



TRILLIUM

2013–2014



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sapio-sexy

Mary DiPasquale

You fascinate me, mon cheri.
I want to curl up in the crease behind your ear
so that I hear what you hear -
then I'll take a peek inside your eyes and see if they expand and
contract just like mine.

Bella donna,
I want to sneak inside your mind,
and leave kisses on the doorstep of every passion you harbor.

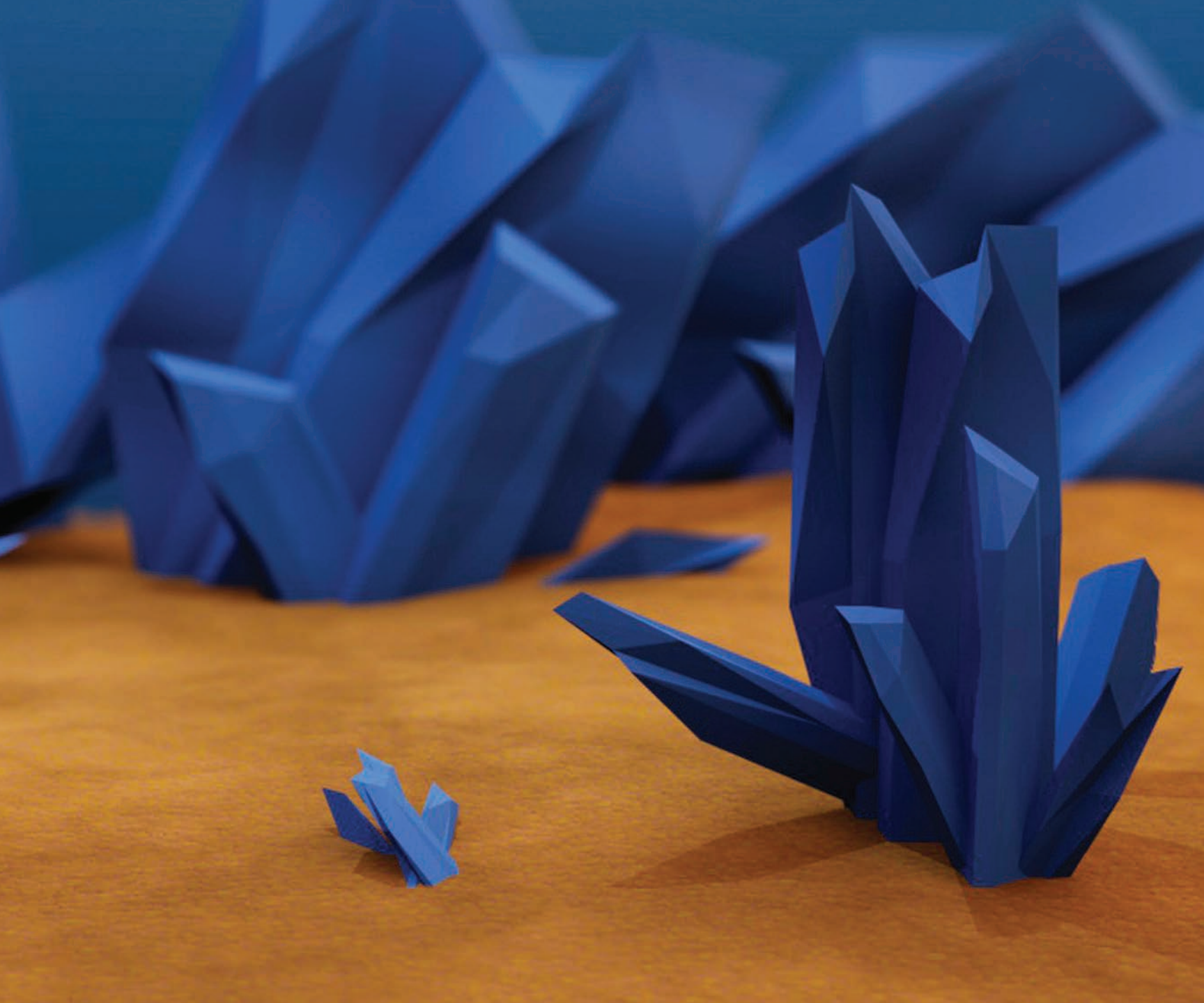
I hunger to walk through the maze that is the wrinkles of your brain
until I know you.

I want to brush fingerprints on your soul as I leave,
So that when you need someone to come to, you'll find a match in
me.

I want to touch you
without touch;
And speak you with the slightest stroke of my tongue...

My heart senses you like you are in surround sound -
It is your lips I want to kiss (my love...)





Neverland

Cara Daniello

Fly off to Neverland,
Where hearts grow old and dreams stay young.
Adventure into the spirit of childhood,
Dare to do what you wished you had before
Innocence was snatched away
With only a trace of the fairy dust of youth.
Lie down in the land where fairies dwell,
Greedily suckling at the bosom of time.
Forget not what you have learned,
But learn to forget the way you learned it.
Is it a discovery of something new,
Or a loss of something hidden within?
Fly away to Neverland, but never land
Where souls are hidden away and left to wither
In solitude
While the façade of happiness lingers
On a sting of gossamer spells
And fairies' false enchantments.

1972

Sarah Healy

The doormat hadn't welcomed anyone home in quite some time. The wind blew as the sun set. A cool autumn breeze. It was not something this area was used to, but it was something that could grow appealing. An unkempt field of sunflowers moved slightly and revealed two black birds as it did. Opposite the field lay a shed—a shed that held the necessary equipment to maintain the sunflowers. Adjacent to the shed was a house. A blue pick-up truck was parked directly in front of the stairs that led to the porch. Rust gathered atop the wheels. It showed no sign of leaving. The house was white with seven windows, all of which were open slightly but covered with lace curtains. A small yellow table sat beside a porch swing, which swung freely now that it was newly unoccupied. The screen door was positioned slightly left of center. It closed quietly and Gertrude slowly made her way to an old brown recliner.

The room in which Gertrude sat was small, but not uncomfortable. A table supporting a lamp had found a permanent home near the recliner. The books and the shelves that held them were covered in dust, as was the mantelpiece. However, the pictures that sat atop the mantelpiece looked as though they had been recently cleaned.

Gertrude carefully positioned herself in the recliner. She pulled a folded letter from her apron pocket. The letter had known no other home. She unfolded it without hesitation and gazed at the printed words. She did not read it. No, she had memorized it the day she received it.

The letter she held was dated September 7, 1971. It had been a year since then, but her grasp on the words had never loosened. It didn't matter how long he'd been missing. It only mattered how long it would take him to come back home.

Gertrude lost her husband ten years ago, but she was not left alone. The two had raised their grandson, although she was not aware she would be doing the hardest part on her own. His name was Jacob and his pictures lined the various hallways of the house. When Jacob turned eighteen, his friends had all signed up for the war. Jacob didn't.

"I'll fight, I will," he always said, but he had always avoided the line to sign his name. He had wanted to fight, but he had hoped he wouldn't have to. Not this time, at least. He had wanted to drive Sally around in his pick-up truck. He had wanted to clean up the sunflowers so his grandmother would have something to look at while she did her crochet on the porch. He had wanted to get a job at the hardware store in town. He had wanted much more than his eighteen years had given him, but on a Monday afternoon, his number was called and, even though he hadn't left yet, all he found himself wanting was to come home.

It was July 1, 1970 when Gertrude took Jacob to the bus stop. The sun was shining, but no one noticed.

"Your grandfather would be so proud of you." Jacob nodded slightly, and hesitantly climbed out of the truck. Gertrude followed.

"Be strong. Stay safe. And come home. I love you," was all she

said. All he did was cry. "Be strong," she whispered again and he was gone.

Gertrude had received several letters from Jacob while he was away. She kept them in a box placed on her bedside table. But it was the letter she received September 7, 1971, only a year after he left, that she kept nearest to her at all times.

It was late evening when someone knocked on her door. It was a sad knock, but a gentle one. Her heart dropped as her eyes met with those of the officer. He was a handsome man; young, but aged with the duty of carrying the loss of so many others. Gertrude took the letter that he held out and hugged him without thought. He didn't smile—he couldn't, but his eyes met hers once more. He nodded and left. Gertrude sat down on her porch swing before carefully opening the letter that informed her that Jacob was missing in action. She was desperate to know more, but was only met with the few lines typed on the page in front of her.

Gertrude had heard nothing since that day and was half thankful for that, as she knew there were worse letters she could have received. She folded the letter back to its original form and placed it into the pocket of her apron, hopeful that the next letter she would receive would be from Jacob himself, stating that he was coming home.

She placed her hand on the outside of her pocket and patted the letter softly as her eyes wandered around the room. And they wandered for several minutes until they fell on a pair of athletic sneakers in the corner opposite her as they did every night. "I told that boy to put those away before

An Ode to Knobby Knees

Rosa Ferraro-Gómez

Driving on Thyme Avenue, Dinah hardly recognized the Sailor Man's Crest. Aside from the overcast drear so common for April mornings, the color had been drained from the summer land of her childhood by sleek, slate condominium complexes and hotel chains. All of the quaint hotels, motels, and bungalows were gone.

All, except for one.

The Carousel Hotel still sat on the corner of Thyme and Tuberosa Street, slouching and sick now. Pulling over, Dinah parked her Range Rover but remained inside. After a moment, she dared to focus her gaze on the hotel: its once gold walls had been weather-beaten and marred in graffiti, its once Olympic-sized swimming pool had been warped into a tub of mildew, and its carousel roof fixture had almost entirely deteriorated.

Stepping out of her car, Dinah was greeted by a waft of ocean musk and the shrill gossip of the seagulls. They knew what was happening today.

For months, the controversy surrounding the Carousel's fate had made statewide headlines. Supporters had pushed for the landmark hotel to be restored, while opponents had countered that the restorations would cost more than their worth. The verdict had been reached two weeks ago: the Carousel had been condemned and scheduled for demolition this afternoon at two o'clock.

It was for no other reason that Dinah had returned to the Sailor Man's Crest. Although a lifetime had passed, Dinah needed to watch the wrecking ball pulverize the hotel into pieces—and she needed to watch it in person.

However, as Dinah approached the Carousel, the conviction evaporated right up from her feet. There was a frenzy of reporters, news vans, police officers, and spectators encircling the hotel up ahead. Of course Dinah had expected a crowd, but she had never anticipated the resemblance it would bear to that August morning, twenty-five years ago. **

It had been a tradition for Dinah and her parents to vacation at the Carousel with the DeSegretti's. Dinah's father knew Mr. DeSegretti from college, and, every year, the two families would book a suite for four days in August. In that time, Dinah and the DeSegretti's younger daughter, Natalie, would be inseparable.

That final summer though, things were different.

Dinah had sensed it as soon as the DeSegretti's arrived in the Carousel's lobby. Although Mr. and Mrs. DeSegretti were the sparkling duo they always were, Natalie's soda-pop personality had gone flat, and her older sister was missing.

"Is Marie not coming?" Dinah's mother asked.

Mrs. DeSegretti smiled. "No, Marie's spending time with her Princeton roommates—boy I tell ya, that college age, how gabbados' they get! Say, you

do something different with your hair?"

"Yeah, yeah, I went lighter with my highlights."

"Jesus, I need to find a new hairstylist. The one I was seeing—"

"Oh madon'!" Dinah's father exclaimed. "Let's check in, huh? Then you's two can talk about your hair, your nails, and whateva' else."

Their suite was the unit directly by the beach that summer, on the third floor. There were three bedrooms, a kitchenette, a bathroom, and a living room. The furnishings in each room were a combination of beige and varying shades of blue. Helping her parents with their luggage, it was the first time Dinah noticed the shadow of stains on the carpet, the nicks and coffee rings on the end tables, and the aged feel to the comforters.

Once the two families had their belongings in the hotel room, Dinah unpacked alongside Natalie. The girls were sharing the middle bedroom again, which somehow seemed smaller without Marie. Bustling around each other, the girls made occasional eye-contact and exchanged grins, but no words were spoken. Dinah's brows knitted. Did Natalie not want to be her friend anymore?

"What?"

"No, no, nothing." Dinah smiled. "You just look...different."

It was the partial truth. Although she was still as blonde, petite-framed, and knobby-kneed as Dinah had remembered, Natalie had sprouted long legs and

enough for a real bra. Dinah flinched at an unfamiliar sting then. Staring down at her own body, she frowned at her flat chest, chubby stomach, and short legs.

"Thanks, I guess."

"Girls," Dinah's mother poked her head into the bedroom, "get your suntan lotion. We're going to the pool."

Down at the pool, Mrs. DeSegretti and Dinah's mother oiled themselves up while Mr. DeSegretti and Dinah's father played shuffleboard, puffing on their fat cigars. Natalie was sitting on the white-lined edge of the pool with her CD player in her lap. Listlessly, she kicked through the water, appearing lost in the bright ripples and their shadows.

"Natalie!" Dinah popped up next to her.

Pushing her headphones askew, Natalie offered Dinah one ear. "Huh?"

"Why don't you come in the pool?" Dinah pulled off her goggles.

"I don't feel like swimming."

"Why?" Dinah hoisted herself out of the water with a splash. "Come on, we can play Marco Polo, or—"

"I said I don't wanna." Natalie snapped. "Besides, I'm sick."

"With what? A fever?" Dinah reached her hand up to Natalie's forehead, but Natalie swatted at it immediately. "Ouch! What'd you do that for?"

Narrowing her eyes, Natalie shot to her feet and marched away from Dinah, falling into a lounge chair next to Mrs. DeSegretti. Together, both Mrs. DeSegretti and Dinah's mother turned to Natalie before looking back to Dinah.

"She hit me!" Dinah told her mother later when everyone was leaving the

pool. "She said she felt sick, so I went to take her temperature and she hit me."

Dinah's mother sighed, shrugging her tan-freckled shoulders. "Her ma says she's taking Marie's move to college real hard, but I don't know. I don't know. Just give Natalie her space for the rest of the day, okay Dee?"

Dinah nodded.

That evening, dinner was at the families' favorite restaurant in the Sailor Man's Crest, La Vigna. Although the tables were still draped in white tablecloths, the entire back wall still covered in a scenic mural, and the ceiling still lined in plastic grapevines, Dinah felt there was something different about La Vigna—like how the Christmas tree never seemed that big or that bright once Dinah learned Santa Claus was a crock.

Whatever the reason, Dinah abandoned her efforts and sat in between her parents without hesitation; she knew her mother wanted her to leave Natalie alone. Doing so actually proved easy, since Natalie wouldn't even look in Dinah's direction.

"We should skip the boardwalk tonight." Mr. DeSegretti suggested once the waiter had taken everyone's order. "The news said there's gonna be a meteor shower. We should just grab some blankets, some beach chairs—"

"A bottle of chianti." Mrs. DeSegretti added in tune.

Mr. DeSegretti laughed. "And a bottle of chianti. What d'ya guys say?"

While Dinah's parents praised the idea, Dinah and Natalie whined in protest.

"Oh c'mon, girls." Mrs.

DeSegretti coaxed. "The boardwalk will be there tomorrow night and the night after and the night after that. Besides, aren't you girls getting too old for those rides and arcades?"

After the families set themselves up a yard or so shy of the shore, Dinah kicked off her flip-flops and wandered down to the ocean. It stretched out black and rolling in front of her, the full moon's reflection a mere spotlight, and the water rushed over her feet, warm and milky from a previous storm.

"I'm sorry about hitting you."

Jumping a little, Dinah realized Natalie had come to her side. She sighed: "It's okay. Your mom said you miss Marie since she went to college..."

Natalie scoffed, "Jesus, Dee, you're gullible."

"What?"

Dinah watched as Natalie opened her mouth to add something, but quickly gave a never-mind-shake of her head. She stepped closer to the ocean then, and Dinah followed her.

"I can tell you anything, right?"

Natalie asked, looking to Dinah.

"Of course you can!"

"And you'll keep it secret?"

"Cross my heart!"

"Hope to die?"

"Yes, Natalie."

Returning her gaze to the ocean, Natalie hesitated again. "Marie doesn't go to college—she ran away with her black boyfriend. I heard Mom and Dad talking one night, so they don't know I know."

Dinah stared at Natalie, unsure of how to respond.

“How could I miss Marie?” Natalie continued. “Don’t you remember what a bitch she was? Always teasing me with that stupid nickname, ‘Knobby-Knees-Natalie.’ But I do, I mean, I am...I am jealous of her.”

“Jealous! Why would you be jealous?”

“Because...” Natalie focused on

the water licking at her calves, “she got away.”

From what? Dinah started to ask. But she could see that Natalie was trembling, and so she grabbed her hand instead. Natalie gave a wan grin and dropped her head on Dinah’s shoulder. The girls remained like that for a while, the only noise around them



the shh of the water against the sand.

“Dec!” Dinah’s mother called soon. “C’mon, it’s getting late!”

Dinah let go of Natalie’s hand and left her by the ocean. Back at the camp, Dinah’s father was yawning, Mrs. DeSegretti was slurring her words, and there was a glaze to Mr. DeSegretti’s eyes. As they packed up, Mr. DeSegretti volunteered to stay on the beach with Natalie.

“Are you sssure?”

“Yeah, go and get some rest.”

Mr. DeSegretti assured his wife, kissing her wine-stained mouth. In a lower voice then, he smirked against her hair, “Don’t worry, Natalie won’t keep me too long.”

Dinah awoke later that night to Mr. DeSegretti and Natalie returning to the suite. Rolling over, Dinah mumbled and began to doze off again. But when Natalie didn’t come into the room after a few minutes, Dinah sat up and climbed out of the bed. She could hear something outside the bedroom door as she drew closer to it. Carefully, Dinah pulled the door open.

Through the slit, Dinah saw the shadowed outline of Mr. DeSegretti. He was pacing like a caged panther Dinah once saw at a fair, running his hands through his hair, and muttering to himself.

Looking past Mr. DeSegretti, Dinah searched the living room for Natalie. Although the room was dark, Dinah knew Natalie’s blonde hair would pierce through. She wasn’t near the front window, the couch, or the kitchenette. Dinah adjusted herself. She wasn’t in the bathroom, or—

Mr. DeSegretti ripped open the

bedroom door, throwing Dinah onto her back with her nightshirt hiked above her waist. As he sprang forward, streaks of outside light illuminated him, freezing Dinah's blood: his face was twisted as though he smelled something foul, and his eyes, plunging to Dinah's exposed panties, belonged to a shark sniffing blood. It was hardly a second before Mr. DeSegretti lunged for Dinah.

"Honey..." Mrs. DeSegretti moaned. Behind him, the living room brightened with the fluorescents from their bedroom, and Mr. DeSegretti stopped close enough for his warm, booze breath to beat on Dinah's cheeks. "Honey...it's three in the morning...come to bed already."

"In a second, honey."

Threatening Dinah with his glare, Mr. DeSegretti lingered in front of her for a minute more. When he finally retreated to his bedroom and Dinah heard the door close, she realized she had soaked herself in piss.

A tear landed hotly on Dinah's cheek, startling her back to the present. She remembered the Carousel that following day. Mrs. DeSegretti was hysterical as the police arrived with their search dogs, and a rubbernecking mob soon surrounded the hotel. Dinah's parents barricaded her in their bedroom; a rerun of 7th Heaven on the T.V., mistaking the chaos for what had triggered her crying.

One by one, the police questioned Dinah's parents and the DeSegretti's in the living room. When they questioned Mr. DeSegretti, he led the police to believe that Natalie had a habit of "sneaking off with boys." Although part of Dinah burned to

run out into the living room and scream, "It was you! You! You killed Natalie!" a larger part of her still smelled the urine on her thighs.

The police combed the Sailor Man's Crest and the surrounding areas for Natalie, and the DeSegretti's appeared on the local news station. While Mrs. DeSegretti pleaded for Natalie to come home, or, if she couldn't, for the person who had her to have a heart, Mr. DeSegretti stayed silent and poker-faced next to her. Dinah rushed to the bathroom after watching the broadcast with her parents and spewed vomit into the toilet.

But as months passed without one trace of Natalie found, the cops and the media moved on to other cases, Dinah's parents resumed their nine-to-five lives, and the DeSegretti's relocated to Baltimore. Dinah, however, couldn't forget weekly night terrors ensured that—or dismiss the fact that Natalie, whether dead or alive, was out there, somewhere.

So when the Carousel made the news that next spring, Dinah was convinced Natalie had been found and Mr. DeSegretti had been arrested. Only, that wasn't the case. An anchorman with an obvious toupee announced instead that the Carousel was going belly-up, its revenue having been straggled by the negative press of the "Missing Montville Girl."

A headline. A cautionary tale. Natalie DeSegretti would never be known as anything else, and every day after that August morning, Dinah had struggled under the weight of that. Natalie was her best friend! How could she have been such a coward?

At two o'clock, Dinah stood on the

outskirts of the spectators. She wasn't positive if watching the Carousel's demolition would alleviate her any, but she owed her presence there for Natalie.

The wrecking ball swung into the front of the Carousel with a roar, disappearing into a bursting cloud of debris. When it fell away, the demolition crew scraped the opening wider, exposing the hotel's rotting skeleton.

Some of the rooms revealed prodded at Dinah's earliest memories of vacationing there: in that room, Marie's hermit crab had gotten loose and ended up in Dinah's father's coffee cup; in another room, Dinah had watched *Scream* with Natalie and Marie and hadn't been able to sleep; and outside of that room, Natalie had beaten Dinah and Marie in a *Skip-It* contest. Dinah smiled to herself.

By the time the crew reached the suite of that final summer, the rest of the hotel was already a mound of rubble. Dinah started to laugh as the demolition claw rose to the suite, and, in one movement, all that remained of the Carousel came tumbling down.

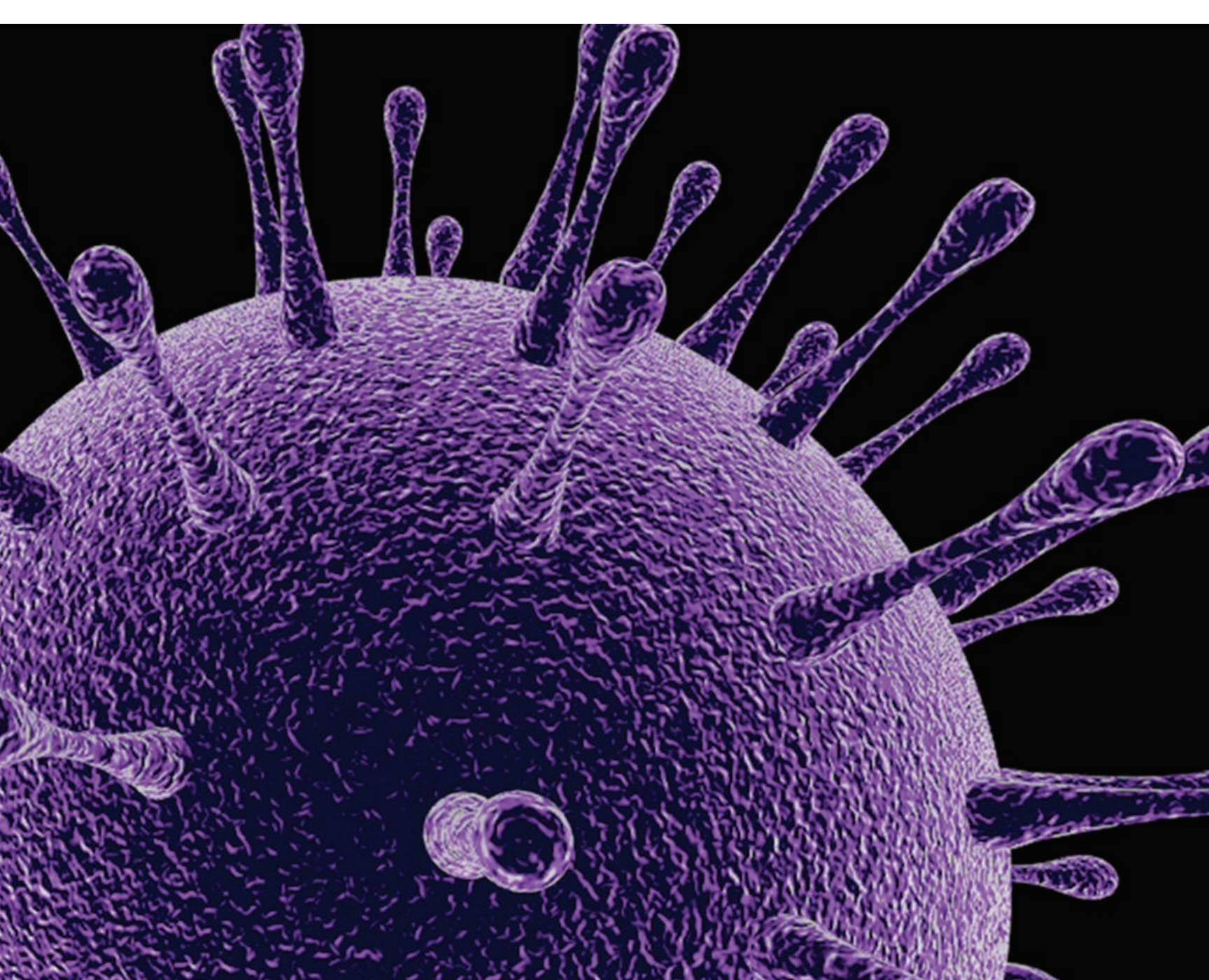


My Mitochondria Mom

Sandra Virginia Gonsalves- Domond

Emerging from the cytoplasm of the ovum,
Energizing my cells,
Hitching a slope-like ride,
Eloping from my mitochondria mom.
Like a rose budding up from the fragranced morn,
Birthed like a newly arrived fawn,
Here I am crisp,
Into the world
Growing and growing.







*Cricket*s

Brendan Payraudeau

They stopped
when I told you, listen. They always do that
like shy children flinging secrets in the dark.
When I told you, though, your name rinsed off
and left me spotless, quiet,

I felt tire-swing vacant,
picture frames, paperclips,
pursed lips.

Naming a thing only to have it
stop singing, rinse off.

A Constant Beat

Peter Sitomer

Life follows a rhythm no one can master.
The carefully structured bars and notes,
The radically different keys and tempos,
The incredibly different meanings and emotions.

It requires out of its performers
solos meant for two players.
It requires clarity to produce
a common sound all can relate to.
It obliges its players to not only play its music,
but to compose more for the next musician.

Every heart has its own beat.
A unique sound its owner must follow,
sometimes against their will.
But this process is common
despite its complexity.
This is what makes the challenge.
The challenge every man, woman, and child must face.
Following one's own beat
No matter where it might lead them.

Slumber

Imani Hardaway

Your voice, buzz rolling snare drum,
flippant as slot machines, buoys
through my ears like flotsam while I watch
the black speckled shells of insects,
toppling over one another.

On a butterfly's wings, I am a speck: bodiless,
sublime, though growing bored
on blades of grass, a bed of nature.
I cannot resist the look of wet leaves,
heavy yellow buds: lines green as veins, like mine.

Earth, swallow me up. Make me a mole.
Dirty kneed, I'll crawl to my cerebral terrarium.
Hurry, life is calling me,
its trumpets out of tune.

Dreams About You/ My Only Love Poem

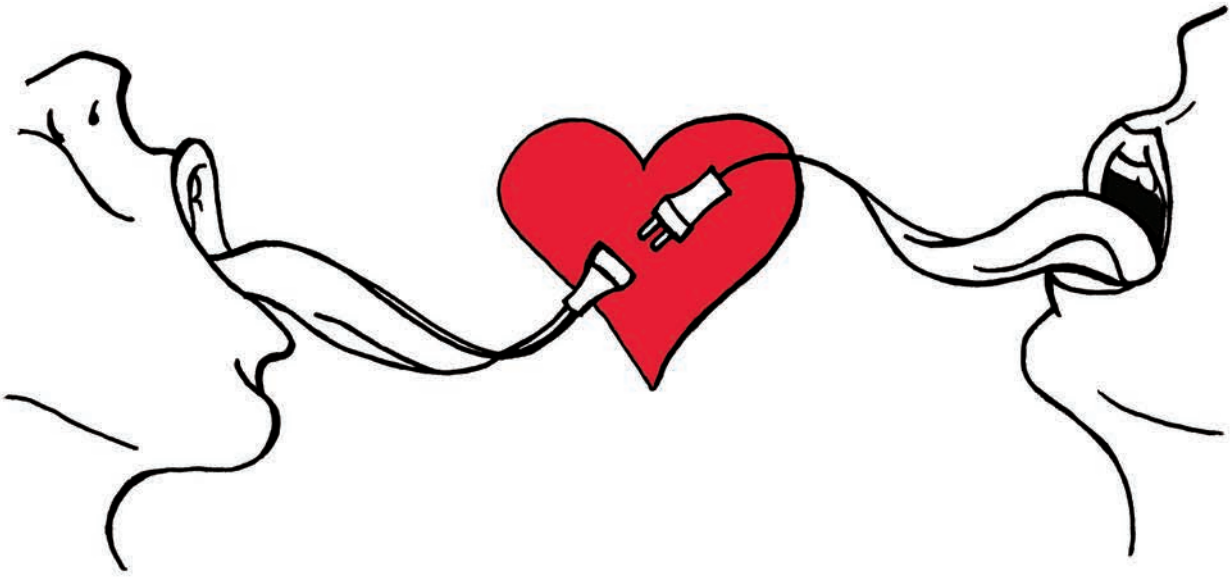
Leandra Tejedor

I want your lips to brush
away the distemper of your love.
It cakes on like dirt, like mud, until
it lays on my chest so thick, breaths come like puddles of oil.

I want your hair
to come out in clumps
in my grasping paws. I want to feel it
faltering out, follicle by tearing follicle.

I want your skin
to peel away under my fingernails, opening you
up so I can breathe your insides dry,

tasting you on my tongue, dripping
down the back of my throat, burning
the insides of my nose and letting me breathe again.



The Fiend

Danielle Corcione

I am Gothic and a romantic,
a man-made monster
and a “deliberate decision”

I could’ve been your Adam,
but a fallen angel instead
bring my vessels to life

concocted by you,
that was created by a woman
only eighteen years of age

we are the living fiction
for the audience to read,
and the critics to rate
we are the nightmare
of a doctor’s reality
and a daughter’s pen

Ode to the Back of Your Head

Marc Santos

Now, I think my favorite thing about you is the back of your head
because half the fun of Christmas is the month of anticipation
having only guesses to open
and only eyes to touch with
and this is like having that December foreplay in a jar
when the other side of any brunette gift wrap could be what I've been up all night for.

Winter Fragments

Jaqueline Thomas

Late January: only hoarfrost
and not enough wood for fire. At night

miles from Burlington, we move close
by grey-light and cannot hear a single sound.

~

Our cats, quiet in this strange world,
cannot sense the melting snow

drop from its branches,
because it is not melting,

and will not melt. We wait together; pick
winter jasmine and make wreaths. Hearth

now full-ash,
and floors dusty with cold:

we can smell, weight it.

Tomorrow, you
drive into town for kindling, food, and I

climb into bed, under quilt, heavy with your
morning smell. And listen for footsteps

known well, the only sound,
on solid ground.

~

Along the brick wall
left from last year's owners,
small weeds gather:
We cannot name them. And wait
for the next rain, or snow,
to wash away
what never fully rooted.

~

First warm day, our windows wet with it,
we dress in boots and scarves
to make our way to old steel bridge
where children jump in summer,
brave with heat and not-yet hardened
by what we know and unknow
every year, with its slow passing.

~

Waking early, you spice coffee.
I feed the dog and cats. In hard-light,
world iced over, I watch you turn the page,
itch your silver beard, and pause in translation.

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen.
Do you know the land where the lemon tree grows?

Do you know it well? There, there, would I go with you—

There is no-where to go, no-where
I'd ever want to go from here.

~

We sit at the steps when evening falls
small leaves still on the sill, and the sense
of being at sea.

This is how the winter breaks.

Not the sound of starling—the feeders
on the oak trees—or the child's impending

restlessness. But us, no longer waiting.

And finding, longer still, how in our waiting
spring has come. We do not want it.

The Black and White Photograph

Brendan Payraudeau

Laying on its backside, lazy
but for its face: love
scene in Philadelphia.
Fading now by breaths taken,
waiting

for some curious hand to mouse
into privacy, finger more
oil stains, ask it what happened?
Its subjects bite tongues,
smile in the nightstand like a tomb

trying to be just a photo
and not a past.

Coming Home, Four A.M.

Jaqueline Thomas

After John Berryman

In the quiet that precedes
small remnants of sound & not
their absence,
 head lights mark
strange shadows in fog-stream skies:
 a few cars on the highway.

The driver turns, unthinking onto
back-road, soon she finds that infinite-
simal break
 where pavement meets forest,
half-littered path & heavy undergrowth
in throes of spring's first hours,
minutes; walks

toward the spot where sun
might be,
 rising,
 if it were, sheds
her coat her bag her sweater:
not needed. She will walk this path,

& then walk longer. Knowing,
since youth, that one night, she too,
would last cross

the damp-oak grounds
clothless, soundless
 toward crack of light,
 that great edge
be it water or sky, where there is
no I, nor word for I.



Penis Monologue

Diana Atalla

I would love to have a penis.
Masturbation would be much easier
and orgasms would lose their question
mark, I would never have to be asked
if I came, no.
I've heard there's nothing so liberating
as free-balling. I want the awkward
in class erections of eighth graders,
a sense of certainty in sexuality,
in-your-face uncomfortable in the middle
of math class no matter how hard
my parents tried to deny it.

I would have done better in geography,
knowing way sooner that the capital
of Thailand is Bangkok when the punch line
is a blow beneath the belt.
I got my first period a few weeks after
my older sister kicked me in the crotch.
I actually prayed for the flow of blood
to find me instead a few years later.
My equivalent to a fifth-grade erection
was easy to conceal, I kept the secret
tucked away until I was a teenager.

The blood-flow of men creates a weapon
(many think) or some sort of hard protection
that allows them to go outside more.
My brother always had the most freedom.
I got in trouble for drawing a penis once
and showing it to my parents
when I was around five. They were scared,
worried because I knew that the penis
existed, asking me where I learned.
I still don't know how I knew.

The pictures I drew were of girls and boys
with piss and shit trailing in neat lines
down the page. Even then I wondered why
it was such a big deal that we do the same
with different parts when we all have blood.
I know now that the issue
is tradition. Some do the fucking
while others are simply fucked.





Synesthesia

Jaqueline Thomas

“If only she, from withdrawn grace, would fall towards me.”
— Heidegger

Think of me, Hannah, when the city turns
to flesh & mold.

Words remind of other words.
Skin of other skin.

This is this because it is not that.
You hold a leaf & say it is
all other leaves.

When a child dreams of the unknown:
ghost, storm, strange water, it is not
the other they fear, but the other in them-
selves.

Martin counting coffee spoons in
the lonely hour, whispers sorrows
to the unsuspecting moon. The owl too.

These fragments I have shored
against my ruins.

Again, into the night
I cannot find your face from ash
& bone from wind.

Color-Blocked

Miranda Southwell

This lunar influx of Mondrian madness raises me, as the tide,
Out of true blue depths of despair only to plunge me, headlong,
Into grey smoke-stained disdain which seeps forth from my person
like an amber wave, yelping yellow at its core,
Mottled with abrasive airs of acid green, blackest bile and venom-vile vermillion.
A truly poisonous palette which grips me like a vice,
Grabs hold the last precious pink throes of life, of love,
And distorts them, inverts them, maligns and murders them,
Leading to a road of endless ebony
Where petulant purple pride resides
Letting resound her mournful wails of wine
Before at long last lying down to die





Whet

Marco Santos

You breathe peripheral glances
and whiskey coaxing
the sheepish boy from my bones the pulse
of backdrop music and your close heart
beat and tease saying

tonight

no amount of 80 proof
could steal the waltz from your voice
the way your every step says
curvature
and I could fashion planets around you
a liquor fueled sun blurring at the edges.

Is it wrong to want more than my safe
little orbit
and wonder through this highball
whether to name our system
yesterday or tomorrow?

Burnt

Michele Patti

Tom selects a match,
in one motion
lights it on the back of the pack.
The first drag, the longest.
Embers glow, between his fingers
flick ashes that gently reach the ground
Another hit harder than the first.
He looks down at his hand, surprised it's halfway burnt,
what once was whole and harmless.
A stream of smoke escapes his lips.
Exhale the remnants, forget what has already soaked in
and filled his lungs with regret he'll feel tomorrow.

Polyamorous man chooses between heaven and earth

Diana Atalla

You got uncomfortable
when I asked on the first date
if you live alone. I joked
that I knew about the cat,
that you weren't too old
to be living with your parents.

You live with your girlfriend.

Terra means earth.
My name, heaven.
Yours is Manley.

On the second date
we spoke of atheism.

I should have known then
there'd be no third.

Men dwell on earth
and I don't blame them
when they're scared
to take a leap of faith,
to know the ways
I can help them elevate.

Reja Vu

Marco Santos

It was a mistake, putting this sweater on when it still smells of your
perfume.

I'll admit I was cold,

I'll admit it thawed me out fast,

and I'll pretend not to notice when I shift in my seat like hiding
before crushing the fabric against my nose.

Flash memories ache like old breaks in bone predicting oncoming
rain,

hair I loved to smell when close and pull when making love
to you,

lips I loved to test with my teeth,

skin I loved to stain

That's it, boy, focus on the sex

the sex the sex the sex

and maybe you'll forget how she held you together long enough
for you to take snapshots of your own fault lines,

listened to you describe in two stanzas what patting yourself on the
back sounds like,

nursed your diaper rash and fashionably marred wrists with her lips
and naiveté.

Play it cold—

shrug it off and bury this sweater in the drawer

because you were only building castles to play with in your little
sandbox

that you'd grow to call a home over time.





Days End

Miranda Lasocha

The wrinkle of the sheets,
the warmth of the covers,
your chest as it rises and falls.

The stillness in the room,
I lay next to you curled in a ball,
the hum of the television
background noise to your light snores.

But each time,
Your breath remains the same—
quick quick quick.
slow,
falling deep in sleep
after you place your arms,
holding me before I fall asleep .

Sunday Night Dream

Imani Hardaway

You're in a dim lit bar buying the closest
woman a drink, tempting her with a poem,
your hand up her skirt: one you wrote
about a siren with a bible. Maybe
she'll come home with you,
maybe you'll marry her.

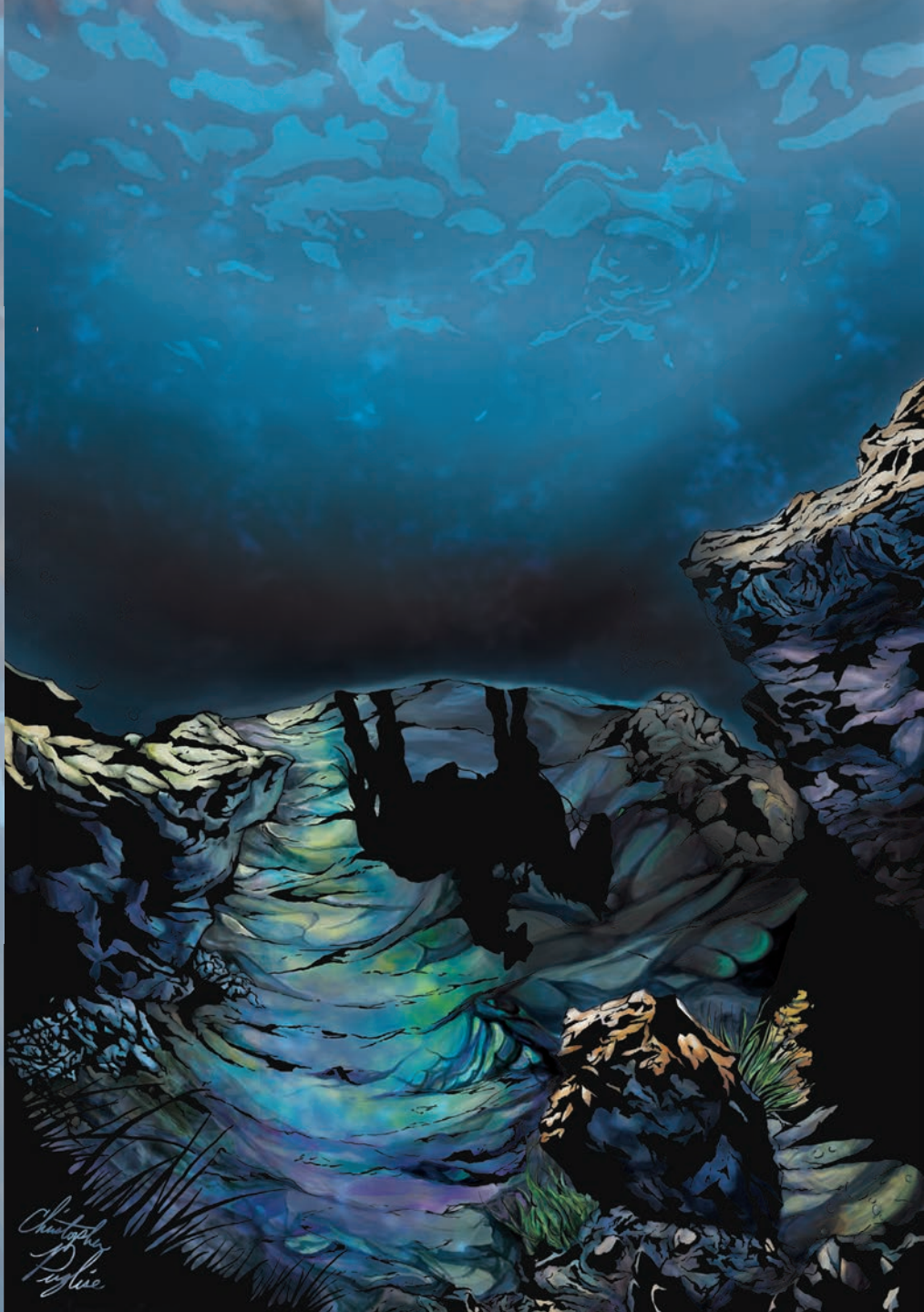
What if I told you your words slipped
off silver spoon-fed tongues?

You'd give a slack shouldered shrug
slurring "Let 'em talk," and keep drinking,
thinking of the ease of the novel,
the agony of the line on lonely blank paper.

You wrote yourself into life over
cheap wine and an empty stomach,
about a boy and sorrow, about a man
and Skid Row perched over a typewriter.

Your vulgarity's a sweetness untouched,
a tempered place I couldn't reach
with a poem, but with a hand on your thigh
buying you a drink.

Christopher
Puglisi



Christopher
Puglisi



Beneath
Upon a pl
Tenderly
A step
Will
An
...lit sky I found
... little bed
... high to tread
... crystal water
... only little totten
... far from the
... what is
... dark rises from
... without
... has dark
... the night that still

Chris Puffin

Bugs

Leandra Tejedor

The man sat in a space so crowded with bodies and equipment that he could taste sweat mixed with the dust coming off the machines. It made his mouth feel thick and dry. He looked down through the door to the ground, fuzzy and blue like a low quality art film he had seen in a bar once. A rope was tied around his neck, reaching down to attach to his hands and then his feet. There were buckles securing his arms behind his back, attached to his torso by a series of locks and straps. His agent was sitting behind him yelling some advice about how to let the sun hit his face in the right way so the cameras could capture his expression. He said that if he hit the ground make sure his face would be looking up, towards the cameramen. The man wondered when he'd get the go-ahead to jump, if only so he would stop feeling his agent's dick against his ass.

He looked around for the dwarf named Alfonso. He had lost track of him in the rush to get everything onto the plane. "Where's Alfonso?" he tried to ask, but no one could hear him over the wind.

He and Alfonso had met at a diner about a year before this moment. The man had been conning a waitress out of the establishment's check by claiming he had found beetle larvae in his coffee and Alfonso had been eating scrambled eggs. Alfonso overheard the man's conversation and once they were both outside asked him why a beetle would have chosen a cup of coffee to lay its eggs in and not scrambled eggs. The man laughed and showed the dwarf the mason jar full of bugs that he

kept in his glove compartment. They were partners from that moment on.

The two spent the next year traveling around the country, making their way from city to city, and hitting every town they could along the way. At first Alfonso was just going to ride to the next town, he had no money and was ready to go anywhere that wasn't the house he had grown up in. But after the first night in a shared hotel room when Alfonso showed the man how to hack the hotel's video game system so they could play without getting charged they had decided to keep traveling together. They silently agreed that Alfonso would always sleep on the couch since he took up much less space than the man did.

Their schemes got bolder the more time they spent together. Alfonso drew a crowd on the streets of Baltimore by talking about his orphanage and the man helped by acting the part of a sophisticated donor. In a town outside of Boston the two collected money for a raffle, the profits of which would be used to help war veterans who were missing limbs. In Philly they printed out police badges at Kinko's and got tourists who were ignoring crosswalks to pay them fines on the spot to avoid jail time and permanent record marks. They went on like this until reaching Dallas, where the two ran out of ideas and had to resort to pickpocketing. This was much easier when they distracted passersbys with magic tricks. Alfonso was the first one to perform, as he knew how to flip a coin so it landed on heads every time, but since he dropped the cards a lot and couldn't handle any props because of his small hands, the task of performing street magic eventually fell to the man. This

worked well because he had a sharp nose and dark eyes and long eyelashes and skin which always seemed tan despite the season, and this combination of features was able to distract women with rich husbands and wide eyes walking down sidewalks better than most of the magic tricks.

It was in this way they got some money in tips, and a lot more in wallets stored in back pockets. After a few cities of this game, their show changed. The man was halfway through a trick when someone pulled out a straitjacket, and the man put it on. It took about five hours to remove, during which most of the crowd got bored and left, but he finally got free. The pair slipped away and drove out of the city without finding the jacket's owner, and the man began to practice with it every night, in every hotel room along their stops, until he had it down to three minutes for an escape.

Once this happened, they stopped having to steal from purses. They had more tip money than they could spend, and more tricks were added to the man's resume. Alfonso was always helping by his side, buckling buckles and strapping straps. He would create a stage, yelling out new adjectives in each city in his resonating voice. "Watch the fantastical actualization of the mortal man's conquest of the very matter of his world," his voice would boom out across parks and streets. "See as he lays waste to the solidity of our cosmos." They learned that to escape handcuffs the trick was to take painkillers beforehand, and that the way to escape handcuffs while being weighed down at the bottom of a swimming pool by rocks was to forget that one had to breathe.

A representative from a television network came up to them after a performance and told them he had a proposal for them. He told them he was going to make them stars. Alfonsio smiled that way he did where the corners of his lips almost seemed to touch his ears and said they'd love to.

And that was how the stunt came to be. At first it was going to take place in Hollywood where a lot of people would see but the lawyers said absolutely not, and in the end the only place they could get clearance to do a stunt as big as the producers wanted was in the air. The network always bought them two suites at every hotel, but Alfonsio would still sleep on the couch in the man's room every night. They got all of their meals for free now, the mason jar lay full of dried beetle shells in the bottom of their luggage. The man was thinking about that mason jar as he braced himself for the jump ahead of him. The only way for him to float down at a survivable speed would be to get out of the ropes and cords tied around him and pull the line attached to the parachute attached to his back. He tried to remember playing N64 Smash the first night in the hotel room with Alfonsio instead of thinking about how his vision would blur and his arms and feet would lose all feeling as the ropes pulled tighter. He remembered how Alfonsio's left eye would squint whenever he smiled at girls. His agent was shouting some more advice about how it was important that he not move his shoulders too much so it didn't create noise for the microphones.

"Where's Alfonsio?" he asked again. "Didn't get on the plane," his agent answered before telling him which muscles to flex for which cameras.

"Everything's ready," a voice from the back called. The man could barely make it out. He was just realizing that Alfonsio wouldn't be able to help him the way he had during that one performance where he had wrapped two ropes around his neck and the world had gotten far away until Alfonsio cut him free.

"Ready in three."

The man watched as red lights blinked on on the cameras around him.

"Two."

People had better be watching this, he thought, because it was one hell of a trick to do without a tip jar in front of him.



Is It Raining Out?

Samantha Geyer

I am proud to say that I have known a great love in my life.
However, this love is not one that I can call my own.
This love is pure and this love is patient.

Is it raining out?
No dear.

It is the force that fuses one soul to another
And it is one that I am quite envious of.

Is it raining out?
No dear.

This love has no expiration date and knows no limit.
It is never tiresome and it is never questioning.

Is it raining out?
No dear.

It is a love that can withstand the test of time
And one that can never be forgotten,
Even though one of the lovers may become forgetful themselves.

Is it raining out?
No dear.

The mind may be slipping, but this love
Is her enduring grasp.

Is it raining out?
No dear.

It is a love that will never get tired of hearing,
Is it raining out?
For when she is around, it could never be raining to him.



Grandma's Death

Rebecca Gokberk

The first time Grandma died, the Jehovah's Witnesses brought her back to life. She had gotten triple-bypass surgery at the age of seventy-nine and went into a coma after the doctors stitched her back up. For two weeks she stayed in ICU, looking like a ghost and already halfway out the door to heaven. My father picked out her coffin and the priest came to bless her body and wish her a safe trip to heaven. The day the doctors were going to unhook her from life support, a group of Jehovah's Witnesses also came to visit and pray for her. When they left the room, she woke up. The doctors said it was a miracle; I knew better. There was no way in hell Grandma was going to die being blessed by some Jehovah's Witnesses. She hated them.

If Grandma had died when she was supposed to, I never would have hated her for her callousness towards everyone that loved her.

Before the surgery, she stayed locked up at her house all the time. After the surgery, she stayed at our house for a year (if it had been any longer, we probably would have killed her ourselves). Weakened by surgery and her almost death, Grandma became a very nasty couch potato. Perhaps she was angry because she couldn't move around like she used to or be of use to anyone in her current state. For whatever reason, she took out her anger on my younger sister.

Grandma constantly criticized my sister in everything she did. The last straw was when Grandma called her fat. My sister, at the delicate age when everything was an extremely sensitive topic, cried and refused to talk to Grandma for days. When I found out, I immediately confronted Grandma and the following conversation ensued:

"Why did you call my sister fat? Look at you! Your boobs sag to the floor!" I seethed.

"Oh, look who's talking little miss perky boobs," she replied.

We constantly made jabs like this to each other. She whined like a baby when my parents forced her to eat her vegetables and I was always ready with a mean joke. She retaliated by mocking me when I melodramatically recounted my daily high school drama stories. It went on like this until the day Grandma told me to stop caring about what other people thought about me and I brought her a chocolate chip cookie from the kitchen (it would have taken her ten minutes to walk there and she definitely would have been caught by someone).

Grandma was diagnosed with diabetes when she was seventy-five. That hit her harder than anything else because of her incurable sweet tooth. When she came to live with us, mom threw all the candy away and Grandma was only allowed to have a cookie or brownie once every couple of weeks. She'd moan and whine every time my mom baked sweets and the smell wafted from the kitchen into the living room.

"What are you making? Is it cookies? Gimme a cookie," snapped Grandma. Mom usually ignored her.

Grandma, in all her infinite racism and rudeness, also had a little bit of wisdom she bestowed upon me in exchange for a cookie, preferably chocolate chip, every few days. She told me what to say to girls when they were being catty to me: "Tell them they're all idiots," and how to handle boys that didn't reciprocate my love: "Tell them they're all idiots." She taught me to not care about expectations or judgment from others and how to say black, white, Jewish, poor, and gay in Armenian.

Life was tolerable at best with Grandma. By the time she had been living with us for almost a year, Mom was at her wits end, my sister hardly left her room, and I was running out of witty things to say to her never-ending criticisms.

On a particularly normal spring night (no crying or screaming), Grandma woke up gasping for air. Her hospital stay was a short one this time. On day three of being confined to a room on the cardiac floor, the EKG, the device that monitored her vitals, changed rapidly from normal to the frantic beeping of life quickly draining away. Her heart-rate had dropped to zero when the nurse rushed in, grabbed the defibrillator, quickly placed the paddles on my Grandma's chest, yelled "Clear!," and shocked her. On the second shock, Grandma came back to life...again.

If Grandma had died when she was supposed to, I never would have come to love her despite her heartlessness.

Grandma ended up at a nursing home. I visited her when I could. I still joked with her, but it wasn't the same. The cynical Grandma I knew had been replaced by

this catatonic stranger who claimed she had met Jesus and they had finally escaped the Indians. I listened to her spew out nonsense and watched as she withered away. The mischievous spark was gone from her eyes; only dullness remained. I missed the old, devious grandma who had a mean streak even the devil would have been proud of. My mother signed a do not resuscitate (DNR) form and we waited for her to die... forever this time.

The third time Grandma died, my mother yelled at the doctor for trying to revive her. Grandma's vitals had tanked again and a doctor was at her side preparing the defibrillator when mom walked into the room and told them to stop.

"Her form says Do Not Resuscitate!" Mom yelled. "Just let her die!"

The doctor and nurses who had crowded around my Grandma slowly backed away from her, fighting the urge that had been implanted in their minds from the day they decided to pursue a career in the medical field: to save lives. It may have been difficult for them to stand around helplessly, but those last few moments were even tougher on my mother.

While Grandma's vitals steadily dropped to zero, my mother crouched beside her bed and whispered beseechingly in her ear, "Please...just go...there's nothing left for you here...just go." And Grandma went...for about a minute. Her body was as still as a corpse.

"She's gone," the doctor said.

Then Grandma inhaled deeply and breathed life back into her body. The doctor, nurses, and my mother stared at

her in shock as Grandma struggled like a swimmer gasping for breath after being under water for too long. When my mother told me what had transpired at the nursing home, I laughed.

"She just doesn't want to die," I remarked. "What's keeping her here?" No one knew. We could not understand why Grandma didn't die. Some called it a miracle; I called it stubbornness.

If Grandma had died when she was supposed to, I never would have prayed for her death, not because I didn't care or hated her but because I loved her too much to see her suffer.

No one believed that she would live more than a few months, so we indulged her one last request: to die in her own home. Just like a young child, she needed twenty-four hour care. She couldn't cook for herself or bathe herself. She was in such bad shape she could barely walk. We got her an aid to do everything she couldn't do. Ironically, her aid is a tall, black woman with a heavy Tanzanian accent. It's funny that Grandma, one of the most racist people I have ever met, is spending the rest of her days in the company of a black person.

It's been over a year since my family hired an aid to take care of Grandma. I called my mother the other day to see how Grandma was doing.

"She's still going strong," Mom said. I'm fully convinced that Grandma is the human equivalent of a cat: three lives down, six more to go. Oh God, I hope not.

I don't like to visit her anymore. She's not the same woman she was a few years ago. Whenever I stop by and sit on the

porch with her, she usually falls asleep about two minutes into any conversation I have with her. She doesn't make fun of the people that walk by (I don't even think she sees them. Sometimes I wonder if she even sees me anymore). Her eyes are no longer sharp, the devious smile is gone, and the mocking laugh has disappeared.

What do you do when someone you love has lost the will to live? Do you let them go? Do you watch them as they move through the days, weeks, and months as listlessly as a doll?

If Grandma had died five years ago when she was supposed to, I would have cried at her funeral only because my mother and father would have cried. I didn't know Grandma enough to cry for her death or remember her life. If Grandma had died four years ago when she was supposed to, I would have remained dry-eyed during her funeral; I despised the woman too much to shed a tear for her. If Grandma had died two years ago when she was supposed to, I would have cried, like any loving granddaughter, for the loss of her Grandmother.

I don't know what I will do at her funeral. Perhaps I will cry because that's what you're supposed to do at a funeral. But maybe I'll smile, thinking of her constant japes. Maybe I will burst out in laughter, suddenly remembering how her eyes got as big as saucers when I presented her with a cookie peace offering.

Until then, I patiently wait for her final death.





A Better Life

Ariel Schmiedhauser

The harsh scent of nicotine and sex fills my nostrils and I wish I was somewhere else. I get out of bed and almost freeze to death as the frigid November air hits me. When I cross my room and check one of the heating vents, I realize there's no air coming out of it. The heating must have been shut off again. I pray the electricity is still on.

I get dressed and walk into the kitchen. She's already sitting at the table, wearing the same robe, drinking coffee and smoking the first of many cigarettes. I stare at her for a minute, counting the similarities. We have the same hair, the same eyes, and almost the same face. I look so much like her and it scares me.

"Hey baby girl, sleep well?" Mom asks me in the same, sweet tone she used to use when I was a little girl. As bitter as I've gotten over the years that voice still manages to cut me to the core. When she's sober, she uses the mom voice and I can still call her Mom. The other voice, the normal voice, that's just Anna.

"Heat's shut off again, did you pay the bill?" I ask, feeling like the adult and hating every second of it.

She doesn't answer me; she doesn't have to. I already know where the money went, I already know who it went to, and it wasn't the heating company. I don't have time to say anything more on the subject because her bedroom door opens

and I immediately revert to the five-year-old afraid of the dark.

A man walks into the kitchen and my mother stands from her seat at the table. I carefully study a crack on the linoleum floor as he gives her a kiss followed by the cash. It's the same thing every morning, the same routine. I wake to the same smell, the same feeling, the same fucking everything. That dirty cash is enough to remind me who I am and where I come from. It's enough to make me hate myself even when I have no reason to. It makes me hate her even more.

Every client's the same, no matter how clean cut he could possibly be. They all pay for sex which helps fuel my mother's addiction, so by default, they pay for the drugs. And because they pay for the drugs, I place a lot of blame onto them. They're the reason the heat is off again, they're the reason I don't have a normal life, they're the reason I feel stuck in this broken down apartment.

The man leaves and my mother gets to work dividing the bills. She makes a promise to pay the heating company but I know where half the money is going before she's finished counting. She folds most of it and puts it in the cookie jar on our counter. The jar is one of those cartoonish looking things that has a bear on top and seems like it should be in a home in the suburbs somewhere. It has never once held cookies in it.

She puts the money in and removes the drugs. She hands me a twenty for my weekly expenses and I almost throw up. I walk away from the table without eating anything. She tries to question me about food but it's not long before she's

snorting or shooting up whatever she has left and she forgets about me.

I walk into my room, pick up my book bag and leave out the fire escape. I never leave through the front door when she's high. I close the window behind me and try to straighten up my uniform as best I can when I reach the bottom of the fire escape.

I got into one of those charter schools, the ones for rich kids, on a scholarship and an essay I wrote when I was still in elementary school. The essay was about my dad and how he was shot and killed in the line of duty and how I had never met him. The essay was a lie and I guess the school had felt so bad for me they decided to give me a full ride and a chance at a better life. Either that or they didn't have enough poor white kids at their school and they wanted to look like they were helping the community. The truth is I don't even know who my dad is.

I head to the park and meet my friends. They've been out all night and probably slept in the park. Some of them are hung over, some of them still drunk, but I don't care. They hand me one of those really awful breakfast burritos from Quick Check and I eat happily.

We formed the little in elementary school before I was whisked away to experience the schooling of the upper crust. There are five of us total, all of us children of whores, junkies, and criminals. Alex, Lionel, and Lucy have pretty much given up on school. Trey makes an effort, but hasn't gone regularly for most of his high school career. I'm a senior now and have not missed a day of school since sophomore year.

"How's the morning, Cassidy?" Alex asks, slurring just a bit.

"The usual," I mutter between bites of breakfast burrito.

"Want a drink?" Lionel asks. I refuse.

I give them a quick farewell before heading off to make the train to the Upper East Side. Out of the group, I'm the only one with a "chance," as my guidance counselor calls it. I don't wear the badge proudly but I know my friends know the day will come when I fail to greet them in the park and they've accepted it.

One subway ride and I'm in a completely different part of the city. It's not really shinier here, but I like to imagine a shine. God knows it's brighter here than where I live. Nothing smells of garbage, cigarette smoke or weed. There's a park that kids can play in without fear of stepping on broken glass or used needles. I walk to the school, feeling the same weight I feel every day, the weight that I don't belong here, that I will never belong here.

My history class is talking politics and I could care less. I sit in silence, listening to the bleeding-heart idealists trying to make their points while the hardened, raised-since-birth conservatives shoot them down. Everyone answers every question rapidly while my teacher comes up with new ones based off of their answers. He's got a doctorate in political science or something and he makes you call him Dr. Martin. Not Mr. Martin, Dr. Martin.

It's like living in those schools you see in England where every student says,

"Sir," followed by an intelligent statement. Public schools aren't like this. At public school I was gifted. Here, I'm average.

Dr. Martin calls on me and I don't have a point to make. I attempt to agree with whatever the last person said and then I realize we are on a different subject all together.

"I'm sorry, what was the question?" I watch the staring faces of the trust fund brigade, ready to mock. All their uniforms are cleaned and pressed by their housekeepers every day. Their hair is perfectly sculptured and their nails have never had a scrap of dirt underneath it. They are all future heads of state, CEOs, Wall Street brokers, lawyers, doctors, or humanitarians. I'm just trying to make it through day by day while they have twenty years of their lives planned.

He repeats the question; it's typical I would get this question. It's something along the lines as to whether or not politicians have a responsibility in cleaning up the poorer neighborhoods and how they should go about doing so. I narrow my eyes a bit. It might not have been aimed at me intentionally; everyone has to answer at some point, but I can't help feeling like it might have been.

I answer honestly. Should they? Yeah, then maybe I wouldn't be in my situation, and if they provided better after school activities, better schools, better teachers, maybe I wouldn't be such a rarity. When I finish speaking, I'm surprised there's no laughter, no glances, like I'm some kind of experiment. No judgment, they just listened.

The bell rings and I head for the door when I'm told to wait after class. I think

I'm in trouble. Did I swear when I spoke? I couldn't remember.

"I want to talk to you about joining the debate team," Dr. Martin says, cleaning his glasses.

I'm walking home from the subway and I'm weighing my options. I don't know what to do. I could join the debate team or never participate in a school activity and remain quietly in the corner as I have been doing. I've never considered myself good at something, especially not arguing, but Dr. Martin thought I had solid evidence to back my points up and I would be a good fit for the team.

There's this big debate thing that I've never been clear on the name of nor have I ever bothered to learn it. The winning school gets a trophy and usually the winning team has better chances of getting into whatever school of their choice or, in my case, better chances of landing a scholarship. I just have to convince my mother to give me the hundred dollar activity fee and to sign the permission slip.

I walk in the door and still feel the chill from this morning. Sure I leave out the fire escape, but I come back in through the front door; it's easier than climbing back up and generally by this time any client she had is long gone.

I smell smoke but hear no one else in the apartment. I look around and find my mother passed out on the living room couch, cigarette in the ash tray. At least she didn't fall asleep with it in her hand again. The last thing I needed was another fire in the living room.

Still, I make sure to put out the cinders that are left in the ash tray while I think about joining the debate team. It sounds stupid and maybe I shouldn't try, but would it really be so bad? I think about the money and about the fact that I have to actually ask my mother for something while I stare into the kitchen. It isn't long before I seem to find an answer.

I'm looking at the cookie jar and again I'm weighing my options. Do I have to ask for the money? Do I try to appeal to whatever part of her is my mother and ask for this one thing from her? Or should I just take it? She wouldn't know it was gone, or if she did, she'll assume someone came in and robbed us again. I could hide it or take it to school tomorrow. I didn't even spend the twenty she gave me. It's not like I haven't gone hungry before. I can skip lunch for the week and use the money I have in my pocket.

Would she notice if eighty dollars went missing? She doesn't notice me half the time. I try not to wake her as I walk from the living room to the kitchen. I lift the lid off the jar, the bear smiling at me while I reach inside its stomach. There are small chips in the side of the jar, tiny fractures that tell me how old it really is. I push aside a fresh bag of something I don't want to think about while I search. I find the rough and dirty paper and pull it out, holding the cash in my hand.

It's a large stack but I'm not greedy. I count out four twenties and put the rest back into the jar, then put the bear's head back in place. I feel sick, but it doesn't feel the same. It isn't what I usually wake to every morning; this is different, this is new.

I look at the apartment, the dirty

dishes in the sink, the couch that's falling apart, the cracked kitchen floor, everything unclean and broken. I look at the money in my hand and I feel like I'm part of this world now.

I unfold the permission slip and walk over to my mother. The best time to get her to sign something is usually when she's too high to function. Once I got into a fight back in the fourth grade, so I had her sign my suspension note while she was half passed out on the kitchen floor. Every time she asked me about school I told her it was Saturday. I was home for a week. I gently shake her awake and sit on the coffee table in front of her.



“When did you get home?” she asks from some place far away.

“Just now.”

There's a clinking in my stomach that I can't seem to shake. I feel like I'm a monster and I'm doing something horrible. I show her the paper, ask her to sign it, say it's something for school, a trip, and she doesn't ask questions. She just signs her name and drifts back.

I walk to my room and sit on my bed. I look at the four twenties and the signed slip of paper. I could put the money back, rip up the slip, and pretend this never happened. I don't like the new me, the one who lies and steals to get somewhere she wants to be. I stare at the thick, clean, stationary with the gold embroidered seal and the four pieces of scummy green on top of it. I fold up the paper with the money inside and place it in my backpack. My decision was made when I opened the jar; there's no going back.

I have these dreams sometimes where my mother comes into my room and tells me to skip school. I always agree and get excited. She tells me we're going on a field trip, a vacation even, and she takes me to Coney Island. I've never been there but I've heard it's fun. We spend the day going on all the rides and she never once leaves to “freshen up.” While we're eating the last of the kettle corn she tells me she got a new job and has been going to a support group. She tells me she's sorry and that she wishes we could have done things like this more often. I don't know why but I tell her it's okay and I don't blame her. We watch the sunset while we sit on the Ferris wheel and I'm happy. I've always thought that's what a perfect day

would feel like.

I remember that perfect day as I wake up to the same smell. I go about my routine but today feels different. I have the money, I have the permission slip, and for the first time I'm excited about something real.

Weeks pass and she never noticed the missing money, just like I thought. I stay after school every day for the debate team and for the first time in a long time I feel like I'm having fun. I have hope for the future, for my future. I smile now more than I used to, even when I'm at school. And I have friends—friends who worry about their midterms and their grades. Friends who don't spend their days and nights in a park no one plays in.

We're training for the annual inter-school debate which will be held tomorrow, a Saturday. I'm nervous but I'm also excited. I think I'm happier about the fact that I don't have to be home. My mother asked me once where I've been after school and even when I told her, she forgot the next day and hasn't asked me since.

Dr. Martin sends the team home early so we can all get some rest before the debate. We were given the option whether or not to request a ticket for friends and family. I don't know why, but I requested one. My heart pounds in my chest as the subway clatters and creeks towards my station.

I'm repeating a mantra in my head. I'm going to ask her and she will say yes. I might be seventeen and I might have put up with her shit all my life, but now she's going to be my mom, just for one day. That's all I need, one day.

I open the door to the apartment

and see my mother sitting at the kitchen table, counting fresh bills.

"Hey Cass." She greets me with a smile. She isn't high right now but she's happy, she must have made a decent amount today. I say hello and sit down at the kitchen table. She finishes counting and looks at me, "Something wrong?"

Is there something wrong? I almost laugh. Whenever she asks me that I want to hit her. But I push it to the back of my mind and get to the point. I'm going to ask her and she will say yes.

"Well, I joined the debate team at school and we have this debate tomorrow. It's a big thing; I could get a scholarship for college and get into a really good school. And I know you might be...busy...or something, but I would really like you to come. For support." I place the ticket on the table and watch for her reaction. I'm no longer hopeful, I'm terrified. She can't say no, she can't not come. I have never thought I wanted her support, for her to say you did great, but I do, I really do.

"Sweetie..."

"No. You have to come to this!" I'm angry and I'm shouting. She's alarmed; this is the first time I have ever done anything like this.

"Why do you care whether I go to this or not?"

"Because just once I would like to pretend that we have a normal relationship. That you care about me, like you're supposed to, even when I know you don't. I just don't want to feel alone when I'm up there. I see all these other kids with their parents who either

skip work or tape their kid's performance and I want that. For one day, I just want to feel like you're proud of me. And I don't want to have to feel ashamed or embarrassed of you."

I don't cry. I throw the ticket onto the pile of cash and I walk into my room. I'm tired now. I didn't say everything I felt, no, she couldn't handle that. I can't tell her that sometimes I think about what life would be like if she overdosed and never woke up. I can't tell her that there have been nights where all I've done is cry and consider throwing myself from the top of the apartment building. I can't tell her these things.

Those words would create a cut that would never heal, not with time, not with apologies, not with thousands of dollars' worth of smack. She would never get better if I told her these things. She couldn't get better.

I close my eyes and think of Coney Island: the Ferris wheel, the sunset, the kettle corn, my perfect day. I could never tell her about Coney Island.

The next morning I'm walking to the subway when I hear my friends in the park. They are laughing, having a great time. When you hear them laugh you would never think that Lucy's mother has been in and out of rehab since she was born, that Lucy almost died as she was born a month early addicted to crack. You would never know Lionel's father is a drug dealer currently serving a life sentence for killing Lionel's mother. That Alex gets daily beatings from his alcoholic father while his mother is too high to care. And Trey, like me, comes from a

whore mother. You would never know these things when they laugh, but you would know these things if you saw the scars, the bruises, the slowly forming patterns of addiction. Their stories are on repeat, all doomed to end the same way.

I stop and stand by the chain link fence. I place my hand into one of the wires, holding the cold metal that's dividing me from the abandoned park where only the oldest kids, the ones who are survivors, get to play. They tell jokes, stand and spin on the rusty merry go round, throw old cigarette butts into the sandbox. I want to join them, give in, but I don't. They see me and wave me over, but I turn away, hearing the clattering of the fence as my hand lets go.

We win the debate. My mother never shows. I'm happy and I'm sad at the same time. I watch the staring faces of proud parents. They hug their children and tell their great job, while I stand in the corner with my medal, Dr. Martin holding the trophy for all to see.

I look at the medal in my hand. The blue ribbon with a circle made of gold; it's an achievement that I could care less about. I have no one to share it with. I thought it would feel good to win something, to be good at something, and it does, but it would be better if my mother was here. If she wasn't "working," and she could stop being selfish. For once. For me. That's all I want.

I go home that night and I walk into the apartment.

"Did you win?" I'm surprised she remembers, even when she's gone, which she is. She's sitting on the living room couch, cigarette in hand, tournament still tied to her

upper arm.

She nods in and out, the new high taking its hold on her. I feel the acid in my stomach churn. She can do whatever she wants all day. She can fuck all the guys in the world. She can shoot up all the drugs she wants. She can do all these things and I will say nothing. But she can't bother to take a train uptown to see me win a damn medal, to come to something that's important to me? I never understood the phrase, "lost it," until now. I take the medal from my pocket and throw it onto the coffee table. I don't stop there, though. I don't shout at her, I don't scream, not aloud at least, instead I walk over to the cookie jar and smash it on the floor. The jar shatters into a million different pieces. The bear is not smiling anymore. It no longer looks out of place inside the apartment, on a counter that is only cleaned once every few months.

I remove the bags from the wreckage, those stupid bags, filled with shit she cares more about than me. She's panicking, screaming at me, as I carry the bags to the bathroom and throw them into the toilet.

After I flush everything away, we stand in silence. I don't know for how long. I'm expecting to feel guilty, to feel bad like I did about the money, but I don't. I don't feel sick anymore. I don't hate myself anymore. I don't hate this apartment anymore.

I walk out of the bathroom and she lets me pass, still stunned. When I head back to the kitchen, she follows me, staring at me, still unsure of what to say. I pick up some of the bills off the floor and pocket them. This is my reward. I deserve this cash. "I stole eighty dollars, by the way. So I could

be on the debate team. I'll need more when I apply to colleges. Thought I should tell you."

I leave the apartment through the front door, feeling lighter, happier. I don't understand where it is I'm going until I reach the subway.

Coney Island isn't what I thought it would be. The creaky boardwalk feels like it's going to collapse and there is no one around. It's closed during the winter, but that doesn't stop me from sneaking in. I walk by the boarded up snack stands, reading the signs for corn dogs, burgers, fried dough, kettle corn, all things I wish I could get right now with the money in my pocket. Money I don't care that I stole.

I find the Ferris wheel. There's no tarp over it, nothing to block it from damage. I climb the fence surrounding the ride and sit in the seat locked in place at the bottom. I look out at the sunset and smile. Coney Island. My perfect day.



I Saw Daddy Killing Santa Claus

Anthony Gramuglia

For most kids, the most traumatizing memory they have in regards to Santa is when they learn he doesn't exist. For me, the trauma started years before that.

It was Christmas Eve, the night before Saint Nicholas's scheduled stop at our house. My four year old self sat in the back seat of our car, my baby brother Nicholas—who I believe now to be the Antichrist's moronic sibling—slumbering at my side. My parents sat ahead of us, my dad at the wheel.

Most people, when meeting my father, fail to understand how we're related. While my mom looks like me—plus boobs and minus eight inches—my father doesn't. While I'm lithe and angular, dad is blocky and round—not fat, but stocky. At the time, I saw him as a giant. Now, I can look down from my full height with a look of amusement.

Back then, as with all boys at the age of four, I saw my father as the Almighty.

Had my father not been a wealth of knowledge and morality, the words he spoke to me that night, with everyone in the car, would not have stabbed into my heart like an icicle.

"I can't wait for Santa Claus!" I squealed, kicking my feet anxiously as we made our way past the brightly lit roads. Dad turned into the slightly wooded, mostly abandoned, lane that led to my grandmother's house. "I hope I get a bunch of movies! I'm so excited!"

My father chuckled, an amused little grin on his round face. "Don't get your hopes up."

"Whaddya mean?" I frowned, but remained excited.

"Santa isn't coming this year."

"He's not? Was I naughty?"

Had he confirmed that yes, I had been an annoying brat who pestered them for Disney films and a Super Nintendo so often that it made their ears bleed, then I might've forgotten the conversation we had, as I forgot most conversations I had as a preschooler.

But he didn't.

"No, it's because I killed him."

I didn't respond for a moment or two. It took a second to absorb his words. "You did what?"

"Killed him. Last Christmas.

Don't you remember the alarm going off when Santa broke into our house?"

How didn't I hear that alarm? It must've been when I was dead asleep, the sounds closed off to my brain under the blanket pulled up over my chin. How didn't I notice it? Actually, I didn't know what the alarm sounded like. For all I knew, the alarm could've been a little whisper saying something was wrong. It was only years later I learned it sounded like a stampede of elephants in a metal band audition.

"I went outside," my father continued, his lips curling into a grin fitting for a slasher movie killer, "with a twelve gauge shotgun."

"We own a gun?"

My dad was silent for a moment.

"Yes. Yes we do."

"Can I see it?"

"No. No you can't." Dead silence. "Anyway, I went outside and saw that fat guy

on our roof with a bag of gifts, and I shot him."

"Why would you do that?" I stammered, my entire body trembling as I imagined poor Santa, just going about doing his job when my dad interrupted his work with a round of bullets.

"The stupid reindeer kicked the gutters. Do you know how much work it takes to fix those things?"

"I—I don't believe you."

"Don't you remember when the gutter broke last January?"

"Maybe," I admitted, fearing that perhaps my father's account was the Gospel truth.

"So I shot at him, and the first round missed. First time I just blew off one of the reindeer's noses."

I visualized that first shot, the bullet missing, hitting the lead reindeer's nose until all that was left was a bright red splatter. Was that why Rudolph's nose was red? Because my dad blew part of it up? As a four year old, I didn't take into account the possibility that my dad had actually blown off Rudolph's nose and that, perhaps, without that shining light to lead the way, Santa may have crashed into a pole and died anyway, or navigated into North Korea and been nuked on sight.

"I nailed him in the gut the second time, though," my father pointed out, a laugh on his lips. I imagined the bullet slamming into the base of Santa's jelly belly, the flab rippling across his gut and man boobs as if the asteroid that eradicated the dinosaurs had slammed into the an ocean of vanilla pudding.

“But couldn’t you have just let him go?”

Ignoring me, my father continued with his story, his eyes glinting in joy as he proceeded. “He fell backwards into the chimney, and went all the way down. Once he landed, I burned his carcass.”

My mind’s eye traveled to that scene, imagining poor Santa clutching at the hole in his chest with his formerly white mittens—now forever stained scarlet—as my father tossed a match into the fire, the logs already in place. He must’ve planned the assassination from the beginning!

Why would his entire body burn? What if Santa used hairspray or some other flammable products in his hair? What if his clothing was pressed with a special type of cleaner? I imagined his beard lighting up in flames, his rosy red cheeks devoured by the fire, his skin peeling away to expose pink meat, turned black in the inferno of my father’s creation.

“Wait, that can’t be true. I would’ve found a body in the fireplace,” I stammered, “You’re just making it up. What happened to the body, daddy?”

My father smirked once more. “Don’t you remember the roast beef we served at dinner the next day?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, didn’t it taste a little odd?”

I nearly vomited where I sat.

My mother turned to my father, her eyes narrowed, as she mumbled, in a flat tone, “You’re a fucking asshole.”

When we finally arrived at my grandmother’s house, I was sobbing

uncontrollably. I brushed away the tears from under my glasses, but this ended miserably for me, since I accidentally knocked my glasses off my nose, and onto the floor. I didn’t care. I had eaten Santa’s flesh. I didn’t deserve the gift of sight.

My grandmother was a tiny woman, like my father in many ways. Italian immigrants tend to come in two varieties: they either add an extra syllable onto the end of their words as some sort of flourish, or, like a minimalist, omit syllables and words from their statements entirely.

My grandmother was the latter.

“Oh, [hello]. How [do] you do?” she asked in a thick accent that sounded like a mix between a growl and a squeal. She welcomed my family in, her humble table nearly collapsing under the amount of food that I refuse to describe, lest I become so overwhelmingly hungry that I forget to complete my story. At that point, though, food had no appeal. Food would never taste good again.

I was still crying.

“Oh Jes[us]! What[’s] the mat[ter]?” she asked, bending down by my little, pathetic form.

“Da-daddy told me he ki-killed Santa!”

My grandmother was a small woman, but the change that came over her face was one that would chill the bone of a hardened killer. Turning to my father, she slammed her palm on the backside of his head, a disapproving glare in her eyes. “Oh, you shimmonette [little piece of turd]. Why [did] you do that? You bast[ard].”

My father laughed. I cried.

I only stopped crying the next morning when I found presents around the mantle place, and realized that my dad had, in fact, been lying to me.

Years later, around Christmas time again, I found myself at a family party, this time for my mom’s side of the family. On my father’s side, the story had become the stuff of legend, but my four-year old cousin Augie had never heard the tale. Augie sat examining his newest present, some Transformers toy, with an expression of utmost concentration on his face as he unfolded the toy from a truck to a robot. Being of African and Italian descent, Augie’s hair somehow grew into an afro that quadrupled the radius of his head. This bares no importance onto the story, but you need to know how adorable this kid looks.

“Hey, Augie, do you like your gifts?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you like getting gifts from Santa?”

“My mom got me this. Santa gave me an Xbox 360.”

The fat bastard never gave me that Super Nintendo or Sega Genesis. I’d say he grew generous in his later years, but, of course, he wasn’t real. “Well, it’s a shame he won’t top that next year.”

“No, he will. I asked for a Playstation 3 next year.”

“Well, Augie, I hate to tell you this, but Santa died.”

“Sure he did.”

“I killed him myself.”

“Whatever.”

“Saw the fat ass on my roof and shot him. Twice.”

“You’re stupid.”

“...you don’t believe me at all?”

“Nope.”

“Why not?”

Augie turned to me, with the utmost seriousness on his face, as he said, “Because Santa can travel at Mach 100. How else do you think he gets gifts to all the kids of the world?”

“Well, uh—”

“Santa Claus probably moved so fast that you shot his after image, and then he probably called over Optimus Prime to wipe the floor with you before punching Kim Jong-Il in the nuts.”

Augie then turned back to his toy, and I realized, in an instant, that I was a stupid little kid.



Trillium [tril-ee-uh m]

noun. (LL., from the Latin “tri-,” for “tres,” three.)

1. A genus of low, perennial herbs, having a short, fleshy rootstock, bearing at its summit a whorl of three leaves, and a white solitary flower, with its three outer segments green. Many of the species are classified as endangered
2. 1973. Ramapo College’s yearly Literary Magazine of poetry, fiction and visual arts from Ramapo College students, edited and put together by the Literature Magazine Workshop class



Remembering

The Trillium staff offers this 2013-2014 edition in commemoration of the students and faculty our Ramapo College community has lost this year. We remember students Anthony Cassano, Stephen Dormer, Shannon Finn, Rodman Hess, and Collin McNeil. We also remember Professors Kathleen “Kay” Fowler and Theodore “Ted” Sall, and Staff members Violet Halter, Robert Russell, Merrilee “Lee” Scott, Rev. Ronald “Ron” Stanley, OP, and Joseph “Joe” Wedral. May the sorrows we feel be lightened by the love that surrounds us.

In October 2012, Hurricane Sandy devastated the East Coast of the United States. Many Ramapo College students and their loved ones were directly affected by this storm. For weeks, many faced power outages and food shortages. Some are still rebuilding from property damage. The Trillium staff would like to thank the numerous volunteers who devoted their time to cleaning up the wreckage. Together, we will “Restore the Shore.” We will get back the places we call home.

Trillium has been Ramapo College's Literary and Art Magazine since 1971. Trillium is edited by and features the poetry, prose, and visual art of Ramapo College students. The magazine is published every spring and is available free of charge all year across the campus.

Trillium can be viewed online:

<http://www.ramapo.edu/trillium/>

Also visit our companion site:

<http://onlinetrillium.wordpress.com/>

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