



INSPIRED BY THE DEAD(LINE)

ENL 3850
CLASS ANTHOLOGY
WINTER 2022-2023

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INSPIRED BY THE DEAD(LINE)

THOUGHTS FROM 202

INTERMEDIATE CREATIVE WRITING
WINTER 2023

PREFACE

STACY GNALL

A trip to a cannibal deli counter. A millionaire with a macabre hobby. An insomniac who “waits for the light” in “the veil of night.”

The poems, stories, and hybrids in this student anthology are largely informed by darkness. Here, we witness a love that “may be dead.” A visit to a nursing home gets a Transylvanian twist. A man meets what he fears most—Death—and she’s not quite what he had dreamed.

When deciding on a title for this anthology, our class discussed the double meaning of “Dead(line).” Through the parenthetical, of course, we get to have our cake and eat it too. This book is just as much Inspired by the Dead as it is Inspired by the Deadline.

But the imaginative writings that you hold in your hand are also inspired by “the line” itself. The Winter 2023 section of Intermediate Creative Writing focused on genre experimentation. After taking into consideration techniques of poetry and prose, we then focused on various forms of hybrid texts. The works in this volume are inspired by how we utilize or refuse the line, how we break and combine lines, how texts can best straddle—and/or outright cross—genre lines so as to invest them with a freshness.

In this way, these poems, stories, and hybrids are also about possibility and light, about the ways in which we, as writers, give timeless questions and concerns new life. Here, we see an infant through her mother’s eyes—as a gem, emerald and sapphire. A young girl learns that folks can be good even when their reputations are bad. A Goddex renders their own intricate mythos. A tall tale (or is it?) grants a neighborhood kid eternal life.

Whatever inspired these creative pieces—be it darkness or light, death or life, the use (or lack thereof) of the line, or even (write it!) due dates—they reflect the uniquely talented voices from Winter 2023’s ENL 3850. May they always find inspiration everywhere.



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ALYSSA PORCERELLI

BACK COVER IMAGE
ANONYMOUS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|
| 1 | THANTANAPHOBIA
HANNAH CUNNINGHAM | 50 | TO BE OR NOT TO BEE
JACOB YASSO |
| 6 | BORN OF SOIL
CARIEL GAMLIN | 56 | LOVE BOMBING
ALAZIAH CADDELL |
| 8 | THE CRIME OF BEING HELPFUL
ALDO TRICOLI | 57 | GROWING UP ITALIAN AMERICAN
OLIVIA VITALE |
| 12 | THE WAREHOUSE
OLIVIA VITALE | 66 | THE WEARY TRAVELERS
KAVIN PATEL |
| 14 | TO FALL ASLEEP
ERIN LETOURNEAU | 69 | DREAMER'S PARADOX
ALEX POPP |
| 15 | MOON JONES
KRISTIN MURPHY | 70 | DEAD END
ALYSSA PORCERELLI |
| 18 | THE HOBBYIST
DEVIN MANGRU | 71 | AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES |
| 23 | LINGO
WILLIAM ACEVEDO | | |
| 25 | UNCLE V
RONAN MANSILLA | | |
| 32 | THE WATCH
JACOB YASSO | | |
| 34 | MEMOIR OF AN ARSONIST
ALEX POPP | | |
| 42 | MY PRECIOUS JEWEL
ALAZIAH CADDELL | | |
| 44 | THE OZ EFFECT
KRISTIN MURPHY | | |
| 49 | LEAVES
JAMES HUFFMAN | | |

THANTANAPHOBIA

HANNAH CUNNINGHAM

For as long as he could remember, he had the same nightmare: him being chased in his childhood home, the haunting echo of a blade scraping against the wall behind him, and the seemingly never-ending hallways. It didn't matter how fast he ran, or how much he hid, he'd always be found in the end. The dream would always end with a cold grip on his arm, and the scythe coming down at him.

He could never exactly pinpoint when this crippling fear began. It wasn't just dying that he was terrified of, but what came afterwards. He went to so many churches to help suppress his anxiety, but when the topic of death and the afterlife came up, his stomach would twist and churn so hard he couldn't listen.

However, for a good few decades, he didn't have the same nightmare that plagued his dreams. His wife, Cheryl, would hum a sweet tune and gently rub his back. For a while, he wouldn't even dream, he would simply sleep. Yet the nightmare began again the night after she passed.

He began to realize that he himself didn't have much time left when his son-in-law started helping him up and down the stairs, and when his daughter began to beg for him to move in with her family.

"I don't like the thought of you living alone in this big house. I mean, what if you fall down the stairs?" His daughter said, and as she began to ramble about not being able to live close enough, he heard the scraping of a blade echo in his brain.

Within two months, he had fully moved in with his daughter and her family.



The first time he saw the stranger, was when she was at his doorstep. He sat in the living room, reading a favorite book of his, while his grandkids watched a Star Wars movie. The more he read, the heavier his eyelids felt, and soon, he began to fall asleep.

Then he heard the haunting echo of a blade scraping against the walls. He forced himself awake, and he practically jumped out from his seat, his heart racing a mile a minute.

"Grandpa? Is everything okay?" His granddaughter asked, pausing the movie.

"I'm alright, just..." He sighed, feeling his heart rate calm down. He shook his head. "...Just a bad dream, that's all." His granddaughter nodded her head, and unpaused the movie.

He was about to relax in his seat when he heard the same noise again, but at the front door. He tensed up, and slowly looked at the door. Hesitantly, he got up from his seat, and went to the door.

He peered into the peephole, and saw a woman at the door. Her face was obscured by a black veil, and the only thing he could make out from her face were the coins that rested upon her eyes. She looked up at the peephole, and slowly nodded before turning to leave.

"Is someone at the door?" His granddaughter asked.

"I didn't hear anyone knock." His grandson responded.

He didn't answer either of them, and in a moment of sudden bravery, he swung the door open. The stranger had vanished completely.

He hurried out the door, ignoring how the cold wind bit his arms and face. He looked back and forth between the road, confused, yet horrified. He spotted their neighbor, who was exiting his parked car.

"Hey, did you see a woman at our doorstep? Did you see her?" He asked.

Before their neighbor could respond, his daughter hurried to his side, placing her hands on his arms.

"I'm so sorry! He's..." She looked at him, and looked back at her neighbor. "He's not well." She said in a hushed tone. The neighbor nodded his head.

"Come on, let's get you back inside." She said, leading him back to the house.

After that first encounter, he would see the stranger in his dreams, the gleam of the coins being the last thing he'd see in his nightmares.



The months melted into each other, and he soon found himself in a hospital bed, his breaths shallow, with the pestering, haunting knowledge that he was going to die there.

His family stood around him, his daughter held his hand tightly, as drops of her tears fell on the sheets. His son-in-law whispered something to his daughter, and led their kids out of the room.

"I don't want to go." He said to his daughter, as he began to tear up.

"I know." She responded, her voice cracked from the tears.

"I love you, dad."

"I love you too, sweetpea."

He'd never felt so tired in his life. For once, he felt okay with the idea of falling asleep. The nightmare never came.

Yet, once he closed his eyes, he opened them again.

He watched as his son-in-law came back into the room, and he watched him hug his daughter. He stared in disbelief as he looked at himself still laying in the bed.

"It must be weird, watching yourself from your body."

He jumped at the sudden voice. He turned to look, and saw the stranger from before standing next to him. She slowly turned her head to him.

"Who are you?" He asked in a terrified tone.

She chuckled, and walked past him, shaking her head slightly.

"I think you already know the answer to that."

He stared at her, still in disbelief at everything.

"You're..." He trailed off, too scared to finish his answer.

"Death, The Grim Reaper, Muerte. I go by many names." She answered for him.

She walked to the door, and waited for him to follow her.

"Are you ready?"

He stared at her, then at the nurse and doctor who came in, who covered his body entirely with a blanket, then back at her again. "Do I have to go?"

"It wouldn't make much sense to stay. You'd be bound to this room," She extended one of her slender, bony hands to him. "I'll guide you, I promise. You won't be alone." She said

Hesitantly, he walked to her, and took her hand. She opened the door, and he was greeted with a bright, warm light.



He opened his eyes slightly, the brightness still affecting his eyes. His eyes quickly adjusted, and he saw the farmhouse he used to own in the distance. A gentle breeze greeted him, and all his fear melted away, leaving him with a still calmness he hadn't felt since he was with Cheryl.

"Where are we?" He asked, as he looked at Death.

"Your afterlife. It's a lot better than that stuffy hospital room." She replied, joking at the end. He chuckled quietly. He never knew Death could be good company.

As they got closer to the farmhouse, hints of apple pie started greeting him, and he could see someone sitting on the porch, knitting. He stopped in his tracks as a smile grew on his face. Death stopped as well, and looked at him.

"She's been waiting for you." She said, and while he couldn't tell if she was smiling, he could hear one in her voice. She let go of his hand.

He hurried to the farmhouse, no restrictions of age or pain stopping him. He got to the front steps, and saw Cheryl. She put what she was knitting down, and smiled warmly at him.

"Hi darlin,' made some apple pie just for you. It's fresh out of the oven." Cheryl said. He missed hearing her Southern accent dearly.

"You can have some too hun. Don't be a stranger, now." She called out, waving her hand to Death.



All three sat in the kitchen, each with a slice of their own. He wasn't quite sure how Death was going to eat with a veil, or even if she could eat to begin with, but every time he looked over at her plate, her slice would get progressively eaten.

Cheryl and him caught up, talking about everything from the grandkids, to their son in law, while Death sat quietly, chuckling and laughing alongside them on occasion. Eventually, Death stood up.

"Thank you for the pie, Cheryl. Delicious as always."

"Anytime hun."

He watched as Death took the plate and placed it in the sink.

"Wait, you're leaving? Already?" He asked.

"My job will never be done, sadly." She said as she left the kitchen. He stood up and hurried over to her.

"Wait, before you go."

She turned to him, and cocked her head to the side.

"I'm sorry. I was so scared of you for a long time. You don't deserve that."

She couldn't help but to let out an endeared chuckle.

"Many, many people are scared of me, or the concept of me. I understand why. I've never been offended, I promise."

"Thank you, for everything." He said.

She didn't reply. Gently, she placed a hand on his arm. He was left with the coldness on his arm as she disappeared before his eyes.

BORN OF SOIL

CARIEL GAMLIN

I came from Soil

I was amassed in darkness swallowing amniotic fluid,
grasping a mirror and pearls,

Still second to a man,

I came out years older than the goddesses of golden curls

And as soon as they saw the skin of the earth it was determined by the poser Hellenic gods I was unfit for
the goddess-hood of sky and bright crashed unto the damp soil.

My skin bronze it soaked the sun would glow in moonlight,

It's luster so lovely a crown of coils sprung upon my head and defied earth laws,

I wished such beauty was loved.

Among the soil I laid and sprung roots reaching for the center

It's fruits were picked from gods without consent and eventually my fruits became bitter And my blood
soaked the cracked fields.

They drank my blood and deemed it ambrosia and said it was sweet,

I knew better.

I gave them their ambrosia and my blood became a swamp The hush of snakes tongues chanted the re-
lease of bondage Out of the swamp came I; Goddex.

The skin so dark it consumes the sun

My silence allows beads to rustle

appearance so monstrous I become the reflection's fear;

unemployable

My trembling finger is outstretched to the white palace of the poser gods

Your end is nigh, Gods of discord,
for your murder of the gods of light.

You were created with planned obsolescence, Perish

I await the end of their days.

THE CRIME OF BEING HELPFUL

ALDO TRICOLI

As she was trudging up the bright green hill, she saw a boy in the distance who was peering at the woods—the neighbor’s kid. He was never bothersome to anyone, always quietly reflecting on the patio, but he always carried that glum gaze and that lonely look on his face in his signature suit, which helped hide his famished demeanor. He would always come back from church in that suit and sit on the patio like this until his father called him for supper. The girl, glowing in the sunlight in her snow-white dress and maintaining her angelic grace, never knew why he did this ever since he arrived here two months ago but was too shy and nervous to go up and ask him. Furthermore, she was told that he was a bad man who came from the inner city an hour away from her mother, and she should avoid him at all costs. Should she not, her mother told her, he would violently lunge at her, fill her with sin, and make her the devil’s child. So, she decided to trust her mother and never talk to him, assuming that his harmless posture was part of his attempts to deceive those who would walk into those malevolent eyes.

She once again began to sneak by the boy like usual, taking care not to provoke him so she could get back to the family barn up the road. Her hands held a beautiful red basket, which contained all the strawberries that were picked by her brothers at the edge of their farm. They matched the rage she felt towards this boy, the blood he would spill if he were left alone with any of the villagers here. After all, his very presence has already caused so much division, she noted. If his father didn’t buy the land before we saved up enough to expand, the village’s farmland wouldn’t be split in two. Yet, she found herself not knowing why they bought that land, only having heard from her mother that it was related to what he and his father did in the city that got them kicked out. She was curious but knew it was best for her to hurry, so she continued down the road, lightly stepping across the pleasant plains on this fine sunny afternoon.

When she returned, she found her father and brothers already at the table having lunch and her mother putting the strawberries to good use on pies she would have her bring to the market to sell tomorrow. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, and she sat down like usual and began to eat with her brothers after saying grace. Out of the blue, her father asks, “You took a little bit longer than usual to get back today. Everything all right?” She was perplexed, as she didn’t recall doing anything different and only stood on the hill for a brief moment to observe the boy. “Yes father,” she responded. This isn’t the first time that he’s been able to pick up on small discrepancies like this, as he’s always been an astute man. But he’s also very punctual and pragmatic, always working to ensure that the farm is running at maximum efficiency.

The conversation between them continued for some time, during which her brothers quickly left to continue their work on their farm, leaving her with him. Shortly after, she began to continue her studies with him. While her mother would always protest her learning, knowing that this would encourage her to leave the farm for a job in that city their neighbor came from, her father would always remind her of the ways it could help the farm and raise the income of the family. She was eager to help in any way she could, so she always tried her best and quickly became a prodigy. Although, like her mother, she did not know what it could lead to. However, her father always aimed to teach her how to run her own business someday and, presumably, do so better than the boy and his father had. Deciding once again against probing and further, she continued to toil on her work.

On this particular day, her father had chosen to take her outside for a field trip once she had finished the accounting and finance work that she was doing. In her typical manner, she quickly sped through the work, her eyes gleaming with exhilaration from taking on the new problems, each stroke of her pen exhibiting the alluring freedom she had to ask questions and ponder the subject without restrictions. Consequently, she was ready to go before four o'clock. As they got into the car, her father started to explain how he had some business dealings they were going to take care of and that he wanted her to come along to see how business negotiations work in action. She was ecstatic, as she had been patiently waiting for such an opportunity for years.

As they were driving, she found it unusual that they were going towards their neighbor's house, which stood in the opposite direction of the cityscape she expected to find herself in. When she noticed this, she asked, "Where are we going, father?", to which he explained, "We're going to the other side of town. I have some business with the family who lives on the farmland there." "You don't mean the farmland where the city boy and his father are, do you father?", she asked apprehensively. "You shouldn't believe what your mother and the townsfolk say about them," he calmly stated in his matter-of-fact tone, "Their family is just misunderstood, that's all." The girl wanted to refute his claims, as it had become a part of the fiber of her being to do so for her safety, but she recognized that she, too, felt that something wasn't right about the whole situation. Briefly reflecting on this, she then asks her father, "What really happened to them? Why do we all seem to hate them so much?", but she finds this hard to choke out, so she has to repeat herself. He simply responds with, "You'll see soon enough, but must be patient with them, all right? They've been through a lot, and we don't need the townsfolk to waltz their way into more of their business." Her father briefly sighs after this remark, and they continue the rest of the trip in silence.

They arrive at the family's home, which dimly glows as the evening approaches, highlighting its dark roof and the thick, black coatings of night on its railing and garage door but deemphasizing its otherwise pure-white exterior. While she finds the presence of this large house odd in the otherwise completely natural landscape, she focuses her attention on the boy, who has not left the patio. To get in, it seemed that she and her father would need to talk to him, the very thought of which startled her, yet she now found herself invigorated from knowing that she would soon have her confusion straightened out by him. She could feel herself slipping to the backside of her father as they got closer to him, however. Upon seeing

them approach, the boy smiled wearily. "Are you doing all right, son?" my father asks, to which he promptly responds, "I could be doing better, but I'm making peace with what happened. I hear that her friend is recovering from the accident, and I pray that she'll be all right. I'm sorry that her life will never be the same without her friend but am glad that I didn't kill her." Upon hearing this, the girl shutters back a little, clutching her father's hand with the terror of a roadside deer plastered all over her face. How does my father know this man, she wondered. Why does he associate with a murderer? "Good to hear," her father says, gently stroking her daughter's hand to calm her down, "I'm sure she'll be okay, and I'm glad that you're realizing out here that this wasn't your fault. After all, no one could have seen them in the black blizzard of that night."

"I suppose you're right, he says, upon which he stands up." "But where are my manners? I haven't introduced myself to your daughter yet," he states, upon which he offers out his hand to her. The girl starts to take his hand upon her father's look of approval but quickly jerks back and asks, "W-what did-d you d-do? W-w-what happened?" Her father scolds her for this as the boy fixes his now gentle gaze on her, giving her an immediate sense of warmth, as if she were just wrapped in a blanket, prompting her father to stop and look at him. He then says, "It's all right, she has a right to be concerned. After all, my father and I are just strangers who moved to this town out of the blue to her, and I've gotten better with talking about it as I've begun to come to terms with things anyway." "Are you sure you want to fill her in, I could just-" "No, it's all right," the boy noted, interrupting her father.

He then proceeds to recount the day when his life fell apart, the deadly, gray winter night when he accidentally hit two young teens walking around in the city with his car as he was coming back from the bank, killing one and putting the other in critical condition without even realizing it until it hit the news. He would torment himself over this frequently, decrying his actions and the notoriety he gained as the person behind the hit-and-run, which was only made worse by the heart attack his mother passed from shortly after the incident. He realized that he was fortunate, however, in that his father was able to pay the million-dollar fine for bail and minimize the time he spent in jail to two years by hiring his best lawyers. However, during these two years, the city, its surrounding suburbanites, and the countryside in the city's greater area grew very cynical of his father's company, especially now that his son was convicted, and he ended up having to file for bankruptcy by the time he and his son were reunited. While they had retained their old vacation home in the country they recently bought, which they now had the task of converting to a farm, they had to give up everything else, including the business.

It was then that the daughter realized that the boy was indeed misunderstood and that her father was trying to help them get back on their feet; in the same way, the boy's father was trying to help defend his innocent son, not advance his corporate agenda by any means necessary as her mother so strongly believed. Her father let them buy the farmland from them with his money so that no one would be suspicious of him, and they agreed to work together for their mutual benefit so that they could recover. Upon gaining this new knowledge, she immediately apologized to the boy for her question, who quickly forgave her and was then handed a strawberry that she left in the car by her father. Being this sharp kind of person, it's no

wonder that he had instinctively gone back to the car to check if she had brought something for the stranger if he wasn't who she thought he was. This provided her with the opportunity to give him the strawberry, which she normally has as she passes by him each day, and she chooses to take it this time, which he gratefully accepted.

After getting to know the boy a bit more and discovering the many ways that he tried to help the family, including that very trip he went to the bank to withdraw funds that could help their dying father, she began to admire him. No—it wasn't just admiration, she realized; she was infatuated with him. Here he stood, an honest, gentle, kind-hearted man who was degraded into nothing for something out of his control, his car slipping on the ice in that fateful black blizzard he couldn't see through, and he withstood all the attacks that she and the other townspeople sent barreling towards his character. But it was already half past six, and she knew that she would have to be back for supper. So, she said her goodbyes, and his father said theirs as she began to ponder just how complicated business relationships, and relationships in general, can be.

Unfortunately, it would be too late for her to have a relationship with that wonderful boy, as she and her father would move to the city and change their names the following week of their visit. When her father was reading the local paper one morning, coffee in hand, he found a photo of him and his daughter meeting with the boy, when his daughter was clutching his hand in fear. Someone, this anonymous journalist, was watching the house without their knowledge. It was accompanied by an article spreading false rumors about how he was helping them. "He's not doing this out of the goodness of his heart or because he feels bad for them," it read, "he's doing it to expand his business, and has made his daughter his pawn." He had been caught, and the public conscience had issued its judgment.

The article's validity aside, the mere fact that his assistance to them became public knowledge put them in danger, he knew, and so he prepared for them to leave. It frustrated him that these lies would be believed and surely spread quickly, but he knew there was nothing he could do about it. His wife, like the other townspeople, was attached to this newspaper, having grown up in the town her whole life, and so she believed it, too. With this followed his urgent attempts to explain the situation, which were in vain. Fueling the pain he felt, most of all, is his tearful departure from his now former wife, who would soon get their marriage annulled by the local priest. However, she and her father would, thankfully, keep in touch with the other family, allowing them to struggle together and recover from the mistrust they sowed by trying to do the right thing after a tragedy. Life would no less keep them apart, however, and they would be relegated to dreaming about one another, never being able to see each other again. All because of, no less, their crime of being helpful.

THE WAREHOUSE

OLIVIA VITALE

There it is. That unmistakable sound that breaks me from my unconscious state. Every morning, the sound reminds me of the life of monotony that plagues me. I hit snooze on my alarm and lift my leaden body out of bed. My feet drag on the floor as I move at a snail's pace to the bathroom where I brush my teeth and splash water over my tired face. Coffee is no longer a motivator; it's more of a lifeline at this point in my career, so I take a cup to-go and begrudgingly head to my car to escape the comfort of my home and participate in the consumerism that this country cannot shy away from.

I find it hard to believe that anyone enjoys their job, especially when it is one like my own, but I suppose there is a necessity for fields like mine, and I don't exactly have the luxury of choosing to work elsewhere. As I pull into the gates that surround the Warehouse and Dave at the booth lets me through, I notice that the parking lot is particularly full today. Must be a sale or something that I wasn't made aware of. I shrug my shoulders and continue in my search for parking until I find a spot in the back left corner of the lot, not far from the entrance where they bring in the cargo.

I watch as my coworkers Frank and Marty struggle to carry a crate in, as it seems as though the cargo is uncooperative today. Someone nearly lost an arm in transit.

"Good morning, boys."

"Good morning, Steve."

I head toward the locker room where my locker sits patiently, waiting to collect my coat and personal belongings in exchange for my smock. Although this place likely wouldn't pass a health inspection, I put on my hairnet and gloves out of habit, and because I'm cautious after last Thursday's events. I had to throw out a good pair of socks and shoes because George didn't do his job right. There was no way I could have gotten the red, sticky stains out of my socks and shoes. The worst part is, that was not the first time I have had to throw out clothing. There should really be a new uniform. Our smocks don't assist all that much in sparing our clothing of liquids. Not in the quantities we work with anyway.

I take my place at my station along the conveyor belt, and begin my routine business as usual. Roger and I make conversation as we chop, dice, skin, peel, and movements of the like. He lets me know that Diane and the children are still well. It's comforting to know in times like these.

When we reach our lunch break and have to change uniforms for our shift in positions, I head back to the locker room and switch into my sales management attire. There is a shortage of staff around here, so I've had to fulfill a couple of roles as this business continues to grow. Once in uniform, I take my place behind the counter, but not before Jim could flip the open sign around.

Customers pile in at a steady rate, given the deal I've just been informed about. Buy one get one free. Seems like a scam to me, but I don't make a habit of trying out our products anyway, so why should I care? As long as business is booming, as Fred always reminds us. Janet and Bill come in for their weekly supply, given that they recently got on a new diet plan.

"Hey Steve, how's it going?"

"It's going. What can I do for you?"

"We'd like to do the BOGO deal. Does it have to be a pound? The kids don't come by much right now, because school has been so busy lately, so a quarter pound is really all we need."

"Well, the deal is one pound, but you are both such loyal customers. I'll tell you what, one quarter pound, coming right up."

"How fresh is this batch?"

"Killed Thursday, sliced Saturday, and marinated on Sunday so that it could be ready in time for sales today."

"Oh, good. You know how we feel when it's a little too fresh. Feels like I can still hear it."

"I know that feeling all too well. And will that be all?"

"Yes, that will be all."

"Okay, one quarter pound of human meat. Your total will be 12.99. Now, will that be cash or card?"

TO FALL ASLEEP

ERIN LETOURNEAU

Darkness seeps through the sky.
Rooms falling quiet, but a mind,
Never going on silence.
Stirring, thinking, grieving,
tossing, crying,
trying.

Time pushes forward, And like a
Lighthouse keeper watching;
I wait to see a light sailing from the sky.
Devastating storms and still watered nights,
I sit still, and I wait for a light.

Dreaming is halted, like an unexpected crash.
Iridescent illumination becomes Brightening Radiation.
Light and loud the veil of night washed away.

Dreaming halted, abruptly by a beaming light,
Not the light I was looking for.

MOON JONES

KRISTIN MURPHY

It aint no way that you live anywhere in the city of Detroit and don't know who Moon Jones is. I guess since you from out of town, I don't mind telling you the story. I mean, everybody should know who Moon is and why he special.

Luckily for you, I was there the day it happened, so you getting the real story, not the one they tell in Junebug's barber shop. It was 1945 and remember this happened in Detroit. Stuff was just getting back to normal a little bit in the city. The riot was two years before. I was only 6 when it happened, but I can still remember hearing mama crying and seeing all the scorching fires outside. People were running everywhere, and daddy just screamed "get yall asses in the basement and out that the front room"! The city was just starting to look better. The stores by our house had windows again and summer was right around the corner.

Summer was our favorite season. We had been waiting to see the sun again because that meant it was time for little league. At first, we hated little league. It took up our whole summer. That meant less days hanging downtown at the best ice cream shop, less days throwing rocks at that old, abandoned house, and most sadly we couldn't make any money for candy by helping out the old ladies around the neighborhood. They always gave you a couple of quarters for carrying their groceries and helping them pull out the trash can. All that money was only being spent in my head because daddy had signed me up for that little league team. He said that "all the strong boys know how to play baseball and the earlier you start, the better I would be" It was funny because we quickly found out that all our daddies had told us the same thing, even Moon's. What really got us to agree wasn't that little motivational statement, but the ice cream they promised us if we beat the team that we played.

The day Moon got his name was the nicest day ever. It was hot, but I wasn't sticky. The sun was out, but them rays wasn't stinging me like they do in the summer. All the parents were there, ours and the team that we played against. I have never seen so many people at a little league game, but if you saw how pretty that day was, you would have found a reason to be outside. It was a little league game, so the audience didn't expect much action. They were there to feel the summer breeze. It was Moon's turn to bat and his daddy was yelling from the stands, "knock it out the park son." Nobody's daddy loved them like Moon's daddy. We laughed because we knew he couldn't hit a home run let alone knock that ball out the park, but he said it because it would make Moon feel good.

So, there he was getting ready to bat. He was twisting the bat in hands and bending his knees like the real players do. The kid on the rival team pitched the ball. It was an ok throw and Moon drew his bat back, bit his bottom lip, and hit the ball. It wasn't no homerun, but we all screamed "run, get to first base"! He took off, and we jumped up to see. He made it to first base and the other team was still chasing the ball. We yelled, "run to second base"! He ran with a look of determination in his eyes and suddenly everybody looked up. Something was coming down from the sky and it was coming fast. The whole audience was in awe and one of the parents yelled, "What the hell is that coming down"? Moon was the last to see it, but the first one to make contact with the object. Most people think Junebug lying about that part, but no, I saw that thing come out the sky and hit Moon in the head, right before he could make it to second base.

Just like that, a beautiful day turned into a nightmare. Moon was on the field out cold, and we didn't know what had hit him. It was big enough to hold with one hand, but when one of the parents observed it, she said it just looked like a black rock with a pattern unfamiliar to her eye. Nobody paid attention to the rock until Moon got to the hospital. His parents picked him up off the field and put him in the backseat. They drove him to the hospital. My mama is best friends with Moon's mama, so she made us get in our car and follow them to the hospital immediately. I was happy about their friendship that day because I needed to know what happened to my friend.

He was out cold for about 10 minutes, when the doctor came out to the room where we were waiting. He didn't have a frown on his face, so I knew my friend was alive and going to be ok, otherwise I think the doctor would have at least had a dried tear in the corner of his eye. He told us that Moon had survived this strange flying object, but he did not believe us about flying the thing whatsoever. He was in disbelief but outnumbered by eyes that he demanded we take him down to this mysterious rock. So, we did just that and took him down to the field, where the thing still was. Nobody wanted to touch it because we couldn't understand where it had come from. It just came out the sky and hit moon. When the doctor saw the object, he mentioned the distinctive pattern of what appeared to be some type of rock. The doctor bent down and picked up the object. He said that he had never seen any object that looked like this, but he had some encyclopedias with drawings of all types of rocks and stones, so he could give us a logical explanation of what this thing was that hurt Moon.

A few days later the Doctor went over to Moon's house. He was acting very strangely. He said that he thought we were all crazy, but he in fact was the crazy one. He brought over a large book with him that said Astronomy on the cover. He said that in his spare time, it was one of his favorite books to explore. Like any normal day, the doctor had time to read his book in between work and he came across a page with a drawing. It was something about the drawing that the doctor had seen before. According to the words accompanying the picture, it was a drawing of the moon, drawn by some famous astronomer a long time ago. He was beyond shocked, because here this pattern was again. It was so distinct and unlike any rock he had ever seen in his life. He thought he had gone crazy to see that this drawing of the moon looked exactly like the object that had hit his patient in the head.

I didn't think the doctor was crazy. I was there that day. That thing came from somewhere else, everybody that was there knew it. The whole house was silent for a minute. We had no idea what the moon looked like. We all weren't just convinced by this drawing in a book and the fact that this rock has such an interesting pattern. But what else could have hit him that day? It came from nowhere and I think if it were a normal rock, it would have killed him. These moon rocks must be different from the regular ones down here, is what I remember thinking. We were still silent; we didn't know what to even do with this information. We knew nobody else would believe it. Then, we heard a man's voice say "From now on, we calling my son Moon." We been calling him that ever since that day. The whole city knows the story and we the only city that believe it really happened. That's why I wanted you to hear it from me and not down at the shop. Junebug done added so much to the real story that he should start selling his version. Anyways, you got the truth, the real reason everybody in the city knows Moon Jones and why he special here in Detroit.

THE HOBBYIST

DEVIN MANGRU

Raindrops hurtle towards the car, splintering against the windshield and forming a watery haze faster than the wipers can clean. The car's light ricochets off the precipitation, bathing the surroundings in an ethereal yellow glow. The storm's fury seems to never relent, briefly electrifying the night sky followed by deafening roars of nature. The road ahead is similarly perilous, rolling and winding with no end in sight, bordered by a thick layer of spruce. Silence among the driver and his companion is broken abruptly:

"Slow down Eric, you're one mistake away from getting us both killed."

"I know what I'm doing. Relax, will ya."

"Are you blind? Do you not see we're pretty much in the middle of a hurricane?"

"It's just a thunderstorm Sylvia. Look. We're late already and it's barely raining. A little rain never killed anyone."

"Yeah, well, nobody who suddenly died woke up that morning expecting to die," her voice dripping in venom.

"Fine." Eric expertly detects Sylvia's increasing anger, "I'm sure Dr. Hawthorne will appreciate guests who are almost a half hour late."

"He can't be that uptight. Can he?" Sylvia says tentatively.

"Honestly. I have no clue what he's really like. But, I'd prefer it if we didn't take any chances. This could be huge for me."

"For us."

"Sure. Sorry. For us," Eric concedes, "I mean... the guy lives in a mansion and owns this entire neck of the woods. Working for him is surely the way to move up in this world. He probably has an in-house chef or

even someone who gets his bath ready for him."

"Do you even know what kind of work you'll be doing for him?"

"Who cares Sylv? If it pays as much as I think it's gonna pay, what does it matter?"

"I guess so. It's just that he seemed kinda... off. Y'know, based on how you described him."

"So what if he's passionate about taxidermy? Aren't all rich people weird when it comes down to it? It's not a crime to have a hobby."

"The creepy part for me was the doll collecting, but the taxidermy is just as bad. What grown man collects dolls? It's just odd."

"I collect action figures Sylv... it's basically the same thing."

"Exactly my point. You're just as weird," Sylvia smirks as she watches heartbreak crawl across Eric's face, "Ugh. I really don't want to walk into a house full off stuffed animals and Barbie dolls. I hope he at least has a good chef. I would die for some soy-glazed salmon or filet mignon right now."

The Hawthorne estate materializes at the end of the treacherous road. It glares at the approaching couple, its eyes a deep abyss of fluorescence. Thin strokes of moonlight, filtered by the forest canopy, paint the house in a surrealist fashion. High archways decorate the exterior, casting impossible darkness beneath their stone mouths.

"Wow. Gorgeous, isn't it?" Eric proclaims.

"That's one word for it. Sure."

"Well... almost as gorgeous as you."

"Ha. Ha. Shut up Eric."

The estate's door swings open as if puppeteered by machinery. A stout man whose hair is nearing the end of its lifespan reveals himself to the couple and beckons them inside.

"Greetings Mr. and Mrs. Davis. My name is Lawrence Barlowe, Dr. Hawthorne's butler. I'm delighted to see you navigated this storm safely. Dr. Hawthorne was beginning to grow worrisome."

"It's nice to meet you Mr. Barlowe. Sorry for the delay, my wife here takes ages to get ready." At this, Sylvia rolled her eyes.

"Ah yes. It takes rather long to become dolled up. Follow me this way to the main dining hall. Dr. Hawthorne awaits."

Lawrence starts towards the dining hall, walking unnaturally quickly compared to the movement of his legs. The estate itself imposes a sense of insignificance onto its guests. Ornately carved mahogany floorboards, looming candlelit chandeliers, furniture on the caliber of royalty, countless spiraling staircases. A nauseating labyrinth of wealth, seemingly stretching for miles in each direction. In the dark corners of the estate, it appeared as if human beings stand in eternal stillness.

"Mannequins," Sylvia whispers to Eric, trailing behind the fast-moving butler, "Not just dolls. He collects mannequins. I don't know if that's better or worse."

"They look so... life-like from here. He really does amazing work with these. I want to see them better but some of these rooms aren't even lit."

"I don't see any taxidermy besides a deer and a bear mounted so far."

"Maybe he keeps all of it in his basement? Probably so his guests don't have to see it."

"Sure, but why keep the mannequins up here then?"

"It's none of our business."

Situated uncomfortably far from the entrance, the main dining hall carries all the grandeur of a King's palace. Dr. Hawthorne's slender figure is slightly obscured by the flickering candelabra, the only source of light in the room. His arms hang rigidly by his sides, but upon seeing his guests, life returns to his body.

"Ah! Mr. Davis, what a pleasure it is to see you again! And, wow, Mrs. Davis you certainly look stunning tonight. You two make a brilliant couple," his voice brims with childlike excitement and the Davis's return the pleasantries. "Please, have a seat wherever you wish. Dinner will be served shortly. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Davis why don't you tell me how a striking young woman like yourself happened upon a man such as Eric."

"Oh of course Mr. – uh – Dr. Hawthorne. Well, it was pretty much just random chance, really. There's not too much to tell. My friends had convinced me to try this speed dating event at a bar on our college campus. We were interested in the same movies and books, and I decided to go on one more date with him. The rest is history."

"You forgot the part where you fell in love with me instantly because of my irresistible charm," Eric added.

"Oh, stop it Eric," Sylvia chuckles.

Several employees arrange the feast while small talk ensues between the dinner guests and their host. It seemed as if every dish imaginable garnished the dining table, creating an almost overwhelming combination of color and aroma.

"So what kind of work will my husband be doing for you Dr. Hawthorne? I don't mean to pry, I'm just curious," Sylvia inquired.

"Not to worry, my dear. A perfectly natural question," a sly grin creeping across his face, "He is to assist me with my hobby. I'm sure you've noticed the dolls scattered throughout the estate. You see, it takes quite the effort to gather the necessary components in order to craft these works of art. Some of them are rather... lively. It requires an individual with particular talent and a keen eye for observation that I just do not have available on my current staff. Doing the legwork myself has quickly become wearisome as I continue to age. Eric possesses the youthful vigor that I so desperately need."

"Whatever it is Dr. Hawthorne, I'm prepared to do it," Eric states proudly.

"Good man. I will explain the details after this glorious meal, you will be delighted to hear how much the work pays. Now don't be shy and eat as much as you desire, there's more than enough to go around. I'm sure you are both famished after the drive to my estate."

The couple eat as if they have never eaten before in their lives.

"Please tell your chef how wonderful this meal is!" Sylvia exclaims, "There's something about it that makes me never want to stop eating."

"Yeah, thank you so much for treating us to dinner Dr. Hawthorne. I only hope I can repay you through hard work," Eric says.

"You'll be repaying me much more than you expect, I'm sure. If I may, I would love to know how you manage to keep your skin so smooth Mrs. Davis."

"Oh wow, what a nice thing to say. Well, I – uh - I don't do much besides my ordinary skin care routine."

"Surely not! It's quite truly flawless, I don't think I have a single doll in my collection with such picturesque features. They do wear down with age though. I could never figure out how to keep them fresh for too long."

"Say, Eric. I'm starting to feel really tired. Aren't you?" Sylvia asks, desperation seeping into her tone.

She finds it difficult to turn her head to look at her husband. "Eric?"

"It seems as if he is preoccupied with enjoying his meal, my dear."

"Eric? Eric! I can't move. I think – I think there was something in this food."

"Ah it's taking hold," Dr. Hawthorne's voice a horde of ants crawling across delicate porcelain, "I was beginning to worry you wouldn't eat enough. Oh how simple a matter it is to lure you young couples here. All it takes is the mere suggestion of money and you willingly walk into my jaws like half-witted gazelle drinking from crocodile infested waters."

"E-Eric?"

"Your husband cannot speak, my dear. It appears he ingested quite a powerful dosage. He can, however, still hear and see everything around him. I'm quite surprised you have managed to hold on for so long. Lawrence! Oh, where did he run off to now? Lawrence, prepare the basement for our guests! I'm not a real doctor, you know, but you two are in good hands. Your transformation will keep me more than occupied over the next week. Oh, how giddy I feel! It's almost like being a child again. I see you've finally lost the ability to move your lips. Good. I hope you get comfortable with it; after all, this is your reality now."

LINGO

WILLIAM ACEVEDO

Beyond what is heard is what is said.

Why is it that French
always seems to leave me drenched?
Its whisper and eaten sound,
Always reaches to confound.

Why is it that German
sounds like coercion?
That history
Can cause misery.

Why is it that Spanish
sounds like it's trying to vanish?
It's history as vast as the dead sea.
It's a song sung so expressly.

Why is it that Russian
sounds like an invitation for discussion?
It can be as fierce as a hug.
Or as sneaky as a smug.

Why is it that Arabic
sounds like a dessert kick?
An archaeologist making his finding public.
A wish granted from a lamp still adpic.

Why is it that Latin
is as deceptive as satin?
A language only used in science.
A Gregorian Chant followed by silence.

Yet in all, a language is a language.
There surely can be no adage.
Imperial Cultures as old as time.
Simply broken down to chimes.



UNCLE V

RONAN MANSILLA

Quincey stood anxiously outside the hospital room door. The man inside was breathing heavily, every inhale and exhale like the wheezing of a worn-out bellows. Quincey had been standing there for a while now, couldn't bring himself to enter. He knew little about the man — had not met him — and didn't know how he should introduce himself.

Hello, Uncle Victor. Pleasure to meet you. I'm your great-great-grand-nephew. Sorry you're dying and all that.

Quincey had gotten the news of his uncle's illness from his mother, who had heard it from a distant cousin, who had in turn heard it from an even-more-distant cousin. Nobody seemed to know this Uncle Victor personally, yet now that he was hospitalized (Something about his heart?), Quincey's mother had guilted him into visiting the ailing relative.

But I don't even know the man!

"He's dying, Quincey. He needs company."

And thus, he was now the inaugural visitor.

Quincey would have continued to fret outside the door if it weren't for the nurse, who with her kind (but loud) voice said: "Are you here to visit Mr. Drake? He's right in there." The moment she said this, the man inside the room fell silent. Quincey peeked around the doorway and found his gaze matched by that of a frail old man sitting up in a cot.

"Who're you?" asked Victor Drake.

"I'm your great-great-grand-nephew," Quincey said, entering the room. Near Victor's cot was a sofa — an ugly thing, out of fashion since the 60s. Quincey sat, legs crossed, foot bouncing nervously.

"Great-great-grand-nephew, eh? Didn't know I had one of those."

Silence followed.

"Do you have a name, great-great-grand-nephew?"

Quincey flushed.

"My bad. My name is Quincey."

"Nice to meet you, Quinny boy." Victor extended a wrinkled hand, and Quincey leaned over to shake it. Victor's grip was surprisingly firm.

"So, what brings a varsity boy like you over to see an old fogey like me?"

"How'd you know I'm varsity?"

Victor pointed to Quincey's letter jacket.

"Oh, yeah. I'm on the swim team, the Fighting Dolphins."

"I never did learn how to swim," Victor said, scratching his balding head. "I suppose nobody ever thought to teach me."

Another silence.

"So, what's your story, kid?"

"School and swimming."

"Well, I could have guessed that," Victor said, rolling his eyes. "What else is there to you? This is the first time we're meeting, after all."

"That's all there is, really," Quincey said. "Wake up, school, swim, sleep. Repeat indefinitely. I suppose I like to paint when I have the time."

"Landscapes?" asked Victor, eyeing the unflattering meadow scene hanging from the off-white hospital wall.

"People. My friends, usually." Quincey fished out his phone and showed Victor some of his work. Victor seemed impressed.

"Those are good!"

"Thank you."

"Now, are your grades as good as your paintings?"

"They're OK." Quincey shrugged. "I'm not an honors student, but I get by."

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

"No."

"Pets?"

"I've got an old Doberman. Yay big. Kind of a dope."

Victor's face was triumphant.

"See? You do have a story."

"I guess I do." Quincey was actually grinning. The visit was a lot less awkward than he had expected. It certainly helped that his uncle had a sense of humor.

"So, what about you, Uncle Victor? What's your story?"

"My story, eh?" Victor shifted in his cot, sitting further upright. "I've lived a lot of years, Quinny boy. Are you sure you've got time to hear about 'em all?"

"I think so." Quincey slouched back, making himself comfortable on the homely couch. He had been so tense, and for no reason.

"Let's see..." Victor rapped his fingers on the bedrail. "Well, I was born and raised in Romania."

"I've never been. What was Romania like?"

"Where I lived was mountainous. The Carpathians. Green as can be – trees stretching on and on for days. I was an only child. My father was a politician, but he died when I was young. My mother passed a little while later."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Don't be." Victor chuckled. "I inherited my parents' fortune, and what a fortune it was.

"From there, I served in the military for a while. Rose up the ranks. When I finished with the army, I followed in my father's footsteps – politics. Between my salary and the inheritance, I scraped up enough money to buy an old castle."

"No way!"

"I did! Poenari was its name, built on the Carpathians – you could see for miles from up there. I tell you, that was the life."

"Did you have anyone to share your castle with?"

"I came close," Victor said. "But no. When I was young, I had a number of... flings, I suppose you'd call them. Nothing serious. Let's just say your uncle got around."

Quincey found this comment surprisingly unsurprising. If his uncle was this charming now, how much more so must he have been in his prime?

"Well," Victor continued, "time passed, and I met a gal named Lucy. She was gorgeous, and she made me feel young. Now, Lucy and I, that was serious."

"So, what happened?"

"Her family didn't like me, which made things pretty much impossible between us. Eventually, we went our separate ways."

"And that's it?"

"Well... I was with a gal named Mina for a while, but that didn't really pan out, either."

At that, Victor trailed off, letting the memories wash over him. A monitor of some sort beeped in the adjacent room, reminding Quincey that he was at the hospital. Victor being as funny as he was, Quincey had almost forgotten that his uncle was, in fact, dying. For the first time, the thought made him genuinely sad. Quincey did his best not to think too hard about it.

"Is that your lunch over there?" Quincey asked, pointing to a tray of food sitting on the bedside table, some kind of stewed beef, carrots, and Jell-O.

"Yes," Victor said. "But I'm not going to eat it."

"What's wrong with it?"

"They over-season everything." Victor scoffed. "I'm old and I'm sick – far more suited to bland fare, yet they've put a whole garden's worth of garlic and herbs in there."

"And what's wrong with the Jell-O?"

"I've never liked the stuff. It's all yours, if you want it."

Victor plucked the Jell-O cup off the tray and held it out towards Quincey. As he leaned over to take the cup, Quincey caught a glimpse down Victor's hospital gown and gasped. Right there, on Victor's chest, was a giant scar.

"Oh, this?" Victor asked, pulling the gown's neck down to offer a better look. It was a pink keloid, raised, at least two inches long.

"Bayonet," he said. "Got it while I was in the military."

"That must have hurt."

"Quincey, m'boy." Victor looked him dead in the eyes. "It hurt like a mother."

The comment caught Quincey entirely off guard, and then he was cracking up. Victor soon followed suit. The giggles didn't subside for quite some time.

"I see you've got a cross necklace there," Victor finally managed to say. "Are you religious, Quinny boy?"

"Catholic." Quincey gripped the cross in his fingers. "What about you?"

"Agnostic, I suppose. Never really did go to church."

"No?"

"No. The organs, the statues, the incense – it all made me nervous and fidgety. Mina took me to Mass once not long after I first came over here. I've never been back."

"Wait, so Mina lived here? When did you leave Romania?"

"When the war broke out."

"Which war?" Quincey was doing the mental math. "World War Two?"

"Are you kidding me? I was out of Romania long before the fascists moved in.

"So, you're telling me you left before World War One?" Quincey paused.

That doesn't add up...

"You're yanking my chain!" Quincey exclaimed.

"Of course I am, Quincey. Victor laughed. How old do you really think I am?"

"I don't know, but you had me fooled for a moment there."

"Well," Victor said, leaning in conspiratorially, "the real story's a bit bawdy, if I'm being quite honest."

"Does it have to do with Mina?"

"It does." Victor gestured him over. "Get closer and I'll whisper it to you. Wouldn't want to upset the nurses, yes?"

Quincey wasn't exactly sure if he wanted to hear about his great-great-grand-uncle's sexploits, but curiosity got the better of him and he leaned in obligingly.

"All right," Quincey said. "Go on."

"Well, let's see..." Victor paused for a moment, thinking. His eyes swept over Quincey, and out of nowhere, a sadness passed over Victor's face. He sighed – a weary, lonesome sigh.

"What's wrong?" Quincey asked.

"I don't want to do this."

"We don't have to talk about her if you don't want to."

"Oh, Quincey." Victor's eyes were pleading. "You haven't figured it out?"

"Figured what out?"

"The clues. So many clues. Can't you see them?"

"I don't understand," Quincey said.

"The castle? The garlic? The scar?"

Quincey's face was blank. He still didn't get it. Victor raised his hand to Quincey's chin, touching it gently.

"I'm sorry, Quincey. I really am."

At that very moment, connections began firing in Quincey's brain, but it was already too late.

Victor's bony fingers tightened on Quincey's chin.

Victor Drake.

His nails dug in. Quincey was bleeding.

Drake... Drak...

And in one motion, Victor snapped Quincey's head back, vertebra shattering like mirror glass.

Dracula.

The correct realization, and Quincey's last.

The boy's body slumped forwards into Vlad Dracula's arms, and for a moment, Vlad lay there stunned. He had done this same thing countless times, but never had it bothered him like it did now.

He wasn't your nephew, Vlad finally told himself, and with wthat, he began to drink the boy's blood.

Yet even in his thirst, Vlad made sure not to stain that pristine varsity jacket, and when he had finished, he carefully placed the boy's body in the cot.

"I'm sorry," Vlad whispered.

And he was.

THE WATCH

JACOB YASSO

Ring,
Ring,
every hour,
There she is our beloved clock tower.
Standing tall, watching all
All who go from hall to hall.
She towers over the center of our heart,
Tall, sharp, pointed like a dart,
Beautifully stained with cracks of history,
She embodies nameless mystery.
A memory of soldiers who fought,
For me to stand here today.
On the same slate grey concrete,
Where they once stood before their death's,
Even before she was erected.
She lives year by year all by herself up there.
Vines growing down, trimmed,
Fresh like a haircut.
She is always dolled up,
A constant neck breaker,
How does she get ready?
Who even wakes her?
She has some friends, we all know well,
The only ones who can reach the bell.
Clear views from the top of the clock make hunting easy,
The falcon swoops down and grabs food breezy.
Amazing they do not mind the constant ring.
Ringing then, ringing now,
I just don't know how.
Who is up there ringing that bell?
Perhaps it is the lord of hell!

Reminding us of our ticking clock,
And when the time death will knock,
Or perhaps it is the master of heavens
Eavesdropping over our deepest confessions.
Who is up there?
I may never know.
However, I applaud her hourly show.
She does so much, and on time every hour,
Oh to understand,
Our beautiful Clocktower.

MEMOIR OF AN ARSONIST

ALEX POPP

I remember that night well, my entire team does.
Between the screams and the flames of hell, we'd not so easily forget it.
The cracks in the shell of my revolutionary faith may have sealed,
But "zealot" is a word that has been taken from me
For the best.

The Fifth-Street Foxes

In the beginning, there were three of us
Rusalka, Druid, and I founded the cell
After hiding in a dumpster behind the club
On 5th street, while corporate military raided
The place for revolutionaries that disappeared
Like foxes

Like the other cells in this city, we wanted
To be free from our corporate sponsored chains
But we were new, few in number, and lacking experience
Some of us never even shot a gun before.

We turned to cunning and careful planning
To see us through larceny and blackmail
With hardly a shot fired or clue to our names
We wanted to be like the revolutionaries
On the night of the 5th street raid
Like foxes

Dullahan

The headless faerie knight of Irish legend
Searching for souls to take with him to the afterlife

This is the name my cellmates gave to me for the hunger
In my eye whenever the corporates are mentioned
I wanted heads to roll and towers to fall
An interesting fit for a cell of foxes.

I was the voice of treason in a cell
where most wanted to lay low.
I told them that the corporate gods
Sitting on top of their obelisks of steel
Would not be dragged down to mortality
Without bold moves and influence

They told me to see the bigger picture
That we needed bigger mouths and sharper teeth
Before we could bring down larger prey
I thought them to be cowards
But I hadn't found my head yet

The Westford Warlocks

Their reputation preceded them.
Bold and violent, making a statement
was the only thing they cared about.
The other major cells in the city
Put up with them because they
Fought the same people and
Because they were quick to anger

I reached out to them like a preacher
to his silent gods, begging them to grace us
With their knowledge and experience.
They answered my prayers unimpressed
By our only assassination attempt
And wanted to show us how it's really done

Rusalka and Druid joined me that night
They thought it was a stupid idea but
We were family, they wanted me safe
This didn't stop them from expressing
Their fears and concerns about
The Warlocks or this job, fears

I didn't share until I finally met them myself

Lusus Naturae

The Warlocks arrived in a black van
With matching purple suit jackets
Over military grade plate carriers
They didn't bother to check the alley
And the driver lit a cigarette as
The four of them casually fanned out
They were the real deal

They all began passing money
To the driver, who was the only one
To bet that we would show up
But it didn't seem like he made
That bet out of faith in us.
They laughed at our codenames
Like a pack of wild hyenas
With an insatiable hunger
Burning behind their eyes

What unsettled me was that
I recognized that hunger
It was like looking in the mirror
Into my own hate-filled eyes.

It frightened me

I remember I asking myself
If this is what my cellmates saw
When they looked at me
If they saw a bloodthirsty beast
Barely restrained by the bonds of family

Faustian Pact

Their leader's name was Luke,

But he mocked our use of codenames
And told us to call him Lucifer
Since he was basically the Devil
He gave the three of us our kits
Each had more armor, firepower, tech
Than we've used as a team on any single job
I couldn't tell if more of the weight
Came from the ceramic plates
Or from the purple suit jacket
Which sealed our pact with Lucifer

Casus Belli

Our target was the director of finance
For Delta Corporation
I was always down for assassinating
A corporate representative, but
For the Warlocks, this was personal
Delta's rep was responsible for funding
A botched hit on Lucifer the week before
They planned to send a message
Written in charred blood

Delta's rep was attending a
Crowded banquet that night
Good food, fancy clothes, fake smiles
All for the merciful who let the
Mortals feed off their scraps
But the plan was to start fires,
Seal exits, cause fear and eventually
Funnel the crowd out into the street
Where Luke wanted to make a show
Of executing our target.

I was down with assassination,
But this was too reckless, too loud,
Too much
Every person in there had some kind
Of connection with the corporate world
But most were likely staff or family

Many bound there by their own pacts
They didn't deserve this

But by the time I realized this
I was split off from my team
Alone with Lucifer himself
With a box of thermite in my hands

Banshees

We were like ghosts as we drifted
Through the mostly empty building
Most of the guard was posted to
The ballroom as Delta's detail
They were the lucky ones.

We could have easily slid past
the few guards strolling through
hallways and maintenance shafts
But Luke went out of his way
To ensure we were the only ones
Breathing when we left a room

I tried to convince myself
That they were corporate guards
That they had it coming for them
Wrong place, wrong time
Something in my heart told me
There was something wrong
With the Devil before me
I played it off just fine
Until we saw the janitor

Changeling

I grappled the janitor from behind
And began restraining him
Before Luke could pull the trigger
Instead, the Devil asked me
Why let him live, why take a hostage

With a hunger in his eye that told me
He wanted heads to roll and towers to fall
I told him to see the bigger picture
That a hostage would give us leverage
When things eventually went loud
He told me I was a coward and
That I would handle the hostage
It was clear to me he lost his head
A long time ago

Dies Irae

The two other teams radioed in
They had planted their thermite
And were waiting on us
Lucifer handed me the detonator
Unable to contain his excitement
And told me to start the show

Both the building and my heart shook
As Druid's team confirmed detonation
And began falling back to the van
Rusalka's team told us to stand by
For the next detonation

All I could do while waiting was
Let my eyes wander between Luke's
Demented grin and itchy trigger finger
And listen to the terror
In the whimpers of the hostage

Rusalka's team called for the next detonation
My heart was beating rapid fire, and I hesitated
I pulled the trigger and the building shook a second time
A tense moment of silence fell upon us
Before detonation was confirmed
But it was Rusalka's voice through the radio
Not one of the Devil's thugs

Salvation

I could hear them from the stairwell
Getting louder and louder
The screams of the terrified and the damned
As if Hell itself was coming down to greet me
I looked at the janitor again and realized
Hell was already right next to me
Drunk on adrenaline and reveling in the terror
It was too much and I finally broke

I began questioning my whole life
My ideals, our cell, the revolution,
Were we really the good guys here?
Were we really any better than the corps?

I was yanked out of my stupor by
Luke raging at me for the second time
To pull the trigger on the detonator
He cursed my name for cowardice
And leveled his rifle at my head

I was done

I dropped the detonator in defiance
Ready to die for my role in this
I wasn't expecting to hear a gunshot
But it wasn't the Devil's gun I heard
As his body slumped to the floor
I realized it was Rusalka I heard

Ex Memoriam, Ad Astra

It turns out that Rusalka left
Her Warlock buddy in a pool of blood
Because he was about to fire
On the passing mob of civilians
And showed up just in time
To keep Lucifer from taking me with him

We released the janitor from captivity
And took the thermite back to the van
Where we ripped up our Warlock suits
And waited for a Druid who didn't show
The arrival of corporate military
Forced us to leave without him

He showed up the next day at the club on 5th street
While Rusalka and I were watching the news report
With the other foxes in our cell
He told us a likely exaggerated story about
How he had to play along with the Warlocks
Until he could outfox them and slip away
Just in time for the corporate military
To show up on their doorstep
I was just glad that my family was back together

MY PRECIOUS JEWEL

ALAZIAH CADDELL

Four minutes past the hour
Your breaths filled the room Your cries brought calmness and
comfort like rain, so cool
The seconds before were now forgotten
You were far greater than rubies, My blue Sapphire

Impenetrable skin, bright-wide eyes
How Surprised I was to see.
Twenty-eight hours of somber
30 minutes of stress, and the ring of fire.
A woman was born
Bare, skin stretched
You were unknown to me like an unclaimed sea Still, I wait
to see your crown. My Diamond

The flashes were grim.
Dry and intense,
The womb bottled up, pumped, now open.
Yet, your light gave me strength, my Topaz.

Our eyes connected and bound
You never shut them
As you gazed

sparkling dust finally met us
My moonstone.

Head full of curls.

You enter this world.

Cradled to my bosom.

My trials had met my purpose.

My precious, precious jewel

THE OZ EFFECT

KRISTIN MURPHY

Moved by Air

No amount of knowledge acquired could ever define my existence. Birth is such a sacred feature of life. Yet I feel like I was carried here by the wind. Not in the beautiful way that people fantasize. I was blown away from another home. I was hurled by the sky. I landed on a witch. A witch that did not have the best reputation in this new land. As for me, my first impression will always be a girl that will ever so kindly crush your body and take the shoes right off your feet.

Not Found

I have been lost for a long time and in many places. This one and that one. The feeling of being misplaced is all too familiar. Has a teacher ever skipped over you during attendance? Is there anyone that I missed? They play it off so well, but I take note of how the popular kids were never forgotten. I take advantage of not being noticed. I sneak off, but inevitably find myself going back to that brick road. The one they direct all traffic to. The road is cracked. It needs to be painted. We have all been told that that there will be treasure at the end. We will see if it is ever found.

Impact

I told you before, I came crashing down. Into life and a world already functioning. I killed somebody upon my arrival. The crowd around me cheered, but I was horrified. I killed dreams and the futures of others with my birth. I became the priority. When you are the only one that arrives, you cannot help but feel that you are the only thing that matters. This whole journey revolves around you and who you meet along the way. I don't have time to play the

good witch, bad witch game. I fear being called the later. Please believe me when I say that I did not plan to come here.

Good People

Everything is not all bad. The best part of life is that I have met good people. I was scared and confused. I only enjoy traveling alone when I plan to. I was overjoyed when I met a friend. He was missing a part of himself like me. The kind words we spoke to one another covered our unseen wounds like bandages. You assured me that we could make it to the destination. We met others and learned the sacredness of community. Everyone is on a journey of some kind. We hoped that what we lacked could be found at the end of this road. I only hope to meet more good people like you someday.

Yellow

When you think of yellow, what do you see? Tall sunflowers swaying in the hot summer breeze. The magnificent blazing sun. Yellow can be mesmerizing in the right amount. Yellow represents optimism, energy, joy, and happiness. This brick road was once freshly paved and radiant. Now it is dull. That same yellow also represents jealousy, betrayal, illness, and danger. The eyes play tricks on us. The sun is yellow by no mistake. It is all the things that yellow represents. Have you stood under the sun for too long?

Moral Compass

Good and Bad are arbitrary terms. Definitions depend on the judge. When I got here, they told me that it's good or bad and nothing in-between. The wicked lie east and west. The good resides in the north and south. Life blows us in all directions so what's the point in picking a side anyway?

Flying Monkeys

I am just a girl that has somewhere to be...I think. I realize that I have gained more than wisdom on my way. I have enemies too. They want to knock me off my path. I know who they were sent

by. It is no way I can fight this swarm. The numbers are against me. The only thing on my side is my mind. I must think myself out of this. The flying monkeys only think about harming me. They never ask why. They are foolish beasts who are controlled by a meticulous master. I am jealous of their ability to fly. If only they knew the sights they could see if they would not be chasing me.

Man Made Savior

I for one do not believe in a single savior. Life taught me that I must save myself. Words spread like wildfire. They say that the Wizard will rescue us and give us what we are missing. I am a skeptic, but this man sounds like he has the answer to my problems. I just need someone to point me in the right direction, whether that may be back home or another new land. It upsets me that these saviors always look the same. White, male, he looks incapable of fighting his own battles. I walked up to you and asked for help anyway. He gave me cynical answers and spoke with a narcissistic tone. To my surprise you looked like all the ones before, you just chose to hide behind a curtain.

Tin Man Blues

Believe it or not, you know the song. I heard you sing it. The one about that hard exterior we carry. Heavy, hard, hollow. Inside is hot and steaming. But when the water comes to cool me, I am left rusted. Stuck, stagnant, subdued. I need to take off the outer layer. Shed in some way. This hardness of heart does not benefit me or others. I carry it anyway as I wait to shed.

Sleep My Pretty

Who is this girl? She asks so many questions. Why and how is the first word of any sentence that her brain composes. I used to admire her curiosity, but it has drained me. I have no answers and she know when I make answers up. No noble lie will cure her mind. I know a way to soothe her. I gifted her a magnificent bouquet of flowers, poppies to be exact. A whiff would be enough to calm her. I watched as her eyes fought to remain open. She drifted into the other world. There she will find the answers.

Man vs. Beast

Nature is a gift given to us all. The poor man refuses to see this. He works so hard to create an artificial version. The Beast on the other hand, knows the truth and lives within it every day. He only works when he is hungry, everything else he does is merely for fun. Beast spends his time in the moment, not the past or future. So, it is not surprise that man created hell for his own trickery. I watched him work industrially. I must admit that some of his inventions were beautiful, even if they mimicked the features of nature. But just when everything looked one way, the beast pulled back the curtain. Revealing to us that nothing in this artificial world is true.

No Trouble

Mama told me to go somewhere where I cannot get into trouble. She forgot to give me directions because I do not know of such a place. Maybe, it is somewhere north of here? Somewhere behind the moon I suppose. It might be south though. Somewhere beneath the world, where our physical form ceases to exist. I'll just try going west. I was told that hopes and dreams lie there. So all I need to do is dream of no trouble. That sounds too easy. I will start out east. Only because it rhymes with peace and that is all I can think of right now. Looks like I am already in trouble, and I have not even moved. Oh wait, I see a rainbow. Mother nature is speaking to me. She is my guide. She told me that my destination is to make it over that rainbow.

Consult the Crystal

How do you handle the stress of the world? I try to escape it. It is not enough to be grounded to this Earth. I have learned that you must be in tune with the infinite. A wise old man told me that the magic crystal holds the power. The crystal was the number one line of defense for the Pharaohs of Egypt. That magic revealed to Cleopatra the strongest men to help her secure her kingdom. Oh, I desperately hope this magic will work for me. I just need to get over my fear of the future first.

Liquidate

Too much baggage only weighs a person down during their journey. I choose to pack light, only managing myself and surrounding myself with friends not afraid to fight on the way. I thought that was all a girl could ever need. It was still something in my way. Time to liquidate perhaps. Out with the old. Now I am more conscious of my new needs. Unfortunately, time was never on my side. The flames came rolling and my old life flashed before my eyes. Water to the rescue! That is the only thing strong enough to defeat fire, and just like that. I watched everything dissolve. Does this count as another kill? I do not feel as bad about this one. Would anybody believe that an assassin wears a dress, and her weapon of choice is water? The proof is here in my pale.

Woke

Familiar voices are all around me. My eyes are still closed. I feel the touch of my mother, her warm hands shaking my shoulder. "Wake up Kristin" is all I can hear everyone saying. I look around and see that I am where I was a long time ago. The faces I now see resemble the others in the infinite world. What is this strange feeling? I know something that they do not know; or I just understand what they refuse to. Infinite worlds show that we have infinite choice. So why does that old lady choose to be bitter? The man chooses to live under an assumed identity. He looks strong and wise, but he is just another man hiding behind a curtain. Here I am knowing that life is not what we make it. It took me a perilous journey back home to find that out.

LEAVES

JAMES HUFFMAN

The leaves of eucalyptus, that neither are green nor living
blow feverishly, and yearn for a new direction.
Calling for a bright dawn, the birth of a new spring
yet frost, chill and solid, covers in a suppression.

Blow feverishly, and yearn for a new direction
are the meadows, with warping bark and teetering trees.
Yet frost, chill and solid, covers with a suppression.
for even tomorrow, the crystalized land, it shall be.

Are the meadows, with warping bark and teetering trees,
calling for a bright dawn, the birth of a new spring?
For even tomorrow, the crystalized land, it shall be
the leaves of eucalyptus, that neither are green nor living.

TO BE OR NOT TO BEE

JACOB YASSO

Brood

Our highness embedded a piece of rice but smaller,
Into the combs, where their lifecycle began.
Two thousand eggs today, two thousands eggs tomorrow,
She propagates the perfect army.
So many eggs, put all in their place,
For three days we must wait.
Those days, being watched and protected,
They would never leave us neglected.
In this family everyone has a role to play,
Jobs that do not stop for night or day.



Larva

A white grub,
Hatched from the egg.
No legs, no wings, no eyes.
Still in its cell, it squirms.
Waiting for food to be dropped into the combs.

Adolescence.

The continued feeding creates growth within the cell.

The larvae are unrecognizable from earlier today.

So fast, and so full, they are becoming adults.

Workers ensure the grubs are fed,

Then they are shut out,

Capped.

Locked in their cells to begin metamorphosis.



Pupa

Two weeks locked away.

How much has changed.

The pupa, growing steadily.

They start to grow tiny nubs. These turn into their arms and legs.

The big black balls where their eyes should be, started to turn color.

The wings protrude from the shoulders of the bee,

Not able to fly, they need to dry.

The body begins to become stiff and turns color.

The black and yellow stripes slowly make an appearance.

Then comes the hair, no not on their head.

Plumose.

These tiny hairs take over the bee,

And all but the wings, it spreads to all limbs.

The Pupa is now grown, theres just one last test,

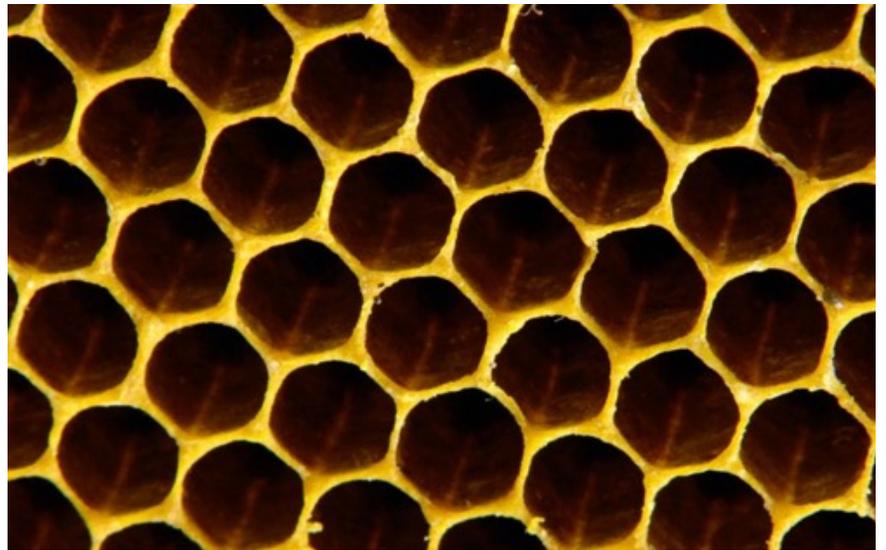
Can they break through the wax to work for the nest?

Drones

As an adult things get harder.
No days off, and no off days.
The hatched must now become the keepers.
They are vital in supporting the queen and tending to her needs.
Without them the hive wouldn't survive.
They watch over the eggs, ensuring their safety.
They must feed the larvae as they were once fed.
They must watch over the youth till their time has come,
To seal the cap, so they can become,
Bees in flight, or worker bees.
But never a king or queen.
They all have their place, inside or outside the combs of their hives,
They can fly here or there,
And collect pollen from everywhere.
They must know how to make it back,
To give the fruits of their labor to the hive.
They can fly far away from the hive, all with the power of their wings.
They must be careful; they mustn't not sting.



The worker Bees
Bring all the pollen to the hive.
Their sweat builds under their scales,
The waxy substance the laborers mix,
With the pollen, and of course,
The Sucrose of Nectar.
They chew and chew,
Mixing and aerating.
The artisans work is only beginning.
The microscopic fingers,
On the skinny frail limbs,
The architect creates scientific unanimity.
Cells, aligned. One by one,
Each, at the center, a movement,
A life.



The Old Barn Outback

The Old Barn Outback was well built, still standing.
The years it faced, scratched with proof of the tools once used.
Now derelict, vacated by all except one.
A colony of soldiers, their lines clearly set.
Eight feet tall their skyscraper city,
Tucked in the back, behind the wall.
Anyone who went near, had to face the armed militia.
Martyrs of their craft,
Stinging to their deaths.
Their country is strong, they have outlasted,
And have claimed victories before.
But the beekeeper came and explored.
With nets the army could not charge through.
He busted the wall, gassed down the innocent, and cleared the city of all its valuables.
Thousands lie puzzled on the floor squinting through the dizzying fog,
They see what's left, if any at all.
They see the queen, alive and well.
"Back to work"
The buzzing continues for victory at last.



The Buzz of it All

There was the dark oak tree,
Down by the bay.
Where it was quiet, still, and beautiful.
The sound of bees buzzing through the tree.
There were two children, always playing in the scruff.
Laughters of joy cracking in the sunset,
As they jumped and played in brush.
Till they took a tumble,
One over the other.
Rolling, now flat on the ground.
Till their eyes align,
Facing each other, gasping for more humorous air.
In the field that day they felt a buzz,
One unknown, unfelt, unheard.
The ringing of light through their young bodies,
Yearning for a voice.

The Sounds of Spring

No clouds, clear
What are those tracks from the airplanes?
Contrails, cutting clear crosses in the warm blue sky.

Green, luscious grass,
Rippling in the wind.
Except where there is a patch.
An area not for grass.
Laden with seeds each and every spring.
Where flowers will bloom.
In eden, there are tulips,
Dandelions, and lilies.
Violet and yellow with a hint of fire red.

The sounds of this scene are many, but there's something.
Something I can hear but just cant see.
It's voice vibrating the air that pushes into my ear.
The sounds of buzzing bees.

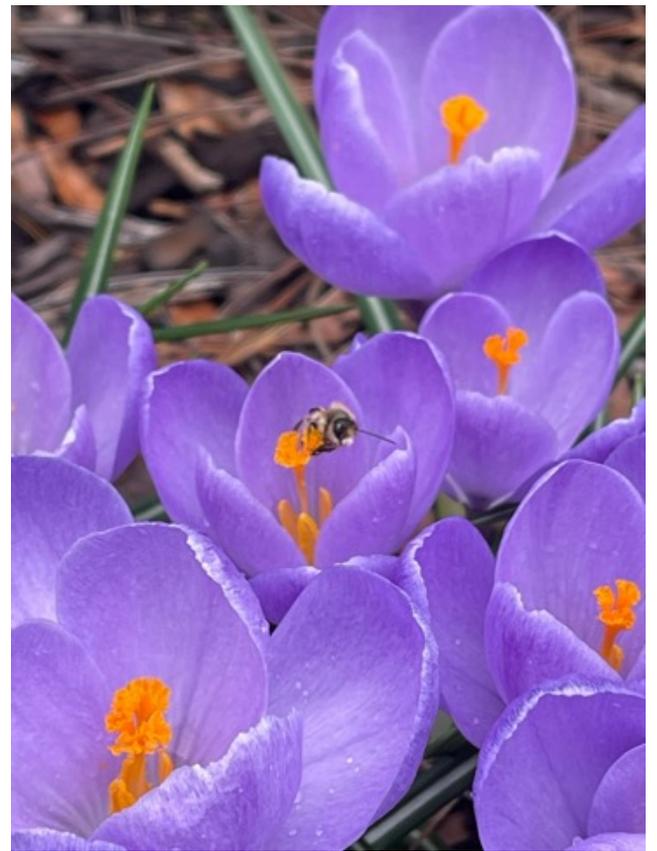
I peer into the tulip,
There she is.

The Life We Live

In a box.
Trapped each day.
A small hole where light comes in.
Some go out, most stay in,
Our cell of our life.

There is structure to our system.
Rows of inmates line each cell.
Our work is cut out for us.
In a field, no life around.
Just our boxes of life,
Surrounded by nothing.

In our box, our queen is Bardi.



She watches and ensure the cells get filled.
When we are not doing what we are born to,
Well...
The consequences can ensue.

For those who are lucky a simple scolding,
For others it is far worse.
When there are already too many of us,
What is one less?
Who cared about him?
Or what he was worth?
Not our queen.

At any chance she gets she will punish a soul.
Leaving them to die.
Then she throws them out through the hole.
Her own blood, workers eternal.
She doesn't care about us,
Her hate is eternal.

She wants one thing,
Only has one desire.
The fruits of our labors,
She expects nothing greater.

LOVE BOMBING

ALAZIAH CADDELL

I remember, I knew, I saw.
I wonder what it's like to love every flaw.
To speak, to know, and to understand.
I remember the first look I gave you.
I knew I would fall hard.
I saw myself giving in.

I remember, I knew, I saw
I wonder what it's like to love every flaw.
Thinking of all the times I said my heart would never open.
Then you reminded me of a past time
I remember the pain, the embarrassment, the thrill
I knew I didn't want to go down that road again
Yet, I still saw us sticking together like a prickly bush.

I remember, I knew, I saw
I wonder what it's like to love every flaw. You loved me so fast it was quite fascinating,
I remember that evening in Chicago
I knew who you said you were
I saw myself forgetting the hurt, to give you more of me.

I remember, I knew, I saw.
I wonder what it's like to love every flaw.
Four years until now,
I remember who I was and who you were.
I knew it would be hard to break barriers
Now I see how much we have overcome.
I saw then that you would always be the one.

What are you?

The thing about being Italian American
is when I'm asked "what are you?"
I say Italian
but I was born and raised in America
and I haven't spent longer than 3 consecutive weeks in Italy
and everytime I go
I get funny looks because of how I'm dressed

When we're in Italy, my dad is the guy who moved to America
but when we're in America, he's the guy who moved from Italy
and when he speaks in America, people ask where he's from
because his accent is most definitely not American
but when we're in Italy, they don't believe he's from there
because his accent is not Italian enough
so sometimes he just says he's from Canada and they nod

I never really know what to say when people in America ask if my family is in the mafia,
because technically no,
not anymore
but my great grandpa did sign his name in blood
and then he got deported
but my parents told me not to tell people that
because they'll think we're all criminals

So to answer your question,
I guess I'm not Italian or American
but I'm both at the same time and I'm okay with that

Superstitious

I never knew I was a superstitious person until
I saw an owl and believed my death was near.
Bisnonna always hated those demons disguised as birds.
She believed they were bad luck.
And I know it's not rational to think that
I will fall to the Earth and become part of it because of a bird,
but part of me wonders if she knew
something the rest of us didn't.

Thinking about it mixes as well in my brain
as oil does to water,
like the contents of the bowl Bisnonna used
to rid us all of the malocchio.
Maybe I wanted to believe it, or maybe she really was magic,
but if the pharmacists knew she could cure a headache
better than Tylenol could ever hope to do,
they'd have come knocking.

I remember the night she died
I heard an owl outside my window.
Ordinarily I'd begin a prayer, but all I could do was cry.
She came back to visit me, or at least that's what I tell myself.
Call me superstitious,
tell me I'm out of my mind,
but when that owl comes back on the same night each year,
I know it's her.

To the Old Italian Women Who Raised Me

Bisnonna,
Thank you for teaching me that women are to be worshiped.
I don't think there will ever be another man who loves a woman the way Bisnonno loved you.
I could see it in the way he looked at you, held you, kissed you until your last breath.
Even when you couldn't remember your own name, you still remembered he loved you.
And when you were gone, he reminded me every time I saw him how much he missed you.
He missed you so much, in fact, that he couldn't bear to live without you.
It didn't take long for him to follow you.

Nonna,
Thank you for teaching me how to deal with men.
You make it look so easy, and you seem so invincible.
I always knew you were tough.
I've watched you put out candles with your bare fingers and skin rabbits without flinching.
But I didn't know the depth of it until you told me that your cousin tried to rape you
and you put snake skin in his soup to curse him.
I know you're tough because you wear a smile when you talk about it.

Zia Angela,
Thank you for teaching me to never lower my standards.

I'm sure your husband was scared to face Bisnonno on the porch steps with a rifle in hand,
but he still showed up for you, and he stayed.
He stayed with you until the cancer took your body.
Because of you, I won't accept any less than someone who is willing to face it all.
Scary father with a rifle, or a deadly disease.
For better or for worse, in sickness and in health.

Zia Elsa,
Thank you for teaching me to fight back.
I bet those men were sorry that they ever even thought about touching you.
You gave them a fair warning of what you'd do to them if they tried.
I wonder why they didn't believe you.
The man with a knife in his eye and the other man with a knife in his foot
learned that day to never doubt a threat,
and I learned that it's better to cause them temporary pain than to have a lifetime of it
if they were to get to you first.

So to the old Italian women who raised me,
Thank you for making me the woman I am.
The recipes you leave behind are ones of
Love
Resilience
Patience
And strength.
I'll make sure the women who come after me know them by heart.

Sundays

No matter what, Sunday was the one day of the week I could count on being the same.
Mass, pasta, yelling. In that order, without fail.

We would wake up, and go to mass at the same time at the same church.
Then, we'd go to Nonna's house for lunch at 1:00 pm.
We couldn't be a minute late because she timed the pasta perfectly. She'd yell if it's cold.

And that's where the yelling comes in.
After the pasta goes in the pot. After we ate the pasta. And after we talked after eating pasta.

When we were done eating and the women and girls were done cleaning up and then men were

back inside from smoking, we'd go to Bisnonna's house, where the rest of the family had lunch. My cousins, aunts, uncles, all finishing up their pasta and yelling by the time we arrived.

Then more yelling started. Usually happy, enthusiastic yelling, but sometimes the yelling was accompanied by crying, and one time a knife was pulled.

I guess there were a few times when Sundays differed from their usual routine, but for the most part, they stayed the same. The kids played in the yard and nearly lost a limb each time, the men sat outside and smoked, and the women stayed in the kitchen drinking coffee and doing dishes.

I loved that I could rely on Sundays to always adhere to the same structure. But eventually, Bisnonno and Bisnonna died, and we had no reason to gather on Sundays.

We still go to Nonna's, and our schedule is relatively the same.

11:30 am: mass

1:00 pm: pasta

And shortly thereafter: yelling

But we don't gather all together like we used to.
So Sundays are still Sundays,
but then again, they're not.

Old

Everything is old in Italy.

The old men in the village play card games like it's their last time they'll shuffle a deck. Sips of their coffee don't make a dent, because they have nothing to do, and all day to finish it. And when they're done, they'll go for a stroll with their hands behind their backs and no intention of moving fast enough to break a sweat.

Although, it's a miracle they don't sweat in the summer heat.
The buildings are old
and the people are old
and their minds are old
and I've figured out that old people don't like air conditioning.

The buildings are so old that it's hard to imagine that some of them are houses rather than the rock placed in front of Jesus's tomb.

It seems like one good slam of the door and the place will look like a construction worker still in driver's training got too close with a bulldozer.

Hell, even the village's stray dogs are old.
They don't really bark to beg for food, they just kind of linger
and move on when they don't get any because frankly,
they're too old to put on a show and they know
the old lady down the street is going to give them some leftovers.

But just because everything is old, doesn't mean word doesn't travel fast.

The old ladies sit up in their balconies, updating each other on who died as if it were iMessage
and the village bulletin where obituaries are posted is their Facebook.
They have no concept of technology beyond sewing machines that require feet to pedal, and
they're probably happier this way.

Since everyone's been around for a little more than a while,
and they haven't moved from their plastic outdoor furniture in the last century,
they all know each other.
and when they see someone they don't recognize, they get suspicious.
These old ladies are like the neighborhood watch, and nothing escapes their sight.

Nothing ever changes in the village, and I suppose it doesn't have to.

The church in the middle of the square still stands after a thousand years,
and it will probably last a thousand more.
That church will probably outlast mankind.

But that's what I love about going back
because Nonna might move the furniture around in the dining room,
but it still looks the same and smells the same in her house.
Whoever said we had to move out with the old and in with the new
clearly never knew a good thing when they saw it.

Laundry

The metal railing on the balcony
collects the heat of the sun
and wears it like a badge

It holds the clothesline
and a view of the mountains
consumed by wildfires

The helicopter moves from the sea
to the mountain
back to the sea

Bringing with it water
to restore the land
and put out the fire

But the sun has other plans
and still the fires continue
while we watch from the balcony

Hanging up clothes to dry
that'll be stiff and standing
on their own in minutes

Buckets of clothespins
rest on our hips as the
sweat drips down our backs

The breeze is so gentle
you almost have to hold in
a breath to feel it

Then we'll shower and change
and do our laundry again
because the sun will greet us tomorrow

The one thing that sucks about going to Italy
Is having to say goodbye

Months, sometimes years of waiting to go back
and see Nonna waiting at the top of the steps
with pasta ready for us in the kitchen
and our beds made, ready for us to rest our

jet-lagged selves and switch our internal clocks

Nonno is somewhere in his garden
hidden by trees and vegetables
making sure the food is freshly picked
before our arrival and ready to become
part of Nonna's dinner plans

We spend time catching up and filling in gaps
who's done what since the last time we came
and what we're doing next
laid out on the table like a side dish
and connecting us like wires

Then Nonno takes us on a tour of his farm
telling us what vegetables are in season
and how many more hens and roosters
have joined the family
since the last time we were given this tour

We visit aunts and uncles
reminding them of how old we are
and they tell us how much we've grown
though they have stayed the same
and haven't seemed to have aged at all

Trips to the beach take us back
to the last time we were together like this
sun beating down on us
and waves crashing against the sand
while we reminisce

Being together makes it feel like
if anything bad were to happen
it wouldn't even matter
because at least we're all here
and not separated by the sea

But it can't last forever
and we'll have to go back to America

waiting for the day we get to do this again
and hoping it won't feel
like so much time has passed

We have our last meal together
and pack up our things
saying goodbye about a hundred times
while Nonna and Mom start to cry
like they always do

Well wishes and plenty of hugs
hoping to carry us over until the next time
we take a trip across the pond
but sometimes they're the last ones
and we don't even know it

Sometimes goodbye is forever
or at least until we next meet
to eat, hug, laugh, and cry
not in Italy, but in heaven
where we can all be together again

THE WEARY TRAVELERS

KAVIN PATEL

The flat plains trudged along the side of the road, seemingly to never end. They had forgotten what it felt like to be stationary, the rocky pathway reverberated throughout their bodies continuously. The wooden wheels began to splinter from the journey, yet the horses carried on step by step. The boy looked at his father, who had a tired look on him, which he was used to seeing. His gray beard, once swaying in the wind with life, no longer moved. His eyes, once filled with wonder and love, drooped to barely open. It was just the two of them now and the boy yearned for the days where he ran into their cottage from playing in the hills behind their little town with the other kids, where his mother, a lively woman who always seemed to have a glow about her, would have a big bowl of his favorite meal waiting for him. His little sister, Amelia, waiting patiently at the seat next to him, for she refused to eat without the presence of her brother. He remembered Amelia's constant interrogation about what games he was playing with the other kids, and asking if she could come with the next time. "Maybe", he always replied. He felt guilty about that now as it had been almost two years since he last saw Amelia and his mother. His father woke him up late in the night one day long ago, and told them that mother and Amelia had left them. He remembered the tears in his father's eyes that night as he stared into his eyes and woke up the next morning thinking it was all a dream. Since then, the boy and his father have travelled across the western country. His father always saying, "There's nothing here for us anymore," as he would pick up his bags and load it onto the carriage and instructed his son to do the same. The boy turned to his father in the carriage and asked when they would stop, which came off as him asking his father when they would find a new town to stop in for a brief time. But deep down his father knew his son was asking when they would finally settle down. Deciding to ignore the true question, he turned his head and replied, "We'll stop at the next town we see, alright Tommy?" The boy turned and looked out the window, and it didn't seem there would be a town for at least a few more days, and he dozed off dreaming of the days where he would be running through these fields.

After stopping for the night, Tommy and his father loaded up their bags and continued on their journey through the plains. This morning, they came across a small town in the center of a prairie, with wooden fences surrounding it, and grazing animals wandering outside the enclosure. Tommy and his father wandered in and were the object of strange glances from the residents. At the center of the town stood the tallest building, the cathedral. And surrounding it were small shops, one for the blacksmith, one for the baker, and one for the butcher. His father urged the horses to stop, and they exited their carriage and stepped foot inside civilization for the first time in months. A few residents came up to them, asking about where they were from and why they had come here. "My name's Arthur Hill, this here's my son Tommy." "We've

been travelling for a few months now looking for a new home, a place to start over in the promising West." The residents brushed this off; they had seen plenty of families come there in search of the promised land, with too many turning back not finding what they were looking for. An older woman came up to them, and informed Mr. Hill that she had a room open in her in; the resident there had just passed. The woman asked for five months' rent in advance, to which my father responded that he preferred not to do such a thing. "We don't know how long we're gonna be staying here, so I'd like to pay monthly." Tommy looked up at his father with a look that told him exactly what he was thinking, and his father handed over the five months' rent.

They unloaded their carriage and there was only a few satchels and bundles of clothes. They had left most of their possessions behind when they first left, and it seemed that with each move, they left more pieces behind. Another resident came and took their carriage and walked towards the stables. They entered into the inn and climbed up the stairs into their new home. It was small, but enough for the two of them. A small table was sitting in the middle of the room when they walked in with two smaller cots laying against the windows. "Make yourselves comfortable," said the innkeeper as she walked away.

Weeks passed by and Tommy and his father had settled in nicely to this little nameless town. The residents soon considered them to be natives; however, that did not come without the relentless questions about where they were from and why they were here. To which, Mr. Hill always replied, "For a better life out west." For such an aspiration, Tommy felt that they were not succeeding. He felt more lonely than ever and missed Amelia and his mother. Mr. Hill began working in the pasture that surrounded the town for extra money; the supply they had packed with them was quickly dwindling due to the innkeeper increasing rent. While his father would go to work, Tommy would walk around the town and visit the butcher and blacksmith shops and ask all the curious questions a young boy could ask. The workers were amused at first with his curiosity, that quickly became annoying. He looked around for kids playing in the fields, but found none. He did, however, meet some children a few years younger than him who were playing with marbles on the edge of the town. Tommy walked up to them and asked what their names were. "You're the new kid aren't you, my name's Bill, this here's Joe, Mary, Rob, and Jane." Tommy quickly grew accustomed to his new group of friends and even started thinking Mary was more pretty than the rest of the girls back home. And with that, Tommy thought his life was finally starting to settle down into some normalcy and him and his father could finally rest.

More weeks and months passed by and while Tommy was doing his daily stroll through the town, he saw a group of people working together outside the cathedral. As always, he asked what they were doing. "Why, we're building the pyre for the ceremony of course, it's a sight to see when it's all light up," replied one of the workers. They told Tommy that it was a yearly ceremony that they do and everyone brings their meat and sits around the fire to celebrate the end of the year. Tommy was instantly filled with joy, for he loved big gatherings. He ran to ask his friends if they were going, to which they all said they would be. When his father arrived home from work, Tommy set down a bowl of poorly made soup he had cooked for his father. "Did you hear about the great ceremony, it's sure to be an exciting event?" said Tommy. "Yes, it is sure to be," replied Mr. Hill. Over the last few months, he had seen life come back into his father. Perhaps it was the work and the sense of belonging that they had found in the town. Regardless, Tommy was overjoyed to see his father's beard swinging in the wind once more. The morning of the ceremony, his

father trailed off to work, leaving Tommy nothing to do until the night. All of his friends were occupied with chores or helping their parents set up for the ceremony. To pass his time, Tommy decided to walk through the town again and he ran into Mary, who made him feel all flustered. They talked only briefly, for she was helping her mother cook some dishes for later that night, but Tommy and Mary decided to meet in Tommy's room at the inn before the ceremony to share some of the food her mother had prepared for her.

Tommy was laying on his cot when he heard the knock and he jumped up with excitement, but tried to calm himself before he opened the door. Mary walked in, wearing a dress Tommy had never seen before with a small bow in her hair. She was holding a small cloth that contained the delicious meal her mother had prepared. Tommy missed his mother's cooking and that first bite took him back to when they were all together. They sat, and ate, and laughed as the sun went down. Mr. Hill was later than usual coming back from work today, he had to do extra work to prepare for the ceremony as everyone else did. On his walk back to the inn, he saw the residents setting up tables and cloths to lay down on next to the great structure that was to be set ablaze. He was tired from his long day at work, but he was still excited to spend time with his son at the ceremony, knowing how much they both needed to feel like a part of something. And with that, he mustered up extra energy and was excited to see his son and walk to the ceremony together. He trudged up the stairs and walked into their room and stopped in his steps. He ran in quickly and shut the door. He saw his son standing over a young girl. Tommy turned and looked at him, but he could not see his son anymore. He ran over to Tommy and grabbed the blunt blade from his hand and stuffed it into his bag. He shook Tommy as if trying to wake him up from a nightmare. "Pack your things," said Mr. Hill once Tommy woke up. Tommy was confused and tried to resist but his father raised his voice and Tommy complied. They hastily packed their things and were walking out the door, when Tommy looked behind him and saw a little, red bow on the floor and he thought Mary must have left it there. Tommy and his father walked out the back of the inn and headed towards the stables. Mr. Hill got the horses and the carriage and they were quickly on their way. The fire behind them lit up and the smell of roasting meat entered their noses. Under the cover of the shadow made by the fire, they rode and rode until all they saw were those flat plains.

DREAMER'S PARADOX

ALEX POPP

At any given moment, I can be found dreaming
Unable to stop, (un)consciously dreaming

My soul knows nothing of borders
I walk between worlds ceaselessly dreaming

One half chained to the world of flesh
The other half floating, masterfully dreaming

My heart longs for the other world
Where I'm free and lavishly dreaming

But this heart is bound to this world
Searching, yearning, desperately dreaming

Torn between worlds, starved of the time
To spend jealously dreaming

Until my name loses meaning
And I lose myself endlessly dreaming

DEAD END

ALYSSA PORCERELLI

Draped in shades of gray and red,
she slips beside him in the king-size bed.
Her makeup a mess, no less than her head
smears her face like the words he had said.

She slips beside him in the king-size bed,
leaking the feeling this love may be dead. It
smears her face like the words he had said,
the blood he had bled, the lies he had fed.

Leaking the feeling this love may be dead,
she takes the blame and stays instead.
The blood he had bled, the lies he had fed
rip her apart, hanging on by a thread.

She takes the blame and stays instead –
something over nothing, alive over dead.
“Rip her apart, hanging on by a thread”:
instructions for love from a book he had read.

Something over nothing, alive over dead
is what she pictures in her fragile head.
Instructions for love from a book he had read
tell him that this is the path to be led.

What she pictures in her fragile head
is a love that cleans all that she's bled.
Tell him this isn't the path to be led –
it's simply no use; this love's a dead end.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

HANNAH CUNNINGHAM

Hannah is a junior at Detroit Mercy, studying English with a creative writing concentration. Her favorite creative outlet is writing poetry, but lately she has been trying to improve with writing short stories.

CARIEL GAMLIN

Cariel Gamlin (They/ She) is a History student born and raised in Detroit, MI. After graduating from Wylie E. Groves High School, Cariel came into the school as a nurse but transferred into History, English, and a minor in Museum Studies. Cariel Gamlin's writing connects anthropological research, History, and surrealism into their writing to blend creativity with social science research. This is paired with a rich dialogue about blackness and queerness.

ALDO TRICOLI

A cybersecurity major in his second semester, Aldo Tricoli is always up for finding many unique ways to bring all his interests together. Having graduated from Romeo High School last year to become a recent alumnus of the Romeo Bands and FRC team 3539, the Byting Bulldogs, he brings a less traditional background as a programmer and clarinetist. Combined with his interest in learning different languages, such as Spanish, he weaves his many perspectives together to think outside the box and push toward new heights in his writing, career, and life. All the while, you'll often see him playing at our Sunday student masses, playing in our pep band, and competing in cybersecurity competitions with the Cyber Club.

OLIVIA VITALE

Olivia Vitale is a Biochemistry major and a Literature minor. She is currently studying for the MCAT and plans to attend medical school to become a physician. While Olivia is interested in medicine and science, she has also taken a liking to writing. Her interest in writing stems from her love of literature. Olivia will read anything and enjoy it, whether it's a novel, a cereal box, or a post that her mom sent her from Facebook. Writing is something that is fairly new to Olivia, but her experience reading has provided her with a lot of inspiration for pieces.

KRISTIN MURPHY

Kristin Murphy is a senior who majors in psychology and minors in English. She enjoys storytelling and creative writing.

JAMES HUFFMAN

A Senior at the University of Detroit Mercy, James is currently double majoring in Philosophy and Political Science with a Pre-Law Certificate.

ERIN LETOURNEAU

Erin Letourneau is concluding her junior year at the University of Detroit Mercy as an English Literature major, with a double minor in Political Science and Womens and Gender Studies, along with a certificate in Legal Studies. Since studying at Detroit Mercy Erin has maintained numerous leadership positions in academic and student-driven organizations. She enjoys writing in her freetime, as well as working on typesetting and graphic design. Erin is grateful for the community of people in the English Department and is driven by the professors and peers that continue to push her academic and creative abilities.

KAVIN PATEL

Kavin Patel is finishing his senior year at the University of Detroit Mercy majoring in Biology with a minor in Creative Writing. He plans to attend Texas A&M University School of Dentistry this coming Fall. Short stories are Kavin's favorite genre of creative writing because, it provides the most immersive experience for the author while writing it and for the reader. Kavin hopes you all enjoy his short story!

ALYSSA PORCERELLI

Aly Porcerelli (she/her) is a graduating senior at the University of Detroit Mercy with a business major and creative writing minor. Her work in poetry has gathered several publications and awards, notably with one of her poems placing in the 2022 Dudley Randall Poetry Prize. Aly is both an avid writer and musician and hopes to use her creative interests to resonate with an audience, writing about important topics that are not often talked about, namely mental health and mental illness.

WILLIAM ACEVEDO

Raised in a Linguistic Family, William Acevedo grew up between borders on languages, cultures, and ideas. Influenced by French, Spanish, and English literature, William has set out to express consciousness, the interconnectedness of life, and the 21st Century. From Farming, Research in Engineering, craftsmanship in Entrepreneurship, a taste for culinary arts in his grandmother's Bakery, a passion for Opera, an interest in cycling, and a strategic mind for gaming, William hopes to inspire others in the arts of self-expression.

ALEX POPP

Alex Popp is majoring in English with a focus on creative writing and is considering a minor in journalism. He grew up reading myths and folklore from around the world and this fascination with storytelling has stuck with him to this day. Alex enjoys TTRPGs, late night walks, and digging into the occult

RONAN MANSILLA

Ronan Mansilla is an English/Computer Science double major, and will also be receiving a Japanese language certificate at the conclusion of the winter 2023 semester. In essence, Ronan has a passion for languages. He enjoys writing, programming, reading, and watching the latest Masterpiece Theater shows. His two dogs also enjoy watching Masterpiece theater with him, though they have yet to take up any of his other hobbies.

JACOB YASSO

Jacob Yasso is completing his junior year at Detroit Mercy studying Political Science, on the pre-law track. He also is a member of the Honors Program

of my productivity

Cringe

ser mea facundia

Life

range into east

Fac quod amas

Do what you are most passionate

Chi sei Chi via essere
who are who you choose to be

당신이 누구인지
당신이 되고 싶은 사람

