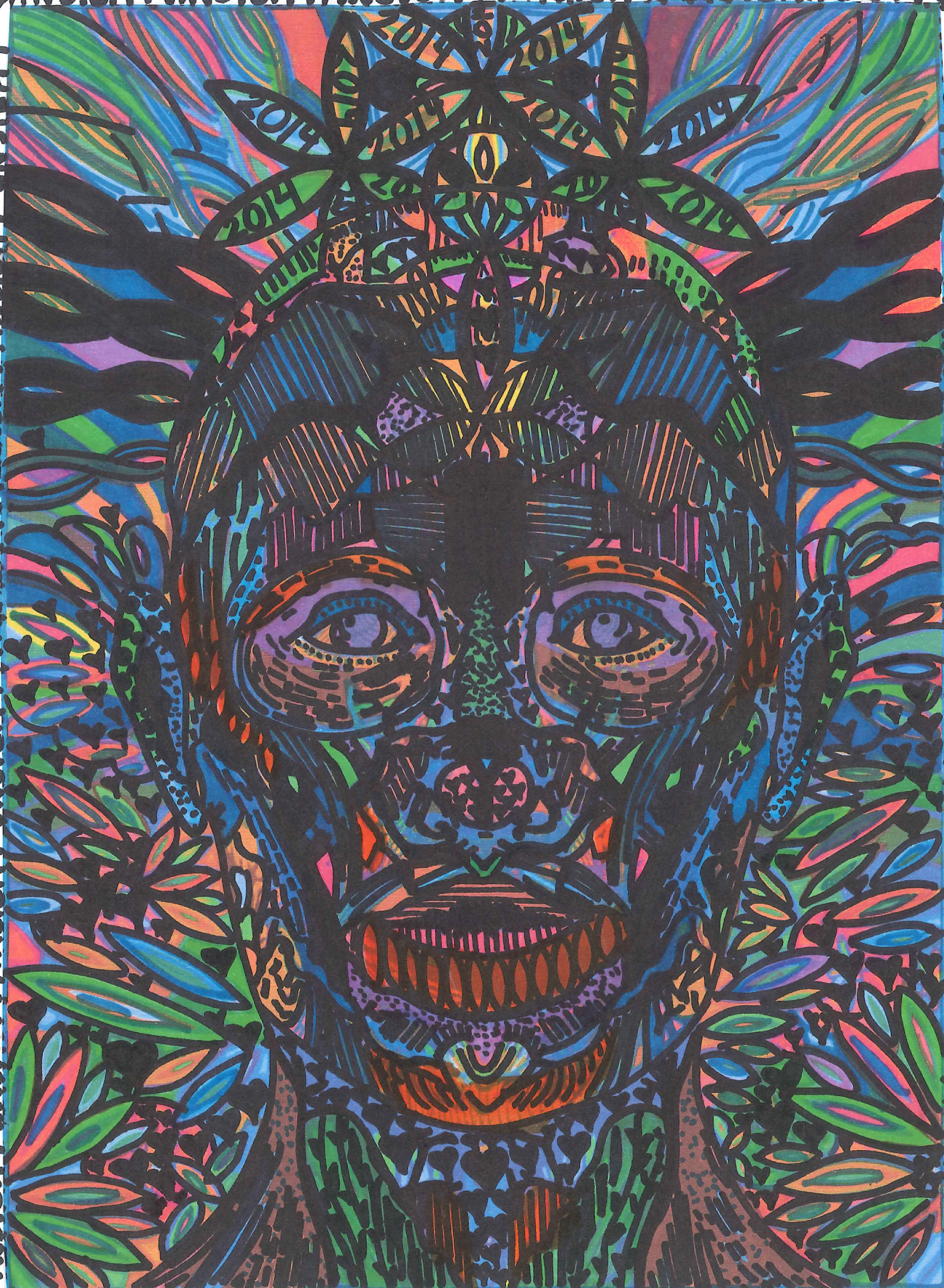


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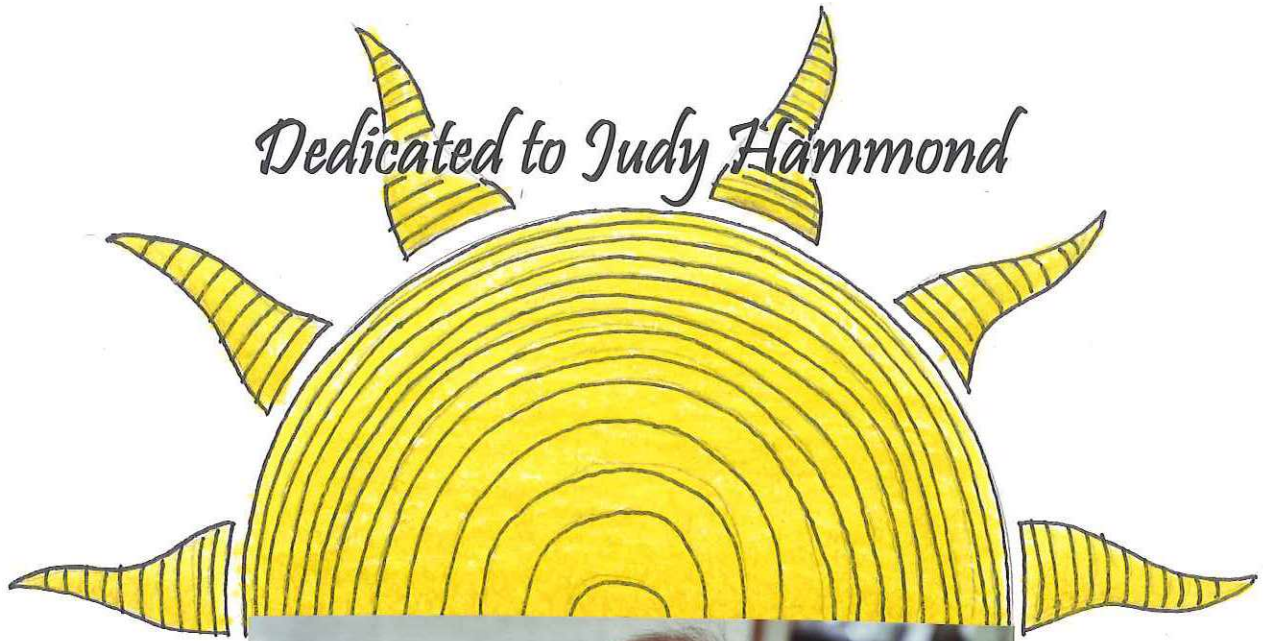
THE LITERARY MAGAZINE

OF

HALDANE HIGH SCHOOL

2014

Dedicated to Judy Hammond



We can always count on you to do everything under the sun.

Thank you for your tireless dedication to everything Haldane. You have held the school together for years. We appreciate everything you have done!

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Table of Contents

Cover: Drawing, Shauna Ricketts

Night to Morning: Poem, Cassandra Traina

Passion for Admiration: Poem, Cassandra Traina

Untitled: Drawing, Shauna Ricketts

Alternate Worlds: Photographs, Cameron Henderson

The Forest-car: Poem, Cameron Henderson

Flowers in Early Spring: Poem, Tobey Kane-Seitz

What's a Religion Born of Wind?: Poem, Wylie Thornquist

The Calm After the Storm: Poem, Josie Altucher

An Adventure of Sorts: Prose, Lucy Austin

This Title Doesn't Have a Poem: Poem, Catherine Drotar

And now: A "Haiku": Poem, Becky Gore

You Remind Me of My Aunt: Poem, Alice Flanagan

Facetious Babies: Poem, Clayton Smith

Untitled: Drawing, Alice Flanagan

Sketchbook 1: Drawings, Wylie Thornquist

King of the Northeastern Sky: Poem, Jonathan Clemente

Taunting Birds: Poem, Isabelle Laifer

Green Beast: Poem, Isabelle Laifer

Frozen Bagels: Poem, Kieran Austin

African Eve: Poem, Lucy Austin

Boundlessness: Poem, Lucy Austin

Intentions: Poem, Becky Gore

Untitled: Photograph, Allisen Casey

Depths (a novel in progress): Prose, Cameron Henderson

Sketchbook 2: Drawings, Wylie Thornquist

Untitled: Drawing, Paige O'Toole

Why I am Bad at Writing Poetry: Poem, Grace Seward

Bus: Poem, Nikki Shiga

One Hundred Eighty Times: Poem, Jonathan Clemente

Artemis the Hunter: Poem, Allisen Casey

Smoke At Your Own Risk: Poem, Allisen Casey

Retribution: Poem, Dante Nastasi

The Divine Brew: Prose, Evan Pohlchuk

Great Deep Slumber: Poem, Corina Schmidt

History of a Face: Poem, Kieran Austin

Restless: Poem, Kieran Austin

Ghostface Killah eats a Pesto Sandwich: Poem, Cameron Henderson

I Dream In Vapor: Poem, Alice Flanagan

Still: Poem, Bella Convertino

Gender Roles as a metaphor is in here somewhere: Poem, Gianna Galazzo

Love: Poem, Gianna Galazzo

Pens: Poem, Gianna Galazzo

The Housewife: Prose, Allie LaRocco

Untitled: Drawing, Henry Dul

Untitled: Photograph, Allisen Casey

Night to Morning

Sometimes the night sky breaks and it rains its stars on your Milky Way hair
And the blue velvet sky is finely beaten and sprinkled into your eyes
And your goose bumps fill craters of the moon
And when I look at you
You hold the night more beautiful than I could have ever imagined
And you shine and the cloth of your body beams with its sweet night smell
The smell of lavender and pine
The smell of hope
And the animals, all the animals with their gray eyes on the secret prey they want
They sing to you
In the morning
Your eyelashes will look like grass with sticky dew
And your arms will be branches of a hazel nut tree
That run down your neck, through your spine, to your toes and roots you to the earth
And the sun- the sun will escape its rays and crawl down to the earth on which you stand
And the sun will lie upon your cheek
And kiss it
And you will make the most beautiful morning I have seen
Then I will not be able to worship the garnish sun or the sacred moon
But him, my love

Passion for Admiration

My eyes rest upon my fingers, on my lips, and on my chest.
Time and space takes nothing from your beauty, it is all I see.
The warm breath on your windows spell out your resonating words.
For breakfast, I devour your beauty marks on your nose, the dimples on your cheeks,
The goose bumps on your shoulders.
I wear glasses with your picture plastered to them, earrings with your whispers, and
chokers with your gentle touch.
The poems I read to you have no words on the pages, they are in your eyes.
I envy the immortal, they will never have to live a day without you for you are immoral.
Our children will have sewing machine fingers and they will stitch us together.
I do not need a sheet or a pillow for the night because your body is warm and your chest
Is soft.
My white noise machine is collecting dust, for your heart beat is all I'd like to listen to.
I match my breath, I close my eyes,
And with your kiss on my eyelids
I dream of your winter mint smell.

-Cassandra Traina

Euphoric Meadow

Her shoulders used to slump like

the meaning of surrender.

Her eyes used to be glazed over with a sense of longing,

yet a sense of fear.

Her throat used to clench with caution,

as words tried to escape from her heart.

Her feet were dainty; without a callous or blister. Completely smooth,

lacking any sign of any movement more intense as a step.

Then, the meadow came.

Birds sang to her; opening her ears to an orchestra of euphoria.

Her eyes opened wide as she watched the flowers flutter;

as a gust of a mighty wind blew through nature's bed,

dotted with pastels and brights.

Her amber-flecked eyes sparkled with joy.

Her delicate feet ran through the tall wiry grass; callouses almost seemed to grow.

She had no fear of stepping out of an unknown path.

-Allie LaRocco





The Forest-car

**The ferryman drove me in the forest-car,
A relic of the treefarm realm
Lost and muddy through post-suburban yuppie-land,
With the ashtree grown from the mildew floor mats
Framing oldtown brick horizons in wooden liner notes,
And the north wind, the broken sunroof breeze of dilute solar flares
Flurried the blue switchgrass in the fungal seams,
And when it got to us, when the street rolled under the wheels to the waste-
docks
And the brownwater brooks,
And the asphalt citadels in August snowdrifts,
And the melting dust-and-cinder coliseum,
And the lonesome freight guardian of the plywood grove,
We stop and wait for the wind to open up our latches.**

-Cameron Henderson

Flowers in Early Spring

Flowers in early spring
and the way a landscape looks painted
After a light
Snow while you're sleeping
The way the color pops
After the rain pours down
sun shining through
orange and gold trees.
The sound of ocean waves
And receiving letters
In the mail.
But nothing means
quite as much to me
As the one who wrote
The return address,
and the words
meant for me.

-Tobey Kane-Seitz

What's a Religion Born of Wind?

What's a religion born of wind?
Cathedrals of dried grass
Stained glass of a cicada's wing
An impermanent place of worship
(as all places of worship are)
In fire, little more than seconds of kindling
In wind, scattered with a child's hot breath
There is no praising a lively gust
Because it is impersonal, above good or evil
The Greeks reflected their own depravities in the
four winds
Poured their crimes into the breeze
And trapped their guilt in a rock in the sea
When I feel the biting North
I can hear Orithya's clouded screams
Even the syrupy, westerly Zephyrus
Killed young Hyacinth in jealousy
If the pure winds rape and ravage
What hope is there for me in an airborne belief
system?
What redemption can there be for me
In the mistral palms of a sinner
So fickle, so fickle
As are the winds (as am I)
I'm sure
As the dust devils picked up in the prairie
Not a soul thought of
A gentle exhale smelling of sycamore
And in a pelting monsoon
Who would thank the zephyr that gathered
the wispy beginnings of rain
Could you pray to a god that does not love you,
Does not smile, does not reflect back
A pearly heaven in its grinning teeth?
Or worse, has no face at all
What enlightenment is there in either

-Wylie Thornquist

The Calm After the Storm

Do you know my favorite type of weather?
Favorite temperature or season?
My favorite type of weather
Is the calm,
After the storm.

In the summer is when I love it most.
When radiant sun rays peak through the clouds
Shining like a night light,
And clearing away the dark.

When the sun illuminates the air with an angel-like glow
Bouncing off of the mist that hangs around
Surrounding you with open arms,
Begging you to come and venture outside.

When the mist runs over your skin and eyes
Like many tiny soft feathers.
The birds come out and sing their songs,
Enjoying the sun and air.

When water drips from leaves and flowers
Giving every plant a glow and shine
And the spider webs strong enough to with-stand the storm
Glisten as drops of water hang onto each thread.

Everything smells like new life and growth
It smells fresh.
When everything is alive, yet calm,
And serenity fills the outdoors.

This weather is most enjoyable for me, pleasurable.
The weather I love most
Is the calm,
After the storm.

-Josie Altucher

An Adventure of Sorts

Elizabeth had hoped her first step onto the New York City train platform would be grand and monumental. The scene would zoom in and circle her head like the cinematography in a professional movie. She would stand there for a moment, breathing in her first gulp of independence in the city.

Instead she teetered at the edge of the sliding train door, waiting for the correct space to fit herself into the flowing traffic of people. She darted out at a seemingly clear moment. She felt a brisk jab on the back of her heel and instinctively turned around. A giant suited man towered over her, his briefcase at the perfect height to swing at her and knock her to the floor to be trampled by a combination of Uggs, sneakers, leather boots, and, most dangerously, spiky heels. The man looked down at Elizabeth with a puzzled, nervous, slightly stern but possibly intimidated expression. They both looked ahead instantly.

She began to ease into a rhythm of steps, and scooted herself into empty spaces when they were available. There was something about being by herself that made her want to move quickly, a certain energy, maybe brought on by the other people, that made her feel rushed, but motivated. She had three hours before her film class, so that was not the reason for her fast pace. Elizabeth wouldn't say that film was her utmost and only passion. In fact she didn't feel particularly more drawn to film than she was for the other things she enjoyed. She was a girl of many interests, but she had no overwhelmingly clear message of what brought her the most pleasure or spirit. She appreciated many things, but hadn't found her "calling" yet. But she knew she loved to watch movies, and she loved the experience of empathy for the characters as she observed them. She had also made a few attempts at screenplay, but she was still very amateurish, and they had faded out after about ten pages. Still, she had been riveted by writing them. Another main reason for taking this class was that it got her away from her suburban neighborhood and gave her time to herself in a chaotic but human city.

She exited the train platform into the huge expanse that was Grand Central's main concourse. She gaped at the ceiling above her. No matter how old she grew, there was something about that incredible mural that astounded her. It was so excessive, so enormous, but so simple. Its simplicity was what made it so difficult, in Elizabeth's mind. She wondered about the process. How did those people get themselves up so high, shaking and panicky, and hold their tool with the precision to create such perfectly immaculate lines to depict our galaxy so accurately? To her it was not only beautiful, but also a symbol of focus, and drive. She remembered how her friend had told her that her mother had worked on curating the ceiling, and had inscribed her initials on an out-of-sight corner. There was no way Elizabeth could ever have that. Her beginnings were not as exciting or rich as her friend's. But Elizabeth would come up with her own way to document herself here.

Someone gently brushed her arm, drawing her out of her daydream. She realized she'd have to move, for remaining idle in a crowded place like Grand Central was not a wise decision. Her mother had told her to always head right when she got off the train platform, but she had stumbled into the main concourse without thinking. She looked around, ashamed of how inexperienced she appeared. She then got her bearings and took off in the direction of the 42nd street exit. She passed a few stores as she walked. The smell of Zaro's bakery and its windows filled with enticing cupcakes and pastries were too much for her to resist. She walked inside of the cramped room and squeezed her way to the front to get a better look at the display.

"Next? What do you want?" asked the Zaro's employee impatiently.

Was she talking to Elizabeth?

"Oh, um, a blueberry scone please," answered Elizabeth, without confidence.

She grabbed the bag with the scone in it from the intimidating employee and joined the line waiting to pay. She searched around in her bag for what seemed like ages for her wallet. Why was it that the most important things like wallets and phones always ended up at the bottom of the bag underneath useless wrappers and lengthy books and old receipts? When her fingers felt the soft leather of her wallet she was relieved. She managed to get the wallet out after the struggle, so as not to cause anything to fall out of her bag.

Elizabeth reached the cashier.

"A blueberry scone," Elizabeth murmured.

"What's that?" asked the woman behind the cash register.

Elizabeth's mother's constant reminder to speak up rang in Elizabeth's mind. She hated those 'I told you so' moments.

"A blueberry scone" Elizabeth repeated, louder.

"\$2.50."

Elizabeth gave her a five. When she got her change back, she hurried to put it in her wallet. There was a restless line of people behind her, and she felt pressured. She stuffed the two bills into the wallet and hurriedly stowed the quarters in her coat pocket.

She was finally on her way. As she walked she awkwardly leaned over, cramming her scone into the almost non-existent space in her bag. She zipped up her coat, but looked down and realized the ends of her cardigan were sticking out like uncomfortable limp wings sprouting from her hips. She hitched them up into the bottom of her coat and put her gloves on.

Elizabeth pushed open the swinging door and stepped onto 42nd street. At this moment she experienced the gleam she had longed for when she had stepped onto the train platform. The tall buildings, the lights, the flashy excessiveness of the city were not what appealed to Elizabeth. She appreciated the grimy storefronts that hid the best ethnic food or the most authentic products. She found her pulse within the determination and ambition of the faces of the people walking by. Everyone was surrounded by their personal drive. Those who belong in the city are those with purpose. The fast-paced, darting around, sharp faced, focused sort of

walk distinctly differed from the swaying, low-to-the-earth, unmotivated walk of the people in her town.

The crisp frost in the air stung Elizabeth's face, making her fantasize about woolen hats and furry hoods. She enjoyed watching her feet make the transitions onto different types of pavement: marble, cement, cobblestone.

She came to a gentle halt at her first bus stop. This was where she first began to feel the intense chill. She pulled her zipper up the last centimeter.

"Freezing, isn't it?" remarked a voice behind her. Elizabeth turned around to see a white-haired middle-aged man in a long beige coat and earmuffs.

"Yes." Elizabeth strained to get her voice out. Her shyness in certain situations was almost physical. She smiled courteously at the man. He smiled kindly back at her and swayed back and forth on his feet, rubbing his hands together for warmth.

She stared at a bus coming in the distance. The red numbers were a mass of blur at this point. As it slowly paraded closer to the stop, the numbers came into clarity. It was her bus, arriving in miraculous time.

"Well look at that!" Exclaimed her new almost-friend. Elizabeth chuckled quietly in response.

The seconds she waited as others climbed the steps onto the bus were the coldest. She felt as if there was a magnet inside of the bus, dragging her in, and she had to fight against it. Finally, it was her turn. She guided her metrocard into the slot. The machine displayed the non-encouraging message of "Please swipe again." She attempted it a second time, her efforts again being unsuccessful. She heard a muffled noise from the bus driver.

"I'm sorry, what?" Elizabeth asked in a panicked tone.

"Turn it around." The driver suggested.

"Oh sorry, sorry." Elizabeth gushed. After her third try, she was finally in, the only casualty being her pride.

As she turned to stride into the seating area of the bus, she glimpsed out of the corner of her eye the white-haired man shaking his head with shrugged shoulders, as if to say "no big deal."

Thankfully, there were several empty double seats in the front of the bus. The white-haired man settled himself into a single seat two rows in front of her and became engrossed in his iPad, which he had drawn out of his canvas briefcase.

During the brief bus ride Elizabeth fell into her usual routine of people watching. At one time at home she had jotted down notes of people's behavior in an old composition notebook, but had then realized how unsettled it made others. So now she relished her observations as they came to her and made no attempt of recording them or storing them in her memory. They came and went as quickly as the change of the stoplights on city corners – sometimes faster. She had recently become interested in body language between people in

different types of relationships – not excluding those who were alone. Even the way someone crossed paths with another in a narrow area displayed the type of person they were, even in a mundane way. Elizabeth had been stretching herself to analyze all things previously considered “mundane”.

As the number of streets before her stop began rapidly decreasing, a bubble of worry formed in her gut. Sometimes the driver would go two streets before stopping, sometimes three, sometimes even only one. She had no way of predicting how many stops there were before hers. Being out of control was Elizabeth’s major fear. Her finger almost pressed the dangerous-seeming red button one stop too early, but she realized her almost-mistake just in time. When they were just two streets away from her stop, she took the risk and pressed the button. Thankfully, the bus pulled into her destination safely.

As she exited, she could see the sun filling everything – the signs, the eroding bricks, the rubber on her shoes, her own skin – even though it was winter and frigid. Somehow it seemed warmer here, more glowing. She had removed herself from the touristy Grand Central area into the hipper, more cultural area of Chelsea. She strutted confidently two blocks ahead to glance at the building where she would be taking her class. Assured that she had easily found that, she wandered about, taking in the storefronts of shoe stores, butcheries, vegan health food shops, and everything in between. She became momentarily captivated by the placid serenity of a pair of Buddhist statues.

As she finished her odd ramble, she came to the realization that she had a grand total of two hours left before her class began, which meant at least an hour and a half to kill. It was lunchtime, and though she hadn’t planned to, she set out to find a place to eat.

She passed tiny corner coffeeshops, barbeque comfort food joints, and expensive tapas cuisine before she decided on an average-priced Thai restaurant.

As she walked in, she realized she had never eaten at a restaurant alone before. At home, someone sitting solitarily at a table would hear a background of muffled snickers, whispered pity, or, the worst, would be harangued into joining a group of out of control, highly interrogative but hopelessly ignorant teenagers.

“How many?” inquired the waiter in his polite, sweet, accented voice. Elizabeth flinched very subtly, embarrassed.

“Just me.”

The waiter nodded and led her to a table by the window.

He handed her a menu and was off. She hungrily opened it, her mouth tingling at the thought of spices and curry. Her eyes glanced over the choices, knowing some, having to read the descriptions of others. She didn’t feel lonely, but she had a sense that someone who saw her would think she was. That was what made her uncomfortable. She enjoyed the solitude, but was completely paranoid that people would think of her as an outcast. She felt bizarre for feeling contented when by herself.

The waiter returned moments later, bringing her a glass of water. One of the downsides of being by herself was that she had to endure the awkward silence as he poured, instead of having someone to converse with to ease the tension.

"Can I get you something to drink?" he asked, something about his voice charming Elizabeth, he seemed so genuinely caring.

"Just the water, thank you."

"I'll be back in a couple of minutes if you need more time."

"Thank you," Elizabeth replied, although she had already made up her mind. If there was one thing she was surely knowledgeable about it was Thai food. She had studied it intensely using the method of eating it as often as humanly possible.

Her gaze swept the room, scanning the images of Thailand and the traditional Thai objects being displayed on shelves. She then noticed a young woman, sitting alone, just like her, focused on the novel in her hands. Why was it that Elizabeth regarded this woman with the utmost respect, thought of her reading as intelligent and thoughtful, and considered her sophisticated for sitting alone at a table? How could she think this when she had previously criticized herself for the same things? Maybe the only difference between urban people and suburban people was that the urban people could accept their actions and make them look natural. Elizabeth believed that she was meant to be an urban person, at least she hoped, so she decided in that moment to accept her own actions. She felt that sitting alone at this restaurant was a personal success because it required her to be an individual.

The waiter came back to check on Elizabeth.

"Ready now?" he asked.

"I'll have an order of summer rolls and a Massaman curry please." Elizabeth spoke clearly and with conviction.

The waiter took her order and backed away into the mystery behind the curtain in the back of the room. Elizabeth sat more heavily into her chair and stared out the window.

She looked at the people. She realized that along with the drive and determination and focus she had observed earlier, there was also a layer that was carefree and boundless. There was a freedom in that there were no existing shells surrounding them. They were bare in their individuality.

She thought of her town. Her mind lingered on the students in her highschool. What bothered Elizabeth above all else was that there was a certain judgment of ambition. Personal motivation was met with complete misunderstanding, gaping looks or scowls. If a student began to feel passionate or care about something that could help them achieve success, everyone else would question them. "Why do you bother?" Or "What's the point, anyway?" And there were no answers to those questions, only a feeling that can't be described. Not only did people have no realization of their future, they thrust their lack of ambition on those who had it, making it frowned upon to even try new things.

Of course, this was a generalization. Elizabeth didn't have hatred for her peers, only a slight amount of annoyance and pity.

As Elizabeth dug in to her summer rolls and found ecstasy in the peanuts filling her Massaman curry, she opened up the old composition notebook she had been carting around but not using out of self-consciousness. What was there to be afraid of anyway? She began to write.

"The stern-looking middle-aged couple seem grouchy and uninterested in their surroundings until you glance down and realize they are holding hands. The tall, charmingly intimidating but desirable man looks at everything as if he's searching for a new perspective. The woman adorned with various types of tribal jewelry seems incredulous about everything. The Middle Eastern man wears a rugby jersey and carries a messenger bag. He seems to be the most sensitive....."

Her thoughts swarmed her and she wrote calmly while she ate. When she felt she should leave, she paid the bill and ripped out the section in her notebook entitled "The Waiter", where she had described all the qualities she had admired in her server. She left it lying on the table along with her generous tip. She thought to herself, "If he finds it creepy, who cares? This is New York. I will never see that man again."

She walked quickly to the building of the film class. She opened her bag and saw her squashed scone, forgotten in the sudden craving for curry. Oops. She pulled out the note with directions to see what floor she was supposed to go to. Floor two.

The elevator doors were already open and waiting for her. They were luxurious, with shiny metal and marble floors, not what she had expected for a small film class. She thought quickly of her previous fear of elevators and had a smug moment thinking of how she had gotten over it.

She arrived on floor two, now seeing what she had expected her film class to look like. Posters were hung hastily on the walls of the hall, attached with putty. A woman with a tangled mane of brown hair strode by, nodding at her. Elizabeth opened the glass door at the end of the hall and entered into a busy environment of people mingling around. She headed for the information desk.

"Are you here for the teen film class?" the woman with the short red hair asked from behind the desk.

"Yes." Elizabeth replied, meekly, her self-consciousness creeping back into her poisonously.

"We have a better projector downstairs so you guys are actually meeting in the basement today," the woman explained.

"Thank you," Elizabeth replied. She went through the glass door and back to the elevator. She pressed the B button.

When the elevator doors opened, she was met with gray. Gray filled all of her senses. There was nothing that looked remotely like a classroom. She took a few steps around, trying to

get her bearings. There were two hallways, one leading to what seemed like nothing promising, the other had a turning steel door, like the one they had to exit subways. It was the type that you could see through very easily, it was more of a set of bars than a substantial door. Elizabeth assumed that whatever room the woman was talking about was beyond the gate. It turned gently open with Elizabeth's steps pushing it through and clicked back into place. There were more doors on this side. One had a random combination of letters: OBNATC.

The doors were grim and terrifying. Elizabeth was afraid to open any of them, in fear that when opened, fire would rush out of them or a man would be staring at her from inside, or maybe a dark hallway would face her, filled with evil. She began to feel uneasy about the basement in general and what could be lurking there. She decided to go back through the turning gate, back to the elevator, up to the second floor and ask for more clear directions from the woman at the desk. She went up to the turning gate again, but when she pushed on it, to her horror, it wouldn't budge. It was locked from her side. A mass of steel was blocking her from the elevator, her only plan of escape.

Elizabeth began to panic. This was not the basement she was supposed to be in. It couldn't be. She must have somehow made a mistake with the directions the woman had given her. Everything about it screamed that it was wrong. Even if dangers weren't lurking behind the doors, she was trespassing in the lower level of a Manhattan building. More than that, she couldn't get out. She could be stuck here for as long as it took for a janitor or a worker of the building to decide to take a look around the basement. She didn't know whether to scream or to cry. Neither was coming out.

She remembered that she had added the phone number of her film teacher into her phone, he had emailed all the students and parents a week prior with his contact information. Maybe the film class truly was behind one of the fear-inducing doors and she was being childish. He would tell her that. If not, hopefully he could send someone down to rescue her. She typed out as mature and coherent of a message she could manage, describing her situation, and pressed send. A little red icon popped up on her screen, telling her that she had zero service.

At this moment Elizabeth was genuinely terrified. It seemed as if there was no way out and she could not reach anyone. If anything awful happened to her she couldn't even tell her mother. She tried squeezing herself between the steel rungs of the gate but failed.

Why did she think she could take on traveling to the city by herself, navigating and reacting to surprises? She was in a situation with no way out now, because of her own inflated confidence. The city was not an exciting, bubbling, fascinating place to her anymore. It was a malicious city filled with shadowy basements and locked steel gates.

Elizabeth wanted to sit down and moan. Instead she darted around for no reason, her nerves forcing her to move.

Something suddenly popped into her attention. There was a corner she hadn't seen. It was dark and intimidating. She decided to brave it nevertheless. She turned the corner and there was a door with deep red block letters saying EXIT. There were also diagonal yellow and black lines, begging her to be cautious. The door was made of thick metal.

Elizabeth did not want to open this door. She would either find herself in a horrific hidden part of the building, a dirty alleyway where she couldn't figure out her location, or an alarm would go off and she would be in deep trouble. But she looked back at the steel gate and realized there was no choice.

She pushed through the door and to her surprise, she was in the depths of a New York City underground garage. She darted back into the basement. The men parking cars would think she was insane, popping out from one of the random doors connected to buildings. But she had to get out somehow.

She grabbed her bag and opened the door once more. This time she sprang out of the basement, running as fast as her lungs could handle, fleeing from her confinement, ignoring the stares of the confused people. She scaled a long ramp and finally came in contact with fresh air. Her eyes scanned the tall buildings and the backdrop of the bluest sky, more blue than she had ever seen. Or maybe she just appreciated it more after the flood of grey she had just been ensconced in. Her jacket was off, since she had removed it when she was inside, but her adrenaline gave her a buzz of warmth.

She didn't feel like a child anymore. Even if she had stupidly gotten herself into a horrifying situation, she had also gotten herself out of it. She had "lived to tell the tale", as many would say. The city had given her a newly sharpened set of survival skills. She knew she'd never leave.

A group of teenagers strolled by.

"Are you guys going to the film class?" Elizabeth asked. They stopped and smiled with friendliness at her.

"Yeah, we were there last semester, we know where to go. Come with us." A hispanic boy answered.

At last, safety.

-By Lucy Austin

This Title Doesn't Have a Poem

**It's a door without a room.
A handle without a broom,
a textbook without a fact,
an opening without an act.
It's a host without a guest,
an intro without the rest,
a zipper with nothing to zip
a spatula with nothing to flip.
It's a something without a purpose,
Like pointless irony that makes a big fuss.**

-Catherine Drotar

And now: A "Haiku"

**Haikus can be hard.
And sometimes they end weirdly.
Octopus party.**

-Becky Gore

You Remind Me of My Aunt

You remind me of my
fathers eldest sister-
my aging aunt with the sea grass hair,
a marble eyed old woman fenced
in to a garbage corral in
Ypsilanti, Michigan,
too engrossed in
the shadows of telephone poles
and the innate hue of electrical wires
and the ever clearer curvature of the
earth,
too in love with the
lines in the concrete
and the way the ground falls away
from her feet
and the kaleidoscopic expanse above
(which she claims beckons
her in her sleep),
to see the face in the
speckled mirror above the speckled sink;
a worn face,
a sun-harshed face,
the lapsed face

of a lapsed zealot
born from a microcosm
of midwestern catholicism
into the macrocosm of expression
with a celebratory whelm of color and
faith and cynicism
whose consequential
existential
disquietude left her to seek
refuge in her
sea grass hair
and marble eyes,
refuge in her
electrical wires and lines in the concrete
the curvature of the earth and
the ground falling away from her feet,
refuge in
a fenced-in garbage corral in
a parking lot in
Ypsilanti, Michigan.
you remind me of her.
maybe it's the nose?

-Alice Flanagan

Facetious Babies

These are bundles of joy

gifts of life

to the untrained eye

they can do no harm

but do not be fooled

for they will judge your every move.

most don't hear their sassy remarks

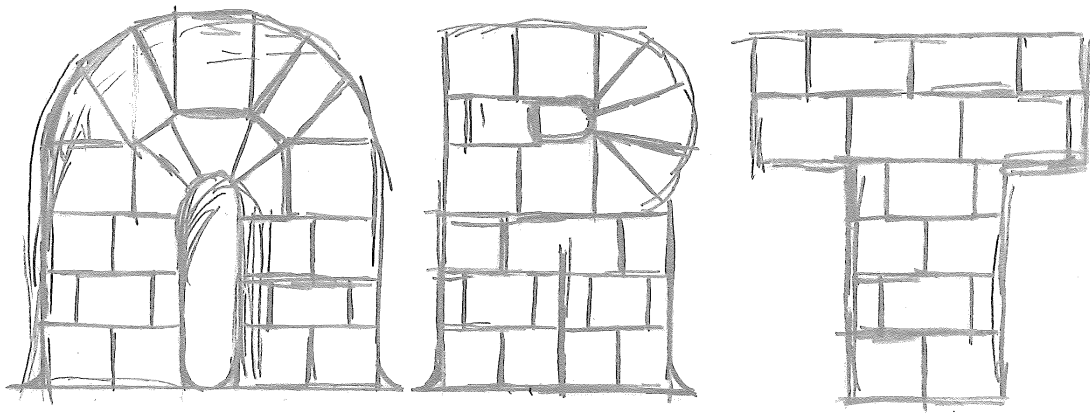
as they are blinded by cuteness.

these babies are big trouble

sorry to burst your bubble.

-Clayton Smith

RISE



POETRY





King of the Northeastern Sky

When dark night creeps up on the day
The sun solemnly slides away
Burrowed below the moon-lit sky
He lets the darkness pass him by
Then with a new found bravery
He rises up from yonder sea
Shining upon the empty night
He conquers shadows with his light
Now darkness and corruption slain
The world no longer suffers pain
For in the clouds the sun now lies
As king of the Northeastern skies

-Jonathan Clemente

Taunting Birds

The birds are taunting me

I cannot fly

I cannot soar in the great blue sky

I am rooted to the earth

I am born here

I will die here

I am stuck

The birds are taunting me

I cannot fly

GREEN BEAST

Jealousy is the green

Beast that shrouds my soul and

Clouds my mind.

- Isabelle Laifer

Frozen Bagels

**A bag of frozen bagels
Huddled like wet dogs around each other
Almost miserable looking
Moved from warm brown paper bags on busy city streets
To plastic recycled from old editions
Of the New York Times
Their new neighbors are hot dogs, stacked
Amongst tubs of unused butter and
The one smoked eel that never stopped
Looking like a snake making its way
Through pastures of frozen peas and corn
Perhaps the bagels were just looking for the light of day
But only received it through quick bursts
Of UV radiation and heated toaster strips**

**Maybe it would have looked better
Worn like a giant ring on
A seven-year-old's soft finger
Scattering poppy seeds like
Contrails of a pilot lost in his own sky
But now one lies in front, skin golden with margarine
Like a new coat of paint
Covering an old wall of sheetrock
But unlike the wall
It doesn't stand through the tremors and harsh rains
No, it never made it through the day**

-Kieran Austin

African Eve

Strange, it could be said
Of that ancient African Eve
Who belongs to all of humankind through blood.
The stemming-point of alliance, conflict, lust, complexity, loyalty.
How divided a world we are
When at one point all Earth's people
Nuzzled off of the same bosom.
Reaped the benefits of one single concentrated thing.
The barest human instinct: to nourish oneself.
We shared together.

Worlds change.
Apartheids, genocides, segregations, enslavement.
Rebellion against the fact that
We are all the same,
That in the beginning we all suckled the same milk, none richer, none more
plentiful than others.
Creating words like "superior", "grand", "master".
Human-made injustices toward humanity.

Our tendency to grow apart gave birth to
Mahoganies
Taupes
Ivories
Russets
Coppers
Alabasters
Pigments dotting the radars.
Territories marked
Lines drawn
Eyes tilted for some
Drooped for others
Bridges of noses as characteristic of a people
As the bridges over their rivers

Slowly, over time
Like a snail through cattails
The streams have trickled between each other
Muddying the waters
Until there can be no identification of the river
In which they came.
Droops and tilts of eyes evening out.

Balancing.
The pointed mountains of lips meeting wide swooping valleys
Producing plateaus.
Our species has reached a new era
Where diversity is celebrated but also blended.
Until one day, far off,
Our waters will be so tainted
That there will be no documentation of those
Who knelt down to take a sip before.

The barest humanity
Is defined
By the unrecognizable.

-By Lucy Austin

Boundlessness

I have eyes to see every angle,
on all appropriate parts of the body.
With the ability to encompass all, no edge left in darkness.
For breakfast,
I swallow fast heartbeats, invisible railings, manmade ideals of constriction.
I wear a flowing shawl of ancestors,
the dead with minds still brightly alive.
I fear harnesses, I fear the confines of physical inability.
For fun there are masses to jump off of,
notes to reach,
depths to crawl.
I am drawn to fearlessness, for I come with multiple complexities,
while he is made of only energy.
Our baby would grow to be petite, weightless, springy,
with a hidden layer of strength,
her gut a catapult.
I am able to rest on the support of others,
pajamas made of warm, glowing fire, so as to not let spirit die.
I pray for flotation, enlightenment.
I confess to my inconsiderate carefree nature.
In dreams I smell the nonexistent aroma of pure, rich, untouched air.

-By Lucy Austin

Intentions

Everything is fine.
Everything is ok.

I can't find myself willing to accept any of
them.

Take these pills,
And check in with me in two weeks.

You shouldn't worry so much,
What's the point?

Have some water!
How is water supposed to make me feel
better?

...Brilliant.

Just get over it.
Don't think about it.

Talk it out.
Talk to me!

What's the dosage?
One pill each night?

Distract yourself,
Get some new hobbies.

But all you'll do is analyze me like some
exotic animal
Behaving out of the norm in a zoo.

Why not four?

Listen to music,
Take deep breaths.

Besides,
I don't know what to talk about.

Why not chug the whole bottle?
Won't it make me feel well?

They don't understand.
The things that they tell me?

The silly thing isn't that I'm letting
something small get to me.

The world around me closes in.

They're the things I whisper to myself each
night.

The silly thing is that there's nothing
wrong at all.

Everything is fine.
Everything is ok.

And though all our intentions are pure,

Right?

-Becky Gore



-Depths-

Have you ever looked out the window of the subway, and felt the urge to venture into the darkness? To see what dwells beyond the curtain of shadow, where only one's imagination fills the void? Felt the lust for adventure of the explorers of old, only to be pulled back into reality by the dry illumination from the ceiling and the quiet crowdedness of the interior? Few have dared look far beyond the glass walls between the familiar and the unknown, and even fewer have dared to cross them.

Sometimes, though, once every ten thousand times someone glances through those windows, they will see, as if in a dream, two figures off in the darkness. Two figures, on the border of reality and illusion. Two figures, running into the depths.

1

-Shadows-

"Stay down."

Stephen lowered his camera. The two crouched behind a crumbling partition between the two lines. When the subway had fully passed, Anders slowly raised from the filthy bed of concrete and debris. He beckoned Stephen to follow.

"The door should be coming up in a bit," Anders spoke quietly "Just watch out for motion detectors, we don't want to be tripping alarms."

Stephen nodded, and trailed Anders down the track, stepping lightly along the outside of the track.

The multi-track expanse soon shrank down into a single-train corridor, walled on either side. Along the concrete walls ran a bar of red and white stripes, as if to show the way. Rows of bright white lights lit the path. Occasionally, a red, blinking light would stray off the line to indicate a motion detector, camera, or some other unknown point of interest. After about 100 yards, the tunnel opened up again, and the right-hand wall dissolved into a row of separating columns and cinderblock partitions.

Approaching a station, the graffiti levels began to rise. Amateur taggers and daring, testosterone-driven teens would often slip off a platform to scrawl indecipherable text-fragments on doors and walls for their regular adrenaline rush. Further along the track, a cavity opened in the left-hand wall. On the far side of the rectangular nook was a small set of stairs leading to a black metal door. Atop the doorway were two lights, one broken and unilluminated. The door could easily be mistaken for a white one at a distance, for it was coated so thickly with layer upon layer of paint, so that individual tags merely blended into monotony. All that remained was the negative space, a black relic of its former appearance.

Anders looked quickly at his smartphone, checking the time.

"We gotta be quick, the train's just about leaving the platform," Anders said as he slipped over towards the door. "Watch out for the third rail right there, but come on over"

As soon as Stephen had walked over to his partner-in-crime, there was a metallic bellowing from further up the track, as if from a robotic stampede raging through the tunnels.

"Crap!" Ander's said loudly. "Keep the camera down."

The two crouched by the miniature stairs, pretending to be invisible in their dark clothing. They waited there while the beast barreled past them through the tunnel, whipping their hair with warm, displaced air. Once the rhythmic, clockwork clattering had faded into the distance, the two rose.

"Perfect timing," smiled Stephen.

"That was one close call," replied Anders with a relieved chuckle.

He proceeded to draw a complex penknife-tool from his jeans. The object was packed tightly with a set of blades and obscure utility devices. He then inserted one of the smaller blades into the keyhole of the door, jostling it until the oscillation shook open the rusted lock. He began to monologue as he opened the door, and continued as they entered.

"It's not even fair to call these things locks anymore. Most of the maintenance infrastructure was built in the 1950s, and it's stayed pretty much the same since then. Most people aren't dumb enough to come down here in the first place, and those who do are more interested in graffiti than exploration. Other than the rare worker, we're pretty much the only ones that actually bother to go through these doors."

Stephen already knew a great deal of Anders's urban and historical knowledge. He was talking far more to the camera than his partner.

Beyond the timeworn steel panel, a short hallway extended towards a vertical tunnel, its walls punctuated with ladder rungs. Anders turned and gave a wide smile to the camera. He began to climb, until he had reached the underside of the manhole, the metal stopper to the dark enigmas of the Undercity. He reached up a gloved hand, and pushed the disc aside, allowing a crescent of early morning light to fall onto the faces of the two pioneers.

"We're home."

2

-Nexus-

Anders swiped at the screen of the tablet computer, turning the pages of a cracked paper manuscript, diagrams and specifications visualized in digital form. The document was one of many relics of the city's planning and infrastructure design in the early 1800s. Originally, it was a small but burgeoning port town, sucking money out of the thriving tea market. In 1811, Mayor William Livingston began the process of urbanizing the town, appointing commissioners to lay down plans for sewers, railroads, roads, and zoning.

For the past month, Anders had been visiting the Central Library far more frequently, since they had digitized most of the city history documents, and publicized new manuscripts that were before only seen by those truly intrepid and perseverant researchers.

His current topic of interest was the 1818 Central Rail Station, an ambitious infrastructural project that constituted the hub of the urban subway system. According to the documents he had scrutinized, the underground station was scheduled to be completed in 1823, 5 years after its commission. However, it was never completed for unknown reasons, and the rail system was built around it. Surprisingly, considering the grandness of the thing, there were very few remaining documents pertaining to it. It took a considerable amount of research to even know of its existence.

By cross-examining plans and maps, Anders deduced the most probable location of the Station. No document that he could find specifically pointed to the site, thus making it necessary for him to

spend weeks in the library tying together disparate sources in order to form a realistic path of attack. From what he could gather, there was no way to access the station directly through the train lines (as none were actually connected to the uncompleted hub). His best shot was through a long-forgotten portion of the sewers that branched eastward off of the Atlas River. Unlike the subway lines, the subterranean waterways were rarely, if ever, maintained. They were designed to be self-sufficient. This meant less to be worried about in regard to getting caught (except for the tricky business of surreptitiously entering and exiting manholes).

Anders almost always gathered his information from three sources: documents, his own personal experience, and the Dwellers. The Dwellers were the ones that had fallen through the cracks, the ones that had hit bad times, the ones that were ostracized, the ones who needed to hide, and the ones who wanted to escape. The Undercity was, in fact, steeped in its own culture- a troglodytic anthropology, a reclusive society unto itself. Anders was one of the few ambassadors between the Above and the Below, but even he would admit he had only scratched the surface of the subterranean and the dangerous mysteries offered in its outstretched palm. So unbelievably close, yet so foreign and unattainable. The public no longer knew of the city as it truly was. They saw a façade, a shell of shining skyscrapers and grassy parks, of crowded streets and exotic marketplaces, unaware of the dark mirror they stood upon, reflecting the city into its interior.

On more than one occasion, Anders had been warned about pursuing the eastern spur of the Atlas. Even for the Dwellers, there was a fearful mystery surrounding the lower echelons of the Undercity. These societies were as hidden from the upper dwellers as they were from the layman. For Anders, of course, this only furthered the intrigue. He had a feeling it was no coincidence that the way to the Central Station was one of these places.

He finally pulled his eyes away from the screen and his pad of paper. The page was littered in sketchy maps and outlines of paths, as well as rough notes written in his quick, pseudo-scripted handwriting. As soon as he had exited the fortress onto the sunlit street, he texted Stephen with his smartphone. The device also doubled as a GPS and mapping device when he needed it, and he had overlaid his maps with custom information taken from his research.

Hey Stephen.

Hey man, what's up?"

Got the plans for the next shoot. This one's gonna be fun. Ever heard of the 1818 Central Station?

The name sounds familiar. What about it?

"Hopefully we'll be able to see for ourselves.

You've always got something up your sleeve Anders.

It's gonna be a long trip, though. I'll give you the details soon. Wanna meet at my place?

Sure thing man.

See you soon.

Anders slipped the phone in his back pocket, and began down the grand marble stairs. Each step was covered in odd, 1-dimensional clusters of people, reminiscent of birds on a wire. People who were chatting, texting, eating, or simply gazing at the city. The Central Library was located in the old city. The new construction could be seen, glassy and metallic, behind the ornate stone architecture, but the atmosphere here still had a very old world (even European) feel. The city beneath the foundations, as Anders had learned, was just as elegant. The original architects didn't hold back on their designs. Mosaics, engraved text, plaques, and lofting arches made up the old subway stations (many of which were abandoned in the new network). Even the sewers were built extravagantly.

It took 15 minutes to walk to his apartment. The building was on the edge of the old and new cities. It was a humble neighborhood, but he felt lucky that he had landed enough jobs to get a decent place for himself rather than sticking to college dorms for grad school. He had transformed his flat into a paradise of his indulgences. Reproductions of city plans from all over the world, model buildings, architecture magazines, world maps, globes, and shelves upon shelves of books all livened the atmosphere. By the window, he kept a small collection of bonsai trees, among other curiosities. He covered his walls with prints of photographs from his countless expedition, organized into clumps based on region. The curving masonry of London's tunnel-bound rivers, the broken bedrock of Stockholm subways, and the bland, impermeable concrete of Las Vegas drainways, littered with debris from flooded campsites.

Stephen arrived, and sat opposite Anders by the glass coffee table. Anders moved aside piles of books and papers to make room for his new materials. Stephen sipped from a cup of dark coffee as Anders briefed him on the history of the operation, and the details of the route. Anders was already familiar with the Atlas, but this would be Stephen's first time.

"Fortunately, the Atlas is a drainage-only sewer. It's connected loosely with the sanitary sewer, so it's not all nice and squeaky clean down there, but we won't have to be wading through people's crap. When we reach here, there's a boat that we can use to take down the tributary. The water should be deep enough to canoe. The spur looks like it runs into some other old sewers, but I don't think we'll have to worry about encountering any waste. Bring noseplugs just in case, though."

"A boat? Like, a Dweller's?"

"Yeah. Whoever used to own it left ages ago. I found it just sitting in the water, tied up to a column. The creepy thing is, each time I saw it, even though it was months later, there was no algae on the bottom. My guess is that the local Dwellers use it for transportation sometimes. Still, they're so spread out most of the time it's easy to forget you're not alone down there."

Stephen raised his eyebrows.

"So when do we meet?"

3

-Dweller-

It was 11:00 on a Tuesday night. Few bystanders passed them, and there were no cops to be seen. Anders and Stephen sat on a bench on the edge of a small park. The manhole was about a meter away from them. They had already donned tall wader boots, and Anders had a thin crowbar hidden behind his back. Stephen held his camera in his lap. The street was lit solely by the spectrum of artificial illumination from stoplights and shop signs, casting a web of unnatural tones on the urban blackness.

A final group of people passed out of sight on the opposite side of the street. Anders rose, utterly silent, and swiftly dragged off the manhole cover. Stephen knew the routine, and followed Anders down through the sidewalk, holding to his camera and the ladder rung with one hand while replacing the cover with the other. Anders had reached the bottom of the drop, and turned on his headlamp. He signed Stephen a thumbs-up when he came down.

They were in what appeared, under the cold LED light of the headlamp, to be a control room of sorts. An array of large gears and cranks covered the right wall, their material so crusted with rust and stalactital growths that it was highly dubious that they still served any purpose at all. The opposite wall opened up into a large tunnel, revealing the room to be more of a nook coming off of the sewer. A sweep of the headlamp detailed their surroundings. The walls were masonry, each brick a hewn relic of the ancient city. They curved outwards and inwards as they climbed, forming a pseudo- circular tunnel around the water. Its level was about a foot or so, but the darkening and erosion on the walls revealed that the tunnel had sometimes filled up to only a few feet short of the ceiling. Anders began to narrate in an excited whisper.

"On an average day, the Atlas just runs with its own river water. It's a natural stream that was enclosed in the sewer tunnels and harnessed for drainage, but it's always running with flow from the source spring. When big rains come, the tunnels get inundated, and fill up almost completely. When that happens, there are floodgates to let the extra water into the sewage system. Only in the 60s did they do new work on the sanitary sewers to handle this overflow, after environmentalists were complaining about sewage getting swept past treatments plants and straight into the surrounding waters."

The two began to wade through the river water, moving downstream with the current. To the edges of some bricks clung limp braids of algae, undulating under the water. Occasionally they would pass a crack or pipe end in the wall that dribbled moisture into the tunnel, leaving streaks of mineral deposits. In some stretches, the stream narrowed into a thin bar bordered by flat floors. They passed through wide, arching intersections, by caged-waterfall tributaries, corroded mechanical floodgates, and

banks of stone and sandy sediment. Sometimes they would find scattered manmade remains, fabric and wood, which Anders explained were from flooded Dweller settlements. Some Dwellers had learnt to predict and protect themselves from the deluges, but most were not so lucky. They lived an evanescent existence, always starting anew. Anders guided them through the byzantine network of subterranean environs. Occasionally he would pause to point out some hidden piece of history or infrastructural curiosity, or to warn Stephen of some hidden danger. The journey was narrated by his snippets of explorational wisdom.

It was an hour before they came across the first major landmark in the sewer. Here, the tunnel opened up into a large chamber. The floor was of silt and gravel, and the ceiling was held up by thick, sturdy pillars and arches. The water was perhaps half a foot deep on average. The sedimentary terrain under the shallows was sculpted into dunes, isles, and valleys by the ever-present river current. Under the water, they could see the shapes of small fish darting amongst the stones.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the expanse, though, was the encampment. On the far side, built upon raised wooden platforms, was a cluster of makeshift tents, jury-rigged living space made of whatever detritus was at hand. An incandescent lantern hung above the settlement, revealing them even before Anders headlamp turned towards them.

"Hey, sorry if we're bothering anybody. I'm Anders, just filming with a friend. Not with the police," Anders gave his typical introduction.

A silhouetted figure in the distance began to move. He had been watching them the whole time, sitting on a dock of sorts jutting out from the encampment. He beckoned the two adventurers. They moved towards him, hesitantly.

"Don't worry boys, I ain't gonna bite," he assured them in a Cockney-esque accent. "We don't get too many travelers round these parts."

The man smiled and laughed at the mere idea of travelers in the Undercity. Yet here they were, right in front of him. His eyes were old and framed with creases of age. His yellow smile spoke volumes about his hygiene, but his expression was warm and sincere.

"What brings you two down into these parts?"

"Well, we're doing a documentary film about the city underground. Maybe you wouldn't mind if we interviewed you?" Anders explained. The man seemed slightly apprehensive.

"Mm, okay then. You won't be tryin' to reveal our whereabouts or nothing? Wouldn't want some slick city boys coming down here and stuffing us into homeless shelters. We got out homes, and they're down here."

"Don't worry, it's just for educational purposes. We're trying to get more people to appreciate the other side of the city," Stephen reassured. The man seemed satisfied enough, and stuck out his hand.

"Name's Greg, Pleased to make your acquaintance."

"So what were you doing when we interrupted you" Anders asked, looking at something resembling a fishing rod where the old man sat.

"Oh, fishin' for eels, boy! You'd be surprised how they breed down here. Not the handsomest lot I'll reckon, but a right good meal when you cook 'em up."

Stephen looked slightly sickened. Anders continued.

"So what else do you do for food in the camp?"

"Well, every now and again one of us'll pop out a manhole and nab some supplies from the grocery. I hear there are some people that never have to go up at all, they just grow everything down here somehow. Can't imagine how pale those blokes must be!" the man laughed heartily.

"So, would you mind talking about how you ended up down here?"

"Well, let me think, now. I lost me job in 1992, when the recession hit. Spent me days sleepin' on park benches for a while, 'till I got wind of the people living down under. At first I was living in the old train tunnels, after I saw another homeless bloke slip down over a wall into a secret entrance. I found me way in, and luckily some people down there were kind enough to help me out, teach me the rope with getting food, setting up shelter, and not getting caught. Two younger men, they was residents for 10 years then, and knew the Undercity like the back of their hands. They was crazy folks, though. Kept bantering about some haven city off down deep. How the gods still lived and crazy bollocks like that. You'll find some screwy folks downabouts here."

Anders and Stephen found a certain humor in hearing the old man, who had only moments ago been cheerily fishing for sewer-eels, commenting on the eccentricity of his fellow Dwellers.

"Anyway, they was good enough mates to me, and I'll remember them fondly. When the train-men came though, they barged in like a typhoon, like nobody's business. Sayin' this was company property, and we'd better scram or else. I got out by the skin of me teeth. Some of the others got taken away, probably to homeless shelters. Those two mates, though, they just vanished. Left nothing but some scribbles on the wall. I eventually found my way down here, going by what I remembered from those two, gathered me wits, and set up shop with these blokes."

Greg motioned to the tents where his friends were presumably asleep.

"We don't get too many folks round here. Workers barely come to the sewers. Once, though, some maintenance men was down fixin' a floodgate or sumthin'. A couple of them was passing through here. Carlos, you see, he's a silly fellow. Threw a sheet over his head and ran at 'em like a ghost. They scrambled!

Greg laughed at the memory of the antics.

"So whereabouts exactly are you boys headed? I take it you know your way."

"We're going to the Eastern tributary," Anders answered plainly, not wanting to reveal too much.

"The East? Oh, I've heard strange stories about those tunnels, boy. Strange people, strange happenings. They say the further down there you go, you'd best be armed. We don't mind upper-folks here, but further in, well, who knows. You'd two be vigilant."

A sense of foreboding fell over Stephen. Anders remained resolute.

"We will, you can count on it. Thanks very much for your time."

It took another 15 minutes of wayfaring through the tunnels before they reached the boat. It was a rugged red canoe, streaked with white scratches where the hull had scraped against the stone, gravel, and concrete of the sewers. It floated parallel to the side of the tunnel, where it was affixed via moldy rope to one of the steel reinforcement pillars. An aged bottle of detergent, with its bottom cut off to convert it into a bailer, hung from the stern. The oars had seen better days, cracked and de-varnished, but they would serve.

Stephen panned over the vessel, highlighting the juxtaposition. He didn't ask any questions, simply followed Anders' lead and crouched down in the hollow of the boat. Anders pushed his paddle into the dark water, moving them into the current. He was the ferryman, the Charon of the sewer, drifting down the stone-walled Styx into the damned heart of the City.





Why I am Bad at Writing Poetry

I often write
What I think is my best poetry during
Moments when I feel most insecure.
And yet they all sound the same.
I must not be very complex if all I am passionate about
Is my lack of self-worth
And other flaws in my character.
How is that when I look in the mirror all I see are the faults in my being
Never the faults in the world that surrounds me.
I stare at the things I can't change instead of the things I can.

-Grace Seward

Bus

Tell me,
How does it feel
To be the saddest person on the bus?
It's an honor really.
Do you mind
that you are all alone?
What about all these people surrounding you,
do they even care?
Why are they pretending to sleep?
Are you holding your breath?
Are you thinking of jumping?
Are you even scared?
Tell me,
What's it like to be a ghost.

-Nikki Shiga

One Hundred Eighty Times

I've been around the world

One hundred eighty times

I've travelled west to Sweden

Where euros are like dimes

I dropped down next to Sicily

Then morocco, then Sudan

Then travelled east to China

.... Korea and Japan

I slid past the pacific

Till I landed on Peru

Then jumped up to Barbados

Where the ocean was quite blue

My fingers touched the Amazon

And tickled Tenochtitlan

Then jumped over the Atlantic

And bounced right off Milan

I smashed right into Stonehenge

And flicked the Baltic Sea

Around the world one-eighty times
Is not enough for me
I need to feel the wind
As I climb Mount Everest's top
Or taste the buck and barley
As I walk through golden crop
I want to see a sunset
Six thousand miles away
But I can't wait forever
I need to go today
I hope to go to Canada
And taste the maple sap
But it's awfully hard to go there
When I'm looking at a map
... In fact.... I've never been,
To anywhere... At all
I've never left my room...
I'm just staring at a wall.

-Jonathan Clemente

Artemis the Hunter

She is like the snow that falls.

**Captivatingly beautiful,
But pain-stakingly cold.**

**Frost-bite sucks on your fingers
That are entangled with hers.**

She has priorities bigger than

**Simple giggles
And fluttered eyelashes.**

You find yourself sinking deeper

In her

Wise sparkling eyes.

**Of a woman who runs with wolves
With skin tough as diamonds.**

However, she howls in the night,

Howling at the moon

Praying she can take her walls down

Shed her skin, take off her armor

But is forever stuck.

...Forever idle,

Forever afraid,

Forever questioning

Who is underneath?

-Allisen Casey

Smoke At Your Own Risk

I miss you the way
Someone needs to kiss
Their cigarette
Every morning.

When I first wake up,
Tar has built up on my insides.
I need to paralyze the pain
And inhale you once again.

After I eat,
When I have a moment to sit,
When I'm watching our favorite show
And when I'm about to go to sleep,
I need to inhale you once again.

Because
Just when I think
I can handle it,
A breeze blows in
And suddenly,
I'm back to days
I can never get back.

Your memory
Whirls and swirls
Around me
Suffocating me like nicotine smoke.

And no matter how long
I hold my breath
You still linger on my clothes,
And on the walls.

Everywhere I go,
Everything I see.
You're always there
Haunting me.

-Allisen Casey

Retribution

Here I am
A new place, A fresh start
A place to forget my woes
For years I've done wrong
To all whom I've crossed
And still I know in my heart without doubt
I do not deserve to be here
They say we all deserve a second chance
Really?
I don't know
I've killed people who deserved to die
I've killed people who didn't
I've stolen from rich and poor alike
I've given to almost no one
I've lied, I've cheated, I've spoken little truth
I've manipulated the hearts of others
I laughed at one man's funeral
Cried at another's
Spit on one man's grave
Put flowers on another's
I shot a man in cold blood
Saved another man from drowning
I abandoned my child
I abandoned my wife
I abandoned them when they needed me most
So I don't know
Do I deserve a second chance?
Or do I deserve retribution?

-Dante Nastasi

The Divine Brew

In the grand scheme of things, Gleb was a fairly average being; at least when compared to his “peers.” He had a modest home overlooking the city of St. Petersburg, and was a devoted employee of his organization. His brother Boris was always more sociable, and generally better liked and more memorable, a fact for which Gleb didn’t harbor any negativity, but always did envy. Gleb had never been married or had any strong family ties, and lacked much of the real-world experience of his associates, likely because he had ascended at such a young age, and was also relatively new at the proverbial “office;” he had only been around for only 1100 years or so. That’s the main reason it came as such a shock when he got the promotion everyone had been lusting after.

It had been decided by a committee of VPs choosing from a pool of the various department heads which of them would be getting the position, a pool which included such prominent names as Paul and Uriel. Since Gleb had always been better at the paper pushing deskwork aspect of the job, he was technical department head over Boris, and qualified for the position. As such, his name was thrown into the collective hat without much thought, and certainly not with any anticipation of selection. As a matter of fact, the general consensus was that Zachariah was a shoe-in.

And, yet, there he was – Gleb the All-Powerful, sitting idly in The Divine Brew (heaven’s most popular coffee shop) and utterly lost as to what to do. He ordered himself a caramel macchiato and, as he looked down into the cup’s milky depths, he thought it was hardly a fitting beverage for the Supreme Being. But, he liked them and there was little that suggested that was going to change. He sat, sipping his drink and wondering what failed bureaucratic mechanism had malfunctioned so horrendously as to land him as the boss, for, as far as he was concerned, he was in no way right for the job. You see, while omnipotence was simply awarded along with the title, the omniscience element was a skill learned through years of working with the problems associated with Sointing. Gleb, being the introvert that he was, had always taken a more passive stance on the affairs of mortals, letting the others bustle about performing this miracle or that, communing with the prophets and what not, and never really picked up the trade. There had, of course, been non-all-knowing holders of the position, but the most notable of them went down in history as the idiot who botched the flood job and almost wiped out the clientele. Gleb sipped his drink and pondered what he was to do.

Just then, Gleb’s friend George walked in and, spotting his woeful acquaintance, took the seat across from him.

“Why so glum, *my lord*,” he said lightly.

“Just trying to cope with the new position, I suppose... it’s not really all as much fun as it’s been made out to be.

“Whatever the issue is, it’s perfectly fine, because I know exactly how to cheer you up. I just popped down from an interesting conversation with Paul – who, by the way, sends his best – and you’ll never guess who just got let in!”

“Well, I would think its sort of my job to know who does and doesn’t get in, and, actually, that’s where my problem is right now. You see I don’t know-“

George cut him off, “This guy! This guy will now be keeping us company for eternity...”

Gleb looked around the room, but there was no one there who seemed out of the ordinary. Upon George noticing this, he quickly exclaimed “Damn! He’s run off again; you can’t

bloody trust someone to hold still for five minutes on their first day, can you? Listen, I've got to go find the *former* dragon king of Bhutan, you stay right here, Okay?"

"I wasn't really planning on going anywhere. Are you sure you don't want a drink or one of those little cake balls?"

"I really can't, this guy's still supposed to be in orientation. Paul will kill me if he finds out I lost him."

Gleb thought for a moment; "Maybe I could do something about this. After all, I do run the place."

"Gleb, that's really kind and all, but I'm not sure you'd be the right man for the job. Plus, you'd still have to go through admin, and **no one** wants to do that. I'll be back in a bit, alright?"

Gleb acquiesced, and George ran off through the door in search of the ex-Bhutanese monarch. Once again, Gleb was seated alone. He went to take a sip of his macchiato, but by this point it had gone cold.

Almost an hour passed before Gleb was again interrupted. By this time, he had pretty much given up on George coming back, and gone through several chocolate chip biscotti – he knew they were bad for him, but figured he had an eternity to work off whatever weight he gained. As he sat, in strode a man of fair hair and a bright complexion; Gleb recognized him from around the office, but they had never actually spoken. Passing by, the man stopped, and exclaimed "Is that a caramel macchiato!? I had almost forgotten – I *love* those things." He gestured to the barista, "I'll take one of what he's having." It wasn't until after this exchange that the man stopped and realized who he was speaking to; a fact broadcasted by his sudden halt in what was quickly becoming a veritable river of dialogue and utterance of a quiet "Oh."

He didn't stop for long, though, "I've seen you around the building, haven't I? Yeah – and as a matter of fact, you're the boss, aren't you!? It's good to finally meet you in person."

"Well, yes, I suppose it is," replied Gleb, "but I don't actually know who you *are*."

The man introduced himself as Jude, and the two began talking. Gleb, reserved as he tried to be, could not help but unload all of what he'd been thinking about. He felt bad for Jude, having to sit through a near total stranger's speech on his inadequacy, but Jude's welcoming smile somehow endured the whole rant, and, when it was over, he actually had something to say.

"Gleb," he said, "I understand where you're coming from, I really do, but I have to tell you that you're *dead wrong*. You'll be wonderful at this job."

"That's very kind, Jude, especially after I made you sit through that entire tirade, but I have to disagree. I'm just not knowledgeable enough to hold the title – that is, I'm not omniscient and that's practically essential!"

"I hardly think so..."

"No, it really is, and for that reason, I'm going to do miserably at this."

"And that right there is why you will be great."

This got Gleb very confused, a feeling the very nature of which furthered his point, "What!? I'll be great because I'm going to do terribly?"

"No, no, you misunderstand" Jude replied, "It's not that you're *going* to do terribly, but that you're *concerned* you're going to do terribly. That very concern puts you a cut above the rest. Sure, they may be omniscient, but that doesn't mean they know what they're doing. They sit up on their throne, completely untouchable, and while they do often know what course of action to take, they couldn't care less as to whether it works out or not. You, however, can relate to the humans, and have their best interests in mind – if you didn't, you wouldn't be here right now."

Gleb was shocked; "I...I never really thought about it that way; perhaps you're right. Thank you, Jude, you've really helped."

And, at that Jude walked out, giving Gleb some time to mull things over. He sat for another hour, and was just getting ready to leave when George finally walked back in.

"Gleb! Where are you going? I told you I'd be right back."

"George, that was hours ago."

"Yes, well, things got a little complicated, sorry. Anyway, I'm here to help with your problem... whatever that may be, I didn't quite catch it the first time through."

"George, my problem is solved. Or, at least, I think it is, and really that's all that matters."

"Oh yeah, and how's that?"

"Well, the whole thing was essentially in my head the whole time – I just had the wrong state of mind. You see, this fellow named Jude came along and helped me figure out..."

"Did you say Jude? I love that guy! He's helped me out of more than one tight squeeze."

"Oh, so he makes a habit of it, does he?"

"Yeah, and if he was here, your 'issue' was probably beyond me, anyway. After all, the head of the department wouldn't have shown up unless it was something big."

"What? What department are you talking about?"

"The one that Jude's head of."

"Which is?"

George smiled wryly "Lost causes."

-Evan Poholchuk

Great Deep Slumber

I miss
You. I
Miss your
Smile, your
Eyes as
You take
In the
World. As
You take
Me in.

My eyes
Wander, catching
On your
Dull grays.
Catching on
Your crinkled
Nose as
You laugh
At my
Mistake. Catching
On your
Hand, clutching
The other
Behind your
Back.

I take
Your hand
And drag
You behind
As I
Leave this
World. As
I leave
My thoughts
And venture
Into the
Stars above.

We leave

Trails of
Vapor as
We go,
Disturbing the
Clouds and
Their great
Deep
Slumber.

-Corina Schmidt

History of a Face

**His eyes, colored like the hearts of the convicts
Set a sail from banishing shores of their ancestry
Not quite black, but darkened nonetheless.**

**His nose, not quite the giant like those from where either side came hence
Unassuming, perhaps the only constant on a face
Hardened by decades of Sydney's finest sunburn.**

**His eyebrows, as thick as sheepdog's fur,
Prominent and ever-present, imposing but
Never worth attempts at grooming.**

**But his forehead was perhaps warmer than theirs,
Just like his Scottish heart
Generations back but still tucked away
Hiding in the wrinkles aside his squinting eyes.**

-Kieran Austin

Restless

Light bulbs hung from the ceiling
Not uniform, though,
Staggered, clustered, maybe even starting to dim,
But I think
They gave the room some character

They kept it dark enough there
Enough at least so only the restless
Would notice the elderly couple
Mopping up spilled milk
Meant for overpriced coffee and not
The edge of the table and the
Squeaky clean floor.

Or maybe instead they noticed the three -
Or was it four? -
Familiar faces out there in the crowd
All in good spirits
At least so they would hope.

Maybe the man with crossed legs was more of a sight,
Unintentionally pushing on the seat in front of him
But who doesn't shy away, after all
He must have needed to stretch off that dose
Of French fries and pound cake

Or maybe it was the kid
Three tables down who caught their eye
Because if body language is really a language
Then his pheromones must spoken volumes
As he slouched and neglected to sing along,
Not allowing the charm of the Southwest
To even approach his unwilling tongue.

In retrospect, perhaps they all could use
A bit more restlessness.
Joking about the downed cup
Or a simple repositioning of the legs
Or maybe just howling along with the rest of the
Uninhibited audience.

-Kieran Austin

Ghostface Killah eats a Pesto Sandwich

I felt like thinking but my thought funds just keep sinking.
Solipsistic brokers ripped me off for every blinking
Neuron in my cloudbank.

I wish I could pay off favors with bitcoin,
Maybe I could rap a bit more like John Burgoyne
And fill the broken spaces with dirty laundry loins.
And perhaps I'll even convince myself I have free will
And tell all my relatives that I got mad skills.

Buzzkill!

You couldn't ride a beat if it was strapped onto your feet, sonny.
I'll take my milk tea with a little more honey.

I'm a broken mirror,
Relatively objective and absolutely objected to
Abject objectivism.

I'm a pragmatist,
And I'll buy your car,
And your tickets to Coachella when your income becomes sub-par.
I met a man named Heisenberg, but he didn't wear a porkpie hat,
And I can't be certain but I think he killed Schrodinger's cat.

I dreamed there was a door last night,
I dreamed about your floor last night,
And I dreamed that you were broke last night,
Took out a bank loan in my sleep.

-Cameron Henderson

I Dream In Vapor

I dream in vapor
since you left me.
In my head you look just like
A clouded mirror,
Like the steam from the kettle,
The fog sitting low on the mountains
And dancing off the pond
When the first light of morning
Begins to warm the air.
But in actuality you are the
Puff out of grandfather's cigar
And I see you rising steady
From the flame,
Choking my lungs
So that I cannot even speak
Your name.
You hang stagnant in the
Smog and I think I can
See your shadow like
Maybe you never
Left at all,
Like maybe you
Will still be waiting for me
To take your hand
And lead you home.
They who say the hardest thing
Is holding water in your
Cupped hands,
Clearly have never tried
To love a
Cloud.

-Alice Flanagan

Still

Skin stretches in a vertical fashion,
An endless exhaustion from an upward tilt.
Thoughts reach for what is the atmosphere's;
These are the reasons my bones ache at night.

They race a never-ending summit,
An indefinite peak of power.
A paralyzed peripheral vision.
These are the reasons my feet do not feel the ground.

They take example from planetary patterns:
The wooded limbs of trees,
The dusty head of a mountain;
Within this confusion, the roots are lost.

Tell me,
Where is the will to digest what is present;
To crave what is now?
If only you treasured the love
For standing still.

-Bella Convertino

Gender Roles as a metaphor is in here somewhere:

They say, oh!
Be a merchant, son!
For if you get in trouble
or make a weary trade
you'll still never be hung!

An easy life'll ever be
out there on the open sea
Although you may find trouble
On land they'll never bother thee!

You'll 'mass a fortune
Great and grand
And be here a respected man
Society will never be
leery o' you like it is
o' me!

You'll be allowed to stay
in markets and look at
all the stands
Stand up in the church row pew
and say "Hey! I'm an honest man!"

You can hold your head up high
and never have to worry
For you will ne'er be judged
as if you were a worker, boy
or a lousy vagabond!
(Your name and hands covered in mud
that they had been dragged through and on)

They say life'll be twice as grand
And I'll ne'er have to use my hands
And that I'll be an honest man
Respected throughout all the lands-
It's just that I'm a pirate.

-Gianna Galazzo

Love

**Love is a subjective thing
Comes unbidden, makes you sing
Ring across the hilltop things
I thought I loved her once, you know
It came unbidden: fast and slow
Frequent and high, short and low
I made it almost to a show
Love is different, incomplete
When in loving as in sleep
And in life I do never reap
But rather weep: in poetry
there is divine love and it grows
On trees, laughing as they go
And take with them the ache in my chest
Leaving behind them only plot-holes
And rips in the scenery seams,
Cracking the scaffolds and scratching the stage with their
Bare feet and wide hands, perfect for holding my
Falling-apart, tattered heart in.
I store it in a jar of stars on my desk
And sometimes I have to work just so I don't look at it,
leaking fluid and brain matter from [a thousand
little bullet-holes, bitten
cannibalized by those perfect little liars
It stays out so I don't have to deal with the ache under my ribs
Words are only half as painful if they're not attended to
Sometimes I wonder if the more it grows,
the more they feed, like
girls in a catolounge off of each other's' dreams,
full of hunger and other wild things' demise
Screaming 'buy' with their eyes,
But I'm a seller, always have been.
My money leaks out of my thighs with the rest of me.**

-Gianna Galazzo

Pens

Black as a cat in a starless night.
Rarest of them all, in my house
Pouring ink like a broken fuse pipe
Infinite as beaches of sand: endless,
Until it runs out.
It grows on trees in English classrooms
Sweating from first day of school's anticipation
Its spring inside cradles unborn thoughts up
Like a cradle or a newborn nest
Sometimes in jars half-full or half-empty
Others, scattered around, under car seats
And behind sofas; abandoned, discarded and empty.
It wants to be used
To breathe life into paper
To be chewed, banged, thrown and grasped tightly until death.
Others expect it to satiate
They crave for stability, endurance, good flow.
Others still just want a pen.
Like a stick of charcoal
Or a dark gum pack: inside it
Are words ready to be eaten, devoured, swallowed whole.
After a time it will be
Behind sofas, kicked there by worrying feet,
Uncaring of where they're not going until
They stop, used, abandoned, dried up.
I write laughs, cries, tears, sighs,
Funny anecdotes where people often do die.
The way it sits in my hand is a little crooked,
Pushing against my index finger in a manner
Almost painful.

-Gianna Galazzo

The Housewife

Every single day is the same. Every day is the constant repetitions of cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children, washing, walking, and fatigue. Today, at seven in the morning, the wound-up alarm clock rings. The white surface of the clock has a bright sheen of cleanliness, as yesterday, Wednesday, was dusting day. My husband, George, left about ten minutes ago to go to his office, which is an hour or so away. The most recent copy of *Life* is on my nightstand and I read the bold letters on the cover, "The Story of Marilyn," "Memoir Contest," and others. I will read it before bed tonight.

Another day has begun, the twentieth of May, 1953. No different as this same day a year ago; same chores, same life. I do love my family, but I suppose that the life of domesticity is not satisfying enough for me. However, this is my place; I don't know how I could make my life any different.

Two past seven, I am running behind already.

We mothers hardly get the appreciation of our hard work, but why argue? Things were made to be this way, I was born into it. Ever since I was a little girl, I knew where I would be; living as a housewife in a suburb of Illinois. I had never questioned it, but I knew I wanted more in life.

After I got ready, I had to check on the children to make sure they were up and ready for school. I walked down the narrow hall with photos displaying Christmases and birthday parties since my oldest, Kathy, was born.

"Harvey! I am older! I need to use the bathroom first!" The shouts of Kathy's feelings of annoyance toward little Harvey clarify that they are awake.

I rush down the yellow-carpeted stairs, which is getting more worn with every step. When George and I first moved in, the carpet of the stairs were a bright yellow and the soft material had felt like a cloud. It's funny how you can see how time passes by, simply by looking at the carpeted stairs that has been walked on for many years.

I walk into the kitchen while tying my yellow floral apron around my waist. This room seems too familiar to me, as every day for fifteen years I have spent at least four hours in this room. I cleaned the green linoleum countertop last night after dinner, which saves me a couple of minutes of

the rushed morning. I open up the drab white cabinet to grab some flour, sugar, and baking powder, and start to make pancakes for the children.

After mixing, pouring, and cooking, Kathy and Harvey gust down the stairs as the smell their freshly made breakfast arises. Harvey gets a pitcher of milk from the white refrigerator with bits of rust in the nooks and crannies. He then steadily walks the pitcher towards the table.

“You better not drop it, Harvey!” Kathy teasingly yells at him. Her remark makes him walk with extra care.

Breakfast was served and eaten, and children gathered their books and pencils for school. The bus arrived at 7:45 sharp and with a hug and a kiss, they were off to school. I shut the door behind them and sighed with fatigue. It was almost eight o’clock, I had no idea why I was tired.

I had always badgered George about going on a nice vacation, but he had always put off the idea. He always says that spending his hours at work thinking about money made him very conscience of finances. I know that isn’t the issue, however. George was never too fond of any outlook different from his and a vacation was just out of his narrow spectrum of spontaneity.

Anyway, I should go along with my cleaning and organization. I will start upstairs in the attic, as I have not cleaned up there for numerous months; seeing if there is anything I need to tidy up or dust. I quickly climb back up those worn yellow stairs and go up the sturdy wooden ladder to the attic floor.

On the center of the wall opposite me is a ratty window with dust around the edges, letting in the little light that can fill the room with a hazy glow. I look around, and these boxes of nostalgia are just too invited to resist. Cleaning can wait a few minutes, and I decide to rummage through boxes of my youth.

First, I choose a box labeled ‘papers’ and think that these are essays of grade school past. I might chuckle with some of my topics from elementary school. I open the flaps with a film of dust covering them. I see an old notebook, and immediately the memories come back to me. I have always had a love for writing, especially when I was in my twenties. The Great Depression was a hard time for my family and I wasn’t able to go to college. Instead of going to a nearby university like my other friends, I stayed at home and helped my mother with her sewing for her job at a

nearby dress shop. Whenever I had time to myself, I wrote, somewhat as a sense of coping with the fact that my family was struggling to make ends meet. All my experiences and observations of the Great Depression were condensed in this notebook.

I open the leather cover and delve into the first line; "She came into school wearing rags today. Ruth, the girl whom has always worn the prettiest dresses of floral since childhood, was wearing rags." My heart clenches as I read the sentence. Ruth McLaughlin was my very best friend until the last few years of high school, when she moved away due to the expenses of living back in our suburb of Hartford. I was heartbroken by her departure, as that told me that people's lives were changing too quickly because of the Crash. I wonder what she could be doing now, fifteen years later. After those first phrases, I couldn't stop reading.

After finishing, I quickly shut the leather-bound notebook and put it in my apron pocket. This was nice, but my long list of chores made its way back into my conscience. I should be getting back to work.

I began dusting the windowsills throughout the house with that same feather duster and noticed the grime at the sides of the window. I rushed off into the closet where I kept my cleaning rags and buckets and began to wash the windows.

After grabbing another rag, I dried the excess water off the window and put it back into the light blue bucket full of soapy water. I looked at that pile of miscellaneous rags next to me, remembering Ruth's dress on the second week of school. Immediately after that thought, I dried off my hands and took the journal out of my apron pocket.

Looking at the clock near the stove, I discover that I have three hours until the kids get home from school. I put away the cleaning supplies and hurry on upstairs to the study and sit down on the dark wooden chair that matches the desk. Opening the first drawer from the top, I grab a handful of sheets of paper, a pen, and begin to rewrite my journal. Using it for reference, I prop it up on the desk's side that faces the window; the words illuminated by the sunlight.

I had no sense of time. I was enveloped into my life as a young woman; how I felt weary yet strong. The deep sadness of how I saw my local grocer on the streets, asking for food to feed his family. With every word, a part of my life gets brought back to me, every bit of strength that I had returned to me. Thrown into a haze of my past, I was able to see that I had my own life. These

writings prove it. My destiny in life isn't just to serve my family; that isn't all that makes up me, Margaret Brown.

"Mother, we're home! Father picked us up from school today!" My heart stopped for a moment and this world of no time, no chores, and no dependence disappears.

"Mother?" Harvey called out this time.

"Alright darling, I am coming right now!" I say, not with much sincerity. I am almost done with my journal, five more pages; my pen racing as fast as my heart.

My pen drops and I have finished. I look at these papers—there must be about thirty—with such pride and joy that I had never found in my own self in years. Looking into my past gives me a sense of belonging and value, feeling like I have more to myself than housework and my family. There is more to Margaret Brown, and I want to show that world. I go over to my bedroom and read an article in the *Life* magazine: "Memoir Contest." I fold up the papers and put them into a white envelope, writing the mailing address of *Life* headquarters on the front.

I go down those old yellow-carpeted stairs and see George with Kathy and Harvey. They seemed to be waiting, expecting for something.

"Hello, darling," I hug George and kiss his cheek. I then hug Kathy and Harvey. The children run off to put their schoolbooks away.

"Margaret, where's dinner?" George asks with an uneasy tone. "It's Thursday, is it not? We have an early dinner on Thursdays, correct? We always have."

My eyes widen as I recognize how I have forgotten about dinner. If it was last week, I would've gasped, apologized and immediately began preparing the pot roast. But I know that I am more than that. The purpose of my life isn't just to serve. I will always take care of my family, but I need something for myself.

"I make dinner every night, so how about you make it? The ingredients are all in the refrigerator and the recipes are in the book on the counter. I have to do something right now that is important to me." My heart has never beaten so fast, but I have never felt stronger.

-Allie LaRocco



