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Fall 2016

The Molloy Student Literary Magazine Volume 14

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Recommended Citation

Hey, Damian Ph.D.; Ostapiuk, Joseph; Chappa, Chloe; Solis, Adrianna; Gallagher, Mary AKT; Anderson, Morgan; Caiazzo, Frank; Esposito, Nicole; Kalista, Lauren; Mascia, Vincent; Rontanini, Christopher; Sivert, Annmarie; Collins, Meghan Kristyn; Jareb, Emily; Daly, Helen; Jones, Idalis; Miranda, Elizabeth; and Vaglica, Victoria, "The Molloy Student Literary Magazine Volume 14" (2016). *The Molloy Student Literary Magazine*. 7.

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The Molloy Student Literary Magazine

Volume 14 (Fall 2016)

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Letter from the Editor

The Molloy Student Literary Magazine, sponsored by Molloy College's Office of Student Affairs, is devoted to publishing the best previously unpublished works of prose, poetry, drama, literary review, criticism, and other literary genres, that the Molloy student community has to offer. The journal welcomes submissions, for possible publication, from currently enrolled Molloy students at all levels.

All submitted work will undergo a review process initiated by the Managing Editor prior to a decision being made regarding publication of said work. Given sufficient content, *The Molloy Student Literary Magazine* is published twice annually in Spring and Fall.

Interested contributors from the currently enrolled Molloy student community should send work via e-mail attachment and brief cover letter (including a two-sentence biographical statement) to:
Dr. Damian Ward Hey, Managing Editor, *The Molloy Student Literary Magazine*: dhey@molloy.edu.

Enrolled students who are interested in becoming members of *The Molloy Student Literary Magazine* staff may e-mail letters of inquiry.

Excelsior!

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Due to reasons of space, not all accepted pieces may appear together in the same issue of the magazine. If, for example, a contributor submits multiple pieces and more than one piece is accepted, the Managing Editor reserves the right to choose which piece is included in the current issue. Accepted items that do not appear in the current issue may appear in an upcoming issue.

All decisions made by the Managing Editor regarding publication or non-publication of any particular piece or pieces are final.

The Molloy Student Literary Magazine

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Joseph Ostapiuk

A Bridge Between

(1st Place, The Molloy Common Reading Program Inspired Works Contest)

The rainbow of artificial light stretched across the vast digitized sky, spanning its LED glow across the brightly colored city. The projected image of clouds hovered amidst an artificial sun that replaced its predecessor. The warm, radiating glow of flashing lights shone through the windows of every home as the streets lay empty while the auditory stimulation of advertisements echoed through the open avenues.

Through the lens of digital contacts, a virtual cloak placed a mask over the natural world creating an augmented reality in place of an old, sensory state of being that had now been removed irrevocably. Sensation: pain, sadness, passion all were fading into the distance like a decaying memory. Thought had been derailed, controlled, and ultimately fractured under the influence of stimulation and digital noise.

Education, in its former sense, had become irrelevant. No longer did students need to sit at desks with pencils in their hands. The endless trails extending deep into the digital world wholly and immediately occupied every child from conception until adulthood and beyond. Travel had also been eradicated, as geographical location became arbitrary. The senses could be stimulated artificially to experience the grandeur of the Grand Canyon, or the smell of the morning air upon the Alps. And emotional sadness had become diminished with the constant and unrelenting nature of technology. The heart did not have time to wince or to bleed. Psychology had moved from a room to a lens, and any pain could be dealt with within the

individual's eye. Coping with the nature of existence no longer incited a struggle. The mind became its own mechanism as the feelings themselves vanished under the overarching cloak of technology. The heart, no more — the mind, no more — until life itself existed within the infinity of the digital realm.

The natural world had become entirely abhorrent and unbearable to look upon with human eyes. The rapid and unstoppable integration of technology trained the retina to appall the image and reject its substance, until the natural world had been eradicated from the face of the Earth entirely. The visual pain of trees, open fields, and even the smallest insect caused the most violent, splitting agony throughout the brain until the eyes of the afflicted rested on the warm and comforting glow of a digital gaze. Faces walk around adorned with digitized contacts meant to ease the agony of perceiving the remaining remnants of the Old World still present — human flesh, steel and the ground. Ultimately, these features too would be eradicated with the coming years, but the New World still gleamed with the imaginative glow of a child of the past — teeming with energy and vibrancy. The subtle nature of humanity had almost entirely dissipated. Friendships were gone. Relationships had only become necessities that lingered deep within the primordial mind, but pleasure had entirely been revoked from the actions of lust and passion. Mouth-to-mouth dialogue sank to base terms meant only to communicate base ideas, as the digital world now encapsulated the entirety of human existence.

Ramsey Orpheus remembered the days before the New World began; he was 30 years old when the shift had been completed. Now, at the tail end of his life — gray, old tired and weak — he walked the empty streets alone and silent, reminiscent and distant. An outsider conflicted with the overbearing nature of his surroundings, Ramsey had been

indoctrinated into the New World hesitantly, at first, but eventually, his morals waivered with the persistent hand of technology bearing down onto every living portion of his life.

There were those who repented, he remembered. The New World did not come overnight; no, it happened steadily, and there were those who fought against it fervently. The stairwell to acceptance was one littered with fractures, but technology's overall magnitude reigned over all. Oppressors were never exterminated. Those who opposed simply lost their fervor with the coming of time until their voices became irrelevant to the majority. At first, virtual reality was used sparingly and in short bursts, but with its emergence arose a dependence. The eyes of people became starved for digital stimulation, and in their yearning a new age began.

Still, his memories emerged from the repressed portions of his brain. While most of his rememberings had become convoluted with the inexorable over-stimulation of the digital realm, some moments of clarity prevailed as a passageway into a not-so-distant past that seemed so very far away.

He remembered the trips his family took as he was a child.

Midnight. Sitting in the tailbed of the truck, the open air inhaled. Crossing the road towards the Delaware River, the glow of the last street light dissipating behind. Stepping onto the cold ground, the river's calm consciousness becoming audible as sight set upon the vast and unending sky above. Color and imagination bounded together within view as stars hovered weightlessly within the Great Unknown. The sounds of nature — the only sounds that spiraled through the midnight air.

Regaining consciousness, Ramsey pushed down his contacts over his eyes. Even he, in his old age, still could not view the natural world for more than a few minutes at a time

until he, unconsciously, had to place his digitized lenses over his weakening eyes.

It was Fall, or that was what the calendar said. Such trivialities were no longer considered, for weather, season and change were no longer factors within existence. Only the effervescent nature of technology, and the unavoidable pathway to death progressed with each coming day. But Fall it was. Drove of digital trees mimicked the colors of fall — yellow and orange leaves contrasted against the dark brown of tree branches. Even the air, artificially conditioned, matched the slight chill of autumn as he walked slowly through the synthetic cityscape Ramsey remembered the golden arches of trees spreading across wooded trails that he would walk with his wife.

Her golden hair radiated with the warm amber of autumn. Her green eyes danced amongst the colors of falling leaves and sunlit lakes. Her cold hand and elegant frame glided effortlessly across the ground — her smile raising with the afternoon wind.

She died during the days of transition.

Bumping into a younger man entranced within his virtual reality, Ramsey's dream fell out of his mind and became lost amongst the digital ether. He attempted to retain her face, but it blurred as his eyes became pained with the memory of natural light, and her cold hand dissipated as sensation grew weaker with each coming moment.

The human frame had lost all its intrigue. The body no longer aroused curiosity — the subtle moments of life no longer excited the mind into happiness. The digital age had stripped the flesh-like pleasures that humanity once held and replaced this void with artificiality. The eyes, the hands, the mind had become desensitized by the new age until the physical world no longer bore any meaning to the vessel.

Walking amongst the distracting nature of the streets, and enraptured by the events occurring within his lenses, Ramsey lost himself for over an hour, entranced by the images flooding before him. Tailored images sparking his interest kept him engaged and wholly unaware of the world surrounding him for minute after minute, as the sun rose and peaked on a bright and typical afternoon. Regaining his physical place and removing his lenses, he looked up towards the hordes of digital advertisements grasping his attention and the sound of digitized music accompanying their grandeur. Somehow, their physical sight lacked in comparison to that of their virtual counterparts. Looking around further, he realized that everything seemed to lack a vibrancy, a digital luster that existed within the digital world. The natural world seemed undeniably dull and dreary. For a moment, Ramsey felt a growing sadness emanating from his chest — a distant, nearly foreign feeling he had not felt for some time. It grew steadily as the image of his wife re-entered his mind. It increased as his hands began to sweat, and eyes began to ache with the agony of sight. He squinted strongly to keep her image floating within his mind, but his hands disobeyed as instinct prevailed. He placed his contacts over his eyes and his feelings weakened and subsided. His mind was clean.

Ramsey walked on unoppressed for some time until his knee began to ache. Technology had not yet removed pain from the body, and Ramsey would likely not witness such an alteration. Becoming more and more aware of his pain, he decided that his daily walk should end. He began, slowly, to walk towards his home somewhere on the other side of town. His escapades caused him to lose his direction, but his lenses directed him on his way towards his destination.

The ache continued, but it began to hurt more than usual. His weakening frame constantly grew worse with each

day, and his knees wore out brutally as he continued to try to restore his old life.

The daily walks through the bustling city streets — her coat pressed gently against his. Store front displays gleaming with elegance.

As his pain increased, his head grew heavy with pain, and he had to remove his lenses. Looking upward, he saw the remnants of an old passenger rail, and it reminded him of a trip he had taken some time ago.

The train rattled on the tracks as it approached the tunnel. She was leaning against the pole as light scattered throughout the car. For one moment, her frame would be illuminated by a dim glow, and then she would pass into darkness. She was standing there, lost in her own thoughts, engaged in reverie. Her dreamlike glance inspired his eyes as he began to smile.

As the pain increased, so too did his memory. Visions of an old existence, emerging like a butterfly from its cocoon, clawed themselves out from the crevices of his mind. The digital world paled its light and fell beneath the intense scenes within the brain. His hands clenched his knee, and his teeth grinded against one another. His eyes remained focused as looked up and decided, through his agony, that his old life would return. He would force it to return. There would be no other option. He moved with added vigor towards his home as he began to realize his surroundings. Consciousness of the physical realm was returning aggressively as he blocked out the sounds of advertisements and the temptation to cover his eyes with the lenses.

Hobbling close to his home, he walked down his street and up his steps to the door. He unlocked it on his first attempt and climbed a flight of stairs into his small apartment.

Scattered were old books he had not read in ages. Looking towards them, realized that he had almost entirely forgotten what any of them were about. The titles seemed an entire other language to him, and their plots, their characters, their words were lost within the worn recesses of his mind. He picked up a dusty, old book. He read the title. *Brave New World*. He could not recall a single scene within the novel. He opened it to its first page, but nothing could re-spark his memory. He dropped the book and looked towards the mantle. His knees were fiery with pain. Every step caused him to wince. A dull pain began to form in his skull. He picked up an old picture frame. It was covered with dust. He wiped off the dust. He moved to a chair and sat down to relieve his knee. He looked at the frame and saw her. He saw them together.

Her face. The park. Summer.

He kept his eyes focused on the memory.

Photographs. A secret cove. The lake.

His head began to radiate with pain.

A laugh. A bird.

His eyes began to water with tears.

Her face.

He forced his mind to remember her.

Remember

As he looked towards the frame, his vision began to blur.

Remember

His palms began to sweat profusely.

Remember

His brain pounded incessantly.

Remember

Blood trickled down the corner of his eye.

Remember

His hands reached towards his pocket — trembling.

His eyes were burning with tears and blood.

His hands fumbled once, and then, leaning over to his weakening fingers, he placed his contacts on his eyes.

The world slowed. His body relaxed and his mind silenced its fervor. His eyes were quelled, and he resigned to the warm hum of the digital glow.

Chloe Chappa

The Winds of Change

(2nd Place, The Molloy Common Reading Program Inspired Works Contest)

Part I

The wind hit me like an oncoming train the minute I stepped foot out the front door. I pulled my scarf up to my nose in hopes of saving my already dry lips from beginning to chap in the cold air. At least it's a quick walk, I thought as I began her trek down Fifth Avenue.

On this cold March day, I was off to my grandmother's to celebrate her birthday. I wasn't quite sure how old my grandmother was turning this year. The family never spoke of age, anymore. It wasn't necessary. After 30, you would receive the Cure, and no one would care how many years you had lived, only that you looked younger.

As I passed the park, my attention was captured from my own thoughts and turned towards the protesters in the park across the street. I had heard on the news that they would be protesting that day, but it had never registered that I would be walking right past them. It was almost a shock to see them. Their gaudy signs were lit up in shades of pink and green. Their chants were loud and clear, "Cure the young! Cure the young! Twenty-four forever!" They wanted to move up the age at which people received the Cure that prevented aging. Instead of thirty, everyone would be perpetually twenty-four. I looked at them with disgust. They had no valid reason to be changing the age; all they wanted was youth and the beauty that came with it. God, I'm almost twenty-four, I thought, remembering my twenty-second birthday had passed just last

month. I took one long look at the protestors. They all seemed about my age. Of course, you could never tell someone's age when over half of the population would look thirty, forever. "I guess the rebellion of youth never fades when you never age."

Science has just confirmed! More Vitamin D prevents aging....

Try the newest anti-aging cream from...

The Cure keeps you young, let us keep you looking...

For the small price of...

Buy now and save...

I had stopped watching where I was walking and stumbled right into the electronic advertisements that littered the streets. As always, they all promised to keep people looking younger than the Cure, and boasted more success, better results, and younger looking whatever than their competitors. Who actually buys into this, I thought. It's just greed and vanity. And people who would do anything to get it. I had the strong urge to tear down the fluorescent rectangles in frustration. There must be more to life than looking young, I thought. I shook off the glowing screens and continued my walk to my grandmother's building.

At the party, I watched silently as my family conversed. I gazed around at all the adults who looked not much older than I was. My parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins... the generations appeared to blend together when they all sat around the table. My mind was still filled with thoughts of the vanity I had seen on my walk that morning. "Why do we get the cure?" I blurted out loud. I truly hadn't meant to! Then my family turned to me in shock and offense; they were concerned and confused, but instead of giving an answer they attacked like a pack of dogs. "What do you mean why? We get it so that we don't age! Everyone does it!" The clamor rang in my ears for what seemed like ages.

Eventually, the matriarch put a stop to the outrage. “Leave her alone!” My grandmother exclaimed. “Violet has the same concern people did when the cure first came out.” She continued, “people were scared and confused. All we had known was that people we love grew old and died and that was life.” For a moment, Grandmother stared at the wall, but it was as if she were no longer in her apartment with her family. Her face fell and, if I’m not mistaken, her eyes began to water. She looked as though she were a child again, reliving her own experiences. “I remember standing at my parent’s funerals. It wasn’t pleasant, it was hard, losing the people you love. You need to understand, the Cure fixes that. I won’t have to leave you now, you won’t lose me ever. The same goes for your mother and your father and everyone else in this room. We won’t die. You don’t have to lose us.” She looked me right in the eye and asked, “Do you see, Violet? We take the Cure to spare the future generations the loss the previous ones suffered through.”

I sat back in my chair at the table, staring absent mindedly at the cake in front of me. As someone who had grown up around the Cure, I had never been to a funeral. I had never met anyone who died. I had never experienced loss.

Perhaps the cure was meant to be more than the cosmetic fad people had turned it into. I vowed, then and there, that if I were going to live forever, I was going to use it for more than looking young.

Part II

I had woken up that morning to Father shaking him. “Up! Get up! It’s time for work!” I began rise from the floor I was sleeping on with seven siblings and thirteen cousins. On cold nights, we would huddle for warmth and enjoy each other's company. But last night had been hot and the body heat

generated on the crammed floor had not led to a restful night for any of us children.

I started my day the way I had every other: I washed my face with the bowl of stagnant water that sat next to the fire in the center of our little hut. My siblings, my cousins, and I were each given a small piece of bread – a rare and welcome occurrence – to eat while at work. The children and our father left the hut just as the sun was rising.

I had to shake my shirt to keep it from sticking to my sweaty body. The wind hit me like the boiled water Mother used to pour over my head when I got a bath as a child. Not that I wasn't still a child. Eleven years old is a child, but it's hard to feel like it when you work like an adult.

Working the rice fields was no easy task. For children who were not used to the nature of the job, the constant sensation of stones hitting your toes was uncomfortable, the water of the rice paddies was freezing, and the grueling hours from sun up to sun down were unbearable, but by eleven I had been coming with Father to work for as long as I could remember.

Father said he was lucky to have a job when so many were in need of one. My uncle said we should be proud of everyone working so hard. Mother said that we shouldn't have to worry about any of this. That children hadn't always had to work. And it hadn't always been so hard to get jobs. And there hadn't always been a food shortage. Once, there had been fewer people on the Earth, before people started taking the Cure. And with fewer people, there were enough jobs for everybody. And farmers could grow enough food for everyone. And no one had to crowd their families into huts. But after the Cure came, there were just too many people.

That was evident enough. Everywhere I turned, another family was begging on the streets. My father and uncles were

lucky to have held jobs for the short time that they did. But even with four salaries to support the family, there were nights when no one ate, hand-me-down cloths were a common occurrence and new ones were impossible to find, and everyone in the hut knew – but never outright said – that we would not survive a bad monsoon season.

This is not counting my pay, much of which I saved by stashing it away in a jar. But I didn't want to save my salary for a shot that was killing my family when it could be used to better my village. No, I decided early on that I wanted to buy a house for my family or fix up the old schoolhouse to bring in a teacher. I knew I wanted to change the world, even if that only meant having an impact my own corner of this huge planet.

At that young age, I foolishly thought that having enough money for a house would mean I could stop working, forever. I had no idea then what a toll life would take on my dreams.

Part III

The wind was dead when I stepped off the plane. But the stench of burning garbage and rotting food had replaced it in the hot steamy air. I took in a deep breath. The air should have been disgusting, but I was ecstatic. I had finally followed through on my promise. I had taken the Cure; the time had come to get out into the world and make a difference. I was ready to change the world.

I wonder if that comes with eternal youth – the need to leave a mark on the world. I was coming to work in a remote village, known for rice farming and severe poverty. My organization had forced me to bring medical supplies, vaccines, and the cure. But I wasn't interested in the medical aspect of my mission. I wanted to teach. To meet people and help them learn about the world around them. I had longed for a real

human connection despite a language barrier, and to inspire other people to make a difference in the world around them.

My mind was enveloped by lesson plans for my first class as I gazed absently out the window of the car. In my haze, I missed the layer of black smoke that appeared to cover the entire nation. I missed the garbage piled over the streets. I missed the dried fields, where nothing was growing and hadn't been for years. Perhaps I didn't notice them because these disgusting sights had become visible throughout the world. I had been told through the news that they were simply what people were calling the results. Regardless, what I didn't miss was the protest.

Just like I had seen in New York, all those years ago, people were protesting in what appeared to be a village center. They held signs just like the New Yorkers did, but instead of lights and fancy paint these signs were made of cardboard and other pieces of trash. There was one man standing in front of them all at a makeshift podium crudely constructed out of planks of rotting wood. Based off their reactions, they liked whatever he was saying. The way that they were riling up and chanting I almost thought they were being preached to. The crowds cheered as the man finished what must have been a rousing address, lifting his fist into the air to prove his point. They erupted in more thunderous applause and cheers, culminating in a chant that shook the ground beneath them. I only wish I had known then what they were chanting.

“What are they protesting?” I asked my driver.

“They are against the Cure. The one that keeps you young. They cause many problems here”, he told me drily.

“Problems?” Surely, they did not deal with the greed and vanity the Cure had caused at home. Surely, these people that I had traveled across the world for, the people I would humble myself before, the people I hoped to befriend and work

with could not possibly possess the same vanities I had promised to escape from all those years ago in Grandmother's apartment. I felt as though the dogs from my past were nipping at my heels.

"Yes", my driver explained, "there are too many people. No one can find work, the fields are all barren so there is no food, and while people are not dying from age, they are dying rapidly from disease and starvation. My country is in ruin, and it is because of that shot."

I was stunned. I leaned my head against the window of the car and listened to the protest. Of course, the issues here were much more serious than the vanity of America. People were dying. Dying. I could hear the chants from the protest all the way back at my schoolhouse.

I had still never faced death in my lifetime. Part of me had hoped I never would.

Part IV

I wished I never had to experience loss.

As I grew up, I became a fighter. I fought hard to keep my job and to support my family. When I became a man, I withdrew my savings. Unfortunately, it was never enough to move my family out of that hut. But it was enough to us through the first wave of diseases. We all fought sicknesses from fevers to chills. Many of my family members did not make it. I fought the doctors when they said that the children would die, continuing to hold out hope. But the doctors were right. I fought tears at their funerals.

I fought disease and hunger myself, working through the pain and giving my siblings and children whatever measly scraps of food I had. I fought to get Father's job back after he lost it due to a sickness. But I was told that I was lucky enough

to have a job when no one else in my family could find one and that I shouldn't be greedy.

I fought my sister hard on getting the Cure. She was adamant that there were no side effects and that living forever was worth whatever the cost. But she shared the same upbringing I had, and she fought just as hard as I did. Eventually, she won; she would live forever – or so she thought. Not a week after getting the Cure the shot made her sick. She fought it harder than anyone else would have, but she still died. When I started to look for answers, I was told that it was just a bad strain of the Cure and it wouldn't happen again – as, helplessly, I watched my sister die in my arms.

Then, I fought the government and their stupid Cure. The Cure that had caused my family's poverty and hardships. The Cure that had caused so many of his loved ones to die. The Cure that he had hated all his life that managed to ruin it, anyway.

So, I fought the government. I led rallies. I petitioned the government. I was arrested for MY actions on more than one occasion, but I had become too popular, too widely accepted for any jail to hold me for long. I wanted more for this world than the atrocities that this one shot was causing. Successful as I was in my village and those surrounding it, I knew that to spread my message on a bigger scale I would need two things: and education, and an advocate from outside of this nation, someone with some type of authority.

That was how I found myself sitting outside of the school hut I had always looked at but never entered. I had never given a second thought to what went on inside. Most likely nothing, after all the hut had not been used since well before I was born. But now I needed to know exactly went on within those four walls.

Part V

When I looked up to find the man from the protest standing in my class, I was stunned. I was just about to begin my night lesson for the adults of the village, but it felt as though my words had gotten caught in spider webs that had formed in her throat at the sight of him. I did not know whether to send him away for his criminal background or embrace him for standing up for his audacity and courage, two qualities I didn't have, myself. I wondered what I would even say to him. As luck would have it, I didn't need to say anything. Silently, he took a seat at an empty desk and watched the lesson.

When class had ended, he approached her.

"You cannot give that shot to people here. It hurts us more than it does people in your country."

"It affects people back home, too. Just as badly, but in different ways." He looked at me puzzled, as though he couldn't understand what I meant. "It hurts people all over. At home, it has made everyone self-absorbed; they don't care about anything but themselves, anymore."

"That is not our problem here. Here, people are dying."

He then stormed out of the schoolhouse. I watched him leave; I was baffled by the exchange.

And so it went, day after day. He would attend my lessons, and became quite a remarkable student. He took on the most advanced lessons and conquered them as easily as if he already knew them. It was clear that he was eager about learning and had beautiful aspirations for the world. I had begun to believe in him and in his dreams, too. After every lesson, he would ask me questions. About my life in America; about New York; about how the world worked outside of the squalor he had known all his life. And I would ask him questions, too. About his hopes for the world and what he would do to improve his nation. He told me about his siblings.

We laughed about the mischief he and his brothers would make, and how it would always upset his mother. He spoke smiling about his younger sister's beautiful singing voice, and it became clear how much he loved them all. He told me about the rice paddies and working as a kid. We spoke of everything and anything we could think of. In all honesty, I looked forward to our conversations more than my own lessons some days.

One day, I asked him directly whether he had ever seen someone die.

I knew he had lost so much, and given up so much more for the cause he loved so much. And here I sat, privileged as could be, and yet I was supposed to be teaching him? "Have you?" he asked me. I shook my head no. I stared at the ground and was unable to meet his gaze.

"It happens here, all of the time. Children die of disease, people die in accidents, and one day I will die of old age," he stated proudly. Then, his expression became melancholy. "The children you teach live on the streets; it will not take long for you to lose one. The adults, too. Even those with the cure. It can make us sick, you know. They do it on purpose; they did it to my sister. You will see it too, one day." He paused for a moment, choosing his words carefully. "You will know loss, but you will learn that loss within our lifetime does not end our lives."

I looked at him inquisitively. I did not know if I wanted to learn that lesson, but it felt so natural. The feeling of loss felt as though it was meant to be a part of the human experience in a way. I soon found out that even something so natural was excruciatingly painful. Another bad strain of the Cure had been passed around by the government in order to control the population, and many of my students were affected or had parents who were affected. I lost almost half of my already miniscule class. I went to more funerals that week than I had

ever dreamed of in my worst nightmare. I cried with the families of those lost. I stared into a coffin for the first time in two generations of my family. For the first time, I experienced loss.

And after my next lesson, I felt a need for guidance. I turned to my revolutionary companion. “How do you deal with it? How do you lose the people you love and go on as though nothing happened?”

He merely shrugged his shoulders. He knew that the simple answer was, you don’t. But what I needed in that moment was not a confirmation, but a solution. So, he responded, “You keep living. You don’t give up hope that tomorrow will be better. And you never forget what they meant to you.” We shared a long look of newfound hope. Then, as usual, he turned around and walked away, leaving me sitting at my desk, with a brand-new perspective.

Many months passed, and I lost more of my students; but it only encouraged me to work harder than ever to give my remaining and new students the best education I possibly could in honor of those who had passed. The man came less and less to classes; I was told it was of his protests. Eventually, he stopped coming, altogether. The rumor in the village was that he had been arrested. I had already called the US Embassy to see if they could locate him. I was told to mind my own business because the United States would not meddle in other country’s problems. So, I set out to work in the village. I helped organize protests – not for him, but because we could not let an injustice such as this serum destroy the world in which we live. Because he had made me believe in his cause, too.

More than anything else that day, I remember the way the wind howled in the doorway. It wasn’t natural to have such strong gusts this time of year. I almost cancelled class because of it. Looking back, I’m glad I didn’t. It was this shrill wailing

of the wind in the doorway that caused me to get up from my desk and to look outside. From the doorway, I could see a large crowd in the village square, similar to the day I had come to this place. With all the commotion, I naturally went to see what was happening.

He walked down the road weary and downtrodden. His hair was long and matted, his face caked in mud. His clothes were torn into shreds. He had dark purple circles underneath his puffy, red eyes. He refused help walking when people ran to his side. When he reached the square, he refused medical attention and insisted he stand at the podium, the same ramshackle structure behind which he had stood when I had first seen him. It was here that he, the man who had made this spineless girl fight for a cause, uttered the words that would shatter my world, yet again.

“It’s all over. This stupid, hopeless fight against the Cure. It’s lost. We’re done.”

Adrianna Solis

Beautiful

(3rd Place, The Molloy Common Reading Program Inspired Works Contest)

The mirror was her best friend
Her very best companion
It would tell her how beautiful she was
How envious people must be of her
She would smile and simply deny what she already knew
She was beautiful
Maybe even perfect
Twenty-seven and gorgeous as ever
Of course, she had the plastic surgery to thank for that
But she felt no regret
She took pleasure from the stares that would come her way
Men and women would gape in wonder when she walked by
It gave her a feeling of pure ecstasy
She was addicted
Her beauty gave her power
Until it didn't
Who is that?
"That isn't me" she whispered
"Why is she prettier than me?"
She watched the girl, no older than eighteen, strut her way
downtown
She walked home
Confused
Angry
Jealous
She had to see her mirror

For comfort
For reassurance
She needed to hear that she was still the most beautiful
Flashing her most exquisite smile she waited for the flood of
compliments to arrive
They never did
Something was different about her dear friend
Another lip injection it said
Just a little more Botox
Or maybe a tummy tuck
You're looking a little pudgy today
She looked at herself closely
Not able to rid her thoughts of the young beauty
With the perfect cheekbones and slightly larger breasts
A little more work couldn't hurt she thought
But it would
Surgery after surgery
The mirror still wasn't satisfied
She became obsessive
Comparing herself to every young girl she would walk by on
the street
Her insecurities were consuming her
She tried to break free
But would only fall further into the darkness
Drowning in her own self-hatred
She became fearful of the mirror
Pulling away from the friendship they once had
But it called to her
Injecting her mind with its poisonous words
There will always be someone younger it whispered
And more beautiful
And more desirable
She began to understand the words that were being fed to her

Tears ran down her face
She could never compete with the young and the beautiful
No amount of plastic surgery would help her
For the first time in her life
She felt ugly
Ugly and broken
She lay there
They began to surround her
The thoughts
The voices
She couldn't fight them anymore
She was tired
The insecurities were pounding on her door
And she let them in
All of them
She let them consume her
Consume her completely until she was nothing
Nothing but a beautiful memory

Mary AKT Gallagher

Horace and Wordsworth on Poetry and Its Aims

As an obvious result of living and writing more than an entire millennium apart from one another, Quintus Horatius Flaccus (commonly known as the poet Horace) and William Wordsworth have widely differing literary traditions informing their ideas of what makes a poem – and what makes a *good* poem. They share only the most general of notions as to what poetry is, and venture to express markedly distinct opinions on its value and purpose in society. Studying their works on the subject in juxtaposition gives a reader an idea of the progression of the art over the centuries between them; in both the concepts and standards that changed, but also in the traditions that did not. The latter, the principles which Horace and Wordsworth – both widely respected and successful figures in their field – each found mutually vital to their art are important and remain so in a contemporary discussion of poetry because they are proven to be more than mere trends of either period.

The guidelines that both Horace and Wordsworth deemed necessary to write down include the idea that poetry should have an emotional effect on its audience, what relationship one's poetry should have to reality, even the kind of person a poet is and should be. They are significant because these two legendary literary figures who deigned to discuss the workings of their practice – though separated by more than more than 1500 years, as well as by the influence of hundreds of other critics and philosophers to come between them – both *said* that they were. The simple fact that they hold these ideals in

common begs the question of whether these shared principles should be considered universal standards of poetry.

A major tenet which permeates the text of Horace's *Ars Poetica* is the importance of maintaining a definite structure within one's poetry. He dictates that a poem must be written with some set of rules in mind, and an end in sight. He states in the first line of the text: "*Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam*" – Latin for "suppose a painter joined a human head with the neck of a horse," and continues a perverted blazon-like description of an abstract hodge-podge of animal parts depicted in a painting, "so that what began as a lovely woman at the top/ Tapered off into a slimy, discolored fish." He then asks facetiously, "Could you keep from laughing, my friends?" The absurd suggestion and the confusion a viewer would inevitably feel at such a spectacle carries across the point that deviating too far from what is real and natural without a purpose has very little effect beyond being laughable. While recognizing and supporting the unique freedom that a poet or an artist has in being a creator encumbered solely by the limitations of his (or her) own imagination and not by those of the physical world, he warns against the use of that freedom to too great a degree. He anticipates and dismisses a pupil's argument: "'But painters and poets/ Have always been equally free to try anything./ We writers know that, and insist that such license be ours...but not to the extent/ Of mating the mild with the wild, so that snakes are paired/ With birds, and tigers with lambs.'" (68) The capabilities of invention possessed by a poetic mind must not be misused, according to Horace; otherwise a poet runs the risk of producing a piece that is unrealistic to the point of being ridiculous.

Horace also makes a point of aspiring poets to be consistent in their work; in both the rules they set for themselves within the context of their specific work and in the

work's adherence to reality. With the latter advisement, he demonstrates himself to be an early proponent of literary realism, long before the movement itself even started. While not being so specific as to prescribe what one's ultimate purpose should be, he does insist that a poet employ a teleological method in their work: composing a piece with its beginning and end complete and as a singular whole, so that it does not start off as one thing and veer off track into something entirely different by the end. He commands, "Make what you want/ So long as it's one and the same, complete and entire." (68) He applies the same directive to all the elements within the work, such as characters, instructing an aspiring poet to: "keep to the end the same sort of person you started out with/ And make your portrayal consistent." (70) Horace elevates a poet's consistency throughout his work to a high value, seeming to equate the close adherence to the pre-established set of rules for characters and plot with literary honesty – if a poet is consistent in his poetry, he is portraying people and life as they are; he is being truthful in his work, and verisimilitude is a prized quality in poetry. He rules that the *Deus ex Machina* (a literary device by which a sudden divinity or otherwise powerful character enters the play and is responsible for the entire resolution of the play) must not be employed "unless the action tangles itself in such knots/ That only a divine deliverer can work the denouement." (71-72) However, the implication is that making use of such a device is lazy writing and a betrayal of a poet's audience as well as his own characters. It should not be necessary for such an uncommon event that could not be realistically anticipated to occur to conclude a work that is supposed to portray human life *as it is* as closely as possible. Horace would regard such a departure from the truth as unnecessary, and a poor example of his ideal of poetry.

Horace goes on to say that the ideal poet is a learned and experienced man. With the aspiration to both teach and please his audience at heart, a poet's education and familiarity with his world are essential skill to his field. He claims,

The principal source of all good writing is wisdom./ The Socratic pages will offer you ample material./ And with the matter in hand, the words will be quick to follow./ A man who has learned what is owing to country and friends./ The love that is due a parent, a brother, a guest./ What the role of a judge or senator chiefly requires/ What part is played by the general sent off to war/ Will surely know how to write the appropriate lines/ For each of his players. (74)

Horace posits here that the knowledge and wisdom attained throughout an (educated) person's life provide a writer with material about which to write and lessons with which to instruct his audience. Experience in the world equips him with good judgment of the way real people feel and behave, and therefore enables him to portray the people who are mere figments of his imagination as honestly as possible.

William Wordsworth, whose *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* was published (in its primary edition) in 1800, was an important figure in the Romantic Movement of literature. This movement, in response to the culture of the Enlightenment of Western Europe, tended to prioritize the expression of emotion in literature over the Enlightenment tradition of prizing humanity's

ability to reason above all else. There was also a notable shift in focus from the awe-inspiring capabilities of human beings themselves to the awe-inspiring beauty and power of nature, and the devotion to nature was only exacerbated by the Industrial Revolution, which served to urbanize Great Britain at an alarming rate, inciting a literary tradition of nostalgia, where Romantic poets would lament the days gone by when England was all countryside and still dominated by an agrarian society. Wordsworth, in particular, saw “the rustics” (the mostly impoverished occupants of the countryside; remnants of the pre-urbanized generation) as the ideal people – they maintained the strongest connection to nature because they cultivated the land themselves; they were not spoiled by cynicism and access to worldly materials. The rustics were common subjects of Wordsworth’s poetry for their simplistic lifestyle, their unsophisticated language, and their communion with the natural world.

In his *Preface*, in accordance with the Romantic tradition, Wordsworth offers his definition of poetry: “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” (304) He says that this overflow must be written in the words of the common man, defending this departure from the tradition of flowery, verbose language (often meant to demonstrate the extent of the poet’s education) with the claim that the primitive human emotions are more easily accessed and understood in the environment and language of the rustic:

...in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly

communicated...and...are most
easily comprehended. (303)

He goes on to posit the assertion that the English language is in its purest form when spoken by the rustic people, because of their frequent interaction with the natural world (or, as Wordsworth describes it, “the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived,”) and because they are so unsophisticated and simplistic that they communicate their opinions in “simple and unelaborated expressions.” (304) Simply stated, Wordsworth implies that rustic people do not have the extensive vocabulary that their more civilized counterparts do; they say only what they truly feel, without mincing words. Similar to Horace in this instance, Wordsworth places a high value on the expression of truth in one’s poetry; it goes so far as to inform the language he employs.

Where Horace claims a poet is an educated and worldly person, Wordsworth ventures to claim that a poet’s skill is ingrained by nature rather than nurtured into development. He answers to the self-imposed question “what is a poet?” that he is

a man...endued with more lively
sensibility, more enthusiasm and
tenderness, who has a greater
knowledge of human nature, and
a more comprehensive soul, than
are supposed to be common
among mankind...[he is] affected
more than other men by absent
things as if they were present...
(308)

These distinct ideas of who a poet must be can be derived also from the slight differences in the opinions of the two of what a

poet's purpose is. Horace states that he endeavors to "either delight or enlighten the reader, / Or say what is both amusing and really worth using." (75) A poet should educate or entertain, and preferably do both at the same time. Wordsworth agrees with the goal of delighting the audience, but then deviates to replace the goal of enlightening, stating that "the end of poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure." (311) A poet's purpose, according to Wordsworth, is to incite feeling, and to delight. Both are of the opinion that pleasing one's audience is an absolute necessity, and they both believe that this can be done by relating truths of the human spirit, whether it be by taking one's experience in society and applying that to their characters, or by interacting with nature to encounter one's simplest and most natural passions. In an ideal situation, their intended audience would recognize either of these endeavors, finding them relatable, and, hopefully, pleasing. Even the purposes they claim that are different from one another still have the same ultimate goal of helping an audience to come closer to encountering the truth. Horace attempts to impart it directly through dramatized poetry, and Wordsworth, by communicating the spontaneous overflow of feelings to an audience who has not felt them, enables them to do so vicariously, and to come into closer contact with their deeper, more natural emotions, and to experience them simply and honestly.

Writing in different time periods, reacting to different events and influences, and practicing different traditions in literature would lead a reader to expect that Horace and Wordsworth would have entirely different ideas of what a poet is supposed to do. While they do differ in several respects, such as by what means a poet is supposed to go about fulfilling their purpose in writing poetry, their general purpose is the same.

Each endeavors to bring their audience closer to discovering the truth; wherever and however they find it.

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Morgan Andersen

The Painter's Journey

Quickly, quickly, quickly was all that I could think about. I had to get out of here as fast as humanly possible as my life depended on it. Running down the hallway, without actually looking on either side, I sensed what colors were passing on either side of me. No, no, where is it? I was starting to run out of time, so I picked up the pace, when suddenly I saw a flash of red and orange. I stopped abruptly and was standing face to face with the painting I was searching for, my first painting. Everything about it seemed familiar to me: the strokes, the colors, and yet they seemed distant, as well. The sounds outside were getting closer – loud explosions on either side of me; I had to pick up the pace. Tearing my painting off the wall, I started running with it cradled awkwardly between my arms. The sounds seemed even closer now; the entire building was shaking now. I was almost out of the building when a bomb fell onto the wing where I had just been. My body was pushed to the ground by the force of the explosion, and my painting fell out of my arms. Getting up, disorientated from the fall, I searched frantically for my painting. I found it under some rubble, but thankfully it seemed to have survived the fall undamaged.

I feel as though I have some explaining to do. You all may be questioning why I was stealing from a museum – let alone one of my own paintings. Did I forget to mention that I was in London in the middle of a German air raid? I was risking my life to steal my own painting back, and for you to understand any of this, I do, indeed, have a lot of explaining to do.

So, I'll start from the beginning. My name is Benjamin, and I was a painter until a month ago. My life used to be based around painting, but now I can't even look at a paintbrush, let alone paint. My paintings were based on emotions – the events in life I had experienced. In the beginning, they were colorful and joyful, and then they progressively got darker and gloomier. I couldn't help it; it was just the way I felt – as though there were no inspiration left. My last painting was devoid of colors completely, and I sold it a month ago. Handing over the painting to the buyer, a wave of depression fell over me; bright colors and joy no longer existed. And since that day, I have no longer felt myself; and I have been unable to paint.

I tried and tried to paint, but I couldn't even lay down a single brush stroke. Nothing would help, so I decided to meet my friend in town, since if anything weird was happening to me, she was the one to contact. She knew everything there was to know about the weird, abnormal, and even paranormal happenings in art history. The prospect of this meeting was all that got me through the next week, the chance that she could help me. The day that we were meeting, I felt hope. But I was also worried: what if Rosalie couldn't help me? What if I were stuck this way for the rest of my life? Although I was feeling these emotions, they were not as strong as they once were. Yet, I still wasn't myself.

When I walked into the cafe in which we were meeting, Rosalie could tell immediately that something was wrong. As I explained my predicament to her, she seemed worried. It took her a long while with continuous questioning of me, to figure it out. And with one last question, as though a lightbulb went off, her face lit up. But then she looked very worried. The question that put it all together was when, exactly, had the depression occurred? When I told her it was at the exact moment in which

I had let go of my last painting, giving it to the buyer, her face became even graver than it was before. She looked me straight in the eye and said: “I know exactly what has happened to you, and you are not going to like it.” She told me that, because my paintings were linked to my experiences and emotions, every time I painted I was inserting my soul into the paintings. The reason behind it was that every single brush stroke meant something to me, so they were connected to me literally, so when I sold them, each took a piece of me with it. Like puzzle pieces coming together it began to make sense, how my colors were getting darker, and how my emotions were getting gloomier. Although this made sense, I still had a lot of questions: how did my soul wind up in my paintings; and could I ever get my soul back? Could I ever be myself again?

Rosalie told me not to worry, that she had read about it before, and although she didn’t know the why, she did know the how – how to fix my problem. I had to get all my paintings back in one place and add an unintentional stroke of color into the painting – which was a relief because it wouldn’t ruin the integrity of what meant so much to me. That would be the easy part, physically getting back all my paintings would be the hard part. Since there were twenty of them out in the world. Another problem that I may not have mentioned is that the world was at war right now, for the second time in not a very long time.

This probably should clear up why I was in a London museum in the middle of an air raid. It was all part of the plan: get the paintings when no one was around, and why would someone be out during an air raid? Rosalie told me that I had to get each of my paintings back in the order in which they were sold. This red and orange painting was the first one I had ever sold, and holding it outside of the destroyed museum made me realize how hard this journey was going to be. It would be

worth it in the end, if it could get me my life back. Even holding this painting made me feel a little better, it gave me hope that this journey would not be a vain one. One down, nineteen to go. After bringing my painting back to my flat, I immediately went to Rosalie's place to tell her the good news. She knew it was good news that we already had one painting, but she also informed me something about the current situation. She had read a lot more in her history books, and found out that there were two painters that this had ever happened to. And the problem was that the painters could only live without their souls for two months. The first had died before getting all his paintings back, but the other had survived. So, if I calculated this correctly, we only had three weeks to get back thirteen paintings.

Changing the subject, we started to hatch plans on how to get all the paintings back. We created intricate plans on how to steal all of the paintings, planning out every last detail, the only one that would cause us any trouble would be number nineteen, but we decided not to worry about that one for now. The next two paintings were in the same house, but they were in Scotland. Rosalie decided to come for the ride and help me out with these two. I knew the layout of this house, so both of us could go for one painting each, and get out of there quicker.

Five days after the London museum, Rosalie and I were on a train heading back to London, two "packages" wrapped up and on the luggage racks. Three down, and this plan had gone without any troubles.

Two days after the train ride, I was in possession of seven of my paintings. These four were the easiest, because they had been gifts to friends and family. All I had to do was ask for them back, saying how I wanted to restore them, to make sure that the colors wouldn't fade.

We followed the plans to a T, and they worked. We traveled to different countries day after day getting my paintings back. The count was at eighteen, and everything had gone according to plan. Nineteen was the one we were worried about, though. The problem with this one was that it was on display at Buckingham palace. The queen had approached me about buying one of my paintings; she commissioned it for one of the bigger galleries in the palace. And we had issues figuring out how to get this painting back, since stealing from the queen was risky business. There was virtually no way to get into the palace anymore; visitors were no longer allowed. With time and hope running out, Rosalie heard of an event that the queen was hosting, welcoming service members into the palace, trying to boost their morale, so they would keep fighting for their country with passion. This was our way in, our last resort, so we went, me dressed as a sailor, and Rosalie as a medic.

The timing was cutting it a little close to our deadline, with only two days left. Two days and I was dead without this painting. So, walking into the palace, there was a feeling of anxiety and fear. One wrong move, and then there was no hope. When the time came, we both excused ourselves, and headed straight towards the gallery. Realizing that we couldn't walk out of the palace with a giant frame, the best plan would be to roll up the canvas and hope for the best. We arrived at the gallery with no trouble, and went to work straight away. I took out a knife and started to pry up the corner of the canvas. When we started this plan, I forgot how loud the ripping canvas would be, and I realized that with increased sound, there was an increased chance of us getting caught. Being cautious, I sent Rosalie outside of the room to act as a lookout. It was a good thing that I had done so, because a minute later, I heard Rosalie start talking. Immediately, I stopped what I was doing and tried to find cover in the room, just in case someone came in. I could

hear Rosalie going on about being lost, how she went looking for the bathroom, and her bearings had gotten messed up. I could hear her putting on her charm, and she even got the guard to escort her back to where we were supposed to be.

With them gone, I got the painting off as quickly as possible and tried to roll it up carefully as not to ruin it. I stuffed the painting under my shirt, and hurried out of the room. Of course, I ran into a guard; but today seemed to be my lucky day, because the guard just looked at me and said: “you look like an appreciator of art, you must not see a lot of beauty out there fighting.” I was shocked, but responded, “it's really nice to see something that isn't destroyed and revolved around hate,” and with that the guard left me alone to appreciate the artwork. I was so relieved and shocked that I got out of this, and began to look for Rosalie. There was no sign of her until she burst out of the bathroom and almost ran right into me. She gave me a questioning look, and I just nodded. After that we headed towards the doors, and once again found no guards.

There was one day remaining now, and nineteen paintings were not sitting in my flat as Rosalie and I were retrieving the last one. It was almost as though I could almost feel a pull towards it, as though my last painting was calling out to me. This painting was the easiest to retrieve, since it was in a summer resident of a man, and the season was now fall. All twenty paintings were placed in front of me, and all of them were retrieved within a month, and we still had the the last hours of this day, my last day. With all my paintings surrounding me, I felt a little better; they were already starting to affect me, even to the point in which I could pick up the paintbrush and choose a color. Yellow was my color of choice; I felt drawn to it, so I took the paint and added a little brush stroke into every bottom right corner of all twenty of my paintings. After the twentieth painting, I put the paintbrush

down, and immediately felt a surge of emotions, as if every piece of my soul went soaring back into me at one moment. Nothing else in the world mattered.

I was myself again.

Frank Caiazzo

The Runaway

I packed my bags and moved swiftly out of the house. The look left on my mother's face was a look of horror and anguish. This look reminded me of a time in grade school when my brother and I were riding bikes around town. I pedaled as fast as I could and left him alone. He was only eight at the time and did not know what was going on. I didn't like my brother; he was always a problem to me. My mother always said that I was a hammer blow. I never knew what she meant by this. I figured it was an expression from her time. She was consistently disappointed in my actions. I worked hard on whatever I did even though I did not always have the best intentions.

It was cloudy and rainy out. My perception of the darker days was that they are for the darker people. Every villain acts in a darker time. I needed to sprint 14 blocks to get to the bus station, and this was no small feat. I was a rather large-sized man, and running one block was a lot to me. From 24th street to 38th street, everyone was staring at me. This worried me. I hoped I did not look suspicious for my actions were not honorable. On 38th street, two blocks from the terminal, I saw three cops so I decided to take a detour. I knew they were not aware of my actions, but I still altered my path. News does not spread that quickly. This detour added fifteen minutes to my journey. The rain fell harder as I sprinted into the bus station.

After all the madness occurred, I could rest. I waited for my bus to arrive in the station. I was eleventh on the line. The line was moving so slowly since many people had suitcases

packed. These suitcases were too big to carry on. I only had enough time to pack a backpack. This bus was called The Grim Reaper.

I got on the bus.

I felt as if a weight was lifted off my shoulders. This ride was three and a half hours that was very long for me. I never envisioned myself using public transportation. I've had my own car since I was fifteen, but driving was not an option. Along the ride, I thought of all the memories. We used to have a lot of fun together.

I really liked my family. They were always there for me when I needed them most. When I struggled in school, they helped me. When I lost my job, they gave me money. I became emotional. I realized how much I was going to miss them.

The person who sat next to me was a kind-hearted lady in her mid-70s. A lady like my grandma that made it to church every Sunday. She saw me in a state of sorrow and offered me a tissue. If only she knew what happened earlier, today. She would not be too happy with me. I accepted the tissue and said thank you. She asked why I was crying. I could not tell her why. I was forced to lie. I told her my dog died. She became emotional, too. A young man in the seat in front of me kept turning around. He seemed familiar. He was only a mere 5'2. This man posed no threat to me, but he reminded me of a buddy I used to work with. I loved working at that butcher shop. My job was to cut up the meat. My mom did not like me working that job. I always came home covered in blood. The stop was finally up and I began to worry about more pressing issues.

I sat on the street corner waiting for my friend to pick me up. The sky was dark, and it was still raining. We have been friends since birth and I thought I could rely on him. In our relationship, no justification was needed for a visit. I never understood why he moved to Baltimore. The crime rate here is

so high. The cops cared more about underage drinking than a robbery. Robberies never happened. I brought those facts to his attention, yet he still decided to move here.

As far as I knew, my friend was unaware of the events of today. I was just a friend coming to visit. After ten minutes, I became paranoid. My friend was never late. I was confused as to why he wasn't showing up. He has never been late. He always had great time management skills.

But then my friend did arrive, and I got in his car soaking wet from the rain. I asked him to get beers. When we were younger we used to buy twelve-packs of beer and go to the turf and drink all night. The turf was like a second home for us, and beer always came with it. Surprisingly, he declined my offer. He said he needed to get home for work. This seemed odd but I didn't think anything of it. I was just happy to be with my friend again. As we arrived at the house, the sky began to clear up and the sun came out. The sun was shining bright as I walked up the steps.

I thought he could be trusted.

Nicole Esposito

Short Story

It was a warm day in the beginning of May; the birds were chirping and the sun was shining so brightly. A young girl was waiting by a window in her house; even though the day was bright and cheery, she was not. She felt blue, dull, and dreary. This teenage girl had just had surgery on her foot. She was stuck, attached to her crutches for months on end, waiting for the day she would be able to walk again. The pain sometimes became unbearable and the cast was so bulky and heavy. She had just found out that her boyfriend had cheated on her and she felt so alone and insecure at the time. This girl was just in a very bad place. As she waited for her mother to get home to take her to the doctor for her foot, she just sat there on her bed and thought about how terribly sad she was. She couldn't do anything; she couldn't walk; she couldn't drive; she couldn't go out and have fun with her friends, and it was really hard for her to do anything herself without losing her balance and almost falling over.

Ten minutes later, her mom came home and she got in the car to go to the doctor. She expected no one to be in the waiting room because there never was; there was usually only one to three other people waiting in the room. When the girl and her mom walked in there was a room full of elderly, almost every seat in the room was taken. It was packed. The girl looked around, scrambling for a seat because she couldn't stand for too long. She scanned the room and found one seat left right by the door; it was next to a teenage boy. The girl began to put her crutches to the side and started to sit down; as she began

sitting, she turned her head to look at the boy and noticed how incredibly handsome he was.

The boy's striking appearance made the girl very nervous to sit next to him – it almost took her breath away. It made her so nervous that when she sat down she looked at the boy and apologized for sitting there, her face turned the color of a tomato; she couldn't have been anymore embarrassed.

The boy replied to her saying it was okay.

The girl's mother, who was sitting across the room, kept glancing at her, reading the girl's lips as she was trying to tell her how cute the boy was. For the next five minutes, the girl and the boy sat next to each other in absolute silence. Then, two old women saw that the girl and boy were wearing matching medical boots and said, "Aww! Look how cute those two are with their matching boots on!"

The boy and the girl both looked at each other in complete embarrassment. The boy asked the girl how she had gotten the boot, and she explained that she got hurt playing soccer and how she had to get surgery on her foot.

The boy explained that he had gotten his boot because he had broken his foot while running because he tripped over his own foot, and they both laughed. They went on to talk for a while, but the girl had butterflies in her stomach the whole time so she had to look at the ground while she spoke to him.

A few minutes later, the boy got called into the room for his appointment. He told her it was nice talking to her. The girl's heart was racing faster and faster as if she had just met the love of her life. She couldn't sit still. Her face became flustered, and she couldn't get that stupid smile off her face.

A few minutes later, the girl got called into the room for her appointment. The nurse led her into the room where she would place her foot in a therapeutic foot bath for about twenty minutes to relieve some pain. As she sat in the room with her

mom waiting for the time to pass, she could not stop thinking about the boy and how amazing he was. He was so sweet and so happy, and his smile was one that could brighten up just about anyone's day.

The girl became worried: "What if he wasn't interested?" Or "What if we never see each other again?" After about two minutes, a blonde nurse walked into the girl's room. She asked how she was doing and then said "That boy in the waiting room wanted me to tell you how absolutely gorgeous you are." The girl sat there in utter shock and, again, her face became the color of a ripe tomato. She then nervously responded, "Tell him I think he's really cute, too..." The nurse smiled and walked out of the room. The girl became so unbelievably excited that she could not stop smiling. After about five minutes, the boy walked past her room; as he did, he glanced at her and gave her a big smile. And she smiled and waved back at him. When the foot bath was over, the girl left the doctor's office with her mother and went home.

When she got home, all she could think about was that boy. There was just something really special about him. She knew he had felt this connection too, just by the way he looked at her. There was one problem though: he didn't know her name so she thought, "How can he ever find me again?"

But, believe it or not, by some crazy miracle he found her. He searched through all the corners of social media and found her picture – he knew it had to be her. The next day the girl woke up to a notification on her phone that the boy had requested to "follow" her on social media. This was one of the happiest moments of the girl's life. They began talking and then hung out together for the first time. From that day forward, the two of them were inseparable.

It was love at first sight.

Casey Garcia Guillermo

I'm lying in bed, staring at the ceiling, not being able to sleep one more night. This time, I swore I saw it coming out and running towards me. It's a creature that I see every once in a while come out of my closet and run towards me. I stop him every time by yelling for help. One of my parents comes in angry and tells me that there's nothing in that closet. I've been seeing this creature ever since the second grade. It stopped for a couple of years, but it started again ever since I started high school.

It's a little boy-like creature that runs at me with an object in his hand. I never get to see what that object is because he disappears every time I yell for help. I would say that he wants to hurt me with this object. As a kid, I didn't get psychological help because my parents didn't think I was old enough to benefit from it. But now that I'm older, and more likely able to understand my dream, my mother made an appointment with a local psychologist. My first meeting is this Friday.

On Wednesday, everything at school was the way it always was. There were the popular kids sitting together at one table; the athletes at another; my friends and I sitting at still another; and the kid from my old elementary school who always sits by himself at his own table. He's a short, skinny boy who doesn't like to talk to anyone. In elementary school, the boys would bother him during lunch. I'm not going to exclude myself from that list. I once took away his favorite toy that he would always bring with him. When he asked who had taken it,

everyone said they didn't know. I took it home and forgot where I had placed it.

Friday came, and I was picked up early from school that day. I had my appointment at 3 and got there at 2:48. The assistant called my name, and there I was walking into the room. The psychologist was a man that looked like he was in his late thirties. I began by telling him when the problem had started and what the creature looked like. He told me to go home and to think about a memory of my childhood where the closet has a significance.

As I was walking out I bumped into Guillermo -- the kid who always sits by himself during lunch. I said hey but he didn't respond back. I guess he works here after school.

Friday came, again and I didn't remember any significance of the closet. I told the psychologist and he told me to try harder to remember. I told him I'll try. Before I left I asked about Guillermo. He said that he is a patient and that's it. He couldn't say more.

On Monday, I asked a couple of friends about Guillermo. They told me that both his parents died when he was young. No one knows how because he never said it. One day in elementary school for show and tell he brought it in a toy car. The same toy car I took away from him and never returned. I went home that day and looked for that toy. The last place I checked was the closet. There were so many things in there but I found the toy. It was Guillermo's toy car. I left it in the closet and decided to take it out tomorrow and give it back to him.

My algebra class went by really slowly, and lunch took forever to come. I went to go look for Guillermo, but he wasn't there. He wasn't where he usually sat during lunch. I decided to go the psychologist's office. I asked the woman at the front

desk about him. She said that Guillermo Escobar had died about a week ago. He had been hit by a car.

Who was the person I saw yesterday?

I ran home and looked inside my closet. The toy was gone. I laid on my bed began to think what was going on. It was 7:30 already. My mom still hasn't come home from work. I heard the door which meant my dad was at home, at least. He knocked on my door but the creature came out of the closet. It ran toward me. Before I could scream, I recognized the creature.

It was Guillermo.

Lauren Kalista

Short Story

0100 hours when the once exuberant city of Knighton was beginning its downward spiral to defeat. The year 3030 marked the worst year in centuries with corrupt, robotically augmented leaders controlling virtually every aspect of living; civilians living every waking hour in fear of their own government somehow finding any reason to get rid of them; military tactics being used on their own people. Certainly, most *feared* this was the beginning of the end in more than one way.

I was awoken by not only the sounds of sirens that soon escaped before I could visualize what was truly going on, but the sheer sounds of those I once knew pleading for help...which seemed to vanish quickly, as well. I found myself in a cold sweat accompanied by the pumping of adrenaline throughout my body at an uncomfortable rate that my mind couldn't keep up with. I searched around my being ambiguously trying to grasp what reality had quickly become for me anxiously screaming out for someone, anyone to hear me.

"Alexa, Jenny, Mark, Davis...?" I cried out in hopes of any sort of reply, which led me to slowly lose hope with each moment of silence that soon enveloped all around me.

Surely, I was sleeping and this was all a nightmare, well...at least that's what I so desperately hoped for. Frantically, I rushed around the house breaking down any door or obstacle in my way and there was seemingly nothing to be found. The living quarters of my family remained untouched...but there was no one to be found...anywhere.

I returned to my room and with all the doubt in the world and truly trying to resist the possibility of it all being real,

I rested my head in my hands and remained there for what felt like a year. I got up and started the dreadful journey to the outside...each step down brining me closer and closer to reality. I grabbed my gear off the rack and headed out fully prepared for what I thought was the worst to come.

The society I lived in required all men at age ten to join the forces and it's now been 8 years since then, and each and every day has been spent practicing drills and training for what they *thought* was the worst that could happen to society. Well, they thought wrong, and it seemed like they were "preparing" us for nothing at all in hopes of us not being able to retaliate if ever something like the current were to happen.

As I took my first step outside, I did a complete 360 in the middle of the street and was absolutely speechless at my surroundings that were engulfed in smoke and fire with no ability to see a mere twenty feet away in any direction. Again, I called for my neighbors, friends, family which was out of pure amusement, as if anyone were actually going to respond after the thousandth time I called.

Everything was grey and dark but I could tell it was morning by now. I searched house after house endlessly for any sort of sign to what was going on. I approached a house that was almost completely in shambles, not necessarily concerned if it were to collapse on me in any way. I walked through the remains of the house and didn't recognize it at all...but out of the complete silence I heard shuffling in the distance. Rushing upstairs, I peered through every room, flipping furniture shouting "Can anyone hear me?!"

In the corner of a small bedroom that looked like it had been torn through already, a faint, fragile voice said "Mom? Dad?"

I removed all the items barricading the little girl behind it as she sat trembling holding onto something that happened to be a picture frame of her family.

“Hello.” I said. “What is your name?”

She remained silent for a few moments as she tried to gather enough gust to answer me when she said “E-Ella.”

I soon realized we were both in the same situation. Our families were long gone, nowhere to be found or heard from, we were alone, up until this very moment.

“Hi Ella, I’m Z.”

She remained quiet for the majority of the time spent together. I took her along with me continuing the search for others for hours on end with no luck of anyone else being alive or simply around still. As we walked up and down streets, it was clear to see the flames growing faster and faster ripping through anything and everything in its path, limiting the number of houses we still needed to check. Occasionally, I would turn around checking to see if Ella was still by my side; she made no noise at all, so it was fairly easy for me to assume she got away. We walked as far as we could before it got dark and as far away from the areas engulfed in flames.

It was a constant battle to keep myself together, without wanting just to give up which seemed like a fair decision before this girl came into my life and now suddenly I feel as if I’m responsible for her and it was my duty to help her which meant resisting the temptation to give up.

I resisted the urge to ask too many questions regarding Ella’s family: if she remembered anything; if she was even okay at all seemed like a difficult question. The few times we did converse, she rarely spoke more than one word in reply.

It was undeniable that our own leaders were to blame for this, and in the far, far distance all that could be seen were the several governmental buildings still standing as if the

surrounding environment didn't completely shatter around them. I never understood why this happened. To this day, I question why a world so corrupt in its being would torture its citizens and leave them behind.

There wasn't much of an option regarding where we go to next. Either leave behind everything – not that there was much left to leave – and start new, if possible. Or attempt to walk into the danger zone where we would be risking our lives, not knowing what is to come in any way. Would it even be worth it? Living a life without anyone meaningful in it and forever not knowing what actually happened? It seemed like there was a clear answer we didn't necessarily want to face.

With everything behind us, and the unknown still on our minds, Ella and I walked hand in hand toward something we weren't even sure was out there. A new life, a fresh start.

We approached the end of the seemingly never-ending street at the far side of town where we both have never been before. It was still dark, but far less smoky and grey than other places we'd been. On both sides and all around were tall trees of various sorts covering whatever sky was still visible to those below them. All around us the air was filled with pure silence...it was calming but ambiguous at the same time.

Throughout it all, Ella held onto my hand with the tightest grip... as if she were holding on to the past she still hoped would be around the corner somewhere. The end of the street vanished – just ended, and before us was nothing but a few scarce trees and what seemed to be a mirage of a way out of all of this. I thought... could this really be what it looks like? And then I'd try to get a grip of what I was trying so desperately to convince myself it wasn't.

A way out. A gate that stood alone with no accompanying fence around it. Just a large, tall gate that no one has ever seen or mentioned before. It was foreboding and quite

intimidating as well. We inched closer and closer to it, and before I could stop it, Ella reached out and grasped the handle and opened the left side. I was anxious and somewhat relieved at the same time. She looked up at me in awe, but I couldn't grasp what I envisioned before me, just behind that very gate. It was a completely different world; it looked bare but so peaceful and untouched. I stood there in the same spot for a while in pure amazement, and right before me I watched as Ella ran ahead past the gate and I gasped with my hand covering my mouth.

She gestured with her hands for me to follow her past this gate. But for the first time since I had found this girl, a smile almost unbelievable came across her face and I was shocked beyond belief. For the first time, Ella was happy; she looked as if she's forgotten everything she had endured only a few footsteps prior to where she currently stood. I was truly amazed at how free she was and genuinely overjoyed with what seemed like the escaping memories and fears of what used to be reality slowly vanishing in my mind.

It was like nothing I've ever seen or encountered in my life. Everything was covered with light and the environment looked like something from above. A polar opposite of the world we'd left behind only minutes ago.

I remained cautious of where I was and where I stepped, and Ella remained in her stance of happiness. Surely, I was happy, but I couldn't just give up everything...that is for a while at least.

The time is now 0100 hours...the start of the beginning...year 1.

Me and Ella facing the world we'd left behind.

Vincent Mascia

Resistance

It started on a cold winter day in Fost, Tanzania. My finger was dislocated and there was a bullet lodged in my chest just above my heart. Luckily enough, I had gotten away from the torture house. If I didn't get out, I would've been dead right now. When someone gets brought into the torture house, they are usually never seen again. That's because it's run by the Royal Army now, and they don't take well with the resistance fighters.

My country had broken into war four months ago, and I came back to this wretched place to aid in the fight. My father, Sanjob, was the leader of the resistance, but was quickly kidnapped by the Royal Army. I left America to come back to the hell hole that I promised myself I'd never come back to. But I had no other choice: if I didn't come back, my father had no chance of living. I've already interrogated ten Royal Army Captains about my father's whereabouts, but they were all no use to me. It's a good thing my father had military knowledge that he passed on to me, with years of training. The last guy finally cracked and had spoken up. He told me my father was being kept in this heavily guarded warehouse. My goal now was to take to get my father back and help the resistance take control of this once ever-so-great nation.

I needed to find the nearest resistance base, but I knew the closest one wasn't for miles. I had a general idea of where I was, so I knew which way I had to walk. I just didn't know how far I was going to have to walk. On my journey to the base, I encountered several animals. The wolves were the worst, being they are the fiercest animal in this part of the

country. Lucky for me though, I had constructed a slingshot and hit the wolf right in the nose, which is real sensitive, so it just took off. I had no food or water, and the mountainous terrain didn't help my situation, either. I knew I had to keep going though, for my father's life was on the line. Finally, I had gotten to a high enough vantage point and I could see the base where the other resistance fighters were. It took me another two hours to get there, but once I did it was one of the most relieved feelings I had ever felt.

When I swung open the door, there was a group of the resistance sitting by the fire, and a few others in the kitchen making dinner for everyone. I saw my best friend Rakiem. We've known each other since as long as I can remember, being that we were neighbors and the same age. "Hey brother," I said to him. "Arjay," he exclaimed, "We all thought you were dead!!" He proceeded to run over to me and give me a big hug. "I'm sorry about your father. I heard what happened and just know I got your back no matter what." I told him what I knew and that I needed a team to help me rescue Sanjob. I chose seven others based on their training. My plan was to strike quickly and quietly. Everyone had geared up and was ready to go. "Load the trucks, and let's go," I yelled to my fighters.

We made our way to the warehouse and sat hidden in the tree line 100 meters away. It was heavily guarded, and I knew that this was not going to be an easy fight. Looked like the quiet plan wasn't going to work, so I told them we had to go with plan b. Rakiem and I set off for the two guys guarding the doors. One of them heard the rattling in the bushes, and began to search for what the noise was. Too bad it was me and he was strangled within the first three seconds; he didn't even see me. The other was taken out by Rakiem's silenced AR-15. We motioned to the others that it was clear and they met with us just outside the doors. I had told them that it was now or never,

and this was their only chance to leave. They looked at me as if I had four heads, because they had already all come this far, so why turn back now? I told them to get ready, because in about ten seconds, all hell was gonna break loose. I ordered two of the resistance fighters to plant explosives on the doors. They did and came back to the rest of the group. This was it.

I yelled “Detonate” and the doors exploded open. There had to be at least fifteen Royal Army soldiers behind those doors. I saw two of them go flying when the door exploded. All that was heard now was gunfire and screams. We began to advance inside, but yet there was no sight of my father. A resistance fighter next to me had gotten his head shot clean through, and I watched his body drop. I shot the soldier that did this and made my way deeper into the compound. I was able to get out of the gunfire and search for my father with Rakiem, until finally we found a ladder leading into a basement. We made our way down and it left us in a little room with a door way that lead into a bigger room. Through the doorway, in the middle of the room, a man was in a chair with his hands tied and a bag over his head. It was my father. I was so overzealous to get my father back, that I just ran up to him. Rakiem yelled “NO” right when he was able to tell what I was doing. Little did I know that there were two men with pistols waiting in the corner of the room. Once they saw me they began to open fire.

Rakiem ran out of the room after me, wielding his AR. There were all kinds of shots and everything was so loud that my ears were ringing. Rakiem had killed them men, but when I looked at him, I knew something was wrong. We looked at each other, and then suddenly, he fell to the floor. He’d been shot three times and one of the bullets hit the artery on the right side of his chest. I ran over to him and began talking and yelling for him to get up. He looked up at me and said, “Make sure you and your father get out alive.” That was it. His pulsed

stopped after that, and I began to sob. How could I have let this happen? It was all my fault. I made a detrimental mistake, and my best friend had to pay for it. I soon began to realize where I was again and I knew I had to go. I untied my father and took the bag off of his head. Once he stood up, he saw Rakiem lying lifeless on the ground, and I could see the tears in his eyes. I told him we had no time and there was more soldiers coming. We got up the ladder as fast we could and made our way through the building.

Finally, we got outside and just seconds after an airstrike was called on the warehouse. It crumbled to pieces. All that I could see in the rubble were body parts. Only three other resistance fighters made it out with us. The five of us ran back to our jeeps parked by the treeline. The whole way back, I couldn't stop thinking about Rakiem. I remembered all the good times we'd had. He's gone now, but definitely not forgotten. Heroes often risk everything they've got for the good of others, and today Rakiem had risked it all for me. It was now time for me to risk it all for him, and to do what we set out to do earlier: fight for the greater good of others.

Joe Ostapiuk

The Fall

I killed your brother. It was some time ago, and body after body has lain in me since, even your own. The routine turning of the faucet, the cyclical filling of the water, the slow cleansing of the drain. The tired and the weak, replenished. The routine turning of the faucet, the cyclical filling of the water, the slow cleansing of the drain. The tattered and the tainted, purified.

His eyes were a bright green, and his skin was fair and pure. Your mother's hands were glistening and clean; they had innocence in them then, too. They both reveled in their freedom, their peace that embraced them. Her gentle hand twisted the handle and covered the drain as I began to fill. The waters raised gradually, peacefully. She looked over me as my white surface cradled the life pouring from the faucet, smiling as it neared the brim.

She sang beautifully:

Mary had a little lamb,
Little lamb, little lamb,
Mary had a little lamb,
Whose fleece was white as snow.

Your brother laughingly adored her song as he lay beside her, his tiny hands reaching towards her.

Calmly, your mother twisted the handle again, and so there was silence. The surface was sealed still, its transparency untouched. She carefully rose and carried your brother to my side, his playful eyes admiring the serenity, her eyes, too. Your mother raised him above me and lowered his body into the water, his feet sending ripples throughout, until, inch by inch,

his flesh was immersed, his green eyes smiling ceaselessly above the surface. His hands clapped wildly, and the tremors clouded the water, the stillness broken.

A splash of joy jumped, and the water swayed spritely around his small and round body; his tiny voice echoed throughout the room as his laughter carried out into the hall. His wandering eyes bounced from one object to the next, and the mystery of the world seemed opened to his vision, a vast world of light danced brightly about his eyes.

Your brother swam a toy snake across the surface of the water, its forked tongue extended as he smiled. He immersed himself in childish thought as he glided the snake from one side of his body to the other. But I remember her eyes, brightened with the revelation, as your brother, unknowing, continued joyously. Her eyes, *they* transfixed upon the serpent, and so her ears fell deaf, and her mind fell into wonder. Her eyes, her eyes had *fallen*, darkened with the knowledge, naked and blazing with the light. I remember her hands, moving across the edge, knowing good and evil, until his head slowly sank beneath the threshold. There was a moment of silence. But the tremors began once again- the water thrashed erratically- the serenity shattered. Her eyes were changed, her purity lost within the act as life swallowed life, as green vanished, the skin discolored, the balance undone.

I never was sure what happened afterwards. She stood there for some time, staring endlessly into the void, like someone who had seen something so profound that it had left them voiceless. Then, almost mechanically, she took his body carefully in her hands, his skull rested in her palm, and left the room. Time melted by slowly like the suspended drip of the faucet, which even seemed to be holding its collective breath, holding still as moments drifted into hours.

The drain was released, and the water began to sink into nothingness; gradually, peacefully, it fell into the dark of ether, and so the remnants vanished. Your mother has grown wretched- her eyes sunken, and her flesh hard and calloused. His eyes, they faded slowly, until his innocence suffocated, inexorably. But so, the circle continued, the relentless wheel pressed onwards as it did before: the routine turning of the faucet, the cyclical filling of the water, the slow cleansing of the drain. *The Fruit devoured. His body now naked.*

Chris Rontanini

Short Story

This is a story about a boy who grew up in a strict Catholic family but does not believe in religion. This story outlines how the boy perceived religion from the time he was in elementary school all the way until high school. He is forced to go to church by his mother every Sunday no matter how much he does not want to. His mother is very religious and superstitious while his father only goes to mass on Christmas. The reason he goes to church on Christmas is because the family goes to a Christmas Eve party directly after mass. The most religious member of his family is by far his Grandmother who references God frequently.

Throughout the boy's elementary school years, religion was the one constant in his early life. Along with going to mass every Sunday he was enrolled in religion courses at his parish which helps prepare students for their confirmation in seventh grade. There he was taught the stories of the bible and how they are relatable to everyday life. The first major step before a student gets confirmed is to receive first communion. Students make their first communion in second grade and it is made out to be a big deal. All the boy's family showed up to the mass and a huge party was thrown for him afterwards and he received gifts. He was very happy on the day he received first communion because he was getting so much attention and gifts. He never once stopped to think why he was being celebrated and what did receiving first communion really mean. He never questioned religion because his mother talked so highly of religion.

During middle school, he starts to question the faith that he was taught to have. When the boy goes to mass and listens to the priest's stories, he is left with more questions than answers. Stories about Jesus curing the blind and diseased do not make any sense to him because there is no logic to prove it. He wants to find out the truth, so he searches for what other people are saying on religion. Specifically, he looks up comedians and talk shows that talk about religion. His favorite comedian makes a solid argument for why religion is a scam, and he agrees with what this comedian says. Based on the research he conducted, he decides that evolution is more logical than creation, and the entire way he sees life has changed because of this decision. When he hears his family speaking about religion, he questions them and wonders how they fell for this scam.

After thinking about how much of a scam religion is, he realizes that religion causes people to do crazy things but what do they get out of it. An example is fasting for holidays and the crusade wars. A friend of his cannot eat and drink from sunrise to sunset every day for at least a month (Ramadan). In eighth grade, he stops going to church except on Christmas, and when he goes to church on Christmas, he only sits there; he does not participate.

In high school, the boy is asked to write a short story for his composition class. He chooses to write about himself and how he has perceived religion throughout his life. One day the grandmother is at the boy's house to visit and she walks into his room but he is not there. The grandmother sees a piece of paper on his desk with an A written on the top. It is the short story that the boy wrote and she begins to read it. She is appalled at the content of the story. When the boy comes home, she asks him about the story and when he began to think this way. This turns into an hour long lecture which makes no progress

because both parties are trying to convince the other but neither will concede defeat – just like a political debate. His grandmother is so upset that she storms out of the boy's room and goes home.

The next day the boy's mother says she heard what happened and wants to hear his side of the story. The mother thinks he was very brave to stand up to his grandmother and say how he honestly feels. She convinces him to visit his grandmother so that they could speak about the argument they had. He goes to see his grandmother and they begin to speak. The grandmother apologizes for being nasty to him the day prior. She says that she believes people have the right to voice their opinions, so while she does not agree with his position, she respects that he is so passionate. She was raised by parents who were even more strict and religion came first. She wants her kids to have the faith that she was taught and she may have gotten carried away. Her main message is that she does not want to lose her grandson because of this disagreement. They hug and all is forgiven. The boy realizes that his grandmother is a special person because after he attacked her beliefs she still loves him.

Anmarie Sivert **Vacation, Please**

Work – it’s something no one wants to do, but everyone has to do it to live. I always ran from the train station to the coffee shop to get a caramel latte and then straight to my office building. Every morning, the door man would open the door and nod his head to reassure that I was doing a fine job. After sprinting into the elevator, I would stand there in anticipations that the day has just began. Coming to the thirty-seventh was like a home for me. When I came through the door, everyone would say “Good Morning, Alice” to me. It made me smile knowing that the day had just began and there was so much to do. My schedule was always packed with long hours and not much time to myself. When I was working, I wanted a break; but when I had a break, all I wanted to do was get back to finishing my work. It was the cycle of a life.

Work was rigorous and stressful for me. Sometimes I would come home shaking being of my work load. People always say “hard work pays off,” which is true. At the end of the day, it was all worth it to get my salary. But to be honest, I loved my job and the idea of work. My life was my job.

Every day around twelve my co-worker, Carly, and I would take a break and have some sort of adventure. Today was like no other, so we decided to go to the park. At the park, there were always so many people and things to observe. It was a chilly day, with a slight breeze that made the colorful trees dance and the leaves shimmy to the ground. Children jumped around the playground and were so joyful as they played. The crazy children were always so bright and uplifting to see. They were living a life where happiness was what filled up their days.

Carly and I were sitting on a bench watching people walk by and trying our best to just past the time. It was relaxing to get some fresh air on our time off. It gave us time to take some deep breathes and rest our eyes.

Before we were about to get up, a little girl ran up to her father yelling, “I want to go to Walt Disney World!” The idea of Disney just made me smile on the inside. I remembered all the great things about being a kid. Disney was just a magical place. I turned to face Carly and said, “Wouldn’t it be great to go to Disney right now?”

Carly looked at me like I had ten heads and chuckled, “Are you kidding me?”

I replied instantly, “Not at all, I think that would be a great trip to take; I haven't taken a vacation in a while.”

She looked at me and stood up while saying, “What? Are you five years old?” I didn’t reply; I couldn’t reply because she wasn't ruining Disney for me. As we left the park to return back to work, I couldn't remove the idea of the Disney trip from my mind. I haven't been there in years, and soon I hoped to visit again.

After putting my jacket and bag away, I went to sit at my desk. I tried my best to get back into my work but I couldn’t. I was so intrigued by the idea of going to Walt Disney World. I am never distracted at work, and I was trying my best to focus. After playing games with myself, I decided to look up information about a trip to Disney. I was looking up all the attractions at the Disney parks and it got me so excited. I couldn’t believe the amount of joy I was receiving by looking it up online.

Carly came by my desk to chat and of course saw my research on a Disney trip. She continued to call me a child and then asked for the opinion of Bobby, another co-worker. She tried her best to make fun of my Disney trip idea, but Bobby

backed me up. He said that he would come on a Disney trip with me because it would be a different type of feeling now that we are older and no longer children. He looked at our work schedules to figure out a time when a trip would be most doable. We all needed a break from work and time to be a child again.

I sat there staring at the screen wondering what to do. Should I book a trip? Is this just an impulsive action? What should I do? Carly, Bobby, and I just sat there looking at the computer until we finally clicked the button and made a decision.

Meghan Kristyn Collins
Maltreated

The weeping willow tree will attack,
In defense, if you cannot subtract.
The un- from the spoken
That was suddenly awoken,
When the weeping willow tree
Was finally set free.

†—†

Meghan Kristyn Collins

My Brother

Path to salvation
That's what it was meant to be
Yet alteration arose instead
From *suggestions* the doctors planted in Mother's head.

Presented on a silver platter to aid his ill mind,
And everyone thought it was for the best,
Yet they were wrong: it made him worse.
It fried his brain and changed who he was.

At first, my brother seemed fine
But once in a while he was so out of touch,
That we had to spoon feed him like a baby
Then, it changed him again.

He became worse, less empathic
And more cruel than we thought possible
No matter what we did, in his mind *we* were always wrong
For this medical breakthrough broke him
With side effects unknown until too late.

Two siblings once so close now separate different paths
One stays, one strays
And when two loses one
Life is no longer fun.

Helen Daly

Her Journey

And she gingerly walked upon her new solid ground,
And basked in the light that had directed her down.
She stood straight, head held high as she continued her path;
And never looked behind to the ruins of wrath.
Her heart was relieved and her breath it was deep;
The journey gave healing to her parts, once weak.
In essence the good was an amazing new way,
To release all the bad and embrace a new day.
It wasn't all easy this new direction she chose
She fought and she cried, and for a while, refused to go.
But the writing had been on the wall, you see
That her path needed change for her to just "be"
And even still her dreams were about staying in in the past,
But she knew this new path would bring her peace, at last.
And with a grateful heart, she continued her pace;
It was amazingly smooth with newfound loving grace.
And her heart it was grateful for what she kept from the start...
Her children, family and friends, her pets and her good heart.
For no one or nothing could steal the light from her soul,
And when they tried she protected her given grace like gold.
No one said it would be easy and with every step she found,
New reasons to be grateful, new light to keep around.
So she took all the bad and hid it from light
And kept all the good, very close, and in sight
And the day did come when she no longer cried
Tears turned to numbness, her naïveté had died

And she knew of her monster and all of his deeds
His castle of sadness all withered, in weeds
And what healed her was forgiveness a new light to shine
And her new life was light, and she liked it just fine.

Helen Daly **Her Storm**

And she laughed at the wind as it tore through her hair;
She stood defiantly tall with the storm, still there.
As if just any destruction could do her some harm,
She had seen stronger and harder storms come forth, then
disarm.
The winds would be rough and the water she knew-
Would beat down from the skies where gray covered blue.
As pieces of her life flew by incomplete;
She reached out and caught what was important to keep.
Her family, her friends, and some Irish rosary beads;
They came from her mother, so those she would need.
As if any weather could weaken her pace;
She'd been through the worst and calm she'd embrace.
And though it took time for her pieces to mend,
The storm did move past her, and come to an end.
She'd never forget the force of the gale;
As it tore down her home, her dreams, curtailed.
But she knew just as sure as the gray sky turned to blue;
That there would be time left to dream new dreams, too.
But that would take time and new bridges built from her heart,
And that my dear friends, is a great place to start.

Emily Jareb

august:

the last time i saw you.
we stood out on the balcony
smoking cigarettes in silence.
you apologized for not speaking to me
for six weeks, and glanced my way,
expecting forgiveness.

instead, i said nothing
because my mouth was dry
from kissing the envelopes of love letters
i never had the courage to send to you,
in that instant, becoming nothing more
than a knee-deep stack of papers in my living room.

the next morning, the sun awakened me
to everything your love had become:
an un-air-conditioned apartment
on the wrong side of manhattan, with
stained shag carpet and pale walls, a skeleton
framing the bruised skin, the cancerous plague

its grasp was burning the temple
of my selfhood to the ground, to nothing but ash
raining upon the good citizens of New York City
the last time i saw you, i did not give you
another opportunity to apologize.

Emily Jareb
Temple in Three Parts

(i)

Sitting
on the cold tile
floor, quiet in prayer,
the hospital has become
our church.

(ii)

It has
all come to this:
oxygen masks and the
morphine, becoming communion,
quiet.

(iii)

Silence.
Mother returns,
I know without a word.
We do not cry, a shrine to his
silence.

Idalis Jones

Free

I am free of the chains
That withheld me from happiness
I breath out with ease
I smile with truth
I am free of the box
That kept me prisoner
I am free of the chains
that tore through my flesh
And cut me open
I am magnificent
With wings that can carry me above
I have stopped drowning in the ocean of others thoughts
And now fly with the wind of my own validation
And I am free

Elizabeth Miranda
Windows and Mirrors

my house no longer has walls
only windows and mirrors
what was once plastered with spackle and secrets has
disintergrated
but - the walls didn't didn't crumble
they simply ceased to be.
just like the truth of santa and easter bunnies these too leave me
with a cold empty feeling
now I see everything NOW I see
though it's far from pretty
the view is far better than the walls which teased me
all that's left are windows and mirrors
suspended in midair just like that
windows don't me warm but they love me far better than those
lousy old walls ever could
mirrors don't reveal me instead I see my reflection shrinking-
wondering what happened
standing there growing smaller and smaller is an unfamiliar girl
when there were walls I knew no worries
now that everything is uncovered I know too much
so did they protect me? were they a blessing? were they a sin?
where do I go now?
do I build up new walls to keep the whispers deep behind them?
I think to myself
walls make a house but windows and mirrors make a home

Victoria Vaglica

The New Year's Eve Blackout

It was a frigid day in New York City on New Year's Eve. Times Square was packed with thousands upon thousands of people who were anticipating the ball to drop. The entire Eastern coast, from Maine all the way to Florida, was watching Ryan Seacrest's live broadcast in Manhattan. Families, friends and blissful couples were chatting as their skin became dry and chills developed throughout their bodies, due to the extremely cold temperature and wind chill. But, no matter what, they would continue to wait for the hour that changed the year from two thousand and sixteen to two thousand and seventeen.

Before the New Year's broadcast began, families gathered together for the final holiday of Winter break. They all brought appetizers, pasta dishes, pastries and many other foods to keep them energized as they anticipated the first second into two thousand and seventeen. Bars, restaurants and nightclubs were packed with young adults still trying to make the decision, of who they would kiss when the clock struck twelve! As people were gathering to meet with friends and families Ryan Seacrest's live broadcast began and many gathered around the television. Children happily played for they knew this was the only day, that they could stay up past their bedtime and run around for hours.

Somewhere around eleven o'clock in the evening, the electricity vanished. Millions were left in complete darkness as the new year was rapidly approaching. Times Square was a sea of darkness and millennials feared for they did not know where they would charge their phones. At home, viewers were not frightened because they had flashlights and generators. Whereas

tourists and New Yorkers in Times Square were flustered and nervous. The New York City Police Department informed everyone that the electricity would be up and running in no time and to remain calm.

But then, multiple Con Edison workers arrived on the scene in their utility vehicles. They entered the main building that the ball was facing, in the hope of finding the cause of this power outage. After the electricians had arrived, the crowd became tranquil and made the best out of their holiday delay. The Long Island Power Association also worked tirelessly to assure Long Islanders that they would see the ball drop.

Amidst the New Year's delay, New Yorkers began to live as they once did – without the use of technology. Children and parents played with board games. The bars and restaurants were filled with genuine conversation, for people were not staring at their phones for hours upon hours. They weren't interacting with others over their computer screens; they were conversing and interacting with each other. This unexpected blackout allowed New Yorkers to remember the importance of socializing instead of using social networking websites.

Suddenly, a shock of electricity came upon New York. It was 11:50, and viewers had ten minutes to spare, before the festivities began. New Yorkers were ready to celebrate and felt they were filled with luck, for their celebrations were not ruined. One New Yorker even stated, "I am so happy that my night wasn't ruined! This is a great sign that two thousand and seventeen will be the best year of my life!" Another jumped on stage with Meghan Trainor and screamed, "The night has just begun!"

Finally, the ball dropped and two thousand and seventeen began with an explosion of excitement and joy. After all, the blackout served a purpose to bring everyone together and to remember the importance of the holiday season.

Sometimes, we forget to put our phones down and capture the moment, and make memories. Altogether a picture is not truly worth a thousand words if we do not remember the moment it was taken. Therefore, we must always focus on the people in front of us and not just the screen upon which they are virtually presented.