The Echo
2018
I am thrilled to present the 2018 edition of *The Echo*. *The Echo* has a long, respected history at Furman—since its creation in 1893, *The Echo* has been a steadfast platform for student excellence and creativity. Following the development of the creative writing track by Furman’s English department, we reimagined *The Echo* as not solely a publication but also as a way to celebrate art in the Furman community. We did so by emphasizing art as a lived experience and bringing *The Echo* to campus. We hosted events, including a spotlight on Greenville poets, a painting event, a poetry writing event, and numerous giveaways and activities. We have been delighted by the enthusiastic response from many Furman students and faculty.

None of this would have been possible without the support of *The Echo* community. First, thank you to my assistant editors, Lizzy Coyle and Maddie De Pree, who continuously supported me, challenged me, and kept me sane. Thank you also to the editorial board, who lent constant enthusiasm, flexibility, and always fresh eyes despite facing a rather demanding tenure. Finally, I owe endless debts of gratitude to my faculty advisors, Dr. Tevis and Dr. Morris, for wisely and patiently guiding me through the successes and trials of this role. Leading *The Echo* over the last year has been an unparalleled honor and joy for me. I thank you all for your interest in *The Echo* and hope you enjoy the beautiful pieces that the Furman community has created and shared with us.

Maddie Allums
Editor-in-Chief
Class of 2018
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Breath

Poetry • Ella Morton

April of freshman year, it stormed so loud
the cinderblock walls of my dorm rattled.
I could hear the rain splattering
Against the screen of our open window
I wondered if it was coming into the room
And rolled over in bed.

When I panic I breathe too fast
Pushing as much air out of me as possible
I create a windstorm around me
As if I could take off from the ground
Or breathe fire, if I ventilate fast enough.

But sometimes, when I feel out of control, I just breathe in and in
Expanding my lungs to full capacity
And I hold it for as long as I can
Until I feel like I could lift off like a balloon.

My roommate, who is a better person than me, climbed down from the top bunk.
She shut the window quietly
She thought my even breathing
Meant that I was asleep.
Awaiting Transmutation
Brandon Barney
Photography

From a Distance
Brandon Barney
Photography
Soft Hands
Poetry • Jared Buchholz

A porch. A wooden swing. We’re wearing jackets. Mine blue. Yours jean. You’re sniffling. I’m shaking. Autumn’s just about gone. Our hands do a dance while the fingers warm and interlock and talk through feeling. And when my index finds the callous above the knuckle crease of your right thumb, you say, “It’s from drawing.” And I wonder, “Have I never felt something like this?”

Her fingers.

Elegant. Skeletal. I imagine her hand as an old tree, thriving alongside an untouched stream. Can you hear the water? The movement? And life moves, soaking earth, and deep roots drink and drink, and the green leaves, the branches from which they cling, these are the lines in the valley of her palm.

But my fingers are fleshy. Stubs. More skin than bone. One time I caught the cat staring at them, licking her tongue. She’d mistaken them for sausages. I told her, “No. You cannot eat my fingers.” However, it’s my right pinky—crooked, veering from the ring—that most disturbs me. The odd angle is the result of a headfirst slide into second base. I was fifteen.

A memory.

During that same year, in the front yard of the family cabin, my grandpa and I will chop wood together. My axe head will stick, caught on log. And I will fail and fail and I will sweat in November snow. When I take off my gloves, I’ll say, “Papa, they’re slipping.” And he’ll glance up at Pennsylvania sky and grin at me with his three teeth and declare, “You can tell a man by the callouses he’s got.”

After we finish, when he reaches out and shakes my hand, when I feel the hardness of his skin, my hand will withdraw, snap back. Turtlehead into shell. He’ll look confused. I’ll feel too foolish to explain.
My leg pushes. The swing’s chain scrapes against itself. And I feel at ease. And I hear voices. “It’s almost Halloween,” you say. But I cannot see the party-goers through the shrubs and small trees. Silence. A passing vehicle. The brake lights. Overbearing. Our fingers and toes are now numb. I smell firewood in your hair.
Ties
Abby McElmurray
Photography
Jackdaw Fairy
Sarah Murdaugh
Oil on watercolor board
Robin Fairy With Sunflowers
Sarah Murdaugh
Oil on watercolor board
Alakazam
Fiction • Lizzy Coyle

Geoff always kept $3.50 in his front left pocket. Jeans, khakis, cargo shorts with the black, plastic buckle. Didn’t matter. Always front left pocket. He used the $3.50 to buy a croissant, TruMoo chocolate milk, and a newspaper every morning. As he sat and ate his breakfast and read his paper, he would deposit another $3.50 into his front left pocket to prepare himself for his lunch. On his lunch break, he would leave his cubicle, walk down three flights of stairs—37 stairs to be exact—turn right, and then walk 2 blocks to Clive’s diner. He bought a BLT every day. It cost $3.50 with tax. As Geoff ate his BLT, he placed another $3.50 in his pocket for his dinner.

For dinner, Geoff would stop in Ingles. He had a pattern. He would enter the store and go immediately to the far-left side of the store to pick up a small bag of lightly salted kettle cooked potato chips. He then crossed to the far-right side of the store to the deli section. The butcher then sliced one piece of Wisconsin Cheddar and three slices of Rosemary Ham. The butcher wrapped up each slice separately and handed it to Geoff. Geoff already had a loaf of bread at home, so he walked to the front of the store to the cash registers.

“How are you doing today, sir?” The cashier asked. Her nametag read “Gabby.”

“I’m doing fine, thanks,” Geoff said. He stuck his hand in his front left pocket to dig out his money.

“Your total is $3.50,” Gabby said. Geoff handed her the money without counting it. He didn’t need to.
“Sir, you are twenty-five cents short,” Gabby said.

“No, I’m not,” Geoff said as he reached in his front left pocket to search for the missing quarter. There was nothing there.

Gabby lifted up three one-dollar bills and a quarter. “See?” she asked.

Geoff could not articulate what he was feeling. His face got very hot and red, he started to feel sweaty, and his hands could not stay still. “Well, I had another quarter earlier today. I don’t have any more money. That was it.”

“Looking for this?” someone asked.

Gabby and Geoff both turned their heads. A small, old man had appeared behind Geoff. He was wearing a velvet burgundy suit and a black top hat. He was holding a quarter.

“Please give that back to me,” Geoff said. “I believe it fell out of my pocket.”

“It didn’t fall out. I summoned it out. With magic! Alakazam! The mystical Archibald has done it again!” the old man said.

“Sir, how many times do we have to tell you? No more coming in here and messing with our customers. You need to leave immediately,” Gabby said.

The old man looked slightly offended. He slid behind Geoff and made his way toward the glass sliding door. “Alakazam!” he shouted as he threw down a handful of peanut M&Ms and then ran out of the door.

“That was weird,” Geoff said as he handed Gabby the last quarter. The old man had dropped it on the ground. “Have a nice day, Gabby. See you tomorrow.”

Geoff took his grocery bag and made his way out of the store.

The old man was standing by some shopping carts, attempting to light a cigarette. As Geoff walked by him, he dropped the cigarette and ran toward Geoff.

“Wait, wait,” the old man said. Geoff paused impatiently because he didn’t know what else to do. He patted his pockets to make sure the old man hadn’t taken anything else.

“I kinda fucked up my trick back there. I was supposed to throw down this handful of disappearing dust instead of peanut M&Ms,” the old man said, fisting an overflowing handful of what looked like lint from a washing machine. “See?” he said as he threw it down.

Instantly, they were surrounded by a world of gray. Two sets of coughs worked their way out of the cloud before it settled. “I haven’t actually ever tried the stuff before. Just bought it. Offline. On Amazon. My grandson helped me,” the old man said through his coughs.
“I really must be going,” Geoff said as he tried to side step the old man.

“No, no, wait. I’m sorry about the powder stuff. Listen, I need an assistant. For my magic act. You are just the right height. And I have a good feeling about you.”

Another feeling came over Geoff that he was having trouble describing. It was similar to when he was a child and his toothbrush was in the wrong section of the toothbrush holder, or when his day-of-the-week underwear was not in the correct order.

“I do not think I care to be an assistant to you,” Geoff said. He attempted to side-step the old man, but the old man was quicker than Geoff realized. Geoff ended up bumping into the old man.

“Tell me this, Stretch. You got any enemies? Cause I don’t trust a man without any enemies. Means he isn’t genuine and he lies to himself. Nothing worse than a liar.”

“Sir, do you realize you have not even introduced yourself to me?” Geoff asked. His mother had instructed him as he grew up that introductions are important in getting what you want.

“Sure I did! While we were inside! I said ‘Alakazam! The mystical Archibald has done it again!’ Don’t you remember, kid? It just recently happened,” Archibald said.

“That does not exactly qualify as a legitimate introduction,” Geoff said. He made another haphazard attempt to circumnavigate Archibald.

Archibald stuck out his hand. “I’m Archibald. My friends called me Archie, but they’re all dead now. So, I guess it’s just Archibald.”

Geoff did not enjoy physical touch. Memories from holidays as a child mainly consisted of being fondled by random adults who seemed to flit in and out of his life with the sole purpose of squeezing his cheeks tightly, hugging him with too warm bodies, or covering him with too wet kisses.

Handshakes were not usually a problem, as Geoff was a business man, but Archibald’s hands were frighteningly yellow. Whether from old age or jaundice or peeling callouses, Geoff did not care to find out, but Archibald grabbed his hand anyway and gave it two, big pumps.

“So, what do you say about being assistant? I know most of the time magicians’ assistants are nice, fine ladies with tight asses and sets of breasts to knock a man dead, but I’m in a bit of a pinch, and you are tall enough to maintain control of the ladder,” Archibald said.

“I still do not think I care to be your assistant. For one, I do not know anything about you. Or magic, actually. And I have a job. So, no. Now, I really must get going,” Geoff said. He hadn’t missed an episode of Jeopardy in months, and he was not planning on letting a senile old man stop him.
“You don’t have to know anything about magic! And it’s a weekend gig, so it won’t interfere with your desk job. Come on, Stretch, whaddya say?”

“Still no. I need to get going,” Geoff said, finally sidestepping Archibald.

“What? You have to get home so you can watch Jeopardy and eat a sad ham and cheese sandwich? Why don’t you get out of your own way and live a little?”

Geoff paused and turned around, preparing to say that his sandwich was not sad. But Archie was gone. All that was left was a little cloud of dust.

Geoff got into his car and put his grocery bag onto the passenger seat beside him. He made sure the radio volume was on eighteen before pulling out of the parking lot. He drove home the usual way, passing the usual buildings and landmarks going his usual speed. As Geoff pulled into his apartment complex, he parked in the spot he normally parked in and carried his belongings inside. He unpacked his groceries and prepared to make his dinner so he could eat it while he watched Jeopardy. He pulled the bread out of the pantry and unwrapped the deli meat and cheese. He arranged the meat and cheese on the slices of bread, just as he liked. Grabbing a knife out of the drawer, he prepared to cut it, but paused. Though he normally cut it horizontally, Geoff cut the sandwich diagonally. It was not the worst thing that had ever happened to him, he thought to himself. •
My father grows eyebrows that demand to be heard. Wiry hairs stand strong, arouse groomed opponents.

Dad wisely concedes “a little rebellion now and then is a good thing.” His eyebrows shoot bayonets and wave vermilion banners—some men shave their fight, growing only tamer, but Dad raises hell with every arch of his brow.
Siena Parade
Finley Buchanan
Photography
Tea Time
Ren Zimmerman
Marker
Dreamland
Poetry • Olivia Oliver

I’ll see you in my dreams my love
Hurry meet me there

You the place
That old place
And dear love take good care

Beneath the towering redwood trees
In the glowing hall
Where aliens ride bicycles
And the air resembles fall

Where the stars are always shining
And friends are to be found
We’ll laugh above the silly city
Past the sirens sound

To our dreamland meeting place
Nothing can compare
The waking world is boring darling
Hurry meet me there
Cable 34  
Claire Pullan  
Photography

Perspective  
Emma Brown  
Photography
Dust to Dust
Poetry • Jared Buchholz

I’m in a hurry. Brushing teeth. Putting on shoe. Checking pocket. Keys. Wallet. And as my hand grips the brass door knob. The heat turns on. I pause. I smell burning dust. I do not move. The feeling of warmth moves. From the ceiling. From the little metal grate. It moves through the air. Into me. I remember things like snow. How my father would wrap my sister and me in that patchwork quilt that my mother’s grandmother sewed together. He’d smile and say a rhyme. Use words like snug and bug and rug. And I remember other things. Like Erie. Wood burning in a cast iron stove. How green can be forgotten. The taste of icicle. And I think to myself how can one smell do so much. And I say to myself I’m going to be late even though I know I won’t be.
Cracked
Jordan Winiski
Bookmaking with wood and paint

Roads of Hope
Jordan Winiski
Brass and copper
Leaves drop like cigarette ash, littering the ground in patches of smoldering orange and brown. I idle amid the debris of oaks, dragging the toe of my shoe across wet grass. I carry with me a paper cup, filled halfway with the sticky leftovers of an electric blue Slurpee. I find a butterfly, dead, lying on its side, gingerly pick it up by the wing with my fingernails, careful not to pinch. A bare patch of silky black skin is left unearthed where a wing used to be. The other wing is flailed out as if in flight. Colors blend like watercolor bleeding on a wet page—orange, black, white. When I hold it up against the sky, light shines through the wing, as beautiful as stained glass.

Colorful scenes play through my head, the remnants of Sundays, my mind constantly wandering in my mother’s church. Jagged depictions of biblical stories travel down the glass walls like words on a page—Jesus amongst the saints, Jesus performing miracles in massive crowds, Jesus resurrecting the dead with a razor-sharp fingertip. His crystal blue eyes pierce mine from behind a tall, oak altar. I spend hours squirming in my seat next to my mother, who sits erect, her head bowed. She prays for her continued strength, peace for her father, decaying in cancerous Arkansas, clarity for her restless daughter. She sighs an amen, turns to look at me. She knows my mind strays, sees boredom in my posture, feels criticism in my heart. I struggle under the gaze of two pairs of iridescent blue eyes.

My eyes do not meet those of the butterfly—I picture them closed, lids pulled over dark orbs, nestled amongst fibers of hair-like follicles that cover its body. I cannot bear to place the thing in my palm. I pour the Slurpee from its
cup, dumping bright blue liquid amongst a patch of red and pink blooms. I lay the butterfly at the bottom of the funnel in a sticky heap of melted ice and dye. I hesitate to snap on the lid—the action seems unjust. I poke my finger through the top and tear out a small hole from the plastic, then place the lid over the lip of the cup. A beam of light floods through, the wing of the butterfly catching sunlight and illuminating the inside of the cup like morning Mass.

My mother sat with her parents in Arkansas in a dim lit bistro, solemn, the next day’s treatment weighing down their shoulders and smiles. The ambiance cast soft shadows across my grandfather’s thinning face. My mother squinted through the dark across the room, recognized a short Korean man. She had seen the portrait of the national specialist hanging in the Halifax Hospital back in Florida, the same hospital in which my grandfather had been diagnosed with multiple myeloma. The oncologist had been dining with his family a few tables away. Fifteen hours later, he would stand poised above my grandfather’s incised chest, scalpel between his fingers, and slide a port through his left pectoral muscle. My mother approached him as he stood to leave, tears culminating in her eyes. My grandparents trailed behind. Names and handshakes were exchanged.

“This is my father, W.L. He’s beginning treatment with you tomorrow.”

There was no small talk.

“Doctor, my father...this man is too important...this man is too kind to be suffering like this.”

I imagine the tears that spilled from her eyes, the memories that filled her mind—my grandfather bearing my mother on his mountainous shoulders, deep into the ocean past the crashing waves, out to where the water settled in a sheet of glass. The ocean rolled and lapped against my mother’s body, her head just barely bobbing above the water, as she clung to my grandfather with weak, wet arms. They glided like sea foam upon the surface, like plasma atop blood, with no fear of drowning. As my mother poured out her heart to the oncologist—amongst the chiming of glasses, clatter of silverware on china, the rushing of heavy laden waiters and idle chatter of diners—I imagine my grandfather stood there, silent in his humility. He placed a massive hand gently between my mother’s shoulders as they heaved with the weight of her words.

“Ma’am,” the doctor met my mother’s eyes. “It is unacceptable that your father has this strain of cancer.” He looked up at my grandfather’s face. Perhaps they shared a slight nod or tilt of the head, a moment of recognition. “I will take care of him,” he said.
Within the clean white innards of a cancer ward, my grandfather sat watching as his cells were scattered around the room in bags and vials and tubes. There was a port, a hole punctured through his chest, directly above his heart. A small plastic tube connected blood vessel to pump, dragging blood along clear plastic tubes that coiled in the air and into individual vials. The oncologist inserted the vials into a centrifuge like bullets in a gun, and the device spun with a mechanical whir, separating blood from plasma in a whip of red color, collected stem cells to be cryogenically frozen.

Perhaps the port in his chest tingled, pinched his skin. Perhaps my grandfather curled his toes in discomfort, ground his teeth, held on tight to my grandmother’s bony hand, ran his fingers through my mother’s hair. Perhaps he pictured me, only five years old, digging in the wet sand with a blue plastic shovel, flinging sand and shells in the air. Perhaps he pictured my sister, nearly three, sleeping under the shade of an umbrella in the arms of my mother. And perhaps he pictured himself, still fit and steady, grasping my small hand as we ambled to the ocean, how he would hoist me up by the arms, pulling me from the water’s grip, my toes bombarded by the crash, how we would giggle, his laugh booming in his strong chest.

Back at home, that same port in my grandfather’s chest would receive chemotherapy. Pale liquid streamed from three bags, hung from hooks like dead fish. He would drag the stand across the tiled floor, the wheels catching in the grout. He would stagger, regain his footing, look around to see if anyone had witnessed, and continue to fumble forward. In the bathroom mirror, he would run his fingers over his scalp, watching the hair fall and settle in the sink. Once, I naively told him he looked handsome without hair as I ran my own fingers over the top of his head. The corners of his mouth twitched into a sad smile.

I recall my ten-year-old self, perching on the edge of the bed as my grandmother leaned over my grandfather and removed the chamber from his chest, revealing the open wound. I remember it as a black hole, small but ominous, the surrounding skin irritated and red. Her fingers moved deftly as she cleaned his skin with a warm washcloth, swiped a gloved finger through the opening. I convinced myself I could see through the hole, to the inner mechanisms of my grandfather—his veins and vessels crisscrossing like roads on a map, his strong heart pulsing in the dark cavity, his lungs inflating with a sharp gasp as my grandmother replaced the chamber and attached the port with a blunt click, white liquid flowing once more.
I trace the flight pattern of another butterfly with my eyes as it swoops to rest on the arm of a bench, the bark of a tree, the curb of a sidewalk.

The butterfly lands delicately on a tall stem of grass and rests there, its wings fluttering softly in the breeze. Cup in hand, I tiptoe to the stalk and slowly reach out. I run my finger along the blade of grass from top to bottom until the butterfly clutches my nail with its legs, its wings splayed out in preparation for flight. Our eyes meet for a second—two bulging black holes and two blinking blue stars. I bring it closer to my eye. Its antennae kiss my lashes. The butterfly springs from my finger and returns to hopelessly fighting the breeze.

My grandfather died, not of cancer, but from a common cold. He slept away his final days in Halifax Hospital. The only indication of life, a beat on the heart monitor—a faint, brave tone that sang out like a whistle. On his deathbed, my grandfather never spoke. He solely opened his mouth to breathe, raspy, throaty noises escaping his chapped lips. He never opened his eyes. His thin lids lay heavy over his pale blue irises, betraying veins hidden under skin, poking through like mountains on a topographical map.

In my mind, this image is false, a lie. What I remember is the sound, that melody he whistled as my grandfather hauled loads of plants, dirt, and tools from his garage. He kneeled at the trunk of one of the great trees in his backyard, where a garden flourished. With massive yet gentle hands, he settled plantlets in loose earth, coaxing the stems to stand tall, smoothing out the dirt with his gloved fingertips. At night, we gathered on the concrete slab around a homemade fire pit, filled to the brim with damp logs. He sent me around the backyard to collect dead branches and armfuls of paper leaves that crumbled in my hands. We watched sparks scatter, joining the stars, then dim and fade in the overcast night sky. Rain floated down like fall leaves, and the fire hissed and spat. My grandfather whistled, a lullaby, perhaps, as I dozed with my head on his shoulder under the cover of oaks.

Late in the spring, my mother called me from Daytona. Over the speaker phone, she recounted the details of the hospital room—the sterilized white tiled floor, the white sheets tucked neatly around my grandfather, the opaque plastic curtain, hanging from the ceiling like the folds of a robe. She described the protection she wore—the thick plastic sheet that hung off her shoulders, the paper shoe covers snug around her boots, the hood pulled over her head, the face mask muffling her voice.

She must have been pacing. I could hear her dampened footsteps on the linoleum floor, the rustle of her crisp plastic smock. My mother wanted me to
talk to my grandfather, to tell him I loved him, even though she told me he would not respond. “Just in case,” she seemed to warn. “Why don’t you say a prayer, dear?”

Pressing my lips against the mouthpiece, I whispered my prayer across the state, along paved highways and dirt backroads, along the ridges of hills and the shores of beaches that separated us. I spoke of fond memories I shared with him: days spent reading on lawn chairs in the hot Florida sun, games we would play in the bed of his truck, pretending to be pirates, time spent in his orchard, sinking our teeth into lemons and grapefruits, trying not to make sour faces.

And what I remember now, what I remember most, the way his high, sweet whistle soared above the tops of trees and rustled the leaves like a wind, the way his melody sung out through the house, rattling the panes of the stained-glass window that hung on the back porch, the way his lullaby stuck in my head, in my teeth, on the tip on my tongue, on my lips, the times I found myself whistling in my head instead of out loud, for I knew my song was not as clear, nor as beautiful.

“Oh God,” I heard my mother gasp, “Oh God!”
“What? What did I do?”
I grasped the phone with sweaty palms, pressing the receiver to my ear.
“He...sweetheart, he just opened his eyes. And he’s...smiling.”
I could hear my mother weeping, alongside the pace of the heart monitor, droning on and on.

I saw my grandfather in that same hospital room weeks later. I pulled the white plastic sheet over my shoulder, the hood lifted over my head. I tightened the face mask over my mouth, slipped shoe covers over my small feet. My mother led me in by the hand up to the frame of the bed, barred me from straying too close with an arm across my chest.

He was pale even against the crisp white pillow and crisp white sheets and crisp white hospital gown tied loosely around his thin neck. His chin tilted slightly to the ceiling. A grim expression settled on his face—not the smile I had conjured over the phone, but a frown—his lips pressed in a tight arcing line. The straggling remains of his brows furrowed, drawing creases in his forehead.

I do not recall any words—perhaps I simply stood there in silence. I felt myself watching for something, a fluttering of the eyelids, a twitch of the fingers, a smile to spread across the white canvas of his face. I felt myself waiting for something—a procession of angels, a heavenly chorus, a ghostly hand on my shoulder or a whisper in my ear: “I will take care of him.”

Yet days later, I climbed into the passenger seat of the family van and my
mom handed me a Slurpee, neon blue and melted in the Florida heat. I took it warily in my hands and met her gaze. She had been crying, the whites of her eyes the color of wine, the blue of her irises drained of color.

“Olivia...” my mother started.

“It’s okay, Mom. I understand.” I stared out the window. The sun shimmered on the hot pavement. Sweat dripped from my forehead like tears.

She laid her hand on my shoulder, curled a strand of hair behind my ear.

“He loved you so very much, Olivia.” She wiped her mascara away with a 7-11 napkin.

I did not cry that day, or night, or week; I shed no tears until the funeral. I remember the long walk down the aisle, the vaulted ceiling of the church rounded like the barrel of a gun. Vast windows lined the walls, and a tall, proud portrait of Jesus hovered over the altar. I remember the coffin, deep chocolate brown with thin gold trim lining the carved edges, like an ornate cigar box. I stood on tiptoes, craned my neck, clutched the brim of the coffin.

I remember the corpse, pale and stiff, a marble statue cut from an image of him. In life, my grandfather towered over me, able to perch me on his shoulders and place me amongst the tips of trees, where the birds sang along with his lullaby. But his corpse had shriveled to half its size, a tree, cut down and hacked apart. He was translucent, his long neck tailored in a dark tie and a rich brown suit, neatly creased like the folds of the hospital gown he had worn for so long. His long arms lay by his sides, settled in a bed of pale blooms. His lips curled upwards in peaceful smile, a dry pallid pink like the petals of a flower.

I stood, gazing into the coffin. I placed my fingers gently on the skin of his stony hand, tracing the veins along his wrist like braille. Tears spilled down my cheeks, wet my lips, dripped from my chin to my hand and seeped between the cracks of my grandfather’s cold fingers. A stained-glass window cast colorful, dancing shapes across his smiling face. His eyes were closed, but had he opened them, he would have seen Jesus’ stark blue daggers staring back.

The curtains are pulled back, wedged between the wall and a pillow. Dust motes float through rays of soft light. My hunched form casts a shadow across the pale wood desk. The dead butterfly, its damp body like a shriveled raisin, lies delicately in the shade. I poise the X-Acto Knife above the hairline fracture that joins wing to body, sever it. Flakes of skin and shards of transparent chitin jump up from the pressure of the blade, join the dust suspended in the air around me. The wing splits in half, fractured along one of the black eyespots. I lay the broken pieces on a sheet of paper, suture the wound with a strip of
clear tape. The wing rests like a painting behind a sheet of glass—the glare of the tape smudges color. I swipe the wingless corpse into the trashcan with the knife point.

My mother insisted he was in a better place, beyond suffering, at peace. She told me it was merciful of Jesus to take my grandfather when he had, that it was good and kind and just. The nights she found me crying myself to sleep, she would sit on the edge of my bed, consoling me with whispers. She implored me to reach out to Christ, to close my eyes and pray. But back in my mother’s church, I could not picture Jesus—his eyes—apart from those cold, glass shards. Nor could I picture my grandfather amongst the saints, there on the vast stained-glass window, smiling as he had on the phone and in the coffin.

I more often find myself picturing my grandfather’s expiring face, an array of angles and deep shadows. I picture the sharp edges and creases, the translucent, paper-like skin, the veins on his lids like a red and blue road-map of Arkansas. I picture his ghostly visage framed in his coffin, his tailored brown collar hiding his hollow neck, the slight smile that crept across his pale lips. I am haunted too by his whistle, his lullaby. Some days I cannot conjure the song, no matter how hard I might strain; other nights, the memory of him sings me to sleep.

It is strange we find such beauty in dead things.
surveillance.
Anna Peddle
Photography
East Caldwell Street
Poetry • Zachary Hughes

Rainy morning sleepy slow
Across the way the willow weeps
Epitomizing gentle tones
That paint the greens of Caldwell Street

Alongside birds and drainpipe drips
These greens greet me in their glory
I ponderingly purse my lips
And reciprocate the kiss good morning
Buoyant
Sarah Dusek
Embroidery
Square Dancing
Poetry • Hayden Cox

My grandmother is famous for her strawberry jam
My grandfather, for his square dancing

Step right.
Step left.
Step right.
He left.
He left.
He left.

left like the stir of her spoon
left like a step in a tune

Left like a
heart attack
in the middle of a dance

Grandmother’s strawberry jam was a bit runny this year
It Didn’t Start The Way It Ended
Poetry • Ella Morton

It didn’t start the way it ended,
With Papa pointing at my dad and my uncle
Saying, “didn’t I used to be associated with you two?”
It didn’t start in a nursing home in Greer, SC
Or with unshaven scruff that didn’t belong
On my grandfather’s once polished smooth cheeks.
It didn’t start with my mother taking us outside
So we wouldn’t hear the soft-spoken man
Curse and shout at the waitress.
It didn’t start with an argument about car keys
Or a police car chasing an old man
Trying to drive to Edisto beach on the wrong side of the highway.
It didn’t start when I first realized
Something was truly wrong,
When my grandfather locked himself
In his hot car in the driveway,
When he got lost while his girlfriend was getting her hair done.
It started with a joke,
Or maybe not a joke but an observation,
Steeped in our typical family humor:
It seemed that Papa only ever wanted to eat Jade of China or O’Charlie’s. Perhaps, we thought,
he can’t remember any other places to eat.
Adust
Fiction • Faith Kressner

They call me in when she’s out. I am asked to build houses from piles of sticks, trees from blackened husks, bedrooms from splintered heaps, and human lives from small mounds of ash.

_He has burned many things in his life—letters, fevers, bridges, toast, leaves, and marshmallows, to name a few. He likes best the fire that transmutes the tangible (hair clippings, small insects, plucked feathers) into the beautiful anonymity of dust._

I tell the tales she scrawls in ashen waste, report the work of flames. Perhaps a splash of gasoline begins the story, or a slow leak of gas. Once, an untended steak—a shame, really. Ought to have asked for it medium rare. But I am no true author. I am merely her scribe, my mouth filled with burning words. I see the end and craft the beginning. I enter the theater at the end of Act V, inevitably discover the workings of tragedy, and proceed to construct the tales of Montagues and Capulets from sprawled bodies and happy daggers.

_He has often wished that he might see a phoenix in a zoo. To burn so wholly that every constituent particle becomes flame, sacrificing the body to the living dust of creation—that is the perfect burn. He would be honored to burn such a creature._

(You are dust, and to dust you shall return.)

I see ash, fresh and restless across the charred skeleton of a once-blue house. There, a xylophone of scorched pine planks laid beneath the crooked outline
of the once-front door. I see a soot-stained baby grand inexplicably standing alert in a wasteland of collapsed tables and crumbling upholstery. Over there, a melted muffin pan, and there a single tattered green sock, spewed from the dented washing machine, its lid hanging loosely open like a once-gasping mouth. Above it all, clumps of soot fall like leaves to the fertile black earth.

_In the end, he tires of playing at fire. He tires of the space between doing and being, the space between grasping fingers and flame. His feathers ache in the heat._

I see the restless field of ash beneath the once-blue house as clearly as I see her now, leaping to life in my hands. She is my author and her words burn as I swallow each and every one of them—crimson, crackle, smolder, lust, explode, hatred, stars, ignite, adoration, dust, flame, dust, flame, and dust again, eternal.

(I will perch myself on the baby grand afterward, and wait for the birds to rise from the skeleton trees, shaking burnt dreams from their wings.) •
Lewis looked away from the professor. Again. He was having a harder time keeping his eyes off his watch than he would looking at porn. Fifteen more minutes.

He bounced his leg under the classroom desk, hitting the underside every so often when he forgot how little room he had to work with. The arm rest designed for comfort felt more like a cage. "$200 a class!" he could hear his mom lecturing him now, her voice cracking over the phone after she learned he had skipped a week of school in August to drive up to Arkansas. $200, he thought. There are better ways to spend that kind of money. He had not talked to her since then. Last he heard she had moved to a smaller flat closer to the Jacksonville airport, a thinly-veiled attempt at persuading him and his father to come visit.

His eyes scanned the room. The soulless beige painted on the side and back wall was broken by only the occasional light or irrelevant plaque honoring some long-dead idiot wealthy enough to donate to the university but not clever enough to put the money elsewhere. Lewis did not even notice the Louisiana State University Academic Pledge framed by the door.

Most of the students had their eyes forward or on their laptops, learning the material. Poor souls. What was the point of a degree anyway when he already made a thousand dollars every weekend?

“Mr. Walsh?”

Lewis froze, moving his eyes back to the professor. Dr. Shelton was young, with a hard chin and new glasses. The man was probably only a
few years out of his doctoral program, but he already had the knack of gray-
ing Sunday School teachers for knowing instinctively when students were not paying attention.

“Wh… Excuse me, Professor?” his mother’s home etiquette kicking in a syllable too late. He looked Professor Shelton in the eyes as he racked his brain for any memory of the lesson.

“I asked you a question, Mr. Walsh.”

His gaze flicked carelessly to the whiteboard. Dr. Shelton’s scribbles were all over it in a black and white Jackson Pollock that Lewis would have paid good money to never see again. He took a deep breath, but he could not stop his temper from rising. His leg started bouncing faster. Internally he wanted to scream: WHO GIVES A SHIT! I DON’T CARE ABOUT YOUR GODDAMN CLASS OR THIS GODFORSAKEN SCHOOL EVERY MINUTE I SPEND HERE IS A WASTE OF MY FUCKING LIFE!

“I’m sorry, sir. I must have lost my concentration for a moment. May you please repeat the question?”

He hoped the anger flushing his cheeks would be mistaken for embarrass-

“You ought to pay better attention, Mr. Walsh.”

Lewis rolled his eyes as Dr. Shelton returned to the board. A girl in the front row with some fancy hairdo giggled. Lewis glowered at her pink and green designer backpack: family money without a day’s work in her life. Lewis took off his Jacksonville Jaguars snapback to air out the few beads of sweat appearing at the tips of his hair. He put it on the desk in front of him, distract-
ing himself with the logo. Ten more minutes.

Lewis thought ahead to the weekend. His mother had threatened to call the authorities for the whole Arkansas affair, but Lewis had smartened up since then. The weekends were better, anyway. With more traffic and more shipments, no one would pull over a 2001 Pathfinder with Louisiana plates and an empty trunk, so long as they didn’t notice the extra jingling under the chassis. This Saturday was a big one, though. Mr. Leblanc, a self-titled “small business owner” in New Orleans, had ordered a huge batch of shine from his father. Lewis would have to be up at the crack of dawn to make the two trips from east Evans to the Bayou before midnight on Saturday; Mr. Leblanc didn’t do business on Sundays.

Lewis glanced up at the clock again, thinking how he’d spend the profit. Five more minutes.

His birthday was on Saturday. Maybe he would buy himself an iPad or a new sound system for his car. He’d figure it out. Three more minutes.

He entertained the thought of surprising his Mom for Thanksgiving.
Flights were cheap now, and he knew she’d appreciate it, but he was still mad about Arkansas. Father had cut him back hard after that. Think of everything else he could spend that money on. Two more minutes.

A phone went off in the front of the room at the same time Lewis felt his pocket buzz. He vaguely noticed a murmur growing in the hallway, probably from students who were lucky enough to have professors without sticks up their asses. Lewis cocked his head as he noticed a few other students drop their hands to their pockets, but no one pulled out their phones. One more minute.

Lewis twiddled his fingers, but it did not take long for his curiosity to get the best of him. He read the notification on his home screen without breathing.


A knock at the door saved Lewis from the need to think. The door opened while Dr. Shelton continued his lecture, unaware of what Lewis had just read.

“D…Do…Doctor Shelton?” A quiet girl Lewis vaguely recognized as some sort of student aide leaned her face and curly brown ponytail through the crack of the door. The hallway grew louder, but Lewis did not hear them over the words echoing in his head.

Nuclear attack… Jacksonville… Lewis forced his attention on the girl.

“Miss Marsh, what can possibly be so important that it cannot wait until the end of my class?” Dr. Shelton snapped.

While Dr. Shelton had his eyes on the door, half the class glanced at phone screens appearing by their pockets; the other half looked outside. Miss Marsh kept getting bumped from behind as what seemed like half the school sprinting behind her to get out of the building.

Lewis looked in her direction, but saw only blurs.

“STAY CALM!” a shrill, official-sounding voice rose above the tumult growing outside to no avail.

Nuclear attack. Jacksonville.

The class rushed to the door, taking Miss Marsh with them. Before Lewis knew it, the classroom stood empty except for him and Dr. Shelton.

Lewis’ eyes zoned out on the white board. Dr. Shelton took out his phone, but Lewis paid no attention; he couldn’t move.

He vaguely noticed his leg had stopped bouncing. What was the last thing he had said to his Mom?

Dr. Shelton sat down on the table at the front of the classroom spinning his
phone between his fingers. He stared at Lewis, but Lewis ignored him, eyes still fixed on the white board.

After a moment, Dr. Shelton put his phone back in his pocket and took a deep breath.

“Mr. Walsh, you are free to go.”

Dr. Shelton spoke heavily. For the first time since Lewis had known him, the man slouched. Lewis barely noticed. Would his father mourn his Mom?

“Mr. Walsh, may I help you?” Dr. Shelton enunciated the words more strongly this time, but spoke calmly.

The room returned to silence except for the crackling of the A/C.

“Lewis!” Dr. Shelton shouted.

Lewis jumped, more at the use of his first name than at the volume.

“You cannot sit and do nothing.”

“What do you expect me to do?” Lewis shouted, rising to his feet. He picked up his Jaguars hat, remembering the games his mother used to take him to.

“Evacuate. Seek Shelter. Call your family and tell them you love them.”

Lewis clenched his hand. He did not love his father. His father was useful, yes, but Lewis had never been a son to him, only a tool. As a child, he was a tool to leverage against his Mom; now he was a tool for the business. His mom though… his Mom he loved.

“My Mom’s dead.” Lewis spoke with clenched teeth.

“Are you sure?”

Lewis hesitated. He nearly said yes, but he realized he was not sure.

“Call her.”

Lewis reached into his pocket, eyes on Dr. Shelton.

“Would you like me to step out?”

Lewis said nothing as he dialed the number. The phone rang once, twice, three times…

“Lewis?”
Afterwards
Mary Roh
Photography
Ferdiad
Anna Johnson
Digital painting
The Devil’s Playground
Fiction • Ben Gamble

Shaking hands held the list of rules. My sweat blurred the ink. I took deep
breaths. In a way, the noise and chaos were calming. The screams from the
ball pit and the kids yelling at the ticket dispensers were like an Om, repeating
endlessly on the path to nirvana.

“You must be Greg!” my guest said, clapping me on the back from behind.
I nearly pissed myself. Deep breaths.

“Um, yes, y-yes sir.” I placed the list of rules in my lap and glanced down
at them. Number one: avoid showing fear. “Yes, yes sir. I’m Greg.” I said. I forced
confidence into my voice as the kids two tables over forced pizza down their
throats.

The man sat down across from me, his tuxedo absolutely immaculate.
Dark silk seemed to flow across his skin, his tie perfectly tied, his hair slicked
back, every single strand lying flat in perfect obedience. I couldn’t place his
age—he had the beginnings of crow’s feet, and just enough salt-and-pepper to
make you want to trust him. He couldn’t have been past forty.

“Well,” he chuckled, flashing his pearly whites. “I gotta say, this is a first.
I like that. I like innovation.”

I glanced down at the rules. Number three: be on your guard against flattery—
The man drew a cigarette from inside his jacket and placed it in his mouth,
taking a pull without lighting it.

“Ah, that’s good. Want one?”

...and be on your guard against gifts.

“No, thank you,” I said. In my head the words sounded neutral, but my
tongue fumbled them. They came out too quickly, as sweaty and shaky as my
hands were. He noticed and gave me a little wink. He leaned back against the side of the booth, absentmindedly brushing some leftover pizza crumbs off the table and putting his feet up. He watched the children scampering around, trying vainly to play the monster blaster game which they did not have the coins for. Another child had somehow become stuck in the basketball hoop, which had not stopped his fellow players from still trying to shoot basketballs through the same hoop.

“Gotta love kids, don’t you?” he said. We were quiet for a moment. I dug my hands into my thighs and tried to remember the cold feeling of the rosary around my neck.

“What am I thinking?” the man said, sitting upright. “Where are my manners?” He reached a hand out to shake. Mine was slow to meet his. The man’s grip was firm and friendly. And warm. “I’m Satan.”

The words were just barely missed by the Chuck E. Cheese waitress who approached, apron tight around her waist and overflowing with pre-packed bendy straws. She had clearly started the day with an attempt at a proper hairstyle, which was promptly suffocated by the mouse ears held on to her head by a thin elastic band. “Hi, my name’s—”

“Amy!” The devil said, grinning. She glanced down at her chest, where her nametag was missing off her uniform. “How’s the sister?”

Amy, to her credit, maintained a smile. “I…she’s fine, I don’t…how did you…”

The devil patted her hand. “It’s okay. She was in a dark place.” He frowned, eyes glancing up in a moment of pensive reflection. “I mean, she is in a much darker place now, but she was also in a dark place before.”

There was silence at our table interrupted by the wails of the child stuck in the arcade basketball hoop, being pounded senseless by his friends’ three-point shots. The faint smell of brimstone radiated off the devil, mixing with the aroma of marinara and body odor.

“I…” Amy said, eyes flickering between the two of us. Behind her, a small group of six-year-olds with birthday hats sprinted by.

“You should go check your phone,” the devil said. “But, when you get back, I would like a whiskey on the rocks, and Mr. Greg here, he will have…”

“Water,” I said. I glanced down at the page of rules I’d copied off the summoner’s website. Six was avoid allowing the summoned too much control—they will test their boundaries.

“Boooo,” the devil said. “Get him a whiskey too.”

“No, really, I want wat—”

“Sir…we…we don’t have whiskey, this is a family establishment…also, sir, this place is non-smoking, and…”
“Amy,” the devil said, grinning at her. “Your sister just killed herself, about two hours ago. I’m not trying to play hardball here, but, you know, it’d be kind of a bummer if I had to snip-snap a few more branches off the Peterson family tree just to get a damn drink. So, let’s get those whiskeys from the flask the cook keeps in his gym bag next to the Glock. In the meantime, I’m going to keep smoking, because giving these little shits cancer is about the best thing they can expect from this restaurant, and we will decide on what pizza we want by the time you get back. I’m thinking four cheese, Greg’s thinking pepperoni, who knows what we’ll decide. Half and half? Maybe just two pizzas? World’s full of surprises.”

Amy Peterson, eyes wide and wet, face scrunched in a teeth-chattering smile, walked away for a few steps, then sprinted towards the kitchen doors, completely ignoring a middle-aged woman asking for more ranch dressing. She pulled her phone out as the doors swung shut.

“Talk about bad service,” the devil chuckled. “Anyways, we should probably get somebody else to put our pizza order in for us, because I think our friend Amy’s going to be a little out of commission.” He glanced around the restaurant. “She is having a rough week. Rough like, r-u-f-f, you know, because her dog just died. And she’s gonna O.D. on Friday.” The devil stuck his tongue out and let his head fall to the side, limp. “Bummer, right? So leave a good tip. In cash. Not like you can pay for heroin with a Mastercard. But hey, what kind of pizza, that’s the immediate concern. Then we’ll talk shop.”

Rule number nine: avoid food or drink offered by the supernatural. Avoid accumulating debts in any way. “I’m not hungry,” I said. “I, uh…”

The devil sighed. “No fun, Greg. No fun. You know what all work and no fun leads to?”

“…hell?”

“Ulcers. And then hell!” the devil said. A passing child, bowl cut hanging low over his face, stopped and turned, mouth agape.

“You can’t say that!” the kid said, his bowl cut trembling with moral righteousness.

“You should go ba—" I said quickly, reaching for the kid’s hand. The devil raised his own hand—manicured, moisturized, and devoid of wrinkles or fingerprints. My mouth went dry, something in my throat seizing and clenching tight enough to rip.

“George,” the devil said, giving the kid a big ol’ grin. “You know your daddy?”

George nodded his head, confused.
The devil cocked an eyebrow, leaning in close. “Are ya sure?”

George stared for a minute, then looked at me. He opened his mouth to
speak and backpedaled, tripping over a chair. He scrambled up and ran away.

“The best part,” the devil said. “He’s actually his father’s kid. But after that question at dinner tonight, it’s probably the last straw on the divorce cam-
el. I mean, good news, he gets to come back to all of this—” he gestured at
the chaos around him “—every other weekend for the next twelve years.” He
paused. “Anyways, Greg, let’s talk business.”

Amy, makeup carved in streaks down her face, walked up, placing two
plastic sippy cups reeking of alcohol down at our table. Her mouse ears were
askew. She reached for the order pad in her apron and fumbled for a pen, not
looking away from the dark suited man across from me.

“Here honey, borrow this one.” The devil pulled out a fountain pen, un-
screwed it, and handed it to her. She muttered a quiet, “Thank you,” and went
to write. The smell of iron and salt joined the smell of whiskey.

“Oh, shit, that’s the blood pen,” the devil said, snatching it back.  Blood
splattered across the table for the third time that day. “You know what, just
give me the pad, Greg’s being kind of a wet blanket about the pizza.” He took
the pad from Amy and slipped a roll of hundred-dollar bills into her apron.
“Go cheer yourself up. Sorry about the sister.” He turned away and back to
me, doodling idly on the margins of the pad to get the ink running. Once it
touched the page, it bled through, and ran down all the way to the bottom.

“Looks like we’re in business!” The devil said, looking up at me. He
snapped his fingers and both of our whiskeys burst up in flames for a moment.
I pressed back into the seat, the heat clawing its way into my skin. “Oh, don’t
tell me you can’t stand the heat. Because, Greg,” he said, swinging his feet
under the table, and leaning in close, a shark’s smile stretching wide across
his face, “I think we’ve got debts to talk about. The kind rule number thirteen
can’t help you with. Sure, you did rule number ten well—do the summoning in a
place that minimizes the creature’s potential—I mean, kids can’t enter into legally
binding contracts, so good call there. I’m like Elton John in a convent levels of
not being able to fuck anyone over here. But rule number thirteen, Greg, that’s
the name of the game. Tell me what it is.”

He didn’t look away, his brown eyes dark and deep. I glanced down,
looking at the grime on the table, the paper in my lap, at anything. Where he
stared, I felt my skin itch and crawl, like it was trying to get away, to pull itself
apart. Rule number thirteen, rule number thirteen…

“You don’t remember it,” he said, barely whispering over the arcade nois-
es around us. “Go ahead and check. Some things you want to be real sure
about. This is one of them.”

I uncrumpled the paper and let my eyes fall down to the very bottom.
Rule number thirteen.

He nodded, barely moving, smile never stopping, and I felt my throat unclench.

“Don’t get in over your head,” I said, quietly.

The devil grinned wide and slid over the legal pad. With a lazy flick of a finger, he rolled the pen over to me, ink dripping all the way.
Sinister Fantasies
Kenny Nguyen
Photography
Monster Hotline
Poetry • Ben Gamble

Excuse me, sir,
I was told to call here with concerns
about being a monster.

Yes, sir,
I have already self-examined for the more obvious signs.
I do not—generally—hide myself in the darkness
under the bed or in the closet.

My haircutter did not need
to clip any ram’s horns from my scalp last week
and I have not felt the discomfort
of a red barbed tail when I sit down.

Similarly, sir, I simply lack the architectural skills
necessary to build a house of candy
so that I could lure children to their death
(and I do not own an oven, anyhow).

I am regularly mocked for
ordering steaks well-done and thus
do not think I could drink blood
as my primary means of sustenance.

Beyond some crookedness within the parameters
of acceptable orthodontics,
my teeth have not approximated themselves into fangs
and if I could breathe fire
I imagine it would be easier
for my shaking hands to light a cigarette.

When I touch my skin I feel no scales, sir,
and I have not needed prescription contacts
for yellowed reptilian slits of any kind.
So I am reasonably confident
that I am not a basilisk,
but people seem to tense when our eyes meet
and every dawn I feel a little more dead.
I am fine
walking around in sunlight
and I have no qualms handling my mother’s silver.
Even so, sir, I do not see myself in mirrors any longer
and anything like a church
does not seem to want me there.

Sir, my home is one-story and therefore
not ideal for the detainment of distressed damsels.
But I do not think for that purpose I need a tower or moat.
I never took her,
no sir.
But she ran as soon as someone came to her rescue
and she has never grown her hair long again.

Sir,
I am calling because I feel there may be
something subtler—something I have missed

like for example the fleeting thought
that I could push the old neighbor
dawdling before me down a flight of stairs,
breaking at least some teeth
but more probably a brittle bone
with each collision of his body against the steps.
and then—its sister thought
that the acoustics of the stairwell are such
that his broken bones would find his lungs and veins
before our neighbors found him.

or sir knowing that
my arms and hands can produce enough torque and turn
to snap the spine of the girl who fell asleep
beside me on the metro.
she would wake up, sir, as my hands touched her neck
but it would be too late. it would be too late.

sir
i am also aware
that if the metro station were empty as we walked out
i could do far worse things.

i could do anything.

and there would be no knights in shining armor
or fairy godmothers
or happy ever afters.

there would just be me.

These are not thoughts that I want, sir,
but I am afraid that they want me.

Sir, if there is nothing
you can do I understand.
There are other hotlines—
though the AA frowns upon finishing off spirits,
and I think the suicide hotline and I
may have fundamentally different objectives.

If, sir,
I could ask one last favor
Does your organization cooperate to any extent
with the monster-slaying hotline?
If so, I would appreciate their number
and then I can stop being such a pain
and let you get to your next call.

Thank you for listening, sir.
There are not many people I can talk with these things about.
I only ask if you see my name in the paper
or, worse, if you don’t,
please remember that I tried.
i could do anything.

and there would be no knights in shining armor
or fairy godmothers
or happy ever afters.
there would just be me.

These are not thoughts that I want, sir, but I am afraid that they want me.

Sir, if there is nothing you can do I understand. There are other hotlines—though the AA frowns upon finishing off spirits, and I think the suicide hotline and I may have fundamentally different objectives.

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Thank you for listening, sir. There are not many people I can talk with these things about. I only ask if you see my name in the paper or, worse, if you don’t, please remember that I tried.
Worrying About Robbie At 5:00 p.m.
Elizabeth Mangone
Mixed Media
Retro American
Jackie Hirons
Photography
How To Survive in a Southern Ghetto
Nonfiction • Paul Bryant

Make sure you know how to smile. If you are black make sure you smile equally to everyone. If you are white make sure you smile to whites, but make sure you smile to blacks harder to show that you are not like other whites. If you are a woman make sure you don’t smile to anyone because it might give them ideas. If you are a woman also make sure you wear boots, not only because this is where you will secure your tampons, but also because this is where you will hide your pocket knife. If you are a teenager make sure you smile to the people you think might jump you in the school bathrooms. Make sure you never go inside the school bathrooms. Make sure you do not wave to the SRO; he will get suspicious. If you do have to go to the bathroom make sure you hold your breath, unless you are having a bad day, then just make sure you inhale enough mellow. If you are a teenage boy and have to use the stall make sure you bring duct tape to secure the door shut; they frequently place money and crack in the toilet rolls so the locks are broken. If you are an adult make sure you stay single until you are able to leave; if you are married make sure you don’t have any children until you are able to leave; if you have a family make sure your children know how to run, make sure your children know how to fall, make sure your children know the right time to get back up because most of the time it is better to just stay down. If you are a child make sure you do what your mom says; your dad’s advice will hinder your ability to leave. At night make sure you always leave a lamp on in front of an open or thinly- curtained window—sure, it will increase your energy bill, but it will also increase your chances of waking up with all your belongings. Make sure you always wear clothes with holes, tears, mustard stains, extreme fading like
black to gray, night sky blue to blue jay blue, white to sweat yellow to make sure your clothes look like they belong on your body and no one else’s. Make sure you always walk with a bop and not with a boop. Boops get you killed. If you are out alone at night make sure you pull your hood up and look at the ground so that strangers won’t see your scared face. If you are old make sure you pray at least 3 times a day; kneel down beside your bed and clasp your hands; make sure you shake them fervently; it is ok if you don’t really mean it; you have lived here for this long so it must be working. At a funeral make sure you wear all black, but if you are a man make sure you wear a light-colored tie; if you are a woman make sure you wear light-colored shoes to signify your happiness that the deceased is in a place better than here, even if that place is no place at all. At the funeral home make sure you are nice to the greasy, dark-suited white man and his family because they are overworked. Make sure you do not say the names of the dead because their shrines of wallet-sized pictures and one-dollar candles on their church’s patio, in their school library, and on their neighborhood basketball court will not ward them away for long. Make sure you call everyone bitch, including yourself, be nondiscriminatory. If someone calls you bitch make sure you return the favor because we are equals under the authority of Providence. If you are a child make sure you go to school; it will help you be able to leave. If you are playing cops and robbers on the playground make sure you are a robber if you run fast; these cops don’t have guns. Make sure you do not play in the street, not because you will get hit by a car, but because your mom will yell at you because she thinks you will get hit by a car. Make sure you know I’m telling you all this because I care. If you do not identify with your sex make sure you are careful who you tell because most people here are either radically Christian, homophobic (they don’t know the difference) or both; I don’t want you to end up like my high school football team’s kicker who was jumped by three receivers and one linebacker in the bathroom because he playfully slapped their butts during practice. Make sure you go to church and shake the preacher’s hand. Make sure you do not call people bitch in church. If you are having a bad day make sure you do not make it worse by doing something illegal. Make sure you take my advice with scrutiny. If you have once lived here you will always have once lived here and will never truly be able to leave. •
My Mother in Paris
Maddie De Pree
Photography
She-Ra 5
Olivia White
Photography
eve

Poetry • Sally Cannon

we are the daughters of Light and formed out of
pure chaos
with tattoos up our sleeves, black and blue and pink and
hieroglyphics sewn into our muscles, birds bursting out of our veins
and a multiverse straining against our paper-thin skin
we made this world to play in
and the games that float in and out of existence:
the apartment buildings in New York, 1920
the cabin in a field that hides a Reaper and all his friends
(mechanical rituals that we all perform but no one remembers)
the prison break of the century
(all that was left was the door to a cell, and the imprint of a building)
the towers spiraling up to keep creatures of nightmare captive
the woods with pale, morphing figures you never see straight on
the back entrance of a club with steady pulsing lights and rave music
all come to rest, coated in gold, in the hollow of our collarbones
called goddess
because we’re all seeing, all knowing, we play war with living, screaming figurines
called devil
because people are afraid of a girl that has seen, that knows, that is
raw power
and they cannot control us because
we can be anyone or anything
(a murderer, a mage, the child-eating beast, or the doe eyed beauty)
and as the man of the hour, Apophis has got nothing on us because
he may be strong and wild and free
he may be the man to please
he may be a tornado through a pile of leaves
(a war in the dark waiting to happen, love after a college football game)
but we’re quick to the punch and learn quicker than they ever dreamed
and snake charming through bared teeth with innocent waves and soft voices
keeping pace with the big boys, the chaos stream, the heightened sense of being
the feeling of fighting his matchsticks with a forest fire before we make our great escape
is the kind of thrill we live for
Ordinary Fairytale
Poetry • Sarah Feingold

Mother measures out our heights on the whitewashed doorframe
Etching our progress into the soft wood with pencil
Documenting our success in a public transcript
Anyone can step up to and see how they compare
New cousins strain on tiptoe to surpass the next mark
Where the crown of my head had crested at three years old

I reigned from three feet and three inches tall, a princess
I’d sit Indian style with my crown and magic wand
Staring, poking the end of it into my stomach
Trying to wish away the fat that no princess had
Giving up and trying to fit all my toes in my mouth

Five, sucking in when I put my Rapunzel costume on
Turning sideways, tilting my head back, my hair dripping
Kissing my hips as I tried to keep my costume dry
I got a new dress when I cut my hair with scissors
It was red, and I lined up my dolls to be my dwarves

Seven and my obsession was now Princess Jasmine
I colored my fair hair black with permanent sharpie
Then drew on my thighs, outlining what needed fixing
So when my fairy godmother came she would know
And beautify me just in time before the clock struck

Twelve and I was stuck as a fat pumpkin forever
Like the ones we carved at Halloween with the steak knives
I taught myself to use for things other than eating
Keeping score with the faded pencil on the doorframe
Of everything I thought I didn’t measure up to
I convinced myself that tasting nothing tasted sweet

Sixteen and my markings on the doorframe simply stop
The old whitewashed wood longs for the sweet sting of graphite
To inch up its flat spine and continue my fairytale
She Was Fire
Annie Reigel
Digital art

He Was Water
Annie Reigel
Digital art
I’m Okay
Ren Zimmerman
Digital art
You Missed It
Fiction • Maddie De Pree

Before he dreamed of the bird, Van Lovell watched TV and ate a personal pizza with ranch dressing. He called his mom, who asked about job prospects. With Van being three years out of college, she wanted him to think about a career, even though Chipotle was one of the nicer chains, and if he was happy being a line cook, she was happy for him, too. And by the way, she said, she had seen on Facebook that Haley landed a nice new job. She asked if Van had seen the nice new post. He had not.

After he hung up, Van left his dishes in the sink and took a shower. He watched an artsy porno where a lady dressed as an egg had sex with another woman while a man braided their ponytails together. When it ended, he swallowed two NyQuils, brushed his teeth, and laid down on his couch. He fidgeted. The personal pizza felt heavy in his stomach. An hour passed, then another. He folded his arms behind his head and counted various pieces of lint on the ceiling. When he still couldn’t sleep, he flipped onto his side and picked at a hole in his sweatpants.

When Van finally closed his eyes, he dreamed of the bird.

Van opened his eyes to the dream. Everything was warm and too bright, and the ground was white in all directions. There was nothing everywhere. The air smelled of wet dirt and, oddly, of popcorn. In the blank landscape, the bird was the only figure. It shuffled over to Van’s side.

“You made it,” the bird said.
Van blinked and looked down. “What?”

“You made it,” the bird repeated. The bird was black and disproportionately large, about the size of a golden retriever, and it seemed strangely overweight. Its beak leveled with Van’s pelvis, a fact that made them both uncomfortable. “Here you are.”

“I guess so.” Van looked around. “Where is here?”

The bird cocked its head. “Do you know that quote?”

“What one?”

“Wherever you go, there you are.”

Van nodded. The bird shifted on its feet and ruffled its wings. Some time passed, during which the bird preened and Van stuck his hands in his pockets.

“I’m sorry about the smell,” the bird said, finally.

“What smell?”

“The popcorn.”

Van stared at the bird. The bird stared back.

“I made it before you arrived. The popcorn, I mean.”

Van said nothing.

“It’s gone,” the bird continued. “I mean, there’s really no more. I would share otherwise. But I ate it all. I really can’t share.” More silence. “I hope you believe me.”

“Yeah,” Van said. “Yeah, I do.”

Another pause, in which the bird ate loudly from a badly concealed bucket of popcorn. Van tried to check his watch, then realized the face was blank. The bird pulled its head from the bucket, burped, and looked at Van seriously through a beakful of popcorn.

“How much,” it said, half-chewing, “do you remember?”

“Of what?”

The bird swallowed.

“Of Haley.”

_Haley._ Van closed his eyes. He saw her finishing homework in his dorm room, sucking on a lemon slice from her drink, stepping out of his shower in a curtain of steam, shaking her hair loose in the sun, laughing over her shoulder. He saw the small of her back, the mole on her right shoulder, her feet twisted up in his sheets. He saw her face contorted with tears, her tiny fists flailing against his chest, ruthless and hard. His own hands, lying stupid and open in his lap. _I am so sorry._

_Bastard. You bastard._

“Not much,” Van said.

“You are a liar,” said the bird.

Van said nothing. The bird looked at him evenly.
“I’ll show you something,” the bird said. “It’s something you’ll remem-
ber.”

The ground beneath them shook and gave way to memory. The whiteness
dissolved and the landscape gradually swelled with the shapes and colors of
a Waffle House. When all the corners had filled out, Van found himself a few
booths away from himself and Haley on their first date. It was some midnight
in October during their sophomore year in college. The bird produced a fresh
bucket of popcorn and, with some effort, hopped into the seat opposite Van.
“Watch,” it said.

Van watched. In the next booth, he and Haley were laughing together.
They had met at a party earlier, and, having decided that they both preferred
conversation and food, had driven to Waffle House for a meal. The two of
them had just finished talking about names and family trees. Haley scraped
the last bite of scrambled eggs from her plate and glanced up, sly. Van, watch-
ing the memory from the next booth, saw the look in her eyes, her half smile.
It was so familiar that his stomach hurt.

“Hey,” she said. “I think you’re lovely. Give me the rest of your hash
browns and I’ll let you take me home.”

She was kidding, but no joke—for they really did go back to his dorm that
night, and it was the first time he thought of sex as making love instead of
something quick and pale. Forever afterward, he would tell Haley that he fell
in love with her that night. She never believed him.

“Shut up,” she would say. “Nobody falls in love that quick.”

“I do,” he would reply. “I do with you.”

Deep in Van’s memory, the date was ending. Haley and Van walked over
to the register and paid each other’s checks. Van, still seated inside the Waf-
kle House, watched them walk to his car hand-in-hand. Slowly, the memory
began to disintegrate. As the colors faded and the booths melted into flatness,
Van watched them laughing in the parking lot. Everything else dissipated.
Their figures were the last thing to go.

The bird dug around loudly in its popcorn. It pulled its head out of the
bucket, scattering crumbs. Van rubbed his temples.

“What else do you remember, Van?”

“Nothing,” he lied.

“What about the night it ended?”

“Don’t show me that.”

The bird smirked.

“Please,” Van said. “Don’t show me that.”

“This was the night you lost her,” it said.

The ground shook again. When the memory filled out, Van felt sick. This
was his and Haley’s apartment, the place they had shared just after under-grad. The memory felt reluctant. It trembled. Parts of the room were blurry, and there was a second kitchen where the bathroom should have been. Haley was pacing in front of the couch where Van sat, his head in his hands. She was scrolling through his phone, shaking her head in disbelief. On the screen were a series of text messages between him and a woman named Desi, whom he worked with at Longhorn Steakhouse.

“Four months!” Hayley yelled.

On the couch, Van said nothing. He looked at his feet and didn’t move.

“Jesus,” she said. She laughed. “Four months sleeping with someone else.”

“It wasn’t about you,” Van said quietly. “I promise. It wasn’t anything you did wrong.”

“What the hell was it, then, Van? What was it?”

Tell her it was insecurity, thought Van, watching his memory-self stumble through an inadequate response. Tell her it was your stupidity. Your worthlessness. Your jealousy.

“Please,” he said. He looked up at her through his hands. “Please tell me this’ll be okay.”

Haley snorted and turned away. She kept scrolling, came across a series of photos of his penis and some corresponding images from Desi. She held them up and smiled. “Nice,” she said. Next to Van, the bird snickered. Van looked at it in disgust.

“This isn’t funny.”

“Yes, it is,” said the bird. It gathered another beakful of popcorn, crunching loudly.

“I’m serious,” Van said. “Stop being stupid. This is impossible for me.”

The bird chewed and said nothing.

Standing at the edge of the memory, Van watched himself walk toward Haley with his arms open, desperate. Please. Haley backed away so quickly and angrily that she tripped over their coffee table and fell backwards. She screamed in frustration and began to sob. “Haley, please,” Van said. His voice was breaking. “Come here. Just let me help you up.” He extended his arms to her again. She scrambled away on all fours, eyes wild. She shook her head. “No,” she said. “No. Get out.” She was rubbing her face roughly, standing up, hugging her arms to her chest. Her face was tear-streaked, but she wasn’t crying anymore. “I’m not joking. Go.”

“Haley.”

“No,” she said. “Absolutely not. Get the fuck out of here.”

Van didn’t move.

“I’ll mail your things to you,” she said. “You need to go.”
Haley slammed his phone onto the table and watched from a distance as he picked it up and returned it to his pocket. Before he left the apartment, Van crossed the room and stupidly tried to hug her. Finally, Haley flew at him, knocking her fists against his chest, kicking him away, elbowing him with as much force as she had. He bowed his head against the blows. He barely flinched.

Before Van left, he turned and looked at her. Haley glared back at him, livid. Her eyes, Van thought, watching the memory from behind the couch. I forgot about the sharpness of her eyes. She was huddled against the wall in her pajamas, red-faced, her hair wild. Her t-shirt came halfway down her thighs, and she was wearing a pair of fuzzy Halloween socks with pom-poms at the cuff. Spooky! It was the last time he saw her.

As the memory faded back into whiteness, Haley dissolved from the head down until only her sock feet remained. Eventually, those vanished too. Everything turned white again. Van exhaled shakily.

“Why are you showing me all this?”
“Because you still think about it,” said the bird.
“Show me something else.”
“There is nothing else,” the bird said. “Not anything you should see.”
“That’s not true.”

The bird shifted uncomfortably. The popcorn bucket rolled between them, empty.

“Show me the moment it would’ve been okay,” Van said. “Show me the moment I could’ve saved it.”
“You really want that?”

For the third time, the whiteness gave way to color and sound. I remember this, thought Van. He and Haley were sitting outside on a coffee shop patio. It was the week after he had started sleeping with Desi, before he was racked with guilt but still knew he was doing wrong. It was a summer day, lazy with heat and sunshine, and Haley was dozing softly on his shoulder. Van stroked her hair and took a sip of his coffee. Haley lifted her head and smiled.

“I love you,” she whispered. She closed her eyes and nuzzled her face into his arm. Van kissed the top of her head. The memory stopped.

“That was it,” the bird said.
“What?”

The bird stared.

“I don’t understand,” said Van. “She’s just sitting there. We were both just sitting there.”

“No.” The bird shook its head. “If you had told her about Desi, you could
have saved it. That was when you should’ve told her.”

Van stared ahead blankly.

“She would’ve been furious,” said the bird. “She would’ve yelled at you in front of everyone. She would’ve thrown your drink in your face. But in the end, it would’ve been okay.”

Everything felt too bright. The whiteness of the ground blended with the blinding horizon and made Van feel dizzy. He closed his eyes.

“That was it,” the bird repeated. “You missed it.”


“That’s enough,” Van said. “I’ve seen enough.”

“If you say so,” said the bird. The memory paused mid-loop, and the bird pecked at its popcorn bucket. Van observed the scene, frozen in time – the sunshine, the patio, his hand resting on Haley’s head. After some time, he turned back to the bird.

“How does forgiveness work?”

“Beats me,” the bird said. “I used to teach math.”

More time passed.

“I’m just wondering,” Van said. “I was thinking—”

“No,” said the bird. “It’s too late.”

“You don’t even know what I was going to say.”

“You want to call her,” it said. “Don’t.”

“Why not?”

“It’s too late.”

“It’s been two years,” Van said. “It could be different. Maybe she wants to hear from me.”

“She doesn’t.” The bird fluffed its feathers, irritated. “Trust me. It’s too late.”

Van inhaled and spoke again. “I just—”

At this, the bird lost its patience. It lifted off the ground for the first time, beating its wings around Van’s head and neck. “It’s too late!” it screeched. “Too late!” As the bird screamed, it began shrinking down to normal size, its face folding and warping in time with its wings, its voice growing shriller and shriller until it devolved into loud cawing. Van winced and covered his ears with his hands.

In the middle of its melodrama, the bird started choking on a popcorn kernel and had to return to the ground while it coughed. Its eyes bugged and spit flew from its beak as it hacked. Its eyes grew bloodshot, and the noises from its throat grew strangled and forced. Van, horrified, backed away and fainted.
Van Lovell woke up gasping. He sprang from his couch, ran to the kitchen, and threw up his personal pizza in the sink. He paced around his apartment and gnawed at his left thumbnail, thinking. Too late, too late! The tastes of pizza and bile felt thick in his mouth. He brushed his teeth twice, then washed his dishes from the night before, still thinking.

Eventually, he sat down at his kitchen table with a sheet of paper and scribbled down the entire dream. He wrote about the white sky and the white ground and his sick stomach. He sketched a picture of the bird and a picture of Haley. He drew her Halloween socks and her hair in the sun. He drew the plate of scrambled eggs at Waffle House. He wrote about his guilt, his unfathomable stupidity. He wrote that he was happy about her new job. He wrote that he had never loved anyone so much. He wrote that he never would. He drew a picture of himself in the corner.

When Van finished the letter, he folded it neatly and placed it in an envelope. To Haley, he wrote. He washed his face and put on a fresh shirt, sprayed on some cologne. He did not care that he was late for work. Before he left, he ran his hand through his hair and took a deep breath. Then he slipped the envelope into the trash and walked out the door. •
A mom and pop jewelry store with terribly out-of-date walnut paneling
Is closed, a note of appreciation penned for all their loyal customers
Pinned behind the door decorations—cast iron bars and tangled chains.

The owners retired, too old to belong in that place anymore.
Next door, I am too new to belong in the Twin Scissors Barber Shop.
A bell greets me anyway, and jazz meanders toward me from a wooden stereo set.

Two barbers nod to me behind spectacles and the gray heads that have half their attention.
Fox News is showing a broadcast about tax cuts, and the scissor-wielding men keep it on
Just to cuss about the six figure salaries of the politicians who laud the new plan.

There’s never a new plan. They’re old enough to know this, even if I am not,
Old enough to know that the fade they shave beside my temples
Is the same as the last haircut given to their old brothers before they faced the draft board in ‘69.

The eclectic book of women’s poetry in my hand suddenly seems out of place.
Too contemporary to belong, though these men have known more of both women and poetry
Than I will know until I age into a relic for a young poet to appreciate.

That said, the hands that hover by my head belong to a man
Who muses on the merits of having a wife or a dog—
“If you lock both in the trunk of your car for fifteen minutes, which one will be happy to see you?”

He’s never been married. His fingernails and mouth are much too dirty for that.
The hands in my hair are not especially clean either, but I don’t mind.
Dexterous hands, thick-fingered mitts molded by years of construction.

He’s always liked manipulating material. Less concrete now, more keratin.
Less money than he used to make. He listens to jazz, watches TV, and works with his hands.
He’s happier, going to buy a condo next year.

I read once that we all experience a bit of heaven, hell, and purgatory, depending on the day.
Among the worn wood, the wafts of hair tonic and warm jazz, I feel not quite anywhere—
Like we could whisper the world away, take a deep breath, and be home.
Learning to Die

Poetry

Zachary Hughes

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