

kings river

KRR Review



SPRING 2022

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The *Kings River Review* is published each fall and spring semester by the students in English 15J, Literary Journal Publication. Our desire is to produce a journal that reflects the emerging voices and visions of community college students, designing a space for their creative expression. The journal is named for the Kings River which runs along the western boundary of Reedley College.

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We welcome submissions from two-year college students from across the United States. Please visit our website (kingsriverreview.com) for submission guidelines:

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

The *Kings River Review's* purpose is to bring to the light the creativity and talent from community college students. The editorial team feels very honored to contribute to the creation and publication of this journal and would like to thank everyone for their contribution to this spring 2022 issue, whether that be from submitting their work or buying the book. This was a very interesting and exciting project that allowed us to see all the different creative minds among community college students across the country.

The editorial team members come from different backgrounds and majors. Each of us have shared our strengths and weaknesses with one another to cohesively and successfully put out an issue that we hope each and every prose writer, poet, artist, and photographer will be pleased with being a part of. We were happy to come together and share each of our own thoughts, ideas, and inspirations to create the *Kings River Review*. Our desire is to share creative works that speak to us and hope that this issue will inspire hopefuls to share their own creativity. Our team is very excited to present these talented spring 2022 contributors.



Two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is a stylized, cursive 'M.A.' and the bottom signature is a cursive 'J.P.'.



Two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is 'Justin Sydonal' and the bottom signature is 'Sarah Young'.

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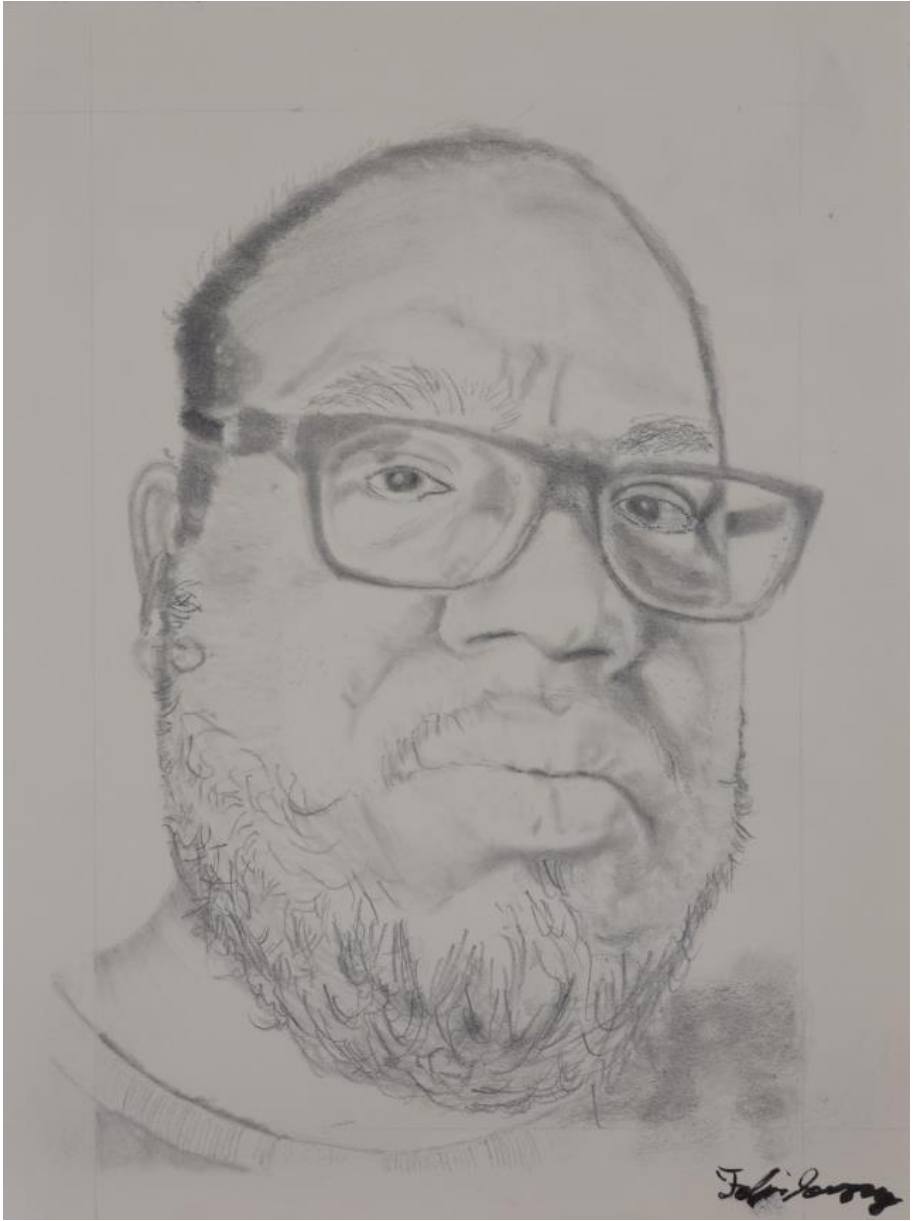
The Dagger's End

Oliviah Gonzales



Self Portrait 3

Felipe Dominguez



Self Portrait 4
Felipe Dominguez

Brianna Thomas

Hunger

My heart races, as the skins touch
Saliva mixing with sweat
Hair tangled, fingers grasping
Moans and exaggerated sighs.
All for just one kiss
I sit gazing in awe
Confining the fidgety varmint
Aflame within me.
Envious yearning invades
A once tranquil shrine
My virgin lips
Implore for charity
Like a hound for a feast
Or a feline in heat
The unquenched thirst
I dare not look away
Shame, I am without.
Upon the withdraw
I am provoked by its haste
Craving for a reprise, an extra taste.

Sheinna Esposito

A Visit to the City

The sounds of irritated yells, honking, and chatter greet them as the two enter the city. To their left, they spot a young couple enjoying their lunch. To their right, they see a woman catching her cheating husband. She pours her beverage over his head, and the younger woman looks at the two, looking dumbstruck about the news. The city's alive today, and the construction up ahead provides its rhythmic beat.

But . . .

But what if everything goes silent when the sun sets, and the skies greet them with a magnificent red? What would it be like to walk along the empty streets filled with cars but no people? No sounds will greet the two as they enter today, no sounds of angry yelling, honking, chattering, and rhythmic beating. The only greeting they'll get is a peaceful silence. To their left, they see a rusted table and moss-filled seats. To their right, they see a murder of crows conducting a meeting.

It seems as though the city's alive today, but not in the way that they think.

Sheinna Esposito

Greetings

Blossoming at the
Gentle touch of rain, even
The desert greets you.

Karen Thao

Memories

Forever within my heart
the warm feelings shall stay.

The childhood memories
and the laughter of those older days.

I shall miss you,
but this is not the end.

We're turning a new chapter
and this is where it begins.

I'll see you tomorrow,
or I'll see you some other day.

Good bye, I love you.
My dearest friends.

Karen Thao

Purple Flowers

Purple flowers and a sunny haze.
The wind blows and I am lost in your gaze.
Our fingertips touch, gentle as can be.
My heart skips and then I know this is meant to be.

This sunny warmth isn't as hot
as my cheeks being kissed by your lips.
I now know that this is love,
and I eagerly await for our next kiss.

The Huntsman

J.L. Lakin

Léon Brunelle sat silently outside a small cafe near the Square Marie-Curie. He was a lean man of average height, with jet black hair, cut short, and a thick walrus moustache. He sipped at a cup of pitch-black coffee and surveyed the busy Parisian streets the same way a hawk might look out over a meadow, searching for prey. He was waiting on an old friend, or so he had told the waitress. Léon had spent the last twenty years of his life hunting war criminals. He had been a Lieutenant in the French Army before Germany had invaded, and spent the war fighting from the shadows as part of a resistance cell. In the chaos of the war's end, many of the Third Reich's myrmidons had gone into hiding, slinking away like rats into the debris of a world they nearly destroyed. Brunelle was familiar with their atrocities. He had witnessed many of them first hand, and had no qualms about what he was doing. Some men would crumple into sobbing heaps, begging and pleading that they had changed and left the past behind them. Others tried to vindicate themselves, claimed they were “following orders,” as if it would make them any less guilty. Most just stood in silence. Nonetheless he took pleasure in doing it, though he felt perhaps pleasure was too strong a word. Vindication, perhaps that was the word for it.

From within the crowd, Léon focused on one particular figure. A burly, bearded man who at a passing glance resembled some sort of giant from a folk tale. The man caught sight of him and grinned. Quickly he made his way to the table and sat across from Léon. “Brunelle, my old friend! It has been too long!” The man's voice boomed like rolling thunder. “Marek, it is good to see you again. I'm glad to see you are doing well.” Léon responded with a warmth atypical of himself. The pair spoke for a while, discussing

the things old men typically do when they meet with friends they hadn't seen for some time. An old Django Reinhardt song played softly on the radio, and for a few brief moments, Léon felt like he had slipped back in time to before the war. Before the world, and their lives, had changed forever.

"How is your family, my friend?" Marek asked. Léon snapped back to reality. "They are doing well. My wife is back in Orléans, no doubt waiting for me to come back home. She hates how much I travel, truth be told. Even these trips to Paris." Léon nearly reciprocated Marek's inquiry about family, but stopped himself. "It's November, is it not? It would have been..." He was cut off. "Her birthday, yes." Marek responded, solemnly. "20 years and I still feel like I lost her yesterday." The emotion on his face was plain to see. An intense sadness, the kind of pain that cuts deep into a man's soul and leaves a scar that never seems to fade. "You French, at least you had the fortune to reclaim your homes. Not us though. To lose the love of your life, and your own home in but a few years. To jak tortura." Léon bowed his head slightly. He figured this must have been on Marek's mind for some time. The old Pole had a habit of turning from French to his native tongue when he got emotional, be it joy, melancholy, or rage.

"That is why we do what we do, Marek. To bring those monsters to justice." Léon responded. "And revenge." Marek added quietly. Léon silently traced a small scar across the top of his hand. "Yes. I suppose for revenge, too." Léon looked out towards the streets. "I'm still searching for him, you know. That is why I came to Paris. A contact said he would be here this week." Léon uttered quietly. "Looking for whom?" Marek inquired. "Ulrich Straube. The Butcher, we called him. He was an interrogator for the Gestapo. One of their best, and for us, their worst. He is the worst kind of monster. The kind who tortures, and enjoys it." He continued tracing the scar on his hand. "I nearly caught him, you know. We stormed the Gestapo's station in Lyon. I had him cornered in

his office, and we were going to take him back to headquarters to give him a taste of his own medicine. But there was something about him, something about the way he spoke that made me lower my guard. I spoke with him, and then the others raised the alarm. He took that chance and put a knife through my hand, pinning me to his desk.” Léon's eyes seemed to glass over. “Maybe I should have shot him, Marek. Damn the plan and the information. Just take him out and get it all over with. Maybe then I wouldn't be so....” He trailed off, staring back at the street.

The two sat in silence for a moment. “My friend, there is something I need to tell you.” Marek uttered. Léon looked back up, and tilted his head inquisitively. “You remember the fellow who started us on this whole business, yes?” Marek stated. “The American?” Léon responded with a slight confusion. “Sharp-jawed with black hair. Jack, I think was his name, no?” Marek nodded, smiling slightly. “That is the one. I still work with him. Hell, he is the reason I'm even in Paris. We are to meet tomorrow, us and...” Léon quickly stood up, cutting off Marek. He could see him on the sidewalk, just across the street. The unmistakable figure of Ulrich Straube. Tall and gaunt, his blonde hair turned slightly white by the passage of time. “Finish your story when I get back, friend. I've found my quarry.” Léon said, not taking his eyes off his target. Marek shouted to his friend as he walked away, “Léon, wait! I must tell you something about...” He did not hear the end of what Marek was shouting. He didn't care. He stalked Straube through the streets, trailing him the way a tiger trails a deer. He followed him to the Gare d'Austerlitz, a train station just a short walk from the cafe. He walked through the crowd, a swift purposeful walk that was almost a run. He caught up to his target and grabbed him by the arm like a vice, pulling him quickly to a more private section of the station. “Ulrich Straube, by order of the Republic of France you are under arrest for...” Straube dropped his suitcase and turned around. His eyes widened just slightly, but his face was not one of shock, but of

bemused nostalgia.

“Herr Brunelle. It's been too long since last we met.” Straube said, an ever-present tone of smug satisfaction in his voice, “For what reason do I have the pleasure of your company now?” Léon pulled at the German's arm. “Don't play coy with me, you bastard. You know exactly why I'm here. Has hiding like a rat for twenty years truly dulled your mind so much that you'd forget?” Léon's words came out as a low, hateful growl. Straube sighed, and then chuckled quietly to himself. “I assure you, Herr Brunelle, that my memory still serves me perfectly. I had thought, perhaps rather foolishly, that you would have let go of this petty grudge you've held against me.” Léon clenched his teeth and jerked Straube closer. “Petty grudge? You tortured and murdered people! Some of them for little more than looking at one of the invaders the wrong way! You and your loathsome comrades worked for the most vile men in history and you have the gall to call this a petty grudge?” Straube placed his hand on Brunelle's wrist and sneered. “Herr Brunelle, please, you are smarter than this. To hold on to your contempt for so long after the war has ended is not healthy. Those things are in the past, are they not? And besides, you must have seen with the way this world has gone that what I did, and what I still do, was for the sake of the greater good.”

Léon spat on the ground. He'd heard such words before, but never with the almost methodically calm tone that Straube used. Often when men like him tried to defend themselves, they spoke in a panicked, rushed way. A hurried attempt to justify the great and brutal crimes they and their comrades had committed. Not Straube, though, who's patient voice would seem gentle to those who didn't know the truth. Straube's face turned from a sneer to a more calm, plain expression. He spoke softly, “Herr Brunelle, I can see you're curious. If you would loosen your grip, even just a little, I would be happy to explain myself to you a bit further.” Léon closed his eyes, frustrated. The German was right, in a way. He was curi-

ous. Curious how a monster like Straube could speak so plainly of his actions as being for “the greater good,” and, perhaps more importantly, what exactly he meant by what he was still doing. He loosened his grip on Straube's arm and stated, “Fine, but know that nothing you say will change my mind. I've indulged others like this a dozen times before you, Ulrich. I still sent each and every last one of them to the prison cell they deserved.”

Ulrich Straube freed himself from Léon's grasp and adjusted his suit. He flicked his wrist a few times, as if to get the blood flowing again. After a second, he spoke. “Herr Brunelle, it is really quite simple. I'm sure after the Allies landed in France, after Paris was 'liberated,' that you continued your work in Europe. One of those irregulars of theirs' who skulked about the sidelines of the battlefield, bringing precious information back to your masters like a loyal hound.” Léon scowled. The German was right about his service after the liberation. Straube continued, “No doubt you saw the devastation the Bolsheviks wrecked upon Germany, Herr Brunelle? How they turned our beautiful cities into little more than smoldering piles of brick and stone. And how they killed and tormented our honest German people. Did that not convince you of our righteousness, Her Brunelle? Did it not show you that what I did was a necessity? Better that a few obstinate people be disciplined harshly for their misdeeds than the whole of Europe be torn apart by the Slavic menace, yes?” Léon gritted his teeth once more, clearly angered by Straube's words. “Convince me of your righteousness? It did no such thing. What I saw in Germany was the wages of your fascist ideology. Death and destruction, yes, and so much of it unduly placed on the shoulders of the innocent. But for you to so arrogantly claim that you were defending Europe, it is absurd. Was it not your armies that marched into the Soviet Union intent on conquest? Was it not your 'brave German soldiers' that pillaged the countryside of Poland and the Ukraine, who murdered with wild abandon in Russia? If anything, perhaps the Red Army was simply repay-

ing the favor you had paid them!” He snapped at the German, a clear and righteous anger in his voice.

Straube frowned, and then spoke. “You French are such a stubborn people. Rest assured, though, Herr Brunelle, that there are some among your allies whom have been convinced of the effectiveness of my methods.” Léon furrowed his brow, confused. Straube continued, “You no doubt know of the conflict now between West and East. This so-called 'cold war,' that has again dominated the news since the Bolsheviks erected their wall in Berlin. It's a war fought not on battlefields, but in shrouded rooms and dark corridors, though it is still just as bloody. It is what men like myself excel at, Herr Brunelle. Men like you, as well.” Léon snapped back at Straube, “Stop with the riddles and speak plainly, German!” Straube sighed and shook his head. “Fine, I will be quick about this. My particular skills are in demand, Herr Brunelle, with the organizations currently fighting this 'shadow war' against the Communists. They give me the resources to continue my work against Bolshevism, and in return, I work at extracting the information they want, using my tried and true methods.” Léon ruminated on this for a moment before responding. He knew that some of the men he had caught previously escaped through channels offered by sympathetic parties. Argentina, Spain, even an order of Franciscans in Croatia, but never by some secretive organization. “What kind of organization?” he asked. Straube sneered again, the smug smile of a man who thought the world of himself. “Really, Herr Brunelle, you should know exactly whom I speak of. No doubt some of your own friends and colleagues work alongside them.” Léon let out an exasperated sigh and looked Straube in the eyes. He reached towards the pocket of his overcoat and muttered to himself, “We are done here. I'm going to do what I should have done years ago.”

Suddenly, before he could even react, someone grabbed Léon's shoulder, throwing to the ground. “Back off the kraut, jackass. He's with me,” said a semi-familiar voice in labored French. Léon

looked up as the man approached Straube. “This moron give ya any trouble, pal?” said the figure, now in a distinctly North American English. “No trouble at all, Herr Smith. In fact, you could say he's an old friend.” Straube replied. The American turned around, and Léon could only bring himself to stare in stunned silence. There, standing alongside one of the greatest monsters Léon Brunelle had ever known, was Jack Smith. The man who had started Léon on what had since been his life's work, now collaborating with the monster who he had hunted for the last two decades. The two men began to walk away, Straube smugly giving a few departing words. “I suppose this is auf wiedersehen, Herr Brunelle. I've a train to catch soon.” It was several minutes before Léon could muster the strength to stand again.

Léon Brunelle stumbled through the crowd at the Gare d'Austerlitz before finally coming to a stop near the stairs at the entrance. He looked out at the streets of Paris, at the wind carrying orange and yellow leaves through the Autumn air. He could see the distinct figure of Marek Kulczykcki, now hurriedly making his way towards him. “Léon!” the Pole shouted. “Léon, I must tell you be-” Léon cut him off. “Marek, I know. He told me. Not in exact words, but he told me.” Léon sat down on the stairs, silently. Marek followed. The two men sat in silence together, staring out at the city streets as a hundred Parisians went about their days around them. Nearby, the sound of a whistle heralded the departure of a passenger train. Léon reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a packet of cigarettes. He placed one in his lips and began patting himself in search of a lighter. To his right, he felt a poke. He turned to Marek, who produced a lighter of his own. Léon nodded slightly, then lowered his head as his old friend lit his cigarette. He passed one to him, and they both stared out at the busy streets of Paris in an uneasy silence.



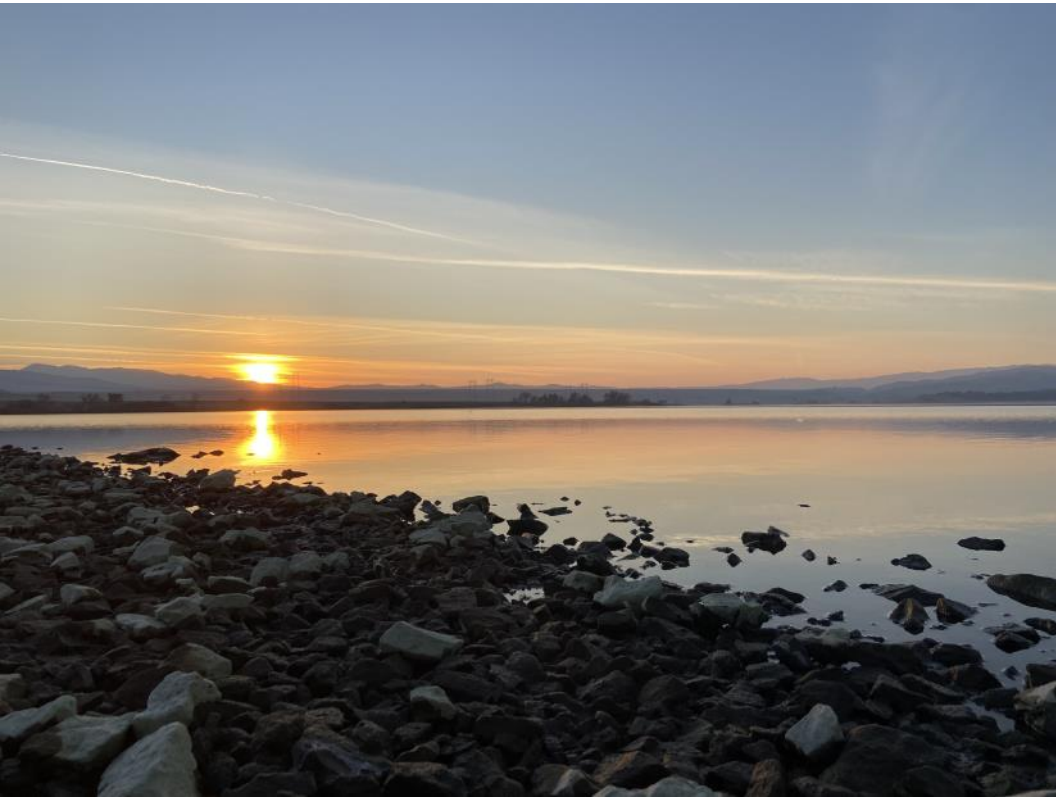
A Tree's Touch

Hailey Duarte



Burning Sky

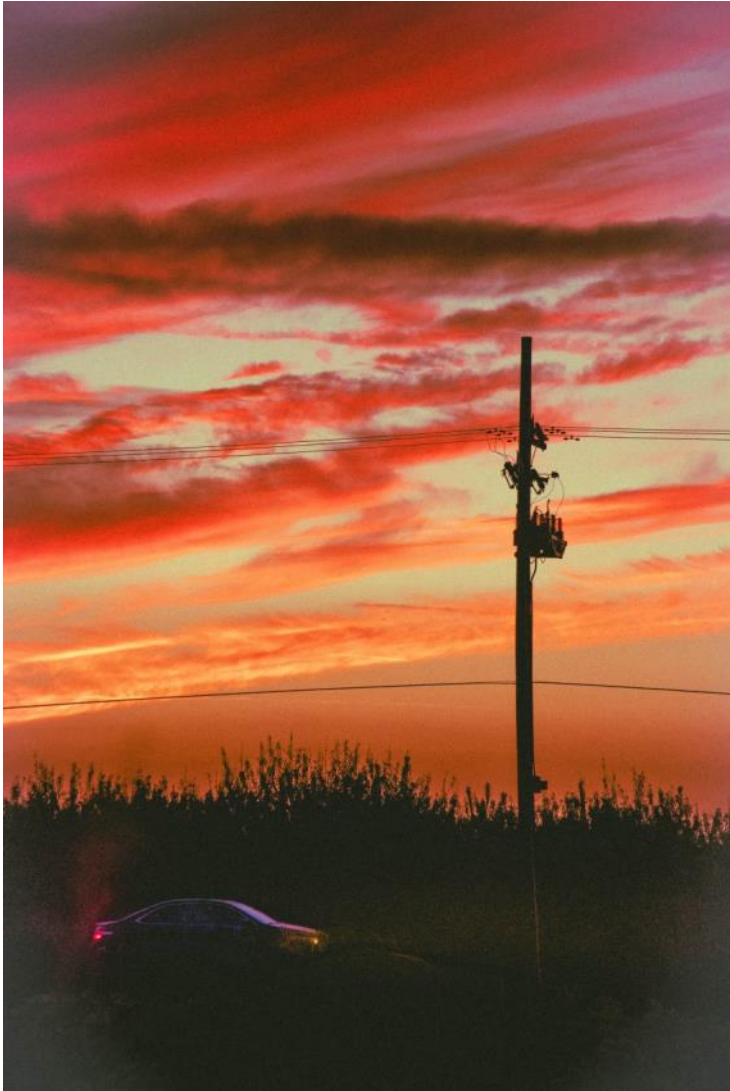
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Goodnight Valley

Hailey Duarte

Reedley College Featured Photographer



Call Me When You Get Home

Emiliano Farras



Dawning of the Season

Emiliano Farras



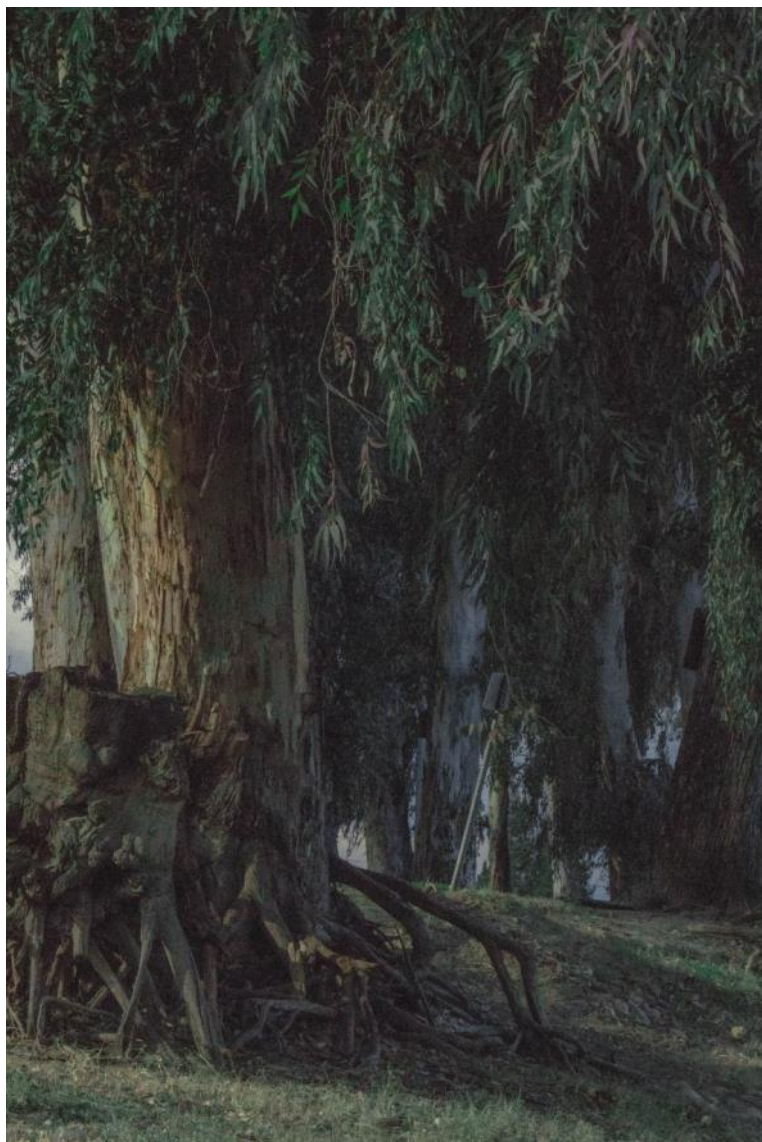
The Full Moon in Leo

Emiliano Farras



Sometimes, I Like to Be Alone 1

Emiliano Farras



Sometimes, I Like to Be Alone 2

Emiliano Farras

The Dragon's Princess

Seth Doyle

A lone knight travels atop his trusty steed. As they travel across the grassy plains, the knight's mission keeps running through his thoughts. It seemed simple enough when it rolled off the king's tongue; slay the dragon, save the kidnapped princess for the neighboring kingdom. But the more he thought of it, and the closer he got to his goal, the more he started to worry. Saving a princess? Well within his abilities as a knight, but slaying a dragon? The word "dragon" is enough to make any knight nervous, even one as hardened and battle forged as himself. He managed to lose himself in thought, with only the sound of his horse's hooves stomping into the soft ground still tying him to reality.

"Almost there" he silently thinks to himself, as the large tower he has been riding towards continues to grow larger. By all accounts, it looks like a mundane stone tower, albeit one that has seen better days. As the knight continued to ride closer, he could make out more and more features of the tower, until the only thing separating him from the prize he sought was an old rickety bridge over a deep chasm dug into the surrounding ground.

He was more than a little dumbstruck at the large structure, and paused to take in the sight. A large tower standing well over 200 feet, it seemed to pierce the very sky itself. Connected to the tower was a large building. According to the king, this was once a temple, a sight of holy worship, though those days were long since gone. The knight couldn't help but notice the large bushes that have overgrown the perimeter of both the building and tower, and the large vines creeping out from the bushes, delicately clinging to the rough stone blocks used to build both structures. He dismounted

his loyal steed and continued to stare at the large archway doors, just on the other side of the old rope bridge. He carefully extended his right foot and placed it on the first wooden plank of the bridge. It dips slightly, while making a loud creaking noise, but manages to support his weight. As he crosses the bridge, he tries his best to steady his nerves.

By the time he reached the end of the bridge, he had managed to calm down enough that his hands and feet were no longer shaking, although his mind was still racing with thoughts. He paused in front of the large double doors that lead into the smaller building. Most of his thoughts were of horrible, gruesome deaths. Being eaten, burned alive, or just simply torn limb from limb, but some were visions of glory, standing atop a dead dragon with a beautiful princess next to him. It was those few thoughts that managed to convince him to enter. He pulled one door open just enough to peek in. The room he saw was barren and in ruins. The old pews either pushed to the walls or lay destroyed. A door was in the back left corner of the room, which he assumed led into the tower where the princess was being held. Large, stained glass windows, showing various monks and gods adorn the walls. Beams of sunlight entered the room through the holes found in the wooded roof. A glint of bright light caught his attention. One of the beams of light was reflecting off a massive pile in the back-right corner of the room. The pile easily stood six feet tall and stretched twenty feet long, and was made up of mostly gold with sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and other gemstones scattered throughout. He recognized this as a dragon's lair, with its hoard front and center. He notices as one of the beams of sunlight was pointed right on the horde, and that was when he noticed it. The sunlight was bouncing off a large mass resting on it, the dragon. It was the perfect scenario; the beast was asleep atop its golden throne.

He carefully walked into the room and managed to silently unsheath his longsword. "If I slay it in its sleep," he thought, "I can't die." He slowly managed to sneak about a quarter of the way into

the room. “Who dares to disturb my slumber?” A voice rings out in the room. The knight was taken by surprise. The voice itself was shocking to him, loud and almost booming throughout the small room, but also silky and somewhat feminine. “Well I do hope that you’re at least worth my time” The voice rings out again. The large shape starts to shuffle atop the pile of gold and moves towards the center of the room. The knight sees a long tail swing over the pile, and for the first time he is able to see the beast in its full glory. Massive leathery wings slowly shuddered and stretched, its body slender but packed with muscle. Its head seemed almost skull-like, with large Horns jutting from the back of its head, and pointing towards its mouth. A long-forked tongue would shoot out of its mouth from time to time, much like a serpent. The beast was now completely standing upright, just staring at the lone knight. The beast easily stood sixteen feet tall, and stretched about eighty feet from the tip of its tail to the end of its nose. The sunlight reflecting off of its iridescent black scales.

“Since we must fight, may we at least learn the names of each other?” The beast said, in its smooth voice, ebbing as effortlessly as water in a creek. The knight tightened his grip on his sword’s handle, and nervously ran his thumb over the underside of his sword’s guard. “I am Sir Galliard, Knight of the kingdom of Qoyiria, and I am here to rescue the princess.” The dragon laughs to itself, “I am Irsirra, Lady of the shadows. May I ask why you concern yourself with the issues of a neighboring kingdom, an issue in which you have no stake in?” “I am a knight, I have a sworn duty to protect all people from vile evils like yourself.” Galliard yelled at the dragon, whose only response was to laugh. Her laughter boomed and echoed in the large room. “Perhaps you should get both sides of the story before you resolve yourself to a task you are told to complete, knight” she coldly retorted, with a hint of pain hidden behind her silky voice. “And what, do tell, was the reason you have for kidnapping the princess?” Galliard asked.

Irsirra, realizing that this knight had no idea what happened

and having no knowledge of what the king did, stood puzzled for a moment. “Did the king truly not tell you anything?” Her surprise was easily heard in her voice. Galliard simply shook his head. “The king and mine’s history go far back. Back when he was just a prince, he decided that to be respected, he had to slay a dragon. I had lived in the mountains for hundreds of years, not caring at all about his kingdom, but he still marched into my lair, intent to kill me for nothing more than to say he could. Unfortunately, I wasn't there when he arrived, but my hatchling was. He killed my child without hesitation. Heartbroken, I told him that he will one day feel the same pain as I did, the pain of losing a child, and that one day I will be the one in control of his kingdom. But when I kidnapped the princess, little did I know that it was all a part of a trap he planned for me. You see, he put a magical item in the middle of the tower, trapping me in this building, along with his only daughter” Irsirra said. Galliard could tell that this dragon wasn't evil, but had reasons to kidnap the princess. “Could I convince her to let me pass, and release both of them?” He thought to himself.

He looked up from thought just in time to dodge a line of bright green liquid. Jumping to the side, he noticed as it landed on the stone floor about ten feet behind him. It hissed and bubbled, slowly starting to dissolve the stone as a vile green mist rose from the puddle. “It was at that moment I started to hate humans, and vowed to myself to destroy all that they have built,” Irsirra said with an angry snarl, “come knight, and march forward to your own death!” Galliard managed to duck down just in time to dodge her large clawed front foot. In it passing he slashed at it with his sword, but to little effect, with it simply bouncing off her tough, scaly hide. “You’ll have to do better than that, knight!” Irsirra practically screamed. She was laughing at the sight of this knight who could do nothing but dodge her attacks.

Galliard kept ducking and jumping as Irsirra swung her large, muscular tail around, hoping to slice him with the sharpened scales located at the end. Galliard was watching her, trying desperately not

only to find an opening to attack, but a spot where his attack would do actual damage. As Irsirra breathed deep to prepare another spray of acid, Galliard watched as a spot on her stomach, near to where her neck met her body, glowed bright green. He saw as the pouch collecting the acid grew, raising a few scales slightly and giving him an opening to the softer leather skin. He roared as he lunged forward and plunged his sword deep into her soft flesh. Irsirra roared and screamed in pain, standing on her hind legs as she registered the pain she now felt. Galliard watched as she clutched the area where he managed to stab her, only to fall on her side. He could see that she was still breathing, albeit slowly and labored. He carefully walked to where her head was now resting. She looked up at the knight, and simply smiled. "At least," she said between labored breaths, "now I can see him again." Her eyes slowly closed, and Galliard watched as she took her last breath, still smiling as her life drained from her body.

He took a moment to reflect on what had just happened, said a silent prayer for the fallen mother, and turned to walk up the tower. As he walked up the long winding staircase, he came upon doors. Knowing that there was an item trapping both the princess and the now dead dragon here, he knew he would have to find it and destroy it before he could truly complete his quest. He opened the first door to an empty room. The second room he came across was about a quarter of the way up the tower. He opened and saw many boxes. He opened one and instantly gagged. The smell of rotted fruits and vegetables, as well as the smell of decaying meat poured out of the box. He slammed the lid closed, and made a mental note to not open anymore boxes unless absolutely necessary. As he continued his trek up the tower, he could tell where there was a floor, placed what seemed to be perfectly halfway up the tower. He walked in and saw a few small boxes, as well as a larger box placed around the walls. In the center he saw a black orb placed delicately on a pedestal made of stone. As he walked closer, he saw that a large piece of obsidian was set in the middle, with what looked to be

a carving of a dragon made to look like it was clutching it. He picked it up, and looked at it more carefully. He realized that this must be what he needed to destroy, and without hesitation, slammed the orb on the floor. As it shattered, a pulse of magic emanated from it and the building seemed to shudder as the magic was dispersed. Before continuing up the stairs, he turned to look at the larger box placed among the others. It was as though something was drawing him towards it, making him want to open it. He shook his head, and continued up the stairs.

Finally, he made it to the top. Two large wooden doors, carved in the visage of large oak trees. This has to be where the princess was. He pushed open one of the doors and walked into a barren room. Sitting on the bed near the wall was the princess. She sat there looking out a large window. She turned and smiled once she saw Galliard. He was a little surprised to see the princess look so healthy but thought little of it. Together they walked down the tower, no words spoken between the two of them. Galliard didn't need words to understand what the young princess was thinking, as she clutched his arm tightly, out of fear. When they got to the large room in which fought Irsirra. The body of the dragon was gone, now replaced with a large puddle of acid. Still giving off a bright green mist, he noticed a few scales floating in the pool, as well as his sword near the edge of the large puddle, the blade almost completely dissolved except for a little that remained near the guard. He left it there as the pair left the castle.

Once they crossed the bridge, Galliard helped the princess onto his horse, and noticed as she took a deep breath. Her nightmare was finally over, no more dragon, and soon she was to be reunited with her father and her kingdom. He spurred his steed onward and started the journey back to her kingdom. He thought it was strange that she had yet to speak, not even to thank him, but assumed it was due to her great fear as she tightly squeezed his stomach to stay on the horse. "I can't speak right now," the princess silently thought. "I would hate for him to recognize my voice." This thought caused a

slight smile to spread across her face. As Galliard continued to spur his steed, the wind blew through the princesses long blond hair, and made it lift just enough to expose her last patch of iridescent black scales on the back of her neck as it morphed into the same texture and color as the rest of her skin.

Audrey Bergen

Madness in Transit

Mad and glad
which are you?
mixed up, flipped up
making potions like mad scientists, sorcerers
drinking them like addicts
acid, acrid
nails on a chalkboard down my throat

Audrey Bergen

Caged Canines

I do what I can in the short time I'm here,
and don't mind when I come home covered in hair.

Someone asks me if I work here.
I tell him "No, I'm just a volunteer."

Do I really exude that air of confidence?
Because most days I sure don't feel like it.

Some dogs bark boisterously when anyone walks by,
like doing so will get them noticed.

That if they wag their tail hard enough, people
will look past their missing eye.

Other dogs sit quietly as I walk by their kennels,
as if they have already given up on finding a home.

Tina Tien Nguyen

Color, Water, Eye

She was obsessed with blue,
The color of the sky, ocean, and her eyes.
She loved a clear sunny day,
Looking northward, she saw wavy mountains;
Looking southward, she saw a newly made sparkling road;
Looking eastward, she saw the horizon filled with glass buildings;
Looking westward, she saw the crystal sea.

“You know why?” she said,
“The blue soothes my eyes.”
Not just because it’s a cool tone,
But blue things up her mood when she’s alone.

He was obsessed with her eyes
Regardless of their color.
He loved looking deep at them,
Glittery and bright like jade.
He loved those gleamy eyes,
Believing that they knew not to lie.
He never allowed anyone
To let tears shed from that pair of jade.
She was his world,
She was his sun,
She was his soother,
She was his only love.

They had gone through
Peace, storms, joy, and blues.
They wished to hold their hands
Together forever like sea and sand.

A clear sunny day came,
They no longer saw each other.
Everything was still the same,
But his eyes began to drip water.

She enjoyed blue things
Though she wasn't alone.
He faced his real feelings
That his sun had been gone.

Time flew by, one day he realized,
He was obsessed with blue.

Tina Tien Nguyen

Freedom

I left my home country
To seek freedom.
I gave up my old life
To make my own life.
In Vietnam, my home country,
There was no way to define true freedom.
I had to write my feelings
About a literary work
Based on what was strictly taught in textbooks.
No space for personal creativity,
No space for freedom of speech,
And no chance to write a poem like this.
I dared not to wear what I loved
And try different hairstyles
Since I feared other people would judge me.
I was not allowed to hang out with my friends
Since my parents feared they were not nice enough.
Now I have had a new life,
I can do what I like, choose my favorite styles,
And give my future a try.
Now I have had the right
To make my own decisions.
My thoughts and actions
Are my possessions.
My mind is now open
To inhale the breeze of freedom.

Nikki Haugland

Guilt

You eat me alive like a cannibal.
For the words you say are confidently
whispered into the shadows of my mind.
I bow down to your voice as it echoes.
I searched for the light that was once there.
But unlike Sherlock Holmes I have no Watson.
I stumble drunk in the sea of thoughts.
Like shredded paper this task to glue the truth together is daunting.
When I locked the door from last time, I threw away the key.
I thought I was done with you once and for all.
Your skills for picking locks are impressive.
Your determination is relentless.
I unplug my mind from its outlet
Exhausted I concede.
My white flag waves.
You win, today.

Silent Wave

Nikki Do

My socks are soggy.

Which is to be expected if you live so near and close to the beach as I do. Although—my little sister says I should mention this—the ocean doesn't normally greet you at your front door.

She wants me to also write, and I'm quoting this, that the *sharks will come soon*. Sometimes, I think she's too young to understand what's happening to our town.

This morning I woke up in our one-story, beige house. We have a green, green lawn that shone blue today, a bike outside rusting by the hour, and a garage that can't keep out water. To make things worse, our roof leaks and our dryer has been out of commission for four-three—too many days. I can't keep wearing soggy socks. Marsha, my sister, thinks it's because we upset Marshed Mellow, her frog. *Marshed Mellon*, she says, *told me about this! It happened all those years ago in... Rome!*

She's wrong because the place she's trying to say is Egypt. Obviously. I'm not sure why I have to keep taking Marsha to Bible study. If Marshed Mellow *is* right, then perhaps we should put lamb blood on our doorways instead. I'll laugh later or something—if I said it out loud, God knows my parents would be extraordinarily holy and smack me straight to heaven. As my calves dive into the water, Marsha tugs on my arm. *I'm ready!* She's too short to walk in the water. So now my socks are wet for both of us.

I can't say if I like the way our street got remodeled. When Marsha is on my back and we pass by Mr. Garcia's old house, Mrs. Pham's yard, Mr. Adam's treehouse, Mrs. Rivera's fence, I try my best to tell her stories about them. Everyone's doors are the same color but no one seems to be behind them. For our whole lives, Marsha and I lived on Bach Drive, named after the famous Baroque composer and no one else. Someone forty years ago probably

thought it would sound classy instead of tacky. *Someone forty years ago would also not expect our houses to be in the brook rather than by it.*

Hey, Nat, I hear her say.

Yes, Marsh?

Can we go back? The sharks are coming.

I think about it for a minute as freezing water slams against my thigh. They make small waves and ripples with white sea foam that curls into itself. The air is already biting at my skin.

The clouds above are sinking to our level—I'm sure of it. My arms are heavy.

Sure. Let's head back.

She grins with all give-or-take sixteen of her teeth showing. I know by now that we're going home because she wants to play with Marshded Mellow—the spelling, of course, done by yours truly. When we found Marshded Mellow, he was a frog sitting on our window sill. Our parents told us not to bring him in, but I told Marsha she could because *the world is fucked anyway*. I did get in trouble for introducing that word to her. Not fun. Marsha is a bit of a hero with animals though. She has some sort of sixth sense because I'm sure when I was her age, Marshded Mellow would have probably died already. He knows when to hop on her hand and she knows better than to hold him for too long.

I'm glad we got to keep him, especially since we met him before all of this. *He's a bad omen*, my mom commented. My dad agreed with her—although I suppose he never disagreed either. It didn't help either that the rain wouldn't stop when he came. That day she made comments asking who would take care of him as if she took care of Marsha. God, my arms are

heavy. It's raining again.

Hey, Marsh?

She doesn't respond. I nudge her with my elbow.

Mm... Nat?

Let's stop by this playground.

Mmkay.

I wade through the water, bumping into a chainlink fence as I do. The water is waist level now. On a half-submerged sign, the words *Lily Treetop* are a fading viridescent color. It's the playground of my youth. With the playground itself, I'm glad that its reds, blues, and yellows persist in this weather. I'm more glad that it's tall enough for us to be out of the water. For now, it's a pier we get to watch the water from. I set Marsha down on the tallest platform and lean against one of the poles. Etched in it are the initials C and M in a heart. While Marsha hops around, finding nooks and crannies I used to play in, my eyes flutter shut. I hear her boots making tiny thumping sounds as she bounces up like a kangaroo and down like the rain. I feel hatred welling up inside of me as I hear the waves crash against the playground.

The first time I opened my eyes underwater was when Josh in the third grade almost drowned me.

I recall his hands grabbing at my back and my neck. He pounced on me from behind, determined to pull me under. At first, he yanked my hair, then my arms and shoulders until my body thrashed in and out then in and out of the water. I drank chlorine as I gasped for air. I yelled out, *stop!* between coughs and gulps of water. I tried elbowing and kicking him, but under the water I was slow. When I wanted to move, my body would follow like a shadow out of sync. It was my body, but I had no power over it. Between the constant movement, I saw the sky, the

sun, and a seemingly never-ending blue. Looking back, I realize water carries memories with it wherever it goes.

Nat!

Yeab? I respond. I don't want to open my eyes.

The sharks are coming.

Okay, Marsh. I don't want to start moving again.

Then they came.

A violent gush of wind pushes against my arms and legs. The water slams into my waist, even on this platform. My mother once told me that I would burn in hell, but I'm so very certain that hell is

cold. I hear a high-pitched yelp from my left and see Marsha fall backward with the water. Her clothes, dry when I carried her, are soaked. Her socks are soggy now.

Marsha! I call out when another wave thrusts me forward. I tumble towards the yellow railings. My shoulders bruise against them as my bones rattle against the metal. Turning back, I am an ant against the current. She's gone. My feet float with the next wave. *Where is she?* She's too small. She can't swim when the water is this violent. She's gone.

Marsha! I yell again, but saltwater fills my mouth and stings my eyes. I flail around—trapped in the playground as the sea level rises. Water rushes into the railings, surging between every gap and grabbing at my clothes. I look left. I turn. I dive beneath the surface.

I open my eyes underwater.

Marsha was right. The sharks did come. They're here and for a moment, I witness colors that belong far beyond our suburban neighborhood. In the place I grew up, I find *fish* and they shimmer in yellows and blues and pinks and purples and oranges. There is kelp floating where my feet once stood and they wrap around the playground like vines of ivy. Underneath the poles and platforms, sea pancakes—sting rays—swirl in the sand, creating patterns and trails like underwater snails. The water is *rich*, blue, and never-ending.

But I can't find Marsha.

I swim out, in the direction of the waves pushing and pushing and pushing. *She can float, can't she? She can float.* I want to cry but it's hard to cry when you're underwater. I rise to the surface to breathe. The sky is blue—cloudy, but blue. My arms are tired and my lungs are desperate for air.

I hate Bible study. But I'd do anything to part the sea now.

Nat! Nat!

My ears perk up at the sound of her voice. *Marsha!* I call out.

She yells out my name again and I follow as best as I can. My biceps and forearms are sore. The clothing I wore—just to keep

warm—is heavy and weighing me down. I keep my head above water, even though it pushes me any way it wishes. The wind pushes against my skin and my hair. I feel like a rat, but I can't complain until Marsha is okay. No matter how tired I get.

Nat! I find the top of her head by the trunk of a tree. She's so incredibly small compared to the flood. Are our parent waiting for us?

I swim to her.

When I reach the tree, I feel the water recede—only for a second. I hold her in between

my arms while gripping onto the tree. *This time we won't get lost.* She feels warm despite being thrown about in the ocean water. I just know her socks are soggy.

Close your eyes, Marsh. The water is salty.

Okie.

Together we sway with the tree which groans with every gust of wind and tumbling wave that comes our way. I think we're in Mrs. Rivera's yard but I'm not too sure. And then, what about our house? I hear wood being torn apart by the currents, the creaking of the playground, and the branches above shaking. My heartbeat seems to follow the rhythm of it all. I think my arms are shaking while we wait for the water to forget us. I hate that water has memory.

I close my eyes but hold tight to Marsha. I was careless before. I'm not sure when but the water becomes gentle—the level remains as high as it was during the peak of the storm, but it's calm again. We float together, holding onto the bark as if the water will rip through us once more. For a moment, I can feel my arms relax.

With my sister leaning against my chest, I float backward into the ocean water that has submerged my entire childhood. There are birds dancing across the sky. I think they're poetic or something. All of it was. If I weren't so human, I would have treasured the sea more than my Marsha. I sigh. This would be nicer if we didn't have to go home. At least birds still fly this way.

Marsha tugs on my sleeve.
Let's find Marsbed Mellon, Nat.
Okay. Let's go home.

Visiting

Hunter Hays

As I sat in June's living room, I tried to push away the thought that she probably didn't know I was there. I smiled as I sat next to her on her tea stained couch, looking around at all of the Dalmatian decorations splashed around her house. An old green bandana caught my eye as it sat forgotten on her dining room table. I tried not to think about that Saint Patrick's Day when she invited my little brother and I to join her and her therapy dogs in the annual parade downtown. We all wore those matching green bandanas and dalmatian print pullovers, and despite multiple times of her asking me to stay close, I would run ahead and do cartwheels down the middle of the strip. I thought I looked like a gymnast. She let me pretend I was one. The memory tore itself away and I looked over at Miss June, who, for probably the millionth time, was telling her niece the same story about her rescue dog, and how she loved to be cradled like a baby. I resisted the urge to roll my eyes and mouth along. Miss June would pick up the stuffed toy dog we had bought her. Wishful thinking made me unsure if she knew it wasn't her puppy or not. The real dog hadn't been here for a few weeks at this point. Occasionally, in brief moments of lucidity she would ask about her. We had taken her to my mom's house because June wasn't able to take care of her anymore. She wasn't able to even take care of herself at this point.

Miss June was dressed in her usual green everything, even down to her socks. It was her favourite colour. There was no harm in it, but I hated how it highlighted the purple veins stretching across her arthritic hands and thinning arms. It looked like a map of all the adventures she had taken, reminding me of every stop she had made. I tried to ignore the thought that the map was running out of room too soon. I knew she was old, but the thought of her being gone was too much.

She had always been there. Not just for me, but all the neigh-

borhood kids. We had all grown up calling her Aunt June. It was her who had helped me when I crashed my scooter in front of her house, running and getting a Band-Aid. She made me laugh until the pain went away. She had even offered me a McDonalds cookie if I promised to not let it spoil my dinner. For years, it was her who was the permanent fixture in my life and in the neighborhood. Generations of families would come and go, but Aunt June was always there, decked out in green, smiling with a Dalmatian right inside the front door.

When I left for college and came home for the first time, it had been her that I talked to first. I had told her all about how campus was absolutely giant and how I was afraid I was going to get lost one of these days. I told her my classes terrified me, and about the crazy math professor that kept calling me McKenzie despite there not being anyone with that name in the class. She had laughed and told me I was going to do great. Years later, Aunt June was who I first introduced my fiancé to. She had threatened him with the wrath of a red-headed Irish woman if he were to ever break my heart. I was dumbfounded because she had never talked to anyone like that before in front of me. She told me it was because this was the only boy I had introduced her to that she had liked. I laughed when she said his red hair was a bonus. I tried not to think about whether she would make it to the wedding.

I continued to listen to her repeated stories, and wondered how long I would still hear them. How many more St. Patrick's Days would pass, how many more Halloweens would be spent trying to explain what the new neighborhood kids were dressed up as. How many Christmases would she still be putting out lit up milk jugs so that they surrounded the cul-de-sac in a serene halo. The same halo I had watched every Christmas Eve from my bedroom window, entranced by its warm glow. The same halo I realized I hadn't seen since I had left home. The clock on the wall chimed. I swore the ticking was mocking her already.

She was still busy talking her niece's ear off, and had even man-

aged to circle back to the dog story. Millionth and one. I looked around again at her house and thought about where we could still go. There were a couple places I still wanted her to see before it was too late. I could take her to the old park. They had just finished construction so it looked brand new. Or I could take her on a drive, put the stuffed dog in the backseat and laugh with her as it stuck it's head out the window to enjoy the breeze. I could find a plane and fly us to the beach so she could finally see the sun as it set over the ocean.

Her voice pulled me back to reality.

“I’m so sorry dear. I feel like I should know this, but I can’t quite remember your name. Who are you?”

And there I was, in Aunt June’s living room, sitting on her tea stained couch trying not to choke on her words. I wanted to shake her and remind her of all of it. Every holiday, every hello, every memory she had of us that I could see in her eyes, still slowly slipping away. I wanted to kick myself for not visiting more. I wanted to tell her to come back; beg her to stay just a little longer.

But I knew I would be asking for the impossible. She didn’t have much time at all. Instead, I ignored my heart breaking into a million and one pieces. I smiled at her.

“My name is Hannah. It’s nice to meet you.”

Occupy

Loria Harris

Thunff . . . I rock Jason's body away from mine. The smell of Jim Beam, the sticky layer of sweat forming all over my skin from the heat in the kitchen—I couldn't breathe.

“What the piss, Lisa?” He slaps across my face with his open hand, making my eyeball try to jump sides. A milky yellow floods my vision as I grapple across the room to find the car keys. “I just need to kiss my lovey dovey wifey!” His leathery lips pucker as he reaches for me again. I have the keys now, and I dash for the door. The crickets chirp in off-key harmony as I jump in our black Toyota, squinting to see in the night. He bangs on the hood as I light up “R” on the gear shift and spew gravel at his spitting mouth.

My fingers are shaking, but I rake them through my dark hair, peeling it off my neck. Fumbling for the knob, I turn on the radio, and it serenades me.

I don't know how you do what you do, I'm so in love with you. It just keeps getting better.

A single salty tear burns my eye as it drools down my cheek.

Why does he come home and ambush me like that? I wonder. Every few weeks, after he's been gone for the evening, he'll come home reeking of alcohol and demand my *affection*—not even my sex but my affection. He'll say, “No, kiss me like you *mean* it,” or “I just need you to really hold me” and not release me for a solid sixty seconds. I never have any other option, and I bristle from the feeling of his rough, calloused hands surprising my goose-bumpy arms even on a good day.

I don't know where I'm driving, but I keep going, turning right on Main. A neon sign glows green from the brick tavern-turned-church building. “God's Plan.” God's plan. God's plan. I think of my mom. I could call her. She'll have all the answers, everything I need to fix about myself to make God's plan work for me and Ja-

son. I could call my sister. She'll have marijuana. Maybe that could be God's plan for tonight.

**

Smoky haze permeates the air. My sister Amy is laughing next to me on the couch, holding her stomach. The heaviness of my head tells me not to move it, but I do. I look at her. I laugh a little too. I don't know what's funny, though. When I look up at the ceiling, the picture frame from the wall is floating on it, and I wonder how that got there.

“Amy, why do you put pictures on the ceiling?” I muster the words. She just keeps laughing. I close my eyes instead and try to drift off. Still aware of the room around me, I become encased in a bouncy ball. I bounce around the room, my eyes closed, and I realize I'm floating in liquid—liquid inside the bouncy ball. I reach out to touch the skin of it, and it wiggles from my touch, soft and flimsy.

It's not rubber; it's a sac.

**

I wake up to the salty scent of bacon tickling my tongue. My stomach purrs at me, begging. I stumble into the kitchen and see Amy, her blonde hair already curled and bouncy, spatula in hand.

“Good morning!” she says. She seems too smiley to even contain herself. I don't remember what it's like to be single.

“Wow. You have energy.” I rub my eyes and try to stretch my back without losing my balance.

“I have work in an hour.”

“Touché.” I also don't remember what it's like to work five days a week.

She serves us each a plate—scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast. I feel as if I could devour it in two seconds, but I try to pace myself.

“You doing any better this morning?” she asks.

“I don't know.” I shovel eggs onto the toast then into my mouth. “How has your health been?”

“It's hit or miss, like always. But I've been okay, and I feel good today!”

“That's good to hear. I think you're doing the best of the both of us right now!” I chuckle.

“I don't know. All I know is I wish I had someone coming home at night who couldn't keep his hands off me, Lisa. I think you're luckier than you know.”

“He hit me, Amy.”

“Yeah. But he was drunk, right?”

“Yeah. Maybe if he just wouldn't get drunk. Then he wouldn't be rough about it. Maybe if I didn't jump from his touches. Maybe if I could get myself to feel . . . like I used to feel?” I stare at her across the table. I don't really expect her to have answers, but I feel my eyes pleading for anything she can offer.

“Hey, it's gonna be okay.” She comes over and wraps her arms half around the chair, half around me. I lean into her shoulder and scrunch my nose so I won't cry. She smells of frankincense and lavender.

“I've got to go to work,” she says.

“Oh, how is work?” I compose myself.

“Work is great! And awful,” she says, standing up and clearing her dishes. “I think James is really starting to notice me, if you know what I mean. But Melissa just started her maternity leave, so I have a lot of slack to pick up.” Now I understand the perfect hair, the fitted floral dress that still looks professional but not a smidgen less flattering for it.

“Ohhhh, interesting.” I crunch my bacon. “I thought you liked Adam?”

“I did.” She winks. “But, look, I really gotta go. Stay here as long as you need.”

I will.

I trudge through sloppy, rainy mud up the hill to our house. My ankle boots are trying to slip off of me, but I didn't want to park in the driveway. I had to see, had to make sure he wasn't here first. So I parked down the hill, around a corner, and I'm taking the path through the grass. No one is parked. I let my shaky breath escape. He's done this before, overwhelmed me, scared me away, but this was the first time I've had a mark—the first time he's hit me. I don't really know what I'm supposed to do next.

Coming home to make a grab for what I can call mine feels right, though.

I press my forehead to the cool glass of the narrow window alongside the front door. My breath fogs my view, but I don't see any lights. I don't hear any sounds. I turn my key and head inside, leaving my muddy boots on the rug.

I advance to the bedroom . . . *our* bedroom. . . or so I tell myself. He must be at work, like Amy. It seems people who own their own selves are all there. How ironic. He's a civil engineer who works under another civil engineer, which I guess makes him a glorified construction worker. Today, in the rain, he probably gets to work inside an office, though. My clothes are on the floor, hanging in the closet, and stacked in drawers, but I grab from the dresser first because he won't notice those are missing. I stuff a few panties, pajamas, jeans, shorts, and t-shirts into my duffel. I glance around. A red dress is shoved between his suits in our closet. I think I might need that, too.

On the drive back to Amy's, the news rages, "Occupy Wall Street gains momentum, as an estimated 1,000 people now crowd the famous street, demanding financial equality." It's weird to think about all that's going on in the world outside of my own bubble. I can't imagine a single person I know who would go there and do that, least of all, my mom. That reminds me I should call her before the rumor mill goes crazy.

“Mom, do you ever wish you had stayed at your job?” I ask when she answers my call.

“Lisa, hi, honey! Is everything okay? Matt said he heard from Amy that you stayed with her last night.” I knew it wouldn't take long. Matt's my cousin, who works at the same firm as my sister.

“I'm fine, Mom. I was just thinking about things like money and wondering if you wished you'd kept your job after you married Dad.”

“Are you having money problems? I just finished a Bible study on money with your father. Maybe I can send it to you!”

“No, we're not having money problems, Mom. Thank you, though. I'm just wondering if I shouldn't make some money, too. I know my home ec. degree won't get me anywhere special, but there are probably some jobs.”

“Oh, sweetie, when I left my job, it was because I had a much bigger purpose than delivering mail. I was preparing to be your mother.”

“Couldn't you do both?”

“Not with my whole heart, honey. Your dad made enough money, and God gave him that responsibility and authority.” She pauses. “I've never heard you talk this way. You always wanted to be home, to love your husband, to be a devoted mother. You even got your degree in it, said you never want to do anything else. What's going on?”

“I know, I know,” I sigh. “I guess I'm starting to wonder if this is it? Will I ever be able to stand on my own feet? You know, to bring more to the marriage and all that.” I feel I have to give a reason.

“I understand. I wondered that once, too. But staying home was an act of obedience, an act of love. Ruth, Mary, and Esther—all the best women in the Bible—they all changed their whole lives to be wives or mothers.”

“That's sweet,” I say. I'm not a mother yet, though. I wonder if that matters. “How is Dad, anyway?”

“Still the best man I know! Is everything really okay? Why'd you stay with Amy?”

“Yeah, we just had fun catching up. Look, I'm gonna let you go. Love you, Mom!”

“Oh, okay. I love you too, Lisa-Bug.”

**

“You're still here,” Amy says when she walks in the door.

“Hi to you too. You said stay as long as I need?”

“Of course!” She eyes me up and down as she wrenches her heels off her feet. “Have you talked to Jason today?”

“No, I went to the house and grabbed some clothes, though.”

“Oh. So you're staying for a while?”

“Is that okay?”

“Of course!” She keeps saying that. “But,” she pauses, “what's your plan?”

“I don't think I want to go back, Amy.” I hadn't said it aloud yet. Now that I've heard it, I feel a knot of guilt in my gut. I see myself as a Delilah, a betrayer. But then I think of Rahab after helping the Jews, free of her misguided loyalties. Which am I?

“Hell. And I just wanted to come home from work and relax.” She walks past me towards her bedroom. I think her body's crashing out on her after a long day of work. I don't often see the run-down, grumpy Amy, but I know she struggles.

“Please do! Don't let me stop you.” I sigh. If I start paying for a hotel room, Jason will cancel that card, and I don't have a clue where that would leave me. I have to figure something out, but my stomach beckons me again. I scan her fridge contents while she's changing, and a giant jar of whole dill pickles calls to me. I hope she won't mind.

**

The next morning, he calls. I've just finished vomiting in the toilet when I hear my phone. I should have checked the expiration date on those pickles. Or maybe I shouldn't have ordered my Tikka Masala so spicy for dinner.

"Jason," I say, preparing to push this conversation off for another time. But he jumps in.

"Hey, I am so sorry, Lisa."

"What? You are? Why?" I wasn't expecting that.

"I should not have slapped you. I was just mad that you don't want me to touch you. I mean, I'm your husband!" He voice starts to get gravelly, but he stops and calms himself. "I let it get the best of me. When are you coming back?"

I pause. "I don't know."

"Look, I'm so, so sorry. I didn't react right. I won't do it again; I promise. I love you."

"I know. I love you, too."

"Do you remember our wedding vows?"

"Which part?"

"When I said *whenever I get it wrong, I promise to make it right*. Lisa, I meant that. I want to make it right."

I can remember him on that day two years ago, damp eyes and dimples, the sun glowing behind him. I don't think I could have loved him more in that moment if I tried.

"When are you coming back?" He breaks the silence.

"I don't know. Tomorrow?" What the hell am I thinking?

"Okay, that's great. Hey, we have a lot to work on, don't we? Look, I'll work on my temper. I know I really need to. Will you work on being more affectionate with me? Maybe there's something you can read or think about during the day that will help you be excited for when I come home?"

"Yeah, I guess that seems fair." I feel the blood draining from my face, but this has to be the right thing to do. I have to at least try before I make up my mind to leave. Delilah and Samson probably

never tried couple's therapy.

**

“All the power is owned by the richest 1%. We are the 99%!” The radio is still fixated on this Occupy Wall Street story. *Are people actually worried?* I wonder. I think we all know nothing will change; maybe some small casualties will happen in the streets. But life will continue how it continues.

When I pull into the driveway, I feel a wave of relief wash over me. This is my driveway. This is my house, my husband. I remember when we bought this house, together. I jumped in his arms and he carried me across the threshold while I stretched out my arm and snapped a selfie. I was so happy to be held, so unafraid to leave any hints of dreams of another life behind. I knew it was my calling; I knew my mom would be proud. I knew Jason would want all of me, and I was ready for it. I can be there again. And thanks to what the wet stick told me last night, the feeling of uncertainty can be a distant memory. I thud the driver's seat door closed, and I think how excited he must be to hear the echo of that from inside the house. Heaving my duffel onto my shoulder, I wonder how long before the doctor declares I shouldn't be lifting it. And I feel my cheeks grow warm and smile. I can't wait to tell Jason.

"Ngày giông bão đi qua, vô tình
mang hạt nắng phai mờ..."
"My fragile sunlight was
swept by a sudden storm..."



Home Sweet Home
Dec. 5, 2020

Home Sweet Home

Tina Tien Nguyen



Les Fetiches Study

Oil on canvas h: 24" x w: 18

Victoria Fussell



Observation Mask Study

Acrylic on paper h: 24" x w: 19 5/8"

Victoria Fussell



Paper Sculpture Study

Acrylic on paper h: 22" x w: 20"

Victoria Fussell



Papillon

Acrylic on black canvas h: 18" x w: 24"

Victoria Fussell



Time Study - 5 @ 5:00

Acrylic and mixed media on canvas h: 24" x w: 18"

Victoria Fussell

Daria Smith

Winter's End

Here on this quiet earth,
green and still,
a white butterfly flutters past.
I watch it disappear across the field,
as the grass begins to sway
like a conductor waving his baton.

A gentle breeze brings
the smell of honey,
as I watch the trees gently shake against the wind.
I glance around the almost vacant park,
the mountains to my right
and above the passionate sun.

I notice a bare tree standing close by,
its arms, empty, stretched out,
pleading with me to wrap them around myself.

The world calls us to love.
So, I answer,
falling into a heap on the grass
letting my body rise and fall.

Daria Smith

Backyard Tree

It's late morning—almost noon—
two brave mockingbirds
wrestle in the Dogwood,
white petals pressed
open, those willing palms
hold sweet nectar, face-up
with no secrets to hide.

By mid-day
the world sits on the tree's shoulders
as the bees come to drink
and the hummingbirds,
right behind them,
suck at the breasts
of nature.

I too was called here,
entranced by blooming life.
That was before I knew its name.

Then one day,
I came home,
to see
its tight fists
had opened.

Daria Smith

Dragonfly

At first glance, you are a frilly thing with wings that glides across the grass or nearby stream. Gentle and calm, like the clear blue water, you move in and out, above the water lilies-- a forest of white and green. Unlike the Yellow wasp that floats over water, you do not put fear into the souls of mothers who warn their children to leave the bee-like creature, alone. It's children that chase you, that seek you out, and yet, they never can catch you, or the glory that glints on your wings. And, unlike mosquitoes that make children cry from red welts left behind, and a relentless itch, you simply zig-zag in the sky as the sun goes down.

J.L. Lakin

The Rant

What the hell is a poem, anyways?

What is it that marks the difference between disjointed ramblings and a work of free-form literature?

If you ask me it ain't a damn thing. You probably shouldn't ask me though. I'm just a student wondering why when I can put my thoughts to paper it can be considered a work of art, but when the guy on the street corner shouts them out loud he gets called crazy.

Maybe it's something about respectability. Somehow me showing up to class in gym shorts, sleep deprived and stinking of booze adds some sort of authenticity to it all.

Or maybe it's the nature of the work. Musings on nature and philosophy and religion and whatever else happens to pop into the brain as a concept you can stretch into a couple of stanzas.

Taking the abstract and putting ink to paper or pixel to screen all for the sake of making the conceptual into something....
uh....

Ah, to hell with it. It's probably nothing.

Poker Face

Kaylee Drew

Lottie wasn't lucky.

In her experience, there was no such thing as luck. It simply didn't exist. If you wanted luck, then you'd have to make it yourself. And then it wouldn't really be luck, would it? So, no; despite what people thought, she wasn't lucky. Lottie was, however, very observant, very clever, and she was very skilled at noticing things.

For example, Lottie had noticed a long time ago that a pair of sunglasses were useless without a good poker face. They hurt more than they helped. They made it hard to see your cards, and sometimes gave away tells because you got lulled into a false sense of security.

Lottie was currently noticing that the scrawny kid at the far end of the card table apparently hadn't gotten the memo. The giant sunglasses looked cartoonishly ridiculous on him and had thus far done nothing to stop his horrid losing streak. Lottie almost pitied him. Almost.

He couldn't be any older than an average high schooler. She had no idea how he got into here. Fake ID, maybe. The sunglasses kid must have known what he was risking before he got here. He could live with the consequences.

Lottie leaned back in her seat, the wooden legs scratching against the colorful carpet, and the wooden floors underneath groaning. She set her ankle over her knee and dropped her right arm over the back of the chair. Hopefully, she looked relaxed.

Fwiiip.

The dealer's hands danced over the cards, sending them flying through the air in an organized dance, mixing together and ending in a neat pile.

Fwiiiiip.

The cards dance again, the sound nearly being drowned by loud cheers coming from a nearby beeping slot machine. Chatter and old-fashioned piano music drifted through the large casino. Fainter were the sounds of waves lightly splashing against the walls, followed by the slight swaying of the large boat. An ornate chandelier swung slightly in the air, the very same chandelier that Lottie almost got her frizzy blond hair stuck in earlier that day.

The dealer cut the deck, and then tossed the top card to the side, discarding it. Then she swiftly tossed a card to each of the four players, and then did it again before setting the deck back down.

Lottie watched Sunglasses. He picked up his cards and stared at them, searching and scanning as if reading a novel, and pressed his lips into a thin line.

Must be a bad hand, Lottie mused.

She peered down at her own two cards, the smooth paper running over the exposed skin on her fingerless gloves.

Two of diamonds. Ten of spades, she noted. *That really sucks.*

She set her cards back down.

“Another drink!” Yelled the man sitting directly to Lottie’s left. His cards were lying discarded where the dealer had set them. He hadn’t even looked at them.

The man leaned past her to grab a glass of champagne. The glasses all clinked together as he stumbled. Lottie resisted the urge to wrinkle her nose as the sharp jab of expensive cologne assaulted her nostrils.

Everything about this man was a cry for attention. His expensive suit. His gold watch. The way he played without care. The way he bossed around everyone. He had hit on Lottie seven times already, despite being over three times her age, at least. Every second she was near him she felt her blood pressure rising. The man’s bald head and egotistical personality reminded Lottie of Lex Luthor from those Superman comics she used to read.

People like this were easy to read, at least. They’re loud. They wanted to be seen. They wanted to have tells. They wanted every-

one to know everything they were doing at all times. They made a show of everything they do. He was as easy to read as a book about the alphabet. Its why he kept losing all his chips. He kept buying more.

“Want a drink, darlin?” Luthor slurred, waving over the waiter again. He had already downed his glass in a single gulp.

Lottie didn’t respond. She stared at her pile of chips. Not too big, but not too small, either. It was almost as impressive as the pile belonging to the man to her right.

He was a tall, silver haired man, with a mustache and a tattoo of a skeleton on his neck. He was staring at the hand he was dealt. Studying it. His face blank. He had amassed most of the chips at the table. He was cold and calculated. An experienced player. She’d seen him in here quite a few times before. Seen him in other New Orleans casinos, too. Played with him once or twice. Won some. Lost some. She didn’t know his name. Never cared enough to ask.

“Here’s the flop,” the dealer said, spreading three cards out in front of her. Lottie lifted her chin and leaned forward to see better, careful to let nothing show on her face.

King of spades. Queen of spades. Three of hearts.

Luthor scoffed, just now looking at his cards.

Lottie scoffed inside her mind. She didn’t have anything. She had the ten of spades. But she would need the jack of spades and an ace of spades to get a royal flush. The only hand she is somewhat close to was also the most impossible one.

Lottie was not lucky. She had nothing.

At least it didn’t seem like she was the only one.

Sunglasses cleared his throat and tossed two purple chips forward. “One thousand.” His voice cracked when he spoke.

Lottie felt her heart jump. *There’s no way he has something that good. He’s bluffing.*

Luthor scoffed again. “Call.” He tossed in two purple chips.

“Call,” Lottie said confidently. Two purple chips left her pile.

“Call,” Tattoo said, his voice hoarse and rough, as if his throat was filled with sand. He copied the actions of the others. Two chips.

The dealer nodded and set another card down. “Here’s the turn.”

Three of diamonds.

Wow. This is just the worst, Lottie thought. She considered folding. But then again, Sunglasses was looking pretty nervous. Luthor was searching for another drink, not even seeing the cards. Tattoo was unreadable.

Fold now, I lose. Keep going, might lose, might win, she pondered.

“Um, five thousand,” Sunglasses said, throwing in a larger stack of chips. He barely had any left.

“Oh, uh, yeah. Call,” Luthor said dismissively.

“Raise. Ten thousand,” Lottie declared. She threw in many chips. The dealer raised her eyebrows. Sunglasses whipped his head around and stared at her sharply.

“Call.” Tattoo matched her bid.

Sunglasses stared at his chips. He bit his bottom lip. He didn’t have enough to match the bet. Lottie knew he’d-

“All in.” He shoved his remaining chips into the pile.

Welp. That backfired. On the outside, Lottie remained a blank slate; unreadable. On the inside, she was shrieking hysterically.

The dealer nodded and put the last card down on the table. “The river,” she said.

Jack of spades.

Everything sucked. Absolutely everything sucked for Lottie right now. She barely heard Luthor piling in the rest of his chips.

On one hand, she could fold. On the other hand, thousands of dollars. One hand, keeping what little money she had left. On the other, the tiny chance of besting Luthor.

“All in.” Lottie heard the words coming from her mouth but didn’t entirely feel like they were hers. She slid all her chips into the mounting pile in the middle of the table. Tattoo did the same.

Shock was very thinly veiled on the dealer’s face. She signaled Sunglasses to show his cards.

Six of hearts. Seven of clubs.

Obviously, his bluff did not work out for him in the slightest.

Then Luthor. *Two queens. Not that bad.*

He's going to win. The thought flew through Lottie's mind. She stiffened. A spike of anger shot through her. *Unless someone does something, he's going to win.*

She grabbed her cards and flipped them over.

"What!" Luthor choked. Sunglasses mouth fell open.

"Royal flush," breathed the dealer, looking at Lottie's ten of spades and ace of spades.

Tattoo frowned and looked at Lottie strangely. It was the most expression she had ever seen from the man. He turned his cards over.

Three of spades. King of Diamonds.

"Full house," noted the dealer. Lottie smiled. Good hand. But not good enough.

Lottie decided to make herself sparse after that. She collected her winnings and exited the boat before they recounted the deck, leaving the spluttering gamblers behind her. Later, perhaps, when she dropped her winnings in a beggar's plate, a few cards fell out of her sleeve as well. She chose not to notice.

She Dreamed

Lisandra Torres

She often sat alone. Whether it was home, or school, it was always just her. She often thought it didn't matter, but deep inside there was always this thought laying in the back of her head like a sick reminder that she did indeed feel alone. How else would she honestly describe it, if she didn't spend most of her time pretending everything was fine? If she didn't spend most of her time lying to herself then she'd have to face reality, face her problems. Ultimately, her preferred way of dealing with problems was ignoring her problems. Along with deluding herself, that too.

It was a nippy day outside, so there she laid in the grass out back behind her house. Messy golden curls, a small green sweater and a purple sundress and socks. No shoes, she didn't like shoes. They made her feel confined, so in the confines of the safety of her home she preferred to just pretend they weren't a thing, consequences be damned.

The sun partly covered by clouds, seemed to comfort her in a way no human could or ever had. Her eyes were far away, cloudy, lost yet found in the depths of her mind. A place only she could get too, her home, her safe place. Daydreaming or laughter and pitter patter of feet against the hardwood floors of her house. A messy room littered with clothes and accessories and makeup as little girls dressed up and chitter chattered about anything and everything. Although, personally, she preferred to imagine them telling each other secrets of pain and sorrow. The trust and relief and comfort of having someone trusted enough to tell such things. To be sad. To be vulnerable. To feel secure and safe enough to say such things and find comfort in their words and soft touches all the way to hugs, embraces.

She dreamt of stories being shared and whispers deep into the

night. A hand to hold for no other reason other than they could because they wanted to. They felt safe and warm and loved. The trust was there, no one to judge them as they leaned into one another, shoulder to shoulder. Head-to-head and silence. There didn't always need to be sound. There didn't need to be voices or conversations. Just silence and company, closeness. She preferred the silence, feeling far more intimate and close.

Other times, there was this need for warmth and hugs. Just a smile and maybe a patting of the head followed by "Hey! How was your day?". Nothing much, nothing complicated just *normal* everyday things. Fresh food being served, a warm meal and quiet peaceful chatter around the table as they say grace. Maybe a few jokes and a hand slapping the table every now and then.

Sometimes, if she really felt the need, there would be a lover. A nice little couple taking walks through the park and a fun little stroll through town. No real destination, just company. Hand in hand, arms slinked together. Perhaps a shared kiss or two. Talks about the future, about them, what they wanted. Maybe a forever, a marriage and a few kids and growing old together as time passed by. I cannot truly say that she was a romantic, she honestly didn't care for romance. Far too young to really want anything like that out of anyone.

What she truly wanted, what she would never admit, even to herself even though she knew it deep inside, was a friend. Family. An acquaintance, anyone really. Just someone to spend time with her. Greet her, smile, and ask her about her day. Her family was rarely home, so much so that she had to learn how to care for herself at such a young age. Laundry, cooking, dishes, cleaning, all of it. She raised herself honestly speaking. When they were home, it was rarely a treat. She would get a hi and that was about it. Both parents deep in work so much so that they didn't really feel it necessary to do much else. She could take care of herself; she didn't need them. To be honest, they'd simply be more annoyed if she did need there help, they were busy, she didn't need to be babied. How else was

she to learn to be a functioning adult if they coddled her?

She could never ask for anything, the same response of “Don’t you see we’re busy? We do so much for this family, and you want more? How selfish could you be?” or “We don’t have time for this, go bother someone else.” They never noticed how quiet she became. How she stopped asking for things or how she simply stopped speaking to them altogether. They never noticed how she stopped interacting with them and would avoid them at all costs, using any and every excuse known to humanity. How she dreaded the days they would return home and how it felt as though she were living with strangers. How she felt completely and utterly alone in this world with no one to talk to but herself and her plushies.

She stopped telling them about school. How she was alone and had no friends. How everyone called her the weird girl and bullied her relentlessly. So much so that she avoided human interaction all together despite desperately wanting human interaction. In the beginning she told them about it only for them to brush it off as if the safety and well-being of their child didn’t matter. “They’ll grow out of it.”, “Suck it up.”, “It doesn’t matter” so on and so forth. She stopped telling them about it. They never asked.

Isolated, alone, lonely, hurt. She laid outside on the grass, staring at the sun as if it had all the answers. She dreamed of wings to fly, fly away, and find a home. Someone to love, someone to love her, want her. She wanted a home, not a cold, empty, loveless house. Golden hair, sprawled across the green of the earth, tears rolling down her eyes, she cried and cried for someone, anyone. She didn’t understand why she had to suffer like this.

No one ever truly understands the damage of what isolation causes. What loneliness and despair could cause to someone, especially one as young as her who didn’t truly understand the world. Yet, somehow, I would say she understood the world. The cruelty of it, the pain and reality of it. Far too young to truly grasp yet she understood. She understood enough to know that she hated it. Hated herself, hated being alone. She was tired, oh so weary and tired.

Not the, I'm sleepy kind of tired. The kind that was truly done with the world and simply wanted to cease existing because living was far too painful, so much so that it was unbearable and simply not worth the pain. Not worth living another day.

She was afraid though, like many others in the world. So, she did nothing. Simply laid in the sun, exhausted from all the gut wrenching tears that made her feel as though her chest was about to cave in on itself. She stayed there for hours, lost in the depth of her broken and shattered mind, drifting away to a land that would keep her safe. Even if it was only in her dreams. She would never admit that she was alone, that she was hurt. But, she knew, deep down, so much so that it was engraved in her soul. Her mind and body knew. Golden locks, green sweater and purple dress laid out in the nippy weather. Mind far off, far gone. She did all she could really do on her own to keep her sane. She dreamed.

CONTRIBUTORS

Audrey Bergen is an English major attending Clovis Community College. She is an aspiring writer and a part of the Honors program.

Nikki Do is a second-year English major at Golden West Community College. Her greatest aspiration is to become a storyteller, whether that be in a classroom or through her writing.

Felipe Dominguez Jr. is a student at Chabot College in Hayward, California. They are working toward an AA in Fine Art Painting and Drawing with the prospects of transferring to a California State University. They use art to explore their identity in a rapidly changing world.

Seth Doyle is a student at Reedley College majoring in Agriculture Education. His short story is based on his hobby of playing Dungeons & Dragons.

Kaylee Drew is an avid fiction writer who is currently in the process of drafting/revising a YA fiction novel, as well as working on an AA degree at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. Drew was born in Texas and spent her childhood in Minnesota. Drew enjoys drawing, collecting comics, and reading fiction.

Hailey Duarte is a sophomore attending Merced College who is working towards a double major for both English Literature and Psychology with a goal of becoming a teacher.

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Emiliano Farras is a 21-year-old photographer currently attending Reedley College where he is studying to attain a major in studio arts. He uses photography as a creative outlet to express emotions and themes from personal life.

Victoria Fussell was raised in Berkeley California and grew up a “child of the 60’s” in a working-class home with her mother. Rich color, texture and dimensionality transform the masks she often paints and sculpts. Victoria is currently attending Chabot College, where she is honing her acrylic painting and lost-wax casting skills.

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Loria Harris attends St. Charles Community College, where she is pursuing her Certificate in Creative Writing. Her work has been included in *The Mid Rivers Review*, *Reverie*, and honored in online writing contests. A lifelong creative, she is an award-winning photographer and possesses a Bachelor's Degree in Music Performance.

Nikki Haugland is not only a full-time student at Anoka-Ramsey Community College but also a full-time mother and insurance producer. Her poetry is something that was slowly worked on and revised throughout the semester. Poetry has been a great form of therapy for Nikki for maintaining her busy lifestyle.

Hunter Hays is a student at St. Charles Community College, where she is working towards her Associates in Creative Writing. She enjoys writing creative nonfiction, the occasional poem, and fundraising for her local hospital.

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Daria Smith is an aspiring poet, photographer, and journalist attending the College of the Sequoias. This is her second semester. In her free time, she enjoys birdwatching and taking long walks in nature.

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Brianna Thomas is a 25-year-old student majoring in Creative Writing while attending Monroe Community College. Born and raised in Rochester, NY, she is an avid lover of reading with the hopes of becoming a successful published author of both poetry and short stories.

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS



Submissions accepted year-round

Requirements:

Artwork & Photography: Up to 5 pieces sent as .JPEG files

Creative Nonfiction: Up to 3,000 words

Fiction: Up to 3,000 words

Poetry: Up to 5 poems

Screenwriting: Up to 1,000 words

All literary submissions must be:

titled

formatted in Microsoft Word or RTF file (.doc, .docx, or .rtf)

formatted in 12 point, Times New Roman font

double spaced

free of mechanical and grammatical errors

original, previously unpublished work

non-English submissions must include English translations

In the body of your email:

Indicate the genre and title of each submission (Artwork, Creative Nonfiction, Fiction, or Poetry).

Include a short biography, the name of your college, your email address, mailing address, and phone number.

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Questions? E-mail us: kingsriverreview@reedleycollege.edu or visit our website: kingsriverreview.com

Art

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Fiction

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