



AMPERSAND





Ampersand

Utica College's
Literary Journal
—— 2020 ——

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The 2020 Ampersand Staff would like to extend our gratitude to our talented contributors for sharing their work and the readers for their support.

We hope that this journal will bring entertainment and inspiration to you during this trying time.

Table of Contents

By Author

Frank Bianco

<i>Don't Bother</i>	6
<i>Hesistance</i>	7
<i>Mantras</i>	8
<i>Old Notebooks</i>	9
<i>Idle Thoughts</i>	65

Kylie Burger

<i>BURN</i>	10
<i>Cassette: 1985, 1973, 1986</i>	12
<i>HANGOVER</i>	13
<i>Working-Man's Praise</i>	14

Nichole Delaney

<i>Internal Grief</i>	16
<i>Ocean Eyes</i>	17
<i>The Labyrinth</i>	18
<i>The Perfect Storm</i>	19
<i>Untitled</i>	19

Patrick Donnelly

<i>The Poet's Hippocratic</i>	20
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Daniela Hannah

<i>Jump into the Ice Cold Water</i>	22
<i>Creative Block</i>	71

Abbie Hei

Me, the AC, and spontaneity..... 88

Olivia Harwick

Dive of the Dolphin.....23

In Praise of Indian Corn24

The Dusty Dustpan 25

The Grand Garden.....26

Skylar Harwick

All Hail the Excel Selection Box27

Cicadidae 28

Lichen29

Ship upstairs.....30

Stitched31

Gabriella Hudziak

Cicadas32

*From Strebel to the Library,
so I can print some papers*.....33

Alma Jasencic

A piece from the Religion of Peace 34

Home in Europe35

Listening Ears.....36

Unknown 37

Emily Joss

A life worth living91

Brittney L. Nowack

<i>Soul Food</i>	38
<i>Grandpa's Garden</i>	101
<i>Procastes the</i>	
<i>Odd-Habited Host: A SIMulation</i>	104

Alexis Orr

<i>3:56PM</i>	39
<i>Sacrificial Lamb</i>	40
<i>Empty Cup</i>	41

Chris Restivo

<i>Her name was Raine</i>	43
<i>Man vs. Nature</i>	44
<i>Morning Blues</i>	45

Danae Rivera

<i>Garden with no Forget-Me-Nots</i>	109
<i>I'm going hunting</i>	112
<i>The old gods won't save us</i>	114

Liam Rodgers

<i>"Are videogames your priorities?"</i>	46
<i>A Digital Reality:</i>	47
<i>Control "F" is for Crouch not family</i>	48
<i>HELP</i>	49
<i>It's all for the kids</i>	49
<i>The FUTURE is now</i>	50
<i>Time does not exist in video games</i>	50
<i>The Virtual Social Life:</i>	52

Kaitlyn Tambasco

<i>A new beginning</i>	53
<i>Whatever you do</i>	56

Artwork

Olivia Harwick

Blossoming tree near Gordon Science Center59

Beautiful day by DePerno Hall..... 60

Jeff Miller

Celtic Heart 61

ConcreteCover

The Bullwhacker 62

Varick Street Sky 63

Emmalyn Ylala

From beach to island 64

6

Frank Bianco

Don't Bother

In one's sudden
Frustration
With someone,
One could be tempted
To write about that person.

Don't give them the satisfaction
Of immortalization.

Frank Bianco*Hesitance*

Precious Subject Matter—
What good
Are a poet's
Honed abilities
Without
Rounded metaphors,
Unlikely similes,
Veiled allegory . . .
Yet it seems to me
Infinity is Finite—
There are Many,
Yet only a Set Amount;
Thus yields the struggle
For originality.

Hesitance . . .
Every
Word
Must seem
To work,
Otherwise—
What
do you have?

Frank Bianco*Mantras*

Greed's Mantra:

I was poor before—
I don't wish to be again.

Generosity's Mantra:

Many helped me get here—
They deserve a reward.

The Optimist's Mantra:

Positivity shines
Through the darkest clouds.

The Cynic's Mantra:

I knew I was dead
Before I was born.

The Extrovert's Mantra:

Everyone is watching you—
Greet them openly!

The Introvert's Mantra:

Speak quickly, walk fast,
Keep your head down.

Frank Bianco*Old Notebooks*

Juvenilia

Hand-in-hand

With naivety—

Pure ambition

Without restriction.

 No second takes

 No retractions

 No hesitations—

 Raw and from the heart.

To return to that time

Even for a moment:

To go to bed angry, instead of

Waking up depressed.

Kylie Burger*BURN*

Burning embers of the day past
steam as they hit the cool abyss.
Neither are meant to last,
nor would that first kiss.

The flame simmers as it descends –
happiness reaching its peak.
It extinguishes at the bend
where the dark empty engulfs that which you seek.

Who knew it would be so soon, but it is true this burn would leave us;
Still today I remember that gray sea of bluish green
in your eyes that held me like the calm wave does,
but endlessly warm unlike any ocean – a dream.

In the days since and in those to come, if ever I fear,
I shall say, “In through the nose, out through the mouth.”
That day with you I hold dear
because you showed me what it is like not to go without.

More time is what I lack.
The flame of day runs out at dusk
as the black night suddenly comes back.
The stars, too, burn, but not as much.

With the end of July,
I met someone of mild temper and tremendous life
unlike others before who made me ask, Why?
Your fire and mine burned with no strife.

Here I set glimpsing the end of another day –
dreaming of a time when our flame was brighter than any sunset.
The days will end and begin again,
but I will always grieve for that which we never kept.

I burn still.

Kylie Burger

Cassette: 1985, 1973, 1986

He comes from old money,
They say. Oil is the trade
But grease you won't find
Stuck beneath his nails.

Dire for that payday, his
Big
Break,
To get money for nothin'.

If only we had a little more,
She says to her son. Three
Jobs, no benefits. No pay
To suffice his medical needs.

Pink flush. The hue for which
Her cheeks blush with the
Stolen money,
 It's a crime.

A dime piece is what he says
She is, not a quarter. Tiny,
Skinny, weightless. Tucked
In some dark pocket, shimmer
Hidden. Delicate drifting bill.

Money telling them both through
The speakers of an El Camino to
Rush to the good stuff –
Not to let go 'til they see the light.

Kylie Burger*HANGOVER*

Burst from the chest is a lonely heart.
It writhes in pain at all hours and
Not a single remedy exists in all of man.

No matter the time spent joyous among
That love, decades or mere days, it all
Aches just the same.

We look for that healing elixir, that
Non-existent all-powerful cure for
The hurt.

The hurt. Feeble it makes the organ
One cannot live without. It gouges.
There is no suture to mend it.

It is not a pounding headache rectified
With the same poison the next morning;
A liquid potion does not offer itself.

Hold onto me, pleads the pierced, polluted
Palm of the hand. The gallows have hanged
Any hope for healing. No touch restores it.

Stop the bleeding with a tourniquet of
Another's embrace. Still blood seeps
Through the gauze of that temporary fix.

The hangover of the heart is
Not easily remedied with
The hair of the dog that bit you.

Kylie Burger*Working-Man's Praise*

Those nuisance pests in need of repelling that hurriedly
 Crawl over butcherblock countertops, always
 Looking for sugary treats to eat. Sweet crumbs, run!

They are red, black, carpenters even! Glass-boxed
 Farms exist where pretend scientists astutely watch
 Their subjects' burrow relentlessly in a maze of

Fine-grain sand. Are they more than specimens? They are
 Able to build communities, raise families. A truly
 Remarkable feat by such small creatures. Admirable beings.

Ten to fifty times the weight of themselves they
 Can carry. Atop the curved, scrawny back and thorn legs.
 Putting in overtime, work boots numbly aching at

The end of shift. They are not a pest to rid, nor the big bad
 Bug on that unforgiving red metal can that yells
 In bold letters: **ANT STOP.** Or *Raid*, as if these entities

Are unruly invaders of some foreign land in need of
 Subduing before they overrun our home. Quick! get rid of them
 Before an infestation builds, before riots flood the

Streets. Picketers raising homemade signs telling us to
 Protect our homes; to look out for our children's minds.
 Don't let rioters corrupt our comfort with what we know

To be valid. We understand the truth as it is—
That these migrating workers serve a purpose in the
Natural order of things. They, too, have mouths

To feed. Night and day, only out to eat, to scavenge, for
Their arthropod kids. They will live and survive.
Commandeering our rations, yes, but we have plenty.

Dad exclaims, “It’s *Them!* on the counter!” There a little
One scurries with his heist. But I know this guy is not a
TCM Saturday Morning flick. Flamethrowers will not find

The hands of the good guys and aid a Hollywood-
Worthy eradication of some giant mutated species. No,
Atomic radiation has not infected this one, nor the

Family he provides for. Strength and power venerate him as
A hero, unsung, and unappreciated. No film set does
This ant go to for make-up and running lines. This is his life.

Nichole Delaney

Internal Grief

Pain settles in the empty corridors of my heart

A place where flowers once flourished

No longer beautified by your touch

Foundation rattled by your absence

Our souls, now separated by galaxies

I no longer feel whole

Nichole Delaney*Ocean Eyes*

They asked me why blue was my favorite color.

So I told them.

I used to drown in her eyes.

Tie cinderblocks to my ankles,

And enjoy sinking to her core.

Her eyes,

Blue,

Like the ocean.

Explored by many,

Understood by none.

I attempted to swim,

But she wasn't ready for me to reach her surface.

Nichole Delaney

*The Labyrinth**

Our relationship, a labyrinth.
Unable to see past the next turn.
Lost in the beginning of this inescapable maze.

But the truth is,
I don't mind being lost with her.
I don't want to find the end.

So I'm here,
Her hand in mine,
As we run around this labyrinth.
Taking every turn together,
With no intention of getting out.

**Recipient of the 2020 Vogel award in poetry*

Nichole Delaney

The Perfect Storm

You were the storm I wasn't ready for.

Now I have pain seeping through holes

That were once full of love.

Drowning in the overcast of tears.

Thoughts of you pierce me,

Like hail hitting the tin roof.

Untitled

I told her that my best poetry comes after an ending.

So if you see her,

Thank her for me.

Patrick Donnelly*The Poet's Hippocratic*

It is here with us.
We have stepped past it
A threshold tripwire guarded,
With commitment strewn.

I do so solemnly swear
That I will be with you,
Yes you, maybe not you,
A matter of choice we bear.

It is my duty
To prove nothing,
To derive nothing,
Yet to give everything

So I step willingly.
The terms accepted, and wholly;
That I cannot hide I from you
Nor you yourself from I, surely.

We are mutual,
We are several,
Truths we can't deny.
Opinions differ, tempers fly.

What I sow,
You must reap,
The fruits low
Piled in heap

With you as witness
To I, and to oath
Same as all in our business
That I so solemnly swear
I am with you and nothing
Can be real without us both.

Daniela Hannah*Jump into the Ice Cold Water*

I stare into the clear pool
knowing I have to
jump into the ice cold water.
It's time to take a swim.

Knowing I have to
train for the season ahead,
it's time to take a swim
in order to reach the goal.

Train for the season ahead,
I wake up when the sun rises and leave as the sun sets.
In order to reach the goal,
you are forced to watch the seconds tick by

I wake up when the sun rises and leave as the sun sets,
my body aches but there is no rest.
You are forced to watch the seconds tick by,
I want the clock on my side.

My body aches but there is no rest.
I stare into the clear pool.
I want the clock on my side.
Jump into the ice cold water.

Olivia Harwick*Dive of the Dolphin*

The water's weight is a comforting haven.
It's as wonderful and secure as my family's love.

Except one of my favorite things to do
Is catch a glimpse of our shimmering skin
When we glide to the surface, and fly above the Sun!

While I'm in the air
The sky kisses my face.
It's the ocean above my sea
With tufts of white
among the blue
like the crests of the waves in my home.

I curve, turn, and thrash my tail
To drive me back down to my waves.
I slice through the water
Back home to my friends again.

"Creak, whistle, chirp, squeal",
My family says to me.
They want me to help find our meal.

We dip our noses in the kelp,
Softly twisting our bodies
To caress the leaves
That hide their fish
From our view.

The sweet meat of the fish, my family, and my waves
are my true loves.
I want to be here forever flying by the setting Sun.

Olivia Harwick*In Praise of the Indian Corn*

The way that the opened husks
Twistedly drape around and shoot out
Above the kernels
Reminds me of
The hair of that infamously masterful
Theoretical physicist
On a good day.

The crinkle of the translucent, veined paper
Of the leaves is the sound of
Those magnificent fires used to keep
The little ones alive
Amidst the frigid, autumnal nights.

The deep magenta veins of the husks
That flow with auburn and beige hues
Is reminiscent of
The oxygenated liquid life
That surges with necessity and passion
Beneath our skin.

The body is a wonder!
The colorful, oblate spheroids
Packed so tightly
That they deform their neighbors
In competition to stand out the most.

These different jewels all shine
With the same romantic, soft glow
Even in the dimmest of lights.

This art leans in my window
So I can see the beauty
Of this colorful fall
Even with flora so delightfully small.

Olivia Harwick*The Dusty Dustpan*

Oh, policeman of the unruly,
Tax collector of strewn receipts,
And tamer of crimson jellybeans haphazardly
Dropped on the tiled floor!

You are here always,
But only thought of
When needed the most.

You clean for our guests
So they are not aghast
By the littered tumbleweeds.

You usually hide when unemployed
In the most shadowed corner
With your ribbed stem embracing tightly
The emerald stalk of your broom.

Dustpan is your name,
Mainly because it's the dust
that clings to you
Even after you're tipped to dispose of
The floor's acne.

You gather on yourself
The same dust
You clean from the floor
When not in use.

Thank you for your quiet servitude
In the name of sanctity
That is cleanliness and order.

Olivia Harwick*The Grand Garden*

As I walk over the garden's floor,
The light thuds of my stained, brown boots are absorbed
By the damp dirt and moist, splintered wood chips,
Until I step
Onto a small leaf menagerie,
And there is the soft sound
Of my presence.

The curvaceously wrought benches
Allow you to sit quietly
And slowly, but thoroughly take in
The rustle and earthy scent of the pale yellow, toothed leaves.

A light grey squirrel
With a stripe along his bristly head and back,
Characteristic also of the leaves' auburn yellow
Hesitantly takes me in,
And digs loudly for his
Stash of nuts
Never found.

Skylar Harwick

All Hail the Excel Selection Box

Oh, great and powerful box
With your bolded forest green edge
Enrapturing my continuous data
In your 4-sided rectangular hug
Extended by your white '+' sign
Where would I be
If I couldn't drag you across my screen
Leaving the original column barren
To stuff a dull gray box with intriguing data
Now newly green?
Sliding you by your crosshair
From begin time to nonlinearity label
Only to drop you
Exactly where you belong...
Sometimes across the entire table.
You are on my side.
Until I pull your small corner cube downward
Duplicating what's contained
In the previous cell
To the one beneath
Erasing my next step.
I throw your rebellion away
With the pure back arrow
At the top left of the computer screen.
Oh, great and powerful box
How I need you
For lettered boxes in a row
and numbered ones in a column
As I analyze 18 female mouse vocalization trials
Needing to be dispelled
Through use of Excel

Skylar Harwick*Cicadidae*

The spiracles give some air
inefficiently when I move.
These holes break my exoskeleton walls
as I'm permanently removed.

My chitinous carcass
Grasps a living thing,

as I touch tightening tarsus to loosened bark:
my old body is draped permanently.

Crawling out through the back,
my softness plops to the ground
I burrow under for defense
Protecting my sides all around.

Selective pressure is now against me
by syphoning a sweet xylem.
A koala bear chewing eucalyptus
which he found above, but myself, the bottom.

Both so nutrient hollow....

I rise again and sing to the women;
I rival a glorious saw.

My lover sought to give me attention
which I met through successful copulation.

My lady cicadidae cuts the protective branch
At circa the day of a sunny, bright summer

Our pink young travel down to nurse the roots:
stealing the sweet xylem
I formerly suckled as a youth.

Skylar Harwick*Lichen*

The thin organism
extends its grey - green tentacles
to hug its cracking bed of bark.

Its photosynthetic-ness
craves the sun - side,
but never rises above to the leaves.
Its rhizines leave the bark intact,
for it resigns itself to be mutualistic.

Lichen likes to form circular patches:
play rugs for ants.

A fungus pairs with algae or cyanobacteria
to become this archaic plant, a chimera.

It satiates deer during frigid months,
and satiates my eyes on a green day.
The extensive hybrid is used for human perfumes and clothing dyes,
camouflage for hummingbird nests and insects,

yet most think it's a war on trees.
It can certainly decay
tissues of those animals not evolved to consume.

Left untouched, it resumes
Manifestation in its silence.

Skylar Harwick

Ship Upstairs

With stars on the side
You were a Navy's pride
But now your sky is a room.

Your waves are a stand,

as you sail upon the sea:
a mud colored filing cabinet.

I know military subs are made of metal.
But how could you sail out of wood?

Did your massive ancestor chip?

Did the tendons of delicate
Ropes snap in a fitfully frightful wind?

Was it a fateful trip?
In a year of the century you served,
so many years ago?

Is the man's head
Perilously before your bowsprit
Your master

Or your victim?



Skylar Harwick*Stitched*

‡ A girl's last day of school
‡ in a jacket not too worn,
‡ As it had been repaired for years
‡ As a family heirloom to be worn.

‡ Colors of brownies and cream,
‡ Warmed to a bake by the setting sun.
‡ As she waited for the bus to take her
‡ On her last bumpy run.

‡ A fresh red seat available on the back
‡ Beside two unruly boys
‡ Speaking in low whispers about
‡ How girls are just their toys.

‡ One of them pulled her sleeve,
‡ And she gasped as fast as the rip.
‡ Before more damage could be done,
‡ The girl threw a hit.

‡ “A stitch in time saves nine,’ my dear,”
‡ Said her mother, pulling thread.
‡ In response to her daughter's tale
‡ Filling every parent with dread

Gabriella Hudziak*Cicadas*

Thirteen
to seventeen
years in wait, emerging
after from the ground, down below.
The molt

begins,
one final time; the
skin hardens and the bright
white shines through. Then, all concert joined,
they sing.

The songs
of choirs, searching
from springtime into summer for
the unions they long for.

In the trees, the young
enter this world. Their parents
will be gone by June.

Gabriella Hudziak

From Strebel to the Library, So I can print some papers

I've always wondered why there's glass windows around the staircase leading in and out. Perhaps it was an addition after, as the brick inside matches the brick outside. My grandfather remembers the construction of this building, Back when the college was in the basement of a church. I doubt he remembers though.

It's a beautiful day out, and I love those pink flowers. The most effort is made when we have someone to impress. The tiles of the courtyard shift under my feet as I pass through. I wonder if I took a crowbar, could I lift them up?

Next to the computers, on-the-go students use, Many afternoons of mine were spent. The shift from reading alone to knitting with friends is a warm memory. As for the computers, it's been witness to many last minute printing jobs, I'm not so innocent in that regard.

All papers go to Sheldon by default it seems, Which I've always noted with annoyance as I, and many others, tapped our feet while waiting for what we need. I don't think I've ever felt more contempt for a character in a show I've never seen.

On my way back, The shine of the sculpture among the flowers captures my attention. There isn't a plaque, so I don't know what or who it's from. At the base though I see, MAH 83. I wonder who that might be.

Alma Jasencic

A Piece from the Religion of Peace

I prayed for my people

The fallen Twin Towers left a hole

That was filled with hatred towards my people

I listened to comments that hurt

All Muslims are terrorists

So, do I continue to pray on my hands and knees?

Do I fight back?

Allah answers,

He opens The Holy Qu'ran on this verse:

Take to forgiveness, and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant.

Al-A'raf [7:200]

Alma Jasencic*Home in Europe*

I miss my home in Europe
Although I was born in America
The air in Bosnia is so crisp and
I feel the hairs on my back stand up
When I speak about my home
In Bosnia the cappuccinos taste foreign
And they are better than the ones in America
And the culture is so special
I share it with my family
I share holidays with my fellow Muslim friends

I imagine myself walking down
A long brick road, not yellow of course
Watching people pray, chat,
And shop
And I notice cafes and small shops
And I walk upon bridges that were once blown up

During the war my home experienced
In the capital, Sarajevo, I notice a
Catholic Cathedral and
A mosque and
A synagogue

My home is a home for many people
It is the home for the individuals who
Attended the 1984 Winter Olympic Games
That took place in Sarajevo
And it is the city of beautiful sunsets
As I watch the sunsets in America
I picture myself sitting in front of
A small shop in Bosnia, sipping on my cappuccinos
And admiring all the best qualities Bosnia has
It is my home in Europe.

Alma Jasencic*Listening Ears*

To listen to a bird is like an alarm clock.
It knows when the sun sets and when the sun rises.

To listen to trees is like being carefree.
As you listen to trees on a windy day,
All of your negative thoughts go away.
In that moment you are one with nature.

To listen to the waves crash,
It sounds like a downpour of rain.
Even listening to the rain,
Soothes small wounds within the mind.
Watching the small droplets fall,
Leaving the negative thoughts behind.

How can we understand the true value of Earth if
we cannot listen?

To listen to the wind, rain, trees,
The sun on hot days, and all of Earth's creatures,
We must have listening ears.
It is like the sounds of music.
And Earth will soon finish this song.

Alma Jasencic*Unknown*

Take me to an unknown place.
Where no man has walked.
I speak with sense.
I have no time to make amends.

I said what I said
And still no one trusts me.
Take me to an unknown place.
A new face here, a new face there.

Enjoy my words, I speak with truth.
Take me to an unknown place.
I want a fresh start.
I want to feel accepted around people who don't know me.

An unknown place is hard to find
In a world where people are always searching
For something new, something old.
Take me to an unknown place.

Brittney L. Nowack*Soul Food*

Before you, I made boxed mashed potatoes for dinner
With a side of store-bought sugar cookies.
I cut bread with a butter knife, cooked pasta
Like I was cooking it for a toothless baby.

My signature meal was scrambled eggs with a side
Of buttered toast. Those were the items mom bought the most –
And the easiest to prepare when I would ask what was for dinner
And she would say, “fend for yourself.”

When we moved in together, you’d coach me on my kitchen
Procedures: yell at me for thawing and refreezing, ask me why
I wasn’t using a serrated knife, tell me I can’t use the same cutting
Boards for both raw meats, and ready-to-eat.

In a way you taught me more than just being able to survive.
I used to get by as a scavenger or making minimalist meals.
You really taught me what it felt like to thrive,
To get lost in the moment and live for the feels.

You turned food from a reminder of malnutrition
To a passion with a power that could change my condition.

Now I live for the days I have no obligations and I can
Play freely in the kitchen, Wüsthof swaying sharply
Slapping the bamboo beneath my hand.
You reignited my inspiration once again.

Alexis Orr

3:56 P.M.

And then, he changed.
He was no longer the sweet, affectionate *boy* I knew
since age 10.
Or the *boy* I once spilled all my trust in.

He was hitting, *pawing* at my chest.
A push, a kick, a somber cry
and engulfed vocal cords that will heal with time.

A single sock, a pack of batteries wrapped in plastic
to focus on,
to forget the grunting of his voice
and to pretend
this wasn't happening
that this *was* love.

My psychologist tells me
If I don't tell a bluecoat
that the next victims death *if* commits suicide
will be blood on my hands.

But she doesn't know...
the guilt of it all.
And what comes with suicidal thoughts.

Stark nakedness,
a purple toothbrush in hand
finally in control
of what happens next.

Alexis Orr*Sacrificial Lamb*

Gingerbread Men
mask the smell of trauma,
while the carolers outside sing,
blanketing the sounds of conflict.

The lights strung around the room
are bystanders watching..
watching the flush in his face
warm as a christmas embrace,
and the green in his eyes hot
like embers from the fire.

He kicks her hard enough
for her to miscarry the baby they made
the night he told her he loved her
and would never hit her again.

Now her blood, the babies blood, my sisters blood
decorates the white tree skirt
as she screams in agony
and my father joins the carolers outside.

Alexis Orr*Empty Cup*

An empty cup sits on concrete
and rumbles as city goers strut through
brilliant patchworks of people
to arrive at a job that they hate
just as much as visiting their mother.
They waste their riches
on luxury and material
of which they have several,
and speak from a sanguine voice
about how they had fired their maid
when they found her asleep on the rug
the morning they returned home
from a three month vacation in Paris.
And yet,
they cannot spare
a dollar,
a quarter,
a dime,
a nickel,
a penny,

(continued, Pg. 42.)

for the man, woman, or child
who stare into the cracks
of the concrete
because they are ashamed
of who they are, and muddled by
the way they got there.

You pass them
like you do
the one who killed your father
not paying them any mind,
but they are not
the ones who killed
your father,
but you will be
part of many
who kill them.

Chris Restivo

Her name was Raine

She's like the rain
Not many embrace her
But I saw her pain
Yet did not face her

I felt so bad
And might still be
A forgotten eye
That could not see

She had no name
That's why I chased
I guess I'll just forget your face

Chris Restivo*Man vs. Nature*

Oh, how the grass still grows
Even though we set fire to the stove
Tree and man
We all are one
Oh, how Im sorry for what we've done
Who takes the blame?
It's all our fault
Make a change
From all the assault
The conflict grows
From day to day
And some still say they are okay
To save this place
In which we live
To work together
We all must give
And drop our guns
Before it's late
The earth cannot take all this weight

Chris Restivo*Morning Blues*

Leaving, like it must be done
Leaving as pieces that connect us fall off

Life moves
And so, do I

But without you I'm sure to die
Resting easily by your side
Waking up next a woman that lies

It's hard to sleep
It's hard to dream
When the woman of your life makes you scream

Not out loud but right inside
Is where the screams seem to reside
Inside my mind

When you leave
I feel your lost
The day drags on and I remorse

To live with you
And watch you leave
It all happens, so suddenly

Liam Rodgers

“Are Video Games Really Your Priorities?!”

Everybody’s life has a different meaning
Different things of which they are dreaming

My younger brother has his mind on one goal
That to be achieved through the use of a console.

Not in school, not in sports,
Video Games have become his main pride source.

How my brother defines success,
Others it would not impress.

Improving his gaming skills
And upping his number of kills.

These are the priorities my brother has in mind,
All of which my father deems a waste of time.

Everybody’s life has a different meaning,
For my younger brother his own standards of achieving.

A digital Reality:

Not everybody's reality is the same.
For my younger brother has his own in a video game.

Not quite as valid though, but surely self made.
However non-tangible, only virtually displayed.

Much more preferred than the one that is real.
Everything that exists was created to be ideal.

Playing as his custom character, living in his custom house,
Driving his custom car around wherever abouts.

In this reality he can do whatever he may please,
with the exception of all responsibilities.

He could choose to go on a mission.
Or he could choose to partake in competition.

Free of consequence, free of repercussion.
Free to act without fear or caution.

If he dies, he shall respawn.
If he is losing, he may be withdrawn.

In this reality no manners or rules of etiquette exist.
Habits of swearing and cussing forever persist.

(continued, Pg. 48)

Expressing anger and frustration is a commonality
 With disregard to any sense of morality

Insulting mothers and using racial slurs,
 Online is where it commonly occurs.

Free of consequence, free of repercussion.
 Free to say whatever to whomever without fear or
 caution.

This reality, for everybody is not the same.
 For my younger brother has his own in a video
 game.

Control "F" is for Crouch not Family

"Mom I need more batteries"
 He would say at least once a week.

And that's all we we would hear from him.
 Nothing at the dinner table,
 Nothing during Real Time with Bill Maher,
 Wouldn't hear anything from him unless he came to one of us.

He'll be asked to do chores every once in a while,
 Only to half ass them
 And then of course get right back to playing Xbox.

Is he neglecting us?
 Or is he really onto something?

HELP

He has fallen and he can't get up
Everything revolves around playing video games
Let him continue this cycle? Or
Perhaps send him to HELP?

It's all for the kids

He doesn't just play on the TV on his shelf,
He plays as apart of something greater than himself.

He doesn't just play as his own single man,
He plays for the prosperity of his clan.

Playing in his clan battles,
Fighting his clan wars,
Contributing to his clan the highest of scores.

His contributions to his clan don't just stop there,
As he recruits other members to find the next heir.

After all, it's for the kids,
Forget about spending time with your family,
Because god forbids!

He doesn't just play on the TV on his shelf,
He plays as apart of something greater than himself.

The FUTURE Is Now

Forget about face to face interaction
Unless it's through a screen
The future is now
Utopias are all that are seen
Reality will become virtual
Eventually

Time does not exist in video games:

What is time?

To a businessman, time is of the essence.
It is the clause in a contract in which the two
parties must act in coalescence.

To a physicist, time is only a theory.
And is perhaps mankind's greatest query.

To my younger brother, time does not exist.
For all the hours, minutes, seconds playing Xbox
are dismissed.

The act of playing video games consumes his
mind.

Enough to where he loses track of time.
“Aidan come down!” my mother would call.
“Five more minutes!” as he would stall.

Five minutes would go by,
“Aidan get down here!” she gives another try.

Still no movement or effort to be made.
This is the game that they always played.

Trying to get as many hours, minutes and seconds
of play time as he possibly can.
Forever hibernating in his den.

For my younger brother, time is not of the essence,
For playing video games has consumed his adolescence.

When he gets home from school, to his
bedroom he will run.
As my mother begs him to get his homework done.

From the moment he presses the on button.
The clock will strike 3 a.m. all of the sudden.

His sleep schedule as a priority, has been dismissed.
For my younger brother, time does not exist.

Liam Rodgers*The Virtual Social Life:*

Who needs friends, when you have friends online?
Doesn't matter if they are real, as long as they get along fine.

They could be in Missouri, or they could be in South Carolina
Or they could even come all the way from China!

They can still be friends without ever meeting face to face.
They can be in different parts of the world, but still in one place.

Doesn't matter from where they came,
Nobody's a stranger, if they play the same game.

No need to leave your home
When all your friends are on free roam.

No need to feel lonely
When you're in a private party only

Because after all,

Who needs friends when you have friends online?
Doesn't matter if they are real, as long as they get
along fine.

Kaitlyn Tambasco*A New Beginning*

Old heart and yesterday's trash
Deathly afraid to say no
Always making excuses
To tell him I can't go

Always hiding and wanting out
Not sure where to turn
He was an old start
And my heart was about to burn

Nights with the girls were much more fun
South Park, Disney, Full House and more
Avoided so much anger and hurt
Who knew there was more in store

Thought of ways to avoid him
Never wanted to get a text
Finding alternative routes
Just for my now ex

Treated me like crap
Treated me like trash
Wasn't being myself
All for some ass

Never cared for anything
Never cared for me
Was in it for himself
And I was his property

(continued, Pg. 54)

Gave me rules to follow
Made me go to the gym
I wasn't in it for me
I was in it for him

Told me what to do
Every day and every night
Shook my hand in public
It was hard to see the light

He was sneaky and sly
Did things for personal gain
Never told the truth
Which caused me so much pain

Received many red flags
Friends gave me advice
I acknowledged it
But thought they were just being nice

Winter break was fun
Gave me time to relax
The only thing I knew about school
Is that I didn't want to go back

Only spoke when spoken to
Was hiding all around
I would talk for a second
And then wouldn't make a sound

When school was back in session
It wasn't until one random day
I was by myself
And decided to pray

I asked my friend from home
And my friends at college too
That was when I realized
I needed to cut loose

I blocked him off of everything
Blocked his number too
Still found a way to contact me
I wasn't sure what to do

Decided to talk to him
Was scared to death
After it was done
I finally took a breath

Didn't go as planned
But knew that that was okay
Said I was better with him
I had nothing else to say

The next few weeks were hard
Don't get me wrong
I wondered why breaking up with him
Took me so damn long

(continued, Pg. 56)

Still said hi when I saw him
But it still caught me off guard
Wondered why this process
Was so very hard

After a while I was back to reality
I never acknowledged him again
This whole process
Was very much the end

I've been stronger because of it
I'm a new person and in a new relationship now
Don't want any part of him
Anyhow

Whatever you do

Her heart beating a thousand times a minute
Scared to death and can't explain it
Panicking, sweating, moving all around
Trying and trying not to make a sound
She feels like she's tied to a chair
But all of a sudden, she gets up out of nowhere
She walks out and slams the door
Not really sure what she's fighting for
She walks alone in that empty hall
Scared and nervous about it all
Tears come streaming down her face

As she looks down in such disgrace
She always thought she was strong
But she realized she was wrong
Her mind wanders in all different places
As she remembers so many faces
She walks and she walks
Not knowing if she's able to talk
She gives herself some time
Just to think and rewind
She goes back, more nervous than before
Not knowing what is in store
She walks back in, scared to death
The lady tells her to take a breath
She gives her a weird look
And begins to gather her books
She looks tired and worn out
Not knowing what to talk about
The lady tells her she cares
She tries to look away from her stare
She starts to break down all over again
The lady didn't know where she's been
She wipes her glasses on her shirt
The lady knew that she had been hurt
She slowly explained that she was upset
She looked up and their eyes met
The lady reminded her she was strong
She thanked her but told her she was wrong
She opened up more and more
She told the lady about how it hit her like a car door
The lady told her she would be there for her
She tried to think back and it felt like a blur

(continued, Pg. 58)

The lady comforted her for a while
She then started to smile
She told the lady it's hard for her to open up
As she felt like she was ran over by a truck
The lady then had to leave
The lady told the girl she was there if she needs
She thanked the lady once again
Letting all of her positivity get to her head
She still had some stress
But maybe a little bit less
She talked to her friend
Who also made her feel better in the end
Her friend told her she was strong
She didn't tell her she was wrong
Her friend reminded her that so many people are backing her up
And that she was worthy of so much
She sat there taking it all in
Not knowing where to begin
She started crying again
But was so thankful in the end
Because whatever you've been through
You have to let it empower you





Olivia Harwick

Blossoming tree near Gordon Science Center



Olivia Harwick

Beautiful day by DePerno Hall



Jeff Miller
Celtic Heart



Jeff Miller
The Bullwhacker



Jeff Miller
Varick Street Sky



Emmalyn Ylala
From Beach to Island

Frank Bianco*Idle Thoughts*

You can't recreate the same set of circumstances that led to someone else's success. They had *their* path—you're on *yours*.

Just because you sit under the Bodhi Tree like the Buddha, it doesn't mean you'll attain Enlightenment as the Buddha did.

*

Meditation was created by Eastern Monks who needed something to do while waiting for their hot tea to cool off.

*

Critical thinking is hindered by the differences in what people perceive to be taboo subject matter.

*

You could spend your whole life searching for something that was never meant to be found, something that was always inherently unobtainable.

You might then ask yourself: Is all the work I've put into finding this Thing rendered meaningless if I realize that I'll never find it?

If you begin to think that, recall all of the

bonds that you have forged throughout your endeavors and judge accordingly.

*

Be social and critical, but don't be critical of being social.

*

The Tightrope – Relationships adopt a tightrope mentality. Two people stand on either end of the rope, and the idea is that they will both walk toward each other, meet in the center, and then one will carry the other over to the other end safe and sound. The kicker is, neither of them are tightrope walkers.

*

Cultural Artifacts - Isn't it fascinating that a human being can come to dislike a fellow human being just because of some superfluous cultural artifact?

She had a Boston Red Sox keychain on her backpack—I wore a fleece Yankee jacket. Naturally, this means we are not allowed to like each other, or even try to get to know one another.

*

Stringing a web of lies is just as difficult as telling the truth.

*

Perhaps the expression “Try everything once” should change to: “You can only enjoy something once.” You can only enjoy something once because it’s fresh and new. The more you do it afterward, it either becomes boring, or it becomes addiction.

*

I once had a professor who on the first day of lectures said that she “never teaches the same class twice.” Somehow, she had been a teacher for 30 years.

*

I never understood the concept of “citing sources.” Once you look something up, you know it.

*

“Paradoxical Parenthetical” - An aside spoken in Conversation or Explanation for the sake of pointing out a possibly contradictory aspect, and thought of while in the middle of saying the given point, which can cause the speaker to wonder why they attempted to make the point in the first place. The equivalent of saying something that would be a draft of a point in an essay that would either be deleted, discarded, or put away to be used for something else.

*

Something my Father once told me – “Just because a pig lives on a farm, that doesn’t make it a horse.”

*

Gravity has been giving me trouble lately. I feel like I’m being pushed more than I’m being pulled.

*

Cops – Never around when you need them, always around when you don’t want them to be.

*

Tragedy is only as severe until the next one happens.

*

Suggestion - Fandom, and its relationship to the given IP, is much the same as the voting process in America. The fans can only suggest the direction that the creator should take the IP, much how voters merely suggest to their elected representatives who they’d like to have sworn in. The difference is that, when it comes to voting, the representative must always listen to what the voters say. With creators: it’s their work, and they can do what they want with it.

*

Origin of Hypocrisy - I think Nature predisposes us to be hypocritical. In the winter, we want to warm-up because it's too cold, but when summer comes along and brings its blessed warmth, suddenly we prefer the cold.

*

Money doesn't buy happiness, but money will buy you a happy memory.

*

Success is making enough money to live comfortably, in such a way as to never have to speak to anybody again.

*

Free Jazz - Only a true master can successfully fool his audience into thinking he doesn't know what he's doing.

*

You either catch lightning in a bottle, or you watch the lightning strike a tree, catch fire, and walk away to let someone else put it out.

*

It's difficult to be a Thinker when everyone has just about thought all there is to be thought.

*

They say that “less is more.” Yet, the less you write, the more you labor over the phrasing and quality of what you have. (Shall we not forget the story of how Joyce, in his later years, spent an entire day trying to figure out just the right way to arrange seven words?) Every short declamation must be perfect, or else it’s an elementary sentence devoid of subtly.

*

Silent Letters - ‘Old’ used to be spelled ‘olde.’ Then a scribe decided to ease the pain of his arthritic hand and stopped writing redundant letters.

It makes me wonder if we could do the same with words like terodactyl, neumonia, sutle, or fau-pa.

*

The Pretentious Artist - There is nothing worse than coming off as pretentious.

However, Artists are in a position where they cannot help but be pretentious, for they must possess the ability to “puff-up” their work—they need to apply hidden, fantastic meanings and interpretations to their work, as well as have them written out masterfully, or else their use of language is no more unique than what a “commoner” could scribble on a paper napkin.

*

Daniela Hannah*Creative Block*

Frantically running around the house, she dashed up the stairs into her bedroom. When zooming in, she looked into her non-traditionally organized room, but she was on a mission. She thought to herself; where could it possibly be? Scanning her room quickly she looked at every nook and cranny for a split second with widened eyes, she thought it had to be in here somewhere. Jamie did not have time to ponder, she needed to look in the limited time she had before her mother gave the final yell to leave the house for her new high school. Jamie knew if she did not find her prized possession in time, she would be overwhelmed on her first day.

Shaking her head abruptly it helped her refocus. She started on her dresser. Between the piled smeared makeup wipes, bottles of fragranced lotions and her dangled necklaces which hung like chandeliers, it was not on the covered dresser. Jamie thought, maybe it did fall on the floor last night.

Jamie hunched down and started throwing the mountain piled clothes all over her bed and onto the other side of the room. Throwing the colorful garments created a tornado of shades and patterns only creating another disaster. Every article of clothing Jamie picked up she wondered to herself, just look under one more shirt, one more pair of pants, one more sock and maybe it will be there. By the time she reached the end of the pile she was distraught. She stood

motionless as a statue holding the remaining clothes in her hands.

Rewinding back in her memory like a DVD from the night before, she opened her eyes and was back in the moment. She threw the rest of her clothes from her hands and grabbed the right bedpost. She gripped the bed post as hard as she could and jerked the bed back towards her to see if the pen was there. She moved the bed forcefully back at an angle, which made the room even more chaotic, like her morning. She needed to end her search quickly. Looking around the corner she saw it lying there and it looked right at her, longing to be held again. Jamie knelt down and picked up her pen slowly, as if it had been injured from the fall the night before. She felt whole again and gazed at her pen with a glimmer in her eye. She needed her pen to survive the day. She knew if her writing instrument was inside her backpack ready to be used for any of her class notes or daydream doodles, they would both be completed.

Jamie had searched for what seemed like hours in her thoughts but was merely five minutes in reality. When she found the pen, she knew she could finally take on her senior year. Jamie knew if she had her pen, she would feel welcomed. People at her new school could not stay by her side, let alone fit inside her hand when she needed comfort. If she ever felt lonely, her pen was there to help her create comfort with markings of any paper she could acquire. “You don’t want to be late to school, right?! Let’s go Jamie!” her mother’s final yell echoed through

the quiet two story house. Jamie walked downstairs with her lucky pen. She gently placed it inside her organized denim pencil pouch and zipped it up. Her mother had the door opened, ready for Jamie to walk out of. The sky was clear just like Jamie's worries about where her missing pen had gone off to. The warm sunshine glowed on her face, helping her realize she was confident her senior year of high school was going to be a success.

Jamie jumped into the car, quickly buckled her seat belt and was ready to go. She moved her hand to the volume button towards the radio slowly to see if her mom would have noticed. Before her index finger touched the dial to crank up the music, her mother said without taking her eyes off the road, "You know better than to try that on me this morning." Jamie always wanted to have something to do but her mother valued the silent morning drive before the uproarious day began.

During the ride, Jamie could not wait to get out of the car and start her day. She sat with her left leg shaking with nothing to do except to place her forehead against the cool car window. Jamie felt useless because she gets antsy during car rides. Jamie remembered when she had a small spiral bound notebook her father gave to her where she wrote and drew during any short or long car trips. After too many sick car rides her mother could not handle cleaning up the aftermath of the dizziness, the leftovers displayed on the car floor. Jamie's father always encouraged her creativity to flow and to grow no matter what

she did.

The beginning of the summer, Jamie's father gave her his pen while he lay on a hospital bed with a numbered amount of days. He told her, "Jamie, here is my prized pen that I know you have wanted for a while and I want you to have it. Keep drawing, doodling, writing and create as much as you can. But remember this pen doesn't define you. People already see you for your uniqueness and you do not need any special pen to show people that. I know you will do great things, sweetie. You are sooo creative and I want you to know I am so proud of you." That was their last conversation before his passing.

The eternal fifteen minute drive to school was finally over and Jamie's mother said, "Well, here's your new school. Do you think you're ready for the day?"

"Mom, I have dad's lucky pen so everything will be fine. Even if you didn't let me play music this morning..."

"Jamie, you know I'm not like your father in the mornings."

"I know..."

"But, when I come and pick you up you can play whatever your heart's contents. Does that sound like a fair deal?"

"Sounds like a deal! Well, I better not keep the other cars waiting. Love you."

"Love you to sweetie."

With a quick kiss on the forehead she was ready to tackle her first day at her new high school while she stepped out of the Subaru Outback. She stood stoic in a superhero pose with

her eyes closed. All seemed right in her world for be last, first day of high school to begin.

“What are you doing?”

Jamie opened her eyes and saw a shrimp sized high school boy with bottle glasses three inches thick and two inches in diameter for each lens. Jamie was puzzled because she did not know if she was offended by the comment or not. She replied, “Why do you wear those glasses?”

“Because I have too,” while the slouched kid sniffled and pushed up his glasses at the same time.

“That is exactly why I stand this way because I have too.”

“I’m Gary Estevez and I’m guessing you are new here?”

“Nice to meet you Gary and yes, very new here.”

Jamie placed her hand out so quickly to shake Gary’s hand it startled him. He slowly stuck his hand out, still nervous for the end result. Jamie grabbed his hand and shook it so much his arm started to look more like a noodle. After the handshake, Gary gained his noodle back and looked up at Jamie. Gary saw a gleam of hope in the new school year. Jamie’s fiery red hair and warm white toothy smile glistened in the August sun and made Gary smile a little himself.

When Jamie saw Gary’s smile it made her think about herself as a young child. She remembered being the shy kid in class who had few friends, but her love of creativity allowed her to grow in confidence. Jamie could see Gary had not

found that confidence yet, but there was something inside wanting to come out of him.

“No time to waste! Let’s go Gary! You have to give me the grand tour of the place.”

They walked up the stairs toward the brick building’s front doors. Jamie with her head held high and Gary with his heavy backpack stepping towards their education. She asked Gary when they entered into the red brick building, “Are you or are you not going to show me the place?”

“There isn’t much here in the building to show around, sadly.”

“What if I walk down the wrong hallway?”

“All we have here is the main hallway and the fine arts wing. Not much of a grand tour.”

“Can you show me the fine arts wing?! I have a class down there and I want to check it out.”

“We are going to be late for class if I show you now.”

“When does first period start?”

“Five minutes.”

Gary showed her his watch reading MON 8:25 A.M. in black from his Casio F-91W watch. Jamie contemplated if she missed her first class would it be worth it or not? She pulled out of her jacket pocket a crinkled white paper which had her class schedule. Unfolding the tight ball was half the battle. Finally getting it opened she looked down and read out loud, “First period. Richard, Taylor, Pre-Cal.”

“I’m in that class also but Coach Taylor is not the man to mess with on the first day of classes. Let alone, you are a new student and I don’t want him to have a bad impression of you.”

Gary held his backpack straps tightly. “It’s on the other side of the hallway and I can show you the art wing later.”

“No worries if you can’t show me now! Plus, where is Coach Taylor’s class?”

“His door is the last one on the right.”

Gary glanced at his watch as it clicked away and he had a worried look and said, “We need to go now or we’ll be late.”

As soon as he said that, his watch clicked to 8:28 a.m. as the seconds ticked down. Jamie saw the fear trapped in his eyes and he started to fast walk down towards the classroom. She quickly followed behind him. She thought to herself, this kid is small but he can pick up some speed. Jamie then realized Gary had to be a senior since Pre-Cal and AP Stats were the only classes offered for them. She slapped her forehead of the quick judgement of him being a freshman. Gary looked over his shoulder and said, “I think we’re going to m-”

Gary suddenly stopped at the closing door and Jamie collided into his backpack. Coach Taylor glared through the slender window on the wooden door. Gary looked through his glasses with a toothy nervous smile while shrugging his shoulders up while gripping his backpack even tighter for comfort. Coach Taylor opened the creaking door slowly as he stood there with his styrofoam cup filled to the top with black coffee. He took a sip from the steaming cup and finally said, “Take a seat, first day of class and I already have two trouble makers.”

Jamie and Gary took seats next to each oth-

er in the back of the classroom and sat through the typical first day of class rituals. Everyone in the class already had their supplies out. Jamie and Gary frantically looked through their backpacks for their items for class. Coach Taylor stared at them with his beady eyes and took another slow sip of his coffee. Nothing artificial in his coffee, just the rawness of the beans and water like the rawness of his personality.

When Jamie took out her father's pen, she knew even though she was late to class, she always had something to look forward too. Her pen and notebook would keep her company in class. While her classmates had half opened eyes, she was wondering what notes she will write for class along with her daydream doodles on the side. Her attention was not fully focused on the mathematical lesson, but she imagined what she would be able to accomplish in her senior year at Northwest Whitfield High School. With every thought or doodle she knew she had to write it down before they left her mind forever. Jamie made sure she used another writing instrument for her lecture notes to not waste the creative ink.

The class lasted for an agonizing fifty two minutes but Jamie kept occupied through her mixture of notes and doodles all along the lined paper. When the bell finally rang it startled Jamie. Gary got startled also from Jamie jumpy. Their classmates rushed to pack their bags to have their four minutes of freedom in the hallway before second period. When Jamie and Gary exited the classroom he asked nervously, "Hey Jamie, what's your next class?" Jamie pulled out the wrinkled

schedule again and it read, second period. Adams, Mandy. AP Literature. Jamie showed Gary the piece of paper and he said to her, “I don’t have that class, but I hope to see you later.”

“There is bound to be something we could have at the same time.”

“Wait, what lunch do you have? For me, I think I have third lunch since I have AP Bio as my fourth period class.”

“My fourth period is a science also. Now I know I don’t have to eat alone!”

“That would be swell to have someone. Gosh, we only have two more minutes and we don’t want to be late again.”

“Alrighty, until lunch Gary!”

“See you then, Jamie.”

Jamie started walking down towards the other side of the hallway as Gary stared at her for another moment longer. The smile on his face was growing more with every step she took away from him but the moment was disrupted from someone purposely bumping into Gary from behind. He knew who it was but did not let that student ruin his great day so far. The name Jones arched at the top of the letterman jacket and the number twelve stuck out on the back because it is Tom Brady’s number. This same student had known Gary since middle school and had been bothering him for no reason ever since. But, Gary had lunch to look forward to and only three classes were in his way to get to see Jamie again. Jamie made it to AP Literature with plenty of time. She decided to sit in the back row with her back against the wall. If she stayed in the back, her teachers would not be able to see her doodle

on her notes which had got her in trouble before. As she got her new notebook out, students still trickled in, so Jamie took the chance to doodle away. She allowed her pen to flow in any and every direction. The sounds of footsteps started disappearing around her. The room started to darken until it was only Jamie hunched over her desk with the pen and paper close to her freckled face. Tap, tap on her shoulder and she jolted back losing her concentration and the room started to come back to reality again. She looked over her shoulder and saw a blue and orange letterman jacket with the school's quarterback inside it. He had light green eyes that looked into Jamie's soul which melted her heart instantly. She could not break eye contact with him. He started to open his mouth and all Jamie could do was stare. He said, "You look new, what's your name?" Jamie sat there and processed his golden hair and smooth voice from their encounter for a couple of seconds before she could say anything. She realized it was not a dream as she shook her head quickly and said in a quick nervous tone, "Jamie is the name, I am new and I draw in any free time I have." She finished her sentence and realized she could not hide her blushed red face from him, so she looked down and doodled.

He took off his backpack and sat next to her as Jamie acted as if she had continued to doodle. He said in a tone of kindness, "Are you doodling something now?" She replied, "Oh, yeah, you know, stuff..." She did not have the courage to look at him but continued to draw to distract herself. She saw in the corner of her eye he started to lean in for a closer look. He placed his hand on the

back of her chair to get a better look at her raw creations. When she mustered up enough courage, she looked up at him while he examined her work. He was so close she saw he had tiny freckles on his face just like herself. He continually looked at her lined paper and said, "Not too bad. Maybe your doodles would look better on plain paper not lined." He looked into her eyes with a smirk on the right side of his mouth and he moved back into a straight up position as the bell rang for second period to begin.

AP Literature was background noise as she concentrated on the boy instead of the material of the class. She could not stop thinking about this cute guy sitting next to her. Out of everyone in the class he picked her. So many questions where running through her head, she did not know what to think.

Before she knew it, the bell rang for third period and she looked over to him again without it seeming obvious she wanted those dark green eyes gazed on her making everyone else disappear. He noticed Jamie staring at her and gave a final smirk saying, "I'm Brandt Jones by the way. But everyone calls me Jonesy."

"Okay..."

"Keep up with the doodles."

"Thanks, Jonesy!"

He put the left then right straps of his Nike backpack on and gave a little hop to make it secured. Jamie processed their conversation again, then shook her head and started to pack her bag for her next class. She took the crinkled paper and read third period. Thornton, Rebecca. Advanced Drawing. Jamie in that instant forgot

about Jonesy and started to pick up speed in her steps towards the fine arts wing.

She finally arrived down the hallway and saw all of the drawings, ceramics and multimedia art projects from the past displayed on the walls and in glass cabinets. Jamie knew immediately this was where she was meant to be. She stepped into the colorful room and sat at a table where she had plenty of room to lay out her essentials for prime doodling. Her notebook, denim pencil pouch and her lucky pen. This time she felt she was alone but looked at her pen and knew everything was going to be alright. She was in her element to be able to draw freely without judgement or having to worry about getting in trouble.

The teacher went up in front of the class of eleven people. She explained, since it was the first day, she wanted students to write their name on scrap paper she gave them and make it as creative as possible in their style. When Jamie finally received her scrap paper, she went back into her own head space and started writing her name out and doodled all around. As she kept drawing, the room started to fade to darkness around her until it was just herself, the lucky pen and the manila colored scrap sheet. She allowed the pen to physically get her imagination down. While drawing, she noticed something which had not happened before. The ink was not keeping up with the flow of her ideas on the paper. She worked until the end of class, but her pen was at the end of its life. She did not have a chance to talk to anyone because she did not need anyone. All she needed was her pen and imagination to keep her company. With no ink in her pen how could Jamie sur-

vive the day? Ding, ding the bell had rung, ending third period. She lost her focus and the room slowly came together again.

Mrs. Thornton looked over Jamie's artwork and said, "Woah, this is some great stuff you have here. Your name is Jamie, right?"

"Yes, I'm Jamie and I'm excited for your class. I love to draw and really want to keep it up just like my father. Maybe even go to art school but we'll see. But my pen started to dry up towards the end."

"You have some natural talent that's for sure! I am excited to see how you will be liking the other projects I have planned for the year. I have extra pens; do you need one?"

"I have other pens in here but thank you. Well, I better get going," she looked at her schedule again and saw fourth period. Griffith, Thomas. Astronomy. "Astronomy is my next class."

"That classroom is on the other side of the building. Better hurry up so you aren't late."

"Can't believe my first day is going by so quickly. I'll see you tomorrow for sure."

When Mrs. Thornton had turned back to her desk, Jamie's soft smile slipped away. She rushed to pack her bag and dashed over to Astronomy with her book bag unzipped. She stepped into the classroom right before the bell rang and felt relief washing over her. She found the first open desk and sat down quickly, starting to rummage through her backpack for her classroom tools. Jamie settled for another pen in the denim pouch, but her loneliness started to become a reality. Her lucky pen allowed her to truly express herself when she had no other outlet.

Without her pen, Jamie felt drained of her confidence.

Without the pen she felt she could not doodle anything. She lost her creativity and had no other pens worthy enough to express herself. Jamie thought, I could listen to the lecture or keep worrying about my loss of creativity leaving. She chose the second option.

In that moment Jamie felt she was not worth being proud of. She did not want to lose her creativity and in that moment, she felt she was not able to finish the day. Her father's prized possession was empty, and she felt as if he was starting to fade away. She could not concentrate on anything. The science class started to darken around her until it was just Jamie inside her thoughts. The bell rang and Jamie thought, finally something to keep my mind off of what happened in art class.

Jamie walked into the cafeteria that smelled of fried chicken, mashed potatoes and green beans. She got in line, grabbed a chocolate milk, her styrofoam plate with chicken tenders, mashed potatoes and green beans on the side. While impatiently waiting, she wanted to sit with people to distract her. Jamie got to the lunch lady and she handed her a check which paid for the next month of lunches. Now she needed to find a table.

She scanned the lunchroom and saw Jonesy and she thought he would let her sit with him. She slowly approached his rambunctious table and asked, "Hey Jonesy, could I please sit with you since there is an extra spot?" He looked at her and then back to his football buddies who poorly held their laughter in. Jonesy's green eyes turned cold

and he replied, "Sorry Jamie, this table is reserved for only the senior football players." His comment made the whole table shook with laughter. Jamie thought she ran into a doppelgänger of Jonesy. She felt so hurt since before he was so kind when they were in AP Literature. The only way she could respond was she looked down and said, "Well, sorry to bother you and your teammates. I'll see you later, I guess." The other letterman jacket wearing players did not even hear her and Jonesy just looked at her and shook his head as his way to say sorry.

She found a table for herself and picked at the meal since she lost her appetite. Jamie had so many thoughts swirling through her head, she did not know what she would do without her pen. She saw a styrofoam plate gently placed in front of her. She looked up and it was Gary. After placing his plate, he sat down with his backpack still on as if it was his turtle shell. He looked at Jamie's face and did not see the confidence in her eyes. Gary asked, "I know the food here is terrible, but if you add ketchup it helps." He chuckled from his comment but saw she had no reaction. Jamie looked up and said, "My pen has no more ink in it. Now I don't know what to do..."

"Can I see the pen?"

"Sure, it's dead anyways. Only use it has is to look at now."

Jamie handed the lifeless pen into Gary's hand and he inspected it. He asked, "May I unscrew it?" Jamie nodded yes and he proceed with the inspection. He unscrewed the top of the pen and gently took out the spring and actual writing part of the pen. He looked at it and placed the

pieces on the table. Gary look out of his backpack another pen and unscrewed it as well. He replaced Jamie's pen with his own pen into the shell of her pen. When he placed it into her pen it fit like a glove. Gary slid the spring back into place and screwed the top of the pen once more. For the final test, Gary clicked the pen a couple of times and everything was in working condition.

Jamie looked at Gary and felt so relieved she began to tear up. Gary handed her pen back. He waited to ask her a question about the pen but instead he said, "You just seemed so content while drawing in class, I didn't want you to lose that feeling. Plus, it is your first day here and it must be something that makes you feel better."

Jamie said choking on her words trying not to cry in the cafeteria. "Gary, this pen means a lot to me and I know it would have been a hard day without it."

"I'm glad I could fix it for you but I'm here for you too. I know we just met today but I feel like this senior year is going different since you are here."

"I think so too. This pen is so special to me but you fixing it has made it even more special. I noticed how shy you were, and it made me think of myself. My dad had fixed this pen before and you fixing it has made it new again. Plus, I'm glad I sat here cause I almost sat with Jonesy but I'm not a football player so did not make the cut." She chuckled as a small tear trickled down her freckled face.

"Jonesy, oh I'm so sorry you met him. He thinks he owns this school with his charm, but he wouldn't know uniqueness if it was right next to

him.”

Jamie paused and remembered what her father had told her over their last summer together. She looked at Gary and said, “Uniqueness, you really think so?”

“Jamie, you stood like a superhero on the front steps. Unique is an understatement.”

They both laughed and continued to eat their microwaved chicken tenders. Jamie did not feel so alone anymore. Not only because her father’s pen was reunited with her but she felt she had something more: Gary. They would be able to help each other through their final year in high school. Gary might not be able to fit in her pencil pouch but she knew he had uniqueness as well.

Abbie Hei*Me, the AC, and spontaneity*

And I thought of my existence when my city burns in flames set by its own people like koalas setting their branches on fire, resisting -- no, actually aided by a malfunctioned air conditioner repeating orders given to it by god knows who it is, blowing its wind non-stop until all are silent, absolute zero.

And nothing like what the AC dreamed of happened. No, it is only happening slowly, as fuel dries out and air thins. But the koalas did not give in, not for a moment. They struggled to survive in spite of all the corpses and CS there can be. But then the aim of the AC was for the temperature to drop to zero, so intentions never mattered, I guess.

And I thought of my existence in such a ridiculously perilous warfare between the concepts of values of humanity and reality, religion and slavery, Hobbes and hedonism, living and dying, rights and law, police and triads, plastic pipes and iron pipes, pipers and piping hot, hotties and booties, no I am not lesbian but I'm just saying,

And I thought my life is utterly useless at a certain point. Like a pig which is too small to resist and too skinny to be slaughtered, but just enough for breeding, or simply the act of breeding but not breeding itself. The policemen, if they were policemen or men at all, have wives to take care of, that is, before they take care of their jobs properly.

And I thought of leaving, this place which had once oppressed my literature and thinking, this place which raised me into my timid self, this

place which has been haunting me and today still haunts me with dry corpses not seen in regular TV news, pallor faces if they were intact, half a skull if not, and naked dead not accounted for.

And I thought of legitimizing the thought of leaving, like you must go, you must go, your mom has been telling you to go, your friends want you to never come back, and believe me they ache to see you and ensure you are safe but they are in such a situation right now and you are out of it and can be out of it forever. Chop chop! On you go!

And I thought of my people, for once this cold city as my people, how their future would be, how their lives would end. The end being like a suffocated fire is highly probable. Fire is no matter, and a regular camera only catches part of the flare. Once it dies out, it will probably disappear, without a trace, as if nothing ever existed there.

And that is what my existence resembles. Therefore, being arrogant, I jot down what I like and what I don't like, and see if I am a special one, for once in my life before I jump back into the fire. I like broccoli, I like animals, I like theatre. I dislike papers, doing research, and scheduling stuff to do. Strangely, I like the smell of books, I remember at least six schedules I have, one of which was given to me by my mom as a present, and I like having a schedule. I like gaming, I like being with friends, technically being with them really. I am not much of a chatterbox, which is a strange remark because I am writing all this stuff down. I like Book Antiqua more than Bookman Old Style, sorry editors. I like having long showers and long hair and long... sleeps I can sleep for 18

hours a day. I like Satie, but the most impressive word I learned this year is Scheißwurst not Gymnopédies. I like talking bullshit and I know I talk bullshit and some appreciate bullshit and some scorn bullshit, and I know my art is a bit different from my hobby.

And I thought of the questions I got from a theatre experience: Who are you? What are you doing here? Where are you going? I know perfectly where I am going. Home. Even if it is a heck of a home. What I am doing is studying, for what I do not know yet, because I do not know if I can survive to make something of it yet. But who am I?

And I thought of my existence again. Everything I have I inherited from people I met, people who influenced me, people who inspired me, people who interests me, who am I? Am I not a battlefield where Kant and Confucius simply swear at each other? Am I not a hybrid of comedy of manners, metatheatre, and a getting-nowhere naturalist?

And I thought, you know, that's interesting. "There is no asylum anywhere to be seen, and that goes on forever, no matter how hard I work, for however long a commitment made, and the only, last asylum is death at home", which makes an interesting prologue to my life. I am ready to embrace whatever comes. Hi, AC, you suck.

Emily Joss*A Life Worth Living**

The suit is blue, sharp-looking, and well-fitted, far better than anything I would ever catch my husband in- even on our wedding day. A man this well dressed hasn't walked in my direction in years. I wish the streak had continued.

From the street window of our apartment I watch him without getting up off the couch. I watch as he walks along the crooked sidewalk, and cross onto the grass so he wouldn't get his shoes dirty on the loose-rock path that leads to the door. I watch as he fixes his hair before buzzing in twice, then doing it one more time for good measure. When he knocks on the apartment door I say, "coming," knowing damn well I'm going to continue sitting here on this couch for at least another fifteen seconds to make it seem like I'm not busy sitting here on my ass.

I open the door without removing the latch at the top so it could only go so far. "We don't want what you're selling," I tell him.

"No ma'am, I'm not here to market," he tells me, but I already know that. I know who he is. I've been watching him through the crack in our blinds since his blue beemer rolled up against the curb. We received a letter in the mail (sometimes they grant us the forewarning), so I knew he was coming. If it wasn't today then tomorrow, and if not tomorrow, then by next week at the latest. He parked the car and proceeded with the normal routine that they all do. He glanced in the direction of the apartment, took his briefcase from the passenger seat and opened it,

looked back up at the apartment searching for the number that fell off years ago, looked up and down the street, then scribbled some words in his notebook, and now he's here asking me if he can come inside.

“Not until my husband gets home.”

“When will that be Ms. Groundings?”

My lack of a response becomes one for him, as he pushes me further to let him inside.

There's no point in fighting him. Randall always tells me to and he's good at it when he's here, but once they flash their badge at me I feel powerless in my own home.

“Coffee?” I suggest. He declines, but I decide I'll still make myself a cup, if for nothing less than to excuse myself into the kitchen before he chooses to too. “Bathroom?” he asks, mimicking my tone from a second ago. I stammer once and play it off as a cough. If Randall were here he would do this better. The one furthest from the living room no longer works, but I can't have him knowing that. “Yes. First door on the right.”

I watch him leave before I enter the kitchen. One swift movement clears the cigarette butts from the counter and empties the still steaming remnants out of my mug that is to be put back under the coffee machine.

He enters again as I put away the last bottle of liquor. I lean against the cabinet and watch him complete his duties. Sometimes they ask questions, other times they only choose to care about the decency of the home. Nothing sticks out today aside from the garbage spilling over its top in the corner. I'm a fool for not emptying it early, but there's still a good chance the crumpled

fast food bags and take out menus will go unnoticed.

“How is Malik?” He asks while inspecting the kitchen. “I’m assuming he’s at school today? I’d like to see him when I come again-” he pauses to write in his notepad, “that’ll be on Sunday. I assume you’ll all be around?” He smooths out his hair again.

“Yes,” I say and move to glance at the clock on the wall. “I should actually be leaving soon. It’s ‘bring a parent to school day’ or something like that.” He doesn’t have to know that I’m already late. “Yeah, there’s going to be games and goodies and I think the students made a play...” I say fading away, but he doesn’t much notice.

I continue to watch him, in his sleek blue suit, as he strolls through my dimly lit kitchen. I don’t like quiet, not with these people. “Do you live alone?” I ask him.

“No ma’am. My wife and I live at home with our daughter.” A daughter, I would have thought most people in this business would shy away from children considering all the appalling scenes of maltreatment they come across. Especially in this city and its outskirts, I’ve heard horror stories from the neighbors of children’s ears burned away by their drunken fathers and others left without food for days at a time by their sick-in-the-head mothers. That’s not us, we aren’t that bad, perhaps he will see this, and have a soft spot in his heart because of his own daughter. His family and mine are not that different.

“Does your job pay you well?” I ask him.

“Yes ma’am it does.” You see, Randall’s pays well too I want to say, but that’s only when he has

one. He has one most of the time though, that's why we're here in this apartment and not living inside the Methodist church on the corner of Lexington and Norfolk.

I continue with the questions, both to subdue my sanity from the silence and to assure myself that our family is doing just fine, and we'll be okay this time around. "Does your wife work?"

"Yes, she has a better job than I do," he says closing his notepad. That's not what I want to hear. I hate families with working mothers. Truthfully, I'm jealous of them because I know that that should have and should still be me. I'm a college dropout, and instead, a mother to a boy that isn't even mine, yet am a better parent to that boy than his own father. "Looks like I'm finished here. I will see you all Sunday," the man in the blue suit says just as my angst is about to settle in.

When my husband finally comes home, it's Saturday. He walks through the door with a bigger smile on his face than I've seen in years. "We're getting out of here," he says. I roll my eyes, but make sure he doesn't see the notion, "you've said that before."

"No, I mean it this time. A buddy of mine, he hooked me up with a job—"

"Who?" I ask him, again sneaking a quick laugh without his awareness.

"Doesn't matter. It's a good one, a real one. It's where I've been for the past few days.

I've already started and I'm telling you this is going to work out this time Beth."

I let the conversation fade, he's going to do what he wants no matter what I say. I let him be-

lieve, and then I let him go the next morning before the sun comes up without question. He's off to make our lives better, or something like that. I can't say why a small part of me believes him, but as it goes, much like every other time, I hope that this is our chance.

Malik and I spend our Sunday watching cartoons. When I hear the knock on the door I open it without looking, expecting to be greeted by the man in the blue suit. Granted I am, but an officer is also at his side. "Is Malik home?" The man in the blue suit asks.

"Why?"

"Ms. Groundings, Malik is being taken under the care of Child Protective Services."

"You can't do that, he's mine," I cry.

"No, he's not ma'am, and his father has violated his probation again. Malik can't stay here," he says as he and the officer force their way inside making me feel as powerless as ever.

I block out the sounds that escape Malik's mouth, the words that call out for me to save him. I do nothing as he leaves the apartment but I can't help but watch him sitting in the back of the patrol car as it runs on our sidewalk, teasing me. Through the sorrow building up in my eyes I watch his small frame look so out of place behind the expanded steel barrier. His left hand fiddles with the button on his overall strap while the other twists a piece of his bushy hair- much like his father does. It wasn't long after I lost sight of the car when I decided that there was no one in this apartment building capable of helping me out of this, and sitting here wallowing in my shame was only a step in the wrong direction. Grabbing my

phone and my purse and sliding my feet into the closest shoes to the door, I take off in search of anything that can get my life back on track, or at the very least get Malik back in my arms.

By the time I make it into the inner city it's midday. I don't make my way around here often, especially on a Sunday. I would have thought on a day like today the streets wouldn't be as crowded, the stores not nearly as packed. It's the Sabbath day is it not? Not that I'm religious or anything, but I thought more people were. Every time I turn the corner, it's only yet another city block full of people shopping, strolling, and laughing as the sun shines down on their rolexes and ray-bans. Two women, laughing too hard to see me and forgetting that they aren't the only ones on the sidewalk, walk right through me and on into the opposite direction that I'm headed.

Their insolence stops me in my path and I watch them walk away. I analyze their movements, the way the one on the right carries her bags as if she's too absolute to be holding such weight, but also in a way that only makes it seem like she wants everyone to know that yes, she can in fact afford Louis Vuitton. The one on the left, I admire her hair, and the way the sun makes it shine brighter than it does the skyscrapers as it settles on them. My eyes make my way down her body, the pantsuit that fits her perfectly, and the heels that break my own ankles just by looking at them. It makes me conscious of my own outfit as I find myself tugging at the bottom of my oversized shirt once I come out of my trance and keep moving.

After spending half the day knocking on

every shop with a help wanted sign in the window and grabbing every application in sight, I take a rest on the bench and wait for the C train to take me home. Page after page they ask the same questions: highest completed level of education, employment experience, reason for leaving prior positions. My brain can only loop over the same information for so long, until I decide that now may be a good time to call my sister and inform her of the new circumstances. While dialing the number I contemplate how easily I'll be able to explain to my baby sister that the decision to drop out of school to raise some man's son years ago ended up biting us in the ass. And that, with no surprise, my husband can't pay the bills as an entrepreneur with no college degree either. Maybe I'll ask Rebecca to take some of our belongings, the really important things only. I'll explain how Randall ran off with some big plan and a load of promises but no explanation. Maybe she'll want to lend a hand just one more time when she hears about the letter we received denying our request for a tax return extension last week. Hopefully, she'll break down the same way I did when I tell her about the tears rolling down Malik's face while he sat in the back of the patrol car all alone, and the sound of his wailing as he watched me become smaller and smaller in the distance.

Before the phone rings a third time I hang up and put it away. I'm not putting this on her again. I don't know exactly where it all went wrong, but at the same time it doesn't matter anymore. There's really no point in thinking about the past when my only job right now is getting Malik back to me and only me. I'll accept whatever-

er job I can land out of this pile in my hands, I'll eventually leave Randall and get a place of my own. After that I'll fight to win custody over Malik and then continue up the ladder at whatever job I'm at, or maybe even go back to college.

My feet rattling under me bring me out of my thoughts. I stand, refusing to give in to the despair. Boarding the train I'm in a better state of mind than I've been in in longer than I can remember.

When the door to our apartment opens later that night, Randall stumbles through it waking me up. I'm waiting on the couch, but he doesn't seem to notice me as I continue to watch him. He walks through the door of our dimly lit apartment. He tosses his briefcase of what I know is nothing against the wall, and tears his clip-on tie off his shirt in one swift motion. I have no idea where he found that tie. Another failed attempt leads him back to our crummy kitchen where I lose sight of him.

I lay back on the couch and listen to the routine. The microwave dinner being torn open and the box hitting the ground after it's tossed in the direction of the overflowing garbage bin that hasn't been emptied in weeks. Through the humming of his meal preparing itself, I hear the cabinets opening one after the other. Medicine bottles fall to the floor, along with plastic cups, silverware and other miscellaneous objects I can't name. I don't move until I hear glass shattering against the wall.

When I enter, Randall is standing over the glass along with the liquid that is spreading across the colored linoleum. "What did you do?"

I ask him, but when he merely points down at the floor I begin to yell. “No, what did you do Randall? Do you know where Malik is?” He kicks past the glass, only to retrieve another one. I continue with my interrogation, “where have you been?” But there is no answer. He stands there, doing nothing but swaying just a touch back and forth. The microwave beeps. “Look at this! This is what you leave us with?”

This man that stands in front of me is not the type of man that I thought would bring me here. At least he wasn't that man when I met him. When I met him all those years ago, only a few weeks into my freshman year of college, he was different. He didn't go to WSU like I did- he didn't go to any college. He was working as a mechanic at the carshop my father made me go to so I would know where it was if I ever needed it. He found me there confused and out of place. We immediately took a liking to each other, quickly coming so close we'd tell each other of every mistake we made in our lives and every good thing that came out of them. He told me of his son only a few days after meeting, and his boldness never stopped thereafter. He was so good at sharing those profound concepts of living his life as an entrepreneur, and he never ceased to explain his naive plans of the future- that I always took part in, in his mind. The man that stands in front of me now, whose mind is too far gone to even look in my direction, is not the same man I met. However, there is one aspect that remains the same, and that is his ability to fill my head with these ridiculous schemes that consume my every thought until I can't help but fall miserably into him.

I walk to the dining room table to collect the pages I searched through today. All the pages with the circles and arrows and hopes of something better, of something that was helping me get out of here. I take all the pages and I throw them out the back window.

I look back at the man that took my life from me- no, maybe I let him take it, but maybe he convinced me that there were no other options. I snatch the bottle out of his hand, along with the rest of the ones I can find, although I'm sure he has more hidden somewhere. They follow the path of the paper. The microwave continues to beep, but I pay no mind to it as I stare out the window wondering whether or not I would survive a jump from such a height as the papers do, or if I would crack under the force like the bottles.

**Recipient of the 2020 Vogel award in fiction*

Brittney L. Nowack*Grandpa's Garden*

“My grandfather pissed in a cup and put in back in our cupboard today,” Zaman always filled me in on the latest news from his household. We frequently laughed at the forgetfulness of Pip.

I got off the phone and turned to my saxophone. It really didn't matter what kind of day I was having. The subtle vibrations under my fingers always provided some sort of solace. I often played something entirely random, inspired only by feeling. Truth be told, I could never really read music that well.

My own grandfather's face flashed before my closed eye lids with a black curtain backdrop, his face slouching on the left side. His smile was never quite the same after his stroke that he refuses to admit was a stroke. I often find myself side-struck in worry that his incapable ass is driving around in his RV exploring the world when his brain seems to malfunction with hardly any warning signs. Even if there were warning signs, would he and his awfully dangerous stubbornness even listen to them?

I jumped at the thought of him in yet another accident. Though I was not present for his last, I'll never be able to shake away the memory of seeing him crushed between two SUVs on his motorcycle from the rear view of my mom's disgusting mini-van.

After that day, I never wanted another dehumanizing memory of my grandfather imprinted into my brain ever again. It was so easy to laugh at Pip and his inability to remember even the smallest detail, like where to urinate. But visiting Pip

at Zaman's house reminded me that the loss of memory is not so funny, that Zaman didn't even exist in Pip's mind anymore. I can't laugh at the crumbling of people even though it's just part of life. I didn't have Zaman's strength in that regard.

I didn't want to remember my grandfather as a lesser version of himself. No, I want to remember shooting paintballs at the targets in his rock garden. I'll remember playing soccer inside his house and him breaking nearly every valuable item he owned and just laughing about it. We'd throw knives at the side of his house; there was never such thing as an element of danger. I want to remember sleepovers watching Charlie's Angles. At the time, I thought my grandfather just thought it was a really good action movie. Now, I know that he just thinks Charlie has some hot angels working for him. That, I can laugh at. But it's hard to laugh at the destruction of time when it wipes away everything you thought you knew.

"Halia, when are you getting married?" I remember my last talk with my grandfather who never used to harass me about anything. The same man who grew pot plants in his bedroom closet and was a divorced man now suddenly cared about the sanctity of marriage.

"I don't really want to get married, grandpa," I told him in a discouraged voice. I can't remember what he said next, but I do remember how I felt that day. It was the same way I felt the day his hip bone was popping through his skin and I swore that I would never remember him as anything less than the superhero he was.

The phone rang and I nearly dropped my

sax. I didn't even realize that I had been playing this entire time. I don't even remember the melody in the slightest.

It's probably Zaman calling back to tell me about how Pip had forgot to put his pants back on after using the bathroom. It always seemed to be some sort of bathroom tragedy with that poor old man. Poor Zaman for having to take so much out of his own life to care for him.

"Halia! It's Grandpa Smith!" I only have one living grandfather, but he always needs to remind me who he was as if I had forgotten him and wouldn't recognize my only grandfather.

"I have these speakers here at the house, do you want them?" I was suddenly reminded that my grandfather was in the process of selling his house. He finally sold it to live in his RV and he was clearly emptying out and giving away so-called heirlooms. I remembered my sister telling me that she was morally forced to take this hideous cowboy lamp to her Star Wars themed apartment.

"Yes. I'm actually not doing anything today, I'll stop over," I hung up the phone. It was true, I didn't have anything to do. At the same time, I just wanted to get this over with for some reason.

I drove up the pebbled driveway to the garage door that didn't open anymore. I walked up the patio pavers that my grandfather installed as makeshift stairs because we had trouble, as kids, climbing the grassed-over slope up to his door. My grandfather greeted me at the door, "Hey kiddo!" I gave him a hug. Then he asked, "Why don't you ever stop up anymore?"

I looked around at the house. The empty house. The place I spent so many years making fun

memories. There was nothing left to break with my soccer ball. I walked through the kitchen and out the patio doors to see no rock garden or targets, just what looked like the remains of a mudslide. I moved into the living room, the t.v.-less living room where my sisters and I had so many sleepovers. All that was left were the speakers, the last memory of my grandfather's home.

I realized I was just trying to mummify his memory into something I could handle. I was just waiting for him to die.

*Procrustes The Odd-Habited Host:
A SIMulation*

I awake in a cell on a cheap single children's bed. Disoriented, I look around the room and see a used fridge and stove. The three objects are the only things in the room, tight-packed in a four-by-four door-less holding chamber. Why are there windows?

I look out the windows and see that there are several others in holding cells that mirror my own. All the cells look onto a large room which has a cheap boom box sitting on a wooden crate; there is nothing else in the room.

Beyond that however, I can see what looks to be a grand entertaining room. The large boom-boxed room has windows on all surrounding walls. To the left, a seating area with fancy red chairs and a big stone fountain behind them. Directly ahead, I see a bar area. Silver chandeliers

and sconces dress the walls and ceilings. I then notice the most peculiar of things, chairs in isles accompanied by a wedding arch. There are no windows that look outside. I am clearly in a basement. Why would someone be holding wedding ceremonies down here?

I look to the right and see the other prisoners in their cells. In the cell directly beside me is a crazed looking woman with fiery short hair and Harry Potter shaped glasses. She's wearing a long lab coat.

I knocked on the window and asked, "Can you hear me?"

She nodded, "Yes. My name is Caroline. You were brought in last night, I saw... I'm sorry."

"What?" I responded. "The last thing I remember, I was at Procrustes' for the monthly bash."

"Yes... this is Procrustes' basement." Caroline looked terrified to tell me the rest of the story. "Every month, Procrustes holds a bash, as you know. It's always rumored as the most elite party of the month, only the most prestigious of guests are invited, and the activities at said party are kept a mystery as part of the appeal." She spoke slowly and calmly, as if we weren't both trapped in tiny holding cells in some billionaire's basement. "The truth is... we aren't the actual guests. The end of the year formal party is the real event..."

I didn't know what to say. I just stood, speechless and let Caroline continue filling in the blanks for me.

"You see, the prisoners are reeled in every month at the 'party;' Procrustes drugs us and

keeps us down here until the annual event.”

“But why? What’s the annual event?” I wasn’t sure I really wanted to know the answer.

“Well... we are all down here for different reasons. Procrustes makes the most of her prisoners. As for me, I’ve been working on a top-secret science project. Well... it was top-secret anyway, until Procrustes found out that I had been working on a mind control device. I’m a scientist, you see. My team and I have been in contact with the aliens and the mind control device was intended to help us demand more information from them. Of course, this would have made me rich. Procrustes is now in possession of the device. Who knows what she plans to do with it, but it will surely make her rich. In the meantime, she’s been using it on me to squeeze information out of me about the aliens. I’ve at least been fortunate enough to be alive. I’ve been here for three years.”

“...And the others?”

“Beside me is Brandon. I imagine he’s here strictly for his good genes.”

I look passed the windows on the opposite side of Caroline’s room. Brandon was strikingly handsome. He had bright blue eyes that rested on the most perfect face. His lips were smooth and plump. His skin looked as sweet as caramel. For a moment, I forgot I was a prisoner.

“His genes?” I asked.

“Haven’t you noticed how many children and grandchildren Procrustes has? Not to mention they are all gorgeous. When Procrustes or one of her children is ready to mate again, they seek out the perfect match in terms of genes.

Normally, they are forced into marriage, hence the creepy altar you see out front.”

Chills ran up my spine. This was sick.

“As for the rest,” Caroline continued, “I don’t know their names or have any information on them. Prisoners are typically here for one of three reasons. They have money and are held for ransom, they will make for good babies, or they are purely entertainment.”

Another haunting chill went up my spine. I don’t have any money, nor does my family. I’m decent looking, but I don’t think my genes are worth stealing.

I choked on my words, “...Entertainment?”

“The annual bash is the wedding. Either Procrustes or one of her children will marry a prisoner. The others, unless they are providing some financial benefit, are sent to ‘dance’ in that room.” She pointed to the large room with a boom box. “Procrustes likes to change it up. Sometimes she sets off fireworks in the room, sometimes she simply lights a fire, other times she locks the doors to our cells and lets the prisoners starve to death.”

I sat there on the floor of my tiny cell, shaking as Caroline finished explaining the horror scene that would end my life. “I don’t understand... How... Why would someone...” I couldn’t even get the rest of the words out of my mouth. I was going to die here. “Why are you so calm?” I asked Caroline.

“Look, girl, I’ve been in here for three years. I’ve watched people get married off, I’ve watched those same people die a year later when one of the wedded gets bored or wants a differ-

ent looking child. I've watched strangers burn to death. I've watched my friends drown. I have no hope left. The only thing I can be grateful for is that I have a reason for Procrustes to keep me alive. I'm currently attempting to work my magic with the aliens. Sometimes the mind control device fails; as I said, I was still working on it. Each time though, I pretend it works. I'm trying to earn the alien's trust so they can save us."

This didn't seem real. "How close are you to achieving that, Caroline?"

"I'm honestly not sure," She answered.

"Do you have any special skills? I've seen it once, a prisoner convinced Procrustes that he was a brilliant author. He spent his days in a cell writing books. Procrustes had them published in her name for the money. Eventually he was killed off after he wrote a terrible romance novel."

"I can paint," I said. "I'm not that good..."

"Well I would get good," Caroline said. "It's the only thing that may save you."

I sat in my cell working up the courage to talk to Procrustes and convince her to keep me alive. Somehow, I was going to have to put my faith in a stranger being friends with aliens and my mediocre painting skills.

Danae Rivera*Garden with no Forget-me-nots*

I feel lost in my own house, in my own garden. I don't remember any of this. Not the lavender, not the Hydrangeas, not the Begonias, nor the Wisteria. I have no memory of this place, its ivy walls and russet paint. A brick chimney and hardwood floors, the scattered stone walkway lined in moss. Was this really mine? I don't remember it at all, I don't remember myself half the time.

I look in the mirror and all I see is someone who I cannot name. I've been told my name but it doesn't click with what I see in the mirror. Maybe I need a new name? No no, it's too soon to worry over that.

I walk through the garden for the 5th time today and see what the old me- the real me, left behind. The heel of my flats clicks against the stones as I walk amongst the colorful flowers and ivy and bird feeders. It feels ... unfinished, incomplete. A plot of land with a cottage half covered with vegetation. What was I doing? What was she doing?

Hiding herself from the world amongst the spider ivy and tomato vines? Drowning out the smell of asphalt with petunias and honeysuckle? Was she sad? Happy? Mad? Lonely? Longing for some form of company she turned to mother nature as her solace?

What should I do? Finish her work or move on? I don't know her so why should it matter? No... it does matter, because she was me, err- I was her. I'm the one here yet I feel as if I'm the one that lost. I lost the game of life and memory. I am but a husk, the discarded cocoon of a butterfly long gone and

moved on.

I feel myself drifting, losing myself yet again, dissociating among the Lobelias. Forgotten to the world. I don't want to be lost yet I don't want to be found. Where am I now? Is this cottage mine? Is this cottage, half-eaten by ivy and moss and lilac trees mine? Do I own this garden or does it own me?

Why can't I remember? I can feel my chest heave as my mind races with the information given to me, I can't remember a thing. I've lost it all and I'm scared I shall lose it again. Lose every new memory I've made and find myself stuck in an eternal loop of wandering in a half empty garden.

What do I do? How can I remember? I don't want to forget, not again. If I forget I'll disappear and be a new husk and a new me shall be left behind to fade into the Daffodils. Alone with not a comfort but the dripping leaves and bushes to embrace me. No, I don't want that. I refuse that.

My breathing hitches and the corners of my vision blurs in a tie-dye of color. My center of gravity sways as I stumble along the path. Passing bushes and baskets of Lilies and Snapdragons, I don't remember any of these. Did the old me plant these? Grow them with her love? The only witness to keep their memories of her. Should she plant one of her own? A last stand to cement this version of her before it fades into the background like rain on a cloudy day? She doesn't want to be forgotten. For this version to be discarded and lost like a drop of blue in an ocean of grey.

Forget me not

Her mind echoes in a whisper like a dying flame. A candle facing the wind, at risk of being blown out at any moment.

Forget me not

A blue flower, buds huddled together, never alone. I have not seen them in the garden, this shall be my memory. The mark I leave when I fade and replaced with another me with a missing mind.

This garden has no Forget-me-nots.

Maybe then it will not forget me.

Danae Rivera*I'm Going Hunting*

There's a wolf in the woods

Dauntless in its hunt, stalking the tree line for its next hyper fixation - any soft thing that will squish under its jagged teeth, anything that will crunch in its eager jaws. Something that will squirm and squeal, giving it the satisfaction of being the predator that makes its prey mewl for mercy. Amber eyes glow like a lighthouse, jetting out from the ever-dark void that consumes the trees every dusk. A charcoal pelt stained with dried red and speckled with grey from age.

A boy is missing. Snatched from his yard 2 nights ago. Lanterns lit in the search have all but burned out. The tracks faded among the dense thicket as rain came and wept for the boy that will never come home. A mother cries for the monster in the woods to bring him back with wasted breath. He will not come back for the monster found him soft on its tongue and crunchy in its jaws.

I have seen the amber eyes drift to my home and my children in turn and I must ready myself. Before the snow sets in and erases every clue, a monster owned the wood. Before the beast decides my boy looks far softer than its last meal. I shall best the monster in its own game, armed with a rifle for my claws and pelt of its kin, insulting it with every step I take into its domain.

It roars and howls and growls in its throat like a nightmare. Hiding behind the shadow of the trees like a veil, contorting its shape into that

of a creature from the depth of H.P. Lovecraft's mind. Am I the hunter or is it I who's being hunted? We walk in a maze of trees and mud, one following the other till one rounds a corner and they are now the hunted.

I find the beast upwind, standing proud on a ridge overlooking all that it owns. Is it basking in its territory or surveying for me? Snow has begun to fall; I can feel the cold creeping up my spine and settling into my joints as my claws take aim.

There is a wolf in the woods.

And I have gone hunting.

Danae Rivera*The old gods won't save us*

The cold air burned in his throat. Freezing his lungs with every breath as his vision blurred from the snow blowing into his eyes. No matter how tight he pulled his grass cover, the wind still shook him to the core. Even with numb ears he could hear the commotion amongst the rest of his tribe. Questions and whispers if they should go through with it. Angekkok wasn't there yet, should Kamik really go through without her?

Kamik, their fearless leader waved them off. This was the right thing to do. It was the only thing they could do. Their land and their people were at stake. Invading foreigners with no respect for tradition had torn down several sacred structures, killed anyone who opposed and captured the rest. As their numbers dwindle, so did their options.

This was the only way, Kamik said. Release the signals and call them home, call them to help us, to save their people.

They gathered around a burning altar of sticks and cloth. Billowing pillars of purple and blue left for the sky. Tomkin could hear the faint murmur of chants and prayers. He stood in the back of the crowd, the blur of bodies and voices felt so far away from him. His mind was already abuzz with other worries, was this the right thing to do? Angekkok had said before it won't help, that the old gods won't save us. Kamik disregarded the wise woman and went ahead with releasing the signal anyways. What's a blind woman to do to stop him anyways? This was for the good of

the people he said.

Tomkin found his feet moving on their own, freshly fallen snow crunching under his boots. His mind was frozen over, foggy with frost as his body naturally guided him to a hut. Pushing his way through the doorway, he found himself in Angekkok's hut.

"I warned them not to release the signal." She dreaded from her seat. Despite cloth over her eyes she turned to Tomkin as if she was staring right at him. "Now they are coming..."

"Who is coming?"

"The old gods" she answered

Tomkin moved closer to her, "Isn't that what we want? For the old gods to come and save us?" Despite being by her side, all Tomkin could see was her silhouette and the outline of braids.

"What more disaster could befall us? We've lost our sister tribes and everyday our motherland dwindles as the foreigners take claim. The signal was left for a reason was it not? Are we not meant to send it in our time of need?"

"That truth is a lie, generations have lost details and meaning. Smoke of purple and blue is not what calls the old gods to save us. It is what ends us."

What ends us? Kamik said it was our savior, the last resort. The signal was a last gift of love from the old gods as they left to the stars. Was Kamik wrong? Were we the harbingers of our own destruction? Thoughts flooded Tomkin's mind, Kamik was a good leader but he refuted Angekkok's words. Did he wish she was wrong? But, how could she? He had questions, worries. Before he could find the words to utter a sen-

tence, a sound cut him short. The sound of the thunder crackled through the sky like a sonic boom, followed by commotion from the others outside. Angekkok didn't even flinch, she didn't need to see to know what was happening.

"They're here."

Her words pulled Tomkin's attention away from the havoc outside.

"Angekkok..." he mustered out, finding his voice "what's happening?"

"They won't save our lives or our land."

The woman sighed and reached her arm towards him, he grasped her hand in his. "They are here to claim the rest for themselves and bring on a new age in their image. One where we will never escape their worship again."

A rumble shook the walls. Tomkin gripped Angekkok's hand tighter, his breath hitching in his throat. A shadow slipped through the cracks of the door and walls, expanding and covering everything in its path. That rumble was a growl and the thing that made it was standing outside the door.



Contributor Biographies

Frank Bianco

Frank is a poet, musician, and comedian from East Utica, and a senior set to graduate in May with a Bachelor's Degree in Communications.

He has thoroughly enjoyed his time at Utica College, having worked for the school newspaper, as well as having lent his voice to the college radio station, and is grateful to have met lots of amazing people. He humbly extends his gratitude to Ampersand for publishing his writings, and hopes that those reading enjoyed his work.

Kylie Burger

Kylie is an English and Adolescence Education major who has always enjoyed writing creatively. Growing up in Clayville, New York, she shared many wonderful memories with her family and friends, both four-legged and two. For her, writing is a way we connect with each other and with ourselves—a way in which we find some fragment of who we are.

Nichole Delaney

Nichole is a junior at Utica College and majors in English and adolescent education.

Patrick Donnelly

Patrick is a senior English major determined to create works worth remembering. By learning everyday from everyone he hopes to be able to plant real characters in deceptively unreal worlds. His perception of success is to have at least one person find joy or intrigue in his work.

Daniela Hannah

Daniela Hannah is a senior graduating Utica College in May 2020. She is originally from Dalton, GA and is a southern girl at heart. From her education pursuits, she is heavily active on campus with WPNR 90.7 FM, Swim Team and Women's Water Polo Team. After graduation, she plans to move back to the south and pursue a career in the radio industry.

Olivia Harwick

Although her utmost passion in life is Chemistry, Olivia loves travelling, painting, biking, as well as walking on local nature trails with her twin sister, Skylar, and her fiancé. She has recently completed her Math Minor and is industriously visiting graduate schools to which she has been accepted so she can continue her education as a Chemistry PhD student. Her ultimate goal is to become an Astrochemist so she can share her love for Chemistry with others.

Skylar Harwick

Skylar Harwick is a student, poetess, and model based in Upstate, NY. Graduating at this semester's end, she is a biology major and creative writing minor who has helped edit the Ampersand for the past two years. She has presented female mouse vocalization research at several conferences, and is interested in pursuing modeling and biology following receiving her degree. Her poetry is inspired by her experiences, as she frequently writes about nature, her research, modeling, and having a partner in the military; her relationship with writing has culminated in becoming the Editor in Chief of this year's issue of the Ampersand.

Abbie Hei

Abbie studied at Utica College in the fall 2019 semester.

Gabriella Hudziak

Gabriella Hudziak is a Communications and Media major with a concentration in Creativity. She has always enjoyed writing and reading poetry, and this is her first time submitting any creative work to something like this- and she's very excited about this!

Alma Jasencic

Alma is from Utica, New York. She's currently a student at Utica College studying Government and Politics, and a minor in Human Rights Advocacy. She is passionate about equality and living in a world where we treat others fairly. The political climate we live in today should encourage others to speak up about issues they are passionate about.

Emily Joss

Emily majors in physical therapy with the intent of specializing in neurological rehabilitation and working with amputees in the near future. She's an athlete and a writer in her free time with a hope that neither are omitted from her identity after graduation.

Dr. Jeff Miller

Dr. Jeff Miller is Chair and Associate Professor of Communication and Media and director of FILM@UC, and teaches a variety of courses including Theories of Visual Communication (COM 426). His photography has regularly appeared in the Ampersand since 2015 and two of his photographs, titled "Dublin Graffiti," and "Bear's Den" were published in last year's edition. Three of his four photos selected for publication this year, "concrete," "Varick Street sky," and "Celtic heart," were taken in an around Utica, while the fourth, "The Bullwhacker," offers an unorthodox perspective on the famous monument in Helena, Montana.

Brittney L. Nowack

Brittney L. Nowack is currently an undergraduate studying Adolescent Education with a concentration in English at Utica College, transferring from Mohawk Valley Community College. Before truly recognizing her love for literature and writing, she attended Herkimer College and graduated with an Associate's Degree in Business Administration.

In addition to writing creatively, Brittney enjoys writing literary criticism and analysis.

Her work on Sylvia Plath is part of the 11th annual New Critics: Undergraduate Literature and Composition Conference at SUNY Oneonta.

Alexis Orr

Alexis Orr is an English and Adolescent Education major who has always had a love for writing and literature. She finds that writing is one of the best ways to get her problems out on paper as well as cope with more difficult situations. She used to write on a daily basis while she was in high school but lost her spark. These few poems are the first poems she has written in 3 years.

Chris Restivo

Chris is a senior cybersecurity student here at Utica College. He always enjoyed expressing his mind and experiences with outlets like poetry, music, art, etc. He thanks Professor Richardson for a great time in class and for giving him the opportunity to write more poetry. He is happy to be included in this year's issue.

Danae Rivera

Writing and thoughts of fiction has been a part of Danae's life for as long as she can remember. Her mind's always chock full of some fantastical idea or another that comes and goes in fleeting moments. For the longest time she's thought about writing something serious but never truly committed to till recently and she don't regret it. Putting an idea to paper is an extraordinary experience and one she hopes to keep experiencing for a long time.

Liam Rodgers

Liam was born and raised in Syracuse, NY. He had just recently finished his degree in Construction Management from UC in the class of 2019. Throughout his years of attending UC he ran Cross Country and Track and also hosted a metal radio show at WPNR. He doesn't considering himself much of a writer, but he did enjoy writing poems for his literature of addiction course and he hopes you enjoyed them as well.

Kaitlyn Tambasco

Kaitlyn Tambasco is a senior studying Communications and Media and Criminal Justice, and is proud to be published in the Ampersand for the third year in a row. She is also Co-President of the National Society of Leadership and Success and is also the Managing News Editor for UC's student newspaper, "The Tangerine." She has been writing ever since a young age and is something that she knows she can't live without.

Emmalyn Ylaya

Emmalyn is a Junior from Adirondack majoring in Liberal Studies. She has participated in Ampersand since freshman year, even though her work didn't make it in freshman year (the 2018 copy). Her hobbies are shopping, watching movies, reading books, eating food, listening to music, and making art. Besides Ampersand, she also participates in so many clubs and organizations such as Active Minds (Public Relations Officer), Art Club (Secretary), Literature Society (President), Tangerine (Clerk), UCTV, Cybersecurity Club, Accounting Society, Young Americans for Liberty, Psychological Society (Secretary), Psychological Child Life Society, Math Club (Webmaster), Nutrition Club, Her Campus, Billiards Club (Webmaster), and Women In A New Direction. She is willing to give her positive contributions and best effort in everything she participates in as much as she does with her school work.

Dasan Ahanu*2020 Vogel Award Judge*

Dasan Ahanu is a poet, educator, scholar and performing artist born and raised in Raleigh, North Carolina. In addition to performing across the country, Dasan has hosted or coordinated many Poetry, Jazz, Hip Hop, and Cultural Arts events. His work has been featured on National Public Radio (NPR) where he is noted for his appearances on “News and Notes with Ed Gordon” and “State of Things with Frank Stasio.”

His writing is featured online and in print publications. He has worked with a variety of North Carolina Hip Hop and Jazz artists and released a number of spoken word recordings. Dasan is a resident artist with the St. Joseph’s Historic Foundation/Hayti Heritage Center in Durham, NC where he has developed poetry and spoken word programming for youth and adults. Dasan is co-founder and managing director of Black Poetry Theatre, a Durham based theatre company that creates and produces original poetry and spoken word based productions. He is the author of three poetry collections.

Dasan is also an alumni Nasir Jones Fellowship with the Hip Hop Archive at Harvard University’s Hutchins Center for African & African American Research. His scholarly work is focused on art interventions, creative expression, Hip Hop and popular culture. Currently, Dasan is a visiting professor at UNC-Chapel Hill in Chapel Hill and a consultant working with organizations on art based strategies.



Thank you for reading!

