

# FLIGHT

- 2019 -



# Flight

## 2019

An Anthology of the Written and Visual Arts

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## *Robin Hill Gray*

### **Hard Healing**

uncertainty is like that first acrid taste of, cough syrup.  
the defense of these taste-buds.  
the acceptance of the body.  
the hard duality.  
two directions but eventually a choice is made.  
to swallow it all and heal your body. uncertainty eventually  
provoked choice, and demanded responsibility.  
to heal, or continue sick.

# *Maria Reyes*

## **Rage**

She walked with fear by her side,  
But she never let it get in her way.  
She walked with confidence in her beauty,  
And hustled with rage.  
She sought vengeance through her success  
For all the wrong life did to her.  
Her smile radiated throughout the day  
Never did she let anyone see her pain.  
She was blessed with the will to carry on,  
Even when she felt she wasn't strong.

## *Alexis Perez*

### **Colors, Shapes, and You**

It used to be  
you and me  
A mix and blend  
of blue in green  
And all the sounds  
in between

Now I speak with  
pain  
Has it made me sound?  
For this cold world  
has broken me down

Time and time again,  
I find myself in circles,  
round and round  
Pardon me,  
a saddened face  
Colors change  
from blue to brown

I've hit the ground  
I beg of you, would you stay  
just one more round?  
Spare me time, spare me time  
for each would count,  
pound for pound

To make an ocean  
of sorrows where I lay  
To live another day  
in a world of grey

Don't you see,  
I've lost my faith  
just in you  
Cracks and grooves,  
I've lost my pace  
Now in tears I bathe  
just for you



## **Life's Lesson: Who I Am**

When one becomes homeless you need to adapt to survive. It shapes you as a person, I myself became resilient. I lost my job, had no income and couldn't pay rent. This was a pattern I have been repeating my whole adult life. Though I couldn't understand why. It was September 15, 2005, I watched the sheriff post a sign on my door basically saying I'll be trespassing if I enter. At first, whoosh, nothing. I was being suspended in a sensory deprivation tank, floating on nothing looking at my old door. I tried to take a deep breath, but my chest was squeezing in on itself. The sandpaper that was once my throat was making it impossible to get air in. The piercing pinpoints in my eyes were causing them to burn as hot as the weather. The tears forming couldn't seem to soothe. Run before you do something worse than you already have. The movement of my limbs was causing my outside to match the fever pitch of my insides. The scream I release echoes in my ears. I screamed that way till my legs turn to water and I splash down. What did I allow to happen? My mind projected each event better than my Vizio's pixels could piece together. All the things that lead to me losing my job. The accusations at family and friends that closed their doors to me. It all played over and over in my mind for days as I walked from place to place with no real destination in mind. The sound of the thunderous traffic finally pierced its way in. It was a freeway overpass. I climbed over, all that was left was to simply let go. A new voice I had never heard before asked, "What about the people driving?" The siren broke me from my trance. I didn't even realize how close the officer was to me. It was his voice I was hearing, he was telling me that I didn't have to hurt myself or anyone else. It was like being underwater and yelling to each other. Now I had a choice. Be selfish or ask for help.

I asked for help. He took me to a behavioral health center. I was diagnosed with Bipolar 1, ADHD and Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Working with them we came up with plans and then began to learn-how to accomplish them.

Determined, I looked for everything that would help me understand what exactly was going on. My behavior issues started when I was young. I was always getting into trouble. I would be so happy and full of energy, bouncing like a ping pong ball all over the place. If I couldn't tie my shoe right, here came the Tasmanian Devil. "Dramatic," was the word of choice my family used to describe me. My mom would send me to live with relatives when she couldn't take any more of my theatrics. Anywhere I went I had to learn to be a part of that household. I would last anywhere from six months to a year. Then I was shipped back to mom. As I got older, I began to think being me was a no, no. So, I would mimic people. I would watch, listen, study their movements, and their style. That only started a whole new set of problems. It was causing me to think people were talking behind my back. Never knowing what I was supposed to do or how to behave. The daily war of fear and anger continued its destructive fight within me. For me, it wasn't sitting in darkness. It was seeing all the vivid colors of existence and not being able to use them. Trapped in *Mary Poppins*, everything so animated and energetic, but unable to be a part of it. The thing about mental illness is it's a battle. You must be on constant guard and use all your armory against this formidable enemy.

I died on March 6, 2018. A little bit about bipolar, when you're happy, you're over the moon and stars happy. I wasn't keeping up with my medication. I wasn't journaling, I skipped a few appointments. Since I was wearing those rose-colored glasses, I wasn't noticing that certain behaviors were sliding their way back in. The thing about all that is my behaviors are more extreme than other people. I was sleeping entire days away. I called out of work days in a row. When I yelled at someone, the next block heard me. The cycle

started again. I was never going to be cured. Which is true, but managing is possible. I've proven that I can't manage anything time and again. I was like *Sisyphus*. Getting to the top of the mountain with that heavy stone only to watch it roll down again. I keep repeating the same cycle. The more I thought about it the more tired I became. In sleep, I didn't have to see or hear anything I didn't want to. It was so much easier. I texted my mother and sister and told them I loved them and to let my nieces and nephew know I loved them too. I went into my room and I took an entire bottle of my strongest medication. I heard the knock at my door, and I got up to open it. It was my sister. She saw the pill bottle empty. She didn't bother to ask any more questions and called 911. I was fighting with everything I had, every step of the way. I punched the paramedic, fought against nurses. One second, I was ripping out the third IV line and the next, I was waking up. I was told everything that happened. I had died for four minutes. I didn't see a light, no loved ones who had passed. It was a dreamless sleep, an absolute void. When I found out that my sister brought her oldest daughter with her and that she saw me, I never knew I could feel such shame. They transferred me to the behavioral health center once I was stable enough. Here is where I truly experienced irony. I was transferred to a behavioral health center right next door to the hospital I was born at 41 years earlier in Torrance, California. I would be starting my life over again at the place where I began it. In my journal, I was writing about what I wanted my nieces and nephew to think of me now and when I'm gone. I wanted them to remember me, for loving them and being there for them. For not letting my illnesses run my life anymore.

Some people believe we are shaped to face events. I believe we are shaped by them. My events taught me who I was and from them, I became who I am and will continue to be, a resilient, vibrant, fighter (determined). Until you are in that moment you truly do not know what you are going to do. Learn and grow, and then become who you are truly meant to be.

## *Kiara Pulido*

### **Like the Seasons Flow**

When she met him, she was a winter day in January

February came and she was as hopeful as a child

waiting to see snowfall

March brought peace and happiness like never before

In April, the spring gave her a new reason to live

By the time May came around, her eyes began to tell

what she couldn't

The pain he left her in June was nothing like the heatwave

he gave her in July

August set off a whirlpool of emotions that fought in her mind

day and night

Throughout September, she saw herself withering away

into darkness

In the midst of October, her smile was quickly fading

like the warmth of summer air

The cool November breeze brought to life a different,

almost indistinguishable person

By December, what was once a celestial laugh was now

a desolate void.

## *Blaize Bell*

### **Waterlogged**

It was the apex of summer, several hours after nightfall,  
And we sat upon the edge of the spa in stilted silence.  
Soaking my feet, I ignored how the skin swelled and pruned in the  
                  stinging water.

Resigned,  
I swallowed my words with the drink you handed me.  
Your attention remained fixed on something in the distance,  
Incognizant that a disorganization was stewing among the stars and  
                  in my mind.

There were bubbles in the drink and in the water where I sank my  
                  most unabashed truths.  
I watched with wonder as they struggled and gasped for air,  
Yet I made no valiant effort to throw them a lifeline.  
Glancing to you, I strived to see if you could see them too,  
But you simply passed me the bottle again, entirely unaware of my  
                  desperation.  
Realizing with obvious disdain that you were still not interested in  
                  listening,  
I pushed them further beneath the surface,  
Aware there was no way to retrieve the words now.

With an abhorrent sense of intrigue,  
I imagined that we might all drown here in these steaming waters  
of unspoken confession.

There also seemed to be a silly part of me,  
Perhaps partially pathetic,  
Who fantasized that it was possible for you to hear what I had  
submerged beneath the water.

I wished for this,  
Knowing it was a complete waste of a shooting star.



*Kim Krausert*



*Alyssa Rietsch*



## **Flying for Freedom: The Story of Bessie Coleman**

Today, Mama cried for the first time in years. Her boiling tears of rage streamed down her wrinkled brown cheeks and to her chin, clutching the landline phone as if it were her child. “Our Bessie! Our dear Bessie,” she repeated, as she crumbled to the ground in despair. April 30th, 1926, the day my favorite sister, and certainly Mama’s favorite daughter died doing what she loved most in the world, flying an airplane.

We planned the funeral a week later in Chicago, where she lived most of her adult life with our brother, Walter. Thousands of people showed up, all in support of what my older sister accomplished and overcame to live her dreams as the first African-American woman to become a pilot. None of us had stopped crying, we all lost someone very special to us, us not just being Bessie’s family, but the thousands and thousands who saw her as a special figure that fought racism and was an inspiration. Mama asked if I was going to speak to the large crowd about the sweet memories I had of my sister, but it was difficult to find the words in the rushing thoughts in my brain, and even harder to fight through the tears enough to form actual sentences. “Speak from the heart,” mama said, as she rubbed my back to comfort me. I stood up and walked solemnly towards the stage of the church where my sister’s body was presented in along wooden casket.

“Bessie died too young. Born in 1892 and passing in 1926, my sister was taken from me tragically at age 34. The same passion she held for years was the one to take her from us, flying. My family drew the short straw in life, as daddy left early on and a majority of us worked as cotton pickers. Bessie had to look after me and

our other sister at only 9 years old. When she got older, she attended school and eventually university, she was always an intelligent girl and it certainly defined her determination to better herself. Even

though she was low on money, at any chance she got she would send me a letter, describing her life away from the family. Her letters were mostly about life at college, but on multiple occasions she would express her excitement for aviation, and swore to me she would make it one day in the world of piloting.” I reached for a tissue, but there were none left, so I wiped the tears on my wrist and continued.

“She found support in a man named Robert Abbott, who suggested she learn to fly in France since there were no schools or pilots in America that would teach her. Every day I blame Abbott for my sister’s decision and it fills me with rage just to say the man’s name. At the same time, I’m grateful for that man, as he helped my sister achieve her dreams. She moved to France and sent me more letters, one that I specifically remember had large bold letters at the top that read, “I, BESSIE COLEMAN, AM NOW A LICENSED PILOT!” I remember being so excited, because she kept her promise to me, but mama knew how dangerous it was, and she was right. My sister was a free spirit though and even danger and racism couldn’t stop her willpower to do what she wanted. When she got back to the U.S, the press got to her before we could and further fueled her excitement. Not long after, she started doing air shows and crazy stunts in planes, that we were sure she had a wish to face death one on one. I know now why she was so desperate to do death-defying stunts. She wanted to inspire more people like us, more African-Americans, to become aviators. I think she did a pretty good job.”

My eyes peered over the large audience as I took a deep breath, recollecting my thoughts. Most of these people didn’t know how close I was to my sister or how much love I have for her. “Most of you knew her as ‘Queen Bess’ but I knew her as my big sister. The one that would watch over me and keep me safe, or tell me stories from what words she learned in school, or would send me letters to make sure we never drifted apart. None of you knew my sister like I did, but I sure appreciate every one of you for supporting her and celebrating her life with us today. Thank you.”

I walked off the stage to applause and through my watery eyes, found my way to my seat next to mama. She rubbed my back again, understanding the suffering I was going through in losing my

sister. The funeral ended soon after with Walter being the last to speak. We flew home, tragically ironic, and nestled into our beds without dinner. We all were too upset to eat, and our stomachs felt tight from grief and guilt. I heard a sound from the front door a few moments later, the ‘clink’ of the mail drop opening and closing. A familiar sound from when my sister would send me mail every month, now a sound I couldn’t hear without tearing up. I walked to the door and there was another envelope from my deceased sister, mailed out a day before her death. My hands were shaky and I took it to my room without showing mama or any of the others. Carefully I opened it, as if I tearing it open would damage the last final memory I have of her. I read it slowly and carefully. It read:

Dear Georgia and family,

On May 1st, I will be performing my most important air show ever, for the Jacksonville Negro Welfare League. This is what I’ve been practicing for and hopefully I’ll inspire more African-Americans to explore the possibilities aviation can provide for them. My life’s work will finally mean something in just a few days. I want everyone to come see me after the show so I saved enough money to buy 6 plane tickets, they are included in this envelope so hopefully you all can make it. I’m making headlines, Georgia, all over the U.S. I’ve worked so hard to eliminate segregation and I think I’m getting somewhere. Wish me luck!

Love, Bessie

My eyes were sore from crying that I couldn’t cry anymore. All I could do was grit my teeth and shut my eyes tightly, clutching the letter in my hand, and crumbling to the floor just as mama did when she got the news.

Source:

“Bessie Coleman Biography.” *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, Advameg, Inc., [www.notablebiographies.com/Co-Da/Coleman-Bessie.html](http://www.notablebiographies.com/Co-Da/Coleman-Bessie.html).

# *Mya Rodriguez*

## **Nothing More**

My hands are always empty,  
And my mascara no longer runs,  
No more arms around me,  
Each step's better as I walk without someone.

No more extra thought to the color green,  
And I don't skip ROS because it's still a good song,  
Moving on is supposed to hurt but it's something I need,  
So please hurt, I swear it won't be for too long.

Memories try to conquer things I see and hear every day,  
Taking back things that were yours,  
And things I love, but that you gave.

My head and mind cleared,  
None of the shirts that you gave,  
Frames and drawers are empty,  
No more space for you to invade.

Lying in bed and finding no one's there,  
Funny how the empty sheets comfort me more,  
And I prefer the night's cold air.

It's too much work to hate you,  
But much more to forgive,  
But I'm glad that it's over,  
And now it's for myself that I truly get to live.

## *Mario Perales*

### **Frankly My Dear, I Enjoy This Oceanic View**

I think I've heard this voice before  
Somewhere along the blue-eyed shore  
Let's dip our feet and converse  
About how our paths gradually diverged  
Into each other  
Finding peace in one another  
It's curious how your smile reminds me of the sunset  
Extending and overlapping your body like your corset  
We ask how our last few years have been  
Remembering each other's kin  
The little one  
Who was searching for you  
Above in the blue  
My promise stands  
I will never wear any other band  
If I could  
I would just stay here with you, in the sand  
But I know I must go  
And wait for my time  
I'll be waiting for your signs  
Like closing my eyes and seeing first the thighs  
Then your shoulders floating high  
Like a kite  
Then your ruddy blue eyes  
My Paradise  
You and our daughter  
I'll be back tomorrow  
I have to go tell her  
"Frankly my dear,  
She'll always be here"

# *Elijah Rios*

## **Poetry**

Poetry doesn't have to rhyme all the time.

Poetry is best when it comes from the heart,  
That is when it is true art.

Every night I wield this weapon and write.

I can write how people say that I am an  
Inspiration and I am strong, while I cry and  
Glare at my legs as they are dangling to my  
Demise.

Altruistically I can write how I am terrified,  
Even though I am not petrified. And I will not  
Cease to move forward.

### Poetry

How I can write I might fall; just fall.

Just write.

Just get up.

Because poetry is in all of us.

Poetry is all of us.

This is what we all yearn for.

Beauty.

Between man and ink.

# *Alfred Llagas*

## **Fancy Lights**

There was a time when things were simple.

Bad drawings, pieces of paper waiting to be crumpled.

He was fighting the breeze with great resistance.

I could see the fancy lights in the distance.

There was a time when all he wanted to do was move around.

His urge to take on the world and meet new people  
seemed so profound.

His spirit was strong, his will was firm, his mind was active.

His needs were simple, his generation was old,  
his wants were primitive.

Everyday he loved to get on that seat and row his legs.

You can stop him, you can tell him off, but his urge still begs.

He annoyed, he frustrated, but he loved and always insisted.

You can hate him, you can despise him, but his love never resisted.

All he could brag about were C's and D's.

If he were lucky, maybe he'd even mention some B's.

He can be the worst student any teacher can prefer.

But he teaches life lessons that can be hard to decipher.

Simi Valley was his happy place.

He'll brag, he'll exaggerate, he'll rub it in your face.

No matter what time of day it was, no matter how dark the nights.  
You could always see in the distance his fancy lights.

Where did we go wrong, did we do the right thing?  
Why do our hearts feel so heavy, like our tears want to sing?  
He was so strong, so mobile, so admirable.  
Thanks to us, he's on life support and feels miserable.

They say it's not our fault.  
They say we did all we could.  
Then why does it feel like we locked him in a vault?  
Why didn't we keep him home like we said we would?

Hang in there, Dad, keep fighting for us.  
We all have our regrets, but we all stand euphonious.  
We love you and we're sorry.  
If only we could take away your misery.

You have many more years to look forward to.  
Don't give up now, there's many more things you have to do.  
You've always been my hero.  
My dad, my savior, my ground zero.

Put your helmet back on, let's see you get on that bike.  
We'll go for a ride to wherever you like.  
Let's go meet new people and explore new sites.  
Let everyone see those beautiful fancy lights.



**Can't Change Who I am (Jason forgives his bullies)**

Seeming like a normal day, walking hand in hand with Zach to my locker, I kissed him goodbye, wistfully smiling as I twisted out my locker combination. "I am so fucking lucky to be with someone like him."

Distracted by thoughts of the next time we would get together (in my head set to the tune of "Young and Beautiful" by Lana del Rey, naturally), I almost didn't notice a large knuckled finger tap me on the shoulder and a voice asking "Jason?"

Whipping around at the touch, I came face to face with none other than George Queensberry. His letterman jacket thrown over one shoulder, thumb hooked casually in the right pocket of his jeans, he seemed like he actually wanted to start a conversation with me. Shocker! After what he and his buddies did to me, I felt apprehensive.

"Yeah, George? What's up?" My lips trembled for a few seconds.

George inclined his head toward the Senior Walk, calling out "Jack! Andrew! Come over here!" I had an excruciating sickness plummeting down deep in my stomach. This wasn't going to go well for me (again) if George wanted Jack and Andrew nearby. Strangely enough, they were happy to see me... And they had a couple small boxes tucked under their arms.

My gaze went everywhere. "Okay, what is going on? You're happy, have gifts? Not insulting me? No anger in your eyes? What gives?"

George spoke first: "We wanted to apologize. What we did to you five months ago wasn't cool. We'd like to say that we're sorry."

I wasn't the least bit convinced, arms crossed over my pale pink Judy Garland T-shirt. "Really, guys? What's to say that you will do the same thing to someone else? There are other gay and gender nonconforming kids at this school besides me. I'm still healing emotionally from what you jackasses did."

Jack interrupted in the midst of my sarcasm. "We get it, Jason. We've learned quite a bit from going to those QSA meetings Principal Cortez told us to go to after what we did... Made us a bit wiser, less mean."

Andrew joined in the conversation. "Yeah, we didn't know how much the LGBT/queer community went through. Guess we thought that because we were straight, we... um... well, had pride in ourselves! Therefore we take everything we had for granted. You, Ms. Lynde, Charlie, Zach, Kelsey, and Coco really opened our eyes. Thanks. Oh, before we forget, we had something made for you."

Jack and Andrew gestured to the boxes in their arms. I nervously took Jack's first, tearing aside the purple and green paper. I grinned from ear to ear, noticing the care that went into writing J. MAYBEAR on the 3x5 index card with bright red Sharpie; I would expect something like this from Zach or Charlie, not the jackasses who beat me up and are now apologizing for it.

I peered at the gift with suspicion, then my eyes widened in shock: it was a hand drawn dual picture, done with precision in pencil and colored ink. Harvey Milk holding his megaphone on the left (I could hear his words in my head: 'My name is Harvey Milk, and I'm here to recruit you'), the Stonewall Inn on the right with rainbow flags hanging down to cast shadows on Christopher Street.

"Wow, Jack. This is beautiful... I didn't know you could draw."

Jack rubbed his neck with his knuckles. "Yeah, I guess. Keeps my mind busy when swim season's over. Thanks. I felt obligated to draw this after what we learned."

"You're welcome. And I'm impressed."

“That’s what Ms. Lynde said, too.”

Andrew stepped forward to give his gift. “George, along with Coco, helped me a bit with this one.” I gently rolled up Jack’s gift and set it in my locker. Taking Andrew’s gift, I cautiously removed the exquisite holographic gold paper, the reflection nearly blinding me.

It was another picture... but one picture I recognized instantly: The picture of Sharon and Alaska which Andrew had torn in half right in front of my face as I was bleeding from punches thrown by the others. I could still hear his taunt in my ears—*Who are these, you stupid fairy? Your mommy and daddy?*—but this time was strangely effervescent... Due to the fact that the picture was brand new, straight from a Bing search I’ve done several times and encased in a golden picture frame. Plus Andrew had a forgiving grin on his face. Like he felt remorse for what his actions did. Geez.

Covering my mouth with my hand, I broke down in tears.

“What’s wrong? You don’t like my gift, Jason?”

“I do, Andrew, I really do. It’s just the fact that you hurt me deeply when you tore this in front of me.”

“I acknowledge that. And I feel terrible about what I did, especially after Coco and George volunteered to educate me more than I could from going to the QSA meetings on my own.”

One of my eyebrows arched in resistance. “You’re being sincere, right?”

“Of course I am, Jason. After Coco told me how much this picture meant to you, I was scratching my head as to why. And that’s when George stepped in to help me.”

“Really? You did that, George?”

“Yup. Andrew was asking about this picture, so Coco and I invited him to watch some episodes of RuPaul’s Drag Race I had recorded at my house after last Monday’s game.”

I smiled in glee. “And? What did you think of the show?”

“The show’s pretty cool. It takes serious balls to dress up and

present yourself as a drag performer. I don't know if I could do it... Look at me! I'm not sure if I could pull off looking good in drag." Andrew turned his body to the side, glancing down at his butt and legs.

I laughed a bit. "Oh, you certainly could. You've got a nice body from swimming all the time. You'd look gorgeous." Andrew Phelps cracking me up... that's a first!

"You think so?"

"I know so, Andrew!"

"Okay. And those queens you like, Sharon and Alaska, are quite awesome. I can see now as to why you are such a confident and unique person, Jason."

"Thanks, Andrew."

All three of them said unanimously, "So does this mean you forgive us?"

Twisting my mouth, hands on my narrow hips, I looked at the guys, contemplating my response. "Hmmm. Let me think . . . might take a teensy bit more time . . . but yes, I forgive you."

"Sweet. So are you going to participate in the annual talent show and dance competition this year?"

"As a matter of fact, I am. My boyfriend Zach and I are dancing."

Andrew made a face. "Wait. Zach, as in Zachary Grant? He's your boyfriend?"

"Yes. Is that a problem?"

"No. I'm just a bit shell shocked, is all. But I can't wait to see you guys dance."

"Same here. You've never entered the competition before?"

They all answered "No."

I had to giggle just a bit. "All right. I'm looking forward to see what you put together."



*Daniela Campos* / One with Nature



Ryan Spear / Winlose

## **Let Me Be Your Inspiration**

Let me be your inspiration  
That thing that drives your mind  
Let me be that dedication  
That tiny voice inside  
Let me be that constant passion  
That fleck of inner light  
That spark that keeps your fire burning  
The reason why you fight  
Let me be that determination  
That breath inside your lungs  
Let me be that meditation  
That thought that keeps you young  
Let me be your inspiration  
Those thoughts that keep you warm  
Those images that keep you going  
Even when you're torn  
Let me be that rapid action  
That takes over when your done  
Let me be that overjoy  
When the war is done and won

Let me be that slow addiction  
That drives you most insane  
Let me be that one creation  
That brings down all the rain  
Let me be that cause of elation  
That ever-present thought  
Let me be that standing ovation  
That praise you've always sought  
Let me be your inspiration  
That makes you feel alive  
That one thing that you can't let go of  
That one who helps you thrive



## *Noelle Spice*

### **Changeling**

The twinkling of bells has echoed into the crevices of my life  
I drummed my fingers to the pulse  
I hummed the succession in my quiet moments  
The first note to my ears was an untidy timeline  
The song was composed from a nonsense territory  
But it was impossible to ignore  
Impossible to think straight

The meter woke up every closeted impulse  
Of yet to be discovered possibilities  
An urge to explore soon consumed my thoughts  
Find the source—to satisfy, dissatisfy, or dement  
The purpose was merely to entertain my curiosity  
To suggest I wanted to join those vibrant folk is ludicrous  
But out to the wilds I was drawn

To a ring of mushrooms the song led me  
Neath a banner of rainbow  
And with a fairy finger motion the charming ones came out  
They danced to the same cadence

Their movements intoxicated me--an unhindered display of gaiety  
Despite my objections, I was glamourous  
They sparked joy onto a joyless frump  
Thus my nature was accepted  
So out I came again—  
Every night to join those fair folk



*Amanda Van Westrienen*

**//Simulated\_Insanity//**

S was not your typical young adult. He was extremely tech-savvy, skilled with digital things, spent large chunks of his time either reading comics or focused on a screen of some type. He was, simply put, a major introverted nerd. Aged 24, single, pale skin, long black hair, tall and of a scrawny build, a part-time worker at a fast-food joint, his habitat is located in a cramped apartment complex. He had an extreme obsession with his two computers: one was a desktop, the other a hefty laptop (he named them both Suzanne and Ellie, respectively). He also has a pet cat named Tera, which was short for Terabyte. Despite having limited social skills, he had one good friend named Deron. The guy was the same age as S. He was African-American, heavy and well-built, a player in the college football team, and very outgoing. A spark of positive energy flared wherever he went. He and S were good buds. Even though S hangs out with him only a few times a year, Deron forgives him anyway.

One warm summer night, S had finished a special project that no one in their right mind knew could be possible in this day and age. Over the course of three weeks, he constructed a simulator in which one can experience the real world through one's own rose-colored lens. An ideal utopia that can be visited by programming the mother computer (that is, making sure all options and settings are correct), standing on a disco-colored platform, and strapping into the contraption as "the system" painlessly transports the user's consciousness and spirit into the virtual realm. The user can leave the simulation anytime through one of randomly scattered doors called vanish points. His creation was dubbed "//Simulation\_S//". It was

made with the help of eight distinctive computers (they all varied in terms of years), a tablet, a large plasma screen TV that he turned into a functioning computer (this was the mother device), LED lights, a fuzzy car seat, a futuristic helmet, nitrous oxide containers, and parts of a roller coaster car he bought at a pawn shop. The contraction had some difficulties at first. Soon enough, things were running as smooth as expected. His apartment was now a cyber laboratory, and he was satisfied nevertheless. When S texted Deron about his bizarre contraption, Deron wrote, “You wild. But to each their own, right?” S chuckled when he saw his text.

“Alright,” S said. “Let’s test this baby! Tera, if intruders break in, claw them out.” Tera meowed in annoyance. With everything set, S stepped on to the vibrant platform, put his back against the fuzzy dismantled seat, fit his head into the suspended helmet, and lowered the restraint. Moments later, a small amount of nitrous oxide emitted in the helmet. Subsequently, he felt like he was drifting off. Drifting off to a state of deep sleep . . .

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S abruptly woke up. He found himself staring at a fairly open sky. “What the? Why am I laying down?” Lifting himself up, he discovered he was on a flowery grass hill. Straight ahead he saw the downtown area of the city of Gleeson, CA, the place he currently lives. He moved carefully down the steep hill and went on to the sidewalk. He noticed everyone and everything around him. People kissing, laughing, having a good time, blasting music through the speakers of their cars, having water balloon fights. “It’s better than I thought it would be!” he said, astonished. He then heard someone call out his full name: “Yo! Stanleigh!” He recognized the voice. It was his friend Deron. He turned his head and saw Deron and a group of three guys walking towards him. S immediately discovered

that the group of guys were actually three friends that he had lost contact with years ago. His eyes raised. “What are you doing just standing there by yourself?” Deion asked S. S was frozen in time. “Uh.. umm... You see...” “Come and kick it with us!” A nervous smile entered S’s face. “A-alright”, he agreed. One guy said, “Let’s go for some drinks and sushi. I’m buyin’!” The guys cheered and S confidently walked with the crowd. *I have a feeling that this place won’t be so bad*, he thought, grinning.

S and the boys were living it up, as if tomorrow didn’t exist. They hit a series of restaurants, hotspots, and clubs in the city. S had felt elated. He felt like he should have lived like this a long time ago. Everything was absolutely perfect, as it was. S felt as though he had somewhere to fit in. These guys weren’t the type to judge. They were one-hundred percent cool with him in spite of him having social quirks. For the first time in his life he felt like he actually belonged. It was all too good to be true. In the words of the guys, this was lit!

The group’s last destination was Gio’s Pizzeria and Desert Palace. It felt as though hours have passed. S was aware of this, but he didn’t care. He and the guys were too busy stuffing their faces on extra large cheese pizza and garlic fries. For desert, the group was given a large “doggie tub” (the restaurant’s fancy name for a round metal tub filled with at least fifteen different flavors of ice cream.) Everyone dug in and ate and ate some more. No one can eat quite like these guys. After the glorious feast, Deron shared another one of his crazy anecdotes. “. . . So then me and my little brother were acting up and then he stood on the counter wearing my daddy’s pants and said to my momma, ‘Look ma, I’m grown!’” A burst of hearty, rambunctious laughter erupted at the group’s table. S was boldly laughing along with them. “Man, you sure are somethin’, Stan,”

said Deron. S laughed awkwardly and said “Yeah.” In his head he thought *Boy, does it feel weird to have someone casually call me by my real name.* But then reality struck. As the group left the restaurant, S had noticed a vanish point in the distance. This was enough to make him realize that he was not at present in the real world. *I was so deeply immersed in the festivity that I forgot this whole thing was a simulation! Crazy!* He thought this would be a great time to end it here. “Listen guys, It’s been fun and all, but I gotta go.” “Alright, partner,” said Deron. The two did a special handshake, and then went their separate ways. S walked towards the door and opened it. Soon enough, his consciousness started to fade...

///

Dazed and groggy, S had awoken in a room full of beeping, electric sounds and the sound of the blasting A/C. He knew he was back in his apartment in the real world. With little effort, he lifted the restraint from his chest and took his head out the helmet attached to the rest of the contraption. Thankfully, Tera was given food and water beforehand. She had used her litter box as well. S looked at the time on his phone: 10:30 pm. Though he can’t remember the exact time he went in (it was daytime), it was still the same day. He cleaned Tera’s litter box, then went to bed.

“It feels so good . . . to escape to a better reality.”

## *Kimberly Binwag*

### **Seventeen**

Sometimes I'm not pretty  
and there are days where I am empty.

I can't seem to figure out why.

I'm longing for my memories  
and the times that passed me by,  
People that have left me unseen.

I'm in the same place I was in at seventeen,  
where nights like these I cry my eyes out  
and pretend I'm better than I've really been.

Mama doesn't know and hopefully, she never will.  
It's funny holding onto that.

That I'd rather protect another than protect myself.  
I don't know what to do.

I'm stuck in seventeen,  
Still empty,

Unseen.

## **Silent Killer**

Depression isn't just being sad.

Depression is unmotivated.

it is anger,

anxiety.

Depression is going to bed fine,

then waking up upset.

Depression is being happy

then sad.

Depression is being sick.

Not just mentally

but physically.

It being sick to your stomach.

It's constant headaches.

It's dragging yourself out of bed just to take a shower.

It's forcing yourself to be productive.

It's contemplating yourself

Depression is wanting to be alone even when

being alone is a terrible idea.

Depression is being alone in a full room.

Depression is a killer.

But it won't be the death of me.

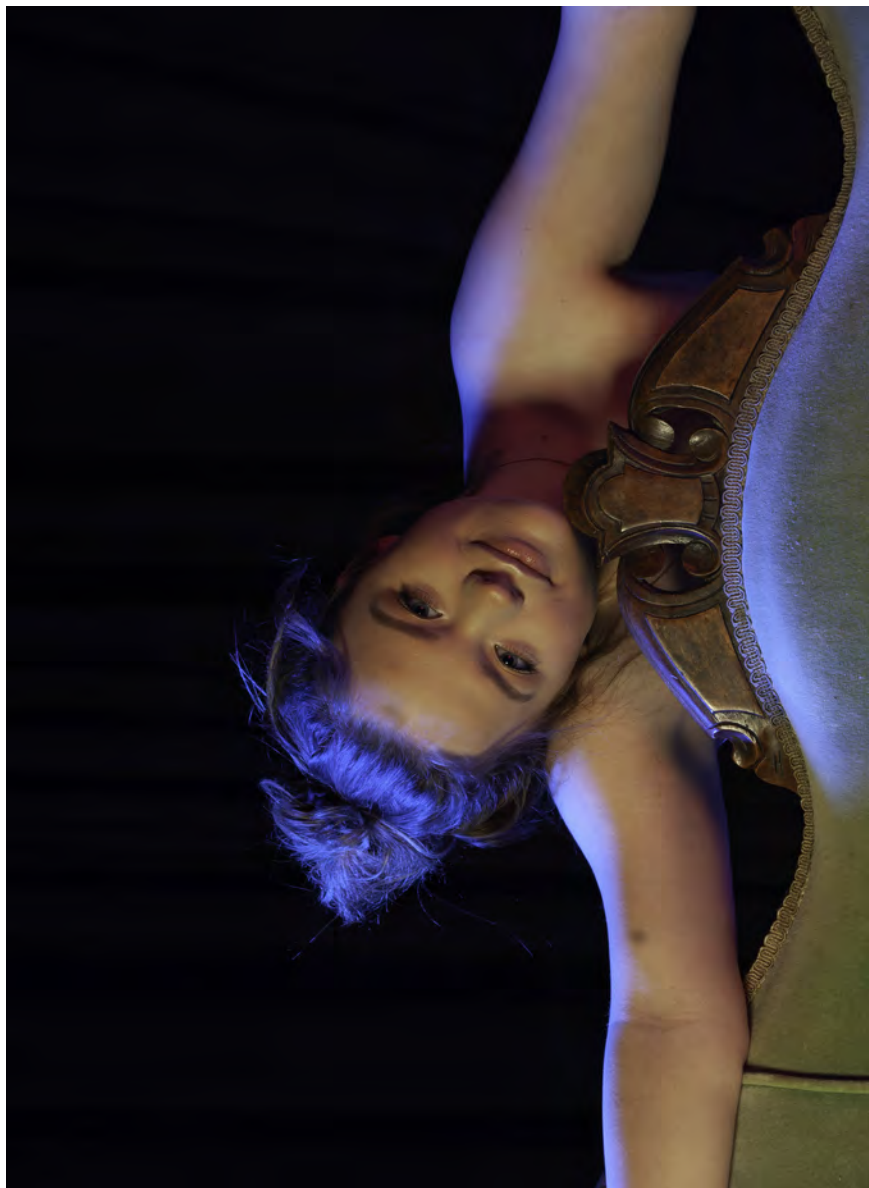


## *Kathryn West*

### **My Father's Hands**

When I was young they held me  
Kept me safe and warm  
Wrapped me in my blankets  
And protected me from harm  
As I grew I reached for them  
They kept me steady as I walked  
Caught me when I fell  
And at bedtime gently rocked  
Bigger still I watched them  
On Sunday mornings lifted high  
They taught me to be strong  
Encouraged me to try  
They showed me how to hold a hammer  
How to make coffee with coco and cream  
They showed me long division  
And that nothing is as tough as it seems  
As I grew older I left them  
But found I was never alone  
They waited for my calls  
Hugged me when I came home  
They were there to move my furniture

Fix my water pump, test my brakes  
Take me out on birthdays  
For my favorite chocolate shakes  
Older still I see their faults  
I see the calluses and lines  
And I see the legacy you have made  
When I take your hands in mine



*Aleta Meeker*



*Delisa Williams*



*Dacia Crouch*



*Chelsea Heard* / Cleaver





*Pryce Leonard*



*Danny Daoheuang*

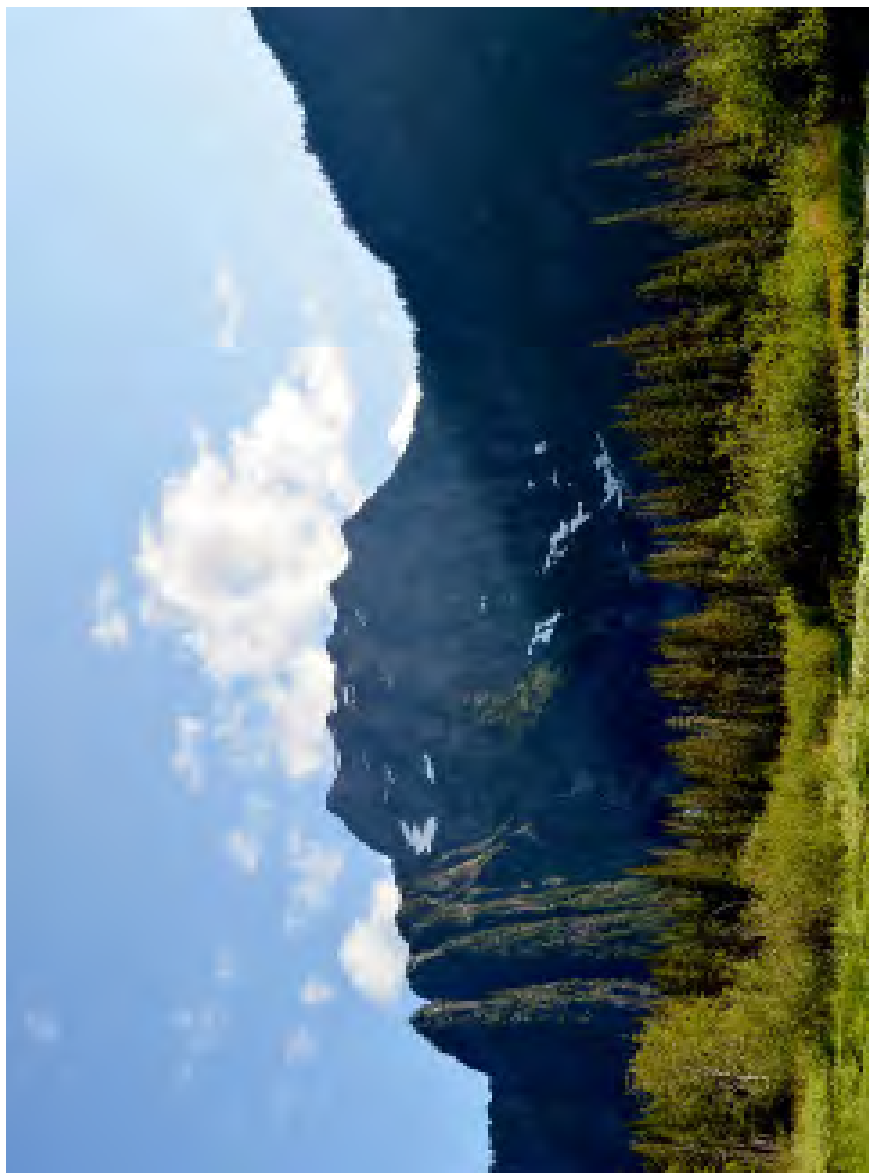




*Raul Bermudez* / KeyBar



Michael Deweese



*Kendal England / Mountain*



*Marc-Anthony Rosas*

**Possibly Almost Perfect**

The children left their nursery windswept.  
Ordinarily, they clean themselves, but not today.  
Their father and mother took them to the park,  
All ecstatic, to fly a makeshift kite. As it should be.

I tidy the nursery for them without pause,  
Position the smiling doll, toy engine, and red ball.  
Everything is in its proper place. Perfect.  
No need to pause to double check the room,  
No need to see if I made a mistake,  
Practically perfect people seldom do.

Further explanation will steal from self-discovery,  
But here is one thought on my latest responsibilities.  
There comes a time when life becomes a topsy-turvy room.  
Even seemingly stellar families lack practical perfection.  
My charges are no exception. The lack of direction  
leaves distress, contention, a nursery jumbled.

I have rearranged the space, they must find the purpose.

Once found, that misplaced chalk will create  
Perfectly smudged pictures on an ordinary sidewalk slate.

Admittedly, perfection is unattainable,  
yet it lies practically within reach.

At this time, my words cannot aid them further.  
I never put ideas in people's heads. How impertinent.

They can only learn the balance between order  
And imagination by discovering their own  
Possible, practical, perfect solution

Should I sit the children down, enlighten them?

Possibly, but what would happen to me if

I loved all the children I left?

Practically perfect people  
never have sentiment to muddle thinking.  
The winds have changed, my time is up.

Should I say goodbye?

Practically perfect people seldom do.

## *Brandon Shane*

### **An Ogre's Boulders**

I carry boulders on my shoulders, I grit my teeth  
I grunt with strength and stomp my feet, I stand resolved  
in the hands of defeat.

I look down into the valley and see many like me  
Rugged skinned and two headed beings looking for a place to sleep  
Carrying boulders on their shoulders, the weight of two identities  
We walk down a divide, our ancestry more than some abomination  
to be seen

We aren't a fashion, nor a trend, we're the future of these  
mountains for eternity

It's a paradox of two coats, two hides and two loves.

Waiting for a future, where we're all of the above.

A land of all, all monsters and creeds.

## *Jasmine Amador*

### **In Her Mind**

never ever did she feel so alone  
she compensates by buying luxuries on a loan.  
hoping pretty trinkets and shiny things fill her heart  
from all the suffering that tore her apart.

dragging her aching body each day,  
she prays no one ever has to feel this way.  
long days and sleepless nights on routine,  
she didn't expect life to be full of things unforeseen.

when the sky is dark and quiet  
the voids fill her mind and she can't deny it.  
they listen but don't understand  
all she sees are empty hands.

new experiences turn into bad habits,  
whoever she was turned into absence.  
she's not sure of the world around her,  
the unknown begins to consume her.

she hopes for sun-filled days and better moments  
after all, she is her only opponent.  
one last breath before she falls asleep,  
and I dream to be complete.



## **One in Three Abuse Victims Become Abusers**

The first time you heard this statistic was in middle school. The words swam in your eyes, and you stared at it for at least ten minutes. You read it over and over, until the teacher yelled at you to pay attention in class. Your eyes snapped to the front.

It's haunted you ever since.

In college, you sit in psychology class. The words are there again. You feel yourself go a little stiff, glancing to the left and right as if you just committed a crime. The people beside you catch your eyes and look away instantly. The class moves on. The sickness doesn't leave.

At some point, it felt like Russian roulette with your friends. One in three, they say, and there are three of you. At some point, you bite your tongue, perhaps in an attempt to sever it away. You wonder if they know this, if they have internalized this fear as much as you have. But you have erased your ability to speak.

Whenever someone moves too fast at you, or reaches out a hand to pat you on the shoulder, or when they raise their voice a little bit, you flinch. It's quick and harsh and you swallow away the instant panic. You can't. There's confusion in their face, maybe they even seem upset, but you don't speak. You can't speak. The fear is seeping into your stomach like tar and you smile to try to ease it away.

The years swirl around you, and you can't remember much of your childhood. You probably don't want to. But in your dreams, you can see scenes of darkness. It's hard to tell if they're memories

or not, but you wake up gasping. You bury yourself in your pillow to muffle the screams, and afterwards you can't sleep for a week.

You never spoke a word about it to anyone.

At some point, you mentioned to your therapist that you were scared of hurting others. It was the closest you'd ever gotten to opening up. She paused, set down her notes, and looked at you. You stared back in silence, and she finally asked you why that scared you.

There was no answer from you, and you tuned out whatever she had to say for the rest of the session. Even though it's been years, something keeps the words lodged in your throat. There is no one to protect, there is nothing to lose from talking about it. Yet, the idea makes you puke at three in the morning.

At some point, terror overcame you at hurting anything. You cried the first time you killed a fly, and instead of killing spiders, you tried to take them outside. Whenever anyone was around you always begged them not to kill them, and they rolled their eyes. You cringed as you looked away, thinking that the sight of a spider's crushed body reminded you of your younger self.

There was no reason to believe that you would turn into an abuser. When you look back, everyone described you as quiet and sweet and shy. Gentle and kind and soft. But the words bounced off you. They didn't hear your thoughts as they ran through your head a million miles an hour, each one darker than the last. And though you tried, you couldn't shake them away.

Intrusive thoughts, your therapist said. It was common, you knew that. But that didn't stop the fear that maybe one day you'd snap. That you'd act on those thoughts. The moment you were free, you told yourself you would never be like them. You told yourself that it wouldn't happen.

But the anger came at times. Uncontrollable and unreasonable. You would snap at people in shades of red, not even registering what you were saying. Everything was a blur when you were angry. That was normal with people like you, too. But that didn't stop you from apologizing fifty times at once and isolating yourself for weeks. That didn't stop the fear that wormed its way through you, nestling into your heart.

After years of therapy, your therapist said that if you couldn't talk about it with her, then talk about it with someone. Going over every single detail internally would be the death of you and you knew that was true. But you wouldn't. You couldn't.

You don't sleep much anymore. After so long, you thought that it would naturally get better, but it's only gotten worse. The people around you attempt to shower you with love, but much like the kind things they say about you, it all just bounces off. You wonder if it's even possible to feel love at this point, and you're afraid of the answer.

One in three people that are abused become abusers. If you can't feel love, that already pushes you halfway. The thought sticks to you, and you can't pull it off. In your head, you have this idealized version of it, this thing called love, but you don't know the details. Your mother says that you feel distant some days, and you wonder if you missed a step somewhere. You go over it all again, trying to piece everything together to see where you went wrong.

At some point, you decided that even if you couldn't tell someone else about it, you could admit it all to yourself. The words spilled out in a tsunami of something that you couldn't describe and you had to stop before you accomplished anything. Tears blurred your vision and you sat curled up on the bed, a laptop with an open word document on it staring at you.

Spilling your guts means admitting that somewhere buried under the years of numbness, there is anger and hatred and bitterness. The acknowledgment makes your throat burn and you think that pushes you so close to the finish line. Anger and hatred and bitterness is what they were made of during the dark ages. What they were made of in those times you don't remember. The times that you don't want to remember.

But it's the closet you can get to 'healing.' And so, you try again and again, to figure out what it is that's been simmering inside you for so long. You still don't have the answer.

Your latest therapy session was different. She looked at you and said 'better' although that was the farthest thing you were feeling. But before you could comment about it, she nodded to herself and she looked so sure you almost believed it.

Healing takes time, she said at the end. But who would you be after you healed? The statistic burned in your brain, but you sat down and wrote. The words spilled and for once you slept right after. It didn't feel like improvement, but you tried to count your blessings.

Healing takes time and you promised not to become like them. You screwed your eyes shut right as they opened in the morning, and took a deep breath. Those words repeated over and over again. You couldn't see yourself opening up to anyone, but you at least, could admit to yourself the source of twenty years of agony.

And maybe, just maybe, that was the first step to healing.

## *Brooke Arellano*

### **Finally Free**

Blood stains red  
Lips turn blue  
Bruises fade away  
As you say I love you  
Every slap comes with a ring  
Every punch followed with promise  
You'll end my life if I don't stay polished

Your perfect girl I must be  
As long as I want to remain "free"  
One little slip  
Earns me a tight grip  
A new bruise I must hide  
In no one I can confide

I can't scream for a savior  
For that I must be braver  
I'm sorry for what I've done  
I'm sorry that I ended your fun  
Next time I'll keep my mouth shut  
I earn another blow to the gut

A ring goes off  
It's all I hear  
They can't save me, I'm dying  
It's music to my ears

For years I lived in fear  
Hoping some end would draw near  
You gave me an end  
To your will I will no longer have to bend

Blood stains red  
My lips turn blue  
My life drains away  
I'm finally free of you

*Chanel Smith*

**Monologue from Am I Good Enough (a play)**

“When I close my eyes I see an image when I open my eyes it’s  
not there, when I look in the mirror it’s a different story  
when I listen to that song that image is in my head again,  
I want to be her, the clothes, and guys, never wondering  
if she’s enough for a guy, she just is. I asked God this,  
why didn’t he make me in this image,  
he responded but I made you real.”

## *Daniela Campos*

### **Closeted**

Your valued sentiment

Buried in scripted words

Of a book titled “Fear”

An obscure walk on a tightrope

To an unguaranteed step

Of a fall that may appear

A tunnel of desire

Blocked by uncertainty

Sealed by the sheer

Sleeve of judgment

Which undeservingly masks

Who you should blatantly endear





*Paula Gutierrez / La Alma (The Soul)*



*Mya Correa / Oil Painting*

## **The Black Shadow Woman**

It was Thursday early evening, and all was quiet on our street where we lived in Mentone, California in a three-bedroom, one-bath Bungalow-style house built in the 1940's. I was home alone, as I was accustomed to every evening of the week. My husband, Joe, worked at the 7Up/RC warehouse in Redlands, California for twelve hours a day, five days a week. Our two daughters had already moved out of the house and lived on their own, while our son, JoJo, was still living with us and going to Redlands East Valley high school. That evening my son had gone to spend the night at a friend's house in order to go to football practice before school started at 7:30 the next morning. So, there I was home alone by myself on a quiet uneventful Thursday night. My plans for the evening was to do some laundry then settle back and watch some television.

The house had wood walls and wooden floors in all three bedrooms. The kitchen and wash room had linoleum, the living room and hallway had carpeting. Because of the wood floors, you could feel the vibrations when someone was walking throughout the house. I was in the laundry room taking the sheets and pillow cases out of the dryer and putting them into a clothes basket when suddenly I felt the floor vibrate as if someone was walking down the hallway. I yelled out, "Jojo, is that you?" No response, so I walked into the living room and looked up the hallway expecting to see or hear Jojo, but to no avail; there was nobody in the house. I turned and walked over to the front door to close and lock it, as it was getting a bit chilly due to the setting sun. I proceeded back to my laundry when suddenly I heard a long loud shrilling scream from what sounded like a woman who was somewhere in the house. I then felt the vibrations of the floor again, only this time as if someone was

running down the hallway. I raced through the entire house, checking the closets in each bedroom, and behind the shower curtain in the bathroom, but again, nobody else was in the house. I went to the front door re-opening it and stepping out onto the front porch to look around the neighborhood and listened for any commotion or activity that might be going on. All was quiet throughout the neighborhood and within my house; I know I was not hallucinating nor imagining what I heard and felt.

Once again, I went back into the laundry room, this time taking blankets out of the washer and putting them into the dryer. I then grabbed my basket and walked into the front room over to the stereo where I put in a CD to play then turned on my cordless headphones and placed them on my head. I then took my basket into my bedroom and threw all the laundry on my bed to sort through. As I stood up, I was standing in my bedroom barefoot on the wooden floor while tuning in my music on my headphones, when suddenly on my left side behind me I felt an unknown presence that began stomping their foot on the wood floor to get my attention. I quickly turned around to see who it was, and nobody was there! I said aloud, "Oh hell no!" Then I hurriedly went throughout every room turning on every light in the house all while checking to see if possibly someone else was in the house, but there was nobody else besides me. I knew I was not losing my mind and that all that I experienced was not a delusion; it was real. Could it be an unseen force from the spirit world that exists around us trying to communicate with me for some unknown reason? Was I going crazy?

As frightened as I was, I had barricaded myself in my bedroom, made my bed and decided I would take a nice long hot shower, put on my clean pajamas and settle down to watch some television until I fell asleep. Before exiting my bedroom, I noticed the time on the clock read 11:15 p.m. I had spent forty-five minutes taking my shower. It was so nice, warm and relaxing. When I was done putting my pajamas on, I opened the bathroom door and stepped out into the hallway heading to my bedroom to my left when I noticed some-

thing out of the corner of my right eye, so I turned to look and there it was. It was an all-black shadow figure of a short pudgy woman in a dress and long hair walking out of my kitchen towards the front door as if she was leaving my house. Stunned at what I just saw, I ran into my bedroom, slammed the door behind me and locked it shut. Leaning up against my bedroom door I thought to myself, 'What the hell was that?' I noticed the time on my digital clock had read 12:13 a.m.

For approximately thirty minutes I locked myself in my bedroom sitting in front of the television staring blankly at it while trying to regain my composure. I became parched and wanted some water, so I slowly opened my bedroom door and walked down the hallway flipping on the hallway light then headed towards the kitchen, passing through the living room, when all of a sudden, the phone rang. It startled me and I nearly jumped out of my skin, while letting out a low shriek. Looking down at the caller identification it had read, S.B. Co. Coroner's Office (San Bernardino County Coroner's Office). I let the answering machine answer the call when I heard a man's voice saying that they had found my phone number in my mother's telephone book under who to contact in case of an emergency. I knew right then that my mother had died.

Two weeks later I had gone to the San Bernardino County Hall of Records to obtain a copy of my mother's death certificate. Reading it, the cause of death was from congestive heart failure. The approximate time of death was at 12:13 a.m. the exact same time I had seen the black shadow woman walking out of my house. My mother had told me once that we had Irish blood in us from my grandfather's side of the family. I had just seen a special on television about the "Screaming Banshee," a female spirit that goes to family members and screams to announce the death of a dying relative. It is from Irish, Scottish, and Native American folklore. Could this have been what I saw in my house that night my mother died at the exact time that she had passed away all the way in Hesperia, CA? I believe so.

*Antonio Yanez*

## **What Is Love?**

Love, a very impenetrable word.

Which is spent with someone you hold so dear.

If you tell me what is love.

I would probably say it is a magical sensation that you have with your partner.

No, I don't mean by sex.

Something much more intimacy between the two.

I believe it is a bond that is built through hardships.

I am a strong believer on that.

My daughter is a reminder of the love we once shared.

See my parents are why am I trying so hard.

That is a joke to me.

I respond why? Well cause I still love her.

Through thick or thin, I will always be her shield.

That is what I define as love.

Be there for her even when she least expects you to be there.

## **Humor Heals**

At any moment in time a humorous event can happen. It may be something you see or hear. You may touch something that feels funny, thus invoking humor. Perhaps something you taste might provoke you to laugh. I don't think you can smell something humorous. Can you? This might be worth researching. Of course the recipient must recognize and admit that the event is humorous, otherwise it isn't. Generally, when you find something humorous it brings a spark of happiness and makes you feel good. Even if it's only for a brief instant. Another effect of humor is that it can heal. That's what I'm going to tell you about.

Since humor can happen any time, it can also happen anywhere. This is a story about a humorous event that occurred in the bathroom. Now you're going to say, "Huh! Lots of funny things can happen in the bathroom. Why write about them?" What's special about this humorous event is that it occurred in the midst of a sadly tragic life event.

For more than two years my husband battled cancer. He never stayed in the hospital, except occasionally overnight following a treatment. During his last few days he got out of bed and walked with a cane with great difficulty. Finally, he was no longer able to walk around. So how do you go from the bed to the bathroom? Fortunately, my mother had a wheel chair and we borrowed it from her. While I held down the handles with all my might, my husband was somehow able to plant his feet on the ground, turn himself around, and plop down in the chair. Once, when he landed, the chair started falling sideways. I had to push with all my strength to get it back upright. That was really scary.



Let me give you some background information so that you can get a better picture of what's going on here. My husband was around six feet one inch tall. Although there was a time in his life when he weighed much more, he still weighed about two hundred thirty pounds. Even though life's struggles had diminished him, he was still a large man. I, on the other hand, am a petite little thing. I stand five feet one inch tall and weigh in at about one hundred five pounds.

Back to the bathroom story. Once I wheeled him into the bathroom and placed the wheel chair in front of the toilet, he would somehow stand up and slowly turn around. Great. Now what do we have to do in order for him to sit down on the toilet seat? As anyone with mobility issues will tell you, it's not easy to sit down from a standing position. At times it can even be virtually impossible. I solved this by placing the back of a straight backed wooden kitchen table chair in front of him. I had to sit on the chair to anchor it. He placed his hands on the top of the chair and began lowering himself down to the toilet seat. While he was doing this, the front two legs of the chair began to lift up off the ground, tilting both the chair and me backward. Once he was seated, the chair would return back to its original upright position. I remember chuckling to myself the first time this happened. So how do we get him up off the toilet seat and standing? Enter, once again, the handy-dandy straight backed wooden kitchen table chair. The same thing happened on the reverse trip. When he placed his hands on the back of the chair and started lifting himself up, the front two legs would come up off the ground, once again, and I would be tilted back in the chair. Once he was standing the chair would return back to its original upright position. I remember chuckling to myself this time as well. I continued to chuckle inside every time it happened thereafter.

I was able to find an instantaneous spark of humor in a painfully sad and tragic situation. Even though the moment was fleeting, that humor gave me a tiny respite from a terrible situation. Those



small moments of humorous tilting rides on the straight backed wooden kitchen table chair in the bathroom have helped me in the healing process of mourning.

Unfortunately, at the time I was unable to tell my husband about the tilting roller coaster ride he gave me, while I was seated on the straight backed wooden kitchen table chair. I remember that at the time I wish I could have, but he was beyond the ability to find anything humorous. I remember thinking that if I could have, we would have both shared a laugh, which might make us both feel better. Still, I was however, able to share the tilting chair ride story with my mother, while talking to her on the phone. We both laughed. I remember telling her that humorous things can be found even in the midst of the saddest times and life events. She agreed. I know that at the time this helped me feel a little better.

When I was almost done writing this, I had to stop and cry, which is a very difficult thing for me to do. I wish I could cry more often than I do. So here again humor had the power to heal.

Before I began writing this piece I found my journal and read what I wrote about the tilting chair ride, complements of my husband lowering himself on to and lifting himself up from the toilet seat. I wrote, "It's kind of comical. ...I think it could be a funny sight if [only]..." I haven't read my journal from that time for a while. I took the opportunity to read a few other entries. I'm glad I did. Researching humor made me do it. I wouldn't have done it otherwise. Lastly, in and of itself, writing this paper about the tilting chair ride to illustrate the healing power of humor, has in a small way, helped me in the healing process of mourning. So even inadvertently, humor has healing powers.

## *Robin Hill Gray*

**He**

metaphor for chocolate.

hunger's sweet tooth.

the worlds delicacy.

birthed from gold.

carved into marble.

it's hard for the world to swallow this truth.

so their angst buries it in the earth instead.

unknownst to them it is the most potent seed.

grows without water.

survives the harshest winter.

rises with every sun.

passing light to all sons.

## *Leticia Velasco*

### **Grief**

How do I continue without you? You are the love of my life,  
my soulmate

You left without an explanation and I'm never going to get one.

I'm sorry I wasn't there for your darkest hour.

I'm sorry I didn't read the signs.

I'm sorry . . . you're gone.

## *Maria Reyes*

### **Thorns**

She is a rose.

Her love is the stem,

And her thorns protected her

From those who couldn't

Handle a little pain.

Although they made her tough,

She was delicate

And longed for someone

To handle her with care despite her edge.

Because anyone can admire a rose

But it takes patience

To love it and help it grow.

She is a rose,

And she longed for someone

To pick her not for her beauty

But notice her for how she carries herself

And respect that although her thorns are thick

She is worth it in the end.

## **The Berring Abyss**

A roaring sea in all directions, crashing waves smash against the hull and salt water coats my face. Water rushes across the deck and lightning crashes in the far distance, monolithic storm clouds were forming miles away, and we were headed directly towards them.

“We don’t have time to change course, we’ll be far gone before the worst of it. The sooner we go through the less of it we’ll take.”

The crew was stoic, weathered from the harsh conditions of life out on sea. Battered from physical injuries that scarred and permanently numbed flesh, fervent demands of the Captain and the lack of food that had any taste. It all became dulling, a constant grayness, a tint that was filtered onto life itself.

We just nodded and went to our posts, continuing our work.

The waves began to hit harder, the water began to flow over the deck like water going down the rapids. The salt water stung our heads like the rough slap of a belt, we covered our faces with worn cloth and continued to work, the ship fell like a plane suffering severe turbulence and then smashed against the wavering sea. We all held our breaths and centered ourselves close to the metal flooring.

The birds were far gone, the only things living other than us were well underneath the surface. There’s something cathartic about a solemn silence in the most chaotic of situations, it felt as if we were heading towards our deaths with a warrior’s honor.

“Just five more days before I see her again,” I hummed in my head whenever I began to fall under the spell of depression, I visualized us together once more. A few months of hell for a year’s pay, the pain is worth it. I imagined the vacation I’d promised her, Japan. I’d promised Japan this year, from Okinawa to Sapporo.

“JACK’S OVERBOARD, JACK’S OVERBOARD!” I didn’t know who had yelled it, it was like a volcano had just erupted. Another repeated, “JACK’S OVERBOARD!” Then I repeated, “JACK’S OVERBOARD!” I found myself looking over the metal rail where he was last seen with four others, all frantically trying to

spot him. The ship teetered side to side, forward and backward. If I wasn't holding onto the railing with my life I might've fallen overboard too.

A siren began to roar, an eerie aura filled the air.

That's when we saw him, his hand had shot up in the air, clutching for the heavens. Then his other hand, then his arm. Then his head, his eyes were wide open, his hair sloppily covering his face. One second he'd be gasping for air, then another he'd disappear within the manic sea.

"BRANDON, BRANDON! HELP US PULL!"

I'd been frozen, a blank face. That's when I realized, I was narrating his death. I felt a slap across my cheek only to realize it was the stabbing wind mixed with the salt of the sea, Aaron was pulling with all he had, his feet slipping and shoulders propelling forward dangerously towards the railing, the impact instantly bruising his chest and cracking his ribs. Mavericks feet were slipping, he'd been laying on his back and now heading towards the same fate as Jack.

I grabbed the rope and began to pull with all my strength, Jack's feet were now firmly placed on the hull, though the water was still threatening to drown him. My hands started to bleed, everyone had begun to whimper with their wounds like a mountain lion licking her injuries, we were scarred and hardened men unable to fulfill the task at hand, unable to save Jack. The rope slipped, from one hand to the next, it became bloodier and bloodier as it left the grip of each man.

"There's nothing you could've done, young man. You did your best, you all did. The best thing you can do is get ready for next year's season, enjoy your paycheck.." He walked away. That bastard, I muttered.

"Heh . . ." He turned around and smirked at the door. "Lucky you weren't hit by a rogue wave. Would've killed all of you . . . Get some rest, son."

"Jack wasn't the only one." I bit my teeth and looked down in shame. He smiled and nodded. "It was a rough season. Like I said, son. Get some rest."

I wanted to stomp my feet, hit the table. But there was nothing to be done, this was the life I chose, the life we all picked. The Aleutian Enterprise will be here next year with a batch of fresh faces ready to be broken in by Mother Nature.



***Johnny Legnard* / Beautiful Boy**



*Jonathan Thor* / **Legends of Aetherus**



## *Kimberly Binwag*

### **Night**

The day made itself sunny for me.  
Dark clouds lifted and an ocean was revealed  
glimmering.

I woke myself with an earthquake to catch  
the ropes of gold piercing the curtains on my window.  
Ropes that wound themselves around my wrists  
and pulled me closer to the day.

But I am not of the day,  
I am not of the sun.  
For where I prosper is where silver meets midnight,  
where diamonds in the sky  
speak to each other in Morse code.

Yes, the day made itself sunny for me.  
It put the rainclouds in a drawer, locked it, and threw away the key  
but it is too late now.  
I've lost favor with the sun, betrayed the king that many worship.

My loyalty lies to the moon.  
I am no longer a slave to the day.  
Now the ropes that bound my wrists have tarnished  
and become silk sashes of silver and grey.

**Change**

Change is happening all around  
The things we hear are only sound  
People talk but we don't hear  
Because we don't want them in our ear  
But we can't run  
Because it's not done  
This isn't the end  
Because you still have a friend  
People change  
But not overnight  
You may feel derange  
But you must keep up the fight  
You never know  
What tomorrow will bring  
But as you grow  
You'll learn one thing  
People learn  
From what we show  
And what we show  
Is what they know  
In order to change  
One to another  
We need to exchange  
The thoughts we try to cover  
The world has evolved  
And so have we  
In order to let the world be solved  
We must wait on society  
Patiently

## *Marisol Avila*

### **Andrew**

The paradox of heartbreak. Wishing your abuser would suffer greatly under the weight of your absence. On the other hand, refusing to admit that you're even hurt, as if pain should be worn like shame. As if showing weakness equates to losing this mental game. Games I don't want to be a part of, but those that I keep wandering back to just to get a taste of the reality of you. Dodging the crime scene tape left behind by previous occupants. Did they all start off like me? Which were genuine, which were just strategies? What I mean is, was I only a game to you? How is it simple for you to wander about the interweaving's of my essence without getting caught? How do you sleep at night knowing you've touched places only reserved for the deserving, without having deserved it?

How doesn't it bother you, that you so carelessly destroyed the great ruins of my inner world?

You experienced the miracles of me, and it did not move you. So focused on your own pain, you don't notice the destruction you've caused me. How can you live with yourself?

## **Happy Place**

My happy place, my go to dream  
The deepest, darkest, part of me  
The wish I wish the heart that beats  
The me I really want to be  
Held and loved and almost cherished  
A wife, a mom, a friend so dear  
I close my eyes and almost see  
The place beyond the fear  
Beyond the work, beyond the friends  
Beyond the daily grind that spends  
Its entire time just getting by  
Beyond that place an endless sky  
An openness, a truth that bares  
Its soul its heart, its priceless wares  
A happy place, where time just stops  
The grind, the wear, the endless clock  
Where there is meaning, where there is joy  
Where there is the right kind of boy  
Where there is light, without the dark  
Where people love and patience parks  
Where eyes are closed before they open  
And just the right kinds of words are spoken  
There is where I want to be, my happy place  
My go to dream, the deepest, darkest, part of me  
The me I really want to be

## Trapped

I am lost.

I am a prisoner in my own mind. A slave to my own thoughts. I am nowhere. I am no one. Sometimes I lie awake at night and wonder: am I going anywhere? Or am I just done? I am trapped. Where? That is the question. What have I lost? I walk aimlessly in what seems like a void plagued by swarms of overwhelming shouts which scream “failure” that go on infinitely. I am trapped in what feels like a never-ending horror film where the victim and the killer are the same person. The person I fear the most is myself. I am walking down a path that leads to nowhere. My thoughts are a map I cannot read. I feel as though I have stumbled down a rabbit hole. I walk, wandering aimlessly when I stumble across a person wearing an unhinged grin, wielding a gun. They look very familiar yet unrecognizable at the same time. They tell me to point it at them and pull the trigger. I don’t hesitate. The gunshot echoes in my head as I keep searching. I venture around in the unknown abyss, unsure what I am looking for. A new figure approaches me, this one empty handed. This figure wears no dark grin, but the opposite, a worn out, weathered, faded, frown. People only see your mask. Seldom care about the person underneath that mask. Maybe they couldn’t wear their mask any longer. Maybe they wore their mask for so long that it just became their everyday face.

As I get closer, the shadow-like figure reaches out, placing their hand on my arm. Suddenly, I am no longer sitting in my room, or wherever I am in this abyss, but transported inside a maze. I look for a way out, but everywhere I turn I am met with a new face. This face looks warm, but I know from prior experience that looks can be deceiving. This new face advances with each rugged breath I take. It’s almost as if it’s spotted the fear that shakes me to my core. The shadow reaches out to touch me, to kiss me, to be intimate with them. My gut feels like a knife twisting inside me, but their touch is a fire my body craves for. I am a bundle of nerves as they caress me, a firework waiting to burst. I close my eyes and let myself dissolve in flames. When I open them, I am astonished to find I am no longer in the maze but gazing back into the eyes of the broken figure. The figure looks back at me one last time giving me a sad smile, that doesn’t reach its eyes. I hear them utter, “I’m sorry, but I have to go.” I desperately try to grab their hand, to throw them a life-line. But, they sink down into nothingness, the abyss claiming another

as its prisoner. It dawns on me that I'm able to pinpoint the lost thing: The thing I cannot find that I have been searching desperately for. The thing I lost was myself. I look out at what I believe to be nothing, until I see it. I am a figurine trapped inside a snow-globe as I look out of my own eye and see the surroundings of my room, which was once my only safe haven; Posters that covered my wall, books that lined the shelves, papers that cluttered my desk now stare back of me... Stripped of any life. My photos, achievements and memories piled in a package, buried out of sight. Where am I? When did I lose my way? I try to scream out for a person, for a lifeline, for a purpose. Tears stream down my cheeks for I am stuck in the very prison where I placed myself. I am fighting a losing battle, my fate sealed. People think monsters hide in your closet or in your bed, but I know better. The worst kind of monsters lurk inside of your head. I am silent, realizing my thoughts howl, carrying over in a way my words never will. It occurs to me that we've all said goodbye to someone for the last time without realizing it. Perhaps we've even said goodbye to a person for the final time who lost their battle.

As I explore the hell where I'm damned to forever, I am scorned, scorched, and trampled with the very words I speak, document, and believe about myself. My mistakes cloud my mind and come as an endless stream of data. Sometimes, I feel like there are too many open files and I don't care if they all burned. Or if my server crashed. Or if I decided I just don't care anymore and unplug. As the days drag on the weight I lug around increases. It's beginning to suffocate me, and I am tired, the kind sleep doesn't fix. I am tired of being tired. People tell you it's not that bad, that they will support you, be there every step of the way with you as you battle unimaginable pain, that things will "get better." They don't see you slipping through the cracks. They don't see the smile you plaster on your face but doesn't reach your eyes. They don't seem to notice that you've given up on socializing, or fun, or food, or life. Or the fact that you gaze at the knife on the table, eager for it to nibble at your wrists. They don't see you falling. That you've just given up on you. I'm just really hurting right now but I feel as though my screams are silent. I take one last look at my surroundings, my mind made up. I wonder when people will notice, *if* they will notice. But that's the thing about the final goodbye, no one truly knows it's the final time except you. It's almost as if I have become in sync with the abyss because the loaded gun appears at my feet. No one is in sight. I know what I need to do. Almost effortlessly, I pick up the gun and aim it at myself, the gun surprisingly, very light. It's as if I can finally let out the breath I didn't know I had been holding all this time. I release the trigger and everything is finally still.

I am found.

## **Emotional Awareness**

Life is full of emotional struggles that are full of questions like:

Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here?

It's your job to figure out the answers to these questions while nurturing yourself in the process.

Start by finding a safe place and build on that, some call this a foundation. Embrace and stay with each emotion you encounter since it's meant to teach you something.

Many experiences are included in your emotional journey, they are both good and bad. Learn from the bad ones and treasure the good one, because with each one you are transforming into the special and unique person you are meant to be.

Life is a journey live it with integrity, an open mind and a never-ending desire to learn.

*Noelle Spice*

## **Shadows**

Three times today

I saw a shadow

But never saw what cast it

First—a butterfly

Second—a hummingbird

Then, a flower on the wind.



*Olivia Snyder*

## **Plumage Full of Problems**

Here's the deal,  
The world has gone to the birds.  
Not the actual, fluffy, whistling ones.

Those avian actors have been upstaged  
By divas, seeing no need to revere prior rulers.  
"O reason, not the need!"

The puzzling problem is decided by free will,  
And if it will aid the survival of the portrayers,  
Diverse, colorful, breathtaking, natural life,

Or be used to monopolize the limelight.  
Quite the performance by the human race,  
Carefully, writing the script of all's future

Because all the microscopic, various,  
Infinite, fragile life forms and thespians,  
Not only just the feathered entertainers,

Are overwhelmed with plastic  
Overshadowed by development, monstrous high-rises,  
Drowned out by the glittering, marquee lights of progress.

It's a birdbrained idea, but maybe  
The representatives of the artificial should harmonize,  
The natural world does not find it difficult to synchronize.

When you think about it, it's a matter of values.  
Maybe valuable to taxonomy, but not the economy  
This concern could be just annoying sentimentality.

But, a canary serves as a warning.  
Ecological health plagued with measles of humanity.  
If the birdies stop singing, will sopranos be next?

If we do not see the feathers on the aerial acrobats  
Auditioning for the spectacular high trapeze act  
Can the show of planet earth go on?

With a unique ability  
Comes a unique responsibility  
To look out for the feathered, furry, scaly, and silent.

Are we our brother's keeper?  
Maybe.  
Maybe the question is whether the capacity for compassion  
Has taken a bow with the Dodo, final curtain call.

## *Blaize Bell*

### **Eros**

There is an instinctual drive subsisting in the realm of primal need.

It is here my thoughts linger.

I surrender control,

Abandon shackling repression eroding deep ravines of red

into my wrists,

And submit myself to the nearly inevitable loss of self provoked

by momentary climactic rapture.

I pursue thrills, chills, and something more intangible,

Found only beneath the superficial upper crust of earthly delights

of the flesh.

The benign calm,

Newly banished from my demeanor,

Replaced by the throes of mania spawned from little more than

a deliberate touch.

In the splendor and frenzy,

I am reminded of my definitive humanity.

Little more than a being of eros,

I am an infinite stock of forces known to be irrational, irrepressible,

and insatiable in their pursuit to be fulfilled.

The act itself is violently daimonic,

Reminding me of my capacity to be captivated in a moment

of ecstasy.

It is nearly a bloodsport,  
Gnashing teeth and clawing nails hurriedly seeking  
to reap satisfaction.

When it's over I remain forever changed,  
Newly plagued by an unyielding desire to feel my existence,  
Incarnated by congress,  
In a temporary transcendence of time with nothing more than  
our shared human fates.

This is an eternal battle waged on fertile soils,  
Between propagation and stagnation,  
Won, for now,  
By the perpetual élan vital of the masses.

*Diana Lussier*

## **Familiar Feelings**

you're a familiar feeling. I know you. I know you too well.

but I also know how it feels when you leave.

I know how bad It stings when you walk away.

I know how it feels to worry about you.

I know how it feels to love you.

I know how it feels to be the one you crave.

but which feelings are stronger? which flames burn brighter?

which flame will burn the least when it comes time?

which flame is meant to burn out?

the flame that burns in my chest when you walk away?

or the one that burns in my chest when

you come close?