An illustration showing the lower halves of four people standing side-by-side. From left to right: 1. Red pants with a tan waistband featuring small red hearts. 2. Dark purple pants with red side stripes, white socks with a black Nike swoosh, and white sneakers with pink and black accents. 3. Light pink pants with black side stripes, white socks with a black Nike swoosh, and white sneakers with pink and black accents. 4. Light pink pants with black side stripes, black socks, and pink high-top boots with black laces and soles. The background is a solid pink color.

# STUCK IN THE LIBRARY

FALL 2018 LITERARY EDITION

"creativity is contagious. Pass it on."

*-Albert Einstein*



*Hydration || Jaysha Ramirez*

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## **PROMPT 1**

**INTO THE STORM**

## **PROMPT 2**

**LAST WORDS**

## **PROMPT 3**

**LETTER TO MY  
FUTURE/FORMER SELF**



PROMPT 1

INTO THE STORM



# DURING THE STORM

*Rachel Augustin*

The Days during the seasons of our lives  
Will always bring peace to the seashore  
When the turbulent tides rise, they will always fall  
Bringing calmer waves in the ocean  
The mountains will disappear silently  
With abundant peace on earth  
For the branches of God's tree of Life  
And tomorrow, the harvest will bring forth  
Fruits, always after the rain.

# THE CALM STORM

*Hira Khan*

I am like water  
Calmly washing up on your skin  
Feeling you under me

My waves pull you in gently  
Holding on to your love  
As you embrace my surface with your body

The ocean of my heart accepts the pebbles you throw  
As you watch me skip a beat  
I accept your gift and bury it in my soul

In return I give to you myself  
Hoping my drops seep into your skin  
So that you can carry me everywhere

Instead I see you playing with me  
Pulling me in and then pushing me away  
Picking me up and slamming me down at your will

What you don't see are the waves rising  
Anger booming as I crash harder against your skin  
Attacking you with each current

My turbulent waves pull you down  
Gripping on to every insult you hurl  
As I engulf you whole

I am like water  
Calmly streaming over your remnants  
Daring you to break my heart again

# THE ENDLESS NIGHT

*Mariam Esa*

Close your eyes, it'll be alright  
Awaken to the dawn of a new day-  
Think of tomorrow to get through the night

Fast approaching, metallic bright  
Silently approaching without delay  
Close your eyes, it'll be alright

Looking around (home?) at the shattering sight,  
Looking up to the sky and far away...  
Think of tomorrow to get through the night

Scrounging for something, anything that might  
offer distraction from the horrors of today  
Close your eyes, it'll be alright

Shivering, alone, shaking in fright  
Utterly alone to silently (anguishingly) pray,  
Think of tomorrow to get through the night

Cast aside, ignored, a dying light  
Trapped in a world of rough rubble grey  
Close your eyes, it'll be alright  
Think of tomorrow to get through the night



# STORM OF THE MASSES

*Allina Khan*

Pens and paper and computer screens  
It's a chase to shake those money trees  
I become so starved for tangibility  
The site of rain and sun and tranquility  
I've joined a rat race where every face is looking to chase respectability  
Pacing thoughts and racing hearts  
Mindless ability and growing debility  
It's a chase to shake those money trees  
Pens and paper and computer screens

# DREAM

*Beaton Galafa*

Every night  
A hand picks me from my body  
And on wings whose owner I will never see  
Flies me into the desert.  
Once, it made me stand there as a dark storm blew  
From heavens sweeping everything under  
And along with me as I tried to run  
Back to the sea until I could see nothing but darkness.  
The scariest of them all  
Was when standing on a hill  
I was forced to watch two men wrestle  
Over a simple matter I did not seem to understand  
And the other one brought out a knife  
And he cut his friend open  
And he carved him from the chest down the stomach  
And he carefully extracted his intestines and the liver  
And held them in his hands until I screamed in my bed.  
And just last night  
It made me watch as pregnant rivers and lakes burst  
Swallowing us all one by one  
First the forests and the mountains,  
Then together with our farms and animals  
Ate our homes and their palm trees swiftly  
Until this place was sad and void again.



*Standstill || Elvir Ali*

# ICARUS

*Samantha Velasco*

I don't want to end up like dear Icarus  
Flying too close to the sun  
Forgetting his wings are only  
Made up of feathers and wax.  
But the sun calls for me at times  
To reach up to that horizon  
To get closer to the sun  
Even if just once  
Even if I burn in the end.  
The sun is calling to me again  
This earth doesn't seem to hold me anymore  
And I would like to touch that sun  
But will I finally have the guts to burn?



# routine

*brie rose*

## **1. the calm.**

it was there for only but a moment. that's how it always is, the storm only brewing when my guard is down.

## **2. the darkness.**

it clouds my mind and body all at once. much like any natural disaster, it's unexpected. it's unsettling, but nothing unusual.

## **3. the wind.**

it's knocked out of me. any intake of breath hurts, leaving a sharp sting in my chest as well as my throat.

## **4. the thunder.**

a noise and vibration that doesn't hold back. every part of me jolts from the uncontrollable rumbling that is coming from within my chest.

## **5. the lightning.**

striking my mind so effortlessly, never hitting the same spot twice. wreaking havoc on every sanction in my brain, breaking and destroying any sense of safety.

## **6. the rain.**

the damp feeling is like a rush, a release of withheld energy and sadness. the tears stream, marking their territory on my exterior skin as they cascade, after claiming my inner self.

## **7. the aftermath.**

the destruction. the recovery. the routine. once finished, i am only anticipating when the next storm will hit.

# LOVE STORM

*Mariam and Samiha*

I used to believe love was a storm.  
We'd tear apart the darkness  
And raise up the ground;  
I never thought I could withstand it.  
But you were my thunder,  
And I was your lightning-  
So, I let the sky touch the seas  
Let the winds howl at the trees;  
What I didn't realize  
Was that you were drifting away from me.

Now every time I cross the open sea  
The sky whispers a desperate plea;  
Bring back the ocean,  
And bring back the winds.  
You were the sun who broke up our clouds,  
The anchor that kept me a-ground  
Why can't we love like a storm again?  
Why can't we love like a storm again?

I used to believe love was a storm,  
I used to believe we could tear apart the darkness  
And raise up the ground;  
I never thought I could withstand it  
But you were my thunder,  
And I was your lightning-  
I used to  
I used to  
...believe in our love.

Why can't we love like a storm again?  
I never thought I could withstand it  
Can't we love like a storm again?  
But now I know  
I was the storm.

# THE SHAKESPEARE PAGES

*Romel Martinez*

DELIA OPENED THE BOOK with cold, brittle fingers. The title page of *Merchant of Venice* was looking at her, both reader and page were locked in a standoff. She didn't bother to read under the title, where the cast of characters was listed on the golden paper. She turned her attention to the flames of the fireplace, the source of their dying warmth. She knew she needed to do it. Do it now, before it was too late.

"What do you think you're doing!?"

Delia spun around, knowing the moment had passed. Brian was standing by the doorway of the old log cabin. One of the few places which warded off the endless snow storm. He was bundled up in a series of coats and sweaters, covered with flakes of snow. He closed the entrance door behind him, shutting them off from the danger of the wind. As he unwrapped his scarf, he scowled at her.

"What do you think I'm doing?" She said with defiance. "I'm going to toss the *Merchant of Venice* into the fire and work my way up to the other plays."

Brian gradually crept close to her, as if trying to talk down someone from the ledge — for this was a highly sensitive matter. "You have no idea what you're doing. For god sake! Please put the book down and - !"

"I know what I'm doing, Brian!" She snapped. "I'm only doing this for us! We must survive. Can't you see that? We need to stay warm!"

Delia was unable to tear her eyes off Brian's anger. There was fear tugging at her heart, but she needed to fight it, for this was her only chance. When she gripped the hardcover book of the complete collection of William Shakespeare, she remembered why the pages needed to burn. The thick pages of the anthology could sustain them for another week or two, hopefully a month, until someone could rescue them.

"You better not do it!" He breathed out, smoke-like mist coming out of his mouth, even with the entrance door shut the cold was prevalent inside. "Because of you we had to burn Doyle, Kipling, Marlowe and Poe! I almost died when you burned Poe— I couldn't stay to see that. Now you want to burn Shakespeare?" Tears were descending beneath his eyes, freezing on his cheeks before it reached his beard. "I'm sorry. I...I just can't let you do it."

"But it's for survival!" She screamed, using her last source of energy. She held up the book, opened to the play, and with her left hand, gripped the title page. "I'm sorry, this must be done. I'd rather live than preserve the dead."



“If you burn Shakespeare, who’s next? There’s no one else to burn.” He whispered.

They heard the cold outside, singing sweetly now, perhaps the only song existing in the world. For it had been seven months since the snowstorm blanketed the planet, signaling the end of society. First technology failed, reverting everything back to the Ice Age, then the animals died around them. Finally, the humans, for no one was able to survive negative one-hundred-degree weather. It was indeed a cold and deadly storm, never ending, always killing, sustaining that melodic sweet song.

However, Delia held on to hope - she wouldn’t give up so easily. There would be a cure for this, there needed to be a way out. Hadn’t we survived the bubonic plague once? Now, wasn’t that an example of the supreme power of modern science? Why couldn’t it save them again? So she had the right to burn Shakespeare, because deep down she knew someone out there, one with scientific knowledge, would come in and save them. She was determined to burn the book, the last known copy of Shakespeare’s work, because hope fueled her.

“Please don’t do it, Delia.”

“You’ll forgive me. Once we’re saved, you’ll realize that I did the right thing.”

“No!”

She tore the book to pieces, ripping page after page, tossing each one to the fire. While the slaughter was happening, Brian dropped to the floor and cradled himself to a fetal position and sobbed. William Shakespeare was now truly dead.

Delia ignored his manic weeping and tossed the shredded remnants of a majestic collection into the fire. She saw the golden tinted shreds joining the dying flame. She frantically fed it all thirteen hundred pages of verse, sonnets, poems, and drama; which at one point in her life, before the storm, she found to be beautiful.

But beauty must die because survival demanded it so.

And yet to her horror, she felt the room get colder, Brian’s sobbing ceased, and when she turned to look at the fire place, the flames had died. For it was smothered by the Shakespeare pages.

# SHE IS IMAGO DEI

*Sammie King*

Her beauty is light.  
Her eyes are ultra-light beams that pierce the dark.  
She sees through man because she is from him.  
He praised God when he woke up next to her in the morning.

She is partner, helper, friend.  
She is not meant to be dominated in bedrooms,  
Or to be submissive to male egos.  
Her yes is definite and her no is no.

Not maybe,  
But No.  
She knows her worth.  
Her walls are sanctioned.

They hold paintings that tell stories for generations.  
Her life is meaning  
She lives by proverbs  
She takes it as advice passed down by the wise.

She knows that God has a plan for her,  
But she also knows that the devil does too.  
She is vigilant  
Wise in discernment.

She won't sell to men undeserving.  
She won't sell because she know they can't afford it.  
She is made for crowns,  
Diamonds live on her fingers.

She plants seeds on the ground that she walks on  
And bears fruit in the garden where she lays.  
Encouragement lies on her lips  
They speak life into his ears.

She is the giver of life, that is why death is always chasing her.  
Her scars show that struggles exist in her past,  
But her past will not dictate her future.  
Her struggles won't define her.

They open doors to testimonies  
Her testament leads others to sanctuary  
She reflects God's light  
And holds dear to his love.

Her bosom opens cages to let her soul fly.  
She was a caterpillar trapped in a cocoon,  
Until she broke free of her insecurities.

She is Bathsheba  
Hiding from David, whose eyes are like peeping toms stationed on rooftops.  
It is not always her fault,  
Though she is usually blamed for man's uncontrollable lust.

She is the mustard seed  
Whose roots are still deeply planted in the garden.  
She produces fruit from the word God.  
She is polished by his grace,

And stands on his foundation  
She was made healer, helper, friend.  
She is the giver of life,  
And she gives more abundantly as she strides.

Her eyes hold fire from the sky.  
Her mind holds power.  
She is not a thought provoker,  
but she provokes time because everyone stops to watch her.

She is gorgeous  
Damsel  
Queen  
She.... is the Woman.

# SOLACE

*Autumn Aldain*

moon and sun are level  
in this tranquil peace we fleetingly revel  
the sky halved by the dyadic league  
one inspiring wakefulness, the other fatigue  
with contrast, they offer to lend their light  
influencing and shaping our fear and fright  
encountering the strength of night's force  
builds sensitivity to a more violent course  
seen as a weakness unknown to the day power  
forget the prime, they partake evenly in every hour  
by mere existence, forcing us to notice the dark  
for in a world without comparison nothing would be stark  
keeping their distance, staying in their zone  
watching and waiting in the mystic unknown  
out on the water where they scan and reflect  
the friendship between them is easy to detect  
solely by dawn and dusk gains gloaming  
the worlds brief pause from moaning

# UNAPOLOGETIC

*Kayla Ariana*

I have a bad habit of  
Falling for guys with  
Harsh eyes and gentle smiles.  
For they always look like heaven  
While hurting me like hell.  
They whisper sweet nothings in my ear  
As if I'm  
going to be worth their while.

I don't know who you can  
Mistake for being the fool here.  
For it was I that appeared  
Bright eyed and bushy-tailed  
But  
They who thought  
I didn't come prepared.



# AUGUST 22, 2013

*Jessica Drigun-Lara*

As mediocre as it sounds, the night began like any other night – my sister-in-law, Gaby, and her cousin, Natalie, who were visiting, came into our room and they were doing the usual; annoying us while I read and Irvin played some game on his PS3, asking questions while they looked at themselves in our mirror.

“What do you guys want?” I asked.

Gaby turned her attention to me, her cat shaped eyes looking hesitantly around the room, as Natalie kept looking at herself.

“We wanted to know if you and Irvin wanted to watch a movie on Netflix with us.”

“What movie?”

Natalie took her attention away from the mirror, her hazel eyes growing big with excitement as she turned to me and said, “Chain letter.”

“That sounds stupid.” Irvin laughed.

I slapped his bicep with my book. “Sure, let me just finish this chapter and we’ll watch in the living room.”

I wish I could remember what book it was. After that night, I wanted to blame something else for what happened. To blame my imagination on a book I read, on the movie we watched – but I can’t.

We all gathered in the living room. Natalie sat on the far right and Gaby took the seat next to her. Irvin and I sat side by side on the longer part of the couch – so we could put our feet up. I had brought out some throw blankets for us; now that I think about it, it was quite cold for an August night. We had hooked up the older PS3 to the TV and logged into Netflix. Natalie found the movie for us. We all thought, *how bad could this be?* A cheesy slasher film – that’s all we thought. About 45 minutes into the movie, Irvin turned and whispered to me.

“I gotta be up early tomorrow, so I’m gonna call it a night. You gonna be good here?”

His light brown eyes looked at me with concern.

“I’ll be fine. We have the little lamplight on here,” I pointed to it with my eyes “and besides, I won’t be entirely alone.” I looked towards Gaby and Natalie.

He was hesitant at first, which I understood, but I assured him I’d be fine and I’d watch a funny movie or show after to clear my head before bed. He kissed me on my forehead, his mustache tickling me, and he got up and went into our room to sleep and I turned my attention back to the movie.

The movie wasn’t the greatest, but it wasn’t the worst. When the movie ended Gaby and Natalie said goodnight and made their way towards Gaby’s room to get ready for bed. I told them to shut the lights off whenever they were finished and made my way into our room.

Now, let me tell you about our room. We called it the ‘Harry Potter’ room and if you’ve seen Harry Potter then you understand, if not, well... the room is small and narrow. All that fit was our full-sized bed and our dresser, and of course us. Our bed sat at the end of the room, in front, on the right side sat our black dresser, and at the beginning of the room were two doors; the entrance and the closet.

The entrance door was all white with a gold door knob and the closet door was the same yellow mustard shade as the left side of our room, with a small foot dent on the bottom from a time Irvin kicked the door. When I first approached the door to my room, I remembered Irvin had gone to bed early and since I didn’t want to disturb his sleep, I didn’t turn on the light, using the light from my Blackberry instead. I got into our full-sized bed and climbed straight for my side of the bed - the left side. I was pretty tired by this time. I didn’t have any problems falling asleep, especially since it started to rain. I laid there until the rain lulled me to sleep. I think I might have been asleep for a couple of minutes, maybe an hour before I started to stir.

I felt as if something was watching me, as well as sitting on me, but I was able to turn over, so I shook the feeling off. I tried to calm myself back to sleep when Irvin’s body started to twitch, which was normal, but this time it was different, his body felt as if he was being fanned up and down. I tried nudging him. He didn’t wake up but he did stop. Again, I tried to calm myself but I kept feeling that I was being watched and then the pressure was on me again. My chest got tighter and my mouth got drier. I didn’t know what to think. I told myself, *just sit up. Take some breaths and just go back to sleep.* I opened my eyes and stared at the wall. I turned slowly to get on my back – I kept telling myself I was being over dramatic.

As I got up from my bed, my stomach felt uneasy. I turned to look over at Irvin, who was sound asleep. *At least he’s sleeping.* I let out a sigh of relief, but the feeling in my gut was still there. I looked around the dark room, trying to gain focus. My eyes looked over at the doors and there it was, a black figure, hunched, upside down at the tip of the closet door. I couldn’t move. I just sat there, frozen, staring at this shadow. The rain suddenly changed from calming to storming. It was black as night and it had no face. I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me. I stared and it stared back. Even without having a face, I knew it was staring back. I propped my back against the metal headboard. I shook Irvin’s body viciously but he wouldn’t budge. The shadow crept closer. It was right above the foot of the bed, moving closer. Panic set in. I screamed and grabbed my Blackberry from the shelf on top and put the light on the shadow. Irvin jolted awake and grabbed me.

“What happened?!” He asked, half asleep and half panicked.

I told him everything that happened and what I saw and felt. He turned the light on and inspected the closet. He even called his mom in to soothe me. He said he believed me, but his eyes said different. His mom blessed the room with the Bible and Holy Water but I still couldn’t go back to sleep. When Gaby and Natalie woke up that afternoon, I told them everything that happened. Gaby turned to me and said, “I had a dream. You came into my room and just stared at me from the door, but you didn’t talk or move.”

I didn’t know what to say. But before I could speak, the house began to shake.

But it was just the aftermath of the 5.8 earthquake that day in Virginia.

# FANTASTICALLY UNREMARKABLE

*Julia Andresakis*

Roger was a perfectly pleasant man. He understood this as fact because his coworkers wrote it into his birthday card every year. *You are a perfectly pleasant man, Roger!* Each card would read, with about half of the office's signatures scrawled along the bottom of the dollar store card stock. He did not have many friends outside of work and so he could not define himself more accurately. He did, however, own an aged cat, Myrtle, named after his grandmother. But the cat tended to disappear for weeks on end, return for a couple, and then slip out through the back window once again. Roger both accepted and envied her free spirit.

On a Wednesday with a fifteen-percent chance of rain, Roger forgot his umbrella. When he woke up to begin his morning routine, he noticed the overcast and thought to himself, "I'd better grab an umbrella today." He proceeded to take his seven a.m. shower, which typically lasted around six or seven minutes, followed by him brushing his teeth, flossing, and finding an appropriately casual-yet-formal outfit to wear. By the time he was finished with his tea (coffee made him anxious), it was seven twenty-two. He lifted his tan briefcase off from the ground where he had left it the evening before and took the early bus.

"Aw, shoot," he thought to himself, but audibly this time, as he stepped out of the vehicle and felt the beginnings of a morning shower. Because his place of work was only a couple of minutes away, and because the rain had not yet begun to pick up, he was able to reach his office mostly dry. And, though he did not particularly need the umbrella, he felt foolish for leaving it at home anyway. He hated when things slipped his mind without his permission.

"Good morning, Roger," spoke the automated voice from Roger's computer as he turned the system on at his cubicle. Apart from the custodian, who was fixated on a stubborn stain, he was entirely alone. In his division, at least. This was typical; Roger liked to step into the office before the others began filing in because it gave him time to clear his head. He recently, at a coworker's suggestion, read a book about mindfulness and how to find moments of calmness in the workplace. He now spent time before work practicing breathing techniques and keeping bad thoughts at bay.

Today was unusual. Roger was thrown off of his rhythm, as though someone had moved everything on Earth one inch to the left. He felt unusual, but still sat at his desk and pretended that everything was exactly where it was supposed to be. He closed his eyes. He was now pretending that he was at the beach and the noise outdoors was the sound of the waves crashing over him. It had been such a long time since he had been to a beach, or anywhere outside of the city, for that matter. This thought, and subsequent thoughts, filled him with a profound sadness. He waited for it to pass, minute after minute.

The feeling persisted, becoming louder and heavier than Roger could bear. His eyes began to water; his ears grew hot; his frontal lobe throbbed against his skull. Roger, at once, found himself on the cusp of asphyxiation.

His legs wobbled with the strength of a freshly birthed fawn up to the roof, where Hamesh and Greg and a few others excused themselves for bi-hourly smoke breaks. It was merely a patch of concrete that Roger had always thought would be absolutely fantastic for an office Fourth of July barbecue. And though he liked to imagine being at work on a dry summer's day, enjoying meat and perhaps a few firecrackers with acquaintances, he was stuck in this timeline, where he was meatless, weak, and by himself.

He took a few more steps out onto the platform as he regained his breath and his heart-beat steadied. He did not understand what had happened to him, but he understood that he was now drenched. He looked out towards the skyline, and down at the crevices in the sidewalk that had formed into puddles. Most people were, presumably, on their way to work or school. He envied each of them because their lives were not the same as his. Each person he watched rush to hail a taxi or hide under a building's scaffolding was going to have an equally different day than his; they were going to laugh at different jokes, make different pay, eat a different lunch, and come home at the end of the day to different company.

He took a couple more steps towards the edge. He glanced at his watch. He still had time before Hamesh or Greg or the others would come up for their morning cigarettes. He peered over the ledge, where some people remembered to bring their umbrellas and others did not. The ferocity of the rain began to prod holes in Roger's clothing, and the wind worked against the direction of ground thirty feet below him.

He was worried about the water that he would track back into the office. He hated to be a nuisance, or cause anyone, especially the custodian, any trouble. He worked with good people; the kind who had husbands and wives and children in gifted and talented programs. They were the kind who rotated buying doughnuts and cleaned out the microwave after every use. It pained Roger to think about how disturbed his coworkers would be to see him cold and soaked, so he instead continued observing the people down below. He saw children walking alongside mothers, teenagers sharing their umbrellas, and dogs wearing raincoats. Half of his left foot, he noticed, was now unsupported by the pavement.

In a moment of clarity and complete tranquility, he thought of everything he would miss if he ceased existing suddenly, on a Wednesday with a fifteen-percent chance of rain. Conversely, he thought of everything that would miss him. He thought of nothing.

Perhaps it was a short circuit or a lit fuse, a simple malfunction. Perhaps he had been thinking about the last time he had been to a beach, or the fact that Myrtle had not come home in over a month. Or, maybe, it had been the ringing and pounding of his head and his heart that did him in, the despondency impossible to stifle once it had bubbled up to the surface. And if he had remembered his umbrella? It might have been a remarkable day.

# SOMETHING CALLED A STORM

*Algonquin Jones*

The snow day meant that Mansoor and I would be staying home from school. It meant Dad would be in the front yard building an elaborate sculpture out of snow. There were no snowmen nor snow angels with Dad. There was always something new, something needlessly detailed to build out of the amorphous white clay that fell from the sky. Mom would be in the kitchen scrambling eggs and he'd be out in the front, the walk shoveled, the driveway clear so Mom could get to work, a heap of snow on the front lawn being molded into something spectacular.

During my first snowstorm, which was before Mansoor was born, Dad built the space shuttle in our front yard. It was a frosty snapshot of the moments just after takeoff. Big plumes of puffy white smoke at the bottom out of clumps of dense snow. Then, a pillar going upwards, molded into the rocket with the shuttle strapped to its back. He'd built sculptures of Jedi knights and ferocious beasts. One of his sculptures, a huge lion, roaring at passing cars, even made it into the local paper.

That day, Mansoor and I woke at 10AM, a side effect of having stayed up past our bedtimes the night before. We were a nine-year-old girl and five-year-old boy who were told that the schools would be closed tomorrow. We did what any children would've done.

I remember the frenzy with which we got dressed. Thermal underwear. Sweatpants. Hoodies and down-filled snow jackets. The mittens and ski caps tumbled down from the box on top of the closet when we reached up to it, standing on the kitchen stool and just barely snagging the edge.

"What do you think dad is gonna build today, Lily?" Mansoor asked as I tightened his boots.

"I don't know," I said. "But we better get out there before it all melts!"

I checked that Mansoor was fully dressed for the snow, my mind swimming with old legends Mom used to tell us about frostbite and gangrene, about little boys and girls who weren't careful and had to have their legs cut off.

We burst through the front door expecting to see the beginnings of another masterpiece, but there was nothing. Outside, the wind whispered softly, like a friend just passing through. The snow drifted down in lazy flakes and the trees were nests of black and white lines. The walk wasn't shoveled. The driveway wasn't clear but Mom's car was gone. More than anything, Dad wasn't outside with his white-toothed smile. Outside, the world seemed dead, and it struck me how something so silent, so seemingly peaceful, could possibly be called a storm.

Mansoor and I retreated inside slowly. Stepping as softly as the snowflakes that drifted down. "Mom?" we called. "Dad?"

The kitchen was similarly silent. The living room was spotless, the throw pillows framed on the sofa cushions just so. The remote placed just underneath the TV, straight as an arrow. The door to Dad's office was open and inside we could hear the faint crackle of the antennae TV he had in there for when mom wanted to watch the Bachelor when the game was on. The newsmen on the TV droned on about closures and weather advisories as Mansoor and I leaned into the office doorway.

Inside, Dad sat slumped over his desk. His computer off. A glass of melted ice cubes leaving a ring on the imitation oak desktop.

"Dad?" I asked. "What's going on? Are we going to be building a sculpture this time around?"

He lifted his head and his eyes seemed to land, like a bird too tired to fly onward, on me and Mansoor in the doorway. "No sculpture this year," he said, lifting the glass and seeming disappointed that there was only water inside.

"Where's mom?" I asked. Mansoor held my jacket sleeve tightly.

"Grandmas," he said, swigging what was left of the water in the glass.

"Why?" I asked.

My father shrugged.

"When is she coming back?" I asked. Mansoor held onto me more tightly. He didn't know what was going on but he understood that something was wrong. That this snowstorm was different.

My father shrugged again.

"I want mom," Mansoor said, his voice low. He was talking to me more than dad.

"Sorry to disappoint," Dad said, getting up and going to the cabinet he kept in the corner of his office. There were more glasses inside. The newsmen cut to a field correspondent out in the snow.

"I want mom," Mansoor said louder. "I want mom!" The worry in his voice rising. The want. The need of a five-year-old child.

"Take you brother to the kitchen, Lillian," Dad said, shooing us with his hand.

"Where's mom? I want mom!" Mansoor was screaming now.

"I said take you brother to the kitchen," Dad said. It was a command this time.

"Come on, Manny," I said. "Let's go make breakfast."

"No! Lily! I want mom! Call mom!"

Dad grabbed a glass from the shelf and threw it against the wall where it shattered, setting Mansoor off. He was wailing now. "Get him out of here!" Dad screamed. "Get him out!"

I picked Mansoor up under the arms and ran up the stairs to our bedroom. Downstairs the door to Dad's office slammed shut and we stayed holed up in our room. When Mansoor calmed, I descended to the kitchen and bought up a box of cereal, Reese's Puffs, which we shared, otherwise busying ourselves with board games and watching the snow until late in the afternoon.

In the evening, we saw Mom's car pulling into the driveway, its tires slipping on the snow which hadn't been shoveled. Downstairs, she and Dad were screaming at each other. He'd done something with a woman at work. It wasn't the first time. We were too young to know, but I was used to the arguments. It didn't have to be a woman Mom didn't like. Sometimes it was just the way the dishwasher was loaded. Mansoor didn't understand. "Why are they yelling?" he asked me, clearly on the verge of tears again.

"Sometimes adults disagree," I said wiping his tears that were beginning to ball up at the edge of his eyes. "Sometimes they do the wrong thing."

"I don't like when they yell," he said. "I don't like being upstairs."

"I know," I said, holding him close to me. I was only nine. He was only five. "We'll build our own sculpture together tomorrow," I said to comfort him.

"Will it be in the paper?" he asked.

"Of course," I said.

We looked out onto the street. There were salt-spreaders patrolling with their flashing yellow lights. The snow had stopped and other than those trucks outside, everything was still. It was as if the world hadn't changed at all. Mom left again that night. I watched her car back out of the driveway as Mansoor slept. And, as I watched the snow beginning to melt, icicles slowly forming on the eaves of our neighbors' homes, it struck me again, how something so quiet could nonetheless be called a storm.



# 2012 AND THE ABRIDGMENT

*Lucille Grimaldi*

## *2012*

Conspiracy theorists and such came from all around and said that the world was going to end.  
Everyone older than me said it was ridiculous and absurd.  
Everyone my age was pissed that we were going to die and we'd spent our entire short lives stuck in school.  
We spent our nights complaining about it through comments on Facebook posts.  
I was pissed too, and I said, "Well, if this is my last year then why can't I have fun?"  
But I kept doing my homework in case we didn't die that Christmas break.  
I finished my homework and woke up that next morning.  
And the next morning.  
And the next one.  
And the one after that.  
I woke up every morning, or afternoon, for the next 1,728 days.  
I spent a majority of those days procrastinating some form of school- or homework.  
I spent a fraction of those days in a self-loathing panic, rushing to finish my assignments to near perfection to maintain my academic standing and not get yelled at for getting anything below a 90.  
On five of those days, one every year, I woke up and went to a concert, having the fun my 2012 self thought I deserved.  
On the 1,728<sup>th</sup> day, I stayed awake in the kitchen, late into the night, drinking a Mexican Coca-Cola, completing assignments that were to be handed in on the 1,729<sup>th</sup> day.  
Logically, I know that time has passed, but at some point I realized that no year has felt real since then; they each have too many events and feelings and changes and life doesn't feel like it did when I was ten or eleven or twelve.

## *2012: The Abridgment*

A few years ago the Internet was flooded with people saying that the apocalypse was happening and all the kids were freaking out, but nothing really happened, and the Earth still exists, and life is still going on, and I am still here, in the same apartment, doing homework. It feels different now; I just can't explain how.



# 11:03 PM

*Myron Prinzmetal*

During the storm I sat

We sat

You

And I

Stormy

We were in debt

Condemned

To violation

To emancipation

In its proclamation

Torn asunder

One nation under Trump

Invisible

This is not a poem

# THE BLIZZARD LURKER

*Roksana Jasiewicz*

Staring out the thick, frosted-over window, I watched in amazement as the big, wet snowflakes danced through the air, some of them sticking to the surface of the glass. The world outside was pale, the earth's crust hidden beneath a blanket of fluffy snow draped over the landscape.

Squinting through the white and attempting to see the house across the street, I began to regret staying home for winter break and not joining my close group of friends on a trip down to Florida. *Bet they're having way more fun than me*, I thought.

My Tibetan Terrier padded into the living room, the metal tags on his collar jingling. Rubbing up against my leg as he passed, the canine slipped beneath the glass coffee table, curling up into a semicircle shape. Laying his head down on top of his front paws, he turned his head away from the windows, as if attempting to tune out the winter storm.

Stretching out my legs on the window seat, I picked up a small remote, turning up the volume of the violin solo playing through the advanced sound system. The music flowed throughout the house, basking me in a sea of calmness and comfort, letting my mind wander to the time when I heard this very music live, in concert.

The whistling of the kettle caught my attention, bringing my thoughts to the packet of powdered cocoa I had left on the kitchen counter. Getting up from my front row-like window seat, I drifted into the kitchen, reaching over to shut off the burner. Ripping open the packet and dumping the powdered sweetness into the chipped mug, I poured hot water over it, watching the powder dissolve.

My faithful companion's sudden barking rang out from the living room, making me flinch. Sighing in annoyance, I briefly glanced over my shoulder, seeing the dog's head sticking out from underneath the coffee table, his ears at attention. Being used to him barking at everything and nothing, I ignored his outburst, and reached for a spoon.

Stirring the mixture, I picked up the mug and traveled back to the living room, ready to resume watching the swirling snowflakes. Taking my seat, I brought the cup to my lips. My taste buds welcomed the sweet consistency and I greedily gulped down the drink, my throat burning with the heat it brought.

Gazing out the window once more, I furrowed my eyebrows, my mind immediately registering the slight change in scenery. The pristine snow in the front yard of my family's home was disturbed, bearing markings of passing. Boot prints were visible in the deep snow, the marks messy and distorted, as if the unknown traveler stumbled through the yard in a half-drunken stupor. Whoever left these prints was on my property during the three to four minutes it took me to head into the kitchen, prepare my cocoa, and come back. This would explain the barking from before. A stranger on our property.

Maybe someone's car had broken down or was stuck in the snow, and the poor citizen had come looking for someplace to wait out this horrid weather?

Before I could properly assess the situation, the warm yellow lights of the hanging crystal chandelier flickered before shutting off, leaving the living room in perpetual darkness. The violin symphony had abruptly stopped, the LED lights on the sound system diminishing. Whipping my head over my shoulder, the dimness of the unlit kitchen and the slowing blades of the ceiling fan confirmed my suspicions. Glancing around the silent house, my mind slowly registered the undeniable fact.

*Power failure.*

Setting down my cooling cup of cocoa, I raised myself off of the window seat, my movements slow and sluggish. Making my way into the dark kitchen, I proceeded to open some of the low cabinets and drawers, seeking batteries. With my search coming up empty, I decided to go for a more traditional approach.

Venturing down the crooked, narrow hallway, I headed into my bedroom. Making a beeline for the dresser, I picked up the several candles stationed there, stacking them in the crook of my arm. Snatching a zippo lighter off my desk, I traveled back out into the corridor. The old hardwood floor creaked under my weight, the sound loud in the otherwise quiet home.

I positioned the numerous candles around the living room and kitchen, lighting them. Reclaiming my place by the window, I set down the last of the Yankee Candles, lighting its untouched wick. The aroma of banana and walnut bread filled my nostrils, calming my senses. Picking up the chipped mug, I downed the rest of the now-cold cocoa, the artificial mixture leaving a powdery after-taste on my tongue.

With the white noise provided by the generous sound system gone, my ears were bombarded with the sounds of the ongoing storm. The howling wind tore through the safe fortress of the ranch home, stripping the frame of its warm insulations, leaving behind concrete foundations. The naked branches of the neighboring young acacia's scraped against the burgundy siding of the house, the eerie sound making a shiver run down my spine.

Desperately wishing to focus on something besides the ghostly intonations, I turned towards the window. Looking over the landscape, my heart began to race at the sight of fresh footprints in the deep snow. The new tracks led from the edge of the forest of tall and handsome douglas firs to the front of the house, right outside the great bay window I was sitting at. Those same tracks then led around the side of the house, disappearing under the low visibility.

The sudden realization of my precarious situation made my breath hitch, pulling me out of my tranquilized state. Quickly registering this wasn't just a random passerby, I jumped to my feet, pulling the heavy drapes over the exposing window. The action caused the living room to be engulfed in darkness, the draft created putting out several of the candles.

Heart thumping against my ribcage, I settled into the corner of the couch, bringing my knees up to my chest. Sensing my uneasiness, the loving canine slid out from under the coffee table and jumped up onto the couch, climbing into my lap. Wrapping my arms around the animal, I pressed my chin into his fur, my frantic eyes scanning the shadows of the room.

Whoever it was wandering around the property was going out of their way not to be seen, but still make sure I knew they were out there. The exposed bay window gave away my position as I moved throughout the house, making whoever was out there aware of when I was in the line of sight of the window and when not.

My heart sank at the sound of a 'shave and a haircut' knock on the front door, the sinister noise penetrating the deafening silence.

# THUNDER

*Zainab Iqbal*

Remember when we were small and it would  
thunder?

We would run to the little space outside the bathroom, in front of the closet.  
We would sit down, shut our eyes, and cover our ears with  
our hands.

Sometimes we would see lightning peering at us from the living room  
window.  
We would let out a little  
scream.

When it would rumble in the middle of nighttime, we'd run out of  
bed and go to mama and baba's room.  
We'd think we're waking mama up but she was already  
awake.

Because she knew we'd run to her  
at two in the morning.

We'd hide ourselves in their blanket as if the piece of giant  
cloth was our shield.

One day we stopped  
running to the little space outside the bathroom, in front of the closet.  
We stopped running to our mama's room in the middle of  
nighttime.  
We'd just shut our eyes real tight and bring our blankets  
to our heads.

Sometimes the storm didn't wake us.

One day I waited for the thunder  
and walked to the living room window.  
It gave me a jolt and I shut my eyes  
just for a second.

One day I was scared to be alone  
during the storm, so I was on the phone with my mama for twenty  
minutes.

But I was brave enough to tie the curtains.  
I opened the windows all the way because I wanted to stare earth's  
magic in the eye.  
I put out my hand to catch the rain drops.

The crackle of thunder crackled my soul.  
I wanted more.

Tomorrow I'll stand in the middle of earth  
my feet bare  
my arms open wide  
my head up  
waiting for the rain to dance on me.

The clouds will see the light zipping past  
a sad girl standing in the middle of earth.

The thunder will shake my insides, telling me  
"you are fucking alive."

# DESTRUCTION AS A FORM OF HEALING

*Gina Riveccio*

“During the storm,  
you can pray for it to be over  
or you can find beauty in the destruction.”

You were the one that told me that, you know— right after I told you I always loved to watch storms.

I told you I loved storms because the destruction is a form of healing: storms are Mother Nature’s way of taking herself back. You told me it wasn’t that deep, you just thought destruction was fun to watch.

Maybe that should’ve been a red flag.

Tell me, what happened when I became the storm?  
Did you pray for it to be over? Or did you watch me in awe?

I remember the woman I was before I met you.

Before every shred of confidence was ripped from my body and every ounce of self worth disappeared into thin air. You sat there like an innocent bystander as insecurities ravaged me. Except you weren’t innocent at all.

I remember when it all started. When, after you had told me it took a long time before you could open up to someone, you told me you had no problem opening up to her. Her, the girl you met months after me. The girl I told you I didn’t trust. The girl that made it clear she wanted you from the moment she laid eyes on you.

“But our relationship is between you and me. You don’t have to trust her. You only have to trust me.”

But how was I supposed to trust you when you wouldn’t tell me anything?  
How was I supposed to trust you when you’d have a bad day and go running to her?  
How was I supposed to trust you when you were slowly pushing me away?  
You made me question everything.

Everyone called me crazy. They said I was jealous over nothing because you had never touched her.

As if intimacy is only physical. As if talking to her the way you did wasn't just as intimate as anything you could've done behind closed doors.

When we broke up you were the innocent victim. "I never cheated on you." No, you didn't. Not in the traditional sense. You didn't have to. You destroyed me anyway. You convinced the world I was crazy, and you almost convinced me too. But you didn't have to touch her to cheat on me. You cheated on me the moment you opened up to her.

You whispered that I meant more, but your actions screamed that she did.

For a long time before we broke up, I wanted to tear you apart. I felt everything, and you felt nothing. I just wanted you to feel something. I wanted to open you up and break you down. And then one day I snapped.

Do you remember how that day started?

Your eyes were rimmed with red and your breaths were shaky. I took one look at you, and felt your hurting in my heart. I didn't know what happened to you— I still don't. All I know is I wanted to tell you that if you needed me, I'd be there. But I didn't get the chance to do that because you pushed me away. Not emotionally, as you had been doing for so long, but physically. And it wasn't hard, and it wasn't rough, but it hurt like hell. And then she came over. And you collapsed in her arms. And I collapsed entirely.

I was a bright, fiery red; tidal waves crashing against the shore; the kind of wind that tears houses to shreds and knocks down trees. And you, you were the burning wood, the steady shoreline, the last tree standing. I was relentless, but you would not be destroyed.

And that's when I realized I was wasting my energy on a person who couldn't care less. I was done being angry. I just wanted to be myself again. I hated who I became— who you made me become. I never wanted to be weak. I never wanted to lose myself.

I never wanted to be in a position where I had to take myself back.

I need you to know I always loved to watch storms.

But I never wanted to become one.



# FOREST OF DARKNESS

*Kalliniki Lambrinoudis*

I don't care what your words are saying, just as long as they are spoken.  
If I hear more silence, the remainder of my heart will scream and claw its way  
through my throat in order to reach a content place.

I know I will never understand.  
Guide me through the way of the subject I will never be able to grasp.  
The one too complex for my feeble mind;

But just show me.

Remind me that it never was simple and it never will be.  
Be my educator to the mindset unknown. Make my eyes see the full form of this  
obscure figure.

Shine some light on the forest of darkness, but hold my hand throughout the path  
and I promise to continue to hold yours.

# THE PERFECT STORM

*Diana Ariel Harman*

During the storm, life seemed grey, with chances of clouds with sounds of little rain-  
drops coming down my window  
During the storm, the world was spinning in chaos  
Round and round colors exploding in extreme motion  
The sounds of my chest and the sounds in my head  
As I rinse and repeat  
Same schedule  
Again and again  
Over and over  
My life a tornado spinning across the world  
Picking up what it can  
And dropping like volcanic ash  
My life looks more like a natural disaster  
But during the storm that I call life  
The sun rises and sets  
Sets and rises  
Minute by minute  
Hour by hour  
Storm by storm  
One natural disaster after the next  
Not giving time to recover  
But at the end  
A glistening amount of sunshine  
A rainbow full of glorious colors shines  
On my face  
On the world  
On the chaos  
As the confidence falls  
the storm has past  
The storm of my life  
The storm of my self-being  
That's what I call  
The perfect storm

# #MY FIRST TASTE

*Jennifer Aguilar*

A drop on the head startled me,  
And then the rain came down.  
I always forget my umbrella.  
So, I took on covering myself until I started to get used to it.  
Even opened my mouth for a taste which probably wasn't a good idea  
... It wasn't.  
It started to pour, a beating on my fragile skin,  
And I felt myself begin to drown.  
I saw everyone under shelter wondering if I was going to make it out alive.  
And I stood there wondering the same damn thing.  
After some gurgling, I swallowed it all down; I could feel the pinch in my  
throat when something is too hard to swallow  
Like a chalky pill that just doesn't know where to go.  
But I did it till my mouth was desert dry, begging for one more drop even.  
After all we've been through? She knew what that would do to me, to us.  
So when the thunder and lightning make everyone scatter,  
I stand there with my mouth open wide  
because no one can hear you scream during the storm.

# TRAVEL

*Dante Baudelaire*

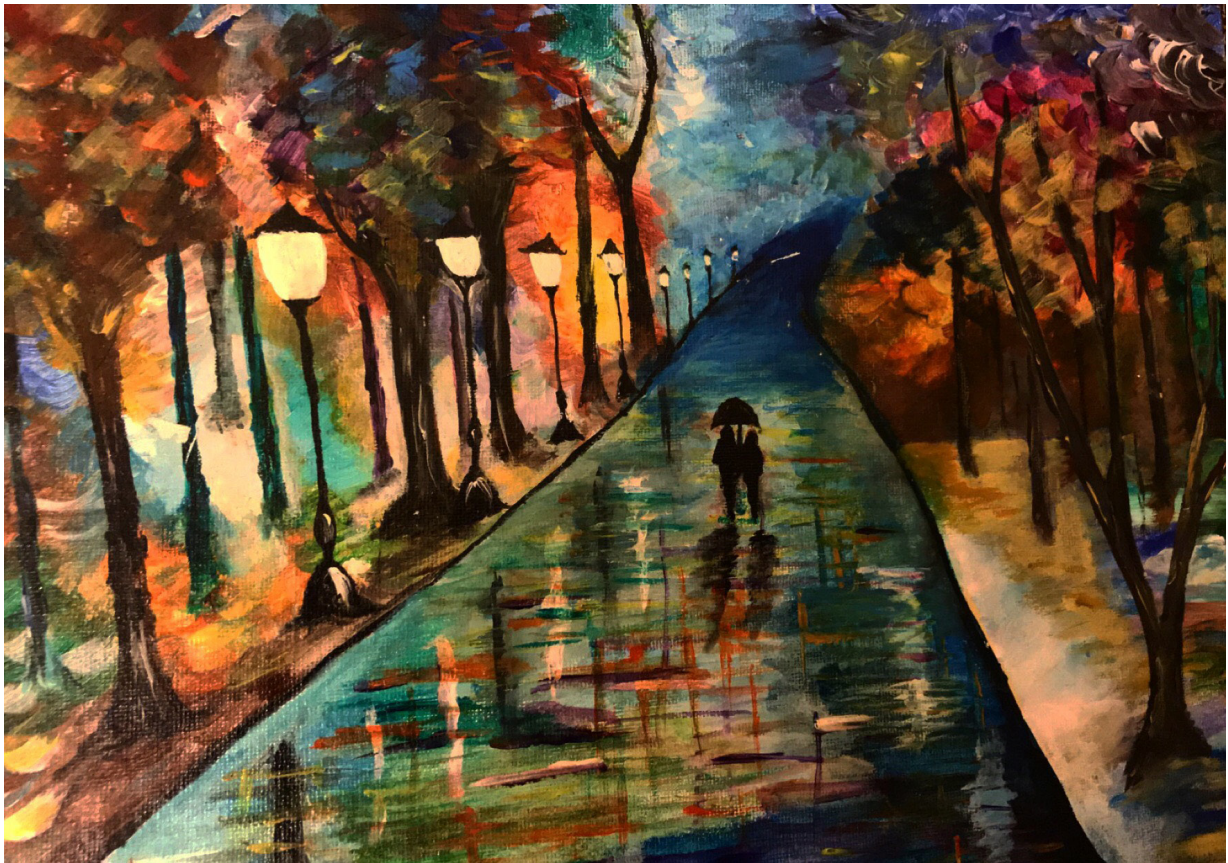
Cascades of revelation  
tempestuous times abound  
Being freezes

Fallen tropes of weakness  
expand the pupils in the deep  
Time flows

Blanching branches torn aside  
paths built anew

The darkness pulls me in  
The world is silent here

I dye alone  
in colors sweet



*Me & My Conscience // Sereen Hammad*

# STORM OF EMOTIONS

*Avery Lieberman*

The storm is heavy today. It brings thoughts of pain and anguish.  
Everyone hates you.  
No, they don't, you just think they do.  
It's hard to separate your feelings from the truth.

You hear it all the time.  
"You're amazing! You're awesome!"  
You don't believe it.  
If you really were as amazing as everyone thought you were, then why would they need to tell you all the time?

It's hard to accept compliments.  
But this is true.  
You are unique.  
You are an amazing person.

It's hard for you to see this.  
Your vision is clouded by years of torment, and your mindset is warped.  
That doesn't mean things can't change.

You hate yourself.  
You really shouldn't.  
Life is worth living.

You have friends, and people who care about you.  
But most importantly, you should care about you.

The storm of self-hatred and loneliness is all around you.  
It seeks to break down your walls, it wants to consume you.  
It will not.

You are amazing.  
You are awesome.  
You will overcome this storm of negative emotions.

It's difficult to comprehend all of this because your brain won't let you see past the self-fabricated version of yourself.  
But it will happen.

Friends. Acceptance. Recognition.  
These are the protectors to guide you through the storm.  
And once you are through, you will reach the beautiful ray of sunshine that life truly is.

Happiness.

# I AM NOT YOUR FATHER

*Anonymous*

“What do you want from me?”  
you whisper,  
like a child  
who is whispering

She looks your way  
nay, glares

Like a sun  
that is bright  
and glaring

And your faces  
face each other  
face  
to face

Like you’re standing  
before a mirror  
only the reflection  
is distinguishable  
from the reflectee

And neither  
do the movements  
of the reflector and reflectee, respectively  
act in synch

And neither  
does a glass  
separate  
the folks  
whose actions  
we have now  
somewhat  
metaphorized. The end.

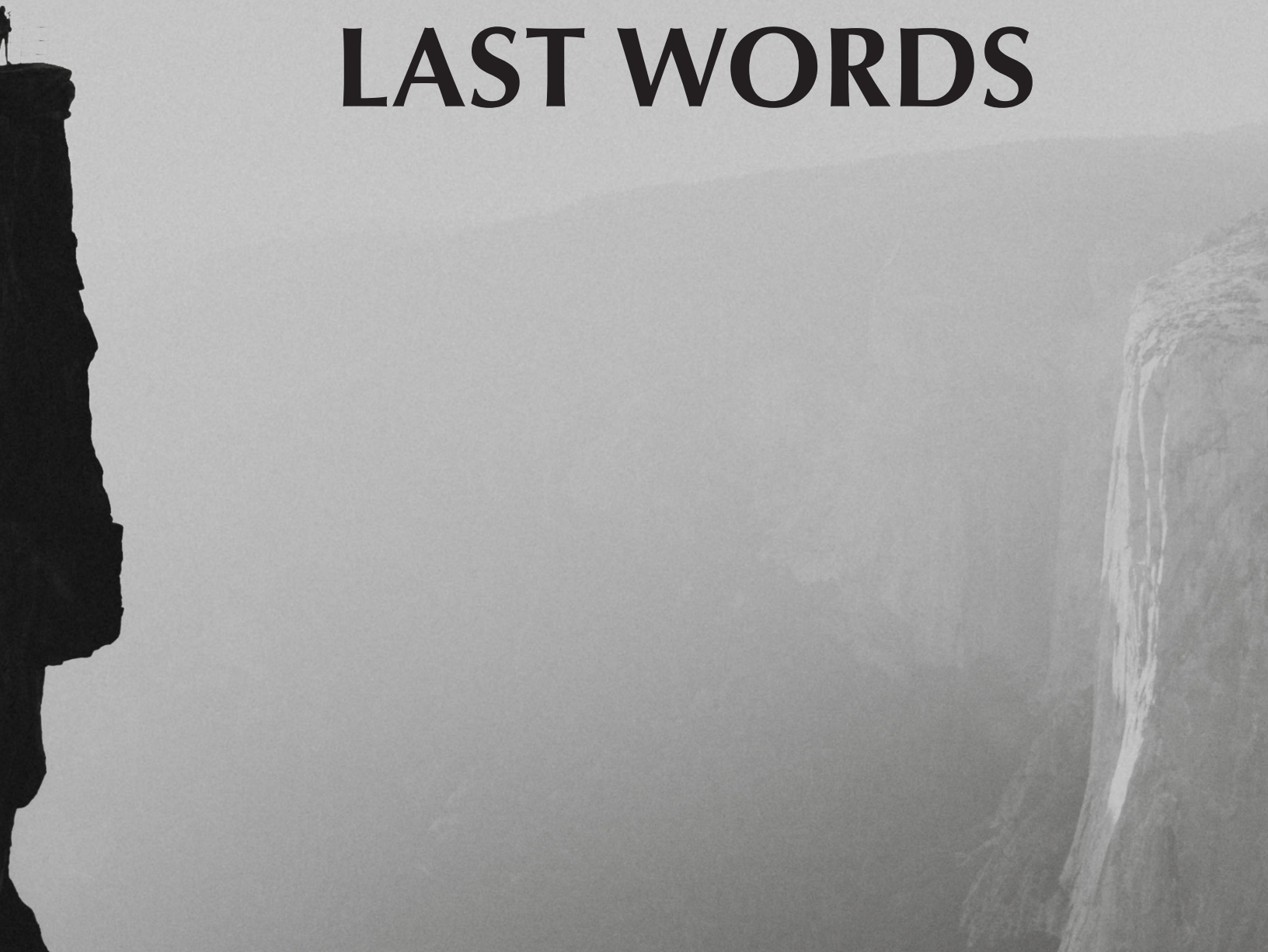






# PROMPT 2

## LAST WORDS



# CUT

*Vicky Lee*

I've been thinking for a  
while now  
and I know people will say  
I'm mad  
they'll look at me differently  
wonder what my deal is but

I can live without you

Sure, I used to lather you  
with love  
Shower you with  
compliments  
Shelter you from the rain

I'd bend to your needs  
so you can help me look  
better than I felt

Not for me  
Not anymore

Yes, I've let go of you  
Yes, I'm alright

or at least getting there

This is your dead end  
and my beginning  
where I cut you off

# SURFACE

*Jessica Rosario*

We are all lost  
We are all broken  
Struggling to be found  
What lies in  
us?  
Beautiful, untapped potential  
to create  
construct  
perfect  
what we have at our disposal  
What we are now  
Who we are now  
Is not what we are  
meant to be  
It's a phase  
We will soon morph  
Into the beautiful creation  
we were meant to be

# DEPRESSION DOESN'T GET THE FINAL SAY

*Kathleen Conlon*

As someone who has suffered with depression for half their life now, I've often thought of what my last words would be. Usually, they were written on crumpled up loose-leaf paper, hidden within the pages of a book. I know how morbidly sad that sounds, but it's true. The letters usually began by telling everyone close to me how much they meant to me and how sorry I was for leaving. Afterwards, I'd explain what brought me to such a harrowing place - years of pain, dealing with a mental anguish that pulsates. The finality of it all created such a separation from self. When you fall into such a dark pit of despair, your mind begins to lie to you - until you can't even trust yourself or what you're thinking.

It's haunting to imagine the totality of life being summed up within a short exchange of consonants and vowels rolling off your tongue, or exposed by ink as it moves across a piece of paper. Brevity never feels short and sweet; not when you're talking about the last breaths a person takes or the final thoughts that will ever be written down. How does one encapsulate a lifetime by arranging the alphabet around?

I never wanted to write those letters, however, looking back I'm glad that I'm still able to read them; being able to read them means I'm still here. Sometimes, when I'm cleaning or opening a book that hasn't been touched in a while, the crumpled up pages of loose-leaf reemerge. As much as they break my heart to read, I'm thankful those weren't my last words.

You see, depression is kind of like those villain tropes we see in movies:

*"Any last words before you die?"*

In that moment, life flashes by in an instant. You feel like your options are limited. At first, it may appear as though there is no way out. However, if you fight like hell, with all of your strength and might (and I'm not saying it's easy by any means), I believe you can kick the bad guy's ass.

# UNTITLED 1

*Celeste Cox*

I offer my throbbing entrails as a token of love,  
Look, I cut open my own stomach, to give them to you.  
The blood turns cold and the stench makes me nauseous.  
There is nobody there, and I am alone again.

Sadness saturates the air like the smell of a cadaver, weeks old and facedown, because the old woman had  
no one and it took her mail piling up on the moldy doormat for the mailman to realize she was dead.

The jade bangle cracked on the linoleum floor marks years of bad luck.  
It was far too exposed under harsh fluorescence  
It made my eyes turn permanently red  
Red and shining with self hatred  
The stain of being woman  
So much damage has been done.  
Time can never be restored. I'm not sure I can either  
But the scent of jasmine brings me back.  
These are the fragments of my battered soul.  
Pick them up off the floor, take me in your pocket  
All I want is to be far, far away from here.

# BLANK

*Merari Hernandez*

Liliana had skipped her morning class, an adolescent psychology class on language development. The bus full of high school students made her feel unusually out of place. It was one of the new city buses, painted an obnoxiously bold royal blue, the ones meant to ensure more space for more commuters (though it did the opposite), but it still smelled as the buses did when she was in high school, of maple syrup and a crayon box.

When Liliana arrived at the park it was mostly empty, except for some early morning dog walkers and students wearing her old uniform, taking the shortcut she knew saved five minutes of walking. She took her time walking to the secluded area where she had spent most of her junior year.

The air smelled metallic, like old, neglected jewelry. Scattered twigs and small piles of graying snow covered the narrow concrete path, which ended abruptly, becoming dirt halfway, like the person designing the park changed their mind last minute, as if the path was never meant to exist.

Liliana wondered if the area had changed over the past three years. In her mind, the bench was completely leaning to one side, the bronze paint peeling off the rusty metal arms with a muted shade of green exposed underneath. She imagined that the bench, once her favorite place to watch the sunset, was adorned with a variety of brown and white bird feces, so much it would be impossible to sit on.

She reached the end of the trail, still bordered by two overgrown rose bushes that were never able to successfully sprout blossoms. She entered the area, ducking under a low hanging tree branch. The bench still looked exactly the same, waiting for her in front of the pond. It was standing as upright as it could, no paint peeling off, no rust, no bird feces. It was underwhelmingly the same.

Liliana lowered herself onto the middle of the bench. The mid-February weather caused the pond to sporadically freeze over, with clusters of ice floating throughout. She watched as birds flew over, close enough for their wings to graze the water. Their dark wings looked like moving ink blots against the blue-gray backdrop of the sky.

“Did you still remember before you died?” She was speaking to nothing, or rather, no one. She continued speaking, stuffing her hands into her coat pockets. “I used to think about it all the time.” The breeze stung her cheeks but she tried to ignore it, tightening her beige knitted scarf around her neck.

“It’s kind of weird that you died almost three years after.” The news of David’s death the month before inspired this trip. It was his best friend who told her, a former teammate on their school’s baseball team. Liliana forgot she even had his number, she had assumed she deleted it along with David’s.

It was a freak accident, he said. A ruptured brain aneurysm during practice. Liliana wasn’t able to process it at first. Over time David had become a blur and up until that point she hadn’t been able to remember the outline of his face, his mannerisms, the color of his hair. She only remembered his amber tinted eyes, his warm voice, and the calluses on his palms. But with the news of his death Liliana suddenly became overwhelmed with every detail she had suppressed.



The sleep paralysis had come first. She'd wake up with an immense pressure weighing her down. Her body would feel foreign, like her mind and nerves had been transplanted into another person. Then the shortness of breath and dizzy spells came and were followed by full on panic attacks. Symptoms that arrived three years late.

"You know, a part of me died right here, right on this bench." Liliana pulled her left hand out of her pocket, the frigid air hitting it. She placed it flat beside her and stared at the blue-green veins visible through her skin. She laughed and closed her hand into a tight fist.

"God, that's so corny," she sighed.

Liliana leaned back. She slid her right hand out, blindly searching for the small heart she knew was engraved beside her on the bench. Before it happened, David took a small pocket knife he kept for protection when going home late, and scratched their initials into the bench, encircling it with an imperfectly shaped heart. It was to eternalize their love, he'd said, as if etching it into a wooden board would guarantee so. Liliana found it almost immediately, and slowly dragged her fingertip along the grooves.

"It took me a while to get over what happened," she said, tapping her finger on the heart. Closure was something Liliana didn't have the privilege of experiencing. She had folded in on herself, keeping the shock of the trauma confined within her. The numb state she forced herself into allowed her to act like nothing had happened, to carry on like she wasn't slowly rotting on the inside.

She had stayed after school that day to work on a project for her Biology class. David waited for her in the hallway across the classroom she was in, making flimsy paper airplanes out of old school flyers and flinging them past the room. Every few minutes she'd see pastel planes gliding by.

It was a Friday night and she didn't want to go home yet. He suggested they spend some time at their place by the pond. They walked hand in hand, dragging their feet through two-day old snow. It was dark, but she felt safe.

He didn't say anything when they sat on the bench and he slipped his hand around her wrist, pulling her hand toward the belt buckle on his navy blue uniform pants.

"What are you doing?" She tried pulling her hand away but he kept it there. They'd only been dating for a few months, and things between them had never gone past hugging and kissing.

"I just wanna, you know, get rid of some stress or something," he breathed, shortening the distance between their bodies. He unbuckled his belt with his other hand.

"What? But we're in a park. It's cold." Liliana clenched her jaw. She avoided looking into David's eyes. She curled her fingers up, wondering what he would do if she tried to snatch her hand back. Her ears were clogged with the sound of her heart pounding

. "So? This is the only place." His grip on Liliana's wrist had tightened. "Come on, there's no one here and it's dark. It'll be quick, real quick, come on."

He didn't let her respond before he gently pushed her onto her back. She wasn't able to process what was happening, to figure out how to react. She forgot how to breathe. Her voice was stuck to the lining of her throat and her limbs remained stiff and useless by her sides as he pulled her clothes off and then his.

There was a jagged scar in the shape of a constellation peeking past the waistband of David's black shorts. Liliana kept her eyes on it, tracing its path from the dip of his waist to the edge of his belly button. She wanted to ask how it got there. Was it from a surgery? Maybe it was from an accident. She wanted to scratch it off of his otherwise unblemished skin, peel it off and make him bleed out.

"Why are you crying? Are you okay?" Her reply was silence. His voice sounded muffled, like he had cotton stuffed in his mouth. David dragged the rough skin on his thumb across Liliana's cheek, wiping the tears that were beginning to burn her skin. Liliana closed her eyes. Everything after that was blurred out, blacked out and replaced by a blank screen. She assumed it was a defense mechanism, her brain going into panic mode and force restarting when she tried to remember.

He adjusted the clothes she was still wearing, helped her get dressed, and brushed off dirt that got on her. When David got her to stand up, she stood frozen, like her feet planted themselves into the snow-covered soil. Before walking away, Liliana looked over her shoulder and saw what she thought was a silhouette of herself sitting on the ground, slouched over and weeping into her hands.

David wasn't supposed to have been like that, he wasn't supposed to have done something like that. It didn't make sense, but Liliana blamed herself, because who else was there to blame?

"Is it wrong for me to say I'm glad you're dead?" Liliana said this while she watched a line of ants march around her shoe. She stood up and walked to the edge of the pond. The sun had completely risen and the floating ice was glistening. She noticed her reflection and realized she'd been crying. As she turned to leave she looked back at the bench and noticed a single ray of sunlight over where she'd been sitting.



# SAY GOOD-BYE

*Jason Appelbaum*

Snow and wind hitting the windows of a cabin too small, you and I try to talk, but I run out of words.  
“I love you” and “I care” don’t seem what we say to each other anymore.

I troubled you for a light when we met on the rainy streets of New York City.

We had a lot to talk about then. We spoke about anything for hours. Returned wine glasses filled with  
laughter and smiles and giggling in a subdued room.

We hoped to say more. We hoped traveling by car to a lake in the high mountains of the Himalayas  
would open ideas and we would reach out, our hands touching, like memories that haunted us.

Now we have a blizzard. I look into your eyes and say goodbye.



*Zainab Iqbal*

# STORM

*Moshe D*

In the shadow of the weeping pines  
Our love lingered  
Like salamanders  
In the mottled light

How can our days be counted?  
By the passages of sun and moon  
In obverse planes of light and darks  
Like two lovers joined but never meeting

# ZENO'S PARADOX

*Zeno Bernstein*

We only have half an hour  
To write a poem  
To describe our lives

We only have half our lives  
To write half the poem  
That is our lives

But where is a life  
And before the Deadline  
How many words can we fit  
In a poem

Forty Nine

# IN THE WEEKS AFTER YOU LEFT

*Doria Wohler*

It was as if I had imagined it. The warm embrace, feeling his sharp exhale against the nape of my neck, the warmth of hot tears as they seeped through the shoulder of my t-shirt. It was as if I had daydreamed the words as they left his mouth, as if I had etched out in my mind but not actually seen the way his lips slowly paced out the words,

“I’m so sorry, Claire.”

For the past three weeks I had said those four words out loud to myself while I rode my bike in the morning, sometimes so loudly it caught the ears of oncoming foot traffic. Sometimes I said it so softly, so internally, trapped in my gasping inhales — a dry, stifled sob. I inscribed the words across the lines of my notebooks, in cursive and then in hard print, so hard it left an imprint on the pages to come. Sometimes I called his voicemail and listened for the soft intonation of his voice, reminding myself of his every syllable’s idiosyncrasies, the way he slurred his own name, the way he hit *ch*’s so imperatively. I could see his teeth, square and pronounced, catching his tongue ever so slightly when he talked through a smile. It was a romanticization I couldn’t stifle when I was sober and he was here, but now it came to me at random moments, washing my hands in the employee restroom or ordering takeout over the phone. Had he been here I would have told him that I saw him in *Singapore Mei Fun* and in almond-scented pink soap, the sort of smell that “would have been nice, had it not the context of a public restroom.”

In my dreams I saw him, and his kidneys weren’t failing, and so consequentially he hadn’t been distant, and then suddenly catatonic, and then hospitalized on the day after my twenty-third birthday, a day we had promised months ago we would spend together, but which I had spent eating chicken parmigiana at a restaurant downtown with my dad and stepmom, picking lazily at threads of mozzarella and pretending I wasn’t devastated.

“You know, Ben, it’s not impossible to be a little more pleasant?”

In June we were sitting across from each other on his couch. My legs were drawn in tightly to my chest, my body tightly pressed against the end furthest from Ben.

“And it’s not impossible, Claire, to be straightforward with me instead of being weird and distant and nearly spilling with discomfort over the arm of my couch—you know?”

I could have argued that his position, laying sideways, propped on one elbow, was also incredibly cold. I could have proven this by laying up close beside him and feeling his body writhe as mine touched his, but then again I couldn’t have. It would have hurt too much.

I thought often of all the mean things he had said to me, of all the arguments we had because I was trying to help and he didn’t want to be better, or because he wanted to be alone and I was certain that being alone was killing him. Evidentially it wasn’t his desolation that was killing him, but an

autoimmune disease that was silently eating away at his *everything*, pulling his insides apart like cheap nylon. And it manifestly wasn't helping my cause to try and help Ben, because with every effort I made he took a step back, and another, and another, pulled back a little further, held my hand with a little less intention. He was a ticking time bomb of lonesome and self-destructive tendencies, both internal and external, and I was impatiently waiting for the explosion that would lead him running back into my arms, feeding my savior complex.

"I'm so sorry, Claire."

Sometimes I imagined he wasn't sorry at all, but instead he was just guilty and in his final breaths wanted to lighten the heaviness of his burden. When I imagined him like this, it made me angry, not with him but at myself for thinking so apathetically of someone who practically died in my arms. When I told my therapist this she didn't seem as concerned, instead reassuring me based on months of previous evidence that Ben was, in fact characteristically, not one to take blame for his own actions. I told her, through hot angry tears, that I thought I was a sociopath for thinking these thoughts, and then she scribbled down something, I imagined like "*She's doing it again!*"

I was doing it again, as I had been doing for months and months of trying to deal with feeling somehow betrayed, but not wanting to admit that I was allowing myself to be wronged. I was coping with not being able to view my relationship as perfect despite its flaws. I was coping with the way my friends described their boyfriends. The way they smiled to recall something their boyfriends had done to apologize after fighting always jarred me, begging me to ask the question, "So after you fight, he apologizes? You don't just both ignore each other until eventually someone wants to eat or drive somewhere and is so bloodthirsty for companionship that they break silence? That's not... something you *do*?"

"I'm so sorry, Claire."

Perhaps these words were compensation for all the *sorrys* I never got, and perhaps I really did deserve to let those be his final words, to me, to the world. Not an "I love you," which would have been tear jerking in its own respect but not nearly as candid. I wasn't even completely sure that he loved me at all, more so that he just needed me to help him pick out his new glasses frames and needed me to draw circles on his back while we watched movies and needed me to spend every waking moment worrying about him when everybody else had stopped worrying and started accepting.

Maybe I loved him. I most certainly loved him. I loved his thick head of hair and his toothy grin and his duck-footed, hands-in-pocket stance he assumed when he bent in close to read the little captions posted beside paintings at the museum. And perhaps I loved him too much to even want to hear him say sorry, because I didn't think he needed to be, because when he felt like he was about to leave me I didn't expect him to say anything at all, instead just place his hand on the top of my head and scrunch his nose at me and remind me that he didn't need to apologize because every element of our relationship, as horrendous as often it was, was completely genuine and honest. In my every imagined reaction to his apology I found a reason to think he didn't need to apologize, and in every replaying of his words I felt guilty. And I knew I shouldn't have. But I also knew there was no use in placing blame on someone who wouldn't have taken it alive and most certainly couldn't take it now.

"It's okay."

I wasn't sure if I was reassuring myself or him, but in retrospect it was all I could think to say, all I think I could have said, had I said anything at all.

# long distance

*Sophie Shnaidman*

sometimes love isn't enough  
even though it should be  
even though you want it to be so bad  
sometimes the distance between two points is overwhelming  
even if the path is linear  
because the path is a long one  
hundreds of miles north  
to you  
hundreds of miles south  
to me  
and sometimes I imagine a world in which we'd never crossed paths  
in which I'd never walked to the movie theater with the blue umbrella tipped over my eyes  
and walked through the doors  
and seen you there  
leaning on the crane machine  
with your hair and eyes and green shirt  
in which we didn't sit side by side in the darkness and whisper laughter  
and sit across from one another with untouched burgers and fries  
because the company kept us satiated  
a world in which we didn't drive with the windows rolled down  
and stand in the warm night and listen to the explosion of colored lightning  
and chase the fire  
and sit on the beach  
you were so fixated on me you missed the explosions every time they passed over your head  
because I was enough  
you didn't need the fire  
you just wanted me  
and the first time I kissed you  
was an explosion of its own  
and the thunder outside my window when you left for the first time was an explosion as well  
and now the loneliness and the hopelessness is also an explosion  
a quiet and self-contained one that no one will ever hear  
and all I wanted was to hear your voice and your laughter but I told you to leave  
so you did  
and now I sit at my computer alone  
and cry on the keyboard  
and imagine a world in which you aren't.

# TO THE

# CORNER STORE

# MEN

*Fatima Abbas*

This one's for all the corner store men that  
Let me take pregnancy tests in the bathroom  
Tell me "habibti don't cry, children are Allah's blessing"  
That let me pay them back later because  
They know money for us came from dark, empty places and  
This wasn't easy  
That people slept inside their food trucks, in between customers,  
Stuck between wishing business would be dry for one, quick, nap  
And needing business to be busy so their children can have dinner, knowing  
Someday their children would grow up to call them uneducated, then *leave*  
for something more  
This one's for all the times I wanted to die—  
The time I almost did die, overdose  
The times I did die, inside  
The time my father died, five years ago

For my uncle who told me my poems needed to be more "happy" because they were just too *sad*;  
Because I am just too *sad*  
Always a man listing the ways in which my existence is problematic  
I wonder if my father was just as bad;  
This one's for my mother  
Who wasn't ready to be a widow  
Who taught me that women come out of everything, bloody yet alive and that's all that matters but  
Being woman means pretending to search inside your purse for something so the corner of your eye  
Can see if the man behind you is following you  
Because *this* is survival  
New York women are prodigies at avoiding rape  
They cry and shout and argue into the steering wheels of their  
Civics, their Camrys, their Rovers- 7:30 in the morning  
And then they wipe the tears, lower their voices  
And go to work.





*Dc Farrell*



# WASHED UP WARNINGS

*Natalie Mosseri*

Locked letters piled high  
Ankles covered in papercuts

Tiptoeing  
Legs cramping

You've spoken every word you've had to say  
Felt the incredible need to further elucidate

Each thing  
Everything

Ventured wildly with the mere intention to simply

Hand them perception  
Show them depth

Shout comprehension until your voice gives out

When that very moment arrives  
When you begin free falling  
When your nails begin to sink deeper into your sweaty palms

Everything will be said back to you as if it is  
Unfamiliar to the ears of the inexperienced

You will keep yourself grounded  
Keep your eyes confined

As the pit of your stomach fills with frustration and disappointment

At the warning signs that were stumbled over  
At old faces with fresh expressions

As they comfort themselves by crying  
"Inevitable"

# AGE OF THE EPOCHIANS

*David Mitchell*

My people had always been at war with the Haldekians. We always fought, then made treaties, and then broke those treaties. It was a constant cycle of war, but it had made us both stronger. No one else dared stand in the way of our endless battles. Then they emerged, and for the first time, we banded together to defeat them. We thought it might have been the beginning of a new story, but we were wrong. Things quickly returned to the way they always were. This was to be expected. While we caught up in our own struggle once more, they regrouped. They calculated. They grew stronger. And we feared them. We banded once more to defeat them. Lifelong enemies teamed up twice against the same threat. We thought we drove them away completely. Their settlements were raided. Their towns burned. Their cities destroyed. For the next 20 years, they couldn't be found anywhere. We could finally return to our own fighting, uninterrupted. But they regrouped. They calculated. They grew stronger. When we found them, they were completely different than the people we slaughtered two decades prior. They were bigger. They were taller. They were faster. They were stronger. We didn't stand a chance against them. Everything we did to them, they did tenfold to us. We, the strongest of the land, were utterly annihilated.

Now, my people do not have a place to call home. Our lives are always on the line. Tomorrow is never a guarantee. They will not stop until we are extinct. To anyone reading this, these are my people's last words: Do not try to fight them. You will not win. Plead and beg for your lives and maybe, maybe they will spare you....

Fear them. Fear the Epochians.

# A LAST WISH

*Maryam Ahmad*

Someone else's pain tears me from inside  
I suffer as they suffer  
I cry to sleep at night thinking of their pain  
If only the oppressor felt the same  
If only the one causing the pain felt the same  
If only there were no pain in anyone to begin with  
Then I wouldn't have to bleed when I saw them suffer  
Then I wouldn't have to cry dark blood  
Or drown in the bloody tears

# IT LOOKS GREAT

*Robert Feinstein*

That sign of his, it's still there, so chalk one up for Lipkin. But I don't really think too many people notice it. After all, "Lipkin Place" only runs for one short block.

Please don't ask me to describe what Lipkin looked like. I cannot recall. His appearance was strictly nondescript. As such was the case, you could be stuck in an elevator with Lipkin for maybe twenty minutes, and hardly notice that he was in there with you.

Throughout his life, Lipkin had never done anything remarkable. He endured a total lack of accolades. He'd never climbed Mount Everest, and he'd never swam the English Channel. He'd never even gotten an "A" in algebra, nor for that matter, an "A" in any other subject. He did, however, once win a volleyball medal. The trouble with that was, he'd never played that sport, not ever. Lipkin was on his eighth-grade basketball team, and spent the entire season warming the bench, except for the five minutes he was sent in on the final day of the tournament. The team was well ahead at that point, and it easily won the championship, no thanks to Lipkin. Everyone received a shiny, tangible award, but they had run out of basketball medals. However, the school had an extra one for volleyball, so it was bestowed on him. Lipkin used a nail file to try to make the volleyball net look more like a basketball hoop, but that didn't really work out very well.

By the time he was pushing seventy, it was of prime importance to Lipkin that he finally be acknowledged. He had walked past a lamppost many times, quite aware that it was just as anonymous as he was. It was definitely standing there on a street, but the street had no name.

An idea eventually crystallized in Lipkin's mind. Why not have a sign printed up, put it on the pole, and name the street after himself? But what should he call it? "Lipkin Avenue?" He rejected that. "Lipkin Lane" had a nice ring to it, but he decided that wasn't quite right either. After going through a lot of possibilities, he decided on "Lipkin Place." Yes, that would be perfect, for he would now be marking his place in the world. It would be a glorious testament to the fact that he, Lipkin, was a man of importance.

Lipkin had the sign quite professionally printed, and with much pleasure he subsequently went to work putting it up. So engaged was he in this task, that he was unaware of an approaching intrusion in blue.

I'll say this for Lipkin, if for nothing else he deserved an "A" for persistence. He was back there again, sign in hand. He was back there just as soon as they let him out.

With the sign secured in its rightful spot, he leaned back a bit with considerable satisfaction. "It looks great," he shouted. And those were Lipkin's **LAST WORDS**. Lipkin mouthed them just before he fell off the ladder, and broke his less than noticeable neck.

# FINAL WORDS

*Alyna Valderrama*

Old memories die hard  
Even if they are good ones.  
Like of past friends who moved on without you.  
I remember  
I remember when I was important to you.  
We texted everyday  
But that slowly faded to once every two weeks.  
I was there for your big moments  
And what was your past - time calls as well.  
I have a bad memory  
But I remember the songs I would play  
That had you in my mental music videos.  
I opened up to you on new levels  
While you opened up with painful past memories.  
I loved you, mostly as a friend  
But sometimes more than that.  
Now suddenly the chained doors in my mind opened  
Only to exchange sleeplessness with sadness.  
Our lives equally go by so fast  
And yet  
I'll never be able to reach you again.  
So  
Here lies my unspoken goodbye  
To you.

# BE PATIENT

*Tonsor Mal*

Patience. They told me patience is what allows a relationship to flourish. Patience is what allows the seeds bestowed inside us to bloom, to intertwine and to connect with each other on a scale far larger than the superficial level we see in society today. They said patience is what turns lust into love. Patience is the key. But looking at you, looking at us and looking at everything we've been through, I often find myself wondering. Is patience the key that opens the door? Or is patience the one that locks it?

You see, I loved you. I truly did. Every moment I spent gazing into your chocolate almond eyes; every moment spent listening to your harmonious voice; every moment spent tasting the spicy Taki chips from your lips; every moment spent watching your every move, poised with perfection, are memories I wouldn't dare trade for anything else in the world. The money, the fame, the glory are nothing compared to what we had, what we built and what we shared. But lately we've been facing so many challenges. You've been busy, I've been booked with loads of work and we no longer have time for each other. It's been this way for the past two months. You became more in love with everything else around you, but not with me. My love cannot be the only thing keeping this relationship alive. And from so many of our friends I heard patience and time are what will help this relationship survive the hurdles thrown at us. I'm afraid to admit it. But they are wrong. Patience cannot resolve everything.

You see, for so long I wanted us to work out. I was convinced that it was you and me for the rest of our lives. But this unrequited love I was receiving became too much for me to handle. It became too detrimental for my well-being. It took the energy out of me. Countless nights spent crying myself to sleep, asking myself why doesn't she love me the way I love her? What's holding her back? This familiar concept of patience rang in my head. *Give her patience. She'll learn to love you.* But I didn't want you to learn to love me. I wanted you to automatically feel it. I wanted it to naturally occur. I wanted it to light up your heart like my love for you did to mine. As I see you falling in love with the world around you, one you used to despise, I had to accept the fact that patience is no longer an option. How much longer can you tell a yearning heart to wait?

I hope you can understand where I'm coming from. I needed something from you that you were not able to give to me and I needed something that patience was not able to provide. You grew into a person I no longer knew or understood, a person I no longer saw a future with. I'm truly disgusted with everything, but mostly myself. I let us get to a position where I hate you and the person you've become. I cannot look at you the same anymore. I do not see you the same anymore. I don't believe a single phrase that falls from those beautiful lips. You turned my beautiful, jovial heart into a cold, desperate, feeble thing. I let patience take advantage of me. Now I hope you see why I must leave.

I don't have the courage to tell you this to your face. Courage has been robbed from me, as have hope and happiness. Writing this to you seems easier. In the end, you never listened to my pleas anyway. Maybe you'll read them instead. I don't expect forgiveness or acceptance from you; writing a letter is a pretty courageous thing to do. In all honesty, I don't want anything from you. But I do want you to understand where I'm coming from and I want you to respect my decision in leaving.

After this, I no longer want any type of communication with you. By the time you've finished this letter, you've been blocked on every platform I have you on. My number has been changed, so there's no use trying to contact me. Yes, you might consider this a petty move. But I'm all out of patience.

Consider this a goodbye. My last words to you. The final chapter in our journey together. I want to thank you for all the good you've done for me and all the happiness we've shared together. All the positivity you showcased and all the possibilities you've shown me. But it's time for me to go and move on. I know this has all been thrown at you and can be very overwhelming. It'll be very difficult to grasp the idea of what I'm saying. It'll take some time. But as the famous phrase goes: "Patience is key."

# BHIM

*Brendan Justice*

When I met Bhim, I identified him by his license plate, T178893, and the Brooklyn intersection where I was to meet him. The ride was the type where there's already another passenger in the car by the time I get in and this ride, apparently, was the type where we weren't supposed to talk to each other. It wasn't for a few passenger pick-ups and drop-offs that Bhim and I started to talk.

"JFK?" he asked.

"Yep." I responded. He knew this already.

"Do you know what terminal you need?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. Do you know what terminal flies American Airlines?" I asked.

"I think it's Terminal 8," he said, "but I don't take people to JFK often."

Google agreed with his memory.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Phoenix, to visit my grandparents." I said.

"Ah, are you from Phoenix," (which he pronounced 'Fen-nix'), "or New York?"

"I'm from New York." I said.

"Ah, do you work here?" he asked.

"A little, but I'm a student." I said.

"Where are you in school?" he asked.

"Brooklyn College. CUNY," I said.

"What are you studying?" he asked.

"English," I said.

"Are you interested in English?" he asked.

"Yeah, I guess. I'm interested in a lot of things," I said.

"Ah, that's good!" he said. "You have to be interested in different things. You have to be interested in everything. Even just *skim, skim, skim*."

He took a pause.

"I read a lot," he continued, "but nothing ever sticks." He now sounds a little deflated. "I read it over, and over, and over, and I can't remember what I read. I can read the same book three times and each time it's like I'm reading something that's new. I don't know why I can't remember. There must be something small wrong with me."

"Well," I pushed back, "I'll take classes where we do work for a whole semester and I only remember two or three things out of it by the end."

He makes a sound to himself, like he's releasing air.

"I just wish I could remember," he says. "It's like trying to find a grain of rice in a bag of chaff."

There's a pause.



Bhim continues, “I just see these people who can talk and talk and talk, and never run out of things to say, and I don’t understand how they don’t run out of ideas. They just keep talking. English is not my native language, but even in my native language, I don’t know how to remember things. There’s something wrong with me, it’s like there’s something small that’s wrong in my brain; it just doesn’t stick. I would read Shakespeare, Tom Sawyer, and write about it after in my diary, and nothing. I feel like a boat untethered. Do you know what I mean? I try to do all three, reading, writing, and speaking, but I can learn 100-150 words before they disappear. How do people remember all of them?”

“Maybe it’s that you put too much pressure on yourself,” I respond. “Sometimes you can’t get what you want too much. My problems aren’t so bad, but, back in high school, I went through really bad depression. I was putting too much pressure on myself. I wanted to be smart, all the time, even if I didn’t have anything to say. Maybe you should try to make yourself laugh more,” and I chuckled, “I don’t know.”

Bhim makes a small sound from the front seat.

“Bhim, you’re impressed by other people, and maybe those people are impressed by other people, and those other people are impressed by you,” I sit forward and talk more urgently, “I read in a book once that, thoughts are the accumulated pressure of feelings, maybe you just don’t have feelings towards what people say to respond in the conversation. Maybe you need to spend time with people that share your interests too—you need to be able to relate to what people talk about. That’s one of the reasons people tell me they miss being in school is, you’re forced to talk to people; day in and day out. It can be kind of a practice thing, after you have so many hours of conversation a day it becomes a lot easier.”

“Terminal 8?” he asks again, as we approach the airport.

“Yeah,” I said, “small-talk is kind of pointless, maybe that’s almost a good thing that you don’t have a response. You probably put too much pressure on yourself. It could be that you’ve found some inner peace that other’s lack, and that’s why you don’t feel like you have something to say.”

We pull up to the curb outside the departure gate.

“What?” he asked.

“What,” I said.

“Oh,” he said, waving his hand, “I was just talking to make conversation. It’s not really an issue, I just, you know you were an English major, and I wanted something to say. Enjoy Phoenix sir!”

And at that, I got out of the car, taking my bag from the trunk. I walked toward the terminal in that one-legged way that one does when they have a heavy bag strap digging into their shoulder. My phone buzzed to tell me my ride was finished, and then it asked me how much my driver should be tipped, and I stopped for a second to think about it.

# GOODBYE FOR NOW

*Emily Shrem*

So now I'm saying goodbye. I'm finishing the novel of you and turning your final pages. Onto a new book, a new genre. Back on the shelf, with the rest of the tales as old as time. But this book, your story— maybe I'd even call it our story, was a good one. Anything but a classic. The kind you don't read in a sophomore level English class, rather some girl reviewed it on Tumblr as a book that made her heart race and her palms sweat. A book she never wanted to finish and was heartbroken when it didn't end quite like she thought it would. But aren't those the best books? When the plot thickens and twists— starts out as a on eway street, empty at 3 AM and ends as a car that breaks down in the middle of the freeway during afternoon rush hour? Those are the books people talk about. The stories that make people feel alive.

So here I go; here are my last words to you. You were an odd, charming kid. Being with you simply made me happy. You showed me your true, raw self and I couldn't thank you enough for sharing that with me. I let you in. Showed you what made the gears in my mind shift and move. We had fun together. I never thought about it at the time. I'd be wrapped up in your arms, listening to some dumb song by A Boogie— like any other day. But then it all ended so abrupt and blurry. You decided I wasn't for you. It was like we started a puzzle together and you left halfway through, leaving pieces scattered and my heart shattered, utterly puzzled and on my own to figure the rest out. I never got a reason why, spent nights half convincing myself it was you, but the other half blaming myself as something not good enough. We were just a couple of dumb kids so drunk in the moment that our lives turned into a never ending hang-over.

Sharing the details of our story wouldn't be right. After all, there are two sides to every story; so why did ours feel like a six sided die? We wanted it to be lowkey but it ended up being the talk of the town because the Capulets don't associate with the Montagues. Romeo and Juliet never had the happy ending they wanted. They were the perfect match, but matches burn. We didn't want to end up like that, but it feels as if you lit my candle and then attempted to blow out the flame. I'll always have this lingering feeling like we're done, but not quite over. You gave me butterflies when you came into my life, and when you left I felt them die and now they're sitting here, giving me this sickening feeling I never signed up for. You left me bitter but you also showed me what I deserve— and it wasn't you. I deserve better and I know that now. I'm happy now and I hope you are too. We had a good run, with great memories I'll never forget — and I know you won't either.

# NEW LAST WORDS

*Riana Kolari*

My last words to you were filled with apologies  
Apologies that you didn't deserve,  
Because I had done nothing but love you.  
I apologized to you  
When you were the one causing the pain.  
You were the one lying  
And playing with me like it was a game,  
And yet I was the one still trying.  
My last words to you  
No longer stand to be true  
Because no I don't miss you  
At all.  
And I blame you for a lot,  
Because now I see it as it truly was.  
You were trying to manipulate me,  
But you should've know the woman you were dealing with  
Because I would never let you get away with it.  
If I could have a new set of last words for you  
It would start with an F and end with a U.

# THAT'S ALL, FOLKS!

*Natalie Palmer*

“Football Season is Over.” This was the title of the suicide note left by literary jester and Peter Pan — Hunter S. Thompson. As a writer and journalist so critical yet so embedded in American culture, Hunter’s analysis of our society remains just as important today. With the current mania surrounding journalism, press/government, and free speech, it feels urgent to remember some of America’s most darling and provoking journalists.

Hunter lived in extremes. Whether he liked it or not, these extremes (though necessary at times) seemed to create both bedlam and beauty internally as well as within his writing. His mind was all speed, speed, speed all the time. Whether he was giving a panegyric on drugs or sports or politics, Thompson had a magnetic presence. January 2005 George Bush was elected for a second term, and by February 2005 Hunter decided to kill himself. He had mentioned suicide times before. And his suicide was not so much shocking as it was impending.

His breakfast routine was demented but fascinatingly unique. He considered it a time to anchor his psyche. A time for him to be alone and try and find some sort of balance I suppose. As a ritual, and never before noon, Hunter religiously had something like four bloody marys, two grapefruits, a pot of coffee, crepes, a slice of pie (key lime maybe), omelets, bacon, at least two margaritas, and cocaine (for dessert) of course! This kind of morbid excess somehow created an equilibrium for that mad man. He loved explosives and anything big and anything loud and anything that was, you know... chaotic.

Thompson wanted his ashes to be shot out of a cannon. Johnny Depp, who was a longtime friend, planned the funeral and dished out millions to make it perfect. Norman Greenbaum’s “Spirit in the Sky” and Bob Dylan’s “Mr. Tambourine Man” played when the ashes shot from a monument shaped as a fist with a peyote button branded in the middle. Celebrities, politicians, family, and friends told endless stories about Thompson’s unusual mythos.

Would you plan your funeral? Would you serve drinks while people mourn and reminisce? Is there a song you want playing when your ashes submerge the sky? I do not know if it is better to plan these things or not. Final words may not be so final. Definitely not for a writer whose novelty and critique of the times remain apropos. Thompson once said, “it’s better to be shot out of a cannon than squeezed out of a tube.” Unorthodox was Hunter’s style. And anyway, what fun would a funeral be without a party? See you in the afterlife.

“No More Games. No More Bombs. No More Walking. No More Fun. No More Swimming. 67. That is 17 years past 50. 17 more than I needed or wanted. Boring. I am always bitchy. No Fun — for anybody. 67. You are getting Greedy. Act your old age. Relax — This won’t hurt,” (Hunter Thompson, Football Season is Over).

# A CHANCE TO SAY GOODBYE

*Sara Ahisar*

My heart is shattered and I think of you;  
What I wouldn't give to see you one last time.  
There was no chance to say goodbye.

Six years, and nobody knew;  
Six years of pain but not a word of complaint.  
I would never have guessed.

One day you were here, the next you were not;  
Time has stopped.  
I feel the loss again and again.

I wonder what I might have said;  
Had I known.  
I wonder and I have no answers.

There aren't words large enough;  
Words to express the pain, the loss.  
Words to do you justice.

The hole in my heart, it will always be here;  
Each day anew, it's burned again.  
I don't think that will ever change.

I love you, I miss you, I wish you were here;  
Oh, for one last conversation.  
A chance to say goodbye.

# A NOT SO SWIFT LOVE STORY

*Jerry Salem*

This is the story of a painfully beautiful love.

Years filled with tears of hopeful longing for a sense of understanding across an unknown  
distance and time.

An intimate connection between former strangers stronger than any explanation our physical  
realm can offer two souls on their quests for happiness.

Estranged halves once a complimentary whole, destined to be pushed apart, can only ask the  
question: will we ever find a love like this again?

Looking into each other's eyes for the last time beneath the train tracks lies every I love  
you ever uttered, all the hurtful words exchanged never intended to afflict the other, and the  
countless dreams of magic they desperately wanted to create together— all culminates into  
“I’ll see ya.”

As they walk their separate ways into an uncertain abyss of new possibilities and potential,  
he can’t help but turn around. One last glimpse into a fairytale past is his final prayer to  
comfort and warm a withering soul.

More beautiful than ever before along the their shared journey— her smile is waiting for his.

# LAST WORDS *to my soldier*

*Mira Lynn*

I stand here  
amongst guns and roses  
As the raindrops drop hard on your casket  
Now the raindrops begin to drop down my face  
I wish you were here  
My last words to you,  
I lov--  
I hate you.

Because you cheated on me  
All those months I stood alone  
You were with her  
As you came walking through my door  
Her perfume of dirt/gun powder soaked your clothes  
Because you were too tired to shower.

Every night you would dream, dreams of her  
They called it PTSD,  
but it was the thought of her that got your heart racing, feet pacing  
You were always unfocused  
And still you remained faithful,  
to her.

You took my left hand & pledged your allegiance to me with that ring  
But then placed your right hand on your heart  
pledging your allegiance to her  
I wish you were here  
My last words to you  
I lov--  
I hate you  
Because you choose lady liberty over me.





## PROMPT 3

Letter to  
My Future/Former  
Self





*Tara Lnberg*

So I got the letter,

And let me tell you,  
It was no surprise.

I remember the day I wrote it  
The day I sent a paper  
To the future  
Daring things to be  
Different?  
Daring you  
to be shocked?

...Nostalgic?

But instead  
Here I am  
Writing back.

Only this time,  
There is nowhere  
To send this --  
No one  
To answer  
My reply

What were you thinking?  
Huh?  
Huh?

But that  
is something  
For the life of me  
I don't recall.

# WASH CYCLE

*Daniel Candor*

to elapse  
in cogitation  
and inflate  
damn rumination

so to speak  
speak to spike  
head impaled  
life derailed

you lift me down  
to cast me in  
you map my conscience  
and lapse in sin

spite to spit  
spit to spam  
bed of nails  
canned tails

to congeal  
in elongation  
and relate  
damn cremation

# WORDS & POEMS

## CHAPTER 1Q: A WRITER WRITES AND A POET RECITES

*Dc Farrell*

I search the heaven and you explore the sea  
This is how we find ourselves to synchronicity  
I see the hues blue and whites  
You witness sharks bite and hues of the dead  
That which would keep thee  
Up at night.  
So vibrant hues of reds,  
Redder than the world would allow it to be.  
I seek the Angels and you the mermaids,  
Who us, but men of the earth  
never seen but heard to be.  
To be true  
Both mythical  
Each of these beings we went out to see  
Even if for a peak,  
But while I embraced the peace  
U seek the chaos and the cynical  
Looking for a piece of something you don't have.  
A light in the dark  
A moment of bliss  
Is this what makes us so similar  
For though I see the light in space  
I'm still floating

Lingering out there with no home to call my place.  
I tend to see myself as a Happy Idiot  
But moments of clarity questions that  
Am I splitting in two  
to find serenity  
But how does it work if I'm still looking for what's  
due  
To remain stupid would be suffice  
In this game I call life  
Cause to feel is to peel  
Back  
tissue  
And walls  
And if you look closer in the dark you will see empty  
ancient halls  
Of the lasting past  
In which they have stay tensed While I seek spirits I  
craved n  
You seek me thru the heavens and space heart ready to  
flame on  
And be set ablaze  
Only in time before n in time after  
I do not know nor see  
The end of this phase.....



# THE CORPSE

*Anosha Arshad*



Lay me in a bed of roses  
surround me with cigarette smoke  
cry me ocean waves  
leave me in the dark.  
Goodbye.  
I'm already dead.  
- 11:25 p.m.

*City of Ashes || Areeba Zanub*

# A BRIEF INQUIRY INTO THE TIME YOU BROKE YOUR OWN HEART

*Ahnaaf Zitou*

Dear Future Me,

Hello future me, how's it going? Remember me? I am past you when you were smaller and less good looking (hopefully). Anyway, I'm writing to you to remind you about her; yes, *her*—when you really screwed up and broke your own heart. Let's set the stage if you don't remember: you were in high school and you came into math class on the first day; an old Indian guy was teaching the class and you chose a seat in the back. You were just sitting there when she came in and took the seat in front of you; she was pretty, but you didn't think too much of it. Yet, somehow on the first day you managed to add her on Facebook; seriously, how did you manage this? I can barely get people to talk to me. Was I really that cool back then? Now that you remember and probably are crying in your hands, let's take a trip down memory lane to the time you broke your own heart.

Let's not use her real name in case someone else reads this, so let's call her Jane for now. After a few conversations with her, you realized you like Jane. She is funny, smart, and enjoyed things that you do. She laughed at your jokes—even the one about jeans (that one is very bad, I hope you aren't still using that one). She seemed to like you. At first, you didn't think that was possible. That was your mistake, because at the time that I am writing this I can tell you she was into you. There were a couple times when it was obvious, like that fire drill where you two were just talking the entire time and you noticed she was pretty short, like 5'3 short, or the other time in class where you were doing classwork and you were making everyone laugh; she almost fell onto the floor laughing. You two would talk all the time. As soon as she walked in, you guys would talk. She even talked with you after class in the hallway; after she left, your friend thought she was your girlfriend. You are probably realizing at this point that she liked you even though you thought she didn't.

As you can see, future me, Jane liked you. Now, let's see what you did to try and get this girl. Let's go through your memories and see what steps you took. Nothing. You did absolutely nothing, you idiot. You kept trying to figure out if she liked you or not. How about that time you guys bought candy at Target, or messaged each other through your tenth period class? How about when she wore that cute dinosaur onesie for Halloween or that black dress? Yes, I know she looked amazing in that dress; now stop having dreams about it please. You couldn't figure out any of those signals; such an idiot. Even if it didn't work out you could have tried, but you didn't, and it tore you up inside. Near the end of the school year you two had that deep conversation about life and family, and what it meant to both of you. You still didn't say anything to her. That was your moment. Finally, the year was over—you had lost your chance.

You saw her almost every day senior year. She would sit at her lunch table and then you would walk by. She would see you and look up for a couple of seconds; you would look at her for a couple seconds, then you would turn the corner and head for your table. That hurt a lot and it's something you shouldn't do again. Hopefully you learned from that time. You are going to start taking more chances in life—don't be scared. You were scared to tell Jane anything because you weren't sure if she liked you and you were afraid of being rejected. I just finished my first week of college and I already got rejected once (that one was embarrassing, let's not talk about that). Try more things future me, you'll never know what you will find.

By the time you are reading this, I hope you are happy. I hope you got over that time in high school and are taking more chances. Hindsight may be 20/20, but if you never take chances, you'll never know. I'm not just talking about romance here, future me. I mean in all facets of life. Take more chances. Try learning things you've always wanted to do, like music, writing, and acting. Don't just dream anymore. You've lived a very closed, safe, and privileged life so far, but you are going to be given many new opportunities and challenges in the future. You can't be afraid anymore. Grab the brass ring, seize the day, you know things like that. I won't bore you with any more clichés. Don't be afraid. It's better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all.



# SWALLOW

*Quentin Felton*

I have a weird relationship with food; I tell myself to forget it's there. Carbohydrates weigh me down; I'd rather eat myself. Feed myself to the wind, watch flesh float away, waste away. Take me away cause I'd rather not make friends with the growls in my gut again. I'm alone again. All bone again & it's hard to get outside of myself cause I'm the only place without food. Skin folds over toilet bowls & I'm told that seeking flavor without limits is indulgence. You just ate, so why are u still hungry? Nothing tastes like home, I stopped eating there too. But when you were younger you'd scour the floors for dusty cheerios. Babies will eat anything, just about everything. I wonder what happened (I wonder if it's easier to speak about this with no i's involved). When it's been a while since the fork has touched your tongue, you start dreaming of a world where forks aren't needed. Where digestion is danger, where hunger is forged, where gorgeousness throats the gorge. Risen once you're getting too big or it won't be baby fat forever is said by a father & swallowed by his son. Self-hate festered in upset fostered by stomach turned Coke machine. At least it's zero calorie. Cold bubbled belt buckles freeze off, belly fat, bloody scars mean it's working. No one even notices the rips & pulls til bae is all like where'd you get these from & you're like "I used to scratch myself in my sleep" & When u say you hate yourself, you really do mean it, meaning last week you lost half ur size & half the sight in your left eye before fainting onto the 2 train's speckled platform. Mom was like how long has this been going on? You lied "I forget to eat sometimes." But when you do remember words don't count, so don't count the grams of sodium glucose protein cholesterol & fiber in this poem, don't count the number of calories stuffed in these clauses as you fantasize packing & puking them in & out of your mouth at once. Chew your food for once, you'll choke & the lack of space btw food & throat skin & belt line & line is meant to make u & ur clauses Claustrophobic. Catastrophic meat markets leave you in pieces at Whole Foods cause they haven't put cruelty-free air on the stands yet but it's okay. The gays still say you're a skinny legend. How's it that if you eat a watermelon seed you'll spurt something other than growth? Is it growth to recognize that I-I mean you- have a problem? Problem is whenever you're called out you start eating everything but food again. Fingernails, arm hair, loose skin, inner cheek bone & & & The ambulance won't always come. You say this won't happen again "I promise" but the I is the only thing that weighs less than you.

# MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

*Jared Moore*

Dear Former Jared,

Take chances,  
It's fine to be afraid of the unknown,  
Just don't let fear dictate your life.  
Enjoy every moment,  
For it can be your last.  
Be there for those you care for,  
And if you truly love someone,  
Tell her before it's too late.  
It can end up being one of the greatest decisions you ever make.  
There will always be a future,  
But you must learn from your mistakes.  
A life filled with taking chances is better than a life full of regrets.

# UNTIL I SEE YOU AGAIN

*Maheenul Nadim Burhan*

The distant past is not so distant, or is it? Some say the past makes you the individual you are today - there is an uncanny resemblance with the present you and the former version of you. Others think of the past as one with the exact opposite polarity. According to them, the past is a foreign country; they do things differently there. One of the first things that comes to my mind when thinking of the past is that it might be narcissistic and self-centered, like Charlie Puth's hit song "Attention" was made for this "PAST".

There is this cliché saying, "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger." And being the conflicted contradictory homo sapien I am, I do think, indeed past is like a friend and a foe at the same time. It is like the past alternates dimensions like the characters in Dragon Ball Z, and it hits you right in the cerebral cortex out of nowhere. How does one perceive this random tag game the "past" plays with you? It depends on the person, to be totally honest with you. Everyone is entitled to their own moral preferences. When people say something, they are expressing their moral feelings. There is no right or wrong.

This makes me think, aren't knowledge and awareness simply vague concepts? Everyone lives bound by their own ideals and beliefs and they define that as Reality. So can it be said we live bound by our own thought process in our own little world, shaped by our own vague subjective interpretation? Well, you never know, do you? If you ask me I think every single one of us creates our own world constructed by our own fundamental, leading to the creation of sum to infinity parallel universes.

The Past is like something who will be there for you in a way a yellow card is introduced in a soccer game. When does one get lost in memories of his past? In my case it was when I was diagnosed with clinical depression after my grandfather passed away. With all the complex chemical reactions going on in my brain centralizing on the past, I woke up. After a while, I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain. It seemed the sky cried in loving memory of the 6th death anniversary of my grandfather.

# you of today

*Oriya Abed*

dear me of the past,  
you wouldn't recognize you of the present.  
we are, quite figuratively,  
two different people,  
with varying values, beliefs, and perceptions.  
doesn't that scare you?

dear me of the past,  
you don't define me,  
you molded me into the you of today.  
we are, quite literally,  
the same person,  
yet, we still differ.  
doesn't that surprise you?

dear me of the past,  
change is headed your way,  
the you of today is glad you didn't resist it.  
change is good,  
you accepted that,  
and now I know that.  
aren't you happy about that?

# LUSTRE

*Kali Norris*

It is always January.  
You want to grow old.  
This means losing everything  
that was ever important enough  
to make you feel.  
To love anything is to willingly cradle a blade  
within your own body,  
bleeding out at its loss.  
Blessed be the ordinary days.  
The years you will barely recall.  
You will never lose evenings of work in the library,  
nights on the couch to lackluster television.  
It is easy to be deceived by light,  
but unlovely things will always be  
exactly what they are.

# HOW TO FIND A HOME

*Monica Saw-Aung*

*This is freedom: you can carry everything you own on your back.*

## I. Daedalus

It is a dangerous thing to make homes out of other people. Your imagination builds majestic arcs out of half-formed impressions, mansions out of shambling woodwork. The wings you craft are lofty and beautiful, but such waxy deception! Do not grant others the power to fly, for they will surely plummet to the sea. They always do. It is a weight too heavy for any human to bear.

## II. Odysseus

It is the hardest job of all, to be alone on this forsaken frontier. You will fall on flat surfaces and break your skin on silent snags. Do it anyway. The storm will shred everything you consider safe, normal, established. When you reach the eye of the beast, it will all have been worth it. After a decade on water, the shifting tides will part to reveal solid earth under your feet.

## III. Hestia

Build a hearth in yourself, so you can always warm your hands over the heat in your soul. Your bones will be the kindling and your blood the lighter fluid. Let the fire keep your spirit bright and your eyes wide, your feet light and your mind right. Follow the path of your veins to the beat of your heart. Before long, you will find it. A planet snaps back into orbit, a ship anchors into harbor. Thank yourself, you are welcome. This fire is here to stay.

# WHO YOU ARE

*Bethany Friedmann*

You are not who you thought you'd be  
No, you are far more than the girl who had her life figured out  
You are learning how to trust and how to dream.

You are not where you thought you'd go  
You are farther than you imagined Indiana to be  
Though you thrive in the nest, adventure is in your blood, you know.

This is not what you thought you'd think  
The world is far too wide for your opinion to be truth  
You are learning how to listen, and you don't hate the color pink.

This is not how you thought you'd feel  
Free falling isn't quite as fun as Tom Petty made it sound  
But the growth pains of uncertainty show you what's false and what's real.

Life is not what you thought it'd be  
Disappointment is earth-shaking and dark  
But this idea that God is with you is no longer just a sentiment.

Hello old friend, it's me.



# BIRAT33

*Nicholas Tan*

Hey Nick,  
Remember Birat?  
The kid who would always share the spicy black dots from his salami sandwiches  
(21 and I still don't know what they're called);  
That you felt were  
a little wrong to take since he looked like a stick!

Recall  
Him telling Francis, "suck my 12-inch!"  
How he pulled his shirt off when no one believed in his four-pack  
And when he punched Herman for calling you a chink.

You admired  
The way he never stuttered when talking to girls  
Sticking his head up high while Mrs. G screamed at the top of her lungs  
Him accepting every recess race request  
Even though you always lost!

The guy didn't mind your sweaty head,  
Or your short stature,  
or your lame haircut,  
or your shyness.

But most importantly,  
He gave you his Runescape account!  
Birat33  
Level 11.  
You talked for hours on the phone to find where Ernest the Chicken hid  
at haunted Draynor Manor  
Those damn trees kept hitting you, but it was a blast  
for best friends

He shared his older brother's account  
So, when he moved to Atlanta after 6<sup>th</sup> grade  
You could yell [BIRAT!!!!!!!!111] over private message  
Only to get a reply from Dibesh, saying he'll be on later.

And when he did beat his brother to the computer  
He'd introduce me to all those vulgar and obnoxious songs  
I still love  
like the one with the chorus, "The city looks so pretty do you wanna burn it with me?"  
only for me to think about what I really hate  
And bring up the SATs

It was right around that test when we lost touch.

Nowadays  
I have more friends  
Good ones,  
And even a few really great ones.  
Yet,  
Maybe this is rude  
Maybe I'm nostalgic  
Maybe I'm even remembering wrong—

I just haven't met anyone else quite like him.

Adult life is reserved,  
Professional,  
Neutered.

I see myself becoming the same  
at times  
Only to be startled by the familiar impulse of a  
hot-blooded,  
Suave,  
Headstrong,  
heroic friend.

So, Nick,  
if there's one thing you should know  
Even in 2018  
You're still learning from the man he was in 2007.

# CATCHING UP WITH THE OTHER LORDYS

*Lordy Belance*

Address: 15 years into the future

Date: November 9, 2018

Dear 7-year old Princess Lordy,

How are you? How is school? I am quite fine. College is alright, but it can be hard, overwhelming, and there are always decisions to make (ex: which event to attend, whether to stay in a class or drop a class). Enjoy your childhood and do not try to grow up too fast. I am glad that you made some friends at your school. Tara, Frank, Ryan, and Jada seem really nice and fun (except for that time when you and Jada had a disagreement about whether it was better to fix a bike or buy a new one, but I know that it is okay between you two now). I also love your friends Amy, Nikki, Zukki, Rodgie, and Sophie. Now, I do not see them as much, but we can get in touch with each other by using Facebook (when you become a pre-teen or teenager, we could be Facebook friends). Anyways, I remember you mentioning that Alynda (your older sister), Mom, Farrah (Nikki and Zukki's mother), and Mrs. Pat get on your nerves sometimes. I still laugh when I remember you telling me that you told Mrs. Pat that you're not her friend and when you yelled at Mom to shut up. I know how you feel; my sister and Mom still annoy me, too, sometimes, but they do it because they care. We both need to work on accepting that. Speaking of people being annoying, try to ignore Kenneth, Kevin and other people who bother you, or tell a teacher, Mom, and/or your sister (I should have done that more with the people who bothered me). Now, let's talk about school matters. I am pretty much like you. Sometimes (or most of the time), I can be lazy and put things off until the last minute, but I still give effort. You must do that, too. You are not stupid. You are smart, but you are also lazy (I say this with love, not hate). Lastly, like you, I am in love with the cartoons and TV shows that you watch. It is fun watching KaBlam, Rocket Power, Rugrats, All Grown Up, Oobi, Corneil and Bernie, and more. When you grow up, you will never stop loving these shows, but you will also come to love other shows, such as Grey's Anatomy, The Brady Bunch, Hannah Montana, and General Hospital. I wish you good luck in school, friendship, and everything, and may God bless you and help you make wise decisions.

Love, hearts, and kisses,

22-year old Princess Lordy

P.S.: The world has changed a lot between fifteen years. For example, people go on Netflix to watch movies instead of going to Blockbuster to purchase movies. I miss going to Blockbuster. We have got to visit each other sometime. We will have tons of fun.

\*\*\*\*\*

Address: 11 years into the future

Date: November 21, 2018

Dear 11-year old Lordy,

How are you holding up with school, home life, and everything? For me, this week has been busy, stressful, and exhausting, and I'm glad Thanksgiving is tomorrow. I know things are not completely easy for you, with your classmates bugging you, you getting in trouble with your teacher, Mom, and sister, and struggling with schoolwork. Also, I heard that you got in trouble for letting Bianca play with and break your glasses. Hang in there, sweetie. Everyone loves you and just wants the best for you. As for your bullies, tell them to back the hell off or die. Additionally, if you do not get your period at twelve, do not freak out. It does not mean that something is wrong with you. Everyone gets their period at different times. And stop messing around with Kadin! As his aunt, you should try to be the bigger person. Do the same for Bianca. And I know it's hard to listen to others when they tell you not to do things. I know how it feels to want to play by your own rules. But most of time, the people who tell you not to do something - your mom, your sister, your friend Amy - mean well and want the best for you. So try not to drive them up a wall, okay? Also, what's up with your crush on Francis from The Fairly Oddparents? Stay away from him. He's a bad guy, I warn you! Stick with Danny Phantom. He seems like a nice and handsome guy, and he has those awesome ghost powers! With that being said, I hope you have a Happy Thanksgiving and don't forget to watch the Thanksgiving Day Parade and the Dog Show!

Love,

22-year old Princess Lordy

\*\*\*\*\*

Address: 18 years into the past

Date: November 21, 2018

Dear 40-year old Lordy,

Konichiwa! I hope this letter finds you well. How are you, Carlos, and the kids doing? I am swamped, but grateful that I don't have school tomorrow. I hope you are enjoying your career as an author, screenwriter, actress, model, and singer. I honestly do not know how you do it all. You have got to tell me all your secrets. I can't wait to be you when I grow up! Have you been keeping in touch with your old friends and classmates? I hope you have. I wonder how Amy, Rodgie, Jonelle, Kiani, Isabel, and all our other old friends and classmates are doing. I hope they all have successful lives now. Please promise that we will always stay in touch, no matter how busy we both get. Take care and have a Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving! Don't forget the Parade and the Dog Show.

Love and hearts,

22-year old Princess Lordy

# seasonal kisses

*Mic Braun*



preparing for winter like the ant, and the grasshopper  
who is soaking up the last kisses of summer  
both to be crushed by the fall  
of a branch, the temporary home of termites

The new will replace the old

a butterfly sheds its cocoon,

the first embrace of wind

through its dangling earrings

the arrival of Fall

leaves adhering to rules of nature

morphing their colors

The new replacing the old

\*\*\*

but you, still cocooned in your hopes

are shielded from failure knocking at your door

mocking kisses from the gods

Newer places, and old

fears that you will be crushed.

\*\*\*

preparing for winter like the ant, and the  
cold and bitter truth  
is an aardvark waiting to suck you in.

*Journey of Autumn || Ireneusz Szymborski*

# A LETTER TO MY FORMER/FUTURE SELF

*Saelly Alvarez*

You know what, Saelly? You aren't perfect and you never will be, but that's okay. You know why? Because nobody is, because there's no such thing as perfect. It doesn't exist. So accept yourself for who you are, and when you look at yourself, do you want to know what I see? I see a beautiful woman, who just wants to be the best she can be.

You were just a young, happy-go-lucky girl, pulling pranks, dressing up, telling stories and making everyone laugh. Growing up to your teen years, you began to discover new things about yourself. Your first menstruation appeared; new friends, who taught you who would stay and who would stab you right in the back. New life lessons began to develop and many changes occurred.

Fast forward to high school and major changes began to form around you: wanting acceptance in groups, peer pressure, and mainly love. Love is probably the biggest challenge you have come to face. It made you do things you would have never expected to do, that you knew deep down weren't the best of things. You did them anyway in order to fit in, but when you needed help everyone had left, leaving you in the dust and in tears.

Dealing with depression was another factor that you accomplished and I am proud of you. You had done things for the wrong people but still had a smile on your face. You smiled to keep you from crying; you laughed at all your troubles to block out your pain. You smiled because although your heart was shattered, you knew tomorrow could be a better day.

I want you to remember that you aren't perfect but you are a conqueror. You made it through depression, abuse, fake friendships, fake loyalty, enemies, and negative energy, which is why you are still standing today. You are fearless. To my former/future self, the next time you look in a mirror, tell yourself that you made it, and this is you today.

To all my former friends, I hope you have found peace within your hearts. To my ex, I hope you found someone to change you for the better. To the people who wronged me, I hope you learned your lesson for your future. To this day I hold no resentment on anyone. You may have done some things as well but you were young and you learned, and that is a thing called life. I am writing this to you because you are a conqueror. You are Saelly A. Keep writing. Keep growing. I am so glad you found your peace. I love you.

# SINGING IN THE PAIN

*Malcolm Stone*

Oh, nightingale sing your song  
Your sweetness of notes  
Arrangements of melodies  
Entrancing and mesmerizing

Your cooing drags me out of bed  
Such harmony and tranquility,  
You bring flowers to me?  
How lovely and surprising

Don't listen forever, buyer beware  
Sweetness becomes sour,  
Melodies become broken,  
And life monotonous and agonizing

Perched on my windowsill  
Continuing its performance  
A scorpion in disguise  
With words of poison reprising

I try to fall back to sleep  
For each day I do dread  
The soothing bird has gone mad  
Soon I will be hospitalized

Nightingale quit your pesky tune  
Shoo you miserable crooner  
Be free of my heart and mind, be done analyzing



# DEAR LILY

*Lily*

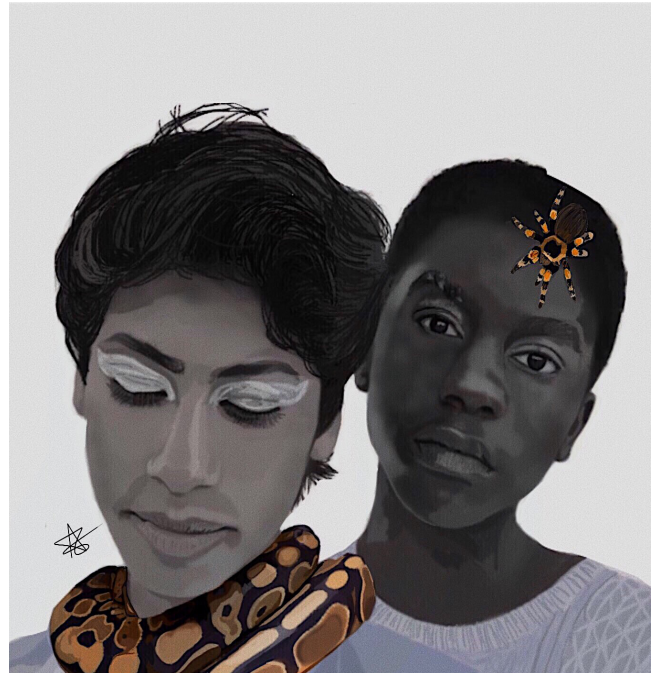
Dear Lily,

Hey future me, I hope that you are doing well. I'm pretty fine as of this moment. Are mom, Eli, and Tiger doing great? I'm sure Eli and Tiger are jumping about like fools as usual, ha-ha. I wouldn't be surprised if mom is still bothering you. We both know that's her way of showing love and affection. Anyways, life better be going great—you know how you can get a bit off track and work on something new out of the blue. Those emotions of yours, are you managing them well? Remember, you have a terrible habit of letting them spiral out of control. They usually jeopardize the hard work and progress you poured out, so I hope you've grown and tended to them. Did you hit your dream career, or should I say careers? Remember you were thinking of being an independent artist, while working as a mental health counselor. Doing two of your favorite things; creating and drawing paths or at least helping others pave their own path. Either way, no matter what you do, I hope you're excelling in it. Remember your motto, by the famous Greek guy in mythology, or was it Roman mythology? I always messed them up, he said "*Vidi Vici Veni.*" I came, I saw, I conquered.

Love,

Lily

Xoxo



*Fear || Areeba Zanub*

# LETTER TO MY FUTURE SELF ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

*Anna Matskin*

If love ever finds you...  
If the world ever minds you...  
If your soul one day kinds you...  
Let me know...

If good reminds you...  
Let me know...

If society chimes you...  
If a man reminds you...  
That you gotta look at signs...

If you ever need to...  
Put your head down...

Just remember  
A smile is also found in

A pen....  
So remind yourself  
Of yourself. Stop whining...  
And write about it then...

# REMINDER

*Carlos Torres*

if you keep going down that narrow path  
you'll end up in a place you haven't seen before  
when you get there please don't

1. touch the flowers
2. walk into circles where the grass has not grown
3. speak too loudly
4. ask what I mean when I say that lights do much more than reveal what was once hidden
5. stray from the path, because
  - a. you'll get lost, and when you get lost -
  - b. don't look too closely at the skin of the trees you pass

if you keep moving through the house like that  
you'll make it speak words that haven't been written before  
when you hear them please stop

1. touching the walls with those hands
2. pushing at the doors like they'll lead to an exit
3. trying to hear what the floors are saying
4. peeking behind walls to make sure no one's there
5. looking through open windows, or
  - a. your eyes will be seen and they'll
  - b. fill your heart with water to expose the cracks in its armor

if you keep holding on to the cliff edge you've found yourself on  
you'll tire yourself out and fall to your death  
when your head cracks open please try to

1. let go and let the waves take you
2. count to five and speak in the tongues of truth
3. dry yourself off before you go jumping into new waters
4. hold yourself up to your own light instead of another's
5. make choices carefully and chew on them before you swallow, or
  - a. you'll choke on every bite that you thought you could handle, and
  - b. wonder why your words feel so heavy

# LETTERS TO A KID FROM GRAVES[END]

*Nolan Frontera*

Dear Nolan,

I remember being around drugs my whole life.

From people smoking huge blunts at Z Park, to guys shooting up heroin in the lobby of my building. I've seen it all.

Nothing really phased me. I've witnessed drug deals, robberies, girls sucking cock for a stick, OD's...

I've witnessed it all. It's upsetting to say, but I have.

My life is pretty simple though. I've stayed away from the wrong crowd, hung out with decent kids, and never touched drugs really. Sure, I've smoked pot and had a beer here and there, but I think that was what most kids did growing up.

The neighborhood isn't so good. People think it's a good neighborhood, but it really isn't. It's a place that knows where to stab you, whether it's in the back or the front—you're still getting stabbed. And these stabbings aren't necessarily a stabbing with a knife, or any sharp instrument. We're stabbed with different things. Ugly things.

Things we can't see or feel. Stabbings that rip the circulation of not just blood, but of anything.

Your heart becomes a stone that can only be dissolved by the ethanol or the powder of a fermented flower.

No one cares about no one. Here in Graves[end], you just gotta go down a narrow path. Turn your head a little left or a little right, you can catch yourself in a pretty messed up situation. You don't want that. You can turn your head one direction and that's that. It can change your life in a quarter of a second. A pill or a bottle can be on either side of you, and that can be the apple you may bite into—like those two jerk-offs, Adam and Eve. It tempts you. Addictions are a common thing here in Graves[end]. They're the shackles that bind us the most.

Drugs scare me. They really do. Friends, relatives, mothers, fathers—it's to anyone really. They don't have concern for life. Life, to them, is nothing but a blob of walking and talking flesh. A machine.

They were falling in love. First with Mary Jane, everyone having their last dance. And soon they began looking for a lady named Brown Sugar. I've heard she's as sweet as the poppy fields in the East. I guess once you get bored of one, you want the next. What's next though? I honestly don't know kid, and I don't want to find out. The days go and the days keep going and they'll never stop. They never will. Life is just a wheel that keeps turning. Spokes on the wheel, even if they loosen up a bit and fall off, the wheel will keep turning. The wheel never stops for anyone or anybody.

The days go and the days keep going and they'll never stop. They never will. Life is just a wheel that keeps turning. Spokes on the wheel, even if they loosen up a bit and fall off, the wheel will keep turning. The wheel never stops for anyone or anybody.

That's why I walk my narrow path. I never say hi to the people I once knew. They were almost god-like to me—immortal. Still, days go and they keep going and they'll never stop— gods I had once known became mortal. The ones that I had looked up to became slaves to a substance. The elite became the paupers. My heroes became my villains.

Nolan,

I just want to thank you. I want to thank you with my upmost sincerity when I say you saved my life. You saved me from infiltrating within the enemy front. You had a good head on your shoulders. You saw the shit that was going on, and you inhaled every piece of that smelly disgusting shit. You didn't cover your nose like most people nowadays do. Nowadays, when there's a nasty pile of shit on the ground, people just walk by it, with their noses covered and their souls quarantined. We all have an animosity towards the shit, but we need to acknowledge the fact that the shit exists, and that it's important.

We need it to come out of our asshole, eventually.

We cannot be confined to only the beauties of mankind. Even in shit, there is something worthwhile. I mean, farmers found use for it, right?

You're always gonna feel like Holden Caulfield living through the days of 1984. So get used to it. The problems within Graves[end] are unfathomable. They'll forever be. Jesus, with all his power, even he can't change the narcotic frenzy.

Graves[end] with all its deviancy and unnaturalness—Nolan, you will never leave. Even if you manage to embark on the arduous voyage towards the dark side of the moon, you'll never escape Graves[end]. This isn't Shawshank or Alcatraz, where the main character gets out alive—this is Graves[end] and your ass belongs here. Find the benevolence as you stumble across it. It'll be there, you just got to search for it. You'll be okay kid.

I love you bro,

Nolan "Noli-PatZ" Frontera

P.S.

That was the nickname you were given by the Graves[end] Junkies. Hold it as a memento. Never forget where you came from. Never forget they once loved you.

# FUTURISTIC VISION

*Brianna Neal*

I imagine that I am a scientist  
Finding a cure for answers.  
I imagine that I am an inventor  
Building my latest discovery.  
I am anxious to keep waiting,  
Eager to explore this vision.  
Reality is too vulgar.  
I pray I am a survivor.  
With false readings and deceptive cards,  
An imitation doesn't exceed my standards.  
Dear future me,  
Please love yourself.  
Your personality is something to cherish  
Not something to be destroyed.  
This abomination will kill us both  
Be cautious and play the game.

# D.F.S.

*Latife Lita*

Dear future self  
Whether it be twenty years or two  
Please try to stay true to yourself and your health  
Stop feeling so worthless  
You're always so damn sad  
It has to get hard first before things go from good to bad  
Dear future self  
Whether it be twenty years or two  
Look at yourself in the mirror  
Ask  
What can I do?  
Stop immersing yourself in darkness  
Stop using it as a shield  
Push yourself to believe all your pain will be healed  
Dear future self  
Whether it be twenty years or two  
Look at where you are now and all you went through  
The worst of it is over  
The storm has finally passed  
Don't you ever turn your back and sulk in the past.



# TO MY FUTURE SELF

*Charlene Catalano*

At the age of fourteen, I wrote a letter in my middle school yearbook from the perspective of my thirty-four-year-old self. Here is a response to that letter.

Hello,

Wow, I would first like to apologize for not writing back to you. I have successfully received your letter addressed to me in our middle school yearbook. I must say, I'm pretty sure that you're lying about what the future has in store for me once I become thirty-four years old. For starters, you claimed that I would become the "CEO of a major marine biology corporation" but let's face it, I'm meant to be a teacher. You loved tutoring your peers just for the fun of it. Clearly it was, and still is, your calling. I'm pretty sure you were sitting in your classroom while writing that statement in an effort to mess with me. I see that you still have that crazy sense of humor. You also mentioned that you named our future dog Charlotte. Let's face it, you named your dog Checkers. It's a fun game which takes intelligence and strategy and you absolutely love it.

Our love of the game was especially brought to our attention after our friend bought it for our birthday. However, I will say that you must be truthful when it comes to reminiscing about the past. I do still miss middle school and the memories that came with it. After all, it was a part of what made us who we are today. You failed to talk about what happened in high school. I'm not sure why, because those were some fun times. We developed friendships which grew well into college. I hope that your life is filled with nothing but joy and and I will work hard to make sure of it. Once again, I would like to thank you for the last letter you have sent me. I have been meaning to write back. It's just that I was waiting for the right opportunity to do so.

Sincerely,  
Charlene Catalano



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join our staff!

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Format Editing  
Photography  
Graphic Design  
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**GET STUCK!**