

LARGE PRINT

WINTER 2016 | ED 1

"Let the beauty of what you love be what you do." -Rumi

"Impressionism is the newspaper of the soul." -Henri Matisse

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom." -Anais Nin

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom." -Anais Nin

"Let the beauty of what you love be what you do." -Rumi

"Impressionism is the newspaper of the soul." -Henri Matisse

BLESSINGS

Internatic

Sevinista creates her first cal

the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

& I C U E

thunder no mind - liste

AWAY FROM THE SAFE HARBOUR

thunder no mind - liste

body" -Eubie Blake

LOVE

& I C U E

me & Garden

My friends are my estate

Sevinista creates her first cal

Internatic

the beauty

at you

Large Print

Winter 2016

Ed. 1

Large Print: Teen Literary Journal
Winter 2016
Ed. 1

Copyright © 2016 Large Print: Teen Literary Journal

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher and author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

The copyright to individual pieces remains the property of each author.

For copies or inquiries:

Teen Department
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh- Main
4400 Forbes Ave
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
teensmain@carnegielibrary.org
(412) 622-3114

Large Print

Editor's Note

I started this journal because I want to graffiti this singular message along the sides of a building, in bright red ink: *Teen voices are valid*. More than valid, they are loud and right, reckless and soft, careful and considerate, imaginative and strong. They scream at protests, tell others that they love them, and sometimes, write poetry. Everyone has a story, especially teenagers and their wide, heavy, changing voices, and teenagers need a space for their stories. This is that space.

More than anything, we want to live in others' experiences. We want to live in moments we will never have and in narratives that hang off our own tongues, but don't make it into open air. The pieces that you read in the following pages are angry and dreary and soft and loving. They tear the page, then repair it. They let you live in worlds you are familiar with and worlds you will never be. These pieces more than graffiti the message along the side of the building for me, they echo it back, louder: *Teen voices are valid. They are important. And they are here to stay.*

Happy reading,

Leah DeFlicht
Managing Editor

Table of Contents

Chumped	Weston Custer	4
Wildflowers*	Brianna Kline Costa	5
demeter	Riley Smith	16
Cool Kid	Lexi Lott	18
Feather Pen	Chyna McClendon	20
Old Records: A Tribute to Amy Winehouse's Influences	Maddie Figas	21
Conflict	Ryan Fisher	22
The Water	Ilan Magnani	30
All the Lonely People	Emiliano Siegert-Wilkinson	32
Prince	Chelsea Lewis	41
May	Maisha Baton	43
Janice and Austen	Olivia Benning	45
Andrew Jackson Tongue Twister	Isabelle Davison	50
To the Last Sip	Tess Buchanan	52
They Ask Me Who I Am	Hazel Rouse	60
We Live in a Rape Culture**	Gabriela Leseman	61
native tongues	Brianna Kline Costa	64
Acknowledgements		
About Us		

*Trigger warning: self-harm.

**Trigger warning: rape, sexual assault.

Chumped

Tomorrow I won't take a shower,
I won't talk to Posti,
I won't play guitar.
I guess you could call this, like, premature retirement.
Instead, I'm going to walk home stupid.
I'm going to slam Siamese Dream into my tape deck,
and let it play back and forth forever.
Or at least until I'm just listening to white noise
and my bed is drifting through the Crab Nebula.
Sitting still was always enough.

Wildflowers*

**Trigger warning: self-harm.*

“Nothing is more unbearable than this.” Dr. John raised his eyebrow as he flipped through the brown composition notebook in his hands. “This seems to be a related phrase in your writing.” I nodded.

“What does it mean?”

“I think it’s self explanatory.”

“Ah.” Dr. John paused. “You write very beautifully.”

“Thank you.”

“Besides this journaling, have you done any more creative writing? Poetry, and so on?”

“No.”

“Have you ever considered it as a creative outlet, a coping skill that utilizes one of your talents?”

“I don’t think so.” I wanted to be cooperative, but something about Dr. John’s drawling voice made an hour seem so much longer.

“We’re not feeling very talkative today, are we?” Dr. John smiled gently and leaned forward. “Is today of any importance to you?”

I had been wondering when this would come up. “Yes. It’s the anniversary of my wedding.”

“Interesting.” Dr. John tapped his pen on his desk.

“What’s so interesting?” I said, an edge behind my words.

“I find it interesting that you remember this date. Don’t you?”

“It’s not unusual to remember your anniversary.”

“So, it’s been a year since the...” Dr. John tapped his pen a few more times in his pause. “...event.” He studied me carefully. “I’d love to hear in your own words how you think you’re doing.”

I scoffed a little. “Well, I’m CEO of Dunmore Pharmacy—”

“The business you inherited from your father.” Dr. John liked to reiterate information for me to confirm or deny. I nodded and moved forward.

“Right. I moved—”

“Out of the apartment you and Naomi shared?”

Large Print

I gritted my teeth. “Yes. I got a dog—“

“But it ran away. Do you find any symbolism in that?”

“I think it symbolizes a dog.” I stopped myself before I got frustrated, since Dr. John was only trying to do his job. My patience had worn much thinner in the past year, as if irritation were always right below the surface.

“You moved closer to your parents, if I remember correctly?”

“I moved into the house my mother and father had hoped I would move into when Naomi and I were engaged, but Naomi had said that it was too exuberant and fancy and liked the two bedroom apartment on the other side of the city. But my mother thought it would be good for me to be closer to the rest of my family now. I’m a few blocks away.”

“So you have a nice, steady, well-paying job, and you moved into a nicer, bigger house closer to your family, and yet—“ His eyes flitted down to read something off of his clipboard. “Nothing is more unbearable than this. Why do you think that is?”

“Naomi is gone.”

“So it’s been a year since Naomi left you at the altar. And you don’t feel you’ve moved past this point.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever move past this. That’s the problem. That’s why I’m here.”

“I see.” There was a pause. Dr. John looked at his watch. “It seems that our hour is up. I would like you to write about Naomi this week. I know it’s a painful topic, but a lot of wonderful writers use pain to fuel their writing.”

“I’m not a writer.” I looked down at my hands folded in my lap.

“I would beg to differ.” Dr. John stood up and handed me my notebook. “Try to have something for me when I see you next Monday. Enjoy your week.”

~

April 24, 2016

I know I am supposed to write these journal entries addressed to no one in particular, because Dr. John says that it is just for me that way. But I always find myself writing them to you. Everything

comes back to you.

It's our anniversary. I was thinking of planning a road trip up to Maine to visit you. I had a romantic scene planned, where I tell you about how much I love you, and I pictured you telling me that you had missed me so much. But Dr. John advised me that things never work out how we imagine, and maybe it would be more useful to write the scene out, instead of trying to perform it in real life.

The first time I ever saw you was in ninth grade, when you moved to Utah from Ghana, smiling with so much charm and likability, a halo of dark curls cascading along your cheeks. You sat with me at lunch, over anyone else, for reasons even today I can't fathom, and you told me how your mother was Japanese-American and was in Ghana as part of a nonprofit when she met your father. I was quiet back then; I still am. I just stared at you as you went on and on, your accent and words mesmerizing. I knew from the moment I met you how incredibly unique you were: naturally quirky, oblivious charming, optimistic, full of wonder.

I've never been exceptional. Growing up, I enjoyed playing sports, watching TV, hanging with friends. You liked catching butterflies, counting stars, painting. I was so ordinary, and you so extraordinary. I was a field, just dry and flat and lifeless. But then you came, and suddenly there were wildflowers, poppies, forget-me-nots, marigolds, chrysanthemums, your favorites. And the wildflowers grew over every inch of my field, and you filled me so completely with love that I'm sure if someone had cut open my wrists, seedlings would grow from the wounds instead of blood. I never felt like I was special until you came, and then every moment with you, I discovered this whole other side to myself, as if your individuality were infectious.

One of my favorite memories of us is the first night we moved into our apartment. You had lead me up this rickety fire escape to the roof. I remember feeling a twinge of disappointment once we got to the top, looking at the sky. The stars in Utah over the mountains are usually so exceptionally beautiful, but the sky was overcast that night. But you told me to just imagine where the stars would be. And you told me that's how you stargazed during the day.

But my favorite thing about that moment is that I never would have thought to do that! I never would have thought to imag-

Large Print

ine where the stars would be. But it just comes so naturally to you, and I love being the person you share it all with. And now I can't look at the sky, anytime of day, any weather, without picturing your face. That's what you do to me. With every word you spoke, you made me believe you put the stars in the sky.

I loved your paintings, you loved my writing. I remember I used to write you poems. Even after my father convinced me to inherit his chain of pharmacies in southern Utah instead of pursuing poetry, you told me that your favorite music was the sound of my voice reading the words I'd strung together.

I haven't written anything in a year.

Dr. John wants to me to start writing again, too. That's where this journal idea came into play. He wanted me to try poetry again, but he doesn't understand. All my poems were about you. And now even picturing your face makes me feel as if every bone in my body has shattered. Nothing is more unbearable than this.

~

“How was your writing experience this week?” Dr. John said, flipping through my notebook as he did every time we reached the end of our “talk.”

“Painful,” I answered honestly.

“Are you proud of what you wrote?”

He always asked me this. “Honestly, it was just a journal entry, a letter. It's not anything to be proud of.”

Dr. John looked at me sadly. “I see,” he said, which seemed to be his answer for everything. “Have you...uncovered anything yet?”

“What does that mean?”

“Did writing about Naomi bring any discoveries? See, our mind sometimes covers up painful things. Did you uncover anything?”

“I don't think so,” I said unsurely. Dr. John looked disappointed, but resolved, as if he expected nothing more. “I'm sorry, I know I'm not doing very well.”

“Oh, Joshua, you can't do therapy ‘wrong.’” He waved my apology away. “What you're waiting for is a breakthrough. Not necessarily an epiphany, but a moment where we feel ourselves break-

ing down the mental barriers we put up. Our mind is our enemy and our closest friend. What do you think about that?"

"Um, I'm not entirely sure, doctor."

"That's fine. We have as long as you need to discover this. Some breakthroughs take several years." My heart sunk as I imagined several years of these Monday afternoons. "This week, I want you to really go deep into the wedding. I know how painful this will be, but I'm determined this will yield good results. Possibly a breakthrough."

I nodded, even though I still couldn't fathom what those words meant.

~

April 31, 2016

I've relived my wedding in my head a thousand times. I've cut myself open so many times with these thoughts that the blade has gotten duller, the pain has subsided over time. But though it has diminished, it is far from gone. Sometimes that makes it even more painful, as if sawing through skin with a dull rusty knife.

I remember it was raining. I remember that so distinctly, because we had planned a beautiful wedding in the grass field behind the chapel, just how Naomi wanted, and though the forecast had predicted sunny blue skies all week, a flash flood had taken us by surprise an hour before the wedding, and we had to move everything inside. But I was in just an ecstatic mood that nothing could have bothered me in that moment. I remember Rose, with her black three-piece suit and bright pink hair, helping me adjust my tie right before the wedding.

And I remember standing at the altar, the piano starting to play, and I had imagined you walking through the white doors in your violet dress with the gold embroidered roses. But....you never came. Instead, one of your bridesmaids, Mindy, rushed through the door, tripping over her dress, and told me that you had disappeared from your room upstairs.

The next few hours were a panic. My mother had tried to convince me that you had left, but I had said that we were soulmates and I knew that you would never leave me. I must have said that two dozen times that night. I thought that you might have been kidnapped

and insisted that we call the police, that we do something, because Naomi was lost, and the longer we wait the more danger she could be in. And the more time passed without her showing up, the more the whispers multiplied.

Slowly, one by one, people began to leave, until all that was left were my parents, Rose, and the priest. And as I sat in front of the empty white seats filling the hall, I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket. I read the name on the caller ID, and every bone in my body seemed to shatter.

As I held the phone to my ear, it was as if my entire body went numb. "Hello?" My voice came out as a hoarse whisper, and every cell in my body willed it not be true.

"Josh? It's Naomi's sister. I just called to let you know that Naomi is safe. She's going to be staying with me in Maine for a little bit. We already stopped by the apartment to pick up her things. She..." And then it was as if someone had soaked my body in kerosene and lit a match.

This field, these flowers that grew in every inch of my body, the ivy that twirled itself around my rib cage and bloomed scarlet flowers over my heart, I felt everything ignite and burn. The fire spread more quickly than the flowers had, and I could feel the smoke filling every inch of my body, fogging my head and escaping when I opened my mouth. That was pain like I'd never felt.

I remember begging her. I asked to talk to her, and when Andrea refused, I asked her to pass on a message, and she reluctantly agreed. My words seemed to stumble over each other, all trying to reach the person who pulled words out of me when no one else could. I fumbled for my vows in my pocket. "Tell her—tell her she's a wildflower, tell her that I love her more than anyone has ever loved anyone, tell her—"

"Josh, I'm—I'm gonna go." I could hear the deep genuine regret in her voice, and then the dial tone.

I left the chapel altogether, and stumbled out into the pouring rain. I sat on the steps, and I let my tears mix with the rain water and burn my cheeks like acid when they rolled down.

"Hey." Rose sat down next to me, her pink hair plastered to her face. We'd only been outside for seconds, and we were drenched.

“What are you doing?”

“Putting out the fire.” I stared ahead, expressionless.

Rose didn't say anything, waiting for me to elaborate. “She set me on fire,” I explained shortly.

Instead of making fun of me, like I had expected, she said something that deeply surprised me. “I always thought you should have been a poet. You have a way with words. You think of phrases I never would've thought to say.”

I looked at her, but couldn't think of what to say, so I just allowed us to sit in silence. I spoke a few minutes later.

“I have no idea what comes next.”

“Well, you're going to get up, and drive home, and move on.”

“I can't.” I looked at her, as if searching for a better answer than that. “She was the love of my life.”

“No, she wasn't. Love isn't always reciprocated, but true love is. If she didn't think you were her true love, she wasn't yours.”

“No, you—you can't say that. You don't know how it was like with her. She just made me a better person, she made me a person that I wasn't ashamed to be. She was my favorite part of myself...”

“Maybe she is your true love. But if you really believe that, you can hang onto the idea that she'll come back. But there's a chance your real true love is in a coffee shop a thousand miles away, or playing chess in Turkey, or fast asleep in Greece. You just have to wait: wait for her to come back, or wait to find the person you looked for in her to find you.”

“I didn't 'look for anyone' in her. But now I'll look for her in every person I meet.” I paused. “I don't think I can wait.”

“We don't really have a choice—any of us—do we?” Rose turned to me, and smiled grimly.

I could barely see; the rain water still poured down, dripping down my forehead and into my eyes. My last coherent thought from that moment was imagining walking into my apartment that night, all of her belongings packed into a compact car in a hotel parking lot twenty miles away. I could already feel how stale the air was, how cold the apartment was without her presence, how barren and empty: a beautiful corpse, a skeleton. And I thought, the fire dampening in the pouring rain, leaving my body steaming, wet, and cold: Nothing is

more terrible than a place that has had the life taken from it. Nothing is more unbearable than this.

~

“Do you feel any progress was made this week?” Dr. John looked at me deeply, as if everything depended upon my answer.

“I’m not really sure. I don’t really know what progress will feel like.”

“It will make everything... a little less unbearable.” Dr. John smiled. “Let’s switch to something a little more positive. In the past few weeks, I heard you mention your sister Rose nearly as frequently as Naomi.”

“Yes,” I said quickly. “Rose is the most important person in my life, besides Naomi. She always has been.”

“I see. And what makes Rose so important to you?”

“She’s special. She’s always been so special, like Naomi, but in such a different way. They were both born as though they’d been specially crafted.”

“And so you admire that they were both unique, special. You’re unique, too, Josh. You’re special.”

I shook my head. “No, I’m unique, but not special. I’m unique, but only because each of us are unique, no one is a carbon copy of another person. But the irrefutable fact that every person is unique means that being unique is really nothing special.”

“That’s an interesting view.” Dr. John was never speechless, but once in a while I could invoke a thoughtful pause from him, and I considered it an achievement. “But you are special. You’re very special.”

“You don’t need to patronize me.”

“I don’t do that, that’s counter-productive. The fact is, Naomi, perhaps without even being conscious of it, convinced you that you didn’t exist without her. That the most important part of you was her. That is toxic, and that’s what I want to help you undo. You were a person before her, and you will exist as a person after her. Now, I want you to think—seriously—what is special about you?”

“I don’t know.” I found myself getting irritated and flustered, using anger to cover up the embarrassment that I couldn’t find one thing special about myself.

“I am supposed to let you answer the questions, and monopolize the conversations, but you seem to have trouble speaking your words aloud, as opposed to writing them down, so I’ll answer this one: you are resilient. You are stubborn. You are filled with unconditional love and faith. You write beautifully. Those are the things that make you special. Do you agree?”

“No.” I shook my head. “I don’t. Naomi was resilient, Naomi was stubborn, Naomi was loving and faithful, and all you’re seeing is her rippled reflection in me, the last traces of her imprinting themselves into me.”

There was a pause. “I think you need to humanize Naomi: recognize that she was not a goddess, she was a human, the same as you: a person who could succumb to the same things that plague you: pain, loss, failure...death.” Dr. John paused as if waiting for a response, and when I gave him none, he continued forward. “You need closure, because as long as she exists in your mind as she does now, you will never see her for what she really is.”

“What does this mean? Should I call her?” I was hopeful; I hadn’t spoken to her in a year and would do anything to hear her voice one more time.

“No, I think you should visit her in person. I was hoping we could reach a breakthrough before this point, but it seems to me like...that is unlikely.” Dr. John sounded deeply sad and regretful. “Josh, this will be painful. We are pushing down the barriers that our mind has put up for us, and as we chip each stone away, there is a new stab of pain. But after this, we will reach past the intolerable to the tolerable, and that change is one that should not be underestimated.”

“Should I go to Maine?” I asked, appalled.

“No, Naomi is in town. I would highly recommend that Rose accompanies you. I know you trust her, and today, you will really need someone you trust there.” He stood, and shook my hand.

“When I see you a week from today, I am confident you will have reached this breakthrough.”

“Wait, Dr. John,” I said suddenly, before I turned and left.

“Where’s Naomi staying?”

He smiled sadly at me. “Rose will know.”

“So, did you really not know?” Rose and I sat in the grass. It was morning; the sun was rising and the grass was wet, but I barely noticed the dew seep through my pants.

“No, I think—I think I knew.” My legs stung with pins and needles from sitting against them for too long, so I adjusted myself. “It’s so hard to tell. It feels as if my mind isn’t my own. But I think I knew. It was just...painted over. I don’t know how to put it.”

“Good. I couldn’t tell if you were, like, actually crazy, or—“

“Don’t.” I shook my head, staring down at my lap. “Don’t call me that.”

“Right. Sorry.” Rose looked ahead. “How do you feel?”

“I think I’m alright. I mostly feel numb. There was a sudden unbearable stab of pain, and now I think I’m just in shock. But I think it’ll hurt again later, once I give it time to soak in.”

Rose nodded. “What do you remember? After we talked at the wedding?”

“I remember how bad it was raining.”

“Like a hurricane. I remember, too.” Rose’s eyes glazed over. “I remember driving back home after, the cars were just sliding down the road.”

“Is that what happened? The car just slid off the road?”

“Almost. Two cars collided. It wasn’t anyone’s fault. It was raining so hard...”

“Where was she going?”

“Andrea said they were going back to the hotel.”

“She could have changed her mind. She could have decided to come back.”

“It won’t help, you thinking that way.” Rose shook her head. “It doesn’t matter what she was thinking when it happened.”

“And it was over, just like that?”

“Yeah. Yeah, the car came out of nowhere. Just like that.”

“Is Andrea okay?” I realized that that memory hadn’t resurfaced yet, just one of the thousands I had buried in my mind.

“She broke her arm. But she’s fine now. I mean, not fine. She’ll never be fine.”

T here was a pause before I spoke. “I lost her twice in one day.”

Rose looked at me. "I know."

There were a few minutes where we just sat. I allowed myself to unbury all the memories I had concealed from myself, and I understand what Dr. John meant when he said that this process would be hard and painful.

"I think I'm ready to go. There's not much else to do."

"Are you sure? Don't leave for me, we can stay all day if you want," Rose said quickly.

"No, no, I want to go, I'm sure. There's no reason to stay." But I still hesitated for a minute. "I'll think I'll come back and plant wildflowers."

Rose stared at the rectangular patch of dirt in front of us, little sprouts of grass just beginning to poke out of the ground. "I think she'd like that."

I stood and held out my arm as she started to stand. She grabbed it, and I pulled her up.

"So, how do you feel?"

"Nothing is more unbearable than this. But it won't stay this way. And that's bearable, at least."

"That's the spirit." Rose smiled, and for a second, I felt like what I said was true, like perhaps this feeling wasn't forever. I followed a foot behind her as we walked through the rows of tombstones, the sun rising over the graveyard.

demeter

we're sitting on a field of flowers stitched into the world's most un-
comfortable armchair.

we have the same hips—you gave me them, after all—so bone
grinds bone.

i like the closeness, even with the sharpness,
i'm telling you a myth about a woman who moved the seasons for
her daughter.

you're writing letters across the sea to a man who would have been
my grandfather

had things been different.

one day, you're going to leave them to me, because you know i'll
love them,

the ink of another age tripping across the page.

the used car salesman won't let you leave,
not until you have a car and his number.

funny, isn't it?

another day, another car, and i may not have come to be.

you think grey is for old ladies

the bottle says your hair will be strawberry blonde

spoiler alert: it lies.

from there on out, i draw you with an orange crayon,

chanel #22 reaches all the way downstairs

my sister and i, dogs on a hunt,

sniff our way to you.

especially when mom urges us to wait.

i can see you in the mirror sometimes.

we have the same legs, same hips.

you're in my mother's eyes, my aunt's voice on the telephone,

the magnolia in the backyard.

the night you leave, i creep downstairs, book in hand.
i place it on the chair's petals for you to read, wherever you are.
it's mythology, because i know.
you would move the seasons for me.

Cool Kid

What is the meaning of cool? The definition can differ, depending on who you are and where you come from, but according to my second-grade self, all it meant was having a rad skeleton figurine and being able to flounce it around without caring what anybody else thought about you.

This theory came when I was small, on a particular day in the middle of October, during the unfairly small stretch of days where the weather was a wonderful mix of cloudy and cool without being too chilly. It was an escape from the terrible heat of summer, but it would be whisked away just days later to be replaced with the finger-numbing cold of winter.

I plunged my fists into the spilling bowl of popcorn on the couch between my dad and I. He made a half-hearted attempt to scoop the fallen pieces back up off the cushions of our stiff couch, a hideous maroon color. But for every piece he cleaned up, I doubled the mess. I guess as a grimy 7-year-old, I didn't mind the buttery kernels escaping my mouth when I opened it to sing "This is Halloween" from *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.

Maybe my dad was just being nice whenever I asked him to watch it with me over and over, or maybe he really liked seeing the same movie 400 times in a row, who knows? About three weeks earlier, my dad had clicked on the film, and soon after, I was absolutely hooked. I could sing the songs and recite the lines. I would draw pictures of the characters, holding the marker incorrectly in my pudgy hand. Of course these works of art were never works of art at all. If someone walked by and took a glance at my notepad, complete with dark scribbles and scratches, they would probably wonder what could be going on inside my brain.

I remember the night that my dad hopped up from the couch without a word, then rushed upstairs. When he reappeared at the bottom of the steps a few moments later, his fists were squeezed tightly together, trapping something in between. I jumped off the couch and skidded towards him, poking his fists with my squishy kid hands. He unlatched his fingers, and the object rolled from his big fingers into my little ones. I held the object up, beaming. It was

the slender figurine of Jack Skellington, a character from the movie, made of felt and wire. I fit the tip of my pinkies into the hollow shape of his eye sockets and ran my thumb over his stitch-looking smile. His attire was spot-on, from his pointy black shoes to his bat wing bowtie. His thin, long fingers stuck out from the sleeves of his slick striped jacket and the shade of his skull, a light greyish that had once been perfectly white, blended into the cloudy sky out the window behind him.

“It’s Jack the Pumpkin King!” I shouted with delight, tripping over my words clumsily so it sounded more like pumpinkin. “How didya get this?” I asked as excitement bubbled through me. My dad kneeled down beside me, looking at the figure.

“I bought it for decoration when I was a kid,” he explained.

“How old? My age?” I asked, feeling the doll’s clothing.

“Nah, I was older than seven. I wasn’t as cool as you when I was your age.”

Cool. It’s an interesting word. Dad called me cool, and I liked that a lot. I wanted to be cool. Can a second-grader even be “cool”? The thing was, being “cool” meant being like my dad. When my friends came over to play, they would probably think it was strange of me, showing off a wiry skeleton toy when they all had their princess Barbies. But I didn’t care, because it didn’t matter how many Claires or Sarahs or Haileys would roll their eyes or make a sick face when Jack Skellington wanted to go to the ball with Cinderella or fight a sea queen with Ariel. If my dad said I was cool, then I was cool, and no eye roll would change my mind.

Feather Pen

She has been here for weeks.
Long hair comes down in thick waves
down her back.
Her russet skin deepens from the white
dress.
The floor is pale and cold.
She sits crouched with her legs tucked in.
Ink covers her whole hand.
Dripping onto her slender fingers,
crusting over in her fingernails.
And drying on her cuticles.
The ink splotches on her feet,
creating dark pock marks.
The liquid covers the floor. Words swirl
and clump, surrounding her.
The ink is dark like raven feathers,
and stains her lips and teeth.
Above her is paper.
Covered in her scriptures and stories.
Her hand is curved as she swivels Arabic
on the wall.
She tries to stand,
but the ink warps around her ankles,
pulling her the floor.
Her tears are black and streak down her face.
She rubs at her fingers and hands,
trying to scrub off the ravens ink.
Her hands become raw and bleed.
The ink spreads to her dress, floor, and ceiling.
The only sound is her breath.
She sits down again,
picks up the feather pen and writes
in an elegant script.

Old Records: A Tribute to Amy Winehouse's Influences

My mother found a box of old record albums, behind scrap-books and deflated soccer balls. She told me to listen to Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra, but I like the way Billie Holiday's voice rings through the living room. It smothers the flower-wallpapered walls of the kitchen and seeps through the dull bedroom carpets imprinted with furniture that never seems to move. Nothing does, until the turn arm presses its tongue to the record, and the tune flows out, and like rushing water absorbs me. Sometimes, while a lay alone on my bed, I'll close my eyes, I'll breathe with Billie, let her in, swallow her words and spit them out almost whole. Sometimes from the hardwood floors of my London house, I'll sing with her and let her inhale my rhyme, let her catch my words on her tongue and throw them back almost different, almost better.

Conflict

“Stupidity has a knack of getting its way; as we should see if we were not always so much wrapped up in ourselves.”

–Albert Camus

There sits a desolate, empty lot in the center of a town. Describing the town’s exact size is hard, because it’s small enough to not have an airport (or even more than two general stores), but large enough so that you can find it’s dot on a map of the U.S.A if you look hard enough. But enough about the town, it’s that empty lot that’s interesting.

A few years ago there was a school placed in the center of town for ease of access. It was the only one for miles, and so the children of this small town were forced to attend it. The entire population of kids walked a few blocks to their stop and waited for their bus to deliver them into another frightful day.

The school had opened some fifteen years ago and was boasted as one of the best around, whether that was true or not. A young generation of Kindergarteners stumbled into their first classes, and waves of befuddled 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders who had recently moved in attended as well. To really appreciate the school’s situation, let’s take a look at the 4th graders.

Like any other school, it was unavoidable that cliques would start up. New 4th graders who came from the same part of town or kids with the same interests would start talking, and after a few days they stuck like glue. Other kids didn’t interest them and, on a primal level, frightened them.

But then there was the schoolyard.

It was the second week of school, and teachers, already flustered with the high-energy children, decided that there needed to be a recess. They didn’t have an official playground but a very expansive field right behind the building. It had small hills and a few trees. There was also a forest around the border. The teachers forbid students to wander out of the schoolyard, threatening suspension but rarely enforced it.

It didn’t take long after the children were released from their

long-drawn classes to get back into their groups, running around the schoolyard and lazing beneath shady trees. Their voices rang out in playfulness, and passersby would marvel at their youth. That was the first day.

The next was chaos. After returning to familiar spots, the circles of children bickered over others being too close. They complained of not having enough space, people stepping on their shoes, others listening in on their conversations. They were scared of one another, but they also wanted more expanses to call their own. And so these children did what they thought was the right thing to do under these circumstances: they began to fight.

Now these small 4th graders were not especially strong and hardly knew how to wrestle, but they had seen a punch thrown on TV before. It was the same concept, right? And so massive brawls began from a single hit. Cuts and scrapes were awarded to the ones who fought the hardest, teeth were knocked out of people who tried to escape the scene.

Recess finally ended, the bell ringing, and the children had to rest temporarily. But during class, notes were passed and eyes glared and pierced as teachers weren't looking.

And these fights continued, and continued, and continued. By the end of the month, territory was being claimed and divided, and groups were starting to form clearer boundaries and promote leaders. Some were completely dismantled, having no space; others got bigger, and gained more members. But it never stopped any of them from complaining about their area and trying to grow it through violence.

The children felt powerful and in control when they were able to take what they wanted, have their own little bands of students watching their back, proving their dominance.

It was only the beginning of the schoolyard's notoriety.

A year later. At the beginning of 5th grade, nothing had changed. In the classroom, some subjects became harder and some teachers moved around, but it was the schoolyard that was on everyone's mind. Small arguments appeared in certain spots, but at least most of the larger groups had decided to just stay under their

tree or by their rock. That had to change, sadly.

On a breezy October afternoon, one kid brought in a *Superman* comic to show to his bunch of friends. As oos, ahs and wows emerged from the gathered readers, another bunch passed by and took a quick glance at the center of attention.

“Oh, *Superman*,” said the group’s supposed leader, scoffing nearly as much as a fifth grader could. “He’s cool. But you gotta admit, Captain America’s better.”

Heads turned. A murmur hovered above the field. The comic’s owner stepped forward. “Really? A shield over invincibility? I don’t think so.”

The argument quickly escalated. Children brought forth varying levels of knowledge, pointing to certain issue numbers and powers. But in the end, some punches were thrown, and another fight was started.

This one lasted a while. Team *Superman* and Team *Captain America* were rivals for months, fighting to prove which comic was better. Of course, they also both enjoyed the benefit of getting more space and more members. Their fighting had grown since last year too; some children got stronger, others learned fighting moves.

All of the spats that had occurred to that point couldn’t compare. Large clusters dueled it out. Some people tried to flee but ending up getting hit twice as hard. And there was another change: most fights had a compromise to be worked out. Give me this area, give me this money, and we’ll stop. But this was new. It was either one hero or the other, and the fighting only ended when Team *Captain America* had lost too much land and just stopped.

And nobody had really changed their views on either comic.

Sixth grade. The years were going by, faster than ever, and all kids still sat in their classes, waiting for the clock to strike for the hour of the schoolyard.

At this point, there was no attention paid to the pitifully tiny duets or trios; they barely had a corner to call their own. It was the large ones who started to develop. They made rules, each very different than the others. How lunch money was to be shared, how

new leaders would be chosen (if there were to be any new ones at all). And all the while they kept a sharp eye on the other children, making sure they stayed where they were.

No fighting, and all were happy.

Or so it seemed. In actuality, a few members of certain groups were not happy at all. They used to have a nice bunch of people to talk to. Now they had to like Superman or had to give up their lunch money or had to do this or that. These unhappy few, meeting up in science class, decided they should go off and forget about the others. But all of the spots had been taken. What were they to do?

The small assembly took their chances and walked into the forest bordering the field. Just a few yards away, they found a small clearing, the perfect size for just sitting and talking and not having to listen to the bigger, tougher kids. And so they stayed.

But it couldn't be happy for long. More and more people noticed their little hideaway and joined them. Well, most did. Some sent the information straight to their leaders. Many people were furious.

"We don't have enough space! How come they can just take some?"

"They were with us last. We deserve to take it!"

"We should show them who's boss!"

And so it happened that one day. While the hideaway's members were talking about girls, one was hit with a rock. The fighting had evolved, with kids making slingshots and wielding sticks. They came in and started to knock the daylight out of them. But this new group didn't give up without a fight. They fended off clusters of angry 11-year-olds, getting bruises and deep cuts from sticks and stones.

After a while the bell rang, and the groups decided to just leave them be. They had more important things anyways, like copying the homework off of their friends in math. And it actually ended up with the small hideaway getting the confidence to claim the little space as their own, declaring it even. Their fighting, although resulting in many a Band-Aid afterwards, had finally done something.

Time went on, and 7th grade arrived. You would think recess would have been thrown out by now and the children would have matured. However, the teachers had been doing it from the start. The small town went by their own customs, so this 'recess' continued.

The rules each group had got deeper and more intricate. There were guidelines on how to treat other members, who would bring snacks on which day, etc. Some of the more experienced among the children were selected to enforce these rules and to keep an eye on anybody waltzing into their space. The rules helped to keep people safe, but some of them were misused and just benefited the leaders (who got a much larger cut of the deal, so to speak).

Just like last year, during the false peace, some people didn't like the restricting rules. Meeting up in study hall this time, they talked to each other about what to do. Finding more space was out of the question; it had all been taken. Then they had a brilliant idea: why not just do what they had been doing from the start? Start a fight!

The next day, these students protested among their fellow members. They encouraged them to join in stopping the dumb rules that they found to be halting their fun. Quite a few thought these protesters had the right idea, and quite a few thought it was bologna.

"How are you going to just *stop* our rules?" the leader confidently jeered.

The response was clear: he was jabbed in the head. And thus, the two groups, one brand new, started to fight with each other in an all-out clash. Many of the participants wanted nothing to do with it, but either they were forced to fight via peer-pressure or intimidation or they ended up being caught in the punches.

It was bad. Between the pointed sticks and bits of metal, deep wounds formed which took months to heal.

This violence lasted for as long as most of their fights did. The original company wanted their space back, but now it was divided in two. It took a while, but finally a compromise was made: a few of the rules would be changed if the new group joined back.

They did, but they weren't looked at the same again, causing a few scuffles in the future.

Funny enough, another faction tried this later, but ended up winning and creating a whole new congregate, so to speak. In either situation, lots of bones were broken when it just lead to an agreement that could have been made without the violence.

8th grade brought something terrible. At this point, the groups were comfortable enough with each other to make pacts; to increase their strength, they would vow to fight whenever their allies needed them. It seemed like a great idea.

But then there was a bully. He was aware of the fighting in the schoolyard (who couldn't be), but had his own agenda as well, that of stealing lunch money, which he did often. One day, he had to knock a kid out when he tried to fight for his stolen cash.

The victim's group got the news. They took it personally, and so decided to have a nice chat with the bully's little troop. And by chat, of course, I mean another fight.

But boy did it escalate. As soon as one group saw another fighting, they were reminded of their agreement and joined in. And then another group was reminded of their agreement and joined in. And another one. And another...

By the end of the day, it was just like 4th grade. The entire schoolyard was in constant poking and bruising and trying to get out because you had nothing to do with this. It lasted half the school year. Even kids who had managed to avoid the fighting had to learn to throw a punch fast. Needless to say, some people got painful injuries that they bear even to this day.

It ended when the bully's group and their friends gave up and consequently had to give up all of their lunch money and much of their space. The winners rejoiced and took their share of profit, but this made the losers mad. Really mad. Mad enough to get together with their partners and try to fight again.

It lasted the rest of the 8th grade. It was worse than anything ever seen before. And yes, it just ended up the same exact way, with losers being declared and winners taking from them and imaginary lines being drawn or erased. Once again, all of the permanent

wounds and broken ribs really added up to nothing.

High school started (the school was K-12). I don't really need to say it, do I? Fighting went on. It got worse and worse and the students got better and better at hurting each other. Leaders still tried to get more space as some of the weaker kids still tried to duck and weave but got their breath knocked out with every hit in the gut. New students were treated hostilely by all of the major groups, and they left almost immediately.

And that brings us to the day. Around September, one particularly interesting student sat on the front seat of the bus, waiting to be taken to another frightful day of school.

He had been there from the start, from the time when all people wanted was more space, to the time when people bickered of which hero was better, to the times when groups were still diverging and fighting with themselves. He always tried to get out of the way, being small and weak, but never really could. He bore scars from each and every fight. There was no safe corner.

He went to school. He listened to the teachers, he ate his lunch. And then he was once again shoved out into the schoolyard.

All around him there were fights. Small ones, big ones, some close, and some far away. But the sound of it still rang in his ears.

Then suddenly, someone who was trying to aim for a rather quick student slammed him right in the face. He fell to the ground, holding his nose, which was bleeding. He slowly got back up, mad. But the other two hooligans were already gone, not even a sorry, or "hey, you need some help?"

He. Had. Enough.

"QUIIIIEET!" He screeched, lasting about ten seconds. One by one, the groups stopped squabbling and looked at him. They grew deadly silent for the first time since the schoolyard had opened.

"Can't you see?" the child said, almost in tears. "It's so stupid!"

The other children gave him blank looks.

"This... fighting! What are you even doing? People are get-

ting hurt, *bad*, and for what? This stupid field? *Pieces* of this stupid field?" some mutters came from around him.

"You all have been doing this since we came here. Well *GROW UP!*" he shouted, still fighting back tears. "It's time to stop... please..."

The other kids made no sound. The speaker looked up. Had he gotten through to them?

But then they charged at him. Before he could even look behind him to run, he was hit with a big club. Then another kid dragged him down and his head hit the floor. They taunted him and called him a nerd, a hippie, a weirdo. They had been fighting for too long to know anything else.

He was kicked and prodded until he stopped moving. Most of the kids left, but some stuck around, sensing something bad. He wasn't breathing.

They reluctantly called for a teacher, who reluctantly called the hospital; they knew how this would look for the school. He was put into the ER and a day later was declared to be in a stable condition. A sigh of relief was breathed from the students and staff.

But like I said, it didn't look good for the school. It was shut down indefinitely after an investigation, the kids relocated to another high school a long way away, and the school, along with the schoolyard, was rolled over and demoted to an empty lot.

The Water

My sadness began as fog.
It evolved into water,
wet and formless as my ever morphing soul.
The darkness wraps its tentacles around me,
spreading over me like ripples.

I sleep in sunken ships.
I am the waves,
trying desperately to reach the sand,
but always being pulled back into the shivering sea again.

I swim in circles.
The billions of tons of water above me
weigh me down.

Death.

She appears before me,
her image
distorted
by the writhing waves.
The ocean trembles as she reaches towards me,
beckons me
to the place beneath the bottom of the sea.

I reach
out
towards her.

I see her clearly now.
her image is vivid,
strong.
Then gone.
Not even
Death

can reach these pain-soaked waters.

All the Lonely People

All the lonely people

Where do they all come from?

All the lonely people

Where do they all belong?

...

Eleanor sits in a house, not her home. Pink doilies and white lace line the tables, the curtains, the plates.

Eleanor waits.

Father McCartney walks into the room with black tea and golden china. He places her plate on a doily and she places her cup in her hand and her tea in her mouth.

Eleanor waits.

The Father stands in front of her, not too close, but near enough for her old ears. His face is red, and his collar seems to swallow his neck.

Eleanor still waits.

“In the year of our lord Jesus Christ, 1966, Father John McKenzie gave his soul back to the creator. He was a good man. An honest one. He served the Church of England faithfully for over 40 years.” Father McCartney takes a pause.

“God bless.” Eleanor sips her tea and motions for the vicar to start once more.

Sweat shines like tears on his face, “Father McKenzie was a great man, a great priest, and a great mentor. I am proud, yet sad, to say I, Father James McCartney, shall take his place. So, as the lord once said to his disciples: Do not be troubled. Trust in god. Trust in me,” James wipes himself off with a handkerchief.

“Good, work on it. I will take care of him, you take care of being believable.” It’s the first full sentence Eleanor has said since she walked through the door. She finishes her tea.

“Ms. Rigby ma’am, I’m having second thoughts, maybe we should just let nature take it’s course. He is an old man after all.”

Eleanor waits.

“With what I have planned, all will *seem* as if nature’s taken

its course. Now work on it.” She places her cup on the saucer and stands up, back straight as a ruler. “And stay away from McKenzie, he mustn’t get suspicious.”

...

Father McKenzie is currently writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear. He is alone, in a closet under the stairs with old candles and a desk polished until it shines like glazed candies. No one dares to go near the old Vicar when he’s working; barely anyone dares to go to his house, as it’s covered in old doilies and decorations from his deceased wife. He’s an old man. Only devotion to god keeps his body from decay and rot.

He refuses to use a typewriter; he says they’re unnatural, unclean. He holds open a bottle of whiteout as it shakes in his bones. Slowly he applies the white sludge, he had realized he needed to delete a flourish added to the classic “grace to god.” His favorite way to teach is K.I.S.S: Keep It Simple Stupid. He is training a young man named James in this method. James is tall, but wide. He is bald, and he sweats like a metaphorical pig. McKenzie always thinks that’s funny, seeing the use of like in that sentence makes it a simile. What would that be? A similical pig? Who knows?

...

James peeps through the closet door and watches as the old man goes into one of his dazes. James knows that the old man gets lost in thought, sitting there as flies congregate around his head. He wonders what he thinks about. Maybe it’s old memories, maybe it’s similical pigs? James doesn’t like Father McKenzie very much, the way he wants to simplify the great expanse of god, his older views, his constant grimace, as if someone just ran over his dog. James doesn’t want to kill him, but that’s a different story. James starts to walk away; he needs to keep working on the... impromptu funeral service. Otherwise Ms. Eleanor Rigby will be very, very cross. Lately, James can’t seem to look the doilies in the eye, as if the old vicar’s wife is judging him. James plops down on the couch, and groans as

he realizes there's no support; it's like belly flopping on your back-side. Never mind that though, James needs to talk. He closes his eyes and puts his hands together.

"Lord help me in this time of strife. I am about do something wrong, for the good of the many. Tell me lord, will you forgive my sins?"

...

Ms. Eleanor Whitfield Rigby is a lonely person. She is a tall, older woman with a straight back and a wide brim straw hat decorated with violet roses perpetually on her head, hot or cold, rain or shine. She is an old-fashioned woman; she speaks the Queen's English and punishes children on her street when even the school-nuns won't. Eleanor Rigby is a religious woman. As a matter of fact she just stepped out of the church. She was picking up rice from a recent wedding and was speaking to the young vicar in the church house.

Eleanor had a husband, John Rigby. He died years ago; he was a friend to the old vicar of the local church.

Never mind that, she is going to make the vicar a lovely pot roast with some rice to soak up the flavors. It would be a lamb roast, with carrots, onions, potatoes, leeks, and a secret little spice. Eleanor's cooking is known for its ability to knock people away.

Eleanor does not have a car, but luckily she lives nearby. Her pink heels clack on the pavement, and she stops at her small, brick house, green awning over her door. She thinks it's all a bit too tacky, but she refuses to ask anyone for help changing it; the only one she would even dare to ask was poor John Rigby. Eleanor Whitfield Rigby is a lonely person.

...

It's very important to know:

Father George McKenzie is not innocent. But neither is Eleanor Rigby. And neither is Father James McCartney. They are lonely people. And lonely people are willing to do rash things.

...

Father McKenzie is still in his broom closet, writing words no one will hear. He is still in a trance, thinking of old memories, growing tired of similital pigs. He remembers his first marriage, his best friend John and his fiancée, Eleanor. It was a wedding with violet flowers and pink doilies, made by his own wife, and they threw rice as the couples kissed, and John McKenzie smiled wider than usual. Eleanor picked up the rice and put it with the lovely lamb pot roast. She said once: “the rice from weddings has so much more flavor, has so much more memory.” Father McKenzie smiles as he remembers the days gone by, but grimaces as he remembers other days that have also gone by. He decides to get out of this trance; it’s no good for him. He needs to finish his sermon, and bad memories are not good for one’s health. There is a knock at the door.

...

Eleanor Rigby is at the door. Father McKenzie opens said door. Eleanor smiles, as any respectable lady should when her host greets her.

“Evening Father, I’ve noticed how long it’s been since we had a chat. I’ve made a lovely roast for the two of us,” she gestures with the plate in her hand. “Maybe even Father McCartney could share.” Father McKenzie does not respond.

Eleanor waits.

“Yes of course Ms. Rigby, I was just finishing up my sermon, and I’m sure James would love your cooking,” Father McKenzie spoke in what can only be described as monotonous dread. The vicar opens the door for Eleanor, and she walked inside. She puckers at bright doilies and brown couches and sets down the roast and rice on the table. Father McCartney walks into the room, and then quickly walks back out.

“Father McKenzie?”

Eleanor waits.

“Yes Ms. Rigby?”

“I’m going to see how James is doing, is that alright?”

“Do what you please, Ms. Rigby.”

Eleanor walks out of the room, and finds Father McCartney. She grabs his shoulders.

“Just stay calm and do not eat the rice,” Eleanor whispers.

Father McCartney hesitates. He straightens his back, and brushes Eleanor off, “Ma’am, I will have no part in this. If he dies, so will I. And that will look much more suspicious than the old skeleton of a man passing away.”

“Do you remember why you wanted him gone?”

Eleanor waits.

Eleanor still waits.

Eleanor is still waiting.

They stare at each other, surrounded by wooden walls and bright tapestries, while loved ones watch through the eyes of doilies.

“He left her,” Father McCartney is currently remembering school without a parent, bullies, playgrounds, and cold slides. He is remembering his first and last kiss. Father McCartney is remembering life without a Father.

“That’s right McCartney. He left your mother for a dying wench. So will you do this? Will you get back at him for all those lonely, lonely, years?” James was cradled in a web of wedding rice and lace. And whatever god might say would not stop him. Lonely people are willing to do very, very, rash things.

...

Today some very lonely people sit at a dinner table with a lovely lamb pot roast and some flavorful rice. Without word, they all grab each other’s hands and bow their heads. Still no one speaks. Father McCartney prays for forgiveness. Eleanor Rigby prays to one, but asks her husband how his day was. Father McKenzie prays for all the lonely people, including him and the others at the table. Father McKenzie smells the pot roast. Father McKenzie remembers a day in spring, a couple days after his best friend’s wedding. Father McKenzie is in a trance. Eleanor notices, but James tells her it’s nor-

mal, but they must wait it out. They wait, and serve plates, maybe when he's back they can act like nothing's happened. No one takes a bite.

...

A much younger George McKenzie and a still living John Rigby are alone in the church house together. They are drinking tea and celebrating the new furniture George has put in. He has finally become a vicar; in fact he's already married a lovely couple. But sometimes celebration is not good for the mind.

"John, I have something to tell you. You cannot, by any means, tell anyone." Father McKenzie set down his tea and straightened his back in his couch. The place needs some color, maybe even some pink. Father McKenzie didn't quite like pink, but his wife had swayed him. At this point, however, the room is grey.

"George, what is it?"

"John, I've... I've had an affair," John sits so still it's as if time had stopped on him, "it was with that woman, she came to the church not too long ago. Her name was Jane, Jane McCartney."

John is still stuck in time.

"John?"

John stands up and slaps Father McKenzie. "How dare you do that to your wife. How dare you." John starts to walk out of the room, but he stops. He goes back to his seat and sits down. His face is quiet but his eyes are screaming bloody murder. "George McKenzie. You will tell her."

"I can't John, I need your help."

"You tell her, you married me and my wife, don't you dare ruin your own marriage. You have to tell her."

"John I can't, she'll-"

"You TELL HER!"

"DAMMIT JOHN HELP ME!"

John throws his fist at George. "If you do this, if you're not honest, everything else will be based on a lie. You won't be happy. You will be a lonely, lonely person. Tell her."

George punches back. They start to wrestle; neither of them

Large Print

want to, but they have to. For if they don't, John wouldn't understand, and George wouldn't do what was right. Father McKenzie starts to win, getting a punch in. John falls down. John falls on the glass coffee table. John screamed as glass cuts a place that it should not have. John stops screaming. There is a knock on the door. Eleanor is currently bringing some leftover pot roast. She sees John through the window. Father McKenzie is standing over him; tears and purple skin surround his eye.

...

Eleanor has not called the police. There is a lovely funeral, Father McKenzie speaks. Eleanor has not cried once. Eleanor knows jail is too little for what Father McKenzie has done to her John. For what Father McKenzie has done to her.

...

Father McKenzie's wife has died. Father McKenzie puts up all the old doilies she made. 30 years pass.

...

A young man with a familiar name wants to become a vicar. Maybe the house will be less lonely.

...

Father McKenzie has awoken from his trance. He realizes James and Eleanor are staring. He does not want to talk about it. "Shall we eat?"

"That sounds lovely, shall we James?"

"Yes ma'am that sounds lovely."

They dig in. Father McKenzie is not very hungry, but he forces himself to eat. Eleanor and Father McCartney are not touching their rice but are rather enjoying the lamb. Father McKenzie feels a little better. That was a long time ago. He smiles, as he

remembers the feel of the meat breaking in his mouth, the leeks crunching as a rich tang emanates from the sauce. And the rice, oh the rice. It takes all the flavors imaginable, and breaks as a moist mold, with bits of potato or lamb adding that little much more. By the end, the priest has engulfed the entire roast, even asked for extras.

“That was lovely Ms. Rigby, thank you for offering me dinner.” Father McKenzie still feels shaky, but his mood is much better.

“Thank you for indulging me Father. Now, I have something I would like to say to you.” Eleanor stands up and starts grabbing strategically placed doilies, color draining until the room is cold and grey.

“Ms. Rigby, what are you doing?”

“Ma’am I’d like to leave for this bit.” Father McCartney walks out of the room.

Eleanor waits.

Father McKenzie looks at Eleanor, tears running from his eyes.

“I killed your wife George. It only seems fair. I would’ve called the cops but,” she sits back down and smiles, the first smile she hasn’t forced in a long time, “you needed to suffer for what you’ve done. I’ve lived a lonely, lonely life. It’s obvious how I’ve changed from the happy little girl that you murdered; I’m an old woman with a poor temperament and a knack for vengeance. Anyways, I killed your wife. I let you suffer with what you’d done. I let you live a lonely, lonely life. Just like *I* did. And, cherry on top, I found your bastard son, and guess what? He wants you dead as well. So,” she reached across the table and grabbed the old skeleton’s hand, “I let you go now.”

Father McKenzie had one last look. Not a look of hatred or fear, not a face with tears. Father McKenzie smiled and promptly died of a heart attack. Ms. Eleanor Rigby took a plate of rice to the place where she got married. She grabbed a spoonful.

...

Father McCartney gave a lovely speech at Father McKenzie’s

Large Print

wedding. Many people cried and congratulated James.

...

Eleanor Rigby died in the church. She was buried along with her name. Nobody came.

Ah, look at all the lonely people
Ah, look at all the lonely people

Prince

Dear Son,

I watch as the teeth of
your feet claw through the
freshly groomed grass with no
remorse. You use to not be able
to use them, you know. My telling
eyes follow you dodging the bulky
opponents daring to take you down.
You seal the game shut and I leap
in excitement but tears graze my cheeks
because you are 6'1, not 4'11, and you
can tie your own tie.

My little man of the house,
can't you stay cheeky and
bright-eyed until the skin
on my hands fold within itself,
until my back slowly lowers into
a hunch, until my legs can't stand
to chase you around anymore, until
my arms are stuck by my side unable
to shield you from the smooth-talking
jocks shuffling greasy across the linoleum.

My eyes cut to the weave shaking girls
sitting cross-legged, cheering for you.
Promise me this, sweetheart, you
will take a blossoming flower's heart
and treat it as such, because baby, boys
and canines are one in the same,
and I'm not raising a Rottweiler.
You will not bark or bite or growl.
Don't slice through her trust and faith-
fulness and avoid the glowing temptress

that is anything but yours.

Following you walk off the field
for the last time, the crowd shouting
MVP filling my head with pride,
I know that you are walking on
the road of constant smiles,
dollar bills and balance.
And me, I can just gaze in your
direction, watching my prince
become a king.

May

Eva had been in and out of school since December—at first it was a sleep study, then her parents pulled her out some days. But when she stopped bothering to show up at all, the cratered days began to callous my feet. Though, the empty of a beige hallway paled in comparison to the hollow of May's heat. It wasn't the first year she had left school for months on end or that May came ripping towards me. But it was the first year that the heat was this punishing on my chest, and June seemed farther away than ever.

The early of May first swells with cold rain and seeps into my window. The mornings never get better. If there's anything I know for sure, it's how infectious and frigid May gets, and how it breathes bitter down my shoulders. But when the sun singes the sidewalks at noon, I am in trouble; it's the heat of May that swallows me whole. The promising new leaves that glisten in the spring sun drag me outside by my bare feet everyday. I guess I'll never learn. Maybe if the days become young again, she and I can give up on May like we used to. We can throw the month to the ground and with it, ourselves. May has left me crisp, once again, with carrying out plans. It's the white hot collision of responsibility and drowsiness. And the worst part is, I have let myself deteriorate against its tyranny again this year.

Showers, however, are promising. There's something about the way a hot shower peels your pores back to invite in the hot of spring into your skin that makes the month almost bearable. But how long will it last? How many showers does it take to rinse weeks from the calendar? How many showers is my satisfaction worth? I brush my hair, bristles slipping through my curls like the hours through the days. The woman on the shampoo bottle laughs at me. Her hair is brisk and glows with summer, the frizz of it invites new heat in. Amidst the humidity of my melodramatic shower, the phone rings. It's Eva. I smile.

The best part about May is that eventually, Eva and I get to watch it fade to black, no matter how bad things seem to get. One year, I didn't get out of bed for the first week of May. Fortunately, that week came and went, just like the rest of them. They all do that,

like the laughter jumping in & out of our chests during nearby June & July. In retrospect, May is always a laughable crisis. Just a minor mishap. But in the middle of its hostile tendencies, it feels like storms blustering towards the last corner of smooth on the lake.

We chat on the phone, and she takes me to the corner store. Eva, unlike other people, understands the heavy of May and the harsh of its mornings. She also, unlike other people, understands that the only remedy is cheap food from plastic wrappers and a hot night. That, or she just likes it when I buy her food. Regardless, she never fails to glow and flourish over the burden of May to pull me into the sweet safety of candy wrappers in June. She says she's fifteen minutes away and I scramble to get dressed.

Our eyes burdened with attentiveness, they watch the sun's plunge into the night. Dusk dusts the alley, our new laughter leads the way. At this rate, it will be May until December. It could be May forever. But in this single sliver of it all, while the sun is heavy and our chests remain light, that's not looking like the worst thing in the world.

The shimmer of blue Rice Krispie Treats sticks to our hands and the hard of nickels tame the front counter. We left the store feeling a warmth that May cannot provide, a warmth that paled in comparison to a nearby June. One from the gooey of a 79 cent cereal based treat and the smile of a friend.

Janice and Austen

JANICE, an aspiring den mother, and her son, AUSTEN, sit together at a small table, Janice intently watches Austen as he plays on his Nintendo DS. Austen pays his mother no attention.

JANICE

Austen...sweetheart, I ordered us some food but you have to eat quickly so we can make the meet on time. In order for me to enroll you for the whole month I-

Austen

Yeah Mom, okay I get it. Tying knots, birdwatching, peeing in the woods, simple stuff.

JANICE

That's not all there is to being a boy scout! Did you even get the link I sent you to NetKnots.com? Austen have you seen a Bowline on a Bight knot up close?

AUSTEN

Uh, possibly?

JANICE

A moment like that is something you wouldn't forget. To climb a tree and smell the fresh pine, waiting in anticipation as a Fringillidae looks around in hopes it'll spot you. Austen...are you even listening to me?

AUSTEN

Not really, I'm on a boss level. Can you wait a second?

Janice snatches the device from her son's hands, closing it without turning it off. Austen groans.

AUSTEN

Look Mom, no offense, but like every offense ever, I don't want to

Large Print

do this. I don't care.

JANICE

Are you trying to hurt my feelings? You know how long I've wanted to do this! What about when your Uncle Herman earned his Ultimate Birdwatcher badge? We threw a party for him and everything! Don't you think I'd want-I mean that you'd want that?

AUSTEN

No. I really don't.

JANICE

Well I do, so stop being so selfish, Austen. I give you everything you want and I can't even have this for myself.

AUSTEN

I never asked for any of this! I hate Ohio and Boy Scouts even more. I tell you all the time but you just don't listen!

They both sit still in silence.

AUSTEN

Can I have my DS back? I was about to win the game...

JANICE

(hesitant)

Remember that story Herman would always tell about us when we were little?

Janice (CONT'D)

I thought it was cool that Herman was in a group. The Boy Scouts always went on trips together while I had to stay back and let Millie Ann Pepperson braid my hair. I couldn't help start the fire, no. I had to sit and help Millie sell Do-si-dos. Watch Millie do this and watch Millie earn that badge. I was such a Tagalong!

AUSTEN

Why couldn't you just be a Girl Scout then? It couldn't have been that bad.

JANICE

You're right. It was even worse. I felt like Girl Scouts was equivalent to the very pits of hell while I watched Herman skipping around in heaven.

Austen gives Janice a look of shock and distaste.

JANICE

I wanted to be looked at as a Boy Scout. Screw Tagalongs and Millie Ann! I wanted to climb trees and go hiking! Nobody took Girl Scouts serious.

AUSTEN

So instead of trying to get Girl Scouts to do the same things, you ditched them.

JANICE

Oh no, I quit because of course your Grandpa Cain refused to reason with me. He said I could pass as a boy but couldn't do a pushup to save my life.

AUSTEN

Mom, Herman is the worst. As a person and even more as an Uncle. Remember for Christmas when he gave me an old pair of socks he used to wear for gym.

JANICE

Those were his lucky socks, Austen.

AUSTEN

Yeah, and they had holes for my big toes.

JANICE

(laughing)

Large Print

What are you trying to say?

AUSTEN

For Christmas you got me limited edition Spider-Man comics, and let me change the color of my braces wire.

JANICE

Austen, I-

AUSTEN

You let me sit in the front seat of the car every Monday. Instead of one inch, you left the barber cut my hair half an inch lower. You let me put a tire swing in my room if I learned how to properly tie the knot.

JANICE

Honey, I'm your mother. Of course I allow you to do those things.

AUSTEN

Yeah Mom but you used to be really strict. You're letting me do more things. I think it's pretty cool.

JANICE

You think Boy Scouts is cool?

AUSTEN

No. I definitely didn't say that.

JANICE

I was just joking around with you, Austy! I understand. It's just been something I've wanted to share with you.

AUSTEN

Sure, but anything but Boy Scouts. I'd rather stay with Uncle Herman and his ferret, Moomoo.

JANICE

Well that's where I was going to take you before I leave for Boy Scouts.

Janice smiles smugly as Austen looks at her in horror. Janice's name is called and she gets up and pushes through a group of people gathered around the corner to get their food.

Andrew Jackson Tongue Twister

Speaking from experience,
when you can't speak you learn
how much you really need to say,
and how much you can save up
in your unbroken piggy bank of "How are you"s and "Oh no it's
fine"s.

You learn how easy it is to fade into the background
of the powdered-sugar-coated uncomfortable silences.
You form an unspoken psychic bond with your winking cat,
and you feel a sudden, unfounded urge to learn sign language.

You learn who really wants to talk to you
and who's just giving you an earful because you can't give them a
mouth—
full of white lies about their new, used blouse
or their sinful shoes
that make your overworked and underpaid blue-collar eyes
water at the sight of them.

You learn that keeping secrets when there isn't a choice
is about as rewarding as learning to write with your left hand
when your right hand was broken in a sledding accident.

Left hand,
right hand,
second hand,
on the other hand,
these phrases taste empty, like flat seltzer water on your broomstick
tongue.

You learn that as an actress, singer, or nighttime radio newscaster,
a silent tongue is a broken ATM machine.
It doesn't matter if someone knows your password or PIN number,
you won't spit out any Andrew Jackson tongue twisters

if your tongue is playing twister with Benjamin Franklin
in his moss plated grave without you.

You learn a lot more when your ears work full-time
and your wagging tongue is on maternity leave
after giving birth to the miracle of a
silent 16 year old.

To the Last Sip

Benny's funeral had the same drapes that my grandma's did. His, of course, had much less people in attendance, but that would be expected for a solitary old man who preferred the company of books over the company of people. Those drapes were the first thing I noticed when the service ended and everyone moved out to the other room for drinks and small conversation. This room was lighter and scattered with tables. Along the far wall was a longer table with trays of cookies and jugs of coffee and lemonade.

I didn't know Benny was dead when I came back to visit Boston. I had graduated from college there in the spring and temporarily moved back in with my family over the summer. I was visiting my friend who lived outside of Boston when I decided to stop into the store where I had worked with him. There his son and the owner of the store, Emerson, told me that he had passed away. I had missed him by a week.

They were planning a funeral for the next week. I stayed in town to help with the store. That way, Emerson could plan and grieve without having to deal with the back-to-school, autumn shopping rush, just like Benny had been doing when I met him on the first day of my job.

Benny was my friend. He was the type of friend, at least I thought, who helped you through things, helped you learn and grow. But as soon as you got past a problem, you lost touch. In a way, I wished all relationships with people were like that, where you didn't have to consider extra feelings or nostalgia, long after the person was gone or moved on. But, as I learned, that's usually the opposite of how things work, even with Benny.

The day I got my job, I walked in and Benny was at the front desk, helping people check out books. Emerson was nowhere to be seen. Later on, I learned that he had been out running errands, but for the time being, I thought it was Benny, not Emerson, who owned the store. I approached him, and after he brushed me off, quite rudely I might add, I stayed in the store until he found time to talk to me.

"Sorry about before. Sometimes I get a little flustered when

it gets busy in here,” he had said from behind me, a few minutes later. I remember noticing that he seemed nicer, even just by saying that. “So you need a job?”

“Yeah, I saw the sign out front. I was wondering if you still needed help. I mean, by the looks of it—”

“What’s your name?” he asked. At this point, the rush of the bookstore had died down, leaving three or four people browsing the shelves. I didn’t know then that this was rare for the store; it was usually packed and busy.

“Marie Rider. What’s yours?”

“Mr. Knowles. Call me Benny though.” Before I could respond, he continued. “Why are you here? Why do you need this job?”

“Well, I’m currently unemployed.”

“But why here?” he asks, walking toward one of the bookshelves in the back as he talked. “Why did you stop here, particularly?”

“Honestly? I was walking past and saw the sign.”

“Do you like books?” he asks, picking up a book that was laying on its side and sliding it into its correct spot.

“Well, used to read them more in the summer. School kind of keeps me from that though.”

“Seasonal reading. Better than nothing,” said Benny. “I used to hate reading. Didn’t have enough time to, never really got why people did it. I get it now though.” At the time, I remember thinking this was weird. But as I got to know him more, I realized that he didn’t really have a choice; he worked there because that is where Emerson was working. “Do you want coffee?” he asked, motioning to the brewer up in the front of the store.

“No, thanks. Like tea better,” I said.

“Well I love coffee. I mean, it took some getting used to, but once you do, every time you have it, it’s kind of like a peace offering you can give to a person before starting a conversation.” He looked up, noticing people heading toward the front register. “I have to go help the last few people in here check out, so if you want to pick a table in the back, I’ll join you in a quick second.”

“Sure,” I said, heading to the back of the store. After a few

moments, Benny returned from the front with two mugs of coffee, and joined me at the table. Every time he was helping out in the store since that day, which was increasingly more often as the year went on, he would greet me with either a smile or a cup of coffee.

“Just in case you changed your mind,” he said, handing me on mug. We sat and talked for a while, and I didn’t even notice each sip I took until the last one was gone and the mug was empty. That was the first time I drank a cup of coffee since my grandma had moved in with us. My grandma thought coffee would stunt my growth, said it would stain our teeth, claimed that depending on coffee to keep you awake was unnatural. She rallied a war against it until it became banned from our house altogether.

The last funeral I went to was my grandmother’s. There, the thick carpets had been crawling with eighty-years-olds and family friends, all claiming to know me, handing out condolences to a point where they no longer held any meaning. People there were in obligatory mourning, and I assumed that here, at Benny’s, it would be even worse. But in fact, it was the opposite.

The window drapes in the room seemed to invite the light in as opposed to block it out. The carpets didn’t seem to swallow people whole, people who, though lacking in numbers, genuinely felt sorry about Benny’s passing. Walking around the room, I saw Emerson, who after two days, had finally seemed to settle into an mellow depression, unresponsive to the family and friends congregated in groups around the room, all holding small glasses or mugs. Before coming back, I hadn’t talked to Emerson in four months. Even when I was working there with him, I only talked with him personally in passing. I walked over to him.

“Hi,” I said, placing my coffee down on the table. Its smell easily seeped up through the thin air of the room, filling my head with bittersweet memories of Benny.

Emerson looked up at me and smiled faintly. “Hi, Marie.”

“Hey, how are you feeling?”

“I don’t know. Honestly.” I watched years worth of emotional buildup fall away inside his eyes until he was left vulnerable. I didn’t say anything, waiting for him to continue. “I guess I never planned for what would happen after he was gone. You know? I ex-

pected it, of course, but I guess.... dizzy is a good way to describe it. It feels like the whole world is dizzy around me, and I am perfectly still.”

“A peaceful kind of sadness. I’m feeling the same thing.” We stood in silence for a few heartbeats. “Is Lisa here?” Over the months that I worked with the two of them, on top of noticing Benny’s gradual mental decline, I also got to know Emerson’s family even more. Some days, Emerson’s wife, Lisa, would drive them to work and pick them up again in the afternoons. Benny moved in with Emerson and his family in his early 70’s, the same age as my grandma when she was diagnosed with her Alzheimer’s. He had been covering the bookstore for Emerson the day that I went in looking for a job. Instead of having a formal interview, I talked to him for a good amount of time just like friends would. It was easy to talk with Benny, as if the old man knew the count on his days and was blissfully making the best of them. Every day at work, we would talk through problems together, just like I used to with my grandma.

“Yeah, she’s over there with dad’s long-time high school girlfriend.” He points to the corner of the room where Lisa was consoling a stout, old woman.

“Why don’t you go and talk to someone else?”

“I don’t know. I don’t really feel motivated to. I’m half expecting him to walk in right now.”

“It’s kind of rude of everyone else, though,” I said, distracted, “making you stand here alone.” I scanned the room of people critically. He looked up at me and smiled softly.

“Now that sounded like the Marie I met a year ago. The one who wasn’t afraid of what people thought or what she said.”

“Yeah, I’ve been trying to do that less...” I trailed off. “You know, it was Benny who taught me to be less abrasive.”

“Benny? In what way?”

“My grandma, when she lived with us, had taught me how to stand up for myself, speak up. ‘Don’t let people get the best of you.’ That’s what she would say. And how that formed, while transferring from my personality to hers, was through abrasiveness. She taught me how to get through things.”

“So she taught you how to argue and lie?” he said. I realized that, for now, talking about something other than Benny first might make him less sad.

“Yeah, my grandma was...” I paused, searching for the right words, “an aggressive woman. She would make an argument out of anything. Her perspective was that to show weakness was like forfeiting, right then and there. For example, my mom raised us religious, but after a couple months with my grandma she had us all convinced it wasn’t trustworthy or dependable. For a good time, even though in some ways what she was teaching me was helpful, subconsciously my solutions to things became lies, arguing. Either confrontation or avoidance. No in-between.”

“And my dad taught you how to not depend on that?”

“I guess so, yeah. He taught me to break down the stigma I had formed against losing an argument or showing weakness,” I said.

“He taught you to go against what you’re family taught you?”

“Family?...” I questioned. “Not family. My grandma wasn’t especially liked by people in my family. When she first moved in with us, I didn’t remember the last time I had seen her. I thought she was the best thing ever, talking with me, teaching me to stand up for myself. She was the devil dressed with a white robe and a halo. She was my best friend, and still was even after I realized how badly she had changed me, how unhealthy the imprint she left on me was.”

“She was the devil? Then what was Benny?”

“An angel in the form of an 70-something year old man,” I said, grinning. Emerson smiled slightly, glancing down at the mug pressed between his two hands. “Your father was a great man.”

“A great man with barely any friends,” he said.

“Give the poor guy a break,” I said, smiling.

The old woman that Emerson’s wife had been talking with hobbled toward us. I looked up and saw Lisa smiling apologetically at us from across the room.

“You must be Emerson, I was just talking with your lovely wife over there. What a sweetheart.”

“Yes, that’d be me. And I didn’t marry her for nothing.”

“You know, you look like a lot Benny used to.”

“Thanks. How’ve you been?”

“I’ve been better. I mean, certainly didn’t plan to be here. It’s a shame, isn’t it? Benny was such a wonderful man. Had such a mysterious edge to him. I miss talking with him.” She turned and finally noticed me standing there. “Oh! How rude of me not to introduce myself. I’m Kathy. Benny’s old friend, you could say.”

“Nice to meet you,” I said. “I’m Marie. Worked with the two of them at the bookstore.”

Kathy smiled at me then turned back toward Emerson. “You know, Benny used to call me up sometimes on weekends? He’d ask me to lunch. Such a sweet guy. You think he missed me?”

“Maybe, I’ve just met you and so far I don’t know who wouldn’t,” Emerson said.

“Maybe. So much ruined potential. Such a shame.” She shook her head in pity, then looked up. “Oh dear, I’m so sorry! I must be so rude, talking about Benny like that. Excuse me. I’m not usually like this. It’s just the rush of it all, you know? It’s getting to me.”

“Oh, no. I understand. It hits a different spot in all of us,” said Emerson.

“I actually think it hits the same spot in all of us, we just react in different ways,” she said. I wasn’t expecting that, for her to disagree with him outright.

“That’s another way of thinking about it, I guess. They’re pretty similar though,” I said.

“They’re complete opposites. One is where it hits, the other is how it affects you. Simple,” said Kathy.

“In some ways, these two things can be so similar maybe they can be considered the same thing,” said Emerson. “Of course, my dad had a different sort of friendship with everyone. That’s what really goes into it.”

“But they’re different!” she said, now arguing toward me. What he said was only feeding into the fire. “You see, when I was younger, growing up with Benny, he was a completely different person. That’s why.”

“As Emerson said...” I trailed off, looking at him. He nodded and gave me an understanding smile. “You’re right.” I said. “He was a different person, affecting each of us in a different way.”

“Thank you,” Kathy said. She glanced down at my drink. “Coffee!” she said, noticing the same thing in Emerson’s mug too.

“Do you not normally drink coffee?”

“No, it’s just the Benny hated coffee.”

“Really? He taught me to love it. I never saw him without a mug of it around,” I said.

“Wait, dad didn’t used to like coffee?” Emerson asked.

“Yeah, how odd,” said Kathy. “Back in high school, he couldn’t stand the stuff. Hated it. Funny how people change.”

“Sure is,” said Emerson. “It’s hard for me to imagine, Dad without coffee. Not even in the realm of possibilities for me.”

“If only we could still talk to him about it,” said Kathy. “I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t say that. I’m just so sad that he’s gone. He got me through a lot.”

“We all are,” Emerson said. I smiled.

“Well, I’m going to go talk to your brother over there. Just making my rounds. But I hope you know he was a sweetie, just like you. No one could live him up, though. I’ll talk to you two later.” Kathy placed a hand on Emerson arm, squeezed, and then turned, walking away toward another group. Emerson gave me a strained smile.

“Nothing better than forced funeral small-talk,” he said.

“If you can even count that as small talk,” I said under my breath.

“Benny would’ve hated it here,” continued Emerson. I nodded my head. “It was hard for him to keep going every day, he was tired. So, even though he’s gone...”

“He’s happier?” I asked. He nodded.

“Or we’re happier for him. Or we’re just saying that to make ourselves feel better.” He paused. “I guess he was always happy. Maybe he just came to accept it.” He looked around the room, and then back at me. “Accept his end.” He stopped again. “I bet your grandma was like Kathy. Arguing through her very last days.”

“Oh, you could only imagine how bad she was. Not in

words, but I could sense a push. Kinda the opposite of Benny's. A push against death."

"Instead of Benny's pull," he said, "toward a better life."

"That's the difference between those two. My grandma was always fighting, even when it was out of her control. Benny? He accepted it. He welcomed it. Welcomed everything with a smile and a cup of coffee."

Emerson nodded, and instead of finishing the conversation, we left it at that. I thought back to my grandma's funeral and realized that maybe it wasn't the people's fault it had been so stiff there. Maybe it was Grandma's. Maybe, Benny's life had the largest impact on the mood of community present at his funeral, to commemorate his death in a way that shone so positively in comparison to that for my grandma's. At that moment, I swear he was there, encouraging cups of coffee into our hands, leading everyone through conversation. And this thought made me hope to myself that life for him ended in the way he wanted it, that he died with the same manner he would finish a coffee pot: gently tipped and drained until the very last drop of genuine compassion had been coaxed out of it.

They Ask Me Who I Am

A twist of limbs and white sunlight, I am
wind chimes singing in early afternoon
and crisp air clinging to your lungs.

I am

soft music and photo albums.

Giggling in the gentle darkness,

I am.

I am flowers and colored leaves,

the crunch of dried grass under feet.

I am the chemistry between you and me.

Socked feet creeping through hallways,
attempting to be discreet.

Lace under the holes of my jeans.

White sunlight and a twist of limbs.

We Live in a Rape Culture*

“You don’t know me, but you’ve been inside of me, and that’s why we are here today.”

–Stanford rape victim

**Trigger warning: rape, sexual assault.*

In January of 2015, a woman was found behind a dumpster, unconscious, half-naked, with 20 year-old Brock Turner thrusting his body against her. With messy hair, a necklace tangled around her neck, bra pulled from under her dress, and her dress pulled up over her shoulders, the woman woke up in the hospital unaware of the events that took place. It was when she picked the pine needles out of her hair and felt the bandages of dried blood on her knees and elbows; it was when the nurses measured the bruises on her body and inserted cold, metal objects into her private areas; it was when she left the hospital, wearing clothes that were not hers, in a body that she did not want anymore, that she realized she had been sexually assaulted by a man she did not know—that man being Brock Turner.

In March of 2016, Brock Turner was convicted of three felony counts: sexual penetration with a foreign object of an unconscious person, assault with the intent to commit rape of an unconscious person, and sexual penetration of an intoxicated person. Turner’s maximum sentence would have been 14 years in a state prison, but prosecutors only asked for six years. However, according to Dan Turner (his father), incarceration would be a “steep price to pay for twenty minutes of action.” Had it been thirty minutes, or an hour, things would be totally different. But that wasn’t the case—and Brock was a swimmer, and he didn’t actually have sex with her, so it doesn’t count. And as a result, Judge Aaron Persky sentenced Brock Turner to six months in jail, upon being released after three months for good behavior.

So what exactly is considered good behavior when you are in prison? Is it folding your single sheet on your bed every morning? Is it emptying the slop off of your tray into the garbage can af-

ter each meal? Is it remaining calm when you lose for the fifth time in a game of cards? Congratulations Brock Turner, you acted like a civilized human being for 90 days, not to mention being handcuffed for 70% of it. Since you only sexually assaulted someone for twenty minutes, you can go back to your regular life now. You are no longer a threat to society.

It is specific issues like this one that influence the prevalence of rape culture in society today. The fact that Brock Turner was able to get away with raping an unconscious woman behind a dumpster is absurd, disgusting, and embarrassing. What's even worse, however, is the fact that Brock Turner is not the only rapist walking the streets as we speak. In fact, we are lucky he even spent any time in jail to begin with. 90% of rapists will never step foot in jail, 70% won't even be taken to court. The reason for this? Rape culture.

A majority of rape cases go unreported because victims do not feel safe or protected, either legally or socially. If a case is taken to court, victims face months of questioning, often ones that don't matter, like what they were wearing, who they were with, how much they drank, and even their sexual history. In other words, the victims are being blamed for the actions of the rapist.

“Well, you were drunk, and your stomach was exposed... So he really had no choice other than to rape you.”

“You had sex with ___ in January of 2014, so he couldn't have raped you in August of 2016.”

“Well did you fight back? Where are the bruises? Did you say no? How do we know you said no?”

It's questions like these that make rape and rape culture such difficult topics to address, because ignorance regarding the subjects is at an all time high. Sex is not an instinct that is encoded into the DNA of men, requiring them to take it whenever they please. That's not how it works, so stop trying to justify their ac-

tions by forming an illusion that if sex is available, they are going to take it. Men are not animals. Sex is a mutual agreement, clear and straightforward. It doesn't take much more than common sense to understand the concept of consent. Anything other than yes, means no. Silence means no. Intoxication means no. Sleeping means no. And when someone says no, you stop. You don't try to convince them, telling them how beautiful they look in the moment, how long you've waited for this to happen, how bad you want them, etc. When someone says no, you stop.

In order to attack rape culture as a whole, we must approach the next generation. We have to educate children before they even know what rape is, that no means no. Regardless of what it is, no means no. It is when parents say no to their children, and then end up caving in and giving them what they want, that we literally teach our children to beg, cry, or force until they receive. If we engrave this concept of no meaning no into their minds from the get-go, the likelihood of men trying to force sex among women will decrease significantly. The future really is in our hands.

native tongues

when my grandmother speaks in a language she does not consider
her own her words get caught in her throat
they get trapped under her tongue before she presses them through
her lips they stick to the inside of her mouth form the lump
in her throat
but she refuses to swallow her unspoken words just continues to
stumble over herself
until she finds herself slipping back into her native tongue
she apologizes
she says *i'm sorry mi amorcita these words do not fit in my mouth*
but it has never bothered me to finish her sentences because i will
always place the words on her tongue when she cannot find
any herself
and she tells me that she is so proud of me and that i am so smart
and so brave
but i want to say
no abuela you have it wrong
it is you not me that is so smart and so brave because even though
you struggle for words that sometimes do not come for you
you use your voice in a country that would rather you be silent

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all of the Teen Specialists at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh- Main, especially Leah Durand and Joseph Wilk. Leah, it was only through your expert navigation of the library's interworkings, extensive emailing and unending support that this journal was made possible. Joseph— this publication would not exist without you. You supported my seed of an idea. It was with your advice and extra-mile-attitude that this project got off the ground, and became a fully operational publication.

Large Print

About Us

Leah DeFlicht
Managing Editor

Arwen Kozak
Assistant Managing Editor

Lauren Jasper
Designer

Anushka Shah
Designer

Elsa Eckenrode
Nonfiction Editor

Joshua Cagan
Fiction Editor

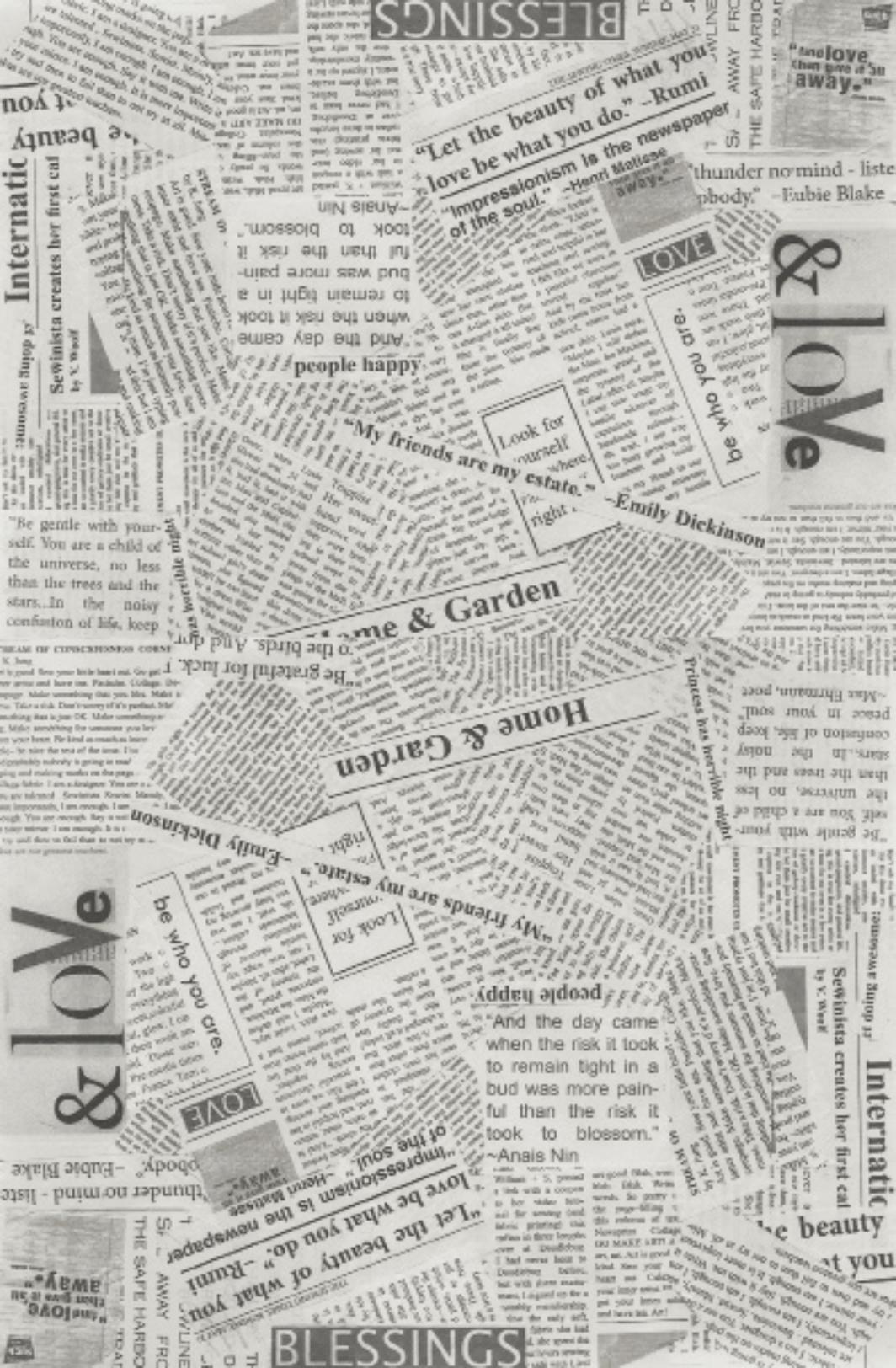
Irina Bucur
Poetry Editor

Kelsey Ford
Adult Consultant

Large Print is a literary journal run by teens, for teens. In many ways, *Large Print* works very similarly to a professional, adult-run journal but is managed, edited, designed and submitted to by teens only. This is our first publication, with work selected from middle and highschoolers across Allegheny County.

For more information on our publication, team, and mission, please contact:

Teen Department
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh- Main
4400 Forbes Ave
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
teensmain@carnegielibrary.org
(412) 622-3114



Internatic
at you
the beauty

Home & Garden
to the birds. And don't

Be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

Be grateful for lack of
the gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

THE SAFE HARBOUR
AWAY FROM
THE DANGER

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

people happy
"My friends are my estate."

Home & Garden
to the birds. And don't

Be grateful for lack of
the gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

THE SAFE HARBOUR
AWAY FROM
THE DANGER

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

people happy
"My friends are my estate."

Home & Garden
to the birds. And don't

Be grateful for lack of
the gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

THE SAFE HARBOUR
AWAY FROM
THE DANGER

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

people happy
"My friends are my estate."

Home & Garden
to the birds. And don't

Be grateful for lack of
the gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

THE SAFE HARBOUR
AWAY FROM
THE DANGER

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

people happy
"My friends are my estate."

Home & Garden
to the birds. And don't

Be grateful for lack of
the gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

THE SAFE HARBOUR
AWAY FROM
THE DANGER

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

people happy
"My friends are my estate."

Home & Garden
to the birds. And don't

Be grateful for lack of
the gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

THE SAFE HARBOUR
AWAY FROM
THE DANGER

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

people happy
"My friends are my estate."

Home & Garden
to the birds. And don't

Be grateful for lack of
the gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

BLESSINGS

"Let the beauty of what you love be what you do." - Rumi

"Impressionism is the newspaper of the soul." - Henri Matisse

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

people happy
"My friends are my estate."

Home & Garden
to the birds. And don't

Be grateful for lack of
the gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

THE SAFE HARBOUR
AWAY FROM
THE DANGER

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

people happy
"My friends are my estate."

Home & Garden
to the birds. And don't

Be grateful for lack of
the gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

& LOVE

Be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

THE SAFE HARBOUR
AWAY FROM
THE DANGER

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

people happy
"My friends are my estate."

Home & Garden
to the birds. And don't

Be grateful for lack of
the gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars...In the noisy confusion of life, keep

LOVE
& LOVE
who you create

thunder no mind - listie
body" - Eubie Blake

BLESSINGS