

Aquila Review



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Aquila Review

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Aquila Review publishes original art, creative nonfiction, drama, fiction, music, nonfiction, and poetry.

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Garden

Taylor Copeland

Get on your knees
And till the land.
Rake dirt, sprinkle seeds, and
Drench the earth.
Envision the possibilities.
Now wait, wait, wait . . .

Waiting for a Bloom

Taylor Copeland

The seeds are sown. The ground is wet.
I go inside and dry my sweat,
And as I wait, I sit alone.
The ground is wet. The seeds are sown.

As weeks go by, the seedlings sprout.
Beside myself, I scream and shout!
I cannot let these plantlings die.
The seedlings sprout as weeks go by.

The sun shines down. The small plants grow.
I sit and wait. They grow so slow.
To pass the time, I'll go to town.
The small plants grow. The sun shines down.

Summer Troubles

Logan Buck

Leslie Compean

Karissa Henson

Alexa Zuniga

Characters

JASMIN, 16, an angsty teenager; KATE and SEBASTIAN's daughter

KATE, 45, a hot-headed suburban mom; JASMIN's mother and SEBASTIAN's wife

SEBASTIAN, 47, a mellow suburban dad; JASMIN's father and KATE's husband

Setting

The action takes place on a front porch in a subdivision during the summer in East Texas. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(Lights rise on KATE, wearing jean shorts and a t-shirt; SHE is decorating her house's wooden front porch with summer decorations—flower pots, signs, and a wind chime. JASMIN, wearing a wrinkled and messy denim jacket, a bleach-stained t-shirt, and basketball shorts, sits napping in a wooden chair with a book over her face. Hungover and tired, SHE moves groggily but tries to hide it. SEBASTIAN, wearing a polo t-shirt and cargo shorts, is helping KATE decorate.)

KATE: Jasmin . . . honey, can you help me set up these decorations on the porch?

JASMIN: No, I'd rather not.

KATE: You're so lazy.

JASMIN: Summer makes laziness respectable. Why don't you ask Dad? He's right behind you.

(SEBASTIAN has come up behind KATE; HE is holding two boxes of decorations.)

SEBASTIAN: Whatever you say, I'm on it, Sweetie. Just tell me what goes where.

JASMIN: Yeah. Do that.

(SEBASTIAN sets down the boxes and starts to go through them.)

KATE: I think those new wind chimes will look beautiful on the right side of the porch.

SEBASTIAN: Right here?

(HE points to a spot on the porch.)

KATE: Yes!

(HE hangs the wind chimes.)

Ah, that looks perfect. Mmmm

SEBASTIAN: What's wrong? Forgetting something?

KATE: No . . . I was just thinking about what I want to throw away to make the porch better.

SEBASTIAN: All right, Sweetie. Let me go get the trash bags.

(HE leaves to get the bags from inside the kitchen, but HE comes back outside quickly.)

KATE: Great! I already found a couple items to throw out. Grab those old flowers, broken wind chimes, and old toys of Jasmin's.

(JASMIN looks up at this. SHE rolls her eyes but continues to relax. SEBASTIAN unfolds a trash bag and puts the trashed items in it.)

SEBASTIAN: Anything else?

KATE: Yes. Can you move the little table to the corner of the porch underneath the chimes?

(HE finds the table and moves it.)

SEBASTIAN: This looks nice, Sweetie. I can't wait to see the finished result. By the way, Sweetie, I heard the washer beep. Does that mean anything?

KATE: Yes! I forgot to put the clothes in to dry. Give me, like, two minutes.

JASMIN: You're talking so loud I have a headache. Can you just go inside?

KATE: You know, most kids get grounded for talking to their parents like that.

JASMIN: Okay? Most kids have Tylenol in the cabinet for headaches, but here we are.

(Beat.)

Look, I just want some peace and quiet in the sun. Is that too much to ask?

(KATE heads inside. SEBASTIAN comes over to JASMIN.)

SEBASTIAN: Jasmin, be nice to your mom, please. It's too early in the morning to be arguing over nothing.

JASMIN: All I did was tell her I have a headache. It's not my fault she's so sensitive.

SEBASTIAN: Just say it a little nicer so we don't get her started, okay?

JASMIN: Whatever.

SEBASTIAN: Thanks.

(HE walks over to the boxes and finishes unpacking.)

JASMIN: I need some water, but I don't want to get up...

(SEBASTIAN heads inside and comes back with a clear bottle of water and a trash bag.)

Thanks.

SEBASTIAN: No problem. Consider that payment for being nicer to your mother.

JASMIN: Mmm . . . something like that

(KATE returns and looks around at the porch.)

KATE: All right. Where were we? Right. Just a few more decorations, and we'll be done.

JASMIN: And maybe I'll finally get the peace and quiet I've been waiting on.

KATE: You can get peace and quiet when you move out of my house.

JASMIN: I live here, too! And Dad pays the bills. Don't act all high and mighty.

SEBASTIAN: Hold on. Don't bring me into this. Can we just be civil?

KATE AND JASMIN: Shut up!

SEBASTIAN: Just trying to help.

KATE: Jasmin, I am getting sick of your attitude these days. Ever since you started hanging out with those no-good friends of yours, you think you run everything. You need to straighten up before things get really bad for you around here.

(JASMIN takes the book off her face and tilts her head.)

JASMIN: Listen here, bitch. Don't act like you know me or my friends!

(KATE gasps. SEBASTIAN picks up the trash bag HE has been using.)

SEBASTIAN: I think I'm gonna take the trash out or . . . something

(HE quickly heads inside.)

KATE: Who are you calling a bitch? I raised you for sixteen years just for you to become a hooligan with your trashy friends? The only one acting like a bitch here is you.

JASMIN: At least I have friends. Why don't you try it sometime? All you do is work and sit around at home.

KATE: Jasmin, I don't know who you think you're talking to. You're about five words away from getting grounded for the rest of your life. Don't test me.

(SEBASTIAN enters with the trash bag and walks offstage to take it out.)

JASMIN: Stop treating me like I'm five. I'm not scared of you! When I graduate in two years, I'll happily run as far away from here as I can.

KATE: Sebastian, come here and listen to this!

(SHE rounds on JASMIN.)

I want a witness so when you come running back, I can say I told you so.

(SEBASTIAN comes back onstage carrying a glass bottle of wine.)

SEBASTIAN: Kate . . . you don't drink wine, do you?

(KATE looks at the glass and then back at JASMIN.)

I didn't think so.

JASMIN: Don't look at me! Maybe a neighbor used our trash can.

KATE: None of our neighbors drink. Don't play dumb. There's only one person it could be.

JASMIN: Don't judge me. I'll bet you drank when you were young, too! I stay safe. I don't drive or anything! Give me a break!

KATE: You're sixteen! I don't care if you're "staying safe," you're too young to be drinking anything! I don't know what to do with you anymore. You're grounded.

SEBASTIAN: Jasmin, we only care about your safety. You're safe until you make dumb, drunk decisions and get yourself in a dangerous situation.

JASMIN: Whatever. “We only care about your safety.” Maybe if you let me have some freedom in this house, I wouldn’t feel the need to leave and drink with friends to have fun. When’s the last time you let me have a sleepover? I have to beg for a little respect around here!

KATE: I don’t let your friends come over because they make a mess, and I have to clean it all up myself because you’re too lazy to help! Is this why you always ask for money before going to church? What? It’s easier to feel spiritual with a couple of bucks in your pocket?

(JASMIN storms off into the house.)

Get back here this instant!

(SEBASTIAN places his hand on KATE’s shoulder.)

SEBASTIAN: Honey, give her a moment to settle down. She’s going through a hard time right now.

KATE: You always defend her! When are you ever on my side? She’s lazy, rude, disrespectful . . . and now she’s out drinking and being stupid with her trashy friends and you want me to give her space? She needs discipline, or she’s going to be a bum for the rest of her life! Nobody wants a bum daughter, and I’m going to make sure she straightens up!

SEBASTIAN: Katie

KATE: Don’t call me Katie! You don’t get to use nicknames when you’re defending our daughter’s being an alcoholic!

SEBASTIAN: She’s just being a little angsty. All teenagers get like this sometimes.

(KATE glares at him.)

I’m not defending it. I’m just saying I understand! Maybe if we give her a pass and talk some sense into her, she’ll make the right decision. You remember what we were like at her age.

(JASMIN returns from inside. SHE holds a half-empty bottle of whiskey.)

JASMIN: Look at what I found in your room. Wanna know who I learned it from? Here's the answer.

KATE: I am a grown adult! I can drink if I want! You're a child! And don't pretend we drink all the time! We drink only on special occasions.

JASMIN: That's a cheap excuse. Maybe if you guys wouldn't treat me like such a child, I wouldn't feel the need to hide everything from you.

KATE: You are the most immature teenager I have ever seen! I can't believe you're acting like this! Maybe if you acted like less of a child, you wouldn't get treated like one! Your brother—

JASMIN: Here we go again! Always back to comparing me to my brother! He was always the favorite! I'm just the forgotten one . . . the black sheep! A stain on your perfect family image! It would make everyone happy if I just ran away and never came back!

SEBASTIAN: Jasmin, don't say that. We love you just as much as your brother. You need to stop acting out so much before something bad happens.

KATE: The only reason I brought him up is because he never acted like this! If you tried acting like him, you'd get in a lot less trouble.

JASMIN: I don't want to be like him! I like having fun, not studying all the time and being a loser! Now he's off getting a degree because he wants to look so perfect! Once he realizes his degree will get him nowhere, he'll either work at some dead-end job flipping burgers, or he'll kill himself!

(KATE grabs her by the arm and leans in.)

KATE: Listen here, you ungrateful—

(JASMIN pulls her arm away violently and hits the newly hung wind chimes. They crash to the ground. KATE is livid.)

Jasmin! Look at what you just did! You broke it! Your great-grandmother gave me those wind chimes! Do you have any idea how valuable those are?

JASMIN: It . . . it wasn't me! You grabbed me and made me do it!

(KATE bends down and picks through the wind chimes. SHE turns each piece to look at the dents.)

SEBASTIAN: Honey, she didn't mean—

KATE: Damn it, Sebastian! Don't you dare defend her!

JASMIN: You always blame me for everything, Mom! You knocked me into it! You knew I'd pull away!

(KATE raises her hand at JASMIN.)

KATE: I don't even want to look at you right now. Go to your room!

(JASMIN runs inside the house. A door slams.)

SEBASTIAN: Honey

KATE: Don't "Honey" me! Look at what she did! I have had *enough* of her! I'm going to send her off to some summer boot camp to learn some discipline! I'll lose it if I see her face again!

SEBASTIAN: Kate, I love you, but I will *not* stand here and listen to you talk so awfully about our daughter. I don't blame her for thinking her brother is the favorite because your actions have affirmed it! She's our child, too.

KATE: I don't care what I did or didn't do! She's been acting like a spoiled brat, and I'm not going to stand for it! How dare you stand here and defend her like always!

SEBASTIAN: There comes a point in time when I have to choose my children over anything. I don't condone her actions, either, but you've taken it a bit too far, so, yes, I am defending her . . . because you, too, are acting like a spoiled brat!

(KATE stands up; SHE is holding the wind chimes.)

KATE: I'm done with this! I'm going to the store.

(KATE leaves. JASMIN comes back onstage.)

JASMIN: Thanks for sticking up for me, Dad.

SEBASTIAN: Don't think you're in the clear, young lady. Just because I stood up for you doesn't mean you're not still in trouble. I think you should go back to your room and think about how you're going to apologize.

(JASMIN storms back into the house. SEBASTIAN finds a chair and sits down.)

I need a vacation.

(Blackout.)

Sun-Kissed
Holly Perez



Firefly's Song

Casey Fields

I want to fly as the others do
And make the children laugh and chase;
But, alas, no light will shine,
For all the city lights
Have covered my own.
Oh, to shine bright
In the sky . . .
My wish
Made.

One Foot in Front of the Other

Audrey Mohon

My grandmother passed away in February this year.
I can hear her voice calming me,
but the cloud of depression is rolling in again.
What would she tell me now?
How I wish I knew.
I lick the pen and write “Garage Sale This Way!”
The whirring, unknown voices try to
negotiate her priceless handheld mirror.
My mother takes the deal:
five dollars and ten cents.

Crying in Your Front Door

Debanhie Cuellar

Characters

AUGUSTINE, 16, JAMES's ex-girlfriend

JAMES, 17, AUGUSTINE's ex-boyfriend

Setting

The action takes place during the winter in East Texas. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(Lights rise CS on JAMES's front door. A parked car can be seen off to the side. AUGUSTINE stands in front of the door while looking down at a dreamcatcher SHE is holding. SHE wears black sweatpants, a gray sweatshirt, and a black puffer jacket. Her short hair is in a ponytail, and SHE has green rain boots on. SHE knocks on the door and waits. JAMES opens the door and stares at her. His hair is long and dirty, and HE has a beanie on. HE wears black jeans and a plaid flannel shirt. HE doesn't wear any shoes, just gray ankle socks. AUGUSTINE lets out a sigh.)

AUGUSTINE: Hey.

JAMES: Augustine . . . what are you doing here?

(AUGUSTINE holds up the dreamcatcher.)

AUGUSTINE: I . . . you forgot this in my car

JAMES: That was like six months ago

(SHE lets out a sad laugh and looks up at him with a smile.)

AUGUSTINE: Four, actually.

JAMES: Agustine, really, what are you doing here?

AUGUSTINE: It doesn't work, by the way.

JAMES: What are you talking about?

AUGUSTINE: The dreamcatcher. I still have dreams about you. They should count as nightmares. They don't scare me, but clearly they haunt me. And it's all your fault . . . because you decided to do this to me. And I know what you told Elizabeth. For someone who's applying to Ivy League schools, one would think she'd be smarter than forgiving you. Especially considering how you blamed me.

(SHE mocks JAMES's voice.)

"Oh, she pulled up. She insisted on giving me a ride!" Jesus, James, *you* got in the car! It was you who'd call, and it was you I met behind the mall. I'll take my part of the fault. I knew, somewhere under my skin, that you'd choose her. I don't think I even had a chance against her . . . but there I was, hoping. I remember thinking I had you, but it was the other way. You had me. You had me canceling plans just in case you called, sneaking around, driving you in my car You know how they say, "You tell lies in the summer; you pay for them in the winter"?

(JAMES shakes his head.)

Of course, you don't. Otherwise My point is, I find it funny how *you* told lies in the summer, but I'm the one paying for them now. You got your girl back. You lied, and she forgave you . . . and now everything is like it was, and I'm just collateral damage. I'm here, crying in your front door, and, in a couple weeks, you'll be kissing Betty on New Year's Eve. I don't know why I'm here. I was driving, and I saw the dreamcatcher. And I don't want it. I don't want anything to do with you because I can't trust you. Because in a blink of an eye you stopped calling. You avoided me at school for weeks, and then I overhear Inez talking about how Betty and you are back together, about your gesture at her party and your mediocre apology song. Because it probably *was* mediocre. And, of course, sweet, nice Betty won't tell you that . . . but I will. Just like I'm telling you how all of your mess is making me miserable.

JAMES: Augustine, you should probably head home.

AUGUSTINE: I heard about what you told her.

JAMES: Again, what are you talking about?

AUGUSTINE: “I believe that what people call God is something in all of us. If God forgives, you should allow yourself to forgive, too.”

(SHE laughs in disbelief.)

You know, now everyone in school thinks you’re some kind of great romantic . . . that you should start writing poems. But you should at least give me credit for that one. One of my worst traits is that I have such a good memory. It kills me, as you can see. And I remember saying those exact words over the summer at the beach house. Of course, I was discussing theology, and you used it to get her back. I’ve changed my mind since then. I don’t believe what people call God is inside of me because I don’t think I’ll ever be able to forgive you for this.

(JAMES sighs and touches AUGUSTINE’s hand, the one holding the dreamcatcher.)

JAMES: You’ll get over it.

(HE hugs her with only one arm, and SHE buries her head in his chest and sobs. AUGUSTINE drops the dreamcatcher and it lands inside of JAMES’s house. HE pats her back. SHE pulls back and nods. SHE turns away and begins walking toward her car. JAMES takes a step back to close the door and steps on the dreamcatcher, which breaks with a loud snap. HE closes the door without missing a beat. AUGUSTINE pauses when SHE hears the snap, but then SHE keeps walking.)

AUGUSTINE: Nothing breaks like a dreamcatcher. Nothing breaks like a dream. Nothing breaks like a heart. Nothing breaks like my heart.

(SHE opens the car’s door, sits down, and turns on the car. “August” by Taylor Swift starts playing through the car’s speakers. SHE slams the door. Blackout.)

Passing By

Beverly Easterling

It begins with weasels
and a wave.

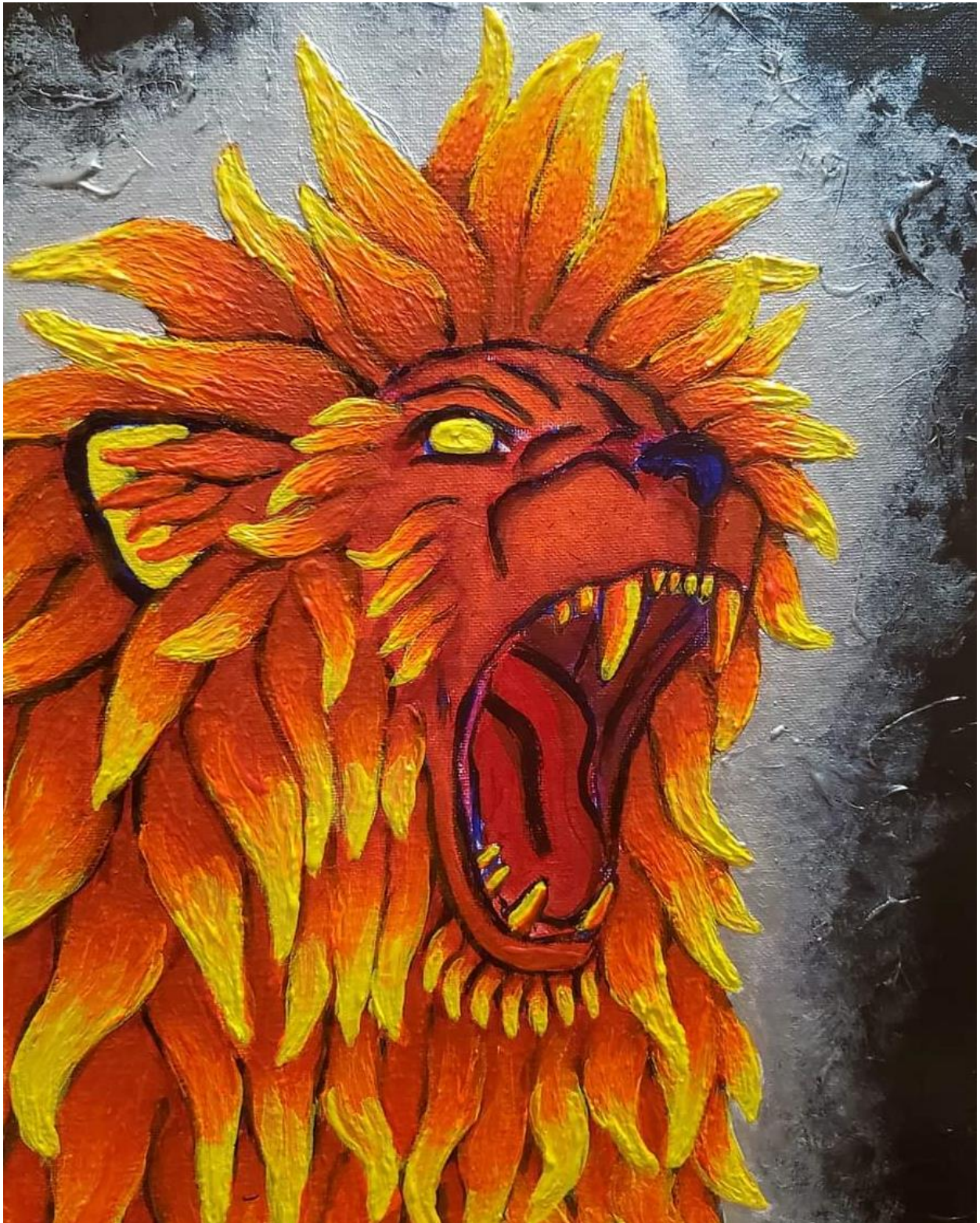
Pretty weasels
in sheath dresses, or striped ties.
Eyes shimmering in anticipation as they
peddle fear
that won't touch them.
Botoxed brows and tearless eyes,
in the savage, eternal race for ratings.

It is a busy little depression
that,
if all goes well,
will garner heat,
and grow,
and pull the wind along
enough,
to earn a name.
Waiting for God's finger
to point the way:
aging grammar school, single father's apartment,
random bridge,
gothic church.

Preparation feels like celebration.
Anxiety, the special guest.
Tubs are filled. Devices charged,
cousins arrive,
roux added,
as breeze lifts
a shrieking cadenza.
Ida is passing by.

Lion

Jeannette Ward



Dyslexia

Brittney Jackson

Dungeons of jumbled-up words I do not know.
Yearning for answers I wish I knew.
Stuck like a fly in honey.
Lonely in my thoughts.
Everywhere I turn, I'm lost . . . even with a map.
eXpertly I travel these troubled waters.
I may struggle, but in time,
Absolutely, I will come out on top.

Dyslexic, Not Dumb

Brittney Jackson

I stare at the page, but the words are jumbled and make no sense.
I struggle, but I will succeed.
My anxiety grips me like a vise.
I struggle, but I will succeed.
Feeling like I will never be like the others,
I struggle, but I will succeed
Feeling as if I am in an endless loop,
I struggle, but I will succeed.
Sometimes guessing with all my might,
I struggle, but I will succeed.

Five

Brittney Jackson

One subject I do not understand.
Two assignments I will struggle with.
Three recesses I miss.
Four hours I will stress.
Five people that remind me I can.

Inferno

Amaya Green

Gabriella Mosley

Thomas Tye-Cornelius

Characters

GRANDPA, 70, grandfather to EMMA RAE and MARY KATE

EMMA RAE, 16, MARY KATE's twin sister and GRANDPA's granddaughter

MARY KATE, 16, EMMA RAE's twin sister and GRANDPA's granddaughter

Setting

The action takes place during the summer in East Texas. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(Lights up on GRANDPA sitting in his porch swing. HE is drinking a dark amber liquid from a bevel-cut drinking glass and struggling to stay awake. HE sets down the glass next to him and drowzes. Suddenly, MARY KATE and EMMA RAE enter from SR. MARY KATE is holding a church program and a box of what appears to be old-fashioned fireworks.)

EMMA RAE: *Graaannndpaaaa!* Your two favorite gals are here!

(MARY KATE struggles with her load.)

MARY KATE: You know, you could hold some of this stuff!

EMMA RAE: Did you forget? I'm the pretty twin. Pretty twins don't do heavy lifting.

MARY KATE: We have the same face, Sis.

EMMA RAE: Yes . . . but I wear it better.

(MARY KATE drops the box of fireworks on the bottom step of the porch and playfully goes after her sister.)

MARY KATE: Now them's is some fightin' words!

(EMMA RAE runs away from MARY KATE's attack.)

EMMA RAE: Ah! Grandpa, make her stop!

(GRANDPA jolts awake at the mention of his name.)

GRANDPA: Huh?! What's going on?

(HE notices the girls.)

Now I know my eyes are deceiving me because my two little ladybugs are supposed to be out in Tennessee with that do-nothing Daddy of theirs!

MARY KATE: We flew in last night to spend the rest of the summer with Mama.

EMMA RAE: Yeah! We were gonna surprise you at church this morning, but you weren't there . . . so we figured we'd bring some fireworks for the Fourth of July celebration tonight.

GRANDPA:

Oh, fire and brimstone ain't nothing but sparklers and caps nowadays! I'll be sure to tell the pastor that at the celebration, too.

MARY KATE: Grandpa! Don't talk like that. If Grandma were here right now, she'd smack you right upside the head.

GRANDPA: Well, Grandma isn't here right now, is she?

(During this conversation, EMMA RAE has slowly worked her way onto the porch next to where GRANDPA sits. SHE sees the amber liquid in his drinking glass and assumes it is sweet tea. SHE takes a swig and immediately pulls a face as she hands the glass back to GRANDPA.)

EMMA RAE: Ugh! Grandpa, that tea's gone so bad it burns! How are you drinking it?

GRANDPA: Well sweetie, to be hundred percent honest with ya . . . that ain't tea in my glass. It's whiskey!

EMMA RAE: Whiskey?! Since when are you a drinking man? I thought Grandma hated the smell of alcohol?

GRANDPA: Well, like I told your sister . . . Grandma isn't here now.

MARY KATE: But don't you think you should honor her wishes? After all, the reason she didn't want you drinking was 'cause she watched her daddy become an alcoholic that way, Grandpa.

GRANDPA: Look, ladybugs, when your Grandma died, I got to thinking, and I realized that I didn't need much—just a ray of sunshine in a frosted glass. It's like my own personal paradise.

EMMA RAE: Grandpa! You can't mean that. I mean, you've still got me, Mary Kate, and Mama. We're family, and you'll always need family.

GRANDPA: I used to think that way, too, but your grandma and I built that family only for her to leave me alone.

EMMA RAE: So?

GRANDPA: So . . . clearly family isn't all it's cracked up to be, Ladybug. Now don't get me wrong, I still love you, but that don't mean I need you.

EMMA RAE: How could you say that when we drove all this way to see you?

MARY KATE: Yeah, Grandpa, that's a little messed up of you to say.

GRANDPA: I'm just being honest, Sweetie. You're the one that brought it up.

(EMMA RAE runs offstage crying. MARY KATE turns to go after her.)

MARY KATE: Emma! Wait!

(Beat. SHE decides to have it out with GRANDPA first.)

MARY KATE (CONT.): Are you happy now? Look at what you did. You know, our daddy told us to keep our distance whenever Grandma died.

GRANDPA: He *what*?!

MARY KATE: He said that you would more than likely become the crotchety old man you always were and that we'd only get hurt if we went looking for the you that we used to know.

GRANDPA: Now I don't think that's exactly fair to me, Mary.

MARY KATE: Oh, you don't? 'Cause to me it looks like he was right. The person we knew died with Grandma. Enjoy your fireworks.

GRANDPA: Mary, wait

MARY KATE: No, I'm done. We're done.

(MARY storms offstage. GRANDPA goes back to the porch swing and sits. The silence is deafening. Suddenly, GRANDPA throws his glass to the floor and starts sobbing.)

GRANDPA: *Damn it!*

(HE goes to the box of fireworks, tears it open, and starts throwing the fireworks wildly into the yard.)

Why did you have to leave, Connie? Why?!

(Lights darken until only a spot remains on him. HE pulls a flask from his pocket.)

My own little paradise.

(HE moves back to the porch swing and sits. EMMA RAE and MARY KATE can be heard from offstage.)

EMMA RAE AND MARY KATE: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference, living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; taking this world as it is and not as I would have it; trusting that You will make all things right

EMMA RAE AND MARY KATE (CONT.): if I surrender to Your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

(The spotlight fades slowly on GRANDPA while his granddaughters recite. HE speaks directly into the audience when THEY finish.)

GRANDPA: Hi. My name is Ray . . . and I'm an alcoholic.

(Blackout.)

Behind the Boulevard
Darlene Taylor



The Case for Religion

Logan Buck

A lesson my father taught me at a young age was “never argue religion with strangers.” This topic is notorious for causing arguments, he told me, and I should be careful about my choice of words. At the time, I thought to myself, “Why?” What makes religion so controversial? Once I began my dive into religion, I understood completely. Religion is always tied deeply to the individual. Also, the history of religion weaves a story of brutality and injustice committed in the name of itself. Wars waged, innocents slaughtered, and lives ruined due to religious beliefs can leave anyone afraid to talk about it. When facing the harsh history of religious cruelty, one can argue that religion has had a negative impact upon world history. However, in the face of undeniable evidence, I argue the opposite. Despite relentless cruelty committed as a result of religion, I argue that religion has been a positive force in human history for three reasons: religion has led positive societal change, helped people find meaning in life, and, overall, generated greater good than evil.

Religion has led to profound change throughout history. While religion has the potential to cause negative change, the power lies solely in the group or individual wielding it. The Civil-Rights Movement provides a fitting example of how religion can uproot evil. Although slavery had been abolished about one hundred years prior, African Americans found that freedom was not the end of racial trouble in the 1940s through 1960s. Segregation, extreme racial discrimination, and racially motivated violence plagued every colored individual in America, and racial tensions were only worsening (Anti-Defamation League). Jim Crow Laws banned African Americans from sharing classrooms, bathrooms, theaters, train cars, restaurants, and even water fountains with white people (Anti-Defamation League). African Americans were targeted for any perceived slight against whites with a gruesome form of public execution: lynching. The NAACP records show that an estimated 4,743 lynchings occurred in the US from 1882 to 1968 (NAACP). Laws such as the “grandfather clause” that restricted voting rights to men who were allowed to vote before 1867 were used to disenfranchise African-American men (National Archives). Other methods such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and violent intimidation were used to discourage and prevent African-American men from voting (National Archives).

To say that African Americans suffered cruel and unjust treatment during this period of United-States history would be an understatement; the end of slavery gave rise to more racial mistreatment instead of less. The mistreatment of African Americans continued with no end in sight and would potentially last for decades

more. However, one man with a dream sought to change the trajectory of the nation through the radical use of religion.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was born on January 15, 1929 into a Baptist family; he pursued a degree in theological study and eventually earned a doctorate in 1953 (NobelPrize.org). In 1954, Dr. King became a pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama (NobelPrize.org). At this time, discrimination was a part of life for African Americans. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., faced discrimination in every school, university, and church that he attended. He became a member of the executive committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1954 and then began a career in civil-rights leadership (NobelPrize.org). As years passed, King led many protests and boycotts to fight racial discrimination nonviolently. After over a decade of leading the Civil-Rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated on the evening of April 4, 1968 (NobelPrize.org).

To understand what Dr. King believed, one need only read his manifesto titled “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” On April 12, 1963, Dr. King was arrested for leading a nonviolent demonstration in the most segregated city in America: Birmingham, Alabama (Maranzani). Dr. King was not a stranger to the United-States legal system; his arrest on that day would be the thirteenth time handcuffs were slapped on his wrists. However, this time Dr. King would be inspired to write a letter in response to eight local Christian and Jewish religious leaders who criticized his demonstrations (Maranzani). With no notes or research materials, he defended himself in a 7,000-word response written from a cold jail cell (Maranzani).

Dr. King explains in the letter why he fights for civil rights: “Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be coworkers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation” (8). Dr. King makes clear that collaborating with the Christian God is how humans can make progress in society: “I say this as a minister of the Gospel, who loves the church; who was nurtured in its bosom; who has been sustained by its spiritual blessings and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen” (11). King’s entire manifesto bleeds with religious imagery and belief. It is not a blanket message targeting the secular people of America; it is a letter urging Christian and Jewish leaders to understand how his method of nonviolent protest and his goals align with religious values.

Dr. King is not some insignificant man caught at the wrong place and wrong time urging religious leaders to believe that his intentions were well-meaning; he is a Baptist pastor, the president of a Christian civil-rights conference, a Doctor of Philosophy of Systematic Theology, a minister of the Gospel, and a devout

Christian man with black skin who implores religious leaders to listen to the cries of his fellow Americans and demand change in the name of God. When the truth of the matter is made apparent, one can see that religion, when wielded by righteous men and women, can create positive change in society. Dr. King's efforts led to the Civil-Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited the unequal application of voting laws (National Archives). To this day, the words and actions of Dr. King continue to inspire people to stand up against racial discrimination and work toward unity. Dr. King's story proves that religion has caused positive change in human history.

To explore how religion can change an individual, one need only look at the life of Leo Tolstoy. Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy (i.e., Leo Tolstoy) was a Russian author known for epic novels such as *War and Peace* (Prahl). Born into an aristocratic Russian family, Tolstoy grew up in a privileged position in Russian society. By 1877, Leo Tolstoy had published legendary works of literary genius and was heralded as the greatest author of his time. However, as time passed, a deep question of life began to eat away at him. Tolstoy had a loving wife, a large family, and wealth from his privileged upbringing and his best-selling novels, but a growing spiritual conflict began to flare up in his soul (Prahl).

As detailed in his autobiographical work, *A Confession*, Tolstoy lived with a deep, uneasy feeling that life, especially his life, had no purpose or meaning. Tolstoy reached an unsettling conclusion that deprived him of ease for years: "The truth was that life is meaningless. I had as it were lived, lived, and walked, walked, till I had come to a precipice and saw clearly that there was nothing ahead of me but destruction. It was impossible to stop, impossible to go back, and impossible to close my eyes or avoid seeing that there was nothing ahead but suffering and real death—complete annihilation" (4). Tolstoy believed that the only logical way out was suicide; however, he sought instead to search for an answer to life: "'But perhaps I have overlooked something or misunderstood something?' said I to myself several times. 'It cannot be that this condition of despair is natural to man!' And I sought for an explanation of these problems in all the branches of knowledge acquired by men" (5).

Tolstoy sought answers for life in different fields of study. First, he sought answers in sciences. After careful research, Tolstoy concluded that science simply explained the physical rules of the world and left the metaphysical questions unanswered: "Those sciences simply ignore life's questions" (5). Then he pursued philosophical schools of thought to find a meaning to life; he concluded these philosophies were fruitless thought experiments that reached no conclusion: "So that however I may turn these replies of philosophy, I can never obtain anything like an answer—and not because, as in the clear experimental sphere, the reply does not relate to my question, but because here, though all the mental work is

directed just to my question, there is no answer, but instead of an answer one gets the same question, only in a complex form” (5).

Tolstoy chose to search for answers in the only topic left: religion. In his early life, Tolstoy was raised with religious belief. However, as he matured, he abandoned religious teachings and chose to live a hedonistic lifestyle (Tolstoy 1). Despite his rejection of religious faith early in his life, Tolstoy looked back upon his life through the lens of his search for meaning. By the end, Tolstoy accepted new truth into his life. His search for meaning ended with the Christian God, and his previous thoughts of suicide dissipated upon his discovery: “‘Live seeking God, and then you will not live without God.’ And more than ever before, all within me and around me lit up, and the light did not again abandon me. And I was saved from suicide And strange to say the strength of life which returned to me was not new, but quite old—the same that had borne me along in my earliest days” (12). Through religion, Tolstoy found new meaning and purpose. While his struggles did not end there, this discovery allowed him to press forward in search of truth. Religion led Tolstoy to an answer to life’s meaning. Religion can bring meaning to life, and that alone is a strong argument for its continued existence.

When defending religion, one must acknowledge the evils that have been committed in its name. To claim that religion only produces good is untrue in the grand narrative of history. Centuries of examples prove this point. One is the Crusades, “a series of military campaigns organized by popes and Christian western powers to take Jerusalem and the Holy Land back from Muslim control and then defend those gains” (Cartwright 1). One brutal massacre during this campaign was the result of a crusade against heretics, not Muslims: the Albigensian Crusades. In the infamous massacre at the city of Béziers, when asked by priests, “Sir, what shall we do, for we cannot distinguish between the faithful and the heretics,” Abbot Arnaud Aimery said, “Kill them. The Lord knows who are his own” (Hiesterbach 1; Tyerman 591). An estimated 20,000 people were slain (Tyerman 591). Stories such as this one are proof of religion used as a catalyst for cruelty and violence.

Religion has undeniably had a negative effect upon human history. However, I argue that the positive effects of religion outweigh the cruelty committed in its name. Modern research constantly proves how religion has positive societal influence. For example, religion affects education positively: “We find that religious attendance promotes higher intergenerational closure, friendship networks with higher educational resources and norms, and extracurricular participation,” (Glanville, et al. 105). Bradford Wilcox proves that the more frequently husbands attend religious services, the happier their wives say they are with the level of affection and understanding that they receive and the amount of time that their husbands spend with them (186). Religious people are

often more charitable, less likely to commit crimes, and less likely to abuse alcohol or drugs (Brooks; Johnson et al. 377-91). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., reversed generations of racist, unjust treatment of African Americans in the name of religion. Leo Tolstoy found meaning in life through religion when the path he walked would have ended in suicide. Overall, religion proves to cause more good than harm in history and modern society.

At an early age, my father taught me never to argue about religion with strangers. Time has taught me two truths that confirm why he was right: religion is tied to one's identity, and religion carries with it a history of bloodshed and suffering committed in the name of itself. However, in spite of these points, religion continues to cause positive change. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., changed America and demanded justice for African Americans through the use of Christian teachings. Tolstoy found meaning in his life through Christianity. Modern society continues to be influenced positively by religious teachings and practices. Despite the history of suffering, religion has had a positive impact upon human history and will likely continue to change hearts, minds, and nations for the better until the end of time.

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Seven

Allyson Jackson

One young person.
Two clueless parents.
Three religious interventions.
Four screaming matches.
Five months of silence.
Six chances given.
Seven states between them.

LGBTQ

Allyson Jackson

Love is not always free.
Great fees have been paid.
Be a fighter.
Tell your story.
Quell the discrimination.

Schwenkfelder-Native-American Relations in Colonial Pennsylvania

Matt Smith

Quaker William Penn established Pennsylvania with the goal of creating a model of peaceable living for the world to emulate.¹ The colony's founding principles attracted many European sectarians. German-speaking Schwenkfelders from Silesia* were among the last of these groups to arrive in Pennsylvania.² The Schwenkfelder immigrants formed cordial bonds with their Native American neighbors, acknowledged their grievances against the proprietary government, and shared evidence of the Indians' good character with the other colonists.

Religious persecution drove the Schwenkfelders to America. They rejected both Catholic and Lutheran doctrines on salvation and the Trinity.³ They also shared the austere dress and lifestyle of their "plain Dutch" brethren (Amish, Mennonites, and German Baptists) and criticized the Lutheran clergy's card games, fiddle playing, and feasts of "gorging and boozing."⁴ The Schwenkfelders' nonconformity and moral rigidity alienated the Lutherans. Deprived of an officially sanctioned religious affiliation, the Schwenkfelders attracted the attention of the imperial authorities. In 1718, Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI sent Jesuit missionaries to forcibly convert them to Catholicism. The Schwenkfelders fled to Germany and then to Pennsylvania between 1734 and 1737.⁵

When the Schwenkfelders arrived in Pennsylvania, they were unable to procure a tract of land suitable for their settlement as a community, so they agreed on March 21, 1735 "to buy homesteads wherever conditions seemed most favorable."⁶ Most Schwenkfelders settled in southeastern corner of the province (the counties of Philadelphia and Bucks, and present-day Montgomery, Berks, and Lehigh counties), where their homesteads straddled the last vestiges of Indian Pennsylvania.⁷

Few of the Schwenkfelder homesteads were more than thirty miles from the nearest Native settlement.⁸ The Schwenkfelders were most accessible to Native Americans living in the wilderness areas bordering European settlements. Many Natives from farther afield frequented the colonized region for trade. Schwenkfelder Isaac Schultz contrasted his peoples' new neighbors with their old ones in Europe. He noted that the Schwenkfelders "found it easier to live in peace

* Silesia is a historical region in the upper Oder River valley of present-day Poland, Czechia, and Germany. In the early eighteenth century, the Austrian Hapsburgs ruled Silesia.

and harmony with the Indians than with their persecutors in the Old World, who had the Bible in the one hand and the sword in the other hand.”⁹

For the pacifist Schwenkfelders, friendliness was both an article of faith and a survival mechanism. For a time, the local Natives adopted a similar posture. Comity yielded rapport, and rapport produced friendships. The Native Americans who lived in the forests surrounding the Schwenkfelder homesteads “were not unfriendly,” Selina Schultz contends, “and the settlers did not fear to have the doors of their log cabins without locks.” On cold nights, Schwenkfelder families “permitt[ed] the Indians to enter at will” and “sleep on the cabin floor in front of glowing embers in the fireplace.”¹⁰

Social interaction between Schwenkfelders and Native Americans fostered cultural exchange. Schwenkfelder tradition maintains that before the Revolutionary War, Native Americans frequented the home of Towamencin Township settlers Abraham and Susanna Kriebel. After the Native Americans experienced the Kriebels’ Schwenkfelder foodways, their visits to the couple’s home increased, “especially during cider making season,” when they “imbibed very freely.”¹¹ The Schwenkfelders’ appreciation of corn and tobacco complemented the Natives’ enjoyment of the apple beverage. Prehistoric Americans had domesticated corn and tobacco, and the Schwenkfelders who adapted European farming methods to include these staples helped ensure the continuity of the region’s ancient agricultural tradition.¹²

In the late 1730s, William Penn’s ethically and financially bankrupt heirs deployed their agent, James Logan, to expropriate lands belonging to southeastern Pennsylvania’s Native American community. Logan used a deceptive land map and forged signatures on a questionable bill of sale to trick reluctant Delaware leaders into ceding their ancestral claims.¹³ In 1742, he convinced the Six Nations Iroquois to pressure the remaining southeastern Pennsylvania Natives to leave the region.¹⁴ Most moved to the Ohio country and along the tributaries of the Susquehanna River. In 1754, the agents of Penn’s grandson, John, made a deal with the Iroquois that promised to push the resettled Natives farther west.¹⁵

The threat of eviction from the east and French encroachment from the west compelled Pennsylvania’s dispossessed Natives to take a side in the budding Anglo-French contest for the Ohio country. Disenchanted with the proprietary family and dismayed by the absence of British or Iroquois support, a Delaware-led coalition in 1755 launched a campaign of violence against Pennsylvania’s colonists.¹⁶ In response to the Delaware incursions, some Schwenkfelders left the

backcountry; Gregorius Schultz, John Yeakel, and Balzer Yeakel sold their Macungie homesteads and moved to Goshenhoppen.¹⁷

Without abandoning their nonviolent principles, the Schwenkfelders contributed to Pennsylvania's defense. Reflecting on 1755, Schwenkfelder leader Christopher Schultz noted that "[o]ur people willingly helped to bear their respective shares of the burdens that fell to the various townships without personally taking up arms against the enemy, a substitute being placed by them as their term of service came."¹⁸ Classifying the raiders as "unfriendly Indians" demonstrated Schultz's humane discretion, but some Schwenkfelders lacked his sensitivity. David Schultze, one of the trustees of the frontier guard, speaking of the Native Americans, lamented that "those Beast-like Creatures" would "turn the Province into its former State of Wilderness."¹⁹

Most Schwenkfelder community leaders, however, continued to recognize the humanity of their attackers. They sought to better understand the Native Americans and their grievances. Schwenkfelders were among the first members of Quaker peace activist Israel Pemberton's "Friendly Association for regaining and preserving peace with the Indians by pacific measures." In 1756, "the Schwenkfelder fathers . . . pledged their financial support to the project."²⁰ Christopher Schultz describes the organization's impetus as follows: "[t]he Quakers as well as we and others . . . took pity on the miserable condition of the inhabitants along the frontier and felt that the Indian war arose on account of the unjust treatment of the Indians and was carried under unholy purposes to the serious detriment of the province."²¹

Schultz and Pemberton exchanged documents containing evidence of the American Natives' integrity to share with their respective communities. Schultz, on more than one occasion, translated English language evidence of the Indians' good character to German and returned it to Pemberton for publication.²² Another Schwenkfelder wrote an essay entitled "Why should citizens attend the treaties with the Indians?" that promoted peaceful engagement with the Native Americans.²³

Aiming to bring the violence to a speedy conclusion, Schwenkfelder leaders attended several peace conferences. Despite his low opinion of the Native Americans, David Schultze spent the summer of 1757 at the peace talks in Easton, meeting with colonial leaders, British officials, and Indian headmen.²⁴ In 1758, several Schwenkfelders attended the convention that produced the Treaty of Easton.²⁵ At the 1762 Easton treaty council, Christopher Schultz and other Schwenkfelders denounced British colonial administrator William Johnson's

dismissive treatment of the meeting's Native participants.²⁶ The same year, community leader George Kriebel accompanied Schultz to the treaty conferences at Lancaster.²⁷

Southeastern Pennsylvania's Native population was in decline before the French and Indian War, and few Native Americans remained in the section inhabited by the Schwenkfelders after the war. Although Christopher Schultz continued his leadership role during and after the Revolutionary War, a new generation of American-born Schwenkfelder leaders took shape between the 1760s and 1780s. The dearth of Schwenkfelder commentary related to the Native Americans after the early 1760s suggests that many Schwenkfelders were too young to recall the bonds of friendship their parents and grandparents had forged with their Native hosts during the early days of settlement. Instead of concerning themselves with the interests of a group of people whom they did not know, the Schwenkfelders' leaders spent the remainder of the colonial era organizing themselves as a church, reforming their schools, and navigating, as pacifists, the difficult circumstances of the American Revolution.²⁸

Schwenkfelders came to William Penn's "peaceable kingdom" to escape persecution in their homeland. When they arrived in America, they cultivated friendships and coexisted peacefully with Pennsylvania's Native peoples. During the French and Indian War, Schwenkfelder leaders responded to hostile Native Americans with empathy and peace overtures. They likewise sought to demonstrate the Native Americans' virtues to their white neighbors. When the Schwenkfelders' efforts failed to produce a lasting peace, their leaders focused on internal improvements and self-preservation. Later generations reflected positively on their ancestors' interaction with and advocacy of Pennsylvania's Native American population; in the words of one early twentieth century Schwenkfelder chronicler, "[t]hey gave an unequivocal testimony in favor of honest dealing with the red man and thus placed themselves squarely on the side of right."²⁹

Notes

¹ William Penn to James Harrison, August 25, 1681, in *History of Pennsylvania: Vol I*, ed. Robert Proud (Philadelphia, 1797; Spartanburg, SC, 1967), 169; Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History: The Settlements, Volume 3* (New Haven, 1967) 281. The Quaker principles of toleration, morals, justice, and brotherly love were integral to Penn's vision for the colony.

² Dietmar Rothermund, *The Layman's Progress: Religious and Political Experience in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1740-1770* (Philadelphia, 1961), 9; Christopher Schultz to Anthony Benezet, April 13, 1768, in Don Yoder, "The Schwenkfelder-Quaker Connection: Two Centuries of Interdenominational Friendship," in Peter C. Erb, ed., *Schwenkfelders In America* (Pennsburg, PA, 1987), 147. ". . . hearing of the full Freedom of Conscience established in Pennsylvania by the Quackers, Founders of that Province, under the Sanction of the British Crown and Constitution, and the mild Government of the House of Hannover [the Schwenkfelders] resolved to go to that Place . . ."

³ Selina G. Schultz, "The Schwenkfelders of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 24, no. 4 (1957), 294-296; Christopher Heydrick, "The Schwenkfelders: An Historical Sketch," in *Selections from the Genealogical Record of the Schwenkfelder Families* (Pennsburg, PA, 1923), 20. "That [the Schwenkfelders], on the one hand, were Protestant and Evangelical, and on the other declined fellowship with the Lutherans, was enough to excite the intolerant spirit of the age, and invite persecution from all sides. . . . Their rejection of infant baptism was sufficient . . . to justify the charge that they were Anabaptists."

⁴ Horst Weigelt, *Migration and Faith: The Migrations of the Schwenkfelders from Germany to America – Risks and Opportunities* (Göttingen: 2017), 23. "In accord with their spiritual theology, Schwenkfelders opposed mainly the doctrine of Lutheran orthodoxy that eternal salvation is offered and received only through the external word and the sacraments. They aimed many criticisms at the institution of the Lutheran Church. Lutheran ministers came particularly into their sights. Schwenkfelders castigated their lifestyle with sharp words and denounced their convivialities with fiddle playing and card games. They branded their homey feasts as 'gorging' and 'boozing'."

⁵ Jan Stievermann, “A ‘Plain, Rejected Little Flock’: The Politics of Martyrological Self-Fashioning among Pennsylvania’s German Peace Churches, 1739-65,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2009), 293-294; Schultz, “The Schwenkfelders of Pennsylvania,” 293. “No others ever came to augment and invigorate this initial band”; Schultz, “The Schwenkfelders of Pennsylvania,” 303, 306. When the Schwenkfelders’ German protector began trying to convert them to his brand of pietistic Lutheranism, they recognized the need to find a new refuge outside of Europe, where they would be free to dictate their own affairs; see also Christopher Schultz to Anthony Benezet, April 13, 1768, in Erb, *Schwenkfelders In America*, 147.

⁶ Samuel Kriebel Brecht, ed., *The Genealogical Record of the Schwenkfelder Families: Seekers of Religious Liberty Who Fled From Silesia to Saxony and Thence to Pennsylvania in the Years 1731 to 1737*, Vol. I (Pennsburg, PA, 1923), 60. Melchior Kriebel reported in November of 1735 that “the Schwenkfelders had established themselves in Macungie, Kraussdale, Upper Hanover, Marlborough, Frederick, Lower Salford, Towamencin, Gwynedd, Worcester, and Germantown, all of them being places in the southeastern part of Pennsylvania.”

⁷ James Meschter Anders, “Schwenkfelder Accomplishments,” in *Who Are the Schwenkfelders: Selections from the Genealogical Record of the Schwenkfelder Families* (Pennsburg, PA, 1923), 2.

⁸ When the Schwenkfelders arrived in southeastern Pennsylvania, “it was . . . dotted with polyglot refugee communities of Conestogas, Delawares, Shawnees, Nanticokes, Conoys, and others—such as Tuscaroras from the Carolinas—whose homelands were farther afield.” Daniel K. Richter, “A Framework for Pennsylvania Indian History,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 57, no. 3 (1990), 247; Nutimus’ Town, also known as Pechqueolin, was located at Nockamixon Flats in eastern Bucks County and was the center of the predominately Delaware and Minisink settlement that Penn’s sons acquired in the infamous 1737 Walking Purchase. John Witthoft, “The ‘Grasshopper War’ Folktale,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 66, no. 262 (1953), 295.

⁹ Howard Wiegner Kriebel, *The Schwenkfelders in Pennsylvania: A Historical Sketch* (Lancaster, PA, 1904), 141.

¹⁰ Schultz, “The Schwenkfelders of Pennsylvania,” 306.

¹¹ Brecht, *Genealogical Record of Schwenkfelders*, 350. Brecht contends that the Native Americans sometimes drank too much cider. When “the Kriebel family refused to give them any more . . . the persistent Indian would place his finger outside the cup, and say ‘Only so much. Only so much.’”

¹² William T. Parsons, *The Pennsylvania Dutch: A Persistent Minority* (Boston, 1976), 64-65.

¹³ Francis Jennings, “The Scandalous Indian Policy of William Penn’s Sons: Deeds and Documents of the Walking Purchase,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 37, no. 1 (1970), 32. Logan’s 1737 “land deal,” the Walking Purchase, undermined the Delaware claim to the lands extending from the vicinity of Tohickon Creek north through the region encompassing the forks of the Delaware River. Quoting William Allen, “the hard-driving seizer of Indian lands,” Jennings writes, “that Nutimus ‘had been allways esteemed’ to be one of ‘the chief original Owners of the land in about the Forks of the Delaware.’”

¹⁴ Richter, “A Framework for Pennsylvania Indian History,” 248-249; Kevin Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn’s Holy Experiment* (New York, 2009), 46-49; see also Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell, eds., *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800* (Syracuse, NY, 1987), 89. The Iroquois had in 1736 signed a treaty with the Anglo-Pennsylvanians that reduced the status of the Delaware to “conquered,” diminishing the diplomatic standing of the latter group and hindering their ability to appeal injustices such as the Walking Purchase.

¹⁵ Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 57-58; Contemporary observer Charles Thomson noted that the 1754 agreement “ruined our interest with the *Indians*.” Charles Thomson, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Alienation of the Delaware and Shawanese Indians from the British Interest and into the Measures Taken for Recovering their Friendship* (London, 1759), 77-78.

¹⁶ Daniel P. Barr “‘A Road for Warriors:’ The Western Delawares and the Seven Years War,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 73, no. 1 (2006), 19-21; Stievermann, “A ‘Plain, Rejected Little Flock,’” 306.

¹⁷ Kriebel, *The Schwenkfelders in Pennsylvania*, 141.

¹⁸ Ibid.; see also MacMaster, *Conscience in Crisis*, 76-77. “At least some of the men behind the ‘Maxatawny and Allemangle Independent Guard’ were members of nonresistant churches, so their action may indicate the understanding of nonresistance in some of the German peace churches at that time. They agreed to contribute money to arm and equip other men, who would do the actual guard duty, and they considered this a charitable act.”

¹⁹ MacMaster, *Conscience in Crisis*, 77.

²⁰ Erb, *Schwenkfelders in America*, 134.

²¹ Ibid., 118.

²² Ibid., 120, 139-41.

²³ Kriebel, *The Schwenkfelders in Pennsylvania*, 148.

²⁴ Glenn Weaver, *The Schwenkfelders During the French and Indian War* (Pennsburg, Pa, 1955), 17-18.

²⁵ Schultz, “The Schwenkfelders of Pennsylvania,” 307.

²⁶ Weaver, *The Schwenkfelders During the French and Indian War*, 18.

²⁷ Kriebel, *The Schwenkfelders in Pennsylvania*, 147.

²⁸ Rothermund, *The Layman’s Progress*, 53-54, 66-67; MacMaster, *Conscience in Crisis*, 228-230; Scott Paul Gordon, “Patriots and Neighbors: Pennsylvania Moravians in the American Revolution,” *Journal of Moravian History* 12, no. 2 (2012), 117, 120-21; Howard W. Kriebel, “Sketch of the Life of Christopher Schultz,” *Schwenckfeldiana* 1, no. 1 (1940), 9-12; Elmer E. S. Johnson, “Christopher Schultz in Public Life,” *Schwenckfeldiana* 1, no. 1 (1940), 17-19; Weaver, *The Schwenkfelders During the French and Indian War*, 8-9, 18-19.

²⁹ Kriebel, *The Schwenkfelders in Pennsylvania*, 148.

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Little Gods

by

Daniel Vines

James Marks's *Altars to Forgotten Gods*

Who left these here? On this small, white, square platform, there are
dozens of bits of clay earth,
contorted and disturbed, covered in the dirt-browns and sandy hot-whites
of the ground, the
crystal azures and shrouded greys of the sky, the
magentas and obsidians of pixie-dust outer space, the
grotesque, glowing lime-greens of god-knows-where,
birthed by some primal, thoughtless
hands that were steered by a meticulous muse.

What are they? There's a rock
shot full of holes, a chalice with
open windows like an aquarium tank to be drunk but not to hold liquid, a
hat with no space for a
head with no ears to hear the
saxophone with no
keys to the hard, heavy, cold hot air balloon with no
basket made of only air and a view of the long way down. No—

—they are planets! Tampered, molded, and left alone for observation, full of
plateaus meant
for smallfolk to see the inches-long view of the
long way down. How they must debate over how they got there, with formulas and
measurements and fizzy, cloudy potions and drugs. But I can see the truth; I can
see that it
holds the Handprint of God. The impressions of fingerprints on the clay
planets making
valleys, digging rivers, worn, rained with sweat from titanic pores; the hands
erecting the
colossal mounds which filled in the empty, negative void between the palms.
But the smallfolk . . .
where have they gone? Are the planets unpopulated? No—

—they are Altars! To forgotten Gods . . . Yes,
all that is left of the Gods are these tributes of memory, odes to their likenesses.
But
the Altars are empty, unworshipped, abandoned like the smallfolk on this

white, square universe,
who must have abandoned themselves in likeness of their Gods. But
what about me? Are these relics left to me? Why me?

I can't use this stuff! It's beyond use. I can't see these Gods. I can only wonder
what God would need a holey rock except a God who was a rock and bored
of rocks,
what God would need a holey grail except a God who had no thirst,
what God would need a hat with no holes except a God with no head,
what God would need a head with no ears except a God who was all ears,
what God would need a keyless saxophone except a God who was holey,
what God would need keys except a God who had no ears like Mozart,
what God would need a nothing-basket except a God who was a riderless
hot air balloon . . .

But what use am I? I am unworthy to question them, only to build Altars and pray.

I place my
Altar to the God of Long Lists on the white, square universe and
ask the Altar where its maker resides. But
it gives no answer. I have labored long, and
the bastard has not showed! But the more I look and bow, the more beautiful
the list
becomes, the taller it
becomes, the more nourishing and motherly and enveloping and—
Oh! It glows like a big, beautiful Golden Calf!

Calf, my Calf, I turn to you for the truth! I follow you, for
only you are here in front of me, only you
know the answer, for only you can hear my question. Please! Please tell me,
what God creates Gods except an Altar?

An Ekphrastic of Billy Strings's *Hide and Seek*

I stopped what I was doing.

I set down my PS3 controller and started walking in Middle Earth,
but the ground kept reaching up and grabbing me. I kicked at the hands below, but
soon found that the hands were what was holding me up. A calloused fist
struck my dome, and I plummeted down into darkness.

I spun through the air like a tangled marionette and saw the superimposition of
cruel wizards above, fiddling fingers spelling out runes, twisting the dangled web
with sleight of hand. Billy spoke weary incantations, and I tumbled out of my fall.

Suddenly, I was sitting in front of my grandfather's old stereo.

I could never get it to work, but I'll be damned if it wasn't working like a champ.

Billy fixed it. But

the antennae were loose, swiveling, falling . . .

and swinging back around. They were picking up other stations and
mashing them all together. A rave-up from the New Yardbirds came in and
infected Billy's band. Lou Reed sent walls of sound from behind me.

John McLaughlin stopped
by. Five stations played at once,
but they knew each other.

The antennae swung 'round and 'round. The wind picked up. I ran to the window.
The sun swooped by. But so did the moon. It was in hot pursuit. I couldn't tell if
they were dancing or in an aerial dogfight for my soul. Billy lifted his finger.

The house was swept up in a tornado. It spun and flipped. It may have been
Dancing, too, for all I could tell, but, like everything else, it

stopped abruptly. It slammed down, and I was flung forward, crashing through
the door. I was
back in Middle Earth.

I stepped forward into the calloused hands. I did not kick them away.

An Archaeologist Restores My Memory

You know how archaeologists obsess over the mundane of a more magical time?

Pawpaw Dell used to break out the old lap steel and play funny Hawaiian sounds to country music CDs. The family would think, “There he goes again. Old Dell and his lap steel.” I was a kid, and he would let me tinker on it. He strapped the picks to my fingers, gave me the metal thing, and I would make silly slide-whistle noises like Tom and Jerry. Then after 30 seconds, I would lose interest and go back to *Oregon Trail*, and he would go back to his lap steel, playing funny Hawaiian sounds to country music CDs.

After he died, Nana excavated the house and cleared out all his detritus. We came home with the lap steel, and Nana said if we sold it, we could have half the money from it.

A few days later, my friend Heitor came to town. He’s from Brazil, but came to Shreveport as a foreign exchange student to be in “the birthplace of rock ‘n’ roll.”

Many Americans loved Elvis, but Heitor lives Elvis in a way that few can.

He plays a replica of James Burton’s paisley guitar for all the leading Elvis impersonator bands in the world. He played with DJ Fontana, Burton himself, the Sweet Inspirations. He travels with them to Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Philadelphia, Germany, the UK, and everywhere else, but he always makes it back to Shreveport.

I brought him to my new house, and we tinkered with an old record player from Pawpaw’s until it didn’t work. Then I showed him the mountain dulcimer Bean and her grandparents made me, and we tinkered with it, holding it like a guitar, then playing it in our laps.

That reminded me. “Oh, I have another treasure to show you.” I thought he might get more of a kick out of it than any of us ever could.

I brought the lap steel case in the room and set it down in front of him.
I didn't tell him what it was; I just told him to open it like a Christmas present.

He popped open the case, and there was Pawpaw Dell's old lap steel again.
Cracks had broken out along the amber wood. Where a tuning head once laid
was a miniscule, empty peg. I had never seen it
in such bad condition. Heitor had never seen

anything like it. When I looked up from Pawpaw's old lap steel, it seemed to
cast a glimmer of gold across Heitor's face, the way that
the Holy Grail must have gleamed on King Arthur's. A reflection
of a Golden Age, of the birthplace of rock 'n' roll.

"Yeah, my Pawpaw played this in Shreveport during the 40s and 50s."

"What, dude!?" Heitor's face might have melted had he not prepared
his whole life to re-live the myths of American music. "Did he play it
in the Louisiana Hayride?"

I frowned. "He played it at home. I think he did play around town, but never
in the Hayride."

"Did he play with finger picks?"

"Yeah, he did."

"Where are they?"

I frowned. They were not in the case. God knows where they had gotten to.

"Where is the slide?"

I frowned. Suddenly, I cast my memory back to Pawpaw playing his old slide
guitar, trying
to fish that carved statuette of steel out of his hand and into the present. It didn't
budge, but

for the first time in decades, I saw it again.

Heitor inspected the lap steel, told me about the way they used the same plates
and knobs

as the Telecasters back then (by God, those *were* Telecaster materials), then lifted
it up and saw

three holes in the bottom.

"Oh! Did it have a stand?"

I frowned. It did have a stand! I thought back to that lap steel sitting beside
Pawpaw at all times

on its tripod, silver legs like a trusty steed.

"Oh! Did it have pedals?"

I frowned. It did have pedals, those little rocks down below, and he would push
them down

when he played as if it were a piano.

Heitor explained to me the way the pedals would manipulate the bridge, bending the notes.

We played around with it for a while. I thought about the missing things, and how they tolled

the bell, brought forth the decline of Pawpaw's old lap steel into its dilapidated state.

Heitor worshipped it like a cracked, armless, colorless statue of Zeus that had just been extracted from the Parthenon.

We couldn't quite figure out the tuning, but

we grabbed a glass and tinkered on the strings and made a few sounds.

I remembered some of those sounds,

the strum of the A6, the 3rds moving up, the

tremolo of the glass hovering over a fret like a hummingbird.

We couldn't make it sound like Pawpaw, not even Heitor the archaeologist, the James Burton

replica, much less me, the Pawpaw replica. I won't be touring the Elvis circuit with that artifact anytime soon, but thanks to

Heitor's tireless exploration into the Golden Age, I have a clearer memory of

Pawpaw playing

his lap steel than I did even when I was right there beside him, playing

Oregon Trail and

half-listening to him making funny Hawaiian sounds to country music CDs.

John Warner Smith

John, Southern University professor, Poet Laureate of Louisiana, was born to read. His guardian was his illiterate grandfather, a great Creole storyteller, one of the last great Oaks that was felled by the wave of industrial academia, and made into paper to be written on, read, and read about. John wrote

letters to Oaks, old ones, ones who had seen the past, the roots of time that led from Africa to here, Shreveport, Louisiana, February 2020, where John was about to read

to the Shreveport Regional Arts Council, mostly from his forthcoming book called *Our Shut Eyes*. In those waning moments before the reading began, John read

the crowd to decide what poems he would read. He flipped through, plucking just this right poem or that, a green grape or a red,

when, late as always, I approached. I did not want to interfere with his crunch, his grape hunt, for I have had many myself, and they bear the best fruit, for they grow there in the moments we need them. Before I could give a quick “UNO? Me, too. Go, Privateers,” his book was down, eyes were up. What was my name? Where do I come from? What do I write? John read

the biography in my mouth studiously, genuinely, and with interest. He was so interested, the tiny plate on his lap strayed, unattended, and a complementary red grape tumbled out of his grasp. I picked it up and gave it to him, and, his voice calm, slow, mossy, he said something like, “They say the nastiest things aren’t the ones that go *in* one’s mouth, but that come *out* of one’s mouth . . . so I’m gonna eat this.” And he popped the grape into his mouth, and it was clear he knew: the grape wouldn’t get far, because even if his hands

couldn't reach,
it was well within the possession of his branches, because John was a professor,
well read,

and, little did I know, I was his latest student, his latest branch. He approached
the podium after
Ashley Havird's introduction, and he read

about Africa, about Muhammed Ali, about Birmingham, his voice still,
ancient, dusky, deep, like Langston Hughes's rivers, but it was clear, he is not
so old as a
river, but he was damn sure an Oak. His voice creaked, moaned, slow, huge and
forever, telling
moments in time before my scant minute on earth. He was of the earth, of God,
and I knew
I had much to learn from him. They were packing up the merchandise, putting it
out of sight,
when, late as always, I
approached. Words and thanks couldn't describe the fruit it bore me to hear him,
so I just
bought a book (his earliest, *Mandala of Hands*), before they left my reach. I knew
he knew I was his branch when he gave me a student discount. I read

the opening quote, from Langston Hughes's "The River," and
the first poem, "Letter to the Oaks," and I knew I would
never be an Oak, like Mr. Smith would
never be a River, but what I could do was make a tribute, a
note of impossible thanks, and I made it late that night,
when my red

grape grew ripe:
this letter to the Oak,
John Warner Smith.

Ms. Turner

Age: 25

Children: 0

Occupation: Teacher, 2nd grade

Employer: Mooringsport Elementary, Caddo Parish School Board

Filing Status: Single

Worth (Market Value): \$42,000/year

Paid: \$32,760/year

Description:

Some of the students call her Mom. She's more of a mom than they've had in their lives, but at least for a year, they'll learn and be loved. She especially likes the bad kids. She was one (no dad, no one to match her last name with). She laughed when she got spanked. She knows how to help them and how not to hurt them.

She thinks of everything. Her mind is one close to catastrophe at all times, and she has a doomsday purse full of band-aids for the hurt, wipes for the dirty, goldfish for the hungry, the allergic, and the picky, leftover Sonic mozzarella sticks in case her microwave screams for Valhalla and explodes in a blaze of glorious alarm-alarming fumes, eyeliner in case she cries and needs a touch-up, a clove of garlic to ward off predators of any sort for anyone in her sight. No one has to worry because she worries for them. She takes care of all the worst possible outcomes. It's a shame she can't enjoy the safety she brings us with us.

She thinks of everyone. Before she was a teacher, when she was on the ledge, she was talking the rural, gay delivery driver off the ledge, and he's still on it today, but for those brief moments when it wasn't too busy, she let him at least take a breather from the balancing act and be loved. Now, she spends the

40 hours with the kids,
5 hours doing carline,
7.5 hours driving to and fro,
5 hours getting ready,
5 hours grading the papers and making the lessons,
5 hours eating,
2 hours getting groceries,
3 hours showering,
1 hour making emergency runs for crafting supplies for school,
2 hours defending herself in panic attacks,
10 hours visiting her mom, grandparents, step-niece-and-nephew, and
whoever else needs visiting, like her best friend with the new baby, her brother,
and me,
2 hours on the Silhouette crafting presents for Mother's Day, Christmas, etc.,
and that only leaves
49 hours for sleeping, and that only leaves,
31.5 hours (18.75% of her time) on video games, cuddling, and breathing. It's a
shame
she doesn't have time to live the life she's built.

She thinks of herself
as ugly and fat. All the students
have a crush on her (so do I). Even the grizzliest felon
blushes and grins when she asks what their favorite sea creature is. I was harder.
I didn't give her a straight answer, and she scolded me. I laughed, and then I was
her favorite, and she was mine.
She's beautiful to look at. It's a shame
she can't see herself.

I did the most I could do: give her a ring
so that next year she can finally match someone's last name and
get paid more of what she's worth (market value).

The Faerie Queen

Maylene, Maylene,
coming out the clouds inside my dreams.
Maylene, Maylene!
Would you like to be my faerie queen?

Well, everybody's talking
but you know it's all just hawking;
they assess your dress, but not the wings behind.
I think only I can see 'em,
'cause I know just where you've been
and the only way to leave there is to fly.

Maylene, Maylene,
coming out the clouds inside my dreams.
Maylene, Maylene!
Would you like to be my faerie queen?

Well, take me to the river,
the unholy, flowing giver,
and drown me in the mystic row of time.
I don't know if I will see
the Styx, salvation, or the breeze;
any way is fine as long as you are mine.

Maylene, Maylene,
coming out the clouds inside my dreams.
Maylene, Maylene!
Would you like to be my faerie queen?

Well, take me to the grove
with the toadstools and the oaks
and reveal the secret blueses that they moan.
I'd dearly like to see
with the weary eyes of trees
who have watched a million die and live and roam.

Maylene, Maylene,
coming out the clouds inside my dreams.

Maylene, Maylene!
Would you like to be my faerie queen?

Well, I hear your trumpets calling
as you save me from free falling
and you lift me back into capricious winds.
And they weave within themselves
like a runic treble clef
and suddenly it seems to all be making sense.

Maylene, Maylene!
Coming out the clouds inside my dreams.
Maylene, Maylene!
Would you like to be my faerie queen?

The Faerie Queen's Suitors

Our fair lady of the forest
choruses have praised.
Rain has tried to drown their voice,
but their spirits only raised.

Not even a missionary,
nary with a cry,
could pry the blessed from their fairy's
sacrilegious sight.

And so it goes,
devoted souls
would let her steal their hides
and deliver them,
empty, free,
up to the naked sky.

Suspended gently, twinkling pixie,
basking in the shade,
a precious sprite all filled with spite
for the ground the men have made;

what she'd give to give her floating
feet a little rest,
something else besides a branch
on which to lay her breast.

But so it goes,
her throbbing toes
will have nowhere to stand
as long as those
combed choir boys
sing her into the wind.

Those who worship tricky pixies
rarely ever lose:
she'd take their shirts off, then their pants,

and then their socks and shoes;

as mosquitos high and ants below
bring pain unto their hides,
they'd cry a praise for the magic fae
who lit their senses bright.

And so it goes,
the fairy knows
she's lost and so have they
who wish to fly
just like the fae,
who longs for dirt to lie.

Bean Creates Summer and a Wave Washes My Head Away

“Children are amused by the dumbest things,”
thought teenaged me, grasping at my newfound
understanding of convolutions and
abandoning simplicity.

But the day before Bean had to teach summer school
(her last day of summer),
we sat on the beach chairs at the pool like
good little adults, talking about loan companies,
reading about sports, listening to podcasts about murder, etc.
I got lost in a story about Grant Frerking’s business savvy amidst the
new NIL rules and heard a SPLASH!

I was alone, and now Bean’s head was emerging
from the water, hair so wet with dirty,
unmaintained water that she would be burdened with
having to wash it in the shower,
unlike clever, clean me.

I followed her and dipped slowly into the pool beside her, asking
what got into her. She said,
“It’s the last day of summer, so I wanted it to feel like summer before it was over.”

And just like that, it was finally summer.
After all the house-hunting, lenders switching companies in the middle
of pre-qual letters, us switching companies for better rates, me sending
52 applications against walls and finally getting a job I hate,
it was summer.
I had never seen something so simple change the course of the world.

She wanted more, and no one was there to tell her no,
so she jumped again and again, giggling
and asking how big her splashes were. I taught her
how to do a cannon ball, and it was so big,
she scraped the bottom of the pool and cried out underwater
like a hurt kid.

I don't know if it was her cannon ball or her pain,
but the filthy splash from it seemed to come alive
and seek me out. And I'm also not sure if it
was eating me or embracing me, but I do know it
washed my head away.
It was worth it.

The Daydreamer Consults Tiresias

Time never passes
in the meadow. It's still as a painting,
except when a gust of wind makes a wish
for the future and
compels the flowers to dance.
The hair of the Daydreamer joins them, grazing
on the wind and trying to blend in.
In a flurry of white dandelion hair
whipping across the breeze,

the ghost of Tiresias lives.
The ghost is of many colors,
a rainbow array of possibilities
scattered to the four corners. Only the wind
may touch them. The Daydreamer thinks
of plucking the naked stem of dandelion clock for
keepsake, but Tiresias casts a cold gaze and

the wind stops. The grass is the same
as it always was; whether blown
this way or that, it will not leave its roots. It
will wind up still in the place it belongs. The Daydreamer
has a quick change of mind and
stays still, leaving
the dandelion stem untouched. A gust roars back, and

at last, petals fly off the head of the Daydreamer.
They will remain still,
pondering, prophesizing, wandering
in the wind until it strips them bald of possibilities. Then they
will thank Tiresias and leave the meadow, certain of their destiny,
until their hair grows back.

Do You Listen?

Late evening fine whining
Carousel of courses
White wheat lean meat
Combed pumpkin horses

As you fill your mouth
You feel your soul
Penetrated by the shadow
Of the man in the corner
He sees you, and misses none
He is the moon and the sun

He sees your stark remark
Her face twisted tart
He's singing about you
Do you listen?

ceorl

Milord! You did not see me from your throne,
you saw me when you braved the open field:
battered, dinted helm, cloven shield,
battle-worn, torn from my own home,

honored to be kneeling at your feet,
and luckier than everyone I'd known
save Erkenbrand, whose feats of most renown
were second only to Aragorn's every action.

And your great episode, of course,
would come with me upon the great Helm's Deep.
Outnumbered by the Dunlendings and orcs,
you would succeed; what would become of me?

You fickly perished in Pelennor Fields,
but a burial of song keeps you alive.
A song! The only thing for which I strive.
But my end came when under you I kneeled.

But, Tolkien willing, I am still alive.
Still, I have no song.
It has been long.
Many lives.

I think I shall live forever.

Trouble

She is a wild beast, bloodthirsty, savage,
a killer. Her teeth are long, sharp shears,
a gift for grinding and slicing the flesh
that oozes from her mouth. I have seen many
flee from her steely gaze. They can tell her
teeth can maul their soft vessels,
crack their bones. They can tell her
razor-sharp claws can shred their skin.
They can only try to escape, but they can tell her
lean legs can run them down, can evade their self-defense.
In her line of sight, they have no right to live. Their only hope is the

collar that wraps around her neck, the
leash that holds her back, and the
subservience we have instilled in her.
We have restrained her, disallowed her from hunting,
then made her depend on our grocery-store food.
We have made her trust us, and told her to trust others,
and told her there are no threats anymore. But she is

suspicious. Still, she watches through the slits in the window blinds,
waiting for the squirrels to finally unveil their plot,
waiting for the UPS man to finally strike,
waiting for one of these strangers to finally declare
that our territory is neutral, not hers.

She loves to go on walks.
She loves treats, especially the meaty ones.
She loves toys, especially the ones that mimic crying animals.
She loves belly rubs,
and she doesn't just tolerate us around her weak point: she demands our hands
on her belly, presents it and pushes our hands down there.

I worry about her sometimes, like any soul whose
body is in the wrong time, the wrong society.
Does she want to kill? Does she need to?

Is her soul hurting, deprived of its primordial purpose?
I hope she is at least comfortable.

Scout's Outing

She's got a permanent smile,
 whatever she's doing:
 barking, chewing bark, chewing balls, ballin' out, outing life.
 That dog would destroy the NFL Scouting Combine
 if she wanted to. She does have other things
 to live for:
 football, basketball, soccer, frisbee golf, track-and-field.
 She's a Black-and-Gold Olympian.
 Scout, First of Her Name. Scoutimus Prime. The Young Scout, King in the North.
 Scout The Troublemaker. Kim Jung Scout, Our Fearless Leader.
 The prestigious Dr. Scoutopolis. Jamal Crawford.
 Odell—or Jarvis?—she's a bayou bengal, a fightin' tiger.
 But she's not a fighter. She oughta be on the cover of *Puppy Magazine*. Raised
 right. She
 quakes with joy, raised right, yes her
 owner is composed and level-headed.
 But everything is
 downside-up,
 Her owner is
 diSIntegrateD and
 H e l e S e t r
 e t r k l e

So the murder comes:
I am in another world—my body, and half of my mind—but my rapid eye
moved here,
watching—no ticket—numb.
“You are LOOKING LIVE! at the Vicks® Arena in Shreveport, Louisiana!
Some call it The Crossroads!” On
Hwy1/North Market. You could merge on to 220, East to Monroe or West
to Dallas
if there wasn’t a game today. Right in the middle of the damned intersection.
There’s the skyline. Boomtown Casino, Regions bank, Horseshoe,
CitiCardMasterExpressTMTMTMTMTMTMTMTMTMTMTMTMTMTMTMTM.
But my eye faces away from the city, toward home
and Whataburger and Checkers and Brookshire’s and and and

Scout—loyal to death—struts onto the concrete field.
Her owner is unshakable. She will win. Because he is the coach.
She is a model. She is a beauty. She is a competitor, a life-outer,
but not a fighter.
The security at Vicks® Arena must be misremembered security
because they let Coach Cook bring a griffin to a dogfight.
and the referees are deaf or sleazed
because Scout's yelp came before the opening whistle.
Her leg is sliced open by the hellish talons.
But she still runs—limps,
and jumps up at the griffin, flying by
and swooping back in for another strike.
Scout is goredgeous.
Scout is gored, beak in her side.
Scout is knocked down, breaking her leg.
And still she fights, standing still on the road to
leap against the next attack.
She loses her eye.
Her fiery, golden eye.
The griffin comes down to finish her off
and still she bites; she's helpless.
She's perfect.
She's got a permanent smile.
The griffin rips her apart like Prometheus
or a barbarian feast.
The light is green, but the faceless cars are still.
The owner wails against the wind—the deed is done.
He holds her spine in his arms.
Her intestines slip through his fingers.
“I love her inside and out,” and she's
inside out—and outside upside-down and out of bounds.
She's out. No more outing. It was the last outing.
There's nothing we can do but weep.
And as I weep and wail,
the weatherman speaks of hail
for the next forty days
until the sky fills up and my eye floats away.

Ascension to Heaven

A dead squirrel emerges
from the melting snow, preserved, but
rotting.

I take a closer look, and
its eyes are swimming like a pool of heavenly ichor.
I take a closer look and find that the ichor is a pile of
maggots in the eye sockets, wiggling atop each other, feasting.
This one has more life in death
than it did in life.

The Tortoise Gets Off His Ass

I never used to be able to write much
poetry. Never thought my ideas were
good enough to write down. I'd turn out
an epiphany or two, but even though
my mind was a hare, my hand was a tortoise.
Now I don't care as much, so I write
a lot more. I don't need to
change the world with every thought.

Now, even if it's just a little, I change the world a lot more
because I write more.

The Lizard and the Lion

The Lizard was larger than any president.
He belittled his own body
and cast his spirit out.
How large was the spirit that
it shaded New Mexico,
it birthed a chupacabra
in Old Mexico,
and it impregnated the Lion
stalking the savannah
in an empty, wild ear of Tanzania.

The Lizard sat still upon his stone throne
and looked at the deep footsteps littering the sand
from all those, come and gone,
who had brought offerings.
He consumed.
In the waning day there approached
a pious donkey and
a haughty elephant
with weak souls
and strong soles.

They trampled the Lizard until he fell to heaven,
passing under to the heart of the earth.
The Lion, shattered inside of his flesh-armor,
heard his impregnated spirit burning him, asking for
release.

So he
plodded along the bushes. He
trekked the desert. He
chased the juicy flesh flies. But his
tongue was not tall enough. His
skin was not thick enough. His
body was not small enough.
But he
could leap across the world, and he

could reign with fear, still and silent. And he
could speak to the still stones, and they
would roll and guide him along his purpose.

So the Lion stands
at the top of a hill, looking down upon the
folk dancing, giraffes grazing, the bastard elephant
snapping sticks with his trunk
while his friend the donkey
lectures the other asses,

and the Lion looks straight ahead
to meet the gaze of the head
of the breathing tree, sitting taller
than any life in the world.

Atop that tree, he will scream
until his spirit is unleashed,
rolling across the sky
returning the awe to the world.
None shall trample the Lion,
and the glory will be restored.

The stones step aside.
The world tree invites.
And with the Lizard's hazy spirit swimming in the Lion's eyes,
he descends.

Minotaur Man

Oh, Minotaur man,
twisted product of spite,
you only see yourself in the bravest light.
You think all problems
should be solved with might.
I wish I could sympathize with you,
but even then you fight.

Oh, Minotaur man,
born in the wrong place,
you think that life can
only go one way.
It's no surprise that
you think that way is straight.
If you refuse to turn,
you'll never get out of that maze.

You got an invisible wife;
I wonder who cast the spell?
When she spoke her mind
did you give her hell?
Yell at her for your mistakes,
like you did to me?
Take everybody's voice,
but none of the responsibility?

You're the reason Plato won
his sick, twisted game.
You're the reason the
sophists have a bad name.
You're Procrustes, and the bed
has your measurements and your name,
but you'll hack and slash till someone fits,
so they can take your place.

You speed through stop signs
on your way to work.

You command the land to bow
'cause you're the king's twerp.
I hate to tell you, but he hides you like a mole.
He makes your presence a punishment
for unfortunate souls.

Winged Staff

After a hard rain, we made our way
into the Ouachita Mountains and found
a spot among the woods to camp.
The night threatened, so we searched
for firewood. Aaron found
a staff, long, ornate,
a slim trunk with off-shooting leaves
of wood. It seemed like the skeleton
of a fallen tree. Caitlin told us it was
a branch of Winged Elm. It seemed like the heart of an angel, decayed arteries
shooting out into the air.
We did not burn it. We stabbed it
into the ground and kept it
upright. We wondered its magic. Maybe

a beacon of life, warding off other settlers. Maybe
a heart of garlic, warding off racoons and bears. Maybe
a shield, warding off the next rain. Maybe
a barbaric warning, warding off invasive
tree roots from our sleeping grounds. Or maybe
it was a prophecy from the ghost of the Elm
that, so long as we use fallen branches
for kindling and stay our blades from the living,
our wood would stay perfectly dry, and we would stay warm.

The fire raged in the sodden mud, and
we stayed warm and dry.

The Colossal Pine Kept Sentry

I

Mom ripped out the Vines for
decoration for the shower last week.
We took them home for
the yard and forgot to plant them.
Today, we found them, vibrant, lush, unbothered,
staring back at us.

II

Bean loves lawns with missed spots. Cute
little imperfections that won't go away. I try to
brush my hair to cover the thinning spots, then I go mow,
but no matter how many times I pass the lush white Forget-Me-Nots,
they laugh as I pass, reminding me
that it was me who was in the wrong spot.

III

The Magnolia leaves are forever,
green as God. Any time
Mooringsport Elementary needs to decorate,
they send kids to pluck the leaves and take them
inside. They throw them all about.
Everyone is so much happier to be outside in.

IV

The old owner put the Rose Bushes
in the middle of the backyard, but
we'd rather have them in the front.
Bean took a shovel to the outside,
hacked at the roots like a gladiator, gave up, and
told me to add them to the poem.

V

The colossal Pine kept sentry
over her new subjects
with disgust. She decided our septic tank was
not at all in the right place, and so unsightly!
So she choked it out, and
our house flooded with sewage.

Tree of Song

The world decides your measure
by the way you speak.
The mansion talks with pleasure,
the shack through gritted teeth.

Riches overflowing
from a honey tongue,
but it will remain lowly
if it forgets to sing.

Desperate souls that call on high reach God with a sigh;
it is not a shame to have some fire in your cry.
It's unseemly there to shout,
but you must raise your voice to get out.

Toil and toil unending
makes a shovel dull.
The soil is ripped, unmending,
but when you sing, it grows.

Why not grow it higher
like a skyscraper of song
to hide you from the others
and leave you alone to grow?

Then soon you'd be higher
than anyone can see,
but only you will know,
only you need to know.

A giant in the forest,
hiding all alone,
and the talkers will debate
if you're a myth or just a song.

An Ode to the Clock at the Antique Shop

Saturday, the morning called us to adventures of great solace:
forgetting the weekday's bleak reality to thrift for antique baubles.
Tiny glasses, wrought in gold, for drops of vintage wine to hold,
a steampunk lamp that bared its bulb; what use?
I looked away.

We came across a tiny clock that ticked just like a beating heart
with waves of ichor from some old god swirling round its lovely face.
It was the size of a penny, or maybe some old golden coin of plenty.
Anyhow, I squinted, trying to see
the time it told.

We got lost in place and time and frolicked across the endless lines
of trinkets from the past the store deemed quaint enough to cause to last.
"Shop 'til 5," the clerk implored and pointed over toward the door.
"That's when we close, and it's only 4! A penny,
one more penny!"

I looked over where she pointed, then I saw a thing of wonder:
a clock so large and unadorned that I could see that it was 4!
Its Times New Roman hours so bold to see without the need to hold,
and best of all, it ticked in 4, not
iambic pentameter!

"How much? How much?" I pointed too at the blank, cheap clock that I
could use.
"That's not for sale!" the clerk said, shocked. "Why would you want that
boring clock?"
"Why do you want it?" I replied. She said, "That's how we tell the time!"
That's how I knew it was the only priceless
treasure there.

A Poor Replica of the One Ring, Complementary with a Box of LotR *Risk*

A ring, around
nothing, a copy of that which does not exist. We know its value. The idea: gold,
shiny. But this is
far too shiny. Gilded, with scuffs, Cracks of Doom which reveal a darker
underlying metal.

An etching, a
transcript of a
fake language, as definite as the
common tongue, created by a
God as real as that of Babel, whose
towers are as great, whose
Palantir is a pen.

A circle, flowing
endlessly, harboring
infinite circles like
angels, no angles; a
thick, milky, fictional ichor which flows over the top and bottom, like a
waterfall covering the edge of a deadly cliff. A
mirror swimming in the
fictional ichor, projecting a reflection of my

face,
a poor replica of myself.

A Mannequin's ECT Score

I'm seeing things.

A classroom, mannequin heads poking up everywhere,
silent. At the frontest front, a vision
of an angel named Lowell in a suit, passing back the

test, what test!?

That pop quiz from everyday remember? Fuck.

I'm tired of this. That

demon Ginsberg crept up again. The heat burns
my ears—*what ears?*—when he comes howling, making me
wish.

I wish I was crazy as Ginsberg—*shock*
me! shock

me!— and people listened to the grief I work
so hard to have.

I want that stupid kid that calls himself

Bob Dylan to want my stupid

attention. I want to see a vision of

Old Scratch Blake. But it's always Ginsberg. I want to

lie.

But I never committed
academic dishonesty.

I never was committed

to leave the droves of

erudite ass-sniffs—*what nose?*—'cause they were the only ones who

pretended to care what quasi-poetic, boring, bewildered truth was inside of me,
what my shit smelled like or dislike. So I'm obsessed with that clipboard. The red
ink! It's like "Tulips" in the white hospital institution!—*Academic institution*—

O, color, hurt me,
shock me! O, ichor of the angel! Tell me,

what's my ECT score? Tell me

I'm different! I I I I I I

want the police to point their authorizing guns

at me while I recite shitty poetry and no
one can hear how bad it is, only see how good I look. I want to
not want it, but for it to happen to me. I want
you to have to be bored reading my reference notes because I'm
so clever and dense.

Me! The beautiful mirror!
Drowning in the infinite C, with mannequin heads,
drowning, bobbing, "Yes, master!" Me! Narcissus, seeing
my face in the water. Me! Narcissus
Plath, confessing my boring white! Me!
Narcissus Lowell confessing my boring
father! Me! Narcissus Berryman confessing my boring
boredom! Me! The vision of Old Scratch Swinburne, isolated, pagan-drowned
Sappho Swinburne screaming, "Shock
me! Shock
me!" Born of swine,
I want to be a master
of craft, but I don't want to
work! I want to sit still, eyeless, faceless, lazy, and—*You got a Sea-plus, kid*
—boring.

Pupil

Here comes the Shepherd with the Bell.
Here comes the Shepherd with the Bell.

Here, to station me to
my post,
hunched over. I am a Thinker,
fisted fingers, bladed shoulders
stabbing out
like false wings trying to sprout.

The sun bleaches my face
and scrapes my imperfections away.
I am pale concrete,
impenetrable and
alone.

I have many lips, each one
a bassless hole in a honeycomb box that
rattles with the busy buzzing
messages the Titular Ones profess.

I salute with my eyes,
No pupils of my own.
I sit at attention,

stiff and hazy
fading

waiting

for Her Majesty the Moon

to shed my concrete
and allow me now to speak

soft and supple and wet,
oil and skin and sweat,

naked, without regret.

My speaker is myself again.
My lips and tongue are free.
I am what instinct may take me,
unwatched by clocks or men.

I linger in the night,
saturated with my soul,
begging for my sight
to make my mouth as whole.
But I think

of my statue:
gawked at and passed over
in the stagnant stocks,
critiqued by the sun-sick heliotics
on the grain of stone in my absent eye,
the diarrhea in my silent mouth.

Here comes the Shepherd with the Bell.
Here comes the Shepherd with the Bell.

Changed

To die,
slip into sleep,
slide out of
consciousness.
When will you wake?

When you wake,
what will you see?
Leap across time,
rub your eyes
and realize
you've just woken up for the first time?
Or
shout, "I missed it!" and
rush to the newspaper to
see how it all turned out?
Or
will you wake up just in time
to see the last scene?
Rise with the rest,
the worst and the best
of history
to stand puzzled
at the placing of the last piece?

What shape will it be,
the last piece?
And what will the full picture look like?
The face of
God? Or
Satan?
Yourself?
Everyone?

But when we see it,
what will happen to it?
Will it explode?

Will it wilt and shrivel?
Or will it expand and become the only One?

Or maybe
you will fix some eggs, dozed and robed,
see the sun on your mother's head, and say,
Did you change your hair?

Nope.

*Must just be me
that changed.*

A Parable Without a Point

The theatre burned down
down in Sleepytown last week.
A groundling turned the Act 3 cannons
to the balcony.

The crowd was loud.
They cried and shouted, “Man, that was a show!
That drunk’s the hottest
star since Shakespeare’s Globe.”

It was better this way;
yes, everyone agreed.
’Cause there’s nothing quite like boredom
to keep you out your seat.

So they made the world
a stage instead to recite their laughs and woes.
They created scenes in public shops where
they knew the crowds would grow.

You might walk in and ask, “Who’s that? Which act?”
Well, no one’s sure.
Well, the 15-second street play
was the cure.

It was better off this way;
yes, everyone agreed.
There’s nothing quite like boredom
to keep you out your seat.

Well, the shows would end
so early
that they’d make a hundred more,

one after another,
the cast
a revolving door.

They'd hand out scripts to strangers
who would learn their
seven lines.

Everyone's an extra
who each got paid
a dime.

It was better off this way;
yes, everyone agreed.
There's nothing quite like boredom
to keep you out your seat.

Well, the townsfolk
got so bored,
the playwrights went
back to the board.

They said
nobody cares
about a story that's
so short.

So they put
their heads together
and made plays
that interlinked,

and the stories
lasted
longer than
a blink.

It was better off this way;
yes, everyone agreed.
There's nothing quite like boredom
to keep you out your seat.

Well, the crowds would like to listen

so much that they'd stand still
to see what's gonna happen to last play's kill and thrill.

They started to bring seats
to see every episode.
So the shops and streets would start to overflow.

It was better off this way;
yes, everyone agreed.
There's nothing quite like boredom
to put you in your seat.

Well, the traffic got congested, and the town hall threw a fit.
They made the stage the only place a play they would permit.

And they made admission 15 bucks: 10 for you, 5 for them.
They built a theatre for such events.

It was better off this way;
yes, everyone agreed.
There's nothing quite like boredom
to put you in your seat.

Weight

I sit in
dead dirt.
The feeling does not
change, feel always like
the place is the same, the
progress is invisible, a creeping
ghost, gazing into the most infinite
Heaven, the staircase is straight and
The scene stands still above my gaze
How many days fly by? Where is the sky?
Do I touch it? Did I not touch it before when
I was down there?
Well. It doesn't look like I dreamed it; would the colors are not true.
I still feel the same the past regresses, and the future is always far beyond.
My eyes are set; my time is spent altering the world which surrounds me.
My appearance is elevated, and I am worshipped and—my!—how happy they are
to see me. Do they not see my frown, or are they too far down to know what
I really
look like? They are ants the way they carry on, and I am just a fool I am afraid
of heights,
but I must press on because I have almost reached the end. There is Heaven. I see
only how
close it is by how far away the underlings have become. I am destined to sit atop
existence with
a scepter perhaps (that would be quite lovely) but I wonder if they could possibly
see it down there.
I breathe mightily yet here the air is quite thin; I believe the soil supplied me nicely
if I can remember
correctly, but I may not think my chest is pressed in such fashion. I have provoked
gravity. I long for the
living dirt with its nutrients and air, but no the ground lies so far down now would
the fall not crush me?
I have achieved it; I am now compressing into nothingness. I have reached the top.
Yes, the weight will crush
me.

Tired

What is that
sucking at my soul? I didn't get enough
sleep, I know, but that doesn't mean
some demon gets to vacuum my soul away.
It gets up behind my eyes and stretches them out,
making words jump around and switch places, and I
can't remember where I was, or what I've seen.
It makes my stomach float up into my throat and
makes my mind squeeze tightly into itself like a black hole.
I have no choice but to fight this demon back with
coffee and Ibuprofen.

Rock 'n' Roll

Rock 'n' roll is a pothole
Rock 'n' roll pollutes the air
Rock 'n' roll is grime
Rock 'n' roll has no hair
Rock 'n' roll is dying
Rock 'n' roll is death
Rock 'n' roll is the ferry
Rock 'n' roll is along for the ride
Rock 'n' roll is a ride
Rock 'n' roll coasts across
Rock 'n' roll is cross
Rock 'n' roll is a farce
Rock 'n' roll is a comedy
Rock 'n' roll is a tragedy
Rock 'n' roll is not an act
Rock 'n' roll is a play
Rock 'n' roll is a stage
Rock 'n' roll pollutes the air
Rock 'n' roll dares
Rock 'n' roll has no hair
Rock 'n' roll is death
Rock 'n' roll is my breath
Rock 'n' roll is grime
Rock 'n' roll has no time
Rock 'n' roll is dead
Rock 'n' roll has no form
Rock 'n' roll is only a spine
Rock 'n' roll is not gendered
Rock 'n' roll is not a genre
Rock 'n' roll has no race
Rock 'n' roll is a race
Rock 'n' roll is erased
Rock 'n' roll is gay
Rock 'n' roll is a fray
Rock 'n' roll screams when it whispers
Rock 'n' roll screams when it stops
Rock 'n' roll screams when it fails

Rock 'n' roll screams when it sucks
Rock 'n' roll is dead
And when you die
Cold, alone, and glorious
Rock 'n' roll will grow

Dirty Shreveport

“Sleepy town,” they say.
“Dirty river.” Even we say,
“Don’t swim in it;
it will swallow you whole, or else
you’ll need to shower.
Opt for a pool instead.”

But what part of the world leaves
you cleansed? Touch a squirrel, a fish, or a stray
cat, and you might be told to bathe. Hug a
man, sweating under the Louisiana sun, and you might rather
scrub the life off with dead suds.

What God couldn’t swallow you whole?
If they couldn’t, they also couldn’t
feed the Caddo folk, watch them
die, and feed their killers.

We are in good hands, or else
Caddo would not have settled us,
France, England, and Spain would not have killed over us,
Thomas Jefferson would not have bought us,
Captain Shreve would not have cleaned us of dead wood.
Many may sail for New Orleans eventually, but
all are born from the dirty,
bloody water which
came before.

Union Station

IV

Brindan called from Monroe:
“We need a bassist for the road.”
I played guitar in Shreveport;
close enough, they supposed.
I drove a hundred miles to practice
and learned forty country songs.
We hit ’em all a couple times,
and then we hit the road.
Close enough, I suppose.

We knew someone in Dallas
with whiskey and a floor,
got kicked out of Oklahoma
and slept outside the door;
we turned a stranger into a friend
on the Kansas plains,
then to the promised land of Denvertown,
and we could take the train.

V

When we rolled along and got to Denvertown,
the boys decided to go and look around.
I told ’em, “Go ahead and look away,
but as for me, I feel like I should stay
at the Union Station.”

I

So I sat in Union Station
on the benches underneath
all the hotel balconies,
tourists looking down like kings.
But we’re all here, at Union Station,
all strangers with our bands,
touring foreign lands
with empty jars for cash or sand
at the Union Station.

vi

To see the world united in one place,
all the different features of her face,
all the faces united in one roof,
stationary, but always on the move,
at the Union Station.

I

So I stayed in Union Station
with the gift shop and the bar,
coffee shops and restaurants,
and the chandeliers like stars.
I stayed out at Union Station
till my 20s turned to 10s,
my 10s turned into 5s,
and the day turned into night
at the Union Station.

vi

And I saw the world united in one place,
all the different features of her face,
all the faces united in one roof.
We're stationary, but we're all on the move.

I sat with servants on business from far away.
I worked on songs while they ran the place.
They treated both the kings and me the same,
so I filled their empty jars with change
at the Union Station.

Grey Havens

I guess it's time to go again.
There's seven seas to see, my friend.
I don't know when I'm going back;
the wind weaves an erratic track.

I'm going to the Grey Havens; I must be on my way,
beckoned by grandiose tales of ancient elves all cloaked in stoic grey.
And if I should harden into stone
from the things that I am shown,
content, I'd spend a heartless year
in thought so pure and clear.
But I'll see you, dear, within my dreams
in the day and in the night.

I'll etch your face inside my mind;
a tablet stands the test of time.
Your presence swims within so clear
that when you're gone, you'll still be here.

Galadriel's sweet gift to you
has given your home life anew,
but mother's magic silver seed
will never grow the same great tree.

In time we will come to worship the magic of the frozen frame,
'til all that's left is to reminisce on what we could not maintain.
I'd like to introduce myself
to the newest version of yourself
and exchange the verses we've added to our songs.
Accept that the Earth is water-glass,
and you may not have to bother with
the things that were or have not yet come to pass.

The hearth, the heart, lies in the things that are.

The Tragedy of Terminos: A Dramatic Scene

Thomas Tye-Cornelius

Characters

ATHENA, daughter of Zeus and Goddess of Wisdom and War
HADES, God of the Dead and Prince of Olympus
HERACLES, son of Zeus and God of Strength
KOROS, a stand-in for all other Olympians watching TERMINOS
MEGANA, TERMINOS's sister
MEYANA, MEGANA's bastard daughter and TERMINOS's niece
POSEIDON, God of the Sea
TERMINOS, a citizen of Athens who has recently taken his own life
THANATOS, son of HADES and God of Death
ZEUS, God of Thunder and King of Olympus

Setting

The action takes place on Mount Olympus in ancient Greece.

Scene 1

(The scene opens on Mount Olympus. The setting is barren with nothing but a semicircle of thrones bearing the symbols of the Olympians. The throne of ZEUS sits CS, and beside it are two smaller thrones bearing the symbols of ATHENA and HERACLES. The Olympians are still young. ZEUS appears as a man in his fifties while his children look like adolescents. Before the three Olympians lies TERMINOS, this young world's first suicide. KOROS stands before the Olympians, who are shocked to see him and not HADES.)

KOROS: Great Olympians, we the citizens of Olympus grow concerned.
The man who lies before you is not yet meant to walk among us,
And Hades himself knows nothing of his departure from the mortal plane.
As King and Heirs to the throne we believe you are the ones best fit.
Question this man and discover the nature of his early arrival.

HERACLES AND ATHENA: How dare you speak to us as if we are on an even
playing field.
Before you sit the future rulers of Olympus, not to mention

HERACLES AND ATHENA (CONT.): The defeater of Kronos and the Titans himself.

On whose authority do you claim to operate?!

(POSEIDON and HADES enter SL.)

POSEIDON AND HADES: That would be the princes whose thrones your births defiled!

(KOROS and the others—excluding Zeus—break into screams. Nothing but chaos is brewing, and it makes TERMINOS start to stir. Seeing that the mortal is on the verge of awakening, ZEUS casts down a bolt of godly wrath.)

ZEUS: Enough!

I will not have my children and my brothers bickering over the fate of a mortal. Hades, your spawn Thanatos is the one tasked with carrying out death. Bring him here so that we may question the arrival of this mortal.

(HADES lifts his bident and summons forth his child. THANATOS enters SL and quickly begins to make himself at home in one of the Olympian thrones.)

THANATOS: Olympus! How I have longed to taste the power of this mount. Hello, Uncle! I am most pleased to meet you after all this time . . . Although I am most confused as to why you would summon the God of Death To the realm of the immortals.

ZEUS: Thanatos, I did not summon you to banter. Before me lies a human who is not meant to have crossed the River Styx. As the God of Death, you are responsible for the proper timing, So I will ask simply: why is he here?

(THANATOS looks at TERMINOS. HE is immediately filled with fear, and the confidence HE originally exuded is nowhere to be seen. ZEUS notices this change and begins to question this mortal's death with more vigor.)

ZEUS: Thanatos . . . you did take this mortal? No?

THANATOS: I did, but not of my own volition.

ATHENA: What do you mean, cousin?

ATHENA (CONT.): You are the only Olympian with such a power as to end life. If you did not take this mortal from his realm on your own, who did?

HERACLES: Let us ask him! The boy is waking up!

(TERMINOS slowly awakens. HE is shocked to find himself standing in the midst of the Olympians and not the souls of the Styx. HE quickly begins to genuflect and bow at their feet.)

TERMINOS: Oh, great Olympians! Thanatos must be mistaken. When I sought an audience with him, I did not think it would be here. Punish me as you best see fit, oh, great ones. It cannot be worse than the things I have already endured.

KOROS: Who are you?! Why are you here?! How did you die before your time?!

TERMINOS: I am Terminos of Athens, son of Tameleuh. I served as a general in the Athenian army and swore my allegiance to your princess. Even still, I failed her. I watched my entire platoon be slaughtered in front of me and did nothing to stop it. By the time that reinforcements arrived, it was too late. My men were dead. Athens was compromised. I had failed at the only thing that I had ever dedicated my life to! I had no other option but to join my brothers in the Styx. I made a vow to do this, and I had to keep it, So I slit my own wrists and called upon Thanatos—

THANATOS: By the time I arrived to collect him, he had faded almost entirely from the mortal plane. There was no hope of restoring the man that he once was. I did my duty, and I did it well, so do not blame me.

HERACLES: You are not a powerless individual, cousin! Exiled or not, you are still an Olympian! This man's death is as much on your hands as it is his!

TERMINOS: No, Lord Heracles! Times have changed since you walked among the mortals! The thing we have above all else is no longer our minds.

TERMINOS (CONT.): Nay, it is our word, and my death let me keep my word.

ATHENA: Keep your word to whom?!

You abandoned your station and deserted my army.

If you were not already dead, you would be sent to death for such crimes.

My brother cares because of his human parentage.

I, however, wish no joy upon your death.

(ATHENA exits SL. SHE is followed by KOROS, who has lost interest in TERMINOS and would prefer to gawk at the higher Olympians. POSEIDON and HADES move to the thrones that used to belong to them.)

HADES: I do not understand it.

How could you think that your life was so hopeless that you chose to end it?

TERMINOS: That is rich coming from you, Lord Hades.

You rule the Underworld with an iron fist.

My brothers are probably churning away in one of your sweatshops as we speak!

What do you have them doing? Watching the river? Mining souls?

HADES: Is that what the mortals think of me?

TERMINOS: That is not even half of it.

(This comment clearly cuts HADES deeply. HE has never wanted to be cruel, but HE understands that his job makes him rather unlikable.)

HADES: Well, then.

If humans are going to start wasting the gift of life,

Then perhaps I should get back to running my sweatshops.

I can't let the tortured souls think that I want them to find peace beyond the
Underworld.

(Hades exits SL.)

POSEIDON: Hades, wait!

(POSEIDON exits SL.)

ZEUS: If I am being honest,

ZEUS (CONT.): You are the only mortal I have ever seen make them this mad. Hades especially. He tends to be the softest of us.

TERMINOS: Why should I care that I make them mad?
I had to watch my brothers die!
Then when I followed through on the promise that I made to them and myself,
I was chastised by the one Olympian that I thought would understand!
To hell with Olympus! To Hell with Athena!
To Hell with your pompous rules! To Hell with all of it!
Send me to the River Styx where I belong!
Allow me the peace that I was seeking!
Take your bolt and strike me down where I stand!
Cast me out Zeus, and let me die!

(ZEUS reaches into his quiver of lightning bolts and draws one. HE stands and prepares to cast the bolt at TERMINOS, who has been abandoned by his brothers, his goddess, the Olympians, and, most importantly, himself. HE does not fear death; HE welcomes it.)

ZEUS: You do not even understand what you've done, do you?

TERMINOS: I grow tired of your games!

ZEUS: This is no game, mortal!
Your actions have affected far more than just you!

TERMINOS: How?

ZEUS: Look and see.

(ZEUS casts the bolt to SR. A human woman and girl emerge from the wings. THEY wear the same garb as TERMINOS.)

ZEUS: Who are they to you?

TERMINOS: My sister and her child.
They were the reason I moved to Athens in the first place.

ZEUS: Then this next part should ring true for you.

(Lights fade on TERMINOS and ZEUS and increase on the woman and girl—MEGANA and MEYANA.)

MEYANA: Mother, why would Uncle Terminos choose to leave us?
Did he not know we are hungry? Did he not love us?

(The lights revert back to ZEUS and TERMINOS.)

TERMINOS: Meyana! I do love you!

ZEUS: She cannot hear you, Athenian.
You chose to leave her. Because of you she will grow up feeling unloved.
Even worse, her fate is the same as yours.

TERMINOS: You do not mean?

ZEUS: She dies at seventeen having taken her own life just as you did.
You were not alone Terminos, but because of you . . . they are.
Know this for all time: you left your family alone and unwanted.

(ZEUS exits SR. TERMINOS begins sobbing. HE is cursed. The knowledge of what HE has done is a fate worse than the depths of the Underworld itself. Blackout.)

Air Travel Begets Misanthropy

James Harmon Clinton

Edward praises white heat, the unapproachable sublime,
and Lucinda raises an inflected map of the South,
directs it all from above. Elvis at the Overton Shell,
the Beatles at Abbey Road, Judy at Carnegie Hall.
Dylan enters once the room has been cleared.

If you check out early, say even before your children
are born, what emanations will survive, what luminous
waves? What if, like an assumed god, you are not quite
disinterested from all these observed phenomena?
How then will your existence be deduced?

My Delta flight chases sunset into the western sky,
forfeits somewhere over Tennessee. In the lavatory,
I swallow three kinds of medicine: one for pain, one
for infection, one for regret. The pilot is speaking,
but winter is near and despair so willing.

Damn Flamingos

Gwendolyn Crabtree

Yamileth Maldonado

Dawson Palomar

Orionna Williams

Characters

DAD (CHRIS), 42, the childish, lenient, and insecure husband of MOM and father to DAUGHTER and SON

DAUGHTER (MEG), 16, the spoiled and self-centered daughter of MOM and DAD and SON's sister

MOM (SUSAN), 40, the authoritative and stubborn wife of DAD and mother to DAUGHTER and SON

SON (CHAD), 14, the sarcastic son of MOM and DAD and DAUGHTER's brother

Setting

The action takes place in a suburban backyard (the typical place for family gatherings) during the summer in East Texas. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(Lights rise on a suburban backyard with a grill, a picnic table, and a small swimming pool. DAD comes into the backyard wearing a Hawaiian shirt and swim shorts. HE stands in the backyard holding a flamingo and looking for the perfect placement. HE finally places the flamingo and begins to heat up the grill. SON enters wearing a t-shirt and cargo pants and stares at the flamingo.)

SON: So you did it again?

DAD: Did what again?

SON: You know what you did.

DAD: What is it you're referring to?

SON: You know Mom is going to hate it.

DAD: I think it enhances the backyard's character. You should put on some trunks.

SON: Why?

DAD: You make your best memories in a swimsuit.

(DAUGHTER enters wearing a one-piece swimsuit.)

Hey, Meg, what do you think of my new purchase?

(DAUGHTER shrugs slightly.)

DAUGHTER: I think it's the ugliest thing that I've ever laid my eyes on.

SON: Like I said, Mom is going to flip when she sees it.

DAD: Whatever. Just go get ready for the party.

(SON and DAUGHTER walks to the back of the stage. DAD is left alone with his thoughts; HE begins second-guessing himself.)

Dang! Are the kids right? Is it actually ugly? Is my wife going to hate it?

(Beat.)

Nah. I think it's pretty rad.

(MOM, wearing a sundress, enters. SHE stares at the flamingo.)

MOM: What on earth did you buy? I sent you to the store to buy ice, not some huge solar-powered flamingo. How could you be so stupid?

DAD: Stupid? You always do this. You make things bigger than they need to be. Mind your damn business!

(MOM paces back and forth.)

MOM: Mind my damn business? How about you show some respect for the person who has spent weeks planning the party that *you* wanted? I didn't spend my free time wanting to plan a party for your annoying family, but here we are.

DAD: You're right. This is my party, and the flamingo isn't going anywhere.

(Lights dim on DAD and MOM and rise on DAUGHTER and SON. THEY are sitting at a picnic table and talking.)

DAUGHTER: Why are they always arguing?

SON: Because Aunt showed him what a real woman is like.

DAUGHTER: Aunt!?

(Lights dim on the children and rise on their parents, who are walking closer to the flamingo.)

DAD: Why would you say something like that . . . especially now?

MOM: Because you only ever think about yourself. I asked you to pick up one thing, and you couldn't even handle that.

DAD: This is about more than just the flamingo. Where is this coming from?

MOM: I just don't feel like you ever listen to me anymore.

(MOM walks offstage in tears. DAD starts flipping patties at the grill. Lights shift back to the children.)

SON: Yeah. She's been there for me more than Mom ever has. You wouldn't know because you're so glued to your phone.

DAUGHTER: How do you think Mom is going to feel?

SON: I don't know. Why should I care?

(Lights shift back to DAD. MOM, thinking out loud, enters with a folding table. SHE begins setting it up.)

MOM: Did we really just have this conversation again?

(DAD checks the water filter on the pool. HE also thinks out loud.)

DAD: Thank God I already told the kids.

MOM: Maybe I'm overreacting. That damn flamingo!

DAD: Maybe she was just overreacting. Maybe I blew it out of proportion.
Maybe it's time

MOM: He should apologize to me. This was all for him.

DAD: No! I'm right. I love my kids, but she always tries to control our lives.

(DAD walks back to the grill. Lights shift to the children.)

SON: So how do you feel about having two Christmases?

DAUGHTER: Maybe I'll finally get that Louis Vuitton bag mom always objects to.

SON: Yeah, and maybe I'll get a PS5.

DAUGHTER: Do you really think they'll get divorced?

SON: If Dad thinks about himself for once. Ten bucks if dad serves her.

DAUGHTER: Bet on it.

SON: Deal.

(THEY shake on it. Lights rise on all spaces.)

DAD: Hey, kids! Come try my world-famous burger!

(The children walk to the grill. THEY put together some burgers and return to the picnic table. MOM and DAD join them there. The family members stare awkwardly at each other.)

MOM: I would like an apology.

DAD: Not in front of the kids.

MOM: I don't give a damn about the kids' being here!

(The children choke on their burgers.)

DAUGHTER: I do!

DAD: I've had enough! I have tried *so hard* to be enough for you. Why can't you be more like your sister?

MOM: What does my sister have to do with this?

DAD: I slept with her, Susan. She likes it. She actually likes it . . . something *you* can't relate to.

MOM: You what?

SON: And she was there for my sports events.

DAUGHTER: And she can afford Louis.

(MOM rounds on the children.)

MOM: You two knew about this, and you didn't tell me?

DAD: I was waiting for the right time to tell you.

MOM: The right time? During a party that *you* made me set up?

DAD: I was going to tell you that this is a divorce party. See? It has everything that you like. Here's your damn flamingo!

(DAD walks over to the flamingo, uproots it, and breaks it over a knee. HE throws it at her feet. DAUGHTER and SON look at each other in disbelief. . . but then THEY chuckle. DAUGHTER gives SON the money SHE owes him. SON turns to DAD.)

SON: The best prayer of all is an honest “Thank you.” So . . . thank you.

(DAD, a little confused, gestures at the children.)

DAD: Let’s go!

(DAD, DAUGHTER, and SON start to leave.)

MOM: You’ll hear from my lawyers!

(MOM screams profanities at them as THEY exit. Blackout.)

Coral Pool
Darlene Taylor



Call of the Dreamcatcher

Sharon McMillen

Characters

ANNIE, 81, KAY's mom, vibrant and full of spunk

GEM, 23, KAY's daughter and graduate student

KAY, 52, an energetic and modern hippie

WILLIAM, 54, distinguished and physically fit friend of the family

Setting

The action takes place on the patio of a vacation home outside of Savannah, Georgia. The time is early summer of the present day.

Scene 1

(Lights rise on the patio of a family vacation home. The sun is setting. A dining table and chairs rest between CSL and USL. A fire-pit and chairs are DSCR.

Flower planters press against the house, and patio doors stand open UCSR.

KAY—in denim shorts and a tie-dye halter top with her hair in a messy bun—sits at the table facing the sunset. SHE lets her legs dangle; her sandals lie on the ground under her feet. A bottle of wine in a wine bucket is on the table next to wine glass, which is half full to her left. Her eyes are closed as SHE shuffles a pack of Tarot cards and silently says a prayer. ANNIE—in a gauze skirt, embroidered short-sleeve top, and bare feet—walks out of the house onto the patio carrying another bottle of wine. SHE heads towards KAY and the table.)

ANNIE: Kay, what are the cards saying this evening?

KAY: Mmm.

(SHE pauses a moment to look at the cards and turn the top card over; then SHE looks up at her mom.)

It's calling her. Anyway, you know as well as I do. The message is about what needs to be said even if we don't want to hear it.

(ANNIE laughs lightheartedly and raises the bottle of wine.)

ANNIE: Ousted by my guides before I can even offer a refill and a toast!

(GEM calls from inside the house.)

GEM: Mom! Gram! Where are you?!

KAY AND ANNIE: Patio!

(GEM rushes out of the house towards the table carrying a box. KAY gathers the cards back into the deck. ANNIE takes the seat to the right of KAY.)

GEM: Which one of you is going to spill and tell me why this was in the back of the closet?

(KAY and ANNIE exchange glances, wink, and take a drink.)

You were waiting for me to find it, weren't you?

KAY: Well, not so much find. You were called to it, weren't you?	ANNIE: Kay, are you sure now is the time?	GEM: What are you two going on about? Called? What?
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(ANNIE looks skyward with a smile.)

ANNIE: Are you sure?

(SHE keeps looking skyward, but now SHE grows excited.)

GEM: Which one of you is going to explain what's going on?

KAY: Okay, okay. Chill out and settle down.

(SHE takes the wine bottle and pours a glass for GEM. Then SHE refills ANNIE's glass and her own. SHE calls into the house.)

William! Would you be a sweetheart and bring us another bottle? Gem, come here and sit. I'll tell you what's going on.

(ANNIE gets up from the table.)

ANNIE: I'll give you two some space.

(SHE walks to the fire-pit and chairs while calling over her shoulder.)

William! William! Come light the fire-pit for me, *please!*

(WILLIAM calls from inside the house a deep voice.)

WILLIAM: You two just need to wait a minute! I'm good . . .

KAY: Let's not forget looks good.

(KAY nudges GEM and gives her a smirk. GEM rolls her eyes and shakes her head.)

WILLIAM: . . . but I can't be in two

ANNIE: And a blanket, too!

WILLIAM: . . . places at once.

(ANNIE sets her wine glass down on the side table and rearranges the back cushion. SHE sits down and tucks her feet up in the chair. SHE takes a drink and stares off at the ocean. GEM grins at her mom and then hollers.)

GEM: William! Mom's just—

KAY: Gem! William, just ignore her!

(WILLIAM walks onto the patio carrying a blanket and another bottle of wine.)

WILLIAM: What did you say, Gem?

(HE first goes to ANNIE to give her the blanket. Then HE goes over to the table where KAY is sitting.)

Kay, did you need something else?

KAY: Thank you, but just the wine for right now.

(WILLIAM comes up behind her and leans in close to her. In one subtle movement, their hands touch; THEY both inhale sharply and then reluctantly pull their hands back. KAY, visibly flustered, does not take her gaze off of WILLIAM as HE walks back into the house. SHE teases GEM.)

Gem, if you don't stop, I'm going to start showing everyone those embarrassing baby pictures!

GEM: Okay! Okay! Now will you tell me about—?

(ANNIE jumps out of her chair and starts pointing at something in the water.)

ANNIE: Do you see her?! Do you see her?!

(WILLIAM walks back outside just in time to see ANNIE excitedly pointing.)

Out there!

KAY: Who?

GEM: Where?

(Both KAY and GEM gaze towards the water.)

WILLIAM: Annie are you seeing the mer—

(KAY jumps at the sound of WILLIAM's voice being so close and lets out a gasp. HE grins at the reaction.)

—maids again?

(ANNIE's excitement fades into mild agitation.)

ANNIE: Ya'll think I'm going batty, but I'm *not*!

(SHE stomps off towards the house and calls back over her shoulder.)

ANNIE (CONT.): And ya'll need to stop this pussy-footing around with each other! You're not hiding anything from Gem and me!

(SHE exits.)

GEM: Leave it to Gram!

(GEM lets out a little laugh as KAY and WILLIAM blush with embarrassment.)

Okay, spill it, you two

(KAY begins to stammer, unable to say anything.)

WILLIAM: Your mom is amazing! How can I not be drawn to her?

(ANNIE calls out from inside the house.)

ANNIE: William! Come help me get a tray down!

(KAY becomes even more embarrassed after WILLIAM's confession. As HE turns to go inside, SHE just stands there watching him with a smile. When SHE realizes that GEM is still watching her, SHE raises her wine glass, smirks, and takes a drink while trying to hide her giddiness.)

GEM: You're not off the hook for that, but you still have to tell me about this.

(Their attention turns back to the box GEM holds. GEM opens the box carefully and takes out a dreamcatcher with quartz crystals, white leather strands, and white and red flowers as accents.)

KAY: Let's get that fire started, and I'll tell you the story of how it came to us.

(KAY grabs her wine glass, GEM's wine glass, and the bottle of wine and heads towards the chairs around the fire-pit. From inside the house, music begins to play, a toe-tapping folk song. THEY both sit down and tuck their feet under their legs. The fire is just starting to burn down to where it will become a nice cozy glow once the sun has set a little more.)

(ANNIE, holding a singing bowl, walks out of the house towards the chairs surrounding the fire-pit. SHE hums and then begins to sing.)

ANNIE: Love is no game
And often wasted on the young
Seasons of life aren't to blame
Words just roll off your tongue
You tell lies in the summer
You pay for them in winter
Acting like you have won her
Taking all her love and leaving her bitter

(ANNIE's voice trails off as the song lyrics takes her thoughts to another time. SHE shakes her head abruptly and is back in the moment. SHE smiles a happy and knowing smile at GEM as SHE sets down the singing bowl.)

Oh, Gem, you heard the call of the dreamcatcher, didn't you! I knew this day would come! Your mom and I have so much to share with you.

GEM: Gram, what do you mean? I heard the call?

KAY: Mom, let me answer that. Gem, this is the way that it has been done for generations. Mothers sharing with daughters when they are drawn to the Maiden's Call.

(KAY pauses to take a drink and let ANNIE and GEM settle into their chairs. The sun is getting lower in the sky; the fire is casting a warm and cozy glow. KAY takes a deep breath, looks at her daughter, picks up the singing bowl, and begins to play it.)

Gem, take a deep breath.

GEM: Mom, this is cra—!

ANNIE: Gem, just trust us. Trust yourself. Trust the spirit within and around us.

(Gem nods her head. SHE settles into the chair and relaxes,)

KAY: Gem, relax and let your mind wander to all those moments where you knew things, when you felt things, when you heard things. You kept them to yourself, but Gram and I knew. We've gone through the same rite of passage. The dreamcatcher was a gift to your great-great-grandmother for some healing work she did with an Inuit family. The roots we have with the old Celtic way of life lets

KAY (CONT.): us help others, and that is exactly what your great-great-grandmother did. The family was so appreciative for the help that they blessed her with the dreamcatcher. To continue the tradition of healing and helping, the dreamcatcher has now become a part of our lives and growth. When a maiden in the family comes of age and her abilities are ready, the dreamcatcher will call to her. Once it is found, we women gather to celebrate and be together. Gem, I know you think this is outdated and pointless, but it's not.

(KAY continues to play the singing bowl while the sun sinks even lower. Instead of shadows, the patio begins to fill with the colors from the sky and the sun itself. It's as if the patio has become part of the sunset.)

Gem, we are a special line of spiritual women going back to the days of Celtic warriors. We are connected to the energy of all that is, all that was, and all that will be. When combined with the knowledge that we are all connected, we can fill the words we speak with energy to spark creation. To walk this kind of a path is not for the ordinary. It takes learning, practicing, exploring. To look so deeply into yourself that you can become part of the expansiveness is transforming. When you can say, "I believe that what people call God is something in all of us," it's not about being conceited. It is knowing and feeling the connection to the realms that this modern life keeps us from. This isn't about weakness or dependance. It's about living empowered.

(KAY is now lost in the motion of playing the singing bowl. All three women have let their breathing synchronize with each other and the sounds of the waves. THEY are still and lost in their own thoughts as the light fades to just the glow of the fire. The last bit of light on the patio highlights the door, and there stands WILLIAM, leaning against the frame. HE knows that what HE has just witnessed is magical. HE can't help but look at these amazing women with awe, admiration, and love. Blackout.)

Dolphins before Dark
Darlene Taylor



Bone Fragment

James Harmon Clinton

A rock fight broke out on the descending street.
I picked up a jagged piece of bone that had rattled
around the yard for days, pegged it down the hill
where Johnny laughed, dancing as it skipped

past his feet. He retrieved it, wound up and hurled it
into a long, gravity-draped arc. I smelled impending rain
amid the basso swoosh of cedar and pine, the canopy
leaning and bowing against itself. A turquoise Henry J

clattered and ground into motion down the hill. Johnny
laughed, then panicked, pointed at the bone. I saw the sure
downward geometry, the bone's end-over-end flight.
It landed in my face, one edge gouging my right eyebrow,

the other just parting the flesh over my cheekbone.
Blood streamed from both wounds and all I saw was crimson.
On the porch my mother knew that my eye was out, her
son half-blind. The eye, though, was secure and watching

the small scene, the assessment of blame, the admission
of the first bone thrown, the summer shower wrapping
itself around the front porch, the recession of clouds
into the eastern sky, and the Henry J's casual return.

Mariopocalypse
Chris “Wild” West



Breaking the Sentence

Audrey Mohon

A cluttered garage with unsold items.

A motherless mother stressed.

A wifeless husband going through the motions.

An assignment pending.

A shift canceled.

A future that is yet unseen.

The Fairest of All: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups

Hollis Thompson

Characters

JESSICA, 10-13, an intelligent, brave daughter

JOAN, 19, JESSICA's older sister

MOTHER, 40s-50s, an unfortunate person in a tragic condition

WOLF, no man can say how old, a mysterious creature who can take many forms

Setting

The action takes place in Jessica and Joan's home, the woods surrounding it, and the wolf's brothel. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(Lights rise on the living room of the house. MOTHER paces the floor nervously. SHE is troubled, hurt in her soul, yet determined. Sounds of young children playing roughly come from offstage.)

MOTHER: Keep it down back there! Don't play so rough!

(The noise subsides. Someone knocks offstage and calls out.)

VOICE: May I come in?

MOTHER: Yes. Please come in.

(WOLF enters the room in the form of a middle-aged man. HE appears kind and understanding, but HE also has a kind of savageness just below the surface.)

WOLF: You called me?

MOTHER: Yes. I have a problem . . . only you can take care of.

WOLF: I thought as much. Don't worry. There's no shame in it.

(Lights black out and backlighting comes up. The power has gone out. JESSICA runs into the room. WOLF examines her with just the faintest hint of hunger in his eyes.)

JESSICA: Mom! Joan blew the fuse again! I've told her a million times that she can't have the hairdryer and the iron plugged into the same outlet. I would've gone to the breaker, but the flashlight's missing a bulb. We were going to change it, and then she broke our last bulb.

MOTHER: Jessica! How dare you speak evil of your sister?!

JESSICA: Because she's stupid?

MOTHER: Jessica!

(WOLF produces a flashlight.)

WOLF: It's okay. I believe I can fix it.

(WOLF exits into another room.)

JESSICA: I don't know how she'd ever survive on her own in the real world. Without me to do everything for her, she couldn't even make a sandwich.

MOTHER: You'd better listen to me, you snotty little brat! I am your mother; I brought you into this world. That means you owe me, and you have to do what I say . . . and I say you never talk about Joan like that!

JESSICA: I'm only telling the truth.

MOTHER: I don't care!

(JOAN walks into the room holding an old-fashioned gas lamp.)

JOAN: Mom, whatever Jessica is saying isn't true.

MOTHER: It's all right, Joan. I'm handling it.

(A loud crash comes from offstage. A child starts crying.)

MOTHER: Oh, and there Hans goes again!

(MOTHER rushes offstage. JESSICA rounds on JOAN.)

JESSICA: Why are you such an idiot?!

JOAN: I'm the idiot? Have you done any introspection lately?

JESSICA: I do plenty of in-tro-spec-tion. I think about all kinds of things—like how I got stuck in this dead-end life with no money, no computer, and a no-good, dummy sister who can't even change the bulb in a flashlight!

JOAN: I told you it broke.

JESSICA: Yeah . . . when you threw it against the wall!

JOAN: There was a spider! It was going to get on my new outfit. This top cost, like, fifty bucks!

JESSICA: It was two feet away!

JOAN: So what if I broke it? It's not some big deal.

JESSICA: So what? "So what?" she says. So . . . Mom is going to need to give someone a long lecture about how critical it is that we save everything we can because she works so hard to provide for us and we are the oldest so we should feel so guilty over putting her through any more misery than she is already living for us and all the other kids. *And* since you're Mom's favorite, that means she's not going to let me go to Pete's and see his new tablet. Sometimes I wonder why I don't report you both for child abuse.

JOAN: And you call me a moron. That Pete of yours is *not* your friend; he doesn't even like you. He just wants to flex in front of a girl. And, since he doesn't have any actual muscle, he uses his allowance.

JESSICA: Shut your mouth!

(The lights come back on. MOTHER enters. JOAN sets the lamp down on a table.)

MOTHER: Jessica! What did I just tell you?! We don't yell in this house.

(SHE walks up to JOAN and puts her hand on her shoulder. WOLF also enters. As HE sees JOAN, HE starts, but HE quickly regains his composure and hides his lust. MOTHER turns to JESSICA.)

Why are you always doing that?! You never listen to me. I could just—

WOLF: Now, now. Don't do something you'll regret in front of Joan.

(MOTHER takes a deep breath.)

MOTHER: Fine. Jessica, I want you to go have a word with this gentleman. He's going to help with . . . getting you a job. With how tight things are right now, I need your help to make ends meet and feed all our mouths.

JESSICA: Does he work with an employment agency?

WOLF: Something like that. Let's give your mother and sister some room.

(JESSICA hesitates.)

MOTHER: Now!

(JESSICA and WOLF go towards the door. Right after they exit, WOLF tries to grab her by the throat. JESSICA hits him and runs offstage. WOLF pursues her.)

JOAN: Jessica's such a jerk. It's no wonder she doesn't have any friends.

(MOTHER stares off vacantly.)

MOTHER: Hey, Joan . . . you know I love you, right? I would do anything for you, and I'll always do what's best for you.

JOAN: Yeah, Mom. I know. I love you, too.

(SHE hugs MOTHER.)

Well, I'm gonna go sweep up what's left of that lightbulb.

MOTHER: Thanks, dear. You're so helpful.

(JOAN exits. WOLF enters. His clothes are a little ruffled from struggling with JESSICA.)

WOLF: I can see why you have problems with that one. She's a stubborn heifer.

(MOTHER instinctively recoils at the "heifer" comment, but then SHE bows her head in sadness.)

MOTHER: It's just . . . when I had Joan, I knew that it was my fault and that I should tough it out and take care of her. She was such a beautiful baby, after all. And . . . you know, I even felt happy with her. But the second one? I didn't plan her. I never wanted another one, and her good-for-nothing father . . .

(SHE breaks down. WOLF puts a hand on her shoulder.)

WOLF: It's okay. Sometimes bad things happen to good people. It's not your fault.

MOTHER: I tried. I really tried. But now that I've lost my second job, I just can't make enough to support them both and all the others. And I want my Joan to be safe. I need her to be safe.

WOLF: You're a good mother . . . for Joan and the other children. That's all anyone can ask you to be. Let me take Jessica.

(SHE looks down and nods.)

MOTHER: I wish there was some other way, I really do.

WOLF: But there's not. You have to face reality. Real life isn't a fairy tale, after all.

(WOLF pats her shoulder.)

MOTHER: I just wish they could have been born at another time. There's just no way I can find enough cash to support everyone. No one's ever hiring in this town . . . not outside of Game Exchange.

WOLF: That's why I'm here. Someone has to do something to give you a break. When the wolf is at the door, you can always count on me to help.

MOTHER: Thank you! Thank you so much! We need more men like you.

(The lights fade to black.)

Scene 2

(Lights rise on the forest. WOLF, still in the form of a man, drags JESSICA towards an unknown destination. JESSICA struggles. SHE knocks WOLF over and frees herself.)

JESSICA: Who are you?! What do you want from me?

(WOLF melts into the forest. His voice returns as a voiceover.)

WOLF: You want the run-down? Your mommy doesn't want you anymore. She lost a job, and it's not a very happy world for the poor, little old mother who had so many children that she doesn't know what to do. So . . . she gave you up.

JESSICA: What are you talking about?

WOLF: Your mother, girl. She was desperate and needed a way out of a mistake—namely, you.

(WOLF emerges from the shadows in his true, gruesome form.)

You see, they think I'm a charity, out there for the sole purpose of helping poor parents who are down on their luck and oh-so emotionally unstable . . . like your mother. But the delicious little truth is that I am actually the owner and operator of the world's most lucrative business—the largest supplier of the single greatest marketable resource on earth.

JESSICA: I'm guessing it's not cupcakes.

(WOLF hits her in the face.)

WOLF: No. It's you. I have the best business model anyone could ever dream of! We never pay a cent in production. We take our things by gift or by force, so our total costs are zero—zero! Profits have been incredible. They've increased by three hundred percent since the nineties!

JESSICA: I'm a person, not a thing.

WOLF: Wrong again, girl. Demand determines everything. You may think a sheep is a pet. Everyone else thinks it's a piece of meat. Majority rules. Your mother threw you away, so she doesn't think you're a person. I—and everyone else—say you're a thing, a commodity that provides an absolutely essential service.

JESSICA: You're wrong. Someone cares about me.

(WOLF grabs her.)

WOLF: Believe me. I'm the only one who cares about you. You're worth a fortune on the market. There are so many men willing to pay through the nose to get at a soon-to-be pretty little thing like you.

JESSICA: You're a monster!

WOLF: No. I'm the boss!

(WOLF grabs JESSICA and drags her offstage. The lights fade to black.)

Scene 3

(Lights rise on the living room. MOTHER is minding her own business when JOAN enters.)

JOAN: Mom, do you know where Jessica is? I haven't seen her all day.

MOTHER: Who?

JOAN: Mom, stop messing around. My sister.

MOTHER: You don't have a sister named Jessica. Not anymore.

JOAN: What are you talking about?

MOTHER: Look . . . just forget about her. She was a mistake. I never meant to have her, and, on top of that, all she ever did was pull this family down!

(She touches JOAN's face.)

You're my daughter—the only one I need.

(JOAN pulls away.)

JOAN: How can you say that?! She's your daughter, too!

MOTHER: No. She's not my daughter. She's the child of that animal who bred her. Which reminds me, you need to stay away from boys.

JOAN: What did you do with her?

MOTHER: I took care of her. That's all you need to know.

JOAN: I can't believe I'm hearing this. Mom, what have you done?!

(MOTHER hugs her.)

MOTHER: It's okay. There wasn't enough money to feed all of us. I was at the end of my rope. I had to choose between her and you, so I'm providing for you. I'm making sure you can have some kind of future.

(JOAN pushes her away.)

JOAN: No! No! You can't sacrifice her for me! How could you even think that?

MOTHER: It's a vicious world, Joan. Sometimes you have to make vicious choices to save what you want.

JOAN: What did you do to her?

MOTHER: You've heard of the wolf who takes away little girls?

JOAN: I thought that was a fairy tale.

MOTHER: Fairy tales are what grown-ups use to hide the truths that are too horrible to tell our children.

JOAN: Tell me where to find her.

MOTHER: Why would I do that? So that I can keep going in the hole trying to feed another mouth? So that she can keep making you miserable every day? You can't tell me you don't like the thought of her never calling you a jerkface again. Plus, she was just starting to get pretty, right? I know you saw it. In a year or two, she would have been competition. Do you think she would have stayed behind a screen all day once she realized she could offer the boys more than an MMO?

(Beat.)

JOAN: Yes. I was getting jealous of her. I did wish she was gone—more than once. But she's still my sister, and I won't just let you hand her over to a monster and pretend that it's for my sake! Mom, you're going to tell me where she is right now because if you don't, I'll leave you alone. You'll never get to see your beautiful daughter that you've done so much for ever again.

(The lights fade to black.)

Scene 4

(Lights rise on WOLF's brothel. JESSICA, having been beaten into submission, lies on the ground. After a moment, SHE groans in agony.)

JESSICA: Am I a pretty girl now, Mom? Apparently, I'm worth something now. Are you proud?

(JOAN enters carrying her gas lamp. SHE runs to JESSICA. JOAN sets the lamp down on the floor.)

JOAN: Jessica! Jessica, what did he do to you?

JESSICA: Joan? Why are you here?

JOAN: I'm here to get you out! Now come on!

JESSICA: Joan, I can't get up. I can barely feel my legs.

JOAN: What?!

JESSICA: Joan, this isn't a good place. You need to leave right now.

JOAN: I can't believe that Mom just gave you to that thing!

JESSICA: I always had this feeling down in my gut that she didn't want me. I guess that's the real reason I picked on you so much. I just . . . wanted Mom to love me—to see in me at least a fraction of what she saw in you. Or, you know, at least have Pete or someone see me. Guess that'll never happen.

JOAN: You idiot! I love you! And it doesn't matter what Mom thinks about you. You're smart and funny and beautiful. There's never been anyone like you, and there will never be anyone like you ever again.

(Beat.)

JESSICA: Wow! I never thought you could make a speech like that.

JOAN: I guess I'm just full of surprises. Now come on! I'm getting you out of here.

(SHE lifts JESSICA up and begins carrying her offstage when the WOLF, again in human form, intercepts her.)

WOLF: You're not going anywhere with my property.

(WOLF rips JESSICA out of JOAN's arms and pushes JOAN to the floor.)

JOAN: Let go of her!

WOLF: I can do whatever I want to her. I own her. Your mother gave her to me, and I won't let her go for nothing.

(JESSICA starts yelling for help. WOLF sinks his claws into her neck.)

WOLF (CONT.): Shut up, you bitch!

(JESSICA silently struggles against strangulation. WOLF glares at JOAN.)

Now . . . get off my property and go home to Mommy.

JOAN: What if I buy her from you?

WOLF: What are you talking about? A dead-beat college student like you can't even dream of the amount of money she's worth.

JOAN: What about a trade? I knew you wanted me when I first saw you at the house . . . but you knew that my mom only wanted to get rid of Jessica, right? You couldn't have me, but if you let her go free . . .

JESSICA: Joan, no! I'm not worth it, Joan!

WOLF: I said, "Shut up!"

(HE leers at JOAN.)

I do want you. I could make something of this one after I got rid of that anime-boy thing she's got going on, but you . . . you're in another league altogether.

JOAN: Then what are you waiting for?

(WOLF turns to JESSICA.)

WOLF: It looks like this is your lucky day.

(WOLF exits with a screaming JESSICA.)

JOAN: Goodbye, Jessica.

(JOAN cries for a beat. Then she readies herself for the suffering to come. WOLF enters in his true form.)

WOLF: You're a fool to have given yourself for her. She was a mid-tier whore, at best, but you! I don't need a mirror on the wall. I know who's fairest of them all. Time to have some fun.

(WOLF hits her in the face, grabs her, and drags her offstage. The sounds of JOAN's cries continue as the lights slowly fade to black.)

Scene 5

(Lights rise on the WOLF's brothel. JOAN sits on a bed dressed like Little Red Riding Hood. SHE is obviously broken. Her gas lamp rests beside a small mirror on a bedside table. The sounds of a struggle erupt offstage. Someone throws MOTHER into the room. SHE wears another fairy-tale- inspired prostitute outfit.)

JOAN: Mom?!

(JOAN rushes to her side.)

Mom, what happened to you?

MOTHER: Jessica came back home and told me what you did. I came here to demand that the wolf release you. He locked me up and then . . . and then . . .

(MOTHER starts sobbing, and JOAN hugs her. Beat. WOLF enters and grabs MOTHER.)

WOLF: Come on! I need a cheap whore for a customer.

MOTHER: No! No!

(WOLF drags MOTHER offstage. JOAN stares hopelessly after them. Then she crosses to the mirror. SHE picks it up and looks into it.)

JOAN: Well, there you are. Just like mom said—like they all said. Beautiful. And I knew it. I reveled in it. I loved the way people looked at me when I walked in the room, especially the guys. You were the best thing about me. I thought you would pave the way for me to do anything or be anything I wanted. But what did you ever do for me? Got me here.

(Beat.)

No, no. That's not right. I'm sorry. You let me save my sister, and I'll always be

JOAN (CONT.): grateful for that. I know that we've already been through a lot, but there's one last thing we need to do, okay? After it's finished, we can rest.

(SHE sets down the mirror and sits on the bed. WOLF enters.)

WOLF: Well, gorgeous, no work for you tonight. None of these deadbeats can afford you.

JOAN: That's okay, Big Bad. I actually was hoping to have some alone time with you.

WOLF: What do you mean?

JOAN: You remember the night you were breaking me in? I liked it. Will you do it to me again?

(WOLF laughs and rushes to the bed.)

WOLF: I knew it! Deep down all you cows like it. You're meant to be consumed. You all know it! But you're the only one I've ever seen who's honest about it. Sure, Little Red. I'll give you a time you won't forget.

(WOLF leaps on her, punches her, and begins groping her. JOAN discreetly grabs the gas lamp from the table.)

JOAN: Oh, no, honey. I'll give you a time you won't forget.

(JOAN smashes the lamp on the WOLF. Instant blackout. WOLF screams in agony for a moment . . . then all is quiet.)

Scene 6

(Lights remain black. A news reports sounds off in voiceover.)

NEWS ANCHOR: This human-trafficking brothel, covertly operating under the front of being a massage parlor, burned completely to the ground. Amazingly, almost all of the women imprisoned there escaped the flames unscathed. The only person not accounted for is a local woman named Joan Perrault. The fire

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT.): apparently began in the room where she was kept. It has been three days since the fire, and no one has seen her.

(Lights slowly rise on JESSICA. SHE kneels in the ashes of the brothel. SHE is weeping softly. MOTHER enters and stands beside JESSICA. THEY are silent for a moment.)

MOTHER: I never meant for this to happen. I just wanted to give Joan the best shot I could, and now—

JESSICA: And now she's gone. She's gone, and I'm still here. What a mess.

(Beat.)

MOTHER: Jessica, I didn't know exactly what the wolf was going to do with you. I tried to know as little as I could. I didn't want to know. I didn't want to think about it. But when I was in there, I learned—I experienced—everything.

JESSICA: What are you saying, Mom?

MOTHER: Every time, I was thinking about how you would have gone through it, and I was so glad that you weren't . . . and I was so ashamed that I chose to send you there.

(MOTHER, sobbing, begins to break down. JESSICA rises and embraces her, though the action obviously pains her.)

JESSICA: Oh, Mom. I forgive you, okay? I forgive you.

MOTHER

Oh, my baby! I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry, my baby!

JESSICA: It's okay, Mom. I'm here.

(They continue to embrace for a moment. Then MOTHER slowly pulls away and exits. JESSICA, no longer able to hold in her anguish, gives voice to her grief.)

Oh, Joan. It should have been me. It should have been me!

(JOAN enters slowly and silently behind JESSICA and puts a hand on her shoulder. JOAN has numerous burn scars on her face and hands.)

JOAN: Why are you crying?

JESSICA: My sister. They killed my sister . . . and it was all my fault!

JOAN: No, Jessica. It's not your fault.

(JESSICA recognizes her sister's voice and looks up at her. For an instant, JOAN's appearance frightens her, but then she lunges into her sister's open arms. JESSICA begins crying.)

JESSICA: Joan!

JOAN: It's okay. It's okay, Jessica. No one can hurt you now. The wolf is dead.

(THEY weep together for a beat. JESSICA pulls away and looks into JOAN's face.)

JESSICA: Your face—

JOAN: I know. Not so beautiful anymore, huh? It's all right. It was worth it, Jessica. *You* were worth it. You and Mom. Now come on. There's still a happy ending for us out there, even with one of us looking this ugly.

(JOAN begins to lead JESSICA away, but JESSICA stops.)

JESSICA: You're wrong, Joan. You're the fairest of us all.

(Blackout.)

Queens of Horror
Chris "Wild" West



The Silent Man

Caleb Dan Gammons

Notes from the Playwright

When my dear friend Hollis Thompson brought to my attention the opportunity of the Pyro Playfest and told me the theme was “Raise Your Voice,” I originally began writing a play for submission. However, I quickly came to realize that the play I was writing wasn’t the story I wanted to tell. At that moment, the idea for *The Silent Man* came to me, and I am quite proud how this play turned out in the end.

By intention, none of the characters you will meet in this play are named. The audience doesn’t need that information, and this lack of names will help the audience focus more upon what is happening within the play. The main character is mute and doesn’t say anything during the entire play. Instead, the main character acts out everything he does. There are key moments in the play during which the audience will want to help the main character make others understand what he is saying. The audience will hopefully think of what they would say to the various characters that appear. While the last line spoken does state the purpose of the story, my hope is that the audience will have already felt the message of “Raise Your Voice” throughout the play.

About the Staging

During the play, the main characters will walk in place facing SR. All other characters will walk normally from SR to SL. This contrast in movement should create the illusion of continuous walking.

Primary Characters

ELDERLY MAN, a mute man who is kind of heart and enjoys helping others

YOUNG GIRL, an innocent girl who is a little mischievous at times but is very
sweet

Secondary Characters

THE FATHER OF YOUNG GIRL, the YOUNG GIRL’s father who appears at the
end of the play

THE HUSBAND, a scoundrel orphanage owner with a bad temper problem who is always out with his wife looking for lost boys and girls he can sell to random rich parents

THE MOTHER OF YOUNG GIRL, the YOUNG GIRL's mother who appears at the end of the play

OFFICER 1, a police officer who is dedicated to his duties in law enforcement

OFFICER 2, a police officer who is dedicated to his duties in law enforcement.

STREET MERCHANT, a merchant trying to make a living selling cooked meat

THE WIFE, the orphanage owner's wife who is always helping her husband track down lost boys and girls to sell to random rich parents

Tertiary Characters

CITIZENS

NURSES

SCHOOL KIDS

Setting

The action centers upon various locations as an elderly man helps a young girl find her way home. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(Lights rise on an empty park bench in the middle of the stage. An ELDERLY MAN with a cane feebly makes his way over to the bench and sits down. The ELDERLY MAN sighs, smiles, and closes his eyes. Beat. Suddenly the ELDERLY MAN clutches at his chest in pain. Beat. The pain subsides, and the ELDERLY MAN sits at ease again. Entering SR, a YOUNG GIRL appears and walks timidly up to the ELDERLY MAN; looking rather distraught, SHE is shivering.)

YOUNG GIRL: Hi, um.

(Beat.)

Mister?

(The ELDERLY MAN looks at the YOUNG GIRL in confusion.)

YOUNG GIRL (CONT.): I can't seem to find my parents, and it's really cold, and I'm scared. Can you help me, please?

(The ELDERLY MAN looks around unsure of what to do. Then HE smiles at the YOUNG GIRL and gives her his coat to help her keep warm.)

Thanks for the coat; it's really warm. If you don't mind me asking, can you not speak?

(The ELDERLY MAN shakes his head.)

I see. That's okay. I just wish I could find my parents. I really miss them . . . and my cat Gulliver, too.

(The YOUNG GIRL looks sad and starts to sniffle. The ELDERLY MAN looks around one more time to see if her parents might show up, and then HE stands. The ELDERLY MAN looks at the YOUNG GIRL, who looks back at him with surprise as HE holds out his hand.)

You're going to help me find my parents, Mister?

(The ELDERLY MAN nods his head, and the YOUNG GIRL smiles and dries her eyes. The YOUNG GIRL stands up and takes the ELDERLY MAN's hand.)

Thank you. Thank you so much! I'm so excited for you to meet my parents and Gulliver. Where will we look for my parents first, though?

(The ELDERLY MAN and the girl look around before seeing a young couple enter SR. The ELDERLY MAN and the YOUNG GIRL approach them. The man and woman glance at each other.)

Hello. Maybe you can help us please? We're looking for my parents.

THE HUSBAND: So you're lost, eh?

YOUNG GIRL: Well, I was with my mom and dad, and we were shopping, but then it got really crowded, so I tried to move out of the way. However, then I couldn't see my parents anymore, and I got really scared. I asked this nice man if

YOUNG GIRL (CONT.): he could help me find them, and that's why he's here. So we were just wondering if maybe you had seen them or could help us find them?

THE WIFE: *Of course!* We can help you find them, my dear. We help lots of lost boys and girls find their way to homes.

YOUNG GIRL: You do? That sounds great!

(The ELDERLY MAN looks suspiciously at the couple.)

THE HUSBAND: Of course, young girl, my wife and I own the Happiest Little Orphanage, where we help all the lost boys and girls find their parents.

THE WIFE: For the right price, that is. Now you come along, dearie, and we'll find you some parents.

(THE WIFE reaches for the girl's arm, but, before SHE can reach her, the ELDERLY MAN pulls the YOUNG GIRL behind him and brandishes his cane like a weapon. The YOUNG GIRL, sounding sad, speaks up.)

YOUNG GIRL: Oh.

(Beat.)

But I don't just want any old parents. I want *my* parents.

(The ELDERLY MAN raises his cane like he is going to attack the couple, and THEY run away scared. The ELDERLY MAN turns back around and places a hand on the YOUNG GIRL's shoulder.)

Finding my parents may be a bit harder than I thought.

(The YOUNG GIRL hugs the ELDERLY MAN. Beat. The man and woman return . . . this time with two police officers.)

THE WIFE: There he is, officer! That's the man who kidnapped our beloved daughter!

YOUNG GIRL: What? No!

(OFFICER 2 immediately grabs hold of the ELDERLY MAN.)

YOUNG GIRL (CONT.): Don't hurt him! These two are not my par—

(THE HUSBAND immediately pretends to hug the little girl. HE struggles to hold her while covering her mouth with his hand.)

THE WIFE: Pay no attention to her, officers. She's distraught.

(To YOUNG GIRL.)

Well, my dear, we had better get you home where you belong.

THE HUSBAND: Yes, we have a lot to—

OFFICER 1: Everybody stay where you are! Nobody leaves until we get to the bottom of all this!

(OFFICER 1 looks at the ELDERLY MAN.)

Who are you, sir, and what were you doing with this young girl?

(The ELDERLY MAN looks nervously at the officers. OFFICER 2 notices that the YOUNG GIRL is trying to speak but can't with her mouth covered. OFFICER 2, frowning, lets go of the ELDERLY MAN and walks over to the couple.)

OFFICER 2: You there! Uncover the girl's mouth and let her go. Since the little miss here is at the center of all this, it stands to reason she can enlighten us as to what is truly going on here.

(The HUSBAND scowls and reluctantly removes himself from the YOUNG GIRL. SHE rushes over to the ELDERLY MAN and clutches his hand. OFFICER 1 gets down on bended knee by the YOUNG GIRL while OFFICER 2 keeps a close eye on the couple. HE is suspicious of them.)

OFFICER 1: Now, my dear, there's no reason to be afraid. Are you okay?

YOUNG GIRL: Yes, sir. Thank you for not letting me go with those two. They're not my parents. They own the Happy Little—

OFFICER 2: Orphanage.

(The couple tries to escape, but OFFICER 2 grabs hold of them and forces them to stay right where they are.)

I thought I recognized you two from somewhere. Well, now. Trying again to convince officers of the law that children who aren't yours belong to you, eh? I have to admit, you're either completely stupid or very bold. Either way, we'll have plenty of time to discuss it all down at the station.

(OFFICER 1 nods to the ELDERLY MAN.)

OFFICER 1: Who is this, then? Why isn't he talking, and where are your parents?

YOUNG GIRL: This man is my grandfather.

(The ELDERLY MAN gives the YOUNG GIRL a shocked glance and then sheepishly grins at both officers, who look at him directly.)

He can't speak, officer. We were just headed back to my parent's house when these two jumped out and tried to kidnap me and take me back to their orphanage where they sell children to random rich parents.

(OFFICER 1 smiles at the YOUNG GIRL and stands back up. HE turns to the ELDERLY MAN.)

OFFICER 1: A very intelligent young lady you have as a granddaughter, sir. Do stay safe out here. It's rather cold outside today.

(OFFICER 1 helps OFFICER 2 drag the couple off SL as THEY protest. The ELDERLY MAN and the YOUNG GIRL are alone again.)

YOUNG GIRL: Are you okay, Mister? That was sure a close one.

(The ELDERLY MAN looks at the girl with disappointment. HE points off to where the police officers left and then to himself.)

Well, we can't let the police know who you are, Mister. They may try to take you away from me before you get to meet my parents and Gulliver. I had to say something.

(The ELDERLY MAN sighs.)

YOUNG GIRL (CONT.): Anyway, all that gave me an idea. We can just walk to my house. My parents are sure to be there. I'm . . .

(Beat. SHE points randomly.)

. . . pretty sure my house is in this direction . . .

(Beat.)

. . . I think.

(The YOUNG GIRL sounds a bit unsure, but SHE smiles as she takes hold of the ELDERLY MAN's hand. The two of them start walking.)

I wonder what Gulliver is doing right about now? Probably eating, if I had to guess. The silly kitty.

(Beat. The YOUNG GIRL's tummy growls.)

I'm a bit hungry, Mister. I wonder if we could find some food along the way?

(A STREET MERCHANT steps out onto SR.)

STREET MERCHANT: Food here! No money? No problem! Free samples for everyone who stops by. Today only!

YOUNG GIRL: Hey, Mister! Look! Free food!

(The ELDERLY MAN gives the YOUNG GIRL a wary look and points behind him while shaking his head.)

Yes, I know we just got away from strangers who were up to no good. It'll be okay. You trust me, right?

(The ELDERLY MAN nods in agreement.)

Then I trust that I'm safe with you, and I'll protect you, too, so you'll be safe with me, okay?

(The ELDERLY MAN sighs, nods, and smiles.)

STREET MERCHANT: Hey, there, you two! How might I serve you? Would you be willing to try the most delectable, delicious, delightful food this side of town?

(The STREET MERCHANT offers the two of them two samples of cooked meat on toothpicks. The ELDERLY MAN gets down on eye level with the YOUNG GIRL and gently grabs her hand before SHE can take a bite. HE then points to himself to indicate that HE should go first.)

YOUNG GIRL: You want to go first?

(The ELDERLY MAN nods.)

Okay. You can eat yours first, and then I'll eat mine.

(The YOUNG GIRL smiles. The ELDERLY MAN looks at the STREET MERCHANT, sighs deeply, and eats the appetizer. The ELDERLY MAN smiles and acts like the food tasted delicious.)

See? I told you the food would be good.

(The YOUNG GIRL eats her sample. The YOUNG GIRL and the ELDERLY MAN smile, wave goodbye to the STREET MERCHANT, and walk off holding hands. The STREET MERCHANT exits SL. Beat.)

You know, Mister, if you hadn't been there on that bench willing to help me, I don't think I could have made it this far on my own. Thank you for helping me.

(A group of SCHOOL KIDS enter SR and run across the stage. THEY exit SL as the YOUNG GIRL looks at them and sighs sadly.)

None of the other kids from school even notice me. They never let me play with them because they say I'm too different. I wish I had a friend like you at school.

(The ELDERLY MAN stops walking and gets down on eye level with the girl. HE smiles, points to himself, and then points to her. Instant joy spreads across the YOUNG GIRL's face.)

YOUNG GIRL (CONT.): Really? You'll be my friend?

(The ELDERLY MAN nods.)

You're the best friend ever, Mister! Also, with us passing the school, I'm pretty sure now we're close to my street where I live, so yay!

(The YOUNG GIRL is beside herself with joy as the two of them start walking again, this time with a pep in their step from being friends.)

We're almost to my home. I'm so excited for you to meet Gulliver.

(Beat.)

What about you, Mister? Do you have a family to go home to?

(The ELDERLY MAN looks at the YOUNG GIRL and slowly shakes his head. THEY both stop walking again.)

Why not? Don't you have a home of your own?

(The ELDERLY MAN slowly shakes his head again and then shrugs and sighs. The YOUNG GIRL holds the ELDERLY MAN's hand.)

Don't you worry, Mister. I'll talk to my parents about you coming to live with us.

(The ELDERLY MAN blinks twice at her and shakes his head vigorously as if to say, "That sounds like a really bad idea." The YOUNG GIRL doesn't see him do this, however, as SHE points up ahead.)

Look, Mister! We made it to my street. I can see my house up ahead of us.

(The ELDERLY MAN clutches his chest in pain and stops.)

Mister, are you okay? Help! Someone help!

(The ELDERLY MAN, wincing in pain, holds his cane tightly.)

Don't worry, Mister. Everything is going to be okay. My parents will be able to help.

(The YOUNG GIRL takes the ELDERLY MAN's hand, and THEY both start walking again much slower than before. Beat. The ELDERLY MAN clutches his chest again and collapses to the ground. HE drops his cane. The YOUNG GIRL looks very concerned for the ELDERLY MAN and places a hand on his shoulder.)

YOUNG GIRL (CONT.): Can someone please come and help my friend and me? Please!

(The YOUNG GIRL tries to help the ELDERLY MAN stand, but SHE can't because HE's too heavy. THE HUSBAND from the Happiest Little Orphanage couple unexpectedly rushes out onto SR and knocks the ELDERLY MAN out of the way. Then THE HUSBAND grabs the YOUNG GIRL and presses a knife to her throat.)

THE HUSBAND: You both made me a fugitive. My wife is in jail because of you; my business is ruined because of you; and now . . .

(Beat.)

. . . I'm going to return the favor. Follow us, old man, and you're dead!

(THE HUSBAND covers the mouth of the YOUNG GIRL and pulls her off SL. Terrified and gasping for breath, the ELDERLY MAN looks in the direction THEY left. The ELDERLY MAN grabs his cane and tries to stand, but HE falls back to the ground on his knees. A few CITIZENS cross the stage from both directions; THEY glance at the ELDERLY MAN and murmur amongst themselves, but THEY do nothing to help him. The YOUNG GIRL's voice can suddenly be heard as a voiceover.)

YOUNG GIRL: It's really cold, and I'm scared. Can you help me, please?

(The ELDERLY MAN grabs the handle of his cane.)

Thanks for the coat; it's really warm. I just wish I could find my parents. I really miss them . . . and my cat Gulliver, too.

(The ELDERLY MAN hoists himself up to one knee.)

It'll be okay. You trust me, right?

(The ELDERLY MAN cries out in pain as HE hoists himself up to stand again.)

YOUNG GIRL (CONT.): Then I trust that I'm safe with you, and I'll protect you, too, so you'll be safe with me, okay?

(The ELDERLY MAN's face expresses immense anger as the weather thunders and lightnings and begins to rain. CITIZENS again cross the stage as the ELDERLY MAN desperately tries to get their attention and their help, but HE is ignored by some CITIZENS and told by others to go away. The two police officers from earlier reenter.)

OFFICER 1: Hey! Aren't you the guy we saw earlier today?

(The ELDERLY MAN points off in the direction the girl was taken. HE desperately tries to make the officers understand but to no avail.)

OFFICER 2: Yeah, it's the guy from earlier. I see you must have found the girl's parents, so that's good.

(The ELDERLY MAN slaps his face in frustration.)

OFFICER 1: You know, I think he's trying to tell us something. Are you trying to tell us something important, sir?

(The ELDERLY MAN nods and continues to point off in the direction where the girl was taken. OFFICER 2 looks at OFFICER 1 and addresses him.)

OFFICER 2: Maybe he knows where the fugitive ran off to. After all, he and his granddaughter already did encounter them once today. What could it hurt to follow him and see what this is about?

(The ELDERLY MAN smiles triumphantly and motions for the two police officers to follow him. OFFICER 1 sighs.)

OFFICER 1: All right, but if this leads us to nowhere, you're buying me lunch.

(Both the ELDERLY MAN and the two police officers walk in the same direction that the HUSBAND and the YOUNG GIRL went. Beat.)

OFFICER 1: I don't know about this. We've been walking for a while now; it's pouring down rain. The likelihood of us finding the fugitive in this weather is very slim.

(OFFICER 2 sighs.)

OFFICER 2: Yeah. Maybe you're right.

(The ELDERLY MAN coughs and clutches his chest in pain. HE motions for the police officers to keep following him. However, they both stop.)

OFFICER 1: Sir, it's been great, but we have to get going. You have a great day, and tell your granddaughter we said, "Hi!"

(The ELDERLY MAN turns around in disbelief as HE sees the two police officers begin to walk away. The ELDERLY MAN waves his hands to get their attention, but neither police officer sees him. THEY exit SL. The YOUNG GIRL's voice returns as a voiceover.)

YOUNG GIRL: Help me, please! He's going to kill me! Someone!

(The ELDERLY MAN looks immediately back at the direction where THE HUSBAND has taken the YOUNG GIRL. The ELDERLY MAN grips his cane, takes a deep breath, and sprints in their direction.)

No! No! Get off of me!

(The ELDERLY MAN drops his cane and starts running. Beat. THE HUSBAND's voice appears as a voiceover.)

THE HUSBAND: Ouch! Get back here, brat! You'll pay for that!

(The YOUNG GIRL runs out from SL and crashes into the ELDERLY MAN. Scared, SHE collapses into his arms. THE HUSBAND, holding the knife, steps onto the stage and sees them both together. A look of pure spite is on his face. HE starts walking slowly towards them.)

Come back, girl, or I'll kill the old man!

(The ELDERLY MAN places a hand against the YOUNG GIRL's face caringly, and then HE pushes her aside and runs towards THE HUSBAND to provide a distraction so the YOUNG GIRL can escape.)

YOUNG GIRL: No! Don't hurt—

(The ELDERLY MAN punches THE HUSBAND as hard as HE can. HE knocks the knife out of the man's hand. Beat. THE HUSBAND retaliates angrily and kicks the ELDERLY MAN in the chest. The ELDERLY MAN clutches his chest in immense pain and sinks to the ground unconscious. THE HUSBAND then picks back up the knife and turns his attention to the YOUNG GIRL. Thunder and lightning effects go off. The YOUNG GIRL screams. THE HUSBAND starts walking towards the YOUNG GIRL when the POLICE reemerge SR and fire their guns at THE HUSBAND. Having been shot twice, THE HUSBAND falls backwards dead. Thunder and lightning go off again. OFFICER 2 walks over to the YOUNG GIRL.)

OFFICER 2: Don't worry, little lady. It's all over.

(The YOUNG GIRL rushes over and sits by the ELDERLY MAN.)

YOUNG GIRL: Please! You've got to help my friend!

OFFICER 2: We'll do the best we can for him and make sure he gets help as soon as possible.

OFFICER 1: What a day this has been.

(The stage dims to allow for the setting to change to that of a hospital. The ELDERLY MAN is lying on a medical bed. The lights rise to their normal level. The YOUNG GIRL and her parents enter the room.)

YOUNG GIRL: Mister!

(The YOUNG GIRL rushes up by the ELDERLY MAN's bedside and hugs him. The ELDERLY MAN smiles weakly at her.)

I was so worried about you.

THE FATHER OF YOUNG GIRL: You have our thanks, sir, for saving our daughter and keeping her safe.

THE MOTHER OF YOUNG GIRL: Yes! Thank you so very much!

(The ELDERLY MAN slowly nods to both parents. A tear falls down his cheek as HE takes the YOUNG GIRL's hand in his.)

YOUNG GIRL: I'm so excited for you to meet Gulliver. When can I take you home with me?

(The ELDERLY MAN slowly shakes his head as more tears fall silently down his cheeks. HE kisses her hand softly.)

Mister, why are you shaking your head? And why are you crying?

(THE FATHER OF YOUNG GIRL walks over and places a hand on her shoulder caringly. The YOUNG GIRL looks up at him; SHE does not understand the situation.)

THE FATHER OF YOUNG GIRL: He isn't feeling well and won't be coming home, Sweetheart.

(The YOUNG GIRL looks at her father and mother.)

YOUNG GIRL: What? What are you saying?

THE MOTHER OF YOUNG GIRL: Your friend is dying, Sweetheart. This is goodbye.

(The YOUNG GIRL gasps as a tear rolls down her cheek. Shaking, SHE looks down at the floor.)

YOUNG GIRL: No. He can't die! I promised I would take care of him.

(Beat.)

He hasn't even met Gulliver yet.

(The ELDERLY MAN places a hand on her shoulder. The YOUNG GIRL looks at him, and HE smiles sadly at her.)

I'm so sorry, Mister.

(Beat.)

I don't want you to go away.

(The YOUNG GIRL wraps her arms around the ELDERLY MAN and hugs him as SHE cries softly. Her parents sit beside her in silence and comfort her. Beat. The ELDERLY MAN squeezes the YOUNG GIRL's hand, and then his eyes slowly close forever. The YOUNG GIRL places a hand on her friend's face.)

YOUNG GIRL (CONT.): Goodbye, my sweet friend. I'll never forget you.

(The NURSES enter the room immediately to start taking care of the ELDERLY MAN's body. The YOUNG GIRL holds her parents' hands for strength, and the three of them make their way towards the exit at SL. THEY stop right before the exit so the YOUNG GIRL can take one final look at her friend. Beat.)

THE FATHER OF YOUNG GIRL: I believe your friend needed you today just as much as you needed him, Sweetheart. We all need friends like yours who will never be afraid to help us. We should all raise our voices, our actions, everything we have to help those around us. Kindness is what we all need.

(Beat. The YOUNG GIRL and her parents exit. The lights fade to black.)

Noise That Is Stillness

Carolyn Breedlove

There are two full shows: Stephen Stills, the Southern band Little Feat, Bonnie Bramlett. Work crescendos and crescendos, adrenaline masking the mounting toll of twisting in and out among the bodies, loaded tray on the pedestal of her left arm, to the rhythm of the tasks and the bands' backbeat—a part of the show, spun as if from hand to hand (sometimes literally: a touch on the arm, patted, half-embraced), surfing the swell of noise and euphoria, pulled back down to flick out clean napkins; set down new drinks; if it's near the end of a circuit, gather empties for the return voyage to the bar.

Halfway through the second show, as Mina turns from the bar yet again, tray heavy with drinks, to squeeze through the people wedged even there, between the bar and the wall, suddenly her tray is—gone. It flips away, glasses with all their diversity of alcohol, garnishes, ice, and the napkins, ashtrays, matchbooks, pen, and black light, all racing each other to the carpet. For one instant she stares uncomprehending, bewildered, at the collapse. Then her eyes light on the shocked, embarrassed face just behind and to her right, and her confusion turns to adrenalinized outrage. In the plunging breaker of sound from the speakers, the crash has opened its own sinkhole of counter noise that is stillness, that has drawn every eye in the vicinity. And there, sharing the pool of wreckage, stands this—guy, with his stupid any-guy sheepish face, holding one tall glass, the only survivor of her late cargo. A sort of moan goes up around them, for the fallen. Catcalls, sarcastic comments, begin.

“*What did you do?*” Mina cries. The pressure is so high, her frustration so great.

“I—I just—saw my drink and I thought I’d just—help out,” he stammers, obviously seeing the evidence all about them of how stupid he’s been.

Mina has dropped to begin gathering the ruins before he finishes speaking. Jack has ducked out of the bar to help her. People shift and try to lift their feet out of the way (feet now splashed with whiskey and gin, tequila, and beer), but really, it’s kind of hopeless given the compaction. Only three—no, four—glasses have actually broken thanks to the carpeting. She grabs for the sodden napkin on which she’d scribbled the orders and straightens to slap it onto the bar before Chuan. He’s come to stand right there on the other side, for once glaring accusingly, not at her, but over her shoulder at Mr. Hapless. She turns back to him as well.

“Never,” her voice rings through the rocking of Little Feat and the little drama-hush in this corner of the balcony, “touch *anything* on a waitress’s tray. Do you hear?” Is that her Mom she’s channeling? “Never.” Yes; yes, she thinks it is.

The frustration, the *adrenaline*. “The person holding the tray has it balanced, and she’s the *only* one who knows *how* it’s balanced. You change one thing, take away one piece of the puzzle, and—” she gestures to the result.

“I didn’t realize. I’m really sorry.” And he does look so abjectly contrite, so mortified, that she’s finished. Heads are shaking, faces turning already back to the stage. Mina hopes her impassioned (she snickers privately, to herself) lecture has been taken to heart by more than just the one guy, that she’s spared, not just herself, but other waitresses—here, elsewhere, in the future—some similar debacle. Amanda, for instance, whom she spots around the back of the bar, shaking her head, incredulous, as Chuan lays down a clean tray for Mina and begins refilling it. Or Toni, who may actually be smiling, you never can tell, under what looks like—maybe a hibiscus? something orangey, tropical, tonight.

All through the second show, leaning against the wall with a friend, halfway down the narrow strip of balcony where she first laid eyes on him, has been Red Jacket. He really is wearing it again, too, carelessly open over a black T-shirt, summer and sweaty crowd be damned. Mina’s brought him three glasses of Scotch, but in the maelstrom has given him no more attention, no more smiles, than any of a couple of dozen others. Still, she doesn’t think she’s imagining that he’s watching her, even as he leans over to say something to his shorter, darker friend in the tiny shocked vacuum between two songs. He’s too far away, the crowd too dense, the perimeter of her focus too tight, for her to have noticed whether his was one of the watching faces after her *incident*.

It’s after two in the morning before it’s over. People from the bands and friends of the bands linger and linger. Everyone’s still high on excitement, and it is kind of a private party. The kitchen crew is still going strong, the busboys bringing in one last round of bins. Waitresses are only beginning to peel away into the night. Mina has counted her cash and totaled all her orders at the calculator twice. She’s so exhausted under the frenzy-singed nerves that she leans one elbow on the little shelf, head propped on her hand. In her soul, she wants to crawl into her cool sheets under the eaves and sleep.

But not two minutes after the music stopped, there he was again, like before. How had he even managed to get through the clapping, cheering crowd? “Fancy getting a bite to eat after?” right into her ear where she stood at the corner of the bar.

And she turned her head, startled and incredulous, to look at him. He was giving her a cocky, hopeful little smile. She bet she knew what it was he was hoping *for*, too. And she’s so *tired* that if she’s hungry she’s beyond feeling it.

“At two in the morning?” she said.

He shrugged. “No time like the present, right?”

Well. There was that. How dull, to be—normal. Living without make-believe. Those people were already long since in their beds. Asleep.

“You have no idea how dead I am after this night.” She wasn’t playing hard to get; she was warning him.

He just laughed at that, of course. “We’ll feed you, then straight to bed.”

She rolled her eyes. “Right. Believe me, I could sleep right here, no problem,” ignoring the probable innuendo. She actually was sorry the timing wasn’t better. Before he could come up with one more lame attempt at persuasion, she went on, “Okay. Okay.”

So she raises her head and looks around. She spots him over near the front entrance, chatting with a predictably trendy-looking couple, friends of the headliner, fellow travelers. He’s waiting without being seen to be waiting. For her.

Mina retrieves her purse from Tony’s office and heads over. The couple are saying their good-byes and starting out the entry hall as she arrives, as if a stage director ordained all their movements, so that at that very moment R. J. is finally alone.

His next move is to smile at her. “Ready?”

Hers is to smile uncertainly back. “Finally.”

Then his: “Cris.” He sticks out his hand.

She laughs; she doesn’t know whether that’s according to cue or not, but she does realize maybe she shouldn’t, at this point, go on calling him Red Jacket. Despite a tiny bit of surprise that he’s not Ian or Trevor or Nigel or something (Paul. John. George. What does she know?), she takes his hand in hers and shakes. “Mina.” If this is a play, or even a dance, some stylist needs to pop from behind a curtain and freshen her up; she feels sticky and disheveled from head to toe, hoping she doesn’t actually stink of more than cigarettes and spilled booze. “So—where to?”

“Ah—that’s a bit sticky, isn’t it?” She keeps a straight face. “Even The Rainbow’s closed, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, I guess it is. I think our only hope is somewhere open twenty-four hours.”

“I only know Duke’s, luv.” He looks down at her expectantly. Hey, she has no idea; she goes straight home from work every night. This, despite whatever he undoubtedly believes, is a first. So . . . Duke’s, yes, the coffee shop over by the Tropicana Motel, where musicians hang out (she’s heard over and over). Of course he would know places like that and The Rainbow, whoever he is. She’s heard Denny’s mentioned. But the only place she’s stopped at this time of night, on her way home, is the twenty-four-hour Lucky supermarket (a strange, lost place at vampire hours: the swing shifters, the druggies, the strippers).

“Okay. How about—Ben Frank’s?” She knows the other waitresses, some of them, occasionally go there when they haven’t bartered themselves for breakfast. And it’s not far. “I mean, if you actually want a meal?”

“Brilliant. Ben Frank’s it is. Lead on!”

She tries not to gape, she really does. *She’s* leading? Be cool; be cool.

It takes longer to pick up his car from the parking lot than it does to drive there. He’s driving a little two-seater sports car, black, with bug-eyed headlights perched right up on the hood. It’s a convertible with the top down. Mina takes it in then raises an eyebrow. Cris grins at her.

“Austin-Healey Sprite.”

Mina nods. “Nice.”

So Ben Frank’s is this Fifties futuristic diner, all sharp-angled swooping roofs and glass. The roof is—well, if she were describing it, she’d have to use the promo term “harvest gold,” but the underside, up next to the building, is painted a bright reddish orange. At 3:00 a.m., the lot is full; Cris pulls into it anyway, by the Jetsons-style signpost, so that he can head the opposite direction and snag a spot right in front on Sunset.

They face each other across a booth in the front with cold, vinyl benches. Mina’s twitchy with the fatigue, plus seesawing between nerves and just—nervy. After everything, after the long night she’s had, she’s tipping over into really not giving a shit, not being cowed. Much. She runs her fingers through her limp hair.

“What’ll it be, m’lady?” he asks. She cringes a little; it really is awkward, isn’t it? She lets it pass. The concept of food has taken on a new attractiveness by its actual availability, by the potential for something more than a cheeseburger. It’s getting so late breakfast is even tempting, so she winds up getting French toast. He orders a Reuben sandwich.

“I’m just going to go—wash my hands,” she tells him. It’s a bit more than that—a little lipstick, blotted so it’s not too obvious, a little powder, an attempt at reviving her hair. *And* washing her hands, thoroughly.

Walking back to the table, she sees Cathy, Beryl, and Toni have taken another booth toward the back. She has to go say hi. Cathy’s giving her a thumbs-up. They all are wearing unbelievably smug, knowing looks. “Have fun!” “Have a good niight,” they chorus at the top of their lungs as she walks away, rolling her eyes.

By the time she gets back the food has come. He smirks at her, also knowingly. Everyone is knowing. Everyone.

“What was that all about, then?” he asks. Knowingly. Where did this come from? It wasn’t in the script. Mina wants to go back. Apparently the script—which she didn’t really study carefully enough in the first place—is being edited on the fly. Everything’s an ad-lib, now.

“Nothing,” she says firmly. “Some girls from work.”

They make idle, silly chitchat in between eating, wisecracking back and forth. Somewhere beneath her self-consciousness Mina registers that he is indeed quite tall; his nose is a bit too big, his lips too thin, his teeth a bit crooked, to be classically handsome . . . but he’s smart, and his wit and smile, the merry cynicism of his eyes, compensate for all that. She strives not to be that shallow. He works for EMI, which of course means little to Mina. A little; she’s heard of it. But The Sex Pistols are still in the process of recording their album, so it’s premature for it to have any irony.

“But—Stephen Stills?” she does ask, confused.

“Ah, no; that was just—for the benefit, you know. Some friends of mine asked me to be there.”

So she knows this much about him and that he lives in London but that he’s really from Birmingham. He knows she’s from Louisiana and lives in Angelino Heights (she describes the area for him). And they’ve finished eating. Suddenly he reaches across the table and takes her hand, lying there, in his longer, bigger one.

“And where to now, pretty lady?”

Mina looks back at him as soberly as Amanda might. It’s not as if she wasn’t expecting—well, something of the sort, but her adrenaline has finally worn off, she’s sagging with fatigue, full of French toast carbs, and not thinking on her feet all that well. Which is no better an excuse than being drunk. And she’s taking way too long to respond; she probably should still be wisecracking, right?

He doesn’t wait for an answer. “Stay with me.” How does he manage to sound throaty and purring at the same time? (Practice, obviously.)

And why the hell not? The Sixties have come and gone, and most of the Seventies, and where was she? Not having one-night stands, that’s for damned sure—something raucous, something out of control, like holding your hand in a flame to see whether you can still feel or not.

“Stay where?” she asks as if genuinely interested in furthering the conversation.

His face relaxes into a smile. *That* was certainly easy, he’s probably thinking.

They head east on Sunset again. It’s so late, traffic has dwindled about as much as it’s ever going to; they have some stretches of the broad, curving street to themselves. Mina feels, underneath the nerves, that hollow, fried, still-up-at-4:00-a.m. ache. They pass the Hyatt; okay, that was probably too obvious. They pass the Chateau Marmont; okay, not *that* high-end. Where *are* they going? She won’t ask. She puts her head back and silently watches all the dark city pass: Sunset Boulevard; she’s being driven up Sunset Boulevard at 4:00 a.m. in an Austin-

Healey Sprite by some dude from London. *Who* back home would ever believe this?

The Night Owl
Crystal Brown



Write Me

Beverly Easterling

Ideas can grow as slowly as moss
feeling for the north side of a tree
in the death breath of summer.

Scanning through the window
looking for a distinguished apocalypse
or a betraying circumstance.

Where in the air to seek a light
surrounded by the grim green reality in
the powerful grip of inertia.

Digging around in the sub-conscience
hoping to discover an undiagnosed regret
and finding damp Cheetos in the sofa cushions.

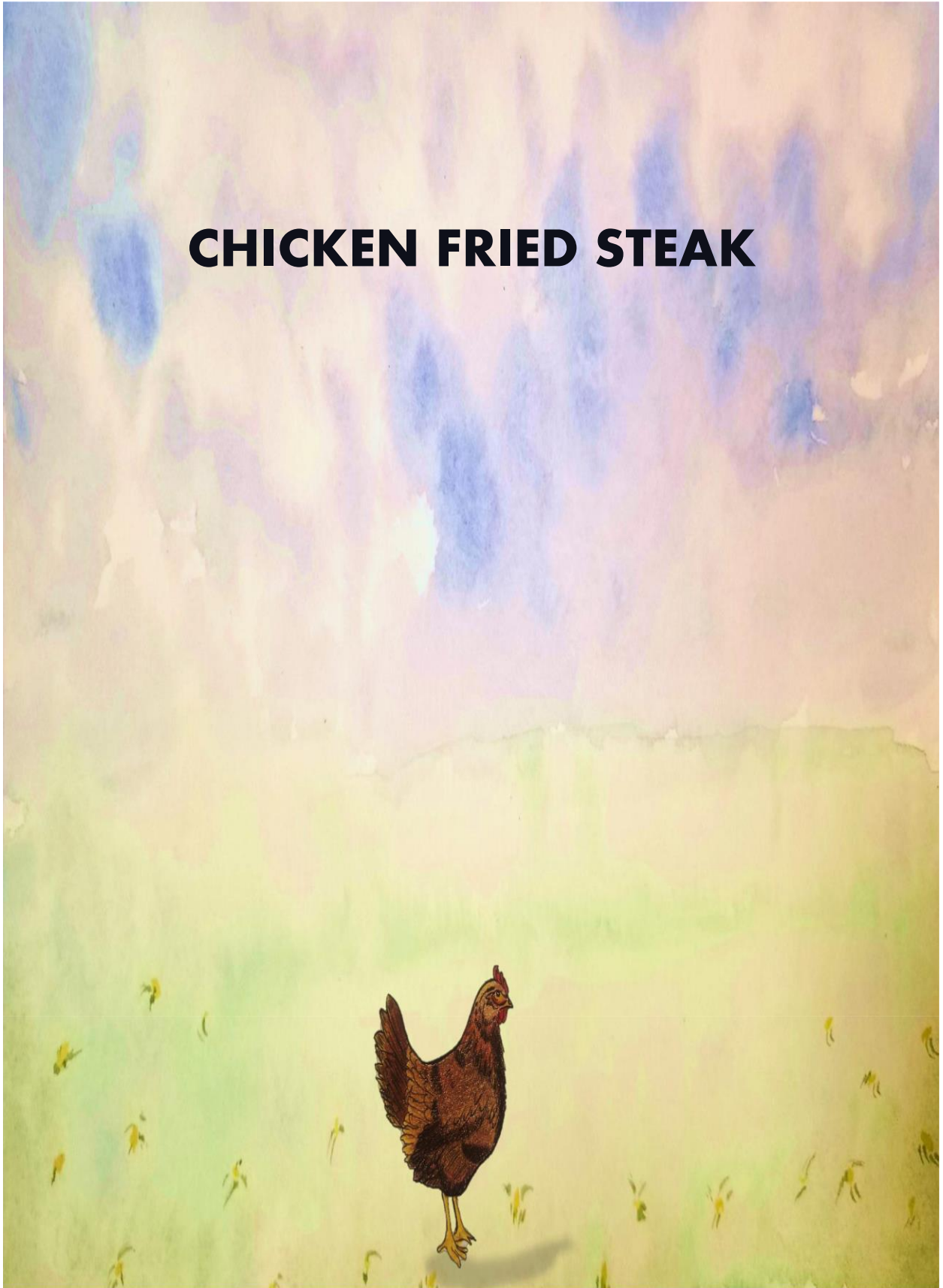
CHICKEN FRIED STEAK
by
April Rockelle Culpepper







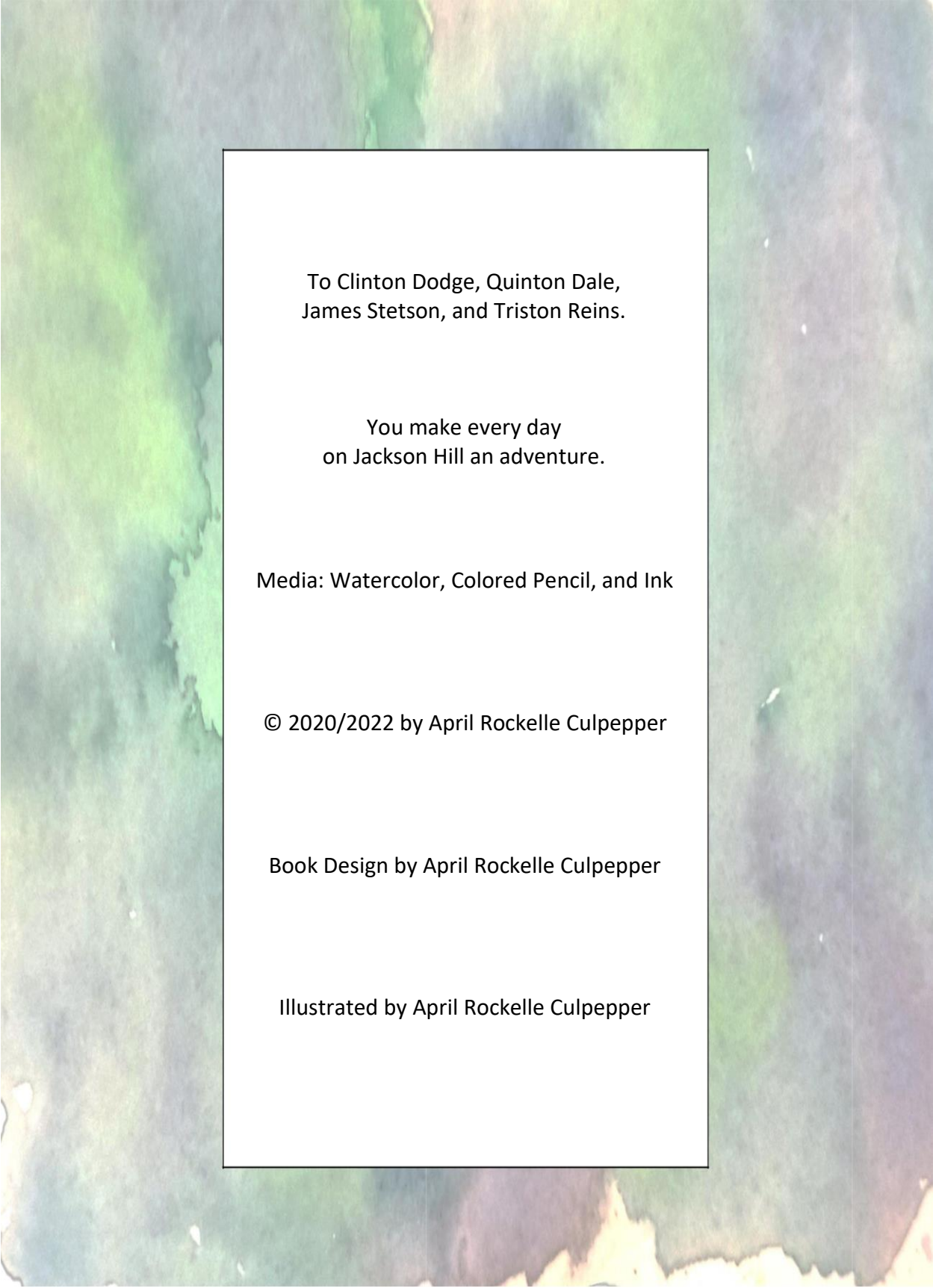
CHICKEN FRIED STEAK



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by
April Rockelle Culpepper



Illustrated by
April Rockelle Culpepper



To Clinton Dodge, Quinton Dale,
James Stetson, and Triston Reins.

You make every day
on Jackson Hill an adventure.

Media: Watercolor, Colored Pencil, and Ink

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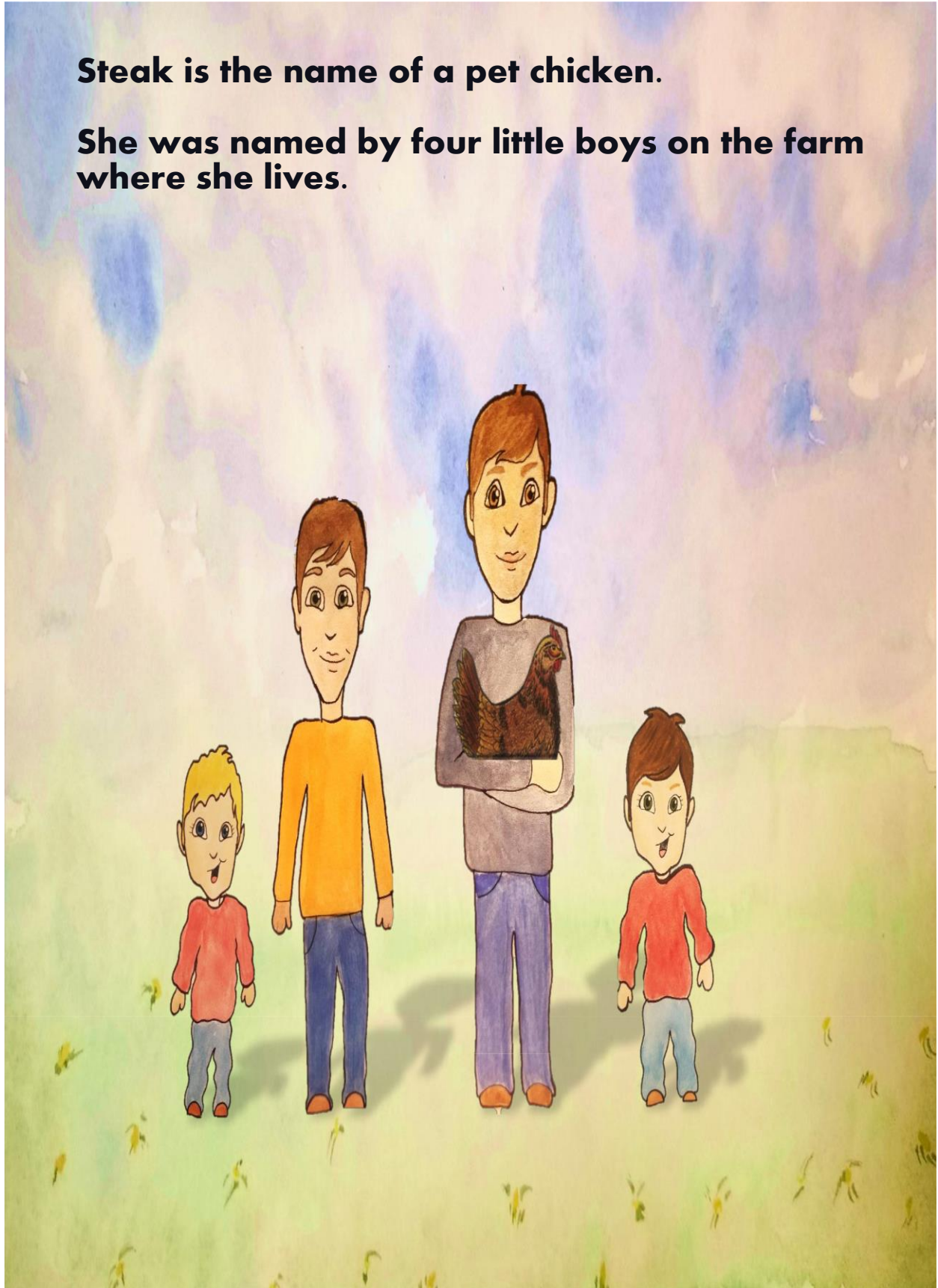
Book Design by April Rockelle Culpepper

Illustrated by April Rockelle Culpepper



Steak is the name of a pet chicken.

**She was named by four little boys on the farm
where she lives.**



Now why they named her Steak, nobody knows.

Maybe it was the color of her feathers.



Maybe the day they named her, they had Steak for dinner.



No one knows for sure, but out of all the chickens in the pen, Steak is by far their favorite hen.

**Steak is no ordinary chicken, that's for sure.
She is a Barn-vel-der chicken.**

**Okay, okay. She is a brown
chicken with a red comb
on her head.**





**She lays an egg a day
and keeps the bugs away.**

She follows those little boys everywhere.



Her boys pet her and love her, and on hot days, they even give her frozen kernels of sweet corn as treats.

No wonder she follows them around!

She even has her own house!

Ever heard of a spoiled chicken?





Then the boys go inside and have dinner with their mother and father.

They visit and laugh and tell stories of their adventures that day, which usually include stories of Steak.

After dinner, their father kisses their mother on the cheek and tells her dinner was wonderful.

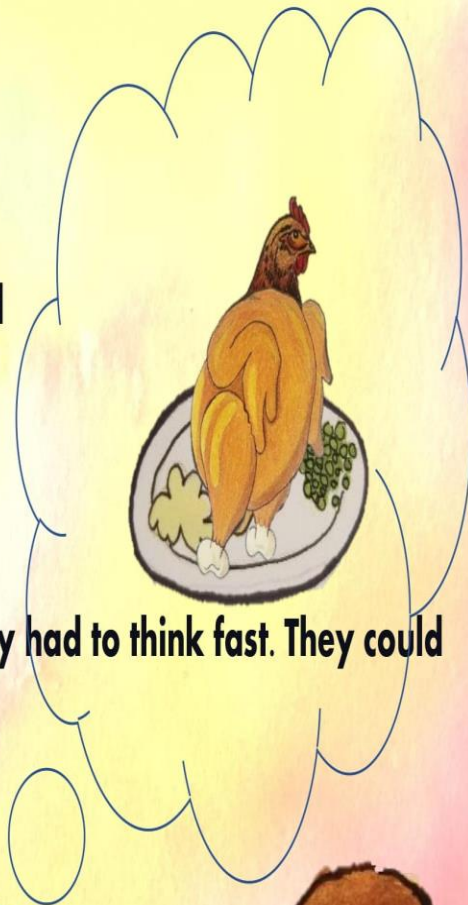
The boys cover their eyes and giggle, and everyone turns in for the night.



But one night, things went a little differently.

Mother asked Father what he wanted for dinner the next night and he said, "How about chicken fried steak!"

All the boys looked up in a fright! They had to think fast. They could NOT let their father eat Steak!



She was the best chicken they had. She laid an egg a day, she did not peck, and she kept the bugs away.

"Oh, no, not chicken fried Steak!" they all shouted, "Anything but that!"

Mother and Father were both shocked.



"But you love steak," said Father.
"Exactly!" said the boys. They could not bear the thought of their
father eating Steak.

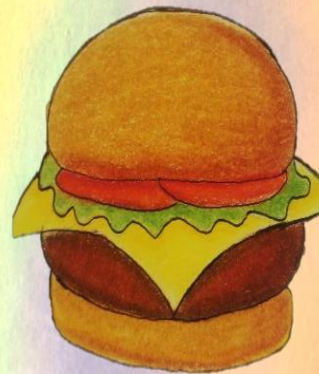


They would eat anything for dinner!

HOT DOGS!

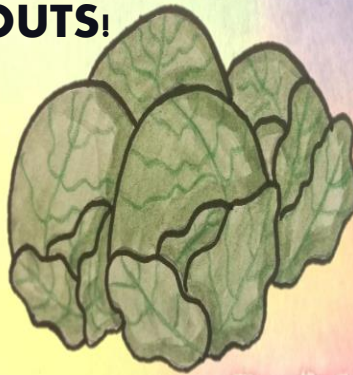


CORN DOGS!



HAMBURGERS!

EVEN BRUSSELS SPROUTS!



ANYTHING BUT CHICKEN FRIED STEAK!



The next morning, the boys got up bright and early.

They retrieved Steak from her pen and headed for their top-secret, NO-GIRLS-ALLOWED (except for Steak) clubhouse.



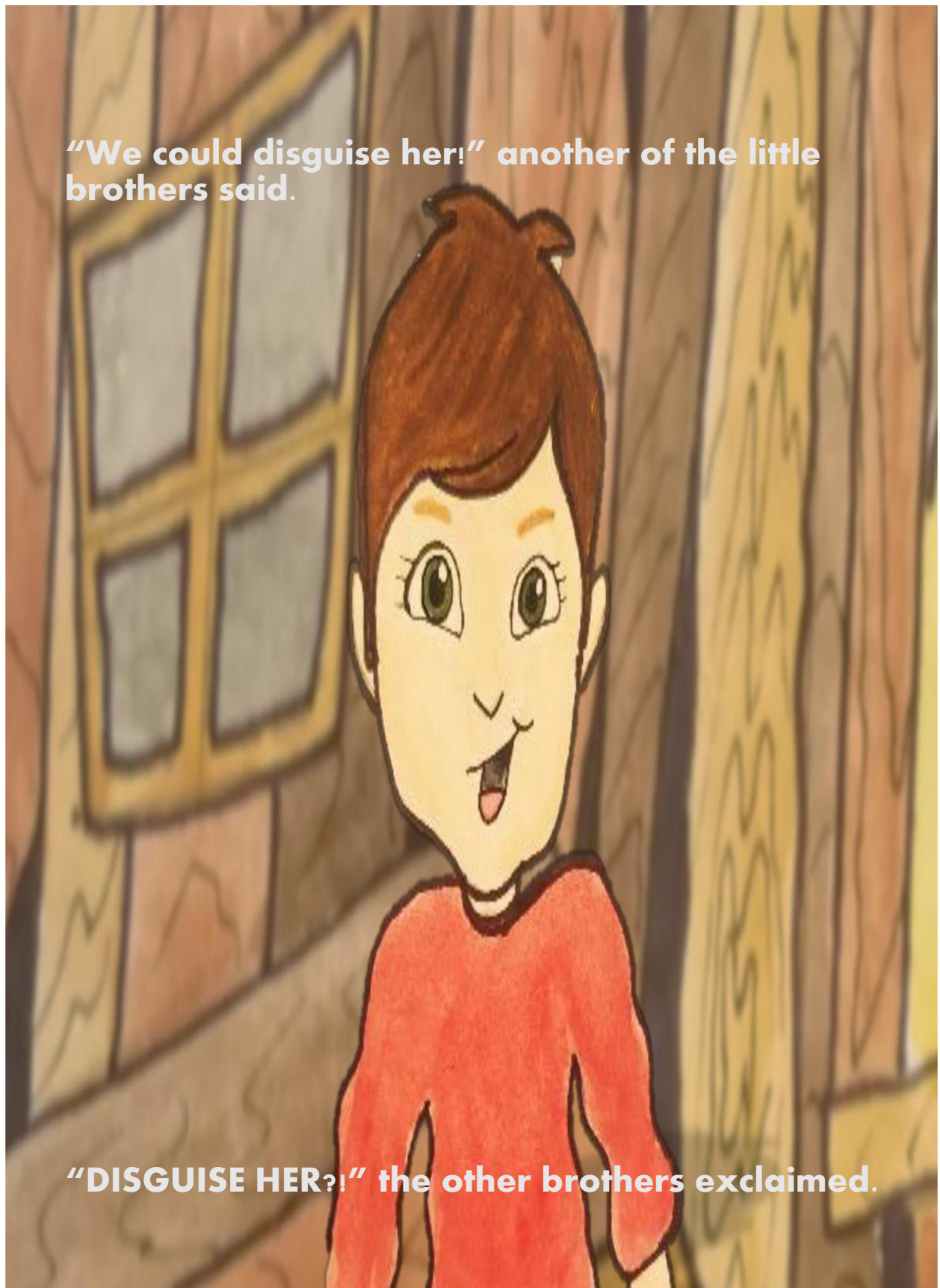
They wasted no time trying to come up with a plan to save their beloved chicken Steak.

**"We just can't let Mother chicken-fry Steak!
We just can't!" a little brother cried.**

**They were all deep in thought as they scratched
their heads and tapped their feet.**



"We could disguise her!" another of the little brothers said.



"DISGUISE HER?!" the other brothers exclaimed.

The older brother laughed, "What as a clown?"



"Or a pumpkin?" said the middle brother.



"Or a skunk!" the little one giggled.



"LIGHTBULB!" said the oldest.

"You could never make a chicken look like a lightbulb," said the middle brother.



"No! I have an idea!" replied the older brother.



Later that evening, Mother could be heard rattling pans and getting ready to start dinner, but she needed some eggs first.



The boys made sure not to make any noises as they took their positions not far from Steak's house.

They could see the house, but they were well hidden.

It wasn't long before they heard Mother coming towards Steak's house. They watched her quietly.



As she came closer a small black and white creature emerged from the house and came towards her excitedly.

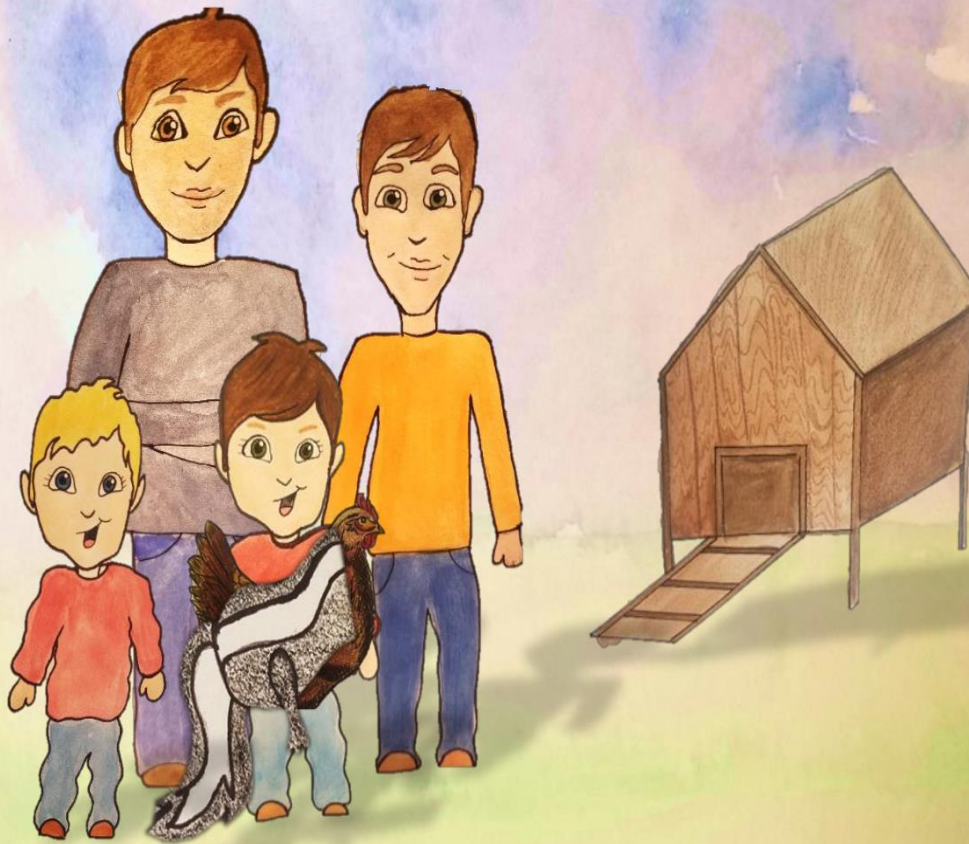


"AHHHHHH!!!! SKUNK!" Mother screamed and ran as fast as she could to get away.

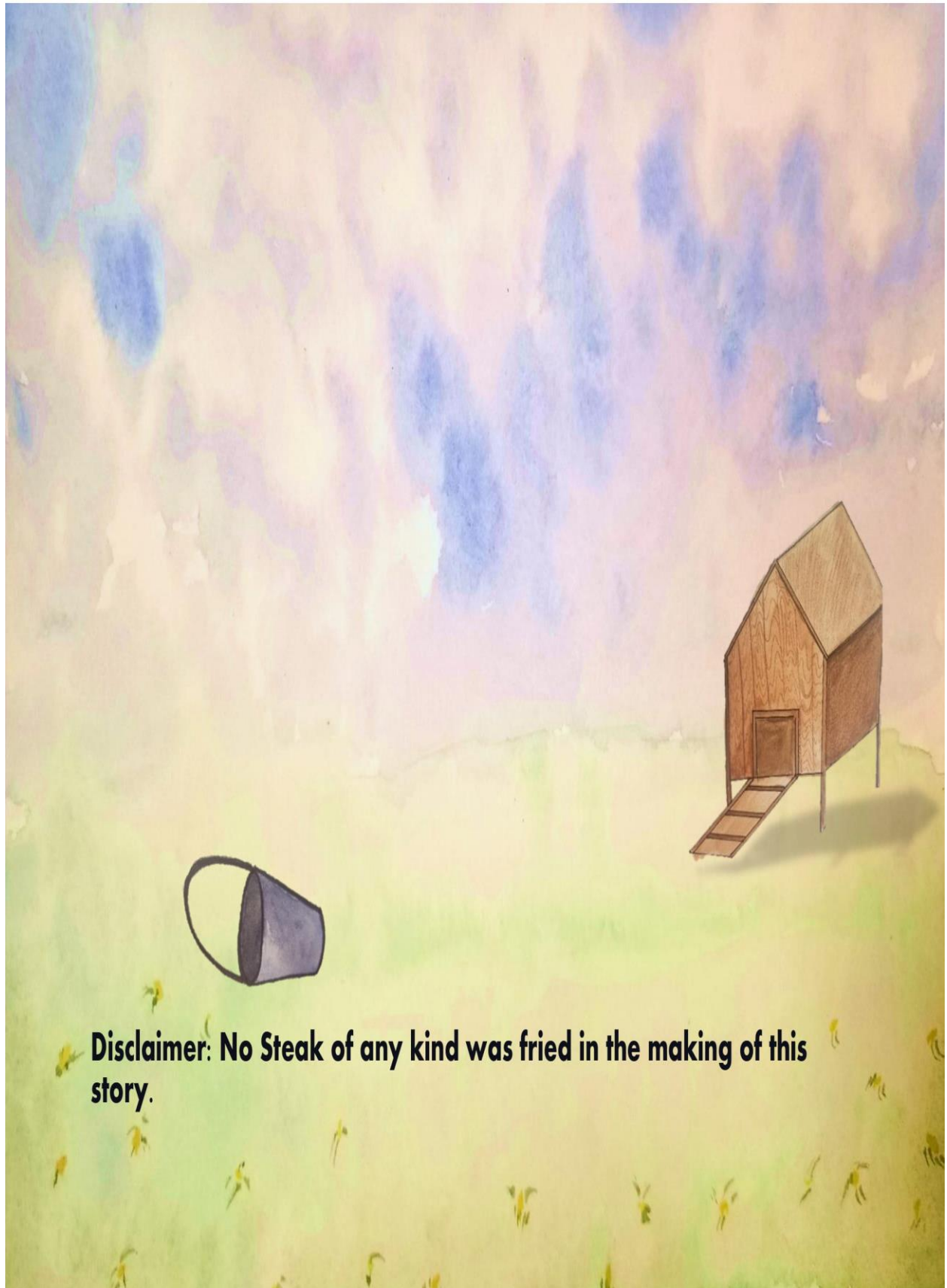
**She escaped and ran for the house.
The boys could not contain their laughter.**



The boys walked over, and the youngest brother picked up the skunk. Inside the black-and-white Halloween costume from three years ago was Steak.



Steak was happy to see her boys and had no idea why she was wrapped in black-and-white fur, but one thing was for sure: THERE WOULD BE NO CHICKEN FRIED STEAK FOR DINNER TONIGHT!









Last Requests

Mason Belk

When you lay my body down,
Don't lay down all your money.
Don't pay a man with skills that you and I do not possess
To prepare my earthly body.
My body is a temple,
Though I treat it like a mobile home the Earth will repossess.

When you put me in the ground,
Don't bury me in Kansas.
From what I've seen, there's too much wind and not so many trees.
You know I love the woods,
And I hate to see you cry.
Place me underneath a willow
And pretend it weeps for me.

If a coyote comes to find me,
Don't let him take my memories.
He may take an arm or leg and run off laughing in the night,
But if I make it up to Heaven
And they let me hold a rifle
And I still know how to shoot,
I'll shoot that coyote out of spite.

If you write my name and number
On a stone you think is special,
From time to time you'll visit and to that stone begin to speak . . .
But I won't be there to listen,
And the stone won't hear a thing,
So make sure I hear your heart before it's time for me to leave.

If someone will sing a song,
Let them sing about the Gospel.
Let every soul find comfort in a melody so true,
And before you say, "Amen!"
Give a heartfelt invitation.
There's a reason why at funerals it's the proper thing to do.

On the days you really miss me,
Don't spill sadness on our pictures.
Try your best to remember how it feels to hold my hand.
Keep our family in your prayers.
Don't worry about tomorrow.
Our God is really real,
And He always has a plan.

About the Contributors

Mason Belk is from Genoa, Arkansas, where he lives a fulfilling life as a husband, father, and firefighter. The lines of his poems, songs, and short stories often contain recurring themes and double meanings.

Logan Buck is a twenty-year-old college student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana seeking a bachelor's degree in biology with a minor in pre-health. After college, he plans to attend medical school to become a radiologist. When not studying or attending classes, he volunteers as a small-group leader for youth ministry at First Baptist Church in Texarkana. In his free time, he enjoys reading, watching movies and television, and playing video games.

Carolyn Breedlove edited and annotated the antebellum journal, *A Glorious Day: The Journal of a Central Louisiana Governess, 1853-1854*. Finishing Line Press published a chapbook of her poems, *Just Following the River*. Her poems have appeared in such publications as *Aquila Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *The Bastille*, *New Millennium Writings*, and *Maple Leaf Rag*. Before returning to her native Louisiana, she lived for many years in southern California. She is presently seeking a publisher for a novel set in 1970s Los Angeles, an excerpt of which was awarded "Best in Show: Literary" in the Shreveport Regional Arts Council's Critical Mass 7 competition by critic and author David Ulin.

Leslie Compean is an undergraduate at Texas A&M University-Texarkana who is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in nursing.

Taylor Copeland is a senior at Texas A&M-Texarkana. She is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in general education (early childhood through sixth grade). Taylor has a passion for learning and has dreamed of becoming a teacher since she was in elementary school. She lives in Mount Vernon in a tiny home with her husband and dog. She enjoys spending time with friends and family, reading, and traveling.

Gwendolyn Crabtree is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in elementary education at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Debanhie Cuellar is working on obtaining her bachelor's degree in mass communication at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

April Rockelle Culpepper teaches middle-school English and is the mother of four little boys. She enjoys writing, drawing, and spending time with her children, who were her inspiration for *Chicken Fried Steak*. She originally wrote the story for her sons after they thought their father would eat their pet chicken, Steak. She intends to pursue her master's degree in English literature at Texas A&M University-Texarkana and hopes to teach in a higher-education setting.

Beverly Easterling is a poet and lyricist whose work is included in *Voices Found: Women in the Church's Song*, a supplement of the *National Episcopal Hymnal*. Her collaborations with composers Robert J. Powell, Mark Schweizer, and Mark Hayes are favorites of choirs in the United States and the United Kingdom. She lives with her husband of fifty-four years in Alexandria, Louisiana.

Casey Fields started her educational journey as an art major with an emphasis in fine arts. After obtaining her associate's degree in 2009 from Northeast Texas Community College in Mount Pleasant, Texas, she transferred to Texas A&M University-Texarkana in 2020 and changed her major to education with an emphasis in special education (early childhood through sixth grade). She is married to Adam Fields; they have one child named Connor. She and her family currently live in Mount Pleasant, Texas.

Caleb Dan Gammons is an author, an actor, and a playwright with a passion for telling great stories. His most notable projects currently are his collaborations with the Biblical Drama Institute (BDI) of Texarkana, Texas. Caleb gives all thanks to God for the story of *The Silent Man* and would like to thank his guiding influences: his parents, his sisters, his girlfriend, and his many friends. Caleb thanks Dr. Brian Billings and the editors of *Aquila Review* for publishing his script; he would also like to thank his future readers for taking the time to read his work.

Amaya Green is majoring in psychology and minoring in sociology at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Karissa Henson is an undergraduate nursing student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Allyson Jackson is twenty-four years old and identifies as non-binary. Allyson came out recently and wants to share some of those personal experiences through poetry. Allyson is an English-education major—loving it so far—who wants to be the type of person that anyone can come to with their problems no matter the

circumstances. Allyson hopes the poems featured in this journal help anyone struggling with identity and acceptance.

Brittney Jackson has an amazing family: a husband of thirteen years and three beautiful children. She is working on a bachelor's degree in early education at Texas A&M University-Texarkana, and she eventually wants to become a dyslexia therapist. When her son was diagnosed with dyslexia, she changed her major to help kids like him. The road she has traveled upon with her son has inspired her to become a better person; he is the inspiration for her poetry.

Yamileth Maldonado is an undergraduate student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She is majoring in psychology and minoring in business.

Sharon McMillen is enrolled in the BAAS program at Texas A&M University-Texarkana with a concentration in liberal arts.

Audrey Mohon is an English major at Texas A&M-University at Texarkana starting her senior year. After graduating in May of 2023, she wishes to pursue a career in education by teaching either English or theatre arts. In her free time, she loves to create DIY art pieces, play *The Sims 4*, or watch *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, *Game of Thrones*, or *South Park*. Although she loves reading, she adores writing as well; whether it be journaling or creating D&D storylines, she can spend hours with a pencil in her hand. Apart from her other roles in life, she is the mother to two curious cats, Reggie and Jojo.

Gabriella Mosley is an undergraduate nursing student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Dawson Palomar is pursuing a bachelor's degree in criminal justice at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Macaira Patterson is a graduate of Washington Academy Charter School in Texarkana, Arkansas, who is currently attending Southern Arkansas University and majoring in mathematics. Her interests include drawing and renovation projects.

Holly Perez is a forty-six-year-old artist who has resided in Texarkana, Texas, for the past twelve years. She has won art shows in Marshall, Texas, and was awarded Cossatot Arts and Crafts Association Artist of the Year in 2002 in Arkansas. When not working as a nurse in a local hospital, she takes commissions for portraits. Most recently, she and her mother, Victoria Autrey, have teamed up as a

live-event artist duo to paint weddings as they take place. *Sun-Kissed* is an eleven-by-fourteen-inch original work drawn with Prismacolor colored pencils on Strathmore toned-tan paper; it appears in this journal with the client's permission.

Matt Smith earned his bachelor's degree from Texas A&M-Texarkana, where he is currently pursuing a master's degree in history. When he is not busy studying history, he enjoys spending time outdoors with his dog.

Darlene Taylor is a Dallas-Fort Worth native who has called Texarkana home for the past thirteen years. She began making murals after painting "something happy" on the side of her house led to her attracting attention and landing commissions. Now she works as a full-time muralist. To all aspiring artists, she says, "You really just have to figure out what your talent is, your passion, and make it unique! Do something a little extra to make it different and stand out!"

Hollis Thompson is the artistic director of the Biblical Drama Institute (BDI) in the Texarkana area and an English faculty member at the University of Arkansas at Hope and Texarkana. He completed his undergraduate work at Texas A&M University-Texarkana and received his MA in English Literature from Stephen F. Austin State University. He is currently working on an academic investigation into the intersection of Biblical studies and superheroes. *The Fairest of All* is a reworking of *The Children Market*, which originally appeared as part of Spooky Drama on Demand, A&M-Texarkana's twenty-four-hour-play festival. Paris Junior College in Texas recently performed *The Fairest of All* as part of the college's new play festival.

Thomas Tye-Cornelius, a Texarkana native, originally came to Texas A&M University-Texarkana to pursue a career in healthcare. He quickly realized that his love of science, while strong, was not enough for him to quell his true passion of storytelling. Now pursuing a bachelor-of-science degree in English, he plans to pursue a career in higher education. He remains undecided if that career will be as a teacher or an administrator, but either way he plans to complete a graduate degree in communications.

Daniel Vines is an English instructor at Bossier Parish Community College. A native of Shreveport, Louisiana, he received his BA in Music at the University of New Orleans and his MA in English from Emporia State University. For his thesis, Vines transcribed his songs to the page as poems, and he has been reconciling his tongue with his pen ever since. Vines's work has appeared in *Flint*

Hills Review, Aquila Review, Aquila Review's Web series Poem by Poet, and the UNO newspaper, Driftwood.

Jeannette Ward, a Texarkana native, is a visual artist and licensed massage therapist. An art-lover since childhood, she works mainly in abstract and surrealist styles, but her style is ever changing and growing. She often uses a variety of textures and bold colors in her paintings.

Chris "Wild" West is a self-taught painter who has been practicing for over twenty years. Originally from the Texarkana area, he has also lived in Louisiana, Florida, New Mexico, and Arkansas. He mainly works with acrylic paint on canvas, but he also works with paper, wood, clay, and metal. He draws a lot of influence from the great 1980s and 1990s artists of classic comics and swords-and-sorcery and science-fiction book covers. He loves painting strong women or flipping famous male characters from horror or science-fiction into female characters with their own names and personalities.

Orionna Williams is majoring in psychology and minoring in criminal justice at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Alexa Zuniga is an undergraduate student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She is pursuing a major in political science and a minor in social work.

