of its better meals—chicken nuggets and seasoned rice—which I took gladly, smiling at the lunch ladies as I walked to my usual table. I sighed with an air of relief. No one saw fit to bother me as I sat in isolation, one of my few moments of peace.

After I finished my food, I headed over to the hallway right outside the high-school gym, looking forward to my daily conversation with Jana. My face lit up as she is indeed in her usual spot, sitting in the corner with the sun shining through the window with the lunch she brought from home. As I took a seat next to her, I sigh, slumping up against the window.

“Heyyy, I know that look. Tell me what happened,” she said, turning to look directly at me, her face scrunched up a bit.

I nod and chuckle a little, “Yeah, you got me. I’m actually glad I can talk to you about this, it’s been bothering me since yesterday. So, you know Mrs. Lester, right?”

“Yup, Lloyd and I know her pretty well. What did she do this time?”

“Well, a couple of days ago, I was reading ahead to see what we were going to be learning about the next day. And when I saw it was the chapter on evolution, I got really excited. I had been looking forward to it for quite a while. So, I we start life science yesterday, and she blatantly tells us that we’re skipping that chapter because of her religious beliefs, saying that she didn’t believe in evolution. I mean, really? You’re a LIFE science teacher, and you skip the chapter about EVOLUTION?”

By this time, my sulking demeanor had drained away, giving rise to some anger and frustration and Jana caught on quick.

“That’s horrible! You know what, I just learned about something like this in my history class. Yup, that’s it, come on Joe, I’m introducing you to Mrs. Casserberg.”

We didn’t go very far, with Mrs. Casserberg’s room being a few rooms down the hallway. The door was open and Jana walked right in, with me following right behind her. I was intrigued as I stepped inside, looking at all the posters on the walls, half of which were in French.

The room was fairly small itself, with only about 30 desks in total, and barely any windows. For some reason though, it still felt comfortable. I turned around to my right and was amazed again to see a woman with fire-red hair and a baby-blue blouse on, and little animals on her socks. She looked just like Ms. Frizzle! I thought to myself as Jana begins introducing me.

“Hey Mrs. Casserberg! This is my friend Joe. Joe, this is my crazy red-headed French and History teacher.”

She chuckled with a hearty air, holding out a hand to me, “It’s nice to meet you Joe, Jana’s talked about you a lot. Sounds like you’d fit in very well in my classes. Now, Jana was mentioning that you had a question?”

“Nice to meet you as well. And yes, I um...well, it’s about my Life Science teacher, Mrs. Lester. Yesterday, we were supposed to learn about evolution and she said that we were skipping that whole chapter because it was against her religious beliefs. I had been wondering if that’s even allowed.

She got this curious look on her face. Something akin to understanding mixed with some strong passion, and I could swear, I almost saw flames in her eyes.

“I’m glad you brought this to my attention, Joe. Honestly, I have been hearing rumors about that for some time now, but no students have yet come forward to say she was actually doing that. Now we might be able to do something about it,” she said as she plopped back down into her seat, starting to rummage through her papers, until she pulled out a history textbook and some paper. She skimmed through the chapters and endless pages until she came to the section about religion in schools. “Here, take this, and start writing down exactly what happened in your class yesterday and how you think it relates to the law case in this book. Bring it back when you’re finished and I’ll help you revise it. We’ll get it sorted out, Joe, don’t you worry.”

I happily took them and started walking back out with Jana. “Thanks

for your help, Mrs. Casserberg!”

“Anytime, you two.”



With Jana’s help, I finally finished writing my letter, and brought it back in to Mrs. Casserberg.

“This is already looking pretty good. I would cite a couple sources to make it seem more credible. Here, I’ve already looked up a couple that you can use.” She pulled out a list of possible sources and marked what to add on the letter, handing it back for me to rewrite. “When you’ve finished that, I’ll type it up for you and we can mail it.”

“Sounds good to me.” I found a desk and sat down, revising my letter, adding in the citations, and added a little heartfelt message on the bottom for added emphasis and I handed it back to her.

“That should do it, Joe. Come back during lunch, and I’ll have this letter typed up. Then we can both send a copy to the school district.” I left feeling somewhat invigorated. Is this actually happening? Am I finally doing something useful? I headed off for the rest of my classes, now waiting patiently to see of anything would change.



After that incident, there was a definite shift in the atmosphere at school. Some teachers were being more open about certain subjects, especially about the recent discussions about gay marriage that had been going around on the news. A lot of their rooms had stickers on now that said Safe Space, meaning students were safe to be and talk about who they are in them. One day, I noticed that my sister had been going to Mrs. Olson’s—our school’s art teacher and one of our camp directors during the summer—room more than usual afterschool, and I decided to ask her what she was going for.

“Oh, I’m going to this GSA program. It’s pretty fun, we talk about social issues and events we’re planning on doing during school.”

“What does GSA stand for?”

“It stands for Gay Straight Alliance. Gosh Joe, I thought you already knew that,” she said with a snide smirk on her face. I stuck my tongue out at her and rolled my eyes.

“Yeah, yeah, you’re really funny, Amber. But I think I’ll join you this time.”

We both headed to Mrs. Olson’s room and sat down. I was a little uneasy, not quite knowing what to expect here. But as conversations started

up, I began to realize that the people here were a lot more open with who they were and very passionate about lots of social issues. I went back a lot over the school year to absorb all the info I could, and I was starting to feel more and more like I was trying to hide something about myself, old feelings that were starting to resurface that I had buried deep in my memories. I took a deep breath and straightened up, resolved to tell my friends at GSA.



The day had come. I prepared myself as best I could, practicing in front of the mirror. I had taken a long shower the night before, to wash off the bad memories that had popped up again, and to feel as fresh as possible for today. With my Doctor Who t-shirt on and an air of nervous confidence, I headed to school.

After classes ended, I walked out to the parking lot and greeted Jana as she pulled up. I had invited her to come to GSA tonight, under a ruse that there was going to be a big discussion about marriage equality. I was glad she was able to make it.

“I’m so glad you’re here today, Jana. I know you have a busy schedule.”

“Of course! You know I love hanging out with you!”

Smiling, I walked with her to Mrs. Olson’s room where everyone was getting situated.

After she sat down, I stood up and went to the front of the room. Everyone was silent, not expecting anything particularly special today.

“I know this wasn’t planned or anything, b-but I think I feel comfortable enough telling all of you,” I took a deep breath, swaying a little to alleviate my nervousness, “I’ve been thinking about it a lot recently, and being a part of this group has opened my eyes to things I haven’t thought about in a long time. I’ve come to the realization that I’m gay. I’ve thought at first that my lack of any romantic interests was solely because of school. And for the most part, it has been. But being able to learn all about this community and how much support has already been shown in this school, I feel more comfortable with who I am.” The room almost exploded, not with shouts, but with smiles from everyone there. Their smiles formed a chorus that swelled and finally waned with that final pure chiming note of a triangle. Jana came up and gave me a big hug. For the first time in my life, I felt like I had complete control, that I knew my destiny, and I reveled in life’s warm embrace.

~~ Joseph Schwartz ~~

## The Long Road Home

Ren pressed her forehead against the cool glass of the bus window and watched the farmland roll by in the fading light, the outlines of withered corn stalks drifting listlessly in the winter air. She didn't know a lot about farming, except for what she had learned from her father's tales of working the family farm when he was a boy. But he had long been estranged from his parents, cut off emotionally and financially for reasons he refused to speak of. She had never met them – did not even know if they were still alive – only that they had moved to Seattle the summer she turned nine.

She decided there wasn't much she would miss about Iowa and turned to her friend in the seat beside her. Meg was snoring quietly with her mouth open. She snapped a quick photo to taunt her with later and turned her gaze back to the scenery rushing by. She stared out over the dark fields, occasionally seeing a light in the distance, a beacon of home. She wondered at the lives of the people behind those lights – what they were doing. Were they sitting down to a meal together? Were they happy or sad, or, like her, neither – just going through the motions of a life? She promised herself things were going to be different in the next town and believed it this time.

\* \* \* \* \*

Shit. I can't believe we're doing this Megs.

Me neither – it's about damn time, though. I'm sick of the cornfields and pig farms. The two young women had gathered their belongings from beneath the bus and now walked quickly down the nearly deserted street, heels clicking on pavement. Neon billboards and bar signs assaulted their senses, disorientating them. Ren pulled up the collar on her battered coat and shivered. Are you sure we're going the right way? What if we missed the street?

Just chill, we haven't gotten to 1st yet. I got good directions from the bus driver. She stopped and pulled out her pack of smokes, felt for her lighter, while her friend shifted her weight nervously from foot to foot, watching her fumble with it, her fingers already becoming numb in the cold. Finally she got it lit and inhaled deeply, sending lazy plumes of smoke up into the still night air. Just a little farther, baby girl.

Ren rolled her eyes at her friend as she fitted her backpack more snugly. A block later, they reached First Street and turned onto it. Just ahead, the glaring lights of the St. Paul train station came into view. They followed

the signs for the ticket counter and got into line. While they were waiting, they scanned the list of Arrivals and Departures.

There is a train leaving for New York in half an hour – pretty sure we can make that one. C'mon Megs. We agreed we were going to Seattle.

No, you agreed. I want to go to New York. The harsh lighting spilled across her face, making her appear paler, ghostlike beneath her streaked blonde tresses. My cousin Jimmy said he'd set us up with jobs and a place to crash until we got on our feet. He says you're pretty enough.

Pretty enough? Ren looked down at the sidewalk.

Yeah, for dancing. I sent him your picture. They have standards at his club, you know.

No dogs allowed. She laughed, her voice gravelly in her throat. Though he said you look like you could lose a few pounds. I got a great diet from one of the girls at work.

Ren shook her head angrily and felt the room going dim around her. No. I can't. I am not going to be like my mother. You said you were going to quit dancing. We were going to open a photography studio.

Meg laughed. Don't be such a drama queen, it's good money – pays way better than failing at photography.

I can't believe it. We've been planning this for more than a year.

No – you've been planning – I just stood back and watched. Sorry, babe – I'm going to make my fortune in the Big Apple. Gonna see my name in lights someday. You're either coming with me or you ain't.

Aren't, Ren corrected. The word is aren't.

You always did think you were better than me, even in high school. Fine. Go to Seattle. I'm going to New York. They were now at the head of the line. She turned to the clerk at the counter and slid her money beneath the window. New York. One ticket.

Ren glanced at the train schedule tacked on the wall. Her eyes followed the list of destination cities. Seattle: 11:45 PM. They were already boarding. She turned to Meg, pleading with her eyes, but her friend was already looking toward her own future.

Sorry, baby girl, I'm on my way to fame and fortune. You get tired of all that rain, you look me up. Good luck with the photography thing. She picked up her bag and started for the boarding platform. Ren started to follow, but the security guard stopped her, grabbing her arm firmly.

I'm sorry, miss, but I need to see your ticket before you may enter the platform. Ren stopped. She didn't have a ticket. Time seemed to freeze.

She heard the loudspeaker announce the departure for the Seattle 409 train and felt defeated. Their argument had cost her the train, and the

next one wasn't for another two days. They had ridden the Greyhound up from Iowa to catch a train in St Paul. She had nowhere left to go. She slumped on one of the benches in the train station. This place was open 24 hours, so maybe she could just hang here. Sometime around 1:34 AM, she dozed off on the bench. She was dreaming of the mountains of Seattle when she was jolted awake by someone shaking her roughly.

Miss? Miss? I'm sorry but you can't stay here. This here's a train station, not a hotel. But I'm going to Seattle. I-I have no place to go until then.

Do you have a ticket? Maybe I can look the other way if you have a ticket, miss.

No. Not yet – I – was going to buy a ticket. I'll do that right now. Ren approached the ticket counter and reached for the wad of bills stashed in her cowboy boot. How much for the train to Seattle leaving on Friday? What do you mean 'sold out'? It can't be sold out - I'm supposed to go there!

I'm sorry miss, but that train's completely full. Next one leaves on Wednesday and there are five coach seats left. Do you want a ticket for that train?

Ren hung her head dejectedly. She couldn't possibly live at the station for another week. I'll think about it. She looked at the departure board again. There was a train going to New York on Friday. No, I can't possibly, she said to no one in particular. She picked up her backpack and headed to the rest room. Sitting in the stall, she leaned back and closed her eyes and tried to think. If she used her money for a motel room here, she'd be short when she got to Seattle. She couldn't live at the train station and January in St. Paul was not exactly camper- friendly. She sighed and opened her eyes. On the back of the stall was a brightly colored poster of a beautiful sunset and a family sitting around a campfire eating S'mores. In the corner of the ad was the outline of a bucking horse and the words That's WY. Catchy. She stared at the scene more closely. Wyoming.

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There were no changes in the train schedule. Seattle was still sold out. She sighed to herself and exited through the rotating doors. Leaving the train station she walked alone down First Street. It was empty and quiet this early in the morning. Thick, fat flakes of snow fell from above and clung to her jacket and backpack. She shivered, more from fear and exhaustion than the cold. She was no stranger to either of them. Ever since her dad died less than a year ago, she'd been unmoored, lost. It's not that they'd had that close of a relationship – he was more comfortable with a bottle of whiskey than he'd been with her – but he was the only family she'd had.

His drinking problem had been his undoing in the end. Before he destroyed his liver, he killed himself, driving off the road in a drunken stupor at 80 mph, flipping his black Smokey and the Bandit Trans-Am three times before being ejected from it. He hadn't bothered with a last will and testament and his two siblings had fought bitterly over the few possessions he did have: a battered 1987 GMC pickup, a dingy house mortgaged for more than it was worth, a Morgan silver dollar coin collection and a 64 Remington shotgun with a badly scarred stock. No one bothered with his only daughter.

Old enough to fend for herself, she'd been forced out when the bank took the house on Oak Street. She'd moved in with Meg and her then-boyfriend, sleeping on a couch in their dark basement that reeked of cat piss and damp cement. That's when she'd hatched the plan to move to Seattle. Nothing held her anymore in Des Moines. When Meg threw her boyfriend out for cheating, the two struggled with paying rent and making ends meet. Running out of options, they'd hocked anything of value and caught the Greyhound to St. Paul where they were going to hook up with the train that would take them to Seattle.

She didn't know how long she'd been walking, alone with her thoughts, when the lights of a 24-hour café caught her attention. Suddenly she was ravenous. She'd been dreaming about a greasy cheeseburger and fries since she got to this dreary town. The place was nearly empty, so she let herself in and slipped into a booth near the door. A waitress with hot pink hair and several piercings in her lip and nose approached the table reluctantly with a pot of coffee and a menu. They exchanged half-hearted pleasantries, both women wishing they were somewhere else. After ordering her burger, she turned to the window and watched the falling snow and contemplated her next move.

Across the street, a black Dodge Charger had pulled into a No Parking Zone, plumes of smoke spilling out from its dual tailpipes. A man had gotten out of the driver's side and gone around to the passenger. Ren couldn't see that side of the car, but sensed movement through the glass.

The man reappeared, dragging a petite brunette by the arm. Obviously in the middle of heated argument, they stopped beside the front fender of the car while the man gestured wildly. The slender woman stood miserably in the cold with arms crossed and head hanging down. He gave her a hard shove and she fell, her feet slipping out from beneath her. Ren was running and out the door before she had time to think, crossing the street without looking, focused on the small form of the woman, still down, with the man towering above her.

That's what you get bitch! No one leaves me. No one – you hear? NO

one. Quit your crying. You're lucky that's all I did to you. And forget about all your shit at my place. It's mine now. You want to leave? Fine. Good riddance. You leave without a damn thing.

The woman was sobbing uncontrollably and trying to rise to her feet when the man kicked her and she fell back onto the street. Ren's blood boiled and the .38 she carried strapped beneath her jacket was in her hand without her realizing it, the grip cold against the palm of her hand. She drew the hammer back with an audible click, a sound that made the man freeze.

That's right, asshole, I'm in charge now, so you just step away from her, nice and slow like. Honey are you alright? The woman nodded and got to her feet, shaking. Why don't you get into your car while I take care of this piece of shit?

The man sneered at her. What are going to do, Nancy Drew? Shoot me?

Don't tempt me, you sonofabitch. This has been one fucked up day - all I need is a reason - just one tiny reason, and I pull the trigger on your sorry ass. Self-defense. No one will even question it. She looked over to the woman in the passenger seat and told her to call the cops. When she looked back at the man, he was fleeing like the coward he was. She put away the gun and opened the car door. Do you want to go to the police? I can take you there.

No. I don't want the police involved. Now that she was up close, she could see the woman was painfully young, more like a child than anything. Th-Thank you, she stuttered. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't come along. Can you drive me to my mom's place?

Sure. I'm Ren, by the way - what's your name? Maddie? That's a pretty name. Can you give me directions? I'm not from around here.

As they drove the empty streets of St. Paul, Maddie chatted easily with Ren about her life and aspirations. She was going to be a veterinarian because she loved dogs. She waved her hands animatedly while she spoke. What about you? What do you do?

I'm a photographer in Wyoming, she said without thinking, without realizing that was where she was going. Relief washed over her as she said the words. A good a place as any to start her new life.

I hear Wyoming is beautiful. Well here's my stop. Thanks again for all you did for me.

You're welcome. They both got out of the car and hugged. Here's your keys.

Oh no it's not my car.

Ren froze. What do you mean? I thought it was yours – you didn't say anything – I – um – shit! What do we do now?

Maddie giggled. I guess it was meant to be your car. Greg clearly left it to you when ran for his worthless life. The title's in the glovebox – he was going to trade it in on a new Ram truck tomorrow after work. Pretty funny how he had me fill it out for him ahead of time because he wasn't smart enough to do it himself. Even signed it. She winked and turned and walked away, leaving Ren standing with her mouth open.

Her heart hammered in her chest as she contemplated this new development. She could just leave the car there with the keys in it. But how was she going to get back to the train station? She eyed the muscular black Charger and grinned. Fuck the train station, she thought. I'm traveling to Wyoming in style. But first, a cheeseburger and fries.

Back behind the wheel, she accelerated a little too quickly and felt the sinuous movement of the car as the rear end slipped out to the left, and then the right side of the empty street. Ren felt a rush of adrenaline and something else, something new. Freedom. As she followed the road signs for I-94 and then 12 west, the sky began to lighten. She caught a glimpse of herself in the rear view mirror with the rising sun behind her, outlining her face and turning her hair to gold. Her thoughts turned again to her dad and how much he would have admired this car and a chance at a road trip. She remembered how, as a girl, she had ridden with him in the semi-truck when his job took him far from home. She had marveled at the land speeding by as he made up stories about the people who lived on the other side of the window glass. In spite of his character flaws, she knew he had loved her and raised her the best way he knew how. Stepping on the gas pedal, she felt the Charger surge ahead with satisfaction as she left the big city behind her for good.

~~ Marcia Hage ~~

## Penny Dawson's Day Off

I hovered over the silent bed where my mother once exhaled hot air into the void of life. She now laid still. I was not the crying type and as I loosely dangled the collared necklace I had removed from her throbbless neck I became entranced in the dull care peripheral details of my own life, and I cremated my love and devotion for mother the instant I left her bedside.

The sun was warm and shiny on my pale, cold skin. I basked in the ensemble of ideas that flourished in my head now that my mother was dead. I was removed from my wealthy heiress moniker and adopted the rightful title of property owner. The only thing I lacked presently was a mate. I had recently parted ways rather irrepressibly from my first and only love, Drew. He was currently swimming in a sea of promiscuous fish, as opposed to floundering as the pilot fish he was, swimming in the shadow of my fear-some dorsal fin.

I felt like walking and told my driver to go home, that I would call him if I needed him. I was on the prowl and felt the ground would provide me proper momentum in pursuit of my fresh love. My mother's hospital was not far from the epicenter of the city and there were many men frolicking about that I could gaggle my eyes at. Among the future prospects I came into cornea connect with, most were businessmen leaving their place of industry for a cool retirement to their boring family lives. Some were strolling leisurely as I was, of course, more aimlessly, some draping their arm around another I wished I were, while some were trying to reach out at the said arm of another for an opportunity to eat a meal. Of the hungry wretched souls I found perusing the streets as the street rats they were, panhandling for money or diving face first into the sharp-edged rusty trash cans of their stomach's desires, I stumbled upon a handsome young man, no older than twenty by the cut of him, covered in three days' worth of urchin make-up and fourteen days' worth of unbearable stench. But he was easy to look at, with the jawline of a young and lost Rob Lowe and the skin of a man who never missed a day in the sun. Not sun-beaten, but sun-beloved.

"Hi, can I help you?" I asked as the young homeless man was scavenging for his next meal.

"I can do just fine for myself thank you very much," said the man.

"What is your name?" I said.

"Why?" he asked.

“Because I think you are gorgeous and a man who looks the way you do does not need his skin turned to leather before he is twenty-five. And you seem like a nice young fellow in need of some assistance.” The man smirked.

“I do, do I?” said the man. “Well thank you very much, but I am here by choice,”

“I understand...what’s your name?” I asked.

“Umm...it’s Hank,” he said. “Hank LaFeve”.

“Well it’s an honor to meet you Mr. Hank LaFeve, I am Penelope Dawson, but you can call me Penny,” I said with a smile.

“Okay...,” he mumbled, continuing to focus on the leftover chicken that was tossed out by the southern fried chicken spot around the corner.

I was sizing him up extensively now and begin to lust for him uncontrollably. Thinking of my mother’s recent demise made me incredibly hungry for sex and my appetite was unbearable at this point. I thought, how will I convince this man to come home with me? It should be fairly simple as he is a homeless man and most certainly in desperation for respite from this maddening Phoenix heat. He is a street rat, a beautiful one at that, but a street rat nonetheless. I can lure him in with food and the prospect of soft linen as opposed to concrete and newspaper he is probably grown fond of. I can feed him, get my jollies and put a foot up his ass before the night swallows us.

“Well, I have food at my house...if you’d prefer to eat fresh food from a fridge,” I said as I gained no acknowledgment from him. “Or we could just order in, whatever you prefer. You could take a shower there too if you’d like. I was even thinking of throwing a party. Do you like parties?”

“A party huh?” said Hank. “A party could be eventful...I’m in, I guess.”

“Great!” I said. “Well, I guess we could walk around for a little bit ‘till my driver can come and get us.”

“Hah, you have a driver, how delightful,” he said.

I paid no mind to his comment and proceeded to walk slightly in front of him. He was my dog and I was about to throw him a bone. What a sarcastic little fucker. “How delightful?” When is the last time you experienced any delight? He was so cute though.

We walked around the city for what seemed to be forever, dragging Hank’s dripping frame around like a panting dog on the verge of keeling over. He didn’t say much, a few observations of the dry brush and the birds that nestled throughout the parched nature holes of our city. Then the driver pulled up on my dropped pin.

He floated around my new house like a dancer, more balletic than our merciless walk around the Miami white skyscrapers of our plagiaristic town. Although, it did seem to be movement more inherent in a burglar of the cat variety. I had been here before. I was just happy to get out of the heat and away from my mother's cold skin.

"Want to take a shower?" I said.

"Sure, where's the head?" asked Hank.

"Under the grand staircase by the entryway, on the left side," I replied.

"Oh, you mean the double bridal," he said smiling and walking in the direction of the large downstairs bathroom.

"Yes, the double bridal," I said with a sneer. "I will see if there is anything that Lillian can whip up for us. In the meantime, have yourself a well-deserved rinse. I will have Lillian bring you down a set of trunks. You can meet me out back by the pool, you will see it beyond the glass back-doors. I am going to take a dip and cool off. I'll have Lillian concoct us up a couple of cocktails and we shall toast to our new found acquaintance."

"I don't drink," he shouted from inside the bathroom.

"Well, then I shall drink for you!" I said, directing Lillian as I instructed while heading for the sunlit deck.

"We only have beer," said Lillian.

"That will do just fine," I said.

He was quite the quick showerer, even though he was in serious need of a long scrubbing. I should have been in there with him. I could have painted him white with the cleansing soap that would soothe his young lonely soul, but I did not want to come on too strong and startle him. This was more appropriate.

"Umm, hello," said Hank.

"Hey," I said back.

"These fit pretty good," he said. "Are these modern?"

"Yeah they do," I said. "And, they are now."

God, he looked great in Drew's old jams. Drew was really into 1980's fashion. The biggest Ferris Bueller dick-rider there ever was and I did not miss it one bit, especially with this fine slice of beefcake I had right in front of me. Drew was more Cameron now. Hank didn't even notice until he jumped inside.

"Oh...ugh, I didn't realize you were inviting me to your birthday party," he said.

What a clever young boy.

"You know, you're not so dumb for a lost little street rat," I said.

"I told you, I'm here by choice," he said.

"I'm sure you are," I said, swimming over in a wake of lust that seemed to swell up near the rose bloom crotch of Drew's jams. "So, you hungry?"

"I could eat," he said.

"Later," I said.

He smiled and then proceeded to begin fucking me. There was very little kissing, just as I had hoped. Well, I will admit I was a little surprised when he didn't make it more of a priority, but I paid it no mind and continued to make him. The waves of the pool were squalling similar to when an earthquake strikes the hills of California and Lillian watched from behind the glass doors like Drew's dog used to do at the edge of our bed. The neighbors never minded, plus the property was so wide and elevated that the noise did not reverberate too far. I threw ragers here. Well done new lover of mine, I may just have to keep you around.

It did not last long, such is the reality for a pent-up and desperate little street urchin, but we were both able to reach ours and I was craving a smoke. The surface was returning to a calm.

"Lillian, can you bring my cigarettes?" I yelled.

"Wooh!" said Hank. "I have worked up quite an appetite."

"You deserve it baby boy," I said, a confident grin exposing my satisfaction. I felt like my father.

"You think your maid has any food prepared?" he asked.

"Prepared?" I said.

"Yes. I told you, it is my choice," Hank said.

"Yeah, I'm sure she does have some food 'prepared', let me just holler for her," I said.

"You know, I am quite educated," he said.

Lillian proceeded to set out a tray of tooth-picked BLT sandwiches she had so briskly thrown together for us in a matter of minutes. I mean... minutes. There were fresh guacamole and chips, pickles and an iced bucket of White Russian Imperial Stout to complete the best after sex pick me up. But first, my pack. She brought them over to me.

"You know, you shouldn't smoke cigarettes," Hank said.

"I don't," I replied.

The Marlboro 100's pack was a simple cover up to keep Lillian from knowing I had weed in the house and it never seemed like any joints went missing from it. She was probably too stupid to even notice the smell.

"You know, Miss Penelope, you should really not smoke cigarettes," she would say.

I rested my arms out to the side on the deck of the pool as I fluttered my feet in the water and created my perfect smoking ambiance. There was no wind in the air.

“Well, have fun with that,” said Hank. “I’m gonna’ go eat now.”

“You don’t want any?” I said.

“Nah, I’m good,” he said. “But hey, that’s my choice, I’ll just have to live with missing out.”

Hank proceeded to walk towards the patio table to pick at the lunch tray and cold pail of beers. I’m sure this was going to be the first beer he had sucked down in a while. I’m sure he was a drinker. He took one last arching glance at me as I began to light my joint.

“I think I’ll just eat inside with Lillian,” he said. “It’s just too damn hot out here and you got me all hot and bothered.”

I nodded subtly and began to puff away the memories of my past life. They meant nothing to me. The sweet aroma and sensation that sparkled in my chest were magnified by the light crowned upon my shaved head, and my mind was focused now. I was content, satisfied and ready to maximize the potential of my independent life. But first, let me not waste this joint by contemplating what new and exciting adventures await. Relaxed focus.

I was only a quarter of the way done when my concentration was disrupted. A loud clang came from inside the house. The sound of dishes falling or breaking, I think. I didn’t even turn my head to acknowledge what happened.

“C’mon, Lillian!” I yelled at the sky, my arms still draped on the deck. “Haven’t you broken enough dishes already?” I earned no response.

About twenty minutes after the crashing sound I had finished smoking my translucent paper and proceeded to swathe myself in towels. The air was dry, but I instantly lost my oasis sensation. The deck was sweltering and my feet began to burn. I had begun to sweat and was only out of the water for two minutes. I will eat inside as well, I thought. I am so hungry.

Upon entering the cool abode of my new estate and sliding the glass door shut, gliding in a daze of afterglow sex and an intense high equaled to witnessing God for the first time, I noticed how still and soundless the house was.

“Hank?” I said, hoping to hear him crunching or singing away to the tune of his own simple pleasures. There was no response.

He was not in the kitchen. I traversed around the marble island where Hank had placed the tray of sandwiches and beer. All of the beers were gone, but a handful of sandwiches were left. He must have only eaten

one. The guacamole was not even dipped into. As I circled around the spread I noticed dark hair smashed up against the tiling of the floor and the edge of the kitchen island. Lillian was passed out on the ground.

“One too many cervezas there, huh Miss Lillian?” I said, flailing her arm up and down, laughing while trying to get a response out of her. She began to mumble incoherently.

“What was that, Lillian?” I asked.

“He...,” she said. “He did this to me.”

I was shocked, but not in total disbelief.

“Well are you sure, Lillian?” I said. “Where is he by the way? A quick rendezvous to the bathroom again.”

“He punched me, Miss Penelope, I swear to it,” she said. “The man hit me.”

It turned out that Hank had the cruelest intentions of all. Not only did he proceed to shamelessly bludgeon my sweet, old, illegal maid, but he also managed in the short, allotted twenty minute timeframe to find my dead mother’s extensive stash of jewelry, crack open her rinky-dink safe and speed off with her 1961 Ferrari 250 GT SWB California Spider, while also making me in the process. There were shards of tomato and lettuce all over the floors leading to my mother’s bedroom, a trail marking a path to his true objective. Mine was in my soaked panties.

Turns out, he was a bigger fan of Ferris than Drew ever was. Turns out, there was no Hank LeFevé in Phoenix. It wasn’t my jewelry, my cash or my car and I was honestly too high to care. He can keep them.

“Hahahahaha. Just don’t crash it you filthy street rat!” I exclaimed. “Get up you old slut!”

~~ Benjamin Kelly Lockwood ~~

# The Forest of Fear

“Look out, Jack!” Marie screams, gripping the arms of the passenger seat. Severed from my car-induced daydream, I bolt upright, bracing for an impact.

“Chill out! It’s just a dumb bird, you psycho.” Jack veers to the left anyway, avoiding the stubborn crow that refuses to move from the narrow muddy road. Around the corner appears a fancy black truck, speeding toward us and forcing Jack to immediately swerve out of the left lane. The two girls sharing the backseat with me are thrown to the left, squishing me against the car door. I hear a whoosh of air and deep rumblings of the vehicle as it charges past, inches from the side of our small Toyota.

“Seriously, Jack, what are you doing?” says the girl sitting next to me, someone whose name I’ve entirely forgotten.

Jack doesn’t reply. He turns to give Marie a playful death stare and then focuses on the road, fingers tapping the steering wheel. Marie takes a shivering exhale and crosses her arms.

The other girl in the back, whose name I think is Emma, glances over at me. “Are you okay, Jason?”

I nod, offering a quick smile and running a hand through my short dark hair. My mouth opens to ask her the same, but I stop when I see that she has already shifted her attention to her phone.

The crow has finally decided to take off, I notice. It’s gliding at the level of my car window, and it is so close I can make out its beady eyes. I start to say something but Jack is intently studying the road up ahead and everyone else is on their phones. Feeling paranoid, I watch as it flies upward, out of view.

After a few minutes we reach the falls, or more accurately, the parking lot of the falls. We still have some hiking to do to get there. The waterfall we’re out to see has some kind of name, but I haven’t bothered to ask what it is. We’re just a group of college students pushing aside our weekend homework so that we can enjoy the weather now that winter is practically over. Nobody studies until Sunday night, anyway. I know Jack pretty well, but the others are barely acquaintances. He is the organizer of this expedition, gathering me and some of his friends from the girls soccer team.

Jack is the only guy I really hang out with and girls mostly ignore me. I’m short, scrawny, and nerdy, not necessarily what most women find attractive. Jack, on the other hand, is a confident, sandy-haired soccer player

who girls adore. When it's only us two, we play videogames or kick a soccer ball around. However, in a group setting he becomes the center of attention and usually behaves like I'm not around. Of course, I don't really blame him because I'm easy to forget.

Admittedly, I'm on edge after the close call on the road and the encounter with the spooky bird. On top of that, Marie keeps going on about the stories she's heard about the area.

"I'm so glad we didn't come here at night! Legend says that the forest is filled with evil ghost animals that prowl around in the dark. That's so scary!" she chirps, hopping out of the car.

Jack seems fully recovered from the near-accident. "Remember that time at soccer camp when we pranked the girls with fake ghost noises?"

"Oh my God, Jack, that was so mean!" Marie scolds, laughing. Everyone begins excitedly chatting about that one year at soccer camp, so I am naturally pushed aside.

I take up the back of the single-file line as the five of us carefully navigate the sloppy trail bordered by rotting stumps, leaning birches, and yellow undergrowth. The constant noise of falling water can be heard in the distance. It's 50 degrees and sunny; a pleasant day for a hike. The girls snap pictures and Jack forges ahead, occasionally testing his parkour skills by jumping from stump to stump. I scan the trees for wildlife or birds, but I see nothing. If that crow is around, it isn't letting itself become visible.

Jack reaches the falls first. "A bit underwhelming, don't you think?" he says.

"A waterfall is a waterfall," the girl I don't know replies. She motions for Emma to come and take a picture of her posing with the falls cascading behind her.

The water gushes from a cliff twenty feet in the air, splashes as it bounces off outcroppings of rock, then lands in the sandy pool below. I agree, it's pretty much a typical waterfall. Ice still clings to the cliff face, but it looks like chunks are breaking off and floating on top of the shallow stream that snakes away from the falls.

Everyone busies themselves taking selfies, hopping across rocks set in the water, and climbing the cliff face. None of that looks especially fun to me. I spot a trail partly hidden by bare tree branches that follows the rushing stream. Leaving the sound of laughter and gleeful shouts behind, I push aside the trees and decide that I will do some exploring on my own. As I walk, I allow myself the delicious taste of self-pity. I will never fit in and I will always be a loner, able to slip away without anyone caring.

It makes no sense to think these things, obviously people like me enough to invite me to go waterfalling or whatever it's called. But it feels good sometimes, wallowing in sadness and the impression that the world has never been on my side. I can pretend that I'm free from the responsibility over my own social life. As I trudge farther from the falls, the path still hugging the bank of the clear, rippling water, all becomes quiet.

The trees have grown thicker, their spidery dead branches reaching out to choke out any signs of life. I'm forced to watch my feet so I don't trip on the tangle of roots invading the path in many spots. Clouds conceal the sun, even though the sky had been bright blue and clear minutes ago. The gloomy, lifeless atmosphere complements my dark thoughts and probes me to sink deeper into my funk.

A crow's caw sounds high above, barely perceptible. I know that I'm being irrational, and I don't think I've ever felt so bitter. Why is Jack able to fit in so well when I'm always an outsider? There must be something I can do to fix this. A menacing voice whispers in my head, answering my thoughts, but it doesn't alarm me. Revenge is a lot more satisfying than pity. Someone has to pay.

"Wait," I tell myself, "I must have walked a long way. I need to get back to the others." Strangely, my body feels leaden and my head is suddenly feverish. It's entirely possible that I'm getting a cold. However, as I stop to turn around, I know that something is off.

Evil. I can sense it tingling in the air. It is in me, consuming me. My vision becomes equivalent to water colors splashed on a dull canvas, and pain crackles in my brain. I am spinning, falling, and burning. Now there is only numbness and black, and also the sinister cackle of a crow.

\*\*\*

I am Wolf, jet black, powerful, and ruthless. My muscles scream for action, but I am suffocating in the heat of my own thick fur. Slowing rising to my paws, I stretch my long limbs and contort my snout in a growl. The voices I hear are muffled and distorted.

"Jason! Oh my God, what happened?"

"What's he doing?"

"He's having a seizure! Someone call 911!"

I lower my head and let out a fierce growl, ready to attack. Four indistinct shapes loom in front of me. Someone lurks behind me, too. It's Crow, who wants to ask something.

Can you do this yourself, or do you require assistance from Bear?

“Wait, I can’t get reception, not even for an emergency call!”

“Jason, it’s okay. We’ll get you out of here.”

We are the ghosts of this forest. If you join us, you will gain revenge. Revenge will satisfy my craving. I am Wolf, kin of shadows and death. A cool, comforting hand strokes my fur, but I growl and violently shake it away.

Kill the humans, and you will become one of us. Help us rule the forest of fear. We knew you were coming long ago, to strengthen our ranks and finally make us whole. You will never be ignored again.

Am I being ignored? I hear voices, one frantic, one soothing, and one incredulous. There’s a husky voice, which wavers and breaks. The hand has returned, but I don’t move this time. You hesitate. That will not be allowed. Kill them now, Jason.

My teeth are no longer barred, and my vision begins to clear. Jack, Marie, Emma, and the other girl are huddled around me. I’m lying on the ground, and Emma is stroking my arm.

No, I am Wolf, ready to kill. I pounce to my feet, lunge, and chomp my powerful jaws on soft, tasty flesh. Black feathered flesh. Crow is dead, and the evil sensation is gone.

My fur dissipates and my teeth shrink. I am Jason once again, sprawled out the wet dirt, my anxious friends surrounding me.

“He’s awake!” Jack says, helping me to slowly sit up.

“Sorry, guys. I don’t know what happened,” I mumble.

“You must have been having a seizure!” Emma says. She’s sitting along with me and supporting me with her arm. “We saw you walking downstream and after you were gone for a while we went to go check. You were on the ground, convulsing! We’ll have to get you back to the car. Everything will be okay.”

Jack and Marie help me to my feet, but I find that I don’t feel so bad anymore and can walk on my own. I know that I hallucinated but I can’t remember what I saw. It was terrifying, I think, but I find that I’m glad to have a group of friends that truly seem to care about me. Emma has been especially kind; maybe I should try to get to know her more.

“Yuck! A dead crow!” Marie squeals. I take a look at what she is pointing at. The sight of bloodied feathers makes me suddenly nauseated, and I stumble, remembering something.

“Are you okay?” Emma asks, her forehead scrunched with worry.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. But it’s getting late, and we have to get out of these woods.” I say, trying not to spark too much concern.

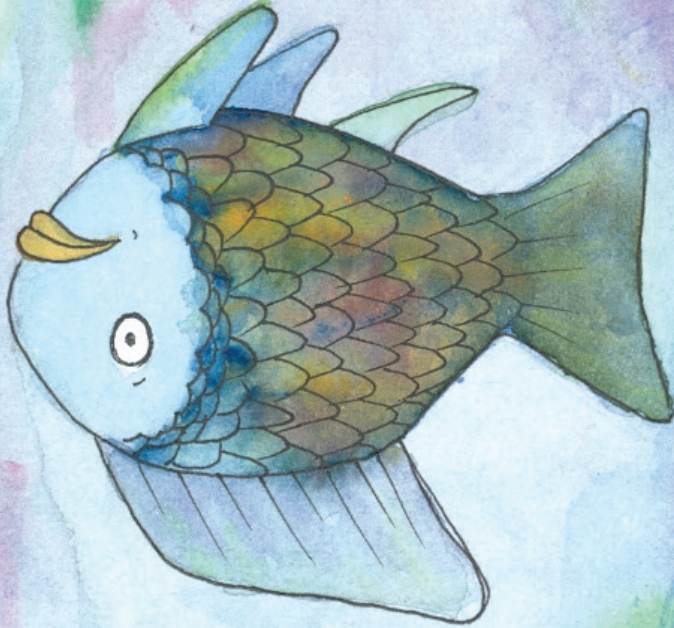
“Why’s that?”

“There’s ghost animals in this forest, remember?” I say, striding

forward. “Not that I’m scared. But Marie probably is.”

Marie laughs. “Come on, Jason. Five minutes ago you were having a seizure, and now you’re making jokes. I agree, though. Let’s get going.”

~~ Allison Tolas ~~



# THE OIL SLICK FISH

BY  
ACCESS PIPELINE



# NON-FICTION

## A Lone, Red Buoy

I ran with my little legs in the ocean water off the coast of California. Offshore, a lone, red buoy floated in the water, placing the line of reality versus imagination. The air of California was cold by their standards but warm from where I stood, as I was used to the Minnesotan winters. The water might have been chilled, but my excitement overran that. I splashed and ran in circles. My mom called for me to come closer to shore, no more than a foot out, so I would sink in. I complied, only to run out again. My brother went further out. I dreamed of the day I would be able to do that. He didn't swim, but at least he got to go out. The waves only lapped across my feet, barely touching. Clouded, sandy foam brushed my feet. It almost knocked me backward.

I dreamt about diving into the water and swimming out to the lone buoy. I dreamt about feeling the water brush beneath my fingertips and across my legs. I dreamt about going under and looking across in the clear water. I dreamt about the colorful fish I would see.

A wave knocked me down and took me under. I had gone too far out, like my mother had warned me, and my face was suddenly under water too. My eyes burned as I opened them. Gray water swirled. Foam clouded the sun. Sand fell into my eyes. Everything rushed past me, and I felt it leave me. I gasped for air only to breathe in water. My fingers dug into the slimy, green rocks below me. I couldn't grip one after another. All were too big for my small hands.

A strong hand gripped my arm and pulled me up. The world swirled around me. Coldness made my bones shake. Everything was chilled, and my body grew numb from it.

"Are you okay?" my father asked, still gripping my arm.

I blinked sand out of my eyes. Sand was caught in my throat. It coated my skin. "Let's do that again," I laughed.

"Let's not," he responded.

Feeling me shake, he pulled me out of the water and onto the sand, which instantly grew to be hot even in California March. I stared out at the gray water with the gray sky behind it. The clouded foams slithered up the beach, almost to my feet. A gust of wind blew the salty water to my nose. The breezy sounding waves sung to me. I wanted to go back.

"Not just yet, Sophie." My father wiped his hands off on my skin, trying to warm me. "Warm up a little."

"Dad," I groaned.

“Sophie.” His eyes matched the ocean, and then he let me go. Immediately, I went back to the water. It came to my waist. I wasn’t allowed to go any further. My fingers slipped through gracefully. The slimy rocks touched my feet, and I tried not to fall in. Looking back at my father, I wanted to slip under. I wanted to dive in. My father shook his head at me. “Later,” he called. “You have to learn how to swim first.”

Fifteen years later, I know how to swim, and I wade into the water at Portobello beach in Scotland. The water is cold on an abnormally hot day in Scotland, and the sky is crystal blue to match the water. I have never truly swam in the ocean, but I want to now. Through my years of going to California, I had never swam but just ran in. Now, I yell at my friend to follow me as I dive under.

Salt immediately enters my mouth, and I grow thirsty. My skin mucks up from the seaweed, and my hair fills with it too. Water slips through my fingertips and across my skin. I stay under the water as long as I can until I have to take in fresh air. Salt burns my eyes. The water shines blue but is gray underneath. Now, there isn’t a way for me to touch the ground, and immediately my friend turns back.

“Come on, Sophie.”

“You go!” I scream and wave her off. Diving back under the water, I have one focus as I push myself through the water. Up above, farther out than anyone else dreams to go, there is a lone red buoy. I want to touch it. Long ago I left my friends and strangers, and I am now one with the water.

Letting myself slip under, I purposely open my eyes and let them burn. I sway and then fall a little more. Gray water shines under me, sparkling as little things float past. The bright sun gives me a sensation of never being alone. It guides me upward if I want to go; I don’t. I lay within the water. It is quiet, with no waves or voices. It is Sirens calling to me, and I accept them.

It all ends when a motor buzzes above me as a Jet Ski zooms past. The movement of the waves push me up. Warm air hits me. I breathe in the fresh air. Salt stings my eyes. I blink them away. Coughing, I take in more air. The Jet Ski zooms past me again. Screaming at them, I completely interrupt the silence. The male glances over, and I give a rude gesture about being this close.

With the Jet Ski zooming off, I am alone. Children’s laughter comes all the way out, and I realize I am still too close to shore if I can hear them. I see the lone red buoy and keep swimming. My body burns as it stretches and flexes to push through the water. As I come to it, I marvel at it. The sun hits the fading red with a brown, rusting bottom. Finally I can touch it.

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The Jet Ski zooms over again, and he yells at me in a Scottish tone. I am not exactly sure what he said, but it is something about going back to shore; I'm too far out. He zooms away again.

I glance at the lone, red buoy, and I dive back under. The water swirls around, and I can't breathe. I popped up as a little girl again, yelling at my dad, "I did it!"

~~ Sophia Johnson ~~

## Horses of the Sun

I dream again of wild horses with windswept manes. There are grays and bays, chestnuts and blacks – every color of the equine kaleidoscope galloping freely across waving grasslands and open desert. I have dreamt of them since I was a little girl, tucked in my bed while the winds howled outside my window like the unanswered cry of a lone stallion. I heard them call to me among flowers and cactus until their voices grew faint and one by one they faded away like stars in the morning sky.

I awaken with a feeling of urgency. My surroundings are unfamiliar, and it takes a moment to register I am in a hotel room in Scottsdale, Arizona with my husband Barry gently snoring beside me. The clock on the nightstand reads 3:37, but sleep will not return. By 4:15, I give up trying and rise to make a pot of coffee. Soon we will leave for the Tonto National Forest to seek out the wild horses that live along the banks of the Salt River Basin.

I am both excited and apprehensive about whether we will find them or not. Last night's local news reported horses shot in this very location by a .22 caliber weapon, designed to be quiet, but offering its victim a slow death. A yearling foal was killed and maimed. Two adults were injured, but able to flee. It is not known if this was part of the illegal horsemeat trade or something done for sport, but it was just plain senseless and difficult to comprehend.

We leave the lights of Scottsdale behind to drive through the desert in the darkness before dawn. As the sky begins to change to a deep blue, the Superstition Mountains appear on the distant horizon. At this moment, the peaks vary between shades of blue and purple and gray, those further out growing progressively lighter until they appear to blend into infinity.

Barry drives and I am co-pilot, issuing directions and scanning the horizon for the first rays of light as we traverse the Bush Highway northeast of Mesa. It is the morning light I seek for my photographs, the warm glow that turns everything it touches to gold. Reaching the Tonto National Forest, I look for the Coon Bluff Recreational Area, as it is supposed to be the best place to view the Salt River Wild Horses. I expect it to be touristy, but do not mind if it means photographing magnificent horses wading in the shallows of the river.

As the sky continues to lighten, the desert begins to appear on all sides in shadowy shapes of cactus and scrub brush. Ahead is the road sign I am looking for. We turn left onto Coon Bluff Road. My camera is ready and my expectations high as we pull into the parking lot near the designated

trailhead. As we park, we notice several small tents erected on bare ground beneath a prominent sign that reads NO OVERNIGHT CAMPING. There is a pickup truck parked off to one side, its driver's side window smashed out, a blue tarp draped over the gaping opening. It looks like it has been there for some time, as there is a fine layer of dust on its roof and hood.

On the way toward the path that leads to the Salt River, we pass a white Camaro with its driver door hanging open. There is a man at the wheel, one leg out of the car, head hanging down. His greasy black hair obscures the details of his face and there are pills in the palm of his open left hand which rests on his thigh. Barry pulls me aside and we give him a wide berth.

Could this really be where the wild horses were? I can't imagine them in such a place of desolation and despair.

## 2

We reach the river as the first rays of sun break over the lower canyon rim. It is quiet here. Too quiet. I notice the absence of birdsong and foraging horses. Except for the calm flowing river, it is barren of movement, not even a breeze. I am both disappointed and relieved not to find them here. I think again of the young colt who lost his life last night. We walk silently back to our car.

Pulling back out onto the Bush Highway, we continue north toward the Superstition Mountains. We have the windows rolled down in the balmy 56-degree air. Barry is scanning his side of the road while I scan mine, looking for telltale signs horses are nearby. A sagging barb-wire fence borders the desert on both sides of the highway. Every few miles or so, there is a v-shaped cutout in the fence to allow animals to cross the road to reach the life-sustaining Salt River. Here and there, I see traces of horses: fresh manure, well-worn trails leading into the desert and tufts of hair hanging from rusty strands of barb-wire.

I almost didn't see the first wild horse, his coat the color of red desert rock, but the softness of his outline stood out against the rough landscape "Stop!" I breathe, trying to be as silent as possible.

Barry slammed on the brakes and pulled to the shoulder of the road. I was out of the car before it quit rolling, the Nikon dangling from my neck, its weight a comfort. Where we stopped, a narrow trail of hoof prints led into the brush. The horse was down in a gully, so we stood above him. It was hard to make him out hidden among the willow scrub as he was, so I circled around to the right, following the edge of the carved out arroyo until I was directly across from where he stood.

He sensed I was there, heard me scrambling over the rocks, despite my attempt to be as silent as possible. His dark-tipped ears flicked back and forth, trying to pinpoint my exact location. I stopped and stood motionless as I took in his beauty. He was a red dun with a small white star in the center of his forehead. A dorsal stripe ran down the length of his back and he had darker legs with primitive barring commonly seen on horses of Spanish descent. But it was his eyes, dark and luminous, that captivated me. Looking to my left, I saw two grays halfway up the rocky slope, about 75 feet away. They reached for branches of mesquite and desert willow overhead. They were youngsters, maybe two years old at best, one a steel gray with snowflake dapples and legs the color of night, the other a rose gray as pale as the branches of the ghostly alders that hid him. His features were finer than the other's with a more delicate bone structure. They soon ambled down the rocky shale slope to join their companion on the desert floor.

I carefully picked my way around rocks and blue green sagebrush to get nearer to the horses. Finding a vantage point that offered some coverage and a good view, I spotted a fourth horse, this one a sorrel the color of the faded red sandstone rocks that formed the edge of the ravine. At the end of his nose was a wide white snip that covered one nostril and painted his upper lip pink.

Watching them now in the first light of the desert, I'm overcome with emotion for these achingly beautiful animals outlined in gold. The sorrel stallion turns to me then, and our eyes meet. I put down my camera and slowly sink to my knees. I forget about taking pictures.

### 3

Forget my husband is waiting for me at the car. Forget everything but this one moment spent with these mystical creatures. He breaks our gaze and jostles his companions, urging them to follow.

When they turn to leave, they do so with grace. Not in fear as horses being pursued or hunted, but with a quiet dignity, in single file, bodies backlit by the sun as it breaks free of the mountaintops. Their mountains. Their desert. Their cerulean blue sky.

Soon, I no longer hear their footfalls on rock and sand, no longer can make them out among the cholla cactus and willow brush. They have vanished in the desert. I walk down the arroyo to where they had stood, just moments before. Did I dream the whole thing? But there, in the sand, are dozens of perfectly round hoof prints. I trace their shallow outlines with my fingertips. Despite the odds against them, there is a band of wild horses living on a piece of desert just outside the concrete cities with their endless

golfcourses. Living as they have been for more than a hundred years. Free.  
I follow their path back to the road, lost in thought.

“Did you get it?” Barry asks me.

“Yes,” I say quietly, “I sure did.”

~~ Marcia Hage ~~

# RESEARCH

# Can Thinking Optimistically Lead to a More Fulfilled Life?

Optimism is defined as the hopefulness and confidence about the future or the successful outcome of something. People tend to think of themselves as optimistic, where they see the glass half full, or pessimistic, where they see the glass as half empty. Optimistic people have a better outlook on life and are excited to face challenges in the world. Pessimistic people think that the world is a bad place and nothing good will ever happen to them. There has been some discussion about whether optimism is a real phenomenon or if it is just cheap talk. If optimism is a real occurrence, do optimistic people lead happier lives than pessimistic people?

## Is Optimism Real?

Optimism is a real phenomenon as shown by Joseph P. Simmons, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. He received his PhD in psychology from Princeton University and received MBA's excellence in teaching award in 2013, 2014, and 2016. In an interview, he described how his research focuses on people's judgments and decision making. He wants to understand and fix the errors and biases that people make when it comes to making decisions. He did a study in 2012, "Is Optimism Real?" investigating whether people's optimistic decisions persisted throughout the NFL football season. He also added the factor of incentives. Simmons wanted to know if people were as optimistic on their predictions when it came to winning cash prizes. The study revealed that optimistic participants predicted their favorite teams more often than neutral participants, even when incentives were large. This shows that people were optimistic about their favorite team winning, even when there was a lot to lose. Follow-up questionnaires showed that the participants strongly believed in the predictions they made, which further demonstrated how optimism is real.

Simmons explained how there is a bias idea that people's decisions are made completely rationally. He wanted to show that people make decisions based on their emotions rather than on sensible thoughts alone. His previously described study showed how the participants chose their favorite team to win based on their emotion and attachment instead of rationally thinking of who is better. For his continued research, Simmons would like to find out what makes a person optimistic versus pessimistic. As an example,

he hypothesized that anxious people are more likely to be pessimistic. He described how if an anxious person is on an airplane, they are more likely to be pessimistic and think the plane is going to crash. Simmons wanted to know what makes people optimistic or pessimistic, and if being optimistic leads to a happier life.

### Optimism and Happiness

A study published in the Indian Journal of Positive Psychology, showed that there was a positive correlation between optimism, happiness, and self-esteem. These three aspects are essential to a person's overall psychological well-being. The study showed that males were more optimistic, happy, and had a higher self-esteem than females. That is an interesting finding because cognitively, there are no differences between men and women. Women in society tend to be more harshly judged and held to a higher standard than men. These reasons could explain why women scored lower on those scales. Women tend to be less optimistic and less happy than men in general. Overall, though, this data suggests that optimistic people may live a happier life.

In this study, family history, socioeconomic status, and religion were all excluded.

### Optimism and Socioeconomic Status

A study published by Julia Boehm, a professor at Chapman University in California, looked at optimism and life satisfaction between different socioeconomic statuses. She focused on the implications that socioeconomic status plays on a person's overall well-being. This study's focus is on how individuals with a higher socioeconomic status are more optimistic than people in lower socioeconomic statuses. This is believed to be due to the amount of stress the lower level seems to be in. When a lot of things have gone wrong for them in their life, they are less likely to be excited and hopeful for the future. People in lower socioeconomic statuses are also more likely to have anxiety or depression. This goes back to what Simmons had said about people that have anxiety are more likely to have a pessimistic outlook. People that do not have as much to worry about tend to have a better perspective on life and have more faith in good things to come.

The study continues to show that people in higher socioeconomic statuses have more optimistic tendencies. These include expecting more favorable outcomes, persisting at goals, and using effective coping strategies. Good coping strategies help to reduce tendencies of depression and anxiety. A higher socioeconomic status is positively correlated with higher

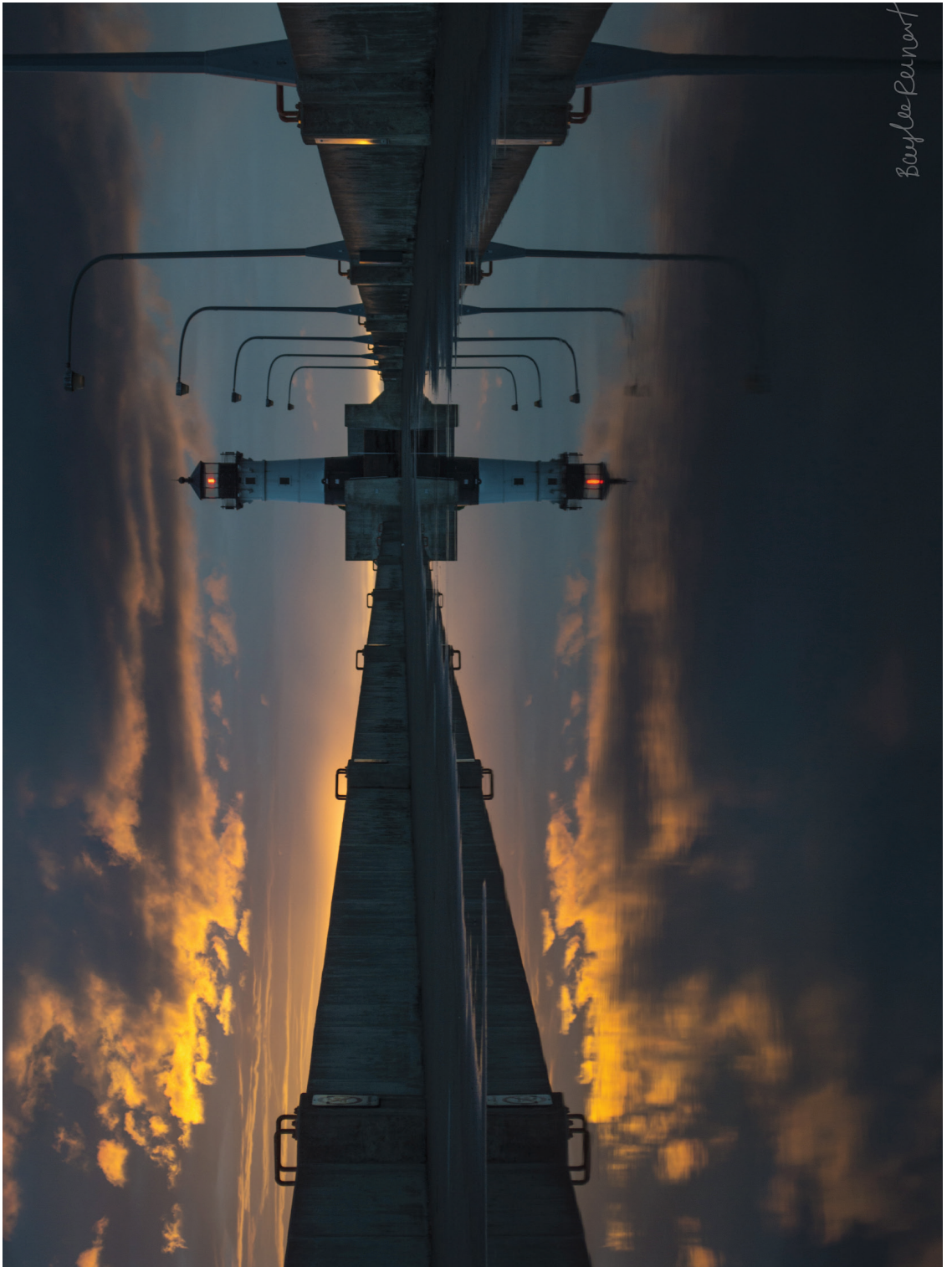
levels of education. It is believed that higher education levels are responsible for many of these optimistic tendencies. On the other hand, the lower status individuals encounter more unpredictable and difficult situations and have less help to deal with those challenges. They are more likely to build an idea that the world is a scary and threatening place and will have more pessimistic thoughts about it.

### Optimism and Performance

A study done by Elizabeth Tenney at the University of Utah stated how optimism has the opportunity to improve a person's chance for success. They did four experiments and ultimately found that people believe optimism can improve their performance. If they think they will do well on a task, they feel like they performed better. Participants also stated in the first experiment that when someone needed the motivation to do something, they thought optimism would help them find the motivation. The experiment also debunked the fact that people think being optimistic will put good vibes in the world and bring good karma to them. Instead, the participants were selective on who they thought needed to think optimistically based on the task. The study goes on to say that optimism can help a person try a new activity or a healthy food for the first time. It can also help a person focus on a task or try harder than they normally would. Unfortunately, there are times where optimism is overpowered by other factors such as actual competence, ability, or attention span.

These studies together show that optimism is real and how a person thinks about it can affect their well-being. The more optimistic a person is, the better outlook they have on life. They are less likely to have stress and are better able to face challenges. Pessimistic people are likely to have a tougher time in life and not enjoy it as much. Simmons' next major question he wanted answered is why are people optimistic versus pessimistic, which could be explained by these research findings. It seems to be linked to a one's personal upbringing and their socioeconomic status. There is research, like the studies described above, that show how optimism is correlated with performing better, being happier, and living a better life overall. There is more research needed to know if optimism is something a person can become or if it is engrained into who the person is. There are benefits to being an optimistic person, so if further research shows it is something that is adaptable, then everyone could benefit from practicing optimism.

~~ Katie Postal ~~



*Baylee Bennett*



# Biographies, Writers

## Martymann Birman

Martyann E. Birman is a writer of poetry and short fiction. She is currently working on her first memoir, a story of young motherhood and losing her spouse to suicide. To see more of her work, visit [www.martyannebirman.com](http://www.martyannebirman.com).

## George Brand

George (Bud) Brand started writing poetry in the eighth grade, graduated from Mellen High School in 1965, and is an alumnus of UWS, where he was a Broad Area Social Sciences major and an English minor. He has had more than 80 poems published in a variety of literary venues.

## Lucas Dietsche

Lucas Alan Dietsche, a self-taught poet, has published works such as “Word Out,” “Elba,” “Commies and Zombies,” “Since the Oregon Trail,” “Moods are Like Wisconsin Weather,” “and Kapshida.” He builds poems to highlight his anxiety, depression, alienation in a late-capitalist society.

## Melissa France

Melissa France is a senior at UWS and will finally graduate with a BA in Writing in December 2018. She grew up in Austria but now calls Duluth home. If she’s not reading, Melissa is either binge-watching Netflix, sailing, or spending time with her boyfriend and friends.

## Susan Gardner

Sue Gardner has been writing poetry and songs since childhood. Recently becoming interested in non-fiction and creative writing, she draws on her life experiences for diverse inspiration. She has a B.S. in Geology from UWRF and lives in Superior with her family.

### Joey Hedman

Joey Hedman enjoys creating things others can relate to, like poetry, drawings, paintings, and some sculpture. He is a Senior at UW-Superior with a Psychology and Studio Art double major. He hopes to begin a career in tattooing soon after graduation, and is building his portfolio to that end.

### Brittany Hewitt

Brittany Hewitt was born with ice in her veins and a heart brimming with pain and passion for the world, a Native of the North. She is now on the precipice of 24 with my toes to the edge of the world that she will soon cast herself to fall or to fly.

### Sophia Johnson

Sophia Johnson, after self-publishing numerous times, made her debut as a writer. Originally from Shakopee, Minnesota, Johnson came to UW-Superior to expand her artisanship. The inspiration comes from politics, travel, books, music, friends and beaches. There is nothing more than that she loves than strong, female characters (besides her dog).

### Giorgi Keppers

Giorgi Keppers hails from Proctor, MN, and ventured to UW-Superior to pursue a forensic chemistry degree. She is constantly inspired by books, music, and friends in her writing and hopes to one day write and publish a novel.

### Benjamin Kelly

Benjamin Kelly, previous to studying writing and English at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, studied journalism at the University of Texas at Austin for three years before deciding to withdraw from school in order to move to Los Angeles and focus full time on his creative endeavors in the music industry.

### Doug Lewandowski

Doug Lewandowski has walked a varied path, a Christian Brother, a teacher/counselor, and Licensed Psychologist. His work life has been devoted to kids. He was also a guidance counselor at Bemidji High School, and an English instructor at the Alternative Education Center there. He lives in Duluth, Minnesota.

### Megan McGarvey

Megan McGarvey Megan McGarvey, is a poet from Oconomowoc Wisconsin. She started writing poetry in 2014 and since then she has been published in the Point of Convergence, The Nemadji Review, and Wisconsin's Best Emerging Poets: An Anthology. She loves writing in the outdoors and gathers inspiration from classical music.

### Tania Murillo

Tania Murillo was born and raised in Mexico City. She is an immigrant whose long history of bouncing back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico has given her multiple homes. She is on the last semester of an undergraduate degree in History with an Art minor. She expects to continue to write; if only to keep her sane.

### Katie Postal

Katie Postal is a senior at the University of Wisconsin Superior. She is majoring in psychology with a minor in health and wellness. She will be graduating in the fall and applying to graduate school for Occupational Therapy.

### Jennifer Reiten

Jennifer Reiten is currently a senior at UWS who is majoring in English and minoring in writing. She grew up in Minnesota and moved to Wisconsin to attend college. Jennifer has always had a passion for writing and dreams of someday becoming a successful author.

## Joseph Schwartz

Joseph Schwartz grew up in Alborn, MN on a small farm. He had always looked up to the night sky in wonder of its infinite majesty and wonder. This is his first published piece and he hopes to get into writing science fiction and fantasy novels.

## Alison Tollas

Alison Tollas is a sophomore English major from Ashland, WI. She plays tennis on the UW-Superior Women's Tennis team and enjoys writing short fiction and newspaper articles.

## Erika White

Erika D. White is an avid reader, writer, and fitness enthusiast. She is a Health & Wellness major who engages in community activism and social justice. Her poem explores the courage of freedom through musical expression. Erika resides in Toledo, Ohio with her husband James and their two children, James II & Jasmine.

# Biographies, Artists

## Marcia Hage

Marcia Hage is a writing major and photography minor. Her work has been published in The Sun, Hometown Focus and Nemadji Review. She writes for the same reasons she takes photographs - to remember a moment and hold it close - to honor the beauty and wildness in this world.

## Jake Semborski

Jake Semborski is a 20 years old photographer from Superior. He has been an ardent photographer for about 6 years now. Photography has been a passion for him, whether the subject is nature, landscape, or portrait. He hopes to go back to school and study digital marketing, to pursue a career in photography and marketing.

## Deb Yam

Deb Yam Deborah (Deb) Yam grew up in five different countries giving her a rich cultural background that often influences her short stories and illustrations. Through her reflections, she creates in pursuit of relearning how to be.

# Biographers, Photographers

## Cody Anderson

Cody Anderson was born and raised in the Twin-Ports, Cody Anderson is an Industrial Engineering student at UMD. When Cody isn't working on data analytics, he spends his time appreciating (and photographing) the great outdoors.

## Julie Gard

Julie Gard is a writing professor at the University of Wisconsin Superior. She is an accomplished writer and poet.

## Bailee Rainert

Bailee Rainert explores different ways that light and color combine to bring life to her subject. She was born in Lino Lakes, Minnesota, to an artistic and driven family, who taught her the value of art in concert. These skills reflect in Rainert's art and photography.

## Lynsey Witherill

Lynsey Witherill, a Duluth resident, is very passionate about photography and being able to show the beauty of the North Shore through her work. She hopes to build a career within the art field and ultimately hopes to create content that will spark joy and ignite passion within others.

## Carsen Witzel

Carsen Witzel recalls her first memory of herself finger painting with shaving cream when she was two years old. Now, almost twenty one, Carsen draws inspiration for her drawings, paintings, and poetry from her emotions and experiences. Carsen also writes fictional stories and aspires to publish her own novel one day.

## Artworks

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