



THE CATALYST



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What we are:

The Catalyst is a student-run creative journal of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse English Club publishing prose, poetry, photography, art, music, and all other creative works by the students and faculty of UW-L.

A thank you or two:

To William Stobb, for helping us adapt to working together at a distance. We know it's hard to work collaboratively in an online environment, so thank you for being so flexible and pushing us to still do good work.

To You, reading this, for supporting us and your peers whose work is in this volume. We hope you come away with a thought or two, but ultimately hope you enjoy reading the pieces just as much as we did.

Content Warning:

Art and Literature often deal with difficult topics. The writing and images in this issue of *The Catalyst* may be upsetting or triggering for some readers.

Mental Health Resources at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

More than ever, we are aware of the impact mental health issues have on our college, local, and national communities. *The Catalyst* is an online journal produced locally at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Resources specific to our campus appear below, and we encourage you to reach out if you find you need support. In the case of an emergency, dialing 911 is always the best first option.

UWL Emergency Resources page:

<https://www.uwlax.edu/student-life/emergency-resources/>

UWL Campus Resources page:

<http://catalog.uwlax.edu/undergraduate/currentstudentinformation/campusresources>

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In memory of

*Jules Joosten
2002-2021*

For Jules | Connor Stenz

It was the type of thing that couldn't help but make me think about my dad, when he would say "I could have gone all day without hearing that". Not in a disparaging or acerbic way, but in a breathless, somber one. That's just one way that he expresses sadness when he hears bad news, like when he heard that his sister died. And even though I never met you, I couldn't help but feel like I lost a sister when I heard that you were gone.

Even though we were two people that would have passed each other by on the street, heads turned away, pretending to be on our phones to not make it awkward, my breath, warmth, focus, and smile, were all stolen by the words I read. In a really fucked up way, I instantly imagined what I was feeling then, but projected onto my parents, which made me think of yours. In doing so, I'm happy that I never took my own life when I was really thinking about doing it. I guess, for that, I should thank you.

I didn't even know you; yet, I still can't focus on anything because your absence has stolen your presence. The words that once flowed so easily onto the pages now trip and stumble on these new bricks in my brain, finding no succor once they finally reach my fingertips.

Someone, somewhere, doesn't get to see you smile anymore. I never did, but in a way, I'm glad I never did, because I'm sure that if I did, I wouldn't be able to live in a world without such a thing.

I couldn't help but think of all the times that I was thinking about doing it too. No one should ever have to feel like they can relate to that feeling, but I guess people like me are here to help the others. I'm so thankful to the people that I have in my life that I was able to talk to, to remind me that just because I can't feel the sun doesn't mean that it can't feel me.

Just because I didn't know you doesn't mean you couldn't have called.

I would have been happy to have met a new friend—God knows I need a few of those. I would have listened. Homeboy don't judge. Maybe we could have laughed it off and talked about boys, and how men ain't shit. I could have told you about my ex—that piece of shit—but maybe you could have helped me feel better about him too.

Maybe we could have helped each other. But now I'm here alone, with no choice but to help myself.

A long time ago, I had this idea that thoughts are the only human things that can reach Heaven while you're alive, if there is such a thing. If I was right, could you say hi to Thomas for me? He'll know who he is—he'd probably like a friend too.

First Date | Marcos Alfaro

My hands were sweaty. Would she have noticed? I always get ahead of myself in these situations, thinking that we'll be holding hands by the end of the night. Wedding bells played in my head drowning out any other sound. I kept looking at the tiny digital clock above the radio station. Late, late, late. My foot turned to lead as I saw the clock turning another number. Is she nice? Do I look nice? Did I overdress? Did I underdress? I brushed my teeth, right? My heartbeat matched my speedometer. I finally managed to get off at my destined exit; thank god for GPS. Slowing down and breaking at lights I practiced what I would say, how I would smile. My heart raced faster. It wasn't speed but distance, and distance was closing. Turning away from the city, zipping left, right, left down picturesque suburban streets I could only hope that my nerves didn't get the better of me. Giving myself whiplash examining each number pasted to mailboxes and garages I finally found it. The numbers I've been repeating ever since my hands got sweaty, ever since the time above the clock changed from 7:00 to 7:01, ever since I looked crazy repeating the same "hello" in my rearview mirror. I found it. I got out, flowers in hand. She opened her house door and met my gaze. We walked closer and blushed. "Hello" she said, "hello" I said in return. Our faces matched in smiles.

Lavender Hours | Marcos Alfaro

I ran away again
I never know where I'm going
Away from pain is my only destination

Shouting echoes behind me
I never look back to see them
My parents

Screams follow soon after
My brother
Getting the whipping end of my father's belt
I smile through the tears

I'm so tired
Tired and cold
I keep running no matter how tired I become.

My lungs burn from the chill air
I didn't know I could run so fast
so far

I'm on a hill now
leaves and sand smush under my feet
I should have grabbed shoes.

Then I would have to see him again
I'm content with my cold feet.

It's about to storm
I can feel the air becoming electrified
The wind and rain are my only friends now

I finally sit after my legs buckle underneath me
I can see for miles in the valley
I have the view of a god.

God
Did you want me to suffer?
To be tortured.
To be scared.

I look up and see the clouds tumble onto each other
It's coming closer.

Death
Sweet and all consuming
I accept it without hesitation.

It looks beautiful
How can God's rage look so beautiful?
Is he angry at me?
Should I have been stronger?

Should I have fought back against all the beatings
all the torment
all the pain.

He is my only brother.
My family.
My blood.

I cry miserably in my dirt coated hands
Rain starts to fall
God is crying with me

I finally look up to see
See vivid purple, rolling in the skies
I cry more from seeing something beautiful

Snot and dirt
It all leaks out now

I can smell
I can see
I can hear

I hear thunder
I see lightning
I smell lavender

Lavender
God smells delightful
He cries along with me through the night

Rim of the City | Ellie Schaap



Punchlist Sketches | Sarah Anderson

"If you were wearing one of my tin foil hats, it wouldn't bother you so much." The outstretched tone of a deeply troubled line two had me cradling my temples. It had more to do, I thought, with the consequences of caffeine dependence and the shortcuts of slum lords than Big Brother himself, but I wasn't about to tell that to the guy who answered "Right?" with "The government wants you to think *left*."

"Why not just leave it for AM crew?"

But, like running out of ranch, that was an AM crew thing to do.

I was clanging a receiver in and out of position; he was calling over a shoulder he carried as though it belonged to someone else. Maybe it only *looked* that way, since-

"Are you looking to get out of here?" I cut myself off.

"Nah. She's at the beach- Jesus," he continued to my fruitless repair attempt, "It's been a long ass day, why not-"

"Suppose I'm more inclined to ask 'Why?' than 'why not?'"

"Why?"

For the first time since that Monday from hell, his eyes met mine. No shades, no scattered glances- one straight shot. They smiled. I was searching them, then, for all the bright, blue, brilliant things I'd missed since-

"Sloane... has this place... corrupted you?" he asked as though I were younger. *I've hit twenty without what I want with you ...*

"What? Why?"

"You're just so... or *helped* you, I guess- I don't know," his brows curled into the untamed mass above.

"Neither," I hesitated, lost again in the way he coiled a phone cord around himself relaying orders I couldn't hear over the image, "In some respects... I guess neither *and* both."

"Neither *and* both," he repeated, rubbing his own temples a good minute, "That can't wait- No... You make my brain hurt."

"Well, this *is* the home of the hard-working lazy-"

"Whoa, whoa whoa-" he stopped me, dead squint, with all the reckless enthusiasm of a wild night at the beach he'd turned down.

"What?"

"Do it again."

"What?"

"Squint. Your eyes- they do this thing when you squint-"

"Squint?" Best guess.

"They, like, it curves *up*-" His shot about the room in static silence. He seized a pen crudely bound to a sharpie with a rubber band and with it gave the PM punchlist more action than it'd seen in months.

"Here," he watched for a reaction that failed to surface, "I know, my drawing's terrible," and didn't stop there. Diagram two of my squinted eye filled the right margin with lashes, bound but reaching.

"Anyways," he'd closed in on me with a hint of warm detergent, "It, like, curves up."

"Have you not seen that before?" I managed. It was not uncommon, I wondered how, in the moment, it had trumped every other mundane marvel in the home of the hard-working lazy people.

"No, I've... I haven't seen anything like it," the voice that rivaled crashing waves died down to a whisper and line two just about drowned out, "It's beautiful."

To Explain Yourself | Sarah Anderson

"Guess I should let people's narrow idea of 'me' make all my decisions."

She paid dearly for her cleverness, enduring a silence cut by a scoff- no doubt with that flat, snide smile that slapped the eyes with nonchalance- she could feel it between the bulk of the receiver and the sound of his breath. It had been weeks, now, of the silence since she'd let him down. She saw no way back but concession, no light at the opposing end of the tunnel. But through the hazy yellow in the street-facing window, she could see the two of them a lifetime ago in the hushed brightness of a crescent moon.

He'd held her in stiffly flexed arms and breathed her in; she rested an ear against a steady pulse. He'd asked that she be gentle with herself. She'd agreed in stillness- eyes closed to all else, unwilling, still, to face an alternative.

He'd been crazy, he claimed, in some past life, about chardonnay, until the time came for a change of pace in the emptying of bottles. Then came the age of bourbon and with it laughter or tears, in accordance with the dose. She knew they'd manage to conquer it- to conquer *all*- and swore her allegiance to him in a fit of frustrated defiance against all those self-righteous know-it-alls who'd tried to "protect" her. She stuttered, scrambled- to make herself worthy, to live up to him, to explain away *failure* and *feel*.

Only recently had the absolutes started to crumble. They'd failed to weather the sunsets on Liberty and Thursday nights closing Del's. Somewhere in it, some voice she'd come to love had told her, "You don't have to explain yourself."

She'd met its eyes without a word; they'd understood a way wide and unparalleled.

They'd come and gone in one warm front, but at the thought of their words she felt her strength in the silence held against her, breathing steady, deep, and slow.

One last time, one explanation short, she hung up.

Bathe | Devany Bauer

I heard the rain before I saw it,
the familiar pitter patter, pitter patter.
How I imagine the hooves of eight tiny reindeer would sound on Christmas.
But this is mid-July
and Santa isn't real.
Rain is real.

Water is real.

I am real.

It was warm enough outside that the raindrops resembled the drops that tumble out of my shower head and travel down my breasts and back. It has been so long since I've had a bath – my eyes flash to the lake where the air pockets snap and pop as more raindrops fall from the sky to the water's surface.

I'm in it.

I'm submerged.

I'm taking a bath.

The pads of my feet press against the smooth stones underneath me
and in one swift motion

my hips rise to the surface.

I'm floating.

There is nothing but water
above me,

around me,

inside me.

Catalogue Entry No. 1 | Roxanne Spielman



*It's like smushing those foamy, yellow ear plugs into your head
holes before the fireworks start thus making everything sound
like you're underwater, in a fish tank, at some cheap China
Buffett; everything muffled, dull, bland, and somewhat
irrelevant; the little girl, with the braces, from Finding Nemo
tap, tap, tapping on the glass.*

|
Devany Bauer

Isolation.

It's been over a year.

When are they going to let us out?

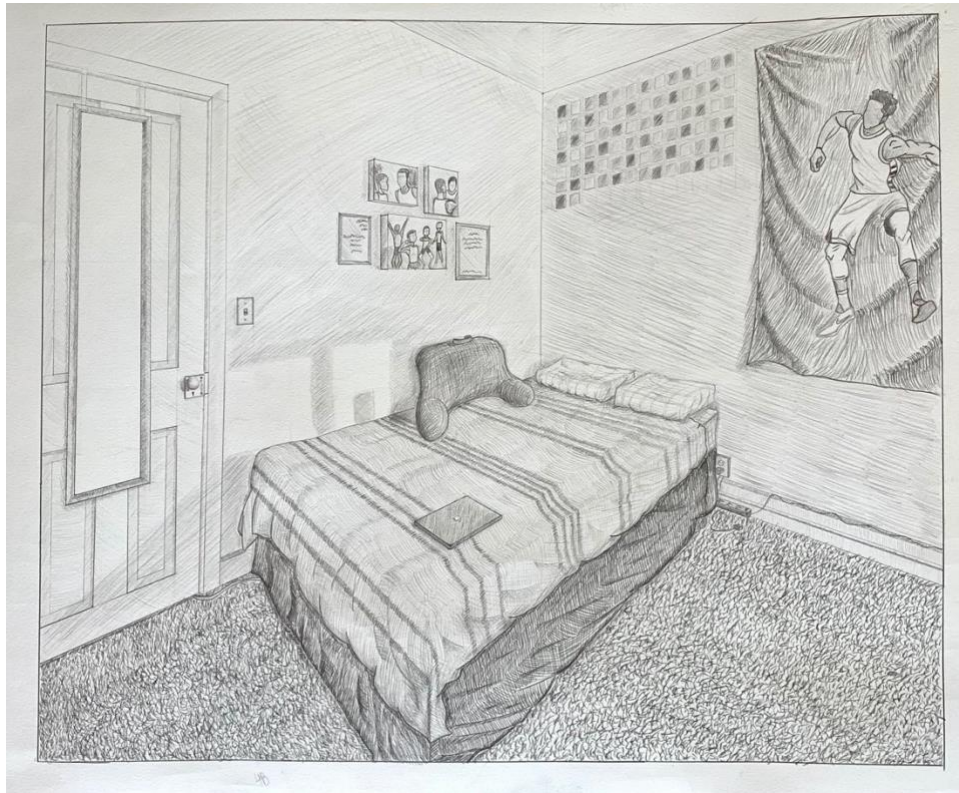
We've been here for too long.

Pawns in their game of "Uncle Sam Says,"

--mask up, stay inside, do your part, we're in this together--

The grossly wealthy sunbathe and sip Coronas on their private islands.

Afternoon Break | Riley Radle



Queen of One | Devany Bauer

one night together,
one frozen pizza,
one bottle of wine,
one playlist,
one night for us.

a million mental pictures
that can traverse time and space,
a shared meal
with "you have the last piece",
a hundred thousand laughs
that would have escaped without the wine,
a handful of spins and sways
around the cabin kitchen,
that may improve with time,
one night for us.

When we woke,
I couldn't leave.
I was too connected.
To him,

to the cabin,
to the feeling of being one another's only focus.
So we sat barefoot on the dock,
resting our heads against each other,
as the eyes in the ripples of the water
glistened and blinked at us.
We turned to the rising sun to
warm our faces as the smell of
freshly cut grass and
freshly brewed coffee
encapsulated us in its buoyant bubble.

"Queen of fucking everything"
my coffee cup read.
I felt like it too.

The Heart of the Party | Jonah Bones

You can have a girlfriend without really having a girlfriend. You can go on dates to your local AMC (whatever theatre really), share a wonderful dinner, play at an arcade, or do any other novel romantic activity, multiple times. But—and this is important—she can still technically not be your girlfriend. Though there she is anyway, under no obligation, just lingering casually in a friendly way. Not-girlfriends have the aura of someone getting their bags loaded into a car trunk behind them by somebody else; polite, as they check their reflections in windows and cell phone screen, but with an explicit end implied; damningly casual.

Tim says it's okay.

At this party, there are two types of people: women with ripped jeans and boys with backpacks; weirdly, I have both, but I'm not unique. My backpack, and presumably everyone else's, does not carry school supplies.

I am in here, surrounded by skin, hair, ripped jeans, sweat, and backpacks, in the ventricle of this very exclusive \$5 house party. I was late to this party. The air is heavy with watery carbon dioxide and smells like a dick. There is an entrance that also serves as an exit opposite a stairway that leads to the party's atrium—the bass pumps. The movement of partiers mimics a heart that's been struck several times by a hammer; it bleeds ripped jeans and backpacks like red and white blood cells. There are LED strips on almost every line in the room set to 0xff0000; it's like demonic Tron. A professional amateurish DJ has his strobes flashing so rapidly it makes me check for people swallowing their own tongues. This music is loud, generic, Latin, and so horribly repetitive it makes me want to smash my head into the wall in sync with its 95 BPM; it's called reggaeton. My heart rate is sinus with its predictable tempo.

This girl that is not my girlfriend is not commercially hot, but she is art film pretty. We'd been casually lingering for about three weeks. She is in ripped bell bottoms and a tie-dye shirt sitting on the table near the stairs. A guy holding a German drinking mug called: I forget the mug's name; I know it though. But anyway, he is screaming sweet nothings into her ear. They haven't noticed me standing three feet from them. My not-girlfriend is swallowing his tongue. My eyes protrude from their sockets in rhythm with my heart's crescendo in double-time, like a cartoon.

My not-girlfriend says I am Jonah, and he is Tim. I say hi, and I'm sorry to interrupt, and how are you. Tim doesn't have a backpack; he has a long-sleeve Hawaiian button-up shirt though and looks too old for a college party, like 30ish maybe. His eyes squint like he is reading my subtitles after I've spoken; I'm paused. Why is he even here? No one says anything for a while. There's an arrhythmic reggaeton-to-reggaeton song transition. Cycles are repeating.

Stein

Untitled | Kristin Foglestad



What We Need | Allison Henderson

What I really need is a cat.
A cozy, lovey thing that never leaves my side.
Something that is small
and uncomplaining
and stupidly content no matter how much or little emotional investment I give to it.

What I really need is to drink more water.
Skin clears up.
Headaches go away.
I'll sleep better
and have really amazing conversation.
I'll take a jog before my 11 am
and gain facial symmetry.

What I really need is springtime.
Springtime brings flowers
and rain
and sun.
People will be nicer
and the price of gas will drop.

What I really need is to graduate.
a cap
and gown
and diploma.
I'll get a job that plays a part in changing the world.
I'll find that passion again
and be rich enough to own an indoor hot tub.

What I really need is a personal priest
or monk
or rabbi.
I'll find god
and read scripture
and pray when I wake up
and go to bed
and eat.
I'll believe in heaven.
and I'll be one of those old church ladies who knits for NICU babies

and donates to high school mission trips.

What I really need is someone to listen.
A comfortably detached person with open ears
and attentive eyes
and a fused mouth.
I'll tell them everything
and I won't feel guilty for burdening them
or embarrassed for oversharing.
I'll even cry in front of them,
with proper warning of course.

What I really need is to be told to suck it up.
That this is life
and this hurt only brings resilience
and purpose.
I'll take that like a champion,
like Babe Ruth or Dolly Parton,
and I'll overcome every negative thought
with determination
and confidence.

What I really need is that thing hiding
in between the lines of these poems we're reading.

It's that thing that those boisterous blond girls
and those guys who wear jerseys over sweatshirts have.

It's that thing that lets people get up in the morning
and not even think about the discontent they should feel.

It's that thing that Plath and Hemingway
and the guy who lived down the street could never get.

It's that thing that I haven't heard anyone exactly describe yet.

It's that thing that lets people get out of their big heads
and go out on Saturdays
and gossip with friends
and talk to their parents
and get married
and have kids
and stay in one place

and live with the ease that the movies
and sitcoms show

So I guess what I really need is that.
that thing
that essence
or quality
or pith
that causes a revelatory shift
and frees me
and my grandfather
and the criminals
and nihilists and artists and addicts.

Coral Bleaching | Ellie Schaap



Found | Harley Kramer

I go from one climate to another. The first one is cold and wet. I feel the damp in the fiber of my being. The second is hot and dry. It feels like the devil himself is trying to suffocate me. The world spins.

Suddenly...it all stops.

I feel nothing. I open my eyes for what feels like the very first time. Looking around, everything is just like me: lost, afraid, alone. I take my first steps into this new world of possibilities. It takes me a second to remember who I am.

I am the sock you lost in the dryer.

On Curriculum | Cait McReavy

Curriculum is a séance.
Reaching beyond the veil of time and
Robbing the graves of history.
The dead, in their hedjets and petticoats,
Peering up at you from the space between the lines,
Of history books written by men with blood between their teeth.
Did you know--- did you know---
No we didn't,
And not by accident.

Curriculum is a mirror which shows nothing.
Shelf after shelf of universal texts which know nothing about you.
These people don't look like me.
Seven years of bad luck to anyone who wondered
Why Fitzgerald and Twain?
Why Salinger and Hemingway?
Did you forget to invite Angelou and Baldwin and Woolf and Wilde,
To this dinner party where all we eat is phonemes?

Curriculum is a love poem in which you changed the pronouns,
Because you're not sure if your class is 'ready for that'.
And no one else writes that anyway.
At least no one you've learned about.
"Artistically impressive, but you misspelled 'failure'",
And "the sentence structure is all wrong, could you take it
down a notch?"
You don't put that essay on the fridge,
You don't title the poem about your first crush "Allison".

Curriculum is "I wish I could forget what was taught to me.
When the teacher didn't mean to teach me anything."
It's knowing that your identity has only ever been an elective.

Curriculum can be: "My future students will see themselves in the things that I teach."
(In the way that I didn't).
Curriculum will be: "I see you." "I see you." "I see you."

Paper Cranes | Cait McReavy

Once crumpled
paper cranes do not fly.
A seam too far to the right,
or a crease across the underbelly,
and the parchment bird,
so carefully crafted,
takes a nose dive into the carpet.

Left uncrumpled,
paper balls do not fly.
A straight edge here,
or crevice that is marked too lightly,
and the ink-armored hero,
so carefully crafted,
stumbles past the garbage can and crinkles in defeat.

Then what of the paper cranes that I folded for you?
Lined up so carefully in a color coded row
then sealed with tender fingers?
The ones that sat on your windowsill
until you no longer loved me;
then flew through the floorboards at the dying of our sun

living alone for the first time | Tara Metzger

my clothes and books and crumbs of life
litter the floor of my cold basement apartment.
there's no reason to pick them up
as it's just me here.

i wake myself up. i walk myself to work.
i meet me at the door to come home
and hang out, just me,
until i tuck myself into bed.

looming behind the sound of upstairs neighbors
and a pathetic iPhone speaker,
are my thoughts.
it's painfully quiet.

no matter how much noise i make
in an attempt to distract myself from the lack of vitality
in each of these windowless, white rooms
it's still so quiet.

although i was eager to move out
of my childhood bedroom
i can't help but emotionally wince
every time i see something that reminds me of Home home.

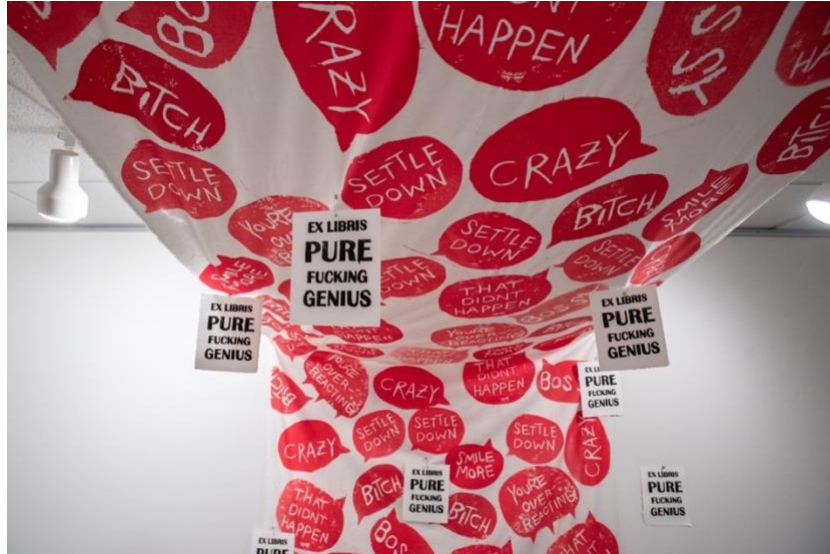
pajama pants that my mom
picked out for me.
homemade soup and
christmas spirit oils she made me take with.

they make my throat close
and my nose burn.
maybe it's the loneliness getting to me
but i'm feeling a little bit lonely.

The Drunk Girl | Jake Richmond

The sensory overload was blaring. Some bass-heavy song attacked the cheap stereo. Bodies were packed tightly into a sticky, violent mess as they desperately devoured their Solo cups to try and go away for a while. As I searched around for the familiar, my body vibrated loudly: only sour-smelling breath and my wet socks. As I weaved through the noise, I spotted the Drunk girl. She was disheveled, and her eyes were slow. Her lashes were droopy, and her face, caked with makeup and melancholy, couldn't decide if it wanted to droop into a smile or a grimace. I noticed how her static-y yellow hair floated around her head like a crown of thorns, and her dress coiled around her slender frame like a snake as it suffocates its prey. The drink in her hand sloshed violently, and her words zigzagged as she balanced herself on some anonymous frat boy. I noticed how his hand slid further and further down her dress with confidence. I wondered if he would plunder her body tonight.

Microaggressions | Kohleen Lyons





Trivia | Jake Richmond

Rusted out boxes of steel rumble in the distance as I stop to catch my breath. I feel my shirt clinging to my wet chest as it inflates and deflates methodically like an iron lung. Unconsciously, I lift my arms to rest my hands upon my crown in an attempt to capture the cool air around me and relieve myself of the painful stitch in my side. My eyes drift upwards and follow an airplane splitting the clear, blue sky with its plumed tail. It looks like a Southwest airline; it's easy to tell because of the blue bottom. When I was little, my mom told me that once, and I've never forgotten. It's weird how our brains choose to remember the most useless and mundane information, as if, for some reason, this factoid would serve a purpose. I wondered if I would serve a purpose, but do I even want to leave behind anything in this mangled mess of a world? Perhaps I would know one day, but not now; my brain was stuffed with more urgent matters—

Why do I only ever see old people driving Subaru's? Fuck, I don't think I drank enough water. I want to know who names these streets anyway. Where even is Barbados? Do you know what sounds good right about now? A burrito. Yeah, that's definitely a Southwest airline. I should call my mom.

I lumbered on, now enlightened with the triviality of my existence—and a hankering for some grub.

Adapting to the Pandemic: Greg Parmeter's new *Misanthrope*



Greg Parmeter in conversation with Sydney Smith

During the COVID-19 shutdown, live theatre productions all over the world were shut down, and theatre had to adapt. At the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Assistant Professor of Theatre Greg Parmeter wrote and directed a production for Zoom called *Influence*, a piece inspired by and adapted from Moliere's 17th Century satire, *The Misanthrope*. Having been fully conceived, written, and performed during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Influence* stands as a prime example of a significant new phenomenon in the theater world. Sydney Smith talked to Greg Parmeter about this ground-breaking work in Spring of 2021, with the end of the pandemic shimmering—real or a mirage?—on the horizon line.

Sydney Smith: For *Influence*, what was your inspiration for picking *The Misanthrope* to adapt?

Greg Parmeter: Loaded question! We wanted to do something that was royalty free. I knew that I didn't have time to create something brand new, so originally the goal was to find a play that could be done on Zoom. But after looking into it, one of the things that annoyed me about a lot of the Zoom plays is that they're not written to be done that way, "we can't have a live performance, we can't be onstage, so let's just put it on Zoom and see how it works," and so fundamentally none of them work. The few that have been written for Zoom have been really kitschy. So, once I started, I was like okay, what we need to do is create something that is designed specifically for Zoom, which means taking a piece that already exists in the public domain and adapting it. I am a huge fan of Moliere, and so I was thinking back to which of his works would be the most adaptable. I thought about *The Misanthrope* because it follows the unities, so it really stays very tight to a time and a place which solves a lot of problems. Also, those characters are dealing with a society and a world based on falseness, who you present yourself to the world versus who you really are behind the scenes. It just struck me that there are a lot of parallels to social media and being online during the pandemic. *The Misanthrope* just struck me as the one that had the most to say about what we're experiencing right now.

SS: What was your process for going through and doing the adaptation, what did you think about as you were going through?

GP: Well, the process started in a very different place than where I ended up. Originally, my goal was to do a modern language translation in rhymed couplets. But as I was going through building it, I went, this is for an intended audience of college students, the rhymed couplets are not going to succeed in doing what we want to do. I just abandoned that about halfway through my first draft. Once I did that it opened up the possibility of including more information that is germane to the now. I was able to write in more things about social media because I gave myself a little bit more flexibility. I started with characters, so I looked at Moliere's original characters and said, "okay, who would these people be in the modern setting?" You can see differences between the original versus what happens in *Influence*, particularly at the end.

SS: There are notable differences between *The Misanthrope* and *Influence*, what are some of them and why is that?

GP: That's a hard question to answer, because I think the spirit of Moliere and *The Misanthrope* exist all throughout the play, but there were certain things that Moliere was trying to do in his world that weren't going to fly in this world. One of the things about *The Misanthrope* is that the ending is very misogynistic. We have this toxic relationship, but one of them essentially gets off scot-free, though he's really the creator of the toxicity. I didn't want to see Alexander get off scot-free while Carly Mae gets everything dumped on her without her having any character growth. Because in *The Misanthrope* there is no growth, Celimene doesn't learn anything, she never takes agency over her life. So, by giving Alexander the heave-ho as she does, it fundamentally changes the ending, but in a more satisfying way. I also wanted the possibility that Alexander learns something real from it as well, and so the resolution of that relationship in *Influence* allows for the possibility of growth for both of those characters. Then there's certain things that existed in *The Misanthrope* that still exist in our play but in a slightly different form. A lot of people talked about the relationship between Flynt and Eliana, and making that an LGBTQ relationship. Well, that romance exists essentially as it does in *The Misanthrope*, the difference is that in *The Misanthrope*, Flynt is a male. I converted the character of Philinte into Flynt in my version because I needed to get more women in the play. Once I did that, I had the choice of getting rid of that romantic subplot or continuing that romantic subplot. The scenes where Flynt and Eliana reveal their feelings were my favorite to write and to work on because they felt so natural to me. I was concerned, because I didn't want people to think I was putting them in there for the titillation of having a lesbian relationship, but I was kind of surprised at how easy the relationship was to write because it felt real. We've all been in love, we've all been in love with somebody that surprises us, we've all been in love with that person that seems unattainable, so there is danger in pursuing that, and how that person makes you feel

when you find out that those feelings are reciprocated, I think we've all been in that position.

SS: It's definitely an interesting thing to explore from an LGBTQ perspective. As somebody who comes from that perspective, I know that you have to take a leap in order to find out if someone will even reciprocate any feelings you might have.

GP: I'm glad you mentioned that because those were things that existed within what we wrote for a couple of reasons. The danger to this little world that they've built for themselves and knowing that it's not always safe to come out to people you don't know. I was blessed in that Lauren, who played the role of Flynt, is also bisexual, and one of the things she talked about in that first scene where she reveals her feelings was how dangerous that is for Flynt, not just emotionally, but in the very real sense that there's now danger entering into her world. I was so lucky to have a queer actor playing that role because she was able to inform not just the performance but she was actually able to inform the writing. That was the beauty of working with actors and I made it very clear that the script was not set in stone when we started. The actors really did have influence over the script of *Influence* and none, I think, more so than in that situation. That's the other fear when you're a heterosexual white cisgender male, writing a scene for a community that you're not a part of, it's always risky. I was glad that it worked out and I had that kind of support to make it even more honest, because I think in the end she brought so much to that moment and I think that's one of the reasons why people responded to it and that entire relationship.

SS: How much would you say that performers in the show, like with the Flynt and Eliana relationship, influenced the script of the show?

GP: Quite a bit! Although, they would probably say not as much as they think but as I look back on it, I know that they made more contribution to the script than they probably even realize, because there were literally lines that while they were performing, I would go in and subtly rewrite based on what they said, because I would hear it and go "oh shit, that sounds better!" I had the joy in this case being a director that could change the script to fit the actor as opposed to having the actor treating that script as gospel and unchangeable. We were able to make those changes, because there wasn't a playwright out there going, "No! No, you have to treat my words as though they're sacred!" Because I'm also going, "this was done on short notice." From conception to closing the show was essentially 3 months in total. And that's terrifying! Even with a script that you begin with, I mean, I've been a part of production processes that have been 18 months, so the ability to have those actors actually give input and create is one of the strengths of the entire production.

SS: Were there any special considerations because you were planning to adapt the show to Zoom? Things that you looked at specifically?

GP: Well, one of the other reasons I chose *The Misanthrope* was it was written to take place in one location and knowing that I had a play that everything took place in one location allowed me to know that we could do this in a Zoom Room. Additionally, when I did the adaptation, I had this awkward time jump of several weeks which didn't make sense. Here we are doing Zoom and, essentially, doing this play in real time, and so a big long jump in time just was not going to work, particularly because there was nothing, we could do to change the environment. But those considerations had to be taken in that idea that things that'll work onstage are not going to work in a Zoom world, especially with an audience that has been living their life on Zoom. Those things weren't going to work, so we had to make sure that this still made structural sense to the audience.

SS: I found a Zoom adaptation of *The Seagull* which was very interesting. In the fourth act, they had three of the actors in the same physical space. I thought it was an interesting device.

GP: Yeah, we had some of those struggles too, in the play when people pass notes or documents, but that's where screensharing came into it. A couple of the other concerns were these conceits that we walked in the door with, I mean, one of the things that I adhered to was I absolutely wanted to do this live. I wanted the possibility of things going wrong. I wanted that thrill of live performance. Zoom also couldn't be the solution to the problem of not having live performance, Zoom had to be inherently important to the story, Zoom had to be the medium.

SS: Do you have any other final thoughts, advice, anything before we say adieu?

GP: You know, like with anything, don't be afraid to take the big risk, don't be afraid to try something hard. But the simplest solution is often the best. But don't be afraid to also change your plan, because there were things that I originally envisioned that changed significantly.

Harvest Season | Brandon Schultz

Crickets chirped in the cool, night air. The moon and stars hid behind a thick veil of clouds. Neither the farmhouses nor the barnyards themselves shed any light into the dark, leaving the world blanketed in shadow. The countryside lay calm, patiently waiting for the morning sun to rise. In the Dembrook household, a young boy slowly lifted his head from his pillow. With a soft yawn, followed by a stretch, the boy slid from his bed and stumbled his way into the kitchen. He frowned at the clock as he poured himself a glass of milk, unsure why he had woken up at such a late hour. The boy shrugged, hardly concerned. It was summer vacation after all, and he didn't have plans for the next day anyway. And so the boy sipped at his milk while looking out the kitchen window, admiring the view of a peaceful summer night. After his glass had been emptied, the boy started to head back to his room. But before he got far, the boy stopped to frown slightly at his window. A thin layer of frost had spread across it, marring his view of the countryside. Moving closer to the window, he could hardly believe his eyes as he wiped at the window. The frost refused to clear. Instead, it only left his skin tingling from the cold. Hardly believing that it had suddenly turned so cold outside, the boy stepped towards his door. The last few days had brought nothing but sunshine and heat to his part of the county, even a trace of frost was out of the question.

When the boy stepped outside, his frown only furrowed further. Just as he had suspected, the temperature was cool, yes, but there was no way that it would let a window completely frost over. The boy stopped when a flicker of movement caught his attention. The boy stared at the small barn in front of him. He could have sworn he saw something, *someone*, standing behind it. But now, he was alone with only himself and the cool breeze to keep him company. Even the crickets had stopped chirping. The boy took a step forward, wanting to clear his mind and to prove that it was only his imagination.

"Hello?" he called. There was no answer. The boy took another step forward. He called out again, his voice trembling slightly. "If anyone's out there, my daddy's got a gun and he'll blast you!"

After a third step, the sound of his front door shutting came behind him. The boy whirled around, but saw nothing besides a closed door. As far as he could tell, no one had entered or left his house. He was still alone. The boy turned back to face his barn and gasped as he saw the silhouette of a tall figure. Wrapped in a dark cloak, the figure towered over the boy despite its unnatural skinniness. A ragged straw hat topped the figure's head, hiding any features of its face from the boy. Young Dembrook fell backward as he tried to stumble away, his face pale as the figure hefted a scythe into the air, its metal blade glinting with the scattered traces of moonlight. The figure moved towards the boy, a heavy limp in its gait.

The boy's screams were cut off before they began. Birds flew into the night air. The crickets stopped chirping for the rest of the night.

"We've already expanded the search areas- No, that's not what I've been saying, if you'd just list-... *Goddamnit* the dogs couldn't even find a trail. We've had parties tearing up every piece of this county looking for that boy. We've called neighbors, family friends, anyone remotely close to this case." The sheriff's rumble easily reached past his office's locked door. Deputy George Polanski shuffled awkwardly outside the door, his hat in his hands as he waited for his chance to interrupt. The sheriff's voice was calm and collected when he spoke again. "I'm not asking for much, just some support to put this behind us all." Another pause, and the deputy heard the sheriff's heavy sigh. "Governor, sir, this is a child's life at stake. With how far he could've gotten by now, we'll need more than what this county has at its disposal. And if we don't find him soon, I'm afraid we'll lose our chances of ever bringing him home." When George couldn't hear anymore talk from the sheriff, he tentatively knocked. The sheriff gave a gruff acknowledgement, and George cracked the door open to slip inside. The room was practical. Nothing too large, it was just able to house a bookshelf and a coffee pot aside from the sheriff's necessities- namely a filing cabinet, a desk, and a gun safe.

"How can I help, George?"

"Being honest sir, I think I'd like to help *you*." The deputy met the sheriff's gaze as he spoke, seeing a lion's share of strength beneath those aging brown eyes, but also the signs of stress and weariness creeping at their edges. A steel wall finally eroding over years of pressure. "I know that these last few days have been hard."

The sheriff chuckled dryly. "Hard? An eight year old boy vanished into thin air, in the middle of the night, and I feel like this department is the only people doing something about it. Every day, the Dembrooks call me, asking if we have any news about their Joshua."

"And they'll just have to be patient, as tragic and hard as their situation may be. But I wanted to talk about you, sheriff, not the case." The sheriff frowned, his grizzled face and its wrinkled features contorting with the motion. George plodded along, a note of concern clearly ringing in his voice. "You've been letting this case get in your head, and not like they usually do. I think- I think there's more going on than just the case, sir."

"Come again, Polanski?"

"Well, sir, it's been four days since the Dembrooks first called us and said their boy was missing, and I'm not sure if you've gotten a full night's sleep since then. Frankly, you're more burnt out than the butt of a lot lizard's cigarette."

The sheriff chuckled at the comment, more earnestly than before. He set two black mugs onto his desk and made for his waiting pot of coffee. "What gave it away? The bags under my eyes, or the naps on my break?"

The deputy laughed meekly, nervously. "Both, sir. It's not right for the county sheriff to be dragging himself at the ends of his wits, and it's not gonna help us find the boy." The deputy's eyes followed the sheriff as he made for the coffee. "On top of that, sir, it's not going to help us find *your* boy." The sheriff's hand slipped as he began pouring the coffee, spilling it onto the desk as much as into the mug. He cursed under his breath while the deputy snapped upward from his own seat, quick to help tidy the mess. The sheriff waved off the barrage of ensuing apologies.

"Sit back down, deputy. I can clean this up."

The deputy retreated back to his chair, a look of concern visible on his face. "I just want to make sure that no matter what happens here, with that Dembrook boy, you realize it won't change the past. It can't, sheriff. I'm afraid you've been pushing yourself well past your limits or what anyone should ask of you."

The sheriff looked up from the half-cleaned mess, looking even more tired than he had at the beginning of the conversation. He slowly sank into his seat. "I... I know. But no one deserves to go through what I did, Polanski. What I still do. If there's any chance that we can bring that boy back home, you can bet your ass that I'm taking it."

George nodded. "I understand, sheriff, and I'd gladly do the same. But if you don't watch out for yourself, you won't be any help to that boy or the county. We all need you, you know that?"

The sheriff nodded and took a heavy gulp of his now filled coffee. "Of course." He spoke tenderly now, a far cry from his conversation on the phone. "Was there anything else, deputy?"

The deputy shook his head. "Just... take care of yourself. Relax tonight, alright? Tomorrow's search party needs you just as much as tonight's would." The deputy took a drink from his own mug before rising. He made for the door, but turned at the sound of the sheriff's voice.

"And Polanski? Thank you."

For the most part, the bar was empty. It was nearing final call and most of the patrons, even the regulars, had somewhere to be tomorrow morning. The sheriff sighed as he let the brandy slide down his throat. It burnt his lips and tongue, cleared his nostrils. The barkeep looked down at the sheriff, a questioning look on his face as his hand hovered over the empty shot glass. The sheriff nodded once, almost imperceptibly.

"Oh, go ahead and fill it again." the sheriff said dismissively, The barkeep grunted and slid the glass over to his end of the counter. The sheriff's old, deadened eyes

followed the bottle of brandy as it was lifted, tipped, and as the ambrosia spilled from its lips. The shot slid back to the sheriff's end. It was drained just as quickly as the last. This time, however, his head spun and whirled. He recoiled in his stool, threatening to tip over, before overcorrecting and spilling forward onto the counter.

"Might want to let that sit for now, Daryl." The barkeep said softly. The sheriff nodded profusely, pinching his nose at the burning in his nostrils.

"Might be for the better," he gasped. The barkeep grunted again and slid the glass away from the sheriff, who violently shook his head to lose the dizziness. It only worsened.

"Oh come on now, sheriff," a new voice purred in a southern drawl. The reek of tobacco smoke filled the sheriff's nostrils, "Can't handle your whisky?" the voice tutted. The sheriff's head snapped to face of the newcomer, unsure who had sat next to him, or when they even did. The sheriff saw a lavishly dressed man- a dark purple suit, a matching wide brimmed Stetson hat, and boots blacker than the night sky. A bright spark of orange glowed from a cigarette in the newcomer's hand. Smoke danced in wondrous swirls as it raced to the bar's ceiling. Another wave of tobacco smoke washed over the sheriff. He frowned. The room around them seemed darker, and much smokier than the sheriff remembered.

"Have we met, friend?" The sheriff asked inquisitively, knowing full well that they hadn't.

The newcomer chuckled wetly, as if he was clearing his throat of phlegm- or even gravel, with how hearty the rumbling from the man's chest was, "No, but we're meeting now, which is what matters. Just know that I'm a card dealer, of a sort. And more importantly, a helping hand." The man in the purple suit drawled, "And if I'm to be honest, you need a bit of help." The sheriff glanced toward the barkeep, wondering what he was making of the conversation. He frowned, there was no sign of him.

"Agnew took the night off, the lad deserved it," the man in purple pitched in, seeing the sheriff's confusion. The sheriff looked around the rest of the bar. It was just as smoky as the air around this mystery man, as if his cigarette had clouded every part of the place. What's more, the rest of the patrons had disappeared along with the barkeep. It was only himself and this newcomer. Before he could comment, the man in the purple suit pitched back in.

"Who the hell are you." The sheriff turned to face the man again, and this time it was not a question.

The man in the purple suit kept his cool composure and took another long drag from his cigarette. It illuminated his face enough to catch a greying stubble and weathered features. "We have a lot of ground to cover, and not a lot of time to do it, if you catch my meaning." He spoke dismissively, as if mildly annoyed at the question. "I can help you find the Dembrook boy, as best I can at least, and in return you'll help me find what took him."

The sheriff's frown deepened. "If you know something, *anything*, that can help that case, please don't spare the details." For some reason, the longer he looked at the man, the worse that spinning feeling got. His eyes became ever more fixated on the black boots.

The man's lips twitched into a smirk. "I'd be careful what you wish for, sheriff. No. For your sake, I will spare the details. While you're sleeping off those drinks, I want some of your boys to check out an old shack. It's out by Derghie Park, on county road G. I think they'll find something useful." The man in the purple suit stood up, and a fresh wave of nausea rushed over the sheriff. He braced himself against the counter and grit his teeth.

"George," the sheriff managed, knowing the deputy would be able to help- even this late into the night.

"You can pick your Phoenician sailor, Daryl," the man in the purple suit drawled. His boots clicked against the bar floor as he strode away. "It hardly matters to me." As the man in the purple suit reached the door, the sheriff was overcome with a dizzying swirl of black and purple across his vision. He groaned and fought off the urge to puke. It wasn't much longer before the floor rushed up to meet him and his world turned to black.

George frowned as he peered into the darkness below him. His conversation with the very drunk and very disoriented sheriff rang in his ears. He had rambled about some shack by a park, insisting that George get there immediately. Something about the Dembrook boy being there, and a lot of nonsense that didn't make sense. Now, after almost an hour of driving across the county and its winding roads, dodging deer whenever they jumped out, the deputy had arrived at the promised shack. The actual place looked well past abandoned and given over to dust- he doubted he could sit or even lean on any of the furniture without it breaking. His flashlight did little to illuminate the cellar, only showing him that the ladder did indeed reach the bottom. He sighed softly, knowing that he'd have to go down there.

"Joshua Dembrook, are you down here? This is Deputy Polanski. I'm here to help." George called out, hoping for some kind of answer. He waited for a moment, his heart pounding. His eyes widened when a child's shrill voice called back.

"I-I'm down here! I'm down here! I can't see! P-please.... H-h-help me." The voice wavered as it begged. There was no strength to it.

"Hold tight!" The deputy practically threw himself down the ladder, not trusting it to hold his weight, but desperately needing to reach its end. The basement was noticeably colder than the shack above, though the old shack already did little to give warmth or protection from the wind. Its stone floor and walls surrounded him,

stretching past the wall of darkness in front of the deputy. George's flashlight cut into the dark, but it refused to be completely obliterated. It clung to the edges of the light, as if threatening to snuff it out completely. The basement was a large, open space of stone and dirt. As the deputy cast the light around the room, searching for a sign of the Dembrook boy. He frowned, seeing a single door at the end of the room. The deputy inched toward the door, his heart threatening to leap from his chest. George reached for the door, slowly swinging it open.

He recoiled in horror at what his light revealed. He found the Dembrook boy alright, but not in any shape he had hoped for. The poor Dembrook boy writhed against chicken wire wrapping across- in part *into* his body, pinning him in place. The boy didn't react to the light shining into his face, and George soon realized why. His eyes were pale orbs- though his report hadn't said anything of the boy being blind, he clearly was now.

"Oh my God. Oh my God. L-look, kid. I'm gonna get you out of here." The Deputy said, almost to himself as much as the Dembrook boy.

"I wanna go home. I wanna go home. I wanna go home!" The boy cried out and writhed more against his brutish bindings. The deputy took a step closer to the boy, but recoiled again as he saw that the boy wasn't alone in the room. Though this side room was smaller than the first of the basement, its walls were lined with sights similar to the Dembrook boy. Rows upon rows of humanoid forms dangled, each tangled in their own web of wiring. The deputy felt his stomach lurch. He sunk to his knees and felt bile slip past his throat and lips. One of the few unfortunate souls his flashlight cast its light on shuddered horribly. It made a weak, hissing gurgle before falling still again. The deputy's eyes streamed with tears and his nose watered from the burning. The Dembrook boy stopped squirming suddenly, though the tears kept rolling silently down his face.

"He's coming. He's coming. Heiscoming. Heiscoming. Heiscomingheiscoming. Heiscoming heiscomingheiscomingheiscoming." The boy spat the words out ever faster, his breathing increasingly ragged. The deputy's hand moved to hush the boy. To calm him.

"Who's coming, son?" The deputy asked quietly, but the boy fell still. The tears stopped flowing from the boy's face, and his breathing became weak, almost imperceptible. A cold spike shivered down the deputy's spine.

Above, he heard the floorboards creak in an irregular pattern. A sharp creak, then a slow shuffle. Another sharp creak. Another slow shuffle. Sharp creak. Slow shuffle. The deputy drew his revolver as he whirled around. He rested his gun-arm over the other and dropped to a knee, watching the ladder while his heart pounded in his ears.

Another sharp creak. Another slow shuffle. It was just above the ladder now, it had to be. The deputy stifled a gasp as a large scythe dropped from the hole, clattering against the stone. There was silence for a moment, save for the wind rattling the oak door above him. Then, a lanky figure leapt down the shaft after the instrument. It was tall, at least two heads taller than the deputy, and its features hidden behind a black cloak and a tattered straw hat. The man, if it were such a thing, stooped down to retrieve its scythe. If it noticed the glaring flashlight, it made no sign.

The deputy's revolver and flashlight shook in his hands, the cold in his spine was even worse now. Whether voluntary or not, George had no way of knowing, the Dembrook boy croaked out a ragged gasp. The thing's head snapped upward, directly at the deputy's light. Fortunately, the thing's true features were obscured beneath a cloth mask as tattered as the hat above it. The deputy could not see any holes for a mouth, nose, or even eyes on the cloth. Exposed patches of grey, sagging and rotten skin peered through the frayed parts of the covering, telling enough of a tale for the deputy. The thing took an uneven step forward as it rose, the scythe clattering against the stone behind.

"Oh Jesus," the deputy uttered as his revolver and flashlight slid from his grasp. He fell to the floor, shaky hands scrabbling for his lifeline. In his panic, the revolver was sent skittering further away from him, into the veil of pitch black encompassing him. A whimper of fear slipped past his lips as his fingers clasped his flashlight. He heard another click of a boot one stone, followed by that all-too-familiar shuffle of its crippled leg. The scythe never stopped its clattering. The deputy leapt for his revolver on the ground, his shaking hands bringing it to bear against the monster before him. The revolver barked in his hands six times; the only relent between each shot was the time to draw the hammer back again. The room flashed brilliantly and blindingly with each report. Each shot ripped through the thing, sending it stumbling backward.

But it still stood. It's frame shifted side to side as it peered down at the six craters in its torso. Its head tittered one way, then snapped to another. One hand slipped from the scythe to poke its clawed digits into the wounds. The deputy stared in disbelief. Nothing should have survived that, but this *thing* was looking at the wounds as if it were a child inspecting a bug it caught. The revolver and flashlight fell from his hands as he stared dumbly.

The click of boot on stone. Another shuffle. The scythe clattered against the stone.

The sheriff cursed wildly when he saw the still form of Deputy George Polanski sprawled out in the grass, the collapsed remains of a shack behind him. The sheriff sprinted toward the still form of his friend and fellow officer, refusing to believe his eyes. With a horrible gash in his side, the deputy and the grass he was laying in were soaked in blood. The deputy's skin was pale-far paler than it ever had a right to be. The sheriff knelt over George, checking for any sign of life. As his hand brushed George's neck, a greying hand snapped up to clench the sheriff's wrist. The sheriff cursed again, then muttered a relief as his friend was alive. The prayer fell dead in his lips when he saw George's eyes, now with the glaring mark of cataracts.

"Oh Jesus, George. What happened to you?" The sheriff whispered.

"It...." George croaked, his hand slipping away from the sheriff, "it didn't... *want* me."

"What was it, George? Where is it?" The sheriff asked desperately.

"Far away.... But not gone. Never... gone." The deputy sputtered, and became still once more. His chest gave a final, ugly rattle.

"It had to go this way, sheriff. But we *are* closer to catching it." That same drawl from last night- the sheriff had thought it was a strange dream when he had first woke up. His head snapped toward the sound of the voice, and again he saw the man in the purple suit. He was kneeling next to him, smoking on another cigarette.

"What the hell happened here?" the sheriff growled. The man in the purple suit shook his head.

"Your deputy found the Dembrook boy, from the look of things."

"You better start talking a lot faster than you have been," the sheriff's voice was hardly above a whisper, but it held the ferocity of a lion. The man in the purple suit chuckled softly.

"Alright, Daryl. I owe you this much. What took your deputy, and that boy, and a whole mess of people before that, it ain't from here, and it ain't alone. But it is the first of 'em to show up. Always the first, like clockwork." The sheriff stared at the man, if he could even continue to think of him as a man. He fought off that nauseating feeling as he stared, refusing to look away. The man's lips stretched into a smirk. "And, I think that if we can stop their Harbinger, we can stop them from coming altogether."

"Why me? Why George, or the Dembrook's boy? This has been a quiet county, we never asked for this... this *thing* to come here."

"Oh, you should know better than that," the man chided, "need I remind you of what happened, what was it, thirty-some years ago by now?" The sheriff's hands tightened into fists.

"How do you kno-"

"About your dearest, dead son? Because I find out everything that I need to. I'll spare you the details of my trade. I also won't preach on your departed kin anymore,

save that the *thing* I hunt took your boy all those years ago." The sheriff's jaw tightened. The nausea still remained from looking at the man, especially for as long as he had been, but it was finally beginning to settle- abate, even.

"Can it die?" The sheriff said at last. The man in the purple suit laughed, a deeper boom than his gravel chuckle.

"In due time, Daryl. You've got one more step to take with me, before you can truly help. Are you ready?" The sheriff paused again. His gaze finally dropped from the man, returning to the slain deputy before them. With the stress and fear still written on his face, George did not look asleep.

"What do I need to do?" The sheriff asked. Another chuckle from the man in the purple suit, who climbed to his feet with the grimace and lack of grace of an old man.

"Come with me," the man drawled and took a drag of his cigarette, "The Harbinger doesn't like things interfering with its harvests. When George reached its victims, the Harbinger leveled the site." As the man spoke, he walked toward the ruins of the shack. The clouds above grew darker and covered more of the sky. The tobacco reek was incessant. The man in the purple suit reached the door frame of the shack and lifted a hand into the air. With another drag of the cigarette, the collapsed woodwork began to shake and rattle, seemingly with a life of its own. The wood snapped and creaked as it shifted, moving to reform the shack that once stood. The man in the purple suit chuckled lightly as the sheriff mumbled a curse in disbelief. The man strode through the door, and the sheriff followed close after. "But this wasn't just a place for it to store what it harvested, no. The walls between this realm and the Harbinger's are thin here, either by a natural design or the Harbinger's own. Even though the Harbinger has moved on, the walls remain thin." The man stopped at the top of a ladder. He beckoned for the sheriff to take the lead, who frowned.

"You had me send George to die."

"Only so that others could be free from the Harbinger, Daryl. And *you* chose George, not me." When the sheriff wouldn't budge, the card dealer sighed. "There is no changing the past, sheriff. But we can move forward, and put an end to what took him from this world. What took the little Dembrook, and your own son." The sheriff closed his eyes. He drew in a great breath and held it, before slowly letting it slip through his nose. The sheriff's eyes slowly slid open, and he began to climb down the ladder. At the bottom, the sheriff could hardly make out his surroundings. "Your eyes will adjust," the reek of tobacco redoubled as the dealer reassured the sheriff, once again appearing at his side. After a moment, the sheriff's eyes did adjust- though it was far from a comfortable lighting. He could make out a door at the end of the room, with a faint purplish glow seeping from its edges. The sheriff tentatively walked toward it, not sure what he would find behind that door with its purplish light. His hand brushed the doorknob. It was far colder than he expected, practically frosted over. "I didn't have a choice, when I first stumbled into their world. They took me, kicking and screaming." The

dealer drawled from behind the sheriff. "I saw more than I ever expected to- more than I ever dreamt was out there. More than I ever feared *could* be out there. Should be. But without it, I would have never become what I am now. Nor will you, should you back away now." The drawl no longer came from behind the sheriff, but around him- as if the room itself spoke for him now. The sheriff turned around, but could no longer see the man in the purple suit. "Will you do what it takes to get your vengeance- and your peace? Will you cross the door?"

"After the Harbinger," the sheriff said to the room, "I'm going after you. I'm putting an end to this all." The sheriff turned back to the door. He felt the doorknob's cold seep through his skin, straight to the bone. He slowly twisted the knob. The door creaked open, and the sheriff felt the room pulling against him, guiding him through the frame. As he plunged forward, he heard the fading laughter of the dealer behind him. The sheriff's world shifted from darkness to a blinding array of light and color. He felt himself plummet, as if he had cast himself into a pit with no sign of ending. The sheriff saw tendrils of purple swirl around him, coalescing against his form before dissipating once more. He saw horrific forms of creatures- a hybrid form of a humanoid with several sets of mandibles and insect like wings. A hideously malformed female form covered in a sleuth of bandages and tattered white robes, hissing and sending brackish spittle in every direction. A bipedal, black-haired fox laughing wickedly. More came, each more dizzying and *wrong* than the last.

"An end to it all. Now that I would very much like to see." The voice drawled.

Carton | Ellie Schaap



This is What Heroes Do | Brandon Schultz

Superheroes. Fucking hate that word. Just a bunch of cock sniffers in spandex, cowards, or both.

Our van rolled down a barely lit road, bumping and swaying at every crack and pothole. Ad-Block was already annoying. Almost as annoying as it is misfortunate having the name 'Ad-Block'. The boy fidgeted in his seat, stealing odd glances in my direction, and tapped his fingers against his chair. He really wasn't a boy, not physically, but with his giddiness I wasn't about to call him a man. I tried to ignore it, like I would the rest of them: the adoring fans and the aspiring superheroes. Ad-Block cleared his throat, bringing me back to the van and his fidgety nervousness. Finally, he found the balls to speak.

"Hey, uh, Solar Flare? Before we get in there and get to work, I just wanted to say that I'm, like, a huge fan and I'm really exci-."

"Cut the shit," I spit back, "name's Sarah. Only the pricks at corporate still call me Solar Flare." The look in my eyes brooked no discussion. His face fell, marring his features. "And don't get excited about this job, we're just clean-up. None of that hero shit."

"Okay Sarah," the kid began slowly, testing the name like one would an unfamiliar food, "w-why no hero, uh, shit? Aren't we the heroes?"

"Got your hero's license yet?" I ask with a sigh, knowing full well the answer. Without a hero's license, you were S-O-L on serving 'vigilante justice'. ZioCorp, its corporate rivals, or the feds hunt you down. Anything to keep their merchandise and sponsored heroes going. Ad-Block's eyes drop to his boots.

"Well, no..." he answers weakly, apologetically even, "but that's part of why ZioCorp sent me on this mission, right? To get my feet wet?" I sigh again, but don't answer.

Our van stopped. I clambered through the back doors, taking in a deep breath of the night's cool air. The van always had been a musty son of a bitch. Ad-Block thanked the driver, who sped off as soon as we had both feet on pavement. Ahead of us stood a factory complex- or what was left of one. It was a wreckage of metal and debris. Collateral damage; just another check and hand wave to fix in ZioCorp's eyes. The front gate was rent apart, letting us stroll through.

"Now *that* is a lot of damage," Ad-Block (what an awful name) whispered.

"We're gonna be here awhile," I sighed, "Octoman makes a mess, no matter what job."

"O-Octoman was here?!" He asked excitedly.

"Keep your voice down." He kept the stupid grin, but fell silent.

I smelled the lobby before we stepped inside. It was rancid like death, but nothing I hadn't already dealt with. Ad-Block however was a different story, and opening the doors hardly helped the situation. Ahead of us lie the form of two men, as utterly broken and beaten as the rest of the factory. One was completely unrecognizable, save for his shoes.

"Oh sweet Jesus," Connor croaked and doubled over. He retched and gagged, clutching his stomach tight.

"This is what superheroes do, son." I said while walking past Ad-Block.

"Oh my God. Oh my God. *This is what heroes do?!*" he shrieked, flailing his arms. "That guy looks like spilled lasagna! What the fuck? Oh my God."

I sighed again. "Octoman's 'power' is having eight arms. You think he was gonna do a recon mission? Use his words?"

"No! But- but I didn't- that's not..." this time, Ad-Block did puke, painting his boots a new shade. I waved my hand, and the pair of cadavers were replaced with a blazing fire. A charred smell of burnt meat filled the air as the fires died back down, leaving nothing but white ash. Ad-Block tried to overcome his retching. One hand on his stomach, the other propping him against a wall, and his head hung limp.

"Why... Why do you... do this job?" He managed at last.

"This is my retirement, kid. Got tired of the superhero shtick- got old fast when 'hero' is just a title, ain't the same meaning to it as there used to be. This is better than being in Octoman's shoes."

"Can't you just leave? You're *Solar Flare*, Queen of Fire!" He yells, waving his hands with every word. I fold my arms and set my jaw. I couldn't tell this kid half of the things I'd seen and done for ZioCorp in the name of being a 'superhero'. I couldn't tell him how I tried to retire, and they denied it. Tried to run away, and they caught me- would've killed me on the spot if I hadn't agreed to come back. If I told this boy *anything*, they'd kill us both and send another pyro to make us ash.

"You want out of the 'hero' business, this is gonna be your last chance. Before you get that license and stick your leg in this bear-trap. Otherwise shut up and help me clear the rest of this shit." Ad-Block stared at me with a look I hadn't seen in him before. Small bursts of static-electricity crackled around his form.

"I can't believe I watched your movies." He spun on his heel and stormed away.

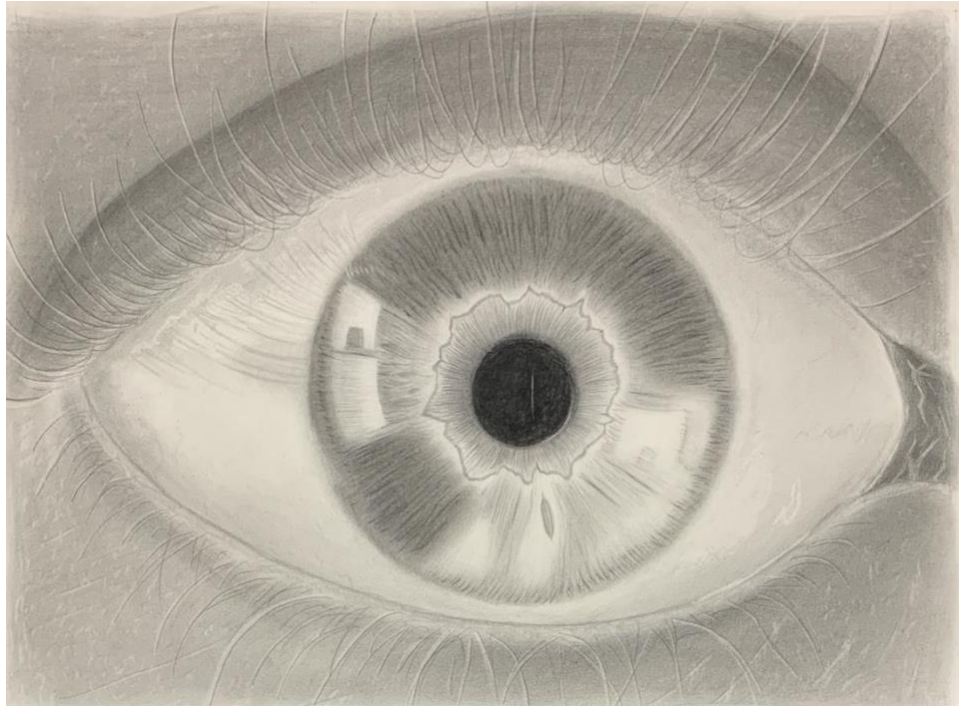
My earphone burst with life. First glaring static, then the crackle of gunfire. Finally, a supersonic dickhead's voice shined through. "Hey Solar Flare, I know you're busy with that lab, but when you wrap that up with the kiddo, I've got a gunfight down past Elms Street that you'll wanna check out. Thanks, you're the best, hugs and kisses, gotta go!"

I took a deep breath, exhaled it slowly. "Crime doesn't rest, so neither can you," I mutter under my breath; one of ZioCorp's favored lines.

Stepping Over Birds | Summer Schwenn

Sometimes it's important to dumb life down
to the simplest things.
Some days it's being able to cross the street
in a timely fashion;
other times it's fully embracing
the slap of cold wind on your cheek
when you can see the sun's reflection
bouncing off the treetops filling your vision.
Sometimes it's easy to breathe deeply and smile,
to feel like there isn't a shadow
looming behind you.
Other days it's a little hitch in the lungs
before my pitch turns to sour
and I can't seem to catch myself quick enough.
It's a crunched up mess on the sidewalk,
a stain blinding your smirk
turning to glassy eyes
and shaky hands.
These days it's best
to walk a little faster and look around less.
You won't find me stepping over birds;
I haven't mustered the courage
to call it quits with fear yet.
It's liberating to feel so suffocated,
a hazy meditation on burning grimaces;
it's a poison that aches with the passion
of paper cuts that sting slow and hard.
It's not enough to look it in the eye,
I want to grab its hand
and take it dancing;
I want to be wrapped around its finger
and lose myself so completely that
I can't find my way home again.

Eye | Riley Radle



Like Spoons | Kerri Seyfert

Spooning has always confused me.

Is it for sleeping,
cuddling,
sex?

It is one of those positions
that is comfortable,
like two people are
meant to somehow
take that form.

With our big heads
and thin bodies,
spooning
like spoons,
in a silverware drawer.

I have done it
multiple times now
out of obligation,
I'd say.

Out of all the positions to sleep
it seems the most
safe.

It feels nice too,
a warm chest against
my back,
like a hot flame
to metal,
arms, embracing me
my butt pressed
to a usually hard penis.
Spoonng.
So weird.

But this one time
I was spooned,
half unexpectedly.
He had rolled me over
after shushing my quick breaths

and placed his body behind mine.
Liquifying my brain
with that spark.
Flooding me with a feeling
that matched the
warm glow of my lamp.

Soft and relaxed,
our bodies in sync
sighing with relief.
In that moment,
I got it.
Spooning,
not weird.
Euphoric.

I lifted my head over my shoulder,
heavy and cloudy from being cradled,
and kissed him,
already restless for his touch.
How can two bodies fit so perfectly?
It was like his and mine were always supposed to be there, spooning.
Like all the moments had led up to this one.
Where my big head became stained and burnt
with his addictive thin body,
becoming consumed with thoughts of spoons.
And as much as I'd like to chalk it all up to proportions,
I don't think I can.
Because that feeling is not one to be replicated by any number of spoons,
but his and mine

Route | Kerri Seyfert

Do you get attached to places?
Do you find comfort in seeing familiar
signs, stoplights, or benches?
Do these material objects
make you want to make a wish?

Do you run on a route
because of its meaning?
Passing places that allow you
To visualize a moment
or even a person?

Do you walk down the stairs
with orange plastic streamers
blowing in the breeze
put up to keep the pigeons away
remembering how we walked up them?

Do you hit the driveway
in your tennis shoes and spandex
to try and forget?
Or to try and remember?
Before you know the answer,
are you immediately reminded
of standing in the driveway
awkwardly calling his name
because he got lost
the first time he came over?

Do you start walking
on the sidewalk and think
about his steps?
When you start your music
and start your pace,
do you choose to run down
15th street
so that you can imagine
how he walked to you?

Past

the hedges
the red brick three-unit home
the white house with the sneakers
hanging on the telephone line
a pair always together
the parking lot
then campus.

Do you take a couple seconds
to stare at that spot
on the sidewalk?
Where you crossed paths
after the super bowl
where you gave each other
that look of
surprised to see you here
but I'm happier for it

When you run past
do you close your eyes
for a few seconds
to remember it all
before you chase
more memories
that will blow
through your hair
with the breeze?

Do you make a wish when you see Hutch
because you know
that's where he'd dream?
And get ready to see you, too.
Brushing his teeth
so his mouth was minty
when he got to kiss you

When you run past the clock tower
do you wonder
if your footsteps ever find
where his once were?

Do you find comfort in knowing
he was once where you step?

When you get back home,
can you tell if your breaths are harsh
from running
or remembering?
Or are you unsure
because when you walk up those stairs
you remember that he walked down them
when he left?

And was your wish
that he'd come back?

Permission | Meg Shevenock

I walk out of the house composed. The air, a perfect-temperature-bath. The bird song between certain alleys, deafening. The moon boxes my eye with its chalked fist. I remember the chalkboard eraser vacuum in the back of the elementary school cafeteria, how every student would fight to carry the erasers in a light, neat stack to be suctioned, after clapping them outside against the bricks. A strange and simple pleasure, even then, old-fashioned, the way the chalk would mark our forearms, bricks take on ghosts, lungs cough. But how slowly the moon is a line about time I can't tell. My friend has died. Only two days ago, I sat beside his hospital bed holding a miniature carton of orange juice. The blue plastic germ gloves bunched in my lap. I think of how, despite his coma, he was full of pain he couldn't describe—we could all see it in his breathing. Still, I couldn't help the dizziness, or how my head ached, drinking the warm orange juice that was healing, there at the tucked corner of his last bed, where, I believed, if only for my own comfort, he allowed me to be thirsty.

editors' note: in February, 2021, Meg Shevenock read from her award-winning poetry collection, *The Miraculous, Sometimes*, over Zoom, and met with UWL students to discuss her writing and visual art practices, as well as abuse, trauma, and recovery.

Day of Lucidity 724: My Body Became a Geiger Counter

|
Aaron Ickler



A Broken Beer Bottle | Connor J. Stenz

I was walking to my car back from my school's gym to put away my wallet and housekeys to prepare for a night run, when I noticed a beer bottle, smashed on the concrete right by the entrance to the parking garage at my University.

"Un-Fucking Believable." I thought to myself, though I probably muttered it under my breath too. "Is it seriously that hard to pick your shit up and put it in the garbage can that's literally less than fifty paces away? I guess it's easy to buy craft beers and smash them on the concrete when you're using your parents credit card. Does she really want to fuck you that much more because you were so badass and smashed a beer bottle on the concrete? Not to mention that it's a beer bottle, smashed and broken. Right by where cars come in and out. Not too far from where kids like to pick things up off the ground. But you were a badass and thought you'd be so fucking cool by throwing a once-full bottle of beer onto the ground, smashing it. What a fucking Chad. I wish I could be like you (sarcasm!)."

I stopped myself from going off on this imaginary person that I had named Charlie. I suddenly remembered that one time that I was on a road trip with my mom and had bought a rotten tuna sandwich from Speedway. I remember it smelled so god awful that I literally threw it out the window while we were merging onto the freeway. My mom was gagging, and I was laughing a little bit. Okay fine, I was laughing my ass off. I admit it. Sorry mom. Neither of us remember where we were going, or what we were doing, but we remember what had happened, and we remember laughing. Most importantly, we remember being happy and having fun being together.

I took a deep breath. The kind that they tell you to do in therapy; breathe in for seven seconds, out for eleven.

Maybe they really wanted to pick it up, but they were worried about cutting their fingers on the glass. Maybe they were having a lot of fun when they did it.

Maybe they're really sorry, but I guess I'll never know.

Sorry Charlie. Just next time, when you can, try to make sure it gets in the trash.

I took off my shirt, threw it into my car, set my watch, and started to run.

Voix | Connor J. Stenz

Entangled in the gloom du lit,
Staring at the ceiling,
eyes squeezed shut,
Listening to the train roar by
and hoping that it drowns out my
quiet sobbing and the
Voices.
Disembodied diatribe scathes me,
bouts of laughter harangue me,
shouting things that rekindle smoldering
Antipathy; yet
Love without affection is
Hate without the pain, or so They say—
"Take your own advice."

Three Austins | Aaron Ickler



Mother's Nature | Melissa Touche

"MOM!"

The darkness of sleep shattered.....

"I missed the bus!"

I can barely gather my thoughts, vision still blurred from a forgotten dream.

"What time is it?" it comes out as a rough whisper. A million questions begin to form as I make out the time on my bedside table. The red was barely visible in the early morning sun. 8:15.

"Why didn't you wake me?" I ask as I throw the covers off and start rushing around my room to catch up on lost time. My schedule already rearranging itself in my head. I'll have to skip breakfast. Of course, I'll drop the younger kids at daycare, a million details coming together before I make my way to the bathroom.

"I thought you wanted to sleep in," my oldest says.

I felt myself getting angry already. Why the fuck would I sleep in? When in YOUR entire existence have I EVER slept in?! Where is your fucking HEAD?!

"Thanks, babe, I appreciate your thoughtful heart," he slinkers away, shoulders hunched, "can you hurry, mom?" he says with a sigh and a hint of annoyance.

Is he fucking serious, little son of a bitch, of all the fucking times that I.....

"Can you get my coffee ready, love, and help your brothers get their things? I'll be down in a bit, please". Before he walks away, I add, "appreciate you."

"Yeah," he mutters. "BOYS! GET YOUR SHIT TOGETHER! WE'RE LATE!", the house immediately erupts with screams, and yells, and possibly tears. I'm not sure, but I don't have the time to check. I need to write a check for the boys' daycare. I undress while I pee, leaving my clothes in a pile by the tub. I let the lid slam shut. I can't flush right away. It takes away from the heat of the water. I'll do it after. The water hits me with 1000 pins.

"FUCK!!!", where the fuck is the hot water? "UGH!" I hurry and bathe in the near frigid shower, shocking away any lingering sleepiness. I'm done. I'll have to throw my hair in a ponytail. Where the hell are my rubber bands? Dammit.

"You boys seen my rubber bands?" I ask as I make my way down the stairs, taking in overturned bowls of cereal, the plastic toy bin, broken toys all over the bottom step, and the living room.

"No, momma," the twins answered in unison.

Fuck they look like their father. Standing their eyes wide and innocent, yet underneath, liars and sneaks! God, I hate that man. Loser ass bitch can't bother to send child support, leaving me this shit hole and these monsters.

"Thanks, sweeties.....", before I finish, I see my rubber bands tied together and action figures hanging from the cluster. "Who did that?" I ask, knowing no one will admit to it. "Chris? Where's my coffee?" I ask.

"Oh yeah, I forgot." Oh yeah, you forgot, right, I think to myself, knowing he just didn't bother, as usual.

"Ok then, thanks anyway. Let's go, boys". I manage to wrangle free the elastic from an armless Batman and start gathering my hair in a ponytail. Can one thing go right today?

"Everyone strap in," I direct, placing the key fob in the ignition. When the boys are belted in and doors shut, I turn the fob. Nothing. I try it again. This is not happening, I think, as I try once more. Nothing. Great. We sit in silence.

"Well?" my oldest asks.

"Well, what? You know as much as I do", I snip. He looks shocked. Maybe I was a bit harsh, but dammit, how the hell am I expected to know everything?

"Alright, let's go. Maybe we can catch the bus", I say, the younger ones excited for a new adventure. Meanwhile, Chris lets out an exhausted sigh.

"Mom, I'm gonna be so late already, maybe I should stay home. I could clean up for you", he offers.

"Tempting, but you promised that before and never made true on your promise, love," I answer, thinking about the dishes in the sink from last night's dinner he never did.

"Fine." He hunches his shoulders; long hair covers his eyes as they shift down. No fight, no argument. He just concedes. At least have some fight in you, I think to myself. At least try to convince me. I see the bus in the far distance. Good, we won't have to run to catch it. We get to the stop, the bus pulling up as soon as I finish getting our fare. Chris immediately makes his way to the back.

"Can you take your brothers, please?" I ask Chris, dumbfounded at his constant state of self-preservation. I wish one time he would stop being so selfish and lazy and help once in a while.

"Hold your brother, and I'll take Teddy," I instruct Chris, as I seat Teddy on the inside seat and direct Chris to do the same with Joey, across from me.

Bills. Pills, deals, wheels, thrills, hills, kills.....

"Mom," Chris leans over and whispers.

"What, Chris," I sigh. I just need a minute alone with my thoughts.

"Ummm, I have that thing today, after school,"

What thing? What thing? Chicken wing, gonna sing,

"and, anyway, I was wondering if I could have a couple dollars to grab a snack after." He quickly adds, "and I can ask one of the guys for a ride home, be home quicker to help get dinner started, help you clean up."

I start rummaging through my purse. All I have is ten. Damn it! Of course, he takes my coffee and lunch money. I don't even know if I'll have time to make it to the ATM, either. What's he gonna do with it anyway? Eat at McDonald's? Of course, he doesn't care if we eat or worry about what we're doing? Always thinks about himself. Never once does he ever think about me and my needs.

"You fucking better," I hiss back, "this is all I have." I shove it into his hands, making sure to dig my nails in his palm as I do.

"Ow," he winces as he takes it. He puts his heads down and puts the bill in his front pocket.

"Thanks, mom," He answers back, as his voice wavers, tears starting to form in his eyes. He lowers his head, shaking it a little, so his hair falls forward and covers his eyes.

There's a small ding, indicating someone wants to get off at the next stop. As we near the stop, the bus starts to slow, eventually stopping in front of the sign. Years of experience to make a stop without slamming on the brakes. I hate those assholes that barely slow down and then come to a full stop. One of these days, they will cause some serious damage to someone, and then they'll learn. They'll deserve it too. Karma, HAAAAAA, KARMA MOTHERFUCKERS!

I look at the oncoming passengers, and my eyes are drawn towards a small, old man who reminds me of an old garden gnome. He is in a dramatic bow. This is reminiscent of the old movies where the villain opens the door and bows, appearing to be chivalrous. HE stays like that until everyone boards. No one really paying attention, everyone in their own worlds and own agendas. The young couple that got on is obviously unaware other people exist. They can't seem to keep their hands, or tongues, for that matter, to themselves. I look at my boys, and all three's eyes are glued to the pre-porn performance.

"Ahem," I clear my throat, and my boys immediately look down, little perverts. Why are all men so filthy? I make eye contact with the driver and use my eyes to point to the hedonists. He only shrugs. Of course. He probably loves the show. The couple moves a few steps and stands by the door. While he stands, and she leans against him. He whispers in her ear, and she giggles. Joey starts staring again. She sees him and smiles. Joey smiles back even wider. Son of a bitch.

I clear my throat again and get Chris's attention. He nudges Joey, and Joey nudges him back, still smiling like a creepy little asshole. She giggles and the boyfriend looks and smiles at Joey, Chris, and smiles at Teddy and me.

"Hmmm," I say, as I smile back through pursed lips. He looks away.

He smells like reefer and patchouli; the smells fill the bus. I look ahead once more. As I do, I notice him. The old man. Sitting in the seats reserved for the elderly and the differentlyabled. He wears a blue stocking cap. His beard reaches to the middle of his chest. Up close, he does look like a gnome.

The only feature I can genuinely make out is his nose. It's big, red, and bulbous. His mustache and beard appear to have grown out of his nose. His dark sunglasses cover half his face. I can barely make out another pair of glasses underneath. He has a dark navy-blue hoodie underneath his moth-eaten tan wool coat. He pulls his jacket closer to cover his knees. His eyes never leaving the couple. He licks his lips and adjusts his pants legs, shifting in his seat.

I stare at him as he leers at the young couple, his head slowly moving up and down the couple. I can almost make out an impish-like grin. I look around to see if anyone else sees him too. It seems as if I am the only one who sees him eye-raping this couple.

DING.

"Mom, our stop," Chris whispers to me. I take my eyes away from the old man. I start to gather our things. Now, I have to decide who to walk by when we exit. The whore and her pimp, or the creepy, old pervert. Chris decides for us and slips him and his brother by the couple as they move out of the way. I follow with Teddy.

"Have a good day," The pothead/pimp tells me as I exit. He and his whore giggling. Fucking assholes, why the hell were they laughing at me? They have some nerve. Trash. I grab Teddy's wrist, and Chris picks up Joey.

We start walking fast to the boy's school. Chris's school is only a couple streets further up.

"I can drop the boys off, mom, and walk them to the office, so you can go to work," Chris offers. It would have been nice if he said that before making me deal with all this extra and getting laughed at.

"Thanks, Chris, I appreciate that," I offer, knowing how annoyed it sounded, but I don't care. Maybe if he used his head, just once. I turn around to go back to the bus stop. It will be another 20 minutes before another one comes. I wish I hadn't quit smoking, toking, poking, stroking, croaking.....

"Mom!" Teddy and Joey holler out arms raised for a hug. UGH.

I bend down, allowing the twins to wrap their arms around my neck and waist. Chris leans down and pecks my cheek, barely making contact.

"Bye, mom, have a good day," Chris says, as he and his brothers turn around to go to school.

"Bye, mom," the twins say in unison as they skip/run ahead of their older brother.

The cold wind hits my face, and I let out a sigh of relief. I am finally free, if only for a few moments. I. Am. Free.

I sit down at the bus stop. The young man next to me lights up a cigarette. I inhale deeply.

I lean in towards him slightly and whisper loudly, "You're not allowed to smoke in here, see the sign? You must smoke three feet away from inside here." I lean back, cross my arms and legs, and begin to patiently wait for the bus.

"I'm sorry," he says as he walks away to smoke away from the bus stop.

As soon as I walk to my desk, I can see my supervisor, Mr. Stevens, waving a folder at me. I pretend not to see him. He waves his folder higher.

"Ms. Mitch, woohoo, Ms. Mitch," He's loudly whispering as if no one else can hear him. We get to my cubicle at almost the exact time.

"Ms. Mitch, I am glad I caught you before you clocked in. Your offspring's childcare provider phoned".

Oh, my God! They're dead! They've been kidnapped! I can begin to hear my heart beating in my ears. Little beads of sweat start to gather at my brows. My mouth lost every bit of moisture.

"What did they say?" I ask, my mouth seemingly full of cotton.

He leans in, looks around as if he's sharing government secrets, and whispers, "You apparently are behind on your payments. They need to be picked up, or the daycare needs the entire amount paid in full."

I can feel my face turning red. STUPID BITCH!!! All I want to do is throw up. BREATHE, BREATHE, I just want to die, fly, sky, high, lie, try, my.....

".....and if you're having trouble paying for daycare, I hope it doesn't affect your work. Don't get me wrong, I have kids too....." I can't help it. I can feel myself starting to cry, my eyes slowly welling up with tears.

I swallow back the tears, except for the one I couldn't catch. I straighten my back. I don't even bother to wipe away the tear.

"Mr. Stevens," it comes out like a hoarse whisper, "I am not late on my bill, I simply forgot to pay it, my car broke down this morning....." he raises his finger and makes a shushing motion with his lips.

"Ms. Mitch, why don't you take the rest of the day," his eyes on my blouse? My chest? And moves to my eyes, "and take care of your business. We'll see you tomorrow." Then he yells across the room, "Mrs. Patterson, can you note that Ms. Mitch is taking the rest of the day off," he looks at me once more, "for personal reasons."

God, I hate this man! I would love to just scream for him to shut his fucking mouth! I wish I was a zombie, like the movies the boys aren't supposed to watch but do. I would eat his fucking face-off and smash the smug mug of Mrs. Patterson. They only keep her as the Executive Secretary because she's the wife of a city alderman. She's also sleeping with half of the town's football players. Fake tits, fake lips, I bet even her ass is fake. Wanna be Kim Kardashian looking.....

".....ok? Karen?" Meg, a woman who just started working here, asks, "can I help"?

"What? I'm sorry I missed that," I ask as I gathering my things.

"I asked if everything is ok? Do you need anything?" she asks.

"Thank you, I'm good."

"Ok, hon, if you need an ear or even a ride to the store, gimme a holler. My number is in the company directory." Then she leans in a bit and asks once more, "You sure, you're good?"

I almost want to scream. Of course, I'm good! Isn't it obvious! I wonder what her catch is!

"Thank you so much. I appreciate that." I smile as sweetly and sincerely as I possibly could muster. I can't wait to just get the fuck out of here!

"Hon, just one more thing. Did you know your shoes are two different colors?" she smiles, clearly feeling sorry for me.

I don't even bother to look down or answer, or say goodbye. I just turn and walk out the door. The sun immediately blinds me, but the cool Autumn air feels good on my face and skin, especially after what just happened at work.

"I need a drink," I mutter to myself. Then chuckle, thinking this is how my mother must feel every day. It's been a while since I thought about her. It has been so long since we spoke last. Dad's funeral. When she came in smelling of piss after a night of non-stop drinking. Or should I say after my whole lifetime of watching her stinking drunk?

"HA!" It comes out sounding like a comic book hero. I have to look around and make sure no one is looking. I am relieved to see no one is at the bus stop—finally, some quiet. I lean back, stretch my legs, crossing them at the ankles—two different color shoes. I fold my arms over, a smile forming at my lips when I notice my shirt is also inside out. I start laughing, at first, a chuckle to a full-blown laugh. I don't even care who is watching. I must look full on nutter. I settle down, and when the bus opens its doors, I'm still smiling.

The driver sits up, smiling, bright, white teeth, "No charge, sweetie, your smile is worth a million dollars," he says, adding a wink.

"No, thank you" I stop smiling instantly, putting in my fare, and walk towards the back.

"Suit yourself, sweetie," he says as he puts the bus in gear with a jerk. I keep replaying the scene at work. Now that I have some time to think about it. Everyone was staring. Why does Mr. Stevens need to be such an obnoxious douche bag? Oh, and Jennifer Peterson, town doorknob, Miss thinks her shit don't stink. What the fuck was Meg's deal anyway? If I need an ear? What a laugh. I wish that the whole place would burn down. I pull the bus stop signal immediately after the stop before mine. I start to gather my things and catch the driver smiling at me as I exit. I hurriedly walk to the boy's daycare. I pushed the call button to enter the daycare.

As soon as I make my way to the front desk, the receptionist calls for the owner. She comes and greets me, apologizing for having to contact my employer. I explained about my car, and she sucks the air between her teeth and tells me how sorry she is, but wait right here, and she will get the receipt book. I start looking around before my eye spots a figure outside the chain-link fence. I look closer and see someone walking by,

slowly letting his hand glide along the chain-link fence. The jacket looks very familiar. I ask the owner to hurry, maybe catch a glimpse of who the person is. I hurriedly make arraignments for daycare to drop the boys off at home.

As I run out the door, I seem to have lost track of the fence stranger. I am not sure, but it sure looked like the bus ride creeper. I look up the street as far as my eyes will go. I do the same in the other direction. I think maybe I'll walk further; I don't know why it's bothering me so much, but it is. I have this gnawing in my belly. It reminds me of the feeling I had before Uncle Frank would come over. Weird. I look at my watch and decide to give up looking, the bus will be making its way back, and maybe I can salvage some of this day.

Barely catching the bus, I can finally breathe and relax. I find myself staring out the window. Before I have a chance to gather my thoughts, I see him. Walking, hunched over, and looking more like a gnome than he did on the bus. He was staring at the kids in the playground. Disgusting! He has to be up to something. Is he going to try to hurt the kids? My stomach is in knots. Before I realize what I am doing, I pull the bus stop bell and decide to follow him. Maybe, if I can keep track of him, I can lead the police to where he is, just in case.

It doesn't take me very long to catch up to him. I have to slow my gait. He slowly walks by a house. He stands out front for a couple of minutes. An older woman comes out, sees him, turns around, and hurriedly shuts the door. He laughs and shuffles along. I wonder what that was about. He walks further and stops in front of another house. He slowly crouches down. I don't want to give my position away, so I stand on my tiptoes and strain to see what he's doing. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a sucker. He smiles, slowly stands, and walks away backward. Whatever he's looking at, he did it longingly. Eventually, he turns and makes his way down the street.

I get to the house he pulled the sucker out in front of. I look in the yard. A little girl, surrounded by her dolls, laid out on a blanket, sucking on a candy. Oh, dear, God! I walk away as fast as I could and throw up in a bush. The way he was looking at her. I start shaking. I know instantly he's going to hurt her. I NEED TO STOP HIM! I don't know how I know, maybe it's mother's intuition, possibly because, Uncle Frank.....

I shake my head furiously. No, I will not think about Uncle Frank. I need to see where that filth goes. I watch him go into a small café. He should be in there for a while. I think maybe I should go into the little mom and pop liquor store. On this side of the neighborhood, the momand-pop stores sell alcohol, vegetables, t-shirts, and underwear.

I walk in, and my presence is announced by a bell. A face pops up from behind the counter. White hair was messily put in a top bun, faded red shirt, a fresh coffee stain on her chest.

"Can I help you?" she asks, looking me up and down. She slowly starts to smile. My shoes! I forgot.

I smile back, weakly. "Can I get a pack of Marlboro cigarettes, red box, a lighter, and do you have 7UP?"

With her lips, she points to a cooler in the back. I open the door to the cooler and am hit with a blast of cool air. I stand there longer than necessary, but God, the cool air feels so good. She clears her throat, so I grab my drink and head back to the counter. I notice an old man, hunched over a broom, eyeing me suspiciously.

"Anything else?" the old lady asks, slightly annoyed this transaction took 30 seconds longer than it should.

I reach in my pocket and remember I gave Chris my money this morning. I shift my bags to my other arm and reach for my wallet before handing her my card. She takes my card and slides it into the machine. She asks if I would like a receipt. I tell her no, and grab my things. I open my drink and take two large swallows. Immediately, I let out a large belch. I screw the cover closed and throw the bottle in my bag. I figure it's been long enough. I go to the café, walk by, and peek into the windows. No one is in there. I go in, another bell announces me, the waitress tells me to sit anywhere, never looking up.

"There was an old man in here.." I began to ask, and she looks back, confused, "beard, creepy.....", before I finish, she starts nodding, knowing exactly who I was talking about. She tells me he left and headed back towards the same direction he came from.

My stomach drops, and I get that achy, gnawing feeling. My first thought is I have to save that little girl from (*Uncle Frank*) that man. I rush out the door and run back towards the small girl's house, as fast as I can, I forget I had these bags to juggle and my coat. When I get to her yard, only her dolls are at the tea party, the hostess, is gone off somewhere. Maybe she went to get some more tea. Before I can think of what to do, I hear a whimper. I follow the sound, and there she is, crying. I go to her and see what she's crying at. There he is, lying on the ground. Clutching his chest. I send her in her house, and put my fingers to my lips, and tell her to, "shhh."

"Help me, please," he pleads, grabbing his chest, all the color drained from his face.

"Shhhhhh, *Uncle Frank*, shhhhhh, I am here to help you" I grab my coat, fold it into a ball, and gently place it over his face. I hold it down with both hands. *Uncle Frank* /the old man doesn't struggle as much as I thought he would. I gather my things, look around, and see I am still alone. The little girl did try calling for her momma, but her momma's face was glued to her phone screen. I head back towards the bus stop, and sit down. I open up my cigarette pack, pull out a cigarette, put the lighter to the tip, and inhale deeply. A wave of nausea mixed with energy, immediately hit me. I exhale and take another deeper hit. It feels good, I feel good, lighter, I feel.....

"Free". Tree, glee, me, FREE.

The next morning, the local news reported, an old man suffered a heart attack on his daily walk. Apparently, no one found him until later in the day. The owner of the

house said he was a nice old man, always brought her daughter a treat every time he walked by, and she even called him, Grandpa.

Foamy Mouths and Tattooed Backs | Taylor Trost

Steam fills the room and goosebumps are unavoidable. I move the curtain aside, cold water dripping down my back as I exit the shower. 12:47 am and I have to wake up at 6:30. Yet this doesn't stop me from having full-on conversions with others in the common restroom we all share. I am nothing if not chatty and eager to meet new people. I don't know the girl next to me, but the flower painted into her skin intrigues me. I can't stop staring at it, although I know it's rude. I feel like each bit of ink pressed into skin represents a story of the past and the people we are. It makes me want to know the story and I can't help but feel the need to ask. We smile at each other, but without showing our teeth to prevent the escape from toothpaste and mouthwash. It's the beginning of a friendship.

Minutes pass as I ask questions I know I will never remember the answers to. In between spitting out my toothpaste I ask, "Where's your hometown?" A small town with a complex yet generic name that has already left my mind. It's almost like a game because it's so hard to hear with the toothpaste in our mouths so we have to guess what each other is saying. "What's your major?" Exercise Sport Science. One of the 10,000 on this campus, I swear. I'm never going to remember that. That's one of the joys of meeting new people in college. There is ethical code that allows you to ask the most basic questions without any requirements of knowing the answer. It's a weird aspect of human nature I would say. The wanting to know others better, the need to talk in the bathroom, yet the mutual understanding that none of this information must be maintained. The air continues to get colder as I grip my towel tighter. I bend over, spit, and head to bed for another day of familiar faces and answers to questions I won't remember.

a concerned tale of clicking and clanking | Alexia Walz

Soon, the clicking and clanking of silverware in fancy restaurants will become deafening again. And we will grow accustomed to that odd moment when everyone puts down their fork at the exact same time, and the restaurant becomes so quiet that you can hear the breath of the person in the booth sitting behind you.

Everyone in this space gets a moment to reset, to take a rare moment of silence in this busy, unforgiving world and use it to reminisce, to reflect, to remember all the intubations and the 30-day vacations on a ventilator and the vaccines and the implanted chips and all the false promises sponsored by the Joe in the oval office and the Joe in the chancellor's office. They take the ethereal silence to recognize that they're remembering that these horrors are passed. They're gone, they're old news. People get to live now, people get to breathe now, people can die on their own time now. Everyone can relish in the fact there's no more outdoor testing tents and personal protective gear. No more polarization. No more suffering.

But then someone notices it. They notice that the beauty of silence is painfully unfamiliar and they go back to scraping their metal utensil on the plate because their wife is once again talking too much about their mother-in-law's overly high expectations of her and the wife is upset because she's actually exceeding expectations by taking care of the children and paying bills and solving disputes between herself and her mother in law and her husband isn't doing anything at all besides smoking in the house and making the asthmatic children cough but in the mother-in-law's eyes, the chain-smoking around the children is worthy of a Nobel prize because her son is the perfect candidate for world's best dad and America's most obedient husband and now, some five year old across the restaurant can hear world's best dad scraping the china plate and he can also hear the head chef in the kitchen yelling at the busboy and he can hear his older sister smacking and slurping her spaghetti so clearly it's like a fish flopping around in his ear and he hates the sensation of the fish flopping and the scraping from the husband and the berating of the underpaid college student whose version of a living hell is bussing tables for the faux Italian sous chef who probably gets aroused by yelling at his employees so the five year old begins to cry. He cries so loud that he is crying for the chain-smoking husband's failing marriage and he's crying for the wife who's just one more smoke-induced asthma attack away from almost calling the suicide hotline but not quite because that's not worthy of a Nobel prize and he's crying for the chef who hasn't yet realized that a daily trip to the liquor store might kill him one day.

He's crying for the five hundred thousand lives lost. He's crying for the rapidly increasing cases and the rapidly decreasing masks. He's crying for the terrifyingly nonchalant Biden-Harris Administration. He's crying for the Black lives murdered and the Black lives destroyed and the Black lives ignored. He cries so loud that even the adults in the restaurant want to cry. Sometimes, the clicking and clanking is just too deafening.

Filter | Ellie Schaap



A Hypothetical Pitch for a Script | Alexia Walz

Imagine I pitch you an idea for a script.
It's fairly brief.
No intense monologues or unnecessary dialogue.
It's about a couple who are in that awkward,
Often undocumented phase of their relationship
But they still have flirty, made for television fun.
They tease without realizing and
Feed off of the sexual tension in the air.
They laugh until they cry together.
They can't get enough.

But then they go home.
And he replays each interaction
To see if he pushed the other person's buttons in just the right way
Or if he said the exact formula of words
In the right order and the right tone
To make someone fall in love with him
Then he examines the actions of his *friend

**He calls the person "friend" to avoid having a certain conversation too early and accidentally expediting the reaction that he knows is coming but doesn't want to hear and in turn lose his reason to replay those interactions that give him so much solace from his sorry version of what he considers a life.

So, he replays the time when she listened intently
To words that don't need to be intently listened to
And he replays the time that she made a bit too much eye contact
Or touched his shoulder in just the right way
And he replays the time that she said:

*Just the right words
In just the right order
And just the right tone
And just the right formula*

Then he repeats the process
Right before bed
as his nightly routine
Just in case he got it wrong

And just in case this is the last time he can feel like he got it right.
But what he doesn't know is that sometimes when she goes home,
She thinks about how she has to work the next morning
And about the type of breakfast she will have
And whether it's gonna be:

eggs and toast
avocado and toast
or
just a quick drink of water

She thinks about her nightly skin care routine
And whether she should watch Netflix
or read her school assignments before bed
or swipe on a dating app for another version of him
and think about them instead
and about how they asked her out
And about how they give her the right formula
Or maybe just the right eye contact.

Then eventually she will—

You stop me
And I remember what I came here to do
You ask what the point is
You ask why anyone would want to buy a script
Or watch a movie about unrequited love
That was written by a woman who shares no demographic
With her characters
And who would never step foot in their house
and who would never be friends with them
and even share a space with them in this industry

You say I have better fish to fry
And better narratives to tell
Like narratives about people who look like me
And people who would share the same
Nondescript, degrading and sideshow-like room as me
Or narratives about suffering and adversity
And overcoming the worst, most hellish lifestyles
One could possibly imagine

You say I could also write movies about history
About America's prejudice and unspoken, but solidified ideals
That shaped the state of America today
The swampy, vile, zombified and tired state of America today

You say I know better
And I do
You say that you stick to what you know
And it's true

We don't write about love and all its beautiful facets
We don't get to write characters
Who are gifted the best, fulfilling lives
We write honestly, brutally and autobiographically
We write about the horrors of our own life
And we get paid for it
Our experiences get tossed around in the pot
The pot that forms greed, infatuation and catastrophe

Oh, and blockbuster hits

But I never got to tell you the end
So, you let me finish
I say that the guy eventually confesses
And he gets the girl!
We laugh and cry and feel validated by them as
They frolic around Central Park!
And buy fruit from friendly vendors!
And trip in the middle of cross walks!
Hand in hand!
To the tune of over used pop-rock anthems
From the 90s!

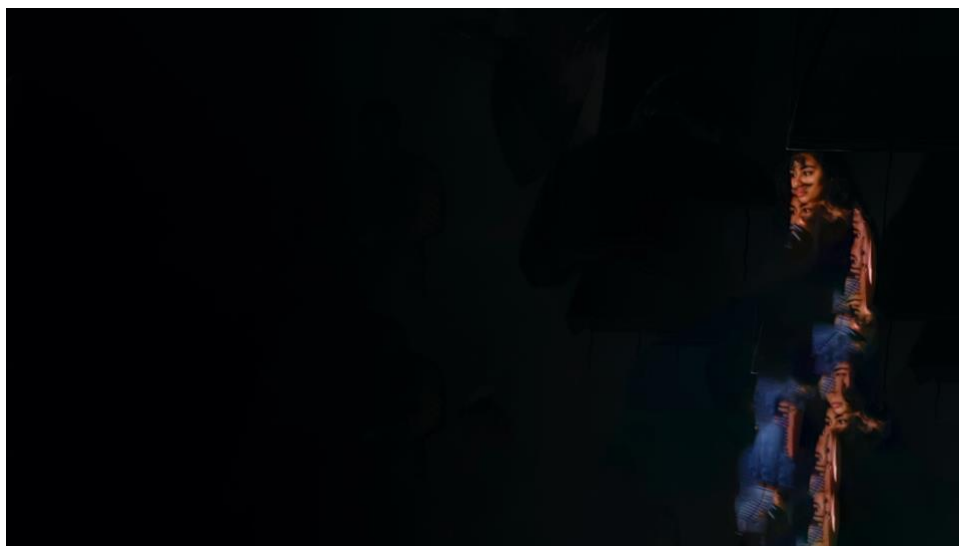
The credits roll.
And you approve
And it sells—
In so many words—
To an audience
Who will never know
That this stolen script
Was made by some
Naïve, love drunk, multiracial, working woman.

This is Not an Emergency | Yenja Xiong

The blade dances between my fingers. Gently, lightly,
as if to reassure me. But it doesn't need to.
There's a calmness to it. Just sitting here with me.
A memory of an old friend, bittersweet.
Its sharp edges, cold, I know. But it brings me warmth, it truly does.
A sensation I still long for, burning underneath my skin,
a breath of relief. A comfort.
A warmth that spreads across my body, stinging,
but finally my mind is set free. And everything that I once worried for,
feared, everyone
that constrained me, tied me in knots of barbed wires
and thorns, called it beautiful just because their roses bloomed...
All stones gone, fallen, turned to ashes grey like ghosts,
for each obligation my family gifted me, finally,
free. My allness ceased.
And tears would lay out in front of me -- but not out of sadness.
Happy, I promise. Because I can now breathe.
Undeniably precious, fragile, that's why I hide it.
In case of an emergency... I tell myself.
This is not an emergency.
I am calm. My head is straight.
I simply play a tune between my fingers, with an old friend.
Floating harmlessly, as if to slip at any moment.
And you don't have to say it.
I hear what you're thinking.
Don't ruin this moment.

Day of Lucidity 219: I Was Once a Photo

|
Aaron Ickler



Ily | Yenja Xiong

From the screen of my phone, white printed
trapped in blue bubbles they were sent from
I know what they mean and I'd like to believe
they come from sincerity
Words from my mother
They must be sincere,
I read the words, "I love you," again
and I've heard it's not something to be said lightly
But that's how I take it
Lightly
Like a feather resting on me
Amongst the stones that weren't so gently placed
Arranged to conceal me
Just a feather, lying in a crevice
Trying to find a place to reach me
But I make no effort to grab hold of it,
Like the feeling from this text message
It will float away soon
As I am not deserving enough

I repeat the words in my head
It's not the first time I've heard them
A slight pause -- awkward --
The disappointment comes quickly
"Where's my 'I love you' back?"
"Oh."
I repeat them.
It's not something to be said lightly
But I feel it leaving my tongue as so --
Heavy --
Like another stone tossed at me
Stumbling down the mountain of others
Finding a place in a crevice, where it stays.
The more I say it, the more I feel like I don't mean it
Out of obligation becomes my intention
I've convinced myself I've
become numb to the heaviness

Until I find myself waking up
Crushed
From the feelings she gave me
That I am not deserving enough

Contributors' Notes

Sarah Anderson is a Junior at UWL from Platteville, WI, majoring in English - Writing and Rhetoric. She enjoys drawing inspiration for her creative pieces from everyday conversation, particularly memorable one-liners, and other silly or salient moments.

Devany Bauer is a student at UWL majoring in communication studies and minoring in creative writing. She is happiest when thrifting, biking, cooking, and crafting; bonus serotonin when she gets to do those things with the people she loves. Devany also enjoys a commendable cup of coffee and is an avid essential oil user. She is always down for an adventure and would love to be your friend.

If **Jonah Bones** had a rifle pointed at him and was asked who the hell he is, he'd probably start by saying that he's a midwestern, ex-track star, skeleton, baker, tech weenie, cat dad. Then, Boner (nickname) would bring up being a rapper and get shot. Contact: garygarconapain@gmail.com

Gavin DuPont is a senior at UWL studying marketing with a minor in digital media studies and design. He first started photography his freshman year. More of his work can be found on his photography Instagram page, @uv.optics.

Allison Henderson is a Junior at UWL, graduating in December of 2021. She is studying Writing and Rhetoric and Spanish and hopes to one day find a career in something important and exciting, although she has no idea what that entails. In her free time, Allison enjoys spending time in nature and reading. Even though she has been writing creatively for most of her life, she only shared this piece because of the encouragement of Professor William Stobb's creative writing course. Allison thanks her existential angst for its contribution to her writing.

Aaron Ickler is a 4th year at UWL, with a major in art with minors in photography and creative writing.

Harley Kramer is a super senior studying English Literature. They enjoy reading, listening to music, and hanging out with their cat. They consume way too much caffeine for it to be healthy and only eats healthy meals because of Hello Fresh since they can't cook to save their life unless they have something telling them exactly what to do. They want to go into publishing so that they can have an excuse (and get paid) to feed their reading addiction.

Kohleen Lyons is a graduating senior at UWL majoring in psychology and double minoring in neuroscience and art. Following a gap-year, Kohleen plans to apply for and attend both master's and PhD programs in clinical counseling psychology. While the arts may not be present in her career goals, they never take the backseat in her mind or free time.

Cait McReavy is currently a junior at UWL. She is majoring in Education with minors in English and Social Justice. She is honored to be included in this issue of the Catalyst and hopes to pass her love for poetry on to her future students.

Tara Metzger is a lover of plants and books and springtime. She has never allowed anyone to read one of her poems before but felt a rare moment of bravery. She hopes that by opening up, other college students will have something to relate to and that it may help someone know that they are not quite alone.

Riley Radle is a Computer Science major and an Art minor at UWL. He became interested in drawing from the people he met in his freshman year. He currently likes working with graphite, pen, and paper but would like to move into digital painting or compositing in the future.

Jake Richmond is a sophomore who is currently studying secondary English education in hopes of one day teaching high school students. He is an avid runner, music nerd, and tea enthusiast who also has a not-so-secret Starburst jellybean addiction. Jake enjoys reading during his free time and has just recently tried his hand in poetry and short prose as a way to decompress from the daily stressors of college life.

Ellie Schaap is a senior studying Art Education with a minor in psychology. Ellie's work focuses on the natural world and our impression upon it. She works with an array of materials that influence each individual artwork. Her 3D art is influenced by found materials and their negative impact on our environment. Whereas her 2D work investigates the everyday beauty of nature and the euphoric yet grounded sense we receive from being within nature. Taking time to be in this relaxed state of mind and find appreciation for the environment is difficult to reach in our fast-paced society. Photographing, drawing and painting nature and the sensations she receives from it helps her stay connected with the environment and herself. Ellie hopes to pursue a career in education and implementing meditative and behavioral health practices into her future classroom.

Branden Schultz is a student of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, striving for an English rhetoric major and German minor. His growing portfolio includes short stories,

poetry, and scripts for plays and film, consisting of works in the genres of action, thriller, horror, western, and comedy.

Summer Schwenn is a sophomore at UWL. She is a political science major, and has a double-minor in Spanish and professional and technical writing. A member of the volleyball team at UWL, Summer also enjoys collecting records, showing off her laughably bad dance moves, and venting her feelings through the written word.

When **Kerri Seyfert** isn't doom scrolling on Twitter through political garbage, she writes poetry and feels sad.

Meg Shevenock's poetry debut, *The Miraculous, Sometimes*, won the 2019 Marystina Santiestevan first book prize from Conduit Books & Ephemera and is a finalist in the 2020 Midwest Book Awards. Her writing has additionally appeared in *Times Literary Supplement*, *Lana Turner*, *Fence*, *Kenyon Review* blog, and elsewhere. She is a reader and researcher for the artist Ann Hamilton.

Roxanne Spielman is a junior at UWL studying Art with a minor in Art History. She has interests in many artistic mediums and scientific fields, especially astronomy. Though she doesn't really know what she's doing yet, she is really trying to figure it out! Roxanne's art attempts to display her interest in a wide variety of things using multiple mediums, such as printmaking, painting, and drawing.

Connor J. Stenz is a scholar of French, Linguistics, and Creative Writing at the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse. While he's currently in pursuit of a career in translation (possibly a master's degree) and an academic year abroad, he frequently enjoys releasing his inner muse via the written word. The nature of his works varies, though they're typically quite dark in nature and reference traumatic events, epiphanies, or simply what's on his mind.

Taylor Trost is a second-year student here at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. She is currently majoring in Interpersonal Communication Studies with minors in Leadership Development, Professional and Technical Writing, and Digital Media and Design. Taylor is also a Resident Assistant and she loves to help and interact with others. This piece is reflective of her time within the dorm and the joys of public restrooms.

Alexia Walz is a junior majoring in Media Studies and minoring in Creative Writing. She simply wants to thank *The Catalyst* for being such an amazing publication and amplifying so many student artists' talents and voices.

Yenja Xiong is a third-year student at UWL. She has a knack for changing her major and minor, but she hopes to graduate soon. She can be found in her room writing, drawing, or listening to music – sometimes in the living room, spending time with her plants. Oh, and friends. She has friends.