Brandon Baionno, Untitled
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LETTER FROM THE VANGUARD EDITOR

This is a special year for the Vanguard Literary Magazine for several reasons. First, this is the first time the magazine has been printed as an e-zine, available in electronic form on the RCGC website. In fact, there will be no hardcopy version of the magazine at all this year. Will the print version of Vanguard return in the future? That possibility is under discussion.

Secondly, the Vanguard Fine Arts Club has been discontinued. It is no more. But the Vanguard magazine lives on and will continue to be edited by me and produced each spring, featuring the stories, poems, essays, artwork and photographs of RCGC students.

Third, this is the first issue of the magazine published under the college’s new name, Rowan College at Gloucester County. So the transition to an e-format is appropriate at this time; there have been big changes for (formerly) Gloucester County College, and big changes for the College’s literary magazine.

As before, the most rewarding aspect of my editorship has been the opportunity of coming into contact with the extremely creative and talented RCGC students whose work fills these pages.

Enormous thanks are again due to Susan Weiss, Publications Administrator, and Brielle Gall, student worker in Publications, whose talent, creativity and skill are responsible for bringing our students’ visions to life on the printed page with their always outstanding visual design.

To submit work for consideration in the next issue of The Vanguard magazine, send written work as an attached Microsoft Word document and photos and artwork as an attached jpeg file to vanguard@rcgc.edu or directly to me at dschleicher@rcgc.edu.

DAVID SCHLEICHER
Instructor I, English
Editor, Vanguard Literary Magazine
ICY NEEDLES

By Brianna McCray

Icy needles,
When it rains.
Icy needles,
Excruciating pain, that drives you insane.
Icy needles,
A love and hate relationship.
Icy needles,
This is no game.
Icy needles,
What is pain?
Icy needles,
It's in the rain.
Icy needles,
It doesn't ever go away.
Icy needles,
Fighting through it- every single day.
Icy needles,
Must find a way.
Icy needles.
EVERYONE SINS
By Shelby Carlton

I died a really long time ago, when I was still in my mother's belly. I learned that on Earth humans call that a miscarriage. I’m not sure exactly how long ago it was, because time doesn't matter here. It has no meaning. There is no past or future, only the here and now. But I can’t stop thinking about what my life might have been like if I had lived. I can’t stop wondering what the Earth looks like. I’ve never seen it myself, but I’ve heard countless stories of it. I listen to every story eagerly, soaking up every word like a sponge soaks up water. (I heard that Earthly expression from one of the other angels, and I love it. I am constantly using as many Earthly expressions as I can find.

I know I’m supposed to be thinking about God and praising Him always, and I am always doing that, I swear, but sometimes I just can’t help myself; my thoughts seem to wander to the Earth on their own. Sometimes I think about my mother. Is she happy? Does she have a good life? Does she miss me? But how can she miss me if she’s never met me?

Don’t get me wrong, I’m tremendously happy here. I love Heaven and all of its beauty; who couldn't? Heaven is breathtakingly wonderful. Heaven is perfect. And God made me an angel because I’ve never committed a sin or done anything wrong. I never had the chance. I guess dying before ever being born has its perks.

I was lost in thought, thinking about the Earth as usual, when one of my fellow angels came to me and said, “Our Lord wishes to speak with you.”

I stared at him in shock. Surely I must have heard him wrong? Why would our Heavenly Father want to speak with me? “Me? He wants to talk to me?”

“That is what I said, isn’t it?”

Trembling, I followed the angel to the foot of God’s Throne and bowed low.

“Rise, my child,” God’s thunderyng voice rumbled gently. “You may leave us,” He told the other angel.

I rose slowly to my feet, keeping my eyes lowered. It was impossible to look directly at Him because His light was so blinding. “What can I do for you, my Lord?”

“You continue to speak of Earth to the other angels, and you are constantly thinking about it.”

I swallowed, shaking in fear. Was He angry with me? “I’m sorry, Father. I will never speak of Earth again.”

“No, my son. I’m not angry with you,” He answered my unspoken question.

Forgetting my place for a moment, I glanced up and met His soft gaze, and He smiled warmly. I quickly looked away when His brilliance began to hurt my eyes. “Why would I be angry with you? You have done nothing wrong. Now, tell me, what can I do to put your mind at rest?”

“I want to visit Earth!” I blurted out. To my horror, the words continued to tumble out of my mouth. “I want to see what it’s like! And I want to meet my mom! I want to make sure she’s okay, and I want to see what her life is like and make sure she’s happy!” When I finally regained control of my tongue, I snapped my mouth shut and studied the golden floor underneath my feet.

“Oh my son, if this is what you truly want, I will grant you your desire. But I must warn you—you won’t like what you find.”

A huge smile spread across my face, and tears pricked the corners of my eyes. “Really? You’re really going to send me to Earth so I can meet my mom? Oh, my Lord, thank you, thank you! Thank you so much! What have I ever done to deserve this wonderful gift?”

“You have always been a good and faithful servant, my child,” He rumbled. “When you go to Earth, you will be tempted by sinful desires, but you must reject them. You must not do anything wrong, or you won’t be able to come back. Do you understand?”
I nodded eagerly. “Yes, my Lord.”

“Are you sure this is what you want?”

“Yes, Father, I’m absolutely sure. This is what I’ve always wanted. I won’t sin, I promise.”

There was a pause before God said, “Very well, then. I will give you an Earthly body and send you down to Earth. I will make sure you arrive directly in front of your mother’s house. Her name is Elaine Parker. You’ll know her when you see her.”

Just as God promised, I jumped through the gates of Heaven, falling past the stars and galaxies and planets before I landed on Earth, right in front of my mother’s house. As soon as I saw it, I just knew it was her home. Slowly, I turned around in a circle, taking my surroundings in. I knew the names of everything I saw from the stories the angels had told me—grass, houses, trees, the busy street in front of my mother’s house with cars racing past...

I could feel the warm sun on my Earthly, human face, and I could feel the cool breeze on my bare arms. I breathed in deep lungfuls of air. I sat down in the coarse green grass and ran my fingers through it, the blades tickling my fingertips. I could hear birds singing in the trees overhead and the cars roaring by. I looked up and watched the white, puffy clouds slowly drifting away in the beautiful blue sky. I could smell some sort of food cooking in a nearby house... some meat, perhaps? I didn’t know what meat smelt like, but if it really was meat cooking, it smelled delicious. My mouth started to water, and my stomach rumbled. Was I... hungry? Wow, I was hungry! I had never been hungry before. A grin spread across my face, and I laughed out loud. I just sat there in the grass, laughing and laughing and laughing. I couldn’t stop; I was just so happy. I was here, on Earth. I was actually here! I was on Earth and I was hungry. I could hardly believe it!

I stood up and twirled around in circles and leaped and spun and kicked and punched, still giggling uncontrollably. The Earth’s beauty was nothing compared to the golden brilliance of Heaven, but it was still beautiful nonetheless, and I loved it. I realized with a pang that I already missed my perfect home in Heaven, but for now I was happy to be on Earth. I would go back soon enough, once I spoke with my mother.

“Hey! You there! What the hell are you doing on my lawn?” An angry voice snapped me back to my senses, and I finally stopped giggling and leaping around. I turned and saw what must be the most beautiful woman on Earth glaring at me with her slender, delicate hands on her hips. Her dark blue eyes were sharp and narrowed, and her curly red hair tumbled over her shoulder. Her mouth was pressed into a firm line.

I stared at her, knowing instantly who she was. “Mom,” I whispered, my voice cracking.

The woman’s eyes widened for a moment, but they quickly narrowed again into tiny slits. “I don’t know who the hell you are, or what kind of stupid prank you’re trying to pull, but if you don’t get off my lawn right this instant, I’m calling the police!”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you. Please, Mom, don’t make me leave! I just wanted to make sure you were okay. I just want you to be happy!”

“Stop calling me that!” she screamed, tears brimming in her beautiful blue eyes. “What is your problem? I don’t have a son! I had an abortion! Is that what you wanted to know? Did you come here to punish me for my sins? I’m sorry, okay? Just leave me alone! Please, just leave me the hell alone!”

The sudden horrifying news hit me like a blow to the chest. I couldn’t breathe. My new human lungs wouldn’t work. I blinked. Then I blinked again, trying to keep the tears from escaping. “You... you didn’t want me? So your solution was to... kill me?” I could barely choke the words out.

“I’m calling the police! Stay away from me, you freak! Just leave me alone!” My mother threw the words over her shoulder as she sprinted back inside the safety of her house, slamming the door behind her.

I stood still for a while, unable to move. Something inside my chest had been crushed, smashed into a million pieces. My mother had killed me. I choked on a sob. My own mother had ended my life before it ever had a chance to begin, and no one had ever bothered to tell me. None of the angels told me. God never told me.
A slow anger began growing inside me, replacing the horrible crushed, grief-stricken feeling in my chest. The anger burned like a smoldering fire in my stomach, and I let it consume me. I charged across my mother’s lawn and pounded on her door with both fists, screeching, “How could you do this to me? You stole my life! I never had a chance to live! You killed me before I was even born! How could you do that? What...what kind of horrible...sick person are you? God will punish you for your sins! You’re going to Hell when you die, you...you...demon!”

I spun around and raced back across the grass, hot tears blurring my vision. I stopped when my feet touched asphalt and screamed into the sky, “Why didn’t You tell me? How could You do this to me? Why wouldn’t You tell me?? I trusted You! I served You and praised You and worshiped You my entire existence! And this is how You repay me? I...I hate You! Yes! Do You hear me?! I said, I hate You!!”

I was screaming so loud I didn’t hear the roar of the car until it was too late. I realized I was standing in the middle of the street just before the car plowed straight into me. Then my world went black.

I woke up to feel white-hot flames scorching my face and fire licking hungrily at my feet. I gasped in pain and stood up as fast as I could, trying to get away from the fire, but it was everywhere. I heard a dark laugh and looked up to see the Devil himself sitting on his fiery throne.

“You shouldn’t make promises you can’t keep,” Satan told me, his black eyes smoldering. “Everyone sins.” A sinister grin spread slowly across his face, and it wasn’t until that moment that I finally realized where I was, and I understood that I would be trapped here forever, being tortured by the Devil for all eternity.

I screamed as the flames of Hell engulfed me completely.

Brielle Gall, *Untitled*
NICE KITTY
By Paul McCullough

“Bye, Ma—goin’ food shopping,” said Mario Warner as he walked through the kitchen.

“Don’t forget I’m making meatballs and gravy—be sure to get good meat, not that lean stuff!” Rosetta Warner, nee Testa, was the classic Italian Mom—her cooking was an art form and family was her world—and she was Mario’s only relative since his father’s execution for serial murder. Mario got the lion’s share of his genes, his brooding Teutonic looks and his occasionally nasty temperament. It had been months since he’d done anything beyond fantasizing about harming anyone and Mario was feeling that familiar itch; he knew that an opportunity would present itself.

Mario left the market laden with produce, mozzarella and the fatty burger which was a factor in his obesity. Food was Mario’s curse and his passion: he savored every morsel of Ma’s calorie-laden meals but hated the sight of his bloated body. Hence his extremely mixed feelings about Rosetta and her occasional inclusion in his fantasies of torture and homicide, but Mario knew that he would never really harm his mother. After all, who else would cook and clean?

Mario’s walk home took him past a normally quiet alley where some unusual motion caught his eye and led him to turn. Midway down the alley was a teenager swinging something at the end of a sort of rope. Closer inspection revealed that the rope was actually a leash and that the “something” was a tiny black cat pawing desperately as the life was choked out of it. Mario strode toward the oblivious teenager without hesitation and relieved the kitten’s dilemma by pulling the boy’s offending arm out of its socket. Moving too quickly for his victim to cry out—Mario was fast and very strong despite his obesity—he slammed the adolescent’s head to the concrete walk as he wrapped his hands around the boy’s throat. The teenager could barely focus his eyes on Mario who was pleased that the animal abuser was conscious and able to display both panic and fear as Mario’s hands tightened on the offender’s neck. He could have made it quicker, but Mario found joy in the subtle nuances of a brutal death as he gradually squeezed until he felt the trachea collapse and the struggling cease.

Mario dropped the limp head, pulled out his pocket knife and went to the kitten. Gently, he cut off the tight collar to relieve the animal’s discomfort. He tossed collar and leash into a nearby dumpster followed by his victim’s body. The cat accessories were too small to bear fingerprints. The alley was between commercial buildings and no one had seen him. His murderous hunger was sated. All was well with the world. On a whim and because the kitten was as cute as it could be, Mario put it in his coat pocket and took it home along with the groceries.

Rosetta had no objections to her son’s new little friend. Having seen him torture everything from insects to dogs to other children when he was a child, the kitten gave her hope that the boy, at thirty, was growing out of his orneriness. Rosetta did not understand naming the cat “Alley,” but that was far from the oddest thing her son had ever done. Mario’s insistence that the cat get no table scraps and be fed only expensive, allegedly healthy cat foods was also a mystery to her, but no harm done if Mario was happy.

It seemed to Rosetta that Alley had a calming effect on her usually edgy boy, and she was right. The grateful little creature slept with his master every night and spent hours on Mario’s chest purring and kneading with his paws in pleasure. Mario had never known such affection from another living creature, and he returned Alley’s love by petting, grooming and talking with him for much of his free time. For a while, his homicidal fantasies abated and Mario began to wonder—with mixed emotions—whether his lifelong murderous rages were at an end.

Alley grew and became a fixture in the household, a member of the family. The hulking murderer’s gentle love for his pet was something new in Mario’s life and, at times, a source of great happiness. At other times, Mario missed the anticipation and the excitement of the kill which was rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Cruelty and death had been an enjoyable way of life for him and being without that joy left him in unfamiliar territory.

Rosetta had encouraged her son to allow the cat to play occasionally in the fenced yard behind their townhouse where it wuld be safe and reasonably secure, but Mario was a doting guardian who worried that some harm might come to his best friend outdoors. When Alley was a year old, however, he began to seem a bit bored with the house and Mario reluctantly relented. For twenty minutes of daily play which his master supervised from the patio or at least from a window, Alley explored his new backyard world with fascination, ran as he could not inside the house and chased butterflies with glee.
During the second week of supervised play, Mario witnessed an event which would change reality forever for both himself and Alley. Having sharpened his hunting skills with insects, Alley adopted the crouch of a jungle predator when he saw a bird land across the yard. The sleek black cat moved with stealth and leaped a moment before the bird became aware of him, and in a second the struggling sparrow was in Alley's mouth. He shook it to stifle its movement, then eased it to the ground and held it carefully under his paws while studying his terrified victim. He grabbed a wing with his teeth and shook until it broke and the bird could not have escaped if it did struggle free. Alley held it to the ground again, enjoying his prey's mindless and fruitless efforts, and then he sunk his teeth into the bird's neck and shook and shook until there was a snap audible only to his feline ears and the bird went still.

It all happened too quickly for Mario to react and he was aghast at first that his sweet, gentle companion had committed this atrocity. As Mario stared, frozen in place at the patio door, Alley looked up at him and then came toward him, bird still clamped between his jaws. He reached Mario, dropped the feathery corpse at his feet and looked up for approval. In that instant, their bond blossomed and deepened immeasurably. Mario could resume the occasional killing which gave his life meaning while maintaining the gentle, loving relationship he had found with his pet. The cat would do likewise—bliss. "Nice kitty," Mario said.
THE INVISIBLE GIRL

By Shelby Carlton

They don’t look at me.
They don’t talk to me.
Can they see me?
I walk past them unnoticed.
They laugh together at some private joke.
They don’t invite me to join them.
Can they see me?
I speak to them, but my voice is unheard.
They never respond.
Their eyes sweep past me as though I’m not there.
Can they see me?
I am a shadow that passes by them,
I am a ghost that drifts past them,
I am invisible.
SOMETHING AS SMALL AS A HIGH-FIVE

By Shelby Carlton

Getting hit in the head with a football
Is no fun thing.
The blow sent me spinning against the wall.
I was just minding my own business,
Playing basketball,
When the ball came flying at me
And spun me into the wall.
The boy who’d been about to catch the ball,
E.S, his name was, saw.
He came up to me
And asked if I was OK.
I was too busy rubbing my head to say.
My friends were laughing;
I’d been hit thrice; I was always in the way.
E.S asked again if I was OK.
I replied with a shout:
“Three times! I’ve been hit three times!”
Concerned, E.S repeated right out
If I was good.
I finally answered him, saying,
“I’m fine,” as I stood. And I was fine.
E.S held his hand up.
I looked at it; was it some sort of sign?
E.S wiggled his fingers, waiting for me.
Then I realized he wanted a high-five.
Though it took a moment for me to see,
I realized what he wanted and gave it.
Though our hands only touched for a second,
Something inside me lit.
Warmth welled up inside,
But it was just a high-five.
Still, warmth was a big tide
Washing through me as
E.S and I high-fived.
As I returned to my basketball game,
I couldn’t name
The feelings that I had.
But they were warm
And good, not sad.
It’s funny how something
As small as a high-five
Can make you feel so good.

THE DRIVE HOME

By Faith Bozzuffi

I think I may have seen a shooting star
On my way driving home from work tonight,
Or maybe it was just my cloudy pupils
Aquiver from the garish retail lights.
Cold fabrics did my fingers fold and pinch,
And denim stacked, with patterns I detest.
Bright orange never thought to hurt my eyes
So much as when it’s not filled with your chest
And rhythmic pumping vessel which I sought
To conquer, but God knows to no avail.
The color leaps and blinds me, softly, swiftly,
To mock me and remind me that I failed.

I think I may have seen a shooting star
But shooting stars are nothing but a flame
From burning rock and dust and olivine
That darts and fizzes quickly like it came.
You are the shooting star, the meteorite,
Whose light raises my hope and then recedes,
Whose ghost is nothing more to me than atoms
Trembling there on my periphery.
But I am not a chemist and I know it.
This wild and aching yearning is absurd.
You are the scientist and I’m the poet.
You play with chemicals, I play with words.

I think I may have seen a shooting star
But wishing is a waste of precious time.
To think a pretty thought in half an instant
Is far from what I’d once have called a sign.
Though I can wish away until my head spins,
There are no ears whose drum my voice can beat.
They say that to have loved and lost is better,
But wisdom won’t extinguish my defeat.
Oh stupid shooting star with golden promise!
It’s nothing but a myth, a hoax, a scam.
But damn, I’m either dumb or optimistic.
I pressed my luck and wished for you again.
When Rory was a little girl she never thought about her future especially pertaining to her health. Yes, she was the girl with the heart condition, but she was never really had any trouble with it until that one horrible day in April when she was 19.

Sitting in the cold outpatient waiting room of children’s hospital looking around at all the little kids playing, Rory couldn’t help and think to herself, “I wonder if I was that unaware of what was to come when I was that young?”

“Rory Grant?” said the peppy nurse in the bright yellow and pink top.

“Follow me please.”

As she followed the nurse out of the waiting room and down the winding hall, peeking into rooms with open doors she saw heart-monitoring machines, oxygen tanks, cabinets that she was sure were stocked with the usual hospital supplies.

“Here we are, room 18, the Tiger room, the doctor will be with you in a minute” said miss yellow and pink like she was talking to a 5 year old. Rory looked at her with a fake smile and said, “Thanks”

Still being seen at a children hospital at twenty three should feel weird for her and she was sure for the new nurses like miss pink and yellow it was probably strange, but by now she was used to it. Since Rory’s incident when she was 19, she has been coming to the hospital for monthly check ups, however this check-up Rory was extremely nervous about.

In a bright green room with tigers on the wall she waited patiently for the doctor. She thought about how she probably should have brought someone with her, but she was stubborn and wanted to prove to herself and her mother that she could handle her own life as the adult she was. While the nurses and doctors outside were running around, she heard a knock at the door as it began to open.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Rory” Doctor Kim said as she walked in quickly.

Dr. Kim was one the of best children’s cardiologists in the state who was part of the new program for adults who were now living longer with a heart disease mostly found in children. She has been seeing Rory every three to four weeks since her incident in April.

“How are we feeling today, Rory?” Dr. Kim said in a gentle tone, ignoring the fact that Rory was alone. Dr. Kim has gotten to know Rory for the past couple of years and knows how she prides herself on trying to be independent, even at times like this when Dr. Kim urges Rory to involve her mother more.

“Fine, just worn out, as usual, but still alive, so that is a plus,” said Rory, trying to be funny.

There was a long silence as the air in the room started to feel very thick to Rory.

“So Doc, what’s the verdict, have the meds been helping?”

Doctor Kim took a deep breath, looked at her notes then pulled up her chair close to Rory as she gently started to stoke Rory’s back "I’m sorry, Rory but there no easy way to say this. Your heart attack in April did too much damage, and the medicine regiment we had you on is just not slowing down the decrease in the lack of blood to your heart."

Rory just sat there for a minute, not knowing what to say. She thought of all the things in her life she had done, and all the things she wanted to do still. She thought about her life as a child, looking healthy and perfect but having a ticking time bomb in her chest. She thought about finally getting over being the “heart condition girl” and was finally ready to live her life as an adult. She remembered all the times her mother told her that to live her to the fullest every day because it could be her last. She always thought that was rather morbid, however now she realized her mother was just preparing her for this talk. She thought about her life and how it was finally coming together. She thought about London and how she wanted to go there so badly. As she was in deep thought she overheard the Doctor saying her name.

“Rory, Rory, Rory?”
Yes? said Rory still in a daze

“We still need to talk about what comes next,” said Dr. Kim with a sympathetic look on her face.

“Right, so what now?” asked Rory, not really wanting to hear the answer.

“Well, I need you to sign some papers so we can run more tests and put your name on a transplant list right away. Also we recommend you start seeing a counselor and nutritionist as well and eventually we will be moving you into your own room here at the hospital.

Rory didn’t know what to say as she looked at Dr. Kim with a blank stare.

“Rory, I know this all seems very scary, but we have talked about “the List” for a couple of months now, and we both knew this day was maybe going to come.” Dr. Kim said trying to hide the worry in her voice.

“Do you want me to call anyone for you while we run some tests today, to come and get you after so you don’t have to drive yourself home,” Dr. Kim asked, already knowing the answer.

Everything from that moment on seemed to be moving at warp speed for Rory. She signed what felt like a million papers, and even started doing some tests that very same day

The minute she left medical facility, the emotional roller coaster that was her life began another turbulent ride. Once she got home, she knew she had to call her mother and tell her the news. Rory moved out of her mother’s house when she was 21, even though her mother was very worried about her living on her own. As the phone was ringing Rory could just hear her mother now.

“Oh my Rory, my darling Rory! Why didn’t you tell me you had an appointment today?! I would have come in to town and gone with you!, you didn’t go yourself did you?!” she imagined her mother saying.

Hello? Hello?! Is anyone there?! said Rory’s mother as Rory was still in her imaginary world.

“Hey mom, it’s me,” said Rory as her eyes began to tear in anticipation of their conversation.

“What’s wrong?” mother said, “You should be at work. Why aren’t you at work Rory?! Are you ok?!” her mother was frantic already.

Rory knew this conversation wasn’t going to be easy.

“I had my appointment with Doctor Kim today. I know you would have wanted to go, but I thought it would just be easier just to go myself,” Rory lied.

She felt awkward already going to a children’s hospital at her age, she didn’t like having her mother coming to the doctor’s appointment with her as well, especially after she moved out on her own.

Rory explained what the doctor said and their plans, trying to not cry as she was finally coming to the realization of it all.

Being born with Hypoplastic right heart syndrome and pulmonary atria was just part of her life. She never knew anything different or even thought about it as much, but now after explaining everything to her mother on the phone it was starting to hit her. She could die. Rory was interrupted by her thoughts again by her mother’s voice.

“So you won’t be moving in right away?” HELLO! RORY ANN?! said her mother

Rory could already hear her mother packing a bag as she quickly answered her. “Yes, I’m here. Sorry, no, I won’t be moving in to the hospital right away, I’ll be going to the doctors every week doing tests. I’m still low on the list, so I have a couple of weeks until I have to officially move in and then I will be constantly monitored.”

“I’m on my way, I’m packing my bags now,” said her mother

“That’s not necessary mom, Jaclyn is actually moving in today, I called her from the hospital. I will keep you posted every step of the way. I just think it will be better if you stay home and come visit this weekend,” Rory explained.

Her mother agreed after a lot more begging to stay home for now and to come visit on the weekend as long as her best friend Jaclyn or her called her everyday with updates. Rory worked very hard, especially after her heart attack to gain her independence from her mother and to prove she could handle her health issue as an adult, so she was happy
when her mother agreed to this plan.

Over the next couple of days Rory’s best friend Jaclyn moved in and helped her with telling their other good friends about Rory’s situation. Thankfully since it was only Rory and her mother in her immediate family, her mother took up the role of telling her extended family.

A couple of weeks later, as she was watching TV at home she started to have a tight pain in her chest. She sat right up as the pain moved to her back as if someone was stabbing her in the back with a knife. Her right arm went numb as she screamed for Jaclyn, as she knew something was wrong. As they waited for the ambulance to get to the house, Jaclyn called Dr. Kim and Rory’s mother to let her know that Rory was being rushed to the hospital. While in the ambulance Rory was in and out of it. Looking around she could see the tree tops and clouds passing her by through the window as the paramedics tried and asked her questions to keep her conscious. The ambulance just made it to the emergency doors while Rory started to drift away. As the doctors and nurses quickly wheeled her towards the OR she saw the bright lights of the hospital ceiling and thought maybe this is it, maybe my ride is finally over. It's finally my time to get off.
“Come on boys; we’re going to be late!” mom called from the center hall of the house.

“OK,” I called from the kitchen.

“Where’s your brother?” mom asked by the front door.

“He’s on the landing tying his sneakers,” I responded.

Back in the kitchen I had seen Ed chomping on a piece of white toast warm from the toaster while sitting down on the steps in the kitchen below the landing.

Soon we three were walking out the front door, out in the fresh morning air and under a clear sky.

Up our curving hill below the buttonwoods we turned right. In the morning we walked over old pale tan brick sidewalks with mom, two brothers; I was 12 and my little brother Ed was 10; we walked below the full summer canopy of trees for eight blocks; the trees stretched over the avenue from both sides and formed a tunnel. Mom didn’t drive so we walked. Mom grew up in the city and seemed to still prefer it. She sometimes called our small town “a cultural desert.”

The sun was already bright. One long block from the highway we crossed a busier street and mom reached her hand beside me toward mine to hold my hand. I felt her warm hand hold mine, but pulled my hand away and said, “I’m too old to hold hands.”

Our school stood half a block up to the right where we went to school during the fall, winter, and spring. The oldest brick building was closest to us: 1890 carved below its red bricks. One block further ahead the curving dirt path led to the newer wide sidewalk which lead to the highway. Across its two lanes and up the tall curb on the other side and further up the sidewalk was the train station.

Our mom worked for the YMCA so we could train for free. We took the train with her into the city for two weeks that summer. We walked across the city to the tall square old brick building; the building looked to be at least 10 stories and took up half a city block just down the street from City Hall. With ornate script, The Young Men’s Christian Association stood carved elegantly above the shadowed alcove of the doorway. We walked up the tall steps with mom. Inside mom had a large wooden desk just outside the wood–paneled office of her boss, Mr. Fitzpatrick. She directed us to the elevator and we rode up on our own to day camp.

In the YMCA we were with all the city kids. One counselor offered us beat–up, cracked, dry, red–leather gloves and we could hit the heavy bag or use the thin, vinyl pull–on gloves and hit the speed bag. I watched one guy, a handful of years older than I was, workout on the speed bag; his tan arms glistened as his fists rolled into the bag below the shadowed stairwell. The bag was held below a round flat platform attached to the ceiling rafters, and he seemed 16 or 17 as he let his fists roll rhythmically into the bag. The sound of his fists hitting the leather tear–shaped bag which bounced off the platform above made percussive music. I tried it too, but I really wasn’t coordinated enough at 12 to hit the speed bag consistently. In that dark corner of the gym a radio played “Summer in the City”, “Takin’ Care of Business” and “I Shot the Sheriff” every morning. I tried hitting the heavy bag but became bored quickly. So they let me spar. They paired me off with this one kid. I was skinnier, but we were both about the same height and we were about the same age, but I thought I was smarter. We were both short for our age. The counselors and the other kids seemed to almost ignore us and we couldn’t hurt each other with such heavy gloves. I had a strong right hand, and even though I was a lightweight I had long arms. One coach kept telling me: “Keep your hands high and your head low.”

I loved it. I had seen old fight films on TV of Floyd Patterson. I could hide behind my arms. I could bob and weave. Patterson wasn’t the strongest or biggest fighter. He wasn’t quite big enough or heavy enough to dominate, but he knew how to protect himself. He would hide behind his arms in what the sportscaster called “a peek-a-boo style” and then boom, a jab to the face. I liked his style. I had watched Ali on TV too. He had long arms too, and he could lay back and jab. He had a fierce jab. He knew how to keep the other fighter at bay. He could win with his mind. Frazier would just bear in and get hit but he kept coming. I liked him too; he was always the underdog, as Patterson was before him.

So, the coach would let me spar on the mats with this kid. We would mix it up, but mostly it was gloves hitting gloves. I sparred with that one kid the most; he was about my height, but his arms were stronger from weightlifting, so I respected his strength, but he lacked reach. He was left–handed, but I was a righty, and my left jab was strong, so I could
keep him away. When we bore in close and started flailing it would be a rush like a million butterflies in my stomach, heat and sweat and the whole world spinning terrifically fast. Body punches were the best because no one got hurt, just the rush, and there was no padding on a kid's stomach. I could hit a kid in the stomach and knock the wind out of him; it was easy. Sometimes I would lay back and flick my left jab. Since he was left-handed he kept his left back and led with his weaker right. We would only go three, three-minute rounds, then the coach would separate us and make us rest, and then tell us to take the gloves off and go play basketball.

I hustled and chased after the same kid; I drove to the basket for layups, and shot from outside, but I almost always lost to him, by a basket in these long games to 50 or 100 even, when each basket counted as two points. We played a half-court game with backcourt beyond the top of the key. The old tall metal water fountain in the corner was like a best friend, but Ed and I were barely tall enough to lean over it and push down the knob, but when we did the cold water slurped over our lips and gurgled down our throats. This tall kid with skin the color of chocolate milk always stood nearby hovering. You could smell his stale gym clothes which he wore every day. He never wore socks with his sneakers, and sometimes stood dribbling a basketball with his right hand. He never touched the ball with his left. The head counselor, who was the only one taller than him, called him “Cherokee.” Cherokee had two boxes of candy, Chiclets and Good ‘n Plenty stuffed in his back jeans’ pockets. He was tall and chubby and always hung around the water fountain menacingly. When we ran over to the fountain for a cold drink he inevitably shuffled over, and when he stood close you could smell his t-shirt and sneakers right away.

“Hey, how come you guys never say anything?” he asked.

We just ignored him.

True, at the Y Ed and I didn’t talk that much, except during breaks between boxing in the morning and arts & crafts after lunch. I would just quietly ask, “How’s it going?” He was pretty quiet and I was still looking out for him. We just silently stuck together. Although we never said anything about it, we knew we were the only small-town, white kids at the Y.

In between the varnished wooden tables and counters in the art room were narrow walkways covered in green —ish carpet. Cherokee sometimes stretched out on the floor face down and wriggled like a forgetful bear. The few girls in that class looked at him curiously from across the room. Once he sat near us, but with his back to us as he sat at a near—by table. He didn’t have a project he was working on, so he just sat there. We didn’t know what was with him. He leaned back in his chair toward me, and asked, “What are you working on, Fearless?”

“A tile square for a coffee pot,” I said.

“How come you never talk, Fearless?”

“I’m concentrating,” I said. “And in the morning I’m learning to box. Don’t you believe I can box with that kid here in Philadelphia?”

“If you keep boxing that black kid here in Philadelphia you won’t be here next week to tell anyone about it,” he mocked.

I just ignored him, then smiled and said, “We don’t need to talk to you— or even each other,” I said. “We have an unspoken rapport and camaraderie.” I knew a bit after I said that, that was the wrong thing to say. Cherokee turned around and got up and lumbered over to the girls who huddled like the petals of a single flower, and said to them, “We have a rapport and camaraderie.” My one attempt at a friendly gesture was just fuel for Cherokee to try to impress the girls. I don’t think he had an original thought in his head.

Each day we were often in the gym in the morning over these old white canvas mats surrounded by white walls, but Ed and I never faced each other. I could see out of the corner of my eye his small victories, a solid right cross, delivered fiercely as he lunged. He was acquiring some of my ferocity. He was still a bit weaker, but I could tell he would
soon be stronger, taller, and more coordinated than I was. He did OK against the kids his own age; we were only two years apart.

After lunch, during arts & crafts we tried to enjoy whatever the activity was, making potholders or ceramic tiles for resting hot pots on that we hoped mom would love. We just quietly stuck together. After more afternoon basketball, or, at the Y, they even had a narrow, banked running track upstairs above us, just below the ceiling; it took eight laps to make a mile. I thought it was stupid, and refused to run more than two laps. It was too small and short and tight. I’d rather run through a field close to home, or under the trees, up the sidewalk, in a race home from the field.

At the Y though we had swimming which both of us were poor at, and this was the most embarrassing, and the counselors offered little help, but mom wanted us to learn. The pool was a deep murky turquoise rectangle with white sides. Later, thankfully, we would leave and descend the elevator before we walked across the city to the train station, then ride the train, and then walk below the canopy of trees to home. Before leaving the Y Ed and I visited mom’s office; she reminded us about the chicken with cream of mushroom soup in the refrigerator.

“OK boys, I’ll see you when I get home.”

And now at that mid–afternoon hour we were set free.

But before returning home we walked across Center City together and over those streets I silently noticed our surroundings: the tall buildings in bright sun, the array of people, the city, the light in the sky breaking through high above grey Billy Penn atop dirty City Hall. I noticed all the surroundings, people walking toward us and past us, a young couple sitting and kissing on a stone bench to our right, and the hot dog and pretzel vendors.

“Do you want a soda?” I asked Ed.

He kept walking straight ahead.

“We’ve got to get home,” he responded, “Mom asked us to put the chicken in before she got home.”

There was usually a note on the kitchen base cabinet to put the chicken with cream of mushroom soup that was in a pan in the refrigerator, into the oven at 4:30PM, which Ed always did; chicken baked with cream of mushroom soup was Ed’s favorite. We would precede mom home and she would sometimes meet friends at Doc Watson’s or City Tavern after work.

“But we have some time still. Do you want to go down to Independence Hall to walk across the park under the trees and get out of this sun and heat?” I asked.

“It is really hot and humid,” Ed responded; “There might be a bit of a breeze down there.”

“We can cross Broad Street and walk straight down Walnut,” I suggested.

“OK,” Ed said, “It will be good to get out of the sun and enjoy the shade of the trees. Hey, did you like camp today?” Ed asked.

“It was OK; I liked boxing that one kid, and that one guy can really work the speed bag,” I said. “I don’t think I could ever do that.”

“But you’re pretty good at boxing,” Ed said.

“Thanks.”

“You’re good at basketball too,” I said. “That tall coach called you ‘Rocket Butt.’”

Ed smiled, and then we were quiet for a bit.

As we walked down Walnut we could feel the air grow strangely cooler, and the wind shifted. The sky now grew a deep grey shade and we heard the distant rumble of thunder as we approached the historic district with its broad lawns, square parks, and brick sidewalks. We were now walking through the park below the trees just a block from the brick colonnade of Independence Hall beyond that bronze statue of Commodore Barry, the Father of the Navy dad once pointed out years before.

“I think it’s gonna rain,” Ed said.

“I think you’re right.”
Then the thunder rumbled deeply and there was a loud crack of lightning, and a cloud burst above us and we started to run. We ran as fast as we could with the rain pouring down on us as we sprinted under the full-leaved green trees and over the lush lawns and brick sidewalks.

“Run!” I said.

And we did, side–by–side toward the corner past The Curtis Publishing Company where mom used to type at night, its dull red bricks and grey carved stone above and beside us.

We ran as fast as we could, laughing, and then we reached the top of the steps which descended to the subway train; before us on either side the wet grey, brown–flecked granite shone; with rain on our faces and our hair damp across our foreheads: two brothers smiling during that storm in summer.

Christa Tropiano, *Untitled*
ALONE IN THE DEPTHS OF MADNESS

Nicholas Del Monico

The gray light was the first thing that had touched my face and the walls of the Victorian bounce room, the sun blocked by the eternal clouds. I arose from my slum mattress like an old, rusty automaton, my knees and elbows degraded by months of illness and malnutrition. I peeked through the filthy windows, observing the near-post-apocalyptic landscape, trees bare of leaves, the ground devoid of grass, and of things that should only live in underwater caves. Jumping onto the window was a thing with 4 tentacles, body of cat, eyes of horse, ears of seal, tongue of gecko, belly of worm, mouth of man, jaw of stingray, and teeth of spider. I jolted back in horror from the chimerical, abominable blasphemy, with fear that would even send Attila and Genghis Khan running back to their birthplace.

I laid down back to my decrepit bed, and turned to the camcorder, nesting in the right corner, next to the iron door. Said I, “How long should I be kept in the coldness of this God-forsaken box? What have I done to deserve this penalty, this end-sin? To be dirt in the rubble of a fallen structure?! I wrapped myself in the tattered that are hardly even called blankets, trying to keep the vampiric frost from sucking the very warmth out of me. Then, like a god out of nowhere, that voice from the Inferno spoke to me, “Really now, you pathetic goblin? Did you think we arrested you because of your ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, mentality, body frame? You supported the cause, you boycotted all that the Pact offers that a shockwave was on its way to destroy all things surrounding the atomic explosion. The sighing wind breathed very hard on the outside of the asylum, and, with each breath, the nightmares had grew ever more dreadful and frightening. Where did the old government go, fighting this false regime of glorifying bloodthirsty, war-and-power hungry, tyrannical, autocratic, fascist, communist, oppressor, suppressionist, drug-and-alcohol-forcing, mind-controlling, anti-Democratic gangs? It had all started when two atomic explosions decimated both Trenton and Camden in New Jersey, turning the Garden State into an American sister of Ukraine’s Chernobyl, Pripyat. The NSA believe it was perpetrated by Al-Qaeda, but as there was widespread violence that began to take hold of all the East Coast, they were shocked to discover that it was actually an anarchic street gang known as the “Pact”, a coalition of the Crips, Hell’s Angels, and MS-13. We all never knew how long all three gangs plotted to overthrow the government and established a dictatorship. At that time, I was just 7 years old when the war began.

But every time a move was made against the “Pact”, it would retaliate by blowing up 2 places with nukes, an example being Littleton, Colorado, and Orlando, Florida after Green Berets executed five high-ranking Sect generals. Eventually, a total of 64 cities were wiped off the face of the Earth, and, not wanting anymore loss of civilian lives, the President was forced to resign and was stripped of all his glory and power, and the “Pact” took over. They first closed the borders of Mexico and Canada, warning both countries and others that if foreign military attempts to land on the “Pactican” soil, there would be nuclear warfare, nonstop until every building crumbles, until every living thing is reduced to a charred corpse, then erased our past and history by censorship and fire, and finally banned all teachings of all religions. 23 somber years had went by, after the Declaration of Independence was burned, along with the Constitution, and other articles, erasing history, and even banning nostalgia to the point of forbidding the mention of it by penalty of death by being eaten by wild animals (as zoos were now had been converted into gladiatorial pits for the masses to enjoy), or worse, by endless torture. I thanked God that all of my family members and friends escaped to who knows where, but sadly, I was mistakenly left behind, and at age 30, I had to fend myself against cannibals, mutants, drones and police robots, and the pursuing secret police, worse than the Gestapo.

Now 34 years old, back to the dreamless sleep I went, into the blinding ocean of unfathomable, nightmarish darkness. There had been no crickets to be chirping about, no mice or rats squeaking for food or attention, no flies whose wings would drive a cow mad from her grazing spot, but of course the wretched wind. As one comrade from the Resistance said, “If there’s wind, there be a shockwave.” Any breeze, even the softest, was to be considered a signal that a shockwave was on its way to destroy all things surrounding the atomic explosion. The sighing wind breathed very hard on the outside of the asylum, and, with each breath, the nightmares had grew ever more dreadful and frightening.
Oh, the nightmares, like Jonah being trapped in a giant tuna for 3 days, as my job as a standard private in the army ranks of the Resistance, of me having to shoot Pact soldiers right in the middle of the forehead, of tanks that would blow most of us to bits, jets dropping high concentration of napalms on refugees and of foreign allies who had infiltrated in order to help us regain control of the States being ripped to ribbons by machine gun fire. I had to be smeared in blood, mud, dirt, dust, ash, and even raw organs in order to prevent PTSD from taking my mind away. Still, I could never had imagined the fateful day, as I and 80 others of my comrades were stationed at an outpost in Iowa, escorting dissidents and Native Americans to the Mexican Border. I was in charge of being the sentry in one of the look-out towers as a sniper. Checking through my scope, it seemed smooth-sailing. But as 2 hours passed on, we were ambushed by “Pact” gun-copters, death from above!

Every migrant and refugee rushed to the gates that lead to the underground tunnel that would lead to Central America, only to be shredded in a matter of seconds by high-power caliber bullets. We fired our anti-air guns onto the invading choppers, taking down many, but like the Persian Immortal army, more came from above. To our horror, they were coming from a large zeppelin that had a huge electromagnetic cannon. As we tried to head to our bunker complex, the cannon had fired on us, and then, all went black, for me. I then awoke in this cell, thus beginning my story into madness.

I couldn’t take it anymore, for I was de-evolving into a savage ape, running around on my knuckles like a gorilla, shouting nonsense to the camcorder, and finally blacking out in exhaustion. It was after I regained consciousness I heard two Pact guards had been given the order to have me publicly executed by hanging via barbed wire tomorrow. I taken back of my thoughts about our rebellious leader, and looked a way for me to escape my inevitable death penalty, or die by suicide. I frantically searched for something weak within the degraded cushions, until, by the angel Gabriel, some cold wind from above had touched my neck, and in an instant, I realized it was a hidden air vent. But before I could make my escape I had to get rid of the camcorder, one way or another.

I then remembered that the guy who does the camcorders often goes to lunch when it’s afternoon. So I waited until noon for the man to leave his post, and as he did, I covered the camcorder with the mattress, as to hide my escape. I jumped as high as I could, but to hopeless avail, and so much, very angry I was at my apparent failure, I immediately surrendered, and threw my tantrum onto the walls once more, to face the makeshift gallows on a Saturday morning-noon. But, miracles can always happen when you least expect it, as many Disney or Bluth fans would had said it in the pre-Sect past. As I thrashed myself around on the walls, various equipments and tools suddenly fell out of one crack between some panels, it was a gift from the Resistance, from Gods Almighty, thank you!

Wasting no time with my wealth of tools and devices, I got straight back to work, prying away the loose panel, using the screwdriver to remove the screws on the vent’s lid, and used the ladder to make my escape. But no doubt, once the security guy had returned to his post and check the one camcorder, he would alert the guards. It also hit me that I forgot to put the lid back on to the vent, but I had not the time to do so. Onwards, I had to crawl through the claustrophobic space of metal, dust, and shadows, into the veins of a massive, artificial beast. As I crawled though the old and angular vents, I had smelled wet rats the size of Maine coon gorging and feasting on cockroaches the size of Yorkshire terrier, a violent and epic meal for predators what we had actually once considered pests.

It seemed like 6 days had passed by as I tried to avoid detection by frequently moving throughout the arteries and veins of the fortress-like asylum, praying that if I did not made it out, at least I would either starve to death, suffocate from the highly toxic dust that was used as a pesticide, or for better or worse, be eaten by the cockroaches and rats. Then, when I stopped to gain rest, the panel below me gave way and then, I found myself in the hallways, in so much confusion and panic, I had to run and find the exit before it was too late. But to make matters worse, I had succumbed to the effects of the dusticide, causing me to see things, like a human face with toothed tentacles, a 2-legged, 5-headed pig with 8 tusks growing from each mouth, and a flying snail with one huge eye on its shell, oh the madness, make it stop, make it stop, make it stop, thought I, fearing I would
be lost in hallucinations forever. But, I regained my senses as a guard had shouted at me, "Halt," and I made the longest run of my life from that infernal gulag. I made twists and turns in my run, passing through auto-sentries and booby-traps, guards and attack dogs, never stopping for even a small breath, and I knew that I had to keep moving for life.

But, at last, the Lord had shown me light: an exit for me to escape this torment, to be free from the chains of these demons and their wicked torture, persecution, and inquisition. I opened the doors with all my last might, and lights hit me face, me embracing the glory and love of gods, or so I thought. As the bright light had cleared into a horrific revelation of a living mural the armed security had been waiting outside the whole time, waiting for me to come outside, to my own death, my end, my downfall, my erasing of my whole physical and spiritual existence altogether. “Put your hands in the air, and on your knees, you maggot. You’re surrounded, and devoid of all hope!!!”, boomed the warden with his megaphone atop an armored protected car mounted with a minigun. I did as he told me to do, to submit and obey the Pact, and there went my final hope, it was all over, my neck on a barbed noose, shot at, poked at, left to rot for all of eternity.

But yet, the Sisters of Fate had other plans for me, for came the trumpets of final hope back again, when gun-copters, tanks, and jets from a different faction attacked the blockade and chasing away many of the Pact soldiers. Then, in an episode of spectacular performance, the jets bombarded the asylum, and as troops rappelled into the building, a gunfight ensues, killing many of the wretched guards once and for all. But, the warden had been charging towards me with revolver in hand, aiming at my head, to kill me, to prevent a rescue on me, for me. I closed my eyes for one last time, to brace for a slug in the skull, but by doing so, a shot rang out behind, and when I opened my eyes, in that instant, I saw the warden on the ground, dead from a gunshot wound. As I turned around I saw the face of a familiar and friendly character: the Resistance leader, my young step-sister, the fall of the Pact has begun!

“There was a discordant hum of human voices!
There was a loud blast as of many trumpets!
There was a harsh grating as of a thousand thunders!
The fiery walls rushed back! An outstretched arm caught
My own as I fell, fainting, into the abyss.
It was that of General Lasalle.
The French army had entered Toledo.
The Inquistion was in the hands of its enemies.”
—The Pit and the Pendulum, Edgar Allan Poe, 1850.
I STILL REMEMBER THE WARMTH OF YOUR EMBRACE

By Shelby Carlton

Your warm hug envelops me like a thick blanket. Your soft, gentle arms hold me tightly and securely against your chest.

I am safe and warm in your embrace.

I wish you could hold me forever,

But I can’t stay here long.

Soon I’ll wake up and remember that

You’re only alive in my dreams.

BELATED

By Faith Bozzuffi

Pasaste tu cumple solo
En el tercer día de segunda mes.
Yo debería haber llamado,
Pero me olvido otra vez.

You spent your birthday alone
On the third day of the second month.
I should have called
But I forgot again.
Brielle Gall, *Untitled*

Christa Tropiano, *Untitled*
Finally! This day is over. I grab my coat and keys from my locker in the break room and rush out the side door before someone can stop me and ask me to cover their shift. I feel my phone buzz against my hip and reach into the pocket of my black work pants to retrieve it. I stare at the screen, giggling to myself over the goofy picture my brother sent of himself, when suddenly I trip over something. "Crap," I mutter under my breath as I stumble, attempting to regain my balance. I glance back to see what the offending object is, but when I do my heart stops.

I tripped over the hand of someone lying unconscious; their body is halfway behind the dumpster in what looks like a poor attempt by someone else to hide it. I nervously glance around the empty alleyway, wondering who this is and how they got here. No one would go in this alley behind the restaurant unless they worked here, and this person certainly does not work here. I can feel my heart beating in my ears as I slowly approach the person. I crouch down, trying not to make any noise, although I quickly realize that doesn't matter as the person is clearly passed out. I see that it is a woman; she’s pretty with shoulder length dark brown hair and dressed in business casual attire, but the wrinkles on her forehead give away her age, what I’m guessing to be late forties. I shake her shoulders a bit, attempting to wake her up. When she doesn’t immediately respond to my poking and prodding, a horrible thought comes to me and my palms start to sweat. I take a deep breath, trying to calm myself, and think back to when I took a CPR class in high school. Okay, first check the pulse. I put my index and middle finger on the side of the woman’s neck, but there is only stillness beneath my fingertips. I curse under my breath, starting to shake a bit as I dial 911 on my cellphone. I quickly give them my situation and location, but it seems like it takes an eternity for the ambulance to arrive. The paramedics who aren’t working on the lady do their best to calm me, but I know that I won’t feel better until I find out what happened to that lady. I push past the paramedics trying to talk to me and run over to the back of the ambulance, whose doors are about to close. “Wait!” I yell, my voice hoarse. “Wait! I want to know what happened!” The doctor in the back of the ambulance who was trying to close the doors gives me a tired look.

“I’m sorry, miss, I can’t release any information at this time.” The flat tone in his voice tells me he uses this line often and is extremely unlikely to be sympathetic to my situation. Ignoring this, I continue to press him.

“Please, I don’t need the details. It’s just, I-I’m the one that… that found her. I just want to make sure she’s okay,” I can hear the desperation in my voice as I plead and can only imagine how foolish I look. The truth is clear, yet I’m standing here begging for it. I can see that he is internally conflicted on what to do, and he sighs as a part of him gives up. “Well, let’s just say she’s never gonna get a chance to thank you,” he gives me a solemn nod as he closes the doors to the ambulance in my face. I stand there, my face blank, unable to process what has just happened over the past half hour. I don’t know how long I stand there before I’m broken from my trance by the sound of my own name.

“Kendall Walsh?” I turn around, coming face to face with two police officers. The one who called my name is short and squat, his bald head continuing straight into the rest of his large forehead which seems to loom over his face, giving him a menacing look. The other is tall and very thin, with tan skin and a very angular face. I try to ignore the chill that runs up my spine at the sight of them, reminding myself that I did find a dead body, so the police are going to want to talk to me.

“Yeah, uh, hi,” I say awkwardly, feeling nervous even though I didn’t do anything wrong.

“I’m Officer Davis and this is Officer Rossi,” the shorter one introduces them; he is clearly the mouthpiece for this duo. “We understand that you are the one who found Mrs. Lang’s body.”

“Uh, yeah, that would be me,” I reply, feeling like I am somehow incriminating myself, even though I didn’t do anything to her.

“Right, well, we’re going to need to bring you down to the station for questioning, just so we can work out the details and figure out what happened to her. Follow us.” The two officers lead me to the police car which I sit in the back of for the short, silent ride to the station. When we arrive, I follow them down a winding hallway to a small room with a window. It is empty except for a table and three chairs. I sit across from the officers and shove my sweaty palms under my legs, willing myself to relax.

“Relax,” Officer Davis says to me in a kind voice, as if reading my mind. “We just need to know exactly when, where, and how you found Mrs. Lang so that we can figure out who did this to her. We would just like you to tell us what
happened from the very beginning." I take a deep breath, release a piece of my dirty blonde hair from my clenched fist, and begin to tell the police officers the story. The whole thing sounds even more bizarre and surreal when I say it aloud. When I finish, I sit back and take another deep breath. The day's events finally hit me and I realize how tired I am. "Thank you," Officer Davis says, closing the notebook he was using to furiously scribble my every word. He gestures towards Officer Rossi, who still hasn't said more than two words, neither of which were directed towards me. "Officer Rossi will take you back to the scene so that you can get your car."

I sleep fitfully that night, unable to push the picture of the woman lying on the ground out of my mind. They gave me off work the next day, but I awoke at nine A.M. anyway, unable to lie in my bed any longer. I find myself wishing that I had someone to talk to about the previous day's crazy events, but I am fairly new to town and haven't made any friends yet. I could call my family, but then they would just worry. I sigh and pour myself a fresh cup of coffee in my tiny apartment kitchen. When I hear my phone buzzing on the counter, narrow my eyes at the clock. Who would be calling me this early? My family knows better than to call before noon- a working 23 year old girl needs her sleep. I glance at the caller ID, seeing an unfamiliar but local number before answering. "Hello?" I do my best not to sound half asleep, but it's difficult.

"Miss Walsh? This is Officer Davis. We're going to need you to come back in for questioning. How soon can you be here?"

After hanging up, I gulp down the rest of my coffee, not feeling like I can stomach anything more. I quickly get dressed and drive down to the station. Upon arriving, I feel the same nervous feeling I had yesterday before talking to the two police officers. I recall Officer Davis' kind words from the day before, but they do little to calm my nerves.

Today I am led to a room even further down that maze-like hallway which has many more people patrolling it than the one from yesterday. I try to swallow the lump in my throat as I sit down across from Officer Davis and Officer Rossi.

"Hello again, Miss Walsh," Officer Davis greets me, of course. "We're sorry that we had to bring you back in, but we were a bit confused on the details of your story. How did you say you knew the deceased?"

"I-I didn't know her," I do my best to control my shaking voice; I don't want them to think I'm lying, but it's quite hard not to be nervous when they're questioning me like some sort of criminal.

"Hmm. Well that's strange, because we found a receipt in her purse from your restaurant," he begins, pulling out a plastic bag holding a small slip of paper and sliding it across the table to me. "And if you look at the top, it says the name of the server is Kendall W. Now I could be wrong, but I'm betting you're the only Kendall W. that works as a server there. And considering the time on the receipt is 11:58 A.M., when you were working, I'm also betting that you were her waitress." The officer falls silent, staring at me with his deep set eyes as he waits for me to reply.

"I-I might have been," my voice is really shaking now. "I see so many people in a day, it's hard to remember every single one of them. I work at one of the busiest diners in town. Did they really expect me to remember every customer?"

"I understand that, but it's a bit strange that she didn't even look familiar to you." He falls silent again, although I have no reply to this. "So, around what time did you take your break from work yesterday?" I'm not quite sure what this has to do with anything, but I thought back to my shift yesterday.

"Well, I worked from eight to four, so my break was probably around noon."

"Interesting," Officer Rossi says in a low voice, glancing sideways at Officer Davis who nods as if they were communicating telepathically.

"Yes, very interesting. Did you know, Ms. Walsh, that the coroner determined the time of death of Mrs. Lang was between 12 and 12:20 P.M.?" Officer Davis speaks, but both officers have their eyes glued to my face. I shake my head, not trusting myself to speak. "According to you, you would have been on break at-" Officer Davis is interrupted by a secretary scurrying in with a Post-it note. He and Officer Rossi read it over before directing their attention back to me.

"Excuse me, Ms. Walsh. We'll be back in a minute." The officers leave the room and I am left alone, although I am sure they have someone monitoring me. I don't care who's watching; I lean down and put my head between my knees in an attempt to relieve the overwhelming dizziness that is taking over me. The fuzziness is just beginning to fade from my vision when I hear the door to the room open again. I reluctantly sit up straight in my chair, ready to face another round of questioning and do whatever it takes to prove my innocence. The policemen glare at me, their gazes chilling me to the bone. I'm afraid to hear what they are going to ask next.

"Well, Ms. Walsh, would you like to tell us the truth now?" Officer Davis begins in a clipped tone.
“I have been telling you the truth,” I answer, momentarily too confused to be afraid.

“If that’s so, then why did we find this,” Officer Davis slides a picture across the table, “with your fingerprints all over it?”

“What is this?” I’m still confused; why are they showing me a picture of a brick?

“That’s the object that was used to kill Mrs. Lang. As you can see, one side of it is covered in blood, which came from the wound on her head. That brick was found loose in the back wall of the restaurant you work at. In case you wondering, the only fingerprints on it are your own.” Officer Davis continues to stare at me coldly while Officer Rossi sits back and sort of smirks at me, his arms crossed over his chest.

“Th-That’s impossible!” I burst out, unsure of how else to react. How could they even be saying this? It was so clearly a lie. As I look down at the picture of the brick in front of me, my brain fills with flashes of images. The woman, Mrs. Lang, sitting at a table in the diner. My hands, working to remove the loose brick from the back wall on my break. Blood, pouring out of Mrs. Lang’s head and drenching the brick in my hand. The cold steel on my wrists releases me from the hold the pictures have on me. Officer Davis’ cold stare and menacing forehead are the last things I see before the world goes black.

When I wake up, I am lying on an uncomfortable bed in a small, dark room. I try to sit up to get a better look at my surroundings, but I realize that I am restrained. As my eyes adjust to the darkness, I see that my wrists and ankles are tied to the bed. Scared and confused, I call out for help. After what seems like hours of shouting with no reply, I give up and attempt to piece together how I got here. My epiphany from the police station comes back to me- I killed the woman from the diner. But how is that possible? Why would I do that? As I struggle with these questions, I hear the door to my bleak room crack open.

“Oh, Kendall. I’m glad to see you’re awake,” a voice that sounds like it is trying too hard to be tranquil greets me.

“W-Where am I? What’s going on?” I say as I attempt to gain control of my shaking voice. The light from the hallway filters through the cracked door and illuminates the figure walking towards me. I see that it’s a man, probably in his late forties, but can’t make out any details.

“You’re at Stony Brook Psychiatric Center, Kendall. Don’t you remember how you got here?” I stay silent, unsure of how to respond, while a million thoughts race through my mind. I’m at Stony Brook? But that place is for crazy people! Why I am here?

As if reading my mind, the man begins to answer these questions. “You were arrested for the murder for Mrs. Lang, but after some tests and a look into your mental history, it appears that you have a condition called dissociative identity disorder, with possible schizophrenia.” The man must notice the look of terror on my face at this diagnosis, because he gives a little chuckle under his breath. “Don’t worry, we’ll take good care of you here.” He walks closer to me, and I see the glint of something metal in his hand. Before I have time to register what this object is, the tip of the needle is already in my arm, and the medicine is working its way into my system. I attempt to jerk my arm away from his needle, but my limbs suddenly feel too heavy to move.

My vision starts to get fuzzy, but I can see the face of the man looming over me as I succumb to the medicine. “You might as well just relax, Kendall,” he tells me in his eerily calm voice. “You’re going to be here for a long time.”
Deborah Schaffer, *Untitled*
It was technically a bright, sunny day in the hilly plains of California called Los Angeles, but in her mind, the day was always a dark, dreary one filled with ominous clouds overlooking her soul with the threat of a thunderstorm. Her brain was blanketed by darkness from the moment she woke up, to the moment she fell asleep. For years, she felt that sense of darkness overtake her mind and her soul, and though she wanted to change it, she couldn’t bring herself to muster up any desire for personal redemption. She couldn’t imagine all the wrongdoings from her past being forgotten, maybe because she felt so unimaginably guilty about it. But maybe it was because she still felt that regret of losing the one thing she loved the most, Matt, though she hadn’t realized it at that fateful time ten long years ago.

Maureen walked away from the window and toward her closet. While she did so, she passed a mirror, and her peripheral vision commanded her body to stay there, in front of it. As she looked, she saw nothing out of the ordinary; she saw her long dark, shiny hair, curling at the ends as it always had, her olive skin with a complexion makeup artists died for, and her hazel eyes that seemed to be on the darker end of the spectrum these days, but that still had a hint of light green that resembled the color of a freshly watered grape. Everything looked perfect, but she just knew in her head that it wasn’t. Her skin, though still perfect, lacked that extra glow that was once raved about by millions. Her hair seemed tired, losing its previous natural red highlights; now it was dull, darker than before. All in all, her physical appearance had caught up to the type of person she truly was.

The phone suddenly rang a few feet away from her, on the table next to her bed. She went to retrieve it, checking to see who it was. When she saw the name on the Caller ID, she instantly felt confused, wondering how in the world he knew her number after all of these years, and why he would be calling her. However, that confusion suddenly escalated into a feeling of nervousness once she remembered just how negatively she had affected him in the past. She wanted to answer the phone so much, but she hesitated more than she ever had before. On the last ring, she felt her body overtake her mind, and her thumb slid across the screen, answering his call.

“Hello,” she whispered hesitantly, with a hint of cheerful anxiousness in her voice.

“Hey,” the deep voice said on the other end.

There was a moment of awkward silence placed there from the lack of communication the two had endured for about ten years. Shock overcame her, putting her body in complete stillness.

She finally decided to end the silence, boldly striking up the conversation.

“How’d you know my number?” she asked, letting confusion rid away of her shock. She wandered across the room, sitting herself carefully on the edge of her bed. Her hand began picking at her quilt, her heart started pulsating at fast intervals, and her nerves started to kick into high gear, driving her mind wild in an unknown delusion.

“Maureen,” he replied, not knowing what to say. The pause sent Maureen’s body into a state of anxiousness, her heart trembling in sync with each breath she heard on the other end.

“Yeah?” she questioned, hoping he would get the hint that she did in fact welcome his call. Another lull came about, and Maureen could only hope that he wouldn’t hang up and give up on whatever he was about to say.

“Still stubborn old Maureen, huh?” he finally replied, his voice hinting witha humored, yet annoyed tone.

She laughed in reply, relieved that the one person that had known her better than anyone proved that he still did, and grateful that he had continued the drastically awkward conversation they were having. He was still the same old Matt she had known ten years ago.

“I guess so,” she voiced in a smiling, thankful tone.

“I asked Chris,” he finally said, in reply to her original question about him knowing her phone number.

“Wait, Chris?” she asked bewilderedly.

Chris was her ex-husband, whom wanted nothing more than to hit on every single previous co-star of hers. She fell in love with his suave ways a long time ago, but their marriage became nothing more than two people living together.
He started coming home later and later each day, and she had no doubt he was at one of the many female-oriented nightclubs he frequented. The jealousy of him being with other women became too much, and she cut him off for good through a divorce.

But, why had her ex-husband given Matt her number? Granted, he was once Matt’s best guy friend before all the turmoil came to fruition, but regardless; she couldn’t help but feel angry whenever Chris’s name was mentioned, but she realized that this time, she was actually very thankful to hear that name.

Matt chuckled on the other end, his deep voice sending her mind into the past they had once shared together, when they were starving artists in their twenty’s living in a shoebox apartment in New York. The past where they were best friends before anything else.

But when fame found her, she seemed to have lost him. Back then, she always blamed him for leaving their friendship, mocking him for not being able to handle the press she was getting. That day ten years ago, when she embittered him all over the media for his bisexual orientation, making sure every casting director would not hire him because of her annoyance toward his lack of enthusiasm for her career and his vexation of her reckless lifestyle of alcohol and spending. She was full of vengeance then, ruthless in every way. She never originally thought she was casting him aside for a life that wound up damaging her, hurting his heart in the process. And she never believed just how extreme his feelings for her were. She wasn’t used to that type of intense love to understand and appreciate its power back then, but now, with this phone call, she did.

The regret that enveloped her memory suddenly became too much for her. She felt her body go numb, and her eyes became soaked. She felt a tear trail down her cheek: a tear that took a long, ten years to finally emerge.

“I’m so sorry,” she heard herself say, now on the verge of sobbing. She knew Matt could hear her over the phone, and she tried to mask her overwhelming emotion, but she did so to no avail.

“Maureen,” he consoled. “Stop hiding your pain. It’s not healthy. You should know that.”

It was true; she should have known that, after all the times that she did it in her past. Whenever they had an issue in their friendship, her way of dealing with it was to distance herself away from him, not wanting to feel embarrassed of her pain in front of him. If she’d only known that concealing herself would lead to the cruel woman she had become, things might have been much different.

“It’s okay,” he silently said. “I forgive you, for everything.”

There was another pause, though this one was not awkward. In fact, it was actually comforting to her. She knew he was about to say something else, and because of the dramatic lull, she knew it was bound to be something big for him to say. She waited, hoping each breath she heard of his would commence with a phrase, or at least a word.

“I just want my best friend back,” he finally voiced.

“I do, too,” she replied, hopefully.

She listened with utter care to everything on the other end, hoping not to miss anything he were to say or breathe. Through this she heard the noise of heavy traffic, horns blaring, cars whirring past each other, speed obviously a mere suggestion on the road he was riding along. She wondered where he was and where he was traveling to.

“So, um, where are you right now?” she asked out of her own curiosity.

“Actually,” he started, obviously a little nervous to admit what he was about to say. “I was on my way to see you.”

Her body suddenly relieved itself of all tension, as if her soul had glided itself down a playground slide. She felt the corners of her mouth curve up into a toothy smile, and her eyes followed suit.

Finally, she thought. It’s all coming back to me.

She had never thought she’d get a second chance at anything due to all of the negative events of her past. The meanness that once consumed every fiber of her being and the cruelty she had once lost control of seemed to finally want to leave. The regret that had flooded her soul for ten years was now being vaporized by a sense of redemption that made her entire being brighten. She never thought she’d get a second chance, but this was her shot. If her friendship with Matt could be remedied, maybe her future could also be.
“Matt,” she started, lightly laughing, her happiness stopping her from continuing. She needed to get whatever she was about to say right: he deserved it.

“I’ve missed you so much,” she admitted, her heart smiling along with her face. She adjusted herself from sitting on the edge of her bed to fully laying on it, with her head against the purple satin pillows and her right knee bent upward.

She heard him chuckle at her comment, and she felt her face brighten into an even bigger smile than it previously was in.

“I’ve missed you, too,” he replied, with a smile in his voice.

She gazed up at the ceiling, envisioning what her life could be now. Everything would be different; there would be no more darkness in her heart, no more of her letting regret overcome her. She would be as bright as the sun in all of her pursuits, never giving up anymore.

“Can I ask why you called me?” she asked in wonderment, a little confused as to his action of doing so. She was grateful for his call, without a doubt, but still a little perplexed.

“I just,” he started, a little unsure of what he himself was even saying. “I felt that if something big were to happen, today was the day.”

“Why today?” she asked, laughing. He always was someone who went through life as an optimistic risk-taker, and who was very much mocked for it, especially by the old Maureen.

“I don’t know,” he said conclusively. “It just felt right.”

As she smiled at his answer, she felt a crash strike her ears. She looked around to see if it was something around her, but she couldn’t point out anything in particular. As her eyes hunted for the culprit, she felt a loud boom under her.

Her body started to shake, but this time, it wasn’t because of any emotion. She then gasped as she realized what was happening. Everything in her room started shaking; old, dusty CD’s were toppling over onto the floor from the place they stood atop a table, her jewelry box flew from the place it sat on her dresser, it's doors flying open, throwing every piece of gold she had, and the standing mirror that stood in the corner of the room crashed to the ground, shattering into pieces of glass strewn across the dark teal carpeted floor. The shaking continued for another minute, until it finally subsided, leaving everything in the room a mess.

She hadn’t realized it, but her phone had flown away from her grasp during the earthquake a few feet away from her, near the window. She frantically went to retrieve it, hoping Matt was alright. As she picked it up off the ground, she saw that the call was still in progress. She quickly put the phone up to her ear, trying to hear anything that might resonate to her end.

“Matt?” She heard nothing in response, only occasional horns. Panic began to overtake her body, tightening her face and her stomach.

It was then that she heard a loud siren that only increased in volume as each second went by. If panic had not fully overtaken her beforehand, it had now. Though she was terrified at what this noise could actually mean, she couldn’t bring herself to put down the phone.

Suddenly, she heard footsteps and a voice eventually accompanied them. She waited awhile in anticipation of what he was about to communicate. As soon as she heard what he voice had to say, she dropped the phone and crumbled down onto the floor, sobbing relentlessly. Her mind ached, her heart froze, and her body went numb. All the hope in her heart and the sunshine it brought her soul quickly diminished, and, in place, came the dark, familiar thunderclouds. Never before had she believed in fate, citing it as “stupid” and that there was no “proof” for it. However, now she didn’t know what to believe. All that she loved in her life, the one thing she wanted back, was now gone. There would be no second chances: not now, and not ever.

As soon as she accepted her doomed fate, she brought up her face to look outside the window. She still saw the bright sunshine she saw every day, but she also saw something different. In the corner of the sky, a dark cloud approached and an eventual rain began to come upon the city. It was one of the first times the weather in this city seemed to have matched her emotions, and it would probably be the last. The life she wanted so much, the one she had dreamed she would have, was being taken away from the fateful darkness of the world, and she had no control over it at all. Her chance at redemption was forever gone.

Her new life wouldn’t start now. Rather, it had ended.
FUGUE

By Damara Peraino

Who am I?

How do I cover these eyes?

To hide someone I no longer recognize.

I swear if I move too quickly I’ll catch the lag in the mirror…

I’m sad again for no reason,

Life is going well, but I’m scared.

I can’t identify the person I believe in.

It’s in my mind and it waits till I lay in bed.

Violently shaking me awake.
THE DAY I FORGAVE MY MOTHER

By Rachael Whitman

The rain slapped against the window panes. I’ve heard people call them the Angels’ tears. Maybe my brother’s tears. My brother...I didn’t even know I had one until recently. I overheard my parents saying today was his 23rd birthday. I confronted my mom but she just broke down crying saying how naive she was and how her life was in shambles.

I had always wanted a brother or sister...ever since I was a little girl. I live in a small suburban town with my parents. We aren’t rich, but we’re pretty well off. I go to a nice, little, private school and every day when I get home my mom has a snack ready for me. My mom is my mother but also my best friend and has been for all 17 years of my life. We go shopping together and share all the same favorite foods. I don’t mind hanging out with my mom for the most part. I’m pretty mellow. One time she bought me a matching sweater and I actually wore it before it “went missing.”

Anyway, back to the present, like I said...I’m not a harsh person, and I normally forgive people easily. But I just hate her right now. I know I am more mad at what happened, than actually at her, but I can’t help it. I’m sitting on my bed and writing this in my journal to try and calm myself. I look at the clock, it’s past midnight, so I resign myself to sleep.

Tick, tock, tick, tock

I am brought out of my sleep by the sound of a clock, but I don’t have one. I open my eyes, and I don’t know where I am. The room is clean, has a bed, dresser, anything you would need, but nothing as if someone lives here. It reminds me of the guest room at my grandmother’s house. I quietly move down the stairs, and into the kitchen. I see three people. Then it hits me. Those are my grandparents and my mom, but boy do they look young. I can see them, but they don’t see me. They are having an argument.

“But mom! He is so perfect! He doesn’t do drugs, or drink, or anything!”

“I don’t care, you’re only 15,” turning to my grandpa, grandma says, “John! Say something!”

Glancing up from his paper, avoiding grandma’s eyes, he says, “Your mother is right. I don’t want to hear anything else about you and him sneaking off. Do ya hear?”

“Yes, sir,” my mom mumbles quietly. She looks like she is about to cry, whether it is because she wants to date this boy or because of the tension between my grandparents, I couldn’t tell.

I follow my mom a few blocks to her school. I watch her walk down the hall before someone calls out her name.

“Hey, Meg!”

“Hey, Ashley…” she responds back quietly.

“Aw, what’s wrong?”

“My parents still won’t let me go out with Rob....I don’t care though.”

“You can always say you’re at my house.”

“Yeah, I know. Already used that excuse!”

“Of course you would.”

They both laugh then go their separate ways to class. I am still following her when I hear my name, but there must be another Kelly, because no one so far can seem to see me. Someone taps me on the shoulder. I see a young man. He looks vaguely familiar.

I look at him and respond, “Hi...you can see me?”

“Of course I can! What are you doing here?”

“I don’t know…” I trail off then I ask him, “Do you know Meg Childs?”

“Yeah, we don’t talk, but I see her around. She’s so sweet!”
“You don’t know her like I do.”

I start to ask his name but then I notice we are walking towards the same class mom is in.

She is talking to someone outside the classroom door:

“Hey Meg wait up!”

“Hey…”

“Your mom still mad?”

“Yeah, but I will just say I am going to Ashley’s tonight.”

“Cool! Your parents are so strict though. They would kill me if they found out about you know…”

“Yeah, I know…” she says with a faintly guilty smile...but before she could say anything else the bell rang.

*buzzzz*

A few hours later I am following her to a party. I am sitting in a corner watching teenagers drink, smoke, and grind against each other. I can not believe my mom is here. She always tells me parties are bad, and I actually listen to her and do not rebel. Unlike her, she is over there in that corner kissing her boyfriend. My anger boils even more, deep down I love her I know, but I have so much anger. As I am watching I feel a tap on the shoulder again. I see the young man from before, he looks at me as if he can read my thoughts.

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Having trouble forgiving someone?”

So he did know

“Maybe.”

“You got to think of it from her perspective too.”

I just glare at him until, out of the corner of my eye, I see Rob and my mom fighting all of a sudden. A moment later she starts crying and storms off.

I wonder what that was about. All of a sudden I am at school again. It is morning. I see mom walk by with Ashley. Ashley is whispering, “So you are for sure? What did you tell him?”

“I don’t know yet, I didn’t mean to tell him, but he is moving so I just blurted it out…”

“Oh...well what are you going to do?

Are they talking about what I they think they are? IS this when she decides to do it?

“I am going to keep it.”

“Really? Now I know we don’t talk about your parents...but with everything with the divorce, they are going to be even more mad, maybe you can live with your aunt?”

“I know...my homelife is so terrible, don’t remind me...what do you think of the other option?

“Could you live with that?”

“I don’t know...my parents would hate me...but is it better than them knowing? I would disappoint them so much…”

I watch as my mom starts sobbing and Ashley puts her arm around her shoulders in a big hug.

The mystery man comes up to me just then. I know he heard the conversation.

I turn to him,
“You know her! Can you stop her from doing it?”

“I can’t. I can’t talk to her yet, it’s not why I am here.”

“What’s that supposed to mean? That makes no sense!”

I turn away and run after my mom, but I know she won’t be able to see me. So will it do any good? I look, and look, but can’t find her. I walk back to her house.

It is now after supper, and I see her in the room on her phone. She is writing a time on her notepad. It is a doctor’s appointment. As soon as the thought crosses my mind we arrive at the doctor’s office. I see her come out of an exam room, Ashley is waiting outside, and my mom tells her it is confirmed and she has the appointment for the procedure tomorrow. I listen, but it is all in a blur. I am still upset, but then something deep inside reminds me of the conversation she had before about her parents. I didn’t know they had divorced. Grandpa died long before I was born. Mom looked so scared...but I keep pushing those thoughts away. It was easier for me to keep being angry. I felt tears fall down my face.

The next day is when it is set to happen. I am but a watcher, I can’t do anything...at all. I watch her enter the clinic. I don’t understand why I am here. Am I supposed to feel this pain as punishment for saying I hated her? It isn’t until two hours later when she exists, crying, does the mystery man appear again. He walks over,

“So, you know about her parents?”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t make it right!”

“I know, but can’t you try and understand why she did it? She was scared, and already stressed”

I know that it helps me to understand her better, but instead I say,

“Whatever.”

“I know you don’t really mean it...you love your mom, let go of the anger, and let that love help you forgive her.”

I don’t know why, but I trust him.

“Just think about it for a moment.”

I pretend not to listen, but I really do...And I do love my mom! I always wanted a brother, but her mistake doesn’t make me love her less. I remember the time I was bullied at school and she comforted me. The time I had a root canal and she made me homemade ice cream. She does love me...

At that moment I let the anger down for a moment. I turn to tell him he might be right, but he is gone. I see him walk over to my mom and they exchange words, she looks a little shocked. Then all of a sudden I woke up. I am in my own bed. Was that all a dream? I can hear my mom in her room though. She is still upset from our conversation. I walk into her room.

She looks at me, “Kelly! I am so sorry! About everything...”

As if she knew I wanted an explanation she told me what I had just learned. “I didn’t understand then what I was really doing. My parents...”

“We were getting a divorce,” I finish.

“How did you know?”

“I just do...Mom, I’m sorry I yelled at you. I was, I am, upset, but I know you love me and I forgive you.”

More tears escape my mother’s eyes as she hugs me even tighter.
“Someone helped me to realize how much power I have to forgive someone.”

“Who?”

I describe the young man, and she looks at me in shock as she says, “He sounds so familiar. He reminds of the person who...and I never told anyone this...who came up to me after I went to the clinic, and I thought he was a protester, I said I regretted it...and...”

“Well! What did he say??”

“It’s ok, your baby forgives you.”
EVEN IN MY SANCTUARY

By Damara Peraino.

There is peace where I lay,
The back of the car truck slightly groaning from the unknown weight,
  The sky,
  It’s a sick kind of blue.
All the edges are pale and relaxing but when your eyes look straight up,
  That color,
  It’s so deep and empty,
There’s not a cloud in the sky to help me find a point of recognition,
  I’ve never been afraid of the sky before.
The day is unnerving;
At least at nighttime there are clouds, stars, planes, forgotten satellites.
  The moon.
  But the day can be empty,
  Just that nauseating deep blue,
It twists your insides as you slowly cringe up more on the car hood.
  You could always look at the sun,
  That would surely save you from this insanity,
  But of course,
  Leave you satisfied and blind.
Those crows seem to break up the bleak, motionless atmosphere.
  There’s so many here,
  They fly in numbers divisible by three,
  And perch on old stones,
  Except one.
  He sits in a tree above me,
  He’s staring at me now,
  Looking down at the fleshy mass,
  What are you doing down there human?
  Staring at the sky Mr. Crow.
There is an overwhelming pit of anxiety where I lay.
  The hood of the car is moaning in pain.
  The sky,
  It’s a sick kind of blue.
Brielle Gall, *Untitled*