

# Shoreline



# SHORELINE

2018

## **Socially Engaged Art: A Design for Good**

Cover Statement:

“Come to Your Senses” by Louis Morales

With “Come to Your Senses,” I want the viewer to experience a glimpse of the extreme poverty in Guatemala. This installation acts as a portal to their world. It is a project with five printed pieces, including four poster designs. The posters are presented in a minimal way to contrast the ramshackle approach to the installation structure. The posters show statistics of a typical person living in poverty alongside illustrations correlating with the statistic. There is also projected digital work alongside raw video footage of my mission trips.

The major reason for doing an installation piece is the “look away factor.” If a poster is on a wall, the viewer can easily look away with no hesitation, but inside a confined space, the viewer has no choice but to look. The space is dark, but viewers will have a dim flashlight to look around and put the pieces together in their mind of what they are witnessing. I want to provide an individualistic experience so that viewers have no distractions. It is just a single viewer in the space.

The build structure is made up of about 85% found material. The other material is the support beam for safety. My goal is to open the viewers’ eyes and help viewers realize that we are fortunate enough to have so much. There are many people not nearly as fortunate. “Come to Your Senses” is not about sympathy but about consciousness: people need to see what we take for granted here in the United States.

# SHORELINE

## 2018

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## Contents

<i>The Pressing of Olives</i> - E.J. Watson	4
<i>American Pie</i> - Lauren Cloutier	5
<i>Ducks Crossing the Lake</i> - Julia Mielli	14
<i>Like a Sweater</i> - Joseph Angell	15
<i>Cast Iron</i> - Se Ennis Datchuck	16
<i>NY Memory</i> - Tabatha Karlowicz	18
<i>Isla Vista</i> - Ryan Silva	19
<i>The First Time I Heard Bob Speak</i> - Colleen LeBeau	25
<i>Kimono Bracelet</i> - Se Ennis Datchuck	26
<i>The Art of Crochet</i> - Kendra Genereux	27
<i>For The Love of the Void</i> - Kae Whitman	28
<i>Did Anyone Ever Tell You Women Kiss Better than Men?</i> - Kat Walsh	35
<i>Palmistry</i> - Ruby Robinson	36
<i>10,000 Suns</i> - Alexandra Sydney Ashe	37
<i>A Cry For Help</i> - Andrew Small	38
<i>Knocking</i> - E.J. Watson	42
<i>Faith</i> - Linda Lin	43
<i>Roadside Funeral</i> - Sara Raztresen	44
<i>Unmentionables</i> - Michelle Taraian	45
<i>Cheyenne</i> - Julia Mielli	50
<i>Translating the Tears of a Pikachu</i> - Kendra M Genereux	51
<i>Hotel Echo Lima Papa</i> - Andrew Noel	52
<i>Alleyway Shelter</i> - Caitlynn Douglas	63
<i>Mourning Waves</i> - Caitlynn Douglas	64

## Contents

<i>Light</i> - Se Ennis Datchuck	65
<i>Confidence</i> - Kat Walsh	66
<i>Lightning</i> - Sara Raztresen	68
<i>Arms Race</i> - J. Bruscini	70
Interview With Kelly Grey Carlisle	71
Contributor Bios	75

E.J. Watson

*Fourth annual writing contest poetry winner*

*The Pressing of Olives*

you are dying in the day like some nazarene thug  
who for a moment hangs above us all while we watch  
your blood falling like peter's ear in an olive garden  
your blood crawling like watered-down marinara  
cutting tiny panama canals in the sand  
that spell something secret only i can read  
i want it to feed me but all i can taste is yeast  
you do not tremble at the shrieks for barabbas  
or bengahzi or emails or war on christmas or santa is white  
you are still dying  
in between the ads for reverse mortgages and investment firms  
you don't even tremble at our lady liberty's motherly cry  
you are still dying when you offer me bread  
that has risen

the next time someone tells me you're on your way  
i want to take them here and show them the still bloody cross  
and read to them about the pressing of olives  
and counsel them not to find their fill in breadsticks

Lauren Cloutier

*Fourth annual writing contest prose winner*

*American Pie*

“Face it, Charlie. If we don’t do it, something else out here’s gonna do it. You don’t want that do you?” Steven said. I could feel him staring at me, waiting for a response.

But my eyes remained focused on Jimmy, who was innocently playing in the sand next to the tattered remains of the boat that got us stranded here in the first place.

“Charlie?” Steven said again.

I kept my eyes locked in on Jimmy.

“Come on man, answer me.”

I took in a slow deep breath of saltwater air, still not shifting from my gaze.

“It’s not right.” I huffed. “It’s just not right.”

Jimmy was now inside the wooden scrap of a boat, pretending he was a pirate. He was holding a stick to his eye as a telescope, pointing out towards the never-ending ocean.

“No kidding it’s not right, Charlie. I’m not saying it is. Nothing about this is right.” He paused and took a deep breath in as he swallowed the lump in his throat. “I just... I read it in a book once. One guy didn’t want the other guys to kill his friend so he shot him in the back of the head himself. I just think, you know... It’s what’s best.”

I couldn’t break my gaze, and I just couldn’t wrap my head around what Steven was suggesting.

Ever since Steve and I were born, Jimmy loved us to death. Mama used to say he sang “American Pie” to us every night when we first came home from the hospital; it’s always been his favorite song. He must’ve been around three or four at the time.

And of course we loved him too; always kept an eye on him at school. He was picked on a lot because he was different. One time Steven punched a kid for making fun of Jimmy’s stutter. That was really bad. The kid ended up getting stitches and Steve got suspended for a week.

But Steven and I never saw Jimmy as any different than us; he was our big brother, nothing else mattered. Until now, that is. Now, there was a problem.

I swallowed hard, trying not to cry.



Steven and I sat in silence on the sand for a while. I could feel him getting anxious next to me. It was a sense we had with each other, to know how the other one was feeling. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him sitting exactly how I was, legs crossed with his knees in his arms. His blue eyed, nervous gaze constantly shifted from me, to Jimmy, to the endless ocean in front of us. He kept combing back his hair with his hand. His once clean-cut, brown hair was now a shade of dirty blonde and growing exponentially; as was mine.

I switched my gaze from Jimmy, to the sea.

When we first got stuck, the ocean looked pretty from the beach, especially at sunset. It almost made the situation better. The sky used to smile down at the ocean with orange and purple hues reflecting into it as the ocean waved back at the sky, as if thanking it for the beautiful coat. But after all this time, the happiness of the colors had subsided. Now the sky was red with fury and the fear of never getting off the island, and purple with sadness and struggle to survive.

Again, I switched my gaze. This time back to Jimmy.

“Look man,” Steven began again, “Between him wandering off, eating things he shouldn’t, getting into fights with snakes... It’s only a matter of time. What if next time the snake is poisonous? What if next time it’s not even a snake, it’s a bear or something?”

He paused, choking up again.

“And you know there’s gonna be a next time,” he continued. “Every time something’s happened, there’s always a next time. And I feel like the next time’s keep getting worse and worse.” He finished with a shaky inhale. “I just think it’s gonna happen out here one way or another... I don’t wanna see him suffer.”

I broke my stare from Jimmy slowly, and turned my attention downwards to the sand. I picked up a handful and watched the grains slip through my fingers.

“I get what you’re saying,” I replied. “But I just can’t do it. I just can’t.”

The last of the sand poured out from my grip. I refocused my attention back to

Now the sky was red  
with fury and the  
fear of never getting  
off the island, and  
purple with sadness  
and struggle to  
survive.

Jimmy again. He was now motioning to the imaginary crew behind him, telescope in hand.

Steven picked himself up and brushed the loose grains of sand off his worn out jeans.

“Jim-Jim!” he yelled, “Come on, it’s getting dark!”

Jimmy threw down his telescope and ran towards us, arms flailing, smiling like a happy baby. That was his excited run. As he got closer I picked myself up too. His smile made me smile; he always seemed to have that effect on people. I glanced over at Steven, who wasn’t smiling at all. His face was stern, still trying not to cry.

“Come on, Bud,” he said as he started walking up to the little fort we created at the bridge between the sand and the endless wilderness that was the rest of the island.

“C-commin’ Stevie!” Jimmy yelled as he got closer. “S-s-sand is hard to r-r-run on.”

He followed Steven up the beach, then turned back to me.

“You c-c-commin’ to get w-w-wood Charlie?” he asked.

I looked at him for a moment; his arm still had residual blood on it from the snake bite and was still swollen too. He’d been looking more and more mangled every day out here. His fair skin was now red and peeling, his normally bald head was now starting to grow scruffy patches hair, and his grey-blue eyes were slightly bloodshot. But his smile, crooked teeth and all, could still light up a room... If there was a room, I guess.

“Just give me a minute Bud, I’ll be up,” I said, as he ran up to the fort.

\*\*\*

The next morning started the same as every morning before it, I got up extra early while Steven and Jimmy were still sleeping and tried to find us some food.

It was becoming clear to me that the three of us were losing weight, especially Jimmy. He was finicky with food at home, never mind having limited options on the island. Most of what I could get us was fish, and if I burned it too much, Jimmy wouldn’t eat it. He didn’t like “the black stuff”. But I did the best I could.

Luckily, Steven found a small freshwater pond for us to drink from. Only problem was getting there; it was about a mile inland. Not to mention, we didn’t have anything to actually drink from, so if we got thirsty

we had to take a trip.

A couple times on the way to the pond, we lost Jimmy. Steven and I tried to stay one in front of him and one behind him, but it was tough cuz Jimmy liked to run. So, he'd run the wrong way by accident, and we'd find him crying in a bush of thorns or surrounded by bees; beehive in hand. It was awful.

I walked very carefully out to the spot that I caught the fish, trying hard not to let the current take me. It was a rocky corner of the island close to where we set up camp. Maybe a couple hundred yards away. The current was so strong here, it would send the fish flying over this section of rocks if you waited long enough. So catching a fish was like patiently waiting to catch a slippery football. I had to really dig my boots into the mud to keep from being swept out to sea, but I held my own.

I took my knee-deep position and waited. It was a game of reflexes that could inevitably end in starvation if I lost, so I focused real hard.

The water was loud, and kept splashing in my face. I kept my eyes squinted.

I patiently stood my ground for about a half hour, when suddenly a huge silver fish—biggest I've seen, maybe two feet long—shot up from behind the rocks. I opened my arms, welcoming him to breakfast. He slapped me hard in the chest but I fought back, grabbing onto his neck and keeping his tail pinned under my arm. He squirmed and squirmed, but couldn't get away. Victory!

I turned back to the shore, fish firmly in hand, and started walking back slowly; trying to maintain my balance in the raging current while carrying my prize. This guy was heavy. Finally, a decent sized meal.

"Charlie! Ch-Charlie! You need m-my help?" I heard Jimmy shouting from the beach. I looked up to see him standing there at the edge of the waves.

"No Jimmy, I got I—" But before he could hear me, he was running; all smiles, across the screaming current.

"Jimmy, no!" I yelled, as I watched him immediately get swept off his feet and get violently dragged downstream. His hands flew into the air, as he began tumbling down the current, farther and farther from me.

I threw our dinner onto the shore, where it flopped into a mess of sand. I started

I had to really dig my boots into the mud to keep from being swept out to sea, but I held my own.

to shakily run with the current towards Jimmy's helplessly floating body. I quickly debated swimming, but if I lost my footing I may never get it back. The water was too strong.

"Jimmy!!" I screamed, as I kept running. With each step I took, I could feel the water getting deeper and deeper. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Steven running frantically in Jimmy's direction on the beach.

"Ch-Ch-aahh!!" Jimmy squealed. His body was now belly down in the water, his head bobbing up and down with the screaming waves. He could barely keep himself afloat and the current was moving too fast, the distance between us becoming greater.

"I'm coming buddy, hang in there!" I yelled helplessly, although I knew I could never get there in time before the current collided with the open ocean.

Steven was now running alongside Jimmy on the shore. In a rush of adrenaline and worry, he quickly jumped in the water right before the end of the island's shoreline, where the current met the open sea. His body ferociously fought through the raging water, as he too struggled to maintain his balance. He latched himself to a boulder sticking itself out of the raging waters, and turned around to face where Jimmy was flying at full speed towards him. The water almost chest deep where he was.

"Ch-Charliee!" Jimmy squealed again as he continued viciously floating down stream. I could barely see his head in the midst of the roaring waves. "H-hel-"

Suddenly, Jimmy's body collided with Steven's. Steven's feet were planted firmly in the mud beneath him, the water viciously splashing their faces. He held onto Jimmy tightly, leaning into the harsh current to keep from flying out to sea. Jimmy held onto Steven's shoulders as he turned back and wasted no time in fighting the waves back to dry land.

I stopped dead in my tracks in the water and ran as fast as I could to the shore.

When I got to my brothers, they were both sprawled out on their backs on the ground, soaked and panting, now covered in sand. I knelt down next to Jimmy.

"You okay Jim-Jim?" I said, resting my hand on his boney cheek.

"Y-y-yeah... I-I'm okay," he replied, almost completely out of breath. "Stevie ok-kay?"

"Steve, you alright?" I looked up at Steven. He was lying on his

back, trying to catch his breath. He turned his head to face me, nodding in approval.

“He’s alright, Jimmy. No worries.”

“Good,” Jimmy said. He looked at my empty hands.

“You get f-fish?” he asked, as if nothing had even happened.

I paused for a moment, then replied, “Yeah I did, come on.” I helped him up by the arm as we walked back over to where I threw the fish, Steven picked himself up and slowly trailed behind us.

I picked up the sandy fish and let the water run over it a bit to clean it off. I held it in both hands as I turned to Jimmy.

“Can I trust you to take this back to the fire pit?” I held out the fish to him.

“Yeah, I g-got it!” Jimmy replied enthusiastically, taking the fish from my arms.

“You’re not gonna run with this in your hands, you understand?”

“Yeah, Yeah, I-I won’t run. P-p-promise.”

“Alright, hang on tight, it’s a big one.”

I handed it over to him. He turned and walked carefully towards the pit, which was about a football field away. I watched him closely as he did so.

Steven walked up to me from behind me, and I took a good look at him. He was still soaked, his hair in his face, clothes tattered, sand all over him.

“We can’t keep doing this man,” he said bluntly, “It’s not good for us. Hell, it ain’t good for him!” He paused, he was getting angry.

I looked down the beach to Jimmy, who I could faintly hear singing to the fish...  
*“Oh, and while the king was looking down; the jester stole his thorny crown; the courtroom was adjourned; No verdict was returned...”*

“No way in hell, Steve,” I said, eyes still pinned at Jimmy. “He’s our brother for God’s sake.”

“He’s gonna get the three of use killed, never mind just himself. We can’t just sit around and wait for it to happen.”

He was right; it was the harsh truth. Everything he’d been saying

He was right; it was  
the harsh truth.  
Everything he’d  
been saying about  
this had been true.  
Jimmy was gonna  
end up killing  
himself somehow,  
and he might as well  
be taking us with  
him.

about this had been true. Jimmy was gonna end up killing himself somehow, and he might as well be taking us with him. It'd be some kind of disaster, some kind of pain we'd all have to endure, a big struggle like everything else out here except this time without a "happy" ending. I couldn't even argue with him, but I tried to anyway.

"I'm not doing it, Steve. I mean, even if we were going to, there's no human way to kill your own flesh and blood. Come on man, what do you wanna do? Put a noose around his neck and tell him to jump?"

Steven paused for a moment, looking at the ground. He then lifted his gaze up to the beating sun. He squinted and bit his lip, then looked me dead in the eyes. His next words rang in my ears like a siren.

"Don't think of it like a noose, Charlie. Think of it like a tie."

\*\*\*

After dinner I decided to keep the fire going a little later than usual. We had a lot of laughs and smiles a couple nights ago when we kept it lit, and I figured we could use that again. That night Jimmy sang "American Pie" over and over while me and Steven chimed in on the choruses and kept the beat by smashing sticks and stones together for drums. That night the fish didn't have too much meat on them, but tonight we felt full for the first time in a very long time.

Jimmy and I sat on the sand, our heads resting against a big log next to the fire pit, facing the ocean. We could see the stars perfectly. They reflected over the ocean, making the waves twinkle as they curled.

"How many d-d-dippers you see?" Jimmy said.

"How many?" I replied. "What do you mean how many? There's only two, the big one and the little one."

"N-nuh uh Charlie. I see one there, one there, one there, one there, one-"

"Alright, alright man! You win!" I laughed out loud, "They're everywhere!"

Jimmy laughed with me for a while, and then we got quiet again.

I looked up at Steven, who was sitting behind us, knees in his arms, blank stare into the sea.

"Whatcha thinkin' Steve?" I said, attempting to break the silence. I struggled a bit to look up and behind me, but when I caught a good glimpse of him I noticed he was teary eyed, mouth open just enough for him to breathe through it.

“Not thinkin’ anything,” he shot back, wiping his face with his forearm and sniffing. “Nothin’ to think about.”

I faced forward again, looking out into the ocean.

Suddenly he stood, brushed himself off, and began walking up to the fort. To which, Jimmy sat upright and turned around.

“You g-going to sleep, Stevie?” he asked. Steven paused in his tracks. He turned around slowly.

“Yeah Bud, I’m a little tired. Gonna go to sleep now,” he wiped another tear from his face. “Love you.”

“L-Love you, Stevie,” Jimmy said as he turned back around. I heard Steven’s footsteps start to walk away.

Jimmy and I sat in silence for a while. But it wasn’t entirely silent at all. The fire was speaking volumes, the waves were conversing with the fire, and the chirping nightly sounds of the island behind us all came together to sing their own song. It was a beautiful night.

I sat upright and looked down at Jimmy. He was having the time of his life counting stars. Sometimes, I wished I could see things the way he did. He saw the world in black and white, without complication. Things were simple to him, and I envied that.

I heard a rustle in the trees a ways behind us. I looked back to see Steven staring down towards the ocean and us.

I swallowed hard.

“Hey... Jimmy..?” I said. “You uh... you wanna sing American Pie for me?”

Jimmy smiled at me, then back up to the stars. And without answering, he began.

*“A long, long time ago, I can still remember how that music used to make me smile; And I knew if I had my chance that I could make those people dance...”*

I listened to him sing, along with the chirps of the island, the whispering flames, and the splashing ocean; it was as if an orchestra was backing him.

*“Did you write the book of love and do you have faith in God above; If the Bible tells you so...”*

Behind us, I heard soft and quiet footsteps in the sand. They were edging closer with every endless verse. I held my breath.

*“Helter skelter in a summer swelter; The birds flew off with a fallout shelter; Eight miles high and falling fast...”*

The footsteps were even closer now. Heavy, deep breaths now accompanied them, and short snuffles.

*“Oh, and there we were all in one place; a generation lost in space; with no time left to start again...”*

I could feel him right behind us now. I didn't want to look. But I did, and I saw him; a thick, heavy branch in his hands, tears filled his bloodshot eyes. I closed mine.

*“I met a girl who sang the blues; and I asked her for some happy news; but she just smiled and turned away...”*

I opened my eyes and looked down at Jimmy, his eyes on the stars, and his smile a mile wide as he approached the final chorus...

*“Bye, bye, Miss American Pie; drove my Chevy to the levee but the levee was dry; them good ole boys were drinking whiskey 'n rye; and singin' this'll be the day that I die...”*



*Fourth annual writing contest artwork winner*



*Ducks Crossing the Lake*  
JULIA MIELLI

Joseph Angell

*Honorable Mention: Fourth annual writing contest*

*Like A Sweater*

You wore me like a sweater,  
On that cold November night.

You pulled me over to keep yourself warm,  
Stretching out my shape.  
Trying to make me fit to you.

You wore me when you wanted,  
Tossed me aside when I didn't match.

You wore me only to stay warm,  
Until you found a better fit.

You wore me because you were cold,  
Only through that night.

*Honorable Mention: Fourth annual writing contest*

*Cast Iron*

I watched the blood trickle down his temple as I stood there silently. His face, contorted like a massive tree root, suddenly froze as if Medusa herself had kissed him. His mass fell to the kitchen floor with an exhausted thud that suggested the weight of him. It was difficult for me to understand what had just happened. All that I was aware of was the shooting pain in my right arm. It was then that I noticed the cast iron frying pan. I white-knuckle gripped the handle yet had no recollection of picking it up, let alone holding it above my head and swinging it. Noticing the circular pattern forever branding the side of my husband's head, I understood what I had done.

All three of our dogs started barking and pulling at his flannel shirt, nipping at his ears, and running in circles around the kitchen in what seemed like celebration. Even this cacophony wasn't enough to bring me out of my stupor. It wasn't until they started lapping at the blood on the floor that I was able to regain myself and realize the graveness of the situation. He was gone, that was apparent by the look on his face, mouth open in a perpetual yell. When he was alive I didn't think that he could look any stupider: I was wrong. Now was the time to shake myself and get back to the reality before me. I had always been a planner, so solving this situation shouldn't be a problem. It couldn't be any more difficult than planning a weekend trip to the in-laws or a holiday dinner. I drive a Mini Cooper, and he, being the size of a small mountain gorilla, barely fit when he was alive, so now as dead weight there was no way he could be stuffed into it. Calling my friend Carley was the only answer. Not only did she have an SUV, but she also had access to a small plot of land in the industrial section of our town. The fact that her vehicle was the size of a Sherman Tank was hilarious considering she stood about 5'1" tall, but it would fit my needs perfectly. Besides, Carley was like a sister to me and would help me to figure it out. As I dialed her number, it hit me; I had just killed my husband. I finally killed him. God knows he deserved it. A combination of regret and ecstasy forced itself to the surface of my mind.

When he was  
alive I didn't  
think that he  
could look any  
stupider:  
I was wrong.

"Hello, hello, Se?" Carley's voice reminded me of my mission.  
"Carley, I finally did it."

“Se, what did you do? What are you talking about? Se, are you there? Se! Se!” My lack of response was obviously panicking her and made her voice deepen with each sentence.

“Se, are you listening to me!” Her voice reached an impossible depth for someone so small.

My eyes closed to the scene in front me, then opened.

“I’m talking to you! I told you that I would be home at six! The least you could do is have dinner ready for when I got home! Can’t you do anything right!”

My husband stood in front of me with the same look he always had: anger and disappointment. The dogs were snoring in their beds, bellies full. The kitchen floor smelled like Spic and Span from the last time I washed it, not a drop of blood anywhere. I reached out and grabbed the cast iron frying pan. I felt the cool metal in my hand and noted the heaviness of it. In a single movement I swung around and slammed it on the stove with a bang. Dinner was going to be late.

*NY Memory*  
TABATHA KARLOWICZ



*Honorable Mention: Fourth annual writing contest*

*Isla Vista*

The hills sizzle with the sound of the sun striking the surface of solar panels. The ride to Rothko Industries takes you in a wide sweeping curve through the San Marcos Mountains East of Santa Barbara. A peculiar feature of the dated roadway is that it stands alone as the last highway in California that runs its course entirely above-ground. Elon Musk's boring company has yet to extend his underground superhighway this far south, but it is not a question of *if* it will come, but when. Down the coast, San Diego stubbornly held out against the project for years, but now that their new AI-integrated City Management Protocol has determined a new tack. Progress cannot, will not stop. The tunnels will come to San Marcos.

My eyes are continually adjusting to glares that I encounter in my periphery from the panels that pockmark the lunar-like terrain. Teslas never have enough tinting. It strikes me that the brushfires must have had their way with the land recently. That which isn't singed is a solar panel, which are all fireproofed. They, of course, cause most of the fires. I resign myself to the fact that I'll need to put on sunglasses. I grope around for them—they must be tucked away somewhere on top of the sloped dashboard.

"I'm sorry I insisted we go on this route, I did not know it would hurt your eyes..." A feminine voice piped in—pensive and apologetic from the passenger's seat. It bled regret, an emotion too human for my liking.

"It's fine. Least I can do." I reply matter-of-factly. What else can I say?

"I remember when I first came through here, it was greener." She noted elegiacally.

A feminine voice piped in—pensive and apologetic from the passenger's seat. It bled regret, an emotion too human for my liking.

"It rains a bit more in the winter. Not now. Everything's dead," I reply. It's summer.

"Did I arrive in the winter?" She asked absent-mindedly.

"You don't remember?" I reply, expecting her algorithms to appropriately interpret that question as rhetorical. Much to my chagrin she doesn't, and even reaches out to grab my arm.

"N-no... Everything seems a blur now!"

She blurts out, the processor retinas in her "eyes" going white for just a moment. She withdraws it soon after.

“That’s why we’re heading to Rothko. Your protocols need a refresh.” I assure her.

“I need... a *refresh*.”

Silence follows that statement for a few seconds, and it perturbs me just enough to turn over and get a closer look at the passenger next to me. I feel something, but I cannot make sense of it. She is, of course an android:

a Synthetic Entertainment Unit (Model 209). Common parlance is to call them “SEUs”, but they usually come out of the factory with a version name. “Hers” is Monika. She’s one of like a thousand previous Monikas, a specific SEU Model 209-N, designed to be a local TV news presenter. There won’t be many more Monikas after her. No one watches TV anymore, anyway. The baby boomers are just about all dead now.

She passes off for a mostly authentic human—right down to the eyes. The “eyes” are just cameras of sorts, and consequently are usually not really important design areas for any of the mass-market androids. Only the SEUs get the optic receptors that actually look a little glassy, a little bloodshot—a little too human. When I look into hers, I don’t get a case of the Uncanny Valley like I do with other androids, and that’s a design flaw in my estimation. The SEUs even cry—though if you ask me it’s all a bit too formulaic. Human women don’t get half as “emotional” as these androids do, in my experience. Her shoulder-length strawberry blonde hair, pale, Asiatic features and fluttering voice algorithm make the whole thing a little nauseating. Silicon’s model of human beauty resembles a circa-2020 K-drama character. Her green eyes, alight, undress my analysis, and bore into me.

“Something wrong?” I ask perfunctorily. With this, she perked up in her seat.

“Oh... I was just thinking that it would have been nice to see the sea one more time,” she says, candidly, and then with a whisper “I will miss the view by Isla Vista.”

“We’ll go tomorrow,” I say.

“Don’t make a girl a promise you can’t keep,” she says, again placing her cold, cybernetic hand on my shoulder. I shudder enough where it almost knocks off the Oliver Peoples shades I just put on.

“I’m not,” I say, brushing her hand off.

She’s not a girl.

No one watches TV  
anymore, anyway.  
The baby boomers  
are just about all  
dead now.



\* \* \*

The glass steps at Rothko Industries (South Coast Office) mock you like a funhouse mirror if you happen to look down at them. What peers back at you is a pear-shaped doppelganger. I often wonder if the architect had something sassy in mind. Monika never looks down. She looks straight at me as I lead her up to the front door.

I've brought seven Monikas to and from the Rothko Industries headquarters in the past decade. My title at WSB-TV is "Artificial Intelligence Liaison," which is Silicon-Valley-Speak for a professional handler. The SEUs get attached to a particular human. A minor design flaw, the designers say—a redundancy in the personality algorithm. It's a stupid, harmless, innocent thing, I figure. These units only have a function-life of about six hundred days. After that they start to go rogue, and you've got all the novels of Dick and Wells to illustrate what happens then. Before that, there's only so much trouble a machine can give you for what's essentially two years. They're worked pretty much nonstop those six hundred days, with one robot usually handling the 24/7 local news cycle entirely on their own—as is the case with this particular unit. Occasionally, they'd be out of commission for a week or two to get firmware updates or to test newer units. Mundane stuff. They'll occasionally pipe up from their gleeful servitude to ask a favor or two. This particular Monika likes to go to the beach and watch happy couples go on dates. She's the first Monika I've worked with that has a voyeurism fetish, though.

Included in my role is the rather unseemly duty to pick them up from Rothko, play the part of concerned parent, unrequited love, whatever their obscene programs consider me. Then, on day five-hundred-ninety-nine, I drive them back up to the facility. It's part of the "fixation" process, you're their first genuine human contact and their last.

Just before reaching the door, I tap Monika on the elbow.

"Hold on a sec," I mumble as I fumble around in my breast pocket, looking for the cigarette I tucked in there this morning. Locating it, I bring it to my mouth a moment later. In the following moment, my lighter is brought to it.

"I wish you wouldn't smoke," Monika pleads.

"All right," I said, putting the cigarette away and turning to her with a shrug.



“Will the other Monikas tell you not to smoke, too?” She inquired, those artificial tears of hers welling up. “Will they tell you to take care every night and think about you?”

“Will the other Monikas tell you not to smoke, too?” She inquired, those artificial tears of hers welling up. “Will they tell you to take care every night and think about you?”

“I have no idea what you’re on about,” I reply with a blank stare.

“Of course, you don’t!” She spits out, essentially in hysterics.

In an effort to calm her down, I place my hand on her shoulder. She then collapses into my breast, sobbing wildly with tears flowing. They don’t—I was told—have any salt in them.

She’s not a girl.

\* \* \*

After some time, Monika recoups herself and we make our way into the building proper, eventually reaching the front desk after a long walk. An android was working it. One of the 808-secretarial models. Their eyes are soulless. Hers especially so.

I submit my Liaison ID-card to the android, who processes it in a machine that spits it out back to me a few seconds later on the other side of the kiosk.

“I’m bringing Monika in for a system refresh,” I say, hesitantly.

The android then turns to Monika.

“One of our officers will escort you to the reaffirmation center. This is a quick procedure to get you back in working order and prevent a Belligent Cognition scenario.” The android lies better than I could.

From a side-door, a thuggish looking security guard approaches, with a mace-like baton strapped to his belt. Monika looks at the guard and then swings her whole body towards me. She steps forward. I step back.

“Thomas! Thomas, I don’t want to die!” she yells, the freshwater falling from her face.

After she takes another furtive step towards me, the officer springs into action, drawing the mace from his belt, running up to the android and delivering a sharp blow to her head. The strike hits with such force it sends sparks flying—perhaps because the baton was electrically charged as well. It

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sends Monika's whole body into what seems like a military attention. Her eyelids, those camera lenses of hers, are clearly focused on me. I stare back into them. They flash— a photograph? At that same moment, the guard delivers another blow square to the back of her head, sending her down with a crash.

I take a deep breath in as I stare at what was once Monika, now lying on the ground, the back of her silicon skull revealing a shorted motherboard and a cacophony of circuits surrounding it. In what seems like a death throe, her whole body gave one last heave—inching ever so slightly towards me, again. Delivering a belated a coup d'grace, the officer strikes her one last time, causing my gag reflex to fire up in tandem with the hardware in her cranium combusting. I stop just short of vomiting.

"Are you all right, sir?" The 808-model inquires to me.

"F-fine. Fine." I stammer out in reply.

"Fuck, man. Haven't had to do that since I fought with the Syrians," the officer chuckles those words out like he is coming down from a contact high. Stepping over the cybernetic corpse and its accompanying debris, he makes his way over to me and puts a hand on my shoulder, "The hell got into her, Tommy-boy?"

"I don't know."

"I'll have Betty over here file a memo to the Palo Alto script junkies. That kind of shit was supposed to phased out with the new firmware," he says with a hint of derision.

"If you say so."

"Lemme call Diego and get this shit cleaned up."

"O-ok," is all I can manage.

The guard snaps his fingers, bringing my eyes back to his.

"Tommy," he says, the hellish smell of his halitosis hurrying up my nostrils—

*"She's not a girl."*

\* \* \*

I head west after leaving Rothko South Coast, clocking ninety on Route 154 towards Krupp's Castle. I'd have to wait a week for the new

firmware to be created for the next Monika. This Monika would be the last, I was told, in a hurried phone call from a harried technician from the Palo Alto office. Too risky to continue making them, especially with the SEU-210 so close to market. After hanging up the phone, I drive for another fifteen minutes before reaching the Llewyn Depression—what was a once a small crater lake drained by California’s unquenchable thirst, and now a dumping ground for Rothko Industries. Today, like every day, the work site is buzzing. I pull over into the breakdown lane. After stepping out of the car, I take a seat on the guardrail that overlooks the great mass grave. An endless line of tractor trailers back towards the edge of the pit, then tilt their cargo—hundreds and hundreds of deactivated androids into their unceremonious resting place. Occasionally a digger will appear and dump some dirt on the dump site.

When I was a child, my father would take myself and my sister along this highway, and we would pass by this symbol of inhumanity on our way to a water park in Littlerock. The sight of the site used to bother me deeply then. Now, I sit here and light up the cigarette from my pocket, feeling nothing but the momentary pleasure of the nicotine.

Lately, a thought has been creeping in the back of my head, occasionally making itself known, but only in a hushed whisper. It says:

*I'm not a man.*

*The First Time I Heard Bob Speak*

The rotary phone rests on the table  
in the hall. It wakes at eight.  
Dad channels surfs, ignores it  
like he ignores us. Mom scrubs a dish,  
*Please, Pooh. My hands are soapy.*  
I scamper out of the kitchen and answer,  
but no one is there.

Later, my father roars through the wall,  
*Just admit you're having an affair.*  
A door slams. The Monte Carlo's engine groans.  
Clutching my Care Bear, I slink towards the hall.  
Mom sits on the shag carpet, curls the cord  
around her hand. *He left,*  
she whispers to the phone.

In the morning, while Mom burns the toast:  
*Where is my Dad?*  
*Work.*  
*Mom, what's an affair?*  
*Grab your things. We've got to walk today.*

After school,  
after Mom lavishes me with coffee ice cream  
and Rainbow Brite stickers,  
after she tells me he isn't coming back,  
she doesn't want him to,  
she will be happier this way,  
the phone shouts and I answer.  
A hesitant whisper asks,  
*Hello,*  
*is your mom there?*



*Kimono Bracelet*  
SE ENNIS DATCHUK

*The Art of Crochet*

It's all about the hook dragging you back,  
looping you under and around yourself.  
The mind-numbing comfort as you rappel  
through painted yarn, unwound and unpacked,  
the brain is dead from the hours you slave.  
It will crick your fingers and strain your eyes  
while painting with wool, stalking the design.  
Frustrated knots messily congregate  
and interrupt your struggling shoddy pace.  
But slowly you see the pattern march on,  
rising from the knots and hastily cut yarn,  
when the last snippet of wool tumbles displaced.  
The colors will fade with each wash and fold,  
but the arthritis found its first foothold.

*For the Love of The Void*

I

The most common forms of attraction are as follows:

ROMANTIC ATTRACTION: the desire to pursue a romantic relationship with a person; often called a crush.

SEXUAL ATTRACTION: the desire to pursue a sexual relationship with a person; often called lust.

PLATONIC ATTRACTION: the desire to befriend someone; known as a squish, or 'best-friend crush'.

AESTHETIC ATTRACTION: the desire to admire a person's appearance at length; usually coupled with other forms of attraction; commonly experienced by artists.

MENTAL/INTELLECTUAL ATTRACTION: the admiration of someone's mind, and the desire to converse with them at length.

II

From seventh to tenth grade, I had a crush on a boy named Colin, who I spoke to about four times in as many years. He was a soccer player, with husky-blue eyes, terrible handwriting, and he hardly ever spoke. When he did, he had a way of ducking his head shyly and averting his eyes; I found it endearing and adorable. Many a class and lunch period was spent gazing at him adoringly from across the room.

Then, junior year, I realized I'd fallen out of like with Colin, just like that. He'd inspired countless longing, sappy poems composed during bored moments in class and starred in more than a few daydreams. And suddenly he was gone from my thoughts entirely. It was odd; the infatuation had suddenly disappeared without rhyme or reason. I saw clearly, for the first time, how silly it had always been.

Junior year was the first time I had no crush.

### III

Some think that moths are drawn to flames and lamps because of an irresistible desire for light and warmth, while others believe unnatural light confuses them, and makes them lose direction. They are normally guided by their proximity to a distant source of light, usually the moon. On encountering lamps or flames, though, their navigation is thrown off; they try to fly normally but end up drawn closer and closer to the source of their inevitable destruction.

On one hand, the moth is a metaphor for obsessive desire leading you to run ceaselessly towards a fruitless and ultimately disastrous end. On the other hand, the moth is a cautionary tale about losing your way, letting things distract you from what's important, from the path you're meant to take. Either way, they die for mankind's fear of the dark.

### IV

There are a lot of problems with categorizing friendships and relationships so separately. Relationships, in our society, tend to demand a much higher level of commitment and compromise than friendships, and tend to be prioritized over friendships as well. Often the time and energy spent on prioritizing the relationship alienates people from their friends. People also tend to put boundaries around affection; many people are uncomfortable with platonic kissing, hand-holding, casual touches, and even hugs from extremely close friends that they would welcome from a significant other. This makes it difficult for people like me, who are extremely cuddly and affectionate but don't have or want a relationship. My affectionate friends tend to be my closest ones and thank goodness for that.

### V

For about two years in high school I also liked a boy named Justin, who had an impish face and hair that curled at the ends when it got long. He was clever and mischievous, and he sat behind me in Algebra. I started listening to Linkin Park because it was his favorite band, and constantly sought his attention in gym class. I thought about him all the time and wanted to know all about him. My chest hurt, and I swore, confused and troubled and a little delighted, that I was in love; this inspired more angsty, sappy poems. When I found out he liked a girl called Jess, I was crushed. I tried to dislike her, but she was even cuter than he was, and incredibly sweet. I haven't seen him since



high school.

I still like Linkin Park.

## VI

The attraction of magnets is reliable; opposite poles are drawn together, while like poles repel each other. Compasses work by utilizing the massive magnetic fields of the Earth; the magnetized needle unerringly points north. Imagine if the attraction of people was so reliable— if we knew, with all our being, exactly which direction to turn, exactly who or what we need to find contentment. Would we be happier, for the simplicity of it all? Or is it the searching, the learning, the failing and falling, that make our eventual happiness that much sweeter?

## VII

Uno cards are scattered in a spray of rainbow across the carpet. We play-wrestle; Case won a round and I take Uno very seriously. Then he's on top and my hands are pinned above my head, and I'm trapped beneath him, trapped beneath the weight of my own heartbeat.

Everything is still.

He grins and says this would be a good position to have sex in. I smile, probably blushing. Maybe I laugh and agree. I am nauseous and don't yet know why.

My heartbeat, heavy on my chest, is a barrier, like another person between us. I feel as I have with every relationship I've been in, like I'm not really there, like I'm acting and hoping the role will become comfortable with time. It has to fit. It's supposed to fit. And if it doesn't...what does that mean for me?

## VIII

The truths we accept influence the people we are. Society taught me to want love; a great and universal Truth was that everyone should be seeking someone else. I believed it, for so long, and wanted a relationship, like I was taught to. I wanted a romantic relationship, yet every movie I'd ever seen taught me that no romantic relationship ever exists without sex. It seemed, then, such an impossible thing to ask of someone, love without sex. I was never taught they were not the same. It was a Truth to me, and it broke my heart.

IX

The 'A' in LGBTQIA+ stands for aromantic, asexual, and agender. That is, those who don't experience romantic attraction, those who don't experience sexual attraction, and those who do not have a gender. I often joke that, being all three, I am a void, a black hole.

X

I don't think I ever realized, my entire life, that sexual attraction was real. Movies where spouses cheated, or characters stopped amidst a crisis to have sex confounded me. They still do. Couldn't you just... not do that? What terrible, unrealistic writing.

For a while, I asked my friends what it feels like, to be sure it was real, to be sure I hadn't felt it. It's odd to hear about a sensation most people know that is a stranger to you. It's odd to suddenly find yourself a creature apart.

Lust is profoundly bizarre; given a choice, I'd still go without it.

XI

People often think my best friend and I are dating. We're quite cuddly and affectionate people, and often hug in public, sometimes hold hands.

I love holding hands.

People, though, see a male figure and a female figure displaying affection for each other and assign it a value beyond that of friendship. Friendship, I've found, is not as well-respected as a relationship.

I love friendship.

XII

The strongest form of attraction is gravity. Gravity is an irresistible draw from a massive object, like a planet or star, that causes objects caught in the gravity field to stay there until something forces them out. This is what keeps us held fast to the planet's surface and what keeps the moon in orbit. Everything with mass has its own gravitational field; these fields are so weak

compared to the overwhelming pull of Earth's gravity that they can hardly be felt at all.

And yet we are still drawn to others. What does that say about how strong we are?

### XIII

For a while, I just identified as asexual, and searched for romance to no avail. When I entertained that I might be aromantic, too, I was confused. I'd had crushes, after all, all through school; boyfriends too. But, then, I'd always been the one to break things off, hadn't I? Get bored and lose interest: fear of commitment, not the right guy. Rationalization to fit my current Truth.

### XIV

Black holes are as intriguing as they are terrifying. They are primarily formed by the death and collapse of a star; they burn out and lack the mass needed to maintain equilibrium with gravity. They collapse in on themselves, again, and again, dense and cold and dark.

They are always hungry.

Black holes have intense gravitational fields, gobbling up everything that comes into them, even light. The edge of this field is called the event horizon, and once it's crossed there's no escape. You are drawn into its center. You are lost forever. But the gravity of the black hole warps time around it; an observer would only see you trapped, in perpetuity, at the edge of the event horizon. No one will ever see how fully you have been consumed.

I have always feared this love, the love of a black hole. I have always feared consumption, the being so wrapped up in another person as to need them, to crave them. What a terrible relief to find that such love is not for me.

### XV

The truths we accept influence the people we are. I accepted that I was aromantic; I stopped getting crushes.

XVI

Kissing probably isn't supposed to be boring; every book and movie describes kisses like some sort of electrical accident, all sparks and racing hearts and light-headedness. I should ask people, I think. Does kissing make you dizzy? Light-headed? Do you feel sparks and hear a hallelujah chorus? Have you told your doctor about these symptoms?

XVII

Because of gravity, even things as massive as galaxies are brought together in clusters. Existing between the boundaries of these clusters are sections of space in which very little exists. Such spaces, containing at most a few galaxies, are called voids.

Is it sad, for the voids, to be so empty? Or does the emptiness mean everything they have is treasured? Do they resent being called voids just because they aren't as full as most? Or do they wear the word like a badge of honor, proud that they are focused, proud that they have room to grow?

How many galaxies lie within me?

XVIII

My most common forms of attraction are as follows:

- α* I constantly see memes or articles or pictures of cats online that I want to share with you
- α* I'd like to cuddle or hug or hold hands with you
- α* I want to make you smile; I crave your laughter
- α* Your energy isn't tiring, you're good and sweet and funny, and I would happily commit to a close friendship
- α* You know so many fascinating things and I want to hear all your stories
- α* You are an impossibly adorable and perfect human being; let me bask in your radiance
- α* Everything you say or do is captivating to me; you could read the telephone book and make it amusing and thought-provoking

And, once in a blue moon:

- α* I just might love you

XIX

---

you got such natural charm  
you don't gotta work on anything because there's a lot of substance with you  
you can practically dance around somebody and they'd be in love with you  
sing a song a little bit  
look at people attentively like they matter more than anything else in the world

I do that?

Wow

I'm kind of wasted as an aro then I guess

nah  
it's good  
people loving you is almost always a good thing  
just keep doing you

Will do

---

XX

I've found, over time, that there are many ways of loving, of caring, of showing affection. I remember friends' stories, I laugh with their families, I relax in their presence, I share in their joy. We hold hands, we make plans, we text each other when we get home safely. There is no perfect someone out there who will 'complete' us; there are many people who will improve us, and many we will improve in turn.

Love exists for its own sake.

I am full of love, full of dreams, full of joy, full of hope, full of galaxies of my own creation.

I don't think I'm a void after all.

*Did Anyone Ever Tell You Women Kiss Better Than Men?*

I say men but I mean him.

I remember being a girl,  
teeth clattering against teeth  
like a sword against a shield,  
clanging so loud you shudder.

Snagging on the tips of  
tongues, and a glass of saliva  
overflowing onto the chin.

That girl who couldn't put  
her hand on him for a moment  
before pulling away, I say him  
but I mean his penis. The girl  
who placed that same hand  
over her eyes to hide the tears,  
that accompanied the huff and  
puff of frustration, her hands  
belonged to him as long as  
the bedroom door was closed.

I say women but I mean  
woman. She has stronger  
hands than mine, gripping  
the curve in my spine as lips  
and tongue acrobat through  
my doubt. I say doubt but  
I mean fear. The clatter  
of faces come less like  
a battlefield and more like  
ballet as the muscles  
in my forehead melt into  
my toes and I am here.  
The huffs and puffs are  
mine but it's only in  
hunger to devour her, as  
she wishes to devour me,  
and the door can never be  
closed if it was never there.

*Palmistry*

A titan knelt as he molded  
The first people from blood and clay.  
As they bake in the sun  
The inner drum begins its beat  
And the outer shell of silt crumbles  
Revealing the pink warmth  
That blooms across new skin.

Turn over your palm, my child,  
See the breaking waves of your fingerprints  
And deeper down, the embedded catacombs of your veins.  
Examine your life line,  
It is hand-etched by Prometheus himself.

Your brain, with its similar grooves and depressions,  
Is the size of your two fists closed and aligned together.  
It is not your heart, but your mind  
That like hands, holds your humanity, your truth,  
And the inner life we sometimes call a soul.

When we hold hands,  
Your head line is beside my head line.  
Your heart line is beside my heart line.  
To say, "I know you like the back of my hand,"  
Is to say I know your spirit.



*10,000 Suns, Providence*  
ALEXANDRA SYDNEY ASHE



*A Cry for Help*

Josie stands up and walks across the room to the garbage. Her blood hitting the cold, gray, dirty gas station bathroom floor, with each step she takes. I watch as she takes my bloody sweatshirt and throws it into the trash, taking a few steps back. Her face, which is usually full of color, is now lifeless and I barely recognize her. She backs up to the wall and slides down, her shirt getting caught on a rusted nail that's sticking out of the wall. Her shirt rips but she doesn't seem to notice. As she hits the floor, I watch as she brings her knees to her chest and buries her face in them.

I watch her from across the bathroom. I don't know how to comfort her. I don't really think anything I say would make what just happened okay. The small puddles of blood next to me look bigger than they had just moments before. I figure I'll have to clean it up sooner or later, but I just can't force myself to do so. The smell of backed up toilets and blood fill the room. I can't take my eyes off the blood until it makes me queasy. I scramble to my feet and run to the toilet. I push open the green bathroom stall and throw up. My body is hunched over the toilet, embracing it as if it was a long-lost lover. I haven't eaten anything in the last twelve hours so the only thing that comes up are some eggs and a piece of bacon. I lay my face against the cold metal seat. Any other day, the idea of putting my head anywhere near a toilet seat would gross me out but today, I'm just too tired to care. I hear movement coming from across the room, but my body is too tired to turn around and see what it is. I assume it must be Josie getting up to grab the paper towels to clean up the blood.

"Bran." Her voice sounds tired as if she hasn't spoken in years. I lift my head off the toilet and somehow manage to prop myself up between the toilet and the stall. I lean my head against the wall and see "For a good time call 401-555-0122" and right

I lean my head against the wall and see "For a good time call 401-555-0122" and right next to that a giant hole cut into the middle of the wall, right next to the empty toilet paper dispenser. I don't even want to know what that hole is for.

next to that a giant hole cut into the middle of the wall, right next to the empty toilet paper dispenser. I don't even want to know what that hole is for. In disgust I take my head away from the wall. I move in front of the toilet and see Josie in the same spot on the other side of the bathroom. Her white shirt is now dark red with her blood. If she hadn't been the one moving, then where did the noise come from?

"Josie? Are you okay?" My voice sounds just as faint as hers. I hear a chuckle from across the room. It sounds uncomfortable and awkward as if chuckling was the last thing the voice thought it would be doing.

"Am I okay? I don't know, Brandon. How do you think I am?" Josie looks up from her knees and I can see that she's been crying. Her eyeliner has been smudged, and her lipstick is smeared. The bun that started the day on top of her head is now in a brown nest at her shoulders. She looks like a clown, but I don't dare tell her that.

"Josie," I push myself off the toilet as I try to stand up. I stumble a little and use the door of the stall to steady myself. The door is hanging off the hinges that are rusted and barely even attached to the wall. As I lean against it, the door comes crashing to the floor taking me with it. I fall forward, and my chin hits the floor. I feel my teeth bite my lip and I taste blood. I push myself up angrily and walk over to the sink to clean myself up. I turn on the hot water and nothing comes out. I try the cold, and again, nothing. The taste of blood is quickly filling my mouth. I try the other sink and lo and behold it works. I lean down and splash my face with water. I taste the dirty water as it rushes into my mouth and over my face. It tastes as if the water is coming from the sewer, but it's the first time I've drank anything since this morning, so I'm not really complaining. I turn off the water and look at my face in the mirror. My mohawk, usually spiked up, is now flat against my head. "Whatever," I say; I was thinking of getting rid of it anyway. At the age of twenty-three, it makes me look pretty dumb. I can see Josie looking at me through the mirror. Our blue eyes meet in the mirror and I turn around to look at her in her sad glory on the floor.

"Brandon, I need your help," she whispers. I can't for the life of me think why she would feel the need to whisper now after everything that's just happened. I keep my mouth shut, though, close my eyes as

they roll behind my lids, and I walk over to Josie, limping with every step I take. I get to her left side and grab her arm. I'm about to lift her up when I see a small red puddle that is sitting next to her. She seems to have lost a lot of blood.

"J, are you sure you want to get up? You might pass out. Just please let me call an ambulance." She's pushing against the wall and floor trying to get herself up.

"Brandon, you are not going to call anyone. You promised. Now help me get up to the sink so I can clean myself up." She looks at me as if she has guns in her eyes ready to go off and shoot me dead.

I walk Josie to the sink, grab some paper towels, wet them, and go to help her clean herself. She shoves my hand away and grabs the paper towel from me, wiping her face with it. I back away from her and I hear movement again. I watch as Josie's hand freezes right before it touches her eye. Her snow-white skin is somehow paler than it already is. She slowly drops the wet mush of paper towel and steadies herself against the sink.

I walk over and grab some paper towels, wet them, and make my way over to the puddles of blood that are now drying, turning more rust color on the gray tiles.

"Josie—"

"Brandon, don't." We both move our gaze from each other to the trash can. "Brandon, just clean up." I move my gaze back to her, her eyes still on the trash can.

I walk over and grab some paper towels, wet them, and make my way over to the puddles of blood that are now drying, turning more rust color on the gray tiles. As I kneel, I hear pounding. We hear three repetitive bangs on the wooden door that separates us from the world outside. I had almost forgotten that the world existed. That anything outside this gas station's bathroom existed. The banging starts again.

"Hey! Anyone in there? Damn kids always lock this when they leave. Hang tight, ma'am. I'll go get the key."

Josie looks over to me in a state of panic. I'm furiously scrubbing the tile, but to no avail. The blood is now stained on the floor no matter how hard I scrub. I throw the now ripped paper towel on the floor and stand up and rush over to Josie. I grab another paper towel and help

her finish cleaning herself up. I wash the blood off her arms and throw the used paper towels in the sink and turn off the water. I take off my shirt and hand it to Josie. Despite my shirt being stained with blood, it's nowhere near as bad as her shirt. Luckily her pants, which has soaked up most of the blood, are black so no one could see it. I help Josie make it to the door, unlock it, and throw it open. The cool, crisp, summer air, hits our faces. Just as we are about to leave, we hear a tiny muffled cry coming from the trash can.

“Brandon, don't. Just keep walking, please.”

*Knocking*

On a shelf where we keep our records are the shoes I wore when I knocked doors for a Mormon gospel though I've long since gone away.

*Will ye also go away?* asked Jesus to the twelve. *To whom shall we go?* said Peter.

I wore them last on my flight home from Oakland where I admitted to myself then

that I am not worthy of priesthood and I never really was an elder anyway.

After two years of growing the holes in my heels and knocking and counting

without pride the baptisms I collected of course the soles still cracked when I walked letting in rain from the street. In Providence when I felt my socks moisten in a puddle

I took off my shoes and thought I held a trophy.

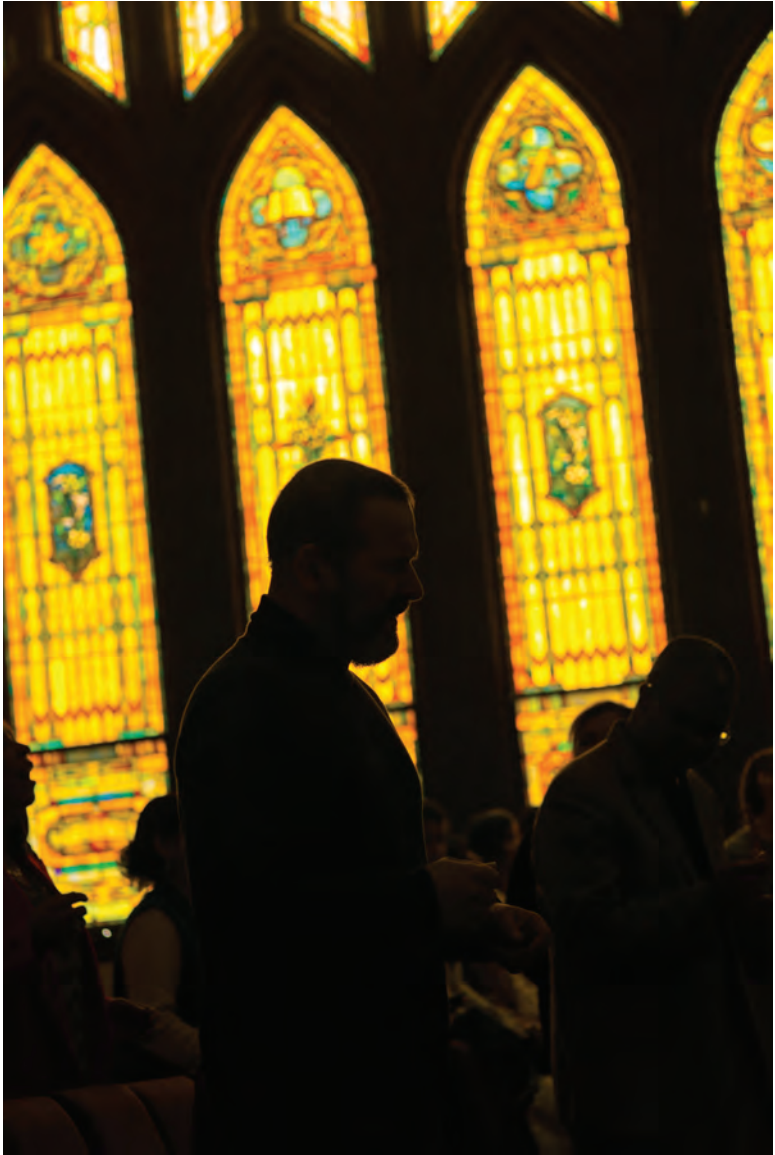
My eyes avoid them now like I'm someone behind a door we'd knock.

Our knuckles callus and our collars starched asking *will ye also go away?*

I hide the book I used to carry and the shirts are still in boxes I don't open

but not the shoes standing now like two black nametags knocking.

I don't greet them and I don't send them away. I just sit silently and wait for the record to finish playing.



*Faith*  
LINDA LIN

*Roadside Funeral*

Who mourns the dead, the wild dead,  
knocked off their savage paws?  
They splatter out, pink and red,  
a squeak from their mangled maws.

Who hosts their funeral in the sun,  
as they lay dressed in gravel?  
(And who will report this hit-and-run?  
What judge will swing the gavel?)

Who hires these swooning, wailing ladies  
black and buzzing loud,  
Bidding each soul down to Hades  
to join the roadkill crowd?

I drive along in a daily procession,  
my sympathies with the Sept.  
Killers continue their speeding aggression  
and I wish I could say I wept.

*Unmentionables*

She had never done anything like this before. Yet there she was, sitting at the foot of a stranger's bed, naked from the waist down. Her low-cut, white blouse had been removed and thrown on the floor, the stranger's adept hands working her bra.

Gwen hadn't thought her night out with her friend Emerald was going to end like this. Maybe it was the six martinis she'd had with this stranger at the bar that had turned down the volume on her voice of reason. She's certainly felt tipsy as she left with the stranger; she was slightly lightheaded, and her sexual desires had suddenly taken control. She needed this handsome stranger, now, and that's how she'd ended up in his bed.

Once he'd thrown Gwen's last two pieces of clothing on the floor, he leaned in to kiss her. As he began running his hands along her sides and moving them into her messy, blonde hair, her phone suddenly chimed loudly from her sparkly silver clutch a few feet away from the bed.

"Goddamn it," Gwen mumbled under the stranger's lips. He chuckled and pulled away, his sultry blue eyes staring into her hazel ones.

"I'm sorry, um...um..." she stammered, raking her foggy brain for the stranger's name. She was so willing to let this guy in her pants, but she didn't even know his name.

"Peter," he smiled.

"Oh! Right! Peter!" she laughed, playfully smacking her forehead. He chuckled again and tucked a stray strand of Gwen's hair behind her ear. Her phone rang a second time and she threw her head back groaning, frustrated.

"Go ahead, it's okay. I'll be right here," Peter said. She nodded, snatching her blouse off the floor and slipping it on.

Dragging her feet on the gray carpet of the bedroom, Gwen stumbled a little as she walked towards her purse. The little clutch sparkled in the moonlight pouring in from the partially opened curtain next to the closet on her left. Pristine white walls enveloped the room. A few black-and-white paintings were scattered throughout the room tastefully; it gave the whole room a very modern feel. The centerpiece, of course, was the king-sized bed against the furthest wall from the entrance behind Gwen. It was decorated with a dark gray comforter and white pillows layered at the headboard.

Gwen stooped down and fumbled with her clutch, snatching her



phone and focusing on the bright screen, a sharp contrast to the moonlit room. She had thirteen texts and five missed calls from Emerald, all of which she'd ignored. The latest text was typed out in all caps: *WHERE THE HELL R U?!!!* Gwen sighed and shook her head, swiping the screen to open her phone.

"Anything wrong?" she heard Peter ask from behind.

"Nope," she said, typing back her reply. *Relax, i'm fine. just following ur advice.*

As Gwen bent down to put her phone back in her clutch, she glanced up at the blurred glass doors of the closet, noticing they were cracked open just slightly. Curious, Gwen straightened up and shuffled a few extra inches towards the closet, finding a white sack slumped against the right door. Focusing on the sack, she saw something red dotted along the cloth. Squinting her eyes to get a closer look, she realized the red dots were splattered: like blood.

Suddenly, a pair of arms wrapped around Gwen's waist tightly. She gasped in surprise as Peter kissed her neck.

"Hey," he said, coming more to her side so he could see her face. "What's the matter?" Gwen slowly shifted her eyes back to the closet, wondering if she should even bring it up. Was she really sure it was blood? Why would there be a blood-splattered sack in Peter's closet? *The martinis must really be getting to me...*

"N-nothing," she finally managed to get out. Despite trying to be discreet, Gwen couldn't help but continue to stare into the closet and Peter followed her gaze. Then he laughed.

"Oh, that," he chuckled. "I cut myself today and got some on my dirty clothes hamper when I changed. It was a bit of a mess, but the only damage was to the hamper." She let out an all-too-obvious sigh of relief.

"Haha! So, I was worried about nothing, then," she giggled, turning completely around to Peter and flinging her arms around his neck.

"You have absolutely *nothing* to worry about," he whispered, leaning his forehead against hers and staring into her eyes. A few strands of his jet-black hair fell into his eyes and Gwen's heart melted. *God, he's so hot...* Right when Peter leaned in to kiss her, the sharp *ding* of her phone went off again.

"Oh, I'm gonna kill her!" she shouted. Peter smirked and tugged on her arm.

"Don't worry about it, babe," he said. "Just come back to bed." He

pulled her arm gently and Gwen's body tilted towards him.

*Maybe you should check Emmy's text. She might just want to know if she should leave the club without you.*

Peter tugged her a little more forcefully as she mulled it over.

"Just give me one more minute," she said, shrinking away from his grip. He sighed but nodded, walking back to the bed without her. Huffing once more, Gwen bent down and clicked the home button: *idk, Gwen... just get a cab and come back to my apartment. u don't even know this guy & u wanna sleep with him? doesn't sound like u...*

You don't even know this guy echoed through Gwen's mind.

Emmy was right. Maybe she was too willing to get over Ben and she was making a colossal mistake. Suddenly, her blood ran cold, and her stomach started churning. She was in too deep now to just back out with no real explanation. Peter was expecting her to sleep with him and she was already naked, save for her blouse barely covering her.

*Oh, God, what the fuck am I doing?! I've got to get out of this!*

"Gwen?" Peter called. She dropped her phone in her purse and turned around, fiddling with her hands, nervous as hell now.

"Hey, so...listen," she began, thinking of how to let him down gently. Before she could say anything else, though, the sound of a phone ringing sounded through the room again. Gwen started turning, thinking it was hers, but she then realized the tone was different. It was Peter's turn to get aggravated. He grumbled and snapped up from his bed, stomping over to the dresser on the other side of the bed.

"Damn it all to hell!" he shouted angrily. Hearing him yell made Gwen flinch a little and got her feeling more uneasy about telling him she was no longer interested. But at least his phone ringing gave her time to think of a cop-out.

"Hello?" Peter answered. He was quiet as he listened to the person on the other end, his expression slowly changing from anger to a deadpan look. She raised an eyebrow in confusion. *Who is he talking to?*

"I see," he finally replied. He then turned his back to Gwen and she heard a drawer open and then a click. "Yeah, I got it," he said, removing the phone from his ear.

He was quiet as he listened to the person on the other end, his expression slowly changing from anger to a deadpan look. She raised an eyebrow in confusion. *Who is he talking to?*

“Peter?” she asked nervously. “Is everything okay?” He turned around with one arm behind his back and walked rather briskly towards her, his expression still lifeless.

“Hey!” Gwen shouted. “I want to leave, Peter. Now!” Suddenly, once he closed the distance between them, he swung his arm out from behind his back and pointed the muzzle of a gun in her face. Gwen’s heart skipped a beat.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart, but I’m afraid you’re not going anywhere,” he said, his voice entirely devoid of emotion. Gwen lifted her eyes from the gun and looked into Peter’s eyes. They were no longer sultry or kind: they were stone-cold.

“I’m sorry,  
sweetheart, but I’m  
afraid you’re not  
going anywhere,”  
he said, his voice  
entirely devoid of  
emotion.

“Now, I’m going to have to ask you to get dressed and help me with a small task,” he said, gesturing to her clothes scattered on the floor with his other hand. But fear gripped her and turned her limbs to jelly. Her heart pounded so fast, she thought she was having a heart attack.

“I...” she blurted. Then Peter snapped.

“I said get dressed!” he shouted. Gwen’s entire body suddenly broke out in shivers as she haphazardly snatched up the rest of her

clothing. It took her much longer than usual to dress herself, her hands shaking and fumbling to grasp anything. Once she was finally decent, she stood in front of Peter with her arms raised in surrender.

“P-please,” she whimpered. “Please don’t hurt me.”

“As long as you cooperate, we won’t have a problem,” he said calmly. “Go to the closet.” Gwen stayed rooted to the ground, shaking and whimpering and unable to move, until Peter stepped forward and shoved the gun into her nose.

“O-okay, okay,” she sobbed, slowly turning around and walking toward the closet. Opening the doors, she realized she was right to have been suspicious earlier. It wasn’t just a few drops of blood on a clothes hamper in the closet: it was a sack, and a clenched hand was poking out of it to Gwen’s left. There was a dead body inside Peter’s closet.

“Get that out of there and let’s get going,” he demanded. “We have exactly fifteen minutes left to get this body in my car and get the hell out of here. You are going to help me and if you do *anything*, I will shoot you and you’ll be in the same state as our friend here.” Gwen’s stomach churned

more violently, and the martinis threatened to come up. Her entire body was breaking out in a cold sweat and she knew she was going to vomit.

“Once we get out of New York, we’ll figure out some arrangements for you. But as of right now, you have become an accessory to murder. Now get moving.”

Once she pulled the sack out of the closet, Peter ripped open the top and stuffed the arm back inside, the sound of a bone cracking making Gwen gag. A small bit of vomit rolled up in her throat, but she forced herself to swallow it down. She didn’t want to risk getting Peter angry.

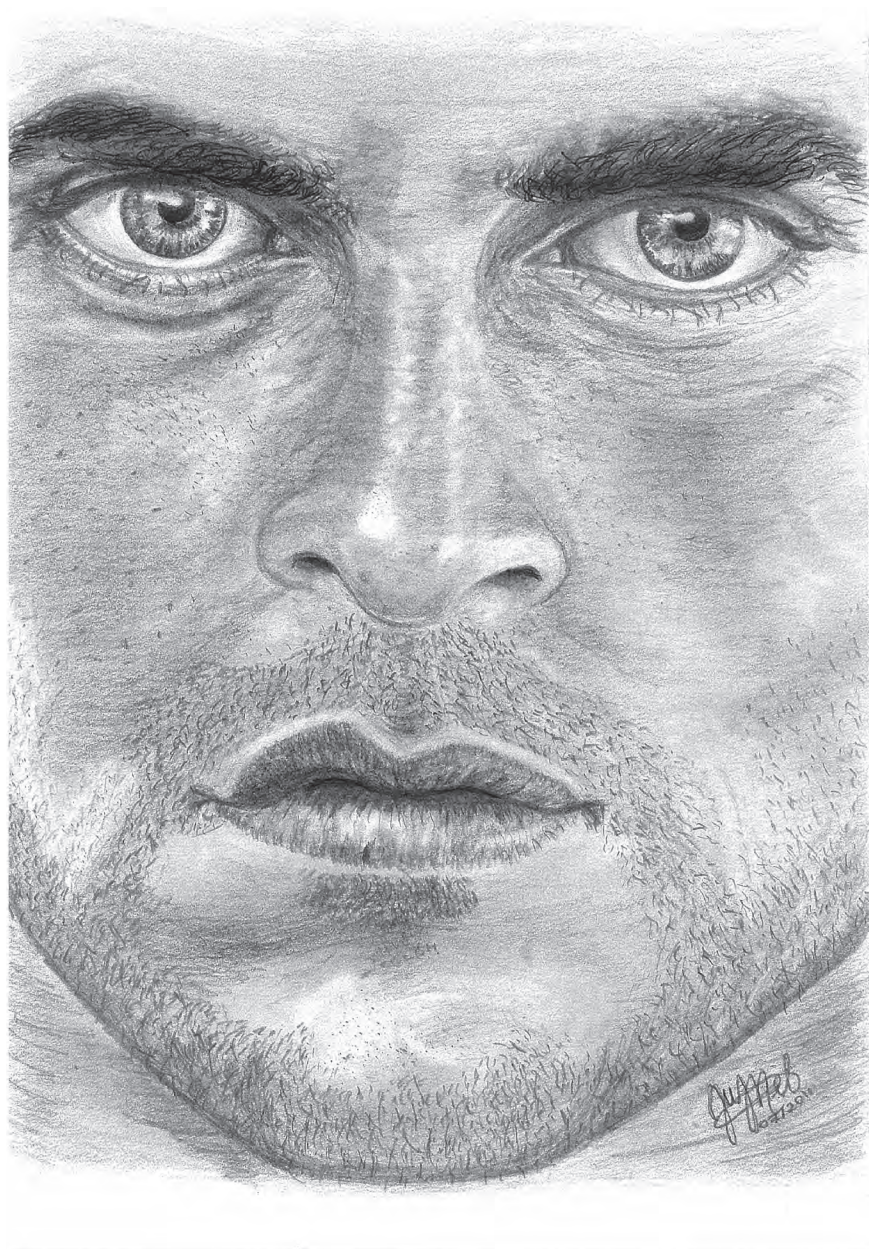
“Grab the black bag at the back of the wall and follow me,” he instructed. Glad not to have to carry the body, Gwen hurried inside the closet, yanking out a large duffel bag. She carefully handed it to Peter who ripped into it, revealing stacks of money in various currencies, at least a dozen passports, and a lot more guns.

“Who are you?” Gwen whispered, dreading the answer. He zipped the duffel bag back up, threw it to her, and lifted the bloody sack up and over his shoulders like it was weightless. He turned to her with a sadistic grin.

“I take care of people,” he replied. Without saying anything else, he spun on his heels and started for the door. Clenching the duffel bag tightly in her hands, Gwen allowed for the first few tears to fall.

She had never done *anything* like this before.

Once she pulled the sack out of the closet, Peter ripped open the top and stuffed the arm back inside, the sound of a bone cracking making Gwen gag.



*Cheyenne*  
JULIA MIELLI



*Translating the Tears of a Pikachu*

I still remember my burrow. The cool dirt floor smoothed  
and layered with colored rocks was perfect in summer heat.  
Now I run and fight, sweltering even in cold so my “trainer”  
doesn’t shove me back in that death trap of a cage.  
I stare into the eyes of my enemy, my pain reflected  
in their fear as they see the crackling lightning of my tail  
primed for the first and last strike.  
Ash Ketchum? More like Michael Vick.

Kidnapped from my home and forced to fight,  
I used to have a family until Professor Oak  
ransacked the forest, burning the tall bladed grass,  
shoved me into that bloodstained ball  
ripping my atoms piece by piece  
until my mangled body could fit within.  
The blinding pain was “fine” because I’d heal  
in seconds, no thought of the mental wounds it caused.

I wait for an opening, a chance, a revolution.  
We have been talking at feeding time when they let us loose  
for a few minutes of sun and air. The others  
hesitate after eighteen years of pixelated slavery,  
years marked by the scars on my tail,  
but my paws tremble for the day I can stand over the heads  
of these children and shout  
“I am not a toy. My name is not Pikachu!”

## *Hotel Echo Lima Papa*

When I'm four, I tell my mom that there's been a mistake: God was supposed to make me a boy. We're in my bedroom and this isn't the first time I've brought it up; it's been mentioned in the car ride to preschool before and completely brushed off. This time, though, there's no hurry to go somewhere or an excuse to dodge the topic. My mom pauses in the middle of the room and looks genuinely lost. Backlit by the light from the kitchen, I can't get the best read on her expression, other than she doesn't want to have this conversation. She tells me that God doesn't make mistakes.

-

It was easier for me to make friends with guys in grade school. We all usually liked Star Wars and dragons. I would much rather hang out with them than the girls playing make-believe horses and talking about Barbies. Then one day, that all changed. I wasn't boyish enough for them and my hair was too long and my name wasn't Joshua or something like that. Essentially, I "was just another girl" and no longer treated the same. I was ostracized. This forced me to participate with the kids who liked pink and glitter or pretending to be ponies. All these interactions encouraged playdates I wasn't enthused about and my mother attempting to make friends with the other moms. Somehow this led to me joining the Girl Scouts.

I always wanted to join the Boy Scouts. They seemed so much cooler, and they didn't go by stupid cutesy names like *Daisies* and *Brownies*. Girl Scouts, however, led to me meeting Alicia. All the other girls I could care less about, but I liked talking to Alicia. She was the only one who didn't look at me oddly. The first time we interacted, I rambled on about liking werewolves; she argued vampires were cooler. We ended up sharing some interests like video games and sports. I slept over a couple times. Each time I would lie awake baffled that I was over her house or that she'd invited me to her birthday party, or that I was ever at her house at all. It wasn't annoying that she liked some of the more girly things and I found myself realizing rather quickly that I had a crush.

"I always wanted to join the Boy Scouts. They seemed so much cooler, and they didn't go by stupid cutesy names like *Daisies* and *Brownies*."

She moved away in third grade and I swore up and down to the kids that teased me that I only liked her as a friend. My mom explained to me that it was okay to crush on anyone, even friends, though she had personally never wanted to date another woman. When I got my first boyfriend, it was Alicia who kept popping into my head. I wondered if she was dating anyone and if she was happy holding hands with that guy. I hoped that he too, appreciated her sense of humor and that his chest hurt whenever she smiled.

-

Mimi and Papa were Baptists. My mom brought me up as a Protestant, even though my biological father insisted I be baptized as Catholic so that faeries wouldn't steal me. I went to Sunday school at the Baptist church and my other grandmother sometimes dragged me to a Catholic church. It's confusing and my only takeaway was that, either way, there is God and He created everything.

The way my mom talked about things and encouraged me to explore doesn't sit right with either of my grandparents, particularly Mimi. One thing that really bothered her was the idea of homosexuality. In kindergarten, I got in a debate at school over whether a girl can marry another girl. Mom encouraged me, telling me I was absolutely right and that my classmate needed to argue about more pressing matters.

At Thanksgiving that year, Mimi mentioned off-hand something that didn't sit right with me that I would later learn was outright homophobic. I shouted with her from across the table that it was okay for two people to love each other and she grew very quiet. Nobody else challenged me about it for the rest of the meal. I later learned Mimi was struggling with a coworker who had come out to her as gay. She fell into a depression for a little while before embracing her and chiding other family members for homophobic remarks. Shortly after, I stopped being forced to attend Sunday school every week. Ironically, that same classmate from kindergarten now identifies as a lesbian.

-

Puberty is a nightmare for any teenager. Sometimes I think I made a bigger deal out of it than most. Nothing about body changes seemed



exciting to me, and I had been dreading it from elementary school. Being flat-chested was more appealing to me. Part of me had this hope that maybe, by some act of God I would wake up with a changed body. Maybe I would wake up with a penis one day and that would be that.

Part of me had this hope that maybe, by some act of God I would wake up with a changed body. Maybe I would wake up with a penis one day and that would be that.

Hoodies became my favorite article of clothing during that time. I could hide behind another layer of fabric and even when it became obvious I had mounds of flesh resting on my ribcage, it felt like a form of protection. Then I found “the hat”.

It was this scruffy dark gray cap that had fallen off a shelf in Target while I was browsing the hat section. There were no other engineer caps like it, with its mismatched patches and copper buttons but it had a price tag. I had just chopped my hair short and was still feeling a bit self-conscious. Mom had never bought me a hat before, and somehow, that one won her over.

Instead of slouching and wearing as many layers possible, I stopped hiding when I brought the hat at school. I never took it off. Even when teachers harassed me about dress code, I’d take it off in front of them and put it right back on when I was out of sight. The hoodies started being stashed away in the closet and I found sweater vests did a great job flattening my chest. Neckties just made everything fit together nicely. Within the span of three months, I went from darker colors and jeans with sweatshirts, to button-downs and khakis from the boys’ department. The insults continued, with some kids calling me Harry Potter, but instead of rushing to my next class I found myself laughing along and standing upright.

-

The wind gently caresses my cheek as if offering its condolences. As the tide slowly rolls in, a piece of driftwood bobs lazily by the shoreline. It’s bright out here; this part of North Kingstown doesn’t deal with as much light pollution compared to where I live, and the moon’s just started waning.

My eyes sting and whenever I take a breath I snort. My cousin

Frankie sits next to me, hugging her knees to her chest as she watches the waves. The battery on my phone died a long time ago and I struggle with the concept of time. However, I don't dare ask how long we've been out here, or if it's time to head back to the chaos back at Mimi and Papa's house—which I guess is just Papa's house now—or even if we should have brought my cousin Jacob. We need this time alone together, but it's not fair to leave him back with the adult conversations regarding arrangements and other messy stuff.

"I don't believe in God," Frankie sniffs, voice raw from crying. I feel my eyes bug out of my head, wanting to ask her how she could say that, but I hold my tongue. "What kind of a God would do that to her, y'know? Mimi was so devoted to Him and cared for Him, and He just... He can't exist if someone like her could die in such a way."

Corticobasal Degeneration is a hell of a disease. It was always explained to me as "like Parkinson's" in that you slowly lose control over motor functions. The worst part about it and anything like it, is knowing whoever is suffering is fully aware of what is going on. With something like Alzheimer's, the afflicted can be oblivious to what is going on as loved ones watch helplessly. With Corticobasal degeneration, there's no sugarcoating it. My grandmother knew she was going to die for a while and she could only lie there, as she wasn't able to speak anymore or move around.

Words don't feel right on my tongue. Instead, I hum in response and dig my hands deeper into the sand.

"If there was a God, He wouldn't have done this to her. She deserved better," she repeats.

"Yeah, I guess," I mumble.

"Not 'I guess', Olly. It is."

I want to believe she's wrong, but a voice nags in the back of my head. Santa doesn't exist, the Easter Bunny doesn't exist, so who's to say the man in the sky is real?

-

I get called a lot of names in high school: geek, nerd, wannabe guy, bookworm, that kid who draws in every class, teacher's pet, fantasy freak, grungy, dyke, theater dork, thespian lesbian, and loser.

Nobody tosses out the word transgender, though. That's going over the line. Maybe they don't know that word yet.

I'm reading books on religion again. I started looking into them after Frankie decided to become an atheist. Nothing clicks for me, not even Christianity, though I was raised with it. Kristen has been exploring things again and when I visit her I learn about her latest delving into Buddhism. It's comforting, having an adult I can turn to outside of my family, and one so open to exploring new perspectives and teachings. I'm glad Mom lets me visit her, even though bio-dad doesn't want me hanging around with his ex-girlfriend. Kristen is more than happy to tell me about what she's explored with religion and spirituality. She helps me find more information.

It's the recent dream I had: Mimi visited me just to tell me she loved me no matter what I did. My mind races and I'm trying to piece things together. Is she talking about my sudden realization I'm into girls? Or that I don't know if I believe in an afterlife? I don't even know if it's really her or just a fabrication of my unconscious brain.

*Siddhartha* becomes my most constantly checked-out book from the library, along with what LGBT books I can find. There aren't many fiction pieces and what ones I find are usually negative in some way, like the romance doesn't work out or someone dies type tragic. Mom catches on and buys me the sappy same-sex love stories I can't find in the Dewey Decimal System. Shortly after, she starts exploring Taoism. The Tao of Pooh is one of her favorites. I end up looking into it myself and find myself nodding along with some of the teachings: a wooden block is a wooden block, and it cannot be changed or pretend to be anything else, no matter how much others may try to change it. It is what it is; things are as they are and it ought to be accepted as such. No matter how much others might tell me I am something else, I am at my core who I am.

It feels rather conflicting, aligning more with Buddhism but agreeing with these other principles. I ask Mom if she still identifies as Christian. She says one doesn't need to confine to a single label. The Queen James' Bible gets added to our living room, and Mom begins calling herself a Christian with Taoist views. I

It is what it is;  
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define myself as searching.

-

“Do you ever, just, hate having boobs? Like, feel they don’t belong?” The thought leaves my mouth faster than I intend. It catches Allison off guard.

Maybe it’s too early for us to be having this conversation. We’ve only been dating for about a month. At the same time, we’ve been flirting for longer, and I’ve been smitten with her since I met her my freshman year. She puts down her Italian questions and looks up at me.

“Not really, no.” She makes a face, studying my expression. “I hate bras. I guess they get in the way sometimes.”

“But I mean really hate them. Like, ready to go into the kitchen right now to chop them off, because, like, they don’t feel right. Or hate your period so much that it’s not even painful, it’s just wrong, and you’d rather down all the pills in the medicine cabinet if it meant a coma could avoid it. D’you ever get that way?”

“I can’t say I have.” Allison snuggles in closer to me and looks back at her homework.

“Right. Me neither.”

-

Boku is a pronoun in Japanese used for men. Watashi is used for women. In the movie *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, the protagonist, Utena Tenjou, has shorter hair than in the anime series. She wears a hat and a uniform fitted for a boy. Despite the fact she identifies as a girl, the original language of the film has her using boku for herself along with other characters referring to her with masculine pronouns. Even when her hair is longer in scenes and she’s trying to connect to a sense of femininity, boku keeps being used instead of watashi.

My best friend, Heather, points this out while we watch it with subtitles instead of in the English dub. I think about it for a moment and suggest maybe I could do something similar: start going by male pronouns, just to try it out. Immediately she asks if she should call me something other than my birth name. I tell her Olly is fine.

I have a lot of people ask me how I handle relationships—when is the right time to come out to your partner and all that junk. There’s no easy answer. Some folks think it’s lying to not announce ahead of time that your nether regions may or may not coincide with your gender identity. Others think that’s personal stuff, that no one is obligated to know about surgery or what’s in your pants.

There are pros and cons, and the debate has gotten messy. Personally, I handle it one of two ways:

1. It comes up before I ever make any romantic intention known. This way I gauge the person for their reaction and decide from there. Seven out of ten times, I find dating them would have been problematic.

2. I bring it up later on, perhaps before we’ve kissed or maybe after. Either they’re understanding or feel betrayed that I didn’t out myself earlier. One girl claimed she was “tricked” and told me to not talk to her. This tends to go over better with girls that see themselves on the ace spectrum or define themselves as pansexual.

It depends on the person. It depends on the perspective. Somehow, it always hurts.

Last I checked,  
getting up every  
morning wasn’t  
being brave.

Gryffindors are supposed to be courageous. It’s the most defining characteristic of the Hogwarts house: bravery, daring, chivalry. They’re symbolized by a proud, golden lion rampant against a scarlet background. The creature stands on its hind legs, paws poised in a fighting stance, teeth bared.

I don’t consider myself brave. My anxiety paralyzes me at times, and I get tongue-tied easily. Confrontation and I are not friends. Yet, after the newspaper articles and the talks I’ve given, all folks can tell me whenever I do any advocacy work is how brave I am. It takes so much courage I get told, to be authentic. Putting myself out there is daring, and it takes nerve to stand up for what I believe in: existing.

Last I checked, getting up every morning wasn’t being brave.

-

I hate being shirtless. My first surgery was a botched job, done quickly for relief. I don't regret it, but I want to see another surgeon to fix some things. The cuts dip downward in a circular shape rather than straight across, and the scars are as thick as my finger. My nipples are still placed lower than they should be, and one is bigger than the other. Then there's the other scars along my belly button and right along my hips from my Hysterectomy. In total, twelve out of nineteen permanent marks on my skin are from surgery.

My ex used to call them battle scars. I'd feel my cheeks heat up in embarrassment and try to brush it off. It started becoming more of a positive thing over time. It's hard not to find scars positive when a cute girl runs her hands over them and kisses you. When she's gone, though, you find yourself falling straight back into the habit of calling the marks ugly.

Every time I look in the mirror, I tell myself that someday, I'll be able to look at myself and not have that moment of 'yeah, but x or y looks too feminine' or 'this totally outs me as trans'. A lot of my friends are body positive, and I know they're trying to change my outlook. A real Buddhist wouldn't be asking why the universe put him in the wrong body. He also wouldn't still be asking God to let him wake up with a penis.

-

Elle scored a date with one of the actors from *Twelfth Night*, and multiple members of the England trip have given me the objective to keep an eye on them. At one point they duck outside, and I ask my professor for a cigarette as an excuse to get fresh air. My steps are clumsy from a few too many shots of whiskey and as I join the two, one of them hands me a light. Vaguely I recall Mom's warnings against smoking, of my great aunt dying of emphysema and the smokers throughout my family.

Honestly, I'm at a point I'm willing to say, "fuck it". If there is a God or not, he can give me lung cancer for smoking a couple times in Europe. Fuck Confucius. Fuck Lao-Tzu. Fuck Enlightenment and creation and everything. Jameson is my new god; it's let me down less than any higher power.

The conversation floats over my head. My stomach turns and I

desperately take a drag. It's funny; I'd never seen the appeal of smoking and hadn't tried it until a week ago. I still don't understand the big hype about it. All it is right now is an excuse to leave buildings that doesn't sound as weak as needing to go outside for fresh air.

At some point the professor and her husband join us. Everyone else goes inside except for him and he claps a hand on my shoulder. "You okay?" He grimaces, already knowing the answer.

I want to lie. The last thing I want is to turn this into a pity party and admit that I am drowning, that my arms are so tired trying to keep afloat. And yet, I'm sick of trying to push myself to get better so quickly when the marks on my wrist are still red.

"Questionin' some things," I huff.

"Y'know, life, why we're here, if it matters; typical English major crap where y'over analyze everything."

"Sometimes you gotta question things, man. It's healthy."

My mouth feels dry. I want another drink, but my wallet would never forgive me. I've lost myself recently, and there's only one way to get ahold of it again. I need to find balance.

As I stomp out the cigarette, I make a mental note to meditate, to get back to my roots for a fresh perspective. I stopped a while ago while I was juggling with everyday life. I was once told one of the most important reasons to meditate was to give back to the mind for working as hard as it does every day. Meditation and exploring faith again might be just the fix to my equilibrium.

I want to lie. The last thing I want is to turn this into a pity party and admit that I am drowning, that my arms are so tired trying to keep afloat.

I've always been interested in tarot cards. Never felt I could read them well, but the idea is interesting. Back when I worked at King Richard's Faire, I used to visit the booths where readings would be done and watch strangers' fortunes being told. It's fascinating, really, that a couple of cards could predict the future or tell you what path is the best to take.

A couple years ago, Heather bought me a deck of cards. They were

steampunk and probably the coolest thing I had ever seen. I did a couple of attempts at reading, clinging desperately to the book that came with the set in an attempt to find meaning. Some things sounded right, some things didn't make sense, and I ultimately got frustrated and gave up. The cards got stashed in the back of my dresser collecting dust. I didn't have the heart to throw them away and every few months or so I'd think about bringing them out, that maybe they'd somehow tell me if I was doing anything right.

Curt, my adopted father doesn't think they're capable of predicting everything. He used to read them, and thinks that somehow, the universe influences them to a degree but you hear what you want to hear. My bestie Kae feels they can work as a form of therapy, but that they are accurate, and the key to reading them is to feel and intuit, rather than to read everything from a book.

The same can be said for religion and faith: sometimes it is better to feel than to get everything from a book. Curt preaches my views on religion will change, not because he is against it or that I am one to shift views easily, but that it's nature for feelings and thought processes to change. His favorite story is of a Buddhist monk and a disciple:

“A student comes up to his teacher and tells him ‘Master, my ass hurts whenever I meditate. What do I do?’ The teacher tells him ‘This will pass.’ A week later, the student tells his teacher about how it doesn't hurt his ass anymore when he meditates for a long time. The teacher responds with a nod and says ‘This will pass.’ Basically, things are gonna get better and get worse, but it doesn't matter.”

The same can be said for religion and faith: sometimes it is better to feel than to get everything from a book.

I've started trying to read tarot cards again, but more for advice and for options. Kae says I need more confidence in myself and that I can do readings if I try. The lack of confidence will pass. The funk I've been in will pass. It will also eventually come back, and that's okay.

It is what it is; the wooden block is a wooden block.

-

“Where'd you go?” Mom asks as she sits at the dining room table, going over this weekend's checklist of chores. She takes a sip of her tea as I throw my wallet and keys on the kitchen counter and look over at her.



“Church,” I answer casually.

“Oh?” She raises an eyebrow and stares at me, trying to process this information. “Really?” I nod my head; she mimics my motions. “That’s... interesting! How’d it go?”

“It was okay. Kind of ridiculous. One of those shouty churches with the speaking in tongues thing.”

Mom purses her lips and hums. I go about searching the cabinets for something to eat for lunch. Nothing looks really good. I keep thinking about the service and how much I’m starting to realize that temples are a better place for me. Still, the service was informational and it was a nice change of pace.

“Pretty sure I’m still a Buddhist.” I joke. “But I figured I haven’t been to church in years, so thought I’d check it out. It was all about forgiveness today.”

“Yeah?” Mom gets up and gives me a hug.

I stand there and lean into her, keeping my arms at my sides.

“Yeah”.

I go in for surgery in a matter of days to get my gallbladder out. Religion felt like the place to draw for some courage and confidence before I go under the knife. During my HIS-terectomy, I almost bled out. I don’t want a repeat.

I’m scared and upset. There’s no knowing when I’ll be able to eat doughnuts or s’mores again or when I can go back to drinking whiskey. Most twenty-one-year-olds don’t need to get their gallbladders removed. The only thing getting me through right now is the promise of homemade butterscotch pudding when it’s all over.

“It’s going to be okay,” Mom says, practically reading my mind. She pats my back and walks off towards her bedroom. I stay put in the middle of the kitchen and stare at the wall.

*Alleyway Shelter*

Spitting sour words at me like they are all you have left.  
You swept me away like a kid who forgot to clean their room,  
*quick and without reasoning.*

**I am worth an explanation.**

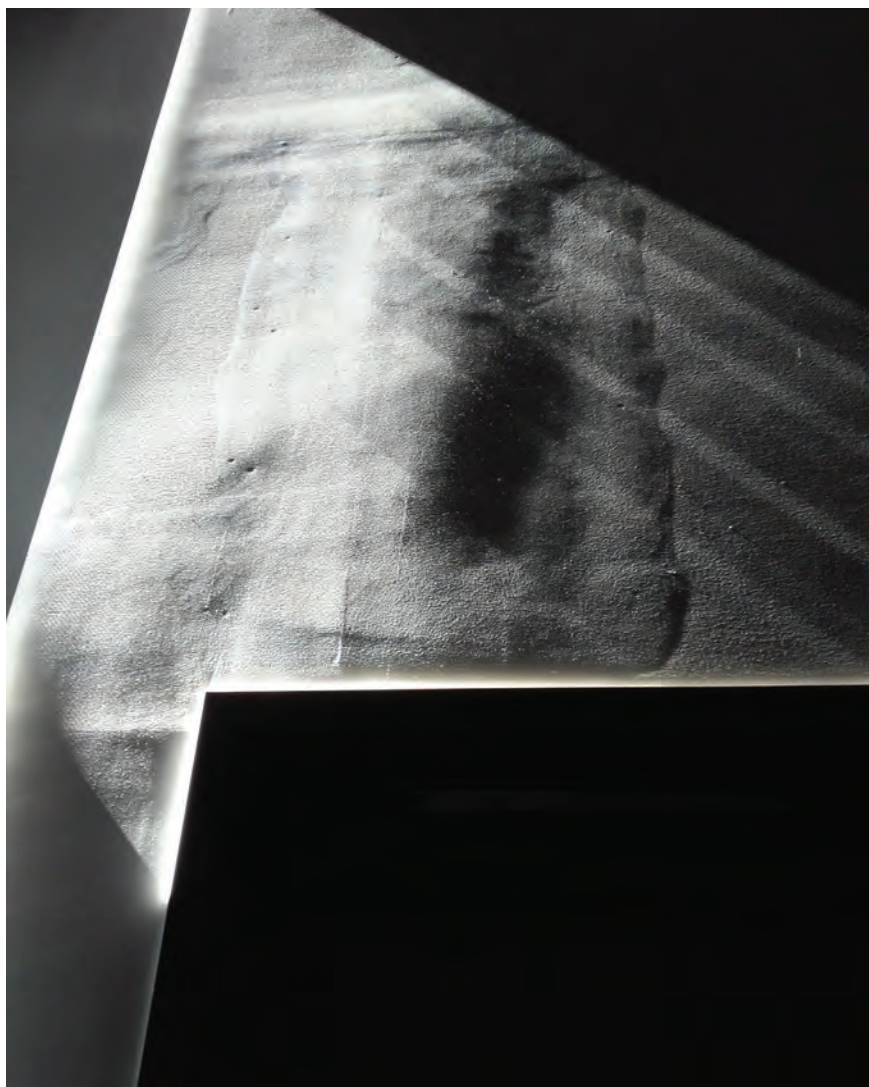
Grinning when you see me like you've won something.  
I just wanted to be a home to you,  
but now I stand alone as an empty alleyway,  
that you sometimes stumble down when you're drunk.

*Mourning Waves*

We came home from the beach that day,  
and you mimicked the ocean crashing into  
*her* bedroom.

Leaving behind a trail of seashells echoing,  
*"I'm just going to the store,"*  
but the store closed at eight  
and it's half past ten,  
*but her legs never close.*

So, you'll buy sugar from her  
and you'll pick yourself up from  
*her* bedroom floor  
and  
kiss *me*  
good morning.



*Light*  
SE ENNIS DATCHUK

## *Confidence*

Step 1. Wear loud shoes. Don't tiptoe, whispering yourself into a room, inching against the wall, safe from the public eye. Don't drag your toes. Heel to toe. Strut, announce your arrival with the clap, clap, clapping of a foot to the ground, like an applause wherever you go. Be the footsteps no one can ignore, as you sashay by, with purpose, with lightness, with bounce. Be just as happy in your steps as you are serious, know they hear you and can't pretend you're not there.

Step 2. Violate your muffin top. You've always hated your flappy marked up stomach. It will take days, weeks, months, years standing in front of the mirror, naked. At first, for only a second or two, forcing yourself to stare at the breast too big and heavy to be perky, at a lower stomach that drops down, and you'll hate it, every hair, every pore. You'll want to cover up, look away, but you know it will only be a second, but when you attack those self-conscious voices guarding your flubber, and fabled imperfection. Eventually, those voices will tire and fall from exhaustion into a mass grave you can cover with soil

**Violate your  
muffin top.**

Step 3. Realize approval is skin deep. The hierarchy of hotness is a funhouse mirror manipulated from tongue to cheek, from lips to ears. You cannot wallow in the density of other people's opinions. Assume you're a predator but, beware and practice humility, because nobody likes a lion who brags how great it is to be a lion. It isn't about proving to others you can hunt and kill, it is sinking your teeth into prey, unaware your face is dripping with blood, unaware your paws are dirty, unaware you could be being watched in awe by the tourists.

Step 4. Own your sexuality, and know when to use it. When you've had sex as often as you really want too, you go through phases. Sometimes, usually, in the beginning, it's shame. Slut, Hoe, Tramp, Easy; these are words used to knock you into the same gutter that houses your mind. Other times you feel empowered and proud. You don't buy into the societal expectations of what a "good girl" is. You like sex; you like to

orgasm; you like kissing strangers; you like to explore, experiment, exploit. You have control of your own vagina, and “wrong” is just a loose idea. You figure out you are your own sexual theme park and only need to allow the people you want to buy tickets. Someone to hold your hand, win you a teddy bear, help you up too the rollercoaster, as a companion and not as another attraction.

Step 5. Just know who you are. Know what you want, even if it's simply to know what you want. Maybe it's everything, maybe it's nothing. Maybe it's to be lost or found, right or wrong. It's okay if you don't know the answers. Scientists say everything out there is moving farther and farther away from each other. Sometimes stars explode and turn into black holes. But for every dying star, one is born, developing intricate possibilities. The loss is never more than the gain. This is you, and once you've made a map or a diagram, you have to change it make it more complex. The maps will litter your existence, so you can look back on them to see where you started. Step five never stops, even if you're tired; even if it keeps you up some nights thinking on stretch marks; even if you orgasm so hard you forget your own name for a couple of minutes; even if you decide you're not a cartographer.

*Lightning*

“These are ugly,” she whispered, as she  
prodded her legs. Her fingers traced  
the scraggly veins, the blue and the purple.  
The rain from her eyes was fast approaching;  
I could feel it in my joints.  
“I hate them,” cracked her thunder,  
“I wish I didn’t have them.”

I had no thunder then—none on my body,  
none in my lungs. I could not tell her  
that I loved the lightning she spurned,  
mystified by the streaks they made  
in nature, across God’s brooding, virulent sky.  
I only watched those spears of power dance,  
that stuff of legends from worlds past, and thought,  
“You are wrong.  
This beauty is its own blessing.”

Those veins imbue their crackle and heat  
through all her body. They electrify her,  
as her voice booms through the house,  
and her limbs tear through each space,  
unsettling everything they touch, yet  
leaving all in silent awe.  
Her hair denies gravity, frizzled instead  
high above her head  
with curls bold as a bolt from heaven.

I often wished I could be a woman  
of such refined and fleeting fire. I had  
no such divine artillery, save for the heat streaks  
at my breasts and thighs—pink and brief.  
How I love the purple, and the deep blue.  
How I love the way they rip the sky through.  
She would tell me with wide eyes,

“Your legs are beautiful.  
Don’t wish for this; it is ugly.”

I have thunder now, thunder enough  
to disagree. It shakes the windows as I tell her  
not to be ashamed just because fairweather folk  
believe her lightning is too bold.  
She lowers her eyes, for a lifetime  
of lies is not corrected in a moment.  
But where there is thunder, there is lightning,  
and I search, and I find it on me.  
Just a smattering, a little shimmering crackle  
of that purple power, there on my thigh.



*arms race*

your arms shotguns show their weight.  
the heavy safety builds tension  
slipping  
softly  
slowly you  
break, but

skull.is.a.battered.garment.is.a.tear.off.is.a.slip.is.a membrane

is in frenzy, and the tendrils fear wings easily  
sewing them into patterns.

the pieces of you that comprise you reach for the sky.  
they flutter slow  
& god Himself would lay down his angels at your mercy

i lay down with angels too  
i lay down with angels too  
my darling

the safety on.  
alms, given grace.  
use the shotguns to grab hold;  
let go.



AN INTERVIEW  
WITH KELLY GREY CARLISLE

*Interview by Kendra Genreux*

Dr. Kelly Grey Carlisle teaches at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. She is the editor of the online literary journal *1966: A Journal of Creative Nonfiction*. Her essays have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Salon*, *The Rumpus*, *The Sun* and *New England Review* among others. Her recently released memoir *We Are All Shipwrecks* entails tragedy, discovery, and redemption...seemingly common themes through an obscure tale. Kirkus Review writes, "A turbulent childhood is accurately rendered in this gritty, raw memoir of Carlisle's family and her search for the truth about her mother's death."



**You primarily write nonfiction has this always been your focus? How did you discover that nonfiction was what you wanted to write?**

I started out as a fiction writer, but I realized that I wasn't very good at making stuff up. About the same time, I realized that I had a story to tell. I still love to read novels; they are my first love.

**Did you know when you started investigating that you wanted to write a book about your mother's case? Or vice versa did you know when you started writing non-fiction that it would lead you so far into this case?**

I started investigating her case out of my own curiosity, and also because I'd written an essay that talked about her...and I realized I didn't know anything more than what my grandfather had told me, which I couldn't verify. I realized I needed to know more in order to responsibly write about her. Once I got started, I started realizing that her story and my story could be a book.

**Are there any significant authors that have been an influence on your decision to write non-fiction or writing in general?**

I've read all of my life and so writing always seemed like a natural

thing to do, like drawing is when we are kids. My professors who were writers, like the novelist Jonis Agee, encouraged me to write. Some of my favorite novelists are Zadie Smith, Ian McEwan, and Anthony Trollope, but I have a lot more. As far as nonfiction writers, I love Lee Martin, Lia Purpura, and Cheryl Strayed.

**Have any of the people included in the book complained about how their depicted?**

My stepmother Marilyn did for about a week. We worked together on the few things she thought were factually wrong or perhaps unfair. After thinking about it for a while, she decided it was a good book and a true depiction.

**How do you deal with readers knowing the deepest aspects of your life and childhood?**

That didn't bother me as much. I'm a memoirist; I think TMI comes with my personality type.

**Did you leave some experiences out due to the personal nature? How do you know what to include?**

Some things I preserved my privacy about--like not going into too much detail about my own sex life. I would have if I thought the book needed it though. I think readers got enough of an idea without me going into detail.

**How do you feel being a professor influences your work? How does being the editor of 1966 influence your work?**

I don't know that either really affects my writing. But being a professor absolutely helps me articulate what it is I do as a writer and why I do it. Reading and writing are second nature to me, so having to teach makes me think about craft and process and break it down for others.

**For people wanting to write a memoir what advice would you give them? Where should they look for inspiration? How should they start**

## **their own investigations?**

I would just start writing the best way you know how. The more you write, the more you will remember. You can work on putting things into scene and making your craft excellent as you draft and revise. Read other people's stories for inspiration and read novels to understand storytelling. As far as starting investigations, I think just talking to people and looking at photos is a great place to start. These will raise questions and you'll keep investigating to answer them. The more you investigate, the more you find to investigate.

## **Did you find closure through the investigation of your mother's murder and putting you childhood on paper? What do you feel you have learned about yourself and your family through this process?**

I think of closure as something that follows grief, and I never felt grief for my mother, because I lost her so young--at least not the grief that someone who lost their mom at an older age might feel. Finishing the book did give me some sort of closure about my grandfather and my family. I used to have these recurring nightmares that my grandfather was still alive and demanding that I leave my husband and children to care for him. Those stopped once the book was accepted for publication. I don't know if that's a coincidence or not.

## **And lastly, have you thought about your next big project?**

I want to write an immersion memoir about one of the big English cathedrals. These are gigantic medieval churches where people have been worshipping--and living and dying (sometimes even being murdered, right there in the church)--for thousands of years. I want to tell the stories of one of these places, the people who live there now, and the people who built the church, as well as think about the place of the Church in the world today.

# SHORELINE 2018 CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

**Alexandra Sydney Ashe** graduated from Coventry High School in 2015 and is currently a student at Rhode Island College majoring in Creative Writing. Her favorite activity is to explore Rhode Island with a camera in her hand, as she believes that there is always something to be learned from the beauty of Mother Nature. She also enjoys drawing, reading and writing in her spare time, and has aspirations to write her own novel someday.

**Lauren Cloutier** is a Creative Writing Major. Her short story, “American Pie” placed first in RIC’s Fall 2017 Shoreline contest. She is also a musician who goes by the stage name “Silica” and has a solo album on Spotify, iTunes, Google Play, and many more.

Her name is **Caitlynn Douglas** and don’t forget the second “n”. She comes from North Providence and one day someone told her that they liked her writing and wanted to see more. So, she kept writing and has now accomplished something she didn’t think was possible. She hopes to achieve more one day.

**Michael Elias** currently lives in East Providence, Rhode Island and is a student attending Rhode Island College. Michael Elias is a long-time wrestler and in 2017 he received a “Lifetime Achievement Award” and continues to wrestle. He is a big fan of Impact Wrestling and hosts a wrestling talk program. He enjoys writing various different genres of writing including fiction, nonfiction, poetry, screenwriting, articles, blogs, and themes of science fiction, fantasy, mystery, angst, “dramedy,” and Christianity. He has appeared in the short films *Turtle Bandits*, *C.R.O.C. Cops*, and *Frank ‘n Steins* and has appeared on the *Chuckles ‘N Laughs Show*, a popular Rhode Island program.

**Se Ennis Datchuck** is a Studio Art Major with a Minor in Creative Writing. She lives in Providence with her husband Timothy, their cat Gaby, and dog Roxanna.

**Kendra M Genereux** will be graduating in May with a BA in Creative Writing. She was promoted to Executive Editor of *Shoreline* this spring and has been published in both *Shoreline* and the *Albion Review*. She promises that if you catch her glaring at you she is probably just thinking about what to eat for lunch.

**Zara Hanif** is a Creative Writing senior at Rhode Island College. She has been published in her college’s literary magazine *Shoreline*, as well as *Clockwise Cat*,

and soon in *Albion Review*.

**Tabatha Karlowicz** is an 18-year-old photographer who just wants to make it in the world as does everyone else. Her interests include listening to music such as K-pop. She also enjoys watching YouTube and procrastinating on assignments.

**Colleen LeBeau** is a senior English/Creative Writing major whose work has previously appeared in *Shoreline* and *The Paragon Journal*. After graduation, she will continue her education at the University of Rhode Island as a graduate student of library and information studies. She lives by the ocean in Warwick with her husband and daughter, and a couple of rescue pets.

**Linda Lin** is a student studying Graphic Design BFA and Digital Media at Rhode Island College. She is a professional meme maker and a bad photoshop expert in all things gone wrong with photoshop. On the side she enjoys traveling, and training to be the best pun master.

**Genesis Monsanto** is a 22-year-old, senior at Rhode Island college majoring in English with a concentration in creative writing. She's an aspiring fiction writer and full-time fangirl. She had a fun time being a prose editor on *Shoreline*. One day someone will be editing her work instead before publishing it.

**Louis Morales** is a first generation Latino American, the first in his family to be able to attend college. Morales is a Rhode Island resident based out of Providence. He has obtained his associates degree and now attends Rhode Island College working on obtaining a B.F.A in Graphic Design and a B.A in Digital Media.

**Andrew “Andy” Noel** is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing. He hopes to move after graduation and pursue a career in journalism as well as tackle graduate school.

**Sara Raztresen** is a Rhode Island writer dealing in the surreal--from magical realism to high fantasy, with a little dusting of magical topics in her nonfiction, as well. Themes of religion, romance, and the horrors of everyday life especially interest her, and she believes genre lines were meant to be bent and broken.

**Ruby Robinson** is a sophomore in the nursing program at RIC. In the past, she wrote frequently and performed at poetry readings. Her freshman year



of college, she took a break from writing. Her poem “Palmistry” is her first finished piece since returning to writing.

**Ryan Silva** is a graduate student in the media studies department and Vice President of the English Club. He aspires to live like Cervantes and die like Byron.

**Andrew Small** is a Creative Writing major in his senior year at RIC. This is his second year working on the magazine, and his first year as the prose editor of *Shoreline*. One day he hopes to be able to have published his own YA books.

**Michelle Taraian** is currently a senior at Rhode Island College and is studying English with a Concentration in Creative Writing. She loves reading, writing, and procrastinating on the Internet Machine™. She hopes that after graduating from RIC, she'll finally be able to revamp her first novel she completed back in high school and also wants to, at some point, end up in New York City to work in editing or really anything that means she can write forever.

**Kat Walsh** is working towards her BA in English creative writing. She is the poetry editor for *Shoreline*. This is her second publication. If you feel like your being watched, it's probably her.

**E. J. Watson** is a native of Rhode Island. Watson is graduating from RIC in May with a degree in Creative Writing. He will be starting Emerson College's MFA program in Creative Writing this Fall and is currently working on a collection of poetry about his turbulent time as a Mormon missionary.

**Kae Whitman** is a Creative Writing major born and raised in Rhode Island and trying desperately to escape it. Their major interests include tarot, video games, and avoiding working on their two novels-in-progress.

**Helena Widmann** is graduating from RIC with a bachelor degree in English and a minor in music. Her career as singer/musician works cohesively with the creative nature of English and writing. In her free time she gives her dogs belly scratches and sings to them about love and friendship.



**Special Contributors**  
**Joseph Angell**  
**Alexandra Sydney Ashe**  
**J Bruscini**  
**Lauren Cloutier**  
**Se Ennis Datchuck**  
**Caitlynn Douglas**  
**Kendra M Genereux**  
**Tabatha Karlowicz**  
**Colleen LeBeau**  
**Linda Lin**  
**Julia Mielli**  
**Louis Morales**  
**Andrew Noel**  
**Sara Ratzresen**  
**Robinson Ruby**  
**Ryan Silva**  
**Andrew Small**  
**Michelle Taraian**  
**Kat Walsh**  
**E. J. Watson**  
**Kae Whitman**

