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The Mall: Writing from Butler University's First Year Seminar 2019-20

The Mall Staff

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BUTLER UNIVERSITY

WRITING FROM FYS STUDENTS

The



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THE MALL

Writing from Butler University's
First-Year Seminar 2019-2020

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2019-2020 EDITORIAL STAFF

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Your first year of college is symbolic of your first year of freedom. Ironic, considering most of us finished our first year quarantined in our parents' houses. The second half of our spring semester was taught behind computer screens, and COVID-19 robbed us of our social lives. But through that difficult time, something beautiful was born. Voices were shared, authors became established, and students transformed into artists.

As we present this year's edition of *The Mall*, we would first like to thank those students who were brave enough to submit their pieces to the publication. We received dozens of submissions, and it was an honor to read them all. As freshmen ourselves, it was truly eye-opening to experience the incredible diversity in thought, artistry, writing, and opinion that this campus has to offer. This year's edition is a testament to that diversity, and to the tenacity and fighting spirit of all our fellow Bulldogs. Please enjoy this 2019-2020 issue of FYS students' *The Mall*.

Sincerely,
The 2019-2020 Editorial Staff

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Academic

To most, the thought of writing out an academic essay – doing research, coming up with an arguable thesis, compiling and citing sources – sounds like a total drag. To these authors, it’s an opportunity to produce something groundbreaking, something that innovates, and excites, something that holds its own.

In this segment of *The Mall*, first year students are allowed to explore topics that are important to them, and establish themselves as legitimate, credible writers. Each piece is expertly crafted: containing a wealth of analysis and combining outside sources with thoughtful use of textual/video evidence.

Some pieces are short and sweet, like John Waterman’s “Classism and the Fervent Pursuit of the American Dream: A Further Look into Tom Ripley in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*”, while other pieces, like Kolton Bailey’s “Batman the Philosopher-King: The Juxtaposition of Plato’s Ideal City and Batman’s Gotham” span pages and include fully annotated bibliographies.

The Mall’s greatest strength however, something it has demonstrated year after year, is its ability to showcase Butler’s diverse spectrum of interests and opinions. Take “Saying “Bi Bi” to Exclusive Feminism”, by L.F. for example, a piece which highlights how exclusive feminism has forgotten the LGBTQ+, or “No Country for Young Rappers: The Similarities Between Lewellyn Moss and Kendrick Lamar”, by Kyle Schwartz, which presents a fresh new spin on a classic movie.

No matter your interests, there’s something for you. The *Academic* section begins now.

Sincerely,
Lucas Johnson, Editor

Classism and the Fervent Pursuit of the American Dream: A Further Look into Tom Ripley in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

John Waterman

In Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999), Matt Damon's character, the eponymously named "Tom Ripley" travels to Italy to attempt to persuade Jude Law's character, "Dickie Greenleaf" to return to New York after his extended stay in Europe. When Tom arrives, he swindles his way into Dickie's life and eventually befriends him and his fiancée, Marge. As the story progresses, Tom becomes more and more obsessed with Dickie's way of life; his days spent in his beautiful Italian home surrounded by beautiful Italian women and fueled by beautiful American money. Ultimately, Tom ends up killing Dickie and taking his place, spending the rest of the movie scrambling to keep up appearances and killing off loose ends. Ripley's journey, his desire to be a "somebody" and the resulting consequences highlight Minghella's critique of the American dream for upward social mobility: that when avarice and the desire for status are the sole drivers in the pursuit of a better life, one is often left off in a worse state than the one he began in.

Even in the very beginning of the movie, the audience becomes privy to Tom's deep-seated desire to acquire power and money. From 4:08 to 4:15, we see Tom peeping through a curtain in an attempt to catch a glimpse at the opera taking place on the other side. He stares longingly at the actors before a well-dressed lady turns around and notices him, causing Tom to quickly dart back behind the deep black curtain. The opera embodies status and class, and the only thing Tom desires is to be a part of it, to enjoy it, but the black curtain and the well-dressed lady that scares him off represent his lack of means to properly enjoy it and the "no-outsiders-allowed" temperament of the people that are involved, respectively. Tom wants to feel involved, to feel like his is part of the upper-class, but the reality is that he simply is not a participating member. This idea is further compounded at 5:57, where Tom is seen stuck between two black bars, in the middle of his grimy little apartment, forced to listen to the screaming of his neighboring tenants. As much as Tom

would love to escape, he is stuck right where he is, slightly above the lowest of the low, but nowhere near the highest.

Tom's desire to stay in power after he is commissioned to retrieve Dickie becomes evident the moment he lands in Italy. At 9:15, he tells a woman his name is "Dickie, Dickie Greenleaf". After he has successfully entered Dickie's inner circle, he even states, "I'll do anything for you [Dickie], you're the brother I never had. I'm the brother you've never had" (47:08). Tom is so strongly motivated by his greed that he is literally willing to do "anything" to keep it. After he kills Dickie and takes over his life, the audience sees Tom enjoying himself, even sitting in an expensive private box watching an opera with a beautiful woman by his side (1:09:13), the very situation he had previously been shut out of. Soon after, however, things start to go horribly wrong for Tom, as he is forced to kill Dickie's friend, Freddie, to cover his tracks (1:26:22). As the police start suspecting him, Tom's new life falls into shambles, and by 1:39:48, he has completely fallen out of Dickie's life and back into his own. By the end of the movie, Tom is forced to kill the only person who truly loves him, his friend Peter (2:11:28), and by 2:14:04, the black bars have fallen back upon him, this time completely surrounding his image until they completely engulf him, leaving him no better off than he was when he first began, living in his tiny apartment and peeping at operas from behind a curtain.

Minghella's little film opera turns out to be a tragedy, the story of a man driven by greed and the desire to be a "somebody" leading to the ultimate loss of all he held precious in his life. Through Tom Ripley's demise, Minghella comments on all who push boundlessly and recklessly into the unknown in pursuit of power, and states, with much finality and sorrow, that the perfect ideal of the American Dream, the idea that anyone can make it to the upper-class so long as they push themselves to the upper limit, is nothing more than a fool's errand.

Batman the Philosopher-King: The Juxtaposition of Plato's Ideal City and Batman's Gotham

Kolton Bailey

The city of Gotham is protected by the caped crusader who saves its citizens from criminals and the vicious mob that runs the city. In Christopher Nolan's film adaptation of the popular DC comic, *The Dark Knight*, Batman is faced with the ultimate villain, one without a reason or any motivation for the destruction he causes: The Joker. Batman's goal is to clean up the city and destroy all of the corruption that has started to cause it to rot from within, a rot so deep that it has even made its way into the police force. Although he wants to clean up the city, Batman keeps to a very strict moral code that he refuses to break. His virtues and morals are comparable to the values expressed by early Greek philosophers, namely Plato. Batman is trying to transform the city of Gotham into the "ideal city" outlined in Plato's political theory, making himself the self-appointed philosopher-king of Gotham in the process.

Plato's political theory is closely connected to his moral philosophy, centered in his belief that a city should be representative of the same basic components as the human soul, made of three parts: reason, spirit, and appetite. The first value is reason, representing one's awareness of a goal or value. The second value, spirit, is the drive towards a noble action. The last part of what Plato believed to be the soul is the desires of the body, or the appetitive part (Long, 55). Plato pushes his theory on the human soul onto his idea of a perfect city, to dividing the city into three classes of citizens, directly related to the three parts of the soul. The people are divided into these classes based on their virtues and vices. The craftspeople are represented by the appetitive value and their virtue is temperance, allowing themselves to be ruled by the higher powers. Craftspeople are the everyday citizens of a city. The guardians of the city represent the value of spirit and their virtue is courage, as they need to be able to fulfill their function as protectors of the craftspeople and commoners. The highest class of the citizens are the rulers whose virtues are leadership and competence. Plato

referred to these leaders as “philosopher-kings” and believed that they should know what complete goodness is through education and military service as a guardian before progressing to leadership (Yu). This analogy can be applied to Gotham, the fictional city in *The Dark Knight*.

The normal citizens seen in *The Dark Knight* are representations of the craftspeople, as they fulfill their basic function as workers, providing the services needed to make the city successful. They rely on the guardians to keep them safe from the evils of the city, namely the mob, the petty thieves who lurk in the night, and the maniacal villains like the Joker. Unfortunately, the Gotham police force as a whole does not represent the perfect set of guardians. The ones uncorrupted by the appetitive desire for money or power offered by the mob are the only true guardians. Commissioner Gordon, Harvey Dent, and Batman are representations of what a true guardian should be. In the beginning of the movie, these guardians are in the process of cleaning up the city and ridding it of the evil of the mob, none of them yet reaching the level of leadership required of a philosopher-king.

Batman suspects Harvey Dent of having the virtues necessary to become the leader of Gotham, believing that he cannot be it himself, due to his identity being covered by a mask. Dent convinces Batman that he is the right one to be the leader of the city when he is eating dinner with Batman’s alter ego, Bruce Wayne. Dent says, “Whoever the Batman is, he doesn’t want to do this for the rest of his life. How could he? Batman is looking for someone to pick up his mantle” (Nolan). Dent has shown his virtue of courage as a guardian by publicly going after the mob and successfully arresting some of its members. Plato believes that, “The only real object of fear for the guardian should be fear of moral evil” (Long, 63). However, Plato’s ideal city requires that the guardians own no property and that they are not allowed to be married or have children in order to keep them focused on the fear of moral evil, rather than fear of losing their family or leaving behind a widow. To Batman’s despair the same happens to Dent, as Dent starts to morally slip when he abducts one of the Joker’s henchman because he was wearing a name tag that had his girlfriend Rachel’s name on it. Dent takes the man and tries to torture him for information by threatening his life. The Joker continues to break Dent’s morality when he abducts him and Rachel.

The Joker doesn’t belong anywhere in the classes of Plato’s ideal city. He is a contradiction to Plato’s moral philosophy that ignorance is the reason for evil. Plato is influenced by Socrates’ belief that the appetitive part of the soul is the reason for the ignorance that causes evil, saying that the false presumption that the reward from the wrong act will be worth the risk (Long, 56-57). The Joker is not interested in money, sex, or any other form of pleasure, he is a self-proclaimed agent of chaos. After Alfred tells Batman the story of the gem thief he says, “Some men just want to watch the world burn” (Nolan). The Joker has no motivation besides a healthy dislike of the proper

order of society and a desire to cause total anarchy. He is trying to prove to himself that everyone is just as crazy as he is through the game he created; by giving the two boats the detonators to each other's bombs. Although the people were collectively good and both made the decision to spare the other passengers' lives, Dent is successfully demoted from his guardian status to the level of psychotic behavior displayed by the Joker.

Dent is torn apart, quite literally, by the explosion the Joker caused as a part of one of his games of ethical contradiction. The choice was for Batman to choose between saving Dent or Rachel. Batman was given the addresses for both of their locations and chose to save Rachel, however the Joker tricked him and switched up the addresses on purpose. As a result, Batman shows up at Dent's location. Batman saves Dent from the explosion, but it killed what morality Dent had left and left him a psychotic villain. His half-burnt face, giving him the name Two-Face, represents his new life philosophy: that life should be left up to a fifty-fifty chance of death, as Rachel and his own fate had been left to those same odds. He demonstrates this philosophy by flipping a coin whenever he confronts someone who he felt was responsible for the death of Rachel, killing them if it lands on the burnt side of the coin but sparing their life if it lands on the other. This twisted sense of reason is similar to the Joker's motivation, contradicting the moral philosophy that to know the good is to do the good. Dent being completely turned from the guardian position leaves no one to fulfill the leadership position of philosopher-king, taking away from Batman's hope of restoring order and peace in Gotham.

Batman realizes the severity of Dent's corruption when he is confronted by Two-Face holding a gun to Gordon's son's head. Batman has already fulfilled all of the requirements for the guardian position in Plato's ideal city, having resisted the temptation to kill the Joker and showing absolute courage in facing the evils of the Joker's rampant attempt to burn Gotham to its core. Batman realizes he needs to become the leader of Gotham while keeping his identity still hidden. A virtue needed by the philosopher-king, not mentioned before, is the power to deceive. In order to avoid conflict between the classes of society, Plato theorized that the leaders would need to tell noble lies to the citizens that would deceive them in a way that would create peace and ultimately keep them safe (Steinberger). As Batman saves Gordon's son from Dent, he realizes how Dent's corruption would negatively affect the citizens and police force, or the townspeople and guardians in the ideal city analogy. In order to protect the people from the negative consequences of this information, he decides to take the blame for Dent's actions and instructs Gordon to tell the world that Dent died a hero. The wisdom and use of a noble lie to further save the city from chaos promotes Batman from guardian to philosopher-king, or, as Gordon calls him, the Dark Knight.

While at dinner with Bruce Wayne, Dent predicts his own future stating, “You either die a hero, or you live long enough to see yourself become a villain” (Nolan). The lawless influence by the Joker breaks Dent’s will and almost makes Batman break his only rule of not killing anyone. Plato’s ideal city theory is only feasible if the virtues of the city are present in all of its citizens as well. The fragile sanity of people in a situation of panic and destruction and also the existence of lawless individuals, causing chaos without reason, makes the ideal city nothing more than a fairytale. However, the objectively good nature of the citizens on the boats and the willingness of people to put others’ lives before their own, proves that the majority of people in Gotham have a good soul and want peace and order in society. The analogy of Gotham and the ideal city can also be applied to America as a whole. America can never be turned into the ideal city Plato had envisioned due to the presence of evil and corruption its citizens face, however the virtues and morals of a good soul exist in all people and can bring us closer to peace when they strive to be more like a philosopher-king. By practicing a balance of pleasure, courage and the pursuit of wisdom, people can collectively triumph over the corruption and lack of moral values present in any nation. Creating the ideal city starts by the virtues being present in the citizens themselves before it can ultimately affect the entirety of the city and lead to a more peaceful society.

Annotated Bibliography

Long, Joseph. Plato: Moral Philosophy. *Knowledge and Reality*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2019.

The following bibliography was used to show the three parts of the soul that Plato described to make up each of us. It was helpful because it is directly related to how he describes the ideal city. It gave me the virtues for each part of the soul and the balance that leads to being good. The textbook is written in a way that is easier to understand and digest than the actual documents of philosophers.

Long, Joseph. Plato: Political Philosophy. *Knowledge and Reality*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2019.

The following bibliography was the main argument I used to compare the city of Gotham to the ideal city. The information defines each class and the following virtues that are aligned with them. It is written in a way that is easy to understand and grasp. It was my primary source.

Steinberger, Peter J. "Ruling: Guardians and Philosopher-Kings." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 83, no. 4, 1989, pp. 1207–1225., doi:10.2307/1961665.

This bibliography was used to better understand the importance of the noble lie in Plato's ideal city and the confusing difference between guardians and leaders. It was helpful for understanding the concept but was not focused on the right aspects of the analogy that would allow me to use quotes from it. It highlighted the use of the noble lie and was enough evidence to support Batman's lie about Dent.

"The Dark Knight." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, 16 July 2008, www.imdb.com/title/tt0468569/.

This bibliography was used to get facts about the film. I used it to spell check the director and quotes I used from the film itself. The list of actors and actresses also helped me remember who said which quotes. Nolan, Christopher, director. *The Dark Knight*. Warner Brothers, 2009. This bibliography is for the use of the actual film. I used direct quotes and referenced the movie to support my analogy of the ideal city and Gotham. Nolan's directing style and the dialogue throughout the movie made my essay easier to write.

Yu, Kexin. "Unpacking the City-Soul Analogy." *International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2017, doi:10.7710/2155-4838.1169.

This bibliography simplified some of the terms and examples of the city-soul analogy. It provided information to support my thesis, but I didn't use any direct quotes from this source. The information was helpful in describing the progression from guardian to philosopher-king.

More Than Panels

Leah Bechtold

Storytelling takes many different forms. From oral tales passed generationally to written biographies, stories unfold in a variety of styles. In order to please many different learning styles, some authors use a mix of both artistic rendering and traditional text. A common example of this lies in graphic novels. Lauren Redniss's graphic novel *Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie: A Tale of Love and Fallout* includes many mediums and speaks to a variety of learning styles. Through words, her own illustrations, and original photographs and documents, she chronologically unravels the story of Marie and Pierre Curie's life together and the legacy left in their wake. Similarly, Jim Ottaviani and Leland Myrick's graphic novel, *Feynman*, shares the life of Richard Feynman and his extraordinary accomplishments. However, Ottaviani and Myrick rely on a traditional graphic novel format with panels, gutters, and drawn illustrations in a less sequential and more dramatic retelling of Feynman's life. *Radioactive* and *Feynman* share skillful use of colors and illustration of scientific concepts but vary in other aspects including the use of a chronological timeline and mediums used in production. Each graphic novel effectively balances text and pictures to elevate reader understanding and allows for these pieces to become nontraditional educational tools.

Redniss as well as Ottaviani and Myrick both rely heavily on color to communicate with readers. In *Radioactive*, Redniss notably uses color psychology when she illustrates Pierre Curie's death. In six pages, she carefully paints out Pierre's final moments in blue hues. Of these six pages, only one includes text. Redniss writes, "As he crossed the busy intersection of Rue Dauphine...the physicist was struck by a horse-drawn carriage crossing the Pont Neuf... viscous matter trickled in all directions in the mud: the brain of Pierre Curie" (Redniss 96). This excerpt overflows with raw facts and real emotion. In the next five pages, however, Redniss allows her readers to grieve Pierre in silence; she offers no additional text. Instead, she illustrates the moment the coachman realized he had struck Pierre and then two figures carrying away a lifeless body. While Redniss could have expressed heartache,

mourning, and sorrow through words, she allows color to speak for itself. Rebecca Withrow wrote in *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, “Reactions [to colors] were recorded on the Profile of Mood States, and results demonstrated that blue-violet produced sadness and fatigue, whereas cool green produced confusion and anger” (Withrow 33). This study proves how the human subconscious associates cool tones with less stimulating emotions like depression, fatigue, and sadness. Redniss uses five pages of exclusive illustration to convey one of the most critical deaths in Marie Curie’s life. While eliminating text may seem extreme, from a scientific point of view, Redniss does exactly what she needs to project sadness upon readers.

Ottaviani and Myrick also excel in choosing appropriate color schemes in *Feynman*. Different colors represent different phases and people involved in Feynman’s life. His first wife, Arline, always appears in orange and yellow as well as his sister, Joan. His second wife, Gweneth, always wears blue as well as any mention of his older self. This careful use of color to differentiate characters proves effective and essential as *Feynman* moves between decades from page to page. However, the use of colors does not follow the same color psychology Redniss presented in *Radioactive*. Achim Hescher’s book *Reading Graphic Novels: Genre and Narration* includes insights on additional ways to utilize color. Hescher writes, “Color relates to the form and content of an image, and its use may be formulaic, thematic, and naturalistic ... Also, characters are recognized through color” (Hescher 61). *Feynman* follows this pattern. Specific color schemes surround specific people and follow them through the entirety of the graphic novel. This use of color identifies individuals as well as provides them a theme. Ottaviani and Myrick envelope Feynman’s time with Arline and Joan, the two most important women in his early life, with bright colors. As he reflects on his past self and second wife, darker colors appear more frequently. Hescher proves that this stylistic choice allows readers to recognize characters through colors but also allows for themes to build. For example, Feynman feels deep love for Arline and Joan which the illustrator shows in orange and yellow. Thus, when readers find these shades, they also find these themes. Ottaviani and Myrick used colors carefully to portray the different people and emotions involved in Feynman’s life.

Both *Radioactive* and *Feynman* excel in illustrating scientific concepts for reader comprehension. A clear example from *Radioactive* appears on page 80, where Redniss draws the atomic bomb’s nuclear fission process before detonating above Hiroshima. Redniss uses a consistent color scheme as well as clearly labeled parts. She shows how the first few atoms split which resulted in the split nucleus and released energy. When she reaches the end of the page, she informs readers this chain of events occurs with all remaining matter. *Feynman* explores quantum electrodynamics multiple times. A

prominent example falls between pages 218 and 226. Here, Ottaviani and Myrick draw out how photons and electrons interact and uses a common graph with axes of space and time. The authors even use humorous text and anecdotes to contextualize the information. The authors of both graphic novels share in using a blend of text and illustration to portray a clear, concise explanation of complex topics. Alandeom Oliveira and Kristin Cook's article "Student Visual Communication of Evolution" write:

Integration of artistic drawing with physics was shown to effectively promote student conceptual understandings and to improve students' attitudes toward physics. In sum, evidence exists that visuals can support conceptual understanding...and that use of pictures can foster learning of science (Oliveira & Cook 521).

In their research with students in postsecondary education, students that either drew for their own conceptualization or looked at drawings found physics material far more understandable than before. The choice to illustrate physics concepts in *Feynman* and *Radioactive* follows this logic. When readers have the ability to read text and pair it with an image, the material falls into place. Not only does this allow for a broader audience, but an engaged audience with less frustration over difficult concepts.

While *Radioactive* and *Feynman* share many similar traits, a few key differences emerge. First, *Radioactive* tells the Curie's life story together, apart, and postmortem in chronological order. As readers progress, the timeline follows suit. Redniss begins with Pierre Curie's birth in 1859 and ends far beyond Marie's death in 1934. She moves through each event and discovery as it occurs and allows interviews and photos to interject with either future or past information. Even when these interruptions of flow occur, she returns to the linear timeline immediately following. In *Feynman*, Ottaviani and Myrick take a more dramatic approach. They tell Feynman's life story to the same effect Redniss tells Marie and Pierre Curie's; however, they include flashbacks, Feynman's self-reflection on his past endeavors, and move between multiple decades. Each time they divulge from the linear timeline, they clearly label the shift, date, and even event explored. Both graphic novels label dates clearly and present detailed information, yet the shift in storytelling creates a distinct difference. Elizabeth Schibuk's article "Teaching the Manhattan Project" outlined how she most successfully taught her students at Conservatory Lab Charter School about the Manhattan Project using videos, a graphic novel, and maps. Through the article, Schibuk stresses the importance of maintaining a consistent and linear instructional focus. She explains how she introduces students to the Manhattan Project by watching a video of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and then the students begin their research of nuclear energy with the Greeks and then journey through the

graphic novel *Trinity* which anchors their discussion (Schibuk). Schibuk proves the importance of allowing readers to follow a consistent pattern in order to learn, yet she understands the need for students to feel interested from the beginning. *Radioactive* takes the first approach by providing readers a chronological retelling of the Curies' lives. *Feynman* tells Feynman's life story, yet keeps readers engaged with new twists, turns, and even reflection periods. Each graphic novel presents its story differently, yet both work well to unpack the lives of complex physicists.

A secondary difference between *Radioactive* and *Feynman* lies in the use of materials. Redniss boldly uses various mediums to present the Curies while Ottaviani and Myrick rely on the traditional graphic novel style with panels and gutters. This stylistic choice works less with the biographical information presented, and more with the reader's journey through each piece. Picking up *Radioactive*, readers immediately feel the textured cover, observe the letter size pages, and sense a nontraditional style. Redniss allows herself the room and freedom to use full pages only for a few words, splashes of color, or scanned images. On page 199, she leaves an explanation of why she used cyanotype printing for a majority of her illustrations. She writes:

The negative of an image gives an impression of an internal light, a sense of glowing that I felt captured what Marie Curie called radium's 'spontaneous luminosity.' ... Second, because photographic imaging was central to the discovery both of X-rays and of radioactivity, it seemed fitting to use a process based on the idea of exposure. Last ... Prussian blue capsules are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as a 'safe and effective' treatment for internal contamination by radioactive cesium and radioactive thallium" (Redniss 199).

In *Radioactive*, Redniss allowed her creative voice to interpret the Curies' story both historically accurately, but also in terms of materials. She made many artistic choices and used each one to further the story and allow readers to experience the Curies' journey as if walking along with them over one hundred years ago. *Feynman* takes a more traditional approach but allows readers to experience the same thrill in the dramatic way the scenes unfold and the shifting timeline. Both graphic novels serve as wonderful interpretations of the lives of famous physicists and each take risks in various ways.

In terms of educational tools, both *Radioactive* and *Feynman* showcase the very best of blending text and visuals. This synergistic relationship contextualizes difficult phrases and concepts with images and explains challenging images with text. Alex Romagnoli of Monmouth University writes in his book *Graphic Novels and STEAM*:

The benefits of comics lie in their very structure which incorporates multiple modes of interpretation with which readers interact. The unique combination of visual stimuli with narration and dialogue allows for students to access multiple modes of interpretation and comprehension that might otherwise be missing in a monomodal text” (Romagnoli 24).

Romagnoli proves in his book the critical nature of appealing to as many readers as possible and doing that by making STEAM concepts as accessible as possible. While some individuals may find a biography of a scientist fascinating, perhaps some of the deeper concepts and research becomes simplified. Others may prefer a photo story or a collage of how a discovery came to light but find paragraphs daunting. Herein lies the beauty of graphic novels. Authors marry both and readers of various preferences, backgrounds, and science literacy can all appreciate and enjoy information previously unattainable to them. For science to become more widely known and to increase interest in challenging concepts, graphic novels speak volumes.

Though *Radioactive* and *Feynman* use different methods to explore the biographies of renowned physicists, they share in the methodical use of color and illustration to explain complex physics concepts. The integration of both traditional text and descriptive images allows graphic novels to speak to a larger audience and thus creates a valuable teaching tool. Graphic novels can give individuals a mere look into the STEAM field or can unearth deeper ideas like quantum electrodynamics and the discovery of radioactive materials. As people become more technology focused and place values on appearances and visuals, graphic novels have an opportunity to step into the forefront of nontraditional textbooks bridging images with text. Due to the expansive nature of style and form of graphic novels, they possess the ability to become the next chameleon of educational tools – transforming to whatever subject matter necessary.

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Accessibility and Simplification

Leah Bechtold

Lauren Gunderson's play *Silent Sky* tells the life story of Miss Henrietta Swan Leavitt and the women who worked alongside her discovering Cepheid stars and variables which provided the rudimentary base for the modern measurement of the universe. Not uncommon from many other theatrical works, *Silent Sky* includes few characters and just eleven scenes. In these few pages and scenes, Gunderson covers a span of time from 1900 to 1918 and then beyond. To keep her audience captivated, *Silent Sky* runs at the average production time of two hours. By following this rule, Gunderson makes Miss Leavitt's life story and remarkable discoveries understandable and memorable to individuals with many interests and backgrounds, but it comes at a cost. Gunderson sacrifices historical and scientific details with oversimplification and stereotyping. In *Silent Sky*, Gunderson makes scientific ideas accessible, yet leaves out Edward Pickering's instrumental role in Miss Leavitt's scientific tenure, oversimplifies the process it took her to discover Cepheid variables, and furthers the common stereotypes of scientists.

Silent Sky's five characters include: Henrietta Leavitt, Margaret Leavitt, Peter Shaw, Annie Cannon, and Williamina Fleming. Of these characters, Annie Cannon and Williamina Fleming truly worked alongside Miss Leavitt and Margaret Leavitt introduced the theme of family versus occupation as Miss Leavitt's sister. Peter Shaw, Miss Leavitt's fictional love interest, takes precedent over a real and critical man during Miss Leavitt's time as a computer and astronomer at Harvard. Edward Pickering was an astronomer and physicist himself and in 1876, was hired to take over the Harvard observatory when he was just thirty years old (Johnson 15). Miss Leavitt worked under Pickering for a majority of her career. She fell ill on multiple occasions and on multiple others had to return home to Wisconsin to care for her family. At each of these setbacks to her scientific research, Pickering supported her. He promised her a role at Harvard when she returned and wrote letters to communicate with her. He even sent star plates to her location and asked her to continue her research on Cepheids from many miles

away. Both biographically and scientifically, Pickering played a key role in Miss Leavitt's life. Yet for the sake of drama and theatre, not everyone finds a supporting role. Gunderson chose to exclude Pickering from her play and in turn, sacrificed the opportunity to celebrate the individuals behind the scenes who support scientists from afar.

In order to make the discovery of Cepheid stars and variables as simple as possible, Gunderson had to abandon some details. Science in theatre should engage an audience, not confuse them. A 2000 *Wall Street Journal* review of the plays *Copenhagen* and *Tantalus* illustrate why Gunderson needed to keep the astronomy light and the plot ever changing:

'I couldn't follow the science -- which is what they were talking about most of the time,' says Marianne Johnson, a New York business consultant who saw "Copenhagen," the hit Broadway show about atomic scientists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg and the making of the first atomic bomb. 'It's hard to keep track of who all the characters are,' Martin Lewis, a Denver laboratory designer, said when he was four hours into the 10-hour "Tantalus" in Denver. Most of the 27 actors in the play based on Greek mythology wore feature-obscuring polymer masks (Gubernick).

Composing a play about nuclear physics and the creation of the first atomic bomb compares to the challenges of writing a play about one woman's quest to measure the universe. Gunderson did not create a small character list and romantic plot on a whim. *Tantalus* includes 27 characters and reviewers expressed difficulty following the relationships and purposes of each character; *Silent Sky* includes five. Audience members only need to keep track of five people at all times and this simplification limits concerns of audience confusion regarding character relationships. Not only that, each character has a specific dialect, trait, or even spotlight that identifies them. Gunderson recognized the importance of keeping her work accessible to as many as possible, and the choice to limit the character list may not directly follow Miss Leavitt's life, but does follow literary guidelines and recommendations.

George Johnson's biography of Miss Leavitt spans 130 pages and includes her entire scientific story. Clearly, eleven scenes cannot cover what a biography elaborates on in 130 pages. For the sake of time and audience engagement, Gunderson had to eliminate some aspects of Miss Leavitt's life. One critical piece of information that Gunderson simplified, and even romanticized, was the multitude of steps it took Miss Leavitt to fully grasp Cepheid stars and then calculate her Cepheid variables. Johnson writes that in 1912, Miss Leavitt's graph plotting 25 variable stars in the small Magellanic cloud and explanation of how these stars represented relative distance was published in a *Harvard Circular* (Johnson 44). It took her years to even come

this far. She had to discover these variable stars, recognize a pattern between them, identify and plot them, and then write a report for review. Miss Leavitt did not have a lightbulb moment. In fact, a more complete report she wrote was published in the *Annals of the Astronomical Observatory of Harvard College* in 1917. This report included the measurement of 96 stars and spanned 184 pages (Johnson 57). This report concluded that an astronomer could tell the distance between stars from their magnitudes. The longer a star's period in a blink, the farther away the star was. Miss Leavitt's own words regarding her scale say, "For stars between the tenth and sixteenth magnitudes...corrections are likely to be minute. For brighter and fainter stars, sensible changes may be made ultimately, but the scale is probably a close approximation to the true one" (Johnson 58). The minutia of her findings does not interest an audience. Five years of research and analysis includes little drama and an abundance of complexities. For the theatre, this journey needs to occur in a snap.

Miss Leavitt experiences a lightbulb moment in Act I Scene VI of *Silent Sky* while her sister Margaret plays the piano. On page 41 Margaret begins playing the symphony she has been working on composing:

MARGARET. (*Margaret plays a simple, lovely piece on the piano... Henrietta notices the stars above her starting to shine again...They appear in time with Margaret's music...Margaret stops playing – the stars stop blinking.*) What's wrong?

HENRIETTA. It's – it's tonal. [...] The stars are music. [...] The pattern. The numbers – When you put them in the right order – they're – Oh my God the blinking is music – so simple – Right there... (Gunderson 41-42).

In the theatrical version, Miss Leavitt's discovery becomes diluted. While scientific breakthroughs can occur as lightbulb moments, *Silent Sky* discounts the years of research and determination Miss Leavitt encountered. This discovery does not completely follow Miss Leavitt's biography; however, it falls in line with critiques of scientific plays. In the play *Copenhagen* which revolved around atomic scientists and the creation of the first atomic bomb, some reviewers found it too difficult to understand the science. In order to reach a broad audience and make Miss Leavitt's name well known, some of the hard science had to soften. A play that discusses plotting of hundreds of variable stars in Magellanic clouds and Miss Leavitt's work reporting the connection between the star's periods and distances from each other may not entrance an audience as well as a romanticized moment with Margaret does. The stage, music, and dialogue all lead up to this epiphany. Everyone has experienced an epiphany before whether academic or personal, and with this addition of realization happening all at once, Gunderson makes Miss Leavitt's work relatable.

While importance lies in making science and astronomy accessible, authors must walk a fine line when representing scientists realistically. In *Silent Sky*, Gunderson works to keep Miss Leavitt's profession at the forefront, but also must make her story engaging to thespians and those uninterested in science. She oversimplifies ideas and adds a love story between Peter Shaw and Miss Leavitt. Johnson's *Miss Leavitt's Stars* shares that this love story never occurred. Miss Leavitt remained single her entire life and dedicated her life's work to scientific advancement and astronomy. While these ideas contradict, Gunderson still conveys the Cepheid stars and variables just with the addition of a love story. A 2016 study published in *The Journal of Science and Education* discusses how elementary students learn science from plays. Students from an urban background watched a play about scientists and how they collaborate with other researchers and professionals. The playwrights worked to include scientists feeling homesick, collaborating with engineers, having different ethnic backgrounds, and feeling emotions. Interestingly, the students learned, but did not change their preconceived notions of scientists. Yet the students retained the information included in the play:

“...less than half of the student questionnaires and drawings of scientists indicated...growth as a result of the play. That being said, numerous students were able to tell us what they learned from the play and many questionnaire responses and drawings indicated such learning” (Burgin).

This example shows that even when playwrights take steps toward realistic representation, sometimes stereotypes persist. A tradeoff exists between accurately representing history and a life story and sharing an abridged life story and the general discoveries of an individual with an audience. Even when playwrights highlight accuracy, audience members can allow stereotypes to take over. People may retain the information learned in a play, but only if the story engaged them.

Gunderson works to make Miss Leavitt's story accessible to people of varying backgrounds by withdrawing some details and facts. A 2009 report published in the *International Journal of Science Education* discusses two key strategies used to present science in theatre:

The first strategy aims to simulate social events, usually of the adult world, which students have not yet experienced. Often employed in the form of extended role plays, these convey topics which relate to affective contexts of social, cultural, and intellectual discourse which occur in science contexts... A second strategy employs mime and role play to convey abstract physical phenomena, which would be otherwise unobservable in the classroom (Dorion).

In *Silent Sky*, audience members see role play at work. Gunderson elaborates on intellectual discourse and uses imagery and music to discuss the physical phenomena of Cepheid stars that audience members otherwise struggle visualizing. Miss Leavitt's story gets attention, but at the cost of introducing an engaging love story and sacrificing the years of toil and studies it took to reach a final conclusion of Cepheid variables.

Silent Sky purposefully exposes Miss Leavitt and Cepheid stars to the realm of popular culture. Audience members leave knowing her name and the name of Cepheid stars. However, they also leave with an incorrect perception of how Cepheid stars apply to astronomic measurement today and believe Peter Shaw and Miss Leavitt experienced a Harvard romance. Scientists work and study in *Silent Sky* and never come near a chemistry set or lab coat, but audience members rarely have their minds changed and stereotypes challenged by plays. Gunderson honors Miss Leavitt and follows the skeleton Johnson outlines in *Miss Leavitt's Stars*, but she also adapts her story for the stage. While this is not inherently wrong, it is frustrating to watch a life story go through changes to make it modern and exciting. *Silent Sky* effectively allows for Miss Leavitt's life and discoveries to receive acclimation and recognition, yet oversimplification of scientific ideas and stereotyping of scientists occur to make it stage worthy and alter the perceived course of Miss Leavitt's life.

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Cracking the Aura of the Appeal

Sydney Plautz

Both Hannah Gadsby and Craig Thompson demonstrate the common desire for people to feel loved and accepted by their community. For some, admission to a selective society comes effortlessly, but for others, like Gadsby and Thompson, who do not as easily fit in, social belonging is a struggle that is often paired with destitute desire. In their personal stories, *Nanette* and *Blankets*, the authors both share their journeys in finding the true value of their self-worth among a society where they did not fit in. Through the narratives of Gadsby and Thompson, comedy sheds a critical eye on the psychological impact of trying to fit into societal ideals in an attempt to crack the aura of the appeal and promote self-acceptance.

Before dissecting Gadsby and Thompson's individual narratives, it is important to understand the reason people are drawn to community membership in the first place. According to researchers at Stanford University and University of Waterloo, social belonging is one of the deepest rooted human desires, so much so that without it, one can predict early death on the same level as a life of continuous smoking (Walton et al. 513). Social belonging is important to humans because it provides a strong base of purpose and self-worth in their lives. This purpose drives people to live meaningful lives, impacting their length and quality of life. From this, it is clear that people physically cannot live a normal life alone, without acceptance from a social group. While it is clear that certain morals and labels connect individuals in society regularly, like political ideologies, and occupations, these researchers wanted to explore the extent to which social connectedness exists in day to day interactions. The researchers concluded that mere belonging, like sharing a birthday with someone, increased people's levels of motivation. This is initially surprising because sharing a birthday is a very arbitrary thing and does not seem to have any intrinsic significance. However, this finding makes sense because even mere belonging to a group means that someone "shares a common definition of themselves" with others (Lau 220). Because they share a common trait, the positive characteristics of one group member

tend to be applied to all and, in turn, this benefits an individual's sense of self and develops purpose.

While there is a strong value to group membership, it can be argued that acceptance of yourself is more important than acceptance from others; one must be confident in who they are before they can associate themselves with a group. This is because the membership will be based off an incomplete persona. To further illustrate this claim, psychologist Christina Star describes the sense of self as a personal anchor (Star). It is the only thing that grounds someone through internal conflict when others are the waves that push them in all different directions. There can be no safe boat without an anchor; there can be no whole, strong individual without knowing, understanding, and accepting who they are.

In her special, *Nanette*, standup comedian Hannah Gadsby accentuates the emotional struggle involved with living as an outsider in society to stress the importance of social belonging. Gadsby is gay, originally born and raised in Tasmania, where homosexuality was a crime until 1997. While growing up in a society knowing that she had to hide her identity is emotionally damaging, Gadsby jokes that “[she] had to leave as soon as [she] found out [she] was a little bit lesbian” (*Nanette* 00:03:31). More harshly, members that did not fit into Tasmania's social mold were told to “get [themselves] a one-way ticket to the mainland [Australia]” (*Nanette* 00:04:18). Even further, Gadsby continues exemplifying her trauma by joking that she should, “pack [her] AIDS up into a suitcase there and fuck off to Mardi Gras” (*Nanette* 00:04:10). The psychological impact of these statements is overlooked because Gadsby initially presents an impenetrable comedic front as her coping mechanism. Being told to leave and never come back because she would never have been accepted as a value to her community because of her natural-born characteristics is no meager joke. Additionally, by severely stigmatizing homosexual people as a population of diseased individuals instills both false beliefs and fears about gay people. This only further alienates the already disgraced group in Tasmanian society. These statements were made by people that should have loved Gadsby unconditionally, people like family, neighbors, and peers. Gadsby learned to replicate and internalize this same hate, becoming homophobic herself, and she reflects that she soaked herself in shame and hid in the closet for ten years.

Gadsby emphasizes even further struggle after exposing herself as a member of the gay community to convey to her audience her magnitude of isolation. Even after accepting being labeled as gay, Gadsby still did not feel fully confident in her “community”. As a quiet person, Gadsby felt she could not match the persona she thought she was supposed to have. Gadsby inquires, “Where are the quiet gays supposed to go?” (*Nanette* 00:06:26). Gadsby's question is significant because even when she found a group with an encompassing characteristic, she still felt she still did not belong. However,

it was not the other LGBTQ+ people around her refraining from including her, Gadsby had not yet fully accepted herself. In order to cope with her feelings, Gadsby adopted self-deprecating humor as her defense mechanism. She constantly made fun of her own homosexuality and social interactions, leaving out the impact of her lasting trauma and replacing it with punchlines. By forming a career out of shaming herself, Gadsby was only adding fuel to the isolation that she experienced, indicating to her audiences that it was okay to laugh at others' expense.

After building up the depth of her isolation, Gadsby embodies her newfound mental strength to show her audience the importance of accepting themselves and others. Gadsby had started by sharing a joke about hitting on one man's girlfriend. The man stopped himself from throwing a punch because he realized Gadsby was a woman, and he says he would not hit a lady. The audience laughed at the punchline, and Gadsby moved on to the next joke. However, later on, Gadsby revealed that the same man had come back and beat her up because he eventually realized her sexuality. She was badly injured but did not seek medical attention because she was ashamed of herself. Finally completing her full story and sharing her abuse with the audience is representative of Gadsby's long overdue acceptance of herself. She now understands she is worthy of medical treatment and a value to society. Further, Gadsby now shares her whole truth in a packed Sydney Opera House with pride. She no longer feels alone and is able to develop her career and focus on making an impact on society, rather than changing or suppressing herself to conform to societal standards. Therefore, Gadsby's journey provides support for the argument that acceptance of oneself is more important than other people's collective opinion. Though Gadsby can still be considered an outsider in society, she is content with who she is. From experiencing both the highs and lows of Gadsby's journey from her point of view, the audience can begin to understand the importance of accepting others regardless of their identifying labels and to appreciate the value of individuality over group membership.

Similar to Gadsby, Craig Thompson developed his narrative about his own struggles with belonging to stress to his audience the importance of personal acceptance. Growing up in a lower-middle-class family, Craig felt isolated because he had fewer luxuries than most of his fellow classmates. As an example, Craig was never able to go skiing at his annual church camp because the pass cost more than the Thompsons could afford to spend. The other students all laughed and pointed at Craig alone on the bus on the way to the camp, and one kid even held a sign up to him labeled POOR (Blankets 78). The irony in this matter is that supposedly secular students were sporting only name brand clothes and bullying on the basis of wealth. While their religion emphasizes treating thy neighbor as thyself and charity to the less fortunate, the children emphasized the ingroups and outgroups of their

society. In reflection of his experience, Craig comments, “Something about being rejected at CHURCH CAMP felt so much more awful than being rejected at school” (Blankets 78). While with a group that was supposed to have the same deeply rooted values of faith, Craig was still all on his own. From the quote, it is clear that Craig had a more difficult time accepting the ostracization from those who were supposed to make him feel connected to God than from the school bullies who were known to be mean. Therefore, not only was Craig isolated at school, the loneliness extended to a place where all students should have come together on their foundational religion. By definition, Craig should have felt accepted by others of the same faith, but that is far from true.

Thompson illustrates the void created in his life by his lack of social belonging to address the psychological impact of isolation to his audience. Craig became depressed after years of emotional and physical trauma in his life. As a child, Craig used dreams of race car driving and floating among the clouds to escape his reality (Blankets 40-42). As he grew older, his thoughts became more severe, and Craig began to think of life as only a passing means to heaven. He longed for “an eternal world that would wash away [his] temporary misery” (Blankets 52). This is a powerful statement because it means that Craig did not want to live life on Earth, a sign of his overarching mental illness. Without a sense of purpose, Craig had no sense of self, and without a sense of self, there was no way Craig could have been accepted into any of the social groups he strived to be a member of.

Thompson revealed his sheer obsession over his pen pal and short-term girlfriend, Raina, to highlight pivotal moments in his journey to self-acceptance. When Craig found Raina, he finally saw a sense of purpose in his life. He relied on her as the sole source of all of his happiness and viewed her as his personal angel. After meeting a single time at church camp, Craig and Raina became pen pals. He was so obsessed with the flirtatious letters that “a momentary lapse in [his] and Raina’s correspondence only intensified [his] illness” (Blankets 154). In context, Craig is relating to a cold that he was fighting, but this can be applied to Craig’s mental illness as well. He was so reliant on Raina’s letters to occupy his thoughts and help him block out his aforementioned misery. When the letters stopped coming, his physical and mental condition worsened. The average individual would not become reliant on letters from a new friend as their sole source of joy.

Later on in the story, the two ended up spending a couple of weeks together during their winter break, and after only a few days, Craig portrayed Raina as a superhuman godsend. He painted her as an angel with cascading wings and a shining halo, floating above others that worshiped her. He, too, worshipped her (Blankets 306). Craig had been alone for so long that when he finally found someone who accepted him, he was addicted to her affection. He barely even knew her, but his life basically depended on her acceptance of

him. It was unhealthy. In the end, Raina too rejected him because she could not live up to his idealized expectations.

With Raina no longer in his life, Thompson finally began to accept himself as who he really was, and he flourished, further exemplifying the importance of self-acceptance amidst social isolation. Craig no longer relied on either religion or Raina to fill the void in his life, so he was able to focus on improving his self-image and moved out of his parents' house, into the city. Craig was able to light aflame all of his ties to his relationship, except the quilt she made for him, without combusting himself because he was now defined by more than the subject of Raina's affection. He later denounced his faith to Christianity because "it denies the beauty of being human, and it ignores all these gaps that need to be filled in by the individual" (Blankets 533). Craig's statement is not only applicable to his beliefs on religion, but it solidifies the depth of his own personal journey. Craig no longer sees life as temporary and unimportant, but he sees individuality as beautiful. His social isolation does not impact his capability to be happy anymore because he now has a strong sense of self. Craig's journey shows the audience that it is okay to not fit into any one social group. He formed his own social space from the lessons that he learned from both his religion and his relationships, exemplifying the claim that anybody can find happiness, so long as they accept themselves.

In their desperate attempts to fit into pre-existing societal groups, both Gadsby and Thompson suppressed their true identities and found themselves buried in psychological distress. They finally found true happiness when they learned to accept themselves, regardless of society's unchanged opinions. Therefore, these comedies urge their audiences to disregard the lure of membership to one specific community for them to be able to truly view themselves as valued individuals.

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Saying “Bi Bi” to Exclusive Feminism

L. F.

In modern feminism, we see many influential women coming forward and utilizing social media to spread awareness on prevalent issues, such as rape culture and male gaze. These leading voices are strikingly different than the ones that came before them in terms of diversity. The struggle to include many minority groups in feminism has been long fought and still continues today, but one of the forgotten is the LGBTQ+ community. Though lesbian women have led past feminist movements, the trans and bisexual community has been shut out just as much as gay and bisexual men and everyone else in the queer community. These groups are consistently ignored because they are seen as contrary to the feminist movement just by their identity, especially bisexual women who find themselves excluded from both the LGBTQ+ community and the heterosexual community. Luckily today many women like Roxane Gay, who identified herself as a Haitian-American, bisexual, feminist, and writer in an NPR interview, are leading feminism and exposing millions to its principles through media (*Raz*). Her TED talk and book captures the attention of millions of educators and students and exposes them to the good and bad of feminism. She pushes the idea that no one in the feminist movement is perfect and that's okay. This line of thinking is a relief to so many feminists who feel threatened by call out culture and those beginning to recognize implicit sexism they have engrained in them. She also shows that anyone can be a feminist, even if you indulge in sexist media every once in a while, or don't fit the cookie cutter mold of what a perfect feminist is and looks like. Though she brings up her identities and unique differences openly with the world while remaining an amazing spokesperson for intersectional feminism, she doesn't directly interconnect her bisexuality and feminism. This missing link is preventing a more complex and motivated feminist movement that we all desire. Though they have been historically excluded from feminism and harmed by its heteronormativity and cisnormativity, the bisexual community and the LGBTQ+ community as a whole are crucial to feminism as they present diverse experiences of gender, sexual violence, and more that

drive the modern feminist movement. This essay will examine the intersection between sexuality and feminism with a focus on bisexual women.

Bisexuality has consistently been excluded from the feminism movement in the past. Though it was prevalent in Ancient Greek and many other historic settings, it wasn't fully shamed until Sigmund Freud detailed heterosexuality as positive and homosexuality as negative. In *Invention of Heterosexuality*, the author highlights Freud explaining his subject Dora's sexual encounter with a female figure as "a passing pubescent phase- a stage on the road to heterosexuality" while her male sexual encounters are deemed legitimate (Katz). This not only began the idea that bisexuality is temporary, but it attached negative feelings toward any type of homosexual interaction. Though they were societally unacceptable, these communities still began to unite and flourish within itself. In fact, the bisexual community was involved in the 1963 Stonewall riot, along with other LGBTQ+ members at the time, and lead multiple marches and early alliance groups at universities (Rosenblum). When the time came, the bisexual community wanted change and supported the feminist movement, but the women called "lesbian feminists" soon pushed them away. In an archive of published bisexual works, one section introduces two phenomena to this exclusion. They observe a growing distance between bisexual women and lesbians, along with lesbians being closeted of any bisexual feelings ("Bisexuality", 39). Women who initially identified as lesbian during this movement but dated men afterwards were seen as "lesbians gone straight" instead of bisexual or whatever they wanted to identify as. This resentment lesbian feminists held towards those who are attracted to men is bitter, unproductive, and long lasting, which led to consistent exclusion and erasure of their opinions and ideas. It hasn't been until the current feminist movement that bisexuality was even partially included in feminism. Though pansexuality has been embraced by most recent social justice movements, others in the LGBTQ+ community are still pushed aside and ignored. Gay, bisexual, and straight men take much of the criticism feminism offers on the basis of using their power as males to rise in their careers and society, which stratifies women further. Trans and non-gender conforming folks are also criticized by the feminism movement. Past and some present feminists view transitions as either taking advantage of male privilege to become female or avoiding gender-based discrimination by transitioning to male or not conforming to gender at all. Asexuality isn't even acknowledged by some feminists. There are so many more people who find themselves comfortable in the LGBTQ+ community but not in the feminist community because of their history of exclusion based on power structures they can't control and identities they hold close. They have been consistently pushed away by feminists and their opinions were silenced. Intersectionality and inclusion of everyone has recently become more crucial to achieving any efforts. Roxane Gay supports this by claiming, "I reject the mainstream

feminism that has historically ignored or deflected the needs of women of color, working-class women, queer women, and transgender women, in favor of supporting white, middle- and upper-class straight women. Listen, if that's good feminism – I am a very bad feminist” (Gay). If we endorse the belief that these individuals are counter to our ideas of “good feminism”, then we should not be feminists at all.

Heteronormativity has had a negative impact on bisexuality and feminism as a whole, which we still see today. Modern feminism tackles many issues but one of the most notable is sexual violence, especially with the #MeToo movement (Reynolds). A significant percentage of these acts are projected towards bisexual women and men. By only looking at sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence as a male taking advantage of a female, you completely ignore the estimated half of bisexual women that have been raped, the six in ten bisexual women who have encountered intimate partner violence, and the one-third of bisexual men who have faced partner violence (Kates). These voices matter and need to be heard to tackle this problem and end the harm it causes on all walks of life. Yet, “because queer sexual culture or ‘way of life’ is what violates social norms, *culture* becomes the material of queer resistance” (Ward, 417). This dissonance caused by violating social norms also causes cisnormativity. Cisnormativity has an even worse influence on feminism, especially for trans men and women. In our modern praise of women, we tend to highlight struggles only cisgender women face, such as menstruation, breastfeeding, and birth control. Though these issues are important for cisgender women, there is so much more to feminism than these struggles and only talking about these issues completely eliminates the contributions of other gender identities. Trans women are women. We need to stop the preconceived notion that they are lesser than us because their journey was not the same as ours. We also need to stop excluding trans men or other gender identifying individuals who deal with menstruation, breast feeding, and birth control. These issues aren't just faced by cisgender women and these issues don't make us more of a woman than anyone else. This unspoken exclusion is detrimental to advancing the feminist movement and will lead to its demise if we don't recognize that all genders are valid, and their stories need to be heard.

In more recent feminist discourse, we see a great portion of the LGBTQ+ community taking charge on hot topics. We value the idea of including different women in feminism and recognizing the intersectional oppression they struggle with throughout their life. We see individuals like Ellen Degeneres, Ellen Page, Harry Styles, Laverne Cox, Ruby Rose, Cara Delevingne, and so many more LGBTQ+ celebrities taking the media by storm and publicly identifying as feminists. Bisexual inclusion in the feminist movement especially has increased in recent years, with many influential celebrities, such as Demi Lovato, Miley Cyrus, and Lady Gaga, identifying as

LGBTQ+ and feminist. Though these individuals are not representative of a range of socioeconomic class or race, they have become role models both for young LGBTQ+ folks and young feminists who are exposed to them through media, which encourages growing acceptance and progress with each generation. This push towards having access to a role model through media can help others realize they are not alone in their struggle and they can be successful, even with their adversities. These celebrities also use their platform to normalize feminism and show how diverse feminists can be. They have become spokespersons that are pushing forward the feminist movement to inclusivity and commonality.

Though these celebrities have catalyzed recent growth of the feminist movement, they rarely put their sexuality and feminism together. The modern feminist movement involves a large portion of bisexual women, yet our sexuality on the basis of gender and the social construct behind it is never criticized or even discussed. We need to start talking about how sexuality is based on this, how it can lead to enforcing the gender binary, especially for the bisexual community, and how we have pushed towards pan/polysexuality in recent years because of it. We need to talk about how sexuality and belief systems such as feminism are seen as phases in our lives that we will grow out of. We need to start talking about how slut shaming is a common phenomenon for the LGBTQ+ community, especially bisexuals, and for sex positive feminists. We need to highlight works such as *Mulan* that show badass women taking on masculine traits and how attraction doesn't have to be based on gender. We need to highlight drag queens and how their shows throw ideas of gender, sexuality, and power out the window (Taylor and Rupp). There are so many more issues and discussions that combine both LGBTQ+ struggles and feminist struggles in modern society which are often ignored. Though many figures in both movements deal with the same issues, we have yet to work together cohesively to make change. If we keep ignoring these hot topics, we will never make progress towards a better society. But if we begin teaching our ideas of sex and gender through both an LGBTQ+ perspective and a feminist perspective, future generations will eliminate the toxic norms we grew up with. Publicly uniting these two movements would provide more support and change for not only the issues we face together, but issues we face separately that are just as important.

Including bisexuals and the entire LGBTQ+ community in the feminist movement is necessary in moving forward with modern feminism. In the previously mentioned archived literature, the authors bring up the point that lesbian and bisexual women are working towards the same social changes, such as violence against women, AIDS, and discrimination ("Bisexuality", 40). The focus of the current feminist movement is still violence, discrimination, and sexualization. To achieve our goals of ending sexism, objectification, and sexual and domestic violence, the LGBTQ+

population needs to be heard. Instead of using privilege to speak on behalf of others, we need to provide these platforms to members of the LGBTQ+ community and other minority groups so they can tell their stories and experiences themselves. These voices are just as important as the voices of cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, middle- and upper-class white women who tend to lead feminism. If feminism promotes the equality of men and women, it also needs to promote the equality and inclusion of everyone. As best said by Roxane Gay in *Confessions of a bad feminist*, “We are not just women. We are people with different bodies, gender expressions, faiths, sexualities, class backgrounds, abilities, and so much more. We need to take in account these differences and how they affect us, as much as we account for what we have in common. Without this kind of inclusion, our feminism is nothing.”

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Native American Iconography: Analyzing Peele’s Critique of American Imperialism in *Us*

Lucas Johnson

In Jordan Peele’s *Us* (2019), humans are taken over by an underground population of doppelgängers. The invasion originates from the abduction of the main character, a young girl named Adelaide Wilson who is swapped with her doppelgänger at a young age when she enters a hall of mirrors at the Santa Cruz boardwalk. Throughout the film, the doppelgängers and their scheme to take over America closely mirrors U.S. imperialist and colonial tendencies from the early 1600s to the late 1800s. The doppelgängers, or the “Tethered”, as the film refers to them, plan on replacing everyone in the United States by killing them and taking over their lives. Peele uses this connection to highlight how perspective and bias can shape opinion and reactions towards injustice. To modern day Americans, U.S. imperialism is seen as a necessary evil, one that helped push the world into modernity. When the Tethered take over in *Us*, however, it is considered a horror movie.

The most evident connection to American Imperialism in the movie is found in one of the very first scenes. A young Adelaide enters a hall of mirrors named “Shaman’s Vision Quest” (6:07). The entrance to the building is littered with Native American iconography. The cartoon man depicted on the front sign resembles a classic American Indian caricature. The Natives, of course, were the first victims of American Colonialism. Dating back as far as 1607¹, English colonies were established on Native American land with complete disregard to the previous inhabitants. This theme continued throughout the next 300 years¹ as the United States came to be country of its own and spread from coast-to-coast. Similar to the plight of the Natives, Adelaide’s abduction is the first time the Tethered begin to replace humans. As the viewer learns later in the movie, it is at this point that Adelaide’s

¹ From the Jamestown Colony (1607) to the Wounded knee Massacre (1890), Americans have been treating Natives as inferior beings for nearly 300 years. See Source [4].

Tether swaps with the real Adelaide, leaving the real Adelaide locked up and stripped of the life she used to have. The connection becomes even more obvious when the film hits the 23:41 mark, after many years have passed and the Tether Adelaide has settled into her new life quite comfortably. A passing shot of the hall of mirrors shows that it has a new name now, “Merlin’s Forest”. Just as Native American culture was cleansed from the U.S., the “Shaman” man is now replaced by “Merlin”. The “Merlin” character is a white European man, further establishing the connection. Tether Adelaide does not even remember the violence she committed in the past to get to where she is now. The point of all this is to emphasize that history is written by the winners. The U.S. won, so it gets to whitewash its actions and prosper from all the stolen resources it acquired. Tether Adelaide won so she gets to forget what she did in order to get to her perfect life. Peele moves to expose the hypocrisy of this way of thinking once the Tethered take over and the roles are reversed.

When the Tethered begin their invasion, regular Americans suddenly become the victims and the Tethered become the colonizers. After Red and the rest of the Tethered Wilsons capture the real Wilsons, Red tells the story of why the Tethered are taking over. She explains how the Tethered were forced to suffer until one day, they realized they were being “tested by God”, a revelation which set off their plan to overtake America. This is a direct reference to the idea of Manifest Destiny. Manifest Destiny was the concept that American expansion over Native lands was a God given right to all U.S. citizens². The most common pictorial representation of Manifest Destiny is an 1872 painting by John Gast called *American Progress*². In this painting, America, represented by a fair-skinned Angel, is seen bringing light and progress to the dark Native American lands. To most, the idea of Manifest Destiny was a perfectly sound rationale for invading Native lands². Now that Red is the Angel and the Tethered takeover is the westward expansion, however, the idea is meant to sound crazy. Red is intentionally shot to look insane. She is placed in the center of the frame, a violation of the Rule of Thirds³, making her seem very unnatural and out of place. When she delivers the line, “tested by God”, her eyes are looking off into the distance even though the people she is talking to are right in front of her, and tears are streaming down her face, making her seem unhinged and deranged. Peele’s

² Manifest Destiny was practiced in the 1850s onwards as an excuse to claim Native land for its resources under the guise of “spreading Christianity, technology, and education”. See Source [3].

³ The rule of thirds is a compositional rule that states that the most natural way to frame a subject is on one of the picture’s thirds. Pictures that violate this rule often look unnatural. See Source [2].

message here is clear. Justification by God only seems rational when it comes from a personal point-of-view. When forced upon someone else, the notion of “God given right” is logically incoherent. This point is further compounded at 48:06, where, when asked who they were, Red responds “We’re Americans”. To the Tethered, they themselves are the real Americans, who’s God given right it is to settle the lands of America, while the regular humans are the pesky Natives who are in the way of progress.

Peele’s third and final commentary on American imperialism comes near the end of the movie. After Red kidnaps Jason and leads Adelaide back through the hall of mirrors and into the underground facility where the Tethered were being kept, stumbles upon a few empty classrooms filled with rabbits. The viewer sees hundreds of rabbits lined up and down the halls and in each room (1:34:19). The rabbits unchecked growth in the underground lab mirror the U.S.’s unchecked growth during the late 1800s to mid-1900s. During this time period, the U.S. was becoming a world superpower⁴. With the Natives out of the way and no domestic threats to hold it back, the U.S. was free to extend its influence over Latin America⁴. The U.S.’s main goal was to make money, extracting as many natural resources from the lands as possible and setting up predatory contracts with smaller countries to force them to supply good and services at lower prices⁴. After the U.S. pulled out of these countries, however, most fell into disarray. Without American investment, their economies flatlined. Since the U.S. had installed their own leaders in favor of the democratically elected leaders of the past, no one was in place to fix the issues⁴. Eventually, these polices would come back to hurt the U.S. The Latin American drug trade, mass poverty leading to radicalization and attack on the U.S., and even the Cuban Revolution were all a result of America’s actions⁵. These same concepts are paralleled again in the film. The government that set up these underground facilities to further their own interests at the expense of the Tethered’s eventually pay the price when the experiments fall apart and the Tethered rise up to take revenge. Through these parallels, Peele is showcasing again the downfalls of American Imperialism and how the idea that America was in any way helping any of these Latin American countries is bogus. Peele is challenging anyone who sees America’s past as one of necessary evil and Machiavellian Progression (the

⁴ Panama Canal, Banana Wars, “Good Neighbor” interlude, Hemispheric Defense Doctrine, all served American interests better than Latin American interests. See Source [5].

⁵ U.S. foreign policy left many Latin American countries in financial ruin, leading to a vast increase in crime and drug trafficking, and lit the way for dictators to take control. See Sources [5,1].

idea that the ends justify the means) to see it for what it really is; a big country bullying smaller entities into doing what it wants, and then paying the price afterwards.

Typically, horror movies are seen as cheap shock content that push a disturbing or grotesque story with no real deeper meaning or narrative. Peele's film *Us* turns that stereotype on its head with its deeply imbedded social commentary and complex themes. Although this essay in particular focused on Peele's message as it relates to the analysis of American Imperialism through the placement of Native American iconography, much remains uncovered in regard to Peele's additional commentary on other topics including race, class, and mental health. Further research into these topics as they show up in Peele's other works such as *Get Out* and *The Key and Peele Show*, and how the themes in those works reflect back once again onto *Us* would be interesting. Additionally, seeing as *Us* proves that social commentary and horror can be quite successfully intertwined, additional research into how old horror classics reflected the social issues of their own times might also prove fruitful. All said, Peele's *Us* stands out on its own right as a shining example of horror done properly: enough scares to make it fun, and enough thoughtful detail to make it interesting.

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Cracking a Nut: Jackson's Critique of Society and the Pressures on the Mentally III

Lucas Johnson

In Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, two sisters named Constance and Merricat Blackwood live in isolation along with their Uncle Julian. Having lost their parents at a young age, Merricat and Constance grow up learning to fend for themselves, withdrawing fully from society and maintaining a reclusive lifestyle in their family manor. After living alone for so long, the girls each develop distinctly unique personalities and struggle to maintain sound mental health, especially when the outside forces they try so hard to keep out start trickling in. Merricat's constant fear of the outside world, in contrast with Constance's detached and distant personality, shows the mental rift that was created when the family was poisoned by arsenic, six years previously. This rift demonstrates how isolation shapes human nature and unveils Jackson's commentary on how different societal burdens, especially on young children suffering from traumatic events, can lead to mental disorders and other disastrous results.

Jackson's chief example of how a traumatic event in tandem with societal pressures can cause mental issues is shown through Merricat. First and foremost, Merricat is distrustful of outsiders and believes most of them to be agents of evil working against her and her family. A prime example of this is found when Merricat thinks to herself. "I wanted to be at home, but I knew, too, that Stella would see me pass if I did not go in, and perhaps think I was afraid, and that thought I could not endure" (Jackson 422). Even though Merricat has not yet interacted with Stella, she already has an idea in her head of what Stella might be thinking of her, of how Stella might be watching her, or deviously waiting for her to trip up. In clinical terms, this is called a "perception without a stimulus" and is one of the telltale signs of some level of schizophrenia (Picchioni and Murray, Box 1). Another telltale sign of schizophrenia is the experience of delusions, or "a fixedly held false belief that is not shared by others" (Picchioni and Murray, Box 1). This sign manifests in Merricat's belief in magic items and magical powers, specifically

her belief that she can alter real life events using small, representative objects, a process called “Sympathetic Magic” (Frazer). Merricat states, “On Sunday morning I examined my safeguards, the silver dollars buried by the creek, and the doll buried in the field” (Jackson 459). In addition to the plain fact that belief in Sympathetic Magic on its own is delusional, Merricat’s belief that she needs to safeguard herself from imaginary foes (the townspeople, i.e. society) falls under the medical term, “delusion of persecution” (Picchioni and Murray, Box 1), and is yet another symptom of schizophrenia. Under delusions of persecution, the victim believes they are under threat from some vast, centralized conspiracy. In Merricat’s case, that threat is the entire outside world.

Jackson uses Constance’s character, on the other hand, to portray another side of mental illness, one where the main aggressor isn’t society, but rather isolation and mistrust of others. According to Drs. J. Bisson, S. Cosgrove, C. Lewis, and N. Roberts, one of the significant symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can be “negative alterations in cognitions and mood” (Bisson, Box 2). One particular facet of that is “noticeably diminished interest or participation in important activities” (Bisson, Box 2). In the very first page of the book, Jackson writes, “Someone had to go to the library, and the grocery; Constance never went past her own garden” (Jackson 421). Constance has almost no interest in the outside world or the responsibilities and expected behavior of a girl her age. She doesn’t shop, she doesn’t socialize, and she only cooks for her immediate family, never leaving the manor’s grounds for over six years straight. Constance’s desire for isolation and all-around aloofness is even further compounded after Merricat tells her, “If I had a winged horse, I could fly [Uncle Julian] to the moon; he would be more comfortable there (Jackson 462). Constance, instead of giving a reasonable response, goes on to, “[look] at [Merricat] distantly. ‘Dandelion greens,’ she [says]. ‘And radishes... I hope that the carrots ...’ She [taps] her fingers on the table, thinking. ‘Rhubarb,’ she [says]” (Jackson 462). Much like in the previous excerpt, Constance would rather distance herself from conflict and distract herself from the problems before her, no matter how serious. At the time (the early 60s), mankind didn’t know if safely landing on the moon was even possible, so Merricat’s desire to suddenly jet off to the moon with a sick family member is all the more concerning. Instead of consoling her sister and confronting her delusions, Constance would rather go off on a tangent on the food she is about to prepare, ignoring the obvious mental issues Merricat is dealing with. Rather than being a good sibling, Constance would prefer to live in her own world, where the only pressing issue would be whether or not to bake a rhubarb pie for dinner tonight. Once again, this is a proven sign of PTSD, clinically defined as “Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others” (Bisson, Box 2).

Through the portrayal of Merricat as schizophrenic and of Constance as having PTSD, Jackson's critique of society finally becomes clear. Both the sisters' mental illnesses started, as most mental issues do (Satcher), as a result of a traumatic event. In both cases, however, this event is only the seed of the terrible disease that is to come. According to Satcher, "cultural and social factors have the most direct role in the causation of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)... These traumatic experiences are associated with the later development of a longstanding pattern of symptoms accompanied by biological changes" (Satcher). Essentially, the majority of the time, society is at fault for exacerbating an already traumatic experience to the point where it transitions into something like PTSD or other mental diseases. Examples of society mistreating the sisters are common throughout the book, ranging from adults mocking them in public places (429) to people trashing their house after it had already mostly burned down (520). Society's blame for the sisters' mental disorders becomes even more evident when taking into account the fact that, "Mistrust was identified by the SGR [Surgeon General] as a major barrier to the receipt of mental health treatment... [additionally,] Stigma was portrayed by the SGR as the most formidable obstacle to future progress in the arena of mental illness and health ... [mistrust] refers to a cluster of negative attitudes and beliefs that motivate the general public to fear, reject, avoid, and discriminate against people with mental illness" (Satcher). Once again, society is to blame for compounding the sister's illnesses. In Merricat's case in particular, the stigma she carries every time she walks out in public, the stigma of having dead parents, the stigma of being sisters with an alleged murderer, and the stigma of just being weird, directly fuels her mistrust of society, and, as mentioned above, mistrust is just as much a part of the equation as stigma. The sisters' mistrust of the outside world, justified as it may be, is the root cause of their mental problems, and, according to Jackson, the onus was on society to help re-incorporate the children, to not cast them out, and to make them feel welcome in the new world. Now that that opportunity has passed however it's too late, highlighting the very real consequences of not acting quickly when mental issues arise.

To put it all together, the very fact that these disorders, which both stem from a tragic event, were mishandled by society, and lead to all manner of negative consequences, including a death, a fire, and two mentally ill children, sums up the authors critique against society as a whole. Society does not treat it's mentally ill with proper enough care, and, while it may be easy to ignore the consequences in the short term, just as it was easy to ignore the children for a whole 6 years, the ramifications of these decisions can eventually come back to affect the community at large. Interestingly enough, even though *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is nearly 60 years old, its message is just as relevant today as it was back then. In modern times, when

mentally ill people ask for help, especially veterans, they are usually unable to receive the degree of assistance they need and can sometimes then turn violent and commit acts of terror or other heinous crimes simply because their disorders have worsened, as was the case with the Parkland Shooter (Benner, Katie, et al.). Had society stepped up when the time was right and provided for these people that have done nothing wrong but have a mental illness, there might have been different outcomes.

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No Country for Young Rappers: The Similarities Between Lewellyn Moss and Kendrick Lamar

Kyle Schwartz

The 1980's West Texas desert and Los Angeles's Compton projects may be more similar than many think. With drugs running the deserts and the streets, murders are not uncommon, and greed is inevitable. Money and drugs tend to block judgement and encourage crime in places where the drug trade runs heavily. In the Cohen brother's movie, *No Country for Old Men*, Lewellyn Moss acts off greed to keep his newfound riches. Similarly, rap artist Kendrick Lamar raps about doing what it takes to break the poverty cycle and leave the projects. Whether it is a movie about wild West Texas or an album about Compton, LA, *No Country for Old Men's* Lewellyn Moss and Kendrick Lamar's *good kid, m.A.A.d. city* show how the race for riches leaves no winners.

Some people may live the majority of their lives without being labeled a criminal, but it only takes one life choice for that to change. In Lewellyn Moss's first scene of *No Country for Old Men*, Lewellyn Moss is hunting antelope in the desert. Moss hunts for sport and is interrupted by the sight of blood belonging to something other than the deer he shot (7:08). After stumbling upon a drug deal gone wrong, Lewellyn Moss knows exactly what he may find: money. In the first verse of Kendrick Lamar's "Money Trees," Lamar tells how rapping is the "only thing that frees his mind," then continues to say, "Then freeze that verse when we see dollar signs" (Lamar). Moss and Lamar both freeze what they do for leisure in order to chase money. Both men are distracted from what makes them feel free when they come across an illegal opportunity to make money. Lewellyn comes across many dead or almost dead drug traffickers and eventually finds a satchel containing \$2.4 million in cash. When he goes home to his trailer park, he tells his wife, Carla Jean, the satchel is full of money to which she responds, "That would be the day" (14:44). This shows right away that Lewellyn and Carla Jean are living a low-class lifestyle and have not had riches like this before. Also in the first verse, Lamar talks of growing up having "Dreams of livin' life like rappers do" (Lamar). Growing up in Compton, it was many

young man's dream to someday leave the projects and be successful. For Lamar, this meant living the high dollar life like Eazy-E and E-40 who rapped about luxurious lifestyles. While Moss and Lamar grew up in very different places, the desire to leave the poverty cycle was no different. The small towns of West Texas were becoming increasingly dangerous. *No Country for Old Men* begins with Sheriff Bell talking of the more heinous crimes being committed and says, "The crime you see now, it's even hard to take its measure" (2:12). Whether the crimes were in Texas or Los Angeles, they all had something in common: greed.

Most criminals commit crimes on the idea that they will get away with it. At the first sign of danger, Moss flees his home and sends Carla Jean to her mother's house (25:42). At this point, Moss decides he will do whatever necessary to protect his millions, even if it means turning his entire life around and leaving his home with nothing more than Carla Jean or what he can carry. This is the point when Moss decides to risk it all for the money. The final line in verse one of "Money Trees" states "Go at a reverend for the revenue" (Lamar). This simply means Lamar possesses a "by any means necessary" mindset when it comes to money, no matter how respected or innocent the victim is. Greed ignores all sets of moral standards and any idea of good versus evil. In both cases, the criminal understands and acknowledges wrongdoing. As Moss is telling Carla Jean to pack her things, he says, "At what point would you quit bothering to look for your two million dollars?" (26:05). Moss understands that he is about to be living on the run from the law and the drug ring, however the reward, to Moss, is far greater than the possibility of punishment. Whatever choice is made in this moment will affect the rest of Moss's life. Similarly, Lamar sings, "It go Halle Barry or hallelujah, pick your poison tell me what you doin'" (Lamar). A choice is almost always giving between "hallelujah"-the good- or "Halle Barry" being the crime that is taking place. These decisions are usually made quickly with little time to spare and must be acknowledged. Neither crime nor the law will wait on the decision. No matter how different the setting, people have the ultimate choice between good and wrongdoing, but the idea of wealth usually sits on the wrong shoulder.

The power of wealth can quickly turn one from ethical to unethical and blind one's original beliefs. However, these unethical choices are sometimes necessary in underprivileged areas as tradition methods of wealth are unavailable. Lewellyn Moss puts Carla Jean and his own life at risk all for a bag of cash. While he previously may have never thought of turning their worlds upside down, Moss now realizes, at least to some degree, the implications of his decision as he tells Carla Jean, "Things happen... Come on I can't take them back" (26:11). When choosing between Halle Barry or hallelujah, Moss chose Halle Barry and has no way of turning back. Blinded by a couple million dollars, Moss is willing to risk his whole life. Explaining

this effect that wealth has on the poor, Lamar says, “A dollar just might make that lane switch” (Lamar). To Kendrick Lamar, the lane switch is from spiritual to selfish, or from making money honorably to robbing the weak. This does not always have to be for a couple million dollars; large crimes are continuously committed for seemingly small rewards. The rewards though, can seem ever so enticing. Before Lamar was famous, he was enticed to commit many small crimes in order to get by. Lamar recognizes that the desire for wealth or even opportunity for wealth can change one’s logical reasoning, just as it did to Lewellyn Moss.

While some may stop at one criminal act, it is more than likely that one crime will lead to another, like one lie. Eventually, Lewellyn Moss ends up hunted, shot at, and severely injured. After a shootout between Moss and notorious hitman Anton Chigurh, Moss stumbles across the U.S.-Mexico border, leaving his riches where only he knows. So far, Moss has created more trouble for himself than two million dollars could ever fix; he has a target on his back. Through all of this trouble though, Moss still believes his money can save him. His life has never been more at risk, however a single satchel shields Moss from the truth of inevitable death. Acknowledging this act of pursuit, Lamar says, “I been hustlin’ all day, this-a-way, that-a-way, through canals and alley ways” (Lamar). This line claims that there is constantly a chase for wealth and an inability to escape the chase once committed. The use of rhymes and repetition points to a cat and mouse chase through the darkest parts of the criminal world such as canals and alley ways. While Moss is chasing after wealth, he is also running from Chigurh, and Chigurh is chasing Moss in order to obtain the \$2.4 million-dollar satchel. Finally, Lamar still claims that “Money trees are the perfect place for shade” (Lamar). Even after all the challenges, Lamar still believes having immense wealth will shade him from hardships that the less fortunate must deal with. Ironically, those who do not criminally chase after wealth do not face nearly the same hardships that men like Lewellyn Moss must face. Although Lamar may feel safest under money trees, another *good kid, m.A.A.d. city* song is titled “Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst.” This addresses his realization that while money trees may be the perfect place for shade, they can only momentarily lessen the need to be saved and are not the solution to all problems. Unfortunately, this is not something Lewellyn Moss realizes until it is too late. He always thought, that as long as he had the money, or knew where it was, then he could keep himself safe. It seems to some people, if not most, the thought of riches is blinding, almost as if it changes one’s entire personality, reality, and acceptance of unethical actions.

There are no winners in the criminal world; there are only those sitting comfortably under a money tree for the time being. Eventually, they die trying to grow this tree or walk out into the sun to face reality. Lewellyn Moss only saw the money tree in the far distance; he was never able to enjoy

the shade, even for a minute. Moss died trying to secure his position and died in the hot sun of Texas. Kendrick Lamar saw the cruelty of the money tree but could not help but to be drawn towards it as he grew up living in the projects of Los Angeles. Does greed turn the unstable into criminals? Do criminals always have a choice? Maybe we are all just good kids growing up in a mad city.

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Poetic

Another opportunity Butler's First Year Seminar course gives to freshmen students is the opportunity to write various creative pieces, whether that be poetry or personal narratives. As opposed to academic essays, poetry in particular showcases an author's ability to transform any topic, from the color indigo to the subject of physics, into something more than its face value. Most of all, poetry allows readers to connect with an author's emotions and opinions on a fundamental, human level.

In this section of *The Mall*, we tried to showcase as many different types of poetry as possible, from traditional pieces like Letitia Bortey's "Feelings of Indigo" or Nicole Dickson's "Will we be alright?" to avant-garde pieces like Leah Bechtold's "++- and so much more," all the way to meditations on current events, like Emma Littau's "29 Days and Counting."

Truly, every work presented below was an honor to read and even more of an honor to publish. Each submission did a fantastic job at highlighting the various fundamental pillars of poetry, such as imagery, structure, innovation, ingenuity, and voice. A poetry exclusive section was not something we've been able to do in the past, so we hope this year's poetry section inspires the next generation of Butler Poets to pursue their passions to the fullest extent, and that we continue to see poetry submissions in years to come.

These authors dive deep and elicit an emotional response in each of us. The *Poetic* section begins now.

Sincerely,
Natalie Shaffer, Editor

My Dad Always Waves Goodbye: A Meditation During Quarantine

Alexi Eastes

The yellow dandelions are finally growing.

I wish numbers weren't so important.

They cannot see your imagination.

10 pairs of overalls with Diet Cola and coal stains.

Realize the potential you have.

Shootings 2 miles down the road from school.

My mind is much more enchanting.

You have no idea how long this has taken.

Will the flowers ever grow? When the weeds stop sprouting.

Feelings of Indigo

Letitia Bortey

When does blue become purple?
Is it when the smooth case bursts open
 Oozing with refreshing juice?
Is it when the eternal marks of your punches change color as it heals?
 Is it when the sky meets the lavender field with love?
 When my eyes see you staring at me it makes me feel purple.
But the tapes in my head like a locomotive chugging on make me feel
 Blue.

Wet

Letitia Bortey

I'm not sure how to hold water
It slips through the gaps between my fingers
And puddles all over the floor
Saturating and spreading into the velvety carpet
Amoeba-like with its protruding phalanges
Able to reach the waves
But not before it leaves
Some hard to clean stain
Stains that drip down
And leave the corners of a million-dollar home
Mucky with a hint of moldy evergreen and mud
The family inside doesn't know that
The green that daddy brings in
Leeches their world of the sweet butterscotch sap
That could've gotten them out of this sticky situation
Somehow blood's supposed to be thicker than water
But I'm not quite sure
How to hold it either

america

Natalie Shaffer

America, what the fuck are you doing? America, you've changed...
You've convinced everyone that you are This crown jewel that all should
mine for That you are the epitome of freedom And liberty
And happiness
But you've changed, America
When you drill past your shiny exterior
Black tar pours from the center
We searched and we searched within the sludge But we could not find you
Or your freedom
Or your liberty
Or your happiness
Instead, we found your people
Being suffocated by your rotten innards
We found skeletons with their skin still on
Their eyes sunken and their ribcage begging to be let free
We found families huddled together in fear
As monsters with sharp teeth ripped them apart
They ripped arms from their sockets
They broke the chain their family struggled to maintain
We found those whose skin blended with the tar
Being harassed by those with lighter skin
Merely because they resembled the black void they lived in They reminded
them of the new America
But that was your own fault, wasn't it?
We found a prominent man in a suit
With your banner on his lapel
He scowled and hissed at those below him They were covered in filth, little
did he know He was just as dirty as they were

We found women being thrown into alleyways They leave these caves
With blood between their legs
And tears running down their face
We found men with the rainbow painted on their face Being spit on and
knocked over by thunderstorms Being called heinous names
That dull the rainbow
America, what have you done to your people?

good/bad

Natalie Shaffer

you are the good guy
you buy chocolate and stuffed animals and food especially food because you
know I love eating you take me to the movies, even the scary ones and the
chick flicks that you think are “cheesy” but you endure them because you
love me
you stroke my hair even when your fingers mess up my curls
but I don’t care because your hand is the comb I’ve been waiting for
that will brush out the tangled and knotty mess that I call my life
you call me beautiful and say I love you every day
so that I can be happy at least once
without putting on a mask
you grab my face and tell me “I always want you to know
that I could travel the solar system
no, the entire universe
and I could still not find a star that is as bright and as shining as your eyes”
kids at school tell me how I’ve finally picked the right guy
because I’ve made it a habit to publicize my love life
and the horrible decisions I’ve made regarding my happiness
such as letting a man make me think that there was something wrong with
not letting him take my virginity
or letting myself think that because a guy cheats on me it’s my fault
you treat people like your mom’s cooking
love it or hate it,
you’ll eat it all with a smile on your face
you never swear; you’re never loud; you never frown
teachers love you because they can talk to you about the coursework or about
their children
and still, feel comfortable with you because that’s just who you are
and me
i’m the bad guy

no, not billie eilish's bad guy
where i'm the fucking your dad type
i'm just not as good as you
i'm not saying i'm a bad person because i'm not
you're better than me so i'm the bad guy
I'm the emotional one
which means you need to be happy all the time but not actually happy
and to fix it you engrave a permanent smile onto the smooth canvas of your
cheek
I'm the busy one
so that means I always have things to do spending more time on homework
than you pulling out the knife I sputter names
of those who have hurt me before
giving your eyes the same tool to kill me which makes me the bad guy
I'm not as likable as you
so, people see us, and they may be happy for us
yet I would be the one to break your heart
because "Robby would never do that to her"
but apparently, I would be the one to do that to you because I'm the bad guy
I'm the lamp, giving just enough light for someone to read
and you're the lighthouse, guiding boatloads of people out of the storm and
into your arms
I'm the dumb one
because you're the smart one
I'm the bitch
because you're the nice one
I am the lone violin, a small crowd gathering in the streets to hear my tune
and you're the entire fucking orchestra in the recital hall across the street with
flutes and clarinets and trombones and hundreds of thousands of people to
adore you
I am the homemade solar system a little boy made for their science project
Saturn hanging by a thread from its pedestal and stars are poorly drawn on
the painted cardboard
and you're the fucking paper-mache volcano with the crowd of children
cheering for you when you finally explode
I am the loyal and loving girlfriend that tries their best to make you happy
by buying my heart back from those who auctioned it off like a slave
and you're the loyal and loving boyfriend who is still viewed as something
more
though we are both the same I'm not you
so I'm nothing

++- and so much more

Leah Bechtold

We were electric



The time we went to the movies
Greasy hands touched in the popcorn
Sparks flew
A sweet smile drifted across your salted face



Replay our first dance
We matched perfectly
We swayed to the vibrations
Your heart my sole guide



Then the distance
Smiles and tears
Pointing and reasoning
Here and there
Insecurities erupted
Ready yourself
Reality strikes.

ooo

~~You+me everyone else~~

I was foolish to believe in the simplicity
We were electrons
Destined to have our quarks
Destined to be a little quirky
It could never be so simple

ooo

you+me
+other girls+my friends
+your friends-your dog+my laugh

-distance-time-music
+hope-trust-sleep
+work+school-parties
+uncertainty
=
our stark reality
~~ooo~~
We were never electric
Always

29 Days and Counting

Emma Littau

- 11 April 2020

In this world, time keeps moving, even though it may not seem that way. Every day is the same, even though a new day begins every morning. It may seem as if time has stopped moving, but time is the only constant as each mechanical second passes. Time continues to move, people are born, and lots of people are dying. For many, time stands still. For those combatting death, time flies by.

There is a family. A wife. A husband. A daughter. Two sons. It has been exactly twenty-nine days since any of them have left the house. 0.079 years. 0.952 months. 4.143 weeks. 29 days. 696 hours. 41,760 minutes. 2,505,600 seconds. Time is quantifiable. A considerable amount of time has passed, and although it does not feel that way, the numbers do not lie.

Time is a circle. Currently the circle of time is one day. 0.003 years. 0.033 months. 0.143 weeks. 1 day. 24 hours. 1,440 minutes. 86,400 seconds. They have lived this circle, this cycle, 29 times, and there is no end in sight.

The cycle goes something like this: Roll out of bed at nine o'clock. Eat a quick meal. Get to work, get to school, get on that Zoom call. Although time seems stagnant, it still governs their lives. If they miss their Zoom call, they will get reprimanded by their bosses, their teachers. When one call ends, the next begins. At twelve o'clock a break for lunch. The break is not long because, although time has stopped, the work sure has not. Back to work. The work finally comes to an end in the evening. At seven o'clock they will gather around the table for dinner. After dinner, a time to rest and relax after the hard work of the day. They play games, looking around and seeing tired smiles instead of looking blankly into a computer screen. At eleven o'clock they retire to their beds, only to wake up and do it all over again. The sun has set. It will be a new day tomorrow, yet the same as the day before.

While they have not left the house in twenty-nine days, others get up and head to the front lines. Time is not on these heroes' side. Time flies by as they rush to snatch people from the jaws of death. How they wish time would slow to a crawl, giving them the time they need to protect themselves, giving them a chance to develop and gather tools to save others.

For some, time moves painfully slow, but for others, time could not move slow enough. Regardless, time does pass. Time is the only constant, yet it is different than it has ever been before. The days of the week are irrelevant, there will be no going out to eat on Fridays, no church on Sundays, and no hump day on Wednesday. Everyone, whether they stay under the roof of their home or venture to buildings full of beeping monitors with refrigerated trucks parked in the back, will wonder what unfamiliar world they are living in.

Six months ago, this world could have only been a dream. They are all living in a dream.

A Bass Drummers' Salute

Drake Howard

I have known the pain that comes with a bass drum harness,
Rich in back pain for those who only drum for the prospect of marching
snare. The frustration of nine-lets, broken mallets, cold fingers,
All of this encompassed by incessant back pain,
That's enough to provide countless sleepless nights and chiropractic
alignments. To endure this all just for the idea of marching snare while being
Ridiculed for having it easy and humiliated for "not playing a real sport".
Looking back on it I can see all of these tormented souls,
Those who "aren't good enough" to play snare,
And I see handwork and determination through it all,
Through all the pain, Ibuprofen, and splinters,
The bass drummers will stick through it,
Marching to the beat of their own drum.

Path in the Clouds

Emma Littau

1 A photograph of marks in mist.
 It is a picture of nothing,
 yet of where something once was.
 The trails are the only proof of their existence,
 yet all that is needed to believe.
 So small /
 so vital /
 paths are so telling.
 Trails blazed cannot be erased.
 These signatures are permanent,
 captured in a photograph that will be evidence
 for eternity.

2 When I am
 gone from the world

will my

trail

still be

noticed

Was my life charged enough to

make a path

Have I paved a way through the

fog for those struggling to

be seen

Impact is important

But there is more to me than

what I leave behind

There is me.

If I cannot be recognized

as me

I hope my trail is enough

for me to be known

My aspirations are to leave a mark that
curves the world forward
While so many paths are
polarized with negativity
I will withstand
Forces
leave my own trail

Will I leave a mark on the world . . .

Will I leave a path in the clouds . . .

Will we be alright?

Nicole Dickson

Nothing Gold Can Stay.

The raindrops cling tightly to the wire screen

as the sun's happy rays smile from above.

It's Thursday, and Grandma's teaching me to bake.

They always say *no progress comes from perfection.*

Give yourself a chance,

but the struggle attacks more than just the soul.

If only I was capable of so much more.

The apple pie sizzles in the oven.

Personal

I think we'd all agree: first impressions are crucial. Judgments are made, stereotypes are placed, and assumptions about a person are written as fact. It's how we operate. But what about what lies beyond a first impression? From the time we started kindergarten, we were told to "never judge a man unless you've learned to walk in his shoes". So when did that all change?

In this segment of *The Mall*, first-year students are able to share their voices without any distractions. There are no judgments based on what shoes they might own, or stereotypes assigned on how they look, or assumptions about their personality concluded on their manner of expression. There are only their words, their stories, their talent.

Whether its mastering the ability to invoke empathy, as seen in the creative piece "Problem Dog," or sharing their triumph over pain, as seen in the inspiring "Chicken Nuggets," students use the wide array of lessons and techniques taught in their First Year Seminar courses to hone in on their true selves and own who they are.

We've decided to highlight these specific essays for a multitude of reasons, including their relatability, ability to evoke emotion, and outstanding talent in storytelling. Each piece within the following section has something unique to offer, and we hope they move you in the same way they moved us.

If you think Butler is a one-note campus, we beg to differ. The *Personal* section begins now.

Sincerely,
Karrington Tabor, Editor

I'm Always Too Late

Emily Schaller



Encompassed in two thirty-pound backpacks and almost an hour late, my father and I sprinted through Dulles International Airport on the way to gate A23. We were on our way from gate B76...the exact opposite side of the airport. Out of breath and uncharacteristically sweaty; we finally made it - just as the attendants were calling the last boarding group.

“Last call for the outgoing flight to Antwerp International Airport, this is the last call for boarding.”

We get ourselves situated on the plane, my father and I not sitting anywhere near the other, and lock eyes to share a slight head nod and an exasperated sigh. Surely wrapping myself in the scratchy, but somehow soft and comforting airline blanket and watching movies for eight hours will assist in my relaxation. Only, there is no screen on the back of my chair like there had been previously, but from my window seat in the back I can just barely make out the corner of a small screen hanging from the cabin ceiling. I have two choices. I can either make an attempt at sleeping or lean on the not-so-great smelling stranger beside me to watch whatever movie they are playing. Deciding on the former, I close my eyes just as I hear the stewardess once again.

“Thank you for joining American Airlines today, now sit back, relax, and enjoy your flight.”

After that whole ordeal in the airport, it was as if she could sense our diminishing stress. At least we weren't too late.



It was May 26 of 1940 that Operation Dynamo came to be. As the soldiers waited on the cold, blood-soaked beaches of Dunkirk, France, the admirals were devising a plan to get their soldiers back to England and back to relative safety. Weeks had gone by with no hope or promise of returning, but soon a large transporter ship arrived, reviving some of the light in the eyes of the soldiers. Wishing to be among the first of many to escape the desolate and dispiriting beach, soldiers ran, pushing each other out of the way; they could not wait. This was a matter of life and death. As the lucky few sailed off with high hopes, German blitzkrieg rained down upon them, destroying the ship and many onboard. It was now or never. After word had spread of the terror raining down in France, British fishermen and civilians packed their sailboats, attempting to be ready for the unimaginable. The colorful British flags removed from the sails, all entertainment gone and replaced with as many lifejackets as their dainty wooden frames could contain. This was war.

As the Little Boats prepared for a signal from Operation Dynamo, the fishermen paced along the piers shrouded with the telling overcast skies while the soldiers solemnly waited for something unknown. But they were all thinking the same thing.

“Hopefully it’s not too late.”



Finally able to actually relax as we settled into our secluded bed and breakfast, my dad and I took our time acclimating to the surroundings. There was a small, bright blue door located beside the house surrounded by elegant cherry blossom trees. And, when opened, the entire city of Bruges, Belgium was revealed. Crossing countless canals covered in bright blooming yellow flowers and meandering aimlessly down curving cobblestone streets, I found it. Belgian chocolate. We stumbled upon a spot in the road that smelled of the best chocolate ever made. Warm notes of cocoa and everything sweet wafted up and around us, encasing us in the scent. It was as if the rich scent of the chocolate carried us into the store because the next thing I knew we were walking out with an “I <3 Bruges” bag and twenty euros worth of chocolate.

Spotting a lonely white bench in the middle of the neighboring park, my father and I quickly make our way over, ready to indulge ourselves.

“Do you know which one you want?”

“Come on Father, don’t make me wait just choose one!”

As my dad picked one up and bit it in half, I watched as decadent caramel dripped from the other half. He looked at me and gestured I do the same. So

there we sat, not speaking, for at least twenty minutes, simply enjoying the sounds of the calm city and sharing in the delight of the best Belgian chocolate to be found. We then wound our way to a restaurant, packed to the brim with customers and happiness, making it impossible not to immerse ourselves. We happily ate our platefuls of fresh spaghetti and bread on our cramped corner table with no worries in the world. As the night sky began to darken its hue, we realized our time in this temporary bliss was over, and it was time to get back to the house. A quick walk back was all it took and from there on, all was well.

I thought.

I allowed myself the indulgence of a quick bath filled with zoonenbloem (sunflower) bubbles and wrapped myself up in the fuzzy robe with all intentions to sate myself with one final chocolate. Only I couldn't find them.

I had left the chocolates in the city.

Stumbling down the stairs, and completely falling down the last few, I let the news loose.

“Uhm, Father? You're going to be mad, but I'm pretty sure I left our chocolates under the table of that Italian restaurant.”

“You're not serious,” he questions as he immediately looks up the restaurant on his phone, “the restaurant closes in 8 minutes!”

I thought it would be gone forever due to my mistake, but when I looked back all I caught was a brief glimpse of my dad fleeing out the door on the way to retrieve our chocolate. So I sat, disheartened and ashamed on those last few stairs of the spiral staircase, not even wanting to take a glimpse out the window.

“There is no way he is going to make it, in a foreign country, in the dark, and rescue our chocolates,” I muttered to myself.

It was as if he was just waiting outside the house to hear me admit my desperation because when I looked up, there he was, smiling at his accomplishment with the bag hanging from his hand. Though I could sense a lingering tension in his smile, he still found the ability to gloat at me,

“Despite what you did, I made it! I was right on time.”



A fleet of approximately 700 small wooden boats, known as the Little Boats, sit, awaiting their call to action. Navy officers begin to file up and

down the pier, shouting essential information and orders to the brave civilians.

“It’s time to go! Go save those troops and bring them to safety!”

Loud cheers rang through the air as the quest came to its commencement. The men rushed to their respective boats, ready to save their men and their country. They took off, traveling down the English Channel and navigating to the shallow Dunkirk shores. The bleak sky never ceasing, almost as if it could sense what lay ahead. A small group of boats pushed into a strangely murky area of the waters where it was no longer blue, but black. It was oil. Looking further into the horizon the fishermen caught a glimpse of a decimated ship of their own and German Luftwaffe ruthlessly attacking. Having already braved the wrath of mines, bombs, and torpedoes, the Little Boats refused to turn back. They waited just in case. Then, from seemingly nowhere soldier’s heads began to emerge from the water. They were covered in oil and needed help getting into the boat and to safety before the sinking ship set them and everything nearby ablaze.

This was it.

Immediately getting to work with the equipped ropes, the sailors began their rescue. As many people as they could fit on the boat, comfortability was out of the window. The empty lifejackets now filled with the rugged soldiers of the war, these Little Boats turned back through the sludge of water and oil, returning those soldiers to safety.

The evacuation had begun, they had made it.



It was a new morning as my dad and I woke up to quiet chirping from the delicate orange and black birds perched in our window. As we carefully made our way down the treacherous spiral staircase; we were met with the warm and enticing smells of fresh, bright red berries, hand-squeezed orange juice, and warm Belgian waffles. How were we supposed to leave this wonderland? But we had to focus on our next task, not the latter. We sadly packed up our few belongings and set out to leave our perfect, secluded little world. But everything would be fine, because today was the day that we would reach Dunkirk, France.

45 miles.

That’s all that stood between me finally being able to stand atop the history-soaked sands of the Malo-les-Bains. The car came unequipped with an aux cord and English radio stations, but 45 miles? I’m sure my dad and I can figure some way to pass the time. We sit in silence for a few miles, staring out the window at the rolling plains of old forgotten pastures and overcast skies.

The fields break for a moment and I notice a large back up of cars in front of us. Normally this would be nothing but a simple inconvenience, but Dunkirk is only greatly visible at certain times of the day and I will not miss this.

“What do you think all of this traffic is for? Certainly all of these cars aren't on their way to the beach, let alone in March? It's cold outside!”

“I'm not sure, I sure hope that's not the case, or else we might miss low tide, and then you won't be able to see anything.”

My nerves raise, this was the one place on the trip that I had picked and planned, but here I sit, unable to contribute anything. I watch, picking at my fingernails and constantly twisting my hair as my father turns on the radio and listens intently.

“Il y a actuellement des retards sur la côte en raison des frappes environnementales mondiales qui se produisent dans le pays. Veuillez faire un détour.”

“I know I've taken three years of French, but what does that mean, Mr. “I have a degree in French”?”

He looks at me with a stern glare, and I cower back slightly, awaiting his prognosis.

“It looks like environmental strikes are causing road closures. We're going to find a detour.”

Off we set, exiting on the next ramp, ridden with anxiety and uneasiness - the grey skies once again mimicking the mood. But then I see it, a sign proudly displaying the name, Dunkerque. This is it; nothing is stopping us now.



The soldiers wait, cowering in the shadows provided not only by the dreary clouds layering the sky but from the war itself. Commotion is heard by the pier, causing blood and tear-stained faces to turn quickly and expectantly, awaiting their saviors. Only, it is just a smattering of warning missiles from the Germans, as if they hadn't seemed hopeless enough. All hope had gone. This had to be the end for them. No one was coming to save the soldiers; they had simply been sent here to die. And for what? All hopes of neutering the Germans had sunk as quickly as one of the British transport ships. There it is once again, slight commotion coming from the front of the waiting lines. No missiles are discernable, but there is something that is just barely visible through the thick fog of the Malo-les-Bains.

No. Not something.

Some things.

The front bows of at least 50 boats push through the thick fog to the rescue. Shouts and whistles are heard from every direction.

“Is that the Germans?”

“What is a little fishermen’s boat doing all the way out here? They do know that this is war, don’t they?”

“No! They’re beckoning at us. . . THEY’VE COME TO RESCUE US!”

Not wasting any time, soldiers pile into the ocean, and like fish in water, begin swimming towards the boats; starvation, sleep deprivation, and hopelessness forgotten, and instead the soldiers are filled with adrenaline. They pile into the boats, fitting like sardines in a can, and it becomes obvious who this is.

Fishermen and townsfolk out in the midst of war, braving the sea and any complications. Just to get to them.

“Settle in men, you’re safe now. We’re going to get you back home to Britain. It’s only about 95 kilometers. We’ll drop you all off and be right back out to rescue the others. Thank you for everything you’ve sacrificed for us so far, but it’s our turn to help you now.”

95 kilometers.

That was the only distance that now stood between imminent danger and the safety of home.



I sat, unsure of what to expect as we pulled up to the desolate and sandy parking lot. It wasn’t raining, but I anticipated a cool breeze and possible salt spray, so I pulled on my light raincoat, rain boots and got out of the car. In front of us stood a large old sign, made of decaying wood that illustrated the events of a war that took place 79 years ago. There, right next to the “you are here” dot, in big bold letters read, “Operation Dynamo”. As my dad and I stood, silently reading the sign, an older gentleman came slowly up the stairs, trailed by his trusty golden retriever. Being that we are in Europe, the man didn’t return my smile, but thankfully his dog was there to return the exchange.

“So, what do you say, Em? Are you ready to stand where your boy Harry Styles stood?”

“I know you think I just like this place because Harry was in the movie but come on! Look at all of this history, man! Let’s go, maybe you’ll be the one to see Harry.”

We make it down the rickety steps and onto the beach. We had finally made it. The beach spanned for miles and met with the ocean amicably in dark

contrast. It was low tide and all of the small tide pools were overflowing with shells and salty water. Edging ever-further into the sands the breeze is gone. The wind is not, however. Out of nowhere, the wind came at us at full force, almost bowled me over. The wind and sand together created a hypnotizing rolling effect that made the beach look even more open and desolate than it was. I planted my feet more firmly in the sand this time and set out to my father who was hundreds of feet in front of me, seemingly heading to the middle of the ominous water.

“Where are you going?”

“WHAT? I CAN’T HEAR YOU OVER THE WIND.”

I give up on my attempt at communicating with him and push through the harsh winds. As I get closer, I can see that my dad had finally stopped, so I walked as quickly as I could whilst bracing myself against the winds. That’s when I saw it. Sitting in the middle of the sand was what looked just like a jumble of garbage, but upon further examination was the outline of a shipwreck. On it was a barnacle-covered sign that had been bolted down years ago.

“The Crested Eagle”.

This ship, decimated and forlorn, rested in front of me in a heap. There had been real soldiers here, real parts of the war, and here it was just laying amidst the shores of this isolated beach. The plaque spoke of the perils of the war, but also of the brave men who risked their lives in Operation Dynamo saving more than 300,000 soldiers. I am overcome by all of the intense information that has been thrown at me and am unsure of how to process it all. We had made it, the Malo-les-Bains, and all I could do was stand and picture the endless lines of soldiers on the sand desperately waiting for anyone, while the Germans mercilessly attacked them. But now it was just us. The lines of soldiers were gone, some having returned home, and some in this very beach. We were alone with nothing but the history surrounding us.

Finding Faith in the Unknown

Rachel Morand

I couldn't reach the microphone. They had to bring out a small stool—which looked horribly out of place on the austere altar—just so I could see over the podium. As I stepped up to begin speaking, I looked out into the countless pews and saw the beaming faces of my relatives. I didn't know why my First Communion was such a big deal. I was also unaware of ever having agreed to deliver the first Bible reading; my mom must have volunteered me. My assigned verse came from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy. The section was about how the word of the Lord is more fulfilling than bread, but all that stood out to me was the mention of serpents and scorpions.

As I began to recite the words, I thought about how, in a few minutes, I would receive the wafer and wine that my parents had explained to me were Jesus' own body and blood. Suddenly, I was filled with doubt about the ceremony. I wanted to jump down the marble steps and take refuge in the parking lot, but it would be many years before I would work up the courage to actually act on my uncertainty.

I didn't realize it then, but that uneasy feeling was a self-realization: I don't want my views spelled out for me. Instead, I yearn to discover the great mysteries of existence based on my own life's journey. However, I find myself relentlessly chained to those beliefs which have been imposed on me since childhood. My personal struggle has shown me that all humans seek to understand the gravity of their individual universes, yet it is intensely challenging, if not impossible, to completely undo the tethers of worldly influence and explore the vastness of our own minds.

It's hard to pinpoint an area in my life that Catholicism hasn't affected: my eldest brother is going to be a priest, my dad proposed to my mom in church, and we all went to a religious camp for seven years. I was completely immersed in the faith. One of the main ways this devotion impacted me was through religious education. Every week, I would go to my church and learn some aspect of the catechism. I heard Bible stories until they were second nature, reeled off saints more easily than presidents, and formed

my sense of morality from the Ten Commandments. I never even considered anything else to be the basis of what I regarded as ethical. It wasn't until middle school that I started to form independent thoughts concerning philosophy and justice, and I found that I didn't agree with many of the Catholic teachings that had been presented to me.

My old youth group leader once explained to us that people of other religions cannot reach salvation. When I questioned my mother about this exclusivity, she told me that only the Catholic faith is the truth, and everyone else is misguided. One time, I attended a Mass during which the priest spent the majority of the service asserting that tolerance is evil because it excuses sin. Another instance, at a retreat, a deacon asked us to pray for the sanctity of marriage, since the sacrament was being corrupted by the manipulation of Satan. As I reflected on these experiences, and many others, I wondered how a religion that worships a God of love and believes everyone is made in His image can be so unaccepting of other people and their differences.

The more I unpacked my misgivings about Catholicism's hypocritical perspectives, the more uncertain I became about everything I had been taught. I wasn't sure if my concerns were valid or if the devil was trying to lead me astray—I was always told Satan was the sower of doubt. I was stuck between wanting to live my own truth by respecting the diversity of all people and trying to live by the principles of my birth faith because I was too scared of losing the world I grew up in to completely let go. The universe, as I had been conditioned to see it, no longer made sense. For my entire life, I had leaned on the crutches of other people's beliefs, and one day, as I began to comprehend my deviation, that support vanished. I felt like Atlas: I was suddenly alone in holding the colossal weight of my world.

I didn't know where to begin in trying to untangle the web of my newfound ideas. One concept that stood out to me as a priority was loving and seeking to understand all people, but it felt as though I would be betraying my family and my background. It was a terrifying and isolating experience; I was torn between the comfort of the doctrine I had grown up with and the tremendous mystery of concepts I had not yet explored. Everything I had accepted, for so long, as the truth was no longer definitive. I entered a mild identity crisis: I knew that I wanted to seek an intimate understanding of my existence, but after more than a decade of being told where to look, I didn't know how.

I often found myself falling back into the patterns of reasoning that arose from my childhood lessons; I would use Catholicism as the standard against which my actions and judgements were measured. Despite these past setbacks, I still strive to look objectively at life's questions and form my own, untainted answers. However, I'm starting to recognize that the pure, impartial mindset I desire is extremely elusive.

It is incredibly difficult to truly free one's mind from the clutter of connections built up from the past. We all have some preconceived notions that we are condemned to carry. This struggle might make a quest to discover a personal insight into existence seem fruitless, but I believe that it is better for everyone to attempt to explore the metaphysical perplexities that are often presented by religion than to embrace for fact an interpretation that someone hands to him. Even though we are undeniably influenced by outside forces, we are still individuals. Each of us experiences life a different way. We endure unique trials, celebrate particular successes, and react in distinctive ways. Reality is subjective. It is not reasonable to apply one rigid set of principles to a group of people and expect perfect contentment. There will always be discrepancies in thought because humans are naturally diverse.

Nevertheless, as I saw firsthand, it is not easy to find one's place in the infinite spectrum of ideologies. The reality remains that we are all tied to external opinions that impede our journey toward insight. We cannot ignore or hide from these shackles. Instead, we must acknowledge our attachments and work to move past them. I have found that the problem lies not in our inability to pursue liberation but in our unwillingness to do so. It is easy to remain complacent in a single standard of reasoning; the sense of familiarity can mask dissatisfaction. We, as humans, are innately frightened of the unknown, but exploring this fear is the only way discoveries can be made. In order to understand what the universe means to us, we must let go, unconditionally, of everything we know. If we can achieve this break from our prejudices, we can reach the almost-unattainable goal of seeing life as only we can see it.

I have not yet fulfilled this objective, and I'm not sure if I'll ever be able to. Catholicism is so thoroughly embedded into my mind that pieces of the faith could reside in me forever. Still, I will try my best to distance myself from the biases I have acquired and delve wholeheartedly into the expanse of my own reflection. The microphone is finally within my reach; I will profess words that I choose, even if I don't yet comprehend what I'm saying. When I realized that I was holding up my own world, I was completely overwhelmed with the burden. Now, I think that in order to be free, I need to let go and trust that amidst the chaos of the fall, I will find what I'm looking for.

Chicken Nuggets

Hamzat Ipesa-Balogun

March 15, 2019 2:20 AM

A slight jolt sends a shockwave throughout your system. Your eyes slowly shutter open. The hospital room appears to be fuzzy. A slight haze clouds your vision. One. Two. Three. You try to blink away the cloudiness. Once your vision is clear enough, you begin to analyze what is happening. You see everyone rushing toward her. Putting two plus two together, you realize what is going on. As your body springs forward toward the hospital bed, you feel a slight ping of guilt. You remember you promised yourself that you wouldn't fall asleep. You remember you wanted to be awake for EVERY last second. You quickly push this negative feeling away, once you reach the hospital bed. Her face looks so calm and peaceful as if she was just sleeping. Your jaw rapidly moves up and down, trying to repeat the words that everyone else is saying. La ilaha il Allah¹ La ilaha il Allah, La ilaha il Allah. This one phrase is all you can say, as your mind is still trying to connect the dots of what is truly happening. Your gaze gradually raises toward the hospital monitor. Your eyes lock onto the heart rate monitor and the numbers quickly begin to drop. 10, 9, 8, ... 0. And before you were able to catch your breath, she was gone.

Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un²

October 12, 2018 10:03 AM

¹ There is no God, but Allah. When someone is about to pass away, their loved ones try to remind them to say this. Because Muslims believe whoever says this La ilaha il Allah on their death bed, with absolute sincerity, will go to Jannah (Heaven).

² "To Allah we come from and to him we shall return". This is apart of the 156th ayah of Surah Baqarah. This a phrase that Muslims say when a person passes away.

A sigh escapes your lips, as you glance over this assignment. Throughout your years of taking PLTW³ courses in high school, you are getting used to the fake medical scenarios they give you to solve. But that doesn't make them any less stupid. You don't care for Sally-Ann, who is diagnosed with Tuberculous or even the Williams family with some unknown disease. Time and time again, you wonder why you must read about these fake scenarios. Putting down your pencil, you begin to wonder about the college applications you have to do. A warm feeling envelops your body and a slight grin is displayed on your face.

October 13, 2018 11:43 PM

Okay, this is the plan. You're on fall break now, which gives you enough time to complete the applications you are working on. Without fail, you successfully hype yourself up for the upcoming work. By doing this, you become very determined to finish everything by the "early action" deadlines. Okay, that "was" your plan, and this is what happened. After one of your family's regular prayer sessions, she sits down with you and your family for a meeting. A slight smile forms on your face, because your family never has formal meetings. And I mean never. So, you know big news is coming. Maybe you are taking a big family vacation to Mecca. Maybe your family is going to get you a \$100,000,000 gift card to Foot Locker. The possibilities are endless. She begins to explain what the meeting is about. The childish grin quickly turns into a somber frown. You hear nothing of a family vacation or new basketball shoes. Instead unknown medical terminology drowns your ear canal. And by the end of her explanation, you want to cry your heart out. What in the world is this disease anyway? You're waiting for the punch line. You're waiting for the April fools' prank. No matter how long you wait, there was no punch line. All of the fake medical scenarios we study in class finally rush at you. Sally Ann is no longer a fake person. She is in the same position as them now. This is cannot be real life.

Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un

A random April evening in my sophomore or freshman year. 2016 7:13 PM

As soon as the last basketball drill is over, your body says listen up: "you have been working me all day, time for revenge." You reach down to take off your Kyries and the soreness begins. Your foot touches the hardwood floor and the aching begins. Right, left, right. You try to coordinate your movements but to no avail. You are practically limping of the basketball court, wondering if your coach is a coach or a professional torturer. Truth be told, you suck it

³ Project Lead the Way. These are the medical classes that I took throughout my four years of high school.

up and trudge into the silver Toyota Corolla. Once you sit down and get your bearings, you and her lock eyes and a huge smile makes its way to your face. Driving after basketball practices with her is the best. You always have the funniest conversations about pretty much anything. On this particular day, you are driving down the backroads of speedway. You know, with horses, farmland, corn. The basic Indiana stuff. Anyway, you don't remember what made her say the word "sheriff", but after you heard it, you lost it. Your body bursts into uncontrollable laughter. Your eyes burst into lachrimation. Your arms burst into a frantic failing motion. You have almost forgotten about your beat-up body. When you finally calm down, you ask her to repeat it one more time. And again, she says "sheriff?". Your cheeks puff up to hold back your laughter. Alvin and the Chipmunks will feel ashamed if they see my face. You then say, "No, no, no its Sheriff not sheriff." She turns to you in utter bewilderment. Realizing that she has no idea what you're talking about. You go on a five-minute tangent about how her Nigeran accent causes her to say this word wrong. Even though most people will just ignore your cheeky behavior, she finds it amusing. In fact, she finds it is so amusing that she begins to laugh as well. Moreover, for the rest of the car ride, you try to explain to her how to pronounce the word "sheriff". At least your pronunciation anyway. Most people probably wouldn't notice the difference between diction, but you know you did. At least, you think you did.

Time flies when you are having fun
Summer or Spring 2019 10:43 AM

You readily open the green book. This book is written by the greatest author, so you are legitimately excited. You arm yourself with your orange highlighter, ready to mark up the text. This is the best. After the events of March 15th, you have been determined to get closer to God and become more religious. A new flame of motivation ignites your soul. You already consider yourself very religious, but everyone has room to improve: Because no human being is perfect after all. Moreover, you have begun to study the Holy Quran more: in the English text. You realize that up until now, you have just memorized surahs⁴, just to memorize them. You haven't really put much thought into it: until now. In the past that was enough for you. But now you actually want to understand what God says. You genuinely want to understand what you are reciting in prayers. NO MORE AUTOPILOT. You have been going through the motions for so long, but no longer will you make that mistake. I mean it only makes sense. Why look for advice, when you have the greatest advisor ever. God. He is the one that made you, so of course, he knows what will bring you peace and happiness and what will not. You feel like you have been

⁴ These are the chapters that the Quran is divided in. There are 114 surahs in the Wise Quran.

stupid all your life because the answer was right there in your face: But you just didn't see it. Through studying the Wise Quran, you find numerous passages that stick out to you. However, the ayahs that stick out to you the most are ayahs 150-157 in Surah Baqarah⁵. The meaning itself is beautiful, but there is something else to it. Something that makes you naturally gravitate toward it. Something.

Allah created time, so he has control over it.

March 14, 2019 7:48 AM

Yeah, that was tougher than I thought. This thought runs through your head as you pop down into your chair in your first period English class.

You just spent your morning explaining to each one of your high school teachers about your family situation. All of their reactions were the same. At the start, they were glancing between you, a computer screen, a piece of paper, or something like that. And by the end, their eyes were as wide as the moon and they have no idea what to say. *Even though these teachers each heard this story for the first time, you had to repeat it six times, which was really difficult.*

You think back to you to your older sister's, Halimat, advice.

She told you to email them instead of telling them in person because it might be rough. At the time, you thought sending an email would be lame.

However, now it doesn't seem like such a bad idea.

I mean the advice came from big sis. I mean she was eighth in her graduating class and she went to Smith College.

Moreover, you consider her an elitist and a savant. Halimat is pretty much the general of the household. Scientifically, you see her as a macrophage or NK cell⁶. After you finish your sister's criteria list, you still think you did this the right way. *Because this is a subject that should be told in person.* Anyway, you take out your bright red spiral notebook and one of your random pencils that have been stowed away in your backpack and put them on the table.

Your hand reaches forward to open your notebook, but one of your classmates asks you, "did you get the Dual Credit Anatomy homework done?"

In an instant, your body sweats bullets, not because of the homework. But because you forgot to tell your anatomy teacher about you know who's situation. You explode out of your chair and dash out of class: leaving a trail of dust behind. Think Sonic the Hedgehog. You fly into the Usain Bolt sprint as you try to climb upstairs by skipping three steps at a time until you get to the third floor. Now standing in front of the door to your anatomy class, your breath is now hesitant and hitched. But you grasp the door handle anyway

⁵ This is second chapter of the Quran and the longest surah.

⁶ Natural Killer

and open the door. A sea of freshmen is waiting for you inside. Their stares almost burn a hole into your cranium. Almost. You shrug off their stares and speed walk to your teacher and get her attention. Your mouth lowers, to begin the same spiel for the seventh time, but nothing comes out. Realizing that this would be a serious conversation, your teacher asks if you want to go outside and talk. You agree to this and both of you move into the adjacent lab room. Now inside the lab room, your mouth moves into a fluttering motion and you explain the dilemma the best way you can. Your teacher has always been a person that anyone can root for. She is extremely scatterbrained, but she tries her best which is admirable. When she hears about what your family debacle. You see her heartbreak into two. Howbeit you barely know this woman, she pulls you into an embracing hug. However, she quickly let's go, which you find pretty funny. Looking at her face, her facial features turn from worried to disbelief, to bewilderment.

She hesitates a little and then skeptical says, “You. You seem really calm and you are handling this well.” She is almost implying that you are a robot or something. Regardless, your eyes raise slowly, so you can look her dead in the eyes and retort, “Yeah, I feel like I have been prepared for this my whole life”.

Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un
December 20, 2018 7:56 PM

You watch her slowly move out of the room. *She has lost a lot of weight.* She appears to be weaker than she used to be. However, she is still as vibrant and beautiful as usual. You notice that she is still wearing them on her feet, which surprises you. They are really old. They are really worn out. They are really uncomfortable because you got the wrong size. But she still wears them to this day. *These simple house slippers that you bought for her birthday are still being worn.* You think to yourself. Although she has a lot of house slippers to choose from, she still wears the old black and white fluffy ones with a broken end and wrong shoe size. A feeling of overall astonishment wraps around you. This is how she has always been; she always does these selfless acts to make others feel better. *You have never met a human being like her.* Just seeing this woman on a daily basis puts ease in your heart. She is coolness of your eyes. She is your.....

Time flies by when you are having fun
September 27, 2019 8:48

You find yourself listening to the Khutbah⁷ that you recorded on March 15th. It feels nice to hear someone talk about her in a positive light. Usually,

⁷ These are the sermons that are given on Jummah.

Khutbahs are not about a person's life unless they are a prophet or someone like that. So, it gives you a sense of pride to hear her being praised in such a manner. Because she lived her life in a way that could inspire anyone. She is such a great person and any good that comes her way is well deserved. The Imam⁸ appears to be concluding his sermon, so your hand reaches toward the electronic device, so you can turn it off. Having said that, you notice that there is still some time left in the audio recording. So, you let it play a little bit longer. After reciting Surah Fatihah⁹, you hear the imam recite some more verses and continues with the prayer: like usual. You freeze. *Hold on a second.* Even though you haven't mastered the Arabic language yet. You are still able to pick up a few words. Sabr and Salah. Steadfastness and prayer. Your hands launch forward toward the English translation of the Quran on your desk. Your fingers rapidly flip through the pages until you reach the desired page. *It can't be.*

A few weeks later your Imam, Imam Ahmad, comes to Butler for an event. He is an extremely knowledgeable person and very humble at the same time. Weird right? You don't find people like that nowadays. In any case, you play the recording for him and ask what part of the Quran he recited on the 15th of March. Just by listening, he can pinpoint what the verse is. Which is pretty incredible because the Quran has over 6,000 ayahs. At first, he makes a mistake though, he thinks it was ayahs 45-46 in Surah Baqarah. But when he got gets a second listen, his face changes. The rhythmic words of God swirl around him and enter his auditory canal. he reveals that the verses are actually ayahs 153-157, not 45-46. A sense of something you can't describe invades your entire being. A feeling of humor. A feeling of melancholy. A feeling of disbelief. Maybe a little bit of all three. You think back to the ayahs that you naturally gravitated toward.

They were the same ones used that day. No wonder you felt that so strongly about them.

But the question is how can someone who doesn't know much Arabic, able to make that kind of connection? God knows.

Time just rolls by without a care in the world.
March 15, 2019 4:05 AM

⁸ Islamic religious leader that leads the prayer and in charge of most religious activities or events.

⁹ Al Fatihah means the "The Opening" and this is the first surah of the Quran. This surah is recited in every Salah prayer.

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. For the first time in your life, your mind is completely blank. No thoughts about the Pacers' game. No thoughts about an upcoming test. No thoughts about what you want to eat for breakfast. Nothing. One step after another, your body silently takes you out of the hospital room. Now outside, your upper back leans against the tan walls of IU West Hospital. Your gaze zeros onto the room number. 3132. A melancholy chuckle is all you can do as you remember asking her what her favorite number was so long ago. You remember that it is the #9. You look at the numbers one more time and add them up $3+1+3+2=9$. You feel that this is fitting for her. With most of your family starting to file out of the hospital room. It is time to go home. You go in the elevator. You take two rights and a left. You walk down a looooooong corridor and you're out. The cool morning air stings your face. But you don't care. You and your brothers load up into the yellow Volkswagen buggy that you despise so much. But you don't care. You are on the road heading home, but is it truly home without her?

Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un
February 12, 2019 3:45 PM

Aye, today you have an interview with the University of Pennsylvania. Did you prepare for it at all? Nope. But to be fair, you can generally carry a conversation about pretty much anything. So, it shouldn't be that bad. Besides you are going to be talking about yourself, so you know a lot about this interview topic. *Yeah, I am just gonna wing this one. Whatever happens, happens.* This is what you think as you walk out of the bathroom. Suddenly, a blaring siren punches its way past your Pinna and deep into your auditory canal. Your body takes you towards the nearest window and you gently spread open the blinds, so you can see. A bright red ambulance and fire truck are making their way down the street. As you always do, you pray that they will reach their destination safely. The cars appear to be slowing down. You blink once. The cars appear to still be slowing down. You blink twice. *Maybe the neighbors are having a situation or something.* The cars come to a screeching stop in front of your house. Your jaw crashes onto the floor, you let go of the blinds, you race downstairs. You practically trip over yourself as you race down the staircase. *Well, looks like no interview for me today.*

Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un
Sometime between 5th grade to 8th grade. 2011-2014 11: 15 AM

The judges are scrambling to tally the points so, they can declare who the grand champion is. This is the most disorganized karate tournament that you have ever been to. But to give them their credit, you have only been to like three of them so far. The lead judge is a young man in a long sleeve dress shirt and black tie, which accompanies dark dress pants. He quickly

announces, “Hzxy myt Iswka-Blogrpjn step forward.” *If you had a dollar for every time someone mispronounces your name, you would be richer than Jeff Bezos. I mean my God, it’s not that hard. Wait, hold on a second was that your name that he TRIED to pronounce. Can’t be. Not connecting the dots, your head turns to the right then to the left. No one moves. Oh snap! That was your name he TRIED to pronounce. Your body slowly inches forward and the main judge hands you the trophy. Your arms reach out and your hands gently wrap around the golden figure. You pull your arms back and take a step back, so you can stand next to the rest of the competitors. You think about whether you should be happy or not. I did win, but he butchered the cheesecakes out of your name. By the time, the judges dismiss you, any negative feelings turn into fleeting ones and the positivity takes over. You race up the bleachers and thrust the trophy into her face, so she can see it. She appears happy at first, but her face curves into a suspicious expression and asks, “So how did they say your name again?”*

Time flies when you are having fun.

March 13, 2019 9:57PM

Shoot. I tried. Dad tried. Granny tried. Big Sis tried. Her sister tried. Your oldest brother tired. None of us no matter how hard we tried, could get her to open her eyes. The doctors predict that she will pass away on the 14th, but we all want to see her open her eyes, one last time. We all tried, but to no avail. Well, all of us but one. My dad calls up my middle older brother, Azeem, to come forward and give it a try. Now let me tell you about my older brother Azeem. He is one of the most patient and “chillest” guys you have ever met. I mean like freezing rain chill; he is an overall great human being to be around. Moreover, he has Autism, he is not Autistic. Autism is something he has, but it’s not a character trait. You always hear the word Autistic and dislike it because people let that define people with Autism, which is foolish. Anyway, because of said Autism, his speech isn’t always “clear”. Whatever that means. Anyway, you and your family always notice Azeem’s key phrases that he uses like “Excuse me” and “Carry on”. When it’s his turn to bat, he tries to gently nudge her awake and call her by what he knows her as, but to no avail. You can see that he is starting to get irritated, so you think that he should just stop. But you underestimate your big brother. All it takes is one of Azeem’s famous catch phrases: Excuse me. As soon as he says that, her eyes fly open. As if her biological instinct kick into overdrive. This phrase that she probably remembers hearing hundreds of times, is all she needs to open her eyes. It is honestly a miracle. It is really a powerful moment for you.

We had all tired and the one person that was counted out, came in and scored the game-winning buzzer-beater. Truly a masterpiece.

Time flows just like a river. Never stopping for anyone. Make memories while you can.

A random Sunday in your 2017 or 2018 2:27 PM

Your heart fills with excitement and joy. Your body is shaking uncontrollably. Imagine what will happen to a regular person's body, after eating a gazillion cookies and washing it down with sprite. That is, you times five and a half. She looks over to you and gestures you to calm down, because you are just going to basketball practice. She always tells me that you treat this basketball thing too seriously and it's not a do or die affair. Honestly, you are only understanding this now. She slows the car down and stops because of a red light. In front of you is Dixon Funeral home, which you don't really pay any attention to. She then turns left, and you refocus on basketball.

The hands of time cannot turn back.

September 26, 2019 9:12 PM

New people. New food. New responsibilities. New environment. This college thing sucks so far. Like really sucks. *Butler no offense, it's been real, it's been fun. But it hasn't been real fun.* In any case, you begin to formulate a list of things you like at Butler.

1. The prayer rooms in Jordan Hall
2. The squirrels
3. HRC
4. The squirrels
5. The professors. Shout out to my man Nick.
6. THE SQUIRRELS
7. There is no #7 because everything is trash after that. Just kidding, you have met a few decent people, so they can be 7.
8. Did you mention the squirrels?
9. Vacant
10. Vacant

On the other hand, you are hopeful in God that things will get better.

Recently, you study and learn about many religious figures in Islam. *And a lot of them had hard lives. Like really hard lives, "not like my phone died it's the end of the world" hard.* Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)¹⁰, *Prophet Abraham (PBUH)*, and *Mary (RA)*¹¹, *the mother of Jesus (PBUH)*, all had pretty tough instances in their lives.

¹⁰ Peace be upon him is a prayer that is said after the name of any prophet of Allah.

¹¹ Radi Allah Anha is prayer that means may Allah be pleased with her. This is used after the names of female companions of the prophets, people who are mentioned the Quran, or Siraa (the story of prophet Muhammad (PBUH)).

So, you draw on them for inspiration. Even you know who, *who just passed away*, fits this category. She is the most religious person you have ever met. *I mean the doctors said, "you only have so many days to live". And she responded, "That's what you say, let's see what God says".*

Yeah, that's pretty religious there, folks. You begin to remember the moments where you see her patiently preserve through her trial and these moments teach you something. *You can be dissatisfied with your situation, but still have a great relationship with God.* For some reason, you always thought those things were mutually exclusive. Because you believed that dissatisfaction is akin to ungratefulness. Which is 100% false by the way. Now realizing this, you take all your pent-up frustration and hop unto a twin-sized bed. You whip out your iPhone and begin texting the same number that you always contact in case of an emergency. You always call this number, when you want to snitch on your siblings. You always call this number when she takes too long to get home. And at this moment, your digits are slamming against this screen. You are pouring in all of your feelings and emotions. Your concerns and frustrations. After the message is complete, your left thumb hits the send button. Knowing that no matter how long you wait, there will be no response.

Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un

March 15, 2019 2:05 PM

You're sitting in the building that you have been in all your life. The same striped carpets alternating between green and tan. The Islamic architecture elements are the same. The domes and pointed arches, the whole nine. You are sitting in the same Masjid Al-Fajr, but it's not the same. Usually, when you dress up you feel really good. Today, you are wearing a brand-new gray suit. But your shoulders are slouched, and you are infected with the blues. You are not the happiest guy right now, and the fact that her body will be shortly delivered by the Dixon Funeral Home, doesn't help at all. Today's Jummah is kind of rough. *I have been to numerous Jummahs¹² in your life, but today is just different.* Imam Ahmed starts his Khutbah and he explains the travesty in New Zealand. You and your family truly didn't hear anything about the New Zealand travesty until now. Even though you are 8,347 miles away from New Zealand, you can empathize with the suffering families. Why? Because you also lost a loved one today. The Imam begins to wrap up his sermon and the prayer begins. The Muslims in the room begin to stand up one after another. They form long rows that extend all the way to the back of the Masjid. The

¹² A special prayer on Fridays where Muslims congregate at a Masjid (house of God where worship is done). There is a sermon that is done and a prayer at the end.

Iqama¹³ is called, and the prayer begins, like in any other prayer in Jama'ah¹⁴. He recites Surah Fatihah like any other salah prayer. After the collective congregation says "Ameen"¹⁵, Imam Ahmed begins to recite his ayahs of choice.

<https://bit.ly/2Ofldpq16> - [Following this link leads to the audio file]

Although you are an absolute novice in Arabic, the words create a reaction within you, something deep down. Liquid Sadness leaks from your lacrimal ducts and slowly drips down to your mandible and stains your peach fuzz bread. These words pierce me. These words dissect me, deeper than any possible weapon.

Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un

May 19, 2019 7:49 PM

You sit across from your rival. You and he engage in one of your many intellectual conversations about life. *Earlier you said that Azeem is the chilliest guy you know, but this adversary of yours is the coolest guy that you know.* Like too cool for school. He can pretty much beat you in anything. You usually have the upper hand in fighting games like Super Smash Bros. But he wrecks you in pretty much any game that involves strategy. You swear to dunk on him at least one time in his lifetime. If you were the protagonist, he would be the antagonist or antihero depending on the day. You can wish to throw a flurry of roundhouse kicks to his esophagus, but still, look up to him as one of your role models. Yes, you are talking about your older brother, Ahmed. Not to be mixed up with Imam Ahmed. *God willingly, Ahmed will reach that Imam status though.* Nevertheless, You two are in a conversation about the recent events in the family. You tell him that everything came really fast. So fast, that you didn't have the time to register everything. Moreover, you say that you just want one more thing. You want to hear her talk to you, just one more time. It could be a piece of advice, or maybe laughter, or even getting yelled at to sweep the floor. You just want something. *To be honest, you haven't even prayed for this because you think it is impossible.*

Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un

June 8, 2019 11:15 AM

¹³ Signifies the start to the prayer

¹⁴ Praying in a congregation

¹⁵ After Surah Fatihah is recited, Muslims says "Ameen" at the end because this surah is a prayer asking for God's help and seeking his guidance.

¹⁶ These ayahs that are recited are 153-157 in Surah Baqarah.

Dude, you did all that work for this? No way! *You can't tell me that all those late nights studying, the anatomy of a human body or practicing calculus problems was, for this.* You honestly think this is one of the stupidest things, you have ever done. You walk on a stage when they TRY to pronounce your name and you get a piece of paper. That's IT. You are sitting at your high school graduation, wondering what the importance of all of this is. *This ceremony is probably one of the most overrated things that you have ever seen in recent memory.* Now you are grateful to God that you had the opportunity to graduate high school. That isn't the problem. The problem is that you must sit through this long ceremony in the HOT sun. You are practically an ice cream cone melting in the scalding heat. Man, if your older brother Azeem wasn't walking with you today, then you would have tried to find some type of excuse to get out of this. At any rate, after all the funky charades are done and you are FINALLY freed, you want to go home. There is a problem though. Your family wants to take pictures. You are not the biggest fan of pictures. In fact, you dislike them strongly. But on the other hand, you love your family. So, you make the sacrifice and take like a gazillion pictures. Even though it is probably only 50, it feels like a gazillion. Ahmed can almost smell your irritation in the air, so he graciously saves you and Azeem from the mayhem. Next, you and your brothers climb into that yellow buggy again. You don't even have time to think about your disdain of this car, because you are just happy that you are heading home. Once you get home, you can finally start on the fun stuff. You are, by no means, enthusiastic about that fatuous ceremony. However, you are enthusiastic about the food that comes with it. The house is decked out in Chick-Fil-A catering, chicken nuggets, chicken sandwiches, biscuits, you name it. But that wasn't all, your sister orders a double décor cookie with butterscotch icing. *Will you eat yourself into a food coma?* Regardless, you can't wait to dive in. At this time, the rest of your family has come home. They remind you of the box, you must open. It is a time capsule that you made in kindergarten. *Your teacher told you not to open it until you graduate high school, and by the grace of God, here you are today.* You take the box out of the pantry and put it on the kitchen table. Your finger turns into scissors as you shred away the wrapping. Before you open the box you actually remember some of the things that you put inside. *For example, you remember that you put a Pokémon card and a picture of yourself in there.* With the brown wrapping gone, the Nike shoebox is now bare. Your family crowd around you to see what is inside. Your hands gradually lift up the box. *Is the drama building yet?* You fling the box open and you acknowledge some cool items like your stuffed frog toy and the Pokémon cards. Beneath the miscellaneous are the important items. Once you discover these items, this experience turns from leisure to the best day of your life. You notice an envelope and turn it over. It has your name on it, with a line that forms a heart on the bottom. You didn't even need to open the letter to recognize what this is. *All you needed was to see the handwriting. You*

have seen this handwriting hundreds of times. You saw it on field trip permission slips, lunch money checks, shopping lists, etc. Even though she was a pharmacist, her handwriting almost appeared as a physician's. Yes, it is her handwriting. Your mother's. You wonder how something like this is possible. It can only be called a miracle of God. This graduation day started off as an absolute travesty, but now it has turned into something that you will treasure for the rest of your days. You have never felt more grateful in your life. Allah has come up clutch in your life before, but nothing like this. Who could have planned something like this except God? This situation increases your resolve to deepen your faith.

By the time you are done reading the letter, you realize you inherited something. It's not something that is measurable. It's not something that is quantitative. Yet, it's something truly significant. You inherited your mom's inner will to patiently preserve through any difficulty. You inherited your mom's fearless attitude that allows her to be relentless, no matter what the odds may say. More importantly, you inherited the faith that your mom passed down to you. She passed the torch down to you. There is no way you can drop the ball now. You miss her, but you have work to do, so you don't miss her in the next life.

Inna Allaha ma'aa sabirin¹⁷

¹⁷ For God is with the Steadfast. This is found in Surah Baqarah Ayah 153.

The Well

Lydia Zidan

I came upon a well in a snowbank, just frozen over. Grey fish with grey scales swam beneath the surface. Their writhing bodies collided and intertwined in the cramped well. Despite this, the scene was serene. I traced my finger around the edge of the well, and a red-faced man poked his head out of the window of a nearby kitchen, explaining, “You pick what you eat”. My father was delighted at the concept of fresh fish on a cold, Austrian December morning. Lacking a similar affinity for seafood, I returned to the well and peered over the lip, below the ice. The grey fish continued to swim, unaware that with the point of a finger, they were doomed to the heat of a skillet. My father pointed to a fat lively one and as fast as it came into the well, it was whisked away by a green net. In the thirty minutes the chef’s work would take to make that fish a meal for my father, I became acquainted with their world. I scrutinized it and compared it to my own.

 Their world: Grey fish, grey stone and a grey sky muddled and blurred by ice.

 My world: White smoke billowing from the chimney of the kitchen, the red brick matching the red cheeks of my mother, the green of the fir surrounding the estate, the soft pink slippers of the ballerina who had performed the nutcracker the night before, the pale yellow sugar cookies that would decorate the bedpost Christmas morning, the plaid stockings on the mantel and the slate bodies of the fish.

 Shocked by their meager conditions, I assigned roles to the fish, gave them jobs and families. One would be the mother, another—the smallest—the child, and a third—the biggest—the father. They were firefighters, veterinarians and doctors, all jobs I had learnt about in primary school. Despite their newfound meaning, the grey fish continued to swim undisturbed. Peering down into that their world, I could see their existence for what it was, and they could not. So, to make their sad state more palatable to myself, I had imagined to the best of my ability a reality I deemed meaningful, the only one I had known

in my seven years. Looking back upon that day, I realize that, like the fish, we all live within borders, both physical and transparent. To be aware of these limitations is to suffer. To remedy this suffering, we turn to the imagination to give our lives meaning and the illusion of freedom.

As we grow older, we begin to cope with our reality in ways outside of playing “house”. Despite the fact that religion most directly translates to the “return to bondage”, many devote their lives to a faith in the hope that they will be rewarded for their good deeds in an afterlife. Religion highlights and outlines the so-called borders we may possibly face and provides solutions. One great transparent border we face is our inability to comprehend or know what happens when we pass on. Religion and spirituality tell us where we are to go when we die and how to get there, a roadmap for life so to speak. Surprising enough, this is a border in itself. Awaking to the absurd and thusly scrambling for something that gives a semblance of meaning is simultaneously freeing and limiting. The realization that we will never truly comprehend our own existence, or that there may not even be someone or something out there that can, leaves us, at times, yearning for the security of the well. That is why it is necessary for the imagination to take over in the form of organized religion and the like. To devote oneself to a cause allows for control and therefore the illusion of freedom.

Maybe, instead, we reject reality altogether. We innovate and build a world that we deem fit. Think Steve Jobs or Mark Zuckerberg. These men recognized the borders in their lives and turned to their imaginations to create something that bridged the gap between reality and what lies outside the well. On the flip side, we live off the grid, rejecting conventional societal markers of success (another border in itself). There are many ways to treat the pain that comes along with the specific human quality of self-awareness. All of these ways, too, result in the illusion of a self-earned freedom.

When I looked up from the reflection of my shattered visage in the well, the ice was already starting to reform at the edges and my father’s fish was ready. I shook the cold from my body and shuffled into a warm dining hall. The now bronze fish was placed in the middle of our table, and as I somewhat guiltily tucked into breakfast, the fish’s grey counterparts continued to swim undisturbed outside. No matter how much colour lies within our well, we are not fish. We will always strive to escape the borders that confine us, whether that be through physical means of evolution or the leap of a consciousness struggling to make something of random data.

When the Last Light Fades

Kaitlyn Graham

Step One: Patient will experience an increased desire to sleep.

Driving down back country roads in a '99 Ford Contour, my imagination runs wild. I roll down my window with the gray crank lever, stick my hand out of the window, and wave my arm up and down through the wind like a scarlet cardinal bird, swooping and diving against the whistling wind. I glance at my brother, Matthew, as he sits next to me, head buried in his baby blue Nintendo Gameboy as his thumbs glide rapidly across the keys, too busy in his games to focus on the outside world around him. My eyes flicker back to the outside. There is something about the air in the country that just smells different. Everything is just better in the country. Maybe it is the mixture of fertilizer and dirt that keeps my imagination entertained. Maybe it is the lack of pollution and factory emissions that are always present in the city air. Whatever it is doesn't matter, though. My imagination runs wild in the car. I am in a highspeed car pursuit, running away from the evil, scary monster that is chasing me. It is my job to slay the dangerous pterodactyl-like creature that jumped from house to house following us before we arrive at my great grandparents. Other times, I am the lead singer in a rock band, throwing a concert on a float in a parade, my braided pigtails slapping me across the face as I throw my head back and forth.

Saturdays were my favorite days growing up as a child. Every week was like clockwork, my family- from my great grandma down- gathered at my great grandparents' house for dinner. There wasn't a holiday that could outweigh the excitement I felt each Saturday. They lived in the middle of nowhere, Ohio, where the only things surrounding their house were cornfields- or soybeans, depending on what the farmers planted that year- and farm animals.

During the summers, my great grandpa Clarence and I would take walks along the property. Some days we would trek out to the three apple trees far away from the house. During the fall, we would pick apples for my

great grandma, and she would make us fried apples to eat after we were finished playing outside. I would help him in the garden, my bare feet squishing in the mud as I watered the plants. My grandmother would laugh as she locked the screen door, pointing to the water hose and tell me the door would be unlocked after I rinsed all of the mud off. After we finished in the garden, we would go to the property line where the neighbor's wire gate began. They had donkeys and cows, and they even allowed me to pet and name them like they were mine. And in my head, they were. The cows weren't as friendly as the donkeys, but they let me pet them, nonetheless. The donkeys would come running every time we walked up to the fence. Most of the time, we would bring them carrots, or apples that we had picked from the trees. But on the days we didn't bring them food, we would pick handfuls of grass and feed them. It was one of my favorite things to do.

On August 30, 2005, the day after Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans, Clarence went under the knife to have cataract surgery. The surgery, though it was a relatively easy procedure, held devastating news for the family. Everything was fine at first. The anesthesia wore off, bandages were changed and eventually removed, and he was back to normal... except he wasn't. He began forgetting simple things: where he set his keys, who a distant relative was in the family when they were mentioned in stories, the names of his grandkids. His mouth began twitching uncontrollably- his lips pursing together as if he was going to kiss someone, jutting out from his face before they were pulled into a straight line, a mix between a smile and grimace. He had impeccable balance, yet now he was stumbling as he walked from his recliner in the living room to the dining room table. Enough was enough. Two weeks after his surgery, my grandma and great grandma took him back to the doctor. They had thought maybe Clarence had a small stroke while under anesthesia, since it was common in older people. Tests were run and, by the first month of the new year, our family had results. The doctor's diagnosis: Lewy Body Dementia.

Soon after, his health rapidly began to decline. They put him on medication. Some to help the disease, others to counteract the side effects of the medications to treat the disease. Clozapine, an antipsychotic usually prescribed to treat severe schizophrenia, was one of the harshest drugs prescribed for him, due to the severe side effects like tremors and mouth twitches. In total, he took two antidepressants and three different medications to help lower his blood pressure, tremors, and swallowing, all of which came with side effects of their own. He began sleeping more, taking naps during the day and then waking up when we got there. I would come running into the house and he would wake up. We would go about our usual routine. As weeks turned into months, he would wake up less and less, and before long, he'd sleep the entire time we were there.

Interlaced in all of the bad days, there were good days of course. I

cherished those days the most. We wouldn't go on our walks anymore, and he wouldn't speak as much, but he was awake. His eyes would dart from person to person as conversations were carried on around him, and my eyes would focus on him. Occasionally, he'd look at me, and the hint of a smile would fall into his eyes and I would feel the warmest ray of sunshine falling onto my perpetually cold skin for the first time in what felt like years. In those few seconds, I would feel joy like no other.

Step Two: Patient will experience a decrease in muscle mass, resulting in the weakening of muscles. Health providers should expect sudden drops in blood pressure, irregularities in the patient's heartbeat, and at times it may be hard to detect.

With Clarence sleeping constantly, our walks shortened to the garden and back. I no longer ran barefoot through the mud and got yelled at by my great grandma for trying to come into the house without washing my feet off. Instead, I walked steadily next to my great grandfather as he focused on walking. Before long, we limited our walks to the indoors. I would help him walk-- his right hand in my left, his left hand on my shoulder— through the house to the back door. He would stumble a little; I would balance him. He would smile. It was one of those smiles that if you blinked or looked away, you would miss it. But it was always there. We would walk to the screen door and stare outside. I wonder what he thought about, but I never asked.

The more that he would sleep, the more I stayed inside. My cousins and I would play hide and seek in the house, or dance on the piano foam mat in the sunroom as he slept in the living room. I would visit him often in his recliner just to see if he had woken up, before I would go back to playing. My uncle took over, and instead of Clarence and I wandering around the great outdoors, my uncle and I would take walks down the country road or through the woods to a small creek on the edge of the property. The worn-down royal blue recliner became the only thing Clarence visited during the day. He would leave the recliner long enough to use the restroom, before he was back in it, one leg draped over one of the armrests.

Staying in his recliner only made things worse for him. It wasn't long before he lost the ability to walk by himself and began using a walker. Even when he walked, he would be accompanied by my grandma or great aunt. Being able to walk was slowly washed away like the tides washing away the sand at the beach.

Stage Three: Patient will experience a decrease in appetite.

Clarence rarely finished his dinner anymore, though food was something that he had cherished for as long as I have known him. We thought maybe he was just coming down with the flu, because even with the

disease slowly eating away at his mind, he always got excited about dinner. As his body began to cave in on itself, he would stop coming to the dinner table. I would fix a plate for him, making sure only to get his favorite things- mashed potatoes, green beans, buttered noodles- before pulling up a stool next to his recliner. Stabbing a green bean, my only focus was to make sure the food stayed on the fork as I moved it through the air and eventually into his mouth. He wouldn't talk much, but you could tell in his eyes he liked the food. They'd crinkle on the outsides just enough for me to know that if he could, he would smile. Over time, we transitioned into soft foods and then moving to just liquids. No matter what it was though, I made sure to feed it to him. I would give him small bites of food and as he chewed, I would take a bite from my own plate. He would never finish all the food, and I would never mine, but no matter how much was left on the plate at the end of dinner, it was my duty to make sure he was fed. It was a job well done. It was the first duty stripped away from me when he was moved into the hospital.

Stage Four: Patient will experience hallucinations and visual distortions.

Throughout the course of his disease, there was always one consistent phrase he would mutter, no matter where he was. "I want to go home."

When we would leave, while he could still walk, he would get up, slip his shoes on and mutter his goodbyes. It didn't matter how long he had lived in that house; it wasn't his home. We would explain it to him, that no, he wasn't going home with us because he was already home, and he would slip his shoes off and sit back down without another word. When I was younger, I always thought that maybe he was tired of the disease and wanted to go to Heaven. He had always been a strongly religious man, and at the time, it made sense. However, as I grew up, I began to change my viewpoint on the phrase. "I want to go home."

This single phrase, muttered from the lips of most Lewy Body Dementia patients, is common. The destruction of memory starts from the newest memory to the oldest memory. After the disease devours so much of a person's brain, they start thinking in the mindset of a child. His home that he wanted so desperately to return to was his childhood home, or so I think. His home was no longer a part of us; our family. The idea of family no longer pertained to us, because to him, we were strangers.

It's hard watching a family member slowly fall into the grasps of death, knowing the Grim Reaper was waiting, inches out of eyesight with a hand around the very essence that brought us life, but the disease brought harsh realities to light. He was fighting another war, and this time, the country wasn't an ally. This war wasn't fought between countries, and he didn't have

people to shoot at. There were no ships to board, and no seas to sail. This war raged solely in his mind, and he had no one in there to help but himself.

Although, outside in the real world his hallucinations were ever-present. He would ask about the babies crawling across the floor of the living room when there were no children present in the house. He would complain about the dogs using the restroom in the house and insist on cleaning it up when they didn't own animals. One time, before things got terrible and he lost the ability to walk, he was staring out the window, watching over the front yard. He had insisted that there were construction workers digging up the lawn, and there was no way he was letting that thought go. Before we could register what was happening, he had disappeared into the bedroom, loaded a 12-gauge shotgun, and went outside. He screamed at the 'workers,' threatening to shoot them if they didn't get their equipment and leave, when there was no one in the yard. We finally coaxed him back inside, took the gun away from him, and removed all the guns from the house.

Stage Five: Patient will experience confusion and incoherence.

Our visits would no longer start and end on Saturdays. My grandma, brother, and I started spending the night on the weekends to help my great grandma take care of Clarence. Occasionally, my cousin would spend the night with us as well, and we would spend the majority of the time in the depths of the furthest bedroom. That house had become both heaven and hell. From the outside, it was pristine. The hedges were kept trimmed and neat by my uncle, the grass was mowed and fertilized by my brother, and the gardens were tended to by my grandma, aunt and myself. From the outside looking in, it was a family helping care for their elderly great grandparents.

Inside, however, was hell. My great grandfather, his memory trapped in a steel cage locked with so many different mechanisms it could challenge Fort Knox, no longer knew anyone he once cared greatly for. The man I had spent so much time looking up to, who had swept me under his wing and threw me over his shoulder like I was his own child, no longer recognized who I was. My brother stayed in the bedroom the entire time we were there, watching T.V. and playing his video games. He couldn't stand to watch our only father figure evaporate into thin air. His mind was disappearing, and he didn't speak anymore. When he did, it was nothing but jumbled mutterings and confused questions.

My grandfather no longer looked at me with a smile in his eyes as I played on the living room floor. Now, he stared at me like I was a stranger who broke into his house. Staring back at me like a deer caught in the headlights of semi-truck on a backroad's country road, I no longer felt the sunlight hitting my skin. Instead, the thunderstorms rolled in, hail pelting down all around me until everything was shattered and broken, and I was left

soaking wet, crying in the rain. I was trapped on the outside, or he was trapped on the inside. Perhaps it was both. No matter what I did or said, no matter how many hugs I gave him or pleas I sent up to heaven to help me find the keys to unlock his mind, it was pointless. Nothing helped. I was no longer something that brought him joy, and if I was, I no longer recognized the happiness in his eyes.

The American flag is draped across the open coffin, providing a warm blanket for the numb, lifeless body. I pretend as if he is cold, and that covering him up would somehow make up for the fact that we are preparing to lower him into the ground for his body to become nothing more than a rotting piece of flesh as we slowly begin to forget his favorite food, color, and movie. We erase him from the new Christmas cards, Thanksgiving dinners, and Saturday afternoons. We forget that he's even gone until one day... boom. He pops into your memory as if he was an item at the grocery store you forgot to pick up the night before. People I have never even met are gathered in the dark warm glow of the halogen lights, preparing to bury a pillar of the family. It feels like we should be gathering at a family reunion rather than a funeral with the way everyone interacts with each other. These strangers stand around talking to each other, laughing, as if my grandfather wasn't a lifeless corpse, lying dead in a casket fifty feet from their conversation about burnt garlic bread and unseasoned spaghetti sauce. I want these people to leave. They have no right to be here, laughing in the presence of him.

I was nine when we buried my great grandfather. Standing three steps to the left of the coffin, I didn't cry or move. I just stared. Stared at the strangers telling me stories of my grandfather, even though they hadn't visited him since he first began to get sick. Stared at the rigid, pale body beside me. Stared at the one flickering bulb in the ceiling because it was driving me insane. All I could think in that moment was how disrespectful it was of the funeral home director to not fix a flickering light before hosting the funeral. I was a terra cotta soldier, standing in place, waiting to safely welcome my grandfather into the afterlife. I was there to look out for him, it was my job. I couldn't just abandon my post because he was dead. No. It was my job to steady him when he tripped, to feed him when his tremors took over his ability to even hold a pen. It was my job to make sure he was protected even now.

I was cold. Everything about my being, from my skin to my eyes to my soul. Every aspect of my being was a bitter cold that refused to go away, no matter how many forced hugs and fleece blankets were given to me. I thought maybe that I had flown to Antarctica in my sleep, and that we were

really paying an ice tribute to my grandfather. Perhaps we were trying some type of new ritual to bring him back, and in order to do so, the recipe required the heat of a living body. Maybe I was just dying. After all, dropping body temperature was one of the last symptoms in the long list of signs someone is about to pass.

Stage One: Denial

Tuesday, February 9, 2010.

I had been impatiently awaiting this day since February 9, 2009. My ninth birthday—one step closer to being a teenager. My mom and I talked while we stood on the corner, huddled in our coats as we waited for my bus to arrive. She asked me where I want to eat when I get home to celebrate my birthday, but I'm not sure yet. I think I want to go to LongHorns or AppleBee's. I board the yellow bus- we affectionately called the Twinkiemobile- and wave my mom goodbye from the window, balancing the store-bought cookie cake with blue and white icing on my lap. I loved taking in desserts for my class on my birthday, and this year was no different. My day is pretty normal for a 3rd grader. We eat the cookie cake, they sing me happy birthday, and my teacher begins to talk to us about multiplication. My mom picks my brother and me up early around two, and I'm so excited. I bound down the hall, my Hannah Montana Messenger bag strapped across my body as I head towards the office. It's my birthday, I got a cookie cake, and I'm getting picked up early? I was so excited! This was the best birthday ever!

The car ride home is silent. I sit in the back of our white minivan, tapping my feet together in time to the music on the radio as I stare out the window. The drive isn't long- ten minutes maybe- and before I know it, we're pulling into the driveway, and we're walking inside the house. Why is she so quiet? I throw my bookbag on the floor, toe off my shoes at the door, and practically jump onto the couch. She swallows. The television isn't turned on like it is every other day, and my brother doesn't grab for his video games instantly. Instead, my mom sits on the couch beside us. She's sad. I can see it in her eyes, but I don't know why.

“Papaw fell today...”

She goes on, tells us he fell between the toilet and the bathtub, that Mamaw hurt her back while trying to pull him out from the small area. He was in the hospital, taken by ambulance to the number one hospital in the area. My brother runs into his bedroom, slams his door and cries; my mom follows him. I sit on the couch, unmoving. I cry, but I don't cry for myself. I cry for my mom and my brother, because they're both crying, and I don't

understand why. Papaw fell. He's in the hospital. He'll be fine. I have fallen off my bike plenty of times, and at the end of the day, I always get better. So will he.

Stage Two: Anger

We wait for my grandma to get home at half past five before we pile into the car and head to the hospital. The car ride is relatively quiet, the music at a low murmur in the background. I sit still, hands folded together in my lap and lean my head against the window as we drive. I glance over at my brother as he sits next to me, and the happiness in his eyes as he plays his Gameboy has disappeared. His eyes are puffy, and he doesn't sing to the music. My eyes flicker back to the outside: fluffy snow covers the ground, the red and green glow of the stoplights turning it different colors as the light changes and we pull off. It's dark as we drive under streetlights, and I long to be outside of this car right now. Though when I get my wish, I immediately want to leave again.

My grandfather was admitted into the ICU immediately after he arrived. In order to prevent infection, only three people could enter the room at a time, and anyone under the age of twelve was not permitted into the room. I was not allowed into the room to see him. My grandma and mom would take turns visiting him to watch me in the waiting room. My brother stayed in the hospital room constantly. I didn't understand how they could keep me out, keep me from visiting him. I hated the hospital for it. Day after day, I would go to school, and then go to the hospital to sit in the waiting room while everyone else got to continue visiting and seeing Clarence. Every day that passed that I sat and did nothing, the rage inside me grew into an enormous fire. It wasn't fair.

Over the course of the five days he was in the ICU, I became very aware of the hospital around me. The eggshell white walls surrounding me, and the constant 68-degree temperature felt like I was shoved in a refrigerator with no hope to escape. Hand sanitizer was everywhere: hanging on the wall outside of each room, every table in the waiting room, and at the reception desk. People would see me in the waiting room, offer me smiles like they knew why I was sitting in there. Maybe it was kindness that tugged at their lips when they saw me. Maybe it was just pity; the little girl locked out of the room because the relationship she had built with her great grandfather wasn't strong enough to overshadow her age.

Stage Three: Bargaining

Clarence was in the hospital for five days before my mother told me they were transferring to hospice. The nurse on duty snuck me through the

halls and into the room to see him. I felt like I was a spy, sneaking behind enemy lines to rescue my family from the evil disease that had captured and stolen my great grandfather. He was asleep when I went in, and it was something I was used to. The steady rhythm of the machines and monitors beeping was the only thing keeping the room from complete silence. I didn't know it at the time, but it was a warning of his forthcoming death. I thought hospice was just somewhere that could help him more than the hospital. I thought it was a sign that he was getting better. They transferred him to hospice where I would spend every evening the next week in his room. My mom had surgery the first day my great grandpa was in hospice, and even then, we didn't stop visiting him. We couldn't.

I liked it when he slept while I was there. We would hold casual conversation, most of which was meaningless and only spoken about to keep the pesky silence out of the room. I would pray over his bed, begging for God to show up and fix him, to let him come back home. We still had way too many memories to make. He still had to tell me happy birthday and help me eat the cake. We still had holidays to celebrate and decorate for, games to play. He couldn't leave me yet. Each day I would pray, and each day nothing would happen. Day after day after day, I found myself praying more and more, begging for him to get better. Nothing ever worked. Not even two weeks after his fall, he caught pneumonia, and in the early morning light of Sunday, February 22, Clarence passed away in the presence of my great grandma and grandma.

Stage Four: Depression

The coldness settled into my bones as if I had just participated in the Polar Ice Plunge. Fleece blankets and scalding hot showers didn't help. Warm hugs and kind affirmations left me bitter and resentful. It didn't matter how many hot mugs of cocoa I wrapped my tiny hands around to slip slowly. The coldness was still there and would always exist. My heart was no longer complete. I had just put my only father figure in the ground. I had watched this disease eat and devour his brain until he didn't even recognize me.

My days came and went in a blur and in what felt like a blink of an eye, we were flipping the calendar to the new year, and we were preparing to celebrate my tenth birthday. We didn't throw a party. We didn't invite people over or spend time with the family. No one wanted to celebrate. It wasn't right. We went out to dinner, though, and my mom bought me a cake. My birthday was no longer my favorite day of the year. Now, it is just a reminder that with each day I age, which each day I wake up on February ninth and turn another year older, it's another year my grandfather won't be a part of. A cruel, sadistic reminder that he won't be there, that he is gone, and that no matter how many candles I blow out wishing for him to come back, he won't.

Stage Five: Acceptance

I don't like acceptance. Honestly, I think it's a load of crap to accept someone's death. You don't accept it. Death isn't something you can check like you do the small little box on the terms and conditions you didn't bother to read. No. You learn to live with the pain of them not being here until you can function again. One day, you wake up, you shower and brush your teeth, you get ready for your day and you force yourself to get used to it.

There is no accepting it. There is letting your grief completely devour you until you are nothing more than a robot living in the day to day motions, or there's learning to shoulder the grief as easily as you shoulder the backpack you shrug onto your shoulders. You go to school, do your homework, and you begin to learn how to become a functioning member of society as the years progress. The only thing you learn to accept is that the gnawing pit in your stomach won't go away over time, and that you will actively pretend to ignore it when your family gets together for holidays. You bottle your pain up, you write poems and short stories about it. You turn that pain into writing because you so desperately want to get it out of your system and writing helps. You rip out pages from your notebook that only have two sentences on them because they don't sound right and the longer they sit on the page in front of you, the more aggravated you get that they aren't right. The words don't flow onto the paper as easily as life flows from a body when someone passes. You obsess and fixate on how to describe death in terms that haven't been used before because even though everyone experiences death, no one experiences it like you.

Death isn't pretty. It isn't peacefully passing away in your sleep, hair and makeup done, and then going directly into the ground. It isn't finding a beautiful way to describe it on paper. No. Death is choking on the last breath of air you managed to pull into your lungs. It's your family members finding you laying in your own waste. Death is having your remains burned into nothing or being buried six feet underground for maggots and worms to feast on your rotting flesh until the only thing left are yellowed bones in a dirt-covered coffin. You can go about your day, but the fact of the matter is that even eleven years after a loved one dies, the first whiff of Old Spice cologne will send you hurdling back through time, to a memory of being pulled in a little red wagon, or picking apples from the three trees on the property. A memory filled with petting donkeys, hiking through the woods on the edge of the property, and seeing your entire family every weekend. It's being hoisted onto the shoulders of your great grandfather as you giggle uncontrollably in a

time when your heart was still made of gold and you didn't know death existed.

Moving Up and On

Karrington Tabor

“All mankind is divided into three classes: those that are immovable, those that are movable, and those that move.” –Benjamin Franklin

18. 15. 7. 8. 4.

I have moved 18 times in my 19 years.

I have lived in 15 different homes.

I have perched in 7 different apartments, condos, townhomes, etc.

I have stayed in 8 different houses.

I am known in 4 different states.

I can sit here, and I can tell you about how I lost my childhood. I can sit here, and I can tell you how I became familiar with living in and out of every size of cardboard U-Haul boxes. I can sit here, and I can tell you about how well I got to know the bruises on my arms gifted to me by my first ever high school boyfriend. I can sit here and tell you about how I was both saved and destroyed by my first love. I can sit here, and I can tell you about the nights I've spent debating whether life is worth living, or whether I was worth it. Or, I can sit here, and tell you about what could've been. About what should've been. About what my life would look like if we had stayed in the House on Treyburn Drive.

You get a strange feeling when you're about to leave a place...like you'll not only miss the people you love but you'll miss the person you are now at this time and this place because you'll never be this way ever again." – Azar Nafisi

Karrington Tabor's Know-How of When to Move:

If your lease is up, move.

If your house gets foreclosed, move.

If you start to become more aware of the back of your knees, move.

If you start to feel that itch in your legs like you need to actually go for a run, move.

If you start to hate the fact your couch is leather, and your chairs are fabric, move.

If you start to become wildly aware of your neighbors' lives, move.

If you start hate going home, move.

If you fuck up, I mean really fuck up, move.

The Sixth House (Really House Three, but c'mon do I really need to define which place was an apartment?) I ever lived in was ruled by evil. Ironic, looking back, that this was the *sixth* house I've ever lived in and that somehow, this was the *first* house I ever learned about evil. It sat the second house on the right of the cull-dasac Greenbriar Dr. Driving in, after two years of heavily anticipated construction, and over the handpicked limestone shaped in rectangles and hexagons laced as a brand-new driveway, you wouldn't think anything about this simple one-story home, and this simple two child Midwestern family. My earliest memories were built in this house. I can't remember them anymore, but I know they were. Hell, I can hardly remember anything other than the feeling of a grown man's hands, dressed in deep blue, ripping me from my father. I can hardly remember what it felt like to derive joy from playing house with the beautiful Barbies with their beautiful Blonde hair like Mom's, but instead how that beautiful blonde hair had hands raking through it with her a strangled yell and red painted nails flying into a point towards the men putting silver bracelets around Daddy's wrists. I can hardly remember anything other than the nights spent in the master bed, curling up with a silver-framed wedding photo of my parents as Mom lies in the hospital in Delray Beach, Florida, holding onto Dad, as he lays in a cot in the great State of Louisiana. I can hardly remember anything, but

I can remember those years. I can remember those teachers who picked me up Saturday mornings to take me back to Art class, and the families who adopted me for a couple weeks, and the two makeshift parents who stayed in the house when Dad called at night, and Mom couldn't move away from weird machines.

That was the Sixth House. With the olive-green paint, and the ugly green wall that was supposed to protect us from burglars, from hurricanes, from any dangers lying *outside* the wall. The wall didn't protect us from the men in blue, or the people who lived down the street (the same ones who swore up and down they loved me like a sister, and Donovan like a brother as they spread rumors around to house moms who cut us out of their child's lives immediately), or even the disease that created tumors the size of softballs in her colon. That was the Sixth House. Not the Seventh House, where the state of Louisiana housed us. No, That Seventh House is the house that caused my ten-year-old brother and an eight-year-old me to become adults in the Sixth House. But we did what we did best, we get up and get gone. A new place to live is a new way to live, and a new way to live is life without any screwups. That's because I was the one getting screwed up.

We moved to the Tenth House the summer going into middle school. Granted, it wasn't a home, but a luxurious beach condo rented out the back pocket from one the few friends of a Karrington Tabor's Know-How of When to Move: If your lease is up, move. If your house gets foreclosed, move. If you start to become more aware of the back of your knees, move. If you start to feel that itch in your legs like you need to actually go for a run, move. If you start to hate the fact your couch is leather, and your chairs are fabric, move. If you start to become wildly aware of your neighbors' lives, move. If you start hate going home, move. If you fuck up, I mean really fuck up, move. Tabor 3 friend remaining. Beautiful, perched right on Highland Beach, with its rolling sand dunes and green ocean, seaweed piling along top of washed up shells, a picture on a post card screaming New Start. This is Dad's favorite house we've ever lived in. This is the house Mom's chemo ceased and Dad was rightfully found not guilty. This is the house Mom learned how to paddle board, and Dad befriended God. This is the house I saw little of Donovan, and even less of myself. This was not a home, but one of our legendary pitstops: a place where we perch until The Perfect House comes to rent. We stop here, for almost a full year, before moving up and on.

The past is behind us, right?

Wrong.

We lived in and out of the Town House (Home Eleven) for a year, leaving, and coming back to it. This house was definitely Donovan's favorite. His room was huge, with a walk-in closet and a private bathroom. The hallway leading to his bed was paved by signed athletes' jerseys and sneakers he had collected. His bedspread was plain black, but his mattress I swear was more comfortable than mine as it molded to fit the curves of your spine. His flat screen hung up on beige walls surrounded by pretentious street art Mom bought him for a pretty penny, and his Xbox sat on top of glass shelves with artful controllers next to a brand new stereo system which connected to your phone (I had just received his CD playing hand-me down). He had his first girlfriend, (that was good enough to introduce to the family), in this house. His muscles were bigger than my head, he had finished being a Freshman in high school at the old house, and the girls all said he was the best-looking kid they had. It didn't take long for those who followed him from childhood to follow him in there too, but that was House Fourteen. He stood, already 6'2 at 15, in the front of classes singing deafly the lyrics to Romeo & Juliet as punishments and patronizing any and all teachers he came in contact with. Ever the god, Donovan Tabor was omnipotent. And then, the Sixth House came back in all its haunting glow. He just hadn't really wanted to smoke, he only had one functioning kidney and he had to be careful of that stuff, ya' know? Kids are ruthless.

A better way.

Moving gives you an organizing do over. As you set up house again, you can improve systems that didn't work so well before, and create that place for everything. You can round up all the coffee supplies and put them next to the coffeemaker, get all your office supplies bundled and binned, corral your cleaning supplies, and tie your sheets and towels in sets with ribbons. You learn what works through trial and error.

By Sophomore year, we tried to move schools but then they were too vigorous with rules and we'd both cry as he drove us home in his black BMW m3 with subs pounding away our sobs. He tried to go back to the other school, but was met with taunting and vigorous hate from the same kids who called him their best friend to the girls they spoke to. Finally, he transferred to online school, we transferred to a new house.

The final house we lived in South Florida; this house was everything. On another damn cull-da-sac, filled with fellow Hoosiers by coincidence, sits a house notorious in three cities for the best damn parties you'd ever be lucky to get into (*You're welcome*). Two stories high, light purple paint, and framing

windows. The staircase leading to two grand windowed doors only has one railing, thanks to my less than perfect driving skills. (For the record, my car has this push to park thingy, and I swore I pushed it when I got out of the

“Childhood is what you spend the rest of your life trying to overcome.”

car. I was grabbing my stuff from the backseat when suddenly, BOOM, bye-bye railing and bye-bye front bumper. I cried.) The back of the house is full of floor-to-ceiling windows which gave the wrap around leather couch warmth, and the hanging tv a glare. The kitchen had white countertops with white drawers, and white cabinets, each stained by make-up fingerprints either by Mom or by me. The fridge was always stocked with green juices that smelled like sewer and tasted like a snake bite, fruits that were hand cut and stuck into a plastic bowl, and some sort of onion dip just because it was my favorite. The freezer in the garage held most of my dinners, lean cuisine and oven pizza really do get the job done. Dad’s-turned-Mom’s Office sat in the nook of a room behind the living room, with beautiful oak desk and grand handcrafted wooden cabinetry which held every file we owned behind paned glass and a picture of Mom’s mom who we lost the year before.

The first door leading from the wooden stairs you slipped on if you wore socks was the white wooden door with its silver door handle which opened onto, yep, you guessed it, my room. Donovan and I had decided to paint my room pink and brown for that homegrown hick-girl vibe and Hubba Bubba pink (the color before you chew the gum) splattered onto wood floors and on one single wall behind a luxurious dresser and Donovan’s hand-me-down TV. The wall to the right was littered with this hand-crafted, hand-painted, heavy-as-shit mahogany cabinet that was littered with random clothes in drawers, books on fashion design, an old record player which George Straight’s Top 10 played on loop

10 THINGS NO ONE TELLS YOU ABOUT MOVING AWAY FROM HOME

1. People won't visit as often as they say they will.
2. Put aside 1/2 to 2/3 of your vacation days to travel back home.
3. It's a BFD when you come home.
4. You have to decide who is priority.
5. You need to make the effort to keep in touch.
6. Smaller holidays are pretty quiet.
7. No one ever has any idea what time it is where you live.
8. Your life seems very glamorous.
9. Small tasks may be a lot harder
10. You become a lot more independent.

next to a Bluetooth speaker used for sleepless nights, and pictures of people I don't hardly talk to, but Mom wanted framed. The other wall was sliding doors masquerading as windows behind three layers of pink and white curtains. My bedspread was pink lace with a dozen throw pillows and hardly any warmth. But the wall behind my grey clothed headboard was wallpaper shaped like wooden planks underneath a COCO&CHANEL logo and flowers from one of my exes.

**Zac Brown Band's
"Roots"**

My roots,
even when I'm a
thousand miles away
from my roots
I'm home

Don't give up
Hold on a little longer
What don't kill you
Only makes you
stronger

But man, this was the house. Both of us had countless garage parties filled with good music and better people. That garage held a handmade beer pong table Brandon and Zach, Donovan's friends, built among posters they stole from restaurant drive-through's and Donovan's hand-built gaming table and mom's least favorite couch. This house is where I mustered up enough courage to dump my boyfriend of two year's whose hands had kindly left permeant scars along my frame, and whose heart was always mine, just as long as his body belonged to other people. This house I fell in an indescribable love which to this day pangs my heart to think about what could've been (Remember how I mentioned Brandon? Yeah, word of advice, don't date your brother's best friend. You'll love each other too hard and your very protective brother will hate you. Then he'll get sick of the sneaking around and you'll get sick of the threats, and he'll cheat, and your heart will stay broken for the next two years. Instead of dating him, just move). This is the house I started my last year of high school in; This is the house I threw my last party in; this is the house I cried and laughed and just *lived* in.

We moved halfway through its second year, a running record for this family to have lasted that long, and Mom and I lived in and out of air b-n-b's, past the prom Dad missed for work, and until a week after Graduation. Then, and now, we're here. In Sunny Orlando, on a tourist's dream of a neighborhood, a block from Universal and behind Restaurant Row (a street where on both sides is an array of every kind of food joint you'd like). In our last condo, Unit One, where Donovan and I's bedrooms share a wall and a bathroom. Where Dad's office doesn't have a door, and Mom doesn't work. Where the two puppies are fed lobster mac and cheese, and Donovan's

girlfriend becomes my lifelong best friend.

This is the first house where my entire family, my brother, my mom, my dad, and I *live together*. Dad is not in and out of hotels and learning how much you need to live with by how much fits into a suitcase. Donovan is not sharing motel bedrooms with Dad as he figures out how to best help the company, and how to land the girl of his dreams as his girlfriend while not being able to take her to a place he lives. Mom is not being eaten up from guilt for not being able to live where her husband works, and stressing about raising her last kid so she doesn't become a complete lost cause. And then, there's me. I am not angry at Dad for not being around, not angry at Donovan for taking away the one person who has ever showed me what it means to love someone, and not angry at Mom for taking out all the emotions piling from years of estrangement on me. Sure, we're all here. And we're all together. And if I hadn't lived the soap opera version of life, maybe this is the part of the essay where I'd tell you that it's okay now. Moving up and moving on, it's easier. Moving up and moving on is exciting because at least we've all decided to stay here.

But it's not. This is the part where I tell you about what could have been. This is the part about my *home*.

In Fishers, Indiana in a neighborhood known as Windemere in circa 1999, there was something called House-A-Rama. An event hosted by home designers and banks who show off the most luxurious, expensive, well-crafted homes they manage to build. Phil Myers, an extremely well-established architect in the state of Indiana, built around three to four homes on one cull-

“HOW TO MOVE AWAY” BY LYNN PEDERSEN

It's best to wake early, four, five a.m., while the neighbors sleep and the moon floats like a pearl in a pool of ink. In half-light the empty house is less familiar, less sad—the walls with their nail holes, the carpet—its patterns of wear, curtains with no job to do. I sit on my suitcase, eat powdered donuts; a napkin for a plate, juice out of a paper cup. Make one last check of the cupboards, the drawers. Run my hand along the countertops, the stair rail, trace the walls with my fingertips, each scar proof of my childhood, my initials carved into the tree of this, our sixth house.

My family could write a *Handbook for Leaving*—the way we pack up during summer solstice, disconnect from people and places like an abrupt shutting off of electricity. My father has convinced himself that the unknown is always better, the way the retina sees images upside down and the brain corrects.

da-sac in that neighborhood for House-A-Rama. He built ours. The beautiful white and tan brick home with slanted roofs and a single column framing the doorway to oak double-doors. A pond surrounded by boulders of rocks and pebbles lays neatly in the left corner behind an old tree and a standard mailbox. Inside, every piece of furniture and fabric was hand designed and hand-picked by my mother after Donald Tabor brought Melissa Tabor home as he said, "Well, baby, I promised you'd be queen. I just bought you a castle." The back, truly in a grand castle style, was stone brick and large windows that faced acres of an old golf course, and a swing set would be built for Donovan's (and mine's, once I was born), recreational use. It was home, our home, designed by our mother. It's now owned by some dentist or doctor or another who bought it from a then-retired Dad. It's now a symbol of what could've been, what *should have been*, to my family. Every time we drive passed, both parents get this heartbreaking, wanton face and neither can hold eye contact as they hide their faces and turn up the stereo. Their eyes say it all: WE were supposed to live there until college, they were supposed to grow old there, that was supposed to be our *home*; WE were supposed to grow up in the long run, Donovan was supposed to play sports, not grow up in and out of surgeries, I was supposed to find some Senior my Freshman year who'd marry me after I became a doctor, not grow up in between fits of anger and pure apathy; WE were supposed to live together, not in and out of homes and hotels, of boxes and suitcases. That was supposed to be *our home*. And they hate that it isn't. I hate that it isn't.

Here I smoked
candy cigarettes, my breath
in winter passing for
smoke, pale green of my
bedroom. I counted the
number of intersections on
the way to school (four). I
bundle memories together,
weight them with stones
like unwanted kittens
drowned in a creek.

What kind of animal
constantly moves? The
point of migration is the
return. We're nomads
without the base
knowledge of where to
find water. These moves
are like arranged marriages;
economics now,
love later. Maybe it's not
against nature to move.
Most of the body is no
more than ten years old
and blood renews itself
every 90 days. But leaving
disturbs the fabric of a
place. I'd rather stay and
witness change. My mother
always wanting to plant
perennials that we never
stay to see. I pour some
water on the marigolds
clattering around the
mailbox, Aztec flowers of
death, their strong scent a
beacon to lost souls. Then
we drive away, the blank
windows like the blank
eyes of the dead, waiting
for someone to seal the
past with a penny.

I hate that my roots are firmly planted in a house I will probably never own again, in a state I never got to live in, and with people who hate themselves for moving. But that's the glory. Remember how I started this essay, that I could take you through every pathetic thing that has happened to me or that I've created, or I could tell you about Treyburn. Well here's what I'm going to tell you: I have learned a lot by looking at what ifs. What if we lived there? What if I grew up normal? What if I had stayed with gymnastics and made it to the Olympics like they had once planned? What if Donovan hadn't had kidney failure, and he was able to play the sports he was so damn good at? What if he was able to love people without being terrified they'd use his past against him, and what if I was able to stand alone without constantly berating who I am? What if we were happy, like the easy happy, where thoughts don't crush your spirit and actions don't make you afraid of God? What if?

If, all that happened, we wouldn't be *us*. I wouldn't be the straight-up, know-it-all who likes to have fun and Donovan wouldn't be the hilarious, protector who loves with every fiber of his being. My mom wouldn't be the careful, strong-headed powerhouse who everyone can't help but love, and my Dad wouldn't be this wise, hard-working man who tries his hardest to help anyone who crosses his path. So, if all that was real, and I was writing this out of a place of triumphant self-pity, I wouldn't be able to see how far we've come. I ask a lot of question to my dad right now, since we are working on writing down his roller-coaster of a life. I ask him about all the houses he lived in before me, and all the ones we lived in together. And I ask him why we move. His response: "We move because we are made to move. We don't settle, not in our jobs and not in our homes and not in our lives. We moved because God moves, and we move because why the hell not?" So, word of advice: move. Move again, and again, and again. Every time you become oddly aware of the back of your knees and you get an itch followed by tingles up and down your legs as excitement blows a wide bubble around your heart and your brain hollers to get up and get going, move. And never stop moving. Now that I am starting to sound like that one guy who tells you how to get your life together on an infomercial, just hear me out: I will never be able to live in just one house, in just one town, with just one job, but I will be able to live with just one person. Why? Because no matter where you go, or how much you change, people are the only reason to stick around, and people are the only things that can create, feel, and be in *love*.

"Beginnings are scary, endings are usually sad, but it is the middle that counts the most. You need to remember that when you find yourself at the beginning. Just give hope a chance to float up."-Sandra Bullock, *Birdie Pruitt, Hope Floats*

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How To Tell A Lie

Karrington Tabor

You'll need to know what a lie is first. A lie starts as something people tell others in order to cover up the truth; a deceitful act to hide their vulnerability. You'll tell your first lie by age four. You'll run to your mom after your brother refuses to play with you and lie that he hit you. Then once he's in trouble, he will sit for three hours and play Barbies with you. Later, it's the same big brother, Donovan, who will teach you one of the most important lies- how to lie to yourself.

In order to complete a lie, you'll need a secret. The first secret you earn is something unasked for, something completely out of your control. You'll be nine years old and stand completely confused as a dozen officers line your home to escort your father from your arms. You two were just playing a game, you guys were just singing. He didn't do anything wrong. You didn't understand. Fear sets in. A lie is necessary in situations like these. No one can know what happened that night before bed; No one can know you watched your father being forced into the backseat of a cop car; No one can know you stood there, balling uncontrollably, as your mother clawed towards the barred windows. A lie is what your mom tells you when you cry to her out of confusion. She won't be able to focus on you or your older brother. The officers are apologizing profusely when they watch your brother rock back in forth with you thrashing in his arms. When she can finally bear to look at you two, she says she'll be right back. A lie. She won't come home until the next morning, a complete wreck. Her hair will be ratted, eyes dark and cold. She will only have enough time to kiss your head before she's hollering at the top of her lungs on the house phone. Lies are uncovered from those calls, lies you don't want to know. Your older brother, only thirteen at the time, will hold you close all night and tell you the best lie of all: it will all be okay. You have to believe this lie. So, you repeat it. Repetition is essential when telling a lie.

So, you have your first secret. From the secret, you'll need to know why a lie is necessary in order to tell the lie and do it justice. You won't go to school for the next two weeks. Your big brother can't handle school right

now, mom tells you, you'll have to go stay with Donovan's friends while she takes care of things. Confusion grows in your chest. You don't understand why you aren't allowed to call your best friend and tell her you're scared. You don't understand why Dad won't be home tonight. You don't understand why you can't talk to anyone until you arrive at the new house, the house that's not yours. This family will share sympathetic looks between you, your mom, and Donovan. Every family member takes their turn to give you sappy looks and big hugs. These hugs are a type of lies. These hugs want to deceive you into believing that these people understand. They don't. This is when you realize that in order to tell a lie, you'll need to understand why the lie is important. You never wanted to feel so pathetic again. You never wanted to feel so small again. So, you form the lie on your lips when your mom looks at you to see if she can leave, "I'm fine. Besides, it's just a sleepover."

A lie changes as you grow closer to it. A lie is not only hiding the truth, but it can also be expanding on it. You'll learn how to discern an overexaggerated lie from a basic one when you go back to school. It's been weeks, but no one asks you where you've been. Donovan will watch you on the playground that day, he won't move. He's scared, but he doesn't tell you that. He lies instead, telling you that he just misses you, that he doesn't want to leave you, that's all. You believe him. But then those girls in your fourth-grade class walk up to you. They said they can't talk to you anymore, that they can't be friends with a criminal. The disgust exuding from their words and the contortion of their face's shocks you. You don't get it. They say their parents told them that your dad was disgusting and so awful he had to be escorted with thirty cops from your house as if he was some murderer. Confusion morphs into anger. You'll yell at their lies. You'll even tell your own, that nothing happened. Anger will morph into rage. But, then they laugh. Now, that sinking feeling will set in. You'll say it again as they walk away. Nothing happened. Then, Donovan will tell you it's all okay. This lie is starting to become your favorite.

In order to pull off a perfect lie, you'll have to believe it. So, you'll use that repetition method again. You'll be okay. Dad is okay. Mom is okay. You aren't helpless. Live by the idea that you'll have to repeat it to believe it. You create a mantra within a week: You're okay, dad's okay, you have Donovan, you don't need anyone anyway. Anger etches its way between the lines of this mantra. You won't tell your mom that you can't look at yourself in the mirror from feeling so puny. You won't tell your dad every night at six that things at school are terrible. You'll repeat the same story: You're okay. You know dad's okay. Donovan has you. Mom is fine. It's just merely lying. Something you're beginning to be very good at. After all, you know all the layers of how to get away with a lie.

But then a lie changes again. You're older now and you're starting to *know* lying as if the lies spewing from your mouth are your only friends. No

longer is a lie hiding truth, or an over-exaggeration. A lie becomes helping others feel better. You lie the most on those phone calls you receive every night at six for a year and a half. You lie when you purposely forget to tell your dad that people taped his mugshot to your brother's locker. That hours before he called you saw your big brother break for the first time. That after school he cried so hard in the car that by the time you reached home his throat was bleeding from the wailing. That mom couldn't talk to dad right away because she's on her cell with the lawyer, trying desperately to get that picture off of Google. You lie again when you don't mention that there's an anti-criminal club against you in your class. And again when you tell him everyone acts the same, and that you aren't forced to stay inside during recess. You lie when the fact that teachers take turns picking you up and bringing you to school on the weekends stays completely unheard of. You'll lie and say you understand that God is on Dad's side. You lie a lot now.

Lying isn't for everyone. Lying is not for your mother. She tried to use every form of lying before being forced to tell the truth. She held you nightly now, the shaking being harder and harder to calm. She will get up one night when dad is eligible to come home. It will be him sleeping with a gun next to the bed instead of Donovan this time. She can't stop throwing up. Her skin is sweaty and cold. Her eyes sunken in. She hasn't eaten in weeks, but somehow her body looks breakable now. Mom won't stop crying when she can't make it to the bathroom. Mom doesn't cry. Dad is scared. He's frantic. Dad will lie to you now, demanding in a shaky voice to stay here, don't wake up your brother, just watch some Tv, Sissy. You do as your told. He's the one who wakes Donovan before they leave. The lanky fourteen-year old will be shaking, as he rocks softly beside you in the bed. His eyes never close that night and his hands never leave that phone. Mom can't lie to you about being okay when you go see her the next morning in the hospital. She can't lie to you and tell you she doesn't have cancer. She can't lie to you and say she has a fighting chance, instead she promises. She promises that this T4 tumor won't take her away from you. Who needs a colon anyway? She'll say fuck cancer and laugh. Her laugh is the only lie she tells you that day. You'll lie to yourself in that moment, and you'll believe that laugh that promises you things won't change. You hold onto that laugh. After all, it's the only sign of hope you have left.

A lie is not easily accomplished. A lie pushes you beyond the point of breaking. You can only break so many times until you're just shattered fragments like the jagged edges of an unlucky, demolished mirror. Sometimes you lie, like when you thank those people who had shunned your family for the food they begin to provide now that mom's sick. Sometimes you lie a little harder, like when you look at the stranger who lives with you now and tell him you appreciate his help. Sometimes all that comes out of your mouth is lies: no, I'm not scared; yes, you'd be super grateful for a ride to the hospital;

no pastor, I don't need special help; yes Donovan, I can look at myself in a mirror. The lies always change, but now they change you. You will begin to see yourself as these lies- hidden and too big.

To tell a lie, you'll have to understand why lying comes to you so naturally. To tell someone a lie, you'll hide a part of yourself, the part you've hidden for years. And one day, you'll go to tell a lie to your now ex-boyfriend. You'll go to tell him that it was fine when everything went down those years ago. That you love hanging with your mom and you could never resent your dad for what happened. He won't speak; a silence thick and deafening. Then you'll cry. Each tear falls from you eye like a different lie falls from your lips. To tell a lie, you'll have to understand what a lie means to you. It is not strength, it is not okay, it is toxic. You live by the truth now. You'll realize that those secrets come out through your eyes, through your body movements, or through the weighing silence. You'll realize that some lies hurt you in the long run. You'll realize lies aren't hiding the truth, obscuring the facts, or even saving someone. Are the benefits of lying worth it if the benefits gluttonously eat away at your heart? Lying only shows through in your true colors.

In order to know how to tell a lie, you'll have to know this one thing: don't.

Slim Thick

Shelby McCallister

I stepped on the scale, so hungry that I was praying I lost enough so I could eat three meals that day. Wrote down that number. Grabbed the blue measuring tape and wrapped it around my bust, waist, and hips squeezing as tight as I could. Wrote down those numbers. Numbers were my only measure of self-worth.

In the summer of 2018, I signed a three-year modeling contract with a local placement agency. I was ecstatic at first. But slowly and slowly, I started to think that maybe I had signed over the rights to my body. To this day, if someone asked me what my measurements are, I could list them off without hesitation. I would say: bust 34", waist 27", and hips 38". At first, this didn't bother me. It was just business. But as I started to go to more auditions and call backs, the first thing they would ask for was my measurements. Not only was it somewhat degrading for my value to be defined by numbers, but my numbers were never right. I was told to lose three inches on every measurement. *How the hell? They're going to give me a diet and workouts right?*

Over that summer, I managed to get my waist down to 26.5" before boot camp. Celebration time, right? Nope. Still not good enough. So here we go... the journey started. How fast could I get down to a 24" waist, a 31" bust, and a 35" hip? Let the race begin.

Step one to becoming a model: cut your calories down to the amount that a ten-year-old should eat. I went from eating a healthy and normal 2000 calories a day to eating 1350 calories a day. I had an app on my phone that I viewed as the holy grail at the time. *Seriously, when I opened it up, I think my eyes saw a bright, white light radiate from the screen.* I put everything I ate into it so that it could tell me if I was staying within my limits. If I went over my calories it turned red. Red equals failure. Any day that I stayed in the green was a good day. To put it in simple terms, I was hangry all the damn time. *Just ask my parents.*

Step two to becoming a supermodel: workout at least once a day, sometimes twice if you felt fat. I followed my workout routine religiously.

Every night at my local Planet Fitness I ran one mile, biked ten miles, and then ended with 'light but toning' weights. And if I worked hard enough and burned enough calories I could even go back home and eat a snack according to my app... one and a half carrots... yum! Some nights I would do a saran wrap around my stomach with vapor rub to enhance sweating while working out. Maybe then I could eat two full carrots!

"You need to get tested for mono", my family doctor told me.

Are you serious?

Yep, you heard it right, I had mono. On top of steps one and two previously mentioned and having mono, I had runway classes, acting lessons, test photoshoots and dance classes. Good Lord, I just wanted to take a nap and eat Panda Express. I eventually healed from mono but then I was sick for three months; not because of the 'kissing disease' but because I was malnourishing myself. For three months, I had common cold and flu symptoms because I wasn't taking care of my body.

Remember when I said I got down to a 26.5" waist over the summer? Well because of all my illnesses over the next couple of months, I gained my inches back plus a little more. I was at an unspeakable 27.5" waist. My agent started to write it down as she said it aloud and I remember praying that she would say it quiet enough so that no one else could hear it. In order to model outside of Indiana, specific measurements are required to get placed in an agency. I remember her saying that in Indiana they aren't as strict about measurements because we are known to be "slim thick", but to get out of Indiana we had to be not "slim thick". The numbers got so deep in my head because my ultimate goal was to get placed in Chicago, but I couldn't do so if my numbers weren't good enough. I was ashamed that I had gained back an inch. I felt so ugly. *Did I deserve to be there? Were the other models better than me because they had smaller bodies?*

I was starting to lose hope.

I remember going to our runway classes and we would all be lined up against the mirror in our matching black, skintight outfits and black heels. I knew that comparison was the thief of joy but how could I not compare myself to all the other girls when I was constantly being told my progress wasn't as good? Comparing myself to the other models was what destroyed me. I specifically remember one of the girls who was the same age as me at the time that we started modeling. We both signed the contract around the same time which meant we were in training together. Our bodies looked the same. Side by side, the width of our features looked the same. We started out with the same measurements but, somehow, she had already demolished two of our shared goals. And there I was, with zero.

"Five, six, seven, eight", the runway coach would enthusiastically say. Some rounds were 'bubbly and fun' rounds where we had to smile the whole time.

I remember looking at myself as I walked toward the mirror and thinking *how am I supposed to smile when I'm not happy?* I would leave class with blistered ankles, sore calves, and a drained spirit. I told myself to keep the end goal in sight and all the brutal parts would be worth it.

I prayed every night to be healthy and for strength to continue to progress but there was one night where I sat in my bed, so exhausted, my pillow was flooded with tears, and I prayed to God asking Him to give me a sign of what I should do.

The morning after.

I woke up the next morning to an article posted on my twitter feed by a fellow model. She had posted a plethora of stories from various models of our company coming out about our agent scamming them. Things from booking fake gigs for the models to placing the girls in a brothel house to save money when travel was needed for a shoot. I remember running my hands through my hair and closing my eyes. For the first time in a while, I could fully breathe and feel free. This was my way out.

Am I a failure for completing less than one third of my three-year contract?

I called my agent and explained to her that I needed to resign from my contract because I was no longer healthy or in the right mental state to continue. A few days later, I resigned my contract and I was free to eat whatever the hell I wanted.

Now, a year and a half later, I am healthier than I was then, despite still struggling. I get extreme anxiety when I eat full meals because I fear gaining weight. I compare myself to others, especially the models I worked with. I almost feel resentment towards them for getting farther than I did which I am ashamed to say. I get anxiety about taking pictures with friends because I might not look good. I still struggle with body image at times. Though most of the impacts were negative, I have gained mental strengths that have changed my life. Today as I sit here, I realize that no one's progress, or journey will ever be the same. I wish someone would have told me that. I was so consumed by looking like the other girls that I was losing sight of what was important: my mental and physical health. Just because I didn't accomplish what I wanted to at the same rate that the other models did, doesn't mean I am any less worthy. I wish someone would have told me that. Writing this today, I have learned that it is my journey, and only mine. I have learned that I should take more pictures even if I don't look good. This is life. I have good and bad days, but on my bad days I am no lesser of a person than on my good days. I wish someone would have told me that. So no, I did not accomplish my goal, but you better believe that I am amazed at who I have become and how strong I have become. So whether I get out of "slim thick" Indiana or not, I am damn proud of myself and no one will ever take that away from me again.

Problem Dog

Joseph Vainisi

"I'm the king, man. I run the underworld. I decide who does what and where they do it at... I make the money man. I roll the nickels. The game is mine. I deal the cards." - Charles Manson

"I am the beast I worship." - MC Ride

A mess of colors flooded the room. Red, green, blue, white, orange. Lights flashing left and right, flooding my mind with rancid imagery. Between the intermittent flashes, complete and total darkness. Flood of light. Flash of dark. There was something comforting about the suffocating darkness. Peace of mind, if only for a fraction of a second. When I was blind, I wouldn't have to see the pistol in my hand. I wouldn't have to see his face forever burned in my mind. Wouldn't have the cold sneer of Mr. White's command repeat over and over in my head. Wouldn't have to justify my actions. Wouldn't have to answer to anybody. In the darkness, there was nothing. And right now, that is just how I want it.

I can't do it now. It's gonna have to be you... Do it, Jesse. Do it.

Mr. White's words. My actions.

The writing on the walls spelled out exactly what was on my mind. Painted on almost perfectly like the hell I was living in. Faces. Evil faces. Uncertain faces. Demons? Probably not. I've never had any interest in angles or demons. My arm was pointing up, wielding the pistol. Ready to hurt. Ready to kill. The more mutants that fall, the more his face begins to take shape in front of me. Each pull of the trigger became heavier than the last. Bullets of sweat whizzing down my head. I wipe it away, regaining my composure. There are more coming, and I have to stay focused. Eyes forward. Aim steady. Mind true to the task at hand. The screen conjuring images of madness and violence. Two more of them came from around the corner.

Flash. Bang. Scream. Death. Flash. Bang. Scream. Death. Easy pickings. Except this time I swear I saw him, but another glance revealed

again that it was only a mutant. I'm not out of the frying pan yet, there is still more dungeon to fight my way through. I make my way down a set of stairs.

"Look at all this damn water," the television speakers blaring. "Don't drink that. No telling if it's poisoned."

My mind? Yup. Definitely poisoned. Was the television speaking to me? Doubtful. The commentary seemed painfully relevant though. I keep moving. Have to, if I want to stay alive. I move further down the hallway. I pass a skull graffitied on the wall. Double take. I've seen this before. I glance over my shoulder. Sure enough, there it is. The exact same skull caked onto my wall. Did I really see that? Am I losing sense of reality? Get a grip. But what is real? The mutants aren't. Gale is.

Was.

Here we go again. Thoughts. Evil things. Refocus. My mind's in pieces. The only thing important right now is the screen in front of me. That's it. I put my mind back into the character I'm playing. Toxic waste splashes underneath me as my boots march through the horror. Blood too, mixing in with the runoff, creating a dark, dirty sludge. My next move is to climb a ladder, elevating my position in the dungeon. Closer to escaping. Closer to finally leaving this hell. I have no idea what is to come though. More mutants? Perhaps, but maybe something worse. These days, nothing is ever really as it seems. Life has begun taking joy at my misfortunes. Laughing at me. Realistically? Probably not. Certainly seems that way though. Thinking again. Unhealthy. So are bullets. Bullets. Reminder of the game. Reminder of the pistol in my hand. Just in time. More mutants began to flood the screen. I'm overwhelmed. Too many faces. Too many weapons. All charging at me. Out for my blood. They want to hurt me. I want to stay alive. They're standing in the way of that. They have got to go. Frantically pulling the trigger as fast as I can. Darkness retreating behind the muzzle flashes. Repeated over and over and over. Bodies piling up on the floor in front of me. Blood pooling together, until the floor was red. Each body indistinguishable from the next. Panic begins to set in as more and more mutants keep pouring in, coming from everywhere. Fear comes next. Everywhere is a trap. Death hidden behind every corner of every room. All eager to bash my brains in or shoot me to a pulp.

Breathe. Calm. I aim true and keep firing. Something's changing though. The green pistol, looking black. The plastic texture morphed into a cold metallic frame. The weight felt familiar. Comfortable yet unbearable. Burning my hand. Burning my mind. The explosion of flame at the end of the barrel was almost too much for me to witness. Had to keep firing though.

Flash. Bang. Scream. Death.

There were too many of them. I've been hit. Each shot I fired was answered by three right back at me. I grit my teeth and keep going. Hit again. Things weren't looking good. I've passed the point of no return.

Once again, I see him in front of me. However, there is no mistaking it this time. There he was. His face, the same desperate expression he had given me. I could hear his words. Ringing in my ears. Screaming, rather. The same shaking, cracked pleas. Begging for life.

You don't have to do this.

Did that come from the screen or my head? Voices, nevertheless. Tears, the hardest part of it all. Sadness. He was so sad. So scared. Now he's not sad. Now I'm sad. Now I'm scared. No tears here though. Sweat instead.

If I don't shoot, I'll die. Mr. White will die. Mr. White said so. He's a contamination, and so he must be cleansed. That's what I was taught. Doesn't make it any easier. But I did it. Squeezed the trigger. Put him down. Like a dog.

Flash. Bang. Whimper. Death.

His head kicked back at sickening speed. The moment between the trigger pull and the crumpling of the body seemed to last forever. Graceful almost, the way he hit the ground. Like a dance. His final dance. Gale did seem to have an affinity for dancing. On screen, this familiar scene played out. The same scene that had been plaguing me. That won't leave me. It's taken too much from me. It won't go away. Why can't it leave me be? Why can't it go torture someone else's head? Mr. White won't have to be tormented by this. It's easy to tell someone else to pull the trigger. Well, it's easy to pull the trigger as well. Too easy. It's what comes after that isn't so easy.

Another mutant. When will this end? Will it ever end? Well, it will when I die. Death seems closer than ever before. Maybe it will all end soon. That wouldn't be too bad, I suppose. Not suicidal, just not too fond of living right now. I've seen death. I don't want that. It's what keeps me going. It's why I did what I had to do. It's why I pulled the trigger. But it's hard to keep doing it. I don't want to keep doing it. I aimed my pistol at the creature rushing me. There he is. The problem dog. Again. I've already done this. I'll do it again. There is the same voice. Here is the same gun.

Do it Jesse. Do It.

I hesitated. The mutant didn't. Why would he. Before I knew it, dead. Game over. Mission failed. I couldn't go through with it this time, and so I had to pay the price. But I am alive. Me. Not the video game character. Me. Because I did do it. Because I did not hesitate. Because I did want to live. On the screen I see one word. Rage. Painfully accurate. The screen then asks me a question. Begs for an answer. Restart or quit. Go back to my sad excuse for a life and wallow in my own misery, or distraction. I'm a tramp. A bum. A junkie degenerate who has thrown away his life so I can cook meth and hire prostitutes with my burnout buddies. But a straight razor, if you come too close. I don't want to think of that. I don't want to go back to that life. Restart or quit. The answer was pretty easy.

About a week later I find myself hanging around outside of the community center, where they host those hokey addicts' anonymous meetings. Where I only started going to deal meth. Know the customer, right? Fiddling now with my pack of cigarettes. The ricin cigarette. The poison. The capsule that I would use to kill the great Gustavo Fring. Why? Because Mr. White told me to? Just like he did with Gale? Because I needed to do it to survive? Was my life really worth more than his? No. It was because he was just another dog. Another problem dog, and he needed to be put down. Just like the last. I've been thinking lately, about that. Problem dog. What happens when I'm someone else's problem dog? I've already faced down the barrel of a gun more times than I can count. Too many times for one lifetime. More times than most other people would be able to. Just for a little money. Cheddar. Fat stacks. Dead presidents. Cash money. Everything I've ever wanted. I've become the beast I worship.

I debate whether or not to go in. Whether to head home, or chew bullshit for an hour. Hear the same stories. See the same faces. I put out my cigarette. I get up to leave.

I have nothing to say anyways.

The Powerless Witness: A Bystander's Account of Elsie's Murder in Fritz Lang's *M*

Elizabeth Chapa

Fritz Lang's 1931 film *M* opens with a mother waiting for her young child, Elsie, to return home from school. It is evident by the costuming that the mother is of the lower class. Unlike the other children, whose parents wait in fur coats at the school to accompany them home, Elsie is not fortunate enough to have an escort and must walk the streets alone. As we see Elsie leave school bouncing her ball down the street, she is approached by a man, who is only introduced by way of his shadow. The mysterious man purchases Elsie a balloon and various other gifts, gradually gaining her trust--the first of which is a balloon in the shape of the child. This balloon accompanies Elsie and the man, Beckert, as he lures her away from the city. The following narration is from the balloon's perspective.

Snap.

A knot is tied near my legs and I can feel the excess rope trail beneath me as if to form some sort of tail. I feel the grip around the rope release and I begin to drift upwards.

Bwhump. Bwhump, Bwhump.

Knocking into a few people on the way up, I jostle around until I rest comfortably in the middle of the clump. The whole clump gets tossed sideways as our owner pulls us along. I feel a slight shove downwards and the clump gets squished a little as we're brought into a new atmosphere. Instantly, I feel fresh air surround me. Our clump suddenly stops and we right ourselves. Our tails are then tied together on a post. I feel the warmth from the midday sun as I drift aimlessly, or at least as far as I'm able to, remaining tethered to the stand. The cool breeze tugs us this way and that, causing our little clump to sway along with the music of the wind. Or is that actual music?

Off in the distance, I hear a faint whistle that slowly grows louder and louder. As it draws closer, the whistle is accompanied by the pitter patter of footsteps.

Then, a sharp smell hits me. It's a strong scent of pine needles and sap, wafting up, up, up as if to suggest I'm sitting taller than the trees. There's something suspicious about it, but I can't quite place it. The smell stops directly beneath me.

So does the whistling.

Jangle jangle.

Coins are exchanged below, and careful hands reach in and grab hold of my rope. I feel a slight tug at the end of my tail. Slowly, I'm untangled from my place in the clump and gently directed towards another set of hands.

"Pretty!"

It's a child's voice, so full of eagerness and excitement. My tail is quickly grasped in her small hands. I can feel the weight of her eyes admiring my figure before speaking again.

"Thank you!"

Directly following this, I can sense her moving closer to the whistling man, however I trail behind as much as my tail will allow. Next to him or not, his smell is pungent as ever. The pine stench seeps into my skin and screams at me.

DANGER! DANGER!

If only there was a way for me to warn the little girl. She shouldn't trust this man.

His whistling persists as the breeze picks up, allowing me to trail even further behind the pair. I catch myself on a tree branch, hoping the girl connected will also be forced to stop. My guess turns out to be correct.

"My balloon!"

The girl remains helpless beneath the tree, refusing to move on without me, her most treasured possession for the time being. Much to my dismay, the whistling man steps back and unshackles me with ease, making my attempt of a rescue no more than a failed effort.

We continue on our journey, and with each step, I grow more and more weary of the whistling man. At one point, the penetrating pine odor is overtaken by a sweeter smell; I'm engulfed by the sugary aroma of chocolate and confectionery sweets.

Ding-a-ling-a-ling

The man opens the door to the candy store and allows the child to walk in, with me exceptionally close behind her.

"Ooh! Can I have some of that?"

The little girl jumps up and down with excitement, causing a jolting sensation in me too.

Jangle, jangle.

There's another exchange of coins, and I hear the crinkling of candy wrappers, as well as the crumpling noise of the paper bag they're put in.

Overriding all these sounds, though, is the whistling tune that never finds an end.

The man swiftly guides us out and onto our next destination as if in a hurry. What is on this man's agenda? I'm almost certain it's something evil, but what can I do? I'm forced to be a passive bystander, unable to speak, yet doomed to perceive. I can't guide this child away, or yell at her to run. In the end, I won't even be able to see what he ends up doing to the girl.

Although, maybe that's for the best.

Our next destination is accompanied by a whole myriad of sounds.

Clink, clank. Clink, clank.

I hear whirs and beeps and that incessant whistling. The girl leads me all throughout the toy shop before selecting her choice of toy and bringing it to the man.

"Could I have this one, please?"

Jangle, jangle.

A coin exchange happens for a third time, and something tells me this is our last detour before this little girl's final destination.

The girl, laden with goodies, willingly follows the man out and I realize something peculiar. During this whole journey, this man has not spoken. The only noise he emits is the continuation of his tune. He doesn't ask the girl questions about her life, nor does he bond with her. He's systematically going through a checklist of actions as if they're a chore. All this man does is merely whistle while he works.

I begin to hear the crackle of crisp leaves underfoot and the snapping of branches as we pass through to what I can only conclude to be a secluded area of underbrush. I make one last attempt to catch myself on some sort of shrubbery, though I find no success.

Oh little girl, don't you know how much danger you're in? It's not too late! Drop your goodies and run! Although I know she's too trusting of this man to do so, I keep holding onto hope that she will come to her senses.

Shink.

That sound alerts me that the time for escape has passed. The smell of pine gets even stronger.

"What's that?"

The little girl asks, not with concern, but with innocent curiosity. She receives nothing but his whistling in response.

"Excuse me sir, I asked you a-"

Her words are interrupted by a gasp. The whistling stops. The woods are silent. The only noise I hear is the slight rustling of the leaves as they're gently tickled by the wind.

Thud.

I'm jerked downward as the little girl is tackled to the ground. Her candy scatters around the forest floor, and her toys topple away. She begins to cry

for help, but her screams are replaced with a gagging noise as the whistling man chokes her. Before she's completely asphyxiated, he releases her. Her vocal cords are beyond repair; her cries are no more than hoarse exhales. Her grip gets tighter around my tail as she holds onto the only happiness she has left. My body floats side to side, parallel to her struggling attempts to escape. Oh little girl, this is only the beginning of the end. You're too late. There's nothing anybody can do now.

Squelch.

I hear the puncture of skin and a tang of iron fills the air, mixing with the pine needle cologne of the whistling man. I hear the gush of liquid as the little girl's blood begins to flow out of her. Her attempts to scream come more frequently, but they're never successful.

Squelch.

There is another puncture. The iron-y essence intensifies, and a second gush begins. Her flailing begins to slow. I can feel the little girl's grip loosening around my rope. Her strength is escaping as the life is drawn out of her.

Squelch, squelch.

The punctures become more frequent. The pine smell is now completely beat out by the stench of raw, fresh blood. I'm thankful if only for the fact that I can't see this horrifying event; the sounds and smells are bad enough.

Unable to mask his pleasure any longer, the man makes his first noise apart from his whistling.

Squelch, squelch, squelch, squelch.

A bubble of laughter (or is that some other sound of release?) erupts from him and he brings the knife down again and again.

At long last, the prolonged death of the little girl comes to a close. The girl's struggles have ceased. She lays motionless on the grass. The last of her strength has escaped her, and with it, I'm released into the air.

Up, up, up I go. The sole witness to the town's worst offender. Yet all I can do is float away, preaching a silent alarm that no one will think anything of. Even if I could alert the cityfolk, what good would it do, anyway? She's already gone.

The last thing I hear before I drift off into oblivion is the man whistling once more. He finally brings his tune to an end, just as he did the little girl.

Who's There?

Leah Bechtold

"There is no such thing as a real void, one that is completely empty" (from Seven Brief Lessons on Physics by Carlo Rovelli).

I don't know how to best describe my current state other than feeling completely and utterly alone. My parents left me their orphaned daughter when I was very young; I have no siblings. My grandparents are long gone. It's just me, Phleb. It's been just me for quite some time. In the quiet and cold that felt like night, my mother used to tell me to remember that I am never truly alone. I think she was smart, but she was wrong. I have nothing in this void to comfort me. Sometimes I scream and cry and my only consolation lies in my own breath returning to me in an echo. In the daytime, I sing for eternities. After being alone for so long, my mind plays tricks on me. Sometimes I swear I can hear a voice singing back in harmony. A shadow following my dance. A chuckle when I laugh. But I'm alone. A flicker of light shines in the distance illuminating a figure that almost resembles me, but I'm hopeful.

I like to imagine what life would be like if I had a companion. Someone to really sing back to me. A partner in my one-sided tango. A face to see break into laughter at my antics. A voice to say my name. Yesterday I could have sworn I saw a figure in the distance. Tall, lanky, clumsy, and curious. For a moment I let myself believe that he existed. I fantasized the life we would have together. I imagined the love and laughter and life I'd yet to live. But in an instant, he faded away, yet I could hear a faint whistle. A tune familiar to me. The harmony to the melody I sang. The mind plays cruel tricks but perhaps my mother wasn't so wrong. Perhaps the world hasn't been so cruel to leave me totally alone.

I wish I wasn't curious. I wish I could convince myself that I'm going crazy and no one sings to me. But it's not my nature. I'm not satisfied with just the possibility of a companion. I'm desperate for the truth. I did not sing my usual ritual today, nay, I sang a message. A cry of desperation. A plea for

humanity to find me. With the same melody I cried out, “My name is Phleb. I thought I saw a face to comfort me. Show yourself and I’ll be glad. I’ll be glad indeed.” And then I waited. I waited until I could feel every fiber of my being at attention. My ears listening for any disturbance in the all too familiar atmosphere. A cough or shuffle or breath. An existence to match my own.

I waited what felt like years. Maybe even eons. And then I heard a raspy squeak. “Here.” My breath hitched in my throat. “Who’s there? Please! Show yourself!” From what I thought was the emptiness of space emerged a figure. Tall, lanky, clumsy, and curious. His gaze darted around before meeting mine. In an instant, a surge of emotion rushed through me. He looked scared. He looked as if life had battered him as it had done to me. He looked like he knew what I felt. He looked safe. He was the harmony in my song. I stepped toward him, tentatively, and extended my hand. He peered around inquisitively and took my hand in his own. My heart suddenly beat in tune. I felt a rhythm connect that wasn’t just my own. I was part of a symphony. Yes, this was my companion. This was my meant to be. I looked up at him as if to ask where he was for all my existence. He knew exactly what I meant. Without opening his mouth, he echoed my song in perfect harmony. He mirrored my tango. He matched my being.

I squeezed his hand. We needed each other. Neither of us could exist without the presence of each other. Perhaps my mother was right. In the infinite void of space with all its darkness and unknown, my soulmate has been watching over me. There’s never been emptiness, just isolation. Hand in hand, we walked toward our new life. Our new being. Our unity. No, the void was never truly empty.