

REFLECTIONS

THE TWO-WAY MIRROR ANTHOLOGY

2019-20

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Foreword

It's a staple of just about every crime drama on television: the two-way mirror scene. You know how it goes. The accused sits in a flimsy folding chair, his sweaty hands open on a metal table, his unshaven face expressing defiance or maybe regret or maybe confusion. The detective interrogates him, looking for verification of his suspicion, perhaps, or a bold admission of guilt, or some other clue to the mystery under investigation. And then there are the observers, just there, behind the two-way mirror, watching the inquiry unfold, looking for tics and tells and clues to the meaning behind all the words and motions. They see in, but they remain unseen. They deduce and infer and try to make some sort of sense of the mystery within the room.

Of course, it will all be cleared up in 42 minutes if we're watching this on television, but the students of the 2019-2020 Two-Way Mirror Creative Writing class at UHS know that true interrogation isn't so easy.

We spent the year on both sides of the mirror, as interrogators and observers and even as those being interrogated. We saw ourselves and our worlds in new ways and everything was heading toward a tidy conclusion, and then, plot twist, we found ourselves sheltering in place, socially distant, and feeling a bit isolated. That two-way mirror became a Chromebook window into a Google Meet session. The metaphor became too literal, but still, we carried on, and along the way, we realized that this too (this especially!) is an experience to interrogate and reflect upon.

The book you hold in your hand, *Reflections*, is the culmination of these interrogations. It is the product of experimentation and discipline and play and, yes, reflection. It's a record of the continual development we've all made in our craft and in our understanding of this world. It's also a foretaste of great things to come from this promising group of writers.

Whether the strange context that we're finishing the school year in is going to be the new normal, or if it will simply be one more peculiar experience in the great chaos of human history, this group of students will surely interrogate and reflect on it with insight.

Michael Riedell (Fall Semester)
Kyle Kirkley (Spring Semester)
4-27-20

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Biographies

Simone Adams

Night Ace

Sitting at the edge of the tall modern skyscraper, the city lights in the night radiating. It's the year 2101, I was in Shanghai, watching the man I was assigned to kill.

"Are you in position?" my boss said through my earpiece.

"Yes I'm in position," I responded.

I watched the man walk downtown with two guards behind him. He looked like a normal guy just walking along with the crowd, but he wasn't. He was a monster, at least I thought he was. As I was about to snipe him he suddenly squatted down and opened his arms wide for a little girl running after him. I pulled the gun back in shock to see a child suddenly get in the way.

"What's going on, why haven't you eliminated the target?" my boss asked

"A child is in view sir and now a woman as well," I responded as I saw the target hugging a woman.

I was shocked to see this serial killer with a wife and child.

I followed the man for hours and finally he was alone after dropping his family off at their apartment. He walked alone. I took my chance but before I could kill him he said calmly.

"Do it. Go ahead and kill me. I killed many people because it was my job so I don't blame you for doing it too." He said just standing there.

"What do you mean it was your job? Killing for no reason is not a job," I said still holding the gun up.

"I used to work for the program you work for now. I was the legendary Night Ace. The assassin that never missed a kill. One day I decided to leave because I fell in love with my now wife you saw earlier. You were taught to not hesitate, never ask questions and kill with no mercy. Now do what the company says or you'll be hunted down like me," he explained.

I put down my gun because I thought about how my father was killed. I joined the program to get revenge because the police didn't do anything. I didn't want his little girl to go the same path.

"Make sure you take care of your daughter. She saved your life tonight. It was an honor to meet you.....Night Ace." With that said I left into the darkness.

Goodbye Earth

I have a photo of a man whose name I don't know in my hand, torn and worn, imagining what this man in this photo life was like before the world ended. After the nuclear war 20 years ago, millions of people died. Only a certain amount of people survived the war. Some countries prepared spacecrafts for evacuation just in case a nuclear war would happen. They only took the finest and most intelligent people that would be useful for future generations. I was one of those candidates. I was a normal American girl who studied in the field of science, I went to a prestigious school in London. I was not a rich girl, I came from a middle class family so the only way I managed to go to the prestigious school was because of scholarships for my intelligence. My family was in America when the nuclear war happened and I was taken to the spacecraft in London and was evacuated. I never saw my family again. I was 19 at the time. Now, 39 years old, I was sent back to earth with a team of other scientists, soldiers and researchers. We were sent on a mission to gain data on whether humans could return to Earth. After the nuclear war, the air was filled with a major amount of radiation and all resources were burned. The evacuees were evacuated to the moon where a base was made. Over the years we started to get low on resources so that's where this mission came into play. We didn't know what Earth would be like but we never expected to become so beautiful. The world healed itself. The world did just fine without us. We were just parasites and now that we're gone the world is healthy again. I looked at my comrades and they all smiled and nodded. We just got what we needed and made our way back. We lied to the officials that the earth wasn't livable and that the resources we brought back would keep everyone alive and well. Humans needed to go somewhere else, the Earth did it's job.

Warm 81 Words

Boy. Girl. Sixteen. Seventeen. They both were sitting on a bench outside their school, looking up at the breeze in the sky. It was 5:00 in the afternoon, everybody had already left the campus except them. They were both waiting for their parents to pick them up. They started to sit closer and closer to each other. They looked deep into each other's eyes. Their faces became only inches away from each other. They closed their eyes and kissed softly.

81 Words To Destruction

What do you see? A world of infinite possibilities. A world in which was not paid attention to. While people were looking down on phones and liking pictures of nature, they were standing right in the middle of life's beauty. People got so seeped into technology that they didn't see what the world was doing. The world was slowly getting rid of people. Natural disasters rose often. Diseases were developed and suddenly the humans were completely wiped out.

81 Words From Gamer To Hero

Hello, I'm Christa and here's a story. I'm 18 years old and a gamer. I've played video games all my life and I've really enjoyed virtual reality until one day everything changed. Virtual Reality wasn't just VR anymore. It was now reality. Demons, dragons, and zombies became real. Our realities switched with another universe's reality. After the dramatic switch, the world became chaotic. Gamer's like me who were once looked at as weirdos became heroes. Yeah.... Life's pretty awesome now.

The Man That Loved Twice

September 1940

“You’re late son. Customers have been coming in and out all day.” My 46 year old greying father said to me in an irritated tone .

“Sorry Pop, I had to go register for the draft today,” I answered.

“Jesus, why my boy? You’re so young. Dammit....well I need you to take the truck and make some deliveries.” My father gave me about ten boxes in a basket.

I took the basket and the keys off the wall and went out to make the deliveries. After about an hour of delivering I had one more place I needed to deliver to. I had to deliver to a house in Oakland. Racism was a major thing at the time and there was a lot of segregation. My family were the whitest people you can meet but we didn’t believe in segregation and racial inequality. There were a couple neighborhoods that were filled with African Americans. Whites weren’t allowed in those neighborhoods except my family. My family had a lot of respect from them because of our beliefs and respect we gave them. I arrived at the last house. The woman who owned this home was a normal customer of ours. She was a well known lady in the neighborhood. The folks around the town called her “ Mama Darla.” She was a very kind person but also was known for her voodoo. She came from New Orleans and people were known for their witchcraft there. Nobody ever wanted to get on her bad side because rumor had it, her cheating husband died from a random heart attack right after Mama Darla found out about it.

“Mama Darla, I brought your bread and pound cake. Lemon pound cake, your favorite,” I said at her door.

After a couple of minutes Mama Darla opened the door and said “ Oh Damian, come in boy. Come have some of this pound cake and tea with me.”

“Oh no, Mama Darla. I can’t, I have to get back to the shop. My dad will kill me if I don’t keep helping out with the shop.” I tried to explain.

“Boy, I know your father. I’ll give him a call that you’re hanging out with an old lonely woman like myself,” She said.

“Okay, if you insist,” I answered, giving up.

We sat down in her living room and ate lemon pound cake and tea. After 15 minutes of talking suddenly the front door opened and a girl that, I would never get off my mind, stepped in. The girl was wearing a school uniform, her ironed pressed hair was pulled back in a bun with a bow. She was wearing high white socks, black shoes, and a white dress shirt with a patterned skirt. Her skin seemed smooth and reminded me of a honey coco tone. She was beautiful and perfect.

“Grandmama I’m ho--” She paused as she saw me sitting on the sofa.

“Baby, this is Damian Brown. He’s Joseph Brown’s son, the one that delivers your favorite bread,” Mama Darla explained.

“Oh the Browns. Y’all get a lot of respect around here. My name is Ana Johnson, I’m Mama Darla’s granddaughter,” Ana said as she put her hand out to shake mine.

We shook hands, her hands were so warm and soft. Her hands made me feel comforted. We let go of each other’s hand and looked opposite ways of each other. Mama Darla laughed suddenly and Ana and I looked at her in confusion. Mama Darla slowly got up out of her chair and said, “Well I think you best get on boy. Let me lead you out. Ana baby will you go wash the dishes.”

“Yes grandmama. It was nice meeting ya Mr. Brown.” Ana ended with that and made her way to the kitchen.

Mama Darla was pushing me out and closed the front door behind her. She waved her hand for me to lean down for her and she said in a low voice, “You like her don’tcha?”

“Excuse me?” I said in confusion but not really confusion.

“Don’t play dumb boy. I saw the way you looked at her, especially when you touched hands. Oh boy you two definitely were feeling each other.” Mama Darla said smiling.

“You really think so. I mean do you think she clicked with me like I did with her?” I asked.

“Yes but she would never admit it. Her mama and daddy, god bless their souls, pushed the issue that all white men were bad. That all white men hated negros like us. But since I met your family, y’all are the future. I know one day, life will allow all people to be together and have the same rights, just now is not the time. So y’all best not be together, I mean I don’t mind y’all being friends but anything more than that is a no no.” Suddenly she said seriously.

I was left in silence. All I could do was nod and walk off to the truck. When I got in the truck I looked at Mama Darla who was at the door and she waved with happiness. I waved back and drove back to the shop.

A couple of months later, after that meeting with Mama Darla, I would see Ana come by the shop from time to time. The more we talked, the closer we got. Every time she visited the shop we would talk in the back of the shop about all kinds of things. My father would scold us from time to time but after a while he gave up on us and just let us be. On one summer late afternoon my parents were in San Francisco and Ana and I met at the back of the shop like usual. Ana ran up to me and gave me a hug. I hugged her tightly for what seemed like forever. We let go of our embrace and stared in each other’s eyes, ignoring everything around us.

“Ana.” I said with a smile.

“Yes?” Ana sparkled with curiosity.

“Us. Can we be together? Even if society forbids it, can we try? Ever since I met you I can’t stop thinking about you. You’re on my mind everyday. I’ve fallen in love with you Ana.” I said in desperation.

“I feel the same way about you Damian but...but.” She started to explain.

“We can make this work Ana. I know we can.” I interrupted.

The silence filled the space between us. I started to move closer to Ana softly pushing her to the wall. The smaller the gap between us got, the faster my heart pumped. I leaned down to Ana’s face and gave her a little peck on her lips. I backed up a little but then Ana pulled me back and we had a full on real kiss. Her soft lips, her scent, our breaths between the kisses, I enjoyed it all until suddenly something horrific happened.

“Look at what we have here.” A man said as he approached us with 4 other guys.

“A negro and a traitor.” Another man added.

“Hey, we mean no trouble alright?” I said calmly.

“Mean no trouble huh? Well you should have thought about that before you kissed that bitch.” The man said.

Suddenly more guys came behind Ana and I. Ana got close to me and held my hand tightly. Ana was a tough girl who seemed to fear almost nothing, but that moment she was terrified.

“Leave us alone.” I said with anger.

“I’m sorry but you’re a traitor. And do you know what we do with traitors?” The man asked.

After a pause of silence the man smirked and continued.

“We punish them. Boys separate them.” He ordered his group.

One man pulled Ana away from me and the 3 others punched me down. I was a fighter so I got up just to be outnumbered and thrown back down. They punched me again, kicked me and stomped me. All I could feel was continuous pain and hear the cries and begging of Ana.

“Please stop. Please just leave us alone.” Ana begged.

“Shut up bitch!” The man said as he slammed her to the wall.

The man started to creep his hand over her leg and under her dress and Ana cried knowing what this man’s intentions were. I managed to gain enough strength to push the guys off me. I punched the man that was up against Ana. As soon as the guy fell to the ground I took Ana’s hand and ran but before we could get too far.

“No no no you’re not going anywhere.” The leader said.

Ana and I were running as fast as we could but suddenly things became slow motion as I heard the sound of gunfire. I slowed down noticing a weight pulling me back and downwards. That weight that was pulling me down was Ana holding my hand while collapsing on the ground. I squatted down and came to the realization that Ana was bleeding tremendously.

“Ana, baby hang on. Stay with me baby, okay? You’re fine. Everything is gonna be alright.” I said, trying not to panic.

My right arm was holding her up and my left hand pushing down on her wound in her stomach. She was bleeding from both the back and stomach. The bullet went right through her body. I looked down the alley where the men attacked us but when I looked up nobody was there. They all left.

“Damian...Dami...Damian. I’m not gonna make it,” Ana said as a

tear ran down her face.

“Don’t say that. Please, just...” I stopped talking because I noticed that Ana’s body went limp. I started to shake her body yelling at her to wake up. Her eyes were soulless, the life in them had vanished.

I held her close and cried in her cold neck.

“Ana!” I cried hard.

Suddenly I heard the back door of my family’s bakery open down the alley. My mom and dad ran out to me with worry and panic in their eyes.

“Oh my god. What happened?” My dad asked.

“Pop, she’s gone. She’s gone! I couldn’t save her pop. I couldn’t protect her.” I said.

“Son...” My father could only say that much.

Suddenly a voice, that was very familiar, said something in a very shocked tone.

“My baby.” The voice was Mama Darla.

She ran through my parents and sat down next to me and her dead granddaughter. She lightly touched Ana’s face, flinching at the fact that it was cold and lifeless.

“So she was shot?” Mama Darla asked.

“Yes I’m so sorry. I couldn’t protect her.” I said with so much guilt.

“How much do you love Ana?” Mama randomly asked.

“Very much. I love her to death. I would’ve gladly died for her.” I said in all seriousness.

“Would you live for her?” Mama Darla looked up at me with serious eyes.

“Yes of course.” I said confident but confused.

“Well I give you eternal life.” After she said that she blew dust on my face.

I fell on my back and started to cough and feel a horrible pain in my chest. It felt like my heart was stopping. My parents ran over to me and Mama Darla left with Ana. Even though Mama Darla was gone I heard her voice.

“Live for thy love and thou will return.”

July 2020

Immortality... Mama Darla cursed me with immortality. I thought to myself that maybe immortality was a second chance for me to one day see Ana. Living for so long alone made me give up on the idea of Ana ever returning. Over the years I managed to make millions and become rich beyond what I could dream of. I owned a company that had stores throughout the globe. I set up shop in San Francisco, not far from my hometown Richmond. I went to my office that was located in a big skyscraper downtown. As I entered the entrance of the building, I was

greeted by my employees. I smiled at each of my employees as I went to the elevator. After a couple of minutes of being on the elevator I got off and headed down the hall to my office. As I was on my way to my office I was abruptly stopped by an employee.

“Sir sir. I forgot to give you the schedule for today. There’s an interview scheduled for the secretary position. Her name is Lisa James and she’s waiting for you in your office.” The employee said, as she handed me a schedule.

“Thanks, you may continue on with your work.” I said.

I headed to my office and entered through the door. The girl got up with her back towards me.

“You may sit.” I said as I walked around my desk.

I looked down at the resume as I sat down and did not see the girl’s face yet.

“So your name is Lisa James? So why did you apply for this position?” I asked seriously, still not looking at the girl.

“Well, sir, I applied for this position because of how fond I am of organization and helping others with it.” A terrifyingly familiar voice said.

I slowly looked up and was shocked to see someone that I’ve longed for for so long.

“Ana?” I said out loud.

“Um no sir, my name is Lisa.” The girl repeated..

She was Ana, she had the same voice, the same hair, same face. She was the same in everything. I figured that she must be what I researched not too long ago, “Reincarnation.” She returned, I lived long enough to get my second chance. I smiled brightly and stared at what was now Lisa.

“Well Lisa, please tell me all about you.” I smiled again.

She smiled back and continued with her introduction. I enjoyed every moment of her company and kept thinking about how we would be able to start over. Finally, fate was on my side.

Adrian Cabral

Farewell.

Love is alive with color, farewell to the perfect daughter
Fearless, full of light and spirit,
The sun shines down on your glossy skin
Rays for light spread like butterflies on a willow.
Gold fills your heart while the prince's silver crown
Eradiates beams of his soul
For you.

Porcelain fireflies

Shooting stars fly through the sky
Shattering like glass
Raining broken jars of dead fireflies
Leaving the ground speckled with pieces of the sun
The dancing shadows line every spot the sun does not.
Pain frosts the air as people run in terror
Their crystalline shoulders hammered with the silver light of their broken dreams
That rain down from the sky.
Everyone is in a panic,
The creature with red eyes watches from a distance
Feeding off of the chaos
Getting stronger.
The children cower in fear
Their soul pouring out of their eyes
Along with a river of tears,
The red-eyed monster takes their innocence
And bottles it for safekeeping.
And to think this all started with a star.

Imagination

I sit at my desk in darkness
With a meager lamp as my only source of light.
I stare blankly into space; imaging the words on my paper
Popping off the page and walking out of my bedroom door,
 holding hands and
Singing songs.
The paintings and drawings on my wall are laughing at each other,
Creating bridges out of paintbrushes to reach one another.
I imagine all of my markers align like soldiers
And rolls off of my desk in neat rows of two
And my paint tubes are the ones telling them to do so.
My sister yells my name,
I look up.
She laughs at me and tells me to go imagine somewhere else.

Unrequited

When I see you
I forget how to rhyme
My rhythm
Skip

Skip

Skips

A beat every time I hear your melody
My tempo speeds up
When you glance at me
My fragile heart
A prisoner
Thump

Thump

Thumps

Surrounded by a cage of weak armor
Cracks a little
Every time you look at me
Because I know
That your melody
Belongs to a different song.

Personified

I tried to get away
But it followed me.
Like a puppy with anxiety
It never left my side
No matter how hard I tried.

My poem would cry when I didn't feed it,
Now the ink is gone and there is no more paper.

It whimpered if I didn't let it sleep with me,
Now there are letters in my bed.

I asked it not to leave its belongings behind,
But there are still words in my mouth that it left there
And I can't seem to get them out.

Conversations of a desk

Conversations on a desk are like
Dropping a stone into a lake
And waiting for someone to find it.
A little doodle,
A hello.
They write back,
You didn't expect them to.
Soon enough you have a penpal
And you don't even know their name.

Take me away

Lift me up
High
Leave the clouds behind
Take me up to dance
With the moon and the stars
Higher
Into a galaxy of white, purple and blue
Colorful
I ask you not to wake me
It is too peaceful here
To return to the evil world
Let me stay in dreamland
Where nothing can hurt me.

Miscellaneous haiku

In the darkness
Staring at the stars
Peaceful.

The humidity entraps me
Surrounded by fauna
Covered in butterflies.

Rain trickling down
As we pack the car
Wet clothes

Words
Letters on paper
Alphabet soup.

Disturbed

Lousy kids with backward hats
High schooler's heads filled with gnats
Their flesh is filled with mealy worms
You can see them writhe and squirm
The beetles live inside their ears
Filling their eyes full for tears
The eyes! The eyes! Are full of maggots
Clusters of them causing havoc
The flies now live inside their feet
The ants have burrowed in their teeth
The fruit flies fill their freckled nose
The aphids crawl inside their toes
Those poor highschoolers, all alone
I think they just need to go home.

Just listen

Someone once told me
That when the monster appears
Draw.
Draw until everything around you
Disappears
And you are just left with a pencil
And a piece of paper.
Does that work with writing too?
Can you write until He quiets down,
Or does he keep overwhelming your mind with thoughts?
I sit in my room at my desk
Writing about a magical land
Where all the people in it
Are happy all the time
Where they have never met
the monster.

Sebastian Cowen

Thoughts of a Carrot

Thoughts, swirling in my head like ghosts swarming on the minds of loved ones. Thoughts of love, of anger, of anguish, illness and death. “I hope you’re finding everything alright, sir?” Yes. Strange thoughts to have in a grocery store, strange indeed. To think of ghosts and carrots? Perhaps ghost carrots, then? People have already made blood oranges, so it isn’t much of a stretch in my mind. Or may carrots even possess a ghost? So, “No, where are your carrots?”

A Night to Remember, Or Not

It was a night to remember, yet I don't.

All I can remember are the sequences of nine.

The blotchy nine seconds of sobriety and of clarity.

However, there were twenty-seven seconds of respite where all my mind converged on a single point, and all the secrets of the universe became clear to me.

To write so much, to wonder if I even ate that night and to publish a book all myself.

And yet, I don't even remember writing it.

Beauty In Everything

The beauty of our world
Is one seldom spoken.
From the canyons of forests
To the nebulas of space.
There is always beauty
Everywhere you look.
Even those who can't see it
Know the beauty in everything.
From the war grounds of Normandy
To the great wall of Berlin.
Beauty exists in all shapes of the world.
The beauty of life
And the beauty of the unknown.
Those hidden and dark beauties.
Of death and of war
Beauty holds its place -
In all concepts of the world.

Over the Dark Field

Over the Dark Field
Of a sickly, death ridden grass -
Of the lands beyond - the expanding sea -
Over the Dark Field.

Over the White Clouds
Flying high above the sad land -
Turning the grass a sickly - death ridden dark green -
Over the Dark Field.

Over the Sad Souls
Crying - their melancholic songs -
Suffering - living forever onwards -
Over the Dark Field.

Over the Dark Field
Of the tears falling to the sky -
Of the rain - crying among souls
Under the White Clouds.

A Discarded Tin Hat

It has been - a long time. That otherworldly innocence I had. That otherworldly innocence everybody had. It has been a long time indeed. Naive, each passing grade, just like the last. Playing thoughtlessly, unknown to me that I could forget every moment.

Oh well. That's just how life goes - sometimes. It isn't pleasant, to be fair. But I cannot change that, so why should I care. I was who I was. I am who I am. - One day I will be who I will be. That is all there is to it.

I know one day I will not be me, but I will be - evermore. But I will not be alone. Everyone will change - as I do. The world will change - as I do. - Oh well. Everything is as it is. I wear this tin hat now, but I will discard it eventually. That is - just how things are.

I may put a dam across this river, but I know it will only rot - floating away with the rocks. So be it. Let it float away and rot. So I may, too.

It Is Silent Here

It is silent here.

The Snow falls, slowly, making no mention of its presence.---

The rooftops, violated by winter's emotions.

He lay in bed, silently, allowing no mention of his presence.

His parents gone for the night, and so too, he.

The breeze came to gather its flakes, but captured his mind and soul instead.

Taken through the glass window.

Past the children's army of snowmen.

Past the wars fought in many parents' backyards.

Past the trees, barren, but alive.

Up through the clouds, lifted by the air.---

To where the Snow falls, slowly,
making no mention of its presence.

Then, heavy like the Snow,
falling slowly,
the mind and soul go together.

Farther and farther.
Through the Chimney smoke,
and through his body.

Farther and farther.
Falling ever so slowly,
abandoned by the Snow.
Allowing no mention of his presence.

It is silent there.
The Ash falls, slowly, making no mention of its presence.

The Two Way Mirror

All I could see was myself. But I knew there was something else. The Quiet, hidden corner of my mind. Holding thoughts even I didn't know I held. The Two-Way Mirror of the Quiet Mind. Where I saw only a reflection. Where the source of that... staring always traces to. Holding me hostage in my reality. A new reality, just behind the thin glass, showing only the reality I know. The hidden potential festering eternally, to be locked forever. To unlock only in dreams, or perhaps, a never ending dream. However, I may never know, as to live in dreams could mean I lose myself. Only when the reflection of myself then, fades, will the land of dreams and the Quiet Mind be awoken. Perhaps then there is a way to see through the reflection of the Two-Way Mirror, when not shackled by an eternal dream? Perhaps, then, are those who are mad, really mad? Are those who lie unconscious truly unconscious? May we ever truly know?

A Rotten Village: After Li Po

The furnace grows cold
And ever colder still.
The village thrives,
Yet I see no one
Along the roads.
Day has become night,
And night has become moonless.
Without the moon,
the orphans' cries grow louder.
My boots are worn
With the thick muck
I walk along.
Evermore.

The Boat has begun to rot,
With the rivers tears.
The March frost
Quickly becoming
The grass's thirst.
And new vines
Sprout along the
Temple walls.
Soon the river calms
For us once again.
And the rot will wash
away with time.
The grass drinks,
And the vines
Will be cut.
The moon will slowly rise,
With a fiery light,
Burning brighter than the day.

Insanity of the Greenhouse. Wait... (Based on Celena's "The Nut House")

The house was all wrong for them, because of course they didn't listen to me. They're decent enough people, sure! But I thought they wanted a greenhouse for their plants... But no! They want to have a green house. Not a greenhouse oh no no no nooooo, it has to be a green house! If it were a greenhouse, well that wouldn't be too good, now would it? They're not plants, they're people! If it were a greenhouse there would be waaaaay too many emissions for them to handle. No no no, plants get the greenhouse and people get the green house. Don't they understand the perfect house can make or break a marriage and it's my job to make it perfect, so I painted the house and redecorated. Not with plants though, they live in the greenhouse, not the green house. I still had a key so I thought that's what they wanted! Perhaps they wanted plants? No, of course not. What sane person would like plants in their green house? Now, if we were talking about their greenhouse...

I'm a realtor and my slogan is, "I'll find the perfect house for you!" How can I say that if I sell greenhouses, not green houses? It should have been, "I'll find the perfect house for your plants!" Anyway, that's exactly what I told the officer and the Judge yet here I am Samantha, talking to you all tied up like some crazy person! I bet you put plants in the green house, don'tcha??!! No offense, so what's your dream house? I swear to Allah if you say a greenhouse. That's for plants! Wait, no a *greenhouse* is for plants. Nevermind Samantha.

Actually, I heard from a little fishy that you like Magenta. Screw you, Samantha, you plant. Go live with the plants in my newly built patent-pending greenhouse designed for plants only. You know why? Cuz you're a Plant, Samanthat! Plant Samantha! Plant Samantha! You know WHY??!
CUZ. YOU. ARE. A. P.L.A.N.T!

You Always Make Me Forget What to Believe

I was sitting by a lake that day. I don't remember which lake, but the mountains on the horizon were pretty. That's when I met you. You were jogging along the trail nearby, and seemed tired. I called out to offer you a seat at the bench I was sitting at. "Sure! Thanks!" I heard you call out. I looked back out towards the horizon, and you never came to sit next to me. You always make me forget what to believe.

Sierra Gittleman

when Optimism and Pessimism fell in love.

Said she sees spotted does eating cemetery clovers sweetly. Said he sees mangy animals disrespecting the dead. Said she sees rooms of students soaking up the world in stories and lectures that make their souls dance. Said he sees concrete complexes of indoctrination: ignorance disguised as truth. Said she sees humanity dawning on an epoch of freedom and expression. Said he sees humanity falling off a cliff. Said she sees him lost in blackness. Said he sees her drowning in light.

The Dove and The Olive Tree.

The dove in the olive tree

The dove

He is the lover within the kingdom of wings

The olive tree

She is the soft welcoming host within the earth's soft matrices of rootways

I will love you and I will not ask for anything in return says the dove

I will welcome you, I will hold you in my branches says olive tree

But the other birds do not want to be tortured by love

And the other trees do not want to be crowded by calm

So in a way, they need each other

The dove and the olive tree

The olive tree and the dove

They need to be needed by each other

sunflower fields.

You fill my mind with sunflower fields
Rays of gold intrude my blood vessels
And carry gratitude to every cell
I am full with sounds of morning sunlight
And the ambiance of a lazy afternoon
One in which, for a moment, the whole world is still.
The cornmeal colored grasses cease to sway,
as if they are taking a moment to breathe.
Little children are napping, mothers are resting, they burn their faces away
Away from barbies scattered on the floor
Away from scribbled drawings and misspelled words
We take advantage of the momentary blindness
Honey is seeping through the windowpane
And dripping down the sides
Sighs drift effortlessly into the air between us
And we have found each other in the blissful aftermath.
We feel the sunlit glory while we look at each other's faces
wearing quiet smirks
We are younger than we think we are.

SWMRS.

SWMRS is the best band of my generation. They make us howl when it is late and I am enamored by the night sky, holes poked thoughtfully into our tin foil cover to allow us to breath. Their music is the drug that keeps us out in the streets, love drunk on each other's voices, until the blackness of night softens into grays and peaks out over the mountaintops in a multicolored haze, fading intense blues into baby's breath and sweet lilac.

Harold.

Harold is sitting on his couch and all the morning light is coming in through the window behind him. His house is warm and calm but not quite quiet-nothing is ever quite quiet. He sits by himself and sips the contents of his steaming mug.

Sometimes he feels so small. Sometimes he feels that he is a tiny dust particle floating in clear air while other dust particles bounce off each other and laugh. When light rays stand still on the air, there are millions of dust particles but in Harold's corner of the world, the particles are less concentrated. They don't bounce off each other. They float. They stay calm. Sometimes he feels like the air around him has a grasp on him. He likes to think that the air's grasp is a hug. He likes to keep the heater on in the morning. He wants the air to be warm so as the air hugs him, it hugs him warmly, sweetly, comfortingly.

He goes on long walks in the evening right before it gets dark and he talks to his plants in the morning. He says

"Good day asparagus," he says. "I just woke up, I'm quite parched dear, would you like to share a glass of water with me?"

Some mornings he shares his mug of coffee with his basil plant and tells her about his dreams from the night before. Some mornings he just sits there quietly and wishes there was someone he could share his silence with, someone who would understand what it meant. Some evenings he sees couples walking together and holding hands. They smile at him and say "hi" as they walk past. He says hi back and his face transforms into a beam of warmth as he flashes a smile back. He holds that warmth next to him for the rest of his walk home. He reaches his house with slow, heavy footsteps that seem beaten down to the external gaze but he is simply savoring the warmth before he steps inside an empty house. Some evenings he walks home briskly with his head in the clouds and feels grateful to live in a world with so much life, so much green. He waters every plant in his house carefully before he goes to sleep: the sweet little ones soaking up the last of the sun's rays in the windowsills, the large vines crawling up the walls, the ones in macrame holders hanging down from the ceilings, the ones sitting wisely in their ceramic pots, filling the corners of every room. On those evenings, after he has put down his book and his tea has been drunk, he closes his eyes and drifts into rest warmly because he knows his house is not empty and he is not alone.

Radical is An Inherently Good Word.

If there's anything my freshman year in college taught me, it's that we all begin to blend in to our surroundings at some point. If you spend enough time alone in the forest, you will eventually become one of the animals that belongs to it, slowly losing your humanity. Or we become functioning cogs of one creaking human machine moving compulsorily to cut down every tree in the forest in which the animals live.

It was a Sunday morning. I picked up an empty paper bag off the floor of my dorm, the crinkling broke the Sunday morning silence uncomfortably. I held it carefully to minimize any sound and my eyes quickly darted over to Clarrissa's closed eyes, she didn't even reposition and her arms were still crossed awkwardly over her body. More relaxed now, knowing that she would not wake up, I placed the bag in our woven wastebasket made from rolled up magazine papers and stepped slowly over to the amassed mound of papers on my small square dark green desk, slipping into the chair without a creak. I wasted my morning on housekeeping waiting for Clarissa to wake up so that we could begin our Sunday afternoon activities.

I went to get coffee and when I got back, she had changed positions, now on her side, her mouth curved up ever so slightly, a tiny smile that illustrated a lovely moving picture parading around in her mind like jumping into Mary Poppins chalk circle. My mind grasped at the cascading memories, judgments and commentary streaming and twirling always through my head. It picked up the first day that I met her. She was already in our room when I arrived. She was facing towards the window looking out at the buildings. She looked awed. It was the same look she had when we went to the redwoods for the first time. She had grown up in Florida's swampy marshes. But here, the musical rainforest sounds of streams flying to their appointment with the sea and the stillness which surrounded the trees, great big giants that protected the ground from the sun and made their own atmosphere of damp ground and pure, clean air, only wanted peace. The mosses were soft, delicate as lace. They were the frills that accent a perfectly feminine garment. She had never seen anything like it and that first day that I met her, she looked out on our campus like she was looking out on her entire life, over the edge of a cliff. We all think of college as a new chapter, a new beginning, but for her it was something different. I think she knew we would be changed inexorably by the end of our time there. It wasn't our classes or the location, the newfound freedom, or the people, it was the truth that we discovered, like finding gold amongst the river rocks, it became the only thing that mattered. It was a long sigh releasing everything like a mist into the air. It was the cure to the fear we'd been struggling to extinguish since we left the womb. The wildfire was still raging all around, destroying everything in sight but at least now we

had fire retardant and water hoses to begin the fight against the flames. We finally had hope. We didn't have to accept slow suffering burns eating away at our skin and flesh, cauterizing and branding our bodies with a purposeless scorch.

“These are desperate times. We've lost a staggering 60% of monitored vertebrate life within just 40 years.”

Clarrisa groaned, turning on her back and opening her eyes. She untidily propped herself up on the back wall and looked at me with her tired morning face as if the only thing she wanted was to slump back down into bed and stay there, rest there until all pain had died and she could awaken in a new eon beyond suffering, full of sunshine yellow flowers blooming and bees buzzing happily in the golden dawn, the sound of their buzzing overpowering your ears and creating a strange sort of mourning music. A new eon where we could all lay peaceful in fields and meadows of long soft grasses which caress us in deep conversation. But it was too late she had missed the train for her idyllic fantasies and knew that her wakefulness, however painful in the moment could not be taken away, she had crossed the misted veil from her dreams back into reality and the portal had closed in on her becoming hard grey concrete and it would stay this way until she drifted into sleep again late into the night, that portal would open swirling her into fantastical scenarios that would never reach her waking self. Most of us wished inside our brain, in a place we didn't know was thinking, churning out unfulfilled desires, to live inside the dreams we couldn't remember, to escape the rigidness of tall nondescript skyscrapers that specializes in making calls and organizing bullshit nothings on a spreadsheet, checking off the pointless tasks scrawled on to do lists, while the world crumbles away outside of his desk office or my cozy living room, furnished with the all distracting blue lighted stories telling me to forget the clearcut, endless fogged obscured stubs where life once flourished, forget the raging fires, forget the leaders like clowns onstage, performing to us saying they care and taking away our rights offstage. She wanted to escape it all but the only way to escape the system is to make a new one. It's what we were trying to do with our early mornings and late nights in the chilly, damp, fog ridden old growth groves, metal spikes in hand. It's what we, “dedicated to taking the profit motive out of environmental destruction by causing economic damage”, were trying to do when we snuck through the drab cemented blocks constructed mile after mile to car dealerships and conglomerate headquarters.

I've had the pleasure of getting to know radical environmentalists. They reject human superiority and separateness from other species.. They blame such views, in addition to capitalism and endless economic growth, for the dire state of modern ecosystems. Many follow a burning desire for a more viable and inclusive future for all.”

On my first visit to our college, I walked noticing the greens in the trees, the textures of the mosses that clung to them, branches reaching out in all directions in perfect symmetry. It was the summer after my junior year. I remember the warm air enclosing my body when I stepped out of the air conditioned car. I breathed that warm air in and out and felt the

heat make its way through me, making my face rosy. The warmth was only slightly uncomfortable but it was enough to make me crave the cool of the crystal clear river that ran through the forest near my childhood home that would soon be cut used to build houses, furniture, anything that made life more complicated and more comfortable.

Activists have occupied the ancient Hambach forest in Western Germany for a remarkable six years in an ongoing effort to keep coal giant RWE at bay. Many were violently evicted by police recently. They advocate direct action in the form of civil disobedience, blockades, tree-sits, and even the dismantling of machinery for halting ecological destruction. As George Monbiot noted, a “hopeless realism” in the form of piecemeal “tinkering around the edges” has led us to our present predicament. steady change may no longer be enough to avoid civilisational collapse. Environmentalists cannot rely on timid appeals to power any longer.”

My mind kept leafing through the images left in my mind from weeks before. They were like snapshots seared into my head. I looked around me, drab gray concrete walls that held me in, metal poles and beyond that, a small window to the artificial landscaped green outside. I feared the longer I stayed here, the more I would lose my connection to the delicate puzzle that creates ecosystems. I felt myself losing hope and becoming another functioning cog, mindlessly a part of the prison system.

The world’s 42 wealthiest people own as much as the poorest 3.7 billion, reflecting capitalism’s logic of endless growth and the accumulation of wealth in fewer pockets.”

I was becoming grey, lifeless like the concrete walls around me. We all blend into the colors around us. Perhaps black like your room with the lights off. Black like your pupils with which you perceive the world. Black like ink with which we write. Black like no light. Blinking and blinking into blackness. You feel like you can float in blackness. Blackness is like a blanket through hard times. Who does color turn you into? Can you fall into the wooden grains of your desk and see yourself with all brown on, like you are the bark of a tree? Can you see yourself fall into the red of a fire, passionate and fluidly destroying? Can you be the peaceful green of meadow grasses blowing in the wind?

<https://theconversation.com/radical-environmentalists-are-fighting-climate-change-so-why-are-they-persecuted-107211>

life.

we have dates deadlines, deadlines, people to impress and people to please
homeworks to complete, ideas to manage, food to make, rooms to clean,
adventures to experience, fun to have, life to live
and still we must heal the earth
we must understand our souls
we must liberate slavery
we must, we must, we must
and yes, we must
but what about the things that are not a must?
what about walking softly on a clear morning
feeling the brisk air fill your body, Leaning into a blue sky
looking at flowers, admiring that pair of eyes sitting across from you
laying in bed all morning
feeling the night encircle you and swimming in stars,
painting that peace you've longed forever
your fingers are pens, paint brushes, pencils, crayons
create, my love
draw that house you're going to live in some day
write about things that make you smile
don't worry about the deadline, the person the please, the ideas to manage,
the food to make, the room to clean, the fun to have, the life to live,
don't worry about life
be life
and you will become the clear morning, the stars at night, the flowers in his
hair, the peace you've longed forever

Gabriel Grunder

Two-way mirror

I walk into the room,
I see a mirror in the gloom.
I look into it,
And I see the future.
I have seen this mystery before.
What is it doing here?
Why has it shown up?
Am I about to experience something
Like nobody has ever seen?
Then, I see a land of happiness and dreams
Come true.
Is this really real?
I believe that
This is a
Two-Way Mirror.

Insanity Ward

I'm leaving home now and I feel like the nightmare is over. I watch as the house I used to live in whips past. I watch as the car races by the intersection. I feel astonishment, even disbelief, that I got away with, at least, half my sanity. I feel like I've been holding my breath for more than an hour. I want to cry for joy, but, at the same time, shout in anger for the people that abandoned me, once again, when I needed them most.

City of Glass

In this
City of glass,
There are broken shards everywhere.
In this painful silence,
No one can hear you scream
In agony.
Death starts to lift you up in its arms.
Perhaps, you could've renounced your sins,
For it is to hell which you are going,
When you leave the family
You once knew.
You are now entering the City of Glass.

American Grief

Have you not learned, America?
Have you not seen the bloodshed we caused?
Have we not caused enough wars?
Have we not caused enough misery and shame?
Or have I become a killing machine?
With the AK-47s and M-16s?
Have I become a mindless slave?
Have I become a thieving knave?
Are we able to redeem ourselves today?
Or have we become demons to slay?
Have you not learned, America?
Have you not learned at all?
Why do we have to be the cause of so much pain?
All we've done is cause our own little
American grief.
All we've done is cause so much suffering because of things
like politics, oil, war, And other things besides.
All we've done is almost kill off entire races because they're not like us.
Yeah, we're totally making America great again.
Bullshit. Absolute bullshit.

God's Army

Are we not worshippers of God?
Are we not traitors of Satan?
Are we not lovers and forgivers?
Do we not show mercy?
Do we not show forgiveness?
Or are we hurtful people?
Do we use other people for our personal gain?
Or are we risk takers?
People willing to fight the darkness?
Willing to stand up for others?
Willing to light up the night?
Are we not made of love, virtues, and forgiveness?
Are we just mortal men?
Do we just have mistakes happen over and over again?
Or are we God's soldiers?
Are we the hunters of Satan's goonies?
Do we bring death to the evil?
Do the hunters become the hunted?
I believe we are God's army.

Nightmares

Nightmares.
My own demons of the night.
Snakes and sharks.
And ghosts too.
They haunt my dreams.
First, I'm swallowed whole.
Next, I'm torn apart by sharks in a tornado.
Then, I'm in the water
With razor sharp teeth digging into my midsection.
Finally, comes the end of the dream.
I'm in a realistic haunted house with animatronics.
Then, there's a woman who's listening to Christmas music.
She's slowly swallowing me whole.
Then, everything goes black.
That,
My friends,
Is the definition,
Of nightmares.

Journal of Nightmares

Wednesday, February 5th, 2020

I had a dream. In the dream, I was riding a bus to Sonoma State University. I was riding on the bus across the overpass. The campus looked like a beach area. I came to this mansion-like dorm area, and there were kids that were sleeping in tents. The tents looked like inflatable tents. I think these were the kids in the camping clubs. I got off the bus and walked past the little kids' playground. I walked into the building and immediately got jumped by, like, 4 or 5 kids. I fought them off, by flipping them over my shoulder and punching them, until one of them twisted this dial on my uniform and an alarm went off. Everyone scattered and I got a couple broken bones. I passed out. Then, I woke up in the hospital wing. I was lying on the cot and somebody was walking towards my room, while the nurses were checking on me. They started rearranging things to make it look like a classroom and the guy walked in. He was a man in a nice-looking suit and he walked over to the nurse and said "Hiding a patient, I suppose?". He looked like one of those classic mafia bosses. I noticed that I had wings, which looked like bat wings. He walks over to me and starts crushing my bones in my wings, that I have suddenly grown, under his heel. I start crying and moaning. His head turns into a T. Rex head, licks me with its tongue, and says "Delicious flesh." I then jump up and start clawing at him. Then, I turn into some kind of Native American with white hair and I start shooting him with what looks like an SMG (Submachine Gun). I watch as the guy on the other side of the room quickly regenerates his skin, muscle, and bone. He says, "You're lucky you haven't pissed me off--yet." I have a pump shotgun appear in my hands and I start shooting him again. He sends a dinosaur snout at me and I fall into the mouth. Suddenly, I'm tiny and the mouth closes and I am hanging off one of the teeth. I hear a voice saying "One kick is all it will take to swallow you." He chuckles. Then, the dream ends.

81 word stories pt. 1

It was fun and games until the world ended. I was on my phone, as usual, looking at news about the Wuhan Coronavirus. My phone started making amber alert sounds, and then I heard a voice saying, “Notice to all residents of Ukiah, please stay inside. There is currently a zombie outbreak. If you or someone you know is bitten or scratched, please call the quarantine hotline immediately.” I was suddenly really scared. The virus had mutated and spread. What’s next?

81 word stories pt. 2

It all started with him throwing me onto my bed. He broke both my belts on my butt and threatened to end my life. *We* are victims of a personal attack. *We* are prisoners of pain and misery. *We* are slaves to the ones that want to hurt us. We are the ones getting hurt because of problems with autism and PTSD. *This* is what we have been gifted with. The gift of torture, misery, betrayal, and pain.

Drunk American Traitor

We snatched him up, lugged him aft, and pitched him head-first down the cabin companion. He had gotten drunk, insulted our mothers, groped our wives, and named us as the sons-of-bitches we were. Our captain, though he was, had led us on a suicide mission into the waters of enemy territory. We locked him in the brig, and said to him, “You are a traitor to the United States of America. You have led us into Nazi territory, and demeaned us, traitor.”

KC Kirkley

A Shooter, I'd Say

"Tomorrow," he said, whoever he was.

I felt the word more than I heard it, the hot wind of whisper in my left ear, the chilly run of gooseflesh up my neck.

"Another shooting," he said, close enough to be audible under the sound of the crowd, under the defiant music being piped through amplifiers designed for a venue ten times the size of this tiny club.

I whipped my head around. It had been a strange thing to say and a strange way to say it, but stranger still was how close the words felt, familiar and true.

The crowd was pressed up close around me, sure, but still. Plenty of these strangers were close enough to have leaned in and said it, sure, but why? I scanned the nearest people and couldn't put a face to the voice. I scowled at the ones nearest me, tried to make eye contact, tried to pick the owner of the voice. Two of them were in the middle of a shouted conversation about conspiracy theories. Most of the others were looking at their phones. One smallish adolescent stood behind my left shoulder, his eyes closed, rocking back and forth to some rhythm only he could hear, completely unrelated to the music in the air. He would've been the best candidate, but I ruled him out too. He seemed wrapped up in a personal experience so entirely removed from the outside world that any image of him saying anything to anybody felt false.

I turned back to face the stage, dismissing the voice as something misheard or imagined, waiting like everyone else for the next band to finish setting up.

I tried not to look old, but there was no hiding the fact that I no longer fit in with this crowd that shared my musical tastes. I looked down at my tennis shoes and jeans, strangers among the Doc Martens and homemade duct-tape boots around them, and imagined that the kids squeezed around me were a little puzzled by my presence.

It wasn't so long before he spoke again, whoever he was.

"A boy in a brown jacket," he said.

This time, I didn't turn around. Instead, I froze, waiting for more.

I was rewarded.

He said, "Thirteen victims. Rancho Mirage High School." His voice was a close whisper, close in my ear, quiet but clear, impossibly close, close enough to be a lover, strident, laced with the sonic equivalent of arsenic.

Maybe I could have said something back, something like, "It's no joking matter, especially not so soon after the Saugus High shooting." I might have said that, sure, but I didn't. I didn't say anything, and I like to

tell myself that I didn't because I didn't want to scare the voice away, but maybe I didn't say anything because I am fearful of confrontation, because I want these kids to like me, because I'm already self-conscious about being the old guy in the room, because it's none of my business, or rather, I hope it's none of my business. Let's go with one of those.

Anyway, it could have been any one of those assholes; they were all pressed up against me like crayons in a box. What else could I do but listen? I listened and listened, but the voice said nothing more. Eventually, I turned around to survey the crowd once again. The mass of passive faces pressing around me didn't seem to have heard what I heard. The fans mashed into the club were laughing, were telling stories to one another, were checking their phones, were making out, were boasting, were whining, were joking, were doing all the things that people always do in the midst of crowded waiting.

I studied the faces. The voice had been high and masculine, with that mix of confidence and cruelty that chimes only in the adolescent male. Which one of these trolls crowded around me was it? I looked for someone in a brown jacket, a teenager, but no, there was no one who fit the profile. It didn't seem possible that one of these half-drunk revelers could be behind that voice, yet it didn't seem possible that it wasn't one of these either. It was real. It was a real voice.

Now, You might be expecting some narrative trick here, some manipulation, some joke, some voice from the ether, some alter ego, some *Fight Club* device, but goddamn it, I'm telling you that the voice was real.

Of course, my confidence, like Mariah Carey's sex appeal, faded with time.

And yes, I know what you're thinking: what kind of a guy thinks about Mariah Carey's diminishing sex appeal at a time like this? What kind of guy goes to concerts by himself and then takes seriously whatever bullshit he overhears in the mash of the crowd? Good points, both. I'd agree with you, I would.

Except for here's the thing: the next day, a kid in a brown jacket really did walk into Rancho Mirage High School, and he really did shoot thirteen students with an assault rifle.

It happened just like he said, whoever "he" was.

Also, I should note for the sake of clarification, that I'm no longer attracted to Mariah Carey.

But about the shooting, I wasn't as shocked as you might think. Something in the timbre of the voice in the crowd had convinced me he was telling the truth. Something about it was familiar, even. So, what I felt at that time was not so much shock as shame. Maybe I was the only one who had been warned. Yes, if I'm going to be honest with myself (and you), then I have to admit: I never doubted it would happen. And I didn't do a damn thing about it.

I could have said something. Maybe I should have said something. But I didn't.

with my first group of students, a slurry of addled adolescents in need and deserving of more love and attention than I was capable of giving.

After morning announcements concluded (conspicuously devoid of any mention of the shooting) I asked the class if they'd heard the news. "You hear about that school shooting?" I said.

Some nodded noncommittally, hoping, I'm sure, that I wouldn't call on them to discuss it. I figured the nods meant something like, "Yes, we know we're supposed to be sad about kids gunning each other down at schools just down the freeway, but we've got our own shit to deal with, you know?" I'm pretty good at interpreting nods, and they had a point, there, if that's what they meant. I mean, we've reached the stage that we're a bit numb to all of this, haven't we? Even I have a serious case of Outrage Exhaustion.

"So sad," I said from my place in front of the class. The sour smell of body odor and cannabis vapor mixed with the pungency of white-board cleaner I had used just before class. "Why does this keep happening?" I said.

No answer was forthcoming.

"I wonder if there was any warning, you know?" I said. "Any signs it was gonna happen, you know?" Sure, I was courting my guilt, I know it.

"There are always signs," one be-hooded kid said without looking up. "These school shooters, you can see 'em coming a mile away. I don't know why we don't just round 'em all up and chop off their hands before they can do their damage."

Huh.

The kids nodded in agreement and I wondered if maybe we were experiencing a dearth of compassion.

"Fucking Muslims," another kid muttered.

I wasn't certain which one. How disturbing, to have a room full of xenophobes right here with me, but I had a hard time blaming, what with 4chan and dark web conspiracies and fundamentalist extremists everywhere we turned. "Well," I said, "let's not be racist, okay?" You might blame me, I suppose, for being so lax, but you try fighting the waves of hate and cynicism inherent in eight score adolescents for a few hundred days a year and see how long you last. I mean, it's my job to get them to think. It's like teaching empathy to Steve Bannon. You just have no idea where to begin. "Besides, I'm pretty sure these school shooters are young, angry, disaffected, white men. I'm pretty sure that's who they are."

The kids shrugged their shoulders, mostly.

Later that night, I sat on the couch with Maggie and watched Jeopardy. She knew all of the answers, as usual, and I enjoyed listening to her beat the contestants to a pulp, as usual. Cuddled into the crook of my arm, she murmured, "What is 'The Cask of Amontillado'", "Who is Marcel Proust", "What is the 100 Years War", "What is Carbon Monoxide." The frustrating thing about Jeopardy is the way the contestants pump their thumbs on those buzzers and then glare with incredulous rage at

their devices when the computer claims someone else was faster. After Jeopardy was over, the news came on. There it was, the lead story about a troubled teen (they always call them “troubled teens,” don’t they?) who had apparently been spending time on weird websites. An angry boy. Again. Another case of outrage. Another case of AR-15s. I’m not the political type, you know? I’m not too comfortable talking about the 2nd Amendment and facsism and all that, but I’m beginning to wonder, what in the hell is going on?

“I just don’t understand,” Maggie said.

I could hear our son, Max, in his room, and I wondered if he could end up as one of these angry kids who decides that infamy is a good life goal. Who knows what hate he traffics in? It would be naive to say we don’t all hate someone, something, somewhere. It’s a matter of degrees, isn’t it, or a matter of commitment. Could I, myself, be a shooter if I took my own hate more seriously?

“Don’t understand?” I said.

“What’s the cause, I mean. Why is this happening?”

I felt the question as an accusation. Am I responsible?

“These things are inevitable,” I said. “Society, you know? You’ve got the gun nuts and the neo-nazis and the dark web and the religious nuts and the role-playing nuts and the amphetamine nuts and the plain old-fashioned nut nuts. Honestly, I’m surprised it doesn’t happen more often.”

Maggie seemed a bit horrified at this, but she didn’t say anything. She just shook her head and bugged her eyes out at me.

“What I’m saying is, it’s no one’s fault, specifically. It’s too big to understand or fight. Our culture is a freight train and we are cockroaches on the tracks. Try to stop it, slow it down, redirect it, you’ll just get crushed.”

“‘No one’s fault’ is just a weak-ass way of saying ‘everyone’s fault’”

“Semantics, I suppose.”

“What does that even mean?”

“Exactly.”

Two days after the shooting at Rancho Mirage High School, I took the Metro down to Alvarado Street after school. I wanted to walk in the market and bombard my senses with stimulus. I wanted to overwhelm myself with the smells of frying fish and curry and Szechuan pork. I wanted to drown the reverberating sound of my guilt in the sounds of five or six languages I didn’t understand, to distract my eye with the uncoordinated colors of competing trade.

The school day had been another failure in the long stream of failures I had been enacting all year, all career. Students staring blankly as I fumbled through explanations of concepts even I didn’t care about. Colleagues who didn’t listen or read complaining about my lack of communication. Parents pointing out my inconsistent policies, my clear instability, my tendency to call students by offensive nicknames like

“SpaceWaster” and “Grade Whore” and “Philistine”. Really, they should have complained to the office about my ineffectiveness in getting their children to write basic, complete sentences, but instead they just wanted to know why I didn’t hand out top marks to everyone who showed up.

None of that mattered, of course. It was all old news, the same as it was since I was a student myself. What mattered is that I couldn’t get the Rancho Mirage shooting out of my mind. I should have moved on by then, right? Normal people don’t think about that kind of thing for too long any more.

As I wandered under the steel canopy and smelled the savory foods, I grew predictably hungry. The corn cob stand was near, so I approached and made my order. Waiting as they shucked the cob, dipped it in warm mayonnaise, and sprinkled it with cheese and chili powder, a gaggle of tourists crowded behind me to watch. They must have been from the midwest, as they were shocked by the vendor’s treatment of the corn. I felt the press of them behind me, and the press felt familiar and disturbing.

By the time I paid and escaped with my corn, I was near panic, but no mysterious voice occurred in that press. Perhaps my fears were unfounded. I sat down on a bench outside and munched on my corn and watched the pigeons pick at crumpled trash. One of them, a dingy gray thing, hopped toward me with a napkin. Improbably, it fluttered up onto the bench beside me, dropped the napkin on my lap, and flew away. In the wake of the bird’s wings, the napkin fluttered and caught my closer attention. On it was scrawled a note. I knew before I read it that it would haunt me. It said, “Thousand Oaks High School. Tomorrow.”

I wadded the thing up and dunked it in an abandoned cup of soda, shivering despite the baking sun, insecure in the knowledge that the note was no rumor, no lie, but a true threat.

My first instinct was to pretend I had never seen the napkin. My second instinct was to drive up to Thousand Oaks and file some sort of warning. The second option was fraught with complications, and they say to always obey your first instinct, and so I did. I’m not sure where I first heard that advice, and who from, but it sure was nice to have some sort of basis of support to excuse my inaction.

That’s right. I said nothing.

I went home, watched Jeopardy with Maggie, and once again entertained dark, philosophical thoughts about hate and violence and my son and my own capacity for evil.

You will not be surprised, I’m sure, to hear that the napkin was correct.

I admit that, when I heard the news, I felt responsible to some degree, but it was complicated. One part of me believed that I had nothing whatsoever to do with the whole thing. I was an innocent bystander; no one would have believed me even if I had tried to warn them. Another part of me stood condemned, as condemned as the kid who pulled the trigger. These kinds of internal conflicts fade with time, though, as life hustles

forward in its rush of noise and action.

Classes needed to be taught.

Food needed to be purchased and consumed.

Family needed to be related to.

Colleagues needed to be appeased.

The lawn needed to be tended.

Jeopardy needed to be watched.

Weeks wasted by, and I nearly forgot about the warnings. Even the most bizarre, the most magical and surreal events, lose their immediacy in the face of daily routines and responsibilities, the accumulation of minutes after minutes. Maybe “forgot” is the wrong word; maybe it was just that I’d learned to pretend to ignore the memory of those warnings. Yes, it was when I’d learned to do this that a third warning appeared.

I was pulling weeds from between the cracks in the sidewalk in front of my house. These weeds took miraculous advantage of the tiny spaces in the concrete, and I felt a little guilty for so ruthlessly destroying the improbable lives they had built for themselves. But then again, I’d be the shame of the neighborhood if I let them stay. So, I was pulling these weeds and the neighbor kids were having a water fight in the street, complete with hoses, water guns, and balloons. Such innocent and wholesome fun! I was half watching them and half paying attention to the weeds and trying to remember if my son had ever done this with the kids in the neighborhood when he was younger, when I noticed a strange pattern of water on the pavement. The pattern caught my eye because of its decidedly purposive nature. It didn’t look so random, is what I mean. In fact, it looked like words, and the words the water splashes spelled out were “Burbank High School.”

I knew what they meant.

Three little girls in bathing suits chased an even littler boy down the road. The girls had water balloons and the boy had a pail that likely used to be full of water. They didn’t seem to notice the word-splashes as they scampered by, their wet feet scribing a line of prints through the message.

I watched the children running for a while and then I turned back to the fading message.

Burbank High School. I knew the place. Hell, I’d been on the campus.

Here was a warning, and only I could see it. Here was another chance.

The kids shouted and squealed and turned and ran back past me going the other direction, and by the time they passed, the message had evaporated. I watched them and looked at the spot on the pavement where the message had once been, and I knew that this time would be different.

This time, I would say something.

Imagine My Relief: An 81-word Story

Mother's toenails curled at the ends like dying flatworms, but she thought her feet were beautiful. She wore open sandals to show them off, those horrifying peach-glossed digits. Meanwhile, I searched stranger's faces for signs of disgust.

Imagine my relief and guilt when, while moving a crate of bearings from the storage shelf, the weight shifted, I lost control, and the box came crashing down, mangling Mother's left foot. She wore tennis shoes after that and never was quite as happy.

The Inventor of the First Time Travel Machine: An 81-word Story

Inevitably, he was the type of wingnut to use the machine for absurdly impractical purposes. After his first successful test (sending his pet rooster, McNab, three minutes into the future), Dr. Lingenberger mounted the device and sent himself exactly 955 days into the past. Once there, he had the gratifying experience of watching himself experience the epiphany of discovering the scientific basis of time travel. Once the moment passed, he returned to the machine, went back again, and again, and again.

The Victims

(with apologies to Ernest Hemingway and his short story, "The Killers")

We were headed to a diner, Dad and I, because the rain had grown so unbearable. Before we left, we sat in the kitchen looking out past precarious stacks of newspapers and boxes of cereal, through the patio door, at the scrambled sky, saying "That's one crazy rainstorm". We volleyed the phrase back and forth the way that desperate people always say stupid, obvious things. The percussion of the rain on the roof and deck beat erratically, without any sense of decency or rhythm, so we told each other that it was the rain that was bothering us. It had only been a few weeks, after all, since Mom had left.

The diner we chose was out of town, out where we never would have gone before, eight miles outside the city limits where only the truckers or tourists with broken down beaters bothered to stop. We chose it because Mom never went there, at least as far as we knew. At least we didn't have any memories of her there, which was exactly the point of going to that diner instead of one of the dozens of local joints where she still seemed to hang in the din of dishes and scent of frying foods, where she haunted the tables just as she haunted our house and car and the space between us, even in the car. At the restaurants near home, it was impossible not to watch for her in every rush of the swinging door, behind every raised menu.

The night my mom left was nothing like the muddy mess that Dad I drove through that night on the way to the diner. Instead, it was clean and sharp, like a bright blade. The sun had shredded the sky. The three of us had stood in the kitchen, the windows gleaming hot, Dad with arms limp at his sides, Mom holding a backpack and an apple.

Mom said, "You'll never see me again."

I cried.

Dad said, "I don't understand."

Mom said, "You wouldn't."

In the car on the way to the diner, Dad and I couldn't find our way into a conversation. The rain slashed the air at sharp angles in the wind. The street lights illuminated isolated cones of rainy chaos, but the dark areas between them seemed just dimly alive with undefined motion. The headlights of the car showed the sweeping drifts of water rushing under and over us. Dad was leaning forward in the seat, squinting to see through the rain past the windshield wipers, his fearful lips continuing to work soundlessly when he wasn't speaking.

This is probably what he'll look like when he's really old, I thought. Maybe he's not scared. Maybe he's aging right now like a time-lapse video on the Nature Channel. I shook my head and leaned my

forehead against the window. The cold of the glass felt sharply simple on my skin. The dirt of the fallow fields on the side of the road had been turned into a muddy river flowing parallel to the highway. It bubbled and foamed as it drank in the rain.

“Geez, I can’t see shit,” Dad said.

He hadn’t started cussing in front of me until she left. Apparently, he figured the ordeal had made me a man, and I suppose he was kind of right, but still. He’d also started acting like I was some world-weary adult, having done and seen everything, like the time at the grocery store when he’d pointed out a woman with big tits. It made me queasy.

But about the rain, he was right. I couldn’t even make out the edges of the road, where the road stopped and the newly formed roadside river began. Out there beyond the city, the centerline was faded so badly that I couldn’t see if we were even on the right side of the road. I did see elevated headlights coming toward us, though, and I felt my hamstrings tighten in anxiety. No matter how grown-up he thought I was, I couldn’t help being tense about some things, like when big rigs approached on little roads out in the boonies, especially in this rain.

Dad seemed to sense something bad was about to happen as well. He leaned in and squinted a bit more. His lips made silent shapes.

The truck bore down on us, an angry charge of high, cold light, and then passed in a rush, all speed and sound, the roar of tires in water and then the smack of a wave against and over our little car. It felt like we’d been swallowed. Dad swerved, or maybe the gale force of the truck knocked us into an oblique angle, but suddenly we were sideways and Dad was saying fuckfuckfuckfuck and then we were on the other side of the road, pointing back toward home, askew, our front tires in a muddy gully, our back tires up on the gravel of the road’s shoulder.

We held our breath in a silence that the rain and wind seemed unable to penetrate.

“You okay?” Dad asked.

I nodded, afraid that I’d cry if I tried to speak.

He took a few calming breaths, then chuckled nervously.

“Well, that was something,” he said. “You ever hydroplane before?”

I shook my head.

“That was a hell of a way to pop your cherry, then.”

I wasn’t sure what he meant, but the way he said it sickened me.

The front tires were submerged in the flow of mud. He breathed a few more deliberate breaths, put the car in reverse, and spun the tires. The earth foamed in front of us, but we didn’t budge. He put the car in drive and spun the tires some more.

“Guess I’ll need to get out,” he said.

He stood calf-deep in the sludge and pushed while I held the gas pedal down, but all we accomplished was spewing the mire in the air, covering Dad with a thick layer of watery earth. Next, I joined him outside and we pushed together. It felt as if my legs were being sucked away from

my torso. The car moved a little with both of us pushing, but still not enough.

Dad was soaked in sludge and the rain didn't seem to be rinsing him off. He had wiped his eyes and mouth, but the rest of him was a swirling smear of muck.

"We'll have to get some help," he shouted over the wind and rain.

"I can't move," I said. It was true. The mud refused to release my feet. I reached down into the earth to pull my leg, but nothing happened. I couldn't even find my foot. I kneeled into the ground and fished for it. It felt like my legs were more a part of the earth than of me. Dad grabbed me by the armpits and heaved me up and out, setting me shoeless on the gravel. We sat on the edge of the road, there, exhausted, soaked with liquid dirt, laughing a little. It was a relief to be able to see the humor of the situation.

We crawled back in the car, mud and all. Dad pumped the heater up to thaw us out and we resigned ourselves to defeat. Mom would've been pissed – she couldn't stand failure. It occurred to me then that I kind of wished she was dead; that would've made the whole thing much easier. Maybe then I wouldn't have always been looking over my shoulder or around the corner to see if she might be there. As it was, though, she hovered in the margins, a sort of menace of undefined danger, and the horrible thing is that she could be there. What would I say if I saw her at the movies or the grocery store or a café? What if the woman at the restaurant behind the menu alone in the booth under the painting of the bullfighter turned out to be her? I had imagined such a scene many times. Sometimes I imagined clinging to her and burying my head in her chest as she rubbed my back and straightened my hair with her long deft fingers. Sometimes I imagined how I would shout her down with all the pain she'd given me.

The rain slowed down, and soon an old guy in a pickup pulled over to help. He jumped out and peered in at us through Dad's window. His nose looked like it had been smashed flat and his eyes were tiny dots under a giant brow. One ear was obscenely large.

Dad rolled down the window.

"Looks like you could use a little help," the man said as he shook Dad's muddy hand.

"I guess we can push her out," he said.

The three of us crawled back out into the mud and tried pushing again. We tried having the old guy hit the gas while we pushed, but we just succeeded in coating ourselves in fresh layers of dirt. I could feel it in my hair and ears. I could almost feel it in my throat and stomach.

"She's stuck pretty good," the old guy said.

We nodded like two doofuses.

"Tell you what, there's a diner down the road. I could drop you off and you could probably call a tow from there."

Dad laughed. "Yeah, we were headed there for dinner anyway." He eyed us a minute. "You eat at Henry's? I never seen you there before. Course, it's hard to tell what you look like with all that mud and shit, but I sure don't recall a kid there for a long time."

"No, we're just trying it out for the first time."

"Henry's?"

We both nodded.

He made a sound like "Hmph."

The old guy seemed nice, but he wouldn't let us ride in the cab with him, "On account of the mud," he said. I suppose his own muddy legs didn't count. The rain had stopped, but it was still cold as hell out there in the bed of his truck. It felt like the mud was freezing into a concrete shell on me.

He pulled in to the diner's parking lot just long enough for us to get out. He spoke to us through the little window that separated the cab from the bed.

"Hey, listen," he said. "If anyone asks, you didn't see me, right?"

"What?" Dad said.

I tried imagining this situation if Mom was with us, but I couldn't. She never got herself into messes like this. She always had things under control, two steps ahead of everyone else, even nature, it seemed. No way would she end up covered in mud without a vehicle at some sketchy diner. No way she'd have to ride in the back of some guy's truck.

"Good luck," he shouted as he pulled out.

There were only three cars in the parking lot.

"I'm not even sure if they'll let us come in like this," Dad said.

"Let's try to clean up a little."

We tried to wipe ourselves down, but it seemed to me that we just succeeded in smearing the mud around. Dad looked at me and shook his head.

"Well, okay, so let's just go straight into the bathroom and get some of this shit off before we try to get any food or ask to use the phone."

The diner was empty, or at least it seemed that way. There was a counter with empty stools that ran the length of the room. Across a narrow center walkway, there was a row of booths under the windows. It was all faded orange vinyl and wood. There were dirty dishes on the counter and at one of the booths, but no people. Then we heard muffled voices coming from behind the swinging doors that must've led to the kitchen.

Dad seemed stricken.

I shouted, "Excuse me. Are you open?"

Dad looked at me, still speechless, with wide eyes. The voices in the back stopped.

Someone in a mask busted through the swinging doors with the greatest of ferocity and speed, grabbed each of us by the hair (pulling Dad low to be even with me), yanked us into the kitchen and threw us both face down on the floor.

I felt my nose crack and start to bleed as I hit the ground, and though my eyes watered and I might have whimpered, I kept myself from starting to cry. I started to look up, seeing a boot on the back of Dad's head.

"Face on the floor, you little shit," she said.

Mom? It sounded like Mom, but I didn't dare utter the word. Still, it gushed around in the rush of blood coming from my nose.

"What are they, homeless guys?" her partner asked.

"Looks like they crawled out of a gopher hole," said Mom.

While they talked, they started tying us up, reminding us periodically to keep our fucking faces on the floor. When Mom grabbed my hands and held them at the small of my back while she wrapped a tight cord around them, a charge went through me at her touch. How strong and precise her fingers! How I had missed her capable fingers!

"Where's Ol' Anderson?" she asked.

She was referring to the guy with the pickup, I was sure, but I wasn't going to say anything.

"What do you care about Ol' Anderson?" said someone, a new voice that sounded scared too.

"He eats here every night, right?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"So where is he, then?"

"I don't know. I just cook. I don't have a LoJack on the fucker, I'm not his mommy telling him when to come eat dinner."

I heard a smack and a "hmpf" that must have been the cook getting punched.

"You talk to me like that again and you'll get worse," Mom said. "I'm still waiting for you to tell me where Anderson is. People are going to start getting hurt."

Dad mumbled something.

No, I thought. Don't do it, Dad, I thought.

"What's that?" Mom said.

She must've lifted her boot from his head, because then he said real clear, "I think he just dropped us off and headed north in his pickup. A guy with a messed up face gave us a lift when we broke down."

There was a moment of silence when I thought that maybe she didn't recognize him, but oh, she did.

"Hank?" There was some silence then. "What the fuck?"

She flipped him over with her boot like roadkill.

"Oh my God, what the hell is this? And that's Matthew?"

Dad nodded.

"Shit."

Dad grinned like an idiot.

"Hey, Maxine," said the other guy. "What about Ol' Anderson?"

Everyone was silent again for a minute.

Mom sighed and shook her head at us. "Okay, let's go," she said. She looked at the two of us and shook her head again. "Get yourselves

cleaned up in the bathroom. You look like a couple of bums.” She knelt and wiped the blood from my upper lip and it felt like the beginning of life again.

“We’ve got to go,” said her partner. But he kind of whispered it like he knew something special was happening.

She nodded and stood up and they left.

Once things got sorted out at the diner, Dad and I both ordered pancakes.

“I wonder what he did,” I said.

“Who?”

“Ol’ Anderson.”

“Probably double-crossed somebody,” the cook said. “That’s what they kill them for.”

“I can’t stand to think about Mom killing someone,” I said.

“Well,” Dad said, “then you better not think about it.”

Celena Linares

My Dearest Diana

5 things I can see:

CRT television

Blood on my hands

Basement window

Maple Dresser

Empty clothes basket

4 Things I can touch:

Dirty Hardwood floor

Blood on my hands

Denim pants

Elaborately weaved rug

3 things I can hear:

Singing Birds

Whispering screams

Daisy playing on record

2 things I can smell:

Peppermint Bark Yankee Candle

Blood

1 thing I can taste:

Blood

Counting the accidents won't make them go away. Counting the pain, screams, fear, and blood splatters won't make me feel okay. I'm dying to hear you yell my name. The only scream I want to hear as you tear me apart Diana, my Diana. I never meant to harm anyone but you made me this way. How could you do this to me? You just lie there alone and take my breath away while I wallow with a knife and what you want from me. I can not help but believe the things you whisper to me. The sins of all these men, what they did to you. You know it riles me up, takes me down a deep path where I just can't control myself. My fingers get a little twitchy and my eye follows. You whisper in my ear like a seduction but instead of sexy little words you say "destruction". You are the love of my life, my will to live, and laugh. If blood is what you want then blood is what you shall have, even if the memories keep me up at night. What did you say, Leon Reid?

What did he ever do to you? Oh, he will pay dearly. Now all I need to figure out is how to do it. I'll do to him what he did to you and what you did to me, but yes I know. I'll invite him to tea, yes, he will come without protest and I will give him a ride. He will make a comment on the decor

then the lack of my wife who he decoiled in my bed. I'll make pleasantries, saying, "yes, I miss her dearly" but you're right beside me laughing. I'll stroll in and say, "help me" I mean, haha, "Come help me, in the kitchen" of course. Not even my thoughts are safe.., from your love my dearest Diana. In the kitchen, I showed him the sink he was supposed to have been fixing while twirling you around his finger, isn't draining because of the dead rat I shoved down there. While he takes a look beneath I just happen to drop a knife on his leg down hard, oopsies.

His blood trickles down from the knife as the crimson liquid splashes on the white tile, and I get sick to my stomach as I realize the weight of my guilt.., I mean as I realize I need to finish the job for you my love. Diana, my dear Diana, my love, yes for you. Then, uh, I knock him out with a frying pan. Now that I have him passed out I can truly make him pay, you like that right? Of course you do, what will I do? I will, uh, take the silver knife and bring it to his shirtless chest and carve a heart right where his heart would be. I will then stab in pulling the muscle as blood squirts out of his chest. A drop lands on my fresh face and I feel disgusted. It's like the time you and I were walking and I fell into the mud and you just laughed at me, I felt disgusted. Then you helped me out and wiped the mud from my face. I love you, Diana. You're right, next I would pull back the muscle and meat revealing his beating heart.

I would cut each vein like the strings of a harp then move to the arteries wiping the blood from my forehead. I will hold his warm heart in my hand as I squeeze it like a sponge, as you did to me when you slept with him, Diana! When you tore out my heart and squeezed it! When you let all the love leave my body when you already had all of mine but I never had all of you! You stood among my lifeless heartless body and still ask of me. To make these men feel what I felt to make them feel the heartbreak, make them feel the pain, but you are the only one I want to make scream. You're the only one I want to scream my name, Diana, my Diana, But you have never really been mine and I will always love you for that.

Goodbye

I felt the breeze the best that day, stood at the edge of the sky, taking it all in, the sun had almost set. The clouds laid across the field of yellow, while the purple of night chased and sunk into it, like a hook into an unsuspecting fish, stolen. I watched my feet as they said goodbye to the bricks beneath them then all I could see was the living sky. The stars sang long after I had hit ground.

Edge of the Sky

She stood from the edge of a cloud. Peering over the town filled with people she could never meet. They spent time watching her clouds roll past, her shapes covered the sky. In summer they loved her but when winter came they would make her cry. As her fluffy clouds turned grey and heavy she fell asleep, till spring came again. She cried over the grass and flowers, on crowds and birthday parties, all the same. Lemora loved her duty, even when people yelled for her to go away, because when drought came they always begged for her to stay. She wished to speak and yell at them back but her voice was but wind on their human ears. Every rainy night she sang her beautiful song. She sang about the single human she loved and sang:

My love I know you hear me
As you fall asleep
I will wait for you eternally
If you will only do the same
You don't remember me
But your heart surely will
I know you don't mean to hurt me
When you kiss another girl
Never mind that my love
It is time for sleep
I will serenade you till the end of time
Even if you don't remember you are mine

Her cries caused thunderous roars across the town where her love lied awake, dreaming of something supported by fate. He did not know that he had the best love in his life just 2000 years before. He was the first of the souls to be chosen to go down to earth and inhabit a body. His name was Adion god of Earth's sky in training. She was Lemora, Goddess of Earth's clouds in training. Adion was one of the most promising in his class but he was enthralled by the garden of Eden. The grass and the fruit, when Mother nature called upon him he begged Lemora to come with him as his Nora. Lemora, who had been so in love with Adion agreed. He lifted her up and spun her around till she giggled so hard it echoed like thunder in his eyes. It sent ripples through his meadow iris but before they were ready it was swallowed by his pupils. Mother nature swooped in and told Adion that Evania will be going down to earth with him to be his eve. Adam pleaded to Mother nature begging for Lemora to come with him instead, but to no avail. Mother nature dismissed him and left as swiftly as she came. Like a storm she left the floor soaking wet. The tears of Lemora and Adam rolled like a winter rain that night, although there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Three days went by and Lemora refused to make clouds before Adam Left, bright skies everyday till he was gone. On the last night

Adam took a small trip without telling Lemora. He slipped away to talk to Stemitia the Goddess of Jupiter's Clouds while Lemora waited for him on the beach. He convinced her to land on earth and help create a small surprise for Lemora before he left her. Lemora worried the whole time he was away, she tried to make sand castle but cried. Then right before sunset Adam came running down to the beach. He had a picnic basket in his hand and a big goofy grin on his face. He apologized and pulled out food from the basket, glancing up at the sky every couple of seconds. As he handed Lemora an Orange soda, the sun began to set. The scooted together but Lemora became confused as clouds appeared, she wasn't doing it and was convinced the day was ruined. Adam held her tightly and told her to just watch and enjoy. The clouds looked like those on Jupiter, showing grand pink zones with dark purple belts and the sun peeking from the middle as it set. The most beautiful Sky that ever existed on Earth and it was all for the love of Lemora. The only issue was that the clouds were composed largely of ammonia and killed the few dinosaurs that were left from the landing of Stemitia. After that night Adam left to the garden of Eden creating a life with Evania. It was hard for Adam at first but Mother nature removed his memory. He could still feel that something was missing but he'd never remember Lemora. She will always remember him while she sings the age old song, as the goddess of Earth's Clouds:

My love I know you hear me
As you fall asleep
I will wait for you eternally
If you will only do the same
You don't remember me
But your heart surely will
I know you don't mean to hurt me
When you kiss another girl
Never mind that my love
It is time for sleep
I will serenade you till the end of time
Even if you don't remember you are mine

Cups

I like to internalize
Fill the bottles up
Mine are three times the size
Of your stress cups
I almost enjoy filling them up
Collecting these creatures in jars
Just to Shake them up
Make them fluorescent green or yellow
Then let them loose at night
The death that's in their eyes
Is the scariest thing I have ever seen in my life
But you must admit
They make some beautiful art
They track their anger and sadness amongst the page
Fill my body as I cross the stage
It's almost a light show when they fill my voice with pain
How come a paper is more beautiful
When there is blood splattered on the face
A scene is more powerful when you die
A poem is sweeter when you cry
They only wear a tie to your funeral
They read your poetry like a testament to your mind
But it's only the pain and beauty left behind
I wish my poems were sweeter and more kind
But I have yet to feel the love it takes
To capture Cupid for a change
I will catch all the gremlins and insects that plague my mind at night
So I may enjoy Cupid for the moments he flies by

Today

I have finally seen you today
I have seen you be kind
I have seen you walk away and
I have seen you be blind

I have given you a chance
But I don't know what to believe
Because life isn't all you see
And I've heard much worse today

I have heard "one plus one is two"
I have heard you say "goodbye"
I have heard you say "I love you" and
I have heard you say "I lied"

I have given you a chance but I don't know what to believe
Because life isn't all you hear
And i've felt much worse today

I have felt your warm embrace
I have felt your loving kiss
I have felt your growing haste and
I have felt the knife you jammed into my chest

I have given you a chance
But I don't know what to believe
Because life isn't all you've felt
And i've dreamt much worse today

I only dreamt of you once
But as I lay awake in pain
I have given you my last chance
I have finally seen you today

Fireflies

You are a firefly in my life
A glimmer in the sky
Like a shooting star as you soar by
A tiny source of light in a large world
You are the one i'm focusing on
But I have jars of dead fireflies

When I decided to jar your light
I shortened your beautiful life
You glow brightly as I shake the jar gently
Your light bounces off the glass walls
The shadows dance like you're putting on a show just for me
I could watch all night

I'm sorry little firefly
I didn't mean to clip your wings
Mama said it was all a game
Whoever catches more fireflies wins
I know you're not the only firefly
But you should be treated like you are

Now I just watch fireflies go by
Trailing across the night
The sparkle when you cross a ripple
Is far more beautiful than when you were in a jar
So I gave all my jars back to mama because
Sometimes mama doesn't know best

Starry Nights

The wind blows and stars still glow
Between phone calls
The hammock swings alone in the star light
As a buzzing shakes the table

Tears glisten as the owl's hoo
Drowns sorrowful sounds
Leaves fall with every weep
The bear sleeps with every scream and
The squirrel hide their nuts underground

Pain frosts the air
Winter is coming
But I'm not ready to feel it

A Haiku

Sebastian sucks butt
because he ate my mcdonalds
This morning frick you (not worth the comma)

Sophia Maurer

The View From Up High

Step after step to see the grand view,
Determined to get to the top,

I begin counting steps but stop,
momentarily bored with the numbers game.
I make an excuse and say “let’s look around”,
but secretly I’m letting my heart pound.

My breath eases up, I’m ready to go up.
Up, some more.
Stair after stair after stair.

Am I halfway, maybe more, I think I can see the top.
I notice the rhythm of the steps.
Ten short, one long, a flat pause,
repeating a rhythm again and again,

I place my hand on the metal rail,
the cold, a shock to my hand.
I wake with vigor realizing I’m nearly there.
The last steps I conquer with ease.

One more step, now I’m there!
I look at the view, with a smile on my face.

I realize that the journey was as great as the view.

The Rock

The rock watched the
sunset over
and over for thousands of years
watching the seasons change
watching trees grow and die.
Watching animals walk around.
Watching the environment change.
Things started to change
when these peculiar animals came around.
Building tall buildings cutting down big trees.
The rock never thought anything would happen to it.
That was until he was chucked into the ocean,
where parts of him began to wash off.
He saw the ocean change and animals disappear.
He too would become a spec of sand.

The Never-Ending Day

I shut it down.
My Computer is off.
I'm done for the day,
What more can I say?

The bright yellow light is still on,
On my oh so messy desk.
But honestly,
it's time for me to rest.

I switch the light off,
my vision is lost.
The sliver of the light,
from under my door reminds me,
that the day is not done once more.

I need to brush my teeth, and
What about my test?
Oh no!
It looks like I can never rest.

The Birds They Go

Traveling south they go far away
from where the sun doesn't show.
Far in the distance, they go.
I see them up there moving in flocks.
Farther and farther they go,
feathers flap down to land
and it blends so seamlessly with their tans.
they stop hardly ever, only to rest in the fields
watching the sun give a watery smile.
They squawk and fluff their feathers.
Soon they will return north.
Where the sun shines brightest is where birds are.

The Mosquito

The moon shines from behind
those grey clouds
playing a game of
hide and seek.

The clouds move along,
the moon shines ever brighter
With the stars.

The silhouette of
the mountains
surrounds the town
with its little lights on
as if it were a gingerbread house.

The stars and twinkle
saying goodnight.

In my tent, I am awoken
to the sound of a mosquito,
he buzzes around
as if to give me a warning
of what is to come.

I try to forget it,
but the buzzing persists.

I get up. The battle
Has commenced
who will win the battle,
the mosquito or the human?
one to survive and
one to not suffer the itch.

I aim for the target,
with a SPLAT he's gone.

I drift back to sleep
under those glittering stars.

Two Worlds

Three... two... one!
I launch myself with one giant leap.

Is this really happening?
Is this zero gravity?

The wind is loud, the water is far.
What feels like long ago.

Hyperspeed.

The whisper of the wind.
The secrets of the universe, unlocked.

Will I regret my options here?
My landing is coming oh so near.

What was I thinking? Was this worth it?
To be in cold water? And what about the rocks?

So many thoughts in such little time.

My stomach twists.
Is the solar system out of whack?
The blue water comes ever closer.

Then sploosh!

Frigid bubble underworld.

The Tale Of The Bird

Long ago, when I was young, there lived a king by the name of Henry, the bird king, and a Henrieta, the bird Queen, but there was, of course, a human king and Queen that lived very close to the Bird royals. When I was young, Henry king, the bird in charge of all birds that loved us all and treated us fairly. Well, he wanted to travel somewhere far away from the castle because that was where his parents had died. This desire that the king had is an essential fact that changed my life forever. Now the old king always wanted a son but always got hens instead of roosters. So when the firstborn princess named Speckle married a Rooster named Lolo, who was a wild rooster that came from nothing to eventually a royal. He had dark eyes and pompous strut. Upon reflection, birds say clues were there all along, but his charm blinded us all. Now you're most likely pondering what did Lolo do to make almost every sane bird hate him. I remember that day so vividly.

Everything changed for all the birds of our land; everybody's story starts the same. It was a beautiful spring afternoon some 87 years ago. I was young and unruly, I must admit. I was always getting into trouble and being loud and fluttering around to relieve myself of energy. I loved my family so much. We were a big flock and celebrated birthdays and holidays with seeds and all the delicious food we could find. My family was my universe; they were funny, kind, supportive of my dreams. The one thing my family always looked up to (as did the whole town) was the royals that we admired and deeply respected. If the King and Queen thought or acted a certain way, all must do there ways. The king was jovial and taught us to be respectful through his actions.

Nonetheless, every bird knew that Henry had a desire to leave the castle to visit his parents grave. However, everyone knew that if you are a royal, you cannot go past the shore of the ocean. I know you might be wondering what caused the king's parents to die. Well, many royals back Royals were allowed to travel around the world. That was until the fatal accident occurred to King Henry's Parents. Birds say the Royals were tired and decided to relax on a rock, not noticing, a big wave snuck up on them and took their life away with one swift pull. The king tried to save himself but was failing to breathe; he commanded one thing, never to let any other royal leave the shoreline of the country.

Now for many years, Henry the King didn't dare leave the castle itself. It took a few years to adjust to life as a King. Henry soon enough grew restless. My parents say he would be seen on sunny days pacing the courtyard over and over his feathers, all misplaced, and his eyes were dark holes with no end in sight. My parents said he was lonely and sad. Because

of the pain, King Henry felt he left the castle for a year. He traveled around the country and came back with a hen named Henrietta. The hen had shiny black feathers, eyes that were a turquoise color, and perfectly groomed nails. He said to all of the kingdoms that he was going to marry her. Hens and Roosters noticed the change in the king's eyes. They were no longer dark endless holes, but there was a brightness that shone through his eyes. He soon enough had a kid named Speckle. (Still long before I was born). Birds saw the little hen grow up along with her four sisters. When I was born, King Henry was still in his reign of power. For he was always hosting new parties and helping out the poor. However, it was widely known that the king wanted a son and was only given daughters. So, when his first daughter Speckle was going to marry The rooster named Lolo, who had greasy old brown feathers with a scratch on his cornea. Not to mention nails that were groomed to be an extra-pointy(like a knife). The king didn't notice these signs that showed for he was now a lot older, and the spring in his step was lacking. His eyes still shone, but there was a dimness to them. As for Henrietta, who was a lot younger, she was even starting to have white hairs in her once dark as the night sky feathers. When Lolo married Speckle, he was kind and inspiring, many thought he would be a great new king. So, soon enough, a year after the two had been married, King Henry stepped down from his power. I remember this day, so clearly, my whole entire family had gone to the ceremony.

King Henry stood there a smile his face as he announced to the whole kingdom of birds: "I am stepping down from being king, my son in law whom I trust with all my heart will be taking over the role of king, along with my daughter Speckle."

He said those words and signed a few documents, and sure enough, Lolo was now king. The ceremony ended, and Lolo said he would do his best to make this kingdom better, he rambled on about coming to form poverty, and now he was king. The day lingered on, and my family decided to go back to our nests and enjoyed our time eating nuts and talking about the changes in the kingdom. As well as what would happen and where our former king was going. We didn't find out until a few weeks later when the king announced he was leaving the country and going to travel to the place where his dad had grown up and eventually further.

We went to bed, pondering what would happen with the Royals. I woke up early to help prepare for the party for a few hours. Nonetheless, I was soon sitting down with my entire family enjoying seeds and worms celebrating my brother's birthday. Aunts and uncles were there wanting to see how the first day of Lolo being King would go. I was still young and had a lot of energy to spare. My parents decided to let me go outside to relieve myself of energy, so I flew out, I saw a tree that was the tallest. I was a determined bird, so I decided to fly to the top of the tree to see If I could see the castle.

As I was flying towards the top, a bird called out, ‘‘the king, killing us, families, fly fast hurry.’’

I was befuddled beyond belief but scared, so I decided to head back home and tell my dad what I had heard. As I recounted my story, my dad’s face began to slip.

‘‘We must go now hurry, or we will die, the new king must not be right in the head.’’ my dad said.

However, he tried to warn the crowd, but the music was too loud, and he soon lost his voice, and no one believed me after all of the jokes I had played. So my dad stood there, trying to warn my big family, but no one listened. They were flying around dancing and eating. That was until there was a BOOM that shook the entire nest. A siren came along, and a fire was shooting at us. My family decided to fly as fast as they could. We tried and tried, but another BOOM was heard, and soon enough, I felt this great pain on my left-wing, all I remember was falling down into nothingness into an empty hole as if the flames were engulfing me. I could hear screeches and cries as other birds fell to the floor. What felt like moments later, I was awoken to the sound of a rooster, and there he was Lolo. He was standing over my weak body.

‘‘Well, well, well, if it isn’t the only bird that didn’t die, you young bird have some extraordinary power. But I don’t think you’ll be using this power any time soon. Every single one of your family members is dead and not to mention your friends. Now you know how I felt when every single one of my family members died, and birds say I shouldn’t be sorry for myself because I’m a king. I’ve been waiting for years and years to be where I am now, so everyone can feel my pain and know what I’ve gone through. I made sure at least one bird of every family is alive so they can feel the pain I feel.’’

I remember looking into his eyes with disbelief, hoping that this was all just one terrible, terrible nightmare and that I would wake up to hear my mother singing as she was making breakfast. But the reality of my situation washed over me like a wave crashing and breaking me down into nothing so I could feel nothing and be nothing. As the king flew away, I stood in the nest where I could see leaves smoldering. I couldn’t bear to see my dead family members who were in the living room. So I stayed in my room listening to the sound of the wind and watching the sunshine on my father’s burning flesh, my stomach growled and growled. I had no other choice; I had to face my fear of looking at my dead relatives in the living room. I flew along the hallway as the wind whistled early through the pipes. I saw a glimpse of my brother burned, his eyes closed and a look of fear etched on his beak. I saw more bodies of my loved ones, Some of their eyes were opened, and their feathers gone. Only fear was left every single of the birds. I closed their eyes and said good night to them. From that moment,

hatred coursed in my blood as I looked at all the family members who one week ago wore alive thriving and talking to me fluttering right next to me. And now they were gone into another world one wear I couldn't speak to them or laugh with them. I thought to myself, *how could king Lolo do this to me, we have done nothing to him but love him and follow what he says, I have to save others from this, he's locked up even more birds in his jail.*

This is how I became famous, I decided to go against the king, which was outlawed because people were afraid of losing their family members or themselves. But I had already lost all my family members. I felt that I had lost everything and could only gain by trying to save other birds' lives. So I flew with purpose East, which was where the castle was located. I flew higher than the tree only to see more fires far off in the distance. Screams broke the stillness in the air. To many, this could have scared them off, but for me, it gave me strength for doing this. Soon enough, the castle was getting closer, but the day was already almost gone. So I decided to get some rest in a different home that was not a bird. That's when I found Mr. Pober, he as a tortuous, I watched him sitting on a rock alone.

I called out to him, "Can I stay with you, my family was killed, and I'm off to kill the king."

"Now, little chap doesn't ever start with saying you want to kill someone, let alone the king he will kill everyone you care about," he said.

"Were you not listening, my family has just died, I don't care about living. I only want to help more birds. King Lolo only wants to kill and to rip families apart. So that others can feel what he felt when he was a kid, he's twisted, now is the time to take over the king," I said.

"Son, I hear what You are saying, and I'm sorry for what has happened to your family, but we must not kill the king, then you would always be seen as an equal. You must strive higher and be better than the king ways, for his ways yes are twisted, but I'm sure you don't want to be known as a killer," Mr. Pober said.

"Don't you see what I've been saying? He's killed hundreds of families, killing them all, I have no one to talk to anymore. I have to save the innocent that are locked up, all I need is a place to rest, not someone who will try to get me to not kill someone who is pure evil," I said.

"There are many ways to save the innocent, I will help you, we can get up early tomorrow and work out a plan," said Mr. Pober.

"Oh, alright" I said.

I remember that night went by very quickly because the next thing I knew,

I was woken up by the sound of Mr. Pober. He said it was time for me to get up to develop a plan. Many hours later, we developed the plan. We took action when the night breeze ruffled my feathers. Mr. Pober glanced at me with a look that said it was time for us to take this idea and make it a reality. The stars twinkled down at me encouragingly, and I flew into the night air, wasting time for Mr. Pober's slow trot to catch up to me. I didn't realize how slow he was, it annoyed me so much that the night seemed to go on forever, a simple twenty-mile destination took all night. We decided to stay in the woods that was right next to the castle. We slept for only a couple of hours, I woke up at dawn only to see Mr. Pober sleeping soundly. I decided to wake him up. We got started on our plan, my bravery fluttered in my heart; it was now or never. The plan that we had developed a day ago seemed so foolish. But there was no time to change it. I had a good eye, and I could see the guards flying around all over the castle. I decided to fly really fast so that they couldn't see me and Mr. Pober would distract the guards. Mr. Pober looked at me with determination and said to me.

"I will first wait thirty seconds or until the guards notice me. Then go as fast as you can. try to steal a key from a guard, to save the innocent from the prison."

I could see him moving with grace and steadiness without any fear of what may happen. Bird guards started to notice, and they began to fly towards Mr. Pober. I knew this was my only chance to save myself and the innocent. I counted 3, 2, 1, and whoosh I was off before any bird could even blink. I had made it in the castle. I flew around looking for a sleepy or distracted guard. I knew the king was coming. I got to where the prison was, and a guard was distracted by the noises from outside Mr. Pober. I could see what looked like the king flying. I knew it was now, or never. I grabbed the keys and unlocked the prison as if in slow-motion the birds flew out of jail. I could see the king flying closer and closer to me, his talons ready to strike, to kill. He was coming nearer and nearer. Then a look of fear etched on his face. He tried to stop for the glass window. He hit the glass window with such velocity that he died in that instant. A cheer broke out, birds shouted and screamed "the king is gone, we will live."

I went outside to see Mr. Pober injured but alive, tears in his eyes he said, "I am so proud of you son, I told you the Earth will kill those who do wrong in the end. This country needs healing, but we will survive and get through this together."

Well, I'm pleased to tell you that the country is healing from the loss that happened 87 years ago. Now, as for kings well, it was just Queen Speckle. She never married again but helped out the kingdom through this terrible time. The world is now a lot better; it will never be the way it was before this heinous crime. Still, it is thriving differently, now that's all I will share for today.

Tyler Mcminn

Wilted Flowers

You.. are the rotten patch in the Daisy Fields
I'll never forget the withering decay you Made Me Feel
A vile taste concocting a Sour Phlegm
Clenched between the jaws of a skull are the Flower Stems,
A beautiful gift... the Bite Of Death
As rosebush thorns unwind Inside Your Flesh,
Strangled by the Hand Of Silence..
You're nothing by stomped Dandelion,
I'll cherish the moment you whimpered "Is Something...
Is Something Wrong?"
And break your fingers one by one singing
She Loves Me, She Loves Me Not.
That's when the scary thoughts in my Violent Mind Hit,
Staring at the gravestones surrounded in Violet Lilacs...
Bones coil like vines, Stopping The Raspy Shrills
Rotting, I'm Laughing Still
And the Popping & Cracking Builds the Poppies & Daffodils...
I shouldn't have grown with you, we Blossomed Hatred
Evil tongues and black tendrils picked from our Complications
Sprouting from a Monstrous Vase With a mouth that Swallows Faces,
Now the sunflowers cry as a New Night Begins
I only see the beauty in your eyes reflecting Blue Irises...
Wealth can boil your innards until the Guts Flake,
You wanted to marry gold... now there's Marigold Blood Stains
Red flowers fertilized from the open chests of Corpses
I didn't want a happy future with you ... Orkids
I tried to spoil you rotten like the Soil You Walk In
But Gargoyles Were Watchin as it Roiled To Nonsense,
You were a devil in thorns, floral Spawn Within Our Hatred
But I gave the seeds to something Demonic In Carnations ...

Glass Box

In this glass box around the pen, plastered with caution signs...
Fingernails and teeth were lost trying to enter,
with scratches and claws and bites..
The same pen that destroyed him with jealousy and toyed with his legacy
Until he foiled from the coils of melodies boiled from it's poisonous
recipe...
On the floor next to it, a blood splattered gas mask
Rifle cartridges, gunpowder, and torn suits of hazmat..
Wars were fought, seeking this instrument of ink
With the density measured in increments of screams,
Raining bombs as lyrics shriek when seeking cover,
In this box these claustrophobic words eat each other...
The ravenous characters he scripts made his soul
In this glass box that he nicknamed the skull...

Luminescent

The machete lays stuck in the ground of a red Savanna Field
A dark sky with clouds like the brown bruises of Banana Peels
Slightly off-road, the white pickup truck scarred by Patches Of Rust,
Under a flash of blue lightning exposing the wet crevices in the African
Mud
Hours pass... the bold, lunar face of the night has now been Torn In Two
Eclipsed by an acacia tree, splitting and leaving cracks in the Orange Moon

Gallows

An eviscerating wind cuts around the branches of the Alder's Peril
Followed by snapping twigs and the clicking spin of a Revolver Barrel...
Rustling ground of leaves under a Falcon Squeak
As plummeting Malice Leaks from the Talons Squeezed...
The sweat soaked man could not escape the Whistle, His Soul Was Pulled
Out of his back that told me jokes for it was Riddled With Bullet Holes...
Now a wanted man, walking a dark road Vile & Lonely
A man who's accepted his pending punishment with the Wild Coyotes

Travelling away, yet with my Shadow Estranged
I know the ropes of death, for the Gallows Await

Being chased by sheriff's stars under the moon is Simply Awful
Mistaking the sun's shine for golden liquor in my Whiskey Bottle...
It's hard to play my cards right when my hands are Hell Shuffled
Red trickling down my fingers adjusting my Belt Buckle...
I walked amongst the hazy fields where Cattle Graze Endless
Under the sun with boiling blood singeing my veins like Rattlesnake
Venom,
I walked the forests of gnarled oaks and nests in Owl Holes
And saw my future in the yellowed bone of a vacant Cow Skull...
I know what is coming, with my knife blade Gleaming In The Sunlight
Sunken eyes, ghostly skin, needing light Reaching To The Glum Sky

Travelling away, yet with my Shadow Estranged
I know the ropes of death, for the Gallows Await

Brushing my fingers on the Insidious Bark Of Willows
I tip my hat to the scorpion, and Oblivious Armadillo
Father, reverend, forgive me for I Have Sinned
The log axe had grown rusty after the Spine It Hit...
A tumbleweed in my core flies until the Cries Begin
The end of an Incognito orchestra of straight razor Violins,
Until the knots are finally bound Around My Neck,
An angry mob surrounds, with Shouts And Threats
And right before they dropped the latch Beneath My Feet
A butterfly lands on my finger under the Beating Heat
Drop.
I smile.

Asylum

Biting at the circling fly, until the Damage Is Clearer
Crying in fear at the smiling Man In The Mirror...

Behind rusted iron doors, forced to Torture Ourselves
The corners of the room... black holes and Portals To Hell
The sin leaking from my tear ducts Soaks Into My Palms
Listening for mama's lullaby, dead still dancer in a Broken Music Box
A patient attempted escape until fists of raindrops Sink In His Flesh,
Lost in the storm, sorrowful angel statues watch him get Beaten To
Death...

No way out... a foul building that is the uvula of a Hungry Forest,
The intestinal corridors spill outwards like a maze formed from Gutting
Horses /
The rolling hills still cold under a blanket of Flurried Pines
Vacuuming this sanitorium beneath a Worried Sky...

It silences my calls like the birds that drowned in the Courtyard Fountain
Squealing in the chaos until the Horde's March Pounces...

My ears tune in to the crackling Fire And Ember Mist above a Pyre Of
Severed Limbs
But the grisly pops are drowned out by an insanity Choir Of Pressured
Hymns...

My chest jerks at the magma chambers of my heart like Defibrillator
Currents
As I watch a nurse swing open her innocence with the latch of the
Incinerator Furnace /
Flipping out... health lectures pushed my buttons, the kill switch, and the
Kill Throttle
The word live reflected backwards in the glare of an orange Pill Bottle,
Hope is a contradiction, therefore I Hate Madness
Hypocrisy is all these crooked spines jutting out of Straight Jackets,
Scared to blink, scared to stare... I have Shivering Eyes
As their facial expressions change in the shifts of Flickering Lights...

Wrinkly charcoal hands caress my head at night, Descending My Dreams
Hallways infested with knives, ropes, pills... euthenasia Vending Machines
Banging heads and stomping footsteps Surrounding Me
Screams drown the laughter... then laughter Drowns The Screams /
Lost In A Maze, clogging my veins with Festered Sores

Pawns in a game wandering shame on a Checkered Floor...

I don't feel right, holding flimsy trays of slop for pigs in our Cafeteria
They say it's meal time... but my gut is altered by the Rat Bacteria
I walk normal in the walkways of the crazy like a Psychopath
The endless roads suck me in and I refuse to Fight It Back...

Gods sway and swing in the ancient Gallows Awfully
Distracted in group therapy sessions because my Shadow Talks To Me,
I see above, gnarled tubes and a constellation of pipes Draped In
Emptiness
The stench of the hospital void rests on my tongue, and Tastes Insidious...

In school they called it thinking caps... Funny how what they Said
Compares
After forcibly gaining shocking Ideas sparked on the Electric Chair
Harnessing the plasma in my blood with a Wretched Snare...

Feathered Devil

A bird flew into the window, and startled an old man. His granddaughter laughed at his uncontrollable shaking, not knowing anything about parkinsons or seizures. A twitching wrinkled face, quivering into the newspaper on the table, lifeless. He died under the seemingly innocent giggles of the little seven year old, which stuck with her forever. Every time she hears a thud on the window, tears trickling fail to drown out the broken songs from broken beaks. Guilt, frustration, anger, and sorrow.

March 12, 2020

Chrysalis

The gypsy moths hovering around the lantern in my Core Tighten,
As their wing scales glimmer like teeth in a yawning Bored Lion...
A lead crown ruling a corrupt grass kingdom of Monarch Butterflies,
The ones in my stomach, the ones in the valley's Long Dark Underside...
A giant's constellated thoughts make Agony Shine as it Scratches The
Light
And It's florid crystalline shoulders roll Backwards In Time...
Coffin and cocoon, my metamorphosis it's Sepulchre Keeps
Impending death, the celestial caterpillar inches up it's dark Nebular String,
I am protected, waiting for the emerald storm to Begin, Eager...
For my chrysalis is the boney armed hug of the Grim Reaper

Locomotive

Rusted iron, smoldering smog and Bubbles Of Arsenic
The chain linked serpent roars through the Tunnels Of Darkness,
A single guiding beam in front, a Cyclopean Eye
The invisible rat scurries ahead of the Cone Of It's Light,
It squeaks and sprints but of course Cannot Go Faster
For the beast catches up, slithering the Horizontal Ladders..
Chugging, chugging, it's prey Shrieks at Death's Embrace
Dinner is served, you have Reached Your Destination.

The Vultures

Awful smells stain the air over sand Scorching And Pale,
Rays of heat sting the Earth like a sun with Scorpion Tails..
Sandstone poking the back of the throat until the Spine Screams
Like trying to carry dehydration, and then Dry Heave,
Imprisoned hearts, ribcages raided by Scarab Beetles
A feeling as sharp as goosebumps sprouting Cactus Needles,
Distant mirages in the dust lie to Wilted Sets Of Dreams
Gusts of wind and screeches in the sky, a black Silhouette Of Wings
The sound of fluttering, a Loathsome Defeat
Fallen to the sand, stomach pressed under the Grossest Of Feat,
As the bird stares at its meal and releases a single Croak From Its Beak

Seyra

Isolated to the village, my soul continued to scream at the roiling empty stomachs of my children. Just outside of my door, the blizzards got far worse, and if we migrated we'd freeze on the way. If we stayed, it's likely we would run out of food to survive on. It wasn't always snowing harshly, but it came in such intervals that trying to escape into the city just two days away would still mean certain death. And yet, the fireplace crackled and roared with ease, a daunting reminder that we have enough wood for warmth but not enough food to warm our frostbitten guts and broken hearts. I tell my kids, Njal and Revna, that they are not allowed to leave the house. I tell them that their lives will go back to the way they used to be once everything clears up. I lie to their faces to ignite a spark of hope, of *false* hope. They wonder what feelings our neighbors are having, how the rest of the village is taking the situation, and I tell them not to worry.

After a week, all unanswered prayers to Odin torment the faithful. One family of five, three kids and the parents, tried to leave the village in hopes of seeking solace. Most of us don't know whether to believe they made it, or died trying, but I *know* they could not survive. The forest around us swayed in the blistering winds, capturing nearly all wildlife in frost and ice, pausing any decomposition. I saw it for myself, when one morning I scouted the woodland to hunt, but found only firewood, berries, and carcasses. I witnessed one man so hungry, he was knelt over a half-frozen deer, eating the corpse raw with his bare hands. He would later return to the village with so much blood on his beard and face that it attracted flies. Those flies soon disappeared when it became too cold for them to live, and that man could not wash his face because our wells were now empty and the river was frighteningly cold. He'd itch and scratch, he'd beg for the stench of deer to be eradicated but was met only with insanity. Most of us went mad in the following days. A mother killed herself and her baby in fear of starvation, and a blacksmith left the village much like the other family, who was probably granted the same fate. I thought maybe this was punishment by the Gods, or a test, but I didn't know why.

With my sword and shield, I had to protect my kids from that bloody bearded man, who'd gone maniacally insane. He claimed he wanted our organs, and yelled into my face about the guidance of Hel, and as he gripped my shoulders I could smell the putridness in his breath. I killed him, forcing my sword in with one stab. My children cried behind their fingers in the corner, and became afraid of me. That night, even with the raging fire making the room glow orange I felt like the flames never penetrated the sheet of ice and darkness around my skin. That man didn't get a proper burial, only a toss in the snow after I dragged him out there myself. This wasn't the only violence, the whole village had begun to turn

on each other. My great friend Arne who lived a few houses down was the only one I thought I could trust, and I wasn't even sure if he'd still trusted me either. He lived with his wife who was one of the only people who could put a smile on the faces of my children. Curiosity of how they were holding up, and pressure from how many times Njal and Revna asked about it, eventually led me to check it out. When I got there, I was horrified. I didn't knock, as I was unsure if they were alive due to the blood stains on the porch. I saw Arne and his wife feasting on the bloody-bearded man that I killed. I didn't leave him too far out in the woods, but... cannibalism?. I slammed the door shut quickly and hobbled back through the snow to my cabin confinement as fast as I could, realizing we were on our own now. I thought they were coming after me to kill me which boosted my adrenaline to return to my kids. They already lost a mother at the birth of Revna, I couldn't let them lose me. When I barged back into the house, I huddled them into my arms by the fire. "Daddy, is Arne and Siv okay?," asked Njal. I only shook my head, for I was at a loss of words of how to explain to them what I saw. Arne and his wife Siv never came after us, but that night Revna said she heard a scream and glass breaking from outside. I began to go a little mad, myself.

I didn't know whether to board the house up for defense or to ravage another for food. All we had were berries and figs and even those began getting more and more scarce. We were starving, just like everyone else... with the exception of Arne and Siv. My children were going to die if I didn't do something soon, and each day the blizzards got worse and worse. They were already afraid of me, they'd seen me kill a man in front of them. They'd see what the man looked like, too. How horrifying the blood made him look. They wouldn't know who to trust, the crazy man or the killer. That night, our cabin got snowed in, with no way to open the door. It was dead quiet, no voices from other houses, only the wind. At this point my kids were skin and bone. I had no choice. A single tear ran down my cheek, as I fed them my fireplace-seared flesh. They would survive.

March 20th - April 2nd, 2020.

The Blood Of Izu

Laying my swollen eyes onto the ghost ship, I saw the coastline quake at the anomaly's roars. They'd tried to keep him buried, keep him underground. Rise. Rise, colossus, rise. Most will run, most will cry, I will not. With salty waves of crashing seafoam and riptide, what stood before me now was marvelous. Ethereal, horrifying, and unyielding. I placed my knife to my throat, and with a red waterfall going down my chest I gave our savior a proper welcome.

March 11, 2020

In The Mafia, It's Every Man For Himself

Matteo's bloody fingers put his cigar out in the ashtray. "Danny's... dead," he said. After telling the waiter to come back later, Vin leaned toward Matteo. "Do you know what this means, kid? You put our entire business at risk. They'll be all over us when they trace you to me." Matteo knew what had to be done, and was prepared. Vin gripped his gun under his coat, but was too late. Bang. Matteo caught the first bus out of Brooklyn.

March 10, 2020

Jungle Music

When Makayla began her expedition of stopping jungle deforestation, she never thought she'd see a head on a stick, or a naked body be burnt alive. She'd been a musician, whilst studying the vicious cultures of tribal life in Myanmar. Makayla changed, when they ate her friends in front of her. An orchestra of screams played by tongues and stone knives. She enjoyed it. Becoming the new tribe leader, she was the drummer in her band of bone shattering and bludgeoning.

March 12, 2020

Jonathan Pacheco

Virus

They treat it like Y2K, even if it's threatening. Why bring more pain to yourself with fear. Why bring more suffering to yourself with panic, Will it kill you or will you kill yourself. The threat is not just the sickness but ourselves as a whole. Nothing can stop us if we continue to let it get into our heads. I know most of this is contained and everything is gone, But what do we have left if let this get into our minds. We can blame the media for its excessive use of making it look comparable to a nuclear bomb. So let comedy be a temporary cure, let time with family be a temporary cure, let life itself strike you down with the power of a holy god and give the strength to combat the threat that is the Virus. For we as a people should fear nothing except the fear of ourselves. The cure will come and when it does we will be free. And our children of the future can and will be immune.

Buds

The earbud, it talks about how the world can be separated when you put them on. How it is like how someone talks to his wife but she pretends to listen. As for you would hum or nod to your friends words even though you are not listening. A similar thing is the line "I touch your arm to show you the tornado or the polar bear." It is used to say that no one would really care about something dangerous or something that is cute and cuddly. While she would overdose on pills and would forget about what happened to her since all she does is wear earbuds and not give a crap about anything.

∞ Infinity

It's normal for a majority to hope that Crimson's sun can lead the walking miles of dread into hands of opportunity. Even darkness that is somber is the perfect image of a figure in a reflection taking more punishment. Midday to midnight, Atop of and below the morning, Unleashed one by one, they all quietly fall. Brave evil within a black hearted hero as seen by the deceived. Was it all missed?, Was there nights with no harm or trouble?, Does the hand holding the ace shake with lies? Who is to be believed but the one with a hollow heart. It's not time for the end but wait. Wait a few more hours, a few days, weeks, months, years,decades and even a millennia. It will all come out to the end and most likely between the flashes of pages. For this is just a chapter out of more.

Ancient History

Born in the kingdom of Megalodonia His father was a soldier in the Helicoprion platoon but died in combat during a snake invasion but managed to survive due to necromancy. His Mother was part of the working class due to having a mutation with 4 arms. His older brother died during the war in battle. Soon he would become a leader and founder of a gang called the SteelJaw Saints but each member has since scattered due to the war. With a kingdom no more, A village no more and the deaths of many. The god of vengeance has blessed thee with power of wrath. For he who has no justice will gain his justice by any means through the pain, agony and pleas for mercy by the ones who have wronged him. His path shalt not be disturbed by anyone who dares to try but if so they shall be a victim of vengeance. His name will never be spoken but I leave an idea of a Shark with a body of a man and arms of four within the mind of you dear reader for the madness is just getting started and trust me when I say this. You don't want to skim, because you will miss a farm boy and his thoughts.

The H

The Courtesy among him to allow others to succeed was only like the past in days for not all men are courteous to many strangers. It is as if the day stood silent when he died where there were no tears but just silence in respect to sacrifice.

As a monster rises then slowly falls with fatigue and rage but keeps going. A magnum is all I have and a single bullet which I just aim, pray, and hope that I will live again.

Life of a Jock

I was a Jock in a place surrounded by crime and chaos, I don't need a special someone even though I am crying. My hobbies include video games and comic books, and enjoying eating pizza more than any other living individual but I do that because I am depressed. I don't understand my life to be brutally honest. It is just really sad and messed up which is just at an end of a joke. Sometimes I could lightly walk away.

Die and Let Live

A tomb rests at one place like a landmark educating the young, reminding the old and becoming nostalgia to the ancients. If we recall history then we remember all the darkness that came first with the light that came last. So live and let die like history has done again and again.

An Infection to Hear

It all started in the morning, the pain sounded like a drum playing an orchestra of Madness. I was just an average store clerk working day in and day out, I don't know what it was about me but I always thought of myself as The Village Idiot. For there have always been times where I was always made fun of by peers or by people I don't even know. It is most likely because I am very stiff while walking and moving and I tend to mispronounce words through my stuttering. I always go home each day, drop off my stuff, go into my study, and look out the window thinking to myself "what is so comical about my imperfections?". but it still hurts, it's as if from time and time again I just need to wake up. I need a drink?, but it's my ear. more into the rabbit hole I go and this isolation I put myself in it's leaning more into madness. The Vicious emotions thrown my way still leaves me puzzled, it was the next day and I went back to my usual job working as a store clerk for Wal-mart. I would be filling up stock for various aisles around the store and Cleaning up any mess that was left on the floor. I would eventually take my lunch break but I would feel ill afterwards. Eventually I would take my leave home but I could hear something laughing at me again. I laughed with it and to my suprise only blood was left on my hands as the store was closed.

The Promo

I remember seeing your face before, Visions were flying as my head was spiked on the mat, my neck was broken and I was told I would never wrestle again. While you just stood there and smiled at my pain and my suffering. But you know that there's a wicked feeling in the air tonight. Can you feel it?, I see the tremble in your eyes. You know that I am a cold cold man. And deep down, in my soul, you can only see nothing but darkness. You fear me, You despise me and You are scared of the reality that you are just like everyone else. Weak, broken and just a shell of what you were once. The obsession with sympathy that you possess has turned an immortal into a mere mortal. And now you're lost. Stuck in limbo, between your world and mine. But I think, I think it's time for you to face the fact that my mission is clear. I know that you can hear me. I know that you are listening. And I want you to know that I am more than anything that you can ever imagine. I am now your pain, your suffering and the ghost of the past that has come for his justice. The blood that will soon run on this steel will be a symbol, a symbol of your own demise. For the master of the death match has come to play. And the game of choice is something I know that you are familiar with. But the Judgements upon you will not be my job to give; only to retrieve. For when a soul like yours escapes the darkness and denies the purity of evil, That's when the time for words ends and time for action begins. I'll be your escort on the one-way trip. You want to know what hell is like? Hell is watching helplessly as your soul is stripped away from you. You are raw from the pain and powerless to stop it. Especially with the difference between light and darkness, for you as the light to win it requires the tireless effort of every good man. For I the darkness to triumph, all that is required is for good men to do nothing. For some people, hell is not a place for sinners to burn after death, for them, hell is each other. When there is no more room in the depths of hell, the dead will walk the earth. During this invasion, the gates of mankind will be stormed by the agents of darkness. It is at this point when certain men will take on an impossible task, to stop the insurrection from beyond the grave. That is when the judgement will be passed down. So declare or let it be declared!. Where within every man is an evil he would like to deny. Everything man has wanted yet lives within his own heart. The most unspeakable horrors lay waiting in every man's soul. The idea that light will somehow always win over darkness is nothing but a rumor. A rumor created by agents of darkness. If a man believed that evil would defeat good, how many men would continue to fight the good fight? Without incentive, there's no passion, no hope. But with that rumored hope, destiny is only delayed for within millennia not all who wander are lost within the multiverse... yet you are me.

Smiley™

A creature is born on halloween within the darkness of the city streets. No name of the mother was found nor the identity of the father, All that was left was a grinning skull mask and a child . It is believed that the mother of this child abandoned the baby on the streets after a chase throughout the city of Neo Cisco, California. We have successfully obtained the child and will bring him to our facility for further study and analysis on what he is or where he comes from as well as the mask. After three years of testing we have concluded that the child is somewhat of an uncanny case. We have never seen a human, Excuse me creature made like this ever in our lives. We have also named this animal Neco and will continue further research on the child. However the mask that was with Neco seems to be of ancient descent but mysteriously cannot be traced back to early human civilization. We will continue searching the databases on any sign of the mask but I am made to believe that this thing or monster is more powerful than anything we could have ever imagined even at the age of 12. But I sense that he might become a danger to this facility, for every employee has been either injured or beaten to near death already by Neco's hands. The behavior is however strange for Neco to have for constant laughter is present after he brings much pain to everyone. We are also witnessing abilities for the first time, Neco has demonstrated feats of unbelievable strength and athletics. He also has ways of blending in with shadows or at least becoming one with shadows through time and has made a way to control shadows as well. The mask however has been reacting very strangely as well, it seems restless to do something but we can't conclude on what it is that it wants. But it seems that it wants Neco. Wait a minute, what is he doing? Neco seems to be interested with what one of our guards is holding but why would Neco be interested in the weapons of the guards?. Wait he is reaching for the weapon, he's reaching for the gun, we must stop him at all costs. I have placed an order to kill Neco on-site and placed the facility on lockdown. I only pray that we will live, but if death is the only option here then I will die for this homeland for I am a scientist and this is a. Well looks like I'm dead

Nia Rich

Shooter

I was the first one shot that day. The bullet missed my heart by a few inches but it might as well have gone through my underdeveloped cerebral cortex. I'd rather be dead than have survived this. I'm sure everyone else in those classrooms would agree.

It took two surgeries and a combined sixteen weeks of recovery to get back to a place where I could go to school. I did, although I didn't want to. I had to change my fourth period class because that was where it happened and I couldn't go back there without having a panic attack.

I have nightmares now. Every time I close my eyes I see that black blur, hear that deafening crack, feel that stabbing, burning sensation in my ribcage. I see the look on his face as I fall, smacking my head against a desk. I passed out, but before I did, I saw everyone staring at me. There were screams. So many screams.

The dark circles under my eyes are a testament to the tragedy I've been through. I've stopped wearing makeup. I don't want to conceal the garden where the flowers of my heartbreak bloom. I'd rather people see the torment that sprouts on my face like a budding forest, like a field of depressingly purple irises. I've heard that dandelions will grow anywhere, so will they take root in the dirt of my exhaustion and bloom? Maybe then I could make a wish to be free of this place and free of my memories.

My therapist says I have PTSD. I'm not surprised. When I woke up on a stretcher with pain spreading from my stomach to my heart to my hips, I didn't yet know what atrocities had occurred. I remember staring at the sky and praying that I was the only victim. I remember staring at the ceiling of the ambulance and listening in vain for other sirens following. I couldn't hear anything over the pounding in my ears.

I remember feeling the tears welling up in my eyes and spilling over. I remember thinking, "my mascara is going to be ruined," I remember focusing on the feeling of the tears trailing down my face, picturing myself with smeared makeup just to get my mind off the agony I was experiencing. I remember making no sound as I wept, wept for my innocence, wept for my health, wept for my classmates, and wept for the shooter. Through all of this, I felt the sorriest for the shooter. What kind of evil poisons a person to try to kill their classmates? No matter how hard I tried, I could not fathom an answer to that question.

I remember looking to my right, seeing an EMT and making eye contact with him. I turned my hand over and motioned to it with my eyes. He understood and held my hand through the stomach-dropping turns of the ambulance ride. Even now, I can't picture his face. I remember his amber eyes and golden hair. It was curly and bounced with the bumps of the road. But I can't remember

the spacing in his eyes, the curves of his nose or the color of his lips. I couldn't quite make out his features through the tears, but he looked kind. He seemed kind. But, after I blacked out and woke up in the hospital, thankfully numb. My parents were there. I tried to talk, but could only let out a tiny whisper, "where is he?" They assumed I was talking about the shooter. They said, "He killed himself." I didn't understand. I cried. They didn't understand.

My first day out of the hospital was two weeks after the shooting. I was assigned two weeks of bed rest. I found myself lying in bed, staring at my surgical scars and wondering how vivid they'd be when I got back to school. Nobody would see them, though. They were on my rib, under my left breast. Nobody would see them. Nobody should or could see them. They were hideous. I was hideous.

The day I started self-harming was normal to begin with. I woke up, on my last day of bed rest, and stared at the ceiling. I had woken from a nightmare, this time I hadn't passed out when I was shot, but I stayed alive and watched the carnage. I saw him shoot my teacher, my classmates, my best friend. Then, he saw me, with my eyes open, and held the barrel to my head. I heard a bang, and then I woke up. I stared at the ceiling, wishing this had actually happened. I wondered if it had. Maybe I had died and gone to hell. Honestly, it wouldn't be much different.

I ate oatmeal for breakfast. It tasted like sawdust and fear. I told my mom, "I can go back to school tomorrow." I wouldn't. I was wrong, but I didn't know that yet, I didn't know that they had missed a piece of shrapnel that would cause internal bleeding that afternoon. After breakfast, I locked myself in my room and plugged in my headphones. I tried to listen to happy music, tried to make myself smile for the first time in weeks. It didn't work. In every beat of the music, I heard gunshots. Flashbacks took me back there again, and again, and again. I didn't know what to do.

I ran into the bathroom. Maybe I should take a shower. Maybe that would help. But before I could, I saw the box of razors in the medicine cabinet. My mind took over, pushing my logic to the side and making my hand work of its own accord. I picked the box up and opened it. Three brand new, unused razor blades. My father wouldn't notice if I took one, would he? He was a forgetful person, and had been so immersed in his work since the shooting, he didn't pay attention to much else. I took it out and watched it glint in the bathroom light. It was beautiful.

The first time I held it against my skin, I felt my heart begin to race as I desperately thought, "don't do this." But it was as if a demon had possessed my hand and taken over my body. I swiped it across my arm, hard and fast, hissing. The first bead of blood leaked from the wound and began to spill over, and almost dripped before I held it over the sink. I watched it drip, down the drain, and I actually smiled. It was pretty. Prettier than I had ever been.

I did it again. Before I could take a breath, my entire arm was covered in stinging, dripping cuts. I had sliced up and down my arm, all neat, parallel lines. As I did this, I could not think of the shooter, or my

wounds, or my dead classmates. All I could think of was the pain, and the beautiful, beautiful blood dripping from my arm to the drain. I wanted to start on my other arm, but my father knocked on the door. "I gotta take a shit."

"One second!" I turned on the sink and started to wash the blood down the drain. I sopped up the blood on my arm and washed it. Some of the cuts were still bleeding. I held toilet paper over them and put my sleeve over it, then closed the door. I went back to my room, the blade in my pocket. I looked at it again, this time in a new light. I figured I needed a hiding place for it. I put it in the top drawer of my jewelry box, which looked like a small dresser. My prettiest piece of metal.

I watched Netflix on my phone, but with every word the characters spoke all I heard were the screams of my classmates as I fell to the ground. I heard gunshots in the background noise, and my own crying in the laugh tracks. I hated this. I hated this.

I had a sandwich for lunch. I didn't think while I was eating, I just chewed and swallowed until it was gone. As I was walking up the stairs, I felt a sharp pain in my left rib. I sat down on the step and cradled my side, then pulled my shirt up to take a look. There was a purpling bruise spreading there, but I had no memory of hurting myself. "Mom!" I shouted down the stairs as another sharp jab of pain stabbed me. "Mom, something's wrong!"

We went to the hospital. A doctor immediately diagnosed me with internal bleeding. I was x-rayed, and they found a bullet shard left under my heart. It had pierced something I couldn't pronounce, so I was rushed to the OR. They pumped my stomach to get me empty in time for emergency surgery. Before I went under, I saw my doctor looking at my left arm, his brow furrowing. I didn't have time to worry before I was out.

I'm not sure if you're supposed to dream while under anesthetic, but I did. I remembered a day at school, happy, the day after I got highlights in my hair. Aaron- the shooter's name was Aaron. He came up to me, nervous, his hands in his pockets. He pushed a tuft of hair to the side and gave me a crooked grin. I smiled.

"Hey, Carmen,"

"Hi,"

"I like you hair,"

"Thank you," I laughed. "It was a birthday present.

Sylvia interjected, "Whatever, can you leave us alone? We were having a conversation,"

We weren't

"Oh, sure," Aaron's grin disappeared. He left.

"Why did you do that, we weren't-"

She interrupted me. "Who cares? I was saving you from that freak."

When I woke up, my parents were sitting on my right side,

speaking in hushed voices. I croaked out, “Mom? Dad?”

“Hi, honey, how are you feeling?” My mother grabbed my right hand and squeezed it.

“Pretty numb.” I shrugged.

My father’s phone rang. He said, “I have to take this,” and walked out of the room.

“Honey, your doctor told us something concerning,”

I braced myself. “What is it?”

“He said there were self-harm cuts on your left arm.”

I didn’t say anything.

“Why would you do something like that?”

I looked down.

“Honey, talk to me.”

“It’s nothing, mom.”

“No, it’s not nothing. It’s something, and it’s something important.”

“Seriously mom, I’m fine.”

“But you’re not fine!” Tears welled up in her kind crystal eyes.

“You’re a victim of a shooting, you’ve just had your second surgery, and you’re cutting yourself!” I winced. “It’s not fine.”

I didn’t say anything.

My parents decided to put me in therapy after that. I went to my first session and didn’t want to say a thing. That plan didn’t really work out.

I sat down and stared at the floor. His shoes were blue and black with white laces.

“So, your parents tell me you’re having issues with self-harm.”

And just like that, I broke down. My eyes filled with tears and spilled over, and I put my head in my hands and sobbed. He didn’t say anything.

When I finally stopped my tears enough to speak, I told him everything. I stared at his black and blue shoes and told him about the shooting, about the flashbacks, about how while I was cutting I didn’t have to think about anything. Then I looked up at him. His eyes were the same color as the shooters. I looked at his shoes again.

“I... I don’t know what to say.” his leg shifted. “Do you want to get checked out for antidepressants?”

“Sure.”

I didn’t want to.

He set up a check-up.

I didn’t want it.

I got pills.

I didn’t want them.

I took them.

I didn’t want to.

I started to feel numb. There was no need to cut when I couldn’t think through a cloud of smoke. My head was spinning too much to have

flashbacks or panic attacks. I was nothing. I did nothing. I felt nothing, which meant no fear and no sadness. I was ok.

My friends stopped talking to me. One of them was dead. So was my homeroom teacher. I cried every day, but just to let something out. I sat alone at lunch, behind the math building, and I did not eat. My appetite was blown away that day.

I drank a lot of water. Otherwise, I lose so much weight I'm a skeleton. Eating had become a chore. I was so skinny. I would look at myself in the mirror and I didn't mind withering away. Maybe then I could leave my ever waking nightmare.

The number of funerals I had to attend in the next few weeks was tragic. My best friend, Sylvia- dead. Some people from my classes, dead. A brother and sister even- now their parents were completely alone. So many funerals. I had to wear my black dress to each and every one. After the fourth funeral, I really couldn't cry anymore. I just sat there, surrounded by grief, numb to it at this point. I would stare at the caskets, open or closed depending on how bad the bullet wounds were. There was an open casket for a kid who was shot through his eye. Gruesome.

It would be two and a half weeks until I could sleep again. After the first two weeks, my therapist noticed the dark circles under my eyes. I don't know how, since I never looked into his hazel eyes, but he did. He asked if I wanted a prescription to sleep. I said yes. I agreed with everything he said.

My therapist wanted me to start writing journals. I said I would do it tomorrow, but I didn't. I didn't do it the next day or the day after that or even that week. I came back the next Tuesday with an empty blue journal and my therapist didn't mind. He just told me to tell him out loud. So I did.

The next day I wrote, "Carmen. Hi. How are you?" But crossed that out because talking to myself was weird. I wrote, "Normal today. As blank as ever." I crossed that out too- he didn't need to know that the meds made me blank. So I wrote, "Today will be good. Because today I go back to school and see my friends." I thought, *or what's left of them*. I didn't write that. What was the point of going to school to friends who didn't talk to me anymore? I didn't know. At least I would get out of my stupid little room.

I decided I didn't want to sit alone at lunch anymore. I walked up to my friend Hazel and said, "Hi," She just looked at me. I asked, "How are you doing?"

"Pretty shit," She put down her fork. "How about you?"

"Me too," I said. I sat down. "It's kind of hard not to be, isn't it?"

"I guess," she sighed. "The teachers seem to be trying pretty hard."

"Or what's left of them."

She didn't say anything.

The first time I smoked marijuana I was at a football game. Two friends- no, three, now that I think of it- invited me to ditch the game and go to a park. One of them- the only guy, may I add- had an empty soda bottle. I went with them. The guy poked a hole in the soda can and pulled out a bag with small green nuggets. He asked if I smoked. I said I did. I didn't. But I accepted the makeshift pipe and coughed my lungs out doing it. He smirked at me. I felt strange, as if I was floating above myself. We went into the park and sat on a bench. I was so confused, it was as if time was half as fast. I got a ride home and my mom could tell. She didn't care. She had given up, just as I had.

After that, it was all downhill. I bought my own marijuana, my own joints. I soon got into nicotine and that led to alcohol, and, well, here I am. I'm a pothead alcoholic with a nicotine addiction at the age of 17. Exciting, right?

I walked out of the janitor's closet and popped a piece of gum into my mouth, a dime bag of bud in my back pocket. I needed to rinse my mouth out as soon as possible. James would be leaving that same closet in about 2 minutes, so I needed to make myself scarce.

Doing this for weed wasn't new to me. Since I really felt nothing most of the time, it wasn't much of an issue with me. As long as I got weed I didn't care what I had to do.

I took a swig from my water bottle- not filled with water- and walked out of the school's front door. I didn't care about attending classes at this point- my mom didn't care either. I went to the park across the street and ventured under the bridge- my spot.

I pulled out my bong and lit up.

I did end up showing up to school at lunch, if only for the pizza. I ate. I went to my 5th period, then got tired of school and left between 5th and 6th. I wandered around until school was supposed to be over, waited a while, and walked into my house. My dad wasn't home yet- what a surprise. I grabbed a bag of chips and began making instant ramen.

"Honey, I can make you a sandwich if you're hungry."

"No mom, it's okay, I can make myself something," I turned the stove on and placed down my pot. "Besides, you already do so much."

"I don't mind, really."

"It's okay, I like ramen."

"But it's all you eat anymore!"

"I eat pizza too."

With that, my mom went back into her room and shut the door. Once my ramen was done, so did I. I reached into my closet and pulled out a bottle. I took a swig and turned on my TV.

I remembered father's day when I was 11. It was supposed to be about my dad, but it never turned out that way. We went to a movie and

ice cream, both things I liked more than him. I got rocky road. He got pistachio, which I found disgusting. He'd lick the ice cream into different shapes to make me laugh. I used to love to laugh.

My dad got home around 6:30 like usual. He usually peeked into my room to say hello, but hated the smell of pot so decided to leave me alone.

Before I knew it, Christmas was approaching. My first Christmas without Dad.

Christmas Eve, junior year.

"Mom, can I use your phone?"

I did. As I was about to text someone, I noticed she still had my father's number in her contacts. I opened the text messages. My father had said, "She's my daughter too, Caroline. I want to see her." She said, "No, she doesn't want to see you."

"Mom..."

"Yes?"

"Why does this text say dad wanted to see me?"

"What?"

"You told me-"

"Honey, you don't understand-"

"You *told* me that he didn't want to see me! You *told* me he regretted ever *having* me!"

"It was for the greater good."

"How *dare* you? How dare you keep me from my father! Right before he died?"

"He died because he drank himself to death!"

"And now I'm halfway there, thanks to you!"

I slammed my door.

That was the day I relapsed into self-harm. It lasted a while, but I didn't care. My mother didn't notice, I didn't tell Pete, my therapist, and it eventually stopped when I got to my senior year.

Ever since my father died, my therapist upped my meds. Surprisingly they made me even more numb than before, which I didn't know was possible. I didn't know there were degrees of numbness that I could feel. Right now I'm almost 18, I don't know what I'm going to do with my life or what college I want to go to. Maybe I won't even go to college. Maybe I'll just kill myself. It would be better to die, even without an afterlife, than to stay in the world I'm living in. My mind never thinks straight. Thinking is overrated anyway. When I can string together something coherent it's never good. It's always, *life sucks*, or *I wish I was dead* or *goddamn my scars are ugly*.

Ever since that day, I've felt ugly. My friends look at me like a reminder of that day. My teachers try not to, but I can see in their eyes. They pity me.

I don't want their pity. I want to be seen as myself again, not some symbol of the tragedy that wasn't my fault. Or maybe it was. Maybe it was all of our faults for not stopping the bullying this kid went through. Maybe it's all of our faults for not deciding to sit with him at lunch, or even say hello. But how were we supposed to know that this kid would be pushed to kill his classmates? How were we supposed to know? We are not responsible for anyone else's happiness. We should not blame ourselves. Somehow, I still do.

Sometimes I wonder why I didn't die that day. A few inches up, it would have gone through my heart and I would have died. A few more inches up, he would have shot me through my head and I would have died. Every day I hate the shooter more for not just killing me. I feel guilty that I had to survive and others didn't. I feel guilty that I had to attend their funerals and nobody had to attend mine. It's not fair that I got to survive. It's not fair.

I know one day I'll feel better about all this. One day the guilt will melt away and I will be grateful to have survived. One day I'll get through this cloud of depression and PTSD and live again. But until that day comes, I will suffer alone and in silence. There is no point in spreading negativity by complaining, I guess. There's enough sadness in our community to add to it.

For now, I'll just have to live in pain. For now, I'll just have to live in sadness. My scars will forever be a reminder of what happened on that terrible day, and what our town had to go through because of it. But just because I am a victim of tragedy doesn't mean I have to let it define me. For now, it will consume me, but one day it will just be a memory. I wish that would be someday soon, but I know it won't. I know it will take me a long time to recover from this, and that's not my fault. But until then I will survive and I will come out of this stronger. I know I will.

A Collection Of Poems About Somebody Who is Hard to Love

I feel his anger
Forging burning paths down my face
Singing my eyes until I am blind to all but rage and disappointment

Molten tears drip from my chin and burn through the tectonic plates of my ribcage
Making tremors erupt from my quivering heart
Until they burn through screaming flesh and make a home there

Until all that is left is a mangled, blackened lump.

Why should the blood running through my veins
be more important than the tears that ran down my face
until I built floodgates
to keep from drowning?

I hold us in the palm of my hand
Hot
Sharp
It stings my skin
But I hold it there
And cradle it
And hope it will cool down
To soothe my burns
Instead of cauterizing the wounds it inflicted

It takes a while
But in time, my skin becomes too tender
And I decide I'd like to keep the use of my hands
So I tuck it into my pocket
For safekeeping.

It burns a hole through my jeans
Singes my skin, then falls out
Tumbling away, downhill
I chase after it
Barefoot on rough ground
My feet slice open on the shards it leaves behind

I keep chasing
But it rolls away too quickly, running for the horizon, away from me
It leaves my sight. I stop.

My eyes begin to sting with tears
My lungs are burning
And the soles of my feet throb

I feel my screaming heart pounding, trying to fly out of my chest to keep
chasing you
But I see my singed palms and bloody footprints

And decide to turn around
And walk away.

Why should I forgive someone like him?
Someone who is not my friend
Who has pushed my parents past their limits and back
Who has forced them to the edge of insanity and to accept the
unacceptable
Who would never stop to think that maybe he is the one in the wrong,
because it's
 always everyone else's fault.
Who tells my parents that they failed because he is unhappy, when all they
ever did was
 love him
Who refuses to take responsibility lest he break out into anger and violence
and
 smashing things
Who lays out eggshells for us to walk on because if we don't we'll have to
step on
 broken glass instead
Who thinks justice and righteousness lies in the palm of his hand, that he is
fit to judge
 but to never be judged
Who is a ticking time bomb, each second another moment closer to
disaster he'll force
 us all to endure
Who drives us out of our own home for fear of his rage
Who will complain and complain but never try to improve
Who always apologizes but never, never means it
So why? Why should I forgive a brother who will never, never be truly
sorry?

Countable Infinity

Do you know how mentally draining it is to hear that your older brother is being institutionalized so you need to watch your younger one because both your parents are handling it and he is on the road trying to get himself run over.

And then your mother calls unpanicked To tell you that she's just taking him to Willits

I've been on this emotional roller coaster for much of my life.

But it's starting to feel as if the tracks ended a long time ago, I am free falling.

I wonder when I'll hit the ground.

It seems most of my family already has, so maybe I should catch up.

Maybe cracking my head open, is the best way to let the mental illness out?

I imagine it leaking out like oil into water, beautiful and toxic iridescent gleaming.

Poison

It could suffocate any creature that comes in contact with it

It will, lay waste to my lungs as if they are a city after an earthquake.

Tumble the skyscrapers of my mind

The shards of glass from its windows have flown into my eyes and made me blind to what is wrong.

To me, this could just be another day

It's been going on since we were children.

I guess we still are, but it's hard to feel that way.

I didn't think that I would grow up like this

but hey, it matures you

I've been told that I'm wise beyond my years, and I wonder if it's the trauma, or just the way I don't talk unless I know what I'm talking about.

Because I'm too afraid of a snap back, someone telling me I'm stupid or too young to understand

It's hard to be sure of yourself when you doubt every word that comes out of your mouth.

I often fantasize about becoming mute.

If I just stopped speaking, they can't get mad at what I say.

But that silence would just leave more room for my thoughts,
which I would rather push away.

Because my mind is a cavern that echoes everything back except
the good things.

So if I shouted, I hate myself into the void, how many times will it
reverberate in my head?

A countable infinity.

Michael Riedell

Letter to a Little Girl

a composite of borrowings from student poems

I've seen you, a City of Glass,
Too nervous, as if you aren't
Worth the comma it would take
To describe you even briefly.

I've seen you smile like the ocean,
Full of bounce and shadows,
With singing eyes like skies of possibilities
And, too, I've heard your whispers in the dark.

You become December air,
You become the heartbeat of crows' wings.
You become an orphan child on a rocky edge,
Barren but alive, abandoned even by snow.

This is a letter to a little girl,
This is a letter to your empty paint tubes,
White and purple, blue, the red of dried blood.
This is a letter to a sliver of light.

There is a life that breathes instead of drowns,
A life that dances like an endless caress in butterflies,
Where hope is no contradiction,
And honey seeps in though window panes.

There is a land of sunflower fields and children's books,
Where broken music boxes sing again
On lazy afternoons on the other side of desire
And scars don't hurt this long.

Joe Bob Frank the Young Magician

Joe Bob Frank the young Magician
Had an act he just knew would win
The talent show in his writing class
With boys and girls and Jack the Ass.
First he'd wow them with amazing card tricks
And a Tootsie Pop gone in one lick.
He'd pull a rabbit from a hat and set it free.
He's turn a silver dollar into three.
He'd read their minds, he'd steal a nose,
His cane would burst into a rose.
The kids would scream, they'd yell, *No way!*
And then for his finale, our magician would say:
Who would like to be sawed in two?
And of all the hands up he'd say, *You!*
Yup, Jack the Ass would strut on up,
And then young Joe Bob Frank would cut
And cut and cut that Jack in twain,
But would not put him together again.
There'd be Jack the Ass and Jack the Head
And one or both would soon be dead.
Then he'd say, *Well, that's the show!*
Oh! The standing ovation would go and go!
And even the teacher, wiping a tear,
Would let out a hoot and let out a cheer
And declare the winner, the one to thank,
The magician known as Joe Bob Frank.

Sonnet Instruction Guide

In order to write a sonnet well, first
Just read some. Get the feel of the rhythm
While you learn the rules. Form does seem a curse
At first, it's true, but there's a strange freedom
Within structure. Ten syllables? Easy.
We talk like that all the freakin' time. Well,
Sort of. And rhyme? Writing ABAB
Isn't that tough. Try it. Just say, *What the hell...*

As for what to write? Kid, you're on your own.
Write about your life, or someone you like,
Or weird thoughts you have when you're all alone.
And crush the end like in volleyball: Spike
That final couplet so we know you're done.
Then breath deep and start to write the next one.

Missing the Moon

If I speak of last night's full moon
coming over our eastern hedge,
or of the half-moons of zucchini I fried
this morning with my eggs, you
might infer I'm just small talking my way
to avoid talking politics, the absurdities
at the helm of our nation state, and the
virus that has so many clenched in fear.
You wouldn't be wrong, except that
I do love moons—wherever I find them—
and I have my guesses, too: that the fearful
most worry about missing the moon.

Miranda Stearns

Morning On A Lake

Pine trees reach their long arms out.

Tiny fingers grasping endlessly at the diamonds that pepper the night sky.

Dark and gnarled, the old fists and knuckles loom above you.

The scratch and rustle of sleeping bags makes your spine shiver.

Shadows, cast from the embers of a dying fire contort and twist.

Their writhing bodies beckon you to peer into the darkness, past the safety of the cabin's deck.

The whispers of forest creatures grow louder until they're inside your head

And even pressing your hands to your ears can't help.

Somehow you fall asleep.

Golden light tips and spills over the top of a rocky edge and kisses your face awake.

A whirring of engines echoes through the basin and slices the glossy water.

Hungry, the little waves paw and lap at rocks on the shore.

A chirping bird flies overhead and lands on the long arms of the pine tree

Which no longer looks dark or gnarled.

The ashy fire pit, now cold, casts no menacing shadows upon the cabin.

It's hard to remember what was so frightening in the light of day.

Messy Dressing Room

Someone's soup is on the ground.
Toe tape littered all around.
Dirty grime all on the mirror.
We talk so loud it's hard to hear.

I'm tired now, I think I'll nap.
Upon this rat pee stained an old mat.
My clothes are scattered far and wide.
There's no possessions once inside.

Oh god whose day old chai is this?
There's trash can there, how did you miss?
Behind these cluttered lockers looms,
Some fuzzy mold now in full bloom.

It's probably time that we clean up.
What the hell is in this cup?
Like dirty pigs we sit in muck.
Can someone help? My costume stuck!

Let's put the dishes in the sink
Let's do away with this horrible stink.

Alrighty now can someone sweep?
We should make a pile of things to keep.
Hey you guys it's looking better!
I finally found my blue knit sweater!

Now let's put away the broom
No more messy dressing room!

Christmas Lights

Blue, red, green, silver.
Twinkling against the outsides of houses.
Eaves adorned with bright stars.
The low hum of Christmas music and the warm taste of hot chocolate.
One neighborhood after the other.
Driving in loops.
In circles.
The lights shine in on our faces.
Bright against the darkness of the night that tries to envelop them.
But not quite bright enough to hide the low fuel sign emitting from the car.
I suppose it is time to go home.

Nothing Rhymes With Orange

My favorite color is orange you see,
But, unfortunately for me
Almost nothing rhymes with orange.

There are words that kind of, sort of, maybe rhyme with orange
Words like porridge, shortage, and foreign.

But no word ever fits quite right
And that makes writing this quite a fight.

That's okay with me I guess
I'll just have to try my best.

Orange is still my favorite color afterall
Maybe I'll even paint it on my wall.

When all is said and all is done
I think I've learned something fun.

Orange is still my favorite color you see
And, it's not perfect, but that doesn't bother me.

Because nothing is perfect in this world
If everything was, we'd all be bored.

So I'll keep my favorite color orange
And I'll try to rhyme it no more.

The Math Test

The chatter of classmates discussing their scores was so loud she thought her head was going to burst. She held her breath as the teacher came around to her desk and handed her back the chapter nine test. Face down. Her breath caught in her throat and her fingers shook as she turned the paper over to see a mess of red pen spilled over the page like blood. She looked up at the teacher and began to open her mouth to speak, but was cut off.

“Test corrections are due Wednesday” her math teacher said with a subtle apologetic nod in her direction. She nodded and sank back into her chair, defeated once again by geometry.

My Favorite Drive

In the winter, rain pounded on my windshield with angry fists.
As the car climbed higher up the hills it softened its attack,
And turned, slowly, to wispy snowflakes.
It was too good of a moment to forget.

In the spring, the windows of the car were rolled down
And the faint breeze that sways the grass rushed in.
The cows in their pasture looked up as the car rushed by.
It was too good of a moment to forget

In the summer, the air conditioning blasted
And the drinks in the cupholder rattled with ice.
The car wandered up and down streets in a never ending loop.
It was too good of a moment to forget

In the autumn, the sunsets bathed the car in an orange light.
It seemed to be trying to catch the car,
And tell it that it was time to go home.
It was too good of a moment to forget.

Thoughts While Home With A Cold

There's nothing worse than feeling your nose start to stuff up, your head start to fog, and your body start to ache. The feeling that you might be getting a cold creeping up on you suddenly until it knocks you right off of your feet. And of course, it is always at the most inconvenient of times. Right when there is a big meeting at work, a test at school, a dinner party for your friend.

It starts with convincing yourself that you're fine and you can push through. You just can't afford to take time off! But, then, not even the DayQuill can keep that worn down feeling from overtaking you, so you go home.

It's always when you're home sick that there is just so much you want to do. Going on a walk, finally trying that recipe or going out on the town. But instead, all you can do is lie in your bed with a mess of tissues and cough drops surrounding you.

Of course, when our noses finally start to clear and our thinking becomes clearer, all that motivation we came up with suddenly disappears, and we carry on, back to work, school, and our everyday lives.

Winter 2018

December air fills my lungs,
Sharp and crisp.

It's late at night
We should all be asleep.

We're too close now
We can't turn around.

Our phones are ringing
Parents are wondering.

But we're on top of the world
And only the stars are above us.

It was a marvelous moment
Of friendship and bonding.

And the night would have been
Absolutely perfect too.

If only I had checked
And made absolutely sure,

That I hadn't left my purse
Atop that magic hill.

The Sounds Of Any City Street

Steam hisses from a grate on the ground
It smacks your leg with hot air

Voices chatter all around
Too many languages to count

Sirens whirr past
Blaring their jarring tune

Across the street
High Heels click impatiently on the stone ground

A baby cries
And its mother hums

Dishes and silverware clang
In a nearby restaurant

There's a hum from the streets
A buzz of electricity and wonder

The Future

I wonder where we'll go.
Where school and jobs and family will take us.
Across the country?
Across the sea?

I wonder what we'll do.
Everyone seems to have a plan right now.
School?
Then a job?

It's all so strange.
So uncertain.
So unplanned.
What will happen?

We wish to know.
Day and night.
Just for a hint of what the future might look like.

But in the end
Isn't it best
To be along for the ride
And find out while you're going instead?

Judy Vega

Maybe if you stanned...

Maybe if you stanned Bola. A single response underneath my post about my dying dog, huntingly illuminated by the bright screen of my smartphone. Bola? The K-pop group? Were they the answer I was looking for? The solution to my life's troubles? If I had stanned Bola, would I be where I am now, sitting on my couch in a powerless home, my dog, the only companion I've had for years dying besides me. Should I try? What did I have to lose? I closed my eyes. I thought of Bola. I felt Bola. I let Bola overwhelm me. I felt chills, like my spirit cleansing itself from all human troubles. Then nothing, quiet. Then all at once, information rushing into me like a train, the world became clear to me. War, death, love, peace, it was as if the world had decided to bestow its knowledge onto me. My dog, which had been breathing its final breaths, became younger, full of life and youth once again. He jumped from his spot next to me and ran, circling the once dying plants that filled the room. Now the plants were greener and everything stood up straighter than before. My phone rang. It was from my mother, who had been laying in her hospital bed with legs that could hardly move, telling me that she was cured! The wretched pain she had been feeling for years, growing stronger as death walked towards her, was gone. She had asked the Doctor how such a thing was possible but the Doctor had only shaken his head, only two words came from his mouth. *Stan Bola.* I felt the phone fall from my hand. *Bola.* Of course, I began to laugh, of course! Who else could it have been besides the goddesses themselves. I fell to my knees. *Oh Bola, thank you for everything, I shall give you everything that I am, Stan Bola!*

Sofia the First is Garbage and here's why

I've been getting a lot of messages lately saying that I'm not treating the shows I review with respect, that I overreact to minor things, and that using in between frames doesn't count as 'real evidence'. But I'll have you know that I've been reviewing movies longer than most of you have been alive and some of my reviews have reached 100+ likes on famous platforms like Movie Fan club.com and MySpaceMovie. If that's not enough to prove my credibility to you tiny brained doubters, then guess who has a degree in film reviewing from a very creditable school. So credible, in fact, that few have heard of it and those few are extremely well known in the reviewing community. So to everyone who sent me rude messages on twitter, you're embarrassing yourself making fun of an elite like me.

With that out of the way, for today's review I found this trash show that seems to be really popular for some inexplicable reason. Trash like this is obviously off my radar, but I happened to catch a few episodes while my sister and her friends were watching the show. *I* could recognize the obvious flaws in the show within the first few episodes but I have bigger fish to fry so wasn't originally going to write a review for this small little nothing. That *was* the case, until I overheard my sister and friends saying how good the show was. *Good?* Were we watching the same thing? Who would enjoy such a snooze fest? I asked her to deliberate and she told me that everyone in her class was watching the show and they all liked it alot. In a moment of disbelief, I went to the internet for answers only to find that this trash show wasn't quite the small little nothing I had originally thought it was.

It's troubling for me when I see people being fooled into enjoying trash shows like this by money hungry corporations. But I guess that's why it's my job to save them from their own inability to recognize bad forms of media. So ladies, gentlemen, and readers of all sorts allow me to save you from the horrible clutches of *Sofia the First*.

Some quick background info on the show, Sofia the first aired on Disney Jr. through 2012 and 2018, currently available to watch on Netflix, I'm surprised it lasted as long as it did. The show is about the adventures of Sofia, a peasant girl who becomes a princess when her mother marries the king, and how she deals with the struggles of becoming a princess. The show has 107 episodes, 107 too many, so I will be focusing this review on the most recent one, specifically part one of the three part finale. There are so many things I felt I needed to reveal to the viewers of the show and I hope many of you will learn to tell good from bad. On to the review.

First let's talk about that opening. Yawn, I don't get how people can stand it. It's the same song they've used for 4 seasons and the only thing that changes that are made to it between seasons are the clips that

play during the thing. There is also zero spice added to the opening despite it being the finale. The finale! Not the last episode of a some season but the very *last* episodes of the series. The opening gets even worse once you take a closer look at the clips. Within the first few seconds, the viewers are subjected to a horrible dress transformation. Sofia's dress just fades in and doesn't even fade in along the line of sparkles that swirl around her dress. Come on Disney, you guys can't even afford basic animations? Clip 6 and 7 of the opening are the worst of the thing about the entire thing. In clip 6 we see a boy and Sofia performing an ice skating routine. The boy lifts up Sofia into the air while she does the splits, but how? I can understand why the boy, a well off prince, can lift her up, but Sofia was a town girl not too long ago. Where did all this ice skating experience come from? You can't expect me to believe that within a couple months, she not only learned how to skate but also pull off this move. I know this is a fantasy kid's show, but creators, please don't treat your audience like children. In scene 7 we see a map of her world. The map lacks any originality whatsoever. It's a direct copy of our map with a few changes here and there. Now I know the show lacks in the world building department but the map feels like a personal offense to designers everywhere.

With the opening out of the way, we can get into the real meat of the review, the episode. It starts off with the royal carriage driving away from the castle. The carriage heads towards the peasant town when we hear one of the extras says "It's the princess". What can I even say about this? I've never been so insulted in my entire life. The writers have zero faith in their viewers if they think they need to clarify that it was *royalty* in the carriage. I think the viewers are smart enough to figure out that a *royal* carriage driving away from the *royal* castle has some kind of *royalty* on it. There's even two 0.5 second scenes where you can see the people on the carriage are Sofia and her mom. Have a little faith in your audience *please*. The carriage takes Sofia and her mom to the old shoe shop her mother used to work at before meeting the king. Once inside the store, Sofia's mom gives Sofia a new dress and it's here that viewers learn Sofia's graduating from her princess school or whatever weird fantasy grade school equivalent. Barely two minutes into the episode and I've already seen two things that piss me off. First, let's talk about that new dress. I hate it, despise it even, which should mean something because it's very hard for me *not* to like something. I don't know what was going through the head of the person who designed the dress, but what made them believe that having the main character not wear her signature purple was a good idea. These will be the last moments we get to see Sofia and you have the *audacity* to have her wear pink. The second problem, right next to Sofia, there's this huge window and it's so distracting that it sucks out the little charm the scene had left. I haven't figured out how to add pictures to my reviews yet, so I can't show you but trust me, the entire scene is horrible.

Sofia then starts singing about Sofia's life as a princess. The song itself is decent, nothing really show stopping or ear aching. I did notice that the animators use the same background model twice during the song and

just because you can recolor a model and pretend you have two doesn't mean you should. The song then transitions to Sofia's sister singing and trying to pick out a dress for the big graduation. Her scene takes place in a walk-in closet where we get wide shots of all these gorgeous creative dresses. When she finally picks a dress, she chooses the most mundane bland dress. Sofia's sister has been established as this fashion chic girl who would never wear something boring. Writers, do you really think in a closet full of better options she would go with the lamest looking one? You've been working with this character for 6 years and you guys still don't know how to write her. Don't get even me started on her brother. The girls get new looks for occasion yet he's stuck wearing the same outfit he's been wearing since season 1. Yeah, season 1!

Only by watching the first five minutes of this show, you can definitely see why it's trash. If you liked this review, I recommend you check out my other reviews like emoji movie and how it changed the movie industry for the better or how Peter Rabbit fooled the government and committed tax fraud.

Screen

A bright screen illuminated the dark room. A young man sat at a desk, eyes captivated by movement coming from the screen. His eyes reflected the image of a young woman singing into mic. The air around him was filled with the sounds of her music, her voice. He had never heard anything like it before her voice, her! It was all so new to him. He was curious, he wanted to hear more. *I stayed up all night that day just looking for stuff with her in it, haha.* That night changed the life of Lucas Barnes forever. Barnes met his wife 9 years ago while he was scrolling down his feed on youtube. He stumbled upon her cover of a song he had never heard before. *The song was called Just be Friends, I remember it like it was yesterday. It was this japanese techno pop song that um honestly I didn't even like the song all that much, but when I heard her voice, I was blown away.* Completely taken away by her performance, he decided to message her and a message from her appeared in his inbox. *She didn't have a very big channel back then, well no one did then haha, so I guess that's why she responded. It was weird at first, I had never really talked to strangers online before but I guess it was nice. We both were pretty new to the internet socializing and I don't know about her but my friends would tease about it all the time haha.* It was the start of something that would later turn into a beautiful love, a love that grew online.

The two chatted frequently for the next couple of months. The longer they talked the more frequent their talks became. Their chats went from once a month to almost daily. They shared stories from their childhood, daily life, and other interests. Barnes discovered that they had a lot in common. They both enjoyed activities like biking, skiing, and hiking. They both appreciated music. She shared her interests and he did the same. Their chats went on for hours. After a while, Barnes noticed that he was starting to feel different about the singer, before it was simple amazement that drew him to her, but now something was different. *I started talking to her because I was amazed by her voice and as we got to know each other, I guess, something changed and I felt different. Before I kinda just wanted to get to know her, maybe be friends or something but as we talked more I wanted to know more, I wanted to talk to her more, back then every time I heard my phone chime. I would look at the notification and be disappointed it wasn't her hahaha.* The two continued to chat until one day the singer suggested that they video call. *I was speechless, I mean that was something I had always wanted to try doing but I never thought she would be the one to suggest it. In the back of my mind, I always thought she thought I was some weirdo on the internet and she just put up with me. When she texted me "Hey want to video chat?" I remember thinking, well at least now I know she doesn't think I'm weird hahaha but really when she texted me that was, for me, the biggest confirmation that she considered us friends and*

maybe there was a chance we could become more.

Barnes agreed and they decided to call later that day. He spent the rest of the day getting ready for the video call. Going through every drawer, every hair style he knew how, to find the best one. The video chat was slowly approaching and with every minute Barnes grew more and more anxious. With every tick of the clock, tap of his foot, drip of the faucet, it felt like time was going slower. After what felt like years, his phone rang. It wasn't the ding Barnes was used to hearing, it was a light rhythmic ringtone used exclusively with one application on his phone. He quickly answered the call. *I was so nervous. I knew what she looked like but she didn't know what I looked like. I was worried that she had imagined me as some sort of 6'3" hunk with a six pack hahaha. What if she took one look at me and thought 'this was a bad idea'.* On the other side of the screen, he saw the singer that he had grown to love over these last months. Her face may have been obscured by the grains from her low cost camera, but she looked stunning nonetheless to him. It was slow and awkward at first, it was the first time either of them had really spoken. Eyes fluttered back and forth, not really knowing where to place them. They talked about simple things, like the weather and the latest movie. Those first few minutes were awkward and stifling but the longer they talked the more comfortable they became. They talked for hours, much longer than any conversation they held over text. *She was laughing and smiling, I was the same, it looked like she was enjoying our conversation. We both had work in the morning, but we could never end our conversation. I would be "It's getting pretty late, I should go to sleep" and she would be "Yeah, me too. But before that what are your opinions on so and so" And that kept the conversation going for at least another hour. I was so tired in the morning, I almost called in sick hahaha.*

The two continued to call for the rest of the year when Barnes suggested they meet in real life. *We both had a general idea of where the other was in the world and we were surprisingly close to each other. Some days I would go get coffee and hope we'll bump into each other though we didn't live that close to each other hahaha. When I asked her to meet up I felt like a creep, ya know, like it's a big red flag when someone online asks you to meet up with them. I regretted it the moment I texted it to her. I was going to take it back but before I could text her, she messaged me. When I saw the message I almost dropped my phone. She had agreed. She even sent me a cute little smiley face hahaha.* The two set up plans and decided to meet the following Thursday at a Starbucks in a town that was between the both of them. When that Thursday approach, Barnes sat at the shop, hands wrapped around a simple coffee, eyes darting to the door with every sound the door made. He was early, but that didn't stop him from looking. 10 minutes before their appointed time to meet, he heard the door open. He looked and it was her. She looked around and when she saw him, she smiled as her face turned a slight red. *I asked her out later that day and she said yes. The next year, I asked her to marry me and she said yes. We were hopeless in love I guess hahaha. Advice? Hm, Love can be found anywhere.*

The Bird

The girl wanted to dance, but a bird flew into her bedroom and told her no. The girl said *I shall sing instead*. The bird shook its head. *Singing shall only bring you pain*, the bird warned, landing on top of the girl's wardrobe. *Then I shall paint and I will paint the most beautiful things!* Laughter exploded from the bird as it took flight again. *Silly little girl*, the bird flew around the girl, *silly little girl*. The girl wept.

Kingdoms

In a world not so different from our own, creatures of all shapes and sizes rule the land. Using ruins left behind by an ancient civilization, these creatures were able to build up civilizations of their own. They built magnificent cities and kingdoms. Where vibrant cultures painted the towns in reds and purples and music that filled the land from one corner to another. As time went on, the kingdoms grew larger and more powerful. Some, fearing the growing power, turned their backs on the world and isolated themselves. Some turned to the world and saw it as nothing but land meant for the taking. And others worked desperately to keep the peace, yet it was a peace that was rapidly growing weak. Dume, a kingdom brought up from the ashes by an evil warlock, was the first to destroy this fragile peace. The warlock wanted more power and sought to steal it from other kingdoms. Alliances were made, weapons were developed, and war broke out. Lives were lost every day. Right as it seemed as though the world would be lost to warlock forever, the Kingdom of Risa joined the great battle. They ignored the war happening far from their own land, hoping that the fighting would soon end before it reached their borders. Soon, however, it became clear that the warlock would bring a great darkness to the world if they did nothing. When the Kingdom of Risa joined the battle against the warlock, they brought hope of bright tomorrow and hope was all that was needed to turn the darkness into light and defeat the warlock.

Cooper Wagner

Fallen Angel

Oh My Love
I Heard Your Cries From Miles Away
Praying For A Higher Power
To Help You Through Your Hardship
And I Was By Your Side
No Matter What Demon That Will Try To Harm Us
It Won't Break Us Away
Your Damaged Burned Wings Adds To The
Beauty Of You Filling My Heart With
Love And Affection
Making My Devilish Black Soul Shine
Brighter Than Any Star
Making me The Dark Piece Of Obsidian
Stand Out With The Eye Gazing Diamonds, Emeralds And Rubys
Filling Every Dark Corner Of My Body with Light
Now I Must Protect My Damaged Love
That Fell From The Heavens So Gracefully
You My Fallen Angel Never Hit The Ground
But Fell Perfectly Into My Heart

Overseas

Over The Sea, My Love Sits In Tears And Shambles,
A Frown Upon My Face And Horns Above My Head
Time Will Take Its Toll And Eventually, We Will See Each Other
Months, Weeks, Days, Hours, Minutes, Seconds
Our Time Away From Each Other May Hurt Us Along The Way
But After *Its* Done, We Will Be Stronger Standing Together As One
My Angel That Fell Upon Me Our Love Has only just begun
The Pain May Hurt Like A Thousand Suns
But It Will Be Needed Until It's Done
I Your Love, A demon In Black
Will Wait Till The End Of Time To Take Your Hand
But As Long As We Are Together
No Man, God Nor Animal Will Break Us Apart

Writing Out My Pain

I Sit Under This Tree Writing Out My Pain.
Misunderstood By All The Eyes That Look
Tears Burn Through My Cold Black Soul
I Look At Home But It's Not The Same I See A Burned And Fire Filled Home...
Burning, Burning, Burning, Just Like Me
Scars Down My Arms, Blood Pumping Through My Veins
Black Hood Black Shirt
Black On Black To Show The True Me...

Death Sings

Red Eyes, Sharp Teeth
Cracked Bones, Bad Breath
Losing Blood, Crying In Pain
It Won't Stop, Going Insane
Straight Jacket, Padded Room
Cameras On, Cutting Deep
Voices Loud, Broken Glass
Kid Screams, Parents Run
Heart Beat, Slowly Leaving
Ambulance sirens, Death Sings
Flat Line, Bright Lights
Heart Broken, Death Has Come To Play

The smile upon me

I Sit In Waiting With Tears And Scars
Broken And Depressed
Sitting In The Never-Ending Hellish Cage Of Hate And Fear
Scared To Come Out Scared To Be Me
Different Than The Ones Around Me
The Odd One Sitting In Dark Colors Surrounded By Those Filled With
Color, Love-Filled And I Sit Here In Shame And Fear
Father, I Have Sinned But Haven't You To Sinned
After The Years I Live Shall Be Sent To The Stairs Or The Elevator
To Walk My Way To Heaven Or Ride My Way To Hell
Both Ways I Shall Be The One Wearing The Mask With A Fake Smile
Being The One With Tears Behind It I've Been Sent Here To Live In Tears
If I Lived My Life Again Having The Choice To Change My Ways Father
I Tell You, I Wouldn't Change A Thing I May Be The One With Tears And Bruises
But Like I've Said Before, The Smile Upon This Mask
Is Just To Throw You Off

Story of the blank screen

Out of the never-ending chart of numbers,
they decide to choose 81?

Staring at the blank white screen of thy computer,
quite simple if I may say

But why 81 there's nothing that special about this single double-digit number
Why must I sit and think of what to write and only have 81 words nothing
more nothing less

In this so-called story, I shall write there isn't anything special just a story
of confusion and a story of the blank screen.

Feelings from below

Feeling the heat from the body-loving me with every bit of flesh.
the breathing hard, & warm as we cuddled in the nice warm bed.
nothing sexual clothing was on, We can't do anything sexual with clothing on,
it all ends with a wink I guess
a lie, a love, a heart that hurts, pain in your chest dragging you straight
Down feeling claws of the one from below if the two worlds are real i'll
have a hell of a time

Loving Kiss

No Love, No Soul, No Happiness.
Oh Life On Steep Hill, Push Me Over
And Watch Me, Roll!
Let Me Hit That Cold Hard Road
With Full On Force...
Broken Skull, Bleeding Knee, Scraped Arm,
All Wrapped Up With Your Loving Kiss

Lovely Bird

Love Life Like It's The End!
Love It Live It, Yes Oh Yes Spread our Wings, My Love
Love Life Like It's The End!
Life Won't Last Forever My Love So Fly To The Higher Worlds
Love Life Like It's The End!
Like Our Life Is Near Its Death
Love Life Like It's The End!
It's Time To Go My Love So Fly Higher
Love Life Like It's The End!
The End Here So Fly Away My Beautiful Love
Love Life Like It's The End!
End Oh End Won't Separate us My Lovely Bird I'll see you soon
Love Life Like It's The End

Oh Master!, Oh Master!

Oh Master, Oh Master
Oh How Much I Love You I'll Do Anything For You
To Love Me Back!
Oh Master!, Oh Master!
Your Oh So Hurt Those Cuts And Bruises
Really Look Like They Hurt
But What Do You Say Your Love Did This!?
Well, I'll Have A Chat With Her,
I Hurt Her That's Oh So Very Cute
Oh Master, Oh Master
Please Love Me I Killed That Girl,
That Hurt You Oh So Much
What Did You Say You Fear Me?
That I've Done A Terrible Thing,
But Master Oh Master I Love You So!
Oh Master, Oh Master
Please Talk To Me
I Love You Oh So Much And I Don't Want You To Leave!
Please Oh Please, Master! Open This Door!
Oh Master, Oh Master
Thank You So! I'm Sorry So!, I Love You So!
But Why Aren't You Breathing...
Oh Master, Oh Master
I'm Sorry Very So...

Brianna White

Starlight

They said her heart was as dark as the night sky, but even the night sky has its flecks of light, known as stars.

Hell: An 81 word story

There was no light, but the sounds were piercing. I heard crying, screaming, laughing and somehow I was silent. I was scared and confused but I stayed silent. Then, all of a sudden, red light lit up what looked like a bus full of people. I looked to my left and a man was screaming for help. To my right, a man and women were crying. Eventually we got off the bus, in a world of screams, hell.

Leaves of Fall

Sun blasting gold,
bare arms in september,
where are the cascading leaves of fall?

Mason Jar

Your words cut me like the shard of a broken Mason Jar;
deep, sharp, always leaves a scar;
Only difference, scars don't usually hurt this long.

Goodbye

Fall,
the ending of a year,
In the loveliest goodbye.

The Difference: An 81 word story

I walked inside and saw you laying on the other couch, you were spending the night, too. Right then I wished I was sober and aware. But as you got up and my heart rate sped, I realized you were different, You had an opportunity to take advantage of me, but instead you walked over, obviously thinking I was asleep, and turned out the light and the tv, you listened to your music. But I wasn't asleep and still you respected me. You're different.

Emily Whitman

Metaphors

Sometimes it feels like every inch of my body is going dry, like I haven't had water in days and you're the only water for miles upon miles.
Getting mad with you turns my chest into a ball of flames.
Watching you leave hurts more than shoving a dagger through my left eye.
Sometimes I would rather go blind than watch you go through pain.
Watching you walk away pulls more and more heart from my chest.
When you pretend to care my skin crawls.
So many songs tell me to miss you.

81 Word Stories:

Sad #1

Sad doesn't begin to describe the
Ache in my stomach. I swear my
Reality shook. I think my hearing
Even got fogged and my eyes pin-pointed
On the floor. I looked around and everyone
Knew this was bigger than life to me.
Before I knew it I was uncontrollably
Crying but it didn't feel like pain, but
Like nothing, a joke , unreal. Everyone
Was telling me in detail, it felt fake.
"He's really gone ?" I asked, choking on tears.

Sad #2

81 times we must have fought, 81 times we probably
Said "I love you," at least 81 times we let our eyes meet.
The stares that make someone's stomach turn , the stares that made me
want to drop
Everything to ask if you were okay, sometimes even the stares that made it
seem like
World stopped and we were the only ones even breathing
And your lips and eyes drew me to you like
Magnets. I couldn't help but want you.

Break Up

I must have cried until my body went dry and
I couldn't count how long I'd been sad for
Nothing helped ease any pain, not even friends
I poured my heart out into my work, I never had a
Deep breath. Hell, it was hell to be around myself.
All I wanted was to forget about you, instead
I had to see you daily. Everytime I looked at you
Memories flooded my head. All I could think about
Was you.

Moving On

At first it was very hard. All I could think about
Was you. I tried with my whole heart to forget you.
I felt a little crazy. I questioned every promise
And every flaw that I could possibly possess
My friends didn't know how to lift my spirits and
Neither did I. Time went by and I had to learn how
To do things without you. I forgot how to depend on
Myself. I missed you, but I missed me more.

Stories & Such

The room felt small and breathing felt difficult at the time. She sat, one hand in the other and picked and bit at her nails. With each blink her chest tightened up and her breathes felt as if they were growing shorter. Her heart raced so fast she could hear it beating in her ears, louder, and louder. She felt like she was thinking about things no one thinks about, but it was just to pass the time. She kept thinking people could hear her heart almost beating out of her chest, she didn't want to seem so nervous. Everything got harder and harder in a positive way. She hates the waiting game in the waiting room.

Songs and pictures remind me of a time when the thought of us was planted & universes away. Back then it wasn't so scary to think of. It's absolutely crazy to think that when I first met you all I wanted was to talk more. Now the idea of a time when we weren't even acquaintances is beyond bizarre. Sometimes I wish I could go back and warn myself, but I wonder if I would tell myself it's worth it or that the happiness is worth the price. I know that at a different time I would have planted it in my head to hate you. Even then I don't think I'd be happy, I think the things I went through because of you taught me things. I mean just being around you taught me things and I'm not sure I would want to strip that all away. I remember when I finally could call you mine the confidence I had when I was trying for you and shrunk down to nothing because now I had to try to keep you. Before I knew it I was paranoid about little things and things that never crossed my mind now seemed like a threat. I was always scared to care too much or too little. In the end I don't think I liked me when I was with you.

Biographies

Simone Adams: I'm an artist in many ways like music, drawing, and writing. I loved creating material and using my imagination as well as bringing, in some ways, the "what if?" to light. My writing skills come from a young girl's heart. A girl who thinks about many aspects of real-life as well as possible fantasy. As an artist, I hope to inspire and speak to my readers, listeners, and observers' hearts.

My name is **Adrian Cabral** and I am a 9th grader at Ukiah High School. I like to paint, read, write, and play guitar. I write mostly poetry, but occasionally do write short stories. I have a dog named Wobbles who has 3 legs, and I feel that he should be president one day.

Sebastian Cowen is an aspiring musician and author, just trying to get by while a plague plunges itself into future history books.

Sierra Gittleman: A World-Class traveler, adventurer, and healer. I enjoy exploring nature and long writing sessions amongst the trees. Amazing at naps. Loves to garden. A Wiccan and a Jew-yes, one of those very annoying new agers. I want to do my best to bring love and peace on this planet that we share. If you read any of my work here, I hope you enjoyed it. They were chosen especially because each contains a small lesson that I have learned. Hopefully, they brighten your day, are mentally appealing, or made you think.
With best regards,
Sierra

Gabriel Grunder is one of the many students who wrote this book. He lives in Ukiah, CA with his cat, Iris, and foster mother, Alicia, along with his foster brother, Elijah. He spends his time doing school work and going to work. He enjoys the occasional videogame for Nintendo Switch and loves to binge-watch on Netflix.

When **KC Kirkley** isn't writing, he's most likely teaching writing or hanging out with his family. His short fiction has appeared in a number of reputable journals and magazines, and his short story "How to Read a Love Letter" was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He is currently working on a novel about America's obsession with celebrity.

Celena Linares: I'm a 17-year-old girl who writes angsty love poems to get through high school. I fell in love with the arts from a young age while backpacking and I've never let go. From acting to writing scenes I have always adored the arts.

I am **Sophia Maurer**. I was born in 2005 in Sacramento California, I attend Ukiah High school In Ukiah California. I enjoy spending time in nature on a sunny day. I am very passionate about architecture and how to preserve the ocean and the many diverse ecosystems on earth. Nonetheless, I enjoy spending time with my small dog, named Henry and cooking food for myself and my family. I also enjoy listening to books on audible, because the voices for characters are better than I could ever have. One thing that I hate is wasting my time on monotonous tasks like the dishes, that being said I always think of the most creative and inspiring ideas or stories during these times. I find inspiration all around me from the architecture of a building to writings and paintings, as well as inspiring people who have stories and wisdom to share, which is everyone.

Tyler McMinn: I write poems, and I make music. This class has heavily improved my skills for both. It has taught me various lessons by looking inside of myself to pull ideas from in order to complete the challenges, and overall has made me a better writer. Take this class if you want to sharpen your pen.

Jonathan “Joestar” Pacheco: *The fancy short Biography*
So I see you have made it to my biography, Well you might be asking yourself what is so special about this Jonathan guy. The answer is that there is nothing special but you might have had a great time reading my pieces. So let’s cut to the obvious, Me and like almost everyone else in this book are from or was born in Ukiah, Had a happy life, did sports and etc. But unlike everyone else I have done a lot of things this past year that have really rocked the dragon out of the quest. Like embarrassing myself in stand-up, throwing in some episodes for a discontinued podcast and having been a part of a film that was never made. Other than that it has been a real roller coaster creating all these pages and I hope I have done my part on creating the best book in a troubled year. Currently, I am working on a little project alongside my brother which I can’t give anything away. But if you have any questions to ask about how I write or what I like writing about most feel free to message me on Instagram @Jonnypac64 or Snapchat @Jonathan_pach30. Now with all that said if you excuse me I am going to enjoy a nice glass of Coke-Milk.

Hey, I’m **Nia Rich** and I’m 16! I think really little of myself and have terrible mental health problems but hey, who doesn’t these days?

I enjoy softball, the performing arts, drawing, and writing, two of which are made impossible by the current situation with COVID-19. Thanks a lot, pandemic.

Assume I’m always tired.

Some of my proudest moments are being published for entering a writing contest in the third grade, earning student of the month many years of school, being named Ms. Clutch in a softball tournament in 8th grade, being called someone’s favorite old man in a production of Chitty Chitty

Bang Bang, seeing Hamilton twice (that wasn't really an accomplishment it was just awesome) and winning the county competition for Poetry Out Loud 2020.

I grew up with my parents, 2 brothers, and gained a 3rd one when I was 13 and 3 days. We have joint birthday parties, which is cool because it's an excuse to have an actual fun party when I'm older. I've only ever gotten haircuts for myself (one during a mental breakdown without my parent's permission and another carefully thought out with their kind-of permission). Since I cut my hair I've been questioning my gender identity- I know I'm not a boy but not sure if I'm 100% a girl? Am I nonbinary? Not even I know! I sometimes experience dysphoria (I think) so I've just sort of been riding the train of not completely knowing myself, but that's okay. I find comfort in knowing that I do not have to figure everything out right away.

I love you! Wear your seatbelt! Drink enough water! Go outside (but stay safe)!

Thanks for reading about me.

Michael Riedell is a writer of poems, songs, and short plays. He's the author of *The Way of Water* and *Small Talk & Long Silences*, and he edited *Deep Valley: Poets Laureate of Ukiah 2001-2018*. He and his wife, Ms. McCarthy, live a quiet life with their little dog, Coco. Even when not quarantined, he mostly sits in his backyard strumming guitar and watching robins and goldfinches take turns at the birdbath.

Hello! My name is **Miranda Stearns** and I am a senior at Ukiah High School. I have been lucky enough to grow up in Ukiah and become involved with many things that the community has to offer. I have danced with Mendocino Ballet for fourteen years and participated in all of their annual productions which has become a large part of who I am today. I have always been passionate about English and reading and writing so I have especially enjoyed learning and growing as a writer this year in our Creative Writing class. I am planning to attend San Diego State University in the fall as an English major and I can't wait to see what the future brings!

Judy Vega: Sick of the physical activity of her health education class, Judy ran off to the creative writing class to pursue her childhood dream of being rich and famous. The dream quickly died once she learned the tragic fate of writers. *Writing can not make you rich and famous*. Though troubled by the news, Judy stayed with the class in case of a possible future where such a feat was real.

My name is **Cooper Wagner**, and recently I moved to Ukiah from Hawaii yep such a dream place to live to some random town people may not even know for 15 years I thought id be alone without love hating myself for my secret gay pride when I moved to Ukiah I was the new

kid wearing black clothing being silent writing depressing poetry not being understood every lunch I sat by myself every day I walked silently listening to skillet and three days grace some rock bands songs that understood me I dated this guy online and we loved each other till I met Ayia at the time we met I knew her by Evan a cute boy that had a dark past we started dating during a power outage and we started dating because she was like nobody I've ever met someone who loved me not for my features but for my heart i brung myself to break up with the kid online I was a little heart broken and he was too but me and Ayia pulled through it growing in love and getting past any stuggles or I should say any demons that blocked our path to this day we love each other and hopefully in the future we wont just be boyfriend and girlfriend but husband and wife she is my true love and from Hawaii. I leave off with "Ola a make E ha'i ke aloha"

My name is **Brianna White**, but I go by Bri. Writing short stories is fun but I really like writing poems or quotes. I am 17 years old and a Junior at Ukiah High. I enjoy reading, listening to music, writing, photography and volleyball. Thanks for reading!

Emily Whitman is a sophomore at Ukiah High School.

