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Portrait staff, "Portrait 2022 Fall" (2022). *Portrait Magazine*. 10.
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“A nice ride”
Short animation/Digital illustration v.01
2020

Portrait Literary Magazine

Buffalo State College

Fall 2022 Edition

Back on The Reservation.

Tarps on top of houses beheld;

Petroleum's life begins again.

Is this my home, are these my men?

Or was my father's life expelled?

And all I see is unexcelled

Potential; My mother's mother

Grew from the land, now too smothered

To be considered home for me.

And my skin, pale to a degree

too high to be a brother.

David Schuler

No Room For Wonder

Setting fire marks desire death and begets a slumber
To much dismay you cast away the breath that usurps
the wonder

Civil souls pay their tolls and relent in might roar
If not to beacon the hellbent deacon who releases nightly
horde

Cast off the mad talk and scribe your peace anew
Scowl and scorn at the howl of the mourned before you
reach the pew

Pick and pitch the wicked for which forked way they stray
But best believe we all mischief when the red apples
turn gray

But never mind the past, you were taxed to even ask, the
eve gives lights to the free

Devils in their revelries please me the least, but it fits the
best for me

Devil's grip grit and acquit with atrocious undertone
The feline yowls at all her fowls while the wolf proceeds
alone

The king stands in tower, rifle trained on beast
What good be the carrion, if not for trophy or feast

No Room For Wonder contd.

The sensation of infestation be met with the hand of God
If the lord loves all he mold you are naught but cold and
fraud

Entropy and atrophy nip at me bashfully through the
weather and deceit

Toe tags tapped gracefully and tastefully once they hear
my feet

The brand of the prince placed grand on the helm
As the wayward hermit begins his permit in the realm
The willow whips promiscuous lips to throw off a gaze
A sight to behold, a truth nigh untold, there is still hell
yet to raise

Fiddles and riddles, tongues tied in knots unknown to the
now

Rather than a fortress of courtship, or a garden of sloth,
I'll return your curtsy with bow

For now I use the rain to mask strain, and rid the blunder
silenced by thunder

With my tasks on ear, heart stripped of fear, there is no
room left for wonder.

Amir Benson



McKenna Davis (ceramic)

Strange Passion

On the bank of a babbling stream, there sits two young men. Around them is forest going through growing pains. Brilliant green leaves on occasion are roused by the gentlest of breezes. Every so often, a leaf just unable to hold on for a second longer breaks away from the fold; it is carried into the gently moving water to parts unknown. A flag of green is adorned on every tree for as far as the eye can see, but the occasional yellow leaf throws off this uniformity. Clouds gather to the North, but skies are still blue in this stable oasis perched in a desert of uncertainty. The sun is starting to sag in the sky, soon it will begin to set. Days are growing shorter, shadows grow longer.

Jump cut to the stream bank. Two pairs of shoes, each one in varying states of wear. One pair consists of muddy vans, the other of well-kept Timberlands. There are many sights to be taken in across the water. Safety from the awkwardness of running out of things to talk about is somewhere beyond the distant bushes, perhaps this is why both men look that way.

Strange Passion contd.

A tacit oath of silence is maintained until it no longer is.

“You hear about that thing that happened a couple months ago on Spring Street?” Vans is the first to turn the mute Cold War hot. A shot is fired.

“A lot of things happen there, be more specific.” Timberland returns fire.

“Y’know. The murder.”

“Oh God, yeah. That shit. Heard like one thing about it from my parents, one of their friends who lives there said something about it to them.”

“Yeah? How much did they say?”

“Only that a murder happened. Detectives, ties, like some true crime shit, y’know only true. Right there.”

“Details man, I’m talking details. Did you hear the details?”

Strange Passion contd.

Timberlands shook his head. Clouds crept their way overhead, and the sparkle to the babbling stream soon was diminished. Vans continued to suck down the cigarette. A beat. He opened his mouth for more words to come out, but there was nothing. An exhalation brought drew out the smoke from his lungs, then words soon followed.

“Was a crime of passion apparently. Real wild stuff. Happened in the middle of the day. Out of nowhere. Boom. I mean, there were hints. I don’t think in hindsight people saw them. Guy was strange to begin with. Was some rumor he threatened a family across the street, but that was like what, six years ago? Anyway, I’m getting ahead of myself. So him and the girl he’s with, they are up in the same house on our street. Natural fixtures of the neighborhood for a decade, well not her actually. Truth is I’ve never seen her in my life, which is weird because she owned the place apparently. I didn’t even know he lived with anyone; I only ever saw him. Would go past the place like everyday while skateboarding and shit, would only ever see him. Only him. Just him. You get what I’m saying man?”

Strange Passion contd.

“You’re staring to lose me here.”

“Point is he was always out there on the lawn. I never even knew he lived with anyone. Apparently, he did. Don’t know what the situation was but they weren’t married. Not that there’s anything wrong with that. But I always thought he lived alone. Apparently, they were in some long-term thing. People now, the onlookers once this all blew up, they talked about hearing arguing a lot from there. There was a lot the day it all happened. Or so people say-this is all one huge game of telephone, see? Anyway, she gave this guy a lot of chances. That’s what people say.”

Once more Vans was out of breath. He found oxygen in another cigarette drag. Timberland leaned forwards as far as he could without falling face first into the stream, hanging on every word waiting for the grand point to all this.

Strange Passion contd.

“Threw him out of the house. Dropped him like a bad habit. Threw him out again, dropped him like a bad habit. Well eventually this becomes almost like a ritual, and she still sees something good in this guy. Still lets him back in, still throws him out. Now where does this all end up? One day she throws him out, and this time its for a long time, but you know what she does?”

“What does she do?”

“She lets him right the fuck back in, but this time after some long time. And this long time, it should have been permanent, because what do you think happens first argument after this hiatus?”

“Think I got an idea.”

“It doesn’t end well. Neighbors all had this bad look on their face when I skateboarded by. I saw the tail end of it, you know? The ambulances, mortified neighbors who heard everything in broad daylight, hell maybe even saw glimpses through open windows. Then I never saw any of these people again.

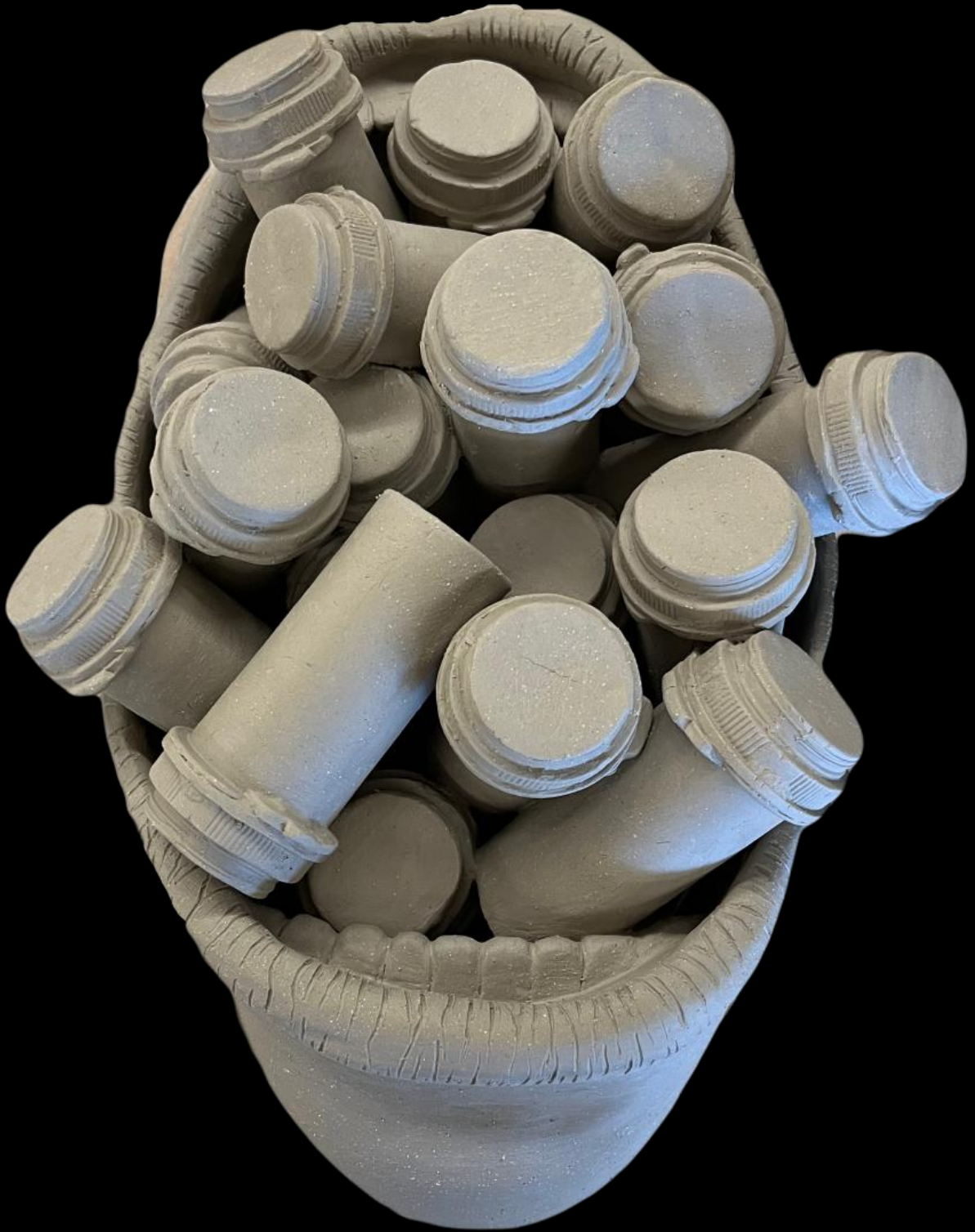
Strange Passion contd.

What baffles me, is why did she keep letting the guy back in? Was there anything there? Was it always that bad? Do you think they had any love for each other? I heard the guy kept badgering her to be taken back in, but she had to have felt something for him, or maybe she was scared? I don't know. I don't know these people; I don't even know how much of what I heard is true. Because all I've heard is bits and pieces from people who heard bits and pieces. In my heart of hearts? I think she felt something for the guy, had to be some bit of love. He had to love her in some twisted way too. He kept coming back, wanting something out of whatever they had. I think what I heard last time the rumor mill got spinning was she tried to break things off with him and that's when he did what he did. Even called the cops on himself. I don't get it. I just don't. Do you?"

Timberland shrugged. Vans let out an exasperated sigh. Clouds now blocked out all traces of blue sky.

“You got more smokes?”

Dean DiLuzio



McKenna Davis (ceramic)

Blacksmith's Game

She came on the tail of a raindrop.
Slithering sterling straight into my eye.
Rendered blind this must be the end I thought.
Heartstrings pulled taut, pools of sorrow standby
for the inevitable snuff of spark
often remarked as the lonely man's bane.
But no, I mean yes! A wave to embark,
the fanning of a flame, the blacksmith's game,
Keep the iron red hot but melt it not
as hammers fall to weld us together.
Sing with each strike that ties our hearts in knots
an alloy to withstand any weather.
When the work is done, iron cooled and wrought
a bond is born whose shape cannot be bought.

Daniel Spiller

Mother

Huntress under closed eye
delivers whispers through shadow.
Yew bends to float a feather
Breaking an entire vessel.
She streams slow and fierce,
Snake of water
Mother destroyer
Balance thy beating blood
with life's rhythm.
What's offered is taken,
and never forgotten

Daniel Spiller



LeeAnne Dutkiewicz (collage)

The Untitled Prayer

When I was a child
I used to pray //
And when I was a pre-teen
I thought that at twenty-two
I'd still know how to pray //
Now at twenty-one –
I've forgotten how to say amen
And look up at the sky
Believing there's a heaven beyond the clouds.
I hide behind trees and avert my eyes
Turning away from the Host
So I don't have to explain why I'm mute:
Results of my own will.

But how am I supposed to explain
This which lacks words and I myself can't understand?
How do I ask for what I don't know of?
How do I repent for the sin I don't know I've committed?
How could I ask for more when I know that all I need is
Already within me: mind, body and soul? [or at least
it's supposed to be]
I am everything and everything is me
And yet I still can not pray.

The Untitled Prayer contd.

I have free will because the Host has free will.
I am transcendent because the Host is transcendent.
I am because the Host is and
The Host is because I am.
I have language because the Host has language.
Yet [I write because
I still can not pray.]

I can not pray either because
I can not
Or
I am unwilling.

Amen.

Yamilla Tate

Summer's Over

After the final petals of spring wilt and fall, I come out to live in summer's smoldering coffin. Under the sun's dictatorship I forget how to love the world of humans and turn to worship my own pleasure and hedonism. Engulfed in the season's selfishness and gluttony, I walk the streets alone, worshipping my sun burnt complexion, reflected in the display windows. I forget there's a life beyond my own vision, I cease to care about human desire for connection. Summer is my coffin, my end, I burry myself alone. This purgatory of bees and empty city parks is the life after death I crave after spring's sickness and forced existence.

Now I feel my lungs contract and fill with the air the humid season saved me from. I confront judgement and the prospect of the second chance I never asked for and don't desire. My peace, my rest, my self-centered eternity is now darkening and opening up to a light I walk backwards from, because: summer's over.

Yamilla Tate

Countdown

Kick around mother's piled-up
calendars, crunching whispers of
time and weather told in tearing veins.
Summer Sun burned too hot, left you
under otōto Otoño to see the world,

so falling into barren seasons you hope
to cope through a chest filled with warm cider
wrapped in a tender caress,
or else sad songs and cold liquor
from bottles that grip you right back,
burnt thumbs and sticky lungs
screaming out your Tears Over Beers—

bloodlet the memories, the feelings,
maybe it'll be easier when the emptiness
finds you again as

it always does

Zachary Ogren

Inner Mad

Never say mad as a hornet.

Hornets aren't mad.

They're pricks.

Itty-bitty-yellow-striped-sharp-ass-pricks.

When I'm mad I'm not itty bitty.

I'm not big as a mad bull.

I'm the same size.

Just mad.

Being mad feels big.

Thick hot smoke swelling against a cage of meat.

It can't get out.

But it seeps.

Up to your throat
pinching it.

Under your jaw
clenching it rigid.

It can get in your eyes too.

Blind you red.

Your breath gets scared
tries to leave.

Nope.

Inner Mad contd.

The mad pulls it back in
and out.

Dunking it in your lungs.

Drowning your breath.

Your teeth get scared too.

Your jaw quakes beneath them,
the breath clings between them for help.

If you're lucky,
it'll get to your head.

And that's where you can kill it.

You don't think,
stop mad.

You think
breathe.

Samantha Coleman



Stephen Forman (digital)

Blitzed Evening

Glass belly sloshes notes of emptiness.
Cold glossy lips press against mine,
its neck bleeding gold poison
pushed through veins by the
bumpumpump of my heart.
Brain slumps against skull
soggy and stupid
Vision twitches and twines.
Feet try to follow the crooked path in my eyes,
They fumble
dump me into the lake
skin buzzing from the sharp cold.
Water lilies bobbed brightly in the water
sweet shards of perfumed clouds.
Petals cling to my face and hair
I slump against the lakes back,
bottle slipping
its drowning gurgles lost in the rocking of the tide.

this morning
i rolled off my bed
into the sea
i wasn't frightened

Blitzed Evening contd.

the water was warm
and silver
and not at all wet
wisps of tails
shimmering scales
twined in the white sky
trees below twanged notes of copper
birds roosting in their brassy branches
i paddled the wind
reaching the sun
a ray trailing loose in the sand
i gripped the hot band tight
pulled up
past the moon
rustling stars
pinching sparks against my skin
as they drifted below the night
the night wept lonely shadows
i pressed a handkerchief against velvet cheeks
it blushed raven
and kissed me back to earth

Blitzed Evening contd.

my bed hobbled toward me
its legs folding into splinters
i huddled onto its lap
the edge of the world creeping under my eyes
breathing them open.

Samantha Coleman



Stephen Forman (digital)

Serving Now

Beautiful cakes, pastries, brownies
The warmth could welcome noses,
and fill nostrils with a sense of home, belonging,
and love.

Everyone comes to the tea party with melodic joy!

Sweet red velvet cakes make hearts,
brownies with frivolous frosting and melted
marshmallows,
macaroons with every color of the rambunctious rainbow,
small minuscule marvelous cupcakes lined up on trays to
look like teacakes,
cookies that are freshly pulled out of open oven melt an
onlooker's insides with warmth,
crumbly crusty pies line this party to make things
complete.

It serves all - I thought.

Plenty of people twirl their forks in circles
Enjoy the merriment of a party
and I stand staring at the banquet table- I can't touch.

Serving Now contd.

If I attempted to taste, it would evaporate on my tongue
They would cease to persist on
If I attempted to touch, it would fade like kinetic sand
Slipping through my fingers

Was this all a mirage? Meant to torment
and tickle my negative atmosphere to shatter
it further and drown the surfaces.

Such merriment isn't made for a heart cavity
Such parties are for those who love
Such laughter come from those who smile with pride
I am nothing but a prisoner with a false invitation.

Link Haggerty

Wonderland

Falling

Down

was

the

easy part

Head swirling

Mind racing

Questions, teacakes, and potions

The unknown

In a twist, we found one another

Six untouched hands

Tattered with pain

Or scars of the past

Gleaming green eyes can turn golden

The horns of a ram jagged

A voice from silence

Oh Alices, where did we fall?

Wonderland contd.

We laugh at tea parties
Each mad _____ a hat
 under

A spot in the rose garden that will be
Painted red in absence

A queen from each kingdom of cards
All of us a different hand
Oh Alices, where did we fall?

A bond in a chimerical land
A bond with tension retied
It won't sever

But Wonderland is not real.
Alice after Alice will return home at the call.
The pocket watch ticks...

Link Haggerty



Emily Constantin (ceramic)

Parting Advice

“Never stop learning”, were the last words I remember hearing from Fred. I had gone to see him sometime between commencement and my last day on campus. We had not spoken much since my freshmen year but felt he was someone I needed to say goodbye--I mean thank you--to.

The easels were pushed against the cinderblock wall leaving only the drips of paint on the polished cement floor. My professor's windowless office was in the corner with a schedule taped to the door. I told Fred about a job I got; I was excited to be landing somewhere. It would begin after a week in Ocean city celebrating with classmates, but with no money and fewer plans we didn't do much of that. We drank on the beach, worked on our early stages of melanoma, and speculated about how much cash we would need for the drive home; my speeding ticket is the only detail I remember. The following Monday my first job began, my second two years after that, then a third near Syracuse, and a fourth in Rhode Island before stepping into a twenty-six-year position at a large corporation, which made it hard to leave. It was everything I was looking for.

Parting Advice contd.

Three kids, two states, and one divorce later I decided to take a gap year, something most people take between college and work not the other way around. And even then, I was collecting severance so I'm not sure it counted. I didn't travel, I spent most of it playing video games and riding my bike to lunch, convincing myself I was getting in shape. It was embarrassing to say, "anytime will do" whenever I was scheduling an appointment.

Now I'm in school again, which is harder than I remember. A week ago, two girls stopped me in the quad and asked, "Are you a student?" dispelling any illusion that I was blending in. I've figured there must be something in the professor handbook about not wearing a backpack to maintain that distinction. Shoulder bag, bike bag, soft computer bag, even a real briefcase – all good, but no backpack.

It's different than I anticipated too, not that I was expecting the Dead Poet's Society, but I didn't think my classmates would come across so uninterested in learning. I hate saying that; "It was different, when I was young"; I'm sure it is just my bad memory. I'm excited to be here though, and that made me think of Professor Lipp, Fred-Fritz Lipp who taught drawing.

Parting Advice contd.

Though he might be insulted by that — he taught us not drawing.

When I stopped to see him, forty-one years ago I had to wait while he finished talking to someone; “He’s a survivor” Fred said when the former graduate walked away. The sound of that frightened me, as I had been wondering how hard the real world, everyone had been referring to for the past four years, was going to be. Fred explained the guy had just lost his job and was looking for something new. Beyond that, anything else about our conversation I’d have to make up, except for those last words, and his laugh.

In Fred’s figure drawing class, we began using colors around week four with our sketch pads on easels, pastels on worktables, and model on a pedestal - his robe laying over a stool in the corner. We were all used to that by then, the naked people who posed for us that would then walk around sipping coffee, looking at drawings of themselves, and telling us how good we were. But colors were new, it’s not like they were wearing a rainbow scarf, red mittens, or a studded holster. Even a contemplative apple would have added some crimson.

Parting Advice contd.

There was the dirty white studio, the flesh of the model, and a stool if they were seated. So, when the girl next to me, her name escapes me, asked, “what colors should I use,” it almost seemed like a valid question. We all watched as Fred picked up her 64-color pastel box, looked at it, slowly turned it over, and let fall its contents onto her worktable, saying, “Use these.”

We went back to drawing listening to his short laugh as he moved along. No one was insulted, embarrassed maybe, but I don't think there could have been a better answer to the question. Well, unless she had the 120-color set.

I've been trying to recall a lecture or fragment of something Fred told us but having a hard time. Well, except a demonstration of how to knead an eraser, which must be an attribute of my poor memory because although it does not come with instructions it is called a *kneaded eraser*. Fred would laugh, walk the studio, and stop behind my easel; I couldn't see him but knew his arms were folded, his thumb and forefinger holding his chin, the same way he did with everyone else. Anxious, I pretended to contemplate my next color or just hold the pastel to the paper, motionless, starrng at the model.

Parting Advice contd.

Next was his finger touching a mark on my sketch pad which I would follow up the length of his arm, to his face, where we would make eye contact. Fred would nod, up and down. Without a word he'd move his finger to another mark as I stepped back to look with him, at arm's length. Fred would then move his head slowly from side to side. Before moving to the next easel, he lifted his eyebrows to get an acknowledgement of my understanding. It was all I needed.

It's only been once or twice during my career, while taking a seminar, or course for something, that I've even thought about those words, and then it was only to say, "Look Fred, I'm learning!", knowing it was not what he meant, but believing he might think it was funny. And then, that, I at least learned that. When trying to remember other advice from that year, or the entire four, I come up short. The second thing I thought worth sharing was not from then, but to my memory's disappointment, was fourteen years later when the commencement song Everybody's Free ...to where sunscreen came out. Which makes sense considering my graduation burn.

Parting Advice contd.

Last month I looked up Fred online with the hope of telling him I was back at school learning something new. Maybe I could even thank him, which I never got around to in 1985; it wasn't that I didn't feel thankful, those words just weren't part of my vocabulary. But Fred passed away six years ago, so I read the article someone had written and watched a video of him talking about a sculpture he had done. The video was presented as "a rare occasion to hear Fred Lipp talk about his art", and for good reason. He used the hand gestures, I remember, as he spoke of the scale - very large, the paper - the details of its texture, the pencil - what a good tool it is, his process - changes made, and the final installation. Its total length was an hour and eighteen minutes. It didn't help me understand a thing. Admittedly, I came to this conclusion forty minutes short of the ending but could tell it wasn't going to.

Fred's gesturing developed into a mocking expression from classmates that I stayed in touch with after college. They'd see a poster for a party, nachos on a menu, or a big number at the end of their electric bill and point, waiting for eye contact.

Parting Advice contd.

With a little head movement, I'd know their plans for Friday, what they were ordering, or that they'd be short on cash that week. It was always good for a laugh. But now it's funny, when I think of it, did they not understand? Today, I'm grateful when I hear someone tell me I've done a good job, especially when learning something new. I may even get to a point where I know if they are telling me the truth. But I will never be able to do that if I can't teach myself.

David DuBois



Emily Constantin; *Frustration* (digital)

Sestina for the Dead

It sits like a busted dull knife,
a busted plum lip. And suddenly you're bleeding out
but it isn't blood—its juice sat between my gums
like cherries in the summertime, when the pit that cracked
my tooth tasted the sweetest.

Take me back to the end of summer,

before I get sick and tired. The body is what makes
summer,

what makes me selfishly bored of it all. The knife
knows. Tell me that every sliver on the brink of rot is the
sweetest.

Tell me fruit is only luscious when it's out
of season. My body is a pomegranate, the seeds cracked
from the flesh, the heart lodged in your gums—

But where does the membrane go from the gums?

The fruit skin gets swallowed up with the seeds of last
summer,

when the sky never departed and the sticky flames cracked
over oak wood. And somewhere between here and the
forest it became a knife,

Sestina for the Dead

and the cherries were choked down bitter until we took
our fingers, pulled them out.

I remember the decay. I remember many small deaths in
the sweetest

flavors. I thought that perhaps my rot made me the
sweetest

bit of flesh, over raspberry, tart strawberry. Your gums
only need a small cut to pour it all back out.

You only need the breath of winter to miss the summer.
And so, like a farmer's market, I put myself in the path of
the knife,
if it means you'll display me gently on the cutting board,
all raw and cracked.

I am used to the nature of what it means to be cracked.
I am used to the acid of desire for a glimpse of the
sweetest

strain. My body of the year is no longer freshest pick, the
knife

no longer loves to butcher. There's a tinge of pink in your
gums.

It's me. It's me with my hair long last summer.

Sestina for the Dead

It's me. Can you hear? I'm calling out
for you. All stained red and half sweet, I'm out
of fruit to bear—the roots are all cracked
and nothing has been as warm as that summer
when the dirt smelled like honey and the night was the
sweetest
part of it all—when our breath got caught in our gums
and we cut out the truth with the wrong knife.

Now it is out. Now we have cleaned and sheathed the
knife.

Everything has gone sour, the seeds cracked. The blood
has dried in our gums.

But the taste of that summer lingers on my tongue—
necrose, the sweetest.

Sage Katherine Enderton



Stephen Forman (digital)

What's Ours is Mine and Yours

Love is a funny thing, no? Because in a literal sense, it's just a word we've heard our whole lives. One that when stripped down to its purest form, can pretty much mean next to nothing. In reality, it actually means everything. It's in everything we say and do, how we act and react. It's shown in the way we carry ourselves, and the measure of which we determine the value of people and personal relationships. It's the very thing that everyone spends their lives searching for in a myriad of ways. Some people crave physical affection, others quality time. Some people write poems and songs- novels even. They scream it from the rooftops and whisper it from their knees. And then, there's some people who, despite the onslaught of options at their disposal, still can't seem to figure it out.

“Honey! You're here!”

Stella's head snapped up from its pillow atop her arms, and she mustered as much of a smile as she could for her mother- though it was hard when, yes, she was here, with more drinks under her belt than she could count on one hand, and she had been here for quite some time.

What's Ours is Mine and Yours

“Hi, Mama. Just got here.” She said.

Stella’s father, looking too far out of his depth, gave his daughter an even sadder excuse for a smile than she had given her mother, before he stalked off in search of his youngest child.

“So, how are you doing, baby?”

Stella knew that her mom meant well in asking, but right now all she wanted was to carry on a conversation that isn't centered around her feelings. Preferably with the bartender.

“I’m fine, Mom. In fact, I haven’t changed since you called this morning.” As she spoke, she plucked the green olive from the bottom of her now empty cup. Grimacing, she flicked it into the waste bucket. Her mother was prepared to speak again, but Stella cut her off quickly.

“Jesus, Mom, could you go help your family? Stefan just stuck his head in a beer bucket.”

As the older woman scurried off, mumbling something about *your useless father*, Stella caught a glass bottle as it slid across the counter.

What's Ours is Mine and Yours

“Cheap. Hold the olives this time.”

“Thanks, Johnny. You’re good.”

The man behind the bar nodded with a familiar smile. Taking way more than a sip, Stella spun around on the silver barstool, scanning the crowd of family, friends, and friends of friends that filled the dimly lit room. The air reeked of stale chips and booze, a dash of sweat and pretty as a peach perfume; an incredibly good time. Her eyes were able to find him quickly, as they always did. His dark hair had now fallen flat, matted and stuck to his forehead as he danced. Don’t Go Breaking My Heart. It’s the first and last song that played on their prom night. Cruel, she thought. It was at that moment Stella realized just how far from the door she was, and that she was already moving.

Stella knew she loved Tommy, and she knew that Tommy loved her back. She figures it probably happened at some point between 9th and 11th grade. Maybe the summer of their junior year when she went on a date with senior Mac Jacobs. Tommy had warned Stella about guys like Mac. It wouldn’t be unfair to say that he may or may not have been one of those guys B.S.- *before Stella.*

What's Ours is Mine and Yours

He had encouraged her not to go as much as he could without exposing himself, which is the only reason she went anyway. Because he wouldn't tell her not to. So when Mac inevitably left Stella standing alone in front of a 24/7 diner pushing midnight, she still called Tommy, and he still answered. He pulled up outside Paula's within 15 minutes, no argument, no I told you so, no questions asked. From that night forward, things were different between them. Good, great, difficult. She knew about love, but it wasn't something that came easy to her. She had spent an unfortunate amount of time on the receiving end of love that didn't feel all that lovely, but Stella's had Tommy for so long now, that of course she knew she loved him- she just didn't know how to tell the difference between loving him and being *in love* with him.

All she knew now was that Tommy looked at her like she held both the sun and the moon in the palm of her hands. So she tried. For him and for herself. She tried because even if she couldn't tell the difference just yet, Tommy could, and she trusted him enough to let that work for them. But as time passed and the months grew colder, so did they.

What's Ours is Mine and Yours

They had spent years tiptoeing, and eventually abandoning the line between friendship and more, struggling with the more, too consumed by the fear that the latter could ultimately destroy the former. All of these hesitations finally came to fruition and made it painfully obvious to Stella that she didn't hold the sun and the moon-- Tommy did. His beautiful, bright light has been shining onto her, seeping into her cracks this whole time. Everything remotely good about Stella was a direct reflection of the *overwhelming good* that Tommy breathed into the world each morning. How could she keep taking that from him?

Tommy and Stella learned a lot from each other during that time. Stella found that she can not give a kind of love that she's never had. Because she does love Tommy, but she doesn't love herself nearly as much. She's afraid; keeping him around while she navigated that fear wasn't fair. In return, Tommy learned that he loves Stella too, but he doesn't have to wait for her to learn how to love him in a way that he's ready for and deserving of.

The sandstone steps started to feel almost sticky from the humid, night air. The cuff of her denim shorts have likely already left their mark against the soft skin of her thighs due to how long she'd been sitting there.

What's Ours is Mine and Yours

The past 30 minutes of fighting her way towards the front door were almost futile now, with Bowie's Rebel Rebel trying its hardest to lure her back in. She can't move though. The squeal of the barn door told her she now has company, so instead of hiding, she stubs her cigarette out on the stoop and briefly watches the smoke swirl between her and the man seated to her left. The man she just spent the whole night celebrating. Avoiding? Both, probably. She blew the lingering cloud away and finally willed herself to meet his gaze. This close, he looked the same as he had that winter night, though now, bathed in the blue light of neon bar signs, it was easier to notice the heavier bags that hugged his under eyes. She felt a bit guilty because for just a moment she believed he might deserve them, but then she realized she was just projecting. Perhaps she might deserve them instead. Perhaps she might deserve worse. Perhaps she'd ask God or something later. She's drunk.

“Hi Tommy.”

“Hi Stella. You look like hell.”

“Yeah. I was reaching for heaven.”

“Careful. He might be listening, and we've got church tomorrow.”

What's Ours is Mine and Yours

A beat of silence- then laughter. She made a mental note to add forgiveness to the list of things she'd ask about later. Tommy and Stella tapped the necks of the bottles together and took a tandem sip. Stella felt her eyes once more move to follow the flow of traffic.

“Thank you for coming.” He told her.

An olive branch. Long awaited, and still sickening.

“Well, I mean, the drinks were on you guys, so...” He shook his head and laughed like he didn't really mean to.

“Fuckin' stop it.”

“I'm kidding.”

“Yeah, you always are.” He said it so quickly it was almost lost to the wind. But she heard him, and she knew he didn't say it the way he wanted to. The way she knew he meant it.

“Uh no, but-” She paused and shrugged, “Thanks for having me, man.”

“Yeah, well, I just don't want you to become a stranger.”

“And Ellie?”

This time it was Tommy who turned away.

What's Ours is Mine and Yours

She hated that the guilt tried clawing its way back up her throat. Stella appreciated Ellie; she was sweet, good to Tommy, and good to her even. Ellie had been nothing but kind to Stella since the day they met, despite not at all needing to be, and yet that name still burned her tongue, branded with the taste of bitter resentment. What scorched even more was that-

“She really likes you, Stella. We just don’t want-”

“Don’t want what?”

She was taunting him because she knows what he wants to say. She knows him, and it’s funny. Before today she never found him so patronizing.

“We just want you to be okay.”

Stella laughed and Tommy sighed.

“I am more than okay.”

“C’mon, Stel, don’t bullshit me.” He said. “I know you.” He *knew* her.

“Are you asking me to speak now or forever hold my peace?”

“Can you be serious for once?”

Almost silence. Stella wondered when David Bowie became Carole King, and if someone maybe turned it up on purpose. It is in fact too late, Miss King.

What's Ours is Mine and Yours

“We’re best friends before anything else, Stella. I don’t wanna lose you. I won’t.” He told her, and she smiled.

“Yeah, you won’t kid.” She bumped his shoulder with her own. “I don’t wanna lose you either.”

He smiled in return and stood, reaching out his hand to help her up from the stoop. The band on his finger was nearly blinding under the artificial Heineken glow. And finally, as she took his hand and crossed the threshold, she accepted he was already lost.

Krista Regan

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Dean DiLuzio, Daniel Spiller, LeeAnne

Dutkiewicz, Yamilla Tate, Zachary Ogren,

Samantha Coleman, Krista Reagan, Link

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David DuBois, Aoife Clune, Sage Enderton

Letter From the Editor

Dear Readers,

We are so excited to reintroduce the Portrait Literary Magazine to Buffalo State's student culture after a long-awaited hiatus. Portrait, at its core, hopes to allow our student body an outlet to express themselves and share their art, whether it be visual, literary, or somewhere in-between. Our editorial staff had such a great experience this semester as we worked to breathe some life back into Portrait and plan for upcoming editions. We were so excited to receive so many submissions, and we can't wait to share more with you. In my last semester, it feels lucky to have been given the opportunity to work as Head Editor and put out our first issue before my departure. Next semester, our lovely Aoife Clune will be taking over as Head Editor—and I know she'll do great things for Portrait.

Sincerely,

Sage Enderton, *Head Editor Fall 2022*