



VIOLET MARGIN

a literary journal

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where it is written

Regina Joy



I ask myself,
What can I offer to the breadth
Of our current literature
That sets
Itself on the shoulders of prose
And poetry that undoubtedly knows
It's affect on the medium
And holds it down
And keeps us inspired by Poe? by Plath? by Pound?

Where is it written
Is it in the fucking stars?
Where does it say that a poem has to look
Like this?

That it has to be wrapped
in layers of complicated metaphor
To be taken seriously?

And for what?
To be praised by some white boy with a BFA
On YouTube?
Fuck that.

I will express myself and enjoy other's expressions However.
I. Want. To.

I write to alleviate, to purge, and to put into words
experiences that I need to make sense of. I *do* write to



share, I write *because* I care but- even in my most basic turn-it-in assignments- I have never written for an audience if I could not see myself there.

Although I can appreciate the stuff of Frost, Shakespeare and Dickenson, I must accept that these great writers were not writing for me.

Which is fine! They don't have to. And I don't need them to be.

I have a voice, and it is a voice from my generation, is a voice from my heritage, and it echoes the voices of those who came before me. And it deserves to be heard. On terms that I set. And what I don't get, are systems that let the people of today walk around and claim that poetry is "lame", but then dismiss anyone with an attempt to reframe the medium because it's not "real poetry". It's "Insta-poetry". It appeals to the masses.

"It's a thought in a tweet, you hit send, and repeat, and I think that it's neat, but it's nothing on Keats-" **silence!!!**

Progress is speaking.

Watch in awe as she passes.



advice for turbulent lovers

Regina Ivy

Fuck taking care of your records.

Drop the needle in random spots to find your favorite songs.

Drag the needle across the spots that skip.

Listen to your records on a cheap, shitty portable record player.

Listen to them over and over and over and over and laugh when the sound starts to warp.

Be reminded that it's okay to love things, and to love them recklessly.



Awakening Giants

Grace Miller

China whispers a song
to the sleeping giants dwelling
in the opium eaters whose eyes
still bleed from force fed addiction.

Light a funeral pyre for the golden age
stripped away to blackened arteries
beating in protest but conquered
by the empire where daylight never ends.


Trading sorrow to build riches atop pain,
poppy fields ache with remembrance
of the reaper's resin-stained fingertips.

The abused breathe black to omit pain,
coloring themselves in shades of red to grasp peace,
grieving amidst a culled land
where dragons once kneeled to lions.



In My Head is a Wilderness

Grace Miller



I'm building a home where
yellow tints bleached clouds
when morning parts, where bees'
sweetened labor of honey tombs
and waxen combs rejuvenate
industrial fed hands. We were taught
of atoms, of miniscule meanings
but not living,

not the feel of river water
running past iron to touch unclothed skin
blemished by plastic masters,
not the sighing songs of willows
slowly asphyxiating to concrete jungles,
nor the taste of lilac and lavender pockets
crowning fields where burrows and families
conglomerate in the recesses of surrounding mountains
standing in resistance, their snow-capped peaks
converging like threaded hands to cradle life.

I reek of dirt—it is the only way

I know how to live.

the duality of a child

Teddy Armstrong

I'm a liar
and a whore,
a dirty slut,
untrustworthy –

with a beautiful singing voice
and eyes that beckon,
an invitation to look,
to destroy,
to leave my life a wreck.

I'm a versatile child,
a siren that can be anything if you think hard enough.

If you think hard enough,
my middle school schedule is convenient.
It allows for some quality time before Mom's home.

I can learn my lesson, everyday,
after my algebra and 6th grade reading.

Because it's absolutely necessary to beat it into my head.
In fact, morally, you're quite perfect – unlike me – because
even God punished liars and whores



yellow wallpaper

Teddy Armstrong

i gorge on yellow wallpaper and poetry,
words stuck in my throat

always a glass of milk to wash them down

and nothing that's supposed to feel like velvet
actually feels like velvet

silk, perhaps, but not velvet

i think thoughts too damning and count myself mad
but all i can do is shift

when i kill bugs, i feel down
their minute yet vast lives snuffed by a fingertip

i avoid stepping on cracks,
one can never be too careful

i sleep under boulders, safe
yet away from the breeze and flowers

a tragic life.



it's difficult to write nowadays...

Teddy Armstrong

some people say ignorance is bliss.
i say they're wrong, being stupid is so hard.

i feel like a clumsy giant, stumbling through the forest,
taking down the toothpick-trees accidentally.

i think there's something wrong with my brain,
something caused by, well, you

it's like i can never get my bearings
and there's this secret to the world that i'm not in on.

it makes me want to kill you till you're gone,
though you're already dead.

and this time, i'll step on a crack, just to see how it feels.

sometimes i wonder, what it would be like
to die in the cold vacuum of space.

suffocating or freezing to death, probably,
but i haven't looked into it enough to know for sure.

and i wonder, sometimes, what cocoons are made of.
is it silk or part of their fragile bodies,
who could say?

it's such a shame to miss someone, soon as they go,
but that's what happens when you have a bathtub-type
of boyfriend.

warm and fully engulfing, a cocoon of bright
burning stardust - enough to make you almost-sweat.



Werewolf

Fiona Ton

I often walk on two legs.

Sometimes, I go weeks,
I am consumed by the mask.
Money is tight, and wolves don't hold jobs,
at least not very well.

I forget myself.

The tension in my chest builds.
And I find myself without clarity,
uncertain of my place in that world,
where my natural state is as shadow and ghost.
Self-conscious
I search myself,
my body,
my movements,
the way I smile without showing teeth.

And each time I stumble onto it,
like it was my first time again.
The shadow,
buzzing at the edges of my perception,
and I remember.



Emerging from the dreams of daysleep,
my body relearns itself,
the long gaunt four-legged thing unleaving,
She is me after all.
primal mind though crawling outward to shake me awake.

The cold night air through fur under skin.
Taking deep breaths through phantom muzzle.
the hidden arms of night which i was born to take up
pressing to burst from the shell. All comes as if it always
was.



Fire

Fiona Ton

So often we forget it,
the magic tamed by unnamed ancestors.

In our time,
The gentle flicker in hands,
cold scratched metal casing warmed by gentle glow.
Like a lively creature,
set to join our world for moments,
to set the sacred incense of our time to smolder
as we lean against pillar,
near to the ashtray,
and for a moment cast out our thoughts,
like ghosts from salt.

Ye who is at once so tender,
warm and small,
whose ambitious nature is to grow;
was our kinship with you one of need,
or did we find our souls
reflected,
in imperfect living heat.



Gone

Carissa Chrysokos

My grandmother's head filling with the juices of
memory loss

Cold white hospital is making this worse

"I need a box." A box? "A box to

Put a box in a box nevermind"

This is her reality.

The door screeches closed.

Wishing I could turn around with each mile

She will be okay

I will see her again

I try to move quickly, but

Droplets fall like knives against porcelain, landing
sharply, only to

scatter A low hum comes from above, surrounding
the entirety of the

room.

I stare at the popcorn stars above, begging for more

Time

Cold squares line my back as if they are a sheet of
ice, but I am frostbite

Numb, to the cold

My weight holds me hostage. Unable to stand, to
move.

Each, erratic breath trapped inside this small, plaster
box.

Time crawls for a moment, but still

I cannot escape my mind.

The phone rings. She is

Gone.

I hear everything and nothing at once.



The Oldest Sister

Carissa Chrysokos

She'll have a heart of gold
That's what they say as they fill the mold
Full of her blood sweat and inability to say
No.

She'll be the model for all to come
The one from which we all can bum
Her aspirations
full to the brim with our expectations.
She won't want it unless she needs to prove us
Wrong.

That's what they say as they fill the mold
Sprinkle in a little bit of gold
Spray me with responsibilities
The queen unseen at the top of the family tree
Conditioned to point my chin to the floor
Smile, say yes, and never
Expect more.

They act surprised when I explode
Not understanding what it means to be
The only one with her head on straight
Carrying the weight
Of an entire family and all of their failed
Dreams.



Sticky Shed

Madi Diaz

Sweet you,
traveled three floors to tell me

*I'd be sooo happy if it were
cold enough to free my
knit stockings of their
year-long hibernation. But,*

seventy-one degrees is way too
hot to be dressed in wool

Early October weather keeps your legs sticky,
dreaming for that mohair release.



Leno Lace On My Frame

Madi Diaz

Lightness stayed as I
encased her frame in fiber

Now I know,
only to kiss and thank her when
laying on her bench

Anchored to the floor with
carmine blue hardware,
embossed with spirals

On days where clouds hover
no fluorescent light is enough to
make her happy,

Yellow warmth, given only
from the sun
restores her willingness to spin my
angora, I promise to

mend her her wooden body with
enough oil to sooth her creaks



Draw-In

Madi Diaz

Delicious and sticky

raw wool smells of sweat, the kind that
attaches your nose to fibers, and carries
with you for the rest of the day, or
indefinitely.

Not for the stink, but the itch.



There's a graveyard of boys that resides inside my head

C.S. Ravelli

embellished by first names on gravestones
and memories we never made
and the relationships I never had
and dedications that read
Was it all in my head?

From the tear soaked-soil bloom beautiful blue irises
that I was never gifted
because boys never asked me for my favorite flower.
I grieve the futures I imagined,
the moments we shared,
that apparently only I lived through.
My friends send me condolence letters
each anniversary of my disappointments.
You'll find someone someday, they write
with sign-offs that I'm sick and tired of,
but will never see the end of,
Warmly,
Someone whose never experienced being alone



As She Grows Through My Unicorn Eyes

Rebecca Pitchford

taken from the shelf that i have been placed
to a new land i'm sure will be great

wrapped in a box that I thought i was erased
only to be opened by my new best mate

hugged and and squeezed by this little girl with blonde
hair i no longer want to be shared

days go by and i only lay by her side

but as the years chug on i have to hide
is this a game she likes to play
or am i no longer a name she likes to say

in the corner of the room
under her bed
through my eyes
i watch her shed

the little girl who hugged and squeezed
turned into a woman who laughs as she pleased

Years go on and as
she cleans her sleeping chambers
Cobweb and Dusty Bunny
my new best mates
get swept away





wanting to be done and have a new purpose
maybe a new best mate
or a shelf where i can be showcased

my unicorn eyes see the same girl with blonder hair
as she picked me up from my corner under the bed
we walked through the house in rooms i have not been
and thrown into a place that's dark and wet

after that horrible journey being submerged
in water in the dark scary place
to hot and dry

in the radiating warm space
i start to wonder why

but when my blonde hair mate hears the jingle
from the machine that made me feel burnt
but left me with no wrinkles
i am placed back on the bed

days go by and i do not leave her side
as she sleeps
i know that i no longer need to hide.

Virtues

Amanda Woodsun

A lily crushed into your hands,
Petals fall, those that remain are
bruised and broken, doomed to ruination.

Who would want to pick this flower,
When presented the option of one
that is pristine, perfect?

Tell me, why would someone
Choose you, when the ghost of someone
Else's hands stain your skin?

Who would make a life with someone
Who didn't tend their garden to make
Room for their roots to inosculate?

What worth do you have remaining?



Voluntary Lobotomy

Amanda Woodsum

Sometimes I wish I could drill two holes into my head and remove the undesirable parts of my brain. Maybe I could enter the back of a Claire's and force some untrained piercer to cut into me. Maybe I could take a long hook and do what the Egyptians used to do to their pharaohs- pull my brain out of my body so I no longer have to deal with the wretched organ. It would be a silent death of existing. I would still be alive, but I wouldn't have to be myself.

Maybe I could drill the holes even further, to release the demons that float around in my empty skull. I wouldn't have to deal with the everlasting pain, the loss, the confusion of being human. This form of self-harm is no longer legal. And so, I am left with the consequences of the self.

If I could, I would take a spoon and remove my eyes so I wouldn't have to see myself on the other side of the mirror. Remove my ears so I wouldn't have to hear myself speak. I wish to be a husk. A worker bee moving throughout the day, without feeling without affliction.

Sometimes, I wish I could just remove my brain so I wouldn't have to think about all of this shit.



Maggots in a Decaying Raccoon

Mackenzie Clevenger

Your body is my mobile-worshiped
painted crib, bloody with first steps
and first breaths and first, first—
first, if this is going to work,
I need you to slit your life's throat
and serve it to me with your best china.

Raise me like a daughter's hand
to her mother, raise me
from the stiff arms of death,
and coddle me in the gut
stained velvet blankets,
soft and mushy.

The brick chimney sun heats
the two-lane highway pavement,
and your organs spill out
like the babbles of a newborn,
and in your manicured, empty claws
I find my haven.





I will leave eventually,
when your skin is sagged
your belly is concave,
and your breast is dry of nourishment.
When the drenched, rich soil erupts
to swallow you, I'll be gone.

I remember when you were slimy
with innocence, stripped bare
for me to invade as I saw fit.
After all, your shriveled and furless version
is the only one I know how to burrow into.
When you are dying is when I become alive.

Can you feel me squirming?
I am not right in your arms—
the weight is too heavy, isn't it?
Now that you're brittle and breakable,
one bad step from a plummet,
I need you to let me push you over the edge.

Aubade on Keratosis and Why I Keep My Nails Short

Mackenzie Clevenger

When the sun's fingers first dance on my skin
I feel their trace along my veins, the warming of the blood,
and the goosebumps of songbirds beneath their steady nails.
I am roused from the covers, welcomed to warmth,
but the peace of waking is furiously ripped
away as I go to work on my indulgent craving.

That incessant, constant, comfortable craving.
It's a permanent bother that bubbles beneath the skin,
as the wish for one normal morning is ripped
from hope at the sensing of the surging, contained blood
that runs beneath my flesh. The warmth
raises to meet the grime beneath my nails.

The bumps that litter are accustomed to my hitching nails
as they stop to itch the heads. They know I'm craving
the sweet, sanguine tang of liquid, the feeling of warmth
that pools richly from beneath and paints the skin.
The ridges suspect that this is my life blood;
that this impulse is what truly ripped

me from my slumber, what has always ripped
itself free from my chest and made a home in my nails.
The keratin rakes across my skin, searching for a well of blood
that can be sprung from my body's infinite caverns, craving
the smoothness and softness of ungraspable skin.
I value the velvet of freedom over my own flesh's warmth.





My nails dig deep beneath the layers. A sickly warmth
spreads through every inch as the caps are ripped,
with the promise of penance, from my skin.
The grime that plagues the underside of my nails,
is the evidence of this recurrent craving:
the dried and congealed remnants of old blood.

I sit dazed in the bed, arms streaked with small blood
stains that dry and crust quickly in the warmth
of the air; and now I am craving—
praying—for my consciousness to be ripped
from my traitorous nails.
That I may no longer relish the parting of my skin.

The rabid craving is lost only with the seeping of blood,
the soreness and irritation of skin. I hate that this is my
sole warmth. I have ripped myself raw in my wake. I need
to cut my nails.

Self-Portrait as a Pastoral

Mackenzie Clevenger

The whole field has a copper dusting,
that shines like pennies in the soft morning glow.
The air crisp, stands still,
as it does in the moments before downpour,
when the Earth is duckling washed
by the sweet caress of wispy clouds;
sunny.

The cow's carcass bakes in the heat.
Ivory ribs, a gaping mouth,
carved into its side, grub matted, larva riddled.
Bugs like the crooked rotten teeth
of a reaper bird's knowing smile:
the return to the dust and soil,
inevitable.

Those knived-mouthed creatures,
hunkered over in death meal
have the same glazed eyes, staring
at the milky grass, as the dulled cow.
The birds breathe death, drink
its sour buds like nectar. After all,
the gods are those that relish death's
taste.

The cow comes apart, poorly sewn patchwork,
the squishy flesh tearing from dusty bones,
the way pages from the Farmer's Almanac fall loose.





Its blood inscribes itself in the dirt,
an overturned inkwell, pooling
into the earth and into the throats of feathered
necromancers.

Nature often gorges itself on bitterness
found in the heartstreams of the beast,
encased in all of those salt coated veins.
In years that cow will be the unwilling mother
of a juniper tree or a honeysuckle bush,
but the bugs that scamper the leaves will always know
who died here.

Police Code 10-52

Kolby Knickerbocker

Trees run past me,
a view from a shattered window.
The world spins upside down and I'm flying with the birds.

I'm heavy
and weightless,
a stone floating in space.
Did I leave the stove on?
Who's with the kids?
Still my thoughts
and hold my hand,
but you're floating with me.

The earth crashes like a meteor;
We make touch down.
Pull a bag over my head,
Let me breath in the CO2.
I would choose to end me
To save you.
Searching in the wreckage
For your hand.
Cold and slick,
Hot and dry.

Now I live in the darkness.
I watch movies of our life from a giant monitor.
I see us with the kids.





I see us flying with the birds.

I see us in a meadow, laying in grass neither one of us can feel.

One cough, two,

Weak eyelids open to the world.

Wet grass brushes

My fingertips,

But I don't recall any rain.

Flood lights sting my eyes,

Sirens wail past.

Red covers my vision,

But still my mind races with you.

Bile grips my mouth,

Acidic and vile.

Thoughts of you strewn

On the street

Like a hunted goose,

Put to rest by your smile.

You hug me,

We're shaking,

Sobbing,

But whole.

Until Next Paycheck

Kolby Knickerbocker

Empty cabinets home to dust.
They dance in time to suffering.

“Mom, what’s for dinner?”

I scrounge with the rats,
desperate for a morsel of cheese.

“I don’t know yet sweetie.”

Barren fridge like an icy tundra,
baring no fruit
for the weary traveler.

“But I wanna eat now! Please?”

Small stomachs grumble
Thunder in a cave
shivering

My body tears apart.
My organs fight to see who’s the weakest,
who goes first.





"I'm sorry. Just give me a little bit, okay?"

Small hands clutching at me

Small teary eyes gazing

Bile in my throat

Burning

A mystery box appears,

ordinary yet strange,

on my porch.

A note attached with hasty tape,

"We hope this helps".

Relief,

Blissful calm.

The famine is over

as sunken stomachs fill up.

A few cans,

A box of rice,

A package of meat,

A bountiful feast!

Butterflies

Alexandra Rodrigues

What happened to the state of my stomach? It's been like this for a while now. The erratic fluttering. Ginger ale and mint gum are a must for these nervous situations. I try not to think of the source as it seeps deeper into my life. Feelings of nausea lead me to pour my soul out in front of you. My mouth opens, revealing a kaleidoscope of wings. They fly out the small window of where we stand. I ask again, what happened to the calmness of my stomach? It's been like this for a while now. The erratic fluttering. Loving every glance that induces my sickness. I inch further to you, as you then hold my hand.



Everywoman

Sophia Decherney



Driving down the highway, calmly you arrive from nowhere
The volume was on an odd number before the music
stopped, but now it rests at zero thankful to be relieved
of its burden —

the same screeching beats responsible for the suffering of
your easygoing mother If we asked you who you were,
you would say, “easy, I’m...”

And nothing more

And so you are the easyfriend who arrives dancing – sings,
and jokes

Who can begin equally from chaos

Who nobody remembers but everyone knows was there

Blended perfectly into the scene

This was the morning you woke up without fear

This is everymorning to you, everywoman

The history of evolution coinciding perfectly for your one
body

That grew as easily from girl to woman

That body that was your mother’s, then was yours, then
was not, and then slowly it was again, and now you share
it, and someday you will stop, and someday it will no
longer be yours.

You know the dirt better than you know yourself

And now, when you think of dirt, you remember not the days
it was your playmate in the garden – squalling and squealing –
In the days before you became everywoman

You who are the daughter to whom all mothers compare
Saying, “Did you hear that everymother’s daughter did..” and
“why can’t you be more like everydaughter”

Who has twin suns in her eyes and marries a man with a job
everyone respects and no one could tell you

New flowers appear in a vase on your wooden dinning table
each day, the same table that is always set, that at meal times
is always full, that at breakfast always sports a paper, that after
dinner cleans itself

You are rewarded every time you smile

So now you smile all the time

Who you are is now who you love

You who care not for all the little things and yet appreciate
each one with gratitude

You are full of gratitude

And ease

And every

And

And if you cannot be. How will you live now?



In which I realize that I loved you in the mingling of things.

Mya Miriyala

My mom says never
lend a person salt for fear
that they turn bitter.
So returning your sambar
masala isn't hatred.

I just thought you might
want it back. And maybe you
can return my bowl?
The white one, with blue flowers.
We broke one of ours, that's all.

You see Ikea
makes bowls with tempered glass, not
porcelain. So when
they fall they shatter and when
they shatter they splinter but

that has nothing to
do with you and me, except
I can't lend you the
vacuum. There's too much glass here.

I swear it's not about you.

And I don't need your
grater or tea strainer now,
I'll make do. And I
returned the doormat we stole
from you as a prank last winter.



I was waiting for
you to notice its absence.
But know it's not that
I don't love you anymore.
It's silly to keep waiting.

And it's not that I
don't care about you or our
friendship, it's just that
I'm scared of you when you're drunk.
Of the bile from that night.

But that's not quite true
is it? I'm not scared now, not
anxious or angry,

not anymore. I guess I
just never really knew you.

My mom once said not
to expect my cousins to
dance at my wedding.
I told her who needs cousins?
Some brief, stupid part of me
believed I had a friend who would dance.



Object Permanence

Janiel Laboy

I fear

I'll disappear

when left to my own devices.

That all the pieces of me I've collected

will simply

get up

and wander away.

But maybe I never existed anyway.

A haunting of my imagination.

A specter on a spectrum only I can see.

Sometimes I forget to exist.

I wish other people would forget me too



A life of Deceit

Janiel LaBoy

Generally speaking,
I find my own presence intolerable,
So I don't expect other people to want to deal with it either.
Sometimes, I want to crawl out of my skin
and spend the rest of my days as a disembodied entity.
Except those usually serve some purpose.
Whether it be death and destruction raining from the heavens
or creating a religion and calling themselves God.
But I have neither the ambition
or general will to exist long enough to accomplish either.
I can assure you it was never my ego that was the problem.

Maybe it's the lack thereof.

The way my words simply tumble their way into the open
and I am left unrepentant.

Why should I be sorry for a truth you are unable to handle?

I don't think myself mindlessly cruel, I simply find no point in lies.

Seldom is it that my tongue is held and I am all the more villainized
for it. How is it my fault that the cure to your malady is the
truth that caused you to so callously stick fingers down your
throat?



I don't get it.

But I let it be.

I mean truly,
as truthful as all else can be,
I don't care.

Or at least I've tricked myself into believing I don't.
Into believing that the way friends so casually speak of
their relationships doesn't leave
me aching and lost inside.
I don't know who the fuck I am.
And I don't think anything I could discover will truly satisfy.

I am no entity
bent on raining hellfire and destruction.
But I feel as though I could simply come apart at the seams
with the strength of my continuous self-loathing.
And I don't know if I genuinely like anything about myself.

Like maybe the only person I deem it acceptable to lie to is me.



Portrait of Myself

Kalle Harper

I am a book
Full of stories and ideas
Born and raised by loving hands

I am an ant
Quiet and unnoticed on my own
Stronger than I seem, useless against a boot

I am a star
Far away and unattainable
As radiant as the millions in the backdrop of the sky

I am a teddy bear
A caring and comforting companion
Until I'm outgrown

I am a dragon
Guarded and free
Hoarding trinkets and knowledge like gold

I am a goddess
Vengeful and kind
Preparing my offerings for I decide my own fate



My eyes are not the windows to my soul.

Kalle Harper

You can stare all you want,
But all you will see is a void
You will not know me —
The deepest parts of me
— Through me.

I can lie to anyone,
But not to a blank page.

I've stored my soul in my words.
Carving out a piece with each syllable.
I cannot lie to myself.

I do not think. Just
Feel.
Rules

Don't
Matter
To Me.

I go w t l
i h h f o
t e w



No

Of my brain waves.

Rhyme or

Reason.

My poems are the windows to
My world.



On Paper

Markisha Clark

The children pounded through the house as Terra crouched in her bedroom closet. She had begun the task of sorting through the mounds of papers, books, legal documents, and shoes but hadn't got very far. This is how it always happened. The plan in her mind was always to jump in the mess and have it cleaned and organized in less than twenty minutes, yet something hindered her every time.

CRASH—Aaahhhh—

"I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING... NO, DON'T TELL MOM!"

Running footsteps and moaning followed. Raymond, her son squeezed into the closet and sat on her knees. "Felicity pushed me, and I fell into the T.V."

"Are you bleeding," Terra said as she pried his hand from the back of his head. Since she didn't see any gashes and since this was the fourth T.V. they had broken since moving into the new apartment, she sent him away and reached for a stack of dusty spiraled notebooks in the corner.

After glazing over the contents, she was able to put them in order from earliest to most recent. These notebooks, she knew, were the chronicles of her life. Since she was sixteen, she had kept a journal and wrote in it almost every day. This she had done through her teenage years and into her adult life until...

"What a waste of time," she said as she opened the earliest one dated '2008'. "What did I think I would be able to with all of these," she grumbled. "It's not like I'll even read through them all. Did I think someone would make a book about my life?" She snorted and laughed as she flipped through to the middle of the notebook and read aloud,

"Sadie tried to lock herself in the bathroom, but mom must have picked the lock. I heard screaming and cussing and went out to see what was happening. I thought there would be blood but there wasn't. Sadie was standing in the bathtub fighting mom and then mom slapped her twice and she screamed—"

Terra looked up from the page and screamed. She wasn't in her closet anymore. The walls were white with thin blue lines. There in front of her was her mother and sister screaming at each other as big letters... words... Terra's words... her handwriting fell over them and crashed to the floor.

"I hate you!" Appeared and fell just as Sadie screamed it.

"I DON'T CARE" appeared and fell just as her mother said it.

"Get away from her!" appeared and fell just as it fell from Terra's lips, but nobody paid attention to her. The ghosts of her childhood didn't acknowledge her presence even as an adult.

Terra realized like a jolt to the chest that she had entered her notebook, her own account of what happened that horrific night. She ran around along the blue lined walls looking for a doorknob but instead found a black pen hooked on a wire spiral in the corner of the room. Instinctively, she picked up the pen and wrote on the wall: I left my mom and sister and went to a happier place.

She turned around because she smelled smoke like a candle had just been put out. There, in front of a backdrop of white walls and blue lines she saw herself, younger, thinner, and wearing a wedding dress as she knelt beside her groom. They held a candle between them that had just been blown out.

Terra felt her chest swell as she watched and listened to them make vows to love one another for the rest of their lives, to grow and learn together, and finally they kissed. Then, the groom put his lips to his bride's ear and Terra knew what he had whispered: "This is forever."

"Liar!" Terra shrieked and whipped around again. Ink squirted everywhere as she pounded the wall with her pen. She smashed it until there was nothing left but broken pieces of plastic in her hand.

"I have to get out of here," she said as she crumpled to the floor and streams drenched her face. She looked at what was left of the pen in her hand: nothing but ink and blood from where the plastic pierced her palm. She rose and, face to the wall, wrote with her finger in ink and blood: I stopped running.

When the final stroke of the "g" stained the wall, Terra closed her eyes and bowed her head, hands falling limp at her sides.

A small voice whistled through the room. "I didn't push him mommy. We were playing and he tripped and fell."

Terra, back in her bedroom closet, reached out to hold her daughter, Felicity, in her arms but hesitated remembering the ink and blood on her hands. She gasped realizing they were clean. She swooped the girl into a tight embrace.

"Why," sniff, sniff, "are we crying?" Felicity asked.

"Sometimes it's good to just cry, hunny."

She kissed her daughter and told her to go hug her brother and say, "I love you." Terra ran to her bedside table and dug in the drawer until she found the small, decorated notebook her children had given her for Christmas. Grabbing a pen, she fell onto her bed, and wrote until her hand ached. When she finished, she read the last line aloud, "There's a saying: *its not as bad as it seems*. Well, for me, it is always as bad as it seems, but not so bad when it's on paper.

Conversations with the Moon

J. Fox

We are sitting in the creek bed. The air is cool, the breeze playing with our hair, tossing it into our faces. The moon is full and bright, its reflection tearing as the water ripples against stones and sticks and broken beer bottles that, no matter how often I clean up, always return. I love the creek, I come here all the time. It is away from people, it is silent, with a perfect view of the moon. For a while, the moon was my closest companion, and I still love to bask in her beauty every now and again.

I brought Jamie with me for the first time almost a year ago. We had been friends then, only friends, laughing and joking with each other as we leapt from stone to large stone, giggling stupidly when one of us missed a step and our socks got soaked. The shift that took place after that took a long time. But the wait— to me at least— was worth it. I still remember what he looked like, moonlight dripping down his face and pooling in the nape of his neck. That was the first time we had kissed. And ever since that moment, the creek bed has been ours.

And now we are sitting here again, side by side, our shoulders pressed together. The moon is covering his face the way it did that night, when we first became kings of the creek bed together. Shadows slide along the muscles of his neck and his Adam's apple bobs up and down as he swallows. I know that he has to say something, and I know exactly what that something is. I brace myself for impact.

"You can't be in love with me," he murmurs. I take a deep breath, letting my gaze slide away from him and to the shallow water that almost glows in the moonlight.

"I know."

"Then why are you?" he asks, sounding almost angry. But I know, because I know him better than anyone, that he is just in pain.

"Because I can't help it."

"Jesus, Grant, that's not a good enough answer," he whispers, his face flushed, tears building up behind his eyes, catching on his eyelashes. I can only shake my head because maybe that isn't a good answer, but it is the only true answer. There are other things that I could say, there are things that I could lie about, but I'm tired. I don't want to lie anymore, I don't want to hide anymore. And maybe he is right, maybe I shouldn't be in love with him, but not for the reasons he claims. Maybe I shouldn't be in love with him because we want different things, because he isn't ready to move forward together, because we aren't compatible. There are many reasons why maybe we shouldn't be together, and none of them are because we are both boys. But I know for him, that is the first reason why we can't be together. And my heart breaks for him because of that.

"Jamie," I start, not sure where to go from there. There is so much that he needs to hear right now, and none of it I think he will listen to, not coming from me. Instead I stand up. He scrambles to his feet next to me. I take a hesitant step forward, holding my arms out at my side. It is an invitation. An invitation to step forward, to meet me halfway. It is a step forward to accepting himself. He hesitates for a fraction of a moment, his eyes widening, the muscles in his throat working as he tries to even his breathing.

He takes a step backwards.

It hurts to watch him go. I loved him, god, did I love him. But it also hurts because we could have been great together. Maybe that is a lie, but now we will never know. I do not blame him though, I think that it would hurt less if I did. If I called him a terrible person for leading me on and then ditching me, if I could scream his name in rage and burn the things he got for me, then maybe it would hurt less. But I do not hate him, and I do not blame him. I understand him. I understand the storm that is raging inside his head right now, I weathered that same storm, and I wish that he knew that because I could have helped him. I tried to help him.

I watch his back for as long as I can, until he smears into the night and becomes nothing more than one of the stars a million miles away. I know that this is the last time I will see him. I know that he will stop responding to my texts and I know that I shouldn't even bother calling him. I know that the kingdom of the creek bed has a single ruler once again.

Eventually I sigh, laying down along the bank of the creek. My back presses uncomfortably against a large, cold stone. I focus my eyes onto the moon, ignoring the way she blurs as tears fill my eyes. They fall slowly out of the corner of my eyes.

"I tried," I whisper to the moon. "I tried to help him. And it didn't work." I know that him leaving is not my fault. I know that accepting himself is something that has to happen on his own time. But I know what it feels like, I lived through it. And I could have helped him, if he had asked.

"Does he even know how lucky he is?" I do not mean to shout, but suddenly all of my emotions are exploding inside of me. The moon, patient as ever, watches over me and waits.

"I had no one when I was going through that. I had no one to talk to, to help me through it, to tell me that it was okay that I was gay. I thought— I thought that my world was ending, and I had no one to help me hold up the sky when it was falling down on me," I cry, hearing my words echo down the creek bed. The only response I get is the gentle swish of leaves rustling and water running and breaking over stones in the creek.

"I would have held up the sky for him," I whisper, voice cracking as more tears fall down my face. "I would have done anything he asked me." the moon does nothing. Maybe she knew how the ending was going to go, maybe she knew that this would happen. Either way, I feel her light on my face and I know that she is here with me, and I know that she is going to help me through this, just like she helped me through the horribly

messy process that was accepting myself. This is not the first time she has heard me scream and it will not be the last. As long as I am king of this creek, she will hear me, and she will look down on me and protect me.

“You won’t leave me, right?” I ask her, voice soft. The moon’s light falls across my skin, never faltering or wavering. And despite everything, I smile.

Lasciviously Yours

Carrienne Garner

The closer I get to the house, the more radio screeches in static. It grates on my nerves like a spoon scraping the bottom of an empty styrofoam ice cream cup, and I jam the power button to stop the assault. I loosen my chokehold on my steering wheel and take a deep, calming breath, pushing away the fears that have resurfaced every time I've done this conjuring. I repeat the same three phases like a mantra, trying to convince myself they're still true.

He will come back.

He will be there.

Everything will be ok.

Something feels different tonight, though, and the mantras I've told myself for the last three years aren't doing their usual magic. Over the past couple of months, a weight has settled in the pit of my stomach, growing heavier with each passing day. I feel nine months pregnant tonight, but I look no different.

At last, the family's old abandoned home comes into view. The peaks stretch toward the night sky, looming over the gravel driveway, and the weight in my stomach turns to lead. It looks like a house out of a movie where a witch or two live alone and practice their magic, rusted wrought iron gate and all.

The house, named "Cape Raven," belonged to my ex-boyfriend's family for years; they only left because my ex, Dolon, died suddenly in the house. No one knows why or how, so they deemed the house cursed and left after the life insurance check cleared. Since his death, I've returned to the house every full moon and conjured his ghost. At first, we just talked, and each time I asked about his death, it was as if the connection between him and this realm weakened; suddenly, I could hardly understand him, or he'd flicker in and out.

I pull up in front of the house and park the car, then grab my bag of supplies for the summoning. The cold, crisp October weather has cooled the house enough that my breath comes out in little white wisps as I ascend to the attic. I wouldn't say that the house has entirely fallen into disrepair, but it's clear that no one longer resides here. As I approach the attic door, the weight in my gut slightly lifts, then lands heavily as if giving itself momentum and trying to remind me that it's there.

I make my way to the far side of the attic, weaving through the worn and tattered boxes to where I cleared an area big enough to fit a summoning circle. A ring of salt remains from the last time I summoned Dolon, and I step over it, sitting in the center of the circle and pulling a half-lit candle from my bag. My summoning is simple, something I came up with in a rush because of how suddenly he died.

I'm not a well-practiced witch, nor do I do it daily. I became one more out of

convenience than anything else. I pull a match out of my bag and steady my breath before striking it against the side of the box.

Nothing.

Again.

Nothing.

Again.

Nothing.

My hands tremble as I fumble with the match; each failure to light is time stolen I have with him. I look out the grime-encrusted window at the moon perched low in the sky tonight, her light casting distorted shadows of the trees outside whose limbs twist their way to where I'm seated on the floor.

One of the matches finally takes, and I kiss the wick with the match, setting it aflame. I watch it dance, hoping it'll entice him to return to me.

"And so it'll be, bring him back to me," I whisper, setting the candle back into its dust ring on the floor. Closing my eyes, I shift in my seat, causing the floorboards to groan and deeply inhale.

I continue whispering to myself as my mind conjures the image of him the last time I saw him alive: velvety raven hair tousled from sleep and sex, slight scruff on his face he hadn't shaved because of my lascivious distraction, and green eyes the shade of newly born leaves in the spring.

I woke up to an empty bed and followed the scent of bacon into the kitchen. Dolon stood at the stove with his back to me, his hair disheveled and his t-shirt only half pulled down on one side. Wordlessly, I slunk over to him and pulled it down, causing him to turn around and wrap me in his arms, topping it off with a kiss.

"Good morning, gorgeous," he greeted me with a sleepy, lopsided grin.

"Good morning, handsome devil," I responded, and I swear his bright eyes flashed.

"Hungry?"

"Famished. You gave me quite the workout last night."

Dolon's lopsided smile turned devilish as he let me go and returned to the stove. "It was my pleasure."

My words start to slow when I notice the sensation of the candle's smoke wafting up and around me, enveloping me in a lover's embrace. The familiar mixture of musk and pine fills my nose, but there's a note of something else I can't identify, like a man caught with another woman's perfume on him.

Before I can open my eyes to admonish him, long, cold fingers cup my cheek, and I shiver. The scent is more harsh now, and the difference makes my gut tighten. Searing, hot lips touch mine without warning. I pull away, finally opening my eyes. The sight of leafy green eyes or velvety raven hair does not greet me.

"Where is he?" is all I can manage. I should feel fear, but I don't. Instead, there's an estranged familiarity.

I watch in horror as the thing before me sits back with a sadistic grin, and its features contort into a face I know as well as my own, right down to the...devilish grin.

"What do you mean, I'm right here?"

I blink, shaking my head to clear my thoughts. "What the hell was that?"

Dolon stares, a shadow of a smirk painting his lips. "What, Vi?"

"Those eyes...and that face. That was not you. D—did you learn a new parlor trick or something?"

He laughs, which sounds wrong, sending goosebumps down my arms. "You can say that. I'll admit I..." he pauses and stares at me. Then, a quick flash of something in his eye and he resumes, more chipper than before. "I haven't been feeling myself the last couple of times you've summoned me, but I'm here. I'm back."

"Wait, y—you're back? How—what?"

Dolon smiles and opens his arms. "It's me, Vi. I'm back. I'm—well, I don't know what I am, but I'm here."

I shake my head in disbelief. "No, you're not him. Dolon is gone. There was a fire—he's dead," I plead, tears threatening to escape. "I attended his funeral. I buried him. I've been talking to his ghost, and even then, just barely. You can't be back, whatever the hell that means."

The being claiming to be Dolon tilts his head like a puppy looking at its master, waiting for a treat. "But I am. If you reach out, you can touch me. Besides, did you see a body?" A smirk again.

"I—what? No, of course not. They said there wasn't anything left. They had to identify him—you—by your dental records."

Dolon looks at me, hurt, etching his features. "And you didn't think my death was suspicious?"

"I mean, yes, but—" I stumble over my words. "Why would I have questioned it? How would I have proved otherwise?"

My thoughts raced. Dolon can't be back. Even with my summoning ritual, it wasn't permanent. It was a bandaid placed over a hole in a sinking ship.

"You could have figured it out! You didn't love me. You quickly threw me in a box and stomped down the dirt."

"I was quick about nothing!" I scream. "Every gods damned full moon, I have summoned you. Praying to anyone who would listen to bring you back once more."

Tears stream down my face and Dolon smiles again. He reaches out and caresses my cheek, catching a tear on his finger and licking it. "Mmm, I love the taste of sorrow and desperation."

"W—who are you?"

Dolon sighs and sits back. "I told you already, I'm Dolon."

"I still don't believe you, and I'm tired of talking in circles. You're not Dolon. Dolon doesn't lick my tears and enjoy my sorrow." I cross my arms over my chest to help steel my nerves. "Who the fuck are you?"

Dolon smirks and shrugs. "I already told you," he starts, and I begin to argue again as he lifts a finger to silence me. "But I'm feeling generous, so I will say this: I answered your call," he tilts his head and observes me, "You get ten questions."

The flame from the candle flickers when he says this, and the shadows cast from the tree stretch as if waking from a long slumber.

I wrack my brain, my mind reeling.

What do I need to know?

“Are you human?” One. The shadows creep closer.

Dolon gives me a sinister smile. “No.”

“Are you alive?” Two, and they creep closer.

Dolon’s face falls in disappointment. “I’m as much flesh and blood as you are right now.”

“You didn’t answer my question. Are. You. Alive?”

Dolon rolls his eyes. “Technically, yes.”

“Technically?”

“What I said before is true; I’m as much flesh and blood as you are right now. That’s three.”

I sift through everything I learned of the occult. I primarily focused on becoming a witch, but my interests wandered into darker territories to ensure I didn’t accidentally summon something I didn’t want.

“Are you...a demon?” Four, the shadows merge, forming a hand with long, spindly claws atop crooked fingers.

Dolon again smiles at me eerily, and then it’s the other being looking back at me. Now that I’m getting a good look at him, he is horrifying. His skin has a yellow pallor to it, his veins showing green like spiderwebs under his skin. Green, rotted goat-like horns protrude from his forehead and curl back and under. His mouth is a black void with sharp teeth, and his eyes are entirely yellow, his pupils black and tiny in the center.

“Look at you, asking the right questions again. I am a demon, but my tastes are more...singular.”

I fall back and scramble away from him. Only one demon I can think of would do the things he’s done. “You’re an incubus,” I state it so I don’t waste another precious question.

“I am. That’s five,” he says and crawls toward me, his appearance again changing to Dolon.

I shake my head. “That wasn’t a question.”

He frowns and hisses. “You bitch.”

I smirk and shrug. “Is Dolon real? Was it always you?”

“Yes and no. That’s five *and* six.”

I got too cocky. “What happened to the real Dolon?” Seven.

“He perished in the fire; the Dolon you knew was gone.”

“Wait, what do you mean was gone?” Eight. The tips of the shadow’s claws almost graze my fingers. I move my hand, and they move with me.

Dolon smiles and reaches out to caress my hair. “My lovely Violet, always so

perceptive.” He leans forward, and I hold my breath as he caresses my cheek with his nose. The act is so gentle and intimate that it catches me off guard. “Dolon is alive again.”

Before I can respond, his lips find mine, and it feels surprisingly familiar. He moves from my mouth and kisses my jaw and neck.

“What did he do?” I half-moan. Nine.

A low chuckle emanates from him, tickling my throat. He kisses his way back to my ear, whispering, “He made a trade.”

As he answered, his hands joined his mouth to distract me. Passion saturates my veins, and I need him anywhere I can get him. On me, in me, anywhere. I don’t care. “Dolon,” I whisper, and then it’s like we’re back to where we left off.

A million warning bells ring, but I ignore all of them. Dolon is here, and he’s touching me, and, god, I have missed his touch. I match his intensity as I kiss him back, and we hastily discard our clothes, falling onto the pile of blankets I hadn’t noticed.

I thought we were primal the last day I saw Dolon alive; that didn’t even begin to hold a flame to what did in the attic.

Once we are both spent, and the lust clears from my vision, Dolon leans down and kisses me softly again. “You have one more question.”

One more question. Dolon. A demon. This man—thing—isn’t my Dolon. I push him away and stand, dressing in my clothes. “What did Dolon trade?”

The demon sighs and stands, snapping his fingers so he’s also dressed again. “Isn’t it obvious?”

I shake my head as that lead in my gut from earlier returns.

“My dear, the boy traded his soul for yours. You’re mine.”

My lips curl back in disgust. “I am no such thing.”

The demon chuckles. “Oh, but you are. We just solidified the deal. You were so much easier to coerce than I anticipated.”

The clawed fingertips grab hold of my ankles with one hand and snuff out the candle with the other, dousing everything in darkness.

I jolt awake, my heart pounding in my ears, and sit up. The room is dark, and I feel Dolon roll over next to me.

“Everything ok, Vi?” his voice is gravelly from sleep.

I take a couple of grounding breaths and nod, even though he can’t see me. “Just a weird dream.”

“What happened?”

I sit back against the headboard and close my eyes. “I was at your family’s home, but it was abandoned. You had died suspiciously in a fire, and I became a witch to summon your ghost.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, but the last time...something went wrong. I summoned a demon.”

Dolon scoffs. “Of course you did. This sounds like the plot of a movie.”

"I know it does, but Dolon—it felt so real. I had sex with the demon..."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I knew he wasn't you, but I was so overcome with lust that I just...I couldn't help it."

"Then what?"

"Then he told me you were alive again because you traded your soul for mine."

Dolon takes my hand and kisses my knuckles. "That's silly." Dolon pulls on my hand, which I take as an invitation to lie down again. "I'd never do that."

I lie down again, resting my forehead against his. "I know."

He snakes his hand around my neck, pulling me to kiss my forehead. "Besides," he says as his grip tightens on my neck.

I push him away and open my eyes. Glowing yellow eyes bore into mine.

"Your soul is already mine."

A Pilot's Unplanned Mission

Laura Evenson

The engine roared deeply as Captain Jaqueline Forte steered the massive commercial airplane through the cerulean skies. Gripping the control yoke with practiced precision, she skillfully guided her aircraft toward its intended destination. The cockpit hummed with the familiar symphony of dials, buttons, blinking lights, and the pink noise from the airflow and engine. Pink noise is similar to white noise but has a lower and deeper pitch. This flat scene had become the backdrop to Jaqueline's life as a pilot.

Suddenly, a jolt shook the plane, causing Jaqueline to lose grip on the control yoke. A wave of sheer panic surged through her as the autopilot disengaged, leaving the plane at the mercy of gravity. As the turbulence subsided, Jaqueline fought against the disorientation, desperately trying to regain control of the aircraft. She peered out of the cockpit window, searching for any sign of trauma or danger, but all she saw was a thick swirl of clouds surrounding her. Confusion gripped her mind, clouding her thoughts. She felt nauseous.

Jaqueline reached for the nearest object to steady herself, but all she could focus on was a pen resting on the empty drink holder. As her hand closed around it, the world around her blurred, colors shifting and merging. The once familiar cockpit melted away. What was happening? She felt lighter than air, like a wispy cloud. When her vision cleared, Jaqueline's heart skipped a beat at the sight that greeted her.

Instead of her usual surroundings, she found herself trapped within the very object she had reached for—the pen. Her entire body had shrunk to miniature proportions.

Jaqueline could not begin to comprehend her situation. She was inside the pen, gazing outward into a vast and surreal landscape that resembled an overgrown jungle. She immediately saw vibrant jade plants scattered around her.

In the midst of her miniature perspective of this expansive wilderness of lush jade and other foliage, an unexpected creature caught Jaqueline's eye. It was a strange but vivid and ginormous zebra, its pink and white stripes a stark contrast to the green-hued surroundings. She felt like she was about to fall, although she was securely positioned in what appeared to be the clear top of a pen, and it was shaped such that she was able to look down and see the bottom of the pen. She still was not sure what was happening. What she was able to ascertain was that the pen, "her pen," was in the pocket of a seemingly giant person carrying a camera who was perched high up in an ancient palm tree to likely snap never-before-seen pictures of this niche animal that seemed to be looking right up at her. The mystery photographer was losing his grip and began to sway while hanging on to a few fronds that were no longer strong enough to support him.

Still stunned and disoriented, Captain Jaqueline Forte had unwittingly accepted that she had become trapped inside a simple pen, inside a photographer's front pocket. She had been plunged into a world that defied logic and challenged her very existence. Now,

she had to uncover the mystery of this surreal reality and find a way to escape this pen and pocket before it was too late. But where could she go?

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As Jaqueline Forte contemplated her predicament, her mind began to piece together fragments of memories from long ago. The lush landscape, her father's pen, and the distinctive zebra stirred something deep within her. "Could it be? Was this all a manifestation of the past, a symbolic journey to reconnect with the person who had abandoned me?" she thought.

With determination fueling her every thought, Jaqueline mustered the resilience that had made her a skilled pilot and set out to explore the surreal wilderness surrounding her. She was suddenly no longer trapped but moving cautiously through the vibrant jade plants. She marveled at the intricate details she had never noticed before. Tiny insects scuttled past, each one a reminder of the interconnectedness of life.

As she ventured further, the colossal zebra remained a constant presence, its pink and white stripes seemingly guiding her path. Jaqueline felt a strange connection to the creature, her heart aching with a mix of curiosity and apprehension. The symbolism of the zebra's presence began to dawn on her—an animal known for its uniqueness and individuality, just like the man she suspected to be her father.

After what seemed like hours of exploration, Jaqueline stumbled upon an ancient tree with gnarled roots spreading like a protective embrace. Its bark bore marks of time, etched with memories locked away for too long. Without knowing why, she felt drawn to this tree—a place of hidden significance.

Resting herself against the aged trunk, Jaqueline traced her fingers along its weathered surface, feeling an inexplicable warmth. In an enchanting display, the tree's branches began to sway in harmony with the wind, whispering secrets only she could understand. Memories flooded back, and her heart raced with a mix of euphoria and trepidation.

Within that very moment, the giant person lowered the camera, peering down curiously at Jaqueline's miniature form that was back inside of the pen after having fallen out of his pocket. Their eyes met, and a profound understanding passed between them. Jaqueline's suspicions were confirmed—this giant was indeed her birth father, the man who had slipped away from her life shortly after her birth.

As the photographer carefully retrieved the pen from the ground near the bottom of the tree trunk, he released Jaqueline from her surreal prison of being trapped and being so small in size. There was an immense sense of reckoning in the air. The connection between father and daughter had been awakened, albeit in the most unconventional of circumstances.

With sensitivity and patience, Jaqueline's father explained the choices he had made and the reasons that had led him to disappear all those years ago. "This is completely overwhelming," she thought. While his heartfelt explanation did not justify his absence, it allowed a seed of forgiveness to take root within Jaqueline's heart. She recognized that life's complexities had driven her father away, but now, they had been brought together through the unlikely of journeys.

As the warmth of her father's embrace lingered in Jaqueline's memory, slowly, she began to regain consciousness. Her eyelids fluttered open, revealing the sterile ambiance of a hospital room. Tubes, monitors, and the faint beeping of machines surrounded her. A

dull ache pulsed through her body as she tried to sit up, her gaze fixating on the figure standing beside her bed.

To her surprise, it was her father, his eyes brimming with concern and relief. Their reconnection within the surreal world of the pen had dissolved into the realm of dreams, leaving Jaqueline disoriented and questioning her own reality. Had it all been a figment of her imagination? A manifestation of her deepest desires?

Confusion etched across her face as she mustered the strength to speak. "Dad... is that really you?"

Tears welled up in her father's eyes as he reached for her hand, squeezing it gently. "Yes, Jacqueline, it is me. I have missed so much, and I am truly sorry for everything."

A sense of relief washed over Jaqueline, mingling with her continued disbelief. Pieces of the puzzle fell into place—the turbulence, the pen, the surreal adventure—all of it a journey within the confines of her own mind. As she listened to her father recount the story of his search for her and the accident that had rendered her unconscious, she realized that their connection surpassed the boundaries of metaphorical symbolism; it was grounded in the deep love and longing that had persisted through the years.

Overwhelmed by emotions, Jaqueline knew that this was a second chance, a fresh beginning they both had yearned for. She forgave her father and embraced the opportunity to rebuild their relationship, thread by thread, painting a new canvas of shared experiences and cherished moments.

Days turned into weeks in the hospital, with Jaqueline's father at her side every step of the way. Through medical procedures, rehabilitation, and countless conversations, they forged an unbreakable bond built on trust, understanding, and the shared dream of a future she had once glimpsed within the pen. "What a strange dream I had," she told her father. "It made no logical sense and could not have happened."

As Jacqueline's strength returned, she forgot about the experience inside the pen. She wrote it off as a possible disassociated fugue state during which her mind wandered, but she could not get over how it seemed so realistic. "Maybe it was a hallucination?" she thought to herself.

With the weight of her newfound revelation and her magical pen in hand, Jaqueline stepped back into her role as a pilot, ready to soar through the skies once more. No longer burdened by unanswered questions, she was propelled by a new purpose—to embrace the connection she had found and to forge a future woven with love and understanding. Through the depths of symbolism and the surreal landscape she had encountered, Jaqueline had discovered not only her father's presence but also a profound sense of self and the power of forgiveness.

She was eager to return to the deep blue skies that had defined her life. But this time, she knew she would not always be alone. Her father and his passion for photography would be flying on some of her flights to other exotic locations when she would have a few days off, and they could capture the intense beauty of the warmer climates of our planet.

Together, they embarked on their first flight, her father capturing breathtaking sights through his camera lens and Jaqueline navigating the aircraft with confidence. The symbolism of their journey had transformed from a surreal enigma to a tangible reality, a testament to the resilience of their bond and the power of forgiveness.

As the airplane soared through the endless blue skies, Jaqueline looked out at the world with renewed appreciation. The sun illuminated everything beneath her, casting vibrant hues and contrasting glows upon the earth below. In that moment, she understood that life's challenges and twists were not to be feared but embraced, for within their depths lay the potential for profound transformation.

As they flew on these trips together, father and daughter, the softness of the sun caressed their faces, reminding them of the journey that had led them here, a journey that began with an airplane, a pen, and a bond that refused to be confined by time, or circumstance.

Shoes

Kennedy Postovit

As she disappeared into the alleyway, her shoes became noticeable. A vibrant yellow, striking in the 6pm sun; an iridescent-looking glimmer that complemented her purple socks that scrunched at her ankles like a school girl's uniform. She wore an almost neutral expression, with one side of her mouth upturned, yet her furrowed brows and squinted eyes kept her from wearing this potential excitement. She approached the door, but before knocking, she paused to tell the person on the other end of the line thank you for the luck and that she loves them, then the call ends. After three soft thumps, the door swings open as if the shaggy-haired boy in grey pants and a white t-shirt was staring into peephole, awaiting her arrival. As he takes her by the hand, she succumbs to her smile and follows him into the house.

Only the house's walls and the two newly-found lovers know the remnants of the night they shared, but when she exited down the alley, in her yellow shoes and purple socks, she no longer hid her expressions. Instead, she hummed to herself a lighthearted melody, laughing between choruses, while her aura almost illuminated the alleyway; all aspects of her looked bright, except his dull-black, oversized shirt she wore like a souvenir.

She visits the house almost each day in the next month, entering and exiting down the alleyway. She becomes accustomed to the routine of hanging up the phone, knocking three times, and with an intimate kiss upon her entry, he locks door behind them. He wears familiar clothes (and she wears a piece of his), but each encounter seems less exciting. Her smile, humming, and laughing become less apparent when she walks home after their time has ended, and the alleyway looks darker than the first time she walked along the tree-lined aisle.

The next week, as she sluggishly walks down the alley, her shoes became noticeable, because they no longer shined in the sun, and her socks were no longer the thick, purple ones she normally wore. She approached the house with plain black sneakers, laced with the excess tucked into the ankle. Her customary socks replaced with white ones that barely peaked over the top. She wears the same black shirt she left with after their first encounter, which barely display her green shorts, the last remnant of her colors. She no longer feels the need to call for encouragement, nor to knock, rather, he greets her with a yell from the other room that he'll be there in a second. The smile she wore so shamelessly turned to a soft expression with sunken eyes.

One day, she exits without an umbrella to decipher between the tears and the rain that ran down her cheeks when she left for the last time, and as she disappears into the alleyway, her shoes become noticeable; once bold and distinctive, now muted and restrained.

Little Red Eyes

Isabella Cogar

Sunday night, I had a dream when my roommate was gone. I woke up with my shirt soaked in sweat. It felt more like a nightmare. I was freaked out over my dream so I decided to tell my roommate. I regret this more than you know.

“I thought it happened. It felt so real.” I told Lindsey

“Were you like, sleepwalking?”

“Nah, definitely not.”

“Okay, then what happened. Make it quick. You suck at telling stories.”

“I know. It started with me climbing into my bed and looking over at yours. You know that cooling blanket you have?”

“Yeah, the blue one.”

“I swear on my life I saw this black figure under it.”

I started thinking about whether I had a deep, lucid sleep or if the creature actually stood on the bed. It just felt so real. My dad and I have always had these really vivid dreams of flying high between Monet-like puffy clouds. Sometimes, I have a crazy dream where I am chased, usually resulting in breathlessness and tension when I awake. The fear and panic which washed over me seemed completely different. The unsettledness in the pit of my stomach feels like I just can't breathe. But this felt different. The only point of comparison I have with this sickening feeling occurred when my Southern Baptist grandma would tell me all about the occult, Satanists, and whatever other religion she deemed evil.

“He had black eyes but the body of a grandma.”

“Oh, that reminds me of the movie with the naked grandparents who try to put the kids in the oven.”

“Hansel and Gretel?”

“No, it came out in 2015.”

Lindsey and I tried to figure out the movie’s name five minutes later.

“Oh! Oh! I know!”

“The Visit!” we yelled in unison.

“Okay, anyways, I saw the guy grandma creature thing.”

“Creature thing,” she said in a mocking tone.

She always chided me, but I found it funny, usually.

“So it started coming after me, and I fell off my bed because it lunged, and I cracked my head open on the ottoman.”

“Wait, do you have my cooling blanket?”

“No, I would never take your shit.”

“No, I know, this is weird.”

“I don’t know. Did you do laundry?”

After that remark, a cold breeze passed through us. It felt like falling off the monkey bars and getting the breath knocked out of you.

“Dude, did you feel that?” I whispered.

She fell silent, nothing but a blank stare emitted from her big eyes. In a monotone voice, she said she wanted to climb into bed. Her eyes glowed red.

“Bye,” she said in a voice unlike anything I have ever heard. The room went black. When I awoke, the window sprayed shards of glass. Lindsey was nowhere to be found. I am telling you this happened. As I grew older, I could not shake the breathlessness each time I would awake.

It has never stopped. She or it, or they will never stop.

Smoothies and Screwdrivers

Isabella Cogar

That blue, sterile screwdriver ruined my life and I'm left wondering when I will feel like it was worth it. Xanax, oxycodone, and clindamycin flowed into my body through the tasteless, ten dollar strawberry banana smoothie. But I should feel lucky, who am I to complain, most people don't even live if they have this. Sometimes I think about how if I was born in medieval times they would have left me on a mountain, one with hills and butterflies. Maybe they would have considered me a god of sorts. I went to the 31st floor and peered out, seeing the overly saturated orange, green and purple colors of the walls, dotted with morose paintings of dogs, leopards, and oceans. I still can't look at that orange color or the blue dog.

If I was so wrong then why did I hear them freak out when I sat in the waiting room. Accompanied by six aspiring surgeons, my doctor grabbed the blue screwdriver and in my drug induced state, things began to spin. A multitude of voices filled the room as I heard the screwdriver drop. The last face I saw was the head surgeons, eyes wide with a disorienting look.

Next thing I know, the morning had awoken me and I found myself back in the hospital bed. Unable to speak, yet coherent enough to ask for water. I heard my mom cry for the first time in my life. I wish I had known why she was crying, but once I left my body, I did not care. The funeral was big, at least I hope. But who cares? I am on that mountain I saw when I blacked out and for the first time I did not think about the blue screwdriver.

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