

Fall 2015

Fall 2015

Valparaiso University

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The background is a soft, ethereal composition. A large, glowing, spherical orb with a textured, crystalline surface is the central focus, emitting a warm, golden light. The surrounding space is filled with a delicate, starry pattern of small, shimmering particles. Dark, silhouetted leaves and branches are scattered throughout, adding a sense of depth and contrast to the luminous scene.

the
Lighter

Winter 2015

Issue 61
Volume 1



a Note from the Editor

As a rule, the *Lighter* never declares a particular theme for an issue. The magazine is fully composed of student works, and the *Lighter* strives to include all types of material, regardless of adherence to a predetermined concept. But I find that each semester, the works chosen for publication by the selection committees tend, on some level, to share a similar idea. If student material reflects the campus culture, each semester seems to usher in a new shift in our collective society.

This semester, the common thread among most of the pieces chosen seems to be the relationship between the familiar and the unknowable. The works published here span all ranges of topics; from the fantastic to the physical, the mundane to the extraordinary. And yet from crippling mental illness and wild acts of violence to reflections on the most intimate of moments, the pieces included in this semester's journal all seem to highlight a similar struggle: to understand both the universe and ourselves.

The design for this semester's journal attempts to illustrate this paradox. The swirling, starry faces of the galaxy overlap with the familiar textures of Earth's flora, merging the spectacular with the subtle and drawing our eyes towards the congruencies between the things we know best and the things we can never hope to understand.

As our world changes around us in great, shuddering shifts, we change as well. Society grows, develops and moves, both on campus and off. We as students find ourselves different people with each new year, discovering facets of ourselves previously hidden and capacities within ourselves previously untested. Our art reflects our journey, our struggle to understand.

So look carefully. Read closely. Keep your mind open to both depth and breadth of meaning. This journal holds a universe; from the delicate veins of the familiar to the gaping chasms of the unknown.

The *Lighter* would like to thank Allison Schuette for her patience and support as the faculty advisor to the *Lighter*, and to Kate Braun for her fireless enthusiasm and incredible dedication as assistant editor. To the students who served on selection committees; you are wise, thoughtful, and attentive, and your work has shaped a phenomenal issue. To the students who submitted their work; you are creative, talented, and brave, and we are so lucky to have been a step in your creative journey.



*All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. The *Lighter* is an award-winning university journal that welcomes submissions from all students of Valparaiso University, regardless of race, gender, religious creed, or sexual orientation. The editor assumes responsibility for the contents of this publication. The views expressed in these works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University.*

the Lighter

Selection Committees

Poetry



Sophie Stauffer
River Wilding
Nellie Bonham
Caprice Ballaweg

Art



Kendall Kartaly
Robert Lee
Susan Lee
Katherine Lawrence

Prose



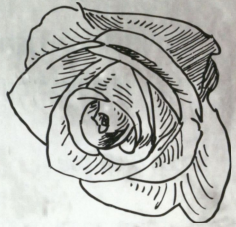
Kendall Kartaly
Alexis Banks
Kaitlyn Braun

Editor in Chief *Abigail Accettura*

Assistant Editor *Kaitlyn Braun*

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On Living with Depression for Eight Years

Inspired by Patrick Roche's *Couples Therapy*

Stacy McKeigue

He is the body pressed against me
in bed, sticky with night and desire—
I don't get much sleep when he stays over
because he always wants to fuck
with my mind. He calls
images out from shoeboxes
in the dusty closet of my brain:
photographs of times he will not let me
forget.

His is the hand entwined in my hair,
lugging my head back down
to the pillow in the morning.
Stay here, he coos.
What is the point of getting up?

He enjoys sneaking up behind me,
wrapping his arms around
my middle when I'm staring
in the mirror.
He whispers: Baby,
look how much of you there is
to love.

He is the jealous type, frowning
silently in the corner as I run scales,
caressing the keyboard spine of another
man
in the darkness of my closed eyes,
whose sighs of ecstasy drown
his low, gravelly song.

He can get... unpleasant when we fight,
reaching for the tiger-stripe scissors
hidden in the desk. But really,
I know I provoke him, always making
mistakes
and saying stupid things.
He is only trying to correct me,
make me better.

And he buys me the most wonder-
ful gifts,
like this gorgeous strand of pearls
to wear in my mouth. When
people ask
how we're doing, I flash the jewels
and tell them that I have never
been happier.
He's bad for you, says everyone
who doesn't understand just how
alive
I am with him. They see the world
in only seven colors; I see it in a
million
shadows of grey, each shade
darker and more unique than the
last.

He is the cherry sauce
on an otherwise vanilla life,
dribbling down my thin
wrists, my soft serve hips.
He is my Muse, breathing life
into my art, giving me reason
to rhyme.

He says I am nothing
without him.

Woodlawn Park

Sarah Geekie

When the new woodchips came, we ran across
to our park. We grabbed
the purple dinosaur and hung on its neck.

The purple dinosaur baked in the sun
while we hid behind mounds in the sandbox.
The grownups stayed on the gravel.

When the ground froze and turned white,
we slid down icy slides into drifts of
snow. We dared each other to step

on the pond. We never touched it.
We followed the dog's paw prints all the way
to the swings. We wondered where he had gone.

When the new woodchips came again, only I
came running. I stopped when I saw the new
paint covering decades of defacement
and the stake where the purple dinosaur had been.

Lost in Transit

Cheyenne Minix

A letter written,
Signed with the adoration of two souls
Bound in spirit,
Sent out into the world.
A promise made.

A promise of fullness,
Of struggle and learning and joy,
Of loneliness abolished,
Of memories galore.
The excitement swells, expectant.

Excited for new life,
For high-pitched coo-les,
For the smoothness of baby powder,
For squishy skin stretched over tiny bones.
Waiting patiently, waiting for months.

Waiting for too long,
Anxiously searching the mail,
Praying for a sign of the letter's existence.
The day has come and gone.
The letter is lost.

English Major

Sarah Geekie

They say "Fake It 'Til You Make It"

So if I talk Emerson over elcairs
And Dickinson over decaf

Will I reach enlightenment?

Or will I be dead before I even hit the
books?

Apathy

Micah Spruth-Janssen

Another school another shooting
Another day, another death
The lives we lead cut short by
The hatred of a human
How is God's goodness here?
How is love still living in us?
We say we're sorry
We chant for change
The day is done
The lights are low
How easy to erase
How faces never faced
Can arise
Can ignore
Another school another shooting

Chillicothe, Ohio

River Wilding

I want to remember
The Women, who, as girls,
Danced to "Ray of Light"
Barefooted, bareheaded,
Laughing full and strong,
Nothing going wrong,
Who played in creeks
And culverts in the
Hanging heat of summer.

I want to remember
The Women who had
Babies and lovers,
Illness and addiction-
A spectrum of possessions
In addition to their losses,
Who hit walls unanticipated,
And took their own tools
To those walls.

Only to be taken away
To some Dark, Quiet Place
Where their babies were not,
Where there were only walls.
(No angels came.)
Only to be sent floating...
Floating downstream,
Into the arms of police,
Of their families in mourning.

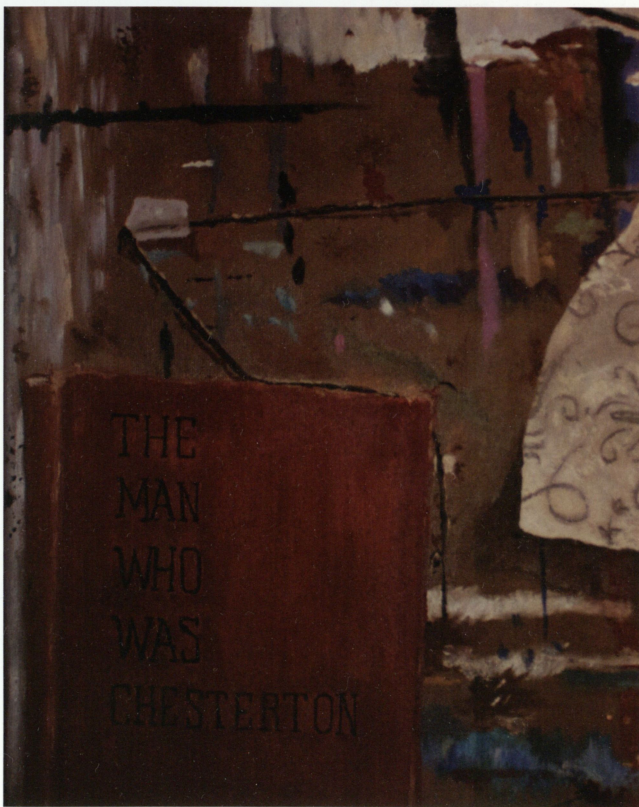
This is my memory:
Women, six of them.
Two missing, four found (not living)-
One of whom was eating for two.



Whispers

Kendall Kartaly

Digital Photograph



Storyboard

Regan Weber

Oil paint on canvas, 24' x 36'



Remnants (1 and 2)

River Wilding

Digital Photographs





A Splash

Regan Weber

Digital Photograph



Untitled

Nicholas Knox

Digital Photograph



The Sun and the Moon

Brittany Talley

Oil on Canvas,



The Dream

(S) bellini



Untitled (2)

Nicholas Knox

Digital Photograph



The Dream

Nathan Biancardi

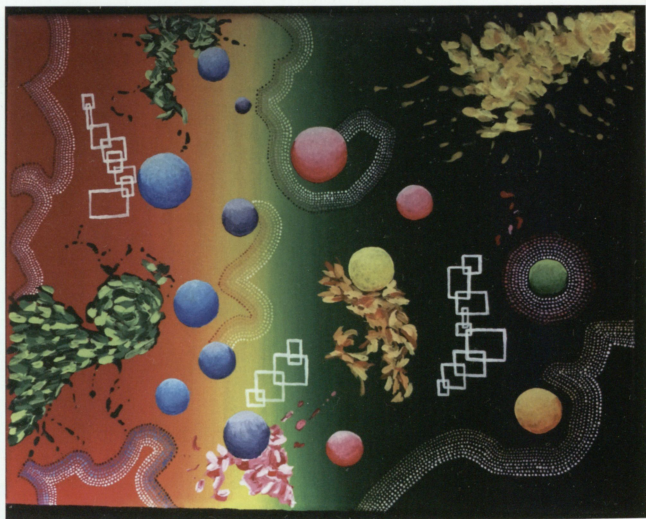
Ink on Paper



The Things We Leave Behind

Blake Larson

Digital Photograph



Lens

Brittany Barrett

Acrylic on Canvas



Atop the Smokies

Nora Villegas-Pineda

Digital Photograph



Landscape

Blake Larson

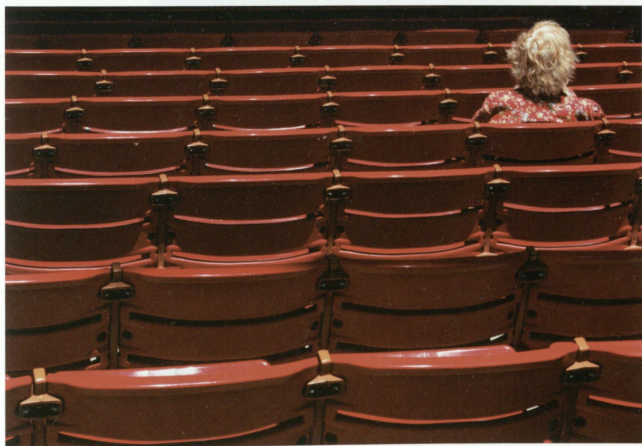
Digital Photograph



Inner Beauty

Nathan Biancardi

Oil on Canvas



Untitled (3)

Nicholas Knox

Digital Photograph



Birk

Samantha Holland

Digital Photograph



Trees

Samantha Holland

Digital Photograph

Library Senses

Marci Stavig

There once was a girl who ate words. She went around in life browsing the books of public libraries while sipping on the cream of her coffee. Sometimes words were delicious. Words like 'flamboyant', 'fortuitous', 'ubiquitous'. Some were harder to swallow, ones that sounded rough and scratchy like 'kettle', 'sarcophagus' and 'thistle'. Others still, were words spoken harsh and loud, soaking in hateful intent. She didn't like those because they left a foul taste on her tongue. They were hot and inflated, like a bad batch of curry, and their taste would linger the rest of the day.

She could remember fairly well the words she ate and how each of them tingled or stung her taste buds. Early on, she realized that her appetite was not like other little children. In elementary school, she would tear off the pages of her books and crumple them into her small fists. Then she'd proceed to stuff them into her pink-lipped mouth with the enthusiasm of any young child daring to do the impossible. Her parents scolded her, and the other kids stopped gobbling Elmer's glue to stare with their big curious eyes. She stared back and swallowed the paper down. The vastness between them was a pathless, tangled forest of thorny vines. She simply couldn't get through unless she cast herself into something clearer for them.

It wasn't the same now. She did her eating discreetly, not because she was ashamed but because she didn't want others to feel uncomfortable. What she couldn't do was stop. There was something irresistible about the sound of words, how they tumbled down tongues, how they were shaped and discerned on a page. Handwritten notes were by far the tastiest. She would quietly take bits and pieces out of those. Slowly, she'd savor doodled hearts and smiley faces that tasted of rich chocolate.

The word-eating girl smiled to herself, brown eyes shining as they browsed the shelf of her college library. Her finger ran across the dusty spines as she felt her way to the best area: fantasy. With lower lip trapped beneath top teeth, she thumbed through the books sitting at her eye level. She wasn't all that short but she wasn't all that tall either. Oftentimes, she'd challenge herself on tiptoes but today was a day for staying safely on the ground. Her moccasin styled shoes were brown suede and the rust-colored beads at the end of the laces softly clicked against each other.

She sat down, resting her back against the book case, and after finishing snacking on words with her eyes (it'd be bad to eat library books since they weren't hers), she stood again to push the book back into place. But lo and behold, there was another pair of eyes peering through the narrow gap between hardcovers. Their color was a cloudy blue whose milky pools reminded her of mist in the morning. A bit startled, the word-eating girl held her breath within that cool fog.

"Are you looking at the fantasy section?" the blue eyed girl whispered through the five-inch window. Her voice was small but excited.

"Yeah. Do you like it?"

"I can't read these," the stranger replied.

"If you can't read, why are you here?" As she asked, it finally dawned on the word-eating girl that this person was blind.

"I'm here because..." the stranger's words trailed off and trickled into the girl's parted mouth. They had tasted of honeysuckle. She waited quietly, hungrily, for more. "My older brother takes me here every weekend. I don't actually go to school here. I can't."

"That's too bad." She felt the need to lower her eyes. "What's your name?"

"Hana."

The flower-scented name brought a smile to the word-eating girl's face. It was too bad that the stranger couldn't see it.

"And you are?"

The word-eating girl felt unusually embarrassed about her own name and she mentally flew through all the names she could think of to replace her own. She wanted to create an exciting new self with a brand new character name. Something simple but something bright. Maybe something curious. She thought of the green grass waving outside the windows, and how its blades rustled against each other in song.

She thought of the paradox of introverted teamwork, of quiet voices, and subjected harmony. The notes were whispering in southern prairies. "M...Abilene..." The two of them let the name sit in the air for a bit. They listened as lilies bowed to kiss one another under sailing clouds. "I'd shake your hand but I do believe there is a book case in between us," she added sheepishly and wiped her hands on the hips of her navy skirt.

"No worries," Hana shrugged and walked around the obstacle as if she knew exactly where everything was. Abilene didn't doubt that she did. Perhaps it was weird to be friendly with a stranger but Abilene tended to like people, especially those whose voices resounded inside her and produced goosebumps on the surface of her skin. This one, her heart fluttered, this one is like me.

Hana walked into the same isle and stopped a foot before Abilene. For a moment, she didn't say anything. It were as if she were checking to make sure Abilene was where she should be. Again, the waves of grass parted a pathway between them, one lined with violet whispers and sky-scraping sunflowers. Somehow silently confirming where Abilene stood, Hana regained herself. "Sorry. Nice to meet you."

They were shortly struck with a case of stiff fidgets and nervous palms.

"You too," Abilene replied and tangled her restless fingers together. "You've memorized the library?" She inquired, remembering Hana had mentioned fantasy, which was of course a correct guess.

"I'd say so," Hana nodded half to herself.

"If I might ask," Abilene started cautiously, even dipping her head forward as all people asking permission practice. "Were you born blind? Or did something happen?"

Hana sat on the question as if she were working the cogs and screws of a heart. There were a couple times where she drew breath, ready to speak, only to let that breath go with the spring breeze.

"You don't have to answer. I was just curious," Abilene said apologetically.

"I've always been like this," was all Hana allowed herself to say. Abilene wanted to press further, to taste more, to know more. She was a girl who wanted to try everything. Her parents had often called her naughty, but they weren't here to restrain her starving mind.

"I see," Abilene forced on a smile for herself. "Do you have a favorite story?" she offered a change in subject, to which Hana welcomed gratefully.

"Well," the blind girl tightened the bow on her blouse with a spice of pride. Abilene felt the hints of cinnamon sprinkle on her tongue from that single word. "The books I know are only in brail or the ones my brother has read to me. You know, I'm blind but I can write."

"What?" The reply might've come out a little too rudely but Hana didn't seem to take any notice of its harsh disbelief.

"I'll show you," Hana waved her palm and led Abilene to a table. Abilene was worried the girl might run into something but Hana found the chair with ease and pulled it out, offering Abilene a seat. Abilene took note of the girl's small wrists and the unexpected sheen of her rounded nails. A small callous obstructed her right pinky, an ant hill in a backyard garden.

"Do you have paper and pencil? Sorry, I didn't bring mine today," Hana asked. She tucked her skirt beneath her and sat down.

"Yeah, sure," Abilene fumbled with the contents her book bag, which she'd set beside her.

She brought out a half-filled notebook and her favorite panda-patterned, mechanical pencil. She then flipped to a blank page. Hana took it with a bow of thanks and Abilene watched her intensely. How could a blind person write anything? Guess work? How did they know what letters looked like? Were there classes for that?

"What should I write?"

As if Abilene knew! It was most fun to see what the author or artist could conjure out of nothing. "Anything you want," she urged. Pulse quickened and eyes started drying because she had ceased to blink. Maybe she had forgotten how in her excitement.

"That's so vague," Hana grinned. She flamboyantly flipped her hair out of her face, not that it mattered. She pretended to roll up her sleeves, for she had on short sleeves so there was nothing to roll. Was this some sort of procedure? Abilene leaned further and her necklace clinked on the tabletop.

"We'll start with a penguin. I like penguins," Hana instructed as if giving a tutorial. She put pencil to page and began writing in neat, italicized letters. Was this some sort of joke? Abilene glanced at Hana's supposedly sightless eyes. No, no one could fake it this well, could they?

The lines she made were small and angled. Her capitalized letters were significantly larger than the others. Even the loops of her q, p, g, d, and l had a quirky yet attractive personality. Hana wasted no energy in the way that she wrote. Her fingers held the pencil lightly and she didn't press the graphite very hard into the paper. Her sentences perfectly rode atop the blue lines. They bounced and spread like ripples in their pond. Her words and writing were a smooth, round pebble. Perfect skipping condition.

Abilene had heard that blind people could type in brail and of course, read it. They knew language the same as others, if not better. They couldn't see words but they could feel them at the tips of their trained fingers. Each series of dots was understandable to them. Abilene was sure that if she ate a page of brail, she could understand too. Her gaze followed each swish and curve of Hana's writing in wonder. She especially liked Hana's simple but pretty-looking word choices: shuffle, feet, bright, leather, slope.

"How do you know what the letters look like and how to write them so well on the page? Your handwriting is better than mine too," Abilene wanted to fire question after question but she restrained herself with great willpower. "It's very curious."

Hana released the pencil and pushed the paper back to Abilene. "I don't know. Not really sure, but whenever I try writing or drawing, sometimes even painting, I feel like I can see."

"But you can't actually see?" It was a question of clarification. She scrutinized the brief paragraph.

"No, I can't 'actually' see. It's hard to explain. I don't have to see to write or paint or whatever. I just have to feel. Feel myself, feel others. I have no idea what you look like but I can feel you too. Your voice, breathing, heartbeat, all of it I believe I can understand. Partially. If I can feel something, then of course I can put it down on page."

"Of course... Well, that's amazing!" Abilene praised and looked around hastily. Not many students were here around noon time. "I guess if it's you, it's okay," she started warily. She did a double take of the room to confirm that no one was observing them. She didn't want to make them feel unpleasant. I have a bit of a bad habit. Although I don't think it's so bad. Do you mind if I use your paper for myself?"

"By all means." It was now Hana's turn to cock her head. Abilene took the corner of the page between her pointer and thumb. With a soft rip, she tore it off and, glancing self-consciously at her new acquaintance, placed it on her tongue.

"What are you doing?" Hana asked. She didn't say it in an accusing manner but was merely curious.

For a second, Abilene thought it was pretty self-evident that she was eating paper, but then

she remembered the obvious handicap of her new acquaintance. "I'm eating some of your paper."

"What?"

"Yeah," Abilene was briefly cautious of the unseeing eyes, but she shrugged off the useless worry before shoving a bigger morsel into her mouth. The words were rich, like honey. And was that a hint of butterscotch? She felt the little swirls and dashes of handwriting slip smoothly down her throat when she swallowed.

"I eat words. Spoken or written. And I remember very well the words I eat. Yours taste sweet," Abilene attempted explaining how her strange habit worked. This must've been how the blind girl felt, trying to convey senses, feelings, and all those unconventional snippets of life. "Jeez, I can't stop smiling," she cupped the warm sides of her face. "To think that there's someone as strange as me. Well, strange in a good way!"

A rosy flush overcame Hana's cheeks. "Yeah, I'm glad I'm meeting you. Strange is definitely good," she said. "I can write more for you, if you'd like. I want to write more. There aren't many people who knowingly read my writing. Mostly it's my brother. Although, I anonymously send things to journals sometimes."

"Do you want to be a professional writer?"

"Maybe, maybe not. I'm not sure yet," Hana answered truthfully. "But I definitely can't go on without it!"

"Have you ever had to?" Abilene inquired. Unlike her powers, perhaps Hana's were under control, as long as one took away the materials.

"I know that my teachers and other students didn't really understand. My family neither. When I could express feelings through the arts, I mean. They kind of bugged me about it, saying I was faking my blindness."

"Ah. Well I don't find it jarring or fake," Abilene assured her. "In fact, this is easily the most genuine thing I've ever tasted."

"Really? I'm glad. Here, I'll write something else and you can tell me how it tastes. I want you to feel me like I can feel you."

"That's perfect!" Abilene exclaimed and leapt out of her chair. "Yes. You come here once a week, right?"

"Yeah," Hana answered promptly.

"Perfect," Abilene knelt down by Hana's legs.

Hana's free, left hand consciously reached out across their path and Abilene's rose to meet it. The two girls' shadows melded. White dandelions grazed bluebell stalks, and gave their lightweight seeds to the sun. Words streamed onto Hana's page, a peaceful bubbling in their pond. Their hands grasped each other tighter and the wind changed directions as they felt the beating of each other's existence turn with the earth. Something was unravelling before Abilene and she didn't want to miss a single strip.



In Memory

Madeline Bartsch

The last time I saw you in person was July. Earlier that night, we went out to smoke a cigarette together and got lost in a driveway, watching children play across the street. I remember your hand reaching for mine and you laughed as we walked back to the porch where our bodies were waiting.

We're sitting on a thin bluish carpet, and you're squinting at a powerpoint with a look of incredulity (your contacts were bothering you, so you took them out).

"Wait...is that a cat?"

"Wha...How is that a cat?"

It was definitely a cat.

Earlier in July, we sat around the table, all smiles and laughter till our cheeks were tight. "Like family," you'd say later. We're like a weird little family.

I remember more of your reactions than your words from the early days. The way your eyes would widen when you would realize you said something off-color. The dark circles under your eyes, but how brightly they would shine when you smiled. The way you laughed with your whole body, unreserved. Such joy.

That night, we left a room filled with swirling colors and vibrancy and music and stepped out into the cool summer night, sober enough to talk but not quite enough to drive. The air had an almost autumnal undercurrent to it, but still carried summer sweetness in its taste. We talked about the flavor of the air. The sensation of driving at night.

You saw me in the hallway that day with my boyfriend in my face, yelling. We shared a look of recognition, soul to soul. You knew to not push. But you watched me closely that day. Kind words. Softer smiles, almost a question. You remembered that day, nearly four years later. Thought you would've forgotten. But then again, it was you.

"I felt like we were really on the same wavelength tonight. Do you know what I mean? Like you and I were just totally on the same page."

Late September. Middle of the afternoon. I'm between classes rushing around like usual, but your face

pops up on my Facebook. A message.

"hey i had a dream that u were in last night that u were sad and i'd just thought i'd let u know that yr loved & the best"

In July, you talked about how much you loved us. Loved our nights together, the ease in which we fell into familiarity with one another...you worried for us. Always concerned for us. We spent hours wandering guided by streetlamps and a feeling of togetherness in our separate versions of lost. Kindness. For those hours, neither of our spirits were alone.

I wish I had stayed later. I wish I had stayed up all night at that Denny's with you and drank coffee and kept talking and asked you all of the questions that burned in me that I was too scared to ask. I wish I hadn't left you alone.

We walked back towards our cars, preparing to part ways.

"sometimes i feel like im floating but for the most part i feel like im getting closer the person i wanna b.

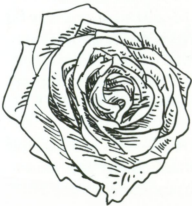
<3"

Above the fence line, an impassive night sky was interrupted by a summer storm. It encompassed the

center of our vision, perfectly contained, rolling and shifting, surrounded by a canvas filled with stars. We sat for what feels like hours now but was minutes then, watching the clouds shudder and the lightning flash green and purple and white.

"There's something profound about this," one of us said. Blatant and cliché but also...so right. Sublimity framed by the beauty of summer stars, out of reach but never out of sight. We watched the light in silence until the clouds blurred and broke, and parted ways.

· <3 ·



A Siren and a Sailor

Marci Stavig

Grisha never meant to get lost. It just sort of happened. Mist blanketed the ocean and filled his body with haze. Everything felt heavier. Sloshing movements tugged beneath his old wooden ship. Well, perhaps a more accurate word would be "boof". He never heard the word himself but he read enough picture books to know that ships were bigger, more majestic.

Boats were child's play. They didn't make ships like they used to. Nowadays, they were made from fins and plastics and such. He knew his little Icarus had a small bow and a smaller cabin. Her two triangular sails were decorated with patches. Her rudder was wearing away and her propeller turned brown-gold with rust.

Navy waters stirred slowly, gathering and brooding. The fog hadn't lifted so he flicked on the lantern he'd installed last year, and grabbed a sandwich from his knapsack. This boat was Old Pap's gift to him. Icarus would sail until her days were over, however long that would take. Grisha just reached his thirtieth year, and she hit sixty-five back in April. Icarus was holding herself together by thistles of nails and screws. Some old, some new. He may or may not have used duct tape in places too. Her bottom was the polished green sheen of permanent algae stains. She didn't float on top of the water as much as chug through it.

Grisha took out his compass and read the NE under lamplight. More often than not, it was frustrating learning how to sail when no one could have vocally instructed him. No hearing. No higher education. No respectable career. Old Pap had been upset at first, but only because he hadn't known how to go about communicating with a deaf person. At least he'd been born hearing, and learned some phonetics before illness took it away. His hearing aid also helped when he was expanding his vocabulary in elementary school. Those who were born deaf or became deaf before learning language, had far more difficulty communicating.

Once in a while, Grisha could imagine catching an echo of something. Of what, he had no idea. It was a low, dull tremor that he couldn't even compare to anything, an unknown rumbling in the back of his head. He pushed it around in rhythm with the waves bumping against Icarus' hull.

The watch on his left wrist read 4:50pm. Icarus left the dock at 9:30am that morning. Grisha had intended to return earlier. Sailing too far north was a bad habit he needed to break. If he didn't get back on track soon, he'd be stuck for the night. Although that wasn't a horrible scenario. Old Pap once took him out towards the rocky islands off the east coast and they'd spent the night drifting on the evening tides.

"The stars are beautiful, ain't they, Grisha?" Old Pap piped up and pointed to the night sky with trembling finger. There was an array of white stars, blinking down at the two small creatures on the earth. Small and stupid and sitting their silly butts down in a vast meadow of black water.

Beautiful. Grisha recognized the three distinct movements of mouth and tongue. It only took him a few extra seconds to reply, "Naisu." His slurred, wandering voice spoke carefully.

"Watch out for 'em sirens though, y'know? No one believes in them. Hell, I don't either. Though I wouldn't mind if one sang to me now and took me to sea. That's where I belong, anyhow. What man doesn't want to be lead to his death by a beautiful woman?" Old Pap's smile widened before becoming a resigned sigh.

Grisha watched him chuckle, watched the loose shaking of shoulders and the drifting of air from tired lungs. There was no laughter around him, no company but the moan of waves he couldn't quite console. He took to the wheel and moved Icarus back to the South from which they came. Like any smart person, he hadn't kept track of Icarus's route all day. He just got lost in his thoughts, is all. One wouldn't think that a deaf person could have thoughts, seeing that they do not form an inner voice, though this depended on how far along their language skills developed before hearing was lost. Regardless, by no means could they not experience emotions or reflect on them. Maybe not contemplate in words, but in, well... more feelings.

Off by the port side, the deaf sailor thought he saw something splash. He squinted his green eyes and focused on that distant something. It was approaching through the fog as he continued watching. When it swam close enough for him to see clearly, he gasped. Jesus Christ, it was a man! How there could possibly be a hu-

man out this far from land? Maybe he had been shipwrecked. Grisha prepared to fetch the single life preserver he had, until he saw the flash of a tail.

The man with a fish tail, Nestori he was called, had separated from his school. Loud ones, they were. But here was fresh prey, and even in unexpected territory. There wasn't a coast nearby and he'd only been out for a leisurely swim. Nestori figured it was worth a shot, so he opened his mouth to emit an unholy sound. By unholy, I hardly mean that he was a bad singer.

Quite the opposite. He had a beautiful, unearthly voice that reminded men of their loving wives and the smell of a home cooked meal. It gave them a somber aching in their chests. He watched them jump off the boat as if they were going to fall on golden pastures. Women were often the hunters since sailors tended to be male. It made coaxing them overboard easier. Though Nestori's masculine appearance hardly made any difference. His voice took them to a place of comfort. To close their ears to a siren's singing would be closing yourself off from a sense of happiness. But that's all it was. A sense.

Nestori didn't have to sing words from any human language. It was a power his species had, a power they used to prey upon the weak and dumb, like this young fellow here. The siren swam up to the hull and decided to present his fish tail in full light, as it so deserved. His blue scales were dull in the grey atmosphere. He flicked his fins in a brash, playful matter. It was flirting with body and voice. His eyes, wide and blue like his tail, reflected the light of the boat lamp. This was the song of the siren: a song of melancholy.

Grisha realized that the creature was trying to drown him, per the warnings of all sea legends, and yet he began laughing. What good was a siren if the prey couldn't hear its song? Grisha laughed as ironically and empty as a deaf man could. It was so refreshing that there was someone out there who didn't pity or disgust him, but went above and beyond to kill him. He was honored and impressed, even touched. He perceived a sort of message in his bones, the swelling up of trampled intentions, or maybe the hope for understanding amongst fellow man. Or it could've all been in his mind. He wouldn't know better, anyways.

Nestori heard the weird throaty sounds coming from the salor, and shut his mouth. His eyes searched the boat. No harpoon or gun on deck. Only humble fishing supplies. Nothing special. "Are you incapable of hearing?" Nestori spoke in human tongue, seeing if the prey would respond or not.

The only response was a blank stare. Grisha couldn't help but admire the creation of this mythical being. As unnatural as fish people should have been, the place where flesh became scales looked incredibly right. So much so that one would wonder why other humans didn't grow fins too. What a sad life it would be to lose one's legs. But to gain all of the seas? Old Pap would have thrown his legs to god and screamed, "Take 'ern!"

"Ai...cannt!...heyarr," Grisha said when Nestori was clearly trying to speak to him. Phrases like "Are you deaf?" and "Can you hear?" were often asked, so he was familiar with the inquiry.

"Then what should I do now?" Nestori muttered to himself.

Grisha grabbed a fish from his icebox, a sizable trout he'd caught earlier, and waved it at Nestori. "Eadu? Did he eat fish? Or was that cannibalism?"

Nestori smiled and planted his fine hands on Icarus's rails to lift himself up. Icarus rocked under the newcomer and Grisha took Nestori's forearms, clumsily pulling him onto the deck.

"Where do you come from? This is far for you, yes?" the siren wiped back his hair as if raking through seaweed. He thankfully took the fish that was offered, even though he would only pick at it. It didn't look very appetizing.

Grisha gestured for a pause to whatever the siren was saying, then grabbed a notebook and pencil. "Heeurr," he sturred and wrote something on a random page.

Nestori watched while plucking out the glassy eyeballs of his fish and tossing them into his mouth. They had a taste of their own. Grisha finished and turned the book so Nestori could read.

My name is Grisha. What is yours? Grisha wasn't sure that the siren could read or write either, so he twiddled his thumbs idly and sat on his striped lawn chair.

Should Nestori really be playing this game? The siren set the fish aside and took up the pen and paper. He didn't know how to read or write very well, didn't need to, but he'd always had an interest in human literature.

Icarus continued lurching south, making small dips and sways like a nervous man who performs for the first time. Fog still lay thick enough that they couldn't see far ahead, but it wasn't unsettling for either of them. Heavy, yes, but comforting. Grisha knew that the world out here was as silent as his own. The bliss of the unknown was as tempting as a sunset. He wanted to go down with it, to be swallowed by it.

"I am Nestori," the siren spoke slowly. He exaggerated his mouth and tongue, and gave the notebook back to its owner.

Grisha didn't quite inwardly recreate the sounds of words, how they were pronounced, but he had enough of an idea. He lip read, and worked hard to split the clump into three groups like his mother taught him. Nes. To. Ri. It was a nice name, much prettier looking than his own. "Naisu da meed yo," Grisha held out his hand for the traditional greeting and Nestori took it without hesitation.

"Nice to meet you too," the siren smiled and looked at the human eye to eye. There was no mistaking the eyes of a sailor. He'd seen them all: alive, dull, and dead. Grisha's were some place in between, some place he couldn't pinpoint. They were a plain, uninteresting green with flecks of brown and gray. The iris held a hint of gold. Ah yes, where the humanity lay.

Like wise, Grisha studied Nestori's face. Slack jaw, long nose, small ears, and eyes that stirred a whirlpool of blue and grey. When their gazes lowered, Grisha took to keeping his mouth shut and writing in his notebook. He felt like he would've liked those old sea chanteys and poems if he could hear them in spoken word. Old Pap always sang them when they were sailing. Grisha could tell because even though his grandfather wasn't always smiling, the spirit within the song made Grisha's bones faintly tremble.

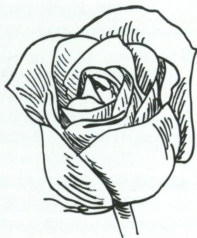
Nestori patiently watched Grisha write with script nearly as bad as his own. The sailor flipped the notebook around. They were lucky the man had a reliable light because no moonlight was passing through the thickness of the fog. Quiet and slow, Icarus churned through smooth waters back home. You are a siren? Would you please sing a song for me? See if I jump into the ocean with you.

"Hah" Nestori guffawed. "What's the point when you can't even hear it?" He slapped the air with his tailfins. "Why should I?"

Grisha folded his hands on his lap and waited.

The siren, tired but easily flattered by earnestness, gave in with a sigh. "Right then, strange fellow." He took Grisha's hands in his own with a humorous shake. There he held onto them. Light, smooth, and strangely honest. Such were the hands of a young boy, and not an adult man. "I'll sing an especially sad one, just for you. Let's hope we don't get you drowned before we leave the fog."

The sailor nodded daffily and sat with a relieved smile on his face as the siren blessed the wretched air with words he could never hear, yet could fully understand.



The Witch Above Him

Alyssa Boneck

My eyes slid slowly closed. The blue light still seeped through my eyelids, but the buzzing of the screen was enough to lull me to sleep. My head fell against my chest and my fingers pressed heavily on the keys. I'm going to have a lot of back spacing to do, I thought faintly before succumbing to fog that was tilting my brain.

My head shot up. My arm retracted so quickly to my chest it collided with the flat Dr. Pepper on the desk, splashing the culprit of my rude awakening in the liquid. She arched her back, fur bristling, and hissed at me before jumping from the desk. The tip of her tail twitched sharply as she sauntered from the room.

"Little fucker," I said, examining my claw marked arm. Five deep lines, slowly oozing blood. I breathed out through my teeth. This is going to scar. I rolled back in my chair, pressing off from the wall under the desk. I stopped just beside the door and stood with a groan. I rolled my head from side to side as I walked down the hall to the bathroom.

I flipped the light switch on and caught sight of myself in the mirror. Dark bags under the eyes. Pale. My cheek bones stood out like sore thumbs. Gaunt, I thought, staring back at myself. I think this is what gaunt looks like.

I opened the mirror and pulled out the antiseptic cream and bandages. After rinsing off the wound, I slathered on the antiseptic and wrapped it. I closed the mirror without looking in it and went out to the kitchen to feed Herbert. She was named after my great grandfather. He made me promise to carry on his name. My father was a Herbert, he'd say, and his father was a Herbert. You should have been a Herbert, but my daughter had to have a Logan. He'd scratch the side of his nose, shaking his head. Logan, he'd mumble, then look back down at me and sigh. You've gotta continue the line. He'd prod my chest with a swollen finger. Carry on the line.

I grabbed a can of cat food from the cabinet and peeled it open. I held it upside down, waiting for it to slide out with its signature squelch. The scent cojured sir Herbert. Her nose peeked out from the hall, slowly followed by the rest of her. She jumped up onto the counter and waited for the food to hit the dish, her tail swishing languidly from side to side, sweeping all my mail to the floor.

Finally, the food dropped. Herbert pounced on it, and I tossed the can and retrieved the mail from the ground. Coupons. Bills. Bills. Junk. I set them back onto the counter as I sifted through them. After another layer of ads for stores I hadn't gone to in years, I was left holding a thick envelope. Light, though, I thought, tossing it in the air and catching it. It was addressed to me in pen, so from an actual human being, perhaps. I grabbed a knife and sliced the envelope open. I hadn't received personal mail in years.

Peeking inside, I found a sprig of some type of plant. I hesitated in picking it up. Who would send me a dried out plant? Witches. I flipped the envelope over, letting the plant fall onto the counter. Herbert came over and pawed at it, then sniffed her paw and promptly turned her butt to the plant.

"So it's not catnip." I pulled out the card that was still snug in the envelope. The writing on it was of the fancy sort. "Calligraphy," I said to myself quietly. I scanned the one sentence that graced the card and then set it down next to the sprig, perplexed.

I couldn't have a stalker. They couldn't see through the boarded up windows, and no one could have come in to plant cameras while I was gone because I haven't left my house in over a year.

Witches. The word echoed in my head.

"Herbert, what do you think?" The cat glanced at me from where she sat, pawing at her cat litter. "This is utter shit," I agreed, looking at the card again. This is for your wounds, it read. What do you know about my wounds? I thought, flicking the card across the counter.

Thoughts of Amy flashed through my mind. I shook my head. No. I won't think about it. I dropped my head into my hands. But, not wanting to think about it just made the memories flood faster. A Freak Accident, the newspaper read. First page. She deserved first page. A freak accident, the words kept spinning around my brain. No. It was freaks who started the accident. Damn witches. I grabbed fistfuls of hair. My chest was beginning to ache. I bent down to one knee, eyes closed, trying to focus on my breathing.

I have to make my rounds.

I rose quickly and grabbed a piece of beef jerky from the candy dish in the center of the counter and then slowly went from kitchen to living room to bathroom and bedroom, checking all windows and vents. They had to be secure. The windows were locked behind their wooden boards, the vents lined with poisons. The door always took the longest to assure myself that it was secure, because once every two weeks it had to be opened for my food to be delivered and the mail slot left open, apparently to receive strange letters with cryptic messages.

But everything was secure. Nothing out of place. I left the sprig and card on the counter and retreated back into my room. I dropped into my desk chair and pulled myself snugly to the computer. I woke up the screen to find lines and lines of gibberish. I held down the backspace button as I read over the section that was the actual review. The shoes were as marketed. A deep brown, and comfortable. I was surprised at how well crafted they were. You could tell they were made by an experienced hand.

The bullshit went on and on. I clicked submit. I only had one more left to meet my weekly quota. I was eagerly awaiting payday Friday, as at the beginning of the week I had thought I'd seen a cockroach speed across the kitchen floor and had a massive panic attack. Who knows if that was someone's familiar? I had to get a whole new level of poison and then because I couldn't stop worrying about cracks in the windows, I had to purchase all the wood to secure them. Obviously just locking them wasn't doing the job.

When it comes to the outside world, nothing beats precaution, not even price. But, now I was running low on food. All that was left was the beef jerky, Herber's food, and a few bottles of water. I couldn't possibly drink from the tap. Pixies had infiltrated the water systems before. All faucets were stuffed with cotton balls to keep out any infestations and the toilet had a lock on it for when it wasn't being used. I even bathed in water from those massive jugs.

I pulled out the next item I had to review. A forearm sized box. I sliced the tape and lifted the flaps. The item inside caused me to frown. I set the box on the desk. If I review it, I get paid, I reasoned to myself. But if you touch it, you could be cursed, my brain whispered back.

I shook my mouse, waking up the computer screen and found the item's page. "I specifically said no magical items," I grumbled as I read over the description. It was for basic illusionary magic. Supposedly, able to be used by any level of magic learner. At the bottom of the description in all caps it read **WARNING: THIS ITEM IS PRONE TO SHORTAGES WHICH MAY CAUSE UNPROVOKED IMAGES.** Well, isn't that just great. I checked the return address of the package. It matched the manufacturer's name listed for the item.

"I need the money," I said, picking up the wand from its coffin-like bedding. There was a small piece of paper titled Instructions beneath it. I read over the little paper. Seems simple enough. I held the wand lightly, but firmly. Now, focus on an image and, "Swish and flick," I said quietly, my mind seeing a cityscape.

Suddenly, the whole wall in front of me had transformed into the view from the top of a skyscraper. I felt the empty space between me and the ground. The tiny specs that were people made me think of ants. My chest constricted, my heart pounding. Things became hazy and I felt a sharp pain pulsing through my chest. I scrambled back rising dizzily from my chair. "It's not real," I mumbled, squeezing my eyes shut. I dropped my head into my hands, and tried to focus on my breathing. "It's not real."

My heart was still hammering in my chest when I looked back up. The image was gone. "Basic magic my ass," I said, sitting down and pulling myself back to the computer. I dropped the wand back into its box along with the instructions and rested my head on the desk.

The rest of the evening random parts of the apartment changed. I went to go to the bathroom only to open the door to find an endless chasm where the floor should have been. My kitchen turned into a tery hell-scape for over an hour.

Finally, I just got exhausted with it and went to bed. Until my stomach woke me up by curling itself into a tiny ball of pain. I pulled myself out of bed and maneuvered my way down the hall, my eyes still crusted shut.

I flipped the kitchen light on and instantly regretted it. Groaning, I searched the counter for the jerky but my eye was caught by something else instead. I picked up the brownie and took a big bite, letting the rest fall back onto the counter, then turned back to the bedroom. I flopped on the bed, my last thought being how dry that brownie

had been.

I sighed happily as I stretched my limbs out, loving the feeling of the silky sheets. I blinked my eyes open and reached to turn the end table light on. One thing I missed about the morning was the sunlight, but I couldn't help the windows having to be boarded up.

Why wasn't I reaching the light switch?

I looked back at the lamp and my mouth fell open. My hand was covered in fur. My hand wasn't even a hand. I had a paw. I tried to wiggle my non-existent fingers, but nails flew out from the paw instead. I jumped up, landing on all fours.

I opened my mouth to swear and a loud meow came out. I sprung out of bed and raced down the hall, the click of my nails ringing against the wood floor. I burst into the bathroom and leapt from the toilet lid to the sink counter. I went on two legs, my front paws resting against the mirror, and stared into the face of a cat.

It was a short hair. Chocolate brown. The fur shiny and soft looking. The ears were pressed firmly back. The eyes looked panicked, if a cat's eyes could portray such a feeling. Still, I recognized the feline looking back at me.

'I'm Herbert,' I tried to say, but a loud yowl escaped instead. My paw sprung to cover my mouth. I gave one last glance to the face in the mirror, then dropped to all fours and leapt to the floor. I wandered down the hall to the kitchen, my tail dragging on the floor behind me. I had to get rid of that wand, but that was a problem for later.

On the floor of the kitchen, which currently looked like a damp, moss infested stone dungeon, my body laid in the fetal position. I crept up to it and lightly pressed a paw against its cheek. The eyes sprang open and I jumped back. The eyes followed me, then looked down, seemingly transfixed by its hand. The fingers wiggled, then it - I - promptly began to lick them.

My jaw fell open. I'm a cat. I'm a cat. This had to be an illusion. I began pacing around the dungeon, and slammed into the non-visible counter. I fell back onto my butt, dazed. Then backed up, said a silent prayer and leapt up onto the invisible counter.

I landed on solid air and breathed out heavily, accidentally hissing. I shut my mouth tightly and scanned the room from my new height. I saw an image that caused shock to shoot through me. The front door was open. How long had it been open? How long had I been asleep, unsecured in my own bed? But, the familiar panic didn't follow the realization. My heart beat steadily, my breathing stayed normal, and I found another feeling come over me.

Curiosity.

I edged forward until I found where the counter ended and dropped to the floor. I maneuvered around the living room couch and coffee table, which loomed above me like giant's furniture, and stopped in front of the open door. I sat.

I sat and watched. Nothing moved out there. The lights hummed steadily, casting a harsh glow throughout the hallway. The floor had scuffs. There was even a smudge of dried mud right outside the door across from mine. My nose twitched, my tail swept across the floor. Back and forth. Back and forth...

It couldn't hurt, I thought to myself.

I crept forward, peeking my head out into the hall. No one. I darted forward, stopping with my paws just before the mud. I sniffed it. My nose exploded with a million different sensations. This is what the world smells like?

Movement to my left caught my attention. I pounced before I could think. I was dazed by my own sudden movement, but below my front paws I felt something wiggling. I lifted one paw slowly, peeking beneath it. Cockroach.

I smashed my paw back down, then lifted both my paws, forming a barrier so the bug could only scurry closer to me. It sprung to attention, trying to race past me, but I pounced on it again. This time I gave the bug a head start, flinging it across the floor before chasing after it.

It was headed straight for a vent, but I flew through the air landing in front of it and promptly licked it into my mouth. The crunch it made between my teeth was satisfying and I continued down the hall, my head and

tail held high. I came to the stairs and jumped down the steps one by one, bringing myself to the lobby. The doors were propped open and the breeze that flooded the building was enticing.

I scurried out the door and into the sunlight. Feet came down all around me. I darted around them and crossed the street to where the scent of meat was strong. I jumped up onto the windowsill. It was the butcher's shop. Cases and cases of red meat taunted me from behind the window. I jumped to the sidewalk and sat myself down next to the door, waiting for someone to enter.

I didn't have to wait long. After a few moments, a man came bristly to the door. He glanced down at me before grasping the door handle. As he opened it, I went to dart between his legs, but his foot caught me instead and shoved me back. I batted at his ankle, but it quickly disappeared into the shop with the door closed shut behind him. I glared at the door, the tip of my tail flicking from side to side, then turned from it and continued down the sidewalk.

I crossed the street to avoid a magic shop. I crossed it again as a store selling herbs came into view, and then again farther down the road when I caught sight of a fortune tellers sign. But, soon I was distracted as little kids bent to pet me. A chunk of a sandwich was tossed to me as I paused beside a cafe to watch a feather float through the air just out of my reach. I pulled the meat from the bread and meowed my thanks before moving on.

I found myself in Midway Park I hadn't been there in so long. The trees seemed bigger, how much could they have grown in a year and a half? And then I remembered I was a cat. Everything was bigger. I spent the rest of the afternoon chasing the geese around the pond. Their terror amused me.

When I realized the sun was beginning to set, I quickly climbed a tree. After shooing a nest of pixies off my branch I settling into the bark. The view was amazing. Pinks and purples spread across the sky, the colors vivid, reminding me of a stained glass window. Amy used to love this. Soon the sky faded to black and with the sun gone, I figured I should go home.

There were much less people out now. The few who were didn't pay me any mind. I sauntered down the street, a cat grin spread across my face. A block from home, I felt my fur bristle. What was that scent? My heart began to pump and my eyes darted around until I caught the gleam of eyes watching me from the alley across the street.

The eyes lunged forward, a gigantic creature coming into the moonlight. Its teeth shown, glistening with saliva. Its claws dug into the ground with each quickening step towards me. Instead of running, though, my nails sprung out and I threw myself at the animal. My claws raked against its face before digging in. I held on tightly as the dog thrashed, but I soon found myself sailing through the air.

I landed on my feet and took off running. Everything was a blur around me as I raced back home. The landlord was just closing the doors to the apartments when I darted past her legs and up the stairs.

Before I got to my home, though, I caught an odd scent in the air. I slowed, trying to place it but nothing came to mind. I followed the smell to the floor above mine, halfway down the hall to room 307. I was directly above my apartment.

It was when I got to the door that the smell came back to me. I had smell it that day. It was a strange concoction of herbs and magic. Something I hadn't even realized I had smell when she was lost, but now I recognized it. It was the smell of a witch. The smell of the freaks who took my fiancée away from. The freaks who made it so I couldn't even walk outside anymore. A freak accident? That can happen anytime!

I was staring at the door, my fur bristled, my eyes filled with rage as it was suung open. A woman smiled down at me. "Come in," she said.

Witch I meowed. The only reason my nails weren't embedded in her face was because memories of Amy kept me frozen. They flashed in front of me. We were going to get ice cream. Ice cream! My tail twitched. And what she got instead was turned into a frog.

A little spill. An accident, they all assured me, but it couldn't be reversed. She had been touched my a pure witches brew. The best they could do was erase her human memories, so she wasn't tormented by them. Don't you want her to live out the rest of her days as a happy frog? They all crooned. Yes. Yes, of course, I had responded.

The witch in front of me spoke, pulling me from my trance. "So I am. I warmed some milk for you."

My ears perked up. She couldn't be that bad if she was offering milk, I reasoned. Or, it's a trap, my mind snapped back. I sat, confused as to what to do. Witches weren't to be trusted.

"If you don't come in, you'll never get to be human again," she added.

My tail froze. She stepped to the side, gesturing me to enter. I stood and slowly walked past her into the apartment. Everything looked normal. That is, until I caught sight of a large glass terrarium filled with cockroaches. My back arched, a hiss escaping my throat. She bent down next to me.

"Yes, I've been spying on you," she said, stroking the fur from my head and down my back. "You're an interesting case. I wanted to help." Before I could realize what was happening, I was clutched to her chest and rising from the floor. I struggled against her and she dropped me onto the counter where a bowl of milk sat.

I sniffed it, then took a lick. A deep rumble emanated from my chest. I lapped up the rest of the milk as she pet me and spoke. "You tried very hard to keep me out, but I'm clever with a power tool and you never check you ceiling." She laughed. It was a pretty laugh. "You receiving the wand was just luck on my part. I thought I was going to have to get Herbert to eat the herb, but you swallowed that thing whole." She ruffled my ears.

The milk was gone, and I turned to look up at her.

"I have a charm that allows me to see through such basic illusionary magic. What did it look like to you that you ate it in such a hurry?"

Meow.

She giggled. "The celestial beings must have wanted my plan to work then." She patted my head. "A brownie. I could go for a brownie."

I nipped at her hand. I want my body back, I tried to speak. I need to be able to get my body back. Or, maybe it would be best if I just forgot everything, the idea snaked into my mind.

She nodded. "The magic will wear off by midnight. This was a simple body switching spell, not a transformation one. You will be ok, but I want you to remember tonight, how wonderful outside can be. I have some herbs that can help with your anxiety. And I hope you remember me." She played with my tail. "Maybe we could have dinner sometime."

I stared up at her, unblinking. Seriously?

"Of course I am." She pulled me into her lap. I couldn't help it as I started to purr as she continued to pet me. "You'll have to clean up a bit first. Herbert did try to use the litter box while you were gone."



A Conversation with Scott Cairns

On Thursday, November 5th, 2015, poet Scott Cairns visited Valparaiso University to give a reading of his newest collection of poetry, "The Slow Pilgrim," in the Chapel of the Resurrection. Cairns is a librettist, memoirist, translator, and prolific author, as well as a professor of English at the University of Missouri. He also happens to be witty, reflective, and constantly intuitive in his understanding of the writing process. What follows is an interview with Cairns, conducted by Lighter Editor in Chief Abigail Accettura the day after his reading.

Accettura

Why don't we start by talking about how you came to poetry? What led you there?

Cairns

Well I didn't really know I wanted to be a poet, but I did grow up with poetry. My father was a high school English teacher, and besides teaching literature courses he also taught creative writing courses and photography courses. He was kind of just an artsy guy. He dabbled in poetry himself, he sometimes wrote poems for church events. But he also loved Robert Frost, so he would recite Robert Frost off the cuff throughout my life. . . . There was also a thing back then called "Poets in the Schools," and there was an agreement between Washington State and Oregon state to use each others poets to visit schools. And there was a poet named William Stafford who was a frequent visitor to my father's classes. And probably during my junior and senior high years he visited maybe four times— he would visit my father's classes and then my father would bring him home for dinner before he had to drive back down to Portland. So on several occasions I had the benefit of having this really interesting, brilliant poet at the dinner table. And then my dad would often make him read poems to us. . . . Stafford used to keep his poems on these tiny pieces of paper that he kept bundled up in a wad in his back pocket.

AA

When did you start publishing?

SC

When I was in college. I think when I was a sophomore I just started publishing poems in little magazines. When I got to grad school I began to submit things more widely. But I used to get lots of rejections. I used to tape all the rejection letters up on my wall as a badge of honor, as a reminder to keep working harder. I had a whole wall full of them. I think ignorance is what kept me going— I knew if I wanted to make it as a poet I had to keep sending things in, regardless of whether or not they were accepted. And eventually the balance began to shift. But I got my ego out of it pretty early because of Annie Dillard. She taught me that it's not about you, it's about the text, about the word. And I bought into that. I try to help my students understand that poetry isn't about a personal expression of feelings— it's about setting up a scene on a page so that the reader can have an emotional event instead.

AA

What inspires your poetry?

SC

Other poets, mostly. Other ideas. I'm kind of a God obsessive, so. . . back when I got started, there weren't that many people writing about God. Now there are a lot more. But I think what inspires me most is wanting to know a lot more. I'm committed to the idea that if you press language it will reveal something. So I just write to find out, and I read to find out. I have a habit of being in dialogue with the things I read. I usually keep my writing pad right next to the book I'm reading, so that at the first inking of a response to something I'm seeing I can start jotting down that response. And eventually I set the book down and focus on what's on the pad, and work that into something shapely.

AA

What kinds of things do you like to read?

SC

I read poetry, mostly. I sometimes read novels. I have a lot of friends who write, so I try to keep up with their work. And then there are texts that I re-read a lot, that I turn to for generating my own responsive texts. But in the past 20 years I've been reading a lot in what we call "church history" or the writing of the Saints— theological works, but not so much theological works by people who call themselves "theologians," but from primary sources from the early centuries.

AA

Why is that interesting to you?

SC

Because I wrestle with my own faith. And I find that a way to deepen it is when I look at people who take it seriously, and read and write in dialogue while I'm engaged with their words. I think, a life of prayer helps to maintain a life of faith, but a life of conversation with people who take it seriously and have seen things that I haven't seen, that helps me deepen the faith. One of my favorites is Saint Isaac of Syria. I read his work every day.

AA

Do you ever experience writer's block?

SC

I think once I mentioned writer's block to William Stafford in conversation, and he said "well whenever you experience writer's block just lower your standards." And I think there's something to that. Most times, writer's block generally occurs when we start editing before we start drafting. It's at least a two part sequence— you have to pile up the clay before you can shape it into a pleasing vessel. So in a way that offhand remark by Stafford helped me realize not to edit before there's something to edit— just to write, and pour it out and pile it up, and then shape it and edit. I do think writer's block has more to do with anxiety than it has to do with being out of ideas. Also I think, when people try to write by staring blankly out a window, they're more likely to encounter a kind of nothing. But if you open a book and are reading a book, there's something there. You can actually distract yourself from the fact that you're sitting down to write by reading. And then something you're reading will provoke something to write. And the stakes aren't very high yet, you're just reading a book. And eventually something you read will make you think of something else, and you'll go back and forth, and eventually then you'll have something to work on. So that's why I think people suffer from writer's block. Because they rely too much on their own imaginations to create something out of nothing. And I just think, it's a lot easier to create out of something than it is out of nothing.

AA

What's your favorite part about being a poet, and having the career that you have, as a writer and as a teacher? What moment is the most fulfilling for you?

SC

Probably reading. I guess, I'm a poet, but I'm mostly a guy on a journey. Writing is part of that journey. But increasingly I think I have more pleasure in the quiet and the stillness shared by a text, entering into a stillness with a text and letting those words open me up in a way that I used to count on my own words to do.

AA

What kind of advice do you give students who are also pursuing poetry as a career?

SC

Get a good job cooking. Learn how to cook. I supplemented my income as a graduate student as a sous chef, working for different chefs in different places. It's good work, and it's especially good work for

a poet. Because what poets know, what most writers know, is that when you're writing a text, you're making a thing. It's all about stuff, the stuff of language. So the more experience you have working with stuff, and not thinking abstractly, the better off you'll be as a poet. So mincing a bunch of onions, building a soup, building a sauce, the detail and concentration involved— these are all transferable to the making of a text.

AA

I can't help but ask, where did you learn to cook?

SC

When I was young I was a bus boy at a country club. And the club had a German chef who was hard to work with, and would periodically fire people in the middle of a dinner service. So on one evening he just walked out into the dining room and pulled me off the floor and gave me some stuff to cut up. And that happened again and again, until eventually when I would come into work and suit up for my bus boy job, he would take my jacket from me and give me an apron instead and make me work the line. And he taught me knife skills, and how to season, and all the basic stuff. And then when I went to college I worked in restaurants as a line cook, and then as a graduate student I moved up to sous chef. Plus, if you work as a cook, you don't have to spend that much money on groceries.

AA

You mentioned being on a journey— do you find travel to be important to you in terms of inspiring work?

SC

You know, I don't need travel for the work. I don't need travel to generate poems. I need it to generate compassion. I think early in my life I was a pretty selfish person, and pretty judgmental. And I learned along the way that those aren't good things. So it helps me to mitigate my own isolation, my own self-protection, self-concern. Having children was a huge step in that. Being married to someone I love who loves me back. But now I'm careful to be constantly aware of the other, and open to the other. Traveling helps me do that much more than just sitting in an office does. To actually look in the face of someone whose experience is very different from my own and then to enter into a conversation with them about the troubles or the beauty in their lives— that's vital. My goal is to become the person I'm called to be, in the best way that I can. Travel becomes a tool for that. Poetry becomes a tool for that.



Contributor's Notes

Brittany Barrett- I am an English and Spanish double major with a minor in Cinema and Media Studies. I love looking at how all forms of art can shape us and teach us about ourselves and others.

Madeline Bartsch- Madeline is a senior Secondary Education and English major whose love of literary magazines stems back to reading countless hours of bad sports poetry for her high school's magazine. Her piece is for Sierra, her old co-editor; she hopes that a handful of paragraphs can even come close to capturing Sierra's essence and how much she is missed.

Nathan Biancardi- I was born to artist parents and have been drawing since I could hold a crayon. My art is stylized because I do caricature art of people, and I love the concept of identity of a person or an object. I enjoy many artistic time periods but I usually blend different styles in drawing and painting. Thick and thin lines are my favorite part of drawing, and using a lot of brush strokes to paint gives my pieces a lot of expression.

Alyssa Boneck- Alyssa is a junior creative writing major with a business minor. She dreams of the day when her writing to-do list has as many checkmarks as her school to-do list, though she's rather uncertain at the current moment if that time will ever come. It may be worth while to add that "The Witch Above Him" was written for a class assignment.

Sarah Geekie- Sarah is a senior English major with a Music minor. When she has free time, she likes to pet cats and eat chocolate. She also enjoys re-reading childhood books, using other people's Snapchat filters, and avoiding social interaction.

Samantha Holland- Hi, I'm Sam, and I try to avoid my responsibilities as long as humanly possible by taking cool pictures instead.

Kendall Kartaly- My name is Kendall, I read many books, drink too much coffee, and have great stories to tell one day.

Nicholas Knox- I am a photographer, whose primary focus is in the field of street photography. I hope my work brings a certain level of appreciation to photography as an art form.

Blake Larson- Blake is a digital art major and loves digital photography to capture images that are in the moment, not posed or setup.

Stacy McKeigue- Stacy is a senior digital media major with a creative writing minor. She hopes to publish her first collection of love poems, tentatively titled "Sincerely Yours," before she turns 25.

Cheyenne Minix- Cheyenne is a Freshman creative writing major with an art minor. She one day hopes to become an established fiction author, as well as a travel writer and photographer.

Marci Stavig- Marci is a secretive, sensitive, little creature, half-awake as she writes this snippet. What she is willing to say, is that she hopes you enjoy the fantastical whims of her writing which she has forced upon you, and wishes everyone luck in their own delusional endeavors.

Regan Weber- I am an exploratory artist. I try new mediums and methods to fit new projects and challenges in an effort to explore this vast world of creation.

River Wilding- River is a junior Creative Writing major/ Art minor. She has been making photographs since she first received her apple-green Fuji Finepix in 2008 and has no intention of stopping any time soon. She also wants to decimate our society's patriarchal structure and reinforce ideas of equality-for-all, self-love, and peace through her poetry.

Flora Villegas-Pineda- Flora is an avid enjoyer of photography, poetry, and all things outdoors. You can often find her nestled in a coffee shop enjoying a steaming cup of black coffee, or curled and about, lost in nature with her camera strapped around her neck.

