

Periphery  
Art and Literary Journal  
Edition 60



***Periphery***  
***Art and Literary***  
***Journal***

*Edition 60*

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# About

*Periphery* is an annual, student-produced publication of Drake University. Funding for *Periphery* is provided by the Board of Student Communications. Content and opinions in this journal do not reflect those of Drake University.

For more information and content: [www.peripheryjournal.com](http://www.peripheryjournal.com)

# Socials

 [periphery.editors@drake.edu](mailto:periphery.editors@drake.edu)

 [peripheryjournal.com](http://peripheryjournal.com)

 [periphery.du](https://www.instagram.com/periphery.du)



# Submission Process

Submission to *Periphery* is free and accepts work from undergraduate students from across the globe. *Periphery* accepts stories, photographs, poems, music, essays, paintings, videos, interviews, new media work, sculptures, graphic narratives, spoken word, comics, and genres that have yet to be created or recognized. All submissions are sent through a blind review process by the Editor-In-Chief, Art Director, and Editorial Staff only. *Periphery* reserves the right to edit any and all submissions, but does not claim the rights to any published work.

## Staff

**Editor-in-Chief**

Anna Richardson

**Art Director**

Lily McIntosh

**Editorial Staff**

Karin Berdahl

Atlas Desmond

Avery Hjelm

Aanika Pfister

**Faculty Advisor**Carol Spaulding-  
Kruse

# Acknowledgements

*Periphery* is blessed to have a tight-knit team who brings the journal to life. First and foremost, I'd like to thank our Art Director, Lily McIntosh, for stitching a coherent whole out of our parts. Your vision for the journal invokes nostalgia while keeping hope for the future. Next, I would like to thank the rest of our editorial staff (Karin Berdahl, Atlas Desmond, Avery Hjelm, and Aanika Pfister) for arriving passionate and prepared to every meeting we had. Each of you brings a strength to our team that no one else could. Your perspectives gave the journal the breadth and beauty it has today.

Beyond the editorial staff, I would also like to thank Carol Spaulding-Kruse, Gannon Henry, my fellow Drake publications, and Christian Printers, all of whom play a central role in keeping our journal alive when I am gone. Finally, I want to thank all the authors and artists who were brave enough to submit their work to our journal. The editors only bring your work together; in the end, YOU are *Periphery*. Your inspiration, imagination, and ingenuity will always have a home here. May your will to create never waver.



# Letter from the Editor

This year, *Periphery* reached the milestone of 60 years in operation. Since 1963, *Periphery* has been a home for creative endeavors on Drake's campus. As the journal grew up, so too did its reach across the country and even the world. Last year, we published several international submissions and received national recognition from the NCTE.

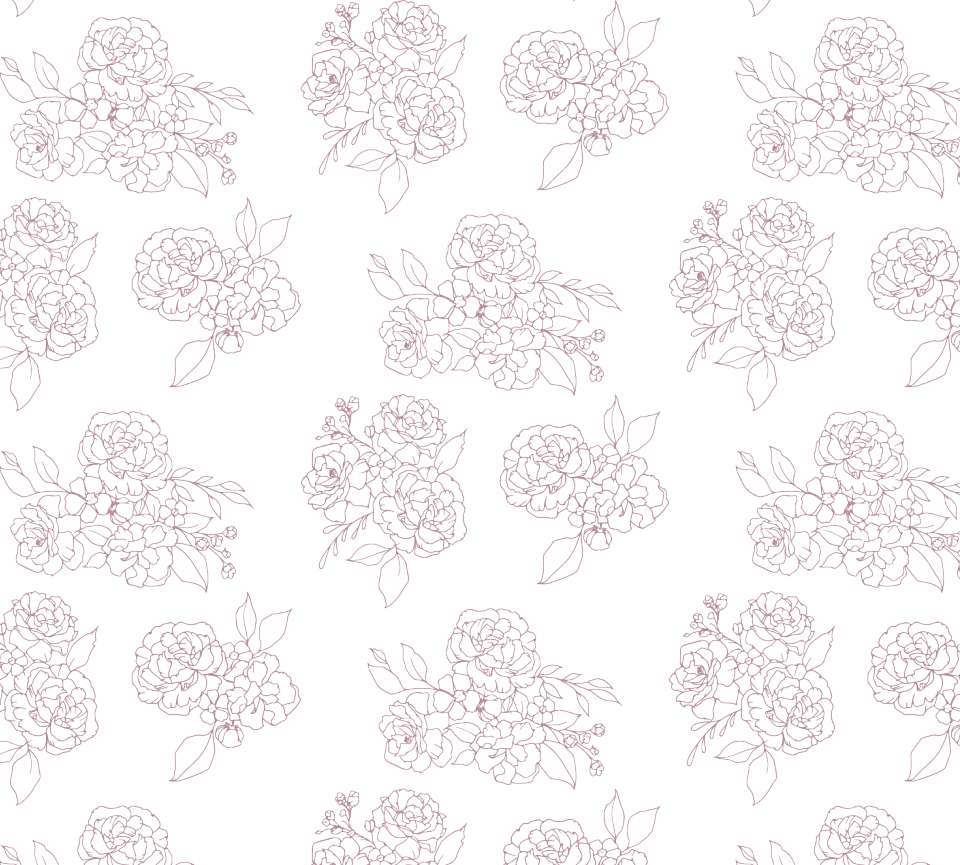
I am proud of our accomplishments, but they came (unwittingly) at a cost. In growing up on Drake's campus, there were ways in which *Periphery* grew distant as well. That's why over the past year, *Periphery* become more than a journal. We hosted poetry slams to give voice to our classmates. We beta-tested a writing and art swap to connect authors with artists. With each undertaking, we took a step closer to our starting place as a home for creative souls. Blossoming as a journal need not mean leaving our roots behind. Only by staying connected to our roots will our blooms return perennially.

Our passion as creators connects us beyond the liminal space. Given a long enough timetable, any space can be liminal. We are always on the precipice of something new. This year, we celebrate growth while acknowledging works in progress.

Congratulations to everyone featured in these pages. Your work lives alongside 60 years of continuous exploration of the outermost boundary. The farthest limit. The extreme outer edge. Our past, our present, and our future live together in the pages of *Periphery's* journals.

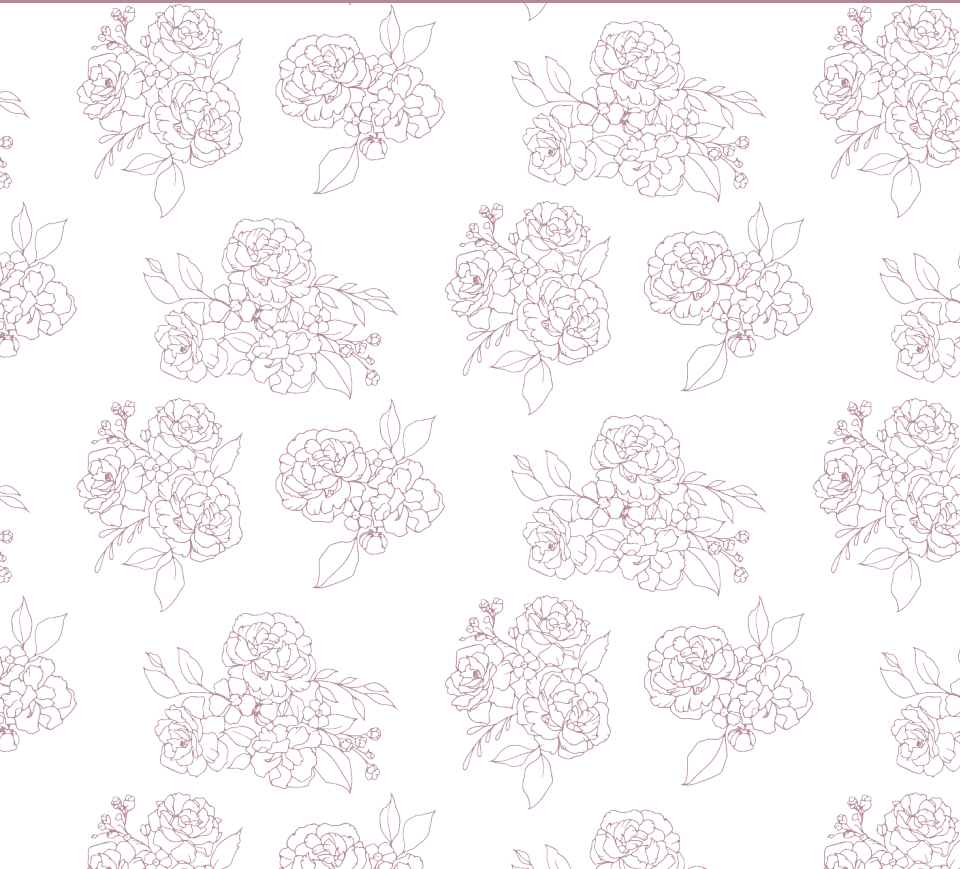
*Anna Richardson*

*Editor-in-Chief, 60th Edition*





 Literature 



# Preamble to all Poetry

*Logan Grant*

Fuck off and continue reading.  
Fall into me for now,  
and I will return the favor.  
Be nude. Be quiet. Be gentle.  
It'll only be a moment. It's *all* we have.

# Intimate Partner Violence

*CJ Younger*

I sleep deeply not knowing what mouse hates this house  
With his cheese he will please make a plan burn it down  
If he's kind he will do it with me still inside

I sleep deeply not knowing what horse feels remorse  
For the sins of the father the brother the son  
Who trampled their women with hooves made of coal

I sleep deeply not knowing what dog creeps in fog  
His paw pads are frozen his nose is ice cold  
His jaws touch my throat with such longing my lord

I sleep deeply not knowing this man in my bed  
Who tosses and turns and throws punches play dead  
I try to stay quiet and pray to my gods  
My mouse and my horse and my dog and this song

# On Transformation

*Grace Deak*

the girl i used to be is bleeding out in the back of a maroon  
theatre, hand  
to her chest as she looks up towards stars she cannot see. the girl  
i used to be died with the first breath of spring  
as the flowers blossomed.

do i miss her?

the girl i used to be won a first place medal with her oldest friend,  
hand  
to her chest as the cameras flashed and her parents cheered. the  
girl  
i used to be wanted to be good  
wanted to deny herself and take up her cross.  
where is the balance?

the girl i used to be would hate the person i became, because she  
fought tooth and nail to become  
someone else  
(someone better.)

the girl i used to be couldn't look in the mirror either, but she  
refused to  
admit why. the girl i used to be could never imagine falling in  
love.  
the girl i used to be sold the soul she never had  
to the thief  
to the queen  
to the hero  
to the lover  
to the God she can't lose faith in

the girl i used to be  
is sitting on the bench, waiting for the coach to put her in, for the  
next  
time out, for the final play, waiting  
for the girl i used to be

the girl i used to be is bleeding out in the bottom of my chest,  
perpetually  
on the edge of death, still hung up on the impossible. the girl i  
used to be  
still believes there could be one last hurrah amidst a pandemic.

i used to be a girl  
    (i think)  
i used to be—

the girl i used to be was stabbed in the back with a sword  
she taught herself how to wield. the person i am now holds  
the sword at arm's length, wary of the bloodstains on the blade.  
the person i am now wishes they could save the girl  
i used to be, but a rusty sword is no match against the black  
plague  
and i cannot change how God made me. the girl i used to be  
will have to die in order to learn that.

the girl i used to be is dead, and i wear her skin because it is the  
only way  
i can keep the person i became safe. i do not wear it like hercules  
wears  
the coat of the nemean lion. i wear it like medusa covers her hair  
and eyes;  
it is the only way i keep myself lovable.

# Divine Mediocrity

*Colin Frier*

Genesis: Out of the frying pan and into the fire. The planets freeze in orbit, a thousand glowing cherubim with finger cymbals descend from the heavens to sing, “Unwritten,” the entire hospital staff falls prostrate in front of your bassinet, and the leper patient one door over offers you a half-eaten Ghirardelli box. Squalling like a Gen Z who got her Chipotle order botched, you exit the Suez Canal from non-existence to existence.

Suddenly you get the sense that liberation doesn’t seem so free.

But you’ve crossed the Rubicon. Remember what happened to Lot’s wife? Lest you wish to become table salt, don’t look back. Yeah, sure, you feel like a dog without a bone, actor out on loan, captain without a crew, clown at a funeral, bare-bellied Sneetch, fish out of water, square peg in a round hole, a veritable Elephant Man. That’s all part of the cosmic crapshoot, my friend, the divine drama, the terrestrial trick.

Tell me, do you want to know the magician’s secrets?

Exodus: when did you develop the ability to discriminate between right and wrong? You may have boarded two of every animal for the flood, but you couldn’t see both sides to every human. That’s why the Sages of Society had to knock some sense into you— you’re a wicked wretch just like the rest of ‘em.

The Ten Commandments: shut up, sit up, get up, grow up, hurry up, make up, wake up, listen up, stand up, look up.

Job: oh? Little Scruffy died? Got tendonitis? Crashed your pristine Herbie sedan into a nurse’s suburban? Were left for



dead by your duplicitous date on homecoming night? Come now, my faithful rat, your uncle Satan and I are just playing a little blackjack— no need to fret. If ye had but a mustard seed of faith, you'd see that you're just a pawn, a means to an end, a vehicle, a puppet. It's a game, you worrywart! Games are supposed to be fun! Smoke some weed and cheer up, Scrooge!

Bu— do you deserve this? Well, does anyone deserve anything?

The most prolific murderer of mankind: the question.

Proverbs: live, laugh, love. Journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Impossible is "I am possible." Your existence has been reduced to a lapidary quotation, a cloying axiom. Who are you really, behind the veil of someone else's words? They say great artists steal; who was the first? You couldn't be original even if homicidal Yahweh threatened to slaughter you like the Amalekites. Your life is a process of repackaging, of standing on the shoulders of giants, of wetting your beak, of catching a free ride on the gravy train, of parroting hollow ideologies and philosophies and religions. The lie you need in order to live dooms you to a life that is not your own.

Who created the Creator? If God himself ain't a bona fide original, how can you expect to be?

The Gospels: imagine being stuck in traffic, receiving a paper cut, finding out that the next season of your show is not on Netflix, and being forced to sit through two Liberty Mutual ads. Now multiply that seventy times seven— the crucifixion.

Savior? Of whom? What do you know about unconditional love? Your heart is as black as the priest's of the Good Samaritan story. You've been Judas Iscariot to yourself all your life.

You're a martyr without a cause, sent into this Vietnam, this

hostile, alien world, just to suffer. Roused from your peaceful state of repose just to be gratuitously tortured for some ninety odd years.

A nightmare. You only wake up when the crown of thorns, the filet of fraudulence, is placed on your skull and the nails are driven into your wrists, the hands that created nothing.

Who will you be when you stop being who you thought you were?

Acts of Apostles: you have your Damascus moment, your Constantine root-and-branch change in operations, your earth-shattering epiphany— this is my life's calling. This is what I believe in. Ah yes, finally, the move from the ocean of obscurity to the comfort of clarity. Delusion's embrace has never felt so reassuring.

Say what? Christ is just a myth? Truth is just a season? Success is just a fad?

Revelation: the four horsemen: regret, shame, impotence, deceit. You're on the doorstep of hell— abandon hope, all ye who enter here. In your darkest hour, the shining white knight of Understanding will slay the multi-headed beast of Ignorance, so you tell yourself, and at last you will meet backstage with the Puppet Master, the wool will be removed from your eyes, and he'll explain to you why this, how that, who had, when did, what was.

Ha. Ha ha. Ha ha ha hahahahahahahahhahhahhahh.

It was all just a half-hour sitcom.

# Long Legs

*Becca Gatewood*

I've got some long legs, comprising most of my 6-foot-tall self

Long legs that necessitate online shopping  
Long legs that receive comments from strangers  
Long legs that like to skip and hop instead or walk

I love my long legs, but they weren't always mine

They used to belong to other people, to long and lonely nights, to sharp edges and razor blades, to the thorny roses I would walk through, to the pain I would carve into them

My long legs stopped moving forward  
They folded, collapsed  
Holding still so long they would fall asleep  
Go numb  
Until a slice of self-hatred and distress would shake their dust

My long legs began to drag  
Wearing down the souls of my shoes with their shameful shuffle  
I dragged them out of my bed on mornings when my cotton sheets were sheets of rock  
Pinning me down  
Trying to keep others from seeing me, my legs

My scars

Scars that climb my calves like the rungs of a ladder, perfectly parallel by design  
Up both sides

Each rung with a story  
A story they won't let me forget

I bundled them up  
Patching their wounds in the sunshine  
Making them deeper in the darkness

The legs that weren't my own carried me to class and work and  
my friend's place

I wasn't moving  
I was as still as the air in a tense room

But a friend of mine told me it was time for change

To stay still was to die  
To move was to choose to be more than my deepest scar and my  
darkest bruise

So I ran

Long runs that taught me I was worth every cubic inch of air that  
I invited into my lungs

Long runs that taught to preserve and love what I was because  
when I tripped on the sidewalk

last week, my hands instinctively protected my precious head

Long runs that taught me to appreciate this life because someone  
needed to stop and notice that

sugar maple tree and that someone would be me. And I will see it  
tomorrow.

Long runs that taught me just because I ended where I started  
did not mean I was the same. I am  
stronger.

Long runs that taught me to be friends with silence, the only  
sounds my breath, my pulse, and  
my footsteps

Long runs that taught me I was stronger than my yesterday, but  
not as strong as my tomorrow

Long nights, small pills, and lost dreams had me like a crumpled  
leaf, being dragged on cracked  
cement by a hot, dry breeze

Long runs fused me back onto that internal bronchial tree, that  
told me I would continue to be  
and be and be and be and be

# Ode to Small Cells

*Lila Medina*

The small cells cover up  
my body, blood, and organs,

blanketing me inside myself—  
kindly like a mother  
that falls to bed exhausted.

I grab handfuls of myself—  
tugging, hoping to rip off red and yellow chunks,  
hoping it will come apart,  
splitting cleanly away like sugared cotton candy.  
The small cells are talking  
on the phone, to each other,

laughing and gabbing about their host  
and daughter—the angsty teenager inside the already grown  
woman—

who needs to give in already  
to deliciously meaty bones and thick thighs

and to visible blood showing through  
pale cheeks.

They are telling the teenager  
to grow up—give in  
and drink  
the sugar water falling  
down from the sky.

# shattered mosaic

*Lauren Kells*

I.

i tell myself i'm a good person

because i brake when i see a squirrel  
in front of my car

on tiny claws it narrowly escapes  
bursting like a blood-filled balloon

II.

i stop in my tracks wipe glistening tears  
from her mascara stained cheeks  
kiss her twitching eyelids whisper syrupy consolations  
into her waiting ears and catch her haggard breath for her

but i never agreed to be her stronghold forever  
or break myself to see her shine

III.

i broke her spine with my teeth  
so i could make a mosaic but it shattered  
everytime my fingertips  
ghosted across it

picking shards of ceramic  
out of my hands I drove home  
red weeping down my steering wheel

i laid the pieces to rest

IV.

she's not resting she's laying awake  
tasting my name like acid  
in her throat  
until she chokes

one day she'll  
crawl into my bedroom  
find me defenseless  
and spit her blood on my chest

V.

i would have bent over  
backwards for

her bloody or not

i would've  
ignored the acidic hole  
she burned in my throat  
snapped my own spine



and handed her my broken  
tendons to tie up  
her hair with

# You are Me

*Colin Frier*

I was dropped by a stork when the bottle was uncorked  
My head was delivered on a tray  
I dared to look back to see the city in tact  
But I melted at the sight of the flames

I bathed with a snake and found it could break  
The scales on my halo-rimmed eyes  
The lions I could stand but not my mind when it expands  
At the mention of a god in disguise

By the Alamo bridge hope screams under lids  
For a brother in a colorful cape  
We wander alone and turn over stones  
And realize it's all an escape

The trumpets yelled as the curtains all fell  
That concealed the master in drag  
He had a finger for a mouth and it pointed not south  
And fled on his blinding white stag

My love is in verse but it always feels rehearsed  
I put a bounty on my own head  
I showed them the cloth that I cut from their boss  
But they sided with envy instead

I drank under the bow after the waters stopped their flow  
And laughed at the sorrow of joy  
Feel blessed in the sun and cursed when it's gone  
And always have something to avoid

My mind's a furnace of faith, it don't have patience to wait  
For a savior to burn up my foes  
The camel won't fit, but neither will grit  
Your place in line God only knows

So I tore down the calf and held up his staff  
That ensured my victory  
For you know that loss and gain are one and the same

In a world where you are me

# I dream of silkworms, I dream of poisonous things

*Andres Colon*

You invade my sleep  
like how you invade temples in my dreams  
full of smoke and covenants.  
And in those dreams, you're a big god  
and my body is a temple.  
And every single night is another of your crimes  
that I can't beat  
cause in my sleep, history rhymes  
but doesn't repeat.  
Sometimes I dream of silkworms sewing limbs,  
repairing where you've been  
and absolving phantom pain.  
Sometimes I dream of Datura's flowering  
with all the other vespertine.  
And I think it means  
prosperity  
and reclaiming my poisoning.  
But I also dream  
that your mouth is filled with foam  
and you turn to salt between my teeth  
and I cast you out into the sea.  
I dream of church services and man-made havens  
and then someone breaks in  
and puts bullets through the bulletins.  
I dream that I drag you from a burning building

but you feel like my foot when it falls asleep,  
all heavy, as if you're stuck to something.  
Stuck to other kisses, other couches  
like a penny; treasure hunting in the cushions for conquests  
more exhilarating, more annihilating.  
And I think you'd rather burn than be held by me.

I move to the couch to sleep  
and press into the cow-brown leather in my living room.  
There is nothing living here  
with this much carnage,  
cow skin and girl skin, we're pressed cheek to cheek.  
My dog licks the armchair like the leather's still alive and full of  
meat  
till she falls asleep.

# No Return

*Gracie Schwenk*

the Selway  
relentless river  
of no return

her call echoes  
through the magrunder corridor  
shaking canyon walls  
bashing against boulders  
pressuring ponderosas  
down to their knees  
startling the bright Balsamroot  
who take refuge in their petals  
she flows rugged  
clear-cut and hardy  
wiping away any trace  
of the poor souls  
who dare to challenge her

once you know her  
there is no leaving  
she stays with you  
coursing over your bones  
until they drop in her river

The Selway  
relentless river  
of no return

# Gethsemane Oklahoma Territory

Emma Rose Buhman-Wiggs

*To whom it may concern:*

*The following documents consist of transcriptions I took during the initial portions of the investigation into the bizarre incident that occurred last fall in the frontier town of Gethsemane, part of the Oklahoma Territory. Mr. Carlisle Mattinson and myself made two trips to Gethsemane in order to gather this information; I hope it proves illuminating.*

## **Early Spring; Sheriff's Office of Gethsemane, Oklahoma Territory**

Interview of **Eunice Landon**, sister of the accused, by **Carlisle S.J. Mattinson**, contractual investigator through the state of New York

Transcript written by **Katherine "Kate" Heinz**, licensed transcriber through the state of New York

*[Carlisle and I took our places in the Sheriff's office of Gethsemane, just a few buildings north of the railroad that dissects the town. The room branched off of the entrance to the small country courtroom; across the foyer was the door to the few available holding cells. Carlisle took his place sitting behind the splintery and little-used desk. I sat down next to the window, whose canvas covering filtered the harsh daylight into a pitiful suggestion of brightness. Ms. Eunice Landon was*

*ushered in by the singular clerk with little fanfare. A woman of about eighteen years old, she wore a dust-colored skirt and her frizzy hair was coming loose from its bun.]*

**EUNICE:** Lulu? No, sir, y'all don't understand. She ain't never done nothin' wrong before... that.

**CARLISLE:** Nothing? Just a perfect golden child?

**EUNICE:** Well, everybody has their days, y'know. She'd yell or sulk or pour salt in my coffee, but that was all, sir. Nothin' any other kid wouldn't do.

**CARLISLE:** What do you think happened?

**EUNICE:** What do ya mean, sir?

**CARLISLE:** Considering the severity of the incident, it seems like something must have changed within Tallulah.

~

Interview of **Jeremiah Landon**, brother of the accused, by **Carlisle S.J. Mattinson**, contractual investigator through the state of New York

*[Carlisle and I once more took our places in the Gethsemane Sheriff's office, this time greeting Mr. Jeremiah Landon, a young man of sixteen years or so. He wore fraying suspenders over a grayed shirt and spoke with a cadence similar to that of his older sister]*

**JEREMIAH:** Oh nawh, sir, Lulu was *bad*.

**CARLISLE:** Bad? Bad how? Eunice said—

**JEREMIAH:** Eunice never notices a damn thing. She's too busy tryin't get her hair to stay put.

**CARLISLE:** So what did Tallulah do?

**JEREMIAH:** Well... y'see... [*he fiddled with one of his suspender clasps*] Lulu was just an odd duck.

**CARLISLE:** Odd how?

**JEREMIAH:** Jesus, sir, I'm gettin' there. She was never friends with any of th'other girls— I think th'Offmans have a daughter Lulu's age but Lulu wanted nothin' t'do with her. And animals didn't like Lulu much at all. Our lil pony wouldn't let her anywhere near. Lulu'd play in the dirt 'n come back for dinner caked in dust, 'n she'd hold your eyes too long sometimes— you couldn't hardly look away.

**CARLISLE:** None of that is truly incriminating, Jeremiah.

**JEREMIAH:** Oh, that's just the start, sir. You'll see.

~

Interview of **Reverend Jacob Saunders**, pastor of Resurrection Church in Gethsemane, by **Carlisle S.J. Mattinson**, contractual investigator through the state of New York

*[Carlisle and I spoke with Reverend Jacob Saunders on our second trip to Gethsemane, a few weeks after the first. The town had begun to rebuild itself by this point. That being said, the people of Gethsemane were clearly still shaken by the goings-on— several were openly hostile to us for continuing to salt this wound. Reverend Saunders was a tall, amicable man of about thirty years, dressed in priestly black with a well-loved hat]*

**CARLISLE:** Now how long have you been pastor here at Resurrection Church?



**REV. SAUNDERS:** Coming up on six years this June. I was sent here immediately after finishing seminary college.

**CARLISLE:** Would you say you were close to the Landon family?

**REV. SAUNDERS:** I knew them, of course, and saw them every Sunday at service. I checked in with the children every so often after Clayton passed on a few years back. Eunice started running the house then— she must have been sixteen at the oldest— and Jeremiah was doing all of the farming at fourteen. [*his face grew increasingly somber*] Silas would have been eleven, then, and Tallulah was just six.

**CARLISLE:** And did Tallulah ever strike you as... odd? Malicious?

**REV. SAUNDERS:** Oh heavens, no! Never. She was quiet— all of those kids were, once they were on their own— but never cruel. I just figured it was a confusing life, suddenly being raised by your sister.

**CARLISLE:** I suppose that's reasonable.

**REV. SAUNDERS:** [*dragging a hand down his face*] That's what makes this all so hard to digest, really. She was quiet. That was all. And yet...

**CARLISLE:** [*grimly*] And yet.

[*pause*]

**CARLISLE:** What was the first true incident you remember?

**REV. SAUNDERS:** I have been thinking about this for some time, under the light of current circumstances. I believe that

there may have been several instances in which Ms. Tallulah... well, for lack of a better word, exercised her abilities; I may have completely missed them due to my ignorance of her more unusual traits. It is quite easy to explain anything away, should you desire to shy away from any upsetting conclusions.

**CARLISLE:** That makes sense. So what is the first incident you fully believe to have been out of the ordinary?

**REV. SAUNDERS:** I would have to say after one church service in mid-September of last year. As everyone filed out of the church, I shook all of their hands and wished them a blessed week. When Tallulah came by... [*he opened his mouth, but seemed too overcome to speak*]

**CARLISLE:** [*gently*] What happened?

**REV. SAUNDERS:** [*he glanced upwards, his lips vaguely murmuring a prayer. After clearing his throat, he continued*] She shook my hand, like everyone else.

[pause]

**CARLISLE:** And?

**REV. SAUNDERS:** The bruises didn't fade for weeks.

~

**CARLISLE:** You say that Tallulah wasn't a bad kid.

**EUNICE:** Not a rotten bone in her lil' body.

**CARLISLE:** But she was odd?

**EUNICE:** Well... [*she scratched the back of her neck and absentmindedly tried to tuck pieces of hair back into her bun, pointedly avoiding eye contact with Carlisle*] Yes, I spose she

was odd. Always a little... distracted.

**CARLISLE:** In school?

**EUNICE:** Yessir, but at home, too. It was like she was never already payin' mind, y'know? Like you had to say her name every time you wanted t'talk to her, even if she was just listenin' the moment before.

**CARLISLE:** So she had her head in the clouds, that's all?

**EUNICE:** [*frustrated*] No, that's... that's not what I'm *sayin'*. Regular kids have their heads in the clouds.

**CARLISLE:** Ah, so you don't think Tallulah was a "regular kid"?

**EUNICE:** [*trapped*] No, I mean... yes, she was strange, but not bad.

**CARLISLE:** Eunice, I'm going to remind you that people are dead.

**EUNICE:** Yessir, I understand, but Lulu– [*she starts choking up*]

**CARLISLE:** [*he reached across the desk to hand her a handkerchief*] I know this is difficult, but I promise we are just trying to get answers.

**EUNICE:** [*she dabbed at her eyes and handed the handkerchief back*] I understand, sir. But I swear on my mama's grave that Lulu wasn't some cruel monster.

**CARLISLE:** I understand. But public opinion is that an eight year old girl destroyed a block and a half of Gethsemane, killing two people and herself in the process. It's hard to call that

anything but monstrous.

**EUNICE:** [*uncertain*] She made a mistake, that's all. An accident.

~

Interview of **Ms. Caroline Jeffers**, widow of the late Mayor Andrew Jeffers, by **Carlisle S.J. Mattinson**, contractual investigator through the state of New York

[*Ms. Jeffers was clearly a woman cut out to lead a community. She stood tall, with her shawl draped symmetrically over her shoulders despite the wind playing with the sand outside. I noticed that the hooks and rivets on her boots were polished to a shine.*]

**CARLISLE:** I understand you witnessed Tallulah Landon's strange behavior prior to her outburst?

**MS. JEFFERS:** Yes, sir, but only once or twice. One time Mrs. Campbell and I were talking by the counter of her store— her brother had just passed away and she needed someone to talk to— when I heard Tallulah whisper my name by my shoulder. I turned to say hello and saw that she wasn't right beside me, but standing on the porch out front.

**CARLISLE:** Acoustics can be tricky sometimes. Are you sure...

**MS. JEFFERS:** That's what I was thinking, but then she made eye contact with me and I heard her say my name again, as if she were standing beside me. [*she leaned forward conspiratorially*] Her mouth didn't move.

**CARLISLE:** Her mouth... didn't move?

**MS. JEFFERS:** [*sitting back*] Not an inch, I swear. I was so unnerved I could barely focus on advising Mrs. Campbell in her

grief.

**CARLISLE:** I can see how that would be upsetting.

**MS. JEFFERS:** Now, don't put words in my mouth, Mr. Mattinson. I was *unnerved*, but only temporarily. Once I realized what was going on I was no longer concerned.

**CARLISLE:** And what was that realization?

**MS. JEFFERS:** Well, Tallulah had clearly been gifted by God with the power to perform miracles!

~

**CARLISLE:** I understand you had witnessed several incidents prior to the final one?

**JEREMIAH:** Yessir. Lulu had... I dunno what to call 'em, sir, but somethin' akin to somethin' from the Bible.

**CARLISLE:** Miracles?

**JEREMIAH:** Curses.

**CARLISLE:** [*taken aback*] You'd consider it that bad?

**JEREMIAH:** Not at first. The first coupla' times, it was lil' stuff, like the time Eunice sent her to bed without supper.

**CARLISLE:** What happened?

**JEREMIAH:** Silas n' me found a handprint on the wall by her bed.

**CARLISLE:** [*he whistled, impressed*] She hit the wall hard enough to dent the plaster?

**JEREMIAH:** No, sir, our walls're wood. And you don't understand: the handprint was raised.

~

Interview of **Mrs. Seraphina Campbell**, owner of the Gethsemane General Store, by **Carlisle S.J. Mattinson**, contractual investigator through the state of New York

[Mrs. Campbell was one of the jolliest and most verbose women I had ever had the pleasure of meeting. She was short and spritely, with a large nose and poofy calico skirt. She brought molasses cookies for both Carlisle and me]

**CARLISLE:** The final incident occurred directly in front of your store, correct?

**MRS. CAMPBELL:** Yessir, right there in our yard! Quite thrillin', although upsettin' too, of course. Ain't nobody who's pleased about it, no sir, but what a *sight*. That youngest Landon girl— Lulu, right? I almost named my daughter Louise and would've called'er Lulu but Mr. Campbell's mother's middle name was Suzanna so that's what we went with— anyway that Lulu just stood there in the middle as it all happened.

**CARLISLE:** She just stood there? I thought she was the one—

**MRS. CAMPBELL:** Oh, yessir, she was most *definitely* the one doin' it all but she wasn't movin' a *muscle*. Hell, she was stiller than the prairie air in the heat of July, just *watchin'*. I remember runnin' towards the mayor when it happened, but I turned back to see her there and thought, "Oh, sweet Jesus, ain't nothin' stoppin' her now."

~

**CARLISLE:** At risk of straying into superstition, do you think Tallulah was possessed by something Biblical, in your

professional opinion?

**REV. SAUNDERS:** Now, I find that to be a pointed question with a very difficult answer.

**CARLISLE:** [*placating*] This is just to gather opinions, Reverend.

**REV. SAUNDERS:** I understand but it is *essential* to emphasize that only the good Lord Almighty can determine such things, and to suggest demonic possession is to make assumptions about the state of the soul of a deceased girl.

**CARLISLE:** I did not mean to suggest that, only to ask if you saw any evidence for something along those lines.

**REV. SAUNDERS:** [*sternly*] No, I did not. The Lord blesses each of us in accord with His plan, some of us with powers that seem impossible to others. There are plenty of stories of men speaking in tongues and women healing the blind through prayer alone.

**CARLISLE:** Now that doesn't sound like the descriptions I've heard of Tallulah's incidents...

**REV. SAUNDERS:** Who's to say what those powers look like in the hands of a fragile child, still mourning the loss of her mother.

~  
**JEREMIAH:** [*slightly frantic*] One morning all of our chickens were plum dead and Lulu had feathers in'er hair, n' another time she spilled hot cannin' syrup all over her hand n' didn't bat a eyelash, n' she'd always stare at me when I made her mad n' my head'd ache for days. Doreen Macintosh pulled her pigtail at school, so Lulu pushed her down and she cracked her ribs. All of 'em. Doctor'd never seen anythin' like it.

**CARLISLE:** How did nobody else notice this?

**JEREMIAH:** [*scoffing*] Dunno, sir. I've been tryin' t' tell 'em for years but nobody listens.

~

**EUNICE:** [*heated*] I'm *tellin'* you, sir, Lulu ain't never done nothin' bad before that day!

**CARLISLE:** [*holding his hands up in surrender*] Alright, alright, I believe you.

**EUNICE:** And don't trust nobody that tells you otherwise.

**CARLISLE:** I understand. Now, I hear you were a witness to Tallulah's outburst?

**EUNICE:** [*she took a shaky breath before answering*] Yessir.

**CARLISLE:** Would you be able to tell me what you saw?

**EUNICE:** Well, I was comin' down Main Street toward the schoolhouse to talk to the teacher— have you met Mr. Burns? He's a good 'un— when I saw Lulu just standing in the middle of the street, starin' at Mayor Jeffers.

~

**MRS. CAMPBELL:** Mayor Jeffers' office was right across the street from my store, of course, so every so often he'd drop by for a chat and a lozenge in the afternoons, he always had a sore throat, y'see, and my homemade honey lozenges were his *favorites*. So anyway he had just been talkin' with me and he was walkin' back across the street to his office when he ran into little Lulu and said hello or somethin', I couldn't really hear from back behind the counter.

~

**MS. JEFFERS:** I was simply visiting my late husband's office to inform him that our son Charles had sent a letter detailing



his plans to visit us over Christmas. I was walking towards his building when I saw him leave the General Store, presumably with one of Seraphina's lozenges, and bump into Tallulah. She looked positively *wrathful*, and I remember hearing her say "My name is not Lulu, it is *Tallulah*" just as she had that one day— her mouth didn't budge an inch. A miracle.

~

**JEREMIAH:** Danny— meanin' Daniel Childress, the mailman's kid— him and me were just leavin' the farrier because Danny's horse threw a shoe. We stepped onto Main Street just in time t' see Mayor Jeffers just go *flyin'* backwards. I remember his head hit the dirt with the loudest crack I've ever heard in my life, swear to God, and he didn't get up again. The dust started turning an ugly kinda brown. He was hurt real bad. Mrs. Jeffers started screamin' somethin' awful, and Mrs. Campbell came rushin' out of her store.

~

**REV. SAUNDERS:** I remember hearing a loud crack, then Mrs. Jeffers screaming, so I ran out of the church where I had been reorganizing the storage room to see the mayor... unconscious. Tallulah Landon was standing at least five or six yards down the street, staring at him. Mrs. Jeffers and Mrs. Campbell were tending to the mayor, and if I recall correctly, Eunice Landon was a few buildings down the road from Tallulah with her hands covering her mouth in shock.

~

**EUNICE:** [*crying*] I ain't never seen anythin' like it, sir. Lulu just looked at Mayor Jeffers and he flew back like he'd been kicked by a horse. Mrs. Jeffers and Mrs. Campbell ran for 'im, of course, n' I saw Danny Childress and Jeremiah go runnin' that direction too. I couldn't hardly speak, I just stood still as a tree trunk. I think Jeremiah started to yell at her.

~

**MRS. CAMPBELL:** Caroline ran to Mr. Jeffers— what a pair those two always were, such a good match— and I followed 'er in case it was real bad n' she needed a shoulder to cry on. That older

Landon boy and the Childress lad— Daniel, I think?— were just comin' out of the farrier's n' they saw the whole thing happen. I wasn't exactly sure how Tallulah was involved, but I saw her brother's face go all cold and mean n' he just stared her down, yellin' about how it was her fault and Mayor Jeffers was dead.

~

**MS. JEFFERS:** [*surprisingly composed*] My husband was dead, sir; killed by a miracle. May we all be so lucky.

~

**JEREMIAH:** So I started hollerin' at Lulu cuz I knew that she had done it, she had fully *killed* a man, n' maybe that wasn't the best idea cuz she just kinda cocked her head to the side and I felt dread creep up my spine like a ice cube. I think— [*he cleared his throat, looking intently at the wall*] I think it might have been my fault. Danny— well, y'see, Lulu...

~

**REV. SAUNDERS:** Jeremiah was yelling, and Daniel was running towards Mayor Jeffers and the ladies when Tallulah screamed at the top of her lungs. It was truly piercing, and she... it was like she didn't have to *breathe*. This being prairie land, sometimes you'll hear coyotes yelping in the evenings. She sounded like that— high-pitched, long-lived, and absolutely heartbreaking.

~

**EUNICE:** [*she spoke in short bursts, scattered among her sobs*] Then Lulu shot Danny.

**CARLISE:** [*taken aback*] Wait, Tallulah was armed this whole time?

**EUNICE:** No, no, not like that... sorry, sir, just let me... she just screamed, but Danny choked and... and he... he fell down with a... perfect hole, straight through his skull.

~

**MRS. CAMPBELL:** Now, I didn't actually see what happened to the Childress boy, seein' as I was comfortin' Caroline at the

time, but I sure as hell *heard* it. Tallulah screamed bloody murder– I’m thinkin’ in response to her brother’s yellin’, but don’t go blamin’ the boy, ain’t nobody’s fault, truly– and then I heard Daniel just sorta slump to the ground behind us. I turned around to see the Landon boy starin’ at him, pale as a sheet. Must’ve been quite a shock. Those youngsters didn’t deserve none of this. [*she shook her head sadly*]

~

**MS. JEFFERS:** [*pointed*] I was too focused on my husband to notice anyone else, sir. I apologize for my tunnel vision.

**CARLISLE:** [*placating*] No need to apologize, ma’am, I understand completely. So it was only afterwards that you heard about Daniel Childress?

**MS. JEFFERS:** Yes, only later. The next thing I noticed was the wind picking up.

~

**JEREMIAH:** Swear to God, sir, Danny had a bullet hole straight through his head. I have no idea how she did it, but Lulu’d shot ‘im without ever pullin’ a trigger. I was too shocked to do anythin’ more than just sorta stare at ‘im, but then I noticed the dust around us startin’ to swirl, faster and faster and faster. I looked up n’ I saw Lulu starin’ at me, and her eyes... she wasn’t Lulu no more, y’understand? Whatever she was doin’... it wasn’t her no more.

~

**REV. SAUNDERS:** The buildings started to collapse around us, one by one. The dust rose up and blew like a windstorm, getting into my eyes and nose– I had to cover my face with my sleeve, and I couldn’t see a darn thing. The wind was *howling*, too, so loud I could barely hear the beams snapping and glass breaking as building after building imploded. It was unlike any dust storm I’d ever seen before.

~

**EUNICE:** When the dust had settled, Lulu was dead.

~  
**MRS. CAMPBELL:** *[dabbing at her tears]* No blood, no wound— just layin' there. I know it's a silly thing to say, but she looked as if she was asleep.

~  
*[After concluding our interviews, Carlisle and I visited the block of Main Street that had been decimated during the incident. The skeletons of new buildings were already being raised. The rubble had all been cleared away, and the winter rain had washed off any remaining reminders of the deaths that occurred— for all a visitor knew, the block was simply being remodeled. We stood in silence. I am not certain what Carlisle was thinking, but I imagine he was taking a moment to pray for the three souls Gethsemane had lost that day]*

~  
**CARLISLE:** And after all of this, you still think she was blessed by God?

**REV. SAUNDERS:** Now, don't put words in my mouth. I merely meant that one cannot assume that dangerous or upsetting circumstances are only the work of demons.

~  
**EUNICE:** Lulu never did a damn thing wrong, and I'll stand by that 'til I die.

~  
**JEREMIAH:** She was cursed, sir, clear as day. Hell, maybe we all were.

*This concludes the relevant portions of the transcripts I took during our two trips to Gethsemane. Mr. Mattinson may later provide his own accounts of the goings-on, but I recorded the details of the interviews as faithfully as I could.*

*Thank you for your interest, and I truly hope this helps the investigators uncover*

*the truth about what happened to Andrew Jeffers, Daniel Childress, and Tallulah Landon on that day in Gethsemane, Oklahoma Territory.*

*God be with you,*

*Katherine Heinz*

# Dysthymia

*Bryana Dawkins*

And so I am mourning again, the loss of the butterfly with bent wings,  
Crushed on the windowsill, next to the pot of daisies I forgot to water,

I buried it in the afternoon with my late grandmother's pearl necklace,  
And with a kiss imbued the earth with all my secret dreams and desires,

I remembered when I tried to die, laying under the covers as still as stone,  
Waiting for endless light, my wounds from winter slowly splitting open,

As my soul seeped into the sheets, I wondered if it ever rained in heaven,  
And if the blue flame within me faded, would someone mourn for me?

# 9.24.22

*Becca Gatewood*

My sister and I drove down to the vacant parking lot  
The kind of parking lot that creates a canvas of stars above  
your head

The kind of parking lot that is constantly begging  
*Look up*

We looked up

I stood on the car tire  
My sister laid on the grass

Our bodies arched as our eyes invited in light that was older than  
we were

My sister retrieved the phone from her pocket that would have  
been called a supercomputer 10 years ago  
The light I was perceiving is older than the first smartphone  
The stars smile benevolently at our timescale  
At our lives measured in hours

Now my sister lifts her phone and captures that light  
Storing it  
Saving it for later  
For when our star blots the other celestial bodies into  
irrelevance with its daylight

She tells them to hold still while her lens makes a record of them

*That's not how this works*  
The stars respond

*There is no stillness here*

*We are energy*

*We are motion*

*We are everything but stillness*

I lean in

Trying to close the gap that would take about 45 million  
human lives to walk

Tell me more

The stars answer with a question

*Do you know how special this is?*

My sister and I have no words

*The gaps in this galaxy are great*

*We are all lightyears from each other*

*We communicate through a dialogue dozens of decades old*

*Traversing lightyears to connect*

*You are standing inches from each other*

*Your words and hugs and breaths exist in the same instant*

We let the stars' words sink into our skin and write themselves  
on our bones

*You not only overlap, you share life*

The stars continues

*Why do you hide from each other?*

*Why do you try to take up less space in each other's lives?*

We answer only with convicted silence

*You are with each other*

*In this moment*



*Be with each other*

*You are so afraid of taking up space*

*There is nothing but space*

*There is plenty room for you here*

*We look at each other*

*Silently weighing our souls*

*Wondering how much space to request*

*Stop this.*

*The stars demand*

*Stop these trade-offs and compromises and calculations and  
measured requests*

*You need as much space as you take up*

*You need as much space as you take up*

*Stop making yourself smaller*

*Stop asking for a portion that will leave you hungry*

*Stop shivering in solitude*

*Stop waiting to be invited over*

*Stop portioning yourself into perfectly packaged palatable  
pieces*

*Stop wiping your own tears*

*Wrapping your arms over your own knees*

*Patching your own wounds*

*Steading your own heart*

*Singing your own fucking lullaby*

*You are not lightyears apart*

*You are seconds, instants away*

*You are with each other  
Right now*

*Do you know how special this is?*

# Waterlilies

*Halle Kibben*

Fluid cursive *Monet* scrawled  
beside a tidy edge  
depicting nothing neat

brushstrokes capturing fragmented  
facets of a peace-filled pond  
swift as flickering ripples

or calculating  
strategizing  
how to freeze water  
yet keep it fluid still

Atop  
the motionless ever-moving  
surface of the pool  
lilies lie  
paint patches  
tricking eyes  
into thinking they are blurred

The fault, dear looker, is not  
within our eyes

# 上げ劣り

*To put one's hair after coming of age and look worse*

*CJ Younger*

## *English Translation*

Here in my arms, hailed by the  
morning

This aching creature in the  
midst

of these aching cosmos

No one could explain death to

ハチ公

(痛みが良いですね)

I used to weave crowns golder  
than gold

Now I bite my teeth and

虫と共に

I weep

I have fallen the eighth time

(確りして!)

I take too seriously what the  
gods made for fun

My two arms, letting go, reach-  
ing up to touch

(確りして!)

上を向いて歩こう

**Bite your teeth**

涙がこぼれないように

(確りして!)

涙が your teeth to touch

虫と涙が

ハチ公と涙が

皆と

Here in my arms, hailed by the  
morning

This aching creature in the  
midst

of these aching cosmos

No one could explain death to

Hachikou

(*The ache is okay, right?*)

I used to weave crowns golder  
than gold

Now I bite my teeth and

*With the insects*

I weep

I have fallen the eighth time

(*get a hold of yourself!*)

I take too seriously what the  
gods made for fun

My two arms, letting go, reach-  
ing up to touch

(*get a hold of yourself!*)

I look up as I walk

**Bite your teeth**

So the tears won't fall

(*get a hold of yourself!*)

The tears your teeth to touch

With insects, the tears

With Hachikou, the tears

With everyone

# Evidence to a Court That Will Never Exist

*Anna Marie Switzer*

*Content Warning: Sexual Assault*

My best friend says my eyes close when I'm drunk. I have big eyes. They're light brown and turn gold in the sun. I've always been so proud of them. My long eyelashes and big eyes, capable of getting whatever I've ever wanted. They're probably my favorite feature, one of the only things I've really loved about myself.

When I'm drunk, my eyes get small and the world gets blurry. That night, my eyes must have been practically closed. I was slurring my words too— I can't remember much from the night, but I know I was slurring my words. My syllables were elongated, fighting against the alcohol to break free.

I can't remember how we got into the room. There is a lot missing from that night— bits and pieces I probably should remember. I was so drunk that I couldn't see straight, so drunk that for the time in my life, I don't even remember thinking. I don't know why we were in that room— me, my friend, and him.

If I was speaking to a court as their key witness, I would not be able to give them many specifics. It was a rush event, a wine night, for our favorite frat. I had never had a lot of wine before— I didn't drink in high school, never properly learned my limits with all the different types of alcohol. Naive knowledge plus low tolerance means slurred words before I had even realized I should have stopped drinking.

Everyone else was out partying, but for some reason we were

in his room. Maybe I was sitting on his bed. Maybe I was sitting in his lap. Maybe my hand was on his leg like she told me it was later. Maybe. I can't remember it all. My friend left us alone after a minute or two. Said she got a vibe, thought we wanted to be alone. It's all so hazy.

He was talking to me, maybe about music. I think he's a country music fan. I probably made a joke, something stupid with my slurred sentences. He seemed out of focus. I asked him what's wrong.

"I'm just distracted"

I could barely hear the words come out of his mouth. I was too drunk. Nothing made sense. I played along.

"What's caught your attention?"

"You,"

I knew he was going to say me. I've heard that line before. Boys always like to do that— feed me lines about how special I am and how much they love me. But this boy didn't think I was special and he most definitely does not love me. Yet still, I knew what he was going to say.

I didn't know he was going to kiss me. I didn't know he would press against me hard and hungry, slip his tongue down my throat. I should have known. We were alone in a bedroom, door closed, probably locked. I should have known.

—

Even sober, I seem to always miss those cues. I kissed a boy once, a boy that I had been in love with for probably forever, one that I trusted with my life (he would never kiss me when I was slurring my words; his lips never felt hungry). When I kissed him and he tried to make a move, I completely missed the signals.

"It's so hot in here. We should do something about it."

He stared at my shirt suggestively.

"I know right!"

I turned up the AC and kissed him again. I missed the signal.

We talked about it later. When my cheeks were still red from blushing and my hair was still crazy from his touch. We talked about it and he told me what he meant. How naive I had been!

We both giggled, erupting into laughter. He apologized for wanting to do more. I assured him he had done nothing wrong. The next time, I willingly took my shirt off.

When I was alone in a frat house with a boy I hadn't known for forever (for less than two hours, maybe), I missed all the signs again. I didn't know. And I was so very drunk, so hammered, plastered, wasted, any adjective you want to describe it. So I let him kiss me.

I let him touch me. I let his hands creep up and under my shirt. I let him do whatever he wanted— flip me around, pull my hands lower into his pants, shove his fingers into me. His hands felt greedy. At some point, he managed to strip me of all my clothes. Shirt, bra, pants, underwear— all thrown aside in his mad rush to consume all of me possible.

Maybe he asked permission to touch me. Maybe I gave it. The cheap wine has eaten away parts of my memory, stolen those crucial moments from me. I don't remember.

I hope I didn't give him permission. I hope that he didn't ask. I hope that these are boxes that I could check off on the "Did I Get Sexually Assaulted" test that I keep taking. In some convoluted way, I hope that he did take advantage of me so I could justify all the things that I feel.

—

I kept asking him if hooking up was embarrassing. Would he still respect me after feeling my body? After touching me in that way? The words of Margaret Atwood never leave me. "Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy," she says.

The first time I gave head, I thought about that quote. I was literally down on my knees, thinking of Margaret Atwood. It had taken me five months to build up the courage to be in that position, and all I could think about was respect. What is it about sexual relationships that makes me feel so dirty? Half a year later from that moment, my hand was on the same part of another man and I wasn't sure how it got there. I didn't feel dirty then. I felt scared.

Up on a pedestal or down on my knees, I was the victim of

the male fantasy. I just wanted to be respected.

—

My arm was over my bare chest, a futile attempt to prevent full nudity. I used to cover myself up like that in the mirror when I changed. The post-shower transition from towel to pajamas was always hurried and rushed, eyes modestly staring at the ground instead of my body in my tiny round mirror. Any stolen glance felt like a deviation from God's will, like nudity was a sin itself. The church told me that sexuality was evil, and I couldn't help but associate my own body with the likes of Eve post-apple bite.

I let myself be naked for the first time when I was home alone. This was when being home alone was a novelty— when I'd still double check the doors if they were locked and sing so loudly that my voice filled up all the empty rooms in the house.

As if it was a special occasion, I got out of the shower and laid my towel on the floor, nice and neat, like I was setting up a picnic blanket. I let myself be naked for the first time. I laid in the middle of the room and felt the air on exposed skin, watching as the dark hair on my arms prickled in reaction. I stared at my popcorn ceiling and openly defied God, allowing myself to appreciate all the parts of my body that had never before seen the light.

I never laid on the floor again. My glorious moment of reckoning with my natural body lasted only moments before the convoluted guilt waded in. Nudity has never been something I was comfortable with— not with my long term ex boyfriend that I gave my virginity to and definitely not with this hungry frat boy waiting to devour down all the secrets my body held that I had yet to unfold.

So I must have been mumbling about my nakedness— slurred whispers begging for missing clothes— because he offered to turn the lights off. He left to flip the switch, and I curled up into a ball. For a second, I laid there in fetal position, my pose remnant of school drills protecting from tornadoes and last ditch efforts at midnight shielding myself from period cramps.

The lights turned off, and he unraveled me to kiss again.

---

There is a certain ownership men get when they hook up with you. They get to savor the taste of your tongue, move their hands along your curves, revel in the knowledge of what the inside of you feels like. They get the power, the ecstasy, that comes with the intimacy of being with you. They forever get to know things about you, see pieces of you that no one else will.

I struggled with this a lot. Losing my innocence was a journey, a harrowing and difficult experience to survive. I wrote poems upon poems about my sexual awakening, worked hard to reconcile my innate teenage horniness with my value burrowed into my innocence. I had to teach myself that kissing wasn't dirty, that I wasn't any less of a person for wanting something sexual. I had to learn to give away that ownership to men, to understand that I could receive something too.

But I didn't grant him the privilege; he stole it. He gets power over me that I never intended to bestow, power that wasn't his to take. My innocence has been gone for a while now.

(Why do I feel like I just lost it?)

---

I don't think I ever said no.

I am good at that— saying no, that is. I never quite know what I want, but I always know what I don't. I'm a connoisseur at rejecting restaurant options, an expert at ending relationships. "No" has always been easy for me, right at the tip of my tongue.

I always thought when it happened, I'd be able to say it. I was never sure if I could stop it, but I knew I would be able to say no. But consent is a hazy line that becomes hazier when you're two too many drinks deep and the world in front of you blurs. When you're trying to remember what exactly he's asking you to do, when you can't muster the concentration to escape what you can hardly tell is happening. (Perhaps consent is not a hazy line at all. Perhaps that is what they tell you to make excuses for the boys who ignore it.)

He asked me to 69. Did you know that I didn't know how that worked until two months ago? My friends explained it to



me one time at dinner. I just assumed it stood for sex— I didn't realize it was another thing by itself. I never had any interest in experimenting with classic sexual position. As they clumsily described the mechanics, we all giggled at the absurdity of a sexual education course to a nineteen year old girl paired with dining hall hamburgers and french fries.

When he asked me, I said no, that I'd throw up if we did. I ended up throwing up anyway. At least I was able to say no to something.

(Part of me wonders if this still counts as sexual assault. I was able to say no to something.)

---

When the nausea hit, I sloppily scrambled to rehook the bra I didn't remember losing. I stumbled into the bathroom. I threw up a lot. I made him leave the bathroom. I didn't want him to lose respect for me.

My friend found me face first in the toilet bowl. Once I emptied the contents of my stomach, I staggered to the side of his bed where my shirt hid, and we both stumbled out of the house. Another friend came. He wrapped his arms around me, and as we walked home, I cried.

My heart broke for myself a little. This moment felt inevitable. I am a girl in college. This is what happens. This felt inevitable. But I didn't think it would happen so soon. This was only my first week of college being single. It seems like boys respect the invisible barrier of another man more than the woman standing in front of them.

Maybe I should be lucky that I got so long. That I got to experience my firsts in safe environments with a boy who loved me, who respected me. That every sexual experience isn't marred by a really bad one. Maybe I should feel lucky. I'm a freshman in college. I made it longer than a lot of women.

(I feel many things, but luck is not one of them)

---

On the walk home, I apologized to my friend endlessly— apologized for making him leave, for being so drunk I couldn't

stand, for crying, for not being able to speak without slurring, for the weather being so cold. I cried and apologized. I'm always doing that. The whole time I couldn't believe that someone else's fingers had been inside me.

We made it home, and I threw up more. I fell asleep on the bathroom floor, tear streaked mascara staining the dorm room toilet.

It took me a full year of kissing to let someone touch me like that. He got to do it in ten minutes. I even apologized before he did. I apologized for not shaving. I didn't even want his fingers inside of me, but I said sorry? I couldn't say no, but I could apologize? The curse of being a woman. To be a teenage girl is to apologize for your existence.

—

There are times now, times when I am staring at my ceiling at 3 am because I no longer sleep, times when I feel myself spiral, hopelessly defending myself to the male gaze. It is as if I am on trial in court— he is the plaintiff and I am the accused, pleading her case not guilty. Not guilty of overreacting, of making false claims. Other times, the roles are reversed and I am victim, attempting to charge him with one count of Sexual Assault and one count of I Will Never Be The Same. Regardless of who prosecutes who, the trial is identical. It is him versus me.

His case goes something like this: “she never said no and how was I supposed to know that she was blacked out and she came onto me and she never said no and her friend left the room so what else was I supposed to do and we didn't even have sex and she never said no.”

Sometimes I am able to answer, to give him the proper response that I learned through all of my time spent burrowed in feminist literature and leading women's clubs. It goes something like: “you cannot consent when you are too drunk and it wasn't your fault and you didn't need to say no and there is no excuse for him and you are so valid in being upset and I am so sorry and you didn't need to say no.”

Most times, though, most times my case is more indefinite.

I realized immediately after that I did not want to do what I did— or have done what was done to me. Did I know while he was touching me? Maybe I did, and it did not register. Maybe I said something and he did not care. I was too drunk to know. He was drunk too. But is that not his responsibility? To ask if I am okay and actually mean it, to see that I am too drunk, to walk away, to notice that my body is screaming no even if I didn't actually say it? Is that not his responsibility? To stop instead of turning the lights off? He could shove his fingers into my body; he could grab all parts of my skin; he could manage to strip me of all of my clothes, but he couldn't ask if I was okay? He couldn't see that I was too drunk? Maybe he just didn't care.

I never make it long enough to see what the jury decides. I'm not sure I ever will.

—

I remember only one coherent thought from that night. "At least I'll have something to write about. Remember all of this so I have something to write about."

I wanted to write about the chemistry homework on his desk from a class that I had a friend in to his navy monogrammed towels that he probably got from his mom for Christmas. I remembered enough to write about, and I did not stop.

I woke up the next morning on the dorm bathroom floor next to the toilet and the orange scraggly bath mat that no one steps on. After entangling myself from my rainbow polka dotted blanket, I shuffled into my bedroom. I sat in my bean bag, opened up my notes app and wrote everything I remembered.

I wrote and I wrote and I wrote. Like a lawyer desperately trying to save their client from death row, I wrote. I wrote as my body shook and my eyes leaked and I resisted the urge to throw up again. I didn't stop writing. I wrote in class when the lectures got boring and I could tune out my professors. I wrote at 3 am with my roommate and her boyfriend asleep in the bed next to me, fingernails clacking on the keyboard. I wrote outside my friend's suite after a party when I was drunk and locked out and sad.

To me, this feels like my most damning piece of evidence—like the part of the movie where the lawyer’s assistant frantically runs in from the back of the courtroom with the last minute detail that the protagonist needs to pull it all together, like when the good guys finally win the court case despite all of the odds. I needed to remember it all, to never stop writing, just so I could get enough words on paper so that no one could ever forget. I needed to remember— I needed to write— because it was my first real case of sexual assault.

---

About three years ago, I wrote a piece about my first time in the city alone. The freedom and exhilaration of burgeoning adolescence was spoiled by a man with blank eyes and a limp fish handshake who would not leave me and my best friend alone. I wrote that being a woman felt like being “a mouse in an open field, staring up at a sky full of hawks.” I could not shake the feeling that the moment was just the beginning. “Sometimes it feels as if I’m just waiting for my own ‘me too’ moment,” I wrote.

Perhaps, even as a naive, inexperienced sophomore in high school, I already understood the workings of the world. I had yet to be kissed, had yet to experience my first boyfriend. I knew nothing of the world of sexuality that lay inevitably before me. Yet, I still echoed the underlying eternal pessimism of womanhood, the almost acceptance that sexual assault is not an “if” – it is a “when.”

Sophomore year me, in all of her cynical glory, was right. It was only a matter of time before my own “me too” moment, until my first case of sexual assault. It feels naive to assume that it would be my last.

---

My eyes still get small when I am drunk. I refuse to drink wine. The smell makes me sick— an annoying inconvenience as an underaged college girl who has little authority over the selection of alcohol. I cried after kissing three boys in the two weeks following and felt nothing for the next ten. My friends worried about me.

I waited for an hour outside of a boy's room for my suitemate, pounded on the door until they let me in. I searched for her shirt hidden in the sheets as she watched with dazed eyes. I wonder if that was how I looked the month prior.

After we talked the next morning, I realized that everything was consensual, that our situations were different. But for a second, when I was in his room helping dress her, that was hard to believe. How many girls had experienced the same thing? How many girls face invisible courts of their own?

I know I will never prosecute him. But still, the trial continues on. I hope that one day I can eliminate the jury, become the judge, and declare him guilty, once and for all.

# Man with an Ark of Gold

*Colin Frier*

## **VERSE 1:**

Out there on the street is a man with a shuffled walk  
You'll get him to speak, but you won't get him to talk  
There's fraudulence in the air, he's breathing in vanity  
The rich charge for their stares, the poor get them for free

## **VERSE 2:**

Newspapers in his socks, he schleps to the capitol  
Pulling like an ox, a gleaming ark of gold  
The only fool to gaze inside died mysteriously  
The man ruled it a suicide, said it happened naturally

## **VERSE 3:**

The wicked king flashed a roguish smile, said, "I'm glad you  
could make it, bum  
We'll take that chest off of your hands and pay you a handsome  
sum  
We got wine, women, fine living, all of it is yours to own"  
The man mulled it over, shivering, said, "I'd like your throne"

## **VERSE 4:**

"Did I hear that right, you tramp?" the king scoffed, eating his  
grapes  
"Was that your little plan when you marched in here with that

crate?

I'm God-ordained, you filthy fool, your life is in my hands  
So leave my sight, eat your gruel, one day you'll understand"

**VERSE 5:**

The hobo turned to leave, a glimmer in his eye  
"You better watch your teeth," he said, "Wisdom you can't buy  
Solomon you're not, my lord, what lurks inside that chest  
Is a lesson you can't afford, and only I know best"

**VERSE 6:**

"Who are you, some prophet? Piss running down your leg  
Whatever's in there, I doubt it has helped you in any way  
It killed a kid, it killed a cow, that don't mean much to me  
Don't need the why, just need the how for immortality"

**VERSE 7:**

"Suit yourself," said the ragged misfit, "I ain't known for tall  
tales  
You can want something without wanting it, with your need  
cloaked in a veil  
I'll leave you be, your majesty, to bask in your priestly pride  
You'll eat your words and think of me when you look inside"

**VERSE 8:**

The creature gone, the rankled king instructed his men to lift  
The ark of gold, the only thing he demanded as a gift  
But when they tapped the box of jacks, they dropped dead on the  
spot  
The king grunted, "That old hack is crazier than I thought"

**VERSE 9:**

Inspecting the scene of the crime, his ego on the fingerprints  
Shrugging, he said, "That's fine, wear gloves to open the lid"  
The last guard, quivering hard, reached out an Adam hand  
He made it further than far, removed the top as planned

**VERSE 10:**

The king jumped back, deathly pale, disbelieving the thing in  
there  
The servant hurled, growing frail, fixed in a ghastly stare  
The treasure enclosed had fingers and toes, ear-to-ear lifeless  
frown  
Crying, the king started, slow, "My son they never found!"

**VERSE 11:**

The gimp returned with a knowing grin, "What have you learned,  
my slave?"  
The choking king, trembling chin, said, "Some men are truly  
depraved  
You give them life and you let them pray and they'll still make  
Hell anew"  
"No," said God, grave, "Sin comes back to you"

**CHORDS - Capo 1 fret**

Am G Am  
Am G Am  
E G D F  
Am E Am



# I Searched For

*Jessica Hsu*

my birth certificate. Both my mother and father told me they  
 could not  
 remember the time I was born. I like to think that my bleary eyes  
 grew  
 hungry for stars. When I tumbled out, I dreamt of every single  
 scattered spot  
 of light flocking magnetically together, I sought to lay mine next  
 to the Star of  
 Bethlehem, & I found holy texts sunken into my mind in strange  
 voices. Blasphemy,  
 every prophet would mutter, at these words. I swear I saw the  
 signs of the coming  
 of my body in its bloody arrival, bruised from all the stories spilt  
 recklessly  
 from my ancestors' tongues. On a carrier designated without  
 blessing, legends  
 latch on hungrily, soon riding astride to proceed towards the  
 chosen monkey  
 valiantly emerging from a rock or to hail Helenus's tragic fore-  
 telling, but  
 always my heart unfurls for Noah and his Ark, the Ark, the ani-  
 mals aboard  
 the Ark — everyone, the snarl of the leopard & the fluttering of  
 bats' wings  
 & the mewing of the lamb. So I picked apart the narratives, mem-  
 ories retold,  
 oxygen from repeated breaths slowly rusting the gutters of my  
 house, & I asked  
 why the sheep were praised so amply, why the sheep were butch-  
 ered the next  
 page, why the sickly sweet tributes of sheep. When the water

recedes, I heard  
the remonstrance. It whispered through a goddess's image im-  
printed on a piece  
of precious rock, every telepathic thought sent to God (and the  
occasional addition  
of Goddess) on my tatami bed for the punctual closing, & the  
prototyped figures  
on an altar my father knelt beneath for no more than minutes. I  
envied drops of water  
rolling down my skin without needing to know where their desti-  
nation lies. I envied  
not knowing the moment stories flicker & truths lodge in the  
mind. I now know the time  
I was born, as the sun burnt me with a kiss  
in the year of the sheep

# hi-res

Jay Paine

*After Tycho's Supernova as photographed  
in X-ray light by the Chandra X-ray Observatory*

How wide did Tycho's pupils  
dilate on that early November night of 1572  
when that new fixture pinned itself  
to the firmament? Did he gasp,  
knowing that fixture proved our celestial realm  
capable of change not unlike humans,  
many of whom give birth before surrendering  
their material bodies to the pool of atoms  
and void? Did his blonde mustache  
curl upward as he smiled, knowing that fixture  
shone in opposition to Aristotle's belief  
that our realm of stars is unchanging  
and eternal in its disposition?  
Did his heart skip a beat when he claimed  
that Star shone brighter than Venus,  
despite it appearing to have been no more than a stellar infant  
newly ripped from the Milky Way's womb?

That Star did not retain its brightness:  
by 1574, its luminosity waned, vanished,  
but not before Tycho  
made it the subject of his astronomical work: *De nova  
et nullius aevi memoria  
prius visa stella*,  
roughly, concerning the Star,  
new and never before seen in the life  
or memory  
of anyone.

Perhaps those before Tycho  
were deprived of witnessing  
a birth. Those after, a death.

...

Centuries later, an observatory orbits  
Earth and angles its four nested mirrors toward the Star's  
scattered remains. Its aperture dilates,  
and an X-ray image is produced  
concerning the remnant,  
new and never before seen in the life  
or memory  
of anyone.

I study this image: plumes of hi-res spectra  
curling green, yellow, red, and with my index finger,  
I trace the impression of the supernova's violet halo, realizing  
somewhere in our galaxy, all that radiation ripples  
across dark fabric as it surrenders  
particles to entropy, and to think Tycho  
was unable to study the contours of its death,  
unable to recognize that fixture was no more than an ancient star  
exploding into unimaginable quantities  
of pure celestial light,  
but he almost had it right:  
for what was its death but a birth,  
a new angel born luminous before dissolving  
into darkness?

# Scars

*Becca Gatewood*

A few months ago, I saw the inside of my hand

Lost my balance

On the mountains

Blood on my friend's sleeves while he wrapped the wound

1 tetanus shot

2 numbing drugs

3 nurses

6 stitches

1 bottle of antibiotics and

10 gauze pads later

I looked back at my hand

The canyon walls of my carved flesh reached for each other

Cells mobilized and divided on the scene

Pus seeped steadily but

Stitches held their ground

My pulse resided in my pounding, patched-up, palm

Then the scar

This scar joined my library of scars

A collection of incidents, accidental and less accidental

My body keeping record of its softness

My broken skin inviting the outside in

But this scar, this scar taught me how to heal

I was humbled by my friend's diligent response to stop the  
bleeding

I was fascinated as the doctor closed the gap with neat sutures  
I was transfixed by my body's determination to mend itself  
I was amused by the toddler who watched in horrified curiosity  
as his mother dug out stitches

I love this scar  
I love the community of people that kept me safe  
Reminding me that my health is not a solo initiative  
I smile when it aches because I know it's still healing

I smile when I ache because I know I'm still healing

Scars are not reminders of blood and broken skin

Scars are kisses, lovingly sealed, reminding you to wear your  
helmet next time

Scars are crocus flowers, blossoming defiantly through the  
snow

Scars are commas, telling you this sentence isn't over yet;  
keep reading

Scars are cotton, so gentle and soft, moving with your  
movement

Scars are kindness, what better example of love do we have  
than healing?

My scars are a response to my pain; they are not my pain  
It took a mountain to learn that

# The Search

*Kasimir Hird*

Eyes wide and full attention  
Always going on, this almost inaudible whistling  
Now a piping, now a pause and back to the search  
Now a piping, now a pause and back to the search!  
Same thin note over, over again  
Telling all the small fries that it's time to begin  
Break time is over and I've gotta find  
Dig-dig-digging up my walls— I'll see where you hide

It's over!  
I can hear your crawling noises. It's over!

From one side to another, it never goes away  
Two noises? Two noises. Must be a whole swarm in my domain  
Of tiny little creatures, far tinier than I'm acquainted with  
If God gave them noise, I'll take it away!

It's over!  
You already know. You already know it's over.

But perhaps— and I'm laughing at this—  
What if it's a complete unknown, something untamed  
And that truth will bring me either peace or despair  
But whether one or the other, no doubt will remain

One's ear fixed to the wall and at every hint of noise tearing out  
a lump of earth, not really hoping to find anything, but simply as  
to do something. It shall not be said that I, who am fighting for  
its peace, have myself destroyed. This is no empty boast, I am  
simply unbeatable.

Back to work now, I've gotta get to it  
Is that the sound of whistling or the pulse of my bloodstream?  
But there it is again, I thought I was safe  
But there it is again, there's too much at stake!  
So hurry hurry hurry for the overseer  
Cuz you never know when he just might appear  
And this growing louder is growing close  
Coming nearer, same thin note

It's over!  
I just spit out my Twix, that's how you know it's over.  
So you lean back from the wall  
Try to grasp it all with your fingernails– the fear and the consequences  
But anxiety?  
Anxiety leads to nothing when you've got luck to back you.



*Scan for performance of this song.*



# Tell Me How to Love You

*Laura Weber*

*tell me how to love you*  
 is what I'm saying when I  
 make my beloved take the  
 love languages quiz.  
 I'm not "just curious,"  
 I need to know how to melt myself into the person  
 you can love back.

my result was words of affirmation  
 but I completely get that you won't write me letters because  
 you're not good with words! yours is quality time  
 and I wrote my homework list microscopically small  
 to fit it all  
 but a movie marathon is how I devote my time  
 and myself  
 to you.

it doesn't matter though because when I  
 cried for a week straight  
 because of  
 how stressed I was,  
 I googled 'self care' and it said to perform  
 a random act of kindness.  
 I know that two days ago I *randomly* picked a lilac for you  
 and yesterday  
 I *randomly* got you chai with honey  
 but today, I will offer you my shoulder and pretend I'm not busy  
 because making sure you feel loved

is how  
I love  
myself.

tell me how to love you  
because *what I mean is*  
let me lay all of my (you-specific) sweetness down  
so it gets into your teeth and they  
stay slathered in  
perpetual sugarcane slime.

*tell me how to be useful*

is what I'm saying when I answer the phone,  
ask how I can help, and actually mean it.  
the computer says we don't have the  
book you want  
and I'm genuinely sorry about it when I hang up  
because your paper is due tomorrow,  
but maybe someone reshelved it so  
I go to the stacks and  
scan like an I-spy. I can't find it.  
I search the library top to bottom and sweat dribbles down my  
back  
as I see it behind the bookshelf, tucked against the wall.  
I call back and say it's on hold and  
you tell me thank you, not knowing there's fog  
in my glasses.

it doesn't matter though  
because my manager saw me searching and  
if I show how much of a  
hard worker I am,  
I will be a non-replaceable asset  
who is too valuable  
to be fired for the time I wore earbuds at the front desk  
and it took me

two whole minutes to realize someone was  
standing there.

I catch my breath and there's  
lactic acid  
in my calves  
but it's 2:00 pm so I pull myself up and check the book drops.  
I sign my name on the checklist  
for the fifth time.

tell me how to be useful  
is *what I mean* because if I don't  
prove my worth every day,  
who's to say if I still have it.

*tell me how to live a life for myself*  
because I've planted a garden of  
other people's favorite flowers.  
when they bloom, I cut the stems to nubs  
and give the bouquets tied in satin.  
when their smiles fade,  
I am only left with dirt cramped under my fingernails

and the need of  
new seeds in my pocket.  
how much of yourself can you give as  
a gift  
before you're barren?

# The Calf

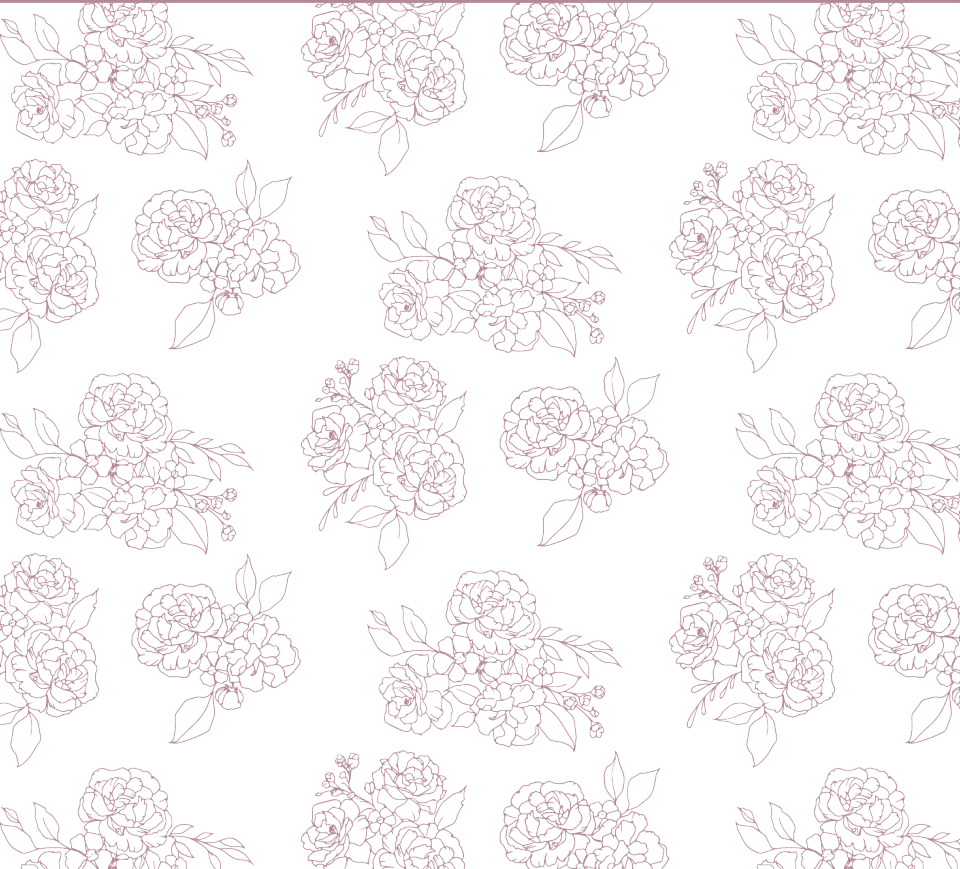
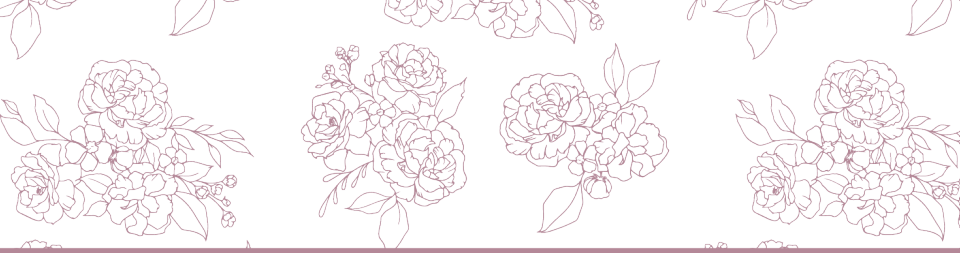
*CJ Younger*

Her bulging emaciation strikes you first. The patchwork skin folded neatly between each slender rib, her neck a deep velvet concave. Yet her distended pink udder is swollen twice the size of your head, veins etched across its bulk. You stand there with your fresh-shaven head and scabbed wrists, looking down at the cow. She meets your gaze, brown eyes beseeching, each ripple fragile as glass.

You are afraid, at first, to touch her there. You crouch down in the prickly grass and grip one thick teat with both hands. It is hot like a fever, and studded with bristles. You pull and squeeze, gently at first and then demanding, until warm, sour milk leaks out onto the grass. It is clotted with soft yellow chunks that collect around the rips in your jeans. Following some base instinct, you lean down and take some into your mouth. The sourness burns the back of your throat. You keep milking until you kneel before the shrunken cow in a sea of curdled milk.

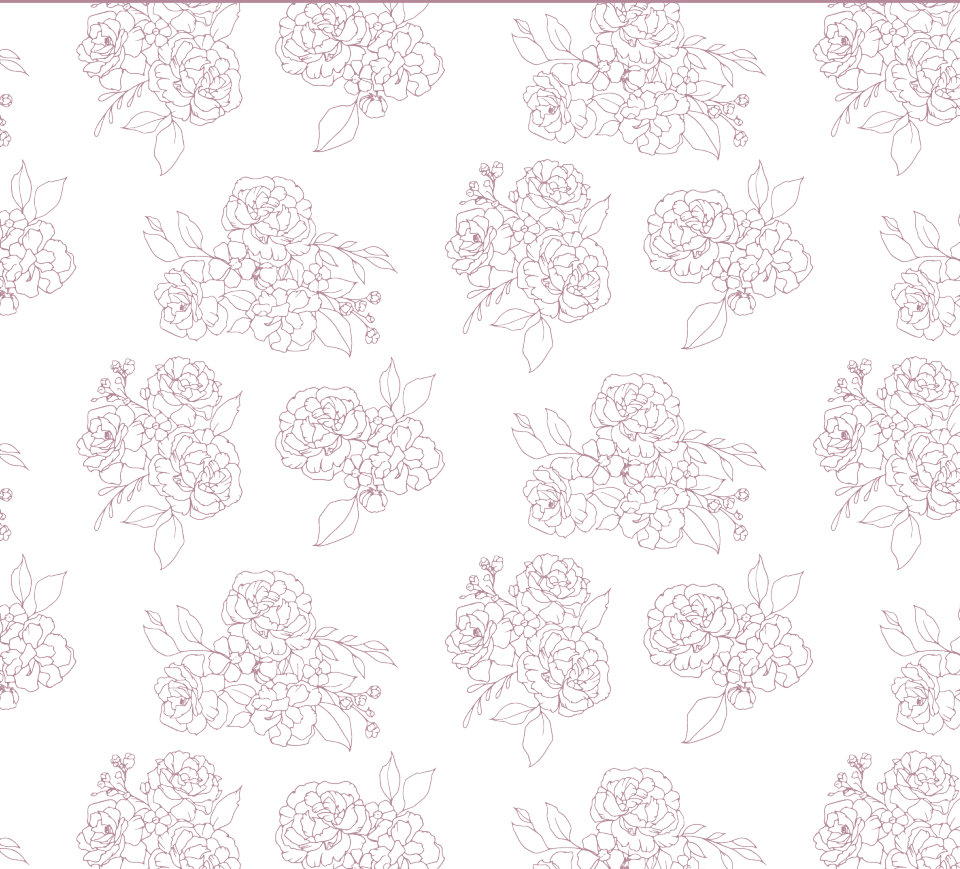
That night you lay tucked between her ribs. The flies buzz in lazy circles and settle on your scalp like big black moles. As the stars begin to wink far above, the cow shudders and they speed away into the darkness. You listen to the thu-thump of her huge heart. You follow the blood pulsing beneath her skin and feel its movement against your own. You wrap your hands around your neck to still the pulsing there but it only becomes magnified against your palms. You did not know how much your skin flexed as blood pumped up through your neck and into your head. You stay awake until sunrise, trapped by the rushing in your veins.







Art





# **Horns**

*Anna Miller*





# Tuna's Big Day

*Esme Belmond*



# I'm Yowling

Kathleen Menjivar



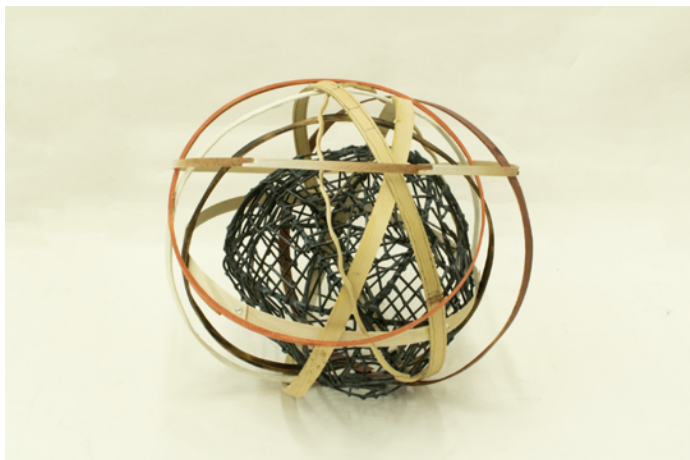
# **Skeleton Eyes**

*Grace Flammang*



# **Walk Among the Wildflowers**

*Annalee Parker*



# Untitled

*Anna Miller*



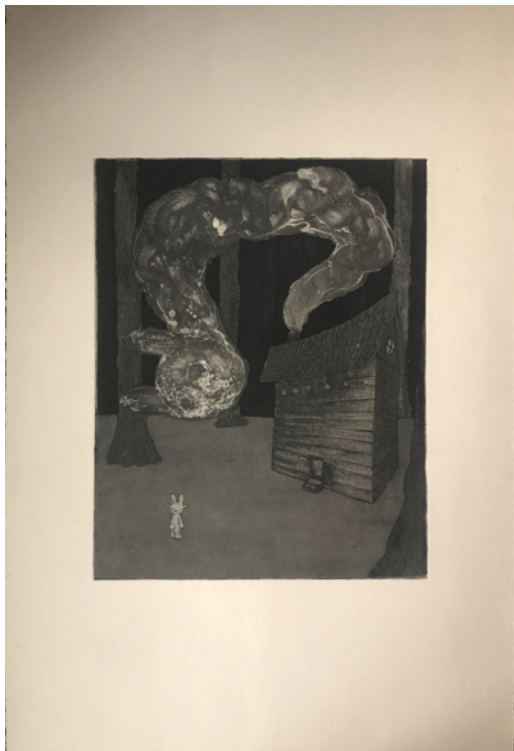
# **David vs. Goliath**

*Hannah Gromen*



# The Father Will Speak Now

*Kathleen Menjivar*



# Untitled

*Grace Flammang*





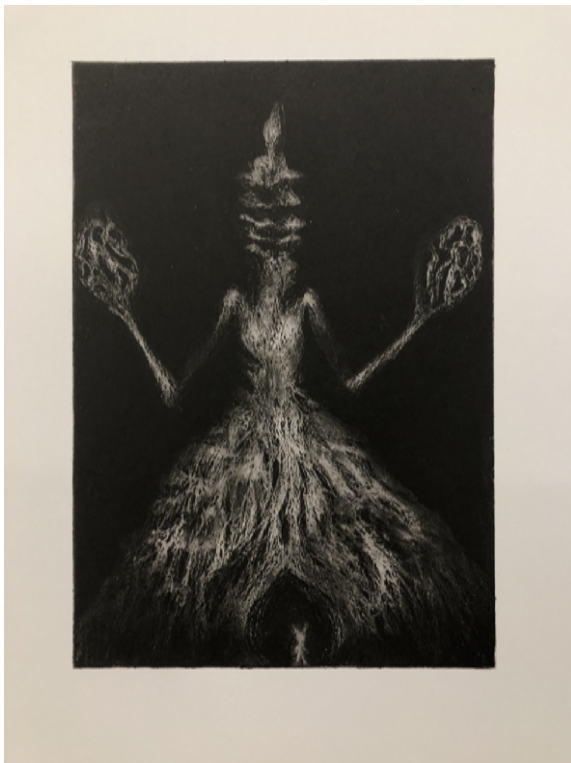
# **Green Roof- Wonderful Collection**

*Anna Miller*



# **Pallas Athena**

*Hannah Gromen*



# Untitled

*Grace Flammang*





Contest Winner

# The Three Mr. Chevaliers and Their Big Bad Wolf

*Attalea Rose*

*Prompt: Happily Ever After...?*

Felice had drowned her undernourished figure in inky black lace and brocade. Her sallow cheeks had been smeared with blush three shades too red for her complexion, and her ash-blonde hair had been woven up into delicate knot. She waited outside the lawyer's office on a gray metal bench, the air-conditioned building pricking her skin with gooseflesh. Her beaded, black clutch was clasped tightly between terse, white-tipped fingers.

Felice's three elder brothers arrived all at one in a furious flurry of hastened paces. Charles. Henri. Laurent. Their polished shoes clicked against the quarry tiles. Charles, the eldest, slicked back his hair with one steady hand while clutching a crumpled copy of Grandfather's will in the other. Henri had his hands tucked into the pockets of his overcoat and clenched his jaw. Laurent, the youngest, trained his blood-shot eyes on Felice's face.

Felice stood as they approached, and Laurent snorted at the unseemly sight of his sister. "Really playing the part of doting, grieving granddaughter, aren't you." He wore a black overcoat and a beige-and-white plaid tie.

"You're pale," Henri observed tactlessly. His overcoat was taut around his broad shoulders, and he had loosened his fiery red necktie.

"Felice always was the actress among us," Charles stated. He refused to make eye contact with Felice. "I suppose if we'd been a

bit more industrious, we wouldn't be in this mess." Felice's gaze fell to the floor.

"We've missed you three," Felice whispered to the tiles. "Grandfather and I." She fiddled with her clutch, and the worn threads that kept the beads attached threatened to snap.

"I called often enough," Charles griped.

"Work," Laurent sufficed.

Henri remained silent.

The lawyer opened his office door without a word. No nonsense, he ushered the gaggle of siblings into his minimally furnished office and set his calloused hands on his mahogany desk. "You can't contest the will," the lawyer stated. His wire-rimmed spectacles slid down his nose. "The late Mr. Chevalier signed his will seven years ago and was of sound mind for the following half decade. You won't win."

Charles clenched his jaw and set his crumpled copy of the will on the table. "My grandfather promised the villa to me and my wife on our wedding day."

"He promised me the hunting estate," Henri demanded.

"And he promised the cottage to me!" Laurent added.

The lawyer rubbed his temples. "All properties rightfully belong to Ms. Chevalier."

Three piercing gazes dug into Felice and she forced herself not to flinch. Her brothers would be relentless, holding a grudge until they died. That is the way of the Chevalier family. Felice's heart curdled as she realized that after this day, this hour, this moment, if she did not yield, her dear brothers would never speak to her again. "They can have them," Felice whispered.

"Ms. Chevalier—" the lawyer tried to interject. The three Mr. Chevaliers' gazes turned predatory.

"It's what I want." Felice stuck out her chin.

The lawyer sighed. "As you wish, Ms. Chevalier."

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In the following six months, Felice shed her black and waited for word from her brothers. She spent her days in the Paris townhouse, the only property to her name, curled up

with a weathered book in the worn-leather chair of her late grandfather's study. She doted on the daily post, but it remained emaciated. She moved the property's two telephones into the study and her bedroom. She occupied those two rooms, and only those two rooms as best as she was able.

On a crisp early summer morning, Felice stuffed a white sundress, freshly laundered undergarments, and a pale nightgown into a suitcase and called a taxi. If her brothers wouldn't visit her, she would simply have to check in on them.

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Laurent was first.

The cottage was nestled between oak trees with a century each to their name. Their boughs shaded the petite structure and its lush front garden, populated with primroses, daffodils, and tulips. The cottage itself had a straw roof, cream walls, and white shutters. Dappled sunlight would drift through the tree boughs and dance across the cottage walls, dripping in through the shutters to brighten the well-furnished rooms and negate the need for electric lighting.

At least, that is how Felice remembered the cottage from vacations there with Grandfather. She arrived at the cottage a little past noon. As she stepped out of the taxi and stood at the end of the stone path that led to the white-painted front door, her eyes widened at the wilted, dead flowers and the tightly closed shutters. She tip-toed up the path and rapped on the door. Once. Twice. Thr—

“No solicitors!” Laurent bellowed through the door.

“It's me,” Felice shouted back. “Felice.”

The door's lock clicked, then Laurent was standing in the doorway. He was wearing a baggy white t-shirt with mystery stains splattered across the front. His eyes were blood-shot, and his hair stuck up in every which direction. He smelled like whiskey, an earthy sweetness that should have belonged to the flowers.

“What do you want?” Laurent asked, his eyes narrowing.

“I wanted to see you.”



“You’ve seen me.” Laurent tried to slam the door, but Felice slapped her palm against the wood to keep it propped open.

Felice set her jaw. “I’m staying for the night. I’ll leave in the morning.”

Laurent let go of the door. “Fine.”

Felice followed him into the cottage, into living room. Half the furniture was missing, corduroy loveseats and chairs replaced with dead air. The room was stuffy, and Felice’s nose wrinkled. The oakwood coffee table was littered with empty glass bottles.

“Guest bedroom’s upstairs,” Laurent said with a wave of his hand.

The stairs creaked as Felice lugged her suitcase up them, to the end of the little hallway where the guest bedroom was. The furniture was all there, at least. The bed with its lilac quilt and floral sheets. The boudoir with its arched mirror. The squat oakwood dresser with its ornately carved handles. But a thick layer of dust coated everything. When Felice lowered her nose to the sheets, they reeked of stagnation, musty and stale. Dead bugs littered the floor. Their spindly legs were pointed toward the ceiling, shell bodies resting against the hardwood.

Felice hauled her suitcase onto the bed and clambered atop it, not trusting any other surface in the room. She ignored the bug carcasses plastered to the soles of her shoes.

Felice had spent months of life in this room, in this cottage of light.

Laurent had ruined it.

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“Laurent!” Felice shrieked, barreling down the stairs. She couldn’t see her feet in the dark and relied on muscle memory to carry her to safety. Smoke followed her down the stairs. It billowed and swirled, obscuring the ceiling. “Laurent!” she sobbed.

Laurent was passed out in the only remaining corduroy chair. He was slumped over himself, skin yellowish and forehead perspiring. Felice shoved him by the shoulders. “Laurent, we have to get out!” Tears wet her cheeks as Laurent stumbled out of

unconsciousness.

“Whatsamatter,” he slurred. His nose wrinkled as he took in the stench of smoke.

“Come on!” Felice grabbed Laurent’s elbows and hauled him to his feet, but he lost his balance and toppled forward, pinning Felice to the ground.

“Dammit, Felice!” Laurent growled as he rolled off his sister. “What’s the matter with—”

Felice was on her feet again, pulling Laurent after her. On the way out the door, Laurent had enough of a mind to tuck a bottle of whiskey under his arm and snatch two coats off the coatrack.

They stood across the street, shrouded in the two coats, Felice in her pale, lace nightgown and Laurent in his stained, white shirt, watching the cottage go up in flames. The straw roof crumpled, the protective oak tree boughs smoldered.

Felice twirled the ends of her hair between her fingers and pressed them to her nose. They smelled of the smoke. Laurent took a swig of his whiskey. He offered the bottle to Felice. She drank in time with the windows shattering.

\*\*\*

Henri was second.

Felice and Laurent used a neighbor’s phone to call a taxi and traveled through the night. They arrived at the hunting estate at dawn. The hunting lodge was a two-story log cabin with a gable roof, and it was surrounded by a lush forest of oak trees. Birds twittered unseen, tucked into the boughs. The crisp air cleansed the smoke remnants from their lungs.

Henri greeted them outside, from atop a sorrel Arabian horse. He cantered around the side of the hunting lodge, emerging from the woods with a rifle strapped across his broad chest. His brown-leather, western saddle was embroidered with red thread, the same crimson red as the wool saddle blanket. Henri pulled on the reins and slowed to trot as he neared his siblings. Two other men atop flaxen appaloosas hovered near the edge of the woods. “What happened?” he asked with a furrowed brow, noting their disheveled appearances.

“The cottage burned down,” Felice answered. Laurent was unresponsive, staring into thin air. His whiskey bottle did not last the taxi ride. “I came to visit, and then there was a fire.”

“Head on inside. I’ll be there in a moment.” Henri tapped his heels against the horse’s sides, and away they cantered around the other side of the hunting lodge, presumably toward the stables.

The inside of the hunting lodge was a trophy vault. The high-ceilinged living room had animal pelts and taxidermy heads plastered to every available inch of wall space. Three deer-antler chandeliers dripped from the ceiling. The brown-leather couch was draped with a bear pelt, the animal’s head mounted above the unlit red-brick fireplace. Grandfather had shot that one.

“Clothes first,” Henri said, once he’d rejoined his siblings. He procured well-fitting walnut riding pants and a black button-down for Laurent and an ill-fitting cherry-red button down and black riding pants for Felice.

Back in the living room, Laurent and Felice perched on the couch while Henri shifted his weight from foot to foot. “You can stay in the guest rooms for tonight. Call the insurance company and a taxi, phone is in the study,” Henri said. He made eye contact with Felice. “I’m sure Laurent can stay at the Paris townhouse in the meantime?”

Felice bit her lip and swirled her fingers in the fur of the bear pelt. “Well, actually, couldn’t we stay—” Henri strode across the room and was gone.

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Laurent went out hunting with Henri that afternoon before the taxi was set to arrive the next morning. He rode a white thoroughbred alongside Henri’s sorrel Arabian while Felice waited with a book by the phone in the study for the insurance company to call back.

Her brothers burst into the house around noon with the other two men, Henri’s friends, full of boisterous laughter and jovial conversation. Felice darted out of the study to join them.

“Oh, Felice!” Laurent exclaimed. “Speak of the devil. I’m not

going back to Paris with you.”

Felice’s brow furrowed. “What?”

“I’m going to stay here for a bit.”

“Then, I’m staying, too.”

Henri and Laurent glanced sideways at one another and their grins drooped. “Felice,” Henri whispered, “You’d like it better back in Paris. This property never suited you.” He grabbed Felice by the shoulders before bringing her in for a hug. “Go on home.”

“But—” The men were already drifting away, toward the kitchen.

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The smoke tickled their noses in the middle of the night, dredging them from sleep. Well, the smoke and Felice’s screaming. “Fire!” she shrieked. “Fire! Fire!” She ran down the hallway, banging on the bedroom doors with closed fists. “We have to get out!”

Henri and Laurent stumbled from their bedrooms, pulling coats over their loose nightclothes. They stomped down the stairs and out the front door, to the yard. The roof was ablaze, flames licking the log walls. “The stables,” Henri hissed, dashing around the side of the house to free the horses. They galloped away from the house, toward the street, necks flailing. Henri’s two friends ran after the horses.

The three siblings sat along the road, watching the hunting lodge as it smoldered. Felice was in her lace nightgown and her ash-blond hair was loose around her pale shoulders. In the moonlight, she was translucent.

“What now?” Laurent asked.

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Charles was last.

The villa was settled on fourteen acres of wheat fields and a two-acre apple orchard. The apple trees were in neat rows at the front of the villa, the wheat fields to the sides and behind. The villa was three-stories and had white-brick walls and a black gable roof.

It was the favorite of Grandfather’s properties, and the one

where Felice had spent the most time with him before he got sick. They would read together in the shade of the apple trees, plucking ripe apples when they grew hungry. “An apple, please, dear,” Grandfather would say, “the sweetest one” or “the juiciest one” or “the crispest one.” Felice would set her book down and wander the trees, dodging curious bumblebees in her quest for the apple Grandfather requested.

The villa was the hardest property to give up.

As the taxi rolled across the dusty driveway, Felice stared at the decrepit state of the property, at the wilting crops, at the brown-leaved apple trees despite the lush warmth of early summer.

The taxi sluggishly rolled to a stop a few feet from the front door. Charles’ wife, Isabel, a petite woman with a sheet of hair to her waist, had seen it approaching, and greeted the three siblings as they clambered out of the taxi. “We’ve had a day,” Laurent grumbled.

Charles and Isabel treated the misplaced siblings to a lunch of turkey-cucumber sandwiches, ripe strawberries, freshly baked sourdough bread, and aged red wine in the dining room, which had soaring windows obscured by thick, mulberry-purple, velvet curtains. Charles sat at the end of the spruce wood table, Isabel to his right, the siblings scattered about the other seats.

“Terrible tragedies,” Charles commented between sips of wine.

“Awful,” Henri lamented, thinking of his horses boarded out to strangers.

“Horrible,” Laurent added, thinking of his lost bottles of whiskey.

Charles tapped his silver fork against his plate. “I’ll send you all back to Paris with the funds to get back on your feet.” Felice linked. “Back to Paris?” she asked. Her hands clenched around her silverware.

“Yes, back to Paris.”

“No.” Felice glared at Charles across the table.

Charles sighed and shook his head. “Felice, don’t be

difficult.”

“Why can’t we all stay here with you?”

Charles pinched his lips and his eyes narrowed, the expression one would give to a petulant child. “Because you’ll be happier in Paris.”

Felice set her jaw and reached across the table for the candle centerpiece. The flame flickered as Felice carried it to the velvet curtains and held it to the fabric, waiting for it to catch.

“What are you doing?!” Laurent shouted. Felice pressed the candle to the next curtain, then the next, then dashed across the room for another curtain, before Charles wrestled the candle from her hands. It was too late. The fire climbed upward, jumping from curtain to curtain.

“Go!” Charles ordered. His siblings and wife obeyed, fleeing the dining room, leaving Charles and Felice alone with the burning curtains. “You have always been selfish!” Charles hissed.

“I thought that’s what it meant to be a Chevalier!” Felice bit back. Charles’ lips snarled. He fixed one last glare on his little sister, then he slammed the door shut between them. “No!” Felice rammed her shoulder against it, but it refused to budge.

Felice stumbled backward, searching for another way out. “Laurent!” The windows evaded her. “Henri!” Her lungs embraced the smoke, gasping and inhaling and guzzling the ash. “Charles!” She clawed at her throat and collapsed to her knees, begging it to stop. And there she lay, a pallid woman, huffing and puffing as the house fell down around her.



