Flight

2011

An Anthology of the Written and Visual Arts

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Flight is published annually by Mt. San Jacinto College. This publication was made possible by the efforts and assistance of the MSJC Print Shop and its excellent staff. A special thanks goes to the Business Services office for its continued support of Flight.
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Early spring holds a clear, warm night
Chilled only by a gentle breeze
The ground is bright from full moonlight
Black silhouettes are the oak trees
The chirps of crickets fill the air
Coyotes howl in the distance
But in the depth of my despair
I feel comfort for no instance
In the bed of my pickup truck
One hand clutching my broken heart
It seems I’m simply out of luck
Of finding peace or a new start
And though so long I’ve been on my own
I can’t face another night alone.
The cascading rain

touches the fire escape
touches the fire escape

that she resides upon.
that she resides upon.

The drops of rain
The drops of rain
all upon her with
fall upon her with

a certain ease.
a certain ease.

She looks out with
She looks out with

eyes that dare to dream.
eyes that dare to dream.

Her thoughts are mystified
Her thoughts are mystified

by what she hopes to be.
by what she hopes to be.
Writing a poem is like washing the dishes
Hard work, drudgery of the meanest sort
Set by a taskmaster both cruel and vicious
Who finds making others sweat a nice sport.
Maybe poetry is more like sailing a schooner
Around the Cape Horn in the midst of a gale
One false move, and your craft is a goner
With all hands sick below, not one man is hale.
Or perhaps forming a poem is like the sad artist
Who, armed with a roller brush and one can of spray,
Must copy the Mona Lisa or he partest
Now and forever with his good GPA.
But I think, funning aside, the strongest simile
Is that poetry is really like . . . poetry.
Amanda Field / Bored

Cocoa to your Puffs
Luck to your Charms
Honey to your Cheerios
Apple to your Jacks
Oxygen to your Lungs
Blood to your Heart
Smile to your Face
Fruit to your Pebbles/Loops
Sun to your Shine
Peanut to your Butter
Chocolate to your Recess
Binding to your Book
Person to your Dreams
Love to your Life
1 in your hopes and dreams
Tigger to your Bounces
Laugh to your Jokes
Star to your Movies
Summer had just begun. I was about 12 years old. I loved waking up and hearing the chickens and animals on the farm. We lived on a large farm. We had horses, cows, goats, donkeys, llamas, dogs, and cats. The sounds of the pots and pans in the kitchen and the smell of coffee brewing was our signal that we had better be waking up. Even though we were on vacation, we did not have the right to sleep in. There were chores to finish before breakfast. I did not know it at the time that I was about to experience the ride of my life.

It was hot that morning, and we had work to finish. We had many animals to feed. It usually took my two brothers and me about one hour to feed the animals. We started with the larger animals first and finished with the chickens. They seemed to be extra hungry that morning. I had a favorite horse to ride. Her name was “Cricket.” She was a large bay-colored horse with a friendly disposition. We named her after a bug because when she became excited, she liked to hop like a cricket. When she was out running in the fields on her own, you could see her jumping over an object, and she would begin hopping and running. It did not matter if she had a rider or not. But, if you were on for a ride when she became excited, you had better hold on.

Our chores were finished and the animals were fed. So it was time to go for a ride. My horse was so tall; I had to use a barrel to step up on just to reach the stirrups. We were riding about one mile away from the barn, when the wind blew a white plastic bag in front of her. She bolted to the right, grabbed the bit in her teeth, and headed for the barn. I had no control of her. I was very thankful I had a saddle on her that day. Nothing was going to stop her from running as fast as she could back home. She took her own path running through the orange grove and jumping over the water trenches. She became excited and started hopping. I did everything I could to hold on. I tried my best to regain control. She held tight to the bit, and was not about to let go. I kept thinking about what was ahead that we needed to travel through. Then, I remembered that there was a busy two-lane highway ahead. I began to panic and tried even harder to regain control. She had quit hopping and ran straight towards the highway.

The ride took us through a group of orange trees and I could not see the highway ahead. I could hear the roar of the tires from cars as they traveled down the highway. The feelings I had deep inside were of pure adrenaline. My eyes were wide open and my heart was beating at high speed. I kept looking at her, and could now see the highway ahead. There was a large open area between the trees and the highway. I began yelling, “Look out! I can’t stop her!” I did this a few times and we came
to the highway. I remember seeing a large black car coming at us. I was surprised my heart did not stop, or maybe it did, and I didn’t know it. I don’t remember if she actually ran across the highway, or if she jumped it. I’m not even sure what happened to the car. I do remember when she began running through the dirt field on the other side of the highway. There was a dull thud sound to her hooves running through the field. I still had no control and had to hold on tight. After we crossed the highway, she picked up speed running even faster towards the barn. It was as if she could feel my anger, and knew she was in deep trouble. When we got closer to home, she saw the barn. Her ears pinned down against her head, her breathing became deep and steady, and so did mine! She ran under a tree branch that almost knocked me off, and she stopped about five feet from the chain-link fence that blocked the entrance to the barn. I went flying over her head, landing face first into the fence. By the time I figured out what had happened, she had turned around and begun running and hopping away. I had visions of my face with chain-link impressions on my skin. I dusted myself off and did my best to calm down.

She ran back inside the other end of the barn, and I was able to catch her. I kept thanking my lucky stars that we had made it back home without any major injuries. I grabbed her reigns as she pulled back. We were both exhausted, and when we looked at each other, we calmed down. I took her back out for a long walk away from the barn, and then took her back home. The next time we went out for a ride, I used a bridle without a bit. I was able to control her more easily. She still hopped like a cricket when she became excited about something.

To this day, when I see a cricket crossing the floor, I think of that crazy horse. She was so kind and calm until something got her excited. It did not even have to scare her. It could be something that pleased her. I remember telling my mom about what had happened. The colors in her face kept changing as I told her about what had happened. There was even a discussion between her and my dad about selling the horse. I was able to convince them not to sell her. When I drive that section of highway today, I still try to figure out what happened to that black car. I am thankful that we made it safely across. Sometimes I think, maybe we should have named her Lucky Charms or something. But then I think the name Cricket fit her perfectly.
Alma Rodriguez / Drifting Away

You’re drifting away
You’re drifting away
Into places unknown to me
Unknown to me
Don’t worry I won’t ask you stay
I won’t ask you stay
But don’t come back
Don’t come back
Expecting me to be the same
Because as you’re drifting
As you’re drifting
Time is being wasted
Time is being wasted
The point of view is changing
The point of view is changing
And love begins to take on a different shape
And love begins to take on a different shape
So drift away
Drift away
Drift away
Drift away
From me
My big boy
For fourteen years
For only fourteen years
Did you live

It seemed so long to you
But so little to me
But no matter how long
Every moment was sublime

You were born
Starved and brittle
I nursed you back to health
From then on you gave me all your love

But then you died
Old and tired
You wanted to be left alone
But still you showed me love, in your own way

I will not be the only one to miss you
But the boys you raised, will shed tears nightly for you
The mother and father you left behind will weep forever
But you are with your elder brother and sister now

All is right by the world
It was your time
Now ascend into never-ending sweetness
I will join you one day.
One particularly dark evening, as I was driving my girlfriend home, a strange event wrapped its arms around me in a mysterious and frightening grasp.

As I was pulling out of her neighborhood, a little car with a broken headlight came around a corner and ended up behind me. It followed ever so uncomfortably close behind me at first, and even flashing his brights on occasion, beaming through that single headlight.

Beginning at this close and aggressive follow, it then slowed down at a steady rate until that single eerie headlight was just visible in my rearview mirror.

I only began to think it odd when no matter where I went, he followed. That single light, a beacon of curiosity, always appeared some distance behind me.

And even odder, not one vehicle ever came between me and my pursuer. It was as if a spell was cast, an unbreakable link was formed between me and this odd follower. He just trailed slowly behind me, at just the right pace.

Slowly, my brain begins to panic, as thousands of paranoia-induced thoughts collide one by one into my head. I begin to increase my speed, trying to lose this pursuer, and as more and more of these frightened thoughts bombard my head, I stop using my turn signals, in hope that I lose him. But still, every move I make is imitated shortly after by that single headlight.

Shivers of terror consume all rationality as I begin to drive like a mad man; I run through stop signs, and speed through residential areas; I even run a red light, as my heartbeat begins to escalate to furious speeds. Frightened questions and assumed answers are all that go on in my mind at this point; that and the constant contemplation of my next move in trying to lose this attacker. Just as I think my lungs are about to explode from hyperventilation, I pull up to a red light.

My heart beats faster and faster as that single headlight slowly approaches from behind me. My eyes are fixed on the only thing that appears in my rearview mirror, a single faceless silhouette, above that single blinding headlight. A bead of sweat rolls down the side of my forehead. The seconds seem like hours as I gaze into the black nothingness that is the face of my pursuer.

The green light is the only thing that could have taken me out of that trance, as I stomp on the gas pedal, careening through the hot summer
night air. In my mind, I am in a drag race, playing for my life at this point. I take that right turn on what feels like two wheels and feel my eyes instantaneously glance up, looking for that single light.

Nothing. The seal has been broken. The chain, severed. My heart skips a beat as I make the next turn, leading to my house. I slowly pull into the driveway. After turning the engine off, and turning off the headlights, I sit in the dark for a moment, still buckled in, thinking about what had just happened—this one little event, which only lasted about eleven minutes. I glance into my rearview mirror one last time, and a shiver runs down my spine as I look straight into the empty face of that single silhouette hovering over that single headlight. My mind begins to race again, my body seizes up in a panic, my mouth about to utter a moan of horror.

I glance again, and fortunately there is nothing there. Only my imagination. I hurriedly get out of the truck and at a quick pace, I walk along the cold cement path that leads to my front door, and sinking into the couch, I finally let out a stale sigh of relief.

It is finally over. But had it ever really begun? Might the whole thing have just been a figment of my imagination? Or was I really being chased by an unknown attacker? I would never really know the true answer; sometimes I still think about that odd summer night and what really happened. I guess I will never truly know, it will always be a mystery.
A boy lost to the darkness, who turned away from the light. The sallow-skinned youth stood in the shadows to fight.

He lost his love to the darkness he was in
His biggest regret, his greatest sin.

It was then he made the switch, he was a changed man

Working against the wicked one and his evil plan
He made a promise to protect the child with her eyes
No one was to know, he would live in disguise.
A double agent, a secret spy, undercover
All because he had loved her

The darkness fell, the good had won
yet it wasn’t over, it had just begun

His path was set he had settled had found his way
It was peaceful until he was tested on that fateful day

The evil Mark on his arm, it burned
For once again his malevolent master had returned
It wasn’t done he had to go back and do his part
Once in you don’t leave, tied forever to the Dark Art
He found himself working for the dark side once more

But his true loyalty had lied now with Dumbledore

His eyes as black as coal, his hair as black as night
He was a hidden hero, the demon of the light

He fought the darkness he had once adored
He was a dark knight, with a shining sword
A traitor to the darkness he once served
In the end, what he got he didn’t deserve
He played his part well, no one knew until the end
That he did what he did for the love of a friend.
He knew what to do, a hero, not afraid, he was brave
No one should forget the sacrifice, the life he gave.
His allegiance was to the good forever, he swore
He was the bravest man, a true GRYFFINDOR.
Mariana Escarcega / Misery

The rain falls
Tears from the heavens
Trying to wash away all of the suffering
All of the pollution that will soon suffocate all who have caused it
The beauty of the world slowly vanishing into ashes
Black deadly ashes
Humans kill their own, so cruel
Rainfall of tears, cleaning the soil where crime had dared occur
Where lives were taken and consciences filled with guilt
Our world, our home turning into the depth of hell
Deep and loveless abyss
Without your gentle smile
That set of eyes that I miss
I wish you’d stay awhile

I loathe you, I love you
Eternal turmoil
Soaring soul broke in two
I reach for you, then recoil

Poison me, yet you’re my cure
Stuck to you for life
Not sure where I’ll find allure
Yet you help me with my strife

Until our souls depart, I’m bound
A greater love I’ve never found.
The sun makes its way up and its shine is incredibly beautiful. The sunshine enters Mr. O’Malley’s bedroom. Whispers of excitement begin as the shine wakes O’Malley from his deep slumber. He awakes and roars a mighty yawn. His yawn could wake ferocious grizzly bears from their seemingly eternal hibernation. O’Malley wipes the dust from his ancient and exhausted eyes. By view of his eyes you could tell he’s seen his share of battles. O’Malley stands and stretches out his brittle body. The sunshine creates his promiscuous shadow on the wall and appears glorified.

After leaving his toothbrush wanting more, he departs from his Brooklyn hotel room. He has a backpack and he packs it up nice! A light zephyr passes the hallway as O’Malley passes. As he passes through the ominous hallways he suddenly stops. He feels an uneasy presence. He turns around to glare towards the dark hallway. A dark figure emerges at the end of the hall. The dark figure appears nebulous. The sun that had been has now vanished. O’Malley is not unnerved by this; he stares fearlessly. The hazy figure begins to march toward O’Malley’s direction. O’Malley is unhesitant and extracts his reverse-bladed sword from his nicely packed backpack. The figure now begins to sprint exponentially towards O’Malley. The sprinting resembles a giraffe on steroids. O’Malley raises his gargantuan sword with poise . . .

Later that day Mr. O’Malley begins walking to Robert Moses’ office building. As he walks he hears the birds singing their wonderful tunes and that lifts his spirit sky high, sky high like a teenage-Temecula boy. The breeze is algid and comforting. The day is amiable, but dark clouds are on the horizon. O’Malley nears Moses’ office building entrance. Just as he reaches for the disparate door, an intimidating roar rolls through the streets of Brooklyn, intimidating like Zeus’ omnipotent beard. The dark clouds have now reached their grasp around Brooklyn. O’Malley is startled, but only for half of a second. As O’Malley composes himself he notices the familiar dark figure to his left side! O’Malley flips backwards acrobatically and pulls out his katana. Rain begins to shower brutally. The thunder speaks for the sky. The heavy falling rain bleeds O’Malley’s vision. This makes the dark figure’s identity abstruse. Just as O’Malley turns to strike, the dark figure is gone. As sudden as the dark figure appeared, it disappears even quicker. The strong winds disperse the rain. The rain seems to leave with the stranger.

O’Malley enters Moses’ office building. The room is filled with a good amount of people obviously working. He trots to the elevator. O’Malley gets cut off by a handsome gentleman. The gentleman stops
right in front of O’Malley. O’Malley is bewildered by the gentleman’s action. The gentleman’s head is facing the floor. O’Malley can not locate the expression of the man since the man has a top hat on. He is wearing an expensive suit as well. The gentleman appears as a classy and benign person. The gentleman lifts his head up to glare into the eyes of O’Malley almost saying some hidden message without speaking. O’Malley can tell there is a look of danger in the gentleman’s eyes. They stare intently at one another for what seems like forever. O’Malley notices the crowded room is not so congested anymore. All of the working people seem to have quietly exited the room while O’Malley and the handsome gentleman stare off into each other’s dreamy eyes.

The gentleman says with a devilish grin, “Get ready to dance… with swords!” The handsome gentleman tosses his gorgeous top hat to the side like only a gentleman can. He then retrieves a brobdingnagian-sized sword from within his provocative business suit. O’Malley pulls out his katana faster than the flash of a nuclear weapon going off. O’Malley demands answers from the handsome gentleman.

“I’m the beautiful man with a beautiful hand,” answers the gentleman. He then flexes and his business suits rips into tiny pieces and combusts into flames as it falls onto the floor. O’Malley observes with awe as the gentleman lifts his overly exaggerated huge-shiny sword ready to strike. The gentleman charges and swings his powerful sword with cogent ambitions. O’Malley barrel rolls out of the way but the strong swing of the sword causes a forceful push that sends O’Malley off balance. The gentleman reacts swiftly and swings his mighty sword towards O’Malley’s direction. O’Malley appears doomed, but he miraculously dodges the strike by jumping into the air with the aid of his katana. O’Malley’s cat-like reflexes save him for the time being. While still in the air O’Malley attempts to stab the gentleman but from out of the blue the gentleman shoves a rush of wind at O’Malley that sends him flying and crashing against a wall. O’Malley has a dumbfounded expression on his face. He is flabbergasted that the gentleman knows the power-wind technique, a scarcely used technique. Obviously the gentleman has been trained. O’Malley gathers himself together and stands again to face the strong-willed gentleman. The gentleman begins laughing hysterically. O’Malley is not intimidated by him.

“Does it depress you to know that you’re going to lose this battle?” O’Malley asks. The gentleman looks puzzled. O’Malley has something grand up his sleeve. The man with the beautiful hand dashes toward O’Malley with cruel intentions. He slashes violently but O’Malley blocks every feeble attempt with his katana. O’Malley back flips and kicks the gentleman’s beautiful jaw with epic force. He staggers backwards. The fight will conclude abruptly thanks to O’Malley’s arcane move. O’Malley raises his arm towards the gentleman’s direction. A special energy commences around the hand of O’Malley. Panic sets in for the handsome
gentleman, his expression mirroring a mother’s who was just enlightened about her daughter being pregnant. The glowing energy has now grown brighter and blue. It grows double in size as well.

“Dodger Blast!” yells O’Malley. He sends the blast at the gentleman. The room grows quiet as the deafening blast heads toward the gentleman. The gentleman screams and weeps like a maiden as the blast nears him. The blast makes contact on a direct hit and a large boom follows. O’Malley just stands there in place admiring his epic move like a baseball player admires his homerun. The dust clears and O’Malley has knocked the handsome gentleman unconscious.

“Apollo has lifted his skirt, Venus has put away her bosom, the day has been launched,” O’Malley says in victory.

O’Malley gallops to the elevator and heads to the top floor. The elevator doors open and the room is pitch back. Like African black. A spotlight comes on near the back end of the room. The dark figure appears yet again. O’Malley gives a requisition to the dark figure. The dark figure walks into the spotlight (drama!).

“Gasp!” O’Malley yells. He is bewildered by what he sees. A cold chill runs down O’Malley’s spine. The dark figure has been Robert Moses the entire time. Moses composed a masterful contrivance against O’Malley.

“Are you really all that surprised, Mr. O’Malley? I’ve resented you from the day we first met. A new stadium cannot and will not be built in Brooklyn,” Moses says with a smirk. O’Malley shrugs off his statements.

“You have made a fool out of me. You sent the handsome gentleman to attack me,” O’Malley claims. Moses concurs and giggles like a teenage girl.

“You laugh like a little schoolboy bi***!” O’Malley says. Moses is angered by this. The tension in the room grows abundantly palpable. O’Malley slowly extracts his katana. They both stay composed and Van Damme-like. Moses yanks out his Lion Dog sword. The battle is about to begin.

Moses and O’Malley chase around one another throughout the room. Their speed moves inanimate objects like nothing. Papers fly into the air as they strike at each other and they continue their sprints around the room. O’Malley finally makes the first contact. He hits Moses across the face with his handle and Moses crashes through the window. O’Malley dives out the window to chase Moses’ fall. O’Malley swipes at Moses but Moses defends himself well and avoids death for the meantime. They fall and fall until Moses lands on a conveniently placed landing pad. O’Malley follows and just misses what would have been a fatal strike. Moses rolls out of the way and reaches for a concealed weapon. O’Malley hurries up onto his feet. He realizes Moses is trying to pull a fast one and readies his katana for defense. Moses pulls out a nine-millimeter pistol and fires it three times. O’Malley dodges with acrobatic moves and bounces a couple
shots away with his katana. Moses then jumps onto the side of the building and climbs quickly like a chimpanzee on HGH. O’Malley follows suit and does the same. Moses reaches the roof and dives forward to prepare to finish the battle. O’Malley finally reaches the roof. They both stare at one another like they do in Dragonball Z to the point where it’s agonizing. The breeze passes through. The pigeons are on watch. Dark clouds cover the sky and thunder begins to roar once again. The wind’s velocity becomes violent and a heavy downpour of rain startles the city.

O’Malley tosses his katana to the side and Moses obliges. Nothing is better than an old-fashioned fist fight. They run at each other like gazelles and leap towards each other. O’Malley’s right hook is denied and Moses lands a left punch to O’Malley’s cheek. O’Malley responds faster than Moses anticipates and punches Moses in the gut. Their blows can be heard from miles away. The city grows curious about what is happening. A little too bi-curious. The media attempts to fly a helicopter nearby to film the once-in-a-lifetime battle but they are negated because of the force of the battle. One helicopter crashes because of the tremendous battle going on. The explosion of the helicopter does not faze either O’Malley or Moses. They keep fighting. Blow by blow they get weaker, but they don’t stop. The battle goes on for days on end. Neither opponent gives in to the other’s ferocious might. Six long days go by and the fighting seems eternal. The battle has caused tremors and earthquakes varying in force.

O’Malley kicks Moses across the face and Moses goes flying into the wall. Moses spits blood out and lashes out toward O’Malley. Moses drop kicks O’Malley in the chest and O’Malley then hits the ground hard. He too spits blood and gets back on his feet. They’re both bruised and battered. It is obvious that fatigue is finally kicking in for both fighters. Their clothes are filthy and torn. O’Malley sprints toward Moses and Moses toward O’Malley. They both yell at the top of their lungs. And they both land right-hand strikes to one another’s faces. Both go flying opposite directions hitting the floor and scraping until walls stop them. For the first time in four days they don’t react right after a hard blow. Both O’Malley and Moses remain in their position without movement. The rain and thunder subside. The sun is finally out. O’Malley and Moses both stagger up to stand. Both look like they’re about to collapse again. The stare-off seems to have been revived but thankfully that is it.

“I’m done with you. I’m done with New York. I’m moving my Dodgers out west to sunny Southern California. I hope you’re happy of what you accomplished,” O’Malley just manages to say. Moses says nothing and O’Malley walks away, never to see each other again. Moses has his doubts on O’Malley being able to convince the Major League Baseball commissioners to allow a move that far away. But O’Malley has an ace in the hole. He has convinced the owner of the Manhattan Giants to move out west to San Francisco. O’Malley has won.
Sandra Adams / Somewhere Only We Know

As I walk around I feel the ground beneath my feet It is a road that can take me anywhere I wish I have no particular place in mind, I am wondering around aimlessly while thinking of you.

I want to scream at the world and ask why life is so unfair I have been crying so much that my tears are starting to sting my eyes With my eyes bloodshot I went to a place to be alone A place where life stands still, A place of peace, Somewhere only we know.

You took me there once before.

It was our place.

The beauty I saw when I arrived was so breathtaking I felt as if I had the wind knocked out of me I couldn’t breathe for a split second as it took my breath away As I sat with my knees in my chest I felt a blanket of comfort cover me While sitting in the cold staring at all the beauty I feel your presence, I know you are here This place is somewhere we always went Somewhere only we know.
Chelsea Seabaugh / Wishing Comfort

Starlight enlighten dreamer’s delightful worlds
Snowflakes so sweet softly stroking long curls
Kisses of mist listening intently hears
Choirs of crackling log fires call near
Ribbons of winds whisper wishes come true
May blankets of peace, love, and joy, comfort you
I am worried that I do not have what it takes to write; poetry or otherwise

Honesty. Confidence. Expression.

What is it that makes a person a greater writer? I have it set in my mind that the words are supposed to flow from writer to paper without any effort

Practice. Creativity. Experience.

Almost silly the thought. Reality tells me otherwise. It makes more sense for it to take real effort, work, and many drafts before the finished product is produced


My mind must grasp this concept. Perhaps this worry stems from fear of judgment, but that thought is foolish. These words are my creation. I shall choose whom to share them with. I must trust myself and the words shall flow
William Brisco / Beseeching Zen

The darkness of loneliness, it’s the greatest shadow of my life. Following me where ever I go, encoring me to hide in its darkest depths. Telling me I’ll be safe, and serene forever and ever.

Trapped like a ghost, can’t be seen nor heard an empty and unspoken endeavor forever and ever. Sullen and sodden I have always been. I’m saturated in grief so lonely within. I realize now the shadowy figure my so-called friend is the philosopher of sophistry feeding me a false sense of security submissively preserved, passively preferred. I have abandoned the entity “my shadowy friend,” but now I am caught between the hunter and the fisherman . . . Reaching out for Zen my only hope for escaping the entity, the shadowy figure, my so-called friend . . . Beseeching Zen.
Daniel Bach / Tunnel
It was an exceptionally cold New England afternoon. I had no sooner walked through the back door than the bell rang. It was Davey, the neighbor with an invitation to accompany him downtown to the corner store. Davey and I were the same age and avid baseball card collectors. After escorting him in and instructing him to wait, I flew up two flights of stairs to change out of my school clothes. After meticulously gearing up I ran back downstairs to put on my winter boots, stocking cap, and mittens. Before exiting I grabbed a few quarters out of a jar in the mudroom and slipped them into the pocket of my corduroy knickers. Little did I know that I was about to learn a valuable life lesson that would forever leave an indelible mark on my psyche.

Walking down Forest Park Avenue Davey ran for the nearest snow bank and within moments launched a snowball at me. I reacted swiftly and retaliated. This snowball flailing exchange carried on half way to our destination. All of a sudden Davey shouted, “I’ll show you how it’s really done!” I stopped dead in my tracks and followed him to the gutter at the sidewalk’s edge. In his hands was a freshly packed snowball that he proceeded to roll in slush and repack. I had never seen this technique before, so I thought I would try it too.

Next, Davey said, “Let’s have a contest and see how many cars we can hit.” Davey’s plan was to keep score the rest of the way, for the loser would reward the winner with a special treat. I reluctantly agreed even though deep down I knew it was wrong. Before I knew it I was launching right and left and giggling to myself. Before long we were both fully engrossed in our activity and oblivious to the outside world. Our mission was to hit as many cars as possible.

I hit my first three to four cars and the thrill was heightening. There was a feeling of excitement coupled with fear. As the cars continued to pass, the snow began falling harder, which made the figures inside the vehicles invisible. This added to my sense of detachment. I remember a little voice inside my head saying, “If I can’t see them, they most certainly can’t see me.” Getting caught was out of the question!

Off in the distance I found my next mark, a black mid-1960’s Lincoln Continental. I yelled to Davey, “I’ve got this one” and began hurling one right after the other. I pelted the car’s right side and with my last throw planted one directly in the center of the driver’s windshield. Instantly, I heard the sound of screeching tires, a car door slam and the driver yelling, “Stop, little girl.” I reacted so quickly that within seconds I had sprung into flight like a gazelle running from a hungry lion. With
every gust of wind the brisk, cold air grazed across my cheeks like shards of glass. As I picked up speed my heart began to race. With every breath of cold air my chest began to ache, yet I could not feel my legs moving. My heart continued to race, pounding over and over in my ears. I felt like I had entered Poe’s “Tell-Tale Heart.”

I continued to run looking over my left shoulder to find the stranger hot on my trail. Where was Davey? I was on my own and needed an exit strategy. Somehow I had to find a way to ditch the stranger, for I did not want to think of what the outcome would be if caught. After picking up speed I entered a side yard behind a row of snow-packed trees. I was certain that the trees had afforded me the anonymity I needed and the chase was over. I came to a halt breathless and terrified to find that I was trapped. The backyard was fenced and there was no escape, for I heard the stranger approaching. My only option was to hide behind a hatchway. I ran around the left side and lay my body flat on the ground level to the hatchway. The stranger wouldn’t see me. With my head down and face planted right into the snow I listened in silence.

Next, I heard the deep sound of the stranger’s voice. “Little girl, do you know what you did?” I raised my head and within inches of my nose saw two large brown boots. I was petrified and speechless to find the stranger looming over me. I stood up shaking like a leaf. The stranger gave me a stern tongue lashing on the potential outcome of my actions. This included an array of descriptions of vehicular accidents. I apologized and attempted to vacate the scene, but he grabbed my sleeve and stated, “You’re not going anywhere.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a pen and small pad of paper. Next, he demanded my name, address, and phone number. I had to think fast on my feet, so I blurted out, “My name is Ellie Mayotte and I live at 56 Riverview Terrace. My number is 739-0906.” The stranger assured me that he would be talking to my parents.

I walked home slowly feeling lower than low. I lied to save my own skin and would probably get away with it, but I felt terrible. That night I went to bed and said my usual prayers. In addition, I confessed my rotten deed and promised to never do it again. The next morning during recess I heard the scuttlebutt about the stranger arriving at the Mayotte’s house. Apparently he came with an officer to talk to Ellie about the incident. Timmy, the youngest Mayotte, stated that after the stranger verbally reenacted the ordeal his mother replied, “Officer, you must be mistaken. My daughter Ellie is 19 and away at college.” This would be my big secret that would stay with me forever, that is until now.
Some measure love in miles,
for me that is too short;
others value it in gold,
for me that is too cheap;
a few even say their love is an ocean,
too deep or wide to cross.
How can you gauge something
that lives inside your heart?
Plans

In a loss of words. In a loss of time. Time can only hold you down.

Peace by Understanding

To know peace one must give up greed. For world peace. There must be a need of understanding, till then we’re doomed with war.
Shameka Alworth / Emotions Running Wild

I feel worthless,
I feel alone,
I feel left out,
Always on my own.
I can be the nicest girl you’ll ever meet.
But there are so many challenges still to beat.

People love to play games, they play games with my head.
Sometimes, too many, makes me wish I were dead.
My Friends are my friends no longer . . .
But hey! What doesn’t kill me only makes me stronger.

I feel hurt,
I get no respect,
I am trapped in a world full of hate and neglect.
I’ve tried to cut,
I’ve tried to cry,
But yet still have not managed to fly.
My problems circle around me like a whirlpool of pain.
Even with all the good I have done,
I have yet to gain.
Hopefully all I’ve been through, is as bad as it can get.
Maybe, one day, I’ll look back and laugh and I’ll get over it.
Ever since my Uncle Ronny had his stroke, a ripple of ridiculous theories was brought about. Well, at least that’s when I noticed them. People have near-death experiences, and they come back to life/reality and then they describe a miraculous white light. I always thought they were liars.

Anyway, I’m in this white room and I have no idea why. It’s almost like a drunken night except I’m dead. For about the first couple minutes I tried to find someone else who might be in this bizarre place. For the first couple of hours after, I cried. I cried for myself, I cried for my family and I cried in fear. After a while, I realized that I may be in this room forever, and if that was the case, I would have plenty of time to cry later.

I then began to explore. I felt like a child all over again. I knew nothing but impulse and I absorbed every bit of information. Unfortunately, my observations were all very similar:

Everything’s white.
There is nothing here.
There are no walls.

I began thinking about just walking until there was an end, but for some peculiar reason, I already knew there wasn’t any.

I was resisting the thought of sadness, but it engulfed my mind without permission. My thoughts were consumed by my ex-wife and my children. It was then that I realized I should have never attempted to love any other women. I have a wife, but the first person who comes to my mind now that I am deceased is my ex. I remember marrying her better than when I married my current wife. I guess we just couldn’t get past the whole milk idea. The milk, I can’t believe I’m even thinking about it. You know there’s something wrong when you are dead and you still go back to that time you argued about the magical elixir that is derived from a cow’s tit.

Christmas then came to my mind. A time of cozy fires and pretending to be a naked Santa with a naughty elf as a wife.

Christmas was one thing I truly missed; I missed watching everyone attempt to put decorations on the seven-foot tree. I missed the fact that there were three of the same green bulbs right next to each other. I missed how one of the white bulbs ended up shattered on the floor. I missed the smell of the second attempt of sugar cookies, and most of all I missed the vibe of kindness.

Christmas was much different these past couple years. There was no waiting until the day before Christmas, every time a present was
bought, it was immediately wrapped and put under the tree. My children watched the majestic feeling of Christmas slip away with age, even though they were only six and eight. What depressed me the most about this was the fact that this was almost exactly like the way my dad had started doing Christmas after his last daughter was born.

The only difference is we normally only got things that were either prizes from his work’s Christmas party, or things that were completely on sale at Wal-Mart at 5:00AM on Black Friday. If that was the case, we would camp out all night in line. So in a weird sense, we almost worked for those gifts. Plus, if we were “bad” that year, we would get onions in our stockings. Nonetheless, being good only ended with an orange or banana.

So what went wrong? Why did I leave Daisy? I thought about it, continuously. The last thing I remembered arguing about was milk. Milk was on the mind and it wouldn’t leave. I then suddenly was filled with a deep sorrow. I couldn’t even remember a legit reason why I left my wife.

It’s sad. The divorce rate is over half of the married population and why? I bet many people would answer the same way I did. They wouldn’t know. Then it hit me. The reality of marriage is lack of dedication. As technology advances, people become more dependent and lazy. People don’t have that strive, that passion like we use to. So when things go sour, people, like me, probably just give up. Decide it’s not worth it. We are a bunch of infected parasites looking for the perfect host that we’ll never find.

I suppose this also applies to the world.

Although I knew it was useless, I still somewhat wished that I had some money to my name. I guess the thought of money was like security. Money has been turned into comfort and a necessity. I was surprised I hadn’t thought of this earlier.

I then started questioning my clothes. They were clothes I had never worn before. My jeans felt tight, something I wasn’t use too. I wore suites comfortably. My shirt was a v-neck. Why? Why was I wearing a maroon v-neck? I soon became confused, and panic started setting in.

I can’t possibly sit here and live. I need food, I need water, I need some kind of substance to make me feel alive. I paused, chuckled, and remembered that I was dead. Although I’m not sure whether or not dead people ate, I figured I would soon know in time.

Mother then came to mind. I stopped talking to her about five years ago. She relapsed again. She refused to leave the leach that used her disease as whip. I couldn’t take it. I still remember the needles and pain. What killed me the most was the fact that my little sister had moved in with her to go to school. She used the rent money for the apartment that my little sister obtained from her graduation, on drugs and a fancy multi-bladed blender. I just couldn’t accept the fact that she should be forgiven.
for directly ruining her child’s life.

I paused. Tears streamed down my cheeks, as much as hate flowed through my body, I missed her. I saw her as dead five years ago, yet I never thought that I wouldn’t get to see her face again. The last time I saw her, her cheeks lacked meat, and it looked as if her makeup was permanently smeared underneath her eyes. She looked old, almost like death. She was very pale.

I then started thinking about all the wonderful things she used to be. I remembered how she used to sing that little song to wake me up in the morning. She used to be so beautiful and graceful. Drugs can do horrible wonders.

My mind was like a blank sheet of paper. Now that I was in this room, I had time to think about everything. There was nothing to distract me, and I realized I saw everything in a new, clear way.

A click sounded. It was my brain informing me of an epiphany.

I knew what this room was.

This is heaven, this is hell, this is the afterlife.

It is a place where a person is forced to dwell within themselves. A place where, depending on your life, you can be happy or miserable. If they led a full life, they would have plenty of wonderful memories and of course the few bad. However, there is the curse of not-living before death. The curse of not perceiving the truly important things.

I was dead a long time ago. I was too occupied in thinking about myself. I didn’t want to deal with pain, I wanted more money, a promotion, I wanted a new wife, I wanted my new wife to shut up about her sisters drama, yet at the same time I craved it.

I argued about milk.

My eyes opened. There was a bright light.

I saw a blur of a person. I looked to the right.

There was another blur, he was a doctor.

She was crying, he was pulling the plug.
**Karrie Castillo / Two of Hearts**

Two might be better than none  
Joy and lust caress the skin  
Special times of fun  
Will tell you where the mess begins  
You on Tuesday and Thursday  
Him on spare time  
On which bed will she lay?  
Hmm. Whose turn is it today?  
Is she at the point that she’s crossed the line?  
Or is it perfect that you both are blind?  
The lust that beholds her touch  
Can make any just drop and drool  
Not to get attached at all,  
Is her one true rule  
To feel the full moon’s shine  
On the sweat of your body  
Is just so quite divine  
But sure is better to know, you owe no money  
But as she rises and begins to move on  
You dearly forget she calls another Honey  
As a matter of fact, you two have met  
But does it matter of the sharing,  
Knowing she splits her heart for two?  
Yes, the one you once thought of marrying  
Wake up, Honey,  
To have her for you, just won’t ever come true.
Grant Stoker / Old Time Wheel
Erin Simon / New York!!!
Joe Posadas
Marissa Knelange / Flowers
Reyna Chavez / We Have Worn Out More Than the Liqueur Itself Would in Its Bottle
Whitney Choura
Delia San Martin / Dolores del Rio
Gloria Pitchford / Domino Slang

It didn’t take you that long to sit down
Shootin’ up the town with a twenty-two
Somebody call the police and make this fool play
I gotta little dog named Fido
My luggage is there too
Momma, there’s that man again
Get outta them bushes, Eliwhisha
Caught him sleeping
Three switching bitches
Ten to Linda
Follow that cab
Get! Chicken shit
Shake rock
Big Bertha
Motor cars
Tennis shoes
Bantae
Nina
Attention
Fever
To feel the plights from passions past,
   You knew how they loved you,
   and now how they loath you.

But they continue to their haunt,
   their pledge to your soul,
How could you have thought?
   their love would grow cold.

The passions past, they leave you to ponder,
Ponder and wander through the thoughts and the whys?
Through the wondering blunder,
   and the spell that you’re under.

The passions past will eat you inside,
They will toil and tear, your heart ‘till it’s bare
   Only to boast and boost their own pride;
But don’t give it a chance,
   It’s all in the past,
Just keep hold of your passion and pride
Christi Braxton / Balthazar

Vincent walked into a bar where a large man, with three missing fingers, stood cleaning mugs with a dirty rag. “I need a room for the night, if you have one please,” Vincent said as cheerfully as he could.

“I am sorry, stranger, but we have no rooms left nor seats in the main tavern either. There is plenty of room on the floor but I warn it is hard, wet, and cold.”

“Perhaps I could share a room with someone already here?” Vincent had no idea why he even said such a thing. Vincent felt hope rise within him. “Please let me ask your patrons and if not one agree then I will be on my way.”

“I don’t know about that.” The bartender said but the lust for money was too apparent in his eyes. He looked as if it had dawned on him for the first time that he could earn more money by doubling out the rooms. “Well if you find someone who agrees you can stay but you will have to pay full price for the room.”

Vincent walked quietly from one door to the next knocking softly and speaking to the sleeper about doubling up. No one would open the door to see who was on the other side until nearly the last door down the hall. That door opened to a man sitting by himself in the dark. “Excuse me, mister?” Vincent was unsure of himself suddenly. “I wanted to ask you if you wouldn’t mind sharing the room for the night. I promise to be out very early. I just need a warm dry place to sleep for a few hours. It is very cold out and as you can clearly see raining as well. Please let me share your room, I can pay.”

The man looked Vincent over and then got up to greet Vincent with a handshake. “My name is Balthazar. No, I do not mind sharing the room for the night. You look frozen and drowned at the same time, come and sit by my fire.” Balthazar lead Vincent to the chair opposite the fireplace facing the chair Balthazar was sitting in. “Care for a drink to help thaw you?”

“Don’t mind if I do. Thank you very much, you are a life savior, my friend.” Vincent sat in the chair and accepted the glass handed to him by Balthazar. “Do you play cards?”

“Why yes, but it has been a while since I have had a chance to play.” Balthazar sat and sipped his drink. “Do you have a game in mind, mister?”

“Vincent, my name is Vincent and yes I was thinking of a specific game if you do not mind playing it.” Vincent felt the heat of the fire start to dry his clothes and the heat of the drink start to warm his bones.

The two men were casually talking when the bar tender came by to see where the wet stranger had gone to. “I see you found someone willing
to share. You will have to pay, of course.” The bartender reached out his hand and waited for the stranger to get up. “That will be a gold piece you will need to give me.”

“That is not what I paid.” Balthazar said in a dark tone.

“That is because the price has gone up. Pay or out you go.” The bartender was not reasonable at all then.

Balthazar shocked both men when he deposited a gold piece in the bartender’s hand. Then he put a second one next to the first gold piece and asked to be brought some food. The bartender quickly left the room before Balthazar regained his senses.

Balthazar and Vincent ate, drank, played cards, and talked all evening and most of the night before falling asleep by the fire. That was when Vincent was jolted out of his sleep by screaming. The fire in the hearth was very low and gave hardly any light and Vincent was confused as to where he was and what was happening. “Balthazar! What’s going on? Are we under some sort of attack?” There was no response but the sound of painful blows and the screaming was reduced to low moaning.

Vincent was panicked by what he heard. Suddenly the door was kicked in and a flood of light came into the room to reveal Balthazar on the floor covered in blood and Vincent standing over him. There was no one else in the room and Vincent felt more afraid than he ever had in his life. I took no time for the whole tavern to be thrown into chaos. Vincent was attacked by the bartender and some other burly patrons and dragged from the room. Once in the tavern a mob gathered around him.

“After that man let you share his room and even paid for you to stay there you went and did this?” the bartender bellowed. People all around Vincent spat on him with disgust. Vincent was bound tightly and left for morning as everyone went back to bed, yet no one slept the rest of the night.

Morning was too quiet as the mob reassembled to escort Vincent outside where he was tied to a pole that was used for witch burning. It took no imagination to figure out what the good people of the tavern were planning to do and Vincent was scared. Wood was piled up and kindling brought. Everyone Vincent looked at had a glint of murder in their bloodshot and dark-circled eyes.

That was when one of the people began to point and scream at the tavern. The whole crowd turned and saw Balthazar come walking out of the tavern healthy and alive. Many people had seen Balthazar’s dead body and to then see him alive was too much. The mob immediately ran away in all directions leaving Vincent who could not run because he was tied to the pole.

“I must apologize to you, my friend,” Balthazar began. “I must have drunk too much and did not take my leave before midnight as I had planned. I was going to give the room to you since you needed it and once I died the elements would not bother me any more.”
“I do not understand.” Vincent could only stare at the man who was dead most of the night. “How are you alive?”

“I do not know how it happened but I remember when it began.” Balthazar walked up to the terrified man. “I was a man like everyone else but I was accused of murder and there was a short trial and I was found guilty. After the verdict they let me go. Then that night I suffered a terrible death but awoke the next morning.”

“You mean this happens often?” Vincent asked amazed by the tale. He was calmer now as Balthazar cut him free.

“I die every night and reawake every morning. I think it has to do with the trial but I do not remember being cursed or damned in any way.” Balthazar stepped back to let Vincent come down from the wood pile. “I could use a drink, how about you?”

“Yes, after a night like that a hot mug of ale would do me good.” Vincent was no longer afraid but now interested in the rest of the strange story Balthazar was living for who knows how long.
Don’t write me a poem
of the birds and the bees.
Enough, already!
so Something New, please.

And don’t start again
on the sunsets and flowers;
there’s enough out there now
killing too many hours.

I don’t want an epic
on rainbows or brooks.
Let’s hear it, instead,
about people, or books.

Or maybe on music,
or art — NOT the view.
Do you think it would kill you
to pen Something New?

So don’t ramble on
about nature and dawn.
Give me grief, give me glory—
but TELL ME A STORY!
Sarah Stebbings / Two Hearts

Can you hear me, Mommy?
I’m talking to you, Mommy.
I can hear your heart beating,
It’s my melody in the night.
Can you feel me kicking?
Because I wanna win this fight.
I know you’re a straight A student in high school.
I can sense you feel like you’ve got everything to lose
And you’re scared what’s the right move,
But I wanna be a part of your future too.
One pill, one choice and you can blink me away.
Just please, just wait, I promise I’ll behave.
If I could talk I’d say to you,
Can I live?
I know you can see and feel me in your dreams,
‘Cause that’s when heaven sends forth a warm beam.
How can you separate our hearts when they’re paired?
That’s me in your womb telling you I’m scared.
I’m calling to you, Mommy.
That’s a life in your tummy.
I’ll always be a part of you,
Trust your soul and let it shine through.
Let me show you it’s true.
Once you make the choice you can’t undo.
Now you look at me through the ultrasound,
And you can see our souls are not unbound.
Six months later you heard my first sound.
Now you look at me in the eyes as your angel
Alive on this earthly ground.
I’m thankful for what you did,
Because you let me live.
She was a girl with a voice. Her voice like everyone else’s spoke and traveled along the wind; but unlike everyone her voice was never liked because of what she talked about. Some voices talked about music, some talked about the news, some talked about gossip among family, friends, some talked about cars or sports. Her voice didn’t speak of those; she spoke of what was on the news, she spoke of stories, poems that were about magic, sorcery and anything that others called fantasy. And it’s because of that her family could never give her a chance to speak. They would stop her voice from being heard, trapping it and wouldn’t release it until she talked about something else, something she did not know much of or not at all. They thought that that was all she talked about; pirates, magic, adventure in the jungle, fighting vampires but they were wrong. She spoke of people and stories on the news; she spoke of what she knew about animals. She spoke of how her friends were doing. But it was hard for her to speak, because people always misunderstood her.

She hardly ever spoke to others, for it was like she spoke one language and they spoke another. She was happy to speak to people, but not for a very long time because she felt as if no one was listening, they thought she was weird, that there was something wrong with her or she was being a pest as always. The way she spoke and what she said to people, she said good bye and hello like everyone else did, but in her own words. She spoke of what was the bright side in every situation; she asked others about their day, how they were going to spend their weekend. And yet her real voice was heard by only a few and the close-minded ears only heard what they wanted to hear and nothing else. Her voice was trapped within the walls; she felt as if her voice could never be heard or understood by others. All her voice will ever be is judged by others; they believed she was in her own little world of knights, pirates, magical people and creatures of the sun/moonlight. She was nothing but a naive fool, who didn’t live in the real world. But she wasn’t, she knew what the real world was like and she understood it. Yet still . . . to her she was all alone and her voice would never be heard. She wishes for at least one person to hear her and not judge her. Yet she feels she wishes in vain. But in a way the silver lining is that she knows who she is, she’s just as normal as everyone else, strange, but normal and there are those who will listen to her. The others who won’t and don’t, they mean nothing to her.
Sonia Stockton / The Croc Native

As I ventured out into the lake
I had but only my canteen
And my trusty musket on hand
The water was calm
And kind to a fellow like myself
Until . . .

I was awakened
To the harsh reality
O, HUMANITY!

I was surrounded by crocs
With a taste for Australian blood
Lucky, I’d say,
For they only had but a smidgen of me
Unfortunate a day it was
For those untamed beasts
Feasted on my hairy arm
Blessed, o BLESSED by Jesus I am!
For the rest of me is well preserved.
Adam Fagaly
Regina Kelly
Saulo opened his heavy eyelids with relief. This morning was different than all his other ones. It was the morning of Christmas Eve, and he was on vacation. He immediately smelled the comforting scent of freshly brewed coffee. He knew he could always count on his wife to have a fresh cup of coffee ready for him on his way to work; but the fact that he was staying home today made it even more enjoyable. He knew he would be able to enjoy his cup of Joe with his wife while discussing their plans for the holiday.

As he began to sit up in bed, he heard the door creak open and the quick pitter patter of a small child’s feet. It was his six-year-old daughter, Noelle. She excitedly jumped on the bed landing right on his stomach slightly knocking the wind out of him.

“Daddy, Daddy, can we get donuts this morning . . . pleeeaaasee?!”

Saulo paused for a moment just to keep her guessing and then quickly agreed to oblige her request. “Go get your shoes on, brush your teeth and get your sweater. And make sure you do it quietly so you don’t wake up your sisters.”

Saulo walked into the kitchen and kissed his wife on the cheek and said, “Good morning, babe,” a ritual they had been doing for the last ten years. He then proceeded to tell her of Noelle’s request and asked her to keep the coffee warm.

Noelle came bouncing out from the hallway, hair disheveled, flannel pajamas, mismatched socks and a coat that was two sizes too big. Saulo couldn’t help but smile: his wife and daughters brought him so much joy. He never would have imagined how far he had come from his childhood growing up in Guatemala. He quietly reflected for a second remembering that they were the reason for all of the hard work and overtime he put in at the granite shop.

“Daddy, Daddy, I’m ready to go . . . let’s go get some donuts before all the maple bars are gone.”

Noelle leaped into his arms, and they were off to the donut shop.

The air was crisp but not too cold, after all, it was a California Christmas. Alvin and the Chipmunks played over the radio while Noelle tried to sing along not quite remembering all the words.

As Saulo was about to turn into the parking lot he noticed flashing lights in his rearview mirror. “What!” he uttered under his breath. He hadn’t been speeding and they had just replaced the broken tail light last week. He slowly turned into the parking lot, brought the car to a stop and
rolled down his window.

“License and registration please?” the officer said.
“Excuse me, officer, why are you pulling me over? Was I speeding?” Saulo politely asked, curious as to the reason for the stop.
“I said license and registration please?”
Saulo begrudgingly pulled out his license and registration and handed it to the officer.
Noelle quietly sat in the passenger seat staring wide eyed at her daddy. Saulo looked over and noticed that she was a little uneasy; he reached over and gently patted her leg to reassure her that everything was okay.

“. . . and who is this?” the officer asked
“This is my daughter,” Saulo replied.
“I’m gonna need the two of you to step out of the vehicle, please.”
“Officer, I don’t understand what I did . . .” Saulo replied out of frustration.

The officer then proceeded to explain that if he didn’t do as he asked he would detain him in front of his daughter. Saulo quickly exited the vehicle with Noelle.

As Saulo and Noelle sat on the curb, the officer searched the vehicle. Saulo was clueless as to what he was looking for and pissed off that he was being humiliated in front of his little girl. Noelle continued to look at her dad for reassurance as she was confused and scared.

After the officer was finished, he handed back Saulo’s license and registration and told him he was free to go. Saulo demanded an explanation. The officer began to explain to him that the reason he was pulled over was the fact that he was Latino, and he had a shaved head.

“My mama always said if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck it’s a duck,” the officer said. “And Son . . . you look like a gang-banger!”

The officer went on to explain that there had been a rash of burglaries that they were attributing to gang members in the area, and the officer felt he had an obligation to check Saulo out. In spite of the fact that he had no grounds to do so other than assumptions made by the officer based on Saulo’s physical appearance.

As Saulo and Noelle finally made into the donut shop, his head was swimming with memories of his parents telling him as a teenager and young adult to let his hair grow or wear tighter pants because he looked like a cholo. He had always scoffed at their suggestion. He believed that he should have the right to dress and express himself the way he wants. He’s a hard working husband and father . . . a church-going family man.
How could someone assume he was a cholo?

Saulo learned an important life lesson that day. No matter how good of a person you may be, or how hard you work, there will always be ignorant people in the world. But it’s standing up to those people and educating the ignorant that will hopefully change our world in the future and make it a better place for our children.

In Martin Espada’s poem “Sleeping on the Bus,” we see a new generation of young people who are oblivious to the fact of what generations before have endured. It was that prior generation of freedom riders who were harassed, beaten and arrested so that in the future others could enjoy the privilege of resting their head on the bus windows and falling asleep. This poem appeals to our emotions and values. The thought of riding a public bus, let alone falling asleep on one, in today’s society, doesn’t seem like it would be considered a freedom let alone an honor. But when we read what people were willing to risk you can’t help but be inspired:

How we doze upright on buses,
How the night overtakes us
In the babble of headphones,
How the singing and clapping
Of another generation
Fade like distant radios
As we ride, forehead
Heavy on the window,
How we sleep, how we sleep. (Espada lines 33-41)

This poem makes me think of my children and what can be possible for them fifty years from now. I want my daughters to be able to live in a world where they don’t have to be cognizant of their race or gender. That they can take for granted their everyday freedoms the way the two people on the bus did. Racism still exists. However, due to the civil rights movement, we are further in the fight: I think in our day to day lives, we should remain inspired to make a change and stand up the way generations before us did.

American History X is one of the most poignant films we have seen that deals with the issue of racism. Edward Norton plays Derek, once a proud neo-Nazi skinhead, now reformed. Now that he is out of prison, he is dealing with the consequences of what he has brought to his family from his racist and violent behavior. The director, Tony Kaye, appeals to our emotions and values through pathos and ethos. Derek (Norton) is desperate to change his life and he feels helpless. That’s something we can all relate to even if on a smaller level. His teacher, Mr. Sweeney, brings
a very thoughtful question to the table after Derek asks him for help. He says “You have to ask the right questions: has anything you’ve done made your life better?” (American History X 1998) This is a question we all need to ask ourselves. We get so focused on blaming others we need to look inward and address what we are doing to fix the problem, just like the freedom riders mentioned in Espada’s poem. They did not sit silent and complain about their injustice: they got up and did something and changed the world for future generations.

Billie Holiday sings the beautifully crafted song “Strange Fruit.” The writer Abel Meeropol originally wrote it as a poem, and it speaks of the 1930 lynching of Thomas Smith and Abram Smith in Marion, Indiana. It appeals to both ethos and pathos. The vivid imagery and beautiful contradictions are moving beyond words:

Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees
Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter cry (“Holiday Singing ‘Strange Fruit’”)

It is amazing to me the amount of information we have readily available to us at our fingertips. Discrimination is almost a mainstay in our society. In researching through different mediums (song, movies, writings), we are filled with a newfound hope even if it does sound cliché. Our society indeed has come a long way. Still, we have a ways to go. All it takes is one person to stand up, one person to make a difference, one person to express their point of view, and maybe, just maybe, we will continue to change our world for the better.
Old Mac Conscious had a dream
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
And in this dream
He had a story
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
With a “memoir” here
And a “memoir” there
Here a “yarn” there a “yarn”
Everywhere a “drama”
Old Mac Conscious had a story
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!

Old Mac Conscious had a viewpoint
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
And in this dream
He had a viewpoint
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
With a “proclaim” here
And a “proclaim” there
Here a “pitch” there a “pitch”
Everywhere a “soapbox”
Old Mac Conscious had a viewpoint
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!

Old Mac Conscious had a burden
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
And in this dream
He had a burden
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
With a “question” here
And a “question” there
Here a “doubt” there a “doubt”
Everywhere a “problem”
Old Mac Conscious had a burden
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
Old Mac Conscious had a dream
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
And in this dream
He had a doctrine
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
With a “gospel” here
And a “gospel” there
Here a “rule” there a “rule”
Everywhere a “tenet”
Old Mac Conscious had a doctrine
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!

Old Mac Conscious had a dream
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
And in this dream
He had some time
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
With a “deadline” here
And a “deadline” there
Here a “rush” there a “rush”
Everywhere a “postpone”
Old Mac Conscious had some time
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!

Old Mac Conscious had a dream
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
And in this dream
He had a venture
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
With a “gamble” here
And a “gamble” there
Here a “risk” there a “risk”
Everywhere a “long shot”
Old Mac Conscious had a venture
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
Old Mac Conscious had a dream
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
And in this dream
He had a method
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
With a “system” here
And a “system” there
Here a “plan” there a “plan”
Everywhere a “program”
Old Mac Conscious had a method
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!

Old Mac Conscious had a dream
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
And in this dream
He had a future
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
With a “some day” here
And a “some day” there
Here a “hope” there a “hope”
Everywhere a “bright side”
Old Mac Conscious had a future
Me—I—Me—I—Oh!
Joy-Ann McDaniel / What They Said

What they said and what they still say
I have to live with every day
But what I make of it is the real case.
They said I am fake and that I act white
They said I was too “Christiany/churchly” LOL
And that I have no life.
They said I thought I was better than them
And I act uppity like I don’t come from
The same place they did.
I don’t deny that I come from a broken home
But what I chose to make of my life is only my concern.
Does my success intimidate you?
Is it because I don’t act like a fool?
Is it because I didn’t have a child
And I have my diploma?
Is it because I am in college, I have a job
And I’m not running around with a boy
Calling me they baby mama?
Marissa Knelange / The Wall

A battleground
With just a smile, knock 'em down
A wink plays its part
Blows away her heart

The Wall stands high and proud
Forms a protecting shroud

Keep all enemies at bay
Snipe 'em without delay
Not a soul to trust
But given into lust

The Wall stands high and proud
Forms a protecting shroud

Igniting memories from the past
Anger rages, fears are cast
Love means war
Shut the door

Rejection penetrates deep
Shrapnel slices, burns, makes 'em weep
Load up the ammunition,
The only safe ambition

The Wall stands high and proud
Forms a protecting shroud

The allies help through the turmoil
Still, different from his native soil
Release the shot from its shell
Makes her cry, a living hell
Allies can only hope and pray
The others stay true, please obey
Suspicion of treason
Is not a good reason

The Wall stands high and proud
Forms a protecting shroud

Love hides in the wilderness behind the wall
She fights, tries to prove she’s better than them all
Communications met with scorn. To no avail
Did she make her point, rises free and sets the sail.

He sets her free, feeling blue.
Alas, the warrior’s a victim too
The Wall still stands high above
Protects him from lasting love?
Marilyn Gardner / A Tragic Goodbye

I was nearly fourteen years old when my mother left my father, a detestable day I will never forget. I felt so much excitement and so much confusion, but I mostly felt sad. I had just come home from a long day at school. I remembered it seeming like an extremely long walk, my annoying little sister was by my side, and the day was extremely torrid. As we approached our old blue and white house, we were excited to see Mom’s car parked in the driveway, but we also wondered why on earth she was at home and not at work. We opened our rusty chain-linked fence, skipped up our entryway and walked through the squeaky, old door my father had been trying to repair for several days.

Actually, there were many things around the house my dad would start to fix, but he never did complete any of his tasks. Eventually our house went from livable to “someone needs to just demolish it, before the house comes tumbling down.” There were holes everywhere, holes in the living room floor where my dad tried to re-patch the beautiful oak wood previously covered by a beige carpet, holes in our bathroom walls because he had the idea to expand the size of it, and a huge hole dug in our back yard because he thought it would be lavish if we had a pool, not to mention the half-painted bedroom walls and the strange wires coming out every which way. Our house went from decent to embarrassment.

When my sister Melissa and I entered, we saw Mom sitting on the living room sofa, with my little sister playing on the floor. Even though I was happy to see her I didn’t show it. Instead, I sluggishly said, “Hi, Mom” and walked into my room. I knew she looked sad, but I was a rebel with no heart for anyone else but myself. I was a mean, arrogant, selfish young girl. All I cared about were my friends, and what I was going to wear the next day. I wondered how my hair and makeup would look if I tried that same look Britney Spears just did. Never did I think about or consider other people’s feelings, let alone my family’s.

I could hear Mom get up from the couch and approach my room. “Melissa, Malinda!” she yelled. “Come into Marilyn’s room, we need to talk as a family.”

Instantly I knew I had got caught for something, it was like a fast river running through my mind; all of my memories for that week or even that month flowed through, one right after the other. In a panic, I was trying to remember what I did wrong, if I had done anything at all, and in a matter of seconds I was already coming up with my defense mechanisms. I was prepared with an invisible hand shield to block anything I was accused of, and a hand grenade to fire back at her once the accusations had begun.
Just then she sat us down on my half-made bed; I was leaned up against my wall and my sisters were sitting on the edge. She then began with a long sigh, followed by a short pause.

“Girls, you know that Dad hasn’t been himself lately, he has been gone for days at a time, and when he is home he’s always in the bedroom sleeping or working on something he never finishes.”

“Yes,” we said in dragging, uninterested tones.

After looking at us in annoyance, she began again.

“Well, I’ve been expecting that he’s been up to no good, so I decided to give him a drug test. Unfortunately it came back positive.”

Both my sisters and I in complete shock stared at each other with our mouths wide open. I suddenly felt a smile broaden my face, and without any sense of control I shouted, “I told you so!”

I knew my once authoritarian father, who had morals and principles, was becoming a drug addict, long before my mother decided to test him. I caught him in our house smoking out of a pipe, a pipe! With my baby sister in the house, who was and is a brittle asthmatic! I remember the countless hospital visits we had to take her to, never understanding why she kept getting sick. I was so angry, I told my mother right away and she didn’t believe me, which then in turn, led me to be more rebellious and angrier with her. So when she told me, I couldn’t help but be excited for being right, but what was about to happen next I couldn’t have imagined it, even if I tried.

Right after I shouted, my mother looked at me as if I had a rope tied to my vocal cords that snapped her head in my direction. With a blank stare, but so much pain in her eyes, she then gave us an option.

“I have some bags packed already, and we can go live with Grandma until Dad decides to stop using, or we can stay here and help him.”

“What do you girls want to do?”

Wow, was the ball really in our hands? Of course it would be my choice, I was the oldest, anything I said or did my sisters would follow.

I without any hesitation shouted, “Let’s leave!”

“Girl’s, do you agree?” Mom asked.

“Yes!” they both exclaimed.

I’m sure they had no idea what was really going on, they new drugs were very bad, and my mom had always lectured us on the inadequate things people do, and what it does to their lives. Not to forget the threat of us losing our life by Mom’s right hand if she ever caught us doing anything like that. My mother cleared her throat, put her hands on her legs, and stood up quietly.

As she headed out of my room she said, “Alright then, start packing your things, we only have a few hours.”
We then left and never returned to that house again. My father continued to do drugs for the next ten years, living in the same town, never to reach out to us or make us his priority, but I guess drugs will do that to someone. There are many times when I look back and feel ashamed for not staying and helping him. I mean, he was there all my life and loved me unconditionally, so shouldn’t we have done the same? I never noticed then, but I notice now, the pain my mother actually went through, the depression and hurt in her heart. She loved my dad so incredibly much but left him because drugs were against her morals and values. She was a mother, an incredible mother, a mother that would never allow that kind of disillusion and horrid disgust around her children.

My mother is a strong woman, but I will often wonder, “What if I had shouted out, ‘let’s stay and help Dad,’” instead of “Let’s leave.” Where would we be now as a family? Our whole life had just crumbled before our very eyes, and sadly enough I still feel at fault for it. Unfortunately, dad never chased after us, he let us go. He was never there for my baby brother’s first footsteps, my graduation, or my Mom’s frightening bout with cancer. What a waste of a wonderful man, who once had a beautiful family—what a tragic good-bye.
Grace Ceniceros / Counting Stars

Under the star-lit sky
I sit and think of you
Making wishes under stars
I’ve realized they’ve all come true

You walked into my life I was so unsure
Yet you were what I’ve dreamt and wished for
everything I could ever ask for and so much more
my prince, my knight, my dream come true
My reason for living is you

Under the bright moonshine
and thousands of twinkling stars
I sit and think of all the wishes made
all the hopes and dreams yours and even mine
how many make it how many fade

Under the darkened night sky
I sit and look up
I thank the forces above
for sending me you
and giving me love
Daniel Bach / Underground

Silence is the only nature
that moves these motionless autumn leaves
on this cold bitter day in May
as they lay underground near my feet
in this gray concrete gutter
that surrounds the both of us,
well the leaves and I that is.

There is a white light
flooding in above my head
through the gutter’s drain
I stand behind this light,
against the wall where my dark jacket
blends in together with the shadows

my small hand scrapes against my rough chin
as thoughts gather in my head just like
how the orange thin brittle forgotten leaves
have gathered down here
endlessly across the floor
stretching as far as my eye can see
hidden underground, only seen
when someone such as me goes
to such a quiet and taboo
place underground like this

the world of yesterday is slowly dying above me
the faces that were attached to souls
are fading, as they run away from me
their entire existence is lightly engraved
in white on these cold gray walls
that only I see

I am not trapped down here
just looking for something
the faces of the past that stick
are the materials that make up my heart and my will
and as long as I have these, my memories
I can face the long awaited day that is today
the scars of yesterday mean so much more
when they are carried into the light of tomorrow
The sere corpse of Jerry Lee Lewis sits before the piano. His desiccated arms run upon the horizontal keys as plumes of dust and dirt billow from his shoulders and elbows. With every movement of his limbs, clods of root and weed-veined earth pile up around his ankles—legs twitching almost lifelessly out of time. His waist rarefied and immobile; rakish appendages bandy and drag helplessly, pathetically over the checkered diapason; fingers clutching diminished fifths along the pentatonic scale—tritones carry upon the air. The air permeated by what is now a thick, bilious cloud of earth and dust—his shoulder bolstering the bass notes begins to sag, obviously fallen off its socket—the entire arm coming out of his sleeve as he creaks a high falsetto in “balls of fire.” The crowd of skeletons—as if newly sown—squeal stertorously as the bass strings in the piano snap; tearing a hole in the top of the piano,—a flash of light—and the arm hits the ground atop the dirt, and stones, and dead, withered grass strewn along the stage. The wood rent by the bass strings, like shrapnel, careens through the now visually impregnable cloud surrounding his visage; embedding, splintering bloodless wounds across his mouth—exposing the deep green rot of his gums—a dominant seven beats an eighth-note rhythm; the arm on the floor still writhing desultorily.

The audience, driven mad by the tension of a half-step modulation—the turnaround—begins to tear and claw at one another; their frenzied bodies becoming an agglutinated furor of bones and teeth: fiery skulls, mandibles, a welter of kinetic rhythm. Fire erupts on Jerry’s remaining arm; its ambulant flames lapping the piano, spreading down his ribs, which shatter like an anthropophagous xylophone: crack, crack, snap—and then down his legs—the piano hitting a perfect cadence as the amnion of flame eats away at his slacks and corduroy jacket; melts the collar of his shirt. He calls to the band garishly; his maw breaking apart at every vowel—jaw unhinging: “One more time, boys! WhoooOOOoooOOO one more time!”—before he falls from the piano bench and slumps to the floor with the hollow pound of a bass drum.

The crowd is silent —
Ericka Mercado / The Secrets Within

It is the 1950’s and Japanese families are dealing with the challenges of putting their lives back together after living in interment camps. One Japanese family moves into a middle-class neighborhood not too far from an upper-middle-class neighborhood. A young Japanese girl who is sixteen years old sees her dream life through one of the Caucasian girls in the other neighborhood. They both attend the same school. With the prejudice people have for the Japanese, the Japanese girl does not have any friends. The Caucasian girl has lots of friends and wears expensive clothing. The Japanese family may not have lots of money but they are a close, loving family. Unknown to the Japanese girl, Lily, the Caucasian girl, Veronica, has a work-alcoholic step father and a functional alcoholic mentally abusive mother who is always spending time with her wealthy friends.

Japanese parents speaking Japanese: Tomorrow you start school. Are you prepared?

Lily: (speaking Japanese) Yes, Father.

They pass the rice around.

Lily’s father: (speaking Japanese) Make sure you go to sleep early so you can have plenty of rest.

Lily: I will.

Dinner is finished and Lily goes upstairs to her room and lays out her clothes for school. Her mind traces back to last week when her and her mother went school shopping. She walked past this clothing store and saw the most beautiful yellow top and skirt set. She wanted it so bad but it was out of their price range. Therefore she had to settle for a brown button-down top with the black skirt. She goes to sleep that night and has a dream she is wearing that expensive outfit. The next morning she is ready for school. She walks through her neighborhood to the more expensive houses. She stops dead in her tracks as she notices a yellow house with white trim. It happens in slow motion as she sees a Caucasian girl walk out with the outfit she wanted to buy for school. Lily is just staring at her. She is so pretty she looks like an angel.

Veronica: What are you staring at, Jakee girl?

Lily is horrified by the racial comment. Therefore, she puts her head down and continues to walk to school. Veronica arrives late to school but the teachers do not say anything to her because her father has prestige in the community. Veronica and Lily share homeroom together. Their teacher, who is prejudiced against Asian people, would ask Lily the hard questions. However, since Lily studies very hard she always gives the right answer.

The teacher: Lily when did the Civil War end?

Lily: 1865.
The teacher continues to lecture the students about the Civil War and what caused it. Lily is listening intently and realizes like the Negro during the slave era people also have to overcome the prejudice that is in the world. That is why she likes history because everyone can relate to it. The bell rings and the students scurry to their next class. While Lily is at her locker one of Veronica’s friends walks by and shoves her. In Lily’s mind she pushes her back but not wanting to start a fight and upsetting her parents she just ignores the shove. The day goes by what seems like an eternity until the lunch bell rings. Lily does not buy her food from the cafeteria like the other students but she brings a lunch with rice and tempura chicken. Veronica notices that her food looks more appetizing. She is curious to ask Lily what it is but she does not want to in front of her friends. Like normally Lily sits by herself and glances a few times at the most popular and cutest boy in school, Robbie Benjamin. Who also happens to be Veronica’s off-again on-again boyfriend. Robbie finds Lily to be pretty but with the social taboo will not let it be known in public. The bell rings and lunch is over. It seems after lunch the day goes by faster and school has ended for the day. Veronica walks home with her friends but does not let them come in. On the other hand, Lily wishes she has friends to walk to home with. When Lily arrives at home her mother greets her at the door with a smile on her face. However, when Veronica arrives at home her mother yells at her to get her more Jack Daniels.

Lily’s mother: (in Japanese) What did you learn at school today?
Lily: (in Japanese) I learned about the Civil War.
Lily’s mother (in Japanese) What is the Civil War. (pouring some tea)
Lily: A war that happened between the northern and southern states.

Lily is going to explain why the war happened when her younger brother walks into the kitchen and asks for some tea. They all sat down to talk. While at Veronica’s house her mother is passed out on the couch. Veronica goes to the bathroom and looks in the mirror and she does not like what she sees. To all her friends she has the best life but she feels unloved and not cared for by anyone. She even notices her boyfriend Robbie looking at other girls. At Lily’s house Lily asks her father for help on homework when he comes home for work. Veronica, on the other hand, has no one to help her. That is one of the reasons she does not come to school on time because her homework is not always completed. It is time for dinner at both houses. Lily’s family sits at the table and passes the food around and converse about their day. Veronica’s mother finally wakes up from her drunken stupor, dresses herself to get ready to go to the country club for dinner.

Veronica: Mother, can I go with you to the club?
Veronica’s mother: Mrs. Donovan and her daughter Tracy will be there and you know that she looks much better than you. Really, dear, do
you want to be the ugly one at the table?

Her mother leaves to go to the country club and Veronica goes into the bathroom again. She looks at herself in the mirror and all she can see is an ugly girl that her mother thinks she is. She realizes she is hungry so she goes into the refrigerator for some food to eat for dinner. Her mother made meatloaf and some green beans for her father but he always comes home late. After eating the food she goes into her mother’s room. She likes to play pranks on her mother by hiding items of clothing and jewelry making her think she is going crazy. Then she goes into her room and turns on the record player and goes through her wardrobe to pick out the clothes she will wear to school tomorrow. Meanwhile Lily also turns on the record player. They are both listening to the same song. Lily daydreams how Veronica’s life is like. She starts to think that Veronica and her family sit at the their luxurious dinner table to eat a three-course meal. Also how they eat from sterling silverware. After they eat dinner they gather around the radio and listen to a funny show and laugh and laugh. She continues to daydream that Veronica and her mother brush each other’s blonde hair before they go to bed. Lily’s mom knocks on the door.

Lily’s mother: ( in Japanese) Turn off the record and go to bed. It is getting late.

Lily: Yes, Mother.

Lily’s mother: ( in Japanese) I will see you in the morning.
Jennifer Knelange / Cancer

A bulbous gray spider, ugly and mean
Kneads its cold fingers through a lung or a spleen.
Proudly it demonstrates mischievous stealth
As it quickly drains mortals of spirit and health.
Slimy and sneaky, loaded with hate
One can’t feel its presence until it’s too late.
A merciless killer, it fiercely deprives
Various creatures short of their lives.
It laughs to itself, a devilish quack
As a loved one’s world fades to black.
John Marshall / High Noon

High Noon

The land is dead. The sun drank all the water from the desert. Oceans of dust crash against a half-forgotten town. Wooden houses stand as if they grew from the earth. An old wooden building is the center attraction of this one-road town. The clever owner of that building elegantly named it, The Bar.

The Bar

Walking past the small double doors causes a creaking sound loud enough for all of the drunken patrons to stare. Does ignorance have a smell, or stupidity? If they had, this place would wreak of it. The stench of beer lingers like a moth to the men sitting at the tables. Poker, the game of champions, is a favorite amongst the crowd. The pianola plays to deaf ears. Chairs moving, chips falling, and drunken mumbles have a music of their own. Sorrow has a place, and this is it.

The Bartender

He cleans presumably the only glass cup in the bar. If he is not the owner then there is none. His appearance is somewhat charming in the presence of the current slum. The hair on his chin looks like a white tumbleweed. He talks with a throat caked with years of cigarette smoke. He spies something just outside the bar.

Lone Rider

He rides into town, and stops in front of the bar. A look of confusion stains his face. He climbs off the horse, the horse jesters of dislike. The lone rider rubs its neck in an attempt to comfort it. He walks on to the patio of the bar. His fresh shave and clean clothes scream that he’s an outsider. His boots make that sound of new rubber hitting wood. His slow, solid, indecisive steps eventually get him to the double doors. He folds the doors open, and everyone in the bar turns and looks at him. They all give their warmest “I don’t like you” smile. Avoiding eye contact he manages to reach the bartender.

At Bar

“I’ll have a water,” the lone rider says to the bartender. Lone rider sits at the bar. The bartender in the nicest way he can possibly muster answers with, “The only water we serve here is outside for the horses.” The rider
replies, “Well then, where actually is here? See, I’m a little lost.” The bartender chuckles, “We’re all a little lost around here, son.” Rider with a sour look on his face says, “Yeah, but I don’t know how I got here. I just kind of woke up riding that horse.” Curious the bartender asks, “What’s your name, son?” Rider says, “Peter, my name’s Peter.” The bartender shakes hands with Peter, and says, “Peter, like the apostle. Everyone calls me Lou. I don’t know why, but they do. And this here is my bar.” Peter eyeballs the bottles behind Lou. Lou notices this then pulls out a bottle from under the bar.

The Bottle

The liquor in the bottle sloshes side to side when placed on top of the bar. Peter licks his lips in remembrance of his thirst. Lou pours some of the anonymous alcohol into the glass cup. Lou holds the cup in his hand then looks at Peter. Peter realizes what he wants then searches his pockets. There is nothing in his pockets. Peter says, “I don’t have any money.” Lou takes a hard look at Peter then says, “You seem like a good fellow, but I’m not going to give you this for free.” Lou takes the drink and drinks it. Peter watches jealously. Lou picks up the bottle. He fills the glass cup to the middle. Lou looks at Peter and says, “I’ll give you this if you can answer one question.”

The Question

Peter is pleased by this. Peter says, “Okay, but can you tell me where I am?” Lou answers, “Sure, if you answer the question right I’ll give you this drink, and I’ll even tell you where you are, deal?” Lou brings his hand out again to shake. Peter says, “And if I get it wrong?” Lou says, “Then I’ll drink it, and probably end up telling you anyway.” Peter sees no reason not to do it. He shakes Lou’s hand, and says, “Deal.”

The Deal

Lou emits a smirk so loud it could be felt. Lou says, “So here’s the question. Is this glass half full, or half empty?” Peter looks at the glass cup that sits on top of the bar. His face is a puzzle. Peter says, “That’s not fair. There’s no right or wrong answer to that question.” Lou replies, “What’s your answer? That is, if you feel you can get it right.” Peter takes a second to think. Silence penetrates the room. Peter notices this. Peter says, “Is this a joke you pull on strangers? Fine, the glass is half full.” The biggest man in the bar gets up from his table, and heads to Peter. The presence of the man is like a lion feeding. He stands next to Peter, and says with a stone voice, “Wrong answer.” The man then takes the glass, and drinks it. The man says, “It’s empty.” The man then goes back to his seat and sits down
as if nothing ever happened.

Nothing Happened

Peter follows the man with his eyes then turns back to look at Lou. Lou is no longer there. Peter turns around hoping Lou would be behind him, but he isn’t. Everyone in the bar is gone except for Peter. Terror, a word best suited by a tailor, he wears it nicely. Peter turns back around in desperation. Lou is there now, but wearing a finely made tuxedo. Peter thought he was confused before. Now he doesn’t know what to think. Peter says, “What is going on? Where did everyone go? Where am I?” Lou pours another drink, this time for himself. Lou says, “You know I’ve met Peter the apostle. He wasn’t much of a drinker.” Peter’s face is painted white. He turns around to leave. The small double doors transform into one large metal door. He can’t leave.

Can’t Leave

Lou stands at the back of the bar. He lights a fresh cigarette that he found in his coat pocket. As he breathes in the toxic smoke, all the light in the room manages to avoid his face. Only the reflection of light off of his eyes and the flame of the cigarette can be seen on Lou. He is a walking shadow. Peter stands back against the metal door. Lou tips his cigarette against the bar table. The bar crumples into a long stretch of ash and coal. Lou walks over the ash, and makes his way to Peter. The coals on the ground begin to catch flame. The flame spreads across the bar. Lou takes his time to reach Peter. The flames behind him grow like a weed. Peter sits on the ground in fear. Lou speaks, “Remember what snow looks like, remember how it feels in your hand, and remember the blistering cold, the pains of frost. Remember these things, my dear Peter, for memories are as close as you will ever come to them again.” The bar is nothing but four walls of flames. Burning flesh has a smell not bearable to describe.

The End
Alma Rodriguez / Like Perfect Little Soldiers in Our Matching Camouflage

Everything’s changing
But not in the way it should be
We’re dancing all around
Masks all around
We’re like perfect little soldiers
In our matching camouflage
You can’t find me
You can’t find me
Even if you tried
All the girls wearin’ jeans
Hair done the same way, tops all the same
Even the shoes
All the boys wearin’ jeans
With same length hair, with nothing to say
Except for Andy
With his dark, dark clothes
And
His long, long hair
Andy doesn’t care
Andy doesn’t care
I can find him in the crowd
Easily
But he can’t find me
But he can’t find me
The child watches

the older kids

play basketball.

The way they dribble,

pass the ball,

and go up for a shot.

He absorbs all

despite these physical demonstrations

and retains it

for future references.

Waiting for the

day he is called

to play.