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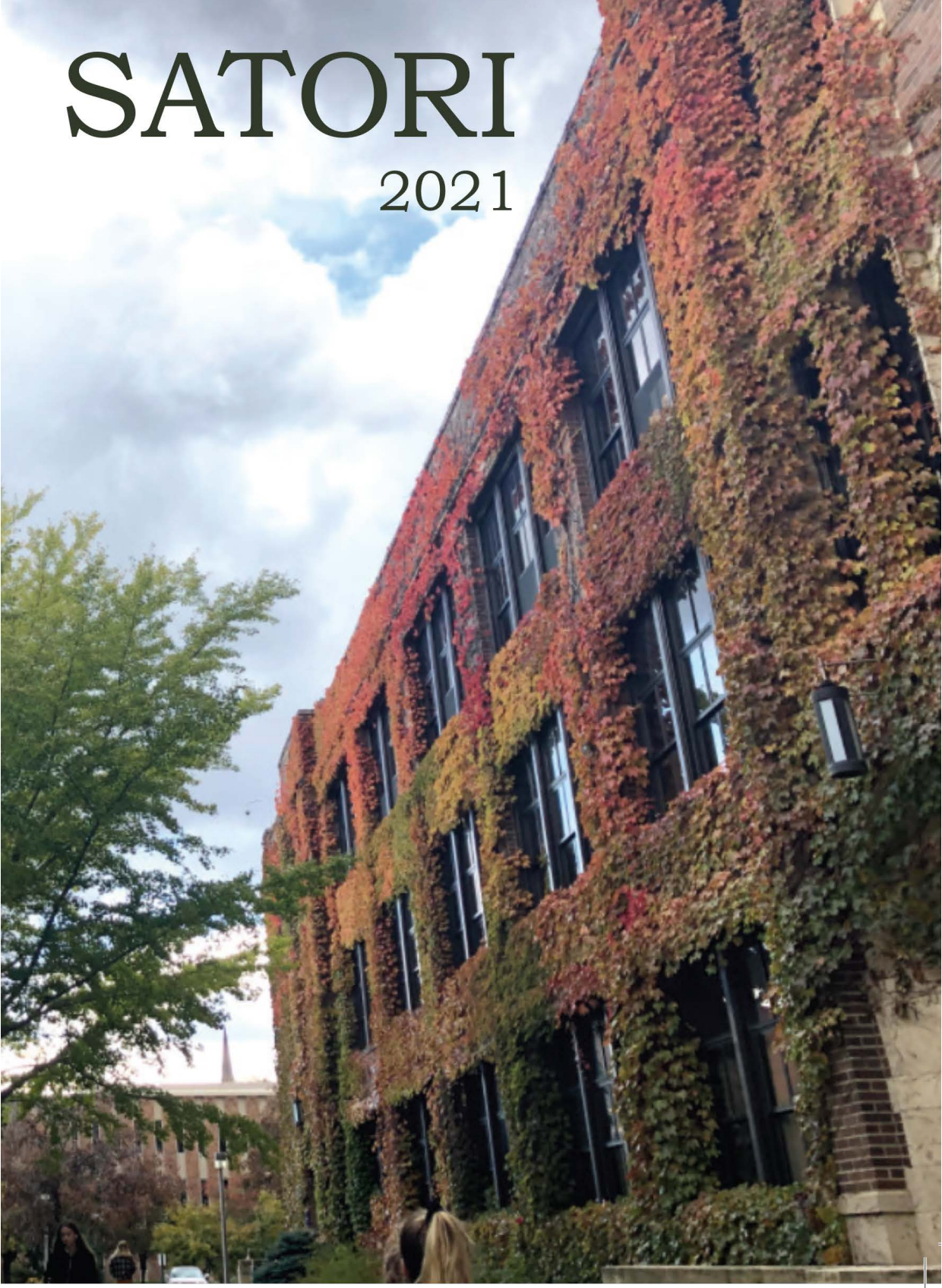
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SATORI

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A Student Literature and Art Journal

Winona State University

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Tree Hall *(cover photo)*



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Dr. Delta Eddy

Dr. Delta Eddy joined the Winona State University English department in 1988 and has since been an advisor to the Satori team. In her time at Winona State University, she has played the role of professor, teacher, advocate, friend, and mentor. Teaching courses in 20th Century Literature, Mythology, Literary Theory, Creative Writing and Rhetoric, she is instrumental in aiding the Satori editors to accomplish their vision of bringing the literary talent of Winona State Students to the community. As the final Satori Editors group under Dr. Delta Eddy's mentoring, we extend our warmest gratitude and thanks to her.

The Winona Prize in Creative Writing

The Winona Prize in Creative Writing is awarded annually to students for their work in Poetry, Fiction and Creative Nonfiction. The donor, who remains anonymous, hopes the prize will encourage students to pursue their writing and literary goals.

Winona Prize in Fiction

Santiago Pérez Goes to the Moon

Caitlyn Salinas

A small mahogany television crouched in the corner of the room. It reminded Santiago of a one-eyed bug, widening its curious eye at him. He stared back, with matched curiosity, at the stop-motion monochrome screen flickering at him. The television reminded him of the lightning bugs and cockroaches that flew about in the Savannah heat. It lit-up, it crouched on four skinny legs, and it had antenna springing from its head. The television even made a noise like an insect: (Meep. Meep meep. Meep meep meep.) A telegraph in Morse code. A man appeared on the screen.

“CBS television presents a special report on Sputnik 1- (meep meep meep)-the Soviet Space Satellite. (Meep meep)- Douglas Edwards reporting. (Meep meep) -Until two days ago that sound had never been heard on this Earth. (Meep meep meep) Suddenly it has become as much a part of twentieth century life as the whirl of your vacuum cleaner... (meep meep meep) It’s a report from man’s farthest frontier. (Meep) – That sound is the radio signal transmitted by the Soviet Sputnik, the first man-made satellite as it passed over New York earlier today...” (Meep meep meep.)

Santiago opened one eye and peered around the small apartment. His father snored on the roll-away bed. His mother rattled dishes in the kitchen. It smelled strongly of chicory coffee. He closed his eyes again, and in what felt like a moment later, his mother was at his side.

“Santiago.” Alma called softly. “Levántate. It’s time for school.”

Rubbing his eyes open, Santiago sat up on the sofa. His mother ruffled his hair. Her hands were soft, her dark eyes framed with gentle wrinkles. Alma patted him on the knee.

“Let’s go mijo.”

Santiago stretched his arms and brought his knees to his chest. His mother had laid out his clothes for school at the edge of the sofa: an ivory button-up shirt, a pair of brown cotton pants, and a small pair of suspenders already fastened to the waistband. On the floor, Alma had set out a clean but worn pair of socks and brown lace-up boots with buckles on the side. Santiago rubbed his eyes with the back of his hands and let out a deep-scooping yawn. He pulled the socks over his feet and stretched the suspenders to his shoulders.

Wandering into the kitchen, Santiago sat at the small kitchen table. Alma set a plate in front of him that contained two small corn tortillas and some black beans. She also gave him a small cup of coffee. Santiago’s stomach grumbled loudly. He began shoveling the beans into his mouth and chewing the tortillas hungrily.

“Slow down Santiago. Your food is not leaving you.” Alma chided, her hand waving with concern. “Now remember to brush your hair and put your shoes on before you leave.” The lilt of her gentle Cuban accent resonated in the room as she stirred rice on the stove. Santiago turned to the reflective surface of the toaster and licked his hand, smoothing down his dark curls. The attempt was futile; they sprang back up on his head.

“¡Ay Dios mío, Santiago, use a comb please!” Alma scolded. She swatted Santiago’s forehead.

“Si Mamá,” Santiago groaned.

The low hum of the school bus summoned from the street below. Santiago ignored his mother’s request,

grabbed his book bag, and rushed out the door. Immediately he bumped into Old Sal, the Pérez's next-door neighbor, in the hallway.

“Oh, uh s-sorry mister.” Santiago muttered, trembling. Santiago hurried past him, shivered, and hurdled down the steps to the street, where the bus was waiting.

Old Sal had always scared Santiago. He had a coarse white beard, a hunched back, hollow cheeks and a hooked nose. Santiago had never heard him speak. He carried a walking stick and trudged around the hallways at night. Each time Santiago heard the thumping of Old Sal's walking stick at night, he put his hands over his ears. Because the Pérezes shared a bathroom with the others on the floor, Santiago heard Old Sal trudging around in his apartment every time he walked by to use the bathroom. He had always imagined that Old Sal watched him through the peephole in his door each time he walked past.

Arriving at school, Santiago stared down at his shoes. His toes peeked through the tip of his left shoe. Carrying his small backpack on one shoulder, Santiago sat in his desk and began to trace circles with his pencil around a water-ring absent-mindedly.

“Good Morning class,” Mrs. Parrish said. Mrs. Parrish, Santiago's third-grade teacher, was a plump woman with a rounded face and cat-eye glasses. She wore a plum pencil skirt, a blouse buttoned all the way to her neck, pantyhose with black lines, and pointy kitten heels. Each time she spoke, more of her berry-colored lipstick smudged on her teeth. She spoke briskly and with chilling intention.

“Today we will be practicing some very important drills for atomic attacks. Now, you all remember the safety video I showed you earlier this school year. Today we shall practice our duck-and-cover technique.”

The class erupted into lively chatter. Millicent Ferron, a bristly-haired girl with freckles and a voice like a ringing telephone, bragged loudly.

“I know all about the atomic bomb attacks. My mom and dad have a shelter all ready in case the reds come. There’s even cornbread and games in it!”

“Alright, alright children! Listen now.” Mrs. Parrish clapped her hands together. “When I say ‘duck-and-cover’ go beneath your desktops and tuck your heads. You will remain in our drill until I say we are done. There shall not be a single peep from any of you, nor a gripe, groan, wail or whine! Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes Mrs. Parrish!” the children replied in unison.

Mrs. Parrish pointed a finger at the class.

“Duck-and-cover!” She screeched.

All the students jumped out of their chairs and crawled beneath the desks. To Santiago, everyone looked like hermit crabs. He did not understand what they were hiding from. He pulled his elbows closer to his body and grasped the back of his neck with his hands, tucking his head between his forearms. He squeezed his eyes shut and imagined a huge cloud of atomic dust descending upon the classroom. Atomic bombs did not sound like a good thing.

The clock ticked tediously. Whispers passed through the room. Santiago listened intently to the clock. His throat was dry and he bit down on his tongue, causing a surge of nauseating pain to fill his stomach. In the corner of his mind, he began to squeeze out a daydream. The corners of the dream were faded like parchment, but he could see clearly, in his mind’s eye, a seed potato rising to the surface of the watery daydream. He reached for the potato, grasping it and examining it. It was about the size of a cherry. It was round and the same shade of green as his mother’s oven mitts. A word came to Santiago’s mind. Sputnik. This was the new word he kept remembering. Santiago found there was quite a curious quality of just-learned words, in that they seemed to make themselves known much more often than ever before. He had been hearing this “Sputnik” word since he had watched the man

named Douglas Edwards from the report on television. A saddle-ite was the thing that went to space. Santiago remembered. Sputnik was a saddle-ite. Sputnik. Sput. Spud. Maybe the saddle-ite is a potato. He thought. It has to be. He was sure of it. If I want to go to space, I need to get a potato saddle-ite I guess. Where do they sell potato saddle-ites? Santiago wondered. They seemed heavy, so maybe the hardware store. Something knocked Santiago out of his daydream. The seed potato disappeared, and he was left with the fading word Sputnik. He began to wonder. Could a potato take him to space? It had for the Russians. Perhaps it could for Santiago too.

Santiago ran up the stairs to his apartment, but just before he opened the door, he stopped, his hand resting hesitantly on the doorknob. His mother's voice echoed beyond the door. Santiago pressed his ear to the keyhole.

"Emilio! Santiago is your own son. At least try to spend time with him and show him you care. ¡Tu hijo ni siquiera conoce a su padre! Que lastima."

"¡Ay Alma! ¡No entiendes! You know I am working all day at the factory! I deserve a whiskey after a long day!"

"You work all day. Si." Alma sighed. "You work all day and drink all night." A door inside slammed and Santiago heard his mother's soft cries from outside the door. Santiago slumped down in the hallway and laid his book bag on the floor. He rested his head on it and fell asleep. He awoke a few hours later to the door opening and his mother's concerned look. She carried him into the apartment and set him gently on the couch. Santiago fell asleep again.

The next day at school, Santiago's mind wandered in class. His head was full of daydreams.

"Children, please open your English textbooks to page three-hundred twenty-six. Today we will be studying poetry." Mrs. Parrish announced.

Santiago opened his textbook. The spine cracked. The binding was fragile and some pages were torn and repaired with tape. He held it carefully. At the top of the page were the words: My Papa's Waltz, by Theodore Roethke. The short poem read:

*"The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.*

*We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.*

*The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.*

*You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt."*

Santiago was knocked from his thoughts by a moistened finger that sharply turned a page in his textbook; a puff of air hit his nose. He had turned to the wrong page. Santiago sunk into his chair a bit.

"Threee-hundred twenty-six." Mrs. Parrish snapped. When she lifted her chin, her nose stood up at a comical angle. "Please pay attention children. We haven't much

time today for your shenanigans.” Mrs. Parrish bumbled on for the rest of the class period, chirping about proper rhyming and metaphors. Santiago flipped the page back and read the poem again a few times, tracing the words with his index finger. He thought about his own father and about the whiskey. He wondered who Theodore Roethke was and how he knew him.

Santiago carried his tin lunch box Alma had packed with arroz y frijoles to the library. When his classmates bolted out of class for lunch and hopscotch tournaments each day, Santiago snuck away to the library. He loved to escape inside books; to different lands where he didn't feel alone. He turned to his favorite pages and folded down the corners, even though there was a sign in the library that said: “Please do not fold pages of library books. Help keep our books in good condition!” Between the shelf with the horror books whose covers scared him, and the shelf that held extra textbooks, Santiago always brought his lunch box to the library and read mysteries during his recess hour. He loved to imagine himself as a detective in one of his books, wearing a big swinging brown coat and questioning suspects with a magnifying glass and a clipboard. But today, Santiago's head felt clogged as if waterlogged. He wished for some relief within the lands in his books. He couldn't focus when he tried to read *The Mystery of the Missing Man*. He kept thinking about all the M's in the title and what it would be like to travel into the sky, touch the stars, and reach the moon. He kept thinking about saddle-ites. This was one mystery he didn't know if he could solve.

What does the moon look like up close? Are the holes bigger? Is it squishy or hard? How did the Russians get there in the potato saddle-ite? Would I sink in if I walked on it?

The same word kept popping into his brain repeatedly. Sputnik. Santiago shut *The Mystery of the Missing Man* and walked over to the front desk by the doors of the library. Sitting at the desk was his favorite librarian, Ms.

Newkirk, who had sterling silver-colored hair and round reading glasses. She wore a dark green cardigan and a brass brooch with a woman's profile on it. On her desk, she stamped return dates inside book covers.

"Looking for something in particular, Santiago?" the old woman asked with a warm smile. To Santiago, it sounded like she was speaking underwater or from far away. Maybe because she works in a library she never has to use her voice. Aware that he had been staring at her for longer than a polite period, Santiago snapped back into the moment.

"Yes ma'am," he whispered. "Couldja please tell me where the books about the Space Russians are?" A loud voice interrupted the librarian's response.

"Hey boy! You shouldn't be fixin' to learn about them Russians. They's the rotten commies my dad is always talkin' about." The boy had cropped blonde hair, an abrupt nose, and eyes that looked like paper cuts. He was much older than Santiago. It frightened Santiago to look him in the face. The boy narrowed his eyes further and loomed close to Santiago's face. His breath smelled like ketchup.

"Better dead than red is what they're sayin'!" The boy laughed. A bell rang shrilly in the school and the boy left, still laughing to himself. Shaking, Santiago picked up his lunch tin and *The Mystery of the Missing Man*. He turned around to the old woman. She held up a withered index finger to her lips and slid a book across the desk. The cover read: *Space Exploration: A Forecast into the Modern Age*. Santiago gripped the edges of the book gratefully and hugged it to his chest.

"Thank you, ma'am." Santiago mumbled. The old woman nodded and returned to stamping inside the book covers.

That night, Santiago sat at the kitchen table practicing his multiplication. His father stumbled through the door, breathing hard. Words slurred and breathing profanities, Emilio poured cheap whiskey and coke into a lowball glass.

He took a sip from the glass, his eyes molten. His bottom lip curled under the rim of the glass. He turned the glass upside down and slammed it hard on the countertop, hitting the surface so that the top of the glass shattered. He ground the glass in a circular motion, as if he was trying to grind spices with a mortar and pestle. Easing off the glass, he poured more whiskey into it and drank from the serrated rim. Blood dripped down the side of his mouth. Santiago hesitantly made his way toward his father. Emilio said nothing. He stared straight into the emptiness ahead. Santiago tugged on his father's shirt, hoping for a hug. The stench of whiskey stung his nose. He gave a small cough but his father was still someplace else. Emilio staggered away to the bedroom, Santiago still clinging to him. He placed a dirty hand on Santiago's head and pushed him away.

"Anda acostáte" Emilio grumbled.

Santiago's head throbbed. He obeyed and went to his bed bewildered. Pulling his blanket over himself, he peered up at the ceiling. He could barely make out the coffee-colored water stains in the dark that decorated the ceiling in lazy circles. The wallpaper peeled at the corners. When Santiago turned his head, he saw that some of the floor boards had been chewed through. He closed his eyes, and wished for both a father and a moon that were closer.

The next day on his way home from school, Santiago stopped by the hardware store. The top of his head barely reached the counter, so he raised his ankles to stand on his toes.

"Excuse me, do you have saddle-ites here? He pronounced saddle-ites with much emphasis on the 'ites'.

"We have a set of lights around the corner over there kid."

"No, mister, um... I was wondering about if you had SADDLE-ites."

The man scoffed and wore an expression as if he had just bitten a chunk of flesh out of his own cheek.

“We ain’t got saddle-ites, kid. What kinda place do you think this is?”

As Santiago turned to leave, he caught a glimpse of some seed packets on a shelf by the window. Sputnik. The word popped into his head once more. This time though, it was because one of the seed packets was labeled ‘Yukon seed spuds’ That’s it! I need some of those to grow a potato saddle-ite.

“I would like to buy these, uh mister.” Santiago pulled a packet from the shelf, tearing a corner slightly, and placed it on the counter. A few seeds spilled out. The man furrowed his brow. Santiago fished for quarters in his pocket and paid for the packet, leaving the store gleefully. I’m going to grow a saddle-ite. He thought happily.

“I’ll be back soon, okay? Llegaré pronto.” Alma assured Santiago, placing her hands on his cheeks. She kissed his forehead. “Stay inside, mijo. Do your homework por favor.”

“Sí Mamá,” Santiago replied. He did not like to stay home alone, but it wasn’t so bad sometimes. If he climbed into the kitchen sink, he could reach the jar on the top shelf where Mamá hid the chocolate wafers for special occasions. As soon as Alma closed the door, Santiago pulled a chair from the kitchen table up to the sink. Removing his boots, Santiago planted his bare feet in the sink. It was a bit wet, so Santiago held a cabinet to steady himself. He was reaching for the jar when he heard a furiously loud and urgent pounding on the door. He jerked his head to the door, trying to think of a good excuse for stealing wafers. He paused and listened to the pounding. This man is very angry. Maybe he is at the wrong place? Santiago wondered. From the other side of the door suddenly came a bellowing.

“Where are you Pérez? Open the door...” His words were very slow and sounded stretched out.

Santiago, frozen in fear, lowered himself from the counter, grabbed his book, and crawled into the cabinet beneath the sink, pulling the doors closed behind him. He grasped the back of his neck with his hands, tucking his head between his forearms just like Mrs. Parrish had said to do. He squeezed his eyes shut, but this time he couldn't imagine anything because the noise was too loud. With each pound on the door, Santiago's heart bumped in his ears. Suddenly, the door burst open, and the heavy clomping of boots echoed through the doorway and into the kitchen. Santiago pulled his elbows in close to his body.

"Where are you Pérez?" A man roared.

"Fucking coward." Another man growled.

"Come on Pérez. You owe me." The man said, clicking his tongue at the silence.

Tears rose in Santiago's eyes and threatened to spill over. His throat tightened and a silent scream rose from the back of his throat. His ribs ached. Clutching his knees with his elbows, his bones shook violently, and an icy fear seized him. He knew that these men were here to take something from his father, but he wasn't sure what. Santiago pressed his hands around a narrow crack between the doors of the cabinet, making sure not to press too hard, and peered out. The man that was yelling wore blue jeans, industrial boots, and a white undershirt. The man's arms were covered in tattoos and exposed, which Santiago thought strange for October. He was accompanied by four greasy looking men. Between the crack, he also saw a short man reach into his pocket and produce a switchblade. Santiago's chest tightened.

Listening to the men continue into the kitchen, Santiago pulled his knees closer. The men knocked down pots and pans and pulled glasses from the cabinets and threw them onto the floor. They seemed to be searching the house for something.

“Hey!” a deep, guttural voice rang out into the small apartment, interrupting the glass shattering and roaring of the other men. “Get the hell out of here! This is private property!”

“Oh yeah? And what you gonna do about it old man?” Snickered the man with the tattoos.

“I’ll shoot your ass right now!” yelled the new voice.

Santiago saw that the new voice belonged to Old Sal, who was pointing a small silver revolver at the man with the tattoos. A surge of relief filled Santiago’s stomach. There was a scuffle between Old Sal and the men. The man with the switchblade took Old Sal by the shoulder and pushed him down, while the man with the tattoos pried the gun from his hands. Startled and shaking, Santiago remained inside the cabinet, tears running down his face. His eyes were now tightly shut. Santiago clutched *Space Exploration: A Forecast into the Modern Age* as he listened to the men yelling around the kitchen table. He slowly opened his eyes again and saw that his father had arrived. He felt relief again. But instead of telling the men to go away, Emilio yelled back, something about not having the money just yet, waving his hands in dismissal. Suddenly, Alma bolted through the door.

“Where is Santiago? Where is my son?” she screamed. The man with the tattoos looked angrier than ever. He yelled one last time at Emilio, who was still frantically waving his hands.

“I don’t got it! I don’t got it! But I’ll get it to you. I will!” Emilio explained. His voice was bitter. Santiago watched as the man with the tattoos turned around and shot his mother. She fell to the ground with a sickening cry.

There was an explosion of noise, mostly from Emilio, who screamed out. The men began fighting each other. The man with the switchblade ran out of the apartment, while the man with the tattoos wrestled Emilio to the ground. He kicked Emilio repeatedly until he did not try to stand

up. Then Santiago watched as the man with the tattoos and the others searched the apartment. They went into the bathroom and the living room, rummaging through the furniture and the drawers. The men then all left the apartment in a hurry. Santiago saw the man with the tattoos carrying a fistful of jewelry. The man took one last look around the apartment and left, slamming the door. Santiago pulled back further into the cabinet.

After a few hours, the noise had been gone for quite some time. Trembling, Santiago pushed open the cabinet doors and looked around the room cautiously. The apartment appeared mostly the same. The water stains still decorated the ceiling and the wallpaper still peeled at the corners. The floorboards remained chewed through. There were only a few things that were different. There was broken glass covering most of the floor of the kitchen. His mother was gone. His father sat at the kitchen table drinking whiskey from the bottle. He showed no reaction at Santiago's emergence. Santiago watched his father's face, searching for emotion. It was an empty pursuit.

"Papá, can you tell me where Mamá is?" Santiago finally asked quietly.

"She's dead." Emilio said flatly.

"Did she go to heaven?"

"Yes."

"Where is heaven, Papá?"

"In the sky."

Santiago suddenly realized why he needed to go to the moon.

Where I Sleep

Jacelyn Schley

One of my earliest memories happened while I was in the crib. I don't remember the colors or the shape of the crib itself—I think it was made of a light wood?—but I do remember the small fleece blanket that looked like a sheet of paper with pastel yellow and purple crayon scribbled all over it. I held onto that blanket while I slept, whether it was in complete darkness or in the brightness of the early morning sunrise. One of the more vivid memories I had in that crib happened during a thunderstorm in the middle of the night. The loud crash of thunder must have made me cry because I saw a dark shape get up from my mother's bed and rush over to me.

I learned how to climb out of it at an early age—this was before my mother had a door for her bedroom—so I'd amble around the house in my diaper while Mom had guests over or cut hair for a friend. She went to a vocational school in Mankato, so she'd be a hairdresser like her Mom. She was very good at it and thought about opening a shop, but she had to give it all up once she married my father because he was a freelance carpenter. Neither of their jobs were stable enough for a steady income and neither job had an insurance provider, so my Mom quit her job at the barber shop and worked for Land O' Lakes in Fairmont. She got laid off once the factory shut down and moved to Utah, so she got another job mowing lawns for McNelius Trucking. She worked that job for a few years until they moved her up to chassis inspection where she weighed and examined every municipal truck McNelius manufactured. For twenty years she's worked there in order to provide for me while my Dad went around town fixing roofs or cleaning out abandoned houses.

Once my mother got off work to pick me up from school or daycare, I'd toddle over to her and give her a big hug. She smelled like gravel dust and deodorant. The yard she works in had partially hardened dirt on the ground with several mounds of gravel sitting nearby. It was very dusty, but the smell reminded me of the gravel roads back home. Home for me was a large patch of dirt, which used to belong to my grandparent's farmstead, surrounded by gravel roads. We sat just outside of town, Dodge Center, a little way south of the small airport there. Several locals in big trucks like to speed down these roads, kicking up a large plume of dust behind them. Sometimes, during very dry Summers, the dust leaves a faint haze in the air. Mom hated it, because it got the laundry that she hung out to dry dirty again.

The time my mother didn't spend on work she usually spent doing laundry or washing dishes while Dad sat in his workshop and smoked. My father once told me the best decision he made in life was to become his own boss and follow his passions. He always had a project going on, whether it was building a deck, a sunroom, a horse cart, furniture, or sometimes an entire building. The workshop he always sits around in is one of these projects. He built it when I was around three years old and I even remember when he poured the concrete for the floor. I took a stick and wrote my name in the bottom corner near the front door while my parents added a date. It's still there buried beneath a pile of rainboots and a large bucket my Dad set out for Mom to pick up his dirty laundry. He lived out there most of the time either watching TV, smoking red Marlboros, or working on another carpentry project. Mom used to smoke too. She used to leave me in the house whenever she joined Dad with her light blue packages of menthols. I was an asthmatic at the time, so Mom popped in a movie too keep me company and came back in once the credits started to roll.

One day, sometime after some more construction on the shop, Mom went out to say something to my father. When she came back, she found me facedown on the kitchen

table, dead asleep. She can't remember what made me so tired or why I decided to crawl on top of the kitchen table to pass out, but she thought it was funny enough to take a picture as a keepsake. The other times she left me alone, she would run out of things that'd distract me. When movies and toys lost my attention, I started getting into things I shouldn't have. Unrolling toilet paper and folding them into perfect squares, mixing baby powder with water to make putty, or spraying some of Dad's Gillette shaving cream directly into my eye are some of the minor offenses I've done when left unsupervised. There are many messes and mishaps, but the worst I've done so far, which earned my first and only spanking in my life, was cutting my own hair.

I saw Mom do it a thousand times for other people, so I thought I could do it myself. In our tiny bathroom, there are three cubbies that sit behind the mirrors above the sink. In the middle cubby sat a small white mug where we kept tweezers, toothbrushes, and two small pairs of scissors. I grabbed one of them and started to hack away my bangs until Mom finally found me. She was angry beyond belief—it was mostly the hairdresser in her—and I got bent over her knee, but she never laid a hand on me since. To this day I have not cut my hair, nor have I ever had anyone else cut my hair except my Mom for the occasional trim. I was a chaotic child getting into everything and anything, but when I wasn't destroying the house I was hiding inside the little blanket hutch in my Mom's room.

On the far wall of my Mom's bedroom there were two open closets where we used shelves and laundry baskets as makeshift drawers. Both closets consisted of pine wood slats laid diagonally across the wall with a rough orange frame around opening. The frame was so rough I would cut my finger if I pressed too hard; but it worked wonderfully as a backscratcher. Like a bunch of grizzly bears scent marking a tree, either my mother or father would randomly walk into Mom's room just to scratch a part they couldn't quite reach. Between these two closets sat a small alcove

that held a window with the blanket hutch nestled underneath.

The hutch's front was made of the same rough, rugged material as the closet frames, and the doors had pine tree cutouts in the center with square metal mesh to cover the hole. Inside the hutch we kept all our blankets. Not just spare blankets or extra bedsheets if Mom felt like changing things up a bit, but several crocheted blankets and quilts made from grandmothers and great-grandmothers who have long since passed away. Mom took special care to store them away somewhere safe as the trailer we lived in often sprung leaks that bled rusty water from the ceiling and walls. I often tore them out and threw them on the floor so I could shut myself inside.

Sometimes I fell asleep in there despite my Mom constantly telling me not to, but she eventually gave up and let me do as I pleased. Once I cleared it out, I dragged some of my own blankets and pillows behind so I could turn the hutch into a pillow fort. Sometimes, after I grew out of my asthma a bit, I sneaked Swiss Cake Rolls and cans of Pepsi from my Dad's workshop and secretly ate them in the hutch. Mom tried to keep me away from the sweets, but that never stopped me, nor did it stop her from finding garbage when it was too late. She could have scolded me, but she knew I had a nose of a bloodhound when it came to sugar.

That hutch was one of my favorite places to hide—I could have lived in there if I could—but sometimes the laundry would block off the doors. Mom always piled up all the clean clothes in front of the blanket hutch for her to do later, but as the week went on the pile would sometimes get so high it would almost be the same height as the bed. Buried underneath was a small stack of hangers for my Mom's work shirts. I had to be careful where I stepped or else I'd break a hanger, but I eventually learned to work my way from the outside in. I must have been in elementary school when I learned to help Mom with the laundry, because I often tried to copy her when matching socks or

rolling up a towel.

Some days we got a lot done, starting with towels and shirts and working our way down to the delicates. Other days we let it sit until we had a weekend to get through it all. Whenever that happened, Mom would pop in a movie series for us to watch as we worked through the pile together. Sometimes it was Narnia or Harry Potter, but the classic favorite of ours was Lord of the Rings, the extended edition. They came in three boxsets, green for the first, red for the second, and blue for the third, and the art on all three covers looked like they were leather-bound books with gold leaf pressed into the title font. It took a whole day to get through all three, but if we started with the laundry in the morning, we would finish on a freshly made bed. Mom taught me how to do that too as we often washed her bedsheets on one of the bigger laundry days.

I loved helping my Mom. Sometimes when she hasn't come home from work, I'd do all the dishes, laundry, and make up her bed so she'd come home with a surprise. One time I got lethargic halfway through after I dumped a load fresh from the dyer onto the floor. The smell of Downy fabric softener and dryer sheets drew me in while the warmth kept me in place. Mom found me asleep in some unusual places before, so she wasn't surprised when she found me half-awake in a cold pile of laundry, delirious and with a slight headache. The only other place, though not as unusual, that had this effect on me was car rides. A warm car seat and the consistent motion of the car never fails to lull me off to sleep only to have me wake up confused and unsure of where I am. As strange or bizarre as my choice in sleeping spaces may be, I am not too picky as to where I'll pass out.

Yet, out of all the strangest places I've slept in so far, as interesting as they may be, the strangest place I've ever slept in would probably be my own bed.

Once I finally grew out of my crib, Mom had me sleep in her bed for a while. Whenever I didn't sleep on her bed, I

shared my dad's futon on the living room while he was still living in our house. I've always wondered why my parents never shared a bed, as movies and TV shows often had the mom and dad sharing the same bed together, but whenever I asked my mom, she told me, "He's a bed hog." I never questioned it beyond that, though I was a bed hog who kicked a lot in my sleep. Mom often complained about it, but she never kicked me out because of it. It was confusing when I thought about it, but then I finally assumed she just wanted her space.

Dad finally moved out when he took one of the couches from the house. It was a tan couch, cheap and had to be assembled—though the arms would often fall off—with storage space underneath. Before he moved it used to sit our Livingroom and we used to store all of our old VHS tapes in there, including several of the Westerns my Dad loved to watch, like Jeremiah Johnson, Hang 'em High, or Paint Your Wagon. Late at night, around 9 or 10, he would cook up a supreme Tombstone pizza then pop in a western as a "sleeper," which is a term he made up for movies to fall asleep to. It didn't matter what movie it was. It's a sleeper if you know you're not going to stay up to watch it. Even though it was meant to be a sleeper, sometimes we would stay up to for him to lean over and occasionally ask me to pull his finger or to have me paint his toenails with the sparkly nail polish I hardly ever used.

Once he took the couch, we didn't have any more sleeper nights.

He moved out sometime during my late elementary school years and left me the extra couch and futon, though he still came in to eat and use our bathroom. The futon was one of the black ones made up of several metal bars for the frame. It was very uncomfortable to sleep on and it still smelled of cigarettes and late-night pizza, so I took the couch. It was a white couch, though it turned yellow with time, and it officially became my bed until middle school. The couch wasn't super comfortable—the cushions were flat, and it was harder than most beds—so I often

layered the cushions with 4 quilts and blankets. It was very comfortable to sleep on, but I often had to fold them and layer them back up again each week because I rolled a lot in my sleep. Sometimes I got creative and turned the couch into a pillow fort. Mom covered the couch with a comforter to hide the obvious stains from everyone else, so I tucked one end between the wall and the back of the couch, set up the two cushions on the floor on the front end of the couch, then draped the comforter over top to create a little tent. I layered several blankets and pillows into the space underneath and made that my bed for the next couple weeks, or until I got bored and wanted a normal couch again.

Since my bedroom was our Livingroom, and Mom was all the way at the other end of our trailer, I had unlimited access to the TV. I often stayed up late watching Fox 47, mostly to catch up on Friends at 10 o' clock then King of the Hill at 11. Sometimes Mom would yell at me to go to bed from her end of the trailer because I cackled too loudly at some of the antics of Bobby Hill or Chandler Bing. Although she'd yell at me, she never got up to do it as she was usually very tired working from overtime. That was another bonus of sleeping in the living room.

I had no set bedtime whatsoever.

I never went to sleep even when Mom had me sharing her bed. She'd leave the TV on in her room after watching the news for the night and I waited for her to fall asleep so I could sneak out. I knew she was a light sleeper, because she caught me a couple times, so I waited up for about an hour to listen to her breathing patterns. Sometimes she'd lightly snore, though that usually meant she was half-asleep. I finally decided it was finally safe for me to move once she started sawing logs. I started by slowly shifting towards the edge of the bed and moving my feet on the floor one leg at a time. I didn't even sit up. I just kept my back arched like I was crawling under a limbo stick. Once I reached the floor it took me five minutes to skirt around the bed and leave the room, stopping every time her breath

caught or when the floor creaked beneath my feet. Only when I reached the hall did I finally start walking normally before flipping on the TV just in time to watch Hank Hill remind everyone about the wonders of buying propane.

I had the freedom to do whatever I wanted, so long as my parents were asleep, but one of the major costs to this freedom was my privacy. As a child, I didn't see this as a problem. I slept in the living room, so people were in my space constantly. Dad randomly came in to eat dinner, pizza, or to yell at me for not helping around the house or I'd wake up after dreaming about a war where I killed several people only to see Mom watching Narnia again while eating her breakfast. Initially I wasn't bothered by this, because I still considered this quality time together, but I got sick of it when I finally got a bed.

I was in sixth grade when it happened. My parents set up metal frame on wheels, the box spring, a little purple skirt for flair, and a full mattress on top. Mom bought me a purple polka dotted bedspread for the occasion and one of those fancy canopy nets young girls hung over their beds to feel like a princess. My cousin Beth had one of those. I loved sitting under it whenever I came over to visit her house and felt a little envious that she had one. That was one of the reasons why I started guilting my parents into finally getting me a bed. The other reasons were when I started realizing my bedroom wasn't like everyone else's. I started making more friends in middle school, which meant more sleepovers in bedrooms that were separate from the rest of the house, especially bedrooms with doors on them. I realized very quickly my sleeping arrangements weren't normal compared to my friends. Granted, my friend's households weren't very "normal" either.

One of my friends had divorced parents that had her move between a fancy house to a dingy little apartment with cockroaches every few weeks. Another friend has parents who fought constantly and sometimes got sent to the hospital after hurting themselves or threatening to hurt each other. Sometimes my friends ran away from home

to hide at a friend's house. Sometimes they admitted they weren't entirely sure their parents loved them in the first place. But they all still had their own bedroom. Not just a bedroom, but a place with finished walls, doors to almost every room, and a fully carpeted floor.

If someone where to walk into my living room and look at the furthest wall, they would see yellow insulation and some exposed wiring as an electrical outlet, with no covering, dangled out of the wall. We still used the outlet to plug in our TV and our lamp without getting electrocuted. Mice sometimes made nests in the insulation and I could hear them running around in the tiled ceiling. The parts where the walls were covered had more wooden slats of a chocolaty brown color and it matched the carpet covering almost three quarters of the floor. The parts that were uncovered revealed the plywood floors underneath. The entrance to the living room used to have a curtain and a rod that kept falling off the wall, but we had to take it down permanently after it fell on Dad's head. So, not only could anyone, guests or family, come in and out as they pleased, but they could also see me sleeping from the kitchen.

The living room sat right next to the kitchen and both the fridge and the microwave sat just five feet away from my bed so if anyone got hungry, I would see them and they would see me. This wasn't too big of a problem during the day, but sometimes, usually at one or two in the morning, Dad would come into rifle through our fridge before returning to his workshop. As a teenager who only had freedom to themselves during the late hours of the night, I had to learn the sound of my Dad's heavy footsteps as he approached the trailer so I'd have enough time to turn off the TV, take off my glasses, and feign sleep for the next twenty or so minutes. It was exhausting work, but if I got caught, he'd either strike up a conversation, which I hated because he started drinking more around this time, or yell at me to quit being useless around the house.

I know it's not fair to compare my life to others. Everyone grew up in their own unfortunate circumstances

and I'm sure everyone has their own form of childhood trauma that stemmed from it, though honestly, I don't think I should consider myself fortunate or unfortunate. My parents may have lived separately and gradually grew apart until they finally divorced while I was in college, but they both loved me and did their best to give me a normal childhood. We had Christmases, family vacations, New Years, an annual tradition of showing animals at the fair, dinners, and movie nights. They got me the toys I wanted, took me to the zoo, celebrated my birthday, and even gave me a rose and a card every Valentine's day. There are people I knew who never had that much in their life. I was happy with what I had, and I didn't see a problem with the way we were living until I finally got a glimpse of "normal."

Once I had my own bed, I felt a little closer to how things should be, but not entirely. The unfinished walls created a gap between the top end of the bed and the inner wall, so my pillows often disappeared into the abyss in between. A few nails stuck out of the wall, so I occasionally scratched myself whenever I bumped into it. Sleeping in the bed too was nice for a little while, but I ended up moving back over the couch because it felt more comfortable to me. The plush back and arms gave me more support with the added nostalgia of curling into a couch for comfort. I also preferred to sleep at a slight twenty or thirty-degree angle rather than the flat, cushy surface of the bed. Overall, I realize having a bed didn't fully satisfy what I wanted.

Privacy was still an issue.

Dad didn't come in as often during my middle to high school years, but Mom was always eating lunch near while binge watching TV, which meant she'd be watching her shows for the entire evening without giving me enough space to focus. It started to annoy me. Not only that, but whenever I insisted on working in my Mom's bedroom while she watched TV she'd get angry or annoyed and say, "Oh I'm sorry, am I bothering you?" I lied and told her I needed to finish an assignment, though really, I just wanted my own space.

Sleepovers were a nightmare. As I said, guests could come over and peer into my room whenever they wanted but inviting my friends over made me feel even more self-conscious. Most teenagers had posters and lights hung up around their room while I had no walls to do such a thing. I did have one wall that was drywall, but I bore holes into it with thumbtacks and my fingers out of boredom when I was younger. I suppose I did try decorating it by taping up nature pictures from my calendar plus a few post-it notes or drawings, but it wasn't much to look at. Also, brown walls paired with yellow insulation wasn't a very flattering color. In the end I realized it was pointless because this room would never fully be mine. More importantly, Mom felt embarrassed in having people over, so she tried giving me excuses not to invite friends over.

"Do we have enough room?" We have a couch and a floor.

"Where is everyone going to sleep?" They can bring sleeping bags.

"It's too late to have a sleepover now." It was four in the afternoon.

"It's a school night." The other kids hang out after school. Why can't I?

Eventually it got so tiresome I decided not to bother asking in the first place. So long as I lived in that place, no one would ever want to sleep over or spend time with me because I don't live the same way normal people do. On the rare occasions she did allow people over, I didn't sense the judgement she was so afraid of. The one time I finally did though was when I invited a couple friends over during my senior year in high school. One of them has been to my house a couple times before while the other never saw it before. The new girl grew up in the wealthier side of town, and she excitedly talked on the car ride over only to fall silent once stepping inside my room. She stayed silent the entire time she was there and hadn't returned since. I don't

blame her though. If I were in her situation, I'd probably run too.

I've changed my bedsheets three times and the position of the bed more than that since I first got it, but the rest of the room remained the same up until my Mom and I finally moved out. My bedroom was the family living room, and everyone was free to walk in and see my space whenever they liked. It's one thing to have your privacy invaded throughout the day, but it's another when someone lurks around the doorway to see what I'm up to. As a teenager who had no control of the space given to her, I'd like to have some form of freedom without someone peering at my computer screen. There's nothing bad on my laptop per se, but there are things I would rather not explain to my parents if they saw it.

By the time I moved out for college, I was both terrified, because it was a start to a new life, and liberated, because for the first time in eighteen years I finally had my own space. I may have shared a bunk bed with a roommate my freshman year, but once I moved over to the single-room apartments on East Lake my sophomore year, it dawned on me I finally had my own room, complete with a door and finished walls, for the first time in the 19 years I've been alive.

It's been on the back of my mind since we first bought a bed, but now that I officially experienced it for myself I can't help but to wonder: did I have a bad childhood? I try not to think back on it, try to comb over the memories to find one sign of dysfunction or abnormality, but I honestly can't think of anything. My parents didn't abuse me. Didn't cuss at me. Never forced me or pushed me into anything against my will. They only punished me once for the haircut, but that was it. They were present in my life and gave me everything I wanted. So why?

Why do I feel wrong? More importantly, why do I feel cheated?

Mom used to tell me the trailer was supposed to be temporary. Dad, being a carpenter, insisted he would build us a house by hand once he and Mom finally married. Since it was temporary, we didn't bother fixing things once they broke, nor did we bother to refurbish my room so it would look habitable. Years passed and both the house and my parent's marriage fell into disrepair from neglect. By the time I moved out the ceiling in the living room started to cave in and there were leaks that required three saucepans whenever it rained too hard. There's also an outlet above my head where we had to use a plug-in to route electricity to the living room. Yes. We had to plug in electricity to our living room, and one day the plug overheated and charred the outlet. If I hadn't noticed the smell of burning plastic before going to bed, it probably would have started an electrical fire. Plus, it was the outlet just two feet above my bed, the same outlet I used to plug in my phone, so I would have gone first if a fire did start.

It's scary to think about now that I'm out of there. Life in the trailer was abnormal and unlivable and my Mom still hold some resentment towards my Dad for leaving us there to build his own place instead of promising to building ours. It's infuriating to think about, especially since he worked mostly for himself while Mom worked for us. Whenever we did laundry, he always threw his in with the mix too, and if we didn't get it done he'd yell at us for never giving him enough clothes for the week. I understood why she wanted to leave, but there are times when I imagine what life could have been life if he put in a little more effort. If he built us a house, what color would my room have been? Purple? Aquamarine? Pastels with flowers and seashells? Perhaps black and red for the goth-phase I wanted to explore? Would I have posters for my favorite shows or films on the wall? Pictures of my family? Pictures of friends? Keepsakes? Artpieces? Collages? And what about the furniture? Would I have had a nice chair, bookshelves, a desk, or even a fish tank?

Not only did I imagine what it looked like, but the people who would have been in it. All the friends I would

invite over to have secret conversations with while Mom occupied herself in the living room. Perhaps I could have fulfilled that old trope of sneaking out or sneaking someone in through my window. I know these are typical teenage fantasies that probably would have never happened, but I'd like to think they could have.

On the other hand, I feel like I shouldn't be complaining. There are people in this world who have gone their entire lives without ever having a bed to sleep on or even a place to live. Despite having their own space, my friends also suffered, perhaps more than I did. Not only that, but I can't assume it's normal to have my own bedroom. Not everyone gets to live the rich suburban lives of a three-bedroom house that I often assume is the norm. Can I really say I had a bad childhood when I don't even know there was a standard? Maybe someone was huddled into one room inside a small apartment, hopped from place to place after their parents are constantly relocating, or grew up in a place where they never belonged.

Furthermore, how can I possibly say it was bad when the only time I felt unhappy was when I was fully aware of those conditions as an adult? We live in better circumstances now. My parents may have divorced in the process, but my Mom bought a house and left my Dad at the trailer. I officially have my own bedroom and it's getting painted a light grey color. I have no idea how else to decorate from there because I never thought I'd have the choice, but now I do. I cannot fix what I never realized was broken at the time. In fact, I don't think I realized it was broken until a couple years ago. My childhood wasn't ideal, but it's still a childhood, nonetheless. Besides, I'm now learning someone's childhood doesn't define them.

It's what they make of life now that does.

A Wake

Caitlyn Salinas

Is death sweet and honeyed, a quiet place
For those who have dreamt and those who have cried?

Does it pull gently like the tide
against the slipping salmon?

Or is it like a chasm across the sky
Plucking holes for Lyra to play a requiem?

Will I cry out to the living
Avenge me!
In some Hellenic rage, black and holy?

Will I awaken at my wake
and realize all of me has sunk to the deep
bottom of that well-wrought urn?

Will I gasp for air,
grasping for the life we call breath
from those chthonic depths?

Or will I rise wide
awake into the fog
Too deep
and longing for sleep

A short length away from
plums and paradise?

Escape



Meghan Haldorson

My Sanctuary

Carly Weber

i am changing
i am unrecognizable
to the ones who thought
they knew me

i have taken on this mold
i have fallen in love
with darkness
i have made it my sanctuary
fear is a thing of the past
i greet my sadness
with a kiss
it sleeps beside me
each night

i have done the impossible
i have learned to love
this evil inside of me
even if it doesn't
love me back

spring

Megan Martin

spring is on her way
her sunlight wraps its arms
around me
and melts the frost away

I thought the frost's
icy daggers would pierce
my body whole

I thought the wind's
endless howling would shake
me until I froze

and I thought the winter's
dreary nights would swallow
the light within my soul

but then I saw spring's light
and she gave me
a flicker of hope

for I knew that spring
would always come
to bring me back to life

Fire of the North



Meghan Haldorson

Healthy Flowers

Carly Weber

and i don't feel well
and i don't feel any different
the leaves will fall from the trees soon
august is nothing new to me
i'm still me
i'm still broken
but so many flowers have sprouted
from this body of mine
since a year ago
since six months ago
since last week
i have been watering them
vigorously
i have been taking care of them
the way i should've been all along
the way i should've been
last august
but time prefers to move forward
and looking back would only take me that way
i am a fierce woman
who has grown fierce flowers
healthy enough to withstand
all of the brutal decembers to come

an intimacy with snow

Amanda Gade

to clear the snow from the drive
long before the sun has risen
how could I be so cruel
as to deprive the world of her moment of silence
I am among the greatest with every white falling breath

shadow antithesis
ice wind clean
ethereal immortality
the arctic down comforter;
I search for a goddess, there is none.
It is only you.
you, too, leave droplets in my hair

the sobriety is overwhelming

when I die, I hope it is on a night like this
let me sit with my skin to the earth
shivering
if only to kiss all of you at once

The Pass



Meghan Haldorson

bloom

Megan Martin

where's your inner child?
you know, you can share your inner wild
I'll keep watch as you dance through the forest
and begin to explore this

the leaves whirl around her
spinning circles
of orange, red, and yellow
as they fall to gently to the ground

she trades these colors for indigo
these flowers bloom more radiantly
than what she had wished for
when she had planted her old oak trees

she returned
I missed that smile
her inner wild
her inner child

she said she now knows
it's okay to let go

escapism: but make it a hobby

Shannon Laurance

i am a writer
but like any self-proclaimed writer,
i haven't written anything for my novel in over a year.

i made an entire world, and only a glimpse
is described in the thirteen chapters,
told through the conscious teen who is questioning
his power, his sexuality, his identity, his friends,
much like i have been.

as he learns about the world and it's morals,
forgiveness, and suffering, so do i, and thus,
i never get to writing his journey down,
meanwhile i create an entire map of the world he lives in.

perhaps, as i delve deeper into creating his world,
with every mountain peak i draw
and with important monarch of a kingdom i invent,
i escape the world i live in.

the real world is foggy.
it is messy, and unstructured.
the water spills over the cup that was meant for milk.
i do not think i will ever quite understand it,
unless i happened to be the one who created it.

Belladonna the Belly Dancer

Miranda Templeton

There was a black-haired beauty,
who worked at a dive bar on ninth street.
On her day off's she wanders to
the fields of sun burnt hay.
Next to the brambles of blackberries.
She was a belly dancer and she worked
through the night. But in the mornings
she bounced and she swayed to the melody
in her head. She was dancing barefoot.
Pounding the rhythm of a song
into black earth memories. It was the bitter
Belladonna who taught me this dance.
She passed the bottle of red wine
that stained our teeth. To keep the rhythm alive,
she feels the roar of it in her ribs.
Oh, how sweet that dancer was with her
doe brown eyes and smile that made
the drummer's hands never cease.
She taught me to twirl and to bend my body
“to kill a man, move your hips this way”—she'd say.
I'd ask her the name of her dance?
It was her birth name no less. The belly dancer
Belladonna taught me this dance.

Skittish Puppy

Ryanne Mikunda

Someone yelled at me once,
Someone raised an arm,
Made me feel like a dunce,
An object of harm.
Someone walked out the door
And never returned.
“What am I good for?”
Is what I have learned.
And they think that I whine
When I just need love;
I have nothing that’s mine
But a chewing glove.
They don’t know that it’s tough
Trying not to get stepped on,
And I hope it’s enough
When I simply don’t step wrong.

Snowberry



Jay Lee

Death Comes in Threes

Amanda Gade

On the corner of Branton Street and Suntag Avenue is a bodega that has rusted into the foundation of Olympus and cemented itself into life of the town. Walking up to it brings back nearly two decades of memories of picking ryegrass and dandelions from sidewalk cracks and sharing a cherry coke from a huge slurpee cup. It doesn't matter how sunny it is, or if the rain pours in sheets, you can see the OPEN neon sign of Brauchelor's Mini-Mart blinking from all the way across town. Open 24/7, even on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and prom night, it didn't matter if you needed a cold drink or a condom. When I was a kid, it was run by a couple in their sixties that would leave out the day-old donuts and bagels for the high schoolers walking by on their way home from school. I had a best friend back then, when our families lived in the neighborhood behind Brauchelor's. His name was Trent McKennon, and he was a sunny-haired short boy who always smelled like sunscreen, even in the winter. Throughout middle school and high school, he was "the small kid." Too small to play the sousaphone with me in marching band, too small to play football, too small to have a girlfriend. He never talked about how much it bothered him, but everyone had changed by the time I left town. Every year, my dad gained weight and lost hair and my mom would tease me, saying that I was taking his good looks from him. Every year my sister's haircut got shorter and shorter until I told her she looked like a lesbian, and she said "good." Every year, Trent got more and more comfortable with the concept of existing, and he stopped hiding from everyone. Every year, Wanda Baruchelor looked older and older until you would've thought she would've just shriveled up and died, but I was convinced that she never would.

I'm old enough to know better now.

My mom used to tell me that death came in threes. She was a NICU nurse, and my sister and I would hold our breaths when she'd come in from her overnight shift, wait for her shoes to drop, and listen for her footsteps. If she came to the kitchen where we'd be eating breakfast, she would kiss the tops of our heads and stand in silence with a hand on each of our shoulders before heading to her room to sleep. That meant she had a bad night. That meant somebody had lost their baby. This was a ritual even up through my high school graduation, my younger sister would tell you the same. She wasn't emotional, at least not around us, but it aged her, I think.

That's why when she called me while I was on my way back from work, crying, I stopped my car in the middle of the road. I let the everyone pass me as I stared down at the blue screen on my lap. I listened to her words, replaying them in my mind until they no longer made sense.

"Adam... your dad died last night."

She didn't need to explain it then. I wouldn't have heard her anyway. I told her I'd be home the next day, and without stopping back at my apartment I made the 14 hour drive back to my hometown on the eastern border of South Dakota.

I moved to Utah the summer after my senior year of high school. I went to college, had (and lost) a girl, then a job or two, called home when I could. Thinking back on it now, I'm kicking myself for 7 years of assuming some sort of immortality existed back here. Whether or not you're ready for it, death always finds its way into Olympus.

The funeral was small and quiet. Our house is small and quiet. The town is small and quiet. "Wanda died just a few months ago too, you know," my sister's tone was accusatory as we sat together in the kitchen, breathing morning breath over coffee. "You would know if you had ever bothered to come home."

And suddenly the house was too small, the coffee was too cold, her face was too mean. I pushed myself away

from the counter and out into the fog and drizzle, following that bright flashing blue beacon back to Wanda's, hoping I would see her frizzy white hair leaving a box of stale cake donuts on one of the back picnic tables. I didn't.

Now, just as I used to do all the way back when, I push the door open and wait for the chime, look to see if I should hold the door, then make my way back to the milk coolers. It isn't Nesquick and Cheezits that I came for today. It isn't a copy of the paper for dad, or a Mars bar for my sister. Maybe it's memories, tightly sealed in a mason jar on a shelf with Wanda's homemade jam, or maybe it's the feeling I had on prom night when I drunkenly proposed to Beth Donahue because I felt like I was dying, and life was too good to die alone.

An oily, pockmarked man that could easily be anywhere from 17 to 30 rounds the corner from the employees-only area just as I pull open a cooler door to grab a beer. I blink, unsure for a moment if the sudden smell of unwashed body that strong could really come from just one person. There's something painfully familiar about his posture, his walk, his size. But I have never known this man before. Shit, he's so god damn thin. Shit.

I approach the counter shortly after he plants himself on a stool behind the register. His greasy blonde mop streaks across his forehead as he tilts his head the other way, lazily watching a woman stroll past the window with a yellow spotted umbrella in one hand, and a smaller hand holding her other.

"Hey Trent, how've you been?" As soon as my mouth opens, I hate myself. I slide my beer, a bag of chips, and a \$20 bill to him and point to some scratch-offs that I recognized from those memories I had found hidden somewhere in the smell of this place. "Two of those."

Without taking his drug-heavy eyes away from the window, he reaches into the display case and grabs two dollar scratch-offs, then slides them across the counter with my change pinned underneath them. His hand rests

over them for an awkward moment too long before slothily pulling it back to himself, pushing his shirt up over his bloated stomach, and scratching.

“Been here,” he doesn’t really need to explain to me more than that. I know what that means. Nobody our age ever willingly stays in Olympus. “How ‘bout you?”

“Not bad, living out by Salt Lake City now.” How can I talk about my life without sounding like bragging? Anything compared to here is an improvement.

I lean against the counter and look out the window with him, we don’t say anything for awhile. Trent twitches and mumbles something about the box of cigarettes in my shirt pocket, so I push three of them across the counter to him, which pulls his attention from the window to my hand, and then to the front pocket of his stained work polo as he deposits them there for safe keeping. Aerosmith plays quietly over the speakers, which I drum my fingers to on the glass.

“Pretty quiet here this early,” I say. I’m not sure how to make conversation. He isn’t talking, isn’t asking questions. I didn’t expect to see him in town, let alone working here. He could be angry with me, or surprised to see me, but there’s nothing. His apathy is almost worse. There’s something in the room between the two of us that feels a lot like an unlit cigarette; there’s only the potential for something bad.

“Yep.”

“Really hasn’t changed at all since we were kids, has it?”

“Nope.”

“Am I bothering you?”

“You’re fine.” He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and takes a deep breath. Between us, the dangling ends of a meaningless conversation drift in the bitter air.

“You aren’t... using again, are you?” I ask. The coolers’ refrigeration system hums to life behind me, showing more signs of life than Trent does.

Our senior year, the two of us got involved with a guy named Jordan. It started on prom night, almost to graduation, on the land of some kid whose dad owned thirty acres and rented out a barn as a wedding venue. It wasn't our crowd, but we both had somehow swung incredibly hot prom dates, and with them two free passes to fitting in for once. This is a small town, lots of talk and not a lot of things to do. Apparently, we did the talking pretty well because we were invited back. Jordan had some very specific ways of having fun, and we liked them. We ended up liking them too much, and I became reckless, sloppy, and I got caught. I lost everything; my job, my car, a full-ride scholarship to Augustana, Beth. So I went to Utah, my dad packed me up and drove me to a rehab facility in Salt Lake City and told me that I wasn't allowed back in his house unless I fixed myself.

I didn't do it for him. I didn't do it for anyone. I did it because I was disgusted with myself, because my first night there I shook and dry heaved and sobbed like I never had before, wracked with anxiety and fear and guilt. It was hitting rock bottom so hard I felt it in my bones. I didn't know what happened to Trent, all I remember from that night were the sirens, and watching him run from the back door of Jordan's house.

"Yeah, I am." He licks his lips and attempts to straighten his posture for a second before slumping back into his previous place. "Shit's hard."

"I know it is." My mind crawls with possibilities of things to say. Likely able to see the wheels turning, he turns away from me to grab a drink. "Is Jordan still in town then?" I'm pressing my brain harder for something wise, but nothing comes.

"Mhm." He lights one of his newly acquired cigarettes and takes a drag before turning around again to face me again, shoving his free hand in the pocket of his jeans.

"Did you ever stop?"

He's quiet for a long time, every passing second making me more uneasy. He doesn't look at me, and I study the face of who my best friend had become. His facial hair is patchy, his eyes are tired, his mouth gaps open just enough to see the jagged edge of a broken tooth. There are so many things I could offer him, but none would ever be enough.

"For a bit," he admits. "Here and there, a few times when I didn't have the cash, lost a few jobs."

"Where are you living?" Before he can answer, I know what he'll say.

"With Jordan and his girl."

I step away from the counter and wander down the aisle with trashy tabloids and boxes of condoms. My head reels, digging through years of therapy sessions for something I might be able to replicate to wake him up, but I have nothing. Big font screams at me with "Magnum XXL" and "Former President Nixon's Juicy Secrets." I can feel Trent's eyes on me from the counter as I pick up a thick, glossy issue with a picture of a middle-aged redhead with sallow cheeks and scabs on her arms. "The 20 Most Tragic Celebrity Overdoses of All Time." As I stare at her immortalized issues, something in me sparks. I don't know if it's anger, or pity, or fear.

"Do you want this to be you?" I ask from my spot. He looks at me with an unreadable expression and shrugs.

"Sure. I'd love to be a celebrity."

Buzzing with frustration, I bring the magazine up to him and drop it onto the counter. "You know I mean dead from an overdose." Again, he shrugs, but this time says nothing. "What did you do after the night I got arrested?"

"Went home, didn't leave my room for a few days, tried hanging myself." When I look at him, his eye contact gut-punches me. There isn't a man behind those eyes. That man has been dead for quite awhile.

"Why didn't you call?"

He scoffs, and I almost smile. Yes, be angry with me. Something.

“Yeah, I was definitely gonna call the success story.” He looks like he’ll be sick. I eye the wastebasket by the counter and briefly wonder how often he’s high at work.

“I still would’ve answered, Trent. You were my best friend. I don’t want to see you go down this road.” But I knew as I said it that the sentiment was years too late.

“If you didn’t want to see me go down this road you would have pulled me off of it with you.”

“You know what happened, I wasn’t even here anymore.”

“Yeah, nobody else was either. Jordan got arrested too. Your names were in the paper and everybody knew I associated with you both. I lost my job because I couldn’t cope, I stopped eating, I didn’t exist for months.” He takes a deep breath and tilts his head back, closing his eyes against the dirty fluorescent lights. “I didn’t bother. Figured you wouldn’t wanna talk to somebody who would just hold you back.”

“Why do you keep saying shit like that?”

“What? Things that are fucking correct?” There’s a certain edge to his voice, like a cornered animal. I don’t know if this is good, pushing him to feel something, but at the very least its helping me feel like I have a hold of something here.

“The only way you could’ve held me back is if you had pulled me back here. You could have come with me.” I know that isn’t true, not really.

“Then why didn’t you find me?”

“Why didn’t you let me? I called you over and over the day before I left.”

“Because I thought they were looking for me. I thought they we’re gonna arrest me too.”

“But then at least you could have gotten help!”

“Not everybody can be helped, Adam!” He slams his hands down on the counter as he pushes himself up, raising his voice. We don’t even meet eyes; I look at him while he stares down at the countertop. “Some people don’t get helped, they just get killed.”

“You don’t have to be like this, Trent.” I am quiet now. Maybe I pushed too hard.

“I am this.”

“You aren’t beyond help man, nobody is. You just need to get out of that situation.”

“I’m so glad you know everything about what I’m going through.” He takes one last, hard draw from his cigarette and puts it out on the countertop. He looks at the mess for a minute before grabbing the trashcan and sweeping the ashes into it. “You have no say in what I’m doing with my life.”

“I don’t want you to die. Is that so hard for you to believe?” I feel like I should sound different, more sincere maybe, but all I feel is a bitter, selfish burn in my gut.

“I’m so glad that now you’ve decided I’m convenient enough to worry about.”

“My dad is dead.” I don’t know why it came out like that, or why now. I feel like there’s a part of me that wants to see him to care about something, but I have nothing to gain here. “And, of course, I didn’t see you at the funeral. You couldn’t take the time to say goodbye to the man who treated you like a son.”

“I said my goodbyes a long time ago.” He pulls a lanyard from his pocket to reveal a jangling set of keys, one of which he fits into a door directly behind him to pull out a mop. “Where were you when I needed help saying goodbye?”

“What are you talking about?” I shifted around the counter to give him room to pull the bucket through.

“You have no idea what I’ve been through, do you?” He stops and looks at me, eyes drooping and impossibly tired.

“No, I don’t. I want to help, let me help.” This isn’t good enough, there isn’t a way to make this good enough. I can feel myself floundering, I grasp at straw in front of me. “I can pay for you to go to rehab, you can stay at my place in Utah with me for a bit, we can find you a job out-”

“My mom told me it was my fault you left.” He cuts me off as he slops dirty water and cleaner onto the floor

and spreads it around. “Everyone in town thinks I’m the one responsible for the good kid’s mental break and drug habit.”

“Fuck what everyone thinks!”

“I don’t have the money to leave. I don’t have anything I would need to go anywhere. My license isn’t legal, my car barely runs, I sleep on a bare mattress on the floor and wake up in rat shit, Adam I don’t know what the fuck you want to hear.” He stops and sighs. “But I can’t tell you whatever it is.”

“I don’t think you want to try.”

He stared for a minute, then turned his gaze out the window, rubbing the hem of his shirt between his thumb and forefinger. “The loneliness was crippling, and the high was amazing.” He pauses, unsure, before continuing. “You remember.”

A pang of nausea stabs me, my body throbbing with my anxious heartbeat. I can hear the blood rushing in my ears. Ignoring that, I say “me leaving has nothing to do with the choices you made.” My voice sounds foreign to me, thick and detached. “Why would you expect me to stay here forever?”

When he doesn’t respond I open my beer and lean against the counter, drinking and watching the dirty mop lazily slide across the tile. We exist like that for a while, silent and steaming, until he finishes his mopping.

He uses his keys to lock the closet once again after retuning the mop and bucket to their homes. “I’m tired of this. Just leave before the next shift shows up.” I look around at Brauchelor’s, permanently unchanging, then back to Trent, his head now slumped and chin against his chest. It’s wrong to see him here, like this.

“I’m leaving again tomorrow.” I finally tell him. I don’t know what I expected, but he doesn’t move. “Give me a reason to come back sometime.”

“Yeah, sure.” He yawns and nods his head at the door as thunder rolls through the sleepy town. “I’ll give you one.”

“Tell me you’ll get help.”

“I don’t need help,” he corrects himself. “I don’t want help.”

“I’ll pay for it, whatever you need.”

“I don’t want the help, Adam.”

“I can’t have you die too.”

“You should have thought of that when you left.”

With nothing else to say, I shove the door open with my shoulder into the rain that has started to fall. Under the ringing of the rusted old bell on the knob, I hear him mutter.

“Please don’t miss my funeral.”

Day Are Long, Years Are Short

Ryanne Mikunda

They sat there on the chairs watching her as she slept.
On occasion the man wiped the tears he had wept.
As he held her hand gently and breathed a short sigh,
He looked up solemnly at his grandson nearby.

Now, the boy looked in wonder at his grandparents,
And how feeble and old they were made perfect sense.
For his eyes saw their age crystal clear with no doubt,
But to his childish mind, what was their love about?

Then his grandpa began to speak kindly to him
Of his life in times past, though his memory was dim.
As the story unfolded through his quaking speech,
The boy listened intently to what he would teach.

“We met long, long ago at a park in the spring,
And our interest quickly became more than a fling.
In the moment I saw her, she caused me to smile.
You can see, son, she’s been doing that for a while.

“Many years– they rolled by, spent in togetherness,
And each day brought a new form of some happiness.
But as my mother used to artfully exhort,
‘Though the days– they are long, all the years– they are short.’

“Yes, the time– it was short, like a flash of a light,
Just a blink of an eye till it was out of sight.
We were young and vivacious, countenances bright.
Now we are old and frail, and our hairs turned to white.

“All our time– it came fast, far too fast for my taste.
There was so little, not a moment could I waste.

I remember our first date just like yesterday,
But the things I forgot I wish I could replay.

“For there were times of laughter that near broke our ribs,
Followed by the noises of babes crying in cribs.
There were moments of jubilant exultation;
There were tragedies of greatest agitation.

“It is true there was ample time for many things,
And that no joy equates to the joy that she brings,
But there was not enough time to satisfy me,
Though I’ve now learned contentment in my time’s bounty.

“For the time– it transformed us into what we are,
And from where we began we have now come so far.
Though I might shortly say my goodbye to my bride,
I know that I will see her on the other side.

“So, my son, let our lives be a lesson to you
To use all your days wisely, for there’s precious few.
Do not waste your time chasing more than you may hold.
Simply use what you’re given to love till you’re old.”

My Rainy Lake, International Falls, Minnesota

Miranda Templeton

In the Borderland
I am barefoot
and I am firmly planted on the coarse sand,
on the shoreline.
From my youth I have played in this water,
and my history is tried to this place-
like an anchor that drags me up to the top of the state.
Unmoving as the water gently encourages
you to give yourself entirely.
'you don't ever have to go back to land'
It presses cold lips, and it murmurs in your ear.
For the water is in my blood.
Overlooking the still black waters.
Sprawled out carelessly—
on the border joining one forest to another
foreign place. In northern Minnesota.
Where the people born have hardened
calloused hands—and sour tempers
but they tend to laugh the loudest
in that worn down-piss smelling border bar.
The water is in our blood. Old homes falling apart,
as they sit full of lively ghosts.
The old paper mill's chimney
was the water and our blood.
The town shuddered in cried,
when the furnace went out.
From the fine white porches of old money,
mourning just the same from crooked
steps in the cracked homes
of the trailer homes. Smoke stakes
went cold, as it was the last breath
sputtering out of an old man's gray lung.

We all became ghosts.
Growing plump, fat and old on
lefsa, lutefisk, and lager.
There is blood in the water.
Born from this water I have
seen the twenty-one winters
come and go.
The water tamed
in the stillness of winter.
And when summer breaks
through the ice there is no safe
place to shield yourself
from the black riptides temper.
Poisoned, black water in my blood.
My wild nature has been tamed
by the water and I have run ramped
and wild on through the scattered
islands.

Hellish child falling
out of the tallest pine tree
I wanted to touch the sun.
Wild youth biting the eye out
of a walleye's skull. Its copper
on my tongue, and the water is in my blood.
In mid-May the water
still carries the memories of winter.
Sun dipping low disappearing on the lip
of the horizon. The last glimmer of light
sets the sky alight in royal
orange, red and gold. My eyes ache,
because I cannot turn my gaze away
from the skies fire being tamed
by my cold Rainy lake.
Because the water is in my blood. My bones.
Even in the shallows,

I am in deep, 'come to me and sleep'
The water sighs. The dream of winter
leaves me numb. I am a mortal
and I am made of soft flesh and fatal habits,
and the water is no longer still—its drunk
on the sun's wine. The Ancient lake
turns on a dime as it rolls violently
into white caps. Oh, the water wants my blood.

Portage



Meghan Haldorson

hateful haunting

Emily Venné

it must have been written on my face
the hours of sleep lost to
bad dreams filled of him
(maybe it was the twenty-minute showers
or the need to buy coffee grounds each week
maybe it was the curtains being drawn
paired with messy bed sheets)
but the only advice i could find
was in my roommates' sleepless slur
as she said
"in my culture
a mirror
facing your bed
can cause a restless spirit
and a detached soul"
but I wish I could tell her
it was the mirror haunting me
and not the ghost of a boy
I can't help but see

compass

Megan Martin

my gaze is unclear
for the water is murky
and the sky
bears no moon or stars

the darkness overwhelms me
if only I had remembered my flashlight
for there seems to be
no end to this somber starless night

but no external compass
can direct my mind
I look deeper and realize
I am my own guide

10:49



Meghan Haldorson

boys will be boys

Emily Venné

you see young boys burning ants
under a magnifying glass as they gasp
at the smoke and destruction
but this is one habit they will
never break.

they will continue to put helpless
ants and naive girls under the flame
of their fiery touch.

they will laugh when all signs
of life disappear as their
prey's souls sizzle.

they will walk away carelessly,
and find their next victim
as if they didn't just scorch the
heat from the soul of another.

You're Unlike Others

Cheyenne Halberg

It happens every time.
I meet a guy
And he seems different.

Except
This time,
With you,
I know you're unlike others.

Because when I am depressed,
I don't need to say anything.
You are just there
For me.

Because when I am energetic,
And I do things others call
Annoying,
You look me in the eyes
And kiss me.

You truly are different
From the past guys I've dated
And the other humans on Earth.

Because when we are together,
And I let down my walls,
You appreciate all of me.

Because when we are cuddling,
And I open my heart,
You embrace my entirety.

Because when I see your smile,
My problems from that day
Melt away.

Because when I look into your eyes
It isn't just my heart that pounds
But the urge to have you in my life.

Because I've known you for a month
But you are like
A best friend.

And I may not know all of you yet,
And you don't know all of me,
But I am excited to meet
Every part of your being.

You seem different from
Every guy,
Every human,
And I hope you don't prove me wrong.

Yellow Walls

Carly Weber

i am drawn to
tired eyes
i crave
bruised hands and
chapped lips
lead me to
the lost souls
with frayed dreams
and sick hearts
let me dissect them
let me rebuild
what this world stole
send them to me
my door is unlocked
a shower running
there is a room reserved
with yellow walls
let them
carve their names
into the woodwork
they are safe here

she is in the mirror

Amanda Gade

she is a wild thing
a bucking, snarling, hissing beast
that laughs like a teenage girl
and sucks her teeth with the judgement
of a mid-30s gay man
who thinks he knows life
and a good dick when he sees one

I don't know how anyone ever got rest beside me
when all she does is screech about body fat
measure her waist with her fingers
and sleep

or how the pills shut her up, I guess
and now when she comes out it's 3:26 a.m.

and my love has gone to sleep
carrying the rest of my thoughts with him

and in a half-upped stupor, she moans
"my god, look at you,
no wonder he isn't attracted to that"
she sharpens her words on the stone of my insecurities
that will always be there
no matter how much sweet apricot surrounds it

she is a wild thing
there in the singing branches of the great elm
and in the hollow tracks that parade through my snowy lawn
I sip my coffee in the morning
and suffocate her in nortriptyline and amphetamine salts
and like a drunk college girl
she passes out against the toilet
fingers still in her mouth

reasons for a lack of trust

Shannon Laurance

i have a graveyard of old friends
tucked away in my scattered thoughts
but their souls echo on everyday,
as the bodies of my new friends decay.

i can hear everyone's thoughts.
the thoughts of betrayal from the
new friends, and ghosts of the old
belittling me, picking me apart,
like a crow picks at the bones
of a delicate rotting shrew.
their thoughts reduce me to haunted dirt,
because i'm not quite worth it.

i can predict everyone's actions,
because they all act the same,
serving only themselves right to
the grave. i know their intentions,
and i don't quite want them to leave,
i spend so much love on them
i am running out of the currency
too quickly for them to just go,
but to the grave they must go.

setting the table

Emily Venné

the first day after you left
I grabbed four plates instead of
the newly needed three
that night I ran into the living room
where you normally slept
and looked at the couch
that still smelt like you
but the old you
was not there

I wonder if that same day you
turned around and spoke
my name
forgetting
that I was 124 miles away

but now 8 years later
I find you sitting at our
kitchen table as a visitor
in a house that was once yours
with a family you once knew
this time I instinctively grab
three plates
as I have learned to do
but it is not the three of us anymore
and I take a seat next to you
not realizing that once again we make four

Papa's under the table

Miranda Templeton

Oh Papa, there was a clap
then there was a crash—
stumbling drunk you came home,
having enjoyed too much
of that midnight air.

Oh Papa. I was ten when I
was awakened from my carefree
sleep. I am cold from the night
breeze. Because you forgot to
close the screen porch door.

Oh Papa, things were better
for us in that old and mold covered
house on eighth street. Where
the furnace cried on those winter days
That crooked and cracked yellow house.

Oh Papa. Look at us now.
Can you believe it? I can smell
the cheap beer on your breath,
from here on the hardwood stairs.

Oh Pape, your hands worn
from a long day's labor.
You would be so tired. No
wonder you dropped to the floor
dead asleep under the table.

Oh Papa, what a sight
to see you there. Snoring like
a roaring bear on the dining room floor.
Mama hadn't seen me yet.
She kicked your foot.

Oh Papa, you made Mama cry
as she stood over your sleeping
form with her closed fists over you.
She was in rage. Instead of a
blanket Mama turned off the lights.

Oh Papa, look up to the
tabletops—bottom. See the faces
etched in the sweet secondhand oak
table. You know the one with the
wobbly; broken wheel.

Oh Papa, the faces in the wood
look like angels were sent
from above to make some
Divine amends to make
up for my Mama's broken hear.

Oh Papa, lower your eyes.
You are drunk. The angels
in the wood—they are your
heavenly judges, over you sweet
intoxicated mortal soul.

The Retreat

David Som

Nobody tells you just how much mud and animal shit will coat your legs by the end of every day in those retreat pamphlets, that the food will be bland, or that the retreat counselors will talk to you like a delinquent middle schooler, the power of it all having gone to their heads. Nevertheless, I shelled out a thousand bucks for this, so I toss my brown shoes, which were white a week ago, beneath the spout delivering water from God-knows-where and crank the lever. The water looks and vaguely smells like urine.

There's no reception out here, and the only Wi-Fi available is password protected for staff use only. After three days, a span of time that felt like an eternity, I'd gotten myself out of the habit of obsessively checking my cell phone for messages and missed calls that weren't there, perhaps out of the smallest bit of hope I still hold somewhere in me that my ex-husband had finally fixed himself and wants to make up. Out of the smallest bit of good he had in him that compelled me to love him despite everything.

Maybe, in that sense, coming out here wasn't such a bad idea. Instead of mourning the end of my marriage, I'm mourning the loss of my favorite white shoes—now sitting limp with mouths agape in a puddle of pee water and wet weeds, defeated.

This ten-day summer retreat, targeted toward divorcees and otherwise newly single women, is set in an environmental center whose campus spans thousands of acres of northern Minnesota wilderness. The staff put us all up in a cabin full of bunk beds that could be mistaken for the average cheap hostel if it weren't for the single outhouse off in the trees for everybody to share or the dank shower stalls crawling with multi-legged abominations in abundantly varying shapes, colors, and sizes.

A few times a day, a retreat counselor with a fake-cheery expression glued to her face raps on the cabin door with a sense of doom unmatched even by Poe's raven. We rush to get ready for whatever hike we're about to embark on, during which we nibble on sandwiches made with tasteless cheese and lunch meat of an ostensibly unknown origin. The counselor of the day drones on at the front of the line about the history of the area and the different animals living in it, and there's only so much the average person can take of that before they start wishing their ears were detachable. So, I've taken to falling at the end of the line instead, where the calls of birds and the rattle of wind rushing through trees overpower the counselor's broken-record speech.

If I'd come here for the sole purpose of socializing, I'd have been sorely disappointed. Most of the women keep to themselves, including me, save for the few mini-conversations over what the weather might be so we can dress accordingly or the hushed conjectures posed for which direction we might head in our next long hike, whether we might encounter a new body of water, large hill, or wild animal, how bad our legs will ache afterward. I didn't even know any of their names.

Now, on the afternoon of my fifth day, the ground is dry. It coughs up a small cloud of dirt with every step forward, and the twigs littered about the trail snap harshly under my feet. "Fergalicious" plays in the back of my mind, a song I've taken to piecing together from memory, since I didn't have the sense to bring an MP3 player—or anything I could play music on in the middle of nowhere, for that matter. I didn't even bring a good backpack, so I keep my water bottle hung on a carabiner from one of my belt loops.

I don't know exactly what it was that drew me to the online ad that ultimately ended in this. It could have been that I'd had one too many drinks the day I signed up and threw my deposit into the faceless void of the internet. It could have been that the appeal of being anywhere besides my new and still unfamiliar apartment was far too great. It

could have been that I just wanted to feel something new or experience something I'd have never been allowed to as a married woman with a mortgage and a husband who seemed to despise me for no good reason.

"You happen to have an extra hair tie I could borrow?"

It took a moment before I realize the question was directed at me. A baby-faced woman walking backward a handful of feet in front of me eyes my wrist full of black bands, her eyebrows raised. I yank one of them off and offer it to her, and she slows down to retrieve it and tie her hair up, now walking side-by-side with me. She looks to be no older than thirty, about half my age, and she twists and pulls at the gold wedding ring on her finger with vigor, as if she's scared it'll vanish at any moment. I watch as her gaze shifts between the trail before us and me.

I nod toward the woman's ring. "The way you're clutching that thing, I'm assuming the divorce was his idea."

She mutters something under her breath so quietly I wouldn't have known she said anything had I not watched her lips move. Then, she seems to realize I didn't hear her, and she says, simply, "He died."

"Oh." My throat plummets into my gut. Shit. "I just assumed you were divorced, since you look so young..." I trail off, and a slew of meaningless words and false starts fall from my lips.

"It's okay," she says, offering me a small smile, kicking aside sticks. "You didn't know."

I shake my head. "It was a bad joke. I'm sorry."

She chuckles. "We're all here trying to cope with whatever grief or loss we have in whatever form we have it. Maybe bad jokes are your way of coping." Our footsteps sync up as we walk, falling farther behind and away from the group. "I'm Lacey, by the way," the woman says. "I think you're the only person out of everyone here I haven't

talked to in some capacity yet, at least before now. That's not to say this is an especially talkative bunch, though."

The sun shines down through small wisps of clouds, illuminating the scuffs and mud stains coating my shoes as Lacey and I tumble forward together. A burning sensation is already beginning to form in my side.

"My name is Marina."

"Marina," she repeats, as if testing out my name, feeling it as it curls around her tongue. "I don't think I've ever met anyone named Marina before. It's a pretty name. So, what brings you here, Marina?"

I shrug. "My divorce went through last month. I guess I'm trying to figure out how I can live for myself. Something like that."

"I understand that more than anyone. 'Till death do us part' is easy to say in theory. It's because, then, you can think of it as some far-off possibility that won't actually happen, but in practice, some days I marvel at how I'm still standing." Lacey pauses, her breath trembling, before adding, "I got married when I was sixteen. I've never been an adult without my husband. Never experienced real life without him."

As if held behind a breaking dam, her tears come quickly and violently. We stop walking, and she covers her face, embarrassed. "God, now it's my turn to be sorry," she says, trying to laugh, but it comes out as a series of choked sobs. I pull a crumpled napkin left over from lunch from my pocket and give it to her, which she takes and presses against her nose. "Just so you know, I don't normally go around crying in front of strangers at so-called retreats and telling them my life story."

Loose strands of hair stick to her eyes, and I brush them away, tucking them behind her ear. "As you said before, we're all here trying to cope with our own grief and

loss. I'm not gonna hold this against you." While Lacey pulls herself back together, we watch the rest of the retreat group forge on in the distance until, finally, they disappear. "I think we should find a place to sit," I say. "I'm a little sick of walking anyway. I think they only make us hike all the time because they don't know what else to do with us."

Lacey laughs again, and this time it comes out like a laugh should. I guide her over to a clean patch of grass for us to sit down, and we do. "Or maybe they think the constant soreness in our legs and burning in our sides will keep us occupied," she says, grinning. I offer her my water bottle, and she takes it with a grateful smile on her face.

"I used to keep a baseball bat in the closet," I blurt out as she takes a drink and hands the bottle back. "I used to keep it there for when my ex-husband got mad. You know, in case he ever did anything. I wanted to protect myself." In the relative silence of the endless woods, I feel loud, imposing, but Lacey nods, encouraging me to continue. "After thirty years together, I knew the way he treated me was wrong, but I convinced myself it was all normal. I convinced myself it was normal to be terrified of my husband because I still loved him. Some part of me still loves him, I think, still waits for him to love me back like he should have this whole time.

"But one day, something changed in me. I had enough, so I left, but every morning I wake up half-suffocating because I don't recognize my life now. Everything's different, and it terrifies me."

A breeze rolls through, and Lacey tilts her head up, eyes closed, to receive it. "You just have to embrace what's different and make it your own. Something just for you." Then, she giggles. "It's easy in theory, maybe, just like the 'till death do us part' stuff. It sounds super cliché when I say it aloud, too. It's true, though, and if you ask me, you're already starting to do that." Her hands sit open, palms-up, on her knees, and I reach out for one, holding it

in my own as we sit there alone, basking in the Minnesota summer and trying to forget about counselors and hikes and shower stalls full of suspicious creatures.

I shuffle my feet, crushing the grass below under my favorite brown shoes.

Hope



Meghan Haldorson

The Resurrection of a Heart

Carly Weber

when you came along
you stitched red patches
on the holes in her blue jeans
and tied her shoes without being asked

late that summer you educated the wildflowers
on what it meant to die and grow again
they remembered your words
as they shook in the cold wind of September

but February's naked trees shivered with disgust
that night a one-way ticket fell into your lap
leaving her broken heart like dirty laundry

when May helped her find her smile
she forgot the color of your eyes
the wildflowers began to peek through
and they told her what you said

“he killed you but you bloomed again
you’ll never truly stay dead”

B&W

Ryanne Mikunda

I don't know why it's so hard
For some people to see the other side.
If you've really got nothing (from which) to hide,
Then why are you afraid your opinion will be marred?
Not everything has a right answer—
Sometimes there's just a best one.
And maybe you should think of the other person('s)
Before your opinion becomes a cancer.
The least you can do is try
To step out of your own shoes.
Too many people worry they'll lose,
But they already have. And that's why
There's almost nothing I can talk about in a black and
white way,
Because there are too many angles.
And angles create shadows,
And shadows... are gray.

in between the lines

Emily Venné

I decided to read one of my favorite
books this morning and your name found its
way into the pages,
between every line,
every punctuation mark.

I had since forgotten your name was in it.
before you, I was able to read it
without your face
your voice
or your eyes
bleeding into the description.
those five letters in that particular
order is something I cannot bear
and I am unable to read the pages
and speak my favorite name
without falling apart at the seams

Train Tracks

Ryanne Mikunda

The day was a beautiful, peaceful rendition,
Unlike my disposition.
Sunshine filled the sky of endless blue,
But feelings of the same color filled me through.
It was a Sunday.
Maybe one day
I'll understand why things are the way they are.
But that day is far
From here.
I fear
I'll never find it.
Blinded,
Gripped by grief,
In search of relief,
I stopped the car on the tracks,
Disillusioned with the facts,
And looked both ways, to the left, then right.
With nothing in sight,
I sat... wondering how long
I'd have to wait for a train
To come along
And take away my pain.
Only a few seconds passed
Lost in thought before at last...
A blink. A flash.
But not a crash.
A supercut to now.
Somehow,
A year later here I am on the tracks again.
I don't know when
The road will stop leading
To this place.
My heart is bleeding

As I look in the rear view and see my face.
Tears stream down, pleading
God, this time, to take away my pain,
Asking him to explain
How I got here and why.
But all I can do is cry.
And when I think about death...
It's like a body is just waiting,
Not to lose breath,
But for the separating
Of the soul.
And all it takes
Is something bad enough to shake
It off, to break
The bond, unmake
The life. Is this it?
Is this why I sit
On these lines?
I am sad, but I don't know
If it's because the world doesn't make sense to me
Or I don't make sense to the world.
Someday I'll see clearly.
But for now, with blurry vision,
I put the car in drive.
For now, I can avoid the collision,
The first step to find a way to stay alive.

An Inevitable End

Cheyenne Halberg

The way I ache for you
Is the way the Earth aches for gravity.
Your arms around me
Is oxygen around the trees.
Our lips touching
Is the sun setting over the sea.
The way your hands send shocks across my body
Is the way the wind sends ripples across the oceans.
Our bodies together
Are as natural as the elemental forces around us.
But like all of the forces in the universe,
We will come to an inevitable end;
We don't know when,
But we will.

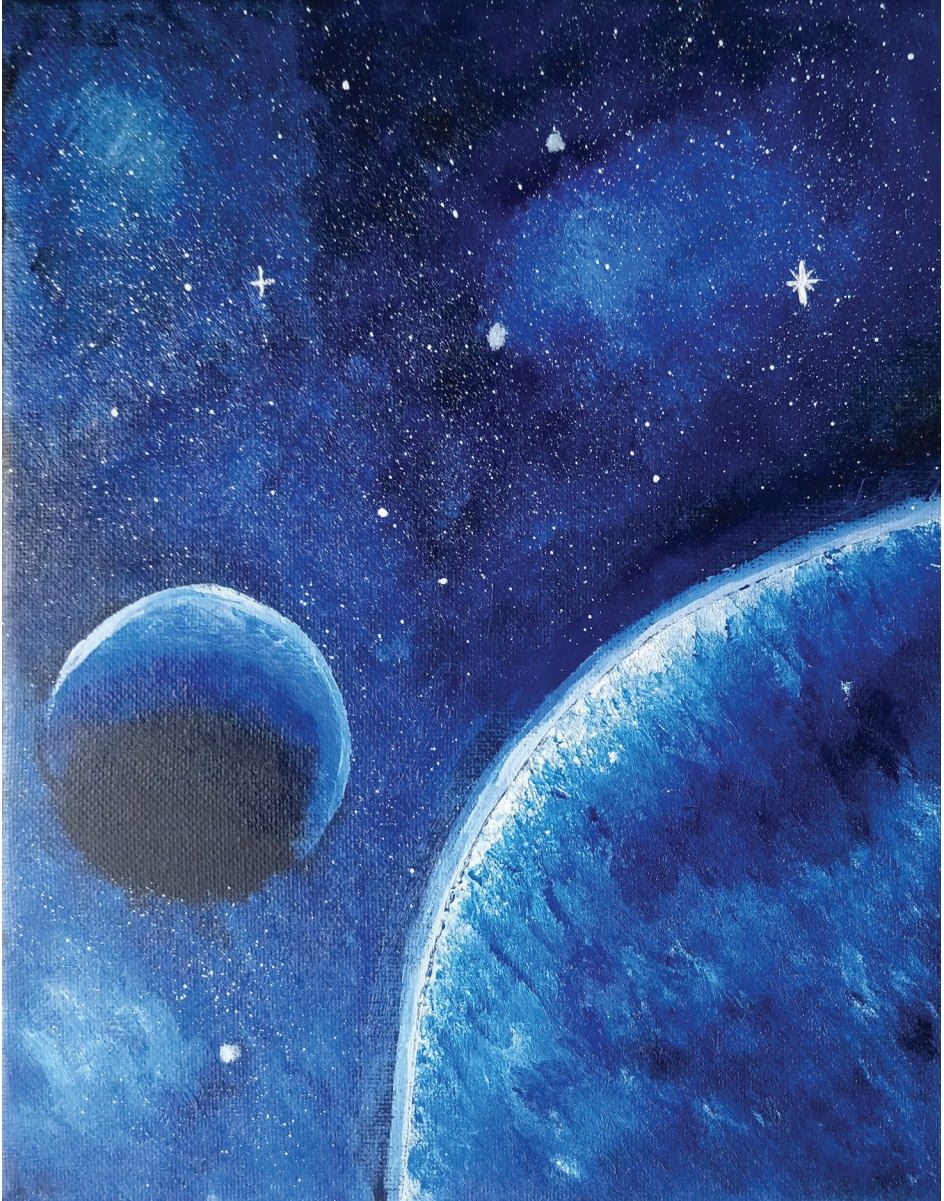
A New Generation

Carly Weber

a new generation

a period of almosts
a time for fleeing emotions
and fast paced desire
we wake to sheets
of short-lived happiness
and walls of indecisive minds
fighting between lust and love
between truth and society
anxiety has stolen our trust
and hardened our hearts
to the joy that commitment brings
a society that celebrates
continuous change
so we seldom plant roots
a way of life
we have subconsciously
agreed to abide by
a lonely road of
constantly chasing

a new generation



Xandra Okori

It is a Time of Unknowns

Cheyenne Halberg

It is a time of unknowns -
A time of uncertainties.
My depression is through the roof -
Or should I say
Below the floor
Because I can't seem to get my body
Out of my bed
Or my mind
Away from the darkness.
On a normal day of depression,
I would think of the future.
But yesterday,
And today,
I won't receive satisfaction from
The thoughts of tomorrow
For I don't know when
I'll see my family again -
Or if.

It is a time of unknowns -
A time of uncertainties.
The unemployment rate
Is worse than it was during
The Great Depression.
The hospitals are running
Out of beds,
Ventilators,
Masks,
And the doctors that once vowed to save lives
Are now choosing who lives and dies.
The shelves at the store are empty.
Buildings that were once booming
Now appear abandoned.

The streets are a mere reflection
Of cemeteries.

In a time of unknowns -
A time of uncertainties -
I have endless questions.
But I can't ask them
Because then I'll be thinking
About tomorrow,
And right now,
I can't even get my body
Out of my bed
Or my mind
Away from the darkness.

the invisible war

Shannon Laurance

the star,
created out of two conjunct planets,
sparked a religion centralized around empathy,
and a bearded man who drank wine and ate bread with his
friends.
two coy fish are circling each other in a murky pond.

ironically, empathy eventually suffocates
underneath piles of money,
and a luxurious house with a built-in spa and pool,
while a homeless man finds that the bench
he used to sleep on at the park
was removed by the city.

a battle that was once filled with men
facing each other on the bloody earth,
holding spears and eventually guns,
is now a battle in the invisible
field of information and code,
scattered through blinking lights,
the clicking of a keyboard, and
the rotting brain of a student,
parent, doctor, politician...

a woman wanders with her pitcher,
filled with crystalline water.
she pours water in the murky pond.
the coy fish disperse.
the sediment at the bottom
of the pond is disturbed,
yet,
the water is clearer than before.

World Gone Amiss

Cheyenne Halberg

Humanity is fighting against one another.
Body against body.
Mind against mind.
Arbitrary borders
Creating a divide.
Personal beliefs
Become a need to dominate.
The urge to be in control
Clouds the vision
We once had to be united.
Indivisible was once inside
The made-up lines.
But even now,
Within those scribbles on a map,
The unfortunate dichotomy takes hold.
Minds blocked by barriers
Of bias and hatred.
Love was once a way
To break the walls down,
But now love seems nonexistent
In this world gone amiss.

r u feeling it now, mr. krabs?

Shannon Laurance

i did not watch spongebob when i was a child.

recently, someone told me:

“people who did not watch spongebob growing up cannot be trusted”

and i want you readers to know,

that you can trust me,

and i have the ultimate respect for stephen hillenburg,

who helped cultivate our generation’s humor into

something better

than a comedian standing on stage with a microphone and

a bottle of water

talking about how much he hates his wife.

haiku of near, far, somewhere, and everywhere

Amanda Gade

clouds sing wistfully
as snow brushes black houses;
old man awakens

deer feet turned skyward
the high noon's blotted-out heat
vultures circling

water carves through rock
thousands of years on this shore
my black skipping stone

felled trees dance in us
our eyes capture every growth
they say keep walking

City Meets Sea



Jay Lee

Oh, Over that Elfin Hill

Miranda Templeton

Hark, and listen while ye may! There was once a green frog and a gray toad, they croaked and told me this tale; there once be seven sisters who were soon to be brides. They danced and made merry for two nights, on that elfin hill.

On the third night the Father, the King, spake; “I be, but a Noble King. I love my daughter’s from the first born to the last. But as I grow old and fail in my health. Two of my daughters shall on this night marry two Sons of Denmark, who are of noble stock and rank.”

But to tell the truth, the two Sons from that far Northland were content in their bachelor ways. Feasting, drinking and being merry. So, it was the Old father and King of Denmark, who sat in attendance as his Sons were absent, to witness the accomplishments of the Seven sisters.

The youngest came forward to announce her heart’s desire to be married to her faith. After hearing this the Old Northland King spake; “Who am I to demand a marriage? To divorce such a two from their union. To tear one from the arms of the other. Nah, keep your virtue and faith.” So said the King.

Next came the second youngest daughter, who sang a pretty melody that made the Old King’s heart ache. But when the song had ceased, and he asked her other accomplishments, she appeared to be dull, and not in the least bit interested in conversation. So, the Old King spake; “Though the melody is sweet. She does not speak—and I need a wife for my sons who have a voice.” So said the King.

Next came the third youngest daughter, who could brew a fine ale and make the best bread. But as her father listed her accomplishments, the young maid was drunk on the ale; as she led everyone in a merry drinking song. “Though she be full of youth and makes my heart light. For a Queen, I cannot accept for one son or another.” So said the Old King.

Next the fourth youngest daughter came forward in delight she sat and began to pluck and play a fine harp made of fine gold. But a maid whispered a terrible secret that the young maid lavishes herself with expenses that were not her own. “The strings of that harp buzz so peacefully. I am a King, but I cannot afford the luxury you seek.” The Old Northland King spoke.

The fifth youngest daughter came forward and bowed in apology, “I cannot travel by the sea, and Norway is too dark for me, so I cannot be a Queen.” “A virtuous, truthful maid to be sure. I adhere to your request.” So spoke the Old King.

Next came the sixth daughter, who could only tell the truth, yet she had no emotions too share. “As a wife and Queen that may be a quality that is unsuitable.” So spoke the King.

Next came the Seven and oldest daughter, who could recite fairytales from every corner of the of the world. This accomplishment pleased the Old King of Denmark. “As my wife has long since passed, I will take the seventh as my wife. And my sons shall pick one wife for their own.”

But as it happened to pass that on that Elfin hill that the two Son’s of Denmark were nowhere to be found. For they had drank far too much, and had gotten lost in the surrounding forests.



Jay Lee

Caitlyn Salinas

Jacelyn Schley

Meghan Haldorson

Carly Weber

Megan Martin

Amanda Gade

Shannon Laurance

Miranda Templeton

Ryanne Mikunda

Emily Vennř

Xandra Okori

Cheyenne Halberg

David Som