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Journal of literary and visual arts

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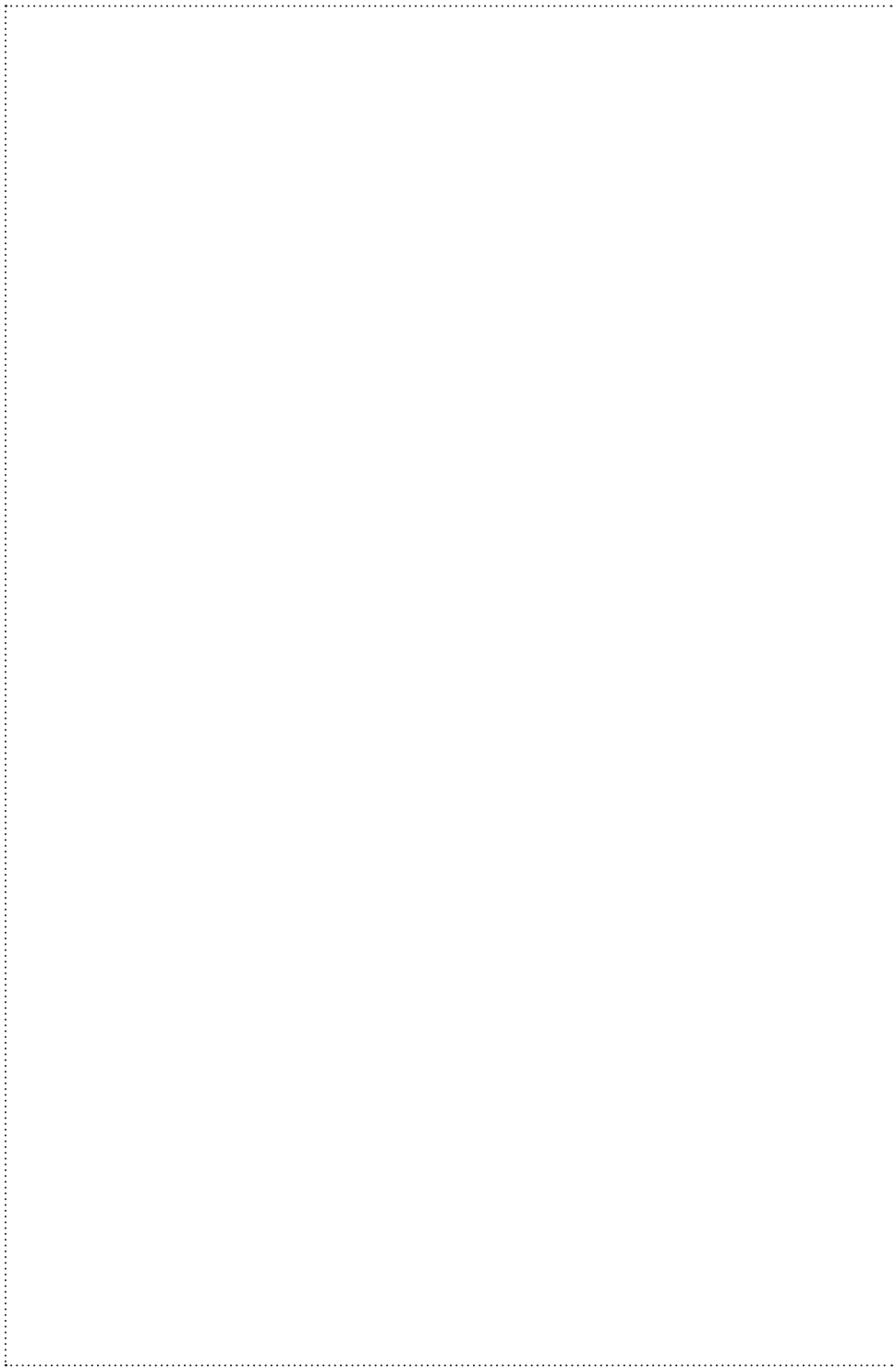
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pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction



pt 3. Poetry



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pt 5. Literary Criticism



A Train Away

by Mackenzie Soto

“I don’t wanna go,” Oliver said, through a voice strained by tears, just one of many similar sounding objections Stella heard from a hundred other children around her.

“It’s just for a little while,” their mother tried to assure him, and herself it would also seem, judging by the slight quiver in her voice. “The train will come get the rest of us later.”

Again, similar echoes from the other mothers and fathers around them, all preparing to let their children go a thousand miles away from their home, their families, to a place that was as foreign as a storybook land to ask strangers for help in a situation they knew nothing about.

“Why can’t you and daddy come too?” Oliver asked. Stella only half listened, she had heard this part before and she didn’t want to hear it again.

“They want to get the children and sick to safety first, but then they’ll come back and get us. In the meantime, you’re going to stay with good people, and your big sister is going to be with you.”

Stella nodded. Trying to keep it together as much as a ten-year-old could. It must not have worked as well as she hoped, because her parents pulled them both into a comforting hug. They held on tighter and longer than any of their past hugs, as if they all thought they could will away the separation. But the train still gave the warning whistle, telling everyone in the station it was time to let go. Their hug broke. Their father said, in a near broken voice, they needed to get on or the train would leave without them. With that, they half-heartedly scurried to the machine.

The structure loomed over Stella, like a giant snake of iron and steel ready to swallow her and Oliver, and slither away with them in its belly. When they got to one of the entrances, a couple of conductors punched holes in the children’s tickets. They helped Oliver and Stella aboard with their cases. When the two were inside, they rushed to the window where a hoard of other children had gathered to wave goodbye to their parents. Stella pushed through the swarm, holding her brother close.

They finally got to the window and Stella propped up Oliver so he could look out and wave goodbye. They waved, and kept waving, even as the train pulled away from the station, even when their parents were out of view. An attempt to hold on to familiarity as long as it would allow, but the train kept going, and the further it went the more of its passengers dispersed from the windows on either side of the car. Stella and Oliver were two of

the last, Stella letting her brother wave goodbye to a world that was disappearing behind them.

“Come on, Ollie,” she said. “Time to find our seats.”

The two reluctantly pried themselves from the window, grabbed their suitcases, and started looking for open seats next to each other. The two were bumped and jostled by other kids rushing to find seats with friends or family. There were some kids who put their bags in the seat next to them, keeping others from trying to sit there. It was working, until the conductors came to tell them to move the bags. Stella was so surrounded by the chatter and sobs, she almost didn’t notice her name being called.

“Stella!” the voice called again. She turned and saw her friend Pat wave to her from a group of seats on one side of the cabin. The minute Stella saw him, she ran up, pulling Oliver along with her, and the two hugged each other tightly: something familiar they both could hold onto.

“Do you know what’s happening?” Stella asked, when their hug broke.

“I don’t know,” Pat said, with a look on his face that made him seem guilty that he didn’t have an answer. “All my parents said was that we needed to leave the city.”

“So did mine.”

Pat suggested they sit, saying it was going to be a long ride. The seats faced each other on either side. On one side sat two other kids Stella went to school with, and would often ride down to the candy shop or the park with in the afternoons: one freckled faced boy named Wil Lewis, and a girl with short black hair called Billie Good. Pat seated himself next to them while Stella and Oliver sat across from the trio. She gave them each a greeting before she asked them the same question she had asked Pat. But they gave the same answer.

Stella began to wonder if the adults even knew anything about what was happening back in the city. From the time she was able to understand words she was told to find an adult if she had a problem. That they would know what to do. But if they didn’t even know what was happening, how could they know how to fix it? This wasn’t as simple as a scrape on the playground. If it was, Stella and her brother would be at home now and not being sent a thousand miles away just to be safe.

The four fifth graders talked on this until they saw it was upsetting Oliver, and decided it was best to change the subject. Instead, they talked about where they were going from there.

"It's not like the City," Billie said. "Once we get out of no man's land it's mostly country."

"At least we'll have a lot of room to play," Pat included with some forced optimism. Stella saw this interested Oliver a bit. Back home, apart from their trips to the park, Ollie usually only had the sidewalk to play on.

"Country is just another word for nothing," Wil said, "just a bunch of dirt and mud. Their market is probably just two shops and a stable. I bet they don't even have phones."

Oliver looked like he was getting upset again, so Stella opened her mouth to object to Wil's assumptions when a loud thud interrupted her. All five children turned to face the sudden noise and saw a little girl with a bob of blond curls framing her face. She looked barely older than Oliver, and he was only four. Beside her was a leather suitcase, which Stella assumed made the thud. The little girl took a moment to gaze at their section on the train.

"This will do," she said, before walking in with her case and planting herself in the seat right next to Oliver. Stella and her friends exchanged a puzzled glance.

"Hi," Stella greeted, though the way she said it seemed more like a question.

"Hello," their visitor replied.

"Wh-Who are you?"

"Oh, silly me. Elizabeth Aldrich," she said, holding out her hand for Stella to shake, "but, I prefer Betty." Stella, almost hesitantly, took Betty's hand.

"How long were you standing there?"

"I just got here. I was in first class before I switched cars."

"Why would you leave first class to come here?" Wil asked, bewildered.

"Well," Betty began, "I wouldn't have minded until I saw who I was seated with. Do you know who I was seated with?"

"Who?" Stella asked, confused if Betty actually expected them to know or not.

"With Alice Michaelis and Paul Lancaster. It's horrendous enough I have to go to school with them, and then I had to be seated an arm's length away. But, when I found out this train ride was

nearly four hours long... well, I refused to sit with those little parrots."

Stella was taken aback by Betty's way of speaking. Judging by the looks on her friends' faces, it seemed that they agreed. Stella had heard Oliver talk to his friends and he did not sound like Betty, and that certainly was not how she had conversations with Pat. Betty sounded more like their mother when she was gossiping with her friends.

"Especially not with Paul," Betty continued. "He's the worst. You all should have seen him crying in his seat. Acting like a scared kitten."

"You weren't?" Oliver asked. Betty responded with a shrug before she reached into a purse that hung across her chest and pulled out a brown paper bag.

"Candy?" she offered, changing the subject completely from her previous rant. "Go ahead, I have plenty."

Wil was the first to accept her offer. One after the other, the children took pieces from the bag. It was the kind that Mr. Leroy would never have put in the penny candy bin, the kind wrapped in shiny foil that someone might feel bad about unwrapping because it was so pretty. They each kept taking pieces periodically over the rest of the day. They talked about what they were leaving behind and theories about where the train was taking them, Betty often being the most talkative in their little group. It continued like this until night came and everyone fell asleep, leaving Stella alone with her thoughts.

While Betty's conversations had momentarily distracted her from her sadness, it still made her wonder how she was so relaxed. How was she able to treat this evacuation, this separation from her family, like a trip to the market? Stella was certainly scared. Her whole life their parents had looked after her and Oliver, now she had to look after him at a time when she still needed looking after. Father had said before they left that once they were settled into the new house, it would feel like home. Stella knew this was just a lie. It didn't matter how warm the house was, how good the food tasted, or even how friendly the people might be. It would never be home. ●

.....
*They held on tighter and longer
than any of their past hugs,
as if they all thought they could
will away the separation.*
.....



The King

by Andrea Ferrara

Every day the sun rises, and every day the king reaches into the sky and eats it. He does so at noon, when it's at its highest and brightest, and can offer him the most strength. He will live forever.

This, of course, is devastating for his kingdom. The farmer's crops grow poorly and his livestock starve. The artisan has no time or light for beautiful crafts. Merchants and shoppers must economize their time. The loss of daylight on unsuspecting citizens proves dangerous. Murderers and thieves have much shadow to work within.

The ones who suffer the most, however, are undoubtedly the children. The king has taken away their days of play outside in the sun. With so much work to be done and so much less time to do it, the kids need to spend their time at work with their parents, or else all of society would cease. What responsibility to place on such young shoulders and minds.

The only happy times were the parties held on the night of the full moon. There was music and dancing, and a small feast to which everyone contributed what they could. When the fire died down, the food was gone, and the moon had just begun its descent, the people spoke. They shared dreams of what life could be like with a full day to match their full night. On one such occasion, the subject of conversation turned towards the king.

"He has stolen our sun for as long as I've been alive!" The angry discussion began with these words, spoken by an old potter. "Something must be done."

"But what can we do?" A young mother takes up the issue. "How can one of us be expected to fight against the king? He is stronger than all of us, he's been eating the sun for years!"

After a long pause during which the citizens contemplated the hopelessness of their lives, a child spoke up. "We may not ever find someone as strong as the king, but we can certainly be smarter. What if instead of fighting the king, one could sneak up on him, and assassinate him?"

This was collectively deemed a wonderful idea, and drinks and food were called for and spread all around to celebrate the genius young mind.

"But who will go?" The small impromptu celebration done, a farmer had taken up the confer-

ence once again. "We cannot abandon our work. My livestock cannot spare me to kill the king." Murmurs of agreement spread throughout the crowd. Success would benefit all, but none could afford the sacrifice of losing two weeks or more to travel to the palace and back.

"What about a child?" suggested an older boy. The posse surrounding him indicated that he spoke

to show off as much as to present anything helpful.

The adults took a moment to think. While the family of the child would hurt some with lack of that extra hand, it would not be as devastating as the loss of an adult, especially in the right trade. They began

nodding, confirming amongst themselves the possibility of this course of action.

"I will go," said a girl, the same one who had presented the idea of outsmarting the king earlier. She was on the smaller side, even for a girl her age, and very smart. She would easily be able to slip into the castle unnoticed, and would likely be able to think herself out of any problems that could arise.

"No, it should be a boy," said someone, for no real reason. This sentiment was immediately accepted, of course, as are many that are equally stupid and of no value.

"My boy will do," the blacksmith declared.

The boy in question stepped up beside his father. He reached almost the same height and had the same strong and stocky build from working with his father in the forge and beating metal into its place. He was not the sneaky, intelligent candidate the original planners had had in mind, but he was impressive. The decision was made.

The boy left at dawn. It would take him about a week to reach the king's palace. He walked in the morning, until the hottest part of the day. Then the king would eat the sun and the world would be plunged into absolute darkness. This was a dangerous time, and the boy would be prepared for it with a small camp. He slept until night and woke with the moon to resume his journey.

When the boy finally reached the palace, he stopped in the diminishing shade of the grand building and took a moment to revel in the glory that he would surely return to. The people would love him. They would hail him as a hero. He would never have to work a day again, while everyone else slaved away for double the time they did now. And

"He has stolen our sun for as long as I've been alive!" The angry discussion began with these words, spoken by an old potter.



they would thank him for it! He allowed his daydream to progress further still. After recognizing his heroic deeds and his obvious strength and superiority, they would probably make him their leader. He would kill the king! It was only right for him to replace the king's sort of authority with his own.

"Hey! Who's there?" The guards had noticed him while he was lost in thought. His stealth mission was already finished.

They brought him to see the king, who waved them aside as soon as they walked through the door to his sun room. It was almost noon, and he was getting ready to feast.

Only this time, something unexpected happened. The king reached up as he always did, and plucked the star from the sky – but it was snatched from his hand before he could devour it.

The village boy stood in front of him, for just a moment he seemed as shocked as the king. Then he put the sun in his mouth and ran. The guards, who had been too focused on the king to watch the boy closely, were now unable to pursue him in the darkness. The king's fury raged; he could already

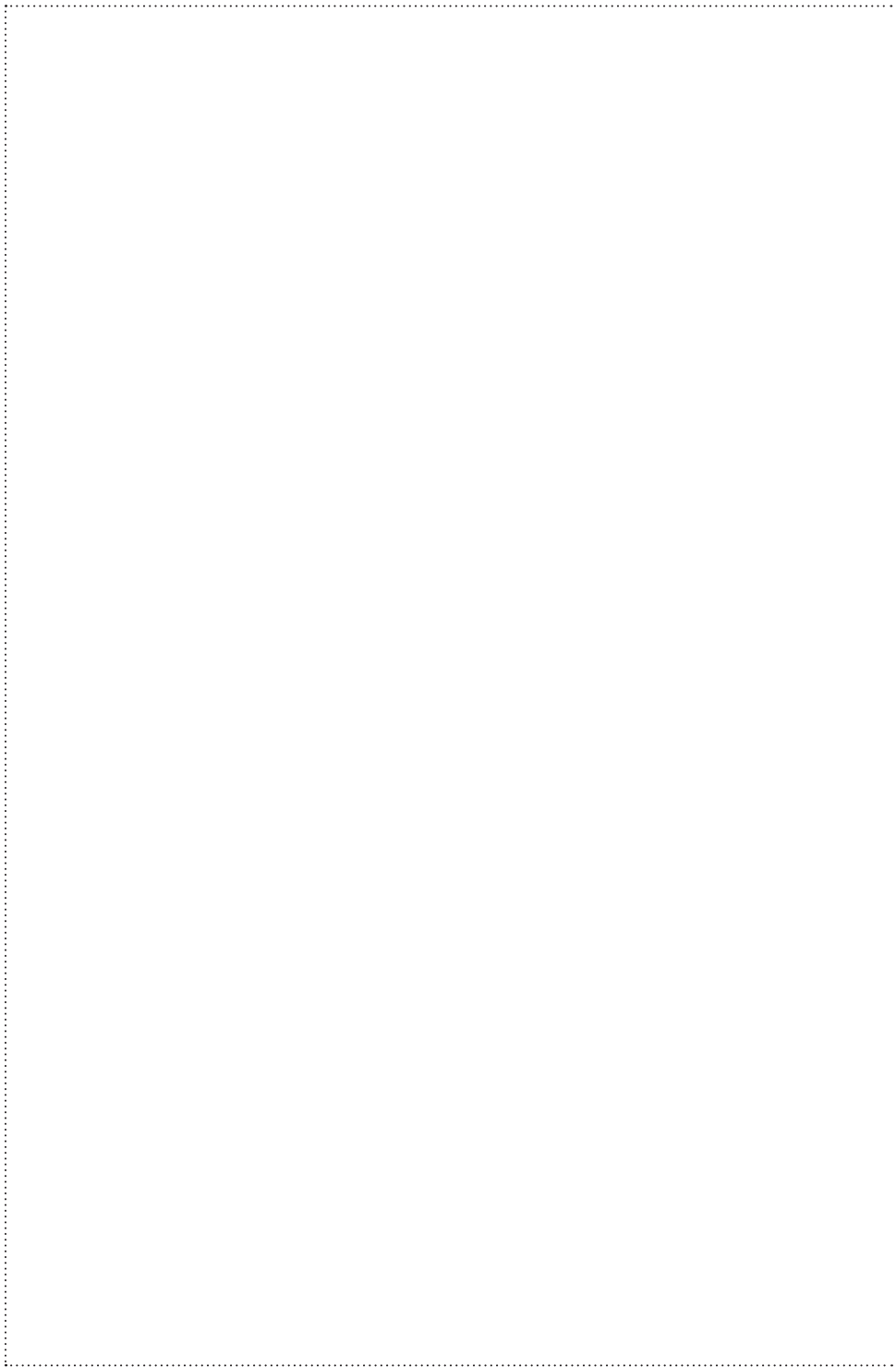
feel the strength fading from his aging body.

The next day, the boy was caught again, and brought to the king at the brightest part of the day. Again, the boy stole the sun, ate it, and escaped. Again and again these events took place, until the king was too weak to even try to stop the boy. The years that he had cheated death with the strength of the sun caught up to him, and he died. The boy, now bigger and stronger than he had been when he left his home, remained at the palace.

His mission was complete: the king was dead, but the boy wanted more. As the new king, he determined that it was his right to eat the sun, as it was the right of the king before him. And who could argue with that?

Years passed, and the king became the strongest man to have ever ruled the land. He thought no more of his family and the hardships of those in the village that had long since been his home. Many of them had probably died by that time.

One day, long, long after the new king had begun his rule, a boy was brought to the palace. He had come to kill the king. ●



pt 1. Short Fiction



pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction



pt 3. Poetry



pt 4. Visual Art



pt 5. Literary Criticism



Joining a Lakeside Tradition

by Ayah Lehtonen

I remember lazy, sun-filled days by the water. At the time, they seemed they could go on forever, ever departing and returning. I was ten when Odell, my friend from school, invited me and my mom to come with her on her yearly trip to the Adirondacks with her grandparents, Nancy and Jay, and her young, exuberant puggle, Adzuki. Odell is energetic, kind, and slightly eccentric. She loves strange old movies that make no sense and too much sense in the most horribly wonderful ways. She likes to alter and make her own clothes, so they are completely unique, and loves the outdoors.

We took two cars, Odell joining my mom and I so she could lead us the right way if we lost Nancy and Jay. It was a long, fun ride. We talked, played car games like Mad Libs and Abracadabra, and then simply sat together, watching the trees flash by. There's something very soothing about sitting quietly with people you trust. Eventually, we entered the mountains.

After driving for hours we turned onto a tiny, gated, dirt road. Towards the end of the road was the cabin. It was half building and half trailer, with bunk beds at one end of the trailer, a larger mattress at the other, and a tiny kitchen in the middle. In order to pass someone going the other direction in the connecting walkway, you both had to sidle. The building half was meant to be part living room and part storage space, but for my mom to have somewhere to sleep, most of the floor was taken up by a blow-up mattress. It was cramped.

If I woke up before everyone else, I had three choices. I could read quietly, tiptoe my way outside, or poke Odell awake to talk in whispers; this third choice almost inevitably led to the gradually increasing volume of excited children until we woke everyone up. Jay, who liked his sleep, could be a bit gruff when this happened, but he forgave us quickly; Nancy and mom were most often awake, if not necessarily out of bed, beforehand anyways. When everyone was up, it was a kind of dance to do our morning routines, weaving around each other after toothbrushes, food, shoes, and access to the single private place to change and do your business: an outhouse at the end of a root-laden trail.

Claustrophobic as it could be, there was something about the cramped quarters that made the trip magical. We learned to work with each other,

and appreciate the company in spite of annoyances. This was especially true on rainy days when we had to look to each other for entertainment, often coming in the form of stories. Although if it had poured all ten days we would have gone a little crazy. Fortunately, most days the sun shone through.

Whenever the weather was fair, the small space pushed us to explore outside of our home base.

The Adirondacks are filled with lakes, and we took full advantage. Each day we'd hit a new one.

First, I came to know the little pond within walking distance. Odell and I would make our way down the curvy dirt road, passing several humble cabins like our own. The trees hemming us in opened up onto water reflecting the sky. Reeds surrounded

the pond, and rocks reached out from the shore, perfect for climbing or fishing. If we tried to swim though, we'd get an unpleasant surprise. Two-foot deep mud left me in dire need of a hard-to-get shower. The closest public shower was a fifteen minute drive away.

Instead of going to all that trouble every time we wanted a fairly gross swim, we went farther afield. The Adirondacks are filled with lakes, and we took full advantage. Each day we'd hit a new one. Long Lake was the place to go to watch sea planes take off and land while playing at an epic dock. It had three rope swings, a slide, and a trampoline. Odell and I would dare each other toward ever greater stunts: taking running jumps in tandem from the rope swing; going down backward, or on our bellies on the slide, belly-flopping, diving, and flipping from the trampoline. It was unrestrained, joyful play.

At night, Odell and I would sit together on the bottom bunk, talking and laughing. We would play games, everything from chopsticks and tic-tac-toe to playing clairvoyants by attempting to guess what color the other was thinking of. We'd reminisce on the school year that had passed and make plans for what new adventures to go on the next day, her filling me in on all that I could look forward to.

There was no lack of new places and events. We went to Lake Harris for the Fourth of July barbeque, a tradition Odell and her grandparents attended each year they could. We ate comfort food on scattered picnic tables by a huge, shining lake. It had the clearest waters. While standing up to my shoulders in them, I could easily see the sand and pebbles on the bottom. We went to a few smaller

ponds where Adzuki could run free, jumping in and out of the water's edge. And we went to Lake Minerva, which holds a special place in my heart.

Minerva seems a small lake, just larger than a pond, but a peninsula of trees slicing it down the middle hides its greater size. It is edged by deep green trees with a small island in the center that water birds like to stop at and it has a wide, sandy beach leading into a swimming area with a dock far enough out to practice diving. There's a private spot on the far side of the peninsula, invisible from the beach, with a rope swing and inner tubes, perfect for a little adventure with friends. And if you kayak out to the left, there's a shallow area with water flowers, frogs, and fish swimming just below the surface.

One day, I stayed there still for nearly half an

hour, watching quietly, and a great blue heron flew down to land by the shore. He fished for minnows, head darting in and out of the water, before coming upon a greater prize. One snatch and he had the biggest bullfrog I've ever seen, longer than my hand, clamped in his beak. He carried it away content, hopping off between the trees.

I felt that I was being let in on a precious secret, with each new place and each experience. Odell had been exploring, swimming, and playing in these mountains every summer since she was a tiny girl, and they were important to her. It seemed she knew each location and what the best things there were inside and out, and I was honored to be shown and welcomed. Her love and the inherent natural beauty made the Adirondacks important to me too. ●

Death

by Alison Drozd

I first met Death when I was three, bemoaning being stuck at the wake of my Grandmother. Before these moments, Death was always as seen on TV, cartoons usually. Silly. Fake. Falling in drama on the floor, a pirouette to rival Baryshnikov. Knowing all the while they would be back to their usual hijinks by the next round of Saturday morning cartoons. Death was now overdone make-up in a room filled to spilling with perfume and tears, hugs I didn't want from people I didn't know. The one I wanted a hug from frozen, arms crossed, rosary beads laid out in her hands.

I first met Death on my tenth birthday, best friend late to the party. Her father's heart had attacked him. How does a heart attack a person? Up until then hearts were merely things I dotted my I's with, not things that stole the father of my bestie.

I first met Death on the highway. Crushed and twisted steel, rubber and plastic strewn about. Screams I could barely register, but blood I could see everywhere. The heaviness in the air alerted me to its presence, as if I didn't already know. Cars smoking. Death had already taken the man, I couldn't let it take her too.

I first met Death the day my son was born. Prematurity not his biggest trial. Tiny and black, tangled in his own lifeblood. Pain magically gone, watching them breath life back into him. Tiny and black, slowly becomes tiny and pink. Was it fast enough to stave off

damage, only time will tell. Death moves on.

I first met Death a year before the towers fell. Favorite uncle. Hours in the waiting room. Surrounded by family, small child by my side. The longest shortest day ever. Puzzles were built, cards were played, tears filled a sea of tissues while his insides rotted and stole his life inch by inch. It was the last time I was surrounded by so many relations, all

wishing for the same thing, knowing it would never, could never, be.

I first met Death in Déjà vu. NYC, planes hit towers, crumbling them to the Earth. Pittsfield, a family crumbles as second favorite uncle rises to meet those lost, a special guide,

hand-picked by God.

I first met Death trying to create new life. Two babies lost their other halves, seven others never given a chance. Death playing games I never asked to be part of. Russian Roulette within my womb.

I first met Death laying in a bed down a cold hallway. Life filled the room the day before, a birthday celebrated with five generations. Last breaths coming moments before we entered. Air heavy from the first swish of the double doors. Bells ring and buzz, throwing us out of the room. Uselessness wraps us up as we stand by watching it all unfold. Eyes glance out at us from open doorways, knowing looks pelt us. Death is waiting for the wrinkled residents inside; their turns are coming all too soon. ●

*I first met Death trying to create
new life. Two babies lost their
other halves, seven others
never given a chance.*



Sleeping Alone in Someone Else's Bed

by Grace Kelley

Someone else's bed is more comfortable than my own. I like the feel of their sheets more, their blankets smell more familiar to me, even just the stuffed animals they have are more comfortable than mine. I sleep more soundly and have better dreams. My impression is more often imprinted in the mattress. I've spent hours sleeping in someone else's bed, when she wasn't there, and I'd like to take this as a sign that I'm properly in love.

I could just be being foolish, it may be just love's teenage dream that I'm talking about, I'm too young to really know what love is, but maybe this fits the packaged definition. The idea of spending the rest of my life with someone terrifies me, but the idea of leaving someone that I've spent so much of my time with terrifies me as well. I've grown with her, I've grown to love her. I wouldn't be the same without her, and she wouldn't be the same without me. She's told me that countless times, intermixed with the little sighs of "I love you" we share whenever either of us are feeling particularly sentimental or if we have nothing else to say.

The words "I love you" no longer just mean "I love you." They mean so much more. Those three words mean I'm proud of you, you've come so far, I need you, what am I going to do without you? The phrase comes with so much baggage, it comes with history, it comes with such a force behind it that even though I hear it almost every day, often hundreds of times, I still get hit with the deepest feelings and a wave of happiness whenever I even think of her saying the phrase. Sometimes I want to scream them at the top of my lungs for the entire universe to hear. Other times it feels so deeply intimate that I never want anyone else to hear. It is those times that I wish she could read my mind, so I don't even have to say what I want to out loud.

There is a lot of silence when we're together, but it isn't deafening. It's comfortable instead of awkward. We spend hours just sitting next to each other, both staring at our individual computer screens while *That '70s Show* plays in the background on the television. Occasionally we laugh, occasionally we stop to tell each other something we remember, but often we just sit in the comfortable silence. We just exist beside each other. We exist in each other's lives and that is fantastic.

It terrifies me that maybe one day I won't have her to exist with. Maybe one day I won't have a

person to go to. My tears have stained her pillows with mascara, not because of anything she has done, but because the force of life has gotten too strong too often and her bed was more comfortable to cry in. But there may be a time when she doesn't have such a hold on my heart. There may be a time when she doesn't have that pillow.

There was a time when I lived in her house, without properly saying that I lived there because there was way too much commitment in that. I'd go home every three days to do laundry, but sleeping in my own bed never felt the same. I was constantly finding excuses to return to the retreat of her bed even if it meant getting up hours earlier to get to work on time. It was nice to spend day in and day out there, spend time with her. Most of the time I was there, I'd spend it sleeping in her bed alone. She wakes a lot earlier than I do, goes to sleep later than I do, but always makes sure that she says goodbye to me if she has to leave for the day. I still long for those days, but we've both grown and now have much less time to sit around and exist beside each other.

Sleeping in her house is quiet, something I often crave having such a loud and busy life. When I sleep in her bed, her dog curls up between my legs. She doesn't mind my cold feet. Her bed is more familiar to me than the cold porch bedroom I have in my own house. It's warmer and I can sleep longer. She's told me before that sometimes she watches me when I sleep, but not in a creepy vampire way. She says I look peaceful, and I think that is because I'm sleeping in her bed, near her.

Her bed is a safe space to be in, away from the world, and I'm so happy that occasionally I can call it mine. It takes me no time at all to fall asleep lying there under the heavy blankets, holding my pink teddy bear. In my own bed, it might take hours. She doesn't even have to be there for me to feel safe. I've slept in her house, in her bed, with no one around, and yet I fell asleep almost instantly. It frightens me to sleep alone in the house I've lived in for nineteen years without triple checking that the door is locked and the basement is barricaded, but whenever I'm in her house, calmness washes over me.

Her bed has *always* been more comfortable than mine. Being around her has always been more comfortable than being alone. I don't know if that's what love truly is, I don't know *what* love truly is, but I think being able to sleep alone in someone else's bed is close enough. ●

Kindness Incarnate

by Robyn McCabe

I've read a ton about God and faith lately and it makes me think of you. It makes me think of pancakes.

Every time a single one of my feet stepped into your home, it would seem as though the stove was already on. No matter the time of the day or the reason I was there, you'd always ask me if I wanted pancakes. And me being a kid and all, I'd always say yes.

You called me Robina, and because of your Italian roots and large family I took to your name too; I remember prancing through your house and chanting it—"Ada Maria Casucci McCabe"—but I usually called you Nonna. There are still pictures hung on your wall where my aunt lives now of all of the family, many uncles, and aunts that I hadn't met yet when you recited their lives to me. I remembered their names too. You called me Dora sometimes, because I looked like her, but also because you knew it was my favorite show. I remember the day you taught me how to spell my name. It is immortalized on the side of the crayon box that still sits in your closet, and on later inspection, I realized I did my R's backward. You didn't care though. You were always proud of me and above that, you knew of my intelligence and knew I would improve. This was a silent, loving respect that I didn't understand the presence of until after you were gone.

I didn't understand that you were the nicest person I would probably ever meet. You, my father's mother, never had an evil bone in your body. You were walking, breathing kindness. I know that none of those bones existed because I know your children, and they have very few evil bones. And even if they did, it would be one of the smallest bones in their body, like those bones in your ear. You were strong and caring in a way that provided for everyone who needed it. Your shoulders—or your bones—held the weight of all of us with grace. I know such kindness and strength from you and my dad only, that's why I think maybe it has something to do with the bones.

I've never been religiously inclined and when I was ten and you died I made sure to come to your funeral. I never saw you being lowered because I went back to school: I didn't want to miss lunch. It was breakfast for lunch. I've never understood my disregard on that day and for years I hated myself

for it. I felt this way until recently, when I suddenly understood my urge to leave your funeral. I just wanted pancakes.

I've read a lot about God and faith lately because I am taking two literature classes and he seems to follow writers and give inspiration to their writing. I've loved reading for these classes and gathering insight on faith and why people have it. I've never

really understood people's faith until lately, to be brutally honest. I don't know if saying that would hurt your feelings. I don't think it would. I think you're why I understand it now.

Your love for God is something I usually disregarded because I wasn't

raised in a religious household and you weren't the type to push it. I cared when Christmastime came around and I got to play with your nativity scene that you'd set up on the table next to your chair. There were so many animals and the baby in the middle was my favorite part. I played with the figurines. You never kept me from the things I found interest in.

You never got mad. I attribute this to your ability to take bad news in stride. I never saw you sad either. I'm not sure the reason or how you did it, but in the face of adversity you held this strength that could be likened to a rock. This strength was unchanging, immovable and immense, a little like your bones. It made the foundation for our family because your ability to see positivity, support and uplift seemed infinite. I miss you.

There were so many times where I sat in front of your TV watching *Monsters, Inc.* eating a full plate of pancakes that you had just made me, crispy and buttery, while I could faintly hear in the kitchen that you were making more. You let me watch it every time I came over and you told me I looked like Boo because you knew she was my favorite character, and *Monsters, Inc.* was my favorite movie. This was what usually happened at your house for days on end. You always let me decide what we would do despite its likely deafening annoyance. You never seemed to care. You held this caring respect for my wishes and always wanted to make me happy. You didn't care what we did, because whatever I picked was what you really wanted to do.

You made the pancakes with me too, multiple times and ever since you have died, I have been trying to recreate the exact way that you made them. I think it's impossible. I just don't get why I

I'm not sure the reason or how you did it, but in the face of adversity you held this strength that could be likened to a rock.



can't make my bones move like yours. I've gotten pretty good at them though, and they almost comfort me the way yours did. Yours had a way of transporting me from this world to one that was a lot happier. I remember having this feeling when I was very young, I don't remember when. I wasn't here. I was with you.

The pancakes I make let me be with you again, just for a little bit. When they are all done, I can hand them to myself like you did and tell myself to enjoy it. My dad isn't really healthy, and he always tells me that he is a part of me and he always will be

long after he is gone. I try to think of you like that. The wholly kind bones in me are yours, I think. And you still comfort me with your presence, because you are truly here with me, I think.

I've been thinking about God and pancakes. My thoughts on the subjects tug on my heartstrings and I think they're you. Your kindness and respect comes back to me at times because I think it's inside me—maybe it's my bones—reminding me to stay calm, acknowledge my own kindness and strength, and experience life when I least expect it. When I need it the most. ●

Chicken Loaf

by *Kim Sawyer-Wheeler*

Let's talk about chicken loaf. You may ask, "What is chicken loaf?" Chicken loaf is meatloaf made with ground chicken instead of beef and/or pork. Sounds good right? Something different than the everyday, humdrum meatloaf, and it's a healthier version of the classic comfort food. Let's give it a try. What do we have to lose? The answer is, EVERYTHING! Do not try it! The people you serve it to will never ever let you live down the fact that you served them chicken loaf.

The plan was originally to make a white chili, which lead to the epic disaster meal. I wanted to try something new, and we had purchased one of the flavoring packets you buy at the grocery store—I know you know the packets I'm talking about. It was my day off and it was a beautiful day with the sun shining. I started to gather all of the ingredients that I thought we had to make the white chili and realized some were missing. What to do now? I don't want to run out to the grocery store across town. Flip the flavoring packet over and it gives you an alternative idea for a meal using the seasonings enclosed in the special little packet.

The alternative recipe was, you guessed it... chicken loaf. Cool. We have everything we need for me to make that: eggs, breadcrumbs, cheese, and most importantly...ground chicken. Everyone makes chicken loaf, right? I'm not reinventing the wheel; I'm making good old fashioned comfort food for my wife and me. I planned on including corn and baked potatoes with dinner as well. What more could you want from a meal? You could want actual meatloaf, and not chicken loaf.

Making sure dinner would be ready, I mixed everything together according to the directions and stared at the mixture in front of me. With some apprehension starting to creep in, I put the spicy

smelling mixture into a loaf pan and added a layer of cheese to the middle hoping to add some pizzazz to our chicken loaf. Before I could regret what I had just done, I threw it in the oven to bake. I'm not going to lie, it smelled good while it was in the oven.

Shell came home from work and dinner was made. She asked me what was in the pan and I told her chicken loaf. She gave me a very puzzled look since we were planning on white chili. With some convincing, Shell agreed to try it. I plated each meal and topped the chicken loaf with salsa, since it looked a little dry. You couldn't use a traditional ketchup-type sauce since it wasn't real meatloaf. I was improvising at this point.

With our plates before us, we sat down for our meal staring at this oddly dense, pale colored slice of "not meatloaf" with a gooey layer of cheese in the middle. Shell waited for me to try it first. She says I will eat anything. I bravely dug in and my first thought was that it was wicked dry, even with the salsa, and it was super spicy. It definitely was different from anything I've ever eaten or made before. It was a bit chewy, but the gooey cheese was delicious. I told Shell it was different, but good, and with more convincing she agreed to actually try it.

I waited patiently for her opinion of our meal. Her response was epic. "Are you trying to kill me?" I answered no, and we both laughed. It was the nastiest thing ever. Dinner was thrown out and we went out to grab something instead. To this day, albeit ten years later, if I mention a new recipe I want to try she reminds me of the chicken loaf debacle and how I tried to kill her, afraid that I might make something so horrid again. We live and learn and laugh about it all of the time. Trust me on this one...DON'T MAKE CHICKEN LOAF FOR YOUR FRIENDS OR FAMILY, if you truly care about them!!! Cheers. ●

Ingratitude: Served Fresh

by Madeline Zelazo

I circle around the floor, scouting for clear plates and empty glasses, hoping to assist anyone in need. Simultaneously, I welcome guests and direct them to the ostentatious booths which discharge a flashy red that never fails to evoke the customers' hunger. If I neglect to seat the customers within half a second, out of confusion (presumably), they ignore the sign that reads "HOSTESS will seat you" and take the initiative to sit wherever they please. Unknowingly, they obstruct the division of the tables among the waitresses, making it uneven. However, I completely understand how the firetruck-red capital letters could be overlooked. With my consciousness of the fact that reading is fundamental, I approach the self-seated tables with pity, feeling sympathetic for their lack of ability: reading. Similar to playing-cards, I pass menus out and around, which are deliberated over by the customers as they ponder up the most intricate questions known to man. Mind boggling questions such as "how many ounces is the prime rib," "can I substitute my potato and vegetable for a salad," and "what products do you have that are all natural, vegan, gluten free, organic, and non-GMO?" leave me speechless by the end of the night. Secretly, I do not know the actual answers to most of these questions, but my acting skills allow me to reply with a confident response which usually convinces the customers to push the inquiry aside. I'll admit, it takes practice. Sixteen questions and seven indecisive order changes later, and I finally have taken an order.

After I swiftly coast around the restaurant to check on my tables, I return to my cash register to reflect on the chaos. I yank at my apron to tie it tighter around my waist and pop my collared shirt to freshen my appearance. I notice multiple soup stains and butter grease splats that have absorbed into my work attire, making my professional appearance dwindle. As I glance around, I catch my reflection in the picture frames along the wall; I take note of my baggy eyes and slicked hair. My appearance reflects the look that I believe would come about from combining an exhausted mother of ten with the grungy image of a masculine incarcerated man who neglected to shower for all six years of his imprisonment. It's a wonder no one runs out the door for refuge upon meeting

eyes with me.

The regulars pour in, expecting to see me as they do every Friday night. The odor of the nose-blind elders floods in. It is a scent that mimics that of a burnt casserole and library books. I direct my face away from the suffocating smell, trying to extinguish my burning nose hairs. At last my buzzer vibrates, signaling that the kitchen is in need of

.....
*After I swiftly coast around the
restaurant to check on my tables,
I return to my cash register to
reflect on the chaos.*
.....



my assistance. Like the wind, I briskly make my way through the swinging doors to the prep-station. One by one the sizzling meals are set up onto the shiny silver cart, waiting to be served. I load my back-breaking tray with dishes and lift the scorch-

ing plates as they release a variety of searing heat that seems like it could easily burn the fingerprints off of a hand. My mind turns blank as I search for a memory of who ordered what. "Who ordered the baked haddock," I announce, as the customers look around confused, not remembering what they had ordered. You can imagine that it is always a joy to experience the early stages of dementia affecting my customers. Proudly, I stand, after correctly distributing the meals, waiting patiently for a "thank you" as a cue to leave, but it never arrives.

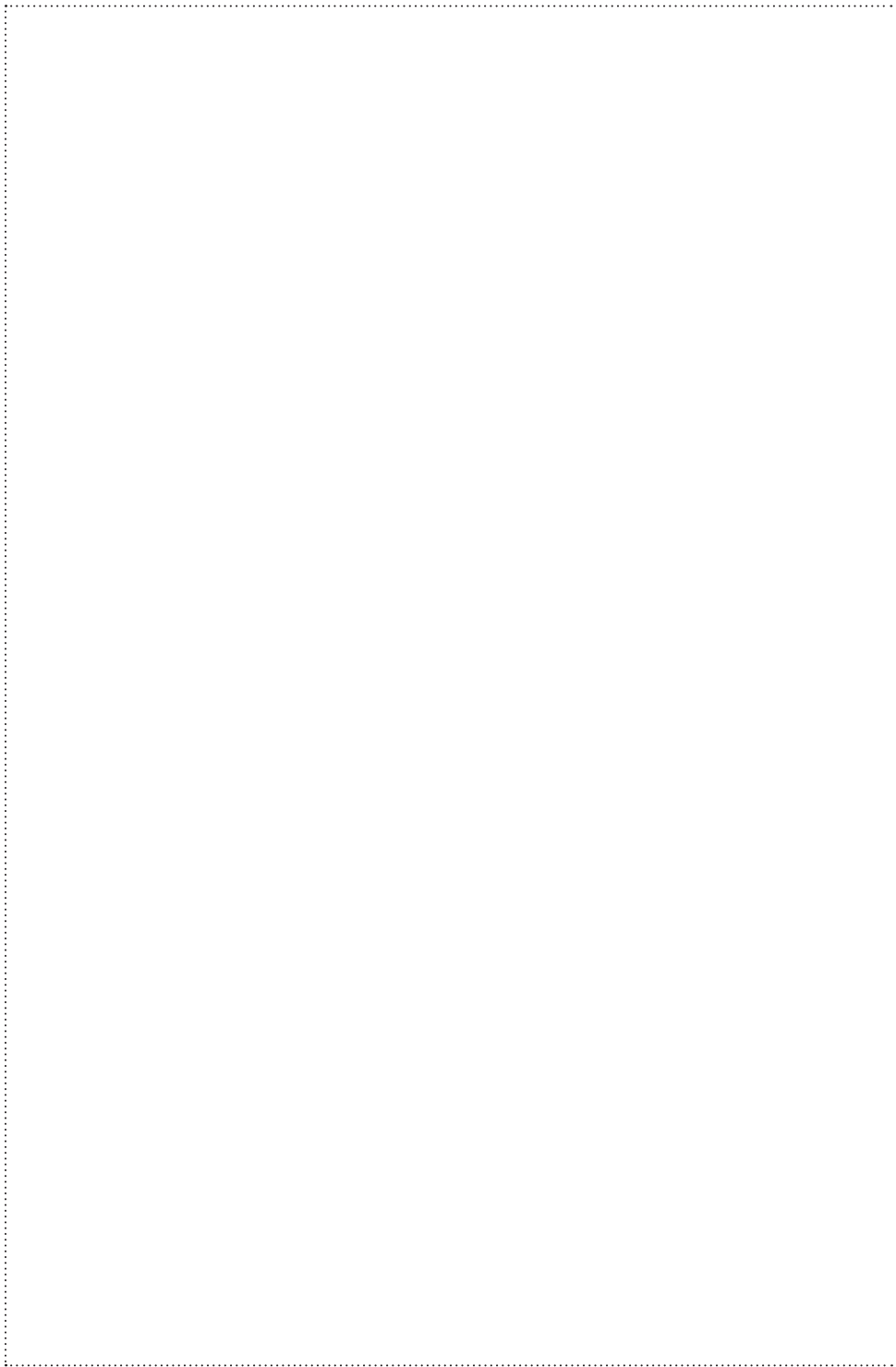
People, young and old, devour their meals. Some children dump salt into their chocolate milk to explore strange concoctions for entertainment; others blow straw wrappers across the table like paper airplanes that ultimately land on the floor, scattered about. On a good day, I will only have to replace a floor bound fork twice, maybe three times, before the parents confiscate the privilege from their kids. Pacing around the restaurant, I check tables, purposely waiting for the customers to fill their mouths so I can ask, "how is everything?" They chew rapidly to get out a muffled "good," or "can I have more coffee?" A grin slides across my face as I watch food fly beyond the table as they struggle to thrust the words out.

As I cater to the tables, I rush to refill drinks, answer the phone for to-go orders, and seat new customers and prepare to serve them. I check in on tables, praying that the complaints are minimal, although that's never the case. The critics grumble about the quality of the meal: "the pie tastes terrible," or "remind me not to get this next time." I send an awkward smile, assuring them that it must not have been too terrible if they had managed to

eat it all. The negativity of these comments make me feel that all my hard work of providing for these people was a failure. I quickly try to shake it off and continue my night. While continuing around the restaurant, I watch an old lady wipe her shirt in hopes of undoing the drip of sauce that has fallen onto her. I swiftly, and without request, deliver an extra stack of napkins. Unnoticed as usual, I proceed without a thank you for my close attention to detail.

Customers prepare to leave. I aid some of the elders with putting on their excessively puffy jackets so they can properly brace for the cold. At this time, I make last minute runs for to-go boxes and prepare my breadcrumb filled rag and tray so I can clear and clean tables in a zippy fashion. Every once in a while, I chase customers out the door

to return their forgotten belongings such as children's toys, women's purses, and men's sunglasses. However, sometimes it is too late and their things take shelter among the shelf of misplaced items. Tiredly, I glance up at the clock, hoping it is time to flip the signs to closed. My boss gives me a nod of the head: my signal to close everything up. I count my tips, distinguishing that the average percentage of customers do not understand the concept of twenty percent. Knowing the results of my earnings tonight, I factor the tips into my \$3.75-an-hour-paycheck, and shake my head in disbelief. I step out onto the stairs to exit the building, only to return at the crack of dawn for the morning shift. I walk with fatigue, grasping that my night has only begun, and the following hours will consist of piles of homework. ●



pt 1. Short Fiction



pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction



pt 3. Poetry



pt 4. Visual Art



pt 5. Literary Criticism



We Shall Be Dust

by Christian deManbey

Angels beat gold drums
I will strum the rose's thorns
Rain blood on this Earth

I shall sing along
Gentle like a lullaby
As the sun turns red

A blood red rose red
Rose petal clenched in my teeth
Scent of life in me

Down on the red Earth
We dance with the thorn bushes
Splash our feet in warmth

Pull you close to me
Your teeth rake the rose petal
Clenched in both our mouths

We dance so softly
That the petal never tears
The thorns never cut

Our feet take to air
Earth crumbling in blood below
The stars going out

From every corner
The thorns pull reality
Like peeling a fruit

It's starting over
All the stories forgotten
No history left

But who cares of that
The music is happy here
Sadness is nowhere

In gentle eyes joy
In a loving heart joy joy
In peace joy joy joy

Angels are crying
Because they can't move like us
As one and not two

Everything will end
What is born must always die
But we're more than birth

In our whispered words
In a touch a laugh a smile
In souls intertwined

Oh we shall be dust
Bringing you closer to me
We shall all be dust

But bodies are cheap
Ours unspooling like the world
So let them be dust

Tasting your sweet song
Lips on lips that turn to rose
The harmony lives

In the dawning void
As it all begins anew
It will sing our song

Whose

by Loretta Francoeur

Whose hands will cling to hope?

Whose body,
cloaked in white,
will reach beneath my bones?

I have come alone.
I have lost the race of time.

I have sat here for days
with nothing new to say.

I have longed for silence,
for its docile song.

The night without time is still just as long.

Whose ears will hear my heart,
singing its tic toc?

Whose eyes will know the time
by the shadows on my walls?

Whose soul will dance with mine
to the rhythm of my pulse?

Whose feet will meet beside mine
to stand the test of time?

Whose hands will cling to hope?

Whose body,
cloaked in white,
will reach beneath my bones?

Love Song

by Loretta Francoeur

I like the way the walls talk.

Maybe,
I have too many ears.

The walls, too many teeth to pull.

The silhouettes, too many eyes to shut.

Always a lingering spirit.
Always a frolicking God.

The sunlight tip-toes through my window,
waltzes 'round my walls.

Always a love song.
Always a love song.

Racamoni Cheese

by Alison Drozd

I'm ashamed to admit I didn't know you on the day you died,
that the fork in the road that separated our lives long ago
still loomed so large that all that was left between us was the
polite "Hello, how are you, how are the kids?"
required by society when we'd cross each other's paths.
Usually in Target, because you were banned from Walmart long ago.
I'm ashamed to say there were times I would duck into an aisle
I didn't need to be down, simply to avoid that exchange.
It didn't happen often. But even once is more than it ever should have.

I found out you were gone via text, a simple "read the obituaries" at 7am.
My eyes washed over your picture. Your name. Disbelief weighed me down.
41, too young to die, a cliché that had never rung truer for me than in that moment.
It was the first time that it registered you were two full years younger than myself.
I must have known, I think at least I should have been aware,
especially because in my first memory I was walking, but you could only crawl.
In that world of pure childhood we inhabited, it never mattered, it was never a thing.
It takes my breath away to know you are the only person I'm not related to
that existed as long as my memory itself did. Until you didn't.

I was thrust immediately into the past, the first years we were friends
those are a blur, a mix of sun, snow, chatting moms, and mac-n-cheese.
Or what you called, "racamoni cheese," once you were able to talk.
Forced upon each other as our moms drank coffee on the front steps
commiserating over how hard single motherhood was, our bond began.
Both of us the youngest kids, at least in our mother's worlds.
I'm not sure I realized you didn't belong to me, not really.
Yelling and laughing, ignoring the older siblings that didn't want us around.
Life in the project was loud and you were my quiet from day one.

We both made our way out of the project, me before you.
I was seven, so you were five, and my heart broke when I was told.
What would my life look like without us hiding in the giant tree planters,
so certain the bigger kids couldn't find us, giggles and all.
The scars on my knees still remind me of our Big Wheel races down the asphalt sidewalks
and when I graduated to two wheels, but refused to leave you in the dust.
You loved rhubarb and I loved the rush of climbing the fence
that separated the project from the rest of the world.
Looking back, I think the old lady that lived there planted it just for us to share with sugar on top.

From the project to a house, still government owned but this time I had a yard all my own.
50 houses, all alike, some shifted left, some shifted right.
Not a project per se, but the same in many ways.
They kept the secret from me, that your gram lived three houses down.
Imagine my surprise when you rang my new bell, "racamoni cheese?"
Without skipping a beat, hand in hand we took off, picking up exactly where we had left off.
In that moment I knew for certain you *did* belong to me.
You became my favorite guest in my houses made of leaves. Forts formed from lawn chairs and
blankets replaced the planters as we hid from the world, giggles and all.

The white spaces of childhood were filled with more memories than I can remember.
Your gram's was the first yard with a trampoline and a pool.
I lived for the weekends and school breaks when you spent more time there than home.
Halloween after Halloween we were hobo twins,
skipping off together to fill our pillowcases with sugary delights.
There was that one year we both loved NKOTB, Jordan for you, Joey for me.
You finally got out of the project into your own government half-a-house.
Sleepovers and hijacking your big brother's video games. Your little brother had come by then.
Your dad still lived in the project, we loved going back for "old times sake," because we had escaped.

Your gram was my favorite adult, second only to her boyfriend Jim.
How many times did we pile in the back of his old rusty black truck
and speed down Cheshire Road, butts on top the wheel-well, white knuckles holding on for dear life?
The wind mussing up our hair, or was that the exhaust? It didn't matter.
All that mattered was sitting there, the world exploding around us.
I can still hear your laugh as the truck jerks forward and I thud onto the metal bed,
I immediately make my way back up on my side of the wheel-well, no giving up.
It was in the back of that truck I learned the importance of holding on, falling and getting back up.
(and not falling into busy intersections...oh the freedom of being a child of the '80s).

All 50 houses have the same exact same tool sheds at the end of each driveway.
With baby oil in hand, we climbed the daunting eight feet of my shed and beckoned the sun
to kiss our skin golden as we lay on the slightly slanted asphalt roof.
On exceptionally brave days we would jump the two feet between the shed and the living-room.
We'd scale the steep peak of the vaulted roof, blindly falling to the other side, landing on
the flatter roof of the bathroom where the sun hung in the sky for hours each day.
It took both of us to make it back up to the peak, first you had to be stepped on,
and then you had to trust the other to pull you up, all before my mom got home from work.
The baby oil on our bodies always added just enough extra peril to make our hearts race.

Your gram got new neighbors, two girls just our ages. We allowed them into our slowly expanding world.
The woods behind Noelle's house, with the discarded couches and tires and traces of fires
replaced the lawn chair and blanket forts, as we hid away a little less hidden.
Without us even noticing, those days together numbered fewer and fewer.
Your aunt inspired me to join the Air Force, you took a different road.
We both became mothers, but no coffee on porches, no small children bonding at our feet.
I heard your name often, our paths crossed here and there, a smile exchange was all that was there.
Right before your second baby we tried to rekindle what once was,
but time is a fickle thing, and sometimes you just can't get back what you once owned.

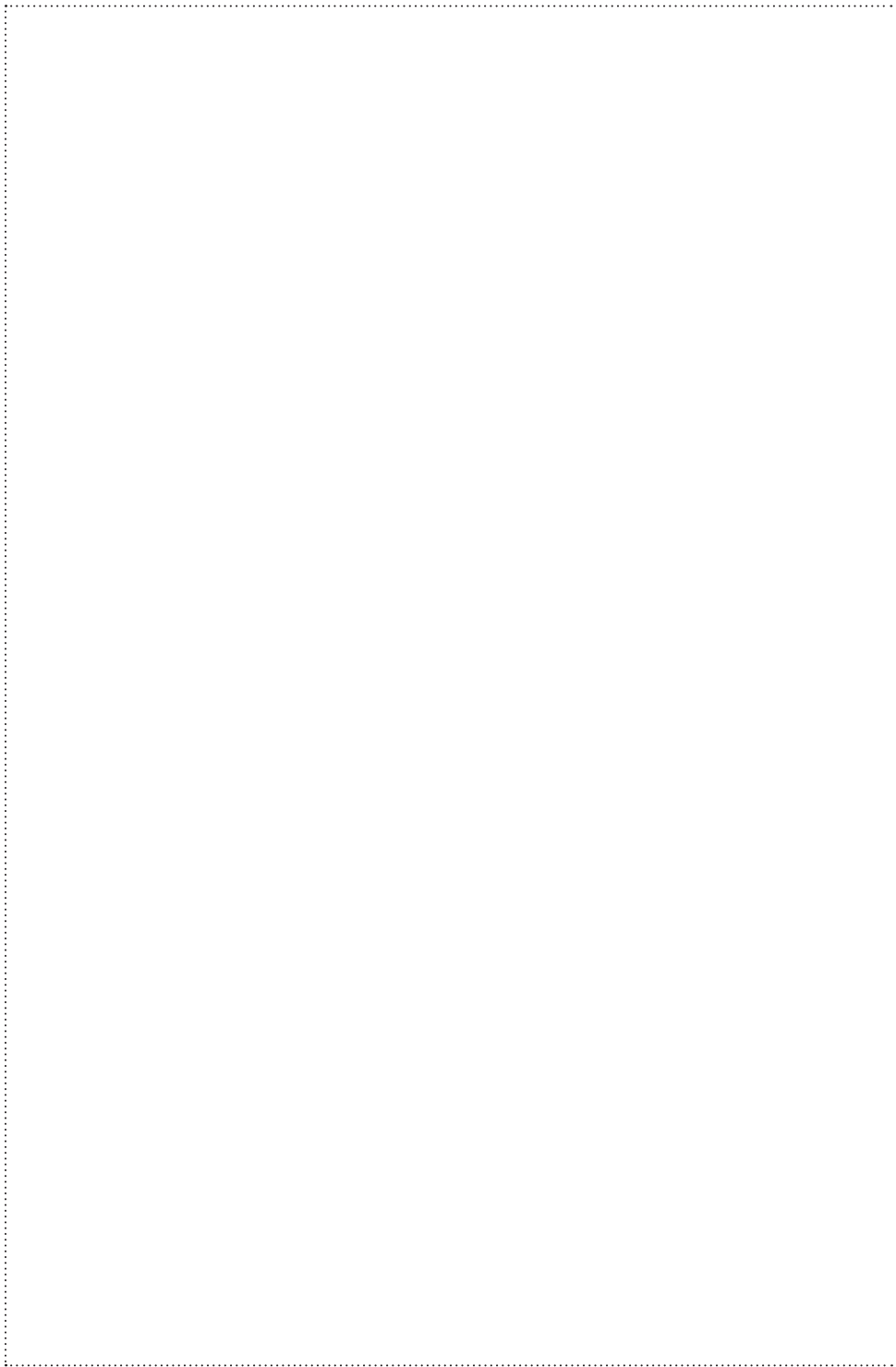
Loden's Elegy

by Jordan Kammeyer

O Loden
My darling feline
Grassy brassy eyes
Long silky fur
Feathery tips of velvety ears
Bushy tail
The bones crooked
A bent kink on the end
Four extra toes
One for each paw
Grimacy smile
When you chance allowed a pet
You never hissed
Or purred
You saved your sweet birdsong trill
For only the most special occasions
...
You were the only cat I know who
Loved lettuce
Fruit popsicles
Beets
Other things that cats are not
Supposed to like
...
You laid by a hole in the kitchen floor
Waiting
For some perchance mouse
Or other creature
Waiting
Then in a frenzy
You lost your patience
Your whole front paw disappeared
Up to the shoulder
In wood
Frantically groping
For the awaited prey
You must've know something
The rest of us didn't
Because nothing
Will ever ever
Come out of that hole
...
You wandered the vacant hallway
Of the sleeping house
The only time
Your delicate mew
Was harsh and resounding
Searching for a friend
I don't know why
You never played with us
When we are awake
...

You ran
As if a terrible beast
Was behind you
Round and round
Everywhere
If anyone
Stepped your way
...
When you were hungry
You scavenged the kitchen counters
Even if someone was standing there
Watching you
...
At dinner
We had to be careful
If we left our seats
For just one moment
You were ready
And took your place
At the table
Like a person
...
Opening closed doors
Was your favorite pastime
You were master
Then why did you still
Get stuck in trees
For days
...
Loden
We named you for your
Grassy brassy eyes
...
Most cats are very good
At grooming themselves
You weren't
We had to cut off
Some of your fur
A dreadlock
Then that place was
Bald
...
Sometimes
You stuck out
Your little pink tongue
And left it there
Did you forget
...

You were small
That didn't make sense
You were a Maine Coon
It's okay though
It wasn't your fault
...
You had seizures
It was scary
The still shaking
Curled and stiff
Your grimacy smile
Frozen and trembling
I turned away
And heard you
Clattering against the chairs
Falling off the bed
Thumping down the stairs
Stop
Your brain was already hurt
Finally
You were released
Panting
Eyes wide open
Looking around
For a long time
Then cuddly cuddly
Pet me you begged
Then hungry
Up on the counter
I would've shooed you
But I was too glad
That you were alive
My darling feline



pt 1. Short Fiction



pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction



pt 3. Poetry



pt 4. **Visual Art**

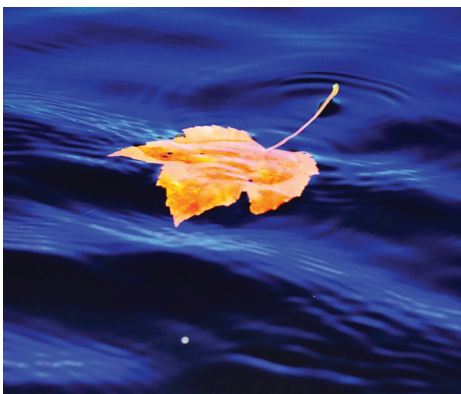


pt 5. Literary Criticism





Allison Armata
In Flight



Allison Armata
A Relaxing Journey



Brianna Christman
Treasure is in the Mind



Matilda Root
Uhura's Garden



Haley Dickhaus
Theatre District, Boston, MA 2020



Matilda Root
Self-Portrait



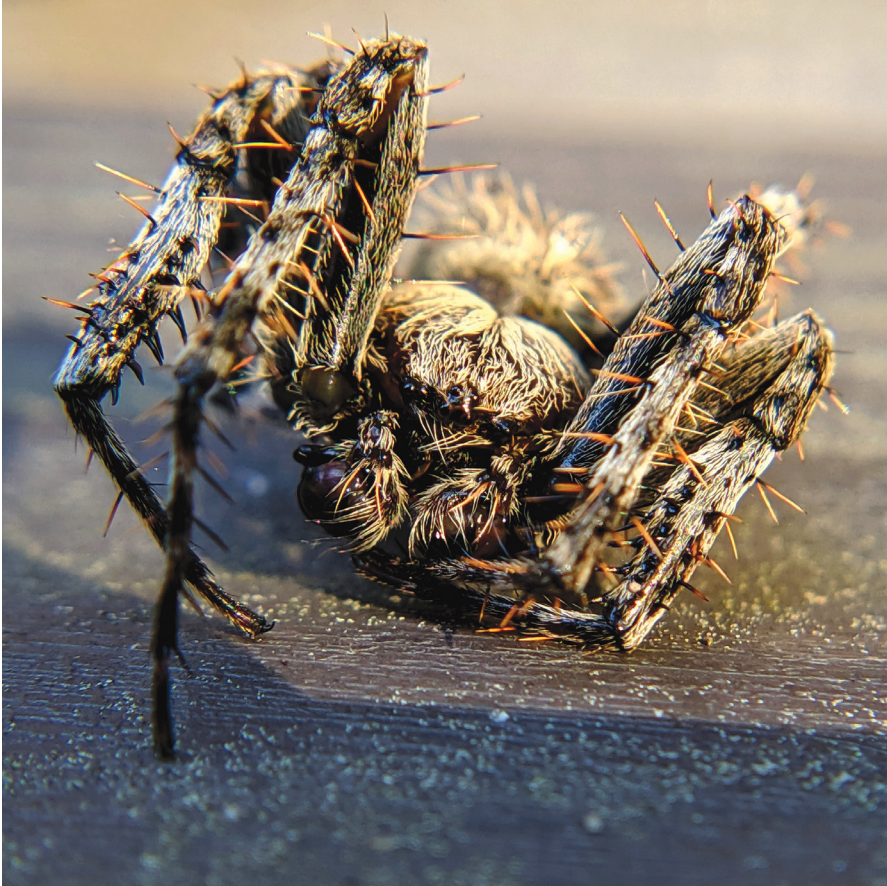
Jake Sinopoli
Saturday's Inspection



Heather Morawski
Royal Gilbert



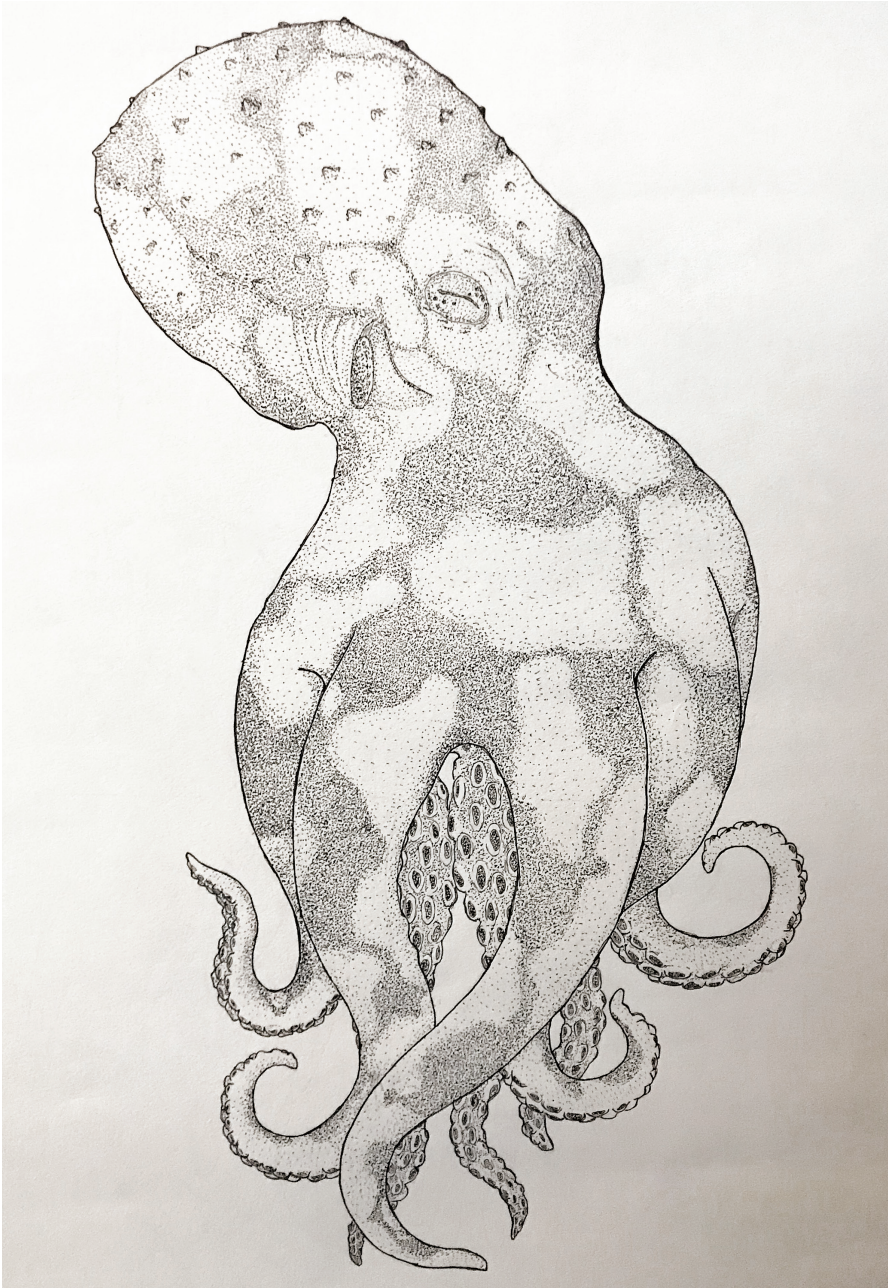
Christian deManbey
Sunrise



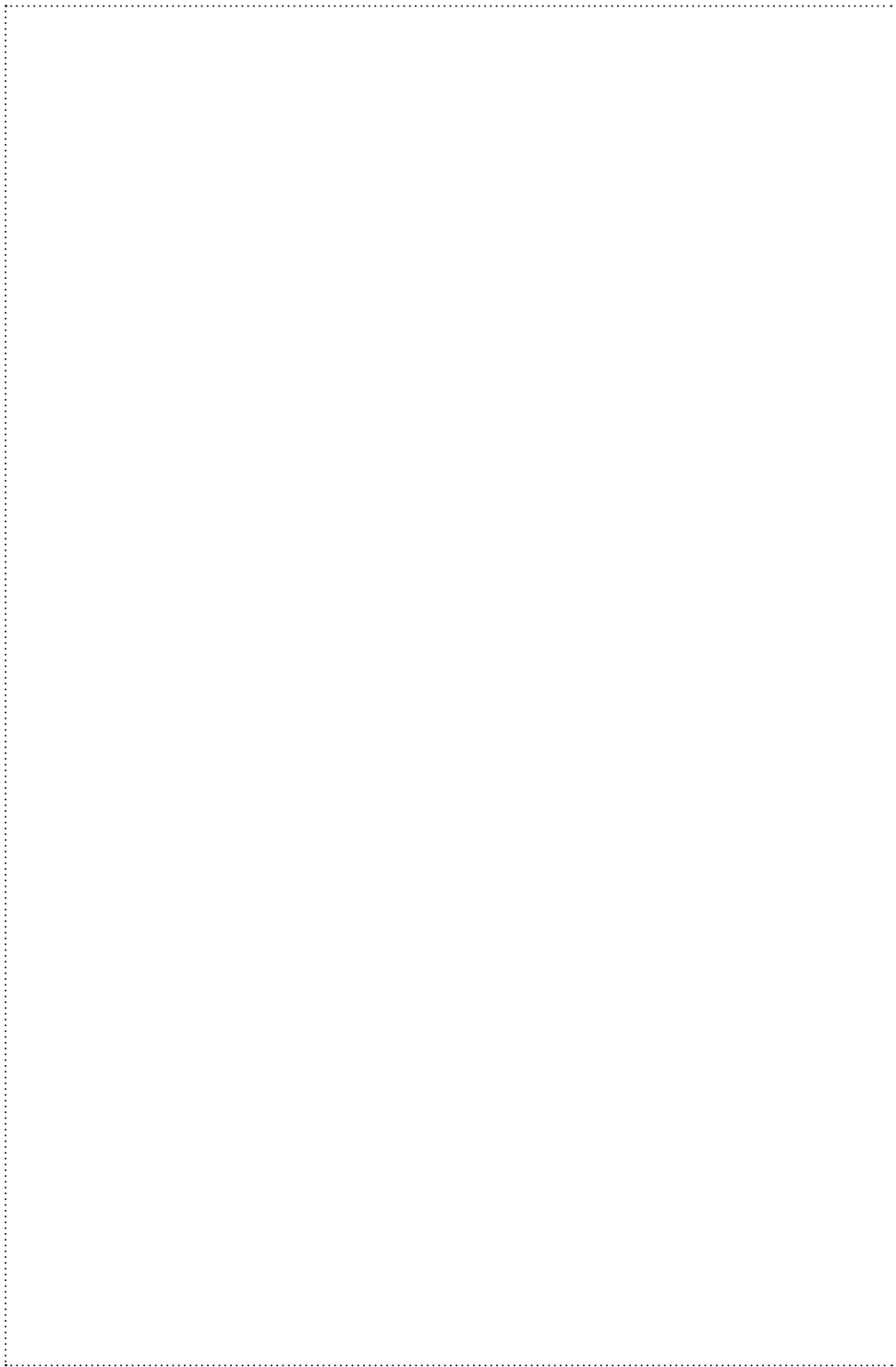
Christian deManbey
Sunset



Jordan Kammeyer
Girls of the World



Kenidee Reeves
Untitled



pt 1. Short Fiction



pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction



pt 3. Poetry



pt 4. Visual Art



pt 5. **Literary Criticism**



Warning: Gender May Be Fatal

by Colleen Moran

Gender is inherently a part of culture and society, and whether that is a positive or negative thing, gender impacts lives through its adoption of gender roles and expectations. These gender roles determine how people live their day-to-day lives, directly affecting their behavior and emotions, while also completely shaping their relationships and interactions to fit within the mold that a gendered society creates. Through societal expectation, someone may change how they express themselves in social settings to fit in, keeping their true self hidden. In womanhood, some of the expected mannerisms are to be polite, passive, and nurturing. In addition, gender cannot be separated from class and social status, as those factors will affect how gender is displayed, as it comes with another set of rules to abide by.

In Nella Larsen's *Passing*, the two main characters, Irene and Clare, black women who sometimes pass as white, interact and navigate gender and womanhood in a unique way. Both of them behave differently, with Irene falling into the mold of what was socially expected of a woman, and Clare representing the changing attitudes of women emerging in the 1920s. They encounter the complexities of gender and race, and deal with them in contrasting ways, with Irene being passive and timid, and Clare facing things head on, taking what she wants. The way in which each woman acts within gender roles affects how the other characters of the novel interpret the events that occur at the end of the novel, when Clare falls out of a window and dies. Womanhood and femininity are a part of what ties these two characters so closely together, as it forms an underlying homoerotic longing between the two. Their upper middle-class status also applies pressure to how they must present themselves as women, as they frequent fancy establishments that require them to fill these roles.

The role of women has evolved over time and will continue to with each generation. The housewife was a staple image of American culture in the early 1900s, with women being defined by only that. In Phyllis Palmer's "Domesticity and Dirt," she states that "middle-class housewives believed they could cherish and impart positive values through homemaking" (18), which is exactly what Irene displays, as she runs the emotional side of her household. Irene is self-aware of this behavior, as during one conversation with Clare in which she describes herself as "wrapped up in my boys and the running of my house" (Larsen 83). Reflective of Irene's class

status, her house is also managed by a housemaid, Zuelna. Irene's housewife activities focus more on the emotional state of her house, such as managing her husband's jobs and wants, and focusing on her boys' wellbeing and education, instead of on things such as cleaning. This aligns with Palmer's description of a middle-class housewife. During an outing with her husband, Brian, they discuss their children's schooling and what they are learning. Irene expresses worry that their child Junior has "picked up some queer ideas about things" (Larsen 59). She becomes protective once again over what her children are learning towards the end of the novel when Brian is talking to them about the lynching of black people. She states, "I want their childhood to be happy and free from knowledge of such things" (Larsen 108), thus trying to fulfill her role of imparting positive values. Irene does not just maintain her children's lives, she also runs her husband's career path. Before the events of the novel, Brian had a longing to go to Brazil, which Irene successfully deterred him from, but he again in the novel express that he still wants to go there to work. The reader sees Irene go through internal turmoil over whether her husband is thinking about Brazil again and her attempts to remove those ideas, again aiming to fill the homemaking role of keeping a positive climate in her household. Irene also is responsible for putting together social gatherings, such as tea parties and conducting the Negro Welfare League dance for Hugh Wentworth, which is a task thrust upon her because of her middle-class status. All of these actions add up to Irene completely fitting into the housewife role and staying within the bounds of what gender stereotypes would demand of her.

Irene's womanhood also affects the behavior she displays in social situations and in her personal relationship with herself, conforming to the idea that women do not express heavy or powerful emotions, instead being timid and quiet or bottling up such emotions and acting with a façade that all is well. Irene has several outbursts during the novel due to this buildup of emotions, where she reflects and asks herself why she is having these emotions, even going as far as being confused and ashamed of herself. Two incidents most prominently display this, with the most telling outburst of Irene's emotions coming again from conflict with her husband. The scene starts with Irene having a simple conversation with Brian about the wellbeing of their children, but Irene takes offence to her husband's remarks about Junior learning about

sex, where he makes a joke about their sex life at her expense. Irene reacts with big emotions: loudly slamming the car door and saying she would find another way home. Irene walks away confused with her outburst as “she was even more vexed at her own explosion of anger” (Larsen 61). In a situation where Irene has every right to be upset, as her husband has made a joke of her, she thinks that she should not have reacted in this way. She is conditioned to believe that she needs to handle every situation with a level head – which is the best way to handle a situation – but the fact that she experiences shame at feeling and expressing a natural human emotion shows what gender expectations

have done to her. The second time she experiences an overwhelming amount of emotions is when she hosts a tea party in her home. Irene goes through the mannerisms of hosting a tea party and making conversation all while dealing with the turmoil that Brian might be cheating on her with Clare. She does not confide her feelings to anyone, nor brings up the subject with her husband, and bottles up her emotions as she is expected to do. Irene ultimately falls into the stereotype of a passive woman, as she never even confronts Brian head-on about their underlying issue of Brazil, instead having the subject floating subtly in the background of other arguments.

Though Clare is presented entirely through Irene’s perspective, the reader can tell that she behaves in a contrasting way to Irene. Clare is boisterous with her emotions, and expresses much more to the society around her, the direct opposite of the assumption of what a woman should be. During the opening scenes on the roof of the Drayton Hotel, where Irene is unaware of Clare’s identity due to not having seen her since childhood, she remarks that Clare smiles at a waiter “a shade too [provocatively]” (Larsen 16). Clare even acknowledges her own non-conformity to society: “to get the things I want badly enough, I’d do anything, hurt anybody, throw anything away” (83). After saying this, Clare “cried, audibly, with no effort at restraint” (Larsen 84). These actions Irene describes, and how Clare behaves, do not fit in the passive behavior expected of women at the time, as she is willing to throw away her entire marriage and family to join Irene in the black community of Harlem. She also has no problems expressing her emotions outright and makes no effort at hiding how she is feeling, which is the direct opposite of Irene; therefore, breaking out of the gender expectations placed upon her.

Another aspect of the novel that reflects gender

norms is Irene and Clare’s relationship with one another and the blatant homoerotic longing that lasts the entire novel. During the first part of the novel, where Irene insists she is done with Clare, she still finds herself drawn in by her “seductive voice” (Larsen 34). Irene admires Clare in her thoughts, describing things such as her mouth, her clothing, and her laugh in intricate detail. What makes these descriptions of Clare stand out so much is that she never once describes her own husband with the intensity that she describes Clare. While Irene remarks about Clare’s beauty and goes into detail about aspects of her multiple times, she remarks about Brian once: “he is extremely good looking”

(Larsen 54). Clare similarly expresses these feelings, but through action. Where Irene is non-active in expressing her remarks and mostly holds them internally, Clare gives physical affection to Irene. These examples of how they behave within their longing

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for each other conforms to the ways they think a woman should behave in a society. Irene never makes an action on these feelings, just how she very rarely expresses her emotions to anyone in the novel. In fact, Irene only admits her feelings about Clare out loud once to Brian, stating that “nobody admires Clare more than I do” (Larsen 90). In several situations Clare greets Irene with affection, expressing her emotions, although briefly. In two different scenarios she surprises Irene with a kiss “on her dark curls” (Larsen 66) and on “a bare shoulder” (110). Clare, who maneuvers life as a woman much more freely and does not conform to social standards, is comfortable expressing how she feels. Gender plays a crucial role in this aspect of the relationship because it would simply not exist if they were not both women.

The most important part of how gender affects *Passing* is how it culminates to affecting how secondary characters interpret how and why Clare falls out the window to her untimely death. The reader may conclude that Irene has pushed Clare out of the window due to Irene’s internal monologues about how she would like Clare to leave her alone, even at times thinking about “if Clare [were to] die” (Larsen 105). The other party guests do not even suspect Irene to have pushed Clare out the window, because Irene followed the gender roles of society and kept her feelings and emotions to herself, and still acts sociably with Clare in public at the end of the novel, when the reader has become aware of the extent of Irene’s disdain towards her: her wishes for Clare to be away from her life by any means. Clare’s adventurous attitude is displayed

to the reader the first time they meet her. As she and Irene catch up on the rooftop of the Drayton, Irene recalls the rumors of Clare being seen out at fancy restaurants with various people. These rumors come from the fact that Clare was moved out of Irene's neighborhood after her father died to live with other relatives and would sneak back to the south side where she was raised. Clare shows this same behavior by sneaking around her husband's back to spend time with Irene in the present day. It can be assumed that anyone that knows Clare has seen her exhibit this type of behavior, which is why her death is deemed "by misadventure" (Larsen 120): a death that is said to happen from a risk that the person took on voluntarily. Clare takes on the risks of breaking out of gender expectations and it, in turn, affects how people have perceived her.

Gender remains both a confine and a mode of expression for both Clare and Irene; it permeates into almost every aspect of their life: their external

and internal relationships. Irene, who was confined by these expectations of gender and acts within them, hiding parts of herself, such as her true emotions surrounding Clare. Clare, whose personality and willingness to break out of those expectations and get what she wants leads to her death. For Irene her womanhood felt like a trap that she was suffering in, whereas Clare freely expressed herself and her emotions, something more commonly seen in society today. Their experiences and ways of acting would have been different if society's standards for a woman had not been what they were in the 1920s. ●

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