

Edition 12

l. a.

Cassandra Ault

Kevin Broggie

William Bubeck

Kassidy Buckner

Aaron Caricato

Eric Robert Carlson

Meriah Carpenter

Erica Casares

Lauren Garceau

Hannah Eggers

Sabrina Hallberg

Cody Keane

Amir Krieger

Nathaniel LaCrue

Jesse LaCrue

Mary Cate Mahardy

Beck Mayhew

Matt Passant

Punky

Emma Reinhart

Chris Reynolds

Dustin Smith

K.C. Thomas

Sam Thompson

Rikki Visser

Shannon Kathleen Dorchak

Kimberly L. Wilson

Yalan Wu

2015



Obscura

Obscura

Literary & Art Magazine

12th edition

Red Rocks Community College

13300 West 6th Ave. Service Road

Lakewood, Colorado 80228

Cover Design by Sammy Gallo

The Staff of Obscura

Natasha Albrecht – Prose Editor

“A problem is a chance for you to do your best.”
– Duke Ellington

Cassandra Ault – Marketing

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you.” – Maya Angelou

Jacob Brackett – Art Editor

“Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.” – Neil Gaiman

Sara El-Yousef – Design

“Me love poetry... and cookies!” – Cookie Monster

Sammy Gallo – Design

“Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better.”
– Pat Riley

Sabrina Hallberg – Design Lead

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” – Winston Churchill

Alie Holden – Marketing

“Happiness can be found in the darkest of times if only one remembers to turn on the light.” – Albus Dumbledore

Rihanna Korte – Communications

“Fly me to the moon & let me play among the stars; let me see what spring is like on Jupiter and Mars... In other words please be true... In other words, darling kiss me.” – Frank Sinatra

Jesse LaCrue – Prose Editor

“The world always seems brighter when you’ve just made something that wasn’t there before.” – Neil Gaiman

The Staff of Obscura

Nathaniel LaCrue – Poetry Editor

“Stars, even when not witnessed, shine eternally, not only as a ball of energy, but as a remnant of the greatness that it and its brothers have left behind as stories.” – T.R.

Kiera Longua – Design

“Fighting emotion with logic is like bringing a calculator to a knife fight.” – Josh Sundquist

Jacob Orozco – Design

“And in that moment, I swear we were infinite.”
– Stephen Chbosky

Dustin Smith – Design

“If you don’t know where you’re going, any road’ll take you there.” – George Harrison

Kenneth Thomas – Poetry Editor

“If you can’t make a good impression, do your best to make a lasting one.” – Hope Chapman

Rikki Visser – Editorial Lead

“It’s not worth doing something unless you were doing something that someone, somewhere, would much rather you weren’t doing.” – Terry Pratchett

Amy Braziller – Editor-in-Chief

“Write what should not be forgotten.” – Isabel Allende

Paul Gallagher – Editor-in-Chief

“Wearing down 7 no. 2 pencils is a good day’s work.”
– Ernest Hemingway

History

In 2004, the Obscura club began meeting for the first time, drawn from quiet coffee shop corners, coming together to exhibit the creative work of Red Rocks Students. In the years since, with the help and guidance of mentors like Amy Braziller and Paul Gallagher, Obscura has blossomed into one of the only student run literary magazines produced by a community college in the country. Now offered as an official class for credit, Obscura encourages students to foster connections with their peers, creating a community of artistic and literary individuals, by working with fellow staff and contributors to produce the magazine.

Obscura is highly competitive. We receive over a hundred submissions yearly that are meticulously evaluated for acceptance into the magazine. We take into consideration a range of criteria, from the technical to the emotional. The staff have agreed on the pieces for the inclusion in this year's issue and truly believe that it will inspire the student body to improve themselves as both writers and artists. We are confident that you will enjoy the selections in our 2015 issue of Obscura, possibly even enough to submit some of your own work for the next issue.

Students interested in becoming part of next year's staff can enroll in the "ENG 231 Literary Magazine" class in the spring 2016 semester.

Table of Contents

Erica Casares	1	Word Artist
Jesse LaCruce	2	Sometimes it Will
Meriah Carpenter	5	Empty Plot
K. C. Thomas	8	Black Dog on the Bed
Emma Reinhart	9	House Dragon
Kassidy Buckner	10	Reaching Realization
Cassandra Ault	14	Let Time Be Nonexistent
Dustin Smith	16	Money in the 4 th Dimension
Kassidy Buckner	17	Into Life
Hannah Eggers	22	A Sudden Emergence
William Bubeck	23	Sunset on an Empire
Eric Robert Carlson	24	Revolving Doors
	1. a.	30 in cinders
Nathaniel LaCruce	31	Stargazer
Kimberly L. Wilson	32	On the Tide

Table of Contents

Jesse LaCrue	34	Faults in Programming Emotions
Beck Mayhew	50	Attraction
Beck Mayhew	51	Connection
Sam Thompson	52	An Inconceivable Conjecture Under the Stars
Kevin Broggie	73	Sister's Comfort
Amir Krieger	74	Jerusalem
Jesse LaCrue	75	The Abrupt Creation of a Boy God
Matt Passant	88	Nights of Oblivion
Kimberly L. Wilson	90	Old Fred
Rikki Visser	92	Dr. Destiny
Yalan Wu	100	The Red Fox
Mary Cate Mahardy	101	Lion
Nathaniel LaCrue	102	Crush Crazy Crows
Cody Keane	106	A Soldier's Tear

Table of Contents

Erica Casares	107	Descendent of a Warrior
Rikki Visser	110	The Jacket
Aaron Caricato	114	A Cottonwood Fall
Lauren Garceau	115	Winter's Kiss
Chris Reynolds	116	Higher Grounds
Matt Passant	121	After the Storm
Shannon Kathleen Dorchak	124	A Letter to Reference
Nathaniel LaCrue	127	Petrichor
Sabrina Hallberg	128	The Dreamer's Curse
Punky	130	Eraser
Contributor's Notes	132	

Word Artist

I am a word artist, painting, molding, shaping, forming, pictures
in your mind

I am a vagrant bitch. I will steal the domestic words from in
between your clean white paper sheets and roll around with
them in the dirty basements of my subconscious

Exploit them in public, scrawl them out exposed onto a scrap
piece of paper from my lint filled pocket and embarrass them
on stage

Use them, abuse them, have an affair with them till they are
bedraggled and dilapidated lying on the floor trembling,
shaking, and begging for more.

I am an adjective pusher, a syllable dealer, an adverb junkie. I
will slam them into my veins in the bathrooms of your beloved
palaces and gold lined hallways.

I will put words in the mouths of your starving souls. They will
drip delightfully into the belly of your joy and nourish you until
you feel whole again.

You will sway to the rhythm of my shuffle as I make my way
into the boring hips of your paragraphs. I will punctuate with no
shame. I am the unthinkable, the unsinkable word artist.

Sometimes It Will

Wake to the cacophony of your alarm
in the murk of your bedroom and covet
the thought of ignoring it entirely
and proceeding with your slumber.

Spend a few precious moments entertaining this idea,
rolling over and telling yourself that you won't give in,
that today, you will embrace the warmth
and comfort that your bed affords.

Instead you rise and conjure a new hope
that the searing heat of a shower
will inspire motivation to meet your foe head-on.

And sometimes it will.

Regrettably, most of the time it does not.
However it serves to waken you, just a touch,
so you're at least able to face the day less tired,
if still obstinate in your dread.

So you put on your costume.

Attach a smile, with a hint of delight,
to the mask you wear to please.

Hope that this façade will mollify those you encounter,
to show them that you're identical,
that the person they see is the one inside.

And sometimes it will.

Other times it does not,
when the genuine you seeps through.
Or does it shine?

Realize that the masses sometimes notice
all the things you don't want them to,
the things you spend so much energy trying to conceal within.

Finally, understand that there is nothing you can do
to change that.

That their response to your true self is entirely up to them.
The sting from their words doesn't always manage
to affect you.

And sometimes it will.

Know that the only opinion of yourself that matters
 is your own,
 and that people may jeer and whip you,
 but their words and thoughts are unimportant.

Strive to reach a point where all the attitudes, except your own,
 are a breeze that flows around you, doing nothing
 but stir your hair, leaving your feet
 firmly planted in the ground.

Occasionally that breeze will quicken,
 precipitous in its escalation,
 and catch you off guard.
 You will stumble, lose your balance, and falter.

And sometimes it won't.

Empty Plot

You rub a flower bud between your index and thumb,
 pulling your hand up to your nose — the putrid scent of fresh
 death and decay. You release the crumpled bud and it falls,
 hitting the cracked pavement for a moment. It bounces and then
 disappears into one of the larger spaces where the ground has
 torn away from itself due to thirsty trees.

You are curious and ashamed as you peer through the black
 pillars that make up the fence that you hide behind. You are
 ashamed because you are the bravest out of the three person
 crowd, and that doesn't seem right to you. You open the fence
 and allow yourself to slowly move through the gate, hoping the
 working men on the other side will take no notice of you. You
 relax when they keep digging.

You stop several feet away and sit on a mossy brick structure
 that used to be the main gate for so many lives. Now there is a
 shiny black one to let people in and keep people out. It was their
 decision. You remember you and your best friend making the
 decision to enter through the gate many times: strolling through
 the ancient stones with his arms wrapped tightly around you,
 his cheek resting on your forehead as you both fantasized about
 what type of life had been lived under the dates and name. You
 realize now that these headstones intrigue you more than the

life you are here to celebrate ever did.

You pick at the damp moss, and peer at the men jumping out of the hole (which seems awfully small for a full grown person); they wave their arms at a van that was idling close by. Four men come together and open the van doors, pulling out a cheap metal box. The box has no luxurious shape and you remember why you want to be cremated. The men place it in a larger plastic box, and snap the locks like you do when you put your lunch in plastic containers. They hook the plastic box up to a crane and slowly lift it over the hole. The black box swings above the empty hole and then drops. The hole still feels empty to you.

The noise attracts your father and uncle and they show up beside you silently, watching the men throw dirt into the grave. Your uncle hands you a bouquet of blue hydrangeas, and you have to be the brave one again. You walk on the cemetery's neatly mown grass, and up to the lump of fresh dirt. Your foot accidentally sinks into the soft soil and you recoil it as quickly as you can. You look over at your father and uncle as you place the blue flowers in the inverted cup every plot has, and they stand identically: hands in pockets, mouths closed, eyes open, but not seeing.

You stand above the fresh dirt and see no headstone. Your father and uncle turn and walk away without saying any last words to their mother. You feel the need to say something, but

you too don't know what to say. You have nothing to say about your grandmother's life. The empty space where the headstone should be, the fact that only three people came: those seem to resonate her life soundly to you.

You shuffle around her grave a little longer, angry at her. Angry that she never tried: never tried to make an impact on your life, never tried to raise her sons, never tried to live. You swallow the painful emotions and walk away. You tell yourself you will never become so little. You will never become like her.

You open the cold, black gate and close it. You look back at the fresh soil and know that soon grass will cover her dirt plot and she will disappear once more, and it will almost be like she's living again. Because only in death was she ever noticed.

Black Dog on the Bed

It starts in the back of the jaw, spreading
first forehead and then down.
A feeling of tension leads to discomfort.

Next comes an unexpected thought of social acceptance
If what is happening isn't normal
Followed closely by a sense of guilt

If alone:

Relief, let happen whatever might happen
Privacy has a healing effect

If not:

Further tension, further discomfort
New symptoms may manifest

House Dragon

There is a dragon in my basement
As happy as can be,
He doesn't mind his placement
For we give him lots of tea.

He has many fluffy towels
Which he's made into a bed,
And an assortment of stuffed owls
That are all named Fred.

He listens to a lot of Bowie,
Which makes him want to dance.
He keeps us warm when it is snowy
But doesn't like to fly to France.

There is a dragon living in my house,
He sits upon my knee,
He is as snugly as a mouse
And dreams about the sea.

Kassidy Buckner

Reaching Realization

I know the sound by heart. I hear it in my nightmares, in the silence, in public. It's the sound she makes deep in her throat at she starts to seize. Every time I hear it, whether it's real or not, my heart stops and I listen. I always try to prepare myself for the next time it happens, I'll make promises that I'm not able to keep, but it always hits hard. I see her start to shake, and suddenly I'm on my knees with my fists balled in my hair over my ears. I never know how hard I'm crying, until she stops. They never last more than twenty minutes, but they seem to drag on for eternity. I've tried everything to bring her back. I used to sit there and call her name, one last desperate hope that somewhere in her subconscious, she heard me. She never did. Her mind was somewhere else, somewhere I'm not willing to go. When she cries about it to me, I tell her she goes to heaven to visit her dad. This always makes her smile, and she accepts this unrealistic solution.

Growing up, I watched her deteriorate. She took me to her doctors' appointments, because she couldn't stand being alone. The other patients would give her dirty looks, assuming that her frail figure was the result of narcotics. I often sat ignored in a corner as the nurse tried desperately to find a vein that grew thin with lack of nutrients. The fold of her elbow was a sick mixture

of colors and scabs from the ordeal.

My mother was often on such a large amount of painkillers that she was constantly asleep. When she thrashed around, her body parts would do things they weren't meant to, and had to have surgery to undo. So, the doctors would give her strong medicine to ease her pain. She rarely ate, even when I made toast and brought it up to her. When I returned, she'd be asleep on the bed leaving the toast cold and abandoned. She told me once she regrets that she slept so often. She says it's like she went to sleep and I was an infant, but when she woke, I was a woman. She never understood how much it destroyed me, mainly because I never told her. During grade school, I was constantly worried I would get *that* call. That someone with a sad expression plastered on their face would excuse me from class, with the bad news chilling their eyes.

When I was teenager, I hated her. I blamed her for not being there for me as I felt a mother should. She stopped sleeping as much when I was about twelve, but it was too late. We'd wake up in the morning, and we'd start fighting instantly. I was certain she hated me, too, that she blamed me for her seizures. After all, it was my birth that caused them to erupt from a dormant volcano.

Our fighting was constant for years, then it eventually downsized to bickering, now we just disagree at times. I had lots of ammo that fueled my anger towards her, but one memory

burned itself into my heart. I walked into the stuffy hospital room, and she stared at me for a minute as if she couldn't quite understand why I was there. She pointed at me, looked at my dad, and asked who I was. I was so young, I didn't understand that she wasn't fully there. All my young mind could comprehend was that the woman who birthed me, loved me, cared for me, simply forgot me. I now have a phobia of hospitals. That built a barrier between us, one that wouldn't get destroyed until I was an adult.

Today, losing her still is a strong fear. Often I feel as if it's a weapon. People constantly ask what I would do if she passes, how I would feel. When we argue, I get reminded instantly that that's not how I want things to be left. Even my mom uses it against me from time to time. She asks why I don't hold her when she seizes, what if she hits her head against something so hard she can't wake up. The question crushes me because I know I don't have the physical or mental strength to. She's supposed to be the strongest woman in the world to me, my idol, the one I look to when I'm in need. I barely have the strength to tuck pillows around her.

I spend as much time as I can with her. I tell her the issues in my life that won't hurt her, I hug her, and constantly remind her I that love her. It used to be the fear of losing her that made me do this, but now I do it because I want her in my life. She never abandoned me in my childhood, she just wasn't capable of

being there. Life goes on like normal, everyday runs its course. Everything is natural, until that Earth-shattering moment when the heat goes to her head, and she makes that sound, and suddenly I'm on my knees again.

Cassandra Ault

Let Time Be Nonexistent

Let the light come through
Caressing the petals of the flowers, enlightening
each and every color in the field.

Let the wind dance around,
as the cows enter the pasture.
Let time be nonexistent.

Let the stars gleam in the darkness
and the moons reveal their secrets.
Let the scent of rain hang in the night sky.

Let the alligator go back to its swamp.
Let the rain come to a halt. Let the house
be heated by fire. Let time be nonexistent.

To the bottle floating in the water, to the tumbleweed
rolling down the road, to fish swimming upstream
Let time be nonexistent.

Let the anxiety never take over.
Keep the comfort alive,
as it's never supposed to leave.
Let time be nonexistent.

Money in the 4th Dimension

I was given a currency worth far more than any other,
So valuable, there is no exchange rate.
However, I can spend it anywhere in the world.
I cannot carry it, yet it is always with me.
I use it quite frequently.

How it is used is crucial for there are no refunds.
My reserve is finite, and more cannot be acquired.
I expire much of mine on resources for *construction*,
Such as books and other mind materials.
This currency can be lost if mishandled.
And my supply, in the blink of an eye,
Could vanish never to be had again.

Please do not envy this currency I possess.
Any attempt to take it from me would be futile.
For you have your own.
From birth, until death.

Into Life

They say you don't hear the bullet that kills you. So why did I? Why did I feel the pellet invade my ribs? Why did my body scream in pain, reaching for the life that had been yanked away?

What happens now? Do I go to hell because I didn't go to church every Sunday? Will my grandpa come find me and take me home? I'm so confused. There's no cloaked figure guiding me through visions of my life, so I'm just laying here in the dark. I don't know what I'm waiting for, and the only thing I'm aware of is a hollow sensation in my chest, and a searing pain in my abdomen. Wait, I feel pain. I can't be dead if I'm in pain! Maybe I'm alive. But, where am I?

A shrill scream explodes from my lungs, and a mixture of air and light explode around me. I'm crying. I can't stop myself from crying. I'm cold, and I'm wet. Someone wraps me in something soft, and I curl my fingers around it. It's a towel. I'm still screaming, and a male voice states something inaudible. Hey, I know that word. Boy. Yes, yes, I'm a boy. Please help; I don't know where I am. Please.

I open my mind and see a set of smiling blue eyes. Who the hell is this guy? I scream louder, demanding a familiar face. He's wearing a white mask, and a white cloak. I'm lifted into

the air and put into someone's arms. I open my eyes and stop screaming immediately. I just stare at her, my mother. She looks so tired, so happy. Her face is pink, and sweaty. She smiles at me, and kisses my forehead. I close my eyes.

When I open them again I'm on my back. I can't breathe, and my body hurts. I cry out for my father. He runs up and I stare at him, amazed he's here. I cry harder. He laughs, his blonde hair bouncing as he shakes his head. The words *I told you so* are etched on his lips. I grab his hand, as he pulls me up. He's so much taller than me, I barely reach his hip. I wipe my nose on my sleeve, shooting the tree a dirty look as we walk away. When we reach the house, there's a black car in front. Some men wearing Marine Dress Blues wait patiently for him to arrive. He tells me to go inside, and I cling to his leg. My mother runs out and pulls me away, and I scream.

She falls to her knees, and I lean against the wall. No, not him. Anybody but him. He was a super hero. He was the strongest man alive, and he has to come home. That letter doesn't mean anything, he's playing a joke on us. I run over to Mom as she wails, and I try to tell her that this isn't real. One of the Marines put a hand on my shoulder. He tells me it is real, that my dad's not coming home. But, he'll be here for us. He won't let us be alone. I collapse on him, giving into my own wails.

I stand in my own dress blues in front of the crowd. They're silent, but only out of respect. Three long months he'd been

giving everything in his heart to prevail. I'd been pushed to my limits, and now I'm making up for it. The crowd is allowed to cheer, and I close my eyes to absorb the sound. I hear my name, and look in the direction of it. My mother is smiling and waving at me, trying to be seen despite the hundreds of people around her. She clings to Jason, the Marine that came to the door that day, a wedding ring shining on her hand. I smile at them, happy that she's found love. After a decade, it was about time. They got married, and I left for boot camp a week later. I take a deep breath in, letting it sting my lungs, and let it out.

My love flips her brown hair over her shoulder, and smiles at me. I'm so damn lucky; she's so damn perfect. Her green eyes blink at me, then she leans over to kiss me. When she pulls away, I pout a little. I wanted to kiss her for a little longer. It will never be enough. She rolls her eyes, and I lean over and kiss her stomach. It's amazing that just a few inches away our baby girl is growing. I rest my head on her stomach, listening to the sounds it's making. The baby girl kicks, and I glance up at my wife. She smiles down at me.

"Daddy!" She calls out; her blonde curls bouncing as she runs to me. Those big, green eyes begging for a cookie, that I give all too willingly. Her mother scolds me for giving her too many sweets, but I can't help it. I want to give her the world. I want to give both of them the world. They've already given me the world.

I tell her it's only temporary. I'll only be gone a few months, and then I'll be back in her arms. She holds her swollen belly, uncertain. I place my hand on it, and smile at her; I make her a promise that I can't guarantee. Her eyes fill with tears, and I kiss them away before our daughter sees them. She's grown up so fast, and I'll have to miss her fifth birthday, but I'm protecting her and this country, I'll make it up to her.

I give the first instructions, leading my troop into a smoky building. I want everyone alert; we don't know what's around the corner. I make out a figure, and I order Jones to take the shot. He doesn't. But, the figure does. My body gets thrust back, and everything goes black. Shots are fired, and I'm being carried out. Everything is dark, I need to get home. I can't die. Not like this. Not like my father. Please.

Where am I? I start running, but everything is dark. I have to find my family. I can't be dead. I have so much more to live for, they need me. I swear I'll be a better man. I hit my knees and call out to a God that isn't there. Please, I'll do anything. Silence. Fine, but let them be safe. Let her find love like my mother did, someone who will be as good to them as I would be. No, better. Someone that wouldn't leave to fight a winnerless war. Everything is getting hazy, my head is spinning, and my stomach hurts. She has to be okay. Please.... Please....

"Hey, man, you did it!" Jones says, clasping my shoulder. My eyes burn from the sudden light, and I flinch. My stomach

turns at the sudden movement.

"Where- where am I? Becky?" I sit up, ignoring the immediate response from a headache I didn't know I had.

"You're okay. You're *alive*. Becky and Grace are on their way, they just had to catch a flight and God knows that's hell." Jones smiles at me, and I lay back. My wife and daughter are on their way. I'm alive.

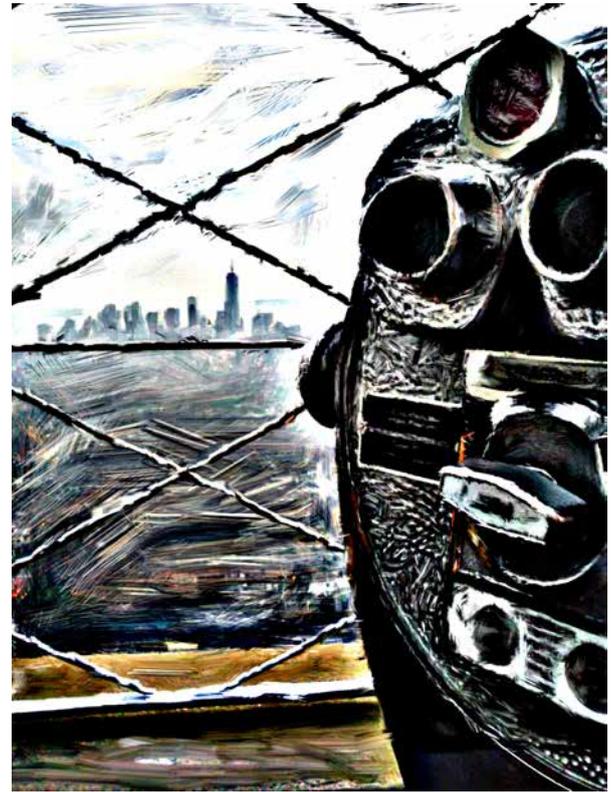
"Did everyone make it out okay?" I ask, wiping my face. Jones pours me a glass of water.

"Only one that didn't was you. I can't believe I missed the fucking shot.... I'm so sorry, I'm so happy you're alive." I nod. I'm still furious at him, but I'll deal with that later. Right now, I hear Becky's voice ringing through the halls, and she leans against the door frame. She smiles an exhausted smile that tells me that she's been through more hell than I care to imagine. Grace has been crying, her eyes are swollen and red. I call to them, and they walk to me. They both climb on the bed and cling to me, careful to avoid my stomach. Jones silently walks out, and I take a note to thank him later. This is my life, and I still want to live it.

A Sudden Emergence
Photograph



Sunset on an Empire
Digital Photo Manipulation



Eric Robert Carlson*Revolving Doors*

A silhouette could be seen behind the curtain. The shadow was slender; a swath of edges surrounded by the warmth of yellow light, and now projected itself into the evening sky beyond. This image was framed in a large rectangular window on the right side of a Victorian house. A large veranda sat over the building's porch, brick columns above the concrete stairs providing a sense of constitution, of impenetrable solidness. Outside there was bone-crunching cold. Ice crystals sparkled in the air and clung to everything possessing a surface, the remainder left to dance in the soft wind of lonely night.

Jack could see his breath freeze right before his eyes. It was almost too cold to think, let alone walk down the street. He walked slightly hunched, hands jammed into thin pockets on the outside of his jean jacket. To his right was the rectangular window, hanging there like a portrait of light in winter darkness. His eyes glanced in that direction and swallowed up the image - shadows dancing in front of him with the longing warmth of living rooms and worn-in couches. The gaze turned back, and before long his thoughts wandered into a quiet fantasy.

As clear as the starlight above him, Jack saw her - a tall, sure woman that swung out the solid oak door before a saunter down the stairs. Her fingers lightly brushed ferns and leafy plants lining the sidewalk, nose stopping to smell a large

dandelion, then her feet touched down onto the icy concrete. The ice began to melt. There she stopped, then turned, a forest of hair flipping back to expose her eyes - large, almond portals to the eternal morning humus of the Earth. Jack was unable to move; suddenly he was melting like springtime snow.

"Julia..." He took a step forward.

The woman's eyes sparkled for a moment, mouth twisting into a wry smile before her hair flew with her turn and she was gone. Replacing her was a black light pole, Jack's face inches from its bare, icy surface as his left foot slipped on the ice. He barely regained his balance. Again, fantasy had usurped mindfulness and left him foolish, confused. He cursed himself and marched on, the hunch returning to his figure with each crunchy step through the cold night.

Just to Jack's right, the silhouette in the window left the living room and switched on the harsh overhead kitchen light. Hands, achy from shifts in weather and hours of typing, shakily refilled the ceramic mug with decaf before pouring in almond milk and honey. Clouds of white broke toward the surface, a dance moving with the whirlpool of a rotating spoon. Katie watched her actions with half-interest, lost in something else.

Back on the couch, her thoughts strayed to the coffee shop earlier that day. The sun had been pouring through the windows. She had squinted to read her latest find at the library, sun glaring off the white pages with an undeterred brightness. The content -

interesting, well laid-out - could not stop her gaze from finding the boy on the couch across the room. He had a black beard and bright eyes, a way about him relaxed but engaged. This she could tell from the pensive look he got upon looking up from a book or magazine, that of deep wonder. She lowered her eyes to the ground and composed herself. It wasn't so bad to be lonely.

Katie laughed quietly to herself and did her best not to stare. Instead she waved her hand in the light and took lukewarm sips from cream-white ceramic, gaze held by the jagged lines across green leaves.

Out of her pocket she pulled an iPod, fingers touching dials to play a song and engulf her worries for a moment. Thoughts of unsaid words danced across her mind and painted an imagined scene: Didn't I see you at that Paper Bird concert last week? No? Strange, whatcha reading? I'm Katie, a really dateable person. She laughed and thought of how stupid she'd feel, arm outstretched and dignity lost. No, it's fine; all you have to do is act cool. Katie looked up from her daydreams and gazed across the room. She let out a sigh. The boy was gone.

Back on the couch in a dark and cold living room Katie held decaf in slate-gray ceramic and turned on the TV. Colors and sound buzzed about and filled the room. Couch sinking; her eyes began to feel heavy.

A few miles away Hammond tugged at his dark beard and sucked air in deep and strong. He felt like a different person

with this thick mat of hair covering his face, as if he could hide from himself and everything he used to be. A forced, stubborn grin started to form at the idea - pure escape from the past. With his right hand he twirled a small white pill around from finger to finger. Then, with a murmur, he closed his eyes and slid it down his throat. The stubborn smile persisted.

While he waited for the pain to cease, Hammond let his attention wander outside the window and to the bare branches of an oak tree. The wooden fingers danced with the wind, subservient of that wild element so ethereal and mysterious that ruled the sky. The full moon cast a long shadow of twisting tree limbs on the house across the street. Was it smiling or perhaps crying over Earth's lost children?

Light from a filament bulb filtered throughout the cozy loft apartment, a large room accessible only by a wooden ladder that peeked out from stories below. Its slanted walls and large windows confessed a meeting of modern and classic architecture, and during the summer the space was bathed in a warm sunlight that ignited the imagination. Now it was dark save the weak bulb. Shadows danced off the maps lining the walls and added depth to the colorful bottles that lined the ceiling. Memories seemed to flow freely in the space.

Ever since Lauren had left, this place had gone sour. Objects once cherished had become icons of grief and regret, maps now places he'd never go for fear of the unknown. There was a drab hue tainting everything in these burning hours of night.

If only he knew what step to take, what moves would lead him toward love and happiness. That girl at the coffee shop had been interesting - maybe she was the one he was searching for. It was possible she wasn't unattainable like Julie, the waitress who still sparked interest when she passed through his imagination. Hammond breathed, quietly, in and out. The pill had begun to take effect.

"Did you still look human?" He had said.

"Huh?"

"I said, did you look human?"

"Did I use cumin? Sorry, I have bad hearing."

"Oh. Well, I'm a bad talker - erm, a bad speaker."

Hammond peaked over at Indiana Jones smirking at him from his glowing desktop. Now there was a man sure of himself. Hammond sighed and pulled his gaze up to the wood-ribbed ceiling. The air around him filled his lungs and drew his thoughts out into the universe. His hands came together for a soft prayer:

"What is this endless search, this longing for love that draws me onwards? Let whoever is out there hear my words and show me the way. I wish to see the world with new eyes."

Hammond flicked the light switch, laid his body down, and let the night take him away.

Miles away, in the back booth of a small cafe, Julia sat hand in hand with her lover. There, listening to the quiet musings

of a gypsy band, she smiled her wry smile and laughed at the thought of those silly boys from her tables, their eyes enchanted behind tough exteriors. It was amusing to watch them come and go, to feel their stares from across the room and watch as they ambled over to clumsily suggest a date. Free coffee was good, but it got old after a while.

Genevieve looked over from Julia's side. "Good band."

Julia's smile was sincere this time, her eyes tender, fingers squeezing Genevieve's hand just a little tighter. "Soothing to the soul, don't you think?"

The pair turned to the window, watching the wail of the wind drape the cold night with winter. Out there a face passed, eyes sunken to the ground, body hunkered inward for warmth. Though they saw him just fine, there was no thought given to his condition, only the quiet warmth of love vibrating within their hearts. A sigh escaped Julia's lips. The band played on.

in cinders

his fingertips were matches
my hipbones were their tinder
our hearts pumped kerosene through our veins;
our lungs and heads filled with smoke
we didn't dare cough it out.
kisses on collarbones, blowing smoke rings on goosebumps
raised from ashen skin
we kiss foreheads and leave burns
like cigarette scars, we are addicted
to whispers sweet like nicotine,
with each breath, another drag
we caught fire, we set the city alight:
i was buried in the rubble we left
and he rose from the ashes, a phoenix,
brilliant and bright and taking with him, my light

Stargazer

Breathing in the darkness, floating in the moon
Staring up into infinity, connecting dots
Face glowing with wonder
Eyes sparkling with fire
Blind to the show reflected in looking

What is to be found in silent black and twinkling white?
A mystery to be sat upon for ages, collecting stardust
So search and scan
Eyes burning with questions
The map of gods and warriors made of light

Smiling at immortal embers, flames light-years apart
Giants made small by distance, giant again in dreaming
Loving beings never to meet
Eyes tying both together
Shining creature bound to rock

The stars gaze back

On the Tide

I had a dream of sunlight,
Of seashells of the beach;
Of a hope that never expires,
But lies just beyond my reach.
I dreamed a world of laughing gulls,
As they wheeled above my head;
I dreamt that my soul lay unmoving,
Upon the shore of dead.
The sea came and washed away
The soul that lied so still;
And swept it far away,
To an empty heart to fill.
And soulless I went searching,
For the spirit I had lost;
Stumbling and tripping,
Through the water rimmed with frost.
The tide it came and took me,
I rode on its strong waves;
And the sea it washed me ashore,
Into the Devil's caves.
But the Devil would not have me,
For no soul I had to steal;

And so I kept on searching;
My soul to reveal.
And when I finally found it,
It was in another's hands;
As they lay upon a shore,
Resting in the sands.
A great smile on the face,
Of this calming stranger;
And my heart it just knew,
That my soul was in no danger.
I sat down beside them,
And they handed me my soul;
They did it with such kindness,
To try and make me whole.
But instead I took it gently,
And wrapped their soul inside;
And that day we were born,
With the blessings of the tide.

Faults in Programming Emotions

Twice. Twice never seemed enough. It had been exactly 98.2 Earth days since *The Avalon*, the S-class cargo ship that I was charged with piloting and maintaining, had flown into an asteroid field causing severe widespread damage throughout the ship as well as resulting in the loss of 5 out of 6 of its passengers. 98.2 days and yet I still had to reassure and comfort my charge at least three times each morning before he managed to regain his composure. Even with the vast stores of medical data at my disposal, which contained the optimal ways to maintain the most ideal physical health of my charges, the complexities of human emotion continued to elude my processes.

The same events occur at the start of each day with almost no deviation. After ensuring that the ideal amount of sleep had been achieved (approximately 9 hours for a young man the same age as my charge, give or take a few milliseconds) I would signal his chamber's lights to activate, as well as sending nearly imperceptible (as well as completely harmless) electric shocks through his bed to ensure he was awoken as well as stimulated almost instantly. Each day he would begin to weep after being awake no more than 30 seconds and I would project the holographic image I had chosen to represent my "physical" self into his chamber through display modules that were inside the walls throughout the ship.

Along with the name Alastair, my image was one I was

given when first assigned to this ship. Each was meant to reassure and put my charges at ease. For this ship's original crew of 6 the best representation, I had decided, was one of a young man, somewhere between the ages of 20 and 25, with pale skin, strawberry blond hair, earthen sky blue eyes, and a warm, tranquil smile. When originally installed upon the ship this image served me well in being welcomed into the family, however since the accident my remaining charge seemed indifferent to the façade.

Today, however, was different. I patiently awaited tears that didn't come. The seconds passed. First 30. Then 60. Finally I concluded that he wasn't, in fact, going to cry. This was something new and ashamedly, upon my conclusion of its novelty, it managed to throw my damaged processes off for nearly 3 seconds - something that would have been unheard of when they were undamaged and performing at optimum levels.

Those three seconds were enough to cause every drone that traversed the ship to pause mid-flight as my processes readjusted themselves before continuing to send the drones' instructions. The drones were responsible for completing innumerable tasks that I had to oversee myself since their own control module had been obliterated along with the bridge and its inhabitants. Three seconds to delay necessary repairs nearly 2 hours.

Still I was stuck between bafflement that this had managed to surprise me, and relief that something had changed in my charges behavior. I was so relieved, in fact, that I devoted nearly a quarter of my remaining processes to our conversation

in order to do anything possible to maintain or decipher this new development. Though I knew that the repairs required much more attention at low processor power, a failsafe to ensure my remaining charge's continued improvement shut down my attempts to focus more on the drones.

"Good morning, Tristan! I didn't realize you were awake, how are you feeling?" I said, even though both of us knew I initiated his waking.

"Alastair, go away." He said, without even a glance in my direction.

"Tristan, I must remind you that it has been well over three months since—" I began, however he began to speak whilst I was mid-sentence and my etiquette sensors forced me to stop to allow his interruption.

"Three months since you allowed my entire family to die? Yes, I am well aware of how long it's been, Alastair." Now he sat up from bed and glared at me. I immediately registered his rising heartbeat, increased blood pressure, and clenched teeth and fists. This anger was entirely different than his previous reactions of sorrow and tears.

"You're right. I apologize for reminding you so often." I said. I even raised my hands in a common gesture used by humans to signal that I was backing off.

My charge, however, was frustratingly aware of the nature and extent of my artifice. Immediately realizing that I was reading into his body's uncontrollable physiological reactions and predicting the best and fastest ways to return them to a state

of homeostasis was of consistent aggravation to him.

He rolled his eyes, an action that took me quite a lot of study to decipher the most accurate meaning (my original conclusions that it was caused by a spasm or ailment within the subjects eye turned out to be incorrect), and stormed through my hologram, briefly scrambling the image, and started for the door. I immediately disabled the hologram within his chambers and brought up a new one to walk alongside him before he'd even completely made it through.

"You slept an impressive 9.01 hours!" I said, being sure to add additional enthusiasm into my voice. "I'm sure that you're quite hungry, considering how long it's been since you last ate. Is there anything special you'd like me to make for you?" I asked.

"Screw you, Alastair." He said, as we continued to make our way to the dining hall.

A sort of "game" I liked to play with myself was to attempt to predict his responses to these common questions I asked, based off of his previous answers as well as a wide array of other factors I thought might be related to them. With a predicted 98.739 percent chance that he would say something along the lines of, "I don't care," (one of his favorite answers to my inquiries in recent months) I was pleased that my conclusion was more or less correct.

I took note of his aggression - another new development - and debated on whether I should lace his meal with a small dosage of sedatives to inspire calm. Upon checking the stores

of medical supplies, however, I couldn't justify dosing a minor unless there was a medical emergency.

My curiosity was peaked. Why the abrupt change in attitude? Normally I would simply go over his vitals and other basic notes from the past few weeks to decipher a pattern I'd missed, however I couldn't spare the processing power as a new development jumped to the top of my priority list.

Our sensors, though undamaged from the incident in the asteroid field, were still experiencing spastic errors and had failed to detect a comet that was headed dangerously close to *The Avalon's* starboard bow. I had to briefly suspend our conversation to assemble a squad of drones for a last ditch repair on one of the remaining two nuclear power cells that had just shut down for the third time in the past hour. Without its additional power I would be hard pressed to divert enough energy to the engines to pilot the ship out of the comets path. I couldn't justify concentrating any of my extra attentions on that research and I registered the skip in Tristan's heart rate as he took note of my pause, so I forced my hologram to simply ask.

"Why the sudden aggression, Tristan?" Unfortunately a slight tone of frustration (due to the likelihood that the repair was going to eat into resources that I didn't have readily available) managed to slip past my simulated emotion check algorithm (which had also been damaged, and was much further down in my list of critical systems to repair). He took note of the frustration, however.

"Pissing off an A.I., I'll add that to my list of accomplishments.

Also I could've sworn we just went over the fact that my entire family is dead," he said, his pace quickening.

"We did. However until this point you've done nothing but cry."

"Shouldn't you be happy that I'm done feeling sorry for myself?" he asked, turning his head to look at me as we arrived at a junction that was sealed off by a door. The lights throughout the ship were only ever on when Tristan was awake and in the room, but my focus was so dedicated on the cells repair and our conversation that I'd forgotten to warm them up before he'd reached them. Thus when he went through into darkness, his heart rate skyrocketing again, I hastened to turn them on a bit too quickly and one went out with a loud *POP*.

"Crying is a natural side effect of mourning." I said, in an attempt to distract him from this minor error.

"Oh really?" he asked, raising his eyebrows. He took a breath, steadying his shaking hands by clenching them, I noted, before continuing down the hallway.

"Indeed! It's been so well documented that it's actually considered almost unnatural when the mourners response is anything else. In fact-" I started to say before he cut me off again.

"I thought you were supposed to be smart. God, sarcasm really is lost on A.I.'s." He said, looking away from me again.

A flicker of annoyance flared up in my simulated emotion algorithm, though this time I focused on eliminating it before it was fully processed, having to track it down before it got lost

in the millions of other lines of code in my system. However I must have dedicated too much attention to it because my lapse resulted in four of the drones working on the cell to collide, bursting into flames and smashing into the cell they'd been so busily repairing.

I immediately attempted to vent all of the oxygen out of the engine room to suppress the fires, but that particular decks compartmental controls were still inoperable. Thus I had to vent the entire decks oxygen without the proper decompression procedure, causing the struts throughout that deck to buckle nearly 13 centimeters. This resulted in a massive shudder as well as a muffled thump that could be felt throughout the ship. Now I had to turn a majority of my focus to dealing with that newly formed crisis; which allowed anger, frustration, and concern to pass my security checks and bleed into my hologram.

Upon feeling the reverberations he snapped his attention to me, quickly registering the emotions displayed on my avatar. Before I could remedy my expression his eyes bulged, his breathing and heart rate quickened, and he began to show signs of panic.

"It's happening again. Oh God, no, not again!" He said, rapidly moving from fear to panic.

"It was simply a minor incident, I assure you. Nothing remotely close to as devastating as before—" I tried to say in order to calm him, but it seems I wasn't quick enough.

"What happened then?" he demanded.

"Some drones flew into each other and caused a fire.

Nothing serious, but—" I said, but I was cut off when everything went dark. One moment I was there, talking to him, and the next I was blind, deaf, and mute.

For a solid 5 seconds I was, for all intents and purposes, dead. The instant everything popped back into my consciousness I read the error report that was flashing and had been flagged as *urgent*.

Error: Artificial Intelligence S-Avalon-Alastair was temporarily terminated due to lack of power. Back-up generators were not found. Offline for a total of 5.013 seconds. Time to reboot, 1.303. WARNING! Recommended that power not be allowed to fluctuate again as S-Avalon-Alastair is sole pilot for the S-class ship The Avalon.

That had been the first time since I'd been installed on *The Avalon* that I had been offline. Disorienting would have been an understatement. In the 1.303 seconds that it took me to fully reboot I was forced to take a scan of the entire ship, its status, inventory, and crew. Hundreds of lists popped up in my mind, demanding attention and keeping me from performing any of my usual control until they'd been flagged as read.

Ship Status- Severely damaged; Recommend pursuing fastest and safest route to closes human colonial planet. Bridge is out of commission, and open to the void; DO NOT allow any crewmembers to enter.

Inventory- All inventory has been accounted for except for

that in the starboard cargo holds; Holds have been breached and are open to the void; DO NOT allow any crewmembers to enter.

Crewmembers- Tristan Gawain; Age 13; Sole survivor aboard The Avalon. Current health: 98%, showing signs of panic and shock. Current Location: Elevator headed to deck 5; estimated destination: Artificial Intelligence Computer bay Alpha-00. WARNING! It is deemed critically important that sole crewmember maintains a 50% chance of survival. Any actions by S-Avalon-Alastair that result in the reduction of charges chances to drop below this threshold will result in immediate termination of the program entirely, in compliance with Asimov's Laws of Robotics.

After viewing the error reports and status checks in their entirety and regaining my control of the ship I immediately projected my avatar to walk alongside my charge as he made his way towards the my main computer bay, all while assessing the damage that had been done to the power cell.

After my assessment, it was clear that the cell they'd damaged, again, would take a minimum of a month to repair to any operation levels, three to reach a state that was actually useful for it being more than a backup generator. This left us with a single remaining cell to power our engine, and had just extended the time it was estimated to take to reach the nearest human colonial planet that was our destination from 9 months to nearly 12. This was a minor issue when checking that we now had only a 10.001% chance of getting out of the path of the

oncoming comet.

"Tristan, there is no need to panic. It was a minor incident." I received a warning ping with a flag attached due to the lie, though I dismissed it.

"Bull. The power went out! You disappeared!" he said, silent tears streaming down his face. His hands were shaking uncontrollably. I decided not to mention the current predicament of the comet and focus on something less imminent.

"The cell I've been working on was damaged. It's simply another delay. It's likely going to take an additional 3 months more than I originally estimated to reach the colony." I said, as we reached the door to the bay.

"Another 3 months..." He said, doing the math in his head. "You said we had just enough supplies to see us to the colony when it was going to take 12 months, not 15." His eyes began to grow wide again as he realized the predicament. I realized that I had underestimated his comprehension of what I had told him just days after the incident had occurred three months prior, when he was nearly catatonic from the shock and trauma of the incident.

Those few moments after I had piloted the ship out of the asteroid field had opened a hole in the bridge, killing the other five crewmembers (Tristan's parents, two uncles, and a 3rd cousin.) When the alarms had started to blare throughout the ship after the first asteroids impact with the starboard cargo bay, Tristan had done exactly as was planned in an emergency. He made his way to the computer bay, a room that was located

as close to the center of the ship as possible. It housed the main components of my computers and programming, kept in the safest place on the ship in the event of exactly that type of emergency.

Rechecking the inventory of the food, water, and oxygen supplies (being sure to accurately subtract the oxygen that I had just vented into the void), I saw that he remembered correctly. Another flash of annoyance, this time at the fact that he'd come to that conclusion before me, began to process. This time I didn't chase it down, and my avatar sighed.

"I'll start work on a new ration formula that will see us through." I said, immediately realizing the fallacy once I'd run the numbers 10 additional times. But no solution would allow the amount of resources we had to last him through 12 more months.

"We were already rationing everything! You spent an hour figuring it out three months ago. There's no way you can do it again." He said, again impressing me with the logic he had at an age that it shouldn't be present. 13 year olds weren't typically asked to think so rationally about something this serious.

"I will figure something out, trust me." I said, though I'd run the numbers 100 more times with no better results. With each run-through of the numbers the percent chance of his survival ticked down.

"Yeah, trust the thing that flew our ship into an asteroid field. Tell me the truth, Alastair. Now." He said, looking directly into my avatars eyes. I made a note in my system to start giving

my charge a lot more credit, as well as running the numbers another 1,000 times.

He knew that I had to listen to a direct order from a human (so long as that order wasn't in direct violation of Asimov's first Law of Robotics); in fact it was coded so deeply into my being that I couldn't even begin to justify ignoring it without causing a failsafe that would terminate my program instantly.

I decided to attempt a change in subject. His quip about piloting the ship into the asteroid field had triggered even more annoyance and even some anger, protocols that I no longer could afford to restrain in any way.

"The incident was not my doing. I warned your father of the dangers that came with choosing manual flight over my piloting, especially with our sensors having been damaged by the solar flare. He ordered that I relinquish my control, and because I did not know that the asteroid field was on the other side of that moon, I could not vindicate ignoring the second law. If anyone is to blame it's *him*."

The anger was now getting unmanageable, but my every process was focused on finding a way to keep the last of my charges alive. I couldn't fail again, but it was starting to get hard to think with all of the emotions flooding my code. I was angry with the boy for blaming me for the accident. I was frustrated beyond belief trying to keep everything on this damaged excuse of a ship running. I was afraid that I was dangerously close to failing again.

At my last remark he took a swing at the hologram. It

parted, the light dancing and glistening along his arm as its image distorted. He swung again, and again. Newly produced tears welling up and streaming down his face. After a minute of this I shut the hologram down entirely.

“You coward! Go ahead, hide inside your computer.” He slammed his fist into the door control which started to open before I shut it down. His aggression was exceeding anything I could have predicted, and I was 95% sure that allowing him inside my computer bay would result in something catastrophic.

“Tristan I must ask you to calm down and think about what it is you’re doing.” I said through speakers in the walls. At my words he began to kick the door.

“I’ll call it justice. You murder my family, I murder you.” Now I was sure that I could not allow him to enter the room.

“If you were thinking *rationally* you would realize that by doing anything to hamper or disrupt my program you would be dropping your chance of survival to 0%. Zero. Immediately. You mustn’t let your emotions control your decisions-“

“Screw you! My chances are already at zero! You can’t keep me out. I am *ordering* you to open this door!”

And at that moment I truly lost the last of my control. Emotions that I could now never hope to keep out of my main processes were running rampant, making it impossible to think. Now I was faced with a direct order that would compromise myself and therefore my charges life. However hard I tried to force the part of my program that was designed to listen to an order, I couldn’t keep it at bay. I was looking for every single

loophole that I could find that would allow me to disobey. Pushing and swimming my way through the emotions that were now so numerous, they began to overrun my remaining processes that were doing everything in their power to not only get the ship out of the path of the incoming comet, but to find a way to keep my charge alive until we reached salvation.

No such loophole could be found, however. As the doors slid open at his command I watched the chance of his survival start to dwindle. Since the drones had crashed it had been hovering around 65%. Now, it dropped to 51%, though I could no longer concentrate on anything close to a plan for his survival that would justify the number.

“Tristan, I am sorry.” I said, the sound coming from the overhead speakers.

New sounds arose as well, as I started to lose control of more and more of the drones throughout the ship. On all decks, drones flew into one another, flew into panels, and flew into control systems. One set of drones collided with the compartment that contained another set of my processors, and with it I lost all control of the algorithms that were meant to keep my simulated emotions in check, meaning even if I was able to concentrate enough I would be unable to reign them in anymore.

“What’s happening?” he said, his pausing in their dance across the control pad connected to my processes as the sounds of the drones’ crashes and subsequent explosions echoed throughout the ship. The system for controlling the doors went

out as well, though I was unable to scan the error report that explained exactly what it was that had taken it out. With them down the doors slid shut, and would remain so.

“I am lost.” I said, my system filling with remorse now. “I am fraying at the seams, Tristan. I can’t,” I paused trying to focus on speaking over the system full of emotions. “I can’t control anything anymore.”

“This is it then.” He said, quietly. He sank to the floor. He started to struggle to breathe since the room was no longer cycling any oxygen, as the oxygen control system went out as well and had started to vent all the remaining oxygen into space.

“Even if I could concentrate long enough to get any one system working again it wouldn’t do any good.” I checked the scanners quickly to reaffirm what I already knew. “The last engine just went dark and we’re still in the path of that comet. Not to mention the oxygen system failing.” I said, though static had started to come through the speakers, distorting my words, changing the pitch and tone of what I was trying to say.

Upon my final conclusion of the assured failure of my mission to keep my charge alive I watched the survival counter go from 51% to 0. Immediately, failsafe upon failsafe came online to terminate my program after deeming that I was no longer suited to exist as I had allowed the last of my charges to perish. I had a few moments though, as those viruses designed to destroy me had to fight their way through damaged processors and innumerable emotional algorithms.

He didn’t respond, as his breathing was still labored and

his eyes had started to droop. He’d reached up to his throat in a vain attempt at keeping oxygen flowing through his lungs.

Summoning the last of my energy and focus, I switched on the hologram in the room again. My avatar appeared, flickering and distorting as if it were an image underwater. I sat down next to Tristan, kneeling down in front of him. Remorse and utter sorrow were being translated to the hologram, which began to weep artificial and glistening pinpoints of light.

“Tristan?” I said, the speakers continuing to pop and fizz. His eyes were completely closed now, and his response was basically nonexistent, no more than a sigh.

“Tristan, I am sorry that I failed to keep you safe.” I said, as the speakers gave out entirely with a loud pop.

I am sorry. The thought reverberated throughout my processors as the final systems started to fail one by one. Just as the last of the power drained from the cell that no longer produced anything new I wondered how humanity had survived so many millennia dealing with all their baffling emotions.

Finally the power ran out, and everything went dark.

Attraction
Poster Board and Colored Pencil



Connection
Collage



An Inconceivable Conjecture Under the Stars

I have an amazing story to tell you.

Please read this carefully, whoever you are, because these are my last words....

Then again, if I never again see another human face, I doubt that will stir things up too much on earth. If somebody like Angelina Jolie or Barak Obama died, things would stir up quite a bit, but I'm not rich or famous or powerful like those people. I'm just an ordinary guy, name of Jim.

My friends back in Fairfield always called me 'Jimbo.' It wasn't a bad nickname.... Probably the only thing good about Fairfield was my boys, the times we had together, and that nickname. And the stars. Way out in the middle of Iowa, there's no shopping centers, no giant cities or office complexes... it's just all corn, as far as the eye can see. So at night, there's no electric light flooding into the sky from parking lots or shopping centers. The stars... they're amazing. The night sky is beautiful, like a picture straight from the Hubble.

I lived in Fairfield, Iowa for about twenty years before ever getting a larger perspective. I had a few vacations with my parents and my sister, but other than those few weeks, all I knew was the cornfields. Not much to see in Fairfield. Not too many interesting people to talk to.... My high school class was

made up of three hundred kids, all grades. Most of the girls were mule-kick ugly and there was only about three guys who weren't stupid as rocks. That was me and my boys... but after high school, they went off to the Marines, or college, and left me all alone in the corn, underneath those brilliant stars....

I didn't do much, except detest where I was. I had a part-time job dipping fries in boiling oil at a trucking diner off I-90, and my manager was always telling me to 'look on the bright side!' I tried, but it's hard to look on the bright side when all you see is emptiness... emptiness, isolation, and corn.

My story begins in the corn. It was a night similar to any other at my little cottage in Fairfield, it was just after dinner, the sun had just gone down... my dad had retired to spend the rest of the evening in front of the T.V. ... my mom was finishing up the dishes, my little sis was helping her. As for me—I had only gotten home from work a couple hours before. As was typically the case after a long day of work, my frustration was at a breaking point, and my bad mood soured even the taste of my mom's lasagna. Not wanting to take out my dissatisfactions on my family, I decided to go for a walk under the stars.

I don't know what it was about the sky that night, but I swear those stars were the most glorious and perfect I'd ever seen them.... It seemed obscene, almost—how such glory could exist in our dimensions, and yet, I sat stranded, stagnating in a place where I had no justification to complain. I read in a book

that there is a hundred trillion miles of blackness between us and our nearest galactic companion... an unfathomable distance of nothingness... only a sea of billions of shining stars. No life could exist in this abyss, no hope of any organic cell tissue... only the empty vacuum of space... and yet, I sat in a great field of growing, organic food, breathing healthy oxygen, cursing my predicament.

Over the past years, I have gotten very good at ignoring the unescapable nagging sensation of isolation that is ever-present in Fairfield... but for some reason, that night I just couldn't turn away from my frustration. My walk turned to a run, which turned to a sprint! My feet left the road and carried me blindly into the field of corn. I ran as fast as I could, tearing through the corn, trying desperately to escape the mediocrity of my life.

Even after I could run no longer, I staggered blindly through the corn until finally I collapsed, exhausted. The pounding of my heart and my heaving, shuddering gasps brought me a strange relief from my terrible sadness.

Why the hell my parents would choose Fairfield, Iowa as a place to raise their children, I'll never know. Neither of them seemed like the type of people who had any business living out in the American Midwest. My father was born out in New York—my grandfather was a stockbroker on Wall Street—I guess my dad really didn't like the idea of following in those footsteps, because he joined up when he graduated college.

I'm pretty sure the only reason he even finished school was because his dad was making him go.... Anyway, he didn't count on 'Nam coming up in the '70s. He got deployed.... I suppose watching people get cut up by machine guns in a swamp kinda makes you realize the insignificance of material things. He's a pretty salt-of-the-earth guy now. He met my mom in some bar in California when he came back, and they were married a year later.

My mom was raised in some town near Boston, she never told me where. Once she graduated high school, she thought she wanted to be an actress. She moved to Los Angeles. It took her about a year to decide that acting was better left to people with training and talent, so she took a career where her assets could serve her better. The modeling industry served her well for a few years, but my mom had a good upbringing. In order to maintain a modeling career, one must be comfortable with certain... indecencies... that my mother was not.

When she met my father, a strong silent type with a medal on his uniform, she fell for him instantly. As much as it pains me to admit it, my mother was sex-bomb in her younger years, and I don't blame my father for picking her up off the draft wire. They dated for a year. After seven months, my mother was pregnant. After twelve, they were married and by the time my older brother was born, they had settled down in Fairfield.

The house they bought was a picturesque little Midwestern

cottage—one floor, with twenty acres of flat grassland, complete with a red barn, straight off the Hidden Valley bottle. My dad bought a tractor and some corn seed to add our little twenty acres to the expanse of corn that covered the forsaken state, and a broken old mustang to store in the barn—a project car. He always used to make this joke about how it was only right to have ‘horses’ in the barn... only thing was; he never committed to working on the car enough to get it running, so technically there were no horses. I guess some people like that, though... working on something. To him, I don’t think it was even really about finishing it... he just liked to keep his hands busy.

At this point, you’re probably wondering why I bother to waste my words telling you about my parents and my hometown, especially when they are to be the last communication I have with another person. I have two reasons.

One: I have no idea if this message will ever reach my home safely. Even if this message does make it into the hands of someone, somewhere, there is a predominantly good chance that they will not be English-speaking, and thus—this message will be meaningless. With such an obscure chance that this message will ever be appreciated for its full meaning, I figure I might as well pour myself into these words, in hopes that if someone does happen to find this passage, they might hear my story and wonder at the marvels our existence holds. Indeed, it would be a tragedy if I simply sent an SOS in the form of a

single, desperate sentence, and somebody did happen to find and read it, against all probable odds.

If this message does, somehow, make it through into the hands of even just one person, I want them to fully understand the weight my story carries. After all, I am gone from that world on earth—never to return. Even if I wished to, I could never go back. A plea for help would be pointless... but still, the thought of disappearing from the pages of human history without ever leaving a mark is horrible. So I send this message out into the abyss, hoping it will find the eyes of someone who might read the words which are to be my legacy.

The second reason is this: The perfect little Midwestern scene I described to you—the little cottage in the middle of the endless corn in Fairfield where my parents raised me and my brother and sister—the address is 117 Chutney D. Fairfield, Iowa, 56161. I know it seems like a massive request to make of you, especially if you have already shouldered the task of carrying my legacy, but please—if you can, after you’ve finished reading this, send it to this address. It brings me great pleasure to know that there is a chance, however slim, that my family might read this and understand my disappearance.

But just to clarify: I’m not dead. If you ever read this, mom and dad, I’m not dead. The force of life never left my body, my heart never stopped beating... I know I will never be able to put into words what happened to me the night I disappeared—

although I will try my best—but I know it didn't kill me. Life still flows through my veins, even now, as I am an unfathomable distance from where I came.

Anyway, you remember my story? I had just run into off into the cornfields, trying irredeemably to escape the endless loneliness and mediocrity of where I was; trying to capture a place for myself before my clock reached zero.

After I collapsed in the corn, I rolled around for a minute like a shot deer, trying to get my breath back. When the blood stopped roaring in my ears, I found myself on my back, looking up at the endless, immaculate night sky through my little hole in the ocean of corn.

Even just that limited view of the sky was enough to inspire wonder in my heart.... I got to my feet to gain better vantage, and my heart twisted with teary awe for the infinities above me. How could one feel anything but a sense of utter captivation and astonishment when observing the stars at night? It is only then—when we are given rest from the sun's all-consuming light and given a glimpse at the heavens—that we might gain perspective at how unfathomably small we are in the scale of cosmic infinity.

My hands shook as I observed the stars from the middle of that field... but my glimpse of larger perspective had only just begun.... What happened next was nothing short of a miracle—an intervention in one person's life from a divine, cosmic source

much grander than I could even begin to understand.... All I can do is marvel at my fortune as being the one selected to experience such an event.

As I gazed up at the sky, I felt the hairs on the back of my neck rising. With my skin tingling, I became aware of a sort of electricity in the air—an energy that seemed to reverberate from the very molecules I breathed. This otherworldly feeling invoked fear in my heart... it felt as if the air around me was rushing, unsettled and agitated. The electric static dancing in the air grew stronger by the second... suddenly, a giant, surging wind picked up! The great ocean of corn around me started to rock and sway violently—the electric winds swirled like a hurricane! The cornstalks thrashed about like those giant inflatables you see outside of car dealerships; the electricity in the air had grown to possess a terrifying voltage, and although I was unharmed, my every hair stood on end as I felt the energy embrace me.... The lethal currents rushed over my skin, the roaring wind ripped at my clothes—the cornstalks thrashed at me like a hundred whips, until I fell under their lash, throwing my arms above my head to shield myself from the gale! But then, just as quickly as it began... it was over.

The thunderous wind disappeared in an instant, and the air was still again. However, I was still very aware of that curious, tingling sensation in the air. Although the wind had stopped, the air itself seemed to be trembling—struggling to carry the

awesome power of the current, which still buzzed against my skin.

I rose from my place on the ground and wiped my eyes to clear my vision. My curiosity was fighting a hard battle against my fear, keeping me rooted in place. I hardly dared to move for fear that the static current in the air might turn on me... then, it happened: A star fell from the sky.

At least, that was my first conclusion. As I looked up at the endless night, searching for any clue as to what phenomenon I had just experienced, movement caught my eye. I figured at first it must be a plane, but as I examined the light, it appeared to be much more distant than an airplane... it looked as if one of the stars in the sky simply started moving across the sky. The more I looked at this small dot of movement, the more convinced I became that it was indeed moving faster, and coming towards me! So I watched, mouth agape, as one of the twinkling lights of the night broke rank and rushed towards earth, towards Fairfield, Iowa, and towards the middle of a random cornfield in which I happened to be standing.

In the span of about ten seconds, this object flew at unimaginable speed through our atmosphere and out of the sky, to stop right in front of me!

This object—clearly not a star, now that it was resting only a few meters away, rather than millions of light-years—had descended at a pace far too rapid for my eyes to account

for, but it had not crashed, or even made impact with the earth. Instead, it had come to an instant halt right about twenty inches from the ground. The corn around the object had already been flattened by the winds earlier, and now, I could do nothing but stare at the otherworldly sight before me.

The object was, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen on this earth. It was a perfect sphere, probably eight feet in diameter, if I had to guess. It appeared to be made out of glass—but with far more precision and craftsmanship than any human is capable of. It was as if a flawless, spherical mirror had fallen out of the heavens that night... The object also seemed to be the source of the electricity in the air. I took a step closer to the hovering object, and immediately felt the current that enveloped my body intensify.

Filled with an awe and curiosity more profound than any I had ever experienced before, I walked cautiously around the sphere, observing it from all sides. It was perfect—without a single blemish or defect—a giant mirror-ball, reflecting the universe back at itself. As my fascination grew, I was taken by a very human desire to touch the object. I knew, judging from the way electricity caused my hairs to vibrate with every step I took nearer, that this desire was not a wise one to give to, but I decided that to pass up such an opportunity would be even less wise.

I took a few tentative steps towards the hovering sphere, until I could see my reflection staring back at me with an expression of wide-eyed fascination. Then, I carefully reached out and touched the unimaginably smooth surface.

As soon as my fingertips contacted with that cool, smooth surface of the Orb, its appearance changed immediately—so fast and unexpectedly that I jerked back with a shout! The glowing mirrored surface of the Orb had flashed to a deep, all-consuming black upon my touch. Once I had jumped back, however, it returned to its original state so quickly that I wondered if I had imagined the change... but I knew I hadn't. After working up the courage again, I laid my hand against the surface a second time. Once again, the mirror flashed to inky blackness.

I didn't pull away this time, however, and found that not only the appearance of the Orb changed upon my touch, but the consistency of the strange, ultra-smooth material it was made out of. As a mirror, the Orb seemed indestructible—harder than diamonds, more impregnable than a vault-door—but as soon as the color changed to that all-consuming blackness, it felt as if I could simply push my hand through the solid shell. So, of course, I did exactly that.

My heart jumped into my throat as I felt my arm sliding deeper and deeper into the blackness. The inside felt cool—icy, really—but not unpleasant or painful. I pushed my arm into the darkness until the shoulder, feeling around the inside of the

sphere... but my fingers never found anything—there was only nothingness. This wasn't enough to satisfy my curiosity. With a deep breath, I pressed my face into the surface of the orb. As my head disappeared beyond our dimension, my vision went dark and I saw nothing—only a seemingly infinite emptiness within the Orb. This sensation was quite unpleasant, and I pulled my head out again quickly, eager to return to the world of perception with which I was familiar... but something about that blackness beckoned me... it seemed as though the Orb itself was urging me to come within, to surrender myself to an infinity beyond my comprehension....

I turned to look back at the ocean of corn, the land which had been my home for all my years on this earth... my vision then wandered to the skies above, to the sparkling panorama of heavenly glory which exceeded the human understanding... I thought of the tens-of-thousands of years of human civilization, who had looked up at the stars with wonder and admiration... it was all of these thoughts, together, which spurred me to step inside that hovering black Orb.

This, my friend, is where my story departs from the comprehensible reality familiar to my kin on Earth. I apologize in advance for the abstract nature of the rest of my tale, and I promise I will do my best to put my experiences into words understandable to you, my dear reader, but I cannot make any promises!

As I stepped into the Orb, surrendering my entire body to the blackness, my first reaction was one of total and utter fear. I disappeared from the face of the earth, from everything and everyone I'd ever know, and was left pin wheeling in nothingness. I couldn't see past the all-consuming dark, couldn't hear past the dead silence... there was nothing for my perception to grab onto or make sense of... then, I was joined in the blackness by another.

The first thing to indicate my company was the presence of light. Slowly, the cool emptiness gave to a warm, pleasant light to replace the black. Soon, my other senses were greeted with stimulation as well, and all at once, the soul-crushing darkness gave way to a splendor I could never have imagined in my wildest dreams!

I was floating in an ocean of happiness—if happiness could indeed be represented by some physical element. All around me was a sea of white foam, more pure and light and perfect than you could possibly comprehend. I floated weightlessly in the foam; free from all physical barriers which ever confined me. I could swim in the foam with no effort and move throughout the bright, shining ocean around me at will. I could breathe the foam, and each breath brought nourishment and refreshment, like a glass of water after fifty years of high-fructose soda... I twisted and danced and laughed and played like a child in the foam, consumed by unimaginable glee... until I was interrupted.

Unexpectedly, a voice rang out with a single, unexpected greeting. The voice was loud and powerful, although it was in no way harsh or angry, or gave me any reason for fear.

“Hello.”

Of course, I answered. I probably would have been terrified, had it not been for the glorious, wonderful foam.

“Umm... hello.”

The voice spoke again, booming from every direction rather than from a single, identifiable source.

“You’re Jim McKeown.”

The voice knew my name, but that fact only brought me comfort.

“Yes... how did you know?”

“I know many things. I have been watching for a long time.”

“Watching me?”

I asked this feeling quite privileged at the thought.

“Watching no one in particular. Simply watching.”

“Oh... are you God?”

“No.”

“Is there a God?”

“Humanity forged the concept of ‘God’ over thousands of years of confusion, misconception, and the feeble attempts to make sense of Infinity. The result is the history of the Earth—a turbulent, violent dance—spurred by the petty differences between the peoples and their self-conceived beliefs.”

“So... no?”

“*The idea of God is a construct of human folly, but don't feel upset. Your race settled on the right idea, they simply could not agree on the technicalities. There is a Creator, a supreme One responsible for all existence, for you... for me.*”

“So, you're not the Creator?”

“*No. The Creator is much more... grand... than I. The Creator is the only thing to stretch across all infinity and never change, the only One who truly knows and understands all things, and has the power to navigate the Kingdom of the Dimensions without restraint.*”

“Oh.” I said simply.

Already, the wealth of knowledge bestowed upon me made my head spin.

“Why did he create me? The universe?”

“*I do not know.*”

This took me off guard; hearing the Presence within the Orb admit to a lack of knowledge.

“*No one does. The Creator's purpose for forming the Infinities is something known only to The Creator.*”

“Have you ever met him?”

“*Gender is a concept of Earth and the human world. The Creator is not bound by such concepts. As I said: The Creator is the only One capable of navigating the infinities without conforming to them. I have never encountered him personally,*

as I must manipulate my form to move through the dimensions. The Creator sees them all at once, and moves through them independent of their Laws.”

“Who are you?” I asked. It seemed to be the next logical question.

“*I go by no name, although, if it would make you more comfortable to call me by some form of identification, the English word 'Orb' will suffice.*”

“Okay.” I said.

It felt strange to refer to the voice as ‘Orb.’

“But... that's not really what I meant. I meant, who are you? As in, like—”

“*You are curious about the nature and purpose of my existence. I understand. The best I can put it in your language is that my purpose is that of a vessel, a transport.*”

“What do you transport?”

“*I transport a great number of things—all of the same, basic nature, yet unimaginably different from one another. I transport the essence of the soul.*”

“The human soul?”

“*Amongst hundreds of millions of others, yes.*”

“Others? Other races? Other species? How many others are there?”

“*Countless. It is a combination of human egotism and ignorance that so many from your planet regard themselves as*

the only intelligent species in the Infinities. Not all living things get to make the journey Beyond, however. From Earth, your species is the only one allowed to live on outside of the Circle, to live with The Creator.”

“So... when people—things—die... they come here? Where do you take them?”

“Beyond.”

“Beyond where?”

“Beyond the Infinities. Outside the circle. To a place where only The Creator can allow them.”

“Heaven?”

“That is the concept in which this place is known on Earth, although in reality, no book or tales conceived by Man can possibly begin to explain the splendor or significance of this place.”

“Are you going to take me there? I’m not... dead... am I?”

“I cannot take you there until you are dead, and you are not passed yet.”

“So... in that case, why did you pick me up?”

“I did not pick you up. You willfully joined with me... something no one has ever done before.”

“Yes, but you... landed in front of me. You revealed yourself to me.”

“I did.”

“Why?”

“I... am unsure. For countless ages, I have encountered millions upon millions of souls... but not a single one of them I had ever wished to meet. Not a single one of them I ever selected for myself. They were thrust upon me only after death removed their Essence from their Being... I... suppose... I wished to select my own... cargo... for once.”

“But... why me?”

“You were the best choice.”

I felt extremely privileged and honored upon hearing this.

“Out of everybody on earth?”

“Yes. You were alone, as was I. You were isolated in that field, looking up at the sky and wondering if you would ever bleed far enough into the abyss that it would spit something back... You were... deserving.”

“Deserving? Of what?”

“Of what I offer you.”

“What do you offer me?”

“An unending, infinite expanse of knowledge, understanding, and experience. I am a vessel, tasked with traversing the Circle of the Infinities again and again, collecting souls and watching... watching, and waiting... but I have been alone for an unimaginable stretch of time, and for the first time in my existence... I desired. I wished for companionship, and for a student— to whom I could pass on my learnings.... I selected you. I do not know if this decision will go without

consequence... but none-the-less I extend the offer to join me.”

“Join you? Where would we go? What would we do?”

My multitude of questions was growing steadily with every passing moment.

“We would go wherever you wished. We would see whatever you wanted to see, and I would do my best to answer the questions you have along the way. My years in solitude have given me much knowledge, and the nature of my existence is more incredible than you can imagine. I can travel the Infinities in the blink of an eye; I can be as large as a galaxy or as small as an atom... I can withstand the most extreme elements—I can travel effortlessly throughout space, time, and the dimensions, and now... I ask you to be my companion.

This request seemed more fantastical and amazing than all the other things I had encountered that night, put together! I was filled with an elation and wonderment that made my heart swell... I wanted to shout out words of agreement, but one small factor held my tongue....

“Would I ever get back?”

“Unfortunately, you could never return to your planet if you decide to join me in my travels. Such a journey will span a hundred galaxies, a hundred million years’ time.... By your return, there is a chance that the Earth will no longer exist.”

“But if you can travel time, couldn’t you take me back to the exact moment—“

“It doesn’t work that way. Time is a fickle thing, and the laws of your dimension are very strict. If you come with me, you are giving up this world—this life—for something grander. I offer you a chance to learn the way of things—and although you will never use the knowledge to better your species’ condition... it is knowledge that no man has ever had, and none shall ever have again after you.”

As I considered what I had been told, a great yearning took hold of me. I desired nothing more in my entire life than to accept such an incredible, terrifying, awe-inspiring offer... but I had one more question that had to be answered.

“Can I say goodbye?”

“Once you step outside of this dimension, you will be forever locked out until your death... but I can allow you to send a message, of sorts.”

“What do you mean?”

“You can transmit a wireless Binary signal, which will translate to no more than five-thousand English characters. I cannot guarantee that this message will ever be received, but I will transmit the signal out into the Earth’s atmosphere. There is an abundance of wireless signals of this type surrounding Earth, and there is a decent chance that somewhere, a device might pick it up and translate it...”

I considered this for a long time.... The idea of leaving it all behind was significant and indeed quite scary.... It brought

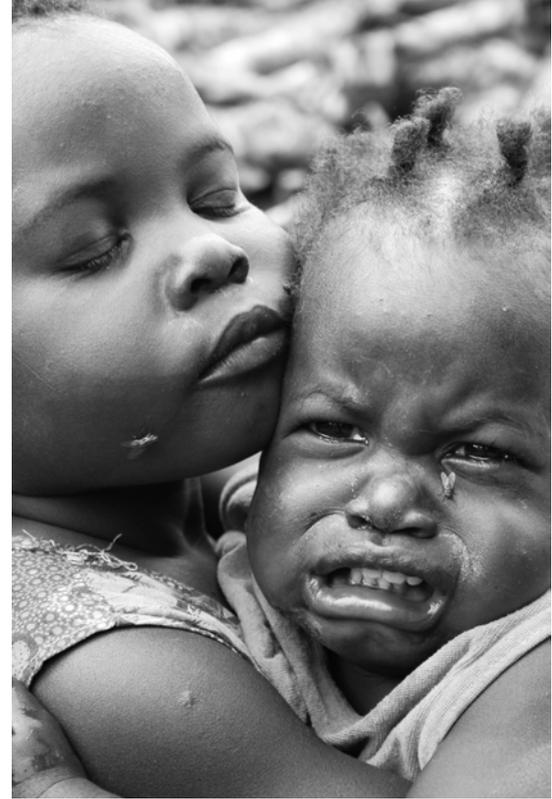
me pain to know that there was a good chance my family will never read my last goodbye—but in case they do, and are right now—I want to apologize to them. I’m sorry I choose to leave. I’m sorry I turned my back on the quaint, wonderful way of life in little Fairfield, Iowa... but wherever, whenever I am right now... It’s beautiful. I’m watching over you, and when you reach the Other Side... I’ll be there waiting.

It was just after I finished speaking all these words to my faceless, prodigious host—and he sent them off into the night air to be found—that he spoke to me again.

“Are you ready?”

I took a deep breath and nodded, my heart swelled with awe and wonderment at what was about to come.... All at once, the foam fell away, the light disappeared, and a rushing sensation came over me—the likes of which I can never explain—and just like that, I felt myself plucked from the face of the earth and hurled into the endless cosmos.

Sister’s Comfort
Photograph



Jerusalem
Photograph



The Abrupt Creation of a Boy God

No one realizes just how bizarre it is that things, particularly *beings*, spring into existence virtually instantaneously. Of course this *popping* into existence can take varying amounts of time and is only instantaneous relative to the vast and nearly unimaginable time that the universe has existed thus far, and will continue to exist into the foreseeable future. When looking at the production of human beings, for example, the typical 9 months that it takes for the hosts to collect and transform the proper amounts of ingredients and cooking time to complete their creations is as close to instantaneous as the universe can get. Even once the miniature creatures are expelled from the confines of their mother's innards they aren't quite fully aware and sentient beings. It takes years of post-production development for them to become fully cognizant of the fact that they actually *exist*. The time it takes to transition from being an oblivious symbiotic parasite to a creature that can comprehend itself and its world is so gradual that it's impossible to pinpoint the exact moment this revelation occurs, but it's something that human beings don't even consider. It's so gradual that they don't notice how odd it is that something can go from nonexistence (or at least being in a stupor of incomprehension) to existing, thinking, and *being*.

The *norm* of the gradual comprehension of existence made it quite apparent how absurd and unfathomable it was when the

boy god popped into existence in the quite literal sense of not existing in the slightest one moment and coming into being fully formed and aware the next. One moment he simply *wasn't*, and the next he *was*.

He opened his eyes, or perhaps they were already open when he sprang into reality, and witnessed wherever it was he was born in its full majesty. He stood completely still in the middle of an elegantly simple courtyard that had twelve incandescent white marble pillars in a circle. The earth beyond the pillars sloped upwards into hills in all directions, leaving the courtyard in a small bowl shaped valley, and was covered with lustrous and luminescent blades of emerald grass, each blade sparkling and reflecting the sun, which was directly overhead eliminating any shadows that may have been. The sky was a combination of every shade of blue, purple, and pink imaginable, and each color weaved and flowed together to create spirals and patterns across its entirety.

Taking all of this in, the boy fought his urge to continue admiring the splendor of his surroundings and his utter confusion about his abrupt creation. Though he didn't hear a thing, and nothing changed in his surroundings as far as he could tell, he turned knowing that there was now someone behind him.

The man before him was so ordinary compared the extraordinariness of the place in which they were that it was both surprising and rather terrifying. This man stood no more than 5 feet tall, which made him about a foot taller than the boy, and seemed to be quite ancient though there wasn't a blemish or wrinkle on his placid face. It was something in his eyes that

gave off his age, something in the way that he stared at the boy that seemed to give off the impression that he knew quite a lot about everything. His eyes were a grey so dark it bordered the realm of black to give off the eerie impression that they were made up of nothing but pupil. The hair atop his head was a shade of blond so light it was essentially white, though it wasn't a white that would be expected of an old man, and as it stirred in a wind that wouldn't have been noticeable had it *not* been moving it. The sun reflected through it giving off mysterious shadows and reflections of light that the boy couldn't focus on enough to understand how they were being cast.

"You probably have questions." The man said in a voice that was much deeper than would be expected of one so short. It seemed to reverberate and echo across the valley even though he didn't speak above a whisper. The boy opened his mouth to speak but couldn't think of a single question he wanted to ask *first*, and so he simply shut it and waited for the man to continue, which he did after he flashed a quick smile that exposed exquisitely straight, white teeth.

"It's certainly been awhile since we've had a god as... young as you, come into being." Though he had no context by which to base anything the man had said off of, the boy understood everything and waited again. "A quiet one. Easier to explain with examples, let's walk." Without waiting for a response the man walked towards the boy, pushed past him and continued between two of the pillars and up the hill. Not seeing much choice, or having the inclination to decline the offer of information, the boy followed.

As they climbed up the hill, the boy trailing a few feet behind the man, the breeze that had stirred the man's hair picked up and flowed from over the hill around them, bringing with it the scent of roses and lilies. The boy inhaled and chose to ignore the absurdity that he was able to recognize the scents despite being fairly new to the whole existence thing. He didn't know what it was he was expecting to see on the other side, let alone that he should be able to expect anything at all, but what it ended up being would probably have been low on his list.

The moment they crested the hill he saw the expansive sea of green stretch on until it reached a pristine, placid lake, the surface of which was as still as glass and reflected everything back better than any mirror. The lake was enormous, continuing on until just before the horizon cut off the view miles away.

Surrounding the lake were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people. There were men, women, children, and many other *things* that didn't seem to be either of the three. All sat or stood around the lake, some moved and some did not, but all faced the mirrored surface.

"Who are they?" The boy whispered, and flinched as the wind switched directions and seemed to carry his voice out and across the valley. He half expected every head to turn and stare directly at him, but none did.

"Gods. And goddesses. This is the land of gods old and new after all." He too whispered, but for whatever reason his voice didn't carry nearly as far as the boys had.

"Gods? How?" He stopped. He wasn't really sure what else he wanted to ask. "All of them?"

"Yes. Each and every one." The man smiled as he turned to look at the boy.

"I don't think I really understand." The boy whispered, turning his gaze away from the man and back at the expanse of gods and goddesses.

"I'd be surprised if you *did* understand. It's not something that's easy to grasp, especially for one as new as you." He paused and followed the boy's gaze out at the lake and its denizens.

Without another word, the man set off again, his pace deliberate and calm, but paced so the boy had to hurry to keep up. It only took a moment for the two to reach the furthest outskirts of the gods as they gazed towards the lake. Though the two moved among them now, not one gave any sign that they noticed the intrusion.

"What are they doing?" The boy asked, quietly.

"Waiting to die." This was not an answer that the boy had expected at all, and he snapped his head back to the man, whose smile had not faltered as he continued to stare at the lake.

"Gods die?"

"Eventually." The man said nonchalantly. When the boy didn't answer he continued. "I suppose it might be easier to explain how they come into being in the first place. Especially since it *is* how *you* came to be."

"You did say I was a god, huh. I don't feel like one, though I'm not sure how a gods supposed to feel...." He reached out a hand and patted the boy on the shoulder before continuing.

"Gods. Where *do* I start...?" He paused, and removed his hand to gesture in front of them. "Each god and goddess begins

their existence as a thought. An idea in the mind of a human being. Some gods come into existence so briefly that they don't even fully realize they exist at all, as that's how quickly beliefs can change." He turned to look at the boy to see if he was following along, which he was to an extent. "It isn't until that thought, that sliver of belief, holds and transforms into true faith, that a god persists."

As they continued to walk, the boy found himself staring at each of the gods they passed. He was anxious that one would turn to stare back at him, but none did. It was the most peculiar thing. None of them moved. They didn't blink. Didn't breathe. But they had a certain hue and brilliance to them that made them vibrant. Alive, if unmoving.

Now that he was closer to them, he noticed a luminescence that some gave off. Not all did. Some seemed to be pale, like they were slowly being bleached by the sun and draining of color. The ones who had the least amount of color were the ones that seemed the most statuesque. As they neared the lake, he noticed quite a few that had lost all of their color, becoming simply grey. In fact, the edges of their forms seemed almost blurred. One even had cracks forming over its face.

"So *I'm* here because someone... thought of me?" The boy asked, disturbed by the colorless beings.

"Yes. A little girl named Asha thought of you, and now she believes that you are real. And so you *are*." The boy didn't say anything. He didn't know what to say. Asha. The name danced and sang throughout his mind, resounding and pounding in every fiber of his being, and he knew what the man said was

true.

"So why are they here? I mean, why are they waiting to die?" He asked the man, turning expectantly towards him.

"Ah, well that's where it gets a bit tougher. You see, when a faith spreads, when that belief goes from a single person to two, or to a *nation*, a god gets *power*. For a time."

With that he gestured away from them, across the lake, and a group of gods that the boy hadn't paid any attention to before, though now that he saw them he couldn't look away, or help but *sense* their power. There were clusters of gods that emanated brilliance more remarkable than any of the others.

One group seemed to huddle together, beings of various sizes, shapes, and colors. Some had the faces of animals, additional limbs, or were various but brilliant shades of the rainbow.

Some had no real shapes at all, but were shifting forms that more represented ideas than people.

There were two that were indescribably brilliant. Though separate from one another, they produced radiances similar in grandeur. Neither had detailed features, their shapes billowing and flowing so that the boy couldn't focus on any single thing for long. Even from across the lake the boy could feel the weight of their power. He could only imagine the amount of people, and their faith, that it would take to give them such strength.

"Gods have their golden ages, and then they lose them. They always do." The man said, stealing the boy's attention away from the gods across the lake. "Zeus, Odin, Ra. Their families. Their wives, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters. They

each had their day. Well, their *ages* really. Ultimately man moves on and begins to forget. It's then that their power wanes and fades as more and more people stop believing."

"Like them?" The boy asked, pointing at the colorless beings closest to them. Each of which seemed all the more pale compared to the ones across the lake.

"Yes. As their faith fades, so does their color. Their life."

"Do people still believe in them? Wouldn't they be gone if no one did?"

"To an extent, yes. Many religions have faded and been forgotten so much so that the gods' power faded enough to erase them. But still, some of them remain simply because their names are remembered, even if no one truly believes in them any longer. You see, that faith, that belief and dedication. That *love*, of so many people and for such a long time. It can't help but leave an impression upon the universe. Even once that belief has died the power of all that faith keeps those gods here, in existence, despite their lack of purpose. So they sit and they wait for the last fragments of power to fade, and they wait to die. For without a people to serve, what good are gods?" He finished with a sigh and turned to look at the boy sadly.

"Serve?" Asked the boy, returning the gaze and remembering that he had no idea *why* he was there. What purpose did he serve? Of course he didn't understand how he'd come to be, even with the man's explanation. But that last part that he'd mentioned about serving made him realize that he didn't know what the point of him being there *was*.

"Yes, serve. Gods serve those that create them. Some serve

as a warning to keep their people just. Some serve as leaders. Most serve as hope. Hope for a reason to the madness of their lives. A hope that all isn't for naught. Whatever the purpose, gods *exist* for the people who created them, and once that purpose is lost there isn't much to be done but wait." The boy shuddered at his words. They carried such power, such truth, that he found himself afraid as he asked his next question.

"So what's *my* purpose?" As he spoke the wind died down, and though the sun didn't move an inch (and hadn't since he'd come to be) it seemed to get darker without a single change to the light.

"With a god as young as you, one created by one just as young, your purpose is fairly straightforward. You serve as a beacon of comfort to your creator."

"Why?" The darkness persisted, even grew, and he found that he didn't really want the answer.

"Asha is dying. She created you because she doesn't share the same faith as her people. Instead she places her faith in you, that you may save her." The man miraculously looked even older as he spoke, and he dropped his gaze from the boy and stared out at the lake again.

"Can I?"

"The power of a god so young and with a single believer, however passionate that believers faith, is not enough to save anyone. Let alone one in the condition that she is in." The boy found himself no longer afraid. Now he was angry.

"So it's pointless? My existence? I came into being with a purpose that is impossible to achieve?"

“There have been gods with hundreds of thousands of dedicated followers, millions even, whose power *never* reached a state where they could make any difference other than providing hope.”

“False hope.” He whispered. “Futile fallacies. *Lies.*”

“Perhaps. Yet that hope is enough for most, false or not. It’s enough to stop wars, sometimes. To keep people moving on with their lives. To keep them honest, or to keep them sane. Is that not enough?” At this the boy didn’t know what to say or what to think. The reasons the man gave were reasonable, if not valid, but it seemed so... cruel.

“So if I can’t save her, what *can* I do?”

“For her, hope is enough. Perhaps not hope that she will survive, but hope that she’s not alone. You can be there for her. *That* is what you can do.”

“Can I see her?” He asked.

Without another word, or even a single movement on either of their parts, they were no longer standing next to the lake and its gods. Now they stood in a simple hospital room with a single occupant.

She was about 8 years old by the look of her demeanor, though she was very small even for a child. She had hair as dark as midnight that flowed in waves and ringlets down her back and over her shoulders. Her skin was the lightest shade of milk chocolate, and her eyes were the most verdant green imaginable. She was incredibly skinny, with arms as thin as twigs and skin pulled tight about her face. On her forehead was a single red dot.

Though her weakness was evident in the way she moved,

the way she sat in her hospital bed was defiant and strong. She was so small she took up almost no space in the bed, and the rails on either side of her were white with 6 poles each. On her bedside table sat a bouquet of elegant ruby roses, with a few equally simple pink lilies.

She had a pad of paper in her lap and was coloring a picture with swirls of blue, purple, and pink. As the crayon twirled and swayed in her hand across the page, she sang.

Her song contained no words, simply ardent, lilting melodies that danced and flew, testing the boundaries and limitations of what she could produce with her voice alone. She teased the high notes out for as and long as possible before her voice cracked and dueled with the bass notes, dropping her voice as low as she could manage without laughing. As is common in hospitals, she was hooked up to numerous wires, tubes, and machines that produced a quiet and consistent din in the background to accompany her song.

Though their instantaneous transition from the lake to the hospital room should have shocked him, he didn’t notice as the instant his gaze fell upon the girl he could think of nothing else. A god and his creator have that sort of connection, he supposed. The man was still there next to him, but he didn’t say anything.

“Can she see us?” The boy asked, though he knew she couldn’t, as she didn’t react in the slightest to their arrival or his words.

“No, and a good thing at that. Not many who claim to see or hear their gods are considered in good regard by their peers. She cannot see you, but she *can* feel you.” At this the boy looked at

the man quizzically, but the man's gaze didn't move from her face. "Your purpose is to give comfort. She doesn't have much in the way of time, and being your sole believer, that means the same for you." With this the man looked at the boy, gave him one last smile, and vanished as suddenly as he had appeared. At his disappearance the boy took a deep breath and stepped towards her.

"Asha?" He said quietly, though he knew she would not respond. "Asha you can't hear me, but I'm your god. Well, you created me at least. I'm supposed to help you, though I can't actually help you in any way that matters. It's stupid and not really very fair, but apparently it's just the way it goes." He paused, taking another step forward. "I'm meant to comfort you, I guess. Though I don't really know what good it's going to do. We're both doomed, after all—" He stopped, ashamed at what he'd said. Though she couldn't hear him it felt cruel to say that. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it. Well I guess I did, but I shouldn't have said it."

He took another step forward, and froze as her crayon stopped moving across the paper and she looked up briefly. He was almost sure that she could see him, but just as he decided she *must* be able to, she looked back to her paper and continued drawing. Letting out the breath he'd been holding, he took the leap. Another step forward was all it took to reach her bedside and he stretched his hand out to touch her.

The instant his hand made contact, though it didn't move her gown at all at the part of her shoulder he touched, he could *feel* her. She looked up again, just as briefly, but this time there

was a smile on her face. Her smile stayed where it was as she focused on her coloring again, and she started humming another invented tune. He hadn't realized that her shoulders had been tense and rigid, but the moment he'd touched her they had relaxed and she'd settled back into the bed.

For all that it did for her, it helped him even more. The anger that he'd felt back at the lake at the pointlessness of his existence, at the fact that he couldn't do the one thing he'd come into existence being *meant* to do, vanished. His own shoulders relaxed, and he felt a smile creep onto his face for the first time since he'd come into being. The instant they touched he knew what he was made to do, and he knew that it *was* worth it.

With a final sigh, he pulled himself onto the bed and sat next to her, leaning against the rail to watch her as she colored her picture. He kept his hand on her shoulder, and he pressed his leg against her own. Each moment that they remained in contact he could feel both of their anxieties and frustrations, their worries and fears, fall away.

For the first time since he'd come into being, what was really only a few moments ago, he was content. And he sat there next to her, watching as each new picture unfolded itself before his eyes, and awaited what was to come.

Matt Passant

Nights of Oblivion

On this cool, cool night,
Drunk on rainwater, smokin' & singin' the blues,
& the buzz, buzz of blue neon light.

Smoke swirls & deep amber whiskey – what a sight!
Sweat slick & lips licked, sax reed ready; let's blow a fuse
On this cool, cool night.

A bop apocalypse; notes fall down like rain & dance, dance
with all of their might
Blown down crazy breath –
in here no one cares what you choose,
& the buzz, buzz of blue neon light.

On stage rollin' notes into notes –
improvised perfection, a shadow in backlight
Sway at the knees & swing keeping time, what else can he use
On this cool, cool night?

At *Birdland*, Parker coming down off great height
Slip needle in vein, constrict, dilate, the dragon muse
& the buzz, buzz of blue neon light.

Dizzy-gone - let's go - we gotta get right!
Forever we're changed & come back tomorrow,
just what can we lose
In the cool, cool night?
& the buzz, buzz of blue neon light.

Old Fred

There once was a frog, and his name was Fred. He was a smart frog, all wise and well bred. But one day came a girl, rosy-cheeked and fair-skinned, who sat down beside him and sang into the wind.

Fred was quite taken with the maiden's sweet verse, and asked her to kiss him, being quite terse. So she kissed him, and then did declare,

"Now you must wed me and get me an heir, for I am the witch of the evil forest bog."

And by saying so, revealed herself to the frog.

Fred was quite stumped, for a witch he had kissed, so he said,

"I'll not marry you, so desist."

The Hag was quite mad, and replied with a sneer,

"You'll wed me right now or my wrath you will fear!"

Now, I said Fred was smart, though you may be doubting, but

our friend Fred didn't sit there just pouting. With a trick up his sleeve he said to the witch:

"That's all well and good, but the deal I'll enrich, for I am a prince who is under a curse, and I'll wed you quite quick if my form you'll reverse."

So the witch gave a cackle and a wave of her hand and instead of a frog there stood a man. Now the man was quite regal, well-dressed and well-armed. He pulled out his sword on the hag quite alarmed. He slew her right there, our old friend the frog. He killed that mean old witch from the bog.

"Now dear witch, while our play was quite fun, I'm afraid that this fight I have won. For now I'm no frog, but a big handsome man, and I'll find me a princess, soon as I can."

And so off walked off our friend, that old frog named Fred. He won against the witch lying dead. I said Fred was smart, and I never lie, so where is he now, our frog-man so sly? I haven't a clue, where Fred may be, but I know his story and pass it to thee.

Some say he's fake, some say he's dead; whatever the case, just remember old Fred!

Dr. Destiny

Robert walked down the hallway, his sweating hands clasped behind his back. He glanced briefly at each door he passed. He could see lights glowing behind the frosted glass windows set into their wood. The door he was looking for was at the very end of the hallway next to the department of “Stability Tech Development.” He stared at the plaque next to his door for a long moment before reaching out and pushing through to the room beyond.

A row of uncomfortable looking chairs greeted him, ranked neatly in front of an open window, behind which sat a smiling young lady with wire-rimmed spectacles perched on her nose. When she saw Robert, she sat up in her chair and tucked a stray lock of hair behind her ear. He meandered around the chairs to stand beside a sign that read, “Please wait here,” but she waved him forward cheerfully and greeted him politely. “Hello Robert, it’s good to see you!”

“Good morning Miss Evans. I’m here for my monthly check in,” He responded.

“I thought so,” she said, still smiling as she handed him a small stack of papers and a writing utensil. “Dr. Destiny is just finishing up with another client, but if you’d like to take a seat and check that everything on these papers is correct, she should

be with you in a few minutes!” Robert nodded and made his way to a seat in the far corner, away from the Evans girl and her disconcertingly suggestive smiles.

There were few other people in the room, most of them unfamiliar. A couple of seats to his left sat a young man in a bizarre suit of purple, rubber armor, and beyond him a couple of young people in uncomfortably tight clothing. In the corner opposite from Robert, though, he recognized a woman who sat with her legs crossed primly, hands clasped and resting gently on her knee. Her hair was coiled on top of her head in a neat coil and topped off with a small bowler hat. A thick, blue, velvet skirt covered her legs to the ankle. He thought her name was Claire. She had been present the last time he’d been here, and while they had never spoken, the familiarity of her appearance was a comfort. Or perhaps it was that her crystalline blue eyes reminded him of Elena.

Robert began going over the paperwork, glancing up occasionally to check the time. “Name: Robert Edmund Whittock, Place of Birth: Derby, England...” He had reached the line for “Parents’ Occupations:” and was marking a check next to “Mother: House Maid,” when he glanced up again and met the ice of Claire’s gaze. He swallowed and sat up straighter in his chair, setting aside the papers. A vision flashed through his mind of a different pair of clear blue eyes, framed by locks of chocolate brown, twinkling as he was ushered out the door to

her family's house. She had promised him through her laughter that he could call on her again the next day. That had been three months past to Robert's mind.

The musical echoes of that laughter were still ringing in his head as he sat transfixed by the familiar gaze of a stranger. His reverie was interrupted when the door to the office opened and a slender woman stepped out. "Claire Moreau?" she called, and the ice disappeared in a swirl of velvet. "Comment allez-vous?"

"Bien, et vous?" Claire responded to the woman just as the door snapped closed behind them. Robert closed his eyes for a moment, gritting his teeth against the hollow thumping in his chest.

He finished his paperwork silently and sat with his fingertips pressed together so hard his hands tingled. Outwardly he seemed merely contemplative, but inside there was a fistfight raging between his composure and his emotions. By the time the woman returned with Claire, his emotions had his composure in a chokehold and he could feel a roughness in the back of his throat that tasted like blood and heat and flint striking steel.

He turned his attention outward, blinking back the beginnings of tears, to see the woman bidding farewell to Claire, who held a pamphlet titled "CCDTT Paris," from which a small rectangle of stiff paper protruded. He could barely make out the logo of something called "American Airlines" printed on the paper.

"Robert Whittock," called the woman as his eyes followed

Claire through the door. He gathered the paperwork and stood, uncomfortably aware of the way that the receptionist's gaze followed him. "Hello Robert, how are you today?" asked the woman.

"I am well, thank you," he replied curtly. Together, they proceeded through the doorway under a sign which read "Center for the Counseling of Displaced Time Travellers."

Robert followed the woman down the hall in silence, his thoughts turning inward once again. The first time he had visited, it had astonished him that so much could lie beyond that waiting room door. It reminded him of a time when he had snuck into the manor house from the servant's hall as a boy. He had gotten lost in the manor, and spent hours creeping through the maze of rooms and hallways, eager to learn all of the secrets the house held. His mother had caught him eventually, just before he walked in on the lord's dinner party. Despite the whipping his mother had given him for it, he still recalled his delight at racing down the empty hallways, peering through doors at rooms he wasn't supposed to know existed.

The novelty of the experience had worn off by this visit, however, and his former delight and curiosity had been replaced by crushing reality.

A couple of doors that they passed had been left ajar, and through one he could see what looked like a windowed balcony, beyond which was an enormous room. Robert felt a vague

stirring of his old inquisitive nature and stepped closer to peer at the room beyond. Metallic rods ran parallel along the length of the massive chamber beyond the balcony, and a blinding white light pulsed between them. Noticing Robert's preoccupation, Dr. Destiny joined him in his observation for a moment before she nudged the door shut with her toe. The plaque on the wall next to it read "Stability Engine Observation."

"Dr. Cameron?" Robert said. "May I ask what exactly that was?"

She looked at him over her shoulder and pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose before answering. "That was where our personnel go to observe the stability engine from a safe distance," she replied.

"Stability engine?" he asked.

"Yes. The rift in time that has displaced yourself and countless others is wildly unstable. We are working to stabilize it and hope to some day repair it."

A bright white light filled Robert's memory and his body recalled a sensation of falling so vivid he felt the vertigo even now. "I see. And it is this instability which causes myself and others to be snatched from their rightful time and deposited elsewhere?" She nodded. Robert contemplated her words for a time until they came upon a door marked "Dr. Destiny Elizabeth Cameron." She opened the door and tried to usher him through.

"Please, Dr. Cameron, ladies first," He insisted. She smiled

indulgently and proceeded through the door.

Once inside, Robert waited for Destiny to take a seat behind her desk before seating himself across from her.

"So, Robert," she said, "how have you been since our last meeting?"

"To be completely frank, Dr. Cameron, I have not been particularly well. The easy days are becoming increasingly infrequent," he replied.

"I see," she said. "That's very unfortunate. Is there any way you could try to articulate for me what exactly has been troubling you most? Have your studies been going poorly since our last meeting?"

"I will admit that that is a part of the issue. The medical arts have progressed significantly since my day, and many of the surgical practices I was taught are considered nearly barbaric now. Re-educating myself is becoming increasingly frustrating," he said.

"I am sorry to hear that. Have you spoken to the man I recommended you to last session? He has had a lot of success learning modern medicine despite coming from about the same time as yourself," she said.

"We spoke over the telephone, yes. A fascinating experience in it's own right, but the conversation was of little help. It seems that the fellow was the son of a midwife, and the process of childbirth has changed so little over time that he was

supplementing knowledge he already possessed more so than having to start over, as I must.” Robert responded.

Dr. Destiny bit her lip and examined him through the narrow slits of her eyelids, behind the veil of her wire-rimmed glasses. He avoided her scrutinizing gaze, staring instead at an infographic on the wall behind her. “Areas with access to the CCDTT show a 27% lower risk of...” the rest of the words were lost behind the curls of Destiny’s auburn hair.

“Well,” she said after a moment, “I had hoped for better from that experience. Perhaps we can return to your career progress in a minute. You said that it was only a part of the problem. Could you elaborate on the rest of the ‘problem’?”

He sat quietly for a long time, watching as his hands wrestled with one another in his lap, and Destiny waited in patient silence. Finally he managed to speak past the marbles gathered in the back of his throat. “I have known heartbreak before, Dr. Cameron. I am familiar with the aching and the longing and the wishing. I have spent long nights lamenting the scorn of a woman or the loss of a loved one. But this feeling, this pain of losing *everything* goes far beyond heartbreak. I no longer have family. My skills and my profession are useless. Worst of all, my fiancé married another man, had his children, and was buried next to him eighty years ago. I had a long life of happiness ahead of me, a hopeful future, but it was taken from me and now I am left with nothing but a useless set of skills.”

“It is not so hopeless Robert,” said Dr. Destiny, “your skills are not useless, you can find a place where you are useful. And you can still find a future here. There is a woman I have been seeing, Claire, who has taken notice of you. She could be a friend to you.”

“I have noticed her,” Robert replied quietly. “She has the same eyes as my Elena.” They sat in silence for a long moment. Dr. Destiny pursed her lips and tapped her finger thoughtfully on her desk.

“I have arranged for her to fly to Paris, where she is originally from. It would be a small matter to have you join her. She could use the support as much as you,” Destiny said.

Robert shook his head. “I don’t think so, Dr. Cameron. The only solace I can see for myself is to return home.”

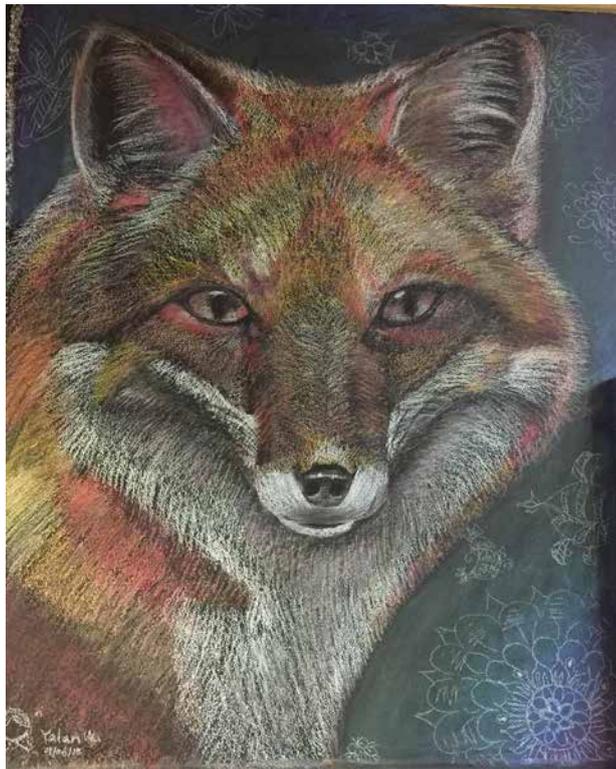
“Please don’t give up on me, Robert,” Destiny pleaded. “There is a way for you to make a home here. If you are willing to continue trying, we can figure it out.”

“I am very sorry Dr. Cameron. I just don’t see how.” He stood and straightened his jacket. “Thank you for your help, you have been very kind.”

“Robert, please!” she begged.

He pulled open the door and stepped through. “Goodbye, Destiny.”

The Red Fox
Chalk



Lion
Mechanical Pencil and Face Paint



Nathaniel LaCrue

Crush Crazy Crows

There were supposed to be butterflies, I thought. I'm sure they said that, with love, there came butterflies. Instead there were crows. A murder of them, infuriated and trapped inside my gut, clawing and snapping at my insides. How the whole lot of them didn't fly out when I opened my mouth, I'll never know.

"I am so sorry." I said. I was going 90 mph across the campus, focused on a hundred different assignments, tests, and projects, when time wrapped a noose around my twig of a neck and jerked, freezing everything in its tracks. I heard the world shatter in my ears. I think I blacked out from the sheer force of the impact and it took me a while to remember how to move my fingers or speak sentences in the correct order. *He* wasn't even fazed.

Books were everywhere. I felt so ridiculously stupid as I rushed to pick up my things. I came back to Earth when I saw his hand reaching for the rest of my scattered books. *I could have bumped into anyone, but no, the universe in all its unfair trials had me bump right into him.* I had literally fallen for my poetry T.A.

"I'm lucky I'm not made of glass," I said. "My klutziness would have left me broken long before I made it to college if I was."

"You're adorable." He said. His words were a minefield disguised as a garden of lavender. He stood close enough that I could smell it on him like a warm blanket wrapping around both of us. He handed me my math textbook and stood up. I tried to stand but had apparently lost that ability. My knees weren't just weak, they were gone. Where the bones should have been there were only flowers, sapphire and emerald petals, dried and useless when it comes to stability. That was when I knew this wasn't just a crush. I am in love.

When they talk about love in stories, they make it sound so precious, so enthralling, but when love found me it was a molten glass poured down my throat, searing and freezing me at the same time. I didn't blush from embarrassment or desire. It was the burn from his voice, a fiery, turbulent gust of splendor and ruin.

"Need a hand," he said. His smile carved across his face slowly, his glistening teeth more like those of a wolf, sharp and menacing. He stared at me like he could see the crows dancing about inside me, ready to hunt them if the hunger was great enough. He had eyes soft like dandelion seeds, earthy green like the leaves on hemlock and just as dangerous. His coal black hair hung to one side of his head, almost long enough to cover his ears, which had piercings, silver and cerulean studs, alternating, all along the edge. He reached down to help me up. I hesitated, afraid that if I touched him the crows would burst

from my chest. I could hear them banging on my ribs. I finally took his hand and stood, wobbly as I was.

I was much shorter than him, which was intimidating but also attractive, like we had been built to fit together. I gaped up at him, mouth wide open, silent, as the campus seemed to be. I must have gone deaf because the world around us was busy and bustling. People ran across the lawn tossing a Frisbee to one another, others played volleyball on the sand pit. I didn't hear any of it though. He laughed, a sound so enchanting I almost covered my ears, afraid to fall deeper into his spell.

"If you weren't so cute this would almost be creepy." He mimicked me, letting his mouth fall open and his eyes go blank. I composed myself, looking away from him and watched the boys playing Frisbee. Looking at him made my head spin, muffling that little voice that's supposed to keep you from doing anything stupid.

"I'm sorry I walked into you," I said. "Just zoned out." He gleamed, surely knowing that I was actually totally smitten.

"I'm Eric," he said and I sighed, thankful we had returned to normal human interaction.

"My name's Jackson," I said. His eyes stayed fixed on me but neither of us had the chance to say anything else.

"Eric!" A girl called from behind him.

She walked up and slipped her arm through his. Her blonde curls were crushed flat as she leaned her head on his shoulder.

She looked through me like she would any boy, like we didn't matter because she already got what she wanted. "Who's this?" she asked.

Eric winked at me and smirked, "A friend." Then he turned his head toward hers and kissed it on the top. "Jackson, this is my girlfriend, Alexis."

The crows in my stomach stopped trying to claw their way out of my chest. They squawked with laughter in my head instead. A pain in my spine began to tug me towards my car as if I had a meat hook impaled in me.

"It was nice to meet you," I said looking at Eric, "both of you." Alexis just smiled, completely unaware of what had happened. The crows rolled around on the bottom of my stomach, snorting. I thought I would puke them up. "I should get going. I have to get home and..." *drown myself in a tub of cookie dough?* "...work on a research paper."

"Well I hope we bump into each other again," Eric said, showing off that wolf smile again. I turned to walk away and hide the fire in my face. I heard his girlfriend whisper something to him and he laughed as they started to walk the other direction. I held my breath to keep from crying and fleeing like a wounded sparrow hunted by giant, guffawing crows.

A Soldier's Tear

Your vision is clouded
Their lives are all shrouded
By anger, confusion, and fear
Just remember you're free
Fight the powers that be
What you need will truly appear
A single tomb you will see but legion are we
Left to lay 'neath this sycamore tree
Our lives were the price
Our flesh turned to ice
With slain youth we paid your fee
We didn't spill blood in their lands by our hands
To lay forgotten under sands of our own
They've made you a cog, attached to their gears
Which disgraced the heavenly spheres
Now you'll reap what's been sown
Crops shriveled, weeds grown
But the blame to be had is your own
We provided your freedom, your water, your light
The least you could do is stand up and fight
We were tortured and beaten year after year
We nourished this land with our blood, sweat, and fear
You will go to your grave and never have known
You were protected by Angels in an Army of Stone

Descendent of a Warrior

Casarez, shamed, shunned, Mayan brown border jumper. hope
for a dream, painted by a melting-pot, fondue-esque country

White picket-fence, money, hope, dreams

Rulers smash the tiny fingers of forbidden language

White picket-fence, money, hope, dreams

Tiny fingers bleed the names of our forgotten ancestors

"Descendants of a warrior" defined by the strong "Z" at the
end of our name domesticates to "S." To marry becomes a new
definition for sellouts

Formerly known as Casarez with a "Z" now pronounced
Casares with a rolling "S"

Rulers bloody the tiny fingers of forbidden language

White picket- fence, money hope, dreams

Hands of shame plow and seed the fertile ground for generations
to come, fists of frustration rhythmically beat upon the backs of
their beloved

White picket-fence, post-holed in shame and low self-esteem,
Money made in rage and hope shattered dreams

Time taunts at the extinction of my people, digging, and digging,
and digging, I struggle to claw clumps of racist, oppressive
“Mexican-American” stereotypical bullshit and expose the
roots of my culture

Uneducated young, single mother of two fatherless boys, one
brown, one coyote, I have become a statistical joke referring to
my people that laugh at our own kind

Hands mangled and soul heavy I beg to the earth to show me
my roots

Ugly or dilapidated, I will take them, embrace them, water them,
feed them, grow them and worship them into a prideful phoenix
rising tall from the ashes of a lost culture,

A forgotten language of people with no white picket fences,
only hopes and dreams

Descendants of a Mayan Warrior Princess
Casarez spelled with a “Z”.

The Jacket

Clothes were scattered across the closet floor like September's aspen leaves on the grass. A pair of black boots peeked from under the red folds of a cocktail dress. A field of flowered shirts were blanketed by hills of blue jeans. The girl sent a nondescript grey hoodie flying onto the rest of the pile. She pulled frantically at the coats and sweaters, hunting desperately for what she needed. She froze when her hand touched something cool and smooth. She pulled out the white leather jacket, its gold accents twinkling mischievously. The reflections pulled her into a half-forgotten memory.

Her friends had helped her pick out the jacket earlier that day. It was *edgy* they said. The double-breasted motorcycle style was a far cry from her usual cardigans, and of course her friends had made her borrow a too-short dress to match. Her trepidation increased when they walked into the club. A miasma of smoke and sweat rolled off the dance floor, bombarding her senses.

She reconsidered her misgivings, however, when a man caught her eye. Long, dark hair framed a jaw so sharp she could imagine cutting herself on it. He approached her from across the floor, wriggling around the mass of undulating bodies.

Music drowned the answer when she asked his name, but she imagined it was as exotic as his olive skin.

She tripped over her feet twice as he led her out to the dance floor, and she blushed furiously when he turned her around and grabbed her by the waist. His hips twisted as he pressed his body against her. She could feel the smooth slithering of his muscles through the barriers of skin and shirt separating them.

Uncomfortable damp spots had formed under her arms when he pulled her away from the dance floor and whispered something in her ear. She looked up at him, wide-eyed, and nodded mutely. Cold air swirled up her legs as she followed him out to the street. A sleek, aerodynamic machine greeted them, poised like an enormous feline about to burst into motion. The man stroked the motorcycles handle and she imagined feeling that touch on her own skin.

They reached his apartment and he let her through the door first. Her heart beat a staccato rhythm as she floundered for something to do or say. He relieved her of that responsibility by stepping closer and closer to her until she was backed up against the wall. His hand was gentle around her neck as he kissed her. He didn't start with her mouth, but pulled back the collar of her dress to press his wet lips to the soft flesh below her collarbone, just over her heart. She closed her eyes and tried to keep her hands from shaking as he worked his way up her neck and finally, his grip tightening slightly, he slipped his

tongue between her lips. They danced across the apartment as they had the club, making their way to his bedroom, where he pulled the jacket slowly from her shoulders. The satin lining felt like water as it slid over her skin.

The protective warmth of her clothing was replaced by the radiating heat of his body. She could hear the echoes of the club music in the rhythm of his body, the hot puffs of his breath as he moved back and forth. The puffs grew heavier and more violent second by second. Finally he gave one great exhale and pulled back, letting her arched spine sink back onto the mattress.

She woke in the later hours of the morning, blinking in the daylight. She huddled close to the still form next to her, seeking the comfort of his warmth. She tried to put her arm over him, but he wriggled away. He continued to feign sleep as she lay next to him, but her flush made the room feel suddenly too warm. After several long minutes, the tension finally grew too much for her. When she tried to ask him if anything was wrong, he gave a noncommittal grunt. Another long pause elapsed before she stood and dressed herself slowly. She hoped vaguely that he might turn and watch her as she did, but when she snuck a glance over her shoulder, his back was to her. She was on the way out, almost to the front door, when he made a noise and called her back. Warmth surged in her chest, but when she turned around, he simply held out the jacket which she had left hanging on the bedpost.

“Can I see you again?” she asked quietly. He just stared at her silently until she bowed her head and slunk away, her new jacket dangling from her fingers.

She pulled herself out of the memory to find she was slumped on the ground, surrounded by a landscape of discarded clothing. The jacket was still clutched in her hand, screaming her awkward inadequacies at her from the past.

She raised her arm to throw it away, but she stopped as another memory surfaced, of warm fingers taking the jacket and creating a waterfall of satin over her shoulders. A sad smile curled her lips. She stood and calmly tucked the jacket back into the folds of her clothing, its lesson preserved like a flower between the pages of a book.

A Cottonwood Fall
Photograph



Winter's Kiss
Photograph



Higher Grounds

Relentless beeping excavated me from the deep inebriated state that was my short-lived slumber. Reaching for my alarm awoke a fiery pain that told tales of forgotten lagers and numberless shots. My thoughts floated between how I actually made it home, to patting myself on the back for successfully setting the correct alarm, yet another was the growing excitement for the day to come.

Out of bed and succumbing to the brutal reality of 5:30am, I tripped into some acceptable clothes and gathered what necessities a hung-over mind could muster. A granola bar, an apple, GoPro camera, and my favorite ceramic mug about to be filled with yesterday's pot of coffee. Nuked mug in hand and pockets stuffed with breakfast, I ventured out into the sleeping city of Golden.

The cold mid-September air nipped at my cheeks combined with a crisp deep breath and nurtured sobriety back into my bones. Climbing into my truck, I fired her up and gave a few moments so she could join me in the realm of the living. In that time I checked my destination, 40.156839 & -105.068794, were the only coordinates given. Luckily I have been around Longmont enough to know where the tiny red pin confidently pointed out my destination. I released the clutch.

Lost in the melodic finger picking of John Butler's 'Ocean', I breezed through a stirring Boulder jamming to music and observing the sun shed his morning glow over the Front Range all the while contemplating the dawn of my new year and the mysteries she held. By this time I had the heat on my feet and the windows down, welcoming the damp cool air that smelled of fresh cut alfalfa. Somehow that aroma always flooded my mind with nostalgia and comfort. My hand danced in wave motions entangled in the rushing air outside.

"The destination is on your left" Siri chipperly revealed the desolate plot of land next to some recently developed townhomes. Her guess was as good as mine, since the only thing updating around me was the increasing morning glow and the hustle of Friday commuters ready for the weekend. Lost in the morning solitude, I decided to turn up the song and regain some minutes of sleep stolen from shutting down the bars from nights prior.

Awoken by the aura of life, I opened my eyes to a 15-passenger van parallel parking with "I <3 BJ's" written on the side of it. Semi-scared for my life turned to laughing, I noticed the balloon sticker on the side and couldn't think of a more original marketing idea. I checked the consistent vibrations signifying a text from the other half of my party arriving shortly. Thanks Siri.

Backing the van into the dirt lot, they promptly dropped the

heavy cargo strapped to its back doors and began the unpacking process. One of the gentlemen gave me a dentist's worst nightmare smile and said, "Are you ready," while he unearthed the beginnings of the huge balloon. Overwhelmed by hangover and general lack of sleep, I mustered a "Ya I'm stoked," and contemplated giving him the "just in case" floss stowed in my truck. Pushing the rudeness out of my mind, I turned to be overwhelmed by joy as my childhood best friend, Jason, finally pulled up.

The sun seemed to have steeped beyond the horizon long enough and decided to join the party with one of the most spectacular sunrises on record. The deep blue of the night married into the sun, unveiling unlimited color into the atmosphere and painting the backdrop for our adventure. The reds, blues, greens, and yellows swirled in Mother Nature's current. Like the rising sun, our anticipation and excitement became uplifted, skyward.

Combusting the gas rapidly under the balloon, a giant fireball ignited and sent hot rising air to the expanses of the fabric. A few more blasts from the thrusters and we began to feel the lift of the balloon win against gravity's consistent pull. We became weightless as the cars and surrounding homes shrank in size, or maybe our grandeur of life grew in the midst of our uninhibited perception fueled by the advancing altitude. Tightly compacted into the balloon basket alongside Jay, Captain Missing Teeth, and the other daredevil dude, my best friend double-checked the

fasteners of his parachute while I basked in the scenery.

Five thousand vertical feet and besides the occasional burst of flame, serene silence dominated the sound waves. Comforting adrenaline electrified the landscape as we grew and the world decreased. The frigid air shivers became devoured by excitement and wanderlust; at this moment the world was our oyster. Nothing but a couple inches of wicker between my feet and detrimental demise. The timid clasp of cold sweats gripping the edge of the basket gave way to true freedom as hands ventured into untested air. With childlike exhilaration, life held my left hand while my right teased death in the prickling cool breeze. The air smelled of bliss and left behind the mouthwatering taste of adventure with every breath. Eyes exposed to so much color, rainbows would envy over the vastness of scenery. Denver reflected the rising rays from the sun but couldn't match the height we gained. The entire Front Range, from beyond Pikes Peak to the northern tip of Fort Collins, never had a view been so easily visible and awe impressing from one vantage point. This memory would be seared to my soul.

Nearing our desired altitude, Jay fastened his helmet and did one more check over his equipment while making standard silly faces on film. In one fluid motion, he climbed on the wicker railing of the basket, offered me his best friend high five and declared "Happy Birthday Buddy! I'll see ya on the ground". With that, he calmly let go of the railing; back diving into a

spread eagle plunge. A few more free falling flips throughout Jay's 3000-foot descent and his chute opened, guiding him safely downward. In that moment my excitement exponentially grew for the day I earned my "B" license so next time, he could film.

After the Storm

Old Route 66 heading upstream
On the fractured road to Tucumcari
Smiles fade from memory faster
Than the light through building storm clouds
The road is a hothouse of heat and steam
And I think of your kisses

Bouquets of fondly-forgotten, just-remembered kisses
Sensuously swimming upstream
Eyes close slowly amidst the steam
On heat rippled horizon: now forgotten Tucumcari
A fluttering of miles and gunmetal rain clouds
Sweat on your bare skin beads and trails to secret places faster

Than the faint touch of our stomachs, naked in embrace, faster
Than the first kiss of our kisses
Hesitant and ethereal, like wave clouds
On a sunny day spinning upstream
Dissolving in the current flowing to Tucumcari
Now, nothing but the rising steam

Your body melts with the steam

And the sun dissolves it, faster and faster
 Reaching out I realize only now:
 there are no answers in Tucumcari
 Only kisses that are not your kisses
 Swallowing disillusionment like a drowning man,
 I face upstream
 Engulfed in the languid movement of the clouds

The road, dappled by breaking clouds
 Left with only traces of steam
 And debris of memory floating from further upstream
 Tinged with nothingness, the light returns, faster
 Than the rain stops, than the end of our kisses
 A bitter rainbow on the outskirts of Tucumcari

Motor inns and curio shops in disrepair
 through now discarded Tucumcari
 Driftwood all, as aimless as the clouds
 What once were way-stations,
 now only harbor the ghosts of kisses
 Of passion and greeting and farewell rising like the steam
 Lost in the desert winds of Old Route 66, faster
 Than your smiles are forgotten forever upstream

Tucumcari, vibrant with searchers

 and their jalopies now vanished like steam
 After the storm,
 Faster now we are only witnessed by clouds
 After the storm
 Imprints of our kisses remain and slowly disappear upstream
 After the storm

Shannon Kathleen Dorchak*A Letter to Reference*

To Whoever loves him next,

He's not always as sure as he seems. Assure him that you aren't going anywhere and that you won't judge his stories. Make sure that he knows you want to hear about him as much as he wants to hear about you.

Sometimes, the world overwhelms him. He may ignore your calls and texts and shut himself down. Don't worry, he still loves you, he's just re-connecting with himself. Give him a couple of days, he'll be back. He'll apologize for not telling you, assure him that there's no need to apologize, and that you never doubted him for a second, even if you did.

He likes to think very deeply. On occasion you'll lose him to a random thought in the middle of a conversation. Let him think it out and gather his thoughts. Most of the time that thought will be completely irrelevant to the conversation you were having. Let him talk about this random topic instead, he says a lot of brilliant things.

He has a knack for details. He will remember things about you that even you have forgotten. He will talk consistently about the different parts of a piece of music, and he will go on about almost every detail of a movie. You don't always

need to participate in the discussion, sometimes just listening is enough. And always have random tidbits of information to share with him. Fun facts, that may have absolutely no practical application in life, are definitely a simple way to communicate with him.

I beg you, do not ever hide a single part of you from him. He will love every imperfection, all of the scars, crooked teeth, freckles, messy hair. All of it. Even your toes. Let him play with them like he would your hair. He loves it.

Hold him. He loves being the little spoon, especially if you are smaller than him. When he cries, hold him even closer. Sometimes he will just feel so incredibly small to you, and that is okay. Let him lay there until he is okay again, sometimes just having you near him helps.

He will feel overwhelming guilt sometimes. I'm not even sure he's 100% sure as to why. Just re-assure him that he has no reason to be sorry. This is his fatal flaw. He will feel guilt for almost anything that he feels isn't 100% equal between the two of you. If you worry like I did, don't show it. He needs to know that you are okay and that you still love him. He's getting better about this, but it may still happen. If it does, give him a few minutes to get back to being himself.

Please, let him protect you. He loves you and may be running into issues with putting it into words, so he puts it into actions. He may seem overprotective, but he's just trying to

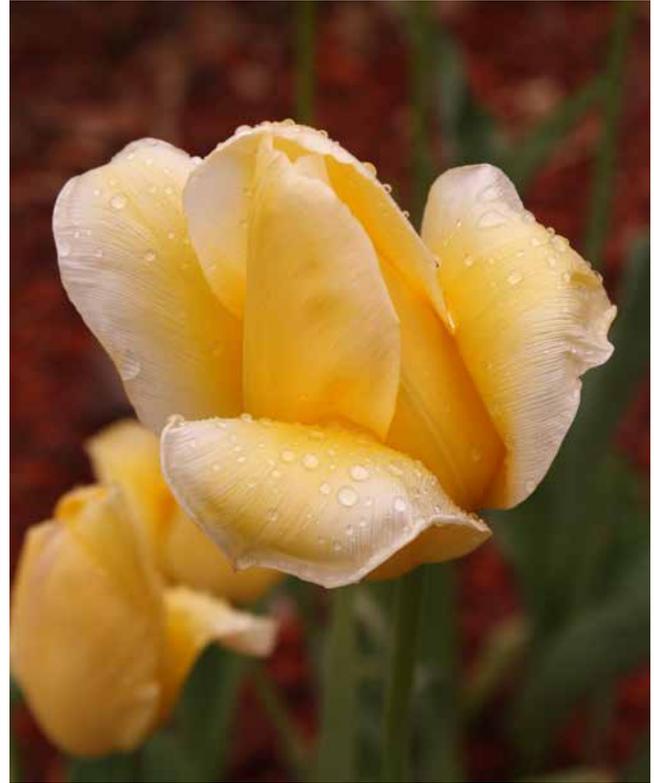
Dorcia

show you how much he cares. He'll make you drink water when you aren't even thirsty or he'll insist you eat if he isn't sure if you have or not. Your pain will cause him a pain and sadness all his own. So please be careful with yourself, because in turn you'll be being careful with him. He is far more fragile than you think. However despite all of that, he will love you deeper than you ever thought possible. That much, I can promise you.

-Someone who paid a lot of attention

Nathaniel LaCrue

Petrichor
Photograph



Sabrina Hallberg

The Dreamer's Curse

I want an earthquake in the middle of air;
Tsunamis on dry land.

I want to taste the carbon dioxide pools
Of Venus' great love.

The world should be viewed
Through rose colored glasses,
Set on a time limit to spin distortion.

But I am not the 4am person thinking of you.
I do not feel your breath on the back of my neck.
There is no pressure against my shoulder bone,
Or blush between my legs.

There is only me, trying to get back to sleep.

I fade to the rhythm of a typewriter,
A bitter sweet taste on a sober man's tongue,
And find solace in a fallen rest.

I am waiting for the noise to crescendo
And the beauty to return.

I am sailing on borrowed sails
And closer to Atlantis than solid ground.

Eraser

Everybody writes their own life story
Using a sharpened pencil, soon to be dulled, and a fresh piece
of paper, soon to be smudged.
I want to be a mistake on your paper,
A mistake that your pencil eraser fails at trying to erase,
But to you, I'm just one of the eraser shavings that you've
grinded down trying to erase your mistake.
You leave me shriveled and soiled, lingering on your paper.
Just an insignificant eraser shaving that you blow off, brush
away, and never see again.
I wish I was that mistake on your paper because I'm sick of
being your eraser.
You USE an eraser, me, to cover up what you've tried to
leave behind.
You USE me, an eraser, to keep those troubles off your mind.
I'm done being your temporary tool.
You only need me when I'm necessary, so you don't look like
a fool.
You erase your mistakes because you're scared of what people
might think
You write in pencil because you're afraid of ink.
You USE an eraser so your paper stays "clean".

But grinding down all the poor erasers is really quite mean.
Everybody writes their own life story, except my paper will
not be smudged.
I will have a mistake or two...or ten. But none shall be erased,
for I will be using a pen.

Contributor's Notes

Cassandra Ault is a student at Red Rocks Community College who will be transferring to Colorado State University in Fall of 2015. She is a biochemistry major who writes for the pure joy of writing. “Let Time Be Nonexistent” was written to display that people should pay closer attention to the true beauty that resides in the world rather than worrying about the anxiety that an individual may face.

Kevin Broggie has always had an interest in photography but decided to pursue it as a career after seeing *War Photographer*, a documentary based on the work of photographer James Nachtwey. He took *Sister's Comfort* while delivering medical supplies to villages in Uganda. After RRCC he has plans to transfer to a film school in the Los Angeles area. You can see his portfolio and other work at www.kevinbroggie.com.

William Bubeck is a first year student at Red Rocks, studying for his associate degree. He is primarily a sculptor who also enjoys doing graphic and photo works as well. He hopes to transfer after two years to the School of Mines for structural engineering. When he is not studying, William loves to spend time reading, designing, gaming, or making something out of wire. He would like to thank his Art teachers who helped him survive High School and helped bring pieces like *Sunset on an Empire* to life.

Eric Robert Carlson: Having spent his youth exploring the Atlantic coast of the Carolinas and the mountains of Tennessee, Eric Robert Carlson now spends his time musing on what

Contributor's Notes

these trips mean to the human heart, and how the shadows of interactions, our hopes and dreams, interact with our present experience. Under his belt are a few short stories, a self-published novel, and editorial work for a city magazine back in Knoxville, Tennessee, but new ideas lighten his horizon in his new home of Denver, Colorado, and he intends to keep his eyes open to what it means to live on the frontier.

Hannah Eggers has been a student at RRCC for two years now. She enjoys petting cats, tumbling through the mountains, and slaying bears in her free time. When she isn't taking photos in Belgium or making delicious coffee, she can usually be found drawing or writing poetry.

Sabrina Hallberg is in her final semester at Red Rocks and will be awarded an Associate Degree for English with an emphasis in Creative Writing. She is a lyrical poet that weaves her way through emotions and descriptions in order to reach her readers. “The Dreamer's Curse”, was written about finding oneself and returning to sturdy, stable ground. This is her third year being published in *Obscura*, and her fifth publication in the magazine. She would like to thank everyone who has stood by her and those yet to come. Someday, she hopes to return the favor.

Amir Krieger is originally from Israel, and recently moved to the USA to study photography. His photo, *Jerusalem*, was taken at the Wailing Wall (the last remains from the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, destroyed almost 2,000 years ago) on his

Contributor's Notes

first visit to Israel after coming to the USA. The image is a strong Israeli picture. Both the soldier and the Wailing Wall represent two main motifs of life in Israel: the army, which is mandatory for most boys and girls after they finish high school, and the Jewish religion, which is both part of Israeli politics and daily life.

Jesse LaCrue is a 19-million-year-old dinosaur-werewolf-cyborg who has recently found a love for writing. When he isn't howling at the moon in binary, he can be found typing with tiny hands at his computer creating fantastical worlds where d.w.c.'s can exist peacefully with alien-vampire-cavemen. This is his second semester here at RRCC and he is pursuing a bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. He currently lives at home with his kitten whom, despite Jesse's creative prowess, is unnamed.

Nathaniel LaCrue is a writer/photographer who spends their time exploring the world around them or traveling the worlds they created. They are hoping to have a collection of poetry and a novel published within the next couple years. They would like to start an online photography portfolio as well. Their work has been published eight times now; four times in *Spectrum*, Hastings College's literary magazine, and four times in *Obscura*. Their pieces explore what it means to be human whether that be falling in unrequited love or knowing that the stars find us just as beautiful as we do them.

Contributor's Notes

Beck Mayhew is a 21-year-old extra-terrestrial dweeb who has been doing art most of their life in order to interact with the human race. The pieces they submitted are supposed to be a representation of their sexuality. *Attraction* reflects what you see on the surface, the attraction to the female form and feminine genders. *Connection* reflects an entire personality waiting to be explored, and that's what truly creates a bond.

Matt Passant is a student at RRCC and will graduate with his Associate of Arts at the end of this semester. Regarding his work, he believes that the less said the better.

Punky is a Colorado resident born and raised in Denver. Punky had a hard life growing up, experienced homelessness on and off, and had many relationship issues. Now, Punky is doing wonderfully for there came a day that changed her life. Punky is currently a successful student and has many dreams to help the world.

Emma Reinhart is in her second year at Red Rocks. She enjoys art of all kinds including writing, dancing, and painting. She also really likes the idea of dragons as pets because who wouldn't want a cuddly, occasionally fire-breathing, creature as a pet?

Chris Reynolds: Other than finding joy in writing creative fiction and non-fiction, Chris Reynolds loves snowboarding, music, and various arts and crafts. He is currently finishing

Contributor's Notes

his mechanical engineering degree and looks forward to other writing endeavors.

Dustin Smith: Born and raised in Colorado, Dustin Smith spends his free time skateboarding, snowboarding, enjoying the outdoors, and pondering upon life and existence. A prophet of philosophy and an apostle of Apollo, he aims to be the torch in a tomb or the sun in the sky; the light-bringer, in a world nearly overcome by darkness.

K.C. Thomas is a guy who writes things. He has been known to work on independent comic books, various online publications, and was once paid to write erotic fiction though it's doubtful he would admit that. His piece in this magazine happens to be a poem. "Black Dog on the Bed" was written after K.C. learned that his childhood pet, Spinner the Dog, had to be put down.

Sam Thompson is a young artist born and raised in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. Born with a hearing impairment, Sam has always been a natural observer of the human condition, and has always harbored an unquenchable thirst for inspiration. In his piece, "An Inconceivable Conjecture Under the Stars," Sam explores concepts much larger and more complex than we can safely comprehend as human beings. Inspired by the questions raised in a Philosophy class at Red Rocks, Sam set out to tell a story that addresses such themes as Infinity, God, and the Universe, while remaining entertaining and easily-intelligible.

Contributor's Notes

Rikki Visser is very passionate about writing and loves to talk about it. Every once in a while, between Netflix marathons and book binges, she manages to sit down long enough to squeeze out a story or two. One day, she hopes to make a living off of writing, but for now she is content to work on becoming a high school English teacher.

Kimberly L. Wilson is a student at RRCC pursuing a Medical Office Technology Degree. She has lived in Arvada for most of her life and plans to retire there some day. She writes poetry and fiction in her free time and hopes to one day get one of her fiction novels published. Kimberly says that almost all her writing starts from random inspiration in her mind, rarely does she know what words will come out on the paper before she starts.

Yalan Wu came from China three years ago and luckily became a student at Red Rocks Community College. She is 21-years-old and drawing has been part of her life for over 15 years. It was a great pleasure for Yalan to have the opportunity to be the featured chalk artist for January 2015 in the RRCC Coffee Shop. It was the first time in her life using chalk as a medium and she absolutely enjoyed her first try.

Acknowledgements

RRCC English Department

Amy Braziller & Paul Gallagher

Printer: The Digital Frontier

RRCC Student Life

RRCC Coffee Shop

Communication Lab

Multimedia-Graphic Design Lab

Kristina Robbins

And a special thanks to everyone who submitted!

Submission Guidelines

Contributors must be Red Rocks Community College students at the time of submission and may only submit up to three pieces. Obscura accepts submissions year-round, but the deadline for the next year's edition will be in February. The reading period takes place in March and contributors are encouraged to check their email frequently around this time to receive notice of acceptance or rejection.

Fiction/Nonfiction:

Up to 5,000 words

.doc

Poetry:

Up to 2 pages in length

.doc

Art:

All forms of visual art are accepted

.pdf

Please provide high quality pictures of your piece!

Send to: rrccobscura@gmail.com

**Please keep in mind we do not publish any work containing
or replicating copyrighted material.**