

# The Canticle

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*University of Utah Literary Magazine*

2019



THE  
CANTICLE



THE  
LITERARY JOURNAL  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

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## Acknowledgments

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We would also like to thank the Department of English for sponsoring our 2019 Editor's Choice Awards. The funding and resources they provided allowed us to recognize some of our most outstanding pieces and further *The Canticle's* goal of fostering a more vibrant artistic and literary community for undergraduate students on the University of Utah campus.

This year marks the sixth year that *The Canticle* has been in publication at the University of Utah. I am extremely grateful to my staff for being so patient and supportive as we have pushed to grow the magazine this year. We have worked hard to bring 2019's volume onto a whole new level.

As with all young publications there are moments when you have to strive to find what the voice is going to be. The community that this book creates is one that i've come to love and appreciate. Often the submissions we receive deal with some of the most intimate and delicate moments of life. This not only establishes a mentality of support and strength, it gives the magazine a poignant and soulful voice.

I look forward to seeing *The Canticle* continue to grow in the years to come. I am excited for the many opportunities and experiences that this publication is going to have at the University of Utah in addition to what it will bring our community here. This magazine truly lets you hear the individual voices of the students.

Thank you all so much for your creativity and support.

Benedicte Dansie  
Head Editor

# CANTICLE

/ˈKAN(T)EK(E)L/

Noun

1. Is a melody or hymn that requires the contribution of various human voices as a collective.
2. Studies of our literary landscape, a geography of intimate experience and the erotics of language.

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\* Denote winners of the Editor's Choice Awards





Starry Night\*  
Kassie John

## Pareidolia

Keyon Ali Hejazi

That night he dreamt he was touched by hell. He woke to his own cries for help—beads of sweat dripping down his brow. His pallid face was like that of a mother dying in childbirth. A wristwatch lay on the nightstand. Catching his breath, he turned its face to procure a ray of light shining through his window. 2:10 A.M. He'd been having nightmares for several weeks now, but none like this. He held his knees to his chest, desperate to be purified by the air of cognizance.

In the past, his dreams had fallen to pieces as he crowned from the womb of sleep—nothing left but relief and a stale feeling of overcoming fright—but his heart was beating faster and faster in that moment. Like paralysis, reality was no longer the salvation for his psyche. The frayed hem of his patchwork existence refused to shroud the memories of a past forgotten. They fell through the rotting seams and onto his bed. A hand reached up from under the sheets and brushed its backside slowly along his thigh. Its countenance was oddly infantile. His throat swelled as he tried to scream for help. Empty mutterings fell off of his tongue and his eyelids became heavier with each second that passed. Just as he lulled into the blackness there came a disembodied childlike voice, *Where's Mother?*

He woke the next morning, lamenting his spectral encounter. What had happened? The line between dreams and reality began to blur even further. A car sped past in the alley outside his window as he slugged to the kitchen to make some coffee. Hanging over his mug, he felt as though he'd been tied to his chair. The illusory ropes that bound him were filled with whispers of a child pleading for help. Tears filled his eyes and fell down his face. There was an unfamiliar violence locked in his chest. He'd read an article a few days prior detailing the cultural practices of a cannibalistic tribe that lived in the Philippine rainforests. It went on to explain an ancillary emotion expressed by the tribe called *liget*. There was no direct translation for this word, but the closest the journalists could come to explaining it was a mad impulse to cut another's head off. When the tribe has no victims to decapitate, only surrounded by their brothers and sisters, they express this emotion through a deep, mournful wail.

He attempted to relieve himself with a howl, but his throat cracked as tears flooded his face. There was something missing inside him now, he was certain of it. His experiences from the night had gutted him, and in the abyss filled a longing for what he had been robbed of. Images from his dream flashed into the retinas of his teary eyes, sifting from scene to scene without aim like a flashlight at the intersect of trails in the night.

He's at a baseball diamond, in the dugout. There's a crack of a successful swing. Proud parents cheer and clap. He's smiling, laughing. The game has ended. It's cold now. The bottom of rusted bleachers loom over him. Cigarette butts litter the ground. A boy stands in front of him with a malevolent grin. He's petrified. Where's Mother? His chest burns. The sinister wrinkles of a growing smile line the boy's face. The gentle backside of the hand slides along his thigh. The boy's face contorts, fading into the glowing moon behind him. The boy twists him around like stop-motion. The hand constricts. It's painful now. Another hand cages his hip. Through his tears, like the compound prisms of an insect's eye, he sees the boy's face in front of him again, writhing and transforming. His mother's face appears in its place with the same sinister grin. It flutters and dissolves, then a facsimile of his own face emerges. The tears suddenly stop. He lay prone, his chin in the dirt, staring forward at the boy standing still in front of him. His hands are covered in blood. His grin has faded, and tears fall from his face and into a crater in the center of his chest.

A knock at the door roused him from his fractal memories. He got up, wiping the tears from his face, and opened the door. There his neighbor stood with a clownish smirk, holding two cigarettes with his thumb and forefinger. They walked to the end of the alley and sat on a curb at the intersecting streets. He pulled a lighter from his coat pocket and lit his cigarette, grabbing his knees and pulling them to his chest. He peered up at the eggshell sky. Cloudbursts lay atop the mountain range, muddled by the pastel sunset. He could feel the heavy momentum of the clouds passing by all the while roused by their stillness. He realized that he'd never seen an image in the clouds. No occult faces or animals. Not even a paltry sheep. Not a single allusion to his world. They just hung above the earth, lifelessly fraying and splitting, dissolving into the sunset.

## **Muse**

Stevie Mitchell

Dear shattered glasses and hung-over mothers,  
Don't dream about your sweet dead brothers.  
They don't mean to show you their pale grey faces  
And photos from forgotten places.

Dear broken windows and empty bottles  
Did you once think you could be models?  
With hair that never needed washing  
And faces that were always bruised  
Thank you for being my favorite muse.



**Three Generations: The Arrowwhites**  
Kassie John

## Навзрыд (Navzrid)

Josh Burgoyne

It is only while under  
This tree—that tenacious oak  
Forcing his way into the heavens—  
That I am finally allowed the  
moment of weakness from  
which I have been running  
for far too long.

I am alone, illuminated by the  
sanguine light of a dying sun.

And like Perun,  
my tears trike the ground  
with the quiet subtlety  
of ten thousand symphonies.



**Clairmont**  
Kassie John

## Tempest

David Boyd

Rest your cries, little teacup: your journey  
ends when the clouds kiss your smudgy halo  
and your glazed over eyes watch the gurney  
haul away your sweetest nightmares. Swallow  
the lust dripping from shinier mornings,  
and burn the lips that rake your gentle mind  
with impatient futures of rose mournings  
and blackened tastes. May Nox's fresh winds find  
the time hardened spirits you carry  
venomous and pure, and let your shy blades  
caress their puzzled neighbors. Never tarry:  
you hang above a torrential world made  
energetic and numb by the thick mud  
of unrefined palates and impure blood.

## Desert Creature

Emily Gardner

I once made a list of things that the strange creature behind my house likes. It was a short list, made in a short amount of time, but of all my lists, I like this one best. It seems as though from dreams or a past I made up.

But somewhere out there, there is a creature slinking through the shadows alongside a desert hillside, and until it comes back, I've got my list to remind me.

1. The creature likes eating cattle, or at least more than it feared my papa's gun.

The summer I met the creature, my papa had shot the creature with his rifle from the back end of the porch because he thought it was a coyote. It had taken a large bite out of Betty, her cry piercing the night, before the gun had even been loaded. Before Papa could hunt it down again, it had vanished into the darkness like a shadow.

When I saw it hunched over in the chicken coop the next morning, at first I had thought it was an obscenely large jackalope. But then I saw past its antlers to its gruesome, crooked legs and eyes like gaping holes, surrounded by the bones and feathers of my favorite hen, and I knew it wasn't a jackalope. It was too ugly to be a jackalope.

I tried scaring it off with a broom, but the creature had snapped at me with long rows of sharp teeth in its black maw, and I knew my broom was not made to survive that kind of attack. When I noticed the blood near its jagged leg, fresh and red unlike the old brown of the hen's, I also knew the creature wasn't leaving anytime soon.

"What on earth were you doin'?" I asked it later, as we both looked towards the red hills. "Lettin' yourself get shot like that."

It continued glaring purposefully at the cattle as they picked at the tall yellow grass. The creature remained haunched as if it could actually pounce and exact revenge with the twisted, bandaged state its leg was in.

"If you're gonna stay here, you can't eat our cattle," I informed it. "Or our chickens."

Its dark, soulless eyes looked over at me, and it bared its sharp teeth again.

"I'll get you some mice," I offered instead, and it must have found that satisfactory because its teeth retreated even as the chicken coop shook with a low grumble.

2. The creature likes the strength and power of crushing bones.

Later, it was suggested that some of the birds had complained about the loud crunching of bones as the creature ate. It wasn't as if I could hear the noise myself, I was usually all the way by the house, but I trusted the birds.

I tried to tell the creature to stop one morning as it yanked meat off of another rat's ribs and picked its bones into small white pieces like letters falling to the floor.

“You can’t even eat bones,” I pointed out.

The creature bit a rib pointedly in half with those large rows of teeth and a loud crunch. It continued this way with every single bone until it had a pile of halves, and then the creature tossed them all in its mouth to chew, sounding like a machine grinding against its own parts. When it had finished, there was no sign the rats had ever been there at all.

I didn’t like its dismissal, but at risk of being the next set of bones the creature might take apart, I suggested a compromise. “I’ll get you some bigger food?”

The creature eyed me from his huddled black mass, and my hairs stood on end. The next day, I dropped off a hare I had struck down with my slingshot but didn’t stick around for long.

3. When free, the creature likes howling like the desert wind.

It stayed in our chicken coop for two weeks. Papa stayed by the cattle while I beckoned the chickens from their frightened corners in order to feed them. I fed the creature too. It could walk now, or hobble, but I assumed that was how it had always walked considering I hadn’t seen it before it got shot.

It was always most active at night, but the night before it left, there was a howling outside my porch as if the wind had decided this would be the day it would take off towards the sky. But it was just my creature, a black thing against the night sky, looking as tall and as prickly as a cactus. It tumbled through the desert, knotted legs beneath it, and ran at the cattle before dodging away as if playing a game only it thought was funny.

In the morning, I looked out the window towards the distant chicken coop and found no familiar shadow hunkering by the entrance. Like the rats, it was as if the creature had never been there at all.

By the end of that summer, I had taken over the ranch. My chickens thrived with the absence of a threat of being eaten, as did the cattle. Like they did with most things in life, the animals simply forgot it had ever happened. Even old Betty with a chunk off her side, stitched up from a local doctor who had said the coyotes must have been wild that night, forgot the creature had ever been.

But every now and then I’ll hear that howling, or see a shadow in the daylight slinking past the hills, and I’ll leave a dead rabbit on the porch just to have it disappear by morning. My neighbors complain about the coyotes sometimes, or how one of their cows must’ve wandered off, but I never have much to say in town gossip. My neighbor Susan once said I must have used up all my bad luck that night Betty was attacked, but I know better. Good luck has got nothing to do with it.

My list is short, but I skeptically added a fourth thing, even as the creature no longer slinks behind my house for a visit.

4. The creature likes me. Or at least more than it likes trying to eat Betty.



**Kingsdale Trees**  
Kate Button

## How I Remember You

K'mwe Paw

I wake up every morning disturbed by the loud crushing of leaves, and it would always be her little feet crushing them. Instead of the chirping of birds, the mornings would always be filled with her laughter. The sun wouldn't be up in the sky yet and she would already be here, running around and playing by herself. She came here so often that I've gotten used to her presence in the forest. It surprised me more to see her go than to see her come. She was always here, exploring the mountain and its forest every day as if she hadn't just been here the day before. Every time she went deeper into the forest and higher up the mountain, her pupils would expand in wonder and fascination. She was fascinated by Mother Nature, but truly, she was the real fascination.

Her days were spent in the forest and only the night could bring her back to her real home. I would know, I always watched her. She'd run around the empty fields and the tree-filled landscapes, nothing in the forest but her and the wild things of Nature. Her mind was probably too innocent to comprehend the dangers of the forest, otherwise, she'd have avoided it like everyone else. Other people, especially children, were too scared to wander off into the deep and vast forest all by themselves, but not her. She was a cocky little girl who loved having mini-adventures and she always wandered off by herself to create them. She never got tired of the same old view or the same old place. She sure was an odd little one.

When I first met her, I thought she was just another lost child, running around too far into the forest and had gotten lost. But she wasn't. She was here with an older woman. The woman had let the little girl run off by herself while she scavenged for plants to take home. The little girl, with her newfound freedom, excitedly ran off to the nearest tree and climbed it, trying to steal some of its fruit. She looked like a little monkey, just dangling off the tree like it was her natural habitat. The woman, after picking out enough plants, yelled out to the little girl to come back down. She protested and whined, but came down anyway.

Occasionally on weekends, the little girl came back with the woman to pick more plants. It was always the same routine: she'd run off and the woman would always have to yell out to her to come back, she'd complain but came down the tree anyway. Eventually, the little girl came and went by herself. The woman wasn't there to remind her to come home anymore. She knew when to leave, and that was always when the sky darkened.

Since she always came to my home, I was curious about hers. So, one day, I followed her home. She stepped out of the grassy field, out of the forest and down a hill. Her sandaled little feet took little steps down the weed-filled path, being extra careful to not fall down—though not really. As she went down the trail, she skipped along while singing a cheerful melody to

herself and picked at the nearby flowers. She would occasionally get distracted by grasshoppers that crossed her path and would run off to chase after them, giggling away with a bright smile on her face while doing so. It's like the dangers of reality weren't even her problem because she was in a world of her own.

She continued walking, and I continued to follow. After a while, she reached a scrawny house made of bamboo sticks with large dried banana leaves as a roof. The house was being held up from the ground by large poles; it barely looked put together with no doors or windows, just entrances in the walls. It didn't seem like it would hold out for long, but this was her home.

Standing in front of the house, waiting for the little girl, was the same old woman from before. The little girl ran up to the woman and embraced her warmly in a tight hug. The woman picked her up, and they both went inside the house.

A little while later, they came out again. The little girl happily skipped alongside the woman with a towel and a brush in her hands toward a small shed next to their house. They went inside and after a few minutes, they came back out again. But this time, the little girl was naked with wet hair and cradled inside the woman's arms. The little girl wasn't much of a still person, she kept trying to wiggle her way out of the woman's arms and onto the ground, like a worm trying to escape from the grasp of a bird's beak. But the woman held on tightly.

"Don't you dare try to get yourself dirty again, I just bathed you." Said the woman.

To which the little girl replied, "No!"

The little girl sunk her teeth into the woman's bare arm like a hungry tigress chewing off meat from a corpse. Then she continued to try to wiggle her way out of the woman's arms.

The woman shook her head and swung the little girl over her shoulder. The little girl threw her hands up in defeat and let herself dangle off the woman's shoulder. They went back inside the house, all the while I watched beside a bush.

One by one, the stars slowly crept into the night sky. I stayed behind the bush, waiting for her to come out again. It took a while, but she eventually came back out with the woman. The little girl was dressed in a new outfit and seemed as chirpy as ever. She's jumping around in excitement, clapping her hands and laughing away by herself. The woman just watched the little girl with tired but loving eyes. They lay down against the porch and stare up at the night sky filled with millions of tiny stars. I climbed onto her roof, peeked through a hole and watched her. The little girl was in the woman's arms, happily pointing up at the stars in awe while the woman's singing a melodious tune to her. In the forest, the little girl always had on a smile, but in the woman's arms, I saw her smile the brightest smile. This was her loveliest smile. After a little while, she fell asleep in the arms of the woman, and I went back home to the deep and

dark wilderness.

There were many parts of the mountain and forest she hadn't explored, but if given the time, I know she would've definitely created many more adventures in the wild. But sadly, she stopped coming. Out of the blue, out of nowhere, she stopped coming to the forest. I waited day after day, week after week, for her to come back again, for her to run around the forest, to hear her little feet stomp around the forest ground, to hear her laughter fill up the quiet forest one last time. But she never came back.

Not knowing where she went or when she would come back, I went to her home to check up on her. I climbed down the mountain, down the hill to her house and looked for her, but she wasn't there anymore. I looked around the places she could've been, but she was just gone.

As I waited outside their home, hoping to catch a glimpse of her bright smile again, all I saw was the old woman on the verge of tears, trembling and struggling to put food in her mouth as she ate. She's sniffing and wiping away at the tears that make it down her cheeks. I saw her look up to the sky, almost in anger, as if she wanted to curse at it. But she didn't.

Instead, she let her tears flow and began wailing. In the midst of her tears, she threw her plate of food onto the ground and desperately screamed out.

With her head to the sky, the woman pleaded, "Take me too...please."

Their house looked dreary and sad, no longer filled with the love and life it once had. Wherever the little girl had gone, it left me and the old woman hollow.

I lost hope and went back to the wilderness.

Sooner than later, the morning resumed to the chirping of the birds, and it'd no longer be her laughter waking me up. The fallen leaves and branches would be crushed by the others in the village, and no longer her little feet. The voices in the forest were now of the other villagers, no longer hers. Everything just resumed back to before her, and I wish it never did. She had disappeared, and I don't know why or where she had gone. I don't know if she's okay or if she's just...gone. Life was never the same without her.

Have you heard of the myth that cats have nine lives? Well, if it was true, would it be okay if I used all nine to stay by her side?

## The Bird

Leo Doctorman

I

You rolled that worm in your beak, I watched you  
Until the threshold of decay claimed your heart.  
I can imagine this featherless avian with wings  
Protruding past the context of thick pine branches  
And you sway like a mourner when the wind  
Scrapes your hollow bones in the dry afternoon.  
You fertilize the atmosphere with your tawny skin.  
Let the coroner assume you departed on your own terms,  
Smelling the world before you, shaded  
Between picket fences in your ideal retirement  
And your funeral pyre of green. Altar to oxygen,  
Where ammonia might be needed  
To desecrate your remains, remnants,  
Remembrance. But why would we bury  
Poultry? We drank absinthe for you,  
And we sat around and imagined a world  
Where processions of insects honored their god.  
The owls in mourning roiled and rolled like dervishes  
In deserted plazas with more bullet holes  
Than mouths to feed.  
You were only a bird because you dragged comets  
Like worms and died the death of a persona-non-grata.

II

But this was you, child of the sky, with stardust  
Streaking across your cheeks, entangled  
In a web of your untruthful wings;  
Parachute of a cosmonaut or a waxwing.  
You are not a bird at all, but a descendant  
Of circumstance. Planting flags on the moon  
Won't grow you a country and planting

Your body won't grow you a self.  
But I see you, swinging crazed  
From your branch. You implore a proper  
Burial of mammalian proportion, beneath  
The dirt; A half-hearted inscription  
Delivered to the coroner  
a month late, on a napkin.

But let's assume you went  
Without agency, wielding star-spangled  
Knives and you swallow your last drops of blood  
From the last worm you had caught.  
Your helmet dropped, glitter eyes form one;  
White plastic encasing your talons,  
Decaying off of your arm like wings,  
Oxygen apparatus hanging like tailfeathers,  
Eyes wild like the tree caught prey,  
Tied up in years to come and swallowed  
By the earth, songs of electronics  
And wires only left for the ears of blind giants.



**Capitol Reef, Utah**  
Andrew Carlson

**no one wants to be kissed out of loneliness**

T. Alisa Cloward

I  
was a drowning monster in the seas, my  
thrashing tentacles  
smashing brigatines.  
Lunging to lessen the suffocation, I  
hurt you. Forgive me, I  
was only trying, feelers flying,  
to make a connection. My  
mouth never sought to kiss so hard,  
slamming against your lips-  
shipwreck.  
(no one wants to be kissed out of loneliness)

## Untitled

Jack Sperry

We drove past the smokestacks and from this hill I could see out the window the fire-needle lights, and on the horizon the lake that would separate the yellow stars from the white. I pulled my phone out from between my thighs, but there was nothing, so I put it back looked back out to the lights.

We were in a bell choir together and had just played a concert, and I'd texted her that I wanted to kiss her, but we were in separate cars and in the few minutes that she hadn't responded, my confidence had been muddled and my heart had started beating a little faster. The nighttime smalltalk in the car had stopped, and we all looked out the glass or lay back and slept with our heads teetering like broken candles, cradled in a seatbelt, or buzzing on the windows from the car's vibration.

My phone buzzed and I pulled it out again and looked at the screen and almost smiled at what I saw, but either way I was relieved because we had almost gotten back to the church by now and I wanted her to have opened it before she saw me so that I could read her and think, and as my car pulled into the parking lot, we were the first there, and I was uncomfortable because we were alone.

We toppled out of the crowded suburban and I stood for a minute with my hands dunked deep into my pockets, hoping to hide my restlessness. Liam got out and we looked at each other, and I raised my eyebrows to greet him and we both laughed so I walked over to the back of the car and opened it and pulled out the uniforms and waited for a minute for the other cars to pull up. When they did and she got out, I looked at her and smiled, but she didn't see me so I went inside and started unloading the crates.

I walked over to the big splintery box called Coffin and twisted the metal knobs, but they didn't give so I pinched a little tighter and they clicked out of place and I opened the hatch. Inside were the stacked wooden chambers and metal plates resting on each other. The steel keys stared back at me with shiny eyes, so I put my hands on either side of the iron scaffolding cushioning the striking slabs and straightened my back, lifting it out gently and walking over to the far corner by the padded chairs, squatting down and quickly pulling my fingers away as I dropped it the final inch onto the carpet. I walked back to the box and grabbed the pieces of old metal framing and set them up and screwed them together, and I hung the wooden chambers on the back spine like sheets on a clothesline and then picked up the octave of keys and rested them on top of it all like a card house.

She and I still hadn't talked to each other, so when we circled up I tried to stand by her

but she didn't seem to know, so I stood quietly as we listened to the director, and when it was all finished she called her brother to pick her up. I looked at her face as she walked around the room on the phone, and I couldn't hear the call but she looked sad so when it was over I asked her if she was alright, and she said she was so I asked her if she wanted to sit in my car and wait, and she said she did so we said goodbye to everyone and went out.

We started talking about the concert, and we must have been lost in it for a while because her phone rang and she said her brother was here. I turned around and looked out the back and through the breathy windows I could see two headlights, but before she got out I said, Wait, because I want to kiss you. She smiled and looked at me and asked why I was so nervous and I said I didn't know, but really I knew it was because I loved her more than I thought was possible, and because I'd never kissed a girl before.

I put my hand on her back but I was stalling so my head fell into her lap, and only against her warmth did I realize how cold it had become from how long we had been. Her perfume filled my nostrils and I smiled and sat up and she kissed me. And it happened so fast and so gracefully that it felt like a dream.

Then I hugged her and the hug was almost as good as the kiss, and I said I thought it was all really sweet and we looked at each other and laughed and said goodbye and then she left.

As I drove home, I found myself up again, this time on the side of the mountain. I looked out the window at the flickering lights, and the keel of the mountains across the valley were black against the stars, and I remembered a time when I was younger:

I'm running through the field behind my house with quiet thuds, and the wet grass flattens under my feet, and the moon is pale and it's cold out, so I can't really feel my toes and my nose is runny. I look up at the stars and the lights as I run, and my eyes start to water so I run faster, and when I get to the end I look back and the sprinklers are shimmering in the moonlight like a shattered star spilled out across space. I lie down and I think about sleeping but then I think that my mom is probably wondering about me, so I start walking home, and I look up to the mountain and I feel warm and small for a second, and for some reason I can't stop smiling, but when I look away it's left me and I'm alone again. Alone in my car, the windows dripping with watery beads. Alone on a mountain, watching the city lights below me. Alone in a field under the night sky, breath like smoke from my young, churning heart, the moon and stars catching their light on the wet grass, flooding with wonder and filling every place on Earth with warm light, as if to say, "Your time will come."



**Untitled**  
Emily Anderson

## **Hikkosu**

T. Alisa Cloward

When you met me, I was a clean gallery of streets. I was jealous, and I was coldly quiet in anger, and I had a stormy past, but you knew none of that. To you, I was flawless and unadulterated, and—for once—I thought I could plant my own skyscrapers, and grow on those streets the city that you saw in me.

But I am jealous, and I am coldly quiet in anger, and I cannot keep secrets from you. So I remain a ghost town, and you are moving to New York.



**San Francisco**  
Andrew Carlson

## The line between reality and roaches

Ariana Liques

The sound of water hitting against the base of the sink made a hollow ticking sound, as if to remind her that time existed in a reality she would never be a part of. *Drip Drop, Tick Tock. How many days has it been since I had my last taste of happiness?* She stared at the once-white ceiling which dropped paint chips like rain drops and had stretch marks across its decaying surface. After what seemed like minutes, she looked at the sun from a shattered window as it melted into the sea of city lights.

*Another day well spent.* She pressed her hands down on the torn faux-leather couch leaking bits of cotton. As she sat up, she felt her arms tremble beneath her weight. Her whole body was a sorry excuse for a living being. Blisters stained the inside of her mouth, and her hair created knots which could never be untangled. Her frame consisted of lanky arms, prominent bones, empty eyes, and hollowed cheeks. She was caving into herself mercilessly. People always said she couldn't see reality anymore, but the fact of the matter was, she had seen too much of it.

People were content with living on the surface, and she wanted them all to burn in the hell they called happiness. She was sick of it. People flashing their perfect white teeth which they bought for the low price of never-ending debt. Lovers who could never let go of each other because they believed two bodies made someone feel whole. *A bunch of idiots.* They were releasing toxicity with their expensive cars, name brand handbags, and lipstick shit-talk. *God, their voices. That's the thing that always gets me.* They liked to play games, using phrases and sleight of hand to get what they wanted. They are all salesmen, making statements sound like investments and bullshit sound like bargain deals. They got what they wanted because unlike them she couldn't play a game she never received the rules to.

The moon was hanging high on it's smokey canvas by the time she decided to move. She stumbled with the first few steps, although to her, it felt as though she were levitating. The room wasn't secure and seemed to be constantly shifting and swaying; everything in her peripheral was blurry. It was in moments like these that she felt exactly like static, unable to be still and impossible to touch.

She swayed slowly into the bathroom and reached for the door, covered with roaches, without hesitation. As soon as the fluorescent light bulb flickered over their feces-encrusted bodies, they scattered into the darkest corners of the room. *Does the light feel like lit cigarettes pressed into their flesh as well? Is that why they hide underneath my skin?* Her unsteady legs walked across the floor like a trapeze artist wavering along a tightrope. It was fitting; this was going

to be one of her greatest performances yet. She tottered towards the slightly open medicine cabinet, carefully placing one unsteady limb after the other. The line she walked on was tearing at the seams. She never understood how she ended up like this. If someone were to look at the haunting hallway walls and hanging picture frames, they wouldn't understand either. Her life seemed like the epitome of bliss. *An education, love, food on the table, how much more selfish could you get?* Living in a place that was constantly falling apart was both something she believed she deserved yet didn't as well. What gave her the right to fall apart?

When her hands reached the medicine cabinet, she stopped and saw her reflection in the mirror. Her stomach tightened into knots as tears welled inside of her constricted throat. "What the fuck is wrong with you?" she screamed out. Her fist collided with the mirror, sending bits of glass shattering around her. A few pieces stuck out of her knuckles, but it didn't matter. She couldn't feel anything anymore. Her body was an old grandfather clock; cogs and gears became her bones which, with a slight tick, were constantly suffering in the concept of time.

With her good hand, she swung open the broken medicine cabinet. A bottle of pills stood lonely inside. She grabbed the bottle and read the label which was written over with sharpie. *Happy Pills*. Her mother had always called them that. She always thought it was very ignorant of her mother to think that 100mg of sertraline could solve all her problems, but it didn't really matter anymore. The pill sat in her mouth patiently as she put her hand under the sink running brown water. She closed her eyes as it slid down her throat and sank to the bottom. *How long has it been since I had my last taste of happiness?*

After a few seconds, I opened my eyes. The marble sink was spotless. The bathtub was pure white with shower curtains which had the words "blessed" and "grateful" written in cursive. An orchid in a blue vase rubbed against the mirror and drew my attention to my own reflection. My hair was neatly braided behind my back, my eyes looked more alive as light bounced off my pupils, and my cheeks were plump with a light pink tint. I let out a sigh of relief, "It's okay, everything is okay." Sometimes, the kindest words you need to hear are the ones you tell yourself. After a few moments of breathing in and out, I opened the door with shaking hands.

The hallway is lined with pictures of bittersweet memories. I continued to walk until I saw her sitting there, pouring hot water into a teacup. *Drip Drop, Tick Tock*. My hands twitched, and I winced at the too familiar noise. Her voice cut me out of my thoughts.

"You were kind of acting like a bitch," she said, stirring sugar into her tea. That was her way of making sure I knew I did something messed up, but she trusted me enough to own up to my mistakes. I laughed a bit under my breath and stood in the hallway. "I know, I'm really

sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you." I watched her as she continued to swish the spoon around in my favorite mug, the black and white Alice in Wonderland one with the disappearing cat.

She finished stirring and looked directly into my eyes, "It's okay dude, you good now?" Someone who has never met her before would think of her negatively, but in reality it was just her way of speaking. She didn't care about whether you had a psychotic breakdown or broke a vase by throwing it at the wall. To her, that was unimportant. What mattered to her was whether you loved her for who she was; then she could love you too. Someone as unstable as me couldn't have asked for a better best friend and roommate. I needed someone who didn't see me as a weak child who just couldn't "get over it," because I couldn't, no matter how hard I tried. I sat down at the table with her and I looked at her with a smile, "You know, we really are Watson and Sherlock." She laughed into her coffee cup, "I'm not wearing the hat." The room mixed with the smell of chamomile and steam from the tea wrapped gently around our bodies to envelope us in a warm embrace. We sipped in the taste of comfort in between jokes and ideas for our new projects. It was moments like this that made living worthwhile.

After what seemed like a few minutes, the moon hung high on its smoky canvas. I turned off the kitchen lights as my best friend walked down the hallway to her room. I was following right behind her, but I felt something was watching me. Feasting on the crumbs on the floor and hiding in the shadows. Clicking noises sounded from the dark. Creatures that could never die and would never leave. Infesting such a warm home. *Touching my body at night, moving underneath my skin, ripping holes through my flesh, making me squirm beneath my sheets, bound, beaten, they're going to hurt me again, they're comi-*

"Hey, what's up?" She looked at me and then into the pitch black kitchen. The room became heavy with an uneasy silence.

"It's nothing...I thought I saw a cockroach," my throat constricted and my eye twitched as I looked at nothing. With that, I turned off the hallway lights and crept into my room.



**A Singularity**  
Kate Button

## **Frame of Minds**

Jake Luman

meager vessel hollowed out  
from my own pink bark  
tossed from rock to rock  
    reef to reef  
    dawn to dewfall  
swept through the spiraling currents  
of a vortex in unison  
brine stinging raw thoughts  
and wind scorning souls that dare to unfurl

## **Dionaea Muscipula \***

Benjamin Nevarez

I like to wonder if the Venus flytrap is aware of the torment it causes. To dissolve living creatures in digestive enzymes as they squirm in the darkness seems like something too brutal to not be conscious of. Of course, the answer is most likely no. Aside from hairs that trigger the process to begin, the Venus flytrap has no neural network, so sentience is impossible. The trap is not self-aware. Or maybe I'm not giving this beautiful monster enough credit. Maybe the flytrap is sentient. Cares for its victims, mourns them, is grateful, even, for their sacrifice. Regardless, once all is finished, the trap reopens, and the world resets. Not, of course, for the prey. The beetle, the ant, the housefly. For them, no chance encounter is more meaningful, more regrettable, than this.

I'm not sure which perspective I relate to more. I'm not here to talk to you about plants, enthralling as they are. I'm here to tell you a sad story, and to depress you. Or to make you think. Whatever. It's all the same to me. This sad story is mine. And hers. I met her in an acting class, of all places. We stood, guarded and insecure, in a circle with fifteen other students, sharing our names and an interesting fact about ourselves. The facts were not, in fact, interesting. Hers was Reia, and that she was a vegan. See? Not a very interesting fact. She certainly was though. Interesting, that is, and beautiful. Slender, almost unnaturally so. There was something captivating, insincere almost, about the way her smile turned, something sad and unkind trapped behind her shit-brown eyes. Captivating nonetheless.

We were friends in passing, at least at first. We ran in the same crowd, a conglomerate of depressed, starving artists, and it kept us familiar at the very least. We kissed at a Halloween party, and ignored it immediately thereafter. We were drunk and high and idiots. The first time we really kissed, actually and intentionally, was seven months later, during a shitstorm of emotion and brokenness for the both of us. We didn't ignore it this time.

Like I said. Idiots.

I have sympathy for the Venus flytrap. I feel I've been unfair up until now, painting the flytrap as rather cruel. This isn't the truth in total. The flytrap is lonely. It smiles wide, ear to ear, day after day. The smile only fades when something, someone, gets too close. Chooses to investigate the grin, and learns the disingenuous truth. I have to imagine that the flytrap craves that closeness, for another to see the truth and to stay regardless. But then the trap closes, and it's too late for either one to stop the process.

A bit macabre, I suppose.

We got too close too quickly, her and I. We got drunk and had sex often, but more

importantly, we watched Disney shows and Vine compilations. It was an intimate, naive ritual. It was something real. We were safe together, we could each tell that the other was damaged in ways that others couldn't understand. Bit by bit, drunken monologue at a time, we exposed how broken and miserable we were, beneath the smile. That forced us into something real, because once you see someone's pain, a part of you becomes obsessed with relieving it.

So far, the story doesn't sound too sad, does it? I mean, we were sad, but the story doesn't seem to be. That part wasn't. That part was really good. For the first time, most of our smiles were actually genuine. The facade had faded. The flytrap was a harmless plant.

The night we started officially dating though, everything fell apart. Which is telling. Normally relationships function the opposite way. We were drunk, as we often were, and we were fighting, loudly, which at this point was admittedly less common. I went outside to smoke, because hey look at me, I'm edgy and I smoke and I'm bad at expressing emotion, and when I came back inside, she had punched a wall and broken her hand in three places. She was sobbing in a fetal position, and honestly I'm not sure if it was the broken bones or the abandonment that put her in that state. The following hours are a bit of a blur, but by sunrise we were dating, and honestly happy about it.

That should've been a red flag I suppose.

Here, the sad story gets sad. We were terrible together. We fought constantly. And it wasn't really our faults either, we were just two souls that never, ever should've come together. The only thing we had in common was pain, the rest was polar. The relationship lasted a month. And then I cheated on her. And then she found out. We broke up, and that night she performed oral sex on our close mutual friend David to spite me. So yeah. Not the healthiest dynamic.

I don't think I ever felt anger before that night. Fury, rage, the kind used to describe berserkers in Norse lore. I did then though. And neither of them had really done anything wrong either. She was hurt, rightfully so, and he was entirely ignorant of the fact we had been together. It's strange how little the logic of things matters when emotion is involved.

That trapped feeling; that is what the insect feels. When the trap closes, when walls collapse in around it, and there's nothing but black and pain and panic. The fly is a victim. That's relatable, maybe more so than the loneliness of the flytrap. We all feel that we're the victims of our stories. It's not always true, but it is a fantastic way to cope with our actions. It's a truly appealing narrative, universal, Shakespearean almost. To be drawn in by something beautiful, something gorgeous, appealing, too good to be true, and for that beauty to swallow you whole? It's tragic. We like tragedy. Especially when we get to be the fly.

Everything had gone to shit. Any trust we had for each other was gone. But we were in

the same social circle, a social circle we had promised each other wouldn't get hurt, or divided, because of our personal lives, so we were forced to remain friends. And so the facade, the false grin, returned. The problem with that though, is that we still had pain in common. The surface stuff, the relationship and the commitment, that was destined to fail, but at heart, at the ugly core of our shared experience, we were still the same. And so we fell back into the same patterns. We got drunk, we had sex. And more importantly, we watched Disney shows and Vine compilations. It was an unnatural limbo state where we both desperately wanted to be. We wanted to forgive, and to be forgiven, and to help stop the hurt. And it was really, incredibly unhealthy. It was counter-intuitive too, at least for me, because it made everything worse. I couldn't be without her, but being with her was confusing, difficult, and it turned my brain into a tenderized, scrambled mess of self-loathing. I burned myself with cigarettes, which is still the most obnoxious thing for me to admit. It's easily the most pretentious mode of self harm. But that was my reality. I was fundamentally lost, and every day, every moment, it got worse.

I tried to drive my car off a cliff. Clearly I didn't do it. I'm a bitch when it comes to finality, I've never been good at commitment. See page 30, where I cheated on my ex if you need convincing. Anyways, despite being suicidal, (which in this instance was more aptly described as driving really fast and swerving around a bit) I wanted to live. I was desperate for a reason to live. So I called her. I told her everything, about how cold, and empty, and scattered I was. And at some point, while I bore my soul, and exposed my truth, she fell asleep. During one of the more vulnerable moments of my life. She fell asleep. Yeah.

That was rock bottom I think.

That's it. That's the story. And I'm all better now, thanks for asking. I mean no, no I'm not, and that's not really the whole story. There's an infinite amount more to be said. Like how after all that shit, I called my mom on a Tuesday night to tell her that her son was a suicidal, broken little boy who hadn't been okay since the fourth grade. But it doesn't matter, you got the important bits. Depressed yet?

I haven't mentioned the metaphor in a while. The Venus flytrap, and the fly. And it is, of course, a metaphor. Isn't it? A great, big, artistic metaphor. But it's not. Or at least not a very good one under inspection. Because what is the metaphor, really? That my ex is an evil plant lady, and I'm a hapless little bug man who fell into her trap? That seems sensible enough. But it's not honest. It's not the truth. Because she's not the villain I've painted her to be. If I'm being unbiased, she's amazing. She has a massive heart. She cares very deeply. And yeah, she's a bit vindictive, but who can fault her? She's a survivor. In so many more ways than anyone should ever have to be, she's a survivor. So then, maybe I'm the trap, and she fell into me

because it was better than falling aimlessly in some direction or another without end. But that can't be it either. I'm the narrator, the protagonist, and this spiteful allegory is of my own design, so I can't be in the wrong. I'm not that self-aware.

So, what then? Maybe me and her are both flies, and maybe alcohol, or depression, or love, is the trap. I don't know. I'm still figuring it out, you see? There are countless pieces that I have yet to digest, like the butterflies I felt when we met each other's families, the olive green baseball cap that she never fucking gave back, the fact that the Disney channel is ruined for me, the best, and the absolute worst memories that I just never get to change. I don't know if I'm the victim, or if she is, or if both of us are just hurting and no one is to blame. I don't know who fell into the other's trap, I don't know if it was love or infatuation, if I regret it, if she had the right idea to punch a wall, I just know that I still think of her sometimes when I shouldn't, and that now she's dating some dude who's allergic to peanut butter. Which, good luck bro, she's vegan, all she eats is peanut butter.

I don't have any answers. I wish I did, but I don't. Maybe the message is just that sometimes we're a flytrap, and sometimes we're a fly. Sometimes we're carnivorous, and cruel, and we hurt people, and sometimes we're the ones who get hurt. And maybe that's okay. Maybe it's okay that we're hurting, and we're hurting each other, and we don't know who or when or how to trust, because at least we're trying.

Or maybe not. Maybe that's just feel-good bullshit. Maybe we were just two depressed, angry kids who messed up, and there's no deeper meaning or message or truth to uproot. I don't know. I wish I could tell you. The title of this piece is literally just the scientific name of the Venus flytrap, so if you expected something important, or deep, or insightful from this, you were kidding yourself. I don't have any answers. This is all I've got, I can't tell you what you think you want to hear. The flytrap. The fly. They're whatever you need them to be.

You fucking figure it out.



**Reflection**  
Kate Button

## Of Dust and Dew

Jake Luman

emerald-flecked iris  
amidst a field of uncaring  
rubble  
the mites upon the blossom  
build cities  
    temples  
    bombs  
arrogant in their iotas  
spilling dewfalls of blood  
caught up in empty grandeur  
never realizing  
they are  
alone

## **Unibrow**

Josh Burgoyne

They say eyes are the window to the soul. In reality, eyes are nothing but a dangerous pool of water easily drowned in, or an olive forest writhing with poisonous dart frogs and the rare black mamba.

Your eyes though, are the familiar chestnut hue of warm cocoa after a day spent exploring as Mother Earth hibernates. They are the outstanding reminder of the heart-wrenching knowledge that forests are dying and pools are evaporating and there are only so many seconds on this slippery slope.

So like the deep flow of blood pouring from the breast of the woman calmly grasping her own hand, I crawl to you,

awaiting the day our heartlines cross, just as two windows are connected by the thick unibrow resting on the artist's face.



**Mt. Rigi, Switzerland\***  
Andrew Carlson

## **The Delivery Room**

Madeika Vercella

the delivery room  
burst from amniotic fluids,  
soft quivers escape and  
you arrive—

quickly  
slinky, glassy eyes  
damp towelettes  
at my sides  
your pinky finger  
tightly coiled around mine  
s l o w e d  
aerobic pulses  
and loosened grip  
garnet undertones  
and upturned zygoma

## Drawsub

Anne Marie Beach

I had never seen her look so fragile. A porcelain doll stripped of paint and pleasures. Grim white cheeks, empty eyes. The rise and fall of life in her chest so slow and painful it was almost non-existent. I had to swallow my rage, cage it in my stomach with the lies and angry words that threatened to spill out and taint the world with their venomous bites. What had happened to the flame-haired paragon that had towered over my youth? The monster in my closet that warned me of what happened to naughty little girls, the angel on my shoulder who whispered wisdom in my rebellion clouded ears? What had befallen such an unshakable foundation of stability and spontaneity? Just a husk that bore my mother's shroud, staring blankly at the ceiling as the broken fluorescent lights fluttered and popped. The machines and wires that sustained her beeped and chirped as if they were true signs of life. I stared, in awe, at this replica. This imposter.

I hadn't even noticed my father and sister enter the room, too caught up in the thrall of the wraith that haunted my mother's hospital bed. My father placed a hand on my shoulder as I sank into the chair beside this phantom that stalked my dreams. I barely felt his touch. I took the ghastly hand of my mother in mine, surprised by its uncanny warmth. I expected a cool, waxy response from this Madame Tussauds impersonation of my mother.

"Mama," A soft voice erupted from my lips, timid, frightened, shaking like a child waking from a nightmare, it surprised me...how terrified I sounded.

"It's Amy now, Muma," I croaked, bowing my head, pressing it into the hand, reverence for the false god who stole my mother's voice and body. The cancer spreading from her heart outwards, infecting all who venerated such an idolatrous figure.

"Unfortunately," The words of the snake oil salesman, the mortician in waiting, the ferryman, permeated my mind, "Sometimes we have to measure what the chemo will kill first, the cancer or the patient. Sometimes we win, sometimes we lose, in your mother's case, for now...it's a draw."

I stood, still holding the skeletal hand in mine, "Everything is going to be okay."

Peace washed over me in waves and crashes as my own words reached my ears. Staring at this lifeless husk of what used to be my mother, nothing left to mourn, I felt relieved. My mother was nothing more than a marionette, instinct weakly pulling the strings. A doll soon to be packed away in a box, forgotten in a dark corner of the attic of my existence. No matter the outcome: win or lose, anything was better than this...this draw, this tie between life and death, on each side vying for her very soul. There was no more use for struggle or fear of what I

would carry after this day, no more use for such self-inflicted hate. No more use in driving away those I love in a last-ditch effort to shear the pain their eventual deaths might bring me.

"I'm going to name my tumors..." my mother had joked between sobs as my father shaved away masses of long red hair, "Marla and Tyler...like the movie." A moment ricocheting through my memories like a bullet in the brain, painful but quick.

A knock sounded at the door, and Felix followed as the doctor entered my mother's mausoleum. Felix hung back in the shadows, a spectator at this macabre event. The doctor wore white, but cast a black, billowy, reaper's shadow. He could trade his scythe for a scalpel, his mantle for a coat, but he could not trade the trail of bodies that no doubt littered the closet of his career. I couldn't blame him, cancer was just as lucrative as it was deadly.

He spoke, but the words couldn't reach me, I was in a fog of solace wandering in a strange, alien joy that fluttered around in my heart, gently soothing my aching soul. My mother was already gone, I had nothing left to fret over. No more agonizing nights filled with sobbing fits of rage. No more agitation of my very being. Dread lifted from my shoulders by the inevitable, unyielding, decay of the world. Live or die, win or lose, it was over. This was the climax of the battle, the denouement patiently waiting its turn.

An arm around my shoulder helped me surface from my thoughts. Felix, guiding me to a window seat as they wheeled my mother away into the abyss, the view of the snowy hills blinding me momentarily. He sat beside me, a constant companion in my unyielding journey, even though I had taken the map and run off without him, stranding him in the desert with nothing to go on but footprints dotting the sandy dunes. I leaned my head on his shoulder in turn he leaned his head on mine. I could feel the beating of his heart through his arm, the warmth of his presence calling me back to simpler times.

Times when the world was effortless, joy was dolls living on high rises made from cardboard boxes and a mother's tender care, summers that stretched to eternity as children tumbled through sprinklers in front lawns, their laughter carrying over fences, through the windows of the boy next door. A time Peter and Janet Buford were unshakable, immortal, gods in the wide eyes of their devoted children, Amelia and Danielle. Felix was my childhood, my rock, my foundation. Mine, mine, mine.

An eternity passed in that moment as I absently watched hikers and their dogs braving the snow as they traversed the crisscrossing trails that lined the mountainside. Felix rubbed my back in small, gentle circles, imbuing me with strength and vitality.

"The worst is over now," Felix sighed, pulling me ever closer, feeding his warmth into my veins with his presence alone, "The rest is going to be a walk in the park in comparison."

I nodded, still staring as snow began to trickle past the window. The dry and powdery

flakes illuminating the darkening skies, like little pinpoints of light in an all-consuming pitch.

“It’s going to be fine,” Felix reiterated, “They’ve done countless surgeries here, one of the top hospitals in the nation. Your mom couldn’t be in a better place than this.”

“I know,” I whispered, grasping the Angel in my pocket. “Win or lose, the worst is over.”

## **My Grandmother, My Mountain High**

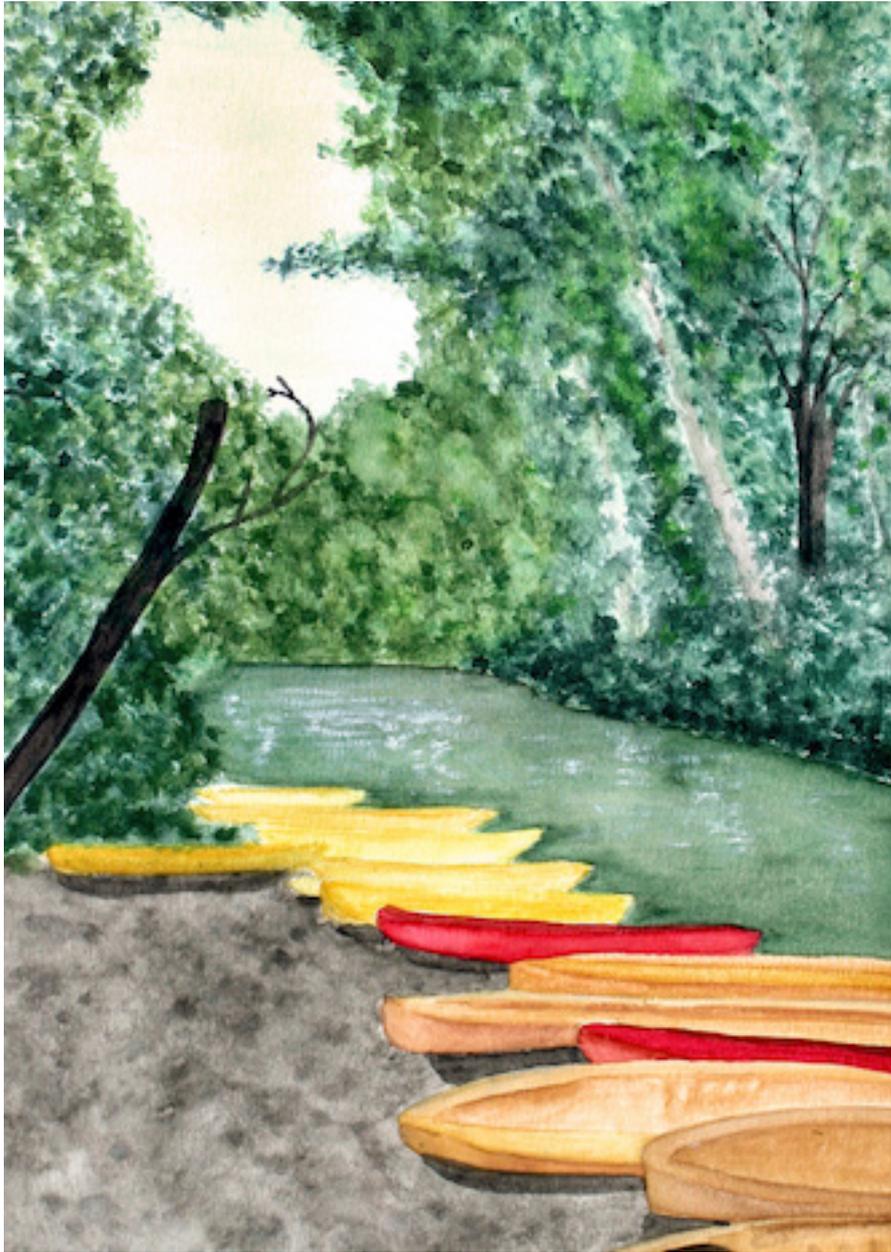
Chris Taylor

the dusted boughs  
of November evergreens  
are her gray hairs  
shining through.

wrinkles  
and folds of stone in the cliff's face  
give evidence of forgotten worries,  
a thousand smiles,  
and the passage of time.

and the glowing white iris  
of the lake beneath the night sky?  
that's just her soul  
peeking out through  
frosted spectacle-windows.

This is  
my grandmother, my mountain high.



**Voyager Remains**  
Kate Button

## Forbidden Words

E. Denning

Sometimes it hurt to look at Jeffery's face.

Lily thought about this every so often, usually at times when she should have been the happiest. For example, when they went on their fifth date and he suggested that they start carpooling to school. Or when their brief kisses transformed into rough limbs wrapping around slim waists and cool lips blurring the boundaries between his flesh and hers. Or when he said "I love you" for the first time, under the flash of her mother's camera the night of homecoming dance.

It was those moments, those meant-to-be happy memories, where she could only see the acne breaking across his chin, the hard lines from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth, the way his eyebrows hung over his eyes like a thick rug.

It wasn't that he didn't have a handsome face. He did. She recognized the harsh edge of his jaw and the hollow of his cheeks as the essence of masculinity. Sometimes, when they got into a fight or hadn't talked in a while, Lily would find her attraction to those masculine features renewed, as if she had grown sick of them before and had simply needed space.

She never considered breaking up with him. Not over something so trivial. Not over a disgust that was, for the most part, fleeting and brief.

And she never confided to anyone that she hated his face.

\*\*\*

Her house was made of things like white carpet that glowed under stainless glass windows, a dustless grand piano with a tucked-in bench, and sofas with stiff white cushions that hadn't been broken in yet. Upon entering, Lily had to remove her shoes and tuck them into an empty slot in the shelf in the entryway. In another slot sat empty slippers for when winter weather chilled the soles of her feet, particularly in the kitchen where cold tiles comprised the immaculate floor. There, the marble countertops held only a vase of fresh flowers and empty space; any appliances were to be used and promptly stowed away in the drawers aside the sink.

The first time Lily invited her best friend over, Taylor had taken one sweeping glance of the living room, the furniture, and the windows before shaking her head with a proud grin. "My place is better," she'd said.

Days later, when she'd been Taylor's guest, Lily had understood.

Taylor's house sat on wheels at the end of a run-down trailer-park. All four walls had been splattered with paint. A cartoon rendering of a woman's face made up of only pointillist

dots enriched the east wall, and the west wall savored an image of the sun setting fire to plains of gold. Doodles-in-progress embellished the two smaller ends, and all of the work brimmed with different skill levels—of a novice, of a master, and of the unique blend of the two known only to toddlers.

“Me and my dad,” Taylor had said, gesturing to the paintings. She’d never claimed which were hers.

Inside, there was no welcome mat to wipe away any dirt or snow, and there was no shelf to place her shoes. Instead, pillows and cushions decorated the floor to make room on a collapsing sofa. Books and journals full of drawings and math equations alike adorned every flat surface—the tables, the countertops, and even the floors.

A house that was touched, a house that was used, a house that was lived-in.

A house that was home.

Even years later, as Lily reclined next to Taylor in her bedroom, she welcomed the posters hanging on every square foot of wall and their homework sprawling across the bedcovers instead of a stiff desk. Here, at this home, she felt no guilt over Jeffery’s face.

“Do you even love him?” Taylor asked after Lily responded to a text polluted with hearts and winky-faces.

Sighing, she tossed her phone to the bed and threw herself prone against a pillow. “Of course I do,” she said with a chest made of stone.

“You look like you’re going to puke whenever you kiss him.”

It was true. Whenever they kissed, Lily would taste the peanut butter he’d licked off two loaves of bread at lunch, and her nostrils would flare at the stale stench of sweat from his morning track practice.

Normally, Lily struggled to bury such things—they were pushed aside under threat of honest prayer at family dinner.

Taylor’s house (her *home*) was the only place such thoughts were allowed to thrive.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Lily said finally. She refused to look at Taylor’s glowing amber eyes, her soft, pink lips, and the gentle, feminine curve of her jaw. “He’s great. He kisses great. I think it’s my mouth that’s broken.”

To Lily’s right, Taylor rolled over onto her side. Amber eyes ran over Lily’s skin, leaving burning trails of want imprinted in Lily’s very blood, and heart, and soul. She thundered with longing.

Slowly, Lily rolled to face her, and when their eyes met, it was an unbearable rush of magma through her veins, an eruption of hope and fear alike.

She should not want this.

Taylor's eyes rocked between Lily's eyes and lips, and she bent forward, their hot breath melting into one single puff of air, and then—Lily soared forward and pressed their lips together. She didn't taste peanut butter. She didn't smell sweat.

When it ended, she only wanted again.

"Nope," Taylor said, as if words came easy, as if it was the most normal thing in the world. "I don't think your mouth is broken."

Lily sucked in a breath. "I'm so sorry."

Taylor smiled. "Don't apologize."

"But this isn't—"

"Shh." Taylor coasted her fingertips down Lily's shoulder.

And Lily wanted to believe, she wanted to trust, she wanted to love and love and love and love. Her throat ached with tears, her stomach fluttered, and her heart raced. She rolled on top of Taylor, curled fingers around the skin of her smooth, warm shoulders, and kissed instead of breathing.

When her eyes opened, she was staring at Taylor's thick black eyelashes, and her hands burned with the urge to touch.

Outside, a car door slammed.

Lily blinked.

A wash of sober ran from her mouth to her toes, raising goosebumps along patches of her bare skin. She threw herself off Taylor. Loose papers flew to the floor and pencils clattered off the bed, as Lily slammed whatever she could into her bag.

"Lily, wait—"

Backpack over her shoulders, Lily was already running, running, running—through the door to the living room, around Taylor's dad logged down with groceries, and to the outside, where the cold winter air stole the heat from her cheeks, leaving a rosy red. She didn't turn to see if Taylor watched from the bedroom window, because outside of Taylor's home, she was supposed to love Jeffery's face.

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Sometimes, when she was alone, she would turn on her laptop, open an incognito browser, and type forbidden words onto the screen. She'd click the first video that she could find without men, and she would watch bare hips rock into each other, hands squeeze the tender flesh of breasts, and lips suck between nude legs.

She didn't do anything while watching.

She used to try, but it was exhausting. Mere creaks in the house became a garage door opening, and flashes of headlights across her bedroom wall became that of her parents' car.

Risks weren't worth trying, so Lily only watched.

If she grew bored of videos, she would type the forbidden words into google and read the stories of her kin. Sometimes, the stories made her cry.

This night, Lily didn't watch videos or read stories.

Instead, she stared at the background on her phone of two girls, thirteen-years-old, holding hands, smiling in front of a waterfall. Back then, she didn't know Jeffery's face, so she didn't know to hate it. Back then, it was just two girls who could do nothing to bereave the love of their parents. Two best friends who had never thought to hide.



Musee d'Orsay, France  
Andrew Carlson

## **Apotheosis\***

Caylee Gardner

by your faith. Who, you ask, is the God here?  
We are foreign souls with secrets untold—  
you pull a thread from the loose carpet, leer  
lifting the floor, the house, my chest. I hold  
your words like tethers coming from your still  
parted lips, divine. I'll douse, on one knee,  
the candle next to us and the world will  
be dark, forgetting sun. I only see  
your outline as part shadow, glorified.  
I like you better this way: more facade  
and less skin, you next to me, our arms wide;  
you are a stranger and you are a God  
you are both over my head and in mine  
and me, likewise, only a held design

## Two Swans

Julie Moncur

My cheek presses into the cold hexagonal tile. With a few heavy blinks, my vision clears and the suitcase comes into focus. It sits open by the locked door, winter clothes spilling out of it in a frantic way. I stroke my gold wedding band with my thumb, pressing my stiff muscles into a sitting position. I lean against the porcelain tub, the rim falling just short of my neck, and my head droops backwards, staring at the bubbling paint on the ceiling. The whole room begins to spin. I hurl forward and grasp the toilet seat, vomiting. Yellow bile and old blood dangling from my lips. I spit the remains into the water, staring at the ring of black mold that surrounds the waterline, the smell of stale urine filling my lungs. I use the toilet to hoist myself up, steadying myself, gazing at the painting that hangs above—two swans, their necks entwined in a lush spring pond. I flick the toilet seat down and flush, shuffling over to the sink. Last night stares back at me. My underarms dampen, I lean over the sink, getting closer to the fragmented mirror to examine my lip and swollen nose. I see the suitcase again behind me. My skin flushes red and spreads down my neck, like a rash but something older. I close my eyes and exhale, hanging my head over the sink, my temples throbbing. Opening my eyes, I see the scissors next to my concealer on the sink's ledge. I pick them up and turn years of history over in my hands, opening them, running the blade along my thumb. I watch myself in the mirror and run it over the faded scar on my neck. I run it across my tongue and taste the cool carbon steel—the same dull metallic taste of the barrel of that hand gun.

It was the summer before I went to college. I held it in my mouth, my hands trembling, drenched in sweat. The cool barrel on the inside of my cheeks, drool seeping from my lips and running down my chin. I stared at my room from behind the slit wood doors of my closet, my clothes brushing the top of my head and falling around my shoulders. I kept readjusting my position, my arms growing tired. Aim it just right. My tentative fingers stroked the trigger. I could smell the sweat drenching my upper lip, snot seeped downward and joined the drool that rolled down my arms. My mouth grew sore. I fought the gagging. From between the wood slits, my messy bed looked normal. My shins pressed into the old carpet. I couldn't feel my legs anymore. I readjusted the gun—abrupt long bows of cello notes. They cried in my ear. My heart switched from a rapid flutter to an all-knowing deep thump that vibrated my throat. The sorrowful song of the Swan by Saint-Saens greeted me in the closet from the radio. My mouth, still strained around the gun, began to quiver. I closed my eyes, an image of my father pushing me on a swing in our old backyard. The gun scraped against my teeth. I bent over in pain and hugged myself, shuddering, shaking, finally releasing the trigger from my grip. I was

surprised at myself to have thought of him in that moment.

He spat his whiskey rotten breath and threw me into the bathroom. I could still feel his friend's hands beneath my nightgown. He flung open the medicine cabinet, and orange bottles of pills fell into the sink. I cowered in the corner and watched him clobber around the cabinet, emerging with steel scissors. My heart dropped into my gut, my tongue withered in my dry mouth. I couldn't swallow, I stammered. My father's large farmer's frame began to barrel toward me. I glared at my mother, who stood behind him in the doorway. Her image disappeared when his grip yanked my arm and he placed his rough palm to the top of my head, forcing my knees to the bathroom floor. I pleaded. With him, with anyone listening. I could smell the liquor seep from his pores. He steadied my head with his one hand and pulled a strand of my hair with the other. My blonde locks fell to the dirty grouted floor. I cried for my mother, a deep moan ripping from my gut. I listened to the scissors slice away. My father's grip grew fiercer. I jerked away from him and yelped. The room went still and silent. The scissors had nicked my throat. I felt along my neck with my fingers, then looked down at my blood-stained hands, then looked up at my father. The scissors fell from his hands onto the floor. He looked down at his hands, the blonde hair falling through his fingers. His hands began to wobble. He clasped them together and stumbled backwards out of the bathroom, drowning himself in his room for two days. My mother's shadow trembled from the hallway, then disappeared like a ghost. I wanted her to hug me. I placed one foot in front of the other toward the sink, the strands of hair sticking to the sweat of my bare feet. I stood on the balls of my feet to stare at my new reflection. A reflection much different than the one staring back at me now.

I feel my grip return around the scissors like a hold on a trigger. I turn my swollen neck over my shoulder as far as it will go, straining to see the blurry outline of the suitcase. I release my neck forward and look at myself in the mirror and see the bag under my left eye budding into a deep purple. I release the scissors from my grip, and they clang into the sink. The blood flow returns to my white fingers. I grasp the bottom of my shirt and pull it up and over my head, my muscles aching. I walk to the shower and turn the water to hot, scolding, sterilizing. I step out of my underwear and toss it into the suitcase. I let the steam fog up the glass. I step into the shower and let the water drench my back and my hair. I roll my neck to massage the muscles with the beating water. I turn and wet my face, the dried blood moistens and turns into a burgundy watercolor. It washes off my face and blends into the shallow pond of a slow draining tub that wades around my ankles. My tender neck rests my head on the tile of the shower wall. I study the bubbling paint, the water damage that hides behind the walls, seeping through. I close my eyes and tap my bony fingers against the wall, padding the keys of an

antique piano. The door rattles. "Eva?" His voice is muffled but clear in my mind. My adrenaline spikes. "Open the door." I step out of the water's stream and make myself flat against the tiled wall. He bangs on the door. I sink to my knees. His body thrusts into the door until it bursts open. A heavy silence flattens the air. I know he's staring at the suitcase. The shower curtain whips open.

"Daniel." He grabs my arm and hauls me out of the tub, his shirt soaked from the shower and my body. I trip and fall onto the floor, my shins ache.

"A suitcase?" he spits, kicking it with his boot. "Get up."

I stand. There is a brief moment when he starts throwing the clothes out and I seize it. I run. Sprint. Into the living room. Heartbeat bobbing in my throat. My body dripping wet, leaving a trail of mushy footprints on the brown carpet. I can feel his body barreling toward me. He grasps my wet hair and yanks it toward him. He spins me toward him and wraps his hand around my throat, pinning me against the painting, swans caught between my back and the wall. Water drips from my face onto his hand. His green eyes break into me. I know they are broken too, I fell in love with them.

He showed me the letter his mother left him before he was too young to read the first time we made love. He smoked a joint while I read, the room searing with the smell of pot. *Love, Mommy*. I placed the letter down and sat beside him, stroking his hair. He nestled his head into my neck, and I pressed my lips into his brown hair. He looked up at me. I admired his green eyes; they were longing, lost, bottomless. I wanted to fill them. He tucked the hair behind my ear and pulled my chin toward his lips.

We both feel his wedding ring press into my throat. Tears tremble behind his eyes, and his grip loosens. I fall to the ground, gasping, sucking down air. The painted canvas falls on top of me. I hunch over, the strands of my wet hair create a curtain between us. He crouches down, leaning in closer, his hot breath on the tip of my ear, waiting to say something, but no words come. I listen for the door to slam shut and the car to start before I curl into a ball and lay on the soggy carpet, the yarn itching against my skin. I close my eyes and run my fingers over the vast ridges of the oil painting, as if I were blind and the paint were braille.

I wake early the next morning to the dog barking. I turn over and see the side of Daniel's bed still made. The dog's bark curls into long slow howls. I get up and stand on the bed to look out the window. The dog barks at the pond, the top of our green car barely visible, the rest submerged in water. I crouch back down on the bed, my stomach rolling, my heartbeat quickening, my throat swollen. The stench of restless sweat musks his pillow. My thumb shakily presses 9, then 1, then 1. A new silence hugs the house, undisturbed. I tie my robe around my waist and put my sunglasses on, just covering the rims of my eyes, my feet tucked into

slippers. I listen to my ring slide down the banister as I go down the stairs. I gaze at the empty square on the wall where the painting hung, then I turn out toward the yard. The screen door shuts behind me. The dog runs toward me, vapor rolling off the pond behind him. He nuzzles the top of his head into my palm. The tire tracks, entrenched in grassy mud, lead into the water. My retina fixates on the center of the pond, the water lapping around the shallow green island, thick bushes of cattails swaying with the wind. Deep in the trees, the dawn chorus of chirping birds joins the deep coo of an owl, their calls rippling across the hazy, quiet pond. I tug my robe closer to my chest and step off the deck onto the grass, my breathing visible in the brisk air in fleeting gusts. The clouds cast a bleak blanket of grey over the blue hues of early morning. Soft rings blossom around the birds, drifting among the lily pads around the car, their necks tucked into their white wings, sleeping.



**Untitled**  
Emily Anderson

## Status of an Asexual

T. Alisa Cloward

1. I always romanticize those who have not touched me. I find myself wondering on lazy mornings if the young man who rings up my coffee likes late night conversations, or if the woman who picks up my fallen books would like to catch a terrible movie just for the sake of enjoying each other's company. Not because I am not already in love and not because I want more, but because I am always hopeful upon the idea that someone could love me without knowing the texture of my skin.
2. I hope every passionate kiss ends. Sometimes, I dream it ends with a last, playful nip at my bottom lip, and a soft chuck under my chin. Sometimes, I dream it ends with a sweet-tempered smile and a look in our eyes that says it all. Always, I hope it will end with the buttons on my cardigan still neatly in a line, and my tights still itching around my hips.
3. Our bodies touch, and my heart wanders. Sometimes I forget that I love you.
4. When your skin is upon my skin and you whisper that you love me in short breaths, I do not listen. I will love you the way you want me to, but please understand that this is not love to me.
5. Even though I know I am not, sometimes I still feel broken.

## Well Read

Russel Ted Fugal

*Aeneas, grasping his shield and long spear...*

I am listening to the Iliad, looking straight ahead, because ever since I became a writer, I've been trying to become well-read. But reading has never been an easy pastime for me. Highway hypnosis—"may in large measure result from an understimulating traffic and road environment and produce a suboptimal activational state in which relevant cues from the environment are ignored"(1)—have you experienced it? I often do, both on the road and the page. Reading has never been an easy pastime for me. Some say that audiobooks don't count, that you haven't really read the book if you just listened to the audiobook. Spoken words often are easier to engage with, but still I find my thoughts drifting. Hands at ten and two—refocus.

*Aeneas fell to his knees, and pressed the ground with one great hand, while darkness shrouded his sight...*

Maybe I would have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. That's an odd name—I don't know if I can speak to this or not because I've never been diagnosed—because in my experience there is no deficit. Although, when involved in conversation with a passenger I always seem to miss exits. Then again, once I did nearly miss a flight because I didn't take the exit to I-80—wound up in Bountiful—and there was no one else in the car then. *This* is more of a parenthetical shift in focus than a lapse of attention. Maybe *this* is another one of the myths that I've begun to tell myself, like that maybe I am dyslexic—reading has never been an easy pastime for me.

Short picture books were easy. Growing up, the bottom 3-4 feet of our family-room bookcase was shoved full of them. I read each of them at least twice; some of them dozens of times. I don't remember, as a child, thinking that reading is hard. I even read an entire encyclopedia—The ABCs of Nature. Hardcover, 3 pounds, 336 pages. I couldn't have been older than nine.

Some books produced an optimal activational state, and I could read them for hours. Others—I can't count the number of books I never finished, or worse, finished without remembering most of what I read. In 2001 I fell in love with Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*, so I dutifully looked at every single word on every page in all three of J.R.R. Tolkien's books at the appropriate pace. I got from point A to point B, but I don't remember much of what came between. Highway hypnosis. The top 2 feet of the family-room bookcase was full of books just like those—Orson Scott Card, James Howe, C.S. Lewis, Madeleine L'Engle, Beverly Cleary, Franklin W. Dixon, and many more. I would often stretch up and pull one off the shelf. I don't

know if I ever finished a single one, and not for lack of interest. In retrospect, they intimidated me, demanding too much focus on one form in a multimodal world. My own thoughts were enough to derail my efforts, not to mention the sounds of a house full of seven children, the texture and construction of the rug, even the lure of counting how many pages were read and the calculated percentage of completion.

My oldest daughter demanded literacy. I had a plan to cultivate her numerical literacy, to raise a toddler with precocious mathematical abilities. She had other plans. She demanded to be read stories. Short picture books were easy. I always finished them, and she'd always ask for more. I enjoyed reading to her, but I had my limits—I had new plans to hatch, and two hours of story-time every day was not sustainable.

When she was three, I discovered the magic of audiobooks. Her first audiobook was *Alice in Wonderland*. I'd never read it, but she'd finish it once a day, every day, and she loved it. She has been insatiable. It doesn't stop: Annie Barrows, Nick Bruel, Beverly Cleary, Debbie Dadey, Roald Dahl, Dan Gutman, Shannon Hale, Victoria Kann, Jeff Kinney, Ann M. Martin, Daisy Meadows, Mary Pope Osborne, Barbara Park, J.K. Rowling, Lemony Snicket, Geronimo Stilton, and many more—hundreds of books before she had even turned six. She learned to read early on, so nearly all of them weren't audiobooks. I couldn't have read that many books to her myself.

I look up to her. Reading has never been an easy pastime for me, like it is for her. Maybe I would have been diagnosed with dyslexia or attention deficit disorder if I hadn't been homeschooled, or maybe I would have just struggled, feeling broken, stupid. I'm not compelled to compare myself to my daughter the way I've compared myself to my peers. I hated writing in primary school. In secondary school, I was expected to appreciate an anthology of American Literature. I didn't feel like I understood any of it, and I couldn't read it. In retrospect, I'm glad I was homeschooled—not because I was able to avoid reading and writing and rhetoric, but that I could come to it, eventually, on my own terms—even if the support of a diagnosis could have changed me. As a child I was able to excel in physics, science, and math. I felt complete.

My second child, my son is much more like me. Invested heavily in weaning my daughter of story-time, I tracked her development closely. I know the precise moment she became a reader, and what the catalytic practice was. I thought it was interesting, but I didn't assume my son would learn in the same way. When he initially struggled with reading, I began to suspect that he was dyslexic. He could easily name all the letters at four years old, still at five he often confused the letters b and d, or slowly recited the letters of a printed word out of order even while he dragged his finger across from left to right. And talk about focus—it took him more than 60 seconds to recite all the letters of a five-letter word, while he dragged his finger across

from left to right. But chewing gum helped. That's when I began researching dyslexia. With kindergarten enrollment just months away, desperate that he not struggle in school, I put him on a six month waiting list for diagnostic testing. Fortunately, the literacy I learned from my daughter then also affected him. He was a fluent reader before his first visit to the clinic. "He's a great reader, he's not dyslexic. But you might want to look into a gifted program..."

I've come to appreciate the neurodiversity of a population with varied abilities. The global spacing of minicolumns in a dyslexic mind allows for amazing cognitive ability, even if focus isn't one of them. My little brother is dyslexic and he is more well-read than me. My son and I can read well, ergo we're not dyslexic? I'm not convinced. I would like to think that dyslexia is more than struggle, that it is a diagnosis of power, and that my son and I share in these superpowers, even if only slightly, and even if it did initially cause anxiety about whether or not he would enjoy reading or hate school. I have learned so much about myself by watching my son learn to read and master it, despite the felt intimidation that we share.

My son and I will never be as well-read as my daughter, but we have our own knowledge and experience. What I've learned from both my daughter and my son is driving me to be increasingly well-read and to seek out a discourse community at the University, to make knowledge and build coalitions. My goal is to sponsor more children in their primary literacy so that I can learn even more and perhaps prevent some frustration.

As I shape these thoughts and make meaning from them, forming the shape of this essay before I've put a word on paper, I'm driving south on I-15, satisfied with my composition so far, then suddenly reaware that I am listening to an audiobook of the Iliad—

*As Sarpedon finished, Tlepolemus raised his ash spear high, and the long shafts leapt from both men's hands in an instant. Sarpedon's struck square on the neck, and the deadly point sliced clean through, so the darkness of night shrouded Tlepolemus' sight.*

Shit. Who the hell are Sarpedon and Tlepolemus? I've just completely missed hundreds of lines in Book V.

## References

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**All that Remains**  
Anita Hawkins

## **Northbound**

Gentry Hale

Juice falls eloquently from wine glass to lips red-stained bullet trains

Running from here to there and only grinding to a halt when someone insists.

The crimson courage flows from glass, past gums, down chin, and out the medium-tip ballpoint gel pen resting between the callus on your right-hand ring finger and the tip of your cherry-painted pointer nail.

Write drunk, edit sober.

You take a sip.

Whizzing past towns full of dog-bone, park-bench, paperboy households I stare blankly out the window glancing from flushed skin to long, white night-time lights and wondering how this train can move so smooth on a ground so uneven and raw

You raise your hand for a refill

And turn your notebook over to a blank page.

We head northbound with no idea what rubble we are running on.



**Lucerne, Switzerland**  
Andrew Carlson

## Monday Coffee

T. Alisa Cloward

Perhaps I will run into you here.

For this, I will tolerate

too-strong coffee

cigarette fog

teeming tables

Because these fumes could not hide

your skin alight like a guidepost in a storm

and I will find you in the haze.

It would be here, if anywhere, that

we will make light of bad service, habits, and reasons

we became quiet,

and when our hands brush accidentally

they will be writing

a rough draft for our futures.



**San Francisco**  
Andrew Carlson

## Theotokos

Josh Burgoyne

You tread into the dim cathedral  
And wrap an old scarf round your head,  
Then look up at the piece primeval;  
An icon—virgin, robed in red.

Her brows are bowed, your eyes steal glances  
While melancholic tide advances.  
She's hanged here for so many years,  
Once vibrant gilt now tamed by tears  
Of those who came to worship warmly.  
Their adoration is the cause  
For fading lips, and skin like straw.

You fall down on your knees inertly.  
While trapped here on this old church wall,  
The flaking gold and kisses call.

\*Written in the Onegin stanza, a strange poetic form created by Alexander Pushkin for his novel, *Eugene Onegin*.



Venice  
Kate Button

## Archaeology

Leo Doctorman

Tearing up the skin of buildings  
Convicted of being ancient, forgive  
The sin of age, I hold a brick  
And it curves sickle-cell, bone-dry  
Solemn in its reversed purpose;  
Rather than holding the sky outside  
The dwelling, tonight it holds down  
The child from evaporating into the sky.

This post-forgotten world forgets  
That tombs are dwellings of the past-tense.

Bullet,

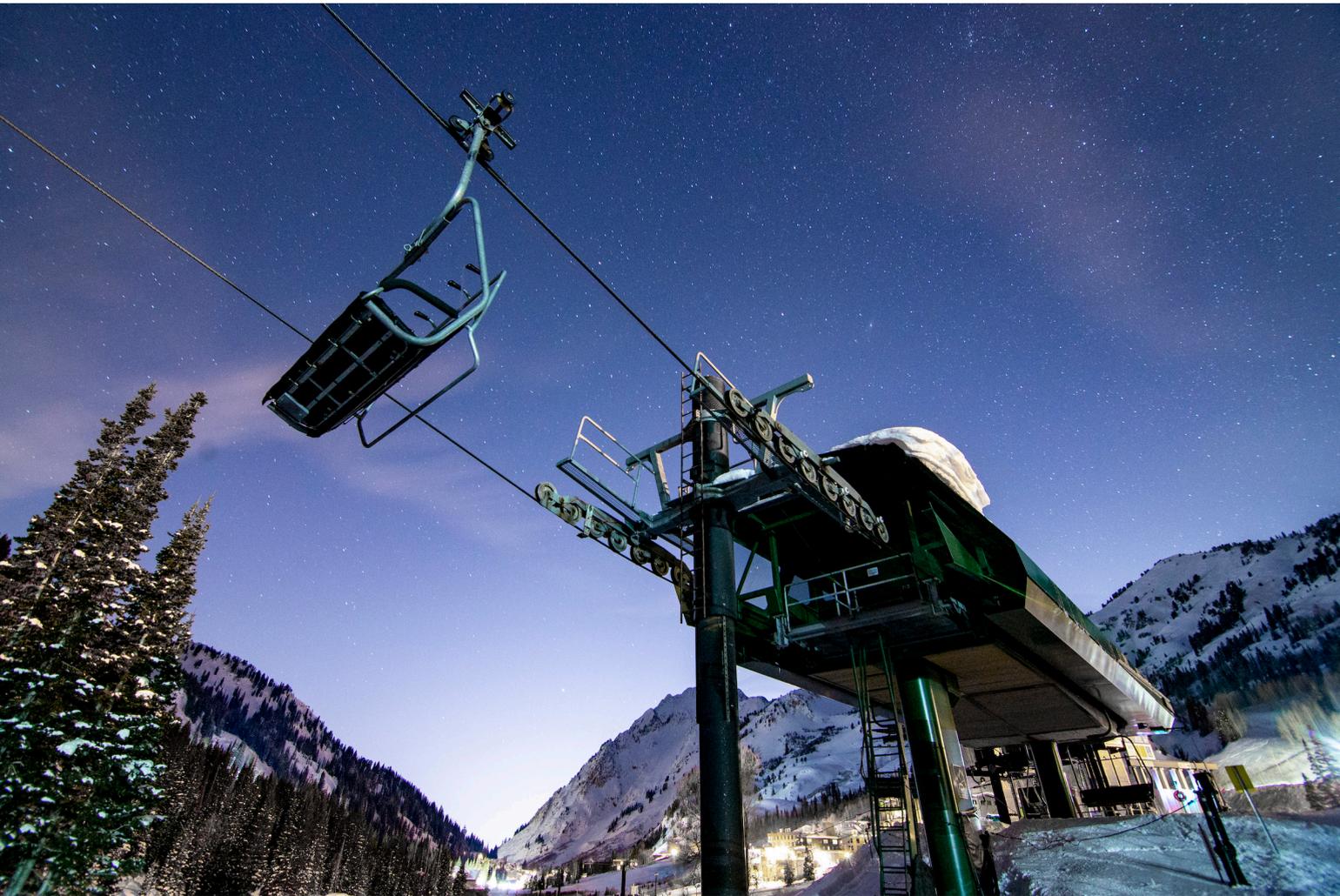
    Poison,

        Gun,

            Breakfast,

Vintage Genocide;

Kill the past, collect its enlightened curios  
And cocoon them in the wombs of eternity



**Alta, Utah**  
Andrew Carlson





