

Windows Spring 2022



 Sean Diggins

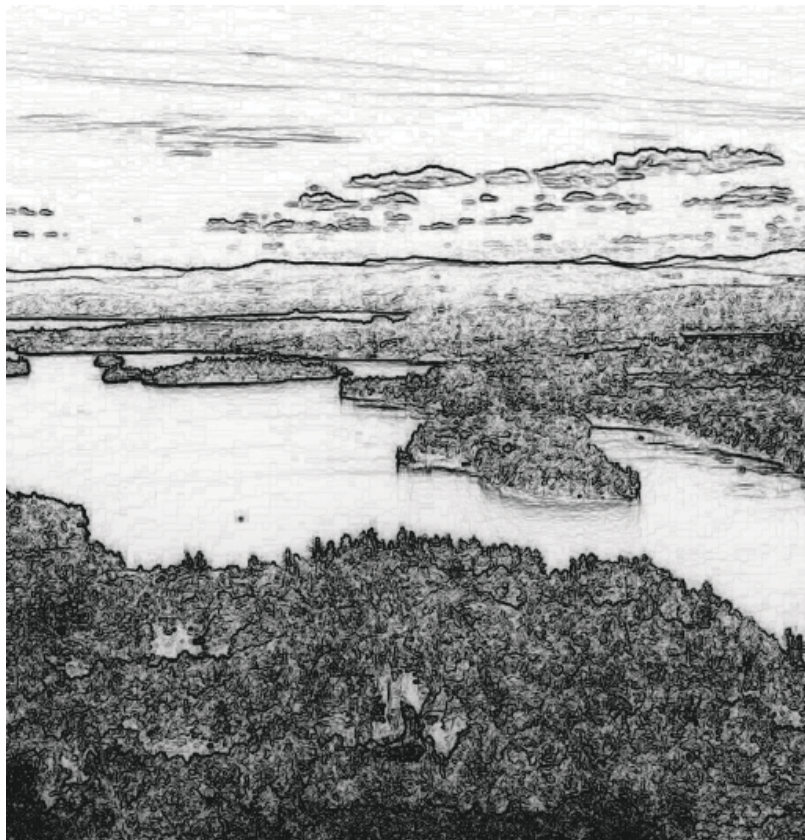
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The Blue Ribbon

 By: Susannah Meszynski

Ellis Island, 1905

Homesickness arrives much quicker than it goes, and much sooner than you expect. It isn't a sudden downpour, but more like the salty spray that wafted over my face as I stood at the deck railing, looking out over the dark churning ocean waves glimmering in the early morning sun. During my journey nothing was real but the sea stretching between one horizon and the other. It was like the blue-ribbon Matka pressed into my hand before I boarded the steamer.

Seasickness kept most of the passengers from eating or sleeping, so you either laid in bed wallowing in self-pity, or went up the deck. Not caring much for the dark, rank chambers below, I did nothing but take in my surroundings for the entire journey. On one horizon lay my future, bursting at the seams with possibility, but tainted with uncertainty, and on the other was home.

Sometimes I was the only one on deck, but not today. Today was the day we arrived in America. All the passengers were desperate to catch the first glimpse of our new life, but I wasn't with the rest of them. I was on the opposite side of the ship facing the coastline that had long since faded away. The one I had chosen to leave behind.

Two years ago, I decided to leave Poland for new opportunities in America. When I told my family I wanted to go the silence was so thick I thought I might drown in it. Then my father, Ojciec, took my hands in his and said, "You go, my little Inga."

I'd dreamt of nothing but America for the next two years. Now that dream was becoming a reality, yet all I could do was stand at the deck rail staring out in the direction of my home which was now miles and miles of ocean away. How could what lay ahead possibly be as good as what I had left behind?

I closed my eyes, and the sharp smell of salt and seaweed became the sweet scent of Mama's bread baking. The rumbling of ocean waves became the cheery tune of Ojciec's fiddle. The warm sun on my hands where Matka's ribbon curled was the warmth of my little sister's hands as we danced together to the music. I was back home with my family, safe and comfortable.

A seagull barked overhead and broke me from my daydream. Its cry was followed by an outburst of excited human shouts from the other side of the deck. It was in English so I didn't understand any of it except

one very familiar word. "America!"

I turned towards the commotion. A crowd of passengers were gathered at the opposite side of the deck. They clung to the deck rail, pushing, and shoving anyone who got in their way. I couldn't see over their heads, but I knew what was going on. We had arrived.

I took one step laced with trepidation, then rushed to join the crowd. I didn't share in the smiles, tears, and triumphant yelling, but instead pushed my way numbly through the crowd until I reached the deck rail. A blurry shape broke the misty skyline. Something swelled in my chest like an ocean wave rising but never crashing.

As the steamer moved closer the blurry shape transformed and from the mist emerged a magnificent, coppery green woman who towered above us like a giant with her torch reaching towards the sky. The raucous crowd fell quiet, looking up in awe as we sailed past the grand lady.

As I looked up at her sharp, serious face, all I could think about was my little sister at the dock when I left Poland. She didn't say a word as I kissed my family farewell, but when it was time for me to board the steamer she flung her arms around my waist and clung to me. "Don't go, Inga. Don't leave me!" Matka had to pry her off me. Ojciec carried her kicking and screaming through the crowd. The last thing I heard as I boarded the steamer was her sobbing, "I will never see her again!" What was this tug-of-war in my heart? Here I was at the most exciting moment of my life and all I could picture was my little sister's tear-stained face.

Ellis Island emerged as we rounded past the Statue of Liberty. It was a rectangle of green grass dotted with red brick buildings. Beyond the little island was New York. My hand trembled where it rested on the top bar of the deck rail. I didn't know if the churning in my stomach was excitement or just the usual seasickness.

A gust of salty wind blew off the ocean waves. My hand flew up to keep my hat from flying off my head. As I did so, the blue-ribbon Matka gave me slipped from my hand. I gasped sharply as it fluttered away. I shoved my way through the crowd, chasing after the ribbon. I threw myself against the deck rail and reached out towards the ribbon. It was just out of reach. I watched it flutter down past the dingy siding of the boat and into the dark water below. The tears I had fought since the boat dock in Poland now rolled freely down my cheeks.

The steamer pulled up to the unloading dock at Ellis Island. I was lost in a sea of passengers clamoring to begin their new life and I allowed myself to be jostled about as we prepared to get off the steamer. Around me, there were laughter, tears, and even singing. Mingled excitement and

weariness hung in the air.

The line moved ever so slowly, but finally, it was my turn to descend the ramp. As I stepped off the ramp and onto American ground, I knew that, just like the blue ribbon, my old life had slipped away.



 Susannah Meszynski

Everything in Me

 By: Ricky Ingemi

I am not scared, of everything to be shared

I am not afraid, of this alluring world you have made

I am not craven, of your selfless haven

I will not surrender, I will stand by your side forever

I will be your beacon of light, your victorious bird in flight

I will be your butterfly tonight, your gladiator with all of its might

I will always gravitate, to what ultimately captivates

You are my cause and effect, adoration is my architect



Soaring Like a Hawk

 By: Mike Roy

May each of your days be filled with hope

To let your dreams soar

Then, reaching your goals, let the world hear you roar

Fill your heart with happiness and let your talent take flight

Let yourself be open to new opportunities, you are so very bright

Don't let your kindness lose its sight

Do what your heart thinks is right

Imagine all you can do, and all you can give

To spread your own wings wide and let yourself live





Owen Scott

The Performance



By: Sean Diggins

He had just been demoted. No longer was he on the xylophone but instead something all the better, the shaker. How humiliating. He was sick for two practices, and his rather pretentious percussion ensemble instructor decided it was time to move on alongside his friend, Josh, who was now on the scraper.

“This is completely unwarranted,” Josh said.

“At least you can hear the freaking shaker; my part is almost silent,” said Sean.

The group was practicing for Solo and Ensemble, a prestigious music festival where people from all over the state go to get judged. This year they were playing “Oye Como Va”.

“I still can’t believe they did this to me. I literally had the melody part. It was gonna be so frickin’ cool man.”

“Hey, let’s just make the best of it. Look, we’re still gonna be a part of the group, now we just won’t have to practice.”

Their parts were some of the simplest to exist on this planet. The same pattern played throughout the entire song nonstop. Absolutely no

skill or talent necessary. Belittling, to say the least.

“Yeah, but I don’t really feel like putting on a suit so I can violently shake a tube filled with sand for four minutes.” Sean raised his palm to his face. “I’m going to look like such an idiot.”

Practice was starting soon for the rest of the band, but for the two boys, their bi-weekly hour session of amounting to nothing was beginning. They stood there watching as the instructor critiqued everyone’s parts but theirs, waiting for the whole group to resume playing, only to be stopped mere measures later.

“Bro,” Josh whispered to Sean. “We’re not even going to get noticed at this performance; we’re just going to blend right in.”

Sean was looking down at his crappy little plastic shaker, a sorry excuse for an instrument, when the instructor said something that caught his attention. “Now guys, since we’re doing a samba type song, I want you all to show a little bit of movement; it will really communicate to the judges that we’re feeling the music.”

An idea came to Sean. A brilliant one. He knew what they needed to do. Something that would surely get them noticed, something that would enact revenge upon their cruel demotion. “Hey, Josh,” he whispered. “I know how we can get some of the spotlight.”

“How?”

“We’re gonna dance our asses off this Friday during our performance. He wants movement, right? We’re gonna give him movement.”

Josh looked at him, visibly thinking about his proposal for a few seconds. He looked over at their instructor praising the mallet section and the drum kit. He overheard him discussing the unimportance of Sean and his parts, and the vitality of theirs. He looked back at Sean. “I’m in.”

The two boys came up with choreography for their upcoming complimentary performance. They practiced for a few hours after school that week and eventually became completely satisfied with their quote-unquote routine. They were ready and one hundred percent willing to precede. Not a shred of hesitation was present in them.

Friday evening came soon enough, and it was time for them to unveil their masterpiece, their magnum opus. They were standing next to the stage, waiting to go on next. The group currently performing was just about wrapping it up.

“Are you ready?” Sean said to Josh.

“I’ve been ready since Tuesday.”

This was it. The instructor led the group out, Proud and standing tall, unaware of the sabotage planned by the students he overlooked. He

turned to the audience and addressed the judge.

“Good evening, Mr. Cunningham! How do you do?” he said artificially sincere.

“I’m doing alright. So, you’ll be playing a Santana Song tonight, correct?”

“Yes. We will be performing Oye Como Va for you.”

“Sounds good! Start whenever you’re ready.”

The instructor turned around to face the performers. He began counting off. The time was here, and they were about to bask in their glory. The band began playing their rendition, quite exceptionally. Not a beat was missed, simply because their instructor wouldn’t allow one to be.

Sean and Josh waited a few measures and then began to sway to the music. No one else had become comfortable showing this movement, so already they began to absorb the attention. Their instructor looked over and smiled, thinking this would be all they did, but the dances became more pronounced. Every extremity seemed to be getting shocked by the beat of the drums, the music being expressed by every movement the two did. Their instructor was now sending over vicious glares but the two couldn’t care. Hips were swinging, arms were punching to the beat. Their shoulders were popping. Other members of the band were looking over now, almost as appalled as the instructor. A quiet part of the song was coming up. The two looked at each other and began bending backwards. As the volume increased, they began straightening out, becoming taller and taller until there was a crash of the cymbals. They popped up now dancing erratically. Sweat was flying off their faces now, feet were kicking, shirts becoming untucked, both in sync and never missing a beat with their instruments. The song was nearing its end, and as the beat had its final finish, the boys let out a loud “HUH!” as a finisher.

The audience was silent. The instructor was speechless alongside the band. The only thing you could hear was the panting of the two young men, basking in their triumph. All of the sudden, the judge began to laugh hysterically. He stood up clapping.

“Oh my god, guys! That was great! You two are easily my favorite performers so far!”



I Miss the Warmth of That February

 By: Lorenzo Occhialini

How beautiful and tragic a memory is.
It will stay with us for the rest of our lives,
But we may never relive it.
Not those big, grand moments of triumph
But those small, quiet moments where you look across the room at someone and realize-
You enjoy their company.

The excitement
 when you
 see they
 keep pace
 with you
 as you
 walk down
 the halls.

The stolen glances
(that they don’t think you see)
When you walk into the room,
That cute, closed smile
They beam at you,
The vulnerability you only show to one another
Before resuming as if nothing happened,
Trusting them to keep all your broken pieces.
These moments, so precious and fleeting,
Only show their true worth
Once gone.





 Owen Scott

Metamorphosis

 By: Cecelia Michaud

I envy larvae.
Transformed into one's truest self.
Isn't that ideal?



Metanoia

 By: Leo Amrani

I could forgive you-
For your intrusion
As you became rooted deep
Into my affections
Occupied my thoughts
And tore my sanity to shreds



Weiswich

 By: Cecelia Michaud

A white world of cold;
pale snowfall casts a curtain.
What lies behind it?
A warm castle of basalt,
submerged in blankets of rime.



Of Ash and Water



By: Lauren Leith

Obscured by silvery, foreboding clouds lurked a city perching on a ghastly hill, surrounded by desolate lands of ash and soot. At a mere glance, the eerie, wavering lights that radiated from the crumbling and haggard factories as they churned out products like clock work, existed as the sole representative of what prowled beneath the cinders, sediment, and grime. All who lurked within the city existed in a wearisome state, vaguely aware of their blatant dissatisfaction. Hollowed eyed and fraying, ashes and soot streaked their sunken eyes and ragged hands. In this city, no god existed to hold their course, callused hands as they exhaled their faint dying breath, often at the hands of the fiery inferno that once breathed life. Instead, strings of metal latched to their limbs, fiercely fastening their fragile hearts to the minds and morals of their puppeteers. Unaware as a lamb to the slaughter, they progress through their day in a mechanical fashion. Blankets of fog created from soot and ash hide the metal strings from view, leaving the marionette unaware of its authoritarian master prowling out of view.

Reverberating in a muffled tone, the bellowing fog horn indicates the end of a shift for the unanimated workers. One by one, like sluggish ants, they march out the exits of the factories. Precise footsteps create an unnerving and inhumane cadence as they divide into four lines. On their hips they wear a knife used to perform their duties. Amongst the workers, parades a man equal in plainness with the same soot mask. Following procedure, he joins the fourth line as they march in unison towards their brightly painted but tattered shacks. Feet scuffling, the imperturbable, mechanical army parades along their path through the mucky streets and beneath weakly illuminated street lights.

Before the marching machine-like and soulless workforce looms a wall with its crest secreted in a sheath of sickly scented soot and smog. One after the other, the workers pass the uncanny and sinister wall, ignoring the potential that may lurk beyond. When it comes time for the plain and simple man to take his turn passing by the temptations of the wall, noises, shrill and fluctuating whimper from beyond the wall, drawing the man to a halt. The wall radiates an ominous aura enticing the man. The overwhelming urge of his fleeting curiosity takes control over his mind, freeing his senses and deteriorating the strength of the strings fastened to his joints. Despite the echo, prowling within himself crying for him to stop, he relinquishes his will to his wonder.

As he segregates himself from the horde of metallic toy soldiers, he proceeds to the wall. For the first time, a fifth line is created. In the distance, a lone, solemn coyote's call echoes through the foggy mask covering the sleepy eyes of the city. Dangling behind him like the chains of a guilty criminal, the strings braze the wall. A yanking sensation involuntarily wrenches his feat back from the wall, dragging his body towards the inner city. Placing both of his sizeable and sturdy hands on the muddied wall, left untouched for at least fifty years, he digs his nails into the grime and soot, and begins to climb the wall, overcoming the force that summons him back to the city. Sturdy and strong from years of laborious tasks, his muscles ripple beneath his flesh.

Now high in the atmosphere on the ridge of the wall, he gazes at what lurks beyond the wall. Before him lay a luscious landscape crafted by the skillful hands of a glimmering river. Now on the opposite side of the wall, the squeaking of a tiny marine animal catches his attention. An otter, short and stout, with curious eyes skitters playfully, attempting to drag him further into the unsung unknown. As his foot shifts forward towards the frolicsome and amiable creature, a stinging sensation of the strings ruptures through his back forcing him down onto one knee. Grappling with the pain, he gawks at the nothingness that appears to restrain him. Determined and dead set, he steps forward and followed the agile and perplexing creature towards the river bed.

Concealed and obscured by the ash and soot, the force on his limbs grows vigorous and intense. As he eventually nears the edge of the river, practically swimming through the air, the lively otter leap-frogs into the river bed. Its head disappears beneath the current, reemerging hastily to beckon him to follow.

Pristine and glistening, the shimmering water entices the man with its lustrous allure. As his urges overwhelm him, he compels himself to the river banks. Thrusting himself into the pristine water, his head submerges beneath the icy mirror. The frostiness bewilders the men. Before today, fiery embraces were all he had ever known. Cupping the crisp and clear water in his toughened and hardened hands, he washes the sooty ashes from his eyes and witnesses the ink like mixture blended with the river water.

As he opens his eyes, another world appearing as a maze of knots divulges its sinister secrets. Growing aware of his strings, he reaches into his pocket and removes a knife and slices himself free from his puppet-like control. Once the knife pierces the woven threads of the first string, the clouds, once made of ash, begin to rain down tear drops onto the parched city grounds. The rain washes the streaky masks away from the people's

eyes. Becoming aware of their strings, neighbors helping neighbors, they slash the remaining strings.

Some, stuck in old ways, refuse to cut their strings. In a panic, they paint the ash back onto their faces. As the river runs black, the parting clouds reveal a crescent moon bathing the man in ethereal light. Now, free to drift with the river currents, he no longer is bound to something artificial. He relinquishes control to the natural world following it towards his future in a city of water.



 Cassidy Tomeo

Fatal Flaw

 By: Ricky Ingemi

I would like to fly away tonight

I would like to be the sun radiating bright

Can I live up to what I have overcome?

Can I forgive my fallen love?

Because you are the revelation of my fragility

The fracture of my vulnerability

These magical times have passed

But the irreversible wish lasts

Sometimes I feel I have sung my last refrain

For I am the ember that was slain

Close to courage is where I belong

The serenity of failure is lifelong



Monsters Under My Bed

   By: Adrian Tkaczyk

There is a monster in my house.

He is as quiet as he is docile. Never have I heard him growl and never have I seen him bite. He simply watches over me and my mother with haunting, red eyes, and a coy smile that flashes yellow, three-inch teeth.

He and my mother are the fondest of friends. They eat dinner together and they only ever talk of me. Tales of all my ineptitudes and all my shortcomings. Insults that dig so deep into my flesh they have pierced through the bone; staining my arm with an insidious, black mark that I must make an effort to hide to not alert others of its presence. And even when I show the steady growth to adults of moral standing, they tell me they cannot see it; that I am simply a scorned son trying to desecrate a woman who has given everything to see that I am provided for. But it does not change that no matter how hard I scrub against it or how often I wish for it to go away, it is as eternal as time and like it, is something I know will remain even when my mortal flesh can no longer say the same.

The monster spoke to me when he noticed it had begun to creep up the length of my arm. He asked me in his low, guttural voice where I had gotten it, and I answered that it only appeared when I first saw them eat together. I watched the monster smile. I watched the monster curl an arm around my shoulders to tell me my mother has been through so much and that the mark is there because of it. I did not argue with him as he knows her better than I could ever hope to. Instead, I went to bed as he watched over me in my sleep. And I closed my eyes to the sound of his growl ringing between my ears and hungry breath against my neck.

I asked my mother about the monster. She told me I was crazy; that there were no such things as monsters and that I was trying to make her out to be someone she was not. I looked at the monster in hopes he would defend me, but he only strung his lips in a pleased smile as if to say he was equally complicit in the gossip they shared that was only ever at my expense. And it was then I became hot with this insidious, white anger as I told my mother she was every bit as wretched as she was terrible; that she asked for the fate of motherhood and in choosing to have me she should fit the stereotype of a kind and loving caretaker; a person we both knew she could never become because of her circumstance or how desperately I hoped I could change her. I saw the monster's eyes glisten as I stormed out and the poison laced between the words lingered; even when I went to bed

with the monster watching over me, quiet and perched atop my desk as still as the dawn.

I woke up to find the mark had crept up onto my neck, and when I went to school, I showed my friends the stain in a last act of desperation. They showed me that they too had the same black marks forever imprinted against their flesh like a hot iron against skin. Some were small and seemingly insignificant while others were smeared across entire body parts as we each confessed the truth of the monsters in our houses. Some are round and stout while others are tall and lanky. But the one constant in each account was the friendship between them and our mothers and our fathers, and how, when we spoke of the monster, we have were brushed aside at every mention by the people who are supposed to love us without condition. And we asked ourselves, how could we possibly slay these ugly, gargantuan beasts and be rid of them for good?

A week went by before we came to agree on an answer: and that was that even if our parents may speak to them, that does not mean we have to, too. We did not say such, but we all knew how even something as eternal as the cycle we were all seemingly trapped in could be atoned for by making the choice to admit to its existence. And that in refusing to talk to the monsters, it may never make them go away, but it would no longer see our shared, black marks continue to grow to show for their venom.

I went to bed that night doing exactly that; looking the monster in the eye but refusing to answer to the insults he and the woman who had given me the gift of life had come to grow fond of. And when I woke up, I saw the black mark was still there, but that it had stopped growing. And I looked the monster in the eye as I watched him retreat from my room with a gruff annoyance; telling me he would be back in due time when I had children of my own.

And I did not answer him. And I promised myself I never would again.





 Ashley Soto



 Ashley Soto

The Gift

 By: Leo Amrani

I've avoided opening the gift for about a week. I know that I shouldn't put it off for any longer than necessary, but I can't help but feel anxious about what lies underneath the shiny wrapping paper. I've kept it on the kitchen table and avoided touching it since I tossed it there. I've even avoided opening the curtain or turning the lights on. Any light that reaches the wrapping paper reflects a kaleidoscope of colors that bleed onto my walls. Such beauty should not be possible for a gift with nefarious intentions. My birthday is usually an occasion I enjoy but this unexpected (unwanted) gift has put a damper on the whole affair. At this point, the box has developed a sort of musky scent that's taken over the entire house. I don't bother to open the windows or light a candle; I can live with the smell of death and the flies buzzing around the box.

At first, I tried to rationalize that it could have been dropped off by a friend who forgot to tell me they were dropping it off. Or perhaps it was left as a prank by a couple of rambunctious children. Maybe when I open it a spider will pop out at me, or it will be full of trash. That would be preferable to what I know is possibly in the box. However, I live in the middle of nowhere so there's a low possibility that anyone would do that. It's very seldom that I receive visitors in the first place. I know who sent me that gift. It's obvious to me now.

A sudden ding and an unpleasant smell break me out of my trance from staring at that cursed present. I suddenly realize my toast is past ready, and I rush over to the toaster and grab the half-burnt bread. I turn my back to the box as I spread butter onto the toast and can't help the goosebumps that spread over my arms and legs. I feel like the gift is going to suddenly come to life and gut me like a fish. I rub my morning stubble, sighing, as I can't figure out what to do about the gift. I try not to let it bother me too much, but I can't help but ruminate. I sit on my lumpy couch that's in direct view of my dining room table. My cat, Mira, meows, and bolts over to me when she realizes I have food. She tries to munch on the toast; I swoop the plate out of the way just in time. I've avoided eating meals at that table since my birthday. My palms sweat profusely when I hear my phone blaring a familiar ringtone: "Here You Come Again" by Dolly Parton. I know exactly who's calling me.

"Hello?" My voice sounds scratchy and small. I almost feel embarrassed.

"I was just calling to see if you received my gift or if you simply

threw it in the trash?” His voice is honeyed and smooth. My heart skips a beat at the sound of it. A part of me missed him. I’m taken back to every moment since I’ve met him. The odd little details I ignored because he was so charming. I remember the end of us when I caught him dripping in blood, a crazed look in his eyes, his teeth clamped on someone’s throat as they took a dying breath.

“No, I didn’t,” I snap. “I told you I didn’t want to see you anymore”. He chuckles on the other end. Clearly bemused at my incessant stubbornness. He finds amusement in my suffering. That’s what this is for him. A game. A form of entertainment. It’s all a game to him. The funny thing is, I don’t mind playing his game.

“I suggest you open the gift. It’s time-sensitive,” he murmurs. I scoff and think about hanging up, but I’m stopped by the sheer curiosity of what the gift is. My anxiety about the gift could be completely alleviated if I get the inevitable over with.

“Fine!” I spit. “You win. I’ll open the stupid gift already”. I tuck my phone between my ear and my shoulder, and I stomp over to the kitchen table. My entire body is shaking, and my lungs threaten to collapse on themselves. The smell erupting from the box overwhelms my nostrils tenfold as I creep closer. I can hear his breathing from the other end of the phone, patient, and calm.

“What is it?” I murmur. The real question should be: who is it? He doesn’t answer, which prompts me to cut at the satin ribbon with a pocketknife. Blood rushes in my ear as I snap the ribbon off and peel back the shimmering paper. Underneath is a fancy hat box that could have been from the Victorian era. As I start to open the box the smell of death becomes more pronounced. Specks of blood cover the lid of the hatbox and my heart sinks when my suspicions of what’s in the box are confirmed. When I quickly pull the lid off the box, I see a real human heart, covered with maggots. I cover my mouth before I can let out a scream. I’m not giving him the satisfaction.

“Is it to your liking, darling?”

“You’re a sicko, you know that?” He laughs on the other end. Light and airy like he just made a bad joke or something.

“Pot calling the kettle black, eh? We’re one in the same. I know you’re difficult, but you’ll soon develop my way of thinking. We can discuss more later. I’ll see you soon...” The call drops and I’m left standing in the middle of my kitchen, drenched in sweat with a rotting human heart on my table. He’s coming for me. He’s coming for me, and there’s nothing I can do about it.



 Emma Galonski

Things Heard & Things Not

   By: Alexander White

You’ll be a fine young man one day.
Everything is okay.
If I ever had a gay grandson, I’d teach him right.
Of course, I’m sober. Why even ask?
I can’t believe all these idiots with their rap music.
 You’re not one of them, right?
I am the reason you are as great and good as you are now.
 I have to take some pride in myself.
You owe me your time, and I’m cashing in now.
I’m sorry your mother and I didn’t work out.
 I know it was hard.

You are a fine young man today.
Everything isn’t yet, but it will be okay.
You can love anyone, and I’ll still love you.
I am sober. Here’s my chip.
There’s value in every art form.

As long as you love what you do.
Look at the young man you've become on your own.
I'm proud of you.
I want to spend time with you. Want to go out?
I'm sorry that I lashed out after the divorce.
I know that I made it hard.

You'll never be anything but a dumb, stupid plumber. Just like your dad.
You'll never do a kickflip.
Why are you playing the game like that?
I told you to be an archer.
Smoke that like this, and take these with this.
Drink that with a chaser.
How do you come up with this stuff?
It's so dark and awesome.
Why are you abandoning us?
You think you're better than us?
Howling wind as I walk by an empty house,
You're halfway across the world right now.

Who knows what you'll be? It won't be that bad.
Keep it up and you might land that trick.
Oh, you went with a sword and board build?
Tell me all about it.
Maybe you shouldn't be hanging out with us.
After all, we're teens, and you're just a kid.
What's going on lately? Are you okay?
That song was pretty gruesome.
You want to stop doing drugs,
Or we won't be friends? Fine then. Let's do this together.
We did it. We made it. We're sober.
We can travel the world now.



Beach



By: Dante Ebrahim

When you become possessed, you'll find food doesn't taste the same. You find driving your car without a passenger doesn't feel the same. You find walking through the house doesn't feel the same. You find yourself bumping into all your furniture, as though someone's come inside and moved everything a few inches to the left. You find when chopping carrots your vision blurs and carrot and finger become one. You find yourself losing hours at a time, and coming to with brown under your fingernails.

You get used to the ghost, and it gets used to you. In bed every night your fingers and toes are cold and your chest feels half empty. You hate the way it roams the house while you sleep and leaves behind smells that remind you of your boyfriend, and you try not to think about his body in the morgue looking almost as mangled as his Harley. You let the ghost keep wandering because then it's almost like he's still here.

You notice things start to go missing, and you know the ghost has moved them. You pay it no mind until the white seashell necklace your boyfriend got for your anniversary one year ago disappears and you tear your apartment to pieces until you find it tucked under the couch cushions. You know you didn't put it there, but things always used to go missing and they'd turn up here. You think your boyfriend must have put it there. No, your ghost must have put it there when you weren't looking.

Your mother calls to ask if you've been taking your meds, and you tell her, Yes, of course, because you don't think your heart could handle what the truth would do to her heart. The last time you remembered to take them, your ghost went away. You think you like your ghost, though. You think you want to drive down to the beach with him tomorrow and feel warm wet sand on your feet. You think you want the water to take you and him somewhere far away from here, a place where decadent striped seashells line an endless beach and the sun never goes down.





 Bhavana Kolaparthi

Things They Don't Tell You About Trans People

 By: Elliott Beninati

Transgender; 'Trans' trans·gen·der: A term referring to an individual whose gender does not wholly align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Cisgender; 'Cis' cis·gen·der: a term referring to an individual whose gender does wholly align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender is a journey.

The number of Trans people I know who have the exact same name, labels, pronouns and preferred presentation as when they first came out isn't as many as you might think. You learn a lot about yourself just by experience. As we grow into who we really are, our understanding of ourselves and our gender might change. People might even discover they aren't Trans. All of these things are something to be celebrated, not feared. Be kind to the Trans people in your life who change their names or pronouns more than once. Help them find joy in their journeys.

We get a lot of inappropriate questions.

Yes, even the "well meaning" ones. Are you going to get the surgery? What does that even mean? There's about a dozen different gender affirming surgeries. There's no "the surgery."

Another popular one is "How do you know you're really Trans?" Dear Cis reader, how do you know you're really not Trans? Have you thought about it? Have you ever explored the possibility? What would life be like if you freed yourself of the restrictions that come with Cisness? If that calls to you, embrace it. No matter what the conclusion is, you'll walk away with both a better understanding of yourself and a better appreciation for people that might be different than you. It's a win-win situation.

It seems like people frequently misunderstand the difference between asking questions about transness vs. asking questions about an individual's personal experience and identity. When it comes to the second, if a Trans person hasn't explicitly said they are willing to answer questions of that kind, and they want you to know and feel safe confiding something in you, you probably won't have to ask questions. They'll have told you already.

No two Trans people are exactly alike.

Our community is so beautifully diverse. That diversity is truly one of our biggest strengths. Anybody from any walk of life can be Trans; no race, religion, sexuality or ability is inherently Cis. Some of us don't conform to gender roles, and some of us do. Some of us want to transition medically, and some of us don't. Some of us are read as the proper gender, and some of us never will be. You almost definitely know Trans people that you don't even know are Trans. If you only accept and celebrate the Trans people you find palatable and agreeable, you don't accept any of us.

You don't have to understand everything about our genders to be accepting and affirming.

If you're not Trans, you'll never really understand everything about Trans identity. That's okay. That's normal. Some of our gender identities may not "make sense" to you. That's also okay! Getting educated on Trans topics is awesome and will help you be a better ally, but not knowing everything doesn't mean you should shy away from us. Learn how we like to be addressed and we're off to a good start. Anything else crucial will follow eventually.

Trans Anger is righteous.

This sounds scary to a lot of Cis people. It shouldn't. The media likes to

portray Trans people as weak and in need of saving, but we also get painted with a brush of anger, of violence. Truth is, most of us are much more likely to not even correct you on misgendering us than we ever are to blow up at you. Even still, our anger is a strength. People aren't handed rights by a majority group by asking nicely. To expect us to fawn and roll over in the face of intentional bigotry is an insult. Our anger is only a threat if you intend to uphold the system that keeps us silent.

Transphobes: It's not everybody, but it could be anybody. This goes for being a minority in any way. People say "not all men", that gay people being defensive of their partners is assumptious, that Trans people not disclosing their status as a Trans individual right away is unfair. We don't think every single Cis person is a bigot, but we have to be prepared that anybody could be. The pain of getting close to someone only to find out their beliefs about you are deeply dehumanizing is truly humiliating. Defensiveness isn't an insult or an accusation; It's self protection, and it's advocating for our safety. The assaults and murders of countless Trans people over time attest to the importance of that self-advocacy. Make it obvious that you are a safe and trustworthy person, and that cuts out the awkward middle ground right away.

Being Trans isn't an experience that has to be defined by suffering. For a lot of Trans people, the experience of being Trans comes with a lot of challenges and pain. Things like unaccepting family, social isolation and gender dysphoria can be crushing weights that lead to many stories laced with dismay. This isn't all we are though. Movies and media want you to think all we do is suffer, and that assimilation is freedom. That's not true. Trans people can thrive. We find love and family and acceptance, sometimes in our own ways; the difference doesn't make it less meaningful or real. We can love our bodies, and they aren't inherently a restriction of who we are. The joy and self realization that comes with embracing who you are is revolutionary, it's liberation, it's learning to truly live. To think of us as weak or pitiful is not just a misconception; it's a failure to understand who we are and the endless amount of things we are capable of.

For further education or resources, contact student advisor Amy Vazifdar to be directed to the NCC Gender and Sexuality affirmation club. We'd love to hear from you!



Love and Snow

 By: James Jensen

Smiling in the moonlight,
I saw true.
Dancing in the cold night,
Me and you.
On our night,
With the moon so low,
Things are right.
Whenever we go,
Into the world
Of thick, white snow.

I love you,
And you love me.
What more could I ask for,
But the world we have seen?
So when we leave this crisp, cool night,
With me on the left, and you on the right,
On the hearth, a fire we shall light.
Still together, everything will be alright.
While the flames are swirling,
They put on a show,
In awe of this world
Of thick, white snow.

When the fire fades,
And we are warm,
Yet tired from our ways.
To bed we will go,
With our world
Of thick, white snow.



Therapy at 3AM

✍✍✍ By: Alexander White

I used to cry at my reflection
Read into situations as if it was my profession.
My eyes were locked in a deadpan
Stare into outer space and this is my confession.

Second-guessing never brought about a better lesson
But because of that, I couldn't have learned a better lesson.
Better listen up if you relate
People mean it when they say it's never too late

To start again, there's no need to wonder when
Or how or why a certain someone lied that one time.
What lies ahead can be said to be a treasure
Untouched, except by you, only if you so choose.

And if you do it is ubiquitous in its deliverance
Of bliss but mostly ignorance of inquisitive, nay,
Intrusive suppositions that were only meant to instill itself
Next to rooted fears, brought to the surface by years of second guessing.

Tilling over the damp soil of regret,
planted with bountiful anxie-seeds,
Watered with the ever-flowing tear ducts of dejection...
I don't suggest it.
It only reaps depression,
and that flower has thorns I still have scars from harvesting.

Honestly, it's exhausting even talking on the topic
of these truths of mine
But the coffins in my closet called
and claimed it was due time.

Bold of them to try and stake a claim in my life
when they've been a long time dead.
Then again, the reflection of myself that they project
when they dance in the light
To the haunting tune of trauma

oughta be properly addressed, assessed, and more
By a professional of course.
But I'm broke, so I guess this is second best for sure.

Point is, there is no point.
Just keep pushing on, Sisyphus, absurdism and all that shit.



 Bhavana Kolaparthi

Deep Friendship



By: Nico Brazill

Hello, my name is Faith. I am starting high school, but I don't feel right about it. None of my friends from middle school are going to be joining me at the high school where I will be. Starting over to find friends sounds really challenging. I am worried that no one will like me. I used to get bullied back in middle school, but my friends would come to my defense. I just hope that I can get by the first day.

When my first class started no one sat next to me. Maybe it was my fault for getting here too early. My second class didn't go that great either. I just can't seem to get people to talk with me. Once lunch period started, I decided I was going to take charge. I walked over to a table with a group of three girls around my age. "Hey, my name is Faith. Is it cool if I sit here?"

The leader of the group responded, "Get lost loser, why would we want someone like you to ruin our gathering?" This sent me into tears. I put both of my hands on my face and ran towards the bathroom. I sat there just crying. Why did they have to be so cruel? I then heard a knock on the door.

"Is there anybody in there?" A voice spoke out.

"Leave me be," I replied sobbing. "I don't want any more trouble."

"No no, you are mistaken," the voice replied. "I am not here to bring trouble. I saw what they did to you and I wanted to see if you are okay."

"Oh, well, thank you, I'm okay. What's your name?"

"My name is Aplut, how about you?"

"I'm Faith. Thank you for checking up on me."

"Don't worry about it. I am disgusted in how people treat one another. People like that should be taught a lesson."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, give her a taste of her own medicine. See how she likes it when others are rude to her."

"Do you know who she is?"

"Her name is Gwyneth, and she is the meanest person in the school."

"How do you think she should be dealt with?"

"Just follow my lead." Aplut led me to the door of the lunch room. Lunch period had ended, and the students were leaving. Gwyneth was walking past us when Aplut put her leg in front of her. Gwyneth fell on her

face, spilling her water. Her hair and sweater were all wet. Gwyneth ran away with her face in her hands. Students were laughing at her as she ran away, especially Aplut.

"Gee, that seemed a little bit mean," I stated.

"Lighten up, she deserved it," Aplut replied. "Besides, she won't be bothering you anymore. How about we go to your house after school?" I was a little disgusted, but I guess she was right. She was just defending me, and she was my only friend so far.

"Sure," I replied. "That sounds good." Once school ended, we walked home. Getting to know her more she seemed a lot nicer than the girl who tripped someone in lunch today. I guess I should be giving her a second chance.

"Faith!" I heard my older sister Hope yell out. "What is this I heard about you tripping someone at lunch?"

"That wasn't me, Hope, that was Aplut."

"And who is that now?"

"Her," I pointed at my new friend.

"Right," Hope responded sarcastically "You shouldn't be blaming anyone for your actions. I know that you aren't good at making friends, but this is not how to act. We'll discuss this when mom gets home. Why didn't she believe me, and why didn't Aplut say anything? Aplut and I went to my room.

"Why didn't you say anything?" I asked.

"Forget that" Aplut interjected. "Why is your sister such a jerk. How dare she question you." I was getting disgusted again. Maybe it wasn't worth having a friend if she was just going to get mad on my behalf.

"Look I appreciate the sentiment but..."

"But what? People should not treat you like this, and I am going to do something about it." Aplut interrupted me and pulled a beetle out of her pocket. She ran to the kitchen and put it into Hope's water when she wasn't looking. Hope was about to take a sip of her water when I ran into her.

"NO! Don't drink the water," I said as I crashed into her. The glass shattered and water spilled everywhere. There was an absence of a beetle.

"What is wrong with you?" Hope yelled at me. "Now I have to clean this up."

"B-b-but Aplut put a beetle in your water."

"Who is this Aplut that you keep mentioning?"

"Her," I pointed at my friend who vanished before my eyes.

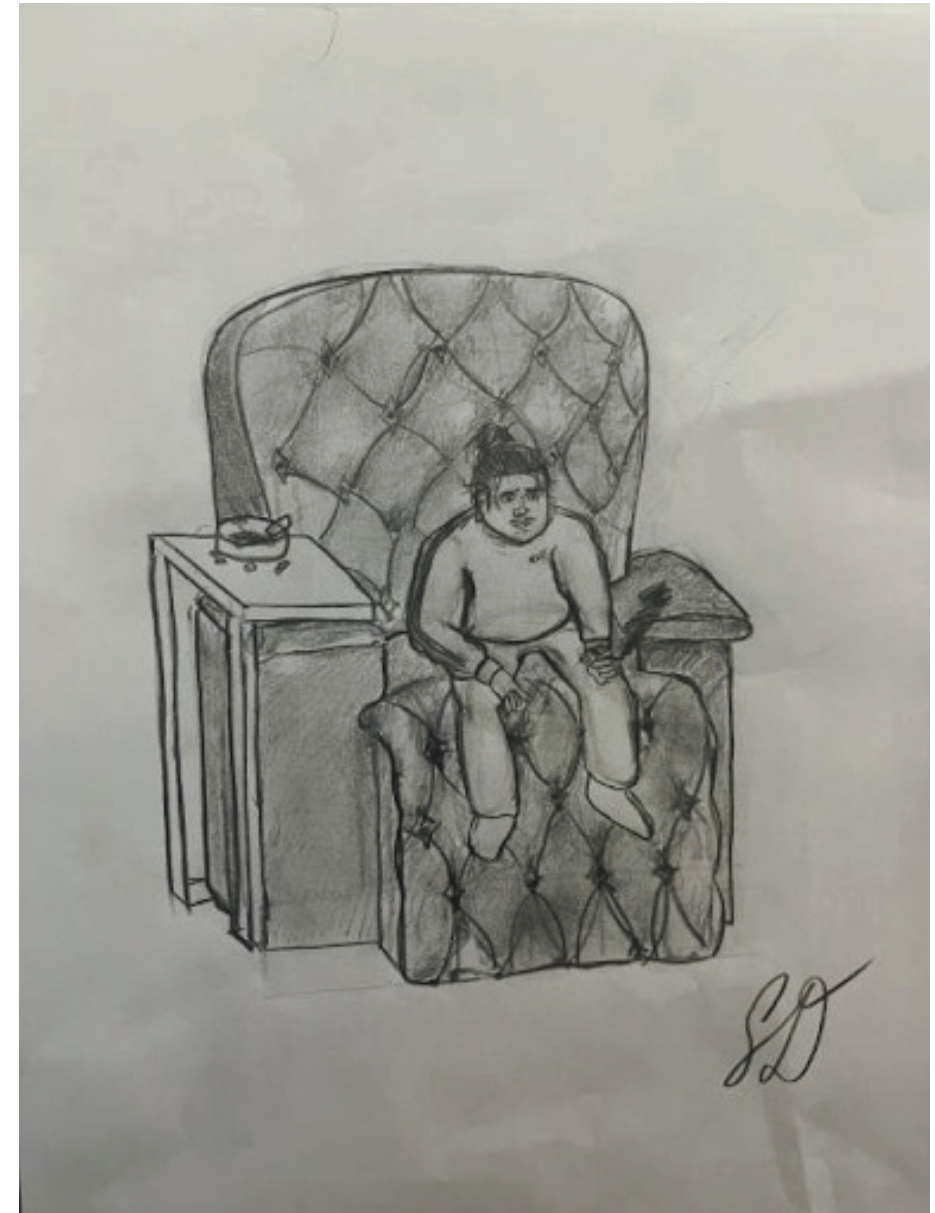
“What?” Memories suddenly flooded my mind. Me being angry at my sister for not believing my story. Me pointing to no one when my sister asked who Aplut was and giving me a sarcastic response. Me talking to myself on the walk home from school. Me tripping Gwyneth and then being disgusted with myself. “No one,” I replied to my sister. “She is no one.”



A Walk Around Town

 By: Lorenzo Occhialini

It was one of those days people considered to be a summer swelter:
Hot, humid, and nothing to do.
As I had nothing due,
I went to the bookstore looking for a clue
Of something new
To flip through,
Then paid- “Thank You!”
Four books, brand new.
It felt so nice to stay in the sun
After rain made it go on the run,
So I stop by the local cafe,
A novella doused in sun rays,
And overhear what people say,
The gentle breeze makes the trees sway.
Not wanting to leave the sun’s embrace just yet,
I get up to walk a path I set,
Around the town I had almost fled:
Past the cafe,
hidden walkway,
library,
And the school,
Now empty of the people I once knew.
But that thought didn’t bother me.
Under the sun and sky, a baby blue,
I felt alive, my spirit renewed,
With heat and sweat on my tanning skin.
The summer, my only constant kin.



 Sean Diggins

Becoming a Mom

 By: Uliah Hernandez

Getting to the hospital, they rushed me from the emergency room to the labor and delivery department. At that point, I was just scared. I was unprepared, and being unprepared made me stressed. I had no clothes for myself or baby girl, no bags packed, nothing at all. All I had was my phone, charger, and the clothes I had on. They brought me to my room, which was dark; one bed, a couch, and a small TV. It had that typical doctor latex gloves smell.

The doctor and nurses came in to see how far dilated I was, which means how open my cervix is for the baby to pass through. When I first arrived I was 4 centimeters, you have to be at ten to give birth. This was around five o'clock at night. They told me to wait for two more hours to see what happened. In that time I tried to focus on my breathing, and use a medicine ball to ease the pain and not get mad while the nurse had to ask me health questions. My mom rubbed my back as she waited for my boyfriend to come. "It's only going to get worse," she said. Hearing that made me go into a sobbing cry. I was already in so much pain. It felt like someone was inside my back and stretching it apart, and pushing it back together again, I already was in tears ready for it to end.

Two hours passed and I was checked again. This time I was six centimeters dilated, so they said I could stay. My boyfriend arrived and my mom had to leave because of Covid policies. I was a lot more comforted that he was there to help because he always made me feel safe. He brought me and the baby's clothes, and my favorite pregnancy pillow that wraps all around me, and supports my belly. It made me feel like I was in my own room. As the night went on I was still in so much pain. I tried to calmly breathe in and out, but the pain only got worse. My plan was to not have to take any medicine. I wanted to get through my labor with only my own strength. If I could just do that I would feel like a real mom, like I could do anything in the world.

A couple of hours passed by and I was at seven centimeters. I remember just bouncing on the ball, crying while my boyfriend hugged me from behind trying to calm me down. I could barely move from the pain. I had puked all over myself and the hospital bed. I was beyond tired, hungry, and exhausted and just wanted to sleep. The nurse offered me the epidural probably ten times, which numbs your entire lower body and stops the contractions. I kept declining, but I did decide to take laughing gas.

Although my plan was to take no medicine, I enjoyed this part of my labor. They gave me a mask and told me to breathe in whenever I felt a contraction and take it off once it stopped. So I started and the first breath felt like I was in the clouds. I felt very little pain, but I breathed in so much to the point I felt numb. They had me lay down because I almost fell back. I got to enjoy my time and laugh with my boyfriend for a while. We laughed at how much I was crying, even though in those moments it was not as funny.

At around four in the morning, I was eight to nine centimeters dilated. A nurse had come in and told me I was ready to push. So I thought this is the moment. I was so excited and scared at the same time. I was finally going to meet the life I spent nine months creating. I started to push, listening to the nurses' instructions, but nothing was happening. I was scared that something was wrong with the baby, can I not do it? Then the doctor came in and told me that I was in fact not ready to push and the nurse was wrong. At this point I was over exhausted, tired, hungry, mad and in so much pain that I felt like I was going to pass out. I just wanted to sleep.

At seven o'clock I decided I could not take it anymore. This was a very hard decision for me because it made me feel weak. A cloud of negative thoughts filled my head, making me only feel worse. Why was I not strong enough? I thought about all the bad things that could potentially happen. Like permanent spine damage. I had decided to get the epidural. As a female, we are always trying to prove to others that we are strong, that we can do anything that a man can do. I was doing something that only a woman can do though, and I wanted to prove to my family, myself, and my future daughter that I was strong enough. This decision made me feel like I was not though. I felt like I had already failed as a mom, and that I let everyone down. The anesthesiologist came in and started the procedure. You're not supposed to move when you get the epidural but as soon as he started I jumped from the pain of the needle going in my lower back. He needed me to sit still. I physically could not because of the contractions. I held on to my boyfriend as he reassured me that I was okay. Finally, after twenty minutes I was able to lay down peacefully, and sleep.

I woke up around eight o'clock in the morning to a new nurse telling me my mom was calling. This was your typical worried, over protective mom call. She was just making sure I was okay. I called her to let her know I was fine and hoping to fall back asleep, but that was not the case. Thanks, mom.... The doctors and other nurses came in to check me, the doctor broke my water by putting something in then a gush of water came

out. At the time my epidural was barely working, only on the right half of my lower body. I started to feel the contractions but not as bad as before. They put a peanut ball in between my legs which helps the baby move down more. I tried to sleep more, but couldn't, so I just laid there while my boyfriend was asleep on the couch. Fifteen to twenty minutes went by and I felt this huge pressure in my back and bottom. It almost felt like I had to go to the bathroom.

"Wake up!" the nurses said to my boyfriend, as I was already in tears ready to finally push. The nurse was holding one leg and my boyfriend was holding the other. They all were cheering me on, telling me I could do it, that I was so close to being done. In my head I was terrified, was I ready for this? I spent most of my pregnancy depressed because I felt so alone.

Most of those days I spent puking in bed or with my boyfriend. Was I still going to be sad or would it get worse with postpartum depression? What if I am a terrible mom? I felt like I could not do it. As you can tell I am an overthinker, but I knew that no matter how I felt I needed to be the best me for my baby. After nineteen minutes, at 8:58 AM Aceianna Rose was born. I looked at my little baby in my arms and could not help but smile at how beautiful she was. I did it. Not the exact way I wanted to but I did it. It felt like a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. She was absolutely perfect, and she was mine. The love you feel from your child is like no other and I loved the feeling and her. She was so tiny like a little puppy, and I was always afraid to drop her or hurt her. She had dark, straight hair and the cutest hands and feet. I was in love with everything about her. Just like that I was a Mom, and I had a beautiful daughter, my life was complete.



Looking Up and Glowing

By: Tristan Jardinier

(01.05.2022)

*I remember when I took Chemistry
years ago
and I learned that everything
that emits heat also emits light*

*I read once that
we are the universe
expressing itself as human
for a little while*

*I look up at the night sky
and I understand the stars
as my ancestors.
I prove to them
my understanding
by looking up
and glowing*



 Nick Maniatakos

Looking Up and Glowing
✍✍✍ By: Tristan Jardinier

(06.14.2021)

*Two days ago,
on a cloudy morning
I drove to a strawberry field
to accept the sacrament of the summer goddess
upon my knees.*

*The dirt between rows
and sun-ripe sweetness
are sacred.*

*My arms were wet up to my elbows -
It had rained that morning.
A humid breeze pulled tufts of hair loose.
The sun was warm on the back of my neck.*

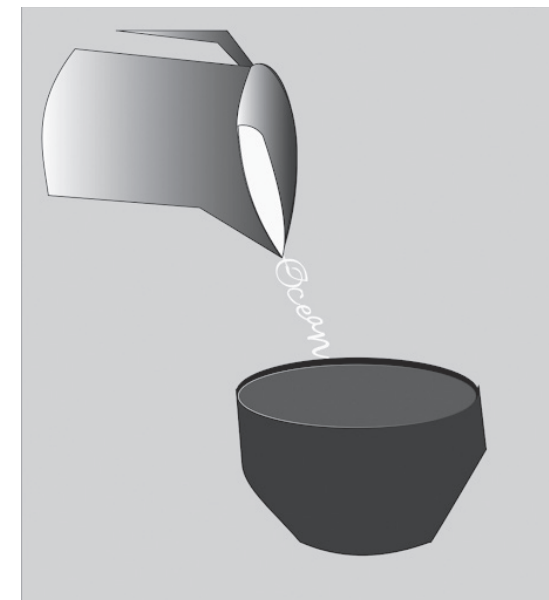
My thighs still hurt.

*I brought strawberry shortcake
to bring in to work.
Plastic tupperware on a plastic table
under light that cannot warm me.*

*It's been three years since I've had a cigarette.
Today I had one in the summer rain
Standing*



 Timmy Sanroma



 Brianna Martel

STORY SPOTLIGHT

✍✍✍ By: Maria Baymar

Dear Friends,

I'm an NCC alumnus who majored in Human Services and graduated with Magna Cum Laude in 2015. One of my first professors was Professor Berry, so you can imagine the level of my English those days when I started my journey of education. Please say hi to her for me! Two years later, I graduated with a Bachelor's degree from SNHU and am currently working as a case manager in community mental health in Concord for 3 years now. My time of studying was not easy but I'm tough because I'm Ukrainian. So, if you ever doubt yourself, think about me: "If I could, SO CAN YOU!"

Ukraine, my beautiful homeland is at war because of a Russian invasion. My husband, my children, my Ukrainian friends and I are in shock, sorrow, and grief since February 24th when the first bombs awoke peacefully sleeping citizens of multiple cities in Ukraine around 5 am. Russia sent its missiles, tanks, and troops into its neighbor to the West in the hope to kill our freedom and democracy. My family is in Kharkiv city, which is very close to the border of Russia. This beautiful city with Universities, museums, philharmonic, theaters, and parks is completely destroyed by now. My family: my brother and sister, my cousins, nephews, my aunt, and my 84 y/o mother who barely walks are in and out of the basement all the time to stay safe; to stay alive. My sister and cousins are volunteering by bringing food to those who can't walk; who can't leave their apartments. My brother and nephews do what they can to help Ukrainian soldiers to fight and civilians to live. I couldn't imagine that I'd ever start my texts to them with "Are you alive?"

Yesterday night, Russians were bombing my husband's hometown: the historical city Izum. Many apartment buildings were destroyed, meaning, many civilians, including children and the elderly, were killed.

The people of Ukraine are brave and tough. Yes, they don't sleep, their houses are destroyed, their lives are broken, their children are being born in the bomb shelters, their fields where wheat and sunflowers should be are destroyed, but their spirit is high. They are not scared. They fight.

What happens if Ukraine loses? WW3 would begin. President Biden said "no boots on the ground", however, there will be American soldiers deployed to Europe helping NATO. The problem is that Putin can't stop, he can't step back, so we need to fight!

What can you do? Read the news, talk to your families and friends, raise awareness, if you know someone who is Ukrainian, reach out to them, show them your support, donate to the Ukrainian army to help Ukraine win: uahelp.monobank.ua

Ukrainians feel and appreciate the support from the world. We are strong together.

Thank you!

Glory to Ukraine!

- Maria Baymar, 3/3/2022

(Ukrainian flag colors mean

'The field of wheat under the peaceful blue sky')





Congratulations,
Spring Class of 2022!

Ricky Ingemi
Susannah Meszynski
James Jensen

Proof