



THREADS 2020

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The State University
of New York

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Message from the Editors

We would like to thank all the students who submitted their work to *Threads* this year. We received many quality submissions, and we continue to read with pleasure the enthusiasm and creativity each submission presents. Of course, all pieces have merit, and we would like to publish everything submitted, but the limitations of space will simply not allow it.

It is important to note that *Threads* reflects works that are not necessarily perfect in their format and composition, but exhibit insight, creativity, social awareness, and a unique perspective. These works—of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and visual art—reflect the range of experience, culture, and imagination of the Hudson Valley Community College student. The editors relish the opportunity to travel and explore the territory each new issue stakes out.

Every year we are extremely pleased to highlight the exceptional work of the students at Hudson Valley Community College. Please plan your submission for next year.

Please submit your work to *Threads* electronically. Visit us at <http://clubs.hvcc.edu/threads> for more information.

Happy reading!

– *Threads* editors

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* Threads Art Award Winner, ** Dr. Maria Palmara Award for Creative Writing,
*** Threads Writing Award Winner

Dear Dad

Janine Alaxanian

It wasn't until she got the phone call, the one from a friend that she left. Maybe she hadn't realized how scared she actually was until then.

She was just shy of giving birth when she asked to stay with Aunt Kimmy for a while. Aunt Kimmy, of course, was ecstatic, even helping her pay for the plane ticket. Her mother had suggested that she wait until she gave birth. Since her little girl would be showing her face any day now.

It was a last minute decision to give her newborn daughter up for adoption. She had to look out for herself and her eldest daughter, Lucie, who was seven years old. Lucie never questioned why she and her mother spontaneously moved from Massachusetts to North Dakota, and she didn't seem to mind having to change schools. It's like she understood her mother was trying to protect her, that it was for the best.

Giving up her daughter was hard for her, but she knew it had to be done. What sense was it to put another person in harm's way, if you don't have to? Her parents were distraught; however, her sister understood.

Life was good for a while, almost two years. She had gotten in a new job in her field of interest, something she was never able to do. She was able to meet new friends. She was able to take Lucie to the park whenever she wanted without the deep sense of presumably utter fear when the dad from down the street chatted as their children played. She helped organize fundraisers and events at Lucie's school. Maybe she did too much; maybe she should have lain low for a little longer. Or maybe time was up, and what she had always feared would happen was finally here.

There was a fundraiser around Thanksgiving of 2018 where the school was able to raise two thousand dollars for the nearby children's' hospital, so they could have the holiday season they deserved. The fundraiser made local news and caught the attention of the mayor who spent his thanksgiving serving out dinner to the children.

Maybe that was why he never stopped looking for her in the first place. He probably searched every day, keeping tabs on her family and awaiting her possible return.

It was just two nights before Christmas. She and Lucie were probably drinking hot chocolate and watching Christmas movies before bed. They were probably happy, giggling, and having a good time. They probably felt like they were safe. They had become too comfortable.

That night, two bodies were recovered from her apartment.

He was never convicted, and he never returned after that. The only possible evidence was a plane ticket into Grand Forks International Airport, a mere twenty minutes away from her apartment.

...

I met my mother when I was five, or so I should say, she found me when I was five. I remember seeing her walk in, like all the rest do. Except this time, she looked at me. She looked at me and a waterfall came splashing off her face. She was sobbing so hard she resembled a plum. She said she had been looking everywhere for me, and after that, we flew to my new home in Vermont.

It was the summer before high school that my parents sat me down in our kitchen and told me everything. It was then that I found out that my parents were my grandparents, and it was then that I found out I had a mother and a sister.

It's been years since I found out and I no longer live in questionable fear. Maybe it was moving to a different country that brought my nerves to a simmer, or maybe it was seeing a police blotter from back home with your name in it. You were being charged with four counts of first degree murder.

Did it make you feel powerful? I wonder, are you actually incredibly insecure? Does hurting, chopping down, and ultimately murdering the ones you're said to love, make you feel bigger than you actually are? I know you must think you're an all-powerful being that everyone must bow to your wishes and commands or face the consequences. I have seen many like yourself, and I feel obligated to let you in on what you really are: a coward.

I'm not sure you remember me, or even know I exist. My whole purpose of this letter is to tell you one thing.

My mother will never die. Her soul, her light, and her love will forever be alive in everyone before and after her; in my grandmother, in me, and in my daughter. I want you to think about that, remember it every day of your life. I hope it drives you utterly, completely mad.

– Your daughter

Old Thoughts, New Thoughts (Palindrome)

Desiree Larrivée

*(Meant to be read from top to bottom,
then bottom to top)*

Lost in a sea of doubt
I am no longer
Smart, capable, outstanding, and impressive
I believe that I am
Living my life in the most mediocre fashion
There's no need to feel like I'm
Worth people's time and thoughts
The voice in my head whispers to me I'm
Just a poor excuse for a human
No one should think they are
Worthless and meaningless
The anxiety I feel,
Is hard to cope with
And this depression never
Leaves my body
The self-loathing I feel
Has a grip on the steering wheel
The motivation to live up to my potential
Is in reverse
My loss of confidence
Holds me down from believing in myself
Absolutely nothing
Awaits my future and
My dream

Finally Father

Michaela Barnes

The radiating warmth and brightness of the sunrise welcomes me as soon as I step out of our 2006 Chevy Malibu. I take a glance at our temporary home for the next week. Multiple palm trees cover the front yard, and I spy a lizard running stealthily along the sidewalk to avoid predators. The white house has a wrap-around porch that leads you to the backyard which has a rustic patio and an in-ground pool. A transparent screen surrounds the backyard, and I can see an alligator wading in the creek in search of its next meal. As happy as I should be to be able to bask in the beautiful area of Kissimmee, a lingering sense of agitation and fear consumes me.

I turn sixteen years old today at 6:20 PM, and all I should be thinking about is my impending permit test when I return to New York. However, my age isn't even the first thought on my mind. This day is one that it seems I've been waiting on forever, and the reasoning makes my birthday seem irrelevant. I can't consider any sort of celebration with the overwhelming sense of uncertainty weighing on my shoulders. Today is the day I will encounter my father for the very first time since the day of my birth, which is unfortunately a memory I don't have access to.

Sixteen years ago, on this very day, my mother and father celebrated the birth of their one and only daughter right here in The Sunshine State. Even my welcoming into the world couldn't keep them together for more than six months. My mother packed all of our stuff up, and we moved up to New York to create a life without my father in it.

As soon as I was old enough to read, postcards and letters from my father flooded my mailbox. Our relationship was based solely off these letters and some phone calls. I awaited every opportunity I had to speak to him, but those opportunities came sparingly. Every year on my birthday, I only had one thought in my mind when I blew out a candle. I wish he was here. I sat around for nearly sixteen years desperately hoping he would magically show up and ring the doorbell.

After spending so much time dreaming about this moment, the doorbell finally rings. I quickly jump out of my queen-sized bed in the rental home, and run towards the red stained-glass door. I come to a halt and pace back and forth for a few moments in the entrance-way. My hand begins to quiver uncontrollably as I reach towards the doorknob.

With one last deep breath, I open the door. I hesitantly look up and expect to be met with piercing hazel eyes that mirror my own. I expect to see square-framed glasses resting on his slightly crooked nose. I expect to see him in his favorite Tampa Bay Rays t-shirt that he mentioned repeatedly over the phone. To my surprise, there's no person standing in front of me.

I step outside and peer around the front yard. Is he playing some twisted game of hide-and-seek? Instead of finding him, I spy a 2009 Chevy Impala reversing out of the driveway and speeding out of the neighborhood without a second glance. I don't even get the chance to see the face of the driver. I collapse onto the grass as tears stream down my face uncontrollably. Feelings of confusion and anger spread through me as my entire body begins to tremble. Why would my father show up if he had no intention of being there when I opened the door? I pull myself together as best as I can and retreat back to the front door.

As I walk up the steps to the porch, I spy a red envelope on the rocking chair with cursive writing scribbled across it: "Dear Michaela".

I quickly grab the envelope and step back defeated into the house unwillingly alone. I disappear into my bedroom and sit cross-legged on the couch before hastily opening the envelope. I pull out a birthday card with flowers and sparkles on it surrounding the number: "16".

I open the card and see the same scribbled handwriting: "I will never be the father you need."

I never thought one sentence could hurt so much, but reading these words over and over in my head make me feel as if my heart is being ripped out of my chest. These eight words are enough to make my whole world come crashing down around me. No pain or heartbreak will ever compare to the wrench in my gut after reading what may be the last I'll ever hear from my father.

I spent years wishing for the doorbell to ring, and now I'm left wishing it never did.

Healing Begins

By Leithe Miller Kramer

The chill of mid-October is settling slowly to winter. Oranges, pinks, and yellows paint most of the sky, but the contrasting navy blues, purples, and indigos creep up from the East as the sun says goodnight in the West. Around is the faint but lively pattering of my family, retracing the evening's daily routine. As a beggar does the rich man, I envy the peace that seems out of reach; my mind begs for a shred of tranquility but only meets the muffled scream of mental disorder. Still, I sit frozen to the chair beneath me, eyes glued unseeingly to the screen before me. Nothing is playing, no pounding or soothing beats of melody emanate from the headphones buried in my ears, and the screen is seemingly blank.

Before I recognize what is happening, my environment turns cold with the grasp of flashback, as a filter falls across my eyes, blurring reality with a tape of time past. His voice whispers in my ear, hands ghosting my shoulders and spine. The heat of his breath chills me as I try to fight my memory with no avail. My body is no longer mine. A prickling sensation spreads ripping through my body as a wildfire does California's hills. My skin itches from his touch as roaring flames lick through my neurons in angry abandon.

But as the sun breaks on a rainy day, the bombardment of memorized thoughts centering on a monster's smirk severs with the birth of inspiration and an inkling of motivation. Haze falls away just enough to see programs and web browsers messily cluttering my laptop. My trembling hands begin the work of dancing across the keyboard like a pianist's on their white ivory keys. No music flies from my creation, instead simple words.

These special words come to life upon my laptop screen, a cinema of my own memory behind my eyes and inside my ears. These sights and sounds plaguing my every breath steal the air from my lungs, as healing wounds rip open again, oozing with unsaid words and screamed denials. The swirl of ignored trauma settles like a restless poltergeist; my body is an entrapping tomb of mayhem. Only with an exorcising methodology of faith will my painful partner and I be free; however, of what faith is the question. I have yet to find an answer, but as more words fill the automated paper, clarity blooms in front of me.

Matrixes of code encrypted into my complex model of modern luxury, throw letter upon letter onto a fake piece of paper to form words that express me. A stream-like pattern of the ebbing and flowing words build a Lego block body, snapping into place; sometimes, taken apart piece by piece until a satisfying flow of fragmented sentences fall into a comfortable organization. A poem takes messy form from the Lego frame, and creativity truly takes flight.

After what feels like days and months, breath returns to my dust-filled lungs. Breath after breath of air that no longer feels quite so stagnant greedily inhaled into my desperate frame. Releasing the warped thoughts that poison my mind, a great breath of relief comes. Each exhale feels lighter, as if a burden has loosened its grip of me. With a moment of newfound clarity, I take a good look at the wordy art piece created by blind fingertips.

Now, my eyes devour a constantly retold tale of a scared girl and a monster. Her anguish and fear feel so real, as if these feelings were my own. The monster massive, with a toothy grin that could swallow the little girl whole, coaxes her nearer. His breath reeks of deceit but the little girl's nose is too busy with the flowers of her basket. His voice filled with lies, but she cannot hear the notes of falsehood.

As the story unfolds before me, pulling at the aches and pains of my body, like a good workout would, my body relaxes. The prickle that consumed me lets go with a deep exhale, and a restless buzz of anxiety-fried nerves settles into a relaxed cricket-chirping quiet beneath my skin. Muscles oversaturated with adrenaline begin to mitigate. Like storm clouds giving way to a rainbow, the pressure behind my temple drifts away and my body is my own again. For no longer does a poltergeist sit upon my shoulder screaming in my ear, and control is wholly by my command.

With the security of a mother's hug, a forgotten smile tugs its way to my chapped lips for the first time in who knows how long. Words flow as a balm to agitated skin, enriching and healing the underlying pained wounds. Stars twinkle outside my window, drawn to the majesty of glimmering fireflies many light years away over the proud mountains of my home. My words dispel some of the clouds that plague me so that my wounds may heal. Peace grips the tall peaks soft and sternly; perhaps, it may hold me too. For tomorrow the sun will rise, a new day will begin, and maybe so will another poem.

Canvas

Kaloni Borno

Everything was just right.
 The smell of the dewy air
 The liveliness of dancing flowers in the wind
 The playfulness of the untamed animals
 To every performance, the clouds provide as it
 Moves along in the sky
 It was the day I'd carefully crafted and painted my
 masterpiece
 You.

Ah, where do I even begin
 The perfect match for your skin
 Is this unforgivable blend
 Of colors.

My color palette assorted
 In hues of honey and amber
 Like the taste buds orbiting on my tongue
 In colors.

I'd stroke the paintbrush with patient and attitude
 Creating shapes and patterns
 From places, you allude
 In color.

You were the canvas I wanted to paint
 As I take
 My finger and trace
 The very beautiful outline of you
 Through colors.

I am nearly appreciating your flaws,
 Imperfections,
 And Stains
 Did I mention just in
 Color?

I didn't want this day to end
 You were my peace of mind
 From the sun rising to the moon
 shining.
 Just as my finish piece
 In color.

Guilin Landscape

Yang Liu

I had heard of Guilin in China for a long time. People would say, "Guilin's scenery is peerless in the world." Finally, I had the opportunity to go to Guilin, a place I had always dreamed of. I was not disappointed; the landscape in Guilin is like a paradise on earth.

The scenery along the Lijiang River in Guilin is like a beautiful landscape painting. Boating on the river, I hear the water lapping quietly. The weeping willows on the riverside lower their heads, and the green branches sway in the breeze, as if they are dancing, with a rustling sound. The hazy fog covers the river; the feeling is like flying through the clouds. Occasionally, there are birds chirping. The sounds of flowing water, birds, and trees compose a beautiful melody. Sometimes, the water splashes into the boat and wets my hair. I close my eyes, and breathe the fresh and sweet air, which mixes with the smell of soil and flowers in the early morning. At this moment, I can't help but be intoxicated with the beauty of the scenery along the Lijiang River.

After the fog gradually disperses, the scenery in front is clearly visible. There are strange shapes of underground mountains visible in the river; some of them are like elephants' noses, some are like young girls picking flowers, some are like medieval castles, and some are like eagles flying high. When the sunlight passes through the clouds and sprinkles on the river, the river is sparkling and reflects the mountains. The beautiful water and mountains add radiance and beauty to each other, creating an elegant impression.

As the saying goes, "Seeing is better than hearing." It's only when you have been to Guilin that you know how fascinating it is. The natural landscape in Guilin is so colorful, that each view resembles a Chinese ink and wash painting. I believe that if you come to Guilin, you will also love this place.

Broken Things

Madison Hayes

It's weird, isn't it? How something that used to be so full of life and busy with the common hustle and bustle could just cease to be what it once was.

The abandoned hospital sits back from the main road, shrouded in vines and overgrown foliage no one had bothered to clean up since it closed its doors for the last time. From the street, it looks like nothing but an eerie building that had outlived its purpose and been forgotten. A sign that once proudly greeted patients as they drove in has been hastily removed, as if that could make anyone forget, and the parking lot sits off to the side, empty, with cracked pavement. The dilapidated structure towers at least five stories high, casting shadows everywhere. Every window and door leading to the first floor were carelessly boarded up in a vain attempt to keep trespassers from entering the somber premises. Graffiti streaks the aging concrete in lewd and profanity stricken phrases, tarnishing the once reputable nature of the hospital that had tended to people for years before its end.

The inside was something considerably more chilling. The bottom floor is pitch black and silent. The air is pungent of a musty scent of stale water. It's hard to tell where you are, as all signs and indications of life have either been harshly ripped down or removed altogether. The empty elevator shafts are defiled with similar street art as the outside, much like the rest of the walls surrounding you, and they sit, open and empty. You look down into the depths of the dark abyss and faintly see murky water lapping at the wall from the flooded basement. The cafeteria is completely deserted, leaving no indication that anyone had ever stepped foot there, vacant of any and all memories. Cobwebs and dust cake every surface, almost suffocating you as you try to inhale. Even more disturbingly, one of the several offices stands out. Unlike the others, it's not void of any and all artifacts, various medical equipment is thrown around the floor as rusted drawers and cabinets hang open, as if someone had frantically come looking for something. It's an extension of the morgue. This being indicated by three metal trays long enough to lay a body on which can be slid out from grimy wall, releasing an eerie and

piercing screech as rust grinds with old metal that hadn't been touched in twenty years. The room is cold and uninviting, and it's not long before you want to move on.

The upper levels, unlike below, are a sight to marvel at. The many shattered windows are the only thing that filters any light into the realm of darkness. The occasional gust of wind would push through the shattered windows on the top floor, chilling the building to an almost unbearable low. The soft howl from it breaks the otherwise deafening quiet, and it causes the tattered white curtains that were left behind to perform a macabre dance. Here, time seems to stand still. The rooms are frozen as if waiting for someone to return to them. Equipment, beds, chairs and various other items are strewn carelessly across floor. The feeling of loneliness is also accompanied by a sadness, so many had walked these halls, stayed in these rooms, and now it's been left to rot and wither away to nothing. The walls themselves shift and creak and the looming emptiness of the building is something you want to run from, but you can't escape it.

Your footsteps echo and bounce off the worn interior, and you vaguely think you can hear the faint whispers of a past conversation that occurred long before this happened. A lone wheelchair sits alone in the center of a deserted hallway, encased in the damp debris that had crumpled from the unstable ceiling above you. Water drips from the broken pipes in a rhythm, a melancholy tune that performs with the whine of the wind from the outside. The long staircases lead you up to the roof, and from it, you can see the entire landscape of the vast city that surrounds the empty building. Despite its tarnished appearance, the hospital was oddly beautiful, in an underrated sort of way. It was beautiful because of its history, and how it retains an old charm. Most wouldn't give it a second thought, and might even shake their head in disgust at how anyone could stand the sight of such a worn building. However, some find beauty even in the broken things.

Social Issues Poem

Ne'Icis Tillery

Police Brutality
 Gun vs Skin
 Weather he's driving
 Or walking, he has
 To give in.
 Blue and red sirens
 Is all we hear
 Put your hands up
 Stop right there.
 They'll beat you down
 They won't care whose watching
 Or how many cameras are around.
 Boom! Boom! Boom!
 The sound of ten officers
 Only on one guy.
 I bet you the victim doesn't even know why.
 Gun vs Skin
 Just because he's 6'1,
 Muscular and dark
 He's a target and officers can do what they want.
 You thought you were safe
 You thought you were normal
 But why must you seem so immortal.
 Getting pulled over for going a mile over the limit
 Do they know how many other races have did it?
 Approaching the window hand on gun
 You have no choice but to sit there
 You'll get shot if you run.
 Where was that fight or flight?
 Oh yeah, that's not a thing
 When it comes to police,
 Especially when you aren't their kind.

Fulfilling Absence

Cindy Sage

Pinning my runner I.D. on my “Color Vibe” t-shirt, I felt official; officially, an outsider.

Scanning the crowd of legitimate runners, I wondered if I looked like an imposter, a “first timer.” I sure felt like one. However, I was on a mission to prove to myself I belonged among the runners, and fulfill the unattained dreams heavily saturating the air around me. Standing among the crowd of competitors, I felt like an odd puzzle piece, unsure of where I fit. Glancing at fellow runners bathed in pink, blue, and yellow powder that was plastered across them, I hoped my inner athlete would show up. Uneasily, my sweaty palms clenched at my side. I told myself it was the warm summer air swirling around my body; knowing, it was my apprehension to complete my first 5k.

Reluctantly, excitement was growing within me. The sweet vibrations of the thumping bass began to sooth my soul while endless clouds of neon powder flooded the sky, distracting my nerves. Maybe my dark tinted sunglasses were shading the uncertainty in my eyes and giving me false security. Or perhaps, the pre-race neon war paint strewn across my body was camouflaging my doubt. Regardless, I welcomed the energy of the seasoned participants that engulfed all of my uncertainties. After the race, I was on a quest for myself and for her.

Once being summoned and herded like cattle to the starting line at the Altamont fairground, we waited impatiently. Meanwhile, the sun was rising leaving nowhere to hide from its persistent rays. There wasn't a tree in sight, only neighboring corn fields dancing in the warm, summer breeze. In the heat of the moment seeming to last forever, my heart rate was rising, and my neon disguise fading in the broad daylight. Taking a long, deep, confirming breath, I convinced myself my determination would carry us through.

Before I could decide otherwise, voices rang out through the speakers, and we took off charging like the front line on a battlefield. Chuckling, I envisioned myself with a club or sword in my hand, pitying anyone in my path. After all, today is the day I will slay a dream; our dream, of one day becoming runners.

Once the novelty of the initial surge began to die down, so did the crowd around me. Instead, the herd of charging bulls had become more like a scattered flock of swimming geese. As the intensity seemed to diminish, the fire inside me was spreading rapidly. Previously, I wondered if I belonged here without her, but my drive for finishing our race was accelerating my speed. As my body begged me to stop, and it did, I continued to pass fellow competitors. Every man, woman, and child behind me, along with her memory, became a mere gust of wind fanning my flame. Consistently, multiple neon powder loaded checkpoints sprayed me with a different hue of a powdery disguise, but the colors were no longer my crutch. The once welcoming arms of the crowd diminished, and I was set free. And although there was no one running next to me, I was not alone.

Now the sun was even higher in the sky, and its rays beat against my skin with fury. My sweat soaked tee-shirt was becoming heavier, and my legs swollen and tired from the relentless pounding of step after step. I had to be getting close as I could once again hear the music thumping, and like an old friend, she sang to my soul.

As I cleared the edge of the corn field, pebbles atop the dirt road crunched beneath my feet, and I knew the finish-line was near. I sprinted, running faster than ever before. Determined, I ran as if the fear of her loss was chomping at my feet. However, today the uncertainty I shed like a winter coat would not catch me.

Finally, crossing the finish-line and struggling to catch my breath it hit me; I didn't die. In fact, I've never felt so alive. Even the neon pink powder spattering my sunglasses couldn't hide the excitement in my eyes as my pounding heart successfully drowned out the music. All I could see was vivid memories of Lindsey with her long, dark hair and piercing blue eyes, happily playing with her beautiful daughters. Today, I ran as one person carrying the weight of two.

Standing on the pressed grass with my eyes closed and my head tilted back, I just breathed, for I had completed our goal of running a 5K. Every deep breath confirmed I belong here. And just like that, the air around me was no longer saturated with unattained dreams. As a single tear cleared a path down my neon cheek, I smiled. Lindsey's memory would never die.

Public Speaking

Anna Clement

Eyes stare
 Stares penetrate
 Penetrate my walls
 Walls sink
 Sinking confidence
 Confidence disappears
 Disappearance of words
 Words slip my mind
 Mind compressed
 Compressed by these eyes
 Eyes that judge
 Judge the shaking hands
 Hands that reveal
 Reveal the fear
 Fear of standing
 Standing in front of so many eyes
 Eyes that smile
 And roll
 And critique
 Critiques that boil
 Boil away confidence
 Confidence that hides
 Hides when feet turn
 Turn to face a crowd
 Crowds cloud
 Cloud a sound mind
 Mind you, I know what I'm presenting on
 On second thought, I can't remember
 Remember the attention a child seeks
 Seek to prove knowledge
 Knowledge on a topic I love
 Love nothing more than to be done
 Done standing
 And proving

And shaking
 Shake off the fear
 Fear of judgement
 Judgement from others
 Others see the brilliance
 "Brilliant of you to say that"
 "That idea was cutting-edge"
 Edge of a cliff, where your heart waits
 Waits for a drop in your stomach
 Stomach churned by self-induced fear
 Fear from anxiety
 Anxiety from impending doom
 Doom? Don't be dramatic
 Drama shakes these hands
 Hands created a masterpiece
 Piece together shards
 Shards of a broken confidence
 Confident and smiling
 Smile in their faces
 Face the fear
 Fear you once hid from
 From this, you will grow

Fire By the Lake

Chris Taaffe

I struck the match with one smooth motion. The flame came to life and danced its way up the stick for a moment. I then knelt down and touched it to the bottom of the neatly stacked pile of wood. A few large logs leaned against one another to form a cozy little cottage for the smaller sticks and branches underneath. The tightly packed pine needles on the bottom let out a few last bits of moisture with a sigh, as the flame expanded over them.

I heard a loon call in the distance and looked out at the lake. It was a perfect rendering of the sky above, only broken here and there by a few lazy ripples in the water. I thought perhaps I'd go fishing again in the morning.

I instinctively tried to grab my phone from my pocket to check the time, only to remember I turned it off and set it on the dresser a few days ago. It must have been after eight o'clock. The last few purple rays of sun peeked out from behind the mountain on the other side of the lake. I watched for a few moments as the darkness of night completely washed them away. The stars shimmered like Christmas lights through the branches of the pines. With a small sense of pride, I spotted the Big Dipper and Orion. The only constellations I knew.

I sat down on the stump of a large tree that had long ago retired. The fire was growing larger now and I could feel its warmth on my legs. I picked up a stick and poked one of the larger logs down into the flames. Embers swirled out from the bottom like a Van Gogh painting come to life. The soft breeze carried them upward as if to join the stars.

My wife emerged from the cabin with a red Solo cup in each hand. The kids had finally gone to sleep. She handed me a cup as she sat down in a folding chair beside me. Inside was a rather large pour of white wine. I sat up straight extending my neck and raising my eyebrows in a mocked level of sophistication. She shrugged her shoulders back at me and raised her cup in my direction. I touched my cup to hers then gently took a sip. The taste reminded me of burnt plastic. My wife wrinkled her nose and stuck out her tongue as she disposed of the liquid on the ground next to her. I smiled and downed another gulp as if it were a shot of whiskey.

We sat glaring at the ballet of flames in front of us for some time. The fire got smaller and smaller and the night got colder and colder. She looked over at me and yawned. I nodded in agreement. I slowly rose up and walked over to the edge of the lake. A tin bait bucket sat there on a large rock. I filled it with water as I looked up at Orion once again. A few drops splashed over the edge as I walked back to the fire. Only a few glowing bits of coal remained. I slowly emptied the bucket over them and stood back as the blanket of smoke rose and vanished among the trees. I placed the bucket on the ground, glanced at the stars one more time and walked inside.



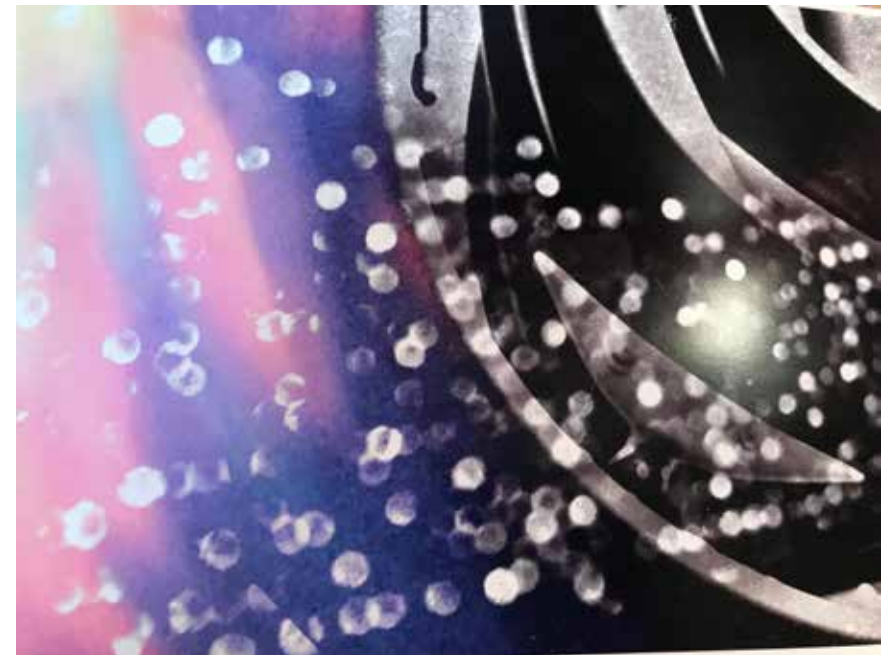
Destinée Kearsing, *The Brooklyn Cubist*



Michael Groissl, *Kyiv, Ukraine*



Natalie Colberg, *Sci-Fi*



Megan Hale, *Vortex 1; Vortex 2*



Brandon Wilson, *Views*



Destinée Kearsing, *Artificial Sunlight on Succulents*

Paper Magic

Sean DuBois

New troops arrive. The smell of plastic is in the air as they shed their gleaming coat for the first time. Fifty-two rectangular paper knights, feeling like fine sugar yet softly reflecting a nearby lantern, slip through the air. Intermixing with the others, first one then another. They settle and group together before entering this unstable state again, going from a solid formation to a smooth flowing, almost living, mass. When they come together like the cells of some creature, they look the same as before. Though inside their camouflaging shell, unseen they have regrouped into something new and unknowable.

A cold breeze blows through the tent and the deal begins, 14 heroes are stripped from the rest, thrown to the cold ground and split up into groups for the coming fight. Two mighty sides, two mighty leaders. They rise being surveyed by friend and foe alike, though only their proud champions see them for what they truly are. Their leaders, ever so cunning, begin to silently plan. The knights wait on, like seeds in winter for the race to begin. They shuffle nervously around waiting for their orders. The others, waiting to be chosen, watch on silently, lifeless. The games commence. One more shining soldier joins each side. Three of the west army's knights thunder to the field. The east forces produce a warrior of their own. Fallen soldiers are sent to their grave, never being seen, never to fight. Once again, more fighters join each side. This time no orders are issued, save for that which send two more to their grave. Over and over more soldiers come, more soldiers go, and some go to fight for their champion. They clash again and again. Many men fall, though some survive to join with the other veterans in their place of honor.

As the frantic war comes to a close, both sides tally their ragged survivors. Their men start to organize themselves back into something like an army. Even though they were evenly matched one side emerges victorious, besting the other by only a few troops. The commanders reintegrate both their troops into one force again and send them to their home on their musty dirt shelf. A loud klaxon sounds and the men settle down in their dusty home they share with a few ants, as their once brave leaders go off to fight in a battle of their own. There they will stay, waiting and watching until the day when they are called to fight once more.

La Sagrada Familia: My Favorite Place in the World

Maddie McTigue

As I was waiting in the backseat of a taxi about 10 blocks away, I began to smell and see it. A mild odor of sea and city wafting in from the cracked window. The sunlight was beaming down, almost blinding my delicate eyes, but I peered through and saw this amazing sight, La Sagrada Familia, in my favorite city in the world, Barcelona, Spain.

This breathtaking building stands at 560 feet tall and takes up more than an average city block. The sheer size of this building is enough to astonish anyone. It is hard to describe the awesomeness of seeing anything this large. Standing 5 blocks away, you can see the top half of the structure and it seems to become larger and larger with every step taken. It seems to get more beautiful the closer you get as well, and just wait until you enter the building! Once you arrive at one of the surrounding streets, you can't help but immediately look up. Imagine a skyscraper, but La Sagrada Familia is the most beautiful church you have ever seen in your life. Even the outside is covered in intricate carvings and sculpture and stained glass that shines like diamonds from heaven and there are religious symbols on every open space. I'm not religious at all, a self-described atheist as a matter of fact, so my astonishment by a religious building is saying something. The facade looks to be covered in the city's dirt and grime from the insane amount of detail. I remember trying to take a picture of the front while waiting in line. It was almost impossible to capture the whole image, and some 10 feet of the uppermost building missing from my picture.

Now you enter. Once you get inside the building, you will pass through a metal detector and search as a precaution and then the light hits you. It is so bright inside this building. There is an angelic glow, with hand-cut stained glass every color of the rainbow, covering about 50% of the surfaces interior causing a sheer rainbow of color parading down from the ceiling onto the walls. And then you look up again, and the columns seem to go right up into heaven with a seemingly never-ending ceiling.

If you could enter that building alone, without all the tourists, you would be absolutely starstruck. There are three levels to the church but the day I happened to be there only one was open, the main floor. You'll find a crypt if you sneak in the back and look through small windows, below your feet on the lowest level.

Once you leave the building and look at it from the back, the view is even better, with a clearer view of the towers and an enormous dome hanging off the back, looking like a white, beehive structure, covered in colorful glass circles. The dome stands about 200 feet high and almost looks like an alien structure.

After I left the grounds, my friends and I walked down the block and still the odor of sea drifted into my nose as we made our way into a small bar. I took a seat at the counter, which seemed to be made out of bright green dollar bills, the greenest I've ever seen, and reminded me what I was in Barcelona to do. Have fun! So I asked for a shot of absinthe and felt my body immediately become warm, and that fiery taste of anise and alcohol stayed in my mouth. The rest of the day is hard to remember precisely, but we all ended up at the whitest sands I've ever seen on the Mataró beach and the delightful scent of the sea was the only thing I could clearly remember.

The next day I woke up in my best friend's enormous mansion to the smells of Iberico ham and eggs cooking for breakfast, and into my room she comes with a joint in her hand, burning the strongest smelling marijuana I've ever experienced, asking me, "How do you like Barcelona, Maddie?" to which I respond "It's my favorite place in the world, Estela."

Your Betrayal Still Stings

Leithe Miller Kramer

The tempting want is a hard thing to temper
 This temptation wrought by childlike desires
 A hard thing to tame
 To leash down with logic
 No chain is strong enough to bind these traitorous thoughts
 Not when it is a child's hand that reaches out to them
 Beckoning them with the beacon of innocence
 Not yet spoiled by reality.

The starving want for your touch has never been something I've been able to train myself out of
 This treacherous want that refuses to submit in hopes that you'll come back.

I remember you holding me to your chest
 Smooth arms gently wrapped around me
 You softly singing "You are my sunshine"
 As if I were the only thing that mattered in that childhood memory that bounces and sways as you did in your kitchen
 And maybe in that long-buried memory
 I was the only thing that mattered to you in that snapshot of time
 That little girl cheerfully singing along
 A treasured, locked away childhood thought I can't bear to get rid of
 It sparks too much joy that, though lost, reminds me of when I was a young little girl with long blond hair
 A little girl you used to treasure

She cast her wings and flew away from the winds of your abuse.

Your storms too much
 Your love not enough

And yet, still, the call of your memory draws me back to you

This screaming cry in my chest whenever I see you is getting old
 It's been years since your touch has grazed my skin and I still crave it more.

Sometimes your voice rings in my ears, a siren song to a distance fond heart.

The time that stretches further with no end in sight sears my heartstrings
so bright they sing
But not in the pleasant song of love

No
Like the tortured snarling whimper of a beaten animal
Of betrayal that finds no healing
I'm not saying I'm eternally broken, instead
These wounds you left
Open and oozing
Are now scars
Puckered and achy
But still there

Their memory, not something so easily mistaken, nor forgotten
They tell me that time heals wounds
But that is about romantic loves, simplicity
Not a broken family's splintered tree stump of affection
Whereas broken as we were in our ways,
at the end of the day we still at least tried to pretend
To care
To know
To ignore

But the sheep often don't see the wolf,
if he is wearing their clothing.
No one is safe, when either no one cares to notice or would rather keep
their heads in fluffy, white clouds
Cotton filled ears are deaf to little girls who cry wolf
Your ears fell deaf when I called wolf

Yet still, here I stand
Still waiting for you to come back
And realize the wolf's teeth are not so nice
His breath reeks
Why can't you smell it?
His eyes pierce
Why can't you feel it
His words are lies
Why can't you see it?

Invisibility

Grace Finin

I wish to be portrayed as
Someone you don't see.

Someone who is
Always in need
Yet,
Constantly helps others succeed.

Remember me
As a fire
Besides the sea.
The fire will burn out
And find itself
Immersed within the sand.

Finally, I am at peace.
I am debris of rocks and ash
That lay underneath the sea.

I am no longer being ignited
By others around me.
I feel the warmth of the water.
The sand in between.
The sunlight shining in.

I wonder how it would be,
To be the waves that are crashing above me.

But then I think,
Invisibility.

I Don't Take Recommendations (It Ruins the Fun)

Hayley Gorman

When I was seventeen, I wrote, "There are books that you always insist that you'll get around to reading. There are books that you know you'll never read, but stay on the shelf anyway. There are books that you keep after you've finished them, just to look at the spine, to reminisce about, to re-read the last few pages." I want to elaborate. Most of those times when you're standing in front of your bookshelf at three in the morning, scanning those few special passages before the pages taper off, you're already crying. You need a shoulder to read on.

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger. Why did everyone else in my tenth grade English class treat this book as if it was the dirt under the heel? Why did they call Holden whiny and complain that nothing actually happens? I asked my teacher, the one who was deaf in one ear and referred to her beau only as her "man-friend," and would always say that we had "places to be, people to see, towns to topple." She told me that someone who's been through a hard life, a painful life, would understand him, and if you hadn't, you wouldn't get it. I was sweating bullets when Holden woke up to his teacher stroking his hair, and nearly screamed into the pages as he walked through the city, dissociating and afraid, just wanting to save the children that the world would try to slowly kill. I got a nicer copy of the book as a gift, but still keep my old, beat up one, as long as the base of my palm to the tip of my middle finger, cracked and frayed and well-loved. "It's funny. Don't ever tell anyone anything. If you do, you start missing everybody."

The Book of Dahlia by Elisa Albert. I got this on sale at the bookstore tucked around the street corner at my old campus, the one that I abandoned suddenly at the crack of dawn and never stepped foot on again. Dahlia, poor young Dahlia, is finally succumbing to her brain tumor. As her panic waxes and wanes, trying to catch in her weak hand the memories whizzing through her head, I felt my heart leap into my mouth as I turned the page and saw the next one stark white. I finished it in the passenger seat of the car, alone, on a wonderfully sunny day with

the windows cracked. I wanted to be Dahlia's friend. "She wasn't ready. She wasn't ready. She wasn't ready."

The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien. I moved into American Lit English because my British Literature class was a crock of shit, and I already loved my half-deaf teacher from the year before who told me that I had something smart about me. I came into the class the day everyone was being assigned a project for the book, and she handed me a copy, saying I could read it if I felt like it. I devoured it like a man starving, reading it every spare second. The last few minutes of class before everyone packed up, walking down the halls, laying in the nurse's cot. I bought a copy at Barnes and Noble and the cashier said his old college professor was buddies with the author. I don't remember reading the ending, but I do know the rock in my throat whenever he goes into his dreams to see the dead nine year-old Linda, skating and asking if she looks dead? "I'm skimming across the surface of my own history, moving fast, riding the melt beneath the blades, doing loops and spins, and when I take a high leap into the dark and come down thirty years later, I realize it is as Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story."

My parents tease me, or maybe it's bragging, when they tell people that I have a bookshelf taller than I am. A girl on the bus in middle school once saw me with a book the width of my thigh, and said with clear disgust, "Ew, you read?" I try to avoid the employees in the bookstore so they don't feel the need to offer me a cart for the stack of books I'm carrying that's clearly about to topple. I want to go visit a child, re-reading the same favorites on her bedroom floor, sunbeams filtering through the girlish pink curtains, sit down on the hardwood floor, and ask her what chapter she's on.

No More Fear

Jill Johnson

The first punch rocked me to my very core. I never saw the full fist headed towards me, but I did feel the crushing pain once it connected. My breath escaped my body, my vision became blurry, and I went numb.

“What the hell just happened?”

My thoughts couldn’t register what my body was dealing with. I spent many years after I finally left my abuser trying to understand why I kept going back and why I felt I deserved to be beaten. Sights and sounds bring me back, loud noises make me jump, and hearing an argument hurts my heart.

So, on this day, he invited me over to talk things out. While I was at his apartment, a girl walked in and it was at that very moment I realized I was set-up, and she didn’t seem too surprised to see me. I saw the smirks on both of their faces and my blood ran cold. I couldn’t move, and I was frozen in my spot. The world seemed to stop spinning, and everything happened in what felt like slow motion.

The next thing I knew, I was physically picked up and thrown out the door, and onto the winter sidewalks covered in slush and ice. Landing hard on my back, I instantly felt an incredible pain. Trying to stand, my legs wouldn’t move! I had to army crawl to my car and drag myself into the driver’s seat. To this day, I have no idea how I was able to drive my car to a gas station next door and call for help. All I could think was, I may never walk again. God gave me the strength to survive, but at what cost?

As soon as I was able to find a pay phone; I called for help. As I was trying to dial, a police car pulled up behind me, and I was told to drop the phone. As I turned around, the sight of a gun drawn startled me, and fear took over my body. I was barely standing as it was, and I was covered in wet snow. When the police officer saw the look on my face and the condition I was in, I knew that he was shocked. I dropped the phone that was in my numb hand. I heard a loud “click” as I was handcuffed and put in the backseat of the police car. The seat was cold, a sickening odor of sweat and dirt hit me, and I felt like I was in a cage. I was uncomfortable, and the handcuffs on my wrists felt so tight and constricting. My fear turned to shock and beads of sweat slowly rolled down my back.

On the ride to the hospital, the officer explained that he had received a call of someone breaking into an apartment. I couldn’t speak, I was in shock and weary of what weight my words would carry. Here I was being unlawfully arrested, and I had nothing to say. The officer told me I needed to get away from this relationship as soon as possible, and that I was lucky to be alive. I found out later that the officer was the uncle of the young woman I had met earlier. Sounds like a set-up to me!

Once I arrived at the hospital, I was taken into a room. How did my life become so chaotic and crazy? When was I going to learn? I was in extreme pain and I was scared there would be permanent damage. I was aware of the bright lights and the sounds of the medical equipment around me. The room felt cold and sterile. The adrenaline in my body was racing, like jolts of electricity. I soon became paranoid that everyone was looking at me, and the judgement I felt was suffocating.

Finally, after what felt like years, the doctor arrived. When I saw his face, a sense of calmness settled over me, and I felt safe for the first time. I was sitting before him a battered woman with a story that he has probably heard a million times. Why was I any different than the girls who sat here before me? I didn’t know until they told me later, that all I did was ask about my abuser. I was worried that he would be upset, and I didn’t want him mad at me. I was asked if I would press charges.

“No way, he would kill me!”

As the doctor started to examine me, I remember my legs feeling tingly and prickly. An ugly bruise was forming on my tailbone and sharp, piercing pain was coursing through my legs. I was given a complete checkup and thankfully nothing was broken. I felt hurt, humiliated and embarrassed. At one point, the intense feelings of how I deserved to be hurt overtook my thoughts. I shouldn’t have upset my abuser to make him angry enough to physically harm me.

Unbeknownst to me, my abuser had shown up at the hospital to check on me. He had become worried when he ran to the gas station and found my car empty. He tried to come in and see me, but they wouldn’t allow him, he started yelling and causing a scene until he was escorted out by the police. As a result, the cycle of abuse was starting to form; hurt, apologize, and start again.

At Rest

Amina Shabazz

I cannot rest though...
 I am still
 my hear twists for
 loved ones
 hardships
 things inside
 how can I rest?
 to be at rest is to be still
 but my heart is racing
 my soul.....aching
 I cannot rest until
 these tears streaking down my face have a reason to
 dry
 till these holes in my heart have begun to fill
 till this matter in my head understands...
 that
 to be at rest can be—in motion
 where my body’s somber but my mind is churning
 where my face is serene but on my lips are prayer
 where in a millisecond everything can change
 just because it stops
 does not mean it is still
 just because it is going
 does not mean it is moving
 that when everything is changing
 in motion
 it can still be
 it may not be
 at rest.

Letchworth Village

Payton Ferreira

As Logan whipped into one of the few parking spots on the property, I felt my palms begin to sweat. My stomach did flips as she pulled the key out of the ignition. “You guys ready?” Logan asked as she slung her bag over her shoulder. As I stepped out of the car, I scanned the premises carefully. My mother’s voice flooded through my head as I took in my surroundings: there could be heroin addicts living inside; you could fall through the floorboards; you could be caught by the police. A series of identical housing buildings lined the street on either side, all dilapidated in their own ways. Boards covered up the doors, and broken glass littered the window panes. I’m sure at one point these were very beautiful buildings. “Payton, come on!” Emmy called, already nearing another set of buildings on the opposite end of the road. I jogged to catch up with them, and my stomach flipped once more.

I caught my breath and stopped at the bold red sign in front of the road, which ventured off into several different paths. Buildings were scattered across the grounds, all connected by the pavement. The sign had been vandalized with a spray-painted doodle of a bald, sickly looking man. His nose was long and his lips were fat. I gulped and mentally pushed past the disturbing image to read the fine print:

**TOWN OF HAVERSTRAW’S LETCHWORTH
 VILLAGE PROPERTY**

- OPEN DAILY FROM DAWN TO DUSK
- PERSONS MUST STAY ON THE PAVED SURFACES AT ALL TIMES
- ENTRANCE TO ANY OF THE BUILDINGS/ STRUCTURES IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED
- PERSONS FOUND ON THE PROPERTY AFTER HOURS OR IN ANY OF THE BUILDINGS/STRUCTURES ARE SUBJECT TO ARREST FOR TRESPASSING

I took another gulp. Logan and Emmy, seemingly unphased by the threats of the Haverstraw Police Department, treaded on. This is a bad idea. I thought. Go home. As we neared the building toward the back of the village, my gut wrenched. Logan’s eyes flicked from side to side, her brows furrowed. The roof had been robbed of the majority of its bricks, and the remaining ones were cracked and crumbled at the edges. The

sides of the building had been swallowed by moss and lichen. Rusted pipes stuck out of the walls, poking and prodding at the air. The grey clouds tumbled over the sky, and a chill went up my spine.

The only entrance available was a wide set of doors leading to the basement in the back of the structure. The windows surrounding it had all been shattered, and the door had been pried open. The white paint was chipping away, revealing rotted wood underneath. As I took a closer look before actually going in, I noticed blue and red words someone had smeared on the wall: WELCOME TO HELL.

The smell of mold lurked inside, surrounded by cool, damp air. I tiptoed around the crumbled drywall on the floor, not wanting even the bottom of my shoes to pick up any germs. "This must have been where the patients stayed," Emmy said, pointing to piles of old clothing and bed sheets. "Can you imagine being institutionalized here? I read that one of the doctors conducted experiments on the children." Logan knelt down to examine a soggy mattress with the words "I had sex here" inscribed on it in red spray paint. I shined my flashlight on the crusty walls, my eyes shuffling through all of the obscure things written on them. "I used to live here once, now I just visit." I read aloud. The insides of the desolated basement seemed to have been chewed up, spit out, and stuffed back in.

We made our way to the upper level as if it were an obstacle course, dodging dangling exit signs and stepping over mounds of crushed brick. The cobblestone walls moaned with sadness. We advanced into a room that seemed to hold importance: a giant desk sat in the center with cabinets on either side. Paper documents were strewn across the floor, along with Dunkin Donuts napkins and an old IV bag. I poked at the bag with my foot, and watched as the thick red liquid sloshed to the other end. Not even wanting to know what was inside, I distracted myself by sorting through the papers on the floor. Most of them were sexual abuse reports, filed by nurses who worked there. Logan's voice broke the silence, booming through the room and interrupting my thoughts. "No way! Payton, Emmy, check this out!"

We stepped out into the hallway to find Logan sitting in a gynecological examination chair, her legs spread open and her feet propped up on the stirrups. I rolled my eyes as she threw her head back in laughter. Emmy's eyes danced with amusement as she let out a chuckle. "Why is this thing in the hallway?" "I have no ide—" Logan stopped mid-sentence. Her eyes focused in on the other end of the corridor, the color draining from her face. As I turned to see what was so interesting, my heart stopped. Three dark figures stood at the opposite end of the hallway, then quickly entered one of the rooms. I blinked twice and my mouth fell open. Logan tried to calm us down, "They're just here exploring. Just like us." I wanted to believe her, but I couldn't shake the anxious feeling that clung to my body. Apparently, neither could Logan, "It's getting late anyway, maybe we should go."

About a half-hour into to our journey home, Emmy twisted the knob to turn down the music – something she never does. "Guys?" Her eyes remained glued to her phone. Logan peeled her eyes away from the road for a split second to look at her, and concern immediately flashed across her face. "What's wrong?" "Letchworth Village is apparently so haunted, it was on an episode of Ghost Adventures. The building we explored is the most haunted building on the premises." My whole body twitched, and then froze. I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up. Logan shot me a look from the rear-view mirror, then accelerated on the gas.

The Hole in the Ceiling

Angelina Spada

The sky was dark through the hole in the ceiling. There were only a few stars in the sky, and the clouds shifted slowly. There was rot and mold in the corners of the empty attic, and dust fell from the rafters when the wind blew, coating the floor in a grey blanket.

Ophelia looked up into the night sky, letting her mind drift to happier places. Her food laid untouched on its platter, growing colder by the minute. She hardly ate anymore— the food usually found its way back up when her brother came to see her. Ophelia wondered what life would be like if her parents hadn't left her and her brother at the ages of four and ten. Would she have a normal life? Would she be able to have friends over, or even go to school? Would she be able to leave the attic?

She traced small patterns into the dust on the floor, making smiley faces and wishing a smile would appear on her own face. She heard the lock unbolt to the attic door and quickly scrambled to her feet. She moved the tray out of eyesight, so her brother wouldn't know she hadn't eaten again. She would be in trouble if he found out.

"One more is in the basement," he said to her and smiled. His smile always caused shivers to run down her spine, and not the good kind.

"What's her name?" She said, barely above a whisper. He smiled wider, causing Ophelia to clasp her hands behind her back and pick at the skin on the inside of her hand. Luckily, he didn't notice.

"Lilith," he said. Ophelia didn't know what her brother did to these girls. But at night, she could hear their screams from three stories below her. She was smart enough to know that he was indeed harming them.

"Is she pretty?" She regretted asking the question as soon as she did. His smile dropped and she couldn't figure out if she was more scared of him now than she was earlier.

"They all are. That's the point," he whispered harshly. He walked closer to her and she had to fight the impulse to back-up further. His hand came to rest on the side of her face, brushing the stray hairs that had fallen out of her braid behind her ear.

"They're all like you," he spat. "Soon, I'll get rid of them all, including you."

She heard the door shut, and she was left alone. She sat on the floor and brushed her palms on her skirt. There were blood stains left on the fabric when she pulled her hands away; she had picked right through the skin.

Ophelia fell asleep for a short amount of time before the screams woke her up. Her face was pressed up against the wooden beams of the attic walls. There was a faint divot in her face when she sat up and stretched.

Judging by the dim light coming in through the hole in the ceiling, she guessed it was quite early in the morning. Her brother usually came to bring her breakfast right when the sun was shining down fully on the house. She smiled lightly, knowing that she had some time to herself. That happy thought however was interrupted by the sounds of screams beginning again. She walked quietly over to the attic door, and laid down to press her ear against the thick wood, hoping to catch some conversation.

"What do you want? Money? I'll give you everything I own, just please don't hurt me!" She heard a woman cry; she assumed the woman crying was Lilith.

"I want to be the one people love! Not her!" He yelled. She heard another loud scream, and then silence. This time, the silence was not enjoyable.

Her breakfast laid untouched, as did many of her meals. Usually, she'd devour all of her breakfast, which was her favorite meal of the day. After waking up to the screams however, Ophelia couldn't quite think straight, let alone stomach any food. She began to think about her life, and she questioned why her brother kept her alive; she feared she was the reason he took all the women.

She watched the clouds move slowly through the small hole, and began to pick at her hand once again. Looking between the hole and her hand, she got an idea; she saw a parallel between the reopened scabs and the jagged edges around the hole. What if she could pick at the hole?

Ophelia stood and reached up to run her hands on the wallpaper that surrounded it. She had just barely grazed the wall, but as she pushed on it, she felt the wall move. She reached up again, pushing at the frayed parts of the wall, feeling it move more when she applied more pressure to it. Her mind was racing, could she escape?

The rest of the evening was filled with thoughts of escape plans. She'd always been forced to be quiet, so that wasn't the hard part of escaping. Remembering the way her house was from early memories of her childhood, she knew that she was on the third floor of the house, meaning a large drop to the ground. If she were to escape, there would be no way for her to get down safely. However, she really wanted to know what the outside world was like. She wanted to help those poor women too, especially before her brother kidnapped another woman.

Her brother had brought her dinner up only a short while ago, meaning that he wouldn't be up to see her again until tomorrow morning. She looked around for anything she could use to rip the hole open even more. Seeing nothing, she opted for standing on her tippy-toes and using her hand. She was able to rip at the ceiling until it was big enough for her to slip through. Her only issue, was getting herself up that high to climb out. She heard the ladder to the attic slam down on the floor, and quickly she sat down in her usual spot before her brother saw what she was up to.

"Good morning! I hope you slept well. I brought cheerios and a banana for you. Try to eat it this morning, and maybe I'll bring a good lunch up for you," her brother said in a forced manner, the false happiness in his voice was clear and evident.

"Okay," she whispered out, pulling the tray toward her although she had no plans of eating it. He smirked at her, and walked down the ladder. Once she heard the attic door slam back into place, she stood and stared at the hole, curious as to how she would ever be able to get up there and out safely.

Pennies Go To Birds

Dorinda Hardage

this is how much it costs:
do you know
that the roots
are in the waters
that struggle against poison

this is how much it costs:
fill them to the brim
i am bleeding out
candle smoke hope?
it is all i have

men in snakeskin slippers
throw pennies to birds
hoping they add up to something
the worst part is
that i am bleeding
to beg
and of course not,
not the men in snakeskin slippers
responsible to me
to throw pennies at a girl
pennies go to birds

we endure
the sound of the color red
of the rupture
of heavy backs
so that we might be allowed to grow

sixteen hour days
until they bleed out
all for what?
a lottery?
it stands over me

i, in windowless room
 hoard pennies in my mouth
 hoping they'll do it for free
 no one thinks it strange
 from my mouth
 to hear prayers
 god is my only hope
 they are not
 because then it would all fall down to chaos
 that would ruin the whole order
 pennies go to birds

Hello New Future

Deborah Wasserstein

On a hot Monday, in late August, around noon time, I found myself pulling into a nearly empty college parking lot that could probably fit hundreds of cars. The lot resembled a ghost town, every few yards, grey pole lights sticking out of the black surface, and yellow lines on the concrete hoping to fulfill their purpose of separating masses of cars.

As I turned the engine off, the radio went silent. The air conditioner stopped blowing, and heat started building up inside the car.

Through the windshield, I saw a path winding its way between two buildings. The building on my left side was constructed with green glass from top to bottom and beams of dark steel running along the sides, resembling a grid.

Next to the building was a path winding up on the side of a shallow hill surrounded by grass and a line of almost identical maple trees, leading my eyes toward a square, tall, green clock tower.

The tower, present like a monument that catches the attention of anyone passing it, had four, white clocks on top each facing a different direction. Looking a bit closer at the clock tower, I was reminded of famous Big Ben in London, England.

Surrounding the tower was a circular area that was abandoned from students and any other people that might roam the college campus while school is in session; however, I was able to imagine a stream of students with different backgrounds and ages, walking up and down the concrete path and the area near the clock tower with their heavy book bags. Some groups of excited freshmen are exchanging handwritten notes, others laughing with their peers, and gossiping secretly about their professors.

To the left of the clock tower was a bulletin board announcing future events; once the semester started, the campus would fill up with life, laughter, and excitement.

My heart skipped a beat, "I cannot wait to take part in those events," I said to myself.

Quickly, I opened the windows to let some cool air into the hot car,

smiled and thought, "This concrete path ahead of me could be the one I will walk on for the next two years."

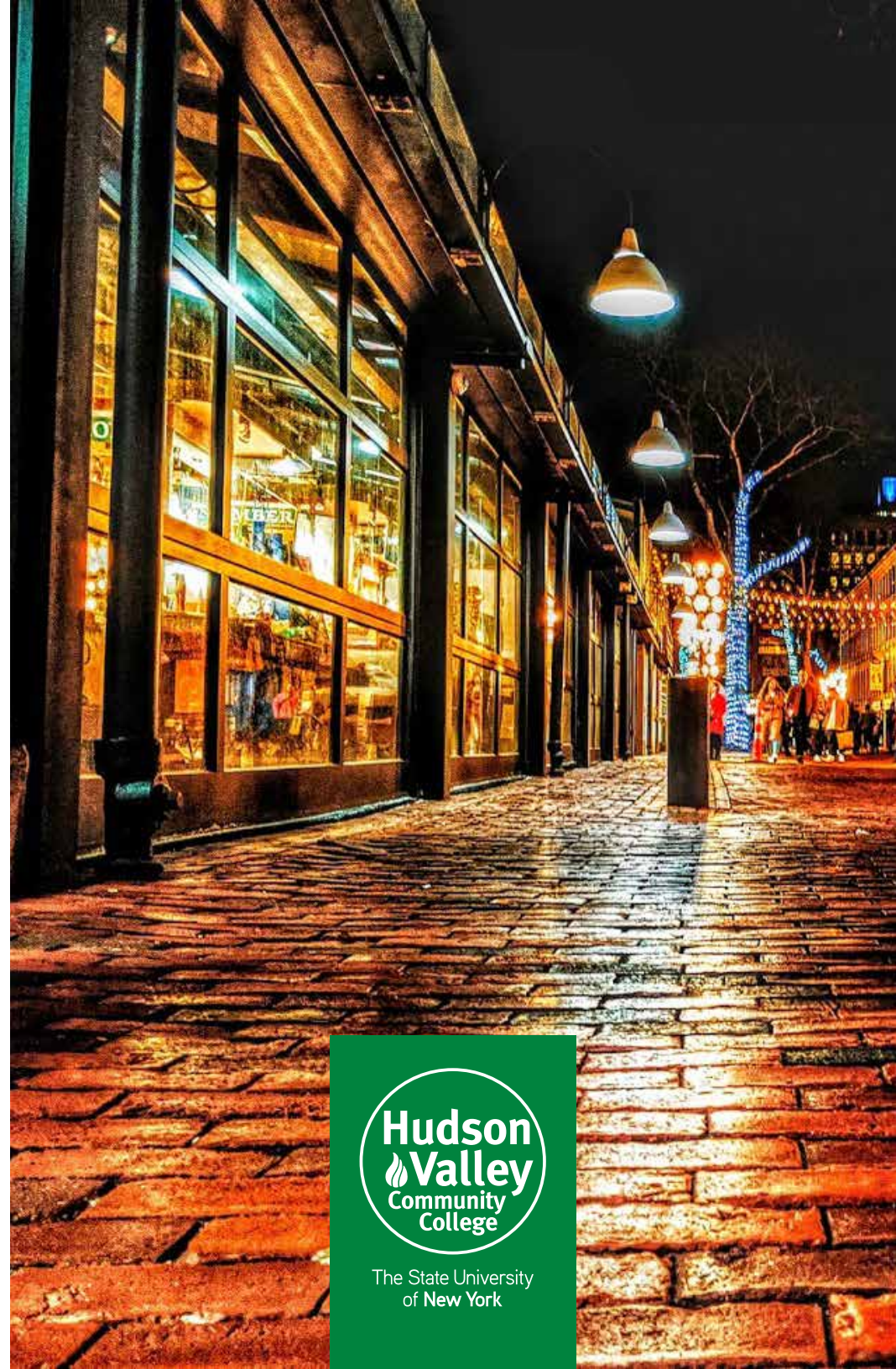
Already, I could see myself carrying my backpack, walking down the path, past the clock tower, into one of the buildings. Roaming the hallways and finding my classroom, my heart started beating fast with excitement thinking that very soon school could be my life.

With butterflies in my stomach, I stepped out of my car, and started to walk on campus, past the glass building on my left, towards the clock tower where I found some benches. Sitting down in the shade, I took a deep breath of the warm summer air. I saw how once school starts, I would be sitting on this bench, eating my lunch between classes.

As I was looking around, I saw chipmunks chasing each other on the grass, bees landing on flowers and bushes, and squirrels hopping around looking for food. In the distance, I could make out a building with the writing Enrollment Center.

Immediately, my mind wandered to the future where I could hear the music blasting at school functions, bags of snacks crinkling when going on field trips, and parents laughing and crying at graduation.

Determined, bursting with excitement, and with a fast pounding heart, I knocked at the door of the enrollment office. I took a leap of faith.



The State University
of New York