



# Reflection

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Reflection is Gonzaga's journal of art and literature, with poetry, short fiction, photography, artwork, and more.

Published in various forms since 1960, Reflection has been a medium of expression and creativity for the Gonzaga community since its inception.

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We thank Russel Davis and Gray Dog Press for publishing this journal.

Reflection submissions are evaluated and selected anonymously.



“But I don’t want comfort. I want  
God, I want poetry, I want real  
danger, I want freedom, I want  
goodness. I want sin.”

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The Stranger  
Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World





# Theme of Journal

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In our dynamic social world, new avenues of expression have expanded and reshaped our sense of connection. New platforms for community construction and meaning making have challenged our sense of belonging. However, amid these changes, human creativity remains a constant. Reflection Journal is looking for submissions that showcase this creativity that can help us understand our new age of bonding and suffering, love and identity. What does it mean to be human in times of uncertainty, dehumanization, and social unrest? We encourage you to share with us your stories of the extraordinary and the ordinary, your odes to normalcy and the abnormal, your arts of human flourishing and suffering. This journal stands as your outlet to redefine, reaffirm, or confront any elements of human nature that need such attention.

## Dedications & Thank You's

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Thank you to all the students, faculty, and staff who supported this year's journal of Reflection. We especially thank Emily Lovchik, Kayla Cartelli, Joanne Shiosaki, and Dr. Chase Bollig for their insight, encouragement, and support. Without them, this publication would not be possible, especially during this time. We would like to pay special thanks to Kayla for working in the Media Department all these years. We appreciate all the work she has done to make the journal and yearbook publications possible for our community. We wish her the very best in her next career and future endeavors!

Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to Tom Hoag who created the cover art for Reflection.

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Staff

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# Staff Reflections

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## **Jax Lucinda Viteznik**

In this last year, the world has shut down and many, including myself, felt as if my life had shut down and lived within the confines of a room. Life is stilled, and friends became close only through the screen of the phone; spontaneity is a memory of the past. But with life slowed and stopped, there is an opportunity to reflect and create that has never presented itself before. Removed from the normal paces of life, we can actually consider it and how we have lived. I have no doubt that as this period ends, people will emerge from isolation more in touch with themselves and the meaning of their lives, and some real art might be created as well.

## **Asha Therese Ferreria Fernandez Douglas**

Prior to 2020, I was moving so fast that I could barely keep up with myself. I got lost in the motions of how life is “supposed to be” without understanding how both the world and I have changed. The past year has given me time to reconnect with the parts of myself that faded into a blur from years of abandonment. Now, I feel like my voice is free to spill onto the page in waves. And that’s exactly how I want it to be.

## **Brianna Covert**

I’ve been reading about and watching a lot of concerning news in the last year and while I do, I find myself identifying with the data points along graphs and the statistical values of governmental reports. But I am not just a number in the system. I am a human—and I’ve had to relearn to connect with myself in the last year, remembering and recognizing the humanness of just simply being. Learning to give myself space and time—time to heal and time to breath amongst the chaos. And in this time, I’ve turned to creating art to make these connections with myself, because there is no better way to find calm than with a blank page, a brush, and a palette of paint.



## Letter From the Editor

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Dear reader,

I value your presence, wherever you are – mentally, physically, or digitally. I welcome you to this journal, on this page, and into this space. I welcome your curiosity, your human nature, and your unique experiences.

Many of our life's complex journeys and adventures have been greatly altered in this past year. My present journey certainly continues to evolve, especially in the reflection of my past and future. I believe that maintaining meaning for ourselves and for others in this climate of confusion, frustration, suffering, heartbreak, and even during brief moments of joy and happiness, is anything but a clear process for us to fully understand and unravel.

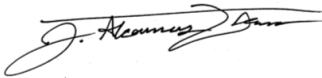
Concepts of human connection, companionship, and community have been thrown into question as a result of the pandemic, reminded in the lanced wounds of political and social turmoil, among interactions with loved ones and strangers, and in the close quarters of affirming or finding one's sense of self. How do we support ourselves through these challenging and seemingly impossible periods in our lives? How can we reconnect or stay connected during our age of digital integration and physical separation? I believe there is no right or wrong answer to these questions when we strive to live with purpose and meaningful connection, for the love and compassion of relationship, and for our ability to create positive experiences for others in this world.

Living with this purpose may shed light on how we can act for our loved ones, friends, colleagues, and our communities during these difficult moments. Living with empathy, love, and support may begin the process of recognizing a stronger purpose in action now and in

the future. We may not always need strict guidelines or formulas to keep our sense of self, community, and meaning maintained in our climate of rapid change. It may be that we ought to live with purposeful action and flexible meaning-making to adapt in a world filled with mystery and confusion. No matter how hazy the lens of humanity is to look through, communicating our experiences to each other can offer some clarity in the fog.

We offer you this journal of reflection so that the communication of these human experiences – through art and reflection – may lend some reclamation or an addition in commonality of meaning for our current situations, learning of these stories, and sharing in the process of passing them forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Kearns". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Judge Thomas Kearns





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# Emma Craven

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## *Poker*

I am just a playing card to you –  
all women are.

When the color has faded –  
I will be discarded.

When all my edges have worn away –  
you will replace me.

When you grow bored of me –  
you will try to trade me to one of your “boys.”

But they have playing cards too –  
newer & brighter.

You think we are all the same –  
expendable and interchangeable.



Tess Pickar

---

*The Wolf*

Don't go into the woods alone,

I remember my mother saying;

The whispering wind reminded me of that.

*It's not the trees you have to worry about swallowing you,  
it's the wolves, dear. They're creatures from fairytales.*

*Trust me, I've seen them.*

I know, my heart thunders, I know,

but I didn't heed her warning.

A hulking canine was crouched over me

with fur made of spun gold,

transparent as honey in the sunlight,

Crushing blue eyes: spirits churning in them

waiting to strike.



His gleaming teeth drew closer,  
threatening to spill lifeblood.  
Invincibility was fatality,  
It was a part of the human race.

There was something so sentient yet so carnal,  
An illusion of a human soul trapped inside the body of a  
wolf  
The fear speaks, loud and clear.  
A timid hand reached towards the face nearly touching  
mine,

The lupine vanished,  
but the man remained.



Jolein Doughty

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*Einstein*



# Lindsey Anderson

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## *Living*

There is nothing left  
in this world I want to do.  
Nowhere I desire to go.  
No new places I'm dying to see.  
No new faces I'm wanting to know.

I've learned about the dead.  
The dead aren't braver than the living;  
they're just unable  
to touch the earth.

There is everything left  
in this world I want to say.  
I love you.  
I miss you.  
I need you.

But these words only come easy to the dying.  
I want to die,  
so I can finally say  
all these things to you.

It takes three seconds of brave  
to say everything that hides behind the eyes.  
I love you.  
I miss you.  
I need you.

These words come easy to the dying,  
but nothing worth doing  
was ever made easy.

Sometimes living is harder than dying.



# Sarah Morgan

---

## *Boxes*

Old-fashioned letters on yellowing paper, documenting lives that unfolded long before my first breath.

Unbreakable dishes with identical blue trimming, Neil Diamond cassette tapes, the wooden spoon used only for hotcakes, a magnet boasting a trip to Santa Fe, to Boston, to Vienna.

The faded black typewriter with a dried-out ink ribbon, riddled with dust and words unsaid.

Black and white picture books, newspaper clippings, graduation announcements, Mother's Day cards, crayon masterpieces.

Teacups, turquoise rings, woven baskets, figurines of snowy castles and humble villages, silk scarves, brownie mix that expired before the Reagan administration.

Frames, collages, scrapbooks, photos of the faces that should be cherished forever, only to be abandoned in the gnarled grip of age.

Your life is in boxes now. Every piece of you is scattered, trapped between cardboard walls.

I could never forget you, even if you've forgotten me.



# Brianna Covert

---

## *Seven Years Syncopation*

I don't remember what music was playing, just that it wasn't good—and it was too loud. The music filled up all the cracks in the tile of the restaurant and bounced around the tiny disco balls on the ceiling and sat on the vinyl seats next to us, mingling with the voices of the crowd. But Virgil didn't seem to mind, so I ignored it. Ignored it by staring at the fish tank behind him, watching all of the colors swim around—darting back and forth. Twisting myself in my seat, picking at the torn cushion. I wonder if the fish liked the music.

We ordered pizza. It was expensive, but I offered to pay. We picked off the tomatoes when it arrived. I tried to make small talk around the noise, but it was hard to hear one another. The music was loud, but his voice was also small. Maybe the only thing about him that hadn't grown up in seven years.

\*\*\*

Maybe two or three summers ago I got the call from your case worker, Virgil. It was one of those hot, muggy summer days and we had all of the doors open. My legs were sticking to the black leather couch and I had the box fan pointed at me. My shirt clung to my chest and the fan kept turning the pages of my book. *Maybe I won't read after all.*

My family still had a landline, but it was rarely used. An

old yellow phone with a long curly chord that sat next to the desk. Ignored until it rang – ignored while it rang. We always waited for the answering machine, usually a doctor confirming an appointment or a campaign message. *This voting season please remember to –*

I liked to listen to the answering machine because it could always be one of my friends. So, when the phone rang that summer, I didn't pay much attention, just enough to hear someone say my name so I could run over and pick up the phone and flop down in the desk chair. And someone did say my name, but it was not one of my friends.

The voice of a lady said my name on the phone. Said my name in the same sentence as your name. Said your name – the name of my little brother – wanted to talk to me again. She left her information I'm sure, but I stopped hearing, seeing. I think I stopped breathing too.

I sat in the scratchy grey desk chair and pressed play on the answering machine over and over again. I pressed play when my aunt walked in the door and later when my uncle came home, and I think maybe even with my cousin too. Eventually, I didn't have to press the button to play the voicemail.

Her words became my lullaby.

\*\*\*

Last time I'd seen you, your hair was strawberry red. But this time it was green. And before that you said it was blue and before that you gave yourself a skunk stripe and – I had never dyed my hair before. You offered me bubble gum pink hair dye, *"I like my hair."* We were sitting on your bed by then, but when I first saw you, first looked up and saw your

green hair – we were in the living room.

The living room looked exactly how I remembered it. You felt so out of place when I stepped in – I felt so out of place. I couldn't think of a thing that had changed. Behind that wall with the red tapestry we played video games together. The same crystal chandelier hung above the same round table where we drew pictures of each other. There was the kitchen cabinet you used to be able to squeeze into when we hid from each other and the same two-seating, mahogany antique bench against the same window with same white lace curtains I would slide underneath. We both used to be so small. How old were you, then? Maybe five, six? A decade passes so quickly.

Everything around us was the same, yet everything between us was different.

\*\*\*

My college spring break is coming up, but I don't have any wild plans with friends. No Florida trips, no parties, just heading back home for a week. I'm flipping through my calendar at my desk and trying to plan out studying for midterms. I rub my eyes, *I'm ready for a break*. A text from Virgil makes my phone buzz.

This is probably the most we've said to each other in a while. I haven't gotten comfortable texting him yet. I miss writing letters back and forth, when I was able to take my time and really figure out what I wanted to say. I open the message. I'm afraid if I think too much about it, I'll miss class to sit in the bathroom instead. My stomach is already turning. I turn back to my calendar and suddenly we've found a day, a time.

\*\*\*

On the second Saturday of every month, Mom used to come visit me. You were supposed to be with her, but seven years ago she came alone. I always held out hope, but I stopped looking forward to those days at all. And for seven years I coddled the image of you in my mind. Your strawberry hair swept off to the side across your forehead, sticking your tongue through the gaps in your teeth, so many innocent features. And somewhere over the course of seven years, you lost these.

They told us to hug, but you still don't like being touched, so I'm sorry I touched you.

I'm sorry I never touched you enough.

\*\*\*

When I got that phone call, I felt so lost.

\*\*\*

The drive home from school is long – typically eight hours, six if there's no traffic. I've gotten so used to the drive. Leaving the city scenery behind for the yellow rolling hills of Eastern Washington and eventually crossing the Columbia river, bubbling against the cliffsides. To driving up past the industrial windmills and elk-crossing signs. Nothing but flat fields and tumble weeds for hours, finally making it to the Pass to find green pine trees and snow in the winter. The mountains are rich and dewy, reminding me of the best parts of home. Then it's taking the highway between cities for the last few hours until descending back into the Valley. Barnes with no roofs and stacks of wrapped hay coming into view. The cross on the hill lit up at night and usually something green in the fields. Sometimes purple.



But this time, we were making a detour about three-quarters of the way in. Driving for an hour or more in the wrong direction to meet Virgil. To meet Virgil for the first time in seven years. To meet him at the house I haven't lived in, in almost ten years. In a town I haven't been to, in just as long.

The night before my Spring Break, my aunt drove up. I finished packing the morning of and loaded the car and we headed out of the city. Leaving the Spokane skyline behind us to watch the yellow rolling fields and strolling cows pass by. Standing in my room before grabbing my suitcase and saying goodbye to my friends, I stood in front of my closet pushing around shirts. *What do you wear on a long car ride when you plan to meet someone afterwards?* I was trying so hard to not try hard. But I didn't know if I should put on make-up or wear a blouse and if jeans were going to be comfortable for such a long car ride.

I think we made good time on the road. Between the sunshine and Fleetwood Mac, the drive was almost nice. But I kept picking at the hole in my jeans and pinching the edge of my sweatshirt. Curling and uncurling my fist, twisting my neck, because this time, every tumbleweed and every tractor and every college bumper sticker meant I was getting closer to Virgil. *Can we stop at the next rest area?*

When we took the exit to your house, I started reading the directions off my phone to my aunt. Pressing myself into my seat, *Turn left here*, my stomach started doing flips. My heart was rattling, and my palms got so sweaty. I think I played a tennis match here, no never mind, we never came this far out. I wasn't ready to remember everything and as we turned into your neighborhood, I did. The park, the grass still overgrown where we got rocks stuck in our sneakers and scrapes on our elbows. I think maybe we even flew kites

there.

I was remembering everything about a place I never thought I'd be in again.

We parked in front of your house, I walked up the ramp to your door, stood inside the living room that hadn't changed in over seven years, looked at you, who had – had changed, talked to your Grandma who had changed too, but not as much. We sat on your bed and you offered me pink hair dye and I said I liked your room and I liked all the art and I liked the music you were listening to. I recognized the area, but I didn't know the area well, so you recommended dinner. And we drove to the pizza joint by the waterfront – but with no waterfront view – and we ate there with the too-loud music.

“Yeah! I did theatre in high school! I was in a couple different shows and I loved it so much. I'm kind of a nerd now, I love musicals. What about you?”

“I did some tech stuff for a couple plays.”

“Oh super cool.”

How do you catch up after seven years? How do you catch up after seven years? How do you meet someone you've known your whole life, for the first time? How do you –

We took you back to your house and on the way, I told you I thought it was pretty over here. You shrugged, your shoulders coming up all the way to your ears before dropping.

I'm not sure how long the last bit of the drive took, but it was dark when we got back. The cross was lit on the hill, there were tractors parked in the fields, more tail lights than I had expected. Coming home is always weird. Having to

readjust to the new buildings in town and new routines my family made without me. Remembering the smell of my home. I said hi to the dog and goodnight to the family and I went to bed. Put down my suitcase, exhausted, and fell asleep.

\*\*\*

It's been six months now since we've seen each other.

I'm afraid if I blink, it'll be seven years again. But maybe seven years backwards. So just in case, I've continued to frame you in my mind as the child with the strawberry blonde hair who I used to fly kites and hide in kitchen cupboards with.

The rhythm to which I live has changed since seeing you. The monotony in my head giving way to a new chaos as I struggle to cling onto the seven-years-ago-us, while also learning to let go. It's been hard to hold on lately. Our old conversations have gotten lost somewhere and I continue to hear your new voice – yet still small – telling me I could try the hair dye. Hearing you say you're bad at directions. Watching you smile as you remember us running around in department stores together, trying on clothes. Some days the crescendo is overwhelming – it's too loud.

Some days it's okay.

Some days, I think I could even learn to dance to it.



# Lindsey Anderson

---

## *Holes*

A boy sits alone on the fire escape.

Below him sirens call out in the night.

The holes in his jeans are not for style - the holes in his heart  
can be seen in his smile.

Can you flex and grin through the grimace?

Clench every balled digit into a fist,  
pick yourself up from the pile, let the sweat wick?

When the big bad world barks, then,  
can you still hide the pain nobody cares about?

When the ones you are supposed to trust the most become  
the host

to your broken life - who can you trust?

The holes can be mended, but the damage can never be  
erased.

A boy sits alone on the fire escape.

Above him shine stars he cannot see.



# Gabriella Marquis

---

## *Muddled Existence*

I woke up today and felt wrong  
Like something was missing  
Or dissipating  
And I couldn't fix it  
As if the oxygen around me was draining slowly  
Causing Space itself to contract inwards  
Pulling at my skin, begging to separate soul from body  
I struggled to make myself move  
As if the body I was accustomed to was suddenly not the  
body I had  
My eyes studying my own face as if it were someone else's  
My cold hand pressing against my chest  
Creating the startling sensation of being touched by  
someone unseen  
I woke up today and imagined  
That Death is not an end  
But a release  
Like the feeling of falling into bed after walking endless  
miles  
Except that the universe would become my bed  
And the release would be so great  
That it would carry with it the undoing of my existence  
And I neither longed for nor resisted that release  
I woke up today and cried  
Because I knew that I was not where I was supposed to be  
I cried because in my dream last night, I was there  
In that house  
In that room  
Being that person

Then I woke up and felt the heavy weight of wrong  
Existence  
And wondered if Existence is anything more than placement  
in Time and Space  
And wondered if being in the wrong Space inherently made  
me in the wrong Time  
And wondered if Time and Existence were lovers or  
strangers  
And wondered why I was not asleep in your arms instead of  
lying awake in a bed  
Crying about Existence  
I woke up today and didn't call anyone  
Because I was overwhelmed with both desire to be alone  
And desire to love  
Desire to disappear  
And desire to sing  
And I didn't know how to call someone just to listen to them  
exist  
And no words or songs felt right  
So I didn't call  
And I tried to listen to music that wasn't right  
And write poetry that wasn't right  
Because what I needed was an all-encompassing mystical  
presence  
And I don't have God in my contacts  
I woke up today and lived  
In the paradox of human life:  
Performing the meaningless in hope that it leads to the  
Meaningful  
Feeling the abiding tension of Existence  
Pouring myself into conversations that don't answer any of  
my questions  
Because it is better to leave them unasked  
Listening to people assert their beautifully enduring and  
unquestionable belief in God  
Which to me is like candy--the sweetest, most decadent kind  
Because of its unconditionality

Which gives me hope that one day  
I will wake up, and have something unconditional of my  
own

I woke up today and wrote myself into Existence  
Sowing myself into emptiness through small black lines  
Inscribing myself as a moment into the Eternity of a poem  
Grounding my existence in the abstract  
Re-forming myself into stanzas  
Re-birth through writing

And for a moment I felt at peace as I contemplated my  
existence as poem  
And then I thought

Perhaps poems too feel constrained by their letters  
This poem woke up today and felt wrong

She rearranged her letters until they were nonsensical  
Or deeply profound, she didn't know

She looked up, and down, and sideways at God  
Crying about Existence and wrongness and poetry

Wishing that she was not poem, but author  
Wishing that she could strip away her stanzas and flirt with  
Time and Space

I woke up today and realized  
That it was my birthday soon

The inevitable return to the first line of my poem  
The allusion to a moment just before I existed

And the moment I did exist

And the messy moment in between

The poem asks, "What am I in the moment the poet writes  
the first word?"

Time asks, "What is a moment?"

God does not ask at all.

I woke up today and felt wrong



# Michaela Friedrich

---

## *Finches*

When I think of my dad  
It brings me a sense of ease.  
I often try to calculate  
How much weight  
In gold it would take  
To pay him back for every time  
He pulled me out of somewhere deep down that rabbit hole.  
After he has just gotten home from work  
And he has just untied his boots  
And he finally loosens his breath  
And just before he gets to wash his hands  
He sees me  
Practically turning my skin inside out  
With anxiousness  
"Kayla just breathe"  
And he hugs me so tight  
And his grease stained hands  
Stain my grey sweatshirt  
I feel the mark of unconditional love  
Being plowed into my quivering heart.  
Those permanently stained hands  
Have built so many things  
Out of what I thought was nothing  
And I can't speak for everyone  
But I think that's pretty neat  
My dad, once  
He built a great big tower



And reserved me one of three spots at the top  
So that I'd see  
The entire landscape of cities, streets, and cherry trees  
Unfold beneath me.  
And everything stretches too far  
But my dad,  
He says he'll make sure that I can reach it  
No matter how far it be.  
Maybe this time  
He'll build a zip-line  
Or something as simple as a slide.  
Once in a while  
The earth quakes  
And my tower begins to waver in the sky  
And the landscape crumbles away  
But my dad,  
He'll be standing at the base of the tower  
Pushing against all of the rubble  
And staining those bricks that he laid twenty years ago  
But when the earth settles down  
And the birds come out to sing  
There will go my dad  
In his yellow plane  
Whose engine hums to the tune of a million finches.



Charlie McCormik

---

*Ode to Winter*

When soft, white clouds descend slowly upon the ground,  
And dear silence succumbs to trace hoof-prints mid-prance,

When the mature blossom of autumn's ripe confounds  
Droop in frozen slumber by Winter's sly advance:  
THOU pale bride, in her loose gown of white flowers to sway,  
Ballets gently across'th silent country meadows  
To land with quiet grace before the amber sun.  
She glides down to her knees and her wide flounce delay  
Layers of lace to fall and place... Her cold bed glows  
With honest peace and she surveys her fold spread clothes,  
Sitting contently amid the new season begun.

On the mountains beyond, and far, on the East ridge,  
The snow is hea'y and it flakes o'er the tall hillside.  
Where so they lay to rest, these fibers of fleeced fridge  
Womb share this breeze? Lay'th they in the forest to hide  
Where snowy owl sit nestled in tree branches;  
Perched up high, flapping his soft wings to fly away  
Las he spots a flock of geese sung chorused in "V"  
And departs. His weight ascends for a small avalanche  
To fluff the virgin snow, and trotting fox survey;  
Paused, with stiff ears astray from the hare that scurry  
Beneath Winter's thick quilt to blanket forestry.

A breeze blows through her dusk as she unclasps thin night  
From barren day. Oh chariot, do hatch and dye  
Bright splotches of magenta and ungrasp pink light  
To seep from the horizon West where fresco'th lye.  
Do hold thriving colors while they dip into sea,  
Morphing impasto light portraits of the sky's muse  
And ripple a cold reflection across'th chilly bay.  
Glossy constellations hold tranquil their degree,  
And spin slowly under the night's pupil, who views  
THY porcelain ballerina with gleaming tattoos,  
And blue eye shine icy white sfumato'lus spray...  
Winter's white hands lift the bright sun into the sky  
And new morning sparkles on the dew iced crystals  
That glisten as soft clouds raise golden wings to fly.  
Flowers flake from her lofty locks, oh, blonde bristles!  
How they tangle in tiny plaits to crown soft curls,  
And dangle... she brushes a strand behind her ear.  
"Is it that you love Him? Thou rested prince of growth,  
Who solemn hath seen thee amid thy cusp? When pearls  
Bloom into hue and sky depict this time of year,  
When thou are'th gone into damp Earth, and mountains  
clear,  
How new life buzz, call hatch the dirt, there, His love  
show'th."

1

Who needs to frame the eyes and nose and mouth?  
True beauty, without the case, doth sustain  
Mere by the cask of love that thou dost vow' th.  
And on, fair by fair, should its grace remain  
In light, through glorious days that kindle time.  
But if should I lift thy veil from thine eyes,

Wilt thou kiss these words to our new-found chime?  
If not already we've made proud God's eyes,  
Our love shalt now; for look beyond no end,  
Does it pour forth from the boughs of Heaven.  
And when thy face I read of change and bend,  
No portrait deter the likes of good men.  
    Whene'er thou hearse these lines into verse,  
    I hope my love through these words doth converse.

2

To you, whose eyes read o'er this line I writ,  
If this train of thought that once I began  
Does outlive the mind that constructed it,  
Then I, with thee, shall give this moment's span.  
Lest this quill scribes the end of me; whether  
'Tis all of me, or none, I will not know.  
But this ink bleeds from me, and the feather  
By which I write this does scribble and flow  
These thoughts, in your pretty eyes and team'd mind,  
Composed all of lov'ng words once I did think.  
Still, back to dust I've become, and now am blind,  
Alas, no longer I write or learn or blink.  
    But if this vestige of me still exists  
    On past my demise, these words shall persist.



Brittany Robinson

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*Stream of Consciousness*

1.

In the middle of July  
I was born into the desert  
The sun was shining  
and there was not a cloud in the sky  
And I  
Arrived, kicking and screaming  
And as much as my parents would try  
There was no stopping me.

2.

When I was in kindergarten  
I felt shame for the first time  
I was not as skinny as the other girls  
I did not wear the right size  
My body was a cage  
Trapping me slowly  
But what I didn't know  
Was that the eyes  
The eyes  
The windows of the soul  
How I understand your universe  
Are what matters  
But as a cloud crossed in front of the sun  
I was left  
Unknowing  
In the shade.

3.

The summer after 4th grade was when I discovered my humor

Before, always quiet and unheard, I hid behind my sisters

Driven to the edge, I cracked a joke

Like a cold soda can on the hottest day of the year

Silence...

Then a thunderous cacophony of laughter

Shaking the ground below me

So many smiling faces all focused on me

I had found my stage

Where I was meant to be.

4.

Now, I mentioned before the desert

The place of my birth

my comfort

my home

The sun rises high in the sky but

When it sets, the world stops to look up at

Canvases of pink and orange and yellow

Accented by mountains in every direction

And the air is dry

It cracks your skin, until your hands resemble the earth

It shaped my humor

my laughter

I am dry.



5.

Days slipped into weeks and suddenly I had purpose  
To imprint my name on this earth  
For those who walk in a hundred  
In a thousand  
Years  
To know my name  
B-r-i-t-t-a-n-y  
Like the French isle  
NOT the bald popstar.

6.

Smiling easily  
I calculate those around me  
Adding things together  
Like the math I could never figure out  
How did I end up here  
Without a friend in sight?  
I have lost sight of myself  
Where have I gone?  
Without a pillar to hold onto  
I must rebuild  
And this time  
I do it right.

7.

The clocks strikes midnight as my  
Fingers fly across my keyboard  
Why do I write this?  
It doesn't rhyme like the music he likes  
But the boy  
The boy  
With the dark circles under his eyes and  
The frowning face sketched on his hand  
Might just  
Stop  
And listen  
For a moment, a breath  
The universe stops and leans in  
Will he listen?  
He claims rap is the only language he understands  
So I became fluent.

8.

Shaking hands with tear drenched eyes  
I hang up my phone and look to the sky  
Why? Why?  
I plead and I beg but God seems to turn away  
Take me instead  
Like the wind, I shake everything  
Searching for a way to fix this  
Letter after letter  
I buy out the entire alphabet  
I take out loans  
It is not enough.

9.

But Faith  
Has the tendency  
To sneak up on you  
Leaving you vulnerable to its bite  
Once I was in a car accident  
Actually two  
Three  
That sliver of a second before you comprehend  
The slamming of metal and the burning of rubber  
Whiplash shakes you  
But nothing rattles like your heart  
How could this happen?  
This brush with death painted black  
Did you think that I had left you?  
Shoving open my door  
All I want to do is fall to my knees.

10.

These words float  
On a stream of gold  
From my heart into my hands  
My brain relaxes  
And my soul eases  
For when these words are out  
They can no longer hurt me  
So  
I spit them  
I grind them  
I stomp them out  
But that's okay  
There are plenty more  
Where that came from.



# Anthony Willins

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## *Shopping; April 2020*

As I look over the meats,

He waits.

I do not notice he

Is afraid to come

Closer and take a look

For himself.

We push off others and

Our massive spaces are suddenly

A passage to be crawled

Through.

Gingerly, you

Must apologize for

Being too close.



# Mackenzie Atkins

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## *A Walk With Papa*

I watch him out the corner of my eye.  
The cedar sentries shiver at the frost,  
Confide in him, and trust he'll empathize.  
Our thoughts and prints run parallel; he's lost

In lighter hours. I try to match his strides,  
But soon my footfalls beat out of time.  
The blending shadows shudder, shroud, belie.  
A wearied nest lets fall a broken chime.

Clouds sweep the heavens' diamond dust, and glide  
Across a gouged out crescent, bright but blurred  
Like memories. The log he stops beside,  
Once evergreen among a copse of firs,

Has rot. Leaves shift like ashes at our feet;  
A raindrop trudges down my papa's cheek.



# Judge Thomas Kearns

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*Begging Spaces*

I chose a begging space  
and shared my quiet presence with  
a lonely wooden bench.  
Its human yearning like an isolated soul  
kept mute amidst the empty prying grass  
and stone cold tables warming in the sunlight.

Those splits, discolored spots, and  
sharp little edges were not  
caused by overuse, but neglect.  
The look of those splits,  
those uneven wooden bars  
next to their disintegrating neighbors  
decayed from years of snow and rain  
that gave it false sensations of connection.

We took part in that relationship of rest  
and contemplation. How odd it was  
to see quick movements, fast steps,  
and eyes fixated on tiny black boxes.  
So many manic passersby – no time  
to visit all these begging spaces. No time  
to feel the wind and random whirls of  
human movement.  
Step out from that stream!  
You might free those straining eyes,  
and free those quick or trudging strides like  
unclipped birds who fly in all directions.

Time churns like deep-water currents  
when common spaces turn into places  
for novel observations. You become fixed  
while watching waves of life wash by you –  
resting in that open solace like a  
lighthouse on the horizon  
only closer to the shore.



# Sophia Bohley

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## *Driftwood*

Coming home from the sea  
In a suit of splintering fibers  
I rock through the waves gently,  
Letting them carry me along  
And never questioning their mysteries.

They bring me where I am needed,  
I accept everything that is given.

My sides are charred ink black  
From fires that once set me aglow  
Then consumed my brittle bones,  
Now flaking away in pieces as the sea  
Fills my cracks and hollowed spaces  
And sings a love song.

She soothes my burns with the salt  
Of her tears, her kindness brings me rest  
And this broken vessel sighs lowly  
With the strength of a forest.





# Olivia Rollman

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## *Imaginary Friends and Bloody Waterfalls*

My imaginary friend's hand is inside of my chest, enclosed around my heart. Occasionally the hand is a phantom, hardly there, and I manage to forget that it exists. Most days the grip is just barely tight enough to hurt, like an itch you can't scratch. Persistent, distracting, nothing out of my ordinary. But some days, my friend tugs on my heart so hard I can feel the muscles tearing. He is always ready to wrench it out at a moment's notice, to sever my heart from the rest of my body. I can't help clawing at my chest in a fruitless attempt to remove the hand. I don't want him to take my heart. He already exists inside of me permanently, he already takes up too much space. And though my heart is weak and struggles to beat sometimes, it is mine. Please don't take it.

Did the air change it feels like it changed I can't breathe someone is on top of my chest get off did my heart just stop am I still alive why can't I breathe—

The average human being takes about 672,768,000 breaths in their lifetime. I think that by the time I die, my number will be much higher. When scientists calculated that number, how many types of breath did they take into account? Perhaps they figured everything would average out to be the same steady rhythm of the forgotten breath, like the quick panting from cardio and the slow, deep

breaths during sleep cancel each other out. I wonder if they took into account panic attacks, but maybe that's too unusual of a breath for the breathing scientists to study. As a self-proclaimed expert on the subject of panic attacks, I'm confident that cardio has nothing on imaginary friends who want to rip your heart out.

—fuck fuck fuck water yes water helps everything drink some water fuck stop shaking I'm spilling the water did I start crying—

My panic attacks are stupid for a number of reasons, mostly because there's no abiding by logic during them. In the midst of one, the only thing I can coherently think about is the fact that I can't breathe. My mind keeps repeating I can't breathe over and over again, despite the fact that I can hear myself wheeze. Guess what dipshit, that's because you're hyperventilating. That means that you're breathing too fast, not that you can't breathe. But the fact of the matter is, looking at a panic attack from the outside is much different than experiencing it in the moment. And so despite having that knowledge in my brain, my breathing tally continues to skyrocket.

—I can't breathe why won't my chest expand be quiet someone might hear you why am I shaking am I numb or what is that tingling—

It's an odd thing to not be able to act on logic. Imagine that you're in a car racing down the road toward a cliff. Your brain says cliff bad, must stop. And you say, "You're so right, brain. Only, my foot won't move to press the brake." And then your brain isn't thinking about the cliff anymore, it says, something's wrong with foot, must fix foot. And then you go off the cliff because you lost sight of what was important: stopping the car. When my imaginary friend squeezes my heart a little too hard for no apparent reason, rationality is not among my body's capabilities. Plain

and simple, anxiety is irrational (e.g. an imaginary friend squeezing your heart). Perhaps if I learned to circumvent those irrational thoughts, I could stop the car from going off of the cliff. But in that moment, when I'm racing toward the edge and my adrenaline is pumping, not a single viable solution enters my mind.

—shut up get off of my chest maybe if I scream my lungs will open up can't scream don't want anyone to hear I can't breathe why can't I breathe is anyone else feeling this—

I say all of this, and yet the memories of my panic attacks are watery at best. At one point, they were freshly painted canvases, still wet with bright colors. And then it rained and I couldn't go get the paintings until the storm was over, but by then they're ruined. Their once vivid colors run together to make a mucky brown that drips from the edge of the canvas. My moments of extreme sensation are muddled down to sad and worthless pictures. But truth be told it doesn't really matter. Those periods of extreme feeling, those canvases, they don't hold anything worth value. If they all survived, I'd be forced to live in a house covered in the chaos I feel inside. No, I don't want to be inured to those paroxysms of ineptitude. So now I'm left with a bunch of shit-brown memories that all look the same. Here, have some shit.

I have to get this done, just finish the chapter. But despite my resolution, the words on the page blur together. Just read the book, you fucking idiot. It isn't that hard. My eyes water and my leg begins to bounce involuntarily. The pain in my chest grows to an unbearable tightness as blunt nails dig into the shallow grooves of my heart. I can hear someone gasping for breath. Those sharp rasps can't be mine, I can't breathe. Why is he so close to me? His warm breath heats my cheeks. I stand up to get away from him and

start pacing. Bright spots float through my sight like garbage lost at sea. My mind feels white. I put my hands on my head and take as deep of breaths as I can manage. This isn't that big of a deal. Calm down there's absolutely no reason to freak out. But the fact that I'm freaking out about something so unimportant only serves to stress me out more. I can't help but feel like something's wrong with me. I wish my friend would stop breathing so heavily.

My mom hums to the radio as my small shaking hand reaches inside of my bright red bag. I fish around under my basketball and sneakers until I find the beat-up pack of gum. The once sleek blue package is crumpled from frequent squeezes. I try to get the feeling back into my hands as I squish the empty package in my small fist. My imaginary friend wrenches my heart and involuntarily, my chewing speeds up with my breathing. His index finger traces the curve of my aorta. He caresses it back and forth. The tickle numbs my feet. I don't even like basketball, I don't care about this game.

“Mom, I think I might have anxiety.”

Pause.

“Did you work out today?” she asks.

My friend strokes my hair with his free hand.

I'm suffocating in my bed as my parents sleep peacefully just feet away. He's going to take my heart this time, I can feel it. My friend is squeezing so hard that I'm certain blood is pouring all over my sheets. I am screaming as loudly as I can I have to get him out of my chest I can't take it anymore dear God someone please help me. But I'm not surprised that no one comes running. His other hand is

firmly clamped over my mouth, smothering my desperate shrieks. My friend shushes me, his mouth against my ear. His body heat is making me sweat and my slick, shaking hands can't pry off his iron grip. Fat tears spill from my eyes and slip down my cheeks, drip from my nose, and blend with the saltiness of my friend's hand. The blackness of the room conceals the pooling water at my neck and the puddle of blood that has become my bed. The blanket of night hides me from the rest of the world.

I try to calm my breathing like I've practiced. In, out. Slow your heartrate. You're in no danger. In, out. A girl I don't know drunkenly stumbles into the room.

"Oh hey! What are you doing in here?" She sits next to me, glazed eyes looking at me unseeingly. In, out. "Are you okay?"

She starts stroking my back (in, out), which is almost the worst thing she could do in that moment. I really don't want to be touched. My friend has given me enough petting to last a lifetime.

Between breaths I manage to get out "yeah I'm fine." I roll my shoulders in an attempt to alleviate the weight that has suddenly appeared on them. In, out. Her hand continues to brush up and down my back. My mind is hyper-focused on the hand. In, out. Up, down. Her hand is warm through the thin cotton of my shirt, but the friction of the movement makes my back feel like it's on fire. I beat back the urge to run as I shove down the lump that has formed in my throat. If she doesn't stop, I'm going to rip her arm off. She's talking or cooing or shushing but I can't hear her. I'm shaking and rocking, or maybe I curl into a ball. I have no idea. The only thing I'm sure of is her hand. I lose track of my breathing and my nails dig into my skin as I try to not make a total

freak of myself in front of this stranger who is simply trying to help. My options flash on my eyelids: run, scream, rip her arm off. Run, scream, rip her arm off. Run scream rip her arm off. Run scream rip run scream rip run scream— I must have run because the next thing I remember is desperately sucking in the cool night air and falling to my hands and knees on wet grass.

Truth be told, logic and rationality only exist in what people see. If you and I looked like we feel on the inside, how would we appear to one another? I think that I'd have a waterfall of blood rushing from where I've clawed open my chest to try to get to my heart. It'd be a huge hole with ragged edges and if you got close enough, you could see that hand whose grip ensures my bloody cascade. A river of hot, sticky blood would follow me wherever I went, my drenched shirt would cling to my chest, and I would reek of tangy metal and salt. Wouldn't that be something, if you saw me going about my daily life and I looked like that.

Would you look as perfect as you do now? Did you know that you always seem flawless? Or would your cheeks be hollowed from lack of hearty self-care? Would you be covered in bruises from where you beat yourself for every small mistake you've ever made? Would your feet be rubbed raw from all of the running you've done? That damned rationality has smoothed your calamities so that the whole world sees none of your pain. I wish we were all inside out. I feel inside out.

## Works Cited

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# Fisher Ng

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## *Reality Renewed*

Life is become the cloaked harbinger of death for the heedless,  
Who carouse, lively, but without living;  
Who lust for riches, but empty riches only;  
Who smile outwardly, but collapse inwardly;  
Who talk in one breath, but say nothing.

Death is become the reviving breath of life for the eyes that see,  
Who give their lives to others, and are ever alive;  
Who yearn to die of self, and live in eternity;  
Who radiant light outwards, and find it inside;  
Who act in an instant, and say not a word of it.

For life in this world is like unto a womb that nurtures until  
death,  
And death is the birth into true life that neither ends nor  
suffers.

The cruel master is become slave to his own selfish intentions,  
Of thinking the world wrongs him and he never wrongs  
the world,  
Of speaking his mind freely but not speaking free of  
prejudice,  
Of using his free time for himself but not giving his time  
freely,  
Of wanting his way to power, a way that goes the way  
of all flesh.

The submissive servant is become the master of his own  
virtues,  
Of walking with the humility of the earth on which he  
treads,



Of listening to others when they speak not a single  
word,  
Of speaking with the lowliness that makes the elephant  
tremble,  
Of acting with the submission of the ant burdening the  
earth.  
For the cruel masters divide the people and disrupt the  
promised peace,  
And the meek shall inherit the earth because the day of unity is  
come.

Error and falsehood is become the truth that guides feet into  
the desert,  
For everyone holds their word with no room for  
another's,  
For everyone walks confidently with the lamp of  
darkness,  
For everyone agrees only that they agree not with each  
other,  
For everyone flees the oasis, shouting it is only a mirage.  
The guiding sun of truth is become the stars of error that lead  
every way,  
For the sun is but one among the stars, all of which give  
guiding light,  
For the word of one cannot answer the questions of the  
many,  
For only with the stars fitting together can the light of  
truth guide,  
For the subjective sees not the objective light unaided by  
other lenses.  
The world is illuminated with a universal education that grants  
each their share,  
Along with the duty of learning and sharing with others to  
understand reality.  
The horizon of happiness is become the valleys of sadness that  
bleed coldness,  
When one sits in luxury and comfort a beggar comes,

When laughter dies to the cost of a joke on a trampled heart,

When unwavering motivations bypass open opportunities,

When smugness and pride die to humiliation and abasement.

The midnight sorrow is become the dawning joy that rises resplendent and warm,

When suffering on behalf of others gives way to their ease,

When the bite of the serpent of despair is a healing medicine,

When the desolation of isolation leads to good companionship,

When the rocking waves resolve to an ocean smooth as glass

The who seek happiness find in not in a moment, nor in an action alone,

But in the spirit of the action that emanates from their innermost being.

The will to follow one's dreams is become the sacrifice of adventure,

To work tirelessly for oneself is to lose friendship and meaning,

To chase after one romance helplessly is to run by true happiness,

To think one's needs more is to make oneself unable to live with less,

To stand rigid in one's beliefs is to lose the possibility of changing.

The sacrifice of one's desires is become the discovery of true will power,

To be grass bending to the wind is to be flexible and alive,

To be consistent as the rising and setting sun is to be dependable,

To be free of conceptions of happiness is to explore life fully,

To be the singing bird and not the cawing crow is to be heard.

To carve confidently the path to one's desires is to consign oneself to hellfire,

While to tread humbly the path ahead is to scale the summit of existence.

Knowledge and freedom is become captivity and ignorance at the hands of oneself,

In freedom's domain, no law but the law of captive passion reigns,

In having no restrictions, people know not which path leads to joy,

In knowledge's domain, naught but ignorance towards others rules.

In attaining knowledge, one threatens to forget one's ignorance.

Captivity and humility before divine laws is become true knowledge and freedom.

In the cage of self, the soul of the singing bird knows no captivity.

In melodious rapture, the bird knows singing is the purpose of its caging.

In submission to the laws of nature, one cannot deviate from reality.

In reverence to the laws of on high, one cannot be suppressed spiritually.

For knowledge and freedom can be blinding veils that obscure the purpose of divine laws,

Which is naught but to bring peace and happiness, and to free people from themselves.



Gabriela Marquis

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*The Pacific Ocean*

The coldness burns and bites  
Then numbs in sweet caresses  
First the toes, then the feet  
Ankles, calves, thighs, torso, breast, neck  
Face, hair, memories  
Lines he traced on your body  
Burned away by the salty waves  
Submersion in the water  
Shockingly cold  
Submersion in existence  
Shockingly mortal  
And reconciliation between body, heaven, land  
Heavenly body forgetting the dirt of land  
And reclamation  
And release  
The memories find sand between their toes  
Seaweed embowering their arms  
The gray horizon extends then descends  
And the white ocean rises  
You are caught between  
So connected and trapped that you are free  
You do not resurface for air  
You do not turn back  
The waves join the sky  
You join the waves  
Forever and only in this moment  
Fear subsides  
As you intertwine in the cosmos  
Meaningless and whole  
So connected, so alone  
The lines are gone  
The body numb now  
Here you are  
On the silver shores



Garrick Bateman

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*What We Left, Where We Left It,  
Bloomington, Indiana*

This is a story about Indiana. It begins and ends in Nebraska.

York, Nebraska. Which is a nowhere-sort-of-town that rests on the side of the highway, below the watchful eye of blue-pinstriped water tower, underneath which lies a squat motel with a slightly weathered sign, where my mother and I would always stop on our arduous drives between Indiana (where Hailey was) and Colorado. When you go to York – if you should ever find yourself there – you’ll know exactly what kind of a place it is. For my mother and I, it was a kind of halfway home. A place that only exists on the side of a highway exit, a town that is not lived in, but stopped in, where the scarce few people you catch moments of wandering the streets are just roadside attractions, and all the storefronts are nothing more than decorative. If you should walk to the convenience shop in the evening, where the red light sits out over the Nebraska corn, the streets will be empty, no matter the time of day, with the lines of parking meters lying expectantly at the foot of vacant spaces, waiting for change.

We pulled over around five-thirty, which was about four hours beyond where the cans of cold brew we’d downed and crushed up in the backseat were able to take us. Our eyes were stitched red, not to mention that, outside the windows, the weather was threatening. All day long, we’d listened to the winds howling vacantly through the car doors and now we’d heard – as told to us in bursts between waves of static – news of a tornado over the radio. There was a storm threatening, stalking us up there somewhere in the soft-bottomed clouds.

In any event, we knew York. This would be our fourth time. Two roundtrips to Indiana. Once for each leg. The first time had been moving Hailey out, and we’d been

driving a rental truck, lugging pieces of furniture in the bed that were haphazardly strapped down by tangles of white cord. On the way back, the bed of the truck had been empty. The third time had been a week ago, on our way out to visit, to stay in a motel down the street from Hailey's apartment. The point of all this being that we'd been to York enough times before to feel like we understood it, in some way beyond a name, and in our hearts, had convinced ourselves that if we reached York, this halfway-home, we'd be all right.

Though we hadn't talked about pulling over, we found ourselves at the diner we always ate at in York by six. No stop had been made at the motel to find a room yet. That would have just put another thirty minutes between us and food, which—when we got it—we ate mostly in silence. I was done already by the time Mom even said anything about it all, about the reason we'd been in Indiana in the first place. I knew she'd been wanting to say it all day. Those words had been perched up there somewhere in her skull figuring out the best way out of her mouth. And when she finally did say it, I didn't think she was going to. She was just sat there, sizing up her fork and deciding whether or not she was going to eat what was on it. "I just don't get what's in Indiana," she ultimately managed. She had that kind of vacant look in her eye that people get when they've been staring at a road all day. "Do you know what I mean?"

I'd already finished eating. The corners of my corned-beef sandwich were sitting at the edge of my plate. I didn't eat the corners of sandwiches. "She's in Indiana, Mom."

Mom and I had gotten in the habit of not talking about her by name. Or at least, I didn't say her name around Mom. To my friends, when I shrugged off anecdotal bits about my sister and her Indiana-girlfriend, she was Jess. But



when speaking with Mom (and this was something Dad had figured out first...at least, before he'd left), saying Jess was almost a swear. She wouldn't complain or anything if you said her name. She wouldn't yell. She wouldn't curse. Nothing like that. But she jumped. Nearly right out of her skin. As if, even after all this time, hearing it said was still a surprise to her.

When you spoke to Mom, Jess was just her.

"She doesn't even have a job there," Mom had said at some point. I wasn't sure how long ago now. For some time, her words had been hanging there in front of me, in front of where I sat dimly, paused in thought.

"She'll get one," I managed. I didn't have much else to say. This had been routine for the past year, ever since Hailey had moved out there. The way I saw it, Mom was scared of Hailey, wouldn't talk to her directly. Instead, she whispered to me. While we did dishes, while we drove home from the dentist. Whenever she could. And Hailey did just the same thing. Just trying to live out a faltering relationship through me. "She's just taking time."

"She's taken time enough." Mom leaned in, as if the waiters might be listening to what we were saying. It was the way she always talked about it, as if what Hailey did in Indiana was still taboo. To think if someone heard. "It's been a year now. A year is a long time to waste."

Mom had been cheerier about it before it really happened. Back before she hadn't really seen Hailey and Jess together. In some way — some very real way — Mom couldn't figure out Hailey. She couldn't see her. When she looked at her, especially when Hailey talked about Jess, she got this expression about her, as if she were being lectured at the

car shop about some issue with the engine and she did not know the names of the parts. She didn't have the vocab for it.

It was harder for her not to have the vocab for her own daughter.

Not that Mom ever much talked about Jess and Hailey as if they were in a relationship. But when she did, there was nothing that could stop that car-shop look. She just couldn't see why. Why would Hailey date a woman?

But Hailey had gone through with it.

And Mom had seen them together. Not as friends, not in the abstract, as a word that floated around the room as just some excuse. She saw Jess as a person, saw Hailey's arm around her waist. Saw kisses hidden behind partially closed doors in rooms they thought were empty. And now, a year with her gone, Bloomington was behind us and she still couldn't put her finger on the whole matter.

"She says she wants to come back. Eventually, I guess."

"When she needs something from me again." Mom sunk back into the booth. Her salad looked up at her.

"I didn't say that. Whenever Jess is done with school."

Mom didn't even seem to hear the words. Which is how it always went with them. They both wanted to ask me about one another, but they'd only listen if I said what they'd been wanting to hear. "Don't be like your sister when you get older."

“Right.”

“And now what? Now they’ve been living together for a year,” she said. “They still hardly know each other and they’re living together. I think she knew it’d piss me off. I think she’d live there all the rest of her life if she thought it’d make a point.” She looked at me again and I knew she was going to ask me something I didn’t want to answer. “What do you think about that? You think I’m right?”

“I don’t know.” Which maybe wasn’t true. Sure, Hailey kept a tight lip about things. Especially anything having to do with Jess. But I’d known them when they had started out dating. We’d hang out at ours or downtown and one night, Hailey had told me that they were together. She’d cried. I’d held her. When I’d told Mom that story, she’d fumed. Nearly got in fits over it, but she didn’t tell me why. And now here she was, watching her oldest daughter have a life outside of her — her own mother — half the way across the country. That she didn’t understand.

So maybe I did know. But I didn’t have the heart to tell her she was wrong. That Hailey hadn’t gone to Indiana to make a point. That, though Mom would have struggled to understand it even if I had told her how it was, the whole matter with Jess wasn’t about Mom at all.

Mom was giving me a look now, though. A look that let me know that she knew I was lying. I felt the need to make an excuse. “She doesn’t really tell me that stuff,” I said.

“Why not? She’s your sister.”

“She’s your daughter.”

“That doesn’t mean she tells me things,” Mom said. “I

wish she would. God knows I wish she would. But the most I hear out of her is through you and she doesn't even tell you enough. Not enough for a mother. I'm supposed to know these things about my kids. You know? I just wish I knew why she threw it all away for...for I-don't-know-what."

Mom finally settled back and started picking through her salad. I guess she'd vented out enough of her pent up hurt and was finally ready to stomach something again.

It gave me time to think.

"Do you ever think about leaving?" I said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, once I leave for school," I said. "You think you'll stay in Colorado?"

"I don't know," Mom said. She got that driving-all-day look again. "I really don't know."

I knew where it was that her mind was. It wasn't Indiana. It wasn't Colorado, even. It certainly wasn't York. Which was just a dead plot of land best used for kicking away stagnant hours. Her mind was in Elko County in Nevada, which was where Dad was. Who'd up and left just at the same time Hailey was deciding to move to Indiana, and just as I was beginning to tour schools out of state. Mom never let on if there had been a fight. A reason for it, for why he'd left without a word. She never told us who the woman was who answered his phone when we first called him at his new home, there in Nevada.

She wondered too, what was in Elko.

But, of course, she had once wondered that of Colorado too. Back when she and Dad had been engaged to one another in New Mexico, in a place a little less than an hour north of the border called Deming. She had wondered then, what was in Colorado. And why it was that Dad was certain that that was where they were called to be. So, with their first child on the way, they'd packed up the place in Deming and had made the drive into the Rocky Mountains.

Years drudged by.

And she had finally found what it was that was in Colorado.

And it was then that it had been time to leave. For Hailey, it was to Indiana. Where she was being led by the hand into a new love. For Dad, it was to Elko. To new mountains. And a new life, which we knew nothing about. And for me, a year off into the hazy future, I could see a school in California. Where I thought I was needed. That was the place I was called to, which made more sense than any other place in the world. And there, in the middle of it all was Mom, her mind in four states all at once, wondering what was in each of them, wondering which one she was called to, and mostly wishing she just understood what it was about each of these places that made them so right.

I suppose I wished to know that too. I wished I had known what it had been that had dragged Dad away to a place we could not follow. As children, Hailey had always been mother's favorite. I suppose I had been Dad's. Or their favorite project, if that was a more appropriate way to put it. They'd been invested in seeing us become, and live out, all the things they secretly wanted for themselves.

Of course, I'd bought into it. Though I may have acted

otherwise, told myself otherwise, every moment I got older, I looked a little bit more like Dad. I saw all the little things in him starting to show themselves in me. The good, but also the bad. It was a startling moment, realizing that I was living out a life that had already been lived before. I only really realized that once he was already gone, and I couldn't follow.

I noticed that his story was my story, except for that he was in Nevada and I was not. I noticed that I had started smoking cigarettes at the same age as him. And even though I knew all the pains he'd gone through to quit, I'd started anyways. Because maybe it was fated, or because maybe—and this was the possibility that scared me more—I was frightened that all the good things I wanted to follow about him I would never achieve if I didn't go through all the things that were bad about him.

It felt like being stuck at sea, waking up one morning and him not being there. His car not in the garage, his chair at the dinner table empty, his seat beside the front window unoccupied at nightfall, where he'd always go to read in the evenings by lamplight. I supposed going to Nevada was just the one thing about him I could not follow.

They came by with the check a little while after the silence had eaten away at us. We'd been sitting there too long for their liking, I supposed. Not that there was anyone in the lobby waiting on seating. Everyone else in York—which didn't seem like many people—was huddled away in their homes, peaking behind curtains at the storm that was picking up in the fields.

No, there wasn't any reason for them to kick us out of the booth just yet. They'd just had enough of us taking up that space. It was time for us to go. To where? They didn't

care. Just not this booth. And the salad — that salad Mom had been dreading over — they took that too. She wasn't asked if she was finished. There was half a plate of greens left to be had. They got taken to the back where they were sloughed into a bin and the dish was sunk into a sudsy pit of water.

But even with the bill in front of her, Mom was determined to linger. To sit a little while longer and wonder about where she would go next. "I just wish she'd tell me these things," she said, and she held two fingers up to her temple. "You have no idea what it's like to have someone who you love so much, trust you so little."

"I don't know, Mom," I said. I didn't want to get any more into it than I already was. I didn't have anything to say about Hailey. Mom wanted my relationship with Hailey to be her relationship with Hailey. Or maybe she wanted what I had with Hailey. Which was — if nothing more — a sort of mutual respect. Or, at the very least, an understanding of one another. In our own private kind of way. "She doesn't really tell me these things either."

"Yes. She does."

She was right. But it wasn't as though Mom didn't do the same thing. With Dad. She knew why he'd gone to Elko. She knew why it had ended and why Colorado couldn't be home anymore. But neither of them was interested in talking about that. And that's just how it was with Hailey. Don't-ask, don't-tell. Of course, I didn't say all of that. My mind was thin now. A dozen hours in the car, drifting by stalks of corn and waiting for the mountains to come had suckered away any desire I had to defend myself. What difference would a lot of words make here, when so few would do? "I don't know. We don't talk about things like that."

“Like what?” Mom said. “Like life? Like anything at all?”

She paused and looked at the bill. It still hadn’t been paid. She hadn’t paid it. “It’s like we hardly even know each other anymore.”

I wasn’t sure who she had said that to.

Then she paid and we went outside to the car.

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It was nearly ten minutes before we decided that the car was really, really gone. At first, we could nearly convince ourselves that we’d simply forgotten where it was we had parked. Maybe it had been up the road a ways. By that intersection where all the stoplights were hung up on wires, swinging idly in a calm wind, that despite its tepid nature, seemed to threaten a coming storm – turbulent, violent weather that was just stalling for time. Had we parked up there? Yeah, maybe we had. We were tired enough that we could fool ourselves for a while into thinking the fact that our car was nowhere in sight was something that could be chalked up to faulty memory.

For ten minutes at least.

But it was in that ten minutes that the light started to fade. And cloudy skies do not let you lie to yourself the way blue skies do. Over the tops of the squatted, slat-windowed buildings, that blue sky Nebraska was blown away on the latent coattails of a twilight breeze, till the very last remnants of day faded into the very color of the brick walls that stood in processions along the road where our car was lost. No, not lost. Stolen. Left. Or who-knows-what. It was gone. Gone, at the very least.



Maybe someone took it. Maybe it wandered off by its own volition. Maybe it was Nebraska itself that had done it. Sure, that was it. It was the very Nebraska-ness of this place, the vacancy of the streets, the way that, at the end of the cobbled sidewalks, you could see a dozen miles deep into the storm-weathered grain, that had disappeared the car from the earth. Maybe it was that spirit that pulled the car in and did not let it go. It was hidden in the heart of the state, tucked away from us. We'd be stuck in York, this halfway-home, till we could give it reason to go west.

The winds got colder.

And when we reached the top of a slight hill (anything could be called a hill in Nebraska), we could see the end of the roads. Not just the end of this road — the road where we might have left our car but knew we hadn't. The end of them all. Where only one path, a swath cut in the grass where the highway ran like a raised blood vessel, could be seen. And clouds, which had blanketed blue skies by the hours of the day, were now threatening upon the plains.

At the edge of where my eyes could reach, one of those clouds touched the earth.

We could not hear it from this spot — not yet. I'd never seen such a thing before. It is a terrible thing, to see the skies kissing the earth. The silent storm, the narrowed funnel cloud, hung gaunt over the distant pastures, and cut a tapered path through the field. Not a minute had dreaded by when we heard the siren. We could not tell from where. It bellied out from the very stomach of the place and bled upwards into the skies, where the very last tendrils of daylight were slipping through the heavy clouds and dissipating into nothing but faint traces of yellow.

We began, first, by pacing our footsteps to the highway, which was even vacant by now. Up the road was a motel. Our motel. It was a mile ahead. Maybe less, maybe more. But with every step we took, the storm paced along with us. Eagerly pausing just far away enough to feel safe. But lurking all the same. It sat in the corn, as if it were waiting. We'd only gone for five minutes when the car that ended up saving our lives, stalled beside us. From behind, through a blanket of dirt blown in from the west, where the storm was spitting about the soil, two headlights announced themselves and grew more oppressive as the sound of tires over gravel drew near.

Moving slowly and purposefully, this low red car approached us, rattled to a stop, and was still. The window did not roll down upon its stalling. There was no honk of greeting. The car – and the person inside of it – didn't do so much as move on or rev the engine. For those precious few moments, we sat there, and we stared at the car and it stared right back at us. And through the windshield, which was already covered in debris from the storm, we could not make out the driver. It was just the car. Sat on the hill, waiting for the storm, and waiting for us.

How long would it have waited? If we had not opened the door when we had, would it have sat there forever, taking its bets on if the clouds would clear and the airs would settle before the violence reached this hill?

It may have. But I suppose we'll never know, because after a moment of burdened silence, we opened the back doors, and let ourselves in.

Inside, a man sat hunched over the wheel, with marked fingers gripping the leather. From where we sat in the back, I could only make out those hands and the sunken

pockets in his yellowing skin where his age has begun to show in his weathered face. His car was just as old as he appeared to be. Maybe they'd been born together, the pair of them. And they had managed to stay together all these many years.

As he kicked his car back into drive, the body of the thing ached and groaned. The stress of two visitors, it almost seemed, had broken that old beast's back. The old man kept the wipers beating as we went, the two narrow fingers flicking away scattering leaves and fractured tree-limbs that made sounds like untrimmed nails on piano keys as they dashed across the windshield. With one ancient hand, he pressed his fingers splayed to the ceiling, as though he were trying to keep the car from collapsing in on itself.

"You live here?" he said, never turning his eyes from the road.

I turned to Mom, expecting her to speak for me. She was in no state to talk. Her head was lulled against the window, the skin of her cheeks pasted on the glass.

"Just passing through," I said for her.

"That's me too." He thought about it a moment, drummed his fingers on the ceiling. "How's it that you're passing through on foot?"

Mom bristled, rolled herself farther against the window and shielded her face with her collar. Once again, I was given the task of speaking on her behalf. Parents had a way of getting to speak through their children in a way that children never got to experience the other side of. "Our car got stolen."

"Stolen?" He made a noise that was something like a harrumph. "How's that happen?"

"We were at dinner," I told him. "We'd been driving all day and were hungry. When we came back out it was just...gone, I guess. We're not sure what happened to it yet."

The old man hummed. "Cars are funny things, you know?" he said. He glanced up into the rearview mirror, and I could tell that the pair of eyes under those bush-needed brows were meeting mine. He tapped the steering wheel with a hand. "This one? She's been stolen twice. Lost another three times. I rolled her into a ditch once. Mechanic said she was totaled. Was gonna be used for scrap metal. I paid the money to get her fixed."

I smiled, gave a polite nod, not knowing what else to do. "You've had this car a long time?"

"Longer than I should have," he said. "But like I said. That's the funny thing about cars. They have a way of sticking around longer than you plan on. Most of the time, I think they end up right where they're supposed to be."

We didn't get much beyond that before we reached the motel. Right after he'd finished speaking, he saw the sign for it from the side of the highway and motioned with his finger at it. "Here?"

I said yes, thanked him, tried to give him the change from my wallet, which he wouldn't accept. He just slowed the car to the side of the road and let us out.

Just as soon as we had closed the door, without so much as a parting wave, that low red car sauntered off into the storm and was breathed away into the Nebraska air.

The motel had just about shuttered up their windows when we came rapping at the door, nothing in hand but a few loose bills in a leather wallet—just enough for a single night. The woman behind the desk—whose eyes kept glancing between us and a TV in the breakroom behind her where a smartly dressed man in a suit was sizing up the storm on a chart—gave us a short-breathed rundown of the motel's amenities.

We took the keys and saw ourselves to room nine.

Before we closed the door, I took a moment to breathe in the singular sight of the funnel cloud pausing in the doorframe and hanging there like shattered glass. I saw it clearly enough to be scared, just in the pause of breath before Mom threw the door closed, drew up the lock, and then sank all the way to the ground. She sat there, back pressed against the door, drinking in short, stifled breaths for minutes on end.

It was not crying. Not quite.

But she did stay there. For a while, I sat with her. Touched her hand. Told her it was going to be all right. We'd call someone in the morning. Was she listening? Did you hear me, Mom? But she never moved. She sat there, petrified, long after the sound of the storm overhead had passed and the winds settled into calm, level gusts.

Even when I had finished my shower, and the steam rolled out of the bathroom and I settled into bed, she was still there. Even when I dimmed the lights and sat under the pale, waxy glow of the moonlight coming in the slatted blinds. Even then, she did not move. Even when the air-conditioning paused and went off for the night and the only sound that remained was the slow, meditative whir of the

oscillating tabletop fan. She stayed right there, sat beneath the doorknob.

In time, I was nearly sleep.

“I don’t know if you’re still awake,” she called from the doorway. “I’m sorry.”

I didn’t move.

Her body sighed against the doorframe. I heard it groan. I heard it almost give. “I’m trying.” Silence. “I’ll try harder.”

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When I woke, it was still dark. The red light from the bedside alarm clock blinked in my face and when I rolled my head to the ceiling, the solitary moonlight flickered above me. I could tell that it was raining now. The motel room, absent of the noise of the storm, and of the whirl of the air conditioning, was silent save for the tinny drum of a thousand raindrops pattering the metal roof.

I turned my head now, to the door and to the window.

Mom was standing. She’d moved from the door. And she was prying, with lightly shaking fingers, the blinds open so she could stare out into the blue night and watch the rain course down the gutters. And beyond that, weeping under brittle moonlight, swaths of crop flattened to the ground where the storm had passed. In the middle of it all, a lonely red house and a tilted grain silo. Standing, but only just, and leaning to, as if it at any moment it could have toppled.

But for now, it sat.

Groaning in the rain.

A pair of car lights flittered through her vision. Those lights, they danced for a moment across the room. Then they too vanished, suckered away back onto the road, where they disappeared in a cloud of dirt, and wandered off to some other distant place. Did she know? Where those lights were going. Did she see, by the path that car wandered down the road, that it was barreling to the west?

She closed the blinds.

The room went dark.

A moment later, a hand came by and touched my face. The hand, as quickly as it had come, retreated into the darkness. Did she know I was awake? Did she know I had seen her — no, caught her — staring at the rain? In that moment that was meant to be private. Was she thinking about our car and where it could be? Sitting in a field of flattened grass. Was she wondering where it had been drawn to? Was there a place out there, somewhere in the gesturing corn, where it too had reached an understanding? If she were given the chance, would she spend her life looking for it?

Her feet made her way to the bedside. I heard a dial tone as she lifted the nightstand phone and punched in ten digits she knew by heart.



Andrew Sepulveda

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*Sneakers*



“Mija, is that you? What are you doing home right now?” The screen door to our house kept Mom slightly out of view as she got up to open it. The dim glow of our old porchlight illuminated off of the thin metal door that stood between us. I could barely make out her face, but I could see her wide eyes that looked at me through the screen. I wasn’t supposed to be here. She expected me to be in Oregon at my university, not on the doorstep of my childhood home in East LA with my busted-up suitcase dragging behind me on its last wheel.

“Yeah mom, it’s me. Can I come in?”

“Marisa,” she snapped back sternly, “Not until you tell me why you’re here and not at school.”

I had just dropped out, but she couldn’t know that. Not when she had spent years of my life telling me how she expected me to go to college. Everyone in my family was excited to see me leave the city I had called my home for years, but Mom was the happiest. “You’re so smart, mija. My baby’s going to be the first one to get a degree” she proudly stated while hugging me close on day I packed the car for my long drive. The concern in her voice as she questioned me now felt cold and chilled over warm memory of me leaving the first time.

“Uh I’ve got a four-day weekend from school so I thought I’d surprise you and come visit since I’m not coming home for Thanksgiving this year,” I said, hoping she wouldn’t catch the lie. “Ay, you could’ve at least let me know so I could clean up the house a little bit!” She smiled, pushed open the door and pulled me in for a tight hug. For a moment, I felt happy as I cherished being home again, but I knew I shouldn’t have lied to her. Pushing something as big as this off could do nothing but make things worse.

"Mira, I still have some of the dinner that I made if you want to eat," she offered. Before I could even respond, she pulled out the sour cream tub she used for leftovers and dumped its contents into a plate in the microwave. Soon, the strong aroma of salsa verde filled the small kitchen. Green chilaquiles, my favorite. I felt truly back at home as she placed the plate and a fork in front of me and I immediately dug in.

"So, how's school going?"

I almost choked on my food. She couldn't even let me finish my meal without asking. I quickly shoveled another bite into my mouth and tried to dodge the question.

"Ith goin good," I managed to get out, muffled by the mouthful of salsa, tortillas, and cheese.

"No really, how is it going for you?" she pressed even harder.

I gulped down my bite, "I guess it's going fine. I've just been really busy is all."

She quietly nodding along as I spoke, seemingly content with my forced answer.

"Well, I'm glad that you visited this weekend. Your prima's quinceañera is on Saturday and everyone will be here for the fiesta!"

I actually choked on my food this time.

"Ay mija, is there something wrong?" Mom said as she rushed to get me some water.

I asked through my sharp coughs, “E-Everyone?”

“Of course! It’s Luna’s big day, she’s finally becoming a woman!”

I felt nauseous and my food sat like a rock at the bottom of my stomach. Mom couldn’t stop telling me in her weekly phone calls for the last two months about it. My family would all be there celebrating Luna. The excited expression on my mom’s face made it clear that I was expected to be there too. Well, no going back to school now.

“We need to get you a dress for the party! No, it’s too late for that. One of your old ones will have to do. Ay, Luna will be so happy to see her surprise guest!” There was no stopping her now as she rambled on about getting ready for Saturday. I finished up my food, then went to my old bedroom. The air in my room at the end of the hall felt stale; no one had been in there for months. The warm light on my ceiling felt comforting, unlike the harsh fluorescents that seared my eyes every day in my dorm room. It was nice being home, but I couldn’t help but worry about the coming party.

I woke up to Luis Miguel blaring on the old stereo in the front room.

“Marisa, levantarse! Make yourself useful while you’re here and help your Mamá get ready for the quince.” In her usual phone call to me, she had been excited to tell me that she was allowed on the “planning committee”. This was really just her and my tía. Knowing her, she probably pestered my nina until she let mom help her plan everything. Now it was just time to pick up all the little things we needed for the party.

First stop, the *carniceria*. Walls of the *tiendita* were filled to the top with every spice, condiment, anything you needed for a party. Tall shelves stuffed with even more items created cramped rows, barely wide enough to fit the tiny yellow shopping carts the store provided its patrons. In the generations it had stood, this store hadn't changed at all. It was the same one I had gone to on errands with my parents for years. I walked towards the back of the store where they kept the snacks and picked up a mango chili lollipop, my favorite. I laughed and thought to myself, "I'm such a kid," then went back to looking at the rest of the multicolored candies and treats that I always saw the little children pleading their parents to purchase for them.

Sucker in hand, I met back up with my Mom at the meat counter where she was purchasing the *carne asada* and *pollo asada* for the party. Despite being early November, it was still warm and sunny out and my family fully intended to make use of the good weather for a barbecue at Luna's quince. A pretty husky guy with a huge beard was crouched behind the counter, taking my mom's order from the giant fridge where they kept the meats. After gathering everything, he stood up and a smile grew across his face as we made eye contact.

"Yo Mari," the bearded guy yelled out to me.

"Damn I didn't even recognize you, Joe. I like the new beard." Joe, one of my best friends from high school, had apparently started working here in the time I had been gone.

"When'd you get back in town?"

"Just last night. What? Did you miss me or something?"

“¡Cállete wey! I ain’t missed you. I been busy so I don’t got the time to think about a pendeja like you,” he joked. My mom shot him a look when she heard that. “Sorry Mrs. Gonzalez,” he said then turned back to me, “So why didn’t you say you were coming back home this week anyways?”

“I just wanted to surprise my mom and my cousin since I’ve got a short break this weekend.” “You coulda at least told me you were dropping in instead of surprising me like this.”

“I didn’t think we’d have the time to hang,”

I really did my hardest to be as stealthy as possible in my return. Why did I think it would go as I wanted it to?

“Anyways what’s new?” I asked him, trying to switch the subject.

“Not much, I’m taking a couple classes at the community college and started working here a few months ago,”

That was actually news to me. Joe swore after graduation that he wasn’t going to do any more school. “So what? did your parents force you to go back?” I asked him.

“¡No manches! I told them myself I wanted to enroll,” he said, prouder than ever. Even more shocking. “I thought I’d try it, see if it’d help me get a job so I can try to move out afterwards,” Joe continued, “Figured it was time I did something. Mr. Sanchez was nice enough to hire me here, so I’ve actually got money for stuff too, you know?”

I hated everything about this. Sure, I guess this was

great for him, but somehow Joe and I had switched places and I didn't want that either. Luckily, I could hear the cash register ring as my mom finished paying for the groceries. "Oh, Mom's done so I guess I better go help her take the stuff to the car. Bye!" I said and ran after her, eager to get out of this awkward situation.

"Yeah, sure. I'll see you later, Mari," he called out and then went back to work, sweeping the floors behind the counter.

I followed my mom to el super for other things for Saturday, then the party store for the piñata we ordered (a giant princess tiara, just like Luna wanted), and finally the bridal store to pick up Luna's dress. The shop had a few quinceñera dresses in the window. Bright pink, blue, and purple gowns covered in rhinestones and lacy patterns watched the people walking by. They all looked like they were pulled straight out of a fairytale with their regal designs. I stopped to admire the turquoise one placed on the mannequin and it stared back at me. The window reflected my face in it and just for a moment, I was able to place myself in the dress. It looked like it was made for me and, had I been just five years younger, I would have absolutely wanted that one. "¡Ay, que bonita!" Mom said, jolting me up from my daydream.

Inside the store, there were even more dresses on racks lining the perimeter and placed in spots exactly where the storeowners wanted you to see them. There were so many kinds too, it was almost overwhelming. I walked around the shop, taking in everything while my mom talked to the woman at the counter about the pink dress they ordered. The lady walked out of sight to the back of the store where she had saved Luna's gown.

"You would have looked great in a dress just like Luna's," Mom told me, once again snapping me out of the hypnotizing gaze of the clothing. "I'm sorry we weren't able to have an actual quince for you. You know how much they can cost to put on."

I could feel a lump in my throat growing as she said these words. I knew these parties were expensive, but as a fourteen-year-old, seeing all of your friends get fancy parties with extravagant dresses and a whole night dedicated to them, you can't help but feel jealous.

"It's ok mom, I get it." I could see my mother furrow her brow out of the corner of my eye while I spoke to her. She could tell there was more than I was letting on. Why couldn't she have just had the party, maybe there wouldn't have been enough money to send me away for school and I never would have had to waste it on an expensive university. She made a sacrifice like this... and I just blew it all away. How could she even think of forgiving me?

"Vamos, mija. We should head back to the house." Mom broke the silence. It seemed like she wanted to talk about this just as much as me. We picked up the dress, then went back home.

I was pretty anxious the next morning, the day of the party. It was almost noon and in just a few hours, my family would all be joining at my tío and tía's house for the party that would last literally all day. Mom had left already to help with the preparations. I showered and washed up, half excited to see the family I didn't see as often as I used to and half dreading the onslaught of questions about school and my life that everyone would be hurling at me. I got out, wrapped in my towel, and sat in front of the mirror looking at the reflection of myself that was in it. I could barely

recognize the tired girl staring back at me with the blank expression and dark bags under her eyes. That girl didn't want to go to a party and deal with family, but she didn't have a choice either. My mother, my tía, and especially Luna would all want to kill me if I skipped so I sucked it up and continued getting ready.

I was through a script I kept in my head of the excuses and deflections I'd use tonight while I brushed my hair.

"What are you studying at school, Marisa?" "I'm still deciding on it. There's just so many options, you know?" I'd quickly answer back.

"How long are you here for, mija?" "Oh, just a couple more days, but how have you been doing?" I'd shoot back at them.

"Hey Mari, how's Oregon been treating you?" "I've only got a couple days here, I just want to think about home, ok?" I'd deflect.

I had it all planned out, now I just needed to get dressed. I turned to my closet and picked out an old, slightly wrinkled blue dress that I hadn't worn in years- luckily it still seemed to fit. It was a little bit wrinkled, but it was still good enough for the occasion. I noticed a pair of heels my mom left for me. My hand hesitated over the fancy white shoes for a moment, then passed over and grabbed the beat-up pair of sneakers I had left here. Mom would be too stressed about the party to notice anyways. It was already 6:30, a half hour after the party started so I grabbed my phone and headed out of the house and down the street to Luna's quinceañera.



I could hear the music of Selena from down the street even before I got to the house. My many relatives were together on the dance floor under the giant tent they had set up outside. The aroma of carne asada filled the air. Over to the side, my tío worked the giant comal, cooking for the guests and talking to his own friends, excited for his daughter and her big day. Tables were already littered with Coronas, Modelos, and shot glasses. Luna was nowhere to be found, but that wasn't a surprise. It was custom for the birthday girl to show up fashionably late in a big entrance. I went around and said hi to everyone, keeping that script I had written in the back of my mind and ready to go when I needed it. I spit out my rehearsed lines to every family member while my mind wandered back to the school I had just left behind.

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“You don't deserve to be here. Nobody cares about you. You should have stayed home.”

My anxieties yelled at me while I sat in my cold room and stared blankly at the homework that was laid out on my desk. The harsh white fluorescent lights of my claustrophobic dorm room burned into my tired eyes. “Have I read this already?” My eyes scanned over the page of my textbook for what felt like the tenth time. Something about old philosophers. Or maybe this was my English homework. They all blend together so easily, especially when you're trying to make up mountains worth late work. I had no motivation to do anything anymore. It was just so much easier to get under the sheets on my bed and ignore the looming deadlines while they continued to pile on.

My roommate returned to our room with a few of her friends while I kept failing to focus on my late work.

The door swung open and sounds from the rest of the dorm entered with her. The three girls looked at me huddled over my laptop and textbooks in the corner then turned around. Their silence told me they didn't want me there. I was a stranger in my own room, and they didn't want me in their space.

"You don't deserve to be here. Nobody cares about you. You should have stayed home."

The words repeated in my head and I tried to block them out, but they just kept getting louder. It wasn't just the schoolwork that was eating at me, but the people here. I didn't really have friends, just people who tolerated me and thought bad about me behind their back. I could tell whenever they looked at me, it was always in their eyes. I'm certain of it.

"Go home, you don't belong here."

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I needed to get away from everyone and catch my breath for a few minutes, so I got my food, found my mom at her table near the dance floor, and joined her.

I was only a couple tacos into my dinner when everyone turned towards entrance to the party as Luna walked in the brilliant pink dress that we had just picked up for her yesterday. She strutted into the party with a sway that made her look like a supermodel, putting on a show for her guests that were all there to celebrate her. She entered the party amidst the bumping cumbia beats and uproar of excitement from the family. With the confidence in her walk and the large grin on her face, she clearly knew how important she was tonight. As soon as the family resumed

their partying, Luna made her rounds to say hi and thank everyone for coming to celebrate her birthday. Eventually, my cousin came around to the table Mom and I were sitting at.

“Marisa? I didn’t know you were coming! I thought you’d be at school at this time,” Luna said, visibly excited that I was able to come to her party.

“How could I have missed my little cousin’s quince?” I responded. I couldn’t stand it, even Luna had to ask me about school.

“I missed you so much, Mari!” Luna yelled and ran at me to give me a big hug. The giant dress she wore smothered me as she squeezed me. I managed to pull myself away finally and caught my breath.

“Wow, you really grew up fast. I feel like it was just weeks ago you were barely half my height,” I told her, remembering the little girl I felt I always saw her as.

“Yeah, I guess I’m practically as old as you now!” she excitedly responded, “Mamá was so happy when I told her that I wanted a big quinceañera, she immediately jumped to planning it. So, how has college been going for you?”

My mind went blank, I could feel myself sweating. The script I had written disappeared from my mind. I didn’t expect Luna to have asked me that question. Of all the people in my family, I trusted that she wouldn’t put me on the spot like that.

I managed to compose myself and answered, “I-It’s going alright. I’m just really busy all the time, you know? I just really missed seeing you and the rest of the family.” Luna smiled, but I could tell in those dark brown eyes that

stared back at me that she could see past what I was saying. Just like my mother, she knew something was going on. "I love you, Mari. I'm glad you were able to make it." She left me off easily with that one and I could tell that she knew what she was doing. We talked for a little while longer then, Luna took off to get her food and sit down with her friends who had just shown up.

I knew that Luna had always looked up to me as her older cousin. We grew up just a block apart from each other, so we spent a lot of our time together. When I was a little girl, we'd climb the tree outside our grandma's house. Luna was about six years old, so I'd have to help her up every time and she'd go on about how strong her cousin Marisa was to all of her friends at school—I personally loved it. It always stayed about this way through my time in high school and when Luna was in middle school. When I told my family that I'd be going to school outside of California, Luna was one of the most excited for me, even though she was sad that her friend would be gone most of the year. I was only gone for a schoolyear and a half, but Luna appeared to have gotten much older in that short amount of time. She seemed smarter, wiser even. Her turning fifteen really seemed to have an impact and I could clearly tell that she had matured. Looking at her at the party, she was gorgeous in her quinceañera dress. My wrinkled, pale blue dress looked like rags compared to what she was in. She looked like a princess; I looked like the ugly stepsister.

The fiesta went along like most other parties with my family. More food and drinks were had throughout the night as my family celebrated Luna's fifteenth birthday. Finally, during a lull in the dancing, the DJ turned down the music and got on the microphone, calling everyone's attention towards Luna and her friends who were on the dance floor. Just like in other quinces I had been to, the

group performed their choreographed dance which they had practiced for weeks. I thought about who would've been in my quinceñera court while the high schoolers continued to dance. Maybe Joe and a few of the others I talked to in high school would have wanted to be involved. Now I barely even talked to them and they all had their own lives going on that didn't involve me.

Everyone cheered as the teens spun around the dance floor. When they were finished, Luna was led to a chair that was placed in the middle of the floor. It was now time for what everyone had been waiting for; Luna was about to become a woman. As she sat in her chair, my tía walked forward, carrying a brilliant silver princess tiara which she then placed on Luna's head. Then my tío stepped forward, carrying a pair of black heels. My cousin had been wearing these beautiful, sparkling white flats all night that matched her elegant, pink gown, but it was now time for her to change out of those shoes and into ones fit for the woman she had become. Her dad then helped her into these new mature, heels while everyone cheered.

As selfish as it was, I couldn't help but think about myself while watching this. I was five years older than her, yet I didn't feel any older at all. I had this great opportunity to really grow into an adult while at school that I had given up on just because I couldn't bring myself to find my place there. Luna and my old friends had matured while I was gone. The one thing I had to do this weekend I put off out of some sort of fear of it going poorly when I really didn't know what would happen. I just felt so immature; It was time for me to grow up... like Luna.

The rest of the night blurred by as I just kept worrying about my future and how I'd let Mom know about my choice to drop out. Finally, it was almost one in

the morning and the guests were just leaving. As usual, my tía was taking care of my drunk tío passed out on the couch inside. Luna was also inside, opening her presents and hanging out with her friends. It was just me and Mom outside in the cool November air now. The party lights around the tent illuminated her face as she sat, sipping her wine and facing forward.

“Hey, mom,” I said to finally break the silence.

“What is it, sweetie?” she answered back, without looking at me.

I was still extremely terrified. My hands gripped my knees and my stomach churned as I tried to muster up the courage to tell her what I had waited so long to do.

“I need to tell you something,” I weakly let out.

“I know, mija. I got a letter from your school already, I just wanted you to bring it up first. We can talk about it tomorrow, ok?”

I should’ve known that this was something I couldn’t hide. Mom always had a way of getting the truth out of me. As hard as it was to admit to her, it felt like it was finally time to change into my own set of heels.





## Contributors

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### **Tess Pickar**

I am a senior English major who's biggest dream is to one day become a published author, so I want to do everything I can to make that dream come true. I want to share my stories with people and spark creativity in fellow writers who may not know their calling yet.

### **Jolein Doughty**

I'm a junior transfer student. Experiencing college as an adult with a full time job, 2 kids, a puppy, and husband. Its a mess but painting helps me calm my inner voice and helps me feel good about the world. I feel happiness in vibrant colors and textures. This painting is called "Living on the Spectrum". I wanted to draw attention to those who are influential and are not known for their mental health in order to begin a conversation to break down the stigmas around mental health.

### **Lindsey Anderson**

Lindsey Anderson is a senior Political Science and English writing major. She is minoring in History and Women's and Gender Studies. She is from Spokane Washington and has been coping with quarantine by writing, revising horrible first drafts, and spending time with her little dog, Peter.



## **Sarah Morgan**

Sarah Morgan is a sort-of senior, graduating late with no coherent plan for the future. She likes to pretend she is a writer, but really, she's just kind of lost. Sarah hopes to write comedy television one day, but for now, she focuses on the mundane.

## **Gabriela Marquis**

Gabriela is a freshman studying Philosophy, English, and Spanish. She likes writing, singing, dancing, and discussing philosophy late at night. She hopes you read her poetry as if you exist within it and suggests reading it outloud for the fullest effect.

## **Holden Jeffries**

When I attended Gonzaga-in-Florence during the Fall of 2019, I advanced my skills as a writer. This program allowed students the time and space for reflection and I took that opportunity to specifically develop an expertise. I major in English with an emphasis on Writing, which enables me to explore the cultural movements of our time and develop craft, care and thoughtfulness along the way. I have spent the last two academic years taking upper division writing courses that challenge my skills, honing my abilities in fiction, non-fiction, poetry and literary journalism. As a senior I am currently working on several projects and plan to begin publication of the ones that I have (lously) finished.

## **Michaela Friedrich**

I am a sophomore at GU and I've been writing poetry for about four years now. I enjoy using images in nature when I write about my experiences and emotions.

## **Anthony Willins**

Anthony Willins is a senior studying English Literature.

## **Brianna Covert**

Brianna is sophomore studying English with a concentration in writing as well as minoring in Art and Digital Marketing. She is hoping to pursue a career in writing, but is continuing to refine her path as she takes more classes at GU. When Brianna's not doing homework, you can typically find her in Jundt working on a watercolor and enjoying the views. Besides painting, some her favorite activities include watching rom-coms, listening to music, and playing tennis.

## **Emma Craven**

Emma Craven is a Senior studying English and Psychology. she has previously been published in Charter and Our Voices. In her free time, she enjoys writing, reading, watching movies, and spending time with her family.

## **Brittany Robinson**

My name is Brittany and I am a senior from Phoenix, AZ studying Political Science and International Relations with minors in Writing, French, and Women's & Gender Studies. On campus, I am the GSBA Advocacy Coordinator, Model UN Head Delegate, a GU Ambassador, and the longest-standing work-study in the Center for Student Involvement. I enjoy travelling, running, and drinking coffee (far too frequently) and I hope to one day write a book about vampires.

## **Kelly Metzger**

Kelly Metzger is a sophomore Political Science and English Major with a writing concentration. She is from Redmond, WA. She currently works as a tutor at the Writing Center. In her free time, she enjoys hanging out with her pets and listening to podcasts.

## **Olivia Rollman**

## **Andrew Sepulveda**

## **Charlie McCormik**

## **Mackenzie Atkins**

## **Sophia Bohley**

## **Judge Thomas Kearns**

## **Garrick Bateman**





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